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## The Hellenic Axel: The Greek Hellenization of Central Asia and its Impact of the Development of Buddhism

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THE HELLENIC AXEL:  
THE GREEK HELLENIZATION OF CENTRAL ASIA AND ITS IMPACT OF THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF BUDDHISM

by

LEDIO HYSI

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in History  
in the College of Arts and Humanities  
and in the Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
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## **Abstract**

The study of the Hellenistic period has produced a historical construction of the various relationships that formed between the Greco-Macedonian settlers and the natives they came into contact with. Hellenic kings established kingdoms as far as modern day Pakistan, Afghanistan and India, bringing them into contact with the Persian and Indian natives. The study herein is focused on the relationship that formed between the Greco-Macedonian descendants and the Buddhist group that emerged out of India. Numismatic evidence shows that Greco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek kings held political control over regions bordering the Hindu Kush; furthermore, the Indo-Greek coins indicate a relationship between their kings and the Buddhists. Artistic representations found in various cities, such as Ai-Khanoum, illuminate on the cultural blending that occurred as Greek themes began to be represented through local techniques and material. Ancient literature and archeological remains provide further proof of interaction and help to give an identity to key Greek and Indian monarchs. With regard to Buddhism, these monarchs played an important role in the growth of the religion as, alongside artistic expression, the religion had prospered since its beginnings through the aid of royal patronage. In the Greek kingdoms the Buddhists found new mediums of artistic expression and kings that supported their monastic and lay lives; in turn the Greeks saw a pacifist religious group that attracted merchants and wealth. The relationship was mutually beneficial and numismatic evidence from the Indo-Greeks shows that their kings showed favoritism towards the Buddhists. The conclusion herein is that the Greeks provided the structural foundations for the growth of Buddhism who in turn attracted wealth and provided a medium for cooperation between the Greek monarchs and parts of the native population.

## **Dedication**

For those who have given everything,  
for my family.

## **Acknowledgements**

With sincere gratitude, I would like to thank those who have aided me in this accomplishment. To Dr. Edward Dandrow, an important mentor, for the invaluable guidance and reassurance that you have always provided. To Dr. Ann Gleig for fanning my interest of Buddhism and the compelling discourse on the subject, and Dr. Deepa Nair for the warm encouragement and wisdom on Indian culture, a topic so foreign to me.

I extend my thanks to my parents, Gezim and Majlinda Hysi, and my sisters, Blerina Salman and Ina Hysi. Your unrelenting support has been as necessary as any lecture or lesson in helping me to achieve my goals.

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## Introduction

Research on the Hellenistic East and its consideration as a part of the greater history of Hellenism has only been recently begun to be solidified. Ambitious Greeks ventured out beyond their homelands with the desire to spread their influence and secure a seat of power within foreign communities while maintaining their cultural roots and identity in the process. These desires led to encounters with a myriad of cultures and societies; however study on these encounters has not been performed with equal regard to each community. The interaction between the Hellenes hailing from Greece and the Buddhist community emerging from the Indian subcontinent is one that can be further elucidated. There is evidence which indicates a transmission of culture and political interaction between these two groups, but the historical ties are scarce and are generally present in the histories of the Hellenistic East and Buddhism respectively, rather than as a synthesized history of the two. The aim of this work is to contextualize the interaction between the Buddhists and Greeks in the East, focusing on the time period from Alexander's exit from India to the fall of the Indo-Greek kingdom.

The triumphs of Alexander the Great, beginning in the Mediterranean world and carrying throughout parts of Asia, marked the initial stages of a transitional period in politics and culture that would develop in the succeeding centuries. Stretching from Macedon to modern day Pakistan, Alexander's empire profoundly influenced the formation of Greek social identity and civic life, while also providing a setting for the spread of Greek culture over foreign lands. This transmission of culture and language is embodied in the idea of Hellenization, a force with which

natives of the conquered lands had to contend and to reconcile. The importance of the Hellenistic period has not always been recognized, and it is upon the resolute efforts of scholars throughout the twentieth century that this era has become a significant part of Greek studies<sup>1</sup>. Despite these efforts and the significant attention afforded to certain parts of the Hellenistic world, some regions which experienced the effects of Alexander's conquests remain to be explored. One such region is that of central Asia, which for the purposes of this study is defined as modern day Afghanistan, Pakistan, and northwest India.<sup>2</sup>

This region provided the setting in which Greco-Macedonian<sup>3</sup> generals would exert their influence and establish kingships for themselves. Similar to the rest of the Hellenistic world, Greek occupation of the area was not to occur without resistance and the culture that accompanied their migration consequently did not develop in a vacuum. Instead, Greeks were subject to the limitations which afflicted most invaders, namely the contentious reactions of the native peoples who were not always accommodating<sup>4</sup>. This period in history certainly entailed dramatic developments in the Greek world and it also bore witness to the changing political landscape which was unfolding in India, the geographical limit of Alexander's empire. Alexander eventually regressed from the East after almost a decade of fighting, and upon this, a local king, Chandragupta Maurya seized his chance and consolidated parts of the Indian subcontinent,

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<sup>1</sup> See Frank Holt's foreword on the ascension of Hellenistic studies and Tarn's contributions. William Woodthorpe Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, 1938

<sup>2</sup> Greek presence in this area was prominent and continuous for over two centuries and their proximity to Buddhist communities allowed the two to interact

<sup>3</sup> Diodotus I established the Greco-Bactrian kingdom sometime between 250-247BCE, this allowed for the continuation of Greek influence and the later rise of the Indo-Greek kingdom centered in northern India. The date of when the Greco-Bactrian kingdom arose varies and will be discussed later.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the Asvaka, Cathaei, and Malavas fought against Alexander. Tarn *GBI* pg.169



defeating the satraps of the region in the process and establishing the foundations of the Mauryan kingdom.

The emergence of the Mauryan kingdom and its eventual fall at the hands of Pusyamitra Sunga<sup>5</sup> a century and a half later played a crucial role in the Indo-Greek interaction. The Mauryans were able to unify the Indian subcontinent to great lengths, which inhibited Greek expansion and allowed for the continued development of the native religious and cultural groups. By the time of Alexander's arrival, however, the Buddhists had already established themselves as an important religious group and their prominence continued to develop aided by the efforts of the great Mauryan king, Asoka.

Buddhism emerged during the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE out of a Vedic culture which at the time was in a state of philosophical and religious flux. The story of Buddhism begins with the Buddha and his teachings. The prince of the Shakya clan, Siddhartha Gautama, left the comfort of his father's palace and witnessed the inevitable truths of aging, disease, and death to which he was previously ignorant. This event shattered Siddhartha's myopic perspective of the world, which was the product of a secluded hedonistic lifestyle, and propelled him to leave the comfort of home in order to find enlightenment as a means to overcome the suffering that would inevitably face him. After many attempts at finding enlightenment, which included extreme ascetic practices and prolonged meditational states, Siddhartha eventually experience a state of being

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<sup>5</sup> Tarn pp 165-175

that revealed truths which were to become the basis for his teachings. The roots of Buddhism were thus established, however, a dispute exists concerning the timeline of the Buddha's life.<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of when the Buddha may have been born, it can be certainly said that by the time of Greek arrival to northwestern India, Buddhism had formed a foundation and a following. Thus, the Hellenes encountered an Indian society in which Vedic religion and its heterodoxies, which developed as reformations against the dominant Brahmanic stronghold, were in a state of contention. The study of Hellenistic Central Asia, however, has been mainly approached in a piecemeal manner with focus guided towards the invading Greeks or their Indian neighbors, rather than a construction of how these two forces interacted. Although some investigations have been made as to how the two entities intermingled, some of the aspects of this cultural communication must be further analyzed.

The Greeks in this region for a long time were an unknown entity to modern audiences; the exploration of their history being almost non-existent. It was with the discovery and interpretation of two Greco-Bactrian coins by Theophilus Bayer in the 18<sup>th</sup> century that the history of the Greco-Bactrians became established.<sup>7</sup> This numismatic evidence became the first substantial source of information and the cornerstone for the formation of a Greco-Bactrian history.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the modern discovery of the Greco-Bactrians had begun and with it the work to establish their importance in the Hellenistic world. Over the next two centuries the numismatic

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<sup>6</sup> Various dates of birth and death are contested but for the purpose of this study, the birth is placed c. 560BCE and death c. 480BCE. The details of these dates will be examined later.

<sup>7</sup> Bayer's *Historia Regni Graecorum Bactrianorum* is considered as a starting point of Bactrian studies, Frank Holt, *Lost World of the Golden King: In Search of Ancient Afghanistan*, 2012 pp. 3-7

<sup>8</sup> Greco-Bactrians appear in Roman literature and help to link events together in forming a more cohesive outline but their inclusion in the Ancient literature is generally a byproduct of Romano-Parthian relationships and isn't necessarily a direct consideration.

evidence mounted, and with this information began the attempts at constructing a historical narrative. *The Greeks in Bactria and India* written by W.W Tarn and published in 1938 was the first such attempt to transcend a numismatic review.<sup>9</sup> With his historical construction, Tarn established the importance of Greco-Bactria in the Hellenistic world, consequently propelling the further investigation of archaeological, ethnographic, historiographic, epigraphic and numismatic research with the aim of constructing a clearer picture. Since Tarn, various scholars have contributed to the history, with Alexander's conquests and the spread of Greek culture over the Hindu Kush being the prevalent focal points of research.<sup>10</sup>

In terms of the history of Buddhism and its developments, the initial discovery of Buddhism, from a Western perspective, comes from the archeological ventures of the British in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, immigrants from Asia brought with them their religions and the new schools of thought permeated throughout the West, influencing various minds. It was with the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893 that Buddhism elevated itself in importance religiously and academically.<sup>11</sup> The efforts made here were driven by desire to spread the message of the Buddha as interpreted by the various schools; for the academic field however, these were the initial sparks that propelled scholars to investigate and establish a history and consequent greater understanding of Buddhism. Ever since, academics have used the scriptures and scrolls of the

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<sup>9</sup> Tarn approached the topic as a part of Hellenistic history, diverging away from the traditional eastern perspective on Bactrian studies. A.K. Narain countered this view in *The Indo-Greeks* two decades later claiming Bactrian history as part of Indian history. See GBI p. iv-v

<sup>10</sup> Amongst these is a successor of sorts to Tarn, Frank L. Holt who has published many books on Greek presence in Bactria and Central Asia in general. See also; Lerner, Sidky

<sup>11</sup> The efforts of Shaku Soen and Anagarika Dharmapala drove interest during the world fair and throughout the twentieth century. D.T. Suzuki, a student of Shoen, would become an important figure in the spread of Buddhist thought in the West.

various Buddhist schools<sup>12</sup> to gain an understanding of the religion's place in Indian and furthermore Asian history. The evidence includes commentaries provided by various Buddhists throughout the religion's development, such as the Tripitaka<sup>13</sup>, and the relics left behind as a dedication to and reminder of the efforts of Siddhartha Gautama.

Relics especially, are an important part of Buddhism as they were essential in reminding practitioners of the Buddha's teachings<sup>14</sup> and contributed to the continuation of the religion. These relics are one instance of how art and artifact helped to persist the Buddhist teachings. Further contributing to its growth was the royal patronage that Buddhism received throughout its development. Beginning with the contributions of Magadhan king, Bimbisara<sup>15</sup>, Buddhism became dependent on royal patronage for its continued success. This importance of royal patrons is further evidenced by Asoka's promotion of the dharma in his edicts<sup>16</sup> and *Milinda's Question* which is a text detailing the conversion of the Indo-Greek king Menander to Buddhism. It is on the points of artistic expression and hybridization, and royal patronage that this study will develop the link between Hellenization and its impact on how Buddhism developed.

Historical records show that Seleucid ambassador Megasthenes served as a diplomat to Chandragupta Maurya, and the edicts of Asoka mention the Greeks as Yavanas, or outsiders to

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<sup>12</sup> These artifacts are the basis of understanding the philosophical and doctrinal elements Buddhism; they also provide an insight on the geographic development of Buddhism as can be ascertained from the various translations. King Milinda's question is one good example, originally written in Gandharan script but later only surviving through Pali and Chinese translations.

<sup>13</sup> The Tripitaka (triple basket) was the attempt to consolidate the Buddha's teachings into writing upon his death; its components are the Vinaya (detailing monastic discipline and based the recollections of the monk Upali), the Sutra (which are the teachings of Siddhartha and based on the recollection of his close companion Ananda), and the Abidharma (the advanced doctrine).

<sup>14</sup> Jacob Kinnard, *The Emergence of Buddhism* pp. 45-47

<sup>15</sup> Charles Prebish, Damien Keown, *Introducing Buddhism*, 2010 pp. 67-9

<sup>16</sup> The Edicts of Asoka state a dharma which is to be followed; although not entirely consistent with the dharma of Buddhism, Asoka's interpretation reflect Buddhist influence and his constructions of reliquaries and stupas propagated the religion.

the north. Cities like Ai-Khanoum, a focal point of Greco-Bactrian Hellenism, show the merging of Buddhists and Greeks, signifying the cohabitative relationship between the groups. This relationship can be attributed to the assimilative nature of Hellenization, a hallmark of which was incorporating the Greek pantheon into foreign religions, and also to the adaptive nature of Buddhism which was a necessary aspect of the practice since its emergence.

As such, it is the aim of this investigation to identify the interaction between the two groups and determine the effect, whatever it may be, that Hellenism had on the development of Buddhism. Thus, the attempts made within will not necessarily fall within the categories of Hellenistic or Buddhist history, but rather as a merger of the two<sup>17</sup>. Through an analysis of literary evidence, numismatics, and whatever else that may present itself as pertinent and substantial in linking the artistic contributions and royal patronage of the Greeks towards the Buddhist community, this research will attempt to illustrate a history of Greco-Buddhist relations.

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<sup>17</sup> More in line with the syncretical efforts present in McEvilley's *The Shape of Ancient Thought* and Kouremenos' *From Pella to Gandhara*.

## Greco-Macedonians and their Descendants in Bactria and India

Carrying out the legacy of his father Philip II, Alexander pushed out of the Balkans towards Persia and created an empire unprecedented in scope, significantly altering the shape of politics and culture of the regions over which he claimed kingship. This movement ushered in an era of Greek influence ranging from Pella in Macedon to Alexandria in Egypt and reaching out as far as the Hindu Kush in Bactria and Sogdiana. This conquest and consolidation of land provided the setting for his heirs –generals he left behind– to establish their own empires and ultimately set the stage for a Hellenistic world.<sup>1</sup> These generals, influenced by Alexander’s methods and goals, were instrumental in spreading Greek culture. The Ptolemies who came to govern parts of Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula and Anatolia, and the Seleucids in the Asian holdings of the former Achaemenid territory provide a template for Hellenism’s spread in addition to clues about the nature of Greek rule and cultural morphism in foreign land.

The Seleucid satrapy of Bactria, the political unit that would serve as the origin for Greco-Bactrian kingdom, would become a part of the territory occupied by the Seleucids and a setting that would facilitate Indo-Greek relations. The Greeks who remained in Bactria<sup>2</sup> were on the periphery of Greek conquest and simultaneously at the crossroads of an emergent commercial

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<sup>1</sup> The establishment of these empires and assertions of Greek culture and language is the basis for the Hellenistic Age. The intent behind the spread of Hellenism varies and will be discussed later.

<sup>2</sup> This includes the Greco-Macedonian settlers of Greek communities as well as the Greek mercenaries who shifted employers between Darius and Alexander.

and cultural center.<sup>3</sup> These settlers were on the border of Hellenistic and Indian worlds, and their stay in the region fostered the evolution of an Indo-Greek culture that impacted Greek and Indian communities alike. The Greco-Bactrian monarchs over time developed a strong autonomous state that relied on native cooperation for its perpetuity, and from this necessary interaction, a dialogue between natives and Greeks was formed. The Greco-Bactrians and their Indo-Greek descendants were a formidable presence during their time and would establish kingdoms with distinct Hellenistic structures that would have a profound effect on the cohesiveness and scope of their reign. These kingdoms and their ambitious kings proved to be an influential force that greatly impacted the procedures of political and social life on the foothills of the Hindu Kush. Thus, I turn to the story of the Greeks in Bactria, the grounds upon which Indo-Greek relations flourished.

