

## Taxila – An Alternative Urbanisation Between the Silk Road and the *Uttarāpatha* (the Northern Road)

Surajit Sarkar\*

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### Abstract

The archaeological record shows that Taxila, the caravan city at the junction of the South Asian routes with those from Central Asia, had a series of substantive expansions in the almost thousand years of its active existence. However, the first fortifications appeared only in the latter half of its existence. This indicates a political history of the new urbanisation that is quite distinctive and assimilative, rather than wary and confrontational. An emphasis on mobility and movement, rather than political and military relations, makes the history of urban development along the trade routes of antiquity quite dissimilar from contemporaneous Hellenic or Chinese cultures of the time located at either end of the Silk Road. Social accommodation for economic advancement seems to have been the guiding principle not only for the trading community, but their political masters as well, despite the changing of their individual kingdoms.

**Key words** - Gandhāra, Local beliefs, Nomads, Trade, Urban Archaeology.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

“This (Taxila) was above 2000 li in circuit, the capital being above 10 li in circuit. The chiefs were in a state of open feud, the royal family being extinguished: the country had formerly been subject to Kapisa but now it was a dependency of Kashmir; it had a fertile soil and bore good crops, with flowing streams and luxuriant vegetation; the climate was genial; and the people, who were plucky, were adherents of Buddhism. Although the Monasteries were numerous, many of them were desolate, and the Brethren, who were very few, were all Mahayanists.” (Wriggins 2004)

While staying in Sirsukh in 629-30 CE, Xuanzang described the city and its many monuments in the neighbourhood in this way. An early mention in Buddhist texts (the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* and the *Mahāvastu*) lists 16 powerful states from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE onwards, the western most of which was Gandhāra in the Northwest. These *ṣoḍaṣa-mahājanapada* are regions consisting of urban and rural settlements and their

inhabitants. Apart from this, there must have been smaller states, chiefdoms and tribal principalities.

Taxila (Takṣaśīlā), was the capital of the Gandhāra *mahājanapada* (republic), the region of modern Peshawar and Rawalpindi districts and the Kashmir valley. In antiquity, trade routes met here from eastern India along the *Uttarāpatha*, Bactria, Kashmir and Central Asia, and with fertile soil and plenty of water, there was in consequence a reasonably numerous population.

### 2. THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD

Located twenty miles to the northwest of the modern Pakistani city of Rawalpindi, Taxila was at one time at the intersection of three great trade routes connecting India, Central Asia, and Western Asia. It was inhabited in the late sixth century BCE, and it flourished from the third century BCE to the seventh century CE. Its decline

\* Associate Professor, Centre for Community Knowledge, Ambedkar University Delhi, Email: surajit.cck@aud.ac.in

can be linked to changes in the trade routes and a subsequent population decrease. It is a vast complex of monasteries, temples, and three separate cities which covers almost ten square kilometers.

Founded in the seventh or sixth century BCE, the oldest settlement at Taxila is the Bhir Mound, with a number of occupational levels. The city was a major centre for trade and learning, and King Pukkusati ruled over Gandhāra in the mid 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The *Mahābhārata* and other early texts mention the role of the Gandhāra people, and Taxila in particular, during events taking place during the late-second or first millenniums BCE. However, by the latter part of the sixth century BCE, Gandhāra was conquered by the Achaemenid empire of Persia under king Darius I the Great, an event mentioned in the Behistun inscription, but the Persian occupation did not last long. Alexander the Great was in Taxila during his South Asian campaign in 326 BCE; and even the great Mauryan ruler, Aśoka, is supposed to have served as viceroy in Taxila before becoming emperor around 274 BCE. Taxila was the key to political and economic history linking South Asia to the West and to Central Asia for at least a thousand years (Heitzmann 2008).

The urban phase at Taxila began during the fifth century BCE at the site known today as Bhir Mound. These include a diverse array of dwellings (including a design featuring central open courtyard with side rooms) and shops organized around a series of public squares. Inhabitants used pits or bins located in public spaces for solid waste disposal and soak pits located within house sites for sewage disposal. Surface drains of solid stone or masonry conveyed rainwater from open courtyards into the streets. The most striking building plan is a hall measuring about  $17 \times 6$  meters with three square piers running down its center that once supported wooden pillars and, undoubtedly, wooden roof timbers.

