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and the Red Sea trade**

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Maritime and overland routes

The country inland from Barygaza is inhabited by numerous tribes, such as the Arattii, the Arachosii, the Gandaraei and the people of Poclais, in which is Bucephalus Alexandria. Above these is the very war-like nation of the Bactrians, who are under their own king. And Alexander, setting out from these parts, penetrated to the Ganges, leaving aside Damirica and the southern part of India; and to the present day ancient drachma are current in Barygaza, coming from this country, bearing inscriptions in Greek letters, and the devices of those who reigned after Alexander, Apollodotus and Menander (*Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* 47; English transl., Casson 1989).

Beyond is Sacastana of the Scythian Sacae, which is also called Paraetacena, 63 schoeni. There are the city of Barda and the city of Min and the city of Palacenti and the city of Sigal; in that place is the royal residence of the Sacae; and nearby is the city of Alexandria (and nearby is the city of Alexandropolis), and 6 villages. Beyond is Arachosia, 36 schoeni. And the Parthians call this White India; there are the city of Biyt and the city of Pharsana and the city of Chorochoad and the city of Demetrias; then Alexandropolis, the metropolis of Arachosia; it is Greek, and by it flows the river Arachotos. As far as this place the land is under the rule of the Parthians (Isidore of Charax, *Parthian stations*, 18–19; English transl., Schoff 1914).

In the period of the early Roman Empire, the Mediterranean basin and south Asia were connected by vast and complex networks of long-distance travel and commerce (Fig. 1). The itineraries given in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (maritime) and *Parthian stations* (overland) are not necessarily routes to be followed by a single merchant with a single cargo from beginning to end.¹ They are networks, controlled and operated by many different political and commercial players, with numerous possible side-routes, waystations and points of exchange

¹ The *Parthian stations* of Isidore of Charax is preserved only in portions and brief references in the works of others. It dates to the very late 1st century BC or 1st century AD and lists the waystations on the overland route between the Mediterranean and Arachosia, with the distances between them and very little subsidiary information on lands and peoples. Around the turn of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, a merchant named Maes Titianos also wrote an account of the routes his caravans took between the Mediterranean and the East, in this case between Syria and China, along a more northerly route which passed through Merv, Bactra and the Tarim Basin (Cary 1956; Bernard 2005). Maes and his work are described only very briefly by Claudius Ptolemy (*Geography* 1.11.7), drawing on the lost account of Marinus of Tyre.

and transshipment. The 1st century AD, the broad date of composition of both manuals, was a period of especially heavy commerce. Carved Indian ivory, from various sources, might find its way to Pompeii (Maiuri 1939; During Caspers 1981) and to Begram (Mehendale 2001). Roman coins have been found at many sites throughout the Indian subcontinent (a distribution map: Begley and De Puma 1991, 2). The scarce surviving information in handbooks such as the *Periplus* and *Parthian stations*, and excavations at intermediate ports and other emporia, can enable us to sketch in broad strokes the typical routes taken by such items, but the trajectory followed by any one individual item or elements of an excavated assemblage usually cannot be narrowed down beyond a range of possible routes and nodes.

Nor are the itineraries of the *Periplus* and the *Parthian stations* separate from one another. In fact, as the passages quoted above reveal, at their farthest distance from the Mediterranean, branches of the overland and maritime routes converged and became entangled in regions which until relatively recent times had maintained closer cultural and political contacts with the Hellenistic world. Papyrus from Egypt has been excavated at the city of Ai Khanoum in north-eastern Afghanistan in a context of the first part of the 2nd century BC (Lerner 2003), and the Bactrian ceramic record of the 3rd to around the middle of the 2nd centuries BC contains many forms derived directly from the Hellenistic Mediterranean (Gardin 1985). The expansion of the Parthian Empire and nomadic invasions from the north, in the mid-2nd century, appear to have disrupted the overland trade via the Iranian plateau. Routes to the north, across the Eurasian steppe from the northern Black Sea region, however, also linked Central Asia to the Mediterranean basin (see e.g., Sherkova 1982; 1991, whose identification of Egyptian goods and influence is, however, excessive; and Mairs 2007).

