



KUSHAN DYNASTY VI. ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE KUSHANS: IN INDIA

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Coins of Kushan rulers, seals in Kuṣāṇa *Brāhmī* as well as red ware with stamped motifs or sculptural and architectural features associated with the time of the Kushans have been discovered at numerous sites south of the *Hindu Kush*, thus leading archeologists to identify “Kushan levels.” Yet the overall lack of attention that scholarship has given to archeological horizons has made it difficult to determine the actual characteristic features of Kushan settlements or simply of Kushan occupation levels. This general observation calls for a broad understanding of the term “Kushan Archaeology,” denoting the study of material remains produced during the Kushan period. Furthermore, in retrospect, knowledge of the Kushan dynasty and its material culture was often gained through archeological explorations and excavations, which were motivated by different research agendas, predominantly the search for Buddhist vestiges. As a consequence, discoveries relevant to both the Kushan dynasty in a narrow sense and more generally to the Kushan period are discussed here and are put within the context of the institutional history of fieldwork conducted on sites located in *Gandhāra*, the Punjab, and



the Ganga plain, namely, in regions that were under the control of the dynasty or of their feudatory states.

The history of Kushan archaeology south of the Hindu Kush probably begins in 1830 with the exploration of Mañikiāla (approx. 40 km southeast of Islamabad) by G.-B. Ventura. The mound, which was discovered in 1808 by [Montstuart Elphinstone](#) and identified as a Buddhist monument a year later by W. Erskine, yielded the coins of two rulers, Kanishka I and [Huvishka](#), found in the primary deposits. Through these coins, the Kharoṣṭhī legend of which was deciphered by James Prinsep, who had access to bilingual issues in Greek and [Bactrian](#) (Prinsep, pp. 313-20, pls. XXI-XXII), a new ruling family, the Kushans, became known.

The remains of the artistic productions that flourished under the Kushan dynasty, as well as the epigraphic and numismatic testimonies of their rule, were gradually exposed by the first participants of Indian archaeology. These, for the most part former officers of the Napoleonic army in the service of local Indian rulers (Lafont, pp. 331-43, 347) or officials of the [East India Company](#) and of the British Government of India (Errington, 1987), were often motivated by the search for the traces of [Alexander the Great](#)'s conquest or were following the itinerary of the Chinese pilgrims Faxian (early 5th cent.) and Xuanzang (early 7th cent.). The creation of the Archaeological Survey of India with Alexander Cunningham as the first appointed director in 1861 marks the progressive institutionalization of archeological research in the region (Errington, 1987, pp. 83, 189). The purpose of excavations was to feed the collections of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta and of the newly inaugurated museums of Peshawar and Lahore; by the end of the 19th century, the majority of sites known today were either identified or excavated; namely, the Buddhist monasteries of the Peshawar Valley (Jamālgaṛhī, Takht-i-Bāhī, Rāṇigaṭ, Kharkhai, Sahrī Bāhlol and Thareli), those located around Taxila (Jauliāñ, Mohrā Moliāran, Baotī Pind), as well as the Buddhist and Jain establishments in the vicinity of Mathura (Katra, Kaṅkāli Tīlā, Chaubarā) (Errington, 1987; see Asthana, pp. 33-48; Joshi, pp. 165-70). Unfortunately, despite institutional demands (e.g., circulars of the government of Punjab promulgated in 1851 and 1862), the exact find spot of the many sculptural elements, the coin hoards, and the reliquaries and epigraphic documents subsequently brought to light remain largely unauthenticated.

Excavations conducted at the turn of the 20th century are pointed out by Alfred Foucher. Driven by the study of Classical influence on Buddhist art



(Foucher, pp. 57-264; Filliozat), the French art historian embarked on a two-year mission across South Asia. While his travels in the Peshawar District led him to identify the Buddhist ruins of Mekha Sanda, Naranji and Shāhbāzgarhī, the authorization he received from the British Government of India to enter the Swat region allowed him to sketch a map of its Buddhist establishments, which was later supplemented by the work accomplished by Evert Barger and Philip Wright between 1938 and 1941 (Barger, pp. 102-24; Barger and Wright).

