

A FOUR-ARMED GODDESS FROM ANCIENT CHORASMIA: HISTORY, ICONOGRAPHY AND STYLE OF AN ANCIENT CHORASMIAN ICON

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Abstract

This article examines a miniature silver vessel characterised by two elements: a depiction of a four-armed female deity embossed in its emblema, and a Chorasmian inscription externally incised around its rim, with a date relative to a specific “Chorasmian Era”. The representation of the goddess is analysed iconographically and stylistically and considered in the light of the available archaeological data. It is argued that besides her iconography, which shows an array of stratified Central Asian and Indian elements, the stylistic traits of the four-armed goddess clearly indicate cultural exchanges between Ancient Chorasmia and the Eastern Roman Empire during the sixth century AD, at the end of which the specimen can be dated.

Keywords

Chorasmia; four-armed goddess; Central Asia; Eastern Roman Empire; Late Antiquity

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a study of a Late Antique Chorasmian icon depicted on an emblema of a miniature silver bowl. The icon represents a four-armed goddess seated on a lion-throne, displaying an array of symbols of majesty and power. Since it was first published in 1909, this image has been discussed and cited in papers several times, but there has never been a study combining its iconographic, stylistic and historical characteristics in a comprehensive analysis.¹ A partially deciphered Chorasmio-Aramaic inscription, incised externally around the rim of this bowl—reporting “the year 700”—indicates that it was crafted in the 700th year of the Chorasmian Era (Ch.E.). This is a long, indigenous and obscure historical period specific to Ancient Chorasmia,² which is a polity approximately

corresponding with the delta region of the Amu-Darya. This uncertain datum, together with the known *terminus ante quem* provided by the Arab invasion and subsequent Islamisation of this region, have led scholars to the generic conclusion that the specimen must have been crafted during the second half of the seventh or even the eighth century AD.³ The only clear fact on the subject, however, is that the obscurity which today shrouds the Chorasmian Era has been caused exactly by the Arab invasion, for the advent of Qutaybah and his troops in AD 712 produced a real caesura in the cultural continuum of Ancient Chorasmia.⁴ The event

Khorezm/Chorasmia in the Republic of Uzbekistan.

³ See above n. 1.

⁴ Notwithstanding the survival of some Chorasmian linguistic and cult relics during the Middle Ages and beyond (Bosworth 1978; Snezarev 2003), nothing of the Chorasmian pre-Islamic literature and lore has actually survived (MacKenzie 1983; Durkin-Meisterernst 2008). Certainly, this cultural transition, although drastic (at least at its beginning, according to the available sources; see below, esp. n. 16) cannot be considered as immediate and as a single event: it was de facto a local development driven by external factors. Moreover, we might consider the fact that only the advent of Soviet archaeology in the area (since 1937, with the Khorezmskoï arheologo-ëtnograficheskoi èkspeditsii – KhAEE) rescued Ancient Chorasmia from oblivion: nowadays we are still dependent on its pioneering endeavours, and much in debt to its on-field accomplish-

¹ Smirnov 1909: no. 43; published and discussed, among others, in Dalton 1926: 57–58, pl. XXXII, no. 203; Rosenfield 1967: 83–91 (within the analysis of Huvishka/Kanishka’s pantheon); Azarpay 1969; Darkevich 1976: 103–13; Harper 1978: 70, fig. 23a; Marshak 1986: 240–45; Rempel’ 1987: 79–97; Ward 1993: 49, fig. 33; Seipel 1996: no. 169; Juliano and Lerner 2001: 261, no. 87; Ghose 2005; 2006.

² By Ancient Chorasmia (Latin version of the Old Persian (*Huvārazmī* used also in other forms, e.g. Khwarezm, Khwārazm, Khorezm) I mean the pre-Islamic Iranian polity, distinct from the mediaeval one. The term is also used here to avoid any confusion with the modern province of



Fig. 1. Geographical outline of Central Asia and Europe with the location of the principal names cited in the text and a magnification of the modern District of Perm (Kama River valley; by the author).

must be considered as the cause of the oblivion of the centuries-old Iranian/Zoroastrian tradition and the beginning of the Middle Ages (see below). With nothing surviving of Ancient Chorasmia's literature after the cultural shift to Islam, all the hypotheses which attempt to give a specific date to the beginning of the homonymous era are, at the present moment, simply not verifiable.

This paper endeavours to analyse the image of the four-armed goddess by considering its stylistic and iconographical characteristics in their historical context. A specific historical background is partially known, thanks to the Early Byzantine written sources, which recorded the frequent contacts that occurred between the Eastern Roman Empire and Central Asia for 100 years, since the mid-sixth century AD. At this

time Chorasmia, together with neighbouring Sogdiana, had undoubtedly been under the aegis of the empire of the western Turks. In examining these written sources and the style of the bowl, I will attempt to demonstrate that it is, in fact, a work of the late sixth century AD, a melange of legacy Central Asian iconographic elements stylistically influenced by the new cultural contributions brought into Chorasmia from the West. While the Western literary sources record these contacts, principally for their main trading aims and purposes, the four-armed goddess, on the other hand, is representative of sourceless Ancient Chorasmia and the cultural exchanges that had sprung from those very relationships. For as people with their goods—first and foremost valuables such as silk and silver—travelled along the steppes at that time so, as had always happened, ideas and customs moved with them. And eventually these exchange elements reappeared in the material culture of this ancient Iranian polity.

ments. For further considerations on the impact of Islam in Central Asia and in Chorasmia, see Frye 1998: 215–17.



Fig. 2. Silver bowl no. 1. A: profile; B: epigraph (after Smirnov 1909).

II. THE FOUR-ARMED GODDESS DESCRIBED

The subject of this paper is a miniature silver bowl that is currently held in the collections of the British Museum and is marked by two principal characteristics: the depiction of a four-armed goddess on its emblema and a Chorasmian inscription. The epigraph, written in Chorasmo-Aramaic script, is incised on the exterior lip of the vessel and is dated according to the Chorasmian Era⁵ (Figs. 2, 3). This metalwork is not unique and three other typologically similar specimens are known (henceforth bowls nos. 2, 3 and 4; Figs. 4–6), not counting other similar specimens (see note 6). Notably, in two of these other cases (nos. 2 and 3), a similar Chorasmian epigraph that mentions a year of the same era appears.⁶

⁵ On the identification of the Chorasmian inscriptions, see Tolstov 1948a; Livshits 1968; 1970. On the Chorasmian Era, see below n. 17.

⁶ Specimens illustrated in Smirnov 1909: no. 42; Azarpay 1969: pl. 3 (here bowl no. 2); Fajans 1957: pl. 10, figs. 29–31; Azarpay 1969: pl. 4 (bowl no. 3); Darkevich 1976: pl. 26 (bowl no. 4). The dates on nos. 2 and 3 are respectively 580 and 714 Ch.E. For a general discussion on the

Silver bowls nos. 2, 3 and 4 were found in inner Asia, more precisely in the Kama River valley (District of Perm) approximately 1600 km north of Chorasmia (see Fig. 1), which corresponds with the modern territories of North Turkmenistan and North Uzbekistan, located approximately south of the Aral Sea. The Kama River valley is also the place where the four-armed goddess no. 1 was supposedly discovered.⁷

The four-armed goddess discussed here appears in

whole Chorasmian corpus, which also includes other silver bowls without the representation of a goddess and not discussed here, see Azarpay 1969 (with the exception of no. 4); Darkevich 1976: 103–8; Marshak 1986: 240–45. According to Livshits (2003: 165) the standard Chorasmian nomenclature for the silver bowls—to be found in the inscriptions themselves—is *'pʃntn* (variant *'pyʃntn*) “vessel for water”. Hence, the bowls might have been connected with a ceremony similar to the Western *lustratio* (purification by ablution in water and other cultic procedures). Moreover, always according to Livshits (2003: 161), the inscription of bowl no. 1 indicates that “the vessel was presented by a specific individual” and at a certain dated moment.

⁷ Smirnov 1909: 13, no. 42; undetermined provenance, discovered before 1875. No. 4 comes from Bartym, and was discovered in 1957 (Darkevich 1976).



Fig. 3. Silver bowl no. 1. The emblema with the four-armed goddess (after Smirnov 1909).

the emblema of silver bowl no. 1 in a very low bas-relief (Fig. 3). The design was crafted by hammering the back of a silver sheet, probably according to a preparatory design, and finishing off with engraving tools in what is known as the repoussé technique. In her four hands the deity holds a corresponding number of symbols, which are—clockwise from top right—a chakra (the spoked wheel of royalty, solar symbol), a lunar crescent, a bowl and a mace/sceptre with three pellets set in the upper section (which the deity grasps in its upper part) and a loop at the base. The goddess is seated on a lion-throne in a semi-frontal position. Her head is slightly bent forward and is shown in a three-quarter view. Her shoulders are shown asymmetrically, as are the sets of arms. The left shoulder is wider, the left arms longer and her waist is divided by a band of fabric in two unequal portions. The effect is of the figure turned slightly to the right, creating a sense of depth and perspective. The goddess wears a mural crown over neatly arranged hair. The crown is in the form of three distinct towers with battlements and in front of the central one is a crescent moon with three pellets representing stars.⁸ The outfit

⁸ Cf. with the lunar crescents, with single or triple pellet, and with the chakras painted on Chorasmian ossuaries (Rapoport 1971: 103, fig. 51; Gudkova 1964: figs. 27 and 32). Cf. also the lunar crescent of the four-armed goddess with the one (with central pellet/disk) which surmounts an ossuary supported by two lions, as depicted in the emblema

of the deity is completed by a long skirt and a long-sleeved garment with sections of net-patterned decoration, and a cloak or shawl is draped over her. There are no bracelets visible at her wrists, which are covered by the broad cuffs of the long-sleeved garment. Around the neck she wears a torque or thick necklace with a pendant diadem.⁹ One earring is shown on the left ear; the other ear is not visible due to the three-quarter profile representation of the head.

The goddess is seated on a feline, perhaps a lion, with the feet resting on a stool covered by the drapes of her skirt. Below her skirt and covered by a drape, the three slender curving legs of the stool can clearly be seen. The animal appears quite tame, to judge by the tail tucked between its legs, its laid-back ears and subdued expression with open jaws. In contrast with the figure of the goddess, the lion is represented two-dimensionally; that is, the means that are employed to create the illusion of depth in the image of the goddess are distinctively absent in the depiction of the animal. An attempt has been made by the craftsman, however, to use the encircling wreath around the emblema as a disguise for the lion's flat aspect, positioning its paws and rear part over this decorative element. This is also the case with the crown of the deity, the crescent in her left upper hand and the stool.

of another Chorasmian-inscribed silver bowl from the Kama valley (Bartym, District of Tobolsk; first published in Bader and Smirnov 1954: fig. 6; for further references see above n. 6 and below n. 20). This last specimen is undoubtedly Chorasmian, not only due to the presence of a Chorasmian-Aramaic inscription with a "year 709" Ch.E., but also for the characteristic "baldachin" composing the ossuary (see Rapoport 1971: 110 with figs. 55 and 56; first noticed by Gudkova 1964: 104). Cf. the standing lions of the silver bowl with those depicted on ossuaries of the Chorasmian cemetery of Mizdakhkan (fifth–sixth centuries AD; Yagodin and Khodzhaïov 1970: 132 and drawings p. 171). Furthermore, the single (acanthus) leaves which decorate the silver bowl are closely comparable—although simplified—with those of some sixth-century Byzantine silverware specimens (e.g. Dodd 1961: no. 7; Ross 1962: 7–9, pls. VIII, IX). The Bartym objects (multiple discoveries between 1952 and 1957), among them the silver bowl nos 3 and 4, deserve more space than it is possible to give in the present article. See below for further iconographical considerations on the goddess's attributes and the use of the crescent with pellets attested also by the Chorasmian royal insignia (n. 81).

⁹ As already noted by Juliano and Lerner (2001: 261, no. 87), comparable with a necklace (also published in Watt 2004: 295, no. 187) from Central Asia, buried in China between AD 581 and 619.

Most of the characteristics described above (the garment, the four arms and attributes, the mural crown with crescent) are also present in the images that are depicted on some of the other Chorasmian silver bowls from the Kama River valley, which are thus likely to have been dedicated to the same four-armed goddess (Figs. 4–6). Therefore, given the recurring appearance of the goddess in association with Chorasmo-Aramaic inscriptions, there is little doubt that this female deity was worshipped in Chorasmia and that this silverware was intended as an *ex-voto* dedicated to her (Fig. 7).¹⁰

¹⁰ Two interesting but fragmentary “seal impressions” from Teshik-kala, dated by Tolstov between the sixth and eighth centuries AD, show figures iconographically close to the four-armed goddesses (Tolstov 1948a: 142, illustrations on pl. 54, nos. 2 and 3; also discussed in D’yakonova and Smirnova 1967, but on the basis of misinterpreted drawings; cf. D’yankova and Smirnova 1967: fig. 4 with Fig. 6 in this paper; *contra* Mode 1991/1992: 185 with n. 54). In particular, the clay impression depicting a fairly stylised frontal and seated human figure, which is represented with open arms (Tolstov 1948a: no. 3; here Fig. 7: A and C) and wearing a three-element crown and a garment with two triangular appendices hanging from the arms, clearly matches the deity on bowl no. 2, although two-armed. The chronological factor related to the introduction of the four-armed iconography in Central Asia might be the reason for such a difference in the number of upper limbs (see below for further details). Moreover, at the Chorasmian site of Dzhanbas-kala, several specimens of female terracotta statuettes wearing a tripartite crown have been found (Tolstov 1948a: pl. 73, no. 1; and V. Yagodin and A. Betts 2011, pers. com.). According to Mode (1991/1992: 185–86), the iconography of deities on animal-vehicles is limited for Chorasmia to the silver vessels under discussion and therefore “It seems reasonable that the Khorezmian dishes really were created by native artisans. But, and this is the crucial point, the Khorezmians certainly did their work by order of Sogdians, possibly merchants, living in Khorezm and worshipping the gods of their homeland in their own temples”. The evidence, although scanty, is actually not thus limited, as shown by a fragmentary statuette of a female figure sitting on an animal from Koï-Krylgan-kala (second/third century AD; Tolstov and Vainberg 1967: table 33, no. 4) and by a fragmentary unbaked clay relief from Toprak-kala (second–early fourth century AD) of a lion paw attached to a portion of female garment (Rapoport and Nerazik 1984: 83, fig. 41; see also 201, fig. 84, nos. 4 and 5, for what seems to be a *ketos*/marine creature’s tail). In any case, despite his interpretation, even Mode 1991/1992 considers the bowls as a Chorasmian product. The style of the specimens belonging to the corpus, however, actually shows a clear absence of homogeneity, which seems to indicate a chronological difference or a difference in the provenance of these objects (cf. in particular nos. 1 and 3). It is impossible to



Fig. 4. Silver bowl no. 2 (after Smirnov 1909).

