

Celto-Iranica : The strange case of a *carnyx* in Parthian Nisa

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Abstract

The author discusses the frieze of an ivory rhyton among the 50 specimens found in Parthian Nisa in 1948. He particularly draws attention on the elder satyr playing a carnyx in the vicinity of a low hill where a goat flees, while a younger satyr is falling in the attempt to catch it, and two satyrs are menacing it by keeping a mastiff dog on leash. The author interprets the scene as a simulated hunt, by virtue of the exaggerated means employed, and suggests reading it as a ceremonial hunt in the context of Cybele's cult, namely a criobolium, the earliest mentions of which are to be found in Pergamon during the third quarter of the 2nd century BC. This event fits in the likely chronology of the frieze at issue, and moreover points to the depiction of carnyces in Pergamon as a possible source for the knowledge of such instruments in Asia. In effect, carnyces are just exceptionally witnessed in Inner Asia, as they are allegedly Celtic instruments ; therefore, the Nisean depiction calls for further considerations on the provenance of the whole corpus of the ivory rhyta. This leads the author to deal with another delicate topic, the name of Cybele's priests, the γάλλοι : the author supports the idea that they were thus called after the ethnonym of Gaulish people, who gained an eminent role in Cybele's temple-town, Pessinous. The reading of the Nisean frieze may therefore provide a new glimpse onto a longstanding matter.

Résumé

Celto-Iranica : le cas étrange du carnyx de Nisa (pays des Parthes).

L'auteur analyse la frise d'un des 50 rhytons en ivoire découvertes à Nisa en 1948. Il examine particulièrement la figure du satyre âgé jouant du carnyx près d'un rocher où une chèvre s'est retirée, tandis qu'un jeune satyre trébuche en essayant de l'attraper et deux autres le menacent avec un gros chien en laisse. L'auteur interprète la scène comme une simulation de chasse en vertu des moyens excessifs qui sont employés, et suggère de le lire comme une chasse rituelle en rapport avec le culte de Cybèle, le criobolium, qui est mentionné la première fois à Pergame au troisième quart du

Ile siècle av. J. C. Cela s'accorde avec la datation possible du rhyton en question, et cela indique en outre Pergame comme une source probable pour la connaissance des carnyces en Asie. Effectivement, les carnyces ne sont qu'exceptionnellement représentés en Asie Intérieure, comme il est normal pour des instruments typiquement celtiques. Par conséquent, la représentation de Nisa se prête à des considérations sur la provenance du répertoire entier des rhyta en ivoire. Ce qui conduit l'auteur à aborder un autre sujet très délicat, c'est-à-dire le titre des prêtres de Cybèle, les γάλλοι : l'auteur soutient l'hypothèse qu'ils sont ainsi appelés d'après l'ethnonyme des Gaulois, qui ont acquis un rôle éminent dans la ville-temple de Cybèle, Pessinonte. La lecture de la frise de Nisa peut donc donner un nouvel éclairage sur un ancien débat.

CELTO-IRANICA: THE STRANGE CASE OF A *CARNYX* IN PARTHIAN NISA¹

BY

Niccolò MANASSERO

It could seem strange to deal with an artefact coming from Central Asia on a journal dedicated to Celtic studies: however, the item at issue in the following pages calls for attention by specialists in this field indeed, as it concerns a typical Celtic object, foreign to Central Asian culture at all.

As a matter of fact, the article is devoted to the frieze of an ivory *rhyton* that was found in Old Nisa, the famous Parthian foundation in nowadays Turkmenistan, not far from the capital Ashgabat.² In that site, an outstanding corpus of ca. 50 ivory *rhyta* was recovered in 1948 in the Square House, a building composed of a central court surrounded by modular, long rooms with benches along the walls and rows of columns in the middle. That building was used as a store-house in the final period of life in Nisa, *i.e.* late 1st century AD, though previously it was likely used as a banquet-hall.³ The finding of a huge amount of *rhyta* – namely drinking horns with zoomorphic terminals provided with a spout⁴ – inside this building thus finds good explanation. However, despite study by authoritative scholars over the past decades,⁵ the number of open questions, regarding both the function and the meaning of the corpus as a whole, as well as the subjects and the iconography of individual friezes and terminals, remains considerable. The place where such *rhyta* were manufactured, for example, remains unknown: to sum up the debate, some scholars believe they were carved elsewhere, possibly in Bactria, then brought to Nisa as a war trophy or a royal gift; some others sustain they were locally carved by

1. The present article follows one dealing with the same subject, which was published in a book in honour of the 70th birthday of Professor Antonio Invernizzi (MANASSERO 2011). The present essay is strongly different from the previous one and reaches further, inedited results.

2. Old Nisa is the name used to indicate the site lying in the Eastern edge of the modern village of Bagyr, to be distinguished from a site lying 2 kms. far, at the Western edge of the same village, that is called New Nisa: for an overview of the site and the history of its discovery, see INVERNIZZI 2004 with mentioned bibliography.

3. See INVERNIZZI 2000.

4. See a comprehensive discussion about this peculiar kind of vessels in MANASSERO 2008a.

5. Besides the publication of the corpus by MASSON-PUGACHENKOVA 1959 and 1982, see some overall discussions of the corpus, mainly by BERNARD 1985 and 1991, CHUVIN 1991, MANASSERO 2007 and 2008a, 169-189, and mostly the recent new edition of the whole corpus by PAPPALARDO 2010.

Greek-trained masters working at the court of Mithridates.⁶ In the lack of definitive proofs supporting either hypothesis, some basic matters about the meanings and functions of both the single items and the whole inventory remain unsolved, and answers must be searched for through details, mainly in iconographic and stylistic features.

Henceforward I wish to give my contribute to such a delicate topic, by discussing an object depicted on the frieze of the *rhyton* no. 8, a specimen deserving special attention already by the first editors of the corpus, who provided the drawing of the whole subject in this case alone.⁷ The frieze shows the sacrifice of a goat, though divided into three successive sequences, by satyr-like characters in the vicinity of a mighty altar and a priest, or perhaps a god (FIG. 1). My attention will here focus on one of the satyrs taking part in the sacrifice, namely the one on the right of the stone heap on which a goat finds safety, behind a second satyr falling down in a vain attempt to catch the goat. The satyr in question – an elderly one – is depicted standing with his right leg forward, holding both hands just in front of his mouth, at the bottom of an object abruptly interrupted by a lacuna, but clearly imaginable as narrow. Beyond the lacuna, just below the frieze frame, an animal head placed on a short duct casts light on the overall shape of the object: it is a fairly long (roughly 1-1,20 m., in proportion to the satyr's stature) and narrow pipe, culminating with an animal head, which is hard to identify owing to its summary definition. Though it's not very clear whether the muzzle is that of a dog or the beak of a bird of prey, the eye outline and forward-facing ears seem to suggest a griffon rather than a *ketos*⁸ (FIG. 2). The object held by the satyr is quite obviously – as pointed out by the editors⁹ – a wind instrument; the typology to which it belongs, however, is surprising, being unexpected given the Central Asian context, and perhaps ignored so far because of this reason indeed. In fact, what lies before us is a typically Celtic *carnyx*, the kind of trumpet very well known to readers of this journal, though not much to archaeologists working in Central Asia.

6. P. Bernard strongly supported the former hypothesis in two important contributions, BERNARD 1985 and 1991. On the other side, A. Invernizzi usually supports the latter idea in a number of works, such as INVERNIZZI 2001 and 2004. The same opinion was held by the publishers of the corpus, MASSON-PUGACHENKOVA 1982, who however stressed too far the implications of a hypothetical local manufacture and overloaded the corpus with Iranian meanings, which are probably weaker than supposed. Recently, PAPPALARDO 2010 suggested that the *rhyta* were progressively collected from different workshops during a quite long time span, relying on stylistic ground.

