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WRITING GREEK IN THE SWAT REGION:  
A NEW GRAFFITO FROM BARIKOT (PAKISTAN)

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1. Introduction

In the last two decades Greek texts from the Far East have experienced a surge of interest, witnessed not only by the publication of F. Canali De Rossi's *Iscrizioni dello Estremo Oriente Greco* (2004 = *IK* 65) and of Rougemont's (2012) *corpus*, but also by the fact that these texts have increasingly become the focus of studies dealing with cultural and linguistic contact, above all those by Rachel Mairs (2014; 2015). Thanks to such new sensitivity, some of these texts may now be seen to contain cultural implications and convey tensions which would have gone unnoticed in the past. A good example of this approach to the Eastern documents is the recent article by Wallace (2016), which focuses on official texts that bring out the voice of the individuals belonging to the highest social strata in the Bactrian and Indo-Greek reigns: individuals whose identity was partially 'mixed' and who attributed great prestige to Greek education and culture.

This article aims to further our knowledge of Indo-Greek culture by examining the epigraphic evidence from the site of Barikot, on the left bank of the Swat River (Swat District, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, north-west Pakistan). Barikot, dominated by a steep hill overlooking the river, was a strategic site in the Middle Swat Valley. The stronghold is well-known in the archaeological literature for its important settlement, whose uninterrupted occupation sequence stretches from the Bronze Age (1700–1400 BCE) to the Medieval period. Excavations at the site were carried out from the 1970s onwards by the Italian Archaeological Mission (established in Swat by Giuseppe Tucci in 1955), under the direction of Giorgio Stacul (1977–1987), Pierfrancesco Callieri (1984–2000), and Luca M. Olivieri (from 1987 onwards).

The main historical event of the Barikot sequence is represented by an important urban phase featuring a lower city and an acropolis on the top of the hill. The beginning of the city can be dated to the 5th–4th centuries BCE (Olivieri and Iori, forthcoming). The city and its acropolis were later fortified during the Indo-Greek phase (during Macrophase 3a) with the construction of a massive and imposing defensive wall which had rectangular bastions, each 100 Attic feet, and pentagonal bastions at the end corners. This defensive wall can be dated to the mid-2nd century BCE on the basis of the numismatic data (MacDowall and Callieri 2004); this chronology is confirmed by several 14C dates (Olivieri and Iori, forthcoming). The lower city was eventually abandoned at the time of the collapse of the Kushan political system following the expansion of the Sasanians in the East, and the settlement was reduced to a fortified complex covering the whole hill.

Barikot's Greek epigraphic record, albeit meagre, is now enhanced by a new fragmentary graffito on a potsherd unearthed in the 2016 campaign, of which we offer here the first edition (§ 4 below). This new text calls for a reconsideration of the entire *dossier* of Greek inscriptions from Barikot in the light of the new trends in research on Greek culture in Asia.

2. The names of the city

According to the main Classical sources (Arrian and Curtius Rufus), in the autumn of 327 BCE during his military campaign in the Swat Alexander the Great conquered three cities. While the whereabouts of Mas-saga/Mazagae (the capital city of the Assakenoi/Assacani) are still debated (see Olivieri 2015a: 63, fn. 25, 26), Ora/Nora and Bazira/Beira have been positively identified respectively with Udegram and Barikot.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This article is the outcome of collaboration between the two authors. Sections 1 and 6 have been written jointly by both. Sections 2 and 3 are by Luca Maria Olivieri, while sections 4 and 5 are by Olga Tribulato. The authors wish to thank Claudia Antonetti for her comments on an earlier draft of this article.

<sup>2</sup> These identifications were first proposed by Aurel Stein (Stein 1930: 40–41; 28–29) and Giuseppe Tucci (Tucci 1958: 288; 296; 327 fn. 28).

