

AGAIN ON “HERAIOS” BEING KUJULA AND SOME RELATED PROBLEMS

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Abstract: The question of the identity of the issuer of the so-called “Heraios” coinage is analysed, and it is proposed that these series be ascribed to Kujula Kadphises, as already suggested by some scholars. In this regard, the circulation of these coins and the connections established by their imagery are focused upon. Some possible inferences on the original location of Kujula Kadphises are discussed in the concluding part, hypothesizing a southern context different from the northern one commonly ascribed to the founder of the Kushan dynasty.

Keywords: Kushans, Numismatics, Yuezhi, Kujula, Heraios.

The so-called coinage of Heraios, long known from silver tetradrachms and obols of a slightly modified Attic standard, has a crucial importance for the history of post-Greek Bactria. It is reputed to provide the earliest mention of the name Kushan, and thus attributed to one of the first rulers of the dynasty. Yet the peculiar features of the legends of these series have prevented the reaching of a general agreement on the identity of the issuer. Currently, scholars are divided over three hypotheses based on the interpretation of the legend: a predecessor of Kujula named Heraios; a Kushan *yabgu*, either called Sanab or not known by name; or Kujula Kadphises himself.¹

While dealing with connected problems for a recent work,² I had to re-examine the question, with the result that I changed my mind on the issue. I always considered this coinage to have been struck by a Kushan *yabgu*, the title explicitly rendered by the word

¹ See *infra*. Falk 2015, 85–86 summarized the debate in a different way, pointing to two positions: either this coinage “was issued before Kujula assumed power,” or “it was issued by Kujula himself.” Falk also mentioned the old proposal to ascribe it to Soter Megas (MacDowall – Wilson 1970, on which see also Alram 1999, 24–25), but correctly took no account of it (indeed, it appears to have been already abandoned in, e.g., MacDowall 2003). I came to know of Lerner 2019 and Taasob 2019 (which bear 2020 as date of publication) only after submitting this article and could not refer to them.

² See Sinisi 2020, 368, note 16.

HIAOY, which cannot be read as a personal name in my view. This broadly corresponds to the second of the three interpretations summarized above, the real identity of the prince who struck this series impossible to define with certainty based on the legends, perhaps hidden by the word appearing between the horse's legs on the tetradrachms' reverse.³ However, I am now convinced that the hypothesis that this prince is Kujula Kadphises is the most likely, and thus I thought to offer some considerations in this regard to the debate.

The proposal to identify the issuer of the so-called Heraios coinage as Kujula Kadphises was put forward for the first time by Joe Cribb in an article published nearly thirty years ago.⁴ Cribb set this conclusion in the framework of a broad discussion of the context of these series, which opened with an overview on the history of the scholarly debate, with a particular focus on the development of the figure of "Heraios" in the scientific literature in connection with the reading of the inscription on the reverse of the tetradrachms. After that, the region of issue and the circulation of these series were dealt with, as well as the links provided by typology and iconography with the earlier and coeval coinages of Bactria and North-western India, closing with a specific analysis of the coin inscriptions and the inferences that could be made on the chronological setting.

The crucial element, however, was provided by the reading of the legends of a series of Indian copper tetradrachms, known only in two specimens kept at the British Museum,⁵ which exhibit the same types as the Bactrian tetradrachms traditionally ascribed to Heraios on both the obverse and the reverse.⁶ These coins, weighing 9.76 g and 10.40 g, are of indisputable Indian origin as they bear bilingual Prakrit and Greek legends, the former surrounding in a circle the king's bust on the obverse and the latter running around the horseman depicted on the reverse. Based on analogies with the bull and camel series of Kujula, Cribb proposed that these coppers could have been struck in Kashmir as an intermission between "the end of Kujula's issues and immediately before Wima's."⁷ The two coins are not very well preserved, and the legends in particular have been heavily impacted, since on both specimens they are partly off-flan, the portion that is found on the coin being, moreover, quite worn. Cribb nonetheless reconstructed the Greek inscription as ΤΥΠΑΝΝΟΥΝΤΟΣ ΗΙΑΟΥ ΚΟΡΡΑΝΟΥ, with the first two words engraved in a sort of semicircle around the horseman and reading from the inside roughly from 8 to 4 o'clock, and the third word, i.e. ΚΟΡΡΑΝΟΥ, read from the outside below the horse's hooves. Thus, the layout of the legend would be the same as that of the Bactrian tetradrachms, only omitting the word ΣΑΝΑΒ, or ΑΝΤΕΙΧ, which is found between the horse's legs on the silvers. A point to be noted is that on both the copper coins only the beginning of ΤΥΠΑΝΝΟΥΝΤΟΣ and ΚΟΡΡΑΝΟΥ are detected on the flan, the presence

³ A similar position had already been upheld by several scholars from eastern Europe, see, e.g., Zeymal 1983, 149–157; Harmatta 1995, 152. On the discussion about Heraios/Sanab among Soviet scholars at the time see also Staviski 1986, 137 and the references given there.

⁴ Cribb 1993.

⁵ See Cribb 1993, 118–119, no. 155–156 (and fig. 4–5) for the description and illustration of the series.

⁶ Cribb (1993, 124) expressly wrote "The key connection with other local coinages that has emerged as the result of this study is that created by the first full reading of the inscriptions of the copper 'Heraios' coins."

⁷ Cribb 1993, 124.

of the word HIAOY, which is completely off-flan, being assumed based on analogy with the titlature of the Bactrian tetradrachms.

Even more important than the reverse inscription was, however, Cribb’s reading of the Prakrit legend on the obverse, which he deciphered as *maharayasa rayatirayasa devaputrasa kuyula katakapasa*, “of the Great King, King of Kings, *devaputra*, Kujula Kadphises,” with the regal titles to be read from the outside between c. 5 and 9 o’clock and the remaining part of the legend, starting with *devaputra*, read from the inside anti-clockwise.

It goes without saying that the crucial feature of the Prakrit inscription is the explicit mention of the name of Kujula as the issuer of these coins. It follows only naturally that, in the light of the typological connections, the silver series ascribed to “Heraios” would have to be attributed to Kujula, and that, therefore, HIAOY could not represent a personal name. Indeed, Cribb interpreted it as a title, compared to that of ZAOOY which Kujula holds on other coin series, customarily rendered as *yabgu* in the scholarly literature with reference to the term *xihou* of the Chinese sources on Yuezhi and early Kushan history.⁸

However, in the decades that followed, Cribb’s conclusions have gained only a limited acceptance, mainly by scholars who collaborated with him on various occasions, such as Robert Bracey and David Jongeward.⁹ Robert Senior only partly agreed with Cribb’s proposal,¹⁰ whereas Harry Falk, who had previously openly rejected it based on a combination of metrological and palaeographical arguments, has more recently adopted it,¹¹ at least for the part concerning the presence of the name of Kujula in the Prakrit legend and the attribution of the Bactrian series.

The reasons for this cold reception are not easy to pinpoint, as the arguments put forward by Cribb have very rarely been openly examined and assessed in detail. To my knowledge, the only specific discussion of Cribb’s proposal was undertaken by Michael Alram,¹² who stressed the uncertainties concerning the inscriptions and disputed the placing of the two copper tetradrachms within the sequence of the bull and camel series suggested by Cribb.¹³ Thus, although he did not utterly reject Cribb’s hypothesis, Alram concluded that he was “unable to agree without reservation to treating ‘Heraios’ as being equivalent to Kujula Kadphises” as there were “too many unknown factors involved.”¹⁴

⁸ Cribb 1993, 130. Cribb has returned to the title, devoting to it a specific treatment in 2018, where HIAOY is expressly taken to render in Greek letters the Chinese *xihou*. Falk 2018 is of the same opinion (having changed since Falk 2015, 87, where H(I)AOY was felt to reflect *ṣāhi* for “king”). The derivation of the title from a Chinese original was already criticized by F. Thierry (2005, 462–463). The question is still a matter of debate, also due to the possible inferences on the ties between the Kushans and the Han (cf. Cribb 2018, 15; Falk 2018, 34).

