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Elite, Wine Consumption and Status Symbols in Ancient Chorasmia

Michele Minardi

Ausonius UMR 5607, CNRS, France / Karakalpak-Australian Expedition
to Ancient Chorasmia (KAE)

michele.minardi@u-bordeaux-montaigne.fr

Abstract

This paper analyses two objects of Hellenistic taste related to wine consumption unearthed during the archaeological excavations of Akchakhan-kala in Ancient Chorasmia: a fragmentary ivory *rhyton* and a terracotta mould in the shape of a satyr's head used to decorate ceramics. These items are only the latest evidence regarding wine consumption and selective reception of Hellenistic culture in 1st century BC-2nd century AD Ancient Chorasmia. Although these two finds show a remarkable Hellenistic influence, it is assured that in Chorasmia wine consumption and vine cultivation were already widespread in the 5th century BC when the local elite used precious vessels of Achaemenid style for their tables and when the lesser strata of the population imitated these Hellenistic specimens and related practices. Once again the "isolated" Chorasmia shows its remarkable tendency to select foreign artistic/artisanal elements for its crafts and to adopt/import alien status symbols for concepts shared by the elites of the Hellenised east.

* Maison de l'Archéologie, 8, esplanade des Antilles, Université Bordeaux Montaigne, 33607 Pessac Cedex, France.

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Keywords

Ancient Chorasmia – ivory *rhyton* – Hellenistic moulds – status symbols – wine and viticulture

Introduction

Although Alexander never reached Chorasmia, a land that lies in the lower reaches of the Amu-darya/Oxus, it seems that Dionysos – or at least a member of his retinue – did. The mould of a satyr's head from Akchakhan-kala, briefly discussed in a recent publication,² is part of the scant evidence regarding the reception of Hellenistic culture in Ancient Chorasmia at the turn of our era. Together with this terracotta satyr, a fragmentary ivory *rhyton* from the excavation of the Ceremonial Complex of Akchakhan-kala contributes to cast some light on the use of status symbols by the Chorasmian elite before the progressive but full integration of the polity in a greater network of exchanges and communication since the 2nd century AD (the Antique 3 period, formerly “Kushan”).³

The Iranian Central Asian polity of Chorasmia (Fig. 1), principally known among scholars for the archaeological endeavours of the Soviet “Khorezm Expedition” (KhAEE/KhAÉÉ) led by S. P. Tolstov (1907-1976),⁴ is one of the “nations” which came under the sway of the Achaemenids during the 6th century BC, and as such it is represented among the numerous others in the Persian reliefs at Persepolis and Naqš-e Rostam, and likewise listed in all the Persian records dealing with the extent of the empire.⁵ The Achaemenid influence on the polity is certain and the control over the area, probably exerted

² Minardi 2015a, 110.

³ As already noted by Tolstov 1962, 226. On Toprak-kala, the emblematic Chorasmian site regarding this stage of the Chorasmian cultural development, see Tolstov 1948a, 119-124; 1948b, 164-190; 1953; 1962, 204-227; Nerazik & Rapoport 1981; Rapoport & Nerazik 1984; Rapoport 1993 and 1994. On the Chorasmian periodization and for further references, see Minardi 2015a.

⁴ “Khorasmian Archaeological-Ethnographical Expedition, division of the USSR Academy of Sciences”. For a full bibliography on the works and studies of the expedition, see Minardi 2015a. References to the work of Tolstov will follow in the text.

⁵ Chorasmia appears in the Achaemenid royal inscriptions DB, DSe, DPe, DNa, XPh and DSab; and its “allegory” in *Sakā* costume is captioned on the royal tombs (DNe and A2Pa). The first mention of Ancient Chorasmia is in the “Young” Avesta (*Yasht* 10, the Hymn to Mithra). For further references, see Minardi 2015a, 13-22.

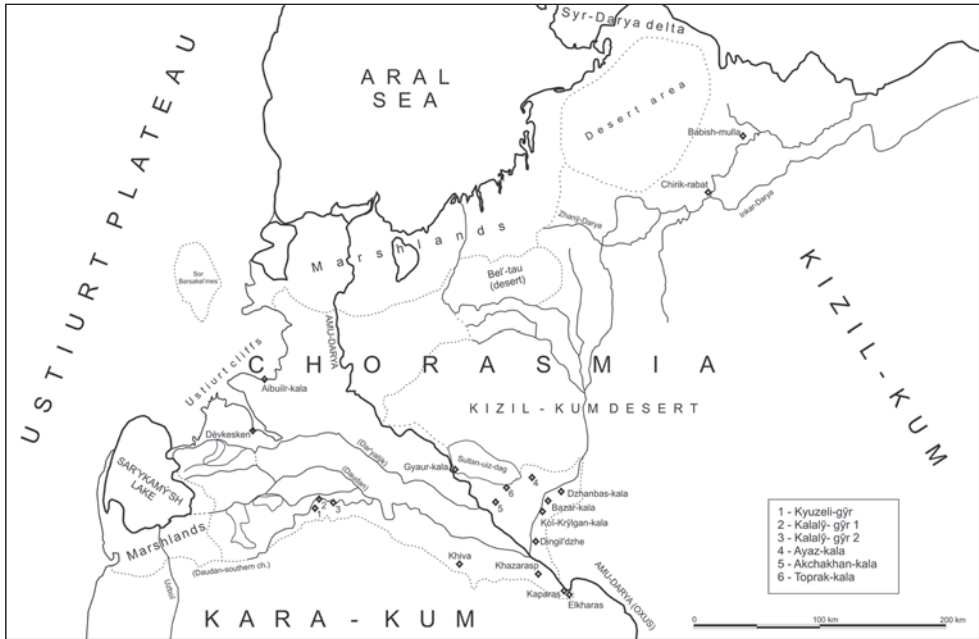


FIGURE 1 *Geographical outline of Ancient Chorasmia with location of main sites (author's drawing).*

through a main Central Asia satrapy such as Bactriana, ignited a cultural development of the country with the appearance of monumental architecture, great canalisation works and a general shift in its material culture.⁶ Due to the strong traditional character of the Chorasmian culture the Achaemenid imprint on the polity persisted for centuries, as evidenced by some recent discoveries at Akchakhan-kala,⁷ and in some forms (such as for instance the use of the Aramaic script) even up to the Arab conquest in the beginning of the 8th century.⁸

After the advent of Alexander, the defeat of the Persians and its aftermath, Chorasmia, due to its position surrounded by deserts and between the steppes and the sedentary world of Central Asia, only partially underwent the Hellenization that invested the other neighbouring polities: in Chorasmia

