

## On Pre-Śaiva Deities: From the Indus Valley Civilization to Buddhist Syncretism

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**Abstract.** *The paper delves into several layers of pre-Śaivism in India. The earliest layer traces back to ancient cults worshipping the Mother Goddess, which emerged during the Neolithic period, particularly in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (ca. 10,000-8800 B.C.). These cults flourished within the Indus Valley Civilization (its mature form 2600-1900/1800 B.C.) and other Bronze Age societies. The second layer reveals the worship of Inanna (also known as Nanāya), the goddess of fertility, who was prominent in the Mittani state (ca. 1550-1260 B.C.) alongside revered Indo-Iranian deities such as Indra, the Mitra-gods, the Varuna-gods and the Nasatya-gods. Another layer emerges with a syncretic cult among the Indo-Scythians, combining the Mazdean tradition of Oηβο (Wēšparkar) and Βορζαοανδο Ιαζαδο (bwrz'wndy yzdty) with the Buddhist figure of Maheśvara, and Νανα (Nana) and Αρδοξβο (Ardoxšo) with the Buddhist figure Hārītī (or Umā). In addition, Buddhism adopted syncretic fertility cults with various demonesses such as Hārītī, Umā, Mārīcī, and others, incorporating iconographic elements of Hellenistic goddesses such as Athena, Tyche, Cybele, Hecate, Baubo, and Demeter. These fertility cults gradually separated from Buddhism and the Indo-Scythian version of Mazdaism after the fall of the Kuṣāṇa and Kūśānśāh dynasties at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Over time, Śīva and Durgā emerged as distinct religious movements, separating from Buddhism and Indo-Scythian Mazdaism.*

**Rezumat.** *Lucrarea analizează mai multe straturi ale pre-Shaivismului în India. Cel mai timpuriu strat arheologic datează din timpul vechiului cult al zeiței mamă, apărut în perioada neolitică, în special în neoliticul timpuriu A (cca. 10.000-8800 î.Hr.). Aceste culte au înflorit în cadrul civilizației Văii Indusului (forma sa matură 2600-1900/1800 î.Hr.) și al altor societăți din Epoca Bronzului. Al doilea strat dezvăluie cultul lui Inanna (cunoscută și sub numele de Nanāya), zeița fertilității, care era adorată în statul Mittani (cca. 1550-1260 î.Hr.) alături de zeități indo-iraniene precum Indra, Mitra, Varuna și Nasatya. Un alt strat apare cu un cult sincretic indo-scythic, combinând tradiția mazdeană a Oηβο (Wēšparkar) și Βορζαοανδο Ιαζαδο (bwrz'wndy yzdty) cu figura budistă a lui Maheśvara, Νανα (Nana) și Αρδοξβο (Ardoxšo) cu figura budistă Hārītī (sau Umā). În plus, budismul a adoptat culte ale fertilității cu diverse zeități precum Hārītī, Umā, Mārīcī și altele, încorporând elemente iconografice ale zeitelor elenistice precum Atena, Tyche, Cybele, Hecate, Baubo și Demeter. Aceste culte ale fertilității s-au separat treptat de budism și de versiunea indo-scythică a mazdeismului după căderea dinastiilor Kuṣāṇa și Kūśānśāh la sfârșitul secolului al IV-lea d.Hr. Cu timpul, Shiva și Durgā au apărut ca mișcări religioase distincte, separându-se de budism și de mazdeismul indo-scythic.*

**Keywords:** Indus Valley Civilization, Mittani, Mahāyāna, Kuṣāṇa, Kūśānśāh, Gandhāran Buddhism, Maheśvara, Hārītī, Umā, Mārīcī.

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## 1. Introduction

According to the hermeneutic circle of Hans-Georg Gadamer,<sup>2</sup> in any historical reconstruction we are unintentionally trying to understand the past from the present, although it is not correct for historical sciences. And the more we want to impose our present on the studied past, the more we become bogged down in our prejudices (*Vorurteilen*). Hence, the main logical fallacy of historians is to interpret the past as the present, although in historical reconstruction we must, on the contrary, interpret the present as the past, i.e. we must reveal the origin and genesis of existing forms of culture and knowledge.

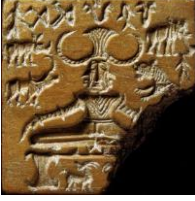

One of the best examples of this fallacy in the Indian history might be presented by the interpretation of 'Paśupati' seal from Mohenjo-daro as some direct evidence of the existence of Śaivism in the Indus Valley Civilisation, see the first picture of Table 1. The matter is that we do not know how to read the texts of this civilization, therefore we do not know at all who the depicted god is and, furthermore, we do not know how to identify his attributes. For example, the idea that his penis is depicted in erection, or this god is sitting in a yogic position could be considered highly speculative. Furthermore, the emergence of Śaivism as a distinct religious tradition, complete with its scriptures and iconography, dates back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. However, in analyzing the Paśupati seal, we encounter a challenge: it predates the tradition itself by 2000 years, leaving a gap in continuity that complicates our understanding.

Another example of this fallacy is an interpretation of woman depicted on the coins of Agathocles, see the second picture of Table 1, as Subhadrā (that is, Kṛṣṇa's sister), see the description of the item 1844,0909.61 at the British Museum. The problem is that we have no inscriptions supporting this idea. For example, the depicted woman may be just an *apsarāḥ* with a lotus flower. Moreover, at that time we do not have any direct evidence of existing Vaiṣṇavism with the cult of Kṛṣṇa. The coins of Agathocles are not typical for the Greco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek culture, indeed. First, he used the Brāhmī script instead of Kharoṣṭhī. Second, some deities are depicted realistically, but not within the framework of Hellenistic iconographies. It means that we cannot interpret the images of his coins.

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<sup>2</sup> GADAMER 1990.

**Table 1.** Some unidentified images of deities.

Image	Description	Date	Identification	Attributes
	The seal depicting a god having two horns, sitting in a relax pose and, possibly, with the erected penis. He is he surrounded by different animals. The undeciphered script is arranged horizontally in the space above the headdress. <i>Medium:</i> steatite. <i>Dimensions:</i> 3.53 x 3.53 x 0.64cm. <i>Museum number:</i> DK 5175/143 (National Museum, New Delhi). <i>Access:</i> <a href="https://www.dsource.in/dcontent/nvli/nvli-collection/details-2-db.php?id=1">https://www.dsource.in/dcontent/nvli/nvli-collection/details-2-db.php?id=1</a>	Ca. 2500 – 2400 B.C.	?	Two horns, sitting in a relax pose.
	Bronze double karshapana minted by Agathocles. 22 x 24mm; 14.45g. <i>Obverse:</i> the lion standing to right. The Greek legend: βασιλεωσ // αγαθοκλεουσ (“King Agathocles”). <i>Reverse:</i> the goddess walking to left, with a flower in her right hand. The Brāhmī legend in Prakrit along left side: <i>rajañe agathukleyasa</i> (“of the King Agathocles”).	Ca. 190–180 B.C.	?	Flower.

In this paper, the main goal is to analyze the earliest Śaiva-like images without falling in the fallacy of interpreting the past as the present. We begin by considering the hypothesis that Śaivism is the original religion of the Tamils (Section 2). This hypothesis is precisely caused by the logical fallacy of presenting the Śaiva Siddhānta, which is an important part of the religious life of the Tamils, as an integral quality of the people since the advent of them. There is much speculation that Śaivism existed as a religion in the societies of the Indus Valley Civilization. In Section 3, we will show that in them there was undoubtedly a fertility cult (in particular, the cult of the mother goddess), but this worship was characteristic of Neolithic communities, for example, there were also offerings of terracotta figurines of the mother goddess. An overlooked yet crucial aspect, insufficiently explored by scholars, is the significant role played by the Sumerian-Akkadian fertility goddess Inanna (Nanāya) within the Mittani pantheon, alongside the Indo-Iranian deities: Indra, the Mitra-gods, the Varuna-gods, and the Nasatya-gods. This aspect will be thoroughly examined in Section 4. In Section 5, it will be shown that the syncretic cult of Śiva, most probably, first appeared in Buddhist

worshipping tradition and with the lapse of time it separated from Buddhism as a new religious movement. In Section 6, it will be demonstrated that the same process concerns the syncretic cult of Durgā that was a necessary part of Buddhism in the beginning. It will then be shown in Section 7 that the various attributes of the *mātṛkās* of Buddhism and Tantrism may have developed under the direct influence of the attributes of the Hellenistic goddesses, such as Athena, Tyche, Cybele, Hekate, Baubo, Demeter, etc.

## 2. Śaivism as an Original Religion of the Dravidians?

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, discussions about the origins of the Śaiva Siddhānta, a major school of Śaivism in Tamil Nadu, significantly influenced political debates and the formation of Tamil national identity, challenging the idea that the Śaivism tradition is inherently or originally Tamil.<sup>3</sup> Eugene Irschick (1986) explains that during this period, British interactions with Tamil society fostered anti-caste sentiments, leading to revivalist and nativist movements such as the Self-Respect Movement of the 1920s. This movement, led by high-caste non-Brahmans, aimed to restore Tamil society to a perceived 'original' state of equality. But scholars studying the early history of Śaiva Siddhānta, trace the roots of its early teachers in the spiritual traditions of central and western India,<sup>4</sup> using written and archaeological evidence. They have demonstrated that the school, originally located in what is now northern Madhya Pradesh, probably arose in the 8<sup>th</sup> century or earlier and based its teachings on the Śaiva Āgamas, which influenced the practice of Śaivism later in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Kashmir.