⁹ See, e.g., Bracey 2012, 206; Jongeward – Cribb – Donovan 2015; Bracey 2016.

¹⁰ Senior 2001, II: 219. While he clearly attributed to Kujula the Indian copper tetradrachms, Senior (2001, I: 11) ascribed the Bactrian series to a prince “Kushan” who immediately preceded Kujula.

¹¹ For the two positions see, respectively, Falk 2010, 77 and Falk 2015, 85–88; Falk 2018, 5.

¹² Alram 1999, 22–25.

¹³ Concerning the inscriptions, Alram observed that, due to their fragmentary conditions on both specimens, “a complete and unequivocal reading is impossible,” in addition to considering the “Heraios” copper tetradrachms as earlier than Kujula’s bull and camel series.

¹⁴ Alram 1999, 24.

Since 1993, Cribb has modified his position on the “Heraios” coppers in connection with the bull and camel series, coming to regard the former as the “forerunners of the bull/camel series issued by Kujula Kadphises in Kashmir,”¹⁵ although this did not impact his views on the identification of “Heraios” with Kujula. The addition to the debate of the observations on the Prakrit inscription of the two copper tetradrachms by Falk, who considered the legend as clearly readable,¹⁶ did not affect the general picture, and “Heraios” and Kujula are, as a norm, still considered as two distinct figures.¹⁷

In the light of the character of the debate summed up briefly here, this is, in fact, far from surprising, as Falk’s interpretation came to represent the “mere” confirmation by an Indologist with direct experience of Indian epigraphy of the reading proposed by Cribb, i.e. a numismatist who specialized in the Indo-Iranian Borderlands, without new arguments that could convince nearly all the other numismatists working on the same subjects—whose opinion can be assumed to be somehow epitomized by Alram’s remarks—as well as that of the specialists on the region from other disciplines.

Indeed, my impression is that the emphasis on the legends and their interpretation has not helped the hypothesis of identifying “Heraios” with Kujula, which is not difficult to understand in the light of the preservation of the legends. In fact, that emphasis has limited the discussion to the detriment of Cribb’s proposal. Therefore, it seems that one could well say that, until such time as new specimens of the “Heraios” coppers with better preserved inscriptions surface, no definitive solution will be achieved by discussing the legends. On the other hand, since the whole question of “Heraios” is essentially numismatic in nature, the problem can be approached from another angle, as there are a few numismatic arguments that may be explored—or analysed in more depth—which might yield some results. Two such arguments can be focused upon: one is numismatic in character in its strictest sense, and pertains to the circulation of the “Heraios” series and their original place of issue; the other has to do with typology, meaning, in this instance, the images used on coins and the repertoire from which they were taken. They are intimately connected, and need to be dealt with in this order, as the inferences drawn from discussing the first have a direct bearing on the assessment of the second.

In the scholarly literature, the localization of the place of issue of the so-called Heraios series in silver is based on their findspots. These are concentrated in the region immediately north of the Amu Darya east of Termez, although finds from northern Afghanistan are not unknown, with Tillya Tepe and Dilberjin included in the list.¹⁸ Cribb referred to the map published by Boris J. Staviski in 1986,¹⁹ and wrote of “the river valleys north of the Oxus (in the Republics of Uzbekistan and Tadzhikistan),”²⁰ although Staviski had circumscribed the area to the lower valley of the Kafirgiran.²¹ If we compare the maps

¹⁵ Reported in Falk 2015, 88. Cf. also Jongeward – Cribb – Donovan 2015, 25, where the “Heraios” series are deemed to be the first coins of Kujula.

¹⁶ Falk 2015, 86, fig. 5, where the inscription was read as *devaputrasa kuyula-ka(t?)akapasa / ma[harayasa rayatirayasa]*.

¹⁷ Grenet 2015, 205–206; Fussman 2017, 276–277; Francfort 2020, 24–26. Cf. also the remarks of other scholars reported in Falk 2015, 86.

¹⁸ See the map, prepared by A. Gorin, in Falk 2015, 77, fig. 4.

¹⁹ Staviski 1986, 135–138, and fig. 12.

²⁰ Cribb 1993, 119.

²¹ Staviski 1986, 136, 138.

in Staviski 1986 and Falk 2015, the coins found in the meantime can be visualized,²² with the consequent enlargement of the relevant area. In this connection, and in the light of the Graeco-Bactrian standard of these series, the isolated finds from the Kabul valley and Taxila²³ can be considered irrelevant for the reconstruction of the area of circulation, which certainly did not include the region south of the Hindukush where the weight standard in use was the Indian one.

At the time, Cribb highlighted the possible distorting effect of the concentration of excavations north of the Amu Darya on the distribution of the findspots,²⁴ and considered it very likely that the “Heraios” coinage might have also circulated in northern Afghanistan.²⁵ However, the territories south of the Amu Darya are no longer mentioned in his successive treatments of the topic. Thus, coins of “Heraios” are said to have “circulated primarily in the Vakhsh valley,” which is considered as the place where the “original domain” of Kujula as Kushan *yabgu* was located.²⁶ One may wonder if this mirrors only a shift in emphasis or a possible more substantial adaptation by Cribb to the general opinion after his 1993 article, although the role that he ascribes to the valley of the Vakhsh as the original seat of Kujula’s power seems to favour the latter interpretation, and his reference to the 2006 study of Frantz Grenet on the location of the Yuezhi *yabgu*s suggests the same. Indeed, leaving aside some differences, the interpretative approach by means of which Cribb came to reconstruct the respective areas of issue and circulation of the “Heraios” coinage, alongside the series of imitations of Heliocles and Eucratides, is analogous in concept to that employed by Staviski, integrated with the results of the interpretation of the Chinese sources on the Yuezhi *yabgu*s. Thus, while Staviski focused on the boundary that he detected between the valley of the Surkhan Darya and western Bactria on one side and the area east of the Kafirnigan and Kunduz on the other,²⁷ Cribb could go a step further and ascribe to Kujula, in addition to the “Heraios” series, the imitations in copper of the Heliocles silver imitations issued by the Dumi *xihou* in the area

²² Staviski (1986, 137) wrote of about fifty coins, tetradrachms and obols. Cribb (1993, 113–117) catalogued 58 tetradrachms and 95 obols, for a total of 154 silver coins, only a minority with recorded findspot (those known at the time are given in Staviski 1986, 258–259, resulting in only four instances of recorded provenance, including a hoard of tetradrachms from the valley of the Vakhsh, for which see Davidovich 1984).

²³ Staviski 1986, 137, note 37; Cribb 1993, 119, and note 14.

²⁴ Cribb 1993, 119–120. Cf. also Jongeward – Cribb – Donovan 2015, 25. The point was already raised by Staviski 1986, 137, note 37, and, more recently, by Francfort 2020, 21–22, note 41.

²⁵ An inference suggested to Cribb by the fact that the “Heraios” coins kept at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris (two tetradrachms and five obols, for which see, respectively, Cribb 1993, 113–117, nos. 11, 19, and 66–67, 78, 92, 111) all have an originally Afghan provenance.

²⁶ Jongeward – Cribb – Donovan 2015, 25; Cribb 2018, 5; Cribb 2020, 654 considers these coins as issued “in the eastern part of Bactria,” as he has always employed the definition of Bactria even for the region on the northern bank of the Amu Darya, in addition to that of northern Afghanistan (cf. Cribb 1993, 119–120, where the latter region was defined as “Afghan Bactria” or “southern Bactria”). Here the use of the term “Bactria” is limited to the region south of the Amu Darya.