7. MASSON-PUGACHENKOVA 1982, 118-119.

8. On the *ketos* and its diffusion in the arts of Central Asia see BOARDMAN 1987.

9. See MASSON-PUGACHENKOVA 1982, 51: here is found the description of the instrument making the subject of this article, "a long pipe, curved at the end, with the outline of an animal's head with an open mouth and pointed ears at the end"; however, the instrument is not recognized and quoted correctly. Neither in the work by INVERNIZZI 1999, specifically devoted to the representation of musical instruments in the friezes of the Nisean *rhyta*, mention is made of the instrument at issue, nor in PAPPALARDO 2010, 170, where the instrument is called "singolare flauto a protome teriomorfa".

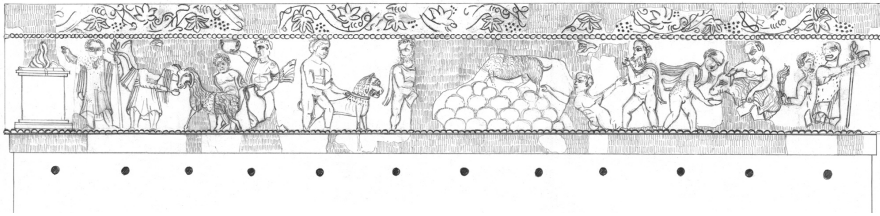


FIG. 1: Drawing of the frieze of *rhyton* no. 8 from Old Nisa, courtesy Centro Scavi Torino, Claudio Fossati.



FIG. 2: Satyr blowing a *carnyx*, detail of the frieze of *rhyton* n. 8, courtesy Centro Scavi Torino, Riccardo Gonella.

Carnyces are known through a number of findings in France (Tintignac and Mandeure), in England (specimens from Trattershall Ferry and Deskford), but also in Germany (one specimen at Dürnau), Italy (a debated terminal from Castiglione delle Stiviere), and Poland (a specimen dredged out of the river Nogat near Malbork). *Carnyces* are almost exclusively made of metal, bronze, silver, and gold, with the sole exception of a few clay fragments from Numancia in Spain.¹⁰

10. For the *carnyces* quoted above see PIGGOTT 1959 updated by VENDRIES 1999, and a résumé by MEGAW 1991, with reference to specific bibliography.

The *carnyx*' images depicted on monuments and artefacts are more numerous, the most common ones being found in representations of trophies from Roman wars against the Gauls,¹¹ as typical element of their warfare paraphernalia, so peculiar that the personification of Gaul was often depicted along with a *carnyx*.¹² Their aspect is often similar to that of their Nisean counterpart, for example on an altar found at Nîmes,¹³ and on Tiberius' arch in Orange, where about twenty *carnyces* appear beside shields, cuirasses, and weapons.¹⁴ The *carnyx*, whose size – as can be assessed in iconographic sources – matches perfectly that of the Nisean specimen, appears as part of the war trophies captured from the Gauls also on a number of coins minted in the wake of the Roman campaigns in Gaul, *i.e.* on a coin of Caesar and one of Albius Brutus;¹⁵ a coin of Tasciovanus, king of the Catuvellauni, shows a mounted horseman holding in his hand a *carnyx* without blowing it.¹⁶

However, *carnyces* and closely related trumpets were in use outside Gaul too: a trumpet bell quite similar to the Gaulish *carnyx* and dating vaguely from the 2nd or 1st centuries BC was found at Săliște, in Rumania:¹⁷ the outline reminds of the open jaws of some of the *carnyces* quoted above, particularly that from Nîmes, although the bell does not have a properly defined zoomorphic shape. Griffon-headed *carnyces* frame the war trophies conquered from the Dacians, depicted on the base of Trajan's Column in Rome (dating to 110-113 AD); a similar *carnyx* is found near the personification of Dacia on a relief, perhaps from Trajan's Column, now preserved in Palazzo dei Conservatori.¹⁸ The *carnyces* on Trajan's Column are particularly similar to the one from Nisa; together with the fragmentary bell from Săliște they are of the utmost importance as they show that such an instrument was widespread not only among the Celts, but also among other peoples settled further East in Europe and closely related, both ethnically and culturally, to the Celts.¹⁹ We might thus call it broadly typical of the peoples that settled in the border areas of the empire and were regarded by the Romans as barbarians.

The Dacian *carnyces* offer us the most extraordinary known representation of the instrument: the only one showing the very moment of its employment. I am obviously referring to the cauldron found at Gundestrup in Denmark – an artefact well known to

11. See POLITO 1998, 59.

12. See HENIG 1997, nos. 3 (detail on the cuirass of the Prima Porta Augustus), 5, and 10.

13. ESPERANDIEU 1907, I, 297, no. 431.

14. See *Arc d'Orange* 1962, pl. 44, and MANSUELLI 1981, 280-281, figs. 1-3. The variety of the Orange *carnyces* suggests that within Gaul itself such instrument did not necessarily end in wild boar heads, as claimed by VENDRIES 1999.

15. SAGLIO 1887, 926.

16. MEGAW 1991, fig. on p. 645. See VENDRIES 1999 for other depictions on coins.

17. See the very bad photograph in MARGHITAN 1969, 312-322, fig. 6.

18. See VENDRIES 1999, figs. 13 and 19. Here again, however, Vendries claims that, on the base of Trajan's Column, signs, and not *carnyces*, are depicted.

19. See the observations of WELLS 2001 on the tenuousness of ethnic and cultural boundaries between European peoples of the Iron Age, particularly pp. 114 ff. about Julius Caesar's distinction between Celts and Germans.

readers of this journal²⁰ – generally dated between the end of the 2nd and the onset of the 1st centuries BC and ascribed to a northern-Thracian workshop on stylistic grounds. On one of the six panels making up its ornamentation, three characters are depicted whilst blowing three long *carnyces* ending in highly stylised animal heads (probably of wild boars), standing upright above their heads (FIG. 3). The scene has been explained as the depiction of a warrior initiation ritual, a war-related context showing however, at the same time, a close connection between such musical instrument and the domain of rite.²¹



FIG. 3: Warriors playing *carnyces*, detail of the Gundestrup cauldron (from KAUL 2011).

20. See KAUL 2011: the coexistence of a Celtic object with stylistic features typical of Thracian toreutics has led F. Kaul to the persuasive deduction that the cauldron was produced by a workshop of *Scordisci*, a Celtic tribe settled after the 3rd century BC between north-western Bulgaria and southern Rumania.

21. It is noteworthy that on another panel of the same cauldron the Celtic god Cernunnus is depicted, whose stem *καρν-* is the same found in the word *κάρνυξ*. On the identity of this antlered figure see important considerations in KAUL 2011, 101 ff.

On the contrary, if we look further East, we have very scanty parallels to the evidence from Nisa. No *carnyx* comes from the whole Asia, though a few depictions are known: thus, the representation from Nisa stands out almost completely isolated in its historical and cultural context.

A slightly different kind of trumpet, ending in an ox-head, is depicted on the parapet of the porch in the sanctuary of Athena Polias at Pergamon,²² dedicated in the early decades of the 2nd century BC by Eumenes II in order to commemorate his father Attalus' victories over the Galatians.²³ Further East, we have just two archaeological evidences approaching the one from Nisa as concerns the geographic and cultural area of provenance. The first is a relief carved above the northern doorway of the Sanchi *stupa* in India, dating back to the second half of the 1st century BC and therefore being roughly contemporary or slightly later than the *rhyta* (FIG. 4). It shows two figures blowing two *carnyces* ending in a bifurcated bulge, which may refer to a schematic head with open jaws or to some floral element.²⁴ The second is a golden diadem found in a grave at Kargaly, nearby Almaty, Kazakhstan:²⁵ one of the characters displayed is mounted on an ibex, and plays a floral trumpet that can be discerned though it is bent and outlined in an unusual manner (FIG. 5). The bell bears no animal depiction, however the instrument is quite similar to a *carnyx*, in particular to the Săliște specimen: we have thus evidence of the knowledge of such an instrument among the Wusun, the nomadic people living in the area in the 2nd-1st centuries BC, to which the item may possibly be attributed.

