From Pella to Gandhara
Hybridisation and Identity in the Art and Architecture of the Hellenistic East

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with a foreword by
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The period following the Macedonian conquest of the Achaemenid Empire is traditionally considered one of the ‘dark ages’ in the history of ancient Iran. Very little is known about Iranian religions and cult practices during the time when Alexander’s successors ruled most of the Iranian world. We possess no Iranian written sources from this period and there are only a few brief mentions in Classical authors regarding Iranian religion or places of worship, leaving us with incomplete and inconsistent evidence. Some indications (Herodotus, Histories 1.131-132) date from the period before the Macedonian conquest, while others (Plutarch, De hide et Osiride 46-47; Strabo, Geography 15.3.13-15) are from the later period and refer mostly to Western Iran. The historians of Alexander’s campaigns do not compensate for this deficiency.

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1 The term Iran as well as the Iranian world/region as used in this paper reaches beyond the borders of the modern Islamic Republic and refers to the region from the Hindu-Kush mountains in the East to the Zagros ridge in the West and from Transoxania in the North to the Persian Gulf in the South, which in the 1st millennium BCE and the 1st millennium CE was inhabited by Iranian-speaking tribes and possessed common cultural and religious ancestry.

2 This situation has even led to attempts to discuss the religious situation of the Hellenistic period based on the Sasanian evidence: Hjerrild 1990. See a useful survey of the period, in: Frye 1984, 137-191; Boyce and Grenet, 1991, 3-34.

3 These fragments were collected and published by de Jong 1997 with extensive commentary. See also P’yankov 1997.

4 Thus, Diodorus Siculus (Bibliotheca historica 17.114.4) mentions that Alexander followed a Persian custom of quenching the ‘sacred fire’ after the death of Hephaestion. Curtius Rufus (Historiae Alexandri Magni 6.7.5) reports that the plotters against Alexander took oaths in the temple that was located in Drangiana in Seistan. See Boyce and Grenet 1991, 3-17.

5 The Rig Veda and the oldest parts of the Avesta (which are ascribed to Zoroaster) are generally dated, mainly on the linguistic grounds, around the second half of the 2nd millennium BCE and c. 1000 BCE respectively. The dating of the Avesta is, of course, bound to the question of ‘Zoroaster’s time’, see no. 12.

6 On temples in the Iranian world before the Hellenistic period, see: Shenkar 2007.


8 See: Shenkar 2007, 175-176. On recent important discoveries of sanctuaries in eastern Iran, see Rapin 2007, 39-42.

invoked. However, the reality is that Avesta, our oldest written source for the Iranian religion and the royal inscriptions of the Achaemenian kings, do not mention such a term. It seems that the earliest certain evidence for the existence of ‘fire-temples’ from which the ātaškada and dar-e Mehr (‘house of Mithra’) of modern Zoroastrians directly derives, is only from the Sasanian period. It thus appears methodologically unsound to apply this anachronistic term to Iranian temples before the rise of the Sasanian dynasty.

The same caution is probably justified regarding the term ‘Zoroastrian’ itself. Despite indefatigable scholarly efforts, the pre-Sasanian history of the Zoroastrian faith is still barely known. Of the beliefs and religious practices recorded in the Avesta, we do not know for sure what peoples, periods and places are reflected, nor do we know when Zarathustra, the great prophet of the ancient Iranian religion, lived and preached his teaching. What was the exact nature of his teachings and reforms and what was the place of his doctrine in the broad context of other Iranian cults? What were the stages in the development and transformation of Zoroastrianism into the dominant religion in the Sasanian Empire and to what extent did the religious practices and beliefs of the Sasanian period (recorded in Pahlavi literature) reflect those of earlier periods? These extremely important questions for the history of Zoroastrianism are not unanimously answered.

It seems more appropriate to use the broad term ‘Iranian temples’ to refer to temples found in the Iranian world in the periods before the rise of the Sasanian dynasty, and to suppose that they are connected to some various ‘Iranian cults’ whose exact nature eludes us, but of which Zoroastrianism as it is known from the Sasanian period onward was obviously a part.

**WESTERN IRAN**

**Persepolis**

Five temples may be attributed with relative certainty to the Hellenistic period: four in Eastern and one in Western Iran (Fig. 13). The temple in Western Iran called the ‘Frataraka Temple’ was excavated by Ernst Herzfeld in 1934. It is a large structure of the Seleucid and Parthian period.

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10 This name has been used for the fire-temple since the Islamic conquest: Boyce 1989. However see also Boyce 1993, where she claims that ‘dar-e mehr should have its origin in the Achaemenid period, despite its late attestation’.

11 On fire-temples in the Sasanian period see: Keall 1971; Boucharat 1990b.


13 ‘Leader’s’ or ‘Governor’s’ temple, named after the title (frataraka) used by the dynasts of Pars during the Seleucid and Parthian period. On frataraka, see: Frye 1984, 158-162; Boyce and Grenet 1991, 110-116; Wiesehöfer 1994, 101-136; Wiesehöfer 2001; Panaino 2002; Wiesehöfer 2007; Potts 2007, 272; Callieri 2007, 115-146.
1923 and is located some 300 meters north-west of the Persepolis platform (Figs. 2-3).\textsuperscript{14}

