



Alexander the Great in the Hephthalite Empire: “Bactrian” Vases, the Jewish Alexander Romance, and the Invention of Paradise

Anca Dan, Frantz Grenet

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Alexander the Great in the Hephthalite Empire: “Bactrian” Vases, the Jewish *Alexander Romance*, and the Invention of Paradise

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انچه اسکندر طلب کرد و ندادش رورگار جرعه ای بود از زلال جام جان افزای تو
“That which Alexander sought and Fate denied him

Were the dregs from the crystal liquid of your soul-reviving cup.”

(Hafiz 410.7, transl. Dominic Brookshaw, *Hafiz and His Contemporaries*, London, 2019)

The “Greek Bowl” from Tibet—a Jewish Reminder of Alexander’s Late Antique Glory¹

The starting point of our study is a bowl that was never thought to shed any light on the reception of Alexander the Great’s figure in Central Asia, nor on the presence of Jews in the peri-Sasanian realms of the 5th–6th centuries. Brought to Europe in 1961, the earliest known silver bowl from Tibet (figs. 1) was successively published by Philip Denwood as a “Greek bowl” from Hellenistic or early Kushan times and by Boris Marshak as a “Bactrian” bowl from the Hephthalite period.² Denwood proposed a reading of the reliefs decorating the bowl’s exterior in relation to Homer’s *Iliad*, which never gained general acceptance. Marshak had limited his brief comments to typology and chronology. Only François Baratte expressed his reservations in writing, without presenting an alternative reading.³

The core of this paper proposes a new interpretation and suggests a new scenario for the bowl’s origin and transmission in Central Asia. In our opinion, this vase (fig. 1a–b), composed of a silver alloy rich in copper, illustrates two scenes from an ancient Jewish version of the *Alexander Romance*: Alexander the Great harvesting the

paradisiac Tree of Life and the same Alexander drinking and sprinkling the water of the Fountain of Life. These two scenes developed from two apocryphal letters of Alexander the Great reunited in the *Beta*-Recension (β) of the Greek Pseudo-Callisthenes’ *Romance of Alexander*, from the 5th century. First, the gathering of aromatic plants in the surroundings of the Oracle of the Sun and the Moon was related in Pseudo-Alexander’s *Letter about the Marvels of India* (cf. *Romance of Alexander* β III, 17). Second, Alexander’s accidental discovery of the Fountain of Life in the Land of Darkness and of the Blessed was related in Pseudo-Alexander’s *Letter to Olympias and Aristotle* (cf. *Romance of Alexander* β II, 36, and the additions of the L manuscript of the β II, 39, and 41, dated before the 8th century). The exotic Indian setting, which made this telescoping possible, is evocative of the quest for spices in which merchants living under Hephthalite rule were involved during the 5th–6th centuries, when their empire united Bactria to Sogdiana, Northwest India, and at times Margiana. At that time, the Judeo-Christian common opinion already had established the Earthly Paradise at the southeastern extremity of the world.

We consider this bowl to be the earliest attestation of the *Alexander Romance* in the Indo-Iranian world, contemporary with the late

Sasanian Empire, when Armenian, Syriac, and (possibly) Pahlavi versions were composed and circulated in or near Iran. Moreover, the vase is a unique visual representation of Alexander's legend in the Jewish context attested by the Talmud and the medieval Hebrew *Sefer Alexandrus Mokdon* (*Tales of Alexander the Macedonian*). This challenges our assumptions about Jewish iconoclasm in Late Antiquity, suggesting a Jewish contribution to the rich textual and iconographic traditions of Alexander's voyage to Paradise, as well as to the prophetic stature attributed to Alexander in Arab and Persian literature. Further, it provides insight into how the iconography of Paradise was invented through transfers among Jewish, Greco-Roman, and Indo-Iranian cultures.

In order to contextualize the Lhasa bowl, first we present the series of "Bactrian" bowls, their models and chronology in Marshak's steps, and we point to a class of objects illustrating Alexander the Great's prestige in the 5th–6th centuries Eastern Iranian regions. In the second part of the paper, we update Denwood's description of the Lhasa bowl with iconographic observations based on new photographs provided by the Ancient Orient Museum in Tokyo. We describe each figure and gesture by recalling its Greco-Roman tradition, Indo-Iranian iconographic parallels, and the possible artistic and religious meanings of this dreamlike representation of the warm Indian land with aromatic plants, birds of Paradise, and dangerous serpents, as conceived by an artist influenced by the Greco-Roman, Sasanian, and Indian repertoires. Then, we consider the connections among the Greek, Syriac, Arab, Persian, and Jewish versions of the *Alexander Romance*, with the latter as the most likely source of inspiration. In the third part, we discuss the relevance of this identification to the historical status of the Jews in the Hephthalite Empire, to Jewish aniconism, and to the invention of the Earthly Paradise, located nearby, on the eastern edges of the (Hephthalite) world.

The "Bactrian" Bowls: An Overview

Models and Dates

The notion of "Bactrian bowls" was introduced by Kurt Weitzmann in his masterly article "Three 'Bactrian' Silver Vessels with Illustrations from Euripides" of 1943. Here he explained the images

carried by three specimens that he considered to be closely related typologically: two bowls from the Hermitage (S-62 and S-75), one discovered in Kustanai (Kazakhstan), the other from the former Stroganoff collection (figs. 2–3); and a bowl at the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. (F1945.33). In 1973, Denwood added the bowl from Lhasa, which is the subject of the present article (figs. 1). Later on, Marshak considerably expanded this group by including objects partly decorated with Classical subjects, or without any Classical subject at all; these objects were kept mainly at the Hermitage and in other USSR museums.⁴

Marshak's other decisive contribution was a revision of the chronology. Weitzmann and Denwood, joining earlier attempts by Kamilla Trever (1940), had attributed the group to the Greco-Bactrian kingdom or the early Kushans ("between 250 BCE and 100 CE)."⁵ Marshak, on the basis of "local" subjects inserted into almost each vessel with figures put the main group in the 4th–5th centuries, not excluding the possibility of "later dates" for some specimens, including the one discussed here. This global time span coincides with post-Kushan polities: Kushano-Sasanian (c. 280–c. 400), Kidarite (c. 420–c. 470), Hephthalite (c. 460–c. 560), the last two supposed to have "Hunnic" origins. At least two bowls, one from Swat (BM 1963,1210.1) and another from Chilek (near Samarkand, now in the Samarkand Museum, fig. 4), can be dated quite precisely to the early Hephthalite period (last third of the 5th century) by the comparison of their rulers' crown types with those represented on coins.⁶

In a subsequent contribution, Marshak⁷ proposed that the sudden reappearance of Classical subjects on the metalware of this period was caused by the political disruptions that had occurred since the "Chionite" invasions in the second half of the 4th century, resulting in the plundering of treasuries and temples in Bactria. Consequently, precious objects, hoarded since the Hellenistic and Kushan periods, would have been put into circulation again, and made available for copying by local craftsmen not trained in this ancient repertoire. This idea is attractive when one considers a bowl decorated with acanthus leaves, stones, and glass inspired by Hellenistic models discovered in a 5th century Northern Wei tomb in Datong (Shanxi, China).⁸ It could also explain why Classicizing motifs seem to appear like *morceaux choisis* without a thematic continuity (as on the Freer bowl, mentioned above). In many cases, however, the "Bactrian"

vessels have Roman imperial parallels and reveal a very subtle knowledge of the Greco-Roman gods and heroes, transfigured into their Indo-Iranian counterparts. Therefore, as Marshak himself acknowledged it,⁹ the scenario of local survivals and rediscovery of motifs must be considered together with that of a continuous exchange of goods (not only in metal, but also in stones, textiles, and glass) along with that of the circulation of molds, craftsmen, and written and oral texts between the Greco-Roman and the Indo-Iranian worlds as well as within the Hephthalite Empire in Gandhara, Bactria, Sogdiana, and up to China.

Direct proof for these continuous transfers is provided by two silver dishes decorated on the interior that have precise parallels in the Roman Empire of the 2nd–4th centuries as well as inscriptions revealing their Eastern connections. One is a silver plate showing Dionysus on the back of a panther, surrounded by the *Dodekatheoi* and a wide garland of ivy and vine leaves, discovered in Beitān-Lanzhou (now in the museum of the Gansu province, China). The plate seems to have been cast. In spite of its “Roman” aspect, it has an inscription in Bactrian cursive that Nicholas Sims-Williams (1997) interpreted as referring to a local “light” drachm (1,020 x 3.12 = 3,180 g). The actual weight of the dish is 3,180 g, which is indeed close to 10 Roman pounds, as noticed by Baratte,¹⁰ which leaves the question of the origin of the plate open.¹¹ The second dish is decorated with low reliefs showing Dionysus between two maenads and surrounded by the Dionysiac *thiasos*. It was published in the catalogue of the al-Sabah Collection, *Arts of the Hellenized East* (henceforth *AHE*), no. 72 (fig. 5). The smooth figures, with lavish hips, loose veils, and lascivious movements recall Roman models—like the vases in the 4th century Mildenhall treasure. However, they are also evocative of later Gupta developments, like the rounded naked bodies on the “Reverie dish” in the Cleveland Museum of Art (Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund 1972.71). Moreover, the reliefs are cast and crimped, according to a technique common in the Sasanian world but rather rare in the West.¹² The same technique was used for the “Graces” silver plate, which probably reproduced a late Hellenistic or early imperial Greco-Roman model, with slight Indo-Iranian accents, in the 3rd century, somewhere in Bactria, Kapisa, or Gandhara.¹³ In the 4th–5th century, the al-Sabah Dionysiac plate (fig. 5) was inscribed twice in Brahmi script: according to the first inscription, the dish

was “worship of the noble Uśūra, the great king of the Dards,” a mountainous population living between the Hindukush and Kashmir.¹⁴ The original weight of 50 staters, attested by this inscription, could suggest that even if the plate was made after Roman models, its silver content was measured in Gandharan staters. Consequently, even if we cannot identify the places where such vases were made, we may suppose the existence of networks of artisans and merchants seeking to satisfy a wealthy elite of the post-Kushan (Kidārite, Hephthalite) societies that displayed a taste for Greco-Roman arts.

The Inventory

In 1986, when Marshak updated his Russian doctoral thesis for the German edition, the inventory of the “Bactrian” silver vessels appeared as follows:¹⁵

– Ten bowls: Weitzmann’s three bowls with supposedly Euripidean scenes (including our figs. 2–3);¹⁶ our Lhasa bowl; the British Museum bowl (figs. 1) from Swat showing royal hunters, two Kidārites, one Hephthalite, and a character without a crown, repeated on the central medallion and therefore identified with the beneficiary; a bowl with six medallions illustrating a triple hunt of lion, bear, and wild boar, with the idealized helmeted head of a Hephthalite ruler on the bottom (Hermitage S–296); the bowl from Vereino at the Hermitage (S–8) showing three non-Hephthalite hunters, one spearing a tiger, while the other two shoot arrows at a terrifying lion (fig. 6, discussed below); a bowl found at Chilek near Samarkand, with paired ladies primping and a medallion with the Hephthalite ruler on its base (fig. 4);¹⁷ a bowl with four horses from Kvatspileevo (now at the Hermitage S–36); a bowl with four female heads, inspired by Greco-Roman *Tychai* (Hermitage S–73); a bowl purchased in Bukhara, then kept in Berlin, and now lost, with Classical mythological scenes in medallions and a ruler in “Kushan” dress. The layout of this lost bowl is comparable with that of the fragmentary bowl in the British Museum (Inv. 124088), decorated with four medallions with standing figures, which Osmonde M. Dalton tentatively identified with scenes from the Jataka stories of the Buddha’s previous lives.¹⁸

Typologically related are: a cup on a high slender foot with dancing satyrs and maenads, found

in Bartym and kept at the Moscow Historical Museum (GIM 83747 OK 14170, fig. 7); a jug from Bashkiria (in the National Museum of the Republic of Bashkortostan, Inv. 5606: Akhmerov 1963), on which we propose to identify scenes from Homer's *Odyssey*.¹⁹ The jug belongs to the same series as the ewer discovered in the tomb of the Chinese military chief Li-Xian, who died in 569 in Guyuan (Ningxia, China). For this last ewer, decorated with three scenes from the life of Paris and Helen, Marshak proposed a Bactrian place of manufacture.²⁰

Since 1986, Marshak's collection of Central Asian bowls of the 4th–6th centuries has been supplemented by vessels that have appeared on the international market of antiquities, or which were already known but hitherto not considered relevant for the “Bactrian” repertoire:

–One bowl (which perhaps has lost its stem) from the al-Sabah Collection, represents six standing figures separated by columns, apparently representing the ethnically diverse elites of the Hephthalite Empire.²¹

–A series of bowls (some of them stemmed) are decorated on their exterior with human busts in medallions, framed by stylized acanthus leaves. The earliest, discovered with the previously mentioned Dionysiac cup from Bartym (fig. 7), has small medallions with human heads in three-quarter view and was dated by Marshak between the 3rd and 4th century (Hermitage, inv. 83746). Further examples of Kushano-Sasanian heads appear on a stem cup in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Louis V. Bell Fund 2000.503). Two bowls, with “Hephthalite” heads, were excavated in Pingcheng (Datong), to which they were probably brought after 450, and are kept in the Shanxi Museum.²² One once had a stem; it has four idealized heads like the Sasanian cup of Bahram II, but their hairstyle recalls the hunters on the Vereino bowl (see below). The other Datong bowl has four heads with personalized features, which were convincingly interpreted by Marshak as an evocation of the four stages of life. The latest bowl, from the 5th–6th century, is in the British Museum (1963, 1210.2) and features five “Hephthalite” heads (with curls held in a band). A particular specimen in this series is the “busts” bowl in the al-Sabah Collection dated by Prudence Harper to the 4th–early 5th century (LNS 1560 M, see below).²³

Other metalwork, which seems to have been imported from Gandhara to Tibet and beyond

into Northern Wei China, shows indirect connections with the “Bactrian” specimens but allows a better understanding of the transfer and hybridization of the motives:

–A stem cup in bronze, gilded, with heads but also with masculine and feminine figures in high relief.²⁴ Eight deer without antlers welded on the lip and the vegetation spreading beyond the Dionysiac figures suggest springtime.

–Two molded cups with *putti* inhabiting vine scrolls, recalling the dense scrollwork of the Beitān-Lanzhou plate (mentioned above)²⁵; one, in gilded bronze, was found in the Datong necropolis, while the other, in gilded silver, is said to come from Tibet but has clear Northern Indian connections (through the lotus flower incised inside the bowl; fig. 8).²⁶

Common Features, Specific Topics

All “Bactrian” bowls are characterized by their shallow “calotte” shape (i.e. not a complete hemisphere) and their dimensions, not more than 21 centimeters in diameter and more than 6–7 centimeters in height, and set on either a low ring foot or on a stem. Similar to their Greco-Roman models, their rims are usually marked by a line of dots or, more seldom, a vine scroll or a wave motif. The decor follows the principle of *horror vacui*. Most of the artists show familiarity with Sasanian metalware. Yet, unlike that of many Sasanian vases, the background of most “Bactrian” bowls was gilded between the figures, but there is no consistent rule. It is also difficult to say if several of these bowls were made in the same workshop, since there is a great variety of subjects and styles in the execution of individual figures. As aptly remarked by Marshak,²⁷ this diversity most probably reflects the coexistence of many local courts in post-Kushan Bactrian (Tokharistan) and its southeastern extensions Kapisa and Gandhara.

The repertoire can be described according to the following topics:

– Sequences of local aristocrats, hunting (the Vereino [fig. 6] and the triple hunt bowls in Hermitage, the BM Swat bowl with Kidarite and Hephthalite horsemen), standing (*AHE* no. 94), or as idealized busts. This category corresponds to the main theme of royal Sasanian silverware, but in Central Asia the ruler is not shown alone.

–Evocation of the good life set in an “elsewhere” environment, in an idealized palace or garden (or

in Paradise, which amounts to the same in an Iranian context), where a banquet with music and dance can take place. Such topics are represented by the Chilek bowl (ladies with Indian-style bodies and transparent tunics, primping between fancy Indian columns, with the profile head of a Hephthalite ruler set in the bottom medallion, fig. 4),²⁸ and by the Bartym cup (dancing satyrs and maenads set between trees, fig. 7).

