Plutarch wrote: “By founding over seventy cities (poleis) among the barbarian tribes and seeding Asia with Greek magistrates, Alexander conquered its undomesticated and beastly way of life” (*Moralia* 328e). It may be that Plutarch was making a rhetorical point; nevertheless, the tradition that Alexander left a number of cities behind in Asia is repeated in ancient sources, and modern scholarship has often seen this as a natural corollary of the conquest and expansion of Greek culture in the East (Bosworth 1988:245–250).

We can see how clearly they [Alexander’s foundations] dominate the map of central Asia ... [and] foreshadow the strategic requirements and economic potential on which, centuries later, the Imperial strategists of British India ... insisted.... [T]he locations of Alexander’s cities testify that the requirements of imperial rule in Central Asia are laid down by nature, and were as valid in the time of Alexander (and earlier) as in that of Queen Victoria.

Fraser 1996:189–190

Thus two aspects of Hellenism have dominated Western scholarship on continental South Asia: first, the larger than life account of Alexander’s campaign to the east (Bosworth 1996:1); and second, the cities established by the Greeks, such as Taxila, now in Pakistan, which then led to the spread of Greek culture across the Hindu Kush. In this presentation, I discuss the ways in which Alexander’s campaign informed the practice of archaeology in South Asia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; the many diverse partners in this search for Alexander’s cities; and the strategic dimension of European forays into the Punjab and Afghanistan that underscored collections of Indo-Greek coins, Buddhist images, relic caskets, gems, and intaglios.
A second strand in the paper relates to a different vision of India, viz. maritime India as reflected in the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* of the first century CE, written in *koine* Greek. This text by an anonymous author, compiled during the period of the Roman Empire, was appropriated for writings on trade and empire during the nineteenth century, especially what was defined as trade in luxury goods required by western empires, such as the Roman Empire, and supplied by the East. A masterly rendition of this is E. H. Warmington’s *The Commerce Between the Roman Empire and India*, published in Cambridge in 1928; as also the 1916 study of H. G. Rawlinson titled *Intercourse Between India and the Western World from the Earliest Times to the Fall of Rome*, published in Cambridge. This shift in interest from the Greeks to India as a province of the Roman Empire was complete by the mid-twentieth century, especially with the appointment of Sir Mortimer Wheeler as Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India. Mortimer Wheeler’s tenure from 1944 to 1948 came at a crucial juncture in the history of India. This was a period of intense political activity as the country moved towards independence from the British Empire, which it finally achieved on 15 August 1947.

Wheeler categorically stated that there is now no doubt that, in the first two centuries CE, Roman traders established “factories,” or permanent trading stations, up and down the coastline of the Indian peninsula, and that their influence extended directly or indirectly far into the interior (Wheeler 1966:88). These factories were not unlike those that the Europeans had established along the Indian coasts from the sixteenth century onwards. Thus clearly in Wheeler’s mind there was a thin line that distinguished the twentieth-century British Empire from the Roman Empire of the first and second centuries CE, and often even this distinction was blurred. This paper interrogates this paradigm of “Indo-Roman” trade with reference to the multiple partners in seafaring activity, and re-examines the role of Greek as a language of communication in north-western India and the western Indian Ocean.

**Alexander Historians and India**

Early Greek writings on Alexander provided justification for European expansion into Asia and set the tone of much of eighteenth- to twentieth-century scholarship. Significant insights into this process are provided by the works of William Robertson (1721–1793), especially his 1791 publication titled *Historical Disquisition Concerning the*
Knowledge Which the Ancients Had of India. Robertson was not only aware of British activities in India, but was also influenced by the work of early British surveyors when he chose to write about Alexander in his Historical Disquisition. He confesses that he turned to the topic of European conquests after reading the Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan by James Rennell, the erstwhile Surveyor General of the East India Company’s dominions in Bengal (Robertson 1791:v). Not only Rennell, but the memoirs and geographies by men such as Alexander Burnes, Colonel Leake, Mountstuart Elphinstone, and John Macdonald Kinneir, who retraced Alexander’s route in Asia in the nineteenth century, influenced the return to early accounts of Alexander, for as Robertson remarks:

The European powers, who now in their Indian territories employ numerous bodies of the natives in their service, have, in forming the establishment of these troops, adopted the same maxims; and probably without knowing it, have modelled their battalions of Sepoys upon the same principles as Alexander did his Phalanx of Persians.

