Settled rather than saddled Scythians: the easternmost Sakas

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Abstract

At the easternmost edge of the Iranic world, settled rather than saddled Scythians ran the kingdom of Khotan as Iranian-speaking Buddhists who traded and tussled with their T’ang and Tibetan neighbours. Straddling the Sino-Tibetan and Irano-Indic oecumenes, these Saka dynasts of the southern ‘Silk Road’ were conquered and converted by the Turkification and Islamisation of the Tarim Basin. Their effect, both historical and artistic, merits consideration in Scythian studies for their own achievements. This survey is based on the existing corpora of administrative and religious texts in Khotanese, an amply documented Middle Iranian language, which enables the tracing of the trajectory of these Scythian legatees until the end of antiquity.

Keywords: Bactria; Mahayana Buddhism; eastern Middle Iranian; Khotan; Khotanese Saka; Kushans; Parthia; Sakas; Scythians; Sistan; Tarim Basin; Tillya tepe; Yuezhi

‘The Scythians, however, though in other respects I do not admire them, have managed one thing, and that the most important in human affairs, better than anyone else on the face of the earth: I mean their own preservation. For such is their manner of life that no one who invades their country can escape destruction, and if they wish to avoid engaging with an enemy, that enemy cannot by any possibility come to grips with them’.2

‘The Bactrians and Parthians descended from the Scythians, as did Attila the Great ... Our Lombards, Hungarians, Castellani, and Goths are descended from the Scythians ... The Turks too ... came from Scythia’.3

‘In every age the immense plains of Scythia, or Tartary, have been inhabited by vagrant tribes of hunters and shepherds, whose indolence refuses to cultivate the earth, and whose restless spirit disdains the confinement of a sedentary life. In every age, the Scythians, and Tartars, have been renowned for their invincible courage, and rapid conquests’.4

At the easternmost edge of the Iranic world, settled and not saddled Sakas, as Iranian speakers and Buddhist practitioners, ran the kingdom of Khotan which traded and tussled with its T’ang and Tibetan neighbours respectively.5 Straddling the Sino-Tibetan and Irano-Indic oecumenes, these eastern Saka dynasts of the southern ‘Silk Road’ came to an end with the Turkification and Islamisation of the Tarim Basin. Their impress, historical and artistic, merits consideration in Scythian studies for its own achievements.

This survey draws on our corpora of administrative and religious texts in Khotanese, an amply documented Middle Iranian language, which enables one to trace the trajectory of these supposed Scythian legatees down to the end of antiquity. As Sir Harold Bailey rightly observed: ‘Early Saka people had no occasion to write books or documents ... Khotan is thus the only ancient Saka state which we can know intimately from its own writings’.2

It cannot be gainsaid that the said Sakas must not be deemed direct descendants of those mounted nomads constituting the theme of the exhibition and accompanying conference. Indeed, there is nothing to suggest linguistically, genetically or culturally, what with the vast stretches, temporal and spatial, which preclude discerning much less discerning sociocultural congruences. Subsumed as the Khotanese are under the ethnonym Saka, this Iranian-speaking group is but one among several under that imprecise ethnic nomenclature. One might be permitted a cue from Gibbon who pleaded: ‘I indifferently use the appellation of Scythians, or Tartars’,6 Literary license, however, cannot endorse academic inaccuracy even if

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1 Centre for Iranian Studies, SOAS, London; email: bw3@soas.ac.uk
2 Herodotus, The Histories 4.46.
3 Bergamo, Supplementum.
5 Dickens 2018: 863.
7 Bailey 1978: 5 in the maiden issue of Afghan Studies was the published version of a lecture read at the inauguration of the Society for Afghan Studies, London, 1972.
some residual vestige lingered in classical and medieval sources that Gibbon would have consulted. He would, in all likelihood, have been aware of that aforementioned Augustinian monk, da Bergamo’s universal chronicle of 1483, whose enthusiasm for genealogically tracing a multitude of marauders to the Scythians is almost superstitious. One may mitigate by adducing that such vestigial notions of ethno-genesis need not be dismissed as wholly untenable. Both late Russian academicians, Elena Efimovna Kuzmina and Vadim Mikhailovich Masson, adumbrate these antecedents with conflated qualifiers. Likewise Sir Barry Cunliffe who remarks: ‘Predatory nomadism first becomes apparent in Scythian-Saka cultures from the 9th to the 8th century BC’. Herodotus, lest it needs reminding, plainly noted:

‘The Sacae, a Scythian people, wore on their heads the kurbasia, a tall, pointed cap made of stiﬀ material, they sported trousers, and, in addition to their native bows and arrows, carried battleaxes known as sagraes. In fact, these Sacae were Scythians from Amyrgium, but were called “Sace” because that is the name given by the Persians to all the Scythians’.

