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A Note on the Vima Taktu Statue in the Collection of the Mathurā Museum

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Abstract: A seated figure of a king in the collection of the Mathurā Museum has been considered to be a statue of Vima Kadphises, the third or fourth king of the Kushan dynasty, but recent analysis of the Brahmī inscription between his legs has revealed that this statue is not of Vima Kadphises but of Vima Taktu. The scupture under study is a significant work in the history of Indian art. Although it is a very well-known sculpture that is almost invariably introduced in several catalogues of Indian art. Previous studies have provided only a general overview of this statue, while a comprehensive study of it has yet to be undertaken. This paper aims to provide a detailed examination of the statue, focusing on its stylistic and iconographic characteristics to identify and evaluate the artistic and cultural traditions reflected in its form and execution.

Keywords: Kushans, Vima Taktu, Mathurā, Statue, Portrait, Sandstone, Lion throne.

Introduction

A seated figure (Figs. 1-2) of a Kushan king in the collection of the Mathurā Museum was initially regarded to represent Vima Kadphises, the third or fourth king of the Kushan dynasty. However, there have been objection and doubt to this identification because the Brāhmī inscription (Fig. 3) on the pedestal or footstool between the two feet of this king mentions that it was the portrait of a Kushan king called Vema Takṣu(ma) (Lüders 1961: 134-138; von Mitterwallner 1986: 54-57, 59; Falk 2009: 111-113; 2015: 107-108). A Greek (Bactrian) inscription found at Dasht-e Nāwūr in central Afghanistan mentions the Kushan king called Vima Taktu (*ooemo taktoo*) (Davary and Humbach 1976: 6; Falk 2015: 108). Furthermore, the Bactrian inscription found at Rabatak in northern Afghanistan clarified the following genealogy of the Kushan dynasty: Kujula Kadphises, Vima Taktu, Vima Kadphises, Kanishka (Sims-Williams and Cribb 1995/96: 80, 97; Sims-Williams 2004: 56-57). According to the newly found four gold coins (Fig. 4) issued by Vima Kadphises, their Greek legend inscribed on the reverse clearly mentions that Vima Kadphises is 'a son of the Kushan king Vima Taktu' (BACIΛEωC OOKNOTAKΔOOY KOOPPADOY YIOC (Bopearachchi 2006: 143 6-1438, figs. 2-5; 2008: 24-25, dessins nos. 1-3, colour pls. nos. 1-3).

Thus, the identification of this seated Kushan king is now established beyond doubt. However, previous studies on this statue have only provided an overview of this sculpture, and except a German art-historian, Elfriede. R. Knauer who tried to make a detailed iconographical and comparative study of this statue, and also made a good reconstruction drawing (Fig. 5) for the first time, an extensive and detailed description of this statue has not been attempted to the best of my knowledge (Knauer 2008). As Knauer's article enlightened and prompted me to study this statue, I conducted my personal research at the Mathurā Museum in 2022 and 2024. My purpose of this contribution is to reveal what kinds of external or foreign influence can be observed on this statue.

In the following, firstly, I will make an overview of this statue. Next, I will criticize Knauer's original and inspiring interpretation of 'two thick cords' to hitch up the apron-like coat. Thirdly, I will investigate the lion throne and sitting posture of this statue with reference to Parthian art and several sitting postures of the Kushan kings depicted on their coins. Fourthly, I will explore the origin of the decorative motifs depicted on the garment, the throne cover, and the footstool of this statue by referring to the arts of the Mediterranean area, West-Asia, Gandhāra and India.

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Figure 1. Statue of the enthroned Kushan king Vima Taktu, frontal view.



Figure 2. Statue of the enthroned Kushan king Vima Taktu, side view.



Figure 3. Brāhmī inscription between boots on the footstool.