Robertson 1791:25

The nature of imperial discourse current in Britain from 1860 to 1930, the period when British imperialism was at its height, impacted the way in which images from Greek and Roman archaeology were invoked in academic literature in Britain. In turn, these influenced writings by popular authors, which sustained this discourse and moulded British attitudes towards the past (Vasunia 2007).

The monumental work of W. W. Tarn titled The Greeks in Bactria and India, first published in 1938, with an updated version appearing in 1984, argued for long-term Greek dominance, based on finds of objects of Hellenistic and Greek workmanship and supplemented by references in Greek sources. Indologists, such as A. K. Narain in The Indo-Greeks (Narain 1957), resisted this claim and insisted upon the total failure of Greek society to influence Indian culture. An important point that Narain stressed was the presence of Greek settlements in India in the north-west before the conquest of Alexander. Subsequently he emphasised that “Bactria and the adjoining regions did not have to wait for Alexander and his successors for the ‘cities,’” but that they were already centres of a highly developed urban civilisation with deep-rooted ancient traditions, and the pre-Hellenistic elements are “as important as the Hellenistic for
the proper analysis of the material culture and the history...” (Narain 1957:130). The issue then is to understand the beginnings of archaeology in the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent in the nineteenth century and the extent to which this exercise was embroiled in the exigencies of imperial control of the region.

The defence of the north-west frontier of India against the perceived Russian threat became a priority of the British government in India established in 1858, and one that continued until Indian independence in 1947. The First Afghan War of 1838–1842 that the British fought in Afghanistan under William G. K. Elphinstone, in which the entire British garrison at Kabul was nearly wiped out, brought home the need to gather information in the region, and this concentration on surveillance and espionage persisted for more than a hundred years after that. As the British government did not consider Afghanistan to be a nation that required a diplomatic mission, there was no direct representation in the country prior to 1922. Nevertheless, the colonial government in India did make early attempts to station political agents in Kabul in 1838–1842 and 1878–1880, generally with disastrous results. Between 1882 and 1919, several Indian Muslim agents were posted in Kabul, but it was only after the Third Afghan War of 1919–1921 that full diplomatic status was established (Farrington 2003). This need for information gathering meant that military personnel often travelled incognito and visited friendly courts in the Punjab and in Afghanistan.

Charles Masson (1800–1853), often described as an itinerant “American” traveller in Afghanistan, was in reality an English deserter from the East India Company’s Bengal Artillery Regiment in 1827. In 1832–1833 he approached the East India Company for funds for travel and archaeological exploration in Afghanistan. From early 1834 the Bombay Government of the British East India Company gave him an annual grant for three years for antiquarian work in the Kabul-Jalalabad region, on the condition that all finds should be sent to the company (Whitteridge 1986:76). The year 1834 is significant in the study of Indian numismatics, as it was at this time that the importance of the coins of the Indo-Greeks and the Indo-Scythians in the reconstruction of the history of Bactria was established (Kejariwal 1988:175). Based on these collections, James Prinsep (1799–1840), the Assay Master of Mints at Calcutta and Benares and Secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, discovered and confirmed the coins of Menander and Apollodotus whom Arrian mentioned in the accounts of
Alexander’s campaign. Prinsep used bilingual Indo-Greek coins to decipher the Kharosthi script. For example the obverse and reverse legends in Greek “BASILEOS SOTÊROS MENANDROY” and Kharosthi “MAHĀRAJA TRATASA MENADRASA” are translated as “of the saviour King Menander.” Scholars have provided various estimates of the number of coins that Masson collected, ranging from 15,000 to 20,000 in 1837 to nearly 100,000 by the time he returned to London. His biographer Gordon Whitteridge refers to 79,735 coins from Begram alone, and several thousands from other sites in Afghanistan (Whitteridge 1986:67). These figures indicate the rich potential of the archaeological sites of Afghanistan and also make Charles Masson perhaps the single largest collector of coins (Garg 1998; Errington 2003). In 1842, Masson returned to London and received a small pension from the East India Company.