Again Sir Harold Bailey observed, in an appropriately-titled lecture, A Half-Century of Irano-Indian Studies: ‘Saka, if we adopt the Achaemenian value of the word for all the northerners from the Danube to the Jaxartes, the modern Syr-darya, now survives in Ossetic of the Caucasus and in the Iranian dialects of Shughnān, Wakān, and Munjān of the Pamirs’.

This disquisition is foregrounded recalling that 1978 exhibition in Great Britain, Frozen tombs: the Culture and Art of the Ancient Tribes of Siberia, also mounted at the British Museum in conjunction with the State Hermitage Museum, Leningrad. Recalling Russia’s tumultuous century at our October 2017 conference, one harks to Petrograd 1915, two years before the revolution, where Sergei Sergeyevich Prokofiev composed his Scythian Suite, opus 20. It was premiered there in January 1916. St. Petersburg, thankfully again it is, to whose enlightened namesake despot, we owe the founding seeds of the collections displayed in London (November 1978–February 1979) and now almost four decades later:

Two years after the debut of Prokofiev’s Scythian Suite, Mikhail Ivanovich Rostovtzeﬀ (1870–1952) fled Bolshevik Russia and during his English exile at Oxford’s Bodleian library wrote daily what duly became a classic, Iranians and Greeks in South Russia. Colleagues toeing the party line in the old country felt obliged to debunk ‘this greatest of Russian experts in the ﬁeld’ according to whom ‘Scythians had appeared from the east as nomadic conquerors, already possessing the animal style in fully developed form, and had superimposed their culture upon the matriarchal peasant communities of southern Russia seemed the epitome of bourgeois arrogance’.


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8 Whitﬁeld 2018: 15, n. 31.
9 Masson 1988: 102 convincingly stated: ‘Since none of the peoples of the Eurasian steppes had a system of writing in ancient times, the scholars of the modern times endeavouring to reconstruct their history and culture relied at ﬁrst on the antique tradition and, accepting the broad meaning of the term Scythe, regarded all inhabitants of the region as a single people’. Kuzmina (2007: 379–83) is a sound conspectus. She notes how east Iranian tribes in self-styling as a ‘noble’ was not so much ‘self-consciousness of aarya’ as ‘aristocracy of a kurbasia’.

10 Likewise Sir Barry Cunliffe who remarks: ‘Predatory nomadism ﬁrst becomes apparent in Scythian-Saka cultures from the 9th to the 8th century BC’.


12 Rostovtzeﬀ 1922; anon. 1952: 8.

A first, often overlooked, point is that Scyths, like Cimmerians, are the only peoples identifiable by their name and not artefacts in western central Asia. And in both cases by the Greeks. But we are not concerned with the Royal Scyths of the West but those of the East or the Sakas (transliterated into Chinese sources sai) who must be identified with the Issedones. Those Royal Scyths, *hōi basiliōi Skythai*, designation of the leading tribe of the Scythian federation is probably an Iranian loan-translation of *saka-rauka* ‘Saka-ruling’ (*saka* ‘strong’, cf. *Avestan sak-, Old Indian *śak-) from a base *ru-ruau- ‘to rule, command’, *ruḵyām* (Khotanese gen. pl., an official title), cf. ‘ruler’ (*Khotanese *rrund-nom. sg. *r̄r̄e*); and the tribal demonym in classical texts (*Greek sakaraukoi, sakaurakoi, Latin sacaraueae, saracaeae*). It lends ballast to the belief of existent bilingual relations between Greeks and Iranians in ancient southern Russia.