– Besides the representation of Dionysiac figures in medallions, the “Bactrian” bowls can illustrate specific scenes inspired from Dionysus’ life, *thiasos*, and theatrical scenes. Weitzmann thought that they derived from the Hellenistic silver models of the so-called Megarian bowls, none of which have been preserved, even if precious metal bowls with floral decoration are well attested in the Hellenized East, and in particular in Parthia. A significant production of terracotta molded bowls with epic and tragic scenes, going back to Late Classical and Hellenistic times, is well documented in several centers from the Aegean to Aï Khanoum.²⁹ Metal, glass, and *terra sigillata* (“Arretine”) vases with mythological motives are widespread in Roman times. Contemporary political rulers are sometimes alluded to by the choice of the topic, or introduced in an epic or tragic scene (like Augustus on bowls from the Boscoreale and Hoby treasures). In Bactria as well, in two cases (the Stroganoff [fig. 2] and Bukhara bowls), such scenes are interspaced with images of local rulers in Central Asian costume.

Alexander’s Late Antique Revival in the East and the West

Several “Bactrian” bowls illustrate the power ideology of the post-Sasanian elites of Bactria, under Kidarite or Hephthalite rule, by evoking the figure of Alexander the Great: the first, already revealed as such by Prudence Harper, is a 4th–5th century bowl from the al-Sabah Collection (LNS 1560 M, mentioned above), which has three series of idealized portraits in eight medallions around Silenus. The head of young Dionysus with a royal headband, like the young Alexander the Great, occupies four medallions. The four others contain heads of helmeted warriors, presumably idealized figures of local aristocrats. All seem to take part in a Dionysiac feast and recall Alexander and his preeminence in the Late Antique ideologies

of power in both the West, where the prototypes of the medallions were created, and in the East, where they were hammered, with features recalling some representations of local Kidarite or Hephthalite rulers, for example on the bottom medallion of the vase with the triple hunt (Hermitage S-296).³⁰

Second, Alexander’s expression (deep-set, upturned eyes, and head bent towards the left) can be tentatively recognized on the Vereino bowl, to be dated in the 5th century or so (fig. 6). The position of the hunters recalls the heroic Macedonian horsemen with royal headbands, sometimes identified with Alexander the Great, on painted or sculpted funerary stelae from early Hellenistic Egypt, like the one in the Graeco-Roman Museum of Alexandria (10228)³¹ or in the Allard Pierson Museum (Amsterdam. Inv. no. 7941).³² Besides the Sidon sarcophagus and the Messene relief (now in the Louvre Museum, Ma 858) supposed to imitate Craterus’ *ex voto* in Delphi (cf. Pliny the Elder XXXIV, 19; Plutarch, *Alexander* 40, 4–5), several statuettes representing Alexander on his horse were tentatively linked to the texts narrating his famous hunts and the monuments they inspired.³³ Relevant for this reading of the Vereino vase are not only the Macedonian and Roman paintings, mosaics, and statues³⁴ but also the bronze statuettes from Begram and Herculaneum (Napoli Museum, inv. 4996), representing Alexander as a horseman who hunts with a spear (figs. 9–10).

The Vereino vase shows two hunting scenes: first, a figure with royal headband is killing a tiger, which puts him in great danger. Reputed for his agility and power, the tiger was said to have the strength of two lions (Megasthenes *BNJ* 715 F21a quoted by Strabo XV, 1, 37). Second, on the opposite side of the bowl a lion, in a swift movement that makes him seem double-headed, faces the arrows of two horsemen. We had no direct access to the vase enabling us to check our identification of the tiger hunter with Alexander, but the hunting of lions and tigers in the Achaemenids’ closed gardens (*paradeisoï*) was reportedly one of the favorite distractions of Alexander, clad in the Persian costume—the dress of Artemis, in Ephippus’ words (*BNJ* 126 F5 *ap.* Athenaeus of Naucratis, *The Learned Banqueters* XII, 537e). The Vereino vase could show the manifestation of the royal power during the famous hunting in Bazaira (medieval Wizgird, near Samarkand)³⁵ in 328 B.C.E., when Alexander invoked his royal

privilege to kill the beast, and he would have done so with only one hit, as it appears on the vase. It is true that in the only text describing this hunt, Curtius Rufus' *History of Alexander* (VIII, 1, 14) mentions no tiger, but a "lion of rare dimensions." Yet, the replacement of a tiger with this exceptional lion is not impossible, since the two animals could be confused, the Persian lion having little mane and the Oxus tiger (like the last one, killed in 1973 in Khorezm and taxidermized in the Nukus Museum) a less visible striping. Moreover, in this passage Curtius Rufus conflates two or three different hunts, two of which dealt principally with lions: the hunt in Bazaira near Samarkand, another during which Lysimachus empty-handedly killed a lion, and probably a third hunt in 332 B.C.E. in Syria, when Craterus helped Alexander kill a lion. Moreover, Curtius Rufus explicitly associates "lions of rare dimensions" with "tigers" in a later passage (IX, 8, 1–2). In fact, before Augustan times, the Greeks and Romans had no coherent image and name for the tiger. Aristotle (*History of animals* II, 1, 501a, cf. Pausanias IX, 21, 4) identifies it with Ctesias' man-eater (*martichora*, fr. 45.15 and 45.15dα–δ Lenfant), while in the 1st c. B.C.E. Varro defines it as "a kind of variegated lion" which had never been captured alive (*On the Latin language* V, 100).³⁶ It is therefore possible that the memory of a tiger hunt near Samarkand was lost in the Western tradition but remained vivid in Sogdiana, where tigers still existed in the 1950s.

The revival of Alexander's prestige in post-Sasanian Bactria and Sogdiana was never connected in scholarship with the analogous phenomena occurring in the Roman Empire. In fact, from the 3rd century onwards, Roman emperors used Alexander, the New Dionysus, in their political communication. Caracalla presented himself as a second Alexander and ordered statues and paintings of his hero to be put on public display in all cities (Herodian IV, 8, 1). In the 220s–240s, games were held in honor of Alexander in Macedonia. Bronze coins representing him with floating hair and a diadem or wearing a helmet were issued at the same time as the golden medallions discovered in Tarsus. By the middle of the 4th century, John Chrysostom reveals the new dimension of Alexander's cult when criticizing the people "who use magic charms and amulets, carry bronze coins of Alexander the Macedonian around their heads and feet" (*Instructions to Catechumens* 2, 5). From that time and throughout the 5th century,

medallions (today called "contorniates") commemorating Alexander were made in Rome and possibly offered as New Year gifts. The *Saturnalia* of 361 were precisely the joyful event for which the emperor Julian the Apostate imagined *The Caesars*, a satiric sketch staging a banquet animated by Silenus and Dionysus, where the Roman emperors are compared with Alexander. At that time, the Macedonian, represented as Heracles or with a diadem on horseback, is identified as "the Great" through Greek and Latin inscriptions.³⁷ This growing popularity overlaps with the wider diffusion of different versions of his *Romance*, including the Latin, Armenian, perhaps Pahlavi translations, and his integration into the Babylonian Talmud.

There are further possible indications that the Late Antique popularity of Alexander the Great could have reached Central Asia. At Afrasiab (the site of ancient Samarkand), from the 5th to the 7th century, terracotta images of Alexander were cast from older matrices. More than 140 specimens were found there and only there, constituting a substantial part of the local terracotta repertoire. Together with Heracles, Athena, and satyrs, this is the only Greek character that remains recognizable. Despite the permanent remodeling of the head covers and hair, at least four types could go back to Hellenistic models (fig. 11). Two juvenile figures wearing a worn-out head cover (rest of the lion head) recall 4th century B.C.E. types of Macedonian youths—like the ivory head from the Vergina tomb or the one from the Walters Art Museum (71.493—said to have come from Alexandria). These can be compared with the young Alexander now in Dresden (Albertinum, inv. Hm 174) or with Alexander on the sarcophagus of Abdalonymus, king of Sidon (Istanbul Archaeological Museum). Two other types can be related to the adult Alexander: one recalls Lysippus' portrait, with the turned neck, slightly bent to the left, and with the melting glance of the eyes looking upwards (Plutarch, *Alexander* 4, 1; *On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander* 2, 2, 335a–b). Parallels are well attested in the late 4th century B.C.E. Pella and in Hellenistic Alexandria (Greco-Roman Museum, inv. 3242). Another type of terracotta from Afrasiab has a square face, long wavy hair on the sides (when this feature is preserved), a long nose separated from the fleshy lips, and large, deep eyes; one can compare it with the early Hellenistic representations from Kerameikos (National Archaeological Museum, Athens

366) or Priene (Berlin Altes Museum Sk 1500).³⁸ This squared face was reproduced with numerous variants (fig. 11, nos. 4–8).

Unfortunately, we do not know if the lion's mane (*anastolè*) ever existed on any of the Afra-siab terracottas, either because they are worn out, or because their matrix was blunt. In fact, these images were repeatedly re-cast, touched up, stamped on various objects: ossuaries, independent figurines completed as praying people, musicians, horsemen, or mace bearers, fitted with a Phrygian cap or a beard, etc.³⁹ Their original molds were possibly taken from statuettes depicting Alexander (like the bronze statuette from Begram, now in the Kabul Museum, here fig. 9).⁴⁰ Although we can never be certain, it is tempting to suppose that in Samarkand this image could still have been identified as Alexander precisely at a time when he was locally remembered as the founder of the city and of the Nana temple.⁴¹

It is in this context, marked by the memory of Alexander, that the Lhasa bowl was made, perhaps several decades after the al-Sabah and the Vereino bowls. Like the "Bactrian" bowls evoking Alexander and Dionysus with his *thiasos*, the bowl has analogies among the Sasanian vessels, especially in their repertoire of dancing girls, boys, or *putti* picking grapes, along with animals associated with vineyards.⁴² Dancers and musicians as well as grape harvest scenes fit the banquet atmosphere in which Sasanian and "Bactrian" jugs, bottles, and oval and round bowls were actually used. The origin of the motif can be traced back to the Greek and Roman repertoire of harvesting wine and other different fruits (such as olives and dates), illustrated by a wide series of paintings, mosaics, architectural decorations, lamps, and especially metal, glass, or ceramic vessels. In the Roman as well as in the Iranian context, harvesting scenes can be compared and sometimes combined with scenes of hunting and bird chasing: they all reflect the variety and vitality of nature, enjoyed by animals, men, or human-like creatures.

The Lhasa Bowl (Figs. 1)

General Description

Dr. David L. Snellgrove, professor of Tibetan Buddhist studies at the SOAS in London, obtained this bowl in 1961 from a member of an old aristocratic

family in Lhasa, who declared it a generations-old family heirloom. Denwood (1973) published it while it was on loan in the Ashmolean Museum (until c. 1978).

As we have not been yet able to see the bowl,⁴³ we follow Denwood's description, comparing it with the photographs provided by Makiko Tsunamura, chief curator in the Ancient Orient Museum. The bowl is shaped as a "calotte" cup 6.5 cm height, with a rim diameter of 21 cm and a medium thickness of c. 2 mm, soldered on a ring foot. It could contain c. 120 cm³ of water, and its weight is 1.134 g. Thanks to the work of Nicholas Sims-Williams (2016), we know that this weight corresponds to 250 drachms, according to a standard unit well attested in Bactria and Sogdiana, whose weight ranges from 4.43 to 4.55 g, being in this case 4.536 g. As this standard could not be known before Sims-Williams' research, and given the round number of local drachms used for the vase, we exclude all suspicion that the object is a fake. The interior surface is smooth; the exterior is fully decorated with cast reliefs of c. 1.5 mm width, crimped into the vase in order to form complex shapes projecting up to 9 mm outside the wall. Several incrustations are clearly visible on the pictures: small parts of the surface of the shell were sunken; the slight ridges of each cutting were hammered over the edges of the added pieces. Some details were chiseled after the insertion of the cast pieces, overlapping the join between figure and bowl at least in one place (fig. 1, c–d). No certain traces of gilding can be observed in the photograph, although it probably existed, at least on some parts of the background.

The base is occupied by a medallion showing a round pool where six fish swim in different directions, in three pairs of two. On the body, six characters are distributed at regular intervals. In fact, they correspond only to four mold models, as two are duplicated. The characters carry various objects and each acts in relation to a tree with multiple and twisted branches. A large snake crawls up each tree, attacking a nest in which birds appear at different stages of their annual life cycle: hatching the eggs as a couple, feeding and protecting two fledglings that are at first frightened and then eaten by the snake (as one deduces from the empty nest). Two figures, mirror images of each other, appear on either side of the tree with the hatched eggs. The figure on the left drinks from a cup, the one on the right gestures to the tree. Their bodies both follow the Greek canon, and

they are nude except for a wavering scarf thrown on the shoulders of the one on the left and a kind of cloak on the one on the right. Only the figure wearing a scarf is repeated in another section. There are two other characters, well differentiated. One, also depicted twice, wears a skirt and carries a fluted amphora on his shoulder. The other, dressed in a short tunic, strikes a drum with a stick while sketching a dance step with his feet. His head seems bald, but a strange appendix hangs on the right side, the only one that is visible.

Technical and Stylistic Parallels

The technique of a single shell with inserted elements in high relief is characteristic of the main ("central") school of Sasanian silverware until the late 5th or early 6th century, with the last datable specimens using this technique being plates attributed to either Pērōz or Kawād.⁴⁴ In the "Bactrian" series, the technique is especially noticeable on the Kustanai and Vereino bowls (figs. 2, 6) as well as on the stem cup from Bartym (fig. 7) and on the bronze stem cup with standing characters and deer from Datong (mentioned above).

Certain features of costume appear with some frequency on the "Bactrian" bowls. Of special interest is the scarf loosely wrapped across the shoulders of one of the repeated figures, to the left of the tree with the nest containing the hatched eggs. The scarf's fluttering ends terminate as a triple triangular shape. A similar form of scarf is seen on royal plates from the time of Shāpur II (309–379) on.⁴⁵ However, the Sasanian points end with pearls or some other small globular forms, which are absent on the "Bactrian" bowls (Lhasa, Kustanai, Stroganoff, Chilek, Vereino bowls, figs. 1–4, 6). Only the Bartym cup has both ends with and without pearls, in one case even on the same scarf belonging to a dancer who also wears a foot bracelet (fig. 7). In fact, the subtle design of the inner lines on the Lhasa bowl, on the scarf worn by the character drinking from a cup, is particularly close to what can be observed on the Vereino and Bartym examples (figs. 6, 7). This scarf is also worn by Zoroastrian deities on the Sogdian terracotta ossuaries from Ishtikhan, probably from the 7th century,⁴⁶ and by heavenly musicians on ossuaries from the Kashka-darya area (fig. 12).⁴⁷

The flapping cloak with fan-shaped folds worn by the figure to the right of the tree is less often depicted: on the "Bactrian" vases; it appears only on the Chilek bowl, worn by four ladies (the other two wear duplicated scarfs, fig. 4). It is never depicted this way on Sasanian vases. There are close parallels, however, in Sogdian paintings: worshippers in the Panjikent Temple II, in the 6th century (fig. 13)⁴⁸; two characters associated with the "Roman she-wolf" on a painting in the Shahrīstan palace in Ustrushana, at the end of the 8th century (fig. 14)⁴⁹; also some of the Zoroastrian deities on the ossuaries from Ishtikhan (fig. 15).⁵⁰

Trees with twisted and knotty branches with offshoots are common on this group of vases, as they are on both Roman and Sasanian silverware, but the specific shape depicted on the Lhasa bowl, with rounded stumps, is found only on the Vereino bowl (fig. 6) and the Bartym cup (fig. 7). Together with the rendering of the scarves, this is another stylistic feature that links this subgroup of three "Bactrian" vases.⁵¹ In the case of the Lhasa bowl and in this case only, we shall see that a precise botanical identification is possible. Although the open flower of the Lhasa cup is identical with one on the Bartym cup, in the latest case the artist depicted the greatest diversity of flowers and mixed the Lhasa flower with all kinds of other buds, including the fanciful ones on the Vereino bowl and the trees and bushes of direct Roman inspiration on the al-Sabah dish representing Dionysos' *thiasos* (fig. 5). The birds living in flowering trees are a common feature of Sasanian metalware. Yet, the snake threatening a nest is paralleled only by a "Sogdian" lobed cup discovered in Tomyz' (Kirov oblast, now in the Hermitage), incised with a fanciful mixture of tree and vine stem (fig. 16).⁵²

Several body features relate the Lhasa bowl to the "Bactrian" series: the long feet of the characters are apparent on the Kustanai bowl (fig. 2). The almond-shaped eyes correspond to those observed on "Hephthalite" idealized heads, on bowls like the one in the British Museum (1963, 1210.2, mentioned above). The prominent ears, recalling a remote Dionysiac model, are similar to the satyrs and maenads of the Bartym cup (fig. 7) and to the *putti* that inhabit the living vine scroll of the other cup that is supposed to come from Tibet (fig. 8). There is also a great similarity in the treatment of the hair on these three vases, in particular between the nude figures on the Lhasa

bowl and the two types of hybrid Dionysiac characters of the Bartym cup: the two flute players mix features of Pan (with goat feet), Erotes (*putti* with wings), and satyrs (by their ears). The two female dancers mix the postures of Greco-Roman maenads (with naked or veiled breasts and stylized rough skirts reinterpreting the animal skins usually worn in the Dionysiac *thiasos* in vegetal forms) and those of the Sasanian paradisiac dancers with scarves.