Alexander Burnes (1805–1841), the Assistant Resident in Kutch, was another intrepid explorer who carried out several political tasks, along with conducting surveys. In 1831, he took a present of horses from King William IV to the ruler of Punjab, Maharaja Ranjit Singh. In 1839 he was appointed political agent in Kabul, but was assassinated two years later. This initial period of exploration in Afghanistan and Pakistan came to an end with the outbreak of the First Afghan War (1838–1842) and with the British annexation of the Punjab in 1849. Nevertheless, interest in the Greeks did not wane, as evident from the excavations carried out at Taxila, located 32 kilometres north-west of Islamabad, the present capital of Pakistan, described by Alexander historian Arrian as the seat of the ally of Alexander, king Taxiles.

Alexander Cunningham, the first Director-General of the newly established Archaeological Survey of India from 1861 to 1885, visited Taxila and other sites in the Punjab in the 1860s in an attempt to identify the “peoples and cities, whose names have become familiar to the whole world through the expeditions of Alexander the Great” (Archaeological Survey of India, Four Reports for 1862-63-64-65). John Marshall excavated it from 1913 to 1934, lured as he was by its Greek association (Marshall 1951:Preface). It is another matter that the earliest coins found at Dharmarajika stupa at Taxila were those of the Indo-Greek ruler Menander I (155–130 BCE), whose empire is said to have extended from Mathura in the east to Barygaza in the west (Tarn 1984:141, 227). The Buddhist tradition lauds Menander for conversion to Buddhism, as
reflected in the *Milindapañha* or *Questions of King Milinda*, a text of the early centuries of the common era.

Mortimer Wheeler selected Taxila as the site of his Training School of Archaeology, since most of all, “it lies at the foot of the Himalaya, in a terrain sufficiently reminiscent of Greece” (Wheeler 1956:189). Wheeler argued that classical elements entered Buddhist art of north-west India not through the descendants of Alexander’s Asiatic Greek colonies but through Roman maritime trade, for the semi-Hellenistic culture of the Greek settlements seem, on the basis of available evidence, to have lapsed for over two centuries before this Buddhist art matured (Wheeler 1966:90).

Contrary to Wheeler’s assertion of a dominant Roman trade with India, I have shown in writings elsewhere (Ray 2003) that the fishing and sailing communities formed a distinct group and were the crucial component of all sea travel. Fishing was the traditional occupation of coastal groups in several pockets of the Indian Ocean, and this is an adaptation that dates to at least the fifth millennium BCE in several areas (Ray 2003:chapter 2). These communities adopted numerous occupations associated with the sea: fishing and harvesting other marine resources, salt-making, sailing, trade, shipbuilding, and piracy. These maritime communities are to be distinguished from merchants and traders involved in oceanic trade. Merchants and traders in some cases certainly owned ships and watercraft, but they neither manned nor sailed these. More often, however, goods and cargoes were entrusted to the skipper of the vessel, who was then responsible for their sale and profit.

**Maritime India and Transcultural Encounters**

The *Periplus Maris Erythraei* perhaps provides the first detailed description of local boats in the Indian Ocean in the early centuries CE, and several types extending from the East African coast to the west coast of India are referred to. In the context of Gujarat, the *Periplus* refers to Syrastrene or Saurashtra: Eirinon or the Rann of Kutch, beyond which lies Barake or the Gulf of Kutch (section 40). This is a dangerous gulf to navigate, for “not only are the waves there very big and oppressive, but the sea is choppy and turbid, with eddies and violent whirlpools” (section 40). After this the author mentions the Gulf of Barygaza, identified with the Gulf of Cambay (section 41).
The region is described as “very fertile,” and “in the area there are still preserved to this very day signs of Alexander’s expedition, ancient shrines and the foundations of encampments and huge wells” (section 41). Somewhat later, the author refers to “old drachmas engraved with the inscriptions, in Greek letters, of Apollodotus and Menander, rulers who came after Alexander” being found in the market of Barygaza (section 47; Casson 1989:75–81). How does one explain the presence of coins with Greek writing in Gujarat in the early centuries CE? This is an issue that we address later; here we continue the discussion on local participation in maritime networks based on archaeology and study of traditional boat-building practices.

