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Essays on the Archaeology of Iran in Honour of Mehdi Rahbar

Edited by: YOUSEF MORADI

With the assistance of Susan Cantan, Edward J. Keall and Rasoul Boroujeni

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Tehran
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Hellenistic Impact on the Iranian and Central Asian Cultures: The Historical Contribution and the Archaeological Evidence

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Abstract: Hellenism formally indicates the historical-cultural period within the ancient Mediterranean and Near East worlds, following the death of Alexander the Great. Among the distinguishing cultural features of the period, a more modern spread of the western civilization with the cultures of North Africa, Asia Minor, Syria and Phoenicia, Mesopotamia, Iran, India and Central Asia, and vice versa, played the most important role in creating a new social-economic and political system. The consequent birth of a new kind of civilisation constituted a model for other cultures in relation to different aspects of the human society, economics, politics, science, art, philosophy, and religion. The Hellenistic world, from a geographic point of view, comprised a vast area, ranging from Sicily and southern Italy (Magna Graecia) to India and Central Asia, and from the Black Sea to Egypt. After the Macedonian conquest of the Persian Empire, new kingdoms arose in North-Eastern Africa, the ancient Near East, Central and Southern Asia. The central event of this new historical phase was certainly the crisis of the ancient western "urban" and "political" model of the poleis, which invested large sectors of the society, from the eminently economic-social to the civil and cultural. If one thinks of the importance the poleis had assumed within the Greek society and history before, it is easy to imagine what its profound crisis caused to the Hellenic culture. For a long time, Hellenism was considered a period of transition between the magnificence of classical Greece and the rise of Roman power. Politically, the most important consequence of this revolution was the change from a political domain of the city-state to that of the great political unities, already dominant in the "Orient", strongly centred on the divinised figure of the sovereign. The transformation of the political-state formations was accompanied by an economic and social evolution. The intensification of trade between the various political entities and the eastern regions, the flourishing of artisanship and the demographic increase brought an economic well-being that encouraged the growth of new urban areas.

Keywords: Hellenism, Iran, Central Asia, history, archaeology, cities.

Introduction

Hellenism, in modern historiography (Bugh 2006), indicates the historical-cultural period within the ancient Mediterranean and Near East worlds following the victories of Alexander. The period extends until the birth of the Roman Empire, the death of Cleopatra and the annexation of the Ptolemaic kingdom of Egypt in the 30th CE by Octavian (the winner at Actium in the 31st century CE).

Among the distinguishing cultural features of the period a modern spread of the western civilisation

with the cultures of North Africa, Asia Minor, Syria and Phoenicia, Mesopotamia, Iran, India, and Central Asia, and vice versa, played the most important role in creating a new social-economic and political system. The consequent birth of a new kind of civilisation constituted a model for other cultures in relation to different aspects of the human society, economics, politics, science, art, philosophy, and religion. The Hellenistic world (Chamoux 2003) geographically covered a vast area, ranging from Sicily and southern Italy (Magna Graecia), also included parts of India, and Central Asia, and the Black Sea and Egypt. In these conquered lands, a particular form of Greek, named *koine*, was used as a common language. After the Macedonian conquest of the Persian Empire, new kingdoms arose in North-Eastern Africa (Ptolemaic kingdom), the ancient Near East (Seleucid, Antigonid, Pergamum reigns, etc.), Central and Southern Asia (Greco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek kingdoms).

If this period is to be considered as a phenomenon of internationalisation of the western and oriental cultures, the chronology of its diffusion can also be extended up to 529 CE, when Justinian, in his campaign of persecution of the pagans ordered the closure of the Platonic Academy. In addition, if we consider the occidental cultures not as having mere erudite aspects, then the last phase of the Roman culture can be interpreted Hellenistic as well. Furthermore, it can be argued that Christianity in itself certainly contained elements of this new culture, if we consider the thoughts of its most notable representative scholars such as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Clemens Alexandrinus, Origen and Saint Augustine. Commonly speaking, therefore, it can be proposed a kind of chronological distinction between a so-called Greek Hellenism (331-323 BCE) and Roman Hellenism also (31 BCE-500 CE); not to speak about the "oriental Hellenism", which at the time, was both able to be "westernised" from the "occident" and to "orientalise" the occident as well. It is still, nonetheless, controversial if it is more plausible to talk about a Hellenisation of the Orient or an Orientalisation of Hellenism as emphasised by some scholars a long time ago (Grousset 1949: 48).

The central event of this new historical phase was certainly the crisis of the ancient western "urban" and "political" model of the *poleis*, which invested large sectors of society, from the eminently economic-social to the civil and cultural. If one thinks of the importance the *poleis* had assumed within the Greek society and history before, it is easy to imagine what its profound crisis caused to the Hellenic culture. Much more complicated is to determine the extent to which "oriental" society (basically the Persian) had been influenced by these processes of westernisation and, in turn, influenced the "western". An eminent scholar, in fact, had emphasised the persistence of elements of cultural continuity rather than those of discontinuity in this period and, thus, the gradual transformation of different types of societies in something completely different (Rostovtzeff 1936; 1941).

Philippus II of Macedonia, whose royal house had been Hellenised since the Persian Wars, managed to enter into discord among the Greeks and to impose his power. With the victories of Alexander, all the liberties of the Greek *poleis* ceased and his successes were regarded as the crowning of a dream: the victory against the Persian people and culture. To strengthen this enterprise, the ambition of a young leader, who wanted to cross the Hellespont, to conquer the remaining world and to create a universal kingdom cohesive with the Greek culture, contributed very much. After Alexander's death, there was a heated struggle between his successors, the Diadoches. In 323 BCE, the general Perdicca holds the Empire in the name of the son of Alexander; Antipater obtained control of Macedonia and Greece, while Antigonus of Phrygia and Lydia, Ptolemy of Egypt and Lisimachus of Thrace.

The battle of Ipsus decreed the defeat of Antigonus and the creation of different kingdoms: at the end of which, in 281 BCE, the enormous political-imperial formation of Alexander, was dismembered in three great dynastic unities:

Ptolemaic in Egypt;
Seleucid in Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia (Plischke 2014);
Antigonid in Macedonia and Greece.

After the battle of Corupedium, Macedonia, Asia, and Egypt were formed, and only in 263 BCE the independent political system of Pergamum arose under the Attalian dynasty. These new political-imperial formations exported Greek and Oriental culture and language within their borders, through Greek-Macedonian imperial flows. At the same time, however, the new kingdoms were influenced by indigenous cultures and adopted their customs, when necessary or beneficial. The Hellenistic world was characterised by a second large wave of colonisation, which led to the foundation of new

cities in Asia and Africa.

For a long time Hellenism was considered a period of transition between the magnificence of classical Greece and the rise of Roman power (Lewis *et al*. 1994). However, the splendour of cities such as Alexandria, Antiochia of Syria, Pergamon and Laodicea (Börm & Luraghi 2018), the importance of economic cooperation, the fusion of cultures and the dominant role of the Greek language and its diffusion, were factors that profoundly changed the ancient world and the Near East as well.

New urbanisation processes were in fact typical of this age, reflected in a progressive accentuation of the city's privileges over the countryside, where the landowners were affirming. This urbanisation processes in particular began to assert itself in the areas of the ancient Near East, where the ancient millennial urban traditions of Mesopotamia, and partly of the Iranian plateau, were progressively replaced by new settlement patterns of western traditions, albeit through the adoption of composite and unreleased models.

Politically, the most important consequence of this revolution was the change from a political domain of the city-state to that of the great political unities, already dominant in the "Orient", strongly centred on the divinised figure of the sovereign. The transformation of the political-state formation was accompanied by an economic and social evolution. The intensification of trade between the various political entities and the eastern regions, the flourishing of artisanship and the demographic increase brought an economic well-being that encouraged the growth of new urban areas.

Yet, we cannot completely agree with the opinion about the complicated issue of dating one site or another to the Achaemenid or post Achaemenid age only on the basis of the construction techniques. Although convincing on certain aspects, this hypothesis finds its own limitation where the site is not represented but by only an architectural feature even if we cannot exclude that it may be characterized also by such a feature.

It is a fact, hardly debatable, that during the Alexandrine period the western culture and its artistic traditions were possibly introduced in Iranian regions. Nonetheless, one can underline that is particularly difficult, due to the lack of evidence, to analyse all the forms of adoption by the local peoples of an occidental cultural trait. Because of that, almost nothing is known about the real interaction between the Greek and the Persian culture.

What is more, the same definition of "Achaemenid" may appear only related to the architectural dynastic remains and not to the more general and extensive archaeological characterisation of a context.

