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FEMALE EUERGETISM IN GANDHĀRA: INVESTIGATING LOCAL EVIDENCE

ASHWINI LAKSHMINARAYANAN

ABSTRACT · This article focuses on donative inscriptions from ancient Gandhāra (broadly present-day north-western Pakistan and northern Afghanistan), a key region located between the east and the west during the first centuries CE. Two local dynasties, the Apracarājas and the Oḍirājas, successfully controlled key valleys within Gandhāra and consolidated their power using political, cultural, and religious strategies. They donated to local Buddhist institutions and publicised their generosity by recording their benefactions. While Gandhāra's relationship with the Hellenistic world has been commonly emphasised in the study of its material remains, mainly its artistic production, it begs the question of how its interconnectivity with its neighbouring regions such as Bactria played a role in shaping other aspects of local culture. In rethinking the Buddhist donative practices of the two local kingdoms, this study adopts a holistic approach by considering the evidence within its religious and cultural *milieu* and by drawing parallels to euergetism, the practice of gift-giving that was widespread in the Hellenic world.

KEYWORDS · Gandhāra, Patronage, Women, Euergetism, Buddhism.

ALEXANDER's final conquests in Arachosia, Bactria, Sogdiana, and the Indus valley between 330-325 BCE led to intensive contacts between Hellenic and local cultures in the far east. As his successors in Asia, the Seleucids maintained diplomatic, economic, and military ties within the Eurasian networks including with the Indian Mauryan king Chandragupta. This allowed their empire to become an important player on the routes linking Mesopotamia to the Indus Valley. Chandragupta Maurya's grandson, Aśoka (c. 269-232 BCE), is widely believed to have introduced Buddhism from the Gangetic Valley to Gandhāra, where it subsequently became one of the major religious forces in the Indic Northwest. Subsequently, the Greco-Bactrians, Indo-Greeks and Indo-Parthian, and Indo-Scythian kings began to make successful military forays into Gandhāra until they were replaced by the Kuṣāṇa king Kujula Kadphises.¹ During this period of tumultuous political change, the Apracarājas in Bajaur Valley and the Oḍirājas in the Swāt Valley emerged as local potentates and shaped trade and mainstream Buddhist practices (c. 65 BCE-60 CE). When the Kuṣāṇa power

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This article presents a part of the results of my PhD thesis titled 'Gender in Gandhāra art (first till the fourth centuries CE)' supported by the Sapienza Università di Roma International PhD Fellowship. It was defended on 12/05/2023 and supervised by Prof. Marco Galli. A forthcoming monograph *Gender in Gandhāra art: Representations and Interactions in the Buddhist context (1st-4th centuries CE)* will include many aspects that are not presented in this article due to space constraints. I am extremely grateful to Prof. Galli for his valuable feedback throughout my research. I also extend my gratitude to the anonymous peer reviewers for their comments which improved my work. All mistakes are my own.

¹ For a survey of the chronological, political, and familial alliances between the different political entities, see E. Errington - V.S. Curtis, *Part 2: Constructing the Past*, in E. Errington (Ed.), *From Persepolis to the Punjab. Exploring Ancient Iran Afghanistan and Pakistan*, London 2007, 57-66.

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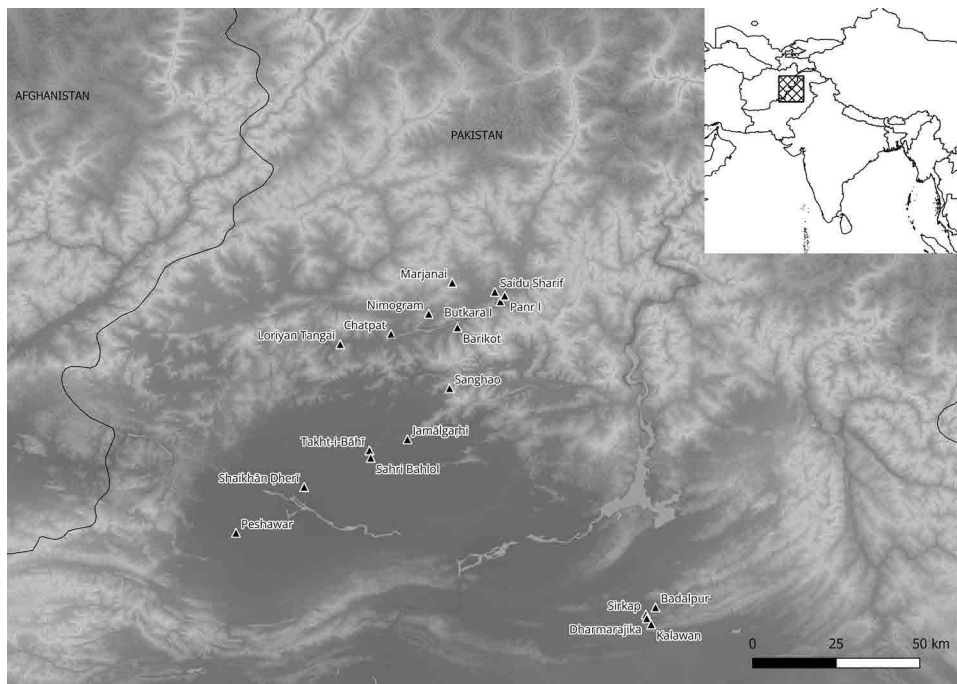
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rapidly expanded into Gandhāra and Central India, the two local kingdoms' political allegiance to the greater Kuṣāṇa empire may have helped stabilise their power and wealth (MAP 1).²



MAP 1. Kushan empire at the time of Kaniṣka I c. 127 CE
(Drawing by author; After Asia Society 2020).

The two local kingdoms – the Apraca and the Oḍi – are the focus of the present article. Due to the scarcity of detailed records, discerning the ethnic and political identity of the two kingdoms poses numerous problems.³ However, recent developments based on emerging Gāndhārī (an early Middle Indo-Aryan language written in Kharoṣṭhī script) Buddhist donative inscriptions and manuscripts permit us to understand crucial information regarding their lineage and administration.⁴ Nonethe-

² For western textual references to Kuṣāṇas, see e.g., Strabo xi 8, 2; Just. *prolog.* 42; Ptol. *geo.* vi 11, 6.

³ For example, the lack of extensive excavations in Bajaur has confounded the problem of identifying the exact geographical area ruled by the Apracarājas. Based on inscribed reliquary bases, two branches of the line existed with one in Bajaur and another in Peshawar. For a detailed discussion, see M. Skinner - R. Wannaporn, *Locating the Apraca Dynasty: New Evidence for an Old Problem*, in L. Greaves - A. Hardy (Eds.), *Religion, Society, Trade and Kingship: Art and Archaeology in South Asia and along the Silk Road 5500 BCE-5th Century CE*, New Delhi 2016, 151-164. For the institutional relationships within the kingdoms see R. Salomon, *Dynastic and institutional connections in the pre-and early Kusana period: New manuscript and epigraphic evidence*, in D. Srinivasan (Ed.), *On the Cusp of an Era: Art in the Pre-Kuṣāṇa World*, Leiden 2007, 267-286.

⁴ Gāndhārī language appears as early as in the Aśokan period. It was also used during the Indo-Greek, Indo-Parthian, Indo-Scythian, and Kuṣāṇa periods. For a discussion on its development with Kharoṣṭhī, Brāhmī, Greek, and Aramaic, see e.g., G. Bühler, *The Origin of the Kharoṣṭhī Alphabet*, «Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes» 9, 1895, 44-66; G. Fussman, *Gāndhārī écrite, Gāndhārī parlée*, in C. Collette (Éd.), *Dialectes dans les littératures indo-aryennes*, Paris 1989, 433-501; H. Scharfe, *Kharoṣṭī and Brāhmī*, «Journal

less, it should be noted that fewer inscriptions related to the Oḍirājas have survived compared to the Apracarājas. For this reason, we know more about the Apracarājas than the Oḍirājas. Using the epigraphic corpus, we can conclude that the Apracarājas were closely allied with the Indo-Scythian Azes and became semi-independent local potentates around the first century BCE.⁵ Their kingdom was founded by Vijayamitra and the names of his successors, and their associated members have been preserved in over fifteen Buddhist donative inscriptions. On the other hand, the Oḍirājas ruled Uddiyāna, the ancient name for the Swat Valley. Out of three inscriptions associated with them, the Seṇavarma inscription is the longest and most detailed record related to the kingdom. The inscription states that the kingdom was founded by Bhaḍaseṇa and highlights the king's Ikṣvāku lineage related to the mythic wheel-turning king.⁶