²⁷ Staviski 1986, 134–140. Staviski’s main focus was defining the original Bactrian core of what later became the Kushan state, which he saw in the area between the eastern river valleys of the northern tributaries of the Amu Darya down to Kunduz to reach the Paropamisadae, where Kujula is attested by his coins, see in particular Staviski 1986, 138–139.

of Termez, while silver “imitation Eucratides were current in the territory of the other three *xihous* in the upper and lower Kafirnigan valley.”²⁸

So, the charting of the findspots appears to produce a clear-cut picture, according to which each imitation series can be squarely assigned to a well-defined territory, generally corresponding to specific geographical features, such as the north-south axes drawn by the river valleys of the northern tributaries of the Amu Darya. Then it is just a matter of matching the results with the written sources in order to obtain the names of the issuing authority. But is this neat picture really reliable in its premises, i.e. when the circulation and place of issue are concerned? If we consider that this whole approach to the problem is based on the idea that silver coin pieces weighing around 15 g—such as the imitations of Graeco-Bactrian silver tetradrachms and the “Heraios” larger series—are supposed to have circulated in areas no larger than the river valleys of the Surkhan Darya or the Kafirnigan, to cite just two examples, a positive answer becomes difficult.

As a matter of fact, there are a few methodological issues that should at least be taken into account. The point was already raised by Paul Bernard in the article in which he presented and reviewed the 1977 original Russian edition of Staviski’s book that then appeared in French in 1986,²⁹ where the general scarcity of finds of silver coins from excavations as opposed to those of base metal was stressed, to the point that “L’absence d’un monnayage d’argent ne permet donc pas de décider par elle seule si un site a faite ou non partie des états de tel ou tel roi.”³⁰

In addition, it could be mentioned that coins found in graves, or in a hoard—as the vast majority of the pieces with recorded provenance are³¹—, can be connected to the reconstruction of circulation only with the due amount of caution, bearing in mind that dangerous automatisms should be carefully avoided.

At any rate, silver tetradrachms were hardly conceived for a circulation restricted to a merely small-scale local level. Some comparisons might be instructive and here follow a few examples selected for their possible relevance. In 1st century CE Parthia, tetradrachms were struck only in Seleucia on the Tigris, and were destined to circulate in the whole economic area of Mesopotamia. Drachms, which represented the main silver denomination, were produced in a few mints on the highlands and circulated at an inter-regional level within the empire (and beyond, as the finds of Arsacid drachms from Armenia, for example, show).³² The last 150 years of Arsacid history saw the activity of only a single mint for the drachms, i.e. Ecbatana, obviously serving the whole of the Iranian part of the empire. Moving eastward, we know pseudo-countermarked drachms struck somewhere in the border areas between the Arsacid Empire and Bactria which were modelled on drachms minted by Phraates IV in Margiana, meaning that, in a previ-

²⁸ Cribb 2018, 5. Jongeward – Cribb – Donovan 2015, 25 already adopted the locations of the *yabgus* proposed by Grenet 2006, associating them with specific imitation series. Thus, the Kafirnigan valley was connected to the Xidan *yabgu* in its southern part and to the Shuangmi *yabgu* in its northern one, while the Dumī *yabgu* was related to the Surkhan Darya with Termez.

²⁹ Bernard 1979, 242.

³⁰ At any rate, Bernard (1979, 242–243) opted to locate the domain of Heraios in one of the river valleys on the right bank of the Amu Darya.

³¹ See the lists in Staviski 1986, 258–259; Cribb 1993, 113–117. Cf. also Falk 2015, 77, fig. 4.

³² See Sinisi 2018b for a recent treatment of problems of coin circulation in the Arsacid Empire.

ous stage, Parthian coins issued there must have reached the western fringes of Bactria in conspicuous numbers.³³ In addition, a hoard containing sixty-nine such pseudo-countermarked drachms was excavated in Takht-i Sangin,³⁴ i.e. at the opposite, eastern end of Bactria. Bactrian numismatic history itself provides quite significant evidence. The Attic standard silver series—which also included drachms, in addition to larger denominations—struck by Indo-Greek kings up to the first quarter of the 1st century BCE with Bactria as their destination,³⁵ make it clear that these coins were supposed to travel and that their circulation was not restricted to limited areas, in addition to showing that the link between findspots and the place of issue should always be critically assessed. Yet the most striking example is perhaps provided precisely by the Yuezhi period imitation series. The imitation Eucratides tetradrachms common in Bactria even have a counterpart in Chorasmia, where the first coins locally produced were precisely imitation tetradrachms of the same Graeco-Bactrian king. Now, one may wonder if these Chorasmian series imitated directly Eucratides’ coinage or its Yuezhi period imitations,³⁶ but the implications for our discussion here are nonetheless clear: if we employ the same logic commonly used to attribute the series of “Heraios” to one or the other river valley north of the Amu Darya, the result is that we should assume that Chorasmia was directly controlled either by Eucratides or by those same Yuezhi that were established in Bactria. Since we know that neither of the two scenarios is plausible, the only conclusion possible is that silver tetradrachms could reach Chorasmia directly from Bactria, with the broad circulation that one normally associates with such denomination.

In the light of all this, it is quite difficult to accept that the concentration of the findspots known today really draws in clear-cut terms the boundaries of the area of circulation of the “Heraios” series, thus also providing us, in a straightforward manner, with the location of their place of issue and consequently with a reliable indication on where their issuer had his main centre of power. In my view, if, e.g., the area of circulation of coins bearing the types of Eucratides’ tetradrachms extended from Bactria to Chorasmia, then it is reasonable to expect that the tetradrachms of “Heraios”—but the point might be raised also for other Yuezhi period imitation series—circulated on a somehow comparable level, meaning both north and south of the Amu Darya, including the whole of Bactria, as Cribb proposed in 1993.³⁷ Indeed, a confirmation seems to come again from Chorasmia, as the first non-imitation tetradrachms struck there clearly adapted the horseman reverse type of the “Heraios” large silvers,³⁸ indicating that the latter were available

³³ The Graeco-Bactrian helmeted bust depicted on the countermark and on the pseudo-countermarked coins appears linked, at least iconographically, to the obverse effigies of the coins of the so-called Sapadbizes group, (cf. Gorin 2010, 121, note 88, with references; *contra*, Zeymal 1999, 240, who considered this link to have “no foundation,” although no reasons were given), as well as to the Eucratides imitations of Yuezhi period Bactria.

³⁴ Zeymal 1983, 129–139; Zeymal 1999, 240.

³⁵ Bopearachchi 1990.

³⁶ Sinisi 2018a, 164–166.

³⁷ Falk (2018, 32) is of the same opinion, although in reference to the specific stage in which “the coinage of the third yabghu, once he became a sole ruler, found wide acceptance all over northern and southern Bactria.”

³⁸ See Sinisi 2018a, 168–177 for a recent treatment, with references.

in sufficient numbers in Chorasmia to represent a source for the reverse image of this early local coinage.³⁹

Analogous indications come from the findspots of the obols. Staviski commented that these lower denomination coins “ne voyagent pas loin de leur lieu d’émission,”⁴⁰ but currently the area covered by the finds of such coins extends as far west as the higher valley of the Surkhan Darya in the north to Dilberjin and Tilia Tepe in the south,⁴¹ meaning a territorial extension larger than that drawn by the finds of the “Heraios” tetradrachms!

Indeed, the evidence of the obols alone clearly indicates that the circulation of the tetradrachms cannot be reflected in the picture provided by the findspots currently known. A direct consequence of primary importance of the notion of an extended circulation area for “Heraios” coins is that their place of issue is impossible to determine with the precision normally found in the literature.

