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Dionysian Rituals and the Golden Zeus of China

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Dionysian Rituals
and the Golden Zeus of China

Lucas Christopoulos
Okinawa



Frontispiece. Imagined reconstruction of the golden statue of Zeus of King Xiutu/Soter, inspired by the silver tetradrachms of the Greco-Bactrian kings Euthydemos II, Pantaleon, and Agathocles, depicting Zeus holding Hecate. Drawing by Themis Dervenjas.

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INTRODUCTION

The Greco-Bactrian kingdom was founded in 250 BC by Diodotes I, who built fortified cities, Hellenistic as indicated by their social structure, religious cults, and administrative organization. Central Asian and Eastern Central Asian populations became fully assimilated into these new cities, adding elements of their own customs and traditions, resulting in a new and distinctive culture known as Greco-Bactrian.

One outcome of this new Greco-Bactrian, or Greco-Saka, culture is that the god Dionysos became one of the most important divinities in the Tarim Basin (explored in Part I), owing to the relationship his worship had to *chthonic* rituals and the annual rebirth of nature. Even after the arrival of Buddhism, the god continued to be worshiped in various Persian forms up until the Tang dynasty, keeping more or less the same attributes and functions.

The festivities and mystery rituals of the Monguors of Gansu–Qinghai and their ancestors, the Xianbei, are developed in parallel in the first part of this article, demonstrating their origins in the Hellenistic past. The war dances of the Xianbei were very similar to those of the Greco-Macedonians, and historical evidence demonstrates links with those in Gansu and Eastern Central Asia.

In Part II of this paper, the famous golden statue of King Xiutu from Gansu will be investigated, with the aim of discerning its real historical context. The discovery of the representation of the statue of King Xiutu painted in one of the Mogao caves of Dunhuang sheds light on this question and reveals an unsuspected presence in Gansu at the time of Han Wudi, namely, the Greco-Bactrians and their affiliated Saka (and Sogdian) troops. Linking these events with the twelve chryselephantine statues captured by Qinshi Huangdi about a hundred years earlier in the same region, we discover that a Greco-Saka (or Greco-Bactrian) kingdom, ruled from walled cities, was based in central Gansu and was first established by King Euthydemus I of Bactria. The implications of the discovery do not end here, as we will see, because it also hints at an alliance between the king of Qin (Ying Zheng 嬴政) and the Greco-Saka kingdom of Gansu.

Overall, this article takes Hellenism in the East as its main vantage point, a view that has been ignored by most historians, who are not willing to place it on an equal footing with other cultures in the region. In fact, however, Hellenism was mingled in Central and Eastern Central Asian history in

antiquity and should no longer be considered as merely a “foreign element,” as its influence on cults, arts, and festivities became part of local traditions from the time of the Greco-Bactrian conquests to as far as the Qin dynasty.

Part I. Tocharian Dionysos and Greco-Xianbei War Dances

τινασσομένους δὲ Βορῆι ἀκρεμόνας πελάσασα παρ' ἀμπελόεντι κορύμβω
αἰμοβαφῆς ἐλέλιξε κόμην εὐώδεα πεύκη. (Νόννου, *Διονυσιακά* 12.317)

The pine-tree, swayed by the North-wind, brought its branches in
among the bunches of grapes, and the fragrant leafage shook, soaked in
the blood. (Nonnos, *Dionysiaka* 12.317)

1. THE DIONYSIAN FESTIVAL 潑寒胡戲



Figure 1. Hellenistic silver-gilt plate from Gansu Jingyuan representing Dionysos sitting on a panther and surrounded by grape motifs and the twelve gods. Second–first centuries BC.

When foreign artists from the “Western Regions” (*Xiyu* 西域) began giving performances in China, the most “exotic” one, pleasing both Chinese emperors and local populations, was the “Pouring water, cold *Hu* barbarian festival” or *Pohan Huxi* (潑寒胡戲). It was also named the “Drunken calling-the-cold barbarian festival” or *Pohu qihanxi* (潑胡乞寒戲), shortened to *Qihan* (乞寒), *Pohan* (潑寒), or *Pohu* (潑胡). The festival was also known as *Sumozhe* (蘇摩遮), so called by the Chinese. *Sumozhe* is the Chinese phonetic translation of a foreign name: *su* (蘇) meaning “cleansing,” “to resuscitate,” or “to revive,” *mo* (遮) meaning “approaching,” and *zhe* (遮) “to hide from view” or “to conceal.” Together, the words mean: “The hidden coming of resurrection.”

Zhang Yue (張說 663–730)¹ composed five poems on the *Sumozhe*, and the first one traces its origins.

Mozhe originated from the West, beyond the Western seas,
Cloths of diamonds and jewels, beards of purple.
Having heard that the emperor's magnificence shone on the world,
They offered songs and dances for his pleasure.

Clad in embroidered clothes, turban, and cape of bejeweled flowers,
These heroic horseman proffered tribal songs in festival.
Splashing *Yin* spirit-water to bring the wintry season,
These year-end sacrifices drew in the cold *Yin* spirit, chilling the imperial palace,
As heroic songs and drums celebrated the coming of winter.²

The *Sumozhe* is described here as “originated from the *Hu* barbarians from the Western Seas” (*benchu Haixihu* 本出海西胡), or the “countries of the Western Seas” (*Haixiguo* 海西國), indicating that the ritual came from the Western (Hellenistic/Roman) world, as located there by the Chinese sources from the Han to the Tang dynasties.³ The “pagan” aspect of that festival demonstrates that it was a Dionysian type of ritual that came from Hellenized Central Asia and became mixed with Buddhist

¹ Zhang Yue was also named Daoji (道濟) or Yuezhi (說之). He was a famous and respected military general, a poet, and a politician originally from Luoyang.

² Zhang Yue (張說), “Five Poems on *Sumozhe*” (*Sumozhe wushou* 蘇摩遮五首), chapter 89 (All are Tang dynasty poems.), (*Quan Tangshi*; 全唐詩), p. 982 (*Zhonghua Shuju* 中華書局) (Beijing 1960).

蘇遮本出海西胡，琉璃寶服紫髯胡。聞道皇恩遍宇宙，來時歌舞助歡娛。

綉裝帕額寶花冠，夷歌騎舞借人看。自能激水成陰氣，不慮今年寒不寒。臘月凝陰積帝台，豪歌擊鼓送寒來。”

³ See Lucas Christopoulos, “Hellenes and Romans in Ancient China (240 BC – 1398 AD),” p. 38. *Sino-Platonic Papers* no. 230 (August 2012).

elements.⁴ In the *Wenxian tongkao*, or the “Comprehensive examination of literature,” it is mentioned that the *Pohan Huxi* was a festival originating from Sogdiana, where people used to splash water during the eleventh lunar month of winter, and that it had started in China during the fifth century AD.⁵

Dionysia-like naked festivities, or representations of Dionysos himself, are depicted in Sogdiana, Hellenized Bactria, and Gandhara on many silver plates and bowls or stone reliefs showing grape harvest festivals (Figure 10). The *Dionysia*, or *Pohan*, was a large public celebration, held in winter, that featured a procession of participants dancing masked, drinking wine, getting drunk, and performing theatrical shows. Horses and men were covered with extravagantly colorful ornaments, and men ran naked or disguised in the streets, throwing water and mud at each other in a joyful atmosphere, and, as in a classical Dionysian ritual, driving away the evil spirits.

In the *Zhoushu*, the Northern Zhou dynasty annals, it is mentioned that foreigners celebrated a winter festival in which participants splashed people with water on the streets of the city of Chang’an (長安), at the time of Emperor Xuandi (北周宣帝 578–579 AD).⁶

A casket found by the Japanese Otani expedition in 1903 in the northern part of the Tarim, next to the great Stupa of Subashi in Kucha and dating from the sixth–seventh centuries, has been described in detail in a substantial article by Astrid Klein of Leipzig.⁷ Six dancers and musicians are depicted on

4 Karim Abdullaev, “Les motifs dionysiaques dans l’art de la Bactriane et de la Sogdiane,” in *Afghanistan: ancien carrefour entre l’est et l’ouest : actes du colloque international au Musée archéologique 2003*, ed. Osmund Bopearachchi and Marie-Françoise Boussac, pp. 227–57; Sara Peterson, *An Account of the Dionysiac Presence in Indian Art and Culture* (London, 2011–2012).

5 *Wenxian tongkao* (Comprehensive examination of literature), chapter 148, Western armies, (*xirong* 西戎), Ma Dualin (馬端臨) (*Zhonghua shuju* 中華書局) “潑寒胡戲即乞寒胡戲，本出于胡中西域康國，十一月鼓舞乞寒，以水交潑為樂，武後末年始以季冬為之。”

6 *Zhoushu* (周書) (Zhou dynasty annals), chapter 7. Records on Xuandi (*Xuandi ji* 宣帝記), seventh day (*jiazi*) of the twelfth month of the first era of Daxiang. (*Zhonghua shuju* 中華書局) “御正武殿，集百官及宮人內外命婦，又縱胡人乞寒，用水澆沃為戲樂” (Beijing 1986), pp. 83–84.

7 Astrid Klein, “The Masked Dance Drama *sumozhe*: Proposal on the Scenes and Individual Characters Depicted on the Ōtani Casket from Subashi,” in *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference of the SEECHAC: The Image as Instrument and as Reflection of Ritual in Central Asia and the Himalaya: From Antiquity to the Present, L’Orientale, Naples, 5–7 November 2018*, ed. Anna Filigenzi, Constantino Moretti, and Charles Ramble. Series Maior, University of Naples L’Orientale, forthcoming.

that casket in a style similar to that of the paintings of the Kucha cave temples. Masked dancers and musicians are represented in a Dionysia-like festival that she associates with the *Sumozhe* (most probably the Indian *Samaja*, or theater), following Pelliot, who demonstrates that the Chinese names of *Poluozhe* (婆羅遮) in Kucha (*Qiuci* 龜弦), or *Pomozhe* (婆摩遮) in Karashar (*Yanqi* 焉耆), are ultimately identical to *Sumozhe* (蘇摩遮) or *Samozhe* (颯磨遮).⁸

Curiously, Klein does not make any reference to Indo-Greek and Greco-Bactrian traditions, seemingly forgetting about five hundred years of Hellenistic and Kushana existence in the region, and instead says the scene is to be understood as inspired by a “dramatic fertility ritual of the Turkic tradition.” Klein herself, however, clearly points out its Dionysian origin, yet, whether deliberately or accidentally, omits discussing it (Klein 12–13):

The Persian name *kusa* or the Turkic name *kösa nishin* were [*sic*] widely used to denote a festival in which a series of masked dramas presided over by a temporary king helped expel the winter.

Kusa is a folkloric figure of medieval and modern Iran represented as an ugly man dressed in rags, holding a cow (the symbol of Dionysos) in one hand and a fan in the other, calling for summer in the middle of winter. In medieval times, the festival was marked by the peoples’ walking in the streets of Persia, where this figure was seen wandering with a mule or a donkey in winter, drinking wine. People threw water on him, and in turn he threw mud at them while shouting “warmth, warmth!” The folkloric *kusa* festival is mentioned mostly by Islamic authors,⁹ and it is a continuation of the Dionysian rituals in Persia, considered to be a part of the national heritage and celebrated in the northwestern and central Iranian villages by Persian-, Turkish-, Kurdish-, and Lori-speaking populations.

⁸ Paul Pelliot, “Tokharien et Koutchéen,” *Journal Asiatique* no. 224 (1934), p. 104. Pelliot argues that *sumozhe* was most likely pronounced like *samaca* or *somaca* in Tocharian during the Tang period, and it was probably derived from the Sanskrit word *samāja*, i.e., a “theater” as a place of entertainment, as well as a “festive gathering” or “dramatic performance.”

⁹ Mas‘udi, sec. 1299; Tā‘ālebi, p. 647; Biruni, 1923, p. 224; *idem*, 1954, I, p. 264; *idem*, 1983, pp. 256–257; Gardizi, p. 243; Šahmardān b. Abi’l-Ḳayr, p. 39; Zakariyā’ Qazvini, p. 79; Demašqi, tr., p. 406.

Today these winter celebrations consist of men running in the streets of the villages, masked and wearing black ram or goat skins, their faces painted black, and holding rods. Similar carnival-like festivals with masks held in winter are known to have originated from the "black ram Thracian Dionysos"; they still take place in Greece. In northern Thrace, people dressed in black ram's wool or goat skins and handmade sandals (*tservoulia*), wearing white wooden masks, run around the village houses with bells hanging from their belts. Here the festival is known as *Apokries*, *Kalampaki*, *Melike*, or *Kalogeros* (meaning "good old man"). That festival is similar to the ancient fertility festivals offered to Demeter, and it is still practiced among the Monguors today, as described below.

During the festival, the *Kalogeros* is followed by other painted characters, and these visit the houses of the villages, where they are received with ouzo and food. Each housewife sprinkles the *Kalogeros* with *polysporia*, a mixture of grains run through a sieve. As a counter gift, the *Kalogeros* symbolically swings his phallus-like scepter, with a piece of cloth attached to mix the grains with water and earth, as he asks for water and rain and a plentiful harvest. The *Kalogeros* then plunges his scepter into puddles, soaks it with water and earth, and smears the participants, as they gather in front of the church and shout: "May the watermelons grow as big as the queen's breasts, may the maize grow as long as the king's prick."

They then sow the *polysporia*, with two young men taking the place of the pair of oxen yoked to the plough (Figure 13), and everyone appeals to the buried grain to come back to life. The *Kalogeros* is the male character, the rain-maker. Another man, called the *Babo* or *Baubo*, dressed as an old woman, holds a cup of "holy water" and sprinkles it on the men playing the role of oxen, while saying magical formulas. The two men disguised as oxen go to sleep as if under a spell, then wake up again. The *Kalogeros* sits on the plough pulled by the two young oxen-men.

In an action exactly like that in the *Carpea*-style fertility dance of the Monguors, a man representing evil tries to prevent the cart from being pulled by the two oxen-men, holding the plough so it cannot be moved. The evil man is finally vanquished, and the *Kalogeros* sits atop the cart as king, while the *Babo* plays the lyre and invokes the vital forces of nature. Then the ceremony finishes in front of the church, where the *Kalogeros* is abundantly fed, before the participants take him into muddy waters, where they "kill" him symbolically by immersing him three times. The *Kalogeros* is then

symbolically resurrected by the villagers' washing him with clean water before they dance all together in circles and eat and drink abundantly.¹⁰

Variants of the masked *Kalogeros* festival are held in Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, and Greek Pontic Anatolia (in the southern Black Sea area), where they are known under various names, such as *kukeri*, *momogeros*, *babari*, or *capra* (Figure 2), and as far as the Appenzell valley in Switzerland, where the festival is called the *Silvesterklaus* and celebrated on the thirteenth of January.

Akita prefecture, Japan, holds a similar masked festival called the *Namahage* (生剥), or “raw

¹⁰ Evy Johanne Haland, “From the Modern Greek Carnival to the Masks of Dionysos and Other Divinities in Ancient Greece,” *Narodna umjetnost: Croatian Journal of Ethnology and Folklore Research* (Nar.umjet) 49/1 2012, pp. 115–20. Note the continuity of this festival with the ancient *Anthesteria* (Ἀνθεστῆρια) held in Classical and Hellenistic Athens and dedicated to Dionysos during the January or February full moon for three consecutive days. The three days of the feast were respectively called *Pithoigia*, *Choëis*, and *Chytroi*. During the first day (*Pithoigia*), or “(wine) jar-opening,” people decorated the houses and the youth with flowers, the social order was stopped, and the Carian slaves were allowed to participate in the festival and to get drunk. (These were the Κάρεις, people of Caria living in Attica who were worshippers of *chthonic* Hecate, linked with the *Carpaia* dance. *Kares* meant also the “evil spirits” or the “spirits of the dead.”) The Athenians made a bull sacrifice (*Tauroktonos*) and welcomed the souls of the dead while disguised with masks of animals, funny faces, or figures of obscene genitals. A big mask of Dionysos lay in a winnowing basket (*liknon*) between two women who called the spirits of the underworld. Then they took the mask of Dionysos and raised it on a pole, and the women started to dance and to offer wine. During the *Pithoigia* day, libations to Dionysos continued, and, as the evil spirits and masked actors played and roamed the streets, the inhabitants smeared their doors with tar or with chewed hawthorn (*Crataegus*) or buckthorn (*Rhamnus*) to protect themselves against evil. During the *Choëis*, or “pouring,” big drinking contests were held, while a symbolic sexual union promoting fertility occurred between a “queen” (representing Ariadne) and a “king” (representing Dionysos) in the *Boukoleion* (the ox-herd's house) of the *Agora*. During the last *Chytroi* day, also called “the pots,” a cooked porridge (κόλλυβος/*kollyvos*) was offered to Hermes *Psychopompos* (Herdsman of the souls), so that he could come, guide the dead souls to the underworld, and bring back a good harvest in spring. The *kollyva* (κόλλυβα) is still cooked today during the commemoration of the dead in Eastern Christianity, similarly to the “Eight Treasures porridge” (*Laba zhou* 臘八粥) served in China during the *Laba* festival (*Laba jie* 臘八節), which occurred on the eighth day of the twelfth Lunar month (around December/January). The *Laba* festival was identical to those earlier described: by praying to the ancestors, chasing away the bad spirits, and preparing for the next harvest, during the Qin (and Han) dynasty from the third century BC, according to the “Book of Rites,” the *Liji* (禮記·月令) 中記載：天子乃祈来年於天宗，大割祠於公社及門閭，臘先祖五祀，勞農以休息. After the advent of Buddhism in China, the *Laba* festival was held, celebrating the “Enlightenment Day of the Buddha,” replacing the ancient religious festival of the dead and coming rebirth of crops with the figure of the Buddha and his “transfiguration” to light.

peel festival," on the fifteenth day of the new year. It is traditionally said by local residents to have come from China at the time of Han Wudi, who sent five masked demons (*Oni* 鬼) into the surrounding mountains, where they wandered around raping women and kidnapping children. During this festival, the masked *Onis* run around in the streets and knock on the doors of the houses, asking whether the children have behaved themselves in the past year.



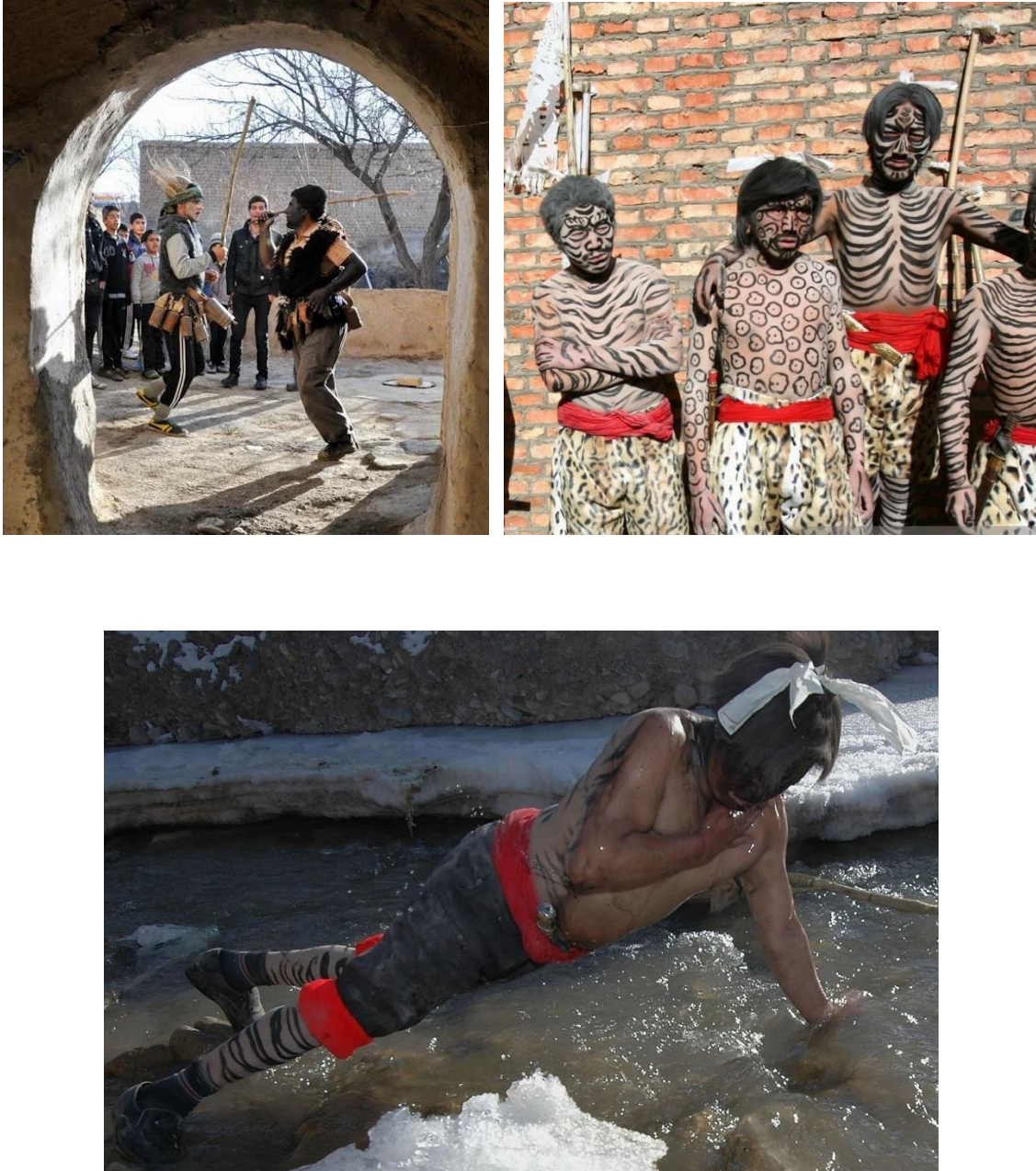


Figure 2. Top left: Greek/Thracian *Kalogeros* masked festival. Top right: *Kukeri* masked festival in Bulgaria. Second row: *Namahage* masked festival, Akita prefecture, Japan. Third row left: *Kusa* festival, Iran. Third row right: Descendants of the Murong Xianbei. The Monguor are painted with mud, coal, and ashes to represent tigers and leopards, in the white tiger purification festival, Nianduhu Village, Tongren County, Qinghai Province, China. Bottom: A Monguor participant, painted like a tiger, purifies himself by bathing in ice water, in a symbolic resurrection ritual.

All of these, including the Persian *kusa* and the Turkish *kösa nishin*, have the same origin. They come from the old Thracian/Greek festivals of Dionysos, as pointed out by Puchner.¹¹ We could also argue that other nations of the world also had, and still have, dances with masks, using them to connect with the world of the spirits. Even if they were not related to the Hellenistic world, as these all had a similar function: to connect with the dark or invisible world, the world of the dead. These rituals had, however, various "shamanistic" purposes, but for our study on the Tarim Basin, the continuation of Dionysos as the main figure for these ceremonials is important to investigate. It will help us to understand the historical origins and the meaning of the Greek drama, as the theater of the Hellenized *polis* in Asia brought a transformation in China by way of the Tarim, bringing new ceremonials with theatrical plays.

The scene depicted on the Otani casket shows dancers in typical Kuchean dress. The origins of these festivals are clearly Hellenistic, and they occurred at an earlier date in the Tarim, when the Tocharian, Sogdian, and Khotanese local populations became Hellenized, at the time of the Greco-Bactrians.¹² Then came the influence of the Buddhism of the Indians, Indo-Greeks, and the Kushana, all of which took place long before the invasion of the Göktürks in the region.

The masks on the Otani casket were inspired by ones found in Hellenistic Bactria, the faces on ceramics and statuettes of Yotkan (second–fourth centuries), the funerary mask of the "Yingpan man," and the masks found in Khorezm in Uzbekistan by S. P. Tolstov.¹³ Resembling a depiction of a dance

¹¹ Walter Puchner, *Altthrakische Karnevalsspiele und ihre wissenschaftliche Verwertung: Dionysos im Länderdreieck Bulgarien – Griechenland – Türkei* (Old Thracian carnival games and their scientific exploitation: "Dionysus" in the triangle Bulgaria–Greece–Turkey). *Studien zur Volkskunde Südosteuropas und des mediterranen Raums* (Vienna, 2009).

¹² The tribes that became Hellenized in the region were mostly Sogdians, Bactrians, Tocharians, and Sakas. The older Tocharian tribes from the Tarim Basin were in the same area, thus influenced by the same elements through the ages. Apart from the Hellenistic archeologic discoveries in the region, we note that the Tocharian language contains a few words of Greek origin. See J. P. Mallory, "The Problem of Tocharian Origins," p. 6. *Sino-Platonic Papers* no. 259 (2015).

¹³ Masks representing a bearded Dionysos with sheep horns and ears. Trudy Korezmkov *Ark.-etn. Eksp 11*, Ak Nauk, Moscow, n.208, 1958, figs. 63 and 94. According to Tolstov, this figure was similar to the fresco of Conon, in Doura-Europos of the first century, and a few centuries later, the "chess players" of Piandjikent (seventh century) led him to suggest that Dionysian rituals and festivities still took place in the Iranian world at that time.

from the “followers of Dionysos” or the *Thiasos* (θίασος), the central figure of the Otani casket is bearded (Figure 7), and, though Kuchean/Persian in its representation, the actor/dancer is most likely disguised as Dionysos himself, masked and with sheep-like ears. His appearance is sometimes compared with that of the Japanese mask of the “Drunken barbarian king” *Suiko-o* (酔胡王), or the “Drunken *Hu* barbarian” (酒胡子), that survived earlier in the Japanese theatrical rituals from the Tang dynasty and was represented as a Sogdian-like figure (Shoso-in 正倉院, Nara, eighth century). Klein (p. 17) argues a representation similar to King Shapur I (241–272 AD) and influenced by Sassanid Persia, but Shapur was often portrayed as a Greek hero on silver plates or bowls from Sassanid-ruled Bactria. The silver ewer found in Guyuan County, in Ningxia in 1983, in the tomb of Li Xian (李賢 502–569 AD), general governor of the Northern Zhou dynasty, was described as being of a Kushano-Sassanian or an end-of-Kushana era style (Figure 11) by Wu Zhuo,¹⁴ but instead shows a Greek mythological scene demonstrating the extensive Hellenistic influence and reference to the arts that seem to have remained in that area (Tarim Basin–Gansu corridor–Qinghai–Ningxia), for reasons that I will develop later. The scene does not represent a “Rome-influenced story,” as Wu Zhuo writes, but rather is clearly the “Judgment of Paris,” as the central figure is offering an apple to the goddess Aphrodites, and Hermes is depicted with his *causia* hat. Though Hellenistic-influenced, the figures do not have typical Greek features, and that silver ewer may have been made in Bactria during Kushano-Sassanian rule.

Closer to the “center of China,” the scene of Heracles capturing the Nemean lion is carved on the tomb of royal consort Wu (Wu Huiyi 武惠妃), dating from 737 AD, demonstrating that Greek myths and rituals were known by the Chinese of the Tang dynasty, and that Hellenistic imagery and references mixed with Buddhism were used by the Tang imperial family (Figure 3).¹⁵

¹⁴ Wu Zhuo, “Notes on the Silver Ewer from the Tomb of Li Xian,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute New Series*, vol. 3 (1989), pp. 61–70.

¹⁵ The figure of Heracles during Tang dynasty China was often used as a “tomb guardian” (*Wengzhong* 翁仲). See: I-Tien Hsing and William G. Crowell, “Heracles in the East: The Diffusion and Transformation of His Image in the Arts of Central Asia, India, and Medieval China,” *Asia Major*, Third series, Academia Sinica, vol. 18, no. 2 (2005), pp. 103–54.