As regards the Sanchi relief, we may deduce – from the fact that the *carnyx*-players belong to a thick group of characters in Greek-fashioned garments – that the craftsman erroneously regarded the *carnyx* as a typically Greek attribute.²⁶ Such instrument might appear here, that is in an area very far from the Graeco-Roman world where it was better known, owing to a misunderstanding of local culture: a perspective-flattening phenomenon common to cultures of several areas and periods, ascribing anything generically “Western” – not excluding Celtic objects – to the Greek world.

22. BOHN 1885, table XLVI. POLITO 1998 specifies that this is a Paphlagonian trumpet rather than a *carnyx*, namely a variant quoted by Eustatius of Thessalonica (our only source as regards the term *carnyx*: see immediately here below). I am at variance with the scepticism of VENDRIES 1999, who even states this is no trumpet, but instead a bull's head sign.

23. The trumpet depicted under the body of the famous “dying Gaul” by the sculptor Epigonus is not a *carnyx* as it has no figurative elements on the bell and the duct is curved, not straight: see MITCHELL 1993, 46, fig. 7.

24. See DUBOIS 1937, pl. XIV: 4, and MAISEY 1972, 32, note 2, pl. X. In the 2nd century BC, at Bharhut, trumpets are found with a flared bell, without any zoomorphic elements: see DUBOIS 1937, pl. XIV: 2-3.

25. See AKISHEV 1983, 41-42, 158-172; and see the useful drawings in BOARDMAN 2007, 15, fig. 4.

26. Attention should be given, in this same Sanchi relief, to the female dancer seen from behind, repeating exactly – with the sole addition of the dress – the iconography of the *timpani*-player often found on the Nisean *rhyta* (e.g. *rhyta* nos. 5, 7, 31, 43, and 63). And we must also notice the double-*aulos* player, immediately on the right of the *carnyx*-players that perfectly matches a character on the frieze of rhyton no. 78, on whom we'll spend some words later. The Sanchi relief shows therefore three iconographic parallels at once, witnessing common sources for images circulating through Hellenistic Central Asia.



FIG. 4: Characters playing *carnyces*, detail of a relief on the doorway to the stupa at Sanchi, India (from DUBOIS 1937).

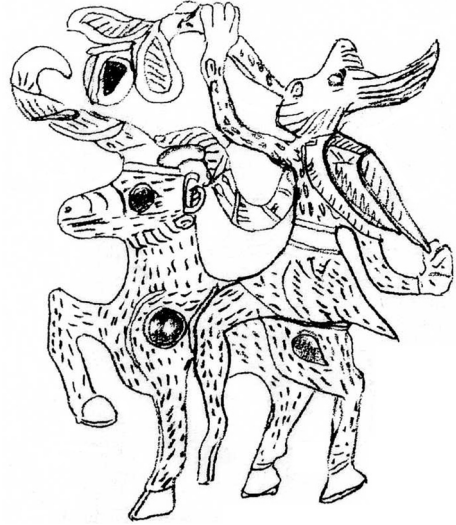


FIG. 5: Mounted character playing a floral trumpet, detail of a diadem found in Kargaly, Kazakhstan (from BOARDMAN 2007).

There might be plausible ground for such a misunderstanding: the term *κάρνυξ* is a late-Greek *hapax*, used only by the Byzantine scholiast Eustathius of Thessalonica (*Sch. ad Iliad.* XVIII, 219), whereas the lexicographer Hesychius refers to a similar word, *κάρνυν*, translating it as *σάλπιγξ*, a noun for the better known Greek trumpet. Any other author referring to the trumpets employed by the Gauls in battle uses other terms: Julius Caesar, of whom it would be most expected, invariably speaks of “tuba” (*De bello Gallico*, VII, 81:3 and VIII, 20), whilst Polybius applies the word for the Greek trumpet, *σάλπιγξ* (*Histories*, II, 29:6),²⁷ to the Gaulish one. If a Greek author such as Polybius uses a Greek word to describe a Celtic object of similar function and shape, it is no wonder that in far-off Sanchi the two trumpet patterns were mixed up and overlapped. The misunderstanding of the Sanchi relief author mirrors the semantic equivalence of the two terms, and stems from the pronounced formal proximity of both instruments. It is understandable that hardly any distinction was made in India

27. Also Diodorus (V, 30) is likely to refer often to this kind of trumpet, but likewise fails to mention at all the term *κάρνυξ* adopted by modern scholars.

between Celtic *carnyx* and Greek *salpinx*, whose shape and size are similar, albeit they differ as regards the animal head terminal. Admittedly, the two instruments differed in the manner they were blown, the first being held high above the head, whereas the second was kept slanting downwards.²⁸ However, the proximity is substantial: both instruments are ascribable to a military context,²⁹ where they were employed in order to urge on fighters and terrify enemies with their din. Just as the *carnyx* often appears in Celtic war trophies, the *salpinx* is almost invariably seen held by hoplites, formed into *ad hoc* units within the Greek army and on whose shields the *salpinx* was frequently depicted.³⁰

Coming back to the frieze at issue, we must deal with an apparent inconsistency, that altogether will lead us to discern an intimate coherence of the whole matter: if the *carnyx* was almost totally unknown in Asia, then why do we find such an accurate depiction of it in lands as far, from both the geographical and cultural points of view, as Parthian Nisa, Kargaly and Sanchi? How did this far-fetched instrument travel from its original territories to the very heart of Central Asia? We need to fill a huge geographical gap, though it must be said in advance that the lack of *carnyces* between Pergamon – the most Eastern place where they are attested – and Nisa could easily be an accidental blank in the archaeological documentation available to us so far.

As one of the most flourishing artistic schools of the Hellenistic world developed there, Pergamon may likely be pointed out as one of the possible training places of the artist who depicted a *carnyx* on the *rhyton* found at Nisa. It appears reasonable to suppose that the renowned sculptural production at Pergamon – where the acquaintance with the Galatians was direct and images of their weapons and standards abounded³¹ – might have exercised some influence on the iconographic repertoire of the artist who carved the *rhyton* no. 8, and possibly other specimens of that corpus as well. However, we must also underline the affinity between the *carnyx* from Nisa and those on Trajan's Column, while the *carnyces* depicted on Sanchi's relief and on the Kargaly's diadem, that don't bear a clearly distinguishable animal terminal, rather recall the aniconic Sălișteea bell. Lastly, the depiction of *carnyces* on the Gundestrup cauldron casts further light on the substantial link between the Nisean *rhyta* repertoire and some subjects and iconographies of Thracian art, some of which I have pointed out elsewhere.³²

28. It is needless to say that the Nisean *carnyx* is held well-high horizontally merely owing to the reduced size of the frieze: had it been played correctly, high above the head, the satyr would have appeared disproportionately short of stature.

29. In this respect the image of the Nike holding a *salpinx* and standing on the ship bow, found on some coins from Salamis commemorating the victory of Demetrius Poliorketes (306-283 BC) over Ptolemy, is significant: see *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum, Vol. V: Ashmolean Museum Oxford. Part III: Macedonia*, no. 3244.

30. About the *salpinx* see Xen., *Hipp.* III, 11-12, and *Equ.* IX, 11, and the study by SARTI 1999.

31. See POLLITT 1986, 79-110.

32. Suffice here to remind the common iconographical type of the heads of the Thracian king Seuthes and of the Parthian king Mithridates: see MANASSERO 2011, 279, with bibliography.