This mud-brick edifice consisted of rooms and corridors and an \textit{ayvān} (portico) with eight columns. In the central, four-columned hall, a stone base for a statue was placed close to the rear wall.\textsuperscript{15} The columns were of two types: one square and stepped, the other a typical Achaemenian \textit{torus} column, probably reused from the platform destroyed by Alexander.\textsuperscript{16} Square column bases are unknown in Achaemenian architecture.\textsuperscript{17} These, and the fact that the temple was not part of the royal complex on the Persepolis platform, strongly suggest a post-Achaemenian date.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{14} Herzfeld 1976, 275; Schmidt 1953, 56; Schippmann 1971, 177-185. For recent discussion, see: Litvinskiy and Pichikyan 2000, 226-240 and especially: Callieri 2007, 51-68.
\textsuperscript{15} See detailed discussion in: Callieri 2007, 56-62.
\textsuperscript{16} Schmidt 1953, 56.
\textsuperscript{17} Stronach 1985, 615-616; Callieri 2007, 53.
\textsuperscript{18} Callieri 2007, 64.
In 1923 Herzfeld uncovered two reliefs in the area of the temple depicting male and female figures in the position of adoration. They thought that they were connected to the temple cult; however, the reliefs in fact belonged to the temple depicting male and female figures in the position of adoration. Another find of temple cultic significance thought to be associated with the temple, but whose exact find spot is unknown, is a group of Greek dedicatory inscriptions, to Zeus Megistos, Apollo, Helios, Artemis and Athena. The excavators, Herzfeld and Schmidt, proposed that these are *interpretatio Graeca* of the Iranian deities Ahura Mazda, Mithra and Anāhītā. This reflects a desire among part of the scholars to equate Greek deities found in Iran as representing Iranian deities with similar characteristics and attributes. However, in most cases, when there are no further indications, one should be restrained from arriving at such identifications. For instance, without additional evidence, preferably epigraphic, we simply cannot know whether the Iranians considered Greek imagery to represent their own gods. The same holds true for the inscriptions mentioning Greek deities.

In the case of Persepolis, there is no evidence to support the identification of the Greek deities with the Iranian ones and the question of possible Greco-Iranian syncretism in the ‘Frataraka temple’ remains open. Its plan, lacking Greek architectural characteristics, suggests an Oriental cult, but the pedestal found in the *cella* is typical for Greek and Hellenistic marble statues, and fragments of such a statue have apparently been uncovered by Iranian archaeologists in recent excavations. Therefore it is possible that this temple housed a cultic statue of a deity whose identity is unfortunately not known to us.

**EASTERN IRAN**

**The Oxus Temple**

In Eastern Iran, the remains of four temples were found. The first to consider was excavated during the 1970s and 1980s by Soviet archaeologists at Takht-i Sangin in Bactria, at the confluence of the Vakhsh and Panj rivers. The excavators date the erection of the temple to the end of the 4th century BCE. It was a major religious centre during the rule of the Seleucid and Greco-Bactrian kings, until it was devastated by nomad forces in the middle of the 2nd century BCE. However, it was subsequently restored and continued to serve as a temple till the 4th century CE.

The temple stood in the middle of a massive *temenos* protected by four towers. Its symmetrical plan consisted of a tetrastyle main hall surrounded by L-shaped corridors and an eight-columned *avyn* between the two wings (Fig. 4). These wings concealed altar rooms in which layers of ashes were found. Outside, two monumental altars of dressed limestone, of purely Greek style and technique stood in front of the wings. Innumerable bones of sheep and goats were found associated with them – a practice wholly alien to Zoroastrianism.

More than 5000 artifacts of various kinds – votives, weapons, and objects of art, dating from the pre-Achaemenian period to the third century CE were uncovered in the temple, scattered all over its floors or dumped into many pits.

The most important cultic find, dated to the Hellenistic period (first half of the second century BCE) was the statuette of Marsyas playing the flute, set on top of a votive altar with a Greek inscription: 

\[ \text{᾽Ειδιγρ ὀδήθηκεν Ἀρτεμίσικος Ὀξὺ ('Atrosokes dedicated [his] vow to Oxus').} \]

In the same pit (no. 4, at the northern end of the corridor no. 2) a small female silver statuette (height 7.6 cm) was subsequently restored and continued to serve as a temple till the 4th century CE.

**The first two volumes of the final report so far published are dedicated to the architecture and the religious life:** Litvinskiy and Pichikyan 2000; and to arms and armour: Litvinskiy 2001. Another important publication which discusses the finds from the Oxus temple in the broad context of Achaemenid and Hellenistic Bactria is: Pichikyan 1995a and Litvinskiy and Pichikyan 1995b; Rapin 1995; Litvinsky 2000a; Litvinskiy 2000b. See also Wood, this volume.

**Descriptions of many of these objects are found in:** Pichikyan 1991, 160-172. It is an interesting fact that many flutes were found in the temple: Litvinskiy and Pichikyan 1995a, 149.
Fig. 4: The Oxus Temple (after: Litvinsky and Pichikian 2000, fig. 50)

mm, width 4.6 mm) was uncovered (Fig. 5). She is dressed in chiton and himation and her bended right hand is holding an object which has been interpreted as a pomegranate by Uzyanov. Only a small fragment of the headdress (probably a kalathos) has survived, suggesting that it could be a goddess.

Also noteworthy is a clay statue (height 35 cm, width 16 cm) of a youth with a quiver, resembling Apollo (Fig. 6), four korai who probably belong to the early Hellenistic style and fragments of a colossal bronze statue which probably stood on a plinth at the entrance to the ayyān. Of special interest are three heads made of unbaked clay which were found in the eastern corridor. Two of them, wearing a royal diadem, are apparently portraits of both a young and an elderly Hellenistic ruler while the third shows a bearded man with a typical Iranian headdress (kyrbasia).

The excavators proposed that the plan of the Oxus Temple is derived from the monumental Bronze Age temples of Syria and Mesopotamia whose main features are axial symmetry and tower-like façades. Despite the

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32 The statuette is discussed in: Uzyanov 1987. However, in the first volume of the final report Litvinsky and Pichikyan do not list this object among the finds of pit 4 in corridor 2: Litvinsky and Pichikyan 2000, 86-87, nor the article of Uzyanov is mentioned in their bibliography. The statuette was, however, published by Pichikyan in Zeymal’ 1985, n. 223. It is dated by Uzyanov 1987, 294, ‘not later than 2nd century BCE’ on stylistic grounds and according to the excavators, the latest object in this pit is the votive altar of Oxus with a Greek dedication: Litvinsky and Pichikyan 2000, 87. But in the previous publication of the statuette, Pichikyan, attributed it to the 1st centuries CE: Zeymal’ 1985, n. 223.

