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The Son of the King: Iranistic Notes on Gāndhārī *kṣabura*

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Summary: The hitherto obscure Gāndhārī word *kṣabura-* should be compared with the famous Middle Persian title/name /šā(h)buhr/ ‘son of the king’ and has been borrowed from one of the Iranian-speaking groups that have invaded Gāndhāra, such as the Indo-Scythians or the Indo-Parthians. The Gāndhārī *kṣabura-* still preserves the initial *xš- in the Iranian word, which is in accord with its ultimate etymology from *xšāyathiya-puθra-.

Once spoken in the extreme NW of the South Asian subcontinent, a region which has more than once been invaded by Iranian-speaking groups such as the Indo-Parthians, Gāndhārī is a promising source to find Iranian loanwords and it is probable that many of them lie still undetected.¹ Pending a more comprehensive study, this note wants to add another item to the dossier of Iranian loanwords in Gāndhārī.

Fragment 1 of the British Library Collection of Kharoṣṭhī manuscripts² contains a short avadāna³, translated as follows by LENZ⁴:

[175] ... The avadāna of Zadamitra. The sixth [176] The whole expansion. It should be done thus. Thus it was heard. [177] Zadamitra went to ... [178] In that country, there was a banyan tree. (*Zadamitra) said to the *kṣabura* ... [179] “-state of concentration was achieved.” Then to the city from this village ... [180] (*Zadamitra) said to the monk: “Show me ...” [181] (*The monk) said: “The true law has disappeared.” Zadamitra [182] said: “If the true law had disappeared, [183] I would have attained individual enlightenment.” Teacher. [184] Arhat. Magnanimous being. Expansion should be according to the model.

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¹ Compare SCHMITT’s (2008, p. 484) wish for a study of the Iranian loanwords in Gāndhārī. As far as the Niya documents are concerned, such a study is under preparation by the present author.

² SALOMON 1999.

³ Edition and notes in LENZ 2003, pp. 203–208 and 2010, pp. 82–84. Cf. also SALOMON 2018, pp. 261–263.

⁴ LENZ 2010, p. 82, the emphasis is mine.

kṣaburasa in the Gāndhārī text, gen.sg. of an underlying **kṣabura-*, has been left unexplained in LENZ.⁵ SALOMON⁶ similarly notes that “no reasonable guess can be offered as to its meaning or etymology”. Nevertheless, this word can be compared with Middle Persian *šhpwḥly* (inscriptional) / *š’bwḥr*; *š’h bwḥr* (Manichaean) / *šā(h)buhr*⁷ ‘son of the king’,⁸ borrowed for instance into Greek as *Σαπωρ* (inscriptional) / *Σαβώρης* (literary). Originally a title, derived from Old Iranian **xšāyaθiya-puθra-*,⁹ it became gradually used as a personal name as well. One thinks here especially of the different Sasanian kings with this name. In the Gāndhārī passage, both the interpretation as a title or as a personal name would fit the context.

It should not surprise to find an Iranian title and/or name in this *avadāna*, as the other protagonist in the story, *Zadamitra*, has an Iranian name as well, most probably a partial Indianization of a Middle Iranian **Zād(ə) mihr*, derived from a combination of OIr. **zāta-* ‘born’ and the divine name **miθra-*.¹⁰

One would expect that the /š/ found in Middle Persian /šā(h)buhr/ would be rendered in Gāndhārī with <ṣ> rather than with <kṣ>. On the other hand, <kṣ>, as well as the alternative <kṣ̄>, which is found in some forms of *Kharoṣṭhī*, are known to represent Iranian /xš/, e.g. *kṣatrapa-* from **xšāθrapā-* ‘satrap’¹¹ or *kṣuṇa-* / *kṣuṇa-* ‘moment, regnal year’ from Bactrian *χῆνον* / *xšunə*.¹² Therefore, it appears that *kṣabura-* was borrowed into Gāndhārī from an Iranian variety where the /xš/ of **xšāyaθiya-puθra-* was still present at the time of borrowing.¹³

⁵ LENZ 2003, pp. 203, 206; 2010, pp. 82–83, 171.

⁶ SALOMON 2018, p. 261.

⁷ In what follows, I have opted to use the phonological transcription as a short hand.

⁸ Cf. DURKIN-MEISTERERNST 2004, p. 313.

⁹ It should, however, be noted, with SCHMITT 2016, p. 205, that the compound has probably been created only in the Middle Iranian period.

¹⁰ The absence of decisive phonological arguments makes it impossible to pinpoint from exactly which Middle Iranian language Gāndhārī *zadamitra-* comes. The etymology was correctly seen by SALOMON 1999, p. 145 fn. 6, and LENZ 2003, pp. 203–204.

¹¹ Additionally, a folk-etymological connection with Sanskrit *kṣatra-* ‘rule, dominion’ may play a role here. For a discussion of this title in its Indic context, see SALOMON 1973.