Hellenism and Iran

Hellenism in the Iranian plateau is a historically very complex period and, archaeologically, difficult to be dealt easily with, because of three main reasons:

1. The short duration of the related historical period;[1]
2. The lack of consideration given by the same ancient Iranian sources;
3. The fact that the period touches the fundamental issues of the relationship between the Greek and Latin historiography and of ancient Iran.

Wiesehöfer (2005: 77) considered "neither revolutionary nor insignificant" the influences that Greek and Iranian cultures exercised on each other. Without contrasting different study approaches and conscious that the material remains are not more important or more complex than other sets (e.g. the cultural) and vice versa, one should recognise that the archaeological evidence of the Hellenistic period also requires a very specific deepening.

The long chronological interval between the Achaemenid and Sasanian dynasties (Briant & Joannès 2006) opens the discussion on the key-aspects of the relationships between Iran and Greek cultures; this important *liaison* was highly extended under the Macedonian dominion, over the Iranian plateau and Central Asia.

The history of the Hellenistic period in Iran, though still fragmentary and incomplete, constitutes, however, a crucial moment that provides us with evidence of the first big changes occurred in the area in the late Achaemenid and the early Parthian period (Callieri 2007; Genito 2012).

Settlements and cities

Either in the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, a geographic set of ancient Roman itineraries, or in the *Kārnāmag Ardaxšir Pābagān* (Grenet 2003), or in the *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr* (Daryaee 2002), historical and literary texts of Sasanian age, contradictory

1. Whereas, among other aspects, the same short duration of the period investigated becomes an essential element to be considered if one wants to try to propose historical assignments and cultural affiliations. Such a short period constitutes, nevertheless, mostly a political time span, rather than an archaeological horizon.

issues seem to arise about the topics of urbanism in Herllenistic period. Whether the main Seleucid city foundations or re-foundations may be found in Media (*Laodicea, Apamea, Heraclea, Ragha Europos*), other settlements (*Antiochia, Seleucia and Laodicea in Persis*) might be located in Fārs as well.

Laodicea city in Media is documented by the famous stele of 193 BCE, built by Antiochus III and now in the Teheran Museum (Rahbar 1979; 1999a; 1999b). The stele gives some information about dynastic cults in honour of the living kings. It shows an edict issued by the same Antiochus, where the cult of the king and his wife Laodicea is regulated and promoted. For her, the king had established also a special priestly female order. Through a strict logic, it could be argued that if in Laodicea there was a social structure (such as that in Magnesia on the Meander River) then Greek gods could have even been there too.

The territorial location of all these cities is still problematic, in particular of Antiochia and Laodicea of Persis, between Borazjan and Bushēhr on the area of Persian Gulf. Thus, a direct geographical relationship between the Iranian plateau and the marine Persian Gulf is intertwined with the hypotheses of Marquart (1901; 1905), Herzfeld (1941) and Bernard (1974). The list of Persian cities given by Stephan of Byzantium and the chapter of Ptolemy on Persis (VI, 4, 3; VI, 4, 4) help us to better understand the concrete reasons of the presence of settlements, depending on the three very well known geo-morphological and climatic areas of Fārs: the coastal, the middle, and the inner.

Cultural interaction

The issue of the cultural integration or interaction between two civilisations is always difficult to deal with. Already with regards to the Achaemenian age, and, in particular, in order to define an independent artistic "imperial" production, scholars had always taken into account the contribution of many different cultures from Assyria, Egypt, Central Asia, Greece and the Aegean coast. In that case, many of them assume that the nature of the Achaemenid court art-style was mostly related to a form of eclecticism. Curiously, this hypothesis seems to reflect both the Herodotus' opinion, claiming that the Persians "*more than other peoples ... like making foreign use...*" (I, 135) and the particular historical related information from the so-called Cart of Susa.[2]

Moreover, the multi-cultural character of the Hellenistic period cannot justify in itself a cultural syncretism of the new dominant culture. It must also be said that the relationship among the local realities, in the more or less "strong" political-cultural and foreign dominions, has always marked the history of the Iranian plateau and characterised the late historical periods for a long time. Thus, the underlying issue actually appears to be the nature of the Greek-Macedonian *colonate*, sometimes addressed on historic grounds, sometimes even in an unreliable way. The fact that the religious architecture is one of the privileged fields of observation of this complex relationship is certainly an acceptable interpretative aspect; yet, some doubts remain. These doubts remain despite the great effort made by scholars and notwithstanding the very little available evidence, often documented on the basis of rather questionable data. It is interesting and suggestive that the famous ceremony mentioned by Diodorus Siculus would have occurred in Persepolis in 317 BCE, for a sacrifice to the gods of Alexander and Philip. This information likely reflects a Greek-centric interpretative key as a possible re-interpretation of events lost in time, and of which nobody would have comprised the old assumptions and meanings. Therefore, this could represent the evidence of a genuine cult of the dead kings in Iran. An even more complicated issue, yet strictly religious, is the one related to the Greek-Macedonian and Persian gods. A famous inscription from Asia Minor (Robert 1975: 327; 1978: 285-283) gives information about the Greeks and Persians.

Fars and Persepolis area

Greek and Latin sources deal with the nature and extension of villages and settlements mostly of Fārs and of Persepolis area (Quintus Curtius, V, 4)

2. The famous foundation Cart of Susa edited by Darius I is among the historical documentation of the period. It is a very important document, constituted by three stone tablets edited in Old Persian, Elamite and Accadian, found in an artificial mound in the north sector of the city giving detailed information for the construction of some buildings (Herzfeld 1931: 29 ff.; Kent 1933: 1 ff.; Stolper 1994: 271-272, fig. 190). The document led us to become aware of the splendor and the richness of the differing cultural influences, which had left a profound sign in the figural and sumptuous art produced and utilized within the Achaemenid Empire. The text reads: "...The palace which I built in Susa, the material brought her come from far away... The gold which has been worked out here came from Lidia and Bactriana; the lapis lazuli and carnelian, which have been worked out, were taken from Sogdiana; the turquoise was taken from Corasmia, and worked out here. Silver and ebony were taken from Egypt...the ivory, which has been worked out here was taken from Nubia, Sind and Arachosia... the goldsmiths who have worked out the gold were Medes and Egyptians". For the transliteration of cuneiform, see Cameron (1948: 11-15, 142-143; Kent 1950: 143-144).

(Boucharlat 2006) and it is necessary to pay more attention to the details of the archaeological and topographic documentation (Briant 1982; Sumner 1986; Wenke 1976; Miroschedji 1981; Maurer Trinkaus 1983; Alizadeh 1997; 2003; Gotch 1968; 1969).

A similar and controversial issue concerns what has been recognised in the Fahlyān/Nourābād area and in the eastern Fārs, as in Fāsa and Dārāb, where traits of Achaemenid and later occupation have been also identified.

The correspondence between the historical and the territorial data hypothesised by Briant (1982) and the complete failure, according to Leriche (1977: 301), to find such concrete evidence likely represent an insuperable dichotomy. A possible way out would be to observe more carefully a given micro-geographical area, that, by itself, constitutes the only concrete basis to correctly interpret a territory, in order to realise an archaeological map.

The existence of "Komastos" (Polyenus VII, 40) near Persepolis, where the Macedonians might have camped, would reinforce the hypothesis that the location of a town, a military colony, or an architectural feature can be only directly related to the quality and consistency of the historical data. Nevertheless, there are reasons to believe that when the majority of the Greek sources deal with cities, fortifications and architectural remains, those are actually referring to their own concept of cities and fortifications in the description of the ethnic "otherness", which did nothing but bring everything back to their interpretative, often mythological, parameters.

Most of the documentation of post-Achaemenid age in Persepolis is concentrated in the south-western corner of the terrace and, in particular, to the inscriptions realized by Šabuhr Sagānšah in the 4th century CE. In the area, where there are remains of H and G Palaces, there would be traces of a post-Achaemenid age; among these, a *podium,* larger than those used in the preceding periods, is limited by a supporting wall made of re-used architectonic and sculptured materials. Once more here we are obliged to say that, in lack of any stratigraphic sequence, it is impossible to have more precise chronology of these remains; thus, the chronological and historical relationship between the graffiti located on some of the Harem's windows frames and the remains found in the area of those Palaces remain unknown. Even the evidence emphasised by Strabo (XV, 3, 3) do not seem to be sufficiently convincing. Therefore, the hypothesis of Eštaḵhr seems to be confirmed, suggesting that it would have been founded during the time of the Fārs' sovereigns. Similarly, the mention in the Sasanian literary books[3] of the pre-Sasanid *Staxr* city, where the enemy of Ardašir I, the Arsacid Ardawān, used to live, may derive from an Iranian tradition that associated the foundation of the pre-Sasanid *Staxr* city to that of the last Arsacid king, his enemy.