Gandhāra came under the control of Greek rulers from northern Afghanistan, the successors to the easternmost section of the empire conquered by Alexander the Great, during the second century BCE. A new planned city, known today as Sirkap, rose on the eastern side. With a wide main street intersected at right angles by a regular series of smaller lanes, this to be Greek urban design is built around a regular series of parallelograms, a geometry oriented toward a view from above (Fig 1). The constructions on either side include, apparently, shops and personal homes, public buildings, and Buddhist shrines. A massive array of excavated pottery, metal utensils, and approximately 8,000 coins provides a detailed picture of daily life, including views of the well-provisioned kitchen, and a market economy with links stretching from Central Asia to northern India.

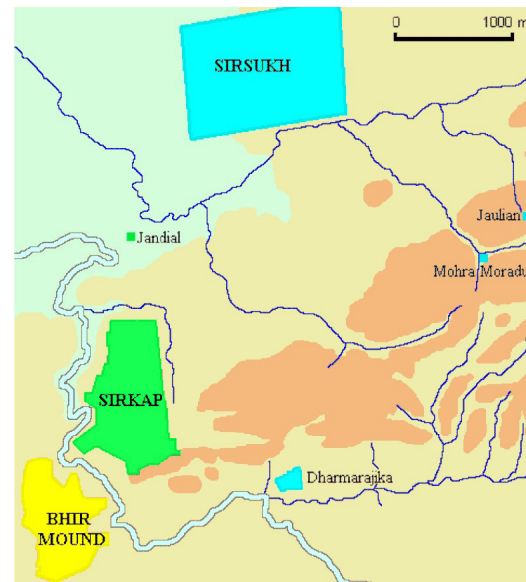


Fig. 1. Map of Taxila

Sirkap remained the main portion of Taxila, with Bhir Mound as its suburb, until about 80 CE when the Kuṣāna kings supervised the construction of an entirely new city to the northeast. This heavily fortified site, known as Sirsukh, remained the main focus of an expanded Taxila until at least the fifth century. The temples

at Jandial, north of Sirkap and individual temples at Mohra Maliaran and Tamra have designs typical of Greek architecture— although there are indications that they were used for worship well into the Kuṣāna centuries. All other religious sites appear to be Buddhist. While the citizenry showed reverence to the Buddha at *stūpa/caitya* sites within the city, the monastic communities resided outside the city walls in quadrilateral assembly halls associated with their own *stūpas*. Several monastic sites located on Hathial were founded, probably, after the replacement of Sirkap as the main population center. Excavations at all these sites have retrieved iconography and epigraphy that allows a reconstruction of Buddhist doctrinal evolution at the interface with Greek and Central Asian cultural influences, leading to the manifestation of an influential Gandharan artistic tradition.

Another phenomenon contributing to the peak of early historical urbanization was the ‘Kuṣāna effect’ caused by the first-century consolidation of an empire stretching from modern Kazakhstan to northern India. Around 130 BC, the Xiongnu defeated the Yuezhi, traditional nomad allies of the Chinese. Forced to leave their homeland in the present Xinjiang province, the Yuezhi crossed the Bactrian border at Uzbekistan, approximately two centuries after the establishment of Hellenistic colonies by the expeditions of Alexander. The reports of Zhang Qian and his thirteen year journey to the Western Regions to Han Chinese Emperor Wudi is available in Sima Qian’s History. During his stay in Bactria, Zhang Qian discovered specific kinds of bamboo and cloth from India, the existence of which impressed the Emperor. Soon after, by subduing the Xiongnu nomads and extending the Great Wall almost till Dunhuang, drew foreign merchants to the gates of the Chinese capital, Chang’an. Chinese rulers realised the international value of silk textiles, and a sophisticated division

of labour and taxation by payment of silk, common at home, created the basis for the spread of the fame of these Chinese textiles. New communities of traders settled along oasis in the new commercial routes, where merchants organised themselves into caravans, carrying goods on pack animals and carts. Although Han authority weakened after 120 CE, the oasis states matured into stable independent caravan cities, looking to caravans for their prosperity and developed into beautiful urban centres and hubs of commercial and cultural activities (Liu 2010).