6 Minardi 2015a with exhaustive references to the KhAEE/KhAÉÉ studies.

7 On the Achaemenid iconography of some wall paintings of Akchakhan-kala, see Betts *et alii* 2015.

8 For further references, see Minardi 2013 with literature.

there was a selection of western practices and symbols adopted according to the needs of its hegemonic classes.⁹ Such is the case of the ivory *rhyton* and the satyr's mould, the objects here discussed. The Greeks never reached the polity and the available written sources regarding the geographical knowledge of this part of Asia clearly show that Chorasmia was consistently ignored and mingled with the world of the northern steppes and its *Sakā* (oriental Scythians) inhabitants.¹⁰

Akchakhan-kala (2nd century BC-2nd century AD; Fig. 2)¹¹ is one of the numerous *gorodishch*¹² of Ancient Chorasmia that today lies in the modern territory of the Semi-Autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan. Since 1995 the Karakalpak-Australian Expedition to Ancient Chorasmia (КАЕ) has focused its archaeological investigations on this site and more in general on the area of the ancient Tash-k'irman canal.¹³ Akchakhan-kala is protected by two walled enclosures, the Upper and the Lower one (15 and 27 hectares respectively); the Upper Enclosure contains a fortified Ceremonial Complex (Area 10) and a Central Monument (Area 07) also of ceremonial function.¹⁴ In its main stage the Ceremonial Complex (1st century BC-1st century AD; Fig. 3) consisted of a columned hall opening onto a courtyard and a sacred/ceremonial area in which a fire altar and fragments of unbaked-clay modelled sculptures have been discovered.¹⁵ Large parts of the Ceremonial Complex were decorated with wall paintings¹⁶ that recently have produced unmistakable iconographic evidence regarding Zoroastrianism in Ancient Chorasmia.¹⁷

9 Minardi 2016a.

10 For further details and for the analysis of the available sources, see Minardi 2015a.

11 In earlier publications the site of Akchakhan-kala (also spelled Akshakhan-kala) was called Kazakl'i-yatkan. The name has been changed from this local one to the name registered in the official heritage record of Uzbekistan. On the stratigraphy and C14 dating of the site, see Betts *et alii* 2009; 2015.

12 For a convenient survey on these Chorasmian fortified sites, see Khozhaniyazov 2005.

13 Helms & Yagodin 1997; Helms *et alii* 2001; 2002; Betts *et alii* 2009; 2015; Kidd & Betts 2010; Minardi & Khozhaniyazov 2015; Minardi 2015a; 2016a; 2016b.

14 Minardi & Khozhaniyazov 2015; Minardi 2016b.

15 The excavation data are still unpublished. For further details on the columned hall of Akchakhan-kala, see Minardi *et alii* 2016. On the fire altar ivory furniture, see Kidd 2011; Minardi 2015a; 2016b. On the unbaked-clay modelled sculptures, see Minardi 2016a.

16 On the wall paintings, see Kidd *et alii* 2004; Kidd & Betts 2010; Kidd 2011.

17 Betts *et alii* 2015.

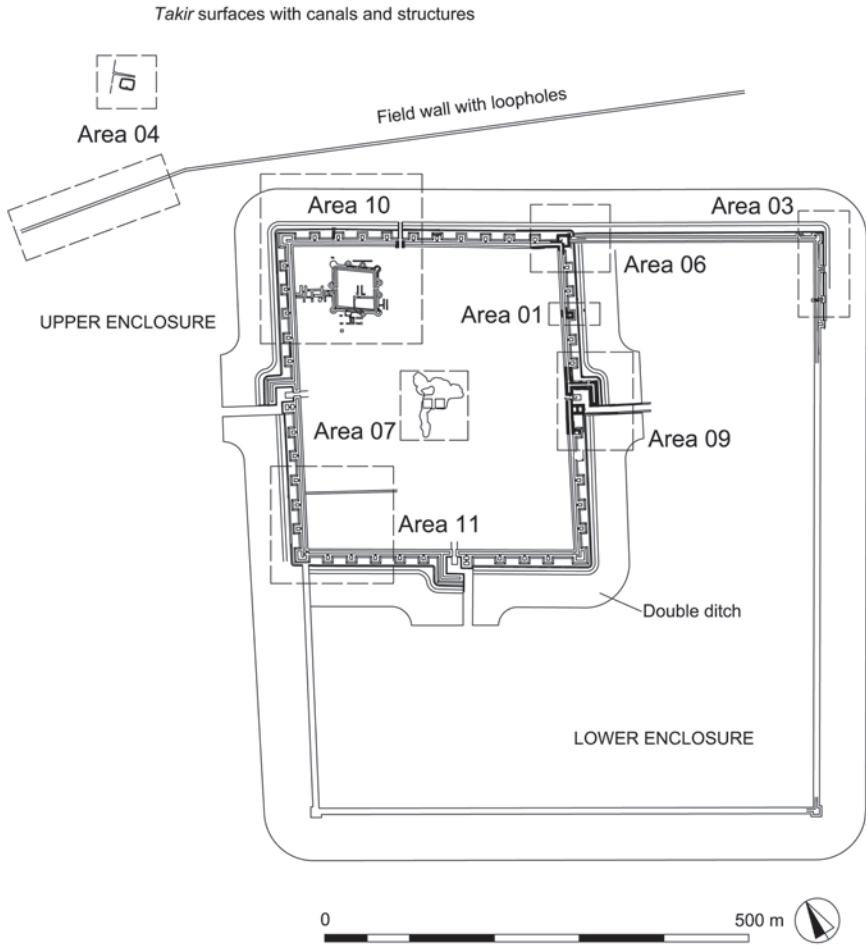


FIGURE 2 *General plan of Akchakhan-kala with excavation areas (KAE).*

What makes this stronghold of special archaeological interest is the fact that Akchakhan-kala used to be a Chorasmanian royal seat¹⁸ in the period prior to the foundation of Toprak-kala (*ca.* 2nd century AD) and the aforementioned integration of Chorasmia in a greater socio-political network (in connection with the development of the “Silk Road”). The KAE excavations have proven that Akchakhan-kala, and in particular Area 10, was abandoned and deliberately

18 As indicated by epigraphic evidence preliminary translated by V. A. Livshits (Betts & Yagodin pers. comm.); see also Kidd & Betts 2010.