Nevertheless, the idea that the Dravidians, 'originating' from the Indus Valley Civilization and preserving their religious traditions, significantly influenced Indo-Aryan religion persists among some Indologists.<sup>5</sup> They argue that post-Vedic Hinduism, as depicted in texts like the Epics (including the *Bhagavadgītā*), the *Purāṇas*, the *Yogasūtra*, and the Tantras, was deeply shaped by Dravidian influences.<sup>6</sup>

From an archaeological perspective, the earliest known Dravidian culture dates back to the southern Iron Age, spanning from around 1100 B.C., marked by the appearance of iron artifacts in the Hallur settlement, to the last centuries B.C., coinciding with the emergence of the early historic period and its written sources.<sup>7</sup> This culture is characterized by megalithic monuments and located in the South Indian states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra. Its anthropomorphic statues, typically crafted from thick stone

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<sup>3</sup> ISHIMATSU 1999.

<sup>4</sup> SWAMY 1975, TALBOT 1987.

<sup>5</sup> SJOBERG 1990.

<sup>6</sup> DANDEKAR 1979.

<sup>7</sup> MCINTOSH 1983.

blocks or thin slabs, are commonly found near megalithic monuments or in burial grounds.<sup>8</sup> These statues depict the human form in a simplified, abstract manner. Carved in the round, they often lack distinct features such as eyes, ears, mouth, and nose. Limbs are represented by elongations at the shoulder area, while lower limbs are not clearly depicted, possibly suggested through elongation of the lower body. Sexual features are rarely depicted, with only a few statues showing female characteristics like breasts. Male anatomical features have not been found. These statues typically range from 5 to 8 feet in height, although smaller and larger examples exist.<sup>9</sup> Very few terracotta figurines are found in these megalithic structures. In some burials there are none at all. Among the images, most often there are birds, sometimes a bull and a deer, while there are very few images of women.<sup>10</sup> The fertility cult that characterized the Bronze Age cities of the Indus Valley is thus not restored. A lot of terracotta, including female images, appears already in the historic period, when the Indo-Aryanization of the Dravidian culture was actively underway.

The religious tradition of megalithic burials is being restored on the basis of ethnographic research.<sup>11</sup> In particular, some tribal groups such as the Gadabas, Gonds, Kurumbas, Morias, Mundas, Nagas, and Savaras are still known to construct megalithic monuments for their deceased members. Additionally, the Gonds, Kurumbas, Morias, and Savaras engage in the planting and worship of stone menhirs and occasionally wooden pillars. Some of these wooden pillars feature a rounded projection at the top, symbolizing a human head. These tribal communities, speaking Austroasiatic and Dravidian languages, regard these posts as representations of their deities or, in some cases, the spirits of the deceased. Beliefs regarding the significance of these stone and wooden menhirs vary among different tribes. For instance, the Gonds believe that the spirit of the deceased resides within a stone, attributing similar spiritual significance to both wooden pillars and stone menhirs. As a result, in modern Śaivism of these tribes there are some rudiments of pre-Aryan beliefs, including the worship of ancestor ghosts (*bhūta*).

Thus, we do not find traces of the veneration of Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and Śiva (at least as a Yoga teacher) among the Dravidians and Austroasiatic peoples in prehistoric times, either archaeologically or ethnographically. Moreover, when analyzing the terracotta figurines, there are no indications of the fertility cult commonly associated with the urban centers of the Indus Valley Civilization. Therefore, the assertion of some Indologists<sup>12</sup> that the Dravidians were originally Śaivites does not stand up to criticism. This statement is pure speculation.

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<sup>8</sup> RAO 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> SHANMUGAM 2007.

<sup>11</sup> RAO 2008.

<sup>12</sup> DANDEKAR 1979.

### 3. Pre-Śaivism in the Indus Valley Civilization?

The earliest urban culture in Pakistan and the western-northern region of India is the Bronze Age Indus Valley civilization. Its key developmental phases are outlined as follows:<sup>13</sup>

- The early Indus (early Harappan) period (3200–2600 B.C.),
- The transition (2600–2500/2450 B.C.),
- The mature Indus civilization (2600–1900/1800 B.C.),
- The posturban (late Harappan) period (1900/1800–1300 B.C.).

Archaeological finds at Indus sites such as Harappa and Mohenjodaro reveal terracotta figurines depicting female figures adorned with elaborate belts, loincloths and various necklaces. These artifacts indicate the flourishing of the cult of the mother goddess in the Indus Valley Civilization. They have been identified from Mehrgarh, the earliest Neolithic site, to Harappa, spanning across seven distinct developmental periods:<sup>14</sup>

(i) In Period I, there are no figurines.

(ii) In Period II, figurines featured jewelry represented by rolled clay strips around the neck.

(iii) By Period III at Mehrgarh, figurines disappeared as attention shifted towards pottery making, decorated with painted designs. Bull figurines replaced human ones, reflecting the potters' focus on mass pottery production.

(iv) In Period IV, figurine manufacturing and ornamentation became dominant, with artisans adorning them with various hairstyles, jewelry, and headdresses, including striking disc representations.

(v) Period V saw increased diversity and complexity in figurine ornamentation, with rolled clay strips forming necklaces.

(vi) Period VI introduced a distinct coiled hairstyle.

(vii) Period VII showcased a variety of adornments including bun, straight, and curly hairstyles, along with necklaces, pendants, and chokers.

However, figurines of the mother goddess of the Indus Valley Civilization are not something unique to Eurasia and North Africa. Female figurines as a part of religious practice first appeared in the earliest Neolithic period, Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (ca. 9700–8500 B.C.). So, in this culture, infant burials were sometimes located under the foundations of houses on many sites, which indicates the ritual aspect of housing construction. The presence of removed skulls, child 'offerings,' and female and phallic figurines suggests that the religion of the time was centered on ancestor or fertility (mother goddess) worship.<sup>15</sup> In subsequent Neolithic cultures, female terracotta figurines became an important element of religious practice in different regions of the Fertile Crescent and even wider – for example, in the

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<sup>13</sup> MCINTOSH 2008.

<sup>14</sup> AHMAD *et al* 2019.

<sup>15</sup> TWISS 2007.

Balkans (Vinča culture dating from 5400–4500 B.C.). In fact, the worship of the mother goddess emerged as a significant aspect of the world-system that grew out of Pre-Pottery Neolithic A as the earliest Neolithic culture of humanity.

It's noteworthy that the Vedas do not prominently feature the cult of the mother goddess, indicating that this aspect is not central to Vedic religious practices. Similarly, Vedic religion does not exhibit the tradition of constructing temple structures or crafting images of deities from materials like terracotta or sandstone. From an archaeological point of view, the sequence of known Indo-Aryan cultures is as follows: (i) The Iron Age Black and Red Ware Culture (1450–1200 B.C.) in Western Uttar Pradesh marks the earliest known Indo-Aryan cultural phase, characterized by pottery painted black on the outside and red on the inside. (ii) Subsequently, the Painted Gray Ware culture (1200–600 B.C.) emerged and was predominantly observed in Western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Eastern Punjab. This culture takes its name from its characteristic gray pottery, decorated with linear or geometric patterns. (iii) Following the Painted Gray Ware culture, the Northern Black Polished Ware culture arose (600–200 BC). This period saw the rise of distinctive black polished pottery, especially in the northern regions of India, especially the Gangetic Plain. Beginning in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., the emergence of significant urban centers and the formation of early historic kingdoms are revealed, marking the transition from the late Vedic to the early historic period of Indian history. Temple buildings and terracotta female figurines as a part of religious practice are found among the Indo-Aryans of the Ganga Valley only in the historic period. This shows that initially the religious practices of the peoples of the Indus Valley Civilization and the Indo-Aryans were significantly different.

This difference is reflected in the contemptuous attitude in the *R̥gveda* towards the cult of fertility. The adherents of this cult are called phallus worshipers (*śiśnadevā*):

*sa vājaṃ yātāpaduṣṭadā yan svarṣātā pari śadat saniṣyan | anarvā yac  
chata durasya vedo ghañ chiśnadevāñ abhi varpasā bhūt ||*

(*R̥gveda* X: 99, 3).

He goes after prey, moving [a way] that is far for a lame man. Upon conquering the sun, he encircled (it), striving to conquer.

When, encountering no resistance, in altered form he took possession the property of [men who have] the hundred gates,<sup>16</sup> killing *phallus worshipers* (Tatyana Elizarenkova's translation).

*na yātava indra jūjuvur no na vandanā śaviṣṭha vedyābhiḥ | sa śardhad  
aryo viṣuṇasya jantor mā śiśnadevā api gur ṛtaṃ naḥ ||*

(*R̥gveda* VII: 21, 5).

<sup>16</sup> The association of phallus worshipers with the possession of a hundred gates may indicate that these phallus worshipers belong to a developed urban culture.

We are not haunted by any evil spirit, O Indra, neither the Vandanas with their deceptions, O strongest one.

Let him triumph over an enemy from a fickle race! Let no *phallus worshippers* infiltrate our ritual! (Tatyana Elizarenkova's translation).

There is a high probability that the word *mlecchá* ('heretic' or 'barbarian') in Vedic was originally the self-name of the inhabitants of the cities of the Indus Valley. The fact is that the word *Meluhḥa* is found in Sumerian and Akkadian texts to most likely designate the Indus Valley region. The Meluhḥans (as eventual inhabitants of the Indus Valley) appear in Mesopotamian texts for the first time in an inscription of Sargon (ca. 2334–2279 B.C. in the middle chronology), which mentions Meluhḥan ships docked at his capital, the city of Akkad:

9. *pu-ti* 10. *ti-a-am-tim* 11. M<sup>Á</sup> *me-luḥ-ḥa* 12. M<sup>Á</sup> *má-gan*.KI 13. M<sup>Á</sup> *tilmun*.KI (RIM E2.1.1.11).