Victory over Darius III at Gaugamela in 331 BCE and the ensuing invasion of Bactria climaxing with the defeat of Bessus<sup>4</sup> serve as the initial steps toward Greek suzerainty over the region. Consequently this also serves as the background for the Greco-Bactrian kingdom, which in turn became the platform for the Indo-Greeks to establish themselves beyond the Hindu Kush. Before exploring the history of these sovereign states, a brief consideration of Greek colonization as well as evolution under the Seleucids will be necessary.

To paraphrase Tarn, Greek settlement of Asia was the work of kings guiding an overflow of Greek population in a deliberately colonial manner.<sup>5</sup> In effect, the micromanagement of

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<sup>3</sup> Its proximity to other significant communities in Central Asia and access to the Silk Road contribute to the importance of the region. Frank Lee Holt, *Alexander the Great and Bactria*, pg. 11

<sup>4</sup> Satrap of Bactria under Darius III during Achaemenid rule. H. Sidky, *The Greek Kingdom of Bactria* pg. 128

<sup>5</sup> For the full statement see Tarn pg. 5

migration is what permitted colonization to occur and proved to be crucial in maintaining Greek foundations in Bactria, for had the region not been supported by a Greco-Macedonian force, the quarreling between satraps<sup>6</sup> for control would have resulted in the extinction of a Greek presence.<sup>7</sup> The ill effects of infighting thus did not weaken the Macedonian grip over Bactria and the protection afforded to Greco-Bactrian communities by some 13,500 troops left by Alexander, as well as a force of pacified rebels, perpetuated a Hellenistic influence in the region.<sup>8</sup>

So Bactria endured as a political entity until the emergence of the Seleucids. Having defeated Antigonus at Ipsus in 301 BCE, Seleucus I Nicator established himself as master over the former Achaemenid lands and established the Seleucid dynasty. Upon his ascension to the throne, Seleucus embarked on a mission to revive and cultivate a Greek presence over Central Asia. Bactria and Sogdiana became important lands for this mission due to their pre-existing Greek communities. The Seleucid plan, carried out by Seleucus and his son and heir Antiochus I (c.281-261 BCE), was to restructure the political system by establishing Greek communities that would serve as governing posts.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the structure of government transformed; the satrapy sat at the top, governed by the *strategos*, or military general, and contained a certain number of eparchies which themselves were divided into hyparchies, further segmented into stathmoi.<sup>10</sup> What held these institutions in place and kept a cohesive political unit was allegiance to the Seleucid monarch who was to have at his service at all times the same resources

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<sup>6</sup> These quarrels partly attributed to the failure of many of Alexander's settlements, Sidky pg. 130

<sup>7</sup> "Barbarians" from the north would have claimed the coveted fertile lands in the absence of a Greco-Macedonian force. For more on the wars between Alexander's successors in the area see Holt 1989 Ch. III *The Aftermath*

<sup>8</sup> Sidky suggests that there were likely more settlers than Strabo and Justin suggest -beyond the 13,500 troops and 23,000 rebels who were disillusioned by promises of occupying the area. A discrepancy exists in the sources over how many of the rebels were killed by Pithon's troops but it is general accepted that the 3,000 figure reported by Diodorus is the correct figure. See Sidky 2000 pp. 130-131

<sup>9</sup> Sidky pg. 130

<sup>10</sup> For a more detailed role of each institution see Tarn pp. 1-7



commanded by each satrap and eparch. This was not dissimilar to the Achaemenid structure, the main difference being the degree of political division rather than form of governance.

Should actions shed a light on intent, the efforts of Seleucus and Antiochus would suggest that their concern for the political overhaul was pragmatic in nature. Alexander and his universal empire certainly served as an inspiration as evidenced by the sheer size of Seleucid territory; however, it would be difficult to link Seleucid development solely to a desire to Hellenize. In this regard, Tarn's assertion that the intent for the Seleucids was to develop a strong state more than to turn Asiatics into Greeks seems correct<sup>11</sup> and as such, Hellenization was a political tool meant to expand empire.

The Seleucids reclaimed the eastern satrapies that housed Greek communities settled by Alexander. These communities in Bactria, Sogdia, Aria, and other satrapies were afflicted by infighting between the *stratego*i from the time of Alexander's exit from the area until Seleucus I established a consolidated political hold over the region. After invasions from the northern tribes, a worry for all Bactrian rulers, Antiochus was granted authority over the eastern Seleucid territories while his father governed the west. The death of Seleucus at the hands of Ptolemy Keraunos<sup>12</sup> brought instability to the empire and forced Antiochus to take up his father's duties in the western half. This delegation of authority was significant as it directed Seleucid attention towards the western half of the empire between the time of Seleucus' death in 281 BCE and the rule of Antiochus II who succeeded his father, Antiochus I in 261 BCE. Antiochus II was burdened by the same troubles in the west that plagued his father, including the Second Syrian

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<sup>11</sup> Tarn pg. 5

<sup>12</sup> Sidky pg. 136

War with Egypt from 260-253 BCE.<sup>13</sup> During this time much is not known about Bactria, although if the condition which we encounter it in upon the rise of Diodotus I is any indicator, Bactria prospered during this period.

The Bactrian satrap Diodotus I was essentially the catalyst for the emergence of an independent Greco-Bactrian state. Having grown disillusioned by far removed kings preoccupied with the western frontier, Diodotus I and Andragoras, satrap of Parthia, another Seleucid satrapy, began to resist Seleucid rule. When exactly these satraps began to revolt is uncertain. Literary sources suggest various dates for the usurpations in the east ranging from 256 BCE to 220 BCE.<sup>14</sup> Tarn suggests 250 BCE to be a valid date for the beginning of Diodotus I's reign but this year presents a problem. Antiochus II had by that time made peace with Egypt and gained territorial concessions as a result, and could effectively deal with rebels in the east. His successor, Seleucus II (c. 246-225 BCE) would attempt to do so after the satraps revolted but his means were less than that of his predecessor which would suggest that there was no revolution occurring on the eastern front.<sup>15</sup> Still 250 BCE gives us an approximation to a realistic date, sometime probably around 247 BCE, the year of Antiochus II's death and an opportune time for usurpation.

Numismatic evidence<sup>16</sup> suggests a gradual progression of Diodotus I establishing himself as king in this three year window (i.e. the period between 250 BCE-247 BCE). This can be traced

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<sup>13</sup> Sidky pg. 137

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Sidky pp. 142-143 Justin suggests the revolts occurred either in 256 BCE or 250 but his dates are problematic as they incorrectly align the rule of Roman consuls with that of Seleucus II who ruled from 246-225 BCE. What his writing does indicate however, is that the revolts were initiated sometime during the rule of Antiochus II which permits 256 and 250 some validity. Strabo also presents an account of the revolts but the interpretations of the reading dictate a later time period due most likely to a mistake in the Greco-Bactrian monarchical succession.

<sup>15</sup> Sidky pg. 143

<sup>16</sup> Numismatic evidence is the basis for Greco-Bactrian chronology. Without the coins, dating Greco-Bactrian kings would be an arduous task and although the coins themselves do not indicate any certainties, they do guide

through the progression Greco-Bactrian coin types. In 305 BCE Seleucus moved his chief mint to Seleucia-on-the-Tigris and at this juncture the local renditions of Greco-Bactrian coinage became suppressed as Seleucid coins became prevalent throughout the empire.<sup>17</sup> From the point when Antiochus became viceroy to Seleucus, Bactria once again began production of coinage at Balkh (Bactra), capital of Bactria, and three different renditions remained prevalent until Diodotus I: a diademed head of bearded Zeus with an reverse side of Athena driving a quadriga of elephants,<sup>18</sup> a depiction of Antiochus with the reverse side bearing a bridled horse,<sup>19</sup> and another bearing a portrait of Antiochus with an reverse side of Apollo seated left on an omphalos.<sup>20</sup> Barring variations in text, control marks or artistic alterations of the reverse, these three models remained fairly consistent and the primary units of currency in Bactria. That is, until Diodotus I began blurring the line between Seleucid satrap and rebel king seeking to establish his own dominion.

Through the coins he commissioned, we can ascertain his growing desire to establish himself as king. There are several coin types with common themes which can help trace this progression. First, there are several coins bearing the face of Diodotus I with the monogram “*BASILEOS ANTIOXOY*”<sup>21</sup> and a reverse side of Zeus hurling a thunderbolt to the left.<sup>22</sup> Somewhat problematic is that these coins present a Diodotus I at two different ages, but when compared to later commemorative coins issued by future Greco-Bactrian kings, the evidence

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researchers to a clearer picture of the nature and lineage of the monarchs. For a historiography on Greco-Bactrian numismatics see: Frank L. Holt, *Lost World of the Golden King: In Search of Ancient Afghanistan*.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Mitchiner, *Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian Coinage Vol 1. The Early Indo-Greeks and Their Antecedents* pg. 10.

<sup>18</sup> Mitchiner Vol 1. Pp. 28-29 Types 46-52

<sup>19</sup> Mitchiner Vol 1. Pp. 30-31 Types 53-57

<sup>20</sup> Mitchiner Vol 1 Types 58-62

<sup>21</sup> Essentially meaning of King Antiochus, indicating Diodotian ties to the Seleucids.

<sup>22</sup> Mitchiner Vol 1 Types 63-69

suggests that the younger of the two was likely Diodotus I II, son of Diodotus I.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore we have coins<sup>24</sup> similar to those mentioned but with the monogram “*BASILEOS DIODOTOY*” which proves that at some point Diodotus I claimed himself king and probably co-ruled with his son as indicated by the appearance of the same younger Diodotus I who appeared on the previous coins. What this suggests is that Diodotus I had indeed been planning his ascendancy for a time while under Seleucid rule. A general rule in numismatics is that a different reverse side denotes a different king and as the Diodotian coins bear Zeus hurling a thunderbolt rather than the marks of the aforementioned Seleucid coins it can be gathered that Diodotus I had plans to become king, despite still bearing the monogram of the Seleucid title on the first coins.

Diodotus’ declaration became clear with the minting of *BASILEOS DIODOTOY* monogram coins, and it is at this juncture which a historical Greco-Bactrian kingdom independent of Seleucid rule can be established. Diodotus I ruled over Bactria-Sogdiana until his death sometime probably in the 230’s, probably between 240-237 at which point his son Diodotus II presumably took control as sole ruler.<sup>25</sup> At this time Seleucus II, son of Antiochus II, ruled over the Seleucid lands and initiated a campaign to reclaim Parthian lands. We also know that around this time Diodotus II allied himself with Tiridates, king of Parthia, possibly fearing a Seleucid invasion of Bactrian land.<sup>26</sup> However, this alliance would prove to be a significant

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<sup>23</sup> Mitchiner Vol 1 Types 126-128, 144,145; these coins were issued by Antimachus and Agathocles to honor the founder of the Greco-Bactrians and they resemble the more aged of the two Diodoti found on the aforementioned “Basileos Antichoy” coins. Literary sources also provide grounds for Diodotus I having had a son.

<sup>24</sup> Mitchiner Vol 1 Types 70-75

<sup>25</sup> Diodotus died at some point before Seleucus II’s campaign against Parthia (c. 237-227BCE) and his son is known to have ruled until at least the end of the campaign.

<sup>26</sup> Tarn pg. 74

factor in Diodotus II's downfall as it served as pretext for another entity, Euthydemus, to kill Diodotus II and seize the crown for himself.<sup>27</sup>

When Euthydemus came to power exactly is difficult to identify as the Greco-Bactrians did not date their coins. Keeping in mind that Diodotus II probably ruled until around 227 BCE, we can figure that it had to have happened sometime in the 220s, as by the time Euthydemus appears in literary sources in 208 BCE, the Greco-Bactrian Empire had become a powerful, well-fortified and well dispersed land.<sup>28</sup> It was through his efforts and eventually that of his son Demetrius, that the Greco-Bactrian kingdom was consolidated into an independent entity.<sup>29</sup> The Diodoti laid the foundations, but greatness was not achieved until Euthydemus' reign.

A more proper indicator of consolidation and rule, beyond descriptions of the wealth of Euthydemid Bactria, can be found from the result of Antiochus III's campaigns into Bactria, presumably to regain the lands lost by his predecessors. What he found was not the Diodoti, but rather Euthydemus, a Greek from Magnesia<sup>30</sup> who claimed that he was no rebel, but rather an avenger for the Seleucids who suffered concessions of land at the hands of Diodotus.<sup>31</sup> Still, Antiochus III, henceforth Antiochus the Great, was not so easily swayed and besieged Euthydemus in 208 BCE. The battles lasted until 206 BCE, when, after having besieged an

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<sup>27</sup> An alliance with the Parthians would not have been welcomed by the Greco-Bactrians who saw their neighbors as competition.

<sup>28</sup> Bactria has been stated in literary sources such as Strabo and Justin as "Bactria of a thousand cities" indicating the dissemination of Greek presence through the establishment of Greek communities and the basic component of Hellenistic society, the *polis*.

<sup>29</sup> Tarn pg. 74-75

<sup>30</sup> Which Magnesia exactly is still a point of debate as there are three potential cities which Polybius could have referred to. Sidky pp. 163-164, Tarn pp. 74-75

<sup>31</sup> Tarn pg. 74

incredibly well-fortified Bactra, Antiochus the Great conceded and came to terms with Euthydemus, thus granting Euthydemus legitimacy through Seleucid recognition of autonomy.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, Euthydemus continued his efforts to maintain a hold over Bactria, which constantly was threatened from nomadic tribes. This threat entailed a reinforcement of the military as well as continued maintenance of the trade roads which ran through Bactria that were the source of much of its wealth.<sup>33</sup> These events served as the precursor for the Greco-Bactrian invasion of India by Demetrius, son of Euthydemus, and the beneficiary of his father's efforts. Euthydemus died sometime between 200-190 BCE, possibly even in 189 around the time of the battle of Magnesia.<sup>34</sup> Demetrius had no qualms about extending his power, and soon after succeeding his father upon death, he began plans to venture south of the Hindu Kush. Tarn presents Demetrius' ambitions as having emerged from a strong desire to emulate Alexander and succeed where the Macedonian king had failed.

Demetrius' venture is to some degree evidenced by coins bearing Demetrius' profile wearing an elephant headdress and a reverse side with Hercules holding a club and lion skin, crowning himself with a wreath with the monogram *BASILEOS DEMETRIOY*.<sup>35</sup> The elephant scalp had been used by Alexander to exhibit his conquests in India, and although he failed in

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<sup>32</sup> In return, Euthydemus provided supplies for the Seleucid army as well as a force of elephants of which Antiochus would make great use in later times. Sidky pp. 173-174, Tarn pp. 82-83

<sup>33</sup> These trade roads were critical for Bactria's economy and the dispersion of cities throughout the land; as we will see later, these roads also came to be a crucial part of why the Greek-Buddhist interaction was amicable.

<sup>34</sup> Tarn pg. 82; the evidence here is provided by the coins bearing Euthydemus' monogram. There are several and some depict him as a young man while others show him older and bearded. Several scholars, including Tarn, have suggested an approximate time period of 25-30 years to account for the aging which would tentatively place Euthydemus rule sometime between 227-219BCE as a starting point and 197-189BCE as the end, more likely towards the lower limit of the scope as supported by the rise of Demetrius as sole ruler.

<sup>35</sup> Mitchiner Vol 1 Type 103; this coin and others of Demetrius' pedigree have been interpreted in various ways leading to different conclusions from Narain, Tarn, Mitchiner, and others. Whatever the correct interpretation may be, these coins signify Greco-Bactrian contact with territories south of the Hindu Kush, which is the relevant detail.

accomplishing his goal, the symbolism persisted in the Hellenistic world. Demetrius probably used the symbol to associate himself with the heroic figure.<sup>36</sup> The coins can be interpreted as Demetrius attempting to define himself as an unprecedented ruler who not only succeeded militaristically where Alexander had failed, but also took upon himself the cultural aims associated with the Macedonian king, i.e. the desire to unify all peoples under one universal culture.

