Royal Imagery on Kushan Coins: Local Tradition and Arsacid Influences

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Abstract

This article deals with the development of Kushan royal imagery as known from coins in the period between the 1st and the 3rd centuries AD, i.e. from the so-called Heraios series to the coins of Vasudeva. The aim is to challenge the traditional interpretative models which ascribed a crucial role to a Roman contribution, and to highlight instead first the role of the local numismatic tradition, which stretched back to the Graeco-Bactrians, and then the influx of patterns of royal imagery of western Iranian—namely Arsacid Parthian—origin, around the time when Vima Kadphises inaugurated a new imperial coinage.

Keywords

Kushans – Parthians – royal imagery – iconographic transmission – numismatics

Introduction

With the birth of the Kushan empire around the middle of the 1st century AD, the southern regions of Eastern Iran and NW India were united under a single power which would represent the main political actor in the area until the early 3rd century AD. In this role, the Kushans were the main eastern neighbours of the Arsacids, in due time giving birth—like the Arsacids in western

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Sizes are given for each pictured coin where known, but images are not in scale.

Iran—to a local imperial tradition destined to leave its mark on the cultural history of the region.

The analysis of regnal iconography offers one of the most fruitful approaches through which these imperial traditions can be studied, providing crucial insights on their constitutive features and on the possible range of their contacts with other polities of the time. Coinage plays in this regard a fundamental role as a primary source under the direct responsibility of royal authorities. Indeed, despite progress in other fields of investigation, coin issues still represent the main evidence available to scholars on how Kushan kings chose to be portrayed, since no other medium has provided such a rich visual repertoire—both in mere typological variety and in chronological extension—and only thanks to their coins we know the official image of every Kushan king.

It may thus be instructive to analyze Kushan coin iconography in order to detect the main trends in the development of the relevant royal imagery and to explore its possible sources of inspiration. Indeed, as the main primary source on the Kushans, coinage has featured since the late 1940s (Monneret de Villard 1948; Göbl 1960) in academic discussion about the western connections of the area nowadays conventionally styled as the Indo-Iranian Borderlands, with particular reference to the links with the Roman eastern Mediterranean of broader art-historical phenomena such as Gandharan art. In this way, emphasis on the Roman contribution to the art-historical developments in NW India, which was long the central focus of research into the cultural history of the region, provided the base conceptual framework in which Kushan coin studies were then to be set. In due time, this resulted in several structural features of Kushan coin series being put in explicit connection with Roman numismatic practices, and the emergence of an interpretive paradigm that postulated a direct and crucial contribution of Roman derivation to the creation of the Kushan imperial coinage under Vima Kadphises and to its development under his immediate successors.

In this methodological approach, technical aspects of coin production became intermingled with the wider question of the transmission of western imagery to Kushan-period NW India, with the detection of Roman influences in Kushan iconography being deemed “proof” of the export of technical expertise from Rome to NW India. The consequence was the creation, more or less consciously, of a sort of fracture in the numismatic history of the region between the pre-and-early Kushan period, on the one hand, and the imperial Kushan period inaugurated by Vima Kadphises, on the other. The result of this fracture has been a long neglect of the local numismatic tradition and a consequent failure to comprehend the development of the conventions employed on Kushan coins, which has had an unfortunate impact on all the discussions

that must rely on coinage as main evidence,¹ those related to royal imagery being no exception.

At the same time, little attention has been devoted to the possibility of lasting contacts and exchanges, including in the field of the visual display of power, with other areas of the ancient world, particularly those of western Iran which were geographically and—above all—culturally closer to Bactria and home to lively imperial traditions.

In addition, as is often the case when the dialogue between different disciplines should be the departing point, art-historical and numismatic studies on the Kushans—or on the Indo-Iranian Borderlands during the Kushan period—have customarily progressed independently of each other. With regard to the research on Kushan coinage, this—as paradoxical as it may appear, given the long-prevailing intellectual trends outlined above—has resulted in the fact that emphasis upon Roman links has been accompanied by the setting of such links within an exclusively numismatic framework, thus limiting their impact to the sphere of coin-to-coin influences and thus producing a rather distorted general picture.

Consequently, not only we are still missing an all-round appraisal of Kushan royal imagery based on a systematic scrutiny of the evidence from different media centred on the crucial contribution provided by coin series,² but the study of Kushan coin iconography must still be set free from the weight of old interpretative paradigms. Such paradigms have been challenged in the last two decades, with the emergence of works emphasizing the role of the local numismatic tradition,³ but we still have to fully set Kushan coin iconography into the framework of Kushan royal imagery *tout court*, and in turn define the latter's place within a broader picture, i.e., that of the development of royal imagery in the wider Iranian world of the time.

In this regard a fundamental issue is the assessment of the role of the nomadic or Central Asian colouring commonly ascribed to Kushan royal imagery in a sort of mirror effect with the theories on the Roman patterns: is the image of the Kushan king really conveying the message of a nomadic cultural identity?

It will be seen that a wider and properly synchronic approach that sets the enquiry in Kushan matters within a broader perspective may produce quite interesting results, impacting our notions of the relationship between Iran and Central Asia, two terms that in several instances would be better spelled as Western and Eastern Iran. It will be accordingly highlighted how, at the

1 This is true, in fact, for the whole of the Kushan studies.

2 Although still useful in several respects, Rosenfield 1967 cannot be relied on for this task.

3 See *infra* for the references to various works by Joe Cribb.

moment in which the Kushans created a distinct imperial coinage following the evolution of their political construction, connections with the Iranian West had a major impact upon the development of a Kushan royal iconography. Indeed, such connections played their role in the framework of a broader phenomenon of transmission of patterns of visual display of power between western Iran and the Indo-Iranian Borderlands which involved several different kinds of media, to be set in its turn against the background of deeper cultural contacts between these two regions.

Once again, coins are here crucial, since their role as main primary source is the same in the Kushan empire as elsewhere in the Iranian world of the time. The enquiry here presented will focus on the Kushan coins struck between the 1st and the 3rd centuries AD, i.e. from the pre-imperial phase of the so-called *Heraios* series to the coins of Vasudeva. Over the course of this period, Kushan royal imagery changed from the early stages still owing to pre-existing local patterns to a new and properly imperial phase, until the crystallization that occurred just before the horizon of the dynasty became fully Indian due to the Sasanian expansion in the former Kushanshahr.

The study is divided in five sections, introduced by the presentation of the documentary evidence, i.e., the coin series, with obvious emphasis on the royal image. The theory of the Roman patterns is critically examined in the second section, while the third and fourth sections explore, respectively, the role of the pre-Kushan local numismatic tradition and the possible contribution of western Iranian, namely Arsacid, influences on the Kushan imagery of power and, consequently, on Kushan royal iconography on coins.

The fifth and last section before the conclusions is devoted to an assessment of what the results of the study of the coin iconography in connection with the evidence of royal imagery from other media can tell us about the cultural background of Kushan royal ideology.

1   **The Typological Development of the Coin Image of the Kushan King from “*Heraios*” to Vasudeva**

Four broad phases can be detected in the evolution of the numismatic depiction of Kushan rulers. The first, which might be styled as pre-imperial, is essentially represented by the so-called *Heraios* coinage. This is first followed by the formative stage of the series of Kujula and Soter Megas,⁴ and then by the

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4 The attribution of the coinage of Soter Megas to Vima (I) Taktu, proposed by Cribb 1995/96 in the wake of the discovery of the Rabatak inscription, has been openly challenged by O. Bopearachchi in a series of articles between 2006 and 2012. Alram 1999 had already

properly imperial phase of Vima Kadphises, Kanishka and Huvishka. The last phase is that inaugurated by Vasudeva. Such a periodization is of course highly schematic, but it remains useful in allowing an overview of the evolution of the image of the Kushan king, as all such phases are marked by quite distinctive features.

The coinage commonly ascribed to Heraios is constituted by just two silver series, tetradrachms and obols of reduced Attic standard on which the ruler is depicted, in both cases, on the obverse as well as on the reverse (Fig. 1).⁵ The appearance of the word Kushan in the legend firmly establishes these coins as the first ones struck by the Kushans after the long issues of imitations of

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critically examined Cribb's arguments, but accepted that the Soter Megas coinage could be ascribed to Vima Taktu (Mac Dowall 2002 remained more skeptical). I will not discuss the issue in detail here, limiting myself to speaking of Soter Megas for coin series bearing this "name". However, I find some difficulties in the scenario proposed by Bopearachchi. It is true that it is not easy to account for the anonymous title of Soter Megas used by a Kushan king, but the problem is not solved by merely postulating a usurper of non-royal blood (for whom the use of an anonymous title would be no less problematic than for the legitimate ruler), of which no memory or record survived his life, as well as no heirs nor followers, everything and everybody disappearing as suddenly as Soter Megas himself had appeared. In fact, in order to accept the scenario suggested by Bopearachchi (2006: 1442-1443; 2008: 50; 2012: 132-133) we should think of two instances, not one, in which the control of the whole empire switched completely from one hand to another, as Soter Megas, after having utterly defeated Vima I (Taktu), would have been completely overthrown by Vima II Kadphises. Moreover, Vima II should have been able to re-conquer the empire from the remote area of Kashmir—to use Bopearachchi's own definition (2012: 132)—where his father would have been relegated by the victorious advance of Soter Megas several years earlier. After this, the same Vima II could even feel free to use the appellation of Soter Megas for some of his coin series, a rather perplexing statement of royal communication when the peculiar use of the title made by the alleged usurper is taken into account. My feeling is that we are faced with too long a chain of unlikely events. In this regard, even the evidence provided by coins of Vima II mentioning his father Vima I adduced by Bopearachchi does not appear conclusive, see Bracey 2009: 52-53 for a discussion of these coins, and here, fn. 37. The whole Soter Megas question is now re-examined in detail in Cribb 2015 (with references to all the previous literature on the subject), where the arguments of Bopearachchi are convincingly countered and the series bearing the title of Soter Megas are assigned partly to Kujula and partly to Vima I.

- 5 Cribb 1993: 118-119, discussed two copper coins (weighing 9.76g and 10.40g) with the same obverse and reverse types employed on the tetradrachms ascribed to Heraios, probably struck in northern Pakistan, at any rate south of the Hindukush. Cribb interpreted the Greek reverse legend as ΤΥΠΑΝΝ[ΟΥΝΤΟΣ ΗΙΑΟΥ] ΚΟΙΙΑ(ΝΟΥ), which would clearly tie these coins to Heraios' series. Yet these coins were also the key for his attribution of the Heraios coinage to Kujula, since he read the *kharoshthi* obverse legend as expressly mentioning the name of Kujula.

Greek series during the Yuezhi period. On the obverse the king is portrayed in the same way on both denominations, that is, as a frontal bust with the head turned to the right.⁶ This mixture of views already sets this image somewhat apart from the standard conventions spread in the area by Greek coinages,⁷ but the remaining features of the portrait are even more telling. While the head is diademed as on Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek coins, the king wears thin moustaches and the hair is cut in a completely different way from what we see in Greek portraiture, that is, thrown back and cut square at the end, level with the lobe of the ear.⁸ Furthermore, the king is dressed in a jacket with edge bands typical of the Iranian horseman tradition.

The reverses show another pattern, as different types were selected for the two denominations. Certain elements are, however, common to both issues: in both the king is depicted full-length, wearing the same costume visible only in part on the obverse, which accordingly also shows the trousers. On tetradrachms the ruler appears on horseback, a Nike flying behind him with a ring, either a wreath or a diadem,⁹ held close to the king's head (Fig. 1b); with the left hand the king seems to hold the reins, while the right is engraved close to the belt, just above the large arrow quiver slung on the side. The obols show the king standing in a $\frac{3}{4}$ view to right, only the bust and head fully turned to the side (Fig. 1d). The right arm is held forward as if offering—or taking—something,¹⁰ while on the left-hand side only the hand is visible.¹¹

6 The combination of a profile head and a facing bust was already noted by Mahler 2008: 304.

7 On Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek coin series royal portraits are invariably in full profile, save for the instances in which kings are portrayed as seen from behind. Heads in profile on frontal busts are instead common in Indo-Parthian coin effigies, the first instance already visible on the copper coins of Gondophares I (Senior 2001, nos. 212–213). A similar combination is found on dated tetradrachms of the Arsacid Vologases I struck in AD 51–54, later imitated by his son Pacorus II in AD 82–84/5 and AD 93 (see Sinisi 2012: Type I of Vologases I, and Types II and III of Pacorus II), even if the first recorded appearance in Arsacid series of this “mixed solution” is on rare drachms of the second half of the 1st century BC minted in Areia, see Sellwood 1980: 145, 46.24. The bead and reel circular bordering surrounding the obverse image on Heraios' tetradrachms is clearly of Greek derivation.

8 The earlobe itself is not visible, being hidden by the hair.

9 However, no ties are visible.

10 The gesture somehow resembles that of the figure with a cup in the left hand that leads the procession on the textiles recently found in Noin Ula, see Polos'mak 2010: 54; Yatsenko 2012, Fig. 2, no. 12.

11 The left hand might possibly be depicted as resting on the hilt of the sword held by the king on his left side. However, the sword is not visible behind the figure of the king.

FIGURE 1A-B *Heraios, silver tetradrachm. Classical Numismatic Group (henceforth, CNG) e-auction 308 (7-8-2013), lot 214 (28mm, 15.04g).*

FIGURE 1C-D *Heraios, silver obol. www.coinindia.com WFS.019.*

The imagery visible on these coins has already been connected to the clay statuary recovered from the Bactrian site of Khalchayan (Pugachenkova 1971: 130),¹² and, indeed, the link is manifest. Further materials displaying similar characteristics have recently been discovered in Noin Ula (Polos'mak 2010; 2015), where embroidered textiles decorated with the images of several characters with similar features in their haircuts, beardless portraits with thin pointed moustaches, and costumes have been found.¹³

The chronology, of the coin series as well as of the non-numismatic materials—one often depending on the other in a particularly vicious circle—is disputed, the original hypothesis of a dating in the 1st century BC for Khalchayan having recently been resurrected (Nehru 1999/2000)¹⁴ after a long period in which a lower chronology dating to the 1st century AD had been

12 Pugachenkova is followed by all successive studies.

13 Polos'mak ascribed the textiles to a North-Western Indian Saka context. Cf. also Yatsenko 2012 for a detailed analysis, as well as for the bibliographical references to previous publications, and Francfort 2013: 1559-1576.

14 The arguments of Nehru appear, however, not fully conclusive. Cf. also below, fn. 147.

dominant (cf. Staviski 1986: 225–226; more recently Grenet 2000). The coin series of Heraios have also been attributed to Kujula by J. Cribb (1993),¹⁵ a hypothesis that would consequently date all these artefacts to the 1st century AD. Regardless of the chronological problem, Heraios' coinage presents a coherent approach to royal iconography that is hard to reconcile with the series commonly attributed to Kujula, where such emphasis on a specific image of the king is difficult to detect. In fact, one is left to wonder why the features displayed by Heraios' coins are not visible on other series of Kujula if they were struck by the same king. On the other hand, the specificity of the imagery on Heraios' coins is hard to place in the sequence of Kushan series if iconographic consistency is taken as the reference criterion, even if such coins are attributed to a Kushan *yabghu* before Kujula. One could indeed employ the conventional label of Yuezhi imagery (cf. Yatsenko 2012) for the Heraios series—as well as for the connected imagery on other media—provided, of course, that the chronological implications are not too strict, and that, for Bactria at least, this overlapped with the earliest stages of Kushan dynastic history.

With the coinage that can be ascribed with certainty to Kujula we enter a different phase, marked by extreme typological variation. Broadly speaking, the series minted by Kujula directly continued those that he encountered in the various regions he conquered, although numerous new types were introduced. We are thus presented with a highly fragmented picture, even with regard to the image of the king. Some types are clearly indebted to “western” models of royal imagery, such as the bust in Greek helmet that appears on the obverse of the so-called Macedonian soldier issue (Rosenfield 1967: 15, Type v; Mac Dowall 2002: 166, Type 2 of Kujula Kadphises) (Fig. 2a),¹⁶ or the obverse bust employed on coins struck by Kujula at the end of the so-called imitation-Hermaios series (Rosenfield 1967: 12–13, Type 1; Mac Dowall 2002: 166, Type 1 of Kujula Kadphises) (Fig. 2c). Yet, placed at the end of a clearly defined sequence, the latter type is essentially the result of mere reproduction of an older image, from which we would expect no innovations. A simple diademed bust clad in a cloak is depicted, as shown by coins of Hermaios and their successive imitations prior to Kujula. However, with its combination of a head in profile on a facing bust, this type of Kujula actually introduces a brand-new feature,

15 Followed by Bracey 2012b; see also Jongeward et al. 2015: 30. Yet this proposal has not gained general acceptance, see Alram 1999: 23–25.

16 A bust wearing a Macedonian helmet was also employed by Kujula on rare obols imitating the obverse and reverse typology of Eukratides' obols, with the name of Kujula (OKOZOYAO) inscribed in Greek on the reverse, see MacDowall and Wilson 1970: 226–227; Alram 1986: 299–300, no. 1271.

remarkably displaying the same peculiar mixture of profile and frontal view seen on coins of Heraios.

It is therefore of some interest to compare such an image with what we encounter on the obverse of the most famous series struck by Kujula, namely a Roman head (Rosenfield 1967: 13-14, Type II; Mac Dowall 2002: 166, Type 3 of Kujula Kadphises) (Fig. 2e). Significantly, the image is that of a *head* as opposed to a *bust*, in accordance with the original Augustan model. Accordingly, the general western inspiration of such types may actually be ascribed to different sources, namely an older, originally Greek tradition, which had broadly become indigenized, and a more recent Roman one.

It is unlikely, of course, that these various western-inspired images offer a closely lifelike representation of the Kushan king, as becomes clear through comparison with Heraios' series as well as with further images found on Kujula's coins. Indeed, it remains an open question exactly whom they are supposed to depict, and the problem is only made more complex by the employment of a similar approach to obverse typology on Soter Meges' coins. It seems possible to state that in this early period a phase of iconographic elaboration can be detected, during which the strength of royal imagery of Greek derivation was still able to make itself felt: over the course of centuries it had indeed become traditional,¹⁷ tightly associated with the very idea of visually translating kingship and power. This is illustrated well by the post-Greek depictions of local rulers wearing Macedonian helmets¹⁸ not only on the Macedonian soldier issue of Kujula and on coins of Soter Meges, but also on coins issued by the group of Sapadbizes in western Bactria (Rtveladze 1993/94), that is, in a context distinct from Kushan models.

Other coin images of Kujula provide some evidence of what Kushan royal attire of this early period really looked like. First we have the reverses of the series with the Roman head on the obverse (Fig. 2f), which depict a figure seated in $\frac{3}{4}$ -view to right, wearing the rider's costume of jacket and trousers. While the right arm is stretched forward,¹⁹ the left hand rests on the sword hilt, the scabbard being clearly visible behind the figure. A most important feature is the seat, a stool with thin crossed legs, which, in keeping with the

17 One has only to think of the long imitation series of Graeco-Bactrian issues from Yuezhi period Bactria.

18 Cf. Bernard 1987: 764, on the symbolic values of the depiction of the ruler in Macedonian helmet also in connection with the appearance of this image on the cameo found in Tilia Tepe (whose style led Bernard to think that it was engraved in the post-Greek period rather than being merely re-employed). Cf. also Grenet 2012: 4-6.

19 Due to wear on the known specimens, it is not possible to identify the hand gesture.

FIGURE 2A-B

Kujula Kadphises, copper coin. CNG Mail Bid Sale 79 (17-9-2008), lot 515 (3.03g).

FIGURE 2C-D

Kujula Kadphises, Indian copper tetradrachm. CNG Mail Bid Sale 67 (22-9-2004), lot 1040 (8.50g).

FIGURE 2E-F

Kujula Kadphises, copper drachm. American Numismatic Society 1973.56.220 (17mm, 3.35g).

Roman inspiration of the obverse type, has been traditionally identified as a Roman-type curule chair (Rosenfield 1967: 13; Carter 2005: 435, fn. 3), with the obvious implication of confirming the Roman connections of the whole series. Another less frequently discussed type ascribed to Kujula depicts a figure seated cross-legged on the obverse (Rosenfield 1967: 14-15, Type III; Mac Dowall 2002: 167, Type 4 of Kujula Kadphises), with a T(?) -shaped object held aloft in the right hand (Fig. 3a),²⁰ probably an axe. The figure is in fully-facing view, apparently wearing a tall conical headgear.

A similar device appears on the diademed head of a further type on the obverse of silver coins found in Sirkap and provisionally ascribed to Kujula,²¹

²⁰ Carter 2005: 435, fn. 3, cautiously suggested identifying the object as a flower.

²¹ The presence of the name of Kujula in the *kharoshthi* reverse legend is far from certain. A coin of this series (CNG 88, 14-9-2011, lot 639) has been recently published whose reverse legend seems to read only *Maharajasa (rajatirajasa) Khushana*, without personal name. Indeed, the legend was already read without any personal name (as *Maharajasa*

FIGURE 3A-B *Kujula Kadphises, copper coin. www.coinindia.com 131_58.*

FIGURE 3C-D *Kujula Kadphises, silver drachm. Rosenfield 1967: pl. 1.10.*

which depicts a bust in edged jacket turned to the left (Rosenfield 1967: 13-14, Type VI; Senior 2001, no. B4.1-2D) (Fig. 3c).

While the outfit worn by the cross-legged figure is not as distinctly visible as that of the figure on the reverse of the Roman head series or on the coins from Sirkap, the general picture is perfectly clear, as the costume exhibited by all these royal images distances them definitively from western prototypes, instead bringing them close to the local ones employed on Heraios' coins.²²

The series of Soter Megas show an approach to the use of images broadly similar to that of his predecessor, although the picture is somewhat simplified thanks to the stabilization of the coin system connected to the consolidation of the empire.

The only image that can be identified with certainty as the king shows the ruler on horseback in a type very similar to that on the reverse of Heraios' tetradrachms. As for Heraios' coins, the type is employed on the reverse (the reverses of Type 3 and 5 of Vima I in Cribb 1995/96: 113-115 and of Soter Megas in Mac Dowall 2002: 168-169) (Fig. 4b, 4d). The diadem ties are in evidence floating behind the king and the horseman trousers are clearly visible. A significant difference from the type of Heraios is that the Soter Megas' type displays a pointed cap on the head of the king, as well as the object, an axe,²³ held by the right arm stretched outwards. An almost identical type of Soter Megas, imitating a type of the Indo-Parthian Sasan (Cribb 1995/96: 119-120), portrays the same figure with just the diadem worn on the head, without additional

Rajatirajasa Kusanasa Ya[vugasa]) by MacDowall and Wilson 1970: 232, where the series was nonetheless ascribed to Kujula. Cf. also Alram 1986: 302, nos. 1284-1285.

22 Regardless of the possible differences, such as that represented by the presence of a head-gear on some of Kujula's series, of course.

23 MacDowall 1968: 32 (followed by Cribb 1995/96: 114) identified the object as an *anḱuśa*, Carter 2005: 432 as a whip.

headgear (the obverse of Type 1 of Vima I in Cribb 1995/96: 111-112 and of Soter Megas in Mac Dowall 2002: 167-168) (Fig. 4e). The right hand now seems to hold no axe, but is either displaying a gesture of blessing—or homage—with its bent forefinger (Cribb 1995/96: 111, Type 1b of Vima I), or holding an object, possibly identifiable as a goad (Cribb 1995/96: 111, Types 1a, 1c of Vima I). Remarkably enough, the apparently short-haired, diademed head of this figure is highly reminiscent of the obverse type of the Hermaios' imitations struck by Kujula, despite the clearly oriental costume worn by the horseman.

To complicate the situation, the type with the mounted king in pointed cap is found on the reverse of two series which both exhibit very peculiar obverse types. The first portrays a bust in Macedonian helmet turned to the left (the obverse of Type 3 of Vima I in Cribb 1995/96: 113-114 and of Soter Megas in Mac Dowall 2002: 168) (Fig. 4g), the second, employed by Soter Megas for his general coinage (MacDowall 1968: 32-33; 2002: 168; Cribb 1995/96: 114-115, and 121), a short-haired diademed bust to right, surrounded by a conspicuous halo of rays (the obverse of Type 5 of Vima I in Cribb 1995/96: 113-114 and of Soter Megas in Mac Dowall 2002: 168-169) (Fig. 4a, 4c). Both figures are clad in a cloak, and hold a spear before their face with one raised arm.²⁴ These types are difficult to interpret for several reasons, that is to say, the iconographic analysis is problematic because of the similarities as well as the differences. They are represented in the same posture and gesture, clad in the same outfit, and both occupying the obverse of a series that depicts the king on the reverse in a clearly different costume. However, while the first type with his helmet is reminiscent of the royal images of Greek inspiration we have already seen, the second, whose general appearance could also be connected to royal imagery, is quite strikingly associated with an iconographic mark—the rayed halo—that, save for a single exception,²⁵

24 The object is commonly reputed to be an arrow (Cribb 1995/96: 113-114; Carter 2005: 432), probably because nothing indicating the lower part of a shaft below the hand is normally visible. However, a spear or spear-tipped sceptre appears more likely (cf. MacDowall 1968: 30-32), as implied by the fillet tied to its tip on the Soter Megas general issue, which would better fit a spear than an arrow (cf. the double fillet tied to the shaft of the trident that is found beside the fire burner on the obverses of late Kushan kings, see here Fig. 12c). Indeed, if one tries to imagine the full-length figure of the ruler of which only the bust is depicted, the posture, which would be rather strange if holding an arrow, appears entirely natural for a spear-holding figure. Cf. below, fn. 124.