1. Overview of the statue of Vima Taktu

Firstly, I will try to give an overview of this statue by referring to the previous studies (Vogel 1915: 123-124, pl. LIV, figs. 4-6; Agrawala 1963: 40-41; Rosenfield 1967:140-142, 144-145; von Mitterwallner 1986: 53-62, pls. 1-4; Biswas and Sharma 2012: 320, fig. 15.1). The statue of Vima Taktu is a big portrait made of reddish sandstone, 208 cm high, unfortunately without the head, representing a Kushan king seated on a lion throne (*siṃhāsana*) and with his legs wide-open in *pralambapadāsana* (Liebert 1976: 225). This was found in a temple (*devakula)* at a hill of Tokrī ṭīlā in Māt near Mathurā (Vogel 1911-12: 120-133). The king wears a long-sleeved coat or royal caftan. The top of the coat around the neck is widely opened. We can see slightly the innerwear at the neck and chest of the king. This innerwear seems to be a round-necked tunic. Therefore, the king wears a topcoat over the tunic. Two vertical bands on the frontal part of the coat that make its hems or edges, are richly decorated with many dainty flowers. Furthermore, the coat is sporadically decorated with several small rosettes (bractea decorations) each with a tassel coming out of the centre.

The king is raising his right hand in front of his proper right breast and seems to have held a club or an *ankus* used to control an elephant. Unfortunately, that instrument is almost lost. On the other hand, although the left hand of the king is badly damaged, it seems to once have been put on a sword-scabbard placed horizontally on his lap (Fig. 6). Disappointingly, the sword-scabbard itself has almost disappeared, but some traces of this weapon still remain on the thigh and coat (Vogel 1915: 124, pl. LIV, fig. 6; von Mitterwallner 1986: 61, pl. 3). According to Jean Ph. Vogel, the bundles of leather strap are still visible above the heads of the sitting two lions (Figs. 2, 5), that was used for suspending the sword from the belt. Knauer wrongly interpreted these bundles as parts of apron-like garment that was gathered up by so-called 'two thick cords' (Knauer 2008: 271-273, fig. 3).

The king is sitting in a so-called European style or fashion on a chair with backrest and his both legs and feet are on a footstool or thick pedestal (Figs. 1-2). He wears long nomadic boots both with a decorative band of grapevine motif. The two sitting lions are represented facing at both sides of the throne on which the king is seated. The top of both lions standing on a footstool is concealed by the topcoat that the king wears(Sinisi 2021: 142; Olivieri and Sinisi 2021: 115-162). The body and legs of the lions are partially covered by the king's long coat and large throne cover (Fig. 2). This cloth covers the throne seat and its both sides. On this cloth is vertically depicted three decorative bands with wavy pattern and heart-shaped (cordiform) ivy motif. The backside of the statue consists of a flat backrest without decoration except two incised parallel lines (Vogel 1915: 124).



Figure 4. Drawing of the reverse of a gold coin of Vima Kadphises.

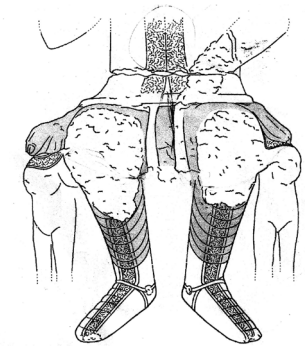


Figure 5. Reconstruction of frontal view of Figure 1 by Knauer.



Figure 6. Lap of Vima Taktu.

Two Straps, Strips or Cords hanging from the Belt (?)

