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Research Article

Analysis of the Rabatak Inscription and Its Significance for Understanding the History and Culture of the Kushan Period

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ABSTRACT

The Rabatak Inscription is one of the most important surviving written documents from the Kushan period. It was discovered in 1993 CE in the Kafir Qala area, Rabatak village, in the northwestern part of Baghlan Province, Afghanistan. The inscription is written in the Bactrian language using an angular Greek script and is attributed to Kanishka I, the great Kushan emperor. The aim of this study is to analyze and explain the historical, political, linguistic, religious, and administrative significance of the Rabatak Inscription and to examine its role in understanding the governmental structure and cultural characteristics of the Kushan period. The research employs a descriptive-analytical method based on library sources, archaeological studies, the inscriptional text, and previous research on the language and history of the Kushans. The findings demonstrate that, in addition to expressing Kanishka's political legitimacy and authority, the Rabatak Inscription provides valuable information about the geographical extent of the Kushan Empire and its connections with important regions of northern India. Furthermore, the use of the Bactrian language in the Greek script reflects the coexistence and interaction of indigenous and Greco-Bactrian traditions and indicates the strengthened position of Bactrian as an official language within the Kushan state structure. The list of deities and religious practices mentioned in the inscription also reveals the diversity and coexistence of Aryan, Bactrian, and Indian religious beliefs. Moreover, references to the construction of a temple, the creation of statues of kings and deities, offerings, and the activities of local officials demonstrate the close relationship between religious, administrative, and royal institutions. Overall, the Rabatak Inscription constitutes a multidimensional source for reconstructing the political, linguistic, religious, and cultural history of the Kushan Empire and for understanding cultural interactions among Afghanistan, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent.

1. Introduction

The Kushan period is regarded as one of the most significant historical periods in the history of Afghanistan and Central Asia, as extensive regions of Central Asia, Afghanistan, and the northern Indian subcontinent were brought together within a broad political framework during this period. This political expansion created the conditions for diverse cultural, linguistic, religious, and economic interactions among different communities. Therefore, the study of written documents and archaeological remains from this period plays a fundamental role in understanding the political, social, and cultural structures of the Kushan world. Among the surviving documents of this period, the Rabatak Inscription holds a particularly important position because its contents provide valuable information concerning the reign of Kanishka I, the political territory of the Kushans, religious beliefs, administrative structures,

and the linguistic situation of the period.

The Rabatak Inscription was discovered in 1993 CE in the Kafir Qala area, Rabatak village, in northwestern Baghlan Province, near the border with Samangan. The inscription was carved on a limestone slab measuring approximately 90 × 50 centimeters and consists of 23 lines written in the Bactrian language using an angular Greek script. Its proximity to the archaeological site of Surkh Kotal further enhances its importance for studies of the cultural and historical geography of the Kushan period.

The significance of this study derives from the fact that the Rabatak Inscription is not merely a historical text but a multidimensional source for understanding the political, linguistic, religious, and cultural developments of the Kushan period. On the one hand, the inscription provides information about Kanishka, earlier Kushan rulers, and the structure of political authority; on the other hand, its references to various regions of northern India,

including Pataliputra, Kausambi, and Srikantha, provide an important picture of the geographical extent of Kushan political influence and its connections with the Indian subcontinent.

Given the multidimensional significance of the Rabatak Inscription, the principal research question of this study is: **What information does the Rabatak Inscription provide regarding the political, linguistic, religious, and administrative structure of the Kushan Empire, particularly during the reign of Kanishka I?** In relation to the main question, the following subsidiary questions are addressed:

1. What role does the Rabatak Inscription play in understanding the geographical extent and political structure of the Kushan state?
2. What does the use of the Bactrian language in the Greek script reveal about linguistic developments and cultural interactions during the Kushan period?
3. What picture of the diversity and coexistence of religious beliefs during the Kushan period is reflected in the names of deities and religious practices mentioned in the inscription?
4. What evidence does the Rabatak Inscription provide concerning the administrative structure and the relationship between royal authority, local officials, and religious institutions?

Accordingly, this study seeks to analyze the content of the Rabatak Inscription and examine its various dimensions in order to provide a coherent understanding of the significance of this document for the study of Kushan history and civilization. It further demonstrates how the inscription reflects interactions among Aryan, Greco-Bactrian, and Indian traditions within the territories of the Kushan Empire.