Actually, the Bartym cup presents the closest stylistic match to our Lhasa bowl, which might suggest the same workshop or at least artists who shared the same register of shapes and techniques. Their respective weight, however, indicates different values for the silver drachm used in the making of the vase: the Lhasa bowl weighs 250 drachms of 4.536 g., the heavy unit used in Bactria and Sogdiana. The Bartym cup weighs 80 drachms of 4.023 g., the light unit used in the Sasanian Empire.

At its greatest extension, the Hephthalite Empire included three different weight zones (Sasanian, Gandharan, and Bactriano-Sogdian), and one cannot exclude that in each case itinerant artists used the local standard as they tried to adapt their expertise to local expectations.

A New Interpretation

Denwood recognized that the bowl illustrates a Greek subject: we follow him on this. For him, however, the key was the repeated motif of the snake attacking birds in the nest, which he recognized as the famous prodigy that happened at Aulis before the Achaeans embarked for the Trojan War. This episode is first told in Homer's *Iliad* II, 303–30: a snake crawls on a plane tree near the sacred spring in Artemis' sanctuary and devours eight fledglings, then their mother, after which he is turned to stone. The seer Calchas interprets this as the prediction of nine years of war.

This interpretation, although never openly refuted, manifestly failed to be convincing for good reasons: the tree is not a plane tree; none of the participants in the Aulis scene—Calchas, Agamemnon, and Ulysses—can be recognized. Moreover, the number of eight fledglings plus their mother, without which the omen loses all its significance, is found neither in the whole composition nor in the individual scenes.

The bottom medallion with fish (fig. 1a) is not attested on other “Bactrian” bowls and is certainly significant. Fish ponds are well attested from Gandhara (with the Begram bronze “aquarium”) to China. Sasanian silver plates dated between the 6th and the 8th centuries reproduce a similar fish pond below two mouflons and a snake, or a tiger with two chicks and fishing aquatic birds surrounding a tree (Hermitage S–7, here fig. 17, and S–22).⁵³ Contrary to many other Sasanian, Bactrian, or Sogdian vessels showing trees or vine scrolls in narrative scenes, the trees of the Lhasa bowl not only frame the individual characters but are objects of their actions. Together with the fish, these trees are one of the keys to the bowl's interpretation. They all bear three oversized flowers (fig. 1d, nos. 3–7), which Denwood compared to lotuses, although the branches of the trees on the other vases bear stereotypical buds (the Vereino bowl, fig. 6) or conventional flowers and leaves (the Bartym cup, fig. 7). In fact, on the Lhasa bowl we are not dealing with lotuses but with open or half open flowers of *boswellia serrata* (also known as *boswellia thurifera*), in Sanskrit *śallakī*, the tree or bush that produces Indian frankincense most frequently known as *kundura* (fig. 18). The *śallakī* is already mentioned in the *Āyurveda* for its medical properties. Interestingly enough, *kundura* is the origin of the Pahlavi and Persian word for frankincense, *kundur*, which shows that India was, in competition with Arabia, one of the sources of the frankincense used in Persia and probably also in Central Asia.⁵⁴ The resin exudes from the bark, solidifies, and is collected in the shape of small balls.⁵⁵

Stories of snakes guarding aromatics in faraway countries were often told in Greek literature.⁵⁶ In India, these stories—very common in Sanskrit literature—were usually related to sandalwood growing on Mount Malaya, at the southern end of the subcontinent.⁵⁷ Similarly, Xuanzang relates that in the Malākuta country (i.e. Malaya) “at the height of summer, when one goes to a high place to look afar and sees a tree entwined by a large snake, one knows that it is a *candaneva* (sandalwood) tree; as this species of tree is cool by nature, snakes like to twist on it; having discovered the tree, one should shoot an arrow to mark it and come to cut it down after the winter solstice.”⁵⁸ Unlike the tree on the Sasanian mouflons plate (fig. 17), the snake-infested tree on the Lhasa bowl cannot be sandalwood, whose flowers look

different and whose oil is obtained by crushing its wood. The *topos* of the snake guarding the aromatics could be applied to different kinds of trees. This is confirmed by the 9th-century Arab geographer Ya'qūbī, according to whom the aloe tree (at that time imported in China as a substitute for frankincense) grows in India in valleys infested by snakes, and so those who gather it have to wear boots with wooden or iron soles.⁵⁹

Another particularity of the Lhasa bowl is that the trees are also associated with birds, both adults and fledglings, in nests. Beautiful birds were imported from distant countries in order to adorn royal parks in Iran as well as in China.⁶⁰ Peacocks, pheasants, parrots, partridges, and ostriches are most often mentioned, but clearly none is the bird figured on the Lhasa bowl. Particularly famed in India was the *kalavinka* bird, whose melodious song was compared with Buddha's voice. The name of this legendary bird was eventually applied to a real bird, the "Paradise drongo" of India, Sri Lanka, and Java, praised over all because of its metallic plumage and melodious singing. In 813, 815, and 818 the kingdom of Kalinga (in Java) sent to the Chinese court *kalavinkas*, parrots, aromatics, and young "Zanj" boys (this term, which in Arabic designated black slaves from Eastern Africa, hence the name of Zanzibar, in this particular context was probably transposed to dark-skinned populations of the Southern Seas).⁶¹ The bird depicted on the Lhasa bowl has some general similarity to the "Paradise drongo," except for the "rackets," two long appendages of the tail, which are missing here but seem to be present on the later Sogdian lobed cup (fig. 16). Probably in this case we should not expect full realism, or any realism at all, as the phoenix bird, usually associated with the aromatic tree in the Western cultures, can take different shapes as long as it is characterized by the variety and the vivid colors of its feathers (fig. 1d, nos. 1–2).

Among the four characters (fig. 1c, nos. 1 and 4 of which are repeated elsewhere), the bare-chested young man with an amphora has a wavering skirt knotted at the waist, which could well be a free rendering of the Indian *dhotī*.⁶² He appears twice in complete profile with sloping forehead, a snub nose, and thick lips, none of which conforms to Classical canons. His long untrimmed hair is brushed to the back. He is the only figure wearing shoes. On his right shoulder, he carries a small

table amphora with a high, narrow neck, a fluted body and a flat foot (fig. 1c, no. 4 and fig. 1d, no. 10). Denwood linked the amphora to Parthian prototypes, but similar specimens of c. 20 cm high, albeit rare, are known in Panjikent. Marshak discusses at length possible models of these clay vessels and, in the absence of Sasanian intermediaries, concludes that they were probably inspired by late Roman amphoras or *amphoriskoi* appearing in c. 400 and imported into Sogdiana from the 6th century onwards (fig. 19).⁶³ Nevertheless, since there is no exact parallel to the amphoras represented on the bowl known today in Central Asia, we suppose that the author of the model of the vase had in mind Roman luxurious wares, most probably in blown glass, as suggested by the spiral ribs of equal length and shape, running from right to left on the whole body and neck of the amphora. Although the shape and the ribs are well attested on blown glass throughout Roman times, the closest parallels for these *amphoriskoi* date from the 3rd and the 4th centuries (e.g. fig. 20, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Inv. 81.10.172). The carrier covers the mouth of the amphora with his hand, which indicates that it is full of a precious liquid. The best analogies for such a representation come from the Dionysiac *thiasoi* of Roman times, for example the Satyr on the 1st century wall painting from the Villa Doria Pamphili in Rome (now in the British Museum 1873,0208.1, fig. 21), or the 2nd–3rd century limestone reliefs from the Chakhil-i-Ghoundi stupa in Hadda, Gandhara (fig. 22, Musée Guimet, MG 17191).⁶⁴

A second male figure, for whom Denwood proposed only a general "Eastern" attribution, is ready to beat a drum and directs his piercing glance towards the snake and the nest. He wears a full tunic with loose sleeves rolled to the elbow. The motion of his bare feet seems to indicate that he is trampling the ground in order to add to the vibrations, a motion that is visible at the bottom end of his tunic.⁶⁵ The drum, held firmly under the left arm, is biconical with a lozenge network of strings that the musician pinches with his hand. The stick is long, thick, slightly curved, and rounded at the end. This shape of drum is sometimes depicted on Sasanian silverware.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, it is never beaten, not even on the Stroganoff bowl where it is played by two Indian macaques (fig. 3).⁶⁷ Indeed, the instrument is more typical of India, where this drum is known

in the Punjab as the *dhhol* and is beaten on the bass side with a curved stick (*dagga*). There the drum is sometimes a plain barrel, sometimes an hour-glass shape (with sticks similar to those in fig. 23).⁶⁸ Consequently this character can be identified as an Indian musician or a priest-musician, who is called in order to divert the danger of the snake from the collectors of aromatics, or from the fledglings, or from both.

This priest-musician indeed has a strange characteristic: a large hairy appendix on the right side of his shaven head (the other side is not visible); (fig. 1c, nos. 10–11). Initially, we contemplated the possibility of a tuft of hair, the *śikhā*, still worn at the back or on the side of the shaved skull by some Brahmanic castes in South India.⁶⁹ They are, however, generally smaller and different in shape. Moreover, the character's face seems grotesque, with round eyes set within folds of skin and protruding nose and lips, rather evocative of a monstrous creature, perhaps with ape-like features. Although unusual for a modern viewer, monsters were not uncommon in ancient arts, either representing in-between species (in myths and legends, particularly numerous in an Indian setting) or a certain esthetic taste for mixture (like the Pan–Eros–Satyr figures on the Bartym cup, fig. 7). Thus, we are inclined to recognize him as a fictional creature, with a fully human body and a head inspired by a cynocephalus. The type of the cynocephalus baboon could in this case be mixed with that of the Indian macaque-drummer, more familiar in Bactria-Sogdiana, and exemplified by the musicians on the Stroganoff bowl (fig. 3). Later, we shall consider the literary connections of this figure.

We are now left with the main subject, two nude males standing on either side of the tree. Only the one to the left of the tree is repeated elsewhere in the ring composition. Except for a scarf and cloak, each is nude and stands so that one can see that they are circumcised (fig. 1c, nos. 7–9). This is a unique feature in Classical as well as Iranian and Central Asian art. Provocative nudity is in itself unusual in this repertoire. The few nude figures that appear on other “Bactrian” specimens are inspired by the eroticism of the Greek Dionysiac *thiasos*, as seen on the silver plaque in the al-Sabah Collection (LNS 1571 M, *AHE*: 196–98), and on the Dionysiac metalwork of the Indo-Greek or Indo-Scythian periods, dated to the 2nd–1st cen-

turies B.C.E.⁷⁰ On later vases, the genitalia are not exposed, as for Heracles on the Stroganoff bowl (fig. 3), or for satyrs and maenads on the Bartym cup (fig. 7), or seem to have been removed (like on one of Odysseus' representations on the Bashkiria jug, mentioned above).⁷¹ On Indian or Sasanian silverware, nudity, both male and female, is more frequent, but it is always very stylized, even when the pubic zone is shown. On a Sasanian gilt silver plate in the Metropolitan Museum, two youths identified as Heavenly Twins are treated somewhat like plump *putti*.⁷² In an Indian context, on the al-Sabah Dionysiac dish (fig. 5), smooth lines characterize Dionysus' body, as they do on the later “Reverie” dish in the Cleveland Museum, inspired by similar models (see above). Such a unique feature on the otherwise dignified composition of the Lhasa bowl certainly calls for a specific explanation.

The young man on the right holds a sack in his left hand (the shape does not correspond to any known metal vessel) and extends his closed right hand. There are two possible ways to interpret this gesture: he feeds the birds with grain in order to tame and capture them, or he is about to collect the resin of the tree, which actually exudes from an incision. This later interpretation is far preferable as his hand moves towards the tree, not the nest.

The young man to the left holds a kind of bottle in his right arm, while lifting a cup in his right hand. The bottle has a long narrow neck (with a movable head?) and a globular fluted body on a wider conical foot (fig. 1d, nos. 8–9). This general shape—well known in Late Antiquity as “pilgrim bottles,” which were used to carry holy water in the West—is attested from Hellenistic times onwards. Three aspergillums in gilded silver from the al-Sabah Collection, dated in the 3rd–2nd century B.C.E., have a comparable body and foot (LNS 1331M, 1293–1294 M, *ANH*: 167–71, cat. 36–38). Two ring-handles on a globular body with oblique striations are attested for mold-blown flagons from layers of the 4th century in Egypt (like in Ismant el-Kharab, here fig. 24).⁷³ As in later Islamic contexts, the aspergillum or sprinkler is generally associated with rare fragrances and holiness. Most probably, the young man uses the bottle in his right hand to sprinkle a liquid, which can drip from a lid on the mouth.⁷⁴ The other vessel, a cup, is raised to the level of the mouth, obviously

in order to drink. Its low shape and fluting recall either the Roman crystal or glass bowls or the gold or silver palmate bowls frequent in northern India, Sasanian Iran, and Central Asia, from Hellenistic and Parthian times up to the late Sasanian period.⁷⁵

Shown in three-quarter view, the heads of both young men on each side of the tree are, like their bodies, mirror images of each other. In contrast with the other figures, they conform to the Classical canon. Their hair is short and abundant, fashioned into triangular locks and parted raised locks above the middle of their foreheads (*anastolè*). This feature, as well as the delineation of their faces and their heroic nudity, definitely points to Alexander.

The Literary Background: Excerpts from the Alexander Romance

The role played by the figure to the right of the tree corresponds closely to an episode in the Greek and Latin text of the *Alexander Romance*: the visit to an Indian sacred wood, abode of the oracles trees of the Sun and Moon. The episode is told in the *Letter to Aristoteles about the Miracles of India*, which was first translated into Latin by Julius Valerius in the 4th century (only a short Greek version was included in the recension β III, 17, in the 5th century):⁷⁶

(pp. 41–43 Boer/Gunderson): The grove was luxuriant, full of frankincense and opobalsamum. Very much of this develops on the branches of these groves and the inhabitants of this area were accustomed to eat it (. . .) I began walking through the whole grove, which means inside a roughly constructed wall, and I saw that opobalsamum, which had a very good odor, was dripping profusely from all the branches of the tree which were everywhere; taken by the odor of it I tore away lumps from the bark and my companions did the same thing . . .

(p. 53 Boer/Gunderson): We did leave the sacred trees but our nostrils were still affected by the odor of frankincense and opobalsamum. In fact the Indians, who tend the shrines of the gods towards ocean, said that I was also immortal since I was able to penetrate all the way to that point. Putting in my bosom what they believed about me, I thanked them.

Just before this passage, the “priest of the oracle,” a therianthrope creature to which we shall return, gives the following instructions:

(p. 42 Boer/Gunderson): (The priest) ordered my friends standing nearby and about 300 of my fellow soldiers to take off their rings and all their clothes as well as their shoes. I obeyed the man in every matter . . .

This explains why Alexander is nude and without a weapon (also prohibited according to III, 17 in the recension β : “In the neighborhood there was no iron, bronze or tin, not even potter’s clay”). The other figure, made from the same mold as Alexander the harvester, drinks from a cup while holding an aspergillum. But no drinking, no libation, no ablutions are taking place there, as the priest forbids any sacrifice and allows only prostration. It appears, therefore, that the figure as well as the amphora bearer with Indian *dhoti*, both represented twice, are taken from another episode, which also took place in a perfumed atmosphere, namely the discovery of the Fountain of Life during the unsuccessful march to the country of the Blessed. At this point it is necessary to draw attention to the image of the pool of water full of fish that appears at the bottom of the Lhasa bowl fig. 1a. Fish play a decisive part in this episode, for in the main Greek versions, the miraculous quality of the fountain is discovered by Alexander’s cook when he washes dried fish which are then revived by the water:

(β II, 39, ed. Bergson 1965, translation Stoneman 1991: (The cook) took a dried fish and waded into the clear water of the spring to wash it. As soon as it was dipped in the water, it came to life and leapt out of the cook’s hands. He was frightened, and did not tell me what had happened; instead, he drank some of the water himself, and scooped some up in a silver vessel and kept it.