Between his knees and thighs, something like a pair of two straps or strips (Fig. 6) can be seen. Regarding these objects, Knauer pointed out that such 'two thick cords' can also be seen on the portrait (Fig. 7) of Antiochus I (70-31 BC) of the Commagene kingdom (Knauer 2008: 271-273, 276, figs. 5, 6). According to her, these 'two thick cords' seemingly hanging from the belt above were used to lift up the hem of an apron-like garment in order to facilitate walking and riding (Knauer 2008: 273). This type of fashion of hitching up a garment or coat was almost conventional in Commagene (Nimrud-Dagi and Arsameia) and can be observed even in Palmyra (Seyrig 1938a: 27-28, 52, pls. XXII; Schlumberger 1969: 194, color pl.; Tanabe 1986: 77-78, pls. 29, 31; Tanabe 1998: pls.166,170, 171; Knauer 2008: 282, fig. 9). Therefore, such a hitching method seems to have been well-known and popular in Parthian West Asia. However, her opinion is totally beside the mark. In fact, so-called 'two thick cords' are not two straps nor cords, but two long hems of the coat. This can be easily proved by the coat worn by Vima Kadphises depicted on his gold coin (Fig. 8). Although on this image a short strip or strap is hanging from the belt of this king, on other gold coins two short strips or straps are hanging (Bopearachchi 2008: color plate coins nos.18-22). Furthermore, on the bronze coins (Fig. 9) issued by Vima Kadphises, one or two short strips or straps are hanging from the belt buckles (Jongeward, Cribb and Donovan 2015: 55, fig. 5, pls. 12-13; Cribb and Bracey 2025: vol. II, 445-448). In either case such short strips or straps are not intended for lifting up the hem of the coat as Knauer imagined. To the contrary, they are rather two decorative strips or straps attached to two buckles of the belt. Consequently, what Knauer identified as 'two thick cords' (Fig. 5) are in fact the remaining parts of the two hems of the coat (Knauer 2008: 271). Her mistake is due to the fact that she did not investigate carefully the enthroned image of Vima Kadphises on his gold coins, only by insufficiently referring to two coins issued by Vima Kadphises illustrated in an exhibition catalogue edited by Wilfried Seipel (Seipel 1996: 130, 133, figs. 115.117). Eventually, her reconstruction of the frontal view (Fig. 5) of enthroned Vima Taktu contains a fatal misconception although her detailed description and interpretation of this statue are very intriguing and the best attempt that has been done so far as my knowledge goes.

3. The Lion Throne and Sitting Posture of Statue of Vima Taktu

The lion throne (Figs. 1-2) with lion-legs or lion-foot-legs was not represented on the coins issued by Kujula Kadphises, Vima Kadphises, but a few gods depicted on the gold coins issued by Kanishka I and Huvishka are seated on a lion throne with lion-foot-legs (Göbl 1984: pl. 7-no.59,14-no.164, 155-Manaobago 1, 2, 170-Sarapo 1; Jongeward, Cribb and Donovan 2015: 286-no. 386, 289-no. 729; Cribb and Bracey 2025: vol. II. 459, coin no. 762, 500, coin no. A, 501, coin no. D, 502, coin. no.1129, 504, coin nos. 1141, F; Olivieri and Sinisi 2021: 141-142). As for the lion throne, in Assyria, Achaemenid Persia, Sasanian Persia, as a rule, part of a foreleg or lion-foot was utilized for the lion-leg, rather than a full-body figure (Kyrieleis 1969: 72-81, 181-194, figs.12, 29, pls.1, 4, 6, 8-10; von Gall 1971: 207-213, fig. 2; Herrmann 1996: pls. 40, 46, 51, 72-75, 78; Alram and Gyselen 2003: 117-132, fig. 2, pls. 1-19; Schindel 2004: pl. 20, 14, 22, 28). However, during the Parthian period, the lion's foreleg that had been employed as the throne-leg was transformed into a full-bodied, front-facing figure (Fig. 10) by Hellenistic cultural influences (Rosenfield 1967: fig.146; Schlumberger 1969: pl.22; Colledge 1977: pls. 33, 35; 1986: pls. XXVII, XXIX, XXXI, XXXIII; Sinisi 2017: 903, fn. 186; 2021: 141-142). Furthermore, in Gandhāra, in parallel to this Parthian innovation, the sitting lion in frontal view was employed for coach or bench-throne of the Buddha and Bodhisattva (van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1949: Pls.16, 21, 23; Ingholt 1957: Figs. 37, 248, 299, 306, 308, 454, 457). Eventually, the two facing sitting lion images of Gandhāran bench-throne might have had its origin in Parthian art. On the other hand, it is well-known that in the case of lion throne in Mathurā, the sitting lion image was primarily represented in profile, not



Figure 7. Investiture of Antiochus I by Zeus/ Oromazdes, West terrace of Nimrud-Dagi.



Figure 8. Vima Kadphises seated on an ornate throne, obverse of his gold coin, Musée Guimet.



Figure 9. Vima Kadphises standing, obverse of his bronze coin, private collection.