The “Chorasmian dates” inscribed on the silver bowls are unfortunately not tied to any absolute chronological system, and thus they ought to be considered only as a *termini ante quem* for the dating of each specimen, following a suggestion first advanced by Henning some decades ago.¹¹ The debate concerning the Chorasmian Era has not been conclusively resolved and its absolute chronological definition remains uncertain.¹² Hence, for present purposes

exclude a priori, for instance, a different provenance/centre of manufacture specifically for bowl no. 3 (see below n. 17). Whatever the case, with the available data only one fact remains clear: a four-armed goddess was (also) recognised and worshipped in Chorasmia. This can be inferred firstly, because bowl no. 1 is not an isolated case but crafted as part of a series (of which no. 4 is a surviving specimen); secondly, because no. 1, in Chorasmia (and the others belonging to the corpus), had been used and dedicated through an inscription; thirdly, because in Chorasmia the tradition to inscribe metal vessels is as ancient as the Chorasmian language itself (see below n. 21); and ultimately, even because the typology of these metal vessels forms a peculiar Chorasmian corpus (Marshak 1986).

¹¹ Henning 1965a.

¹² Soviet/Russian scholars advanced two main theories on the beginning of the Chorasmian Era: the original hypothesis advanced by Tolstov and Livshits (1964a; 1964b), was corrected and revisited by Gudkova and Livshits (1967; also Livshits 1968, 1970, 1984); the second hypothesis was instead advanced by Vainberg (1977: 77–80; 2001) who



Fig. 5. Silver bowl no. 3 (after Fajans 1957).

the analysis here subscribes to Henning's theoretical construct on the subject, which is chiefly based on the correspondence between the Arab conquest of the country and the violent destruction of the Chorasmian cemetery of Tok-kala documented by archaeological excavations.¹³ Al-Ṭabarī and al-Bīrunī record that after leading the Arabs in the conquest of Chorasmia in AD 712, Qutaybah was forced to return to the country with his Muslim army for a second time within the same year, in order to retaliate against the rebellious population.¹⁴ This episode definitely constitutes a caesura in the cultural continuum of Ancient Chorasmia, initiating the transition to the Islamic Middle Ages.¹⁵

reconsidered the available data proposing a different starting period. For further details, see below n. 17.

¹³ Gudkova 1964 and 1968; in particular, see Gudkova 1964: 89 on the desecration of the Zoroastrian necropolis (in particular "Naus 2"—*naus* is the specific archaeological Russian term for the funerary building containing human depositions in ossuaries). On the funerary practices of Late Antique/pre-Islamic Chorasmia, see Grenet 1984: 141 ff.

¹⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. XXIII: 200–01; al-Bīrunī, *Chronology*: 41 (35), § 38–39. See also: Gibb 1970: 42–43; Frye 1998: 211.

¹⁵ Al-Bīrunī, *Chronology*: 42 (36) § 6–12: "Ḷutaiba ben Muslim had extinguished and ruined in every possible way all those who knew how to write and to read the Khwarizmi writing, who knew the history of the country and who



Fig. 6. Silver bowl no. 4: detail of the emblema (after Darkevich 1977).

On the other hand, as far as Tok-kala is concerned, among the Zoroastrian ossuaries recorded during the archaeological investigation of the site, several specimens bear Chorasmian inscriptions dated according to the Chorasmian Era, the latest reporting a "year 753" (actually the "year 738").¹⁶ Thereby Henning, comparing the evidence, created his syllogism on the *terminus ante quem* for all the dates relative to the Chorasmian Era, which was 42 BC and has now been corrected to 27 BC. The computation of all Chorasmian Era years should not, therefore, start later than this *terminus*.

studied their sciences. In consequences [*sic*] these things are involved in so much obscurity, that it is impossible to obtain an accurate knowledge of the history of the country since the time of Islam." Al-Bīrunī, *Chronology*: 59 (48) § 8–11: "For after Ḷutaiba ben Muslim Albāhili had killed their learned men and priests, and had burned their books and writings, they became entirely illiterate [...] and relied in every knowledge or science which they required solely upon memory."

¹⁶ Initially, the reading inscription no. 38 from Tok-kala (Tolstov and Livshits 1964b) was given as 753 Ch.E. (cf. Henning 1965a). A few years later, however, Gudkova and Livshits (1967: 4, n. 3; see also Livshits 1970: 164) emended the reading of this epigraph (actually 673 Ch.E.) and reaffirmed as the latest date attested among the Tok-kala inscriptions, i.e. no. 19 (= tok-kala inscription no. 19), with the "year 738".

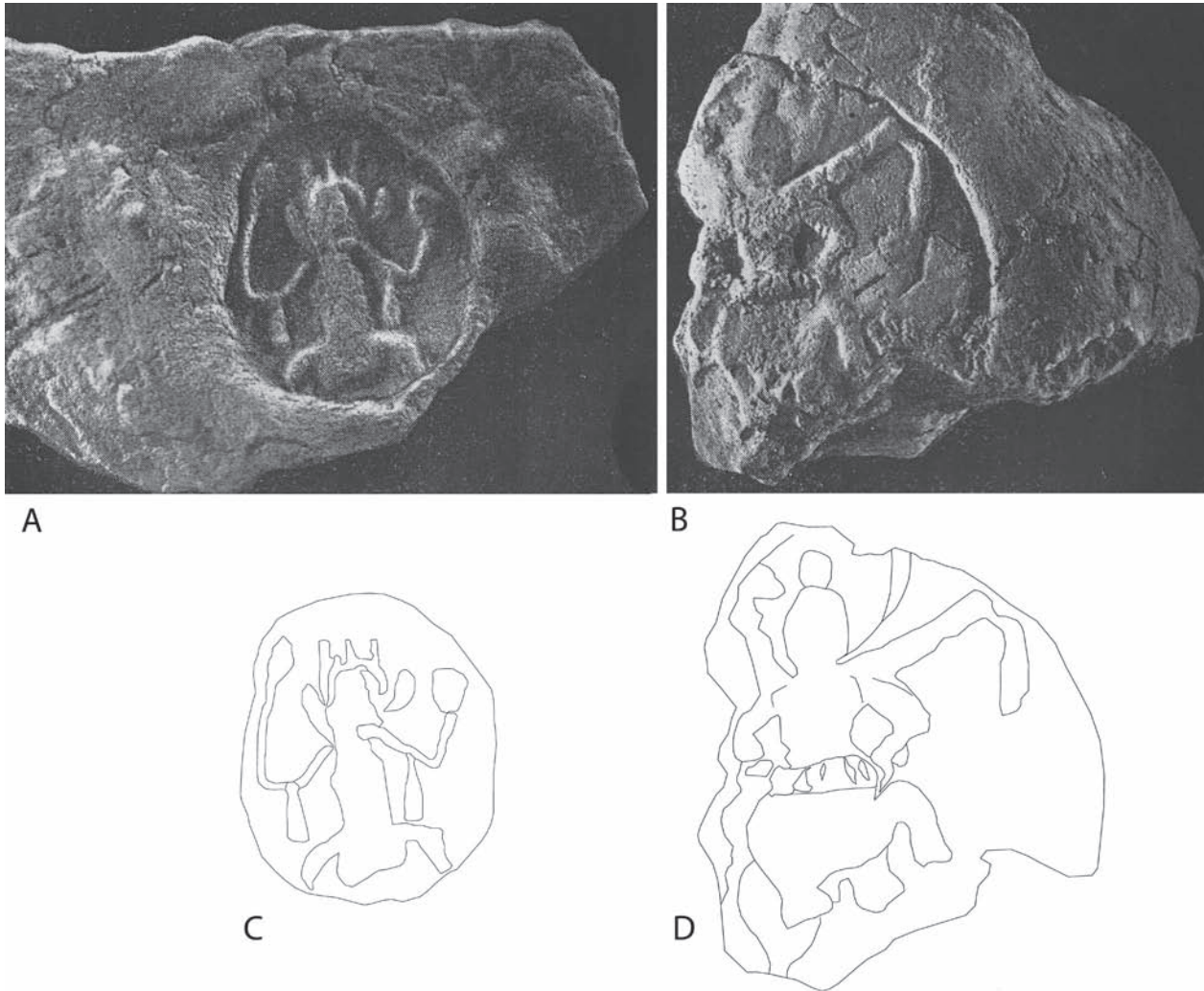


Fig. 7. Teshik-kala (Ancient Chorasmia), fragmentary seal impressions. A–B: the original seal impressions (after Tolstov 1948); C–D: relative outlines (by the author).

Russian scholars, however, underlying the fact that the pre-Muslim Tok-kala settlement was still inhabited at least in the mid-eighth century AD (with a following *facies* in the ninth–eleventh centuries AD), proposed to move the beginning of the Chorasmian Era to the first century AD (10–20/30 according to Livshits or 40–54 according to Vaïnberg).¹⁷ Al-Bīrunī explicitly

¹⁷ See n. 9. These hypotheses regarding a first-century AD beginning for the Ch.E. are based on another important chronological datum for the history of eighth-century AD Chorasmia: the mention, in the Chinese chronicle *Xing Tang Shu* (written AD 941–45), of a Chorasmian king named Shaoshifen (Savashfan). This monarch, in fact, is the only Chorasmian Shah who can be cross-referred with

states that the traditional Chorasmian time reckon-

the available numismatic evidence from Tok-kala and with the literary sources, thus anchored to an absolute chronology (see Vaïnberg 1977: 82 for a comparison between Bīrunī's list of Chorasmian kings and the royal names on the Chorasmian coins). The *Xing Tang Shu* records: "Huoxun [Chorasmia] is called also Huoliximijia and Guoli. This country is situated in the south of the Wuhu water (River Oxus). In the south-east it is 600 li away from Shudi (Betik). In the south-west it extends as far as Kesa (Khazar). At the time of the Han Dynasty, it was ruled by the king of Aojian. The contemporary ruler resides in the city of Jiduojuzhe. Among the Hu (people of Western regions of Tang) this is the only country where carts drawn by oxen are found. The merchants travel in these carts to

ing officially changed after the second of Qutaybah's

other countries. In the tenth year of Tianbao (750), Shaoshifen, the ruler of Huoliximijia, sent emissaries to make tribute of black salt to the Chinese court. In the year of Baoying (762) his emissaries came again." (Ying 2000/2001). According to Livshits (1968: 440; cf. Tolstov 1948a: 227), this testimony should be read as an attempt made by Savashfan to seek Chinese help to fight the Arab conquerors; therefore "it can be presumed that the burials in the cemetery [of Tok-kala] continued in the course of a few decades after the punitive expedition of the Arabs. This is shown by the finds of coins of Savashfan". First of all, however, these coins were only found in the settlement area of Tok-kala and not in the necropolis, which the dated inscriptions come from (Gudkova 1964: 112; Vainberg 1977: 78–79). Moreover, as regards the inhabited area of Tok-kala, continuity is attested until the eleventh century (Gudkova 1964: 42 ff.; see also Vainberg 1977: 79). Vainberg (1977: 79) also dates the necropolis on the basis of the numismatic evidence from the settlement. Secondly, Savashfan ruled Chorasmia from at least AD 750 to 762, a relatively long period for a rebellion in Central Asia at that time, and thus we might perhaps consider the idea that he was more likely to send embassies to China with the intention of establishing some commercial relations. According to Bīrunī and the Chorasmian numismatic evidence, it appears that Savashfan was preceded by the kings Kanik, Khusrav and Azkatsvar I (the latter ruled during the events of AD 712; Livshits 1968: 439–40) and that he was followed by Azkatsvar II/Abdallāh (recto and verso of his monetary issue, respectively with the Chorasmian and the Arab name). The only coins found in the excavations of the Tok-kala cemetery are one specimen of Khusrav, three coins of Azkatsvar I from Naus 3 and one single "strongly oxidised" coin probably issued by Kanik from Naus 8 (Gudkova 1968; Vainberg 1977: 79). It is important to note that none of these coins were found in any stratigraphic association with any of the inscribed ossuaries and certainly not with that reporting the latest date 738 Ch.E. At any rate, this numismatic datum seems to point to the fact that the necropolis (Naus 3 and 8) should probably be attributed to a pre-Savashfan period, not so far from the events of AD 712. In particular the stratigraphy of Naus 2 (Gudkova 1964: 22, section V-V), where the latest Ch.E. inscription seems to come from (the only one really important for the comprehension of the Ch.E.) shows that between the desecration/destruction of the building (filled with a mix of fragments of bones and pieces of intentionally shattered ossuaries and sand; Gudkova 1964: 85 ff.; see above n. 13) and the instalment of the Muslim cemetery over these ruins, a certain hiatus had occurred as indicated by the "pure sand" context which fills and covers the *naus* chamber. In fact, this "pure sand" context which seems to be a layer of aeolian formation, is in its turn sealed and covered by another layer of "compact clay", this time probably formed by the collapsed walls of the same structure. The Islamic inhumations are cut into this last clay layer, at different levels, and