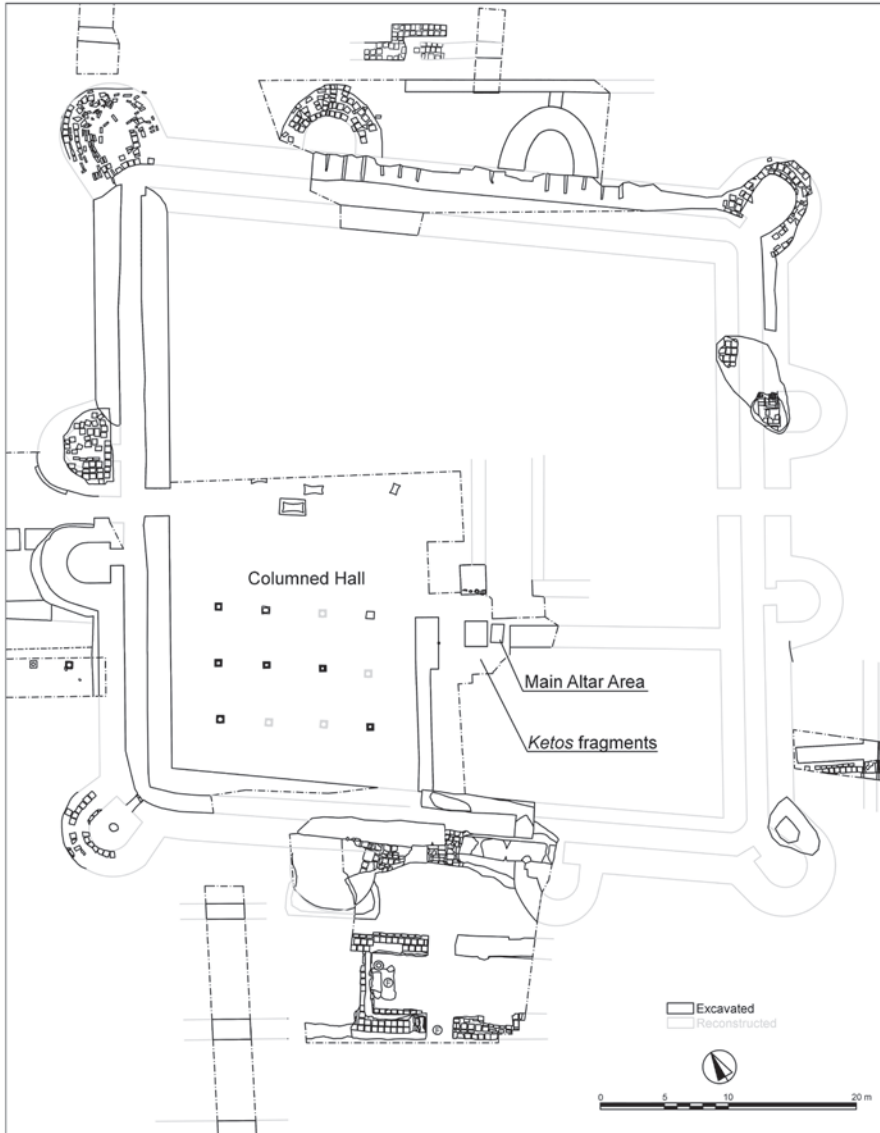


FIGURE 3 Plan of the Ceremonial Complex of Akchakhan-kala (Area 10 – KAE).

despoiled in the course of the 2nd century AD when the new power centre was founded at a distance of less than 15 km. Thus, the *gorodishche*, as well the whole polity in its relative isolation, can be considered as an ideal laboratory for the study of the reception and elaboration of alien artistic/artisanal models – and related ideological issues – within its material culture.

The Ivory *Rhyton* and the Mould in the Shape of a Satyr's Head

The fragment of ivory found during the 2007 campaign of excavations in the Ceremonial Complex (Area 10; Fig. 3),¹⁹ with its general curved shape and its hollow carved interior, is clearly a fragment of the upper part of a *rhyton* (Figs. 4-8). The specimen in its actual preserved state has a maximum length of *ca.* 7 cm, with a height and width of *ca.* 1 cm. The original diameter of the *rhyton* measured *ca.* 12 cm and the object was obtained from a tusk, most likely of an elephant.²⁰ The rim of the drinking horn consists in a polished edge (or rim) less than 1 cm in height, which surmounts what survives of the phytomorphic decoration of the upper portion of the beaker. The edge in its top-part surface shows traces of red colour (Fig. 7).²¹ The vegetal element engraved under the rim of the fragment is acanthus, thus connoting the object as Hellenistic in type. The foliage survives in one of its central portions with a main turning leaf. It is characterized by a rendition of the fine details of its secondary leaves given by small parallel incisions and by a series of deeper cuttings in the turning leaf. The two lesser leaves converging toward the main turning one stylistically typify the foliage of the *rhyton*: this characteristic is quite rare in Central Asian and Indian Corinthian-like capitals and derived decorations, but it finds its closest parallels in Gandhāra.²²

Ivory *rhyta* are not among the most common archaeological finds, especially in relation to Chorasmia where this specimen is currently an *unicum*.²³ Moreover in the polity, where before the 2nd-3rd century AD the material culture does not show a considerable western influence, ceramic *rhyta* are quite

19 Context 537, Stage 4 *i.e.* debris and material belonging to the spoliation of the area overlying the floor of the Columned Hall.

20 The carved ivory altar prop from the same area has been recently the object of laboratory analysis. It has been proved to be ivory, believed to be that of an elephant, see Betts *et alii* 2016. The Nisean *rhyta* have a diameter that varies from 6.5 to 16.5 cm (Pappalardo 2010).

21 *Cf.* Nisean *rhyta* (Pappalardo 2010, 9).

22 For examples of Corinthian capitals in Bactriana, and specifically from Ai-Khanoum, see Bernard 1968. *Cf.* the foliage of the *rhyton* with the similar but not identical rendition of acanthus on a pillar from Butkara I (about 20 AD: Messina 2006, No. 224). For more comparanda, see Pugachenkova 1979, 32-42.

23 Other ivory items have been found in Area 10, such as a polished ivory bead (unpublished, 1.5 cm of diameter) and the carved ivory leg belonging to the fire altar of the complex published and discussed in Kidd 2011; Minardi 2015a, fig. 27; 2016a; 2016b. This ivory specimen, carved in shape of a feline leg with remains of a winged fantastic creature that used to protrude from its frontal part, also presents a vegetal decoration at its back that is most likely acanthus but different in style compared to that of the *rhyton* here discussed.



