

# A SILVER RHYTON FROM AFGHANISTAN HELD IN THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART AND ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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## Summary

This paper offers an original archaeological analysis of a unique object held in the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art, a silver rhyton composed of an all-round female head attached to a spouted *protome* of an Indian buffalo. In the last few decades, by reason of its unknown provenience (allegedly Iran) and due to its peculiar stylistic and iconographical features, the rhyton has attracted a certain degree of scholarly interest. As a result, a number of hypotheses about its creation (variously placed between ancient Sogdiana and Afghanistan) and chronology (from the fifth to the early eighth century AD) have been advanced. This paper reviews these data and then reconsiders once again the characteristics of the rhyton with the aims of providing a better chronological setting for the object and the recognition of its proper cultural and historical context. The analysis considers the iconography and the symbolism of the silver beaker, and takes into account additional numismatic evidence from Afghanistan. It is argued that the rhyton belongs to the first half of the sixth century AD Afghanistan (Ancient Kāpīśa) and that it ought to be historically and artistically positioned in the period during the transition from the Gandhāra to the post Gandhāran *facies* in the area.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In 1966 Dorothy Shepherd published a new acquisition of the Cleveland Museum of Art, a silver rhyton in the form of a three dimensional female head attached from the neck to a *protome* of an Indian Buffalo (*Bubalus arnee* or *Bubalus bubalis*)<sup>1</sup> (Fig. II, A-C).

This vessel of unknown provenance<sup>2</sup> is a curved and spouted beaker of approximately twenty centimetres in height, crafted in the free hand repoussé technique, with signs, in the facial features of both the female and the buffalo heads, of a final chasing from the front<sup>3</sup>. Inside the buffalo's mouth is located the welded spout used for the pouring out of its liquid content; another aperture on top of the female head was used to fill the vessel. On the forehead of the female head a mercury-gilded crescent is visible, within which three likewise mercury-gilded pellets

are attested. An additional two single dots, made in the same technique, appear on her cheeks<sup>4</sup>. The female's large disk-shaped earrings are also gilded and decorated with a rosette of inlaid glass. The woman wears these earrings on her pierced and elongated ear-lobes in what is an originally Indian fashion<sup>5</sup>. Some other details of the rhyton are also gilded, including the buffalo's horns, its muzzle and its eyebrows which hover above the animal's bulging eyes. The general impression made by the female head is of being "Indian", although its centre-parted hairstyle and its necklace made of three elements are features which bear witness to some Hellenistic ascendancy (see *infra*).

According to Shepherd, the rhyton was crafted between the fifth and the sixth century AD in Ancient Sogdiana<sup>6</sup>. This dating was chiefly established because a

<sup>1</sup> Cleveland Museum accession no. 1964.96. As already noted by Göbl (1987) and Carter (1979) the *protome*, considering the presence of the animal's neck, represents this species. Respectively, these are the wild and the domestic variant.

<sup>2</sup> Shepherd 1966, p. 289: the rhyton was claimed to have come from the Dailaman region, Iran *viz.* the antiquities market – unknown context.

<sup>3</sup> Shepherd 1966, pp. 313-315 ("technical notes"). On the hammering techniques in antiquity, see Treister 2001 with references. The female head and the buffalo of the Cleveland rhyton were separately chased from two different flat sheets of silver, and subsequently joined together in one piece.

<sup>4</sup> *Ib.* mercury gilded elements.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *e.g.* with a stone head from Mathurā with similar earrings (fifth century AD – Klimburg-Salter 1995, nos. 216-217). Other examples of this practice are attested by various characters depicted on the Ajantā wall paintings (*e.g.* Takata 2000, Vol. II, C1-8a; C1-3-1), where this fashion coexisted with another practice: the removal of the same disk substituted with a pendant attached to the thus deformed ear. This ancient Indian fashion apparently was not common in Gandhāra before the fourth century AD. See *infra* note 123 with reference to the Nezak kings, who used to wear pendant earrings in their deformed and elongated lobes.

<sup>6</sup> Shepherd 1966, p. 289 and 310. The hypothesis of a Sogdian origin of the rhyton was supported by Belenizki (1980: 10, with tab. 16)

*terminus ante quem*, a Middle Persian inscription, is carelessly etched on the back of the rhyton, in part covering the decoration that appears at its rear. On palaeographic grounds it has been argued that this epigraph (an indication of the object's weight in a Sasanian standard) cannot have been incised "later than 700 AD."<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the symbolism of the specimen was read by Shepherd as a representation of the Avestan "Angel Drvaspa."<sup>8</sup>

In 1967, only one year following the publication of Shepherd's study, Robert Göbl noted for the first time the similarity between the rhyton's Indian buffalo and the peculiar top element that adorned the crown used by the Nezak (Nspk)<sup>9</sup> dynasty of the Ghazni and Kabul areas (modern Afghanistan), and of which the bovine was a prominent part (Fig. II, D, E). According to Göbl's numismatic typology, this crest appears as a crown element of the Nezaks' emissions struck in Ghazni (since 460 AD) and in Kāpīśa-Kabul (since 500/515 AD) that bear the kings' portrait busts viewed in profile. Based on this work, Göbl defined the Cleveland rhyton female head as an "*iranisch-hunnische Prinzessin*."<sup>10</sup>

Over ten years later, in 1979, Martha L. Carter made the rhyton the subject of a new and thorough analysis<sup>11</sup>. Carter's study, which took Shepherd's and Göbl's works as its starting point, focused on the rhyton's style and iconography identifying the female figure in the upper part of the vessel as a depiction of the Indian goddess *Durgā Mahishāsūramardini*, slayer of the Demon-Bull Mahisa, itself represented by the buffalo *protome*.<sup>12</sup> Carter identified modern Afghanistan as the place of origin of the rhyton, setting its manufacture at the end of the seventh century AD (that is, at the limit of that *terminus ante quem* mentioned above), connecting it with "the realm of the Turki Shāhis."<sup>13</sup>

and Rowland (1974, pp. 66-71). Melikian-Chirvani (1996: 109) agreed with Shepherd about "an Iranian sculptural handling of the animal", but *contra* inferred that the object was made in western Iran.

<sup>7</sup> Palaeographic considerations and translation carried out by R. N. Frye and W. B. Henning (Shepherd 1966, p. 315, note 4).

<sup>8</sup> Shepherd 1966, pp. 296-304.

<sup>9</sup> For the reading of this numismatic title, see Vondrovec 2010, p. 169, note 3.

<sup>10</sup> Göbl 1967 vol. II, pp. 325-326. On the Nezak emissions, *ib.* pp. 71-89: Group I and Group II.

<sup>11</sup> Carter 1979. Previously, Carter had compiled the relevant file (no. 23) in Harper 1978, describing the object and hypothesizing for the female head the representation of an Iranian syncretistic goddess (cf. *infra* note 115 with Taddei's views on the Durga of Tapa-Sardār).

<sup>12</sup> Carter 1979, p. 314. However in the rhyton – as already noted by Marshak (1986: 270) and Melikian-Chirvani (1996, p. 109) – the Indian buffalo and the female head are clearly not antagonistic, a relation that is usually stressed in the canonical Indian depiction of Durga as slayer of the demon Mahisa. For further references on the goddess Durga, see Schmid 2003 with lit. For further references on the association between goddess, lunar crescent and the bull in India, see also Di Castro 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Carter 1979, p. 235 and 313. Carter's hypothesis was supported by Pugachenkova (1987, p. 82 – who remarked on the Indian artistic

In 1987 Göbl returned to the Cleveland rhyton and reaffirmed his initial identification of the female head as the depiction of a "Hephthalite Princess"<sup>14</sup>. According to Göbl, the general countenance of the rhyton's female head – which clearly embraces the so called Gupta artistic influence or better, partakes in general of an Indian aesthetic conception – as well as the close association of this head and the Indian buffalo, which is the symbol – being the emblem of Nezak – of royalty, both supported his idea that the piece represented the spouse of some king of the Nezak dynasty. However, Göbl's suggestions have not been further considered<sup>15</sup>, although the comparison between the Cleveland rhyton and the Nezaks' symbolism was, and still is, worthy of discussion.

The aim of the present paper is to expand and further develop these studies, not only because the Nezak monetary classification, based on Göbl's typological sequence, seems to have been recently confirmed in its chronology by scholarly analysis<sup>16</sup>; but in particular because the stylistic features of the rhyton in its two constituent elements – and independently from the numismatic evidence – contain important data that could aid in furthering our comprehension of the history of North-western India and Central Asia. It is the opinion of the author that the rhyton's features bear witness of the transition marked by the penetration of so called "Gupta" elements into the Gandhāran area, stimuli occurred during the fifth/sixth century AD, and that ignited the development of the post-Gandhāran cultural horizon.<sup>17</sup> My argument will thus consider above

environment to which belongs the specimen) and by Marshak (1986, pp. 269-270), who also acknowledged Göbl's theory, although not finding plausible the identification with Durga advanced by Carter. Klimburg-Salter (1988, p. 305) also acknowledged Carter's views. More recently Jäger (2010, p. 190) defined the rhyton as a work made during the sixth/seventh century AD in the "Bactro-Sogdian Area" (without giving any further details in this regard). For further historical and artistic considerations on the Shāhis/Šāhis (seventh-eighth centuries AD), see Taddei 2003 (1962), pp. 25-28; Kuwayama 1976; Verardi 1977; 2011 with lit. For an attempt (based on iconographic considerations) to ascribe to the late fourth-early fifth centuries AD some specimens of the "Šāhis" *corpus* of marble sculptures, see Tanabe 1996.

<sup>14</sup> Göbl 1987, p. 74 and note 46: emission type nos. 198, 217-222 (with reference to Göbl 1967). This comparison with a "princess" was acknowledged but rejected by Carter, who opted instead for the identification of the female head with an "auspicious divinity" (Carter 1979, p. 313, with reference to Shepherd 1967, p. 303).

<sup>15</sup> Mentioned by Jäger (2007) in relation to other "stylistic" comparisons advanced by the scholar about the Cleveland rhyton.

<sup>16</sup> Alram 2000 ; Vondrovec 2010. See *infra* for further discussion.

<sup>17</sup> In my view the definition of "post-Gandhāran" instead of "Late Buddhist" suits better the historical context of the area for not all the "Iranian Huns" of this "Late Antique" period were Buddhist and, as I shall try to argue, not all the crafts – such as the rhyton – were intended for Buddhist purposes. For a general discussion on the nomenclature relative to the post-Gandhāra *facies*, see Filigenzi 2010 with references. Besides, the term "Gandhāra" is used here in its wider acceptance, which comprehends all the territories that shared this cultural and artistic *koiné* (Afghanistan – except for Bactriana/Tokharistan – Kashmir, and

all the late Gandhāran *facies* with its specimens, of which the silver rhyton is in my opinion partaking. Evidence from the best investigated archaeological sites of Taxila and Hadda will be used as a comparative and reference material for the stylistic definition of the Cleveland rhyton. Moreover, the gilded crescent with three pellets that the female personage of the rhyton bears on her forehead (damaged, but still clearly visible) is likely to represent a symbol that contemporaneously appeared in Ancient Chorasmia, where it was connected with the idea of divine investiture and territorial protection and belonged to an old and shared Iranian tradition.<sup>18</sup>

## II. THE FEMALE HEAD

### II.A. Preliminary chronological considerations on the stylistic features of the female head of the rhyton compared to other specimens from “post Gandhāra” Central Asia/North-western India

The discernible Indian character that marks the style of the upper part of the Cleveland silver rhyton, *i.e.* the “female head”, features some of the traits commonly considered by art historians to fall under the label of “Gupta Style” (Gupta Period ca. 320-500 AD and “Late Gupta” period ca. 500-647).<sup>19</sup> In particular, certain characteristics, such as the woman’s almond-shaped slanted eyes ending in incised slits, and her swollen eyebrows, which are somehow delimited by highly arched curves, are features directly comparable with Gupta-Indian specimens of the fifth-sixth centuries AD.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, within the style of this piece there are also certain noticeable differences with Gupta aesthetic, and these differences clearly point toward an influence by the art of Gandhāra. These differences have already been noted by Shepherd and preliminarily considered by Carter, scholars who

Indian North-western territories plus those parts of Central Asia that although peripheral in comparison to the Peshawar Area – *i.e.* proper Ancient Gandhāra – joined, in particular, the following “post Gandhāran” *facies*). Late-Gandhāran is here used to indicate the transition from the Gandhāran *facies* to the post-Gandhāran one.

<sup>18</sup> As already noted by Carter (1979, pp. 315-316 with references; 2010). Although damaged the mercury gilded crescent is still discernible. Carter has been also the first to compare this symbol with the one depicted on the Chorasmian silver bowl with a four armed goddess held in the British Museum. On the analysis of this latter specimen and its significance, see Minardi 2013. This symbol is also attested for example in the Seleucid/Parthian rhyton from Nippur, in the Gopa of Hadda (fifth century AD), in a terracotta rhyton from Afrasiab, and it is also a component of the Nezak royal insignia (see *infra* for further discussion).