expeditions when it was substituted by the Hijra,

so presumably at different periods. Thus, it is difficult to believe that if the Muslim tombs covering Naus 2 are to be dated from the ninth century onwards, the desecration of the funerary building had just occurred in the second half of the eighth century AD. Furthermore, in Naus 2, after the destructive event, there is no trace of a Zoroastrian post-destruction phase, i.e. new Zoroastrian depositions (ossuaries) above the destroyed ones, just an abandonment. On the contrary, Naus 3 (section illustrated in Gudkova 1968: fig. 2, II) seems to have been reused at a certain time after the desecration, as shown by at least one ossuary lying over the sand filling of the chamber which covers some other ossuaries (see also Gudkova 1968: the drawing of the plan, with several ossuaries lying over the walls of the same *naus*). Therefore, not excluding that the Tok-kala site was populated in the aftermath of the Muslim conquest and with continuity even after traumatic events (as the excavations in the settlement area indicate), and that some parts of the Zoroastrian cemetery were reused by the—not yet converted to Islam—local population (as indicated by the stratigraphy of Naus 3 but not of Naus 2; cf. Mizdakhkan where coins of the mid-eighth century AD were found in the last Zoroastrian depositions, see Grenet 1984: 142, 201 n. 2; Yagodin and Khodzhaïov 1970: 110–11), and that somewhere some individuals still used the traditional system to compute the years (but unlikely if we follow al-Bīrunī; see below n. 18), a *terminus ante quem* for the Ch.E. is, in my opinion, still better represented by the correspondence between AD 712 and 738 Ch.E., which means that we have a hypothetical first year of 27 BC. Nothing, in fact, definitely proves that Savashfan, notwithstanding his Iranian name, was not already converted to Islam and that his embassies to China, (four in total between AD 750 and 764)—three of which were sent after the battle of the Talas River (AD 751) and were preceded by another one, sent by an anonymous Chorasmian king in AD 645 (for further details on the Chinese sources on Chorasmia, see Ying 2000/2001)—were not sent to seek the establishment of commercial relations. Moreover, in AD 743–44 Mas'adah b. 'Abdallah al-Yashkiri was appointed ruler of Khwarazm (al-Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. XXVI: 209) without any unrest. Hence, it seems—as al-Bīrunī wrote—that the Shah maintained a certain institutional and traditional role in spite of direct Arab presence, manifested through a governor (see n. 18). Be that as it may, the use of the Ch.E. at Savashfan's court, instead of the Hijra, is a conjecture until proven otherwise. By contrast, we have the association between a historical event (the violent conquest of the country), which is probably mirrored in the destruction/raid of Tok-kala, with the testimony of an eminent mediaeval scholar, al-Bīrunī, who clearly states that the Hijra became official after that event. Indeed, the destruction and desecration of the Tok-kala Zoroastrian cemetery ought to be connected with a "religious", i.e. cultural, conquest, which can be reasonably related to the Arabs (see al-Ṭabarī, *History*, vol. XXIII: 194–95, on the destruction of the idols of Samarkand in AD 712, when

although he says that the Shahs preserved some of their former prestige after losing the actual governorship of the country.¹⁸ Therefore, Henning's *terminus*, as a working hypothesis, cannot be easily discharged but should still be considered logical and valuable: it is based on the archaeological evidence from Tok-kala and the available literary sources, and at the same time avoids speculation on a precise starting year relative to an era that is impossible to determine at the present stage of research.¹⁹

Hence, a *terminus ante quem* for the four-armed goddess of the British Museum could be provisionally established at AD 673, making it slightly earlier than an attribution to the eighth century AD. We might also consider that an earlier date for the manufacture of the silver bowl is quite probable, considering that the inscriptions on the Chorasmian bowls could have been added later, for example on the occasion of their dedication.²⁰

Qutaybah “acted perfidiously at Khwarazm and Samargand”). A detailed argument about the Ch.E. needs further discussion, with the addition of other evidence not directly concerning the main topic of the present article (the eventual connection between the beginning of the era and the archaeological evidence, i.e. the material culture associable with this socio-political change, and some considerations on Vainberg 2001 in which the scholar associates the beginning of the era—first century AD—with a “religious reform”). With regard to the numismatics of Chorasmia and the relative sequence of rulers, the recent hypothesis advanced by Fedorov (2006; also Fedorov and Kuznetsov 2011) does not affect the present argument.

¹⁸ Al-Bīrunī, *Chronology*, 41 (35), §38–40, 42 (36), §1–5: “When Ḥutaiba ben Muslim had conquered Khwarizm the second time, after the inhabitants had rebelled, he constituted as their king Askajamuk ben and appointed him as their *Shah*. The descendants of the Kisrās lost the office of the “*Wali*” (the governorship), but they retained the office of the *Shah*, it being hereditary among them. And they accommodated themselves to dating from the Hijra according to the use of the Muslims”.

¹⁹ See above n. 12: Livshits's AD 10–20/30 is only a working hypothesis.

²⁰ The Chorasmian inscriptions appear on the outer rims of the bowls, in some cases also on the external part of the foot. Observing the decoration of the bowls (the inscription is not always free to develop independently from the decoration of the rim), and also observing the differences in style within the specimens of the corpus, the idea arises that different workshops (or different craftsmen) manufactured different specimens, and that the inscriptions could have been incised some time later (*contra* Azarpay 1969). See in particular the inscription on the silver bowl with emblema depicting an ossuary/reliquary supported by two

III. HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF LATE ANTIQUITY IN CHORASMIA: RELATIONS WITH THE WESTERN WORLD

If we consider AD 673 as the hypothetical *terminus ante quem* for the manufacture of bowl no. 1, and there is as yet no clear reason to doubt this, we should first take into account other pertinent contemporary historical sources to set sixth–seventh-century AD Chorasmia in its proper historical background. A relevant issue concerning the history of Ancient Chorasmia is that nothing of its literary legacy—probably developed since the introduction of the Aramaic script around the third century BC, or even before²¹—survived the Arab conquest of the country, which took place in the first quarter of the eighth century AD. The only available documents are epigraphs and, especially as regards Late Antique inscriptions, often not even fully intelligible to specialists, for Chorasmian as a language

lions (Bader and Smirnov 1954; Fajans 1957: 68–76, pls. 8–10; Darkevich 1976: 103–14, table 26): in this specific case it is clear that the inscription was incised subsequently, but it is impossible to establish precisely how much later.

²¹ The earliest written documents revealed by the KhAEE come from the site of Koī-Kr̥ylgan-kala (Tolstov and Vainberg 1967) and are ascribed to the second century BC (Livshits 1968). In recent years, the Australian-Karakalpak Expedition to Ancient Chorasmia (led by A.V.G. Betts and V.N. Yagodin, and of which the author is currently a member) unearthed at the site of Akshakhan-kala (formerly Kazakly-yatkan) a painted fragmentary epigraph of the first century BC, mentioning a king son of a king (Yagodin *et al.* 2009; see also Kidd and Betts 2010). Chronologically close documents also come from the Chorasmian site of Kalal̥y-g̥yr 2 (Vainberg 2004: 191 ff.). The earliest evidence of Chorasmian writing in Chorasmian-Aramaic script, however, is an epigraph incised on a silver phiale, which mentions a Chorasmian king “Amurzhan son of King Wardan” (Livshits 2003: translation 148–50) found in a kurgan at Isakovka (Omsk). The phiale could be Achaemenid and possibly a work of the end of the fourth century BC. According to Livshits, palaeographical considerations date the inscription not earlier than the second half of the third/second century BC. Therefore, in Ancient Chorasmia we have proof, firstly of the existence of a royal dynasty, and secondly of a practice that continued for centuries, i.e. the use, among the elites, of inscribing precious metal vessels. Once again, this vessel was found (with another silver bowl, Hellenistic in style, also inscribed in Aramaic-Chorasmian and one more undecorated silver specimen with a Parthian inscription) in Russian territory, where it was buried in a tomb probably during the third–second centuries BC (Livshits 2003: translation 148–50).

underwent a peculiar evolution over the centuries.²²

By coincidence the *terminus ante quem* AD 673 almost corresponds with the year AD 659 that saw the Western Turk Empire cease to exist after having ruled all of the steppe belt from the Black Sea to the Altai range and the northern part of Central Asia since the mid-sixth century AD (552–57/561).²³ This domination, which had also involved Sogdiana, surely interested Chorasmia for geographical, logistical and historical reasons that I shall discuss in brief.

Since the second half of the sixth century AD, Sogdiana had been under the aegis of the Western Turk Empire (Fig. 1).²⁴ The most relevant literary sources that have recorded the political relations existing between Turks and Romans in this particular period of time are fragments of the Eastern Roman narrations of Procopius, Theophanes of Byzantium and Menander.²⁵ These authors record how those Central Asian-European relations, being established for commercial purposes (mainly silk trading)²⁶ led to a first official Turco-Sogdian embassy to Byzantium, in AD 568 when Justin II (AD 565–78) was emperor.²⁷ Prior

to this date, however, and in parallel with the establishment of the Western Turks in Central Asia at the expenses of the Hephthalites, around AD 550 another Roman emperor, Justinian I (AD 527–65), received a “visit” from some merchants, most likely Sogdians,²⁸ who for the first time had brought silkworm cocoons from “the Land of the Seres” to Constantinople.²⁹ The event pleased the emperor who, since AD 530³⁰ had been struggling to find a commercial partner, in effect a solution to trade safely with the East without intermediaries. Sasanid Persia, which was hostile to Byzantium, had established and maintained a strong hold over the monopoly of trade with India—and thus the Far East—since *c.* the mid-third century AD.³¹

The embassy of AD 568, led by the Sogdian Maniakh, encouraged Justin II to seize the opportunity to establish commercial relations with the “Turks”; for

role in the commercial affairs of Central Asia and China from the second–third century AD and held this position until the arrival of the Arabs in the first quarter of the eighth century (Grenet 2005). For a detailed historical account on the Sogdian trade, see de la Vaissière 2005.

²² As already suggested by Hannestad (1957).

²³ Procopius, *Bell. Goth.* VIII. 17. 1–9; Theophanes of Byzantium, *Fragm. Hist. Graec.* IV, 270; but even if silkworm breeding has been introduced in the territory of the Eastern Roman Empire the production of silk would not satisfy internal demand until the early tenth century AD (Jacoby 2004).

³⁰ Around AD 530, Justinian tried different manoeuvres to establish commercial relations directly with India, bypassing and so damaging Persia: first he sought alliance with the kingdoms of the Red Sea (Procopius, *Bell. Pers.* I. 20. 9–12; II. 3. 41), secondly, with the “Huns” dwelling north of the empire (Procopius, *Bell. Pers.* I. 12. 6–9) and thirdly with the “Saracens” who dwelt south of Roman Syria (Procopius, *Bell. Pers.* II. 3. 47; 10. 16). For further details and references on the specific argument, see Harmatta 2000; Hannestad 1957; and for further historical considerations, see Ostrogorsky 1963: 64; Stein 1949, II: 304–05.

³¹ During the third century the Roman Empire endured a social and moral crisis that led, among other events, to a disruption of the direct Romano-Indian trade (Rostovtzeff 1957; Bianchi Bandinelli 1970). The crisis, moreover, reached its apex with the victory of Shapur I over Valerian in AD 260; the same Persian king had crushed the Kushan Empire in *c.* AD 240. In parallel, important trade centres such as Dura Europos and Palmyra were theatres of war (AD 252 and 272) and suffered a decline. Even Alexandria sustained a strong economic blow, being first occupied by Zenobia and restored to the empire by Aurelian with the use of force; secondly in AD 296–97, during Achilleus’ revolt, again besieged by Diocletian. On the Sasanian trade, see Whitehouse and Williamson 1973 with references.

²² Livshits and Lukonin 1964: the translation of Late Chorasmian is “a task for the future” and “paleographically the form of the [Chorasmian] letters are sufficiently close to the letter of the epigraphs found in the site of Yakke-Parsan, excavated in 1959 and dated by the archaeologists to the seventh/eighth century AD”. Livshits 1968: “The script of the Toprak-kala documents represents the initial phase of the development of the Khwarezmian cursive. Its further evolution can be followed on two small fragments of texts discovered [...] [at] Yakke Parsan and on the basis of many inscriptions on ossuaries from Tok-kala.” Livshits (1970) added the Mizdakhkan specimens to the “Tok-kala phase” of development of the Chorasmian script. After all, “the Early Khwarezmian system of verbal ideograms has to this day not been investigated because of the meagre supply of materials” (Livshits 2003: 159).

²³ From AD 552 the Turks emerged in Mongolia and between AD 557 and 561 they overthrew the Hephthalites in Central Asia (Sinor 1990: 285–316; Stark 2008 with lit.).

²⁴ On the role of the Sogdians within the Western Turk establishment, see Stark 2008: 289 ff.; de la Vaissière 2005: 197 ff. with lit.

²⁵ For further details, and the other literary sources concerning the contacts between the Eastern Roman Empire and the steppe in the sixth century AD, see Dobrovits 2011.

²⁶ On the importance of silk and its trade for the Eastern Roman/Byzantine Empire, see Lopez 1945; Oikonomides 1986; Muthesius 1993.

²⁷ Menander: fragm. 10, 1. A parallel Turco-Sogdian embassy lead by Sogdian merchants to China is recorded for the year AD 545 (Ecsedy 2000). Sogdians played a fundamental

this reason the emperor sent the general, Zemarchos, back with the Sogdians to the Turkic Kaghan Siziboulos (Istami).³² Menander records how Zemarchos' expedition after a long journey had "entered the land of the Sogdians" from where it consequently reached the "Golden Mountain" (probably in the Altai Mountains) to meet the Turk leader at that location³³ There, after they had exchanged gifts with Siziboulos, Zemarchos and 20 of his Romans were invited to join the Kaghan in a "blitz" against the Persians. This expedition is likely to have begun from a strategic position, that is, from the border of the Turk dominations with the Sasanid Empire. In other words, it probably passed through Sogdiana. In the meantime the remaining Romans who had been dismissed "returned to the land of the Kholiatai" where they were made to wait until the end of the incursion. When, in his turn, the Kaghan dismissed Zemarchus and his companions, they "caught up with the [other] Romans who had been sent away earlier at the place where they had been told to wait. They joined up and began their journey home and leaving the first city of the Kholiatai, they travelled through fortresses". This "land of the Kholiatai", moreover, was situated "across the river Oekh" (matching with "Oxus"),³⁴ a geographical reference mentioned for being the place where the leader of this "tribe" met the Romans. The "Kholiatai leader" was indeed the only one among several "tribal leaders" subject to Sizabul who had requested to join the Romans on their journey back to Byzantium and for whom the Kaghan's permission had been granted. Immediately following this episode, another interesting geographical reference is cited in Menander's account: from across the "Oekh" the Romano-Turk/Sogdian (and Kholiatai) expedition subsequently reached a distant and "enormous wide lake". At this point of the journey a rapid scouting party led by a man named Georgios "set off for Byzantium with twelve Turks by a route that was waterless and wholly desert but shorter", while "Zemarchus travelled along the sandy shore [of the lake] for twelve days and came to the river Ikh, then to the Daikh and, after passing some other lakes, to the Attila. Then they came to the Ugurs [...]" and afterwards to the land of the Alans. From the land of the Alans, north of the Caucasus Range—Menander records in a last con-

fused portion of his description probably gathered by some other sources—Zemarchus' retinue eventually reached the Phasis River (Don) from where they sailed to Trapezus and thence finally set off for Byzantium.