Both Isidore of Charax and the author of the *Periplus* name 'Alexandrias' and have some vague knowledge of the Hellenistic Greek kingdoms of Bactria, Arachosia and north-western India, whose coins a visitor to Barygaza in the 1st century AD might apparently still encounter. When trade goods from the Roman Mediterranean are excavated at a site such as Begram, in modern Afghanistan—the subject of this paper—the question naturally arises whether they came overland across the Iranian plateau from the Hellenised and Roman-ruled eastern Mediterranean, or by sea from Roman Egypt, via the ports of north-western India. As well as the intrinsic value and interest of establishing the reach of Roman commercial networks, and the extent to which long-distance maritime and overland trade routes connected with and complemented one another, what is also at stake is the impact of this trade upon the cities of Gandhāra and the Hindu Kush passes. The question of whether particular items excavated at Begram arrived by sea from Roman Egypt (as I shall discuss briefly in my conclusion) has wider implications for our understanding of cultural and artistic developments in the region in the early centuries AD.

The Begram 'treasure'

In the 1930s, excavations by the *Délégation archéologique française en Afghanistan* (DAFA) at the site of Begram, around 60km to the north of Kabul, uncovered two storerooms full of luxury goods from such far-flung regions of the ancient world as the Graeco-Roman

Mediterranean, India and China (Hackin 1939; Ghirshman 1946; Hackin 1954²). Begram was the site of a foundation by Alexander the Great (Arrian 3.28.4; Diodorus 17.83.1; Curtius 7.3.23) and was later one of the principal cities of the Kushan Empire, which was at its height in the 2nd century AD. The so-called 'treasure' was found in two rooms, Rooms 10 and 13, of the Palace in the New Royal City. Given the restriction of excavations to a small portion of the site, and the uncertainties over Begram's position and status in the period at which the treasure is now considered to have been assembled and cached, these designations remain problematic. The pieces of the treasure represent a deliberate cache, and the rooms in which they were found had thick walls and blocked doorways.

There are two main controversies about the Begram deposits: their date and their purpose. The excavated strata at Begram, which cover a period roughly of Indo-Greek rule in the 2nd century BC through to the Great Kushans in the 2nd century AD, have been dated only relatively, and there is no established absolute chronology (Mehendale 1996, 49–50). Although part of the cache was previously thought to date as late as the 3rd century AD, a broad date for the entire hoard of the 1st century or early 2nd century is now generally accepted, based on stylistic comparanda (Whitehouse 1989, 99; Delacour 1993; Mehendale 1996, 50–51) and numismatic evidence. Coins of Gondophares, Wima Kadphises and Kanishka are the only ones which may reasonably be assigned to the active life of the rooms and not to later strata (Whitehouse 2001, 445–46; cf. Whitehouse 1998b).

The 'old' chronology assigned widely varying dates to individual items or groups of items in the cache, from the 1st through to the 3rd centuries AD, and placed its final deposition at a period well after the Kushan Empire (when Begram was one of its principal metropoleis) had reached its height. With the new, narrower 1st century to early 2nd century date, the notion of a royal treasure, composed of valuable, exotic goods accumulated over a long period of time, loses some of its appeal. Current interpretations hold that it is just as possible that it represents a commercial stock:

When the finds are viewed as first century merchants' stock awaiting further distribution, they provide an opportunity to examine the region's official commodities trade during that era and the nature of the settlement of Begram and its relation to other trading partners. The fact, if established, that the goods at Begram traveled from diverse places in the same era and were stored together in one place suggests that the site was a point of consumption, of collection for further distribution, of active trading, or a combination thereof. Considering Begram as a commercial storage and distribution site may help to explain why the rooms in which the objects were found were sealed off: because of the length of time required for ancient trade to make its way between distant points, there was a need for long-term protection of goods while awaiting further movement (Mehendale 1996, 51).

² See Hiebert and Cambon 2008, 146–47, for a summary of the excavations and the various attendant problems of archaeological method and publication.

Whatever the purpose of the caches and the identities of their owners, the nature of the goods contained in them indicates very clearly their diverse points of origin. Some pieces are preserved better than others. The Chinese lacquerware (Zhang 2011) was too fragile and fragmentary to be displayed in the exhibition *Afghanistan, les trésors retrouvés/Afghanistan: Hidden treasures* which toured a number of museums in Europe and North America in recent years (Cambon and Jarrige 2006; Hiebert and Cambon 2008). Indian ivory carvings were designed to be attached to wooden furniture, which has since decayed (Mehendale 1997; Simpson 2011). Pieces from the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean included finished *objets d'art*, such as bronze statuettes and plaster casts to be used in the manufacture of metal vessels (Menninger 1996).