The first section of this article provides an overview of the royal administration of Apracarājas and Oḍirājas by highlighting their relationship with their neighbours in Bactria and India. It outlines the political structure of the Apraca and Oḍi kingdoms by situating their epigraphic records within the broader historical context. The second section gives prominence to the role of female donors connected to the royal apparatus. Since this article is a first step in tracing the role of women in the donative sphere, the non-royal donors will not be detailed here and will form part of forthcoming publications. Despite the interpretative problems related to these inscriptions, to which only a general archaeological and chronological context is attributed, I suggest that we can identify some strategies adopted by donors to establish themselves within the religious sphere. Commonly, donative inscriptions connected to relics were interred within sacred buildings never seen again. However, monumental donations such as shrines, relief programmes and objects were sometimes clearly marked with the donative inscription.⁷ Regardless of their visibility (or the lack thereof), religious practices undertaken within the Buddhist sacred area may have kept the memory of donations alive within the community. To this end, the third and last section draws a parallel between the phenomena of female euergetism, as a widespread social practice and habitus in the Graeco-Roman World, and *dāna* (meaning gift or religious donation, synonymous later with *deyadhamma*), practised by the local Gandhāran kingdoms to Buddhist institutions (*saṃgha*). Thus, this article positions the benefactions of the Apraca and Oḍi royal female donors alongside the well-known political practice of sponsoring buildings, festivals, and goods by euergetic benefactors to enhance their political prestige in the Graeco-Roman world.

of the American Oriental Society» 122, 2002, 391-393; I. Strauch, *The Character of the Indian Kharoṣṭhī Script and the "Sanskrit Revolution": A Writing System between Identity and Assimilation*, in A. Voogt - J.F. Quack (Eds.), *The Idea of Writing*, Leiden 2011, 131-168.

⁵ For the association between the two political entities and the 'Azes era' recorded in inscriptions see H. Falk - C. Bennett, *Macedonian Intercalary Months and the Era of Azes*, «Acta Orientalia» 70, 2009, 197-216.

⁶ R. Salomon - S. Baums, *Sanskrit Ikṣvāku, Pali Okkāka, and Gandhari Iṣmaho*, «The Journal of the Pali Text Society» 29, 2007, 201-227.

⁷ For the argument that donative inscriptions are not records but rather an attempt by the donor to leave their presence in proximity of other more powerful presence, see G. Schopen, *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters: Still More Papers on Monastic Buddhism in India*, Honolulu 2004, 382-394.

1. "GREEK" OFFICES IN GANDHĀRA

Our knowledge of the administrative structures in Gandhāra before the first century BCE related to the Indo-Greek, Indo-Parthian, and Indo-Scythian kingdoms in Gandhāra is solely based on their coins.⁸ For example, Indo-Greek kings such as Menander I and Agathokles (c. 190-180 BCE) minted coins identifying themselves as both *basileus* in Greek and *rāja* in Kharoṣṭhī and Brāhmī legends. However, around the first century BCE, bureaucratic titles begin to appear in Buddhist donative inscriptions and reveal a mix of both Indic and Greek titles.⁹ The titles belonging to the latter category were not simply copied but were adapted in the local Gāndhārī language. This phenomenon suggests the deep enmeshment of Hellenic administrative structures with local affairs. In providing an overview of the Greek title, the subsequent discussions shows that we should be alert to the possibility that Greek official titles may have been borrowed to refer to locally developed offices distinct from their western counterparts.

As mentioned before, the epigraphic evidence is in large part related to the Apracarājas providing a fruitful starting point. The most common administrative title occurring in inscriptions related to the Apracarājas is *strategos* which has a long history in the political structures of the west.¹⁰ Already in fifth-century Athens, textual and epigraphic sources reveal that the *strategos* possessed both military power and political and responsibilities.¹¹ The earliest *stratego*i were appointed on an *ad hoc* basis depending on military necessities. By the fifth-century BCE, it was institutionalised, and regular positions in Attica appeared around the mid-fourth century BCE.¹² By

⁸ For the Indo-Parthian kingdom, Philostratus in the *Apollonius of Tyana* recorded the titular character's journey into Bactria and Gandhāra. He described the urban centres as having been built using the Hippodamian plan and stayed at the royal court of the Greek speaking local Parthian king (11 29-31). He participated in court rituals such as musical performances, banquets, and gymnastic activities. Needless to say, the account is not completely historical, and it is likely that Philostratus used known information and adapted it to his accounts, see R. Stoneman, *The Greek Experience of India*, Oxford 2019, 469.

⁹ I give references to these donative inscriptions based on the Corpus of Kharoṣṭhī inscription (CKI) numbers as they are more readily available online at <https://gandhari.org> (created by Andrew Glass and Stefan Baums). CKC and CKM are also available in the same catalogue and refer to legends on coins and manuscript fragments respectively.

¹⁰ The Gāndhārī equivalent is *seṇapati* and was used in the Seṇavarman inscription to invoke the presence of divine figures such as the twenty-eight *yakṣa* generals to protect the sacred monument established by the king (CKI 249).

¹¹ References to the title can be found in Hdt. 1 59, 4, Arist. *Ath. pol.* 17, 2 and by the sixth century BCE, they began to be appointed from the ten *phylai* (Arist. *Ath. pol.* 22, 2). For the role of the *stratego*i, see M. Piérart, *A propos de l'élection des stratèges athéniens*, BCH 98, 1974, 125-146; M.V. Hatzopoulos, *Macedonian Institutions under the Kings*, Athens 1996; C. Carsana, *Le dirigenze cittadine nello stato seleucidico* (Biblioteca di Athenaeum 30), Como 1996.

¹² The *stratego*i controlled activities related to military matters including training young citizens, dispatching colonists, and collecting military taxes. A leading *strategos* during this time was Pericles, who was also a rhetorician-politician. Due to the importance of the *stratego*i, the balance of the Athenian democracy was maintained by appointing multiple *stratego*i, to avoid tyranny. For military generals becoming tyrants, see Hdt. 1 59, 4, 1 61, 2-63, 2, Arist. *Ath. pol.* 14, 1, 15, 2-3, Plut. *Sol.* 15, 5-15, 1. For an overview of the office in Athens, see E.M. Harris, *The Rule of Law and Military Organisation in the Greek Polis*, in R. Potz - S. Kroissenbrunner - A. Hafner (Eds.), *State, law and religion in pluralistic societies. Austrian and Indonesian perspectives*, Austrian-Indonesian Dialogue Symposium, Vienna, 27-29 May, 2009, Vienna 2010, 406-418.

the Hellenistic period, increased territorial expansions brought further change in the administrative structures and the *strategos* developed into an important military post within the royal administration. This is the case in the Seleucid kingdom in which *strategoī* were appointed based on their personal relationship with the king,¹³ and they sometimes acted as the king's representatives in the outlying regions.¹⁴

The epigraphic evidence related to this title in Gandhāra presents a different picture. The Gāndhārī *stratega* appears on coins,¹⁵ dedicatory inscriptions,¹⁶ seals,¹⁷ and manuscripts dating between the first century BCE and the first century CE.¹⁸ The title is mentioned in the donative inscriptions of different donors and the wider familial, political, and religious network of some *strategoī* can be partially reconstructed. Based on the evidence, the function of the *strategos* in Gandhāra seems to be vastly different from the office in Classical and Hellenistic periods. Based on our knowledge of the Apracarāja family tree, it is possible to deduce that the heir of the Apracarāja held the office.¹⁹ Three inscriptions dating to different periods and stating that Vaga, Imḍavarma I and Āspavarma were *strategoī* confirm this hypothesis. The earliest inscription with this title is the Imḍavarma I inscription dated c. 5/6 CE.²⁰ It states that the *kumāra* (prince) Imḍavarma I, son of the former Apracarāja Viśuvarma, established a donation along with several members of his family and honoured his brother Vaga, the *strategos*. Another inscription donated c. 15/16 CE states that *kumāra* Imḍavarma became the new *strategos*, likely due to Vaga's death.²¹ By c. 40/41 CE, Imḍavarma became the Apracarāja and his son, Āspavarma, was named the *strategos*. The three inscriptions show that *strategos* was a hereditary title passed via the male heirs of the king. After Vaga's death, Imḍavarma inherited the title likely due to the lack of any direct heirs from Vaga. Subsequently, Imḍavarma's accession as the Apracarāja enabled his son to become the next *strategos*.