Figure 10. A Hatrean god seated on a lion throne, Iraq Museum, Baghdad.

facing (van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1949: Figs. 27, 31, 33, 66; von Mitterwallner 1986: pls. 16, 18, 20, 24, 26, 27, 40). However, its side-viewed image was transformed into frontal one due to the influence of Gandhāran facing lion image (van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1949: figs. 39-45, 47-49, 54-56, 60, 62, 65; von Mitterwallner 1986: p ls.23, 33-35, 63, 65, 66). Eventually, the two facing sitting lions of the throne of Vima Taktu could have been influenced by the Gandhāran lion throne. Another probability is that the lion throne with facing two lions of the Vima Taktu statue originated directly in Parthian art.

Next, I would like to explain the sitting posture of this statue. Vima Taktu is seated on a lion throne, with his both legs slightly opened at the knees, and both feet put on a footstool. This sitting posture is named by John M. Rosenfield as "European style"(Rosenfield 1967: 186-188, figs. 23, 24). This posture was widely spread from the Mediterranean world including Greece and Rome, through West Asia, to South Asia and East Asia (Ishimatsu 1935: 241). Therefore, it is not appropriate to call it as European. This posture was applied for Antiochus I and his five tutelary gods at the hierothesion of Nimrud-Dagi (Fig. 11) and also a male god (Fig. 10) of the Parthian period excavated at Hatra in northern Iraq (Schlumberger 1969;45, color pl.; Safar and Mustafa 1974: 252, pl. 249).Therefore, the sitting posture of Vima Taktu might have originated in West Asia of the Parthian period. Undoubtedly, it cannot be of nomadic origin because nomads usually sit cross-legged or crouching/squatting down on mat, carpet or rug, but not on chair as is clearly represented in the drawing by Herzfeld (fig. 12-A, C.E) and also on the cotton cloth where Huvishka is depicted sitting cross-legged on rug and turned to the viewer's left (Marshak and Grenet 2006: figs. 2, 3; Badanova 2010: 85-86, fig.1; Tanabe 2016: color plate 1, figs. 3, 5, 14; Abdullaev 2019: 34, fig. 27).

In 1934, Ernest Herzfeld, in a lecture delivered at the British Academy, introduced five kinds (A-E) of the sitting Kushan king' posture (Fig. 12). Taking into consideration of these five images drawn by Herzfeld, the D-type sitting posture resembles to that of the statue of Vima Taktu. This type of sitting posture can be seen only on the gold coin issued by Vima Kadphises (Fig. 8), and the gold and copper coin issued by Kanishka I, the copper coin issued by Huvishka, and the copper coin issued by Vasudeva II (Rosenfield 1967, pls. II-19, 39, III-40, V-96~99; Göbl 1984: pls. 2-no.11, 7-no. 59, 12-no.151; Jongeward, Cribb and Donovan 2015:132-133, 172-173, pls. 19-no. 633, 34-nos. 1071-1080, 45-nos. 1651-1663; Cribb 2018: 22, figs. 13a, b; Cribb and Bracey 2025: vol. I, 165, 228, figs. 3.20, 3.69, vol. II, 440, 459, 501, 502, 504, figs.611, 762, D, 1129, 1141, F). In any case, the sitting posture of this type is employed for the statue of Vima Taktu and the six huge statues (Fig. 11) placed on the east and west terraces of the Nimrud Dagi hierothesion, a statue of a Hatrean male deity (Fig. 10) excavated from the sixth temple at Hatra, the sitting image of the king Ahasuerus depicted on the wall painting of the synagogue at Dura-Europos and others (Rosenfield 1967:184-185, fig. 23; Kraeling 1956: pl. LXV; Colledge 1986: pls.VI, XIII, XXIX, XXXI; Tanabe 1998, pls. III-V, 5-7,). Thus, since the sitting posture and the lion throne of Vima Taktu bear a close resemblance to those of the statues of king and deity in the Parthian cultural sphere, this sitting posture and the lion throne cannot be of Kushan nor of Indian origin but most likely are of Parthian origin.

