Central Asia Cultural Development During Kushan Period

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ABSTRACT

This article is investigating cultural development in Central Asia during the Kushan period. Cults and monuments showing Kushan period ideological policy as well as kings’ images were characterized; ancient Kushan monetary following the Greko-Bactrian traditions testify to important changes in language and writing. Kushan letters were developed based on numbers in the Greek alphabet. Currently, known materials allow us to know about spread of religions in Northern Bactria-Tokharistan and the origins of the Kushans dynastic cult. The historical narrative method was used to reveal important events and main characteristics belonging to the Kushan period.

Key Words: Central Asia, Cultural Development, Kushan Period, Buddhism, Traditions

INTRODUCTION
Kushan territories from 1st to 4th centuries AD, encompassed a vast range of artistic cultures, which can be divided into following broad regions: 1) Bactria, 2) Mathura (Indian sub-continent), 3) Arachosia and Nagarahara, and 4) Ancient Gandhara (UNESCO: The Diversity of Cultural Influences in Kushan Art, 2022). Kushans drove their economy with control by proving an incredible success in their culture, economy and territory known as ‘Kushan Era’ through the second and early third centuries (Wilson, 2020). Kushans originating from Central Asian nomadic Yuezhi group, established an empire during the early centuries CE, thanks to formidable rulers including Kujula Kadphises, V’ima Kadphises, Kanishka I, Huvishka, and Vasudeva (Chakravarti, 2016). Kushan period is characterized by a double-cropping pattern, suggesting a change in agricultural practices associated with a population recovery following a post-Neolithic decline (Pokharia et al., 2018).

In Northern Bactria territory, the Kushan dynastic temples were also studied from late 1950s to early 1960s in south Uzbekistan, a Khalchayan monument was excavated, which was originally interpreted as the early Kushans palace (Mkrtychev, 2019). Bactria itself was in a center of Eurasia, in ancient times including parts of modern Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan (Popov, 2015). After the Kushan kingdom formation in Bactria, international relations in government were expanded significantly, as Kushans joined political, diplomatic and trade relations with Roman Empire (Tikhonov, 2019).

The remains of numerous Buddhist temples, memorial structures such as stupas, eloquently evidence Kushan authorities’ support providing to Buddhism and monasteries built in the Kushan period in India, Afghanistan and Xinjiang. The famous Chinese pilgrim Xuan Tsang, who saw this stupa in Peshewar already in the 7th century, moreover, in a redone form, describes it as one of the world's wonders. It was a colossal 30 story building decorated with various woods, resting on a five-story base and crowned with a high metal column with 25 gilded umbrellas.

The reliquary discovered during excavations was kept in the stupa with the inscription of Kanshiki and with his sculptural image. Near Peshawar there was also a famous monastery sangarama, also built by Kanishka; it was a large structure, having 200 meters on each side. Back in the ninth century this monastery was one of the centers of Buddhist education. More buildings that are modestly built during Kushan period in Central Asia.

Another monuments group in an ideological policy of Kushan ruling circles are buildings associated with the dynastic cult of the Kushan rulers. This cult, reminiscent of the worship of a deified Roman emperor, coexisted with both Buddhism and other religions and beliefs of the vast Kushan government.

The most striking of his monuments are open in the village. Mat in the valley of the Ganges River and on Mount Surkhkotal in the southern part of Bactria - Toharstanan in the north of modern Afghanistan. Building in the village. Mat in the Indian inscription found there is directly called the “House of the Gods”. Its tanning follows Indian traditions, which was decorated with statues, the main of which depicted Kanshika, which is noted in the inscription on the statue, and, apparently, the conqueror of valley Vimu Kadfiz.

Simultaneously, the Kushan kings’ images and most other characters are made in style different from Indian art, but there were found analogs similar to Bactrian artistic culture. The cult complex in Surkhkatal, judging by the Bactrian inscription found there during excavations,
was built as the “Temple of Kanshiki the Victor. It contained statues that have come down to us only in Fragments, and altars of fire, which was kindled, most likely, in honor of the Kushan kings.

The ideology of the ruling elite of the Kushan Empire is also associated with imperial coins, which are found both in India and Afghanistan, and in various regions of Central Asia.

Early Kushan coins largely follow Greco-Bactrian traditions as shown in Figure 1 portrait of Kushan emperor Vima Kadphises, AD 100-127. As well as on the Greco-Bactrian coins, on their obverse side, there is usually a chest portrait of the king, on the reverse side the Greek deity is often depicted. The legends of these coins are written in Greek, and the entire monetary system as a whole, as in the Greco-Bactrian kingdom, is based on the silver Attic drachma.

