

Andrew Schumann

## Plato and Pure Land Buddhism\*

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ANDREW SCHUMANN

PLATO AND PURE LAND BUDDHISM

**ABSTRACT.** In his paper, the author uses the structural analysis of myth proposed by C. Levi-Strauss to show that there is a structural similarity between the ontological pictures presented in the Platonic dialogue *Phaedrus*, on the one hand, and in the early Pure Land Sūtras, on the other hand. Both ontological pictures present a kind of eternalistic doctrine about heaven within the framework of monistic philosophy. Taking a short excursion into the history of religions, the author shows that the Pure Land Buddhism has emerged in Gandhāra (today's Pakistan) as a result of cultural diffusion between Hellenistic and Indoaryan religions. He claims that there is a lot of archaeological evidence for the acceptance in Gandhāra at that time of some parts of the Greek teaching about heaven containing elements of Plato's philosophy or at least having a structural similarity with certain passages of his dialogues. On the basis of these facts, the author has drawn the conclusion that Plato's teaching about heaven could have influenced the teaching about heaven in the Pure Land Sūtras at least partially in the 2nd century A.D., at the time when Hellenistic influence still remained strong in Gandhāra.

**KEYWORDS:** Plato, Pure Land Buddhism, Gandhāra, eternalism.

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### 1. Introduction

Since the 19th century many analogies have been found<sup>1</sup> between the Platonic philosophy, on the one hand, and the philosophies of the Hindu school of *advaita vedānta* and the Buddhist school of *yogācāra*,<sup>2</sup> on the other. These analogies cause philosophical speculations about the following possibilities (i) Plato might have been influenced by some

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© А.Н. Шуман (Москва). andrew.schumann@gmail.com. Университет информационных технологий и менеджмента в Жешуве (Польша). Национальный исследовательский университет «Высшая школа экономики» (Москва).

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<sup>1</sup> The classical work about this analogy is Deussen 1930.

<sup>2</sup> Both schools were established in India approximately since the 2nd century A.D.

Oriental and even, perhaps, Indian traditions (indeed, he traveled a lot, having visited Italy, Egypt, Phoenicia and other countries and was impressed by certain Oriental teachings) — this idea was suggested by a number of philosophers;<sup>3</sup> (ii) Indian monistic philosophy could have developed under the influence of Greek ideas. In fact, the *yogācāra* emerged in Gandhāra, the country which was home to a number of Hellenistic states whose official language was Greek from 326 B.C. to 127 A.D., though this claim has not been generally accepted as yet. However, both (i) and (ii) are mere speculations because the Greek and Indian philosophical traditions had quite different religious contexts and different social doctrines.

There is another possible extreme position regarding the history of Ancient philosophy apart from (i) and (ii) according to which there were no interinfluences at all between different Ancient traditions (such as Greek and Indian). According to this position, an influence may be proved only by way of detecting direct quotations and commentaries,<sup>4</sup> but Indian philosophers did not comment on the Greek ones (at least by means of quotations), and Greek philosophers did not comment on (or at least did not quote from) the Indian ones. This opinion is responsible for the fact that the comparative study of Platonic and Indian philosophies is still considered marginal, although the similarities between the two are quite evident. Therefore there exist only a few secondary references on the subject.

Nevertheless, hidden quotations with no references to their authors can sometimes be found in philosophical texts. For example, in the *Nyāyasūtra* one can see many quotations from the doctrinal books of two Buddhist schools, *madhyamaka* and *yogācāra*, without references to them. Hence we may still expect to detect some interinfluences through a textual analysis focusing on such hidden quotations, though the latter may be explored only in the cases where the texts in question are written in the same language.

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<sup>3</sup> See Deussen 1930 and, more recently, Bussanich 2005 and Ram 2005.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., Vidyabhusana 1921 has found that there were direct quotations in the *Nyāyasūtra* from some early *madhyamaka* and *yogācāra* texts. However, in the *Nyāyabhāṣya* commentary, such references to *madhyamaka* and *yogācāra* become explicit.

In this paper, I propose a new methodology of detecting the interinfluences between Ancient traditions transmitted in different languages. This methodology, called the *archaeology of philosophy*, is an extension of the structural analysis of myth proposed by C. Levi-Strauss.<sup>5</sup> Let us remember that his analysis introduced an elementary unit, called *mytheme*. A mytheme is defined as a narrative unit which generally relates character, event and theme, and which can explain the essence of some elementary episode. Levi-Strauss writes out different mythemes on cards and places the cards in such a way that, while fixing the syntagmatic relations among the mythemes, these mythemes would also find some paradigmatic connections among themselves. Let  $M_{11}$ ,  $M_{12}$ ,  $M_{21}$ , ...  $M_{ij}$  be mythemes. Then  $i$  is their paradigmatic order and  $j$  is their syntagmatic order. So, we obtain a matrix to describe the myth  $M$  by analyzing its mythemes with their paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations:

$$M = \begin{bmatrix} M_{11} & \cdots & M_{1j} \\ \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ M_{i1} & \cdots & M_{ij} \end{bmatrix}$$

Notice that at some places of this matrix we can have zeros. It means that there is no mytheme at that location.