In summary, despite the difficulties related to Menander's use of particular toponyms (such as for example the "Attila" for the Volga),³⁵ it is possible to glean the following information from the passage on Zemarchus' journey: the Romans travelled by land through the territory of the Western Turks; on their way they did not cross any water before the Black Sea at the end of their journey and when they did so, it was only after having reached the Alans, who were subject to the Turks. Moreover, they were almost certainly not travelling through hostile Sasanid territory, but were carefully trying to avoid such dangerous encounters.³⁶ Hence, if the expedition crossed neither the Caucasus nor the Caspian Sea, but first a land covered in fortresses and "cities" not far from Sogdiana, across the river "Oekh" and within the territory controlled by the Western Turk Empire—which in this case cannot be Tokharistan/Bactriana³⁷—the land of the Kholiatai ought to have been north of Sogdiana, and the "enormous wide lake" could have been the Aral.³⁸ Similarly, the short cut in the middle of the desert taken by Georgios and his "local guides" is very likely to have been the route crossing the Ustiurt Plateau, a migration route traditionally used by the semi-nomadic populations of the area.³⁹ Finally, the Kholiatai polity itself might be Ancient Chorasmia.⁴⁰

The identification of Ancient Chorasmia with the land of the Kholiatai was first advanced by S.P. Tolstov in 1948,⁴¹ and it is reasonably supported by Menander,

³² Chuvin 1996: 347–50.

³³ Menander 1985: fragm. 10-3. On the identification of the "Golden Mountain", see Chuvin 1996: 350–51.

³⁴ Chuvin 1996: 352.

³⁵ Dobrovits 2011: 393; Daikh is certainly Yayīq, the Old Turkic name of the river Ural, while Attila must be Ätil, i.e. the Volga.

³⁶ Menander 1985: fragm. 10-4: the Sasanids tried to obstruct the expedition.

³⁷ Annexed to the Western Turk Empire with Gandhāra, not before AD 625 (Harmatta 2000).

³⁸ Dobrovits 2011: 391, n. 96.

³⁹ The Ustiurt Plateau lies between the Aral and the Caspian Seas. It is an isolated upland area that in the past was once favoured as winter grazing land by the semi-nomadic tribes of Central Eurasia. See Yagodin *et al.* 2007 with references.

⁴⁰ On the identification of the Kholiatai with the Chorasmians, see also Moravcsik 1958, II: 347; Chuvin 1996; de la Vaisière 2005: 255; Dobrovits 2011: 391–92 with references.

⁴¹ Tolstov 1948b: 219. This identification was, for the first time, also based on the archaeological data gathered by the KhAEE. The first attempt to identify the Kholiatai with the

as not many other Central Asian polities covered in “fortresses” fit this description. Moreover, it is very difficult to believe that a polity such as Chorasmia, no less rich in archaeological evidence than contemporary Sogdiana, one of the few territories under Turkic rule with a long history of sedentary life and with a historical landscape characterised by fortified settlements, did not play any role in this context. We should not be misled by the chronic ignorance of the Western sources on Chorasmia so as to deny its strategic importance among the polities of Central Asia and its long vital history and rich culture, set between the steppes and the sedentary world.⁴²

For present purposes, another of Menander’s passages is also noteworthy: in the 12 years which followed Maniakh’s expedition, at least 106 “Turks” were living in Constantinople;⁴³ so many, in fact, that the Emperor Tiberius Constantine (AD 578–82) decided to expel these foreigners, sending them back to Central Asia along with a new embassy for the Turkic khagan. This time Valentinus, one of the imperial *protectores*, was entrusted with the task and once again, his route was a northern one: he departed from Sinope from where he sailed to Cherson (see Fig. 1).⁴⁴

IV. ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF THE WESTERN LITERARY SOURCES

As a whole, the archaeological evidence strongly supports the literary sources in respect of the intense exchange of goods and people that occurred from the mid-sixth century AD along the Volga-Don route that connected Constantinople with Chorasmia, Sogdiana and thus the Turks. The evidence remains just as strongly supportive of this although much of the data

comes from outside the area of interest, and precisely from the Kama River valley, south of the Ural Mountains in modern Russia (see Fig. 1).⁴⁵ Firstly, from the Kama River valley come examples of Early Byzantine silverware of various types (dishes above all), the exact dating of which is supported by typical imperial control stamps, dating from the reign of Anastasios (AD 491–518) to that of Constans II (AD 641–68);⁴⁶ secondly, there are Sasanid silver plates dated from Shapur II onwards;⁴⁷ and thirdly, the Chorasmian bowls (both inscribed and not) included with other specimens from Central Asia, probably from Sogdiana.⁴⁸

The chronology of these Eastern Roman/Early Byzantine silver specimens from the Kama valley, begins with a single stamped dish of Anastasios; it is with his successor Justinian I (AD 527–65) that the number increases to five, and again to seven specimens stamped under Heraclius (AD 613–30).⁴⁹ Finally, with Constans II (AD 641–68) there are five recorded silver dishes.⁵⁰ The key points to note about these specimens (and each of these points is supported by specific archaeological evidence; see below) are as follows: none of them were found in association with later mediaeval silver objects; they definitely come from Central Asia; and, lastly, they should not be considered the result of direct trade between the sixth–eighth century populations of the southern Ural region and the West.⁵¹ In relation to the evidence for these claims, it has been demonstrated, firstly, that the dish of the Justinian period representing Venus in Anchises’ tent was the personal possession of a Sogdian king, since the scratched epigraph on its back “King Dizōy [?] of Bukhara” bears witness to this fact (dated on palaeographical grounds to the sixth–eighth century AD).⁵² Another plate from Martynova (Perm) manufactured during the reign of Constans II has a

Chorasmians dates back to 1873 by P. Lerch (Dobrovits 2011: 391).

⁴² Minardi, forthcoming doctoral dissertation.

⁴³ Menander 1985: fragm. 19.1.

⁴⁴ Another possibility at the end of the journey was to cross the Caucasus probably to reach Trapezus, as Thurxanthus, whom Valentinus visited, points out (Menander 1985: fragm. 19. 1): “As for you, Romans, why do you take my envoys through the Caucasus to Byzantium, alleging that there is no other route for them to travel? You do this so I might be deterred from attacking the Roman Empire by the difficult terrain. But I know very well where the river Dnapiis flows, and the Danube, and the Hebrus [...]”

⁴⁵ The majority of the material has been catalogued by Smirnov (1909), and studied afterwards by Darkevich (1976) and Marshak (1971; 1986). Several items from the Kama River area date later, to the proper Middle Ages (ninth–twelfth century AD).

⁴⁶ Matsulevich 1940; Dodd 1961; Effenberger *et al.* 1978; Mundell Mango 2009.

⁴⁷ Trever and Lukonin 1987.

⁴⁸ Marshak 1971, 1986; Darkevich 1976.

⁴⁹ Dodd 1961.

⁵⁰ Dodd 1961.

⁵¹ Noonan 1982.

⁵² Smirnov 1909; Dodd 1961: no. 16. For the translation: Livshits and Lukonin 1964; Lurje 2010: 192, no. 476.

scratched indication of its weight in the Chorasmian language.⁵³ Moreover, some of the Sasanid silver plates from the same area have Sogdian inscriptions scratched on their surface, two of them—the first one with Varakhran V (?) (AD 420–38)⁵⁴ hunting and the second of Shapur III (AD 383–88)⁵⁵ also hunting—in Samarkand script. Evidence such as the inscriptions on each of these items, the possessions of Sogdian and Chorasmian individuals, indicate, along with the Chorasmian silver bowls, that these toreutic works ended up in Russia only after they had first arrived, or had first been crafted or used, in Central Asia during the sixth–seventh centuries AD. The impact of such Byzantine imported goods upon the taste of Central Asian silverware production is remarked by the existence of local imitations, including for example, the *oinochoe* with fake Byzantine control stamps of the late seventh century from Pokrovskoie⁵⁶ and the Sogdian cup with composite handle with a “Roman” male profile.⁵⁷ Among the finds from the Kama area several other imitations of Byzantine silverware accompany vessels of Central Asian origin with designs derived from Western archetypes even later during the Middle Ages.⁵⁸

If on the one hand, it is clear that the majority of these items were concentrated in the Kama River Area—they resulted from early mediaeval and mediaeval trade relations from the eighth–ninth century

AD onwards,⁵⁹—on the other hand, we also have to consider who obtained these early items and how. These pieces, with differing origins of place and time, continued to be used as valuable and ready “currency” for trade and exchange. It is possible, then, that the Western Turks might have been the first redistributors of Central Asia toreutic vessels in the north, vessels they had plundered during their conquests or which they had gathered as tribute. Another possibility is that the former Central Asian possessors disposed of such property when the symbolic meanings of these objects (religion, prestige) completely ceased to exist.⁶⁰ In the latter case, it might be possible that the Chorasmian bowls ended up in the Kama River valley after the fall of the Western Turk Empire, more probably at a time subsequent to the Arab conquest of Central Asia and with the change, at least among the elites, of indigenous religious beliefs. In such a scenario these objects were likely to have been dismissed as pagan symbols, good only for their intrinsic value, following a tradition established by the Romans in the sixth century AD. Indeed it is possible, as suggested by Mundell Mango,⁶¹ that the Eastern Roman/Byzantine silver plates were also in part produced as “a convenient export currency for the silk trade” with the East and that this practice was later also adopted until the thirteenth century AD by Muslim Central Asia in this particular context of exchange with the Volga-Kama populations.⁶²

Indeed, silver items crafted in Constantinople (or another centre of the Eastern Roman Empire such as Antioch) in an earlier period (i.e. the sixth–seventh centuries AD) reached Central Asia following the Roman embassies to the Western Turk Empire and the “tribes” under their control, expeditions which often used, as recorded by Menander, the Volga-Don-Oxus route for political and logistical reasons.⁶³

⁵³ Leshchenko 1970.

⁵⁴ Smirnov 1909: no. 53; Trever and Lukonin 1987: no. 7.

⁵⁵ Smirnov 1909: no. 308; Trever and Lukonin 1987: no. 4.

⁵⁶ Dodd 1961: no. 102. Another typologically analogous specimen is scratched with a Turkish rune on the handle (Darkevich 1976: 98, table 20).

⁵⁷ Marshak 1971: fig. 23A: not only the profile with peculiar hairstyle looks “Roman” (probably derived from a Roman model of the fourth century, cf. intaglio in Ross 1957) but also the typology of the cup with a vertical ring handle between a horizontal piece for the thumb and another appendix for the forefinger, was already well known in the West since the Augustan Age (e.g. the Boscoreale silverware from the classic *kantharos* type). A wide range of Asiatic vessels with the same or a derivate vertical ring handle spread later, probably from the same archetype (e.g. Smirnov 1909: nos. 112–17, 170; Stark 2008: pl. 21; Werner 1984: table 9) and similar cups were produced in Sogdiana with evident Chinese influxes (on this argument, see Marshak 1971, 1986).

⁵⁸ Darkevich 1976. For preliminary typological considerations between Byzantine, Persian and Central Asian silver items, see also Mundell Mango 1998 and 2000.

⁵⁹ Darkevich 1976, with criticism in Noonan 1982 and 2000.

⁶⁰ At the end of the eighth century AD Muslim Chorasmian coins are attested for the first time in Russian territory while in the ninth century mediaeval Chorasmia is at the centre of trade with the north. For further details, see Noonan 1985; de La Vaissière 2000 with lit.

⁶¹ Mundell Mango 2006.

⁶² The first Arab dirhams arrived in the Kama River area between the late eighth century AD and the beginning of the ninth, mainly via the Caucasus from the Near East after the conclusion of the conflict between the Khazars and Arabs for the control of the area (AD 750). For further details, see Noonan 1980 with lit.

⁶³ See above pp. 120–21.

One other piece of evidence should be noted, namely Eastern Roman/Byzantine *solidi* and their imitations, which have been found in small numbers in Chinese territory.⁶⁴ Eight genuine specimens of these golden coins found in Chinese elite burials of the Tang period were struck between the reign of Theodosius II (AD 408–50) and Justin II (AD 565–78).⁶⁵ According to their archaeological and chronologically accurate contexts, however, all these coins were deposited in the second half of the sixth century AD, not later than AD 600.⁶⁶ The small number of these *solidi* clearly suggests that there was no direct contact between Byzantium and China at this time, while the important role the Sogdians played as trade and cultural intermediaries directly with the Chinese is well known, as is the cultural influence that China had in pre-Muslim eighth-century Central Asia.⁶⁷ Given this situation it is arguable that these coins reached the Far East through the mediation of Sogdian individuals, as their chronological frame indicates that the majority of them were struck—and afterwards buried—during the period of intense exchange between Byzantium and the Western Turks.⁶⁸ Even the majority of *solidi* imitations clearly derive from archetypes still belonging to the same period.⁶⁹ In Sogdiana the situation is fairly similar,

although the archaeological context of the evidence is often scanty: imitations of *solidi* struck under Theodosius II, Anastasios, Justinian I and Heraclius have been recorded, as well as two imitations of Justinian I's medallions.⁷⁰ The presence of these imitations in the region, even if the original archetypes have not been found in quantity, attests that *solidi* must have been in circulation over a certain period of time and thus—as happened in China—they were regarded as exotic and valuable items worth copying locally.

V. ICONOGRAPHY

The key elements in the iconography of the image of the four-armed goddess are the lion, the crescent moon with pellets, the multiple arms, the majestic seated position and the mural crown. Iconographically speaking, it is clear that the craftsman who created the image drew on a number of models of different schools and periods. These elements will not be treated from their earliest appearance, however, but rather will be considered in their “mature” form, that is, as part of the Roman-Hellenistic, Indian and Persian cultural patrimonies (often with connections and loans of formal elements between one another) since around the second century AD, or in other words, in the period prior to the creation of the prototypes (namely, the iconographic canonisation) of multiple armed deities in India (see below).

As already mentioned, the lion is visible in the

⁶⁴ Thierry and Morrisson 1994: a total of 27 “western coins” including 11 genuine *solidi*, 5–6 imitations of *solidi* and the rest bracteates, have been found in Xingjian and northern China.

⁶⁵ Thierry and Morrisson 1994; exceptions to this rule are: one *solidus* of Leo (AD 457–73), one of Phocas (AD 602–10), and ultimately the only evidence for the eighth century, a *solidus* struck under Constantine V (AD 741–75). These were not found within a precisely dated burial context.

⁶⁶ The *solidus* buried in AD 600 in Inner Mongolia belongs to Anastasios (AD 491–518). For further details, see Thierry and Morrisson 1994.