Using these inscriptions, it is also possible to reconstruct the political hierarchy of the Apracarāja kingdom. Starting from the bottom, the male children of the king were *kumāras* (princes), the heir apparent inherited the office of the *strategos*, and the *rāja* held the most powerful position. Two of the most important offices in the upper echelons of the Apracarāja kingdom were given Indic titles and only the heir was identified with a Greek title. To this extent, the title continued to be related to an important representative of the king, but the inscriptions do not elaborate on wheth-

¹³ H. Bengtson, *Die Strategie in der hellenistischen Zeit*, Munich 1964, 65-66; B. Bar-Kochva, *The Seleucid Army: Organization and Tactics in the Great Campaigns*, Cambridge 1967, 87.

¹⁴ For an overview of the office in different contexts see P. Rhodes - W. J. Ameling - F. Tinnefeld, *Strategos*, in *BNP*. URL: <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/brill-s-new-paully/strategos-e1123850?lang=de>.

¹⁵ E.g., CKC 235: *Āspavarmasa strategasa*; CKC 307: *strategasa Itravarmaputrasa Āspavarmasa*; CKC 236: *Āspavarmasa strategasa*.

¹⁶ E.g., CKI 242: *vaga stratego*; CKI 405: *imḍavarmena strategena*; CKI 241: *viśpavarmasa strategasa*; CKI 190: *Āspavarmasa strategasa*; CKI 257: *Imḍavarma stratego gaṃdharaśpami*; CKI 265: *vago strateo*.

¹⁷ E.g., CKI 1035: *Imḍavarmasa strategasa*; CKI 358: *statree āspavarmame*; CKI 255: *stretregabharya* referring to the wife of the *strategos*.

¹⁸ The *strategos* Āspavarman is mentioned in a first century Gāndhārī manuscript. For the full text and translations, see T. Lenz, *A New Version of the Gāndhārī Dharmapada and a Collection of Previous-birth Stories*: *British Library Kharoṣṭhi Fragments 16 + 25*, Seattle 2003, 92.

¹⁹ H. Falk, *Names and Titles from Kuṣāṇa Times to the Hūṇas*, in M. Alram (Ed.), *Coins, Art and Chronology II. The First Millennium C.E.*, Wien 2010, 73.

²⁰ CKI 242.

²¹ CKI 405.

er it was tied to the outlying possessions of the king that required military control. Alongside the male members, female members such as the mother, wives, sisters also formed part of the royal court. These female relatives are the focus of the subsequent section and for now, we will continue with the other administrative offices.

Ranking below these members, the Apracarāja court likely included numerous officials who ran the royal machinery but only a handful of inscriptions mention their names and titles. Due to the religious nature of the donative inscriptions, their exact job description was deemed unimportant to be recorded. Despite the nature of the evidence, a partial understanding of the court can be acquired.

Another Greek title appearing within the corpus of inscriptions is that of the *meridarch*. Notably, there are more references to the *meridarch* in Gandhāran inscriptions than in the wider Hellenistic world. This title in the Hellenistic period occurs in relation to Syria and Judaea and the *meridarch* was associated with a local governor who worked alongside the financial administrators of the regions.²² It may be dangerous to assume that the Gandhāran *meridarch* was similar to the Hellenistic officer as the case of *strategos* has already shown that direct correlation may be far from the truth.

The earliest reference to the Gāndhārī *meridakha* can be found on an inscription outside of the Buddhist context. A series of inscriptions on a silver *phiale*, dating roughly to the second or early first-century BCE, state that a donation was made by a *meridarch* named Kalliphon. The *phiale* was part of a hoard of nine silver plates and bowls that likely belonged to a *temenos* along the Khyber Pass. The bilingual inscription on the vessel states that the *meridarch* Kalliphon donated the objects to a deity interpreted as Kháos(?) in Greek and Boasa in Gāndhārī.²³ It is not entirely clear what type of deities are being referred to by the inscription. However, the appearance of the *meridarch* in the early first century BCE or even before aligns with the rest of the evidence stemming from the Buddhist context.

The use of this title in the first century CE and within the Buddhist context can be confirmed by a donative inscription referring to Nagaṇaḍa as the wife of the *meridarch* Taraviya.²⁴ Two more inscriptions of unknown date and provenance also refer to *meridarchai* as active participants in the Buddhist ritual sphere. The *meridarchai*, one named Theodotus and another whose name is not preserved, established the relics of the Buddha and a *stūpa* (hemispherical funerary monument built over sacred relics) respectively.²⁵

²² As the chief of the *meris*, a smaller administrative subdivision of the satrapy, the *meridarch* oversaw the area of jurisdiction and maintained stability. With these responsibilities, the *meridarch* of Samaria attempted to subdue the Macabbean revolt in Modin (Joseph *AJ* xii 261, 264, 287). For the references to *meridarchai* in Koile Syria, see G.G. Aperghis, *Jewish Subjects and Seleukid Kings: A Case Study of Economic Interaction*, in Z. Archibald - K. Davies - V. Gabrielsen (Eds.), *The Economies of Hellenistic Societies. Third to First Centuries BC*, Oxford 2011, 22-23; S. Rocca, *Herod's Judaea: A Mediterranean State in the Classical World*, Eugene 2015, 201.

²³ For the types of deities referred to the inscription, see Falk-Bennett, *Greek Style Dedications to an Indian God in Gandhāra*, cit., 25-42. For a list of names rendered in both Greek and Kharoṣṭhī scripts in the region, see S. Baums, *Greek or Indian? The Questions of Menander and Onomastic Patterns in Early Gandhāra*, in H.P. Ray (Ed.), *Buddhism and Gandhara: An Archaeology of Museum Collections*, London 2017, 33-46.

²⁴ See CKI 454: *meriakhasa*.

²⁵ CKI 32: *The[u]dutena meridarkhena*; CKI 33: *meriakheṇa*. For this official title, see also F. W. Thomas, *A Greek Official in a Kharoṣṭhī Inscription*, in E.W. Kuhn (Hrsg.), *Festschrift Ernst Windisch zum siebenzigsten Geburtstag am 4. September 1914, dargebracht von Freunden und Schülern*, Leipzig 1914, 362-265. Based on palaeo-

Other titles related to Greek offices are only mentioned once and their exact place within the local hierarchy cannot be deduced. The title *anankaya* (presumably deriving from the Greek *anankaios*) occurs in a first-century CE inscription alluding to some superficial relationship to the political archives.²⁶ The title does not have any parallels in the Hellenistic world and can only be conjecturally related to an advisor. One way to understand the title can be its connection to related terms in Greek such as ἀνάγκη (*anágkē* meaning necessity), ἀναγκάζω (meaning force or compel) and adjective ἀναγκαῖος (*anankaios* meaning indispensable). Based on some vague affiliation to the idea of exerting influence upon another, the office in Gāndhārī may be considered as referring to an advisor until another reasonable hypothesis presents itself.

A tentative reading of an inscription on the rim of an unprovenanced gilded gold bowl with an eros relief refers to an *epesukupena* pointing to the existence of an *episkopos*.²⁷ The text states that an *episkopos* named Samangaka ordered the bowl to be made and donated. Like the *strategos*, the *episkopos* can also be traced back to the Classical Period. In fifth-century Athens, the *episkopos* was an overseer and legal advisor who supervised newly founded cities and guarded the interests of the imperial centre, Athens.²⁸ The only textual reference to this office in connection with Gandhāra is provided by Arrian. He states that Alexander appointed Neiloxenos son of Satyros as the *episkopos* of the troops at the city of Alexandria in the Caucasus.²⁹ Neiloxenos oversaw the activities of Proexes, a prominent Persian who was appointed satrap of the newly founded city. Neither Proexes nor Neiloxenos lasted long in their positions and due to their unfavourable performance, they were replaced by Tyriaspes and Nikanor. The evidence from Gandhāra does not reveal how this office developed in the first century BCE. It may be reasonably hypothesized that the *episkopos* was a supervisor or guardian with unknown duties and that he was wealthy enough to make a substantial donation.

Greek titles in the Oḍi royal apparatus can be confirmed by references to the *meridarch* and the *anankaios* in the Senavarma inscription. The Oḍi king Senavarma rebuilt a *stūpa* previously established by his ancestors in an unknown location and recorded the donation on a gold sheet. The donative inscription states that Śaḍia, the

graphic grounds, CKI 32 could be dated to the Indo-Greek period between the second and first century BCE. If the relative date is confirmed, the inscription would bridge the gap between the earlier and later periods by providing administrative continuity.