As mentioned earlier, fishing and sailing communities formed the foundation of maritime activity in the Indian Ocean and provided seafaring continuity throughout history, though no doubt their fortunes fluctuated over time. The social factors that made the building and sailing of boats possible provide insights and an alternative perspective into the working of the long-distance trade networks. The history of these communities is evident from the donations that they made to religious establishments. As no contemporary shipwrecks have so far been found in Indian waters, the ethnographic data from traditional boat-building communities becomes significant.

The starting point for this discussion is the present state of Gujarat, marked by a long coastline characterised by mud flats and saline wastes. As recently as 1970, this coastline contained 46 smaller ports and one large duty-free port at Kandla in Kutch. The Kharavas are the premier sailing community, with a long history of navigational skills and maritime expertise. Twelve villages in Kutch and Saurashtra are inhabited by them, starting from Koteshwar in Kutch to Mandvi, Beyt Island, Porbandar, Veraval, and so on. However ship-building is by no means restricted to these 12 villages and instead occurs at several small villages all along the coastline (Orton 2001).

Archaeological investigation in western India has provided information on several long-lasting coastal settlements. For example, the site of Mandvi, on the estuary of the Rukmavati River at the entrance to the Gulf of Kutch, has been known as a port town with links to both Oman and the East African coast, since archaeological exploration was conducted in the mid-nineteenth century. In addition to a range of
ceramics, important finds include local and regional coins, as well as a Byzantine solidus of Heraclius dated to 638 CE and an Arab Umayyad dinar of 716 CE (Vasa 1990).

Writing in 1836, Alexander Burnes described maritime activities at Mandvi as follows:

The principal seaport of Kutch is Mandavee, which stands in lat 22° 51’ N and long. 69° 34’ E close to the Gulf. It has no fewer than 250 vessels belonging to it, and boasts a population of 50,000 souls, which is about one-eighth of that of the whole province of Kutch. It is an open roadstead with a creek. From Mandavee a maritime communication is kept up with Zanguebar and the whole east coast of Africa, with the Red Sea and Arabia and with the Persian Gulf, Mekrom and Sinde and with India as far as Ceylon. The vessels used in this extensive commerce vary in size from 100 to 800 candies or from 25 to 200 tons. They carry a large lateen sail, have two masts and are never decked.

Burnes 1836

The ethnographic data indicates that the coastal settlements participated in trade with other centres further south and also across the ocean, though each port specialized in a particular route. Mandvi, Porbandar, and Veraval traded with east Africa; Porbandar and Veraval with south Arabia, Southeast Asia, and the Persian Gulf. Thus route specialization is an important aspect of seafaring activity that has far-reaching implications for a study of the past as well (Orton 2001:100–101). Another critical factor is the sailing season, which in Gujarat comes to an end in June, after which the monsoon winds become too dangerous until late July.

The *Periplus* refers to several of the navigational techniques adopted in the western Indian Ocean, such as identifying the approaching coast by means of changes in the colour of the water and the presence of sea-snakes.

Vessels coming from the open sea in the vicinity of these places get an indication that they are approaching land from the snakes that emerge to meet them; these are also black in colour but shorter and with dragon-shaped head and blood-red eyes.

*Periplus Maris Erythraei, section 55*
The Jātakamālā of Āryaśūra, a Sanskrit rendering of stories of the Buddha’s earlier births dated to the fourth century CE, while listing the qualities of Suparaga, the navigator, describes him as well versed in astronomy and capable of making accurate observations. He could ascertain the precise position of a ship in the ocean by observing the fish, the colour of the water, the species on the ground, birds, and rocks (chapter XIV). Pliny refers to the Sinhalese, who take no observations of the stars in navigation—indeed, the Great Bear is not visible; but they carry birds on board with them and at fairly frequent intervals set them free, and follow the course they take as they make for the land. They only use four months in the year for voyages, and they particularly avoid the hundred days following midsummer, when those seas are stormy.

Pliny Natural History 6.24

This practice of recognising the Indian coast, especially the Gujarat and Konkan coasts, by the abundance of sea snakes is also referred to in Tibbetts’s later work, and continues to be adopted by local sailors (Tibbetts 1971).

