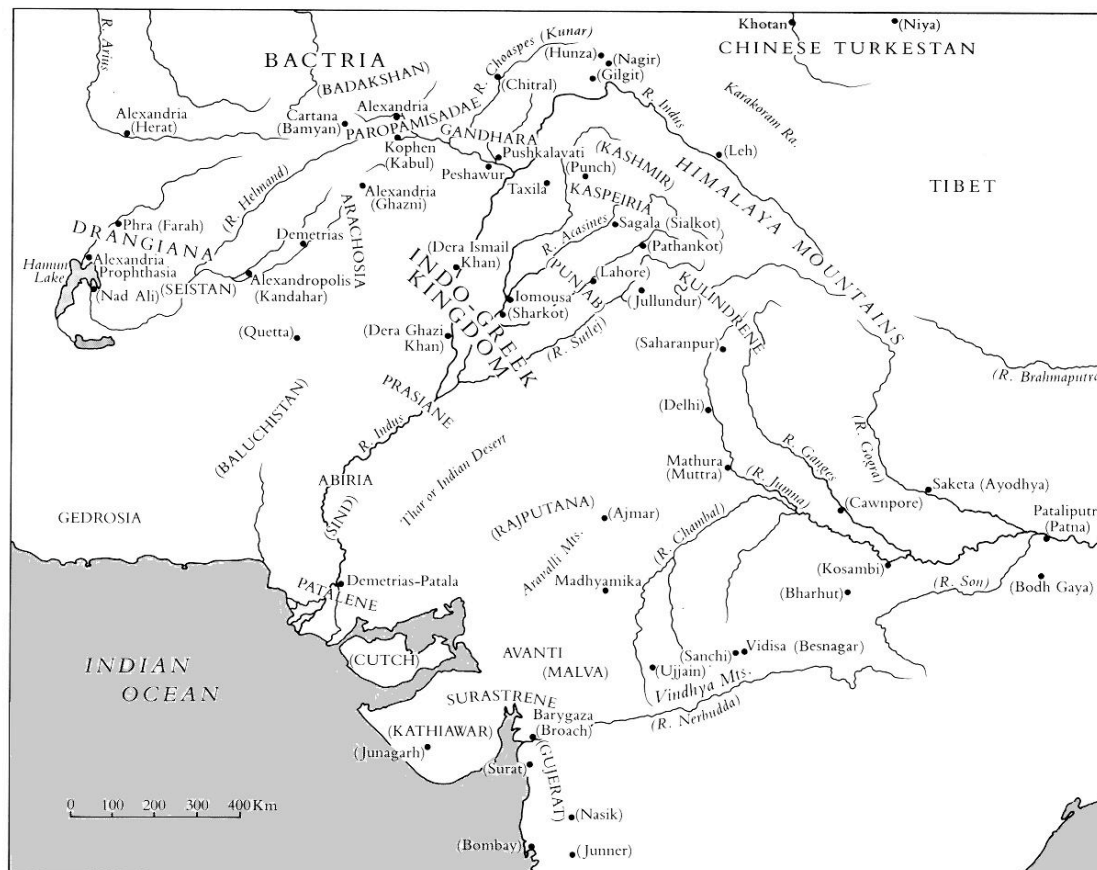


The Archaeology of Central Asia, c. 500 BC – AD 200: Alexander in Afghanistan and Buddhas in Bactria

Instructor: Dr. Rachel Mairs

Course Description

Central Asia, which has in the past tended to be regarded as a frontier region of the worlds of the Mediterranean, Near East, India and the Eurasian steppe, is increasingly coming to be studied as a cultural and political entity in its own right. In the period from the latter half of the first millennium BC to the early centuries of the common era it was an especially dynamic zone of cultural interaction. Politically, the territories of modern Afghanistan and the former-Soviet Central Asian Republics (and in particular Bactria, the basin of the upper river Oxus), became part of the Achaemenid Persian Empire, were then conquered by Alexander the Great, and subsequently became the centre of two powerful local states: under dynasties of Greek-named kings, descended from Alexander's military settlers, and then the Kushan Empire, founded by the descendants of later immigrants from the north. There is a rich archaeological and historical record available from this period, much of which has only relatively recently become accessible to scholars.



