

The Great Indian Road: India – Central Asia – Transcaucasia

The Great Silk Road which in ancient times linked the countries of the Far East with the Mediterranean area by way of Central Asia is well known to the learned and general public. Much less known is the other great trade road, also through Central Asia, that ran from India to the Mediterranean shores. Unlike the Silk Road with its predominantly overland routes, our road was a compound of land and waterway routes, that is, parts of the road ran over land, others along rivers, and some parts across the sea.

This road started, in all likelihood, from Taxila, the capital of Gandhara, in north-western India, and crossed the Hindu Kush range into Bactria. After this it followed the Kokcha, Kunduz Darya, and Balkhab rivers to the Oxus (Amu Darya), and then down the Oxus toward Chorasmia (at Amul, or Chardzhou, a route branched off towards Margiana, Parthyene and the Atrek valley. From Chorasmia the route continued along the Uzboi channel to the Caspian Sea, and crossing the sea, passed on to the mouth of the Kura river (ancient Cyrus); thence along the river and through modern Azerbaijan (Caucasian Albania) and eastern Georgia (Ancient Iberia) it crossed the Surami Pass to reach the valley of the Rioni river (ancient Phasis), where the ships, if we are to trust Strabo, were dragged along the ground. In the lower course of the Phasis (western Georgia, legendary Colchis), as reported by Pseudo-Scymnus, was situated a city bearing the same name and inhabited by people of various nationalities, including Bactrians and Indians (*Ad Nicomedem regem*, 934 [F 20]).

Thence by the Euxine the road led to the Greek cities north of the Black Sea and so ultimately to South-East Europe.

No single or collective name for the entire trans-continental road in question has as yet been formulated. Scholars who have studied this route have given names only to separate parts of its long course, for instance, the 'Oxo-Caspian trade-route' (W.W.Tarn), the 'Caspian sea-

route' (A.S.Balakhvantsev), or the 'Road of Strabo' (the last explaining neither the function of the road, nor its significance, or its considerable length).

In contrast to the Silk Road, the general direction of which, in Graeco-Roman sources, is always described as being from west to east (for example, in the itinerary of Maes Titianus), the description of our road, in the same sources, is given as east (from India) to west. From the same sources we also know that this road was used exclusively for transmitting Indian goods. It is in view of this that the name 'Great Indian Road' is here suggested.

There is good reason to believe that in the old days the road from Gandhara moved not only westwards, but also eastwards to south-west China.

This is indicated by the report of Zhang Qian in which he says that during his mission in Central Asia (between 139–129 BC) he saw, in the markets of Bactria, bamboo and cloth from Shu, which, as the merchants told him, had been purchased in Shendu, not far from Shu.

According to present knowledge, Shu corresponds to the province of Sichuan in China, whereas Shendu incorporated the territory of north-eastern India, parts of Burma, and Yunnan (a province in the south-west of China on the border with Vietnam).

There already existed, therefore, before the emergence of the 'Silk Road' a route between Bactria and south-west China that was used for commerce by Bactrian and Chinese merchants.

The Bactrian merchants seem to have travelled from Bactria through Gandhara and Kashmir, and then along the valleys of the Jumna and Ganges rivers to Burma, from whence they reached the Yunnan and Sichuan provinces in China.

Judging from a number of sources, the Great Indian Road took shape much earlier than the Great Silk Road. Hence it was the Indian Road that was the first trans-continental thoroughfare in the history of civilizations, which linked the Mediterranean world to Transcaucasia, Central Asia, Iberia, and possibly to China.

Like many other grand trade highways in antiquity, the Indian Road emerged only in sections, over several stages, the opening up which was the work of various ethnic peoples,

those from Hindustan, Bactria, Chorasmia, as well as the peoples of Transcaucasia – Albanians, Iberians and Colchians.

The unification of all its parts into a single trade route seems to have been initiated by the Hellenes, starting with the legendary seafaring Argonauts' voyage to Colchis, the journey of Jason to the Caspian Sea, and the expedition of Alexander the Great with his army which opened up the riverain and overland routes from Central Asia to India, also the voyage of Patrocles commissioned by Seleucus to explore the Caspian Sea. This paper presents the author's interpretation of some ancient textual and numismatic data which points to the relationship which existed between Central Asia and Transcaucasia in the Hellenistic and pre-Hellenistic periods.