33 Uzyanov 1987, 291.

34 Pichikyan 1991, 181-182. B. Litvinsky argues that this statue represents a boy or Eros, and dates it on stylistic grounds to the 3rd-2nd centuries BCE: Litvinsky 2004, 69.


36 Judging by the preserved fragments of feet (65 cm.) the statue could have been as tall as 5 m. Based on the material, which is highly unusual for the local artistic tradition and on the stance (left foot brought forward) the excavators think that the style of the statue was Greek: Litvinskiy and Pichikyan 2000, 123. The finds from recent excavations indicate that the statue was probably four-footed: Drujinina and Inagaki 2008, 103-104.

37 They are identified as Seleucid kings by Pichikyan 1991, 189-194 and as Greco-Bactrian kings or governors of Bactria, kings’ philoi by Litvinskij 2003, 51, 55.

38 Pichikyan 1991, 194-196, calls it ‘a head of priest’ but there are absolutely no indications for this identification, as nothing seems to suggest a religious connection. Perhaps it should rather be considered as a representation of a donor.

39 Litvinskiy and Pichikyan 2000, 242-247. This is supported in a recent study by Korovchinsky 2007, 18-19. Victor Sarianidi 1996, 325 argued that some architectural features of the Oxus Temple are already found in the temples of Margiana dated around 1000 BCE.
close similarity between the layouts (especially the tower-like façade), it is difficult to bridge the chronological and geographical gap.

Tracing the evolution of the central, four-columned hall is of great importance in understanding the origin of both the Oxus and the Frataraka temples. An open-air altar surrounded by four pillars was part of the edifice of Jarkutan in Northern Bactria between 1400-1000 BCE. Such halls already appeared between 1000-800 BCE in Hasanlu in Western Iran. They are also frequent in Achaemenian architecture at the royal seats of Western Iran such as Persepolis and Susa. In recent years two Achaemenid sanctuaries incorporating tetrastyle halls were excavated at Sangyr-tepe and Bandikhān in Eastern Iran.

It is worth noting that four-columned halls formed a core for a number of religious and secular buildings in the Iranian world in subsequent periods, such as the Parthian edifices at Old Nisa, Mansur-depe, Nippur and Assur, the so-called āyadanā in Susa, the temples of Bard-e Neshandeh and Kuh-i Khwaja, which most probably should also be attributed to the Parthian period (247 BCE – 224 CE), the Kushan royal temple at Surkh Kotal (second century CE), the sacred complex of Dedoplis Mindori in Georgia (2nd-1st centuries BCE), the Chorasmian palace at Topraq-Qala (3rd-6th centuries CE) and the Sogdian temples of Panjikent (5th-8th centuries CE). A tetrastyle core also features in the temples of Sur, Sahr and S‘a in Hauran, Syria (1st century BCE-1st century CE).

Therefore it seems that the four-columned hall as an architectural element has a long history in the Iranian world and it appears not only in temples, as was sometimes claimed in the past, but also in secular and residential buildings. It is evident that in temples it was one of the central spaces of the edifice, but its exact function and the nature of the rituals performed there are unknown. In secular buildings the four-columned halls seem to have various functions, such as gates, assembly halls and probably even store rooms.

The altar rooms filled with ashes in the Oxus Temple indicate that activities and rituals connected to fire

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42 Hopkins even thought that the tetrastyle hall was an Achaemenid development: Hopkins 1942, 16-17. Colledge also assumed that this ‘type of centralized square’ hall was perhaps contributed by Achaemenid Iran’: Colledge 1986, 10. For the most recent discussion of the origin and significance of the columned halls, see Gopnik 2010.
45 This building excavated, in the 19th century, was for a long time considered a ‘fire-temple’ of the Achaemenid period: Schippmann 1971, 266-274; Litvinskiy and Pichikyan 2000, 209-216. However, it should probably be dated to the later Hellenistic-Parthian period and its cultic interpretation is very doubtful: Boucharlat 1997, 62-63; Boucharlat 2005, 242.
46 Ghirshman 1976, 5-55; Schippmann 1971, 251-258.
49 Rapoport 1994; See also: Grenet 1986.
51 Most recently: Sarianidi 1996, 321.
52 Pugachenkova 1973. This is also supported by the latest investigations at Takht-i Sangin conducted by A. Drujinina, who supposes that one of the altar rooms (5) was used as ātašgāh already from the earliest period, see Druzhinina 2010, 230.
probably occupied an important place in the temple cult.\textsuperscript{55} According to P. Bernard the evidence for the extensive use of fire in the altar rooms (layers of ashes) dates only to the Kushan (1st–2nd centuries CE) and later periods, and the original function of these rooms is uncertain.\textsuperscript{56} However, the excavators claim that it could be safely established that the altar, in at least one room, is contemporary with the wall, which was erected in the Hellenistic period.\textsuperscript{57} Water, the element associated with the river god Oxus, also seems to have had a significant part in the temple cult.\textsuperscript{58} This is not surprising, since fire and water played a major role in ancient Iranian religious practice.\textsuperscript{59}

Although the Greek altars, a statue of Apollo (?) and numerous donations of objects of Hellenic art could indicate that a Greek cult occupied a prominent place at the Temple of Oxus, the temple was undoubtedly also attended by the local Bactrians. Greco-Iranian cultic hybridization comes to fruition in the Dedication of Atrosokes mentioned above. An individual with an Iranian name made an offering to a god called Oxus, as attested by the Greek dedication inscribed on the altar. In all probability, ‘Oxus’ refers to the Iranian god Wakhš, an ancient Iranian name of the Amu-Darja River.\textsuperscript{60} The visual representation on top of the altar of the Greek Marsyas, also a river deity from Asia Minor (Phrygia).\textsuperscript{61} However, this representation did not become a standard iconography of Oxus, since on the coin of the Kushan king Huviška (150/1-191/92 CE), Wakhş (OAXPO) is presented as a bearded man with a nimbus surrounding his head and holding a staff (or perhaps a trumpet or spear) in his right hand and a fish in his left.\textsuperscript{62} It seems that by the Kushan period, the iconographic type of Marsyas playing the flute had been abandoned and forgotten (or, perhaps, the statuette from the Temple of Oxus is an example of the unique type which did not gain wide popularity), and the representation of Oxus was probably being modeled on the image of Poseidon as he appears on the coins of the Indo-Scythian king Maues (3rd quarter of the 2nd century BC).\textsuperscript{63} Moreover, in the Sogdian period, the probable depiction of the worship of Oxus in form of a horse is found on the Sogdian funerary coach, known as ‘The Miho coach’.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{55} The excavators decisively identified these rooms as ąvšgāh ('fire place'), repository for a sacred fire and ashes in a Zoroastrian fire-temple: Litvinskiy and Pichikyan 2000, 98, 206; Grenet 2004, 378.