图三



图四

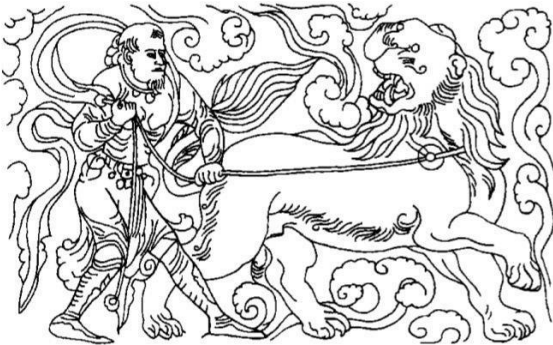


Figure 3. The god Heracles depicted as capturing the Nemean Lion (**bottom right**) and other mythological monsters borrowed from Persian and Chinese iconography. Perhaps a Chinese version of the double-headed Cerberus (**bottom left**), the Ceryneian Hind (**top right**), and the Erymanthian Boar (**top left**). The scene is most likely an early representation of the “Four Heavenly Kings” (四大天王). The four scenes are sculpted on the sarcophagus of consort Wu (737 AD), the spouse of Tang Xuanzong (唐玄宗 685–762 AD), seventh emperor of the Tang dynasty. Shaanxi Historical Museum.

Simone Gaulier demonstrates, correctly, that these rituals preceded the Turkish invasion,¹⁶ and to my thinking, Klein’s article, very solid and detailed though it is, does not reflect the broad and important influence that Hellenism retained in the regions where it earlier had shone.¹⁷ At the time of

¹⁶ Simone Gaulier, “Aspects Iconographiques des Croyances Eschatologiques dans le Bassin du Tarim d’après deux documents de Pelliot,” *Arts Asiatiques* vol. 23 (1973), pp. 165–84. École Française d’Extrême-Orient.

¹⁷ When I say “shone” I refer to “light,” “concord,” “cosmopolitan,” “universal,” as in, for example, the Library of Alexandria of

the creation of the Otani casket, within the Buddhist world of the Tarim Basin, the mystery of a human rising from darkness to light through art, science, freedom of thought, and exercise (ἄσκησις) was, to some extent, a continuity of the Greek idea that gave birth to individualism and the quest for excellence (ἀρετή).

Following the advent of Buddhism, as Gaulier points out, the syncretism of the worship of the Indian prince of the Yakshas, Kubera, and his principal associate, Pancika, together with the cult of Dionysos, were very important, especially in Khotan (Gaulier 133). In Turfan, later, the same worship was carried on, with the Yakshas bearing ibex horns as a Dionysiac symbol on their heads.

Gaulier explains that this “cult, popular among the Yakshas, was anterior to the conversion to Buddhism of its inhabitants” (Gaulier 172). Unlike the advent she proposes (attributing it to Early Christian-era Roman influence), it seems most naturally to be Hellenistic, originating in the plays and Dionysian religious festivals adopted among the local population from the time of the Greco-Bactrians and the Hellenized tribes of that area. One small winged Yaksha-Eros-style deity can also be seen on an Eastern Han dynasty carving, pursuing what appears to be a griffin, perhaps representing one of the “Western Regions” purification rituals associated with Dionysos (Figure 5).

The discovery of numerous ceramics from Yoktan depicting a bearded divinity and linked to wine rituals is mentioned as “Dionysian” not only by Gaulier but also by the Russian scientists N. Dyakonova and S. Sorokin (Gaulier 172). Wine cult festivals accompanying mysteries would have taken place frequently in the cities of the Tarim Basin prior to the Han dynasty conquest of the “Western Regions.” The various masks and ceramics showing figures of Dionysos indicate that he had an older cult very popular in Khotan—there is even a ceremonial *rhyton* representing him (Figure 5). Curiously, he seems—in contrast to his position in India—to have been considered an entity separate from Shiva,

Egypt, with its forty thousand scrolls gathered from all the Hellenistic world and made from different languages and sciences of various civilizations. The same happened in Gandhara with the Indo-Greeks and the local Indian science, philosophical and art writings leading to an enlightened man, not driven by a national or a doctrinal ideology, but on a very open and free path questing for knowledge and searching for truth and development among mankind. See the latest archeological discovery of Menandros's oldest Buddhist temple in the Bazira city of Barikot tehsil, Swat district in Pakistan, by a team of Ca' Foscari University and the Italian Archaeological Mission directed by Luca Olivieri. The massacres from the Indo-Greeks and the Greco-Bactrians were however also taking place, as with other armies, and they cannot be idealized, as no civilization on earth had ever expanded and spread its influence without blood and religion, even the Buddhist one.

as the paintings of the Khotanese artist Yuchi Bazhina (尉遲跋質那, or maybe his son, Visa Irasanga 尉遲乙僧), demonstrate. Bazhina made one painting of Shiva and then a separate one of what appears to be a figure similar to Dionysos (Figure 8), though having four arms and holding a cup of wine (or a wooden piece for rolling silk). This local god also found painted on another wooden tablet in Khotan has been interpreted by Erika Forte as the Patron Saint of Silk Manufacture and anterior to Buddhism.¹⁸ That Saint (god) was probably not only related to silk production, but also to harvest in general, and as a particular evolution of the former Dionysos, as he was older in the region. Julia Elikhina proposes that it is the mythological Persian king Avestan Yima/Jamshid, the first to teach humans industries and crafts in Persian mythology. The depiction of the god of silk and protector of silkworms is proposed by Elikhina to be connected: “with this myth about the first mentor of mankind who taught it how to work the land, smelt and forge metals, weave a weft into a warp.”¹⁹

The painting of Bazhina is more likely a representation of the mythological Persian hero Rustam, or Rostam (Persian: رستم), as recorded in Iranian Islamic folklore, and it recalls tales of past Persian myths. There is a Buddhist stupa named the “*Takht-e Rostam*,” or “Stupa of Takht-e Rostam,” in a monastery complex south of the town of Haibak in Afghanistan, built during the third–fourth centuries AD, while the area was part of the Kushano-Sassanian kingdom. The kingdom (*Koshano shao* in Bactrian: KOPANO PAO) emerged in Bactria, Sogdiana, and Gandhara after the Sassanid Persians took control in these regions over the Kushans in 225 AD. The local Greco-Bactrian and Kushan gods and Buddhist divinities started to be modified, represented or mixed in with Persian forms and connected with Persian mythology. The resulting transformation added elements to the existing Hellenistic or Indian representations.

Nicholas Sims Williams discovered Rostam’s personal name in a document written during the Kushano-Sassanid rule in a Greco-Bactrian script dating from the fourth century: *Purlang-zin* (πορλαγγοζινο). *Purlang-zin* means “the man with the leopard’s skin,” and it represents “a clear reference

¹⁸ Erika Forte, “Images of Patronage in Khotan,” in *Buddhism in Central Asia I: Patronage, Legitimation, Sacred Space, and Pilgrimage*, ed. Carmen Meinert and Henrik Sorensen (Brill 2020), pp. 40–60.

¹⁹ Julia Elikhina, “The Renovated Central Asia Exhibit in the State Hermitage Museum,” *The Silkroad Foundation Journal* vol. 11 (2013), p. 155. State Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.

to the *zīn-i palang* of Rostam.” The first element of this name is the Greco-Bactrian word for panther or leopard.²⁰ There is to my mind no need for further evidence²¹ to prove that his name was inspired by the leopard of Dionysos (which carried him back from Asia to Greece). Further, Rostam was born by cesarean section just as was Dionysos (who was born a second time from the thigh of Zeus). Rostam is a Persian figure representing the Greek god of harvest, wine, and resurrection by the Sassanid Persians and other local tribes of Central and Eastern Central Asia. In the painting of Bazhina, he is clearly represented as a revered deity in Buddhist Khotan, while, unsurprisingly, he became just a mortal hero in the Islamic Iranian tales.

The reason Dionysos was not directly assimilated here, as he was with Shiva in India, is that its cult was older and more deeply rooted in the traditions of the population of the “Western Regions”; it had already been in existence for about five hundred years, as the Hellenistic silver-gilt plate representing Dionysos sitting on the back of a panther, found in Gansu Jingyuan, demonstrates (Figure 1). The perpetuation of its cult of fertility, mysteries, theatrical festivities, and wine harvest among the Sogdians, the Khotanese, and the people of Kucha had continued from the time they became Hellenized up to their Buddhist conversion, until the Tang dynasty. After that, the representation of Dionysos in art

²⁰ Nicholas Sims-Williams and Ursula Sims-Williams, “Rostam and His *zīn-i palang*,” *Iran Nameh Journal* vol. 29, p. 2. 2014. Also published in *From Ašl to Zā'id: Essays in Honour of Éva M. Jeremias*, ed. I. Szánto. Avicenna Institute of Middle Eastern Studies (2015), pp. 249–258. The connection with the Greek myths through the Parthians in Iran (westward, not in the Tarim) is also explained, by mention of similar conclusions by such other researchers as Bivar (1981), Shabazi (1994), and Melikian-Chirvani (2001). The association with Dionysos seems clear in this article (p. 253): “The possessive compound *Purlang-zin* belongs to a common Indo-European name-type. It is hardly possible to doubt that *πορλαγγο*, the first element of this name, is the Bactrian word for ‘panther’ or ‘leopard,’ the etymological equivalent of Persian *palang* and Sogdian *pwrδnk*. The second element is more ambiguous, as there are several Old Iranian forms which might be expected to result in a Bactrian word written ζινο. One can rule out straightaway that the name contains the attested Bactrian word ζινο woman, which would be quite out of place in such a name.” Other meanings are proposed for ζινο in that article such as “skin,” “weapon,” or “saddle,” and “skin” was taken to be the most plausible one. I am personally not ruling out “the man (god) with the leopard and the women,” as it would be an even more appropriate epithet for Dionysos from the Sogdians, the Bactrian Sakas tribes, to describe the god of wine, as he was represented riding a leopard and with naked women in Greco-Bactrian art.

²¹ See: A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, “Rostam and Herakles: A Family Resemblance,” in *Alexander's Legacy in the East: Studies in Honor of Paul Bernard*, *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, New Series, vol. 12 (1998), pp. 171–99.

changed naturally, as they became more influenced by Sassanid Persian elements, to whom they were culturally and ethnically closer than to the Greeks or the Indians. In the sixth–seventh centuries AD, their land was invaded by the Turks and fell under Islamic rule.

Dionysian mysteries in caves and other Hellenistic subterranean rituals of fertility had mixed with later Indian Buddhist practices when they arrived in Khotan. As in the Hellenistic Orphic religious traditions, Dionysos welcomed the souls in Heaven, rewarding them after they had been reincarnated in a human form and had made good on Earth.²² The local Iranian/Hellenized religious and mythological understanding of rebirth, life, and death then became mixed with Indian Buddhist iconography, and new Indian figures and divinities appeared in the cities of the Tarim Basin. At the same time, a similar syncretism occurred among the Kushans.

Young children seem to have participated to these cults and festivals, and Gaulier supposes that they were involved in funeral ceremonies as well (Gaulier 177). Children are represented in the Otani casket holding the drum and wearing a *chalmys*-like cloak, and the semi-naked children on the funeral painting of Kucha (Musée d’État de l’Ermitage, Leningrad) wear a sort of silk *chalmys*, standing next to a tomb. They remind us of the winged *Erotes* (ἔρωτες/cupidon), companions of Aphrodites (Eros himself being the most famous of them). The “Yingpan man,” probably a merchant living during the fourth century, whose remains were found in the Tarim, wore a funerary mask with a golden diadem. His dress has Hellenistic designs on its cloth, depicting Eros-like figures (similar to the *putto* [plural: *putti*] of the Italian Renaissance period), who wear the *chalmys* and are hunting sacrificial goats and bulls. The scene also exhibits pomegranate trees, showing that scene is set in the world of the dead before resurrection (Figure 4).²³ The “Yingpan man” is also holding a small dress, as if to wear it in the future when he will be reincarnated in a newly born child. The local Bactrians, Sogdians, and Tocharians were naturally attached to Rome because they had been Hellenized earlier, probably seeing themselves somehow as having a similar ancestry lineage or at least a cultural affinity with Romans, as they shared similar gods

²² Luc Brisson, “Les théogonies orphiques et le papyrus de Derveni (Notes critiques*),” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 202–4. (1985), p. 400.

²³ Victor. H. Mair, *Secrets of the Silk Road* (Bowers Museum, 2020), and J. P. Mallory and Victor. H. Mair, *The Tarim Mummies: Ancient China and the Mystery of the Earliest Peoples from the West* (Thames & Hudson, 2008).

from the third century BC to the third century AD, and perhaps the funerary dress was locally made. That attachment of the Bactrians to Rome explains why King Kanishka I (78–144 AD) sent an embassy to emperor Hadrian (76–138 AD) to secure diplomatic and cultural ties,²⁴ and in any case, the constant presence of these *Erotes* in Gandharan art and in the Tarim Basin in various forms does not make them “foreign” at all, but entirely part of the local religion, artistic tradition, and belief system including purification and reincarnation. A Hellenistic gilt bronze cup from Datong (大同) in Shanxi dating from the first-second century AD shows Eros among grapes, demonstrating that his cult existed in northwestern China and that he was not “exotic” in the region (Figure 4).

Why then Eros (Ἔρως), the “god of eroticism” would be associated to death religious rituals and Buddhist art? The child-god religious explanation is to be found in the “Orphic Theogony,”²⁵ where Eros is emerging from chaos and “dark-winged night,” (Νύξ) coming out from the “Cosmic Egg.” Eros is a double character, been male and female at the same time, and having four eyes, two wings, and animals’ heads, unifying on himself all the living forms of the Universe, thus he could be considered as “Universal Love.” He was also named *Phanes* “bring to light,” “make appear,” or *Protogonos*, “The first-born,” “primordial form,” and was assimilated with Dionysos-Zagreus. His pan-genitor role was emphasized and mixed in the Buddhist reincarnation beliefs of Gandhara and in the Tarim cities. In the Hellenistic world and in its Orphic mysteries, the soul was immortal, and reincarnated in different bodies of humans and animals. After been reincarnated in a human form, souls were judged and took two different ways according as if they have been good or bad in their human life.²⁶ The Sogdians however,

²⁴ *Historia Augusta, The Life of Hadrian* 21.14.

²⁵ Luc Brisson, “Les théogonies orphiques et le papyrus de Derveni (Notes critiques*),” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 202–204 (1985), pp. 389–420.

²⁶ Martin Litchfield West, *The Orphic Poems* (Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 100–101. Eros’s birth is strangely similar to the birth of the “Monkey King” Sun Wukong (孫悟空) described in the Chinese novel “Journey to the West” (*Xiyouji* 西遊記), written by Wu Chengen (吳承恩 1500–1582). On the Chinese Eros, see: He Xilin, “The Feathered Being and Its Symbolic Meaning in Han Dynasty Art,” *Chinese Archaeology* 11 (2011), p. 175: “As a flying immortal, the feathered being appears simultaneously in both realms of life and death. Besides taking care of the living, he is also consoling the deceased. He is not only the model of longevity but also the messenger who guides the deceased soul to ascend to the realm of immortality.” Also see the conclusion of Xu Zhongshu (徐中舒). *Gudai Shoulie Tuxiang Kao* (古代 狩猎图象考) (Study of ancient

saw the afterlife with a similar perspective, as dying and going to the other world was a matter of reward and honor from this life on Earth, matching with the Greek beliefs. When Alexander captured the famous “Rock of the Sogdians” during his campaign in 328–327 BC, he ordered the execution of thirty of their leaders. These very athletic men started to dance and to sing with joy when they heard that they would be killed and therefore, having fought bravely, die with honor. When he saw their nobility of mind, Alexander let them alive in exchange for an alliance, and the Sogdians loved their king from that day forward. Alexander left three thousand troops among them, led by the general Peukolaos (Πευκόλαος), and they married Sogdian women.²⁷

hunting representations), in *Qingzhu Cai Yuanpei Xiansheng Liushiwu Sui Lunwenji* (庆祝蔡元培先生六十五岁论文集) (Studies presented to Ts'ai Yuan P'ei on his sixty-fifth birthday), Extra Issue No. 1 of *Guoli Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Lishi Yuyan Yanjiusuo Jikan* (国立中央研究院历史语言研究所集刊), Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology Academia Sinica. Pt. II. (Peiping: Academia Sinica, 1935), pp. 569–618: “The depiction of immortals in the form of winged beings is not part of the indigenous imaginative tradition of the Chinese people.”

²⁷ Quintus Rufius, *Historiarum Alexandri Magni Macedonis*, Book VII, chapter X.



Figure 4. Left: The Hellenistic dress funerary design of “Yingpan man,” showing *Erotes* and pomegranate trees from the Tarim Basin, fourth century AD. Right: Hellenistic gilt bronze cup from Datong (Shanxi, China) with grape ornaments, and Eros, first–second centuries AD.²⁸

As for the better known “Eros,” the son of Aphrodite, he was worshipped in the *paideia*, the youth education system of the Hellenistic societies, the child-god playing an important role as a symbol of friendship and cohesion. This was especially prominent during athletic training in the gymnasium and the *palaestra*, taught in most Hellenistic cities of Bactria and Greek-ruled India. It formed, in various adapted forms, an entire section of military training in the educational curriculum of the young.²⁹

28 M. L Carter, “A Note on Metalwork from the Hellenistic East,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 9 (New Series), n. 22 (1995), pp. 257–66.

29 Marcel Launey, *Recherches sur les armées Hellénistiques, le Gymnase*. Bibliothèque des Ecoles Françaises d’Athènes et de Rome (Paris: De Broccard Editeur, 1950). See also: Thomas F. Scanlon, *Eros and Greek Athletics* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

Children who had died were invoked in the ceremonies of purification and resurrection that preceded the sacred athletic games.³⁰ In the Kushana kingdom, this important Greek cultic belief had, as mentioned earlier, become mixed with Buddhism. In a fresco of the third–fourth centuries from the Lahore Museum, the Buddha is represented in a Greco-Buddhist palace with, on his right, two scenes of two Eros-like youths, one in a wrestling match and the other in a boxing contest.³¹ Hellenistic votive weights with wrestling scenes also demonstrate the continuation of these Greek athletic games in the Kushana *palaestra*.

In the Indian (and Indo-Greek) world, the athletic games took place on the first day of the *Kartik* lunar month (October) and lasted for thirteen days, according to the *Mahabharata*, similarly to the Olympic Games, which were held on the second or the third full moon after the summer solstice (August-September).³²

Gaulier compares the Otani casket (Figure 7) to a “Bacchic procession of Classical Greece” (Gaulier 166). She describes the scene as “the hibernation and the miracle of the awakening of nature,” exactly like the Dionysian festivals and religious rituals. The two women represented on the casket are holding the pomegranate, or *side* (Σίδη), symbol of all rebirth, derived from the mystery cults of Demeter (Δημήτηρ) and her daughter Core (Κόρη), which will eventually mix with the symbol of the Lotus³³ in

³⁰ For instance, in the Nemean games, the winners were crowned with wreaths of “dry celery” (Lat: *Aptum graoleans*) by priests dressed in black, commemorating the death and resurrection of Ophieltes, who had died, while seated on a pile of dry celery, after being bitten by a viper. In the Isthmian games, participants similarly celebrated the resurrection of the child Melicertes, who had been thrown off a cliff by her mother, who then committed suicide by throwing herself off the cliff. The dead child was brought back to shore near a stone pine tree (Lat: *Pinus pinea*) by a dolphin and returned to life. The winners of the Isthmian games were then crowned with branches of the same tree.

³¹ Stele with scenes from the life of the Buddha and *Erotes*. Mohammed Nari, Khyber, Pakhtunkhwa Province, third century CE. Schist H. 46 7/16 × W. 13 × D. 3 3/8 in. (118 × 33 × 8,5 cm). Lahore Museum, G-109.

³² *Mahabharata, Sabha Parva*, book 2, *Jarasanda-Badha* 23. In the *Mahabharata*, the athletes fight in boxing, wrestling, and *pankration* for thirteen days. The number “thirteen days” is related to the lunar cycle, according to Valerie Vaughan, in *The Origin of the Olympic Games: Ancient Calendars and the Race against Time* (One Reed Publications, 2002). The rules of free-style wrestling are similar to those of the Greeks in the *Milindapanha* (293), and they are also mentioned with boxers and acrobats (191.3).

³³ For the lotus on Dionysos’s head, see the “Antinous as Dionysos” sculpture of the Vatican (110–130 AD). Also: France Le

Dunhuang (Gaulier 167). Klein merely describes the “phallic symbol” and the “plant-like object,” without detail, as Dionysian ritual objects, but seems to miss the point that their interpretation as the “resurrection of man” and the “cleansing through water”³⁴ (Klein 13) were at the very core of Greek/Hellenistic religion and mysteries.

Dionysian mysteries and festivals were perpetuated also in Persia and in Rome, and many of these even survive today in various forms, like the winter carnivals mentioned above or more sectarian-based resurrection-like cults related to secret societies.

Corsu, *Un oratoire pompéien consacré à Dionysos-Osiris*. Revue Archéologique Nouvelle Série. Presses Universitaires de France, Fasc. 2 (1967), pp. 239–254.

³⁴ All Greek temples were built near pure waters for body purification; alternatively they had a bath, a *loutron* (λουτρόν), also used by the athletes.





Figure 5. **Top left:** Tang dynasty (618–907 AD) libation rhyton from Khotan representing Dionysos with both his attributes: wine and the bull. **Top right:** Winged Eros running after a griffin (or the white tiger), wearing the same type of (Sogdian-like) conical hat. Eastern Han dynasty, stone carving (*Huaxiang shi* 畫像石) from Tanghe prefecture (唐河縣) in Henan Province. **Center:** Chinese Eros, or the “Feather man” riding a dragon, in his original function of *Protogonos*, and bearing animal and human forms at the same time. Xi’an University of Technology. Wall painting of a tomb from Xi’an dating from the Western Han dynasty. **Bottom:** the same Eros “Feather man” (*Yuren* 羽人) represented as a Greek acrobat (*Lixuan shanhuan* 黎軒善幻) and riding a dragon, from a rubbing of a pictorial stone on a tomb in Beizhai Village (北寨), Yanan County, Shandong Province, dating from the Eastern Han dynasty.

Dionysian festivities and rituals took place during the period of the Otani casket in the Iranian world, as an old tradition coming from the Hellenistic times. The representation of the women holding the two pomegranates on the Otani casket is similar to a vase showing Dionysos and a woman

(Demeter?) holding two pomegranates found in Umm az-Za'atir (Iraq), dating from the sixth–seventh centuries. This evidence has convinced Robert Schulz that a Dionysian cult existed in Sassanid Persia.³⁵

The Indian *Samaja* (or *Samajja*) theater festival, where the name *Sumozhe* seems to have originated, is known in India to be very old, in the form of dance performances and plays. E. P. Horowitz³⁶ observes that the oldest writings on *Samaja* were not in Sanskrit but in Prakrit, a language used from the third century BC to the eighth century AD, and the Prakrit *Sanvadas* were mysteries too, with either Krishna or Shiva acting or dancing the principal part.

Varadpande³⁷ and most historians of India (Horowitz 1969, Tarn 1966, Keith 1924) agree that some form of Indian theater already existed before 600 BC in the form of “magical dances” or other performances they link to the Vedic period, but most of the reliable chronological sources Varadpande mentions on theater are Buddhist, such as the *Jataka Tales* (Sanskrit: जातक) or the “Questions to King Menandros (Menander),” the *Milindapanha*.

In 326 BC, a play with satyrs called *Agen*, composed by Python, was staged in the military camp of Alexander the Great (Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ Μέγας 356–323 BC) on the bank of river Jhelum in Upper Punjab.³⁸ During his conquest of Asia, Alexander always saw himself as a descendant of Heracles (through the Argead kings), but he considered himself to be almost equal to Dionysos, his heroic predecessor, who, like him, succeeded in his conquest of Asia as far as India. Alexander even attached two goat horns to his head to appear like Zeus-Amon after he visited Dionysos's oracle in Libya, representing himself to be his divine manifestation on Earth (*epiphany*). He was very attached to Dionysos, quoting him in front of his army when he had reached a Shiva-worshipping Indian city in Pakistan called Nysa (Arrian. *Anabasis*. 5.1), as his conquest of Asia had a religious-divine signification for him. The city, situated at the confluence of the Cophen (Kabul) and Indus rivers, caused the Greeks immediately to associate Shiva with Dionysos. Dionysos became a very important divinity for all people living in the Greco-

³⁵ Robert Schulz, “Dionysus Between Sasanian Iran and Roman Allusions,” *Art of the Orient* vol. 7 (2018), fig. 1, p. 43. Polish Institute of World Art Studies.

³⁶ E. P. Horowitz, *The Indian Theatre* (Benjamin Bloom, 1969).

³⁷ M. L. Varadpande, *Ancient Indian and Indo-Greek Theatre* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1981).

³⁸ *Athen*. (2.50F and 13.595E-96B, 596D).

Bactrian kingdom, mainly because of the royal Hellenistic cults and rituals associated with him.³⁹ This popularity, associated with the drunken feasts that accompanied his worship, is visible on the numerous coins of the Greco-Bactrian kings representing him. This was also the case of the Seleucid king Antiochos III (242–187 BC), who ordered his own statue and one of his queen, Laodike V, to be erected next to Dionysos in his temple in 203 BC, so that they would all be worshiped by the population of the city of Teos.⁴⁰

A fragment of a vase, with a painting depicting a scene from the play *Antigone*, was found near Peshawar. Two theater masks have been found in Eucratidea (Ai Khanoum), in the area of a theater, a gymnasium, and monumental public buildings, which include a plaza, a residential quarter, an arsenal, and two mausoleums.⁴¹

The first real institutionalization of *Samaja* theatrical plays in India was brought about by

39 Dionysos was considered to be from Thrace, but some Greek writers also thought him to have grown up in India: Theophrastos (Θεόφραστος 371–288 BC), in his *Enquiry to Plants* (Book 4.4.1), wrote that Dionysos grew up on Mt. Meros, actually in Pakistan, or the Koh-e-Mor (Hindi: कोह-ए-मोर, मोरा पहाड़), situated 250 km north of Peshawar (also in Arrian, *Anab* 5.1).

40 “As a consequence, cultic honors aim at marking a perennial memory of the city’s gratitude towards the king and the queen by re-elaborating the political and religious life of the city around the saving epiphany of the royal couple. While the first decree orders the dedication of *agal mata* (statues) of the king and queen alongside that of Dionysos, so that they share the temple and the other rituals of Dionysos.” Stefano Caneva, “Queens and Ruler Cults in Early Hellenism Festivals, Administration, and Ideology,” *Kernos* vol. 25 (2012), p. 28.

41 Bernard Paul, “Première campagne de fouilles d’Ai Khanoum,” *Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 110–111 (1966), pp. 127–33. For the mausoleum in Chinese antiquity, it is important to understand that these Hellenistic construction types of catacomb-tombs appeared in China for the first time during the Qin. From hermetically-sealed burials, or vertical pits centered on nested coffins (*guomu* 槨墓), they came to be made horizontally (*shimu* 室墓), and cut directly in the rock, or subterranean, constructed in the image of the houses of the living or like palaces. The tomb gate had an entrance corridor, and it was possible to circulate inside; most of the tombs were organized around a central axis. The prototype of these catacomb-tombs (*hengxue mu* 橫穴墓), was a design opposed to the earlier vertical pit tomb (*shuxue tukeng mu* 豎穴土坑墓), and these appeared during the Qin and more largely in the Yellow River valley during the fourth or the third century BC, after the conquests of Alexander the Great in Central Asia. The Mausoleum of Qinshi Huangdi was built similarly with the one of Amphipolis, within a high tumulus, and three sealed gates on a straight corridor, according to the *Shiji*.

Chandragupta Maurya's (340–297 BC) first minister, named Kautilya (Chanakaya or Vishnugupta). He taxed the actors and protected them, according to his writings in the *Arthashastra* (Science of politics), also sponsoring their schools and allowing them to perform public shows, going from town to town (Varadpande 35).