Altogether, Pergamon and the Galatian populations of Anatolia seem to be the most plausible sources to be related with the *carnyx*' depiction from Nisa. Artists and craftsmen trained in those workshops, perfectly knowing Galatian *carnyces*, are to be thought as the most likely link with the artefact found in Parthian Nisa. In fact, artists and craftsmen from various developed centres in the whole Hellenistic world were surely engaged by the Arsacid king Mithridates to build and embellish Nisa, or by following rulers as well.³³ Among them, Pergamene masters could be working in Nisa and thus transmit knowledge of foreign subjects and iconographies to Parthian culture.³⁴ In the same way, knowledge of *carnyces* could easily spread further east and reach Kargaly and Sanchi, and possibly other destinations not yet witnessed by archaeological proofs.

In this regard, however, caution is needed, as no certainty exists about the place where the ivory *rhyta* found in Nisa could be produced, as already noticed. It has been recently proposed that they might come from different workshops, perhaps located in different geographic areas, and date to different periods.³⁵ However, the exceptionality of the corpus, some recurring iconographic and ideological features,³⁶ and the fact that ivory *rhyta* are witnessed elsewhere by a specimen alone,³⁷ lead me to think that the corpus might be acquired at once, though it might be executed in different workshops by specialized ivory carvers.³⁸ In other words, I think that differences among the single specimens from Nisa are to be ascribed to different workshops and different masters, not to different chronologies. As to the location of such workshops, they could reasonably be searched for in Bactria or in the Eastern Mediterranean basin, following the suggestion by P. Bernard. However, I must remark that the ivory *rhyta* are extremely fragile, therefore their transport from distant countries would certainly damage them to some extent, and call for skilled craftsmen to restore them *in situ*. It's worth remembering that the huge clay statues were certainly produced in Nisa, as their transport is technically impossible even for a few meters.³⁹ In sum, I think that

33. The name of Old Nisa, witnessed by one of the administrative *ostraka* found in the site is "Mitridatkart", that literally means "fortress of Mithridates". Which Mithridates is to be intended is a debated matter, anyway it seems plausible that we should interpret him as Mithridates I, reigning since 171 to 138 BC (see INVERNIZZI 2001), rather than Mithridates II, 123-87 BC.

34. By the way, instruments used in war like *carnyces* could perhaps be appreciated by warriors like Parthians, rapidly gaining power in Central Asia and soon building a huge empire extending as far as Mesopotamia and Armenia.

35. PAPPALARDO 2010, 297 ff.

36. See the detailed analysis of the items in PAPPALARDO 2010; see also some considerations on recurrent subjects and iconographies in the *corpus*, in MANASSERO 2007.

37. A terminal in the shape of a lion comes from Takht-i Sangin, Tajikistan: see LITVINSKY-PICHKYAN 1994; a few ivory plaques from Olbia are more likely part of a coffin or basket rather than parts of *rhyta*, as they are commonly interpreted: see nice pictures in LOUKONINE-IVANOV 2003, 71, cat. 34, and a previous discussion of their function in MANASSERO 2008a, 169, note 5. See also analogous ivory plates recently found in the late-Parthian and Sassanian site of Mele-Hairam, Turkmenistan: KAIM 2010.

38. A hypothesis advanced by BERNARD 1985, 89 ff.

39. In this regard see BOLLATI 2008. The last campaigns in Old Nisa brought to light a number of gypsum moulds representing horses' legs: however, they were likely used to produce terracotta statues, as witnessed by one fragment of hoof found in 2011: see LIPPOLIS 2011 (written before the hoof was found).

nothing prevents us from supposing that the ivory *rhyta* might be produced in Nisa itself, perhaps in the nearby site named New Nisa, the actual Parthian town where craftsmen could work, the ruins of which have unfortunately been very little investigated by archaeologists so far.

Apart from this personal suggestion, I think that the *carnyx* may help us in identifying the region where the carver of *rhyton* no. 8 came from, due to its ethnic and geographic specificity. What we may definitely state is that the town of Pergamon, where many images of Galatians were portrayed in famous sculptural groups and where *carnyces* were depicted among Galatian arms in the porch of the Athena's sanctuary, was probably homeland to the carver of *rhyton* no. 8. Subsequently, in my opinion, we may suppose a certain Pergamene – or Anatolian, for reasons that will be explained later – component in the background of the artists who also carved other *rhyta* found in Nisa.⁴⁰

To support this hypothesis, it must be mentioned that a certain stylistic influence of Scopas' sculpture was already detected by the former editors of the *rhyta* from Nisa, and by later studies as well.⁴¹ Dramatic renderings of faces and muscles, typical of Scopas' works, have been identified on a number of characters in the friezes and in the heads below the rims.⁴² Scopas' bearing on Pergamene school doesn't need to be remembered here: Pergamene influence on carvers of the ivory *rhyta* found in Nisa is therefore very likely.

If *carnyces* depicted on the porch of Athena's sanctuary in Pergamon may likely be seen as a source of inspiration for the author of the examined frieze, I think that one more visual source related to Galatians might perhaps be identified as regards the same frieze. In fact, the figure of the young satyr falling while trying to catch the goat⁴³ might hint at the famous statue of the "falling Gaul" from Delos that was part of a monument commemorating Attalos' victories upon the Galatians (FIG. 6).⁴⁴ In the context of the hunting scene on the *rhyton*'s frieze, this would be a quite ironical hint to a dramatic sculpture, the meaning of the figure being totally re-interpreted. Therefore it would perfectly fit with the character of the scene depicted, one where a customary sacrifice of a goat is introduced by a rather comic hunt with the use of an impressive, disproportionate war-instrument in order to urge on the animal. A satyr clumsily falling while trying to catch the goat adds an ironic mark to the scene, especially if its pose closely reminds that of a sculpture displayed in a famous monument in Delos that was therefore widely known.

40. Therefore also of *rhyton* no. 78, correctly attributed to the same workshop on stylistic ground by PAPPALARDO 2010, 301: see below more remarks on that specimen.

41. See MASSON-PUGACHENKOVA 1982, 145 ff., and PAPPALARDO 2010, 273 ff.

42. For some considerations on the heads below the rims, see MANASSERO 2008b.

43. I disagree with Pappalardo's view that this is a standing figure, stretching forward to catch the goat from a lower point, as an artificial mean to suggest a certain difference in height: see PAPPALARDO 2010, 168-169. The pose of the falling satyr on frieze no. 8 is evidently different from that of the character on the Istanbul's sarcophagus called on as a parallel (p. 168, fig. 4.24), where the ironic nuance of the frieze is absent.

44. POLLITT 1986, 94, fig. 95.



FIG. 6: Statue of a falling Gaul from Delos (from POLLITT 1986).

These considerations lead me to a crucial question that will be discussed in the second part of the present article: why does the elder satyr (and possibly the falling one too) quite explicitly refer to Gauls? Which was the intention of the artist who carved the frieze (or of the customer who may have ordered it) in depicting an instrument – the *carnyx* – as specific and peculiar to a population living far from Parthia? Why should a satyr hold an instrument related to war in a scene that has nothing to do with war, if not to hint deliberately to the Gaulish *ethnos*, to which that instrument pertains?

