

Observations on Lines 1 – 3 of the Gāndhārī Part of the Dašt-i Nāwur Trilingual (DN IV)

by Simon Fries, Svenja Bonmann, Jakob Halfmann & Natalie Korobzow

Summary

Ever since its first edition by Gérard FUSSMAN (1974), progress in the understanding of the trilingual Kushan royal inscription of Dašt-i Nāwur has been hindered by inadequate photographic documentation and the over-all unfavourable state of the inscription documented in these photographs. This holds especially true for the Kharoṣṭhī/Gāndhārī part of the inscription (DN IV). However, recent advances in Kushan studies and the interpretation of the Bactrian part of the trilingual (DN I) allow for new insights into the content and makeup of the trilingual that also have implications for the interpretation of the Gāndhārī part. On the backdrop of these recent findings and based on photographs from the estate of the late Gérard Fussman that have only recently been made available by the Collège de France, this article presents a new reading of the first three lines of the Gāndhārī part, contrasts it with readings that have previously been proposed, and in passing discusses methodological issues that arise when dealing with inscriptions with such an unfavourable documentation.

1) Introduction

About 100 kilometres south-west of Kabul and 60 kilometres west of the city of Ghaznī in central Afghanistan lies the *Dašt-i Nāwur*, a basin with a brackish lake at its heart that presents a noticeable contrast to the barrenness of the surrounding mountains. In its north-western part, at an elevation of ca. 4320 metres, where a pass opens up the ridge of Mt. Qarabayu and connects the mountainous terrain in the West with the basin in the East, is located a rock that is famous for five inscriptions from the era of the Kushan empire that it bears. Ever since their discovery in 1967 by geologist André Boutière and the publication of their first edition by Gérard Fussman (1974; cf. also DAVARY / HUMBACH 1976; DAVARY 2023), the five inscriptions – usually referred to as DN I, II, III, IV, and V – have attracted the attention of epigraphists, linguists, and historians alike.

The reason for this is that at least three of these inscriptions – namely DN I, III, and IV – render a largely parallel text and thus constitute a trilingual: DN I is Bactrian written in an early form of the Graeco-Bactrian script, DN III is most probably Middle Iranian written in the recently deciphered Issyk-Kushan script (BONMANN et al. 2023; on the recent development in this regard cf. CRIBB forthc.; BOBOMULLOEV et al. 2022; FALK 2023), and DN IV is Gāndhārī written in Kharoṣṭhī. Although their content remains essentially unknown, it is very probable that the inscriptions DN II (written in Graeco-Bactrian script) and DN V (in the Issyk-Kushan script) constitute additions to the longer inscriptions DN I and DN III.

While at the time of their discovery DN I, II, III, and V seem to have been in a largely unscathed though rather imperfect state, DN IV was already only partly preserved: a large portion of the inscription (perhaps also containing the Kharoṣṭhī parallel of DN II and DN V) was broken off at the end and cannot be expected to be retrieved (cf. already FUSSMAN 1974: 19). The present-day state of the inscriptions remains unknown. It has been hypothesised by FUSSMAN (1974: 2-3) that they may be destroyed entirely, but it is equally possible that they are still in an accessible shape (cf. HALFMANN et al. to appear).

Thanks to recent advances in the reading of the Bactrian part in DN I (cf. now HALFMANN et al. to appear; PALUNČIĆ et al. 2023; SIMS-WILLIAMS 2012; 2004; SIMS-WILLIAMS / CRIBB 1996), we are informed about the date and the general content of the trilingual (although the details are still unclear and

many points remain up for discussion): it commemorates a religious ceremony held by the Kushan emperor Whema Takhtu on the 15th day of the month Gorpaios in the year 279 according to the contemporary Indo-Greek reckoning of the Yavana era. In Indo-Greek terms, the month Gorpaios essentially corresponds to present-day late August/early September, and the Yavana year 279 corresponds to 105 AD (cf. BALL et al. 2019: 346). This makes the Dašt-i Nāwur trilingual the earliest known trilingual that represents contemporary Bactrian and Gāndhārī as well as the Middle Iranian idiom of the Issyk-Kushan script (provisionally termed Eteo-Tocharian by BONMANN et al. 2023). The Dašt-i Nāwur inscriptions can, therefore, be counted among the most significant documents that shed light on the political, religious and linguistic history of the Kushan empire and ancient Central Asia in general.

While DN I and DN III have always met with considerable interest and have recently seen very fruitful discussion (cf. HALFMANN et al. to appear; BONMANN et al. 2023; PALUNČIĆ et al. 2023; SIMS-WILLIAMS 2012; 2004; SIMS-WILLIAMS / CRIBB 1996), only very minor advances have been made in the reading and understanding of the Gāndhārī inscription DN IV since the first edition by FUSSMAN (1974: 19-22 with pl. 5, 23, 24, 25 and 27). The only recent treatments are by FALK (2015: 108-109) who largely follows the text given by FUSSMAN (1974: 22), and by PALUNČIĆ et al. (2023: 351-366) who suggest a new reading.

The main reason for this lack of progress is the very unfavourable – one may even say: abysmal – state of the inscription: not only is a substantial portion of it broken off at the left edge and at the bottom so that only 6 lines of the inscription remain, these lines are also much less readable than the lines in DN I and III. All this is surely owed to the fact that the porous surface of the rock bearing the inscriptions was in general rather unsuitable for engraving, and that DN IV is located where the rock slopes down a bit so that parts of the surface structure could easily break off in the engraving process and later on. The rather curved and relatively complex Kharoṣṭhī characters of DN IV therefore had to be executed with much less pressure than the more rectilinear and simpler characters of the Graeco-Bactrian script in DN I and II and the Issyk-Kushan script in DN III and V, resulting in a relatively shallow engraving that over time had to deteriorate faster than the engravings of the other inscriptions (cf. FUSSMAN 1974: 19).

It was for the deplorable state of DN IV that Fussman, when together with Marc Le Berre he visited Dašt-i Nāwur in 1969 to take photographs of the site and produce latex squeezes of the trilingual, did not attempt an on-site reading of it but instead based his later edition (FUSSMAN 1974: 19-22) on the respective latex squeeze (cf. FUSSMAN 1974: 19). This latex squeeze is the only known physical copy of DN IV. A photograph of it and three black-and-white photographs of the inscription taken on-site by André Bouteière in 1967 remain the only published depictions of DN IV to this day (published in FUSSMAN 1974: pl. 23, 24, 25, and 27). The later treatments by FALK (2015: 108-109) and PALUNČIĆ et al. (2023: 351-366) are solely based on these photographs.