25 Huvishka in his copper coinage (for all types employed on the relevant series), where the plain halo found elsewhere in the images of Kushan kings is substituted by a rayed nimbus.

FIGURE 4A-B

Soter Megas, Indian copper tetradrachm.
www.zeno.ru #32074.

FIGURE 4C-D

Soter Megas, Indian copper tetradrachm.
CNG e-auction 307 (24-7-2013), lot 161
(21mm, 8.56g).

FIGURE 4E-F

Soter Megas, Indian billon tetradrachm.
Meister&Sonntag quick auction 2008
(5-4-2008), lot 60 (21mm, 9.95g).

FIGURE 4G-H

Soter Megas, copper tetradrachm.
CNG Triton XII (6-1-2009), lot 417
(12.35g).

FIGURE 4I-J

Soter Megas, copper drachm. Cribb
1995-96: 139, Type 4.

is normally used in this region only for divine images.²⁶ So the question of how to connect these three images according to the iconography that they employ arises, taking into account that the reverse type of the horseman is the only one definitely depicting the Kushan king. While the possible Bactrian location of the series with the bust in Macedonian helmet can explain the background for such a choice in that specific instance (MacDowall 2002: 168), this is not the case for those coins with the rayed bust on the obverse, i.e. the general issue of Soter Megas reportedly found from Bactria to western Panjab (MacDowall 1968: 32-42; 1974: 247; Cribb 1995/96: 119). In addition, a Greek-looking diademed bust facing to the right occupies the obverse of another series of copper drachms of Attic standard struck by Soter Megas (Type 4 of Vima I in Cribb 1995/96: 114 and 119 and of Soter Megas in Mac Dowall 2002: 168)²⁷ in Mathura and SE Panjab (MacDowall 1968: 30) (Fig. 4i).²⁸

The minting of a general issue by Soter Megas throughout a large part of the empire paved the way for the significant changes visible in the coinage of Vima II Kadphises, associated with his introduction of a gold coinage.²⁹ Under Vima II the royal image is invariably reserved for the obverse, both on gold and copper series. The significant feature within the framework of an analysis of royal imagery is that, while a rich variety of types is employed, the royal iconography is clearly subject to a process of standardization, firmly establishing a new norm for the depictions of the king. On the coin series of Vima II such a process appears as an accomplished fact, and royal iconography shows

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- 26 Before and after these series. For the former cases, the evidence is provided by the figure of Helios on coins of the Graeco-Bactrian Plato and of the Indo-Greeks Philoxenus and Telephus, as well as by the peculiar bearded figure wearing a pointed beret on coins of Amyntas and Hermaios, cf. Bopearachchi 1991: 378-379. The frequently mentioned Zeus with rays on coins of Heliocles I and II is more problematic, see Sinisi 2015b: 213, fn. 59. Kushan-period occurrences include the Helios/Mirot of Kanishka and Huvishka, as well as Aśaeikhšo on gold coins of Huvishka.
- 27 MacDowall 1968: 30; 1974: 247-250 (cf. also Cribb 1995/96: 121) highlighted the similarities of this series to the coinage of the Graeco-Bactrian king Heliocles, as clear from the reverse typology, via the Yuezhi imitations of his series.
- 28 A further peculiar series of Attic standard copper drachms is ascribed to Vima Takto by Cribb 1995/96: 119, Vima Takto's Type 8. The obverse portrays an enthroned king depicted frontally, apparently wearing a tall hat, while two male figures in Kushan royal dress face each other on the reverse. Both coin sides appear to be inscribed in Bactrian. The series is now further discussed and better illustrated in Cribb 2015: 104-105 and 140, Fig. 60.
- 29 As the standard reference for types and series I will here follow Göbl 1984, where a full system is illustrated for the Kushan series from Vima Kadphises to the Kushano-Sasanians (with minor modifications in Göbl 1993). Bracey 2009 presents a different arrangement of the system for the series of Vima Kadphises. Cf. also Jongeward et al. 2015.

a remarkable homogeneity, clearly resulting from inputs originating from the court as part of a precise plan aiming at a thorough codification of royal imagery. The image of Vima II shows two basic versions: one diademed only, which is less common, and one with the head covered by a domed headgear, i.e. a tiara. Both have two sub-variants according to the clothing of the king.

The first version is mostly represented by a type depicting the bust of the king turned to the right (Göbl 1984: pl. 157, Type II of Vima Kadphises) (Fig. 5a).³⁰ Vima is fully bearded, and clad in a cloak fixed with a clasp at the right shoulder, holding with the right hand a club against the same shoulder. While the head is in full profile, the bust is in a $\frac{3}{4}$ view to right, the left arm and hand not depicted. Around the bare head a diadem is visible,³¹ rendered with a knotted pattern and supporting a higher element that projects upwards from the forehead. The diadem bow and ties are engraved behind the king's head. While all these features seem to reproduce the actual paraphernalia of the king as he would have really appeared to his subject, two further elements enrich the type by referring to the ideological dimension of royalty behind the choice of images: the bust emerges from rocks,³² probably symbolizing a mountain setting, and flames are visible behind the king's shoulders.³³ These latter two visual elements are, in all likelihood, both references to the concept of *xvarnah*, the luminous Royal Glory characteristic of pre-Islamic Iranian kingship,³⁴ which is indeed connected to mountains in the Iranian tradition.

30 According to Göbl (1984: pl. 1, no. 2 and pl. 3, no. 16), this type was used by the second officina during the first emission and by the third officina during the fourth emission.

31 Finely preserved specimens show the vertical grooves depicting the hair on top of the head. Göbl (1984: 35) described such a type as showing on the king's head a "niedrige Diademkrone", which he saw even in his Types VII and VIII of Vima, where the king is pictured within a square frame. The presence of the typical wavy decoration on the side of the head makes it clear that in both the latter instances a tiara-like headgear is supposed to be depicted, even if the space constraints imposed by the image framing required lowering its height. Therefore Göbl's Types VII and VIII of Vima show a different solution from that employed for Type II.

32 The rocks are often alternatively identified as clouds, cf. the discussion in Rosenfield 1967: 201-202.

33 Actually the flames are visible only behind the king's left shoulder, as normally there is not enough space to depict them on the side where the flowing diadem ties and the tip of the club are engraved.

34 Cf. Rosenfield 1967: 197-202 (followed by Carter 2005: 433), who wrongly spoke of the deification of the ruler; Göbl 1984: 14 understood the presence of the rocks as connected to a religious sphere. Sims-Williams 1998: 90 has put forward the hypothesis that the rocky mountain-top might allude to the name of the king, as the name Vima could derive from

A rarer type, depicting the king turned to the left, represents the second variant of the royal portrait with diadem only (Göbl 1984: pl. 157, Type x of Vima Kadphises) (Fig. 5c).³⁵ Both arms are now visible, the right bearing a club, and the left holding an object which is difficult to identify.³⁶ Moreover, the cloak is replaced by a long-sleeved caftan fixed on the breast by two rounded clasps.

The next stage in the evolution of the portrait of Vima II—a stage in which can be included all his remaining obverse types—, begins with the iconographic updating of the main variant of the previous type. The very same image of the bust to right clad in a cloak is now depicted with a domed tiara on the head (Göbl 1984: pl. 157, Type I of Vima Kadphises) (Fig. 6a), adorned by a wavy design on its side and a crescent-shaped, four-pronged appendage on top.³⁷ The

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a form such as *waima-, which has parallels in Iranian languages meaning “rock, stone”. I would like to thank Michael Alram for pointing out this reference.

- 35 According to Göbl (1984: pl. 3, no. 17), this type was used only by the fourth officina during the fourth emission.
- 36 The hand might even merely rest on the sword hilt, but if this is the case, then the pommel is certainly not shaped as a bird's head.
- 37 According to the reconstruction by Göbl, the two versions of the royal portrait cannot be separated chronologically, Type II (as well as Type x) with just the diadem being employed during emissions 1 and 4 of Vima (see Göbl 1984: pls. 1-3, nos. 2 and 16 for Type II, and no. 17 for Type x). Judging by the importance of the headgear among the regalia in the wider Iranian world, as well as by the development of Vima's imagery itself (and that of his successors), it seems very unlikely that Vima's image with the mere diadem could be employed side by side with that in a tiara. This adds another possible difficulty to those listed in Bracey 2009: 52-53 for accepting as genuine the new coins of Vima published by Boppearachchi 2008: 8, serie I, placed at the beginning of Vima's coinage (then arranged for the remaining series according to the framework proposed by Göbl 1984). Bracey 2009: 33-42, based on a die-study of Vima's gold issues, reconstructed an arrangement radically differing from that provided by Göbl, distinguishing principally on a paleographic basis five successive phases. Yet he also considered the two portraits with diadem only and with tiara to have been employed at the same time in Phase II and Phase IV, while Phases I, III, and V exclusively used the image of the king wearing the tiara. Since Phase I and III are respectively known by a single pair of dies and one coin only, and they are clearly separated from the other ones, their position in the sequence might be revised (*contra* Bracey 2009: 35). Phase V does not present special problems, due to the employment of one version only of the royal image, i.e. that in the tiara, which fits perfectly with its late positioning in the sequence. The case might be different with Phases II and IV, which include both versions of the royal portrait. With regard to Phase II, its sequence of arrangement of the dies may be comfortably inverted—as admitted by Bracey himself (2009: 34)—to start with the diademed bust instead of having it at the end, accordingly moving from the bust in diadem only to that wearing the tiara. It remains to be verified whether the sequence of dies ascribed to Phase IV cannot be similarly arranged, i.e. with the portrait in

FIGURE 5A-B *Vima Kadphises, gold dinar. CNG 87 (18-5-2011), lot 762 (19mm, 7.95g).*

FIGURE 5C-D *Vima Kadphises, gold dinar. CNG Triton XIV (4-1-2011), lot 446 (19mm, 8.00g).*

only other change affects the diadem, whose knot-like rendering disappears, probably due to the diadem being hidden by the tiara. The element projecting above the forehead is still in place.

This club-holding bust wearing a tiara is then used for more complex types, where the king appears in full length. One such type depicts him on a two-horse chariot under a large parasol (Göbl 1984: pl. 157, Type v of Vima Kadphises) (Fig. 6c), his legs hidden inside the chariot, while the diminutive figure of the

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a tiara following that with just the diadem, which would result in a more coherent pattern with regard to typological development. Clearly this would require discarding the idea of a single linear sequence of the five phases defined by Bracey, since the obverses with diademed bust of Phase IV should be contemporary to the diademed busts of Phase II, constituting the opening stage of Vima's series. These should, in turn, be followed by the busts wearing the tiara of the respective groups and, somewhere in the sequence, also by the busts wearing the tiara ascribed by Bracey to Phases I, III and V.

FIGURE 6A-B *Vima Kadphises, gold dinar. CNG Triton XII (6-1-2009), lot 421 (7.97g).*

FIGURE 6C-D *Vima Kadphises, gold dinar. CNG Triton XII (6-1-2009), lot 419 (8.03g).*

chariot rider is visible in front of the much larger royal bust. Due to the dimensions of the image, the flames behind the shoulders are not engraved, as the place they normally occupy is now taken by the club, the flowing diadem ties and the parasol shaft on and over the king's right shoulder, and by the chariot driver on the left one.

The king appears sitting cross-legged on a bed of rocks in a further type (Göbl 1984: pl. 157, Type VI of Vima Kadphises) (Fig. 7a). In this instance the bust, still depicted in the same posture, is fully facing as the left arm makes its appearance, the hand hidden within the sleeve. Moreover, the cloak is substituted by the caftan, its two clasps clearly visible on the breast. A belted tunic is visible underneath, while the trousers are tucked into heavy boots. The flames are regularly displayed behind both shoulders.

Even the rarer variant of the first type of bust with diadem only is subject to the same evolution, and now the bust to left with caftan in lieu of the cloak also appears in a tiara (Göbl 1984: pl. 157, Type IX of Vima Kadphises) (Fig. 7c), leaving all other features unchanged, save for the object held in the clenched

FIGURE 7A-B *Vima Kadphises, gold double dinar. CNG Triton X (9-1-2007), lot 468 (16.00g).*

FIGURE 7C-D *Vima Kadphises, gold double dinar. CNG Triton X (9-1-2007), lot 471 (15.93g).*

left fist, whose hooked shape strongly suggests a sword pommel shaped as the head of a bird of prey.³⁸

The full-length figure turned to left with tiara and caftan is instead used for two types depicting the king sitting on a throne (Göbl 1984: pl. 157, Type XII of Vima Kadphises) (Fig. 8a)³⁹ and riding an elephant (Göbl 1984: pl. 157, Type III of Vima Kadphises) (Fig. 8c).⁴⁰ The same basic combination is then found in a type rare on gold coins but common on the copper series—to the point of

38 The sword hilt is visible emerging diagonally from underneath the caftan, on the king's chest between the caftan clasps and the belt buckle, in the type of the king sitting cross-legged (as well as in that of the enthroned king mentioned below). Indeed, the sword's lower tip may be noted to emerge from below the caftan on the right end of the bed of rocks (see Fig. 7a).

39 The club held in the right hand is here substituted by a twig.

40 The king on elephant is actually depicted exactly as the enthroned version, i.e., in full frontal view, both legs visible as if the king were riding turned to the side.

completely dominating their typology—and destined to an enduring success in the successive Kushan numismatic history. The standing king is portrayed full-length occupying the whole field (Göbl 1984: pl. 157, Type IV of Vima Kadphises) (Fig. 8e), with his bearded head in profile to left while the body is fully facing, the feet showing the tendency to the symmetrical splayed rendering commonly associated with Kushan period imagery.⁴¹ Under the caftan the king wears the standard knee-length tunic, closed by a belt whose end hangs from the buckle.⁴² As usual the diadem knot is visible behind the tiara, its conspicuous ties flowing behind. While the left hand rests on the hilt of the sword held at the chest,⁴³ the right arm is lowered to drop offerings on a small fire burner on the left. On the two sides a club and a trident combined with an axe are visible.

Vima also employed, exclusively on copper, a rare variant of this image (Göbl 1984: pl. 73, no. 765) (Fig. 8g).⁴⁴ in this instance the fire burner is located on the right and the king is accordingly turned to drop offerings onto it, his right arm stretching across the body. It is not clear whether ceremonial weapons are also depicted.

The basic type of Vima Kadphises' coppers—that of the king standing and facing to the left before the fire burner—was inherited by Kanishka, who used it with only minor changes for the vast majority of his series (Göbl 1984: pl. 157, Types I-IV of Kanishka).⁴⁵ Most notably, we see that the left arm is depicted as holding a spear vertically, with two ribbons hanging from its tip, instead of resting on the sword hilt. The tiara is subject to an evolution, and a number

41 This treatment of the feet is, however, already visible on coins of the Graeco-Bactrian king Agathokles depicting Samkarshana and Vasudeva-Krishna, see Bopearachchi 1991: 175, Agathocle series 9, and pl. 7.

42 As visible even in the types of the king sitting cross-legged and on the throne.

43 The sword is largely hidden by the caftan, yet its lower tip is just visible at the bottom corner of the caftan on the right, next to the end of the club.

44 Göbl provisionally classified this type as a reverse type (see Göbl 1984: 35, and pl. 172, *König opfernd/1*) assuming that the bust appearing on the opposite face of the coin could depict the king (accordingly numbered as Type XIV of Vima). Yet, contrary to what Göbl (1984: 35-36, fn. 81, and 60; 1993: 31) boldly stated, the bust is actually two-faced and accompanied by a trident, meaning that it can only be associated with Oešo (as already noted by Cribb 1995/96: 98; 1997: 14). Therefore the image of the king at altar of this series occupies its standard place on the obverse.

45 The type was employed for all series except for some quarter dinars (Göbl 1984: pl. 6, nos. 41-45) and some limited copper issues (Göbl 1984: pl. 76, no. 779; pl. 80-82, nos. 798, 803, 807, 814, 818).

FIGURE 8A-B *Vima Kadphises, gold double dinar. CNG Triton X (9-1-2007), lot 469 (15.93g).*

FIGURE 8C-D *Vima Kadphises, gold dinar. Göbl 1984 (henceforth SMK), no. 3/1.*

FIGURE 8E-F *Vima Kadphises, copper tetradrachm. Gorny & Mosch Giessener Münzhandlung (henceforth G&M) 152 (10-10-2006), lot 1593 (16.52g).*

FIGURE 8G-H *Vima Kadphises, copper tetradrachm.*
SMK no. 765.1.

of variants appear (cf. Tandon 2011: 387-393) (Fig. 9a, 9c),⁴⁶ marking the two main mints according to Göbl. The cloak, no longer fastened at the shoulder but frontally at the breast, makes its return, hanging in large folds behind the king and with the upper part flowing on both sides of the king's figure,⁴⁷ displacing the caftan worn by Vima II. The sleeved and knee-length tunic underneath, belted at the waist, is accordingly fully exposed. The treatment of the feet is the same as that seen on coins of Vima Kadphises, while the sword, now completely visible, is suspended from a special belt, its hilt displaying a pomel shaped as the beaked head of a bird of prey. As for his father, Kanishka appears fully bearded, with the addition of a circular shape on the cheek, usually associated in the literature with the feature known from Arsacid coins that is commonly interpreted as a wart.⁴⁸ Flames, absent from the version of this type employed by Vima Kadphises, are again to be seen, emerging from the ruler's shoulders. Sometimes the right hand over the fire burner holds a goad/*aṅkuśa* (Rosenfield 1967: 56) (Fig. 9c).⁴⁹

46 One of them (Fig. 9a here), also employed on quarter units (Fig. 9e here), has a less hemispherical shape, slightly bulging on its forepart. Yet one must not forget, first, the space constraints on the images on these coins, and second and more importantly, that these are side views. In fact, tiaras are not necessarily as hemi-spherical as they appear when seen from the side, as generally happens on coins. Tiaras depicted in frontal view on some coin series (such as Arsacid drachms of the middle of the 1st century AD, see Sellwood 1980: 220-222, series 67) and more clearly on sculptures in the round, such as those found in Hatra or Dalverzin tepe for example (see Fig. 31a here), frequently show a more or less pronounced tapering towards the top, which could well fit the variant visible on these coins of Kanishka.

47 Carter 2005: 434 wrongly spoke of the streamers of a double pennant. Cf. Göbl 1984: 34 who wrote of a sort of scarf.

48 See Invernizzi 1990 and Faccenna 1996 for wider analyses on the so-called "wart".

49 Carter 2005: 434 suggested a quirt "like those of the Saka royalty and satraps".

FIGURE 9A-B *Kanishka, gold dinar. CNG Triton XIII (5-1-2010), lot 266 (8.00g).*

FIGURE 9C-D *Kanishka, gold dinar. CNG 96 (14-5-2014), lot 634 (20mm, 7.99g).*

FIGURE 9E-F *Kanishka, gold quarter dinar. CNG Triton XIII (5-1-2010) lot 270 (1.99g).*

The quarter unit discards the fire burner image, employing the same type cut at the waist (Göbl 1984: pl. 157, Type IV of Kanishka) (Fig. 9e),⁵⁰ resulting in a spear-holding bust facing left which emerges from rocks, like the busts of Vima II.

⁵⁰ The type was employed even on rare copper series (Göbl 1984: pl. 76, no. 779).

FIGURE 9G-H *Kanishka, copper drachm. CNG e-auction 207 (25-3-2009), lot 260 (22mm, 3.91g).*

A rare type employed only on coppers shows the enthroned king in frontal view (Fig. 9g), only the head depicted in profile to left (Göbl 1984: pls. 80-81, nos. 798 and 803). The general composition is strongly reminiscent of the enthroned Vima Kadphises, but sadly nothing more can be added due to the poorly preserved condition of the published specimens.

The inspiration provided by the series of Vima II is clearly apparent even on coins of Huvishka (cf. Rosenfield 1967: 61; Jongeward et al. 2015: 6). The vast majority of the types used by Huvishka on his gold coins are busts of the king emerging from rocks, usually looking to the left, though images facing the opposite direction are not unknown.⁵¹ All are a combination of profile head and facing or $\frac{3}{4}$ -view bust, normally with both arms visible.⁵²

For a large part of his gold series, i.e. the first two issues in both Mint A and B according to Göbl (1984: pls. 11-15, nos. 135-188, and pls. 21-25, nos. 291-337), Huvishka wears a hemispherical tiara and is clothed in a long sleeved, plain, pullover tunic (Figs. 10a, 10c), with a rounded collar at the neck bordered by beads (Göbl 1984: pl. 158, Types I-IV and Type xx of Huvishka).⁵³ No cloak or caftan is visible. The tiara is surmounted by a crest decoration analogous to that displayed by Kanishka, while a crescent adorns its forepart and another

51 If not unknown, however, right-facing images are extremely rare. According to Göbl 1984: 36, and pl. 158, out of a total of twenty-two types and variants of busts of Huvishka, only Type I, xxa, and xxi are turned to the right. While Type I has good use at the beginning of Huvishka's coinage, the employment of Types xxa and xxi was very limited.

52 Save for two types (xx and xxa), out of a total of more than thirty main types and variants identified by Göbl 1984: 36-37.

53 Type xxa should probably be included here.

one its side.⁵⁴ The diadem ties now display a characteristic ribbing.⁵⁵ The king, wearing moustaches and exhibiting two conspicuous side-burns in lieu of the full beard, holds a club in the right hand,⁵⁶ and the hilt of a sword with the pommel shaped as an eagle head in the left one.⁵⁷ The circular shape normally identified as a wart introduced by Kanishka is still found on the cheek. Flames are often visible emerging from his shoulders.

With the second part of his coinage, covered by the third and fourth issues (Göbl 1984: pls. 16-21, nos. 190-288 for Mint A and pls. 25-27, nos. 340-383 for Mint B), a few changes are introduced. The king's bust still emerges from rocks, but while the right hand keeps on holding the simplified club as before, a spear held against the shoulder makes its appearance in the left (Fig. 10e), occasionally substituted by a staff with zoomorphic ending.⁵⁸ The position of the arms in relation to the body is unaffected, and they are both depicted exactly as in the preceding types. A variously decorated tunic takes the place of the plain one worn by Huvishka in the preceding issues, almost invariably accompanied by a cloak or by a caftan open at the front as on Vima Kadphises' series. Significant changes affect the head of the king, as a circular nimbus appear behind it, and the tiara is first subject to modifications of its decorative apparatus (Göbl 1984: pl. 158, Types v-xi of Huvishka), and then substituted by a mitre-like helmet (Göbl 1984: pl. 158, Types xii-xvi of Huvishka) (Fig. 10g). Cheek protections are normally visible, attached to both the tiara and the mitre, and

54 Occasionally the crescent on the tiara side is substituted by a round shaped motif of beads, see Göbl 1984: no. 290 (Huvishka obverse Type xx).

55 On coins struck by Mint B the ribbing is apparently not as regular as on series produced by Mint A (compare Figs. 10a and 10c here).

56 The club is rendered with a simplified shape consisting of a thicker ending on a sort of thinner stick. Rosenfield 1967: 62 spoke of a mace, Göbl 1984: 36 of a Kolbenszepter.

57 Cf. Rosenfield 1967: 63, Type vi, who tentatively proposed interpreting the object as a sword hilt, after having preferred the definition of *anḱuśa* for the previous types of Huvishka. It is likely that the object in question is always the same, and the comparison with the royal iconography of Vima II and Kanishka strongly supports the reading as a sword hilt, as already defined by Göbl 1984: 34. Identical swords with eagle-headed pommels are even displayed by several Kushan deities depicted on the coin reverses, like Mioro, Mao, Mahaseno, Nanaśao, Orlagno, Pharro, Šaoreoro, and Iamšo (Mode 1997: 548, fn. 6, stressed that the deities with such raptor-headed sword hilts are all Iranian since he did not detect the same feature in the image of Mahaseno). Carter 2005: 433, mentioned the raptor-headed sword pommels of the Kushan deities but not those displayed by royal images on coins.