In 1902, the arrival of John Marshall as director general of the Archaeological Survey of India, thus succeeding to Alexander Cunningham, gave a new direction to archeological explorations. From then on, priority was given to the preservation of sites and artifacts and excavation became of secondary significance. New sites were nevertheless uncovered, some of which may be considered the most emblematic of Kushan archaeology. In 1908-09, the fieldwork led by David B. Spooner at Shāh-jī-kī-Ḍherī, on the outskirts of Peshawar, confirmed Alfred Foucher's identification with Kanishka I's great stupa and monastery (Spooner, pp. 14-23). The heart of the main stupa yielded a crystal reliquary and a gilded copper relic casket which bore an inscription in Kharoṣṭhī commemorating the gift of the object to the Sarvāstivāda Buddhist sect in the monastery founded by Kanishka I (Konow, pp. 135-37). Its lid supporting an image of the Buddha in the round framed by those of Brahmā and Indra, the casket constitutes, with the coinage of Kanishka I struck with a depiction of the Buddha (Göbl, pp. 786-89, pl. 78), the first documents which associate the Kushan period with anthropomorphic representations of the founder of Buddhism. In 1912, Sri Radha Krishna excavated a structure in Māt (50 km from Mathura), which is identified by an inscription as a *devakula* (deity-house) and which housed the portraits of Vima Taktu and Huvishka (Rosenfield, pp. 140-42; Falk, 2009, pp. 105-16) as well as a statue of Kanishka I. The latter is possibly a re-use of a former portrait of Vima Kadphises (see [KUSHAN DYNASTY ii](#)). The structure was imperfectly excavated and, although long described as a "dynastic temple" (Rosenfield, pp. 140-42), the nature of the cult is difficult to interpret. The data yielded identifies Māt as a royal foundation and excludes a Buddhist cult; this makes Māt the first temple of its kind to be discovered before those of [Rabatak](#) and [Surkh Kotal](#) (Verardi; Fussman; Grenet, pp. 209-10, 225-31).

Between 1913 and 1934, Marshall concentrated his efforts around Taxila and conducted digs at the Buddhist foundations of Kālawān, Dharmarājika, Giri, Mohṛā Morādu, and Bhamāla (Marshall, I, pp. 322-97) and at Sirsukh, a city



which Marshall believes to have been founded under the Kushan period. The archeological remains are covered by modern structures, so only the southern part has been excavated, thereby yielding a surrounding wall equipped with semi-circular bastions (Marshall, I, pp. 217-20). The work of Marshall at Taxila established a new phase in archaeology. Firstly, large-scale excavations programmed over several years became the norm. Secondly, although the notion of stratigraphy was still in its early stages, the dating system developed by Marshall, based on the distinction of masonry types (whereby the Kushan period would be represented by strong, semi-ashlar masonry) and their relative sequence, may be considered as a major breakthrough. Finally, the increasingly detailed reports provided extensive descriptions and photographic documentation and attempted to place the artifacts in their archeological contexts.

After the declaration of independence and the creation of Pakistan on 15 August 1947, archeological work fell within the ambit of the Archaeological Survey (primarily but not only) in India and of several teams in Pakistan. Excavations came within the scope of a scientific program and objectives set by each team.

With respect to India, the main concerns of the Archaeological Survey having been the assessment of the archeological importance of sites and the establishment of their cultural sequence, the levels dateable to the Kushan period exposed at Kauśāmbī, Hastināpura, Rajghat, Masaon, Khairadih (Uttar Pradesh), and Purānā Qilā (New Delhi), to list but a few (Mani, pp. 39-68; Ray, pp. 239-54; Jayaswal and Kumar, pp. 297-316), have not been systematically examined. Better knowledge was gained from excavations at Sonkh (Mathura District, Uttar Pradesh) and Sanghol (Ludhiana District, Punjab), the results of which have been adequately published.