In the meantime, the Yuezhi moved their headquarters across the Amu Darya into Afghanistan, and the Kuṣāna, one of the five tribes that formed the Yuezhi confederacy, unified them into the Kuṣāna Kingdom by first century CE. The establishment for several centuries of a single political authority that mediated contacts between the Parthian and Han empires enabled the smooth functioning of the Silk Route which gave access to the Bactrian oasis cities of Bukhārā (Buxoro) and Tashkent and to the Chinese-controlled towns of Kashi, Hotan, Dunhuang, and finally the capital, Xian. On this overland complement to the Indian Ocean trading network the multi-cultural coinage of the Kuṣāna kings became an important medium of exchange.

### 3. AN ENCOUNTER BETWEEN CULTURES

An excavation in September 1998 by the Archaeology Department of Pakistan and UNESCO brought forward archaeological evidence of a hall with pillars and walls at the Bhir Mound’s fourth occupational level. Archaeologists understand that this may be part of a palace of the then ruler, King Ambhi, who received the Yauvan Prince Alexander here in 326 BCE.<sup>1</sup>

The meeting between Taxiles (Ambhi) Chief of Taxila, and Alexander, Prince of the

<sup>1</sup> Taxila 600 years older than earlier believed - Published Mar 24, 2002 - DAWN.COM <http://www.dawn.com/news/27360/>

*Yauvan* armies has been described as a formal allegiance ceremony between the two, along with an exchange of gifts – horsemen, gold and silver, elephants, tapestries and animals for sacrifice. From Taxila, Alexander sent a message to King Porus, suggesting that they meet at the frontier, which brought an opposite reaction. These tribal chiefdoms and monarchical states, which had formerly recognised the sovereignty of the Persian emperors, reunited under the command of Porus, who fiercely opposed the Macedonians. The consequent battle, Porus's defeat and a mutiny by the victorious Macedonian army is widely known.

Alexander was following an approach the generals of many invading armies had taken in antiquity. The conquerors were not interested in restructuring the society, or to carve out kingdoms as we visualize them today. While resistance was strongly countered, sometimes leading to the execution of the defenders and sacking of their settlement, the invading kings with a finite army, far away from home and having to live off the land, were often satisfied with the acquiescence of the states they encountered, whether they were republics or kingdom. The defeated adversaries were often let off to look after their own realm, but had to pay a tribute or to provide troops in support of the conquerors' war efforts. In order to show reciprocity, an exchange of gifts was undertaken, with the conquering army at large receiving what was meaningful.

Since 1958, several Greek and Aramaic inscriptions of Aśoka have been found, including at Taxila. Among them, Rock Edict V alludes to the *dharmamahāmātras* responsible for the establishment and promotion of *dharma* even among the *yavanas* (hellenes), *kambojas* and other resident on the western borders of his dominions, while Rock Edict XIII indicates the territories of Yavanaraja Antiyoka (Antioch) and others bordering his dominions. These edicts are valuable indicators of communication networks in the Mauryan Empire, since both Aśokan inscriptions

and the account by Megasthenes refer to the maintenance of roads. Notable among these was the Achaemenid royal road to north-west India, which Aśoka continued to maintain (Ray and Potts 2007).

The recently discovered stele of Sophythos, son of Naratos from Kandahar, further reinforces the presence of a Hellenised local elite whose *lingua franca* was Greek and who amassed wealth through business and by travelling to many cities. The stele was set up by the roadside to be read, and it is suggested that the name Sophythos is the Greek form of Sanskrit Subhuti, son of Naradatta who left his homeland on account of poverty but returned after accumulating wealth. He was warmly received on his return and used his riches to renovate the house of his ancestors and enlarge their tomb (Ray and Potts 2007).