Needless to say, the whole picture remains difficult to draw, and there are still many open questions.⁴² Yet, in my opinion, the problem of the scale of the circulation of large silver coin pieces cannot be easily bypassed based only on the evidence of the findspots, evidence that is, in fact, limited in its character and thus not as compelling as generally assumed—at least, not in the way commonly assumed.⁴³ One is then left to wonder why this problem is so consistently neglected in the literature, all the more so as Bernard had warned about it from the outset. My feeling is that here we are faced with an untold, underlying level, which remains unexpressed: the common picture of the subdivision of the Yuezhi territories around the Amu Darya provides us with a clearly defined framework, in which evidence from coins and historical interpretation can coherently match one

³⁹ The only alternative to a circulation extending from Bactria to Chorasmia is that this typological transfer was handled by Kushan engravers moving from Bactria, which would imply a tighter—yet different in character—relationship between the two regions without requiring “Heraios” tetradrachms to have reached Chorasmia. In this respect, it is to be borne in mind that the numismatic history of Chorasmia shows clear signs of Kushan influence (including local finds of Kushan coins) even later, at least up to the time of Huvishka, see Sinisi 2018a for a recent discussion. In this regard, the evidence of Kushan coin finds in Khotan can also be considered, see Cribb 1984; Cribb 1985; Cribb 1999, 184–185. A quite instructive case is presented by R. Bracey (2011, 50), who discussed a copper tetradrachm of Vima Kadphises found in Vaisali, Bihar: the coin bears a countermark associated with Chorasmia, meaning that this Kushan coin first reached Chorasmia from within the Kushan Empire to return southward and exit Kushan territory in a completely different direction within a few decades, and we are not talking here of a *silver* tetradrachm!

⁴⁰ Staviski 1986, 137.

⁴¹ See Falk 2015, 77, fig. 4.

⁴² Indeed, we could well say that the main problem is that there are many more open questions than the current state of the discussion might lead one to believe.

⁴³ Just to dwell briefly on the more or less hidden contradictions, it might have been worth comparing the Vakhsh hoard of “Heraios” tetradrachms (see above note 22 for the references) and the Takht-i Sangin hoard containing sixty-nine pseudo-countermarked drachms modelled on the Margiana issues of Phraates IV which is mentioned above. The latter hoard (that, by the way, included a tetradrachm and an obol of “Heraios,” see Zeymal 1999, 240) confirms that we cannot extract indications on the place of issue from this kind of find, because such drachms were in all likelihood struck in *western* Bactria. In addition, if the Vakhsh hoard is deemed to be so reliable for the circulation of “Heraios” tetradrachms, then the Takht-i Sangin hoard ought to be considered on analogous terms, which would, in turn, imply that, if drachms could circulate west to east across the whole of Bactria, the same should be all the more true for the tetradrachms.

another,⁴⁴ and all this, in its turn, fits the general reconstruction of the gradual expansion southwards of the Yuezhi. The problem is that the *Kushan* expansion ends up replicating, in a sort of unconscious game of mirrors, that of the Yuezhi, with the result that the former is assumed by default to have proceeded on the same north-to-south direction as the latter, with no one ever questioning this scenario.

Thus, we have the Yuezhi presence north of the Amu Darya attested by Zhang Qian shortly after 130 BCE, and the series of Kujula, the founder of the Kushan empire in the 1st century CE, on the southern side of the Hindukush, with the imitations of Heraios issued since c. 70 BCE by the Yuezhi in the Paropamisadae placed in between.⁴⁵ The Bactrian series of “Heraios,” regardless of his identity, belong to the Kushan beginnings and are therefore regarded as representing *the* beginning, in the northernmost setting, as befits the beginning of the story. However, contrary to the preceding statements,⁴⁶ there is no real compelling evidence for such an exclusively northern context of “Heraios,” unless we consider as an objective fact our definition of such a northern horizon as the natural context of these series, which is, in all evidence, circular reasoning.

Actually, there are some clues leading in a different direction, and here is where the second of the two arguments introduced above, i.e. the images borne by the “Heraios” series and their connections, comes into play.

Cribb already dealt extensively with the question,⁴⁷ highlighting the link between the obverse and the Bactrian “tradition” started by the series of Eucratides and continued by the Yuezhi period Eucratides imitations. Even more significant were the links he focused upon for the reverse typology, partly indebted to the same (Graeco-)Bactrian heritage of the obverse, but largely following southern—i.e. originating south of the Hindukush—patterns. Thus, the mounted king with Nike on the tetradrachm reverse was explicitly connected to the analogous image found on tetradrachms of Gondophares,⁴⁸ and the standing king of the obols to the figure of the ruler receiving the ring of investiture from a female deity on tetradrachms of Zeionises.⁴⁹ These links are of crucial importance, and Cribb rightly stressed that the ultimately Parthian origin of some fea-

⁴⁴ A combination in which the interpretation of the written sources has a prominent place, of course, as eminently shown by the discussion on the location of the *yabgus* reported by Chinese sources, which has seen a revival in the last couple of decades (Grenet 2006; Yang 2016; Falk 2018). The differences in the results indicate that the problems are still numerous. Needless to say, archaeology must also be included, although the evidence for the Yuezhi period essentially comes from burials. As a matter of fact, each discipline has its own set of problems, largely due to the limits of the evidence, as clearly visible here with regard to the discussion of the numismatic documentation. The question that risks being overlooked is that combining historical interpretation of written sources, archaeology and numismatics does not *per se* resolve their specific difficulties, and often it merely results in adding together problems from different disciplines without fully realizing it.

⁴⁵ On the Heraios imitations, see Bopearachchi 1991, 112–125; Bopearachchi 1997. On their attribution see also the references cited in note 88 below.

⁴⁶ Here one could, in theory, argue that the dating of the Heraios imitations is questionable. Indeed, their absolute dating is tentative, although in the context of the discussion here, a chronology modified by a few years changes nothing, as their relative placement in the numismatic history of the region is secure. On the chronology of these series see Bopearachchi 1991, 112–125; Bopearachchi 1997; Bopearachchi 1999, 114–139.

⁴⁷ Cribb 1993, 120–125.

⁴⁸ Cribb 1993, 122–123.

⁴⁹ Cribb 1993, 122.

tures, such as the mounted king with Nike of the tetradrachms, does not translate into a direct Arsacid Parthian source, because they entered Kushan imagery from Gondopharid coin iconography, which had, of course, absorbed Arsacid Parthian elements yet had also partly merged them with Saka motifs. Senior posited instead that the “Heraios” tetradrachm horseman should be recognized as the source for the Gondopharid image,⁵⁰ rather than the other way round, which, although never properly focused on in the literature, fits much better the commonly held scenario of a north-to-south progress of the early Kushans and of Kujula. Cribb had already put forward enough arguments to make this hypothesis untenable, aptly observing that “it is possible to explain precisely how the Gondophares’ design was created, without reference to the ‘Heraus’ coinage, but not the other way round.”⁵¹ Yet, it may be worth adding a couple of remarks, also in the light of the fact that Senior published his work nearly a decade after Cribb’s article.⁵² We have already seen the diffusion in Bactria of the pseudo-countermarked drachms modelled on drachms of the Arsacid Phraates IV. The lack of any feature coming from standard Arsacid drachm typology on early Kushan coins appears to confirm that there was no direct line of transmission from the Arsacid to the early Kushan iconographic repertoire, and the possibility that the Nike-crowning-the-king motif could appear in early Kushan Bactria independently from the Arsacid Parthian developments is extremely unlikely, to say the least. Chorasmian evidence once again helps, due to the tetradrachms with the horseman on the reverse mentioned above: on the one hand we have a phenomenon of transmission of iconographic motifs from Arsacid Parthia to the Gondopharids, and from there to the early Kushan series of “Heraios,” which, in their turn, transmitted them to Chorasmia, giving shape to a perfectly coherent linear sequence: from west to east, and then, in two bounds, from south to north. On the other hand, Senior’s scenario requires that the horseman with Nike created in Bactria, having nothing to do with Arsacid Parthia, was transmitted northwards to Chorasmia as well as to the Gondopharids south of the Hindukush, the latter having in the meantime never been in contact with similar imagery coming from western Iran. There is no need to disturb Ockam to see which hypothesis can be accepted and which one must be rejected.