Whatever the roots of Demetrius' ambitions, the result was an expedition into India and a precedence of Greco-Bactrians attempting to gain control of lands south of the Hindu Kush.<sup>37</sup> So, Euthydemid rule continued until the emergence of another contender, Eucratides, who according to Justin is said to have risen to power concurrently with Mithridates of Parthia, dating his ascension to around 171BCE.<sup>38</sup> Eucratides came to control the capital city, Bactra, after having usurped the title of king, but seizing the capital alone was not enough as other cities in Bactria were looked after by Euthydemid *strategoï*.<sup>39</sup> Thus, began a war between Eucratides and the Euthydemids, and if ancient literary sources can indicate the outcome,<sup>40</sup> Eucratides must have

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<sup>36</sup> There is some confusion as to the identity of Demetrius as literary sources and numismatic evidence indicate the existence of three different Demetrius; this is well detailed in Sidky pp. 183-193; among these is the coin replicated in Mitchiner Vol. 1 Type 111 which has the Demetrius who Sidky refers to as *Aniketos* wearing a kausia, a Macedonian flat hat, indicating his Greek ties while still bearing the transliteration of *Basileos Aniketoy Demetrioy* (of King Demetrius the Invincible) in Kharoshti script as *Maharajasa aparajitasa Dimetriyasa*, used by those residing in Gandhara. He was most likely a short lived Indo-Greek king, but the mere existence of such a unique coin suggests a blending of cultures.

<sup>37</sup> A general outline of the Greco-Bactrian push into the Hindu Kush can be found in Sidky pg. 195

<sup>38</sup> Sidky pg. 207; Tarn dates him to a later time c. 160s but this comes from his association of Antiochus IV and Eucratides as cousins who planned to regain Bactria for the Seleucids with a pincer movement.

<sup>39</sup> In addition to being an excellent military mind, it was likely that, like previous Greco-Bactrian monarchs, Eucratides received support from the local Greek population. This is supported by the fact that Bactra was still an incredibly well fortified city, one which even the army of Antiochus the Great could not conquer. Support from local Greeks and native tribes played an important role in the development of the Greco-Bactrian monarchies and its effects on the Greco-Buddhist interactions will be considered later.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Sidky pg. 208 in reference to Strabo.

been successful in defeating the co-rulers throughout Bactria.<sup>41</sup> Demetrius was to the south of Bactria during this period, but upon hearing of the troubles back home, he made haste and surprised Eucratides who was forced to fortify himself for a period in a mountain pass until he could make an escape.<sup>42</sup> According to Justin, after this encounter Eucratides conquered India,<sup>43</sup> indicating that in the process Demetrius was felled by Eucratides; by what means remains unclear but the transition of power to Eucratides is clear and significant as it essentially meant the end of Euthydemid rule and the beginnings of fragmented Greco-Bactrian and subsequent Indo-Greek dynasties which constantly fought for territory. Having effectively conquered the Euthydemids, Eucratides subsequently campaigned on all fronts, following Alexander's example, and became the unrivaled king of Greeks on either side of the Hindu Kush. Still, these campaigns, while benefiting Eucratides in the short term, also became the reasons for his downfall, as the incessant fighting drained Bactria of its military and resources, leaving the region weak and prone to the nomadic tribes and ambitious neighbors it had so long resisted. Eucratides' death is subject to debate with suggestions of various timelines<sup>44</sup> based on references from literary sources. The identity of his assassin is unclear; the passage from Justin used by various scholars is confusing at times and suggests that his own son ran him through with a chariot while other interpretations indicate that it was the son of Demetrius who actually committed the act. Regardless of the circumstances one thing remains certain, the conquest of the

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<sup>41</sup> These Euthydemid kings were brothers or descendants of Demetrius: Euthydemus II, Agathacles, Demetrius II, and Antimachus as per the pedigree of the Euthydemids presented on the last page of Tarn *GBI*. These kings are important in that they helped to maintain cohesion within Bactria but their histories are not worth detailing for my purposes.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Sidky pg. 214 in reference to Justin for the passage on this occurrence

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Reference above

<sup>44</sup> Mitchiner suggests 130BCE, Tarn 155BCE, Sidky 160BCE



Euthydemids by Eucratides brought Greco-Bactria and the Indo-Greek regions<sup>45</sup> to a tumultuous state with various kings attempting to assert their primacy. For all intents and purposes here, the story of the Greco-Bactrians finishes with the death of Eucratides as his legacy proved to be more impactful south of the Hindu Kush, rather than north of it.<sup>46</sup>

Before turning towards the Indo-Greeks however, it is necessary to consider some factors which lead to the precipitation of the Greeks in Central Asia. Why did the Seleucids and Greco-Bactrians covet Bactria so strongly, and once possessed, how did they maintain their rule? As we have seen from the nature of Greco-Bactrian succession, it can be assessed as a continuous effort to usurp one another, generally with the claim of justice or righteousness at hand, such as the dialogue between Antiochus III and Eucratides. Still, once seated on the throne, each king would have to consolidate his position and earn the allegiance of his followers. The answer as to why, I believe, can be found in the land itself<sup>47</sup> as Bactria was a resource-rich land. How these kings maintained their hold, whatever length it may have been, is a tougher assessment, but the key seems to lie in the nature of Hellenism and its many qualities which permitted assimilation as well as cohabitation.

Bactria's wealth came from two major sources during this period: the aforementioned trade roads that served as a crux for traders hailing from Persia in the west and China in the east;

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<sup>45</sup> The term Indo-Greek generally denotes origins from south of the Hindu Kush and will henceforth be used in such context.

<sup>46</sup> Heliclos was the last Greek king of Bactria to rule over the land north of Caucasus (Hindu Kush) but his reign was troubled and in c 130BCE, the Yuezhi took control of the region forming the foundations for the Kushan Empire. Sidky pp 192;227

<sup>47</sup> Arguments for the desire to spread Hellenism and accomplish Alexander's dream are certainly substantial but from my assessment of Hellenistic culture and the methods employed by various Hellenistic kings, Ptolemaic, Seleucid or otherwise, would suggest that these individuals were more concerned with temporal matters (i.e. wealth and power) rather than the dreams of their predecessor.

the other source was the rich deposits of precious metals. The trade roads running through Bactria facilitated economic movement between regions foreign to one another.<sup>48</sup> Before the Greco-Macedonian presence penetrated the region, Bactria (as well as neighboring regions like Sogdiana, Aria and others) was subject to Achaemenid rule. Achaemenid occupation indicates how attractive and important the region was even before the arrival of Alexander as it solicited efforts from Darius I and III in order to keep the area under their control.<sup>49</sup> So the region persisted as an important economic tool for Alexander's satraps and the Seleucids who took control thereafter. Further evidence to support the notion of large trade movements is the existence of coins themselves. Coins from various time periods of different communities and empires have been found in Bactria and help to establish a sense of the diversity of trade in the region. Some evidence also indicates that the Seleucids played an active role in maintaining the Achaemenid trade routes<sup>50</sup> which hints at how important these routes were not only for the natives and Greek occupants, but also for the kings with empires centered hundreds of miles away. The Seleucid policy of a free circulation of coinage also permitted the usage of coins from various cities and of different standards from that of the Attic to be used in the region<sup>51</sup> which would only have fostered economic movement.

There is one question that still arises in this case; why wouldn't the Achaemenids, Seleucids, Greco-Bactrians and others coming from the west, and traders coming from India and China in the East, use a different road? It's not as if Bactria's land is necessarily easier to tread

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<sup>48</sup> These roads serve another great purpose, i.e. medium to a gradual cultural shift, but for now the economic factor is the important aspect.

<sup>49</sup> Susan Sherwin-White and Amélie Kuhrt, *From Samarkand to Sardis*. 1993 pg. 92

<sup>50</sup> Sherwin-White pg. 62

<sup>51</sup> Sherwin-White pp. 63-64

than any other land, the presence of the Hindu Kush might indeed make the trek even more difficult. The answer can be found, again, in the land itself. Bactria had rich deposits of gold in its mountains,<sup>52</sup> which could have served as a source of metal for their mints and at the same time attracted settlers and traders. Furthermore, the gold in Bactria would have provided another deposit for Seleucid and Greco-Bactrian kings from which they could withdraw the necessary materials to mint coins; fine, well-minted and standard coins were the primary means of payment for armies.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the roads were not necessarily an organic entity, but rather a construct born out of an interest from in the natural materials in the region.

With the matter of why Bactria was such an attractive prospect, I turn to how the kings maintained their hold on the region. For this, it is necessary to examine what Hellenism was and how exactly it served its purpose as a cohesive idea. Hellenization can essentially be defined as the spread of Greek language and culture over a foreign land, but there are certain nuances that permit the idea to co-exist with native communities.<sup>54</sup> This spread of culture and language was not intended to destroy already existing forms in conquered lands, but rather to instill a Greek presence to help bind and consolidate their conquests. In this effort, social institutions and civic structures, i.e. gymnasiums in which *paideia*<sup>55</sup> was taught, were crucial in spreading “Hellenism”. How Hellenization occurred has been a subject of debate mainly between the

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<sup>52</sup> Sherwin-White pg. 63

<sup>53</sup> As we have seen, constant warfare was a near necessity for the Greco-Bactrians and Seleucids in order to maintain a grip on the region. Eucratides is an excellent example of what a king would have to suffer should he not be well supplied with military might or natural resources.

<sup>54</sup> For a concise description of the values and evolution of Hellenism as it existed and as it developed in the scholarly literature see: Anna Kouremenos, *From Pella to Gandhara* 2011.

<sup>55</sup> A Greek word referring to the education a citizen of the *polis* would ideally receive. This education grew ever more crucial as colonies spread further from their Attic origins.

approaches proposed by British scholars such as Tarn,<sup>56</sup> in which the king also served as a missionary for Hellenism, and that of other scholars such as Briant and Préaux,<sup>57</sup> who suggest that Hellenism was a more exploitative process which fostered segregation.

More likely, the nature of Hellenism was somewhere in between. We know that rival factions of Greek nobility developed throughout Bactria,<sup>58</sup> which does indicate that Briant and Préaux's suggestions do have merit. The formation of a Greek aristocracy would have certainly alienated the conquered natives and in turn promoted segregation as a byproduct of the stratified social status. Still, these factions were not necessarily constructed in order to subjugate the local populations, rather they were formed to help transfer power towards interested hands, and as such, the alienation and segregation that is promoted by certain scholars seems to have been a residual effect. The ideas proposed by British Hellenistic scholars, and best represented in Tarn's *Greeks in Bactria and India*, would suggest that Hellenization played out in a more pragmatic matter. According to this view, the goal of these Hellenistic kings was to have a contiguous manifest of city-states throughout Asia. On this basis, we can derive that Hellenism was as much a political construct, necessary for holding in place Greco-Macedonian influence, as it was a cultural one.

Combining both of these ideas, we can see that the introduction of Greek kings and culture to the area brought about a brand of Hellenism which to some degree did promote segregation and also served as a political tool. However, it would be difficult to agree with the exploitative notions pushed forth by those counter to the view presented by Tarn, and it would be

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<sup>56</sup> Tarn pg. 5

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Sherwin-White pp.185-186

<sup>58</sup> Sidky pg. 145

equally difficult to attribute a missionary role to the Greco-Macedonian kings in the footsteps of Alexander. Thus, for our purposes, Hellenism was a pragmatic cultural and political phenomenon which had a profound effect on the cultural representations of a people,<sup>59</sup> including the Bactrians, Greeks and Indians, and served as a tool by which kings, as well as aspiring nobles and generals, could manifest their plans and gain a political foothold over a region. While it did, as mentioned before, promote separation and segregation, the natives who would have suffered such conditions would already have experienced this intrinsic quality of monarchy regardless of the king. As such, it was another brand of kingship with a different set of cultural justifications for segregation.<sup>60</sup>

As mentioned before, the group of Greek colonists who remained in Bactria were either ambitious individuals migrating from the Balkans or soldiers brought by Alexander during his campaign. This contingent settled military colonies to serve as outposts for the campaigns and it is from these colonies that the myriad of *poleis* emerged, which served as the foundations for a Greco-Bactrian satrapy. But this brings about an interesting question, namely, what was it to be a “Greek” in a land so far away from the Balkan homelands? Alexander brought mercenaries hired in Anatolia and Persia to the Hindu Kush, and it was these individuals who comprised a part of the community. But they were not ethnically Greek, i.e. they were not Greek speaking members from any *poleis* in Greece, which suggests that one aspect of Hellenism is the redefinition of what it was to be “Greek”, guiding the concept more towards cultural values rather than ethnic

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<sup>59</sup> Specific examples of this will be discussed in a later chapter with regard to Greco-Buddhist depictions.

<sup>60</sup> The Vedic culture and Brahmanic foothold on the region with its caste system would have preceded the introduction of Hellenism, thus the conquered would have been experienced in matters of political separation; I will discuss Vedic culture and the caste system later in order to elucidate on the political and social conditions before the invasion of Greco-Macedonians.

origins. In effect, if one could speak Greek, discuss Greek philosophy, and adopted aspects of Greek civic life, then he would be considered Greek, whether born in Corinth or Ai-Khanoum.

The Seleucids and Greco-Bactrians, during their respective rules over the region, would have had the allegiance of these Greeks, as they had a common identifying quality, irrespective of class division. This support certainly waned at times and permitted a transfer of power from one dynasty to the next. This support from the local communities was an essential part in each usurpation that occurred, and without such support, no king could have long consolidated their power either side of the Hindu Kush. This is evident in the means by which the Diodoti came to power, how the Euthydemids took possession and what permitted Eucratides to revolt. Still, the Greek populations in these areas composed a minority of the total population, and however apt they may have been at warfare and looting, a longstanding community requires more than pilfered treasures to prosper. Thus, it was necessary for the kings to have some sort of cooperation with the native populations<sup>61</sup> in order to provide a consistent food supply and by extension maintain the foundations the monarchy had laid out.

The cooperation between natives and monarch represents much more than a continuation of the kingdom however, and from these relations some insight can be gained as to why this region fostered an amalgamation of cultures.<sup>62</sup> For this, it is necessary to return to the political structure of the Seleucids and Greco-Bactrians. The satrapies, eparchies, hyparchies and stathmoi, meant a division of political power and responsibility between governors responsible

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<sup>61</sup> The Seleucid colonies, which comprised part of what would become the Greco-Bactrian kingdom, were often populated more so by natives who served as the agricultural labor force. Sidky pg. 132

<sup>62</sup> I am anticipating here what I will describe later in greater detail, namely the beginnings of Greco-Buddhist art and cities such as Ai-Khanoum which provides a great deal of evidence for this cultural amalgamation.

for each unit. This segmentation made consolidation of power an easier task as each governor was responsible to the ruler above him (i.e. hyparch to the eparch, eparch to the satrap) and this chain ultimately ended with the king, who the satrap was responsible to. In a sense, the king could delegate authority to micro-managers while tending to the general interests of his kingdom. The Diodotian revolt and the emergence of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom only changed the structure in that there was a different king the governors were responsible to. So each local governor had to maintain relations with natives that would perpetuate the kingdom as the labor force they provided was integral to the kingdom's existence.

How could an alliance be established between natives and king? To answer this, it is necessary to consider the wants of the local population. As discussed before, the social stratification would not necessarily have been a worry for the natives as this would have occurred under a monarchy, Greek or otherwise. So we turn to more pragmatic matters, which is at the heart of the political aspect of Hellenization.

The main worry for the Bactrians, native and Greek, was the nomadic neighbors to the north.<sup>63</sup> These nomads thrived by constantly migrating and living off the land; sometimes this entailed looting and pillaging where it could be had. So the natives would have needed protection from their attackers who would presumably be more experienced in battle than the farmers. The Greco-Macedonians provided a means for defending the land due to their training in warfare and experience with subduing the local populations. Still, the support of a population can be fickle

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<sup>63</sup> Sidky details how Bactria-Sogdiana was an exception to the Seleucid tradition which generally excluded natives from the ruling class; a common enemy of the nomadic tribes to the north united the Greco-Macedonian nobility and by extension the natives with the Seleucid rulers. This is not to say the natives had a representative voice, rather to suggest that the nomadic tribes to the north worried all in the kingdom. Sidky pg. 132

and protection from invaders, while valuable, can't alone be a deciding factor for compliance. An extension of social or personal freedom would certainly contribute to the cooperation, and it seems that this occurred in some form.