He moored the ships of Meluhḥa [Indus Valley], Magan [present-day Oman], and Dilmun [today's Bahrain] at the quay of Agade (Akkad).<sup>17</sup>

Another reference is found in a late Sargonic tablet dating to around 2200 B.C., where a man with an Akkadian name is titled "the holder (? *lú-dab<sub>5</sub>*) of a Meluhḥa ship."<sup>18</sup> As a consequence of this textual evidence, it's unsurprising that we have observed many Indus artifacts appearing in Mesopotamian sites dating back to the Old Akkadian period, displaying characteristics typical of the mature urban phase of the Indus civilization. Despite the decline of the urban civilization in the Indus Valley during the Ur III period, the term '*Meluhḥa*' remained prevalent. It is found in Ur III economic and administrative documents, indicating that individuals from Meluhḥa or their descendants continued to engage in economic and commercial activities in Mesopotamia during the late Sumerian era. For example, we find the following mentions:<sup>19</sup> "a tablet of Ur-Lama son of Meluhḥa (10. *dub ur-<sup>d</sup>lama* 11. *dumu me-luḥ-ḥa*)" (2057 B.C.); "the granary of the village of Meluhḥa (1. *ì-dub é-duru<sub>5</sub> me- 2. luḥ-ḥa<sup>ki</sup>*)" (2047 B.C.); "the Meluhḥa garden of Ninmar (15. *ḡ<sup>is</sup>kiri<sub>6</sub> me-luḥ-ḥa* 16. *<sup>d</sup>nin-mar<sup>ki</sup>-ka*)" (2047 B.C.); "overseer: Ur-nig, Meluhḥa, a son of Ur-ana-dua (6. *ugula ur-níg* 7. *I me-luḥ-ḥa* 8. *dumu ur-an-na-dù-a*)" (undated). The following phrase is more interesting:<sup>20</sup> "Lu-Sunzida, a man of Meluhḥa (6. *lú-sún-zi-da* 7. *lú me-luḥ-ḥa-ke<sub>4</sub>*)." Its first part contains the theophoric name, translated into Sumerian: "man of the buffalo-cow". This "buffalo-cow" (*mahiṣī* in Sanskrit) may have been a name of the mother goddess in the Meluhḥan language, translated into Sumerian. Although the evidence is scarce, the mentioned texts suggest that some Meluhḥans had integrated into Mesopotamian society by the Ur III period. Three hundred years after the

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<sup>17</sup> FRAYNE 1993, 28.

<sup>18</sup> PARPOLA *et al.* 1977.

<sup>19</sup> PARPOLA *et al.* 1977.

<sup>20</sup> IPARPOLA *et al.* 1977.



initial documented contact between Meluḥḥa and Mesopotamia, references to a distinct foreign commercial group were replaced by an ethnic presence within Ur III society.<sup>21</sup>

It is worth noting that in the Middle Assyrian period (ca. 1365–912 B.C.), we find a title introduced by Tukultī-Ninurta I (ca. 1243–1207 B.C.) – *šar māt Tilmun u Meluḥḥi* (“King of Tilmun and Meluḥḥa”).<sup>22</sup> Thus, it is possible that Tukultī-Ninurta I conquered the territories of Bahrein (Dilmun) and the Persian Gulf (Meluḥḥa) for a very short time.

In the Neo-Assyrian period (911–609 B.C.), the term ‘Meluḥḥa’ came to mean the country of Ethiopia:

1. *ina maḥ-[-re]-[e ger-ri-ia]* 2. *a-na KUR.má-[-kan u KUR.me-luḥ]-[-[ḥa lu al-lik]* 3. *tar-qu-u MAN KUR.mu-[-šur]-[u KUR.ku-u-si]* (Ashurbanipal 73).

On [my] fir[st campaign, I marched] to Maka[n] (Egypt) and Melu[ḥḥa] (Ethiopia). Taharqa, the king of Egypt and Kush]...<sup>23</sup>

Thus, it is clear that the Meluḥḥans had a cult of fertility, but this cult is not found in Vedism and, moreover, was considered a barbarian tradition (*mlecchā*) by the Indo-Aryans in the pre-historic time. Since the Indus script remains undeciphered, providing detailed insights into the religion of the Indus inhabitants is challenging. However, it is generally understood that their religious practices centered around the fertility cult, a concept not unique to early urban settlements but with roots dating back to the first Neolithic cultures, beginning with Pre-Pottery Neolithic A. Hence, it was likely a fundamental aspect of many Bronze Age states which inherit Neolithic cultures. Therefore, phallic images have become popular in very different cultures from the Neolithic. For instance, in ancient Greece of the Iron Age, phallic sculptures took the form of herms (ἕρμα) – quadrangular columns topped with a head sculpture at the top and a phallus in front. They were erected along roadsides and even used as gravestones. Originally dedicated to Hermes, they later honored heroes like Heracles. In contrast, in India of the historic time, the oldest phallic sculptures (*lingams*) are round columns crowned with a phallus at the top and a head in front (or heads around).

#### 4. Pre-Śaivism in the Mittani State?

The earliest known text that mentions Indo-Iranian deities is CTH 51,<sup>24</sup> attributed to the Mittanian ruler Šattiwaza (reigned ca. 1330–1305 B.C.).<sup>25</sup> This text presents a hierarchy of deities:<sup>26</sup> (1) the Storm-god <sup>d</sup>U, referred to as the Lord of Heaven and Earth in both Akkadian and Sumerian, alongside the Water-god Ea [<sup>d</sup>É-a], known as the Master of Wisdom; (2) the

<sup>21</sup> PARPOLA *et al.* 1977.

<sup>22</sup> SAZONOV 2010: 139. See also DELLER *et al.*: 464–465; SAZONOV 2016.

<sup>23</sup> JEFFERS AND NOVOTNY 2023, 112.

<sup>24</sup> JANKOWSKI AND WILHELM 2005, 113–121; MAYERHOFER 1974; DEVECCHI 2018.

<sup>25</sup> see von DASSOW 2022, 455–528, <https://academic.oup.com/book/41909/chapter-abstract/354776874?redirectedFrom=fulltext>.

<sup>26</sup> SCHUMANN AND SAZONOV 2023.

Moon-god <sup>d</sup>30 and the Sun-god <sup>d</sup>UTU; (3) the Sky-god Anu [<sup>d</sup>A-nu] and his consort Antu [<sup>d</sup>A-[an]-tu<sub>i</sub>]; (4) the Air-god Enlil [<sup>d</sup>EN.LÍL] and his consort Ninlil [<sup>d</sup>NIN.LÍL]. This hierarchy includes four well-known groups of deities. The text also mentions Mittanian names that may correspond to the deities listed above: (1) Indra (*In-tar*, Avestan/Vedic: Indra), the Storm-god; (2) the Mitra-gods (plural: <sup>DINGIR.MEŠ</sup>*Mi-it-ra-aš-ši-il*, Avestan: Miθra, Vedic: Mitrá), a couple of the Moon and the Sun (?); (3) the Varuna-gods (<sup>DINGIR.MEŠ</sup>*Ú-ru-wa-na-aš-ši-il<sub>s</sub>*, Avestan: Varun, Vedic: Váruṇa), a couple of the Water-god and his consort; (4) and the Nasatya-gods (*Na-ša-at-ti*, Avestan: Nāñhaiθya, Vedic: Násatyā), a couple of Sky-gods or Air-gods. As we see, this layout parallels the earlier grouping: Indra corresponds to the Storm-god <sup>d</sup>U; the Mitra-gods likely represent a divine couple akin to the Moon-god and the Sun-god; the Varuna-gods resemble the couple of Anu and Antu; and the Nasatya-gods mirror Enlil and Ninlil. Given the etymology of Indra (“possessor of water”), he embodies not only the Vedic god of rain but also of rivers. Similarly, the evolving associations of Mitra/Mithra with the sun in later Avestan and Vedic traditions suggest a broader interpretation of these divine figures and their roles.

In CTH 51, the text concludes with a listing of Syrian-Hurrian storm gods and sky goddesses:<sup>27</sup>

Underground watercourse(?), Šamanminuḫi [the Hurrian deity, presumably, of the storm], the Storm-god [<sup>d</sup>U], the Lord [of the temple in] Waššukkanni, the Storm-god [<sup>d</sup>U], the Lord of the Temple Platform(?) of Irrite, Partaḫi [one of the Hurrian storm deities] of [the temple in] Šuta, Nabarbi [the Hurrian and Syrian storm-goddess], Šuruḫḫe [one of the Hurrian storm-gods], Inanna [<sup>d</sup>A-šur MUL<sup>1</sup> – “star of Aššur” in Sumerian, that is Inanna, the Sky-goddess], Šaluš [the Syrian Water-goddess], Bēlet-ekalli [<sup>d</sup>NIN.É.GAL – “lady of palace”, the Sky-goddess in Akkadian, associated with Inanna], Damkina [<sup>d</sup>DAM.KI.NA – the heavenly consort of the god Enki, the Water-god], Išḫara [the Syrian goddess, associated with Inanna], the mountains and rivers, the deities of heaven, and the deities of earth [the Sumerian logograms: <sup>DINGIR</sup>meš<sup>ANDINGIR</sup>meš<sup>KI-ti</sup>].