⁶⁷ De la Vaissière 2005: 119 ff. An Eastern Roman embassy to China, sent by Constans II, is recorded in AD 643 (*Chiu-t'ang-shu*, ch. 198 and *Hsing-t'ang-shu*, ch. 221, translated in Hirth 1885). On the Byzantine trade, see also Mundell Mango 2009 with references.

⁶⁸ In Afghanistan, five *solidi* struck between AD 408 and 474 (from Theodosius II to Leo I) recovered at Tepe-Kalan, Hadda, Stupa 10 were probably buried as ex-votos during the following sixth century AD (Fussmann and Le Berre 1976: 53).

⁶⁹ The following imitations of *solidi* have been found in China: two from types of Justinian I without datable context; one imitation of a Mauritius *solidus* (AD 582–602) buried in the first half of the seventh century AD; two imitations of *solidi* of Heraclius and his son Constantine (AD 641) buried in c. AD 756 (Thierry and Morrisson 1994). Furthermore three

imitations derived from Justinian types have been recorded from seventh-century burials in Turfan (Wang 2004: 34). As it is possible to note, the copies come from archetypes of the sixth–seventh centuries even though they could have been created much later.

⁷⁰ Raspopova (1999) summarised the situation for the Sogdian Area as follows: six imitations of *solidi* and of one Roman medallion come from Pendjikent, the coins based on a type from Anastasios to Heraclius, the medallion bearing the image of the *tychai* of Rome and Constantinople and the bust of the Emperor Justinian I. In my opinion, it is possible to identify among these imitations published by Raspopova at least one genuine Roman coin although it is clipped and worn out (nos. 1–2, p. 460). Moreover, one imitation of a Justinian *solidus* and one of Theodosius II come from Samarkand; an imitation of a *solidus* of Heraclius and his son Constantine from Andijan, Ferghana; another imitation of a Justinian I medallion comes from southern Chach; from Semireche two imitations of Byzantine coins “of seventh century” are also recorded.



Fig. 8. The lion of bowl no. 1 with comparanda. A: detail of a Sasanian silver dish with Shapur II hunting (after Smirnov 1909); B: detail of silver bowl no. 1; C: detail of silver bowl no. 4.

emblem as a “lion-throne” or as the vehicle of the goddess. It appears recumbent at the feet of the deity with its head bent over. The lion’s position at the bottom of the emblem along with its characteristic head, its open mouth and crescent-shaped mane, immediately recall the image of the dying lion on the Sasanid dish from the Kama valley, that depicts Shapur II hunting, dated AD 310–20 (Fig. 8: A, B).⁷¹ The use of this iconographic model in Sasanid Persia was common, as various other later specimens featuring representations of the royal hunt on silver dishes witness.⁷² On the other hand, the Chorasmian lion depicted on the copy (no. 4) of bowl no. 1 (Figs. 6; 8: C), although in general adhering to the same iconographic scheme, underwent a change in its iconography that brought it closer to the lion depicted on a Byzantine dish of

⁷¹ Harper 1981: pl. 37; Trever and Lukonin 1987: no. 3.

⁷² Harper 1981: pls. 10, 14 and 20.



Fig. 9. Constantinople, silver dish depicting David slaying the lion (AD 613–630; detail after Leader 2000).

the beginning of the seventh century AD, and which belongs to the series of “David plates” (Fig. 9).⁷³ In the latter example, the lion’s head is shown frontally with despairing eyes and lolling tongue. These iconographic characteristics, cautiously considered, might be hints to its chronology and as a consequence, also relevant as evidence for the dating of no. 1.

The lion as attribute/vehicle of a female goddess has been used in the Romano-Hellenistic world (including Syria) for a number of deities such as Rhea/Cybele and Syria/Atargatis. It was often also associated with *tychai* as a symbol of *maiestas* and power.⁷⁴ During the second century AD, the iconography of a deity either astride or seated upon a lion (in the case of Isis, a dog, Sirius) had been transmitted to the Kushan repertoire as far back as the reign of Kanishka (c. mid-second century AD), together with other iconographic models that were used in the same Kushan pantheon (Fig. 12).⁷⁵

⁷³ Leader 2000.

⁷⁴ Teixidor 1979; Rostovtzeff 1933.

⁷⁵ As already suggested for Nana (Callieri 1997), and in general an observation valuable for most of the image of Iranian gods in Western “attitude” (and of syncretic “Roman-Kushan gods”) on the Kushan coinage (see Gnoli 1963). The similarities between Kushan and Roman coinage are not only iconographic (MacDowell 1997 with references). For a survey on the current scholarly views on the debated



Fig. 10. A: China, Sogdian four-armed “god” (last quarter of the sixth century AD; after Riboud 2005); B: Sogdiana, wooden relief from Keder with four-armed deity (end of sixth century AD; after Bajkpakov and Grenet 1992); C: Egypt, enthroned Virgin (fourth century AD; after Effenberger 1977).

The crescent moon, for instance, which appears twice among the Chorasmian goddess’s attributes (in her crown and upper left hand), is also an element with a long iconographic and symbolic history, with notable antecedents appearing both in the West and the Central Asian worlds. This element also appears in association with deities, for example, on Kushan coinage, sometimes attached to their shoulders (Manaobago, Mao),⁷⁶

Kushan chronology, see the convenient Loeschner 2008 with references.

⁷⁶ Göbl 1984; Manaobago type 59 (Kanishka) and 151 (Huvishka), and Kanishka’s Mao types 34, 58 and 76. Manaobago, who shares in general many of the features of the

and sometimes depicted on their forehead (Nana; Fig. 12).⁷⁷ In both cases, again the iconography is unmistakably similar to Romano-Hellenistic models.⁷⁸ The crescent moon appears specifically within the local Hellenistic traditional iconography of Central Asia, for instance on Sapabizades’ monetary series (first century BC, where the association of the lion and the crescent are used for an aniconic representation of Nana), and in the example of the renowned Cybele dish from Ai-Khanoum (third–second century BC).⁷⁹ The addition of pellets, apparently representing stars, within the lunar crescent is again a motif used from Hellenistic times. The number of heavenly bodies, single when representing the sun, is variable throughout the various examples that display them, and the association between crescent and stars has been used as a symbol associated with deities such as Mithra and Atargatis (whose representations, as already mentioned, often associate her with lions) or as a single element in abstract celestial representations on Roman coins and medals, to cite but a few of the examples from the second–fourth centuries AD, which follow the Republican iconographical tradition derived from Hellenistic types.⁸⁰ As regards ancient Chorasmia, it is clear that the crescent with the three stars/pellets has been borrowed from these pre-existing traditions and used, not deviating much from the original divine/astral meaning, to symbolise the idea of royalty, as is shown on the crowns worn by Chorasmian kings from the second–third century AD.⁸¹

The image of the multi-limbed divine being as used for the four-armed goddess relates to an iconographic

four-armed goddess, is also one of the first divinities represented with four arms since Kanishka’s I monetary emissions (see below). He is seated on a throne furnished with lion paws, wearing a Greco-Bactrian helmet, and holding a chakra, a torque, a sceptre (or a plough) and a diadem; a lunar crescent appears at his shoulders. The god, probably connected with the concepts of royalty and investiture, disappears from the Kushan pantheon after Huvishka (Rosenfield 1967).

⁷⁷ Rosenfield 1967; since Kanishka’s type 35.

⁷⁸ E.g. a lunar crescent is attached to the shoulder of Diana Lucifera in the Roman coinage of the second–third centuries AD. Cf. with the astral symbolism on “Iranian coinage” in Gariboldi 2004.

⁷⁹ Francfort 1984: 94–104, pl. XLI.

⁸⁰ E.g. Crawford 1975: types 494/20a, 390/1.

⁸¹ Vaïnberg 1977; according to Vaïnberg’s classification and chronology, the symbol is part of the royal insignia since type B 2, VI.

tradition that was probably developed from Kushano-Indian archetypes. The first “official” examples of four-armed divinities appear on Kushan coinage from Kanishka I (second quarter of the second century AD *ex hypothesi*).⁸² The first female “Great Goddess”, a six-armed Durga, did not appear in the official Kushan pantheon, but was displayed in almost contemporaneous coarse terracotta statuettes moulded from the beginning of “the Early Kushan epoch” for popular and local worship in north-west India.⁸³ Successively, in the course of the third–fourth centuries AD, the iconography of Durga in the Mathura stone reliefs shows how clearly foreign elements—Western ones passed through the Kushans—contributed the iconography of the goddess, which was still in development. This is underlined by her attributes such as the chakra, the lunar crescent, and in one case the lion pedestal as well as the “Mithraic” formulation of the demon bull (Fig. 11).⁸⁴ Moreover, if we consider that the multiple-arm iconography in India began to be standardised only with the Guptas in the fourth–fifth centuries AD,⁸⁵ the appearance of a four-armed god on a tomb bas-relief of a Sogdian merchant buried in China (Gansu) by the end of the sixth century, is a significant *terminus*.⁸⁶ Specifically, it indicates that the four-armed iconography had already entered and had been accepted into the artistic patrimony of Central Asia as early as the sixth century AD,⁸⁷ or that perhaps it was already present



Fig. 11. Mathura (India), stone relief of Durga (third–fourth century AD; after Srinivasan 1997).

in the indigenous cultural tradition as an element of Kushan heritage and merely received new stimulus from the contacts with India.

Two more elements of the four-armed goddess must also be considered: her majestic seated position and mural crown. In relation to the crown it can be argued that this element is associated with the Hellenistic *tyche*.⁸⁸ The crown, which compares poorly to the widely differing Sasanid royal types, finds close parallels in the iconography of first–third-century AD Syria, and thus in general with elements of the

⁸² See above n. 76 for Manaobago (c. second century AD). Oesho is the second four-armed god in Kanishka’s emission (Göbl 1984: type 37). A Kushan rule over Ancient Chorasmia—and subsequently an entire facies of the Chorasmian history named after this dynasty—has been hypothesised by Tolstov and is still part of the current Chorasmian periodisation (Tolstov 1948a, 1948b; Helms 2005: 28 in Khozhaniyazov 2005). Recently, however, this hypothesis is being increasingly challenged (Helms 2005: 14–15 in Khozhaniyazov 2005, with references).

⁸³ Durga figurines, belonging to Sonkh Period V or the “Kushan period from Kanishka to Vasuveda & co.” (Hartel 1993).

⁸⁴ Srinivasan 1991: 291 ff. with pl. 20.16 and 20.18; specimens of “Late Kushana period”.

⁸⁵ Maxwell 1997; few examples of multi-limbed divinities are also present in Gandhāra (for further details, see Gnoli 1963 and Taddei 2003: 96–106, 159–64).

⁸⁶ Riboud 2005. The god is interpreted as Surya but he appears to be a goddess. On the Sogdian culture in Gansu, see de La Vaissière 2005: esp. p. 135.

⁸⁷ As also seems to be indicated by the wall painting with mourning scene from Pendzhikent, with a four-armed goddess identified with Nana and ascribed to the sixth century

AD (Grenet and Marshak 1998: fig. 1).

⁸⁸ A well-known type established in Antioch at the end of the fourth century BC by Eutychides.



Fig. 12. Kushan seal with Nana on lion-throne (second century AD; after Callieri 1997).

Romano-Hellenistic iconography which had also been transmitted into Gandhāra along the Silk Road during the same period (Figs. 13 and 14).⁸⁹ In the Kushan period (from Kujula Kadphises to Kanishka III *c.* first–fourth centuries AD), however, the *tyche*, having already been widely diffused in the monetary iconography of the Indo-Bactrian Greeks,⁹⁰ seems to disappear from the official Kushan pantheon, leaving room for a different Iranian personification of Fortuna with similar characteristics, namely Ardoksho.⁹¹ Yet

⁸⁹ Bussagli 1984; Taddei 2003: 100. According to Mode (1991/1992: 182) “a typical crenelated crown [is] one of the distinguishing marks of the goddess Nana”.

⁹⁰ Gnoli 1963; in Central Asia the use of the *tyche* as a city goddess first makes its appearance on the coins of the Indo-Greek king Philoxenus during the second century BC. At any rate, the first attestation of a *tyche* with mural crown is only with the coinage of Peucolaos and this fashion ends with Maues.

⁹¹ Gnoli 1963: 34: “The iconography of the Hellenistic goddess [*tyche*] contributed to the formation of the Kushana divinity of Fortuna, Ardoksho, who is represented on the coins of those rulers with the characteristic Cornucopia. But the figure of the Kushana Ardoksho is notably different from that of the Greek *tyche*, in that it is strictly connected with an Iranian religious environment.”

while the *tyche/nagaradevata* was perhaps removed from the official Kushan pantheon for political reasons (as suggested by Gnoli),⁹² it survives in Gandhāran art as a ready concept/personification of “place”, used to represent cities in depictions of episodes of Buddha’s life, especially in relation to the Great Departure.⁹³ In the latter case, the *tyche* may be regarded as an iconographic contribution from Syria and the Romano-Hellenistic world.⁹⁴ This is especially persuasive when considering, for instance, the “new” classical deities that enter the Kushan pantheon thanks to relations with the Roman Empire. Certainly the *tyche*-type is attested much later in Chorasmia, but it is not as isolated as it may appear: a head from Varakhsha (Sogdiana), roughly dated between the sixth and the eighth centuries AD, for example, represents a type of mural crown much closer to Syrian models but with a local adaptation, with typical Central Asian arrow slits (Fig. 13).⁹⁵ In some contemporary Sogdian ossuaries, moreover, a Zoroastrian deity appears in *tyche* “disguise”;⁹⁶ similarly, a “Bactrian” silver bowl, held in the Hermitage Museum, bears four *tychai* that are clearly Late Antique in style (Fig. 14; see below for the stylistic discussion).⁹⁷

It is known that iconographic schemes survive for a long time once they have been established as part of a repertoire, and the four-armed goddess with the Varakhsha *tyche* can be seen merely as an attestation to the persistence of the legacy of the Hellenistic iconographic models that were brought into northern Central Asia centuries earlier (and perhaps with the mediation of Gandhāra). Nonetheless, with the particular political and historical context involving Sogdiana and Chorasmia between *c.* AD 550–650, it might be possible to infer that the selection of some specific iconographic types was indeed driven by ideological motives. In this case the Hellenistic *tyche*-type, renewed either in its iconographical or in its ideological popularity in

⁹² Gnoli 1963.