2. The Linguistic Significance of the Rabatak Inscription

The Rabatak Inscription, discovered in 1993 CE in the Kafir Qala area of Baghlan Province, Afghanistan, holds a special position not only from historical and political perspectives but also as an important document in linguistic studies. Written in Bactrian, one of the Eastern Middle Iranian languages, and using an angular Greek script, the inscription represents one of the earliest known examples of the formal use of Bactrian in governmental and religious documents during the Kushan period (first to third centuries CE). This characteristic makes the Rabatak Inscription an exceptional source for examining linguistic developments, cultural interactions, and the strengthening of Iranian linguistic identity in Central Asia. The linguistic significance of the inscription can be examined from several perspectives.

The Bactrian Language and Its Position within the Indo-European Language Family

The Bactrian language used in the Rabatak Inscription is one of the Eastern Middle Iranian languages that was spoken in

the northeastern regions of ancient Ariana, particularly in Bactria (present-day Balkh) and its surrounding areas. The Middle Iranian languages, which can broadly be divided into eastern and western groups, represent an intermediate stage between the ancient Iranian languages, such as Avestan and Old Persian, and the modern Iranian languages, including Dari, Pashto, and Kurdish. As an eastern Iranian language, Bactrian has lexical and grammatical connections with languages such as Sogdian, Khwarezmian, and Khotanese, while also preserving its own distinctive characteristics.

The Rabatak Inscription, with its relatively extensive text of 23 lines in Bactrian, provides an important basis for the study of the vocabulary, grammatical structures, and phonological characteristics of the language. For example, the vocabulary used in the inscription, including the names of deities such as Ahura Mazda, Mithra, and Nana, as well as political and religious terminology, demonstrates the lexical richness of Bactrian and its interaction with ancient Iranian languages and, in some respects, non-Iranian languages such as Greek. The inscription also provides evidence for phonological developments within the Middle Iranian languages, including changes in consonantal and vocalic systems compared with earlier Iranian languages.

The Transition from Greek Script and Language to Bactrian

One of the most prominent features of the Rabatak Inscription is the use of an angular Greek script to write the Bactrian language. This script, which became widespread in Central Asia following the conquests of Alexander the Great in the fourth century BCE, continued to be used during the Kushan period as a means of recording official and governmental documents. However, the choice of Bactrian rather than Greek as the language of the inscription indicates an important stage in linguistic and cultural transformation, in which the Kushans increasingly employed a local Iranian language for official expression.

This transition can be examined within a broader historical context. Following approximately two centuries of Macedonian and Greco-Bactrian domination in Central Asia, Greek had become established as a language of administration and elite culture in the region. The emergence of the Kushans, whose origins were connected with Central Asian peoples, provided a context for the increased use and development of local languages such as Bactrian. The Rabatak Inscription, through its use of Bactrian in an official royal text, represents important evidence for this linguistic development and reflects the cultural and political environment of the Kushan Empire. It may therefore be regarded as a key document for studying processes of cultural localization within the multicultural empires of antiquity.

Linguistic Comparison with Other Kushan Documents

The Rabatak Inscription, together with the Surkh Kotal Inscription and Kushan coins, constitutes one of the relatively limited bodies of written evidence in Bactrian surviving from the Kushan period. A linguistic comparison of these sources demonstrates the important position that Bactrian occupied in

the administrative and official sphere of the Kushan state. For example, the Surkh Kotal Inscription, generally associated with the reign of Kanishka I, was also written in Bactrian using the Greek script. However, the Rabatak Inscription, because of its greater textual length and broader range of subjects—including references to deities, temples, rulers, and territories—provides more extensive evidence for the vocabulary and grammatical structures of Bactrian.

One of the notable linguistic features of the Rabatak Inscription is the presence of relatively complex grammatical structures compared with shorter Kushan texts, such as inscriptions on coins. These structures include compound sentences, the use of verbs in different grammatical forms, and the employment of pronouns and adjectives to express political and religious concepts with greater precision. Such characteristics demonstrate the development of Bactrian as a language capable of expressing relatively complex official and religious discourse.

Because of its combination of the Greek script and Bactrian language, the Rabatak Inscription is a key source for examining linguistic and cultural interactions in ancient Central Asia. The Kushan Empire, extending from Central Asia to northern India, provided a setting for the coexistence of diverse languages and cultural traditions, including Iranian, Greek, Indian, and Buddhist traditions. The inscription demonstrates how the Kushans employed a Greek cultural instrument—namely, the script—to express their own linguistic and political-cultural identity in Bactrian. This phenomenon may be described as a form of “cultural hybridization”*, in which indigenous and external elements interacted and contributed to the formation of new cultural configurations.