In this excerpt, certain Syro-Hurrian deities are equated with the Storm-god [<sup>d</sup>U]: Šamanminuḫi, revered as the Lord of the temple in Waššukkanni and the Lord of the Temple Platform of Irrite, alongside Partaḫi from the temple in Šuta, Nabarbi, and Šuruḫḫe. Additionally, a number of Syro-Hurrian goddesses are compared to Inanna, including Šala, Bēlet-ekalli, Damkina, and Išḫara. This detail is especially significant as it represents the earliest recorded association of Inanna (Nanāya), the fertility goddess, with the Indo-Iranian

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 25. See also LAHE AND SAZONOV 2018, 2019.

gods in the same Mittanian pantheon. In the comparison between the pure Indo-Iranian and pure Syro-Hurrian deities, while the four groups of Indo-Iranian deities (Indra, the Mitra-gods, the Varuna-gods, the Nasatya-gods) find analogues, Inanna (Nanāya) stands out as she does not have a direct counterpart among the Indo-Iranian gods known to the Mittani people. Nonetheless, she is acknowledged as one of the most powerful deities. The worship of Nanāya gained considerable popularity in regions such as Bactria, Sogdiana, and Gandhāra during the Kuṣāṇa Empire (1<sup>st</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), see Section 6. Later this cult significantly contributed to the development of the Durgā worship.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the roots or rudiments of the cult of Nanāya among the Indo-Aryans of Gandhāra can be seen even in the Mittanian pantheon, where she came from the Mesopotamians.

To sum up, the Mittani Indo-Iranian deities, which predates the Vedic religion, originally did not include a mother goddess figure. This element was surely introduced later, likely as an adaptation from local religious practices. This suggests an integration of deities from surrounding cultures, reflecting a broader tendency towards syncretism as the Mittani people interacted with their neighbors.

### 5. Syncretic Cult of the Indo-Scythian Oešo / Wēšparkar and the Buddhist Maheśvara as a Pre-Śaiva Deity becoming Śiva



The earliest images which might be unambiguously treated as a kind of standard iconography of Śiva (see Table 2) belong to the Kuṣāṇa culture and their successors such as different clans of Hūṇās. At the peak of their power, the Kuṣāṇas ruled the territories of North India and present-day Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan. Their dynasty existed from the early 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. to the late 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Their rulers are as follows:<sup>29</sup> *Kujula Kadphises* (ca. 50–90 A.D.), *Wima Takto* (ca. 90–113 A.D.), *Wima Kadphises* (ca. 113–127 A.D.), *Kaniška I* (ca. 127–151 A.D.), *Huviška* (ca. 151–190 A.D.), *Vāsudeva I* (ca. 190–230 A.D.), *Kaniška II* (ca. 230–247 A.D.), *Vāsiška* (ca. 247–267 A.D.), *Kaniška III* (ca. 267–270 A.D.), *Vāsudeva II* (ca. 267–300 A.D.), *Mahi* (ca. 300–305 A.D.), *Šakā* (ca. 305–335 A.D.), *Kipunadha* (ca. 335–350 A.D.).




The deity from Table 2 could be directly related to Śiva according to some of his main attributes such as bull, two- or four- or six-armed, single- or three-headed, trident-axe or simple trident, thunderbolt, water pot, lion skin, lotus flower, antelope, elephant goad, wheel, club, nimbus (sometimes flaming), diadem as the Kuṣāṇa royal crown, etc. But in most of these images the deity has the following name in Bactrian: Oηþo (Oešo). So, his name is Oηþo and not one of the names of Śiva.


<sup>28</sup> SCHUMANN AND SAZONOV 2021a, 2021b.

<sup>29</sup>JONGEWARD *et al.* 2015, BRACEY 2012.

**Table 2.** Images of Οηβο in the Kuṣāṇa period.

Image	Description	Date	Identification	Attributes
	<p>Οηβο with the three heads and the four arms holding the trident and the water pot on the left and his worshipper begs on the right. <i>Medium:</i> terracotta, gouache. <i>Dimensions:</i> H. 57.2 cm, W. 41.6 cm, D. 5.7 cm. <i>Museum number:</i> 2000.42.4 (Metropolitan Museum of Art). <i>Access:</i> <a href="https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/327832">https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/327832</a></p>	<p>Ca. the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.</p>	<p>Οηβο.</p>	<p>Trident, three heads, four arms, water pot.</p>
	<p>Wima Kadphises bronze tetradrachm. 27mm; 16.47g. <i>Obverse:</i> the king sacrifices at the Mazdean small altar. The royal signs: the trident on the left, the Hercules club below the royal monogram on the right. The legend is in Greek: Βασιλευσ Βασιλεων Σωτηρ Μεγασ Οσημο Καδφισησ (“Wima Kadphises, the King of Kings, the Great Saviour”). <i>Reverse:</i> we observe a figure of Οηβο holding the same trident. He is depicted radiate and wearing some drapery of the Greek style. Behind him a bull stands. On the left, we see the Buddhist symbol of <i>triratna</i>. The legend in Gāndhārī in the Kharoṣṭhī script: <i>maharajasa rajadiraja sarvaloga íśvara mahíśvarasa v’ima kathpíśasa tratarasa</i> (“Of the Great King, the King of Kings, the Creator of the World, the Great Creator [<i>Maheśvara</i>],</p>	<p>Ca. 95–127 A.D.</p>	<p>Οηβο.</p>	<p>Bull, trident, Hercules club, <i>triratna</i> (Sanskrit: “three jewels”) usually depicted on the coins of Buddhist monarchs of that time.</p>

	Vima Kadphises, the Saviour”). The title <i>tratarā</i> is characteristic for Buddhist monarchs of that time.			
	Kaniška I bronze tetradrachm. 25mm; 17.08g. <i>Obverse</i> : the king standing facing with a Greek diadem on his kalpak, sacrificing at the Mazdean altar on the left, holding the spear in his left hand. <i>Reverse</i> : the four-armed Orḡo standing left. He holds (i) a thunderbolt ( <i>vajra</i> ), (ii) a diadem, (iii) a trident, (iv) a water pot. We see tamgha on the left. The legend is in Bactrian on the right: Orḡo.	Ca. 127–150 A.D.	Orḡo.	Four-armed, holding a thunderbolt, i.e. <i>vajra</i> (previously depicted in the Indian coins as the key attribute for Zeus and Athena), royal diadem for the Kuṣāṇas, trident, water pot (attribute of a Buddhist monk).
	Kaniška I bronze drachm. 17.65mm, 3.65g. <i>Obverse</i> : the king standing facing with a Greek diadem on his kalpak, holding the spear in his left hand. <i>Reverse</i> : the two-armed Orḡo standing left. He holds (i) a trident, (ii) a water pot. The legend is in Bactrian on the right: Orḡo.	Ca. 127–150 A.D.	Orḡo.	Two-armed, holding the trident and water pot.
	Huviška bronze tetradrachm. 24mm; 13.08g. <i>Obverse</i> : the king sitting on the couch and crossing his legs. The corrupted legend in Bactrian: [Ḑaovavopao Orḡbkī Koḑavo] (“King of Kings Huviška Kuṣāṇa”). <i>Reverse</i> : the four-armed Orḡo standing left. He holds (i) a thunderbolt ( <i>vajra</i> ), (ii) a diadem, (iii) a trident. We	Ca. 150–190 A.D.	Orḡo.	Four-armed, holding a thunderbolt, royal diadem for the Kuṣāṇas, trident.

	see tamgha on the left. The legend is in Bactrian on the right: [Oηpo].			
	Vāsudeva I bronze didrachm. 22.10mm; 9.20g. <i>Obverse</i> : the king standing facing with a halo is clothed in a robust nomadic costume, he is crowned and diademed, holds the trident and sacrifices at the Mazdean altar at left. The royal signs: the trident on the left and the Buddhist symbol of <i>triratna</i> (Sanskrit: “three jewels”) on the right. <i>Reverse</i> : the two-armed god standing facing, holding the trident and diadem, the bull left behind.	Ca. 190–230 C.E.	Oηpo.	Trident, bull, royal diadem for the Kuṣāṇas, <i>triratna</i> .

In other Indo-Scythian cultures which are relatively close to the Kuṣāṇas such as the Sogdians, we can find the deity with the same iconography, but his name is also written in Eastern Middle-Iranian and not in Indo-Aryan. So, the name of this god is pronounced in Sogdian as *wyšprkr* (Wēšparkar). Both names Oηpo and Wēšparkar came from the same Avestan epithet of Vayu (the god of wind): *vaiiuš uparō.kairiō* (“Vayu, whose activity lies in the upper region”)<sup>30</sup>. Therefore, the Bactrian name Oηpo may represent *wēš*, delivered from the Avestan *vaiiuš*, while Wēšparkar reflects the whole epithet. Thus, Oηpo and Wēšparkar possessing the attributes of the Hindu Śiva are the same god of wind.<sup>31</sup>

In one Sogdian Buddhist fragment, we find the following direct identifications of Sogdian (Eastern Iranian) and Buddhist deities:<sup>32</sup>

Homage (*nm’w*) to Brahmā (*pr’ym’*) – Zurvān (*’zrw’*), Indra (*’ynt’r*) – Ādbagh (*’δδβγ*), Mahādeva (*mγ’tyβ*) – Wēšparkar (*wyšprkr*), Nārāyaṇa (*n’r’y’n*) – Vrēšaman (*βr’yšmn*).

Hence, Zurvān is identified with Brahmā, Ādbagh with Indra, Wēšparkar with Mahādeva (Maheśvara), and Vrēšaman with Nārāyaṇa. But this identification of Wēšparkar/ Oηpo with Maheśvara is not his identification with Śiva from the Purāṇas, but with Maheśvara from the Buddhist texts (first of all, from the Mahāyāna *sūtras*), where Maheśvara is described as a

<sup>30</sup> HUMBACH 1975.