My focus in the following discussion will be more specifically on the glassware from the cache because these are the items whose connections to and origins in the Red Sea trade are least ambiguous. Not only do some vessels depict scenes and figures which are quintessentially Egyptian, but particular categories of vessel are paralleled not just in finds from the Roman Mediterranean, but in excavated contexts at intermediate points along the routes of the *Periplus*. It has long been recognised that some of the items which formed part of the so-called Begram treasure, including but not restricted to the glassware, came from Egypt and the Mediterranean world via Indian Ocean maritime routes (Kurz 1954, 100, 109; Mehendale 1996, 59–60; Menninger 1996, 223; Ball 2000, 136–37), and I do not propose anything especially novel in restating this point. What I would like to do is to situate the Begram cache more clearly in certain historical and geographical contexts. These include the city's position as a node in vast Eurasian and Indian Ocean networks of transcontinental travel and commerce, and thereby the connection of these networks to one another. When presented with an excavated assemblage such as that from the caches at Begram, one does not have to choose between 'competing' trade routes because multiple such routes were in operation at any given time. Even the Mediterranean goods from Begram, I would argue, had diverse points of origin and arrived at the city via different routes or sequences of routes. The more particular historical context of the Begram cache is the 1st century AD. Neither the archaeological record nor the textual record in this instance permits much further precision, but the dates of the Begram cache, the *Periplus*, the *Parthian stations* of Isidore of Charax and several excavated port sites of the Red Sea and Arabian coasts and southern India from which we might draw comparanda for the Begram glassware all fall to within the span of a single century, a period of intense growth in the Indian Ocean commerce. At the Roman end, this commerce was developed and sustained, at least in part, by the support and intervention of an imperial power. The 1st and early 2nd centuries AD in Begram and north-western India, in contrast, began with a period of political fragmentation (attested also in the *Periplus*) and ended with the rise of the Kushan Empire. The role of cities such as Begram and their rulers as markets and centres of production in long-distance trade, and the subsequent impact of the consolidation of Kushan power, remains to be fully explored.

The Begram glassware

In addition to the primary publications of the Begram excavations (cited above), several individual studies have been devoted to the glassware from Begram (Hamelin 1952; Hamelin 1953; Hamelin 1954; Delacour 1993; Menninger 1996; Whitehouse 2001). I give references to individual vessels here according to their number in Hiebert and Cambon 2008, the (English) catalogue accompanying the *Afghanistan: Hidden treasures* exhibition, since this is the publication likely to be accessible to most readers. Menninger 1996 should be consulted for a fuller study. The glassware is now divided between the collections of the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul and the Musée Guimet in Paris.

The 'Roman glassware' from Begram is in fact a rather diverse assemblage and contains pieces worked according to a number of different techniques. As I will discuss in the following section, many of these have parallels not only in the Roman Mediterranean, but also from excavated port sites connected to the Indian Ocean trade. There are cut-glass vessels, mould-blown glass, glass with faceted decorations, coloured enamelled vessels and vessels with applied moulded relief decoration, even bowls of millefiori or mosaic glass. There are pieces in some creative and very appealing shapes, including multi-coloured flasks in the shape of fish and boats. Some of the vessels are likely to have been manufactured elsewhere in the Mediterranean and simply to have entered the Red Sea trade in transit through Egyptian ports. A number of items from the storerooms are, however, more securely identifiable as Egyptian in origin.

The finely painted glass beakers, with scenes of people and animals in bright colours, carry some typically Egyptian images, such as the goddess Isis (no. 153), and scenes of the date harvest (no. 163). Most famously, the painting on one vase depicts three boats and a tower surmounted by a human figure flanked by two tritons (Piponnier 1983). This was immediately identified as the *pharos* or lighthouse of Alexandria, one of the wonders of the ancient world, with its statue of Poseidon. Kurz's view, in his 1954 essay on 'Begram et l'occident gréco-romain,' that this was an Alexandrian product 'exporté comme "souvenir"' has proven influential, and he uses this, as well as stylistic comparisons of the Begram glassware in general with finds from Roman Egypt, to reinforce his point that the Mediterranean items from the Begram treasure were exported through the Red Sea trade (Kurz 1954, 108). In addition to Egyptian-themed imagery on some of the glass vases, there are also items made of Egyptian materials, including vessels of alabaster (nos 173–75) and of porphyry (nos 215–16), mined in the Roman period in the Eastern Desert, and bronze statuettes of quintessentially Graeco-Roman Egyptian gods (Harpokrates/Horus the Child, no. 225; Herakles-Serapis, no. 220).