In addressing what else could have gained the support of natives, we again turn to the pragmatic nature of Hellenism and one of its qualities, the freedom to practice one's religion. The cultural aspects of Hellenism included Greek religion and the introduction of the Olympian pantheon, but this transmission of religion occurred in an assimilative manner with local religions rather than a destructive one. The Seleucids did not have an official and unified state religion, and the different satrapies under the king's control were settings to various forms of cult worship.<sup>64</sup> If at the highest governing level there was no officially required worship, it is safe to assume the same at lower levels. Should even local requirements have existed, and there is no definitive proof that there was, it would have most likely been to appease the religious sensibilities of the majority. As such, these lands controlled by Greeks would have allowed for the practice of an individual's religious beliefs, and if this not be necessarily an important trait for the natives, the freedom from a mandated practice would certainly have been welcomed. Still, the Greek pantheon did enter the lives of the natives, but this came more in the form of a permeation rather than a penetration. Greeks brought with them their deities, but wherever they went, they adopted the local interpretations and converged the two to display the similarities between them and the natives.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Tarn pg. 4

<sup>65</sup> Again I am anticipating here what I will discuss in greater detail later. What is important is that the amalgamation occurred which represents a mutual acceptance and understanding of locals and Greeks.



Still, the Greeks were insistent on spreading certain aspects of their culture, such as language and sense of duty, so why would they be lax with religion? One interpretation that I could make of this is that the dissemination of the Greek gods simply did not succeed as local populations were disinterested in the gods of their rulers. The persistence of Vedic religions and its heterodoxies, such as Buddhism, can attribute to this interpretation. There were also Greeks who became followers of Buddhist, Jain and Hindu religions, but the numbers which could be said for certain are limited to few.<sup>66</sup> This conversion of Greeks to Buddhism may have occurred at a later time with the formation of the Indo-Greek kingdom, which will be discussed shortly, but leading up to Eucratides, there is a more practical answer as to why the Greeks did not force their religion upon the conquered.

It can be essentially ascribed to the ultimate goal of the Greco-Bactrians as to why religion did not penetrate the ranks of the peasantry, namely the conquest of neighboring land and extension of kingdom to greater lengths. It was not in the interests of the Greeks to push their pantheon and religious interpretations upon the natives as it would weaken any active support and would require an expenditure of resources and manpower in order to maintain the tradition. Thus, mandating a religious practice upon a people would not only serve to alienate the subjugated even more, beyond the traditional social boundaries, it would also require an active effort on the part of the conquering class to upkeep the practices. The Greco-Bactrians and Indo-Greeks would thus benefit more, and paradoxically<sup>67</sup> be more influential in the region, if they did

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<sup>66</sup> Tarn pg. 391

<sup>67</sup> That is, the presence of a monarchy can be furnished through religion and has been done so throughout history. In this case however, the opposite served the same purpose.

not impose religious mandates. Still, as we will see later, religion did not exist in a vacuum at this time, on the contrary it developed in interesting ways on both Greek and Indian grounds.

The attraction of Bactria now considered, and the form in which Hellenism manifested in the region touched upon, we can return to the story of Greeks in central Asia. After the death of Eucratides, the Greco-Bactrians grew weak and a consolidated rule on the levels of Euthydemid rule was virtually non-existent in the region. The scope of Greco-Bactrian land shrunk and this ultimately allowed for the nomadic invasions c. 130BCE to succeed. Still, the crossing of the Hindu Kush into its southern lands does provide more evidence for Greek occupation, specifically the formation of an Indo-Greek empire.

The Indo-Greek kingdom can be traced to Demetrius' invasion of India and the reign of the Euthydemid Apollodotus I for its foundations,<sup>68</sup> but it is with the king Menander (160-130BCE) that it can be dated more accurately. It became established approximately around 160 BCE and fell around 10 CE, to the same causes of its Greco-Bactrian predecessor. Unfortunately, most of the evidence that exists for this kingdom is numismatic and the lack of literary sources to correspond with the numismatic evidence make this kingdom difficult to study. Still, there remains a wealth of information on one king particularly, Menander, and it so happens that he was the most celebrated of the Indo-Greek kings<sup>69</sup> and also a prominent figure in the Buddhist literature.

For the purpose of this study, the evaluation of the Indo-Greeks will be primarily focused on Menander and his rule as king. It must be limited so because the numismatic evidence of later

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<sup>68</sup> A brother or kinsman of Demetrius, for further details of his role in the Indian conquests see Tarn, pp. 140-143

<sup>69</sup> Sidky pg. 184

Indo-Greek kings, while certainly important in showing the continuation of a Greek lineage, cannot be placed in much context nor can it be used to accurately describe the achievements and nature of rule of the kings they portray; in short, a strong evaluation cannot yet be made on the Indo-Greeks beyond Menander, for whom there is numismatic and literary evidence. The numismatic evidence, which will be examined in a later chapter, for these later kings shows that they had some sort of relationship with the Buddhist communities and native population; however the indications are too faint to ascribe any significant influence from the later Indo-Greek kings in the Greco-Buddhist dialogue.

The historicity of Menander can be confirmed through various sources. There are various coins bearing his monogram, generally with the word *SOTEROS*, meaning savior, inscribed as well as the traditional *BASILEOS* followed by his name *MENANDROY*. He is also mentioned in ancient literature as one of Demetrius' generals<sup>70</sup> who would eventually come to rule over parts of India upon the fall of the Euthydemids. Indian sources also reveal some aspects of Menander's reign. The *Milindapanha*, or Questions of Milinda, tells the story of a discourse between the Buddhist monk Nagasena and King Milinda, the Pali transliteration of Menander. With this evidence at hand, we can begin to construct an idea of Menander's rule.

Menander came to control parts of India ranging from Mathura to the Upper Indus and Gandhara.<sup>71</sup> This extension of power provides the greatest geographical limit of Greek suzerainty over the Indian subcontinent and also provides a context for the nature of Menander's kingdom. Having arisen as the only Greco-Bactrian to successfully resist Eucratides, Menander began to

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<sup>70</sup> Tarn pg. 140

<sup>71</sup> Tarn pg. 227;229

consolidate his control south of the Hindu Kush. He came to terms with Eucratides resulting in a peace treaty which essentially gave to each ruler undisputed rights to the land he held; i.e., Eucratides would own Bactria and lands north of it, and Menander would be king over the southern lands.<sup>72</sup> He further legitimized his rule by marrying Agathocleia, Demetrius' daughter, which won him support from Greeks who resisted Eucratides claims to kingship.<sup>73</sup> His reign can be dated to about 160BCE until his death sometime c.130BCE.<sup>74</sup>

What is particularly interesting about Menander's realm is the composition of its population. The Greco-Bactrians and Seleucids were certainly dependent on the local population as mentioned before, however, this reliance on cooperation seems to have grown even larger in Menander's kingdom. The names given in Claudius Ptolemy's list of Greek provinces in India suggest that the political structure was set up much the same way as it was by the Seleucids in Bactria, and had taken the form which the Greco-Bactrians established upon their independence from the Seleucids (i.e. the Seleucid eparchies became the Bactrian satrapies, thus elevating the political unit in rank).<sup>75</sup> From this it can be assessed that Menander laid a foundation similar to that of his predecessors, the difference being the contingent who were subject to it.

The majority of the population, even greater so than that of the Greco-Bactrian kingdoms, in Menander's kingdom was native to the subcontinent. The Greek population present there was used in administrative and military duties, but they numbered so few that leads some historians

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<sup>72</sup> Tarn pg. 228

<sup>73</sup> Tarn pg. 225

<sup>74</sup> Tables and Illustrations, first table; Jens Jakkobson, "Indo-Greek Chronology .200-145BCE," *Journal of the Oriental Numismatic Society* 198, 2009. Academia.edu

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Tarn pg. 240

to believe Menander's kingdom was essentially an Indian one with a Greek contingent.<sup>76</sup> Such an evaluation seems feasible since what Menander came to inherit was not the guided efforts of Seleucid kings spreading Greek populations, but rather the remains of a Mauryan Empire toppled by the assassination of its last king at the hands of Pushyamitra Sungha.

In a sense Menander became the successor to the Mauryas, both geographically and in a looser sense, spiritually. The *Milindapanha*, which will be examined later, states that Milinda (Menander), after having the discussion with Nagasena, converted to Buddhism, left behind his empire to his son and became an arhat. Whether or not he personally converted to Buddhism is beyond our knowledge as the *Milindapanha* alone cannot be proof of such a change; the idea that he retired and left the empire to his son, Strato I, is mistaken, as Menander ruled until his death, at which point his wife, Agathocleia ruled as regent to his son, too young to govern.<sup>77</sup> What can be attained from this text though is that there was an interest in associating the Indo-Greek king with Buddhism. The text was most likely meant for a Buddhist audience<sup>78</sup> and Menander's inclusion in the story, when other Indian kings could have sufficed, suggests that there was an amicable relationship between king and his Buddhist population.

What this points to is again the pragmatic form in which Hellenization occurred. But there are some distinctions which must first be made between the Greco-Bactrian brand and that of the Indo-Greeks. First, there were fewer cities which can properly be identified as *polis* in

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. Tarn pg. 260

<sup>77</sup> Tarn discusses this in greater detail using coins bearing Agathocleia and Strato I as evidence for the regency, and later coins of Strato I alone as indicating his ascension as sole ruler. Tarn pp. 225-227

<sup>78</sup> The *Milindapanha* that currently exists is a translation of the original written in a Kharosthi script, used in the Gandhara region to write in Prakrit and Sanskrit. Thus, the general audience can be assumed not to be Greek since so much of the Greek identity was based on usage of the language.

Menander's realm as compared to the "thousand cities of Bactria".<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, like his predecessor Demetrius at Taxila, Menander established his capital in an Indian city with no Greek palace to house a king.<sup>80</sup> It seems that the further the Greeks encroached into India, the less important their civic institutions became as they began to realize that support from the local population preceded other necessities in order to maintain a proper hold over their kingdom. As such, Menander began to endear himself to the natives of his land, which could also help to explain his role in the Milindapanha.

The people of his lands were in large number Buddhist<sup>81</sup> and the pragmatic nature of Hellenism in this case would require that he provide some sort of assurance that they would not be persecuted for their beliefs. This was important as prior to Menander's reign, the Sunga Empire, of Brahmanic nature, supplanted the Mauryans, and although accounts of Buddhist persecution may have been exaggerated, fears of future persecution would have to be quelled before Menander could gain their support.<sup>82</sup> As such, Menander would have to subdue any overt signs of a Greek occupation suggestive of religious oppression.

I will visit the case of Menander again and evaluate his coins and role in the Milindapanha at a later time. For now, it will suffice to have detailed the history of the Greco-Bactrians and the nature of Menander's kingdom as they provide the crucial social and political settings that Buddhists would encounter, and which would ultimately determine the outcome of Greco-Buddhist interactions. That being said, I will turn to the other entity in this story, the

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<sup>79</sup> Tarn pp. 232-238

<sup>80</sup> Tarn pg. 247

<sup>81</sup> Due to previous Mauryan control and patronage of the religion.

<sup>82</sup> The fall of the Maurya and rise of the Sunga as well as the Greco-Buddhist and Brahmanic dynamic will be examined in the next chapter. This is included here to provide a setting for Menander's relations with the Buddhists.

Indians emerging from their Vedic roots and the development of a counter-movement that would become the foundations for Buddhism.

## Buddhism and its Vedic Roots

The mountains of the Hindu Kush were an apt place for the Greco-Macedonians to establish themselves, not only in a geographical sense<sup>1</sup> but also in a historical sense with regard to India. The Achaemenid presence in northwest India, stemming from the conquests of the Persian king Cyrus the Great, set the precedent for the Macedonians to make their way through the fertile Swat Valley and onto the foothills of the Hindu Kush. For Alexander, this was the next logical step towards the east, but for the Hindu Kush and the Indian subcontinent, this was one incident of foreign presence in a long history of migrations. These Greeks met an array of Indian clans and kingdoms born out of the migration of nomads and tribes that had developed an agricultural lifestyle and settled the various communes of the region.

Furthermore, the Greeks encountered an Indian population that had adopted various heterodoxies to the Vedas during the centuries prior to Greek contact. The Vedic traditions, which had long guided the shape of Indian society and culture, became the foundations for new movements and counter-movements. Nascent schools of thought such as Buddhism and Jainism presented a different path for those disillusioned with the Vedic norms, and this in turn fermented a cultural revolution that had resounding effects. These new religions appealed to the populous lower classes in the caste system who sought relief from the social restrictions of the rigid caste,

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<sup>1</sup> These mountains have been described as a barrier to communication but evidence would suggest that it was actually a lively center for trade and communication between communities on either side of the mountains. It was burdened by less snow than the Himalayas and it connected the Oxus and Indus valleys, both important tracts of land, and so the Hindu Kush were actually a lively mountain range. See: Romila Thapar, *Early India* pp. 39-41



and also to monarchs who could use the movements as a medium for cooperation with their subjects. The arts, in addition to popular support and royal patronage, further fostered the growth of these new religions. The conditions in which these heterodoxies grew were complex and a brief review of Indian society preceding this period of religious growth helps to shed light on the nature and origins of the social conditions and philosophical discourses that played a role in the heterodox development.

Following the timeline proposed by Thapar, after the gathering of hunter-gatherers, pastoralists and early farmers, the first urbanization would occur at the Indus Plain and north-west India. These lands would have served as a point of convergence for the various cultures as well as a spring of identity for the settlers who would subsequently inhabit the Indian Peninsula. Urbanization of these lands is the necessary antecedent for the kingships and chiefdoms that would emerge throughout India, and, by extension, ultimately responsible for the second urbanization of the Ganges Plains, the rise of the Mauryan State, and the mercantile community which formed concurrently with the decline of the Mauryan state.<sup>2</sup>

The make-up of society in India before the formation of kingdoms included a variety of groups with distinct lifestyles. Amongst these: the hunter-gatherers formed in small groups who would scavenge for nourishment, the pastoralists who were sometimes nomadic and others somewhat sedentary, peasants that composed the majority of the population and would tend to agricultural products, and townspeople who specialized in certain crafts.<sup>3</sup> The significance of

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<sup>2</sup> Thapar presents a periodization of India which provides a rough outline of the major developments in Indian society. The Mauryan State, numbered at seven, and the rise of the mercantile community and cross-cultural contacts, numbered at eight, will be the main periods under evaluation here. For dates, cf. Thapar 2002 pp. 31-32

<sup>3</sup> For more elaboration on the distinct qualities of each group see: Thapar 2002 pp.54-62

these groups is that they would serve as the basis for a comprehensive system of social classification and organization that would later take form, known as the caste system.

The caste is a hierarchy based around the appropriation social status and duty. The caste division occurred in four parts: brahmin, kshatriya, vaishya, and shudra.<sup>4</sup> The brahmin were the priests who held the knowledge of the Vedas and could perform the proper rituals held within; kshatriya were essentially the warrior class that would serve as the defenders of the community; vaishya were merchants and cattle herders; and shudra, considered the lowest class, were to serve the other classes. The caste served more of as an ideal promoted by the brahmin, who also defined the system, rather than a practical form of social structure.<sup>5</sup> Whatever the scope of practice may have been, the existence of such a system indicates that there were notions of class divisions and ideas of religious and temporal superiority. It was these tenets that the Buddha would later challenge, but before examining that path, it is important to understand the origins of Brahmanic thought, which is contained in the Vedas.

A Veda is a composition of hymns, religious in nature and normative in its descriptions.<sup>6</sup> The Vedas were written by the brahmins through their vista and with their ideals in mind, and as such, an inherent bias is inevitable; however, despite the bias, the scripture does provide valuable insight about the brahmin perception of Indian society. The Rig Veda, the earliest of the bodies of Vedic literature written sometime between 1500-1000BCE, came from Aryans who invaded

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<sup>4</sup> A.L. Basham: *The Wonder that Was India*, pg. 139

<sup>5</sup> Basham pg. 139

<sup>6</sup> Vedas are composed of four sections: *Samhita* or the hymns themselves, *Brahmanas* or explanations of the rituals, *Upanishads* and *Aranyakas* that serve as the philosophical discourses, and the *Sutra* which is split into three sections and details domestic rituals, public rituals, and social obligations. See: Thapar 2002 pp. 110-111

India, and represents the first instance of a Vedic culture permeating within Indian society.<sup>7</sup> What this source provides, beyond religious ritual, is an understanding of the culture that would become the platform for the formation of kingships and chiefdoms; furthermore, it illustrates the importance of the relation between king and priest, and how their interactions dictate the legitimacy of authority.