Thus, a strong southern influx can be detected in the typology of the Bactrian coinage of “Heraios.” This is indeed even stronger if we return to the obverse effigy, setting it in the context of the local post-Greek royal iconography. Following Rosenfield,⁵³ Cribb noted the similarity of the image of “Heraios” to those of “Zeionises, Rajavula, Nahapana and Chastana.”⁵⁴ The argument was not developed further, perhaps because the general interpretation at the time was that Saka and Yuezhi were so different as to be clearly distinguishable even iconographically. However, this paradigm can be challenged in favour of a close kinship between Saka and Yuezhi, who actually had a com-

⁵⁰ Senior 2001, I: 147.

⁵¹ Cribb 1993, 122–123.

⁵² Moreover, the direction in the transmission of iconographic features between Gondophares and “Heraios” can still be misunderstood in more recent studies, such as Falk (2018, 6), where Gondophares is said to have changed the facing of his reverse image in addition to provide it with a flying Nike somehow reacting to “Heraios” tetradrachms.

⁵³ Rosenfield 1967, 17.

⁵⁴ Cribb 1993, 121.

mon approach to royal iconography and portraiture, first developed by the Saka of Sistan and Arachosia into a proper “tradition,” then shared by the Yuezhi.⁵⁵ In the light of this, the similarity of the “Heraios” effigy to those listed by Rosenfield and Cribb is only natural, and, while the general features of the image of the ruler were shared in the framework of the employment of a royal iconography introduced by the kings of the so-called Azes dynasty, the bust of “Heraios” is especially close to that of Rajuvula, who used a similar depiction for the obverse of his drachms with Pallas on the reverse.⁵⁶ While such links must not be seen as the only possible source, as these images were spread in different media,⁵⁷ one could therefore readily say, with a simplification merely for the sake of better “visualizing” the point, that the “Heraios” series combined an obverse bust modelled on that of Rajuvula with reverses inspired by the series of Gondophares for the tetradrachms and those of Zeionises for the obols.

The question that now requires to be dealt with is how these southern images reached Bactria to appear on “Heraios” coins, because the implications are manifold and impact in a crucial way on several issues, from, e.g., the relationship between the “Heraios” series and those of Kujula, to that between the two sides of the Hindukush in the Yuezhi period, to the direction of Kushan expansion between Bactria and Northwestern India.

A possible solution is imagining that “Heraios” copied these types directly from coins that arrived in Bactria from the south. Kujula’s series with a Roman head on the obverse shows that the hypothesis of an inspiration provided by a completely external source is absolutely possible, but the case of “Heraios” is somehow different, and it must be put in its context. As we have seen, the northern location of “Heraios,” i.e. along the northern bank of the Amu Darya, is heavily dependent on the known findspots of his coins. While we have highlighted the problems in the connected reconstruction of a limited circulation for these coins, it is worth discussing the consequent implications by tackling the problem from precisely that point of view, which is indeed the commonly accepted one. So, the same scholars who postulate that the findspots of “Heraios” coins allow us to precisely locate the relevant place of issue and thus his territorial domain, narrowing them down to one or the other single valley among those of the northern tributaries of the Amu Darya, at the same time imply that coins struck on another weight standard must have reached Bactria to provide the models for “Heraios” series. It is important to focus precisely on the terms of the question: we have on the same side a quite rigid concept of the relationship between the circulation of silver coins (that are, in fact, normally associated with at least regional circulation) and the place of striking, and, closely linked to this, the need to assume that coins which were certainly not produced to circulate north of the Hindukush, such as the Saka and Gondopharid ones struck on an Indian weight

⁵⁵ Sinisi 2020. Yet the Yuezhi, in their transition to an imperial dimension with the birth of the Kushan empire, did not simply use the same patterns, but elaborated them in a process of selection aimed at creating an immediately recognizable image, clearly set apart from the Saka one of their origins, see Sinisi 2020, 387–388.

⁵⁶ Senior 2001, II: 126–127, nos. 151–152. The image of Rajuvula is actually closer to a head, rather than a bust (although at times something more than the neck alone is visible). At any rate, Rajuvula was the only Saka ruler who did not use a full-length depiction on his obverses, and this is what matters here.

⁵⁷ See Sinisi 2020, 384, fig. 7b for a relief from Butkara with two Saka noblemen depicted in a very similar posture to the standing prince on the reverses of Zeionises’ coins with “investiture scene” and of “Heraios” obols.

standard, had arrived in the valleys north of the Amu Darya,⁵⁸ where they inspired the engravers working on “Heraios” coins. I think that the fundamental contradiction in the approach is evident enough, with no need for further comments,⁵⁹ and one is only left to wonder why a wider circulation in Bactria for the Bactrian series of “Heraios” is not imagined when Indian coins are assumed to have crossed the Hindukush northwards into a different circulation area.

Taking into account that we know imitation Eucratides obols with the name of Kujula⁶⁰ and momentarily leaving aside the problems connected with the reconstruction of the circulation of the silver series of “Heraios,” sticking to the traditional reconstruction means that the Kushans began with this prince along the Amu Darya in southern Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. For reasons which cannot be clarified, while still a *yabgu*, he decided to inaugurate a coinage that drastically departed from the imitation series of Graeco-Bactrian kings commonly struck by the Yuezhi, and used for the purpose images of southern derivation taken from coins that had arrived by mere chance in the Oxus region, crossing the Hindukush and then Bactria. After that, we would have Kujula succeeding “Heraios.” In Bactria, Kujula discarded his predecessor’s approach and reverted to imitating Graeco-Bactrian issues, as primarily shown by the obols mentioned above, which are the only Bactrian coins bearing Kujula’s name.⁶¹ Since his main striking activity is attested south of the Hindukush, Kujula is supposed to have then crossed the mountain range to begin his conquests there starting from the Paropamisadae, imitating earlier local coinages in the process as well as striking a few original series.⁶²

It is here that we need to consider the two Indian copper coins bearing the types of “Heraios” that Cribb ascribed to Kujula, because their interpretation can lead to very different conclusions depending on the starting premises. Indeed, their most salient feature is not so much the legend, but the types, i.e. the images, which establish a tight connection to “Heraios” Bactrian tetradrachms regardless of the inscriptions, since, apart from the style, the obverse and reverse of the two series are identical. Assuming for the sake of the discussion that the Prakrit legend is not legible to the point of confirming the presence of Kujula’s name, we can explore all the possible scenarios.

⁵⁸ It is not possible here to verify the point with a systematic survey of the relevant literature, but I strongly doubt that coins of Gondophares or of Zeionises have ever been found in any of the river valleys north of the Amu Darya (an argument that has some weight if the approach to the whole question is strictly based on the actual findspots).

⁵⁹ One could take an alternative approach and consider the import of southern images in “Heraios” typology the result of the presence of craftsmen coming from the south rather than of the copying of designs from coins. While there is no way to exclude the possibility with any certainty, it must be stressed that, leaving aside the “Heraios” coinage, there is no sign of any southern feature in other series struck in Bactria before the Kushans, and nothing comparable can be seen in the imitations of Graeco-Bactrian series, including those ascribed to Kujula, nor in those of Arsacid Parthian series, nor in the new coinages such as that of the so-called Sapadbizes group. Thus, we would have to imagine that, after crossing the Hindukush, Bactria and the Oxus, these alleged southern craftsmen ended up only working somewhere between the valley of the Kafirigan and that of the Vakhsh. It seems to me extremely unlikely. For the additional problems regarding the chronology of this scenario see below note 70.

