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Kushan rule granted by Nana: The background of a heavenly legitimation

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A female deity called Nana plays a significant role when it comes to reconstructing the religion of the Kushans. Nana's first visual realisation occurs in the early second century AD on the reverse of both the gold and copper coinage of Kaniṣka I, and these coins are amongst the most frequently issued under this king. In Kaniṣka's short-lived initial series, in which nothing but Greek is used for the coin legends he spells her name with Greek letters as NANAIA [Fig. 1]. In the following series the legends are given in Bactrian and spelled NANA [Fig. 2], expressing that the name has two syllables. If any or all of them show a long /ā/ we do not know. Nonetheless, modern research seems to expect a pronunciation /nanā/ in line with Indic languages of the time.

Figs. 1-4: NANAIA (Kaniṣka). NANA (Kaniṣka). NΩNEITO (Huviṣka). NANAÞAO (Kaniṣka).

Kaniṣka's son and heir Huviṣka continues to issue Nana type coins, and the spellings he uses are more varied. The old NANA is common, but NANO is found as well, showing unmistakably that the pronunciation was /nan/ or /nān/, as the final O is not pronounced. NANO is also read on an exceptional coin depicting the deity with bow and quiver, derived from Artemis [Fig. 31]. In addition, we get a new spelling NONO. In this occurrence of the deity's name a pronunciation /non/ or /nōn/ is to be expected.[1] Some issues come with more cursive Bactrian letters and read NΩNITO, very rarely NΩNEITO [Fig. 3]. NΩNITO is also the legend on a single, and later, coin of Vāsudeva showing the goddess sitting aside on a lion [Fig. 34]. A spelling /nōnit/ or /nōnēt/ seems likely. Apart from the common deity Nana(ya), there is an additional "enhanced" type issued by Kaniṣka I and Huviṣka, labelled NANAÞAO [Fig. 4], pronounced /nanaśā/ or similar, meaning "king Nana", and in this case nothing but NANA preceeds ÞAO. The plain NANA and the 'royal' NANAÞAO

[1] Cf. the personal name *nānajeṣṭha* (Nānajyeṣṭha) at Oshibat (18:88) on the upper Indus.

are distinquished by the absence or presence of a sword with the usual eagle's head hilt on her left side. Besides this distinguishing feature of the sword, both Nana and Nanaśā are shown dressed in a long gown and display four marks of identification:

- a scepter-like object in her right hand
- a shallow bowl in her left hand
- a simple halo encircling her head
- a small crescent on her forehead.

Out of these four characteristics the scepter aligns with Nana(ya)'s[2] royal function, while the bowl hints at the importance of some liquid, maybe water for fertility or wine for festivities. However, her head decoration, the halo and and crescent, has never been adequately explained. Theoretically, the halo could be a sign of the sun, while the crescent looks like a sign of the moon. Despite all assertions,[3] Nana can be neither the sun nor the the moon, since Helios (ΗΛΙΟϹ), alias Mihir (ΜΙΙΡΟ), and Selene (ϹΑΛΗΝΗ) alias Māh (ΜΑΟ), are the respective solar and lunar deities found on Kaniṣka's and Huviṣka's coinage, with each having their own specific iconographies. The sun-god's halo shows short rays protruding in a radial pattern, while the moon-god's crescent is very large, extending from the back like two large wings over the left and right shoulders. In contrast, Nana's simple halo shows no radial rays, like the sun, and her crescent is very small and sits on the head, unlike the moon's wing-like crescent shape. Therefore, it seems somewhat unlikely that Nana was associated with the sun, the moon, or a combination of the two.

What is the significance of this deity? Until the discovery of the Rabatak inscription Nana's function remained enigmatic. After this inscription was translated, it became clear that she was the foremost among a number of gods to endow the king with his royal authority, indicated in the proclamation: "Kanishka the Kushan, the righteous, the just, the autocrat, the god worthy of worship, who has obtained the kingship from Nana and from all the gods, who has inaugurated the year one as the gods pleased" says Rabatak (Sims-Williams 2008: 55f.). A comparable function of this deity is mentioned in a silver plate inscription published in this volume (cf. p. 257) that states: "[in] the year [one, Nana] gave the lordship to the king of kings, Kanishka the Kushan".

These two inscriptions demonstrate that Nana was an integral figure in the emergence of the Kushan Empire through her sanctioning of power and initializing an era. To understand how a deity unknown to the Indian world prior to Kaniṣka's reign could assume such a pivotal role, I argue, we need to understand her head-gear, the small crescent on her forehead. All previous research on the topic simply regards the crescent as "lunar", despite some considerations that Nana may not be a lunar deity. What then is she, and what is the significance of this crescent?

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[2] I use the form with brackets wherever dealing with the deity called NANA or NANAIA on Kushan coins.

[3] Most recent Jongeward & Cribb (2015: 260): "Nanaia is a moon goddess".

A short history of the crescent

The crescent, be it lunar or otherwise, has no prototype in pre-Kushan Indian art, meaning we cannot view this symbol as part of an existing Indian tradition. Therefore, the idea of a small crescent would have come from an external source, that is to say from the West, like many other features of Kushan culture. In examining the development of the crescent symbol in the West, it seems best to proceed chronologically.

The earliest reference for divine intervention performed by a definitive stellar deity is associated with Philipp II of Macedonia's attempt to conquer the Tracian city of Byzantium in 340/339 BC. It is from this event that the crescent as a logogram can express a very particular meaning. According to different sources, in order to enter Byzantium Philipp II had a tunnel excavated that he would use to breech the walls on a dark and moonless night. However, on the agreed upon night a very bright star lit the site, causing dogs to bark which alarmed the soldiers and foiled the attack. Due to this stellar intervention, Philipp decided to withdraw for the time being. Stephanus of Byzantium, in his much reworked chronicle, credits Hecate with saving the city stating that, "Hecate, being brilliant, caused torches to appear at night to the citizens".[4] Antoniadi (1939: 183), who translated this passage was amazed to see Hecate, whom he interpreted as the moon, being called *phosphoros*, a term usually denoting the planet Venus. Antoniadi realized that the luminary in question saved the city, and thus its logogram in the form of the crescent-star became the symbol emblazoned on the banner of this city up through the Ottoman Empire.

Figs. 5-6: Copper coin from Byzantium (Moushmov #3233). Silver coin from Krōmna (CNG 784164).

Early coins from Byzantium presenting the crescent-star show the head of Artemis on the obverse [Fig. 5]. This iconography recalls "Artemis phosphoros" who first appears in 181 BC in lists of deities located at the acropolis of Athens (Thompson & Wycherley 1972: 45). Hecate with her torches is a close relative to Artemis, who is also shown with a torch and has the planet Venus as her astral counterpart. Venus is bright enough to lighten a dark night, as described by Pliny (Nat. 2.6) who remarks: " [Venus] excels all the other stars in size, and its brilliancy is so considerable, that it is the only star which produces a shadow by its rays."

[4] ἡ Ἑκάτη φωσφόρος οὖσα δᾷδας ἐποίησε νύκτωρ τοῖς πολίταις φανῆναι (Meineke 1849: 178; Billerbeck 2006: 364:13).

This legend concerning Philipp II's attack on Byzantium has a definite historical basis. A short period after 340/339 BC the exquisitely cut silver coinage of Kromna, a city on the southern coast of the Black Sea, appears with the head of Zeus dominating the obverse while the head of a female deity covers the reverse [Fig. 6]. The female deity is ornamented by a crescent above her head which is covered by a walled crown and a star adjoins her neck. This iconography suggests that a female deity, linked to a star and a crescent, acts as a safeguard for the city. An allusion to the event at Byzantium is not at all unlikely given the fact that Philipp wanted to bring the Black Sea corn trade under his jurisdiction, which would pose a very direct threat to Kromna. The deity behind the nocturnal light which rescued Byzantium seems to appear as a saviour of Kromna as well.

On the Kromna coins the star and crescent are shown separately, but they were combined by a successor of Alexander around 300 BC, who issued staters at Amphipolis in Macedonia, 400 km to the West of Byzantium. In this coin Zeus is sitting on a throne above crescent cum star [Fig. 7]. A link to a particular astral connection is possible but not apparent.

Figs. 7-8: Silver coin from Amphipolis (CNG 861812) with Alexander's head and Zeus. Silver coin from Rome (CNG 988501) with Roma and dioscures.

Allusions to the deity behind the crescent are much more apparent in the case of another city goddess, Roma. Although not a prominent deity on early Roman coins, Roma appears on coins around 207 BC with a helmet, as does Athena, and with the dioscures on the reverse [Fig. 8]. Above the two riders we see their astral symbols, two stars for the morning and evening star and the crescent, for Roma herself. The association with Roma and the crescent appears again on another coin from 113 BC, that shows Roma wearing a helmet and holding a shield with a crescent above her head [Fig. 9].

On the basis of this material the initial phase of the simple crescent and the crescent-star seem to be definable; there is no example predating the miraculous appearance of the bright light over Byzantium in 340/339 BC and in a very short time the symbol spread east, to Kromna, and west, to Amphipolis.