In this paper we want to present some observations on the first lines of DN IV that we made in the scope of a comprehensive survey of the Dašt-i Nāwur trilingual that also included the parallel texts in DN I (HALFMANN et al. to appear) and DN III (BONMANN et al. in prep.; BONMANN et al. 2023). Apart from the photographs already published by FUSSMAN (1974: esp. pl. 23, 24, 25, and 27), we could make use of previously unpublished photographs of the whole rock, the inscriptions and the squeezes that stem from the scientific estate of the late Gérard Fussman and were provided to us by courtesy of

the Collège de France (Archives – Fond Afghanistan/Fussman) where Fussman's estate is maintained. Some, but not all of these photographs have since been published online.¹

The comparative synopsis of all the available photographs allows for interesting and profound insights into the content and structure of the three inscriptions and the makeup of the parallel text that they instantiate. These do, of course, also have implications for the reading of DN IV that we want to discuss here. The focus will be on the first three lines of the inscription for which we propose a reading that – in spite of naturally being rather tentative – seems most probable to us due to the parallels that it may find in DN I and other contemporary Gāndhārī sources. We refrain from providing a reading for the remainder of the lines of DN IV, because in our view these essentially evade a reliable interpretation. Some of the reasons for this will be discussed in passing in the following sections. Finally, a summary of our new proposals for lines 1 – 3 will be presented in the concluding section 3).

2) Lines 1-3: The date of the trilingual and the royal address of Whema Takthu

It is, of course, a fundamental principle of epigraphy that even in bilinguals and trilinguals the chief interpretive authority of a respective inscription lies with the (readable) characters that it features. If, however, the characters are in such a state that several alternative readings are possible, parallelism between the different versions of a text in a bilingual or trilingual serves as a reliable criterion to choose one alternative reading over the others. It may thus be noted that a potential reading in one inscription that can be backed up by parallels in the other inscription (in the case of a bilingual) or inscriptions (in the case of a trilingual) will in general be preferable to its alternatives that lack such parallels, even though such a procedure carries with it a certain risk of circular reasoning.

As DN IV is in such an unfavourable state, it is most often the case that a potential Gāndhārī reading cannot be established on the basis of the (illegible) Kharoṣṭhī characters alone, but that it must be backed up by parallels from the Bactrian inscription DN I. DN I is of central importance in this regard, because, as mentioned above, it is mainly due to advances in the reading of this inscription that we are informed about the general contents of the Dašt-i Nāwur trilingual. In terms of content, any reading of the parallel inscription DN IV will, therefore, have to be checked against the backdrop of DN I (as rightly acknowledged by PALUNČIĆ et al. 2023: 337, fn. 7). We may expect that in the future some additional input will also be provided by DN III as its deciphering progresses (cf. now BONMANN et al. 2023; cf. also BONMANN et al. in prep.), though mention has already been made of the irretrievable loss of the lower parts of DN IV and overly optimistic expectations may therefore be curtailed.

The relevant first part of DN I (as published in HALFMANN et al. to appear) reads as follows:

- 1 Σοθ γορπιαίου ιε
- 2 βαονανδε βαο ι βωγο
- 3 ι στοργο οσημο τακτοο
- 4 κοβανο ι ραβτογο ι λαδει-
- 5 γο ι βαγοιηζνογο κιδι πιδο ι
- 6 χοβε βανε βαοδανε λφαχ-
- 7 το

¹ <https://salamandre.college-de-france.fr/archives-en-ligne/ark:/72507/r10589zxrqxk/fi>; <https://salamandre.college-de-france.fr/archives-en-ligne/ark:/72507/r10588z23mgj6k/fi>; <https://salamandre.college-de-france.fr/archives-en-ligne/ark:/72507/r10587zt5thvzk/fi> (all last accessed on 2023-10-25).

The king of kings, the great salvation, Whema Takhtu Kushan, the righteous, the lawful, the god-worshipping, who by his own authority has gained kingship.

It is obvious that these lines present firstly the date of the inscription or of the event that it commemorates (which may or may not be identical, but this is unknown), and secondly the royal address of the Kushan emperor Whema Takhtu who ordered the inscription. Quite interestingly, the different Bactrian titles of this address do not occur in an isolated use here but find parallels in other Bactrian and Gāndhārī royal addresses used to refer to Whema Takhtu's successors and the Indo-Parthian king Gondophares, who flourished in the first half of the first century AD and ruled over large parts of North-Western India that later in the century were conquered by Whema Takhtu's father Kujula Kadphises, the founder of the Kushan empire.

The following table lists the parallel titles employed by Gondophares, Whema Takhtu, his son Whema Kadphises as well as his grandson Kaneška, who both flourished in the second century, and finally also Vazeška who probably flourished later in the third century (cf. HALFMANN et al. to appear):

Gondophares	Whema Takhtu	Whema Kadphises	Kaneška	Vazeška
(coins) (BAUMS / GLASS 2002b)	(DN I)	(ledger) (ALLON 2019; BAUMS / GLASS 2002b)	(Rabatak)	(Kamra inscr.) (BAUMS / GLASS 2002b)
maharajasa 'great king' (CKC 295, 309, 308)	-	maharajasa	?	maharajasa
mahatasa tratarasa 'great saviour' (CKC 309)	ι βωγο ι στοργο	-	βωγο στοργο	mahatasa tratarasa
rajatirajasa 'king of kings' (CKC 308)	βαοναν-δε βαο = DN IV rajatirajasa (see below)	rajatirajasa	?	rajatirajasa
-	-	-	οανινδο 'victorious' (Surkh Kotal)	jayatasa

-	ραβτογο 'righteous'	-	ραβτογο	-
dhramikasa 'lawful' (CKC 295)	λαδειγο = DN IV dhramikasa (see below)	-	λαδειγο	-
-	-	(sva)yabalasa 'self-powerful'	χοαζαοαργο	svayabalasa
devavratasa 'devoted to the gods' (CKC 294, 295, 308, 309, cf. also 303, 305)	βαγοιηζνογο	devavra[tasa]	βαγ[οιη]ζνογο	de[bra]vadasa

Given these remarkable correspondences, it is very well conceivable (although certainly not sure beyond doubt) that the royal address of the Kushan emperors was largely influenced by that of the Indo-Parthian rulers and Gondophares in particular, probably because they wanted to represent themselves as rulers in continuous succession of Gondophares and the Indo-Parthian rulers and thereby legitimise their rule. The almost perfect lexical match between the Gāndhārī and Bactrian titles is striking; they essentially only deviate with respect to their grammatical makeup: the Gāndhārī forms are attested in the genitive, whereas the Bactrian forms occur in the nominative, which is surely owed to the different grammatical conventions of Gāndhārī and Bactrian. It is, therefore, very probably that DN IV, in as far as it is parallel to DN I, will feature the Gāndhārī equivalents of the recurrent Bactrian titles ι βωγο ι στοργο 'great saviour', βαοναν-δε βαο 'king of kings', λαδειγο 'lawful', or βαγοιηζνογο 'god-worshipping' that DN I attests. This reasoning – although not expressly stated as such – is also partly applied by PALUNČIĆ et al. (2023: 351-366).

In the following, we will therefore discuss the first three lines of DN IV against the backdrop of the possibility that they may contain the Gāndhārī counterparts of the Bactrian titles mentioned in DN I. In doing so, we will present each line in photograph croppings (two black-and-white photographs of the inscription on the rock, and one photograph of the latex squeeze) followed by our own drawing (on the background of the photograph of the latex squeeze), the readings of FUSSMAN (1974: 19-22), FALK (2015: 108-109) and PALUNČIĆ et al. (2023: 351-366), and finally our own reading accompanied by a discussion contrasting it with the other readings. We give Fussman's, Falk's and Palunčić et al.'s readings in the spelling provided by themselves and our own reading by akṣara with hyphens functioning as separators.