Although the memory of both cities later vanished in Western sources,<sup>3</sup> the name of Bazira surfaces in a 10th-century Brahmi-Śarada inscription from Barikot's hill-top (von Hinüber, forthcoming). The inscription, already known (*EI* XXI, 44, VI), bears the toponym *vajira(sthā)na*, which Giuseppe Tucci interpreted as *Vājra*,<sup>4</sup> a form of the name which Arrian records as Βάξιρα (*An.* IV 27, 5). The form *vayira* is well-attested in the Gāndhārī language in inscriptions from the region dated to about the 1st century CE.<sup>5</sup> Since the best approximation for the pronunciation of *va(y)ira* is [ve(j)irə],<sup>6</sup> the information provided by Curtius Rufus on the pronunciation of the local name ([...] *urbis opulentae – Beira incolae vocant* [...] VIII 10, 22) seems extremely precise,<sup>7</sup> thus revealing that the source that he used was particularly reliable on this point (see also Olivieri 2015a: 63, fn. 27).

This information seems particularly relevant in the light of the results of the 2016 excavation campaigns. The recent fieldwork at Barikot has proven the existence of an extremely rich city already in the 5th–4th centuries BCE (Olivieri and Iori, forthcoming), thus providing strong evidence in support of the existence of the *urbs opulenta* recorded in Curtius Rufus (quoted above).

### 3. The Indo-Greek contact phase (Macrophase 3a2–4): an archaeological overview and linguistic data

The excavation campaigns carried out at Barikot in 2016 (Fig. 1) have greatly contributed to our understanding of the Indo-Greek contact phase (Macrophase 3a2–4 in the Barikot sequence, c. beginning–2nd century – mid-1st century BCE), which was previously mostly known from the monumental urban defence complex (Callieri 2007; Olivieri 2015b) (Macrophase 3a3). Moreover, the analysis of the overall material culture of Macrophase 3a has definitely proved that a coeval phase (stratum V) was documented in the past also at the nearby site of Udegram (1956–1962; Gullini 1962). From Udegram stratum V comes the first potsherd with a fragmentary Greek inscription found in the Swat (Pugliese Carratelli 1966), on which see § 5 below.

Overall, Macrophase 3a pottery record (Callieri 2007) has perfectly been defined by now as a production which finds direct comparanda in the Hellenized East and in particular in Bactria (Olivieri and Iori, forthcoming). Direct comparisons can be drawn for fine tableware forms such as e.g. *plats-à-poisson* (both slipped and unslipped), low bowls with flat everted rim (painted), but also fine bowls with simple rims in gray ware (rare) and red ware. Two of the texts described in this article (§ 5 below) are inscribed on this last type of pottery.

Among the Macrophase 3a2–4 materials excavated in 2016 there are four fragmentary inscribed potsherds, two in Brāhmī, one in Greek (Inv. BKG 3985, see § 4 below), and one in Aramaic (painted).<sup>8</sup> These inscriptions should be added to the list of those discovered in the past: two in Greek and one in Brāhmī. Therefore Greek and Brāhmī are equally represented (with three fragments each).<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Brāhmī inscriptions are incised on vessels which are different from those used for the Greek inscriptions: the latter

<sup>3</sup> The toponym Nora used by Curtius for Ora might tentatively be explained as a paraetymology formed from homonymous toponyms which are well-attested in Western sources, including Diodorus Siculus (e.g. see Eggermont 1975: 71, fn. 277).

<sup>4</sup> *Vajira* means 'diamond, thunderbolt' (Skt.). If we wished to translate the toponym into Greek we should think of a place-name like Ἀδάμας (and this without taking into account the possible religious implications of the term *vajira* in the local environment).

<sup>5</sup> *CKI* 249, *CKI* 52, *CKI* 367 (S. Baums, personal communication).

<sup>6</sup> In Gāndhārī neutral vowels before [j] (using IPA notations) are generally palatalized (Stefan Baums).

<sup>7</sup> This point was kindly brought to Luca Maria Olivieri's attention by Stefan Baums (personal communication). On Curtius' higher reliability than Arrian's as far the events of the autumn of 327 BCE are concerned, see Olivieri (1996) and Olivieri (2005a).