⁹³ For examples of Gandhāran *tychai*, see Facenna 1962, III: pl. CDL (first century AD); Buchthal 1945: pl. II, b (second century AD); Klimburg-Salter 1995 (second–third century AD); Gnoli 1963.

⁹⁴ E.g. Rostovtzeff *et al.* 1939: table XXXI, no. 1 (from Dura Europos); Edwards 1990: pl. 83 a (Corinth, first/second century AD); Stillwell *et al.* 1941 (Corinth, Temple E).

⁹⁵ Pugachenkova and Rempel 1960: no. 64; Shishkin 1963: 49, fig. 12, no.2.

⁹⁶ Grenet 1986: esp. fig. 41.

⁹⁷ Trever 1940: table 27.



Fig. 13. *Varakhsha (Sogdiana), tyche* (sixth–eighth century AD; after Pugachenkova and Rempel 1961).



Fig. 14. “Bactrian” *tyche* (sixth century AD; detail after Trever 1940).

the Eastern Roman Empire, might have been carried for a “second” time in history to the East—that is to Chorasmia and Sogdiana—along with other symbols and emblems of Roman power such as the Capitoline she-wolf (painted in the palace of Kalai Kachkacha, Sacharisthan)⁹⁸ and even the Christian cross (it appears in a bas-relief from Keder with the depiction of a four-armed divinity, very close to the aforementioned Chinese-Sogdian specimen)⁹⁹ presumably not before the sixth century AD (Fig. 10: A–C).

Indeed, within the Roman World from the mid-

⁹⁸ Brentjes 1971.

⁹⁹ Bajpakov and Grenet 1992. The small crosses present in the carved wood (on both sides of the divinity, hardly related to Christian concepts) here appear to be used merely as a decorative pattern. Cf. with those present on a fourth-century AD depiction of an enthroned Virgin from Arsinoe, Egypt, now in Berlin (Effenberger 1977) and with other similar specimens of “Coptic art” (e.g. some of the *ampullae* depicting St Menas).

fourth century AD, with the progressive disappearance of pagan gods from the official religious iconography of the Christian state leaving an iconographic vacuum, the symbolic importance of the *tyche*-type experienced a revival, together with the other traditional personifications of virtues and loci which, now divested of their old pagan religious aspects, began to play different symbolic roles newly adapted to the society of the time.¹⁰⁰

The first step in this new direction was taken by Constantine in AD 330, when he inaugurated Constantinople and brought into the new capital a famous *pignorum imperii* from Rome, the Palladium. This venerable relic was placed in a “new temple” adjacent to the ancient *tychaion* of the city, place of the traditional worship of Rhea-Cybele—or the *Tyche* of ancient Byzantium—where her cult statue became subject to a range of modifications which aimed to

¹⁰⁰ Toynbee 1947.

transform the pagan idol into the civic image of the city.¹⁰¹ Thus Rhea-Cybele-*Tyche* was deprived of the lions, which were originally sitting by her sides; her arms were also modified but her mural crown was left in place.¹⁰² From that moment on, as witnessed for example by Roman numismatic evidence and certain consular ivory diptychs, the two statues represented Rome and Byzantium: the Minerva-Pallas Athena type signified the old capital and the traditional Hellenistic deity meant the “new” foundation, in accordance with a new iconographic standard. Since then, in the Roman world the already commonly used Hellenistic *tyche*-type found a new iconographic popularity and was widely used to represent cities (of the empire or those won to it), as is attested by several classes of objects (numismatic, medallions, silverware, bas-reliefs) in which *tychai* of the standard turreted kind (not seated in *maiestas* nor with a foot shown on a ship’s prow as the Constantinople *Tyche*) are depicted.¹⁰³ Another bronze statue symbolising the city or the *tyche* of Constantinople, moreover, was located in the Constantinian forum and still existed at the time of Anastasios (AD 491–518) when the emperor, under pressure from the population of the city (which had a peculiar faith in the supernatural power of the simulacrum) was forced by them restore it.¹⁰⁴

At this point it is relevant to note the evidence offered by a series of coins of the first half of the seventh century AD from Pendjikent/Pendzhikent (Sogdiana),¹⁰⁵ bearing the legend “Nana the city goddess of Pendjikent”.¹⁰⁶ The ideology implied by the epigraph suggests a similar function of the four-armed goddess in Chorasmia, who might possibly be identi-

fied with Nana.¹⁰⁷ The Chorasmian goddess’s mural crown, within the specific historical context here discussed, could point to an adoption of the *tyche*’s symbolic meaning. In view of these affinities, the four-armed goddess could have been the tutelary divinity of a royal Chorasmian city, likewise the Nana of Pendzhikent.

As regards the “frontal” seated position of the goddess, and in particular the specific posture of her legs with knees set apart and feet close together, the origins of which is generally acknowledged as “Parthian” or “Partho-Sasanian”,¹⁰⁸ it is possible once more to compare this iconographic element with Kushan period types. For example, we can discern the same posture in the Kanishka and Huvishka coinage with Manaobago and Oesho or Nana (*c.* second century AD)¹⁰⁹ in later specimens with Ardoksho/Fortuna, as well as in the *unicum* of the Kushansha Ardashir with the depiction of the goddess Anahita (third century AD).¹¹⁰ In particular the goddess Ardoksho, already posited as a Kushano-Iranian type derived from the Hellenistic Tyche-Fortuna, finds particularly significant iconographic parallels with stone specimens of seated deities of the fourth–fifth century AD from Gandhāra (Fig. 15: B).¹¹¹ Similarly, in India, images

¹⁰¹ For further details, see Dagron 1991 with lit.

¹⁰² Even if sometimes the *tyche* of Constantinople sits on a lion-throne (Becatti 1960: pl. 62, a).

¹⁰³ For instance *tychai* are present in public monuments of Constantinople such as the Column of Arcadius (AD 402–03; Becatti 1960); they are depicted in commemorative imperial medallions (Theodosius I AD 388; Becatti 1960) and on silverware, as the examples of the Esquiline Treasure of Rome (AD 380; Cameron 1985; Shelton 1985) and the Antioch chalice (Shelton 1979) attest.

¹⁰⁴ Dagron 1991; Marasco 2004.

¹⁰⁵ Smirnova 1963; for the archaeology and chronology of the site, see also Marshak 1990.

¹⁰⁶ Henning 1965b; *contra* Livshits 1979; see also Mode 1991/1992: 182 “Nana played a leading role in the pantheon of Pendzhikent, and perhaps she was even the Tyche of the city” with reference to Henning 1965b; see also Grenet and de la Vaissière 2002: 156, n. 17.

¹⁰⁷ Rosenfield 1967; Mukherjee 1969; Azarpay 1976; Mode 1991/1992; Tanabe 1995; Ghose 2006. On the figure of the goddess Nana in Central Asia, see Grenet and Marshak 1998; Potts 2001; Ambos 2003; Mode 2003. With regard to the deity on bowl no. 1, although the identification with Nana is possible, there is no explicit literary or epigraphic evidence in support of this argument. Such identification can be inferred considering the relation that used to exist in the Kushan ideology between Nana and the concept of royalty, as indicated for instance by the Rabatak inscription (Sims-Williams and Cribb 1996; Cribb 1999; Sims-Williams 2008 with lit.) and by the numismatic evidence (Göbl 1987: type 60: “Nanashao”). This role of investiture-deity in fact seems to be indicated by the symbols of power borne by the four-armed goddess.

¹⁰⁸ Harper 1979.

¹⁰⁹ Göbl 1984: Oesho types: 37, 309, 950, 812, 235, 367. See above n. 76 for Manaobago types; Göbl 1984: Huvishka’s type 359 for Nana.

¹¹⁰ Göbl 1984: types: 538, 541 (Ardoksho since Kanishka II); 555 (Ardoksho) and 1028 (Anahita). The latter two types, both Kushano-Sasanian of the third century AD, are iconographically very close to the goddess no. 2; see also Grenet 1996a: 388–89, for an iconographic comparison between a clay statuette of seated goddess from Pendzhikent and the numismatic type 1028.

¹¹¹ Callieri 2006; for similar undated specimens, see Zwalf 1996: nos. 93, 94, 99 and 100; on the “Non-Buddhist dei-

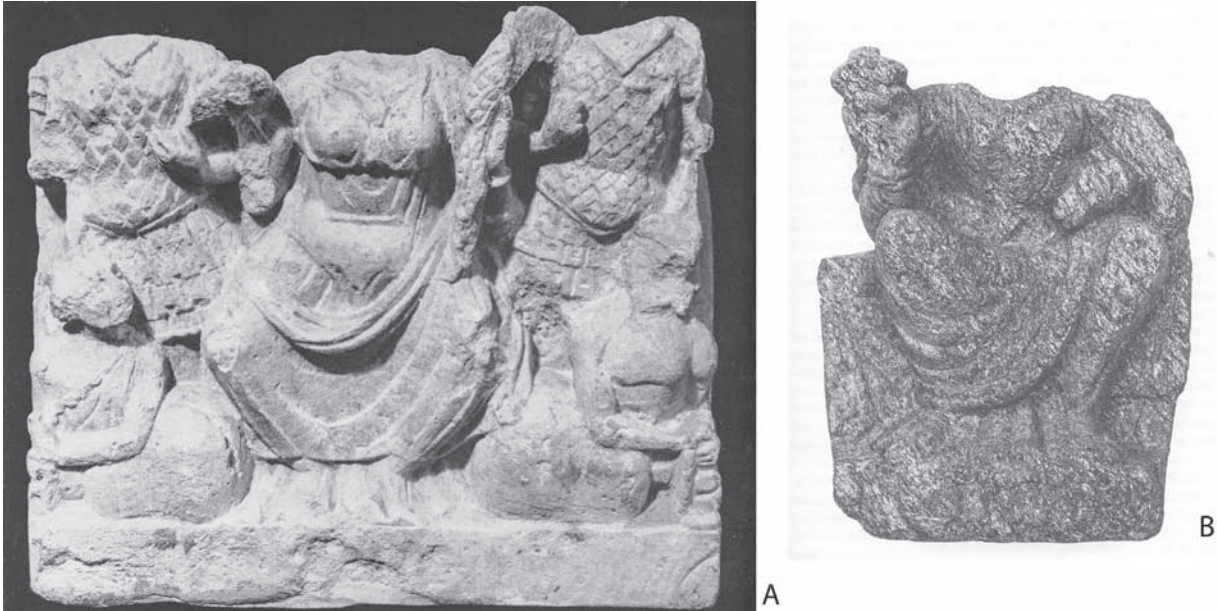


Fig. 15. A: Hadda (Afghanistan), *tyche* (fourth–fifth century AD; after Rowland 1966); B: Swāt (Pakistan), *Ardoksho* (fourth–fifth century AD; after Callieri 2006).

of the enthroned Buddha painted at Ajanta, dating to the end of the fifth century,¹¹² follow the same scheme.

B. Rowland tentatively identified one of those fourth–fifth-century AD statuettes from Gandhāra, specifically a specimen from Hadda with a *tyche*, by reason of the presence of two river personifications at the statuette’s feet. The statuette was also compared by the same scholar to the iconography of the Late Antique ivory diptychs (see Fig. 15: A).¹¹³ In addition, the sculpture’s iconography bears a distinct resemblance to the seated goddess from Pendjikent, which is painted on a wall of Temple II and dated to c. AD 500,¹¹⁴ as well as to a terracotta medallion from Afrasiab (Samarkand) with another enthroned deity of uncertain dating (Fig. 16: A).¹¹⁵ This latter example

is noteworthy because it quite closely resembles the four-armed goddess: the figure of the enthroned goddess is set within a medallion, holding a staff/*semeion* on the left hand and an object on her right raised hand, placed between two other figures of prostrated orants. The enthroned figure’s costume is also generally similar to that of the four-armed goddesses from Chorasmia (see below) and her mantle flutters on her back in something of a stereotypical manner; ultimately she is apparently also wearing a mural crown. More than the scheme of the Hadda’s deity, however, it is the general composition of this last terracotta figure that is clearly comparable with Late Antique Western works, such as the image of Ardabur Aspar in his *missorium* (AD 434; Fig. 16: B).¹¹⁶ The goddess’s lifted hand grasps something that recalls—at least iconographically in the gesture—a *mappa circensis* rather than the lotus commonly held by the Gandhāran statuettes at the height of the chest (although it should be noted that in this section the terracotta is damaged and the identification of the object is thus somewhat uncertain).

ties in Gandhāran Art”—with another similar specimen of a seated goddess hypothetically ascribed to the fourth century AD—see also Taddei 2003: 271 ff., figs. 9 and 10.

¹¹² Spink 2005–2009; Takata 2006, III: C16-11, C16-13.

¹¹³ Rowland 1966a, 1966b; Rowland ascribed the statuette to the fourth century AD.

¹¹⁴ Belenizki 1980: figs. 18–20.

¹¹⁵ Trever 1940 (drawing); Pugachenkova and Rempel 1960: fig. 10 (drawing); Pugachenkova 1971 (picture); Mode 1989 (drawing). This medallion is in my opinion a piece of the fifth/sixth century AD comparable with the statuette of the seated goddess from Pendzhikent, Temple II, ascribed to the sixth century AD (Marshak and Raspopova 1998: fig. 3).

¹¹⁶ Volbach 1961: no. 109.