58 With the occasional exception, spear and staff are normally both adorned with ribbons tied at the tip as seen before for the spear of Kanishka.

FIGURE 10A-B *Huvishka, gold dinar. CNG Triton XVII Sessions 1-2 (7-1-2014), lot 462 (21mm, 8.00g).*

FIGURE 10C-D *Huvishka, gold dinar. CNG Triton XVII Sessions 1-2 (7-1-2014), lot 474 (20mm, 8.04g).*

FIGURE 10E-F *Huvishka, gold dinar. Peus 410-411 (31-10-2013), lot 199 (7.81g).*

completely hiding the side burns.⁵⁹ Finally, the ribbing of the diadem ties is common to coins from both mints.

Occasionally the usual types employed in the gold series are further elaborated, for example by adding legs to the standard bust of the king in order to portray him full figure, exactly as seen under Vima Kadphises. This is shown

⁵⁹ That is, if sideburns were present at all.

FIGURE 10G-H *Huvishka, gold dinar. CNG 91 (19-9-2012), lot 452 (20mm, 7.90g).*

by a type of the second phase depicting Huvishka sitting cross-legged (Göbl 1984: pl. 158, Type xxii of Huvishka) (Fig. 11a).⁶⁰ Similar in concept, but different in its rendering, is an earlier type, also representing the king sitting cross-legged on a bed of rocks (Göbl 1984: pl. 158, Type xxiii of Huvishka) (Fig. 11c),⁶¹ but this time with the staff held high by the left hand, a posture inspired by the typology of Kanishka.⁶² The king is depicted frontally and no longer in the slightly $\frac{3}{4}$ view of the busts, and his head is turned to right. The staff ends with a zoomorphic termination, with two ribbons hanging.

The same early version of the king's image, with rounded tiara and plain tunic, was used to depict Huvishka riding on an elephant (Göbl 1984: pl. 159, Type xxiv of Huvishka) (Fig. 11e), holding a spear⁶³ in his right hand and an *ankuša* in the left one.⁶⁴

Remarkably enough, the latter types, unusual for the gold coinage, find their correspondence in the copper series, which, on the whole, show a different approach to typological selection. No busts are employed, and the king appears always depicted full-length. Of the three basic types commonly used by Huvishka, two are those just seen, portraying the king respectively as sitting cross-legged on rocks holding the staff (Göbl 1984: pl. 158, Types xxiiia-c of Huvishka)⁶⁵ and riding on the elephant (Göbl 1984: pl. 159, Types xxiva-c

60 According to Göbl (1984: pl. 20, no. 269), the series was struck by Mint A in the third emission.

61 Employed by Mint B in its first emission, according to Göbl (1984: pls. 22-23, nos. 299 and 305).

62 Which in its turn has analogies in the typology of Soter Megas' series, cf. above fn. 24.

63 The spear seems to exhibit a pair of secondary points at the base of the tip.

64 The *ankuša* in fact appears similar to the object held in the right hand by Vima II in his bust types that we identified with a sword hilt. Yet here an elephant goad would seem much more likely.

65 In Type xxiiic the king holds the spear/staff in the right hand instead of the left.

FIGURE 11A-B *Huvishka, gold dinar. SMK no. 269.1.*

FIGURE 11C-D *Huvishka, gold dinar. SMK no. 299.1.*

FIGURE 11E-F *Huvishka, gold dinar. CNG Triton X (9-1-2007), lot 488 (7.99g).*

of Huvishka).⁶⁶ A third one shows Huvishka reclining on a couch, his left leg hanging down (Göbl 1984: pl. 159, Type xxvi of Huvishka).⁶⁷ Among the few rarer types, one depicts Huvishka sitting on a throne instead of a bed of rocks,

66 Type xxv (with the variant xxva) is the same image turned into the opposite direction.

67 The left hand is possibly holding the king's sword, cf. Göbl 1984: pl. 85, no. 833.

the only difference beside the seat being the posture of the legs, which are parallel in the frontal view used for the image and not cross-legged (Göbl 1984: pl. 159, Type XXVII of Huvishka). All these types share the feature of a conspicuous rayed nimbus surrounding the whole image of the king. Unlike on the gold coinage, where the nimbus appears only in the third issue, on copper coins it is visible from the earliest series. Moreover, the nimbus employed on gold coins never exhibits the rays that are so in evidence in the types used on copper coins.

All this variety comes to an end with Vasudeva, whose coin production is marked by a dramatic reduction in the range of typological choices.⁶⁸ For his obverses he only employed the type of the full-length king at altar inaugurated by Vima II Kadphises and inherited by Kanishka, regardless of denomination. The head of the king closely resembles the later model of Huvishka, as the king exhibits just a pair of moustaches and wears the same type of mitre, surrounded by the circular halo. The spear held by the king in the type of Kanishka acquires a pair of additional secondary points (Fig. 12a).⁶⁹ Occasionally a trident is visible next to the fire burner (Fig. 12c). The only really significant innovation introduced by Vasudeva is that the king is depicted in heavy, cataphract-style armour, with a corselet and skirt of large square plates and laminated armour protecting the limbs. The choice of the portrait of the king in armour before a fire burner will be imitated by all his successors, albeit with minor variants, essentially bringing to an end the development of Kushan royal typology and inspiring similar images in the successive Kushano-Sasanian series.

2 The Theory of the “Roman Patterns” and the Work of Robert Göbl

As can be seen from this overview, the iconographic features composing Kushan royal coin imagery can be grouped into two categories. The first category pertains to the basic compositional schemes or conventions, such as, e.g., the choice of busts or full-length figures—the latter to be then subdivided into standing or sitting, for example—and their postures. Here the use of the image of the king on the obverse alone, as opposed to royal depictions on both coin faces, must also be included (cf. Cribb 1998: 87). To the second category belong instead the specific elements of royal iconography, that is to say, how the king effectively appeared, and what exactly were the paraphernalia identifying his image. In this regard, it is possible to define both general characteristics,

68 A reduction also mirrored by the reverse typology.

69 That means to say that it is still a spear, not a trident.

FIGURE 12A-B *Vasudeva, gold dinar. CNG Triton XVII Sessions 1-2 (7-1-2014), lot 476 (20mm, 7.94g).*

FIGURE 12C-D *Vasudeva, gold dinar. CNG e-auction 294 (16-1-2013), lot 423 (20mm, 8.14g).*

connected to the wider concepts behind the image of the Kushan royal figure, and specific features pertaining to individual kings.

The proper appraisal of this distinction is crucial, as it provides a much more reliable framework in which to seek connections and models that can be of relevance to Kushan royal imagery.

Once this descriptive analysis is undertaken, the question to be tackled is the definition of the basic features of Kushan royal imagery in order to find their possible connections.

The most important attempt to give a meaning—and an answer—to such a question is no doubt provided by Robert Göbl's monumental work on the Kushans. With his *System und Chronologie der Münzprägung des Kušānreiches*, which he published in 1984 after more than two decades of work on Kushan numismatics,⁷⁰ Kushan coinage for the first time became the focus of study aimed at tracing its history and development through the reconstruction of its

70 From 1957.

inner structure.⁷¹ Within such an approach the analysis of the types employed was crucial, since it was the basis of the reconstruction of the system of production. Indeed, the result of Göbl's life-long study was to establish a tight link between Roman and Kushan coin series, based on their typological relations. More precisely, Göbl focused on the dependency of Kushan types on Roman models from the earliest stages of his work on the Kushans, his method revolving around "the supposition that coins form the prototypes for coins" (Göbl 1960: 80). From this, when applied to the vexing question of Kushan chronology, it was natural to deduce that Roman types may provide the *termini post quos* to date Kushan coin images.

These basic principles have always remained at the core of Göbl's work (Göbl 1993: 25-26; 1999), even if the progress of his research led him, over time, to ascribe increasing weight to elements originally not considered of primary importance, such as the metrological dependency of Kushan denominations on Roman ones,⁷² as well as the *termini* produced by obverse typology in lieu of those possibly provided by the reverses.⁷³ Indeed, such a modification resulted in the absolute priority finally being given to the links established by

71 See also Göbl 1993. The last work on the Kushans by Göbl was posthumously published in 1999, where a summary was provided in English of the arguments contained in his books of 1984 and 1993.

72 Cfr. Göbl 1960: 78 and 1984: 58 on the relationship between the double *dinar* of Vima Kadphises and the *binio* of Caracalla: in 1960 the Kushans "introduced these coins much sooner than the Romans" while in 1984 "Es ist sicher, daß die Kušān die römische Idee kopieren", followed with just slightly less bold words in Göbl 1999: 157-158. See also Cribb 1998: 87-88; 2007: 366. The idea of a direct connection between Roman and Kushan weight standards had already been disputed by Mac Dowall 1960 (even if, according to Mac Dowall 1978: 306, the "moneys of Huvishka adopted and applied Roman economic theory about overvaluing the copper coinage", cf. also Mac Dowall 1997: 240-241), and, more recently, Bracey 2009: 46-47, takes the same line. Jongeward et al. 2015 refer merely to denominations derived from the Attic standard also for the gold series.

73 To be compared with Göbl 1960: 79, where he openly referred to the local tradition, going back to Graeco-Bactrian models, behind the choices of Kushan obverse typology. Indeed, from Göbl's later works one easily gets the impression that with time he came to imagine the beginning of the Kushan imperial coinage under Vima II as so tightly tied to Rome because of the fundamental collapse of the Greek coin tradition in the area which occurred with the fall of Greek Bactria centuries earlier (cf. Göbl 1984: 60). It was in the resulting void that Roman coin features were able to assert themselves so decisively. Yet, in this approach Göbl seemed to have completely skipped the role of Sakas and Indo-Parthians in transmitting the Indo-Greek tradition they directly inherited (cf. Cribb 1998: 86-87; 2007: 363; Jongeward et al. 2015: 5), thus severing a crucial link for reconstructing the numismatic history of the region.

the obverses (Göbl 1984; 1993; 1999), that is to say, to the connections between different coin systems detectable in the royal portraits.

Among them, the most important and crucially emphasized was no doubt the wide-scale employment by Huvishka of *busts with attributes*, in particular those introduced by Huvishka in his third issue, which—according to Göbl—were modelled on the busts with attributes that became common on Roman coin series from AD 260.⁷⁴ The specific feature linking the busts of Huvishka's third issue to such Roman models, introduced on coins by Gallienus, was detected by Göbl in the spear held by the Kushan king, so that “Die Lanzenbüsten des Huviška sind daher vorher nicht möglich” (Göbl 1993: 26), and “cannot refer to other sources (e.g., the Graeco-Bactrians)” (Göbl 1999: 157).

Further signs of Roman influence were seen in the cloak worn by Vima Kadphises, expressly identified by Göbl as a Roman imperial *paludamentum* (Göbl 1984: 34-35; 1999: 157),⁷⁵ and in features such as the marking of the names of the deities on the reverses (Göbl 1984: 20; Cribb 1998: 88; 2007: 367). All this was ascribed to the fact that the inner pattern of the Kushan mint organization was understood by Göbl to have been structured, exactly like its Roman model, on several *officinae*, distinguished under Kanishka and Huvishka by the reverse types.⁷⁶

In addition to such Roman connections, Göbl detected other links with Sasanian coinage which he was the first to consider, which had the effect of strengthening his late chronological framework for the Kushans (Göbl 1984: 15, 20, 34; 1993: 26-27; 1999: 158-159). These consist first of all in the peculiar treatment in Sasanian art of the diadem ties, which invariably exhibit a characteristic ribbing. Save for a few initial coin series of Ardashir (Alram/Gyselen 2003: 117-127, obverse Types I-IId, and occasionally IIIa-IIIb), all ribbons in Sasanian art are depicted in this way, be it on coins, rock reliefs, seals, or silver vessels, systematically covering the whole Sasanian period with a widespread presence in all kinds of visual documents. Therefore Göbl deduced a Sasanian origin for the ribbed diadem employed by Huvishka, resulting in a further occurrence of the transfer of features from a foreign coin system, in this case the Sasanian

74 Anticipated by their wider use on medallions since Gordianus III, see Göbl 1984: 16, fn. 29; 1993: 26; 1999: 157-158, and pl. 3.

75 See below fn. 186.

76 Cf. also Mac Dowall 1975: 145; 1978: 306-307. According to Göbl 1984: 59, under Vima Kadphises this function was played by the obverses, and sometimes also by the choice of different denominations. Cribb 1998: 93-96, reconstructed a completely different system, based on the premise that the reverse types identified production batches instead of officinae. See also Bracey 2009 and Jongeward et al. 2015: 11.

instead of the Roman one, to the Kushan series. Moreover, he suggested that the wreath offered by several deities depicted on the reverses of Huvishka's third issue was inspired by Sasanian investiture scenes, in the context of "a sort of competition between two proclaimed Iranian dynasties" (Göbl 1999: 159).⁷⁷

All this had an obvious impact on chronology, providing the basis for Göbl's theory of a 3rd-century dating for the beginning of the era of Kanishka,⁷⁸ then identified with the era that was supposed to start in Bactria in AD 232 (Göbl 1984: 58, fn. 97; 1993: 86). The strength of Göbl's reconstruction lies in its character, i.e. the product of a global analysis aimed at the detection of the structure of the coinage as a planned, large scale operation, resulting in a full system laid open to integrate all the different features of the coin series.

Yet, upon closer analysis, the propositions that Göbl presented as conclusions extracted from the study of the materials could, in fact, be more fittingly defined as a methodological approach, i.e. as the premises of his work rather

77 Göbl (1984: 79-86; 1993: 42-47 and 77-86; 1999: 159-162) also added the chronology he reconstructed for the Kushano-Sasanian series to the evidence pointing to a dating into the 3rd century for Kanishka. However, the Kushano-Sasanian chronology more recently proposed by Schindel (2005; 2012) is significantly earlier, the main group starting with Ardashir no later than the end of the 3rd century.

78 A theory nowadays upheld, on different premises (but in agreement with Göbl on the terminus for Huvishka provided by Sasanian ribbed diadems), by my friend and colleague N. Schindel: see Schindel 2009; 2014. The year 1 of Kanishka is now commonly identified with AD 127, following Falk 2001, who translated a verse of the Yavanajataka as referring to a Kushan era beginning in AD 227 (but see Golzio 2008: 86-89 for a different interpretation and the proposal to date Year 1 of Kanishka to AD 155/156; on the Yavanajataka see also Golzio 2012: 147-149), then assumed to mark the beginning of the second century of the era according to the theory of the dropped hundreds (see also Falk 2004). It has to be stressed that the use of the dropped hundreds is documented in India, but so far not attested for any of the several eras known in Bactria. This makes the equation of the era mentioned by the Yavanajataka with the Kanishka era highly questionable (a possibility is that the Yavanajataka is referring, in fact, to Indian Kushans, rather than to the Kushan empire of Kanishka's time, cf. Carter 2006). Another 3rd-century era, which is certainly Bactrian (regardless of the possible identity of its founder), is that of the Bactrian documents starting in AD 223 (Sims-Williams 1999). Unless considering it as the Kanishka era (which is the position of Schindel 2009; 2014), its mere existence requires the placing of the reigns of Kanishka, Huvishka and at least the bulk of that of Vasudeva before AD 223, which clearly means a 2nd-century dating for year 1 of Kanishka, be it AD 127 or not. As a matter of fact, the main problem for a 3rd-century dating of the era of Kanishka is the chronology of Kujula: with his reign essentially dated to the second and third quarters of the 1st century AD, it is impossible that the rule of the two Vimas who succeeded him before the advent of Kanishka covered c. 140 years (cf. Posch 1995: 112-114; Alram 1999: 46), especially considering that already Kujula appears to have lived quite a long life.

than results. In fact, Gérard Fussman already perceived in his review of Göbl's work of 1984 (Fussman 1986) that the concept tying together all such single elements—i.e. the very idea of a direct transmission of Roman coin models to NW India to create the Kushan coinage—, may actually be less straightforward than Göbl's reconstruction would lead us to suppose.

Now, a proper assessment of the different elements that were used to create the imagery of the Kushan kings may help to further advance our analysis. We have seen that the successors of Vima II Kadphises took constant inspiration from his series, as is to be expected since, with his monetary reform, he was the king who set the standard for a proper imperial coinage. What can be observed (Fig. 13) is that the mint personnel devised a system of alternation of the basic compositional formulas in order to make series belonging to different kings instantly recognizable (Cribb 1997: 25; Jongeward et al. 2015: 6; cf. also Göbl 1984: 12, 64; 1993: 36): the series of Kanishka took the standing king at altar of Vima II, while under Huvishka it was the turn of the bust, widely used by Vima II, to be re-employed. Vasudeva went back to the main type of Kanishka, which after him was, contrary to previous practice, canonized by his successors, effectively putting an end to the continuous development of the main features of Kushan coin typology.

Approached from this viewpoint, it is clear that Huvishka took his basic type of the royal bust from Vima II, not from Roman models.⁷⁹ Thanks to the series of his ancestor, the model of Huvishka's busts was available directly *in loco* and his engravers had no need to look elsewhere. Indeed,—and this must be remarked here—save for the addition of the spear from his third issue onwards, all busts of Huvishka reproduce exactly the schema used by the engravers working under Vima II for the latter's busts (Fig. 14): the posture of the king, the use of a tiara (in fact the same for Vima II and Huvishka's earlier issues except for the decoration) and the rocks from which the bust emerges are identical.⁸⁰

If we try to imagine the mint crew at work, the environment in which the types under discussion were created comes to the fore, and it can easily be seen how all such images are strictly linked in a system in which they were—for

79 The bust types of the two kings were compared even in Göbl 1984: 64, and pl. 173, 2.4-7.

80 This is to mention just the most immediate features. Further links between Huvishka's types and the images employed by Vima II may be singled out, among which one can mention the raptor-headed sword hilt held in the left hand by Huvishka in his first two issues as well as the particular rendering of the thumb and index finger of the right hand holding the mace. By showing the transformation of an original stylistic trait in a sort of typological convention, the latter clearly points to continuity in workshop tradition.

FIGURE 13 *The basic types on Kushan obverses from Vima Kadphises to Vasudeva.*

- A *Vima Kadphises, bust. CNG Triton X (9-1-2007), lot 471 (obverse) (15.93g).*
- B *Vima Kadphises, standing king before fire burner. G&M 152 (10-10-2006), lot 1593 (obverse) (16.52g).*
- C *Kanishka, standing king before fire burner. CNG Triton XIII (5-1-2010), lot 266 (obverse) (8.00g).*
- D *Huviska, bust. CNG Triton XVII Sessions 1-2 (7-1-2014), lot 474 (obverse) (20mm, 8.04g).*
- E *Vasudeva, standing king before fire burner. CNG Triton XVII Sessions 1-2 (7-1-2014), lot 476 (obverse) (20mm, 7.94g).*

A *Vima Kadphises*. CNG Triton X (9-1-2007), lot 471 (obverse) (15.93g).

B *Huvishka I issue*. CNG Triton XVII Sessions 1-2 (7-1-2014), lot 474 (obverse) (20mm, 8.04g).

C *Huvishka III issue*. CNG Triton XVI Sessions 1-2 (8-1-2013), lot 664 (obverse) (20mm, 7.91g).

FIGURE 14 *The bust with attributes on coins of Vima Kadphises and Huvishka.*

example—turned in one or the opposite direction to produce an easy means of differentiation (cf. Bracey 2009: 31). For the same purpose they were above all variously combined, providing the bust previously seen alone with crossed legs to make the king seated on the rocks instead of emerging from them, or joining the bust to a throne to obtain an image of the enthroned king. It is clear that all these images are closely connected and that they developed from the constant elaboration of their original models from simpler to more complex depictions.⁸¹

The “genealogical tree” that can be reconstructed for these images—as shown by the evolution in the use of the royal bust under Vima II (Fig. 15)—

FIGURE 15A
Vima Kadphises, royal bust on rocks.
CNG Triton XII (6-1-2009), lot 421
(obverse) (7.97g).

FIGURE 15B
Vima Kadphises, full length figure
(royal bust and crossed legs) *on*
rocks, with hand in sleeve. CNG
Triton X (9-1-2007), lot 468
(obverse) (16.00g).

FIGURE 15C
Vima Kadphises, enthroned full length figure (royal
bust and sitting legs), with hand in sleeve. CNG Triton
X (9-1-2007), lot 469 (obverse) (15.93g).

81 This must not necessarily be understood in terms of a linear path in the employment of specific types, since it is always possible to use simpler images after complex ones. It is in the *elaboration* of such images that such a path can be reconstructed.

therefore excludes a massive arrival of elements from outside, even with regard to the compositional formulae used by the engravers.⁸² A feature that definitely shows a change from Huvishka's first and second issues to the third one is style, but this need not be explained as a substantial modification originating outside of the mints, i.e. as coming from the Mediterranean West. Rather, it may have been due simply to changes in personnel among the craftsmen involved in the preparation of the dies, as becomes clear when one bears in mind that a gap of some time might perhaps separate the third issue from the second. At any rate, a survey of the changes in style between Vima II and Vasudeva clearly shows the range of possible visual differences, without necessarily implying anything more than the replacement of old craftsmen with new ones. In fact, one is left to wonder how the busts of Huvishka featuring a spear could have been explained if their engraving were stylistically less naturalistic than that displayed by the series of his first and second issue, instead of the opposite: would a change from a more to a less naturalistic style still be interpreted as the result of influence coming from the Roman West?

In fact the compositional links of Type XXIII of Huvishka to the series of Kanishka, highlighted by the shafted attribute visible in both images (Fig. 16a-b),⁸³ show the direction to follow in order to explain the background to the appearance of the spear on Huvishka's coins. Beside the presence itself of such an attribute, which pertains to the level of the real image of the king, these links are crucially important in terms of composition, as is clearly demonstrated precisely by the way in which the staff/spear is held by the king.

The evidence provided by the copper series can be also added, since one of Huvishka's commonest types on copper portrays the king with a spear/staff as a full figure sitting cross-legged (Fig. 16d), rather than cut at the waist to appear as a bust with spear/staff in one hand. This should be borne in mind, as it reminds us that gold and copper series were struck in the same mints and their dies produced within the same working environment. Even if the mints for precious and base metal were different (Bracey 2009: 42; 2012b: 119), it is clear that dies were engraved by die-cutters using one and the same pool of images,⁸⁴ and that, therefore, the analysis of the imagery they bear cannot be tackled by separating the images used on gold coins from those employed in the copper

82 The specifically oriental iconographic features—such as the outfit and headgear of the king—are obviously impossible to explain as originating in the Roman Mediterranean.

83 Be it a staff or a spear.

84 As clearly shown by the kinship between the types depicting Vima II on gold and copper, not to mention the connections between gold and copper series detectable in reverse typology. Cf. also Tandon 2011: 7.

FIGURE 16A
SMK pl. 157, Kanishka Type IV, gold quarter dinar. CNG Triton XIII (5-1-2010) lot 270 (obverse).

FIGURE 16B
SMK pl. 158, Huvishka Type XXIII, gold dinar (obverse).

FIGURE 16C
SMK pl. 158, Huvishka Type XI, gold dinar. CNG Triton XVI Sessions 1-2 (8-1-2013), lot 664 (obverse).

FIGURE 16D
SMK pl. 158, Huvishka Type XXIII, copper tetradrachm. American Numismatic Society 1944.100.66668 (obverse) (26mm, 11.16g).

series. In other words, if the bust with spear is explained as originating from Roman models, then the same should be valid for the king sitting cross-legged. Now, this is precisely where the theory of the Roman patterns for Kushan coins fails completely.

The spear appears in Huvishka's typology because it had been a constitutive feature of Kushan royal iconography since at least the time of Kanishka.⁸⁵ It was not a new feature that Huvishka's engravers could take only from Roman

85 In fact, since Soter Megas, cf. above fn. 24 on the pointed object, in all likelihood a spear, held in the hand by the figure with Macedonian helmet and by that with rayed halo on Soter Megas' coins.

coins, since they knew it from a direct local source—their own tradition—independently from Roman imagery. The fact that the transmission of these specific features was a local phenomenon is clearly indicated by several elements. The busts of Huvishka took the posture of the king, the bed of rocks, the tiara, the club in the right hand, the flames emerging from the shoulders directly from those of Vima II. With Huvishka's third issue these very same busts are accorded a different outfit—mitre, clothing, nimbus—and in their left hand they are given the spear/staff of Kanishka. Yet, the arms are depicted in exactly the same posture as in the two previous issues and in the series of Vima II. There is thus no need to look to Roman coins to explain such changes, unless we are ready to accept—as we should if we follow Göbl's approach in strict terms—that it is Vima Kadphises who was originally inspired by the 3rd-century Roman busts with attributes, with the all too obvious consequence of moving Vima II to a date after AD 260!⁸⁶

Moreover, and here we reach the point where counter-arguments must be discussed, while the transmission of a local tradition may provide a fitting background to all the features of Huvishka's series, the theory of a direct Roman inspiration can in no way explain some specific types, such as those depicting the king sitting cross-legged or riding an elephant.