As regards the fact that a Gaul may be depicted following the likeness of a satyr, we can easily explain it with the words of Diodorus of Sicily (V, 28): “οἱ δὲ Γαλάται

(...) τιτάνου γὰρ ἀποπλύματι σιμώντες τὰς τρίχας συνεχῶς καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν μετώπων ἐπὶ τὴν κορυφὴν καὶ τοὺς τένοντας ἀνασπῶσιν, ὥστε τὴν πρόσωπον αὐτῶν φαίνεσθαι Σατύροις καὶ Πᾶσιν ἐοικυῖαν: παχύνονται γὰρ αἱ τρίχες ἀπὸ τῆς κατεργασίας, ὥστε μηδὲν τῆς τῶν ἵππων χαίτης διαφέρειν". "The Gauls (...) are always washing their hair in lime-water, and they pull it back from the forehead to the top of the head and back to the nape of the neck, with the result that their appearance is like that of Satyrs and Pans, since the treatment of their hair makes it so heavy and coarse that it differs in no respect from the mane of horses."⁴⁵

Greeks were admittedly racists against foreigners, calling them "barbarians" (a term meaning "babbler"), and labelling them as hybrid creatures, centaurs and satyrs especially: therefore, Diodorus' words just reflect a common thought on strangers. However, the *carnyx* held by the elder satyr on the frieze at issue is a very clear ethnical marker: eventually, Gauls being overtly regarded as satyrs, it's not strange at all to find a satyr depicted with a typical Gaulish object in hand. Nonetheless the subject of the frieze is completely new: as far as I know, no satyr playing a *carnyx* is depicted in Greek and Roman art; on the contrary, images of satyrs playing flutes, especially double *auloi*, are countless.⁴⁶ Among them, special mention deserves a small bronze statue depicting a satyr-like character playing a twin *aulos*, that was consecrated in the temple of Takht-i Sangin, Tajikistan (FIG. 7), in a geographic and cultural milieu very close to that of Nisa.⁴⁷ This image harks back to that of innumerable *aulos*-playing satyrs of Greek art, and reminds of the Dionysiac value of wind instruments in general⁴⁸ (though *carnyx* was not used at *symposia*, for obvious reasons). The Takht-i Sangin satyr, however, is evidently depicted following the iconographic likeness of Marsyas playing the double-*aulos*,⁴⁹ while the Greek inscription on the pediment relates it to the god Oxus, the local river (modern Amu-Darya) on whose shore the sanctuary lies.

We find here another important hint to the Near Eastern milieu we already mentioned before: Marsyas was in fact the god of the river bearing his own name, a branch of the river Meandros in Western Anatolia,⁵⁰ a region that greatly contributed in sending colonists to Iranian lands, from whose capital Magnesia the Greco-Bactrian king Euthydemus himself stemmed. Marsyas' mention in this regards is strongly suggestive, as literature clearly links him to the Galatians: Pausanias (X.30.9) reports that the

45. Mentioned by MITCHELL 1993, 46, fig. 7.

46. See e.g. SIMON 1997, nos. 25, 38, 96, 103, 104, 105, and 121.

47. The object is extensively dealt with by LITVINSKIJ-VINOGRADOV-PICHKIAN 1985. See also ABDULLAEV 2005, 236, and fig. 16.

48. Wind instruments are constantly related to the Dionysiac domain in Greek culture, as they infuse the human mind with *enthusiasmos*; let it be reminded that the *aulos* is the instrument of dithyramb, the Dionysiac composition par excellence, lying at the origin of Greek theatre: see BARKER 2005. However, in order not to tie wind instruments too strictly to Dionysos, it must be said that they were regarded by Greeks as Asiatic instruments, stressing on the emotional, irrational component of human spirit, in opposition to string instruments, lyre *in primis*, which were considered expression of the rational part of man, and were, significantly indeed, typical instruments of Greeks.

49. The identification of the iconographical type was advanced by LITVINSKIJ-VINOGRADOV-PICHKIAN 1985 and never countered; see for example BOYCE-GRENET 1991, 180-181.

50. Polybius, *Histories* V, 45:8-9

Phrygian town Celaenae was helped by Marsyas to repel Galatians. Moreover, we may consider that Marsyas' cult, as well as his name's etymology is admittedly related to the ass;⁵¹ it's worth recalling here that the ass was deemed as gross and unmelodious as no other animal: it was even considered indifferent to Orpheus' lyre, and its bray was explicitly compared to a trumpet's sound.⁵² Therefore, it's possibly relevant to see even an ironical hint to an ass' bray in the *carnyx* hold by the satyr, whose aspect possibly hints to Marsyas indeed: the sound of the *carnyx* is unpleasant and unmelodious at all, as the ass' bray.⁵³

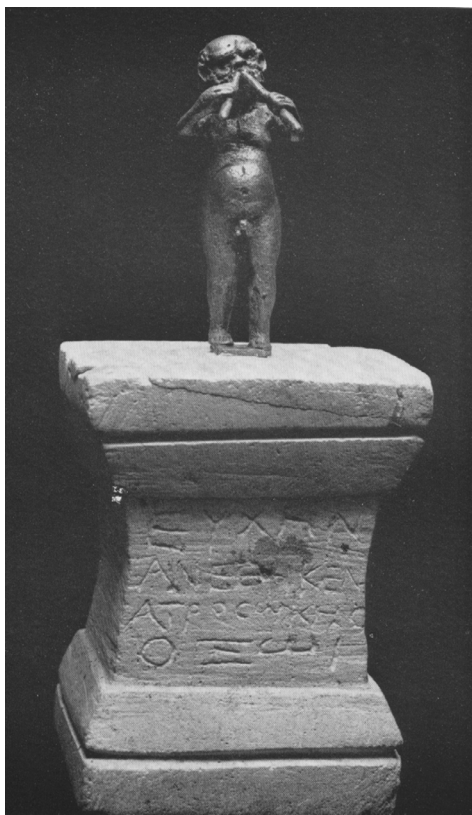


FIG. 7: *Aulos*-playing satyr (the river-god Oxus portrayed as Marsyas) from the temple of Takht-i Sangin, Tajikistan (from ABDULLAEV 2005).

51. See REINACH 1911, 403-404.

52. Plut., *Conv. Sept. Sap.* 5.; Ael., *Hist. Anim.* X.28.

53. We may also consider that Silenus and the satyrs are reported to have helped the Olympian gods to overcome the Giants, who were frightened by the bray of the satyrs' asses, according to Euripides, *Kyklops* 7. Still note that Silenus fought against Enceladus, whose name stems from the verb *enkeleuo*, meaning "to sound the charge", obviously with some kind of trumpet.

Back to the frieze of *rhyton* no. 8, we come to a delicate point of our enquiry, regarding the meanings of some words that nonetheless have an important bearing on our knowledge of events indeed.

The ethnonyms for Gauls and Galatians (Galli/Γάλλοι and Galati/Γαλάται respectively), whose etymologies have been debated for decades,⁵⁴ inevitably intertwine with a matter that must be discussed at once here, as it's deserved by the geographical, cultural and cultic contexts of the *rhyton* at issue. I mean the quite strange case of homonymy of the Greek word γάλλος referring to both the Gaulish population and the eunuch priests of Cybele, a matter already dealt with by a number of ancient sources and modern scholars.⁵⁵ I think that the frieze at issue may help us in this regards and add an useful information to this topic.

The term γάλλος, used in both meanings, appears late in Greek literature, in the course of the 3rd century BC. As regards Gauls, the ethnonym Γάλλοι seems to be adopted by Greek language from Latin (where it might be related with cocks) in the very moment when Greek civilization first experienced contact with them, and substituted or flanked the previous term Γαλάται, perhaps meaning “white” with reference to their pale skin.⁵⁶ On the other side, the term γάλλος referring to Cybele's priests is first witnessed by some Hellenistic epigrams dating from the end of the 3rd – beginning of the 2nd century BC:⁵⁷ such priests were formerly called μετραγῦρται.⁵⁸ Again, Latin influence is exercised in the very moment when Galatians appear in Anatolia, and possibly after the adoption of Cybele's cult in Rome (204 BC) and consequent interest in these priests.