One aspect that is missing from the Periplus is any reference to the belief systems of the local communities. Here again ethnographic data shows participation of the sailing communities in a variety of rituals and beliefs. There are rituals performed at each stage of construction of the watercraft, and these are also compiled in a book titled Nauka Navghatan Pujanam, or “worship for new ship construction.” The communities are linked to coastal temples dedicated to a range of deities and often donate regularly for maintenance as well as performance of rituals. A third feature in the religious landscape is the memorial stone, or paliyar, set up in memory of those who have lost their lives at sea. It is also significant that temple structures often double as markers to identify the coasts and are often associated with local legends of rescues at sea. Thus religious architecture fulfils both religious and navigational purposes, and this was important in an earlier period also.

The characteristic ceramic of Gujarat was the Red Polished Ware (RPW), which marks a technological refinement over earlier pottery and represents a major change in the economic life of the region and has been dated between 50 BCE and 300 CE. RPW sherds have been found at almost 400 coastal and inland sites, and represent a wide
variety of rim shapes, with 160 stylistic variations in jars alone (Orton 2001:125). The distribution map of RPW shows at least four coastal clusters at the sites of Porbandar, Somnath, Una, and Talaja (Orton 2001:118). Thus it is evident that these coastal centres by no means existed in isolation, but on the contrary maintained a symbiotic relationship with agriculturists based at inland centres. The products of farms and forests provided cargoes for the sailing ships and sustained trade with other centres along the coasts. RPW was produced by local potters to meet the requirements of their neighbours, the farmers and merchants, and was produced in a variety of shapes. The fine-slipped ceramic indicates expanding trade networks associated with expanding agricultural activities and settlements, as also sea-going trade.

Archaeological exploration in Gujarat has provided evidence for 22 early historic sites, located in a linear pattern along the river, and a multi-tier settlement hierarchy. The site of Hathab was the largest site, located close to the sea with an area of over 40 hectares, while the largest number of sites, i.e. 11, fall in the category of 3–12 hectares. It is significant that while 13 sites were located in the black cotton soil zone, 6 were situated close to the coast. The site of Padri, situated 3–4 kilometres inland, was known for extraction of salt (Paul 1999–2000:99–105). Archaeological excavations conducted at Hathab in 2001–2002 indicate continuous settlement at the site from the fourth century BCE to the sixth century CE (Indian Archaeology: A Review 2001–2:34–48).

Amreli is another important archaeological site, located upstream of the survey area on the Thebi, a tributary of the Shetrunji, and excavations conducted here revealed continuous occupation of the site from the first century BCE to the eighth century CE (Rao 1966). Several objects found in Gujarat have been cited as evidence for Roman trade, like amphora fragments from several sites, Roman coins (Rajgor 1997), a bronze handle from Akota now in the Baroda Museum dating to 50–100 CE (De Puma 1992:101–102), and ceramics such as the Red Polished Ware (RPW). It is significant that of the 55 sites where fragments of Dressel 2–4 amphorae have been found, 25 are in Gujarat, and 13 of these are clustered around Junagarh.

The area around Junagarh provides a fertile stretch, and as we will discuss later, it formed a core region in the early period. This area was also the location of royal inscriptions and religious shrines. Other find-spots of amphora sherds include coastal centers such as Dwarka, Somnathapattana, Nagara, and Valabhi, among others. Sites such as Valabhi developed into political centers by the middle of the first millennium.
CE. In contrast, others like Somnathapattana and Dwarka were sacred pilgrim centers of great sanctity. At Somnathapattana the beginnings of historical settlement date to the fourth century BCE, but religious structures such as temples emerge at a somewhat later period, in the fifth and sixth centuries CE.

Thus it is evident that diverse local communities in Gujarat, as elsewhere, participated in seafaring activity, as reflected in references to local watercraft in the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*. A reading of the *Periplus* also establishes the absence of state control over maritime trade either in the region of the Red Sea or further afield, though it is true that the local polities attempted to extract revenues from the sale of trade commodities at market centres. It would seem that a general practice was for financiers in Egypt to underwrite voyages to India, as indicated by the Vienna papyrus, which has received considerable scholarly attention (*Fragmentum Bucolicum Vindobonensis* G40822). The papyrus is unique, even though the beginning and end part of the papyrus and the names of the parties involved are lost. The recto and verso are in different hands, but it is evident that the two sides are contemporary and were written in the second century CE. The verso mentions three standard imports from India, viz. Gangetic nard, ivory, and textiles, and the payment of a one-fourth duty on import. The recto stipulates an agreement for transportation of the goods from Koptos inland along the desert road, then loading them onto a boat and conveying them downstream on the Nile to Alexandria. In addition, it records a loan agreement and a penalty clause in case the repayment of the loan is not done on the date specified in the agreement.