Ashoka (304–232 BC), the grandson of Chandragupta, who ascended the Mauryan throne in 274 BC, reversed the liberal policy of Kautilya toward the theatrical arts; he disapproved of theatrical activities like the *Samaja*. His conversion to Buddhism following his bloody conquest of India brought him to a profound repulsion toward the passions, killings, death, and animal sacrifices that characterized the performances, an attitude further reflected in his own edicts (Varadpande 38).

This edict on the *dharma* has been caused to be inscribed by command of Devanampriya Piyadarashi. Here no animal should be killed or sacrificed. Nor shall *Samaja* be held because King Devanampriya Priyadarshi sees many evils in such gatherings. But there are certain *Samajas* which are considered meritorious by King Devanampriya Priyadarshi. (Rock edict no. 1)

In another edict, Ashoka speaks of such *Samaja* public festivals and processions with chariots and elephants (Varadpande 38–39).

On account of the practice of *dharma* by King Priyadarshi, the beloved of gods, there is heard the sound of war drums, the sound of the proclamation of *dharma*, exhibitions to the people of vimana, chariots, elephants, illuminations and divine representations. (Rock edict no. 4)

Samaja was a dramatic show performed on a circular stage or arena known as *Samajja-mandal*. It could be movable and was also an open-air temporary theater that was erected with a circular dance-floor, by fixing wooden planks, tier above tier, like folding a scarf. In the *Milindapanha* (191,3) and various other Indian sources, there are mentions of different types of performers such as *shailusha* (actor) *upamantrin* (court jester), *kari* (buffoon), *suta* (singer), *nrtu* (dancer), and *talava* (hand clapper). While

Indian theater had its own role models, structure, stories, and mythology, the “Greek element” had been mixed with it earlier; each of the cities built by the Greco-Bactrians, the Indo-Greeks, and the Kushans had a theater based on the Hellenistic model. This connection in India is best demonstrated in a text called the *Sillapadikaram* (Tamil: சிலப்பதிகாரம்), written in southern India by a Jain prince and poet named Ilango Adigal, as an Indian version of a Dionysian ritual in honor of Indra and his son Jayanta, taking place during the first century of our era.

On the day (of the dramatic performance) on which this staff (representing Jayanta, son of Indra) was to be used, the dancing girl had to bathe it with holy waters, brought in a golden pitcher, and afterward garlanded it. Then it was handed over with a blessing to the state elephant, already adorned with a plate of gold and other ornaments on its forehead. To the accompaniment of the drum proclaiming victory, and other musical instruments, the king and his five groups of advisers circumambulated the chariot and the elephant and gave the pole to the musician poet on the top of the chariot. Then they went round the town in a procession, and, entering the theater, they placed the pole in its appointed position.

For these Dionysian cults in Athens, and similarly to the one described by Ilango Adigal in Kerala, India, women devotees to Dionysos celebrated him in the month of January. The mask of the god was hoisted on a long pole and carried in the procession of masked devotees, musicians, and actors to the amphitheater, where it was planted in front of the players in front of the performing area (see footnote 10).

According to Jeanmaire, Dionysian festivals were “not made through (passive) contemplation of divine order, but through the frenzied impulse preceding and preparing the intimate union with the god, by a total self-abandonment to his all-powerfulness and the abasement of reason before its power.”⁴² In Classical and Hellenistic Athens, some of these Dionysian rituals were also celebrated during the *Apaturia* festivals in October by both youngsters and elders in the *phratreia* (brotherhood).

42 H. Jeanmaire, *Dionysos, Histoire du culte de Bacchus* (Paris: Payot 1951), p. 43.

They would sacrifice a black ram and celebrate Dionysos *Melenaigis*, who had helped Melanthes to win against Xanthos, the king of Thebes, dressed in a black ram skin, and thus the festival symbolized the "dark winter destroying the light of summer."⁴³ Dionysos "is a *chthonian* deity ... a subterranean god who reveals himself during the winter period or perhaps at the time when the soul of the dead returns."⁴⁴

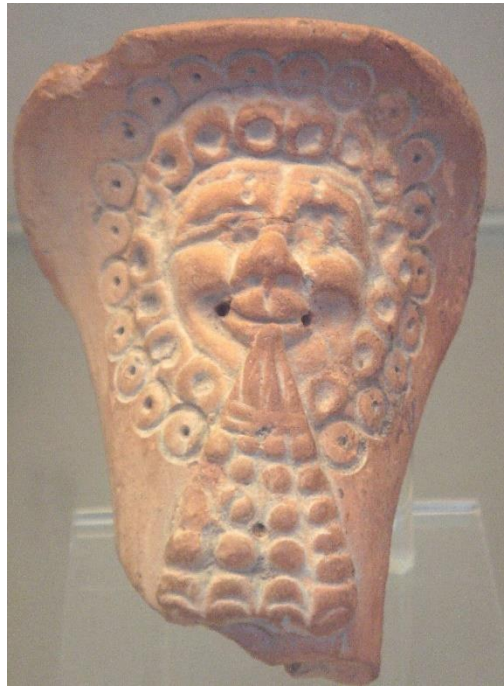


Figure 6. Ceramic from Yotkan second–third centuries AD. Aeolus (Αἰόλος), the god of the winds, seems to blow a stream from his mouth.

After the marriage and military edict between Seleucos and Chandragupta, the Greeks were considered to be included in the *Kshatriya* Indian warrior caste (as the *Kushana* became later as well), and the mixture of Indian and Greek arts, science, and philosophy flourished among the Indo-Greeks and the Kushans. There were no more distinctions between a Greek, an Iranian (Saka/Kushana), and an

43 A. B. Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama, in Its Origin, Development, and Practice* (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 34.

44 H. Jeanmaire, *Dionysos, Histoire du culte de Bacchus* (Paris: Payot, 1951), p. 195. Also: Carl Kerényi, *Dionysos, Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*, p. 64. *Mythos: The Princeton/Bollingen Series in World Mythology* (Bollingen, 1996).

Indian in Gandhara, and in fact many of them were already of mixed blood and lived side by side in the pluri-ethnic kingdom.

These theatrical and ritualistic processions featuring masks and chariots carrying the divinity were called “processions of sacred-images (*eikones*/icons)” (*Xinxiang* 行像) by Duan Chengshi (段成式?–863 AD) in his book *The Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang* (*Youyang zazhu* 酉陽雜俎). Referring to the people of Kucha, he wrote that they celebrated bullfights, camel fights, and horse fights, and that they danced with masks of dogs and monkeys in a celebration lasting for seven days called the *Poluozhe* (婆羅遮).⁴⁵ Unlike *Sumozhe* (蘇摩遮), *Poluozhe* (婆羅遮) in Kucha (*Qiuci* 龜弦), or *Pomozhe* (婆摩遮) in Karashar (*Yanqi* 焉耆), this designation must have come from the Greco-Bactrian word *Purlang-zin* (πορλαγγοζινο), meaning “the man (god) with the panther’s skin,” or “the man (god) with the leopard and the women.” It was most likely an epithet for Dionysos, and *Pohan* (潑寒) is most probably a Chinese pronunciation from the same Greco-Bactrian origin.

The Chinese monk Fa Xian (法顯 337–422 AD), in his “Record of Buddhist Kingdoms” (*Foguo Ji* 佛國記, chapter 3), describes his participation in a similar large ritual procession in Khotan, where hundreds of monks carried images of the Buddha in chariots around the city, finally stopping at the gate. There the king prostrated himself before the central chariot, where the image of Shakyamuni was seated, and venerated it. The festival started the first day of the fourth month and lasted until the fourteenth day. The Chinese monk Huilin (慧琳 421–445) also witnessed Greco-Buddhist-Iranian theatrical festivals in Kucha, saying that these were done to frighten away the *raksa* and the *preta* (evil spirits) (Klein 7–8).

⁴⁵ Duan Chengshi, “*The Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang*” (*Youyang zazhu* 酉陽雜俎), chapter 4, p. 32a.

龜茲國，元日鬥牛馬駝，為戲七日，觀勝負，以占一年羊馬減耗繁息也。婆羅遮，並服狗頭猴面，男女無晝夜歌舞。八月十五日，行像及透索為戲。



Figure 7. Otani casket from the Stupa of Subashi, sixth–seventh centuries AD, center. A dancer wears a Dionysos-like mask with sheep ears in the middle; a Demeter-like dancer is holding a pomegranate on the left side of the image. Tokyo National Museum.

These Dionysian festivals and mysteries, being outside the realm of established religious systems, were considered anti-conformist by the societies in which they took place. Mystery cults in the Hellenistic world did not simply worship a divinity: they acted to bring about an epiphanic experience that upset the established order. Such experiences sought to bring the individual closer to the gods through provoking a total detachment from any social, moral, religious, or psychological authority. The ecstatic effect of wine, considered the “blood of the god (Dionysos),” or *ichor* (Greek: ἰχώρ, Nonnos, book 12), led to the death of the construction of the self. Aided by the dances, masks, music, and disguises, the participant entered a transcendental passage to the underworld, becoming one with the divinity and cleansing himself with subterranean spring water, before being resurrected into the light, just as nature was resurrected in spring.

Apart from mysteries, at established memorial rituals, Greeks mixed wine (οἶνος) with water (ὕδωρ), then poured it on the ground in libations (σπένδω) for the dead and the *chthonic* (χθόνιος) “subterranean” gods to drink, and similar rituals took place in temples among the Hellenized Bactrians and Sogdians.⁴⁶ The Turfan basin (or Shihezi in Xinjiang, Wuwei in Gansu, Yinchuan in Ningxia) and the ancient course of the Yellow River are still well known for their grape harvest.⁴⁷

During the Northern Wei dynasty (386–535 AD) and mentioned in the “Wei dynasty annals,” the *Weishu*, there is a record of what was perhaps the first official Dionysian *Pohan Huxi* festival at the Chinese imperial court. Emperor Ming of (Liu) Song ((劉)宋明帝 439–472 AD) organized a “drunken barbarian” festival in the palace in 470 AD. There the empress Wang Zhenfeng (王貞風 436–479 AD), saw half-naked girls performing a sort of “Lysistrata”-style play; she was shocked and covered her face with her fan. The emperor, angry, rebuked her: “Today, everybody is happy, and yet you hide your face?” The empress replied, “There are many ways to be happy, but what kind of a scene is this for aunts and sisters to gather to see? To watch naked ladies-in-waiting and laugh about it? The fun that our household has is different.”⁴⁸

Other reactions to the Dionysian festival in China are recorded. The first year of *Shenlong*, in 705 AD, during the eleventh lunar month, the emperor Tang Zhongzong (唐中宗 658–710 AD) went to the southern tower to watch the festivities of the *Pohan Huxi*.⁴⁹ During the third day of the twelfth lunar

46 See Rachel Mairs, “The ‘Temple with Indented Niches’ at Ai Khanoum: Ethnic and Civic Identity in Hellenistic Bactria,” in *Cults, Creeds and Identities in the Greek City after the Classical Age*, ed. R. Alston, O. M. van Nijf, and C. G. Williamson, pp. 85–111 (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), p. 95.

47 The region of Kashgar during the Ming dynasty (and perhaps already during the Han dynasty with Shule) was “Chalis” or “Cialis” (Chalishi 察力矢). In ancient Greek, “Chalis” (χάλις) meant “sheer wine.” I have already proposed that translation in “Hellenes and Romans in Ancient China,” footnote 10, p. 7. *Sino-Platonic Papers* no. 230. See also Nicolette Krajewski, “A Three-Handled Jar from Brazan: Influences from Far and Wide along the Silk Road,” *Art and Archaeology of the Silk Road* (SOAS, London, 2011), p. 25.

48 *Weishu* (魏書) (Wei dynasty annals), chap. 97 (*Zhonghua shuju* 中華書局), “上嘗宮內大集，而羸婦人觀之，以為歡笑。后以扇障面，獨無所言。帝怒曰：外舍家寒乞，今共為笑樂，何獨不視！王曰：為樂之事，其方自多，豈有姑姊妹集聚，而裸婦人形體，以此為樂！外舍之為忻，適與此不同” (Beijing 1974–1999), p. 1455.

49 *Jiutangshu* (舊唐書) (Old Tang dynasty annals) (舊唐書), chapter 7, Records on Zhong Zong (*Zhong Zong ji* 中宗紀) (*Zhonghua shuju*, 中華書局), “十一月戊寅，加皇帝尊號曰應天，皇后尊號曰順天。壬午，皇帝、皇后親謁太廟，

month of the *Jinglong* era in 709 AD, he took his officials with him to see the *Pohu wangqi hanxi* in the Liquan district.⁵⁰ The emperor Tang Xuanzong (唐玄宗 685–762 AD) declared that “the *Qihan* festival from the barbaric countries celebrated during the last lunar months already lasts too long,” and on the seventh day of the twelfth month of the first year of *Kaiyuan*, in 713 AD, he published a decree prohibiting these festivities.⁵¹

告受徽號之意，大赦天下，賜酺三日。己醜，禦洛城南門樓觀潑寒胡戲。辛醜，衛王重俊為左衛大將軍，遙領揚州大都督；溫王重茂為右衛大將軍，遙領並州大都督” (Beijing 1975–1999), p. 95.

50 *Jiutangshu*, (舊唐書) (Old Tang dynasty annals), chapter 7, Records on Zhong Zong (*Zhongzong ji* 中宗紀) (*Zhonghua shuju*, 中華書局), “乙巳，至自溫湯。乙酉，令諸司長官向醴泉坊看潑胡王乞寒戲” (Beijing 1975–1999), p. 100.

51 *Jiutangshu*, (舊唐書) (Old Tang dynasty annals), chapter 8, Records on Xuan Zong (玄宗紀 *Xuanzong ji*), (*Zhonghua shuj* 中華書局), “開元元年十二月己亥，禁斷潑寒胡戲” (Beijing 1975–1999), p. 115.



Figure 8. Left: Painting of (Buddhist) Dionysos/*Purlang-zin* from Khotan with Indian and Persian elements, Tang dynasty (618–907 AD) by Yuchi Bazhina (尉遲跋質那). Dionysos/*Purlang-zin*/婆羅遮 is depicted with long flowers (mulberry?), symbol of fertility and rebirth, holding what appears to be a lotus flower in one of his right hands, the trowel with which to plant seeds in one of his left hands, and a cup of wine (or a piece of wood for rolling silk) in the other left hand. He wears a royal hat with sides that look like two ibex horns. Right: Votive plaque depicting a similar god in Khotan. Wood, mineral paints. 25 × 10 cm. Khotan: Dandan-Uiliq, sixth–eighth centuries AD. Acq. 1897 from the Coll. of N. F. Petrovskii. Inv. No. ΓA-1125. (Peshchery 2008, 73).

2. HUNTUO SWORD THEATRICAL REPRESENTATIONS AND ATHLETIC DANCES 渾脫劍舞-建舞

Ceremonial sword dances (*Jianwu* 劍舞) and sword duels were already famous from Warring States-period China, but the theatrical aspect of the *Huntuo* (渾脫) would leave a legacy of public free-dance performances with poems and various scene performances accompanied by music in the Tang dynasty. One of these sword dances is famous in the story of Xiang Zhuang (項莊), who tried to kill Han Liubang (漢劉邦 256–195 BC) while performing a dance with the sword on stage in 206 BC. Before the coming of these new free performances of foreign theatrical dances from the “Western Regions,” the previous local imperial ritual war dances in China were mentioned as coming from the ancient court of the Zhou dynasty (周朝 1046–256 BC), mainly the “weapons dance” (*Zhiganqiwu* 執乾戚舞) and the “Great War Dance” (*Dawuwu* 大武舞). *Ganqiwu* (乾戚舞), referred to the soldier’s dance in arms, with the shield and the battle axe (*fu* 斧) or the traditional Chinese dagger-axe (*ge* 戈).⁵²

The *gan* (乾) weapons dance is a dance for soldiers effectuated on the rhythm of the gong players, and the Master of this dance is dancing like a soldier.... Thousands of people are dancing it; this dance comes from the “Great War Dance” (*Dawuwu* 大武舞) of the ancestral Imperial Court, but the (*gan*) weapons dance is a little dance (*Xiaowu* 小舞), with two people dancing it; both these dances are made for war and have the same features.”⁵³

⁵² According to the *Hanyu Da Cidian* (漢語大詞典), *gange* (乾戈) was the *ge* (戈) weapon and the shield, and also the act of war, the martial strength (*Wuli* 武力) or the “War dance” (*Wuwu* 武舞).

⁵³ *Zhouli*, (Zhou dynasty rituals) 周禮正義(清) Sun Yirang 孫詒讓撰, chapter 48. “云乾舞，兵舞者，據故人，舞師並有兵舞也…萬者何？乾舞也。彼乾舞為宗廟大舞，此乾舞為小舞，二者雖異，其為武舞則同。” *Zhonghua shuju*, 中華書局, p. 1798.

Another reference to an ancient war ritual dance with weapons can be found in the *Huainanzi*, which depicts the mythical emperor Shun (舜) pacifying the tribal You Miao: “Shun had only to dance with his weapons to make the You Miao submit.”⁵⁴

The dynastic dances celebrated every emperor with a different offering of music and play. According to the Wei dynasty annals, the *Weishu*, the founder of each dynasty had his own ritualized dance with a special banner carried onstage by the dancer in memorial festivals, generally representing the family of the dynasty. Huangdi (黃帝), the “Yellow Emperor,” created the “*Xianchi Dance*” (*Xianchi* 咸池), Zhuang Xu (顓頊) the “*Cloud Dance*” (*Yunwu* 雲舞), Yao (堯) the “*Great Memorial Dance*” (*Dazhang* 大章), Shun (舜) the “*Big Beautiful Dance*” (*Dashao* 大韶), Yu (禹) the “*Great Xia*” dance (*Daxia* 大夏), King Tang (湯) the “*Big Rain Dance*” (*Dahuo* 大濩), Zhou (周) the “*Great War Dance*” (*Dawu* 大武), the Qin (秦) the “*Longevity Dance*” (*Shouren* 寿人), the Han (漢) the “*Great Spear Dance*” (*Damao* 大矛), the Wei (魏) the “*Great Tune Dance*” (*Dajun* 大鈞), and the Jin (晉) the “*True Virtue Dance*” (*Zhengde* 正德).⁵⁵

The independent Murong Xianbei did not follow along, but six main memorial dances were held in the court palaces of the Sinicized Tuoba Xianbei emperors to commemorate the past dynasties: The *Yunwu*, *Dazhang*, *Dashao*, *Daxia*, *Dahuo*, and *Dawu*.⁵⁶ The Wei did not see the need to change them, but because they had been perpetuated over a very long period of time, these dances slowly lost their original features.⁵⁷ There were seven main types of music played in these Wei dynastic memorial rituals: the “*King of the Xia*” (*Xiawang* 夏王), the “*Impudent Xia*” (*Sixia* 肆夏), the “*Rising Poem*” (*Dengge* 登歌), and the “*Cry of the Deer*” (*Luming* 鹿鳴). From a set of sixteen additional dances, they kept the

⁵⁴ *Huainanzi*, *Zhujie* (Great Words from Huainan); chapter 11, (淮南鴻烈解卷十一). “故當舜之時，有苗不服，於是舜修政偃兵，執乾戚而舞之，” p. 359. The original reference is in Han Feizi, *Wudu* (韓非子，五蠹).

⁵⁵ *Weishu Yuezhi*. (Wei dynasty annals), *festivities* chapter 109 (魏書樂志). “黃帝有咸池之樂，顓頊作承雲之舞，堯爲大章，舜則大韶，禹爲大夏、湯爲大濩，周爲大武，秦曰寿人，漢曰大矛，魏名大鈞，晉曰正德.” (中華書局) *Zhonghua Shuju* (1974), second publication (Beijing 1999), p. 1898.

⁵⁶ *Weishu Yuezhi* (Wei dynasty annals) *festivities* (魏書樂志), chapter 109. *Zhonghua Shuju* (1974), (中華書局), *Zhonghua Shuju* (1974), second publication (Beijing 1999), p. 1891.

⁵⁷ *Weishu Yuezhi* (Wei dynasty annals) *Festivities* (魏書樂志), chapter 109. (中華書局), *Zhonghua Shuju* (1974), second publication (Beijing 1999) “用不改... 但世運遙，隨時亡缺，” p. 1898.

“Starting Literate” (*Wenshi* 文始), the “Five Elements” (*Wuxing* 五行),⁵⁸ and the “Shao” dances (*Shaowu* 勺舞). The *Ganqi* and *Dawu* war dances of the Wei dynasty were performed by many dancers wearing long crimson, white, and black clothes with long sleeves and crowned with conical hats, all holding their weapons and moving together. They also wore long feathers, depicting the Chinese of the past, for the peace dances, to the sounds of the *Yue* flute.⁵⁹

The Greco-Macedonians had their own memorial parades, held once a year while celebrating the *Xanthika* festival in their Hellenistic kingdoms, among them Bactria. They venerated their past kings in a procession that passed between two halves of a dog, intended to purify the young ephebes who had just joined the army and were following the march. Starting with the earliest of the dynasty’s deceased kings, represented with his flag and weapons, the procession finished with the current, living, king, who paraded in his royal horse chariot with his own weapons and banner, followed by the ephebes in a group carrying the statues of the twelve gods.⁶⁰

For the new theatrical sword dances coming from the “Western Regions,” made without strict forms or ritualization,⁶¹ there is a very detailed explanation from the “Dunhuang Songs and Poems

58 The “Five elements dance” was originally the *Dawu* (大武) “Great war dance” of Zhou times, but the Qin emperor changed the name during his lifetime. 故大武之舞秦始皇改曰五行之舞. *Wenxian Tongkao*, (文獻通考), chapter 144. Ma Duanlin (馬端臨), (Yuan dynasty) (元), *Zhonghua shuju* (中華書局) (1986), p. 1267.

59 *Weishu Yuezhi* (Wei dynasty annals) (魏書樂志), Festivities, chapter 109. (中華書局), *Zhonghua Shuju* (1974), second publication, Beijing 1999. “武舞執干戚，著平冕、黑介幘、玄衣裳、白領袖、絳領袖中衣、絳合幅褲襪、黑韋鞮；文舞執羽翕，冠委貌，其服同上，” p. 1898.

60 Polyb.23.10.17; Livy 40.1-7; Curt. 10.9.12.

61 On the new Western Lands dance performances in China, see the dissertation of Xin Xiaojing, “The Sound of Silence: Daqu (“big-suite”) and Medieval Chinese Performance” (University of California, Berkeley, 2012; available online), p. 95, footnote 233. History of the Song, *Song Shi, juan* 142. There were seventy-two people in the ten “troupes of children,” which included: “troupe of Zhezhi” (*zhezhi dui* 柘枝隊), “troupe of the Swords” (*jianqi dui* 劍器隊), “troupe of the Brahmans” (*poluomen dui* 婆羅門隊), “troupe of Drunk Hu Jumping” (*zuihuteng dui* 醉胡騰隊), “troupe of Joking Subject Pleasing Your Majesty” (*hunchen wansui le dui* 譚臣萬歲樂隊), “troupe of Children Appreciate Imperial Favor” (*ertong gan sheng'en dui* 兒童感聖恩隊), “troupe of Jade Rabbit” (*yutu huntuo dui* 玉兔渾脫隊), “troupe of Tribes Paying Visit to the Emperor” (*yiye chaotian dui* 異域朝天隊), “troupe of Child Xie Hong” (*ertong Xie Hong dui* 兒童解紅隊), “troupe of Hui Shooting the Eagle” (*Shediao huihu dui* 射雕回鶻隊). The “troupe of girls” in total numbered 153 people, including: “troupe of Buddha”

collection,” indicating that the *Huntuo* “dance of the sword” was performed directly in the front of the audience with a sword.

They line up for the dance of the white flags, and the music starts at the back. First, they assemble together like bright and beautiful flowers, and then they separate like thunder and lightning. Their screams split heaven and hearth, and their jumps seem to break the mountain summits. The swords appear, and the *Huntuo* dance begins.⁶²

Gong Sun Danang (公孫大娘) would initiate the theatrical representations with swords of the *Huntuo* festival in China, according to the poet Li Bai (李白 701–762 AD).⁶³ The Tang dynasty poet Du Fu (杜甫 712–770 AD) would write in 767 AD in his “Viewing Gong Sun Danang disciple’s sword movements” (觀公孫大娘弟子舞劍器行) that: “It comes like lightning, gathering a terrific anger, and stops like frozen seas and rivers hidden from daylight” (來如雷霆收震怒, 罷如江海凝清光). The *Huntuo* “sword plays” proper, however, were part of the theatrical *Sumozhe* performance. The performers, who sometimes wore sheep (羊頭渾舞) or rabbit (玉兔渾舞) masks, danced with swords while doing acrobatics, juggling with knives, or spitting fire from their mouths.⁶⁴ In the “Old Tang

(*pusa man dui* 菩薩蠻隊), “troupe of Reforming” (*ganhuayue dui* 感化樂隊), “troupe of Tossing Balls” (*paoqiuyue dui* 拋球樂隊), “troupe of Beauties Cutting Peony” (*jiarenjian mudan dui* 佳人剪牡丹隊), “troupe of Rainbow Robes” (*funishang dui* 拂霓裳隊), “troupe of Plucking Lotus” (*cailian dui* 採蓮隊), “troupe of Phoenix Greeting Music” (*fengyinyue dui* 鳳迎樂隊), “troupe of Buddhist Presenting Fragrant Flowers” (*pusa xian xianghua dui* 菩薩獻香花隊), “troupe of Goddess on Colorful Clouds” (*caiyunxian dui* 彩雲仙隊), and the “troupe of Playing Ball” (*daqiyue dui* 打球樂隊).

⁶² *Dunhuang geci zongbian* (敦煌歌辭總編) (Dunhuang songs and poem collection). Xia, Jianqi. (*Shanghai tushu faxing gongci* (上海圖書行公司) (xia 下) *The sword* (Jianqi 劍器) (*Shang Qin Wang, san shou* 上秦王 三首), “The third of the three poems dedicated to the king of Qin.” “排備白旗舞, 先自有曲來。合如花焰秀, 散若電光開。喊聲天地裂, 騰踏山嶽摧。劍器呈多少, 渾脫向前來。”

⁶³ *Quan Tangshi* (全唐詩) (All-Tang dynasty poems) *Zhonghua Shuju* (中華書局), chapter 167, Li Bai (李白) “何必要公孫大娘渾脫舞” (Beijing 1960), p. 1729.

⁶⁴ Duan Anjie, (段安節), *Miscellaneous notes on songs from the music bureau* (*Yuefu zalu* 樂府雜錄), *Siku quanshu* (四庫全書).

dynasty records,” the *Jiutangshu*, there is an allusion to a “*Huntuo pole*” (*Ganmu Huntuo* 竿木渾脫),⁶⁵ perhaps associated with an athletic performance that involved holding a stick as shown in one “Westerner figurines” dating from the Tang dynasty.⁶⁶ There was a similar dance festival with a cane known as the “Bodhidharma cane” or *Damozhi* (達磨支). This performance was mentioned by Guo Maoqian (郭茂倩 1041–1099 AD) in his *Yuefushiji* (樂府詩集), or the “Prefectural Festivities Collection,” which was written during the Song dynasty.⁶⁷ The “Bodhidharma cane,” characterized by turning and kicking in the air, had been institutionalized in China at the time of Gao Wei (高緯 557–577 AD) of the later Northern Qi dynasty (*Beiqihouzhuzhu* 北齊後主). Altogether, there were seven different public foreign musical festivals in Tang dynasty China: the “Festival of Kucha” (*Qiuqi le* 龜茲樂), the “Drunken *Huntuo* Festival” (*Zui Huntuo* 醉渾脫), the “*Sumozhe* Festival” (*Sumozhe* 蘇莫遮), the “*Suhexiang* Festival” (蘇合香), the “*Damozhi* Festival” (達磨支), the “*Shengming yue* Festival” (聖明樂), and the “*Muhu* Festival” (穆護).