The homonymy of Gauls and Cybele's priests is hardly accidental, and we may easily imagine the Romans' ironic aim in labelling their enemies with the same term used for eunuchs, namely in a disparaging sense. Moreover, we have clear evidence that Galatians were involved in civic and religious life of Pessinous, the temple-town capital of Galatia, devoted to Cybele's cult:⁵⁹ among the famous seven letters sent by the Pergamene kings Eumenes II and Attalus II to Cybele's priest, generally called Attis, a certain Aioiorix, clearly a Gaulish name, is overtly referred to as brother of the

54. See for example DUVAL 1989, 203-204.

55. LANE 1996 authoritatively collects and discusses every sources on the topic.

56. Here I follow the reading of the terms proposed by BLOCH 1900, 436-437. However, another convincing hypothesis is that such ethnonyms may be related to the Old Irish root *-gal*, associated with the idea of war-fever and bravery: see RENFREW 1996, 101-102.

57. *Anth. Pal.* VI. 217-220, 234, and 237, concerning the encounter of a *gallos* with a lion. A verse wrongly attributed to Kallimachus by Wilamovitz has often been used as a proof that the term preceded Galatian presence in Anatolia, thus preventing the term *gallos* (priest) to be used with reference to Gauls. Though no inconsistency could be seen anyway (as Galatians entered Asia Minor since the first decades of 3rd century BC), the verse at issue was correctly attributed to the much later grammar Hephæstion by later scholars: see LYNN 1999, 230, note 175.

58. The word *metragyrtes* is composed of two parts, the first being *Meter* and the second *agyrtes* that comes from the verb *ageirein*, meaning “to gather” or “collect”. BORGEAUD 1996, 61, describes the *agyrtes*, namely the beggar, collecting people “parfois à son de trompette”, a detail not further specified and apparently not based on sources. Although this observation may be considered a suggestion as regards the *carnyx*, I think that Borgeaud wrongly interpreted the verb “collect”, as it likely refers to collecting money rather than people, according to the nature of a beggar.

59. See VIRGILIO 1981, MITCHELL 1993, and CLAERHOUT-DEVREKER 2008.

priest.⁶⁰ This witness is strongly meaningful, inasmuch as very few personal names are reported by those letters: Galatians were certainly well integrated in the civic and religious life of Pessinous by the time that letter was sent from Pergamon, i.e. between 163 and 156 BC. Therefore we should see no difficulties in the fact that Gauls, settled in an inner region of Anatolia and integrated with local inhabitants, might leave several tracks of their culture there, namely in toponymy and the cultic sphere too.⁶¹

However, scholars sometimes strenuously oppose this interpretation, perhaps because it's too straight: they often call on the fact that the priests γάλλοι were thus called after the river Gallos flowing in the region, whose waters led to madness and self-castration.⁶² However, this argument can easily be countered, as the source on which scholars rely is a Timotheus, whose report is known through Alexander Polyhistor, writing in the first half of 1st century BC, therefore much later than the arrival of Galatians in that region. Altogether, the most likely hypothesis is that the river Gallos indeed took its name after the Galatians who settled in the region:⁶³ in fact, the late lexicographer Stephanus of Byzantium explicitly reports that the river Gallos was previously called Terias, and was re-named after an eponym hero named Gallos, according to an aetiological version of the whole story, that masks the historical one.

Neither a recent hypothesis advanced by P. Taylor to explain the term γάλλος referring to Cybele's priest after an ancient terminology is convincing. His stress on the Sumerian term GALA, used for similar transgender priests of Inanna in Mesopotamian literature, has no bearing on Anatolian evidence, as this term is never mentioned by the Hittite texts on the pantheon of Istanuwa and Lallupiya, invoked by Taylor to support his suggestion.⁶⁴ The attempt to link vaguely analogous cultic behaviours through more than a millennium gap and across a huge geographical displacement seems to be a rather stubborn effort to ignore a number of relevant and synchronic convergences, both of words and events, in one and the same area.

As a matter of fact, we have evidence of three names being replaced by one and the same term in the same area: at least two of them were substituted in the exact period when Gaulish populations settled there, however all of them appeared later than that historical event. On the other side we have epigraphic evidence of the active role played by the Galatians in Cybele's cult; lastly, we might add the fact that the Metroac

60. See WELLES 1933, 241-253, especially p. 243. An eighth letter was recently found by Belgian archaeologists of Ghent University: see CLAERHOUT-DEVREKER 2008, 53.

61. Radical visions like those expressed by SERGENT 1988, antedating Gaulish-Anatolian contacts to pre-Hellenistic ages, must probably be rejected, though they deserve to be considered.

62. On the supposed bearing of the river's name *Gallos* on Cybele's priests' title, see the sources collected by LANE 1996, 123 ff.: suffice here to recall that the earliest of them is Ovid., *Fasti* IV, 361 ff., more than two centuries after Galatians settled in the region. See also the same idea expressed by PACHIS 1996, 195, based on further bibliography mentioned at note 6.

63. See a definitive disproof of Timotheus' witness by LANE 1996, 128-129.

64. See TAYLOR 2007: we must remark that the only link of the term GALA with Anatolia is the fact that analogous transgender priests, though they are never called GALA, are told to use musical instruments in a similar manner, namely for eating and drinking. However, there's no evidence of GALA severing their own genitals, and analogies between the two priests' categories are quite vague. Most of all, why should that term jump out of a millenarian blank in a region where it was never attested? See also some remarks to Taylor's hypothesis by LUCKER 2005, 21-28.

cult was later widely spread in Gaul itself,⁶⁵ a matter on which we'll come back in a few paragraphs.

With Occam's razor at hand, I see therefore no good reasons to further refuse the idea that Cybele's priests were called γάλλοι after Gaulish peoples that settled in Galatia and gained an active role in Cybele's cult in Pessinous: this is a much simpler supposition than any other one discussed in the past, and it is not inconsistent at all with the name of the river.



FIG. 8: Silver plaque with Cybele and priests *galli*, from Ai Khanum, Afghanistan (from *Afghanistan* 2007).

Some more considerations can bring further elements as to the coherence of this hypothesis, as things may get clearer if we look them from afar, namely with the help of external sources. As far as Central Asia is concerned, in fact, more connections with Anatolia and Cybele's cult can be postulated.⁶⁶ The already mentioned statuette dedicated to the river god Oxus, though depicted as Marsyas,⁶⁷ recalls us that the

65. See DUTHOY 1969, 37-53.

66. For a complete list of evidences of Cybele's cult, see the monumental work of M.J. Vermaseren, especially VERMASEREN 1987 and 1989 as regards the territories touched by the present paper.

67. For other aspects of Marsyas, for example the unwise challenge with Apollo in a music contest, see REINACH 1911, and countless sources, especially Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* I, 4:2. Strabo, *Geography* XII, 8:15. Ovid., *Metamorphoses* VI, 385-391.

latter was attendant of the goddess Cybele, and was allegedly buried in Pessinous.⁶⁸ Moreover, it's worth mentioning here an amazing silver gilded plaque that was found in the Bactrian town of Ai Khanum, Afghanistan⁶⁹ (FIG. 8): on its surface, an unusual scene involving Cybele (shown frontally wearing a high *polos*) and a winged Nike, on a chariot driven by two lions, is engraved. The chariot is surmounted by a huge umbrella held by a priest with a long dress and a conical hat, while another priest at the opposite is standing on a high stepped altar,⁷⁰ burning incense in a small *thymiaterion*. The bust of the god Helios, a crescent and a star surmount the characters and give a complex syncretistic flavour to the scene.

Leaving apart the matter of the plaque's date and manufacture,⁷¹ we are therefore sure that Cybele's cult was performed in Hellenistic Bactria, a milieu extremely close to that of Parthian Nisa.