That the image of king on elephant must be strictly connected to India needs no elaboration,⁸⁷ even if similar images are not known prior to Vima Kadphises, as the elephant had previously always appeared alone or in connection with divine images. The evidence regarding the king sitting cross-legged, by contrast, is richer. While the standard images of the Saka kings of north-western India depict the armoured king on horseback, some copper series of Maues (Senior 2001: nos. 15.1-2) and of Azes (Senior 2001: nos. 106.10 and 107.10-99, 108.10) do portray the king seated cross-legged (Fig. 17b-c), with a ceremonial sword clearly in evidence.⁸⁸

Kujula himself has a series displaying a similar type on the obverse (Fig. 3a), as we have seen. Accordingly, Vima II, like Huvishka after him, was using

86 This is not to mention that, as seen above, busts with attributes—be they spears or arrows—are first used in Kushan series by Soter Meges, so the impact on chronology of a literal application of the theory of the Roman obverse patterns would be even more radical.

87 Meaning an Indian background for the images under discussion, not a direct reference to India symbolized by the elephant, cf. the apt remarks of Bracey 2009: 36.

88 See Carter 2005: 431-433 on the role of the sword in Saka royal ideology. Cf. also Rosenfield 1967: 178-179 and Mode 1997 on the Central Asian connections of the sword of Kanishka at Mat.

FIGURE 17A-B *Maues, king sitting cross-legged, copper coin.*
CNG e-auction 224 (16-12-2009), lot 299
(22mm, 8.97g).

FIGURE 17C-D *Azes, king sitting cross-legged, copper coin.*
Aram 1986, pl. 34, no. 105.

images which find explicit antecedents in the local north-western tradition. This is, of course, no real surprise, especially when we think about the specific historical circumstances: the Kushans expanded in India, in the process absorbing legacies inherited from previous locally ruling elites of Iranian origin, Sakas and Indo-Parthians, as well as Indian elements. It is only natural that features of Central Asian and Indian derivation—the cross-legged posture and the elephant—were therefore included in their royal imagery.

This is also shown by other details of the royal paraphernalia often visible beside the king, which find their counterparts in north-western glyptics (Fig. 18a), like the ceremonial weapons such as the trident with affixed axe on coins of Vima II (Fig. 18b), to which, significantly, *linga* and *vajra* are added on some of his quarter dinars (Göbl 1984: pl. 168, Oešo Type 3) (Fig. 18c).⁸⁹ Clearly they entered Kushan royal iconography from India, as, in all likelihood, did the club held by Vima II and Huvishka and the staff with zoomorphic

89 See also Göbl 1984: pl. 1, no. 9.

ending of Huvishka. None of these elements are standard features in Iranian royal imagery.⁹⁰ However, this does not imply that Kushan royalty is to be understood in Indian terms.⁹¹ It merely shows the flexibility of Kushan power in its use of imagery as, indeed, can be seen at Mat. There, the Iranian rulers of the empire presented themselves to an Indian audience keeping their immediately recognizable “northern” identity (cf. Fussman 1977: 315), despite acquiring selected traits of local derivation, such as the heavy mace with *makara* ending connected to the notion of *dandanayaka*.⁹²

Upon close scrutiny, it becomes thus clear that there are serious limitations to the theory of Roman patterns, since it is not able to explain the deeper and structural links between the series of the various kings. In fact, the moneyers of Huvishka had no need to introduce Roman features, as they could simply rely on the Kushan numismatic tradition which had developed in the meantime and entered a new stage under Vima Kadphises. Kushan imperial imagery exhibits a basic and deeper consistency that—unsurprisingly—extends from specific features of the royal outfit, such as the spear-shaped sceptre or the mace, to compositional patterns, as the busts with attributes of Huvishka were inspired by those of Vima (as already had been the case for Kanishka with the type of the king standing and sacrificing on the fire burner), not by images of Roman derivation. This is only confirmed by types that cannot have any Roman origin, such as the king on elephant or sitting cross-legged, which must be therefore explained as products of the local tradition.

3 The Role of the Previous Local Numismatic Tradition

Contrary to the theories of a deep and lasting influence from the Roman Mediterranean, several elements show the fundamental role in the adoption or creation of the basic compositional formulae employed in the royal imagery which was played by what, by the phase in which the Kushans gave

90 Yet a trident is depicted as the central motif on a ceremonial shield recovered at Old Nisa, see Invernizzi 2001: 154.

91 As instead done by Verardi 1983: esp. 255–261.

92 On Kanishka's mace see Rosenfield 1967: 179–181, and specifically Mariottini Spagnoli 1967: 1970. Cf. also Carter 2005: 433, where it was aptly pointed out that the mace of Kanishka is anticipated by the club of Vima Kadphises.

A Seal from NW India. Fussman 1972, pl. 1.6 (29mm).

B Copper tetradrachm of Vima Kadphises. G&M 152 (10-10-2006), lot 1593 (obverse).

C Quarter dinar of Vima Kadphises, SMK pl. 168, Oešo Type 3. CNG 99 (13-5-2015), lot 426 (reverse) (12mm, 1.98g).

FIGURE 18 Ceremonial weapons on Indian seals and Kushan coins.

birth to their imperial coinage, could be defined as the local numismatic tradition.⁹³

Before we proceed, it is first necessary to clarify some of the terms of the discussion which have been only cursorily hinted at in the literature, among which the role of the mint personnel is crucial (Göbl 1984: 28, 59-60).⁹⁴ To begin with, it is evident that the alleged Roman pattern of organization of the

93 Cribb (1998: 86-98; 2007: 365-366; see also Jongeward et al. 2015: 4-7) has repeatedly stressed the role of the numismatic tradition in the region deriving from Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek times and shared also by post-Greek dynasties.

94 See also Bracey 2009: 45-46 for some significant observations on the subject.

Kushan mints based on *officinae* would have required the physical presence of Roman specialists, at least under Vima II, i.e. at the beginning of the process, since only personnel with a first-hand experience could bring to the North-West the knowledge necessary to organize the mint and handle full scale coin production accordingly.⁹⁵ One is then left to wonder why such Roman specialists did not employ a clearly—or at least a more clearly—Roman-inspired typology on Vima Kadphises' series, which is visibly much less Roman than what Huvishka's coins will show a few decades later with several of their reverse deities: as a matter of fact, even the reverse typology of Vima II is completely alien to Roman models.⁹⁶

A possible answer to this question may, of course, be that under Vima such western specialists were merely entrusted with organizing the production and were not responsible for physically creating the images, which was left to local engravers; thereafter, new generations of local craftsmen would have followed, inheriting from the original foreign group the skills necessary for handling production. The introduction of Roman typological features at the inauguration of Huvishka's third issue would then represent the successive stage. However, this variant of the scenario proposed by Göbl would, in practice, result in Roman specialists using non-Roman inspired images under Vima II, and non-Roman craftsmen using Roman-inspired types at least thirty years later.⁹⁷ Such a time-frame is likely to have been, in fact, considerably longer,⁹⁸ not to mention the contradictory picture that emerges when obverse and reverse typology between Vima II and Huvishka are examined together according to the approach followed by Göbl. In fact, to postulate a distinction between technical advisors who merely oversaw the mint and craftsmen who actually engraved the coin dies makes little sense in this context, as the alleged Roman iconographic features already identified by Göbl under Vima could reach the Kushan empire only if brought directly by die-cutters or through the medium provided by pattern books (Cf. Göbl 1960: 78; 1984: 28), in both cases bringing us back to the question above.

95 Göbl (1984: 59) spoke of "römische Einweiser fürs Technische, vielleicht auch für die Graveurwerkstätten". Cf. also Mac Dowall 1997: 241-242.

96 Even Göbl 1960: 83-84, 86, only managed to make a connection—in fact, a rather tenuous one—between the later image of Oešo as employed under Kanishka and Huvishka and Roman models, without any parallel found for the god's image on coins of Vima Kadphises. Cf. also Göbl 1984: 48, Gruppe 19.

97 Here meaning Huvishka's Lanzenbüsten of Göbl. I am taking into account, for the sake of the discussion, only the obverse typology on which Göbl focused.

98 In fact, we are not really able to tell when Huvishka's third issue started, yet it would be safe to assume that the first two issues took more than just a few years.

The only alternative to this unlikely and contradictory scenario would be to postulate a continuous arrival of craftsmen from the Mediterranean, at least between Vima II and the beginning of Huvishka's third issue. But such an ongoing flow, or periodic movement at the rate of decades, of artisans between the Mediterranean and NW India⁹⁹ is extremely unlikely—to say the least—,¹⁰⁰ and it contradicts the very idea of imperial coinage as something organized on the basis of a central plan so rightly advocated by Göbl on so many occasions: had the Kushan mint authorities planned from the very beginning that they would have periodically needed specialists from the other side of the ancient world in order to keep on producing coins?

Similarly hard to accept is the idea that Kushan engravers could directly copy Roman coins on such a massive scale as required by the Kushan coin system,¹⁰¹ which is the only possible explanation left if, rejecting the idea that western craftsmen were present *in loco*, we nevertheless continue to argue that the Kushan coin types had direct external origins. Can we really imagine the engravers working in the Kushan royal mints under the highest commission

99 This is what seems implied by Göbl 1984: 29, where the obverse die-cutters are expressly said to have come from Rome, pointing at phases of the Kushan coin production between Vima Kadphises and Vasudeva II. The scale of the phenomenon must be stressed here, since one must imagine the Kushan mints, at least the two main mints striking gold series according to Göbl, periodically ready—or needing!—to absorb a rather conspicuous number of craftsmen from outside: what then of the local personnel?

100 Göbl (1984: 59) pointed to the massacres ordered by Caracalla in Alexandria in AD 215 as a possible reason for craftsmen to flee the Roman Empire and reach the Kushanshahr, where they would have been entrusted with the minting of the series of Vima Kadphises. In fact, this occurrence provides a clear logical argument against the idea of Roman specialists *regularly* working in Kushan mints: what happened when the Alexandrian specialists could live and work peacefully in their hometown? Or do we have to imagine that there were upheavals forcing skilled craftsmen to flee the city corresponding to the appearance on Kushan coins of every vaguely Roman-looking feature? Above all, how would the Kushan minting authorities have dealt with handling coin production in the absence of troubles in Roman cities such as Alexandria? In fact, there is no way to accord exceptional events such as that of AD 215 in Alexandria with the regular planning and running of a complex system like a state coinage thousands of kilometres away.

101 An idea that has, however, been traditional in the studies at least since Göbl 1960. Bracey 2009: 46, preferred to speak of the heavy borrowing by Kushan mint personnel on the superficial appearance of Roman coins, aptly arguing against the presence of Roman craftsmen in the Kushan mint(s) and the employment of Roman techniques on the basis of the detection of technical features of local derivation in Kushan coin production. This was reaffirmed in successive works stating that “the moneyers of Rome and the Kushans were simply copying from coins of each other they had seen” (Bracey 2012a: 216, fn. 5).

waiting for Roman coins to haphazardly arrive in their hands in order to provide models for the Kushan series?¹⁰² What kind of organization of a complex production system such as the monetary one could be envisaged on such premises?

In fact, by exploring the local coin tradition of the Indo-Iranian borderlands—which ultimately stretched back to the Graeco-Bactrians¹⁰³—in order to find the roots of the imagery employed on Kushan coins, we come to some extremely interesting results. In this regard reverse typology is especially telling, since it was not subject to the same degree of elaboration found in royal imagery. This was acknowledged, albeit briefly and only in passing, even by Göbl himself (1984: 47, and pl. 173, Gruppe 1),¹⁰⁴ who pointed to the presence on coins of Huvishka (Fig. 19f) of a type of Herakles already employed by Demetrius I in the 2nd century BC (Bopearachchi 1991: 164-166, series 1-3) (Fig. 19b). Indeed the very same type of Herakles is known on coins of the Saka rulers Vonones (Senior 2001, nos. 66.1-3) and Maues (Senior 2001, nos. 10.1, 44.1, 45.1-2) (Fig. 19c).

This should come as no surprise, and we have already seen that even the Kushan type of the king sitting cross-legged has locally attested Saka antecedents. In fact, the field of investigation may be significantly widened if we shift to a broader range of comparisons. Interesting instances may be found of identical types occurring on Graeco-Bactrian, Arsacid and Saka coins, such as the well-known type of the charging mounted Dioscuri employed by Greek kings from Eukratides to Diomedes, by Mithradates I of Parthia (Sellwood 1980: 39, 12.6-7, 10) and by Azilises (Senior 2001, nos. 30-31) (Fig. 20). In 164-161 BC the same type had even been employed by the Seleucid usurper Timarchus in Media (Houghton et al. 2008, nos. 1588-1589).

If we leave aside idle speculation about the possibility of direct copying by Azilises of a coin type last used roughly a century earlier,¹⁰⁵ such instances of typological correspondence clearly bear witness to another phenomenon of crucial importance which we must focus on, i.e. the diffusion of a common iconographic language in the areas of the East that had experienced a period of

102 What is under discussion here is not the occasional inspiration provided by foreign coins, as is the case with the Roman head type of Kujula, but the idea of the full typological repertoire of a whole coin system based on the principle of copying from completely external sources. This is impossible to reconcile with a really structural approach to coin studies.

103 See fn. 93 above for references to the works of J. Cribb in this regard. Cribb (1998: 87-88) highlighted how the Kushans maintained the Greek formulae of the obverse royal image surrounded by a Greek-looking inscription and the employment of religious images on the reverses. The focus here is on specific designs and types.

104 A stronger emphasis is found in Göbl 1960: 79, which was in fact based on different premises.

105 The latest previous occurrence of the type was on coins of the Indo-Greek Diomedes, who is dated to c. 95-90 BC by Bopearachchi 1991: 101-102.

A-B

*Demetrius I, silver tetradrachm.
Gemini LLC 5 (6-1-2009), lot 664
(16.85g).*

C-D

*Vonones, copper coin. CNG e-auction 86
(31-3-2004), lot 52 (21mm, 8.06g).*

E-F

*Huvishka, copper tetradrachm.
SMK no. 892.2.*

FIGURE 19 *Herakles crowning himself from Graeco-Bactrian to Kushan coins.*

Greek rule. Indeed, before dealing with the ways and reasons for transmission, we should properly assess the contexts, i.e., the specific backgrounds at both the possible sending and receiving ends.¹⁰⁶ Only in this way can we determine whether physical transmission actually took place, and what was the object of this exchange. In this connection, what ought to be no longer downplayed is that NW India and Bactria had fully absorbed the legacies left by their Greek period,¹⁰⁷ transforming them into a part of their heritage. This implies that a

106 Not to mention the crucial problem of how ideas, artistic trends or influences were concretely exchanged or transmitted, cf. Mairs 2014.

107 Cf. Schlumberger 1960: 165, where the role of the “hellénisme secondaire” of the Iranian successors of the Greeks in NW India for the transmission of Greek artistic tradition was highlighted, as well as Boardman 1997: 1-2.

A-B

*Eukratides, silver tetradrachm.
Bopearachchi 1993, Eucratide
series 1, 5.*

C-D

*Mithradates I, copper coin.
Bibliothèque nationale de France
AA.GR.6174.*

E-F

*Azilises, silver tetradrachm. Alram 1986,
pl. 30, no. 101.*

FIGURE 20 *The charging Dioscuri on Graeco-Bactrian, Arsacid and Saka coins.*

large part of the “iconographic language” that was current there was of Greek derivation. However, at the same time, it means also that there is no need to postulate a new influence from the Hellenistic West each time we observe the surfacing of western-looking stylistic features.

Moreover, it has to be stressed that this language was common across a wider region that included also western Iran, which experienced quite similar historical circumstances. Accordingly, by “iconographic language of *Greek derivation*” a quite precise notion is meant here, namely a visual repertoire that only by origin was Greek, which was then appropriated—both formally and conceptually—by non-Greeks, who were able to re-elaborate and adapt it to their needs, thus substantially transforming it. This heritage was clearly open to successive foreign inputs from further away, such as the Roman Mediterranean. Yet we cannot assume that exchanges of this kind took place

only, or even *primarily*, with this area.¹⁰⁸ Rather, the opposite seems to be true, as the most important channels of exchange must have been those within the “wider region” connecting the Indo-Iranian borderlands and western Iran, regardless of how clearly we may see them nowadays.

That is why the same image of the mounted Dioscuri is found in 2nd-century BC Media and Bactria, and later on under Azilises. It is true that Timarchus seems to have copied the types of Eukratides, since his coins even bear the same helmeted head of the Graeco-Bactrian ruler on the obverse, and a connection of some kind has been hypothesized for the common use of the Dioscuri type by Eukratides and Mithradates I of Parthia.¹⁰⁹ Yet, leaving aside Timarchus’ series and a few other possible exceptions,¹¹⁰ the direct copying of imagery was far less common than the occurrences of mere inspiration. We should not assume that the die-cutters, either in Bactria or in Media, could engrave an image only if the model provided by a foreign coin was physically in their hands. This would imply even for 2nd-century BC Greek common religious imagery a rigid “diffusionist” pattern, with a given image moving from its original place of creation to distant places in a strictly ordered and therefore clearly detectable chronological sequence. While this can still be maintained for specific occurrences, for generic images from a period as late as the 2nd century BC—such as that of the Dioscuri being discussed here—it is simply unwarranted.

In fact, the engravers were not copying coins produced by a distant mint, they were just using the same image, which both mint crews had in their repertoire independently from one another—or, in other words, that they had both independently inherited from a common original source, i.e. the Seleucid coin tradition. Indeed, the charging mounted Dioscuri are known on Seleucid bronze coins struck in the previous century by Seleucus II (Houghton and Lorber 2002, no. 760) and Seleucus III (Houghton and Lorber 2002, nos. 937–938).¹¹¹

108 Cf. Ingholt 1954, who stressed the parallels between Gandhara and the so-called Hellenized Orient of the Parthian period, openly rejecting the idea of Gandharan art being mainly dependent on Roman sources.

109 Cf. Wroth 1903: xxvi for a quick summary of the discussion.

110 Needless to say, there are other similar occurrences, and the employment of a Roman head on coins of Kujula was clearly triggered by Roman coins arrived in Kushan territory, to name just an example of specific relevance here.

111 All series possibly struck at Nisibis. The same type, the only difference being the lance held vertically by the two mounted figures, was already employed by Antiochus II on bronzes struck at Tarsus, see Houghton and Lorber 2002, nos. 565–567. This same variant is attested on a seal imprint recovered at Seleucia on the Tigris, see Bollati and Messina 2004: 76–77 and pl. 32, cat. Dr.1.

That this legacy involved not only coinage but the artistic tradition as a whole, i.e. every visual media, is only too obvious. It must, nonetheless, be stressed, in order to provide a wider background for our analysis, since the transmission as well as the exchanges of artistic conventions, iconographies, major and minor features, invested the coin medium only as one among many elements of a much broader phenomenon. Such a concept can never be emphasized too much, especially as it seems to be not as widely comprehended as our analyses would require. It is only too easy to see how, from this viewpoint, the idea of a straightforward coin-to-coin transmission to explain major phenomena of artistic parallelism between East and West is impossible to accept. It is just too simplistic.

In the light of such considerations, an approach which properly considers the processes in their diachronic development can be very productive. A first example was provided by the image of the king sitting cross-legged, which before Vima II is found on the coins of NW India since Maues. In this case we have an instance of the visual rendering of a real image, since we have to imagine that in specific circumstances the king effectively sat in such a posture. In Kushan imagery this is just a choice, and clearly not the main one, since kings are more frequently portrayed sitting on thrones. This tallies well with royal imagery in the wider Iranian world, at the same time showing the limited survival of previous legacies in Kushan royal protocol, which also included the adoption of elements of Indian origin, as we have seen. This background also explains the new image of the elephant used as a royal mount on the coins of Vima II and Huvishka in lieu of the horse,¹¹² the traditional royal mount in earlier Kushan imagery.

If we move from the reproduction of real subjects to figurative conventions, the earlier local coin tradition may provide the most significant comparisons even for the busts with attributes used by Vima II and Huvishka. On the coins of several Indo-Greek kings the busts of deities often appear with their specific attributes from Demetrius I onwards: Herakles, Poseidon, and Zeus are respectively depicted with club, trident and staff on the shoulder (Fig. 21a, c, e).¹¹³ A

112 The use of the elephant in lieu of the horse is paralleled in some seals, such as Callieri 1997: 194, Cat U 7.13, where an "investiture scene" seems to be depicted with Nike offering a crown to a figure riding an elephant (tentatively identified as a deity by Callieri). Needless to say, the horse is the standard royal mount on Saka coins (with the exception of a single series of Azes that depicts the Saka king riding a camel, see Senior 2001: no. 81) as well as in the whole of the Iranian world.

113 Herakles with club: Demetrius I, series 11-13, Strato I, series 29-30, Lisias, series 8-9, Antialkidas and Lisias, series 2, Telephus, series 5; Poseidon with trident: Nicias, series 4; Zeus with spear/staff: Archebios, series 13, all according to Bopearachchi 1991.

A-B

Copper coin. Bopearachchi 1993, Straton series 29, pl. 37.15.

C-D

Copper coin. Bopearachchi 1993, Nicias series 4, pl. 49.E.

E-F

Copper coin. Bopearachchi 1993, Archébios series 13, pl. 52.E.

G-H

Copper coin. Bopearachchi 1993, Antialcidas series 16, pl. 41.D.

FIGURE 21 *Busts with attributes on Indo-Greek coins.*

series of Antialcidas (Bopearachchi 1991: pl. 41, Antialcidas, series 14-17) shows Zeus holding the thunderbolt with his right arm in a way not too dissimilar from the type depicting Vima Kadphises holding the club (Fig. 21g).¹¹⁴

While these types depict deities, kings are often portrayed holding spear and shield in the same battling posture (Fig. 22a) displayed by reverse types representing gods like Athena or Zeus (Fig. 22b, d).

¹¹⁴ Zeus' hand is held just slightly higher, as he is right on the point of hurling his thunderbolt (cf. here Fig. 22d).

A-B *Menander, Indian silver drachm. CNG e-auction 291 (21-11-2012), lot 167 (18mm, 2.46g).*

C-D *Diodotus I, gold stater. Gemini LLC, Auction VI (10-1-2010), lot 383 (8.24g).*

FIGURE 22 *Royal and divine busts with attributes on Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek coins.*

The latter images show that the conventions governing the composition could in fact be exchanged between religious and royal imagery. Thus, though they depict deities rather than kings, the busts with attributes of Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek coinages may very likely have given birth to an iconographic tradition that survived in post-Greek periods to reach the Kushan epoch,¹¹⁵ and which occasionally produced the straight re-surfacing of very old designs in addition to their elaboration.

¹¹⁵ In this regard it is interesting to see how, according to the stylistic analysis of the relevant series, the Sakas of the Azes dynasty appear to have directly inherited the mint structures—including the engravers—previously working for the Indo-Greeks in Eastern Panjab. The series of the contemporary last Indo-Greeks (from Zoilus II onwards) show a style far from that displayed by the immediately preceding Greek series, cf. Sinisi 2003: 166; Callieri 2006: 12. On the stylistic development under the last Indo-Greeks see Boppe-archchi 1991: 129-130.

The fact that Kushan coin art had real ties with the preceding local tradition is demonstrated by the series of Soter Megas, where a *bust with attribute*—be it a spear or arrow—is shown according to canons of Greek royal imagery, unmistakably detectable in the Macedonian helmet worn by this figure that we have already discussed. Unless postulating a complete fracture in the iconographic tradition between Soter Megas and Vima Kadphises, the result is a reconstruction that, in its basic features, runs exactly contrary to the specific statement of Göbl that the busts of Huvishka could not find antecedents in the Greek coin tradition of the area and could be only explained as modelled on Roman types (Göbl 1999: 157). Indeed it is precisely the royal imagery that demonstrates—with the re-surfacing of types such as that of the king sitting cross-legged—that there was no such fracture. In fact, while religious imagery shows more conspicuous signs of external influences of western derivation,¹¹⁶ royal typology, both in terms of the composition and the iconography of the king, openly indicates that the Kushans operated a synthesis of clearly eastern traditions to create their imperial imagery. In such a picture the idea of coin-to-coin transmission originating from outside is simply not sufficient to explain the complexity of the phenomenon.

