

than on the more usual leather. It exists in two copies; one sealed, the other left open to be read. The two copies give different names to the place where the document was written. The closed copy refers to it as "the city of Rob" (modern Rui), apparently the administrative centre of the region, whose ruler is known as the 'khar of Rob'. The open copy refers to "the city of Kandban". This seems to be an earlier name for the same town, which is found only in the earliest documents.

A letter dated in the year 239 refers explicitly to the Sasanian emperor, the Shahan-shah. The writer identifies himself as "Meyam, the steward (and) ruler of the houses of the illustrious, successful Peroz Shahanshah". If the era indeed began in A.D. 233, the year 239 should correspond to A.D. 471, during the reign of the Sasanian ruler Peroz. The apparent reference to his name, therefore, seems to confirm the chronological framework which had been deduced from the inscriptions of Tochi. However, "peroz" may also have been intended as a mere epithet meaning "victorious". Similar formulae in later documents suggest that this may, in fact, be the correct interpretation.

Hephthalite Arrivals

A later group of documents reveals the presence of the Hephthalites as a new political power. Three documents, dated in the years 260 (= A.D. 492) to 295 (= A.D. 527) refer to a property tax payable to the Hephthalites or to "the Hephthalite lords". The vendors are referred to as servants of the king ("shah") and the purchasers as servants of a lord with the Persian name "Shabur Shaburan". The persistence of a Persian aristocracy suggests that there was no abrupt break whereby the rule of the Hephthalites succeeded and replaced that of the Sasanians. On the contrary, it is likely that the local dynasty of the "khars of Rob", at whose court this contract was drawn up, continued to wield power at a local level, acknowledging the long-established overlordship of the Sasanians, but also paid tribute to the Hephthalites, who had more recently arrived in the region. Unfortunately, the references to the Hephthalites do not indicate even approximately the date of their arrival in the northern Hindukush. They provide only a *terminus post quem*: by the year 260 (= A.D. 492) at the latest, the Hephthalites had arrived and established themselves in sufficient strength to be able to exact the payment of taxes or tribute from the local population.

The Turks as Overlords

The next new arrivals, the Turks, are first attested in the year 407 (= A.D. 639). The *khar* of Rob now has Turkish instead of Hephthalite titles, but his name and patronymic in the texts show that he is no Turk. In the year 478 (= A.D. 710), a Turkish ruler is named in a deed recording a donation by "Bag-aziyas, the great Turkish princess ...". Although she is described as a princess of the Turkish tribe of the Khalach, her name is evidently Bactrian. She belongs to the Bredagan family, which is attested as far back as the year 247 (= A.D. 479) as the ruling family of the otherwise unknown city of Lan. Probably Bag-aziyas was the daughter of a local ruler, who had been given in marriage to a Turkish *qaghan*.

Increasing Arab Domination

The Arabs are named in two of the

latest texts. The first of these is a purchase contract dated in the year 507 (A.D. 739). While earlier texts had expressed prices in gold *dirhams* or in Persian silver *dirhams*, here they are given in "Arab silver dirhams", which are specifically described as locally current. A further stage in Arab economic domination is revealed in a document from the year 525 (= A.D. 757), which refers to the payment of taxes to the Arabs. In a document of two years later, a son of the local landowner bears the name "Khamir", probably a local form of the Arabic title *amir*. Soon afterwards, Arabic would replace Bactrian as the language of the local administration, as is clear from a group of Arabic tax records which appear to have come to light together with the Bactrian documents.

The documents described above have already made it possible to decipher Bactrian script, revealing a previously unknown tongue which, in its heyday, was one of the world's most important languages. In this brief survey, I have only been able to hint at the contents and importance of an immense new body of material. The new documents cover a period of more than four centuries, including some periods for which we have hardly any authentic sources. The publication of these texts will soon be completed with the appearance of the second volume of my *Bactrian Documents from Northern Afghanistan*, which will include the letters and Buddhist texts. Then the whole of the material will be available to students of many disciplines, to be compared with Chinese and Arabic sources

and confronted with archaeological and ethnographic data. I confidently expect that the result will be to cast new light on many aspects of the history and culture of ancient Bactria and modern Afghanistan. <

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More info >

See also <http://www.gengo.i.u-tokyo.ac.jp/~hkum/bactrian.html> (in English and Japanese).