The archaeological evidence in Fārs is, furthermore, mainly based on materials collected on the surface[4] and the discovery at Pasargadae and Marvdāsht of some milestones (Callieri 1995), consisting of reused Achaemenid crenellated crowns, may doubtfully constitute a testimony of a general increase in the routes in Hellenistic time.

Other sites of particular significance are located in northern Fārs, as Dehbid (Qāsr-e Bahrām), where Stein found pre-Sasanian ceramic fragments with red smoothed engobe; Nourabād, where ceramic material of Arsacid period was collected from; in the Sarvistan area, at Tāl-e Gaude-e Rāhim, and in eastern Fārs, at Tāll-e Zāhāk, nearby to Fāsā, where fragments of Sasanian and early Islamic pottery and a number of Achaemenid potsherds were also found.

South Iran

A different issue concerns the situation of Elymais region, located between Fārs and the Susiana plain (in Khuzestan area) documented mostly by the sources. Diodorus writes about a temple built by Antiochus III in 187 BCE and dedicated, according to different scholars, to Zeus or Bel; Justin talks about a Jupiter Elymaeus; Polybius attributes to Antiochus IV the building of a temple for a female deity Artemis, and Appian for an Elymaea Aphrodites.

The real archaeological documentation can be started with the so-called temple of Shāmi, preliminarily investigated by Stein, then excavated by Ghirshman, and whose area is now investigated by Messina and Mehr Kian (2014). Within a rectangular enclosure in mud-bricks and stone foundations there

3. As the *Kārnāmag Ardaxšir Pābagān* (Grenet 2003) and *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr* (Daryaee 2002: 41).

4. It is amazing and surprising how Fārs, which is the most important region of Iran for the historical times, lacks any project of a complete full archaeological map. A number of methodological approaches to a given territory have already been made in many different geographic areas, like Mesopotamia (Adams 1965), Bactriana (Lyonnet 1997), Turkmenistan (Gubaev *et al.* 1998), Afghanistan (Ball & Gardin 1982), and Hungary (MRT 1966-1998) etc. In this respect, see the preliminary suggestions of Franzese & Genito (2012).

was an altar of burnt bricks, parallelepiped in shape, whereas seven stone bases were provided to support statues, which were unfortunately never recovered.

With respect to the two terraces of Masjid-e Sūleymān and Bard-e Neshāndēh (Wiesehöfer 2001; Salaris 2017: 180-134) in Khuzestan the old hypothesis of Ghirshman should be re-considered slightly, especially for the later periods. According to him, the terraces could be dated between the end of the Achaemenid period up to 150 BCE. Although we may presume the existence of religious buildings of worship at that time, the related testimonies are not, however, so decisive.

The ruins of Rishāhr in the Būshēhr peninsula are very interesting, with walls most probably belonging to the structures of a harbour.

Iconography, artistic, architectural production and historical-religious issue

The iconography of the female figures very much over the Hellenistic world goes in the direction of using eastern deity with some characteristics of Artemis of the "amazon - type", as the *torso* in marble of a female figure from Malamir in Tehran Museum easily evidences.

This is confirmed by the correspondence between the Elymais' divinity and the Hellenism documented at Susa, where there might have been a temple dedicated to *Nanaia*, which Hansman (1985) considered it originated from the ancient Elamite deity of Ishtar. Nevertheless, even if the *torso* does not originate in an original Iranian cultural context, it is the only statue carved in marble that can be dated to the Hellenistic time and interpreted on the basis of precise Iranian elements. Other examples of small statues always come hypothetically from Shāmi: a small head representing *Aphrodites* or Artemis; another one, still representing *Aphrodites*, from Tāll-e Zāhāk, in eastern Fārs, and attributable to the 3rd-2nd century.

The Persian culture has been considered to have had a particular tendency to appreciate the Greek Art, as the case of the so-called *Penelope* statue suggests. A re-reading of the statue, together with some Roman copies, has been recently proposed (Razmjou 2015), in a more ample general framework of an exhibition held in Teheran. In addition to the actual import of products, there were also some workshops of local artisans, who seem to have worked according to the new mode and style. In fact, the high technical level of the Hellenistic production implies the existence of highly specialised ateliers, so as of contacts with the court circles, in the Mediterranean as in the Middle East. The scarce presence of a Hellenistic artistic production on the Iranian plateau may be due to the poor knowledge that its inhabitants had about the cultural and political noble Hellenistic character; a "royal affair", as said by Melikian Chirvani (1998). Therefore, there would have been cultural motivations to prevent the continuity of such a specialised production correlated to élite commitments. The elusive presence of concrete artistic Hellenistic remains on the Iranian plateau has been considered simply due to the role played by the very short duration of the Greek-Macedonian-Persian élite's dominion, combined with the rather difficult adoption of foreign parameters from the Iranian culture, refractory to a very different way of thinking the reality and its representation. Similarly, it would seem a bit simplistic to think that the lack of sculptural finds depends only on the fact that the majority of them were probably in deteriorabile material.

It is indisputable that these disturbing absences repeat, in some way, the inadequacy of the archaeological documentation already highlighted for other periods of ancient Iran. We refer, for example, to the median period (Genito 1986; 1995; 2004), which has always been known only for the extensive historiographical documentation and almost absent archaeological evidence. In both cases, however, it is important to underline the fact that these periods are located immediately preceding (the median) and immediately following (the Alexandrine/Hellenistic) the Achaemenid dynastic period. This, unfortunately, albeit with different characteristics, supports interpretative uncertainties.

Now, the core aspects of both iconographic and historical-religious issue are related to the presence of a cult of the dead kings with statues and temples with an oriental plan, and to a possible mixture between the Greek and the local religion of Elymais.

Those famous statuettes from Nehāvānd remain of uncertain origin. The summary of Ghirshman (1952) shows the photos of four bronze statuettes (one interpreted as a priest of Isis (?); a second as Athena; a third a female figure; a fourth Isis-Fortuna), which were accidentally found in the same area of the stele of Antiochus III. In a second moment, Ghirshman talks about five statuettes (Ghirshman 1962): the bronze statue of a priest of Isis that had not yet been re-published; a picture of an Apollo and

that of a Zeus playing a lyre, which is added to the three subjects already published in 1952. Ghirshman dates these objects back to the Hellenistic phase of the city, together with the stele of Antiochus III and the circular altar. These elements, associated with the oral tradition, would confirm the presence of six columns placed in the same area of the other finds, which led the French scholar to speculate about the existence of a Hellenistic temple in Laodicea. This hypothesis is confirmed only by the text of the stele, which was explicitly ordered to expose the edict in the most important sanctuary of the city. Moreover, the hill on which the Seleucid centre stood was fully occupied by modern buildings.

In any case, the news about the discovery of those figurines are even less certain: it is not possible to determine the year in which they were found (presumably between 1947 and 1952), and whether they were brought to light at the same or at different times. It is also unknown either how they were found, or if they were a fortuitous discovery; if they were either made for the stele and the round altar, or if they were the result of donations or, more likely, sold by local people who kept them. The absence of an adequate documentation of the context, and the mode of their discovery, together with the impossibility to reconstruct their context, make the analysis and study of the finds even more complex and problematic. The bronzes of Nehāvānd belong, therefore, to that class of objects that, being out of context, have conditioned the scholars to study and to understand them with greater difficulties. Thus, we cannot but wait for the results of the new digs that the Iranians are conducting at Nehāvānd (Rahbar & Alibaigi 2009).

Among other things, at Nehāvānd, a round altar with a slight relief engraved and some small bronze figurines should be added to the six columns, visible at the beginning of the last century and interpreted by Ghirshman as belonging to a building from Hellenistic time.

Two small golden objects, not reported either in the Robert's article (1950) or in Ghirshman' edition (1952), come from the present Nehāvānd and are defined by Ghirshman as a special "treasure". By accepting the chronology proposed by Ghirshman (2nd century BCE - 2nd century CE.), you would have to agree with the view that at the end of the Seleucid occupation Laodicea had an enduring housing settlement of Parthian age. Yet more recent studies prefer dating the end of the Seleucid occupation to the 3rd-2nd or the 1st century BCE, or to the Roman Empire (Boucher 1976; 1979; Invernizzi 1999; 2000).

A possible cult of the "ancestors" should be focused on the relief of Daskyleion in Phrygia, which Gropp considered as a Zoroastrian ritual of the *bāy* in honour of the dead (1969: 166), certainly a step to the cult of a dead king. Even if an ancestors "cult" does not imply a divinization so as a discussion about the *old Persian artāvan* (Panaino 2003: 269), Briant's opinion (1984: 110, n. 32) is quite interesting, attributing to each Achaemenid clan a particular cult on the basis of Plutarchus (*Alexandros* 31, 12). To sum up, one can agree with the interpretation of an initiation related to the towers of Nāqsh-i Rustām and Pasargade and does not have anything against the funerary character of monuments that, in the early period of the Zoroastrianism, were not so exclusive about the prohibition of burying the deceased men.