<sup>8</sup> The Aramaic inscription has been studied by Michael Zellmann-Rohrer (Zellmann-Rohrer and Olivieri, forthcoming).

<sup>9</sup> See the contributions by Gérard Fussman and Stefan Baums respectively in Callieri and Olivieri (forthcoming); for the Brāhmī inscriptions of Macrophase 3a, see in particular Baums, forthcoming.

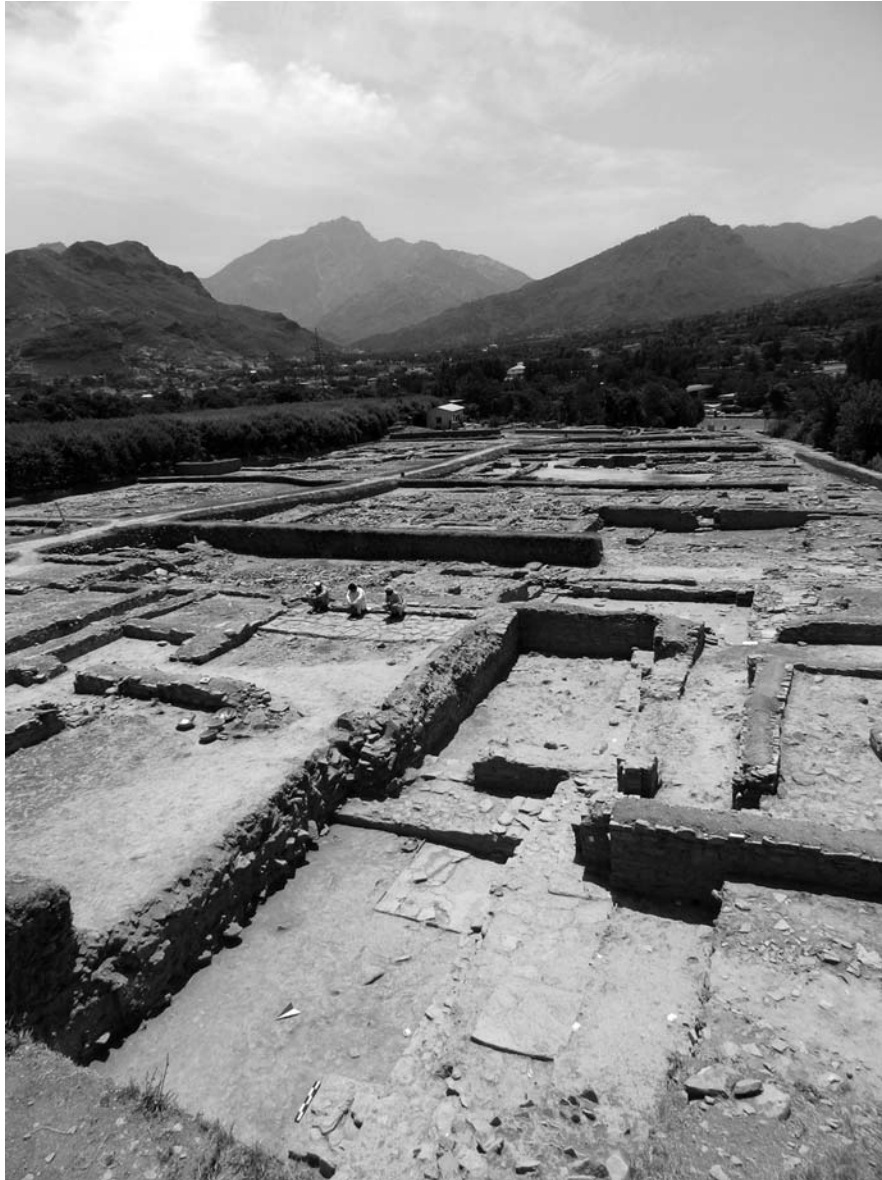


Fig. 1. Barikot, south-western quarters of the ancient city.