A parallel episode, told earlier, presents another kind of miraculous water and fish occurrence near heliacal trees, but in association with birds of fire, which were not mentioned in the other aromatic woods:

(II, 36, 1–2 and 4–6, ed. Bergson 1965, translation Stoneman 1991): We marched on from there and came to a river. I ordered my men to pitch camp and lay aside their armor in the usual way. In the river there were trees which began to grow at sunrise and continued until the sixth hour, but from the seventh hour they shrank again until they could hardly be seen. They exuded a sap like Persian myrrh, with a sweet and noble aroma (. . .) In the river there were also many snakes and many kinds of fish, which could not be cooked by fire, but only in freezing cold water. One of the soldiers,

in fact, caught one of these fish, washed it and put it into a bucket, and shortly found it cooked. There were also many kinds of birds in this river, closely resembling our own; but if any of our people touched one of them, flames shot out of it.

This passage includes a theme shared with the above-cited episode of the sacred wood, namely the trees exhaling “Persian myrrh,” their cosmic (heliacal) dimension, and the potential immortality of the one who manages to enter and take the substance that renders one immortal: the fragrance of the aromatics or the water. Clearly the version or versions accessible to the artist who executed our bowl combined elements that are split in the Latin *Letter* and the Greek version β of the *Romance* as we have it now.

This detail of the revived fish is absent from Ferdowsi and from the Syriac long version (which does not mention the Fountain of Life), but it remains in the Syriac poem *The Legend of Alexander* attributed to Jacob of Serūgh (§ 170–74),⁷⁷ and it is presented by Nizāmi (*Sharafnāma*) as the “Rumi” (i.e. Greek) version, the discovery being here attributed to the prophets Ilyās and Khizr.⁷⁸

In the Late Antique and medieval traditions of the *Romance*, there are several versions of the episode of the Fountain of Life, including the drinking of the reviving water, plus in some cases ablution or bathing. The difficulty arises from the various identities of the character who performs them. In the above-cited Greek version, the cook drinks after he has understood the miraculous properties of the water and keeps some in a silver container for himself. Later on, he informs Alexander only of his discovery, not of his appropriation of the water (II, 41, 2). At a first glance this could correspond to our image, but the cook is a man of low status, by no means an alter ego of Alexander. It would have been totally inconsistent to portray him as identical with Alexander, and to provide him with a scarf which, whatever its diverse possible functions, is always a marker of an elite or celestial individual. Further, this action of the cook is described in the β recension. In other versions, the cook does nothing after having witnessed the miracle.⁷⁹

Thus, in the Syriac poem, the cook plays a passive role: he understands that he has found the Fountain of Life, but he does not drink; he rushes

after Alexander, who in the dark cannot find the return path. In the *Shāhnāma* (verses 1369–1372, translation Samra Azarnouche), there is no cook and his function is transferred to Khizr, who actually drinks and washes himself in the spring:

On the third night, two ways appeared in the dark,
and Khizr lost sight of the King.
The prophet reached the Water of Life,
he stretched the end of his lifetime towards Saturn.
In the clear water he washed his head and body
looking for no other than the pure God as a
protector.
He drank, rested, quickly went back.
His praise was constantly increased by his homage
(to God).

This is, again, very close to our image. Moreover, in this version, the drinking and ablution are performed by a prophet, equal in status to Alexander.⁸⁰ But, of course, the young man on the bowl cannot be Khizr, who first appears in *Qur’ān* 18.59–64 (a garbled version of the fish revived), as the unnamed “servant” of Moses, both his pupil and his teacher. So, who is he?

A Jewish Version

There is one tradition in which the prophetic character assuming this role is Alexander himself: the Jewish version of the *Romance*. In the transmitted material, this version is attested by two sources. One is an Aramaic passage in the Talmud of Babylon (*Tamid* 32b), a compendium of oral traditions and Rabbinic opinions compiled in the 4th–6th centuries, and thus contemporary with ancient witnesses of the *Romance* (Greek recension α , Latin version, Armenian and Syriac version, Greek recension β). The other Jewish version is the text published and carefully translated by Rosalie Reich (Reich 1972) as *Tales of Alexander the Macedonian* (*Sefer Alexandrus Moqdon*), part of the Hebrew manuscript in Oxford, Bodl. Cod. Heb. d. 11 (No. 2797.10 in Neubauer 1906), which reproduces a collection of texts of various dates ultimately compiled by Eleazar, son of Asher hal-Levi in the region of Worms in c. 1325.⁸¹ Despite having been recorded several centuries from each other, at the opposite ends of the Mediterranean, both texts appear to reflect a similar set of narratives. The *Tamid* 32b passage runs as follows (in the William Davidson digital

edition of Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz's *Koren Talmud Bavli*, Noé edition):

With regard to Alexander, the Gemara relates: When he took himself and went on his way, he sat at a certain spring and was eating bread. He had salted fish [*guldeni*] in his hands, and while he cleansed them of their excessive salt, a particularly pleasant fragrance fell upon them. Alexander said to himself: I may conclude from this event that this spring comes from the Garden of Eden. There are those who say: He took from those waters and washed his face. And there are those who say: He ascended along the length of the entire spring until he reached the entrance of the Garden of Eden. He raised a loud voice, calling out: "Open the gate for me!" The sentry of the Garden of Eden said to him: "This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter into it" (*Psalms* 118:20). "Since you are not righteous, you may not enter." He said to them: "I too am worthy, as I am a king; I am very important. If I will not be admitted, at least give me something from inside." They gave him one eyeball. He brought it and he weighed all the gold and silver that he had against the eyeball, and yet the riches did not balance against the eyeball's greater weight.

And here is the narrative in the *Tales of Alexander*.⁸²

They set forth from there arriving at the land of Ofrat (Euphrates) where they found a large, unusual river pleasant to behold. The king and his army were thirsty, but were afraid to drink its waters. The king ordered wells dug in the vicinity of the river and much water was found, and the king and his men drank. The king said: "If it pleases you, we will camp here by the waters, for by their fragrance I know they are beneficial." They agreed to do so, and camped there for ten days. On the tenth day, the king's hunter caught some birds, wrung their necks and washed them in the waters of the river. As he dipped them in and washed them in waters of the river, they returned to life and flew away. Seeing this, the king's servant quickly drank from that river and went to the king to tell him all that had happened. "Obviously, these are the waters of the Garden of Eden," said the king. "Whoever drinks from them shall live forever. Go quickly and fetch me some and I, too, shall drink." The servant hastened, cup in hand, to bring some of those waters to him, but he could not find them. He returned and told the king: "I could not find the waters of the river for the Lord has hidden them from me." The king grew angry, drew his sword, and beheaded his servant. Then the headless servant ran away and Menahem, the secretary, related: "Our sages say that he is still headless in the sea where he overturns ships (. . .)"

Menahem explained this to the king who said: "Apparently, this is the gate of the Garden of Eden." Then he cried out: "Who is upon this gate?" A voice called back: "This is the gate of the Garden of Eden and no heathen or uncircumcised male may enter." That night Alexander was circumcised and his physicians came and immediately healed him with beneficial herbs. Nothing of this was known in the camp for the king ordered his physicians to keep silent. The next day, the king cried out to the keepers of the gate: "Give me a tribute and I will go on my way."

Despite some differences between both narratives (in the *Tales* birds are revived instead of fish, and there is no mention of Alexander's ablution), they come from a common stock of stories in which Alexander plays the active role, anointed in the Water of Life and eventually approaching the Garden of Eden. In order to enter it he accepts circumcision, which admittedly is not enough to bring him inside Paradise, but is sufficient to make some Jews claim him as one of them, or at least as a "Righteous" (*Tzadik*), according to a tradition first recorded by Flavius Josephus in his account of Alexander's entry into Jerusalem (*Jewish Antiquities* XI, 8, 3–5).⁸³ Considering that the Fountain of Life, Alexander himself taking hold of its water, his nudity, and his circumcision (fig. 1c) are all present on the bowl and set in a paradisiac setting evocative of the Garden of Eden, we cannot propose a better explanation for this image than a Jewish version or at least a tradition influenced by a Jewish version. There were many ways to evoke Alexander, but indeed the Fountain of Life is one of the few episodes to which the Talmudic literature pays attention.⁸⁴ The second scene, Alexander collecting frankincense with his own hands, is probably reinterpreted according to the Jewish (and then Christian) image of the Lord's Anointed, king or prophet—Alexander is king and, being divinely inspired, assimilated to a prophet.⁸⁵

The distribution of the cloak and scarf on both images of Alexander seems meaningful in this respect. On "Bactrian" bowls the billowing scarf is worn by a whole range of prestigious or paradisiac figures (see above for the precise references): Greek heroes (Kustanai, fig. 2), aristocratic hunters performing heroic deeds (Vereino, fig. 6), boys and girls with paradisiac overtones (Chilek, Bartym, figs. 4, 7). On Sogdian ossuaries it is worn by musicians and Zoroastrian deities, all inhabitants of Heaven. Like the scarf, the wide flapping cloak

with fan-shaped folds, ultimately derived from the Greek *chlamys* (with a knot instead of the fibula), is not a usual element of Central Asian dress. Instead, it is associated with deities (such as the Amesha Spentas on the Ishtikhan ossuaries), exotic characters (such as the Indian ladies on the Chilek bowl, fig. 4; the male—royal?—characters next to the Roman she-wolf on the Shahristan painting, fig. 14), perhaps also in contexts of theatrical performances (the worshippers at the Panjikent Temple II, one of whom is carrying a mask: fig. 13 here, after Marshak and Raspopova 1996, who interpreted this as “actors playing the part of the gods”). In the present case, Alexander gathering aromatics is endowed with the cloak, a clear symbol of kingship, as one can understand also from the Greek versions of the *Romance*, when Alexander threw his *chlamys* on the dying Darius (II, 20, 5) or later around Ptolemy’s shoulders when he tried to make his general look like him (III, 19, 4). On the other side of the tree, the billowing scarf probably associates him with Heaven, hinting at the immortality he is acquiring, or hoping to acquire through the balsamic fragrance and by drinking water from the Fountain of Life.

Back to the Two Minor Characters (fig. 1c, nos. 2–3)

The bare-chested Indian servant carries a precious liquid, which in our interpretation is the perfumed water from the Fountain of Life, brought to Alexander. He has a solar symbol tattooed on both sides of his chest, which is consistent with his function of servant of the sacred wood of the Sun and Moon, as well as with the Indian practice of real or fake tattoos.

The monstrous Indian drum player calls to mind the priest of the sacred wood described in the *Letter to Aristotle*:

(p. 41–42 Boer/Gunderson): . . . the priest of the oracle appeared. He was more than ten foot in height, with a black body, and with the teeth of a dog. From his pierced ears hung pearls and he was clothed in skins.

This description stems from Ctesias’ description of a fantastic people who live in the Indian mountains covered by trees that produce a sweet aroma, *psitthachora* or *zètacora* / *xètacora*, on the shores

of a miraculous river *Hipobarus* or *Spabaros*, “of all the goods” (recalling the Fountain of Life):

(*Indika*, fr. 45.37 quoted in Photius’ *Library*, codex 72 p. 47b Bekker; edition Lenfant 2004, translation Anca Dan): . . . (Ctesias) says that in these mountains live humans who have the head of a dog. They wear clothes made of savage beasts and speak no language, but howl like dogs and therefore understand dogs’ language. They have teeth bigger than the dog and claws like the dog, but longer and more hooked. They live in the mountains up to the river Indus, are black and righteous, like the other Indians with whom they are in contact. They understand what the Indians tell them, but they cannot speak: they make themselves understood by howls and movements of hands and fingers, like the deaf and dumb. The Indians call them “*Kalys-trioi*”, in Greek “Dog-heads” (*Kynokephaloi*).

These are the premises of the Greek tradition about the righteous yet monstrous people of the Cynocephali, located in Northern India, who were not actual dogs but humanoids with dogs’ teeth. The natural philosophers identified them with baboons (see e.g. Aristotle, *History of Animals*, II, 8–9, 502a), a species which fits well Greco-Egyptian imagery of temple servants. In Roman times, baboons lived in Hermopolis, in the temple of Thot, the Moon god, where they were treated like scribes and diviners (Strabo XVII, 1, 40; Horapollo, *Hieroglyphics*, I, 14–15). A cynocephalus-priest beating the drum was therefore an appropriate figure to illustrate the Oracle of the Sun and the Moon, awakening both distant Egyptian echoes of the Lunar cult and more familiar Indian ones.

Various other therianthrope beings are described in the *Romance*, helping Alexander overcome obstacles or access the confines of the world. A good example in the Persian tradition is the character called *Gush-bastar*, the one Who-Sleeps-in-His-Ears (*gush* meaning “ear” and *bastar* “couch”) described in the *Shāhnāma* (verses 1692–97, translation Samra Azarnouche), during Alexander’s crossing of the country of the Ichthyophagi:

Afar appeared an enormous man,
all over hairy, with big ears.
Under the hair his body was bluish,
his two ears were like elephant ears.
(The soldiers bring him to Alexander.)
“What kind of man are you?” he asked, “what is
your name?”

what are you seeking in the sea? what is your goal?"
He answered: "O King! Mom and dad
gave me the name *Gush-bastar*.

Again, this monster is helpful and serves as a guide between two worlds, the one of humans and the other beyond it: he crosses the lake and brings to Alexander eighty sages who live in an inaccessible city.

The Composition: Sources and Meanings

At first glance, it can seem strange to have two figures of Alexander, facing each other on both sides of the tree, each involved in a different action. However, this kind of "telescopic" composition is widely attested in Roman art. In a Christian context, two silver plates from Syria, both dated from 565–578, therefore probably contemporary with the Lhasa bowl, show the figure of Jesus in duplicate, once behind the same table and then under the same canopy, administering the Host on the right and the Chalice on the left (here the Riha paten from the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Byzantine Collection, BZ.1924.5: fig. 25).⁸⁶ This device is also known at Panjikent in the paintings of fables like the "Beauty and the Beast" (the girl on both sides of the flower which caused her misfortune),⁸⁷ and the "The Goose (here a female duck) with the Golden Eggs" (fig. 26).⁸⁸ This last Panjikent composition is the closest parallel to our scheme, as two images of the stupid owner of the bird face each other to either side of the duck.⁸⁹

Taken as a whole, the decoration of the Lhasa bowl can be viewed as a procession scene of Dionysiac tradition, taking place in a "Sacred Wood" (Persian *paradeisos*, in *Alexander Romance* β III, 17 and in the Latin version of the *Romance* by Julius Valerius III, 24), led by the therianthropic priest beating the drum to clear the way to the tree, and culminating with Alexander drinking the Water of Life and collecting frankincense. The water carrier is repeated once, and so is Alexander drinking. This could be explained by the constraints the silversmith faced: he had to fill the standard circumference of the "Bactrian" bowl with only four matrices of human figures, more difficult to produce than chiseled details (and perhaps acquired from another source). Even

when repeating the trees, he could not avoid duplicating two figures. Perhaps Alexander drinking the Water of Life was considered more important than Alexander gathering frankincense and thus deserved to be repeated.

Having more freedom with the chiseled details, the artist introduced some variations in the trees (fig. 1d, nos. 3–7). The fight between the snake and the birds is illustrated by alternate poses in which a couple of birds hatch the eggs (between the two Alexanders) and protect the fledglings (beyond the priest), or only one bird protects the two fledglings (twice) or finds out that they were eaten by the snake (twice). Not only does the snake approach the nest from different sides, but in five cases the side flowers are open and the middle one is withered (a telescopic image suggesting the heliacal trees). Once again, the tree between the two images of Alexander shows a more optimistic picture: the pair of (solar) birds take care of their eggs in the nest, while all the flowers are open. The overall message is the cosmic cycle of Life and Death, with the ultimate victory of Life, in an ideal spring-time—a theme that the Jewish *Tales of Alexander the Macedonian* associate with birds rather than with the original fish. On the Lhasa bowl, however, both are included in the composition.