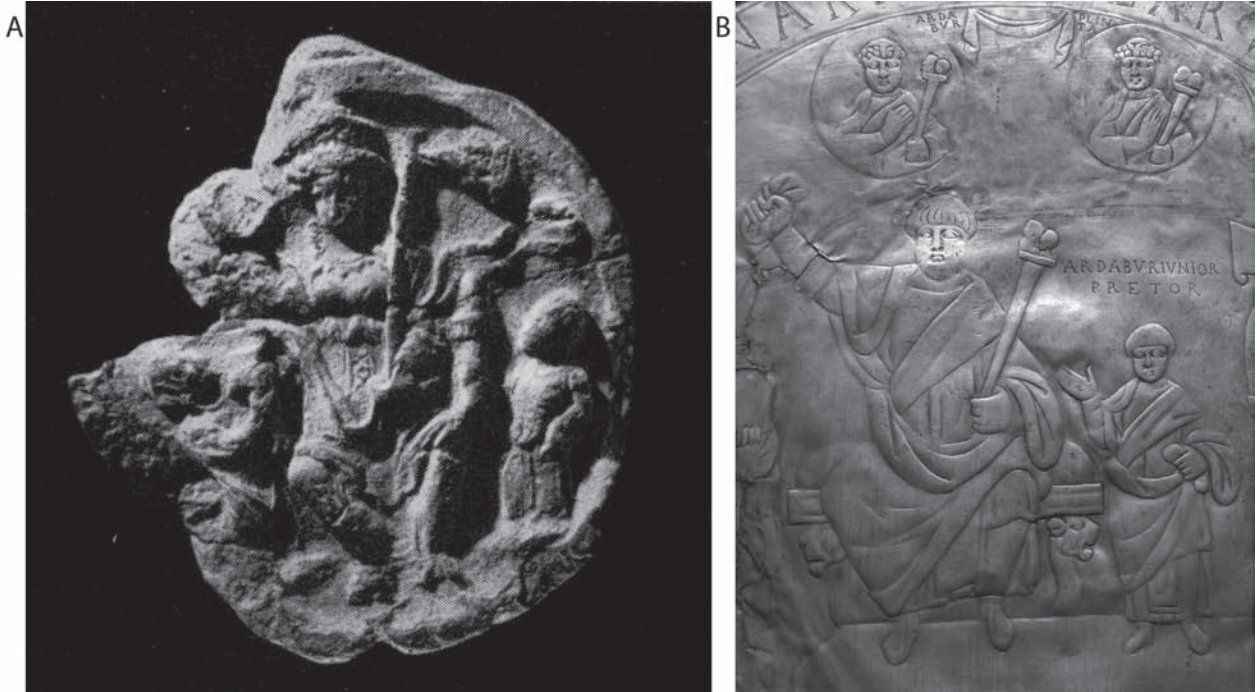


Fig. 16. A: Afrasiab (Samarkand, Sogdiana), terracotta medallion with enthroned goddess (fifth–sixth century AD?; after Trever 1940); B: Rome, missorium of Ardabur Aspar (AD 434; detail after Volbach 1961).

VI. STYLE

Precise evidence concerning the chronology of the four-armed goddess manifests itself in the stylistic aspects of the work. On examining her features, it is indeed easy to identify several quite precise stylistic elements that mark its historical setting and chronology: the goddess has a round face with no internal plasticity (it looks almost swollen); lively, eyes made with the point of a pin with deep overly emphasised eye sockets and incised arched eyebrows; a small mouth with an outlined chin; and a front-facing nose despite the head being in a three-quarter position (Fig. 17: B). In Western crafts, when such recognisable elements are arranged together in what has been described as “a stylistic coherence which excludes any possibility of sporadic or casual similarity”, we may conclude that the work belongs to what has been called “the new Byzantine Style” of the sixth century AD, a style already anticipated by Theodosian art after AD 380, and which had developed in a longer arc of time from Constantine to Justinian (Fig. 17: A, C–D).¹¹⁷ The

four-armed goddess’s hands are also marked by other clearly distinguishable stylistic elements: in her lower left hand, for instance (the one holding a bowl), the fold of the skin between the thumb and the forefinger is markedly V-shaped and finishes in a point (Fig. 18: B); moreover, the lower right hand, the one grasping the sceptre, grips it in a rather unnatural way: here the hand is not closed with the thumb opposite the forefinger, but rather the thumb overlaps with the forefinger (Fig. 18: A). These features, as well as the details noted for the deity’s face, are again directly comparable to similar ones that can be observed in examples of craftsmanship from sixth-century AD workshops of the Eastern Roman Empire as, for example, shown by details in several consular diptychs or silverware items with human depictions (Figs. 19 and 20).

Additionally, the drapery of the goddess’s garments, much stylised and simplified with embossed swathes followed by incised lines finishing in very rigid M-shaped pleats at the extremity of the gown (together with her mantle and the fabric-covered stool) is again stylistically very close to Western Late Antique works. Furthermore, the stool itself, with its slender curving legs, is directly comparable to similar

¹¹⁷ Bianchi Bandinelli 1955.

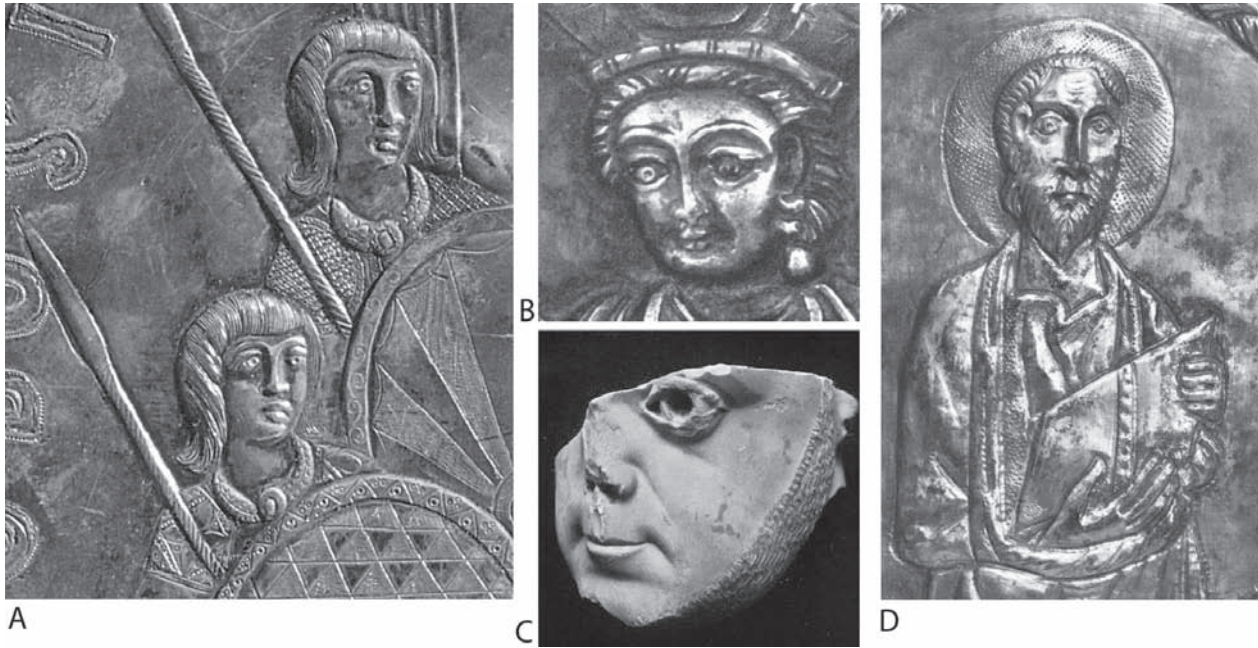


Fig. 17. A: missorium of Theodosius I, the imperial guards (AD 388; detail after Bianchi Bandinelli 1970); B: silver bowl no. 1, detail (end of sixth century AD); C: Rome, Palatine Hill, fragment of marble sculpture (sixth century AD; after Bianchi Bandinelli 1955); D: Antioch, detail of a silver casket with a depiction of St Paul (sixth century AD; after Mundell Mango 1986).

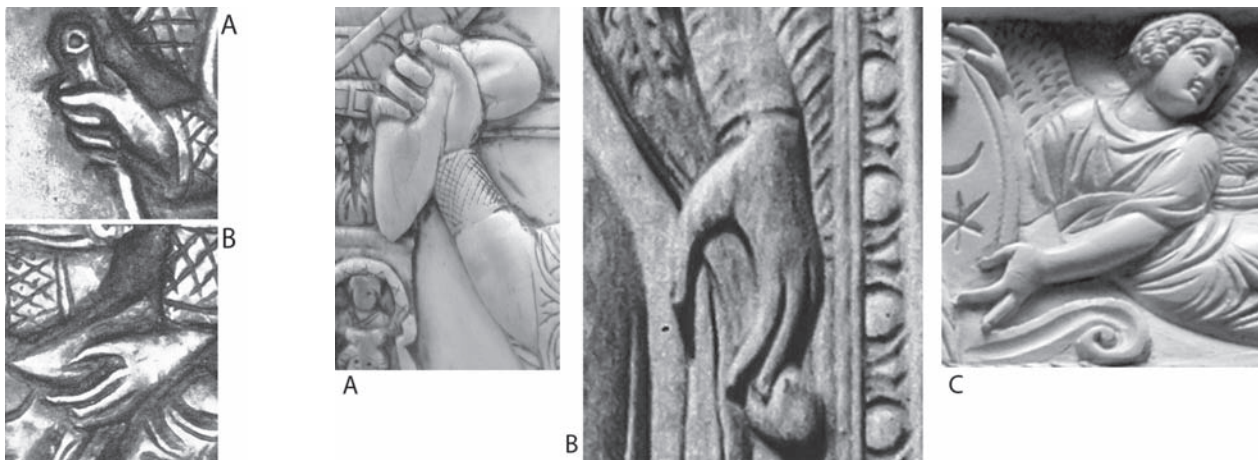


Fig. 18. A, B: details of the lower hands of the four-armed goddess (silver bowl no. 1).

Fig. 19. The hands of the four-armed goddess (silver bowl no. 1) and comparanda. A: Constantinople, detail of the consular diptych of Anastasius (AD 517); B: Rome?, detail of the "Vienna Ivory" (sixth century AD); C: Constantinople, detail of the "Barberini Ivory" (sixth century AD) (details after Delbrueck 1929).



Fig. 20. Rome, consular diptych of Orestes (AD 530; detail after Capps 1927).

Western Late Antique furniture pieces, derived from Hellenistic models whose use was widespread at the time.¹¹⁸ Lastly, the folded cloth between the deity's legs, gathered along the left one, appears to be an element of her outfit not fully understood by the craftsman, reminiscent of the fashion used again in the Eastern Roman Empire in the same period.

It is thus clear that the four-armed goddess, crafted not later than the third quarter of the seventh century AD, shares her style with pieces produced in the Constantinopolitan workshops of the sixth–seventh centuries AD. In other words, the stylistic analysis strongly suggests that the four-armed goddess was crafted by an artisan well acquainted with the traditional techniques and devices of the West.

VII. NOTES ON THE OUTFIT OF THE GODDESS

One more iconographic element that marks the appearance of the four-armed goddess needs further discussion, namely the characteristic outfit she wears,

¹¹⁸ E.g. Bianchi Bandinelli 1955: pl. XXXVII.

which is distinguished by a peculiar decorative pattern that overlays both the cuffs of her long-sleeved garment and the central band of the same garment visible along her abdomen. This grid pattern of diagonal lines, perhaps representing patches of embroidered fabric, is an element common to all the depictions of this deity within the Chorasman corpus, and appears also in the terracotta medallion with the seated goddess from Afrasiab described above. The peculiarity of this outfit lies in the fact that its grid pattern also appears on certain garments that are always worn by “eastern barbarians” when these are represented in Roman (and even in some of the outside “barbaric”) crafts during the sixth–seventh centuries AD. This fact, even if it is hard to explain, should not be ignored or dismissed merely as a coincidence.

A good first example of the use of this pattern is visible on the so-called Barberini Ivory, a piece from the sixth century AD.¹¹⁹ The two barbarians on the left lower panel and the single one in the main panel (partially covered by the emperor's lance), already identified by Delbrueck and Kollowitz as “Scythians”,¹²⁰ wear outfits composed of trousers, long-sleeved shirts and caftans, with grid patterns on the cuffs of their trousers, on the cuffs of their long-sleeved shirts and on a central band along the same garments (Figs. 21: C, 22: C).

The same outfit is worn by another and more famous barbarian personage, this time certainly a Goth, Atalaric (AD 526–34), grandson of Theoderic *Rex Romanorum* (Fig. 21: B). His bust-portrait appears in a consular diptych of AD 530 where he is shown, albeit only partially visible in the tondo, wearing an embroidered garment covered by a mantle/tunic closely resembling those worn by the “Scythians” in the Barberini example. It should be noted that this ivory diptych issued by Consul Orestes reuses a previous consul's ivory, issued in AD 513.¹²¹ Thus,

¹¹⁹ Delbrueck 1929: no. 48; Kollowitz 1941/1978; Delbrueck identified the emperor represented in the ivory with Anastasios. The two barbarians on the lower panel are bringing tributes/gifts to the victorious emperor depicted on his horse at the centre of the composition. The first “Scythian” is clearly carrying a torque (made of gold?) and the second one not gold pieces as supposed by Kollowitz, but silk cocoons in a wicker basket. This kind of container is still used nowadays for the same purpose (see here Fig. 21: C).

¹²⁰ Kollowitz 1941/1978.

¹²¹ Netzer 1983; the diptych originally belonged to the Consul Clementinus.