Rock reliefs

Worth noting is the importance of a rock-relief in Bisutun on the main road between Ecbatana and Seleucia on the Tigris; on the relief a figure of Herakes Kallinikos is depicted, lying on a lion's skin, where the figure is accompanied by a Greek inscription from 148 BCE and a summary in Aramaic. Beyond the existence of a temple dedicated to Hercules, the inscription is a kind of votive offering for the victory of *Kleomenes*, the Seleucid governor of the "upper satrapies", whose father bears the Macedonian name of Pantauchos.

The style of the rock-relief remains fully Hellenistic even if, perhaps, is drawn from a previous relief of Elamite period. The presence of this rock-relief would be particularly significant in the context of a sanctuary in Media. However, despite going back to the Iranian tradition, the relief of Qir-Karzin presents Hellenistic stylistic influences even in Fārs (Callieri & Askari Chaverdi 2013). However, the dynamics of the spread of this western iconography, especially in the religious field, are quite complex and always evolve along the axis of interpretation of the relationships between the interaction and integration of the Greek culture on the background of the Iranian.

The hypothesis put forward by Melikian Chirvani (1998) is interesting and widely accepted indeed, suggesting that the iconography of Herakles found a great fortune in Iran, because it was used for the

representation of a royal figure. The inscription at Karaftu,[5] north of Kurdistan, has been interpreted as belonging to a sanctuary dedicated to Herakles, or as an inhabited rock-area, perhaps the house of an officer commanding a small *militia* intended to control the northern border of Media. As one can argue, this might be the testimony of the large spread of Herakles' iconography over the Iranian plateau, which had a long tradition of knights, even if not hunters.

The famous rock-tomb of Da'o Dokhtār in the Mamasani region probably belonged to the aristocracy of Fārs or, in any case, to a person of an high social level; and the Hellenistic style might have been used as a new tradition against the early Achaemenid. Some Ionic pseudo-archaic columns are represented there, with particularly salient volutes that are generally dated to the post Achaemenid time. The hypotheses of Von Gall (1966: 38), very distant from those of Herzfeld and Stein, seem to be more convincing. After half a century of attribution of such rock-tombs to the Medes, we would not run the risk of having to wait another half century to attribute some of them to the Hellenistic period. We do not know either the commitment or the owner, and the traces of architectural remains of Hellenistic style cannot, by themselves, be seriously taken into account as veritable proofs for a concrete dating or an extension of the Frātārākā power in south Fārs. Going back to the reliefs of the Temple of Frātārākā and his masculine figure (with long priestly dress and with the Zoroastrian *barsom* in his right hand, and the comparisons with the relief of Kel-e Dawd not far from Dokhān-e Dawd in Media) it can be said that the their style is similar in Media and in Persia, and that the iconography also resembles the coin effigies of Fārs. The last example to be taken is the isolated stone rock-relief around Qir that represents a bower in profile turned to the right shooting an arrow-head. Though with some Achaemenid stylistic characteristic, this relief (Huff 1984: 247-246) has been considered to belong to the 2nd century and represents a noble of the area, expressing the proper synthesis between the Iranian and the Greek cultural heritage. In conclusion we can emphasises that in one century from the end of the Achaemenid power and the coming of that of the sovereigns of Fārs, the local aristocrats, though open to different cultural contributions, keep their own Iranian identity anticipating, in a way, the political independence of the later times.

Qādamgāh, and the rock-tombs of Akhūr-e Rostām go further back to a stylistic definition of "Achaemenid" in terms of a major or minor similarity to the "classic" way of being "Achaemenid".

The monument of Qādamgāh originally considered an unfinished rock-tomb of Achaemenid time, is most rightly interpreted (Boucharlat 2006: 454) as completed and bearing some cuts to be once filled with lost plates; it is in front of a water sources, thus suggesting a cultic use.

Also the examples of religious architecture in a possible dynastic context are only possibly indicated by iconographic testimonies; as the tower building, represented on group of the *Frātārākā* coins and that was put in relation to the Zendān-i-Suleimān (Pasargade) or the Ka'aba-i Zardūsht (Nāqsh-i Rustām) of Achaemenid period. As a matter of fact, while we know the Seleucid tendency to adopt traits of Mesopotamian religion, we know almost nothing regarding the Seleucid attitude *versus* the Mazdean religion.

At Bisūtūn there might have been a place of open air worship in the Iranian tradition. It is a sacred enclosure at the foot of the rock reliefs, at the entrance of which the famous Heracles' relief is located, dating to 148 BCE, associated with the cult of Herakles as rider and hunter, which Tacitus discusses (*Annales* 12, 13).

All these observations may be always punctual and

5. Karaftu hosts one of the biggest, spectacular and scenic natural caves of Iran, which has undergone massive changes due to the hundreds of years of human habitation in the region. The cave, located 72 kilometers east of Saqqez, is located within the province of western Kurdistan at a high altitude; the cave is made of limestone, strategically connecting the ancient road from Syria and Iraq to Afghanistan via Iran, on one of the paths of the Silk Roads. Many sites in the immediate surroundings of this rocky mountain have been found to be connected via various tunnels and corridors through the rocks. The Karaftu cave is considered one of Iran's natural marvels near the town of Divandarreh and studies show that in the Mesozoic the cave was under water and it started to surface late in the era. It was used by humans in different eras, who tailored its uses to suit their needs. Karaftu is dug into the mountain, built with rock architecture in four storeys. Karaftu was first explored by a Russian scholar Khanikov in 1917 and other scholars, such as de Morgan, Rawlinson, etc. visited the cave and drew its plan. There is an inscription in Greek above the portal of a room in the third floor. That is why it has been mentioned as the Hercules temple. The inscription reads: "*therein resides Hercules and no evil can penetrate it*". The Karaftu cave is 750 meters in length with a large number of subways. The existence of humans in the cave means that it was subject to manipulations, with many rooms and hallways cut into the mountain. There are abstract paintings of animals, humans and plants that are mostly of ritualistic nature. In 2000, boring pits were dug in the cave, as the archaeological studies revealed, which remain from various eras, indicating that humans inhabited it in the pre-historic era. In addition, pottery pieces and relics found in the cave suggest it was inhabited in the Arsacid, Sasanian and Islamic eras. Over the last few years, the local cultural heritage department has made modifications in the cave in preparation to receive visitors. An archaeological research centre has also been set up in its vicinity.

attentive in order to single out art-historical details; however, they are dotted by critical reflections that confirm a framework of substantial uncertainty about where to place the different finds. We refer, in particular, to the great uncertainty about the role of the material culture of Iran of the period, and in particular of arts and crafts production. Likewise, it could be considered that these aspects are (or would be precisely) those that must be identified in order to discuss the western cultural contribution within the Iranian plateau. However, it is possible that the political elitist origin of those aspects makes them almost elusive, either because essentially absent or, more probably, because they disappeared after the short interval of the Hellenistic period.

Also, in this case the substantial absence of material and/or figurative culture, archaeologically documented and, therefore, certainly ascribable to Hellenistic elements, does not allow to draw the due interpretative consequences. The minor cultural elements appear to be much more documented than the macroscopic ones, making an exclusively elusive framework of reference.

Sculptural remains

Another series of archaeological finds are the Ionic in style capitals and bases, a simplified bell-type and a schematic Achaemenid item, found in the small island of Ikaros—present Failaka—in front of Kuwait. Nevertheless, even in this case, by admitting that the Achaemenid architectural documentation in Fārs is much greater, one recognises that the rest of the documentation of similar items in a different style does not have the characters of secure origin and archaeological reliability.6 The bases of the columns of Tāll-e Zāhāk around Fāsā seem to be related to the Achaemenid period and beyond; two of them, in grey stone bell-type, can be traced back to the Achaemenid style, while the other two with more rounded profile are interpretable as local artefacts of the same period. Other three bases, throated reversed in profile at Dārābgērd, present the same features, and belong to somebody related more to the Sasanian than to the Hellenistic period. It is rather interesting and disconcerting however, that many of the aspects that some scholars (Herzfeld, for example) attributed to the Hellenistic period are now most probably referable to the Sasanian age. It is the case of the frame fragments discovered at Eštaḵhr (Callieri 2018), as well the elaborated Corinth-type capitals. Of the6four bases with three steps located in *Frātārākā* temple, one presents a sign on the horizontal face of the *anathyrosis*[7] prepared for a circular element, perhaps a *torus*[8] or a column, whose presence would, thus, only suggest a rather basic Achaemenid type.