Glass in the Red Sea trade

Glassware fed into the Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade from multiple production sites within the Roman Empire, and, as I have noted, the Begram cache, probably contains items produced in the ateliers of more than one province. Following an intense period of technological innovation—most importantly, the discovery that glass can be expanded and shaped by

blowing—under the early empire the glassmaking industry spread from initial centres on the Syro-Palestinian coast to become a technologically advanced, empire-wide enterprise (see the discussion in Stern 1999).

‘Roman glass’ has been found in excavations well beyond imperial frontiers, and in this regard its appearance at Begram is hardly unusual. Taxila, in the Peshawar valley, en route between the Indian Ocean ports and Begram, along the Indus and Kabul rivers, also yielded Roman glassware, including two ribbed bowls, unguentaria and sherds of mosaic glass. Most of the Begram vessels find good parallels not only in the Roman Mediterranean, but also along the routes of the *Periplus* in the ports of the Red Sea and Horn of Africa, southern Arabia, the Persian Gulf and southern India. The Begram material can be compared with assemblages of glassware from a number of contemporary sites. The composition of such assemblages is not uniform (Whitehouse 1998a, 63, for example, notes the absence of the facet-cut glass beakers of Begram and other sites from ed-Dur), but they do contain many forms in common. The painted glass beakers from Begram are exceptionally fine and well preserved, but the mould-made, ribbed bowls were mass produced and are ubiquitous throughout the Mediterranean world, north-eastern Africa (Stern 1981) and the ports of the *Periplus*, indicating the wide spread of such Roman glassware and the variety of routes by which it might have reached Begram. These bowls occur from 1st century contexts on the Red Sea coast of Egypt at Quseir al-Qadim (Meyer 1992), at ed-Dur in the Gulf Emirate of Umm al-Qaiwain (Whitehouse 1998a) as well as at Arikamedu and other sites in southern India (Stern 1991).

As already discussed, some of the characters and themes depicted on the painted glass vessels point towards an Egyptian, or a still more localised Alexandrian provenance, but Egypt was not the only, or perhaps not even the principal, place of manufacture, rather than of transshipment. Strabo gives an account of glass production on the Levantine coast and makes reference to the glassworkers of Alexandria (16.25), although there are some indications that the Alexandrian glass industry went into decline in the 1st century. Aside from the numbers excavated at the Red Sea port of Quseir al-Qadim, relatively few fragments of ribbed bowls have been found in Egypt, perhaps indicating that their place of manufacture was elsewhere and that they were merely shipped through Egypt (Stern 1991, 117, proposes the Syro-Palestinian coast; cf. Stern 1999, 477).

Analysis of the chemical composition of five samples from the Begram glassware supports a common place of origin in the Roman Mediterranean and has identified the closest correspondences with glass from Karanis in Egypt (Brill 1972; Whitehouse 1989, 98–99). In addition to completed vessels, the *Periplus* (56) also mentions the export of raw glass to India. At Arikamedu, this imported raw glass was used in the local bead-making industry (Stern 1991). Local manufacture of vessels using imported Roman glass would, of course, mean that scientific analysis of the composition of the glass might not give the whole story, but it cannot, I think, actually be argued that any of the Begram vessels were produced in this way.³

³ *Pace* Whitehouse 2001, 442, who notes that the fish-shaped flasks from Begram (nos 164, 166, 169) are worked using techniques not found in any known Roman examples. There are good Roman comparanda, albeit mould-blown, for vessels in the shape of fish (including an example at ed-Dur: Whitehouse 1998a, no. 113), and innovation in the production of the Begram group would in any case not necessarily imply manufacture in India, rather than the output of a previously unattested workshop or artisan in the Roman Empire itself.

Begram and the *Periplus*

Begram is not referred to directly in the *Periplus*, perhaps understandably, given its great distance inland. It was connected into the Indian Ocean and Red Sea trade via the north-western Indian ports of Barbarikon (by the Indus delta, with river routes to the north towards Taxila and thence to Begram and other points in Central Asia) and Barygaza (at the mouth of the Narmada), not the better historically and archaeologically known southern Indian ports of the Malabar and Coromandel coasts. There is altogether less information available on these ports in antiquity, although the portion of the *Periplus* which deals with the seaports and riverine routes of north-western India gives some useful information. The 1st century date of the *Periplus*' composition, perhaps no more than a few decades earlier than the date at which the Begram caches were sealed, offers the possibility that it documents some of the actual routes by which these items reached Begram, and the hands through which they passed. There have, unfortunately, been no major excavations at Barbarikon or Barygaza, although there have been finds of Roman amphorae in the region. Barygaza is a poor prospect for future excavations, since the modern town of Broach lies directly above the ancient settlement (Begley and De Puma 1991, 7; on Barygaza in antiquity, see also Gokhale 1987).