4. Ornaments depicted on garment, footstool, boots and throne cover

The vertical band similar to those of the front of the garment worn by Vima Taktu can be seen on the clothes worn by some male figures from Palmyra and Dura-Europos in Syria, Hatra in northern Iraq and Bard-è Néchandeh and Masjid-i Solaiman in southwestern Iran (Seyrig 1938b: figs. 6,11,15,16, pls. IV, V; Schlumberger 1969: pls.21a, b, 22; Ghirshman 1976: vol. II. pls. XXV, LXXIX-5, CXXVI, CXXXVI-3, 36; Tanabe1986, pls.209-210, 221-226, 238-246, 282, 385-388, 411-412, 426, 433-436, 445, 449, 456). On the other hand, the clay figures of Kushan prince and king with their attendants decorated a wall in the Kushan palace of Khalchayan in southern Uzbekistan. The arrangement plan of these royal figures (Fig. 13) was reconstructed by Galina A. Pugachenkova and Markus Mode respectively (Pugachenkova:1971: 51, 61; Mode 2013: 223, 215, figs.13, 16), and in which a vertical decorative band is depicted on the garments of princely figures. However, taking into account many extant figural evidences from



Figure 11. Antiochus I and tutelary gods seated on throne, East terrace of Nimrud-Dagi.

Palmyra and Hatra, this kind of decorative band on the front of the garment does not seem to have derived from Central Asia, but was more likely transmitted from West Asia to Central Asia (Safar and Mustafa 1974; Tanabe 1986). In the case of the statue of Vima Kadphises and the Kushan king Kanishka I or Huvishka (Fig. 14) excavated from Surkh Kotal in northern Afghanistan, that kind of decorative vertical band is more likely transmitted from the Parthian West Asia than originated in Central Asia(see Sinisi 2021).

Next, I would like to investigate the design of the footstool and boots. The feet of Vima Taktu are placed on a footstool. Its front and both sides are decorated overall with four-petaled floral pattern or intersecting circles pattern (Fig. 15). This motif was widely spread in West Asia from the Seleucid through the Parthian to the Sasanian period including the statue of the king Sanatruq I (late second century AD) of Hatra and a tomb painting of Palmyra (Rosenfield 1967: fig.138; Schlumberger 1979: 93-94, color pls.; Egami 1983: 20-27, figs.1-12). Knauer wrongly attributed it to northern Indian origin (Knauer 2008: 269-270, footnote). However, if we take into account these West Asian extant visual documents, we can duly and evidently attribute its origin to Parthian art.

As for the boots worn by the statue of Vima Taktu are decorated with a grapevine motif (Fig. 16) as was already noticed in many previous studies. Vāsudeva. S. Agrawala introduced seven types of grapevine motif depicted on sculptures excavated from Mathurā (Agrawala 1965: 168-171, figs. 97-100). All of them are different from the grapevine motif represented on the statue of Vima Taktu. Therefore, I once supposed that this motif was transmitted from the Parthian cultural sphere to Mathurā. Although there are several known depictions of grapevine motif on the sculptures excavated from Hatra and Palmyra, none is found to exactly match that of Vima Taktu (Seyrig 1946: fig. 14, pls. XXIX-XXXIII). As a result, it is difficult to clarify the origin of

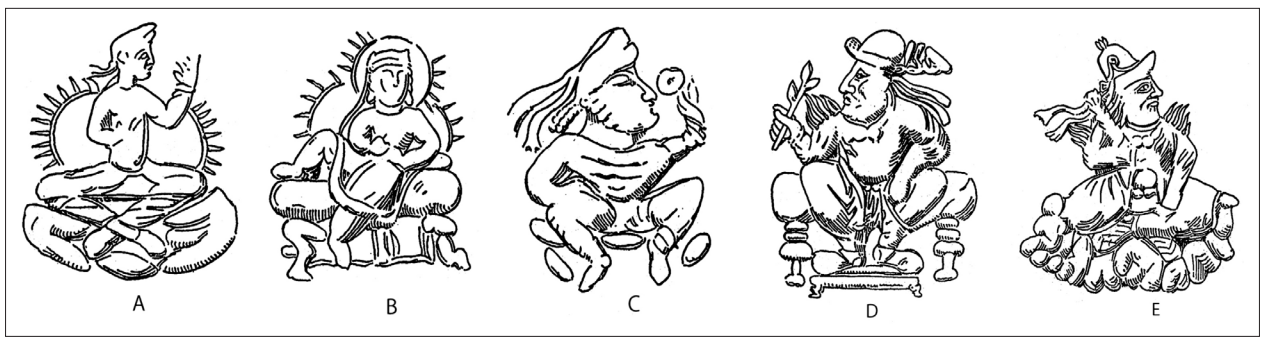


Figure 12. Kushan kings' sitting postures, drawing by E. Herzfeld.