Bactrian traders in the south of China

As mentioned above, Zhang Qian in his report, made to the emperor Wudi (140–86) on returning from a trip to the Western Regions, wrote that in Daxia (Bactria) he had seen bamboo staffs and cloth made in the province of Shu, which the merchants told him they had brought from Shendu. He continues by saying that if Chinese emissaries were to go through the lands of the Qiang people, the latter would get angry, and if they were to go along the north, the Chinese envoys would be caught by the Xiongnu (Huns). Zhang Qian concludes that it might be better therefore to take the route direct from Shu, because this route was not subject to raid.¹

Shu, as mentioned before, is the ancient name of the present Sichuan province in south-west China, covering the Middle and Upper Yangtze areas, while Shendu, situated several thousand *li* to the south-west of Shu, occupied the territory of north-eastern India, the northern regions of Burma (Myanmar), and the western part of the Chinese province of Yunnan which is to the south of Shu (Sichuan) and abuts upon Burma in the west.²

¹ Бичурин 1950, 153.

² Бичурин 1950, 153

Indeed, in view of the aggressiveness of the Qiang people who lived east of Tibet and the upper reaches of the Mekong and Salween rivers, and the threat of the Xiongnu hostility from the north, the best way to reach Daxia was to go direct from Shu to Shendu and thence on to Daxia, thus following the route used originally by Bactrian traders, from whom apparently Zhang Qian learnt about it.

It was quite natural therefore that the Chinese should have used the route by which the Bactrian merchants used to send their goods to north-eastern India and southern China.

Subsequently, the Emperor Wudi ordered envoys to be sent from Shu and Gianwei (Гяньвей), to search out and explore this route, from four different tracks passing over the domains of Daqiao (Да-цяо) in the north and Sui and Kunming in the south. It is reported, however, that the Chinese envoys failed to pass through Kunming, because its inhabitants, who had no king, were inclined to plundering and killing.³

Nonetheless, one thousand *li* from Sui and Kunming there was the kingdom of Dian (Dianyue), where the inhabitants rode elephants, and which was sometimes used by the merchants from Shu, going secretly abroad for trade.⁴ It would appear that the kingdom of Dian was to the east of India. Emperor Wudi was therefore seeking to first make contact with Dian, but after more than one fruitless attempt he decided to postpone this plan.

Meanwhile, Zhang Qian, who would seem to be the best aware of the routes leading from south China via India to Bactria, and probably of a track from Bactria westwards to the Caspian and Black Seas, persisted in exploring the routes from southern China into Bactria. Therefore, when he reported for the second time the possibility of entering Daxia (Bactria), attention was turned again towards the south-western neighbours.⁵ We can infer from all this that there were several old roads from southern China into Bactria, from Shu (Sichuan), through Burma and northern India, or across Tibet and along the Himalayas, which had been in existence since time immemorial, used by Bactrian and Chinese traders before the Chinese

³ Zhijuan Liu 2006, 7.

⁴ Бичурин 1950, 154.

⁵ Бичурин 1950, 154.

expansion into the Western Regions under the Han dynasty, and before Han China opened up a network of traffic and routes, both in the north and in the southwest, to make contact with the Western lands, and in particular with India and Bactria.

The products imported into Bactria from China along these roads, as Zhang Qian notes, were cloth and bamboos. N.Y.Bichurin states that the Sichuan cloth was made of water cane and that the kind of bamboo which Zhang Qian saw in Bactria, known in China as Izyan-zhu (Изян-чжу), grew in Ya-zheu-fu (Я-чжеу-фу) in the Хиун-шанг (ХЮНЬ-ШАНЬ) mountains in the south of China.⁶ A list of Chinese exports may have included other items as well, in particular those using silk. It is not impossible that the remains of garments made in Chinese silk, dating from the 6th century BC, which have been found near Stuttgart in Germany,⁷ could well have arrived there along the Great Indian Road all the way from southern China, the principal silk-producing culture, by way of India and Bactria, and thence across the Caspian and Black Seas.