65 *Jiutangshu* (舊唐書) (Old Tang dynasty annals) *Zhonghua shuju* (中華書局), chapter 24, On Rituals, four. (*Li'yi* 禮儀四) “竿木渾脫” (Beijing 1975–1999), p. 24.

66 See Jane Gaston Mahler, *The Westerners among Figurines of the Tang Dynasty of China* (Rome, 1959).

67 *Yuefushiji* (樂府詩集), *Prefectural Festivities Collection*. Song dynasty (宋). Guo Maoqian (郭茂倩) *Zhonghua shuju*, chapter 53 (Beijing, 1979), p. 777.

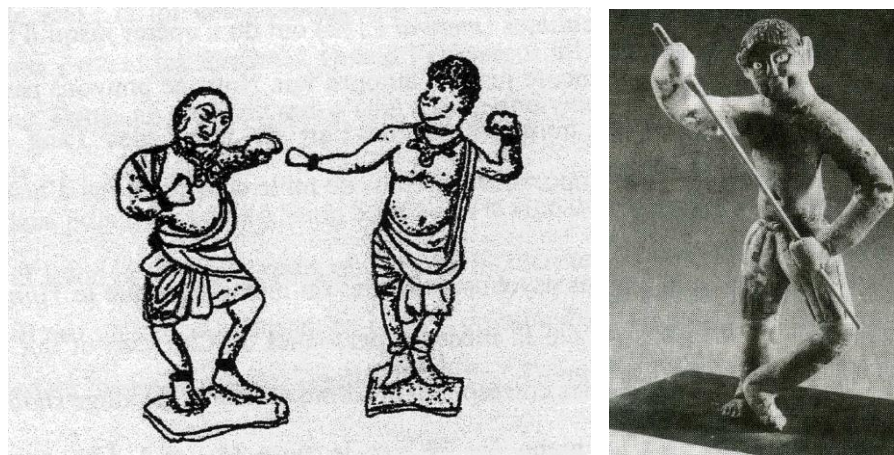


Figure 9. Top left: “Westerner figurines,” known in China as the “drummer servants” (*Yongtang pingshi* 傭湯瓶式), or the “drum-vase boxers” (*Tangping quan* 湯瓶拳). These figurines had small vase-drums attached to their necks. Author’s drawing from a photo. **Top right:** The same type of figurine, here performing a *Huntuo* stick-dance. Source: Yi Yuntai and Hu Xiaofeng, *Chinese Martial Arts History* (*Zhongguo Wushu shi*). (Beijing: Renmin Tiyu chubanshe, 1985), p. 352. **Bottom:** Perhaps a scene of the “Prancing *Hu* barbarian,” from the tomb of Su Sixu (蘇思勳) at Xi’an, Shaanxi, 744 AD, excavated in 1952.

The *Huntuo* martial theatrical dance performed with weapons came to be considered an “athletic dance” (*Jianwu* 健舞), participating in the development of Chinese theater and public

performances.⁶⁸ In the same repertory of the "athletic dances" coming from the Western Regions, one was the *Huxuan* (胡旋), or the "Turning *Hu* barbarian," coming from Sogdiana (Kanguo 康國), beginning during the Northern Zhou period and continuing to the Sui and Tang dynasties; it is mentioned in the "Miscellaneous notes on songs from the music bureau" (*Yuefu zalu* 樂府雜錄), written by Duan Anjie (段安節) between 894 to 898 AD. Similar to the *Lugu* dance (鹿骨舞 or "deer-bone dance"), it consisted of women dancers spinning in circles on a round carpet and doing acrobatic figures accompanied by the song of the drums, the flute, and the sitar, and well described by Bai Juyi (白居易 772–846 AD), poet and governor of the Tang dynasty.

There was also the similar *Hutang* (胡騰) "Prancing *Hu* barbarian" (Figure 9), from the country of Shigu (石國), or Tashkent, and performed by men jumping and kicking their legs into the air. Lu Zhao (盧肇 818–882 AD) in his text "The Hunan scene of the double Zhezhi dance" (湖南觀雙柘枝舞) explains that the Zhezhi dance (柘枝舞), effectuated by women with long sleeves, in fact came from the city of the Xiongnu Zhizhi *Chanyu* (古也鄧支之伎, 今也柘枝之名) and was earlier called by the same name of Zhizhi (鄧支) during the Han dynasty. (That city is of interest because it is famous for the "Roman captives' story" mentioned by Homer Hasenpflug Dubs (1892–1969) of Oxford University in 1951.⁶⁹) According to Du You (杜佑 735–812 AD), these new *Hu* dances and performances came from the Gansu corridor and Kucha.

There were new sounds coming from Hexi (Gansu), called the "*Hu* music." These, along with the music of Kucha and jugglers, attracted great interest in that era, causing a certain slackening in interest in any other musical form.⁷⁰

68 The festivities of Dionysos in ancient Greece led to the first theatrical plays. See: Jennifer Wise, *Dionysus Writes: The Invention of Theatre in Ancient Greece* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

69 See Lucas Christopoulos, "Hellenes and Romans in Ancient China," pp. 57–65. *Sino-Platonic Papers* no. 230.

70 Du You, *Tongdian*, *juan* 146, p. 761. 又有新聲自河西至者，號胡音聲，與龜茲樂、散樂俱為時重，諸樂咸為之少寢。



Figure 10. Drunken Dionysos (Διόνυσος), “liberator,” and Ariadne (Ἀριάδνη) in a grape-harvesting festival scene. Greco-Buddhist art from Gandhara, first–second centuries AD.

3. HERACLES’S DANCE 力士舞

“Heracles’s dance,” or the “wrestler dance” (*Lishiwu* 力士舞), was performed by imitating bare-handed fighting movements danced to the slow martial rhythm of the accompanying gongs. During the second year of *Zhengguang* (正光二年), in 521 AD, the Xianbei warrior Xi Kangsheng (奚康生), who had a “rude and martial nature,” performed that fierce martial dance bare-handed, raising his arms and dancing with the movements of fighting techniques, as if killing an imaginary adversary.⁷¹ This type of dance displayed the performer’s knowledge of combat sports while punching and kicking in the air, just as in ritual shadow-boxing. Japan had a dance similar to this, very ritualized, called the *Rikishi*’s dance, introduced following the visit to Japan in 736 AD of the Buddhist monk Bodhisena (Sanskrit: बोधिसेन).

⁷¹ The Xianbei family name, Daxi (達奚), was changed to Xi (奚) for the Xianbei living in China. *Weishu* (魏書) (Wei dynasty annals), chapter 73. *Xi Kangsheng* (奚康生) “正光二年三月，肅宗朝靈太后于西林園，文武侍坐，酒酣迭舞。次至康生，康生乃為力士舞，及於折旋，每顧視太后，舉手、蹈足、瞋目、頷首為殺縛之勢。”

4. THE XIANBEI *PYRRICHION* WEAPONS WAR DANCE 破陳舞

Various other war dances of Xianbei origin are mentioned by Guo Maoqian (郭茂倩) in his “Prefectural festivities and poems collection.”⁷² In 1946, Yang Xianyi (楊憲益) argued that the new *Pochen* (破陳) weapons war dance festival established for his generals by the prince of Qin (later known as Emperor Tang Taizong 唐太宗 640–649 AD) was in fact derived from the Greek (and then Hellenistic) war dance *Pyrrichion*, and “*Pochen*” was a direct phonetic translation.⁷³ The *Pochen* weapons war dance of “piercing and attacking” (*Chuci zhixiang* 出刺之象) made “a noise that could shake at one hundred *li*, and could cleanse an entire mountain valley” (*Shengzhen baili, dongdeng shangu* 聲震百里，動蕩山谷). Institutionalized in China in 633 AD (*Zhenguan qinian* 貞觀七年) by the prince of Qin, the *Pochen* war dance “has been included in the ten capitals festivities, and they were knocking their bodies against each other while doing acrobatic figures, striking with their weapons.”⁷⁴

The *Pochen* festival took place again in the thirteenth year of *Zhenguan* (*Zhenguan qinian* 貞觀十三年), in 639 AD, when the Göktürk *Qaghan* of Tuli (突利), Ashina Shibobi, came to pledge his fealty to the prince of Qin in the imperial palace. The Tang and the Turks organized the ceremony, with warriors and generals performing the *Pochen*, dancing during the festival with swords and spears and playing ball games, all to the sound of the drums and the flutes. Following this, Ashina approached in front of the prince of Qin and prostrated himself in a sign of submission.⁷⁵

72 *Yuefushiji* (樂府詩集) (Prefectural festivities and poetry collection) (Song dynasty), *Zhonghua shuj* (中華書局), chapter 53 (Beijing 1979).

73 Yang Xianyi (楊憲益) (The origin of the *Pochen* dance of the king of Qin) (*Xin Zhonghua* 新中華) n. 4, chapter 6 “秦王破陳樂的來源” (Beijing, 1946). Also see “Breaking through the battle array,” in Victor H. Mair’s article “Archaic Greek in a modern world, part 3,” on the Language Log website. The *Pochen* dance and other Xianbei war-dances among the Monguors of today are still practiced in various forms with halberds and knives, and these are named the “Dance of the Three Generals” (*Sanjiang wu* 三將舞), the “Dance of the Five Generals” (*Wujiang wu* 五將舞), and the “Dance of Killing the General” (*Shaguo Jiang wu* 殺過將舞).

74 *Cefuyuangui* (冊府元龜) (The Prime Tortoise of the Record Bureau), Book 2, chapter 109, paragraph 1 (Emperors and kings section, enjoying the banquet). *Cefuyuangui, diwangbu, yanxiang* (冊府元龜. (北宋) 王欽若等. 帝王部. 宴享). (北宋) *Zhonghua Shuju* (中華書局) “破陳樂并十都之樂乃撞求跳丸舞劍之技突利” (Hong Kong, 1960), p. 1303.

75 *Ibid.*

The "Broken Chen," "Smashing Chen," or *Pochen*, was a Xianbei *Pyrrichion*-like "athletic dance" performed with weapons. It had been institutionalized by Tang Taizong as a commemoration of the capture of the last, weak emperor of the Chen dynasty, Chen Shubao (陳叔寶 552–589 AD) in 589 AD by the Xianbei forces fighting for the Sui dynasty and led by the Xianbei general Heruobi (賀若弼), who seized Chen Shubao's capital city, Jiankang.⁷⁶ The word *Pochen* may have been used by the Tang in remembering that event, though the Xianbei certainly had the tradition *before* the fight with Chen Shubao, so they must at least have had a similar phonetic denomination for the dance.

Zhang Yue wrote two poems on the new *Pochen* war dance festival, recounting the Xianbei warriors fighting Chen Shubao, and I have translated the second one:

Intrepid youth, dreamy as clouds on the wind,
Gallop valiantly westward into battle.
Their broadswords like blazing thistles, they slash through the northern armies.
The drums of Xianbei are silenced, and the five ambushes countered.
True warriors, they sacrifice all for fame and country,
As the shame-faced generals, with shattered nerves, weave in and out....⁷⁷

At the time of Li Zhan (李湛), also known as Emperor Tang Jingzong (唐敬宗 808–827 AD), a young woman steppe warrior named Shihuohu performed the martial dance of the *Pochen* together with five children of eight and nine years old. The "music" was the surrounding troops' beating the rhythm by smashing their weapons together. This shows, as did the images on the Otani casket, that children were involved in martial training and cults and warlike rituals from the earliest age, just as in the *paideia* of Hellenistic times.

⁷⁶ The Xianbei dances and songs were institutionalized in China during the Wei dynasty, "魏際鮮卑歌" *Wenxian tongkao*, chapter 148, p. 1296.

⁷⁷ *Quan Tangshi* (全唐詩) (All-Tang poems), chapter 89, *Zhonghua Shuju* 中華書局, edited by Kirby Record (Beijing, 1960), p. 981. "小年膽氣凌雲, 共許驍雄出羣, 匹馬城西挑戰, 單刀薊北從軍, 一鼓鮮卑送款, 五餌單于解紛, 誓欲成名報國, 羞將開閣論動."

They organized musical festivities in front of the imperial palace. There was a skillful woman named Shihuohu, and she was from Youzhou (幽州). She brought with her five other girls of eight and nine years old. Between the spears, the girls held one long bow each. It was also possible to see the five armies who played with the spears and the halberds. This was the play of the *Pochen* festival.⁷⁸

The *Pyrrichion* war dance in Greece was said to have been created by Pyrrhos (Πύρρος), the son of Achilles. It sometimes was performed together with plays, as Aelian mentions in his *Various Stories*, as quoted below. These dances were intended not only to enhance martial skills but also as a sign of inner strength and the individual's harmony with warfare, of being totally unified with the spirit of fighting and the gods. This very particular “divine” conception is described when Aelian mentions that the Athenians had chosen their army leader following Phrynichos's superb presentation of the weapons dance.

Phrynichos had inserted in his tragedy a few verses with a military rhythm that was in perfect harmony with the movements of *Pyrrichion*. All the assembly was impressed, and they elected him as their general, thinking that if he was so talented in performing his warrior's spirit, he would also be able to conduct war operations with success.⁷⁹

The *Pyrrichion* war dances employed four main exercises that had the purpose of martial training.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ *Zhongguo wushu shi* (中國武術史) (History of Chinese martial arts), Xu Cai, Zhang Wenguan, Zhou Xikuang, et al. (徐才, 張文廣, 周西). *Zhongguo renmin tiyu chubanshe, chubanshe faxing* (中國人民體育出版社出版發). “陵延日，大張音樂，集天下百戲於殿前。時有伎女石火胡 本幽州人。偕養女五人。才八九岁。於百尺竿上張弓弦五条，今五女各一条之上。看五色衣，執戟執戈，舞破陈曲” (Beijing 1996), pp. 181–82. The original source is the “Essence of Imperial History” (*Zishi jinghua juan* 160. Festivities 2 (子史精華卷，一百六樂部二), edited between 1721 and 1727.

⁷⁹ Aelian, *Various stories* 3.8. (Κλαυδιος Αιλιανος) (*Histoires Diverses*. Trad. M. Dacier (Paris: Imprimerie d'Auguste Delalain [1772], 1827), pp. 107–108.

⁸⁰ Gayle Kassing, *The History of Dance*, 2nd edition (Human Kinetics, 2017).

1. *Podismos*: a quick, shifting movement of feet for training in hand-to-hand combat,
2. *Xiphismos*: mock battle; groups of boys practice fighting in a dance-like fashion with spears, swords, and shields,
3. *Homos*: high jumps, acrobatics, leaps and vaulting with the purpose of getting over high beams and boulders and scaling walls and fortresses,
4. *Tetrakomos*: a slow and majestic war dance, in a square figure, used as a formation in war.

There is a very detailed description in the New Tang dynasty annals of how the prince of Qin ordered his armies to practice the Xianbei *Pochen* dance. Later he re-named it the “Dance of the Seven Virtues” (*qide wu* 七德舞),

The prince of Qin made a diagram of the dance, round on the left and square on the right, with carriages in front and armies at the back, moving and crossing (the formation lines) back and forth, bending and stretching, in order to imitate the battle formations like “entrapping the fish” and the “geese and cranes.” He ordered Lü Cai (呂才), according to his drawing, to teach one hundred and twenty-eight musicians to dance while wearing silver armor and holding long halberds. There are altogether three changes (of battle arrangements), each being composed of four formations of troops, to imitate the attacking and striking back and forth. The singers performed the chorus, called the “*Pochen* Festival of the Prince of Qin (秦王破陣樂).” Later, he ordered Wei Zheng (魏征), together with two political advisers, Chu Liang (褚亮) and Yu Shinan (虞世南), and Li Baiyao (李百藥), the prince’s mentor, to rewrite the lyric, and he named it the “Dance of the Seven Virtues.”⁸¹

81 New Tang dynasty annals, *Juan 21, Zhidi 21, Liyue 11*. (新唐書卷二十一·志第十一·禮樂十一). 乃制舞圖，左圓右方，先偏後伍，交錯屈伸，以象魚麗，鵝鸛。命呂才以圖教樂工百二十八人，被銀甲執戟而舞，凡三變，每變為四陣，象擊刺往來，歌者和曰：“秦王破陣樂。”後令魏征與員外散騎常侍褚亮，員外散騎常侍虞世南，太子右庶子李百藥更制歌辭，名曰七德舞。

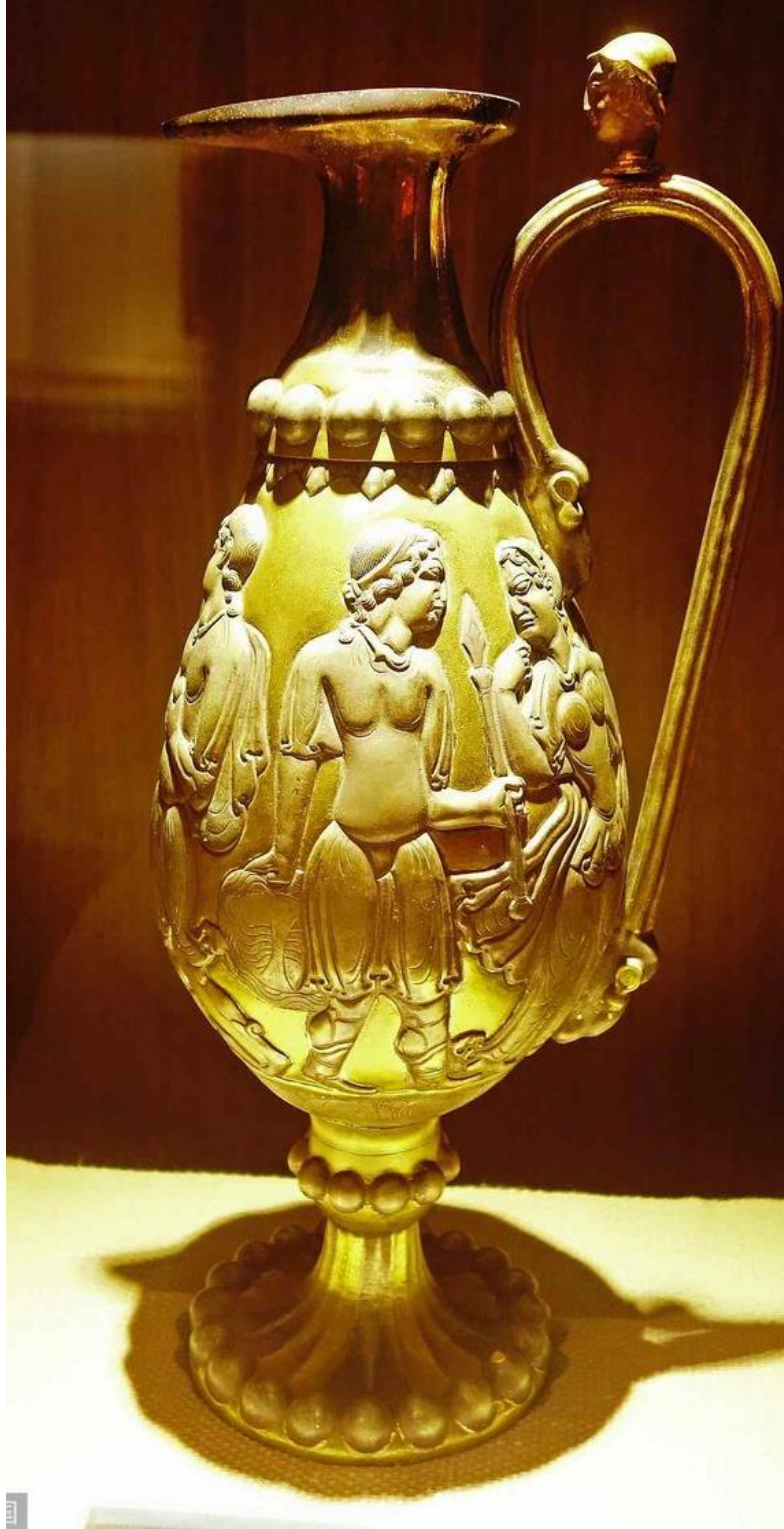


Figure 11. Silver ewer found in Guyuan County, Ningxia, in 1983, in the tomb of Li Xian (李賢 502–569 AD), of the Kushano-Sassanian or late Kushana period and representing “The Judgment of Paris.” (37.5 × 12.8 cm).

5. THE DANCE OF THE BIG MASK 大面舞

It was said that Gao Changgong (高張恭 541–573), also known as the king of Lanling (蘭陵王 541–573 AD) of the Northern Qi dynasty, when he was going to war used to wear, along with his armor and helmet, a large mask conveying fierce strength, because he looked too effeminate to scare his adversaries.⁸² After he won a battle in Jinyong (金墉), near Luoyang, in which he and his five hundred men defeated the more numerous troops of the Zhou, he celebrated his victory by dancing with his mask and his weapons. Thereupon the Sui institutionalized a weapon dance called the “big mask dance” (*Damian wu* 大面舞).⁸³ That dance is lost in China today, but it is still performed in Japan in a more ceremonial manner; it is even commemorated there by a sculpture of the king of Lanling, erected at the Itsukushima Shrine in Miyajima.

I saw a similar dance performed at night at the old Shi Tennoji Buddhist Temple in Osaka, in August 2019. The actors, with their large masks painted in blue or white, danced to the rhythm beaten by the drum (Figure 12), very similarly to the Monguors of Qinghai–Gansu, but moving with a slower rhythm and much ritualized. These theatrical plays are known as *Gagaku* in Japanese (雅樂), and they became institutionalized in 701 AD in Japan after the arrival of musicians and actors from Korea.

⁸² War facemasks worn in battle were used mainly by the Hellenistic heavy cavalry of Central Asia and the Parthian *cataphracts*, both of them forming the troops under a warlike aristocracy. Apparently the same system took hold with the Xianbei nobles, who acted as leaders in battle, wearing heavier armor and covering their horses with scaled armor. As both hands were used to hold the horse bridle and the long spear in battle, the fighters had to wear a metal mask and a strong helmet to protect their faces. See the Dengxian cave painting, in Henan Province, of Wei dynasty *cataphracts*.

⁸³ *Jiutangshu* (舊唐書) (Old Tang dynasty annals), musical festivities (*Yuelezhì* 音樂志). *Zhongzong Records* (中宗紀).



Figure 12. Dance ceremony of the *Gagaku*, performed in Osaka Shi Tennoji Temple, August 2019. Photo by the author.

6. THE DANCE OF THE SHAKING HEAD 撥頭舞

Another martial “athletic dance” was the “Shaking Head,” *Botou* (撥頭), which arrived from the Western Regions to a site near Luoyang, in Henei (河內) Prefecture, at the end of the Sui dynasty. This dance was initially performed with instruments, songs, and lyrics by many people together, stepping and shaking while dancing as if drunk, linking their arms together. Its origins were said in China to be inspired by female beasts’ biting their young to teach them how to kill their prey.⁸⁴ The *Botou* dance has no other attestations in Chinese sources. The most similar dance to be found in India is perhaps the *Arbati* dance.⁸⁵ A parallel could also be made with the “fertility dance,” similar to the *Botou*, known and danced by the Greeks and named the *Geranos*, which came from Minoan Crete and is described by Lillian Brady Lawler as a *chthonic* dance performed by night. In ancient times the *Geranos* was danced around an altar filled with many horns and dedicated to a female divinity (Ariadne or Gaia). Originally the performers moved in a line like a snake curling in on itself in circles, imitating the cycles of the Sun. Its name comes from the Indo-European *-ger, meaning “to wind.” It was the most famous dance of Greece, and it had a tremendous influence in the Roman period, in medieval times, and up until today. Plutarch (*Theseus*, 21) wrote that Theseus originated the dance, creating it after he had killed the Minotaur in the labyrinth, then adding more steps at Delos.⁸⁶

The *Geranos* “snake dance” or “dragon dance” was effectuated by the dancers forming lines in which each dancer put his arm across his neighbor’s shoulder, so they danced close together. The lines they formed moved into a coiled circle. Then the single line separated into two, each line dancing toward and then away from the other (cf. Homer *Iliad*, 18. 590–606). The dancers sometimes carried a replica

84 *Wenxian Tongkao* (文獻通考) (Comprehensive examination of literature) Ma Duanlin (馬端臨), Yuan dynasty, (元) *Zhonghuashuju chuban* (中華書局出版), chapter 147, le 20. “撥頭, 出西域胡人爲猛獸所噬其子求獸殺之爲此舞以象也踏搖娘生於隋末河內有人醜貌而耽酒常自號即中醉肆必毆其妻妻美色善自歌乃歌爲怨若之詞何翔演其曲而被之管絃因寫其妻之容妻悲訴每搖其身古號踏搖云近優人頗改其制度非舊音也” (Beijing 1986), p. 1288.

85 The *Arbati* dance is a mixture between the classical Indian *Hallisaka* and *Rasa (ka)* dramatic dances, and it is proposed by Thapilyal that it was influenced by India during Hellenistic times: see Uma Prasad Thapilyal, *Foreign Elements in Ancient Indian Society, Second Century BC to Seventh Century AD* (Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1986), p. 158.

86 Lillian Brady Lawler, “The Geranos Dance: A New Interpretation,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* vol. 77, pp. 112–30. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1946.

of the large snake (dragon) “Python,” or a long thick cord as a substitute, and they ritually killed it at the end of the dance (Lawler 122).

This action is grounded in Greek mythology. Python (Πύθων), son of Gaïa (Earth), was a large snake or dragon killed by Apollo. Exiled from Olympus by Zeus for that crime, Apollo hid for nine years in a cave, then cleansed his body in the waters of the Pineios (Πηνειός) River to purify himself of the blood of Python. The cleansing cycle of “nine” years is significant in that it is the last number before ten, signifying fulfillment, the number of heavenly bodies, completion. The conflict reflects the idea that Gaïa was the mother of the Titans, Python, and everything else that was related to “Earthly matter,” or the *chthonian* powers, while Apollo was “Light,” “Sun,” and a divine strength for the mortals. The resemblance of the Python or the *Geranos* dance to the sculpture dating from the Qin dynasty and found in Lijiashan (Figure 28) is staggering.⁸⁷ To calm the anger of Gaïa, Apollo organized the Pythian Games.

⁸⁷ The story of Apollo and the Python is very similar to one about Bodhidharma (Damo 達摩), in which he stayed nine years meditating and purifying himself in a cave and fighting a large snake, who was the reincarnation of Chi Hui (郗徽), the wife of Liang Wudi (梁武帝).

7. THE *CARPAIA* DANCE OF THE MONGUORS 莊稼其舞

Through the work of Mátyás Balogh of the Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest, a specialist on the Monguor (Tuzu 土族) tribe of the Gansu–Qinghai area, I was able to observe a fertility dance ritual he filmed, a rite best described by the words of Xenophon in the *Anabasis*, quoted below. The dance performed by the Monguors of Wenjia and Yanjia villages in Qinghai is almost exactly like the *Carpaia* (καρπαία) dance (Figure 13), made in honor of the king of Caria, named “Kar.” He was the son of King Phoroneos, who had during his rule built the “Chamber of Demeter.” The Athenians, Magnesians, and Macedonians danced the *Carpaia* to commemorate King Kar and Demeter, the goddess of harvest and fertility. But I wondered if there could also be a relationship with the Monguors of Gansu–Qinghai. Euthydemus, king of Bactria (Εὐθύδημος Α΄ 223–195 BC), was originally from Magnesia—but was it possible that there was an affiliation between the Greco-Bactrians and the Monguors? The Monguors are said to be the direct descendants of the Xianbei in the Gansu–Qinghai area, and their enigmatic connection with Hellenistic Central Asian culture and customs seems curiously to be alive today. The *Carpaia*-like dance is similar to the *Kalogeros* dance of the Greeks of today, described earlier: both dances seem to have descended originally from the *Carpaia*, and both were included in the Dionysian rituals in Gansu performed by the Greek settlers.