²⁶ CKI 176: *viṣpīlena anamkayena*. For a brief note on the *anankaios*, see G. Fussman, *Documents Épigraphiques Kouchans III. L'inscription kharoshthi de Senavarma, Roi d'Oḍi. Une nouvelle Lecture*, «Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient» 71, 1982, 28; S. Baums, *Catalog and Revised Texts and Translations of Gandharan Reliquary Inscriptions*, in D. Jongeward (Ed.), *Gandharan Buddhist Reliquaries*, Seattle 2012, n. 84.

²⁷ CKI 553: *epesukupena*. For an image and a discussion of the inscription see Falk, *Greek Style Dedications to an Indian God in Gandhāra*, cit., 30.

²⁸ J.M. Balcer, *The Athenian Episkopos and the Achaemenid 'King's Eye'*, *AJPh* 98, 1977, 252-263. Occurring first in connection with Erythrai, c. 447/6 BCE, the *episkopoi* supervised the establishment of a democratic council for a limited duration, see IG I², 10, also in H. Engelmann - R. Merkelbach, *Die Inschriften von Erythrai und Klagomenai*, I, Bonn 1972, 38-47; R. Meiggs - D. Lewis, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions to the End of the Fifth Century B.C.*, Oxford 1969, n. 40. In Cleinias' decree, an *episkopos* also oversaw the collection of tribute and its transfer to Athens (c. 425/4 BCE), see IG I², 66, also in C. Fornara, *Archaic Times to the End of the Peloponnesian War: Translated Documents of Greece and Rome I*, Cambridge 1977, 107-109. The official did not collect and transfer the tribute himself but ensured that the process was conducted properly.

²⁹ Arr. *anab.* III 28, 4.

meridarch, was in charge of manufacturing, either the gold sheet on which the inscription was carved and/or the gilded-schist miniature *stūpa* reliquary in which the sheet was deposited.³⁰ The inscription also states that there were two *anankaioi* named Suhasoma and Saṃghamitra, and that Saṃghamitra oversaw the writing of the inscription. Given that the available evidence associates the *anankaioi* with recording, this office may be related to the royal archives of the Apraca and Oḍi administrations.

Greek official titles in Gandhāran royal bureaucracies provide testimony to the persistence of Greek elements in the region and suggest that it may have been an important part of local political strategies. They attest to the diversity of the cultural milieu and taken together with the conspicuous use of Greek artistic repertoires and personal names, reveal that the elite population consciously adopted these elements due to their profound cultural impact.³¹ The obvious danger is in using these inscriptions together in trying to build an ethnically tinged picture of Greek domination but when an interpretive strategy can be adopted, we can observe dialectical relationships between cultural practices in the Hellenistic world and Gandhāra. The purpose of the subsequent sections is not to suggest that Gandhāran local dynasties were influenced by the cultural behaviour of their neighbouring Graeco-Roman communities but to identify practices, in this case, euergetism, as part of a culmination of a long process of cultural evolution. Before doing so, I wish to elaborate on the presence of female donors in Gandhāra in order to highlight their socio-religious potential and economic capacity.

2. FEMALE DONORS IN THE ROYAL MILIEU

In the world of legends, Buddhist royal women were cast as both a positive and negative influence on kings. In the former case, they were often presented as the moral force motivating kings to be better Buddhists, demonstrate their generosity, and propagate the religion.³² The positive characterisation of royal women as Buddhist proponents is also preserved in the fragmentary Gāndhārī manuscript of the *Aśokāvadāna*, a legend narrating the life of the Mauryan king Aśoka and dating to the turn of the Common Era.³³ The precis of the story states that one day, the king invited a monk to deliver a sermon at his court. The harem women, protected by a thick screen, listened to the words and one of them was so moved by the *dharma* that she threw herself at the feet of the monk. Such behaviour was explicitly forbidden by the king but upon seeing his harem woman's capacity to understand Buddhist teachings, the king

³⁰ CKI 249: *meriakheṇa*; *anakaena*.

³¹ M. Galli, *Hellenistic Court Imagery in the Early Buddhist Art of Gandhāra*, ACSS 17, 2011, 279-329. The sustained regional exchanges and cosmopolitan social environment also led to the interchangeable local use of Macedonian (Babylonian) months and Greek personal names, see e.g., Falk-Bennett, *Macedonian Intercalary Months and the Era of Ages*, cit., 197-216; S. Baums, *A Framework for Gandharan Chronology based on Relic Inscriptions*, in W. Rienjang - P. Stewart (Eds.), *Proceedings of the First International Workshop of the Gandhara Connections Project*. University of Oxford 23rd-24th March, 2017, Oxford 2018, 67.

³² J. Strong, *Aśoka's Wives and the Ambiguities of Buddhist Kingship*, «Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie» 13, 2002, 4; H. Bakker, *A Buddhist Foundation in Śārdīya*, «Indo-Iranian Journal» 61, 2018, 1-19.

³³ For the translation and analysis of CKM 5, see T. Lenz, *The British Library Kharoṣṭhi Fragments: Behind the Birch Bark Curtain*, in A. Collett (Ed.), *Women in Early Indian Buddhism. Comparative Textual Studies*, Oxford 2014, 46-58.

allowed it. The story presents women as important actors in maintaining Buddhism within the royal sphere and may inform us about an ideal defining political behaviour among local royal women in Gandhāra. Taking this into account, this section presents the epigraphic evidence related to royal women's donations in Gandhāra in order to suggest their dual role within the sacred landscape, as both religious benefactors and arms of the political hierarchy. It shows how royal women's actions within the ritual sphere suggest that they sought religious merit but may have also been motivated by socio-political reasons such as prestige and symbolic capital.

In Gāndhārī inscriptions, royal women played the roles of principal donors, co-donors, and beneficiaries of ritual activity. Principal donors were usually one or more women who donated to the recipient Buddhist institution. Co-donors joined the principal donor in establishing the donation and may have been present during the ritual transfer of a building, money, or relic to the recipient Buddhist institution. Beneficiaries were the members with whom the principal donors shared the spiritual merit acquired by the donation.³⁴ The rich information on female Buddhist donors at varying capacities allows us to ask pertinent questions about female agency, the role of the donation in the sacred area and the perception of these donations amongst the wider pool of Buddhist followers. A comparison of this information alongside the known and well-studied category of male donors can also reveal potential gender differences in the donative sphere. In the subsequent sections, this article will consider this royal behaviour of donating to Buddhist institutions alongside the phenomena of female euergetism. In doing so, it will study the socio-economic representation of royal women within the epigraphic corpus to understand how women positioned themselves as donors.

The subsequent overview of Gāndhārī inscriptions show that royal women were represented in ritual donative inscriptions as principal donors, co-donors, and beneficiaries. The chief wives of the *rāja* and the *strategos* seem to have been more active as principal donors establishing multiple donations, but secondary wives, sisters, and aunts of royal men also supported the *saṃgha* further strengthening the Apracarāja's role in the Buddhist corpus. We can tentatively advance that a similar blueprint of patronage was likely practiced by the royal women related to the Oḍirājas, but their donations are yet to be confirmed by the archaeological record.

Principal donors in the Apracarāja family range from the queen dowager to the wives of the *kumāras* and *strategoi*.³⁵ Two women, Rukhuṇa and Utara, feature repeatedly in the epigraphic corpus and some parts of their social and familial nexus can be pieced together.³⁶ An inscription dated around 15/16 CE states that Rukhuṇa, the wife

³⁴ Merit arising from Buddhist benefactions could be accumulated in the donor's spiritual bank and shared with people chosen by the donor. The characteristics of spiritual merit and transference has been widely discussed, e.g., R. Gombrich, 'Merit Transference' in *Sinhalese Buddhism. A Case Study of the Interaction between Doctrine and Practice*, HR 11, 1971, 203-219; G. Schopen, *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India*, Honolulu 1997, 23-55; M.J. Walsh, *Sacred Economies: Buddhist Monasticism and Territoriality in Medieval China*, New York 2010, 113.

³⁵ It should be noted that around twenty-eight principal female donors in the Gāndhārī epigraphic record. An analysis of their role, function, and their social sphere forms part of my completed PhD thesis *Gender in Gandhāran art* (first till the fourth centuries CE) and will be published soon.