<sup>19</sup> For a convenient definition of the Gupta style, see Harle 1974, p. 6. On the Late Gupta style, *ib.* p. 27. For the academic perception of the Gupta and post-Gupta styles, see also Rowland 1967; Huntington 1993. On the Gupta Age, see also Spink 2008, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *e.g.* the Buddha of Sārānāth, specimen of the Gupta style of fifth-sixth century AD (Taddei 1977, no. 47).

compared the female head with certain stucco (plaster) specimens from Hadda<sup>21</sup>, and unbaked-clay heads from Fondukistān (Afghanistan) and Ushkur (Kashmir).<sup>22</sup> While their assessment in respect of the chronology and the place of origin of the rhyton ultimately diverged, both scholars acknowledged its origin within Central Asia rather than Iran. Further, Carter did not support Shepherd’s hypothesis relative to a Sogdian origin of the rhyton and, focusing more directly on the stylistic elements of the piece, she placed instead the specimen in a more appropriate context which is, very likely as we shall see, Late Gandhāran Afghanistan.

The Cleveland female head is clearly reminiscent of the Gandhāran style, with its Hellenistic (and Romano-Hellenistic) components and legacy.<sup>23</sup> These features are

<sup>21</sup> Shepherd 1966, p. 306; Carter 1979, p. 311. Shepherd compared a depiction of Gopa from Tapa Kalān (Hadda), within a composition of a stucco lunette, with the “princess” of the rhyton. But, eventually, she only did so to deny any similarities among the two female countenances. She eventually found more similarities with the style observable in the wall paintings of Pendjikent (*ib.*, p. 310).

<sup>22</sup> Carter 1979, p. 311. According to Carter, the site par excellence with regard to the rhyton’s style (defined as “Indo-Sasanian”) is the Buddhist sanctuary of Fondukistān. On the discovery of the sanctuary and its chronology (*terminus post quem* ca. 689 AD) see Hackin *et al.* 1959. For a recent analysis, see Novotny 2007. In most cases it is erroneous to define the Buddhist unbaked-clay modelled sculpture of Central Asia, North-western India, Kashmir and Afghanistan as “terracotta”; for further details, see Varma 1970; Verardi 1983; Tarzi 1986; Taddei 1993 with lit. For further technical observations on the unbaked-clay modelled sculpture, see Bollati 2005; 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Taddei 2003, p. 249: “In our modern Western culture, Gandhāran art has at times been defined as ‘Graeco-Buddhist’ and at times ‘Romano-Buddhist’ art, though nowadays it is more wisely denoted only by the ancient name of the region where the main production centre was, namely Gandhara”. Taddei 1993 b, p. 41: “Credo che ormai sia tempo che l’arte del Gandhāra non sia più riguardata come un fenomeno da spiegare attraverso un gioco di ‘influenze’, ma come il prodotto di un maturo Ellenismo che si trovava ad avere rapporti diretti con il Buddhismo (...). Era il pensiero buddhistico – dunque la cultura Indiana – il soggetto in quel momento vincente e dotato di carica espansiva (...) la prima diffusione del pensiero buddhistico non poteva servirsi che di un linguaggio indiano, anche se quel pensiero si mostrò tosto propenso a vestirsi di panni ellenistici, di mano in mano che esso veniva fatto proprio e rielaborato dalla cultura del luogo, che era per l’appunto profondamente ellenistica.” Following these concepts, in this paper, the term “Gandhāran art” is used generally to define the Buddhist Art of the territories of today’s Pakistan and Afghanistan etc. which joined this artistic *koiné*. Besides, “Hellenistic” is used to qualify its undeniable principal western aesthetic component, which was undoubtedly developed locally from the first seed of Hellenism brought in Asia by Alexander (in particular in Ancient Bactriana), and also to denote its later dialogue with the Hellenistic territories of the Roman Empire and beyond, which replenish this local Hellenism with Romano-Hellenistic formal elements through land and maritime routes. A concept already expressed in 1966 by Bianchi Bandinelli: “Il termine (...) arte romano-buddista, va usato soltanto se ci vogliamo riferire alla cronologia e a taluni apporti successivi, ma non alla costituzione degli elementi formali di fondo di quell’arte [the Gandhāran art]”. For further references, see Rowland 1949; Bussagli 1984; Taddei 2003.

observable within the artistic language of the rhyton together with the aforementioned Indian “Gupta” formal elements. This stylistic position, which uses different languages in a balanced synthesis, has been described by Carter as a mix of “fully formed Hadda classicism” and “Gupta sensuousness” with a further “imprint of a hard-edged decorative surface treatment characteristic of Sasanian and Sogdian metalwork.”<sup>24</sup> Notwithstanding this pleasing description, Carter’s analysis does not consider that the principal cause for this “hard-edged treatment” is probably the repoussé technique used to craft the specimen.<sup>25</sup> In any case, it is true that the Cleveland female head shows a stylistic predilection for linearism, most notably in the use of the contour line to define, for instance, such facial details as the nose, eyes and eyebrows.<sup>26</sup>

The question of the stylistic setting of the Cleveland female head is perhaps best approached by comparing the specimen with the Gandhāran stucco and unbaked-clay production of third-early sixth centuries AD, and not with an alleged “Iranian style” with no comparable evidence. Parallels might be drawn with the fourth-early sixth centuries AD stucco heads belonging to the (late) Gandhāran Style unearthed in the excavations of the Hadda and Taxila sites, which bear a similar preference for linear definition. At Mohrā Morādu, Jaulian and Dharmarājīkā (Taxila)<sup>27</sup>, Tapa Kalān and Tapa Shotor (Hadda)<sup>28</sup> in particular, modelled sculptural examples attest a style which differs from the more “classical” traits of the proper Gandhāran tradition: instead these pieces bear features (principally characterized by semi-closed slanted eyes) which, according to Marshall, characterized the style of the “Indo-Afghan School.”<sup>29</sup> Moreover, a

recently discovered fragmentary head from Bīr-koṭh-gwaṇḍai (Swāt, Pakistan) coming from a stratified archaeological context of fourth-fifth century AD, bears similar facial marks including very elongated eyes.<sup>30</sup>

One of the most significant changes to have occurred in the arts of Central Asia and of North-western India during the sixth century AD, involved the emergence of a new “Gangetic taste” (to quote Foucher on the “Gupta influence”) by which the aesthetic of these territories is seen to have shifted from the Gandhāra to a post Gandhāra style. According to the scholarly work in this area, this permeability of Gandhāra began only in the mid sixth century AD, at the end of the proper Gupta Period, and then spread onward up to the eighth century AD.<sup>31</sup> More recently Lo Muzio, with regard to the fifth century AD Taxila wall paintings (and material from Butkarā I – Swāt), underlined that “Gupta” elements were already clearly attested in these works<sup>32</sup>.

In pre-Tang China there was a similar phenomenon of Gupta influence which had already become rather strong in the first half of the sixth century AD<sup>33</sup>. By the middle

<sup>30</sup> Callieri 2006, fig.3.11; see also Taddei 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Taddei 1993: late sixth century AD. For further details, relevant sources and historical considerations on the cultural shift between the Gandhāran to the “post-Gandhāran” horizon in the middle of the sixth century AD, see Kuwayama 2006; 1999; 1997; 1991 with lit.

<sup>32</sup> Lo Muzio 2012.

<sup>33</sup> In particular in the territories of the Liang dynasty (502-557 AD) due to the maritime contact between Southern China and India (or with the “Indianized” Buddhist South-east Asia – Howard in Watt 2004, pp. 92-98; Watson 1995). Almost contemporaneously, in China’s Central Plain, within the territories of the Northern Wei dynasty (386-534 AD), the “Silk Road” which plotted its course from the west brought into the sixth century dynastic capital Luoyang that echo of Hellenism probably responsible for the new realism adopted by the local craftsmen in that period (Watt 2004, p. 29; see also Watson 1981, p. 134; 1995, p. 114: the Bodhisattvas in the Dunhuang Caves of the early fifth century AD “modeled in clay and painted [...] are a local redaction of the Gandhāran tradition of North-western India as it had penetrated through Central Asia”). With the successive dynasties of Eastern Wei and Northern Qi (550-577 AD) in northeast China, and the Northern Zhou (557-581 AD) in the northwest, we can see a perpetuation of that southern Liang Gupta-influenced style, especially in the Northern Qi realm, with models still loyal to older Mathurā and Sārānāth prototypes. Nevertheless, this last new wave of Gupta influence, more than simply a legacy derived from the older Liang-India contacts, represents evidence for a transmission of style facilitated by Central Asian traders, pilgrims and artists (mostly Sogdians) who, as a matter of historical data, were numerous at the Northern Qi court, often in relevant positions (Bai in Watt 2004, pp. 79-87; *ib.* Howard on Bai, pp. 96-97; on Sogdian traders, see De La Vaissière 2005). As Watts points out, there was an “overwhelming influence of Central Asians on the plastic arts of Eastern Wei-Northern Qi” (Watt 2004, p. 32 ff.), together with the continuous exposure to western culture of the Chinese territories which were crossed by the “Silk Road.” Following a first Indian cultural contribution brought directly from the Subcontinent to China in the early sixth century AD via South-east Asia, the late Gupta elements that are discernible in the crafts of China in the middle of the sixth century were probably carried there also due to traffic and the relations occurred between China and Central Asia by means of the “Silk Road” network.

<sup>24</sup> Carter 1979, p. 311. On the concept of “Indo-Sasanian art”, see Hallade 1968. A similar definition, regarding an unbaked-clay head allegedly from Ushkur, is used by Rowland 1967, pp. 204-205.

<sup>25</sup> Hoffmann (1966, pp. 106-107) discussing the technical difference between modelled and embossed works, remarked: “the goldsmith’s repoussé technique being better adapted for the rendering of ornament than for anatomy”.

<sup>26</sup> In the Gandhāran modelled production the preference for the contour line is especially attested. Often, as shown by some pieces which still retain their original pigmentation, colour was used to stress this stylistic choice. For some examples, see the specimens published in Czuma 1985, p. 222, no. 126; Berhendt 2007, p. 79, no. 61. The practice still persists in Fondukistān during the seventh-eighth centuries AD (Hackin *et al.* 1959, figs. 168 and 171).

<sup>27</sup> Marshall 1921; Marshall 1951. For a discussion about the chronological issues of these sites, see also Fussman and Le Berre 1976.

<sup>28</sup> Mostamindi and Mostamindi 1969; Tarzi 1976; Barthoux 2001.

<sup>29</sup> Marshall 1951, p. 44 ff. Additionally, Taddei (2003 [1967], p. 30) suggested, with regard to the Indian countenance of the Tapa Kalān specimens (in particular once again about the already mentioned Gopa in the Guimet Museum, see *supra* note 18), a contribution brought forth from India, *i.e.* formal elements of the Āndhra style (second century BC – third century AD). On the “Indo-Afghan School” see the valuable observations made by Varma 1970 (p. 121 ff.).

of the sixth century AD “Gupta” formal elements attested in China had reached the country also crossing Central Asia from India, through the contiguous Gandhāra.<sup>34</sup> Thus, it is not difficult to believe in a transmission from India of Gupta elements into the culturally close Gandhāra during the fifth century AD (Fig. IV, D).<sup>35</sup> The historical role of the “terminal part” of the “Silk Road” network, which linked China, Afghanistan and India, should not be underestimated: it represented a privileged route of exchange and transmission of artistic and cultural concepts.<sup>36</sup> Evidence supporting this idea can be found in well-known examples both before the sixth century AD (for instance the “Begram Treasure” composed by Indian ivories, western items and Chinese lacquer objects – see *infra*), and later during the eighth century AD (with the influence of China crafts on the late Buddhist art of Gandhāra).<sup>37</sup> Not to mention Buddhism itself and its ways of transmission.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Gandhāra and India shared the same culture (“Gandhāra is in every respect Indian”, Taddei 2003) and in some historical circumstances they were even in political connection. This history of regional exchanges had also involved, especially under the Kushans (*i.e.* during the so called golden age of the “Silk Road”), the Roman West, and had shown also the high cultural receptiveness of India and Central Asia, exemplified in those artistic achievements influenced by a new wave of Hellenism. Two “schools” were the principal centres of art and crafts during Kushan times: Mathurā and Gandhāra. Even if Mathurā is considered to be properly Indian and less influenced by the Hellenistic components of Gandhāra, western elements were nonetheless partially accepted in the sculpture production of this centre (for further reference, see van Louhizen-de Leeuw 1989; Klimburg-Salter 1995). Moreover, the maritime trade with the west played a conspicuous part in the cultural relationship between India and the Romano-Hellenistic west probably, as suggested by Taddei (2003, pp. 454-455), still active in the fourth-fifth centuries AD, and even later, as indicated by the *Χριστιανική τοπογραφία* (Christian Topography) probably written between 535 and 547 by Kosmas Indikopleustes (for further details, see Kominko 2013 with references).

<sup>35</sup> For instance, a fragmentary head from Central Asia (Khotan), dated between the third and the fifth century AD (Seipel 1996, fig. 190 – here Fig. IV, D) with its full lips, eyes and broad face matches with the common characteristic recognized as “Gupta” influence in the Gandhāran Art. This datum may be regarded as a hint of the transmission from the west/Central Asia of Gupta elements to China.

<sup>36</sup> Chinese Buddhist Pilgrims like Faxian (399-414 AD) – who brought back to China important Buddhist relics from India – used to reach the subcontinent passing through Khotan, visiting the monasteries of Gandhāra and thence crossing the Indus heading to India. Faxian’s way back home was via Ceylon through South-east Asia. This is an illustrative example of the discussed “double connection” between India and China (through the “Silk Road” and via maritime routes), and of how one did not exclude the other. For further references and discussion on the artistic and cultural relation between Gandhāra and China during the third-fifth centuries AD, see Rhie 2010 with lit.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *e.g.* the face of a Tang dynasty Buddha (Watt 2004, no. 192 ca. 700 AD) with a stucco female head from Butkarā I (Filigenzi 2010, fig. 14).