The manner of the dance was this: a man is sowing and driving a yoke of oxen, his arms laid at one side, and he turns about frequently as one in fear; a robber approaches; as soon as the sower sees him coming, he snatches up his arms, goes to meet him, and fights with him to save his oxen. The two men do all this in rhythm to the music of the flute. Finally, the robber binds the man and drives off the oxen; or sometimes the master of the oxen binds the robber, and then he yokes him alongside the oxen, his hands tied behind him, and drives off. (Xenophon, *Anabasis* 6.1.7–6.1.8)



Figure 13. Top: *Carpaia*-style fertility dance ritual among the Monguors of Qinghai, called the “sow-grain dance” (*Zhuangjia qiwu* 莊稼其舞), which began in the time of King Euthydemos I, the Magnesian, following his conquest of the Tarim Basin and Gansu. Bottom: The Kalogeros fertility dance ritual, which shares the origins and characteristics of a dance from northern Thrace, Greece. Image: *Proinos Typos*, February 2018.

8. WERE THE MURONG XIANBEI A WARLIKE ARISTOCRACY OF GRECO-MONGOL ORIGIN?

We have investigated the *chthonic* rituals that occurred in the Tarim Basin, mostly among the Hellenized Tocharians, Bactrians, Sogdians, and other Irano-Scythians of that area, but there are also some surprising similarities to note in the eastern direction along the Silk Road, through the provinces of Qinghai (青海), Gansu (甘肃,) and Ningxia (宁夏). The Xianbei (鮮卑) warriors, who came from Mongolia and spoke a proto-Mongolic language, waged many wars against the other Mongolic tribal federation, the Xiongnu (匈奴). In 93 AD, they defeated the Xiongnu in a battle and as a result incorporated thousands of their soldiers into the Xianbei ranks. These fought the "Mongolian way," that is, similarly to the Scythians, using the bow and arrow on horseback and attacking with overwhelming numbers of troops from all sides. They fought without any precise order, but then were able to retreat and scatter fast in the steppe. The large number of soldiers was decisive in winning battles and gaining territory. The Xianbei also used heavily armored cavalry, with long spears, a technique adopted after they had been in contact with the Greco-Bactrian model of war.

The Xianbei warrior leader Tanshihuai (檀石怀 137–181 AD) became very powerful around 156 AD, and he formed a federation of tribes together with many Xiongnu and other families of warriors (Figure 14), building a palace for himself and expanding his territory. Arriving from Inner Mongolia, he had attacked the Wusun (烏孫) in the Ili region in Central Asia in 166 AD, the Fuyü (夫餘, Buyeo Korean: 부여) tribe in what is today Korea, of course other Xiongnu tribes, and every group in between, including the Chinese.



Figure 14. Top: Wall painting representing Xianbei warrior horsemen armed with long bows. Northern Qi dynasty (北齊 550–577 AD), Taiyuan, Shanxi Province. **Bottom:** Descendants of the Murong Xianbei, the Monguor youth are preparing for the white tiger purification festival by applying mud and ashes to their bodies. Nianduhu Village, Tongren County, Qinghai Province, China, December 31, 2004.

Tanshihuai divided his empire into autonomous kingdoms, and these were ruled by the "warrior chieftains" or "*Daren*" (大人), so named by the Chinese. These were gathered from various tribal federations, with the eastern section of the empire having about twenty ethnic "clans," the central part about ten, and the western part about twenty, including the Wusun tribe when it was conquered. The Xianbei Murong tribe (慕容) had its own territory, ruled by a *Daren*, but he lost his power after Budugen (步度根 187–234 AD), the great leader of the Xianbei confederation, died.

The Murong tribe then submitted to the Chinese Cao Wei (曹魏) during the Three Kingdoms Period (*Sanguo shidai* 三國時代 220–280 AD), and it settled in northeastern China (Liaoxi 遼西). The Murong Xianbei leader who made the alliance with the Chinese was named Mohuba (莫護跋), and he helped Sima Yi (司馬懿 179–251 AD) in his campaign in the area, joining his troops together with those of Sima Yi. His own son, Muyan (木延), fought for the Cao Wei kingdom, and his grandson Shegui (涉歸) fought against the Jin dynasty (晉). Later, after Shegui's brother tried to usurp the throne, one of Shegui's sons, Hui (麾), became the leader of the Murong. He founded his capital in a walled city in what is today Liaoning. He later fought with his own brother, who was named Tuyuhun, or "Murong Tuyuhun" (慕容吐谷渾).

Tuyuhun then moved to the upper Yellow River and into the Qinghai Lake area, where he founded a new kingdom in 284 AD. There he ruled over more than a hundred tribes of various ethnic origins already living in the region. After the death of Tuyuhun in Linxia, Gansu, his numerous sons waged many military campaigns on horseback, and they ruled from Gansu to the Taklamakan desert.

The Tuyuhun kingdom was later attacked by the Tibetans and the Chinese of the Tang dynasty, who had already conquered most of their positions during the seventh century, and the Tuyuhun submitted. The Tuoba (拓跋) Xianbei tribe, led by Tuoba Gui (拓跋珪 383–409 AD) had founded the Wei dynasty in China, and they had progressively transformed their society through the Sinization of the central and northeastern areas. In the following dynasties, such as the Sui and the Tang, the Xianbei warriors continued to be known as the most loyal fighters of the imperial court, and their fame and participation became crucial for the Chinese in maintaining dominance over the other nomadic horseman fighting tribes, especially the Turks.



Figure 15. Murong Xianbei bronze buckles dating from the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220 AD), representing Pegasus, from Greek mythology. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

As we saw earlier, the Murong Xianbei confederation of Gansu–Qinghai was not a single homogeneous tribe. In the wall paintings most people appear to be Mongoloid, but others Caucasoid. The Chinese historians described some Xianbei warriors as “white,” or blond with blue eyes, or red-haired, in various Chinese sources, such as the “Book of the Jin,” the *Jinshu* (晉書 114.2910; 114–2928; 6–161). Deng Ai (鄧艾 197–264 AD), the general of the Cao Wei kingdom, decided to relocate tens of thousands of Xianbei warriors to the Gansu area, and also to mix them with the locals, so that they would become “less bloodthirsty”: he called them the “white troops” (*Baibu* 白部) (*Jinshu* 47-1322). During the mid-second century AD, the Murong Xianbei were called “white,” and the women were often praised by the Han Chinese leaders for their fairness. Another description is in the poem of Zhang Ji (張繼 712–779 AD), who writes: “The yellow-headed Xianbei entered Luoyang.” Viewing the paintings of Han Gang (韓幹 706–783 AD), Su Dongpo (蘇東坡 1037–1101 AD), the famous Northern Song dynasty poet, described a Xianbei figure riding a horse: “The elder Xianbei with reddish beard and blue eyes.”

This implies that various ethnically mixed tribal people were moving here and there to fight alongside the Xianbei. The region of Gansu–Qinghai, populated by a mixture of people, was as diverse an area as it is today. As we saw earlier in the case of the Tarim Basin, the Murong Xianbei, who lived during the transition from Iranian/Scythian Hellenism to Buddhism, seem to have perpetuated traditions and customs that link them directly with the Greco-Bactrians. The question remaining is:

“why did the Xianbei of Gansu–Qinhai and their descendant Mongolic tribe, the Monguors, retain Hellenistic-like rituals?”

To help find the answer, we can look at the 2014 analysis of the DNA of the Monguor population, which implies a blood-mixture with Hellenes (Greeks).⁸⁸ We also will examine below a royal lineage from an earlier period, and we can study the perpetuation of Hellenistic cults of worship among the Murong Xianbei.

It appears that, during the Han dynasty, the Monguor population adhered quite closely to Greek cultural references: they owned golden artworks similar to the Greco-Scythian, Irano-Scythian or Scytho-Siberian art of the steppes, and they wore finely worked gold or bronze belt buckles decorated with themes drawn from Hellenistic mythology, such as the Griffins (Musée Guimet of Paris) or the two Pegasus depictions dating from the early Eastern Han dynasty (Figure 15).

The Monguors of today live in the Qinghai–Gansu region, and they are called the “White Mongols” (*Tsagaan Mongol*) in Mongolian, or, derogatively, “indigenous” “Tuzu” (土族) by the Chinese. Concerning other possible links between the Greeks and the Mongols, Shram (pp. 93–94) proposes that the name of some Mongolian clans called “Erküt” may be connected with the Greek word *Archon* (ἄρχων), meaning “military chieftain” or “ruler,” and it might refer to the *Daren* military leaders of the Xianbei tribes mentioned in the Chinese sources.

A silver plate of Greco-Bactrian origin with its characteristic “perspective style,” representing a Dionysian scene (Figure 16), has been found as far away as northern Mongolia. In Noin-Ula, in 2006,

⁸⁸ Garrett Hellental et al., “A Genetic Atlas of Human Admixture History,” *Science*, vol. 343, issue 6172 (2014). The analysis argues the likelihood of a 1200 AD mixture with “modern Greeks.” I found that statement, including the chronology, unclear. During the Roman conquest of Greece, the Greeks (Ἕλληνες) were given the derogatory nickname *Graecus*, *Graeculus*, or *Graecari*, meaning “little Greeks,” and considered mostly to be good only for practicing sports all day, naked in their gymnasiums. Greeks often had to change their names to Latin to find better work in the Roman empire. This pejorative denomination of the post-Hellenistic “Greeks” continued through the separation of the Eastern and Western Roman empire, even up to today. Nothing separates the “modern Greeks” and the “ancient Greeks,” just as there are no “modern Jews,” “modern Indians,” or “modern Chinese” that would make them genetically, linguistically, and culturally separated from the “ancient” ones. See for instance the article of Yann Gibbons, “The Greeks really do have near-mythical origins, ancient DNA reveals: analysis connects Greeks to the famed Mycenaeans and Minoans,” *Science*, 2 August 2017. Some of the Monguors of today indeed show features of mixed heritage, including from western origins (Figure 14.).

Russian and Mongolian archaeologists found it in the burial site of a *Chanyu* of the second–first centuries BC, situated at eighteen meters deep.

The *Chanyu* perhaps had it placed there in accordance with his religious beliefs.



Figure 16. Greco-Bactrian silver plate showing a naked Dionysos with his *thyrsos* (Greek: *θύρσος*), sitting on a panther or lion skin, with Ariadne pushing him away. Discovered in the burial chamber of a Xiongnu *Chanyu* by Russian and Mongol archaeologists in Noin-Ula, Mongolia, in 2006. Second–first centuries BC. Photo from: <https://scfh.ru/en/papers/the-light-of-distant-hellas/>

9. THE TWELVE GODS, DIONYSOS, AND THE *CHTHONIC* RITUAL OF THE WHITE TIGER OF THE MONGUORS IN QINGHAI

One of the most complete works ever written on the Monguors was produced by the Belgian missionary Louis Shram (1883–1971),⁸⁹ who lived in the Qinghai–Gansu region among them from 1909 to 1949, before being expelled by the Communist Chinese. Many details on the customs of the Monguors are given, and a few of these raise questions about a possible link with a distant Hellenistic past.

The Monguors are both shamanistic and Buddhist. Living closely with the elements, they worship nature, animals, and spirits, and they believe that their shamans can become shapeshifters and take the form of various animals such as falcons, bears, eagles, and hawks.

Curiously, following their ancient traditions, they still worship the twelve “*Tengris*,”⁹⁰ instead of a single main one, as the Göktürks (*Tujue* 突厥) mostly did. These twelve god-spirits later came to be called the “twelve animal spirits” by the Monguor shamans, who invoked them to ritually cleanse and to fight evil spirits. The representation of these twelve deities in their paintings was originally in the form of twelve Mongolian horseman. In the middle of the twelve horsemen was a central figure, larger than the rest and described as a (divinity) man with a beard, riding a tiger, and wearing a black gown, holding a “knotty stick” (Shram pp. 411, 414–417). Though the twelve *Tengris*, together with the man, were thirteen in all, the Monguor shamans continued speaking about them as the “twelve *Tengris*.”

The painting is similar to the golden plate found in Gansu Jingyuan in that it depicts Dionysos or Alexander–Dionysos sitting on a leopard’s back, surrounded by the twelve Olympians (Figure 1), and holding the *thyrsos* (knotted staff). The “tiger-rider” figure of the Monguors has many similarities with Dionysos and the cults that we examined earlier. He was the strongest spirit: the shamans painted their naked bodies or disguised themselves as tigers or leopards, and they then drove away the evil spirits by running in the houses and the fields. These *chthonic* rituals seem indeed to be directly connected with the *Pohan Huxi* or *Sumozhe* from Kucha from an earlier date.

89 Louis Shram, *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier*, parts 1, 2 3 (1954–1961). Transactions of the American Philosophical Society (Philadelphia). Second edition, 2006; Charles Kevin Stuart, editor.

90 *Tengri* (Old Turkic 𐰽𐰺𐰍:𐰆𐰏𐰤; Chinese *Chengli* 撑犁), “Heavenly God,” is the proto-religious belief system of the Turkish and Mongol tribes.

The *chthonic* mystery ritual of the White Tiger is described by Shram (pp. 428–431):

All the shamans wear the black cap with long tail. After sunset the villagers arrive and the temple is closed tightly. A hog and a sheep are offered, while the attendants prostrate themselves, holding incense sticks, and the shamans dance and beat drums. In the deepest silence, they go to the place prepared for the rite, holding banners. All the heterogeneous items required are loaded into a cart. A hole fifteen feet in depth has been dug beforehand. Its upper part is shaped in a circle, the middle part is square, and the lowest part triangular. The chief of the shamans descends into the pit alone. His whole body is enveloped in red cloth; he wears a cincture made of hemp, such as the people wear at funerals. Holding in his hands the whip and the ritual knife, he takes off his shoes and hose and puts on shoes made from hemp ropes. His pigtail is unplaited, and his hair dishevelled. Some youngsters, their heads enveloped in a red cloth, descend with him into the pit. They communicate by signs and tokens, for it is forbidden to utter a single word inside the pit. The shamans beat the drums outside the pit. In the centre of the triangle one of the biggest jars is deposited, inside of which are put the corpse of the baby or boy, and the different sorts of earth. All items are covered with a piece of red cloth and the kettle is inverted over them. The chain is wrapped around the jar and fastened with the lock. The pair of trousers, the skeleton, bones and skulls are deposited around the jar, with the living snake enclosed in a basket. The triangle is filled with earth, level with the base of the square. Then five stakes are fixed in the earth, and bowls, eggs, bricks, tiles, lions and hand mills are put around them.

The Monguors' perpetuation of the painted Dionysian festivals in the White Tiger celebration and their mystery *chthonic* rituals are strikingly similar to the rites described earlier. Hellenistic mysteries also used buried baskets filled with ritual objects that they called *iera* (ἱερά). The Monguors cover their bodies with ash and mud, then use coal to color their skins in imitation of the markings of tigers and leopards. At the end of the rites, they wash themselves with ice water as a symbol of purification and resurrection.

The legend of Dionysos says he was born from the ashes of Semele, and then Zeus took him and added him to his thigh so that he could be born a "second time." The Sadhus (साधु) of India, worshippers of Shiva-Dionysos, similarly cover their bodies with ashes to purify their souls. This ritual was known in ancient Dionysian mysteries as *Katharmos*, *Katharsis*⁹¹ or "soul purification." The Indians employ three main types of ashes (*Vibhuthi* विभूति) for religious use: ash that is made out of dead bodies from the cremation ground, ash that is made out of burnt wood in the *Homa* (होम) rituals, and, the most used type, ash made out of cow dung. When Achilles learned of the death of his friend Patroklos, "he defiled his head with ash, he moaned, lying on the ground, and tore out his hair" (*Iliad* 18. 23–38). One remaining tradition of these Dionysian mysteries of purification and rebirth can still be seen in an inscription written at the gate of the Monastery of St. Paul at Mount Athos in Greece: "If you die before you die, you won't die when you die" (Ἄν πεθάνεις πρὶν πεθάνεις, δὲν θά πεθάνεις ὅταν πεθάνεις).

As for the Dionysian *Katharsis* ritual proper, it perhaps has survived in the traditional "walking on fire" festival celebrated in northern Greece and Bulgaria. This is the *Anastenaria* ritual, known in Bulgaria as *Nestinarstvo*, and it supposedly derives from the rite of purification by ashes and fire at one time practiced during the Thracian Dionysian rituals, later mixing with Christianity.⁹² Performed as an ecstatic dance in northern Greek Thrace and southern Bulgaria, the practice died out but then started up again in Greece after Greek refugees moved there following the Balkan Wars of 1911–1912 augmented later when other Greeks arrived who had escaped the Greek genocide in Turkey around 1922–1923.

Each year May 20–23, villagers gather at night to dance in circles, inducing a trance state, and then they walk on fire and ashes, accompanied by the sound of the Thracian lyre and the drum and holding the icons of St. Constantine and St. Helen. This follows the sacrifice of a black sheep in a pit. The same event is held indoors by the villagers on January 18, the day of St. Athanasios, before they purify themselves with cold water. In antiquity and in Hellenistic times, the rite must have been practiced naked, with the body covered in ashes, similar to the Monguor White Tiger festival. The Monguors of Qinghai (today only in Lanjia village, Duolin township) walk and dance in circles on ashes

⁹¹ Theodora Suk Fong Jim, *"Salvation" (Soteria) and Ancient Mystery Cults* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2017).

⁹² Katerina Kakouri, *Dionysiaka: Aspects of the Popular Thracian Religion of Today* (G. C. Eleftheroudakis, 1965).

as well, and they call that ritual *Tahui* (踏灰). The main “cleansing” (exorcism) dance practiced during the White Tiger Ritual is called the “Tiger Dance” (*Wutu wu* 於菟舞).

Part II. The Golden Zeus of King Soter in Gansu

漢武帝將其部眾討匈奴，并獲得二金長丈餘，列之于甘泉宮。
帝為大神，常行拜謁時

Han Wudi conquered the Xiongnu and captured two golden statues of one *chi* high, and installed it in Ganquan Palace. The emperor considered it to be a great god, and it was often worshipped.

—Dunhuang Mogao cave n.323. Painting inscription, seventh century

10. KING XIUTU (SOTER): HISTORY AND LOCATION



Figure 17. Dunhuang Mogao cave n.323; painting “Map of Zhang Qian going out in the Western Regions as an ambassador” (張騫出使西域圖). Seventh century.

King Xiutu was an enigmatic and important figure in Chinese history. He had a son named Midi (Ridi), who would later receive the epithet “Golden Midi” from Han Wudi, the emperor of the Han (漢武帝 157–87 BC). According to the *Hanshu*, King Xiutu (*Xiutu wang* 休屠王) had his capital city in one of what were later the Han Chinese “ten districts of Wuwei” (武威),⁹³ and he has been described as a Xiongnu king by most historians.⁹⁴

⁹³ The story is written in the *Hanshu* (28.2). During Han rule, the commandery of Wuwei in Gansu had ten districts: Guzang (姑臧), Zhangye (張掖), Wuwei (武威), Xiutu (休屠), Tiaoci (揜次), Luanniao (鸞鳥), Pulu (撲拏), Weiwei (媼圍), Cangdian (蒼顛), and Xuanwei (宣威).

⁹⁴ The *Hanshu* (28.2) says: “自武威以西，本匈奴昆邪王休屠王地，” meaning: “West of Wuwei, there was the Xiongnu king Hunye (and) the king Xiutu.”

We will consider Xiutu's cultural and “ethnic” background, to understand who he really was. The Mongol Xiongnu federation was led by the *Chanyu* named Junchen (軍臣 161–126 BC); after Junchen's death, his brother Yizhixie (伊稚邪 126–114 BC) became the new great ruler of the Xiongnu. According to various ancient Chinese sources,⁹⁵ King Xiutu ruled in what is today the central Gansu area and fought on the side of Yizhixie as an ally, while another king, called Hunxie (*Hunxie wang* 昆邪王), ruled probably in what is today the northern Gansu area, and he also fought alongside the *Chanyu's* forces. They fought together for Yizhixie against the Han.

King Xiutu based himself in a walled fortress near Wuwei city, prior to the Han (Figure 18). These “*Hu* (胡) barbarians,” so described by the Chinese, were located between the other Xiongnu tribes of the Mongolian steppes, the Han, the “Western Regions” Irano-Scythians (Sakae, Sogdians), the Tocharians, and, in the south, “the Southern Qiang” (*Nanqiang* 南羌). But the lines of trade and communication had broken because of the Xiongnu attacks, and many died in rebellions, or became impoverished. Most of their families moved away (*Hanshu* 28.2). They were, however, known for certain traits: fighting on horseback, holding grape harvest festivals (*Jiuli zhihui* 酒禮之會),⁹⁶ cultivating cereals, and raising large numbers of livestock. The “Records of the Grand Historian, Collected Annotations” (*Shiji Jijie* 史記集解), translated by James R. Ware,⁹⁷ is, however, very clear on the likelihood that King Xiutu was *not* a Xiongnu from Mongolia. Here I have adapted Ware's translation of Pei Yin's (裴駙 471–532 AD) explanation:

Pei Yin: The *Hanshu yin yi* (漢書音義) says: The place where the Xiongnus worshipped Heaven was originally at the foot of Mt. Ganquan (*Ganquan xia* 甘泉下), in Yunyang district (雲陽). After the Qin (秦) took their land, they moved westward to King Xiutu.

⁹⁵ The main references to the story are by Ban Gu in the *Hanshu* “Story of Huo Qubing,” Si Maqian (司馬遷 145–86 BC) in *Shiji*, “The story of the Xiongnu,” Si Maqian *Shiji Jijie* or the “Record of the Great Historian, Collected Annotations,” Si Mazhen (司馬貞 679–732 AD) *Shiji Suoyin* commentary, and the *Shiji Zhengyi* of Zhang Shoujie (張守節 late seventh century).

⁹⁶ The Wuwei area is still famous for its grape harvest.

⁹⁷ James R. Ware, “Once More the Golden Man,” *T'oung Pao* Second Series, vol. 34, l. 3, 匈奴祭天处本在雲陽甘泉山下、秦奪其地、後徙之休屠王右地、故休屠有祭天金人、象祭天人也。(1938), pp. 174–178.

Xiutu possessed the anthropomorphic golden statue for worshipping Heaven. This is the worshipping-heaven statue mentioned in the *Hanshu*.

In 121 BC, the emperor Han Wudi (漢武帝 157–87 BC) sent the military general Huo Qubing (霍去病 140–117 BC) to take over the Xiongnu and other “*Hu* barbarian” positions in the Wuwei area. Huo began his campaign in spring in the Yanzhi mountains (焉支山, today known as Shandan in Gansu 山丹) and Juyanze (居延澤, today Ejinaqi in Inner Mongolia 額濟納旗). In summer he began to invade from Longxi (隴西, Lintao in Gansu 臨挑). He crushed the enemy during this attack, capturing about eight thousand “*Hu* barbarian heads” (得胡首虜八千餘級) and the “golden sculpture for worshipping Heaven of King Xiutu” (得休屠王祭天金人). Midi, the son of King Xiutu, had a brother called “Lun” (倫) by the Han. The Xiongnu *Chanyu* was enraged at this loss and wanted to execute King Xiutu and Hunxie, so, to save their lives, they decided to submit as vassals to the Han. But King Xiutu changed his mind at the last minute, and he was killed in cold blood by King Hunxie. Xiutu’s queen and his two sons, Midi and Lun, were then taken back to China and put into the imperial house as “exotic” guests.

“Xiutu” is written with the characters for *xiu* (休; “putting an end,” “resting,” “stopping”) and *tu* (屠; “massacre”), and in Chinese was the translation of a foreign name that had the sense of: “The one who puts an end to massacres.” The closest equivalent name I found for that phonetic translation is “Soter” (Σωτήρ), meaning “Savior” in Greek, which has the same signification.

The ancient walled city of King Xiutu is located in the Liangzhou (涼州) area of Wuwei city district, and its ruins were still standing around 1970. The walls of the outer city were thick and the inner-city walls thin, with the total length north to south being about 400 meters, and 200 meters in width, in the east–west direction. Within the old city walls, several halls from a later period still stood until the 1970s, including the “Black Tiger Hall” (*Heihudian* 黑虎殿), “Kuixing pavilion” (*Kuixing ge* 魁星閣), “Empress Temple” (*Niangniang Miao* 娘娘廟), “Caishen pavilion” (*Caishen ge* 財神閣), and “King of Horses Hall” (*Mawang dian* 馬王殿), which the villagers linked with King Xiutu.



Figure 18. The ruins of King Soter's city in the Wuwei city district. Photo by the author.

11. THE THREE-METER-HIGH GOLDEN STATUE OF ZEUS AND THE GODDESS

The “New Account of the Tales of the World” (*Shishuo Xinyu* 世說新語, chapter 23), compiled by Liu Yiqing (劉義慶 403–444 AD), described the golden statue of King Xiutu as one *zhang* (丈) tall, or about three meters. Liu also wrote that Wudi worshipped it, and he makes a historical connection with the later Wei dynasty (Greco-)Buddhist sculptures: “These gods are the same type as the Buddhist ones, but they date from the time of Han Wudi” (此神全類於佛，豈當漢武之時). Zhang Yan (張晏 third–fourth centuries), commentator of the *Hanshu*, also describes it as a “Buddhist worship statue” (佛徒祠金人). Wei Shou (魏收 506–572 AD) said that this statue “was a seeping-in due to the circulation of Buddhism” (此則佛道流通之漸也). Greco-Buddhist sculptures were not yet in vogue in China at the time of Han Wudi, but, because they were “like” the later ones, Chinese historians later interpreted them as being linked.

Fortunately, a painting of the statue of King Xiutu can be seen on the northern wall of the Mogao cave n.323 in Dunhuang, dating from the seventh century and named: “Map of Zhang Qian going out in the Western Regions as an ambassador” (張騫出使西域圖) (Figures 17, 24). It represents the scene in which Zhang Qian (張騫 164–113 BC) sets out to travel to the Western Regions, and it shows the Palace of Ganquan, with two Buddhist statues at the upper right, and, below, the golden statue of King Xiutu being worshipped by the Han officials. Below the statue a tablet has been painted with the inscription: “Han Wudi conquered the Xiongnu, and captured two gold [golden statues] of one *chi* high, and installed it in Ganquan Palace. The emperor considered it as a great god, and it was often worshipped.”⁹⁸

The Tang must have been in possession of paintings of the statue in the Ganquan Palace, or other replicas, or maybe the statue was still there during that period. The statue displays the face of a Greek god with his beard (Greco-Bactrian kings were never represented bearded), and the figure is quite bulky. One might think of Heracles, but it is not he. One of his fingers points toward the sky, holding at its tip a goddess. The Olympian god is covered by a Chinese royal gown made of a piece of real cloth, added by the Chinese, as open Greek nakedness was not acceptable in Han worship cults or in society.

What attracted my attention, however, was the silver tetradrachm, used by three of the kings of

⁹⁸ 漢武帝將其部眾討匈奴，并獲得二金長丈餘，列之于甘泉宮。帝為大神，常行拜謁時。

Bactria (Euthydemos II, Pantaleon, Agathocles) at the end of the second century BC, that shows a particular kind of standing Zeus, holding aloft the *chthonic* three-faced goddess Hecate (dark moon/ascending moon/full moon = Hecate/Artemis/Selene) in his right hand (Figure 23). The painting shows something like a face (Figure 24, bottom right), and the tablet inscribed under the statue states: “Two golds [golden statues] of one *chi*” (二金長丈餘) — but as there is only *one* statue of gold represented, why would *two* have been written under the *one* statue? It must be that this was a “two-in-one” gold statue, and I suggest that the standing Zeus is holding Hecate, Nike, or Athena (the goddess seems to wear a helmet and to be pointing to Heaven with her right hand as well).