Other comparisons can be made with the finds of Achaemenid-style capitals at Tomb-e Bot, in the Lāmerd district of southern Fārs (Askari Chaverdi 2000/1999: figs. 2.1). By virtue of some schematic and unrefined aspects, these finds were considered post-Achaemenid, even if their typology always follows the Achaemenid tradition as well. Other bases come still from Tāll-e Zohāk, as well as from Bayza in central Fārs; the latter present in slightly different forms of *torus,* reminiscent of the Khōrhēh (in the Markazi region) bases with low plinth and two steps. The origin of this very rounded *torus* is brought to and spread over the "Hellenized Orient" up to Bactria. They are generally considered as the latest architectural development of Achaemenid origin that had become, in the meantime, widely popular in use. The only base of column representing the real Hellenic tradition was found in a harbour construction at Rishāhr, near Būshēhr, in the Persian Gulf. The base is part of a semi-worked pedestal of a well-known type in the Mediterranean Sea and is

6. The echo of this break away from earlier ideologies and methods came only in the 80s (Carandini 1975; 1979), and the chances of restoring a sense of continuity still seem remote. Taddei (1979) had some interesting remarks to make on the subject, legitimately defending the complete independence of the historian of ancient art from the historian of the material culture, who is also concerned with the economic implications. The great quantity of objects that had not come from excavations, all used to reconstruct the art history of the ancient Near East, may run the risk to represent the screen behind which some scholars passed off fakes as authentic pieces, giving wide circulation to the distorting elements of history. The complicated network of connections between the forger, the dealer and the collector can be put under scrutiny for the first time, without sparing the organization and management of institutes responsible for the protection and conservation of works of art.

7. *Anathyrosis* is the technical term for how the ancients frequently dressed the joints of stone blocks. Since the blocks were set directly against each other without the use of a mortar, the joint had to be exact. In order to reduce the amount of time required to form such a joint, the joining face of the stone was finished and smoothed only in a narrow contact band on the sides and the top, while the interior of the face was recessed. The contact band looks somewhat like a doorframe, and the term—it was coined by the ancients—is allusive. *Thyra* (θύρα) is a Greek word for "door", and so "door framing" is *anathyrosis*. This technique was frequently employed in the construction of walls, including ashlar construction, and might be used between the drums of columns as well. Close examination of where this technique was applied to a stone can help to reveal its place within a structure, or whether other stones were joined onto it.

8. Mouldings are generally circular in plan, with a convex and semi-circular profile. In Doric Attic style, it presents longitudinal grooves. In the Ionic base appears in the sequence torus-moulding-astragal-astragal's-moulding-torus.

chronologically located between the Roman age and the late Antiquity. The related ceramic material found is dated back to the Seleucid and proto-Parthian time. Other examples, though iconographic, are the simplified Ionic pseudo-archaic columns, with particularly salient volutes represented on the rock-tomb of Da'o Dokhtār. The problematic of these uncertain capitals and bases of the Achaemenid and post-Achaemenid period could be linked to an equally symptomatic incidence concerning the dozens of bases of columns present in the Museum of Hamadan and that still wait to be interpreted to the light of their exact origin and chronological location. Moving on, one can dwell about minute objects, among which some vessels in silver, bronze or glass and some small bronze statuary and bijouterie, usually coming from illegal excavations. If most of the evidence comes from North Iran, Caucasus and Central Asia, the only site of the plateau that has a certain number of significant objects is, as already mentioned, namely, Nehāvānd.

Among sculptural evidence we can mention a fragment of foot from the temple of *Frātārākā*, a head from Tāll-e Zāhāk, another one near Fāsā, a base of small statue from Borazjān, a statue base from Fīrūzabād, a masculine statue from Malyān region and a male bust from Tomb-e Bot. The statue of Tāll-e Zāhāk is related to a female religious iconography including the Malamir torso. Whereas the statue could be interpreted as a religious item, or a fire altar a fragment of a small statue from Tāll-e-Khāndaq, at 6 km north of Boruzjān, nearby the Dālaki river, it was actually found in a building. It consists of a white marble, apparently typical of that coming from the Greek islands, and representing a male figure with a rather complex morphological articulation.

Yet, Wiesehöfer (1996) tried to highlight the so-called "dark-ages" of the period. It is plausible that there existed a transitional period when the political power passed from the Greek-Macedonians to the local Iranian. However, even in this case, the direct testimonies are very few and, among them, the archaeological evidences of the local aristocracy. When it comes to the defence of the Macedonian satrap Peukestas, a pass of Diodorus Siculus (XIX, 48, 5) appears as a clear evidence of the new socio-political situation occurred among the locals and the Greek-Macedonians. Only two years before, in fact, the situation appeared much more honourable for the Persians. Furthermore, the lack of sources should be emphasised despite the Aramaic inscription present on the façade of the Darius's tomb at Nāqsh-i Rustām, on which the name Seleukos appears, though of uncertain chronology and attribution (Henning 1958: 24; Herzfeld 1926: 244; Wiesehöfer 1994: 91-90). Instead, according to Frye (1982: 90; 1984: 159-158), it is quite difficult to imagine Greeks interested in a monument of Achaemenid age. Quite interesting is the episode quoted by Polyenus (VII, 39), related to the massacre ordered by a Seleucid *strategos* of a military group of 3000 men in revolt in the Randa village. The revolt was against the sovereign Oborzos (Polyenus, VII, 40), who has to be identified with Wahubarz, the sovereign attested by numismatics (Stiehl 1959: 376; Alram 1986: 167).

Coins evidence

The iconography present on the prestigious coinage of the Fārs' rulers provides us with evidence that the Persian dynasty (or "Persian dynasties") used a typical instrument of the Hellenistic tradition, the coinage, to reaffirm its power. In fact, both the *recto* and the *verso* of those coins are in line with the Greek tradition. The king, in profile, facing right and his head covered with a Persian *bashlik* with a *tiara* presenting two variants (Jakubiak 2005). Both for its technology and material quality, this monetary tradition testifies a time of great creativity in the Hellenistic tradition, which emphasises, very strangely to tell the truth, its impact much more visibly in the craftsmanship minor production, than in sculpture and decorative arts. It must actually be said that once again in particularly significant cases we are faced with a total lack of actual and macroscopic contextuality, generally interpreted as primary evidence of contacts or cultural influences. In Hellenistic Iran, however, it is the minor cases that dictate the law and influence the interpretative criteria of scholars.

The presence of coins both in Iran and Central Asia constitutes somehow a Greek outcome and the use of such a high level of technical specialisation in coinage issue was certainly due to long lasting experienced workshops. At the same time, it is just this situation that allows us to locate the Fārs' coinage inside the Hellenistic tradition of production. This is probably another crucial interpretative point. Alram thinks that the centre of production was Eštaḵhr (1986: 164), even if the archaeological knowledge of the city is very far from being appreciable. We

cannot exclude the possibility that other centres were involved in such a production, as Susa, Seleucia of Eulaios, or Antiochia of Persis etc. This hypothesis, which finds convincing aspects in silver coins, has not been considered in the literature for the gold and bronze coins. It is once more evident that the real, crucial issue is about the interaction *versus* integration of the two communities, both of which sometimes seem to prevail, sometimes to succumb. The use of coinage remains substantially Greek (Jakubiak 2005), the iconography and the epigraphs appear to be more likely Iranian. This is true especially as far as specific Aramaic names and denominations are concerned (Wiesehöfer 1994: 136; 2001; Callieri 1998; Chaumont 1959: 179; Humbach 1988: 102; Skjærvo 1997: 102; Panaino 2003: 283; De Jong 2003; Grenet 2003: 72; Potts 2007), which refer to something connected to the King and Gods, or sovereigns. At this point, one can dwell particularly on the word *bayān* and, in conclusions, it could not be but a new use started by the sovereigns of Fārs, which will be taken up later by the Sasanians (see the case of Bīšapūr for example).[9]

Apart from the Fārs coinage, there are two other categories of documentation related to the Fārs dynasty: a silver cup (Skjærvo 1997) and the wall graffiti uncovered at Persepolis (Callieri 2006). In the first case, the cup, whose shape and form have not been concretely analysed and studied, bears an inscription in middle Persian that has been transliterated.[10] As far as the graffiti are concerned, some of the iconography present there recall some of the figures on the coins. As it is known, the graffiti are depicted on some of the windows frames of the *Tachara* or *Harem* of Darius at Persepolis (Calmeyer 1976: fig. 3), which represent isolated personages and also some more complicated figures to be compared with some rock-reliefs of Sasanian age (Callieri 2006). The identification of such figures, in profile and turned to the left, with some of those represented in the Fārs' coins, are not any more convincing, although the personages represented bear the same headgear, one of which with seven points. The *tiara* they bear are certainly of a sovereign-type, and were found with some variants in contexts datable from the first half of the 1st century BCE to the 1st quarter of the 3rd century CE. Besides, the different proposals of interpretations of the single personage and of the existence of this particular type of documentation are particularly important for Persepolis already at the time of the Fārs' sovereigns (Frye 1975: 238).