⁶⁰ MacDowall – Wilson 1970, 226; Staviski 1986, 136; Alram 1986, 299–300, no. 1271.

⁶¹ Kujula is also attributed some other anonymous imitation series, such as those in copper imitating the silver imitations of Heliocles, see Jongeward – Cribb – Donovan 2015, 24, 29, nos. 31–36.

⁶² Jongeward – Cribb – Donovan 2015, 22.

To begin with, it is worth departing from the traditional reconstruction summarized above. A first question to deal with is how to consider this copper series. One could assimilate it to the other coin series that Kujula struck south of the Hindukush continuing earlier coinages, for which the definition of *imitations* is commonly used. Thus, Kujula might have imitated “Heraios.” Yet, the reason why the series of Kujula are labelled as imitations is that they imitated pre-existing coinages for continuity reasons *in loco*, which is not what happened with the series that we are discussing: what would be the point in Kujula issuing coins in Kashmir imitating Bactrian coins that never circulated south of the Hindukush? This is even more striking when we consider that, according to the terms of the common reconstruction, Kujula did not issue any series bearing these types in Bactria, which is the only place where it would have made sense to imitate “Heraios.” There are other issues that could be added, such as the strong southern connotation of “Heraios” types, but even without considering them, the weakness of this scenario is already easy to see.⁶³

Likewise clear is that the opposite hypothesis of “Heraios” imitating Kujula suffers from an analogous problem,⁶⁴ due to the different geographical settings of the Bactrian silver tetradrachms and of the Indian copper ones, although this “direction” in the movement of the types employed on both series at least appears more coherent. Thus, the more than close typological similarity between the Bactrian series of “Heraios” and the Indian copper tetradrachms does not support the hypothesis of two different issuers, one imitating the other’s series, hinting instead at the possibility that they might be identified as one and the same person. In other words, rather than dealing with a phenomenon of imitation, in one direction or the other, we are faced with the same prince issuing two different series with the same types struck in different places. It should not be difficult to agree that the latter scenario appears to be, indeed, the simplest one, enabling us to solve several problems. Now, considering that “Heraios” exists only thanks to the scholarly interpretation of the coin inscriptions that include this word in the Greek legend, whereas the name of Kujula is known from several sources, with coins playing a crucial but not exclusive role, it is easy to see how we should identify the issuer of the so-called Heraios coinage: these coins were struck by Kujula and a Kushan ruler called Heraios—or Sanab—simply never existed. The reasons why Kujula did not include his name on these Bactrian coins remain unclear, unless we accept Cribb’s theory that KOPPANNOY was meant to represent Kushan as the king’s personal name.⁶⁵ Yet anonymous series

⁶³ Not by Senior (2001, I: 210), who followed a logic diametrically opposed to that adopted here, writing “why would a king issue two virtually identical coins, one in silver and the other in copper.” The answer is that they circulated in two different areas, and the one south of the Hindukush had gone through a deep process of debasement of its silver coinages, which, by Kujula’s time, had transformed into base metal issues.

⁶⁴ The hypothesis is included here only for the sake of the discussion, as it would require the insertion of a Kushan prince based only in Bactria between Kujula and Vima I, which appears impossible according to what we know today. Indeed, it corresponds to the old position of MacDowall – Wilson 1970 (cf. above, note 1), but nowadays no-one would identify “Heraios” with Soter Megas.

⁶⁵ Cribb 1993, 130–131. The question has several implications and cannot be fully discussed here. The closest comparison might perhaps be the name of Arsaces used by the Arsacids, who took it from the founder of the dynasty transforming it into a sort of dynastic name. Yet there are differences, and so far no “son of Arsaces” is known as a title comparable to that of *Kushanaputro* attested by the inscription on the statue of Vima II at Mat (cf. Cribb 1993, 131, with references). If Kushan was a personal name of Kujula Kadphises,

were struck by the Kushans even later, as those inscribed with the title of Soter Megas eminently show,⁶⁶ and this does not represent an insurmountable problem for the attribution of the coins under discussion here.

The point that remains to be addressed is in which phase of the reign of Kujula these series were issued, as his main striking activity took place south of the Hindukush. In this connection it is worth briefly considering the picture of the Yuezhi domains. According to current reconstructions, the Yuezhi crossed the Hindukush and entered the Paropamisadae around 70 BCE, where they started to strike imitations of the last local Indo-Greek king, Hermaios.⁶⁷ This coinage was produced for a long time, continuing up to the time of Kujula, who included his name in the legends of the last ones of such series.⁶⁸ Now, regardless of the opinions on the identity of “Heraios,” there is general agreement on placing the beginnings of Kujula’s reign north of the Oxus,⁶⁹ from whence he started the Kushan expansion. Thus, he is supposed to have managed to cross the Oxus and very quickly get hold of Bactria, at least the part of it that could allow a direct connection to the crossings of the Hindukush through which the Paropamisadae could be accessed, after which he would have first subjugated the Yuezhi already established there, and then started to expand his rule in nearby territories, wresting them from Gondopharid kings and Saka satraps, as his coin series allow us to see. While his rule south of the Hindukush is attested by several different coin series, which either continued earlier coinages or introduced new types, his Bactrian phase is visible in the obols inscribed with his name, in addition to the so-called “Heraios” coinage and the other series imitating Graeco-Bactrian issues. Yet, if we try to imagine how all this could fit into a timeline for his reign, the impression of a sort of unbalance between the region north of the Hindukush, where he is supposed to have spent the first stages of his reign, and that south of the mountains, where coins show us an intensive activity and a presence of Kujula extended through time, gradually enlarging his domains, is clear. When we focus on some problematic points, the difficulties and the question marks increase in quantity. All the quick southward expansion of Kujula from the valleys north of the Amu Darya should take into account a minimum time frame for the Gondopharid and Saka coin types to become known in Bactria in order to provide the model for his “Heraios” coinage, but the various overstrikes that help us to chronologically place Kujula within the 1st century CE tie him with those same rulers south of the Hindukush by means of his coin series struck there: how would he be able to use their coin types as a model in the Oxus region at the beginning of his reign if his coins south of the Hindukush—which must be considered to be-

one is left to wonder why the pattern of use of his names is not consistent, as at times both Kushan and Kujula (Kadphises) appear together in the same legend, for example. My impression is, moreover, that an inescapable result of Cribb’s hypothesis would be that no *Kushan yabgu* could exist before Kujula (whereas other *yabgus* known from Chinese literary sources are attested by Chinese bamboo slips dated to the third quarter of the 1st century BCE, see below note 74 for the references). The same holds true for the idea of Senior (2001, I: 210) to ascribe the “Heraios” coinage to a prince called Kushan well before Kujula.

⁶⁶ See Cribb 2015 for the latest treatment, with references. Significantly, some of these series might have been struck by Kujula himself later in his reign, if Cribb is followed (on the question of the anonymity of the Soter Megas series, see in particular Cribb 2015, 109).

⁶⁷ Bopearachchi 1991, 112–125; Bopearachchi 1997.

⁶⁸ Bopearachchi 1991, 124–125, Groupe IX; Jongeward – Cribb – Donovan 2015, 30–33, nos. 44–84.

⁶⁹ Either as successor of “Heraios” or as issuer of the “Heraios” coinage.

long to a later phase if we stick to the traditional view exposed above—are connected by overstrikes to those kings whose series inspired his “Heraios” coins? The problems are not only numismatic in nature,⁷⁰ but also involve other levels pertaining to the territorial organization of Yuezhi period Bactria: how are we to imagine it in the light of the Yuezhi presence in the Paropamisadae from c. 70 BCE? Who were—i.e. which *yabgu* were they subject to—the Yuezhi established in the Paropamisadae since 70 BCE?