The seven levels (levels 16-22) associated to the Kushan period cleared at Sonkh under the direction of Herbert Härtel (Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin, 1966-74) are characterized by a more-or-less densely built-up area of houses made of baked bricks measuring in average $37 \times 23 \times 5$ cm, which is considered to be standard for the period. Of particular interest at the site are two brick-built, apsidal temples associated with *nāga* cults, located, respectively, at the center of the settlement area and 400 m north of the main excavation field (Härtel, pp. 50-67, 86-87, 413-27). With regard to Sanghol, fieldwork concentrated on a large stupa and monastery complex (Archaeological Cell of the Director of Archives and Curator of Museums,



Punjab Government, 1968-74; idem, 1981-85; Gupta) and on the adjacent township of Hathiwara within the fortified walls of a citadel (Archaeological Survey of India, 1969-73; idem, 1978-85; Margabandhu, pp. 255-72). The large cylindrical stupa of an architectural plan following that of the *dharmacakra* “Wheel of the Law” and the 117 remnants of the stupa railing in red, mottled sandstone disposed in a pit within the monastic precinct constitute the most distinguishing features of Sanghol. Displaying a style characteristic of the Mathura school, these sculptures are the first belonging to that school found outside of the Mathura region.

The beginnings of the history of digs in Pakistan are closely connected to the Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan (IAMP), founded in 1956 by G. Tucci and under the aegis of IsMEO (IsMEO then, in 1995, merged with the Istituto Italo-Africano [IIA] into a new institute called IsIAO; see [ITALY xv](#)). Its aim is to reconstruct the history and environment of the Swat Valley from the proto-historic to the Islamic period. However, the magnitude of discoveries of the inaugural fieldwork of Butkara I (1956-62), a Buddhist complex, forced the director of the mission, Domenico Faccenna, to reconsider this initial program and to concentrate on the evolution of Buddhist architecture and of construction technique as well as on the stylistic study of sculptures (Faccenna, 1962-64; idem, 1980-81). The Buddhist sites of Saidu Sharif (1956-81; Callieri et al., 1989; idem et al. 1995) and Pānṛ I (1960-64; Faccenna, et al., 1993) were subsequently excavated, and the comparative analysis of the sculptures’ stylistic features, along with analyses of stratigraphic layers and of the few numismatic finds, provided the first, albeit broad, chronological frame for the artistic production in the Swat Valley. It was not before the 1980s that research priorities shifted to secular architecture, notably though the study of Bīr-koṭ-ghwaṇḍai (Callieri et al., 1990, pp. 163-92; Callieri et al., 1992). This settlement surrounded by fortifications consists, among structures dateable to the Kushan period, of a palatial complex, compact ensembles of dwelling units and a small Buddhist sacred area. Being situated within the built-up area, this stupa and Buddhist monastery (*vihāra*) displays affinities with that of Sirkap, an archeological site near Taxila, but is the first of its kind found in the region.

The northwest of the Peshawar-Mardan Basin became, from the end of the 1950s onward, the ground of the scientific mission of the University of Kyoto’s investigations. With the issue of the origins and diffusion of [Gandharan Buddhist art](#) and its relation to the West as its main concern (Mizuno, p. 81), the Japanese mission focused on the Buddhist complexes of Mekha Sanda



(1962-69; Mizuno), Thareli (1963-68; Mizuno and Higuchi, 1978), and Rāṇigat (1983-89, Nishikawa, 1986, pp. 69-104; idem 1988, pp. 81-193; Odani, pp. 831-41). Between 1995 and 1999 and again sporadically between 2000 and 2006, another Japanese team, that of Tokyo National Museum, operated extensive fieldwork at the Buddhist complex of Zar Ḍherī, probably best known for the 130 sculpted elements discovered in a monk's cell (F2) in the monastery area (Yoshihide, pp. 297-320).