³⁶ Utara was a common name, and a nun was also called Utaraya, a variant of the name, see CKI 225 and 226.

of the former Apracarāja and the mother of the current Apracarāja, established a *stūpa* with her sons, the king Vijayamitra and the *strategos* Imḍravarma, and their wives and sons.³⁷ The text does not provide the names of the other family members likely due to the lack of space on the surface of the spherical schist reliquary. The donative inscription of Śatruleka, a *kṣatrapa* or governor around 19/20 CE, paints a clearer picture of Rukhuṇa's familial nexus.³⁸ One of her daughters-in-law was Utara, and her brother and sister-in-law were called Ramaka and Daśaka respectively. She also had three daughters named Vasavadata, Mahaveda, and Nika. Taken together, the two inscriptions reveal that Rukhuṇa's family members possessed a mix of presumably Indic (Vijayamitra, Imḍravarma, Rāmaka), Iranian (Vaga) and Greek names (Nika). The diversity of their personal names need not reflect their ethnic identity but the rich pool of choices available to them.³⁹

Despite her widowed status, Rukhuṇa was addressed in the texts as the wife of the king (*apracarājabhāryā*) revealing that the wife of the current king and the dowager could bear the status of being the wife of the king simultaneously. The distinction of being the mother of the Apraca and Oḍi king also elevated women within the royal court.⁴⁰ The title 'the one who has a living son' (*jīvaṇḍrā*) was conferred to Rukhuṇa, the mother of an Apraca king, and Uzamḍa, the mother of an Oḍi king for their role in securing the royal lineage.

One of Rukhuṇa's daughters-in-law, Utara, also participated in the Buddhist donative sphere and was a principal donor in two donative inscriptions. Both inscriptions do not possess a secure chronology, but based on Rukhuṇa's inscriptions, they can be dated to the first half of the first century CE. A silver sheet inscription dating around the period when Imḍravarma I was a *kumāra* states that Utara, as the principal donor, established a stone pillar (*śīlastambho*) along with her husband within a Buddhist shrine.⁴¹ She shared her merit with *jīvaṇḍrā* Rukhuṇa and the *strategos* Vaga. When her husband became the *strategos*, she donated a *stūpa* in Tramaṇaospa, likely the capital of the Apraca kingdom.⁴² The elevation of her husband's status from a *kumāra* to the *strategos* was a matter of pride and as the wife to the royal heir, Utara may have had access to greater wealth and opportunities. The two inscriptions show the accession of Imḍravarma I within the royal family and Utara, as the chief wife, may have also profited from this development. We need more data to confirm how exactly her wealth and donative capacity may have improved due to her husband's elevation as the heir. However, the second inscription notes that Utara established a *stūpa* independently without any co-donors alluding to her greater access to wealth.

Other women belonging to the royal family, referred to in the texts as 'women of the inner court' (*antaḥpurika*), also donated to the *saṃgha*. Lona and Prahoḍi, two women related to *kumāra* Viśuvarma and the Apracarāja Vijayamitra respectively, are

³⁷ CKI 405.

³⁸ CKI 257.

³⁹ For naming practices see H. Falk, *The First-Century Copper-Plates of Helagupta from Gandhāra Hailing Maitreya*, «Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology» 17, 2014, 11-21.

⁴⁰ H. Falk, *Notes on Some Apraca Dedicatory Texts*, «Berliner Indologische Studien Band» 11/12, 1998, 95-97.

⁴¹ CKI 265.

⁴² R. Salomon, *Dynastic and Institutional Connections in the Pre- and Early Kuṣāṇa Period: New Manuscript and epigraphic evidence*, in D.M. Srinivasan (Ed.), *On the Cusp of an Era. Art in the Pre-Kuṣāṇa World*, Leiden 2007, 267-286.

commonly understood to be consorts⁴³ or minor wives of the royal men.⁴⁴ The text of the inscription does not mention their connection to the royal men within this framework, but their role as minor wives can be deduced from the role of the harem women in the previously discussed Gāndhārī *Āśokāvadāna*. Prahodi's donation of relics to an unknown Buddhist shrine can be dated around 20/21 CE and based on our knowledge of the Apracarāja lineage, Lona's relic donation can be dated approximately thirty-five years before the Prahodi inscription.⁴⁵ Both donors construct their identities differently in the text and associate themselves with well known members of their local society such as the royal men and their affluent fathers.

Elite women likely emulated royal women's benefactions towards the *saṃgha* and established their own donations. Only one inscription of such activities survive, and it records the benefaction of Nagaṇaḍa, the wife of a *meridarch*.⁴⁶ The inscription on spherical schist dated either to 8/7 BCE or 2/3 CE states that Nagaṇaḍa established a *stūpa*. As the wife of an official in the Apracarāja court, such dedications enhanced the public status of both Nagaṇaḍa and her husband and enabled them to access a sphere that may have been previously limited to royal donors in possession of surplus wealth.

Comparing male and female royal donors reveal two key similarities between the two groups. While it is not the main focus on this article, the category of objects such as relics, *stūpas* and reliefs donated by royal women were also donated by royal male donors.⁴⁷ Furthermore, both male and female royal donors shed light on their dynastic connections and share their merit with the political hierarchy affiliated with them.

With a focus on women, the aforementioned evidence shows that royal women played an active role in establishing donations and were not always subordinate to men. However, in the majority of inscriptions their identities and titles, despite their status and connection to the local royalty, were intricately connected to men. No equivalent titles related to men are used to address them as queens or princesses and their identity markers primarily refers to them as wives or harem women of the king or his heirs. In comparison with epigraphic data from Buddhist and Jaina religious traditions in the rest of the Indian subcontinent, women's association with male relatives and the use of the same identity markers are also evident in Kharoṣṭhī and Brāhmī inscriptions. While this has been used to emphasise patriarchal nature of the society,⁴⁸ which may very well be the case, I believe that this is in large part due to the standardisation in recording inscriptions. Individual donors may have articulated some aspects of their identity, but the *saṃgha* likely played an important role in the organisation of the records. When ensuring that the donative records conformed to established norms, the presence of some overarching similarities such as a standard formula and common vocabulary are expected. The exact limits of the *saṃgha*'s supervisory role

⁴³ Baums, *A Framework for Gandharan Chronology based on Relic Inscriptions*, cit., 63.

⁴⁴ A. Sadakata, *Quelques inscriptions kharoṣṭhī provenant du marché aux antiquités de Peshawar couvertes*, JA 284, 1996, 301-324; Falk, *Notes on Some Apraca Dedicatory Texts*, cit., 92.

⁴⁵ Baums, *Catalog and Revised Texts and Translations of Gandharan Reliquary Inscriptions*, cit., 205, n. 14.

⁴⁶ CKI 454.

⁴⁷ Some attempts to estimate the value of donated objects especially stone albeit outside of Gandhāra can be found in M. Milligan, *Monastic Investment Bootstrapping: An Economic Model for the Expansion of Early Buddhism*, «Hualin International Journal of Buddhist Studies» 2, 2019, 106-131.

⁴⁸ K. Shah, *The Problem of Identity: Women in Early Indian Inscriptions*, New Delhi 2001.

in recording the inscriptions is not known, however, the use of repetitive standard formulas alongside unique social networks suggest the dialectic relationship between agency and authority. In this way, besides their name, Gandhāran donors used many types of information including their social links to formulate their identities. Inscriptions show that they were not compelled to present all the information related to their social and family nexus and chose to present details that may have been socially important within the context of their donation.⁴⁹ This can explain why some female donors chose to refer to themselves as the mother or daughter of other women who were also active in the donative sphere.⁵⁰

At the macro level, already the first half of the first century CE, royal women alongside royal men were the most important patrons of early Buddhism in Gandhāra. It is no coincidence that within this period, that large-scale residential complexes (*saṃghārāmas*) and monumental relic buildings begin to appear in the archaeological record. Due to the demands for constructing residential buildings, ensuring the protection and survival of monastic communities, and performing ritual activities, *saṃghārāmas* became a major hub for consumption. Royal and elite patronage of Buddhism ensured that renunciate groups, depending on their popularity, amassed large amounts of wealth.⁵¹ This increasing wealth of Buddhist institutions can be tied to their success in attracting the attention of royal and elite male and female devotees. The subsequent section argues that this public role of royal women in establishing donations can be understood through the lens of the Gandhāran social phenomena and political realities. It does so by addressing the intersection between Buddhist institutions and women within the framework of euergetism.

3. THE MERIT OF DONATION: COMPARATIVE VIEW ON EUERGETISM

Despite few inscriptions related to royal women's dedications, it is abundantly clear that royal and politically well-connected women took the opportunity to reaffirm their identity and connection during their ritual communication with Buddhist institutions. A comparative evaluation of the development of euergetism and the Gandhāran donative phenomena highlights the dynamic process in which socio-religious elements were selected, implemented, and maintained in Gandhāra. Before comparing the two phenomena, it is necessary to clarify elements of the two donative practices due to the disciplinary boundaries involved in this study.