The true crescent-star, composed of a star inside a crescent, seems to be intimately connected with places around the Bosphorus and adjoining states to its East, on the southern coast of the Black Sea. The kings of Pontos, from Mithradates III (220-185 BC) and Pharnakes I (ca. 185-169 BC) onwards seem to use it as a family emblem. The most

Figs. 9-12: Silver coin from 113 BC showing Roma with crescent on obverse (CNG 915002). Roman silver coin from 89 BC with Tarpeia under crescent-star on reverse (CNG 2590282). Tarpeia reverse (CNG 95000633). Crescent-star reverse (CNG 3430444). The latter two were both issued in 19 BC by Turpilianus under Augustus.

prominent king, Mithradates VI (120-63 BC) started a war against Rome in 89 BC, which finally led to some sort of semi-independence of western Anatolia. Obviously as a reaction to this uprising a coin was issued in that year by a moneyer Titurius Sabinus [Fig. 10]. It shows the head of Titus Tatius on the obverse and on the reverse the girl Tarpeia below a crescent-star, who is about to be covered under shields cast by two warriors. According to one version of the legend associated with Tarpeia, she met Sabine soldiers, falling in love with one of them and lead them into the stronghold on the Capitoline Hill. However, instead of marrying her they treacherously crushed her to death under their shields (Wachsler 1987: 65; Garani 2011).

The crescent-star on Titurius' coin associates the fate of Tarpeia with the king of Pontos, Mithradates VI, a parallelism that denotes Roman invaders will prevail through tricks and weapons and the invaded will be conquered and deprived of their possessions. Seventy years later in 19 BC, this coin inspired another moneyer, P.P. Turpilianus, to create two coins [Figs. 11, 12], each with the head of Augustus on the obverse. On one reverse Tarpeia is shown within a pile of shields, and on the other reverse nothing but the crescent-star, thus distributing the two motifs from the single reverse from 89 BC onto two reverses in 19 BC. Together, two [Figs. 10, 11] of the three coins are the only Roman coins referring to the Tarpeia legend and the other pair [Figs. 10, 12] presents the only two cases of a true crescent-star in pre-imperial Rome. Turpilianus designed these two coins in 19 BC during Augustus' four year campaign in the East in order to regulate matters in Syria and re-exert control in the semi-independent regions once ruled by Mithradates VI. Cassio Dio (54.9.7) describes the activities of the emperor. This same moneyer minted some additional coins in the year 19 BC referring to the activities of Augustus in the East. One shows a kneeling Parthian king returning the golden standard lost by Crassus in 54 BC to the Parthians after the battle of Carrhae (cf. CNG 98000993). This comparison demonstrates that both Tarpeia issues, from 89 and 19 BC, refer to activities of Roman troops in northern Anatolia, symbolised by the Pontos emblem, the crescent-star, which itself refers to Artemis, visible as the planet Venus.

Returning to the first encounter of 89 BC we see Mithradates from Pontos found in a

Figs. 13-14: Silver coin of Mithradates VI from Pontos (CNG 954951). Alliance coin of Mithradates VI and Athens (CNG 87000466).

series of beautiful gold coins showing a stag bowing down to the crescent-star [Fig. 13]. The stag is the animal of Artemis who has the planet Venus as her astral counterpart. Mithradates VI succeeded for a very short time in 87 BC to win Athens as an ally against Rome. This alliance was documented in a coin showing the Athenian owl and the crescent-star side-by-side [Fig. 14], indicating that the deity was expected to help both allies.

It was general Lucius Cornelius Sulla (ca. 138-78 BC) who led the legions against Mithradates. When the last of the three Mithradatian Wars had come to a close in 63 BC, the same deity behind the crescent-star appears again in 56 BC on two coins issued by the son of general Sulla, the moneyer Faustus Cornelius Sulla, who obviously uses these coins to remind the public of his illustrious father. On one coin we see Diana, alias Artemis, on the obverse, and the general Sulla lording over his subdued adversaries on the reverse [Fig. 15a,b]. Diana sports a crescent on her head and a *lituus* behind her neck. The same moneyer has Diana driving through the sky on a horse-drawn biga, again holding the *lituus* [Fig. 16], with a crescent above her head. The close personal relationship between the moneyer and general Sulla might explain why the head crescent's meaning is known to this moneyer. Not all of his colleagues in Rome would expect this symbol to be understood correctly in public.

Doubts concerning the crescent's public perception become apparent when we compare a series of coins issued by different moneyers in one and the same year, 44 BC, showing the head of Caesar on the obverse and Venus victrix on the reverse. The bust and figures are alike but the symbols differ slightly: On Marcus Mettius' coin [Fig. 17]

Figs. 15-16: Silver coin from Rome with Diana and Sulla felix (CNG 74000531). Silver coin from Rome with Sulla felix as Hercules and Diana with crescent driving a biga (CNG 680913).

Figs. 17-19: Silver coins of Caesar minted 44 BC: a) from moneyer M. Mettius (CNG 160224), b) from Sepulius Macer (CNG 92000899), c) from Aemilius Buca (CNG 730893).

Venus holds a scepter and leans on a shield. Behind Ceasar's head a *lituus* within a *simpulum* is seen, symbols for divine service. On P. Sepullius Macer's coin [Fig. 18] Venus holds a scepter that ends in a large star touching the earth. The same star is also found behind the neck of Caesar. Finally, Lucius Aemilius Buca depicts a plain scepter but shows a crescent behind Caesar [Fig. 19].

There can be no doubt that all three symbols denote the same force: *lituus*, star and crescent refer to Venus victrix, but only Buca incorporated the crescent. If the other two moneyers knew about its meaning we do not know, but another coin of Buca, issued in the same year, 44 BC, clearly refers to the war between Sulla and Mithradates VI. It shows the head of Venus on the obverse and a scene with three figures on the reverse, one of them is Sulla himself, depicted as if awaking from sleep [Fig. 20]. The interpretation of this scene is disputed and is usually explained by referring to Plutarch's account (*Sulla* 9.4), but it was Apollon of Delphi who advised him - contacted after a dream - to appeal to Aphrodite for help (Boer 1975,5: 418). This indicates that we see Victoria-Nike and Venus-Aphrodite on the coin approaching Sulla, with Nike wielding the palm and Aphrodite marked by the crescent on her forehead.

Plutarch admits that he does not know the name of the deity, saying she "may be Semele or Minerva or Bellona", but whatever the case may be Plutarch tells us that Sulla was aware of the protecting deity in Cappadocia, located in southern Anatolia. None of the deities listed by Plutarch sports a crescent, but, as Hatscher (2000: 139) points out, "Die für Sulla mit Abstand bedeutendste Göttin war Venus", whose alias is Aphrodite, as confirmed by the epithet *epaphroditos,* which Sulla assumed after his

Figs. 20-21: Silver coin from Rome from 44 BC with Venus and "Sulla's dream" (cf. CNG 92000831). Posthumous copper coin from Spain with Augustus and Livia (CNG 73000688).

victory over Mithradates VI. Whether from Cappadocia or not, it was Sulla "der V[enus] zur persönlichen Schutzgottheit machte und die auffällig starke V[enus]-Verehrung im 1. Jh. v.Chr. einleitete" (Boer 1975,5: 1177). With Sulla as the main figure on the reverse and the head of Venus on the obverse, there can hardly be doubt as to the nature of the deity sporting the crescent on the reverse. Caesar, supplied with the crescent by the same moneyer, followed Sulla's example and celebrated the same Aphrodite-Venus, who granted him victory as well.[5]

The crescent-star is then adapted by Augustus on a coin issued 19 BC [Fig. 12]. This was the year when he spent the winter on Samos and regulated affairs in "Asia" and Bithynia (Cassio Dio, 54.9.7), the north-western part of Anatolia, theoretically ruled by the family of Mithradates. Their emblem on a coin of his must have been understood as a demonstration of the real power in the country.[6]

A posthumous issue from Spain shows the deceased emperor and his wife [Fig. 21] as objects of a deification. By the side of Augustus we see the thunderbolt of Jupiter, and there is a star above his head, while Livia is shown with a crescent above her head and an epithet *genetrix orbis*, clearly referring to Venus genetrix, to whom Caesar had sacrificed the day before his decisive battle against Pompeius (Boer 1975,5: 1178). The emperor and his wife apotheosized as Jupiter and Venus will not be uncommon under rulers to come, but the star and the crescent are found only here to symbolize the imperial couple.

With regard to Aphrodite's connection to the crescent-star symbol a late, but definitive example is found at her temple at Paphos on Cyprus. According to Pausanias (1.14.7) the sanctuary of Paphos was the first dedicated to Aphrodite Urania outside of Syria, where she is believed to have originated. The temple facade is shown with similar design from Augustus' rule onwards. It is Septimius Severus (AD 193-211), who first uses a crescent-star in its tympanon [Fig. 22], followed by members of his family up to Severus Alexander

[5] Boer (1975,5: 1178) lists all events which Caesar used to link himself with Venus victrix and Venus genetrix.

[6] The moneyer, P.P. Turpilianus, issued another coin (e.g. CNG 98000993) in that year 19 BC celebrating the "victory" of Augustus over Phraates IV who returned the Roman standards when Augustus visited Syria that year, an event reported in the next passage by Cassio Dio (54.9.8), mentioning also that Augustus was initiated into the mysteries of "the two goddesses" which had a fixed place in the year.