Between c.1200-600BCE various communities formed social structures with common themes. The *kula*, or family, was the smallest partition of society and tended to be patriarchal.<sup>8</sup> The families were lead by the *raja*, or king, who generally wielded military power to be used in protection of the community as well as to plunder.<sup>9</sup> His powers were kept in check by assemblies within the clan: the *vidatha*, the gathering at which booty was distributed; the *sabha*, a select council of advisors; and the *samiti*, which was an assembly of the clan.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the brahmin served as another check on the raja's powers, as it was by his word that the power a king wielded would become legitimized. In this sense, the brahmin held the highest ritual status.

At some point starting c. 600 BCE<sup>11</sup>, the Aryans made their way from the north-west settlements towards the Ganges Plains, located towards the north and northeast of the subcontinent. The kings brought with them their subjects and also the political structures they had developed in the Indus Valley to the Ganges Plains. Moreover, this period in India can be traced in a more historical fashion thanks to the emergence of Buddhist and Jain literature; the

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<sup>7</sup> H.H. Dodwell, ed. *The Cambridge Shorter History of India*

<sup>8</sup> Thapar 2002, pg. 117

<sup>9</sup> Thapar 2002, pp. 119-120

<sup>10</sup> Thapar 2002, pg. 119

<sup>11</sup> Thapar proposes a period of c.600-400BCE, Basham cites archeological evidence that suggests this transition began sometime around c. 900-600BCE, coinciding with the later Vedas, see: Basham pg. 39

historical dating and context in the Vedas, which until this period were the primary historical sources, lacks the accuracy and historicity of the Buddhist and Jain literature.

Preceding this second period of settlement, the kingdoms of India were in a volatile state. Constant infighting and threat of conquest from neighboring dynasties constantly troubled the kings of the land. The emergence of dynasties in Magadha, however, would bring about a sort of stability in the region and a historicity about the events that transpired as the Magadhan kings and their deeds became recorded in the Buddhist and Jain literature. Magadha was located south of the Ganges, occupying approximately the area of modern day Bihar. Its capital was Pataliputra,<sup>12</sup> a city that would serve as an important political and economic center for its occupants over the next several centuries. This region certainly was home to kingdoms before the second settlement of the Ganges, however, the histories of these early kingdoms are uncertain. Fortunately, the Buddhist and Jain text provides valuable information that allow for the establishment of histories for the kingdoms that would form upon the second settlement of the plains.

Bimbisara is the first Magadhan monarch mentioned in these sources. His father was a lesser known king, Bhattiya, which suggests that Bimbisara likely rose to power by capitalizing on the problems that had plagued previous dynasties in the region rather than the traditional form of accession.<sup>13</sup> His rule can be approximated to c. 540-490BCE as evidenced by diplomatic relations with other kings as well as his personal relationship with the Buddha.<sup>14</sup> In this time he served as a patron to Buddhism and sought Siddhartha's advice on various accounts. Bimbisara

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<sup>12</sup> Dodwell, pg. 35; Patna is the modern form of Pataliputra

<sup>13</sup> Dodwell, pg. 16

<sup>14</sup> Dodwell, pg. 17

held his kingdom together by means of a strong military and a series of matrimonial alliances; however, these same alliances would come to burden his son and successor, Ajatasatru, whom Buddhist sources would illustrate as an enemy of Buddhism in his early days, only to become a convert later on and repent for imprisoning his father.<sup>15</sup> Most likely, Bimbisara abdicated his throne in old age as was the tradition; still, this story seems to be a motif in Buddhist literature and is closely tied to the nature of Buddhist kings.<sup>16</sup>

The matrimonial alliances Bimbisara established forced Ajatasatru to wage war on his relatives as contests for land arose. These troubles would signify the volatility of the state and his sons, Daraska and Udaya would not be able to hold the Magadhan domain intact. A popular uprising took place and a short lived dynasty led by Sisunaga and then his sons reigned over Magadha. They served as a precursor to the Nanda dynasty that emerged upon the assassination of the last of Sisunaga's line at the hands of Mahapadma. The Nanda dynasty, having arisen through illicit means, was to persist for a time by the same means. The coercive nature by which they amassed their wealth made the dynasty an unpopular one, and by the time of its last king, Dhana Nanda, the subjects had come to resent their king.<sup>17</sup> Thus, a situation presented itself for another hostile takeover to occur, and with the aid of Kautliya, a former minister of the Nanda, Chandragupta Maurya came to seize the throne after defeating the Nanda general Bhaddasala.<sup>18</sup>

The Mauryan dynasty established by Chandragupta becomes the next crucial step in India's development. This dynasty consolidated control of Indian lands beyond any precedence,

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<sup>15</sup> Dodwell, pg. 17

<sup>16</sup> Milinda and Asoka present strong examples of both a king who abdicates in old age (Milinda) as well as one who makes a conversion later in life upon realizing the horrors of his actions (Asoka). Again, the historicity of these occurrences is doubtful, however, it does signify a certain theme in Buddhist literature concerning kings.

<sup>17</sup> Dodwell, pg. 20

<sup>18</sup> T.W. Rhys Davids, trans. *The Questions of King Milinda* pg. 147 shows that there was a necessary battle.

and formed a kingdom that can truly be called Indian due to its scope. Before further analyzing Chandragupta and his successors, it would be worthwhile to first examine the Buddha and his followers from the origins of the religion up to the period of Mauryan succession. The lands of Magadha were populated by Buddhists<sup>19</sup> and as Vedic literature suggests, the Brahmanic culture never fully took hold in the region.<sup>20</sup> Thus, by Chandragupta's time, Buddhists had already become a large contingent of the population. It is certain, as we will see, that Asoka was a patron of the religion and, as such, Buddhism was an important part of the Mauryan kingdom.

Buddhism is the heterodox movement that developed from the teachings of the Buddha, an enlightened person who through experience and meditation came to formulate a distinct path to liberation through an analysis of the nature of suffering and the means by which it can be ended. The Buddha, sometimes referred to as Siddhartha,<sup>21</sup> or Gautama, his clan given name; other times he is referred to as a combination of the two latter terms, and Gautama is what he is called by in Buddhist literature. The details of his life stem from Buddhist literature and it is difficult to distinguish hagiography from historical representations of events; however, there are some useful details about his life that can be gathered from the scripture.

Siddhartha was born on the foothills of the Himalayas at Kapilavastu into the Shakya clan as the son of a chief.<sup>22</sup> His birth can be dated to c.560BCE and he died c.480BCE, most likely

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<sup>19</sup> Bimbisara is said to have ruled over 80,000 townships with Buddhist overseers, Dodwell pg. 17

<sup>20</sup> Dodwell, pg. 16

<sup>21</sup> Translated as, "He who has achieved his goal". Fred Clothey, *Religion in India: A Historical Introduction* pg. 41; one of the Buddhist traditions states that when born, Siddhartha was claimed to either become a great king or great sage, and it seems fitting that his name would be such considering what he was to achieve.

<sup>22</sup> Clothey pg. 41

between 486-480.<sup>23</sup> Other details of his life are subject to the exaggeration of future chroniclers who, due to their Buddhist beliefs, were prone to exalt the greatness of the Buddha. Moreover, the accounts of his life were written at a later time and meant to be more inspirational than historical, thus rendering it prone to further ambiguities and corruption. Despite these shortcomings, the literature provides details about the atmosphere in India at this time, one in which some people were becoming increasingly disinterested with city life and growing more curious about the forest hermits and their ascetic lives.<sup>24</sup> Moreover it gives examples of Buddhist ideals through the actions of the Buddha, a person whose influence can still be witnessed.

The hagiography of the Buddha presents the following narrative: Siddhartha grew up in a world of splendor and pleasure. He was ignorant to the realities of suffering, aging and death due to his father, who willed to set his son on the path of kingship and feared that exposure to such realities would distract him towards the path of the sage. At some point, with the help of his charioteer Channa, Siddhartha explored the world outside the palace walls and witnessed three instances of suffering in the form of sickness, aging and finally death. Shocked by a reality of which he was previously ignorant, he found closure on his fourth journey when he saw the calmness and peace exhibited by an ascetic wanderer. This encounter served as the initial spark guiding Siddhartha towards the ascetic life. He soon gave up palace life and wandered about, determined not to return until enlightenment was achieved. Siddhartha encountered various

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<sup>23</sup> Basham pg. 48;259 In the Buddhist literature he is said to have lived eighty years which would place him within this timeline; other parts of Buddhist literature provide chronology, specifically concerning Asoka's rise to the Mauryan throne dated to be about 218 years after the *parinirvana*, the Buddha's death and achievement of nirvana. See: Romila Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* 1997 pp. 18-22

<sup>24</sup> Clothey pg.42

ascetics on the way, each contributing to his progression in some form.<sup>25</sup> After many years of practice and self-torture, Siddhartha concluded that such a life was not the path to end suffering; he collapsed from hunger and awoke to realize nothing was resolved. After regaining his strength, Siddhartha, more resolute than ever, declared that would stay still until he solved the problem of suffering. A period of forty-nine days<sup>26</sup> passed and during this period Siddhartha was challenged by Mara, the embodiment of the three poisons: ignorance, desire and aversion, but to no avail as Gautama would resist the temptations posed by the evil spirit. Thus, having conquered Mara, Gautama was left in solitude and delved into a deeper state of meditation that led to his realization of the truth behind suffering.

This realization became the basis for the Four Noble Truths, a four step explanation of the nature of suffering and the means by which it can be negated.<sup>27</sup> The teachings of the Buddha are concerned with the same the questions that puzzled all of the heterodox schools and orthodox that emerged in India, namely, the ultimate nature of the self, and world, and the path to liberation.<sup>28</sup>

What set the heterodox movements apart from the Brahmanic traditions upheld by the *vaidika*, the community of Brahmanic followers, and embodied in the *Upanishads*,<sup>29</sup> was the manner in which they addressed these foundational questions and the methods by which

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<sup>25</sup> He met a brahmin sage, Alara Kalama, during his life as a forest hermit. Kalama taught him meditation and the Brahmanic lore, however, Siddhartha was not compelled by the brahmin's path to the end suffering. Basham pg. 260

<sup>26</sup> Basham pg. 260

<sup>27</sup> For a more thorough explanation of the Four Noble Truths see Clothey pp. 42-44

<sup>28</sup> Clothey pg. 42; concurrent with the rise of Buddhism were other heterodox schools of thought that sought to answer these basic questions. While many arose, including Caravakas and Ajivikas, the prevailing schools were those of Jainism and Buddhism and as such, they became the most important and influential heterodox movements. See Clothey pp. 36-37

<sup>29</sup> Discourses between students and teachers that reflected the Brahmanic ideals. See Basham pp. 252-254



salvation from *samsara*<sup>30</sup> was to be achieved. The heterodox movements sought to extend the means of salvation to all rather than an elite group of brahmins. Whilst Brahmanic traditions only allowed the priestly cast to conduct the rituals, the counter movements viewed this as flawed and pushed for a society in which salvation would be extended to all.<sup>31</sup> This view of salvation later proves to be a boon for Buddhism as it attracts wealthy merchants, who would otherwise bear low social status in the *vidaika*, into becoming patrons of the religion and by extension respected members of the community.<sup>32</sup>

The differences between Buddhist and Brahmanic communities did not end here, however; they extended to consideration for other aspects of society. The chief aspects of difference are as such: the role of kings and kingships, the importance of certain ethics, consideration of city-states, expressions of a pantheon and iconography, and the propriety of sacred spaces.<sup>33</sup> The Buddhist view of kingship held that the *raja* was to be *cakravartin*<sup>34</sup> and embody the ideals of the lay Buddhist; in terms of ethics Buddhism stresses the role of karma in achieving *nirvana*;<sup>35</sup> the sacred spaces, *caitya*, initially were spots on the outskirts of towns that meant to extend the accessibility of worship to layfolk and later they became integrated into Buddhist practice.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> This was the perpetual cycle of birth and rebirth that both Brahmanic and heterodox schools sought liberation or *moksa* from. Each religion held a certain view of the world and this in turn effected their evaluation of *samsara*.

<sup>31</sup> Clothey pg. 36

<sup>32</sup> Clothey pg. 46

<sup>33</sup> Clothey pp. 77-79; these key differences determined the interactions between Buddhist communities and their neighbors as the religion would rise to prominence and proliferate throughout the continent.

<sup>34</sup> Wheel turner, Clothey pg. 79; Asoka is considered as one of the wheel-turners as is Menander in the *Milindapana*

<sup>35</sup> Karma is a term bound in Vedic roots that initially referred the law of cause and effect Clothey pg. 35; later in Buddhism it developed to include intent and the consideration of a bad and good karma.

<sup>36</sup> Basham pg 265; Buddhists assimilated this practice by establishing *viharas*, monasteries and temples, nearby.

Thus the antithesis presented by Buddhism against the Brahmanic stronghold hinged on a reorientation of social standing and moral directives. The preconceptions about the world and the static quality of *varna*, the determinant of social standing, which prevailed during the Vedic times were being challenged by an enlightened man and his followers. Until his death, the Buddha traveled along the peninsula with companions and spread his teachings, taking breaks during the four month rainy season. On the eve of his death, he told his followers to not seek a new leader and rather follow the dharma he preached.<sup>37</sup> For Buddhism, this was to signify the beginnings of a splintering within the community and the end of a singular body of Buddhist followers.

Following Gautama's death, Buddhism developed through the efforts of the Buddha's students. Discussion held at three distinct councils were essential in shaping the future of Buddhism. The first council is said to have convened at Rajagriha, then capital of Maghada and it is claimed that during this meeting Ananda recited the *Sutra Pitaka*<sup>38</sup> from memory; Upali did similarly in reciting the *Vinaya Pitaka*.<sup>39</sup> The second council occurred one hundred years following the Buddha's death and was held at Vaisali. At this council the schism became apparent as disagreements about the *Vinaya* pitted Buddhist faction against one another and consequently produced two groups: the *Theravadi*<sup>40</sup> and the *Mahasanghikas*.<sup>41</sup> The third council

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<sup>37</sup> Basham pg. 262

<sup>38</sup> This was the collection of doctrinal and ethical sermons given by the Buddha during his life. Basham pg. 263; the Buddha was an oral teacher and never wrote down his lessons and it is by the efforts of his students that we now have the literature of his work as preserved in the *tripitaka*, or triple basket. The *tripitaka* is a collection of the *Vinaya Pitaka*, *Sutra Pitaka*, and *Abidhamma Pitaka*. See: Kinnard, pg. 23

<sup>39</sup> Essentially these were the rules monks were to adhere to in monastic life.

<sup>40</sup> Literally meaning, "Believers in the Teaching of the Elders", this group was the orthodox sect that would form the Theravada brand of Buddhism, considered to be the "Lesser Vehicle" by the Mahayana sect. Basham pg. 263

<sup>41</sup> Literally meaning, "Members of the Great Community", this sect would form the Mahayana, or "Great Vehicle", branch of Buddhism.

was held during the reign of Asoka Maurya in the Magadhan capital Pataliputra c.250BCE. The gathering was patronized by Asoka, who by then had become a convert, and became an opportunity for him to assert his authority as *Cakravartin*. The result was expulsion of heretics and recognition of the *Theravada* school as the orthodox school.<sup>42</sup>

The details of these councils are somewhat uncertain as some of the events which are said to have occurred, i.e. the recital of the first two *pitaka*, are actually products of a later time. In other words, the tradition established in the Buddhist literature seems to be a projection of later developments on the past.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the events that transpired within the literature are subject to the same exaggeration and bias that loomed over details of the Buddha's life. Despite these limitations that inhibit the historicity of the councils, the records do unveil the schisms that were taking place in the religion and shine light, albeit ostensibly at times,<sup>44</sup> on the concerns of the various factions. Thus, by the time of the Maurya and entering into Asoka's reign, we have a Buddhist community that is growing ever-divergent and fractured over proper interpretation of the teaching of the Buddha. That is not to say that Buddhism had waned in popularity by this point, as the religion still maintained a strong presence in the region. Royal patronage and the arts<sup>45</sup> had allowed Buddhism to develop, grow and spread throughout the Indian subcontinent

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<sup>42</sup> Basham pg. 263

<sup>43</sup> Basham argues that the Buddhist literature, having been written long after the Buddha's life, don't necessarily reflect a historical consideration of the being and rather report on what his students believed about their teacher rather than what actually occurred. His argument seems to be solid as the earliest written records we have of the councils were indeed written at a later time. Basham pg. 258;263

<sup>44</sup> Certainly the schisms would have had serious disagreements at their core, however, petty arguments did take the stage at times and seemed to be more about stressing differences rather than voicing legitimate concerns, i.e. the proper time for dinner. Clothey pg. 46

<sup>45</sup> The *stupa*, a burial reliquary mound, was one of the main artistic forms that permitted the growth of the religion. They would generally house remains of the Buddha and bore inscriptions of patrons of the religion; it was a part of the lay dharma to contribute to the monastic community and as such the *stupa* was a religious and social instrument that validated one's social standing. The matter of art as a proponent of Buddhism will be considered later.

and beyond, but with the rise of the Maurya, specifically Asoka, the religion would be patronized to an unprecedented degree and its growth would show accordingly.