The term euergetism, used to describe the practice of gift giving, was derived from the Greek *euergesia* ("benefactions") and *euergetēs* or *euergetis* ("benefactor" in mas-

⁴⁹ The inclusion of the names of family members in donative inscriptions is not limited to Gandhāra and can be found in other Buddhist contexts in Central India, see O.V. Hinüber, *Some Buddhist Donors and Their Families*, «Indo-Iranian Journal» 61, 2018, 353-368.

⁵⁰ CKI 147: *Balajaya mata* and CKI 225: *Utaradhita*. An in-depth analysis is part of my PhD thesis *Gender in Gandhāran art (first till the fourth centuries CE)* and my forthcoming publication, *Towards Investigating the Representation of Gandhāran Female Donors*, which also engages with the art historical data.

⁵¹ The wealth acquired by monks enabled them to engage in mercantile activities. For money matters and trade as normal part of monastic behaviour, see G. Schopen, *Doing Business for the Lord: Lending on Interest and Written Loan Contracts in the Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, JAOS 114, 1994, 527-554; Id.-Ead., *The Business Model of a Buddhist Monasticism: Acquiring Productive Assets*, «Hualin International Journal of Buddhist Studies» 2, 2019, 217-249.

culine and feminine respectively).⁵² It bound the benefactors and the recipients in a system of reciprocity and promoted socio-political stability by concealing the exploitative strategies of the benefactors.⁵³ For example, in Classical Athens, inscriptions reveal the ways in which the recipient was forced to acknowledge the superiority of the elite benefactor by accepting the gift.⁵⁴ By the late Classical period, euergetic competitions were encouraged by the recipients to motivate donors and increase their wealth.⁵⁵ Women were motivated by the same reasons as their male counterparts, and they sought to improve their social prestige and family standing by establishing important benefactions.

The earliest evidence in the Classical period are primarily related to the contribution of male donors, and female benefactresses do not feature commonly within the corpus.⁵⁶ By the Hellenistic period, queens emerged as prominent donors and received special honours for funding temples, public buildings, festivals, games, and banquets. In the Seleucid East, Queen Laodike V's donations became intricately related to marriage, an important social institution, and enabled her to create a lasting memory of the Seleucid royal ideology. Expressing their gratitude for the donations of Laodike and her husband, the Seleucid king Antiochus III, the recipient city of Teos on the western coast of Asia Minor established festivals in their names and celebrated the Queen's donation by associating her with a spring used for cultic activities.⁵⁷ In other instances, her donation of wheat in Iasos, also in Asia Minor, was used for poor women's dowries and the festival of 'Queen Aphrodite Laodike' was established to give her cultic honours.⁵⁸

Following royal behaviour, civic euergetism and public display of benefactions provided a crucial way for elite women to express their membership within an exclusive group and improve their family's political status. In the Roman Republic and then

⁵² The use of the term can be traced back to A. Boulanger, *Aelius Aristide et la sophistique dans la province d'Asie au I^{er} siècle de notre ère*, Paris 1923; P. Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque : Sociologie historique d'un pluralisme politique*, Paris 1976; P. Gauthier, *Les cités grecques et leurs bienfaiteurs*, Athènes 1985.

⁵³ For the structure of this relationship and the language used to promote behaviour, see J. Ma, *Antiochos III and the Cities of Western Asia Minor*, Oxford 1999, 182-193; M.D. Gygas, *Benefaction and Rewards in the Ancient Greek City*, Cambridge 2016, 3; R. Strootman, 'To be magnanimous and grateful': *The Entanglement of Cities and Empires in the Hellenistic Aegean*, in D. Gygas - A. Zuiderhoek (Eds.), *Benefactors and the Polis: The Public Gift in the Greek Cities from the Homeric World to Late Antiquity*, Cambridge 2020, 137-178.

⁵⁴ M.D. Gygas, *Euergetism and the embedded economy of the Greek polis*, in D.B. Hollander - T.R. Blanton IV - J.T. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *The Extramercantile Economies of Greek and Roman Cities. New Perspectives on the Economic History of Classical Antiquity*, Oxon 2019, 63-82.

⁵⁵ In Athens, formulaic honorary decrees began to be deployed to demonstrate the gratitude of the Athenian people and influence potential wealthy donors to solve the economic and political problems related to its democratic state. See, A.S. Henry, *The Hortatory Intention in Athenian State Decrees*, ZPE 112, 1996, 105-119. For hortatory intention and competition in Greek inscriptions, see J. Miller, *Euergetism, Agonism, and Democracy. The Hortatory Intention in Late Classical and Early Hellenistic Athenian Honorary Decrees*, «Hesperia» 85, 2016, 385-435.

⁵⁶ U. Kron, *Priesthoods, dedications and euergetism. What part did religion play in the political and social status of Greek women?*, in P. Hellström - B. Alroth (Eds.), *Religion and Power in the Greek World*, Proceedings of the Uppsala Symposium 1993, Uppsala 1996, 139-82.

⁵⁷ SEG 1991, 1003. For the translation, see M. Austin, *The Hellenistic World from Alexander to the Roman Conquest: A Selection of ancient sources in translation*, Cambridge 2006, n. 191; A. Chaniotis, *La divinité mortelle d'Antiochos III à Téos*, «Kernos» 20, 2007, 153-171.

⁵⁸ I.Iasos 4, II 18-25; 79-82. For Laodice and Antiochus III's benefactions in Iasos and Teos, see S. Caneva, *Queens and Ruler Cults in Early Hellenism: Festivals, Administration, and Ideology*, «Kernos» 25, 2012, 89-91.

in the Roman Empire, euergetism was firmly integrated first with the Roman *imperatores* and subsequently with *principes* and imperial relatives in order to legitimise their power. Purporting themselves to be the first citizens amongst their fellow Romans, the *principes* veiled their military and economic superiority over their subjects by exhibiting their greater virtue through donations.⁵⁹ In this context, elite women's benefactions were motivated by political pressure exerted by Roman authority and the need for social elevation.⁶⁰ Wealth, instead of gender, became an important factor in social visibility and donors competed to contribute large and small donations ranging from entire buildings to pillars, statues, and stairways, and emphasised their membership in the community.

In comparison, the communication between royal women and the *samgha* was not always characterised by reciprocity in the earliest Buddhist inscriptions outside of Gandhāra. Recorded between the second century and first century BCE in Central and Southern Indian Buddhist sites, the earliest donative inscriptions only detail essential information. Texts such as those carved on stone slabs in Kesanapalli, a Buddhist site in South India, consist of brief sentences with donors' names and the donated items. They can be understood as the precursor to long donative inscriptions appearing around the first centuries CE.⁶¹ By the middle of the first century BCE, inscriptions from Buddhist sites in Sanchi, Amaravati, and Bharhut include some sociological information regarding the donor but do not allude to the donor's intentions.⁶² Between the end of the first century BCE and the first century CE, donative inscriptions developed into complex records with references to multiple donors, their community, family members, and their political overlords. The enlargement of the text and choice to include more information systematically may point to the intention of the record-keepers to preserve a highly standardized and ritualised version of the donation rather than opting to carve only a few lines regarding the donor's name and donated object. Details such as the aspirations of the donors suggest the engagement of male and female patrons within Buddhism and strategies used to communicate their socio-economic associations. Simultaneously during these periods, female donors begin to appear in the donative sphere, and at least at Sanchi, surpass male participation.⁶³ By the turn of the Common Era, similar developments can also be understood based on the Gandhāran epigraphic corpus. As such, the Gandhāran donative phenomenon is very much related to Indic practices. As space does not allow for a deeper comparison, it is important to note that the differences in the levels of participation and culturally distinct characteristics evoked by the inscriptions suggest that the implantation and development of Buddhism remained distinct at the local level.

⁵⁹ A. Zuiderhoek, *The Politics of Munificence in the Roman Empire: Citizens, Elites and Benefactors in Asia Minor*, Cambridge 2009, 111-112.

⁶⁰ Id., *Benefactors and the polis in the Roman Empire: Civic Munificence in the Roman East in the Context of the Longue Durée*, in Gyax - Zuiderhoek (Eds.), *Benefactors and the Polis*, cit., 233.

⁶¹ M. Milligan, *The Development and Representation of Ritual in Early Indian Buddhist Donative Epigraphy*, «Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies» 15, 2013, 171-186.

⁶² Schopen, *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India*, cit., 6-7.

⁶³ M. Milligan, *The economic power of women in early South Asian Buddhism*, «The Indian Economic and Social History Review» 56, 2019, 1-25.