any *talk* on Rostovtzeff was discouraged or controlled; although Soviet authorities published an ethnographic history of southern Russia in 1925 from a draft manuscript Rostovtzeff had left behind, he remained unaware of it until much later. Rostovtzeff ‘already knew the Hellenistic side of this civilization, soon proved to be an authority on Scyths and Sarmatians as well. In following up his nomads, he reached the borders of China and tackled problems of Chinese art whenever they could throw light on the Iranian elements of southern Russia.’ Ideological skewering of sources by communists is matched by that of chauvinists as evident in a recent multi-volume, pan-Turanian project: ‘The Uralo-Altaic view, the strongest, most recent view, and the idea that the Scyths were Turkish have [sic] gained more and more support. Scientists evaluated the issue with [sic] all aspects of it [sic].’ Putting paid a century-plus of scholarship on the ethnohistoric, namely Iranian, record inspires this *piece justificative* by Çay and Durmuş 2002: 162; cf. Jettmar 1967: 17 for this fixation of ‘Turks in art’ universally and Taishan (1998: 152) on the baseless originating of Saka, Wusun and Yuezhi tribes as Turks from the Altai. Their just as frenzied Iranian counterparts, especially in the diaspora, remain ignorant thankfully of the now more than half-century-old writings of Yale University’s Ukrainian émigré historian, George Vladimirivich Vernadsky (1887–1973). His broad strokes, predicated on superficial philological similarities and an over enthusiastic recognition of Iranian cultural ubiquity across ancient Russia, discredited his wide readings and prolific writings. In Vernadsky (1946: 97; 1959: 63–64; 1968: 22) he persistently presumed that the origin of the ethnonym *rus*, now consensually taken as Norse-Finnish in origin, was Iranian because Turkish Scythe-Alans, ancestors of present-day Ossetes, numbered a clan known as *Antes* who merged sometime c. AD 800 with the *rus*, whence Rus-Alan (Rokholani), an Alanic tribe who defeated the Scyths c. 200 BC, following which the former became known simply *Rus*, given the first half of the tribal name, and so Alanic *rux* ‘radiant light’ was the derivative for Rus or Ros (*Rus*, Russians). Frye (1946) and Clauson (1959) are rightly severe and some inclined Marlowe, grounded in his classics, assuredly would have known of the Athenian tragic poet and dramatist, Choïroïs of Samos, who declared: ‘the Saka, sheep shepherds, of the Scythian kin, live in Asia’. Marlowe’s opening act, was set in Persepolis, ancient Pārs, homeland of the Achaemenians and, also later, the Sasanians. The fate of the Scyths was, for some three millennia, linked with the imperial destinies of both aforementioned and the Parthian empires.

Our earliest Iranian – and epigraphic – attestation of distinctly enumerated Scyths is in the Old Persian regnal inscriptions. It is by this gentilic (*Old Persian *sakā*) that they were subsequently recorded in Indic sources: in Darius’s *Bīsūtūn* inscription, (DB I.6, DB II.21), Scyths are listed as *sakā* after the Bactrians, Sogdians and Gandhārans respectively but last mentioned in DB II.21. Likewise mentioned in Darius’s Persepolis terrace wall edict, DPe 18, following the lands of Achaemenid India; and DPh 5-6 where that Persepolis tablet’s body text commences delineating the empire’s four directions, *haça Saktiš tayay para Sugdam from the Scythians who [are] beyond Sogdiana*. Far more important is their distinctive enumeration and pairing in Xerxes’ *daiva* or trilingual (*Old Persian, Elamite, Babylonian*) inscription at Persepolis, XPh 26–27, *sakā haunavargā, *haoma*-venerating Scyths’, *sakā tigraxaudā ‘the Amryan Scyths, Scyths with pointed caps*. The former are inconclusively conjectured to be the easternmost Sakas somewhere where

21 Nikolaev and Pankova bring down the curtain on our exhibition’s catalogue in their closing chapter entitled ‘After the Scyths’. They conclude therein by situating the Scyths as the first of the great Eurasian empires following which came the Sarmatians down to the Turks and Mongols. An echo of thisingers in Christopher Marlowe’s transposing a Scythian shepherd’s rise to power in the person of that Çagatay Türk of the Barlas tribe hailed from the region of Kiš, modern Şahr-i Sabz (*Ozbekistan*), Timur or Tamerlane (r. 1370–1405). Marlowe’s landmark Tudor drama, scripted sometime in 1587/88, and whose title went as, *Tamburlaine the Great, Who, from a Scythian Shephearde*, by his rare and wonderfull Conquests, became a most puissant and mighty Monarque, was published in 1590 at Holborne Bridge, not far from the British Museum. Academically inclined Marlowe, grounded in his classics, assuredly would have known of the Athenian tragic poet and dramatist, Choïroïs of Samos, who declared: ‘the Saka, sheep shepherds, of the Scythian kin, live in Asia’. Marlowe’s opening act, was set in Persepolis, ancient Pārs, homeland of the Achaemenians and, also later, the Sasanians. The fate of the Scyths was, for some three millennia, linked with the imperial destinies of both aforementioned and the Parthian empires.