<sup>31</sup> TANABE 1991/92.

<sup>32</sup> BENVENISTE 1940.

four-armed bodhisattva: “The great *yakṣa* Maheśvara, four armed and mighty” (*Mahāsāhasrapramardanī* 1.86, Kangyur vol. 90, folio 69a).

The syncretic cult of the Eastern Iranian wind god Wēšparkar/ Oṅḡo and the Buddhist Maheśvara is supported by Chinese sources written by pilgrims of the Hunnic time. So, in the *Liangjīng xinji*, composed by Wei Shu in the Tang period (from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), we see the same identification of the Mazdean Wēšparkar/ Oṅḡo with the Buddhist Maheśvara: “The god of the sky of the Western Regions (corresponding to present day Xinjiang, where many Sogdians lived) *hu* of the Mazdean temple of the *hu* founded in the 6<sup>th</sup> year of the Wude era, is the same one called in Buddhist *sūtra* Moxishouluo”.<sup>33</sup> Obviously that the name ‘Moxishouluo’ corresponds to Maheśvara<sup>34</sup> and his function “god of the sky” is connotatively close to the Bactrian Oṅḡo and Sogdian Wēšparkar as the god of wind. In the *Guangchuan Painting Colophons* of the same Tang period we find the same identification: “Zoroastrian temples are where for generations Hušen (Avesta/Ahura Mazdā) has been worshipped. His image is exotic and unusual, and he is the Moxishouluo of the scriptures”.<sup>35</sup> Hence, Wēšparkar/Oṅḡo identified with the Buddhist Maheśvara is not Śiva. Furthermore, the majority of Kuṣāṇa images of Oṅḡo contains additional Buddhist signs such as *triratna* (the sign of the three Buddhist jewels), see Table 2. This fact is explained in the book by I-tsing<sup>36</sup>, namely it is claimed that Maheśvara loves “the Three Jewels”:

There is likewise in great monasteries in India, at the side of a pillar in the kitchen, or before the porch, a figure of a deity carved in wood, two or three feet high, holding a golden bag, and seated on a small chair, with one foot hanging down towards the ground. Being always wiped with oil its countenance is blackened, and the deity is called Mahākāla or the great black deity. The ancient tradition asserts that he belonged to the beings (in the heaven) of the Great god (or Maheśvara). He naturally loves the Three Jewels, and protects the five assemblies from misfortune. Those who offer prayers to him have their desires fulfilled. At meal-times those who serve in the kitchen offer light and incense, and arrange all kinds of prepared food before the deity.

All the Śaiva-like images at the time of the Kuṣāṇas such as *liṅgaṃs* and *yonīs* are excavated only in the Buddhist sites.<sup>37</sup> There is no evidence that the cult of Maheśvara existed outside of Buddhism in this period. And please pay attention that these Śaiva-like images are the earliest.

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<sup>33</sup> BOQIN 1994.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.



<sup>35</sup> LUO 2000.

<sup>36</sup> I-TSING 1896.

<sup>37</sup> SCHUMANN AND ARIF 2021.


The cult of Οηβο was continued by another branch of the Kuṣāṇas who became the Sasanian satraps. They are called Kūšānšāhs (“kings of Kuṣāṇas”)<sup>38</sup>, their rulers were as follows: *Ardašir* I (ca. 230–? A.D.), *Ardašir* II (ca. ?–245 A.D.), *Pērōz* I (ca. 245–270 A.D.), *Hormizd* I (ca. 270–300 A.D.), *Hormizd* II (ca. 300–303 A.D.), *Pērōz* II (ca. 303–330 A.D.), *Varahran* I (ca. 330–360 A.D.), *Varahran* II (ca. 360 A.D.), *Pērōz* III (ca. 350–360 A.D.). But the name of Οηβο changed. His main name in Bactrian and Middle-Persian now sounds like this with the same meaning: Βορζαοανδο Ιαζαδο and *bwrz'wndy yzdy* (“the god who acts in the high regions”). This deity is clothed in the way of Sasanian or Indo-Scythian monarchs and depicted as very bearded and shaggy, see Table 3. But the sign of *triranta* as well as other Buddhist signs such as swastika and three pellets are necessarily accompanied him. His main attributes are the diadem of the Kūšānšāhs, the trident and the bull, see Table 3. So, we see the same Mazdean-Buddhist syncretism in his images.

**Table 3.** Images of Οηβο in the period of Kūšānšāhs.

Image	Description	Date	Identification	Attributes
	<p>Pērōz I Kūšānšāh copper drachm. 17mm; 3.39g. <i>Obverse</i>: the king standing left, holding the trident and sacrificing over the Mazdean altar, <i>triratna</i> in the right field. <i>Reverse</i>: the god standing facing, holding the diadem and trident, the bull standing left behind.</p>	Ca. 245–270 A.D.	<p>Οηβο / Βορζαοανδο / Ιαζαδο / <i>bwrz'wndy yzdy</i>.</p>	<p>Trident, <i>triratna</i> (the symbol of Buddhism), bull, royal diadem for the Kūšānšāhs, swastika (it is rather a Buddhist sign at that time).</p>
	<p>Pērōz II Kūšānšāh copper drachm. 14mm; 2.5g. <i>Obverse</i>: the diademed, bearded bust of king facing right, wearing a crescent moon crown (or a bull horned crown), topped by a globe or lotus flower. <i>Reverse</i>: the fire altar, with the bust of god emerging at the top and holding the trident and diadem. The Middle Persian legend: [<i>bwrz'wndy yzdy</i>] (“the god who acts in the high regions”).</p>	Ca. 300–325 A.D.	<p>Οηβο / Βορζαοανδο / Ιαζαδο / <i>bwrz'wndy yzdy</i>.</p>	<p>Trident, royal diadem for the Kūšānšāhs, the bust of god emerging at the top of the fire altar.</p>


<sup>38</sup> JONGEWARD et al. 2015.



	<p>Varahran I (Bahrām) I Kūšānšāh gold drachm of the Boxlo (Balkh) mint. 29mm; 7.97g. <i>Obverse:</i> the king holding the trident is clothed in the way of Sasanian monarchs, he stands left on the ground line (a lotus?) and wears a crown with ribbons and is surmounted by lotus. His shoulders are in the flame and he sacrifices at the Mazdean altar. On the left, we see the trident standard above the altar, the middle prong is surmounted by a crescent. Between the legs of the king, we observe swastika. Then we see the triple pellets below the left arm and <i>triratna</i>. The legend is in Bactian: Boyo Oapaypavo Ooζapko KopaBo βαγο (“the God Varahran the Great King of Kušānas [Kūšānšāh]”). <i>Reverse:</i> Oηβο holding the diadem in the right hand and the trident in the left hand stands facing. Behind him, there is the bull standing left. The legend is in Bactrian: Βορζαοανδο Ιαζαδο (“the god who acts in the high regions”).</p>	<p>Ca. 325–350 A.D.</p>	<p>Oηβο / Βορζαοανδο / Ιαζαδο / <i>bwrz'wndy</i> <i>yzdy</i>.</p>	<p>Trident, <i>triratna</i>, bull, royal diadem for the Kūšānšāhs, swastika.</p>
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In the Hunnic period (i.e. from the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), the cult of Maheśvara / Oηβο expanded significantly. But now we observe its different forms: from more Mazdean to more Hindu. For instance, in the Sogdian coins we find some Mazdean iconographies of Oηβο taken from the Kūšānšāhs, in the Tukhus coins we see that the trident became an abstract sign of royal power, and in the coins of the Kota Kula we see the earliest signs of Śaivism emancipated from Buddhism, see Table 4.

**Table 4.** Images of *On̄po* in the post-Kuṣāṇa period among the Sogdians and the nomadic dynasties of Kidarites and Tukhus.

Image	Description	Date	Identification	Attributes
	<p>The copper drachm of Kidarite Principality of the Kota Kula in the Punjab. 18mm; 4.95g. <i>Obverse</i>: the Brāhmī letter <i>bhru</i> on the right side and a trident with battle-axe on the left side. <i>Reverse</i>: the very stylized god holding the trident, bull.</p>	<p>Ca. 360–460 A.D.</p>	<p>Maheśvara / <i>On̄po</i>.</p>	<p>Trident, bull.</p>
	<p>The copper drachm of Mawak, the ruler of Bukhara. 15mm; 2.6g. <i>Obverse</i>: the diademed bust of king. <i>Reverse</i>: the bust of god emerging at the top of the fire altar.</p>	<p>The late 4<sup>th</sup>–the early 5<sup>th</sup> century.</p>	<p><i>wyšprkr</i> / Βορζαοανδο <i>Ιαζαδο</i> / <i>bwrz'wndy yzdy</i>.</p>	<p>The bust of god emerging at the top of the Mazdean altar.</p>
	<p>The Tukhus copper coin. 20mm; 1.40g. <i>Obverse</i>: the Sogdian legend around the square hole: <i>tywss γwβw</i> (“the Master of Tukhus”). Tamgha-trident in the right field. <i>Reverse</i>: the Sogdian legend around the square hole: <i>βγγ twrkys γ'γ'n pny</i> (“Fen of the Master of Turgesh's kagan”).</p>	<p>The second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D.</p>	<p><i>wyšprkr</i> / Βορζαοανδο <i>Ιαζαδο</i> / <i>bwrz'wndy yzdy</i>.</p>	<p>Trident.</p>

Hence, the earliest Śaiva-like images of the Kuṣāṇa period cannot be treated as Śaiva images in the narrow meaning, because they reflect a syncretic cult of the Indo-Scythian Mazdean *On̄po* and the Buddhist Maheśvara. Śaivism has been emancipated from Buddhism only since the early 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. after the fall of the Kuṣāṇa and Kūšānšāh dynasties and

even not immediately, but very smoothly. Only from this time we can find some Śaiva-like images without Mazdean or Buddhist additional attributes.