FIGURE 4 *The fragment of ivory rhyton, from Area 10. Front view (author's photos).*



FIGURE 5 *The ivory fragment viewed from below.*



FIGURE 6 *The ivory fragment viewed from above.*



FIGURE 7 *Top view of the rhyton fragment.*



FIGURE 8 *Inner view of the rhyton fragment.*

rare and none has been found in Akchakhan-kala.²⁴ The Greeks assimilated the *rhyton* in the 5th century BC from Persia²⁵ and in Chorasmia *rhyta* seem to appear (in ceramic) not before the mid 3rd century BC, hence not before the development of the local coroplastics.²⁶

Apart from the well-known corpus of Hellenistic ivory *rhyta* from Old Nisa (mid 2nd century BC-1st century AD),²⁷ probably manufactured in Bactriana or in another strongly Hellenised environment,²⁸ eastern evidence regarding this type comes from Takht-i Sangin (a lion-shaped terminal, Bactriana,

24 *E.g.* Vorob'eva 1959, 108-109, fig. 17, No. 1 and fig. 18; Tolstov & Väinberg 1967, 109, fig. 46, Nos. 9-10 and III, fig. 47; Mambetullaev 1984, 27, fig. 5; 1990, 107, fig. 9; Väinberg 2004, 132 and pls. II, 12, 22.

25 On the purpose, the chronology of adoption and the use of this type of vessel in Classical and Early Hellenistic Greece, see Hoffmann 1961; 1962; 1966; 1989; Miller 1991; 1993; with references. On the *rhyton* in Central Asia, see Minardi 2015b with references.

26 For further details on the Chorasmian *rhyta* and their chronology, see Minardi 2015a.

27 Main references are Masson & Pugachenkova 1959; 1982; and the recent and superbly illustrated Pappalardo 2010. For further references, see *infra*.

28 Bernard 1985; 1991 *contra* Pappalardo 2010. See also Chuvin 1991.

5th-4th? century BC),²⁹ and Susa (Greek, second half of the 4th century BC).³⁰ Although forty-eight specimens compose the Nisean corpus, none of them is decorated with acanthus foliage below the rim as is the Chorasmian specimen.³¹ Other Hellenistic *rhyta* present an upper frieze decorated with ivy and with other palmettes similarly to earlier Achaemenid *rhyta* which, however, never present an acanthus.

The mould in the shape of a satyr's head (*ca.* 5.5 × 5.5 cm; Figs. 9-13) unlike the fragmentary *rhyton*, which was found in the contexts overlying the floor of the Columned Hall of the Ceremonial Complex, is a surface find from the Upper Enclosure of the *gorodishche* (Fig. 2). Considering that Akchakhan-kala was abandoned in the course of the 2nd century AD and that it was partially reoccupied in the 4th-5th centuries AD only in Area 11,³² this head – also considering its style – should belong to the context of 2nd century BC-2nd century AD Akchakhan-kala. As already noted elsewhere,³³ the mould was used to cast the image of a young beardless satyr, whose features are a couple of twined short horns that frame a wrinkled forehead, pointed ears, cheeks marked by a deep wrinkle and a slightly open mouth that shows the upper dental arch in a grimace (Fig. 11). The satyr shows drunkenness/ecstasy (or pain) and its head is upturned in a three-quarter view.³⁴ The iconography of the mould and of its cast/applique is clearly inspired by Late Hellenistic statuary models of the mid 2nd – end of the 2nd century BC, and considering the peculiar style, and the nature of the piece, the mould might be an actual Chorasmian creation inspired by western models.³⁵ It might be also possible that the mould has been originally taken from the medallion of a sumptuary

29 Litvinsky & Pichikyan 1994. The specimen is probably later. Numerous ivory sword handles and other worked ivory fragments were found during the excavation of the temple, see Litvinskii & Pichikyan 1999; Litvinskii 2010.

30 Amiet 2010, illustrated at fig. 415.

31 Cf. the Chorasmian ivory specimen with an original Late Hellenistic terracotta *rhyton* with a preserved satyr protome (Parlasca 2004, 133-134, pl. 18.5).

32 In Area 11 a fortification was built above preceding structures. Dating according to ceramic material unearthed during the excavations (КАЕ unpublished).

33 The piece has been preliminary considered in Minardi 2015a, 110.

34 Cf. e.g. with satyr appliques on bronze Hellenistic vessels, Chi 2008, 118, figs. 5-6; see also the style of the ceramic (female) applique in Rotroff & Oliver 2003, No. 306.

35 The model of this Hellenistic satyr, young, beardless and sardonic was probably conceived at Pergamum or in another centre of Asia Minor and it derives from the Praxiteles' iconographic creation of a young satyr. Numerous replicas and variations on the theme are attested both on small scale (bronze, terracotta) and statuary (bronze, marble), e.g. Bieber 1963; 1980, figs. 574, 582, 633, 634, 635 (in this last three cases the satyr is in



FIGURE 9 *Terracotta mould in the shape of a satyr's head.*



FIGURE 10 *The satyr mould viewed from above.*



FIGURE 11 *The satyr mould viewed from below.*



FIGURE 12 *Side view of the satyr mould.*

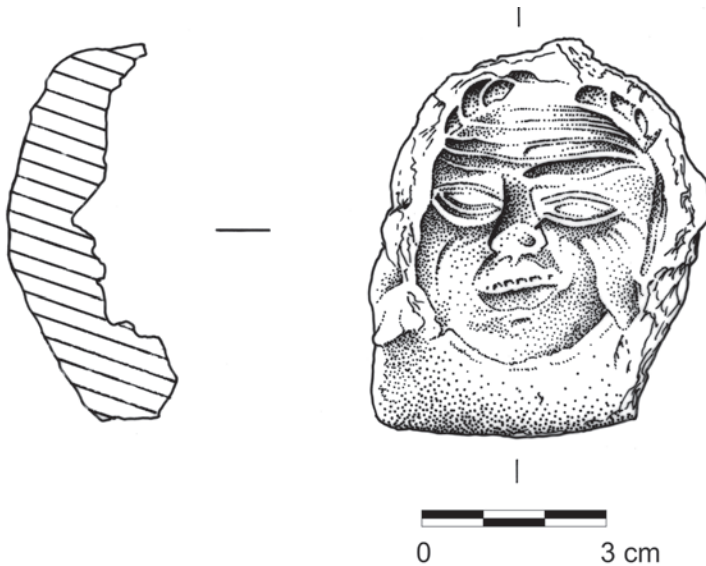


FIGURE 13 Drawing of the satyr mould (D. W. Hopkins – KAE).

vessel.³⁶ Be that as it may, the mould was used in Akchakhan-kala to decorate vases with appliques (a Hellenistic technique) and thus a ceramist workshop might have been installed within the walls of the site, perhaps in the unexplored sand-covered area east of the Ceremonial Complex. This fact attests, as well as the unbaked-clay high-relief of a *ketos* in the *sancta sanctorum* of the Ceremonial Complex dating to the 1st century BC–1st century AD,³⁷ the interest in the Hellenistic culture of the Chorasmian elite – who through exchanges with the Hellenised south (principally Sogdiana, Bactriana, but also Parthia) – during the last two centuries before our era gradually shifted toward the dominant eastern Hellenistic milieu of Central Asia, without being suddenly invested by this new culture.³⁸

pain); Salov 1962; Brinkerhoff 1965; Kobýlina 1961, pl. 23; Kassab 1986. See also the group of Satyr and Nymph from Trastevere held in the Centrale Montemartini Museum, Rome.