23 On Alans, Scyths and Sarmatians see Berndt 2018; Dickens 2018: 1334, 1346–47 respectively.
24 Cunningham and Henson eds 1998.
between the Bactrians and Indians.29 The latter are artistically evident along the eastern stairs of the Apadāna, Persepolis, c. 520–485 BC. But here Irān owes something to ‘Irāq – or at least its Babylonians. At the northwestern end in Nimrud of the palace of Ašurnāṣirpal II (885–889 BC) is a bas-relief depicting two shooting and galloping horsemen, trouser-clad with pointed caps and soft top boots.30

A mention of Parthians may well bring to mind their ‘armoured cavalry’ (Greek kattráphrákoí) and the Parthian shot for they were ‘adept at this than anyone else except the Scythians’.31 But the Scythians were a long shot ahead. Credit where credit due: Clement of Alexandria (8.62) declared that ‘both men and women of the Saka had bows and were able to shoot turning back when galloping a horse.’32 But eventually the Parthians wielded the whip in shunting off the Sakas into southeast Irān henceforth sakastāna in Pahlavi sources or drangiana of Greek geographers (Old Persian zranke, Inscrp. Parthian sktn, Middle Persian sistān, Christian Sogdian sast’n, Greek seistēnē, Buddhist Sanskrit sākasthāna, Classical Armenian sakastana, Classical Chinese wuyishanli, New Persian sistān, Classical Arabic sijistān), Seistān va Baločistān, present-day Irān’s largest province.33 This is dateable between 120 and 80 BC because the Indo-Greeks collapsed at the hands of the Sakas. Parthia played its walk-on part in the destiny of the Sakas by preventing further tribal movements from upper Asia but not before losing two monarchs in battles, Phraates (c. 128 BC) and Artabanus II (c. 123 BC).34 Only Mithradates II (c. 123–87 BC) was able to resume Iranian suzerainty in the east by which time the Sakas were temporarily ensconced in Sistān.35

A gripe in sources from the 2nd century BC permits one to sketch not so confidently but cursorily. The eastern part of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom north of the Hindu Kuś, particularly around the environs of Al Khaibar,36 was annexed by nomads in 145–140 BC. In the first instance Scythians and second time around by the Yuezhi wave emerging from Gansu farther east in China. A Scythian runic inscription on a silver ingot gives away their presence during the initial invasion.37 Indirect evidence comes from Chinese sources. Bactria (Chinese daxiā), to be sure, was under the sway of the Sakas until 130 BC. The Yuezhi themselves were being pushed out west thanks to the Xiongnu onslaught.38 This billiard ball effect of tribal waves into south central Asia, and eventually the northern rim of the subcontinent, need not detain us here. Briefly, the Sakas were ejected from Bactria by the Yuezhi who established themselves in north-central Afghanistān. They re-arranged it into five yabghu or sub-provinces, the third of which would stand out in history and attested in Chinese annals as the Guishuang/Kueizhuang or Kuśāns.39 It is entirely plausible that the Kuśāns absorbed some of the Sakas into their confederation. Tellingly tantalising, this has been proposed in recent scholarship where we have now come to consider those interred at Tillya tepe with their Bactrian gold may not be Yuezhi-Kuśān, as the late Véronique Schiltz had cautioned.40 Her French compatriot, Claude Rapin, reminds us as well that the Tillya tepe burials,41 containing a plethora of bronze mirrors and decorative plaques betraying Chinese links, demonstrates how this location was a waypoint ‘between the steppe belt and Indo-Scythian world’.42 The exact ethnic provenance of buried artefacts at Tillya tepe as that of Sakas, as previously suggested by the late Paul Bernard, is still to be determined.43

The Kuśāns, at any rate, played a pivotal role in the eventual formation of the kingdom of Khotan before the ‘Silk Road’ opened in the latter part of the 2nd century BC. Indian Buddhism arrived at an Iranian, namely Kuśān remove, in the Tarim Basin (modern Chinese taimu pendi) and therefrom China. Accompanying the Mahāyāna doctrine was its liturgical medium, Sanskrit and another distinct dialect of post-Aśokan, inscriptive northwest Prākrit or Gāndhārī for daily administration in the oasis towns of the southeast Tarim Basin during the 3rd century BC. Far removed from its Indian locale, it was an entirely different dialect of Gāndhārī known locally as Niyā or Krorāna Praṇīt.44 Sir Harold Bailey coined it Gāndhārī that was

35 Sir Harold Bailey coined it Gāndhārī that was
written in the kharoṣṭhī script (Old Iranian xšāva-pištāra ‘royal writing’).