These are crucial questions which appear, however, far from being properly addressed in the literature. The point is totally neglected even in the discussion on the location of the five Yuezhi *yabgu* revamped in the last fifteen years.⁷¹ The debate revolved around the interpretation of the references in the Chinese annals, involving coins only with reference to the location of the Kushan *yabgu* inferred from the distribution of the “Heraios” coins findspots, giving the impression of completely ignoring the consensus, which has been general among numismatists for decades, that the Hermaios imitations in the Paropamisadae are to be ascribed to the Yuezhi. Even Falk, who appears to at least partly agree that “before Kujula’s takeover the Kushans had expanded deep into southern regions,”⁷² expressly wrote that “For a re-evaluation of the extent and nature of the Yuezhi realm before Kujula mainly literary material is at our disposition,”⁷³ praising the reliability of the authors of ancient sources from the Mediterranean to China but never touching on the numismatic evidence provided by the series of Hermaios imitations.

In fact, contrary to the indications resulting from the scholarly interpretations of the Chinese chronicles,⁷⁴ the presence of non-Greek intruders in the Paropamisadae from c. 70 BCE is an objective fact attested to by the hard evidence provided by the Hermaios imitations,⁷⁵ which should not only find its rightful place in the discussion, but ought to also be considered of crucial importance and prioritized as coins represent a primary source that certainly precedes the Chinese reports in the hierarchy of the sources available to us.⁷⁶ Therefore, the fact that by c. 70 BCE the Yuezhi had, at least in some parts, crossed the Oxus and reached the southern boundaries of Bactria on the Hindukush should be considered as the starting point in the discussion. It is true that, in theory, one could still claim that it was the Yuezhi royal clan who controlled these southern territories in Bactria rather than one or more of the *yabgu*. Yet this would, in fact, create more difficulties, as the Yuezhi royal court is originally said to be north of the Oxus by the

⁷⁰ Those of a numismatic nature include the question on how coin designs of southern origin reached Bactria. The chronology of the series of Kujula in the south and the context that they define make it quite unlikely—to say the least—that these designs could be brought to Bactria by craftsmen coming from the south. Cf. also note 59.

⁷¹ Grenet 2006; Yang 2016; Falk 2018.

⁷² Falk 2018, 4. The location of the fourth *yabgu* according to the Chinese sources is interpreted by Falk (2018, 33–34) either as Balkh or Bamiyan.

⁷³ Falk 2018, 3.

⁷⁴ Chinese documents such as the inscribed bamboo slips from Gansu (references provided by Grenet 2006, 339, note 39 and, updated to successive studies, in Falk 2015, 68–69) are in another class, and could be much more useful. Yet fewer than a handful of them mentioning the Yuezhi are known so far.

⁷⁵ Since it is hard to believe that Greeks would have struck just imitation series modelled on those of Hermaios.

⁷⁶ At the same time, the inferences that the evidence provided by the Hermaios imitations allows to be made can be considered as definitely better grounded than those resulting from the current picture offered by the findspots of the “Heraios” coinage.

Shiji,⁷⁷ meaning that on its transfer to the south, we would have an unlikely exchange of territories between the court and the *yabgus*, considering that the latter are generally located north of the Amu Darya by scholars.⁷⁸

When all this is considered, there is only one scenario that seems to hold everything together, although it requires us to turn upside down a crucial assumption. If we abandon the premise that Kujula started his reign along the Oxus, an idea that we have seen is based on a debatable reconstruction of the circulation of silver coins in Bactria, there is no need to place him in a northern, i.e. Bactrian, context at the beginning of his rule. On the evidence of his varied striking activity there, Kujula might therefore be considered to have hailed from the southernmost Yuezhi territory *south of the Hindukush*,⁷⁹ by the early 1st century CE leading those of the Yuezhi who had first crossed the mountain range nearly a century before. Contacts with Gondopharid rulers and Saka satraps were an everyday affair there, and would easily explain how types inspired by their coin series could enter the iconographic repertoire of Kushan die-engravers. While the expansion of Kujula in this region has been repeatedly touched on in the literature, thus requiring no special comment here, the place of Bactria in the picture changes. The regions north of the Hindukush became part of Kujula's domain only in a second stage, when he led the Kushans northwards, where his predecessors came from, to unite all of the Yuezhi groups in a single empire. Once in Bactria, in addition to continuing some of the imitation coinages there, Kujula struck the imitation Eucratides obols with his name on, as well as the "Heraios" coinage,⁸⁰ on which his engravers employed types that originated in the south, in line with his new series there, such as that with the Roman head on the obverse, which exhibit the royal iconography of Saka derivation also shared by the early Kushans.

Of course this is a short synthesis, and the stages of the Kushan expansion against the other Yuezhi *yabgus* should be addressed in more detail considering new premises, if this reconstruction is accepted. Following single steps is not easy, as a criterion that immediately springs to mind, such as the evolution of the titulature, cannot be applied so straightforwardly, since some series simultaneously bear the titles of *yabgu* and that of king.⁸¹ One of these issues is that of "Heraios" coppers, on which "Great King, King of Kings" is used in Prakrit and the word HIAOY is supposed to be included in the Greek inscription on the reverse. It goes without saying that we do not necessarily have to imagine the progress of the conquests of Kujula as a linear process, and it is perfectly possible that he moved north of the Hindukush after a first expansion in the south, to focus again on the latter in a successive moment to acquire further territories.⁸² In other

⁷⁷ Thierry 2005, 457–459, 490–491.

⁷⁸ Notwithstanding the whole question on the nature of Yuezhi royal power and its hypothetical existence by the early 1st century CE, see Grenet 2006, 339–340 for a few considerations on the problem and some possible scenarios.

⁷⁹ It is not to be excluded that these Yuezhi maintained a foothold in Bactria on the northern side of the mountain range. Indeed, that would be the most likely scenario.

⁸⁰ Cf. MacDowall – Wilson 1970, 226–227, where a sequence is imagined with the imitation Eucratides obols inscribed with the name of Kujula *followed* by the "Heraios" obols based on the transition from imitation to original types.

⁸¹ Jongeward – Cribb – Donovan 2015, 32, nos. 70–72.

⁸² In a similar scenario, he might well have issued different series in the same place, such as his "Heraios" copper coinage in Kashmir, which is the "prototype" for the corresponding Bactrian tetradrachms, then followed by the bull/camel series with his name.

words, there is no reason to think that all the regions that were conquered by Kujula south of the Hindukush had to be already under his control when he turned to Bactria.⁸³

Moreover, we cannot exclude the possibility that the subjugation of Yuezhi Bactria and nearby territory in the north required some time, and may even not have been accomplished in full by Kujula, especially in the west,⁸⁴ where the so-called dynasty of Sapadbizes, probably one of the non-Kushan Yuezhi groups,⁸⁵ appears to have been located.⁸⁶ It is, for example, tempting to see in this light the employment on coins that Kujula’s successor struck in Bactria with the name of Soter Megas of a bust wearing the Graeco-Bactrian helmet of Eucratides which had prominently marked the obverses of the coins of the Sapadbizes group as well as the Eucratides imitations long struck in the region by the Yuezhi.

This scenario would also fit with the emergence of a stronger Bactrian characterization of the Kushans in a phase later than the initial one of Kujula, as witnessed, e.g., by the history of Bactrian as the Kushan official language between Vima I and Kanishka. One could even be tempted to connect with this background some specific features of Kushan culture, such as the role of the god that from Kanishka onwards will be labelled on coins as Wesh, whose connection with the world of the mountain deities of the Indo-Iranian borderlands is clearly visible in his iconographic physiognomy: in all likelihood he is the god that is “hidden” behind the image of Heracles on the imitations of Hermaios struck by Kujula.⁸⁷

As is evident, the basic hypothesis proposed here rests on the identification as Yuezhi of the issuers of Hermaios’ imitations, which is generally accepted in the studies that have touched on the topic in the last decades.⁸⁸ Senior has proposed an alternative scenario,⁸⁹ assigning these coins to the Saka who had advanced southwards from Bactria at the

⁸³ Cf. Grenet 2006, 333–334.