According to the Chinese researcher Liu Zhijuan, 'The earliest marine silk road across the South China Sea began with the land silk road in southern China. This started in Sichuan, and went through Yunnan via the region south of Yongchang (modern Baoshan) and ran along the Irrawaddy river until it arrived in Yangon (Rangoon). The route continued westward to India, and then crossed the Indian Ocean to either the Central Asian continent or to the Roman Empire'.⁸ O.P.Kobzeva believes that Sichuan was traversed by one of the routes of the Silk Road, a route little known to European scholars, which ran across Yunnan, northern Burma and along the Brahmaputra river to India, and thence along the Ganges to the Iranian plateau. This route, as she suggests, came into being more than 3000 years ago.⁹

In Mauryan times (317–180), especially under the great king Ashoka (268–239), whose power extended from the Bay of Bengal in the south-east till as far as Gandhara and the

⁶ Бичурин 1950, 153. Прим. 1.

⁷ Zhijuan Liu 2006, 11.

⁸ Zhijuan Liu 2006, 79.

⁹ Кобзева 2009, 129.

Kandahar region in the north-west, the most important line of communication was the route which led from the Mauryan capital Pataliputra (Patna) on the Ganges river through the Gangetic plain to Taxila (capital of Gandhara), and thence to Bactria. According to the Indian scholar, R.Thapar, this road was called the 'Royal Highway', and is the 'Grand Trunk Road' of India today.¹⁰

The Mauryas are known to have developed intensive inter-relations with the Seleucid and Graeco-Bactrian kingdoms. An ambassador of Seleucus I Megasthenes, who wrote the work *Indica* partially preserved in Arrian, spent much time at the court of Chandragupta (317–293), the founder of the Indian Maurya dynasty, in Pataliputra.¹¹

If we now recall that under Seleucus I and his son the first Antiochus (281–261) endeavours were made to have the road from India to the Caspian and Black Seas explored, we may assume that Megasthenes also surveyed the road from the south-east in the lower Ganges, where it met the road from Shu, China.

A number of scholars offer rather weighty arguments for the existence of early contacts between India and southern China. N.Barnard, for example, maintains that the lost-wax bronze casting technique was adopted in Yunnan from India. He relied on his survey of the bronze articles of the Zhou state of the 6th century BC that encompassed the central and southern parts of China. Another sign of these contacts are the finds of cowries unearthed in tombs in southern China.¹²

Another hypothesis gave rise to heated discussions. The hypothesis, as put forward by several scholars, including Cheng and Schwitter, is that the nickel which was used in the copper-nickel coins of the Bactrian Greek kings Euthydemus II, Pantaleon, Agathocles, and Eucratides was mined in Yunnan, China, and then transported to Bactria.¹³ The hypothesis has

¹⁰ Thapar 1973, 81–82.

¹¹ Бонгард-Левин 2000, 36; Бонгард-Левин, Бухарин, Вигасин 2002, 48–138.

¹² Widemann 2009, 80.

¹³ Cheng, Schwitter 1957, 351–365.

been severely criticised by Sch.Cammann.¹⁴ F.Widemann addresses the issue substantially in his fundamental monograph, setting out the pros and cons of the arguments proposed by various scholars.¹⁵

Evidence, albeit indirect, of a passage from India to south-west China can be found in the biography of the famous Buddhist preacher, Kang Senghui, Sogdian by birth, which has been preserved in the *Hui Chiao*. Here it is said that his ancestors had gone from Sogdia and settled in India; later Kang Senghui's father moved to Jiaozhi, i.e. northern Vietnam, where he did business. This leads to the conclusion that he reached northern Vietnam either by a long sea-route, or by the shorter land-route from India through south-west China.¹⁶