As regards Gaulish presence in Asia, it's also worth discussing an ethnonym witnessed by Ptolemy (VI, 14:9), who reports some *Tektosakes* somewhere "north of the Imaus mountains", *i.e.* Himalaya, possibly in modern Kazakhstan, as P. Sims Williams recently suggested.⁷² This is a debated ethnonym, whose reference to the well-known *Tectosages* Gauls⁷³ was in a first moment supported, then cautiously rejected, by Sims-Williams, who thinks that Ptolemy might have wrongly reported the name of a Saka tribe.⁷⁴ However, sources give a plural "Sakai", never "Sakes";⁷⁵ though a number of Saka tribes are reported by several sources, specifically "Tekto-Sakai" are never mentioned elsewhere. As the name of the *Tectosages* Gauls means "possession seekers" (<*tektō-sag-),⁷⁶ on the contrary, it wouldn't be unexpected that they could travel as far as Central Asia, perhaps joining expeditions as mercenaries or traders, and leave their tracks in local onomastic and ethnonyms. A similar event is witnessed as regards a clearly Thracian name, *Triballos*, being reported in Bactria as one of the founders of Ai Khanum's gymnasium, not a minor role in a new foundation:⁷⁷ therefore it must not be excluded that Celtic names might appear too in nearby lands. A definitive argument in favour of the presence of *Tectosages* Gauls in that region could be the *carnyx* likely depicted on the Kargaly diadem: Kargaly lies in Kazakhstan, nearby the nowadays capital Almaty – namely in a place that could fit with the Ptolemy's

68. Steph. Byz., *s.v.* Πέσσινου.

69. See *Afghanistan* 2007, 114-116, cat. 24, with further references.

70. Altars discovered in Pessinous are strikingly similar to that depicted on the Ai Khanum plaque: see CLAERHOUT-DEVREKER 2008, fig. on p. 150, below.

71. See the discussion by P. BERNARD in *Afghanistan* 2007, 114-116, cat. 24.

72. See SIMS-WILLIAMS 2009, 463-464: it's worth recalling that Ptolemy (V, 6:7) also mentions a mount named *Skordiskos* in Armenia Minor. Surprisingly enough, we already met this ethnonym as the Celtic tribe to which we may probably ascribe the Gundestrup cauldron, where *carnyces* are overtly displayed.

73. On *Tectosages* see GARZONIO 2003.

74. SIMS-WILLIAMS 2006, 295-299, seems to admit a Celtic presence so far, while he later rejects it: SIMS-WILLIAMS 2009, 463-468.

75. SIMS-WILLIAMS 2009, 464, leans on an excerpt from Georges Cousin, who admits a plural *Sakes*, that is however unattested elsewhere.

76. See again GARZONIO 2003, 254-255.

77. ROBERT 1969, 208-211.

indication “north of the Imaus mountains” – and the diadem brings clear proof of the knowledge of such Celtic instrument in that area indeed.

We can therefore come back to the frieze of *rhyton* no. 8 with stronger arguments, in order to better understand the scene depicted, possibly discerning hints to Cybele’s cult in it, as in some other specimens of the corpus as well. In fact, the goddess’ head is likely sculpted under the rim of another *rhyton* from Nisa, no. 78 (FIG. 9, second head from the right), together with a head that has been identified as that of Attis by the first editors.⁷⁸ Significantly indeed, E. Pappalardo connects exactly *rhyta* nos. 8 and 78 on the stylistic ground:⁷⁹ I point out here their relation on a thematic ground too, strengthened by the appearance, on the latter’s frieze, of the same frontal double-*aulos* player that we already noticed in the Sanchi relief (cf. the second character from the left in FIG. 9, with the character on the right of the *carnyx*-players in FIG. 4). And I go on examining elements possibly hinting to the Anatolian milieu, perhaps specifically to Cybele’s cult, in *rhyton* no. 8 and in other specimens as well.

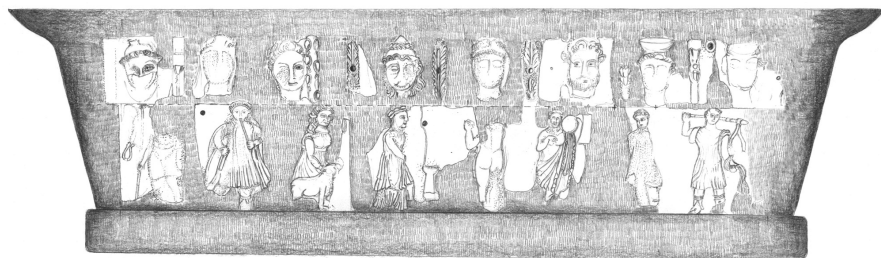


FIG. 9: Drawing of the frieze of *rhyton* no. 78 from Old Nisa, courtesy Centro Scavi Torino, Claudio Fossati.

In fact, I think there’s ground enough to suppose that the rocky hill where the goat escaped might hint to the well-known role of rocks in the Anatolian goddess’ cult, an iconographic element that is clearly remarked on the Ai Khanum’s plaque, for example. Reading the second half of the frieze can stress this suggestion much further:⁸⁰ on the left of the hill, in fact, two young satyrs urge on the escaped goat, one of them keeping a mastiff dog on leash. What we are looking at is quite obviously a simulated hunt, by virtue of the disproportionate use of a *carnyx* and a mastiff dog to catch an ordinary goat: both are clearly exaggerated means to accomplish a simple task, being intentionally depicted to indicate a precise context. We can attempt to

78. I preferred to identify the male’s head as that of a Dioskouros due to his pointed cap with garland, in MANASSERO 2007.

79. PAPPALARDO 2010, 292 ff.

80. The group described here is evidently part of the same hunting scene together with the falling satyr and the *carnyx*-player on the right of the hill, as correctly pointed out by PAPPALARDO 2010, 169-170, fig. 4.25 (scene 1).

interpret such simulated hunt as a crucial step in Cybele's cult, namely the rite called *criobolium*, a sacrifice to all intents analogous to the *taurobolium*, the only difference concerning the victim's cost. Of course we shall not think of the late report of *taurobolia* by the Christian author Prudentius, talking about blood-baptism of the devotees.⁸¹ In earlier periods, in fact, the rite consisted in the ritual chase, the killing, and the successive dismemberment and distribution of parts of the goat or bull.⁸² Using the words of R. Duthoy, "the nature of the *taurobolium* in its premetroac phase remains uncertain, but a number of indications point to its having consisted of a ritual hunt followed by the sacrifice of the quarry".⁸³

It must be said that evidence of *taurobolia* and *criobolia* in the West and their pertinence to Cybele's cult are quite late in date, being ascertained since approximately the half of the 2nd century AD.⁸⁴ However we can rely on a very interesting evidence in order to identify an early *criobolium* in the subject of the frieze at issue. In fact, it so happens that the earliest mention of a *criobolium* occurs in an inscription from Pergamon, dated to 139-133 BC,⁸⁵ where it is described as a sport of the ephebes, who sacrificed a ram "after having conquered it" (κρατηθέντος). Another early inscription from Pergamon mentions *taurobolia*, and another one from Pinara as well.⁸⁶ Unfortunately, we have no precise idea about the chronology of the Nisean *rhyta*, but a late 2nd century – early 1st century BC range seems to fit well, given the fact that they were likely used in ceremonies celebrating the Arsacid ancestors in a site named after Mithridates (perhaps Mithridates I, reigning 171-138 BC, rather than Mithridates II, reigning 123-87 BC).⁸⁷ The Pergamon inscriptions might therefore be roughly contemporaneous with the *rhyta* at issue, and the frieze no. 8 could witness an early depiction of that peculiar sacrifice. Even if we lack a definitive proof of such simulated hunt to be connected with Cybele's cult, we can read the frieze as a depiction of a chase analogous to that mentioned by the Pergamon inscriptions.