¹² It may be noted that this correspondence is somewhat difficult to explain with BAILEY’s (1946, p. 774) phonetic interpretation of <kṣ> as /tṣ^(h)/. On the other hand, it works more smoothly with CHEUNG’s (2013, p. 624) proposal /^hṣ/ (as an alternative CHEUNG suggests /ṣ^h/), but other arguments, such as Gāndhārī borrowings into Chinese appear to work better with BAILEY’s proposal. The phonetic value of <kṣ> remains, therefore, unclear (cf. SALOMON 2008, p. 123) and deserves a re-examination that cannot be pursued here.

¹³ Sogdian preserves initial **xš-*, but intervocalic *-p-* would have been preserved here and the default outcome of *-θr-* in Sogdian appears to be *-š-*; moreover, the geographical

While absolute certainty cannot be reached, I present below two scenarios that would fit both the historical and the linguistic evidence. First, a couple of references to historical persons, such as the mahākṣatrapa Jihonika in the British Library avadānas, make it clear that the historical scene that is represented in these texts is most probably that of the Indo-Scythian kingdoms from before Kaniṣka.¹⁴ It is entirely possible that *kṣabura-* belongs together with *kṣatrapa-* and has been borrowed from these Indo-Scythians. It is difficult to use the “Indo-Scythian / Indic Śaka” quotation *śāhānu śāhi* ‘king of kings’ in the Samudragupta inscription from Allahabad to know whether *xš- developed into *š- in “Indo-Scythian / Indic Śaka” as well. This inscription is dated to the fourth century AD, so that it can be a later development and *śāhānu śāhi* can alternatively also represent Bactrian βαοναο βαο adapted to the morphology of “Indo-Scythian / Indic Śaka”.¹⁵

Therefore, it is worth considering a second option. In some older sources in western Iranian, especially in Parthian, one sees the older *xš- still preserved. This is, for instance, the case in Parthian *hšyt* /xšēt/ from *xšaita- ‘brilliant’, used as a name in the archaic Nisa documents,¹⁶ so that *kṣabura-* may also belong to the Indo-Parthian heritage in Gāndhāra.¹⁷ The first Indo-Parthian king, Gondophares, is datable to the beginning of the first century, so that a borrowing from Parthian would fit the date of the British Library documents (late first century, perhaps beginning second century AD) as well.

A final point. Iranian *-br-* is an unstable cluster, but even when the *-h-* was still present in the Iranian donor language, it would not be surprising that *kṣabura-* was borrowed with *-r-*, as *-br-* is phonetically unexpected in Gāndhārī.¹⁸ Compare also *Miramarega* on a stele from Peshawar (CKI

distance and the historical situation make Sogdian in any case unlikely as a donor language. Bactrian would be a more plausible source language, but *xš- normally develops to *š- <β> in this language, so also in βαβορο, if not borrowed from Persian (cf. SIMS-WILLIAMS 2010, p. 155). In addition, intervocalic *-p- becomes *-v-* (<β>) (cf. -βιδο /vidə/ <*-pati ‘lord’ which is borrowed as *-vital/-vida* in Niya Prakrit). A borrowing from Bactrian would, hence, require the additional assumption of two archaisms for which there is insufficient evidence so far.

¹⁴ SALOMON 1999, pp. 141–151; NEELIS 2008, p. 161.

¹⁵ See LÜDERS 1913, pp. 425–426.

¹⁶ SCHMITT 2016, pp. 104–105.

¹⁷ Only the later *šhypwbr* is attested in Parthian, but the name is exclusively found in inscriptions from the beginning of the Sasanian kingdom (224–651), where the linguistically later form is expected, also because it can have been influenced, if not simply been borrowed from Middle Persian /šā(h)buhr/ (cf. SCHMITT 2016, pp. 204–206).

¹⁸ The same loss of *-h-* is found in other foreign representations of Middle Persian /šā(h)buhr/, especially in Syriac <šbwr>, see DURKIN-MEISTERERNST 2014, p. 86. This

325), which represents Bactrian Μι(υ)ρομαρηγο /mi(h)rmarēgə/ ‘servant of Mihr’.¹⁹

Hence, one can conclude that Gāndhārī *kṣabura-* provides us not only with one of the earliest attestations of,²⁰ but even with a more archaic form of the title / name which, as Middle Persian /šā(h)buhr/, becomes so prominent in later Iranian history.

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should not be taken to imply that *-r-* would be the only possibility to borrow an Iranian *-br-* in an Indo-Aryan language; another option could for instance be *-kbr-*, for which compare VON HINÜBER 2017, p. 132, on names and titles in the colophons of Gilgit manuscripts.

¹⁹ SIMS-WILLIAMS 2010, p. 90.

²⁰ It may even be possible that it is the earliest attestation, but I have not been able to do the detailed checking required to make such a claim. In Parthian, the name is only found in Sasanian sources (*teste* SCHMITT l.c.), but it may be possible that /šā(h)buhr/ is attested in some pre-Sasanian Middle Persian coin or seal that I am unaware of.

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