The three-meter statue of Zeus in Gansu reminds us of Pausanias’s description of the Zeus statue that stood in his temple in Olympia, which was twelve meters high:

The god sits on a throne, and he is made of gold and ivory. On his head lies a garland which is of olive shoots. In his right hand he carries a Victory, which, like the statue, is of ivory and gold; she wears a ribbon and on her head a garland. In the left hand of the god is a scepter, ornamented with every kind of metal, and the bird sitting on the scepter is the eagle. The sandals of the god are also of gold, as is his robe. On the robe are embroidered figures of animals and the flowers of the lily.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Pausanias 5.11.1. Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, transl. W. H. S. Jones and H. A. Omerod, Loeb Classical Library Volumes (Vol. II) (Cambridge, London: London University Press, 1918), p. 437.

12. THE ASSOCIATION OF KING XIUTU WITH THE LATER XIANBEI ARISTOCRACY

An interesting theory that would explain some of the Hellenistic customs and art references existing among the Murong Xianbei comes from the work of Yao Weiyuan (姚薇元 1905–1985). He argues that King Xiutu was the ancestor of some members of the Xianbei military aristocracy.¹⁰⁰ Yao attributes the tribal name Dugu (独孤), an alternate form of the name Tuge (屠各), to a name borne by certain Xianbei steppe aristocratic clans, before they took the Chinese name Liu (劉) when they were moved to Luoyang by Tuoba Hong (拓拔宏 or Xiao Wendi 北魏孝文帝 467–499 AD). (Tuoba Hong moved the northern tribes to Sinicize them.) Yao deduces that Tuge (屠各),¹⁰¹ or Xiutuge (休屠各), is an alternate form of Tuhe (徒河), and that King Xiutu and his clan are the ancestors of the Murong Xianbei.

It is very difficult, if not impossible, to group all of the nomadic tribes of the “Western Regions” and the steppes of Mongolia into large sub-groups or to categorize them by precisely separated “ethnicities.” The ancient Chinese historians categorized them by “tribal associations,” because most tribes, as steppe nomads, moved constantly. When they settled in walled towns, they took on the various local cultural elements, sometimes including the language. They adopted the customs of the area after one or two generations, mixing their own mythologic and religious customs with local ones but retaining old associations and references. In that area of Gansu–Qinghai, the Hellenistic influence in the walled cities seems to have been perpetuated and expanded through many generations, and its mythological and kingship references continued from the time of the Greco-Bactrians to the development of the Xianbei aristocracy in Gansu, before their tribal counterparts farther east were Sinicized by Tuoba Hong. As recorded in the *Weishu*, the Xianbei military aristocracy continued to erect statues in gold of the king and queen until the time of Tuoba Si (拓拔嗣 or Wei Ming Yuandi 魏明元帝 392–423 AD),¹⁰² which demonstrates their direct dynastic affiliation with the Greeks of Gansu and an identical Hellenistic royal lineage.

¹⁰⁰ Yao Weiyuan, *Research on the Hu Family Names of the Northern Dynasties* (北朝胡姓考) (Wuhan University Press [武汉大学出版社], 2013).

¹⁰¹ Wang Penglin, “Tuge (屠各), a Tribal Group, along with Xiongnu,” in *Linguistic Mysteries of Ethnonyms in Inner Asia* (Lexington Books, 2018), p. 113.

¹⁰² James R. Ware, “An Ordeal among the T'o-pa Wei,” *T'oung Pao* Second Series, vol. 32, livr. 4 (Brill, 1936).

13. GANQUAN: SWEET WATER PALACE AND THE GRECO-BACTRIAN CONQUEST OF GANSU

To the west, in the Qin kingdom in Gansu, as the Chinese sources tell us, the Yiqu (義渠) western tribal federation (720–272 BC) was located in the area of the northern part of the Wei River bordering the Qin (秦 771–207 BC). Its large territory reached west to the Xihai grassland (西海), east to Qiaoshan (橋山, northern Shaanxi bordering Gansu), north to the plains of Hetao in Ningxia (宁夏河套), and south to the Jing River (涇河).

In 306 BC, the Yiqu lost a battle with the Qin, and when Zhaoxiang of Qin (秦昭襄王 325–251 BC) ascended the throne, the king of the Yiqu went to pay a visit to the new Chinese king. There he was immediately detained by queen dowager Xuan (宣太后 338–265 BC), the mother of King Zhaoxiang. She ordered the killing of the king and his guards in Ganquan Palace. The Qin immediately sent their troops to attack the Yiqu territory and defeated them in 278 BC. These “Yiqu” (Irano-Scythian) tribal federations of Gansu must have been different from the Northern Steppe Scythians located near Chang’an, called the *Lirong* 驪戎, or “black-horse armies,”¹⁰³ most likely associated with the “Scytho-Siberians”; if in fact they were distinct tribes, they seem to have had similar forms of art.

The area of Gansu or Ganquan could not have been visited by the Greco-Bactrians at this time, as the kingdom was declared independent by Diodotes I “Savior” (Διόδωτος Α' ὁ Σωτήρ 256–234 BC), about 250 BC, and Alexander III is not known to have waged a war farther east than Ferghana. Diodotes I could not have sent an expedition to the east at the time of King Zhaoxiang when they fought the Yiqu warriors in 278 BC. Then when did the Hellenization of the Tarim Basin and the Gansu corridor begin? Probably after the son of Diodotes I, Diodotes II, was killed by Euthydemus, for proposing to make a humiliating alliance with the Parthians. Euthydemus was a Magnesians military general, the former satrap of Sogdiana under King Diodotes I, and when he came into power, taking the throne, a large number of Saka/Iranian fighters joined his forces, expanding his conquests eastward from Sogdiana and Ferghana to the Tocharian (Phryni) and the Seres (Chinese) (Strabo 11.11.1), as the western border of the kingdom was at war with the Seleucids and the Parthians. The Greco-Bactrians expanded east (Tarim

¹⁰³ *Guoyu* (國語) (Accounts of the states), chapter 7, *Jinyu* (晉語) (Shanghai: Shanghai Gujichubanshe 上海古籍出版社 1978), p. 253.

Basin) and southeast (India) with their affiliated enrolled Saka horsemen and chariots. It is evident there were not “Greeks alone” in their armies, but that they were mainly composed of mixed Iranians (Central, Eastern Central Asians) from the locality, along with Greeks.

The distance to Gansu was not a problem, given the rapid pace of the region’s horses. The famous Ferghana horse had an average speed of 40–56.5 km per hour without rest when it walked steadily. Even the average trail horse in decent shape could withstand a journey of 80.5 km in one day. As the distance from Ferghana to Gansu Wuwei is about 3000 km, it could be covered in about a month and a half. This made the place very close and reachable for the Greco-Bactrians, eager to discover and to conquer. The well-known theory that they “couldn’t cross the mountains” thus cannot stand, as the Central Asians were perfectly aware of the characteristics of the regions and knew the passes into the Tarim Basin. Taking into consideration the logistics of the expedition and the time necessary to fight battles and consolidate cities, the campaign of Euthydemos to reach Gansu and create his settlement there must have taken six months or a year, being completed in 230 BC.

The tribes of Central and Eastern Central Asia that Euthydemos had taken as allies became assimilated under the system that had also been successfully used by the Seleucid empire. They were part of a federation of affiliated kingdoms forming a hegemonic power ruled from walled fortresses and cities, as city-states, or city-kingdoms, with their vassal tribal kings keeping their autonomy in exchange for tribute and military aid, especially the many fighters on horseback. They mostly used the same monetary system for trading and were ruled by a king who had married or was issued from an inter-marriage (*epigamia* ἐπιγαμία) with the main ruling dynasty of the conquered city-kingdom that had joined the Hellenistic dynasty.

The conquests of Euthydemos¹⁰⁴ went as far as Gansu Lintao, bordering the Qin kingdom,

¹⁰⁴ This Kuliab stone inscription, found in Tajikistan 200–195 BC and written by Heliodotos himself, shows him to have been an unprecedented ruler: “Heliodotos dedicated this fragrant altar for Hestia, venerable goddess, illustrious amongst all, in the grove of Zeus, with beautiful trees; he made libations and sacrifices so that the greatest of all kings, Euthydemos, as well as his son, the glorious, victorious and remarkable Demetrios, shall be preserved of all pains, with the help of Tyche with divine thoughts.” τόνδε σοι βωμόν θυώδη, πρέσβα κυδίστη θεῶν Ἑστία, Διὸς κ(α)τ’ ἄλλος καλλίδενδρον ἔκτισεν καὶ κλυταῖς ἥσκησε λοιβαῖς ἐμπύροις Ἡλιόδοτος ὄφρα τὸμ πάντων μέγιστον Εὐθύδημον βασιλέων τοῦ τε παῖδα καλλίνικον ἐκπρεπῆ Δημήτριον πρευμενῆς σώιζης ἐκηδεῖ(ς) σὺν τύχαι θεόφρον [1].

where he erected gigantic statues of the twelve Olympian gods, to mark the boundary of his territory. The Greco-Bactrians of Euthydemus passed through the cities of what is now northern Xinjiang Province, then continued south. The king's son, Demetrios I, "the Invincible" (Δημήτριος Ἀνίκητος 222–180 BC), seems to have launched a drive for conquest throughout Taxila¹⁰⁵ around 200 BC and built alliances with the city-kingdom of Khotan or Niya, probably constructing or consolidating fortresses in the region, rich with gold, on his way to the silk-producing Qin kingdom (the Seres). The Greco-Bactrians settled new alliances with the local tribes, who observed the new military and warfare methods with interest. As they went, they established royal cults and festivals and erected statues of the gods for worship, just as in the rest of the Hellenistic world.

It is not known to what extent the populations of northwestern China had been Hellenized by the end of the Qin kingdom, but archeological findings in the region from the Tarim and Gansu show that its ruling military aristocracy referred to Hellenistic models of kingship and to such royal cults as those shown on the Sampul tapestry,¹⁰⁶ the seal of Athena *Alkidemos* in Niya, and the tapestry of Loulan, demonstrating a considerable level of influence.

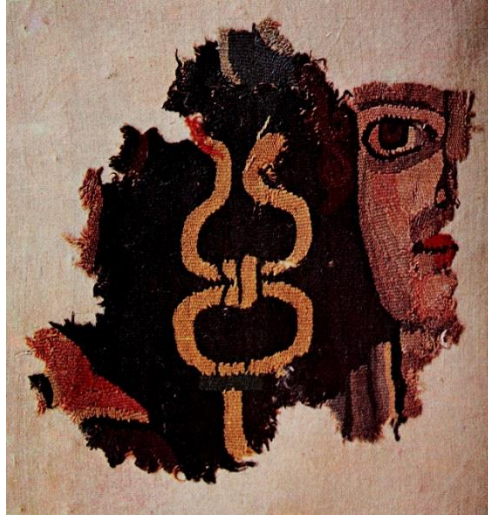
But it may have become a less easily controlled game when many hordes of nomads began moving into the steppes of western Mongolia in Gansu and Qinghai. However, their settlement in the Hellenistic-style cities of Gansu and their direct contact with its system of kingship most likely consolidated some steppe warrior clans into relationships in matters of warfare organization, trade, and cult worship, as happened later with the Murong Xianbei.

The relationship between the steppe tribes and the Greco-Bactrians in 230 BC must have been similar to that of the Roman Empire facing the Germanic or Gaulic tribes: some tribes would be allied and become "Romanized," some would be enemies, and others would first join and later rebel. The groups most closely allied with the Greco-Bactrians were those whose kings were a mix of local rulers and the Hellenistic dynasty in city-kingdoms, as had occurred in Gandhara and in Bactria with the Kushans. When they were divided from the Greco-Bactrians of Bactria, the Greco-Sakas of Gansu–Qinghai rapidly came to be controlled by the Xiongnu. The remaining Euthydemids of 121 BC, when

¹⁰⁵ See Lucas Christopoulos, "Hellenes and Romans in Ancient China." *Sino-Platonic Papers* no. 230, pp. 15–31.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16, plate 4.

they had no more troops, unlike the Romans faced with the Germans and the Gauls, were left with only the choice whether to die or to follow the *Chanyu*.



19 a.



19 b.



19 c.



19 d.



19 e.



19 f.

Figure 19. (a) Tapestry from Loulan. M. Aurel Stein, *Innermost Asia: Detailed Report of Explorations in Central Asia, Kan-su, and Eastern Iran* (5 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928; reprint. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1981). (b) Coins of King Demetrios I in India, with his caduceus. From Benjamin Rowland, *The Art of Central Asia* (New York: Crown); the reverse shows the royal elephant. (c) Massive bronze sculpture of the Qin dynasty showing the symbol of the two snakes (or dragons) mating. Shaanxi History Museum. (d) Detail of the “mating part” of the snakes rising up to Heaven. (e) Carved brick from the Qin dynasty showing the same symbol, the two snakes of Heaven and Earth mating. Shaanxi History Museum. (f) Bronze sculpture showing three snakes (dragons) ascending, on a ritual object dating from the Qin dynasty (similar to the “Serpent column,” Τριτάρηνος Ὄφις of Delphi). Shaanxi History Museum

Ganquan seems to have been a sacred and important site for all of these steppe tribes and the Xiongnu. Between its takeover by the Qin in 278 BC and the ascension to the throne of the future Qin Emperor (Qin Shihuang 秦始皇 259–210 BC), who became the “king of Qin” in 247 BC, about thirty years had passed. *Pei Yin* refers to the Xiongnu’s being turned away from Ganquan: did that take place later

than the period in which the Yiqu king was murdered by the queen dowager Xuan? The migration of the Xiongnu westward from Ganquan must have been after 250 BC, as the Greco-Bactrians were unlikely to have been present previous to that, so there could have been no worship of the Olympian statues. The political situation of the region is easy to guess, as these Xiongnu joined the Greco-Bactrian king of Gansu around 176–162 BC, when they expanded westward, to strengthen their power against the Qin from walled cities.

Hellenistic warfare technology and the fortress-building architectural knowledge of Alexander's engineers was, of course, very advanced at that time in Central Asia. The Greco-Bactrian rulers had improved the military defense systems of the cities (or built them themselves) and provided the enrolled tribes of the region with modern warfare tactics and weaponry, such as the use of the *cataphracts* and other technological war-machines, and the art of undermining city walls.

It is probable that the nomadic Xiongnu warriors from Mongolia first entered the city and subsequently allied with the Greco-Saka of Gansu. Over the years, as the Xiongnu empire became stronger, its troops fought side by side with these allies, led by the great *Chanyu*. Like the Kushana rulers, the Xiongnu most likely joined the dynasty at first, probably making a marriage agreement with King Soter, leading to the later Murong Xianbei military aristocracy. It is interesting to consider that the inscription on an object found near the Wei River, Kangjiagou (康家沟), Lintai (林台), written in Indo-Aryan or "barbaric Greek" and never translated, is perhaps associated with these Murong Xianbei/Xiongnu of Gansu, living there when that object was fabricated.¹⁰⁷

A chariot excavated in Majiayuan, Gansu Province, dating from the end of the Warring States period, when the Greco-Bactrians are thought to have been present (third century BC), is one of the finest of the period ever discovered in China. It demonstrates both the skilled metal artwork the region could produce and the wealth of its rulers. It is decorated with gold, silver, and copper floral ornaments and figures of golden tigers and ibex in the style of the "art of the steppes," similar to those of the Tianshan area, which at the time belonged to the "*Hu* barbarian kings" fighting the Qin kingdom (Figure 29). The golden "walking tigers" are related to the conquests of the Greco-Bactrian kings, according to

¹⁰⁷ Mark A. Whaley, "A Middle Indo-Aryan Inscription from China," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, vol. 62, no. 4 (December 2009), pp. 413–60.

Emma C. Bunker.¹⁰⁸ Yang Jianhua and Katheryn M. Linduff, in another paper, differentiate these “walking tigers” from Gansu from the “fighting” tigers of the Ordos plains, but their association with similar motifs from Eastern Kazakhstan is also pointed out. The main difference is that the artifacts from the Issyk-Kul, the Tianshan, and Majiayuan in Gansu are two-dimensional, while those of the Ordos Plateau are three-dimensional. “These gold ornamental objects for decorating the chariot of Majiayuan and the occupant of Issyk Kurgan illustrate a similar aesthetic predilection for luxurious effect” (Yang and Linduff, p. 76). The three-dimensional objects date from the late fourth and third centuries BC, while the two-dimensional ones appear at a slightly later stage, during the third century BC, at the time of the Greco-Bactrian expansion toward the east. The authors also conclude that “since the dating is comparable in sites discussed in the west of the Tianshan mountains in Kazakhstan and in the Majiayuan cemetery, this suggests that connection spread directly from the Tianshan Mountains to the Qin territory in the Tianshui area.”¹⁰⁹

That connection is, to my mind, however, linked with neither the Xiongnu expansion westward nor with the “escape” of the steppe tribes from the Greco-Bactrians, but rather to the colonization activities of the Greco-Bactrians in Gansu around 230 BC, with their Saka-affiliated horsemen tribes and their kings riding chariots. The animals depicted in this motif are not represented as fighting, but rather are mostly seen standing, stable royal decorations signifying the centralization of power in Gansu. This

¹⁰⁸ Emma C. Bunker, “Gold in the Ancient Chinese World: A Cultural Puzzle,” *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 53, no. 1/2 (Zurich 1993), p. 29. See also Lucas Christopoulos, “Greek Influences on the Pazyryk-style Wrestling Motif of the Keshengzhuang Bronze Buckles,” p. 36, *Sino-Platonic Papers* 260 (2016). Fire gilding, or mercury-amalgam gilding, had been used on Chinese bronzes since the Warring States period, and especially during the Qin dynasty, or the third century BC (Paul Jett and W. Thomas Chase, “The Gilding of Metals in China,” in *Gilded Metals: History, Technology and Conservation*, ed. Terry Drayman-Weisser [London: Archetype Publications, 2002], pp. 145–55). Liquid mercury and powdered gold were mixed into a paste that was then applied to the desired area and was heated, volatilizing most of the mercury. This technique of gilding with the aid of mercury is probably the same as the process used by the Greeks, as described by Pliny in his *Natural History* (33.20, 36.7). Craddock found Hellenistic bracelets and rings containing mercury (P. T. Craddock, “Archaeology,” *Science*, vol. 4 [1977], pp. 103–123), leading us to suppose that this technique was perhaps brought from the Hellenistic world to the Qin.

¹⁰⁹ Yang Jianhua and Katheryn M. Linduff, “A Contextual Explanation for ‘Foreign’ or ‘Steppic’ Factors Exhibited in Burials at the Majiayuan Cemetery and the Opening of the Tianshan Mountain Corridor,” *Asian Archeology*, vol. 1, p. 82 (Research Center for Chinese Frontier Archeology, Jilin University, 2012).

is perhaps why the Ordos style of Pazyryk art seems to disappear after the expansion of the Greco-Bactrian empire, as is pointed out by Trudy Kawami.¹¹⁰

As the Greco-Bactrian empire arrived, new societal systems of ruling from walled cities in Bactria, Ferghana, the northern part of the Tarim, and the Gansu corridor assimilated the strength of the nomads around a deified king, who replaced the mystical divinity of the steppe warrior clans or simply mingled with it. Yan Liu,¹¹¹ however, attributes the golden artifacts of the Ordos region and Inner Mongolia to the Qin themselves. She argues that the gold and silver artifacts found at Xigoupan (西沟畔 fourth–third centuries BC), with their gold *appliqués*, were produced by a technique similar to that used for pieces found in Gansu Linxia (臨夏) and Qingshui (清水), and thus that the Qin must be the originators of these pieces. The art and techniques of metal work are transmittable, and the Qin were perhaps as capable as the Irano-Scythians of producing these particular objects in Gansu. They most likely did not make them for the Scythians themselves, however, as the latter had their own talented artists, as excavated materials demonstrate.

The Qin were always at war with the Yiqu people, their hereditary enemies at the time, and those areas of Gansu were controlled mostly by these fighting Irano-Scythian *Hu*, except when peace was made with the Greco-Bactrians from 230 to 221 BC. Even after fighting them, Qinshi Huangdi did not go farther west than Linxia (Lintao), taking the twelve chryselephantine statues there in 221 BC.

Gold was already used in artifacts in China during the Shang-Zhou dynasties, and some motifs similar to the art of the steppes were used, but the terms “gold” (*huangjin* 黃金) and “silver” (*baijin* 白金) first appeared in literature during the Warring States period (戰國 476–221 BC),¹¹² as the importance of gold increased in China only during Qin-Han times, after they started to trade with their

¹¹⁰ Trudy S. Kawami, “Greek Art and the Finds at Pazyryk,” *Source: Notes in the History of Art*, vol. 10, no. 4. *The Dating of Pazyryk* (Ars Brevis Foundation, Inc., 1999), pp. 16–19.

¹¹¹ Yan Liu, Rui Li, Junchang Yang, Guoxing Zhao, and Panpan Tan, “China and the Steppe: Technological Study of Precious Metalwork from Xigoupan Tomb 2 (4th–3rd c. BCE) in the Ordos Region, Inner Mongolia,” *Heritage Science* 9, article 46 (2021).

¹¹² Bunker, “Gold in the Ancient Chinese World,” p. 29. See also Lucas Christopoulos, “Greek Influences on the Pazyryk-style Wrestling Bronze Buckles Motif of Keshengzhuang,” *Sino-Platonic Papers* 260 (2016), p. 46.

northwestern neighbors, during the third century BC.¹¹³ During the Western Han period, a good example of new gold artwork technology coming from the Hellenistic West, with delicate filigree work, can be seen in the artifacts found in the burials of the “Marquis of Haihun” (海昏侯 92–59 BC), grandson of Han Wudi, in Jiangxi Province, between 2011 and 2016.¹¹⁴

Before the Xiongnu, when the Greco-Bactrians arrived, they met the Chinese of the Qin for the first time and saw that they were producing silk. Euthydemus, while building large walled cities serving as fortresses and investing in the construction of gigantic statues, surely made a marriage agreement and a peace treaty with them, as Seleucos did with the Maurya Chandragupta in India, to secure the northeastern border of his conquests.

The construction of the Gansu kingdom by the Greeks was important because of its geographical situation, as they were seeking an alliance with the Qin to trade silk and gold. New warfare technologies from the Greco-Bactrians must have been beneficial for Ying Zheng, because he could use them against the other states of China, especially the quick, armored cavalry with its long spears and horses from Central Asia (Figure 31).¹¹⁵

The most surprising discovery I made in my research is that the “*Hu*” (胡) son of Qinshi Huangdi, Hu Hai (胡亥 229–207 BC), most likely was the son of a princess offered by the Greco-Bactrians during that alliance (*epigamia*). The name of Hu Hai’s mother was “the *Hu* Princess” (Hu Ji 胡姬), and information about her is surprisingly sparse in the Chinese historical records. Normally, when Hu Hai came to the throne, his mother would have received the posthumous title (*fenghao* 封号) of “empress dowager” (*Huang Taihou* 皇太后), and women in that position were usually very active in politics. But she did not, and shows no such activity. This is strange to the point of being abnormal in the ruling class of the Qin. The reason is probably that she was a princess of the Euthydemid family, and, in the eyes of

¹¹³ Xialong Wu, “Cultural Hybridity and Social Status: Elite Tombs on China’s Northern Frontier during the Third Century BC,” *Antiquity* vol. 87 (335), pp. 121–36 (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

¹¹⁴ Yan Liu, “The Han Empire and the Hellenistic World: Prestige Gold and the Exotic Horse,” *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry* vol. 20(3) (September 2020), pp. 175–98.

¹¹⁵ See, for instance, Christopher Hallenbrook, “The Qin and Han Dynasties: The Flexibility and Adaptability of Military Force and Expansion,” *Bridgewater State University Undergraduate Review*, vol. 4 (2008), pp. 121–25.

the Qin aristocracy, a “*Hu*,” or a “foreigner.” That is why she was not completely included in the royal dynastic system.

The “Hu Princess” bore Hu Hai in 229 BC. Euthydemus must have made an alliance with the “king of Qin,” who was about thirty at that period, in 230 BC. The establishment of the Greco-Saka kingdom of Gansu and the fabrication of the twelve chryselephantine statues of the Olympians took place at around that time, and the alliance with the Chinese happened precisely then. The king of Qin must have made use of the new warfare technology of the Greeks of Gansu until 221 BC, when he became the emperor and broke that alliance, having become sufficiently powerful—subsequent to conquering the other Chinese states, attacking the Greco-Sakas of Gansu, and building the Great Wall—to establish a new policy of centralizing power in himself. He then required the various nations to place themselves under his command and their leaders to prostrate themselves in front of the statues of the twelve Olympian gods that he took from Lintao in Gansu for his own palace in Xianyang.¹¹⁶ But, as stated in the “Western Regions Transmissions” of the *Hanshu*, “he didn’t go farther west than Lintao” (然西不過臨洮).

Hu Hai himself, as recounted in the “Transmissions of Li Si” of the *Shiji*, while going to view a wrestling match (*Juedi* 鞮抵) in 209 BC, and talking with the prime minister Li Si (李斯 280–208 BC), claimed that “he had lost all trace of his ancestors” (且朕少失先人). He was of course talking about his mother’s side, as the Greeks of Gansu had been cut off from him since 221 BC, when he was just eight years old; half of his ancestry, that is, his mother’s side, had simply vanished for him. We can understand why the Greeks were called the “Greater Qin” (大秦) by the Han authors, who connected them either with the (half Greek?) Hu Hai or with their twelve identical colossal statues, or both. But the real story must have been sadly erased or passed over in silence during the Han dynasty. In fact, it appears that Hu Hai was perhaps—half Greek! The king of Qin would not have married a *Hu* barbarian princess if it were not to gain something from this alliance, and it seems that these *Hu* were important enough for him to have a child to seal the agreement. That is probably why Ban Gu was condemned for “illegally

¹¹⁶ *Shiji*, *juan* 6, *Qinshi Huangdi Benji*. 6. (卷六) 秦始皇本紀 第六; 始皇帝太史公曰: 收天下之兵聚之咸陽, 銷鋒鑄鐻, 以為金人十二, 以弱黔首之民.

redacting the dynastic history” in 60 AD, and why modern Chinese archeologists never publicly open the tomb of Qinshi Huangdi, all in order to conceal this.¹¹⁷

Hu Hai, just as were his male ancestors on his mother’s side, was a great admirer of wrestling. A wooden comb engraved with images of wrestlers, represented with a piece of cloth hanging next to them, was found in Hubei Province, and used during his lifetime (Figure 20). In ancient Greece, combs or special half-moon-shaped tools called *strigil* were used to take the sand off an athlete’s body after a wrestling match. That particular comb might also have been used for cleaning or holding the wrestler’s long hair after sports. In Hellenistic times, these wrestling-related tools were traditionally placed in Greek burial tombs together with a bottle of oil.¹¹⁸ Three tombs dating from the third century BC in Hellenistic Greece had these wrestling-related objects in their burial chambers.¹¹⁹ The image of two snakes mating, on the caduceus, an important attribute of Demetrios I, seems also to have been a significant symbol for Hu Hai and the Qin dynasty (Figure 19).

A small statuette without historical sources, but perhaps genuine, comes from a private collection and is claimed to be from the same period. It shows a deified Chinese ruler making a benediction gesture in the style of a Hellenistic king. If authentic, it may represent Hu Hai or the king of Qin at an early stage of his reign (Figure 27). Some of the bronze sculptures found in the Lijiashan

117 In China, secrecy is still maintained on the mausoleum of Qinshi Huangdi, for obscure reasons that the authorities link to “mercury pollution” or other “Indiana Jones-like” life-threatening traps. I hope that, given the moon-landing capabilities of the Chinese, the same drive for scientific discovery will soon lead at least to a robotic filming in and live streaming of what lies inside the mausoleum of Qinshi Huangdi—and that if some Olympians are found in there, it may help in bringing about world peace. When I was a student in 1991 in Beijing, friends who worked in the Greek embassy told me that the Chinese government had asked the embassy to bring Greek archeologists to investigate a site containing “Greek findings.” But when two Greek archaeologists duly arrived, the Chinese scientists changed their minds and stated that there is “nothing to see anymore,” so the Greek archeologists returned home. Something similar happened in Japan, when an archeologist opened the tomb of one of the first emperors and found some Korean artifacts. The authorities closed the door and sealed the tomb. It is also forbidden to perform any DNA tests on the Japanese imperial family, for fear of finding any Korean affiliations. Also see: Boleslaw Szcześniak, “The Sumu-Sanu Myth: Notes and Remarks on the Jimmu Tennô Myth,” *Monumenta Nipponica* vol. 10, no. 1 / 2 (1954).