2.1) Line 1: the date of the trilingual



- FUSSMAN (1974: 20-22): saṃ 1 1 100 20 20 20 10 4 4 1 gapiu na?mana [ma?]sa[sa] [di? {(vase) 10 4 1}]²
 'year 279 (month of) Gorpiaiios, on the day 15'
- FALK (2015: 108): saṃ 1-1-100-20-20-20-10-4-4-1 (= 279) gapiu na(?)ma 1(?) [ma?]sa[sa] di(*vase 10-4-1)
 'Year 279, month (...) Gorpiaiios, day (15)'
- PALUNČIĆ et al. (2023: 352-353): saṃ 1 1 100 20 20 20 10 4 4 1 gurpieasa masasa divas[e 10] 4 1
 'In the year 279, on the 15th day of the month Gorpiaiios.'
- Our reading:³ saṃ 1 1 100 20 20 20 10 4 4 1 g^u1-[vacat]- ^r1pi-a-^{ya}1-sa ma-sa-^{sa}1 di-va-[se] ¹⁰1 4 ¹1
 'In the year 279, on the 15th day of the month Gorpiaiios.'

The reading of the first characters is rather unproblematic and essentially universally acknowledged: the first sign is <saṃ> functioning as an abbreviation of LOC.SG.M. *saṃvatsare* 'year.' As the outline of the *anusvāra* is indicated only faintly, the first character could also be <sa>. This can also function as an abbreviation of *saṃvatsare* (e. g. CKI 60,1 and 563,1 as per BAUMS 2012: no.s 30, 31) so that we tentatively read <sa^rm¹>. The abbreviation of LOC.SG.M. *saṃvatsare* 'year' is followed by the numeral sequence <1 1 100 20 20 20 10 4 4 1> the elements of which add up to the number 279 that designates the year according to the Indo-Greek Yavana reckoning. The numeral sequence is followed by a lacuna with the width of almost two characters.

We now expect to read the name of the month Gorpiaiios, and indeed it seems that in line with Palunčić et al. we can almost securely identify the next akṣara as <g^u1> with which the Gāndhāri name of the month Gorpiaiios usually begins (cf. LOC.SG.M. *gurpiya* CKI 328,5 and GEN.SG. *gurpieasa* CKI 564,1-1 as per BAUMS 2012: no.s 26, 33). The leftward loop of the akṣara designating the *u*-vocalism can only be recognised rudimentarily. This is owed to the fact that left of the akṣara the surface of the rock is broken off at a width of slightly more than one character. The breaking of the surface – most probably a result of the engraving process – led to the loss of a relatively large portion of the loop, but its tip can still be seen directly above the breaking edge.

² Curly brackets designate Fussman's tentative conjectures.

³ In our readings we adhere to the epigraphical convention to mark uncertain characters that are only rudimentarily preserved/readable with top right and top left square brackets (^r), while we mark emendations with normal square brackets ([]).

Due to the breaking of the rock surface the scribe had to engrave the next characters at some distance so that the continuity between <g^ru¹> and the following akṣaras was destroyed, although they belong together. The first akṣara after the lacuna is most probably <^rpi>. While <pi> can be recognised relatively clearly and is generally acknowledged, the scribal element designating the pre-articulation of *r*- can only be recognised faintly. In contrast to Palunčić et al., it seems to us that *r*- may not be indicated by a rightward loop or twirl, because there is no indication of a circle in the photographs, but that it is marked by a simple rightward horizontal stroke added to the lower part of the left-most vertical line of <pi>. This manner of indicating the pre-articulation of *r*- in the Gāndhārī name of the month Gorpiaios finds a parallel in CKI 328,5 (BAUMS 2012: no. 33). <^rpi> is followed by a relatively clear <a> that (in analogy with GEN.SG.M. *gurpieasa* CKI 564,1-1 as per BAUMS 2012: no. 26) Palunčić et al. interpret as <e>, although there seems to be no indication of a vertical stroke at the top of the akṣara. It seems that for its rather curved shape <a> was mistaken for <u> by Fussman and Falk.

We interpret the next akṣara as a narrow <^rya¹> whose top and bottom outline can be seen relatively clearly while the outline in the middle and of the stroke towards the right is only rudimentarily recognisable (perhaps most clearly so on the latex squeeze), because it is disturbed by a crack in the rock surface. In our view, it is neither possible to read <a> as proposed by Palunčić et al. nor <na> as assumed by Fussman and Falk, because there is no indication of the curved shape of <a> (especially towards the left) or the longish vertical stroke of <na>. This <^rya¹> is followed by a <sa> that is more clearly visible both on the photographs of the rock and the latex squeeze.

Our reading so far yields <g^ru¹-^rpi-a-^rya¹-sa>, i. e. the GEN.SG.M. of the stem *gurpiaya*-* that one would expect as the early Gāndhārī rendering of Gorpiaios. This form finds a close parallel in GEN.SG.M. *gurpieasa* in CKI 564,1-1 (BAUMS 2012: no. 26; cf. also LOC.SG.M. *gurpiya* CKI 328,5 as per BAUMS 2012: no. 33) that Palunčić et al. also want to read here. This reading, however, seems rather improbable to us, because we find no indication for the shape of the alleged <a> that Palunčić et al. assume: as the only major difference between <a> and <e> is the vertical stroke at the top of the akṣara, one would expect to read two consecutive <a>-like characters with the typical curved shape. This, however, is not the case, as we have been able to identify only one <a>-like shape in the sequence, namely the first akṣara that Palunčić et al. read as <e>, although it lacks a sufficiently clear indication of the vertical stroke. The following akṣara is more clearly <^rya¹> so that the whole sequence is much more adequately read as <a-^rya¹-sa> instead of <e-a-sa>. This also excludes the form *na?mana* or *na(?)ma ı(?)* proposed by Fussman and Falk.