### 6. Syncretic Cult of the Indo-Scythian Nanāia / Ardoxšo and the Buddhist Hārītī / Umā as a Pre-Śaiva Deity becoming Durgā




Archaeologically, we know that the cult of mother goddess has been a necessary part of Buddhism in North India from the very beginning. Almost at all Buddhist sites there have been excavated figures of mother goddess, and it is known that in every Buddhist temple of the Kuṣāṇa time, one of the halls was dedicated to this goddess. Most images of the divine mother from the Buddhist sites are of the following two types:<sup>39</sup> (i) the seated or standing woman with a child or many children (as a protector of children, childbirth and motherhood); (ii) the woman seated on a chair or throne and holding a flower and cornucopia. It is worth noting that the goddess with the iconography of (ii) has the Bactrian legend Ἀρδοχβο (Ardoxšo), see Table 5, on the coins of Kuṣāṇas dated to the same 2<sup>nd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Hence, we have one of her names – Ἀρδοχβο. Both iconographies of (i) and (ii) are two Hellenistic standards in depicting Tyche (Τύχη) / Fortune supported in minting Greco-Bactrian, Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian coins, see Table 5. Therefore, we have an identification of Ἀρδοχβο with Tyche / Fortune, on the one hand, and with the mother goddess in Buddhism, on the other hand.



The third type in manifestation of mother goddess in Buddhist sites is presented by (iii) a warrior woman seated on (or accompanied by) a lion and sometimes having four or six arms. This iconography continues the Hellenistic standard in depicting Cybele (Κυβέλη) / Rhea. Meanwhile, she is six-armed following the iconography of three-headed and six-armed Hekate (Ἑκάτη), a protector of the household. She is called Inanna (Nanāya) in Akkadian (see Section 4), Ναναια (Nanāia) in Greek, Νανᾶ (Nanā) in Bactrian, nny in Sogdian, see Table 5. In the Rabatak inscription reflecting the edict of Kaniṣka I, changing the official language of the empire from Greek to ‘Aryan’ (Bactrian), we see an identification of Νανᾶ with the Buddhist Ομμα (Umā or Hārītī): “the lady Nanā and the lady Umā” (ἰα ἀμσα Νανᾶ οδο ἰα ἀμσα Ομμα).

<sup>39</sup> SCHUMANN AND ARIF 2021.

**Table 5.** Images of Νάνα and Αρδοχβο in the pre-Kuṣāṇa and Kuṣāṇa periods.

Image	Description	Date	Identification	Attributes
	<p>The goddess with a halo holds a lotus flower and cornucopia, sits on a throne. <i>Medium:</i> gray schist. <i>Dimensions:</i> H. 30.5 cm. Private collection. <i>Access:</i> <a href="https://www.carltonrochell.com/artworks-items/hariti">https://www.carltonrochell.com/artworks-items/hariti</a></p>	<p>The 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.</p>	<p>Tyche / Fortuna associated to Hārītī / Αρδοχβο.</p>	<p>Halo, throne, lotus flower, cornucopia.</p>
	<p>Philoxenos copper hemiobol. 20x18mm; 7.25gm. <i>Obverse:</i> the goddess standing left, holding cornucopia in the left hand, making a benediction gesture with the outstretched right hand; monogram at feet left, the Greek legend around Βασιλεωσ / Ανικητου / Φιλοξενου (“of the Invincible King Philoxenos”). <i>Reverse:</i> the zebu bull standing right, monogram below, the Kharoṣṭhī legend <i>Maharajasa padihatasa Philasinasa</i> (“of Great King Philoxenos the Unconquered”).</p>	<p>Ca. 125-110 B.C.</p>	<p>Tyche / Fortuna.</p>	<p>Cornucopia, benediction gesture.</p>
	<p>Azes II copper alloy drachm. 22mm; 5.93gm. <i>Obverse:</i> the goddess enthroned left, holding a cornucopia and with a benediction gesture, the Greek legend around Βασιλεωσ Βασιλεων Μεγαλου Αζου (“of King of Kings Azes the Great”). <i>Reverse:</i> the god standing</p>	<p>Ca. 16-30 A.D.</p>	<p><i>Obverse:</i> Tyche / Fortuna. <i>Reverse:</i> Hermes.</p>	<p><i>Obverse:</i> Cornucopia, benediction gesture, enthroned. <i>Reverse:</i> caduceus.</p>

	<p>facing, holding a caduceus and making a benediction gesture; the Kharoṣṭhī legend around <i>Maharajasa rajarajasa mahatasa Ayasa</i> ("of Great King, King of Kings Azes the Great").</p>			
	<p>Kaniška I copper didrachm. 21mm; 7.78gm. <i>Obverse:</i> the crowned, diademed king standing facing, holding a spear and sacrificing at the Mazdean altar at left, the Greek legend around: the βασιλεωσ βασιλεων Κανηρκου ("King of Kings Kaniška"). <i>Reverse:</i> the goddess standing right, nimbate, holding protome of lion, the Greek legend left: Ναναια, tamgha at right.</p>	<p>Before ca. 127 A.D.</p>	<p>Ναναια / Νανα.</p>	<p>Halo, lion protome.</p>
	<p>Kaniška I copper tetradrachm. 26mm; 18.99gm. <i>Obverse:</i> the crowned, diademed king standing facing, holding a spear and sacrificing at the Mazdean altar at left, the Bactrian legend around: βαο Κανηρκι ("King Kaniška"). <i>Reverse:</i> the goddess standing right, nimbate, holding a protome of lion, the Bactrian legend left: Νανα, tamgha at right.</p>	<p>Ca. 127–150 A.D.</p>	<p>Νανα.</p>	<p>Halo, lion protome.</p>
	<p>Huviška copper tetradrachm. 25mm; 18.95gm. <i>Obverse:</i> the king sitting on the couch, crossing his legs and holding a spear, the</p>	<p>Ca. 150–190 A.D.</p>	<p>Νανα.</p>	<p>Halo, lion protome.</p>

	<p>Bactrian legend around: [Ῥαοναβοῤῃαο Οοηῖκι Κοῤῥαβο] (“King of Kings Huviṣka Kuṣāṇa”). Reverse: the goddess standing right, having a halo, holding a protome of lion, the Bactrian legend left: Ναῶα, tamgha at right.</p>			
	<p>Kaniṣka II copper didrachm. 21mm; 8.87gm. <i>Obverse</i>: the king wears the diadem and he is with halo, stands facing left with the right hand lowered to the Mazdean altar. He holds the trident in the left hand. <i>Reverse</i>: the goddess is enthroned and holds the cornucopia and flower. The Bactrian legend: [Αρδοχῖο].</p>	<p>Ca. 230–260 A.D.</p>	<p>Αρδοχῖο / Tyche.</p>	<p>Halo, throne, lotus stem, cornucopia.</p>

The name of Hārītī occurs in some Buddhist inscriptions of that time, e.g. in the following *dhāraṇī* of Senavaṃma<sup>40</sup> found in the Swat Valley (Pakistan), dated to Senavarma regnal year 14, and written in Gāndhārī in the Kharoṣṭhi script:

*puyita bramo sahaṃpati śakro devaṇidro catvari maharaya aṭhaviṣati yakṣaseṇapati hariti saparivara*

Brahman Sahaṃpati, Śakra, ruler of the gods, the four great kings, the twenty-eight *yakṣa* generals, (and) Hārītī with her retinue are honored.

This phrase is very typical for the Mahāyāna *sūtras* defining a hierarchy of all beings, where the highest level consists of bodhisattvas and buddhas, then there is usually mentioned the level of highest *devas* such as Brahmā, Śakra (Indra), Maheśvara, and Nārāyaṇa, then it is said about the level of guardians of the world and only then about the level of kings of different highest beings including *nāgas*, *rākṣasas*, *yakṣiṇīs* (*yakṣas*), *garuḍas*, etc. In the Buddhist everyday worship of that time there were different *dhāraṇīs* directed to different highest beings, including Maheśvara and Hārītī. For example, Hārītī helps against demons to protect children (the *Hārītīsūtra*, 佛說鬼子母經, T. 1262).


<sup>40</sup> Access: [https://gandhari.org/a\\_inscription.php?catid=CKI0249](https://gandhari.org/a_inscription.php?catid=CKI0249).

According to the *Āryatārākurukullākālpa* and some other Mahāyāna texts, Hārītī was a child-eating demoness (see also *Āryakāraṇḍavyūhanāmamahāyānasūtra* 5.3, Kangyur vol. 81, folio 39b), becoming a protectress of children, women, the *saṃgha*, and all the beings at all. Maheśvara and Hārītī are a divine couple ruling the *yakṣas* (see the *Mahāsāhasrapramardani*): “Maheśvara, all the *yakṣa* generals, and Hārītī with her sons” (*Mahāsāhasrapramardani* 1.203/folio 73a; 1.210/folio 73b; 1.217/folio 74a; 1.224/folio 74a; 1.230/folio 74b, Kangyur vol. 90). They both became bodhisattvas (*Āryakāraṇḍavyūhanāmamahāyānasūtra* 2.96, Kangyur vol. 51, folio 242b).