118 John Boardman, “Sickles and Strigils,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* vol. 91 (1971), pp. 136–37.

119 John M. Fossey, “The Ritual Breaking of Objects in Greek Funerary Contexts: A Note,” *Folklore* vol. 96, no. 1 (1985), pp. 21–23.

(李家山) tombs in Yunnan Province that come from the Dian (滇) people and date to Qin times show a staggering similarity with the ancient Minoan *Geranos* dance ritual. The *chthonic* Python-like snake (dragon) slithers around a sacrificial bull and humans, while a standing column supports a bull, symbol of harvest and fertility (Figure 28). This came from the time of the Greco-Sakas and the Indo-Greeks, who were based not far from Yunnan.



Figure 20. Top left and right: Wooden comb excavated in 1975 in Hubei Province at Fenghuangshan in Jiangling, with a representation of two athletes wrestling and a referee most likely holding a stick similar to the *rhabdos* of ancient Greek and Hellenistic times. **Bottom:** Attic amphora with a depiction of a wrestling match painted by Andokides, 525 BC, showing a cloth hanging on the wall of the *palaestra*, similar to the depiction on the comb. Staatliche Museum Berlin 1759.



Figure 21. Hu Hai Tomb in Xianyang.

King Xiutu, the “Savior,” was the last king of the Euthydemid dynasty to rule in Gansu and was allied with the Xiongnu. His position in 121 BC must have been very awkward, to say the least, as he was cut off from Bactria by the Yuezhi invasions, ruled by the Xiongnu, far from the Indo-Greeks beyond the Himalayas, cut off from any others perhaps remaining in some of the Tarim walled cities, and attacked by the Han troops. The last stand of King Soter ended as it should, when he refused a humiliating surrender with his family to those who had taken the twelve chryselephantine statues of the Olympians and betrayed them a hundred years earlier. He decided on a desperate act of resistance when he learned that he would become a slave, demonstrating a character of noble origin.

Ganquan was at that time a sacred site for the Xiongnu, the Yiqu, and the Qin, but this is both of great interest and rather confusing. Why and how did Ganquan become the crossroads and meeting point for high-ranking officials and for important religious ceremonies—for enemies having different rites and beliefs?

A palace was built at Ganquan by the first emperor and Hu Hai, and its name meant “Sweet Water Palace” (甘泉宮), or “Forest Light Palace” (*Linguan gong* 林光宮). Its construction was very

similar to that of a Greek temple,¹²⁰ being filled with cypresses, alleys, colorful paintings, and statues of all kinds, a site where musical contests and civilized wrestling events had been organized since the time of its construction by the Qin.

The Sino-Greek (*Qin-Daquin*) emperor Hu Hai went there in 209 BC¹²¹ to watch professional wrestling athletes competing, as mentioned earlier, so Ganquan Palace must have had a substantial gymnasium or a wrestling hall for them to practice in. These were athletes of the highest level, as the remains of statues of wrestlers and acrobats recovered in the so-called pit k9901 in 1999 demonstrate. Most likely the halls were personally founded by Hu Hai for that purpose.¹²²

Ying Shao (應劭 140–206 AD) commented that the *Chanyu* had used a “*Jinglu sword*” (*Jinglu dao* 徑路刀)¹²³ for sacrifices in Ganquan when they worshipped their gods there. It was also known as “the

¹²⁰ See Richard M. Barnhart, “Alexander in China? Question for Chinese Archaeology; New Perspective on China’s Past,” *Chinese Archaeology in the Twentieth Century. Vol. 1: Culture and Civilization Reconsidered*, ed. Xiaoneng Yang (New Haven and London: Yale University Press; Kansas City: Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 2004), pp. 329–43.

¹²¹ *Shiji* (史記) (Records of the Great Historian), chapter 87, “Li Si” (李斯) “是時二世在甘泉，方作穀角抵優俳之觀。李斯不得見，因上書言趙高之” (Beijing, 1959), p. 179.

¹²² See the discussion of similarities between the Greek and the Qin *palaestra* iconography in: Lucas Christopoulos, “Early Combat Sports in China and the Rise of Professionalism (475 BC–220 AD),” in *Nikephoros: Zeitschrift für Sport und Kultur im Altertum* (Graz University, Austria), n. 23, 2010; fig. 6 and footnote 51.

¹²³ On the *Jinglu dao*, see Victor H. Mair in the online *Language Log*: “Of precious swords and Old Sinitic reconstructions,” 2016. For *jinglù* (徑路), Schuessler gives / *kêŋh râkh* /. Most likely this is the straight Scythian-Persian sword with two cutting edges, called *akinakes* (ἀκινάκης) by Greek authors. It could also be the single-edged “broadsword,” or the cutting and chopping *makhaira* (μάχαιρα), used by the Persians and steppe elite horseman as well (Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* II, I, 21). Similar single-edged curved swords were already used by the proto-Celts of the Early Iron Age Hallstatt culture (twelfth–eighth centuries BC). In the Achaemenid period (550–330 BC), when the king went hunting, he took half of his personal guards with him. They were required to have *makhaira* in addition to their other weapons (Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 1,2,9; II, 3, 10; IV, 5, 58; VI, 1,2; VII, 1, 34). In the Achaemenid state, the *makhaira* was used from Egypt to India. In Egypt, the Calasiries and Hermotybies, elite marine fighters, were using *makhaira* as their weapon of choice (Herodotus XI, 32). Some armies that Xerxes led to Greece—the Colchians, Alarodians, and Sasprians—also mostly used the *makhaira* (Herodotus VII, 79). *Dao* (刀), but it is more likely to describe a curved type of broadsword used mainly by the cavalry, while the *jian* (劍) is the straight sword with two cutting edges. Also see: Boris A. Litvinskij and Igor R. Pičikjan, “Handles and Ceremonial Scabbards of Greek Swords from the Temple of the Oxus in Northern Bactria,” *East and West* vol. 49, no. 1/4 (December 1999), pp. 47–104.

precious sword” (*baodao* 寶刀). The “Xiongnu History” of the *Hanshu* (漢書, 匈奴傳) explains that the *Chanyu* had used this sacred sword to cut off the Yuezhi king’s head and then had made a drinking vessel of it. That must have happened around 176–162 BC, when the Xiongnu moved to the Gansu area and expelled the Yuezhi, pushing them westward. Some of these Xiongnu warriors likely became Hellenized in the cities of Gansu just as the Kushana were Hellenized in Bactria, and that is why the Xianbei aristocracy perpetuated the custom of making golden statues of their kings and queens, practiced Greek war dances, mystery rituals, and festivities, and wore Hellenistic motifs of Greek mythology on their belts. Zhang Shoujie also commented that the Xiongnu had earlier made the sacrifices to their god (*Shenci* 神祠) in Ganquan, probably worshipping nature spirits on an altar, before they were expelled by the Qin.



Figure 22. Statuette representing a Greco-Bactrian king (or Achilles?), most likely holding a spear and a shield, with a Phrygian helmet. Found in the Tianshan Mountains, northern Xinjiang Province, third–second centuries BC. Two of these statues were found nearby on the south bank of the Künäs River, Xinyuan (Künäs) County. Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Museum Collection.

By the time King Soter ruled the Wuwei area, the Yuezhis had already attacked the walled cities of the northern areas of the Tarim Basin on their way to Greek-ruled Bactria. This meant that both the Greco-Bactrians and King Xiutu/Soter were enemies of the Yuezhi. The two sons of Eucratides, Heliocles (145–130 BC) and Eucratides II (145–140 BC), saw the Greco-Bactrian cities falling under the rule of the steppe Yuezhi warriors by 130 BC, and it was in 121 BC, only about ten years later, that Huo Qubing attacked King Soter. This demonstrates that Xiutu could not possibly have received help from the Greeks of Bactria, but rather that he was allied with the Xiongnu, at the time the Yuezhi became the enemies of the Greco-Bactrians, King Soter of Gansu, and the Xiongnu.

The Yuezhi started to use the epithet "Soter" on their coins about two centuries later, with a depiction of King Kujula Kadphises (50–90 AD), and they continued to do so through the reign of his son and successor Wima Takto (90–110 AD). This occurred after they became Hellenized in Bactria, so the Soter of Gansu was unlikely to have been either a Yuezhi, or a Xiongnu from Mongolia, but rather was a Greek king. I do not think that Euthydemus would have left a simple Hellenized satrap of foreign origin to guard his eastern borders with the Seres and the twelve chryselephantine statues, the region being too rich and strategically too important to leave in foreign hands. The fact that King Soter worshipped the golden statue of Zeus a hundred years after the war with Qinshi Huangdi demonstrates that there is a Greek affiliation—if there were not, the title and the object of worship would have been different. If these Saka of Gansu, coming from Central Asia, were not related to Hellenism, and were instead enemies of the Greco-Bactrians who had "escaped" them after Alexander, they couldn't possibly have influenced the statuary art and architectural technology of the Qin as they did, because they would not have been Hellenized. This leads to the conclusion that these invading horse troops from Central Asia, with their military and technological superiority, were Greco-Bactrians.

At the time Eucratides attacked Bactria and the Euthydemids, most of its surviving ruling royal family were the Indo-Greeks, who were quite prosperous in India around 200–120 BC.¹²⁴ These royal

¹²⁴ Indo-Greek monetary coinage, which started with Apollodotes, was fully established by Menandros in India. A large number of resources and much wealth were accumulated by the Indo-Greeks following their expansion of commerce. See: Guy Labarre, "Les royaumes gréco-bactriens et indo-grecs: un essai de reconstitution historique," in François Wiedemann, *Les successeurs d'Alexandre en Asie centrale et leur héritage culturel. Chronique d'orient, Chronique 211 DHA 36/2* (Riveneuve éditions, seconde édition revue et corrigée, 2009), p. 215.

kings of the Euthydemid family were in place because of the conquests of the kings Euthydemos, Demetrios, Apollodotes, and Menandros. One would expect that they enjoyed a prosperity identical with that of the local tribes of the Tarim Basin, before the massive attacks of the Yuezhi and the Wusun. They must still have been a major power, and they most likely kept in contact with their Indo-Greek counterparts. King Xiutu was “Soter,” and this shows a continuous contact with the Indo-Greeks, coming from Taxila through the southern cities of the Tarim and Gansu around 200 BC, even if the Greco-Saka kingdom of Gansu had been built earlier, in 230 BC. It is no mistake that the seal of Athena *Alkidemos*, from Niya, is associated with King Menandros, who was the first to re-introduce her depiction on his coins, after those of Alexander. Following Diodotes I, the kings who used the epithet “Soter” on their coins were Pantaleon, Apollodotes I, Apollodotes II, Eucratides II, Nicias, Diomedes, Hermaios, Strato II, Zoilos II, Polyxenos, Hippostratos, Peucolaos, Artemidoros, and Menandros. The epithet “Soter” was most likely written to describe the Greco-Bactria hierarchy of kings, as a term inferior only to “Theos” (god), which was reserved for the king of Bactria proper, while the affiliated kings related to other conquered territories often used “Dikaios” or “Soter” instead.¹²⁵ “Soter” had a religious connotation in Hellenistic Central and Eastern Central Asia, as it also meant “savior of souls” in the *Soteiria* Dionysian mystery cults.

Soter is perceived as the bringer of *soteria*, and *soteria*, *salus*, varies between the preservation of earthly life and the “granting of a new, higher, (life)” that is closer to god, more moral and superior to death, into which one is “reborn” through a *mysterion*. Soter as saving (σώζων) in an entirely concrete sense becomes a helper in attaining *soteria*, a “salvation” in a religiously more abstract, unearthly and more spiritual sense.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Ibid., pp. 214–15.

¹²⁶ F. Dornseiff (1929), RE III.A, s.v. Soter, 1216–17: “Σ. wird empfunden als Bringer einer σωτηρία, und σωτηρία, salus schwankt zwischen Erhaltung des irdischen Lebens und Verleihung eines neuen, höheren, gottnäheren, sittlicheren, todüberlegenen, in das man ‚wiedergeboren‘ wird durch ein μυστήριον. Σ. als σώζων in ganz konkretem Sinn wird zum Helfer zu einer σωτηρία, einem ‚Heil‘ in religiös abstrakterem, unirdischem, geistigerem Sinn.”

Is it possible that Menandros “Soter” (Μένανδρος Σωτήρ. Pali: मिलिन्दो, 180–130 BC) (Figure 23), the Buddhist-convert Greek king, launched a military expedition crossing the Himalayas through Khotan to connect with the Greco-Tocharian cities of the Tarim and the Greco-Saka kingdom of Gansu, going from the southern part of the Tarim Basin to avoid the Yuezhi and the Wusun? The caduceus found on the coins of King Demetrios in India is similar to the one on the Hellenistic tapestry found in Loulan (Figure 19). The symbolism of the caduceus¹²⁷ was very strong for the Hellenistic kings of Bactrian India and Gansu. As in Orphism, it had to do with the birth of Dionysos and its interpretation of mysteries:¹²⁸

When the world was reconstructed, Zeus fell in love with his mother Rhea, who was also Demeter. They unified together in the form of two serpents (symbol of the caduceus), and Rhea gave birth to Kore. Then again, in the form of a snake, Zeus coupled with Kore, who gave birth to Dionysos.¹²⁹

The existence of the Greco-Saka in Gansu perhaps also explains the statement written in the “Records of the Three Kingdoms” relating the history of the Greeks (*Daqin*) from the Late Eastern Han to the Three Kingdoms period (184–280 AD), stating that “The Greater Qin people” (*Daqin* 大秦) (or *Lixuan* 犁軒) themselves claim that they came from (a region) in China, and that they had wanted to

¹²⁷ The symbol of the caduceus or the “two snakes” is very old on the Eurasian continent. It was used during Babylonian and Sumerian times, and it had been the symbol of Ningishzida, the god of harvest and fertility around 2000 BC, just as the “Two Snakes Mother goddess” of Minoan Crete was around 1600 BC. The two snakes had a similar harvest and fertility function in Qin dynasty China and these all must have been related in a Eurasian proto-religious context, just as the bull was from pre-historic times. See the similar motifs of the two twisting (mating) snakes in Northern Europe on the “Golden Horns of Gallehus” (fifth century AD) and the Berserker fearsome trance-like chthonic war-dance performed at night with wolf masks or bear furs in Medieval Scandinavia. The oldest of these proto-religious chthonic rituals is probably to be found on the paintings of the Cave of the trois-frères in the Pyrénées mountain range and dating from 13'000 BC, with the “sorcerer” dancing disguised as a bull.

¹²⁸ This story is similar to the legend of the goddess Nüwa (女媧), who coupled with her brother Fuxi (伏羲) in the form of two snakes and gave birth to humankind.

¹²⁹ Luc Brisson, “Les théogonies orphiques et le papyrus de Derveni (Notes critiques),” *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 202–204 (1985), p. 400.

send back emissaries, but they were stopped by the Parthians (in Central Asia), who were profiting from their own relations with the Han. This is why they could not achieve their desire.”¹³⁰

It is also possible that, when Yan Shigu (顏師古 581–645 AD) writes in his *Dilizhi* (地理志), or “Geographical explanation,” that Lixuan (驪軒) was a province situated next to Zhangye (張掖) in Gansu, he may also have been referring to the Greco-Saka kingdom of Gansu that existed previously in the area, before it became associated with the remaining *Lixuan–Daqin* “farther west”:

Lixuan (驪軒) means the country of the *Daqin*. The provinces of Lixuan (驪軒) and Zhangye (張掖) have been founded to protect the Chinese land; today, the ignorant people call it Liqian (力虔).¹³¹

The term *Lixuan* (驪軒), meaning “black-horse chariot,” was used by the Chinese to denote the “country of the *Daqin* (Greeks)” during the Western Han dynasty (206 BC–24 AD), before it was changed to *Daqin* (大秦) during the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220 AD), to include the Greco-Romans. This confirms that central Gansu from Lintao to Zhanye was known by the Han as “Lixuan,” meaning that it was indeed Greeks who were living there, as the Han associated them with the west. Lixuan was related to “Alexandria,”¹³² and from Alexandria, “farther east” was Alexandria Eshkata (Ἀλεξάνδρεια Ἐσχάτα), built by the king in 329/328 BC in the Ferghana Valley (today in Tajikistan), not in Gansu. Then why did Yan Shigu talk about an Alexandria in Gansu? Alexander left General Peukolaos there together with his three thousand troops among the Sogdians in Ferghana, but there is no record of what happened to Peukolaos and his soldiers. It is possible (though I doubt it) that they went east for further conquest and there founded a new city by the name of “Alexandria” (Lixuan) in Gansu. A later king named Peukolaos ruled Gandhara around 90 BC, and had the epithet “Soter” as well, but he lived far later, as he seems to

¹³⁰ *Sanguo zhi* (三國志) (Records from the Three Kingdoms, books of the Wei), chapter 30 (*Zhonghua Shuju*) (中華書局 1959–1999), p. 638. “自云本中國一別也，黨欲通使於中國，而安息圖其利，不能得過。”

¹³¹ *Hanshu* (漢書) (Han dynasty annals), chapter 28 (Xia), *Dilizhi*, (Yan Shigu explanations) (地理志), 顏師古注: “驪軒, 即大秦國也。張掖驪軒縣, 蓋取國名為縣也。今其土俗人呼力虔 (Beijing, 1959–1999).”

¹³² Lucas Christopoulos, “Hellenes and Romans in Ancient China (240 bc–1398 AD),” *Sino-Platonic Papers* 230, pp. 3–4.

have been a successor of Demetrios II and was affiliated with Menander.¹³³ Lixuan as “black-horse chariot” must however also refer to the royal chariot pulled by the black horses of Ferghana used by the Greco-Bactrians and their Irano-Scythian (Saka)-affiliated kings based in Central Asia, Eastern Central Asia, Qinghai, and Gansu.

After the reign of Demetrios I and before being taken over by Eucratides in Bactria, the last Euthydemid kings potentially to have had links with the Gansu Greco-Saka kingdom and China were Agathocles “the Just” (Ἀγαθοκλῆς ὁ Δίκαιος), king of Bactria around 190–180 BC, Pantaleon (Πανταλέων), king of Arachosia and Gandhara between 190 and 180 BC, and Euthydemus II (Εὐθύδημος Β), king of Bactria between 180 and 171 BC (Figure 23). These three kings have in common their use of cupro-nickel alloy (75/25 ratio) in the fabrication of some of their coins, a technology known to have come from China during the Warring States period and used by both the Qin and the Greco-Bactrians (Greco-Sakas), after they had conquered Gansu.¹³⁴ One of the last of these three kings, heard of just before the attacks of Eucratides, is Euthydemus II. His coins show his face to have been almost half East Asian-looking.

One other king shows unusual facial features and comes from an uncertain lineage, and he is named Demetrios II, who perhaps ruled from 175 to 140 BC and who caused the production of silver tetradrachms.

133 Roger B. Cottureau, *Le Roi Peucolaus Peukolaos, le Juste et le Sauveur, du Gandhara* ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΔΙΚΑΙΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΣΩΤΗΡΟΣ ΠΕΥΟΚΛΑΟΥ. 2021.

134 Nickel traveled from Yunnan to Taxila, according to Labarre, who argues that Menandros stopped to produce these cupronickel coins because there was “enough silver there,” when he conquered India. On the contrary, I think that these coins were mostly made in Eastern Central Asia, and the Greco-Saka kingdom of Gansu traded them with the Chinese directly. For the Yunnan theory see: Guy Labarre, “Les royaumes gréco-bactriens et indo-grecs: un essai de reconstitution historique,” in François Wiedemann, *Les successeurs d’Alexandre en Asie centrale et leur héritage culturel. Chronique d’orient, Chronique 211 DHA* 36/2 (Riveneuve éditions, seconde édition revue et corrigée, 2009), p. 213. Another suggestion has been made by Cheng and Schwitter (1957), who claim that the mines for these coins were situated in Huili, near the Tianshan mountains. See: C. F. Cheng and C. M. Schwitter, “Nickel in Ancient Bronzes,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 61 (1957), 352, text 352, table m. Tarn (*Greeks in Bactria*, 1957) claimed that these coins were made in Nagarahara, near modern Jelalabad.



Figure 23. Top: Silver tetradrachm of King Agathocles “the Just,” 190–180 BC, with a standing Zeus holding the three-faced Hecate. Center: King Euthydemus II, 180–171 BC. Bottom: Tetradrachm coin of Menandros Soter (Menander), king of the Indo-Greeks 165–130 BC.

Did Euthydemos II escape eastward in Gansu around 180 BC? Perhaps, but he does not bear the epithet of Soter, and Soter must come from the next generation of kings. The Greco-Bactrian cupro-nickel coins of Agathocles, Euthydemos II, and Pantaleon stopped being produced after the invasion of Eucratides of Bactria, demonstrating that the Greco-Saka kingdom of Gansu had stopped trading with the Greco-Bactrians of Bactria, because if they had not, the other Euthydemid Indo-Greeks would also have used the same technology. Unfortunately, no coins remain from the Greeks of Gansu, and Xiutu/Soter from Wuwei around 120 BC most likely affiliated himself with Menandros in India, as he bears the same epithet and lived at the same period, following Demetrios's death, as both these kings were closely affiliated. Xiutu/Soter, the last king of the Greco-Saka kingdom of Gansu, is most likely either Demetrios's son, Euthydemos II's son, Demetrios II, the brother of Zoilos I, Menandros Soter himself, or another unknown affiliated king. Menandros died around 130 BC; it is said by Plutarch that he was killed in a military camp (στρατόπεδο) while on a campaign.

But when Menandros, who had reigned graciously over the Bactrians, died afterwards in the military camp (στρατόπεδο), the cities indeed by common consent celebrated his funerals; but coming to a contest about his relics, they were with difficulty at last brought to this agreement, that his ashes being distributed, everyone should carry away an equal share, and they should all erect monuments to him.¹³⁵

This would also make sense, as Menandros was already revered and praised in northern India at the end of his reign, and he perhaps had wished to "save" the remaining Euthydemid conquests of Demetrios in Gansu from the Yuezhi attacks. On the other hand, Menandros was already married to Agathoklea (Ἀγαθόκλεια), so, unless he married a second time, Midi could not have been his son, as he already had a son named Straton in India. The *Milindapanha* also gives an idealized and probably incorrect demise for the Buddhist-convert Greek king, stating that he left his kingdom to Strato I (Στράτων Α) and became

135 Plutarch, *Moralia*, trans. Harold North Foster, 10: 279. Loeb Classical Library, no. 321 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936).

an Arhat, but that is unlikely, because Menandros was a warrior who had fought all his life.¹³⁶ Yet it also could be true, just as in the romantic story of King Ashoka, who renounced warfare after his own military ventures.

According to the *Yuga-Purāṇa*, Demetrios I (Dhamamita), participated in a military expedition with artillery machines (“tree-like engines,” *Gargi-Samhita* 5, *Yuga Purana*), with which he conquered Pushpapura (Pataliputra), in northeastern India, during which he burned alive five of its former local rulers.¹³⁷ According to the *Stupavadana* of *Bodhisattvadana-kalapata*, Menandros also built a stupa in Pataliputra (former Pataligrama), before 130 BC, to help spread Greco-Buddhist civilization in Yunnan in China, Burma, and Siam.

The spread of Buddhism as a state religion in India had already started with Ashoka the Great. According to the Pali Buddhist texts, the *Dipavamsa* and the *Mahavamsa*, he had sent the Greek (Yona) missionary named Dharmaraksita (Pali: Dhammarakkhita) to the courts of the Hellenistic kings to spread Buddhism (he probably also acted as a diplomatic ambassador for the Mauryans). Menandros, who was born in a village named Kalasi near Alexandria in the Caucasus (present-day Bagram, Afghanistan), was well educated in both Indian and Greek sciences and philosophical texts, and he later converted to Buddhism, following his Indian teacher, Nagasena. Nagasena, a native of Kishtwar in Kashmir, became one of the Eighteen Arhat (*Luohan*) of Buddhism in China, represented as holding a *Khakkhara* in his right hand and a vase in his left. Nagasena himself had, however, learned Buddhist texts and practices with Dharmaraksita, in the northeastern city of Pataliputra, colonized earlier by Demetrios I, which demonstrates the close relationship between Buddhism and the Greeks. This association started from the time of Seleucos and his alliance with the Mauryas, who became Buddhists with Ashoka, and who were traditionally opposed to the nationalist Brahmans. It also demonstrates that the Greek Dharmaraksita had a tremendous influence on the spreading of Buddhist philosophy

¹³⁶ The Greeks (Yavanas, Sanskrit: यवन) were described as “intoxicated with fighting” in the *Gargi-Samhita*, *Yuga Purana* chapter, no. 7.

¹³⁷ D. C. Sircar, “The Account of the Yavanas in the ‘Yuga-Purāṇa,’” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* no. 1/2 (Apr., 1963), pp. 7–20.

and texts all over India and beyond,¹³⁸ as demonstrated by Punabbasukutumbikaputta Tissa Thera, who traveled all the way from Sri Lanka to study with him.¹³⁹

Idealized or not, the truth as to where and how Menandros died is unknown, but Soter of Gansu must have been closely related to him. Another king affiliated with Menandros and Demetrios was Zoilos I (Ζωῖλος Α), “the Just,” or *Dhramikasa* (Follower of the Dharma), ruling what is today Afghanistan and Pakistan around 130–120 BC. He displayed the Scythian bow next to the club of Heracles on his coins, demonstrating his military alliance with the Saka tribes. He ruled at the same time as Soter of Gansu, and was from the same dynastic family, perhaps being his brother or cousin.

Strabo’s writing is in any case very clear, and it corroborates the evidence of the archeological findings in the Tarim, in Gansu, in Xianyang, in the Chinese historical texts, in the Greek historical texts, and in the painting in Mogao cave n.323. There is also a silver-gilt Hellenistic belt with Greek mythological figures, originally inlaid with gemstones, found in Qinghai Dulan (都蘭) and said to be from the Kushano-Sassanian period (Figure 30). Displayed at the Qinghai Museum, the depiction of the divinities as the prophetic Thriae (Θριαί) bee-nymphs and Dionysos makes it perhaps earlier than the third century AD, and a Thriae wearing a Greco-Bactrian helmet demonstrates clearly its origins. Why would the Sassanians, in that representation, have used the helmet of a Greco-Bactrian king instead of a helmet closer in style to their own cultural references? Dulan is in the area where the Murong Xianbei ruled; it is also possible that the belt was made right there, in the Greco-Saka kingdom of Gansu, not in Bactria.

The Greeks who caused Bactria to revolt grew so powerful on account of the fertility of the country that they became masters, not only of Ariana, but also of India, as Apollodorus of Artemita says: and more tribes were subdued by them than by Alexander—by Menander in particular (at least if he actually crossed the Hypanis

¹³⁸ “The Thera Dhammarakkhita the Yona, being gone to Aparantaka and having preached in the midst of the people, the *Aggikkhandhopama-sutta* gave to drink of the nectar of truth to thirty-seven thousand living beings who had come together there, he who perfectly understood truth and untruth. A thousand men and yet more women went forth from noble families and received the *pabbajja*” (*Mahavamsa* XII, *Dipavamsa*. VIII.7).