4 The Connections with Western Iran and the Influence of Arsacid Patterns of Imperial Imagery

If we now turn to the development of Kushan royal imagery within the framework of the previous local tradition and of its possible connections with nearby regions, the sequence of different phases sketched out in the first section may be better understood in its main stages.

The first coins, the so-called Heraios' series, employ an iconography of the king that can be defined as Yuezhi. From the viewpoint of the theme of the picture and its composition, the tetradrachms' reverse typology (Fig. 23c) owes a lot to Saka and Indo-Parthian coin imagery: a clear model is indeed provided by tetradrachms struck by Gondophares in the region of Gandhara/Taxila (Rosenfield 1967: 17; Cribb 1993: 122; Alram 1999: 38) (Fig. 23b), which

¹¹⁶ In a much more complex way than the common coin-to-coin transmission model would lead us to believe. Again, coins are just a part of a wider picture, and the phenomenon should be tackled taking various kinds of evidence into account, cf. for example Callieri 2006. I will deal with the topic in a separate article specifically focused on Kushan religious imagery.

A *Azilises, silver tetradrachm. Senior 2001.11: 8, no. 33.1T (obverse).*

B *Gondophares, billon tetradrachm. Rauch Summer 2008 (15-9-2008), lot 256 (reverse) (8,87g).*

C *Heraios, silver tetradrachm. CNG e-auction 308 (7-8-2013), lot 214 (reverse) (28mm, 15.04g).*

FIGURE 23 *The king on horseback on pre- and early Kushan coins.*

bear almost exactly the same type as that employed by Heraios, save for the direction in which the image is facing.¹¹⁷

Especially significant in this connection is the figure of Nike flying behind the king to crown him with a wreath (or diadem). While the motif of the king on horseback was already common in regnal coin imagery from the Saka period, the flying Nike is a feature of unmistakable Parthian derivation,¹¹⁸ introduced to the area by the Indo-Parthians. Of course, the ultimate origins of these secondary iconographic devices are to be found in the Greek iconographic lexicon spread in the Orient by the Seleucids, but their specific role on coins accompanying the image of the king, that is to say, the establishment of their use as a distinctive convention in royal imagery, must be recognized as a Parthian innovation. Indeed, a similar practice is virtually unknown on any Seleucid, Graeco-Bactrian or Indo-Greek series.¹¹⁹ On Arsacid Parthian coins

117 Even the standing king on the obols ascribed to Heraios has a clear parallel in the standing ruler with sword hilt held in the left hand appearing in an investiture scene on the reverse of some tetradrachms of Zeionises, see Senior 2001.11: 119, s. 131-132.

118 This link has been long recognized in the literature, see Cribb 1993: 121-122, also for the references to previous works.

119 With the only exception of a single bronze series of Seleucus II, probably struck in Seleucia on the Tigris (Houghton and Lorber 2002: 278, no. 785), whose obverse depicts an almost facing bust of the king crowned from behind by a flying Nike. Another bronze type of Seleucus II from the same mint (Houghton and Lorber 2002: 277, nos. 779-780), apparently belonging to the same issue, reproduces the full-length figure of the standing king again crowned by Nike, who stands behind him. Seen from this perspective, the

the presence of secondary images beside the royal portrait on the obverse became common, especially on the drachms struck in the Iranian mints, under Orodes II (Sellwood 1980: 144-156, drachms and bronzes from series 46-48), and on the series of his two successors Phraates IV (Sellwood 1980: 162, 50.15-17) and Phraataces (Sellwood 1980: 184-190, 56.6-15, and series 57-58) such images often take the form of Nikai flying behind the king to crown him with a wreath or diadem.¹²⁰ The spread of such devices is due to the meaning they were supposed to transmit, i.e. the visualization of the divine origin of royal power as embodied by the Iranian notion of *xvarenah* (Curtis 2012), which is why the falcon or Eros, often depicted bearing the diadem, were also popular in a similar function. Indeed, this explains at the same time the generalization of such images in comparison to Seleucid practice, and their successive transmission to the Sasanian period. Unsurprisingly, such devices are also employed in different Parthian-period iconographic media, and Nike appears in the so-called Gotarzes relief at Bisutun (Kawami 1987: 37-43, 157-159, cat. no. 2; Mathiesen 1992: 174-175, cat. no. 95), as well as on seals from Nisa (Mollo 2001: 197-199, types 38, 42-44 for Nike alone, types 45-46 for the deity in investiture scenes with the king), where the figure of Eros (Mollo 2001: 195-196, Type 34, and perhaps Types 33 and 36), which would later appear more widely on Sasanian-era artefacts, is also widely encountered.

Thus, the series attributed to Heraios clearly show how features already present in earlier local traditions of royal imagery played a primary role when a distinct Kushan royal iconography came to be created. This was the result of several factors, with older and more recent features merging, the elements of chronologically more distant foreign derivation being essentially absorbed by the Kushans through the local context, i.e. as if they had been of local origin.

This does not seem to be the case with the Roman head on the coins of Kujula (Fig. 2e), but once this type is examined against the background of the wider iconographic repertoire used by Kujula, it is evident that we are dealing here with an isolated occurrence. In fact, due to the specific circumstances of minting during his reign, Kujula's coinage is dominated by the multiplicity

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idea advocated by Senior 2001: 147, that the type of Gondophares was "almost certainly" inspired by Heraios, whose coins would, therefore, attest to similar developments independently from Parthian influence, is clearly impossible to accept.

120 A series of Zeionises with the full-length depiction of the ruler, seen frontally with two Nikai crowning him symmetrically placed on both sides, provides the most striking example of the transmission of these conventions to NW India, see Senior 2001.II: 119, s. 130 (to be compared in particular with the tetradrachms struck by Phraataces in 1 BC, see Sellwood 1980: 186-187, series 57.1-12).

of iconographic choices, and following a single coherent path of interpretation with regard to the approach to royal imagery is accordingly very difficult. Yet, when we look at the types that seem to depict the king as he really appeared, the basic trends are fundamentally in keeping with those seen in the previous phase, and the rider's costume displayed by the figure seated on the so-called curule chair (Fig. 2f) is in every respect similar to that worn by the ruler on the series ascribed to Heraios. In fact, there is no need at all to identify the seat as a Roman-type curule chair, since, in all likelihood, the seat is a folding *diphros* stool similar to a real stool found in Taxila (Marshall 1951: 544, no. 54 [vol. II] and pl. 170.s [in Vol. III]).

That, in this instance, we are not faced with the copying of a coin type originating in Rome (*contra* Cribb 1998: 87) but with the reproduction of a real element of the local royal paraphernalia, is also shown by the fact that folding stools were known in a wider area stretching from Gandhara and the Kushanshahr to western Iran,¹²¹ which makes the theory of the Roman origin for Kujula's seat extremely unlikely:¹²² a similar stool was found in Tillia Tepe and a further one is visible on the embroidered textiles from Noin Ula,¹²³ whose iconography shows no western features whatsoever. Also connected to local imagery and royal protocol is the type of Kujula with the king sitting cross-legged, as shown by its Saka antecedents.

A high degree of typological variety also dominates in the series of Soter Megas. While those images that are definitely identifiable with the king

121 Cf. Overlaet 1995: 110–113, where evidence from western Iran to Sogdiana is considered (including the alleged sella curulis of Kujula, reputed to have been inspired by Roman coin designs).

122 Regardless of the chronology. Mahler 2008: 310–314 (followed by Speidel 2016: 178–179) re-proposed the idea of a Roman curule chair for Kujula's coin type, but not as the result of a mere imitation of Roman coin images: the chair depicted on Kujula's coins would reproduce a real curule chair, such as that found in Taxila, donated by Rome to the Kushan ruler as official sign of *amicitia*, as attested in other instances of formalized dealings between Rome and foreign peoples (cf. also Francfort 2011: 286–287, fn. 49; 2013: 1575, on the possibility of an anti-Parthian alliance between Romans and Yuezhi/Kushans). However, this does not solve the problem of the numerous occurrences of similar folding stools which cannot be explained by the theory of a Roman origin. It is much more likely that such stools were known in the East with no need to be imported in the framework of official international relationships.

123 Cf. Francfort 2013: 1564 (where Kujula's coins with the Roman head are considered as “imitations inspirées par le monnayage d'Auguste”), and Mode 2013: 215, where a folding stool is also included in a new reconstruction of the northern frieze on the western wall at Khalchayan.

continue to display a clear link with Saka and Indo-Parthian models, a conspicuous inspiration drawn from previous Greek imagery is also manifest. Here, of course, interpretation plays a crucial role, since identifying the rayed figure of Soter Megas' general issue as a god or a king produces a completely different picture. Yet some clues are detectable. If the religious interpretation is preferred, then the rayed bust must be identified with Mithra (Mac Dowall 1978: 310; Grenet 2001: 42; Bracey 2012a: 207), who is normally marked by his nimbus of rays. Actually, besides the problems of consistency due to the already mentioned typological variety, the nimbus of rays is the only feature which creates difficulties in identifying the rayed bust with a non-religious image, i.e. with a king. Indeed, save for the nimbus, the rayed bust displays a remarkable similarity to the diademed figure on horseback on the obverse of the Gandharan series of Soter Megas, which is commonly identified as a clear depiction of the king, and they are, likewise, both quite close to the figure depicted as a bust on the obverses of the Hermaios imitations. Moreover, the way in which the rayed bust holds the spear is exactly the same as that seen in the type of Soter Megas with a bust in Macedonian helmet (Fig. 24c), also supposed to belong to the category of royal rather than religious images. We find a useful comparison here in the much later series of Farn-Sasan, who is depicted in the same posture on the obverse of some of his series (Fig. 24e). In this connection, even the bust with spear of the quarter-dinars of Kanishka might be of due relevance (Fig. 9e): the posture is identical, save for the fact that the king faces away from the spear, i.e. in the direction opposite to that of the spear-holding arm. Moreover, Kanishka's spear exhibits the same fillet tied at the base of the spear tip visible in the type employed by Soter Megas for his general issue.¹²⁴ Therefore, the only comparable occurrences on coins known so far link this specific rendering of the posture with royal rather than religious imagery.¹²⁵

In fact, the copper coinage of Huvishka shows that the iconographic motif of the rayed halo, normally reserved for Mithra,¹²⁶ might occasionally be employed in royal imagery to depict the kingly *xvarenah*, usually rendered by a plain nimbus.¹²⁷ Thus, if the nimbus of rays is interpreted as a first attempt

124 Similar ribbons are usually also visible tied to the spear of Huvishka and to the shafted attribute held by several successors of Vasudeva. Cf. above, fn. 24.

125 However, Mithra is frequently depicted with a spear-like staff, as visible in the series of Kanishka and Huvishka (see Göbl 1984: pls. 166-167, Miir 2, 5, 6, 8-10), as well as on Sasanian seals (cf. Callieri 1990 for an overview).

126 Beside Mithra, the rayed halo appears only with Ašaeikhšo, Aša Vahišta, portrayed with his name on gold coins of Huvishka (Göbl 1984: no. 342) in his only known depiction throughout the Iranian world.

127 Analogous to that exhibited on Kushan coins by deities (with the exception of those explicitly associated with rayed halos).

FIGURE 24A-B *Soter Megas, obverse bust with spear, copper coin. www.zeno.ru #32074.*

FIGURE 24C-D *Soter Megas, obverse bust with spear, copper coin. CNG Triton XII (6-1-2009), lot 417 (12.35g).*

FIGURE 24E-F *Farn-Sasan, the king with spear, Indian copper tetradrachm. American Numismatic Society 1944.100.63404 (24mm, 8.34g).*

to depict the luminous royal glory of the *xvarenah*, the rayed bust could effectively belong to royal imagery.¹²⁸ This does not, of course, solve the problem

¹²⁸ As already proposed by Carter 2005: 433, although it is not necessary to assume that Soter Megas must be portrayed. As a matter of fact, the heterogeneity of the typology of Soter Megas' series defies any attempt at a unifying interpretation.

of identifying the figure. Indeed, it is unclear even whether the portrait refers to the living ruler or to a deceased forebear. What is certain is that after this occurrence the employment of the rayed halo in royal imagery on gold coins was discontinued.

It is with Vima II Kadphises that a substantial iconographic break becomes visible, as a full renovation takes place in the framework of the creation of a unified imperial coinage. Unsurprisingly some elements are clearly taken from previous stages, but for the first time we encounter a uniformly coherent program in the employment of imagery. From the series of Vima II Kadphises onwards a consistent history develops, which includes evolution and changes in the imagery of the king but without marked breaks. It is under Vima II that a definite set of regalia is introduced to distinguish the image of the king and to represent his special qualities, which will thereafter continuously distinguish Kushan royal imagery. Coupled with this, the basic conventions of the coin image of the Kushan king were also established, subsequently to be transformed by his successors into a model to be followed.¹²⁹ While in broad terms the attire of the king reproduces the models seen in the previous phase, new specific features appear, such as a variety of ceremonial weapons and certain motifs serving to convey the exalted status of Kushan royalty. These will largely be inherited by Vima's successors, and even when Vasudeva inaugurated the new type of the armoured king, we see him still holding the royal trident introduced by Vima II in the same basic image depicting the king before an altar first employed by Vima II himself.

One crucial feature, in clear contrast with the previous imagery as displayed on the coin series between Heraios and Soter Megas, is that, from Vima II onwards, the Kushan king is invariably depicted wearing a specific headgear (Fig. 25).¹³⁰ On the coins of Vima II, this headgear is depicted as a rounded tiara, similar to those known from western Iran, which will be employed in a few variants by his successors until its substitution with a mitre-style headgear during the third coin issue of Huvishka. From then onwards the mitre will be the norm,¹³¹ with no Kushan king reverting to the bareheaded portrait. This fits well with the practice of the king wearing a specific headgear connected

129 In a process that includes the possibility of re-elaboration. Indeed, Vima's series provided a model, not a typology that was blindly copied.

130 After the stage in which Vima himself is portrayed as diademed only, of course.

131 Although sometimes (e.g., Vasudeva III and Kanisha II in Göbl 1984: pl. IV) a more neatly triangular shape is visible, in all likelihood reproducing a conical headgear. This might well be a variant of a tiara as well as of a mitre.

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IV

FIGURE 25 *Kushan tiaras, SMK pl. IV.132*

to his status common to the Iranian world since Achaemenid times and fully revamped in western Iranian coin iconography since the late 1st century AD.

Another significant break with previous Kushan imagery is that Vima II is depicted with a prominent beard, whereas neither Heraios nor the effigies on coins of Kujula and Soter Megars wear any beard at all. Kanishka will follow

132 Plate IV of Göbl 1984 is reproduced here, despite some inaccuracies in the drawings: no feature projecting above the forehead on the tiara of Vima Kadphises is visible, for example.

his father in this regard, while Huvishka exhibits a pair of large side-whiskers on the coins of his first two issues.¹³³ Later he opted for an image with moustaches only, subsequently imitated by his successors until full beards were re-introduced in the coin portraiture of the region by the Kushano-Sasanians.¹³⁴

Indeed, it is with the second part of the reign of Huvishka, or at least that covered by his last two coin issues, that the standard established by Vima II appears subject to a process of re-elaboration that sets a new norm for the Kushan royal imagery. As already said, there is no sharp break with the previous phase, and significant common traits can be detected when comparing the late Kushan coin images with those of Vima II.

Such modifications took place in a time frame that corresponds to the phase of renewed Roman influence on Kushan coin practice postulated by Göbl, during which the Kushan coin tradition supposedly also imported Sasanian features. Actually, once it has been shown that the engravers working in the Kushan mints had no need to look to Rome to create the coin image of their kings, and could, in fact, find the necessary elements locally, even the idea of a Sasanian influence on Kushan royal imagery as seen on coins appears under a completely different light. Indeed, the Sasanian origin of certain iconographic features, allegedly transmitted directly to Kushan series from Sasanian coins, is as problematic as the idea of the Roman contribution. A first remark concerns the different way in which Kushan imagery was supposed to have reflected the adoption of Sasanian features in comparison with the employment of Roman patterns hypothesized by Göbl. While the Roman world would have provided experts who imported technical knowledge to the Kushan Empire, organized the mints, brought pattern-books, and perhaps engraved the dies, a different kind of influence from Sasanian Iran had to be postulated: there is no question of movement by craftsmen, or technical expertise, and indeed Göbl never hinted at such a possibility; we are supposed to observe a mere coin-to-coin transfer of a detail of the iconography of the king, the ribbed diadem, and a general correspondence in the theme of divine investiture between Sasanians and Kushans.

With regard to said theme, Göbl specifically referred to Mithra and Anahita bestowing wreaths on coins of the Sasanian Ohrmazd I and Wahram II as a possible source of inspiration for the deities on Kushan reverses that “from Huvishka’s third issue onwards” also often hold a wreath in the right hand

133 The use of side-whiskers by the Kushans has local antecedents in Khalchayan, as well as parallels in sculptural portraits of probable royal or princely background, as pointed out by Tarzi 2009: 302.

134 Following Sasanian conventions.

(Göbl 1999: 159). Yet such images are quite rare on Sasanian coins, in fact much rarer than the Sasanian “universal type” represented by the picture of the fire that dominates coin reverses throughout the whole Sasanian period. Indeed, in one clearly documented case of the influence of Sasanian coin devices on foreign coinages, the last Indo-Parthian ruler Farn-Sasan adopted precisely the Sasanian type of the royal fire for the reverses of his series.¹³⁵ Thus if we accept that the Kushan moneyers could only be influenced by such rare occurrences as the deities appearing on coins of Ohrmazd I and Wahram II, this would imply that they could not know other sources for such images, which in turn would mean that in the Iranian world investiture scenes were practically unknown before the Sasanian period. As we have seen in discussing the series ascribed to Heraios,¹³⁶ this is clearly not the case. Indeed, following Göbl’s approach, one is left to wonder why the Kushan moneyers were not influenced by much more recognizably and more common Sasanian patterns, on both the obverse and the reverse.

In fact the images of the deities of the Kushan reverses do not seem to be inspired by Sasanian models at all.¹³⁷ A preliminary consideration to be made is that drawing a clear line between the single deities that bestow wreaths and those that do not, as implied by Göbl’s proposal, is unwarranted when an analysis of the theme of the “divine investiture” is carried out. This said, the first occurrences of gods bestowing wreaths on Kushan coins are to be found in the series of Kanishka, where we encounter the figures of Hephaistos/Athšo, Lrooaspo and Manaobago (Göbl 1984: pls. 164-166, for the types, and pl. 4, no. 28 [Hēphaistos I], pl. 4, no. 33 [Athšo I], pl. 7, no. 57 [Lrooaspo I] and pl. 7, no. 59 [Manaobago I] for their use in the series of Kanishka). Does this mean that Kanishka must be dated to the period of Ohrmazd I and Vahram II, i.e. around AD 275?

Likewise problematic is the issue of the ribbed diadem. On the one hand, there is nothing strange in the possibility that the Kushans might have been influenced in the development of their royal imagery by a powerful neighbour of the stature of the Sasanian dynasty. Given that the Kushan Empire bordered onto west Iranian states, an exchange of this nature would be easy to imagine, and once again the series of Farn-Sasan are there to provide clear evidence supporting such a possibility. What appears odd, even in this case, is that such

135 With a few modifications, as the throne legs are not the feline ones of the Sasanian model, see Harper 1979: 51-52.

136 To mention just one example provided by the coin tradition in the area.

137 As confirmed by the comparison between the images of deities on Kushan and Kushano-Sasanian coins, the latter clearly showing direct Sasanian influence, see Sinisi 2015b.

an exchange should have involved only such a very minor iconographic feature as the ribbing of the diadem ties. The question that remains unanswered is simply “why?”: why copy a rather secondary feature, i.e. the treatment of the diadem, leaving everything else—clothing, headgear, weapons—untouched by “Sasanian inspiration”? One is left to face a similar question even in the unlikely hypothesis that the diadem ribbing might have had some special significance,¹³⁸ since Kushan royal iconography shows nothing else that may have a Sasanian derivation: why then not copy other significant features of Sasanian royal imagery, like the crown for example? Why, at the very moment in which Huvishka allegedly imported a crucial feature such as the diadem ribbing, was everything else left untouched by Sasanian influence, remaining instead quite close to the royal image created by Vima Kadphises?

Moreover, to follow Göbl in postulating this transmission as a mere coin-to-coin phenomenon (cf. also Schindel 2014: 30) results in some significant consequences. Indeed, outside coinage the ribbed diadem is known not only in Sasanian art, but also in the sculptural art of Kushan-period India from Gandhara to Mathura,¹³⁹ as some statues and reliefs depict diademed figures with the diadem ties displaying this peculiar treatment (e.g., Rosenfield 1967: figs. 24 and 86, from Mathura and Ranighat, Pakistan, respectively).¹⁴⁰ Now, if one assumes that the direction of transmission of the ribbed diadem was from Sasanian to Kushan coins, the obvious inference is that the ribbed diadem spread in the non-coin art of Kushan period India after its adoption in Kushan coinage, namely in the series of Huvishka. This would mean that all the sculptures of Gandharan and Mathuran art that display the ribbed diadem—as well as those which may be related to them by style or context—must be dated to after *at least* the beginning of the reign of Huvishka, around year 28 of the Kanishka era, which would translate, following Göbl, to not earlier than c. AD 260. Since I am not a specialist in Indian art, I will leave this issue open, but while the diadems exhibited by some Buddhist figures from Gandhara are sometimes regarded as resulting from Sasanian influences, accordingly dating

138 In fact, Sasanian art shows the ribbing used on any kind of ribbon, not only for the ties of the royal diadem: from those hanging from the king's feet to those knotting horses' tails. This seems to exclude the possibility of associating a special meaning with the ribbing.

139 Yet it was undetected by both Kröger 1981 (where coins were explicitly left out of the study) and Tanabe 1990. While dealing with the broader phenomena of artistic transmission in Asia, Huntington 2014: 159-164, specifically focused on diadems imported by Gandharan Buddhist art from Sasanian patterns, although he did not detect the peculiar treatment of the ribbed diadem ties.

140 Cf. below, Fig. 33c and fn. 167. The Bodhisattva from Mekhasanda kept in the Guimet museum is certainly the most famous example from Gandharan Buddhist statuary.

the images to the 3rd century,¹⁴¹ the picture and the relevant chronological inferences might be less straightforward in Mathura. Actually, in a more westerly context, the diadem ribbing appears in reliefs from Hatra and Elymais before the Sasanian period (Sinisi 2014: 46-47), in what is conventionally styled Parthian art. Therefore we have evidence pointing to the fact that, in all likelihood, the Sasanian ribbed diadem is not a numismatic feature exported to royal imagery on other media, but part of the iconography of the Sasanian king *tout court*, employed on coins and reliefs in parallel, regardless of their relative chronology. Moreover, the ribbed diadem was not a creation of Sasanian art, being instead inherited from the late Parthian period, even if it does not appear on contemporary Arsacid coins. In fact, this strongly suggests that the path followed by the diadem ribbing to reach Sasanian royal imagery from late Parthian art was precisely that represented by sculpture, rather than that of coin engraving.

This picture provides an alternative background to the coin-to-coin transmission of the ribbed diadem from the Sasanian to the Kushan series: it may be perfectly possible—in fact it is rather likely—that the ribbed diadem was transmitted to the Kushan Empire within broader artistic exchanges with late Parthian period Iran.

If we consider from this perspective the question of which elements concurred to the formation of Kushan royal iconography, several points begin to emerge in a different light. While no Roman or Sasanian contribution to Kushan royal imagery can be detected, the origin of the new features introduced by Vima Kadphises remains to be addressed. We have ascertained that in many respects the compositional formulae used for royal images on his coins have local antecedents, as for the busts with attributes then also employed by Huvishka. However, as eloquently shown by the comparison with earlier Kushan practice, Vima must be credited with inaugurating a visibly new phase in the rendering of the general image of the king, sometimes also including, as in the case of the king before the fire burner, the compositional patterns.

But if local models could not be at the origin of the new royal imagery employed by Vima II, is there a possible outside source other than Rome or Sasanian Iran? The answer is positive, as we may indeed look at the Parthian world.