In the background the peak of mt. Ilam (Aornos) (Photo by LMO; Courtesy ISMEO Italian Archaeological Mission 2016)

are incised on fine bowls, while Brāhmī inscriptions are incised either on low carinated bowls with inflected rim (*thali*-type) or on small water-jars, both typical of Indo-Gangetic pottery.<sup>10</sup>

This small epigraphic assemblage, when seen in its context (i.e. including the differences in the host vessels) suggests the existence of local bilingualism, which may be particularly interesting for a fuller understanding of this historical phase. Moreover, although the numismatic assemblage is clearly Indo-Greek (and precisely mid-/end-2nd century BCE), as are the urban defences and the tableware, the material culture (plain ware, terracotta figurines, ornaments, four coeval Indian coins, etc.) is clearly Indo-Gangetic (not local). These data may confirm the hypothesis that the Swat valley was military annexed and fortified *ex Oriente*, in a mature phase of the Indo-Greek kingdoms (Olivieri and Iori, forthcoming) (the defensive wall was built in Macrophase 3a3).

<sup>10</sup> The third Brāhmī inscription (no. 1885 in Callieri and Olivieri forthcoming) might be slightly later (c. first quarter of the 1st century BCE).

## 4. The new graffito BKG 3985

Inv. BKG 3985, trench BKG 11, locus K 1690, stratigraphic unit 2117 (Macrophase 3a2: c. mid-2nd century BCE) (Fig. 2.1).

Bowl, red ware, fine; vertical walls, simple rim; wheel-turned; diam. 13.5 cm. Incised after firing; broken after incision. Swat Museum, Saidu Sharif (Reserve Collection).

The graffito consists of four letters which have an average height of 0.7 and 1.0 cm. After the fourth letter a lacuna must be posited, because the vase was broken after the graffito had been engraved. The depth of the strokes suggests that the graffito was made with a sharp and light tool; the first letter may have been re-traced. The *ductus* is regular, perhaps thanks to the quality of the surface.

EYMH[ ]

The lunate *epsilon* is semi-cursive. *Hypsilon* is regular. *My*, of smaller size, is close to a cursive form. *Eta* is not placed on the same horizontal line as the other letters but tends diagonally towards the right.

The most likely interpretation of the four letters is that they represent the beginning of a name in Εὐμη-, e.g. Εὐμήδης or Εὐμηλος. Since names in Εὐμη- are very common in Greek texts, there cannot be any certainty as to the specific form of the name in this graffito. Εὐμήδης and Εὐμηλος, by far the two most frequent names among those in Εὐμη-, are amply attested in the onomastic record from Asia Minor. No data is available on their use in the Greek Far East (no name in Εὐμη- appears in the onomastic index of *IK* 65).<sup>11</sup>

Graffiti with names engraved on pottery are well-attested at Barikot, where most are in Kharoṣṭhī or Brāhmī, the common scripts of the area. In all probability, the Greek graffito is an ownership inscription or – less likely – a dedication.

## 5. Reconsidering the Greek texts from Barikot

The new potsherd bearing an onomastic graffito complements the small corpus of Greek texts from Barikot, now amounting to three. The two other texts (cf. § 3 above) have recently been republished in vol. II.1,1 of *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum*, devoted to Greek inscriptions from Iran and Central Asia (Rougemont 2012).<sup>12</sup> Here we offer a brief review of this material, with the aim of contextualising the significance of these texts in the light of the advances made during the 2016 excavation campaign.<sup>13</sup>

Inv. BKG 516, trench BKG G (1981), layer (4) (Fig. 2.2).

Bowl, red ware, fine; thin red slip; simple rim; wheel-turned; diam. 14.0 cm. Incised after firing. Swat Museum, Saidu Sharif (Reserve Collection).

The date of this graffito is uncertain, given the meagreness of the associated materials and the fact that the excavation reports have never been published. However, on the basis of the stratigraphic sequence and available information (Callieri 1984, and the excavation inventories), it is probable that fragment BKG 516 belongs to Indo-Greek periods of Macrophase 3a.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Differently from many names from Bactria, it is not possible to identify the remains of this name as a form distinctive of Macedonia or Northern Greece: Εὐμήδης, Εὐμηλος or another name in Εὐμη- are not endowed with a special cultural or regional connection. On Louis Robert's suggestion that a large part of the Greek onomastic stock from the Far East was connected with Macedonia, see now Mairs (2015: 3, 8, 16–17) with bibliography and sensible caveats.