Course Requirements

Map quizzes (5%); papers, 4-5 pages (40%); review of the TV documentary 'The Forgotten Alexandria' (15%); extended essay and in-class presentation (40%). Students are encouraged to find a topic for the extended essay which relates to any previous courses they may have taken on regions which interacted with Central Asia, or which bear on common theoretical and methodological issues.

Weekly Schedule

1. Historical Overview and the Sources

For the purposes of this course, 'Central Asia' comprises the territory from the valleys of the Amu-darya and Syr-darya in the north, down to Gandhara, the hill country around modern Peshawar, in the south-east. Parthia and the Iranian Plateau form its western boundaries. From c. 500 BC to the mid-third century AD, all or part of this region came under the control of the empires of Achaemenid Persia, Alexander the Great and his Hellenistic Successor kings, Mauryan India and the Kushans. These initial lectures, and a film showing, give an overview of the history of Central Asia in this period; some lectures in subsequent weeks will focus on particular periods within this (the third century BC, the early second century AD).

An introduction will also be given to the archaeological material from the region and its many problems; the relevant Classical Greek, Roman, Chinese and Indian histories; and inscriptions and documentary texts (Aramaic, Greek, Bactrian, Prakrit). (All sources will be studied in translation.)

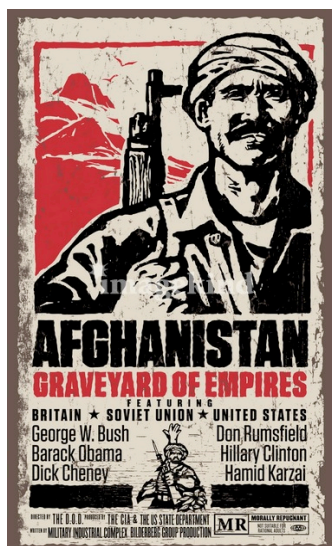
2. Alexander the Great

An overview of Alexander the Great's campaigns in Central Asia and India, and the early Graeco-Macedonian settlement of Bactria and adjacent regions. Alexander faced a hostile terrain, climate and population, and mutiny among his own troops. Upon the false rumour that he had been killed in India, the settlers he had left to pacify Bactria immediately revolted and attempted to return to Greece. There have been numerous modern attempts to trace Alexander's route and identify sites (especially 'Alexandrias') mentioned in historical accounts of his campaigns. Alexander's Central Asian and Indian adventures have also frequently been represented in modern cinema and fiction.



3. How not to invade Afghanistan: Lessons from Cyrus the Great, Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, the Russians, the British and the Americans (among others).

In a 1962 debate in the British House of Lords on American policy in Vietnam, Field Marshal Montgomery, veteran commander of the WWII Allied campaigns in North Africa, declared: "The US has broken the second rule of war. That is, don't go fighting with your land army on the mainland of Asia. Rule One is don't march on Moscow. I developed these two rules myself."



Do the mountains of the Hindu Kush and vast deserts of Central Asia make what is now Afghanistan effectively unconquerable by a major land army? In addition to the strategic mistakes and supply-train failures of invaders of Afghanistan through the ages, these classes will explore what effective strategies of control have been put in place by external powers: including military settlements (and their tribulations) in the period after Alexander; utter destruction by Genghis Khan (archaeologically attested throughout the region); the decision of the Russian and British Empires to establish and define

the borders of the modern state of Afghanistan as a buffer; and war by proxy in the complex relationships between the United States, the Soviet Union, Pakistan and the Taliban.

4. The Two Sides of the Coin

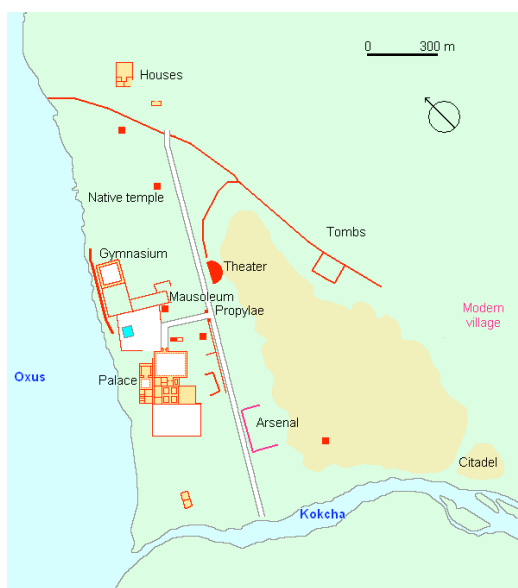
Until the archaeological discoveries of the second half of the twentieth century, histories of the Graeco-Bactrian, Indo-Greek and Kushan kingdoms were written almost exclusively on the basis of their coinage (see e.g. W.W. Tarn *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, 2nd ed. 1951; A. K. Narain, *The Indo-Greeks*, 1957). Following the Graeco-Bactrian military expansion into north-west India, some kings began to mint coins with a Greek legend on one side and Indian one on the other. How far can these coins help us to reconstruct the dynastic history of Hellenistic and Kushan Central Asia and North-West India, and to what extent do the ‘two sides’ of Indo-Greek coins reflect a real social and cultural opposition of Greek and Indian identities?