Different Mahāyāna *dhāraṇīs* and *mantras* including the formulas directed to the Buddhist Maheśvara and Hārītī have spread throughout Central, South and Southeast Asia. These formulas are found in Indonesia, e.g. see the analysis of the silver foil inscription from Sambas in West Kalimantan, written in the Kawi script and dated from the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D.,<sup>41</sup> as well as in the Maldives, e.g. see different *mantras* and *dhāraṇīs* dated before the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>42</sup> It is quite interesting to note that in Maldivian folklore, the name Hārītī is preserved in an unusual form as *Santi Mariyaṃbu*, a “*devi* who carries a bag full of teeth.”<sup>43</sup> This name consists of two parts: (1) the Christian name of Saint Mary, which was taken in the 16<sup>th</sup> century from the Portuguese colonists, and (2) the name *bu*, which comes from the word *bhūti* (“demoness”), one of the names of Hārītī.

The emancipation of *Nava* / *Αρδοχφο* / Hārītī / *Umā* from Buddhism and Mazdaism was a long process that began at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and it is easy to trace back how the same canon in the iconography of this goddess was smoothly transformed into *Durgā* with eliminating some additional Mazdean and Buddhist attributes, e.g. see Table 6.



**Table 6.** Images of *Nava* and *Αρδοχφο* in the post-Kuṣāṇa period of North India.

Image	Description	Date	Identification	Attributes
	The goddess with a halo and a benediction gesture holds a palm leaf, like a cornucopia, and sits on a lion. <i>Medium</i> : stucco. <i>Dimensions</i> : H. 25.2 cm, W. 18.1 cm, D. 9.5 cm. <i>Museum number</i> : 1986.506.12 (Metropolitan Museum of Art). <i>Access</i> :	Ca. the 5 <sup>th</sup> –6 <sup>th</sup> century A.D., i.e. the Hunnic period.	<i>Nava</i> , <i>Αρδοχφο</i> .	Halo, benediction gesture, sitting on a lion, cornucopia.

<sup>41</sup> GRIFFITHS 2014.

<sup>42</sup> GIPPERT 2004.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

	<a href="https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/38231">https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/38231</a>			
	Hephtalite Toramana II copper drachm. 19mm; 6.84gm. <i>Obverse:</i> the Kuṣāṇa-style king standing facing slightly left, sacrificing over the firealtar and holding the trident, the Brāhmī legend: [śrī toramāṇa]. <i>Reverse:</i> the goddess sitting on a lion in the pose of <i>lalitasana</i> (with the right leg folded under and the left leg hanging down), holding the diadem in her right hand and the cornucopia-like long-stemmed lotus in her left hand.	Ca. the 6 <sup>th</sup> century A.D.	Νάνα, Αρδοχβο	Sitting on a lion, holding a lotus stem and royal diadem.
	Copper drachm minted by Jayasimha from the Lohara dynasty in Kashmir. 19mm; 5.84gm. <i>Obverse:</i> the Kuṣāṇa-style king standing facing slightly left, sacrificing over the fire altar and holding the trident, the Śāradā legend: <i>deva</i> . <i>Reverse:</i> the goddess sitting in the pose of <i>lalitasana</i> , holding the diadem in her right hand and the cornucopia-like long-stemmed lotus in her left hand, the Śāradā legend: <i>jaya</i> left and <i>simha</i> right.	Ca. 1125–1155 A.D.	Νάνα, Αρδοχβο.	Holding a lotus stem and royal diadem.

Thus, the earliest female Śaiva-like images of the Kuṣāṇa period are the same evidence of an appropriate syncretic cult of the Mazdean Νάνα / Αρδοχβο and the Buddhist Hārītī. Only since the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. this cult has acquired some features of a phenomenon independent



of Buddhism and Mazdaism, although some Buddhist features continued to persist, especially in isolated communities such as Buddhist communities of Indonesia and the Maldives.

### 7. Earliest Figurines of *Mātṛkās* in the Historic Period of India

In the pre-historic period, the Indo-Aryans did not use female figurines made of terracotta, sandstone, schist, or other materials in their religious rituals. However, with the spread of Buddhism, the production of these figurines increased significantly. Initially, these figures were abstract, as shown in the first picture of Table 7, lacking identifiable attributes of any deity. These early sculptures, reminiscent of Bronze-Age Indus Valley Civilization, depict abstract female forms only with prominent sexual characteristics and without other details. The existence of these abstract images indicates continuity of the Neolithic tradition, albeit with modifications and after a very long interval. Over time, these figurines evolved into more realistic representations, clearly depicting specific attributes such as lions, thrones, cornucopias, children, pregnancy, and nudity, see Tables 5, 6, 7. For instance, in Tanesara (Rajasthan), we encounter the Tyche manifestation depicted in lifelike figurines crafted from schist, dating back to the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. These include: (i) a *mātṛkā* with a child or children, and (ii) a pregnant *mātṛkā*.

The evolution of Tantra from the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. led to a significant increase in the number of attributes associated with female deities in textual descriptions and sculptures. Most likely, many of these attributes have Hellenistic roots. In any case, in the North of India, images of Hellenistic goddesses first appear (for example, on Greco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek coins), such as Athena (Ἀθηνῆ), Thyche and Cybele, and much later they gradually transform into *mātṛkās* (mother goddesses of Buddhism and Tantrism). Some attributes are very clearly visible in archaeological material in their transformation: *vajra* of Athena, lion of Cybele, many arms of Hekate, cornucopia and/or children of Tyche, etc.

But the Hellenistic roots of some attributes of mother goddesses are even better traced in tantric texts. For instance, we can trace the boar or pig as a main attribute of *Mārīcī* (*Mólīzhǐ*, 摩里止), whose earliest known mention is in a Chinese translation from the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.: *Mahāmāyūrī-vidyārājñī-sūtra*; *Kǒngquè wángzhòu jīng* (孔雀王呪經), T.984, XIX: 446–459. There she is mentioned as follows: (1) *Mólīzhǐ yèchā* (*liáng yán guāngmíng*) [摩里止夜叉 (梁言光明)] “*Mārīci-yakṣa*, called the Glorious by the Liang” (T. 984, XIX: 451b10); (2) *dà luóshānǚ* [大羅刹女] ... *Mólīzhǐ* [摩里止] “the great female demon (*mahārākṣasī*)... *Mārīci*” (T. 984, XIX: 453c15–18), where she is mentioned among many other demonesses. Thus, she is described as both a male (*yakṣa*) and a female demon (*rākṣasī*) concurrently. She is worshipped as the mother of demons with a *dhāraṇī* in the *Mārīcīdhāraṇīsūtra*; *Mólī zhī tiān tuólúoní zhòu jīng*

(摩利支天陀羅尼咒經), T.1256, XXI: 261b–262a. In this text, the primary attributes associated with her are the sun and the moon, much like with *Naxva*:<sup>44</sup>

有天名摩利支天。常行日月  
前。彼摩利支天。無人能見無人能捉。

*Yǒu tiān míng Mólìzhī tiān. Chángxíng rì yuè qián. Bǐ Mólìzhī tiān. Wúrén néngjiàn wúrén néng zhuō* (T.1256, XXI: 261b29).

There is a deity named *Mārīcī*. She constantly moves ahead of the sun and the moon. This *Mārīcī* deity cannot be seen or caught by anyone.

Boars or pigs serve as her mounts, which is another significant aspect of her iconography:

*tadanantram oṃ mām iti mantram uccārayann ātmānaṃ  
caityagarbhashāṃ*

*saptaśūkarathārūḍhāṃ mārīcīṃ vibhāvayet* (*Sādhanamālā* 137)

Uttering the mantra “*oṃ mām*” and visualizing oneself within the womb of the temple, one should visualize *Mārīcī* riding a chariot drawn by seven pigs.



The Hindu goddess *Vārāhī*, bearing the head of a wild boar, cannot be identified with *Mārīcī*. First, *Vārāhī* represents the feminine energy (*śakti*) of *Varāha*, while *Mārīcī* stands as an independent deity, unrelated to *Varāha*’s exploits. Second, unlike *Varāha/Vārāhī* who are directly associated with boars, *Mārīcī* is not identified with the pig or boar; it merely serves as her riding animal. Third, *Vārāhī* and *Mārīcī* emerged around the same time if *Mārīcī* was not earlier. Notably, depictions of *Vārāhī* (as seen in the 3<sup>rd</sup> image of Table 7) date back to no earlier than the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D., a time when *Mārīcī* most certainly existed as a subject of *dhāraṇīs*.




However, there is a Hellenistic deity, *Baubo* (Βαυβώ), who is also associated as *Mārīcī* with riding a pig (2<sup>nd</sup> picture in Table 7), and she is best suited to be the prototype for *Mārīcī*. Perhaps the name ‘*Baubo*’ originated from the word ‘dildo’ (βαυβών). *Baubo* is known as the “indecent goddess” (*dea impudica*). She is commonly portrayed naked, riding a pig and occasionally shown as pregnant. She might also be depicted in a birthing position, with her legs widely spread and holding a dildo (4<sup>th</sup> picture in Table 7). An aspect of her worship involves presenting terracotta figures to the goddess as a form of her visualization in the meaning of meditation. Therefore, in Egypt of the Hellenistic and Roman periods, many terracotta images of *Baubo* are found. We lack details except that it was a mystical ritual associated with *Demeter* (Δημήτηρ) and *Persephone* (Περσεφόνη). *Baubo* is the active or devotee form of *Demeter*, the goddess of fertility. Offerings of terracotta were also made to *Demeter*, where she was depicted with a piglet or boar. Such images of *Demeter* have been found from the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. onwards, for example, see the terracotta figurine of *Demeter*

<sup>44</sup> SCHUMANN AND SAZONOV 2021a.

with pig, dated to 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., from Athens (Cleveland Museum of Art, 1926.521). The pig (boar) is therefore the chief attribute of both Demeter and her form represented as Baubo. As we see, this pig could subsequently become an attribute of Mārīcī, one of the goddesses of fertility in Buddhism along with Hārītī and Umā.