From the Indian subcontinent, the earliest evidence of a queen's benefaction comes from the Mauryan kingdom. This coincides with the period of increased contacts with the Hellenistic kingdoms. Since the foundation of the Mauryan kingdom by Chandragupta Maurya, Mauryan kings traded with the Seleucid kingdom, hosted Greek envoys, and governed regions with Greek-speaking communities in the North-western parts of their kingdom.⁶⁴ Dating around the third century BCE and related to the greatest Mauryan king Aśoka, an inscription preserves a royal communication of queen Kāluvākī, one of Aśoka's wives. The text of this so-called 'Queen's Edict' states that the donations made by Kāluvākī such as mango groves, gardens and almshouses should be explicitly related to the queen and should not be assigned anonymously.⁶⁵ The identification of the queen by name as the donor not only permitted her to receive the equivalent spiritual merit associated with the donation but also separated her donations as distinct, perhaps, from those established by other Mauryan members.⁶⁶ This acknowledgement of her role as a donor suggests important links established between the donor, the donated object, the recipient institution, and Buddhist communities at large in a public ritual setting. Assigning the donations anonymously prevented the different stakeholders from establishing their links and the donor lost the acknowledgement for their good deeds. Such strategies closely resemble the euergetic donations of Seleucid queens, whose donations were not only acknowledged by the recipients but earned them special honours.

After a significant chronological gap, a much more persuasive piece of evidence related royal euergetism in Gandhāra comes from the Indo-Greek king Telephus' reign (c. 75-70 BCE). Silver drachmas and tetradrachms issued by the king possess the Greek legend 'Basileus euergetou Telephou' on the obverse and the Kharoṣṭhī legend 'Maharajasa kalanakramasa Teliphasa' on the reverse (FIG. 1). The same term is rendered in Gāndhārī as *kalanakramasa*. It can be potentially related to the Sanskrit term *kalyāṇakarma*, translating directly as good action and thus, an equivalent of the Greek *euergetou*. Hellenistic kings commonly used the epithet (or cult title) *euergetēs* to emphasise their benefaction towards their subjects and gods.⁶⁷ The use of the title was

⁶⁴ P. Wheatley, *Seleukos and Chandragupta in Justin xv 4*, in H. Hauben - A. Meeus (Eds.), *The Age of the Successors and the Creation of the Hellenistic Kingdoms 323-276 B.C.*, Leuven 2014, 501-516. In exchange for the territory, the Seleucid king received five hundred war elephants, see K. Karttunen, *India and the Hellenistic World*, New Delhi 2017, 260-264. Seleucid diplomatic ties with the Mauryans are preserved in Strab. II 2, 1, 9 and Ath. XIV 652e-653a. For a discussion on Seleucid trade with India and Bactria-Sogdiana see S. M. White - A. Kuhrt, *From Samarkhand to Sardis: A new approach to the Seleucid Empire*, Berkeley 1993, 65-67. The most recent analysis of Megasthenes' *Indika* can be found in R. Stoneman, *The Greek Experience of India*, cit., 129-185. For the role of Aśokan edicts in communication, see S. Cohen, *A universal dhamma. Buddhism and globalization at the time of Aśoka (270-232 BCE)*, in S. Autiero - M. Cobb (Eds.), *Globalization and Transculturality from Antiquity to the Pre-Modern World*, Oxon 2021, 207-225.

⁶⁵ S. Bhattacharya, *Select Asokan Epigraphs*, Calcutta 1960, 76. Several theories regarding the authorship and intention of this edict have been proposed, e.g., G. Bongard-Levin, *The Historicity of the Ancient Indian. Avadānas: A Legend about Aioka's Deposition and the Queen's Edict*, in G. Bongard-Levin (Ed.), *Studies in Ancient India and Central Asia*. Calcutta 1971, 123-141; K.R. Norman, *Notes on the so-called "Queen's Edict" of Asoka*, «Studies in Epigraphy» 3, 1976, 35-42.

⁶⁶ Reference to the gifts made by the king's sons, queens, and harem women are mentioned in the Delhi-Topra seventh pillar edict, see E. Hultsch, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum. Vol 1: Inscriptions of Asoka*, Delhi 1969, 130-138.

⁶⁷ For the occurrences of this epithet during the Hellenistic period, see F. Callatay - C. Lorber, *The Pattern of Royal Epithets on Hellenistic Coinages*, in P.P. Iossif - A. S. Chankowski - C. C. Lorber (Eds.), *More Than Men, Less Than Gods. Studies on Royal Cult and Imperial Worship*, Leuven 2011, 417-456.

connected to concrete benefits established by the king to a community and over time may have developed into normal usage. Limited knowledge regarding Telephus's rule prevents us from understanding whether the epithet was related to specific donations established by the king or relate to the relationships that Telephus wanted to trace between himself and the population he ruled. However, the presence of the title within Gandhāra in the Indo-Greek period provides a precedent for linking Gandhāran local royal ideology and donative praxis attested around the first century CE.

Similar to Graeco-Roman euergetic inscriptions, Gāndhārī inscriptions allude to the negotiation between donors and recipient Buddhist institutions was guided by



FIG. 1. Obverse and reverse of a silver drachm of Telephus (with permission of wildwinds.com, ex Triton VIII, lot 666, Jan. 2005).

the distribution of wealth. The donation of coins, buildings, and land likely had a positive impact on the *saṃgha*, and the donor gained a better reputation.⁶⁸ Buddhist literary sources such as the *avadānas* and the *vinayas* provide various examples for instances during which the donations of kings were embedded in the memory of the local Buddhist community.⁶⁹ When a hefty contribution

was advertised permanently by an inscription, read out at an assembly, or proclaimed during a festival, prestige was at stake.⁷⁰ This affected the popularity of the donor within their community and provided them with valuable publicity. This is particularly relevant in the case of royal donations that sought to strengthen Apraca and Oḍi socio-political influence. Royal wives and harem women of the kings and princes donated by emphasizing their relationship to the royal family and made this influence hereditary. This aligns with the Buddhist literary sources which emphasise the role of royal women, notably the chief queens, in performing pious deeds that benefitted both the king and the queen.⁷¹ Drawing from this behaviour, elite donors had an opportunity to be on the same level as the royal family by highlighting their role in the royal apparatus. They shared their religious merit with the political powers since their

⁶⁸ E.B. Findly, *Dāna: Giving and Getting in Pali Buddhism*, Delhi 2003, 17.

⁶⁹ U. Pagel, *Stūpa Festivals in Buddhist Narrative Literature*, in K. Klaus - J.-U. Hartmann (Hrsg.), *Indica et Tibetica. Festschrift für Michael Hahn. Zum 65. Geburtstag von Freunden und Schülern überreicht*, Wien 2007, 369-394.

⁷⁰ The practice of publicly honouring the royal sponsor of a festival is mentioned by the *Pravrajyāvastu* portion of the *Vinayavastu* codex found in Gilgit, Pakistan. For translation, see C. Vogel - K. Wille, *The Pravrajyāvastu of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, Göttingen 2014, 1-43. According to the text, four seats were prepared for the guests of honour at the festival: the king, the priest, the disputant, and the competition winner. In Buddhist texts, notably the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya's Ksudrakavastu* Tha 246v5-247r1 such festivals attracted more donors to the *saṃgha*, thus extending the public distinction of the sponsors such as kings. For the translation, see Schopen, *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters: Still More Papers on Monastic Buddhism in India*, cit., 306.

⁷¹ A. Collett, *Therīgāthā: Nandā, Female Sibling of Gotama Buddha*, in Ead. (Ed.), *Women in Early Indian Buddhism. Comparative Textual Studies*, Oxford 2014, 140-159.

own fortunes were irrevocably linked to the political and socio-economic stability of the kingdom.

Other parallels surface if we consider the language of euergetism and the comportment of the recipients in comparison with Gāndhārī inscriptions. In the Hellenistic period, honours for the king and/or queen as benefactors were publicly proclaimed and acted in front of the king by envoys of the recipient city.⁷² A petition was sent to the royal court highlighting the recipient's goodwill and loyalty in the form of regular prayers and sacrifices for the royal family's good health and fortune. The response from the king and queen, in standard euergetical language, also acknowledged the city's submission along with their intention to assist the city by setting up a series of benefactions.