Furthermore, the Rabatak Inscription provides evidence for linguistic interaction between Bactrian and other languages, including Sanskrit and Prakrit. Certain religious terms and cultural references associated with the religious traditions of the Indian subcontinent indicate the broader cultural contacts between the Kushan territories and northern India. These linguistic interactions make the Rabatak Inscription a valuable source for studying the history of Iranian languages within the context of intercultural contact and exchange.

3. Line-by-Line Analysis of the Rabatak Inscription

The Rabatak Inscription, discovered in 1993 in the Kafir Qala area, Rabatak village, Baghlan Province, Afghanistan, is one of the most important ancient documents associated with the Kushan period (first to third centuries CE). The inscription,

* **Cultural hybridization** is a dynamic process through which traditional and modern elements from different cultural centers and peripheries interact and combine to create new forms of culture. This phenomenon produces a mixed cultural configuration that reflects the interaction of different and overlapping forces. This perspective demonstrates that cultures are not fixed or entirely homogeneous, but are produced through interaction and mutual influence (Canelini, 2005, p. 3).

carved on a limestone slab measuring approximately 90 × 50 centimeters, is written in Bactrian, an Eastern Middle Iranian language, using an angular Greek script. It consists of 23 lines and is attributed to Kanishka I, one of the most prominent rulers of the Kushan Empire (Sims-Williams & Cribb, 1996, p. 75). The document provides valuable information concerning the political, religious, and linguistic structures of the Kushan Empire and constitutes an important source for the study of linguistic developments and cultural interactions in ancient Central Asia. In this article, each line of the Rabatak Inscription is analyzed individually, with particular attention to its historical, linguistic, religious, and archaeological dimensions. The analysis is based on authoritative sources, particularly the studies of prominent linguists and archaeologists.

Line-by-Line Analysis of the Rabatak Inscription

Line 1

Transcription:

[...] no bōgo storgo kanēške košan raštog lādeigo xoazaoargo bag[ē]-

Transliteration:

nō bōgō stōrgō Kanēškē Košan rāštōg lādēg xwāzāwargō bagē

Translation:

“[...] the great savior, Kanishka the Kushan, the righteous, the just, the supreme ruler, lord of the deities...”

Line 2

Transcription:

znogo kidi aso Nana odo aso oispoan mi bagano i šaodano abordo kidi iōg xšono

Transliteration:

eznōgō kidī āso Nānā ud āso wispān mi bagān ī šāōdanō ābordō kidī ēwak xšōnō

Translation:

“The venerable and exalted one, who received kingship from Nana and from all the deities, the one who brought the first year...”

Line 3

Transcription:

nobasto s(a)gōndi bagano sindado otēia i iōnaggo oaso ozoasto tadēia aria

Transliteration:

nōbastō sagōndī bagānō sindādō utēia ī iōnangō wāz uzwāstō tadē Aria

Translation:

“He began [this undertaking]; when the deities were pleased, he issued it in the Greek language and then translated it into the Aryan [Bactrian] language.”

Line 4

Transcription:

ōstado abo iōg xšon(o) abo [i] iundo froagdazo abo šatriagge šaore agita koo-

Transliteration:

ōstādō ābō īōg xšōnō ābō ī iundō fraydāzō ābō šātriagē šāōrē
agītā kū-

Translation:

“In the first year, this [decree] had been proclaimed in India,
throughout the entire realm of the Kshatriyas, as far as...”

Line 5

Transcription:

adēano odo i oa(s)po odo [i zagēdo] odo i kōz(amb)o odo i
pālabotro oidra ada abo i zirit-

Transliteration:

adēānō udō ī wāspō udō ī zagēdō udō ī kōzambō udō ī
pālabōtrō widrā ādā ābō ī zirit-

Translation:

“Among them were the cities of Wasp, Saketa, Kausambi, and
Pataliputra, extending as far as the city of Srikantha...”

Line 6

Transcription:

ambo sidēiano probāo odo mandarsi zaorano abo i sindo
ōstado otē(i)a arougo

Transliteration:

ambō sidēānō probāō udō mandarsī zaōrānō ābō ī sindō ōstādō
otēiā ārōgō

Translation:

“And all the rulers and other important persons; he brought all
of this together according to his own will, and he
incorporated...”