Figure 1. Portrait of Kushan emperor Vima Kadphises, AD 100-127.

However, later (under VimeKadphises) a new type of coins was developed, which since then has become widespread in the Kushan coinage. On the front side, the king was depicted already standing at full height in front of the altar, and on the reverse side, images of Greek gods were found only in isolated cases, and images of the Hindu deity Shiva with the sacred bull Nandiya of numerous deities of the local Central Asian pantheon were considered common: Ohsha - probably deities. R. Vakhsh Amu Darya, the god of fire Atash (or Atosh), the solar and lunar deities Minro (Mitra) and Makh, the god of wind Vado, the deity of victory Orlagno (Veretagny), the goddess of Nana, Ordohsho, Khvanindi and others.

It is interesting to note that images of the Buddha were found only on a small group of coins, and judging by this, one should hardly rely on the Buddhist tradition and consider Buddhism as a state reliquary. Kushan power in the full sense of the word. Apparently, despite the fact that Buddhism was often under the special patronage of the Kushan kings, the latter not only did not persecute but sometimes even encouraged other religious beliefs. In any case, it is not possible to apply the modern concept of "government religion" to Buddhism of the Kushan period.

RESEARCH METHODS: are based on publications and historical materials analysis about Central Asian culture development during Kushan period. Historical narrative method was used
to describe important historical facts and features in Central Asian regions including Bactria - Tokharistan which played the greatest role in formation of this culture. Influence of religions, mainly Buddhism were highlighted. Various architectural with artistic items and elements were characterized.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Kushan kings coins also testify to the important changes that the language and writing, adopted at the royal court, underwent. Already Kadphis I, along with the Greek legend, places the inscriptions of Kharoshtha on his coins. However, this letter did not take root, and under Kanishka it is not found on Kushan coins. At the same time, the Greek language also fell out of use, and one of the Eastern Iranian (Central Asian) languages, Bactrian, became the official language of the Kushan government. Under Kanishka, the Kushan government culture developed, reflecting the processes of interaction and interweaving of several traditions associated with different ethnic groups and different ideological religious systems (Shomakhmadov, 2015).

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Based on the Greek alphabet, their own "Kushan" script was developed, which, in addition to 24 Greek letters, had one more additional sign introduced to designate sound "sh" that was not Greek language characteristic. Since then, on the Kushan kings coins, instead of Greek legends and inscriptions in Bactrian, with the previously widely used Greek term "basileus" replaced by title "Shao" ("shah").

The replacement of images of Greek gods by Indian and Central Asian deities on coins (Akhmedova, 2017), appearance of Kharoshthi inscriptions along with Greek legends, and the subsequent displacement of both of them by actual “Kushan” legends reflect the main trends in development of Kushan ruling elite culture.

It is characteristic that if at the first stages in formation of Kushan government, the royal court largely followed the Greco-Bactrian model, then later, when the Kushan kingdom turns into a powerful government; local elements begin to occupy an increasingly prominent place in the culture of its upper classes. This was evidently due to the attempts of the Kushan kings to find new, more intelligible forms of ideological influence on masses.

Of the Central Asian regions, Bactria - Tokharistan, which was one of the central regions of the Kushan government, played the greatest role in formation of this culture.

The currently known materials allow us to speak not only about the spread of the Kushan era of Buddhism in Northern Bactria-Tokharistan, but also about the origins of the dynastic cult of the Kushans. This cult probably originates from the traditional veneration of nomadic ancestors, which resulted in replacement on coins as imitations of the Heliocles coinage of the Kushan
"hero", nameless Khorezm king and the Indo-Saka rulers of the Hellenic deities patrons with a horse images, an equestrian ancestor or the most divine ruler riding a horse.

It should be especially noted that not only in Bactria-Takharistan as a whole but also in large settlements of this region, different religions and cults were coexisted: Buddhism, a dynastic cult and ancient local cultures (Akhmedova, 2017).

An interesting feature of funeral ritual is that a silver coin, an obol, was often placed in the rat or on the chest of the deceased (this routine finds its analogy in the burials of Greece and that of the Hellenistic government of the Middle East).

The main building material in Bactria-Tokharistan in the Kushan era was large square raw brick. For pavement in the yards, sometimes burnt square tiles in the rooms. Stone was also widely used (Tikhonov, 2020). This abundance of stone details is one of characteristic features in Bactrian architecture of that era. An important element of Bactrian architecture is wooden columns with stone capitals of the Corinthian order. These columns supported a flat wooden board, which was probably the main type of ceiling, the most common for Bactrian style.