The Destruction of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage

Afghanistan's civil war, raging between rival groups fighting for political power, gave birth to the systematic looting of archaeological sites, such as Ai Khanum, Begram, and Hadda. Their willful destruction, coupled with illicit diggings and vandalism in pursuit of material gain, obliterated the ancient heritage of sculptures and paintings. On 22 March 2001, three weeks after decreeing that all the statues of Afghanistan should be destroyed, the Taliban briefly opened the National Museum to journalists. They revealed a gloomy, near-empty labyrinth of rooms missing virtually all of its treasures.

Forum > Afghanistan

By Osmund Bopearachchi

Not a single coin is now left in the cabinets where once over 30,000 coins were stored; among them were coins from hoards recovered at Mir Zakah, Chaman-i-Hazuri (Kabul), Qunduz, and from the excavations at Ai Khanum and Begram. Most of the artefacts stolen from the Kabul Museum surfaced a few days later in the Peshawar bazaar and, from there, found their way to private collections. Among them are the invaluable ivory plaques excavated at Begram by French archaeologists in 1937.

Hoards of Ancient Coins

The Mir Zakah II hoard was the largest ancient coin deposit ever attested in the history of mankind. It was named after Mir Zakah, the village where it was found in 1992, 53 km northeast of the city of Gardez. The hoard must have consisted of approximately 550,000 gold, silver, and bronze coins. Of these, I managed rapidly to examine six sacks full of coins, each weighing at least fifty kilos, in February 1994 in the Peshawar bazaar. We still do not know under what circumstances the Mir Zakah deposit was found. According to witnesses who visited the findspot, the Mir Zakah II hoard

The ancient site of Ai Khanum, before the illicit diggings.



Professor Paul Bernard, 1978.



Hin-Tchi-Ono, May 1993.

The ancient site of Ai Khanum, after the illicit diggings.

Faience head of the Graeco-Bactrian king from Ai Khanum.



Il Giornale Delle Arte, no. 119, February 1994.



Kabul Museum after its destruction

also contained more than 300 kilograms of silver and gold objects. Of course, such second-hand information should be handled with care, as informers tend either to exaggerate or to romanticize the event.

Among the artefacts were gold and silver vessels: for example, a gold censer in the shape of a high beaker on a round base from which thin trails imitating wisps of incense twist upwards. Another piece among them was a squat silver bowl with an out-turned rim, with the impressed image of a sea-horse or Hippocampus, its curled tail terminating in a crescent-shaped curve, on the inside of the base.

Among the sculptures from the deposit, many depict Zoroastrian priests, figurines, gold plaques, rings, and intaglios from the Hellenistic period. A repoussé intaglio depicts a galloping *biga*; two repoussés show the Greek god Hermes wearing a conical helmet; two carnelian intaglios depict a standing helmeted Athena holding a long spear and a shield in typical Greek style. The jewelry in the hoard, in particular pendants, earrings, and bracelets, amounted to several kilograms in weight!

The numerous coins in the Mir Zakah II hoard were mainly early Indian bent-bar and punch-marked coins from Greek, Graeco-Bactrian, Indo-Greek, Indo-Scythian, Indo-Parthian, and Kushana origins. Coins of the Indo-Scythian King, Azes II, and posthumous imitations of coins of Hermaeus comprise the largest portion. The hoard also brought to light an unprecedented number of new varieties, such as a *tetradrachma* of Attic weight standard struck for King Menander I with unknown type and legend arrangement.

The most sensational numismatic discovery was a coin of Nasten, a hitherto unknown Iranian ruler in India. On the obverse, within a bead-and-reel border, the coin carries a bust of the diademed king to right wearing a helmet with a long, flowing crest and a mantle. The reverse shows the king on a prancing horse riding to the right. He wears a helmet with a long, flowing crest. The Greek legend reads *Nastenes / Xatrannou*, "Nasten, son of Xatran". Judging by his name, Nasten was presumably not a Greek, but an Iranian, probably a Bactrian Iranian.

The reconstruction of the history of the Greeks and their nomadic successors in Bactria and India depends mainly on the evidence offered by numismatic finds such as these.

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