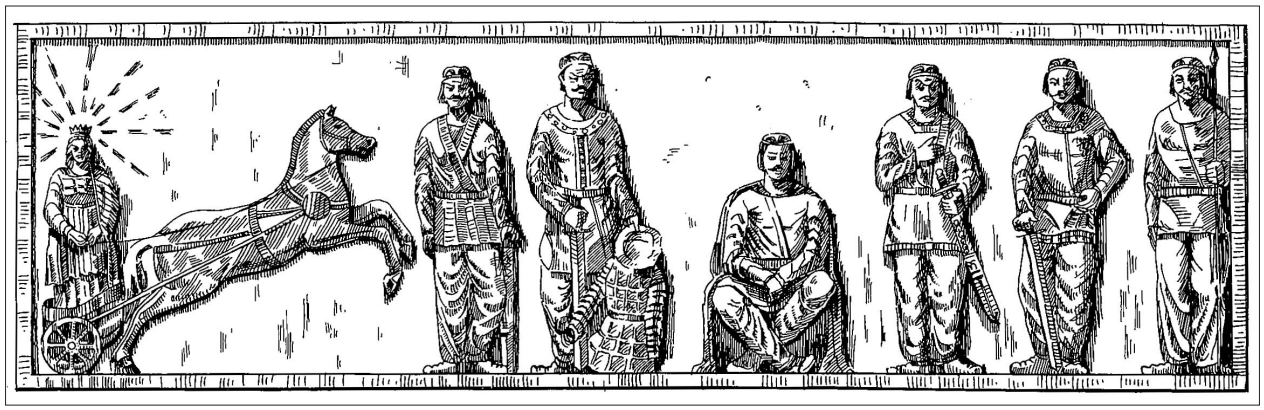


Figure 13. Reconstruction of clay sculptures of Khalchayan Palace by G. A. Pugachenkova.

the grapevine motif depicted or embroidered on the boots worn by Vima Taktu. However, in this regard, I should like to draw attention to the ornaments of boots (Fig. 17) of Antiochus I and Zeus Oromazdes of Commagene (Humann and Puchstein 1980: Atlas, pl. 39; Knauer 2008: 275, fig. 6). Each of all the boots is decorated with a branch of oak with acorns (Fig. 18) (Tanabe 1998: pls. 120, 126, 129). The acorn symbolizes fertility, fecundity, rebirth and immortality in Greek and Roman arts (Waclawik 2015:255-262). As the vine scroll has also the same symbolic meanings, the idea of decorating Vima Taktu's boots with such auspicious motif related to Zoroastrian kingly *xvarnah* (Bailey 1971: 1-77), might have been influenced by West Asian popular fashion of the Parthian period (Coloru *et al.,* 2024: 187-191).

To the contrary, a medallion clasp or buckle of the straps of each boot (Fig. 3) is decorated with a *makara*, typical motif of Indian art (von Mitterwallner 1986: 61, Pl. 4; Knauer 2008: 270, footnote 12).

Lastly, I will investigate the design of the throne cover. Two vertical bands of wave pattern and one band of heart-shaped or cordiform ivy motif are represented on the cloth (Figs. 2, 19) covering the throne on which Vima Taktu is sitting. The wave pattern is depicted on the neck of a painted jar excavated from Merv in Bacrtria (Tanabe and Ishiwata 2022: figs. 1, 7, 9. 10, 12) and on the vertical band of the front of the tunic worn by a Palmyrene youths (Fig. 20) and others depicted on Palmyrene sculptures (Seyrig 1946: 92-93, figs. 15-16). Such a wave pattern originated in Greek art and transmitted to Etruscan and subsequently to Imperial Roman art including mosaics (Knauer 2008: 269, footnote 7). Therefore, its origin can be traced back to Greek and Roman art. However, it seems to be more likely that the wave pattern (Fig. 21) of Vima Taktu was transmitted from through Bactria to Mathurā.