36 Cf. e.g. Zimi 2011, No. 103 (already considered in Minardi 2015a).

37 Minardi 2016a.

38 Chorasmia adopted some selected elements of the western material culture according to its own socio-political necessities, e.g. the *oinochoai/choes* – see *infra*. For an analysis of the impact of Hellenism in the polity, see Minardi 2015a with literature.



FIGURE 14 *Detail of the decoration of rhyton 8 from Old Nisa (detail after Pappalardo 2010, pl. 104, 1).*

We find the same Hellenistic young satyr(s) repeatedly depicted among the carved decorations of the Nisean *rhyta* (Fig. 14).³⁹ Also a marble sculpture with a young but bearded satyr was found in Nisa.⁴⁰ Satyr masks are attested in Kerch (1st century AD)⁴¹ and Ai-Khanoum.⁴² At Takht-i Sangin a well-known flautist Marsia appears on a pedestal with a dedication to the Oxus,⁴³ and a bearded satyr struggles with Heracles on the ivory handle of a Greek sword from the same temple.⁴⁴ Another bearded satyr, holding a *rhyton*, is part of a composition depicting the wedding of Dionysos with Ariadne on a couple of gold clasps from Tillya Tepe (second quarter of the 1st century AD).⁴⁵ The satyr is also a secondary but recurrent element in the architectonic decorations

39 See in particular *cf.* in Pappalardo 2010, pl. 103, 1, 2 (*rhyton* 8); 108, 1 (*rhyton* 24); 161, 1 (*rhyton* 18).

40 Invernizzi 2009, 77-88. From Iran, see also the Denavar specimen: Callieri 2007, 84.

41 Bol & Kotera 1986, No. 115.

42 Francfort 1984, pl. 18, No. 8 (mould). *Cf.* Besques 1971, pl. 112, No. 518 *a-c*.

43 Litvinskii & Pichikyan 1981, 138, pl. 2; 2000, pl. 72; Litvinskii 2010, fig. 45.

44 Litvinskii 2010, pls. 35-37.

45 Sarianidi 1985, 132-135. As noted by Boardman (2012, 106), the composition, although clearly Greek, is a novelty invented by a Central Asian artist.

of Gandhāra and Northwest India among the other evidence from the same area.⁴⁶ In other words, these examples amply illustrate that satyrs are to be found everywhere the Hellenistic culture has left its imprint. The iconography of the satyr even reached the Transbaikal area where two satyr-shaped belt buckles have been found at Tsaram.⁴⁷

Wine Consumption and Vine Cultivation in Ancient Chorasmia

Among the various subjects that used to decorate the interior walls of the palace of Toprak-kala the KhAEE archaeologists found fragments of a wall painting with a grapevine harvest scene, wall paintings depicting grapes and grape leaves with the addition of unbaked-clay reliefs of vines.⁴⁸ In the hall of the palace named the “Hall of Dancing Masks” the Soviet team found what seems to be a satyr’s unbaked-clay head (Fig. 15) and it was even inferred that some ceremonies of Dionysiac character were there conducted.⁴⁹ Furthermore, from the lower and external complex of the same site another mould of a satyr’s

46 *E.g.* Taxila, Apsidal Temple of Sirkap (*ca.* 1st century AD: Marshall 1951, pl. 148, No. 1); Butkara I, Swat (*ca.* 1st century AD: Facenna 1964, pl. DCVIII); satyrs are depicted in Gandhāran “palettes” (*ca.* 1st century AD: Czuma 1985, 147 and 149; see also Francfort 1979, pl. IX, No. 17); a satyr (originally two) is depicted under a well-known statuette with the couple Pharro-Ardoxsho/Hārītī-Pāñcika (Carter 1968, pl. 6, fig. 12). In the territory of the Kushan Empire – such as Gandhāra and at Mathura – Dionysiac themes were eagerly accepted together with the Hellenistic and Romano-Hellenistic artistic language and culture with which they travel and due to a local receptive background (Brancaccio & Liu 2009; Carter 1968; 1982; 1992; Falk 2009 *contra* Carter 1992; see also Callieri 2005). On Dionysos’ association to Śiva in the Hindu pantheon, see Long 1971; Daniélou 1979; Doniger O’Flaherty 1980; Bhattacharji 1988; Puskás 1990. On Sorodeios/Dionysos in India, see Humbach 2008; Falk 2009 with references.

47 Minyaev 2009, fig. 17. This satyr is a local re-elaboration of the western type. For a Hellenistic silver vessel depicting a satyr accompanied by a maenad found at Noin-Ula, see Eregzen 2011, 128-129; Polos’mak *et alii* 2011, 110-117; Treister 2016.

48 For the harvest scene: Tolstov 1948b, 178 and fig. 48; Rapoport & Nerazik 1984, 181. For the other wall paintings of Toprak-kala, *Ibidem* 57 (wall paintings with grape leaves); 91-92, fig. 46: “Hall of the Deer” (a number of bas-reliefs in shape of grapes and pomegranates); 141: room 39; 186: “Hall of the Harpist” (other bas-reliefs in shape of grapes and garlands); 198: northwestern tower.

49 Tolstov & Zhdanko 1958, fig. 93; Rapoport & Nerazik 1984, fig. 40; Stawiski 1979: 178, fig. 142. Compare with a terracotta image from Samarkand (Pugachenkova & Rempel 1965, No. 89) and with a mask from Babylon (Messina 2006, 204-205, No. 150).



FIGURE 15 *Unbaked-clay "mask" from the palace of Toprak-kala (after Tolstov & Zhdanko 1958, fig. 93).*

head was discovered, cruder if compared with that from Akchakhan-kala and resembling more a *paniskos*.⁵⁰

Not surprisingly the wall painting decoration of the Akchakhan-kala Ceremonial Complex also included depictions of vine, as witnessed for example by a fragment of painting with grapes, a grape leaf and a tendril on the background of a three-quarter figure (Fig. 16) and some others showing tendrils.⁵¹ The Akchakhan-kala *rhyton* itself, a beaker of precious exotic material, is a vessel by definition apt to the consumption of wine,⁵² as the satyr is a western figure traditionally associated with Dionysos. If, as it seems, the *rhyton* is a type of beaker introduced in the polity not before the 3rd century BC,⁵³ both the ivory beaker and the satyr mould are likely linked to the influence of the Central Asian Hellenistic culture on the polity in relation to wine consumption. But wine consumption and vine cultivation in Chorasmia have a long and old history that can be traced back at least to the 5th century BC.