Figs. 22: Copper coin issued by Septimius Severus with facade of Aphrodite temple at Paphos (CNG 97000484).

(AD 222-235). Then the motif disappears. Needless to say that a deity incorporated into the Roman Venus would nicely accommodate a symbol which is also known from other deities linked to the planet Venus.

There are many more coins hinting that a crescent referred to the planet Venus, especially throughout the northern Mediterranean in the first century BC, but those mentioned here should suffice for drawing this conclusion. Furthermore, the deities using this star as their astral representation are Artemis and Aphrodite, with different origins in Anatolia and Syria respectively, and were adopted and merged with the Roman Diana and Venus. Finally, the Roman city goddess Roma seems to have drawn on the Venus iconography as well, visible also in the huge double temple of Roma aeterna and Venus felix built at the forum by a range of emperors, from Hadrian (r. AD 117-138) up to Antoninus Pius (r. AD 138-161).

Proposal: Nana wears the crescent of Venus

Advancing from these preliminary examples, it seems rather straightforward to propose that the enigmatic crescent on the forehead of Nana(ya) is a sign of Venus, or more precisely the planet Venus. But how can Venus be considered a crescent, in Anatolia, Syria, Rome or India? Is she not round just like every other star? Not exactly, apart from the moon, Venus is the only one other heavenly body which can be visible to the naked eye in the shape of a crescent. Venus is very bright and she never appears very far from the sun, and so she assumes her crescent shape for the same reason that the moon does, when being lit from an angle.

Galileo Galilei is said to have been the first to see the crescent form of Venus by using a magnifying lens. However, even without such a lens a crescent-shaped Venus has been observed repeatedly in antiquity as well as in recent times. When Venus appears as a

morning-star she is five times larger than in her near full-moon position at the back of the sun. People with extraordinary eye-sight can make out her crescent shape without optical enhancements, verified in numerous modern reports of this phenomenon (Campbell 1916; Reinhardt 1929; Goines 1992). From the ancient world, Offord (1915: 197) has adduced a Babylonian omen-text from the time of Assurbanipal that mentions the two "horns of Venus", one right and one left, over which a star can be visible on occasion. Another text also uses the "horns" for predictions, but calls the deity Ištar (Offord ibid.; cf. Weidner 1912). The "horns" of the moon are a common phrase to describe the lunar crescent in Mesopotamia and in the Greek speaking world, a descriptive phrase equally applicable to the corresponding shape of Venus.

In a Babylonian text[7] dealing with Venus and the moon we read about "two crescents" appearing. It is not too much of a stretch to take them as the two luminaries rising or setting more or less at the same time the sun rises or sets.

Similarly, the *Papyri Graeci Magici,* a manuscript from late antique Egypt, distinguishes between two shapes of Venus, one "shining steadily" and the other "lengthened like the flame of a lamp" (Betz 1996: 94). This description must refer to the crescent.

All these seemingly incidental observasions, including the moons of Jupiter (Offord 1915: 197), would not suffice to ignite scientific discussions on the shapes of Venus or initiate a royal rite. We need a certain number of interested observers, and this requires mechanical means for observation. In India, the early use of magnifying glasses for observing the heavens cannot be ruled out, especially when considering that mirrors and polished crystals were used for setting dry dung ablaze in BC times.[8] The same use of "transparent stone" for sparkling fire sold in chemist's shops is mentioned in *The Clouds* of Aristophanes (ca. 450-380 BC) (Rau 1983: 11). But anything short of a magnifying glass would raise more doubts than attract followers. In India, the required plano-convex lenses can be compared to the caskets and lids turned from crystal, preserved in good numbers as bodies and lids used for reliquaries from the Mauryan times onwards. A perfect crystal box from Sanchi *stūpa* 2 is found in Willis 2000: 88, fig. 97. Early optics still need much research, but India at least can supply the translucent material in perfect shapes with perfect polish in sufficient numbers at the proper time. The mechanism from Antikythera that once computed the movements of sun, moon and planets in the early first century BC was found underwater off the Peloponese coast (www.antikythera-mechanism.com). Without the lucky find we would not dare to imagine that mechanical astronomy had reached such heights. For early optics similar surprises should not be excluded.

The deities seen behind the planet Venus are manifold and many have been identified with eachother based on the same astral counterpart. Pliny (Nat. 2.6), after speaking

[7] Hunger 1992: 142 no. 255 "Venus in front of Orion". Hunger dates this to July 9, 669 BC; however, the two crescents of moon and Venus rather apply to June 28 at 21:47 on the western horizon.

[8] *Nirukta* 7.23, cf. Rau (1983: 5 and *passim*).

about the exceptional luminosity of Venus, lists some names: "There has, consequently, been great interest made for its name; some have called it the star of Juno, others of Isis, and others of the Mother of the Gods. By its influence everything in the earth is generated. For, as it rises in either direction, it sprinkles everything with its genial dew, and not only matures the productions of the earth, but stimulates all living things."

The first hymn of Isidorus to Isis in her temple at the Fayoum, early first century BC, provides another list of Venus' names: "The Syrians call You: Astarte, Artemis, Nanaia (...) and the Greeks (call You) Hera of the Great Throne, Aphrodite" (Vanderlip 1972: 18). Aphrodite and Venus have too close a connection to warrant any further discussion, Artemis has been met with before and will again occur in the Kushan context, but Hera's role is less obvious. Cumont (1935: 15) has cited sources which explicitly take Hera to be Venus (cf. Duchesne-Guillemin 1984: 14).

The Fayoum dedication also mentions Nanaia, a female deity once prominent in Susa. For us it is not important if the Kushan Nana(ya) has received her character from her namesake in Hatra (Westenholz 1997: 79 with fn. 176), or from the temple to Artemis-Nanaya at Douro-Europos (Westenholz 1997: 79 with fn. 180) or from any other of the related goddesses. The objective of the preceding paragraphs was only to show that a crescent, with or without a joined star, does not necessarily have to be a lunar crescent, but that it can stand for Venus, perfectly visible as a crescent in the sky, and that this crescent rose to prominence in Rome, in the wake of Sulla's victory over Mithradates VI. Caesar and Augustus continued to make use of its symbolism.

Parallel aspects of Venus deities for a king

In Rome we had Venus victrix indicating by her name that she is responsible for victories. In the Kushan realm, however, the two aspects mentioned in the Rabatak inscription and on the silver plate (above, p. 257) are a) conferral of royal dignity and b) the foundation of an era. The first part related to kingship has many parallels. The relationship of Ištar to the king is well known and the Babylonian Nanaia is also endowed with this function (Westenholz 1997: 63, 69, 72, 74, 78). In periods more closely aligned with the Kushans, the Sasanian Anāhitā alias Venus "was intimately linked with kingship and the investiture of the sovereign. She may well have earlier guaranteed the Arsacids the same right to divine investiture" (Invernizzi 2005: 77). [9]

For the Egyptian Isis alias Venus (Pliny) we can refer to Assmann (1989: 134) who explains that, "(a)s mother of the Horus child, Isis (...) is not only the great healing goddess, but also the bestower of legitimate kingship. Her milk not only heals illness,

[9] From the late second century BC onwards, the Parthian kings of Elymais, near Susa, and in the adjoining Persis showed their kings with the perfect crescent-star in their back. The Elymais kings maintained this symbol into the first century AD, with Orodes II (58-38 BC) first adding the star to the crescent and Phraates IV (ca. 38-3 BC) combining both to the crescent-star at Ekbatana. South-Western Iran thus looks like a center of the crescent-star iconography, well in line with the veneration of Anāhitā alias Venus.

it makes the child a king, it 'creates', as the Egyptian terminology puts it, 'his beauty'. Isis is the 'kingmaker' par excellence. Even in the 'Potter's Oracle' of the Ptolemaic Period, (...) it is said of the prophesied saviour-king that he will 'come from the sun and be enthroned by the great goddess Isis'."

That kings have a certain predilection for Venus also becomes apparent through the name of Sphujiddhvaja, a "foreign" author of an astrological treatise in Sanskrit with an astronomical final chapter, whose era starts in AD 22 (Falk 2001: 124). This name means "who has Venus on his banner". If the name means anything at all, then Venus appeared as a logogram, and as such a crescent could serve well.

It is beyond my area of expertise to present more than few limited examples of deities with crescents. All goddesses covered here have found full and adequate treatment in numerous publications. Clearly, we are most concerned with a group of dominant female goddesses located from the Mediterranean East up to India, linked astronomically with Venus, responsible for water,[10] i.e. the fecundity of the wetted land, and with the king, who is responsible for the welfare of all those who depend on this fecundity. I repeat here how Pliny (Nat. 2.6) defined the activity of the planet Venus: "By its influence everything in the earth is generated. For, as it rises in either direction, it sprinkles everything with its genial dew, and not only matures the productions of the earth, but stimulates all living things."