We can therefore reasonably recognize an early form of a *criobolium* (or, rather, a *tragobolium*)⁸⁸ on the frieze at issue: the scene described in the previous pages represents a ritual hunt, whose actors are three young satyrs (corresponding to the ephebes of Pergamon's inscription), and an elder satyr playing a *carnyx*. In the extant scenes we can easily recognize the slaughter of the goat and the subsequent offering of its entrails

81. See Prudentius, *Peristephanon* X, *Sancti Romani Martyris contra gentiles*, lines 1006-1085.

82. On the early form of *taurobolia* and *criobolia*, see RUTTER 1968, 226 ff., and DUTHOY 1968, 112 ff.

83. DUTHOY 1968, 126.

84. The earliest witness comes from an inscription in Puteoli, dated to 134 AD: see RUTTER 1968, 231 and DUTHOY 1968, 29. By the way, I can't see it as an accident that *taurobolia* and *criobolia* are later witnessed by the highest number of inscriptions in Gaul "itself" see the amount of inscriptions reported by DUTHOY 1968, 37-53.

85. DUTHOY 1968, 6, no. 2, reporting the inscription IGRR, IV, 294.

86. For these inscriptions see DUTHOY 1968, 6-9, nos. 3-4.

87. See note 33.

88. The substitution of the goat (*tragos*) instead of a ram (*krios*) seems to point to Dionysos' pertinence of the rite, thus confirming the syncretism of Dionysos and Cybele supposed in the following lines.

on the altar (*splanchna*) by both the characters standing beside the altar, stretching their arms towards it. In sum, the whole frieze shows different stages of a sacrifice, since the choice of the victim unto its dismemberment and offering on the altar.⁸⁹

As regards the cultic context of that sacrifice, some observations are still needed: in fact, the characters have satyr-like features, which clearly point to Dionysos' milieu. Dionysos might also be alluded to by the figures standing beside the altar, both keeping a thyrsus in their hands: especially that on the right, who is depicted following the likeness of Dionysos, with thick beard and frontally shown. But the latter figure might hint to Cybele as well: frontality was a main feature of her iconography indeed, as we saw on the Ai Khanum's plaque. Nonetheless, we must recall the close relation linking Dionysos to Cybele, by virtue of both their Phrygian origins and the orgiastic rites performed in their cults.⁹⁰ We might also admit some gender confusion in iconographic schemes related to Cybele's cult, whose priests were the eunuchs *galloi*.⁹¹ Therefore the identity of the character on the right of the altar is perhaps not unambiguous, if we are right to interpret the whole frieze as the performing of a rite connected with Cybele. It might perhaps witness the result of a syncretistic process involving Dionysos and Cybele, that wouldn't be unexpected in such a milieu as Parthian Nisa.⁹²

This statement calls for a further, conclusive consideration on a similar cultic ambiguity that might eventually be seen in another specimen within the corpus from Nisa.

An analogous gender confusion, in fact, might be called on as regards rhyton no. 76, whose frieze depicts hunting Bacchantes at the presence of a sitting figure (FIG. 10), whose identity has been recently proposed as of Dionysos, in spite of her quite obvious female appearance and though the Greek caption below it reads *εστιας*.⁹³ I expressed my opinion on this character's identity in a previous paper,⁹⁴ calling on the analogy of the Greek goddess Hestia with the Scythian Tabiti (as explained by Herodotus IV, 59), who is often depicted in a similar pose and dress. By virtue of such parallel I pointed out the relevance of the caption with the goddess depicted above, a link formerly sustained by G. Košelenko in the frame of Zoroastrian cult of fire. Košelenko's suggestion

89. For a detailed description of the scene, see MASSON-PUGACHENKOVA 1982, 119-120, and PAPPALARDO 2010, 168-170.

90. See BURKERT 2003, 320 on the relation between Dionysos and Cybele, and see PACHIS 1996 on the orgiastic rites of the latter. See also many reflections of that relation in figurative arts, namely on the famous volute crater by Polignotus, in VERMASEREN 1978, no. 213, pl. LXXXVIII.

91. There's a recent trend, in literature on neo-Metroan cult- and in feminist-oriented websites, to use the term "gallae" instead of "galli" as regards Cybele's priests: see LUCKER 2005 and <http://gallae.com>. I won't enter this matter of politeness, though I deem it bizarre to use a term witnessed just once (by Hephaestion, in the verses previously attributed to Kallimachus: see the discussion above) instead of the customary "galli" widespread in sources.

92. On the constant need to read gods' identities through syncretistic processes in Hellenistic Central Asia, and in Nisa in particular, see INVERNIZZI 2005.

93. See PAPPALARDO 2010, 217-222. The different opinions mentioned here below can be found in BERNARD 1991 and KOSELENKO 1967.

94. See MANASSERO in press.

was later refused by both P. Bernard, interpreting the caption as a banquet-toast not related to the frieze above, and by E. Pappalardo, who also argues that the depiction of Dionysos may be detached from the caption.



FIG. 10: Drawing of the frieze of *rhyton* no. 76 from Old Nisa, courtesy Centro Scavi Torino, Claudio Fossati.

In the light of the topics discussed above, I would like to propose a different solution: as I believe that the caption is to be linked with the frieze indeed, we might suppose that a syncretism of Hestia and Dionysos might explain the iconographical and gender ambiguities of both the sitting figure and the female hunters (Bacchantes or Gallae).⁹⁵ Namely, we could suppose that the overall Dionysiac meaning of the corpus of *rhyta* might lead to the adoption of some iconographic schemes and features related to Dionysos, even when scenes relating to different deities were intended. In the case of *rhyta* nos. 8 and 78, a certain iconographic ambiguity would regard Dionysos and Cybele; in the case of *rhyton* no. 76, it would regard Dionysos and Hestia. However, the matter is too complex and cannot be dealt with here at length, as it's marginal to the present article's intent;⁹⁶ I leave to other scholars the task of pursuing such considerations on the ideological implications of that extraordinary inventory.

In conclusion, several details lead me to think that the Anatolian milieu lies behind the scene depicted on *rhyton* no. 8; and that Cybele's cult might be evoked through the depiction of a ritual chase, a *criobolium* which was allegedly associated with her cult. The Dionysiac aspect of the frieze can be explained by the overall meanings and functions of the Nisean corpus of *rhyta*, and by the syncretistic process peculiar to the Hellenistic age. Though a Dionysos-like figure is displayed beside the altar, and though all the characters have satyr-like features, a different cult, that of

95. See note 91.

96. The matter is further complicated by other divine identities that might be proposed as to the sitting figure, both in Greek and Iranian pantheons, especially Artemis and Anahita. Here I just want to show a tessera of this complicated interpretative mosaic; I will possibly come back on the topic in a future paper.

Cybele may possibly be discerned through the depiction of a peculiar moment within her cult. Other friezes and heads below the rims belonging to other specimens within the corpus seem to point to the same direction, namely to the Anatolian milieu and to some syncretisms developing in Hellenistic age. This fact invites scholars to search for further hints to cults other than that of Dionysos in the *rhyta* from Nisa, even if this may bring to unexpected conclusions.⁹⁷

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97. The huge recently published book by PAPPALARDO 2010, though having indisputable merits as regards the stylistic analysis, adds little to the previous editions of the corpus (namely MASSON, PUGACHENKOVA 1982 which in its turn is the translation of the Russian edition, MASSON, PUGACHENKOVA 1959) as regards the historical, ideological and religious points of view. Too much stress is made upon the obvious Dionysiac meaning of the whole corpus, and more subtle hints to other directions are often rejected, the author being retained by too cautious an approach, too often masked by redundant methodological claims.

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