In western Asia the first evidence for grapevine production dates to the mid 6th millennium BC, by the mid 5th millennium the vine had come under cultivation, and somewhat later the domesticated forms appeared.⁵⁴ In the case of Elam and western Central Asia we have clear evidence of viticulture at least as early as the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC.⁵⁵ It is at the Assyrian court in the first half of the 1st millennium BC as we know from written sources that wine played an important social role as an emblem of power and prosperity and that specific drinking sets were developed in consequence for the

50 This “mask” is characterized by long horns departing from the forehead. An image of the profile of the cast is published in Rapoport 1993, 171, fig. 5. A picture of the mould and its cast is exhibited in the former Lenin Museum of Tashkent. Compare with the satyr depicted frontally on the Nisa *rhyton* 1 (Pappalardo 2010, pl. 95, 2); compare also with a terracotta plaque from Kampir-tepe (Abdullaev 2005, 249, fig. 25: 1st century BC-1st century AD).

51 Kidd 2011, 258, figs. 12-13. Cf. the decoration of the Achaemenid palace of Susa with golden vine (on the relative sources, see Briant 2002, 235-237).

52 *Rhyta* were designed to aerate wine and to run it into another drinking vessel.

53 But this might be only the case of the ceramic *rhyton*, which apparently was not manufactured before the technological upgrade of the pottery and coroplastic techniques coming into Chorasmia from the Hellenized east (Minardi 2015a). In Chorasmia, in fact, we do not have evidence for sumptuary specimens of drinking horns although this fact could be purely accidental, as the case of the silver *phialai* from Isakovka seems to point out (*infra*).

54 Miller 2008. For further references on the domestication of grapevines, see also Zohary *et alii* 2012, 121-126.

55 Amiet 1986; Miller 1999 (Anau, Gonur, Djarkutan). On Godin Tepe Period v (IV millennium BC), see Badler 1996.



FIGURE 16 *Wall painting fragment from Akchakhan-kala (KAE).*

Assyrian kings.⁵⁶ With regard to the wine drinking habits of the elites during the Achaemenid period, sources and studies multiply.⁵⁷ For instance, the administrative records of the “Persian Fortification Tablets” abundantly deal with wine.⁵⁸ Herodotus (I. 113) and Strabo (xv. 3. 20) recorded how much the Persians were fond of wine. For Central Asia, Strabo in his “Geography” also tells us that Aria, Margiana and Bactriana at the end of the 1st century BC-1st century AD were lands well suited for viticulture and exceedingly

56 Stronach 1996; see also Moorey 1980.

57 On the western and Persian sources, see Gignoux 1999; Daryaei 2012a; Dusinberre 2013: 114-140. See also Simpson 2005; Miller 2010; with lit.

58 Hallock 1969; see also Dandamayev 2002.

productive of wine (II. 1. 4; XI. 10. 1, 2; XI. 11. 1). Aramaic documents of the second half of the 4th century BC confirm the production of wine in Bactriana and Arachosia.⁵⁹ This seems to have been also the case of Ancient Chorasmia although unrecorded by western sources.⁶⁰

One of the most important sites regarding 5th century BC Chorasmia is the site of Dingildzhe, a fortified rural manor east of the Oxus located within an agricultural landscape characterized by the dry riverbed of the Akcha-Darya (a branch of the Oxus), and traversed by the main homonymous ancient irrigation canal.⁶¹ The Akcha-Darya dried at the end of the Bronze Age and the Iron Age manor of Dingil'dzhe, fully investigated by the KhAEE, seems to have been the residence of a lesser member of the Chorasmian elite who used Achaemenid paraphernalia to show and to connote his status.⁶² A whole collection of carinated bowls unearthed during the excavations points to one of the cultural habits of the inhabitants of Dingil'dzhe: the consumption of wine. These thin-walled and red slipped bowls are new within the material culture of the polity and developed through an Achaemenid influence as in other

59 Shaked 2003.

60 It might be even possible to infer that the introduction of viticulture and wine in Chorasmia by the Persians is echoed in some western sources. As I have already argued in a work on the subject (Minardi 2015a), it is quite probable that the label "Massagetae" of the western literary sources hid in some cases the Chorasmians, otherwise neglected and only mentioned as belonging to the unknown lands inhabited by *Sakā* north of Sogdiana. Herodotus (I. 207. 6) in his narration of Cyrus' battle against Tomyris queen of the Massagetae mentions Croesus' strategy to win the enemy with a tactical manoeuvre and with a feast in order to slay the Massagetae when intoxicated: "as I understand, the Massagetae have no experience of the good things of Persia, and have never fared well as to what is greatly desirable. Therefore, I advise you to cut up the meat of many of your sheep and goats into generous portions for these men, and to cook it and serve it as a feast in our camp, providing many bowls of unmixed wine and all kinds of food". The Massagetae feasted as planned with wine and thus suffered a great defeat (I. 211. 2). Tomyris' son was captured and the queen sent a message to the Persian king reproaching him because "it is nothing to be proud of if, by the fruit of the vine – with which you Persians fill yourselves and rage so violently that evil words rise in a flood to your lips when the wine enters your bodies – if, by tricking him with this drug [*pharmakon*], you got the better of my son, and not by force of arms in battle". That, according to the Greeks, the Scythians/*Sakā* were heavy drinkers of unmixed wine was almost a literary *topos* (Herod., VI. 84; cf. Athen., X. 29 (427a-b) = Anacreon fr. 356 Page. For further references, see Ivantchik 2005, 139-140; Porucznik 2013).