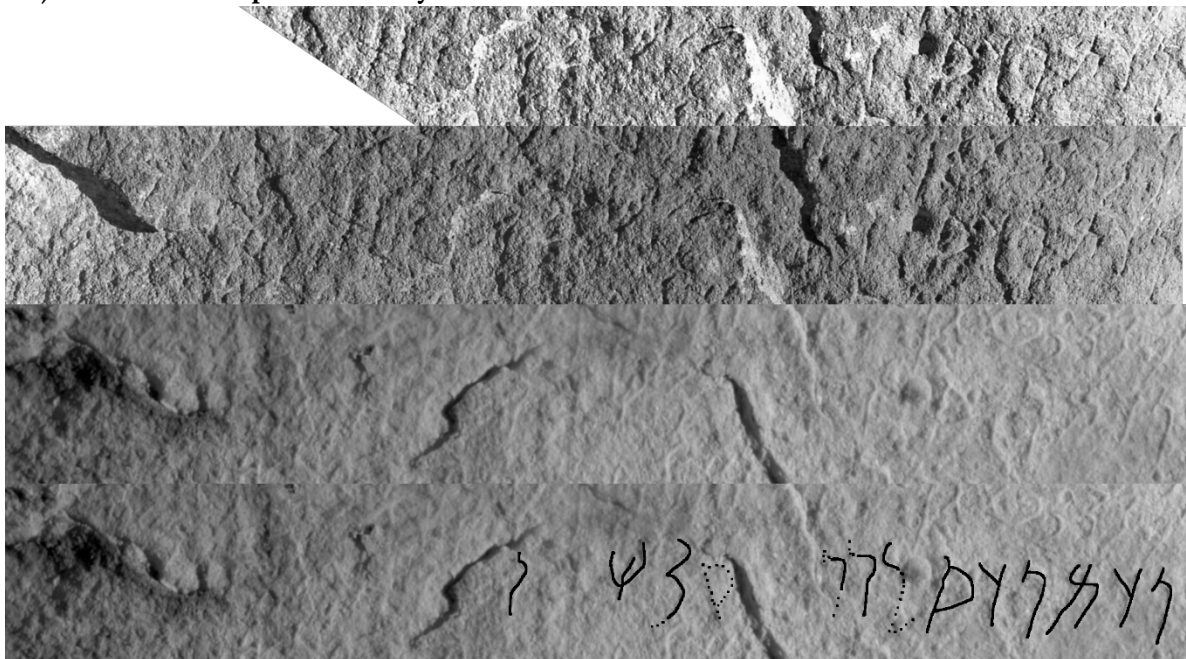
The next word is generally read as a form of *masa*- ‘month’, because it is rather clear that the next two akṣaras are <ma> and <sa>. We follow Fussman, Falk and Palunčić et al. in reading a second <sa>, which yields the GEN.SG.M. *masasa* that is abundantly attested (cf. i. a. CKI 46,1; 60,1; 172,1; 176,D2; 242,1; 249,14; 251,3; 257,1; 266,3; 331,A3; 405,1; 454,A1; 544,2; 564,1-2 as per BAUMS 2012: no.s 1, 6, 8, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 21, 24, 26, 28, 29, 30). The second <sa>, however, is not clearly visible on the rock but indicated very faintly on the latex squeeze so that we prefer giving it as <^rsa¹>. An alternative would be to read <ma-sa> without the second <^rsa¹>, i. e. the LOC.SG.M. of the word for ‘month’ that is not unparalleled (cf. CKI 159,1 as per BAUMS 2012: no. 43, and the further attestations listed in BAUMS / GLASS 2002a: s. v. *masa*). This, however, would not agree with the GEN.SG.M. <g^ru¹-^rpi-a-^rya¹-sa>.

The next akṣara is most probably <di> as rightly read by Falk and Palunčić et al. and suggested by Fussman. This is immediately followed by a <va> that is clearly indicated on the rock but less readable on the latex squeeze. It is unclear whether there is an additional akṣara immediately following the sequence <di-va> or whether there is a lacuna with the width of one character. It seems sensible to emend a <[se]> or <[sa]> here so that one can read LOC.SG.M. *divase* or, perhaps, *divasa*

‘on the day’ as universally assumed. We tentatively propose the reading <di-va-[se]> here, because it finds abundant parallels (cf. CKI 46,1; 60,1; 172,1; 249,14; as per BAUMS 2012: no.s 12, 24, 29, 30; furthermore the very many attestations cited by BAUMS / GLASS 2002a: s. v. *divasa*) and the outline of a <sa> or <se> angulated towards the right could be indicated very rudimentarily on the photographs of the rock, but it should be kept in mind that the <[se]> is only emended, and that <di-va> may very well function as an abbreviation of LOC.SG.M. *divase* just as <sa^ṛṃ> functions as an abbreviation of LOC.SG.M. *saṃvatsare* (cf. already FUSSMAN 1974: 20-21 who implicitly considers something similar in suggesting a reading <di 10 4 1>). In this case, there would, of course, be a lacuna with the width of one character instead of the alleged <[se]>.

The word for ‘day’ is followed by a shallow and lowered <ṛ10¹> that is disturbed by a long crack in the rock surface. The last two symbols that follow are <4> and <ṛ1¹>. The x-shape of the <4> can be recognised rather well on both the photographs of the rock and the latex squeeze, while <ṛ1¹> seems to be a bit elevated and can be recognised more clearly on the photographs of the rock than the latex squeeze. The whole sequence can thus be interpreted as <ṛ10¹ 4 ṛ1¹>, i. e. the Kharoṣṭhī rendering of the number 15. This obviously refers to LOC.SG.M. *divase* so that we can interpret *divase* 15 as ‘on the 15th day’ as it is usually done. Thus we arrive at the following tentative reading of the first line of DN IV that we would like to propose: sa^ṛṃ¹ 11 100 20 20 20 10 4 4 1 g^ṛur^ṛpiā^ṛya^ṛsa masa^ṛsa^ṛ diva[se] ṛ10¹ 4 ṛ1¹ – ‘In the year 279, on the 15th day of the month Gorpaios.’

2.2) Line 2: the first part of the royal address



- FUSSMAN (1974: 20-22): rajatirajasa . . . [dhrami{kasa/asa}] . . . [‘king of kings [...] just’
- Falk (2015: 108): rajatirajasa [trata](rasa?) dhramikasa(?) ... ‘of the King over the Kings, the great [sic!], the lawful [...]’
- PALUNČIĆ et al. (2023: 352-356): rajatirajasa devapu(*tra)sa dhramikasa [maha]tasa [tratarasa] d[e]vasa puja[ra]hasa ‘Of the king of kings, the son of the gods, the righteous, the great protector, the god worthy of worship [...]’
- Our reading: ra-ja-ti-ra-ja-sa ṛtra^ṛ-ta-ṛra^ṛ [vacat] ṛsa^ṛ ṛdhra^ṛ-mi-[ka]-sa [8-10, no more than 12 characters]

‘Of the king of kings, the saviour, the lawful ...’

The first six characters of line 2 are very clear and are universally read as <ra-ja-ti-ra-ja-sa>. The very large shape of the <sa> with a vertical line closing the semi-circle at the top of the akṣara is untypical for the inscription but can hardly be interpreted otherwise. Thus we get GEN.SG.M. *rajatirajasa* ‘of the king of kings’ which, as already rightly alleged by FUSSMAN (1974: 21), is the Gāndhārī counterpart of the Bactrian expression βαοναν-δε βαο featured in DN I. Line 2, therefore, introduces the royal address of Whema Takthu. Quite unfortunately, the rest of the line is barely legible. It seems to us that the first character after <sa> may be a rather large <tra> that is followed by a relatively clear <ta> and a shallow <ra> that is only faintly preserved. This is followed by an uneven breaking line and a lacuna with the width of one to two akṣaras. The next character that can be read tentatively is a faded <sa> that is angulated towards the left. This yields the sequence <tra-ta-ra-sa> that in line with Falk (who wrongly translates it as ‘great’) we interpret as GEN.SG.M. *tratarasa* ‘saviour’ rendering Bactrian βωγο from DN I.