It is also worth noticing the presumed existence of the ancient Parthian city Hecatompylos in western Khurasan and capital of the Iranian Arsacid dynasty. It might have already fallen into decline when the Seleucids revived it as a military outpost about 300 BCE. By about 200 BC, it was the Arsacid capital and is mentioned as such by Pliny, Strabo, and Ptolemy. Hecatompylos lay on the Silk Road trade route between the Near East and China. Although it is thought to have been built at a location not far from Dāmghān and Shāhrūd in Semnan province, its precise site has not been established.

The Seleucids in Iran

As a matter of fact, the Seleucid impact on Iran was, mostly probably, political, military and economic rather than cultural. The dynasty did not seem to have tried to change the existing social and cultural contexts, and very little traces of this impact remained in the later culture, with the important exception of the monarchic ideology and religion. It also adopted a much consolidated and partially coin-based economy and an improved infrastructural system, contributing to increase the east-west trade-commercial roads between Central Asia and the Mediterranean, enriching the ancient Near East's warfare with the heavily armoured war elephant and cataphract, the mailed cavalryman riding a heavy war horse. The Seleucid dynasty structured agreements and alliances with the local élites, favouring local cults also utilising cultic patronage as a means to integrate elites and create imperial cohesion. In particular, it seem to have systematically favoured the building up of various local and, especially, regional sanctuaries dedicated to Moon and Sun deities, who were, thus, both associated with each other and also with the dynasty's tutelary twin deities, Apollo and Artemis, the reigning couple. The eventual consequences of this policy for the development of Hellenistic syncretistic and henotheistic religion need still to be examined. The Seleucid religious policy was, however, an essential step in the evolution of centralised imperial religions that would end in the adoption of monotheism as an instrument of political unification. Another significant development, particularly in the

9. The mostly accepted meaning of the name would derive from the Middle Persian Bay-Šāpūr "Lord Šāpūr" (Sundermann 1986: 294-95), found on bullae (Herzfeld 1938: 418; Byšpwhr), on a seal (Gignoux 1978: 5f.; Byš˙pwhr), in the 5th-century Middle Persian inscription of Eqlīd, probably Byhšpwhl (Frye 1970: 155), and in the Coptic Manichean homilies, Bašabahōr (Sundermann 1986: 294).

10. *May I be happiness to King Ardaxšahr, our brother a descendant of Dārāyān, son of King Dārāyā! This "hammered" (bowl in) gold-and-silver (weights) 50 staters. It belongs to Prince Dārāyān II (Skjærvo 1997: 93).*

areas ruled by the Iranian aristocracies, was the so-called 'feudalisation' of the Ancient Near East with the creation of a vassal state system that would endure for centuries. The Seleucid political-imperial formation was not a sort of foreign *interregnum* in the history of Iran, and it should be considered as the heir of the age-old eastern royal tradition, with direct translation into Greek with the title "Great King" as *basileus megas*, transmitting it to the Parthians, the Romans and beyond.

Hellenism and Central Asia

Central Asia is known for being a complex territorial area, repeatedly examined by different and famous scholars, even for deeper interpretations of its geographical definition and meaning (Rapin 1998). The archaeological knowledge of the Central Asian cultures has been based, above all, on the analyses of the original pastoral nomadism that extended over all the steppe areas that characterised it, mainly starting from the Bronze Age, on those of the north-eastern peripheral areas of Margiana, Chorasmia, Sogdiana and partly Bactriana of the Achaemenid political-imperial formation, and the early-medieval Sogdiana.

In the Hellenistic period, Central Asia is characterised by the birth of numerous political formations in some way directly or indirectly linked to the dissolution of the political system created by Alexander. Beyond the complex political events that occurred after the death of Alexander, and until the establishment of the political and imperial formation of the Parthians, the area saw the constituency of political units characterised by dynastic and para-dynastic structures, in which the presence of the Greek element, ethnically, and above all culturally, has marked and transformed history.

We will focus on some of these political unities, such as the Greek-Bactrian and Indo-Greek kingdoms, which by far appear to be the most significant for length and importance.

Greek-Bactrian political formation

Diodotus, the satrap of Bactriana, founded the Greek-Bactrian political-formation when he seceded from the Seleucid political-imperial formation around 250 BCE and became King Diodotus I of Bactriana (Tarn 1966). Ancient sources are contradictory, and the exact date of this Bactrian "independence" has not been settled. Somewhat simplified, there is a high chronology (c. 255 BCE) and a low chronology (c. 246 BCE) for Diodotos' succession. The high chronology has the advantage of explaining why the Seleucid king Antiochus II issued very few coins in Bactria, as Diodotos would have become independent there early in Antiochus' reign. Furthermore, the low chronology, from the mid-240s BCE, has the advantage of connecting the succession of Diodotus I with the third Syrian War, a catastrophic conflict for the Seleucid political-imperial formation (Mairs 2016).

The new kingdom, highly urbanised and considered one of the richest of the Orient (Justin XLI, 1), was to further grow in power and engage in territorial expansion to the east and the west.

In 247 BCE, the Ptolemaic political-imperial formation captured the Seleucid capital, Antiochia. In the resulting power *vacuum*, Andragoras, the Seleucid satrap of Parthia, proclaimed independence from the Seleucids, declaring himself king. A decade later, he was defeated and killed by Arsaces of Parthia, leading to the rise of a Parthian political-imperial formation. This cut Bactriana off from contact with the Greek world. Overland trade continued at a reduced rate, while sea trade between Greece, Egypt and Bactriana developed. Diodotus was succeeded by his son Diodotus II, who allied himself with the Parthian Arsaces in his fight against Seleucos II.

Euthydemus, a Greek from Magnesia, according to Polybius, and possibly satrap of Sogdiana, overthrew the dynasty of Diodotus I around 220-230 BCE and started his own dynasty. Euthydemus's control extended, going beyond the city of Alexandra *Eschate* founded by Alexander the Great in Ferghana.

Euthydemus was attacked by the Seleucid ruler Anthiocos III around 210 BCE. Although he commanded 10,000 horsemen, Euthydemus initially lost a battle and had to retreat. He, then, successfully resisted a three-year siege in the fortified city of Bactres (modern Balkh), before Antiochus finally decided to recognise the new ruler, and to offer one of his daughters to Euthydemus's son Demetrius around 206 BCE. Classical accounts also relate that Euthydemus negotiated peace with Antiochus III by suggesting that he deserved credit for overthrowing the original rebel Diodotus, and that he was protecting Central Asia from nomadic invasions thanks to his defensive efforts (Bopearachchi & Sachs 2003; Martinez-Sève 2017).

Indo-Greek political formation

The Indo-Greek political-formation[11] covered various parts of Afghanistan and the northwest regions of the Indian sub-continent during the last two centuries BCE, and was ruled by more than thirty chiefs (kings), often conflicting with one another (Narain 1957).

The political-formation was founded when the Greco-Bactrian chief Demetrius invaded the sub-continent early in the 2nd century BCE. The Greeks in the Indian sub-continent were eventually divided from the Greek-Bactrians centred in Bactres (now the border between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan), and the Indo-Greeks in the present-day north-western Indian sub-continent. The most famous Indo-Greek ruler was Menander, who had his capital at Sakala, in the Punjab (present-day Sialkot).

The expression "Indo-Greek Kingdom" loosely describes a number of various dynastic polities, traditionally associated with a number of regional capitals like Taxila (modern Punjab, Pakistan), Pushkalavati and Sakala. Other potential centres are only hinted; for instance, Ptolemy's Geographia and the nomenclature of later kings suggest that a certain Theophila in the south of the Indo-Greek sphere of influence may also have been a satrap or royal seat at one time.

During the two centuries of their rule, the Indo-Greek chiefs combined the Greek and Indian languages and symbols, as seen on their coins (Bopearachchi 1991), and blended Greek and Indian ideas, as seen in the archaeological remains. The diffusion of Indo-Greek culture had consequences which are still felt today, particularly through the influence of Greek-Buddhist Art. The ethnicity of the Indo-Greek may also have been hybrid to some degree. Euthydemus I was, according to Polybius, a Magnesian Greek. His son, Demetrius I, founder of the Indo-Greek political formation, was therefore of Greek ethnicity at least by his father. A marriage treaty was arranged for the same Demetrius with a daughter of the Seleucid ruler Antiochus II (who had some Persian descent). The ethnicity of later Indo-Greek rulers is sometimes less clear. For example, Artemidoros (80 BCE) may have been of Indo-Scythian ascendency, although this is now disputed.