Between the second council at Vaisali c. 386BCE and the third council at Pataliputra c.250BCE, the political landscape of India would experience a dramatic change. The Nanda dynasty created a sort of proto-empire that was to fall within the century and Alexander made his way to the Hindu Kush and Indus Valley, leaving successors in his wake. As previously discussed, this gave rise to the Seleucid satrapies and the Greco-Bactrian kingdoms that subsequently formed out of revolts. Before the conquest of the Seleucids, however, there was a power vacuum left in the northwest territory due to infighting between ambitious Greco-Macedonian satraps and this period coincided with the emergence of the Maurya kingdom, which was to be the greatest of India's ancient polities.

The rise of the Maurya can be dated to usurpation of the Nanda dynasty by Chandragupta Maurya, an ambitious man of reportedly humble origins,<sup>46</sup> to about 324-321BCE.<sup>47</sup> Having seized the Magadhan throne, Chandragupta quickly turned to the troubled territories fought over by the Macedonians and seized the lands below the Hindu Kush. He was famously guided by a brahmin named Kautilya<sup>48</sup> who at times is supposed to be a puppeteer, although these claims seem to be exaggerations of a later generation. Chandragupta is said to later have made contact with the forces of Seleucus I after the latter had reestablished suzerainty over the Bactrian lands.

The Seleucid monarch had his sights set on India but, after having warred with Chandragupta for

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<sup>46</sup> Dodwell pg. 31

<sup>47</sup> Thapar 1997 pg. 20; the dating of Mauryan reign is tied to the death of the Buddha. Tradition states that Asoka ascended the throne about 218 years after the *parinirvana* that occurred c.486BCE, dating Asoka to c.269BCE, and the corresponding information about the length of Chandragupta's and his son Bindusara's reigns places Chandragupta's ascendancy at about 324-321 BCE.

<sup>48</sup> Basham pg. 51; Dodwell pg. 32 here is named by a variant, Vishnugupta

a time, pressing matters in Asia Minor required his attention and Seleucus Nicator thus established a peace treaty with the Mauryan king.<sup>49</sup> What contributed to the Indian resilience was the resources and strength Chandragupta had managed to consolidate. Having established his capital at Pataliputra, the fertile lands of Maghada that contributed to the growth of the kingdom and the strategically fortified position of the capital permitted the Mauryan king to form a lasting empire out of a kingdom that occupied only a part of India.<sup>50</sup>

What details that can be attributed to Chandragupta's empire come from the work of the Seleucid ambassador to the Maurya, Megasthenes. His original work has not survived the passage of time but enough of his references can be found in later classical literature so that a general outline of his encounters can be formed. Megasthenes' work included a description of the geography, social life and political institutions<sup>51</sup> of India, and certain specific such as the size of Chandragupta's army and the appearance of his royal palace.<sup>52</sup> Megasthenes' accounts also paint Chandragupta as a weary king who is in constant fear of assassination and as a result retains a stern control over his domain. What has to be kept in mind is that Megasthenes was a Greco-Macedonian and thus his evaluation was prone to a Greek bias. This becomes apparent in certain considerations, such as his division of the Indian people into seven classes.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> It would seem that Chandragupta gained the most out of this treaty through the acquisition of the Seleucid satrapies of Aria, Arachosia, part of Gedrosi and Parapanisadae; Seleucus in turn was given 500 elephants that helped him settle matters in Asia Minor; See Dodwell pg. 33

<sup>50</sup> Sherwin-White pg. 93

<sup>51</sup> Dodwell pg. 34

<sup>52</sup> Dodwell pp. 35-36; Chandragupta's forces are said to number 600,000 in infantry, 30,000 cavalry and 9,000 elephants. This report is subject to exaggeration as it is intended to be a military report to consider in the event of a possible invasion as well as social report

<sup>53</sup> Dodwell pp. 37-38; Basham pp. 52-53; What Megasthenes produces is essentially a variant of the caste system.

Jain traditions depict Chandragupta as an adherent of Jainism by the end of his life; the tradition follows that upon old age, Chandragupta relinquished his throne to his son Bindusara, and took to a Jain monastery where he slowly starved to death.<sup>54</sup> This is an unlikely scenario and seems to rather follow the theme of most *dharma* that are presented in Indian religions, i.e. the king who abdicates near the end of his life and commits himself to the religious life. Whatever the verity of these traditions, they do provide for an understanding of Chandragupta's kingdom. He did reign for a period of about 24 years and left his throne to his son Bindusara. Furthermore, Chandragupta began the initial precipitation of Mauryan rule beyond the Maghadan borders and established the precedence that permitted his son and grandson to propagate the dynasty to a level of unprecedented greatness.

About Chandragupta's son, Bindusara, not much can be said, as the sources that elucidate details about the Maurya are mainly focused on Chandragupta and Asoka. He acceded c.300-297BCE and at the very least he maintained the scope of the empire established by his father. Some communications between he and Antiochus I are recorded but they are nothing substantial and don't really provide much information about the king.<sup>55</sup> His rule lasted until about 273-272BCE, the approximate time of his death.<sup>56</sup> A four year period of an interregnum is said to have occurred at this point, resulting from a contest for the throne between Bindusara's sons. Asoka eventually emerged victorious and about 269BCE, he became the third, and eventually most important, Mauryan king.

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<sup>54</sup> Thapar 1997 pg. 22

<sup>55</sup> Basham pg. 53

<sup>56</sup> Thapar 1997 pg. 24

What can be known about Asoka comes from his edicts and Buddhist literature; both provide great detail about the king's character as well as kingship and the socio-political conditions of the time. The evidence is not without weakness however, and the inherent bias of Buddhist literature and personally sanctioned edicts certainly do cloud the truth of the matter. Despite this, conclusions about Asoka may still be drawn as there is some underlying truth behind his edicts, scribed on various pillars and rocks throughout India and meant to be formal declarations of policy, and the Buddhist literature that, despite natural exaggeration of the character to show a favoritism toward Buddhism, does illustrate the practical nature of Asoka's rule in recognizing the necessity of support from the religious contingencies of his empire.

Asoka's inscriptions are presented in various forms, from major and minor rock and pillar edicts to cave and pillar inscriptions. These inscriptions were created throughout India<sup>57</sup> to ensure the *dharma* be made public and adhered to. *Dharma* in this sense constitutes an amalgamation of social duties that Asoka deemed essential for the maintenance of his empire and in reality represent aspects of tenets of the various sects within the empire, and not strictly a Buddhist interpretation, which has been carelessly attributed to him at times.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the king would have certainly had a hand in composing the drafts for the inscriptions, as evidenced by some personal touches,<sup>59</sup> however, the messages were edited by local officials who had to adjust for the local audiences.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> See Fig vi, Basham pg. 54 for a map of the edicts.

<sup>58</sup> Basham argues that Asoka was more practical in his approach in presenting policy. Basham pg. 56.

<sup>59</sup> Basham pg. 53

<sup>60</sup> Sherwin-White pg. 100

The king entrusted the *dharmamahamatra*<sup>61</sup> to carry out the policies of the inscriptions, which suggests that he considered a centralization of authority as a necessary adjustment in order to govern over India. This would fall in line with Thapar's assessment of the king in which he is more a pragmatic figure intent on extending his dominion and uniting the Indian lands, rather than a king primarily guided by religious fervor.<sup>62</sup> Concerns about temporal rule would inevitably involve religious adherents, and his attitude towards the various Indian sects shaped the portrayal of the king in the religious literature, primarily that of Buddhism, to suggest a he came to be motivated by notions of justice and proper performance of *dharma*.

Asoka may have personally been a Buddhist, and his later edicts suggest that he indeed held a strong personal relationship with the sect.<sup>63</sup> Still, this may instead suggest that later in life he became a personal adherent of the faith and that earlier on in his reign, whatever patronage Buddhism experienced from the Mauryan would have been a political matter. This is further evidenced by the rhetoric of his earlier edicts that describe an eclectic *dharma*, a composite of tenets of the various sects present in his domain. Traditionally he is stated to have converted after his conquest of Kalinga, which is incidentally the only conquest mentioned on any of his edicts.<sup>64</sup> While certainly a possibility, it is more likely that conversion for Asoka would have been in accordance with what conversion was for a lay Buddhist, i.e. adherence to the Buddhist way of life and performance of the *dharma*; for Asoka this would entail acting as *Cakravartin*, or

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<sup>61</sup> Lit. "Officers of Righteousness" who were tasked with maintaining the social policy, Basham pg. 56

<sup>62</sup> Thapar 1997, pg. 2; here Asoka is illustrated as a practical figure who recognized the necessity of support from the religious populations and their important role in maintaining social order and thus the apparent devotion to religion can be partly regarded as dualistic in that it served his religious and regnant needs.

<sup>63</sup> The inscription found on the Rummindei Pillar speaks of Asoka visiting the Buddha's birthplace and paying homage by freeing the village of Lumbini from taxes and lowering their rent to one-eighth the normal amount. D.C. Sirkar, *The Inscriptions of Asoka*, 1967. Pg 69 Pillar Inscription No. I

<sup>64</sup> Rock Edict XIII, Sirkar pp. 56-57



the wheel turner, a king who was to proliferate the religion and patronize the livelihood of the monks. In this regard Asoka was certainly a Buddhist king, as he fulfilled the requirements of the Buddhist interpretation of the *dharma* king, but conclusions about his personal adherence to the faith can only be made about his later life as it is then when he begins to personally associate himself with the religion.<sup>65</sup>

Missionary work further ties Asoka to Buddhism and the consequent depiction of him as a religious king. One tradition states that he sent his son, Mahinda, to what is the modern day island of Sri Lanka, as a monk with the orders to convert king Tissa. Tissa did become a convert and Mahinda was the monk who convinced the king, but the monk's ties to Asoka are suspect; some traditions portray him as a son, others as a brother.<sup>66</sup> Whatever the relation may have been between the two, there is certainly something to be gained by both parties if such an association were to be believed. The Buddhists would gain repute by being tied closely with a powerful king, and in turn Asoka would receive the support of a populous Buddhist community.<sup>67</sup>

This ties well into Asoka's methods for expansion which had initially hinged around military conquest but later evolved and centered on a cultural unity. He began to preach of a moral leadership at some point, and suggested that the empire be guided by moral principles as presented in the inscriptions.<sup>68</sup> His brand of imperialism thus became based around the idea of a

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<sup>65</sup> While Buddhist literature illustrates him as a faithful disciple from his conversion after Kalinga, this has to be criticized in that it is in the nature of the text to present the man as such. What we have to depend on, instead, is a combination of the Buddhist literature and the edicts that reflect Asoka's self-perception and nature as king.

<sup>66</sup> Basham pg. 57

<sup>67</sup> Other instances of missionary work can be found in Rock Edict XIII; in this case Asoka extended missionary work outside of his domain, supposedly reaching as far as the Mediterranean. Sircar pp. 56-60

<sup>68</sup> Basham suggests that instead of absolving imperial ambition, he instead shaped it to fit within the ethical frameworks of the various sects, Basham pp. 55-56

“victory of Righteousness”,<sup>69</sup> and the guidance provided by the *dharma*. What this entailed is the missionary work that is detailed in the traditions and inscriptions that has come to be widely regarded as proselytization of the Buddhist faith. While some truth lies within that explanation, it is more likely that Asoka’s main intent lie in achieving a sort of moral conquest over foreign land by virtue of culture and subsequently earning the alliance of its kings.

As such, Asoka seems to have been a king aligned with the pragmatism, exhibited by the Greco-Bactrians and Indo-Greeks rather than the religious monarch he is so commonly depicted as. In other words, his primary concern would have been the condition of his kingdom and the support that the Buddhists attracted from the local population. That is not to say that he did not have a high regard for Buddhism, for while it served his political purpose, it also certainly served his religious needs as well. Buddhism grew to become a dominant religion due to his contributions and efforts at the third council. The strong ties between Asoka and Buddhism exist for a reason and it would be inadequate to describe them solely as religious or political. Rather, for this king, the faith provided religious comfort as well as a medium for extending political power. His rule lasted for approximately 37 years until 232BCE and in this time he brought much of the Indian subcontinent under his control and made Buddhism, once a religion of a minority sect, a dominant and persistent presence within the Indian realm. Moreover, in the period between 200BCE-200CE, excavations have yielded a greater number of Buddhist religious remains than all the other sects combined.<sup>70</sup> This further shows the contribution to Buddhism that Asoka made, but at as we will come to see later, it was not his successors that

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<sup>69</sup> Basham pg. 57

<sup>70</sup> Basham pp. 255-256

permitted the religion to grow further, rather the patronage that it was to receive from other sources.

Following Asoka's death, the continuation of the Mauryan dynasty would be carried out by increasingly weaker kings who failed to keep the empire together.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, they weren't the great patrons of Buddhism that Asoka was, choosing instead to support other sects. The disintegration of the Maurya Empire occurred during this period and by the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the kingdom that can be referred to as the first truly Indian kingdom, had become a shell of its former self. This continued until c.183BCE when Pusyamitra Sunga, a general of Brihadratha's<sup>72</sup> army, assassinated the monarch, usurped the throne, and established the Brahmanic Sunga dynasty.<sup>73</sup> For Buddhism this entailed a prohibition of royal patronage as Pusyamitra was an ardent supporter of the Brahmanic culture. Buddhist scripture suggests that this began a period of persecution for the sect, however, much like other instances of Buddhist text, this seems to have been an exaggeration, and archaeological evidence suggests rather that the persecution didn't occur, simply that the patronage was no longer extended to the *Sangha*.<sup>74</sup>

What can be derived from the Buddhist text is the general mood of the times. Asoka's successors failed to support the religion in the same manner of the famed king, and as such, a natural deterioration of the reliquaries that housed the Buddha's remains would occur. This issue was further catalyzed by the emergence of a Brahmanic monarchy and their denial of direct support. Thus, the persecution can be interpreted as a failure to achieve the same royal support,

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<sup>71</sup> Thapar 1997 pg. 228

<sup>72</sup> Brihadratha was the last of the Mauryan kings.

<sup>73</sup> Basham pg. 58

<sup>74</sup> Thapar 1997 pg. 251; Pusyamitra is said to have destroyed the *stupas* built by Asoka but the evidence shows that the structures were not demolished but rather further built upon to enhance the size and detail.

which by extension, could lead to a deterioration of the sect. There is one issue with this interpretation, however, and it can be found in the aforementioned excavations that yielded a great number of Buddhist remains. If the persecution were to have occurred with the ascension of the Sunga, how then could Buddhism have still maintained such a great iconographic and literary legacy within the four hundred year period? The answer, and the argument of this study, I believe can be found in the emergence of the Greco-Bactrians and moreover in their Indo-Greek descendants. They served as a sort of Petri Dish that permitted Buddhism to sustain and later grow as a religion during a relatively weak period with regard to patronage. What the Indo-Greeks provided was protection and assimilation, not unlike what Asoka offered. As such, the Buddhists enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with the Bactrian Greeks; to clarify, this relationship wasn't born necessarily out of religious or philosophical interest,<sup>75</sup> but rather out of political necessity on the Greek side religious growth from the Buddhist angle.

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<sup>75</sup> As will be discussed in the next chapter, this may have played a part but it seems to be limited more to common Greek citizens rather than royalty.