Scattered throughout Sirkap, the second settlement at Taxila, are images of various local and foreign gods and demi-gods. Once one takes into account this diversity—from a bronze statuette of the Egyptian god Harpocrates, to a Greek-style goddess figurine, to local mother goddesses—it is hard to categorize Sirkap as “Buddhist” city. But not all sculptures are deities to be worshipped; some are images of the devotee in devotional poses. For example, a female figure sculpted from grey slate found in Block D' is a rendering of a worshiper offering flowers or other items to a shrine. Similarly, the female figure sculpted from chloritised mica schist also found in Block D' is not a “goddess holding a lotus”, but rather a rendering of a worshiper offering a lotus at a shrine. Finally, the male figures of chloritised mica schist found in Block C that hold bowls may also be an example of the citizens of Sirkap making offerings. Even in these figures, one should note the variation in dress and physical features. Clearly, Sirkap represents a complex mosaic of ritual practice and religious belief. The relationship between the suburban monasteries, the major urban shrines and the localised or private

urban shrines must have been extremely complex involving ancient and modern, local and foreign divinities.<sup>2</sup>

#### 4. CONVERGENCE OF TRADE AND MULTIPLE PUBLICS

The archaeological site, Begram, in eastern Afghanistan connects the route to Khyber Pass and the plains of the northern subcontinent to stations along the Silk Roads from China to the Mediterranean through passes of the western Hindu Kush mountains. Carried along them were people, materials and attendant cultures, and Begram's crossroads locale made it well-suited to development as a trading center but also for strategic military defense, enhancing the likelihood that the site would have been chosen for significant trade and perhaps production, and the attendant storage of goods and materials.

The Begram site is most famous for a large number of extraordinary objects neatly stored in two, apparently anciently sealed-off, rooms in a part of what is now called the 'New Royal City'. The objects found in these sealed-off rooms consist of numerous objects from lacquer to bronze, plaster casts and terracotta to ivory and bone, all of which possessed a high degree of artisanship. Fascinatingly, these artefacts had their origins in various and distant parts of the ancient world – from India, the Mediterranean and China, leading to the speculation that the artefacts were probably a royal 'treasure' or 'hoard'.

However, a contrary argument is that the Begram hoard was not really a treasure because not all the contents were precious objects. For example, numerous plaster medallions were found. These plaques were imported from the Mediterranean world, and were probably models

for the royal atelier, used to make silver ware, sculptures or stucco decoration. They were invaluable to the artisans at the palace but would not have had any intrinsic metallic value (di Castro 2005).

This collection of more than a thousand individual pieces of bone and ivory discovered in Begram is unparalleled by any other single find. In addition, the widespread dispersal of the ivories from Afghanistan to Sri Lanka indicates the extensive regional routes of communication by the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE across the subcontinent. Second, many of the specimens bear similarities, but also include diverse examples and suggest the presence of a number of workshops. Thirdly, the nature of the objects indicates diverse uses, from pieces of furniture to objects used for personal adornment. Hence it is reasonable to assume a varied and heterogeneous clientele ranging from the elite to the urban dweller. Finally the same motifs are depicted both on items of furniture as also on religious architecture of the major Buddhist sites. These factors indicate the existence of a wider cultural sphere extending across political boundaries and including the present states of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The area of modern Afghanistan was already known in the third millennium BCE as the producer of lapis lazuli from the Badakshan mountains, northeast of Begram. From the finds at Tillya-tepe it is clear that Bactria had an established tradition in metal smithing, and analogous gold jewelry pieces in Taxila indicate a trade in those commodities. The finds at Dal'verzin-tepe in modern Uzbekistan included gold bars with Kharoṣṭī writing on them, which suggests contact with the southern part of modern Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup> However, the tendency to focus solely on the Indian objects, or on the Graeco-

<sup>2</sup> 'Space and Society at Sirkap, Taxila: Re-examination of Urban Form and Meaning' by Robin Coningham, and Briece R. Edwards, in *Ancient Pakistan*, ed. Ihsan Ali, vol. XII, Pakistan Golden Jubilee Number, 1997-98 p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> Begram: along ancient Central Asian and Indian trade routes, in *Cahiers d'Asie centrale* [En ligne], 1/2 | 1996, by Sanjyot Mehendale, mis en ligne le 01 février 2011, Consulté le 11 octobre 2012. URL : /index419.html

Roman finds, or on the Chinese lacquers, without simultaneously taking into detailed consideration of the other groups of objects discovered with them can prevent an understanding of the cross connections that emerge from a site like Begram.