Following the death of Menander, most of his rule splintered, and Indo-Greek influence was considerably reduced. Many new political formations began to mint new coinage depicting military victories. The most prominent entities were the Yaudheya, Arjunayanas, and the Audumbaras, the first two are said to have won "victory by the sword". The Indo-Greeks ultimately disappeared as a political entity around 10 CE following the invasions of the Indo-Scythians, although pockets of Greek populations probably remained for several centuries longer under the subsequent rule of the Indo-Parthians and Kushans.

Around 322 BCE, the Greeks (described as Yona or Yavana in Indian sources) may then have participated, together with other groups, in the armed uprising of Chandragupta Maurya against the Nanda Dynasty, and gone as far as Pataliputra for the capture of the city from the Nandas. The Mudrarakshasa of Visakhadutta, as well as the Jaina work Parisishtaparvan, talk of Chandragupta's alliance with the Himalayan king Parvatka, often identified with Porus. According to these accounts, this alliance gave Chandragupta a composite and powerful army made up of Yavanas (Greeks), Kambojas, Shakas (Scythians), Kiratas (Nepalese), Parasikas (Persians) and Bahlikas (Bactrians) who took Pataliputra.

In 305 BCE, Seleucus I led an army to the Indus, where he encountered Chandragupta. The confrontation ended with a peace treaty and "an intermarriage agreement", meaning either a dynastic marriage or an agreement for intermarriage between Indians and Greeks. Accordingly, Seleucus ceded to Chandragupta his north-western territories, possibly as far as Arachosia and received 500 war elephants (which played a key role in the victory of Seleucus at the Battle of Ipsus).

Chandragupta, however, followed Jainism until the end of his life. He got in his court for marriage the daughter of Seleucus Nikator, Helen, and thus he mixed the Indians and the Greeks. Also several Greeks, such as the historian Megasthenes, followed by Deimachus and Dionysius, were sent to reside at the Mauryan court. Gifts continued to be exchanged between the two rulers. The intensity of these contacts is testified by the existence of a dedicated Mauryan state department for Greek (Yavana) and Persian foreigners, or the remains of Hellenistic pottery that can be found throughout northern India.

On these occasions, Greek populations apparently remained in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent

11. It included Bactriana and Sogdiana in Central Asia from 250 to 125 BCE and was centred on the north of present-day Afghanistan. The expansion of the Greek-Bactrians into present-day eastern Afghanistan and Pakistan from 180 BCE established the Indo-Greek political formation, which was to last until around 10 CE.

under Mauryan rule. Chandragupta's grandson Ashoka, who had converted to the Buddhist faith declared in the Edicts of Ashoka, inscribed in stone (some of them written in Greek), that Greek populations within his realm also had converted to Buddhism.

In his edicts, Ashoka mentions that he had sent Buddhist emissaries to Greek rulers as far as the Mediterranean, and that he developed herbal medicine in their territories, for the welfare of humans and animals.

The Greeks in India even seem to have played an active role in the propagation of Buddhism. This is evidenced by some of the emissaries of Ashoka such as Dharmaraksita, or the teacher Mahadharmaraksita, which are described in Pali sources as leading Greek ("Yona", i.e., Ionian) Buddhist monks, active in Buddhist proselytism (the Mahavamsa, XII). It is also thought that Greeks contributed to the sculptural work of the "Pillars" of Ashoka, and more generally to the blossoming of Mauryan artistic production. Some Greeks (Yavanas) may have played an administrative role in the territories ruled by Ashoka: the Junagadh rock inscriptions record that, during the rule of Ashoka, a Yavana King/ Governor named Tushaspha was in charge in the area of Girmar, Gujarat, mentioning his role in the construction of a water reservoir.

Again in 206 BCE, the Seleucid emperor Antiochus led an army to the Kabul valley, where he received war elephants and presents from the local king Sophagasenus.

Art, sculpture and architecture

The political construction of Alexander the Great was an event so rich in meaning also for the Greek artistic production that, transplanting itself in the eastern lands and deriving some figurative characteristics, underwent changes in the formal tendencies. The commissioning of the art works passed from the old cities to the great oriental cultural centres and the courts of the sovereigns, driven by the desire to embellish their capitals, such as Pella, Antiochia of Syria, Alexandria and Pergamon.

Conventionally, we tend to distinguish an artistic production in three distinct periods: early (240-323 BCE), middle (150-240 BCE) and late (150 BCE-31 BCE). We would, therefore, have moved from the late-classical experiences of the early Hellenism to a style with characteristics such as movement, grandeur and the search for the scenic effect of the middle Hellenism, up to an art with classicist tendencies again of late Hellenism.

Workshops of Greek or Hellenized artisans flourished in Bactriana and in particular in the most important cities of Nisa Partica, Ai Khanum (Invernizzi 2007b, idem 2009). Unfortunately, however, very few are the sculptures of Hellenistic age and style brought to light (Parlasca 1991). The excellence of the portraits and the typology of the motifs of the coins wrought in the oriental mints of the Seleucid and Greek-Bactrian kings is indeed proof of a Greek activity. The perhaps most significant all around sculpture in Greek Bactriana is the herm-portrait found in the gymnasium in Ai Khanum and dating from about the 2nd century BCE. Particularly singular in this herm is the head. It thus acquires particular significance that the Arsacid ceremonial centre of Nisa, in the heart of Parthia, has given back numerous fragments of small-sized marble sculptures (Masson, Pugacenkova 1957; Invernizzi 2009). The best preserved statues represent half-naked Aphrodite Anadyomene and a majestic archaistic figure, and date back to the second half of the 2nd century BC. The first (Masson, Puegacenkova 1956, 472-483; Invernizzi 1994, table 34: 3; idem 2001, fig. 1; idem 2005, fig. 2; idem 2007a, fig. 8-9; idem 2007b , 62; idem 2009, 3-41, tavv. I-viii) offers an image of the goddess who prepares hair created in the wake of Mediterranean production. The archaistic statue (Masson, Pugacenkova 1956, 466-472; Invernizzi 1994, table 37: 3; idem 2001, fig. 2; idem 2005, fig. 3; idem 2007b, 70; LIMC 2009, 375, add 12; idem 2009, 43-70, table ix-xii), reveals a very fine modelling.

It affects in Greek Bactriana the extreme rarity of terracotta figurines - in particular, very few are the specimens brought to light at Ai Khanum (Guillaume, Rougeulle 1987, 60-62, tavs 19 and xvi; Abdullaev 1996), when both the levels Seleucid and Partic of Seleucia, Babilonia and Susa are literally inundated with fragments of figurines (Van Ingen 1935; Invernizzi 1968-1969; Martinez Sève 2002; Klengel-Brandt, Cholys 2006). On the other hand, a class of documents that are characteristic of the official context emerges in Central Asia, practically absent, as far as we know, in the western regions: the monumental sculptures in raw clay. The male face from the temple with indented niches at Ai Khanum is an effective portrait datable to the first half of the 2nd century BC, one of the first examples of a technique destined to great developments

throughout Central Asia, a high relief in this case, in the round instead in the documents of the Bactrian temple of the Oxus a Takht-i Sangin (Litvinskij 2003), and especially in the extraordinary clay sculptures of Nisa partica.

The fragment of a male head comes from the Round Hall, and probably represents Mithridates I (Invernizzi 2001, fig. 9; Bollati 2008, tavv. xxv-xxvii). Much more generically idealized, by comparison, are the features of the slightly later male heads from the Square Hall by Old Nisa (Pilipko 1995; Invernizzi 2000, fig. 4; Idem 2001, figs. 10-11). A Nana/Nanaia in the splendid gilded silver plaque of Ai Khanum, where the great goddess on the chariot for a Greek cannot be other than Cybele, great goddess herself of oriental origin, arrived in Greece from Phrygia. The plate of Ai Khanum can mark an initial stage creating a perfect Greek style. Cybele, who is standing upright on her chariot pulled by a pair of oversized lions, carries the polos her usual headdress and is one of the most successful cases of Greek and oriental forms and contents known to us in Hellenized Asia. The range of solutions in the manufacture of silver rhyta is particularly wide, a type of container that is at the same time Greek and Oriental.Finally, certainly Greek or carved carvers in Greek shops are also the authors of the prodigious ivory rhyta of Nisa, in which the subjects of the terminal figures, the griffin (Masson, Pugacenkova 1982, 127-131), the gibbous androcephalus bull, the centaurus and the acolyte hydrophora of Anahita are both Greek and Iranian. An extraordinary group of documents, by number and quality, whose in-depth study can open wide openings to the understanding of the greatness of Hellenistic art in Asia.