Venus in Commagene

The crescent of the Kushan deity Nana(ya) makes more sense once it is interpreted as the symbol of Venus. Venus confers royal authority in cultures other than the Kushans. Still remaining to be discussed is the second aspect we met with in Rabatak and on the silver plate, the aspect of time. On Nana(ya)'s behalf, or order, Kaniṣka initiated the year 1 of a new era. Nothing like this is known from Rome, Anatolia or Syria. However, there is a famous event which occurred in between the careers of Sulla and Caesar, in Commagene, once north-western "Syria". Mithradates I Kallinikos († 70 BC) ruled Commagene in southern Turkey, one of the final stations on the networks linking the Mediterranean with China. Mithradates I was therefore extremely affluent. As a testament to his economic standing he married Laodike Thea Philadelphos from the Seleucid family. His father's line was traced back to Darius the Great, who, in turn, claimed his pedigree directly back to Ahuramazda. Laodike's ancestry, on the other hand, went back to Alexander the Great, who, through his links to Amon, regarded himself to be a descendant of Zeus. The son of Mithradates and Laodike, Antiochus I Theos, ruled Commagene from 69 to ca. 36 BC. His wealth was no less than that of his father and he left us an incredible rubble heap on mount Nimrud Dagh, which to this day

[10] Although India in the early phases does not share the female nature of Venus with the near-eastern cultures, its responsibility for water is acknowledged, as expressed in the Arthaśāstra 2.24,8 *śukrād vṛṣṭiḥ*, "from Venus comes rain".

Fig. 23: Lion "horoscope" on the Nimrud Dagh; after Tanabe 1998: 85, pl. 113.

serves as a protector of his tomb. Antiochus had to come to grips with the idea of being a descendant of both Zeus and Ahuramazda. Instead of dividing his ancestral loyalties he united the two gods in the belief that the numerous gods in the surrounding countries could be reduced to archetypes and that many of these archetypes only differ in name but are substantially identical. He erected large picture slabs which show gods shaking hands with him, and he left us a number of inscriptions in Greek which demonstrate that he ultimately reduced all known gods to just four main characters. The first was Ahuramazda (Oromasdes), regarded as identical with Zeus, and thus implicitly with the Roman Jupiter. The second was Heracles, identical with the Awestan Verethraghna (Artagnes), identified with Arēs, and by extension with the Roman Mars. The third was a confusing melange of Hermes and Apollon, who were combined into one entity with Helios and Mithras, thus unifying the sun with its close companion Mercury. As seen long ago, the reduction to just three gods was necessitated by the actual position of three "male" planets which stood at close quarters in the sky at a certain moment, to which we will return below.

At the side of the statues of these three male gods is the last deity, a woman called Commagene, whose name reflects that she is the deity of the land. In the inscriptions of Antiochus I Theos she is called the "all-nourishing homeland" (Πατρὶς παντρόφος) and she is not readily identified with any Hellenistic or Iranian goddess. Because of this, the argument was made that the goddess has no astral counterpart (Meyer 2005). However,

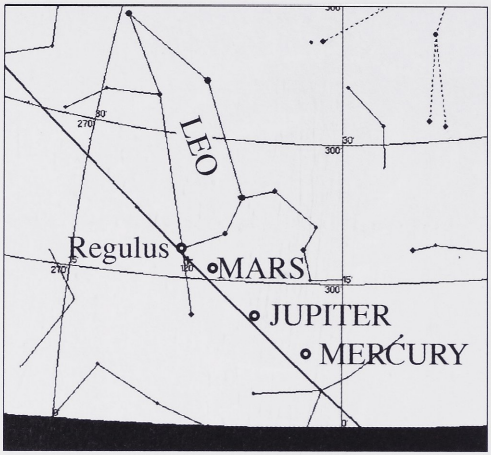

Fig. 24: Position of Mars, Jupiter and Mercury in front of Regulus on June 19, 62BC, 19:47 h, on the western horizon at Commagene.

as a lady providing protection and bounty for the country or the city she has many predecessors, be they the many Ištars of different towns in old Mesopotamia, or one of the numerous female deities with mural crown, with or without cornucopia, be they a form of Artemis, Tyche or Hera.

So far this resembles a clear case of unifying two religious "families" from the Greek and Iranian worlds, based on the idea that names mean little and function unites. In both systems Antiochus made out three male gods, one the father of all, one responsible for war, one for business, whereas the necessary safety is provided by the female goddess. He could have claimed that the said gods gave him his kingship, as so many other rulers of the time did. But he went farther, by erecting the picture slabs which show that all four gods came and shook his hand.

What is shown on the slabs is nothing but a reproduction of what was once seen in the sky. Among the multitude of stars, the function of the king was represented by, or present in, the "king's star", Regulus, the brightest star in Leo. Already its late Assyrian name *šarru*, "king", testifies to its closeness to royal functions (Waldmann 1991: 42), and its Greek name *basiliskos* does the same. In August the sun stands in Leo. Regulus has its position right on the ecliptic. Every planet passing Regulus by has to come very close to it, if not covering or outshining it. For us latecomers in order to find out when the meetings happened Antiochus had a star chart made, often mislabeled as a "horoscope", in the form of an upright stone-slab showing a standing lion to right in relief [Fig. 23]. The twelve preserved stars are arranged following the shape of Leo rather closely. There are three stars in a row above the back of the lion in addition to a large crescent on its chest. The nature of the three stars is explained by a few words in Greek above the stars, saying in ornate terms that they are Mars, Mercury, and Jupiter. These three stars stood in one row at equal distances in front of Regulus on June 19 in 62 BC in the evening around 20 h, after sunset [Fig. 24]. However, the order is Mars, Jupiter and Mercury. The correct order as in the text is reached on June 25 and it lasted until July 3, with Mars and Mercury to the left of the frontleg of Leo and Jupiter to its right. There is widespread agreement on the interpretation that the three stars refer to their position on June 19, all in front of Leo, and that the complete arrangement on the "horoscope" depicts the sky of July 7 of 62 BC, as calculated by Neugebauer (Neugebauer & van Hoesen 1959: 15) on the presupposition that the crescent on the lion's chest depicts the

moon. This chronological solution has been taken for granted by many (e.g. Huttner 1997: 204; Meyer 2005: 324), slightly modified by others (Beck 2006: 231), or replaced by an earlier date (Crijns 2002; Heilen 2005). But this interpretation disregards the order of the planets as listed in the text, the date of the coronation, and lacks one crucial moment, as I will show below.

The meeting of the planets and Antiochus I re-dated

This heavenly event can be seen in any computer simulation. Looking west at June 19 in 62 BC around 20 hours, after sunset, the three planets Mars, Jupiter and Mercury create a perfect line in front of Regulus. While bypassing Regulus, they change the sequence and Mars passes Regulus first (25.6.) and Mercury second (1.7.). In addition, the moon visits Regulus on July 6 and again on August 3 and the sun stands close to Regulus on July 28.

But what about Venus? When Jupiter finally meets Regulus on August 6, he has already bypassed the sun and cannot be seen in the evening sky. But, on the morning of August 6, 62 BC shortly after 4 hours in the morning, just before sunrise, Jupiter stands exactly in Regulus [Fig. 25]. The defilé of the three male stars has come to a close, but what is most surprising is that together with Jupiter Venus also stands in Regulus. She was far away on the starting day and therefore is not shown with the other three. She had to speed to overcome this large spatial difference between her place at June 19 and Regulus' position. Nonetheless, on the same day that Jupiter met Regulus she joined in, last, but certainly not least. At that day of the meeting, she stands at a phase angle of 11°, that is rather "full", but distant and small (diam. 9.8").

We must keep in mind that the planets seem to have a spectacular meeting with the "king" star, Regulus, in addition to the much wider zodiac sign "lion", Leo. The star depicted on the chest of the lion is Regulus and this star is shown inside the crescent, which allegedly is to be taken as representing the moon.

The most important male star, Jupiter, and the single female planet Venus, meet Regulus at the same moment. The joining of Venus has not been taken into account by earlier research on the Nimrud Dagh lion panel, except for Beck (2006: 231f.),

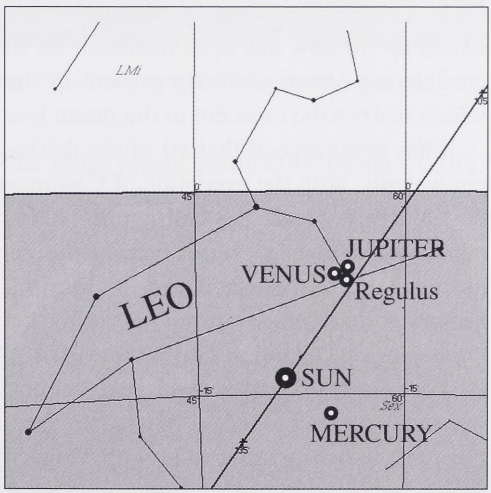

Fig. 25: Position on the eastern horizon of Jupiter and Venus near Regulus on August 6, 62 BC, at 3:23 h at Commagene, the three rising at 4:00, sunrise at 4:45.

