Vidula Jayaswal (ed.)


The book unites 21 contributions by 22 authors, which were for the better part presented to the conference “Kushan Glory and Its Contemporary Challenges” held in Benares in October 2008. Indeed the challenge extends even to any reviewer of this book, unless he is prepared to simply follow the description presented in the introduction: “This strikingly illustrated volume is a significant contribution to the field of Kushan studies and is valuable for students and scholars of history” (p. v). Unfortunately, this very positive self-evaluation by the editor (or by the publisher?) is only marginally substantiated by the contributions, and much less by the editorial work spent on the volume.

True, the seven chapters of the book start excellently with Joe Cribb’s very carefully researched, comprehensive and informative survey of the history of research on the Kuṣāṇas (pp. 3–56) followed by the description of the copper coins hoard from Basani by S. Sharma (pp. 57–76) and thus completing the first section “discoveries, old and recent.”

The second chapter on “hegemony: Kushan empire and out-posts” contains the articles “Eastern Bactria under Da Yuezhi hegemony” (pp. 79–86) by J.D. Lerner and “The northern frontier region of the Kushan empire” by M. Mitchiner (pp. 87–119). The third chapter on “chronology and succession” deals with numismatics again. O. Bopearachchi resumes, as duly noted, his important discussions on the chronology of the early Kuṣāṇas (pp. 123–136) published originally in 2008 in the Journal des Savants, which, though a venerable journal of the highest quality published since 1665 by the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in Paris, might not find the attention of orientalists it certainly deserves.

In O. Bopearachchi’s article the editorial troubles begin: the last sentence of paragraph one occurs mysteriously again as sentence one of paragraph two. Beginning with the contribution by H. Loeschner: “Kanishka in context with the historical Buddha and Kushan chronology” (pp. 137–194) the book really begins to enter somewhat murky waters, as the title of the article foreshadows. Astonishing insights can be gathered from this comprehensive, but also at times fairly confused discussion on, it seems, all and everything available on chronology between the Buddha and Kaniṣka in literature, coins, images or inscriptions. Even the notorious “Reh inscription of Menander” resurfaces: “A pillar ... bears the name and titles of Menander according to the translation by G.R. Sharma, supporting the authenticity of the Milindapañha” (p. 143), which is a rather bold and far-reaching conclusion from an inscription that
does not even mention any name of a king (which should be general knowledge by now, after more than 35 years of discussion after the discovery of the stone in 19791), let alone Menander; how the authenticity of the Milindapañha would be established with or without his name in the inscription remains a mystery. Further, the surprised reader learns, after having helpfully been reminded by a definition from “Mallory & Mair 2000” (missing in the bibliography2) what a stūpa is (note 2), that “Aśoka the Great (many kings are “the Great” in this article) took great efforts to spread Dhamma ... to ... the Himalayas (the kingdom of Khotan)” (p. 141). This is substantiated by referring to Skjærvø 2004, who appears in the bibliography under the pseudonym3 “SkjÊrvì” and who, of course correctly, states “the kingdom of Khotan ... was founded, according to legends ... during the reign of the Mauryan king Aśoka.” And legend and fact are closely interwoven again and again in this article: “There is the possibility that Buddha preached in Gandhāra prior to the incorporation of this region into the Achaemenid empire in ca. 520 BC ...” which is substantiated by “The last Gandhāran king Pukkusāti is said to have sent an embassy and letter to king Bimbisāra ...” (p. 163) without reference but obviously referring to the well-known legend told in the commentary to the Dhātuvibhaṅgasuttanta (Majjhimanikāya no. 140, MN III 237–247), where the kulaputta Pukkusāti does not recognize the Buddha, when he meets him. Only the commentary (Ps v 33–47) promotes the simple kulaputta Pukkusāti almost a millennium later to the king of Taxila (not Gandhāra), who had abdicated to become a monk after receiving a letter from Bimbisāra praising the Buddha.

The fourth chapter on “policies and patronage” starts more promisingly with interesting observations by R. Bracey on the “shrinking pantheon of the Kusḥans” (pp. 197–217). After a lucidly argued first part of the article on the decreasing number of gods4 presented on Kuṣāṇa coins, the subsequent survey on

1 If here a few decades are not sufficient to wipe out an obvious mistake, sometimes even a century is not long enough: In spite of H. Lüders’ article “Die Śakas und die ‘nordarische’ Sprache” of 1913 (reprinted in Philologica Indica. Göttingen 1940, pp. 236–255), the names Dāmaysada and Ysamotika occur again in their outdated and wrong form Dāmaghsada and Ghsamotika (p. 159).


3 Likewise, “Harbel, Herbert. 1993” (Fig. 18.12, p. 355) disguises Herbert Härtel, Excavations at Sonkh. Berlin 1993, which, though missing in the bibliography, is mentioned p. 314, note 4.

4 Here, the contributions by K. Tanabe: The Kushan Represenations of ANEMOS/OADO and its Relevance to the Central Asian and Far Eastern Wind Gods, Silk Road Art and Archaeology 1. 1990, pp. 51–80 and by A. Gail OHþO: Bhūteśa—Śiva as Lord of the Demons in the Kuṣāṇa