Palunčić et al. suggest a very different reading GEN.SG.M. *devapu(*tra)sa* ‘son of the gods.’ Instead of our <tra> they read a <de> that they locate directly to the left of the <sa> of *rajatirajasa*. However, judging from the photographs of the rock, the sinuous shape that they interpret as <de> is more aptly conceived of as an uneven spot in the surface structure of the rock. Furthermore, instead of the <ta> proposed here, they read a longish and stretched <va>. This alleged shape of <va>, however, is untypical of DN IV, which is shown by the much shorter shape of <va> in <di-va-[se]> featured in line 1 of the inscription. Palunčić et al. adduce a parallel for their suggested <va> that they find in the alleged form 3SG.PRET. *apiva* ‘drank’ in line 5. This however, is no less problematic than the form *devapu(*tra)sa* that they suggest for line 2, because it is equally difficult to read. It is, therefore, very unlikely that what we read as <ta> could be a <va>. Something similar holds true for the akṣara <pu> that Palunčić et al. read instead of our <ra>. They assume that the horizontal stroke that we interpret as constituting the top part of <ra> belongs to a vertical line to its left that extends down across the breaking line in the stone and passes over into a leftward slope that they locate directly to the bottom left of the breaking line. Judging by the photographs of the rock and the squeeze, however, this slope is more readily interpreted as an agglomeration of indentations in the porous surface of the rock. As regards the last two akṣaras of the alleged form *devapu(*tra)sa*, <sa> is, of course, unproblematic, while <tra> must be assumed to have broken off. This is, of course, a possibility that we have to reckon with. However, in light of the fact that lacunae occur elsewhere in DN IV where no text is missing (e. g. in <g^u-[vacat]-r^{pi}-a-^{ya}-sa>, l. 1), it is by no means unexpected that the lacuna between what we read as <ra> and <sa> did never contain any text.

Another problem that the reading *devapu(*tra)sa* has is the lack of a Bactrian parallel in DN I. As rightly argued by PALUNČIĆ et al. (2023: 353-354 with lit.), *devaputrasa* is, of course, a recurrent epithet of the Kushan emperors on coins and in some inscriptions. However, given the fact that the other securely established epithets GEN.SG.M. *rajatirajasa* ‘king of kings’ and *dhramikasa* ‘lawful’ (that shall be discussed in an instant) find parallels in DN I, it is to be expected that whatever follows *rajatirajasa* and precedes *dhramikasa* is the Gāndhārī rendering of a Bactrian word also featured in DN I. This is the case with GEN.SG.M. *tratarasa* ‘saviour’ that in line with Falk we suggest here, because this renders Bactrian βωγο. One may wonder, of course, why GEN.SG.M. *mahatasa* ‘great’ rendering Bactrian στοργο is missing here so that the sequence ι βωγο ι στοργο ‘great saviour’ is not fully translated into Gāndhārī. It should, however, be borne in mind that *mahatasa* may originally have followed later in the line and is now simply weathered to the point of being illegible. Moreover, it should not be neglected that GEN.SG.M. *tratarasa* frequently occurs without *mahatasa* on the coins

of Gondophares (e. g. CKC 278, 279, 312). Whema Takthu's inscription may very well have followed this model.

If in spite of the objections raised here against such an interpretation one still wants to read a form with <de-va> instead of <tra¹-ta>, a more sensible suggestion, perhaps, would be <de-va-vra-[ta]-sa>, i. e. GEN.SG.M. *devavratasa* 'god-worshipping.' In this case, the slope-like shape to the bottom left of the breaking line that Palunčić et al. believe to belong to <pu> may be a remnant of the akṣara <vra> the rest of which would then be broken off. This <vra> could originally have been followed by a <ta> that could likewise be broken off and would have been followed by the much clearer (and yet only tentative) <sa>. The advantage of GEN.SG.M. *devavratasa* 'god-worshipping' over *devaputrasa* 'son of the gods' would be that it would find a parallel in the Bactrian text of DN I, namely βαγοιηζνογο 'god-worshipping'. It is, furthermore, recurrent on the coins issued by Gondophares (cf. CKC 294, 295, 308, 309; MITCHINER 1976: *passim*), and most probably to be emended in Whema Kadphises's ledger (CKM 297, cluster 4, ll. 8 and 9, perhaps also 6; cf. ALLON 2019). However, in light of the objections discussed above, it will be better for both methodological and substantial reasons to stick with the reading GEN.SG.M. *tratarasa* 'saviour.'

The next akṣara following the <sa¹> of <tra¹-ta-¹ra¹-¹sa¹> appears to be a relatively tall and stretched <dhra¹> the bottom rightward stroke of which is only barely legible but still visible on the photographs of the rock and the latex squeeze. This is followed by a very clear <mi>, an illegible character, and finally a <sa> that can be read relatively well. This yields the sequence <dhra¹-mi-[1 character]-sa> that has been convincingly emended to <dhra¹-mi-ka-sa> already by Fussman. The illegible character between <mi> and <sa>, must therefore, be <ka>. In line with Fussman and in contrast to Palunčić et al., who think that at least traces of the <ka> can clearly be read on the photographs of the rock, we assess that the <ka> can only be emended, not read, as several cracks and spillings (surely partly owed to the engraving process) have deformed the rock surface. We are thus left with <dhra¹-mi-[ka]-sa> that is, of course, to be interpreted as GEN.SG.M. *dhramikasa* 'lawful' as usually assumed. This recurs on the coins of Indo-Parthian kings like Gondophares (cf. CKC 295; MITCHINER 1976: *passim*) and most probably renders Bactrian λαδειγο and perhaps also ραρτογο 'righteous' in DN I (as rightly alleged by PALUNČIĆ et al. 2023: 354).

We find it impossible to make something sensible out of the remainder of the line, because the akṣaras are so shallow and faded, and the rock surface is so unevenly scratched that one cannot tell where the lines of a respective akṣara may possibly be. This is partly owed to the fact that the characters were engraved along a relatively long breaking line on the rock surface that becomes steeper towards the end and most probably forced the scribe to execute the akṣaras with even less pressure than the preceding akṣaras, because even greater portions of the inscription would otherwise have broken off.