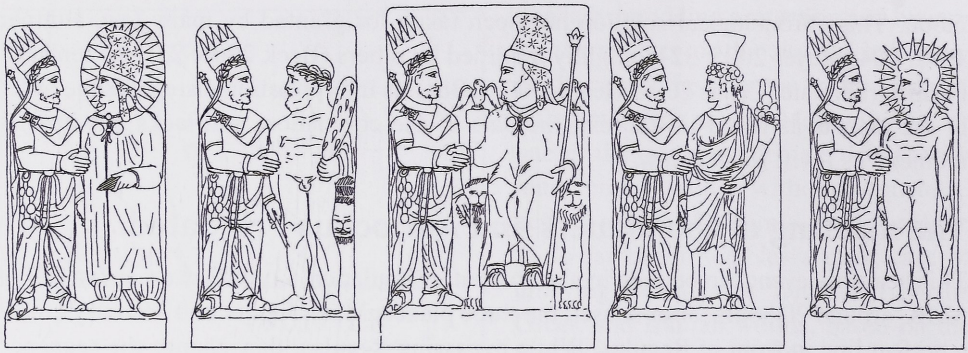

Fig. 26: Stelae on the Nimrud Dagh with, partly reconstructed, depictions of gods shaking hands with Antiochus I Theos; after Waldmann 1973: fig. 4.

who, however, dismisses this singular encounter because he thought that the crescent is that of the moon, in conjunction with the sun on 5 July 62 BC (Beck 2006: 233). By questioning the importance of the moon, I would rather emphasize the triple conjunction of Regulus, Jupiter and Venus. The astrologers had seen Venus approaching and knew exactly where she had her daily position. They worked with computations and would not have needed a direct observation (Heilen 2005) to know that she had her place exactly where Jupiter was.

We may wonder why Venus is not present on the lion horoscope panel. But she is there, I believe, in form of the large crescent on the lion's chest just below Regulus, which up till now has been mistaken for the moon. It goes without saying that through considering Venus as being present in the "horoscope" all chronological calculations which restrict the crescent to the moon lose their basis.

It has been argued that all of the deities depicted on the stelae [Fig. 26] have stellar equivalents, with the exception of Commagene, who is just the deity of the land (Meyer 2005). Only Duchesne-Guillemin (1984: 14), not concerned with Nana in India, considered Venus to stand behind the deity called Commagene at Nimrud Dagh, a proposal that was brushed aside by Meyer (2005: 326 fn. 31) with the most inappropriate argument that Venus was not part of the conjunction in 62 BC. Without reference to the "horoscope", Duchesne-Guillemin (1984: 14) showed that Commagene is only found on the Nimrud Dagh under that name, but not in the younger holy site at Arsameya, where the same Antiochus I had her name replaced by Hera in the parallel passages. Hera, however, is firmly associated with Venus by the Chaldaen astronomers in the services of Hellenistic rulers. Hera then replaces Aphrodite in that function, as was shown by Cumont (1935: 15 with fn. 3; 16) with ample references in the classical literature, one of them the list from the Fayoum (see above p. 275).

But we can add one more argument in favour of our interpretation of the crescent on the lion's chest. There is another and only recently documented rock-cut relief in Commagene, not far from the Nimrud Dagh at the site of Hayderan, nicely photo-

Fig. 27: Life-size figures of deity and king in niche, with crescent-star at head level between them. After Tanabe 1998: 175 pl. 204.

graphed in Tanabe (1998: 174f. pls. 203f). The more recent pictures in Blömer (2011) demonstrate the constant impact of vandalism. The relief shows a Commagene king *vis-à-vis* a female deity, parts in her back are already chipped off on Tanabe's plate and much of the upper body has been cut to pieces before Blömer's plates were taken. We have no means to determine the identity of this king, but circumstantial evidence speaks in favour of a descendant of Antiochus I in the late first century BC or AD (Blömer 2011: 398), in any case later than Antiochus I Theos. The king stands to our right and a deity faces him, holding up her right arm, possibly presenting some fruit. Most important for our concern is that we see on Tanabe's plate right between the two figures a large crescent-star, painted [Fig. 27], and completely demolished during the last decade, being chipped off with most of the upper body of the deity (Blömer 2011: Tafel 73,1). In using our knewly won knowledge about the symbolism of the crescent-star we can identify her as one of those goddesses having Venus as their astral counterpart. The parallelism between Commagene with the crescent on the lion's chest and the deity at Hayderan with her crescent-star seems to be complete.

Fig. 28: Obverse of silver coin of Sapalbisēs, ca. AD 20, Bactria.

Returning to the Nimrud Dagh we see a perfect correspondence between texts, statues [Fig. 26] and "horoscope": the prominent figure in the middle is Zeus-Ahuramazda, seen as Jupiter. Heracles comes as Mars, and Hermes-Apollon, to the right, as Mercury. Mithras as the sun is seen to the left. Commagene is the only woman, an alter ego of Hera, and thus linked to Venus. The "royal" star par excellence, Regulus-basiliskos in Leo, is thus visited by Jupiter and Venus on the same day during the reign of Antiochus I. The two gods shake hands with the king. Any other interpretation than a "heavenly legitimation" in installments would not do justice to this extremely rare phase documented on stone. On the lion, the crescent is much more prominently depicted than the stars of Jupiter, Mars and Mercury. So, reading into this iconographical particularity, the royal legitimation is, to a large extent, the work of the single female deity.

This detour to Commagene provides a further example for the impact of Venus on kings. It is also a strong argument for interpreting the crescent for a logogram for the planet Venus. What we see under Sulla (Tarpeia coin, Mithradates war, 89 BC) and Caesar (Venus coins, 44 BC) holds true also in the time in between (Nimrud Dagh "horoscope", 62 BC). In addition, this monumental celebration of a meeting between the gods and Antiochus is also a vivid example of a royal rite, and as such it may be of importance for our view on the Kushans to whom we will soon revert.

The crescent with lion

It was argued above that the crescent on coins with or without the star in its middle can stand for the planet Venus, which itself is the common astral counterpart for a number of related female deities, geographically situated from Rome to Phoenicia. At Nimrud Dagh the ruler and Venus have been supplemented by a star-studded lion, that is Leo with its Regulus, reproducing a date when a planet met a star within this constellation. Are there more such meetings between the planet and a lion? Ištar, that is Venus, is shown with a lion on many seals from Sumer to Akkad and the constellation of Leo is named "lion" in the Enūma Anu Enlil (Hunger 1992: 27f.; Reiner 2004: 13). Whether the pictures of Ištar with a lion express a meeting of planet Venus and constellation Leo may reasonably be doubted. Such a continuation of astral symbolism over millennia seems possible, but building on it would be speculative.

We stand on firmer ground when looking at the silver coinage of some of the earliest Kushan rulers in Bactria, Arseilēs, Sapalbizēs and Pulagēs (Ghose 2006: 98b), who are conventionally dated in the first decades of the first century AD. On the coins of these

early rulers stands a lion to right flanked by the letters NANAIA on both sides, and the animal is topped by a crescent above a *lambda* (Λ) [Fig. 28]. The combination of lion, crescent and the name of the deity Nana(ya) could well refer to a position of Venus in Leo.

Nana as Venus

We have encountered one lady among male gods in Commagene, and in a similar way Nana is found among the predominantly male gods on the early coinage of Kaniṣka. Commagene as Venus is among the gods inaugurating Antiochus I, and according to the Rabatak record, Nana with her crescent is the most important deity in the inauguration of Kaniṣka. Could it be that the ritual in Commagene influenced the royal rites in Bactria and Gandhara? The time differential is no hindrance, as the ritual, the riches involved and the form of burial in Commagene would have been topic of conversation between the ruling classes troughout these adjoining regions for a long time.[11] In addition, the three Bactrian rulers just cited cut this gap down to about a century.

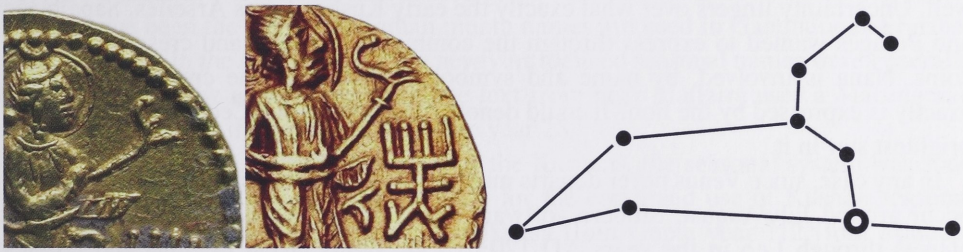

Fig. 29: Nanaśā with lion-wand on coins of Kaniṣka and Huviṣka taking up the shape of Leo's head.

What does it mean for our understanding of the Kushan world if we take Nana(ya) as a deity comparable to Venus? First, on the coinage of Kaniṣka, the redundancy of two moon crescents disappears. A deity shown with a lunar crescent, not being the moon (Carter 2006: 125, 2010: *passim*; Ambos 2003: 233), is indeed bothersome. Second, we will have to trace back this Nana(ya) to cultures of the first century BC in the Near East and their echos in Bactria. A direct link from ancient Mesopotamia to Bactria (Carter 2010: 148) via Ištar, Inanna or Nanaya is unnecessary, since all of her features are found in the late Seleucid kingdom and the regions adjoining it in the North and East. The most important trait for our purpose is the crescent and its use as a symbol for deities connected with Venus, a feature without parallels in ancient Mesopotamia. Third, we understand why the scepter of Nana(ya) resembles the forepart of Leo so closely [Fig. 29], with frontlegs reaching out to the right and the typical half-circle of the neck and head: a seemingly clumsy design turns out to be surprisingly realistic, with a

[11] Conditions at Commagene were often referred to to explain traits of Kushan royal self-conception, with a variety of diverging opinions, cf. Panaino 2009: 341.

clear reference to the same zodiac sign as the one celebrated at the Nimrud Dagh.