<sup>12</sup> See also *IK* 65 295–296.

<sup>13</sup> When this article was at proof stage, during the ongoing study of the Barikot pottery assemblage (Callieri and Olivieri forthcoming), a fourth sherd with a possible Greek graffito was brought to light. The sherd has been labeled as Form 197, trench BKG 202, layer (89); bowl, red ware, fine-medium; thin red slip outside. On the wall, it bears part of a possible onomastic graffito: [ ]OC. Above, near the rim, there is a second possible graffito: [ ]C. The sherd, which comes from a later Barikot phase (4th–5th cent. CE), but may be earlier, has been preliminarily studied by N. Sims-Williams. The latter ruled out the possibility that the inscription was written in Bactrian (personal communication to L. M. Olivieri).

<sup>14</sup> Layer (4) is dated to the end of the 2nd century – first half of the 1st century BCE. Layer (4) was situated between layers (3) and (5). The pottery fragments from layer (3) clearly belong to Macrophase 3b, dated to the Saka-Parthian period (end

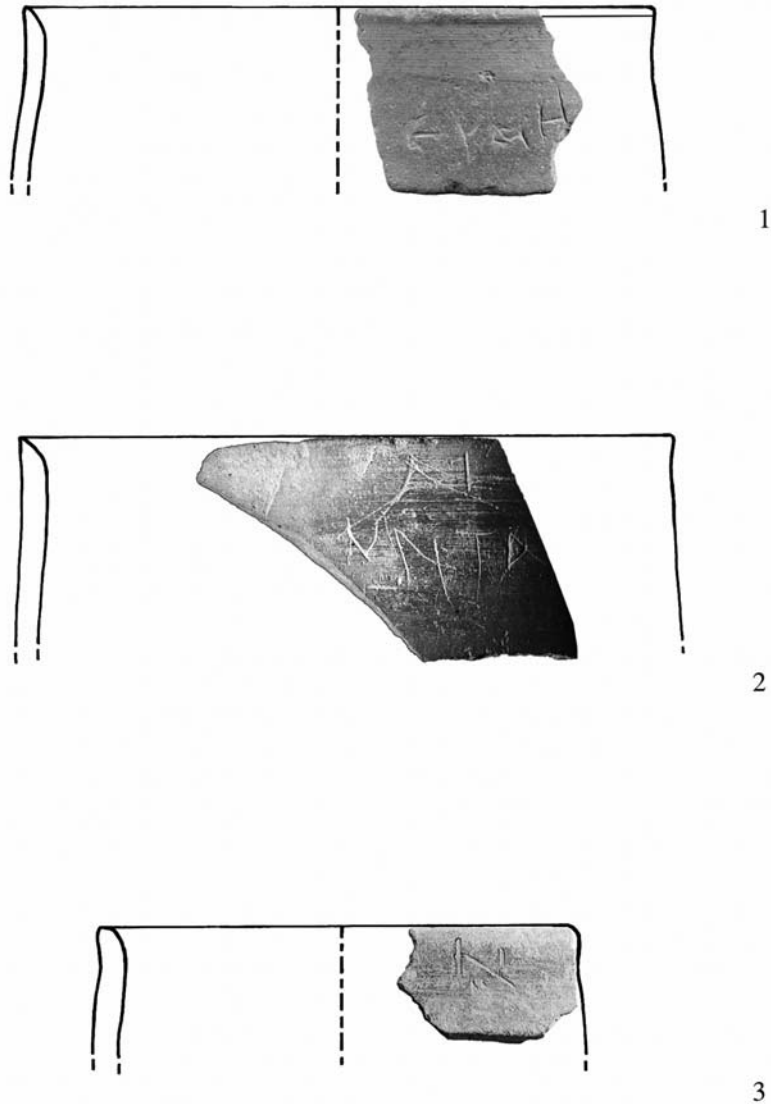


Fig. 2. The three Greek inscriptions. 1: BKG 3985; 2: BKG 516; 3: BKG 852  
(drawings by Elisa Iori, Photos by E. Iori and P. Callieri; Courtesy ISMEO Italian Archaeological Mission 2016)