We have already discussed the ultimate Parthian origin of elements of the coin typology displayed by the so-called Heraios' series. One could add that the

141 Cf. Huntington 2014: 159-164, where Buddhist statuary showing diademed figures is dated to the late 3rd century on account of the presence of the flowing diadem—which is not always ribbed!—the latter being considered a feature of Sasanian derivation.

comparison Göbl made between the investiture scenes on coins from western Iran and the depiction of deities on Kushan coin reverses appears considerably strengthened if the Sasanian coins he mentioned are substituted with Arsacid tetradrachms, which customarily bear investiture scenes from the 1st century BC.¹⁴²

Indeed, it is precisely the royal imagery introduced by Vima II, with his bearded portrait wearing a tiara, which shows more clearly that the Kushans took inspiration from Arsacid Iran in devising how to depict their king of kings. One has to bear in mind that when the Kushans created their empire the Arsacid state had already for a couple of centuries been a major international power, and the dominant political actor in the Iranian world. This resulted in the Arsacid model of royalty—and here we are expressly referring to its visual model—being established as a reference standard. The employment of the rider's costume as aristocratic attire even in non-Iranian lands from Palmyra to Gandhara documents the phenomenon, clearly showing its nature: it was the promotion of this kind of costume by the Arsacids that triggered the adoption of the rider's outfit as royal costume in different regions, regardless of the possible direct import of what is conventionally styled as Parthian costume. This development would hardly have been possible if the main royal models in the area had remained those of Greek derivation, like that of the Seleucids.¹⁴³

Of course, this kind of phenomenon is much broader than a simple case of coin-to-coin transmission, and extends beyond the mere transfer of visual motifs. Diplomatic contacts and marriage policies are only two of the possible channels of transmission that can be imagined.¹⁴⁴ Yet, visual docu-

142 Needless to say, the images on Arsacid tetradrachms were just a part of the wider Parthian period iconographic repertoire. They just give us a glimpse of it, and must be not understood as the only possible vehicles of transmission. Investiture scenes were also common on Parthian seals, as shown by several seal imprints recovered at Old Nisa (Mollo 2001: 197-199, Types 42, 45-46), for example.

143 This is clearly shown by the development of royal imagery on coins of Elymais and Characene, which became independent and started to strike coins in the wake of the Seleucid collapse in the East connected to Arsacid expansion around the middle of the 2nd century BC. In that phase, when despite the difficulties the Seleucid model was still the reference standard for royal imagery in the region, both Kamnaskires I and Hyspaosines employed completely Greek looking obverse portraits. This changed as Seleucid power waned, with Parthian features increasingly absorbed into the royal imagery of both kingdoms, until any Greek semblances were displaced.

144 Cf. Canepa 2009 for an insightful analysis of the relationship between Rome and Sasanian Iran as possible comparable patterns.

ments play a crucial role in addressing such issues, especially in the light of the dramatic dearth of other types of sources.

With this background in mind, the creation of an imperial iconography by Vima Kadphises may be better contextualized. At the moment of the transformation of the Kushan ruler into the lord of a vast empire, Vima sought to establish an immediately recognizable Kushan royal iconography. To this end, he adopted features of royal imagery directly from the most prestigious model in the region, the Arsacid monarchy. Especially significant in this regard is the promotion of the tiara among the Kushan regalia. Indeed, the bust in a tiara employed by Vima at the same time contrasts with the portraits current in earlier Kushan royal imagery as shown by coinage, which were mostly either diademed only or wearing Greek helmets,¹⁴⁵ and appears strikingly similar to Parthian models. This does not mean that the Kushan tiara of Vima is a mere replica of a Parthian tiara, and indeed it shows its own peculiarities. In fact, the tiara appears to have been not unknown in the region before this, and the lord of Khalchayan wears one, for example (Pugachenkova 1971: 48–49, and Fig. 55).

What does appear to be influenced by Arsacid imperial models is the iconographic emphasis by the Kushan dynasty on the very specific tiara-form headgear for the king, which comes to assume a central role in Kushan regnal imagery. This is especially clear precisely when coinage is considered and the fact that Vima started his series with a merely diademed portrait is taken into due account, since he could have chosen a completely different type of headgear for the successive phase, possibly reviving earlier patterns such as those employed on coins by his predecessors. All in all, leaving aside their specific decoration, the tiaras exhibited by Kushan kings between Vima II and Huvishka are quite similar to Parthian tiaras.¹⁴⁶

Another feature introduced by Vima which contrasts with previous Kushan imagery is the full beard visible on all his portraits, which we find subsequently inherited by Kanishka. With the eminent—and in fact unsurprising—exception

145 Even if it could be ascertained that some series of Kujula portray him wearing pointed headgears, which ought to be identified with tiaras, they are not so clearly in evidence and in any case not at the centre of a coherent iconographic programme (the same holds true for the comparable evidence provided by the isolated type of Vima Takto with the enthroned king on the obverse, cf. above fn. 28).

146 Göbl 1984: 14 considered the Kushan tiaras similar to Sasanian crowns and inspired by them. This was mainly due to the fact that Göbl deemed the Sasanian crown system to be the first to distinguish the various kings by means of different, individual headgears. This is not the case, as a system of individual markings on the royal headgear—that is, on tiaras rather than crowns—was already employed under the Arsacids, cf. von Gall 1969/1970: 300–301; Sinisi 2014: 15. See *infra*.

of Indo-Parthian kings, no ruler in the area prior to the series of Vima appeared fully bearded, whereas beards are customary in Arsacid royal imagery from the 2nd century BC. It is here worth mentioning that a diademed, long-haired and fully bearded figure depicted at Khalchayan beside the royal couple has long been interpreted as a Parthian king (Pugachenkova 1971: 50, 130 and Fig. 59), recently identified with the Arsacid Vardanes I (Grenet 2000),¹⁴⁷ specifically on account of these features. Regardless of the real identity of this character, the remaining figures, particularly those closer to the obverse portrait on the so-called Heraios coins, show a different haircut and only moustaches as facial hair.¹⁴⁸ A beardless chin is also exhibited by the enthroned figure identified as the palace lord,¹⁴⁹ which is significantly distinguished by a low tiara-like headgear.

From the time of Vima Kadphises, then, up at least until the end of the reign of Kanishka, Kushan royal iconography made clear use of Arsacid models of

147 Grenet indicated as likely candidates the Arsacid kings of kings Vardanes or Vologases I (preferring the former due to the eastern setting of his campaigns against Gotarzes II) against the choice of a possible Indo-Parthian background for this figure put forward by Pugachenkova (1971: 55). Cf. also Stančo 2007: 191. The question has been recently re-discussed by E. Rtveladze (2011: 158-159, with references to further literature) in the context of his idea of a direct (Arsacid-)Parthian presence in north-western Bactria since the time of Phraates IV. Rtveladze rejected the identification with Vardanes proposed by Grenet, pointing to the fact that the facial features displayed by the figure from Khalchayan are closer to those of Phraates IV, as visible on the latter's coins. Yet, close typological analysis excludes the bearded character from Khalchayan being identified with Phraates IV: two phases in the coinage of this king have been detected, marked by the different type of beard (see Sinisi 2015: 371-372), and in neither case does he wear the full beard visible on the Khalchayan figure.

148 Sometimes combined with side whiskers. The figures of heavy horsemen, distinguished by their full beards, were originally interpreted as Bactrian allies of the Yuezhi by Pugachenkova 1966; 1971. Bernard 1987 (followed by nearly all the successive studies) rejected this reconstruction and identified them as Saka adversaries of the Yuezhi. Thus, regardless of the reading of the whole scene, there is a common consensus that their appearance would mark them as non-Yuezhi. K. Abdullaev (2007: 89-90, with references to his previous works on the topic) followed Bernard in interpreting the scene with horsemen as a battle, and identified even the mounted archers with side-whiskers as non-Yuezhi. However, to what extent all this is really ascertained remains less obvious than a cursory glance would suggest, entangled as it is in issues such as the chronology of the building or the reliability of the proposed reconstructions (cf. Mode 2013). In fact, side-whiskers are not unknown in Kushan imagery, starting with the portrait of none other than the King of Kings Huvishka in his early coin series. Cf. Tarzi 2009: 302, and fn. 133 above.

149 Who wears the same moustaches visible on the other figures which are not fully bearded.

imperial portraiture, employing a variety of Arsacid motifs such as tiaras and full beards. These patterns are found even on Huvishka's series, even if a re-elaboration is apparent, resulting in the demise of the beard, for example.

But if these features were inspired by Arsacid imagery, how can we trace their paths of transmission to the Kushanshahr? First, in dealing with the Arsacid evidence we are luckily in the position to fix some firm points of departure for the analysis. After a brief appearance in the early 1st century BC, the tiara was re-introduced on Arsacid coins around the middle of the 1st century AD. Vologases I used a tiara with hooked appendages on top on all his denominations in his last issue of AD 76/7-79 (Sinisi 2012: 59-67, Types III, V, and IX of Vologases I), and his son Pacorus II did the same at the end of his series in AD 93-96 (Sinisi 2012: 88-95, Types IV, VII, and XIII-XIV of Pacorus II). With the Vologases ruling after the Parthian campaign of Trajan¹⁵⁰ the tiara becomes a standard feature in Arsacid coin portraiture, with only occasional exceptions. A regular system becomes visible on coins, according to which every king displays a specific decorative pattern on the side of the tiara (von Gall 1969/1970: 300-301).¹⁵¹ That this development did not affect only coin iconography becomes evident from various other contemporary visual documents that show Arsacid kings always wearing tiaras, as most eloquently seen in the Khwasak stele of AD 215 (Kawami 1987: 48-51, 164-167, cat. no. 5; Mathiesen 1992: 168-169, cat. no. 87), where the last Artabanus is portrayed with exactly the same tiara that can be found on his coins. Another significant example is provided by the so-called "Parthian stone" at Bisutun (Kawami 1987: 43-45, 160-162, cat. no. 3; Mathiesen 1992: 175-176, cat. no. 96; von Gall 1996), where an Arsacid king of kings is depicted wearing a tiara, even if we have no immediate correspondence with coin depictions due to the characteristics of the image.

Of crucial importance is that, as had happened before, even in this phase the Arsacid visual model was exported to nearby regions (Alram 1987; Sinisi 2014: 30-32), appropriated by ruling dynasties such as those of Hatra or Elymais. Several princely statues from Hatra display the Arsacid-style tiara with spined top decoration, besides other features of their dress that could be connected to Parthian models. The evidence from Elymais is even more striking, as a tiara system parallel to that visible on Arsacid coins was employed on local coin

¹⁵⁰ This king is attested with certainty by named tetradrachms only from AD 121/122 onwards, although he is perhaps responsible for some bronzes dated to AD 118/119, see Sinisi 2012: 194-197.

¹⁵¹ As shown mainly by the drachms (cf. Sinisi 2014: 15). The conventions used on tetradrachms sometimes differ, even if they still vary according to king. On the Arsacid tiara in general, see Olbrycht 1997.

series in the 2nd century AD, each king being individually distinguished by a unique decoration on the side of his tiara. Indeed, it is now believed that after the Kamnaskirid dynasty the rule over Elymais may have been entrusted by the Arsacids to princes of Parthian blood.¹⁵² Actually, Parthian influences had become visible on Elymaean coins very quickly, as early as the late 2nd century BC under Kamnaskires III, when bearded portraits and oriental outfits replaced the Seleucid-style royal iconography of the origins. Indeed, the costume worn by Elymaean kings from Kamnaskires III onwards, consisting of a knee-length sleeved caftan worn over a tunic with a lozenge patterned grid-like decoration and trousers, finds very close analogies in princely attires visible on Hatran statues.

The Indo-Parthians were of course openly dependent on Arsacid models (Alram 1987; Sinisi 2014: 31). The transmission of the royal image with the tiara from Arsacid coins to Gondopharid series in the late 1st century AD period is most clearly documented by the series of Hybouzanes (Alram 1999: 41-42), whose obverse portrait wearing a tiara with hooks includes features first introduced in Arsacid coin iconography by Vologases I and Pacorus II. Yet the Gondopharids seem not to have used the tiara as consistently as the Arsacids did, suggesting that Vima may have been inspired directly from Arsacid rather than Indo-Parthian models.

The likelihood of such inspiration increases when we examine the motif of the king before the fire burner, which was unknown in royal imagery from the northwest prior to its introduction by Vima Kadphises¹⁵³ and the promotion to the role of one of the most common types used on Kushan coins it underwent under Kanishka. Indeed, this image was long associated with Arsacid coins (Mukherjee 1960; MacDowall 1975: 147), appearing on bronze chalkoi struck at Ecbatana by Artabanus II in the early 1st century AD,¹⁵⁴ which bear the same figure of the king before a fire burner (Sellwood 1980: 204, 63.22) (Fig. 26b) on the reverse. The type re-appeared on Arsacid coins roughly a century later, when it was used on the reverse of another bronze series, again minted at Ecbatana (Sellwood 1980: 251, 78.15) (Fig. 26d).

Does this mean that these Arsacid coins were the source of Vima's type? In fact, it seems unlikely that one of the most characteristic types of Kushan coinage might originate from such tiny bronze coins, which could hardly have

152 Van't Haaf 2007 (where the first Arsacids of Elymais are dated to the end of the 1st century BC); Dąbrowa 2014.

153 As aptly remarked by Mac Dowall 1978: 307, where the absence of the type from Indo-Parthian coin imagery too is expressly mentioned.

154 The series had previously been long attributed to Gotarzes II.

A-B *Artabanus II, bronze chalkous. Bibliothèque nationale de France AA.GR.6885.*

C-D *Vologases II, bronze chalkous. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Nr. 18212869 (11.1mm).*

FIGURE 26 *The figure before the fire burner on Arsacid coins.*

moved from Ecbatana, let alone reached Bactria.¹⁵⁵ The idea that an isolated bronze coin struck in Media could end up in the hands of the Kushan moneyers to give birth to the only type used by Vima II on his copper tetradrachms, and then by Kanishka and all Kushan rulers from Vasudeva onwards on gold coins too, appears rather difficult to accept, as another occurrence of the coin-to-coin transmission we rejected above. However, a different picture emerges when the focus is widened to other kinds of visual media in the Parthian Empire, and, indeed, coin imagery ought to be conceived as part of a larger visual repertoire even in discussing evidence coming from Arsacid Parthia.

¹⁵⁵ A few Parthian coins have been recovered in Bactria, among which twelve bronzes have been found in Kampyr Tepa, some of them local imitations, see Rtveladze 2011 for the latest treatment. They are mostly not very well preserved, but the few specimens with legible mintmarks come from Margiana.

In this way it can easily be found that the image with the main figure pouring offerings on a small fire burner is widely attested, documented roughly throughout the first couple of centuries AD in several kinds of media beside coins, such as painting, sculpture, and glyptics (Fig. 27).¹⁵⁶ Moreover, these are known from different places in the Parthian Empire and the immediately surrounding regions, from Media and Parthia to Hatra, Dura Europos, Palmyra, Assur and Elymais.¹⁵⁷

Of special interest are the versions of this image depicting the sacrifice as performed by the king himself, known from reliefs at Bisutun, Hatra and Bard-e Neshandeh in Elymais (Fig. 28), which show that the formula was current in royal imagery across the whole Parthian Empire. It is to be noted that in all these instances a bearded king wearing a tiara is depicted. J. Rosenfield (1967: 25) already remarked on the proximity of the Kushan image of the king at altar on coins of Vima Kadphises to the relief on the so-called “Parthian stone” in Bisutun, but the evidence from Elymais appears here—if possible—even more significant. In addition to the tiara and beard, the king pictured at Bard-e Neshandeh is clothed in a knee-length sleeved caftan very similar to that worn by Vima,¹⁵⁸ and the Elymaean image is exactly the same as that employed by the rare coppers of Vima with a bust with trident on the reverse, even in terms of the posture of the figure (Fig. 29a-b). Exactly like the Kushan coin type, the Elymaean relief depicts the ruler holding his sword’s hilt with the left hand, providing another link which also connects the image to the more common version used by Vima on his coppers, where the fire burner is on the right of the ruler and the king’s body accordingly turned into that direction (Fig. 29c).¹⁵⁹

In this regard the kinship with the images from Bisutun and Hatra, as well as with those found on the bronze coins from Ecbatana, is manifest, regardless of the direction faced by the king’s head or of minor differences such as the king’s left hand holding a phiale instead of the sword’s hilt. Indeed, the variation in the direction faced by the figure is common in both royal and non-royal imagery, changing nothing of significance either with regard to formal patterns or in the meaning of the image itself. It is therefore easy to see that the image of

156 A seal with a similar image, inscribed in Parthian but in all likelihood belonging to the Sasanian period, might be added, see Mordtmann 1864: 48–9, and pl. VI, 1.

157 A quite similar appearance has been reconstructed for figures pouring offerings on small fire burners associated with images of deities from the Hall of Kings at the Khwarazmian site of Toprak Kala, see Rapoport 1994: 171–173.

158 The caftan is open at the front, leaving visible the belted tunic underneath. Also worthy of note is the ribbing of the conspicuous diadem tie falling behind the king’s shoulders.

159 That is, the observer’s left.

A Stone relief, Dura Europos.
Mathiesen 1992, fig. 50.

B Drawing on a
pythos, Assur.
Andrae and Lenzen
1933, fig. 46 (detail).

C Stone relief, Palmyra.
Widengren 1960, fig. 17.

D Stone relief, Palmyra. Widengren 1960,
fig. 15.

E Clay sealing, Gobekly Depe.
Gaibov 2007: 292, Fig. 14a.

FIGURE 27 *The figure before the fire burner in the Parthian oecumene.*

Vima Kadphises facing left is the result of the same phenomenon of transmission of royal imagery from the Parthian to the Kushan Empire that produced the perfect correspondence between the relief of Bard-e Neshandeh and the rarer version of Vima at altar facing right. Evidently, we are not faced with a coin-to-coin transmission, with Kushan coin engravers copying foreign coins haphazardly arriving in their hands, but with something that took place on a much broader scale, involving many different visual media. That is why it had an impact on specific iconographic features, such as the regalia represented by the tiara and royal attires, as well as on the occasional compositional formula, such as that of the king at altar.

A *Arsacid king making sacrifice, stone relief, Bisutun. von Gall 1996, pl. 13:1 (detail).*

B *King making sacrifice, stone relief, Hatra. Safar and Mustafa 1974, fig. 139 (detail).*

C *Arsacid-Elymaean king making sacrifice, stone relief, Bard-e Neshandeh. Kawami 1987, pl. 26 (detail).*

FIGURE 28 *The king before the fire burner in the Parthian Empire.*

A clear instance of a possible path of transmission is provided by glyptics. Two seal imprints (Callieri 1997: 150–151, Cat S 17–18, and pl. 40), apparently recovered from Kula Dheri, Pakistan,¹⁶⁰ show a royal figure pouring offerings on a small fire burner in the right field (Fig. 30a), exactly as on the Bard-e Neshandeh relief and in the rarer version of the type used by Vima II on his coppers. The figure is diademed, and therefore certainly identifiable as a king, and with a voluminous round-shaped headgear on his head, which fits perfectly with a tiara. He wears trousers and a knee-length tunic (or caftan). A wreath is depicted above the fire burner. This latter detail connects the imprints to another seal kept in the British Museum (Rosenfield 1967: pl. xvi.6; Cribb 1997: 66, Fig. 17),¹⁶¹ where a mirror-image version, i.e. with the king facing left (Fig. 30b), is engraved: the circular wreath is visible in exactly the same place above the king's hand pouring offerings on the burner. The fact that it is better preserved allows us to verify that the figure is fully bearded.¹⁶²

Another link between the two seals is the elongated shape behind the figure, which suggests they were both carved in NW India, as implied by the fact

¹⁶⁰ The two imprints, from two different sealings, are identical and were impressed by the same seal. One of the two sealings (Callieri 1997: 150, Cat S 17) was found in Kula Dheri.

¹⁶¹ Cribb 1997 provides a much better and enlarged picture of the seal.

¹⁶² As, in all likelihood, is also the figure on the imprints from Kula Dheri, cf. Callieri 1997: 150.

A *Arsacid-Elymaean king making sacrifice, stone relief, Bard-e Neshandeh. Kawami 1987, pl. 26 (detail).*

B *Vima Kadphises making sacrifice, copper coin. SMK no. 765a (obverse).*

C *Vima Kadphises making sacrifice, copper tetradrachm. G&M 152 (10-10-2006), lot 1593 (obverse).*

FIGURE 29 *The king before the fire burner from Parthia to Kushan coins.*

that the image with the king turned to left is engraved on a seal also depicting other figures, among which is included one with the Shiva-like appearance associated with Oešo on Kushan coins.

These seal imprints represent a most informative kind of evidence, as they attest to the transmission of both compositional formulae—the treatment of the figure of the king at altar—and real features of the image of the king—tiara, full beards. In addition, they document such exchange on a medium—seals—which is the product of that technical tradition closest to that of coin engraving.¹⁶³ The fundamental difference was in the markets these two products were destined for, as none of the conditions that make it difficult to imagine a coin-to-coin transmission due to the nature of the coin medium, i.e. a state production arranged according to accurate planning in order to handle large scale numbers, are of any relevance to seal production.

Of course, the possible role of glyptics in the iconographic transmission here discussed provides just a glimpse of a phenomenon that needs to be understood on a much broader scale. Firstly, there were direct channels of contact between representatives of different elites that found no means of transmission on visual media. Secondly, even when dealing with visual evidence we must not expect royal imagery—and its possible transmission—to have been confined to a single class of objects. Rather the contrary, as its features were

163 See Callieri 2006 for a comparison of the work of coin and seal engravers directly focused on the Kushan Empire.

FIGURE 30A *Royal figure making sacrifice, clay sealing, Kula Dheri. Callieri 1997, Cat S 18.*

FIGURE 30B *Royal figure making sacrifice, stone seal, Begram (British Museum). Cribb 1997, Fig. 17c (detail).*

supposed to be immediately recognizable in every instance of contact with the king's image, regardless of the medium. Furthermore, as we have discussed for coins, they were devised in technical contexts in which the craftsmen were used to the employment and elaboration of codified patterns.

We have already seen the use of the same imagery on the so-called Heraios coins and in Khalchayan, as well as on the textiles found in Noin Ula, which means on coins, and in sculpture and embroidery. This phenomenon becomes even more evident with the establishment of an imperial model by Vima Kadphises, when the dynasty consolidated its power over a large empire stretching from Bactria to India. Thus, the same basic patterns of royal imagery are replicated across a variety of different media.

Tiaras are accordingly found in various types of depictions, with variations between the tapered and the more conical form. Besides coins they are common in sculpture: a particularly famous instance is the head with a tapered tiara found in Dalverzin Tepe (Pugachenkova 1978: 37, fig. 25) (Fig. 31a), while no fewer than three large-sized stone heads wearing conical tiaras were recovered in the area of Mathura (Rosenfield 1967: Figs. 4, 14, 15) (Fig. 31b-d),¹⁶⁴ their dimensions fitting a monumental setting at least comparable to that of the Mat *devakula*.¹⁶⁵

164 According to Rosenfield 1967: xxxiv-xxxv, their respective height is 1'6", 18", and 1'6", i.e. from 38.1 to 45.7cm. The first head was found at the site of the Mat *devakula* (Rosenfield 1967: 148), the third one appears to come from Pālikherā.

165 Cf. the remarks in Rosenfield 1967: 143, on the possibility of "an establishment similar to the Mat shrine", i.e. a further structure, corresponding to the mound of Gokarnesvara Tila at Mathura. Indeed, an almost complete larger-than-life-sized statue of what appears to be an enthroned Kushan king has been recovered at Gokarnesvara Tila, currently

A
*Clay and stucco
head, Dabverzin
Tepe. Pugachenkova
1978, fig. 25.*

B
*Stone head, Mat.
Rosenfield 1967,
fig. 4.*

C
*Stone head,
Mathura.
Rosenfield 1967,
fig. 14.*

D
*Stone head,
Mathura.
Rosenfield 1967,
fig. 15-16.*

FIGURE 31 *Kushan princely and royal statues with tiara.*

Other figures wearing tiaras are encountered in reliefs from Mathura and other sites in India (Fig. 32), including a number of instances where secondary devices exhibit further connections with the royal iconography found on coins, like the moon crescent on the forehead of a tiara-wearing figure from a Gandharan relief now in the Calcutta Museum (Fig. 32c), closely recalling the analogous feature visible on coins of Huvishka.

Sadly there is no possibility of verifying in detail such correspondences in Surkh Kotal, as only parts of the heads of the royal stone statues were recovered. However, two fragmentary heads appear to wear tiaras (Schlumberger et al. 1983: 120, heads S1 and S1a, and pl. 63, nos. 193 and 194), one of them exhibiting a peculiar patterned band wrapped around its lower part (Fig. 33a-b),¹⁶⁶

installed in a local temple as cultic image (at least when Rosenfield described it), see Rosenfield 1967: 142-143, 148-149, and Fig. 11.

¹⁶⁶ Head S1, probably to be associated with Statue II according to G. Fussman (Schlumberger et al. 1983: 120).