Scholarly consensus contends that migrating Saka tribes migrated in the first half of the 2nd century BC to the Tarim Basin and settled on the southern edge of the Taklamakan Desert (modern Chinese takelamaqan shamo). Chinese history attests the presence of these Sakas from the 2nd century BC as ruling monarchs when Zhang Qian filed his report sometime after 140 BC for the (Western) Han emperor, Wudi concerning a possible alliance with the Yuezhi against the Xiongnu. From the 3rd century BC comes our earliest literary, indirect evidence of Iranians domiciled in Khotan because hitherto there is nothing to confirm their advent much less presence. Later literary evidence comes from Khotanese, an eastern Middle Iranian language written in a southern Turkestan Brāhmi script. Khotan was a centre of Mahāyāna Buddhism by the early 5th century BC. The alleged introduction of Buddhism by 84 BC need not be dismissed out of hand. What can be is the supposed Indian conquest of Khotan in the 3rd century BC notwithstanding the presence of Prākrit-speaking, Indian colonists along the burgeoning ‘Silk Road’ even before Buddhism’s regional expansion.

But the foundation legends tracing Buddhism’s advent in Khotan to the 3rd century BC, thanks to Aśoka’s son Kuṇāla or some of his ministers, merits consideration, as does the earliest local documentation of Khotan through a series of Sino-Kharoṣṭhī coins whose dating has been vexing but dateable in all probability before AD 260.

Khotan must have initially been following Hinayāna Buddhism as its Savartavādī variant was prevalent across most of central Asia and only later in the Mahāyāna sect became popular.

An excursus now is in order to highlight that Khotanese texts, constituting the core of Khotan Saka studies and so readily available from the 8th to 10th centuries, were previously our earliest linguistic evidence of a fully vocalised Iranian language. This must be revised in light of my teacher Nicholas Sims-Williams’s discovery and decipherment of the corpus of Bactrian legal documents. Bactrian, like Khotanese, unlike Sogdian, Khwarezmian, Parthian or Pahlavi, is the only other vocalised Middle Iranian language. The earliest Bactrian documents, at the time of writing, are two purchase contracts of uncertain date and our oldest, extant, vocalised Middle Iranian samples.

None of our Khotanese texts employ the demonym Saka to describe themselves although its traces are found in some documents from the 7th–10th centuries. The indigenous name for the people in Old Khotanese was hvatana-; their land was hvatana-kṣīra (Old Khotanese hvatana-, Late Khotanese hvamna-, hvam-, Niyā Prākrit khotana, Sogdian ywonyk); and [‘language] of Khotan’ (hvatanau, hvamno, hvatano formed from hvatana- plus adj. suffix -a-(< -aka)), Bailey. It may well be a self-reference from hvata ‘self’ connoting [‘rulers’ themselves’ (cf. Avestan xvatō, Zoroastrian/Book Pahlavi xvat), an unconscious acknowledgment of ‘the Saka people who settled in Khotan before their record begins in the 2nd century BC in Chinese reports’. A throwback to this peripatetic past and its spiritedness can be glimpsed when reading how the Chinese pilgrim Songyōng (?-AD 528), sojourning through Khotan in the early 6th century, noticed Khotanese women wore girdles, vests and trousers, and regularly rode on horseback. The Tibetans referred to Khotan as li-yul ‘li land’ whose etymology remains unexplained. A Volksetymologie ascribes the name for Khotan to Old Indian gostana lit. ‘earth-breast’ (Buddhist Sanskrit gostana-deṣa, Khotanese gausṭam, Tibetan sa-nu), allusions to that Aśokan legend of a banished son whose ministers witnessed the earth rise in the form of a breast at the very location Khotan was established. Xuanzang gave

Khotan the grand title of ‘the great king of Khotan’ in various passages, most commonly presumed as ‘of the great king of Khotan’ and commonly presumed as that of the 3rd century thereby leading one to surmise that titles, namely, ‘the use of Iranian terms such as hīnāyuṣa- and kṣīra-points to an established connection between the Iranian inhabitants and royal power’; Emmerick 1983a: 265; 1992: 2; Skjærvø 1987: 784; 2003: lviv; Mallory and Skjærvø 1992: 465; Tremblay 2007: 3; Kumamoto 2009.