Apart from the coins of the said early Kushan rulers few pieces of art from Gandhara show the crescent on the forehead of a lady. A well-published exception comes from Haḍḍa, being a lady's head sculpted in clay, crowned by a stephane which is topped by a small crescent (Bopearachchi e.a. 2003: 300 no. 258). This may well represent Nana's head.

Nana, Leo and Kaniṣka

It is clear from contemporary writings from his officials that Kaniṣka received the blessings of Nana in the course of his enthronement, as stated in Rabatak as well as on the silver plate published in this volume by N. Sims-Williams. The symbol of Nana is the crescent. Antiochus I Theos received the blessings of Commagene, who appears on the lion's chest in the shape of Venus, symbolized as a crescent. A partial parallelism is there, no doubt, but if the parallelism should be complete then the visit of Venus to Regulus, or at least Leo, must have been considered as ominous in the Kushan realm as well. Uncertainty lingers over what exactly the early Kushan kings Arseilēs, Sapalbizēs and Pulagēs wanted to express through the combination of lion and crescent on their coins. Nana is involved, by name and symbolically through the crescent, but what exactly is expressed by the lion? It could denote the constellation Leo, or Regulus as the brightest star in it.

In any case, since Venus never departs much from the sun, her entering of Leo should occur around July/August. Modern software allows us to have a look at the defilé of planets through Leo in the years AD 120 to 130. Venus meets Regulus and crosses Leo in a linear movement in all years except in AD 127. In that year Venus touches the forepaw (Omicron leonis) on June 29, in line with Mars and the Moon, barely visible on the western horizon at 19:40 h for about 20 min. Then Venus starts moving retrograde meeting Mercury and the sun on July 14 in front of Leo. Venus keeps on retreating until August 8 when she reaches a distance of 23° east of the sun. Maintaining the distance she then seemingly stops, turns and proceeds again towards Leo and touches Omicron leonis on September 8 and Regulus on September 14, both rising at 1:52 h with dawn breaking at 5:11 h and the sun rising at 5:37 h. Venus leaves Leo during the first days of October.

Such a circle movement in front of Leo is not the rule, but it re-occurs every 8th year and thus it is predictable. At least in AD 127 the time of the circle movement coincides with the rainy season in India.

Features of the Kushan era I: the denomination of months

As seen above the activity of Venus alias Nana around Leo starts with the rains. If this behaviour was regarded as meaningful then the onset of the monsoon should in one way or other coincide with the beginning of the year. Are there arguments supporting

such a supposition? We have to look at the names of the months. The Kharoṣṭhī or Bactrian writing area, that is northern Pakistan up to Bactria, provides quite a number of inscriptions in Kushan years, dated to the first and second Kushan century. With or without the ruling king's name being mentioned, Macedonian months are used from year 28 of the first Kushan century to year 35 of the second, while Indian months occur from year 10 of the first century to year 41 of the second century.

Things are completely different in those regions of India where Brāhmī script was used for composing inscriptions. With Kaniṣka's year 1 a new system is introduced, used only in combination with his era, dividing the year into three sections of four months each. Numbering first to fourth are the four months of the rainy season (*varṣa*), then the four of the cold season (*hemanta*), and followed by the four months of the hot (*grīṣma*) season. This numbering resembles the age-old Vedic rituals of the *cāturmāsya*s, but what was a beginning in "spring", *vasanta* in the Vedas, is renamed "hot season" (*grīṣma*) for Kaniṣka, probably implemented as not to confuse the abbreviations *va* for *vasanta* and *va* for the "rains" (*varṣa*). This system has no predecessor for measuring profane time. Why have these new terms been introduced at all? A dislike towards Indian month names cannot have been the reason, as Indian month names are used in Gandhara and further west and north in the same period. The newly introduced seasonal names were generally used with very few exceptions. Only one text from near Mathura uses a Macedonian month name within the Kushan era, for the year 28.[12]

On the other hand, with the downfall of the Kushans, the seasonal system was soon abandoned, and only few examples remain for the continued use of Kushan seasonal month names in Gupta times. One is the Yakṣa from Gupta year 112 from Mathurā showing the "ongoing" Kushan chronology alongside the Gupta era (Falk 2004: 171). A second case comes from Bodh Gayā, in Mahārāja Trikamalla's inscription dated to year 64 in the "third month in the hot season". However, its exact chronology is disputed. Judging from his hairstyle the later part of the fourth century is more likely than a date in the third century.

Obviously the inventor did not intend to introduce the seasonal month system into the western regions, but it was part and parcel of the Kushan time-reckoning in India. Why not maintain the old Indian month names as was done in the Gandharan and Bactrian homelands? Despite numerous inscriptions, there is not a single intercalary month mentioned in the Kushan epigraphs using Brāhmī script. In Gupta times with the resurrection of the Indian month names, *adhimāsa*s re-occur quite soon. Could it be that the seasonal months of the Kushans were solar, and not lunar as the Indian months? This would explain the absence of intercalary months and would allow to clearly define the beginning of the year with the onset of the monsoon at the end of June or with the beginning of "the heat" (*grīṣma*) four months earlier.

The traditional Indian system with twelve indigenous month names was not completely

[12] Girdharpur inscription; cf. Satya Shrava 1993: 57 no. 64. The edition is unreliable, but the work is still best suited for comparing a substantial collection of Kushan texts.

replaced by the Kushan pseudo-seasonal system and it did return more or less instantly after their downfall. If the two systems were in use at the same time and the new one tries to be as simple and "mathematical" as possible, the two must have served different purposes.

Why was this system not introduced in the West? If the monsoon is the reason then there is no use for such a year in areas where there is little or no monsoon. But for royal self-presentation in the wide Ganges plains, as attested to being under Kaniṣka's control in the Rabatak inscription, this way of reckoning based on the monsoons would show that this king is the driving force behind this natural phenomenon. Already in the Vedas it is the righteous king who, by following the *dharma*, procures the heavenly waters for his subjects.

This sort of calendrical linkage was given up in Gupta times, but a public demonstration of the impact of the king on water can be reconstructed at Udayagiri. M. Willis (2004: 34ff.) has shown how close the connection is between the re-shaped landscape at the site and the phases of the year. The observation of the summer solstice is particularly noteworthy. It can be seen in the passage way above the Varāha relief oriented towards the point where the sun rises on the horizon the day of the solstice. At noon the sun stands precisecly above the Udayagiri rocks on the tropic of cancer. The passage way down to the Varāha relief is linked to a large reservoir cut into the rock behind it at the foot of the cliff of the hillock. It is easy to image the spectacle when the reservoir is opened and the waters run down the passage way, turn right to the Varāha relief where they are forced to build a lake. After this "water miracle" arranged by and for the Gupta king on the day of the summer solstice with its scorching heat it takes only a few days until the monsoon sets in. The king following his *dharma* guarantees the welfare through the heavenly waters for all of his subjects. This spectacle around the monsoon appears to come out of the blue in Gupta times, but a prototype may well have been invented in Kushan times when the onset of the monsoon was used to introduce a new way to define the year.

Why should any king venture to give up the age-old practice of naming years after the *nakṣatra* the full-moon occupies? Months based on lunations are imprecise by nature and are difficult to use to define the solar year. It was Julius Caesar who introduced a new system into the Roman world in 46 BC which did away with the lunar hotchpotch and its conflicting solutions in neighbouring countries. His revolution certainly was topic of

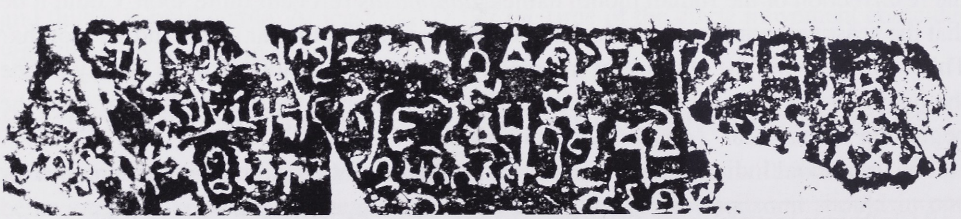

Fig. 30: Epigraph from Māṭ with reading *nanayotsave* in line 1. After Lüders 1961: 297.

talk in all ruling families in contact with Rome. Starting a year with January 1 was not an attractive option for India. But half a year later would do nicely. What was needed were months independent of lunations with new and neutral names, twelve in number, and an easily definable starting day. The summer solstice provides it and the monsoon makes it enjoyable.