5. The Third Century BC

At the end of the fourth century BC, Sogdiana, Bactria, Arachosia and north-western India – all formerly (nominally) provinces of the Persian Empire - were ‘conquered’ and settled with Greek garrisons by Alexander the Great. Fifty years or so later, an independent Graeco-Bactrian state under a local Greek dynasty controlled the territories north of the Hindu Kush, and lands to the south and east were part of the Indian Mauryan Empire. Towards the end of the third century, the Seleucid king Antiochos III attempted – and failed – to bring Bactria back into the Seleucid Empire. The young Graeco-Bactrian prince, Demetrios, who was part of the party sent to negotiate with Antiochos went on to invade India, possibly as far as the Ganges valley. This session will examine how the changing political landscape and transfers of territory were negotiated among the powers involved (by war, treaty, benign neglect).

6. Ai Khanoum



The Graeco-Bactrian city of Ai Khanoum is the most extensively excavated Hellenistic-period site in Central Asia (excavated by the DAFA between 1964 and 1978), and certainly the only one to enjoy any kind of wider celebrity. The architecture and material record of the city reveals a wide range of cultural affinities and connections to the Greek Mediterranean, Iranian world and India. This session will aim to move beyond analyses which separate out the city’s most obviously Greek or non-Greek institutions (theatre, gymnasium, temples) and try to gain an idea of how Ai Khanoum worked as a coherent socio-economic and cultural community. There is also compelling evidence for earlier, Achaemenid presence at the site, and for later reuse, after the fall of the ‘Greek’ city in the

mid-second century BC. A field survey of the wider region, conducted in the 1970s, reveals in addition the long-term economic exploitation of the city's hinterland (discussed in greater depth next week in the lectures on survey archaeology).

7. Survey Archaeology in Central Asia

GIS and Google Maps are only the latest survey technologies to be used to locate archaeological sites and explore how past populations used the landscapes of Central Asia. In



the first part of the twentieth century, aerial photography was extensively used by archaeologists in Afghanistan, British India and Soviet Central Asia, often 'piggybacking' on major civilian and military mapping projects. Unsurprisingly, very high quality military photographs were taken of the sensitive frontier region between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union, and these subsequently passed into the public domain. Three case-study archaeological field projects will be discussed: the eastern Bactria survey conducted in the plain of Ai Khanoum in the 1970s, and two more recent projects in the valley of the Surkhan-darya, in southern Uzbekistan, and in the Murghab delta, in south-eastern Turkmenistan.



8. Business as Usual: Administrative Continuity in Bactria, from the Achaemenids to the Kushans

Both documentary texts and, crucially, data from archaeological field survey increasingly support the notion that administrative personnel and existing systems of agricultural production

and exploitation of natural resources were consistently retained through regime change in Bactria. From the Bronze Age onwards, major irrigation works were maintained in the plain around Ai Khanoum: these required mobilisation and organisation of labour, and regular repair to keep them from silting up. Building on last week's discussion of field survey projects, and the week before's on Ai Khanoum, this session will introduce some new material from documentary texts and inscriptions in Aramaic, Greek and Bactrian, which show how the rulers of Bactria organised its people and resources. Special attention will be given to the newly-discovered Aramaic administrative documents, probably from the capital, Bactra, which cover the period from the last Achaemenid rulers to the early years of Alexander the Great: one document, identical in all ways to its predecessors, is dated by a regnal year of Alexander: in the provincial bureaucracy, it was business as usual.