<sup>38</sup> Buddhism, originating in India, was introduced in China’s Central Plain around the first century AD. The earliest dated sculptured images of Buddha found in China date back to the fourth century AD

In this regard, it is important to note that Carter, to support her eighth century AD dating hypothesis of the specimen under examination, used an unbaked-clay female head from Ushkur (near Baramula, Kashmir Valley – Fig. III, B). For the chronological framing of the style of the Cleveland rhyton head, it is necessary to make a brief excursus on this piece that is indeed stylistically akin to the rhyton. The Kashmir head is part of a series of similar pieces held in the British Museum, gathered together by reason of their stylistic resemblance to other unbaked-clay fragments that are recorded to have been collected at the site of Ushkur, and which are now held in the Srinagar Museum (henceforth the “British series” and the “Srinagar series”).<sup>39</sup> The Ushkur provenience is certain only for those heads and other fragments published originally by R.C. Kak.<sup>40</sup> The British Museum series published by D. Barrett was added to the group on stylistic criteria although their provenience is unknown. They may not even be from Ushkur<sup>41</sup>.

Since the unbaked-clay fragments belonging to the Srinagar Series (for the most part they are heads) are held to have been part of the decorative apparatus of the main Buddhist monument of Ushkur – a stupa, which according to a local literary source was built under the Kushans but later restored or enlarged by King Lalitāditya (ca. 724-750 AD)<sup>42</sup> – they have been ascribed to the eighth century AD. In consequence, the pieces of the British series that were considered of a kindred sort to the Srinagar pieces were also dated in the same century.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, the late chronological arrangement of both the Ushkur series – following a preliminary attribution to the third-fourth century AD<sup>44</sup> – was established on the

and they are probably imports from Central Asia (Su Bai in Watt 2004, pp. 79-87); see also Watson 1981; 1995, Chapter XII with references. On the earlier introduction and spread of Buddhism in Gandhāra and Central Asia, see Fussman 1994; Dietz 2007; Tremblay 2007 with lit.

<sup>39</sup> On the British Museum series, see Barrett 1957; for the Ushkur series in the Srinagar Museum, see Kak 1923, pp. 12-26 with figures; Kak 1933, pp. 152-155, pl. 58.

<sup>40</sup> Kak 1923; 1933; see also Paul 1986, p. 68.

<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, Ushkur has never been made the subject of any systematic and scientific archaeological investigation. The only information regarding the site is in the form of eyewitness descriptions. Nevertheless, such descriptions seem to concur with the aforementioned literary tradition: probably the stupa went through at least two major constructive phases (Kak 1933, p. 153; on the history of the investigation of the site, see Paul 1986, pp. 68-75 with references).

<sup>42</sup> The *Rājataranjini*. For further details, see Goetz 1969; see also Paul 1986, p. 68.

<sup>43</sup> Of this opinion Carter (1979), following Fabri (1955) and Barrett (1957). Paul (1986) ascribed all the Ushkur heads to the sixth-seventh century AD, more precisely in the mid sixth century AD, in a period antecedent to the artistic development shown by Fondukistān. Taddei and Verardi (1978) confirmed the seventh-eighth century dating for the Ushkur series published by Kak, but with reserve (Verardi 1983) for some pieces of the “British series” – see *infra* for further details.

<sup>44</sup> Kak 1933, p. 153; Ingholt 1957.

basis of comparisons with specimens from the Buddhist sites of Fondukistān (Afghanistan, *terminus post quem* ca. 689 AD)<sup>45</sup>, and Akhnur (Jammu – early sixth century AD).<sup>46</sup> Hence, when Carter made her claim that the coroplastic fragment on Fig. III, B represents a stylistic parallel to the Cleveland female head, she did so by reason of its “Gupta” taste and also by reason of the piece’s supposed chronology.

In 1983 Giovanni Verardi, considering the whole Ushkur material (both the British and Srinagar series), remarked how these coroplastic pieces were divisible into two groups on the basis of their clear differences in style, in such a way that could reflect the main phases of the stupa to which they supposedly belong.<sup>47</sup> According to Verardi, regardless of one’s view on whether the earliest production of Ushkur actually existed (not being instead material from another site)<sup>48</sup>, it should be considered akin to the Akhnur production and still be regarded as belonging to the “classical experience of Gandhāra” similarly to the Early Period specimens of Tapa Sardār (Ghazni, Afghanistan) (Fig. IV, C).<sup>49</sup> Therefore, the specimens of this supposed Early-Ushkur phase would find their place in the sixth century AD (or maybe even earlier)<sup>50</sup>, while the late production ought to be considered more compatible with a post-Gandhāran horizon, such as that of the aforementioned Fondukistān or Tapa Sardār Late Period and which would be well placed in the seventh-eighth century AD (Fig. VI, A).<sup>51</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Hackin *et al.* 1959, figs. 191, 206; Göbl 1967 III, Tab. 91: emission of Xusrau II overstruck by a local Arab governor. Fondukistān is believed to be the best, and most chronologically accurate, example of the artistic *koiné* which developed during the seventh-eighth centuries AD in post-Gandhāran Afghanistan and North-western India, illustrated by its production of unbaked-clay modelled sculptures.

<sup>46</sup> Paul 1986, p. 95; Pal 1989, p. 54: fifth-sixth century AD. See also Chandra 1973. Akhnur in Jammu, is considered the site par excellence of the mélange of the Gupta and Gandhāran traditions in the area (Verardi 1983), before the break of the post-Gandhāra period in the early half of the sixth century AD. However, Akhnur in the past was considered contemporary with Ushkur and dated between 700-730 AD (Fabri 1955). The Akhnur and Ushkur specimens “have been variously dated between the fifth and eighth century and the Akhnur School is usually thought to be the earlier one” (Pal 1989, p. 55).

<sup>47</sup> Verardi 1983. *Nota bene*: he principally referred to the Buddha’s head here illustrated on Fig. IV C. See *supra* note 41.

<sup>48</sup> Hallade (1968) had already considered the British Series of unknown provenience, indicating in his relative captions: “from North-west India (?)”.

<sup>49</sup> For the chronology of Tapa Sardār, see Taddei 1999 with references; Verardi and Paparatti 2005; Verardi 2010.

<sup>50</sup> Verardi 1983; see also Taddei 1993 and 1999.

<sup>51</sup> On the similarities between the sculpture of the late period at Tapa Sardār and that of Fondukistān, see Taddei and Verardi 1978, p. 132. The Late Period of Tapa Sardār is defined by a sculptural production of accidentally fired unbaked-clay figures with close affinity with Fondukistān. This affinity in style, due to the uncertainty in the excavation of the site, has been used to chronologically define the site Late Period which otherwise should commence with a *terminus post*

What is advanced by Verardi in respect of the Ushkur Buddha holds also, in my opinion, for the aforementioned head on Fig. III B, the closest piece of art to the Cleveland rhyton according to Carter. We might in fact consider some other aspect of this modelled sculpture that bears witness to its difference in comparison with the specimens of the Srinagar series. Firstly, in considering that all of these heads were made with the aid of moulds<sup>52</sup>, it may then be noted that specimens such as the one that may be seen on Fig. VI, A (as well as the whole original group of the Srinagar Museum) clearly show a coarse editing of the resultant casts that is different from the one used on the two aforementioned heads of the British series<sup>53</sup>. These faces appear stereotyped and lifeless, not only in comparison with the two mentioned examples of the British series but also, and in particular, when brought near to the Gandhāran works of the fifth century AD (*e.g.* Taxila) with which anyway they share technique, material and cultural background. Ultimately, most of the Ushkur-Srinagar heads are simply masks, quickly retouched by a few deep lines made with a rod or a boasting-tool.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, other recently published heads from Ushkur clearly bear a strong Chinese accent, comparable for instance with the specimens unearthed at the site of Kuva (Ferghana, Uzbekistan seventh-eighth century AD).<sup>55</sup> This is yet another difference from the British Museum series, which seems to confirm a later chronology. For present purposes, which are mainly the historical framing of the Cleveland rhyton, it is then important to see how those Gupta elements attested in the female head are not a definitive proof of a late chronology of the piece, and to see the reasons why the most striking stylistic comparison is with a piece, the

*quem* of the fifth century AD (see *supra* note 49). In 1986 Pran G. Paul, principally on the basis of stylistic observations, placed the Ushkur specimens – considering in his dissertation only those pieces of certain provenance, *i.e.* only the Srinagar Series – chronologically before Fondukistān, thus in the late sixth century AD (Paul 1986, p. 78. See criticism in Taddei 1993).

<sup>52</sup> Foucher in Marshall 1921, p. 23: Foucher for the first time noted how, even the stucco production of Taxila, was based on the use of moulds and casts and not completely free-hand modelled as previously supposed.

<sup>53</sup> More specifically, the craftsmen of the Ushkur-Srinagar Series redefined the raw casts with quick incisions, in order to render the principal features of these faces (*e.g.* the eyes, the eyebrows and the wrinkles on the forehead). They subsequently attached a simple modular hairstyle on the skullcap of the heads to complete the manufacturing process.

<sup>54</sup> The modelling technique is in general a quick process, especially when it uses moulds and assembled parts. But in the specimens from Ushkur the simplification of the editing of the raw cast points to a lack of craftsmanship and to an accentuated mannerism.

<sup>55</sup> Recently published by Pal (2006, p. 68). For cfs. with Kuva, see Boulatova-Levina 1961; Boulatova 1972; on Kuva, see also Ivanov 2003; Mode 1992. A Chinese/Tang aesthetic influence is attested, but less evident, in the Durga of Tapa Sardār Late Period (Taddei 1973); see also Silvi-Antonini 1995.

Ushkur female head, so far erroneously considered as belonging to the eighth century AD.

## II.B. The style of the Cleveland rhyton female head

After the synthetic survey of the chronological problematic relative to the style of the Cleveland rhyton, it is now important to consider the details of certain few specimens which might indicate the direct affiliation of the style of the Cleveland female head with the latest phases of the Gandhāra *koiné* relative to the fifth and early sixth century AD.

From a formal point of view, as shown in the example on **Fig. IV, A**<sup>56</sup> during the fourth-fifth centuries AD at Jaulian (Taxila), the Indian character recognizable in the female head of the Cleveland rhyton (and in its kindred Ushkur head – **Fig. III, B**) was incipient, although not yet at its final outcome as attested by the Fondukistān material. This late artistic and stylistic development clearly germinated from the latest Gandhāra production as it seems to be indicated by the stucco head of a Buddha from the Dharmarājikā Stūpa J1 (Taxila, **Fig. IV, B**).<sup>57</sup> The Buddha from Jaulian, for instance, with his aquiline nose heavily furrowed around the nostrils and his pronounced lower jaw, is departing from the Gandhāran-Hellenistic tradition,<sup>58</sup> moving closer to our repoussé Cleveland head. This character may also be discerned by observing his eyes (which are elongated but with a singular curve of the upper lid),<sup>59</sup> the high curving eyebrows (which in Gandhāra are traditionally arched) and the lower lip (although its design varies among the specimens from the site). Comparable with the Jaulian head, are two other stucco heads from Mohrā Morādu (Taxila), which show the occurrence of the same style (**Fig. V, A, B**), even though the female specimen is much weathered at its surface.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, the second of the stucco Buddha heads mentioned above, the one from the Dharmarājikā Area, Stūpa J1, is almost a *unicum* among the examples from Marshall's excavation.<sup>61</sup> Considering that Taxila was probably still active in the first quarter of the sixth century,<sup>62</sup> and thus was likely to have been restored

and maintained by the monastic community with the aid of interested benefactors, this head might indicate how the so-called “Gupta” fashion of the post-Gandhāra art is connected, without any chronological gap, with the previous tradition. This specimen, which Marshall described as having an “elongated face” with a “highly developed forehead, oblique eyes and eyebrows”,<sup>63</sup> can probably be placed between the end of the fifth and the first quarter of the sixth century AD, *viz.* at the end of the life of the site. It might be stylistically considered as the forerunner of the seventh century AD Fondukistān style. Furthermore, it is comparable with our rhyton's female head, in which, however, such characteristics are not yet so developed.

Those “Indian traits” (in any case not quite so stressed as in the Dharmarājikā head) are also to be found on the Western side of the Indus River, in two Buddhist sanctuaries near Hadda (Jalalabad, Afghanistan): Tapa Kalān and Tapa Shotor. From Tapa Kalān there are some examples of stucco compositions of the third-fourth century AD, such as the stucco lunette with the episode of Buddha's “Great Departure”, which contains an “early” depiction of a specific Indian countenance to be seen in the aforementioned Gopa (**Fig. III, D**).<sup>64</sup> But also, perhaps belonging to the latest phases of the site, *i.e.* the fifth-early sixth century AD,<sup>65</sup> countenances with a style even closer to the “Gupta” resemblance of the Cleveland rhyton exist, such as a stucco female head (**Fig. VI, B**)<sup>66</sup>, with wavy hair of western heritage (likewise the rhyton), and another stucco female head with a large headdress (**Fig. III, C**).<sup>67</sup> To this small group, another head from Kunduz<sup>68</sup> may be added, for it shares the same iconography, characterized by a “dreamy” attitude expressed

<sup>63</sup> Marshall 1951, p. 529.