The graffito on this potsherd (*IK* 65 295 = Rougemont 85) was made after the slip was applied, and before the bowl was broken. It was incised lightly, seemingly with a pointed tool; the signs do not have an even depth and the *ductus* is uncertain, perhaps also because of the concave and smooth surface of the vase.

ΔΗ[ ]  
[ ]<sup>vac</sup>ΥΝΤΑ[ ]

J. Harmatta (1994) has advanced the hypothesis that these letters represent what remains of a name in -δημος (in the dative?), followed by the name Ἀμόντας; and that this text accompanied the gift of the vase to someone named in the inscription.<sup>15</sup> Karttunen (1997: 292), Canali de Rossi (*IK* 65 295) and Rougemont (2012: 183) all criticize this interpretation, and not without reason. It is neither certain that ΔΗ in the first of the 1st century BCE – beginning of the 1st century CE). Layer (5) contained ceramic material dated to before the mid-1st millennium BCE.

<sup>15</sup> Harmatta (1994: 408).

line belongs to Εὐθύδημος, as suggested by Harmatta, nor that the name occurs in the dative. In addition to Rougemont's criticism, Callieri (2007: 142) notes that there is no trace of other letters on the left of the first line, so that ΔΗ must be interpreted as the beginning of the name or word (e.g. δημόσιον).

All things considered, the typology of the support – a bowl which was later broken – suggests that the onomastic interpretation of the graffito is the most probable. It may be an ownership inscription, identical to all the other pottery inscriptions from this and later phases of the site (Fussman forthcoming; Baums forthcoming). In this perspective, while the name in the first line must remain unknown, the name in the second line can probably be identified as Ἀμύντας, which has more than 350 attestations in the Greek onomastic record. The identification of the second form with a verb (e.g. a third person plural in -ονταί or a masculine participle in -οντα) is much less likely.

Inv. BKG 852, trench BKG 1, locus 113, stratigraphic unit (346) (Macrophase 3a2–4) (Fig. 2.3).

Bowl, red ware, fine; thin dark red slip (inside/outside); simple rim; wheel-turned; diam. 10.2 cm. Swat Museum, Saidu Sharif (Reserve Collection).

The sherd was probably incised before firing because its extremities are rounded. It was later unintentionally broken. Dating is certain: it belongs to Macrophase 3a (cf. § 1 above).

[ ]<sup>vac</sup>.N<sup>vac</sup>.[ ]

Fragment BKG 852 bears a Greek graffito (*IK* 65 296 = Rougemont 86), of which only *ny* remains. Rougemont (2012: 183), noting that the sherd is broken on the left and that there seems to be a space after the letter N, advances the hypothesis that the graffito originally consisted in a word ending in -v. It could also be an abbreviation of some kind.

## 6. Conclusions: Greek culture at Barikot

In spite of its scantiness, the Greek *corpus* from Barikot deserves to be better known because of its historical relevance. Rougemont minimises the significance of the Greek presence at Barikot, by noting that “un vase avec un graffito en lettres grecques peut aussi voyager”.<sup>16</sup> This may be correct, and it is certainly true that a Greek name does not constitute proof in favour of the Greek identity of its bearer. Yet, the discovery of a third Greek graffito suggests that more attention should be paid to the possibility, already advanced by Harmatta (1994: 408), that in 2nd-century BCE Barikot some form of Greek culture survived, as evidenced by the use of Greek writing and onomastics. The three Greek graffiti come from the urban area, enclosed within the fortification walls which have been identified as “a good example of Eastern Hellenistic architecture” (Callieri 2007: 142). The typology of pottery from the site and the military architecture of its walls, as well the fact that these may have been designed by using a Greek unit of measure – the Greek foot and its multiples – are all elements in favour of the persistence of Greek culture in the site.<sup>17</sup>