Line 7

Transcription:

iundo (abo) i sindo ōstado tadi šai kanēške abo šafaro
karalraggo fromado

Transliteration:

yundō (ābō) ī sindō ōstādō tadi šāy Kanēške ābō šāfarō
karalraggō frōmādō

Translation:

“...all of India according to his own will. Then King Kanishka
commanded Shafar, the *karalrango* [official/overseer]...”

Line 8

Transcription:

(abeinao) bagolanggo kirdi sidi b[...] abo rizdi abo ma kadge
raga fareimoano b-

Transliteration:

(ābēnāō) bagōlangō kirdī sīdī b[...] ābō rizdī ābō mā kadge
rāgā fareīmōānō b-

Translation:

“...to construct a temple called B[...] within the royal palace
precinct, for this purpose...”

Line 9

Transcription:

(aga)no kidi maro kirdan(e) i ma[...]o[f]arro omma ooēldi ia
āmsa Nana odo ia ām-

Transliteration:

(aganō) kidī māro kirdanē ī mā[...]ō[f]arrō ōmā ūēldī yā āmsā
Nānā udō yā ām-

Translation:

“...the deities whose worship [was established] in this glorious
sanctuary, namely the aforementioned Nana and...”

Line 10

Transcription:

sa omma Aouromozdo mozdōō(ā)no srošardo Narasao Mihr
otēia oudoa-

Transliteration:

sā ōmā Aurōmozdo Mozdōānō Srošardo Narasāō Mīhr otēiā
ūdōā-

Translation:

“...and all [the people] swore by Aurōmozdo [Ahura Mazda],
the Mazdaean [deity], Srošardo [Sraoša], Narasa, and Mihr
[Mithra], and...”

Line 11

Transcription:

no pidōgirbo fromado kirdi eimoano bagano kidi maska
nibixtigendi otēia

Transliteration:

nō pidōgīrbō fromādō kirdī ēimānō bagānō kidī maskā
nibīkhtīgandī otēiā

Translation:

“He commanded that images/statues of those same deities be
made, namely of the deities who had been mentioned above,
and...”

Line 12

Transcription:

fromado abeimoano šaonano kirdi abo kozoūlo Kadfiso šao abo
i fr-

Transliteration:

fromādō abīmānō šāōnānō kirdī abō kozūlō Kadfīsō šāō abō ī
fr-

Translation:

“He commanded that images of the following kings be made:
of King Kujula Kadphises...”

Line 13

Transcription:

oniago odo abo ooēmo (takto) šao abo i niago odo abo ooēmo
Kadfiso šao abo

Transliteration:

ōniagō udō abō ūēmō (taktō) šāō abō ī niagō udō abō ūēmō
Kadfīsō šāō abō

Translation:

“...his great-grandfather, and of King Vima Taktu, his grandfather, and of King Vima Kadphises...”

Line 14

Transcription:

(i) pido odo abo i xobie abo kanēško šao ta sagōndi šaonano šao i bagopoo-

Transliteration:

(i) pīdō udō abō ī xobī abō Kanēškō šāo tā sagōndī šāōnānō šāō ī bagōpū-

Translation:

“...his father, and for himself, King Kanishka. Then, just as the *Bagopouro* [divine son/son of the deity]...”

Line 15

Transcription:

rakāne [...] fromado kirdi tadi šafare karalraggo kirdo eio bagolanggo

Transliteration:

rakāne [...] fromādō kirdī tadī šafārē karalraggō kirdō ēyō bagōlanggō

Translation:

“...had commanded the gods [...] Shafar, the *karalrango*, constructed this temple.”

Line 16

Transcription:

[...]o karalraggo odo šafaro karalraggo odo nokonzoko i aštō-

Transliteration:

[...]ō karalraggō udō šafārō karalraggō udō nokonzōkō ī aštō-

Translation:

“[...] the *karalrango*, and Shafar the *karalrango*, and Nokonzoko, the *aštō*- [possibly a religious or administrative official]...”

Line 17

Transcription:

a[lgo kir]do ia fromano eimidba bage kidi maro nibixtigendi tadano abo šaon-

Transliteration:

algu kirdō īā fromānō eimidbā bagē kidī maro nibikhtigendī tadānō abō šāōn-

Translation:

“...carried out the king’s command. Concerning the deities who were inscribed here, may they protect...”