## Hellenistic Precipitation and Buddhist Integration

A certain peculiarity troubled the construction of the Greco-Bactrian history at one point in the middle of the twentieth century; this peculiarity wasn't the evidence or a lack thereof, rather it was the clash of perspectives between its interpreters.<sup>1</sup> Narain's challenge of Tarn's work brought about the question of whose history was that of the Greeks in Bactria and India; did it belong to the Greco-Macedonians who had conquered as far as the Hindu Kush and brought about a foreign land under their control, or was it to be a history of a minor group of would-be conquerors on the fringes of a rapidly growing and immensely powerful kingdom? This debate of perspective never proved conclusive and the solution seemingly boils down to the answer that it was not necessarily exclusive to Greek or Indian history, rather it was a time that belonged to both periods, and to itself.<sup>2</sup>

The Bactrian Greeks have their own distinct place in the history of the lands of Central Asia, and they were greatly influenced by both their Greek roots as well as their Persian and Indian encounters. Bactria was home to a heterogeneous population that had grown out of trade routes formed through the region. Thus to Bactria the Greeks were, regardless of what personal perspective they held, another passing group filled with ambition and desire. We will see that their encounters shaped their identity and that what occurred was more akin to a cultural co-

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<sup>1</sup> Briefly covered before but for clarity's sake; By 1939 W.W. Tarn had written the *GBI* and constructed the first modern historical work about the Greco-Bactrians. In 1956, A.K. Narain wrote *The Indo-Greeks*, which challenged Tarn's work claiming that his bias towards the Greeks misshaped his interpretation of the evidence, leading him to evaluate this era as a period of Greek history rather than what it truly was, a part of Indian history.

<sup>2</sup> This is reflected in the works of more recent historians who have learned to bridge the gap of an isolated perspective and study the evidence, fittingly, in a cross-cultural manner. See Kouremenos; Holt; Sidky

habitation rather than an assimilation.<sup>3</sup> Some of the evidence emerges from sites that belongs to the Greco-Macedonians<sup>4</sup> while others, such as the city of Ai Khanoum, yield a story of two cultures permeating into one another and producing an eclectic blend. Still, at this point it would be almost ironic to fall into the mistake of only considering the evidence and its suggestions of the Greek life.

The cultural co-habitation that was occurring at this juncture was not limited to Bactria and the Greek experience. Further and into the heart of India, an ambitious up start began to lay the foundations for what could be called the first true Indian Empire, the Mauryan dynasty.<sup>5</sup> Chandragupta created a kingdom that through the efforts of his grandson Asoka would extend to cover most of the Indian subcontinent<sup>6</sup> and include a people so influenced by religion and social duty that distinctions could be made along intellectual lines just as readily as ethnic ones. What the Mauryans inherited was the product of the socio-intellectual revolution that occurred in the preceding centuries; the yield was the rise of various religious sects influenced by ascetic lifestyles and a disenchantment with the Brahmanic social norms. The sects necessarily grew in constant contact with one another, and this ultimately shaped their respective lifestyles. In this regard, the experience of the Indians was not unlike that of the Greeks moving towards the Pacific; thus Greco-Bactrian kings and Mauryan monarchs were both supervisor and witness to a process of cultural diffusion and uptake.

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<sup>3</sup> The term hybridization is offered by the various authors in *From Pella to Gandhara*; however, the term is considered to be troublesome at times in describing events as they occurred. See Rachel Wood's discussion on the models of cultural interaction, pg. 142.

<sup>4</sup> The site at Takht-i-Sangin, a temple on the Oxus, is dated to the Greek settlement period and has provided an immense amount of archeological findings. Kouremenos pg. 143

<sup>5</sup> The tale of Chandragupta's rise to power is detailed in the previous chapter.

<sup>6</sup> See Fig. vi. Basham pg. 54

The archaeological and literary evidence, as well as the numismatic evidence, all provide a basis for contact between the groups. They show that, indeed Greeks and the native groups did come into contact and did have some sort of cultural discourse and meshing. Furthermore, the remains elucidate on how different cultural agents were able to converge on common ground and produce new forms of cultural thought and practice. In a simpler regard, the remains show what people were prevalent and the expressions they associated themselves with; in the period between Mauryan emergence and Menander's last breath, evidence suggests that the prevalent groups were the Bactrian Greeks and the Mauryan subjects.

The identity of the Greeks is embodied in Hellenism; for the subjects of the Maurya, however, identification is somewhat more nuanced.<sup>7</sup> For the Indians under the Mauryans identification was associated with class and social status, and, by inseparable extension, religion. The Vedic traditions that shaped the distinctions of class and social status were challenged and consequently produced the heterodox movements that formed into the Buddhist and Jain religious movements. These nascent religions left an imprint on society as much as the individuals who adhered to them. It is with these movements that people began to associate with, and thus will fittingly serve as the basis of distinction here.

If presence be a measure of prevalence, then Buddhism was prime amongst the sects that arose. The religion developed a strong following based around the transmission of an enlightened being's teachings. Moreover, the Buddha's teachings were instructive in a socially normative manner and deeply impacted the actions of its adherents. The religion gradually became a strong

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<sup>7</sup> That is not to say Hellenism isn't a complex cultural system with its own nuances, but rather it is a sufficient description to associate with Greeks in foreign lands. Tenets of the construct have been discussed in the chapter about Greco-Bactrians and Indo-Greeks.

presence and certainly enjoyed patronage under Asoka, the greatest of the Mauryan kings, which propelled it to greater renown. This royal support would inevitably dwindle and come to an end with the rise of the Sunga Empire that adhered to the Brahmanic teachings. Still, Buddhism was not to fade, instead, the religion persisted in an environment that entailed cooperation and co-habitation. What permitted the religion to thrive for so long, aside from the aforementioned royal patronage, was the support it received from the lower classes of society as well as its artistic traditions that spread the symbols, and by extension the messages, of the religion.<sup>8</sup>

The Buddhists inevitably came into contact with the Greeks. Evidence of Greco-Buddhist motifs are present in the excavations from Ai-Khanoum and the bi-lingual coinage of the Indo-Greek kings. Inscriptions in caves,<sup>9</sup> appearance of Greek names in Indian literature, and the *Malindapanha* provide even more proof of contact between the two groups. Still, a recognition of contact, while important, does not provide enough understanding of the nature of their relationship. Beyond the mutual acceptance and intake of another's culture are the political and social ramifications, as well as the maintenance of solidarity. In other words, the discourse between the Greeks and Buddhists had a profound influence on the maintenance of kingdom and the continuation of a religion. The Buddhist population was a convenient source of support for the Indo-Greeks as the Buddhists helped draw the necessary factors that permitted a cohesion about the kingdom. The patronage that Buddhism received in kind would ensure its survival amidst a period of rising Brahmanic influence.

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<sup>8</sup> The royal patronage of Asoka and the support from the *shudra* and *vaishya* have been considered in the second chapter; the artistic traditions of Buddhism and Greco-Buddhist art will be examined here.

<sup>9</sup> Tarn pg. 254; this evidence will be examined shortly.



The nature of Greco-Buddhist interaction, with regard to intent and outcome, is embodied in the evidence of their communication. Tarn speaks of cave inscriptions by Buddhist donors who identify themselves as *Yavana*,<sup>10</sup> located throughout parts of India.<sup>11</sup> Based on the use of Indian names, Tarn rules out the possibility of them being so called cultural Greeks and identifies them rather as members of a Greek *polis*. This idea is further validated by one of the donors who refers to himself as *dhammayavana*,<sup>12</sup> which suggests the native origin of the donor due to the use of native rendition of the term for Greek. Tarn's evaluation, however, is somewhat suspect, although not necessarily incorrect. His basis for the Indian origin of the donors and their status as citizens of a *polis* centers on precedence and bias. He suggests that Greeks took no Asiatic and that this was natural as the conqueror would project his nomenclature upon the conquered.<sup>13</sup> Under such circumstances, Tarn's argument would hold, however, the Indo-Greeks were not the conquerors Tarn makes of them and there is a possibility that Greeks did indeed convert to the religion and take on native names, presumably associated with Buddhism.<sup>14</sup> Whatever the veracity of Tarn's claims, the evidence goes to show that the two cultures coincided in distinct ways and led to peculiar displays of social habit and manner.

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<sup>10</sup> The Sanskrit term for Greek. This term occurs widely in Indian literature, sometimes as its Pali counterpart, *Yona*. See: Rock Edict XIII in reference to *Yavana* king Antiyoka (Antiochus), Sircar pg. 58

<sup>11</sup> Tarn pg. 254

<sup>12</sup> Tarn pg. 256; The term can roughly be interpreted as filling out the duties of a *yavana*. Dharma, as discussed in the previous chapter, was not merely a philosophical measure, but more so a social duty based on philosophical principles. Thus the term can be understood as one who is carrying out the *dharma* of a Greek, i.e. the member of a *polis*.

<sup>13</sup> Tarn pg. 255; he does include one instance of a Greek taking an Asiatic name but describes it as dubious.

<sup>14</sup> Asoka's inscriptions on Rock Edict XIII speak of his conversions of Greeks to Buddhism; Ch. 12 of the *Mahavamsa* mentions monks leading Greek Buddhists.

These inscriptions portray an expression of the Buddhist tenet of *dana*<sup>15</sup> and the duties of a Greek citizen, or at least one interpretation of it. These acts of duty show that the social interests sometimes coincided and furthered the same goal. Moreover, the inscriptions show that identification between the two groups did not necessarily occur superficially and that some deeper understanding of one another's concepts was achieved. What could have prompted such a relationship to develop can be explained in a few ways: Tarn reasonably suggests that some low class Greeks would inevitably, "go native" and adopt a religion that lessened such social burdens;<sup>16</sup> comparisons of Buddhist and Greek philosophies yield an astounding amount of similarities between the two, possibly an aspect that permitted a nascent dialogue.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, when Chandragupta gained lands upon the peace treaty with Seleucus I, the Greek communities of those lands maintained,<sup>18</sup> which suggests that the Greeks, when not the dominant political group, had found a way to reconcile any differences with the natives and co-exist.

The preceding details indicate that there were instances of a Greco-Buddhist culture, but this is hardly conclusive enough to suggest whether or not Buddhism maintained a popular stronghold amongst the Greek communities.<sup>19</sup> Short of future archeological evidence, making conclusions based on the popular appeal of Buddhism would be speculative, and as such I must

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<sup>15</sup> *Dana*, roughly meaning gift giving, has its origins in Vedic traditions, however, it carried on to Buddhism and became an important aspect of the layperson-monastic relationship. Thapar 2002 pg. 119

<sup>16</sup> Tarn pg. 255; this can be certainly evaluated as one of many but not necessarily the prime reasons. Buddhism attracted the lowly *shudra* class and the *vaishya* who were considered within the group of the *kshatriya* and *brahmin*, but in practical terms received little of their benefits.

<sup>17</sup> Extensive comparative work on Buddhist and Greek philosophies has been done by Thomas McEvelley and is presented in *The Shape of Ancient Thought*.

<sup>18</sup> Sidky pg. 131

<sup>19</sup> That is to say, that nothing would indicate Buddhism was the prime means of philosophical and religious discourse in Greek communities.

turn to other possibilities as to why the Greeks and Buddhists would have found an attraction in one another.

With this in mind, it is beneficial to consider the goals of the respective groups in deriving the links between the two. The Greco-Macedonians were an ambitious people who continued Alexander's legacy of conquest, if not for his cultural dreams, then certainly for the power that came along with kingship. The Buddhists represented a counter-movement that sought to spread its message to all beings in hopes that enlightenment may be extended to all. The Buddhists, however, were a pacifist group and could not be employed on the battlefields; their lifestyles also placed them on the peripheries of towns as non-laborers. As such, they were of no use to the war effort or the maintenance of food supplies. From the Buddhist perspective, the Greco-Macedonians would have been warriors seeking to conquer and consolidate lands, not unlike the dynasties that preceded and succeeded the Maurya. So then, of what benefit could another monarchy prioritized around conquest be to this religion, and vice-a-versa? The answer lies in the inherent traditions of the two cultures and how these aspects properly came into play to support, not only their respective progressions towards their goals, but also the development of a Greco-Buddhist identity.

As discussed in the chapter on the Bactrian Greeks, the maintenance of the Greco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek kingdoms depended on support from the natives.<sup>20</sup> They served as the labor force and at times were recruited to support the Greek campaigns. Despite the heavy influence of religion on the natives, the majority of people still maintained an agricultural lifestyle, and those who were Buddhists served the role of the lay Buddhist. Only a small portion

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<sup>20</sup> For more, specifically on Menander, see Tarn pp. 259-269

of monks would have resided in these cities, and they would have been on the outskirts, in the *vihara* near the *caitya*.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, their presence was crucial as upsetting the monastic order would ripple into discord amongst the lay community. Beyond the scope of Buddhism, the Greeks would have to employ caution with whatever group they met, as religion was always a defining aspect of the native Bactrians and Indians. The Greco-Macedonians did manage to find the balance, however, and this can be attributed to particular consideration for religion embodied in the ideals and practice of Hellenism, i.e. that religion be a personal matter and devotion be carried out by the will of the individual.<sup>22</sup>

In a sense, so long as Buddhists were not actively inhibiting the expansion efforts, their presence would be permitted. The relationship did not end here, however, and the Buddhists were indeed a positive entity for the Greco-Bactrians and Indo-Greeks. They served as a conduit to the native lay Buddhist population, among whom belonged primarily those of the *shudra* and *vaishya* castes. The *shudra* were the laborers of the caste system, meant to serve all the classes above them;<sup>23</sup> the *vaishya* were the cattle herders and merchants. Their importance is evident as they performed the most common and necessary of social duties<sup>24</sup> required for the upkeep of a far-spanning kingdom. As such, the Buddhist presence was a convenience, in that it permitted a wide scale diffusion of positive sentiment for a monarch through the prism of monastic support.

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<sup>21</sup> The nature and context of the *vihara* and *caitya* have been discussed in the previous chapter. *Vihara* were the Buddhist monasteries; the *caitya* were secluded places of worship that Buddhists incorporated into their practice.

<sup>22</sup> One of the peculiarities of Hellenism was that a Greek was not necessarily bound to religious duties and treatment of the matter occurred on a personal basis; this is beside duties required by the *polis*, which indicates a political nature, Tarn pg. 256

<sup>23</sup> Basham pg. 139

<sup>24</sup> Their counterparts, the *brahmin*, priests who perform and transmit the Vedic traditions, and the *kshatriya*, essentially the warrior class tasked with military service, were considered to be of higher *varna*, social status, and thus enjoyed a greater social standing despite the disputable importance of their work.

Buddhist support also provided an economic incentive for the Bactrian Greeks. The cost to upkeep an army was immense and consistent resources were necessary; this burden proved to be especially detrimental to Eucratides who constantly campaigned to keep his hold over the Greco-Bactrian kingdom.<sup>25</sup> Troops were primarily paid with coins, and the various coin hoards located at Ai-Khanoum<sup>26</sup> as well as other sites in Bactria, show not only that the efficacy and output of the Bactrian mints, but also of the circulation of coins and its importance to the kingdom. The Buddhist role in this stems from the attractive prospects Buddhism offered to the merchant. Merchants were one of the crucial agents of economic growth during this time; their trade took them to various locations and dealt with several businesses. Consequently, they were profoundly responsible for the circulation of coinage, which kings needed to occur in their towns in order to provide for the army.<sup>27</sup> Through the conventions of Buddhism, the merchant could gain social standing and earn good merit. His donations to the *Sangha*, the monastic Buddhist community, was considered good *karma*<sup>28</sup> and notices of contributions were made public via inscriptions on *stupa*.<sup>29</sup> The merchant thus served the interest of various parties, including his own, through his trade, and became an important link in constructing a positive<sup>30</sup> relationship between Buddhism and the Greek kingdoms.

These factors at hand, the political interest in Buddhism for the Bactrian Greeks becomes evident. This leaves Buddhist motivations open for interpretation, as an inter-dependent

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<sup>25</sup> This is detailed in the chapter about the Greco-Bactrians.

<sup>26</sup> Sidky pg. 135

<sup>27</sup> Minting more coins wasn't always easy as material was scarce, and debasing the coins was an impractical solution.

<sup>28</sup> The Buddhist distinction of *karma* and its values has been addressed in the previous chapter.