Whitfield 2018: 144–45. Walter 2014: 32 notes that Tantric Buddhism was on the ascent from the 7th century onwards in Khotan.


Cribb (1985: 145) estimated that the coins range from c. AD 1 to c. AD 130 and must be acknowledged for conclusively adducing evidence of Kušān authority over Khotan in the 1st century AD; summarised in Wang 2004: 37–38; Kumamoto 2009; Hansen 2017: 341; Benjamin 2018: 286.


Sims-Williams and de Blois (2018: 82), per their computation of the Bactrian era, posit ranging both of these undated, purchase contracts in fragmentary state (DOCS aa, ab) to AD 312–380. A well-preserved, complete and dateable polyandrous marriage contract (DOC A) is now known to have been written and notarised on 13th October 332. Our western Middle Iranian (Parthian) evidence is doubtless older but unvocalised, namely that Awrōmān land sale deed and those 2,500-plus formulaic ostraca of wine receipts from Nīśā (2nd–1st centuries BC).


Bailey 1982: 3.


the country’s official name as kustana ‘earth-breast’, which was neither in currency among the Khotanese or the Chinese (earliest attestation yuzhi, classical Chinese yutian, Modern Chinese hetian). 61

Khotan, for the Chinese more so than Buddhism, conjures jade. 62 It was a reputed centre for abundant jade stone as depicted in the official dynastic compilation, Hanshu or ‘History of the Former Han’ (206 BC–AD 8). 63 One recalls that the jade road was older than the silk one. 64 Khotan was the centre of silk production in the Tarim Basin and Sir Marc Aurel Stein opined that Khotan, not China, was the real Serindia ancient geographers had in mind. 65 And jade, like gold, conjures images of Sakan wealth. 66 Khotan was blessed with a superb supply of authentic jade, real nephrite, as the town was between the flowing Yöröng Kāsh (‘white jade’) and Qara qāsh (‘black jade’) streams flowing from the Qurum (Kunlun) mountains. 67 The river was known in Khotanese as ranjáit tājá, ‘river of precious stone’, 68 the Khotanese ira ‘jade’ here substituted with the prestigious Indian lexeme rana- < older ranata-. 69

Khotan was strategically positioned on the edge of the Täklamakan, with vast distances between oases to the east such as Niyä, 69 and the only feasible route westward wound out of Xinjiang. Throughout the 1st millennium, down to the eventual collapse of the kingdom, it changed hands among Tibetan, Turkish and T’ang contenders. Khotan’s shaky Tibetan interregnum covered two decades (AD 670–70). 70 The Chinese routinely subjugated or manipulated, as was their meddlesome wont, in the politics of all ‘Silk Road’ statelets or Western Regions, a practice prevalent down to the present. No mention of Khotan occurs in Chinese documents of the 9th century but our sources pick up a century later. A protracted struggle between Khotan and Qäsqär, 71 at the western edge of the Täklamakan and terminus of the northern and southern ‘Silk Road’ tiers, was the beginning of the end. For taking advantage of this distraction, Khotan’s last Buddhist ruler fell to the Qaräkhanid in recent Persian literature. A perceptive piece, Allott (1973), correctly attempts at dispelling Arnold’s ‘Scythian’ in ‘The Strayed Reveller’ (line 162) as one for he could not have had those Scythians of Aeschylius, Pindar and Herodotus in mind when composing this verse when deploying ‘what is now a confusing obsolete sense’. On Arnold’s citing of Gibbon who too uses a loose descriptor, see supra Womerley ed. 2005: 1025, and Allott 1973: 164, n. 2, who contends Arnold was probably thinking of either Alans or Cumans.