The considerable trade moving through Central Asia in general and the Begram area in particular may have had local products – cultivated, manufactured or existing naturally – which were valued by the Roman, Chinese and Indian worlds, and which were traded for goods such as those discovered in the two locked storehouses at Begram. Recent research indicates that the ivory and bone finds could all be dated in approximately the same first century CE time period, and that the so-called Begram ‘treasure’ could well have been merchants’ commercial stock deposited at the site along established trade routes.<sup>4</sup>

By the first century BCE, trade between Bactria and India coincided with the arrival of the nomadic peoples of Central Asia to the north of India, the consolidation of the Kuṣāna empire and the opening of trade routes both by land and by the sea routes of the Indian ocean up the Indus. Here, perhaps in the last half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, a find from Takht-i Sangin, in the Greco-Bactrian sanctuary of the Oxus, in Tajikistan, of a horn handle reveals a scene of the Vaiṣṇava triad – Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma and Subhadra. This is the same triad that is found at the shrine in Jandial ‘C’ at Taxila.<sup>5</sup> This could represent one of the many cults being practiced at Taxila, and it is clear that syncretism of beliefs – or rather, double language – so deeply rooted among the Greeks in Bactria, is also present in India. It is clear that the new trade routes operating by the

turn of the CE are circulating all the ideas of the time, and not only those of Hellenism.<sup>6</sup>

It is in architecture and creative arts that the Greek heritage is most clearly visible and that certain Graeco-Bactrian building styles were incorporated into Kuṣāna architecture (Paul Bernard 1994). It was a borrowed form adapted to fit local requirements a demand of the urban efflorescence that required new styles, as in the *nagaraka* or urbanite of Vātsāyana’s *Kāmasūtra*. The *nagaraka* was exhorted to reside in a city or town, to pay attention to his appearance and to participate in social gatherings and popular festivities. This evolution of the urban around the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE fuelled the demand for a wide range of commodities and styles, which were then sustained by the extensive trade networks and communication channels. However, the cultural milieu in much of North India continued to be Indic rather than Graeco-Roman and participation in the wider trading world continued to be bilateral and shared, rather than South Asia being merely a supplier of luxuries.

##### 5. FROM NOMADISM TO SETTLEMENT – POLITICAL CHANGE, ECONOMIC CONTINUITY AND NEUTRAL CITIES

The political and regime flux in Central Asia in the third century BCE caused serious threat to the settled empires of India and China. The Chinese ruler constructed the Great Wall to shield the empire against the attacks of the central asian nomads, but Aśoka and the later Mauryans took no such measures. Therefore when the Scythians (Śakas) made a push towards India, they forced the Parthians, Śakas and Greeks to move towards the subcontinent. The Greeks of Bactria (N

<sup>4</sup> op.cit.

<sup>5</sup> Hinduism in the Indo-Greek Area- Notes on some Indian finds from Bactria and on two temples in Taxila, by Claude Rapin, from ‘In the Land of the Gryphons’- Papers on Central Asian archaeology in antiquity, ed. A. Invernizzi, Firenze, 1995, p. 275-291

<sup>6</sup> Relations entre l’Asie centrale et l’Inde à l’époque hellénistique, Claude Rapin, Cahiers d’Asie centrale [En ligne], 1/2 | 1996, mis en ligne le 01 février 2011, Consulté le 10 octobre 2012. URL : /index417.html

Afghanistan) were the first to invade India in 206 BCE, and were followed by a series of invasions till the beginning of the CE.