On Barbarikon:

Beyond this region, the continent making a wide curve from the east across the depths of the bays, there follows the coast district of Scythia, which lies above toward the north; the whole marshy; from which flows down the river Sinthus [=Indus], the greatest of all the rivers that flow into the Erythraean Sea, bringing down an enormous volume of water; so that a long way out at sea, before reaching this country, the water of the ocean is fresh from it. Now as a sign of approach to this country to those coming from the sea, there are serpents coming forth from the depths to meet you; and a sign of the places just mentioned and in Persia, are those called *graea*. This river has seven mouths, very shallow and marshy, so that they are not navigable, except the one in the middle; at which by the shore, is the market-town, Barbaricum. Before it there lies a small island, and inland behind it is the metropolis of Scythia, Minnagara; it is subject to Parthian princes who are constantly driving each other out (*Periplus* 38).

The ships lie at anchor at Barbaricum, but all their cargoes are carried up to the metropolis by the river, to the King. There are imported into this market a great deal of thin clothing, and a little spurious; figured linens, topaz, coral, storax, frankincense, *vessels of glass*, silver and gold plate, and a little wine. On the other hand there are exported costus, bdellium, lycium, nard, turquoise, lapis lazuli, Seric skins, cotton cloth, silk yarn, and indigo. And sailors set out thither with the Indian Etesian winds, about the month of July, that is Epiphi: it is more

dangerous then, but through these winds the voyage is more direct, and sooner completed (*Periplus* 39, my italics).

On Barygaza:

Beyond the gulf of Baraca is that of Barygaza and the coast of the country of Ariaca, which is the beginning of the Kingdom of Nambanus and of all India. That part of it lying inland and adjoining Scythia is called Abiria, but the coast is called Syrastrane. It is a fertile country, yielding wheat and rice and sesame oil and clarified butter, cotton and the Indian cloths made therefrom, of the coarser sorts. Very many cattle are pastured there, and the men are of great stature and black in color. The metropolis of this country [inland from Barygaza] is Minnagara, from which much cotton cloth is brought down to Barygaza. In these places there remain even to the present time signs of the expedition of Alexander, such as ancient shrines, walls of forts and great wells. The sailing course along this coast, from Barbaricum to the promontory called Papica, opposite Barygaza, and before Astacampra, is of three thousand stadia (*Periplus* 41).

The country inland from Barygaza is inhabited by numerous tribes, such as the Arattii, the Arachosii, the Gandaraei and the people of Poclais, in which is Bucephalus Alexandria. Above these is the very war-like nation of the Bactrians, who are under their own king. And Alexander, setting out from these parts, penetrated to the Ganges, leaving aside Damirica [=Limyrike] and the southern part of India; and to the present day ancient drachma are current in Barygaza, coming from this country, bearing inscriptions in Greek letters, and the devices of those who reigned after Alexander, Apollodotus and Menander (*Periplus* 47).

The north-western ports were nodes in the Red Sea and Persian Gulf trade, destinations in themselves, not just secondary emporia to which goods already imported to southern India might be re-exported (direct voyages between Barbarikon and Egypt: *Periplus* 39; Barygaza and Egypt: *Periplus* 49; Barygaza and the Gulf: *Periplus* 36). The *Periplus* makes reference to the political fragmentation of north-western India and Central Asia in the 1st century AD under 'Parthian princes who are constantly driving each other out' (*Periplus* 38), but there were major urban centres and a market for trade goods. Glass vessels were among the items exported to Barbarikon, and travelling the other direction were Central Asian goods. These too will have passed through Begram and Taxila in the other direction from the glassware and other Mediterranean goods. Among these exports were lapis lazuli, of which the only exploited source in the ancient world was in north-eastern Afghanistan (see Wendrich et al. 2003, 59–60, briefly on *sappheiros*/lapis lazuli and other stones coming from Barbarikon, of which only a small piece has been found at Berenike), and Chinese skins and silks. Barbarikon was therefore a key node connecting inland routes in Central Asia to the Red Sea maritime networks.