<sup>64</sup> As already noted (*supra* notes 21 and 29), the Indian countenance of the Gopa depicted within a stucco lunette from Hadda, is not dissimilar to that of the rhyton. It is also noteworthy that her necklace – with a main square element between two round jewels – is the same worn by the Cleveland figure and, to confirm that this was a Gandhāran/Afghan-area fashion, this is also worn by another stucco figurine of unknown provenience but belonging to this *facies* (Messina 2006, fig. 216). The prototype is Hellenistic (for further details, see Treister 2004). Moreover, Gopa's headgear, which repeats in its composition the scheme of the necklace (a rectangular element between two roundels), is decorated with a Lunar crescent such as the one gilded on the forehead of the Cleveland rhyton.

<sup>65</sup> *Supra* notes 29 and 30. The modelled decorative apparatus of the single stupas is certainly, in most cases, multiphase, as already noted by Foucher in 1921 (in Marshall 1921, pp. 33-34).

<sup>66</sup> Barthoux 2001, pl. 68 i. For a very similar head from Ushkur (?), see Hallade 1968, p. 225, pl. 178.

<sup>67</sup> *Ib.*, pl. 56 a, b.

<sup>68</sup> Hackin *et al.* 1959, fig. 60. The few fragments from Kunduz can be a *trait d'union* between the late production of the eighth century AD (Tapa Sardār Late Period and Fondukistān), and the – still Gandhāran – production of the sixth century AD.

<sup>56</sup> Marshall 1921, pl. IV a. Foucher *ib.*, p. 25.

<sup>57</sup> Marshall 1951, Vol. III, pl. 159, j = no. 75. *Ib.* Vol. II, p. 529, no. 75. Stupa discussed, *ib.*, Vol. I, p. 264.

<sup>58</sup> Foucher 1921, p. 25.

<sup>59</sup> A Gupta *stilema*. Cf. Buddha of Sārnāth, sixth century AD (Taddei 1977, fig. 47).

<sup>60</sup> Marshall 1951, pl. 153 c, d. These two specimens in particular were chosen by Marshall to exemplify his concept of an “Indo-Afghan School”.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. stucco heads from the same stupa, *ib.*, Vol. III, pl. 160, d; *Ib.*, Vol. II, p. 529, no. 81.

<sup>62</sup> See Fussman and Le Berre 1976, p. 57 with references. On the numismatic evidence of the late and post Gandhāran periods, see also Errington 1999.

through a slanting pose. All of these fragmentary female heads, even the earliest Gopa, under the stylistic point of view can be quite closely compared with the British Museum “Ushkur” female head (Fig. III, B) which has characteristic elongated (but not arched) eyebrows, mouth and elongated amygdale eyes. In particular, the Tape Kalān female specimen (Fig. III, C) can be stylistically drawn near to the supposed Kashmiri fragment, and thus with the Cleveland rhyton.

Another stylistic affinity with the rhyton may be observed on the female donors that appear on the basement frieze of the Tapa Shotor Stūpa No. 19 (fourth-first quarter of the sixth century AD),<sup>69</sup> which were standing between Gandhāran Corinthian pillars alongside to Bodhisattvas (Fig. V, C). These pious Indian women had eyes that were framed by eyebrows that are quite similar to the “Indian type” used by the rhyton’s female head. Furthermore, even the profile of these women, with their slightly aquiline noses, nourished cheeks and small mouths with bigger lower lip and ample ears, make for a remarkable match with the rhyton (although the medium differs significantly and the surfaces in the available pictures appear corroded). The Hadda women are clearly stereotyped, although differentiated in sub-types, as the rhyton’s head is completely idealized.

A stucco head of unknown provenance can be placed in the same category as the Hadda stuccoes (Fig. V, D). This female (?) head, published by Zwalf,<sup>70</sup> shows a more traditional treatment, if by tradition we consider the Gandhāran artistic language and its preference for linearism and the use of contour line. The arrangement and shape of the features on this head (*i.e.* the position of the ears, the mouth, the aquiline nose, and the elongated eyebrows) is analogous to that of the Cleveland rhyton. A particularly significant feature is the method used to underline the softness of the nostrils, which has been done by the incision of a broad crescent-shaped element; this is quite rare among the whole stucco and unbaked-clay specimens of the above cited Gandhāran sites, but it is evident in the rhyton. From these indications, it seems plausible that the rhyton artificer has in some ways emulated and observed (or perhaps he was also a modeller and simply applied a *stilema*) specimens like that on Fig. VI, C, since he was certainly acquainted with the conspicuous artistic production of Gandhāra, which

principally constituted the decorative apparatus of stupas. Another element shared by the rhyton female head and some of the heads modelled in Gandhāra is the anatomical definition of the ear with a characteristic and stylized “Y” element inside the auricle.<sup>71</sup> This element is observable in the aforementioned “Ushkur” female head, as well as in some other stucco heads of the fifth century AD which are of “Indian character.”<sup>72</sup> Even the presence of gilded elements on the rhyton (the crescent on the forehead, the dots on the cheeks, the earrings and the buffalo’s horns, as well as its muzzle and eyes) may be seen as an echo of the modelled sculpture editing.<sup>73</sup>

In the light of the fact that the characteristics of the Cleveland rhyton arguably find their closest parallels in the latest Gandhāran production of the “classic” phase, it is possible to argue that its style is not merely an echo of this period – like the style of Fondukistān – but rather finds a place within its transformation and development. The Fondukistān style, which “had assimilated and completely transformed the Gandhāran heritage”,<sup>74</sup> is in absolute terms a more distant relative to the rhyton’s style than what can be observed among the examples from Taxila. Ultimately then the Cleveland rhyton could be seen as a piece of art whose features provide signs for an earlier apparition of “Gangetic taste.” This is grafted and blended with a still strong local tradition *i.e.* the Gandhāran one, which, during the sixth century AD, was in transformation. Further evidence to support this statement is to be found in the Indian buffalo *protome* that constitutes the lower part of the vessel.

### III. THE INDIAN BUFFALO *PROTOME*

As already noted in the introduction, there is no doubt that the animal *protome* composing the lower part of the Cleveland rhyton specifically represents a specimen of *Bubalus arnee/Bubalus bubalis*. This species, recognizable by its characteristic bent and ribbed horns, is also clearly depicted among the wall paintings of Ajantā (India, third quarter of the fifth century AD).<sup>75</sup> There, especially when in the role of decorative filler among the

<sup>69</sup> Mostamindi 1969, fig. 8 and 9; Tarzi 1976, p. 384: *terminus ante quem* given by a “Npsk” (Nezak) coin. Tarzi did not add any further details on this find but he likely based his observation on Göbl’s system (1967). Cf. the rhyton’s female head also with the Brahma of the Grand Vihara, Niche V1 (Tarzi 1976, fig. 7) which coexisted with purely Hellenistic types such as, for instance, the Heracles-Vajrapāni of the same Vihara, Niche V2 (*ib.*, figs. 10-11).

<sup>70</sup> Zwalf 1990, no. 629.

<sup>71</sup> This element is commonly observable in the Gandhāran clay/stucco production but it is not always attested as, for instance, in the cited head published by Zwalf. In comparison, in the Gandhāran schist specimens, the human ears appear to be more veristic.

<sup>72</sup> Behrendt 2007, p. 73, no. 55; cf. Marshall 1951, pl. 153, c.

<sup>73</sup> First noted by Foucher (in Marshall 1921, p. 24): some details of the modelled Gandhāran sculptures were gilded. See also a recent find from Mes Aynak (Kabul), *i.e.* an unbaked-clay head plastered and covered with gold-foil (Engel 2011, fig. 50).

<sup>74</sup> Taddei and Verardi 1978, p. 133.

<sup>75</sup> See in particular caves nos. I, XVI, XVII. See also Spink 2008, fig. 41; Schingloff 2000, vol. I, pp. 111-113.



other wall paintings – when transformed in vegetal “arabesques” in a hybrid shape without its rear legs – the buffalo shows a clear Hellenistic derivation, which in this case is very likely the product of a transmission from Gandhāra.<sup>76</sup>

With regard to the style of this *protome*, Shepherd wrote in her 1966 study that “in the head of the bull [...] there is a feeling of naturalism, perhaps influenced by Hellenistic traditions, but this is overpowered by a dominant Iranian stylization which is expressed in the simplification of the planes and the emphasis on lines and musculature which assume a decorative role.”<sup>77</sup> This claim would be right if the same “dominant Iranian stylization” – as for instance, the multiple lines used to represent the eyelids, or the lines that are used to express the wrinkles on the muzzle of the animal – was not present in the fourth-third century BC Early Hellenistic rhyta from Thracia and the Eastern Greek territories,<sup>78</sup> among the Attic Greek Red-figure pottery rhyta (late fifth century BC), and in the pottery rhyta from Tarentum (fourth century BC). Such “linear stylization” has been used to represent the folds of the epidermis of animals since the third millennium BC in the Ancient Near East<sup>79</sup>, and in the Greek world it is clearly a stylistic loan from Achaemenid Persia.<sup>80</sup> It is a well-known fact that the use of

specific patterns for facial marks in association with the adoption of this oriental type of vessel was fully incorporated into the Greek crafts and arts: the rhyton can be definitively regarded as an eastern form assimilated by classical Greece at the end of the fifth century BC.<sup>81</sup> The

<sup>76</sup> Illustrated in Spink 2008, panel 477. For other compared examples from Ajantā, Mathurā, Barhut and Central Asia, see Combaz 1937. A rare example of western decoration made of *boukephalia* and garlands, is attested in Afghanistan at Tapa Sanawbar, Cave 2 (Verardi 1981; Verardi and Paparatti 2004, pp. 44-45, figs. 32-33, pl. XXXIVb). These high-relief animal heads are unfortunately badly preserved, but they show characteristic “tufts of fur” on their forehead which may be compared with the “fleece” of the Cleveland buffalo. This classical motif does not date much later than the mid seventh century AD (Verardi and Paparatti 2004, pp. 103-104)

<sup>77</sup> See also, Shepherd 1966, p. 308: “The superbly sculptured bull, or ox, head which forms the spout of the rhyton belong to the animal art of the Iranians”. The rhyton in general is defined as “essentially Iranian with a strong element of Indian influence.”

<sup>78</sup> Principally from Ancient Thrace; for further references, see Marazov 1978. For similar specimens supposedly from Sinope, see Sumner 2003. For a general discussion about the Thracian rhyta, see Ebbinghaus 1999 with references.

<sup>79</sup> As is shown for example by the gilded *protome* of a bull which decorates a harp from the Royal Necropolis of Ur characterized by heavy linear eyelids (Woolley 1934, pl. 110).

<sup>80</sup> Hoffmann 1961; 1962, the “Persian Class”. Most of the Attic vessels are not technically rhyta by reason of the absence of the hole in their lower part (they were used as drinking cups). On the purpose, the chronology and use of this typology of vessel in Classical and Early Hellenistic Greece, see Hoffmann 1989; Miller 1991, 1993 with references. On the cultural exchange occurred between Greece and the Achaemenids, see also Miller 1998. No metal rhyta have been found in proper Greece, but it seems that some of them could have been actually modelled on metal specimens (Hoffmann 1989; Williams 1993 with references). Cf. also the Indian Buffalo with a black-glazed pottery rhyton from the Athenian Agora (Rotroff 1997, pl. 150, no. 1384 – fragment in shape of a cow’s head, probably first half of the fourth century BC),

and with another black-glazed pottery specimen from Ai-Khanoum (Guillame and Rougeulle 1987, pl. I, no. 1 – fragment in shape of a dog’s head). Typologically speaking, even the rare shape of rhyton composed by a human head attached to an animal head or *protome*, as in the case of the Cleveland rhyton, has Early Hellenistic antecedents, as shown by two specimens from the Athenian Agora of the mid fourth century BC (a female head, Rotroff 1997, pl. 105, no. 1383 and a satyr’s head, Williams 1978, pl. 103, no. 69). Belonging to the same type are later “Partho-Sasanian” specimens, which Carter (1979) rightly compared with the Cleveland rhyton, such as a fragmentary black-gloss ware Seleucid/Parthian specimen from Nippur (with a female head bearing a lunar crescent on her forehead, *ib.* p. 310 and pl. 3), and a second similar glazed specimen, with also a female head attached to a lower part composed by an antelope’s head, supposedly of the third century AD (*ib.* pl. 2a, 2b – held in the British Museum). To these two examples it is possible to add a third specimen held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (cat. no. 2001.178), a fourth one held in the Louvre (cat. no. AO 31560) and a fifth from the Kelekian Collection (Erdman 1935, pl. II, C). All of these glazed terracotta rhyta bear iconographic similarities with the British Museum example. Moreover, differently from the aforementioned first specimen from Nippur, these last three rhyta are composed by a third element besides the female head and the lower antelope *protome*, *i.e.* a pitcher, which is located above the human head. Typological comparisons, always with regard to the human head/animal *protome* rhyton type, can be also made with other terracotta specimens from Khotan (third-fifth century AD, published in Seipel 1996, nos. 183, 184; Watt 1994, no. 98) and with a Sogdian terracotta specimen that seems to imitate the Cleveland scheme (fifth-eighth century AD – Meshkeris 1962, pp. 46-49 and 99-100, tab. XXV, no. 365; also published in Belenizki 1980, p. 10). Another terracotta rhyton, which may be added to this class, comes from Kohna Masjid (Afghanistan – Schlumberger 1971; Carter 1979, pl. 4). Its lower part, composed by a highly stylized antelope head, is typologically close to the terracotta Parthian, Sasanian, Khotanese and Sogdian rhyta cited above, and also to first/second century AD Roman glass rhyta (such as certain specimens from Begram; also *infra* note 99). Its upper part, constituted by a grotesque head (a Lokapāla?), with its style and provenience confirms the use of this kind of vessels in Afghan/Gandhāran territory in the post-Gandhāran period (as already noted by Schlumberger 1971, p. 5). Cf. with the Lokapāla from Tapa Sardār Late Period (Taddei and Verardi 1978, p. 56, figs. 100, 101; see also Filigenzi 2010, p. 405), and with another similar head from Taxila (Marshall 1951, pl. 161, o=no. 100). Cf. this latter Lokapāla with a Roman satyr’s head held in the Museo Barracco, Rome (inv. no. MB167). Additionally, a closer iconographic comparison with the Cleveland rhyton can be advanced with a supposedly Sasanid seal of unknown provenience, which bears an incised design showing an human head joining a bull’s head in its lower part (Chabouillet 1858, no. 1136). Similarly, Carter has recently published (2010, fig. 8) a circular bronze plaque cast from Assam (ca. eleventh century AD) depicting a female head surmounting a stylized Indian Buffalo. For a systematic survey about the rhyton and its variations in Asia, see Manassero 2008 (in particular tabs. LXVII-LXX) with lit. It is out of the purposes of the present article to replicate such an endeavour, but to highlight when necessary the most useful *comparanda*.