There is enough archaeological and historical evidence to suggest that communication between Central Asia and south-west China continued to be active in the early medieval period. In the first place, there is an inscription in stone written in vertical Sogdian script with carved depictions of crosses, which was discovered in Ladakh, on the Kashmir and Tibet frontier, which states: «Year 210. I came from the interior. The Samarkand slave [of God] Noshfarn shall go to the Kagan of Tibet» (translation by V.A.Livshits). The inscription, dated in the Sassanian Era to King Yazdegird III, corresponds to the year 841/842 AD.¹⁷

Another piece of evidence, of even earlier date, which supports this assumption, is provided by a silver vessel with a Sogdian inscription recovered in the Chinese province of Canton near the border with Vietnam together with coins of Peroz (459–481). According to Y.Yoshida, the inscription on the vessel reads as follows: «This vessel belongs to [...] sp of the Chach people (Weight) 42 staters».¹⁸

Chach (Shash in Arab times) embraced the territory of the modern Tashkent region of Uzbekistan and the southern regions of modern Kazakhstan. It is noteworthy that a silver

¹⁴ Cammann 1958, 409–414.

¹⁵ Widemann 2009, 75–101.

¹⁶ Хуэй Изяо 1991, 110–116; Ртвеладзе 1998, 21.

¹⁷ Jettmar 1993, 151–163, pl. 1–16.

¹⁸ Yoshida 1996, 73–74.

vessel, found in the village of Kerchevo in the Urals, also bears a Sogdian inscription affirming the direct association of the vessel with a Chach ruler named S'w.¹⁹

A tamga which appears on all these vessels is similar to the one on the coins of Chach of the mid-3rd – 5th centuries AD, including the coins of Zabbag and Wanun, the founders of the Chach dynasty.²⁰

Archaeological confirmation of the connection between Sogdia with southern China comes from a Nestorian inscription (707–709) found in Guilin (south China), which mentions some 'An Cheng'. Judging from the first part of his name – 'An', he was a native of Bukhara.²¹

Manshu (the book on the Barbarians in southern China) compiled by Fan Chuo sometime during the Tang period (7th–10th century AD) contains a description of two routes leading into Burma and India which start from Yanshan on the Salween river in the province of Yunnan.

The northern route traversed the plains of Burma, from whence it went, after crossing the Black mountains, to the confluence of the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers. The southern route was down the Irrawaddy river and went first to the Pyū settlement in Mandalay, the royal capital of Burma under Tang rule. After Pyū it continued to the junction of the Ganges and Brahmaputra, where it joined the northern route. From there the road passed on through the Ganges and Jumna valleys and then via Mathura (Muttra) and Sagala (Sialkot)²² to Taxila (near Rawalpindi), following the old Royal Highway of the Mauryan period and what is now the Grand Trunk Road.

Indicomardana. The city of Indian men

The migration of Indians into the Oxus valley along the Great Indian Road is attested in Ptolemy who mentions the city of Indicomardana among those situated between the Oxus (Amu Darya) and the Jaxartes (Ptolemy. 6. 12), the name of which I.V.Pyankov has translated

¹⁹ Лившиц, Луконин 1964, 170–172.

²⁰ Ртвеладзе 2008, 64–75.

²¹ Yoshida 1996, 75.

²² Widemann 2009, 86–87. (Carte figure 4–3)

with good reason as ‘the city of Indian people’.²³ The name Indicomardana is derived from the racial name for the peoples of Hindustan, and the word «mard» means «a man» in the languages of Iranian origin, with the suffix «an» indicating the plural form of the noun. Consequently, it is possible to translate the name, on the strength of I.V.Pyankov, as ‘the city of Indian people’ or rather ‘the city of Indian men’. In this case, identifying Indicomardana with an ancient city-site requires that the name of the site should correspond to ‘Indicomardana’, and also that at least some or rather plenty of artefacts of Indian origin should have been found there. I.V.Pyankov places Indicomardana at the site of Airtam seemingly because certain Buddhist monuments have been uncovered there, of which the most striking is the famous relief frieze.²⁴

However, archaeological considerations alone propose a better candidate for the identification of Indicomardana. This would be Ancient Tarmita (Old Termez), a repository of Buddhist constructions, in particular the grandiose Karatepa and Fayaztepa monasteries, which surpass those at Airtam in both number and significance.²⁵ Yet the main point is that it is precisely at this place where a large number of inscriptions in Sanskrit and Prakrit were discovered, written in the Kharoshthi and Brahmi scripts, and which date from the first centuries AD, i.e. the time of Ptolemy’s *Geography*. The inscriptions have been thoroughly surveyed by V.V.Vertogradova,²⁶ and bear witness to the permanent establishment of people of Indian origin in Ancient Tarmita, including members of the Buddhist religious community, lay men – traders, and also people from other social groups.