The document in Greek was first edited by Harrauer and Sijpesteijn in 1985, and they suggested that the agreement had been made at Muziris on the Malabar coast and that the borrower was a shipowner named Hermapollon and the lender a merchant, and that the former pledged his ship as security (Harrauer and Sijpesteijn 1985:124–155). In his response, Casson argued that there was nothing in the text to suggest that one of the parties involved was a shipowner; and that both parties to the agreement were merchants, one being resident in Egypt and the other in Muziris, and it was the cargo that had been pledged as security. He also countered the claim of Muziris being the place where the agreement was made, and instead suggested that the agreement was drawn up at a Red Sea port soon after its arrival (Casson 1986:73–
Gerhard Thür (1987:229–245) accepted that the contract was drawn up in Egypt and that Hermapollon was the name of the ship, rather than of the owner. Rathbone, in contrast, explains that the transport route within Egypt by camel across the eastern desert and by boat on the Nile is well known from documents and archaeology, and the Muziris papyrus is best analysed within the framework of these movements. Thus:

- at first sight the maritime loan differs little from the maritime loans of the fourth century BC attested in the Demosthenic corpus, but on closer scrutiny the Muziris papyrus does have some significant differences and the apparently single financier seems to have been a man of enormous wealth.... Thus while the legal forms of the contract are fairly traditional, the economic structure implied needs to be re-examined. Instead of a merchant planning a venture and seeking capital where he could find it, we have a financier investing in the trade with India who recruited merchants to run the individual trips.

Rathbone 2001:42–43

From Rathbone’s analysis it is evident that the lender himself purchased the merchant’s shipment, which came from India and paid the equivalent of slightly less than seven million sesterces, most of it probably paid through a bank as a paper transaction (Rathbone 2001).

One final point needs to be addressed, and this relates to the statement from the Periplus cited earlier about coins with inscriptions in Greek letters being present in the markets of Gujarat (section 47). This statement needs to be contextualized with reference to the political situation in the region, and this entails a discussion on the local polity in Gujarat in the early centuries CE and their linkages across north-west India.

### Greek on Coins and the Early Polities

The different approaches towards the minting and circulation of coins on both sides of the Hindu Kush cultural divide are significant. For the Greeks, the coins carried the portrait of the king and were a major source of legitimisation, and hence the images of deities on the reverse. In contrast, the early Indian coinage was based on a weight
standard and does not seem to have had the same connotations of royal authority. Significant for this paper is the appearance of the Buddha image on coins, especially the coins of Kanishka I (127–150 CE), including 6 gold coins and 109 copper coins. These coin types carried labels in Bactrian, written in Greek letters, identifying the image as that of the Buddha on gold coins and Śākyamuni and Maitreya on copper coins (Cribb 1999/2000). The earliest find-spot of these coins was the stupa at Manikyala, located north-west of Rawalpindi, which was the first stupa to be discovered by Europeans and was excavated in April 1830. Local tradition regarded Manikyala as the resting place of Sikandar, Alexander’s horse. This tradition of using Greek legends on coins was continued in Gujarat under the Kshatrapas.

The Kshatrapas are known to have ruled in regions as far apart as the north-west frontiers along Afghanistan and the northern plains of the Indian subcontinent at Mathura. The rule of the Western Kshatrapas is generally dated between the second half of the first century CE and the beginning of the fifth century CE. During this time they issued coins in silver, copper, and lead, as well as copper alloyed with lead and arsenic.

