



Chaire d'Histoire et cultures de  
l'Asie centrale préislamique

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**Report on the habilitation thesis of Ladislav Stančo : *Bactria / Tokharistan in the 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> c. AD. Selected problems of settlement patterns and material culture.***

The work presented by Ladislav Stančo gathers various results obtained through fieldwork conducted under his direction in the Sherabad-darya and Surkhan darya valleys (southernmost part of Uzbekistan near the Afghan border), mainly excavations on the middle-sized town of Jandavlattepa (Czech-Uzbek expedition, 2002-2006) and surveys of the irrigation networks.

The focus is on the period 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c. AD, for a long time quite neglected by archaeologists in favour of the supposedly more brilliant Kushan and early Medieval periods (respectively 1<sup>st</sup> to early 3<sup>rd</sup> c., and 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c.). Geographically the sector under study was part of Northern Tokharistan (formerly Bactria). Politically it corresponds to the so-called « Kushano-Sasanian » dynasty, an autonomous branch of the Sasanians, possibly preceded by a phase of direct Sasanian rule. Textual information on the Kushano-Sasanians, who produced no inscriptions, is very limited and all of an indirect nature ; until very recently they were known only by their coins. The archaeological material associated to these coins was « floating » in the chronology because of the extremely contrasting views on the absolute chronology of the coin series : to sum up, we have on the one side an early chronology putting all of them in the 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c. (Herzfeld, Bivar, Cribb), and on the other side a late chronology starting after 350 (Göbl, now Schindel) or even 368 (Lukonin, Zeymal'). To complicate the matter even further, Göbl assigned to this dynasty a very short duration (finishing c. 400) while Lukonin and Zeymal' dated the end of the last ruler to c. 460.

Until the 1990's Soviet archaeologists, with the rare exception of the « Tashkent school » (Pugachenkova, Rtveladze, Pidaev), did not dare to question the authority of the Leningrad numismatists. This circumstance explains, at least in part, why the few archaeologists (Vadim Masson, Litvinskiy) who dealt with with these transitional period in Northern Tukharistan tended to consider the late 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> c. as particularly prosperous, for they assigned to this time span the Kushano-Sasanian coins and the associated dense settlements. For his own part, Pidaev who sided with the early chronology viewed the Kushano-Sasanian period as a time of crisis before a spectacular recovery, while the view now prevailing (also in Sogdiana) points to the reverse picture because of the serious impact of « Hunnish » invasions.

Ladislav Stančo is perfectly conscious of the past uncertainties (aptly summed up in the Introduction and in the Concluding remarks) and of the importance of a sound chronological basis in order to obtain a reliable evaluation of the post-Kushan culture in Bactria. He opts for Cribb's chronology in its last version (Jongward & Cribb 2014, little different from Cribb 1990 and 1999), which brackets the Kushano-Sasanians between c. 230 and c. 365. Though this system is certainly a great improvement upon the one long favoured by Soviet archaeologists, it is not, however, exempt from some objections. In particular it does not take into account the possibility of a first phase of direct Sasanian administration,

which seems now documented by issues of Varahran I (273-276) in Balkh (see A. Nikitin in Alram & Klimburg-Salter, eds., 1999, pp. 259-263). Already in 1985 Martha Carter (« A numismatic reconstruction of Kushano-Sasanian history », *ANSMN* 30, pp. 215-281) had proposed solid historical arguments for such a reconstruction, though part of her evidence is not valid anymore (e.g. Harmatta's far-fetched interpretation of Sasanian graffiti in Kara-tepe).

The main part of Stančo's essay is devoted to a in-depth study of the material culture associated with this zone and period: irrigation pattern, architecture (plans of the main structures excavated at Jandavlattepa are unfortunately missing). The main « guiding fossil » is the « Fine Ware » (FW) of which we find here the most precise study ever proposed. Ample evidence is put forward that it was not produced before the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. (the date of abandonment of Kampyr-tepe where it is entirely missing) and most probably not before c. 250, and that it remained in use only during a few decades, until c. 350, maximum c. 400. The possible origins of this very refined pottery type are discussed with caution and balance; a Roman influence is not excluded, but perhaps mediated through Iran. The appliques with a lion head are also characteristic of this period. In this case, too, the style can betray a Roman influence but the ultimate symbolism is more probably Buddhist. A terracotta Buddha head is an import from Khotan, like another specimen known at Panjikent; in both cases as well as for the Khotan originals the date is uncertain (p. 138, the Buddhist revival in the 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c. is tentatively attributed to a « second migration of the religion from Eastern Turkestan and China », but an impetus from Kashmir was also considered by some scholars).

A remarkable conclusion is the extreme paucity of objects demonstrably imported from the Roman world, most of which appear along the Surkhandarya and Wakhsh routes followed by the agents of Maes Titianos. Some sculptures are considered « suspicious », without further comments; the possibility of imports of genuine antiques or forgeries during the Tsarist period should be considered (cf. P. Bernard, « À propos de quelques faux dans l'histoire des cultes de l'Asie centrale », in *Cultes et monuments religieux dans l'Asie centrale préislamique*, ed. F. Grenet, Paris, 1987, pp. 41-46). Bactria was obviously far less a part of the Roman commercial hinterland as Southern India was.

As for the Latin inscriptions in the Kara Kamar caves (pp. 209-210), Stančo briefly mentions that doubts were raised concerning their authenticity. It appears also that the successive editors (Rtveladze, Ustinova, Balakhvantsev) have proposed very diverse explanations for their historical context. The present reviewer's opinion, shared by Paul Bernard and Claude Rapin, is that these Latin inscriptions are genuine but modern, probably from the 1920's, the work of some college educated British agent dispatched through the border in order to come into contact with the Basmachis and Enver Pasha. See P. Bernard, « Langue et épigraphie grecques dans l'Asie centrale à l'époque hellénistique », in *Greek Archaeology without frontiers*, Athens: « Open science » Lecture Series, 2002, pp. 85-86. G. REX IM[...] is probably GEORGIUS REX IMPERATOR (not INVICTO MITHRAE!), while AP interpreted as APOLLINARIS can possibly be read CAP, i.e. CAPTAIN.

In spite of these minor quibbles, I consider Stančo's work as the most solid archaeological approach we have, together with V.A. Zav'yalov, *Kushanshakhr pri Sasanidakh* (St.Pb., 2008), to the Kushano-Sasanian period in Northern Tokharistan.

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