Nevertheless, all the cities of Bactria listed in the *Geography* of Ptolemy have been identified, and Tarmita is not among them, although, as explicitly proved by W.W.Tarn, it was

²³ Пьянков 1982.

²⁴ Массон 1933; Массон 1935; Pugachenkova 1991/92, 23–43.

²⁵ Кара-тепе – буддийский пещерный монастырь в Старом Термезе 1964; Буддийские пещеры Кара-тепе в Старом Термезе 1969; Буддийский культовый центр Кара-тепе в Старом Термезе 1972; Новые находки на Кара-тепе в Старом Термезе 1975; Буддийские памятники Кара-тепе в Старом Термезе 1982; Альбаум 1976, 43–46; Альбаум 1974, 53–58.

²⁶ Вертоградова 1995; Воробьева-Десятовская 1983, 22–97.

known by the name of 'Antioch Tarmita' in the time of Antiochus I (281–261).²⁷ Ptolemy, in my opinion, depending on Marinus of Tyre who had relied in turn on Maes Titianus' itinerary, could hardly not have known the name 'Tarmita', but he used instead its other name 'Indicomardana', probably because it was widely used at the time, in the first centuries AD, alongside the name 'Tarmita', because of the considerable Indian population dwelling in the city.

A parallel to the name 'Indicomardana' or 'the city of Indian men' has been detected in the 14th century. In texts and coins of this period Termez was often referred to as '*madinat ar-ridjal*' meaning «the men's city»²⁸ which reflected, according to M.E.Masson, the manly qualities of bravery and courage of the city dwellers. It is possible that the appellation of Termez as '*madinat ar-ridjal*', irrespective of whether the brave city dwellers were Indians or not, became the traditional name for Termez, handed on from generation to generation for centuries.

The Chorasmian king Pharasmanes and the ancient Georgian tribe of Colchians

There is a well known story preserved in Arrian, which concerns the Chorasmian king Pharasmanes (or Phrataphernes, in another transliteration), Alexander the Great, and the Colchians – an ancient tribe of Georgian origin (their descendants being reputedly the Mingrelians), which inhabited the western part of modern Georgia known as Colchis.

The story runs that in 328 BC Alexander the Great received in his camp Pharasmanes, the king of Chorasmians, accompanied by a cavalry to the number of one and a half thousand horsemen. Pharasmanes told Alexander that his lands bordered on the Colchians and Amazons and that should Alexander wish, after defeating the Colchians and Amazons, to conquer also the tribes round the Euxine, he would show him the way to the sea and supply whatever forces were required. Alexander thanked Pharasmanes and concluded a friendly alliance, but refused

²⁷ Tarn 1940, 525.

²⁸ Бартольд 1965, 507.

to march to the Euxine, regarding this as untimely (Arrian. 4. 15). This story, as narrated by S.P.Tolstov, has long attracted the attention of scholars. A. von Gutschmid and W.W.Barthold held it to indicate that the Chorasmanian dominion stretched as far as the south-eastern part of eastern Europe. Thus W.W.Barthold wrote: ‘Chorasmia and the south-eastern part of present-day Europe of the time..., so also under the sway of Mongols, were parts of a whole’.²⁹

W.W.Tarn, however, treated this claim quite negatively.³⁰ S.P.Tolstov, on the contrary, developed W.W.Barthold’s idea to an even greater extent, stating that Pharasmanes had extended his power over the countries on the shores of the Volga river, and saw in the great expansion of the Sarmatians in the 4th century BC ‘a guiding hand of Chorasmanian kings’.³¹ But these are a priori guesses, unconfirmed by literary evidence. Moreover, such a political position of Chorasmia, which in no way accounts for Chorasmia being contiguous with the Colchians, is definitely contradicted by the fact that the huge expanses of steppes, and the foothills and mountainous terrain of the Caucasus mountains which lay between Colchis and the Volga river were occupied by the Sarmatians in the east,³² and in the west by the Sindi and Maeotae who beyond any doubt had never been subject to Chorasmia.³³

We shall consider the testimony of Arrian in quite another way.