It should also be remembered that, if Barikot is Bazira/Beira (as the overall evidence allows us to conclude), the city had already seen an ephemeral Greek contact phase in 327 BCE and the following years (Macrophase 2b) (c. 350–300 BCE) (Olivieri and Iori, forthcoming). According to Arrian, Alexander fortified Bazira and placed a garrison at Ora (Udegram).<sup>18</sup> Both cities were put under the control of the satrapy of Nicanor, commander of the territories before the Indus. We know that the Swat rebelled as early as 326 BCE (Arr. *An.* V 20, 7), and that probably by 324–323 it had been abandoned by the Macedonians (Olivieri 1996: 51 with references). Notwithstanding the discontinuity of the events, the two contact phases (Macedonian and Indo-Greek) might have had some degree of a form of continuity, as proven by the Graeco-Bac-

<sup>16</sup> Rougemont (2012: 183).

<sup>17</sup> The width of the walls is 2.8–3.0 m. (= *circa* 10 Attic feet); its bastions are situated at a distance of *circa* 28–30 m. (= 1 *plethron*) from each other: cf. Olivieri (1996: 48).

<sup>18</sup> Arr. *An.* IV 28, 4: τὰ μὲν δὴ Ὠρα καὶ τὰ Μάσσογα φρούρια ἐποίησεν ἐπὶ τῇ χώρᾳ, τὰ Βάζιρα δὲ (τὴν) πόλιν ἐξετείχισε (“[Alexander] created *praesidia* at Ora and Massaga for the defence of the region, and fortified the city of Bazira”) (see Callieri 2007).

trian acculturation phase in Macrophase 3a1 (c. 300–200 BCE) (Olivieri and Iori, forthcoming). Only this can explain the second Greek occupation of both cities almost two centuries later, and the fact that, of the two sites, only Barikot was fortified, as it had been in the past.

The Greek graffiti from Barikot, although of little significance in themselves, bear witness to an extremely complex cultural context, which remains to be better defined. It is well-known both that onomastic inscriptions incised on pottery after firing are a very common type in Greek epigraphy and that their function may range from the signification of ownership or craftsmanship to that of the individual to whom the vase was sent, donated or dedicated. With all due caution, given the high number of Greek onomastic inscriptions, it may be suggested that the Barikot graffiti are similar to the “economic texts” found in the Treasury of Ai Khanoum, the most important site of ancient Bactria (Mairs 2011a: 39; Mairs 2014: 47). Although most of these texts from Ai Khanoum are painted on vases,<sup>19</sup> some of those which were incised after firing are onomastic ownership inscriptions (e.g. *IK* 65 359, 363, 372, etc.). At Barikot the graffiti could identify an economic context in which Greek writing had a practical and possibly every day use. A further parallel is provided by the potsherd found at Udegram in the layers now safely identified as Indo-Greek, which bears the graffito NOY, tentatively interpreted as the genitive of the name Νοῦς (*IK* 65 297 = Rougemont 87).<sup>20</sup>

Compared to the texts from Ai Khanoum, those from Barikot are certainly inferior. Yet – to quote the words used by Giovanni Pugliese Carratelli in a 1966 article on the new perspectives which a systematic investigation of Central Asia might open – it is exactly documents of this type which, in spite of their rarity and fragmentary status, allow us to appreciate the extent to which Greek culture penetrated and survived in Asia.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See also a specimen from Old Kandahar (Helms 1997: 101, 245, fig. 150, n. 1983, pl. 13; Mairs 2011b: 184, fig. 6) dated to c. 150 BCE ‘or a little later’ (Helms 1997: 101).

<sup>20</sup> *Editio princeps* in Pugliese Carratelli (1966: 35–36 e fig. 11). On the excavations, see Gullini (1962).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Pugliese Carratelli (1966: 31).



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