\textsuperscript{56} Bernard 1994a, 86-90. As F. Grenet notes, ‘the facts were not properly registered and are now beyond recovery’ Grenet 2004, 378.

\textsuperscript{57} Litvinskiy and Pichikyan 2000, 105. However, much of the information concerning these rooms is ambiguous: Grenet (forthcoming b) n. 98.

\textsuperscript{58} See: Litvinskiy and Pichikyan 2000, 308-312.

\textsuperscript{59} Bernard 1994a, 109.

\textsuperscript{60} Litvinskiy and Pichikyan 2000, 313.


\textsuperscript{62} Rosenfeld 1967, 92, pl. VIII, 155.

\textsuperscript{63} Rosenfeld 1967, 92.

\textsuperscript{64} Grenet 2007, 410. The couch is kept in the Miho Museum in Japan. The discoveries of additional tombs of Sogdian merchants in northern China in recent years suggest that the Miho couch comes from Anyang region and should be dated to the second half of the 6th century CE. See: Marshak 2001, 233-244; Grenet 2007, 409-410. It is noteworthy, that one 8th century CE Chinese source even speaks of a temple with a remarkable statue of a horse which was located at the confluence of the

The god Oxus-Wakhš was apparently the chief deity of the temple.\textsuperscript{65} However, the cultic and constructional duality of the Oxus Temple (a pair of altars in the altar rooms in the wings, a pair of monumental altars in the courtyard, a pair of cylinder bases in the central hall) may suggest that another deity beside Oxus was worshipped in the temple. If the silver statuette, mentioned above, indeed dates to the Hellenistic period, one should not exclude the possibility that it depicts a goddess worshipped alongside Oxus, though any attempt to identity her is speculative at best.\textsuperscript{66} Stressing the importance of water in the cult of the temple, the excavators propose that the second deity of the Oxus Temple was the Iranian fertility and water goddess Anāhitā.\textsuperscript{67} However, her cult is not attested in Eastern Iran until the Kushano-Sasanian period.

The numerous finds of purely Greek art may be considered as evidence for the cult of a Greek deity, perhaps Apollo, who is possibly represented by the statue found in the temple. However, examples of non-Greek art (such as the clay head of a bearded man with a kybrasia), the dedication of Atrosokes and the very architecture of the building, indicates that the temple was undoubtedly a major religious centre for the local Bactrians. If we are to try to suggest interpretatio iranica for the son of Zeus and Leto, Mithra and Tir are the attested identifications.\textsuperscript{68} It is perhaps significant that the representation of Tir (identified by the inscription ‘TEIPO’) – on the unique coin of the Kushan king Huviška – shows him as a feminine youth holding a bow in one hand and pulling out an arrow from the quiver with the other.\textsuperscript{69}

Vakhš and Panj rivers: Grenet and Drège 1987, this might possibly reflect a survival of local traditions of sanctity related to the long destroyed Temple of Oxus: Litvinskiy and Pichikyan 2000, 315-316. For the discussion and interpretations of the motif of the horse in the Sogdian art see: Riboud 2003.

\textsuperscript{65} Bernard 1994a, 97-98; This is confirmed by a recently found Greek dedicatory inscription: ‘Seirimonos from Molparies, the son of Nemiskos, presented this 7 talents bronze vessel to the newly revived Oxus’: Drujinina 2008. It is plausible that Oxus-Wakhš was one of the most important divinities in Bactria. As late as 7th and 8th c. CE, several Bactrian documents name him ‘The king of gods’: Sims-Williams 2001; Sims-Williams 2003. He was a popular deity not only in Bactria, but also in other regions of Eastern Iran, as is indicated by many personal names containing the name of this god. The inscription on a coin of Andragoras, the ruler of Parthia, demonstrates that Oxus was probably worshipped in Parthia and Hrycana: Lerner 1999, 25. Wakhš was also very prominent deity in Sogdiana where many anthroponyms contain his name: Livshits 2004, 190; Grenets 2004, 377. Korovchinsky at first thought that the cult celebrated in the Oxus Temple was connected to Mithra: Korovchinsky 2001. However, in his dissertation he changed his mind and suggested that the Oxus Temple was dedicated to Oxus and the goddess Nana: Korovchinsky 2007, 18-22. See also: Boyce and Grenet 1991, 179-181. On Nana and her cult, see: D’Yakonova and Smirnova 1967; Azapay 1976; Tanabe 1995; Grenet and Marshak 1998; Potts 2001; Ambros 2003; Ghose 2006.

\textsuperscript{66} For instance, Uzyanov 1987, 294 identifies her as syncretistic Magna Mater, combining the iconographic traits of ‘local goddess of fertility, Greek Demeter, Aphrodite Urania and Anāhitā’.

\textsuperscript{67} Litvinskiy and Pichikyan 2000, 353.

\textsuperscript{68} See the comprehensive discussion and in-depth analysis in: Bernard 1990b, 52-62.