Legend has it, as has survived in Pliny (born in 23/24 BC), that the Albanians were the descendants of Jason (Pliny. 4. 13 (§§ 38–39)) – a legendary hero, the leader of the Argonauts, who set out for Colchis in his quest for the Golden Fleece which he retrieved with the help of Medea, daughter of the Colchian king Aeetes. Still earlier, Strabo (64 BC–c. 20 AD) wrote that Jason himself, when he travelled to Colchis, wandered as far as the Caspian Sea and visited Iberia, Albania, most of Armenia and Media, where was situated a temple of Jason which, as Strabo points out, is sufficient proof of his sojourn in the country.

²⁹ Бартольд 1965, 28.

³⁰ Тарн 1985, 81, 83.

³¹ Толстов 1949, 108–109.

³² Виноградов 1979.

³³ История народов Северного Кавказа с древнейших времен до конца XVII века 1988, 72–84.

Subsequently Medea ruled with Jason in the region. Medus, her son, 'is said to have been her successor in the kingdom, and the country to have been called after his name' (Strabo. 11. 13. 10).

Incidentally, Strabo was the first ancient author to mention the Albanians, whom he places between the Caucasus mountains and the lower Cyrus, just on the coast of the Caspian Sea. Pliny has the same geography for the Albanian dispersal.

Legends cannot of course be taken to be authentic historical sources. However, a legend cited by an ancient author who lived close to the time of the events described, and which can further be underpinned by toponymical evidence, could well allude to an historical event associated with the advance of the Greeks and Colchians toward the Caspian Sea, which was only five days distant from Colchis (Strabo. 11. 7. 3).

If even the Bactrians and the Indians, as Pseudo-Scymnus writes, could traverse great expanses and settle in the city of Phasis close to the Black Sea, what would it have cost the Colchians to cross much shorter distances and reach the Caspian? There is, to my thinking, nothing strange in this.

The words of Pharasmanes addressed to Alexander regarding his country bordering on the Colchians, may well reflect the political situation of the times, i.e. in the second half of the 4th century BC. Chorasmia at that time, as stated by AS.Balakhvantsev, was a mighty and independent state which had already passed out of Achaemenid hands, at the end of the 5th century BC, that is long before Alexander's campaigns of conquest.³⁴ Its sphere of influence extended as far west as the Caspian Sea, and Chorasmia was probably in control of the waterway linking the Oxus to the Caspian by way of the Uzboi channel.

The state of Colchians in the 6th – 4th centuries BC, as the investigations of Georgian historians have shown, was the most powerful state in Transcaucasia. It embraced the whole territory of modern western and south-western Georgia in the west till the Surami range in the

³⁴ Балахванцев 2006, 376.

east which divided Eastern (Iberia) from Western (Colchis) Georgia inhabited by the Saspeirians and Colchians respectively.³⁵ It is no accident that Herodotus (5th century BC) names only three tribes – Colchians, Saspeirians, and Medes – as living in the territory between the Caspian and the Black Sea.

Among the notices of Herodotus, is one that says ‘from Colchis it is not far to pass over to Media’ (Herodotus. 1. 104) which occupied by then the territory up to the Caspian. This testifies very clearly that there was a route between the Black Sea and the Caspian which was in use already in the 5th century BC, and possibly even earlier (if one gives credit to the legends about Jason’s journey (8th –7th centuries BC)). That is, at the same time that the waterway along the Uzboi from the Oxus (in Chorasmia) into the Caspian Sea was in use.