The architecture is very different from the classical for a strong eclectic character, manifested from the outset due to the tendency to overlap the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian orders, which were well suited to the new decorative taste attentive to the scenography effects. According to the greater needs of the dynastic courts, new types of buildings are born, such as gymnasiums, stylistic innovations are experimented in the porticoes, in the peristyles and in the colonnaded streets of Delos, Athens, Eleusis, Miletus, Rhodes, and Pergamum. Even religious architecture, while remaining faithful to the classical canons, is influenced by new trends and alternative solutions to the static nature of the Templar plan are experimented, such as the circular plan (*tholos*) and the semi-circular *exedra*. The same urban planning of the new eastern foundations presents important innovations concerning the regular layout of some cities, such as Prienes and Dura-Europos. Finally, the new architectural type of the monumental altar is born, with the beautiful example of the Altar of Zeus in Pergamum.

During the period, the sculpture becomes more naturalistic, abandoning in a certain way the ideals of beauty and physical perfection characteristic of the classical period. The common people, men, women, children, animals and domestic scenes, along with exotic subjects (such as Africans, pygmies, fantastic beings), become common subjects in the sculptural production, commissioned by wealthy families for the ornament of villas and gardens. To the decorative sculpture typical of the Rhodian and Alexandrine schools, more classicist of the works destined to the temples and to the public places is compared. The Pergamon school is greatly original, a proponent of a theatrical and dynamic art.

In general, the artistic production of the Indo-Greeks is poorly documented, and few works of art (apart from their coins and stone palettes) are directly attributed to them. The coinage of the Indo-Greeks, however, is generally considered as some of the most artistically brilliant. As far as the political historical level of the period is concerned, we are obliged to consider that the Hellenistic epoch is known only in a very fragmentary way, whereas the archaeological discoveries of Aï-Khanūm and Bactres and others in Central Asia have revealed the great importance of the period.

The Hellenistic heritage and artistic proficiency of the Indo-Greek world would suggest a rich sculptural tradition as well, but traditionally very few sculptural remains have been attributed to them. On the contrary, most Gandharan Hellenistic works of art are usually attributed to the direct successors of the Indo-Greeks in India in the 1st century CE, such as the nomadic Indo-Scythians, the Indo-Parthians and, in an already decadent state, the Kushans. In general, Gandharan sculpture cannot be dated exactly, leaving the exact chronology open to interpretation.

The possibility of a direct connection between the Indo-Greeks and Greco-Buddhist has been reaffirmed recently as the dating of the rule of Indo-Greek kings has been extended to the first decades of the 1st century CE, with the reign of Starto II in the Punjab. Furthermore, Tarn (1938), more recently, Boardman (1994), Bussagli *et al.* 1996,

amd McEvilley (2002), as well as Bopearachchi and Boussac (2005) have taken the view that some of the most purely Hellenistic works of north-western India and Afghanistan may actually be wrongly attributed to later centuries. Instead, those belong to one or two centuries earlier, to the time of the Indo-Greeks in the 2nd-1st century BCE.

This is particularly the case for some works in Hadda, Afghanistan, an area which might indeed be the cradle of incipient Buddhist sculpture in Indo-Greek style. Referring to one of the Buddha triads in Hadda, in which the Buddha is sided by very classical depictions of Herakles/Vajrapani and Tyche/Hariti, Boardman explains that both figures might at first (and even second) glance, pass as, say, from Asia Minor or Syria of the first or second century BCE. These are essentially Greek figures, executed by artists fully conversant with far more than the externals of the Classical.

The famous building on Tākht-e Sangin in Tadžikistan still has to be certainly attributed to a sacred character, and the spread of nude female figurines of Aphrodites in Nisa, in Central Asia, and in Uzbekistan (Abdullaev 2014: 382-359), because the sources exclude this phenomenon for the Iranian plateau, are regarded as private and non-public cultic items.

The platforms of Koktepe, the temples of Sangir Tepe and Kindyk Tepe (Rapin 2017) in Uzbekistan may belong to a Mazdean tradition that was instrumental in uniting various tribal groups. It is yet unclear how this relates to the Achaemenid heartland religion, though the hypothesised role of Auramazdā as ancestral deity may be recalled. At any rate, the dual use of open-air sanctuaries and built temples also existed in Pārsa, undoubtedly as a function of the complex underlying traditions.

Iranism and Hellenism

The different conceptions of Iranism and Hellenism (Asheri 1983) beyond their original historical-cultural meanings, time by time assumed, have become interpretative categories that, from screens to cultural contents, are difficult to decipher. Sometimes Iranism has been used to indicate cultural tendencies towards Iran or that turn to Iran outside of it, and Hellenism to indicate what from the Hellenic world has been detached for broad processes of cultural expansion. Broader than Iranism, the expression of Hellenism intends to indicate a conception of a new era, based both on the expansion of the Hellenic culture particularly in Asia, and in the West. With the former, one wanted rather to express a similar tendency of cultural content that is not always expansive, but of a fragmentary character influencing the traditionally non-Iranian cultural areas. Because of the very fluid and dynamic content of these two concepts, they were also sometimes exaggerated in their meanings with misleading characterisations.

It is indisputable that both terms refer to those complex geographical, political and cultural worlds of Iranian and Greek cultures and that, in one way or another, have marked their characteristics and of their surroundings.

Iranians had long been able to expand to Asia Minor for about two centuries, with the unlimited help of material means made available by the central satrap rule (Genito 2010; 2017). Hellenism permeates through the pores of the 'intermediate band', the different transverse and less institutionalised ways, more individual and normally peaceful. The ways this encounter was realised is probably represented by trade and business relationships, daily contacts between cities and mixed rural areas, meetings for the purpose of worship in the most popular sanctuaries, visits by artists and of (Strootman 12-2011).

Hellenism obviously could not impose itself with force over the border; and perhaps for this reason it had its own fascination and paradoxically found less resistance in the Achaemenid period than after the conquest of Alexander.

Generally speaking, the material culture from the Seleucid period in Iran, as it has been already dealt with, has rarely been the object of excavations by archaeologists, who concentrated mostly on the pre-Achaemenid, Achaemenid, and Sasanian remains. The only *Greek*-style remains are associated with the Seleucids, meanwhile, the remains from the period that archaeologists classify as Iranian in style, have been usually disconnected from the Seleucids and considered as the products of a Persian Revival.

To sum up, the Seleucid dominion has always been considered a 'western' political-imperial formation and, therefore, a sort of foreign element in the history of the ancient Near East. In fact, it was common for most of the eastern political-imperial formations to be created by conquerors coming from abroad. The Achaemenids and Sasanians represent to some extent exceptions. However, like the Macedonians they also had as their homeland a relatively peripheral territory, beyond the urbanised central regions. Moreover, the Seleucid political-imperial formation

was geographically largely unrelated with Greece and Macedonia, because its inner regions were mostly Babylonia, Susiana, Media, and northern Syria. Modern historiography could not interpret the nature of the Macedonian kings, whose power rested on the support of Greek and Hellenised urban élites and the loyalty of Iranian aristocrats.

It would have been more appropriate to consider the Seleucids as a hegemonic political-imperial formation, instead of a kind of state with formal administrative institutions, a unified system of taxation, a capital, and well-defined 'defensible' borders. You will find none of this kind in the Hellenistic Near East, except cities and minor sovereignties. Like most of the pre-modern political-imperial formations, the Seleucid constituted a sort of a non-state system: a tribute-taking, military organisation centred on an itinerant dynastic household that preferred cooperation with local powers, in order to exercise the rule, and focused on controlling the roads rather than to trying to 'govern' peoples and lands. Like any political-imperial power, the Seleucids were relentlessly expansive, as the aggressive policy of even Antiochus IV and his successors demonstrate. There were only autonomous cities, temples and tribes; tribute-paying and non-tribute paying vassal political formations; allies; friends.

Looking at the Seleucid political-imperial formation, one should no longer consider their history and culture in terms of an east-west dichotomy…, as both the Heliocentric *and* postcolonial schools have always done. It is more appropriate to see the Seleucid history as an integral part of Near East political development, and, for that matter, to see Greeks and Macedonians as peoples integrated into a wider Mediterranean and Near Eastern 'world system'.

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آفرینش نامه

مقاله‌های باستان‌شناسی در نکوداشت استاد مهدی رهبر

به‌کوشش: یوسف مرادی

با همکاری سوزان کنتن، ادوارد جان کیل و رسول بروجنی