The Date

We propose to date the bowl from the late 5th to the 6th century, thus putting it toward the end of the series of "Bactrian" bowls. Intuitively, Marshak inclined towards a date after the Bartym cup (fig. 7, which he dated "not earlier than the 4th–5th centuries") because of "more stylized trees."⁹⁰ In fact, the artist of the Bartym cup had a wide repertoire of motifs, including the floral designs and human as well as monstrous features, and this is also the case on the Lhasa bowl. The vessels depicted on it have Hellenistic origins but are best attested in Eastern Mediterranean glassware from the 3rd–4th centuries onwards, with local variants produced in Central Asia in the 6th century. The analogies for the scarves and *chlamys*, both in Iran and Central Asia, also cover a broad time span, from the 4th to the 8th century. We are on safer grounds with the strong Indian references, observed mainly on the Chilek bowl showing the portrait of a Hephthalite ruler with royal ribbons, henceforth not pre-dating the 460s

or 470s (fig. 4). The period 460–540 was the heyday of the Hephthalite conquests in Northwest India, under the rulers Khingila to Mihirakula.

The Invention of Paradise: The Jews and the Greco-Roman, Hindu, and Zoroastrian Gardens Beyond Human Life

The Lhasa bowl is not only the first attestation of an Eastern Jewish *Alexander Romance*, documenting the prestige of Alexander the Great in post-Sasanian Central Asia in general and among the Jews in particular. The bowl also shows that the Earthly Paradise, located at the eastern end of the world, was not a western myth: people who were probably involved in commerce with India, in the Hephthalite Empire, took part in its invention. The paradisiac topography was the result of cultural exchanges between different ethnic and religious communities of the East, among which the Jews—besides the Christians—played such a part that their iconography of Eden became the standard frame.

The Tree and Water of Life

From its earliest attestations as a “sacred tree” in Near Eastern traditions and as the “Tree of Life” growing on the banks of the cosmic Nile during its flood, the Tree of Life seems to have been related to the Water of Life, for the food given by the tree is associated with the drink necessary for all living beings. Many types of trees have been identified with the Tree of Life; they were all generally characterized by the sweetness, long conservation, or price of their fruit, and by the cosmic connection they make between the divinity and the earthly beings that the tree could nourish.⁹¹ In the Bible, the Tree of Life has different functions and meanings: it first appears in *Genesis* (2:8–10, NIV), where it directly surmounts the Spring of Life:

Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the East, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river watering the garden flowed from Eden . . .

When the deceitful snake prompted Eve to eat the fruit of knowledge, he made men endowed with insight but pulled them away not only from God’s wisdom but also from the Tree which made them immortal. Hence, in the *Psalms*, the Tree of Life becomes the symbol of divine wisdom and prosperity, granted to the king or to the prophet: it is a living path to God and a tool for instruction and reflection. This is why, among the trees that could be assimilated to the Tree of Life, in addition to fruit trees, those providing oil and perfume for ointment occupy a special place. In Ezekiel’s vision of the Day of Atonement (47:9–12), the paradisiac image of the river coming from the East and surrounding the abode of the Eternal (*YHWH-shammah*) is completed by the living beings inhabiting its waters and the trees growing on its banks: the leaves of the trees are healing and their effect could be seen in the life gained by everything up to the sea. This healing function of the tree suggests its connection with the aromatics, which becomes explicit in later texts, like 2 Esdras 2:12 (cf. 8:52). Furthermore, Ezekiel’s vision of God’s dwelling is a major landmark for the Jewish tradition concerning not only the terrestrial or celestial Garden of Eden but also the New Jerusalem. It is this *YHWH-shammah* that we suggest recognizing, with its Trees of Life and Knowledge, on a 7th–8th century copper-alloy tray from Iran, in the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin (I.5624).⁹²

Further developments of the original image of the Tree and the Water of Life concern the meaning of “Life” as well as the real location of the terrestrial Garden of Eden. The “Life” given by the tree and the waters is not necessarily the immortal life on Earth: it can be wisdom (*Proverbs* 3:18, 11:30, 15:4, cf. 4 Maccabees 18:16; *Sirach* 24:12–17) or virtue (Philo of Alexandria, *Questions on Genesis* 1.10; *On the Migration of Abraham* 8.36–42; *Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis 2 and 3* 1.[17].56–1.[18].62).⁹³ From Hellenistic times onward, this Tree of Life/Wisdom is identified as an aromatic, for example in 1 Enoch 24–25 (translation Charles 1963; cf. 2 En. 8.3–7; 3 En. 5.1; 23.18).⁹⁴

24. And from thence I went to another place of the earth, and he showed me a mountain range of fire which burnt day and night. And I went beyond it and saw seven magnificent mountains all differing each from the other [. . .]. And the seventh mountain was in the midst of these, and it excelled them in height, resembling the seat of a throne: and fragrant trees encircled the throne. And

amongst them was a tree such as I had never yet smelt, neither was any amongst them nor were others like it: it had a fragrance beyond all fragrance, and its leaves and blooms and wood wither not for ever: and its fruit is beautiful, and its fruit resembles the dates of a palm. Then I said: "How beautiful is this tree, and fragrant, and its leaves are fair, and its blooms very delightful in appearance." Then answered Michael, one of the holy and honored angels who was with me, and was their leader. 25. And he said unto me: "Enoch, why dost thou ask me regarding the fragrance of the tree, and why dost thou wish to learn the truth." Then I answered him saying: "I wish to know about everything, but especially about this tree." And he answered saying: "This high mountain which thou hast seen, whose summit is like the throne of God, is His throne, where the Holy Great One, the Lord of Glory, the Eternal King, will sit, when He shall come down to visit the earth with goodness. And as for this fragrant tree no mortal is permitted to touch it till the great judgement, when He shall take vengeance on all and bring (everything) to its consummation for ever. It shall then be given to the righteous and holy. Its fruit shall be for food to the elect: it shall be transplanted to the holy place, to the temple of the Lord, the Eternal King.

Hence, by the end of Hellenistic times, the Tree of Life had already received an eschatological dimension, referring to the afterlife of the Righteous, those chosen by God (*Revelation* 22.1–2, 14, 19).⁹⁵

Geographically, the river and its trees must be in the extreme East, where *Genesis* located the Pishon/Phison, river of abundance surrounding Havilah, the land of gold, the resin bdellium, and onyx stone. Identified with the Ganges (Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* I, 39), this river anchors the terrestrial Garden of Eden in northern India throughout Judeo-Christian traditions (e.g. Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Christian Topography* II, 81–82).⁹⁶ It is in this later context, when the Garden of Eden was located at the end of the inhabited world (marked also by Alexander's Altars), that Alexander the Great, protector of the Jews according to Hellenistic and Roman texts, having reached the end of his destiny, was imagined to be chosen by God. Right before his death, he attained the Tree's wisdom and therefore eternal life.

How to Represent the Garden of Eden: From Greco-Roman Dionysiac Nature and the Persian Paradeisos to the Zoroastrian Heaven

On the Lhasa bowl, the compositional scheme conveys the idea of the Garden of Eden, for the

two figures of Alexander immediately call to mind (and certainly already did to the public for which the vessel was intended) Adam and Eve near the Tree of Temptation, their nudity, and the snake. In fact, Alexander gathers the incense balls with a gesture quite similar to Eve picking the apple on late Roman paintings and golden glasses (fig. 27).⁹⁷ This positioning of a couple to either side of a tree and near a pool reappears on Zoroastrian representations of the Heaven,⁹⁸ such as on a silver plate in the Miho Museum (fig. 28): here the location in Paradise is established by the presence of a cock (the symbol of the psychopomp Srōsh) and musicians (the symbol of Paradise as "House of Song").⁹⁹

Thus, the composition on the Lhasa bowl is the result of several cultural assimilations, all of which can be traced across one millennium:

The Jewish Garden of Eden was assimilated with the Persian garden from the Second Temple period and the *Septuaginta* onwards.¹⁰⁰

The Tree of Life, a cosmic tree of the cyclical beginnings in various Near Eastern but also Indo-Iranian traditions, became a heliacal tree in the shape of the Greco-Roman *Peridexion* (according to the Greek *Physiologus*, §34). The different stages of flowering on our vase and the various positions of the snake beholding an imaginary shadow suggest the peculiarity of this tree, well adapted to the sanctuary of the Sun and the Moon.

The birds with beautiful plumage (with distant analogies on Sasanian silverware) recall the Greco-Roman myth of the phoenix, the fire-bird often located in India and associated with the Sun, the aromatics, and the ruler.¹⁰¹ Since Hellenistic times, it was occasionally recognized in Job 29:18, where the believer claims to die in his nest after a life as long as the one of the phoenix (*ḥol*). In the Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 108b, *ḥol* is identified with the *avarshina*, the bird taken into Noah's ark (implicitly in pairs) and blessed by him with eternal life for not requiring food. The immortality of the phoenix-*ḥol* has its origins in Eden according to the *Midrash Bereshit Rabbah* 19, 5 (commenting Gn 3:6), in which the *ḥol* is the only bird that refused the fruit of knowledge offered by Eve, a gesture that is paralleled by the birds resisting the snake's attacks and remaining attached to the Tree of Life, as depicted on the Lhasa bowl (fig. 1d, no. 3).¹⁰² Moreover, in the present Indian setting, the Lhasa birds could also owe something to the *kalavinka*, the Paradise bird of India.

The Dionysiac cortege reflects the identification of Alexander as the New Dionysus in India.¹⁰³ As a direct descendent of Heracles, he would have found in the East a tree and a snake, like the ones his ancestor found in the Western Hesperides' garden, another paradise. From Hellenistic times onwards, Dionysus was generally regarded as a savior god, of resurrection both on earth and on water. In India, his *thiasos* was identified with local natural deities, yakshas and nagas.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, the Indian characters of our vase perfectly fit the Greco-Indian Dionysiac landscape of living vegetation and waters (seen also on the Baryton cup, fig. 7).

In Hellenistic and Roman times, Alexander acquired the stature of a founder (*ktistes*), comparable with that of a prophet in the Jewish tradition. His historical adventures through Gedrosia (coastal Baluchistan, where he was able to find water after picking myrrh and dates according to Aristobulus, *BNJ* 139 F49a–b, quoted by Arrian, *Anabasis* VI, 22–26; cf. Strabo XV, 2, 5–7) and in India, at the end of his trip, where he became aware of his life ending (according to the *Romance*), incorporated elements from the myth of Moses (discovering the water in the desert, in the Nb 21.16–18) and Enoch.

The Islamic tradition added Khizr, companion of Moses in the Qur'ān, of Alexander in the *Shāhnāma*, and of Eliah (Ilyās) in Nizāmi. Instead of Alexander, Khizr alone or with Ilyās is depicted beside a fish pond that represents the Fountain of Life.¹⁰⁵ Interestingly, at Samarkand the legend attached to the Shah-i Zinda sanctuary describes three figures enthroned near an underground, ever-rejuvenating spring: they are explicitly identified as Qutham ibn 'Abbās (a cousin of the Prophet), Khizr, and Ilyās.¹⁰⁶ The legend is multi-stratified, and one may wonder whether Alexander was not one of the prototypes of Qutham.

The Laxity of Late Antique Jewish Aniconism

A possible objection to the idea of a Jewish commissioner for the Lhasa bowl is the Jewish ban on human depiction and nudity (Ex. 20:4–5, Dt. 5:8). Already in 1991, Pierre Prigent collected an important series of Jewish representations of paradisiac scenes and explained this violation of the law, tolerated in the Talmud, by the eschatological di-

mension of these images after the destruction of the Temple.¹⁰⁷ Nudity is not an insurmountable taboo: even outside Paradise, in the best-known example of Jewish monumental representations in "Parthian art" *lato sensu*, namely the paintings in the Dura Europos' synagogue (240s), there are human figures everywhere, and nudity in one case (Pharaoh's daughter and the baby Moses in the Nile). Moreover, the Roman sculptural repertoire includes a round marble slab showing King David dancing nude, according to II Samuel 6.13–23. Its curious composition (partly comparable with that of some paleochristian tables and plates¹⁰⁸) has raised doubts about its authenticity, but no definitive proof has been provided so far (fig. 29).¹⁰⁹

Nonetheless, if our interpretation is accepted, the Lhasa bowl is not only the earliest representation of Alexander in Paradise but also the only Jewish image of Alexander as a Righteous. The recently discovered "Elephant mosaic" in the Synagogue at Huqoq (Galilea), dating from c. 400, shows a Greek king trying to perform a sacrifice in the Jerusalem Temple; initially identified by some as Alexander, he is in fact the Seleucid Antiochus IV.¹¹⁰

Jews in Hephthalite Central Asia

In the 4th century the Jewish community in Merv was visited by a religious elder from Babylon.¹¹¹ Direct archaeological evidence has been found here in a 5th–6th century cemetery with ossuaries bearing Aramaic inscriptions; offerings of miniature crucibles have led to the supposition that some of these people were involved in metalwork.¹¹² Altogether, Jews were certainly numerous and influential in the Hephthalite Empire, as shown by the contemporary folk etymology *Nephthalitai* (one of the "lost tribes") for *Hephthalitai* (Agathias IV, 27, 4), and by the presence in the early Islamic period of well-established communities in Merv, Herat, Ghor, Maymana, and Balkh.¹¹³

During Hephthalite times, perhaps more than before, India was reached by Central Asian traders.¹¹⁴ There are some indications that these traders included Jews. A few inscriptions in Square Hebrew on the Upper Indus have been tentatively attributed to the 9th century,¹¹⁵ but Shaul Shaked (personal communication) sees no objection to an earlier date, although perhaps not as early as the adjoining Sogdian and Bactrian inscriptions

from the 5th–6th centuries. The script is especially close to the inscriptions of Tang-i Azao in the central Hindukush, dated from 752/753, and to two Judeo-Persian letters from the Khotan region in c. 800, whose vocabulary shows Sogdian features.¹¹⁶ The earliest textual testimony of the presence of Jewish traders in Southern India is Ibn Khurdādhbih's notice about the Rādhāniyya merchants in the 9th century, one of whose trading routes linked the Indian coast with China through Central Asia. Bīrūnī mentions that "in the past" only a few merchants, particularly Jews, were admitted to Kashmir.¹¹⁷

In which language was the *Alexander Romance* accessible to 5th–6th centuries Jews in Bactria, and more generally to Central Asians peoples? The Jewish elites knew Aramaic, and the Talmud passage is in Babylonian Aramaic. Syriac was mainly used by the Nestorian church, but some Jews probably understood this cognate language, at least orally. For everyday use, Jews spoke local Middle Iranian languages. The question of a (now lost) Pahlavi version underlying the Syriac version and part of Ferdowsi's sources on Alexander is disputed.¹¹⁸ Michael Shenkar has recently demonstrated that at Panjikent a painted cycle from the 740s illustrates the *Farāmarznāme*, an epic drawing much on its narrative material from the *Alexander Romance*, thus making it even more probable that stories from the *Romance* itself circulated in the Sogdian language.¹¹⁹

Final Remarks

Sometime in the late 5th or 6th century, in the Hephthalite Empire or a successor state, a dignitary or a rich merchant, most probably a Jew imbued with Hellenic culture through the filter of other languages, felt it appropriate to evoke the fabled Indian countries while expressing his attachment to the memory of Alexander, protector of his religion and his people. Here it is appropriate to mention again the Chilek bowl (fig. 4) on which the portrait of a Hephthalite ruler is set in the middle of ladies of a markedly Indian type, obviously in order to manifest the appropriation of these countries; we have indeed noticed close stylistic similarities with our object, especially the design of the *chlamys* and scarves. One can wonder whether the Jews in Bactria did not associate themselves with this "propaganda," using

the theme of "their" Alexander taking possession of the treasures of India in order to show him as a forerunner of the Hephthalite conquerors.