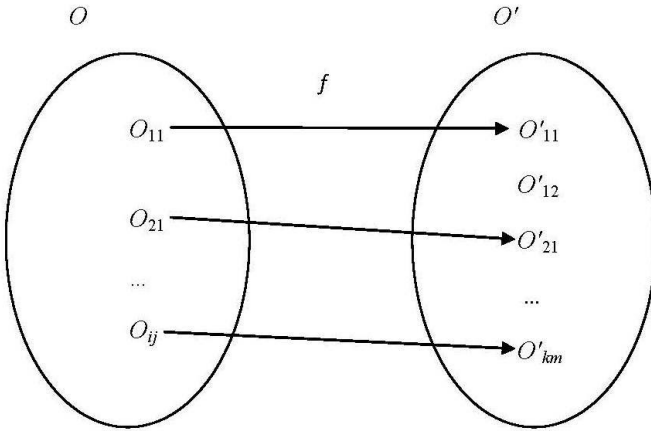
In relation to Ancient philosophies, if we are going to reconstruct their ontological pictures following the structural approach, we should focus on *ontologemes* (instead of mythemes), i.e. the minimal units in ontological descriptions. Let  $O$  and  $O'$  be two ontological pictures belonging to different cultural traditions (for example, belonging to the Greek and Indian religious philosophies, respectively):

$$O = \begin{bmatrix} O_{11} & \cdots & O_{1j} \\ \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ O_{i1} & \cdots & O_{ij} \end{bmatrix} \quad O' = \begin{bmatrix} O'_{11} & \cdots & O'_{1m} \\ \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ O'_{k1} & \cdots & O'_{km} \end{bmatrix}$$

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<sup>5</sup> See Levi-Strauss 1955.

At some places of  $O$  and  $O'$  we can have zeros, too. We say that there is a (*partial*) *structural similarity* of  $O$  to  $O'$  if and only if we can construct a (*partial*) injective mapping  $f$  from  $O$  to  $O'$ , while preserving the syntagmatic and paradigmatic orders of  $O$  and  $O'$ . Let us recall that the injective mapping  $f$  in mathematics means a function that preserves distinctness: it never maps distinct elements of its domain  $O$  to the same element of its codomain  $O'$ . And our additional condition is as follows: if the non-zero ontologeme  $O_{xy}$  follows the non-zero ontologeme  $O_{x'y'}$  by the syntagmatic and/or paradigmatic order in  $O$ , then the mapped non-zero ontologeme  $f(O_{xy})$  follows the mapped non-zero ontologeme  $f(O_{x'y'})$  by the syntagmatic and/or paradigmatic order in  $O'$ . Please consider an example:



In this example,  $f(O_{11}) = O'_{11}$ ,  $f(O_{21}) = O'_{21}$ , and  $f(O_{ij}) = O'_{km}$ . Thus the syntagmatic and paradigmatic orders are preserved. The mapping  $f$  is partial if some elements from  $O$  are not mapped into the elements of  $O'$ . In this case we say that there is a *partial structural similarity* of  $O$  to  $O'$ .

The main claim of this paper (see Section 2) is that there is at least a partial structural similarity of the Platonic dialogue *Phaedrus* as an appropriate set of ontologemes ( $O$ ) to the early Pure Land Sūtras as the second set of ontologemes ( $O'$ ). It means that we can construct at least a partial injective mapping  $f$  from  $O$  to  $O'$ , while preserving the

syntagmatic and paradigmatic orders of their ontologemes. It is the first step in our reasoning.

The second step (see Sections 3 and 4) is to show that for some mapped non-zero ontologemes  $f(O_{xy})$  there is archaeological evidence confirming the existence of a syncretic culture of  $O$  and  $O'$  at  $f(O_{xy})$ . It is to show that there is direct archaeological evidence that the cultural contexts of  $O$  and  $O'$  coexisted in the same region, i.e. that there was a joint syncretic culture uniting the contexts of  $O$  and  $O'$ , and that the cultural context of  $O$  was older than the context of  $O'$ .

From these two premises: (a) there is a structural similarity of  $O$  to  $O'$ , and (b) for some mapped ontologemes  $f(O_{xy})$  from  $O$  there is archaeological evidence of cultural syncretism of  $f(O_{xy})$ , we are concluding that the text of  $O$  (i.e. the *Phaedrus*) could have in fact influenced the text of  $O'$  (i.e. the early Pure Land Sūtras). This conclusion is not definitive but it is plausible with a very high grade of probability, revealing a similar epistemological status to the conclusions yielded by Mill's methods which are actually quite close to our approach.