<sup>81</sup> In the late fifth century BC the rhyton underwent a typological shift from the straight Attic type to the curved and spouted beaker typical of the East (Hoffman 1966, p. 106).

oriental-originated patterns became a well-established consuetude among the crafts of the eastern and northern Greek artificers in Early Hellenistic times.<sup>82</sup>

Our Indian buffalo retains much of the anatomical details discernible in the Early Hellenistic Thracian silver and golden rhyta that were probably manufactured by these craftsmen for the local elites and later buried with those aristocrats.<sup>83</sup> Golden and silver rhyta buried in sites such as Rozovets, Panagyurishte, Borovo and others, illustrate it amply.<sup>84</sup> A close comparison between those Thracian specimens, among the few Hellenistic silver rhyta that survived until the present day, and the Cleveland rhyton, points to the fact that the characteristics of the Cleveland buffalo are analogous with the heads of the Thracian animals, and in particular with some of those that are in the shape of deer (Fig. VIII, B-C).<sup>85</sup> Not only the manufacturing technique is similar,<sup>86</sup> but also certain specific features such as the bulging eyes, framed by rippled skin folds, that used to be inlaid, the shape of the nostrils, the wrinkles of the muzzle, the dots used to represent the hair on it, the fold on the chin groove and also the stiff and “metallic” facial planes crafted with attention drawn to the muscles on the sides of the *protome*. In other words the buffalo’s style matches with that of the western specimens.<sup>87</sup> In general then, the same attention that is given in the fourth-third centuries BC by the Greek artificers (or by their local apprentices) to the

anatomical tectonics of the animal’s heads is also observable in the much later Indian buffalo. Considering all the technical limitations of the repoussé technique,<sup>88</sup> the bone structure of the buffalo’s head, covered by fleshy parts on the muzzle, is clearly expressed using Hellenistic stylistic patterns. Judging from the Greek pottery animal’s head vessels, these formal elements have developed in the previous century in one or more Greek workshops, and thereafter adopted – as far as we can judge from the survived specimens – as canonical elements of craft during Hellenistic times (Fig. VII, A).

Anyway, although a range of stylistic patterns correspond, there remain notable differences between our Central Asian silver beaker and its kindred and earlier Greek and Thracian rhyta. When we compare the Indian buffalo with those western specimens certain disjointedness in its composition is noticeable, primarily in its eyes: these are set too frontal to be veristic and they are not, as in the Classical Attic animal vessels or rhyta, at the sides of the head but instead too close to each other. The eyes of the Indian buffalo are in fact humanized, big and wide open. They were once inlaid with a now lost incrustation, perhaps of some precious stone or glass (likewise the Hellenistic rhyta of Thrace), and this element would certainly have caught the attention toward this smaller and lower part of the vessel, conferring it animation. Additionally, the buffalo’s eyelids were also gilded. It appears clear then, that the animal’s eyes were regarded as an important element within the symbolism of the object and in consequence emphasized and humanized, although the animal remains a rather subordinate element of the rhyton: the female head eclipses the buffalo both in dimension and in terms of composition. Still, the position of the buffalo may have been more strategic than this: holding the rhyton from the nape of the neck of the female head, and pouring a liquid (likely wine)<sup>89</sup> during banquets, libations or other ceremonies, the ancient user of this precious and uncommon object was able to look into the female’s eyes, but his attention was likewise captured by the buffalo’s highly emphasized

<sup>82</sup> Of this opinion Williamson 1996, pp. 236-237. See also Treister 2001, p. 384: “It seems that the manufacturing techniques used by the craftsmen most probably residing in the Bosporan capital, were adopted from the goldworking centres of Northern Greece, primarily Macedonia, and, perhaps, the coastal centres of the Hellespont and Western Asia Minor. The diffusion of hammering techniques went hand in hand with that of characteristic ornamental patterns and subjects.” Additionally, around 300 BC in Egypt, rhyta, probably of Hellenized-Persian style, were produced in specialized workshops – along with other kinds of metalwork – as attested by the reliefs of the tomb of Petosiris in Hermopolis (see: Boardman 1994, figs. 5.17 a, b – drawings).

<sup>83</sup> For a general discussion about Ancient Thrace, see Archibald 1998 with references. On the typological issues regarding metal rhyta, see Ebbinghaus 1999; Shefton 1998, pp. 643-655 with references.

<sup>84</sup> Marazov 1978.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. *ib.*, pl. 66 from Rozovets; pl. 81, from Panagyurishte. Cf. also with two examples of strongly Hellenized local specimens from Kazbeghi (Armenia, bull head rhyton, *ib.* pls. 50-51) and Romania (Poroina, deer head rhyton, *ib.* pls. 54-55). Cf. also with a slightly different and relatively more veristic calf-head *situla* of advanced Hellenistic Epoch, allegedly from Iran (Pfrommer 1993, pl. 6, no. 64).

<sup>86</sup> Besides the common repoussé technique of manufacture, the ears of all these animal heads (Indian buffalo included) are worked separately from a sheet of silver and thus welded and riveted to the relative heads. Moreover the eyes were inlaid, and anatomical details, such as the ears, used to be gilded.

<sup>87</sup> Even the “fleece” on the central part of the buffalo’s horns, given by a texture of small incisions, is not dissimilar to that of some Tarentine animal-head vases (cf. *e.g.* with specimens in Hoffmann 1962, plates VIII-XIII).

<sup>88</sup> Hoffmann (1962, p. 107) described the above observed “simplification of planes” and “emphasis on the line”, as a display “of sculpture in hammered metal” adding that “the goldsmith’s repoussé technique being better adapted for the rendering of ornament than for anatomy, the contours of animal heads in hammered gold or silver tend to be broad and faceted, rather than subtly structured, and the overall effect often strikes one as somewhat lifeless compared to a modeled sculpture”. He also remembered (*ib.*, p. 124) that “in contrast to rhyta hammered of sheet metal in the repoussé technique both cast bronze and moulded terracotta rhyta are *modelled* sculpture”. Ebbinghaus 1999, p. 404: “The animal heads [those from Panagyurishte] are fairly schematic and composed of plain surfaces structured by linear folds”.

<sup>89</sup> For further details and hypotheses on the use of rhyta as ritual vessels, see Melikian Chirvani 1996; Pugachenkova 1987, p. 82; Jäger 2007.

glance.<sup>90</sup> All of these elements are aligned in the frontal and main part of the rhyton and little attention was paid by the artificer to the decoration of the rear of the beaker, which remains somewhat undecorated, with only an incised representation of “Sasanid ribbons”, which close the woman’s necklace (see *infra* for further discussion).

The freehand repoussé technique, employed by the Central Asian-Indian artificer who crafted the Cleveland rhyton before the year 700 AD, ceased to be commonly used in the West at the end of the first century AD; it arose again only sporadically during the second-third centuries AD and in those instances mainly in the manufacture of silver plates.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, in the west, the production of animal-head vases crafted in this technique apparently ceased after the third-second century BC as the archaeological evidence attests. On the other hand, rhyton specimens testify to the survival of this class in the Hellenized east and, in particular, in Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Iran, as well as in Central Asia as late as the seventh-eighth centuries AD.<sup>92</sup> The problem then involves attempting to establish how it is that discernible stylistic elements employed since Early Hellenistic time within the Greek and Hellenized world, were carried so far for such a long time – centuries later in Central Asia – with no apparent continuity. It is almost as if the craftsman of the Cleveland rhyton was still acquainted with a precise combination of Hellenistic artisanal patterns along with the related crafting techniques, to model animal heads from sheets of metal and to decorate them with a method which, in the Cleveland buffalo, has been successfully adapted to an “exotic” animal.

If it were not for the evidence from Gandhāra and Central Asia, it would have been difficult to simply believe that a legacy in craftsmanship could link the Indian buffalo with some centuries older Hellenistic vessels. However, we have to consider the fact that, the Hellenistic tradition (with some Romano-Hellenistic contributions) in Gandhāra remained a strong and constant paradigm throughout the fifth century AD, sometimes even in “pure” forms (*e.g.* the Heracles-Vajrapāni of Tapa Shotor, Hadda or the “Genius with flowers” from

<sup>90</sup> As if the *raison d’être* of the female head – and of the whole vessel more in general – ought to be found in a “face to face” relation with its user. One line, in fact, which is given by the planes of the face which departs from the root of her nose, passing along the cheeks up to the chin of the female head, bestows to the figure its general shape in profile. Adding to this the slightly protruding cheeks and eyes, it seems eventually that the female head was studied to be seen principally in a frontal or a three quarter view. The eyes, moreover, with their incised iris and pupil, this latter slightly covered by the upper eyelid, complete the “magnetism” of the figure.

<sup>91</sup> Treister 2001 with references. On the free hand repoussé, see in particular *ib.* pp. 318-323.

<sup>92</sup> As already noted by Shepherd 1966, with regard to the wall paintings of Pendjikent (Sogdiana).

Tapa Kalān, Hadda),<sup>93</sup> and this probably was due mainly to the availability of models, moulds and casts or, in other words, prototypes that were held and kept over time in relative workshops throughout the area.

Of foremost importance in this regard, is the evidence from the “Begram Treasure.”<sup>94</sup> This hoard has been most instructive in respect to the question of how a Hellenistic legacy might have been inherited (relatively late, ca. in the first century AD) and handed down in local Asian workshops from generation to generation. The gypsum “roundels” found in the Begram hoard are nothing less than the casts made from *emblemata* of Hellenistic silverware of Alexandrine origin.<sup>95</sup> The models can be dated back to the third century BC and the casts were made when these originals were already worn out due to their prolonged use (*argentum vetus*).<sup>96</sup> Thus the Begram *emblemata* were most likely used as models – as source of iconographic and even stylistic inspiration – in certain workshops, and were probably hung on the walls of these workshops, as the holes visible on them seem to indicate.<sup>97</sup> That these *emblemata* were considered precious, even if made only in gypsum, can be understood by their inclusion in the hoard: in a perilous moment in the third – early fourth century AD they were eventually sealed in a safe chamber with other various and likewise precious material.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>93</sup> As recently observed by Coarelli (2010). Coarelli also underlines the relation between the Begram gypsum *emblemata* depicting the bust of a youth (*ib.* fig. 1) with the “Genius with flowers” (*ib.* fig. 6).

<sup>94</sup> Hackin 1939; 1954; Girshman 1946.

<sup>95</sup> Adriani 1959a, 1959b; Burkhalter 1984. The western Roman imports within the hoard seem to be all of Alexandrine provenience (Coarelli 2010, p. 96). On this topic, see also the views expressed by Bivar (1990) and Taddei (1992).

<sup>96</sup> Coarelli 2010: Pliny *N.H.* XXXIII, LV, 157. Pliny in this passage also underlines the common practice of his days, to use casts to reproduce precious embossed works of the past.

<sup>97</sup> Wheeler 1954. On the practice to collect and retain for centuries in ancient workshops old specimens as models, see also Treister 2001, p. 388.

<sup>98</sup> On the chronology of the hoard and of its objects – which are impossible to homogeneously ascribe to the first century AD – see Coarelli 2010 (with reference to Coarelli 1961a, 1961b, 1962, 1963). Among the numerous specimens of the hoard of western origin, for present purposes, are particularly worth of mention a Roman female-head bronze vase and a Roman glass rhyton, both of second-third centuries AD. The bronze vessel although cast and not hammered, and not stylistically comparable with the Cleveland rhyton, is nevertheless derived from similar Early Hellenistic vases such as the gold Early Hellenistic specimens from Panagurishte. This latter golden head-rhyton has been mentioned by Carter (1979, p. 309), in connection with the origin of the typology from which, as she inferred, the Cleveland rhyton may well have derived. The second item, the glass rhyton with a stylized antelope head – so much so as to look like a snail – additionally attests to the perseverance of the use of this kind of vessel during the Roman Imperial Age and its diffusion. Such stylization reminds the *protomai* of the “Sasanian” terracotta glazed rhyta and of the other later terracotta Central Asian rhyta mentioned above (*supra* note 80).