The endpoint of the import trade of Indian goods is shown by one of the many figures of the recently discovered wood panels in the palace of Kafir-kala (Rēwdād) near Samarkand, dating from the first half of the 6th century and therefore contemporary or nearly contemporary with our bowl: a kneeling worshipper of the high Sogdian goddess Nana is pouring into the perfume holder a dozen balls of frankincense he has taken from a flask he carries in his other hand (fig. 30).¹²⁰

Notes

1. We thank Makiko Tsumura, Chief curator in the Ancient Orient Museum in Tokyo, who provided us with the photos and the reproduction rights, granted in agreement with the private owner who exposes it in the Museum. Caroline Riberaigua and Ronan Moreau (Collège de France, Bibliothèque de l'Institut d'études indiennes) offered precious advice on Indian aspects, Sibyl Searle (Ashmolean Museum) and Richard Blurton (British Museum) further data about the bowl's history. Samra Azarnouche provided useful information and translations of passages from the *Shāhnāma*, Muriel Debié helped with the Syriac sources, Mark Geller and Eyal Nahum with the Hebrew and Aramaic texts, Anis Mkacher with the Arabic scripts, Ching Chao-jung with the Chinese translations. Laurianne Sève-Martinez put at our disposal her unpublished manuscript and photos of the terracotta heads inspired by Alexander and discovered in Afrasiab; Pascale Ballet provided useful feedback and bibliography for the typological identification. Michael Shenkar and Annick Fenet sent us bibliographical references unavailable during the COVID lockdown, François Ory helped with the illustration, Libby Grenet and Judith Lerner with the English editing. A complementary study, focusing on the literary traditions and on Alexander's figure in transcultural context, will be published in French, in the *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres*, 2021:1.

2. Denwood 1973; Marshak 1986: 37, fig. 17; Marshak 2017: 79, fig. 17. We use the term "Bactrian bowls" (in relation to the supposed main region of fabrication of the bowls) following B. I. Marshak and the term "Bactria" for the coherence of the text, although the term "Tokharistan" is now attested from the 2nd century (see Sims-Williams 2015). The situation of Marshak's publications is quite complex. In 1969, Marshak first published the Chilek bowl, found in 1961 during regular excavations near Samarkand, together

with the comparisons available at the time (Marshak and Krikis 1969). In 1982, he presented his doctoral thesis *Istoriia vostochnoi toreutiki III-Xiii vv. i problema kul'turnoi preemstvennosti* [History of Eastern Toreutics between the IIIrd and the XIIIth Centuries and Problems of Cultural Continuity]. In 1986, a German edition appeared, with updates but also some cuts. The original Russian text was eventually published in 2017, eleven years after Marshak's death, thanks to Valerii Nikonorov with a foreword by Frantz Grenet. The sections and images that Marshak had left out in the German edition were reintroduced, but the changes were not incorporated. Consequently, it is advisable to use both editions side by side.

3. Baratte 2016: 281–82, fig. 10.
4. Marshak 1982 published 2017, see esp. 72–81; Marshak 1986, see esp. 29–39.
5. Denwood 1973: 126.
6. Grenet 2002: 211–12, pls. 5–6.
7. Marshak 1990: 298–99.
8. Marshak in Watt et al. 2004: 148, no. 58.
9. Marshak 1986: 35–39, 247–51.
10. Baratte 1996.
11. For the heavier usual standards of Iran, Bactria-Sogdiana, and Gandhara, see Sims-Williams in Dan et al. 2018: 234.
12. Baratte 1984; Harper and Meyers 1981: 147–50.
13. Dan et al. 2018.
14. *AHE*: 258–61.
15. Marshak 1986: 29–39. The objects kept in Russian museums are illustrated in the posthumous publication of Marshak's Russian book (2017), except for the Kvatspileevo bowl (S-36), the “bowl with four female heads,” (S-73) and the Bashkiria jug.
16. Some of Weitzman's identifications have since been questioned but with no agreement on possible alternatives. See e.g. Bernard 1979: 134; Bernard 1990; Baratte 2016: 273–80.
17. We are grateful to Judith Lerner for her observations on this vase.
18. Dalton 1964: 55–57, no. 202.
19. Forthcoming study.
20. Marshak and Anazawa 1989; Marshak in Watt et al. 2004: 256–57, no. 157; different views on the subject matter in Bernard 1990 and Baratte 2016: 266–68.
21. *AHE*: 338–44, no. 94.
22. Marshak in Watt et al. 2004: 47–55, 154–55, nos. 63–64.
23. *AHE*: no. 93.
24. Marshak in Watt et al. 2004: 150, no. 60.
25. Marshak in Watt et al. 2004: 184–85; Baratte 2016.
26. Marshak in Watt et al. 2004: 47–55, 149, no. 59 and fig. 39, after *Indian and Southeast Asia Art*, sale Catalogue, New York: Christie's March 27, 2003: 79, lot 78. The only example of female heads, coupled with two other men, separated by acanthus leaves, can be

seen on a cup discovered in a tomb of the Northern Wei dynasty in Yihe-Nur, Mongolia (Yongzhi et al. 2016: 51). Since the figures have exclusive Greco-Roman features, its place of manufacture should be discussed separately.

27. Marshak 1986: 39; Marshak 2017: 81.
28. A plate from Liakhsh (Tajikistan), morphologically similar to this group but decorated only by a central medallion on the inner surface, shows a woman with even more Indian features (nude except for a belt with pendants), holding a vine scroll on both sides while dancing: *Oxus*: no. 49; Marshak 2017: fig. 181.
29. Mairs 2014; cf. Francfort 2020.
30. Forthcoming study.
31. Nenna 1998.
32. Moorman 2000: no. 133, pp. 110–11; Cole 2019.
33. Stewart 1993; Mullen 2019.
34. Wootton 2002; Palagia 2000; Palagia 2012.
35. Bernard 2012.
36. Wille 2010.
37. Mittag 1999; Dahmen 2007.
38. See e.g. Bieber 1964; Hoff 2009; Queyrel 2020: 20–24.
39. Meshkeris 1977: 78–83, pls. X–XII, XXIII. The identification of the prototype as Alexander was first proposed by Veselovskii 1917: 59–68, and was generally accepted in Soviet publications. We thank Laurianne Sève-Martinez for having put at our disposal her photographs and study in preparation of the terracottas from Afrasiab, Pascale Ballet for her expertise on Hellenistic parallels, and Andrei Omel'chenko for the photographs of the Hermitage specimens here reproduced.
40. Tissot 2006: 284 below; cf. Hoff 2013: 86, fig. 5; Hiebert and Cambon 2011: 208, fig. 115.
41. Syriac *Alexander Romance*, translation Budge 1889: 115 (Alexander builds the city and the temple to the goddess Nana, instituting her confederal festival, an addition that could particularly appeal to a Sogdian audience); Ibn Hawqal, *Kitab surat al-ard* II, p. 474 (Alexander builds the inner city wall, an information which, if extended to the Seleucid period, is archaeologically true). In the Islamic period, Alexander was also locally remembered as the founder of Merv, Balkh, and Termez, all cities that had been part of the Hephthalite Empire. In the Pahlavi treatise *Shahrestānīhā ī Ērānshahr* (§ 2–5) compiled in the Abbasid period, Kay Kāwus is the founder of Samarkand; it is in Samarkand that Alexander destroys the *Avesta* engraved on golden plaques. This reflects the altogether negative image of Alexander conveyed by Zoroastrian literature, conflicting with the positive or ambivalent image dominant in other Iranian sources, including Ferdowsi, and probably kept in local traditions, especially in Samarkand.
42. Harper 1971.
43. The COVID-19 crisis prevented us from visiting Tokyo, but thanks to the high quality of the photographs offered by the Museum, we hardly expect direct

examination of the object to change our interpretation, except perhaps for some details of the head of the "priest-drummer."

44. Harper and Meyers 1981: 172 and pl. 17.
45. Harper and Meyers 1981: pls. 13, 15, 17, 20, 22, 25, 27.

46. Shenkar 2014a: figs. 175, 176, 178, 179.

47. Shenkar 2014a: fig. 181.

48. Marshak and Raspopova 1994: fig. 4.

49. Sokolovskii 2009: fig. 6.

50. Shenkar 2014a: figs. 171–74.

51. The Vereino bowl and the Bartym cup are comparable also for the vegetal decoration of their feet, which have some similarities to the living vine scrolls on the other cup said to come from Tibet, fig. 8.

52. Marshak 1971: tab. 46; Darkevich 1976: 39, no. 67, tab. 17.3–6; Marshak 2017: no. 53; cf. Trever and Lukonin 1987: 124.

53. Trever and Lukonin 1987: 118; nos. 37, 39.

54. The Sogdian word for frankincense is, however, *vōdh* (βωδ) which means simply "good smell." The Bactrian word is not yet attested.

55. Myrrh is also collected this way, but the myrrh tree does not grow in India.

56. Detienne 1972; Lecocq 2012.

57. McHugh 2012: 172, 193, 211.

58. *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions*. BDK English Tripitaka 79, transl. Li Rongxi, 1996: 321.

59. Miquel 1973–1980, III: 423–24.

60. Shafer 1963: 38–39, 92–104; for the import of birds in the Islamic world, see Miquel 1973–1980, II: 105–15.

61. Shafer 1963: 103–4. Full accounts of these embassies were kindly translated for us by Dr. Ching Chao-jung.

62. Cf. also Denwood 1973: 124.

63. Marshak 2012: 111–16, figs. 56–57 for Panjikent specimens, 58–59 for parallels. The fluted amphora found in a 6th-century stratum has its handles attached lower than the ones on the bowl, but the top part was missing and was graphically reconstructed. Marshak, however, does not include the amphoras depicted on the bowl in the comparisons; but his 2012 book is in fact his "dissertation" thesis presented in 1965, while Denwood's article appeared in 1973.

64. Cambon 2004.

65. When seated, snake charmers use their feet and eyes movements, the flute having no real effect (except the enjoyment of the public) as snakes are deaf.

66. Duchesne-Guillemin 1993: figs. 14a, 18, 22b, 23.

67. Biconical drums are depicted at Panjikent in carnival scenes, but they are of a quite different type: longer, with the strings parallel and not crossed (Karomatov et al. 1987: 120 bottom right; Marshak and Raspopova 2001: figs. 78–83).

68. After Marcel-Dubois 1941: pl. IX.3.

69. See *Wikipedia*, s.v. Nambudiri, Dikshitar.

70. Al-Sabah Collection no. LNS 1329–1330 M, LNS 1404 M, LNS 1524 Ma–Mb; see *AHE*: 176–79, 199–201, 234–39, nos. 48–49, 64, 72.

71. This holds true also for the Liakhsh bowl (on which see above n. 28).

72. See Harper's entry in *Les Perses sassanides*, no. 37.

73. Hope and Whitehouse 2003; cf. Smythe 2008: no. 26. The only detailed publication of pre-Islamic glassware from Bactria and Sogdiana (Raspopova 2010) includes globular vases with foot and long neck but without handles.

74. Multiple drill holes are observed in the bottom of a Sasanian silver vase with a high neck decorated with a grape harvest scene; there is one hole in the bottom of two piriform glass vessels also from Iran (*Splendeur des Sassanides*, nos. 89 and 105 respectively).

75. *AHE*: 62–75, 106–9.

76. For the *Letter*, we follow the text of Boer (1973) and the English translation of Gunderson (1980). For the Greek text of the recension β, see Bergson 1965; for the augmented variant of the β in the manuscript L (*Leidensis Vulcanius* 93, from the 15th century), cf. Bergson 1965: 193–204, van Thiel 1983, and the English translation of Stoneman 1991. A list of editions of the *Romance* in different languages is given in Stoneman 2008: 230–45.

77. Translation Budge 1889: 172–74. The attribution of the poem to Jacob of Serūgh (451–521) is now rejected, in favor of an anonymous Christian author working in 630 at the earliest.

78. Manteghi 2018: 122.

79. In what appears to be a still later addition preserved in the manuscript L, the cook keeps the water for an illegitimate daughter of Alexander he wants to seduce (II, 41, 3–6).

80. Alexander actually drinks inexhaustible water from a miraculous cup when in India, but this happens in the episode of his encounter with the king-magician Keyd (verses 437–49).

81. The text is also preserved in a manuscript, in *Biblioteca Estense* a T 2.20, earlier called Or. 58 (no. 39.14 in Bernheimer (1960) and in a manuscript in Damascus (now lost). The first scholars who drew attention to this text surviving in three manuscripts were A. Y. Harkavy, who studied the Damascus manuscript (Harkavy 1892), Israel Lévi, who published the text of the Modena manuscript (Lévi 1896), and Moses Gaster, who published a loose English paraphrase of the Bodleian manuscript with sections from the Modena manuscript (Gaster 1897). They disagreed about the representative character of this work: Harkavy and Lévi considered it marginal and late, a fantasy of an 11th–13th century author in southern Italy or Sicily.

On the contrary, Gaster took it as relevant to the Jewish image of Alexander and pre-dating the version of the

Alexander Romance incorporated in the *Yosippon* 10 (a Hebrew compendium of Jewish history now attributed to the first half of the 10th century: see Börner-Klein and Zuber 2010: 142–50). It does not seem that the discussion has advanced much since then (Kazis 1962: 33–35, Reich 1972, and Dönitz 2011: 29–30 remain not committed; Stone 2008: 235–36 underlines the difference with the three other Hebrew medieval *Romances*. Kłęczar 2019: 24, 29–30, 155, 160–63, writes that “Gaster’s theory might well be true. Still, at this particular stage of research, the question of the dating of this text must remain unsolved.” The interpretation proposed in the present article, if considered acceptable, would give weight to Gaster’s opinion.

82. Reich 1972: 80–85.

83. Cf. Peltonen 2019: 57–64; Amitay 2012; Kłęczar 2019 with bibliography.

84. The others, some of which have a markedly Jewish focus, are: the visit to Jerusalem; the dialogue with the Indian sages; the journey to the region of darkness; the Amazons; the ascent into the air; the descent into the sea; Alexander and King Kazia; Alexander and the bones of Jeremiah; Alexander and the throne of Solomon.

85. The prophetic character of Alexander was eventually elaborated by Nizāmī in his *Iqbāl-nāma*, the more mystical of the two poems of his *Iskandarnāma*. He mentions having used, among others, unspecified “Jewish sources” (Manteghi 2018: 79; cf. Casari 2011). The question of the contribution of Jewish traditions to Nizāmī’s version should be re-examined in the future.

86. Weitzmann 1979: no. 547; Toynbee and Painter 1986: 21–22, nos. 79–80.

87. “The Merchant and the Spirit” according to Marshak 2002: 63–64, but Semenov’s interpretation (Semenov 1996: 97–104) seems more convincing to us.

88. Marshak 2002: 133–37, fig. 86.

89. Among the representations of Alexander himself, two 8th-century textiles (from the Washington Textile Museum, inv. 11.18, and the Cleveland Museum of Art, inv. 1959.123) show a double victorious Alexander, striding in different directions, one on a white, and the other on a black horse: Shepherd 1971; Vidal-Naquet 1988.

90. Marshak 1986: 37; Marshak 2017: 79.

91. See e.g. Ameisenowa 1939.

92. Forthcoming study.

93. Cf. Leonhardt-Balzer 2020.

94. See Tigchelaar 1999 and Penner 2020.

95. Cf. Estes 2020.

96. See Scafi 2006.

97. Lutraan 2006: 149–50, C. 151, fig. 4, after Morey 1959: pl. VIII, no. 47. An interesting example of the automatism in recognizing the Paradise and the Tree of Knowledge surrounded by two characters is given by the sardonyx in the Cabinet des Médailles

(Bibliothèque Nationale de France, camée 27, online <http://medaillesetantiques.bnf.fr/ws/catalogue/app/collection/record/ark:/12148/c33gbdm0c>): an ancient Roman gem illustrating Athena and Poseidon founding the city of Athens. In the 13th century, the two were interpreted as Adam and Eve around the Tree of Knowledge; an inscription quoting Gn. 3:6 was added. See Aghion and Hellmann 1988: 52–55, no. 6a.

98. Grenet 2013.

99. Hajime 2019: 114.

100. Bremmer 1999; Noort 1999.

101. Van den Broek 1972; Lecocq 2012.

102. Cf. Niehoff 1996; Lecocq 2014.

103. See e.g. Goukowsky 1981.

104. Coomaraswamy 1931; Peterson 2011–2012.

105. For example on a miniature from a manuscript of Nizāmī from Herat, at the end of the fifteenth century, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Charles Lang Freer Endowment, F1937.24. Online <<https://asia.si.edu/object/F1937.24>>.