\textsuperscript{69} Rosenfeld 1967, 101, pl. X, 204; Bernard 1990b, 55, fig. 23. In Sogdian religious iconography Tir was probably represented as a four-handed deity holding an arrow: Grenet and Marshak 1998, 10-15.
Dilberjin

The site of Dilberjin is located in the desert of northern Afghanistan, some 40 km from the city of Balkh. The remains of a large, fortified city dating to the Hellenistic and Kushan periods were uncovered at the site by an Afghan-Soviet expedition during the 1970s. According to the excavators, it was founded by the end of the Greco-Bactrian era (c. 150 BCE), and existed till the 5th century CE.

The temple was erected in the middle of a temenos in the northeastern corner of the site, close to the city wall. Its plan consists of three discrete units: a cella surrounded by three corridors and additional rooms arranged on either side of the entrance, which was on the eastern side (Fig. 7). Benches were set up close to the walls of the side rooms and along the outer wall at the back of the central hall.

The excavations of the earliest stage of the temple did not yield any significant finds except for wall paintings of standing Dioscuri which decorated the western wall of the ayvān, flanking the entrance (height 2.15 m., width 1.60 m) (Fig. 8). The divine twins are depicted naked, with two white horses, and wearing their distinctive pylos hats. Based on its artistic style and on ceramic material associated with the wall, the fresco was dated to the end of the Greco-Bactrian period.

Several attempts have been made to reconsider this dating and to attribute the mural and thus also the erection of the temple to the Kushan or even later periods. On the other hand, if the paintings were indeed of the Kushan period, one would expect to recognize in their iconography the strong admixture of Iranian and Indian art which characterizes the period, while the Dioscuri from Dilberjin are ‘of pure Greek form and in a broadly Greek style’. Despite the fact that only one Greco-Bactrian coin was found under the earliest floor in the temple, the Greek style of the Dioscuri painting, devoid of any visible Oriental influence, and the ceramics, many types of which fit in well with the Hellenistic assemblages of Ai Khanoum, indicate that the construction of the temple was of the Greco-Bactrian period.

The bronze coin of king Euthydemos I probably dated between 235-200 BCE: Kruglikova 1986, 18.

The excavator, I. Kruglikova, emphasizes that the style and the technique of the painting is wholly different from the later period murals uncovered in Dilberjin: Kruglikova 1976, 81. On the technical peculiarities of the Dioscuri painting, see: Buryj 1976, 111-113.

Kruglikova 1986, 21-23. According to Bernard the ceramics collected from the earliest stages of the temple allow its dating to the Hellenistic period. However, B. Lyonnet specifies that this material ‘is not incompatible’ with a slightly later date, after the fall of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom: Bernard 1990a, 55.
The Dioscuri temple should rather be dated to the Hellenistic period.

It seems unlikely that the temple at Dilberjin was dedicated to the Dioscuri. This was a very widespread motif in Hellenistic and Greco-Roman art. In the Greek world, the divine twins were frequently described as ‘gate keepers’ and the location of the painting suggests that this could also be their function at Dilberjin. They are often depicted standing on either side of a deity; in the West, this would be a male supreme god, for example Zeus, while in the East the Dioscuri are more commonly shown flanking a female deity, probably connected to the moon.

Possible evidence for the cult of a goddess was found on wall paintings in two rooms excavated not far from the temple. The mural depicts a female head wearing a helmet, an image widely interpreted as Athena-Anāhitā or Athena-Arštāt. But there is no direct connection between these rooms and the Dioscuri temple and they are also dated to the later Kushan period. Thus the identity of the principal deity of the temple remains obscure. Although we can speculate that she could be the goddess Nana, the most important female deity in Bactria and Sogdiana whose connection to the moon is well-known.

It has been proposed to link the plan of the Dioscuri temple to the plan of the Ai Khanum temples, which I shall discuss shortly, or to look for possible prototypes in Bactrian secular architecture. It seems, however, that the layout of the Dilberjin temple is in fact very close to the Oxus Temple at Takht-i Sangin. The two temples are composed of three main units, a central hall surrounded by corridors and side rooms which open to the courtyard. The main difference between them seems to be the absence of columns in the Dioscuri temple, which, together with a dearth of valuable finds and offerings, indicates that it was a relatively modest building compared with the monumentality and extraordinary wealth of the Oxus Temple.

The temple of Mohra Maliaran at Taxila, dated to the 1st century BCE, could be attributed to the same type and perhaps regarded as an ‘intermediate’ variant between the Oxus and the Dioscuri temples. It consists of a rectangular cella with two columns and four additional columns set in an ayvān. Another interesting example of this architectural type is the Kushan palace/temple at Khalchayan which has two columns in the cella like that of the Dioscuri temple.

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80 For a survey of iconography of the Dioscuri, see: Azarpay 1988; Lo Muzio 1999, 46-49.
81 Boyce and Grenet 1991, 173. However see Bernard 1996 234, who thinks that the temple was dedicated to the Greek Dioscuri and Kruglikova 1976, 88 who proposes the identification with the Indian Aśvins.
82 Lo Muzio 1999, 46-49.
84 Kruglikova 1986, 110; Lo Muzio 1999, 58.
85 Grenet 1987.
87 Bernard 1994a, 96-97.
88 This layout is known also in other examples of Bactrian architecture, but it is not unique to Bactria as claimed by Rapin 1994, 136.
89 Rapin 1995, 284-287. Although a non Iranian cult, perhaps a Buddhist one, was celebrated in this temple.
of Mohra Maliaran and one row of four columns in contrast to two such rows in the Frataraka and Oxus temples.90

**Aï Khanum**

The remaining two temples dated to the Hellenistic period were uncovered during the French excavations at the Greco-Bactrian city of Aï Khanum, which occupied a strategic position at the confluence of the two rivers, Amu-Darya (Oxus) and its tributary Kokcha in northern Bactria.91

The city, whose name in the later period was probably Eucratadea, was founded by Seleucus I around 300 BCE and plundered and devastated by the Saka nomads invading from the north some 155 years later.92 It had a triangular shape (1600 x 1800 m.) and was divided into two main parts, an acropolis (60 m. height) and a lower town (400 x 1800 m.) where most of the public buildings were located. The city’s necropolis was located outside the massive city ramparts built of mud-bricks.