61 Vorob'eva 1973, 4, figs. 11; 6.

62 Such as seals, rings and furniture of Achaemenid taste – for further details see Minardi 2015a, 78-81, with references.

regions of the empire.⁶³ Evidence of vine cultivation emerged from the excavation data,⁶⁴ and the survey of the area of the manor confirmed the presence of extensive vineyards with relative canals associated to Antique 1 (“Archaic”) material.⁶⁵ The wide-ranging territorial surveys of KhAEE, carried on before and after World War II, when the whole region was still an arid wasteland, have shown that throughout its history the ancient polity used to be covered in fields and vineyards irrigated by canals of different scale.⁶⁶ Toprak-kala is not an exception in this account and it is known that vineyards were planted around the *gorodishche*⁶⁷ and the administrative documents found in what has remained of the palace archives attest that the most frequently recorded products were flour and wine.⁶⁸

With regard to its antiquity, not much remains of the Chorasmian terevics but for a sumptuary vessel of Achaemenid manufacture⁶⁹ or at least style⁷⁰ of which the ceramic carinated bowls are a less precious social mirror. This silver *phiale*, inscribed in Chorasmian language and Aramaic script, comes from the Isakovka Burial Ground I (Omsk) where it was buried in the 3rd-2nd century BC together with another Hellenistic (Seleucid?) bowl also inscribed in Chorasmian.⁷¹ The importance of the “Persian” specimen should not be

63 For further details and references, see Minardi 2015a, 77-78.

64 Pips of *Vitis vinifera* found in the manor (Vorob'eva 1973, 56); wine production hypothesized in room 18 (*Ibidem* 81, 208).

65 Vorob'eva 1973, 208; Andrianov 1969, 122 – this is the earliest evidence of extensive viticulture in Chorasmia.

66 Tolstov & Zhdanko 1958, 710 (fossil fields in the Turktul District of Karakalpakstan); fields and vineyards contemporary with Akchakhan-kala surrounded the sites of Kurgashinkala, Dzhanbas-kala, Gyaur-kala, Ayaz-kala, Koï-Krylgan-kala and Kalalÿ-gÿr 2 (Nerazik 1966, 11; 1976, 13-57; 1987; Andrianov 1969, 127-133; Tolstov & Väinberg 1967, 9, figs. 3; 57; Väinberg 2004, 11-19).

67 Rapoport & Nerazik 1984, 8.

68 Livshits 1984, 257, 262.

69 Livshits 2003, bowl No. 1. *E.g.* see for the type of decoration Bothmer 1984, 26-27, Nos. 20-21, 28-29; Muscarella 1988, 218, No. 326; Carter 2001, 183, figs. 3-4; *cf.* Luschev 1939, tab. 18 *a-c*, for the shape and profile of the vessel; *cf.* the Prokhorovka *phiale* of the second half of the 5th century BC, discussed in Treister 2009a; 2009b.

70 For a discussion on the function of these precious metal vessels, and on the existence of regional productive centres located in the western area of the empire, see Miller 2010 with literature; Dusenberre 2013; for further considerations on the style of such metal vessels, see in particular Treister 2010; on the “International Achaemenid Style”, see also Treister 2007, 97-101.

71 On the context of this burial, see conveniently Koryakova & Epimakhov 2007, 303-311. Livshits 2003, bowl No. 2. This specimen is decorated with palmettes, ducks and dolphins.

underestimated because it proves that such precious vessels circulated in Chorasmia at least in the 4th century BC and that they belonged to the local elite. In fact the *phiale*, probably inscribed not before the 3rd century BC,⁷² was the personal possession of a Chorasmian king “his majesty, King Amurzham, son of King Wardan”,⁷³ evidence of a dynastic tradition among the royals of Chorasmia further confirmed by the epigraphic evidence of Akchakhan-kala (*supra*). According to Livshits, the bowl was *wtykny* i.e. “festive, relating to a feast or a banquet”, thus probably used for drinking wine perhaps in association with a *rhyton* and other vessels as in the royal Persian table sets.⁷⁴

Contemporary with Akchakhan-kala, but on the opposite banks of the Oxus (“Left bank Chorasmia”), some specific wine vessels of Hellenistic tradition were found at Kalalÿ-gÿr 2. This site provide data regarding the evident and increased Hellenistic influence in the country during the 3rd-1st centuries BC but unfortunately does not give us any reliable data on its precise beginnings.⁷⁵ Although nothing similar to the craters found at Kalalÿ-gÿr 2 is currently recorded among the material of Akchakhan-kala (but probably we have craters at Koï-Krÿlgan-kala and certainly *paterae* in the 1st century BC-1st century AD),⁷⁶ the satyr mould here discussed might have been the device to decorate with appliques such vessels, traditionally used to mix and prepare wine.

It was buried with another Hellenistic silver bowl with a Parthian inscription (see Livshits 2003, bowl No. 3).

72 Livshits 2003, in particular 159. On the low chronology usually argued by Livshits with regard to Parthian and Chorasmian Aramaic inscriptions, see Balakhvantsev & Yablonskii 2009 with literature.

73 Livshits 2003. Cf. Athaen., II. 48f-49, where silver *phialai* were bestowed by the Persian king.

74 On the royal table sets of Persia, see Simpson 2005. In Chorasmia also the Achaemenid *amphora-rhyton* with zoomorphic handles is attested, although only with pottery specimens that clearly imitate metal vessels (e.g. Väinberg 2004, 133, fig. 3, 22 cf. with a “Late Achaemenian” specimen from Pasargadae – Stronach 1978, 258, No. 6 and pl. 172). We lack data but we cannot rule out the existence of sumptuary specimens in Chorasmia (as already said about the *rhyton* – *supra*). The (not exclusively) Persian use of gift exchange involving precious drinking vessels is also confirmed in Chorasmia by the inscription of the Isakovka bowl No. 2: “This bowl... of the weight (?) 120 staters... to the sovereign Wardak – a reward for him... Through Ruman (?) Tir...” (Livshits 2003, 162).

75 Väinberg 2004; Minardi 2015a, 93.

76 On the craters: Väinberg 2004, 134 with reference to Vorob'eva 1959, 115 and the Hellenistic south (Ai-Khanoum); on the *paterae* with zoomorphic handle: Tolstov & Väinberg 1967, 124-125, with fig. 50 (covered in white slip); tab. XI, Nos. 12, 33 (fragments attributed to the same type of vessel); 87-112 for further references and other Hellenistic material. See also Minardi 2015a.

The craters appeared in the material culture of Chorasmia along with the pitchers with zoomorphic handles (similar to *oinochoai/choes* and thus again containers used for wine) and other new types of vessels, due to the adoption of new manufacturing techniques and evidently new social habits.⁷⁷

In conclusion, it seems that extensive viticulture – and so the production of wine and its consumption as a demonstration of prestige and as a form of material culture⁷⁸ – along with central canalisation works and the emergence of fortified settlements, was another element already attested and rooted in the Chorasmian landscape of the 5th century BC and introduced by the Achaemenids. A century after the foundation of the first fortified *gorod-ishche* (Kyuzeli-g'yr) the whole Ancient Chorasmian society has transformed, developing in parallel with the change of its rural landscape due to its inclusion into the Achaemenid sphere of influence.⁷⁹ It seems also that the Chorasmian habits regarding the consumption of wine further developed, at least in their exterior forms, when the Chorasmians partially adopted drinking consuetudes and likely a dining style similar to that of the Hellenistic east, a fact that underlines the high cultural receptiveness of the polity and of its elite. The Hellenistic satyr and the ivory *rhyton* should therefore be considered within the two-fold Chorasmian context, with, on one side, a strong traditional environment and, on the other, the will of the Chorasmian elite (and their emulators) to adopt new forms of prestige and control.