106. Grenet 2005.

107. Prigent 1991.

108. Cf. Roux 1973; Roux and Marcadé 1977.

109. Thomas 1970.

110. Britt and Boustán 2017; Balty 2018.

111. Zand 2000: 532.

112. Kelvan 1979, where the inscriptions were mistakenly identified as Hebrew; Grenet 1984: 187–93, 327.

113. For a theory (admittedly not much substantiated) according to which Jews had a pivotal role in the Bactrian glass production and the introduction of this technology in China, see Kurinsky 1991: 155–56, 280–92. For an overview of evidence (mainly archaeological) of Jewish communities in Iran and Central Asia, see Shenkar 2014b.

114. Grenet 1996; Yoshida 1996; la Vaissière 2005: 85–90.

115. Jettmar and Kwasman 1987.

116. Yoshida 2019.

117. Sachau 1910: 206.

118. The idea of a Pahlavi version underlying the Syriac version was for a long time accepted on the basis of Nöldeke 1890. The argument rests on the recognition, or non-recognition, of a Pahlavi intermediary between Greek and Syriac spellings of proper names. Among recent or relatively recent contributions, see in particular, *contra*: Ciancaglini 2001; Ciancaglini 2015; Hämeen-Anttila 2018: 45–51. *Pro*: van Bladel 2007; Manteghi 2018: 10–45. In India, Bhasa’s poem from 630 in praise of King Harshavardhana shows that stories from the *Romance* (in this case, Alexander forbidden to enter the kingdom of the Amazons) were known at that time, presumably in a Sanskrit version (Szalay 2012: 337).

119. Shenkar 2014.

120. Grenet 2020.

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Fig. 1a. Silver bowl from Lhasa, 21 x 6.5 cm, end of the 5th-6th century C.E. Private collection, exhibited in the Ancient Orient Museum in Tokyo. Photograph courtesy of Makiko Tsumura. The fish pond on the bottom and the central scene, with Alexander drinking the Water of Life and harvesting the Tree of Life.



1.



2.



3.

Fig. 1b. Silver bowl from Lhasa, 21 x 6.5 cm, end of the 5th-6th century c.e. Private collection, exhibited in the Ancient Orient Museum in Tokyo. Photographs courtesy of Makiko Tsumura. Lateral views with: 1. the priest-drummer and Alexander drinking the Water of Life; 2. Alexander drinking the Water of Life and Alexander harvesting the Tree of Life; 3. the repeated figure of Alexander drinking the Water of Life and the Indian amphora-bearer.

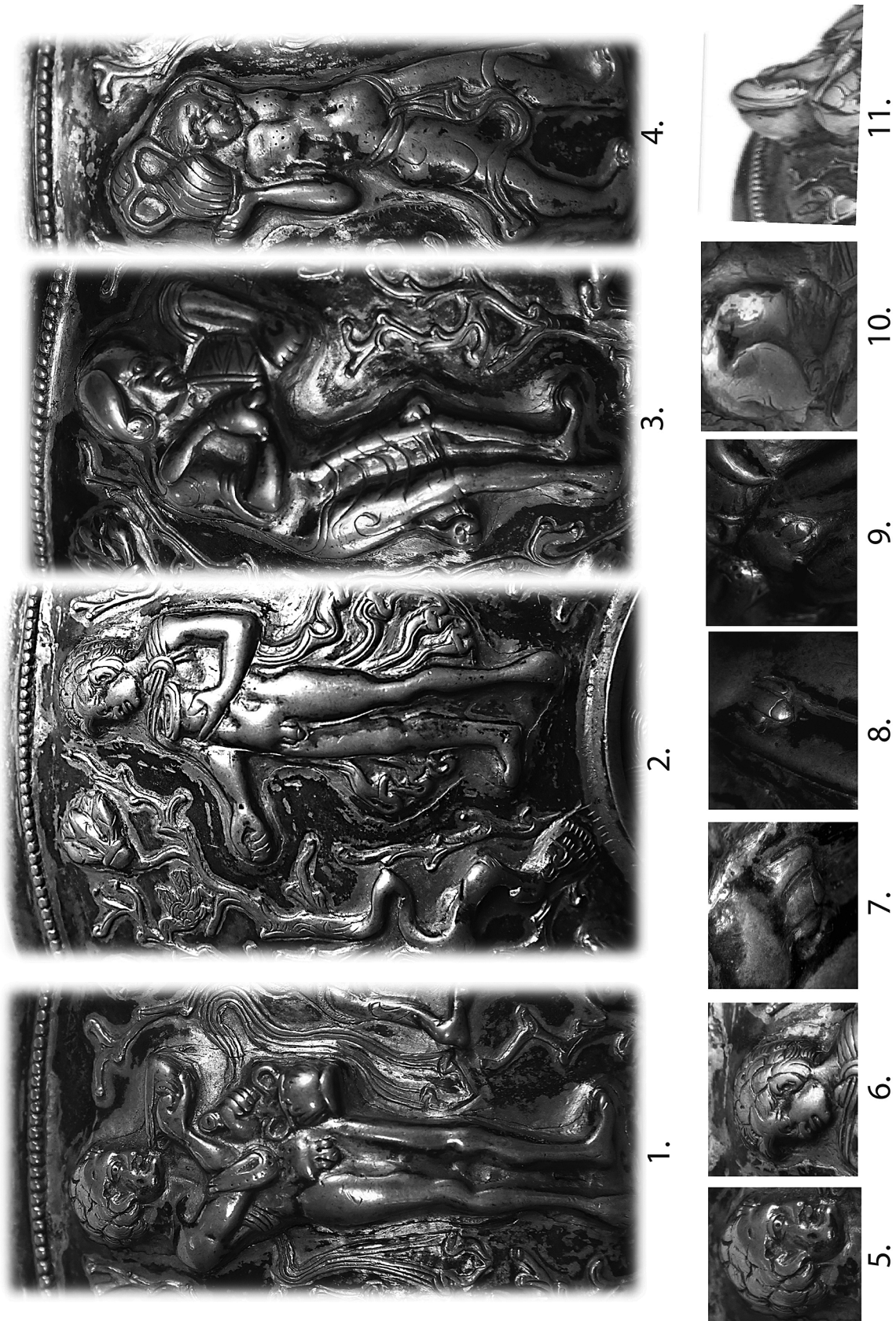


Fig. 1c. Silver bowl from Lhasa, 21 x 6.5 cm, end of the 5th-6th century C.E. Private collection, exhibited in the Ancient Orient Museum in Tokyo. Photographs courtesy of Makiko Tsumura. The characters on the bowl: 1. Alexander drinking the Water of Life (repeated); 2. Alexander drinking the Water of Life (repeated); 3. the priest-drummer; 4. the Indian amphora-bearer; 5-6. Alexander's circumcision; 7-9. Alexander's hairy appendix.



Fig. 1d. Silver bowl from Lhasa, 21 x 6.5 cm, end of the 5th-6th century C.E. Details related to the Tree of Life and the containers: 1-2. the Paradisiac birds; 3. the Tree of Life between the main two Alexander figures; 4-7. variations of Tree of Life; 8-9. bowl and aspergillum of the repeated figure of Alexander drinking the Water of Life; 10. the amphora of the Indian bearer (repeated identically); 11. the hands of Alexander harvesting the incense. Private collection, exhibited in the Ancient Orient Museum in Tokyo. Photographs courtesy of Makiko Tsumura.



Fig. 2. Silver bowl from Kustanai (Turgai, Kazakhstan), supposed to depict scenes from Euripides, 15.5 x 5.2 cm, 4th-5th century C.E. (?). Kept in the Hermitage Museum (S-62). Photo after Smirnov 1909: no. 284.



Fig. 3. Silver bowl probably found in the Perm region (Russia), 14.5 x 4.6 x 0.4 cm, 5th century C.E., from the former Stroganoff collection in the Hermitage Museum (S-75). Photos after Schulz 2019: fig. 1a; Staviskiy 1960; and Smirnov 1909: no. 67.



Fig. 4. Silver bowl from Chilek (near Samarkand), 19.7 x 6.5 cm, last third of the 5th century C.E. Kept in Samarkand, State Museum of History and Culture of Uzbekistan. Photograph courtesy of Rocco Rante.



Fig. 5. Silver dish, the al-Sabah Collection, inv. LNS 1372 M (*AHE* no. 72), 18.5 x 4.5 cm, inscribed in Brahmi in the 4th-5th century C.E. Photo courtesy of the al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait.



Fig. 6. Bowl from Vereino (Perm, Russia), 14 x 4.7 cm, 5th century C.E. (?). Kept in the Hermitage Museum (S-8). Photo courtesy of the Hermitage Museum.



Fig. 7. Silver stem cup from Bartym, 8.5 x 10 x 10 cm, 5th-6th century C.E.. Kept in the Moscow Historical Museum (GIM 83747 OK 14170). Photographs courtesy of the Museum.



Fig. 8. Gilded silver bowl said to come from Tibet, 17.1 cm, 4th-5th century C.E. Sold in *Indian and Southeast Asia Art*, sale Catalogue, New York: Christie's March 27, 2003: 79, lot 78.



Fig. 9. Bronze statuette from Begram, room 13, 13.5 x 3.5 cm, 1st century B.C.E.–1st century C.E. Kept in the Kabul National Museum inv. 57–3–9; cf. Tissot 2006: 284 below. After Hiebert and Cambon 2011: 208, fig. 115.



Fig. 10. Bronze statuette of Alexander from Herculaneum, 48.5 cm, 1st century B.C.E.–1st century C.E., supposed to reproduce a model from the 4th century B.C.E. Kept in the Museo archeologico nazionale di Napoli, inv. 4996. Photograph courtesy of the Museum (cf. <http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/item/objekt/13169>).

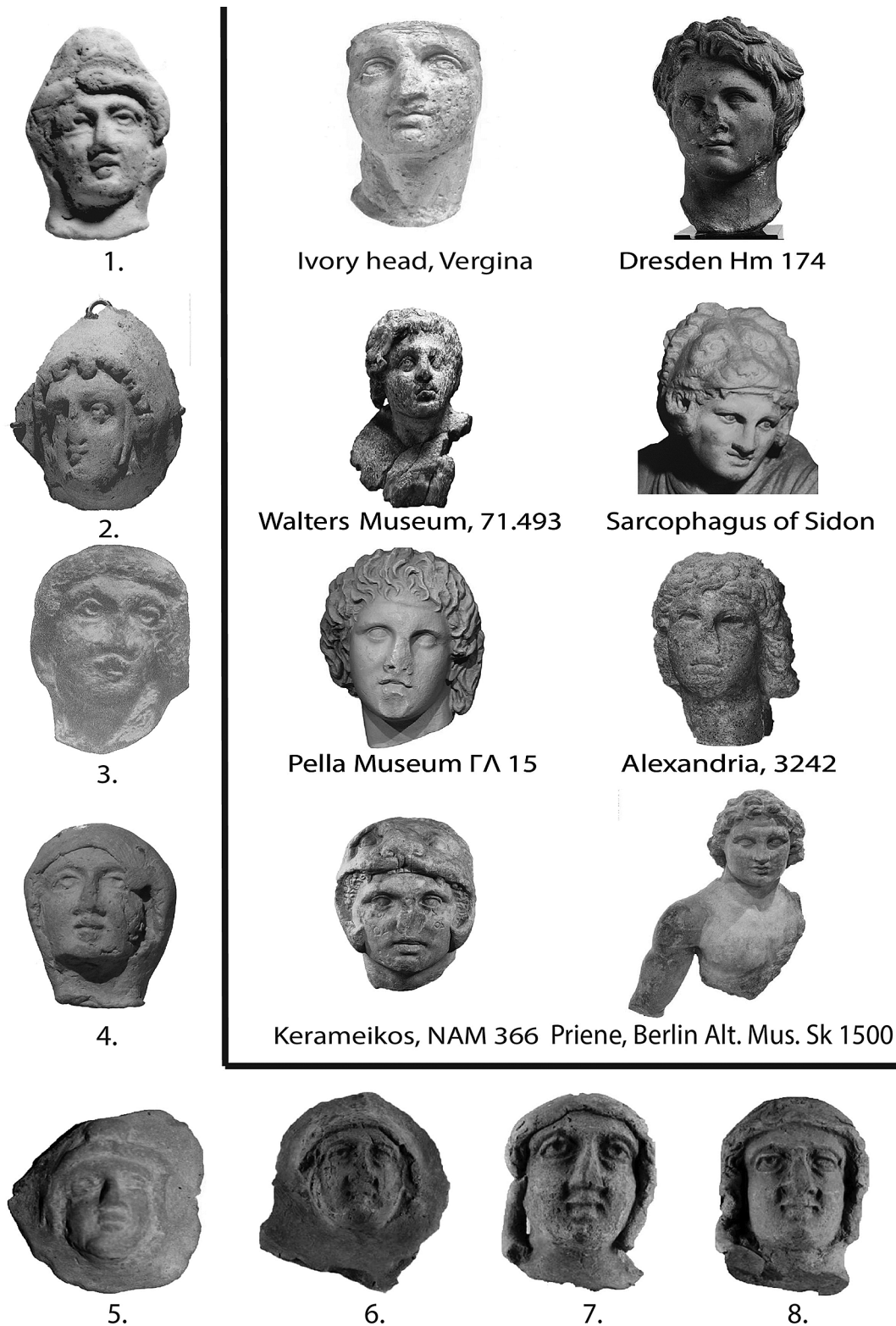


Fig. 11. Terracotta heads from the 5th–7th centuries Afrasiab, compared with Hellenistic portraits of youths (Vergina) and of Alexander the Great. Nos. 1–4 are in the State Museum of History and Culture of Uzbekistan, Samarkand; nos. 5–8, the Hermitage Museum. Photos nos. 1 and 4 courtesy of Laurianne Sève-Martinez, MAFOUZ-Sogdiane; no. 2 after Pugachenkova and Rempel' 1965: fig. 32; no. 3 after Pugachenkova and Rempel' 1961: 44; photos nos. 5–8. Courtesy of Andrej Omel'chenko (Hermitage).



Fig. 12. Ossuary from Khantepa near Shahr-i Sabz, baked clay, 41 x 28 x 20 cm, c. 7th century C.E. Photograph Frantz Grenet.

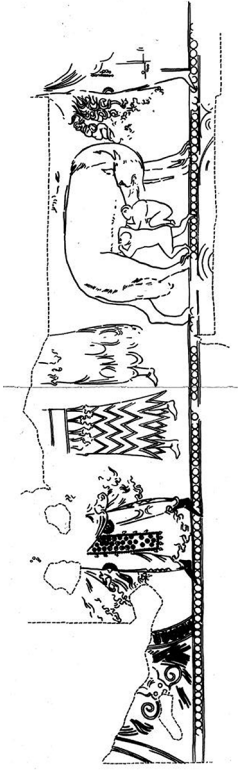


Fig. 14. Painting in the corridor of the palace of Shahristan (Ustrushana), end of the 8th century C.E. After Sokolovskii 2009: fig. 6.



Fig. 13. Painting from Panjikent, Temple II, Northern chapel: worshippers (actors?), 6th century C.E. After Marshak and Raspopova 1996: fig. 4.

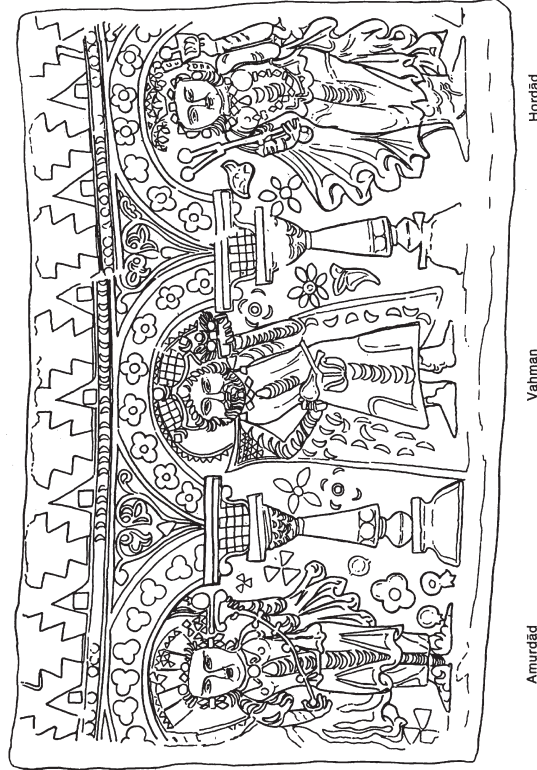


Fig. 15. Ossuary from Ishtikhan, baked clay, 49 x 29.5 x 25 cm, c. 7th century C.E. Kept in the Institute of Fine Arts, Tashkent. Document Frantz Grenet.