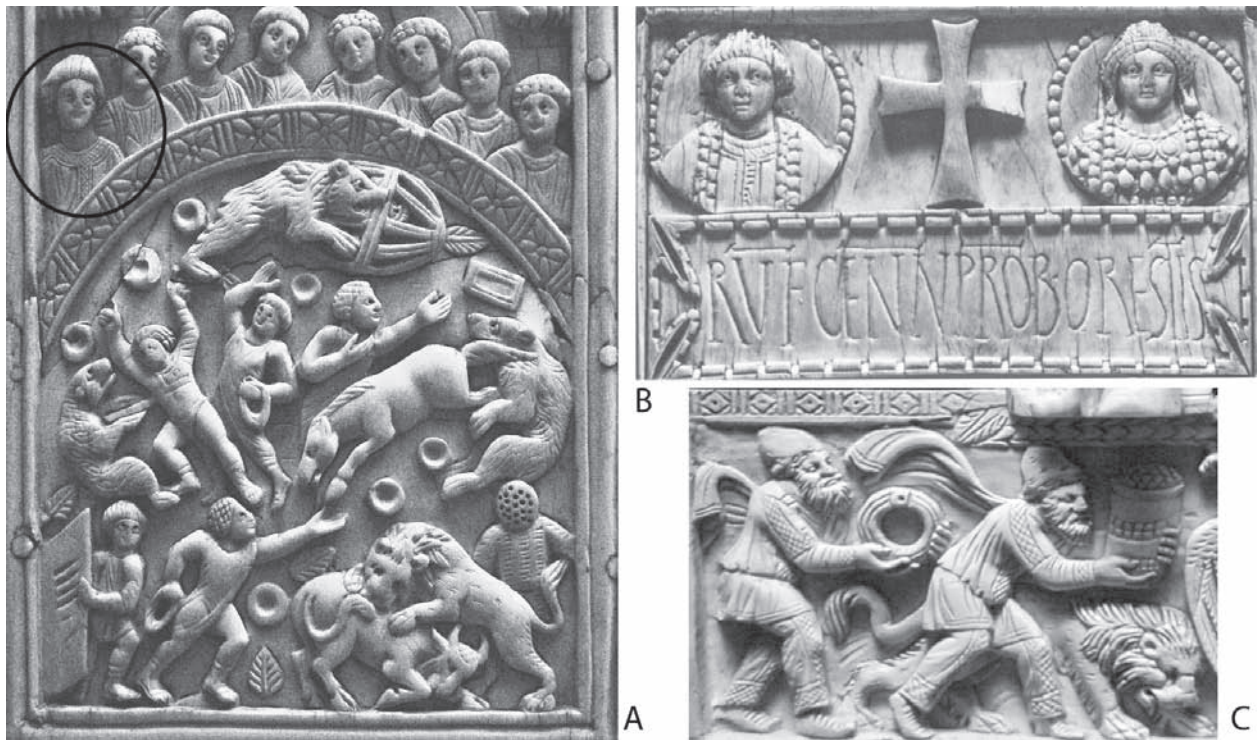


Fig. 21. A: Constantinople, diptych of Aerobindus (AD 506; detail after Delbrueck 1929); B: Rome, diptych of Orestes, detail (AD 530; after Netzer 1983); C: detail of the “Scythians” in the lower section of the “Barberini Ivory” bearing a torque and silk cocoons in a wicker basket (detail after Delbrueck 1929).

the “portraits” of Atalaric and his mother Amalasantha resulted from a new engraving of the ivory made after the lowering of its surface, to the detriment of the two previous imperial portraits of Anastasios and Ariadne. This is indeed interesting because the royal Goths wanted to be characterised in such a way as to be clearly distinguished at first glance by their attributes.¹²² Thus, the future King Atalaric wears a

¹²² Procopius, *Bell. Goth.* V. 2: Atalaric became king in association with her mother Amalasantha, actual regent of the throne, at the age of eight in AD 526, the year of Theoderic’s death. Justinian became emperor one year later in AD 527. Around AD 530, almost contemporaneously with the manufacture of this diptych, a disagreement between Queen Amalasantha and the Gothic elite, concerning the twelve-year-old king’s education, arose: the queen wanted her son to be a Roman while, contrary to her wishes, the Goth nobles wanted their future king educated according to the Gothic traditions. The Goth aristocrats thought that “their king was not educated correctly” and thus “although she [Amalasantha] did not approve, yet because she feared the plotting of those men, she made it appear that their words found favour with her, and granted everything the barbarians desired of her”. Thus the choice of the Gothic fashion

peculiar outfit, which is the principal element for his identification (as was the case for the erased Anastasios and his diadem). This is clear if we consider the fact that characteristics of a realistic portraiture in this kind of medium were not necessary (Amalasantha’s face is in fact simply Ariadne’s face, left untouched) and because in this specific case reworking and recarving the ivory was difficult. Furthermore, exactly the same kind of dress is worn by a spectator of the *ludi* as depicted in another diptych, that of Aerobindus (AD 506; Fig. 21: A) who is probably another barbarian, since his outfit differs from all the others in the composition wearing the toga.

In pursuing the matter further, other examples emerge, including the *cathedra* (throne) of Maximianus, a gift made by the emperor Justinian to Maximianus, Bishop of Ravenna, and named accordingly after the latter.¹²³ The *cathedra* is decorated with 39

for the representation on the diptych of the young king and his mother might be related with Amalasantha’s decision to comply with her opponents.

¹²³ Volbach 1961: pl. 226.



Fig. 22. A: Ravenna, chair of Maximianus, Barbarian guards (mid-sixth century AD; detail after Volbach 1961); B: depiction of Sakā Orant from Butkara I (second century AD; after Cambon 2010); C: “Barberini Ivory”, detail of the “Scythian” in the central panel (sixth century AD; detail after Delbrueck 1929); D: Martynovka (Ukraine), silver gilded plaque (sixth–seventh century AD; after Pekarskaja and Kidd 1994).

ivory panels that illustrate episodes taken from the Old and New Testament. In some of them, where a biblical monarch is depicted with his retinue, he is represented according to sixth-century AD fashion, employing a stylistic criterion comparable with the Renaissance artistic habit of actualising episodes

set in ancient Roman times to match the style of the epoch. For present purposes, we should firstly note among the *cathedra* ivories the specific representations of the king’s *protectores*, who in the sixth century AD were usually barbarians:¹²⁴ they are depicted

¹²⁴ At the time of Justinian, and even before since the third–

mainly as bearded men with a typical Late Antique haircut, broad swords and dressed with the “Barberini Scythians” outfit (Fig. 22: A).¹²⁵ The same guardsmen appear in the British Museum ivory *pyxis* of St Menas in the scene depicting the execution of the saint, in which they also wear the same grid patterned outfit.¹²⁶ Another example can be seen in another ivory *pyxis* in the Louvre depicting the “slaying of the innocents” where once again a barbarian guard at the command of Erodes is a “Scythian”.¹²⁷

At this point, it would be possible to argue that the topical use of a grid pattern together with other elements such as the trousers and a long-sleeved shirt, were widely in use during Late Antiquity to represent, distinguish and describe in a realistic (i.e. descriptive), although standardised, manner some eastern barbaric populations who used to wear such outfits.¹²⁸ On the other hand, some examples come directly from the “steppes” where they seem to have been self-representations of those “Scythians”. For example, four anthropomorphic silver plaques with gilded details and with a grid pattern crossing their central axis (Fig. 22: D) come from Mantynovka (Ukraine) from a burial context in which other local Byzantine and local

fourth centuries AD, it was customary for the emperor to have barbarian soldiers as *protectores*/guardsmen and as appointed military commanders; e.g. Procopius, *Bell. Goth.* VII. 30. 6 (Chalazar the guardsman, a Massagetæ—an ethonym which had long lost its specific meaning—by birth, commander of a fortress in Italy together with Gulidas the Thracian), and Procopius, *Bell. Goth.* V. 16. 1 (Zarter, Chorsomanus and Aeschmanus the Massagetæ). All these lieutenants were chained to their commander in chief by customary oaths of loyalty regarding not only their master, but also the emperor. Moreover, the position was perceived as a great honour (Procopius, *Bell. Vand.* IV. 18. 5–7).

¹²⁵ Volbach 1961: no. 234.

¹²⁶ Volbach 1961: no. 236.

¹²⁷ Louvre, Inv. No. OA 5524 B. As already noted by E.B. Smith (1917) in relation to the similarity between the outfit of the Barberini Scythians and that of the figures depicted on the *cathedra*, but described as an “Egyptian costume” (according to his theory of a common Egyptian origin for both the ivory works).

¹²⁸ For similar outfits with the same central grid pattern, see also one of the hunters represented on a pre-Islamic Central Asian silver vessel of unknown provenance (Smirnov 1909: no. 70; Trever and Lukonin 1987: no. 70), and the Longobard warriors depicted on a Longobard/Byzantine sixth-century AD silver specimen from Italy (Werner 1974: table I, 1; Volbach 1974: table XII, 1—both articles also provide important references on the connection between Asia and the West during Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages).

Byzantine-influenced objects have been found.¹²⁹ The attribution of the material to one *ethnos* or another is still being discussed.¹³⁰ Be that as it may, the chronology of the ensemble is ascribed to the sixth–seventh century AD. The silver plaques, probably used as ornaments for horse harnesses or shield decorations, represent a man, shown frontally, perhaps seated, wearing pointed boots, a torque around his neck, trousers fastened at the waist and a garment with the same grid pattern along a central line on his abdomen. In this case the use of the grid pattern to express an embroidered part of the local costume could have been the effect of the contact with the Roman world.¹³¹

Another interesting eastern example comes from a fragmentary Gandhāran bas-relief, from the site of Butkara I (modern Pakistan, Swāt valley) representing a foreign Buddhist orant—probably a “Sakā” of the second century AD—dressed again in the same fashion, almost identical, to the “Barberini type” (Fig. 22: B).¹³²

From these examples it is possible to infer that some of the oriental semi-nomadic steppe populations (including the Goths) dressed in a typical and very conservative manner; that the custom was shared among several different *ethnoi*; and that the Romans (and before them the Greeks) noticed this traditional “barbaric” custom and used it to represent the actual barbarians artistically. Furthermore, it is arguable that the Chorasmian and Sogdian goddesses, which were expressions of two Central Asian populations with an Iranian origin and a semi-nomadic ancient cultural background, used the same pattern in works influenced by the Roman world during the sixth–seventh centuries AD. I believe that the outfit of the four-armed goddess was a typical local Central Asian costume, but was represented with expedients belonging to an external culture, namely that of Constantinople. Meanwhile, the “Sakā” from Gandhāra could be an

¹²⁹ Pekarskaja and Kidd 1994.

¹³⁰ Pekarskaja and Kidd 1995.

¹³¹ The steppe populations not only dwelt at the boundaries of the Eastern Roman Empire but, as the Goths in Italy, even within its territory: for example, the famous episode of the expulsion of Gainas and his Goths from Constantinople, dated to the beginning of the fifth century, an event commemorated by the column of Arcadius erected in AD 402–03 (for details on this historical event, relative sources and a thorough analysis of the monument, see Becatti 1960: 164–264).

¹³² Facenna 1962; this “Sakā” might even be a Sogdian or a Chorasmian. On the Central Asian Iranians in India, see Grenet 1996b; de la Vaissière 2005: 71–91.

example of the use of this classical element (used to describe a barbarian outfit) as it had been transmitted into the East following the first Hellenistic wave. Thus there are two different historical contexts in which the same iconographic element—from the same cultural background—was used to represent the same concept.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I suggest that the Chorasmian bowl no. 1 is a piece of craftsmanship created precisely according to the style that emerged in the sixth-century AD city of Constantinople as the new language of the developing Byzantine Empire. This style reached Central Asia not much later, perhaps in the Justinian era, as the discussed historical sources confirm. Thus it is improbable that this four-armed goddess was crafted before the sixth century AD; on the other hand, it is certain that the specimen cannot be dated later than the *terminus ante quem* offered by the Chorasmian inscription of the mid-seventh century AD. It would also be possible to define this chronology better if we consider that logically such a symbiosis of Western and Central Asian formal elements, and perhaps even ideological loans, could only have been manifested after a certain period of contacts and exchange. Hence it is probable that the four-armed goddess cannot be dated before the end of the sixth century AD, in a noteworthy concomitance with Tiberius Constantine's decision to send back home 106 "Turks" who had dwelt for a long time in Byzantium. Among these were undoubtedly some Sogdian merchants and perhaps some of the "Kholiatai", that is the Ancient Chorasmians.¹³³ Eventually, bearing all this in mind, the dating of the goddess for the aforesaid considerations can be placed with a fine degree of probability between the end of the sixth century AD and the first half of the seventh century AD.

The new Byzantine style of the sixth century AD had been created to express the need of the new Roman religious iconography in parallel with "the

last artisanal repetition of the naturalistic tradition of Hellenism":¹³⁴ to represent the new religious images of Christianity and of the Emperor as its champion. It is interesting to see how even Ancient Chorasmia used the same stylistic manner for its four-armed goddess's iconic and religious image, although it is rather difficult to discern how a similar ideology could possibly have been transferred with a crafting technique. It is, however, important to remember that "come la civiltà ellenistica, così anche quella bizantina, è una forza unificatrice e omogenizzante"¹³⁵ and how this power extended to other cultures is proven in the example from Central Asia discussed here, which is not, in my opinion, an isolated element at all.¹³⁶ Furthermore, the Western contacts can be held responsible for the choice of the material and the typology of the vessel.¹³⁷

Unfortunately not much can be said about the Chorasmian artistic culture of the time, even though this example hints at the historical conditions that determined the artistic reception of some (other, after the proper Hellenism in Central Asia) Western elements that can be tracked. There is no doubt that the Chorasmian silver bowls, due to their small size, religious content and dedicatory inscriptions, were precious *ex-votos* that were markedly different from the well-known popular terracotta items—statuettes above all—attested in Chorasmia since the beginning of its history and usually representing the "Great Goddess". Moreover, the four-armed goddess depicted in no. 1 is at present a *unicum*, but its crude copy no. 4 might testify to the production in series of such *ex-votos*, of this specific iconographic model derived from an archetype, different from the other four-armed goddesses nos. 2 and 3, perhaps a bigger image probably in bas-relief or painted.¹³⁸

Finally, the iconography of the four arms can be ascribed to those cultural contacts Chorasmia had with the south, or more specifically perhaps with India, another hint of the cultural contacts that this

¹³³ Pre-Muslim Chorasmian traders are explicitly attested in a seventh-century AD source, the *Geography* attributed to Ananian of Širak, where they also seem to be associated with the Sogdians (de la Vaissière 2005: 241). It is important to note that, after the Arab conquest of the country at the beginning of the eighth century AD, the geopolitical situation in Central Asia changed and Chorasmia began to play a new, different and major commercial role (see above nn. 60 and 62).

¹³⁴ Bianchi Bandinelli 1955.

¹³⁵ Ostrogorsky 1963: 29.

¹³⁶ The first impact of Hellenism in Central Asia, brought originally by Alexander's conquest, afterwards developed locally with, nonetheless, constant contacts with the West, is an important issue still to consider for Ancient Chorasmia (Minardi, forthcoming doctoral dissertation).

¹³⁷ An interesting typological parallel with bowl no. 1 comes from Malaja Pershperecina (Werner 1984: pls. 10–22, golden "Sasanian" bowl).

¹³⁸ As already noted by Soviet scholars: D'yakonova and Smirnova 1967; Marshak 1986: 243.

polity had, thanks to its position between the steppes and the sedentary southern world.¹³⁹ In these specific circumstances Chorasmia might have played a sort of “bridging” role (in the shadow of Sogdiana) between India and Constantinople. Indeed, if on one hand the closeness in iconography with Gandhāran seated goddesses of the fourth–fifth centuries AD is remarkable, on the other hand the four arms are clearly an Indian Kushan-era legacy, a peculiar divine character standardised only in the fifth century AD and promptly adopted in Central Asia during the following century. The impact of Late Antique formal elements in Central Asia, always underestimated, provides a rich source for further analysis and discussion.

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¹³⁹ In Central Asia, from the seventh century AD onwards, the multiple-limbed iconography (it) was very popular probably due to the spreading popularity of Indian beliefs. See, for example, the evidence from Khotan. In particular see the Balawaste wall paintings, ascribed to the eighth century or later (Gropp 1974: pl. 42c; see also Mode 1991/1992).

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