If Rome again provided the model for the new counting, then Kaniṣka was certainly the man to dare to copy it. For its failure he is not to blame. An adaptation in India would only follow an adaption in Mesopotamia where the new solar year supplanted the luni-solar year too (Bennett 2011: 6, 182).[13]

Features of the Kushan era II: the Nanaya festival

The historiographical literature dominated by brahmins writing in Sanskrit ignores the Kushans even more than it ignores the Buddhists. Whether or not there was a yearly festival that celebrated Venus' entering of Leo or touching of Regulus, their texts will remain silent on the subject. Epigraphical material from Kushan clergymen could prove more helpful, but what has come down to us rarely deals with historical events. However, there is one text, in part misunderstood thus far, in which an officer of Huviṣka laments about the delapidated state of the family sanctuary at Māṭ. We know that some riots ravaged the Kushan empire during the reign of Huviṣka, an event attested to through an inscription on the socle of a statue. The first three lines [Fig. 30] read according to Lüders (1961: 138-145, § 99) as follows:

1: */// mak[a]ra[s]ya satyadha(r)[m]asth[i]tasya (/) nanayat Sarvaśca[ṃ]ḍavirātisṛṣṭa-r[ā]jya[sya]*

2: */// .. (de)[va]kulaṃ mahāraja-rājātirāja-devaputrasya Huvi[ṣ]ka[s](y)[a] [p]itāmaha(sya) ///*

3: */// (ta)[ḍā]ga¸ c[a] (da)[tta]ḥ [ta]taś ca devakal[aṃ bha]gnapatita viśirṇa[ṃ] d[ṛ]śya ma[h].////*

translated as:

1: " ... of the ... maker, who is steadfast in the true Law, on whom, on account of his devotion, the kingdom was conferred by Sarva and Ścaṃḍavira (Caṇḍavīra), ...

2: .... the temple, the .. of the grandfather of mahārāja rājātirāja devaputra Huviṣka .....

3: .... and a tank was given. And later on, having seen that the temple was broken, fallen down and in a ruinous state ... "

It becomes apparent that it is not clear who confers the reign, Sarva and Ścaṇḍavīra are not commonly attested entities. Lüders (1961: 142) was already familiar with the formula NN-*atisṛṣṭarājya* from a third century seal from Bhīṭā (Marshall 1915: 51), mentioning *maheśvara-mahāsena* as the active deity. For an analogy, he looked for another pair of gods. Lüders accepted from older interpretations a verbal form *anunayat* as underlying *nanayat*, and rejected a reference to the deity Nanaya only because "in

[13] For the introduction of a "calendarist" in China in the first years AD cf. Sanft 2009: 148.

that case it would be difficult to account for the following *tsarva*" (1961: 144 fn. 2). Now, since we have the Rabatak inscription a solution including Nana(ya) is more or less mandatory. A look at the assumed reading *yatsarva* solves the riddle. First, the *r-* is not there. Taking into account that the lower of the two rubbings published in Lüders 1961 shows an *o*-bow above the *ya*, and traces of an *e*-stroke to the left of the *va*, I read the beginning as *nanayotsave*, Skt. for "at the festival (*utsave*) of Nanaya". That the name of the deity was spelled NANAIA in Greek on many of the coins issued in the time of Huviṣka, has been shown above. The following *ścaṃḍavirātisṛṣṭasya*, clearly ends in *-atisṛṣṭa*, while the first term could end in *-a*, or *-ā*. Lüders (1961: 143) knew of a king called Ścaṇḍeśvarahastin, once ruling Kulūta in the modern Kulu valley. The Buddhist Kubjikāmatatantra lists *caṇḍavīryā* (21,35f.) as one of the names of the Devī, with special affinities for the Kulūta country. On the other hand we have a male Caṇḍavīra, a god known from Nepal (Lüders 1961: 143), comparable to the likewise Buddhist Kalyāṇapañcaviṃśatistotra which mentions Caṇḍavīra in verse 23 as a name of Hevajra or Trilokin. As the text from Māṭ reads, the male figure Caṇḍavīra must be meant, probably with a *śaiva* background, as the Māṭ text speaks of brahmins as beneficiaries. At least the name of the male deity evokes the terms *caṇḍā*, *caṇḍī*, *caṇḍikā* etc., all used for Durgā, a well-known female deity resembling Nana in a number of her functions.

My translation of the beginning of the inscription as given above is: "(this is?) the family sanctuary of the ...maker, who is steadfast in the true Law, on whom the kingdom was conferred by Caṇḍavīra at the festival of Nanaya. (*A statue) of the grandfather of the *mahārāja rājātirāja devaputra* Huviṣka ... and a tank were given (*by me?). And later on, having seen that the family sanctuary was broken, fallen down and in a ruinous state ...".

If our reasoning above holds true then the date of this festival was definded by Nanaya, but now the agent behind the conferral was a male god, probably the consort of Caṇḍā. Indian festivals usually are defined by astral conjunctions. The date of the "festival of Nanaya" (*nanayotsave*) was the date of the conferral of royal authority (*atisṛṣṭarājya*). On the coinage, the crescent on her head defines Nanaya as linked to Venus, and her lion "scepter" copies the shape of the front part of Leo, including Regulus, the king. The lion, the crescent and a specific date with a specific purpose link the site on the Nimrud Dagh with the Kushan coins and inscriptions, as there are too many facets to be accidental.

Who is the king referred to in the legend on the smashed pedestal? It must be Huviṣka, who is alive and referred to twice in the text. Lüders (1961: 141) tried to combine this mutilated text with the one on the statue of Vema Takṣu. However, without the help of the Rabatak inscription he was not able to define the person mentioned on the pedestal of the statue from Māṭ. Today we are better equipped and see that the "grandfather" spoken of must have been Vima Kadphises, a king who is different from the Vema Takhtu/Takṣu identified on a throne in Māṭ. A likely statue of Vima Kadphises has in fact been preserved, showing his prominent symbol, the club, held upright in front of the lower body. The statue was mutilated in one of the assaults on this sanctuary,

beheaded and subsequently repaired, put on a pedestal and inscribed at eye level first with *kaniṣka*[?*sa*], then starting further left, again with *mahārājā / rājātirājā devapu / tro kaniṣko*, overwriting the earlier text to some extent. The label inscription was necessary as otherwise onlookers would have taken it as the one of Vima Kadphises on account of the typical club.

Returning to the small statue with its *nanayotsava* we see that it reports some interesting activities at the *devakula* and thus we are entitled to believe what it says about the inthronement of Huviṣka: Nana(ya) defined the date and the function and this must have happened in continuation of a similar event under Kaniṣka. Although Huviṣka has the annual date of his father preserved, he regarded a male companion of Nana(ya)/ Caṇḍā as better suited to act in that function. This shift away from Nana(ya) towards a male god was the beginning of the end of this short-lived female deity under this name in India.

The Aftermath of Nana I: Artemis

This analysis of the relations to other deities in the Near East facilitates our understanding of a so far single gold coin of Huviṣka [Fig. 31] which shows a standing female deity with simple halo and royal fillet. The lady holds a bow and draws an arrow from her quiver. Artemis would be the natural expectation, but the legend says NANO, our Nana(ya), and the necessary crescent is found above her head, merged into the circle of dots.

The original designer of this gold coin showing Artemis called NANO must have been under the impression that Nana(ya) shares part, or most, of her character with Artemis and so he replaced the cup and scepter with bow and arrow. This impression may well derive from Near Eastern notions, as the hymn of Isidorus at the Fayoum temple says: "Astarte-Artemis, the Syrians praise you as Nanaya".[14] Astarte, the old Ištar, is indisputably linked to the planet Venus, Artemis is of different descent but part of that big merger that encompassed all Venus-related female deities in the first century BC. She is easily recognizable through a stag accompanying her or through a bow and arrow, or simply by a quiver. Her position with undrawn bow held in front and the right hand reaching for the quiver is first found with Commodus in Hadrianopolis in Thracia (Edirne), edited ca. AD 180. Follows Caracalla in AD 202-205 at Laodicea ad mare (Latakia) showing Artemis with bow and stag on the reverse and the emperor with his wife erroneously labeled as "Helios and Selene" in the explanatory text to CNG 3510583, because of the crescent below the queen's bust. The arrow-pulling Artemis was then taken up by Diadumenian (AD 217/8) and Severus Alexander (AD 223-235). A copper coin of Geta (AD 198-209) depicts her this way on the stag-drawn biga. Then the motif seems to disappear. Huviṣka's reign includes the years AD 153 to 187, enough for his designer to be inspired by the same western edifice or painting.

[14] After Ambos 2003: 236, Ἀστάρτην Ἄρτεμίν σε Σύροι κλήζουσι Ναναίαν.

Figs. 31-32: Gold coins of Huviṣka a) showing Nana/Artemis; b) Tēir reworked from a similar die as used for a). The British Museum, acc.nos. 1893,0506.17 and 1879,0501.12, reproduced courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Some other die designers seem to have been discontent with this irritating variant and had at least one die re-cut to read TEIPO, the Iranian Tīr, a form of Mars, still in female cloth and drawing an arrow, but deprived of the halo and instead supplied with a *polos* [Fig. 32]. During this process, the crescent in the ring of dots was flattened, the initial N of NANO was given an additional left arm to turn it into the T of TEIPO, and the right end of the same N was enlarged by a short horizontal stroke into the E. Grenet & Marshak (1998: 12) have shown that female forms of Mars are found in Central Asia, centuries later, thus assuming a similar female variant of Mars already in Kushan times. While this cannot be excluded, our explanation is based on similar features between Artemis and Nana, which sufficiently justifies the double iconography. As the reworking of the die shows, not all people responsible for coin design in Huviṣka's mint subscribed to this identification. Again we have to realize that Kushan iconography often reacts *ad hoc* to inspiration from outside and has little that builds on an ancient inherited family tradition.