Rudradaman’s dynasty was one of six families termed the western Kshatrapas, or Satraps, who ruled in Saurashtra and Malwa in the early centuries of the common era. These were allied to other rulers who used the title kṣatrapa, literally “viceroy,” on their coins and in inscriptions. In contrast to many of their contemporaries in central and peninsular India, the Kshatrapas used Greek legends on their coinage. Prominent among the various issues are the silver coins of Nahapana, with the bust of the ruler and a legend in Greek script on the obverse, and symbols such as the thunderbolt and arrow and inscriptions in Kharosthi and Brahmi on the reverse. The Greek legend on the obverse is a transliteration of the inscriptions in Brahmi/Kharosthi on the reverse (Jha and Rajgor 1994:25). All three inscriptions acknowledge Nahapana as the Kshatrapa of the Kshaharata house, reading Rānī Kṣaharātasa Nahapānasa. The obverse legend is a Greek transcript of this Prakrit legend and reads Ranniu Ca-aaratasa Na-aapanasa, in a garbled form (Bhandare 2006).

The design of Nahapana’s coins was derived directly from Indo-Greek silver drachmas. The chief currencies in Gujarat comprised nonindigenous silver Indo-Greek coins, and also local debased silver or copper imitations of the Mauryan silver punch-marked coins. The expansion of maritime trade with the Gujarat coast in the
first century of the common era ensured an influx of silver into Nahapana’s domains, and also linked Gujarat with centres in the Persian Gulf on the one hand and those in the north-west on the other.

In the Persian Gulf, ed-Dur, a large archaeological site on the west coast of the Oman peninsula, has provided crucial data for this maritime connection (Potts 1997:92–93). The site has been identified with Omana, mentioned in the Periplus as exporting pearls, purple clothing, wine, dates, gold, and slaves to India (section 36). Ed-dur was on the shipment route to Charax at the head of the Persian Gulf, and from there via the overland route to Palmyra (Whitehouse 2000:87–128). Further support for this route comes from the finds of 15 Characene coins at ed-Dur and the fact that 40 percent of the diagnostic pottery at the site has Characene analogues. The site dates to the first century CE, and 147 objects of glass recovered from archaeological excavations reached the site between 25 BCE and 75 CE.

The site participated in an extensive network of trade and exchange, as indicated by north-east Arabian coin finds from the site, as well as foreign issues. The latter group comprises four Roman coins (one of Augustus and three of Tiberius), eastern Mediterranean coins (three Nabataean coins of Aretas IV c. 9 BCE–40 CE, Gaza), southern Mesopotamia (eleven Characene coins), south Arabia (two coins from Hadhramawt), Persian (Parthia and Persis), and five Indian coins dated from the first century BCE to the first century CE. Indian coins include copper kārṣāpanas of the Ujjain type and those of Agnimitra, Abhiraka, and Bhumaka (Haerinck 1998:293–295).

Further evidence of the Persian Gulf-Gujarat-Gandhara connection comes from finds of dedicatory and burial inscriptions written in Greek, as well as Greek letters on pottery from Bahrain. These reinforce the identification of the island with Tylos, which was a stopping point for people as well as a homeland for others who understood and used the Greek language, even though their Semitic names suggest that they were not ethnic Greeks (Gatier et al. 2002:223–233). The recently discovered stele of Sôphythos from Kandahar, translated by Paul Bernard, further reinforces the presence of Hellenized local elite, whose lingua franca was Greek and who amassed wealth through trade and by travelling to many cities. It is significant that the stele was set up by the roadside to be read, clearly indicating a certain degree of literacy of the local populace in Greek (Bernard et al. 2004). Clearly, then, ethnicity needs to be
delinked from language, and the use of Greek as a language needs to be examined within the multicultural milieu of early north India.

Since 1958, several of the Greek and Aramaic inscriptions of the Mauryan ruler Ashoka (272–232 BCE) have been discovered at Taxila, Pul-i-Darunta, Shar-i-Kuna (near Kandahar), Kandahar, and Laghman. Rock Edict V alludes to the dharmamāhāmātratas responsible for the establishment and promotion of dharma even among the yavanas or Greeks, kambojas, and others resident on the western borders of his dominions (Sircar 1975:44), while Rock Edict XIII indicates the territories of yavanarāja Antiyoka, or Antiochus, and others bordering his dominions. These edicts are valuable indicators of communication networks in the Mauryan empire, since both Ashokan inscriptions and the account by Megasthenes refer to the maintenance of roads.