The architecture of Aï Khanum displays a blend of Greek and Oriental elements. Along with the gymnasium,93 theatre,94 fountain95 and a heroön of the city’s oikist (founder),96 – institutions characteristic of a typical Greek

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90 Pugachenkova 1966; Pugachenkova 1971. For the most recent survey, see: Bernard 2008 and especially Bernard 2009, which summarizes the research done by the DAI at the site.

91 Several final reports have already been published so far in Mémoires de la Délégation archéologique française en Afghanistan (vols. 21; 26-32) along with numerous preliminary reports written by the principal excavator of Aï Khanum Paul Bernard: Bernard 1966; Bernard 1967a; Bernard 1968; Bernard 1969; Bernard 1970; Bernard 1971; Bernard 1973; Bernard 1974; Bernard 1975; Bernard 1976a; Bernard 1978. The pre-Hellenistic name of the site was probably *Oskobora: Rapin 2005.

92 Bernard 2008, 87, 104.


city – a huge palace complex, residential mansions, and temples followed Oriental architectural traditions. What seems to be the principal temple of Ai Khanum was an almost square building which stood on a three-stepped podium within a wide temenos on the main street of the city, close to the palace. The exterior of its massive mud-brick walls was decorated with indented niches which gave the edifice its modern name – ‘Temple with Indented Niches’ (Fig. 9). The temple had a flat roof with a decorative cornice. A vestibule led to a cela divided into three rooms, a central one flanked by two smaller sacristies. Marble fragments of a foot (Fig. 10) and a hand were all that was left of a huge acrolithic statue, three times a man’s size, which once stood in the cultic niche in the back wall of the central hall.

Three mud-brick bases were found on both sides of a pronaos, close to the walls. It seems that mud and stucco statues once stood on them. French archaeologists have succeeded in reconstructing two ‘masks’ from the fragments, male and female, which may be attributed to the Greek sculptural tradition.

Another significant find at the temple was a gilded silver plate probably originally nailed to a staff and which served as a cultic standard (Fig. 11). A goddess that is generally interpreted as Cybele, is shown standing in a chariot driven by Nike and drawn by two lions across a mountainous landscape towards a priest in a Syrian-style outfit who is standing on a stepped altar, and is placing an incense burner on it. Another priest marches behind the chariot, holding a parasol above the goddesses. A star, the crescent moon and the sun-Helios are depicted above this procession.

Paul Bernard was of the opinion that the plate was imported from Syria, since the scene is typical for northern Syria and the priest’s garments resemble those of priests of Atargatis. Pugachenkova speculated that this scene could depict a true historical event – the transportation of a monumental statue of Cybele to Bactria. Although the plate was found in one of the smaller rooms of the cela, it remains difficult to decide if it originally belonged to the temple or perhaps was brought there later, after the temple was devastated and turned into a storage place. On the other hand, the remains of a plate showing a lion harnessed to a chariot were discovered in the Oxus Temple at Takht-i Sangin. If the plate from the Oxus Temple depicted a very similar scene, the relevance of the ‘Cybele plate’ to the cult of

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Fig. 10: Fragment of a foot of a huge acrolithic statue, ‘Temple with Indented Niches’, Ai Khanum (after: Bernard 1969, fig. 16)

Fig. 11: The ‘Cybele plate’, ‘Temple with Niches’, Ai Khanum (after: Bernard 2008, fig. 23)
the ‘Temple with Indented Niches’ seems to be reasonable. Moreover, it prompts important questions regarding the possible connection between the cults of the two temples.

It was noted by the scholars who discussed the ‘Temple with Indented Niches’ that its layout follows an Oriental or more specifically, Mesopotamian architectural tradition.109 Interesting attempts have been made to draw parallels with northern Syrian temples of the 3rd and 2nd millennia BCE but the chronological gap is too big to be effectively bridged. There is also a theoretical possibility that the layout of the ‘Temple with Indented Niches’ could be the Hellenistic continuation of a Bactrian architecture of the Achaemenian period, but examples of such architecture are still to be found.110

The prototype for the plan of the ‘Temple with Indented Niches’ could be the Neo-Babylonian ‘Temple A’ at Ashur.112 This distinctive rectangular, nearly square, plan of a tripartite cella, entered via a vestibule, appears in Mesopotamia also in a later, Parthian period in the temples of Dura-Europos (especially the Temples of Artemis and of Zeus Megistos).113 This indicates the continuity of this type in Mesopotamia. Probably under Parthian influence, a very similar layout also appears in three late Nabatean temples (Qasr Bint Firaun in Petra, Qasr Rabba, Dibon).114

The high-stepped podium on which the Ai Khanum temple stood is apparently part of the Iranian cultic tradition and is frequently found in Iranian architecture, the most famous examples being the mausoleum of Cyrus the Great at Pasargadae.115 The initial prototype behind these podiums could be the ziggurats of Mesopotamia and Elam,116 but it seems that during the Achaemenid period it was fully absorbed into the eclectic imperial architecture.

Despite the rich finds made in the temple, it is not easy to establish what deity or deities were worshipped in the ‘Temple with Indented Niches’. Fragments of a colossal statue that stood in the central hall should be interpreted as the remains of the chief deity venerated in the temple. The pure Greek naturalistic style of the fingers and a winged thunderbolt which decorates the sandal, suggest that they were once part of a statue of Zeus.117 However, some scholars have been skeptical about the possibility that a Greek god was worshipped in a purely Oriental building and proposed that a syncretistic Greco-Oriental deity was the lord of the ‘Temple with Indented Niches’.118 In his early publications, the excavator of Ai Khanum, Paul Bernard, cautiously proposed that it should be identified with Ahura Mazdā, as he is known in the royal cult of Antiochus I at Commagene.119