It would seem that towards the end of the line the outline of the akṣaras becomes clearer, but it is still not clear enough to recognise any of the akṣaras for sure. One could speculate that the last three characters are <tra¹-¹ta¹-¹sa¹/se¹>, preceded at some distance by <ni¹-¹śa¹>, but this is far from certain. In any case, we find the wide-ranging suggestions and restorations by PALUNČIĆ et al. (2023: 354-356) too far-fetched to be probable, not least because they assume no less than 16 akṣaras to follow the <sa> of <dhra¹-mi-[ka]-sa>. Judging by the length of line 1 and the general width and height of the akṣaras in DN IV that we can read with certainty or sufficient probability, the rest of line 2 could contain no more than 8-10, at most 12 further akṣaras. The amount of text that Palunčić et al.'s reading presupposes could, therefore, most probably not fit into the line. It is, in any case, highly questionable from a methodological point of view to suggest such a wide-ranging reading if the outline of the characters is as unclear as in the present case, because there is no opportunity or

possibility to falsify or verify such a reading. We therefore consider it wiser to refrain from speculating all too much on the content of the remainder of line 2. What may, however, be noted is that in light of the occurrence of GEN.SG.M. *rajatirajasa* ‘king of kings’ = βασιλεως-δε βασις, *tratarasa* ‘saviour’ = σωτηρ, and *dhramikasa* ‘lawful’ = λαδικο and perhaps also ραβδικο ‘righteous’ we would expect line 2 to have contained the Gāndhārī rendering of the Bactrian expression κιδι πιδο ι χοβε βασι βασιδανε λαφακτο ‘who by his own authority has gained kingship’ that DN I attests.

We thus arrive at the following probable reading of line 2 that we propose in accordance with Fussman and Falk: *rajatirajasa* [tra¹ta¹ra¹sa¹ dhra¹mi[ka]sa [8-10, no more than 12 characters] – ‘Of the king of kings, the saviour, the lawful [...]’

2.3) Line 3: the second part of the royal address



- FUSSMAN (1974: 21-22): Vhamakuśasa pi [. ?]gadapiṇa . śea sa [no interpretation offered (Vhamakuśasa probably not related to σοημο in DN I)]
- FALK (2015: 108): vHEMA kuśasa pi [. ?]gadapiṇa . śea (...) sa [‘Vhema Kuśa [...]’]
- PALUNČIĆ et al. (2023: 352-356): vHEMA kuśa(*ṇa)sa y[o] gada [śpa]chaṃ[de]ṇa [ra]ja śeaṇa raja asa|ṇa ‘Vhema, the Kushan, who obtained, by his own will, the royal throne and royal seat.’
- Our reading: vhe-ma ta-¹khtu¹-¹a¹-sa k[u] [vacat] [śa¹-ṇa-sa [vacat or 1-2 characters] śe-a [no more than 6 characters] ‘Of Vhema Takthu, the Kushan, ...’

The first two characters of the third line are relatively clear: <vhe-ma>. As the stroke of the <e>, which is most clearly indicated on the latex squeeze, is quite faded, <vhe> was most probably mistaken for <vha> by Fussman. It is obvious that <vhe-ma> stands for NOM.SG.M. *vHEMA* rendering Bactrian σοημο from DN I, and that consequently it introduces the name of the ruler who commissioned the inscription. As already discussed in the introductory section, DN I is explicit about the fact that this ruler was σοημο τακτοο κοβανο, i. e. the Kushan emperor Vhema Takthu. It is, therefore, expected that the rest of line 2 contains the Gāndhārī rendering of the Bactrian expressions τακτοο and/or κοβανο. This is the reason why Falk, following Fussman, reads the next three akṣaras as <ku-śa-sa>. He obviously assumes that this stands for the GEN.SG.M. *kuśasa* of a noun **kuśa-* that renders Bactrian κοβανο. The same reasoning is essentially applied by PALUNČIĆ et al. (2023: 356) who propose a

reading <ku-śa-(*ṇa)-sa> and suggest that a tiny <ṇa> was engraved as a correction between <śa> and <sa> after these had already been written. Accordingly, they conceive of <ku-śa-(*ṇa)-sa> as a rather unique form of the GEN.SG.M. *kuṣaṇasa* ‘Kushan’ (as it is directly attested on coins issued by Kujula Kadphises, cf. CKC 267, 268, 271).

However, both the reading <ku-śa-sa> and its emendation to <ku-śa-(*ṇa)-sa> suffer from two essential problems that have already partly been noticed by FALK (2015: 109) and PALUNČIĆ et al. (2023: 356). The first problem is the sibilant ś: as Falk and Palunčić et al. point out correctly, the Gāndhārī word for ‘Kushan’ is uniformly attested with the retroflex sibilant ṣ in all contemporary Gāndhārī sources (cf. e. g. CKC 267, 268, 271 and the further instances cited by PALUNČIĆ et al. 2023: 356). The only parallel for a spelling with the palatal sibilant ś that Falk and Palunčić et al. adduce is found in the Sanskrit form NOM.SG.M. *kuśanavaṃśyaḥ* ‘of Kushan descent’ as featured in the Bhaiṣajyavastu of the Vinayavastvagama of Mūlasarvāstivādi (cf. FALK 2015: 109; dated to the 1st/2nd century AD during the rise of the Kushan empire, cf. SCHOPEN 2004: 20-22). This text however, is not in Gāndhārī and can, therefore, not be considered to provide a true parallel of the spelling <ku-śa-sa> or <ku-śa-(*ṇa)-sa>, as it does not represent a contemporary Gāndhārī idiom. It is very well conceivable that the foreign sounds of the Kushan language and consequently also the name of the Kushans themselves that contained a foreign sibilant were treated differently in Gāndhārī and Sanskrit. In any case, it is much more likely that the contemporary Gāndhārī documents reflect the original sibilant more directly or faithfully than the Sanskrit documents, because they were directly issued or commissioned by the Kushan emperors. For the uniform occurrence of the sibilant ṣ in contemporary Gāndhārī documents and the lack of a genuine Gāndhārī parallel we therefore consider the reading <ku-śa-sa> and its emendation to <ku-śa-(*ṇa)-sa> highly improbable. It should be noted in this context that the akṣara read by Fussman, Falk and Palunčić et al. as a <śa> does by no means force or demand this interpretation. The outline of this character, especially as it is featured on the latex squeeze, also allows to regard it as an <a> with a line that is slightly shortened on the right end and thereby deviates from the more usual shape of <a> in the inscription.

The second problem is the lack of a syllable with a nasal in the stem of the form: as the Bactrian form *κοῦσανο* featured in DN I contains the syllable -vo with a nasal, it is to be expected that the stem of its Gāndhārī counterpart also features a syllable with a nasal. This is, indeed, the case with all secure attestations of the Gāndhārī expression for ‘Kushan’ in contemporary documents: e. g. it appears as GEN.SG.M. *kuṣaṇasa* ‘Kushan’ on coins issued by Whema Takthu’s father Kujula Kadphises (cf. CKC 267, 268, 271). Given the presence of the expected nasal in all the other Gāndhārī texts, the alleged form GEN.SG.M. *kuśasa* ‘Kushan’ that Falk and Fussman propose for DN IV is, therefore, not only unexpected but also unparalleled. It is seemingly for this reason that Palunčić et al. suggest tentatively that a <ṇa> was squeezed between <śa> and <sa> as a correction, and that consequently the form is to be read as <ku-śa-(*ṇa)-sa>. We consider this highly improbable for two reasons.