Line 18

Transcription:

ano šao abo kanēške košāno abo iaōēdani zorrigi lrou(g)o aggad...go oanind-

Transliteration:

ānō šāō abō Kanēškē Košānō abō yāwēdānī zōrrīgī lrū(g)ō aggad...gō ānind-

Translation:

“...the king, Kanishka the Kushan, forever, in good health, prosperity, and victory...”

Line 19

Transcription:

o p[...]i(n)di odo...i ba(g)epooro aso iōgo xšono abo io (a) xšono iundo arougo n-

Transliteration:

ō p[...]indī udō...ī bāgēpōrō asō iōgō xšōnō abō īō (a) xšōnō iundō ārōgō n-

Translation:

“...and may the son of the deity rule over all India, from the first year to the thousandth year.”

Line 20

Transcription:

ara[...]i bagolanggo abo iōgo xšono aspado tadi abo i arēmeso xšono aggar[...]

Transliteration:

ārā[...]ī bāgolanggō abō iōgō xšōnō aspādō tadī abō ī arēmīsō xšōnō aggar[...]

Translation:

“This temple was founded in the first year; then, in the third year, it was completed...”

Line 21

Transcription:

[]xa[...] pido šao fromana abissi parēna lado abissi rēdge lado abiss[...]

Transliteration:

[...]xā[...] pīdō šāō frōmānā abissī parēnā lādō abissī rēdgē lādō abiss[...]

Translation:

“According to the command of the king, numerous ceremonies were also performed; many attendants/servants were also dedicated, and many [other offerings/services]...”

Line 22

Transcription:

[...]šai mad...a (abo) bagano lado odo fareimoano axodano [si]dī abo mi bage lado

Transliteration:

[...]šāī mad[...]ā (abō) bāgānō lādō udō fareimōānō axōdānō [sīdī] abō mī bāgē lādō

Translation:

“...the king presented an endowment/property to the deities, and for this purpose it was given to the deities...”

Line 23

Transcription:

[...] atid(ē)os

Transliteration:

[...] atidēos

Translation:

"[...] The text is incomplete."

Complete Translation of the Rabatak Inscription

1. "[...] the great savior, Kanishka the Kushan, the righteous, the just, the supreme ruler, lord of the deities..."
2. "The venerable and exalted one, who received kingship from Nana and from all the deities, the one who [began] the first year..."
3. "He initiated it; when the deities were pleased, he issued it in the Greek language and then translated it into the Aryan [Bactrian] language."
4. "In the first year, this decree was proclaimed in India, throughout the entire realm of the Kshatriyas, as far as..."
5. "Among them were the cities of Wasp, Saketa, Kausambi, and Pataliputra, extending as far as the city of Srikantha..."
6. "And to all the rulers and other important persons, he incorporated all of it according to his own will, and he incorporated..."
7. "All of India according to his own will. Then King Kanishka commanded Shafar, the *karalrango* [official/overseer]..."
8. "To construct a temple called B[...] in the precinct of the royal palace, for this purpose..."
9. "For the deities whose worship [was established] in this glorious sanctuary, namely the aforementioned Nana and..."
10. "And all [the people] swore by Aurōmozdo [Ahura Mazda], Mazda, Srošardo [Sraoša], Narasa, and Mihr [Mithra], and..."
11. "He commanded that images/statues of those same deities be made, namely of the deities mentioned above..."
12. "He commanded that images of these kings also be made: of King Kujula Kadphises..."
13. "His great-grandfather, and of King Vima Taktu, his grandfather, and of King Vima Kadphises..."
14. "His father, and for himself, King Kanishka. Then, just as the emperor, the *Bagopouro* [divine son/son of the deity]..."
15. "...had commanded that it be carried out, Shafar, the *karalrango* [official/overseer] of this temple, constructed it."
16. "Then [...] the *karalrango*, Shafar the *karalrango*, and Nokonzoko, the *aštō-* [possibly a religious or administrative official]..."
17. "Carried out the king's command. Concerning the deities who were inscribed here, may they protect..."
18. "The emperor, Kanishka the Kushan, forever, in good health, prosperity, and victory..."
19. "And may the son of the deity rule over all India, from the first year to the thousandth year."

20. "This temple was founded in the first year; then, in the third year, it was completed."

21. "According to the king's command, many ceremonies were also performed; many attendants/servants were dedicated, and many other [offerings and services were provided]..."