The epigraphic evidence related to royal women is not as elaborate, but a general overview of the Gāndhārī corpus suggests the existence of a standard formulaic pattern, adapted from Buddhist canonical texts, that presents the donor's actions as pious enterprises.⁷³ The pattern generally comprises the date of the ritual donation, its auspicious time and month, the place if relevant, the object of donations, and the names of the donors and the beneficiaries of merit. They bear a close resemblance to bureaucratic records and were likely referred to during administrative activities and conflicts of ownership.⁷⁴ They also preserve the association between donors and their donations and may entreat the moral obligation of the donors to maintain and continue their donations.⁷⁵ This obligation is also expressed by king Śeṇavarma who constructed a new *stūpa* when a previous *stūpa* established by his predecessors was destroyed by a lightning strike.⁷⁶ The enlargement of the monument and restoration of the relics to their original conditions are systematically catalogued by the text to

⁷² Ma, *Antiochos III and the Cities of Western Asia Minor*, cit., 201.

⁷³ This is also confirmed by the second century donative texts on water pot, presumable from Haḍḍa in Afghanistan, that identify the donations as pious gifts, see Lenz, *The British Library Kharoṣṭhi Fragments: Behind the Birch Bark Curtain*, cit., 60; for pious well donations, see H. Falk, *The Pious Donation of Wells in Gandhāra*, in G. Mevissen (Ed.), *Prajñādhara. Essays on Asian art, history, epigraphy and culture, in honour of Gouriswar Bhattacharya*, New Delhi 2009, 23-37. Piety is also an important attribute associated with benefactors in the Hellenistic context, see D. Noy, *Personal Piety and Family Religion in Jewish Inscriptions from Greco-Roman Diaspora*, in A. Grund-Wittenberg (Hrsg.), *Religionspraxis und Individualität Die Bedeutung von Persönlicher Frömmigkeit und Family Religion für das Personkonzept in der Antike*, Leiden 2021, 261-276. The association of piety and Buddhism from the earliest periods is also known from the Greek text of the bilingual Aśokan inscription from Kandahar. It lists the rules governing good behaviour and refers to *eusebeia* ("piety") in the place of *dharma* (roughly "moral order"). The term *eusebeia* should not be taken as the literal translation of the Indic term but as a word that adapts the general spirit of the king's proclamation to a Greek-speaking audience, see D. Schlumberger - E. Benveniste, *A New Greek Inscription of Asoka at Kandahar*, «*Epigraphia Indica*» 37, 1968, 195. For a discussion of Greek terms in Aśokan inscription as a result of cultural negotiation in Bactria and Gandhāra, see D. Sick, *When Socrates Met the Buddha: Greek and Indian Dialectic in Hellenistic Bactria and India*, «*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*» 17, 2007, 253-278.

⁷⁴ Guṇaprabha's *Vinayasūtra* 119.2 in Schopen, *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters: Still More Papers on Monastic Buddhism in India*, cit., 382-394.

⁷⁵ This is the case in the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya* in which donors and their successors were appealed to for further donations if the donated building or object was destroyed, see *ibid.*, 219-259.

⁷⁶ CKI 249, for the practice of rededications, see H. Albery, *Stupa destruction, relic theft and Buddhist propaganda. (Re)-dedicating the Buddha's relics in the Indic Northwest*, in H. Albery - J.U. Hartmann - H.P. Ray (Eds.), *Power, Presence and Space: South Asian Rituals in Archaeological Context*, London 2021, 103-140. Natural disasters as motivations for large donations is also reminiscent of the situation in Rhodes after the earthquake in 227/6 BCE (Polyb. v 88-90, 4).

highlight Śeṇavarma's distinct acts of patronage towards the *saṃgha*. Simultaneously, references to the association between the actions of his Oḍi predecessors elaborate on the pattern of patronage exercised by the Oḍi family and consolidate their presence within this sacred area. In return, monks and nuns likely performed rituals to increase the Oḍirājas' spiritual merit and continuously maintained the link between the donor and the *saṃgha*.⁷⁷

A similar pattern of restoring donations established by predecessors to their former glory by their successors in the Apracarāja family is evident from the action of Vijayamitra II.⁷⁸ An inscription briefly states that Vijayamitra II restored relics and presumably, the broken relic container that did not receive any ritual venerations. The original text recording the establishment of the same relics by Vijayamitra I was also dug up and added to the inscription of Vijayamitra II. In both the Oḍi and Apraca cases described by the brief texts, a petition from the *saṃgha* to restore donations previously established by the donors' families can be imagined. The successful appeal resulted in further donations, and some reciprocal acts of gratitude were performed by the *saṃgha*. One such act may have been a public proclamation to declare the kings' actions during an elaborate ceremony. This is preserved in the Śeṇavarma inscription that begins with a public proclamation in front of important members of the *saṃgha* and includes the text from the previous donation.⁷⁹ Moreover, the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, a code compiled and redacted in the Indic North-west around the first century CE, required monks to perform daily recitations for the merit of donors and benefactors in the sacred area, including the announcement of their names strongly echoing the text of the inscriptions.⁸⁰ These reciprocal acts by the *saṃgha* ensured that donations stayed in the memory of the recipients and community at large and consequently induced other potential donors to replicate the behaviour of generous patrons.

It is not farfetched to suggest that similar reciprocal acts were performed for female royal donors. As part of the inner circle of the royal apparatus, wives, mothers and other family members of local kings and princes had access to substantial power and resources necessary to establish significant donations. Whether they had access to personal wealth, or their donations were extracted from royal resources cannot be established based on the existing data. Regardless of the source of their wealth, their donations allowed them to publicly participate in the Buddhist ritual sphere, affirm their political and dynastic links and likely encouraged other wealthy women to follow in their footsteps.

⁷⁷ For the text and translation of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda* section elaborating on this rule, see Schopen, *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters: Still More Papers on Monastic Buddhism in India*, cit., 274.

⁷⁸ CKI 176, the relationship between the king and his successor, both named Vijayamitra, is discussed in R. Salomon, *The Indo-Greek Era of 186/5 B.C. in a Buddhist Reliquary Inscription*, in O. Bopparachchi - M. Boussac (Eds.), *Afghanistan: Ancien carrefour entre l'est et l'ouest*, Turnhout 2005, 282.

⁷⁹ CKI 249, For a comparison between the situation described by this inscription and the enshrinement of relics by the Ceylon king Duṭṭhagāmaṇi Abhaya (161-137 [101-77] BCE) in the Pāli text *Mahāvamsa* during an elaborate multiday festival, see O.V. Hinüber, *Book Review: Gandharan Buddhist Reliquaries [Gandharan Studies Volume 1]*, written by D. Jongeward, E. Errington, R. Salomon, S. Baums, «Indo-Iranian Journal» 58, 2015, 186-193.

⁸⁰ Schopen, *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters: Still More Papers on Monastic Buddhism in India*, cit., 27.

4. CONCLUSION

Making sense of the archaeological data from Gandhāra, given the complex intersections of cultures, demands the acknowledgement of the process in which the local royals and elites selected and asserted diverse practices. The Apraca and Oḍi kingdoms adopted specific Greek titles alongside Indic ones, both may be construed as local, and the functions of these offices were different from their Hellenistic counterparts. The use of these titles cannot be taken as evidence of a Greek administration, but they underline the interrelationship between local and Hellenistic political systems that left behind discernible traces.

Gandhāran royal and elite women's donations reveal an interesting political strategy undertaken by the local potentates to consolidate their power. Their support towards Buddhist institutions was not unilateral, and as patrons they may have also expected something in return for their significant donations. Considering the Gandhāran donative phenomenon within the wider social and historical context reveals that the motivations of donors were not limited to theological or soteriological merit but may be related to social capital and prestige. Considering the inscriptions beyond their religious functions brings us closer to established practices of gift-giving amongst prominent women in the Graeco-Roman world. Euergetical actions were one-way marginalised groups such as women redistributed their wealth and in return gained access to the public space and positions of power. Women's participation provided higher visibility and public praise for themselves and their families and created a lasting memory of the donor's generosity amongst the recipient group. In Gandhāra, a similar pattern can be identified based on the evidence that has come down to us. The local Apracarāja and Oḍirāja royal women donated to the *saṃgha* to perpetuate and affirm the interdependent relationship between themselves and Buddhist institutions. They created a familial and generational link between their donations by naming their royal family members who may have also been active in the donative sphere. Studying Apraca and Oḍi women's participation in the Buddhist religious landscape in relation to euergetism suggests a way in which we might understand the complex intersection between women, power, and Buddhism within this complex historical context. All the same, the presence of a reciprocal relationship between the donor and the recipient, the acquisition of a greater reputation, and the possibility for marginal groups such as women to improve their status suggests that multicultural practices developing in a dynamic process find echo in Gandhāra and became deeply embedded in its socio-religious landscape.

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