Firstly, in the Gāndhārī variety featured in the inscriptions issued by the Kushan emperors retroflex <ṇa> should (where it is not original) only follow a retroflex sibilant, not a palatal one as it is found in the alleged form <ku-śa-(*ṇa)-sa>. It is, of course, well-known that in some varieties of Gāndhārī word-medial dental -n- has generally become retroflex -ṇ-, while in others the dental nasal and the retroflex nasal alternate in a seemingly unsystematical way (cf. VON HINÜBER 2001: 169). However, a closer look at the official Gāndhārī coin and rock inscriptions issued by the Kushan emperors reveals that these feature an alternation of word-medial retroflex -ṇ- and dental -n- only sporadically after retroflex sounds and not in other contexts, where only -n- is attested (cf. NOM.SG.M. *kuṣaṇa*, or GEN.SG. *kuṣaṇasa* in CKC 266-268, 271, 274-275, GEN.SG. *kuṣaṇasa*, LOC.SG.M. *kṣuṇami* ‘place’ in CKI 230,3-4 as against NOM.SG.M. *kuṣana* CKC 261, GEN.SG.M. *kuṣanayavugasa* ‘Kushan ruler’ CKC 265,

debamanuśasap(*u)[j]i(**tasa*) ‘worshipped by gods and men’ CKI 230,3). It seems that the only official Gāndhārī document that features retroflex *-ṇ-* in other contexts is the fragmentary manuscript of Whema Kadphises’s ledger (cf. e. g. NOM/ACC.SG.N. *daṇo* ‘gift’ CKM 297, cluster 1, l. 4, versus GEN.SG.M. *devavranasa* ‘god-worshipping’ CKM 297, cluster 4, l. 6 as per ALLON 2019). This mismatch between the coin and rock inscriptions on the one hand and the ledger on the other hand may very well be owed to their respective register, as it is readily conceived that the language of the Buddhist monastic ledger was closer to the (spoken) Buddhist vernacular than the more formal language of the coins and rock inscriptions that rather seems to have followed the model of the Aśokan edicts and Indo-Parthian coins, respectively (on a similar assumption regarding the rock inscriptions cf. SKINNER 2017: 60, fn. 53).

Given the fact that we are dealing with an official rock inscription, it is to be expected that if the first sibilant in the alleged form <*ku-śa-(*ṇa)-sa*> had really been palatal, the nasal should have been dental <*na*>. As a matter of fact, this prosodic behaviour is matched by the Sanskrit parallel adduced by Falk and Palunčić et al. for the occurrence of the palatal sibilant in the word for ‘Kushan’: NOM.SG.M. *kuśanavaṃśyaḥ* ‘of Kushan descent’ as featured in the Bhaiṣajyavastu quite expectedly attests dental *-na-*, not retroflex *-ṇa-*. Hence, the alleged <*na*> in the form <*ku-śa-(*ṇa)-sa*> remains without a parallel case and must, therefore, be considered phonetically improbable. The second reason is that there is no epigraphical indication of either <*ṇa*> or <*na*> squeezed in between the akṣaras that Fussman, Falk and Palunčić et al. read as <*śa*> and <*sa*>. As far as we can see, the photographs of the latex squeeze and of the inscription on the rock show no trace or outline of a smaller, lowered or raised character between the akṣaras read as <*śa*> and <*sa*>. It must, therefore, be concluded that no such character was there.

In light of the fact that the readings <*ku-śa-sa*> and <*ku-śa-(*ṇa)-sa*> are not only unexpected but also unparalleled phonetically as well as morphologically in contemporary Gāndhārī sources, it seems to us that they cannot be maintained. One were, of course, forced to stick with these readings against all expectation and systematic thought if the akṣaras in line 3 of the inscription did really not allow for any alternative reading. However, as a matter of fact they do. It has already been discussed above that the akṣara usually read as <*śa*> can also be interpreted as a somewhat uncanonical <*a*>. Something similar holds true for the character that Fussman and all his successors so far read as <*ku*>. While such an interpretation is certainly very straightforward *prima facie*, the outline of the formation on the photographs of the rock and especially the latex squeeze suggests to us that we are in fact dealing with two akṣaras: it seems that the first character is <*ta*>, and that this immediately passes over into <¹*khtu*>. The outline of <*ta*> is rather clear, as soon as one considers the possibility that it does not belong to the formation on its right immediately bordering it.

If one acknowledges the presences of a <*ta*> here, the rest of the formation is most aptly interpreted as a <¹*khtu*> slightly tilted towards the right, as it features the general outline of a <*kha*> and a leftward slope and complex twirl at the bottom that indicate a ligature with <*tu*>. This is most readily and yet only rudimentarily seen on the photograph of the latex squeeze. In our view, this <¹*khtu*> is followed by an <¹*a*> instead of <*śa*> and the universally acknowledged <*sa*>, yielding <*ta-¹khtu¹-¹a¹-sa*>. This sequence can, of course, most readily be interpreted as GEN.SG.M. *takhtuasa* ‘Takhtu’ rendering the Bactrian ταχτοο in DN I. Together with the preceding <*vhe-ma*>, this yields the genitive form of the name of the Kushan emperor who commissioned the inscription: <*vhe-ma ta-¹khtu¹-¹a¹-sa*>.

The thematic inflexion of GEN.SG.M. *takhtuasa* and the lack of a genitive marking on <*vhe-ma*> may seem unexpected, but quite interestingly and unlike <*ku-śa-sa*> and <*ku-śa-(*ṇa)-sa*>, the sequence <*vhe-ma ta-¹khtu¹-¹a¹-sa*> as such is not unparalleled in contemporary Gāndhārī sources. It finds an

almost perfect match in an inscription on a seal issued by Whema Takthu that reads *maharaja devaputra vema takhtuasa* ‘Of the great king, the son of the gods, Vema Takhtu’ (cf. FALK 2009a: 110-112; the sequence is rendered as $\bar{G}[e]matakhtuasa$ in CKI 1073). Hence it seems to us that $\langle vhe\text{-}ma\text{-}ta\text{-}^{\text{r}}khtu^{\text{r}}a^{\text{r}}sa \rangle$ is the most sensible reading of the first six akṣaras in line 3 of DN IV. The following close-up images of the relevant akṣaras in DN IV and on Whema Takthu’s seal illustrate their remarkable similarity.

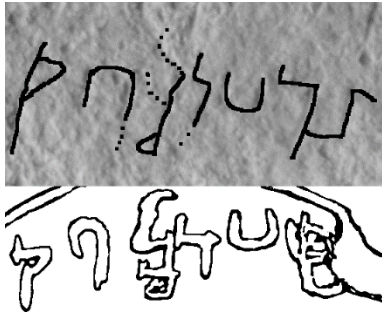


Figure 1. Top: our reading of the sequence in DN IV; bottom: tracing of the parallel sequence on Whema Takthu’s seal (CKI 1073; cf. FALK 2009a: 111 and CALLERI 1997: Cat. U 7.24); the first akṣara is broken off at the right edge.⁴

The rest of the line is much more problematic, and the readings between Fussman, Falk and Palunčić et al. vary. The $\langle sa \rangle$ of $\langle ta\text{-}^{\text{r}}khtu^{\text{r}}a^{\text{r}}sa \rangle$ is in our view followed by what is most probably a $\langle ka \rangle$ or $\langle pa \rangle$. Fussman and Falk read $\langle pi \rangle$, but the left vertical line seems to be too short to allow for this interpretation, and a clear indication of the *i*-vocalism is missing. Likewise, the $\langle y[o] \rangle$ proposed by Palunčić et al. seems not to fit the outline of the character as it is represented on the photographs, because this is too broad and long for $\langle y[o] \rangle$. Apart from this, the stroke indicating the alleged *o*-vocalism is missing.