It is possible to infer from this that the Cleveland rhyton, at least in observing its lower component (*i.e.* the buffalo), is another example of the inherited Hellenistic style, and less aulic than the Alexandrine originated *emblemata*, somewhat transformed but nevertheless, in view of the foregoing observations, with a strong Hellenistic western heritage.

As previously mentioned, however, the main difference between the context of the Hellenistic specimens from Begram and the rhyton is that in the latter case any Roman mediation of western models must be regarded as a speculation, but only due to a lack of evidence.<sup>99</sup> The Begram material chiefly serves to affirm that a tradition of third century BC could have survived approximately until the fifth century AD by virtue of the availability of models (in this specific case, perhaps made around the first century AD) that were based on original ancient prototypes. However, as regards the buffalo head and its unmistakable Hellenized ascendancy – associated as it is with a particular *corpus* of metal vessels to which it is remarkably similar in terms of stylistic patterns and techniques of manufacture – it may be assumed that in some way the workshop that manufactured the item had available at least some casts or specimens of similar Hellenistic animal vases, as well as a general traditional knowledge about them and about their method of production. In this respect, it is important to mention the case of the agate miniature rhyton (length 15,6 cm) part of the Hejiacun hoard<sup>100</sup> (late seventh – first half of the eighth century AD).<sup>101</sup> What is peculiar about this specimen is that it is probably an original of the second century BC, once again from Egypt.<sup>102</sup> Thus, the agate rhyton reached

China at least in the first half of the eighth century AD and most likely through Central Asia.<sup>103</sup>

Here it also is important to remark that there is not a single (surviving) Sasanian rhyton, neither a similar work of fifth-seventh centuries AD Central Asia, which bears the same stylistic peculiarities of the Cleveland buffalo: the only parallels available, as strange as it seems, are those western specimens of Classical and Hellenistic time mentioned above. Nevertheless, we might also consider as *comparanda*, although stylistically less close to the Indian buffalo than those western and earlier specimens – and indicative of continuity in the manufacture of silver items in repoussé technique – a few drinking horns with animal forepart, probably from the Hellenized Middle East, such as for example the “Zebu Rhyton” held in Toledo (first century BC), and a “Stag Rhyton” with the addition of a silver bull’s head cup, held in the Getty Museum (late first century BC–early first century AD).<sup>104</sup>

Two other terracotta rhyta from Central Asia are worth mentioning, as they may be seen as typological parallels for the Cleveland rhyton buffalo.<sup>105</sup> The first of the series, a bull’s head (lower portion of a terracotta

rhyton in the “Greater Gandhāra” tradition, and he used the animal’s head of the Cleveland rhyton to sustain his argument, comparing the specimen with the Hejiacun one. He concludes stating that “the origin of the Hejiacun rhyton would appear to be the northern half of Greater Gandhāra and the southern regions of ancient Tokharistan of the sixth to the early eighth century”, dismissing – although not entirely – the idea of a Sogdian origin for it. The Cleveland rhyton, moreover, is described by Louis as a vessel that “shows a naturalistically rendered water buffalo head beneath the head of a woman with late – or post-Gupta-style facial features.”

<sup>103</sup> On the rhyta in Tang China, see Louis 2007 with lit. The “Hejiacun Rhyton”, as stressed in the present article, is not the sole ancient western object which reached the East through the “Silk Road.”

<sup>104</sup> Toledo Museum of Art (USA): Boardman 1994, p. 88, fig. 4.20; J. P. Getty Museum: Pfrommer 1993, no. 74 (the “Stag Rhyton”), also discussed at pp. 47-49; no. 128, pp. 66-68. The two silver rhyta show remark the continuity in the manufacture of this type of vessels with clear Hellenized characteristics, at least up to the first century AD. In particular to note in the stag’s head, the stylization of the orbitals over the eyes and the facial planes delimited by muscles rendered by veins. On the other hand, the only Sasanian specimen similarly crafted in repoussé technique, with soldered components (the ears) and comparable in its forepart with the Cleveland buffalo, is the gazelle rhyton held in the collection of the Arthur Sackler Gallery (Gunter and Jett 1992, no. 38, pp. 205-210; Harper 1991). Nevertheless, the vessel, ascribed to the fourth century AD in the light of its style (considered of “Bactrian” ascendancy according to Gunter and Jett), is much more schematic and coarse than the Cleveland rhyton, although probably inspired by the same post-Achaemenid Hellenized models.

<sup>105</sup> For typological considerations regarding the whole vessel, as composed by a human head attached to an animal protome, see *supra* note 80. The Hellenistic-Parthian rhyta from Old Nisa, made of different medium (ivory), crafted with a different technique (carving) and of a different typology (long horns with animal foreparts) cannot be considered as direct *comparanda* for the Cleveland Indian buffalo.

<sup>99</sup> Few Roman glazed pottery rhyta are attested during the Augustan Age (*e.g.* specimens published in Lavizzari Pedrazzini 1993). Roman glass rhyta date from the first-second century AD. However, within the Roman Empire, the rhyton never regained the Classical and Early Hellenistic popularity.

<sup>100</sup> Hansen 2003; Dongfang 2005; Louis 2007 with lit.

<sup>101</sup> Louis 2007, p. 238. Cf. Hansen 2003, p. 14, “sometimes after 732 AD”; Thierry and Morrison 1994, p. 112, “ca. 756 AD”. To note that ancient Chinese coins of the Hejiacun hoard were a real “collection”, with specimens dating back to the fifth century BC (Thierry and Morrison 1994, p. 128).

<sup>102</sup> Parlasca 1975, with fig. 1; *contra* Louis 2007. The Hejiacun rhyton is not a *unicum* as Parlasca pointed out, rightly comparing the specimen with another agate miniature rhyton (length 9 cm – *ib.* fig. 4) in shape of a calf’s protome, found in Egypt with eight other agate vessels. Louis (p. 206) criticized this *comparandum* pointing out that the size and the style of the two agate rhyta differ. With regard to the size of the two specimens, most likely this is merely a matter related to the size of the block of raw material available to the artificer. About their style, Louis is incorrect, considering, for example, the manner in which the animals’ horns are worked in both specimens. Besides, Louis acknowledges that “naturalism is a decisive feature” of the Hejiacun rhyton, which has to be connected with Hellenism (*ib.*). The scholar found the origin of this Hellenistic component observable in the agate

fragmentary rhyton) comes from Afrasiab (Samarkand – Sogdiana) and is ascribed ca. to the seventh century AD (Fig. VIII, A).<sup>106</sup> This *bucranium* retains more of those characteristically “Iranian” decorative features previously mentioned, which were not properly attributed to the Cleveland buffalo (for example, lines are used for the eyelids in continuity with the wrinkles of the nose, lines are attested around the mouth, and a short decorative beard is visible on the mandible). Thus, this specimen could be considered to retain some proper and old Achaemenid features, echoing another and more ancient tradition. In brief, the animal’s musculature and bone structure are completely absent. They remain completely unexpressed in this rendering and they are only summed up by the use of lines; this cannot be put down simply to the possibility that this specimen was modelled. The second animal head is from Kuva (Ferghana), and like the Afrasiab Bull, it consists of the surviving lower part of a terracotta rhyton.<sup>107</sup> This specimen is stylistically closer to the Indian buffalo.

The buffalo of the Cleveland Museum silver rhyton cannot definitively be regarded as “Hellenistic”, by reason of its late chronology and on the basis of some of its peculiar features more symbolic than naturalistic, but it may only be placed – considering also the characteristics of the whole object, female head included – within the language of the Art of Gandhāra, where the Hellenization left a major imprint. In particular, the buffalo may be considered as the evidence of an uninterrupted formal and technical tradition established in the west and transmitted to Ancient Gandhāra.<sup>108</sup> The rhyton, in general, is a Middle-Eastern/Iranian ancient type, re-edited by Hellenism and further developed in Central Asia whence it was also imported to China during Late Antiquity. The style of the buffalo’s head differs from that of the female figure and these two elements are juxtaposed and attached to each other rather than merged in one organic piece. As already noted, it is likely that these figures were probably worked separately and only afterwards welded together.

<sup>106</sup> Pugachenkova and Rempel 1965, fig. 179. Cf. also with a fragmentary bull’s head terracotta rhyton from Pendjikent (Isakov 1977, p. 145, fig. 51, no. 2).

<sup>107</sup> Brikina 2000.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. with a supposedly Kushan stone-tray from the area of Taxila (first century AD) with the depiction of Europa’s abduction (Tanabe 2002, p. 83, fig. 9). Zeus, in the form of a bull, appears, within a general Hellenistic composition, characterized by the same stylization of the eyelids as in the rhyton’s buffalo head *i.e.* in the western tradition. In the stone specimen the clear general Hellenistic language of the image uses again, likewise the Thracian rhyta, those so called Iranian trademarks without hesitation.

#### IV. THE SO CALLED “SASANID RIBBONS” AND THE REAR PART OF THE SILVER RHYTON

If we exclude the hair of the “Princess”, the only decorative element on the back of the rhyton is a bow, which closes and secures the necklace worn by her, at approximately the same height at which the head joins with the buffalo *protome*. This knot, which is actually slightly loose, ends in two fluttering strings that are generally called in the pertinent literature “Sasanid ribbons”, a definition based on their iconographic origin in Sasanid Persia.<sup>109</sup> It is important to recall that these ribbons also appear in Central Asia and India in a variety of contexts and, among others, in such aforementioned sites as Ajantā,<sup>110</sup> Hadda, Fondukistān<sup>111</sup> and also Bamiyan (Afghanistan),<sup>112</sup> both in painted works and in modelled sculpture. In the rhyton, what is particularly noteworthy is the rapid manner in which the artificer seems to have quickly executed this rear-facing and somewhat less important decorative feature of the silver beaker. The ribbons are lightly sketched in an almost impressionistic way with very few traits, and some are incised deeper to develop a shading and depth effect, with the lack of that complete symmetry so noticeable, for instance, in the mannerism of Fondukistān. The only example close with the “Sasanid ribbons” of the Cleveland rhyton, is to be found in the painted dome of Kakrak, near Bamiyan,<sup>113</sup> although even in this case, notwithstanding the artistic medium, these painted ribbons lack that depth that is observable on those that appear on the rhyton. While of course the “Sasanid Ribbons” cannot be considered as an absolute chronological datum, the style of this iconographic feature shows once again that a certain stylistic affinity between the silver beaker and the Hellenistic components of the Gandhāran Art is apprehensible.

Additionally, similar observations can be made in relation to the hairstyle of the “Princess”, which is clearly of Western-Hellenistic inspiration. This element is comparable to the Western style not only in terms of the figure’s centre parted and wavy symmetrical hair, but also for the lightly incised locks on the temples, and for the braid that gathers her hair at the rear of her head. Due to the type of the vessel and its needing to have been easy to handle, the artist was presumably led to avoid attempts to create an articulate or emphasized coiffure in

<sup>109</sup> Although the “Sasanid ribbons” actually recall Hellenistic diadems with fluttering strings. For various examples of depictions of this decorative element on Sasanian silverware, see Harper 1978.

<sup>110</sup> See for example the depiction of Iranians in Cave I (Hallade 1968, pl. 127).

<sup>111</sup> Hackin *et al.* 1959, fig. 174.

<sup>112</sup> Hackin and Carl 1933.

<sup>113</sup> *Ib.*, pl. LIII, fig. 63. The wall paintings are considered of seventh century AD.

respect of the Princess' hair. Hence, the artist is likely to have decided for the simplest possible solution and has accordingly fixed the back of the tidy hair with a plait, which has been expressed by a pattern of convergent lines. Rather than a veristic device, the artificer may be seen to have implied in this plait the gathering of the long hair that otherwise could not have found space in the composition. It is notable that the same pattern used in the rhyton for the Princess' plaited hair, is commonly associated in the Roman world with female sculptural portraits of the second-third centuries AD, where it is used with the same purpose, although in more developed coiffures due to a lack of handling concerns. Additionally, such Roman portraits often depict a Hellenistic hairstyle similar to that of the "Princess", which was particularly in vogue after the Trajan Epoch.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

At this point, it might be possible to sum up the following considerations: first of all, the Cleveland rhyton displays in its lower part (*i.e.* the Indian buffalo) a style that is clearly of Hellenistic ascendancy, a characteristic which echoes the Gandhāra *koiné*.<sup>114</sup> Secondly, the female head in its upper portion (depicting an Indian woman) is stylistically akin, considering also the different medium, to stucco specimens from the sites of Taxila and Hadda, ascribed to the fifth-early sixth century AD which show an early stylistic "indianization" leaning towards the so called Gupta Style. Thirdly, the style of the rhyton is in general different from that which is possible to observe in the Afghan coroplastic production of the seventh-eighth centuries AD (*e.g.* Fondukistān and Tapa Sardār Late Period).<sup>115</sup> It also differs from the seventh-eight

<sup>114</sup> The only area in which a local Hellenistic tradition developed since Alexander, was strengthened by the Seleucids and by later western contributions and lasted at least up to the fifth century AD is the so called Greater Gandhāra Area. The art of Gandhāra chose and preserved the Hellenistic language to express its religious concepts and ideas. Sogdiana, although probably involved in an early Hellenization similar to that of Bactriana, was apparently interested in a later wave of influences from the Late-Gandhāran world (see for instance the artistic output of the famous wall paintings and crafts of Pendjikent). As far as I know, there is no documentation about any proper Hellenistic pieces of art in Sogdiana relative to the fourth-sixth centuries AD (such as the "Genius with Flowers" or the Heracles Vajrapāni of Hadda above mentioned), but instead only evidence on some formal elements loaned from the south (see *e.g.* Grenet 2006), and others certainly locally developed.