Shar-i-Kuna, a few miles west of present Kandahar, is also the find-spot of a bilingual inscription engraved on a rock. The Greek text contains 14 lines, while the Aramaic has 8 lines, and the two are versions of the same edict separated by interlinear space. The inscription is dated in the tenth year of Ashoka and refers to the promotion of truth, non-violence, and obedience to parents. Another Greek inscription, with 22 lines of writing on a block of stone, was found in Old Kandahar. It is suggested to be a translation of RE XII and XIII. While the latter section refers to Ashoka’s misadventure in Kalinga, the first part of the record exhorts his subjects to respect each other and accept each other’s teachings (Sircar 1975:33–39).

What was the outcome of these overtures? The evidence from coins and seals indicates a diversity of religious affiliations in existence. Some scholars have argued against Menander’s conversion to Buddhism and suggested instead that this may have been his image in popular perception, and that as a result many of the stories associated with the Buddha and Ashoka may have been transferred to him. Holt’s reference in particular is to Plutarch’s allusion to stupas being raised over Menander’s ashes, and its close correspondence to the narrative of Ashoka raising stupas over the Buddha’s ashes (Holt 1999:180–181).

Buddhism was also not the only religion that Greeks owed allegiance to, as evident from another record, i.e. the Besnagar Brahmi pillar dedication, dated to the late second century BCE. The inscription on a Garuda pillar of Vasudeva, the god of gods, states that it was commissioned by Heliodoros, son of Dion from Taxila, a worshipper of Vishnu. He came as the Greek ambassador from the court of Antialcidas the great
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king to Bhagabhadra, son of Kosi, the saviour who was then in the fourteenth year of
his prosperous reign (Sircar 1965:no. 2).

Textual sources ascribe a variety of roles to the yavanas, or Greeks, and at the
same time there are references in inscriptions to foreigners in charge of provinces in
the subcontinent, especially in Gujarat and the Konkan. As mentioned earlier, the
Junagarh inscription of Rudradaman, recounting the history of Sudarśana lake, states
that it was created by the vaiśya Pusyagupta during the reign of Candragupta Maurya
and endowed with conduits by yavana-rāja Tusaspha on behalf of Ashoka (Epigraphia
Indica 8:36–49). A yona (yavana)-rāja of Sanjayata, or Sanjan, located on the north
Konkan coast, is mentioned in an inscription from Nagarjunakonda dated to the
fourth century (Epigraphia Indica 34:197–203).

On the basis of the legends on the coins of the Kusanas right down to the second
century CE, it is suggested that Greek continued as a living language in large parts of
north India. Kanishka I (c. 127–150 CE) introduced a variety of new Greek inscriptions
on his coins, but after him the language disappeared, though the script continued to
be used. The Greek script was now used to transcribe an Iranian language, commonly
called Bactrian, and the latest use of the script occurs on the Turkish Shahis of Kabul
in c. 850 CE (Errington and Cribb 1992:9). It should nevertheless be remembered that
the Greek script coexisted with the Kharosthi and Brahmi scripts. The language
written in the Kharosthi script was the Gandhari Prakrit spoken in Gandhara and
adjacent regions, while Brahmi was used for Sanskrit and other Prakrit languages.

In the final analysis several conclusions may be highlighted. First, that Greek
continued as a language of discourse in the western Indian Ocean well into the
seventh and eighth centuries, reflecting no doubt the prominent position of Greeks in
Egypt, as well as in the Persian Gulf. The fourth century saw the rise of both the
Christian holy man and Christianity as a civic institution in Egypt. The presence of
graffiti, Christian crosses, and two major ecclesiastical inscriptions in Greek attests to
the importance of Abu Sha’ar as a pilgrimage centre in Upper Egypt. In addition, it
was ideally located to facilitate travel to Sinai for St. Catherine’s monastery or to Aila
(Aqaba at the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba), and onward to Jerusalem
(Sidebotham 2005:109–110). In spite of this prominence, the Greeks were one of the
several communities sailing across the ocean, the others including Arabs, Indians,
Jews, etc. The evidence is for partnerships in the early centuries CE largely between

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Greek-speaking groups, though this changes from the eighth century onwards. Temples and rock-cut caves in hills overlooking the coast mark the landscape of the western Indian Ocean littoral, and there are indications of an ever-expanding domain of maritime travel.

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