



## ASPASII

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**ASPASII**, one of the tribal people encountered by Alexander the Great in Gandhāra, 327-26 B.C. (Arrian, *Anabasis* 4.23-25). While part of his army followed the main highway parallel to the Cophen/Kabul river (see A. Foucher, “De Kāpiśī à Pushkarāvati,” *BSOS* 6, 1930-32, p. 343, map), Alexander led a force over a more northerly route, crossing the various effluents of the Kabul. Passing over the Choes/‘Alīšang, he entered a region (modern Laḡmān and Baḡaur) geographically attributable to India and partly Indian in population. The Aspasi dwelt along the **Choaspes**/Konār river, which exemplified the widespread Old Ir. epithet and toponym \*Hu-aspa “having good horses.” This form is given in Strabo 15.1.26-27 and Curtius 8.10.22; Arrian calls the river “Euaspla” (*sic*), a name which has been taken as a half translation of \*Hu-aspa. The name of the tribe itself evidently has a “horse” theme; cf. the patronymic personal name Aspasianus (Polybius 5.79.7, a Mede in the Seleucid service; see Justi, *Namenbuch*, p. 46b). Strabo gives “Hypasii” as an alternate name of the tribe; and this has long been arbitrarily emended to “Hippasii” in order to furnish another half translation (so. F. Spiegel, *Iranische Alterthumskunde*, Leipzig, 1873, II, p. 564; cf. C. Lassen, *Indische Alterthumskunde*<sup>2</sup>, Leipzig and London, 1867, I, p. 502). Beyond the Aspasi were the Guraei on the Gureaus/Panjhora river and the Assaceni of lower Swat. The latter tribe has also been regarded as having a (Prakrit) “horse” name; but cf. Strabo’s form “Astaceni.” The texts clearly do not support any attempt to identify the Aspasi and Assaceni (as in Lassen, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 1031-32). The Aspasi are perhaps referred to in the *Mahābhārata* as the Aśvaka (tr. P. C. Roy, VI, Calcutta, 1887, p. 32; S. Sorensen, *An Index to the Names in the Mahabharata*, London, 1904, p.



8). This recurrence of the “horse” motif need not imply that these hillmen were horse-breeders; they may simply have continued to attribute important religious and mythical functions to the horse even after they had come to live in a region unsuitable to it (cf. the horse motif in the art of the Kafirs; see, e.g., K. Jettmar, *Die Religionen des Hindukusch*, Stuttgart, 1975, index).

The Aspasii lived in town settlements toward the river; like the later Paštūns, they used the hills as a refuge area and took positions on the slopes to gain the advantage in battle. Nevertheless they were heavily defeated by Alexander’s army. The Aspasii and their neighbors are probably alluded to collectively as the Gandhāla (Gandharians) of Aśoka’s Rock Edict V. 4 (*Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, ed. E. Hultzsch, 1924, p. 87). But this text by no means implies a thorough conversion to Buddhism of these independent frontier tribes (cf. W. W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, repr. Cambridge, 1966, p. 170).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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See also Tomaschek in Pauly-Wissowa, II/2, col. 1722.

W. W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great*, Boston, 1956, pp. 88-89.

O. Caroe, *The Pathans 550 BC—AD 1957*, London, 1965, pp. 37, 49-50, 55-56.

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