The Department of Archaeology and Museums was created by the government of Pakistan in 1950, but the early years of Pakistani archaeology are linked to the Department of Archaeology of the University of Peshawar and to the work of Ahmad H. Dani, notably at Sheikhan Ḍherī (1963-1964; Dani, pp. 17-208). As revealed by numismatic finds, this city-site near Chārsaḍa, probably founded in the middle of the 2nd century BCE, was occupied until the end of the Kushan period. The house of Naradakha, a person identified by Ahmad H. Dani as a Buddhist teacher, is certainly the most interesting structure of the time. The residence, composed of a central courtyard surrounded by rooms on three sides and closed by a high wall on the fourth, housed Buddhist images, which include one of the few documented statues of Hāritī (Dani, pp. 28-31). Among the many sites brought to light by the Pakistan Department of Archaeology and Museums, Jinan Wali Ḍherī yielded the most remarkable finds. Work conducted from 2003 onward at this Buddhist complex located 10 km from Taxila revealed several fragments of mural paintings in the corridor of the monastery, the only Gandhāran examples besides those of Butkara I in the Swat area and Haḍḍa in Afghanistan (Khan and Mushtaq ul-Hasan, pp. 302-7).

The end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century are marked by a series of endeavors that respond to perceived gaps in the field of Kushan archaeology and which pertain to the opaque veil which covers questions of provenance and of chronology and to the dispersal of activity reports over diverse periodicals. Research on the individual or institutional archives of photographs, such as those of the India Office or the DAFA (Errington, 1987; Tissot, 1985, pp. 567-614; idem 1989, pp. 417-24; idem 1990, pp. 737-63; idem 1994, pp. 733-44; Cambon, pp. 13-28; Pons, pp. 100-40), and systematic compilation of corpora of unearthed material and workshops dedicated to a single site (Srinivasan) aim at rendering information which two centuries of archeological work has not always made accessible.

With respect to chronology, the work by Robert Göbl on Kushan coins (Göbl,



1984) and that of Harry Falk on epigraphic sources and on the *Yavanajātaka* of Sphujiddhvaja (Falk, 2001) have cast light on the disputed succession of Kushan kings and on the date of their respective reign. New readings of inscriptions or the analysis of numismatic data, particularly associated to reliquary deposits, have amended long-standing assumptions in the field of Kushan studies. The case of the so-called “Kanishka reliquary” aforementioned is illustrative. While [Sten Konow](#) attributed the donation of the perfume casket to Kanishka I, readings of the inscription provided by Harry Falk and Stefan Baums associate it with architects of the monastery (Falk, 2002, pp. 111-13; Baums, p. 246). Iconographic parallels for the image of the king on the casket and coin evidence, in turn, have led Elizabeth Errington to date the reliquary to the time of Huvishka (Errington, 2002, pp. 101-20). Relying on the examination of numismatic evidence for the dating of Buddhist remains, the latter has further emphasized the role of Huvishka in the expansion and consolidation of Buddhism in the region (Errington, 1999-2000, pp. 191-216).

Archaeology of the Kushan period would benefit from making use of other dating methods available in addition to numismatics. The relative chronology resulting from Bertille Lyonnet’s analysis of ceramic types from Central Asia lays a basis for a much awaited study of ceramics found south of the Hindu Kush. Radiocarbon dating technique, which was only tested on carbonized substances from Zar Ḍherī and Sheikhan Ḍherī, would complement and narrow down the chronological frame of relative chronologies based on stylistic assumptions in the field of Buddhist art of the period. Finally, aside from the “Archaeological Map of the Swat Valley Project” (IsIAO), questions relevant to the social, economic and political structures of urban settlements, administrative centers, and religious complexes, as well as to the (changing) nature of their relationships have been largely neglected, thus possibly reducing Kushan archaeology to the sum of unearthed material remains of a period (See also Kushan Dynasty ii).

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Abbreviations.

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