<sup>115</sup> The Durga of Tapa Sardār (Late Period, eighth century AD – Taddei 1973; Silvi Antonini 2005) has been recently compared with the Cleveland rhyton's female head by Jäger (2006, p. 191). As argued in the present article, under the stylistical point of view the two specimens are definitely different (*e.g.* shape of the eyes, shape of the eyebrows, mouth etc.) and probably separated by a period of more than two centuries. Cf. also the Maisha's head belonging to the same unbaked-clay modelled group (Taddei 1973, pl. 15.4) with the Indian buffalo of

centuries AD style of Kashmir (*e.g.* Ushkur), which witnesses a style originating from the same Gandhāran sources but already independently developed. Besides, the Middle Persian inscription scratched before *cs.* 700 AD on the back of the silver beaker, directly over the incised "Sasanid ribbons", remains a valuable *terminus ante quem*. Hence, the dating originally advanced by Shepherd, *viz.* the fifth-sixth centuries AD, seems a justifiable estimate although it needs further supporting evidence. In contrast, the eighth century AD attribution indicated by Carter, seems arbitrary and is at best merely based on parallels with the post-Gandhāran style exemplified by Fondukistān, which by definition has incorporated in its unbaked-clay production few of those Gandhāran-Hellenistic reminiscences (evident instead in the rhyton), and more of that late Gandhāran aesthetic values often associated with a pervasive "Gupta" taste.

To support the aforesaid iconographic and stylistic ground for the dating of the piece, one must take into account, as Göbl suggested years ago, the numismatic evidence of the Iranian Nezaks, rulers of Kāpiśa-Kabul and Ghazni region. This is all the more important in view of recent numismatic studies<sup>116</sup> which have supported Göbl's hypothetical chronology for the "Classical Nezak" numismatic type. Specifically, two mints in Kāpiśa and Ghazni have issued respectively types 217, 221 around 484-490 AD and types 222, 198 around 500-515 AD.<sup>117</sup> Therefore, the Nezaks' winged crown, with an Indian buffalo's head crest, seems to have been created in the late fifth – beginning of the sixth century AD in Afghan territory.

K. Vondrovec in his recent study of the Nezak coinage, assumed *ex hypothesi* that the buffalo crown monetary type 198 continued to be used by its creators, the Nezaks, for a century, and that it was thereafter reissued by the Alhkon Huns, which ideologically (or for reasons of lineage) linked their rights to their predecessors. Thus, such "Nezak type" was struck until the early eighth century AD.<sup>118</sup> Moreover, it is known from Chinese sources that around 658 AD a golden crown in the shape of a buffalo was worn by the king of Kāpiśa,<sup>119</sup> and this was probably, according to the numismatic reconstruction, worn by one king of the Alhkon dynasty which had

the rhyton: the style is completely different. The Tapa-Sardār buffalo is instead, for instance, well comparable with two specimens from Brahmor, published by Goetz in 1955 (pl. II and in particular pl. VI). Interesting also to note that Taddei (1973, p. 211-212) considered the possibility that Tapa Sardār's Durga was "some local deity that has found an iconographical definition thanks to the emergence of Hindu cults in the area".

<sup>116</sup> Alram 2000; Vondrovec 2010.

<sup>117</sup> *Supra* note 10.

<sup>118</sup> Vondrovec 2010.

<sup>119</sup> *Ib.*; see also *supra* note 36.

followed the Nezaks. Hence, it is confirmed that a peculiar “buffalo crown” existed and that it was an “Afghan” creation.

The buffalo on the Nezak coinage, surmounting the diadem of the kings on Kabul-Kāpiśa types 198 and 222, also attests to a clear attempt by the engraver to indicate through simple crossed lines the anatomy of the bovine’s head (and these lines appear like bridles and bit in the small incision) (Fig. II, E).<sup>120</sup> The same animal’s facial muscles are also attested in the rhyton’s buffalo head, as well as in some analogous heads of metal rhyta of Hellenistic time and finally in some Greek pottery animal head vases of the late fifth century BC.<sup>121</sup> In accordance with these observations, it seems possible to suggest that the rhyton’s buffalo may indeed be a smaller scale replica of the actual golden Nezak crown, which is another object likely to have been made in the same repoussé technique.<sup>122</sup> Although the Chinese eyewitness saw this crown only in AD 658, this particular evidence does not affect the hypothesis that this golden object originated in the sixth century AD or earlier; rather it is quite possible that this symbol of dynastic power had been inherited for hundreds of years. Similarly the Italian *Corona Ferrea*, which was made in the late sixth century AD, survived all the vicissitudes of the Italian peninsula (Napoleon and the Second World War included) until our days, for 1400 years, and was still used as the Crown of Italy until 1946, when finally the country became a Republic.

Be that as it may, apart from the iconography and style of the buffalo itself, other elements of the rhyton bear a striking similarity to the Nezak symbolic system: for instance, the crescent (with three pellets) gilded in the forehead of the rhyton’s female head may be found in the Nezak crown as a central element; similarly, the “Sasanid ribbons” which are incised on the back of the rhyton (partially covered with the Persian inscription) are once again attested in the iconography of the Nezak, fluttering from their neck and not as part of the diadem itself. The two rosettes or “chakras” which fill the disk-earring of the Cleveland head seem to further correspond with the two big radiated wheels on the *verso* of the Nezak emissions, which are copied from Sasanid models but in the

<sup>120</sup> Unlikely the animal is represented as harnessed.

<sup>121</sup> These facial muscles are schematically indicated by different faceting on the toreutic specimens which follow the same scheme of the numismatic representation.

<sup>122</sup> It is worth of mention the silver debasement of which was subject the Nezak coinage during its use: in particular type 198, passed from a pure silver composition to copper flan around 658 AD (Vondrovec 2010, p. 178). This information could hint to the possibility that available silver resources became scarce in the Ghazni-Kabul area at a certain later time from the first emissions. In the light of this datum, being the rhyton made of pure silver, it might be hypothetically inferred that the vessel should not be contemporaneous with the latest phases of the Nezak coinage of the seventh-early eighth century AD.

Nezak coinage emphasized and characteristic.<sup>123</sup> The ribbons and the *chakras*, the buffalo and the crescent are all attributes – associated one with another – typical of the Nezak in their coinage and hence they are meaningful of the symbolism related to their power.<sup>124</sup> The only missing element of this “package” is the wings, which in the crown were possibly not made of metal. Therefore, because all these symbols also occurred in the rhyton (which was already tentatively identified with “the Angel Dvrspa” or “Durga the Buffalo Slayer”) there can be little doubt that this object has been the property of some exponent of the royal entourage or even member of the Nezak dynasty, and perhaps of the original lineage of the dynasty thus created between ca. 500 and 600 AD *i.e.* during the sixth century AD. In my view, for the same reasons related to the symbolism of the piece, the female head could be identified with a goddess of investiture in the track of an old Iranian tradition (such as that regarding *Nanashao* for the Kushans): in fact, the goddess literally emerges from the buffalo, and she is un-naturalistically bigger than the bovine to which she is associated and which remains subordinate to her<sup>125</sup>.

As described by Göbl’s, around 560 AD Xusrau I (531-579) led his Sasanid army against Afghanistan, and

<sup>123</sup> Vondrovec 2010, p. 170. The Indian disk-earrings worn by the “Indian Princess” reflect an Indian custom which spread in Gandhāra and Afghanistan since the fifth century AD. Similarly, and in contemporary with the disk-earrings fashion, when these last were removed, earrings were worn in the thus deformed ear-lobes. This is shown in the Ajantā’s paintings (where both female and male have deformed lobes and disk earrings are also worn by the personages depicted) and by the Nezaks, who show in their numismatic portraits an elongated and deformed ear-lobe probably by reason of the use of disks. See *supra* note 5.

<sup>124</sup> In general in Hellenistic times, from Greece to Central Asia, the (common) bull has been used with symbolic aims in several circumstances: *e.g.* Seleucus I *Nicator* (ca. 355-280 BC) in a renowned tetradrachm where he is depicted with an helm adorned by bull’s ears and horns (on the meaning and the ideological association with Zeus, see Erickson 2012); Menander *Soter* in his numismatic emission type 233 (160-145 BC) used as symbol for the *verso* of his coins a *bucranium* of clear Hellenistic iconography.

<sup>125</sup> The Rabatak inscription (Sims-Williams 1996; Cribb 1999) states: “Kanishka the Kushan (...) who has obtained the kingship from Nana and from all the gods”. See also Pugachenkova 1979, fig. 188: at Dalverzin Tepe a goddess with slanted eyes with terminal slits wears a headgear with a lunar crescent and she has three pellets on her forehead plus two dots on her cheeks, likewise the Cleveland head. The terracotta statuette is dated in the first century AD (but is probably later). See also a similar specimen from Khalchayan (Pugachenkova 1966, fig. 105). Cf. with the already mentioned female-headed “Parthian” rhyton from Nippur (*supra* note 80), with the specimen held in the Samarkand Museum, from Sogdiana (*ib.*) and with the four armed goddess depicted on a Chorasman silver bowl (Minardi 2013). On the possible identification of the Cleveland’s head with Nana, see Carter 2010, with also a discussion regarding the lunar crescent symbology. For a survey on Nana and its symbols in history, see Goodnick-Westenholz 2014.

defeated the Hephthalites with the cooperation of the Western Turks. Thus, the later addition of the Middle Persian epigraph on the back of the beaker may well have been inscribed in Sasanian territory<sup>126</sup> prior to the palaeographic *terminus ante quem* of 700 AD and after the Persian looting of the country, when a registration of the vessel for taxation, for instance, required the coarse and pragmatic inscription to be made for the purposes of indicating the weight of the rhyton, without much concern for its at that time past symbolic value.<sup>127</sup>

In conclusion, the rhyton is a piece of art – far exceeding the limits of pure craftsmanship – constituted by two distinct elements apparently very different in their style, *i.e.* the Indian buffalo and the “goddess”. It is true that there are no toreutic parallels available to which compare the specimen, although we might infer that the rhyton as a whole is an object which was created in a cultural environment evidently characterized by a strong Hellenistic background, partially influenced by Indian (*viz.* sub-continental India) aesthetic concepts. Therefore, in my view and sharing Carter’s opinion, the vessel cannot find its proper historical and artistic context if not within the territories correspondent with ancient Gandhāra.<sup>128</sup> With regard to chronology, the stylistic characters of the rhyton – and style is the only element which can help us in dating an object unfortunately without a context – seem to precisely indicate that period of time in which in the “Late-Gandhāran” area, the transformation of the Gandhāran-Hellenistic heritage, with the emerging of the new “Gupta” taste, has occurred. This artistic development can be set in the first half of the sixth century AD. Additionally, this chronology seems to match with the hypothetical timeline of the Nezak coinage based on the numismatic evidence studied first by Göbl, to which the rhyton, with its remarkable iconographic value, is evidently connected.

One final consideration in respect of the relation between the stucco production of Gandhāra and the rhyton ought to be done. As has been already noted, the Buddhist sanctuary of Tapa Shotor (Hadda) was abandoned, according to Tarzi, around the years 610-620 AD, and for this *terminus post quem* Nezak coins played the

major dating role.<sup>129</sup> The same *termini*, *i.e.* ca. the sixth century AD as the latest occupation of the sites, are attested for Taxila (Dharmarājikā, Lālchak, Bhamalā) as well as for Tapa Kalān.<sup>130</sup> In contrast, a *terminus post quem* of 689 AD is given in respect of Fondukistān, based on later monetary types. Hence, certainly still cautiously considering the numismatic evidence, it might be possible to sustain that the final Gandhāran stucco production – from these archaeologically investigated sites – and the rhyton are contemporaneous.<sup>131</sup> As I have already argued, in this connection the artificer of the rhyton would have been well acquainted with the style and artistic method of the crafts of Gandhāra. Certainly the different media have to be taken in due consideration as well as the fact that not much has survived of the sumptuous production of Buddhist Gandhāra. The Cleveland rhyton falls in an area in which the evidence is badly missing. This toreutic manufacture certainly existed, as also suggested by the gilded elements that are present in the stucco and unbaked-clay modelled sculpture of the Gandhāran stupas, and lastly by the Cleveland rhyton, which, although not a Buddhist artefact, nonetheless was made by a Gandhāran-Indian artist with a Gandhāran background for an Iranian lord.

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<sup>126</sup> On the Sasanian weight standard expressed by the inscription, Henning in Shepherd 1966, p. 315, note 4.

<sup>127</sup> Frye, cited in Brunner 1974, p. 109.