9. Kanishka the Great



Under Kanishka the Great, in the first part of the second century AD, the Kushan Empire was at its height, reaching from Central Asia north of the Oxus/Amu-darya through into central India. His regnal era (beginning probably in AD 127) was used for around three hundred years. This lecture will begin with an overview of the Kushan Empire and its visual and material culture under Kanishka, then focus on the personality of Kanishka as king and innovator. Kanishka implemented several policies which were a deliberate rejection of the past, and specifically of the Greek past. The evidence of several inscriptions suggests that he discontinued the use of the Greek language as a public language of government and political power, but that some bureaucrats remained capable of writing it. In his coinage, the change is more visible, and more telling: the iconography of the deities depicted remains the same, but their names change from the Greek (e.g. Helios) to the Bactrian equivalent (e.g. Mithra). Greek legends are likewise replaced with legends in Bactrian.

10. Greeks, Indians, Hellenised Indians and Indo-Greeks

The Greek-named kings who represented themselves on their coinage using Indian religious imagery and in Indian languages and scripts were introduced in Week 4 ('The Two Sides of the Coin'). This session will examine the changing political and cultural relationships between territories of Central Asia and their Greek populations, and the empires and populations of northern India, through eight individuals:



- Seleukos I and Chandragupta Maurya, who concluded a treaty in 305 BC in which the former Greek province of Arachosia (modern southern Afghanistan, around Kandahar) was passed to Indian control.
- Asoka (reigned c. 269-232 BC), Chandragupta's grandson, the Mauryan emperor who set up edicts across his empire promulgating a new Buddhist way of life. These included Aramaic and Greek edicts in former Achaemenid and Seleucid areas.
- Sophytos, author/commissioner of a Greek inscription, probably from Kandahar, which

makes an overt play on Greek high literary culture.

- Demetrios, the Graeco-Bactrian conqueror of India (discussed in previous lectures), and the impact of the Indian conquest 'back home' in Bactria.
- Menander Soter (reigned mid-second century BC) a prominent Greek king of northern India, who has a place in later Buddhist tradition.
- Heliodoros and Apollodotos of Taxila (late second century BC). Heliodoros was a Greek ambassador at the court of a central Indian king who set up a votive pillar to the god Vishnu, inscribed in Prakrit, at an excavated temple site. His king, Apollodotos, reigned at Taxila in north-western India, one of the few Indo-Greek sites from which we have substantial archaeological remains.

Wherever possible, the epigraphic, literary and numismatic evidence will be set in its contemporary archaeological context, and individuals' asserted identities compared and contrasted with what we might assume on the basis of the material record.

11. Gandhara and Graeco-Buddhist Art

One of the great unanswered questions of Central Asian archaeology in the early part of the twentieth century was that of the relationship between the well-known Buddhist visual culture of Gandhara (present-day north-western Pakistan), which flourished from the Kushans onwards, and the Graeco-Roman artistic tradition.



Gandharan sculpture depicted the Buddha in a strikingly Classical manner. Excavations at sites such as Ai Khanoum to a great extent filled in the gap, and allowed the development of Gandharan art to be traced back to Hellenistic Central Asia. Some earlier interpretations which saw the art of Gandhara as the product of Roman influence ('Buddha in a toga') were shown to be false. In addition to stylistic developments in art and sculpture from Hellenistic Bactria through to Gandhara under the Kushans (and onwards to the great Buddhas of Bamiyan), this session will attempt to place Gandharan sculpture in its original, monastic context, through the excavations at sites such as Kara-tepe (Uzbekistan), Ajina-tepe (Tajikistan), Hadda (Afghanistan) and Taxila (Pakistan).



12. Archaeology, War, Politics and Cultural Heritage, c. 1922-2011

Following on from Week 3 on war in Afghanistan, this session will discuss archaeology and cultural heritage issues in the region from the early twentieth century up to the present day:

- British and Russian colonialism in Central Asia and North-West India, and the development of the first modern excavations.
- The ideological context of archaeology in British India and Russian/Soviet Central Asia: colonialism/postcolonialism, Marxism-Leninism, etc.
- The DAFA (French archaeological delegation in Afghanistan) and French foreign policy 1922-1982.
- National aspirations and reinterpretations of the past in the Central Asian Republics, Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- War and cultural heritage issues; the Kabul Museum; the antiquities trade (and why you shouldn't buy Graeco-Bactrian coins on ebay...).
- Doing – and publicising - archaeology in Central Asia today: international collaborations, survey projects, GIS, Google Maps, 3D reconstructions and television documentaries, museum exhibitions.