⁸⁴ As already suggested by, e.g., Staviski 1986, 140, although he referred to the area of Termez and the valley of the Surkhan Darya. As is evident, the question is to agree on what is meant by the definition of “western Bactria”.

⁸⁵ Rtveladze 1993/1994; Jongeward – Cribb – Donovan 2015, 21.

⁸⁶ Although it is currently impossible to establish a precise chronology of the so-called Sapadbizes group, of course. E. V. Rtveladze (2011, with references, including his earlier works on the subject) wrote of an “abundant amount of evidence indicating that the sphere of Parthian influence (if not of direct subordination) encompassed a large portion of the Oxus valley possibly extending as far east as Termez,” especially in the time of Phraates IV (Rtveladze 2011, 158), but see Gorin 2010, 122–124 for an opposite approach. While the link seen by Rtveladze (2011, 159) between the image of Phraates IV on his coins and the prince depicted at Khalchayan identified as a Parthian king can be comfortably excluded (on this point see Sinisi 2017, 884, note 147), it is evident that we are faced with a series of problems in the definitions we use which we still have to disentangle, from topography (see above note 84) to chronology, to the terminology employed in discussing the numismatic evidence, to mention just a few.

⁸⁷ Cf. Jongeward – Cribb – Donovan 2015, 282–283, who wrote that “the representation of Heracles on the coins of Kujula Kadphises ... may also refer to Oesho.” It is worth stressing that the introduction of Heracles on these coins was due to Kujula, as the Hermaios imitations had Zeus on their reverses, following their original model. Thus it is more than likely that the iconography of Heracles was adapted to depict a deity that was significant to the Kushans, i.e. a *Kushan* god, rather than employed to portray the Greek Heracles. Grenet 2015, 206, identified the god with Śiva. For the series, see Jongeward – Cribb – Donovan 2015, 30–33, nos. 44–99.

⁸⁸ Cribb and Boppearachchi in Errington – Cribb 1992, 135; Cribb in Sims-Williams – Cribb 1995/1996, 122; Boppearachchi 1997, 190; Boppearachchi 1999, 114, 130; Alram 1999, 26–27; Cribb 1999, 188; Cribb 2020, 655, 660, however, speaks of Scythians.

⁸⁹ Senior 2000, 1–2, 68; Senior 2001, I: 11, 39–47.

beginning of the 1st century BCE,⁹⁰ in the framework of a general interpretation that attributed to the Saka a good part of the imitations of Graeco-Bactrian series that other scholars normally ascribe to the Yuezhi. According to Senior, around 75 BCE these same Saka issued the initial coinage of the Vonones family in Gandhara, the latter series sharing some monograms with some of the imitations of Hermaios. It is important to stress that Senior thinks that the Kushans did not belong to the Yuezhi but were of Scythian stock,⁹¹ and that in any case he agrees with the common interpretation on the stages of Kujula's expansion south of the Hindukush, as, in his reconstruction, the Kushans are also assumed to have arrived there from the north led personally by Kujula.⁹² Without discussing all the points touched upon by Senior, it is worth underlining that the differentiation that he made between Yuezhi and Kushans was based on the old paradigm that considers Yuezhi and Saka as ethno-culturally distinct,⁹³ only applied to the reconstruction from a different point of view, so to speak. Since this notion may be rejected in favour of a fundamental similarity of Saka and Yuezhi, who were distinct only in "political-tribal" terms,⁹⁴ it is not of real importance in this discussion as it does not modify the substance, not to mention the fact that, in any case, the progress of Kujula from the alleged Kushan original seat north of the Oxus to the Paropamisadae was imagined by Senior exactly in the same terms as are found elsewhere.

Indeed, the problem is not so much from whom Kujula wrestled control of the Paropamisadae coming from the north, but if he really came from the north or not. In providing an answer we must bear in mind that if Kujula is denied a presence in the Paropamisadae already *at the beginning* of his reign, all the problems of finding a correspondence between his takeover of the region—that we ought therefore to imagine as astonishingly quick, considering that he is supposed to have moved from the northern bank of the Amu Darya—from his predecessors there and the development of his coin series stand as set out above.⁹⁵ This also creates huge difficulties for possible variants of the scenario proposed here based on, e.g., the idea of Kujula being installed in part of Bactria south of the Amu Darya and from there invading the territory of another *yabgu* across the Hindukush before returning northwards. Seen in this light, it makes little difference whether Kujula is imagined wrestling control of the Paropamisadae from other Yuezhi or from a Saka group, as the former choice guarantees no better results.

All in all, once the field is cleared of Heraios as a separate figure, we can see that Kujula's Bactrian issues amount to two original series, i.e. those of "Heraios," and one of imitation obols inscribed with his name, plus some anonymous imitation series. South of the Hindukush he issued roughly twice this number of series, i.e. as many as four original

⁹⁰ The attribution to the Saka of the posthumous Hermaios series was already proposed by Dobbins 1970, based on quite weak arguments (convincingly countered in Alram 1999, 26–28). Senior's proposal undoubtedly has a broader character. Cf. above fn. 88 for the current position of Cribb (in his 2020 article).

⁹¹ Senior 2000, 1.

⁹² Senior 2000, 2.

⁹³ The plane of this distinction is problematic in itself. This said, the generalized idea was that of the Saka as Iranian, "Europoid" nomads, in opposition to the Eastern Central Asian Yuezhi, often described in the literature as exhibiting "Mongolian" physical features. On the discussion and its limits, see Sinisi 2020.

⁹⁴ Sinisi 2020.

⁹⁵ Thus, from this perspective the approach to the problem of who issued the imitations of Hermaios is turned upside down, as the placing of Kujula becomes one of the possible departing points in the discussion.

ones (“Heraios” copper tetradrachms; Roman head/seated king; king cross-legged/Zeus; the so-called Macedonian soldier issue),⁹⁶ two main imitation series bearing his name (Hermaios imitations and bull/camel), one of which may be subdivided into three sub-series according to the evolution of the legends, plus at least two imitation series in the sole name of Hermaios.⁹⁷ Had not the debate been conditioned by what Cribb has called “the false start,”⁹⁸ with Heraios as a separate figure and the urge to find in the coinage so inscribed a match for the reports of the Chinese sources, it would have been not too difficult to ascribe these series to Kujula and intuitive to consider the latter’s context centred in the south, i.e. in the Paropamisadae, rather than north of the Amu Darya.⁹⁹

All this does not mean that the reports of the Chinese sources on the *yabgus* are of no use. Once the Kushan unifier of the Yuezhi *yabgus* is freed from the tight link with the river valleys of the northern tributaries of the Amu Darya which reflected our partial understanding of post-Greek coin circulation, there is no need to think that the picture described by the *Hanshu* and the *Hou Hanshu* must refer to the period of the birth of the Kushan empire and the end of the *yabgus*. It is entirely possible that it might recount an earlier stage of the Yuezhi history between the visit of Zhang Qian and their entry in the Paropamisadae around 70 BCE.

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⁹⁶ Actually, a fair number of Kujula’s series would be better defined as “hybrid,” as they mix imitation and new types on the two coin faces, as visible, e.g., with the issue with king sitting cross-legged/Zeus as well as with the Hermaios imitations bearing Heracles on the reverse.

⁹⁷ See Jongeward – Cribb – Donovan 2015, 21–37 for a recent presentation.

⁹⁸ Cribb 1993, 108.

⁹⁹ In fact, this is all the more true with “Heraios” kept distinct from Kujula, as the only indisputable evidence for the latter north of the Hindukush is the single specimen known for the series of Eucratides imitation obols inscribed with Kujula’s name.

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