<sup>29</sup> Basham pg. 266

<sup>30</sup> Positive in that their relationship was helpful to both parties.

relationship requires proper effort from all parties. That is to say, we can begin to question what the Buddhists would gain by cooperating with the Greeks. It may suffice it to say that the Buddhists weren't actively cooperating with the Greeks, and that any positive interaction is a result of the Buddhist view of the world.<sup>31</sup> This would suggest that the Buddhists would view the Greco-Macedonians as another kingdom due to fall in time; in turn they would do their best to convert the people so that they may break out of the cycle. This view is too simplistic, however, and while some truth may exist there, far more practical reasons can be traced to indicate that Buddhists were aware of the nuances of Hellenism and its potency.

Certain aspects of Hellenism coincide with catalysts responsible for Buddhism's growth, they are: the value of artistic expression and the role of the king as a leader. Buddhism long depended on *stupa* carvings to symbolize the teachings of the Buddha, and its history of royal patronage dates back to Bimbisara of Maghada. Definite conclusions of a grass-roots conversion of the Greek communities to Buddhism may allude us, however, in terms of artistic blending and royal patronage, the Greeks were to be great proprietors of both for the Buddhists. The period between Seleucid control of Bactria and the fall of the Maurya yields little beyond Asoka's declarations in terms of evidence for a Greco-Buddhist interaction.<sup>32</sup> Some pottery and carvings of course exist and will be subject to evaluation, however, the frequency and depth of Greco-Buddhist interaction seemed to grow most with the decline and eventual fall of the Maurya and

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<sup>31</sup> The Buddhist view of the world is embodied in the First Noble Truth of Buddhist doctrine, it follows that: life is *dukkha* (unsatisfactory), all is subject to *anitya* (impermanence), *anatta* (no permanent self) holds true, that no *brahman* (cosmic essence), or *atman* (the manifestation of Brahman) exist, and that human beings are made of the five *skhandas* or aggregates. Clothey pp. 42-43

<sup>32</sup> Of course during this time, c.250 BCE, the third council is said to have happened, thus it was a progressive time for Buddhism, just not necessarily Greco-Buddhist relations and identity.

the subsequent rise of the Sunga. Furthermore, the ascension of Menander I became a defining moment as in his Indian tradition, Milinda becomes a great king and patron to Buddhism.

Returning to the coinage, it would be fruitful to view the evidence from a Buddhist perspective. Coins, primarily an economic convenience, also served as a medium for art form and expression, including politics and religion. The brief survey of Greco-Bactrian numismatics in the chapter about the Bactrian Greeks shows that the first evidence of a bilingual coinage comes from Eucratides. Bactrian kings before him associated themselves with India in a more dissociative manner; the elephant scalp on Demetrius' coins, for instance suggest a conquest rather than the assimilation implied by the bilingual coins of Eucratides. These coins, however, are not associated with Buddhism and merely link the Greco-Bactrian kings to India in some fashion. It is with Menander's coins and those commissioned by his successors that the shift to an increasingly Buddhist audience becomes apparent.

Consider, for instance, the silver tetradrachm attributed to the beginning of Menander's reign, which bears him, striding with spear in hand on the obverse side, and Athena with thunderbolt and shield in either hand.<sup>33</sup> The monogram reads, *Basileos Soteris Menandroy*, of the Savior King Menander, which remains a consistency throughout his coinage; its relevance will be discussed shortly. This coin, however, represents the minority of Menander's depictions and the majority of his coins grow ever closer to the Indian standards, straying away from the Attic standards of coinage.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the succeeding coinage include the monogram, *maharajasa tratarasa menamdrasa*, a kharosthi transliteration of the aforementioned Greek

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<sup>33</sup> See *Fig. I*.

<sup>34</sup> Standards refers to the casting, shape, purity, themes, etc. Essentially the aspects of a coin that are noticeable to the carrier.

monogram.<sup>35</sup> This theme became a mainstay not only in Menander's coins, but also those of his successors. They continued the progression towards an increasingly Indo-Greek audience, indicating their Hellenistic qualities with Greek monogram and traditional profile depictions on the obverse side, and highlighting their Indian aspects with kharosthi script on the reverse.

While not much can be stated about the history of the Indo-Greek kings, the numismatic evidence does present a few noteworthy points. The development of increasingly Indian themes show that their identification was heavily associated with Menander, and that they at the very least took on the appearance of an Indo-Greek king who presided over a heterogeneous community.<sup>36</sup> The bilingual script, if nothing else, is evidence enough of a multi-linguistic community, thus showing that even into the latter stages of their rule, the Indo-Greeks aligned themselves with Indian tradition and identity. What's of even more particular remark is the depictions of Greek deities gesturing the *vitarka mudra*<sup>37</sup> with their hands on the reverse sides of some of these coins.<sup>38</sup>

This distinctly Buddhist gesture signifies that Menander's successors did indeed associate themselves with Buddhism. The sign indicates a transmission of the Buddha's teachings, however, it could also be interpreted to mean that they are indeed acting as *dharmaraja*<sup>39</sup> and furthermore that they are recipients not only of the Buddha's teachings, but also that of the

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<sup>35</sup> See *Fig. II*

<sup>36</sup> Not all coins were exclusively bilingual, but a quick peruse through Mitchiner Vol 3, *The Decline of the Indo-Greeks*, shows the Indian influence.

<sup>37</sup> The *vitarka mudra*, is a hand gesture specific to Buddhism to signify the transmission of the Buddha's teachings. *Mudras* are hand gestures that appear in various instances of Vedic culture.

<sup>38</sup> There are many types depicting this phenomenon; Types 420,422 of Harmaeus, Type 386 of Amyntas; these are but a few. Mitchiner Vol. III

<sup>39</sup> The king who completes his duties; it bears a distinctly Indian connotation and has been discussed in the previous chapter.



*Cakravartin*<sup>40</sup> *Milinda*. Milinda is of course Menander and the idea of him as *Cakravartin* is backed by Tarn<sup>41</sup> based on the interpretation of a bronze coin bearing an eight-spoke wheel on one side and a palm-branch on the other.<sup>42</sup> The intention here is unclear as the coin is a sort of anomaly within the larger collection of Menander's coins; however, what this coin, and those aforementioned belonging to his successors, do show is a close relationship with Buddhism. Whether this be a matter of personal conversion or ostensible devotion cannot be known as numismatic art entailed a sense of propaganda. What can be known though is that during this time, the Buddhists did receive some degree of royal patronage from the Indo-Greeks, and if numismatic evidence not be enough, I turn to the literature.

The *Milindapanha*<sup>43</sup> represents the best non-numismatic ties between Menander and the Buddhists. This piece of Buddhist literature also provides the basis for understanding a good deal about Menander, not necessarily with regard for historical accuracy, but indeed with attention to the Buddhist perception of the king before and after the famed conversion.<sup>44</sup> The dialectic style in which the discussion is carried out hints at a possible familiarity between author and Greek rhetoric. The original text is said to have been written in kharosthi, the script utilized in Sanskrit and the Gandharan language; the original copy is lost and the modern English translations are

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<sup>40</sup> Essentially a great king in Buddhist literature; Asoka was also considered to be one.

<sup>41</sup> Tarn pg. 263; Tarn suggests that the palm-branch, a Greek sign of victory, has nothing to do with the wheel in the sense of the monastic Buddhist *dharma* and rather it is that of the *Cakravartin*, an exalted king who patronizes Buddhism.

<sup>42</sup> See *Fig. III*

<sup>43</sup> The Questions of King Milinda; it is essentially a discussion between King Menander and the monk Nagasena, in which the monk visits the king and begins a discourse with the king concerning Buddhism. The story goes that through various examples, the most frequently referenced being that of the chariot, the monk succeeds in converting the king and so began the patronage of the Buddhists by Milinda's hand. T.W. Rhys Davids, *The Questions of King Milinda*. 1963

<sup>44</sup> Exaggerations are prominent in Buddhist literature, as we have seen in the last chapter; however, the details contained within do express some reflection of reality, as to the degree, it would be hard to tell.

based on translations of the Pali version. Thus, at the very least, the language it was composed in suggests it wasn't necessarily meant for a Greek audience. Furthermore, one of the key facets of Greek identity being language, it would seem unreasonable for the author to present it in a foreign language to that of his audience. The dialectic style may indicate a certain Hellenic influence, but this style is not necessarily a Greek one; the Buddha is known to have taught his students through questions and examples, and as such, this style could reflect an adherence to that Buddhist style.

With the assumption that the text be intended for a Buddhist audience,<sup>45</sup> further conclusions can be drawn about its message. Regardless of its historicity,<sup>46</sup> the text does present a positive perspective of the Greek king who had been convinced about the virtues of the Buddhist *dharma*. We cannot know if Menander was truly a convert, and the story was composed at a later time which renders it prone to corruption; still there is something to be said about the emergence of an artificial link between the Buddhists and Menander. Why, when other kings would suffice, was Menander chosen to fill the role of the king to be converted? The answer here can probably be found in the Sunga Empire.

With the fall of the Maurya and the consequent rise of the Sunga, the Brahmanic traditions regained primacy in Indian society. Although Asoka's successors weren't necessarily friendly towards Buddhism-some even outwardly favored other sects-the connection between the

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<sup>45</sup> This is a fairly safe assumption to make for reasons other than the language it was written in; certain themes about Indian society appear consistently throughout the book, such as the reconciliation of the Buddha belonging to two castes Davids pp. 25-30; inclusion of such factors would assume the audience's awareness of the topic.

<sup>46</sup> The story states that Milinda retires from royal life and abdicates his throne to his son. Davids pp. 372-375; this however, is a dramatization and follows the theme of the converted king retiring from royal life and entering a religious order. Jain tradition holds a similar story for Chandragupta Maurya.

dynasty and Buddhism had been forged upon Asoka's patronage<sup>47</sup> and the Buddhists would have associated Mauryan kings with Asoka. The Sunga, however, did not provide a continuation of patronage, and although Buddhist accounts of persecution have been exaggerated, they certainly did not benefit from Pusyamitra's ascendancy. For a time, the religious tolerance advanced by Asoka, with Buddhism enjoying primacy amongst equals, was revoked under the Sunga and Brahmanism was restored. This was to last until Menander would later take control of these lands<sup>48</sup> and restore the religious norms experienced under Asoka.

Thus a connection between Menander and Asoka forms. The Buddhists would have welcomed this Indo-Greek ruler who, for his own practical and political reasons, permits the freedom of personal worship. As discussed before, Greeks benefited to no degree from the persecution of Buddhists, and in fact prospered with their help. As such, Menander would have been seen as a sort of spiritual heir to Asoka, as one who regained Mauryan lands through conquest over an unjust usurper and reestablished the religious freedoms experienced at the zenith of Mauryan power. This all considered, there's a degree of logic to the inclusion of Menander in the Buddhist literature; he represented a progression of the Mauryan line in terms of governance, as both Asoka and Menander were welcoming of the variety present in their land. Above all they were pragmatic men who sought to consolidate a powerful and long-lasting empire, however, from the Buddhist perspective, this pragmatism played out as a form of royal patronage as it permitted the free practice, and subsequent growth, of the religion, which served the ultimate goal religious adherents.

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<sup>47</sup> This is embodied in the *dharma* present in Asoka's edicts, which while not exclusively Buddhist, is certainly influenced by it. His traditional involvement at the third council at Pataliputra is another indication of patronage.

<sup>48</sup> That is of parts of the Indus Valley and Ganges Plains, with expeditions ranging out as far as Pataliputra.

Artistic expression<sup>49</sup> beyond the numismatics also played an essential role in the Greco-Buddhist interaction. Excavations from Takht-i-Sangin, a temple located about the Oxus River, yield evidence of a blending of Hellenistic art and that of the natives.<sup>50</sup> Hellenistic styles and themes were introduced to a local population that employed their own techniques in constructing the nascent Indo-Greek art style.<sup>51</sup> This served as the essential pre-cursor for the formation of a Greco-Buddhist art style that in time would develop and incorporate themes and character from the Buddhist realm as well as the Greek world. What is peculiar is that the emergence of Greco-Buddhist art seems to have come sometime c. 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE and onward for the next several centuries.<sup>52</sup> Within the timespan of this study, it seems that, short of any new archaeological evidence, the Greco-Buddhist art form was only to see its infancy, as embodied in the Gandharan trays that use local material and depict scenes derived from the iconography of Greeks, Romans, Indians, Iranians and Scythians.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, the anthropomorphic representation of the Buddha was not to occur until later and as such, the indications of a Greco-Buddhist art has to be derived from faint references, such as the *mudra* of the Indo-Greek coins. The archaeological evidence has yielded a great amount of Buddhist religious remains in the period between c.200BCE-c.200CE,<sup>54</sup> which would suggest that these first steps towards a Greco-Buddhist

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<sup>49</sup> The importance of arts in the continuation of Buddhism can be further evaluated upon the symbolic nature of Buddhist doctrine, in which the teachings are constantly presented as similes and metaphors meant to illustrate an underlying abstraction. Art thus provides a medium for the expression and intake of the symbols so important to Buddhism.

<sup>50</sup> Kouremenos pg. 141

<sup>51</sup> Kouremenos pg. 144

<sup>52</sup> Examples include variant portrayals of Heracles, Dionysus, and others; Kouremenos Fig. 16 pg. 162, Fig. 21 pg. 164. Jessie Pons provides a fairly succinct discussion on the evolution of various motifs in the Greco-Buddhist art realm, Kouremenos pp. 153-170.

<sup>53</sup> Kouremenos pg. 154

<sup>54</sup> Basham pp. 265-266

hybrid, fostered by mutual cultural growth, were essential in creating a new artistic expression and also responsible for the continuation of the Buddhist *Sangha*.

## Conclusion

Based upon evaluation of the literary sources, academic works, numismatic evidence and presence of the infant stages of a Greco-Buddhist stages, I thus come to the following conclusion about the impact of Greco-Macedonian colonization on the development of Buddhism. The Greek settlement of the area provided a cultural and military force that was resilient enough to maintain a consistent presence for a period of about four centuries, and in this time, their contact with the Buddhist population fostered a new form of cultural expression, formalized in the Greco-Buddhist art; more importantly for the Buddhist order, however, is that the Greeks provided a platform on which the religion could grow.

The relationship was complex; for the Greeks it was essentially a political affair that permitted economic growth drawn in by the monastics as well as support from cohesive groups of native populations bound together by a common religion. Furthermore, the religion and its adherents did not present an active threat to the Greek kingdoms, and persecution would have been a harmful path of action; even without the benefits of permitting Buddhist practice, persecution would have been costly and senseless as the religious group was never an obstacle for their expansion efforts. Religion was a private affair in the Hellenistic realm and as such, as long as the Buddhists remained focused on their religious goals and drew in merchants and support from locals, the Greeks would simply not have cared about the religious orientation of their counterparts.

Buddhism had grown as a heterodox movement in a political environment that, between the span of King Bimbisara and Chandragupta's Mauryan kingdom, shifted control between various dynasties. From the Buddhist aspect, the Greco-Bactrians and especially their Indo-Greek descendants, were another coalition of ambitious warriors seeking to establish an empire and solidify their legacies. What set them apart, however, was that they provided institutions reminiscent of that great Mauryan, Asoka, specifically with regard to religious tolerance. Furthermore, under Menander and his descendants, of whom little can otherwise be said, a tradition of royal patronage towards Buddhism began. Support from the monarch had historically contributed to Buddhism's success, and receiving state sponsorship from the Indo-Greeks proved to be a boon for the religion that, despite various schisms and divergent branches of schools, maintained a fairly composed and consistent identity. The archaeological remains also validate this view of a growing Buddhist community; various examples of Buddhist art, architecture in the form of *stupas*, and cultural blending present in the expression of Greco-Buddhist motifs and styles all exemplify this point.

Despite the resurgence of the Brahmanic traditions, the Buddhist order continued to grow and would eventually make its way out north and northeast, and develop into other schools, which came to be known as the turning of the wheel. The Greco-Macedonian contribution here came at the crucial point of Indian history c.180BCE when the Sunga arose. The Indo-Greeks at this time served as a sort of Petri Dish that allowed the Buddhist order and culture to persist by providing the essentials, i.e. royal patronage and artistic expression, necessary for growth while also providing protection from possible threats present within Indian lands and outside tribes. As a result, the Buddhist faith grew and evolved to unprecedented lengths. Thus, the Greco-

Macedonian contribution to the development of Buddhism can be evaluated as permissive of geographical growth born out of a necessary relationship, rather than a philosophical or actively proselytic contribution.



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