77 Increased production of vessels; increased typological diversification (although the production of traditional forms such as the carinated bowl continued); emergence of coroplastic and mould-made vessels – for further considerations, see Minardi 2015a with references. Khoums (similar to *pithoi*) were used in Chorasmia to stock wine (Tolstov & Väinberg 1967, 57; Väinberg 2004, 109).

78 Dietler in Joffe 1998: “alcohol has certain distinctive properties as a form of material culture. Alcohol is essentially a form of food with psychoactive properties that result from alternative techniques of preparation. Its heightened social significance derives from the fact that these psychoactive properties make it a particularly desirable element in communal consumption events known as feasts. Feasts are a specialized kind of ritual in which commensality forms the basic idiom upon which various types of “politico-symbolic drama” (Cohen 1974) are constructed and elaborated and in which alcohol enhances the dramaturgical effects while sharing the properties of food as a symbolically charged and highly condensed social fact embodying relations of production and exchange and linking the domestic and political economies”.

79 Minardi 2015a.

Western Mythological Figures at Akchakhan-kala

The question that rises concerns the reason why the Chorasmian elite was so eager to adopt alien status paraphernalia. In the Ceremonial Complex of Akchakhan-kala we have a precious *rhyton*, furniture (relative to a fire altar) with carved ivory props – both of Asiatic Hellenistic manufacture and of imported raw material – and unbaked-clay reliefs, most likely of local religious character but of Hellenistic style and iconography.⁸⁰ On the other hand there is a wall painting (part of a bigger composition) depicting a Zoroastrian god – possibly Srōsh – showing iconographic traits that are mainly Achaemenid, with the addition of locally re-elaborated western features (*i.e.* his mural crown).⁸¹ These exotic elements, including our satyr's mould – which seems not to be the only trace left by Dionysos in Ancient Chorasmia⁸² – might indicate a link between the customary habits in the consumption of wine of the Chorasmians and their modifications in association with an alien religion, although at the present state of research it is not possible to argue about the degree (if any) of syncretism within Ancient Chorasmian Zoroastrianism. It is known from Middle Persian Zoroastrian texts that wine consumption was viewed in a positive manner and even used in rituals.⁸³

The KAE excavations at Akchakhan-kala are narrowing and clarifying the chronology of the transition from the so-called Kangyuī (Antique 2 phase) to the so-called Kushan material cultures at the turn of the first millennium of our era (Antique 3 – early phase). Akchakhan-kala in its Stage 3 between the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD clearly shows that some Hellenistic elements were already rooted in the polity before the apogee and definitive development of the “Kushan” facies in the late 2nd-3rd century AD

80 Minardi 2016a.

81 Betts *et alii* 2015.

82 Tolstov (1962, 126, 215; Tolstov & Zhdanko 1958, 202-204, 219, 224) first mentioned the probable existence of Dionysiac-like cults in Chorasmia but from quite scant evidence. Tolstov discussed a naked male figure holding grapes (also published by Kidd 2011) and cited al-Bīrunī in relation to the legend of “the night of Mina” (on this, see Snezarev 2003, 142-143) with the already cited idea on the Dionysiac character of the “Hall of Dancing Masks” at Toprak-kala (supported and cited also by Rapoport & Nerazik 1984, 75, 82-84; Rapoport 1996).

83 On the pre-Islamic sources, see Daryaei 2012b. See also *Vendidād* 22. 8 on the sacrificial meal consumed with wine. But wine has nothing to do with the Zoroastrian and Brahmanic Soma/Haoma *i.e.* “the consecrated liquid prepared during the main act of worship, the *Yasna*, and its extensions, the *Visperad* and *Vendidād*” (Boyce 1970; 2003; on the nature of Soma/Haoma, see Falk 1989; 2003; see also Abdullaev 2010).

(Antique 3 – late). The Ceremonial Complex was monumentalised (more for scenography reasons than defensive ones), decorated with wall paintings and unbaked-clay modelled sculptures and provided with a columned hypostyle hall after what seems to have been a siege.⁸⁴ If the interpretation regarding the beginning of the “Chorasmian Era” – which sees a correspondence between its beginning, the change of the Chorasmian material culture and the renovation of the capital (regional or not) of Akchakhan-kala – is correct,⁸⁵ we might hypothesise that the adoption of western paraphernalia, status symbols and religious iconography are elements not incidental but connected with a new ruling dynasty who was eager to show its legitimation.⁸⁶

Akchakhan-kala was abandoned approximately only a century later after the start of its main Stage 3, systematically despoiled (and religiously cleaned) and Toprak-kala, a new capital with a palace standing on an artificial platform of ca. six million bricks,⁸⁷ was erected within eyesight, a site that is connoted by the same type of material culture as the last stage of Akchakhan-kala.

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84 Helms *et alii* 2002, 12. On the contemporary destruction of Koï-Krjlgan-kala, see Tolstov & Väinberg 1967, 60-61. On Tolstov's hypothesis of a semi-nomadic penetration in the polity, Tolstov 1962, 135. For further considerations, see Minardi 2015a.

85 Minardi 2013; 2015a with literature on the indigenous Chorasmian Era.

86 Cf. the Arsacids in Seleucid Iran, the Kushāns in Bactriana, although the historical context in Chorasmia is clearly different, as it was distant from the sources of Central Asian Hellenism.

87 Rapoport & Nerazik 1984, 21-22, 25-28.

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Abbreviations

<i>AMI</i>	<i>Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran</i> (Berlin).
<i>CRAI</i>	<i>Comptes Rendus des seances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres</i> (Paris).
<i>ANES</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Studies</i> .
<i>MKhÉ</i>	<i>Materialy Khorezmskoï Ékspeditsii</i> (Moscow).
<i>SA</i>	<i>Sovetskaya Arkheologiya</i> (Moscow).
<i>Tr. KhAÉÉ</i>	<i>Trudy Khorezmskoï arkheologo-étnograficheskoi ékspeditsii</i> (Moscow-Leningrad).
<i>Tr. YuTAKÉ</i>	<i>Trudy Yuzhno-Turkemenskoï arkheologicheskoi kompleksnoi ékspeditsii</i> (Ashkhabad, Moscow).
<i>VDI</i>	<i>Vestnik drevnei istorii</i> (Moscow).