By the time the Yuezhi arrived at Ai-Khanoum in northern Afghanistan, it was most likely in the hands of other nomads who had taken it from the Greeks. The conquerors would have captured a city like Ai Khanoum after a long siege, most likely killing all the defenders and looting the palace and temples. But it is clear that the Yuezhi, shrewd and affluent steppe traders, not only appreciated the marble temples and also realised that it was in their own interests not to attack its numerous established gods. Consequently, the Yuezhi-Kuşānas exerted control by establishing order and collecting taxes. When Zhang Qian visited the Kuşāna camps around 128 BCE, before the Yuezhi entered Bactria, there was no supreme king, but numerous Greek styled city states ruled by their own sovereigns. The Kushans probably left these cities alone, and even paid homage to their gods to win the support of the locals. The peoples who had lived in Bactria before the Greeks had also retained their own languages and cultures, as did nomadic groups who had arrived before and after the Yuezhi. The receptive attitude of the Yuezhi/Kushans towards other cultures resulted in the adoption of the life styles of the conquered, sedentary population after they arrived in Bactria. The formation of an international empire under the Kushan dynasty in the first century CE, an empire that spread from the Oxus River and the Pamir mountains to the Ganges valley, characterised by cultural syncretism, was to dramatically affect the Asian continent in the following centuries.

Between 200 BCE and 250 CE, the Śakas(Scythians) and Kuşānas used two routes from the north western frontier to the western sea coast of peninsular India. Both these routes converged at Taxila, and were connected to the

Silk route. One going directly south to the lower Indus basin and on to Broach, while the other, the *Uttarāpatha*, crossed the Punjab to the Yamuna at Mathura, and then to Ujjain in Malwa, while another branch went on to Kaushambi and Patalipūtra (Sharma 2005).

Unlike previously believed, the extensive Mauryan empire was administered from a number of provincial headquarters, more than the four units previously believed. While some of them were princes of royal lineage, others were outsiders to the royal house, and one Tushaspa in Kathiawad may have been a Greek as seen by his epithet Yavanaraja (after Yavana or Hellene). It is difficult to miss that there was no uniformity in the origin, power and authority of the regional administrators of otherwise equal rank, and speaks for the accommodation of regional diversities in the Mauryan administration (Chakravarti 2010).

Taxila in Gandhāra, served as a centre of learning, becoming famous for its teachers and acquiring veritable 'colleges'; their students included princes from distant regions. The freedom to travel, and the predilection of many Brāhmin teachers for doing so, assured the continuous dissemination of culture over wide areas, and the maintenance of contact between centres of learning and of religious and also political life.<sup>7</sup>

Public life in Sirkap centred on commerce and ritual. The *stūpa* shrines in Block C', E, and E' in Sirkap all indicate that their caretakers were not monks, but non-monastic city dwellers that profited from their maintenance. All three *stūpa* shrines had no attached rooms that could have been used by monks, and all three were attached in some way to wealthy households. Certainly, as the texts tell us, many *stūpas* were built by monks for the sake of worshipping the Buddha, but the evidence from the Block F and G *stūpa* shrines

<sup>7</sup> Kautilya: Foreign Policy and International System in the Ancient Hindu World, by George Modelski, The American Political Science Review, Vol. 58, No. 3 (Sep., 1964) pg 559.

also tells us that *stūpas* were important indicators of power for the ruling class. And, doing good deeds such as building a *stūpa*, was an efficacious method of accruing good *karma*, and in fact, care was taken by rulers to make sure that craftsmen were paid well (Michon 2007).

In Bactria, Gandhāra and Mathura, Kuṣāna rulers used both Greek letters and Kharoṣṭī script (an evolution of the Aramaic brought earlier by the Persians) to write the various Sanskrit dialects. Without a written language on the steppe, the Yuezhi-Kuṣān conquerors adopted the scripts of conquered peoples in order to build an efficient government, maintain a successful tax system, and proclaim their own divinity on temple walls. Fragmentary sources indicate that Kushan kings relied on existing local institutions, such as caste hierarchies, trader's guilds, and religious organisations, to manage daily affairs. They never built a typical agricultural empire, with a strong bureaucracy to control every aspect of life. Their administration did not even reach the village level to collect a tax from farmers. Crossing the Hindu Kush mountains, the regime embraced Indian beliefs and practices – Brāhmāṇical Hindu, Jain and Buddhist (Liu 2010). The flourishing commerce attracted many from the Indo-Gangetic plain as well as other parts of India, allowing the Kuṣānas to synthesise a unique state that became the economic and cultural centre of South and Central Asia for at least two hundred years.