Vessels buried in the temple podium probably indicate that libations were part of the cultic practice. Based on that evidence and on the fact that on coins of the Greco-Indian king Helioclès I, Zeus is depicted with rays of light around his head, and during the reign of Hermæus and Amyntas he even wears a ‘Phrygian cap’, Franz Grenet suggested that in Eastern Iran Zeus was identified with Mithra, a solar deity who had some chthonic characteristics, and not with Ahura Mazdā, and thus Zeus-Mithra could be the god of the ‘Temple with Indented Niches’.120 Further suggestions seek to identify the Zeus of Ai Khanum with the Syrian Hadad121 or propose that a Seleucid king was worshipped in the temple as Zeus.122

A few more words should be said about the significance of Hadad. This Semitic storm-god was introduced in Iran at the beginning of the 2nd millennia BCE and became a part of the Elamite pantheon.123 He is mentioned in the Persepolis Fortification Tablets and was probably considered a native god by the inhabitants of Achaemenid Fars and its rulers,124 an example of the Iranian and Elamite religious acculturation, which was actually the Persian Persepolis pantheon.125 Therefore it would not be surprising to find Hadad worshipped in Hellenistic Bactria, but we do not possess any decisive evidence for this.

Together with all of these attempts at interpretation, it should be noted that the official pantheon of the Greco-Bactrian kings, as demonstrated by their coinage, mostly represents deities of a purely Greek iconography,126 and until a relatively late period we do not find iconographic

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111 Bernard 1990a, 52. Mairs (forthcoming), tries to find additional arguments for this.
112 Downey 1988, 67. For the description of this temple, see: Downey 1988, 149-151.
115 Strochnach 1978, 24-44. As well as Achaemenid enigmatic tower-like structures, Ka’aba-i Zardush at Naqsh-i Rustam and Zendan-i Suleyman at Pasargadae: Bernard 1990a, 53. On the function of these structures with a summary of previous scholarship, see: Potts 2007, 278-295.
116 Zournatzi 1993. However, see Ghirshman 1964, 222 who thinks that ‘The Iranian terrace derives from Urartu rather than from Mesopotamia’ and Boardman 2000, 53-61 who points out Lydian prototypes and Lydio-Ionian building techniques and features. For the in-depth discussion and evaluation of the architectural antecedents for the Tomb of Cyrus, see Strochnach 1978, 39-44.
evidence for syncretism and hybridization with Oriental gods and goddesses.127

According to some scholars, the presence of a small chapel in the temenos, various objects depicting females, and the ‘Cybele plate’ suggest that possibly another deity, perhaps a goddess, was worshipped in the sacred precinct of the ‘Temple with Indented Niches’.128 The available evidence does not permit us to safely establish whether this was Anāhītā.129 Nana,130 Cybele, Atargatis131 or some composite syncretistic female deity who combined the attributes and qualities of these Oriental goddesses.132 The situation is very similar to the statuette from the Oxus temple who, like the goddess on the ‘Cybele plate’, also wears kalathos.

Recently, new textual evidence of extraordinary significance has become available, which may shed light on the mysteries of the ‘Temple with Indented Niches’ at Ai Khanum. This consists of 4th century BCE Aramaic documents from Bactria, which have been translated by Shaul Shaked and Joseph Naveh. One of these documents mentions a ‘Libation for the temple, to Bel’.133 The existence of a temple (*ḥagima) of Bel in Bactria as early as the Achaemenian period indicates that a Mesopotamian cult and perhaps also Mesopotamian temple architecture were part of the Bactrian cultural landscape even before the Macedonian conquest, and could therefore provide an explanation for the architectural layout of the Ai Khanum temples and for the identity of the principal deity of the ‘Temple with Indented Niches’.

The syncretism between Zeus and Bel (under the name of Zeus-Belos) is a well known phenomenon in Mesopotamia, Elam and Syria.134 Franz Grenet has pointed out similarities between the appearance of Zeus on the coins of Seleucia on the Tigris minted during the reign of the Parthian king Phraates II (129-128 BCE) and the deity ÔOROMOZDO (‘Ahura Mazdā’, on two types abbreviated to ÔROM), on the coins of Huviška.135 Two deities are shown wearing a polos and if the ‘Zeus’ on a coin from Seleucia is indeed Zeus-Belos, as argued by Grenet, and not, for instance, Sarapis, whose cult is also attested in the Hellenistic East,136 the identification of Zeus-Belos with Ahura Mazdā may be considered a possibility. One Aramaic inscription from Arebsun (Cappadocia) names Bel as the brother and the husband of ‘Mazdayasnic religion’.137 Bel here is usually considered an interpretatio semitica of Ahura Mazdā.138 What gives this prospect even more weight is the substitution of Ahura Mazdā with Bel in a copy of Behistun inscription found in Babylon,139 which provides important evidence that the syncretism between these two deities might go back to the Achaemenian period.

It is very tempting, therefore, to connect the Bel from the Aramaic documents of the Achaemenian period, the ‘Zeus’ of the ‘Temple with Indented Niches’ and the Kushan ÔOROMOZDO into a continuous, uninterrupted tradition of worship of a hybrid Zeus-Belos-Ahura Mazdā in Bactria, spanning from the Achaemenian to the Kushan periods, but the current evidence might still appear too fragmentary and insufficient for such an ambitious hypothesis. However it is should be noted that the recording of libation (*zwtr*), as part of the cult of Bel in the Aramaic document cited above, may indicate that the vessels found buried in the temple podium were used in a cult of Zeus-Belos.

One can speculate that a local Bactrian population (or perhaps even a population of Mesopotamian descent living in Bactria before the Hellenistic period), settled in Ai Khanum by the Seleucid king, brought with it a Mesopotamian cult and took an active part in the construction of temples according to the Mesopotamian architectural tradition.