Present-day scholars propose that communication between the Oxus and the Caspian Sea was possible by way of the Uzboi channel, and which at that time and right up to the 10th century AD carried a great volume of water down to the Caspian and was navigable. The Khorezmian archaeological and ethnographical expedition, including the Turkmen archaeologist K.Yusupov, have revealed that both shores of the Uzboi were inhabited from the I millennium BC to the early centuries AD. They also excavated the Parthian stronghold of Igdy-kala, which had been built in the extreme north of the Parthian state with a view, as K.Yusupov suggests, to control the river traffic.³⁶ That there existed a trade waterway from Central Asia down the Oxus into the Caspian and thence up the Cyrus river and down the Phasis to the Black Sea, is further supported by the recent discoveries at Ichan-depe and Kalali-Gir of pottery ware from Caucasian workshops.³⁷

Taken together, these facts prove, to my mind, that the Chorasmian king Pharasmanes challenging Alexander to fight the Colchians and offering to guide him to the Euxine, knew of or intended the shorter and easier route to the Black Sea by way of the Caspian and

³⁵ Лордкипанидзе 1989, 219–256; Лордкипанидзе 1978.

³⁶ Юсупов 1984, 77–97.

³⁷ Vainberg, 67–81.

Transcaucasia,³⁸ rather than the difficult and circuitous route which went from Chorasmia over the steppes, and thence, skirting the Caspian, to Ciscaucasia, and then crossing the Caucasus mountains to Colchis. The evidence also testifies that already in the mid-I millennium BC there was in existence the great waterway from Central Asia to Transcaucasia, the Black Sea, and the regions beyond.

The Bactrians and Indians in the city of Phasis

There is a very important piece of information in Pseudo-Scymnus, which has generally been omitted by scholars. The first scholar to take note of it was P.Leriche,³⁹ with reference to whom I have also used it as proof of the existence of the Great Indian Road.⁴⁰ P.Leriche kindly communicated to me that in the *Géographes Grecs* published in Paris in 2000, edited by D.Marcotte, which comprises Pseudo-Scymnus' work *The Circumnavigation of the Earth*,⁴¹ there is a description in particular of the territory from the Strait of Gibraltar till the eastern coast of the Black Sea. Pseudo-Scymnus dedicated this work to either Nicomedes II (149–127) or to Nicomedes III of Bithynia (127–97). It can thus be dated, as D.Marcotte concludes, in the period between 133 – 110/107 BC.

According to Pseudo-Scymnus (*Ad Nicomedem regem*, 934 [F 20]), the Bactrians used to travel, in particular to the west, because at Phasis on the river Phasis there was a 'Greek city of Milesian origin, where men of sixty nations come together, speaking different languages: men of Barbarian origin from India and Bactria would meet there'.⁴²

The testimony of Pseudo-Scymnus indicates that as early as even before the mid-2nd century BC in Phasis, the main city of Colchis, there appears to have been founded a trading station of Bactrians and Indians, which proves in turn, in spite of the doubts proclaimed by many scholars, not only the actual existence but also the operation of the great trans-

³⁸ Балахванцев 2005, 36.

³⁹ Leriche 2007, 122.

⁴⁰ Ртвеладзе 2009 (в печати).

⁴¹ Marcotte 2000.

⁴² Leriche 2007, 122. Fn 1.

continental thoroughfare from India through Bactria to the eastern coast of the Black Sea prior at any rate to the mid-2nd century BC.

Graeco-Bactrian coins in Transcaucasia

Graeco-Bactrian coins have been discovered in the Kura valley and other nearby sites.

These finds, albeit extremely rare, have been recorded by E.A.Pakhomov; onwards their number increased insignificantly. Most of the Graeco-Bactrian coins are those reported from Kabala and Tbilisi.

Kabala – the capital city of Caucasian Albania. A hoard which included five Graeco-Bactrian coins (one tetradrachm of Diodotus and four tetradrachms of Eucratides) was found here in 1952.⁴³

Tbilisi. A hoard of six Graeco-Bactrian coins was found by accident while building a girls' high school in 1874. An analysis of the circumstances connected with the find and close examination of fifteen Graeco-Bactrian coins from the collection of the Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia, led A.S.Balakhvantsev to conclude that the hoard comprised four tetradrachms of Euthydemus I, one commemorative tetradrachm of Agathocles, which was minted in the name of Antiochus II, and one tetradrachm of Eucratides.⁴⁴ The holdings of the Museum also contain nine Graeco-Bactrian coins⁴⁵ which could well have been found also in Transcaucasia.