22. "The king presented an endowment/property to the deities, and for this purpose it was given to the deities..."

23. "[...] The text is incomplete."

4. General Analysis of the Rabatak Inscription

The opening line of the inscription introduces Kanishka I as the "great savior," *baga* (god/deity), and the "supreme ruler." The term *baga*, meaning a "high-ranking or exalted person" in ancient and Middle Iranian languages, is used here to emphasize the religious legitimacy of the king (Boyce, 1977, p. 89). The term has its roots in Iranian religious traditions and is also attested in Avestan texts and Old Persian inscriptions. The epithets "righteous" and "just" correspond to the Zoroastrian concept of *asha* (*arta*), meaning truth, order, and justice, and indicate a connection between Kushan kingship and Iranian religious values. The title "supreme ruler" (*autokrator*) in Greek likewise reflects the influence of the Greco-Bactrian cultural tradition, in which kings were represented as unrivaled sovereigns. The combination of Iranian and Greek elements in the portrayal of Kanishka demonstrates the multicultural character of Kushan political ideology, presenting the king as both a religiously legitimate and just ruler (Sims-Williams, 1989, p. 32).

The following line refers to the legitimacy of Kanishka's kingship through Nana, a Mesopotamian-Bactrian goddess. Nana occupied an important position in Bactrian religious culture and was associated with divine protection and royal authority; she also appears prominently in Kushan inscriptions and coinage. The divine term *bagana* in the inscription signifies the sacred status associated with Nana and reflects her elevated position within the Kushan religious system. The tradition whereby political legitimacy is derived from a deity has parallels in Iranian religious traditions, such as the role of Ahura Mazda in Achaemenid royal inscriptions, as well as in Mesopotamian traditions associated with deities such as Ishtar. The selection of Nana as a source of royal legitimacy demonstrates the Kushans' effort to integrate indigenous Bactrian religious traditions with broader Iranian traditions and to establish a cultural connection among the diverse ethnic groups within the Kushan Empire (Jafri-Dehghani, 2009, p. 6).

One of the most important linguistic features of the Rabatak Inscription is its reference to the transition from Greek to Bactrian. The term "Aryan" in this context refers to Bactrian, an Eastern Middle Iranian language. The initial use of Greek reflects the continued influence of the Greco-Bactrian cultural tradition in the region following the conquests of Alexander the Great. However, the translation of the royal decree into Bactrian indicates the increasing importance of an indigenous Iranian language in official communication under the Kushans. This linguistic development, which occurred during the reign of Kanishka, was accompanied by the continued use of the

angular Greek script for writing Bactrian, itself representing a combination of eastern linguistic identity and a western writing tradition. The passage therefore emphasizes the importance of Bactrian as an official language of the Kushan Empire (Sims-Williams & Cribb, 1996, p. 85).

The Rabatak Inscription also provides significant information concerning the geographical extent of the Kushan Empire. The royal concept represented by terms associated with *xšaθra* recalls Iranian traditions of imperial sovereignty and emphasizes Kanishka's extensive authority. References to India and the Kshatriyas indicate the broad extent of Kushan political influence, which extended from Central Asia into northern India. This geographical expansion not only demonstrates the political power of the Kushans but also highlights their role in connecting Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent through cultural and commercial networks. The reference to the Kshatriyas may possibly relate to eastern regions under Kushan influence, although the precise geographical identification remains debated.

The list of cities mentioned in the inscription—including Pataliputra, Kausambi, and Srikantha—indicates Kushan political influence over important political and commercial centers of northern India. Wasp and Saketa probably refer to additional cities in northern India. This list not only demonstrates the geographical scope of Kushan influence but also emphasizes the importance of these urban centers as economic and cultural hubs. Pataliputra, the former capital of the Mauryan Empire and modern Patna, retained considerable importance during the Kushan period and may reflect Kanishka's efforts to consolidate authority over strategically significant areas of the Indian subcontinent (Fussman, 1998, pp. 621–622).

Modern Country	Modern Identification	Name in the Inscription
India	Probably Vaiśālī (Vaishali), in northern Bihar	Wasp / <i>wāspō</i>
India	Ancient city of Saketa, identified with Ayodhya	Zagēd / <i>zagēdō</i>
India	Historical city of Kausambi, near present-day Prayagraj/Allahabad	Kausambi / <i>kōzambō</i>
India	Pataliputra, capital of ancient Magadha, corresponding to modern Patna	Pataliputra / <i>pālabōtrō</i>
India	Ancient city of Champa, near present-day Bhagalpur	Srikantha / <i>zirit-</i>

Consequently, the political sphere of Kanishka's influence encompassed extensive areas of present-day northern India. This political influence was accompanied by the expansion of Kushan culture, the Bactrian language, and diverse Iranian

and Buddhist religious traditions (Sims-Williams & Cribb, 1996, p. 110).