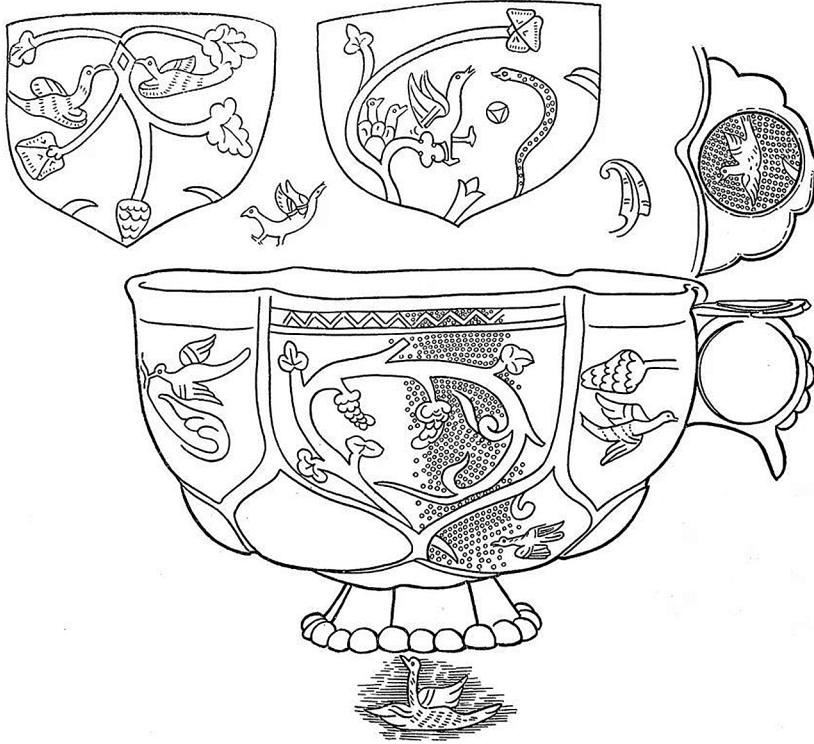


Fig. 16. Silver cup with gilding discovered in a hoard in Tomyz' (Lytko, Kirov, Russia), 10.5 x 6.7 cm, 8th century C.E. (?). Kept in the Hermitage. Drawing after Marshak 2017: fig. 53 (cf. <https://eurasiansilver.com/portfolio1335/>).



Fig. 17. Silver plate from Vereino (Perm, Russia; then in the Stroganoff collection), 17.6 cm, 7th century C.E. (?). Kept in the Hermitage S-7. After Trever and Lukonin no. 37, tab. 108 (cf. <https://eurasiansilver.com/portfolio617/>).

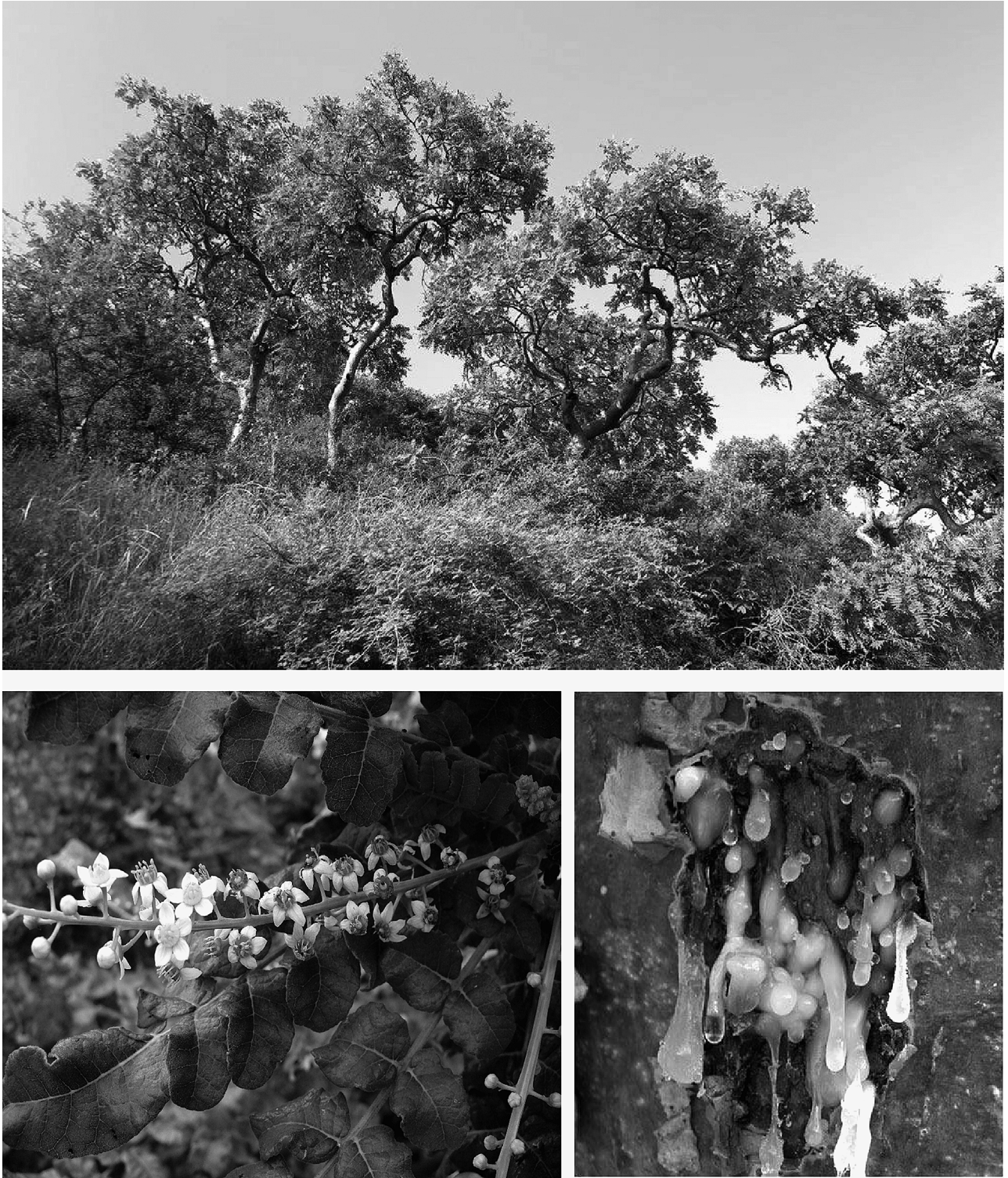


Fig. 18. *Boswellia serrata*: the tree in Udaipur (Rajasthan, India) photographed on the 6 October 2014 by Ori Fragman-Sapir (<http://www.plantsoftheworldonline.org/taxon/urn:lsid:ipni.org:names:127067-1>); the flowers (<https://flipper.diff.org/app/items/info6943>); the incense (<https://www.indiamart.com/proddetail/boswellia-serrata-11763242173.html>).

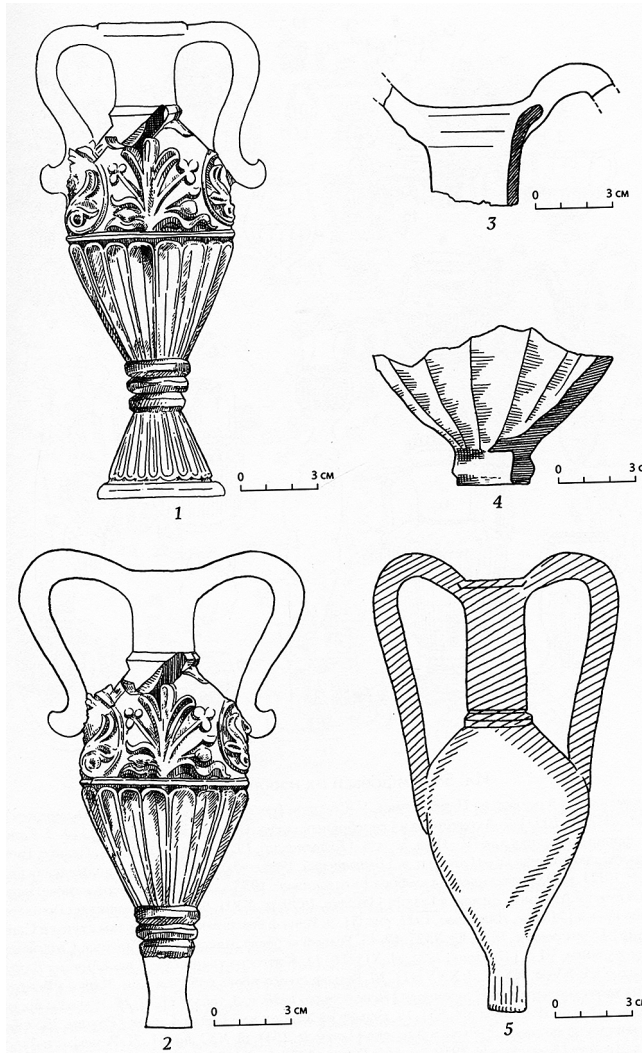


Fig. 19. Fragmentary clay amphora recomposed from four sherds, from Panjikent, complex V/2, 10.2 x 18.2 x 0.8-1 cm, 6th century C.E., with two possibilities of reconstruction according to Marshak 2012: 293, fig. 57.



Fig. 20. Glass amphoriskos with irregular ribs, 14.6 cm H, 7.9 x 7.5 x 4.1 cm Diam, 3rd century C.E.. Kept in the Metropolitan Museum of Inv. 81.10.172, Gift of Henry G. Marquand, 1881. Photograph courtesy of the Museum.



Fig. 21. Part of a Roman painting from the Villa Doria Pamphili on the Janiculate Hill in Rome, 21.5 x 65 cm, c. 50 c.e. Now kept in the British Museum 1873,0208.1. Photograph courtesy of the Museum.



Fig. 22. Limestone relief from the Chakhil-i-Ghoundi stupa in Hadda (Gandhara), 2nd-3rd century c.e. Kept in the Musée Guimet, MG 17191. After Cambon 2004: fig. 94.

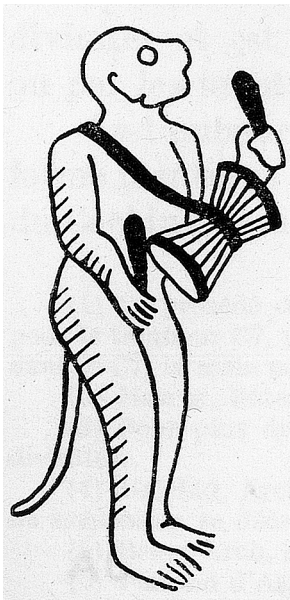


Fig. 23. Relief from the Bharhut stupa (central India), 1st century B.C.E. After Marcel-Dubois 1941: pl. IX:3.



Fig. 24. Pale green glass bottle from Ismant el-Kharab (Dakhleh oasis, Egypt. Exc. inv. no. 31/420-D6-1/D/7/0/6), 27.6 x 14.1 cm (max. diam.), 4th century c.e. After Smythe 2008: no. 26.



Fig. 25. The Riha silver paten with gilding and niello, diam. 35 cm., 565–578 c.e., discovered near Antioch. Kept in the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Byzantine Collection, BZ.1924.5. After Weitzmann 1979: no. 547.

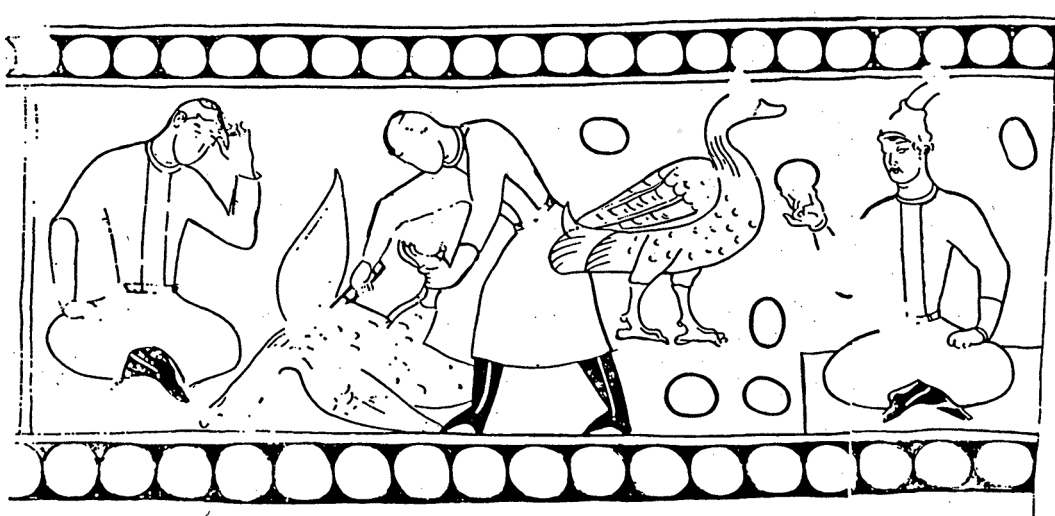


Fig. 26. Painting from Panjikent, Room 1/XXI, "The Goose (Duck) with the Golden Eggs," first quarter of the 8th century c.e. After Marshak 2002: fig. 86.



Fig. 27. Fragment of a gold-glass bowl with Latin inscription D[IG]N[US] A[SS]E[CT]U[M] P[IE]T[AT]IS, 3rd-4th century C.E. (?). Kept in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana inv. 231. After Lutraan 2006: fig. 4.



Fig. 28. Silver dish with gilding, 21.7 x 21.6 x 4.7 cm, Eastern/Iranian, 4th-6th century C.E. Kept in the Miho Museum. Photo courtesy of the Museum.

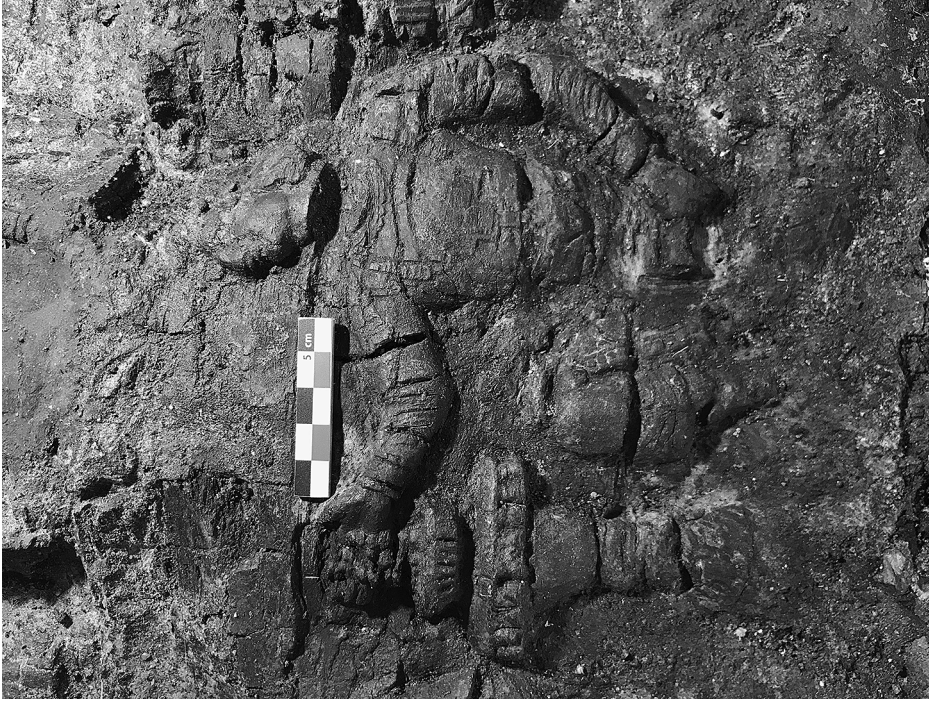


Fig. 30. Fragment of wooden panel from Kafr-kala (Rēwdād) near Samarkand, 6th century C.E.. Kept in Samarkand, Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan. Photograph Frantz Grenet.



Fig. 29. Circular marble plate, 70 cm x 2–2.5 cm, with an archaistic representation of King David according to 2 Samuel 6.13–23, supposed to have been made in the Eastern Mediterranean in the 2nd–3rd century C.E.. Emerged in Ascona in 1962, now kept in the private collection of F. Bolla (Lugano). After Thomas 1970.