The buildings walls were often decorated with pilasters; walls surfaces were covered with white plaster, and sometimes with monumental paintings, both ornamental and plot, including depictions of gestural and Buddhist characters. Remains of such multicolored paintings found in Buddhist buildings and other places of worship.

Characterization of the Bactria-Tokharistan culture in the first centuries of our era will not be complete enough without descriptions of the most widespread archaeological pottery material. As noted above, ceramic production throughout Central Asia in the Kushan period was at a very high level. A significant part of dishes in Bactria-Tokharistan was made on a potter's wheel and was distinguished by exceptional handle fineness, elegance and variety of shapes, and careful striped burnishing. The most characteristic types of red-clay ceramics were tall goblets with a curly stem, small troughs with two handles and, later, large ones with one or two handles and wide, typically open bowls and plates with a bent rim.

In general, ceramic production in Bactria-Tokharistan is distinguished by certain originality, although use of red engobe and striped glazing and individual forms of red-clay ceramics were found in this period in other Central Asian regions; gray-clay ceramics, Buddhism are also characteristic of other Central Asian regions. Especially it shroud be mentioned about appearance in Tokharistan Kushans ceramics of high lids with one hand and handles in the animal figure shape, which are several characteristic forms in Central Asia northern regions. With leave of Greco-Bactrian historical arena, a Parthian government became the largest central kingdom (Gusakov, 2009).

Pronounced specific features were also distinguished in the Khorezm culture; traces of Buddhist influence on the iconography and style of Khorezm products can be traced only presumably. However, one can clearly see the spread of Kushan time in Khorezm, ancient local female deity cults of waters and fertility and the god of dying and resurrecting nature, possibly Siyavush, who was also considered as ancestor of the Khorezmian kings dynasty in the 1st century BC in honor of its accession in Khorezm, its chronology was introduced as the “Khorezmian era”. The coins of the Khorezmian coinage are also peculiar, the issue of which became widespread under King Vazamar (III century AD) when numerous copper coins began to be minted.
Funeral rites of Khorezm, wherein the Kushan time apparently dominated the custom of burying bones of dead in special ceramic ossuary ossuaries, are also peculiar. Women's statues are related to the women's deity of fertility (Dvurechenskaya, 2005). An outstanding monument not only architecture, but also of the spiritual and artistic culture of Khorezm in the Kushan period is the settlement of Toprakala. The settlement of Toprakala is located in the lower reaches of the Amu Darya on lands of the Elikkala region of Karakalpakstan. The main feature of this settlement was that it was created, probably, for two huge palace complexes, and its population, in any case, to a large extent consisted of mods who were supposed to protect and serve these palaces. Especially expressive is the "High" (or sacred) palace, towering not only over the city but also over the entire surrounding area.

It was on a high mud platform, square in plan with height more than 14 meters and length of about 90 meters at each side at the base. Three array towers were attached to central square, which gave archaeologists the reason to initially call this palace as "Three-Tower Castle". The core of the palace was the throne room and the front courtyard adjoining it, which apparently served both for the throne and religious ceremonies; in the first, most likely, only courtiers participated, i.e. a limited circle of people; in second, two or three elks are the main sanctuary of the "Hall of Dancing Masks", defined as the sanctuary of supreme goddess of Khorezmian pantheon.

There were also the “Hall of Warriors” and the “Hall of Victory” similar to it, in each of them an eternal flame burned in honor of victory deities, such as Veretragna or Farna and a goddess such as Victoria or Fortuna. All these ceremonial rooms were richly decorate with relief images of models and similar deities.

A special place among the palace premises was occupied by the "Hall of the Kings", which in terms of layout resembled a throne complex. In this hall along its perimeter sat the statues of deified dead kings, headed by the mother-mistress and gods. In their honor, a fire survived on a larger altar at the entrance, each of the images was likely worshiped on certain days.

CONCLUSION
Sogd in the Kushan period was, most likely, a collection of small principalities, the history of which is still almost completely unknown. Culturally, three parts of this region can be distinguished as Samarkand Sogd in the middle and return reaches of the Zarafshan, Bukhara Sogd in the lower reaches of this river and Southern Sogd in the Kashkadarya basin.

Judging by the numerous finds of terrorist figurines, a female deity cult was widespread in Sogd in Kushan period, which depicted dressed in rich clothes and holding a pomegranate fruit between her breasts. In Talibarzu near Samarkand a piece of khum was found with the image of the so-called Gopatshah, a fantastic creature with the man body and head. This findings testify to the existence of the first-born man or the bull man in Sogd, the cult who originally personified the cosmic force, which allegedly gave rise to both the animal and plant world, and metals.

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