The references in the Rabatak Inscription to local rulers and officials (*šahrab*) indicate aspects of the administrative organization of the Kushan Empire. Such officials may have served as intermediaries between the central royal authority and regional communities, although their precise institutional relationship to Achaemenid satraps should not be assumed without qualification. The reference to “important persons” may likewise denote local elites or aristocrats who participated in the administration of the empire. These references point toward a complex administrative structure that incorporated elements of Iranian and Greco-Bactrian political traditions (Jafri-Dehghani, 2009, p. 7).

Another section of the inscription concerns the consolidation and expansion of the Kushan realm during Kanishka's reign and emphasizes the importance of successive regnal years in recording royal activities. The reference to officials operating under the authority of the great king also suggests a hierarchical administrative system in which central authority was exercised through appointed officials (Sims-Williams, 1989, p. 34).

A particularly significant section of the inscription contains a list of deities that clearly demonstrates the religious diversity of the Kushan Empire. Nana, a Bactrian/Mesopotamian goddess; Ouma, associated with an Indian religious tradition; Auramazda (Ahura Mazda); Srošardo (Sraoša); Narasa; and Mihr (Mithra) collectively reflect the coexistence and interaction of Iranian, Bactrian, and Indian religious traditions. This religious diversity illustrates the pluralistic character of Kushan religious culture and the coexistence of different cults within the empire. The presence of Auramazda, in particular, reflects the continuing significance of Iranian religious traditions in Kushan ideology (Fussman, 1998, p. 623).

The inscription also refers to Kanishka's predecessors, including Kujula Kadphises and Vima Taktu, demonstrating his effort to emphasize dynastic continuity and the legitimacy of his own rule. The commemoration of earlier rulers was an important element of Kushan royal ideology, while the names recorded in the inscription correspond closely with evidence provided by Kushan coinage (Humbach, 2003, p. 159). Particularly noteworthy is the instruction to create royal images alongside representations of deities and royal ancestors. This practice demonstrates the sacralization of kingship and the effort to associate the reigning monarch with both divine and dynastic traditions. Such royal representation may be understood within the broader artistic and religious context of the Hellenistic and Iranian worlds and the developing traditions of Kushan royal ideology.

The title *Bagopouro*, commonly interpreted as corresponding to Sanskrit *devaputra*, “son of the god,” reflects the sacred dimension of Kushan kingship. The title is also attested in Kushan numismatic and political contexts and demonstrates the close relationship between royal authority and religious concepts.

Although some of the final lines of the Rabatak Inscription are damaged and cannot be read with certainty, the references to offerings, endowments, religious ceremonies, and the formal recording of the royal order demonstrate the importance attached to institutional documentation and ritual practices during the Kushan period. These damaged sections probably contained concluding formulae associated with the protection of the temple, the welfare of the king, and the continuity of the royal and religious establishment (Sims-Williams & Cribb, 1996, p. 87).

[illegible]

Second, from a **linguistic and cultural perspective**, the findings demonstrate that the use of the Bactrian language written in the Greek script constitutes one of the most significant features of the Rabatak Inscription. This combination reflects, on the one hand, the continuation of the Greco-Bactrian scribal tradition and, on the other, the strengthened position of a local Iranian language within the official structure of the Kushan state. The Rabatak Inscription therefore provides important evidence for the interaction and

integration of indigenous and external cultural elements during the Kushan period.

Third, from a **religious and ritual perspective**, the inscription provides a clear picture of the diversity of religious beliefs within Kushan society. The presence of the names Nana, Ouma, Auramazda, Sraoša, Narse, and Mihr reflects the combination and coexistence of Bactrian, Iranian, and Indian religious elements. This diversity may be regarded as an important reflection of the multicultural character of the Kushan Empire. Furthermore, the construction of a temple and the creation of images of deities and royal ancestors demonstrate that religious beliefs were closely connected with royal ideology.