Glass is also mentioned among the imports to Barygaza (*Periplus* 49). Despite its position at the mouth of the river Nammadus (*Periplus* 42), the modern Narmada, which flows east-west, the peoples mentioned in the hinterland of Barygaza indicate that it too had connections to Gandhāra and Central Asia. As with the description of the territory around Barbarikon, the region inland appears to contain a number of important political and trading centres, but there is no one strong central power. The earlier history of Greek presence in the region is something which naturally interests the *Periplus* author. In his day, he states that the coins, on the Attic standard, of Indo-Greek kings such as Apollodotos and Menander were still current in the region.

The information in the *Periplus*, along with the discovery of similar items at excavated sites along the Indian Ocean littoral (I think in particular of the ribbed glass bowls ubiquitous at sites from Quseir al-Qadim to Arikamedu), and the specifically Egyptian materials and motifs featured in many items from the cache, suggests very strongly that the Roman glassware from Begram arrived at the ports of Barbarikon or Barygaza by sea from Egypt and thence travelled northwards along the Indus valley to Taxila and Begram. It has been pointed out (e.g., Meyer 1992, 133) that Begram is a very long way from the Indian Ocean ports, a considerable journey along the valleys of the Indus and Kabul rivers, but if we suppose that some of the glassware had already been transported by sea from the Syro-Palestinian coast to Egypt, up the Nile, across the Eastern Desert, down the Red Sea and across the Indian Ocean, timed according to favourable winds all along the way, then a further journey along the Indus valley is hardly excessive. The *Periplus* (38) itself indicates that goods were brought inland from Barbarikon along the one navigable branch of the Indus. In my view, the route via the Red Sea and Indus valley is the most plausible one. This is not to say that all the western goods in the Begram cache came via this route—the Chinese lacquerware, in particular, testifies to the connections to overland routes—but there is certainly no practical impediment to many of them having done so.

Conclusions and further questions

The *Periplus* and the finds from Begram provide a window of sorts onto the political condition of north-western India and Central Asia in the 1st century AD, fragmented and subject to various Indo-Greek and then Indo-Parthian dynasts, yet still maintaining strong, long-distance commercial contacts. That the currently accepted date of the Begram cache now corresponds (very broadly) to that of the composition of the *Periplus* is of great interest, in showing us in some detail exactly how goods—and which goods—moved along sea and river routes from the Roman Empire right up into north-western India and Central Asia, in the period immediately before the Great Kushans. The Begram material—its co-occurrence with Indian and Chinese goods—also demonstrates the interconnection of long-distance land and sea routes in Eurasia. What this also serves to do is to remind us of the importance of the northern Indian as well as southern Indian ports, even if the former have not yielded the rich archaeological material of the latter.

I would like to conclude by raising two points for further debate. The ports of north-

western India also traded with the Persian Gulf: the *Periplus* explicitly states as much, although it does not provide further details on Gulf ports and trade routes. Roman glassware with parallels to some of the Begram pieces, as I have discussed, has also been excavated at ed-Dur on the western side of the Oman peninsula. The materials and motifs of some of the Begram items point directly to Egypt, but might we not argue that any Mediterranean trade goods found in north-western India may just as plausibly, perhaps more plausibly, have arrived via the Persian Gulf as the Red Sea? Whitehouse 1991 puts particular emphasis on Palmyrene involvement in commerce in Mesopotamia and the Gulf: the Romans, certainly, were not the only players. The Persian Gulf trade in antiquity deserves to receive greater prominence in comparison with the Red Sea trade.