Figure 14. Statue of Kanishka I/Huvishka from Surkh Kotal, Kabul Museum.



Figure 15. Intersecting circles pattern, detail of the footstool, Fig. 2.



Figure 16. Vine-scroll on one of the boots, detail of Fig. 1.

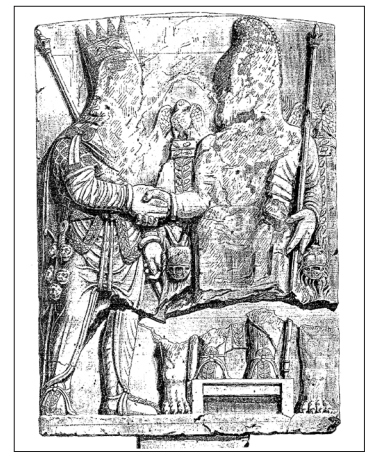


Figure 17. Drawing of the investiture of Antiochus I (Fig.7).



Figure 18. Feet of Zeus/Oromazdes on a footstool (detail of Figs.7, 17)



Figure 19. Throne cover of the proper right side of Vima Taktu statue.



Figure 20. A Palmyrene child with a wave pattern, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.



Figure 21. Wave pattern on the throne cover.



Figure 22. Heart-shaped ivy motif.

On the other hand, the heart-shaped or cordiform ivy motif (Fig. 22) of Vima Taktu derived undoubtedly from Greek, Etruscan or Roman art and was transmitted to Gandhāra (Tanabe 2017/18: 87-101, figs.1-26). For example, the trilobed ivy motif is represented on the vertical band (Fig. 23) of a Palmyrene male figure. A typical cordiform ivy motif is also depicted on the tunic (Fig. 14) worn by Kanishka I or Huvishka from Surkh Kotal and it is very common as decorative motif in Gandharan art. Therefore, the heart-shaped or cordiform ivy motif of Vima Taktu could be probably transmitted from West Asia either via Bactria, Gandhāra or directly to Mathurā.



Figure 23. A Palmyrene male with an ivy motif, Palmyra Museum.

Concluding remarks

As a result of the above observation, it is now clear that the statue of Vima Taktu reveals various artistic influences from the Parthian West Asia. However, several visual documents from West Asia on which I relied to admit and develop the Parthian influences seem to be dated to later than that of Vima Taktu (90-113 AD according to Joe Cribb). Therefore, it is not impossible to argue the reverse influence from the Kushan Central and South Asia to West Asia. However, I do not take such a view because their later dates do not necessarily mean that there was no earlier evidence in West Asia before the date of Vima Taktu. Furthermore, Parthian merchants who also became Buddhist donors from West Asia are represented on some Gandharan Buddhist reliefs (Faccenna 1964: 145-147, pls. CDLXXX-CDLXXXI, CDLXXXVI; Ingholt 1957, fig.419; Rosenfield 1967: figs. 55, 80, 103; Goldman 1978: 193, fig. 5; Knauer 2008: 278, fig.7). They are depicted wearing leggings or leg-guards as the Parthian bronze statue from Shami does (Rosenfield 1967, p. 146, fig. 130; Schlumberger 1979: 90, colour pl., pl. 23). Even if they were produced in early Kushan period, Parthians' presence in Gandhāra is likely to go back to the Indo-Parthian period because several Arsacid-Parthian silver cups were excavated in the Indo-Parthian city of Sirkap and unearthed in Gandhāra (Marshall 1951: vol. II, 607, 612, vol. III, pl. 182-nos. 5, 6; Baratte 2001: 202-204, figs. 21-23; 2002: 40-41, 48, figs. 21-23). What is more, according to Fabrizio Sinisi, the royal imagery represented on Kushan coins received iconographical influence from Parthian West Asia more than the Roman empire (Sinisi 2017: 870-905, 915; especially regarding beard of the Kushan kings, 2024: 93). His convincing claim tallies well with and corroborates my assessment of this statue.

To conclude, the statue of Vima Taktu is the first Kushan royal imagery created first of all under Parthian or Arsacid iconographical influence from West Asia.

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