The second temple at Ai Khanum was uncovered some 100 meters to the north of the city’s fortifications.140 This ‘Extramural Temple’ had a layout very similar to that of the ‘Temple with Indented Niches’, and shows that the Mesopotamian plan chosen for the main temple was not accidental (Fig. 12). Like the ‘Temple with Indented Niches’ it stood on a three-stepped podium and the exterior walls were decorated with indented niches. However, instead of a roofed vestibule, the ‘Extramural Temple’ was entered via an open courtyard. Three separate staircases led to three juxtaposed rooms. This layout is remarkably similar to the temple of Zeus Megistos at Dura-Europos.141

The ‘Extramural Temple’ was found devoid of any finds. It is thus impossible to establish who was worshipped in this monumental structure. It has been proposed that the cella, divided into three chambers, each entered via a separate staircase, might indicate a triad of deities, the possible contenders being Ahura Mazdā, Mithra and Anāhītā.142

In addition, a third religious monument was uncovered on the acropolis – a monumental stepped platform placed in the wide temenos, which probably served as an open-air

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129 Downey 1988, 73.
130 Korovchinskiy 2007, 4-5.
131 Franchet 1984, 124-125.
132 Korovchinskiy 2002 and 2007, 4, 9-15 thinks that she combined the characteristics of all these deities.
134 See for example, Downey 2004.
138 Boyce 1982, 275; De Jong 1997, 246, no. 35.
141 Bernard 1990a, 54.
142 Bernard 1990a, 75; Boyce and Grenet 1991, 172.
Fig. 12: The ‘Extramural Temple’, Aï Khanum (after: Bernard 1976, fig. 11)

It obviously belonged to the Iranian tradition of worship in high open-air sanctuaries known from earlier periods. Two cultic platforms were also excavated in Masjid-i Sulaymān and Bard-e Neshandeh in Elymais, but their dating to the Hellenistic period remains uncertain.

I should also mention a number of monuments once considered Hellenistic temples, but recent research and excavations of these sites have demonstrated that they should rather be dated to the later periods, or that they had no religious function, or both. The ruins of Kangavar and Khurha, located in Western Iran, were frequently cited as examples of Greek temple architecture in Iran. The first is now thought to be a late Sasanian palace and the latter a Parthian estate. The interpretation and
dating of the most interesting complex at Shami which has yielded significant finds of Parthian art is completely unclear. The earliest stage of a temple on the mount of Kuh-i Khwaja, for which even Achaemenid foundations were claimed, was later dated to the late Parthian or Sasanian periods.

To conclude: Iranian temples of the Hellenistic period (four in Eastern Iran and one in Western Iran) can be divided into two types:

1. The ‘Iranian type’ (Fig. 14), to which the temples of Persepolis, Takht-i Sangin and Dilberjin could be attributed, probably developed in Western Iran and originated in Achaemenian royal architecture. This type is characterized by a rectangular tetrastyle cela surrounded by corridors and flanked by wings entered from the exterior. Not all these elements are always present in each temple of this type; there are variations. The layout of the ‘Iranian type’ was never canonized, but its variants became widespread in the Iranian world and beyond (for example in Syria and Gandhara) in the Parthian, Kushan and even in later periods.
2. The ‘Mesopotamian type’ (Fig. 15) includes the two temples of Ai Khanoum and is characterized by thick mud-brick walls frequently decorated with niches, a roofed or open *pronaos* and *cella* divided into three chambers. The origin of this type is most probably in Mesopotamia where it can be found also in the later Parthian period (Temple of Artemis and Temple of Zeus Megistos at Dura Europos). The layouts of several Nabatean temples (Qasr Bint Firaun at Petra, Dibon, Qasr Rabba) also demonstrate close similarity to this ‘Mesopotamian type’ and it seems that they were influenced by it.

The layout of the temples shows that the Hellenistic rulers did not attempt to introduce uniform ‘state’ temple architecture or cult in their kingdoms. It seems they simply followed the religious policies of their predecessors, the Achaemenians. As in the earlier periods, there are more temples in Eastern than in Western Iran, suggesting that throughout antiquity the peoples of Western Iran (Medians, Persians etc.) probably tended to practice their cults in high places under the open sky. The reasons for this difference between the cult practices of the peoples of Eastern and Western Iran still remain to be discovered.

The Greco-Macedonian conquest of Iran had an interesting and controversial impact on temple architecture. The influence of Greek architectural tradition on Iranian temples was apparently limited to a
number of decorative elements. It is significant that the plans of all five temples discussed here were taken from the repertoire of Oriental architectural types, and that they all were built using local construction techniques which were characterized by thick walls made of mud-brick.\textsuperscript{155}

One can only guess what caused the Hellenistic rulers (if they actively participated in the projects and personally chose the plans of the buildings), whose culture, language and customs were predominantly Greek, to erect temples whose plan is entirely based on Mesopotamian and Iranian architectural models. They (at least the rulers of Ai Khanoum) were certainly acquainted with Greek temple architecture, as a heroon of Kineas demonstrates, but for some reason we do not know, they chose Oriental models.\textsuperscript{156} One possible explanation is that the architects who planned these temples were of non-Greek origin, versed in the Mesopotamian building tradition and

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{155} Pichikyan and Shelov-Kovedyaev 1989, 53.
\textsuperscript{156} It is worth noting that further to the East, a Jandial temple near Taxila did include a number of elements borrowed from Greek temple architecture: Rapin 1995, 287-291.
\end{footnotesize}
incorporated some elements of Achaemenian royal architecture. It is puzzling that the Mesopotamian influences seem to have passed over Western Iran and that they appear only in Bactria. Perhaps some cultural and historical factors still unknown to us, and not only the state of archaeological research in Western Iran, are responsible for our lack of clarity.

Despite the fact that the architecture of the temples is entirely Mesopotamian and Iranian, the majority of finds in them could be labeled ‘Greek’ or ‘Hellenistic’. The relationship between the ‘Oriental’ architecture and the ‘Greek’ objects, whose exact nature is still unclear, poses interesting and important questions regarding the Greco-Iranian syncretism and acculturation. In the present state of research it is clear that the Bactrian material in particular (as four out of five temples are from Bactria) reflects the coexistence, and perhaps also a merging, of a number of different cultural traditions — Greek, Iranian and Mesopotamian — and that these temples met the needs of the heterogeneous, multicultural population of Hellenistic Bactria.157

157 Lindström 2009, 131.
Bibliography


FROM PELLA TO GANDHĀRA


FROM PELLA TO GANDHĀRA