In 1897, the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal (vol. 66) carried an extra number issue wherein

- Boyce 1955: 475.
- Russell 2004: 543.
- Bailey 1970: 69; 1971b: 19; 1976a: 8; 1978: 5; 1983: 1231–32; 1985b: 66; Alishan 1989: 17–23; Frye 1993: 219; Schwartz apud Davidson 2013: 105, n. 26 alternately proposed deriving it from Avestan *raust-taoma ‘having the strength of a stream’. Yarshater (1983: 454–56) is the best synopsis which must be consulted for Elamite attestations of his name (rašdama, rašdakma < *raust-taoma), suggested by Ilya Gershchevit (Yarshater 1983: 456, n. 3); and, more importantly, highlighting how Nöldeke (1930: 13–14) was the first to propose that ‘Rustam and Zal are localized most decidedly in Sistan (Drangiana) and Zābul (Arachosia)’ and the Sistānī-Sakan origins of Rustam. Melikian-Chirvani (1998: 2001), 190, 198 n. 17 proposed that Helleno-Scythian art is where one discerns the ‘earliest representation of Herakles [= Rustam] found among the communities speaking Iranian languages’.

64 Mallory and Mair 2008: 78.
65 Wood 2003: 43.
66 Whitfield 2018: 141.
Settled rather than saddled Scythians: the easternmost Sakas

Augustus Frederic Hoernle (1841–1918), principal of the Calcutta Madrassah, published an article concerning an 'unknown language' which puzzled him after having come to his attention and described, in his November 1905 report to the Under Secretary to the Government of India, as 'seem to prove clearly that the language of the documents is an Indo-Iranian dialect.' Hoernle would become the decipherer of Khotanese.\(^{77}\)

His Persianist successor and principal of the Calcutta Madrassah, Sir E. Denison Ross, returned to England becoming the first director of the School of Oriental Studies (now SOAS) established a century ago in 1916.\(^{78}\)

One of Ross's earliest appointees, Harold Walter Bailey, the Parsee Community Lecturer in Iranian Studies (1929–36), upon subsequent translation to Cambridge as Professor of Sanskrit (1936–67), would take up where Hoernle left off devoting a lifetime's industry towards translating these Khotanese documents which Sir Aurel Stein collected during three of his four expeditions to central Asia (1900–1901, 1906–1908, 1913–16).\(^{79}\)

This entire tranche was deposited at the British Museum's Department of Oriental Printed Books and Manuscripts and remained there until the British Library was constituted in 1973.

A milestone in Iranistics was reached when Sir Harold Bailey published his Dictionary of Khotan Saka.\(^{80}\) The Sakas verily went para darya 'beyond the sea' when, to commemorate its publication, an opus planned 'in 1934, forty-four years ago, to make available to Iranisants all Iranian material ... concerned with the one Saka dialect of North Iranian of which Ossetic (Arias) in the Caucasus and Wakhī in Wakhān in the Pamirs are other branches'.\(^{81}\) Columbia University's Centre for Iranian Studies invited Sir Harold to deliver a week-long series of lectures eventually published as the Culture of the Sakas in Ancient Iranian Khotan.\(^{82}\)

His seventh volume on Khotanese Texts appeared a decade before his demise.\(^{83}\)

The Khotanese Stein collection of approximately 50 scrolls, 2,000 paper fragments and 100 woodslips, under the aegis of the Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum, was authoritatively deciphered, and translated by P. Oktor Skjærvø, as Khotanese Manuscripts from Chinese Turkestan in The British Library, 2002.\(^{84}\)

It was fitting that what recently deceased Indologist, Awadh Kishore Narain, stated when commissioned by The Cambridge History series towards the end of the previous century: 'The variety of linguistic remains in the Saka language provides what amounts to a veritable index to the high civilization of the Sakas in Inner Asia.'\(^{85}\)

\(^{77}\) Although A.F.R. Hoernle was its discoverer, Emmerick (1992: 6) points out that J. Kirste was the designator when he proposed the expression 'khotanisch' in his published 1912 article; Wood (2003: 192–93); Skjærvø (2003: xxvi, xxxvii–xlvi, lxxi); Sims-Williams (2004: 418–20) is an authoritative survey of Hoernle; Maggi 2009: 331; Hansen 2017: 348–49.

\(^{78}\) Ross 1943: 168.

\(^{79}\) Skjærvø 2003: xlvii–xlxi.

\(^{80}\) Bailey 1979b.

\(^{81}\) Bailey 1979c: vii.


\(^{83}\) Bailey 1985b.

\(^{84}\) Bailey 1968; also published by the Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum (CII), was a pioneering forerunner to this edition. Skjærvø (2003) jointly published by the CII and The British Library. This corrected imprint is now out of stock. The first edition, Skjærvø (2002) with corrigenda slips, as well as Bailey (1968) are available for sale from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) Library, London.

\(^{85}\) Narain 1990: 174.