The second question concerns a longstanding debate, that of the origins of Gandhāran art, Buddhist sculpture of the early centuries AD which displays strong influences from the Classical Mediterranean world (the position of Begram and the Red Sea trade in this debate is discussed by Whitehouse 1989). The issue is not helped by the fact that much Gandhāran art—it has had a lasting appeal to European, American and Japanese collectors—is unprovenanced and thus difficult to date. As well as Classical styles and motifs, themes from Graeco-Roman mythology are depicted (the Trojan horse: Allan 1946). The search for a ‘missing link’ between the art of Gandhāra and its hypothesised Greek or Roman source was one of the driving forces behind the mission of Alfred Foucher, first director of the *Délégation archéologique française en Afghanistan*, and his excavations at the site of Bactra (Foucher 1911; Foucher and Bazin-Foucher 1942/47). The central question was whether Gandhāran art should be regarded as Greek or as Roman in origin. There is, in fact, now an excellent case for both, and it is not necessary to argue one to the exclusion of the other. Excavations at sites such as Ai Khanoum and Taxila have proven that there was already a strong Hellenistic influence on the material culture of the region under Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek rule, dating back as far as the late 4th century BC. The dating of all or most of the items from the Begram cache to the 1st or early 2nd centuries AD also places these potentially among the stylistic repertoire of local arts and crafts from which Gandhāran art developed. The plaster casts used in the production of metalwork, in particular, provided a very direct means of transmission for images and motifs from the Mediterranean world to Gandhāra (Mairs forthcoming). The influence which western trade goods had on the communities and markets at the Indian end of the Red Sea trade should therefore be explored in cultural as well as in economic terms.

Frontispiece: Fish-shaped flask (1st century AD). Image courtesy of the National Museum of Afghanistan, ©Thierry Ollivier/Musée Guimet.

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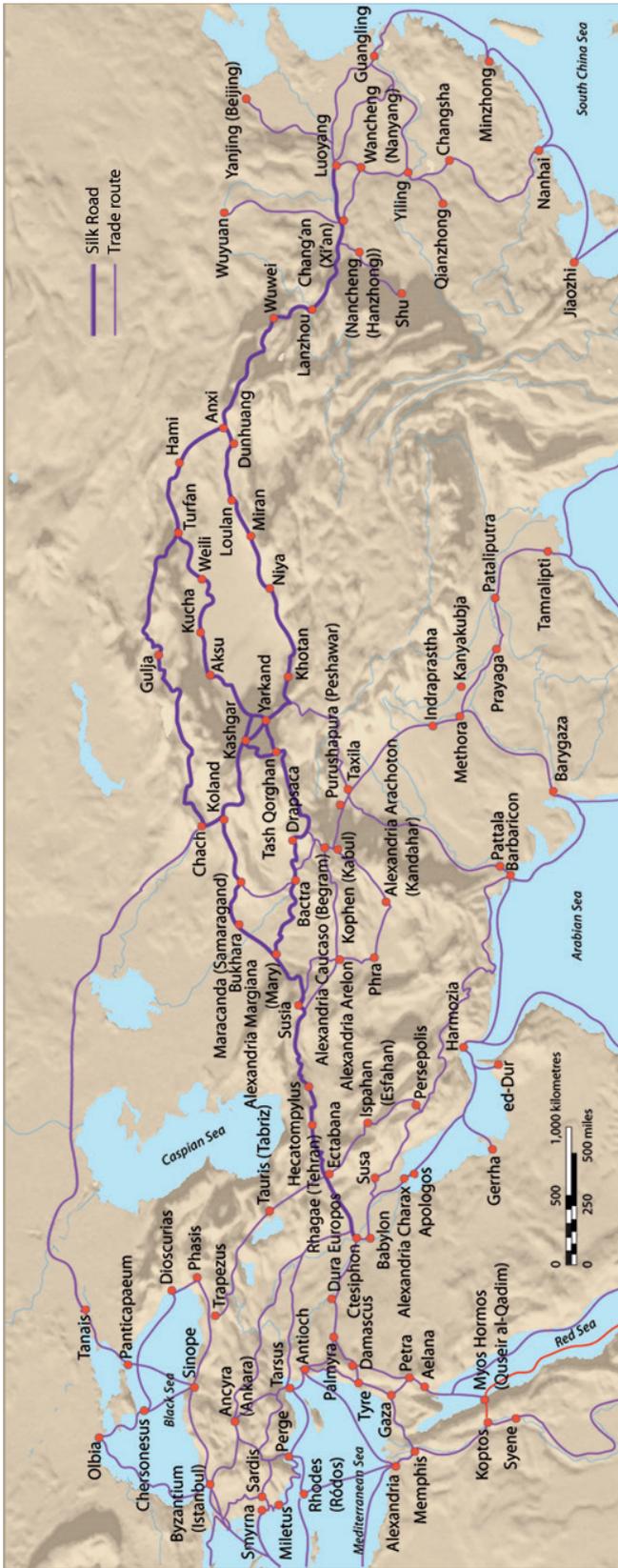


Fig. 1: Map of trade routes (drawn by C. Thorne after Hiebert and Cambon 2008).