A *Kushan royal figure with tiara, stone pillar, Mathura. Rosenfield 1967, fig. 22 (detail).*

B *Kushan royal figure with tiara, stone relief, Mathura. Rosenfield 1967, fig. 38 (detail).*

C *Kushan royal donor with tiara, stone relief, Lahore Museum. Rosenfield 1967, fig. 77 (detail).*

FIGURE 32 *Kushan royal figures with tiara from Mathura to Gandhara.*

in all likelihood representing a wreath (Schlumberger et al. 1983: 120; Göbl 1984: 28). Fortunately, broadening the comparison to other sculptural images yields extremely significant results. Indeed, the figure of a royal donor on a Buddhist relief from Ranighat, Pakistan (Rosenfield 1967: Fig. 86),¹⁶⁷ wears an

¹⁶⁷ The whole relief is illustrated in Tissot 1985: fig. 131.

FIGURE 33A-B *Kushan king with tiara, stone head, Surkh Kotal. Schlumberger 1954, pl. 111; Rosenfield 1967, fig. 122.*

FIGURE 33C *Kushan royal donor with tiara, stone relief, Ranighat. Rosenfield 1967, fig. 86 (detail).*

almost complete diademed¹⁶⁸ tiara with exactly the same type of patterned band sculpted around its base to render the wreath (Fig. 33c).¹⁶⁹

Furthermore, the figure of the Ranighat relief also provides additional evidence to show how widespread the use of similar compositional patterns was: the basic posture of the king is the same as that of the figure visible on the unfinished relief depicting an investiture scene from Surkh Kotal, only the arms posed differently (Fig. 34a-b). It is easy to see that the analogy can be comfortably extended to the sealings from Kula Dheri and the British Museum discussed above (Fig. 30a), once again confirming the use of the same basic forms throughout different kinds of production and across the whole empire, from Bactria to India.

Thus, regardless of the stylistic variety, which was due to the different artistic traditions, in terms of basic compositional forms the official production exemplified by the images of Surkh Kotal and Mat exhibits a remarkable homogeneity. The latter may be explained simply as the consequence of the

¹⁶⁸ Worthy of note is the fact that the diadem tie falling behind the king's head clearly exhibits the ribbing treatment.

¹⁶⁹ One would be tempted to see this wreath even around the cylindrical headgear worn by the Kushan king appearing on the so-called Kanishka reliquary (as already noted by Göbl 1984: 28, 34). See Errington 2002 for a recent treatment of the reliquary, where the casket is dated to the reign of Huvishka. A wreath is also visible around the mitre of Huvishka in his fourth and last emission (in both mints), see Göbl 1984: 34, and pl. 158, Types XVII-XIX of Huvishka.

FIGURE 34A *Kushan royal donor, stone relief, Ranighat. Rosenfield 1967, fig. 86 (detail).*

FIGURE 34B *Unfinished investiture scene, stone relief, Surkh Kotal. Rosenfield 1967, fig. 123.*

common presentational formula, the resulting strongly hieratic appearance being strictly connected to the frontality of the stelae solution employed by the artists in royal service at both sites. However, this was not a casual choice, and must be considered as the result of a specific strategy of communication, which seems to have, to a large extent, also involved the other official means of imperial imagery provided by coinage. One is left with the impression that the most common types introduced on coins by Vima Kadphises were inherited by his successors on their coin series as well as, at the same time, also becoming the standard reference for monumental sculptural renderings of the royal figures in the official art connected to the dynasty (cf. Rosenfield 1967: 156; Staviski 1986: 242).¹⁷⁰ Indeed, the sets of royal statues at Mat and Surkh Kotal are remarkably similar, as both sites included an enthroned image and a number of standing kings in their galleries of royal portraits.

Furthermore, as repeatedly noted in the literature (e.g., Rosenfield 1967: 177; Fussman 1977: 314),¹⁷¹ the statues found in Surkh Kotal and those from Mat show the employment of the same basic costume, in particular the trousers and the sleeved long garment that we termed a *caftan*, worn over the belted tunic. In addition, the image known as Statue I from Surkh Kotal is clad in the

¹⁷⁰ This must not be automatically understood as an imitation in sculpture of coin types (or vice versa), but as their belonging to the same programme of imperial imagery.

¹⁷¹ See also Verardi 1983: 241, with a different appraisal.

same variant of caftan with patterned lapels over the two circular clasps which is known on metal medallions representing royal figures, in their turn in every respect similar to the Kushan kings depicted on coins.¹⁷² Long, sleeved caftans¹⁷³ are commonly associated with royal or princely donors on reliefs from various sites from NW to Gangetic India. They often display a treatment of the edge bands which strongly suggests fur (Rosenfield 1967: figs. 23, 93-94),¹⁷⁴ commonly associated with the “northern” origin of the costume and of the characters wearing it (Fussman 1977: 315; Verardi 1983: 255-257; Carter 1994: 31-32; Grenet 2012: 12). Indeed, figures displaying similar caftans are frequently distinguished by their hairstyles or facial hair.

Thus, it is possible to discern the use of the same regalia and of similar compositional formulae across different visual media throughout the territory of the entire Kushan empire, clearly hinting at the existence of a centrally inspired iconographic programme. This does not exclude the occasional peculiarity, as shown by the apparent opposition between portraits with beards or moustaches from the northern areas of the empire and images from the Gangetic region which normally lack any facial hair,¹⁷⁵ as most significantly exemplified by the tiara-wearing monumental stone heads from Mathura mentioned above.¹⁷⁶ This might reflect local trends in the development of specific canons of idealized imagery (Rosenfield 1967: 173),¹⁷⁷ as also highlighted by the comparison between Buddhist images from the two areas. Yet the similarities are much stronger (Schlumberger 1960: 147; Rosenfield 1967: 156; Rau 1973: 195; Staviski 1986: 224), as shown by the basic stance of the royal figures, hieratically standing with the sword hilt held tightly in the left hand in sculpture as well as on coins. Always clad in the same outfit, kings perform sacrifices in precisely

172 Göbl 1963, where the connection is very convincingly proposed with the series of Huvishka. For a further discussion of the medallions, with additional material, see Göbl 1987.

173 They are mostly closed by a single clasp, see Rosenfield 1967: figs. 98a, 108.

174 A fragment of one of the stone statues from Surkh Kotal has been interpreted as part of a fur edging, see Schlumberger et al. 1983: 120, no. S6 (not illustrated).

175 Needless to say, exceptions are known, see for example Rosenfield 1967: fig. 23, for a man with moustaches depicted on a *vedika* pillar from Mathura. The opposite is also true, as exemplified by the tiara-wearing, beardless head from Dalverzin Tepe (see Pugachenkova 1978: 36-37, figs. 24-25). Yet this head has been interpreted as portraying a young prince (i.e. without facial hair due to the young age), since the fragments of another two heads exhibit moustaches.

176 Another remarkable difference is that the boots visible at Mat as well as on coins are missing on the Surkh Kotal statues, for example.

177 A fragment of a stone head found in Surkh Kotal still preserves a visible part of its beard, see Schlumberger et al. 1983: 121, S22 (not illustrated). It is deemed to belong to Statue 1.

A *Kanishka*, stone statue, Mat. Rosenfield 1967, fig. 2 (detail).

B *Vima Kadphises*, copper tetradrachm. G&M 152 (10-10-2006), lot 1593 (obverse detail).

FIGURE 35 *The royal caftan on the statue of Kanishka and on coins of Vima Kadphises.*

the same way on coins, seals, and reliefs (cf. Rosenfield 1967: 25-26).¹⁷⁸ They stand before the viewer in the same attitude in Surkh Kotal and Mathura, just as one of them sits on a lion-throne at both sites and at Gokarnesvara Tila, as well as on the striking clay medallion found in Khalchayan.¹⁷⁹ The same rigid standing posture is exhibited on coins and reliefs, the splayed feet visible on coins of Vima Kadphises or Kanishka, on the so-called Kanishka reliquary and at Mathura, both on the sculptures found in the *devakula* and on the reliefs from the city district. Even minor features are often rendered similarly across the media, and the way in which the open caftan of the king folds back at its bottom is likewise identical on the statue of Kanishka at Mat and on the copper coins of Vima Kadphises (Fig. 35). Also analogous is the pattern exhibited by the drapery of the tunic of the statue of Kanishka at Mat and on those at Surkh Kotal (cf. Rosenfield 1967: 156-157), only the stylistic treatment setting the two somewhat apart. The left hand hidden in the sleeve is rendered identically on the Kanishka reliquary (Fig. 36a), on coins of Vima Kadphises and probably on a stone battlement at Surkh Kotal, as well as on the Khalchayan medallion (Fig. 36b-d), the latter three images all depicting the seated king

178 Cf. also Schlumberger 1970: 65, on the links between Kushan statuary and coins.

179 Not to mention the enthroned king found on coins of Vima Kadphises and Kanishka, whose image differs only due to the lack of the lion-shaped throne railings. Cf. also Rau 1973: 196; Staviski 1986: 242. For the Khalchayan medallion see Pugachenkova 1962. As a side note, the Nike crowning the enthroned king on the medallion might be another common trait with Surkh Kotal, if a Nike really is depicted beside the enthroned ruler on the stele found there (even if it appears as a little figure in the hand of the king or standing on the throne arm), cf. Schlumberger et al. 1983: 123.

FIGURE 36A
Kushan king, "Kanishka" reliquary. Errington 2002, fig. 5 (detail).

FIGURE 36B
Enthroned Vima Kadphises, gold double dinar. CNG Triton X (9-1-2007), lot 469 (obverse).

FIGURE 36C
Enthroned (royal?) figure, stone battlement, Surkh Kotal. Schlumberger et al. 1983, pl. 57, 172-173 (detail).

FIGURE 36D
Enthroned Kushan king, terracotta medallion, Khalchayan. Pugachenkova 1971, fig. 54.

according to the same compositional formula. Moreover, on the Khalchayan medallion the king holds a twig in his right hand exactly like Vima Kadphises in his enthroned image on coins (Figs. 36b and 36d).¹⁸⁰

Thus, Kushan royal imagery on coins shows a clear influence of imperial patterns of Arsacid derivation. The result was the Kushan adoption and re-elaboration of substantial features of Arsacid royal iconography, starting with a regular system of personal tiaras and the choice of fully bearded imperial portraits. This development was not a mere numismatic phenomenon, as it occurred in the framework of a broader process which involved the visual display of power at various levels and across different media. The involvement of specific compositional patterns, as eminently represented by the image of the king before the fire burner, provides a clear confirmation, since the chain of transmission of this image connects across the Parthian and the Kushan worlds an entire range of visual artefacts, from coins and seals to monumental sculpture.

5 The Image of the King and the Cultural Background of Kushan Royal Ideology

By this point, we can clearly see that numismatic imagery was just part of a larger programme of royal iconography based on common models, which were

¹⁸⁰ The comparison between these two images is especially instructive (cf. Pugachenkova 1962: 89). While the throne is different, as the lions are missing from the coin type, there are remarkable iconographic links in the rendering of the legs of the king seen from the front: the large, almost “bulging” knees and the way in which the caftan hangs from the king’s legs falling on the throne seat are absolutely identical. Knauer 2008 has suggested that the enthroned Vima from Mat might be clad in a different attire, namely a robe, held up on the king’s legs by a suspending device similar to that shown by the figure of Antiochus of Commagene at Nimrud Dagh. The long robe of the Commagenian king is indeed lifted by two straps connected to the belt, probably in order to facilitate riding. According to Knauer the same system was used by Vima as she identified the two straps visible between the legs of Vima as the two cords used to gather up the robe. The correspondence between Commagenian and Kushan imagery so detected was set in the framework of the diffusion of common patterns in royal imagery from Commagene to Kushanshahr (Knauer 2008: 276–277 also stressed the analogous use of cloaks or lion-thrones, for example). While the same general approach is adopted here, the long robe worn by Vima in Knauer’s view is unparalleled in other Kushan royal images, including those on coins, which we can ascribe with certainty to specific kings (such as the two Vimas). It is to be noted that a statue from Mat depicting a seated Kubera or Jambhala shows nearly identical elements which appear to be just the belt ends left hanging, see Rosenfield 1967: fig. 48.

widely employed across the various media to visually transmit the presence and nature of the power of the Kushan kings. The significant core of this visual communication is often linked in the literature to the Central Asian nomadic roots of the dynasty, since the image projected by all such depictions is clearly non-Indian, exhibiting instead a manifest connection to Iranian Central Asia (Fussman 1977: 314-315; Verardi 1983: 255; Carter 1994: 31-32).

Needless to say, this has several implications for our understanding of Kushan ideology and the cultural landscape in which it was articulated. Here an important question arises, largely—even if not exclusively—due to crucial problems of terminology. Indeed, in referring to Kushan figures, frequent mention is made in the literature of the notion of “Indo-Scythian costume”, as a prominent element of the visual culture of what has been dubbed the “Scythian” period of Indian history.¹⁸¹ Rosenfield, who expressly linked the Kushan portraits to the Iranian cultural sphere in reviewing several parallels from the western Iranian world (Rosenfield 1967: 172),¹⁸² defined as “Indo-Scythian” the costume worn by the Kushan kings at Mat (Rosenfield 1967: 151), and used this label throughout his book for all the figures similarly dressed. Two decades later J. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw (1989) did the same, in an important article in which she further developed the parallels already provided by Rosenfield, highlighting for instance the links between Hatrene and Kushan royal headgear,¹⁸³ as exemplified by the comparison between royal images at Hatra and a stone head found at Mathura exhibiting very similar lozenge-patterned tiaras (Fig. 37a-b).¹⁸⁴ Thus, although van Lohuizen-de Leeuw managed to improve on the interpretations suggested by Rosenfield, she still set them within a basic Scythian background. In her view, the figures wearing trousers in the Gandharan and Mathuran reliefs are “male Scythians”, members of “nomadic tribes” whose role was “mainly that

181 Most notably by J. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1949, even if the label was common in the literature of the period dealing with the history and art history of ancient India, which ultimately explains the employment of the term even in Rosenfield 1967. Cribb (1998: 87; 2007: 366; see also Jongeward et al. 2015 *passim*) used the definition of “nomad dress”.

182 Followed almost verbatim by Rau 1973: 196 (even if no mention is made of the source).

183 Van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1989: 77, where the confused interpretation put forward by Rosenfield 1967: 189 (who had rightly written of Kushan conical crowns, but then had inexplicably connected them with female headdresses from Hatra and Edessa, in addition to mistaking the Kushan tiaras on the statues from Mathura for military helmets) was aptly rejected. Yet Rosenfield 1967: 178 had already compared Kushan and Hatrene princely imagery, and had described the head from Mathura with lozenge-patterned tiara as “wearing an ornate Parthian-style helmet”.

184 The stone head, measuring c. 25cm in height, was found in the Jumna River, see Rosenfield 1967: xxxv, fig. 16. 9,1-2 inch.

A Kushan royal portrait, stone head, Mat. Rosenfield 1967, figs. 15-16a; Rosenfield 1967, fig. 16b.

B Stone statue of a king, Hatra. Safar and Mustafa 1974, fig. 197 (detail).

C Copper drachm of Cheiroukes. CNG 87 (18-5-2011), lot 751 (18mm, 3.27g).

D Royal figure, wall painting, Kuh-e Khwaja. Ghirshman 1962, fig. 56 (detail).

E Bronze coin of Abgar X, Edessa. Sincona AG 6 (23-5-2012), lot 209.

FIGURE 37 Lozenge-patterned tiaras in Kushan India and in the Parthian world.

of middlemen passing on to Indian culture certain elements which they had picked up elsewhere” (van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1989: 75). Thus, the connections the “Indo-Scythian” costume shows with Hatra were pointed out referring to “other parts of the nomadic world” or to “the Scythian world from the Black Sea and the Near East to the plains of North India” (van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1989: 75, 77).

In fact, the Scythian reading had already been vigorously challenged ten years earlier in an insightful article by B. Goldman, significantly entitled “Parthians at Gandhara” (Goldman 1978). Goldman (1978: 198–199)¹⁸⁵ remarked on the vagueness of some definitions of the costume worn by figures wearing the “northern tailored suits” common in the literature, observing that “what has been called Central Asian dress at Gandhāra is by the time of the Kushan reign Parthian and had, before the emergence of the Parthian Empire, already been at home in Western Asia in general and in Iran in particular” (Goldman 1978: 202).

We have already seen how several elements of Kushan royal imagery introduced by Vima Kadphises are tightly connected to Arsacid Parthian models. The tiara motif is the clearest example here, but a Parthian derivation seems ascertainable even for features of the royal portraits such as the beard, or the so-called wart. The use of long sceptres and cloaks might also be listed among the similarities,¹⁸⁶ and clear links to western Iranian patterns are detectable

185 Followed by De Marco 1983: 5–6.

186 While not customary for Arsacid kings, long sceptres regularly appear on Parthian coins of the 1st century BC, since all the kings between Phraates III and Orodes III—with the only exception of Phraataces—struck at least a tetradrachm series showing the king with a long staff/sceptre on the reverse. With regard to the use of cloaks in royal imagery, various examples are attested in the Parthian oecumene, from Hatra to Dura, Edessa and Commagene. This should demonstrate quite clearly that it makes no sense to speak of the Roman *paludamentum* for the Kushans, and if we really must use a western term, then *chlamys* would be a better alternative, taking into account that it is visible on the Hermaios imitation series struck by the Yuezhi since c. 70 BC. Remarkably enough, Göbl (1984: 33) seemed aware of the related problems, but ignored them and constantly used the Roman term hinting at the consequent implications, later (1999: 157) expressly stating that “Vima Kadphises also wears the *paludamentum* of the Roman emperor”. At any rate, it has regularly gone unnoticed that a cloak is worn by the seated princely character at Khalchayan (Pugachenkova 1971: 57–58, no. 58, Fig. 68). Another feature shared with areas exposed to Parthian influence was the lion-throne, attested at Dura, Hatra and Commagene (Rosenfield 1967: 183–184; cf. also van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1989: 77–78 for the foreign origin of the lion-throne in India). In the light of these examples, it is clear that, while the lion-throne would have been familiar to Indian subjects of the empire, to use the definition of *simhāsana* for the Kushan lion-throne (as did Verardi 1983: 242) is ultimately inappropriate, since nobody would have referred to it in this way in Bactria, cf. Rosenfield 1967:

even for further features, since fur-trimmed caftans identical to those exhibited by the Kushans are found in Hatra (Homès-Fredericq 1963: 24-25) and Elymais. Needless to say, both these regions were closely dependant on Arsacid imperial models and, once again, the tiara is only the most glamorous feature to single out in order to show the diffusion of Arsacid imperial imagery: one may point out further comparisons for the lozenge patterned tiara visible in Mathura and Hatra, as a similarly decorated tiara is used on his copper coins by a certain satrap Cheirokues (Fig. 37c), probably from Sistan (cf. Alram 1986: 296-297, no 1270), as well as appearing in a wall painting at Kuh-e Khwaja worn by a character identified as a royal figure (Ghirshman 1962: fig. 56) (Fig. 37d),¹⁸⁷ while the Hatran combination of lozenge decoration and pointy crest on top (Fig. 37b), the latter clearly derived from 2nd-century Arsacid models, was also known in Oshroene (Fig. 37e). Unsurprisingly, when royal headgear from the Parthian and the Kushan world is compared, there is no need to focus only on peculiar patterns such as the lozenge-decorated tiara, since remarkable similarities are detectable even on plain tiaras, as shown once again by specimens from Hatra and Mat (Fig. 38).¹⁸⁸

That the whole question of how to define the groups under discussion based on their visual appearance is not merely a problem of nomenclature is clearly shown by the fact that only ten years ago M. Carter suggested a wholly Saka background for the Kushans, considered the second Indo-Scythian power in the area after the Sakas of NW India and separated from them by a “chronological and a *cultural* hiatus” represented by the Indo-Parthians (Carter 2005: 432).¹⁸⁹

Despite the differences between the interpretations of van Lohuizen-de Leeuw and Carter, the implications of the Indo-Scythian reading are both clear and significant: we have either a wide “Scythian area” stretching from the Indo-Iranian borderlands to the Western outskirts of the Iranian world and

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183-186, who seemed well aware of the problem. He also connected the lion-throne with the pedestal with rampant lion-griffins of a Kshatrapa(?) princely image from Mathura, which might find an interesting comparison in the griffin-throne of the Arsacid king of kings Artabanus on the Khwasak stele from Susa (for which see Kawami 1987: 48-51, 164-167, cat. no. 5; Mathiesen 1992: 168-169, cat. no. 87).

187 Lozenge-patterned tiaras are attested also by the pre-Sasanian graffiti in Persepolis as well as by late Indo-Parthian coins: see respectively Callieri 2003: 146, figs. 5-6 and Senior 2001. 11: 188, s. 274.1T.

188 In both instances the tiaras display a decoration consisting of a row of pearls running along the top joining with a further row of pearls lining the bottom rim.

189 Italics mine.

FIGURE 38A *Stone statue of a king, Hatra. Safar and Mustafa 1974, fig. 72 (detail).*

FIGURE 38B *Kushan royal portrait, stone head, Mathura. Rosenfield 1967, fig. 14.*

including the Kushan and Parthian empires,¹⁹⁰ or a Scythian cultural continuity in NW India from the Sakas to the Kushans. The latter would exclude the Indo-Parthians, who ought to be seen as culturally different.

Actually, both models are highly misleading, sharing as they do the incorrect premise that the Kushans were Scythians, that is, Sakas. The difference between the two interpretations is the result of two additional limits: the reconstruction by Carter ignores the evident links between Parthian and Kushan imagery, while that by van Lohuizen-de Leeuw relies too much on the idea of a marked nomadic, i.e. Scytho/Saka, connotation of the empire of the Arsacids.¹⁹¹

The latter hypothesis is premised on the assumption that the Arsacid Parthians long continued to observe a similar sort of nomadic lifestyle to that

190 A similar reconstruction is upheld by R. Senior, whose works are of special relevance here since they deal with the coinages of the Sakas and Indo-Parthians. In his view (Senior 2000:1; cf. also Senior 2001.I, *passim*), the Kushans were “part of the great ‘Scythian family’ and not part of the Yueh-chih clan” and the “similarity of the portraits on the coins of ‘Heraios’ (Kushan), Azilises (Hazara issues) and Zeionises (Scythians)” would show “how related they were.” The Indo-Parthians were also considered to be Scythians (as well as the Arsacid Parthians, cf. Senior 2001.I: 25).

191 Yet it is the general lack of communication between different areas of research that has to be blamed, rather than the single scholars. Indeed, due to the frequent distance between the studies on Central Asia and NW India on one side and on western Iran on the other one, it is not surprising if a specialist working on art history of NW India may be unaware of all the implications of the discussion on the Kushans on the wider horizon of the Iranian world of the period.

ascribed by western sources to the Parnians, the Central Asian conquerors of Parthia led by Arsaces, who were allegedly of Dahae, i.e. Saka, origin. In fact, there is simply no element to support this idea of “nomadic continuity”. In no way can the structure of the army, the occasional connection mentioned by western sources to nomadic tribal groups in the East by some Arsacid king, or the use of the horseman costume, qualify any aspect of the Arsacid imperial construction as primarily—or even only distinctly—nomadic.¹⁹² Nothing in what we know of Arsacid royal ideology, beginning with their resumption from the Achaemenid past of the title of King of Kings, can be connected to a nomadic background, and the evidence we can put together on Parthian religion is likewise clear (cf. De Jong 2008; 2013: 27–35). Aside from a handful of Saka loan-words, Parthian language has nothing Saka about it, being a north-western Middle-Iranian language rather close to the south-western Middle-Persian, and the onomastics known so far, including the royal one, is Parthian—in several instances with significant ties to the Achaemenid period (Schmitt 1998: 178)—not Saka (cf. De Jong 2013: 32). Actually, even the nomadic origins of Arsaces and the Parnians may be critically assessed and questioned accordingly,¹⁹³ rather than simply taken for granted and regarded as a prominent feature of Parthian culture. All in all, it is not by mere chance or convention that we speak of a Parthian and not Parnian Empire (cf. Boyce 1994).

With regard to costume, one could recall once again Goldman's remarks quoted above. In fact, once we compare the trousers and jacket worn by Parthians of Arsacid times with the costume consisting of trousers and tunic

192 See Hauser 2005 for an extensive discussion of some of these aspects. The problem of the excessive role ascribed in the literature to the nomadic heritage of the Arsacids was already clearly pointed out in Wolski 1966: 78–79. See also Boyce 1994; Kuhrt 1998: 532. For the opposite view, see, e.g., Olbrycht 2003, who concluded that “the essential components of Parthian society, way of life and warfare remained rather conservative and were based on steppe nomadic factors”. It ought to be considered that, following Olbrycht, Parthian society must be imagined to be able to keep (or, to be unable to set itself free from) the same character for nearly five centuries. This appears extremely hard to believe both from the specific perspective of a realistic assessment of Parthian history, and from that of historical dynamics and methodology in general. Cf. Kuhrt 1998: 531, against the idea of the Parthian empire as an essentially static body, and Wiesehöfer 2014: 456 on its alleged enduring nomadic character.