The aftermath of Nana II: Nana on lion

Looking at the Near East we found a number of comparable female deities who have close links with kings and lions. In India there is no deity linked with lions prior to Nana or her wand with a "lion protome" copying the front-part of Leo. In the few relevant Kushan inscriptions Nana is mentioned in relation to kings, but no text ever associates her with lions. We need to consult some coins and younger pieces of art in order to see that a lion merges into the figure, no earlier than the second century AD. On one of Huviṣka's coins Nana sits aside on a standing lion, both facing right [Fig. 33]. All her

usual insignia are present, the small crescent, the halo, the royal fillet, the scepter in her right, and the cup in her left hand. It certainly is not by chance that the equivalents in Roman numismatics once again start with Commodus. A coin struck in AD 191 has a Cybele-like goddess sitting aside on a lion running to right (CNG 297414). Caracalla (AD 197-217) copies the model (CNG 830891). Another piece from Stratonicaea in Caria shows Hecate on a lion to left (CNG 3280284), dated with some uncertainty to the same imperator. In this case Huviṣka seems to come first. When looking for parallels or exemplars to art motifs in the Kushan world, the "greater" Roman world furnishes the models almost invariably. But, as in the case of the crescent-star the original center of distribution often lies in the periphery of this world, as in Anatolia or Syria.

A second coin with "Nana on lion" [Fig. 34] comes from the time of Kaniṣka II. Its issuer was regarded to be a "later" Kaniṣka by Martin (1933), Kaniṣka II by Göbl (1984: 76b, #660) or Kaniṣka III by Bivar (1971). On this piece the deity's small crescent has turned into the large crescent protruding from her shoulders on the model of the Salene-Māh type. The cup in her hand has been replaced by a royal fillet and the scepter is not theriomorphic anymore. Her name is spelled NΩNITO, /nōnit/, as on some Bactrian issues of Huviṣka, but the obverse has links to types minted under Vāsudeva, telling from the fields devoid of monograms and the triangular Brāhmī letter *e* touching the loins of the deity, a letter also found on the obverse of Vāsudeva gold coins. The change in crescent and insignia is further proof of a change in perception: the "original" Nana on lion from the West was not understood and soon turned into something more comprehensible.

This change continues at Ranigat near Swabi in the north-eastern Peshawar valley on the socle of a Buddhist statue (Odani 2008: 29, fig. 2). Again, the crescent has the shape usually found with Māh, the moon god. Ranigat has furnished inscriptions mentioning king Vāsudeva and so it seems that Nana(ya) not only was on her way out during Huviṣka's rule, but she also shared the fate with her sisters in function in Egypt and Syria by being mistaken at places for a goddess of the moon. The pseudo-Nana from Ranigat sits aside on a lion, but apart from the "wrong" crescent and the missing scepter she is also shown participating in a drinking bout in the company of men. This has a parallel in another panel from Gandhara at the Linden Museum, Stuttgart, acc.no. SA.31527 (van der Geer 2008: pl. 35), where a lady likewise sits aside on a lion, but here she is just an ordinary female deity, without scepter and without crescent, and the scene is nothing but a modernized drinking bout with Nana instead of Dionysos riding on his lion or panther.

The last phase on coinage is Lakṣmī sitting aside on a lion, on the coins of Candragupta II, on every piece that shows the king killing a prancing lion with bow and arrow.

Misconceptions are ubiquitous, some arising from plain ignorance, others from the wish to use a given art vocabulary for very different religious or political statements.

Such misconceptions probably are as old as the byzantine Venus crescent itself dating back into the first centuries BC. But to this day the crescent suffers the same fate. For Ambos (2003) every crescent is a lunar symbol. Earlier, Dörrie (1964) even combined

Figs. 33-34: Gold coin of Huviṣka with Nana on lion, British Museum acc.no. 1888,1208.555, reproduced courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum. Gold coin, in the style of Vāsudeva; after Mukherjee 1969: pl. I no. IA.

Commagene alias Tyche and the crescent on the lion's chest into the moon as a symbol for Tyche.[15] But there are examples to the contrary. Grenet & Marshak (1998: 15a, "Nana-Anāhīd représentant Venus") see that Nana has genuine links to Venus. They correctly argue on the basis of Sogdian contexts and leave Nana's prehistory out of account.

This misconception of the crescent is not new. Lucian (*De Syria Dea*, § 4[16]) and Herodian 5.6.3 (cf. Offord 1915: 201, 203) confused the crescent and even made Ištar-Astarte-Astroarche a lunar deity. Another example is found in Strabo's *Geography* 17.1.32: "At Memphis also there is a temple of Venus, who is accounted a Grecian deity. But some say that it is a temple dedicated to Selene, or the moon." The translator W. Falconer annotates with good reason: "Probably the statue of Venus bore a crescent on the forehead". As Falconer assumed, the misconception could simply be the result of the ignorance on the side of Strabo's travelling informants. But more likely it had arisen locally, found undisputed distribution and gradually transformed the deity into a generally accepted lunar deity.

Summary

To recognize the Kushan Nana(ya) as a deity showing the crescent of the planet Venus was relatively simple, given the multifold and unmistakable parallels in the Near East and Rome. Still, recognizing the planet Venus instead of the moon as participating in

[15] Dörrie (1964: 205) "Am Himmel hat sich der Mond – Sinnbild der Tyche – als eben die Tyche von Kommagene zu erkennen gegeben." Needless to say that such a *Sinnbild* does not exist.

[16] "There is likewise in Phœnicia a temple of great size owned by the Sidonians. They call it the temple of Astarte. I hold this Astarte to be no other than the moon-goddess" (Strong 2013: 97).

this symbolism has far-reaching consequences for the interpretation of Artemis in the classical art of the Near-East as well.

The rise of Nana(ya) in Kushan numismatics starts with the three "pre-dynastic" kings in Bactria. She is then given prominence by Kaniṣka, and her demise is visible under Huviṣka only a few decades later. She has no antecedents in Bactria or India earlier than the Kushan kings, but must be regarded as an afterglow of a Venus cult that had its heyday in the first century BC, discernible from Anatolia to the Levante, and from Phoenicia to Rome.

A cultic veneration of Venus meeting Leo and its most prominent star Regulus may have predecessors older than Antiochus I Theos, but only under this king does it become apparent for a royal consecration rite in Commagene in 62 BC. This consecration should not be mistaken as an enthronement which occurred at an earlier date in an unmentioned year, month Loos, Day 10, as Antiochus tells us in his edicts. Likewise, the comparable event for Kaniṣka must not necessarily be identical with his enthronement, although the interval between both events may have been short.

Since Kaniṣka I speaks at least twice about Nana(ya), alias Venus, conferring power onto him just as Commagene, alias Venus, conferred power onto Antiochus, an attempt was made to combine the reconstructable movements of Venus in the vicinity of Leo, the concerned sign of the zodiac, or with Regulus as the brightest star in Leo, all this in the years AD 120 to 130. No year provided a spectacular composition of planets, but AD 127 showed Venus in a circular movement in front of Leo for two months. Retrograde movements as such of Venus occur regularly every 8th year.

Once the onset of the monsoon is regarded as important for the definition of the Kushan year then we understand the new set of month names introduced by Kaniṣka for India. If the new months were solar yet another inspiration through Roman ideas would become likely. In addition, we have the chance to guess at a probable date for the "Festival of Nanaya".

The visualization of Venus meeting Leo is the basis for the art motiv of "Nana sitting on a lion". It shows a planet and a sign of the zodiac combined. The first to introduce such a combination in graphic art was, as far as I can see, Antonius Pius in his zodiac issues from Alexandria, dated to AD 144/5 and 147/8. The first Kushan gold coin showing Nana sitting aside on a lion, alias Venus on Leo, was issued by Huviṣka who ruled from ca. AD 153 onwards. This representation has no prototype in Indian culture. The follow-up shows an isolated coin of Vāsudeva's time with a lunar deity spelled NΩNITO on a lion, and the idea culminates in Lakṣmī sitting on a lion wherever the Gupta kings shoots a lion on the obverse.

Although waning in importance in mainland India very soon, and being relegated from enthronement rites in favour of a male god, Nana(ya) with her *vāhana* continues in the North-West, where ca. sixth century Kashmir preserved a number of statues of her with the old theriomorph wand and the cup for liquids (Siudmak 1994). She is even more clearly preserved in Sogdiana, where in addition to wand and cup in two hands

she holds a solar disk and a lunar crescent in two additional hands, pointing at her relationship with sun and moon, of which she is either the offspring or the progenitor. If my reasoning has any ground at all, none of the Nana(ya)s on lion can be older than the reign of Kaniṣka who adopted a series of ideas from the Near East to link his reign to the influence of the same astral deity that had – with or without his knowledge – already stood behind the victories of Sulla, Caesar and Augustus and had given her blessing to the rule of Antiochus I Theos in Commagene.

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