¹³⁹ VibhA.389, *Sammoha-Vinodanī, Vibhanga* Commentary.

towards the east and advanced as far as the Imaüs), for some were subdued by him personally and others by Demetrius, the son of Euthydemus, the king of the Bactrians; and they took possession, not only of Patalena, but also, on the rest of the coast, of what is called the kingdom of Saraostus and Sigerdis. In short, Apollodorus says that Bactriana is the ornament of Ariana as a whole; and, more than that, they extended their empire even as far as the Seres and the Phryni. (Strabo, *Geographica* 11.11.1)

CHRONOLOGY OF THE GRECO-SAKA KINGDOM OF GANSU

- 278 BC: The Yiqu king is killed by the Qin king, Zhao Xiang.
- 250–230 BC: The Greco-Bactrians of Euthydemus conquer the Tarim Basin and Gansu.
- 230 BC: An alliance is formed with the king of Qin, and a marriage takes place that leads to the birth of Hu Hai.
- 221 BC: The Qin Emperor attacks Lintao and takes the twelve statues of the Olympians.
- 176–162 BC: The Xiongnu expelled from the Xianyang area ally with Euthydemid, king of Wuwei, and begin to worship Zeus in Gansu. They then cut off the head of the Yuezhi king and push the Yuezhi out, moving to control all of Gansu region.
- 162 BC: The Yuezhi migrate out of western Gansu, pushed by Xiongnu attacks.
- 130 BC: The Yuezhi attack the Greco-Bactrian kingdom, and the Wusun move into the Tarim Basin as well.
- 121 BC: The Han take the city-fortress of Soter and the golden statue of Zeus. The Greco-Saka of Gansu come to an end.



Figure 24. Top left: Statue of King Xiutu in Ganquan, detail from the Dunhuang Mogao cave n.323 seventh-century "Map of Zhang Qian going out in the Western Regions as an ambassador" (張騫出使西域圖). **Top right:** Face of Hecate, Nike, or Athena. **Bottom left:** Complete sculpture with inscription. **Bottom right:** Head of Zeus, who most likely is holding a scepter in one hand and the goddess on the other.

14. "GOLDEN MIDI": DEMETRIOS?



Figure 25. Jin Midi (金日磾) (left) and his father King Xiutu (right) represented in Chinese fashion on a funerary stone carving (*Huaxiang shi* 畫像石) from the Wu family in Jiexiang (嘉祥武氏墓群石刻), dating from the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220 AD).

In the imperial palace, after his capture, Han Wudi noticed Midi's (日磾) tall stature and muscular strength, but also his virtue, as he was one of the few staying there who did not look at the beautiful concubines. Midi was very loyal to Wudi, and he was also known as a professional wrestler, famous in the history of this art in China. At one point the palace official Ma Heluo (馬何羅) had come near the chamber of Wudi with a knife, planning to kill him, but Midi had caught him, seized him by the neck in a wrestling hold, and rolled him down out of the palace.¹⁴⁰ He not only became very close to Wudi, as a trusted friend,¹⁴¹ but he had also been promoted to being in charge of the imperial stable (*fuma duwei* 駙馬都尉) (Figure 25). Midi was elevated to the post of “Grand Master for Splendid Happiness” (*guanglu dafu* 光祿大夫), and he became the “General of Chariots and Cavalry” (*cheji jiangjun* 車騎將軍) in 87 BC. As his family worshipped the golden statue of a god, he and his brother received the Chinese family name of “Jin” (金), or “Golden,”¹⁴² bestowed by the emperor, because of that golden statue, made “to worship Heaven.” When the Emperor Xuan of the Han (Han Xuandi 漢宣帝 91–48 BC) reestablished the sacrifices to the gods, he went to Ganquan Palace for the first time to worship Heaven (Taiyi 太一), and he sacrificed there to the various celestial animals, to the gods, to the moon,

¹⁴⁰ *Hanshu* (Han dynasty annals) (漢書), chapter 68, *Jin Midi chuan* (金日磾傳) (Transmissions of Jin Midi). *Zhonghua shuju* (中華書局), “日磾掙胡投何羅殿下...孟康曰掙胡，若今相僻卧輪之類也” (Beijing 1959), p. 2229. Ban Gu describes him as a “Barbarian from a destroyed kingdom” (Yidi wangguo 夷狄亡國) in the *Hanshu* (chapter 68, *Jin Midi chuan*, 38.)

¹⁴¹ This reminds me of the role of some Greeks who remained in the Parthian Empire, who still retained the function of training wrestlers and organizing local athletic games. They were also often the “first friends” (*Philoï*) of the local rulers, serving as trusted councillors or bodyguards. See: Rolf Strootman, “Eunuchs, Renegades and Concubines: The ‘Paradox of Power’ and the Promotion of Favorites in the Hellenistic Empires,” in: *The Hellenistic Court: Monarchic Power and Elite Society from Alexander to Cleopatra* (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2017), pp. 121–42. See also my previous work “Greek Combat Sports and Their Transmission to Central and East Asia,” *Classical World Review* no. 106.3, pp. 433–37 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2013).

¹⁴² Han Wudi, the Han emperors, and the Chinese aristocracy in general praised golden art, after they came into contact with the Hellenistic world, and they saw it as a symbol of immortality. A story related by Ella Maillart (1903–1997), that the Wusun spread the legend of King Midas around the Issyk-kul Lake, as well as the various Hellenistic technologies related to gold in Qin-Han China, raises questions about whether the Chinese emperors knew of the alchemy and immortality texts by Egyptian and Greek authors.

to the heroes such as Chiyou (蚩尤), to the golden horse, to many other divine creatures, and also to King Xiutu (休屠王) (*Hanshu* 28.2).

The figure of Midi was depicted very much in the “Greek style,” as his mother was either of Mongolian Xiongnu/Xianbei or Greek origin, and, unsurprisingly, his favorite palace was the Palace of Ganquan, to which he had brought the painted portrait (*xiang* 像) of his mother, for worship.¹⁴³ The golden statue from Gansu was still in Ganquan Palace when Ban Gu was living there. Midi and his brother Lun were supposedly in the lineage of the later Ban (班) family tree, the family that jointly authored the Han dynastic annals, the *Hanshu*. The Ban claimed that their family name came from the word “tiger,” and they were very proud of the martial feats of their ancestors.¹⁴⁴

Midi, son of King Soter, was most likely a relative of Demetrios I (Greek: Δημήτριος; Sanskrit: Dhamamita)¹⁴⁵ from the Euthydemid dynasty (from Euthydemos II), and he was given the same name. He and his brother must also have borne one of their dynastic names (Demetrios and Pantaleon or simply Leon).¹⁴⁶

143 Homer H. Dubs, “The Golden Man of Former Han Times,” *T'oung Pao* Second Series, vol. 33, livr. 1, 1937.

144 Chen Sanping, “Two Notes on the Xiongnu Ancestry of the Authors of *Han-shu*,” *Central Asiatic Journal* vol. 55, pp. 33–41 (2011), p. 36. Note the similarity between Greek “*pan-thyr*” (πάνθηρ) and Sanskrit “*pân-dara*” (पान्डर). Ban Gu (班固 32–97 AD), also called Mengjian (孟堅), was an historian of the Eastern Han dynasty. He came from Xianyang (咸陽) in modern Shaanxi (陝西). He was the son of the historian Ban Biao (班彪) and followed his father in the redaction of the Later Transmission of Historical Records (*Shiji houzhuan* 史記後傳). He was condemned for his writings by the emperor, who claimed that he had “illegally redacted the dynastic history,” perhaps writing an inconvenient truth about Chinese history. Ban Gu finally was liberated by his brother Ban Chao (班超), general of the Western Regions, who sent a letter to the emperor praising Ban Gu. Freed, Ban Gu followed the general Dou Xian (竇憲?–92 AD) on his expedition against the Xiongnu, and then became a central government officer. Dou Xian would eventually be executed for insubordination, and Ban Gu, implicated, later was executed as well.

145 After his conquest of India, Demetrios would be known as Dhamamita or Dimita in the Indian texts. Tarn (p. 144) writes that he was named Dhamamita in the Sanskrit text of the *Yuga-Purana*, and that he had founded a city named “Demetrias.” R. D. Banerji (1885–1930) and K. P. Jayaswal (1881–1937) found the name “Dimita” in the *Hathigumpha* inscription of the Kalinga king Kharavela. Demetrios opened the path of Greco-Buddhist sculptural arts and Indo-Greek civilization that Menandros “The Savior” (Μένανδρος ὁ Σωτήρ 165–130 BC) then expanded.

146 Lun (倫)?



Figure 26. Tomb of Midi in Xianyang (咸陽古城).



Figure 27. Left: Qin dynasty statuette, 15 cm, of a Chinese ruler represented as a deified Hellenistic king, sitting on a throne and giving a benediction: the little finger is closed, the ring and the middle fingers are straight, while the index finger would have been touching the thumb. Perhaps this shows Emperor Hu Hai, or else the king of Qin before he became emperor. **Right:** A similar benediction gesture on a coin of Straton I, “the Just” (Στρατῶν Δίκαιος 125–110 BC), son of Menandros Soter, king of India/



Figure 28. Top: Lijiashan (李家山) bronze sculpture in Yunnan Province from tomb n.68, excavated in 1972. Made by artists of the Dian kingdom (滇國 279 BC–109 BC), Qin dynasty (or Western Han dynasty). Metropolitan Museum, New York. **Bottom:**

Two warriors depicted on a similar bronze belt-buckle demonstrate that the Dian kingdom was ruled by settlers most likely linked with Greco-Saka colonists, as their warlike aristocracy used the *cataphract* fashion similarly to Hellenistic Central Asia from around 250 BC. Aside from the heavy armor, the helmets they wear are also interesting as they look Boeotian, not Qin (Western), Han, or Phrygian. The depiction of the *chthonic* snake is influenced by Hellenistic art. The warriors hold the heads of their enemies in their left hand, similarly to the Qin dynasty and Xiongnu fashion of war, and the bearded warrior on the back seems to hold a type of “dagger-axe” (*ge* 戈) or a scythe, symbolizing harvest. The scene represents a *Tauroktonos* (ταυροκτόνος), or “bull killing,” as it occurred in the Greek mysteries of the Hellenistic period. The later Roman “Mithraic mysteries” (proper to Rome, second–fourth centuries AD) depicted with the numerous sculptures of “Mithras killing the bull,” and influenced by earlier Greek models, borrowed similar symbolic elements while adding the figure of Mithras as the Sun.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ The “Mithraic mysteries” in Rome descended from the Greek religious cults among the Hellenized Parthians, and not from earlier Persian cults (Ulansey), while those of the Dian kingdom in Yunnan came directly from the religious cults of the Greco-Bactrians (Greco-Saka, or Hellenized Saka aristocracy) from Qin-Western Han times. See: Roger B. Beck, *Planetary Gods and Planetary Orders in the Mysteries of Mithras* (Leyden: Brill, 1988) (Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l’Empire romain, no. 109); D. Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries* (Oxford, 1989); and J. P. Mallory and Victor H. Mair, *The Tarim Mummies: Ancient China and the Mystery of the Earliest Peoples from the West* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008), pp. 329–30.

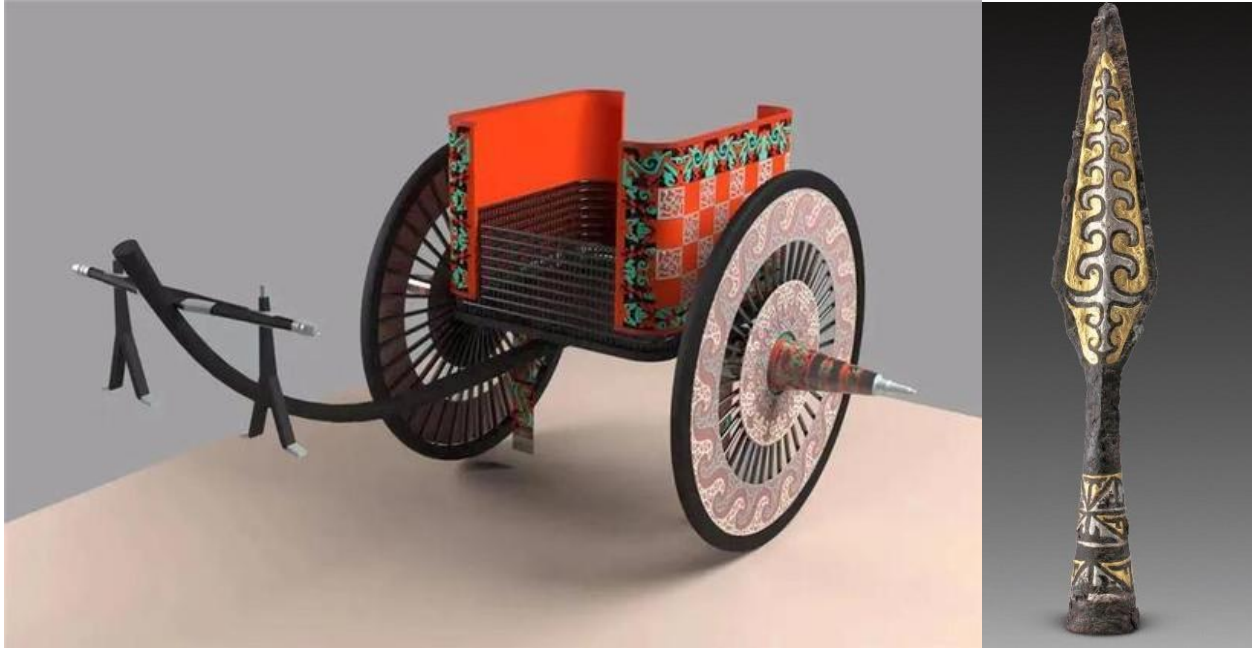


Figure 29. Top left: Reconstruction of the war chariot unearthed in Tianshui district, Jiangjiachuan, Majiayuan, Gansu Province (天水張家川馬家塬出土). **Top right:** Royal spearhead, decorated very similarly to the Mycenaean ones. **Center left:** A wolf designed similarly to the “art of the steppes” and part of the chariot decoration. **Center right:** A golden walking tiger, part of the chariot decoration. **Bottom:** Human faces resembling those of Irano-Scythians on golden buttons. (See the similar “royal moustache” on the statuette in Figure 27.)



30a



30b



30c



30d



30e

Figure 30. (a) Hellenistic silver-gilt belt of 90 cm, Qinghai Museum. Two figures of Dionysos seem to be guarding a door, with the *thyrsos* in the middle. (b) Two winged half-bee Thriae nymphs hold a wreath (c, d). One of the two is clearly wearing a Greco-Bactrian helmet (c). The king and queen are seated and holding a wreath, symbol of wealth, power, glory, and eternity. They seem to hold on their knees the same belt with round sections (e). All the figures have one hand on the stomach and the other holding a wreath (c, d).

CONCLUSION

If we examine previous research on the golden statue of King Xiutu, we see that both Ware and Dubs reach inconclusive results. Ware deduces that the “Hunnic” tradition of sculpting man-like statues of gold for worshiping Heaven during the Han, or the ruler and his queen among the Tuoba Wei, is a custom coming probably from the “Turks,” as they were “fine blacksmiths,” and so “it would be quite reasonable for such people to use the art to determine individual fitness.”¹⁴⁸

Dubs tries to be more precise and quotes the Chinese historians all throughout his text concerning a possible link between King Xiutu’s golden human-like statue together with Buddhist sculptural art,¹⁴⁹ but he is unable to come to a conclusion due to the chronological difficulty. Concerning the influences of Greek sculptures on the Buddhist ones, Tarn is very clear:¹⁵⁰

In the way that things did happen as a matter of history, all the Buddha-statues in Asia with all their implications — and the Buddha-statue played its part in that conversion of Buddha from a man into a god which took place in the Mahāyāna — are there because some nameless Greek artist in Gandhāra, who had to earn his living, first portrayed Buddha in the only way he knew of. I have been tracing the history of an *idea*, the idea of representing the founder of Buddhism as a man; and that idea originated, not with India, but with Greece. It was the one great mark which the Greeks set upon India; and they did it by accident.

I personally do not believe that this world-changing event was simply a blunt accident, made by a “nameless Greek who had to make a living”; rather it was done by a professional artist leading a team, trained by Greek technology in a prestigious sculpture school of Gandhara or Bactria, and

¹⁴⁸ James R. Ware, “An Ordeal among the T’o-pa Wei,” *T’oung Pao* Second Series, vol. 32, livr. 4, (Brill, 1936), p. 208.

¹⁴⁹ Homer H. Dubs, “The Golden Man of Former Han Times,” *T’oung Pao* Second Series, vol. 33, livr. 1, 1937, pp. 9–14. “How could they have obtained Buddhist golden men and later established them at Ganquan?,” p. 7. James R. Ware, in “Once More the Golden Man,” quotes the same Chinese historians on pp. 174–78.

¹⁵⁰ W. W. Tarn, *The Greeks of Bactria and India* (Cambridge University Press, 1938), pp. 407–408.

sponsored by the royal court, to make the good and the divine reachable to the human senses. These fine schools of sculpture existed in the main cities where the Greco-Bactrians were settling, because they were needed to embellish their cults and deified royal lineage worship, in turn to secure the unity of their large colonies. As when the Greco-Bactrians of Gansu came into contact with the king of Qin, at least one of these schools opened near Xianyang, to make it possible for Ying Zheng's magnificence to shine on the Chinese land.¹⁵¹

Certainly, Dubs, Ware, and Tarn would not have suspected that the Greco-Bactrians had settled a colony in Gansu at the time of Ying Zheng and would never have believed that Hu Hai was the result of a Greco-Chinese marriage. For most historians, even today, Chinese history is mostly reduced to the framework of the Han, with the steppe "barbaric" people "interfering" with the Chinese world. As long as historians of Chinese antiquity refuse to include in their research an understanding that the Greco-Bactrians established colonies in walled cities from Eastern Central Asia to Gansu–Qinghai during the period of the late Qin kingdom, they will not be able to put the pieces of that puzzle together. In particular, the evidence of the custom of worshipping statues is central and crucial for Chinese history, as it is at its very core, and it is situated at the time of the foundation of a great nation.

Moreover, the marriage alliance between the Hellenistic dynasty of the Greco-Bactrians in Central and Eastern Central Asia with the Qin kingdom, the warlike aristocracy of the Indians, and the Irano-Scythians all evolved under the same distant and ethnically mixed warlike deified royal lineage. It was influenced by Alexander and his followers, assimilating various previously existing cultural elements into a Hellenistic warlike kingship cult system of deified leaders unified under the same Greek model.

The worship of a colossal golden statue of Zeus, the "God of Heaven," was taken up first by the Xiongnu of Mongolia and then was spread to China with the emperor Han Wudi himself, after it was brought from Wuwei to Ganquan in 121 BC. If we trace the influences that led to the establishment of this distinctive religious belief, we find that the religious rituals and beliefs that preceded the advent of Buddhism in China were driven by certain components: Heaven, Earth, and the Underworld.

¹⁵¹ See Lukas Nickel, "The First Emperor and Sculpture in China," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 76, issue 3 (October 2013), pp. 413–47 (Cambridge 2013), and "Tonkrieger auf der Seidenstrasse? Die Plastiken des ersten Kaisers Von China und die Hellenistische Skulptur Zentralasiens," *Zurich Studies in the History of Arts*, vol. 13/14 (2009).

The Underworld was of special importance: it was there that the dead and the spirits dwelt, and where nature slept in winter. The Greco-Bactrians (Greco-Saka) brought new rituals to the region that were in part a continuation of the former beliefs of the Irano-Scythians and Tocharians in Central and Eastern Central Asia, and also in China itself, during the Qin dynasty. But they were also new, in the sense that they brought with them cults and objects of worship (sculptures) that permitted the individual to feel "closer to the gods," reachable by their own human senses because the gods were represented in "realistic" human forms.

The mystery rituals and theatrical festivities brought by the Greco-Bactrians took place in the new cities they built or where they were based in the Tarim Basin and in Gansu from around 250–230 BC. These were linked mainly with the culture of grape and the consumption of wine, represented by Dionysos. Depictions of mixed local and Greek gods also emphasized the athletic and mental strength sought by the horse riders of northwestern China, together with the institutionalization of wrestling and other martial games, as had happened with the Qin. They began to organize military parades, shows of strength, and wrestling events after coming into contact with the Greco-Bactrian model of warfare and athletic education.

The Sakas, the Sogdians, and the Greeks remaining in Gansu followed the Mongolic Chanyu and its troops from around 176–162 BC, after they took over control in the region. Its warlike aristocracy still perpetuated the Hellenistic model of cults and worship. Later, when the Mongolic Xianbei took over and controlled Gansu (Hexi corridor) in 284 AD, they included these former "Xiongnu" troops of that area (Saka, Sogdians, Greeks, Mongols, probably all referring to themselves as "Xiongnu" at that time) in their ranks, and its military aristocracy naturally continued to follow the same model of cults and worship.

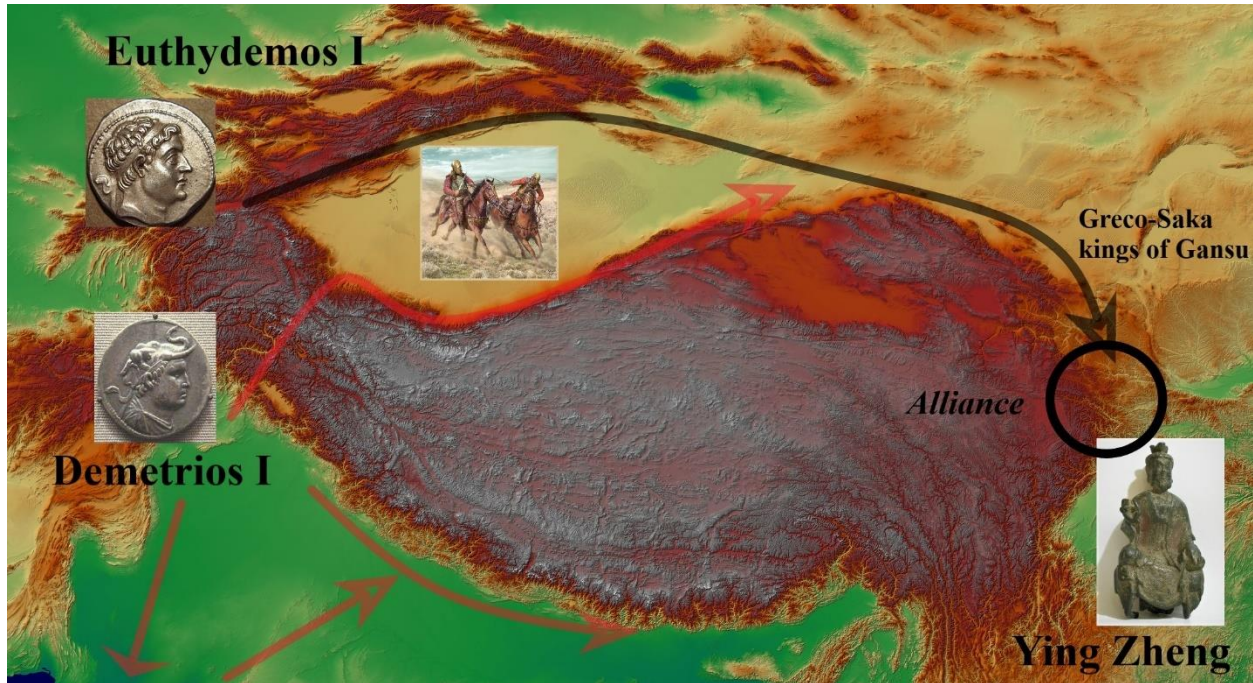
The Greek influence on the history of pre-Buddhist religion in Eastern Asia should not be overlooked, as this element interacted with classical and medieval Persian, Chinese, and Indian developments in the arts, the sciences, technology, warfare science, and perhaps philosophy as well.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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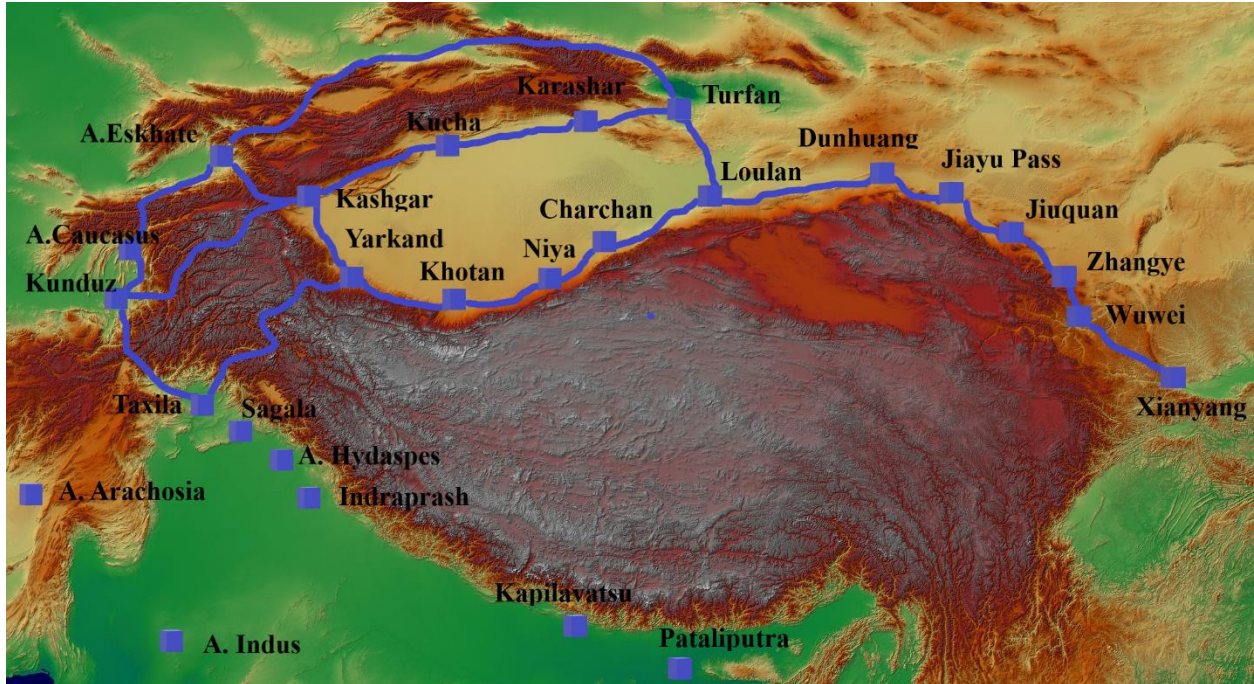
Figure 31. Top: Greco-Bactrian generals' heavy armored cavalry (*Bactro Aristoi Hippias*) of King Euthydemo and Demetrios, fighting in Gansu and dressed in the *cataphracts* fashion, with war-masks and long spears called *kontos* (κοντός), around 230 BC (reconstruction from coins). **Bottom:** Qin dynasty cavalry general with a long spear.



Map 2. India, Tarim, and Gansu conquests of the Greco-Bactrian kings Euthydemus I in 230 BC (in an alliance with Ying Zheng) and his son Demetrius I between 200 and 176 BC. (The Loulan Hellenistic tapestry, with a caduceus related to his coins, seems to indicate that he went to the Tarim Basin from India during his campaigns. The foundation of Khotan occurred during his lifetime.)



Map 3. Positions of the Indo-Greeks of Menandros Soter, the Greco-Bactrians of Eucratides, Wusun, Yuezhi, Xiongnu, the Greco-Saka of Gansu, and the Han empire around 176–121 BC. Orange arrows show the expansion of early Indo-Greek Buddhist civilization associated with Menandros's rule.



Map 4. Main cities and roads to China prior to the Han dynasty. (Cities written with Chinese names from Gansu westward were called by different names during that period.)



Map 5. Attacks of the Han led by General Huo Qubing against King Hunxie and King Soter. The cities are indicated with their Chinese names, but they had other names before the Han conquests in Gansu in 121 BC.



Map 6. Area control and location of armies in Gansu, 121 BC.

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