<sup>128</sup> Sogdiana, since Shepherd’s first thorough analysis of the Cleveland rhyton, has been considered by some scholars as the alternative place of origin of the specimen (*cf. supra* note 6). Although the ideological and artistic influence of Indian/Hindu art in Sogdiana is relevant (Grenet 2006, differently from the Buddhist one), this seems quite late and in concomitance with the vanishing of the Hellenistic heritage in Gandhāra. As discussed in this article, and following Carter’s opinion already expressed in 1979 (pp. 310-311), most of the *comparanda* with the Cleveland rhyton are from the Gandhāra area, and the vessel clearly shows its Buddhist and Hellenistic heritage, being or not the “goddess” represented belonging to a Buddhist pantheon.

<sup>129</sup> *Supra* note 69.

<sup>130</sup> In particular, at Tapa-Kalān, five Byzantine *solidi* of the fifth century AD, found within a hoard with various objects and 202 other coins, are a rather indicative chronological datum (Fussman and Le Berre 1976, p. 53).

<sup>131</sup> Additionally, as repeatedly stated in this paper, during the fifth – early sixth century AD western-style images were used in parallel with more “Gangetic” images in the decorative apparatus of the same Buddhist monument.



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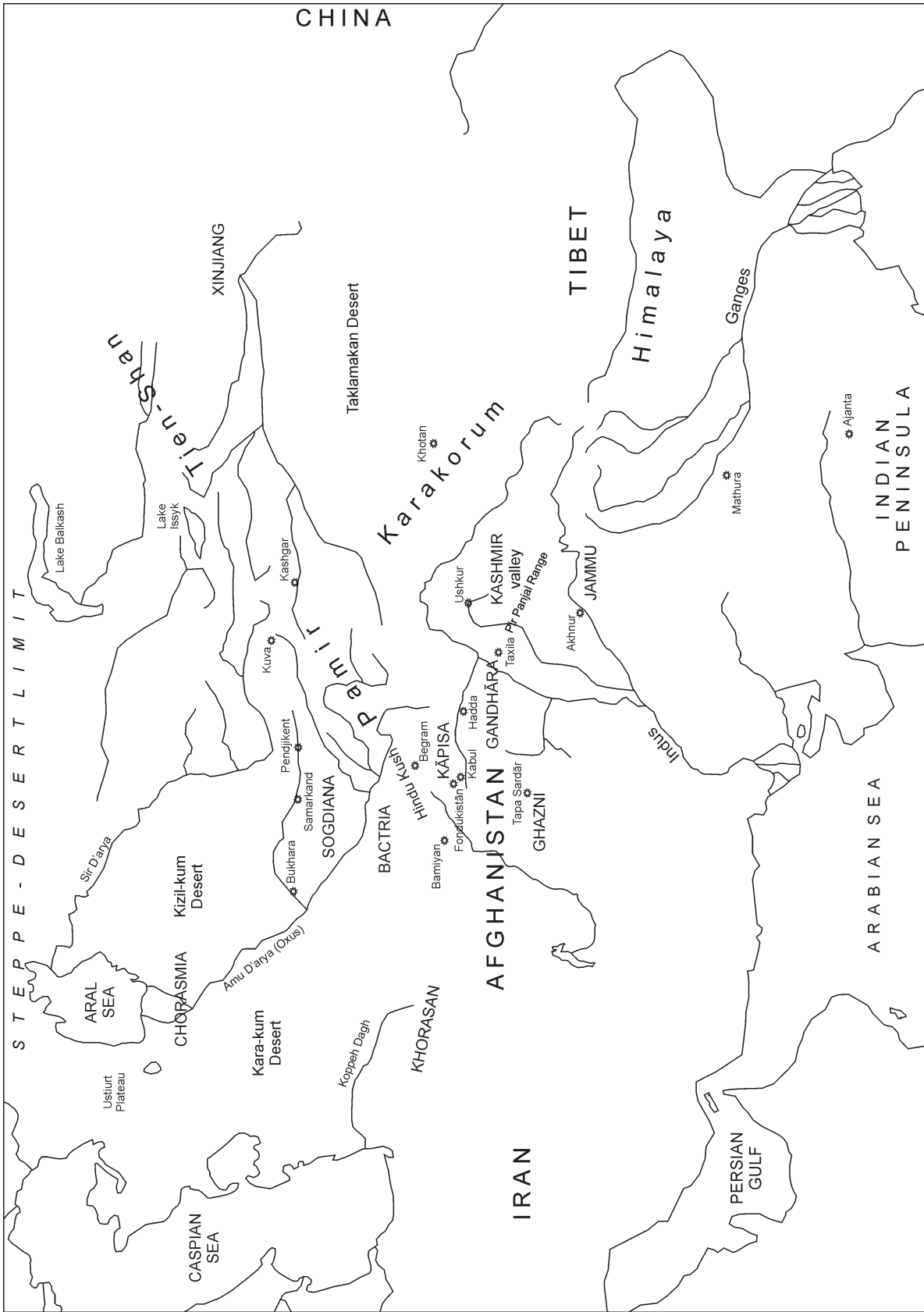


Fig. 1. Geographical outline of Central Asia and North-west India with location of the principal names cited in the text. Author's drawing.

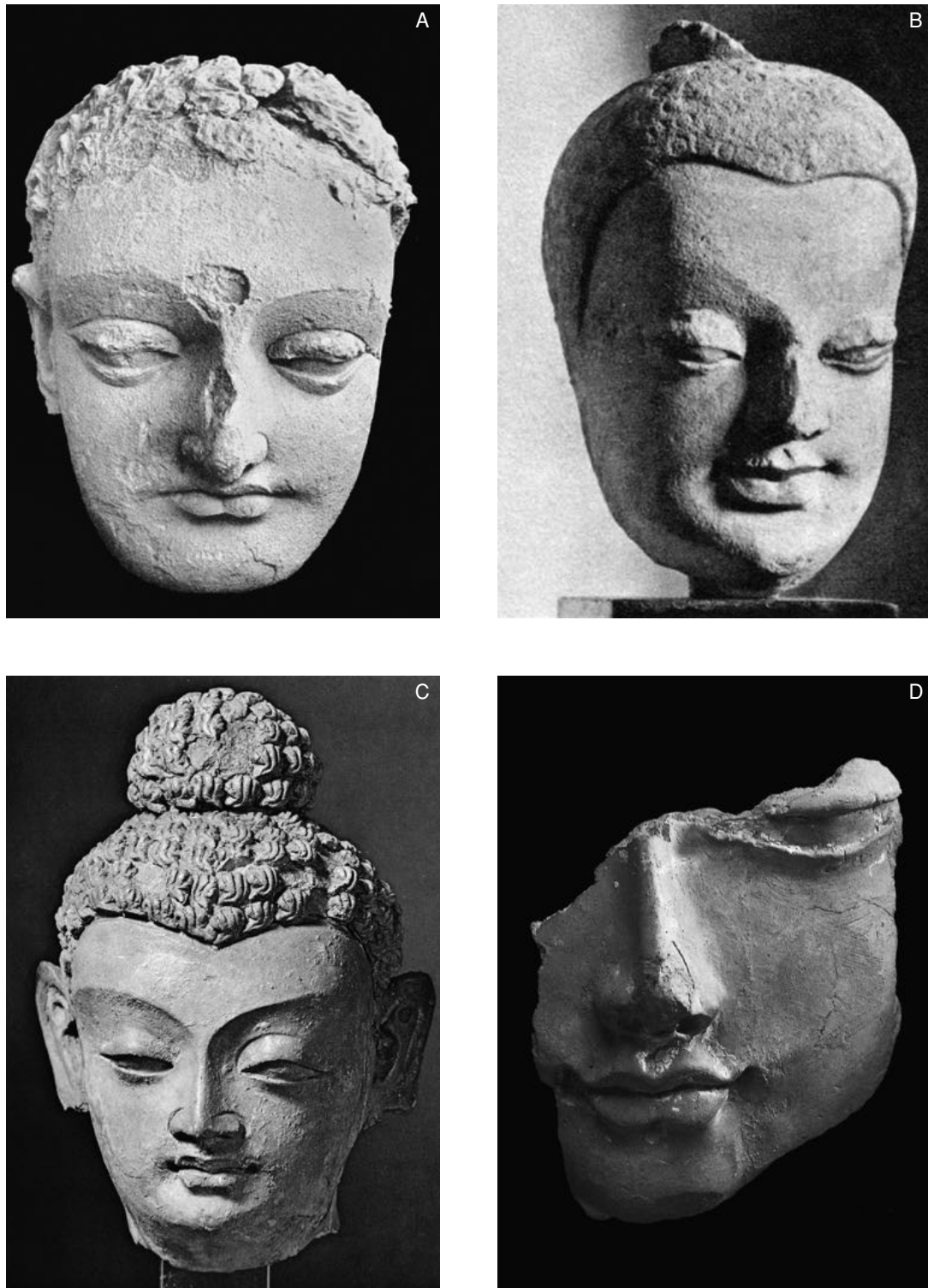


**Fig. II:**

- IIA. The Cleveland silver rhyton. Cleveland Museum of Art, USA (Leonard C. Hanna, Jr. Fund 1964.96). From Melikian-Chirvani 1996, fig. 13.
- IIB. The Cleveland silver rhyton. Cleveland Museum of Art, USA. From Carter 1979, pl. Ia b.
- IIC. The Cleveland silver rhyton. Cleveland Museum of Art, USA. From Carter 1979, pl. Ib.
- IID. Silver drachm of the Nezak dynasty, Type 198. End of the fifth century-mid sixth century AD. Afghanistan. From Göbl 1967, vol. III, tab. 43, no. 9.
- III. Detail of the silver drachm of the Nezak dynasty, Type 198: "the buffalo crown". End of the fifth century-mid sixth century AD. Afghanistan. From Göbl 1967, vol. III, tab. 96, no. 7.



**Fig. III:**  
IIIA. Detail of the Cleveland silver rhyton: the female head. Detail from Marshak 1986, fig. 190.  
IIIB. Unbaked clay female head. Sixth century AD. Ushkur? (Kashmir, India). From Taddei 1977, fig. 71.  
IIIC. Stucco female head. Fourth-fifth century AD. Tapa-Kalān (Hadda, Afghanistan). From Barthoux 2001, pl. 56.  
IIID. Detail of a stucco lunette. Third-fourth century AD. Tapa-Kalān (Hadda, Afghanistan). Detail from Barthoux 2001.



**Fig. IV:**

IVA. Stucco head. Fourth-fifth century AD. Jaulian (Taxila, Pakistan), Main Stupa. From Marshall 1921, pl. IV a.

IVB. Stucco head. Fifth-early sixth century CE. Dharmarājikā (Taxila, Pakistan), Stupa J1. From Marshall 1951, pl. 159 j.

IVC. Unbaked-clay head. Sixth century AD. Ushkur? (Kashmir, India). From Taddei 1977, fig. 71.

IVD. Fragment of unbaked-clay head. Third-fourth century AD. Khotan (Xingjian, China). From Seipel 1996, fig. 190.





**Fig. V:**

VA. Stucco head. Fourth-fifth century AD. Mohrā Morādu (Taxila, Pakistan). From Marshall 1951, pl. 15.

VB. Stucco head. Fourth-fifth century AD. Mohrā Morādu (Taxila, Pakistan). From Marshall 1951, pl. 15.

VC. Detail of stucco female donor. Fifth century AD. Tapa Shotor (Hadda, Afghanistan). Detail from Mostamindi and Mostamindi 1969, fig. 9.

VD. Stucco head. Fourth-fifth century AD. Unknown provenance. From Zwalf 1990, no. 629.



**Fig. VI:**

VIA. Unbaked-clay head. Seventh century AD. Ushkur (Kashmir, India). From Pal 1986, S104.

VIB. Stucco head. Fourth-fifth century AD. Tapa Kalān (Hadda, Afghanistan). From Barthoux 2001.



A

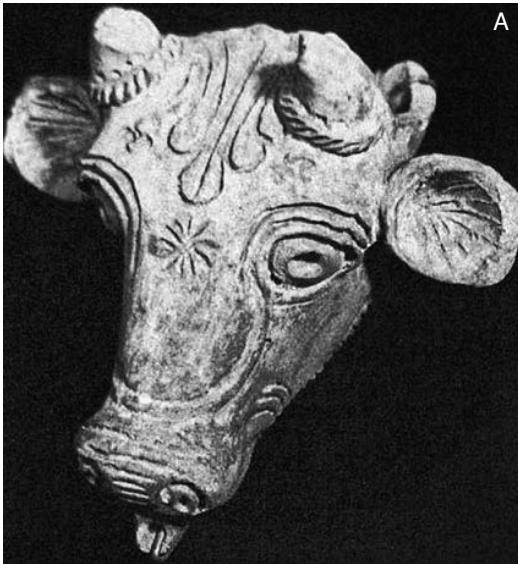


B

**Fig. VII:**

VIIA. Attic deer-head vase. Late fifth century BC. Greece. From Hoffmann 1970, fig. 9.

VIIIB. The Cleveland silver rhyton: the buffalo *protome*. Detail from Carter 1979, pl. Ib.



**Fig. VIII:**

VIIIA. Fragmentary terracotta rhyton. Sixth-seventh century AD. Afrasiab/Samarkand (Uzbekistan). From Pugachenkova and Rempel 1965, fig. 179.

VIIIB. Thracian golden rhyton. Fourth century BC. Panagyurishte (Bulgaria). From Marazov 1978, fig. 75.

VIIIC. Thracian silver rhyton. Fourth century BC. Rozovets (Bulgaria). From Marazov 1978, fig. 66.