Fourth, from an **administrative and governmental perspective**, the inscription provides evidence for the existence of a hierarchical administrative structure within the Kushan state. References to officials such as Shafar and the *karalrango*, together with the delegation of royal commands to these officials, demonstrate the important role of local and regional authorities in administering the territory and implementing royal policies. The construction of the temple, performance of ceremonies, allocation of endowments, and presence of religious attendants also indicate institutional connections between administrative and religious organizations.

Fifth, with regard to **royal legitimacy**, the inscription demonstrates that Kanishka sought to consolidate his political authority through associations with deities, royal ancestors, and the Kushan dynastic lineage. The mention of Kujula Kadphises, Vima Taktu, and Vima Kadphises alongside Kanishka emphasizes dynastic continuity and the historical legitimacy of his kingship. Furthermore, the creation of royal images alongside representations of deities and royal ancestors reflects the elevated and sacralized status attributed to kingship.

Sixth, the findings demonstrate that **religion and politics were closely interconnected within the Kushan political system**. The royal command to construct a temple, install images, perform religious ceremonies, and make offerings, together with prayers for the health and victory of the king, indicates that religious institutions played an important role in strengthening royal ideology and legitimizing political authority. From this perspective, the Rabatak Inscription can be regarded as a significant source for studying the relationship between religion and kingship during the Kushan period.

Finally, the most important finding of this research is that the Rabatak Inscription reflects a **multilayered and multicultural cultural structure** during the Kushan period. Within this structure, Iranian and Bactrian traditions, the Greco-Bactrian legacy, and cultural and religious elements from the Indian subcontinent coexisted and interacted. Therefore, the historical significance of the Rabatak Inscription is not limited to its recording of political developments. Rather, it constitutes an important source for understanding the processes of cultural interaction, integration,

adaptation, and transformation within the territories of the Kushan Empire.

Conclusion

The examination and analysis of the Rabatak Inscription demonstrate that it is one of the most important written sources for understanding the history and civilization of the Kushan period, particularly the reign of Kanishka I. The significance of the inscription is not limited to its antiquity or written content; rather, its principal value lies in the multidimensional information it provides concerning the political structure, administrative system, religious beliefs, language, royal legitimacy, and geographical extent of the Kushan state. From this perspective, the Rabatak Inscription may be regarded as a document in which various dimensions of the political and cultural life of the Kushan Empire are reflected simultaneously.

From a political and historical perspective, references to various territories and cities in northern India, including Pataliputra, Kausambi, and Srikantha, demonstrate the extensive sphere of Kanishka's influence and the political and cultural connections between the Kushan realm and the Indian subcontinent. Likewise, the mention of earlier rulers and the emphasis on royal lineage indicate that dynastic continuity constituted an important element of Kushan royal legitimacy. The delegation of royal commands to local officials and the construction of a temple by royal order further indicate the existence of an organized administrative structure and political hierarchy within the Kushan state.

From a religious perspective, the Rabatak Inscription provides a clear picture of the diversity and coexistence of religious traditions during the Kushan period. The presence of Nana and Ouma alongside Auramazda, Sraoša, Narse, and Mihr demonstrates the combination of Bactrian, Iranian, and Indian religious elements within the religious environment of the period. The royal command to construct a temple, create images of deities and royal ancestors, and conduct offerings and religious ceremonies further demonstrates that religious institutions were closely connected with royal ideology and played an important role in consolidating the legitimacy and authority of the king.

From a linguistic and cultural perspective, one of the most significant features of the Rabatak Inscription is the use of the Bactrian language written in the Greek script. This combination demonstrates that, while preserving certain literary and cultural elements inherited from the Greco-Bactrian tradition, the Kushans strengthened the position of the indigenous language within official and governmental contexts. The Rabatak Inscription can therefore be regarded as important evidence for the process of cultural interaction and integration through which indigenous, Greco-Bactrian, and Indian traditions coexisted within the framework of the Kushan Empire.

Overall, the Rabatak Inscription provides a multilayered picture of the Kushan Empire, in which political authority, religious legitimacy, linguistic identity, and cultural interaction operated in continuous and mutually influential relationships. The added value of the present analysis lies in examining the Rabatak Inscription not merely as a historical text, but as a source for

simultaneously studying the relationships among language, religion, politics, and culture in the Kushan world. Consequently, the inscription occupies an important position in understanding the ancient history of Afghanistan and in explaining the role of this region as one of the major centers of cultural interaction among Central Asia, Afghanistan, and the Indian subcontinent.

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