193 As done brilliantly by Lerouge-Cohen 2010, where the successive stratifications in western literary tradition and their artificial character are clearly demonstrated. Cf. also De Jong 2013: 30.

worn by Persians of Achaemenid period,¹⁹⁴ such as Darius III in the Alexander mosaic,¹⁹⁵ we must infer either that the Achaemenids, in resembling the supposedly nomadic Arsacids, were nomads themselves,¹⁹⁶ or—a much more tenable inference—that the category of a primary nomadic character for the Parthian empire and culture can only be definitely discarded. It is very easy to see in this perspective that the fur-trimmed caftans exhibited by Hatran and Elymaean princes, evidently modeled on Arsacid forms,¹⁹⁷ closely correspond to the fur-edged candys worn by Persians in Achaemenid times,¹⁹⁸ and—like the Persian candys—were in no way meant to highlight any sort of nomadic heritage on the part of those who wore them.

Therefore, it makes little sense to refer to a nomadic context where, for example, Arsacid influences on Hatra are concerned. This obviously impacts the other point of comparison at the opposite geographic end of our spectrum, namely the Kushan Empire. If the Parthians were not nomads, and their empire displayed little in the way of nomadic features, what do the similarities in iconographic repertoire between Parthians and Kushans really tell us? Here we are faced with the residually widespread idea that there existed in Kushan culture and society a prominent nomadic element, as supposedly attested by the continued use of Central Asian costume by the Kushan elite.

194 Here we skip the tunic and trousers worn by the Sasanians only because the Achaemenid comparison should suffice.

195 To mention just one of the most striking occurrences, of course.

196 An analogous comparison with the Achaemenids, perfectly hitting the point, was already undertaken by Wolski 1966: 79, this time concerning the role of the horse.

197 Even if, actually, we still lack depictions that can be qualified *strictu sensu* as Arsacid Parthian of such article of dress. Apart from being the only possible outcome in terms of logical inferences, the problem might be obviated thanks to the Elymaean evidence if the possible Arsacid background of the late Elymaean rulers is considered (cf. Dąbrowa 2014 and fn. 152 above). Indeed, if we accept this interpretation, we have Arsacids, i.e. Parthians, ruling over Parthia (here meant in its political rather than geographical value, thus Parthia proper and Media with the surrounding areas), Elymais, and Armenia. Other Parthians, those known as Indo-Parthians or Gondopharids, who seem to have been not Arsacids (i.e. a distinct branch), were then ruling in the East. Here royal onomastics is singularly interesting, as that employed by the Gondopharids is fundamentally different from the royal names used by the Arsacids (save for the occasional exception), which appear to have been common also in Parthian-ruled Armenia and Elymais.

198 Whether the candys worn by Persians was adopted from the Medes or not. At any rate, the Parsa must have known something very similar since they shared a common background with the Mada before their establishment in western Iran. On the candys, see Schmitt 1990 and Shahbazi 1992.

It will be noted here that, once again, ‘Central Asian’ is widely taken to mean ‘nomadic’, as if these were synonyms, in terms not dissimilar from those employed for the Parthians. But what features of Kushan culture can we identify as displaying a nomadic, which is to say Saka, character? It bears highlighting here at the outset that what we define respectively as ‘Kushan’ and ‘Yuezhi’ cannot be understood simply as mutual equivalents. It is true, of course, that the Kushans were a part of the Yuezhi, and the Kushan Empire stemmed from Yuezhi rule over Bactria. Indeed, we know that, either from their origins or acquiring it on their way to Bactria, the Yuezhi included a Saka component,¹⁹⁹ which, according to the most recent philological studies, may have been the dominant element from the very outset.²⁰⁰ Moreover, in contrast to what appears to have been the case with the Parni in Parthia,²⁰¹ it seems that the Yuezhi takeover of Bactria was a truly large-scale phenomenon.

However, from the Yuezhi conquest of Bactria around c. 140–130 BC to the birth of the Kushan Empire in the 1st century AD roughly two centuries elapsed. What happened in this long period, completely changing the perspective by the time the Kushan Empire was born, was a process that we might term the ‘Bactrianization’ of the Yuezhi (cf. Grenet 2012: 8–9): the Kushanshahr was no longer an agglomeration of Yuezhi chiefdoms, but rather an empire whose elite had fully “Bactrianized” itself, exactly as happened to the “Parthianized” Parni.

Indeed, the assumption that no transformation took place in Yuezhi society and culture in two hundred years and that the Kushan Empire stuck to that heritage as the main means of defining its identity is not only hardly tenable, but appears contradicted by what we can see in the Kushan time.

As a matter of fact, there is nothing we can qualify as nomadic—Yuezhi, Saka or whatever we want to call it—in the main features we can reconstruct of *Kushan* ideology and culture. Rather the opposite is true, as they all look to be firmly based in the local Bactrian tradition. This is clearly the case for the adoption of Bactrian, as spoken by the indigenous Iranian population, *qua* primary official language, at the expense of all other local tongues (cf.

199 The Sai/Sek of the Chinese sources, see Neelis 2007 for a recent discussion.

200 See Sims-Williams 2002: 236–240, where the possible Saka connections of what may be detected as of Yuezhi derivation in the Bactrian language are highlighted. Needless to say, even assuming that they were all Sakas, it is clear that the Yuezhi confederation included different groups, as confirmed by the various names recorded in western sources for the invaders of Greek Bactria.

201 Cf. Lerouge-Cohen 2010: 166, where they are described as “réellement peu nombreux”.

Fussman 1998: 596-598):²⁰² this process is attested by the use of Bactrian in royal inscriptions outside Bactria, such as the Dasht-e Nawur inscription, and by Bactrian-inscribed coins struck and circulating even in the non-Bactrian regions of the empire. Of the utmost significance is that, at Rabatak, Kanishka defines this language as “Aryan”, which is the only parallel known so far for the use of this appellative for Darius’ Bisutun inscription (Gnoli 2002: 84).²⁰³ There is no need to stress further how there can be no question of Saka culture or nomadic heritage here.

With regard to religion, once coins and the description of the deities mentioned in the Rabatak inscription are considered, the religious horizon of the Kushans is manifestly that of Bactrian Zoroastrianism, and as such part of a wider Zoroastrian world that extended across the whole of “sedentary” Iran.²⁰⁴ There are no visible features that can be linked to a Saka religion similar—for example—to that described by Herodotus for the Scythians,²⁰⁵ and when Kanishka defined himself as King of Kings, who “obtained the kingship from Nana”—in a way not dissimilar from how the Achaemenid King of Kings became ruler “by the favour of Ahura Mazda”—he was certainly not drawing upon his alleged nomadic heritage. He was able to do so only because of the absorption of the former Yuezhi elite into the Bactrian aristocracy, which kept

202 The use of Greek on coins was inherited from the previous coin tradition (cf. Cribb 1998: 86-87), but discarded completely once Bactrian appeared in the early series of Kanishka. The same is true for Prakrit, and Indian languages remained in use only in the Indian part of the empire (or in specific contexts, such as, e.g., Buddhist monastic communities, outside of India proper). The mysterious language appearing in some inscriptions, like the Dasht-e Nawur trilingual inscription of Vima Taktu, and interpreted by some as a Saka language, perhaps the ancestral idiom of the Yuezhi (Grenet 2012: 8), is only poorly attested.

203 On the context of use and the meaning of the word “Aryan” see now Panaino 2015: 96-101, whose interpretation may only strengthen the point made here.

204 With the local peculiarities due to its regional variations, of course.

205 Which is the only Scythian religion of which we know something. Grenet 2012: 18 proposed explaining the appellative *ufarr* used at Rabatak for the Kushan goddess Umma, meaning “radiant”, glorious”, in connection with the identification with Hestia provided by Herodotus for the Scythian royal goddess Tabiti. Yet, even accepting that the appellatives might be close in meaning, the names of Tabiti and Umma remain quite distinct. In fact, the general impression coming from the so-called Kushan monetary pantheon is immediately recognizable as different from that provided by the several deities appearing in the coinage of the Sakas of Sistan and nw India. The latter might better fit the Scythian religion described by Herodotus, the connections to fire embodied by Tabiti, the Scythian Hestia, possibly personified by the otherwise enigmatic “lamp goddess” of the Saka series, see Sinisi 2003.

alive traditions common to that wider “sedentary” Iran of which Bactria was an integral part.²⁰⁶

This is not to deny that nomadic elements of Yuezhi derivation survived in Kushan times: localized forms of nomadism and archaeological testimonies of nomadic groups, mostly graves, are attested in Bactria.²⁰⁷ But Bactria remained a highly urbanized region even in Kushan times, with an extensive number of urban centers of various dimensions (cf. Leriche 2007), including large cities such as Balkh or Termez. When we examine how this was reflected on the ideological level and its cultural background, it is clear that the building by the Kushans of huge-scale structures like the *bagolangos*, a real network of temples across the empire (Fussman 1998: 590; 2001: 260-261),²⁰⁸ displays little nomadic connotation.

Thus, no signs of nomadic features are really visible at the level of the dynasty and the elite once the imperial phase was entered, which is not at all surprising once we try to assess the role of the local Bactrian aristocracy during the long pre-Kushan period. Therefore, it can certainly be agreed that Kushan rulers and their entourage did not reject their nomadic background (Grenet 2012: 12), but this does not mean that they promoted it and in no way helps to define the character of their royal ideology: the pride they might have retained in their nomadic ancestry (Grenet 2012: 19) simply does not appear to have been among the main features defining their cultural identity. As a matter of fact, there is a certain degree of contrast between Saka and Kushan royal

206 Regardless of the fact that the Sakas of Sakastan and NW India used the same title on their coinage. It is clear that the notion of King of Kings is not of nomadic derivation, and therefore the only possible conclusion is that even the Sakas adopted it from an imperial tradition which was not their own. The idea put forward by Senior 2001.I: 12, that the title of King of Kings was adopted by the Arsacids due to an alleged Saka influence is simply impossible to accept on any historical grounds: the concept of King of Kings was of Achaemenid Persian derivation, and was *not* a “normal form of address for a supreme Scythian king” adopted by Mithradates II to placate his fellow Scythians in Parthia, as stated by Senior 2001.I: 25 (who is accordingly wrong on both the origin of the title and the reasons for its use by Mithradates II).

207 Grenet 2012: 9-11, where an overview of the debate on the chronology of these discoveries is also provided. See also Stride 2007.

208 So far, apart from the *devakula* of Mat (to which perhaps a similar structure in Gokarnesvara Tila could be added) in India, the known Bactrian *bagolangos* include that of Surkh Kotal and that referred to by the inscription of Rabatak (on the temple at Rabatak see Besenval et al. 2002: 1417-1421), while a further one seems to be mentioned by the inscription of Airtam, see Harmatta 1986; Fussman 1987: 396-397 (both with references), as well as Fussman 1998: 589; 2001: 260.

imagery, the former showing the king mostly on horseback, the latter presenting the king standing or enthroned.²⁰⁹ Even among the exceptions to standard types²¹⁰ there are no Kushan rulers depicted on horseback after Soter Megas. Thus, what seems detectable is actually a moving away by the Kushans from visual patterns normally associated with nomadic contexts.

In fact, what was stressed by the Kushans, at least in the imperial phase of their history, was their *Bactrian* identity, not their possible distant Saka roots. The Iranian revival under the Kushans, as first highlighted by Fussman 1977,²¹¹ was therefore the product of a “sedentary” cultural milieu, which, among other things, was also well set into a larger framework of connections with other parts of the Iranian world. Consequently, we can in no way speak of a cultural continuity between the Sakas of NW India and the Kushans. Actually, though accounting for the differences, the cultural affinities or similarities that should be pointed out are those between Kushans, i.e. the “imperial” Bactrians of the first centuries of our era, and Parthians, including the Gondopharids.

In light of these considerations, we can see that emphasis upon its Central Asian derivation is of little utility when addressing problems connected to the costume worn by the Kushans. True, the rider costume was indeed of ultimately Central Asian origin, and as such employed by all Iranians (cf. Curtis 1998: 66), who, after all, came from Central Asia, including Medians and Persians. In this regard it surely also had nomadic connections. Yet it was promoted to

209 Here royal imagery must be examined with not only coins in mind: the enthroned Kushan king appears on coins of Vima Kadphises and Kanishka, as well as in sculpture at every known *bagolango* from Bactria to India, and in further media such as the terracotta medallion from Khalchayan (for which see Pugachenkova 1962).

210 Among which the type of the king sitting cross-legged may be ranked for both dynasties. In fact, what constitutes a clear difference is the standard framework into which such exceptions are set. Yet, even the comparison of the rare types of the Saka king riding a camel with that of the Kushan ruler riding an elephant illustrates well the different basic inspiration mirrored in the respective imagery. One could even note here that, to explain its use on coppers by Huvishka, for example, the cross-legged posture for the royal image might have had some appeal to the Indian subjects of the Kushans.

211 Where there was no question of nomadic heritage. Yet Fussman set the process in the framework of a conscious anti-Greek reaction by the Kushans, and—more importantly—imagined Kushan royal ideology, as conveyed by structures such as the *bagolango* at Surkh Kotal, imbued with notions of Indian derivation (the latter concept still upheld in Fussman 1989; 2001; as well as in the 1983 final publication of Surkh Kotal; Verardi 1983 had a similar approach). The combined effect was to significantly reduce the impact of the main idea, with the result that, although his 1977 article is frequently quoted in the literature, the full implications of the “Iranian revival under the Kushans” have been not really evaluated.

become, in its most elaborate forms, the royal costume of the new Iranian dynasties not in the framework of a nomadic revival or as a sign of awareness of the nomadic past, but simply because it had always been used as a choice merely dictated by tradition.²¹² The key word is therefore not “nomadic” nor “Central Asian”, but *traditional*. It was as a traditional costume of ancient origin²¹³ that the rider’s outfit continued to be worn by Persian noblemen of Achaemenid times, as well as, with its possible regional variants, by noblemen of all the Iranian regions of the empire,²¹⁴ who ultimately were all mounted warriors. Thus, it was as a “traditional” costume that it was employed by the Iranian dynasties which succeeded the Seleucids, who had naturally imposed Greek royal imagery as common currency in the Hellenistic period. Among these, the Arsacid dynasty was both the first to build a supra-regional power and the most long-lived, and thus came to establish a model of Iranian regnal iconography that came to be followed by many other minor dynasties from the area, be they Iranian by origin or merely exposed to Iranian influences.

By the time the Kushans gave birth to their empire, as the second supra-regional polity in the Iranian world of the time, the Yuezhi had been in contact with their mighty Arsacid neighbours for the whole of their history in Bactria. The Arsacids had already conquered territories in the East under Mithradates I in Graeco-Bactrian times; Margiana was fully integrated into the Parthian empire; and even a region such as Areia must have been, at least at times, under clear Arsacid control (cf. Rtveladze 2011: 157, with further references), as the Parthian series struck in the mint of Herat appear to show. Thus, parts of Western Bactria were in substantial direct contact with the eastern fringes of Parthian territory.²¹⁵ Moreover, a large part of the domains of the Indo-Parthians ended up absorbed into Kushan territory, their ruling elite in all likelihood integrated into the hierarchy of the new empire.

Therefore, it is only natural that, in several respects, the Kushans re-proposed formulas already current in western Iran, where the Arsacids had canonized the use of the traditional rider costume in royal imagery since the 2nd

212 This was already realized by Rosenfield (1967: 177), despite his definition of “Indo-Scythian costume”: he expressly wrote that “both the Kushans and the Arsacids retained their ancestral costumes long after they had abandoned a nomadic way of life”.

213 Due, of course, to practical reasons dictated by horse riding.

214 In this regard it is interesting to assess the role of the robe exhibited by Persians, which is, of course, connected to ceremonial contexts tied to royalty. Indeed, of all the Iranians, only Persians wore the robe (or were depicted as wearing it).

215 In fact, direct Parthian presence in western Bactria has been repeatedly hypothesized, see Rtveladze 2011, with references.

century BC.²¹⁶ Indeed, it should come as no surprise that even in the Indo-Iranian borderlands the rider costume had been used in royal imagery long before the Kushans, as visible on some Saka coins from the 1st century BC.²¹⁷ It was employed in the same guise by the Yuezhi and the pre-imperial Kushans, as shown by the sculpture of Khalchayan and the coinage ascribed to Heraios.

What happened with Vima Kadphises is that this costume became subject to re-elaboration in the framework of a centrally established process of creation of an *imperial* imagery. This process drew on elements which also belonged to the same traditional heritage,²¹⁸ but the result was the synthesis of a distinctly new image of the ruler, which was no longer that of a generic mounted warrior only recognizable thanks to the diadem. To a certain extent one could therefore say that, even with regard to royal costume, the Kushans moved away from the original “nomadic horseman” model. This is well illustrated by a double comparison, contrasting Saka royal imagery and its warlike emphasis on the king in armour as a warrior with images of kings from “sedentary” Iran—the occurrences of Arsacid origin being once again exemplary—on the one hand, and the imagery displayed by the Heraios’ series with that on the imperial coinage of Vima Kadphises, on the other one.

Now, the correspondence between the developments in Kushan Bactria and Arsacid Parthia leaves no real room for casual similarities. It speaks of imitation of consolidated models. If we have deep analogies between royal imagery from Parthia, Hatra, Elymais and Oshroene,²¹⁹ it is clear where the source was, and we have evidence, such as coin series, to confirm it. It is accordingly difficult to see the same imagery used in Bactria as the result of completely independent dynamics. There are simply too many analogies. In this regard, it is worth stressing that the similarities in the king’s imagery between the Parthian world and the Kushan Empire are the result of a combination of two different levels: one pertaining to real features of the royal paraphernalia, and one connected to peculiar compositional patterns, such as the image of the king at

216 From Artabanus I onwards, see Curtis 1998: 62.

217 Saka royal imagery on coins notoriously being mainly characterized by the distinctive portraits of the king in armour.

218 Indeed, even items such as the long caftans are already attested in earlier phases, as shown by some of the figures on the textiles from Noin Ula, see Yatsenko 2012, Fig. 2, nos. 7 and 12, and Fig. 5, no. 4.

219 To name just a few, Characene/Mesene and Persis could also be included, and the list could well include even Dura or Palmyra.

altar, for example. Thus, in specific instances the evidence is there for a *double* correspondence.²²⁰

Chronology also supports this general picture, since the horizon consistently appears to be that of the 2nd century AD, with Arsacid patterns such as that tied to the canonization of the tiara between the end of the 1st and the early 2nd century impacting on the royal imagery of the minor polities in the Parthian sphere of influence in a compatible time frame.²²¹ This also holds true for the Kushans and, all things considered, even a Kushan late chronology would still fit the parallels with Arsacid Parthia.

Conclusions

The specific study of the numismatic evidence shows that royal imagery on Kushan coins comprised a combination of two elements: that of compositional schemes or designs, and that of specific iconographic features which distinguished visually the royal persona. These latter were, unsurprisingly, shared with depictions of the kings on different media, and included the clothing and headgear of the king, as well as royal attributes such as the ceremonial weapons or the iconographic devices that were supposed to convey the exalted nature of the royal power.

Once the documentary material is examined in detail, it becomes clear that no Roman features can be detected, whether as basic designs or as specific iconographic motifs. This is especially significant with regard to compositional schemes, as the common use of busts to portray the king is the result of the local numismatic tradition of Greek derivation, even in the specific variant of the *busts with attributes* that Göbl explicitly ascribed to Roman influence, as evidenced by occurrences from the Indo-Greek coinage.

With regard to the real image of the king, coins show that with the creation of a consistent program of imperial iconography under Vima Kadphises local canons were impacted by foreign influences. However, the latter were not of

220 This correspondence must not merely be referred to *coin* imagery, of course: the focus here is on royal imagery in a broader sense. In fact, a Kushan coin is easily distinguishable from a Parthian one. Yet, it is undeniable that if the iconography of the image used on the relief of Bard-e Neshandeh and that of the Kushan king at altar are compared, only minor attributes (such as the Kushan ceremonial weapons) can really set them apart.

221 Needless to say, Arsacid influences in royal imagery on regions such as Elymais, Mesene or Persis, as evidenced by coin series, are much earlier, see Alram 1987. As a matter of fact, the stages of development of Arsacid royal imagery are more or less regularly paralleled in the coinages of such minor states, taking due account of the local numismatic traditions.

Roman origin, but of western Iranian, in particular Arsacid Parthian, provenance. Indeed, once the bases for the old theory of the Roman patterns for Kushan coins have been shown to be rather weak, we could now more properly speak of *Arsacid patterns* in Kushan royal imagery.

In fact, coins are only the main source nowadays available to scholars, yet evidence of different nature, such as sculpture or seals, shows that the phenomenon took place on a much broader scale: Arsacid influences were felt in Kushan royal imagery *tout court*, involving coinage only as one of the various media employed to spread royal visual communication. They provided the inspiration for the Kushans on account of the strength of the Arsacid imperial model, which, by the early 2nd century AD, had become a “normative” reference in the Iranian world of the time. In this regard, the parallelism with regions of the Parthian *oecumene* is eloquent, since the same imagery is spread in an area stretching from Osrhoene or Elymais to Kushan Bactria and India.

The detection of these analogies has two significant consequences.

The first is that the role of the nomadic component of Kushan identity as conveyed by royal imagery should be re-assessed and substantially reduced. The Kushans built an imperial identity drawing on the Bactrian heritage they had absorbed, rather than on an alleged memory of their nomadic distant past. Indeed, this is one of the main scientific questions shared in very similar terms by Kushan and Parthian studies. On the one hand, it is easy to see that setting the enquiries on the relevant cultural identities in the framework of a broader approach, which focuses on the connections, the links and the possible exchanges between the different regions of the Iranian world of the time, allows overcoming the largely artificial division between Iran and Central Asia. At the same time, this wider perspective cannot be based on the idea of the Iranian world of the period between the 3rd century BC and the 3rd century AD as being essentially defined by nomadic culture. As a matter of fact, and despite the opinion of some scholars, there is simply no basis to imagine the cultural identity of Arsacid Parthia or Kushan Bactria as shaped according to nomadic or steppe coordinates.

The second basic point is that the exchanges long supposed to have primarily taken place between Kushan NW India and the Roman Mediterranean must be set into a much more varied picture, marked by the existence of significant links between the two empires dominating the Iranian world of the time, i.e., Arsacid Parthia in western Iran and Mesopotamia, and the Kushanshahr extending over the southern regions of eastern Iran and NW India.

It is against this background that the evolution of Kushan royal imagery must be set, with the result which we can see on coins of the meeting of the local numismatic tradition with imperial models of western Iranian derivation.

These developments were the result of deep and varied paths of exchange, regardless of the degree to which they appear visible nowadays. They connected western Iran and the Indo-Iranian borderlands in a much tighter way than is generally appreciated, and certainly they invested a variety of different levels, involving issues in no way impacted by the contacts between India and the Roman Mediterranean. The latter took place along commercial routes, also involving artistic trends and ideas, but never produced the transmission of features of imperial iconography. This was instead shared with a much closer region, western Iran, with which Kushanshahr had crucial cultural features in common, from concepts of royal ideology to the deeper religious framework in which they were set.

This could occur in a context that must also have seen the mobility of craftsmen, as seemingly pointed to by some features common to artistic developments in the Parthian empire and in NW India.²²² In this general scenario Roman contributions must also be taken into account, but they played no role in the definition of Kushan imperial imagery or in the way in which the latter was transmitted to its ultimate recipients as a part of a wider programme of image display involving all the visual media available to the dynasty.

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222 The question of the contacts between western Iranian artistic trends and Gandharan art, only partly explored so far (cf., e.g., Ingholt 1954), is clearly too large to be tackled here. As a side note of some relevance here, iconographic schemes such as the bust emerging from rocks so prominent in Kushan royal imagery on coins find their closest parallels in sculptural religious imagery from Hatra, where the sun god Shamash is often depicted in an analogous way, see, e.g., Safar and Mustafa 1974: 113, fig. 88, 178, fig. 172. The comparisons are numerous (see, e.g., Srinivasan 1997 on the connections between Parthia and Gandhara found in textile patterns), even in specific conventions or iconographic formulae (cf. the remarks of Taddei 1966, for example), and Rosenfield himself (1967: 170-171) highlighted some of the most immediate ones connecting Hatra to the art of NW India, from the similarity of the raised hand gesture to the Buddhist *abhaya mudrā* to the splay-footed pose, both attested also by Elymaean sculpture from Bard-e Neshandeh or Masjid-e Suleiman, cf. Kawami 1987: 184-187, cat. nos. 24-26, 28.

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