The $\langle ka \rangle$ or $\langle pa \rangle$ that we read is followed by a crack in the stone and then two formations that are usually interpreted as two akṣaras, namely $\langle ga \rangle$ and $\langle da \rangle$. While the shape of $\langle da \rangle$ is relatively unproblematic, the loop at the top right of the formation interpreted as $\langle ga \rangle$ is missing. A closer look at the photographs of the stone indicates to us that the formations that appear to be $\langle ga \rangle$ and $\langle da \rangle$ could in fact not really be akṣaras but sinuous cracks in the rock surface, because they lack the epigraphical outline of the other akṣaras. The next character is interpreted as $\langle pi \rangle$ by Fussman and Falk, but in our view the shape of the character is too narrow and condensed to allow for this interpretation. Instead, it seems to us that the character may be retroflex $\langle \text{r}ša^{\text{r}} \rangle$, because it features the top bow and the vertical stroke typical of this akṣara. The sinuous structure above this bow is in our view akin to the sinuous formations to the right of the akṣara and therefore most readily conceived of as a crack in the stone. This $\langle \text{r}ša^{\text{r}} \rangle$ is followed by a relatively clear and universally acknowledged $\langle ṇa \rangle$ and by a character that we interpret as a lowered $\langle sa \rangle$ that is somewhat tilted to the right. This results in the sequence $\langle ka/pa \text{ [vacat]} \text{ r}ša^{\text{r}}\text{-}ṇa\text{-}sa \rangle$. It may not be by coincidence that this is reminiscent of GEN.SG.M. *kuṣaṇasa* ‘Kushan’ as it is featured on coins issued by Whema Takthu’s father Kujula Kadphises (cf. CKC 267, 268, 271).

It may very well be the case that the first character of this sequence that we interpreted as $\langle ka \rangle$ or $\langle pa \rangle$ is indeed a $\langle ka \rangle$ that was originally intended as a $\langle ku \rangle$. In this case, of course, the bottom leftward slope indicating the *u*-vocalism would be missing. It is not all too problematic to assume that the scribe made a mistake and forgot to execute the slope to indicate the vocalism so that he

⁴ The seal has a digital representation on the website of the British Museum: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_1892-1103-187 (last accessed 2023-11-07).

ended up writing <ka> instead of <ku>. One wonders, of course, why this was not corrected, and as in general scribal mistakes should be posited with great caution and not too hastily, we only hesitantly acknowledge this reading. This is mainly due to the fact that the remaining akṣaras more or less perfectly fit the reading <k[u]-ṣa¹-ṇa-sa> that is paralleled by the attested instances of GEN.SG.M. *kuṣaṇasa* ‘Kushan’. However, as the *u*-vocalism is not indicated, <k[u]> can only be emended. If one interprets as akṣaras the formations that we have tentatively regarded as cracks above, one may alternatively assume on the basis of the outlines indicated on the latex squeeze that the sequence <ṣa¹-ṇa-sa> is preceded by a <gu> that is itself preceded by one or two characters that may constitute a word together with the <ka> or <pa> earlier in the line. This yields the sequence <ṣa¹-ṇa-sa> that is a paralleled spelling variant of GEN.SG.M. *kuṣaṇasa* ‘Kushan’ (cf. CKI 230,3 as per FALK 2009b: 27-28). However, in this case it remains unclear how the one or two akṣaras preceding the alleged sequence <ṣa¹-ṇa-sa> should be interpreted, and what the word could be that <ka> or <pa> introduces. It is for this reason that we only very cautiously prefer to propose the reading <k[u]-ṣa¹-ṇa-sa> that we interpret as GEN.SG.M. *kuṣaṇasa* ‘Kushan’ rendering Bactrian $\chi\omicron\beta\alpha\nu\omicron$ in DN I.

Palunčić et al. provide a very different reading for this sequence: [ṣpa]cham[de]ṇa that they interpret as INSTR.SG.M. [ṣpa]cham[de]ṇa ‘by one’s own will’. However, in our view they overstrain the interpretive possibilities that the bad condition of the rock surface and the latex squeeze provide. We cannot see that the akṣaras <ṣpa>, <cham> and <de> are outlined on the rock surface or in the latex squeeze. This also holds true for the remainder of the line. While we can clearly recognise the sequence <śe-a> that follows <k[u]-ṣa¹-ṇa-sa> after a lacuna with the width of one to two character and was already noted by Fussman and all his successors, the rest of the line is in our view too illegible to allow for reliable inferences. This may be owed to the fact that the text in the second half of line 3 is arranged along the same breaking line as the text in the preceding line 2 and therefore had to be executed with less pressure than the preceding text so that it deteriorated faster.

Thus we arrive at the following tentative reading of line 3 that we would like to propose: *vhema taṣkhtuaṣa k[u]ṣa¹ṇasa* [1-2 characters] *śe-a* [no more than 6 characters] – ‘Of Vhema Takhtu, the Kushan ...’.

3) Conclusion

In this paper we have presented our new take on the first three lines of the Gāndhārī part of the Dašt-i Nāwur trilingual commonly referred to as DN IV. Based on the comparative synopsis of photographs taken of the inscription on-site in 1967 and of a latex squeeze produced in 1969 (only some of which were publicly available until recently) and taking into consideration possible parallels in the Bactrian part DN I and in contemporary Gāndhārī sources, we have arrived at the following tentative reading:

- 1 saṣṁ¹ 1 1 100 20 20 20 10 4 4 1 gṣur¹piaṣyaṣa masaṣsa¹ diva[se] ṣ¹0¹ 4 ṣ¹¹
- 2 rajatirajasa ṣtra¹taṣrasa dhra¹mi[ka]sa [8-10, no more than 12 characters]
- 3 vhema taṣkhtuaṣa k[u]ṣa¹ṇasa [1-2 characters] śea [no more than 6 characters]

In the year 279, on the 15th day of the month Gorpiaios. Of the king of kings, the saviour, the lawful, [...] Vhema Takthu, the Kushan, [...]

It can thus be established that the first three lines of DN IV contain the date of the Dašt-i Nāwur trilingual or the event that it commemorates, and the royal address of the Kushan emperor Whema

methodological deficit and casts considerable doubt on the conclusions that Palunčić et al. arrive at, and on the reading that they present.

A new autopsy and on-site reading, new squeezes and photographs of the trilingual (if this is preserved at all), or other future research into the parallel texts DN I and DN III or DN II and DN V will hopefully lead to interesting new insights into the makeup of the inscriptions and their relation to each other that may also shed light on DN IV. However, until then we should content ourselves with our well-substantiated findings so far and heed the proverb: less is more.

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