**Table 7.** Images of mother goddesses, excavated in Egypt and India.

Image	Description	Date	Identification	Attributes
	<p>Abstract female figurine recalling the figurines of Bronze-Age Indus Valley cultures. Charsadda Shaikhan Dheri, Gandhāra, Pakistan. <i>Medium:</i> terracotta. <i>Dimensions:</i> H. 7.9 cm. <i>Museum number:</i> IS.20B-1951 (V&amp;A South Kensington). <i>Access:</i> <a href="https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O181906/sculpture-unknown/">https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O181906/sculpture-unknown/</a></p>	<p>2<sup>nd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.</p>	<p>Mother goddess.</p>	<p>Female sex characteristics: breast and vulva.</p>
	<p>The woman is portrayed as a naked figure seated on the pig's back. Her hair is arranged in a central topknot, and she wears a tall kiste on her head, covered by a veil that drapes down to the pig's side. She holds the kiste with her right hand, while her left hand, obscured by the veil, grasps a stele placed at her left side. Fayum, Egypt. <i>Medium:</i> terracotta. <i>Dimensions:</i> H. 13.80 cm. <i>Museum number:</i> 1926,0930.48 (British Museum). <i>Access:</i> <a href="https://www.bmimages.com/preview.asp?image=01613393130&amp;badge=true&amp;tc=true">https://www.bmimages.com/preview.asp?image=01613393130&amp;badge=true&amp;tc=true</a></p>	<p>1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.</p>	<p>Baubo (Βαυβώ), the nurse or the devotee form of Demeter.</p>	<p>Pig or boar, nudity.</p>

	<p>Naked torso of a woman with flowing hair and the face of a boar. Gupta dynasty, Uttar Pradesh, India. <i>Medium:</i> sandstone. <i>Dimensions:</i> H. 24 cm, D. 12 cm, W. 24.5 cm. <i>Museum number:</i> IS.144-1999 (V&amp;A South Kensington). <i>Access:</i> <a href="https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O19072/sculpture-figure-unknown/">https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O19072/sculpture-figure-unknown/</a></p>	<p>5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.</p>	<p>Vārāhī.</p>	<p>Boar face, nudity.</p>
	<p>The female figure is portrayed nude, except for an ornate garland in her hair, squatting with legs spread and knees bent. She touches her genitals with her right hand and holds an oversized dildo (ἄλιςβος or βαυβών) in her left hand. Egypt. <i>Medium:</i> terracotta. <i>Dimensions:</i> H. 8.509 cm. Private collection. <i>Access:</i> <a href="https://www.anticstore.art/104935P">https://www.anticstore.art/104935P</a></p>	<p>1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.</p>	<p>Baubo (Βαυβώ), the nurse or the devotee form of Demeter.</p>	<p>Birthing posture, nudity, ornate garland in her hair, dildo.</p>
	<p>The woman is depicted in a birthing posture without a swollen belly, suggesting the image symbolizes sexual fertility rather than childbirth. Her head is replaced by a lotus flower. Seoni district, Madhya Pradesh, India. <i>Medium:</i> sandstone. <i>Dimensions:</i> H. 10.3 cm, W. 10.3 cm. <i>Museum number:</i> 2000.284.13 (Metropolitan Museum). <i>Access:</i> <a href="https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/38492">https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/38492</a></p>	<p>Ca. 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.</p>	<p>Lajjā Gaurī</p>	<p>Birthing posture, nudity, ornate garland, lotus-headed.</p>

Another possible influence of Hellenism on the formation of fertility cults during the Buddhist era of India is seen in the choice of vehicle for Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth, fortune, and power. She is traditionally associated with an owl (*ulūka*) as her *vāhana*, or

mount. Originally, *ulūka* was a demon (*yakṣa*) and an adversary of *Garuḍa*, whom he was defeated by, as depicted in the *Mahābhārata*, *Ādi Parva* 32. So, initially, he was portrayed as a rather negative character. But he becomes the mount of *Lakṣmī*, embodying her unique energy as wisdom and benevolence. This shift from a negative to a positive portrayal is remarkable, possibly indicating the adoption of this attribute of *Lakṣmī* from an external influence. Hence, we can assume that the owl emerged as the primary symbol of *Lakṣmī* rather in connection with the Hellenistic mythological tradition. The point is that the owl symbolized wisdom and kindness – traits traditionally associated with *Athena* in Greek mythology. *Athena* (or her owl) was prominently featured on coins issued by Hellenistic rulers in Northern India. On *Kuṣāṇa* coins, she appeared as Ρἰῑτι, Ρἰῑτο (*Riṣti*, *Riṣto*). To sum up, given the popularity of the image of *Athena* in Northern India, such an influence on *Lakṣmī* is highly probable.

In Buddhism and then Tantrism, the *mātṛkās* (*Hārīti*, *Umā*, *Mārīcī* and others) were understood as demoneses, who then converted to Buddhism under the impression of *Buddha*'s preaching and therefore *dhāraṇī* is effective to them. They all actually represent a fertility cult. Figurines of *mātṛkās* appear initially only in Buddhist temples. This suggests that Buddhism spread as a fairly tolerant religion towards non-Indo-Aryans, which allowed non-Indo-Aryan worship of fertility goddesses to be included in Buddhist ritual. Most likely, there were several waves of the spread of this worship. Firstly, it was from the Iranian peoples. Secondly, it was from Egypt. It should be noted that from the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. until the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D., enormous trade was carried out between Egypt and the West of India, which also stimulated cultural exchange. For example, in Upper Egypt there was an influential Buddhist community.<sup>45</sup> It was precisely the cult of fertility that united different peoples. For example, iconographic modifications of the image of *Baubo* from Egypt could have influenced not only *Mārīcī*, but also *Lajjā Gaurī* (please compare the fourth and fifth images of Table 7).

## 8. Author's Contributions

It is a continuation of author's already published works<sup>46</sup>, but some new general conclusions are provided based on the further textual analysis and some additional archaeological data.

## 9. Conclusions

From the point of view of archaeology and textology, we cannot date Śaivism earlier than to the early 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The matter is that all the Śaiva-like images represent a syncretic

<sup>45</sup> SCHUMANN 2022.

<sup>46</sup> SCHUMANN AND ARIF 2021, SCHUMANN AND SAZONOV 2021a, 2021b.

Mazdean-Buddhist cult of the divine couple of  $\text{N}\alpha\nu\alpha$  /  $\text{A}\rho\delta\omicron\chi\phi\omicron$  /  $\text{H}\bar{a}\text{r}\bar{i}\bar{t}\bar{i}$  and  $\text{O}\eta\phi\omicron$  /  $\text{W}\bar{e}\check{s}\text{p}\text{a}\text{r}\text{k}\text{a}\text{r}$  /  $\text{M}\text{a}\text{h}\bar{e}\check{s}\text{v}\text{a}\text{r}\text{a}$ . This cult began to separate from Buddhism and the Indo-Scythian version of Mazdism only after the fall of the Kuṣāṇa and Kūṣānśāh dynasties at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

Meanwhile, the pre-Śaivism era in India exhibits multiple layers that might have left residual elements in the early development of Śaivism starting from the early 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D., when the first Śaivist texts were composed:

- Neolithic cults of the mother goddess, starting from Pre-Pottery Neolithic A, flourished in the Indus Valley Civilization as well as other Bronze Age cultures.
- Worship of Inanna (Nanāya), the goddess of fertility, on par with Indo-Iranian gods in the Mittani state: Indra, the Mitra-gods, the Varuna-gods, the Nasatya-gods.
- Syncretic cult of the Indo-Scythian Mazdean  $\text{O}\eta\phi\omicron$  /  $\text{W}\bar{e}\check{s}\text{p}\text{a}\text{r}\text{k}\text{a}\text{r}$  /  $\text{B}\omicron\rho\zeta\alpha\omicron\nu\delta\omicron$   $\text{I}\alpha\zeta\alpha\delta\omicron$  / *bwrz'wndy yzdty* and the Buddhist Maheśvara.
- Syncretic cult of the Indo-Scythian Mazdean  $\text{N}\alpha\nu\alpha$  /  $\text{A}\rho\delta\omicron\chi\phi\omicron$  and the Buddhist  $\text{H}\bar{a}\text{r}\bar{i}\bar{t}\bar{i}$  /  $\text{U}\bar{m}\bar{a}$ .
- Syncretic fertility cults of various demonesses (such as  $\text{H}\bar{a}\text{r}\bar{i}\bar{t}\bar{i}$ ,  $\text{U}\bar{m}\bar{a}$ ,  $\text{M}\bar{a}\bar{r}\bar{i}\bar{c}\bar{i}$ , etc.) in Buddhism using the iconography of Hellenistic goddesses (such as Athena, Tyche, Cybele, Hekate, Baubo, Demeter, etc.).

Thus, pre-Śaivism reveals a remarkable level of cultural diffusion through the assimilation of fertility cults by the Indo-Aryans. These cults exhibited a profound multicultural essence, serving to forge a shared religious domain within the broader Eurasian world-system. This cultural amalgamation underscores the intricate interplay of beliefs and practices among diverse communities, contributing to the rich tapestry of religious expression across the region within the framework of fertility worship.

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