The foundation of the Kuṣāna kingdom, together with the unification of China under the Han dynasty and the Pax Romana of Octavian Augustus in the Mediterranean world, had created particular conditions that enabled the development of long distance commerce between the four great civilisations of the beginning of the Common Era: Greco-Roman, Iranian, Indian and Chinese. From around the end of the first century BCE commercial routes along the Takla Makan desert of Xinjiang led from China to Kashgar into Ferghana, Transoxiana and Bactria. These caravan

tracks, known as the Silk Road, channelled loads of merchandise to Bactria, where the merchandise was diverted either towards Iran and the Mediterranean regions, or carried over the Hindu Kush down to Taxila, and from there to the Indus delta, the Ganges valley and other seaports of the Indian Ocean (Di Castro 2005).

## 6. URBANISATION – INSTITUTIONALISED RELIGION, TRADERS AND THE STATE

Urbanisation along the lands of what was to become the Silk Road probably took the form of a network of settlements of various sizes rather than isolated and insulated cities. As scholars suggest, the egalitarian character of first cities suggests a strong family focus and household autonomy rather than a large scale community identity. This continued in the difficult terrains of the Silk Road, and made it possible to indicate the town as a neutral meeting point for the diversity along the trade routes. Some of these towns were wealthy enough to field armed soldiers, who protected the caravans against marauding nomads. These commercial centres or trade towns in effect came to form a neutral zone, in a region crossed by caravan routes. This can be seen in contrast to the multi-polar Hellenic diplomatic world, where being neutral was seen as a moral abdication of responsibility, a virtual renunciation of what it meant to be Greek.

On the other hand, from Achaemenid times, military commanders in Gandhāra and Taxila recruited and trained local manpower for fighting wars in distant lands. Centuries later, the Kushan King Kadphises in 60 CE conquered Taxila after his conquest of Gandhāra from the Parthians-Śakas. Making this historic town his capital, this product of a Hellenic culture tempered by Mesopotamian and Persian influences, continued the process of accommodating the various cultures and beliefs that were carried by the routes of the region. His coins with Buddha on one side and Zeus on the other indicate a vibrant economy



shared by different cultures, communities and linguistic groups.

Archaeologically, there is both quantitative and qualitative expansion of Taxila in the pre and post-Alexander periods with a corresponding increase in trade networks. This increase was sustained by demands for a range of commodities from urban dwellers, including for imported and imitation goods. The history of these trading communities is evident from the donations that they made to religious establishments.

The micro study of Sirkap in Taxila shows how the boundaries between Buddhism, Jainism, and Brāhmānical Hinduism break down, and can be seen in coexistence with local deities in private belief and ritual. From oracular gambling for predicting the future to ritual of propitiation of tutelary deities for protection, the local matrix was complex. Religion in the domestic sphere was dominated by local *apsarāsas*, *yakṣas*, and *yakṣīs*. Local inhabitants of the city, both native born Indians and foreign-born migrants, made up the body of devotees. The names of the deities they propitiated were local ones and a few made their way into classical texts such as the Mahābhārata, or into lesser known protective charms such as the Mahāmāyūrī, but the vast majority of these names are now lost to us as the cults died out. While the names may be lost, their basic functions are not: local and foreign deities and devotees were tied together by the rituals which generated good luck, wealth, health, and success in love (Michon 2007).

Thus commerce cannot be studied in isolation from the diverse religious landscape developing in the region. The crossing over of

local religions and forms of devotion, with shrines simultaneously used by the common folk as sites to address their own concerns of health and well-being, indicate that rather than being a religion of renouncers, early Buddhism, like the other beliefs and ideologies of the time, consciously inculcated a cooperative sense of identity among its followers. A sense of identity that was carried over into the new forms and centres of urbanisation developing at the time.

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