Also notable in this connection is the private collection of a resident of Essentuki, I.D.Malyujenko, in which alongside a large amount of Hellenistic coins there are also Graeco-Bactrian coins, which he acquired from the locals of Azerbaijan and Georgia before the Russian Revolution, and which I examined in the 1960s.

Many explanations have been put forward to explain the presence of Graeco-Bactrian coins in Transcaucasia. S.A.Dadasheva, for example, supposed that they had found their way

⁴³ Дадашева 1976, 106–109.

⁴⁴ Балахванцев 2005, 36.

⁴⁵ Bernard 1985, 55–71.

into Kabala through Media and indicated a military alliance between Eucratides and Timarchus, the Seleucid satrap in Media (whose coins are similar to those of Eucratides) against the common enemy, the Parthian king Mithridates I. She also made a conjecture that Eucratides supported his ally financially, and that this eventually created the conditions for Timarchus to start minting his own coins imitating those of Eucratides.⁴⁶

A.S.Balakhvantsev, however, considered that the Graeco-Bactrian coins could have made their way into Transcaucasia by way of the route using the Caspian Sea, and not along the northern area and around the Caspian and Ciscaucasia, where none such coins have been found, that is, not through Media.⁴⁷

The appearance of Graeco-Bactrian coins so distant from their place of manufacture, in Transcaucasia in particular, was very likely bound up with the considerable actual value of the coins, which was due to a high level of silver they contained. They may have been used, in distant lands, not as money, but as trade-pieces or as a medium of exchange.

All the above instances offer evidence for doubtless contacts between the peoples of Central Asia and the peoples of Transcaucasia. The Chorasmians were fully aware of the ancient Georgian tribe of Colchians already in the last third of the 4th century BC, and probably from much earlier, and most likely because of the existence of the Caspian Sea-route. The Bactrians found themselves living in Phasis – the principal city of Colchis situated at the mouth of the Phasis river as it entered the Black Sea. The intercourse between the Chorasmians and the Colchians developed both via the overland and via the maritime route – using the Caspian route, which could be arrived at by three main routes along Central Asian rivers: 1) along the Kelif Uzboi and Oxus into Margiana where it joined the route from Amul; 2) along the Oxus up to Amul and then to Margiana (Merv), Parthyene and the valley of the Atrek river, which flows into the Caspian; 3) along the Oxus to Chorasmia and thence to the Caspian by way of the Uzboi.

⁴⁶ Дадашева 1976, 108–109.

⁴⁷ Балахванцев 2005, 36.

Judging by the find-spots of Graeco-Bactrian coins, the major route from the Oxus to the Caspian was the first, and especially the second route, for on it have been found 24 Graeco-Bactrian coins (Old Merv (Gyaur-kala) – 20 specimens, Gyarry-Kyariz – 1 specimen, Nisa – 2 specimens)⁴⁸, while on the third route only three Graeco-Bactrian coins have been uncovered over all the years of excavation in Khorezm.⁴⁹ The second route reached the mouth of the Atrek river, from where Turkmen seafarers set sail on the Caspian in the 18th – 19th centuries.

I suspect that it was from this point that the maritime route of the Great Indian Road began to be used to cross the Caspian Sea and to continue along the Kura (Cyrus) valley to the Black Sea.

Everything stated above indicates the importance of the Great Indian Road, and calls for the need for further profound and thorough study of the history of the formation and the operation of this great thoroughfare on the basis of archaeological, literary, and other sources.

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⁴⁸ A portion of the route from Parthyene into Margiana is described in detail by Isidore of Charax (1st century AD), see Schoff 1914; The stations along the route are identified by M.E. Masson, 1951, 27–31. On the Graeco-Bactrian coins found along the route, see Smirnova 1999, 246.

⁴⁹ Вайнберг 1978.

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