This methodology is new and is applied for the first time to demonstrate that the ideas of Plato's *Phaedrus* could have partly influenced the Pure Land Buddhism at its starting point. First, we can construct an injective mapping from the set of ontologemes of the *Phaedrus* to the set of ontologemes of the first Pure Land Sūtras preserving their syntagmatic and paradigmatic orders (Section 2). Second, the religious doctrines referring to celestial or astral realms, the contexts for both the *Phaedrus* and first Pure Land Sūtras, coexisted in the same region of Gandhāra, where the Pure Land Buddhism emerged (Sections 3 and 4).

According to this methodology, it is enough to have a structural similarity between ontological descriptions rather than the same descriptions by way of quotations. For instance, in the *Phaedrus*, the following ontologeme is introduced: "the army of gods and spirits, arrayed in eleven squadrons" (247a),<sup>6</sup> while in the Pure Land Sūtras we find another ontologeme: "innumerable buddhas of the ten directions" (*Sukhāvativyūhasūtra* 268a; Takakusu 1988: N360). The two entourages are different, but we are taking into account not the descriptions them-

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<sup>6</sup> Here and elsewhere, Harold N. Fowler's translation is used.

selves, but the availability of these descriptions, between which we can construct an injective mapping: there is an entourage for the highest divinity in the text of *O* and there is an entourage for the highest divinity in the text of *O'*. At the same time, there exist in the Pure Land Sūtras many principal descriptions, such as mantras, for which there are no counterparts in the *Phaedrus*, while almost all ontologemes of the *Phaedrus* can find appropriate counterparts in the Pure Land Sūtras. Thus, structurally the *Phaedrus* is simpler and may be (at least partly) injectively mapped into the set of ontologemes of early Pure Land Sūtras preserving their syntagmatic and paradigmatic orders.

## 2. A Comparison of Plato's *Phaedrus* with the Pure Land Sūtras

In the Greek mythology, the pure lands are called the *fortunate islands*, or the *islands of the blessed* (μακάρων νῆσοι). The designations occurred in two senses, as (i) a terrestrial pure realm (a real “island”), and (ii) a celestial pure realm (a divine “island”). Both are localized in the West, the first in the Atlantic Ocean. For example, in the first sense, the fortunate islands are called *Atlantis* (Ατλαντις νῆσος, ‘island of Atlantis’) by Plato in his dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias*: according to Plato, this island in former times embodied his ideal republic. In the second sense, they are called the *Elysian fields* (Ηλύσιον πεδῖον) by Homer in the *Odyssey* (4.563), referring to the afterlife for good men.

Hesiod describes the fortunate isles as follows:

But when earth had covered this generation also, Zeus the son of Cronos made yet another, the fourth, upon the fruitful earth, which was nobler and more righteous, a god-like race of hero-men who are called demi-gods, the race before our own, throughout the boundless earth. Grim war and dread battle destroyed a part of them, some in the land of Cadmus at seven-gated Thebe when they fought for the flocks of Oedipus, and some, when it had brought them in ships over the great sea gulf to Troy for rich-haired Helen's sake: there death's end enshrouded a part of them. But to the others father Zeus the son of Cronos gave a living and an abode apart from men, and made them dwell at the ends of earth. And they live untouched by sorrow in the

islands of the blessed along the shore of deep swirling Ocean, happy heroes for whom the grain-giving earth bears honey-sweet fruit flourishing thrice a year, far from the deathless gods, and Cronos rules over them; for the father of men and gods released him from his bonds. And these last equally have honour and glory (*Op.* 156–169b).<sup>7</sup>

As we find out, these islands (i) were not involved in the Trojan War, (ii) give “honey-sweet fruit flourishing thrice a year”, (iii) are ruled by Cronos, the deity who had ruled before Zeus, i.e. life at the islands is outside of time (outside of *rūpaloka*) and outside of terrestrial realms (outside of *kāmaloka*). The worlds of *rūpaloka* and *kāmaloka* are ruled by Zeus, the ‘Sky-father’.

Hence, the Greek term for the pure lands had the meaning of ‘isles’ (νησοι) and ‘fields’ (πεδίοι). The Buddhist term had the meaning of ‘level’ (*bhūmi*) and ‘field’ (*kṣetra*). The Greek main pure land is localized in the West. The main pure land of Buddhism, *Sukhāvātī*, is localized in the same direction, i.e. in the West. Let us recall that there are the following five pure lands in Buddhism, called ‘Buddha fields’ (*buddhakṣetra*, 佛土, *fótù*):

1. *Abhirati* (‘manifest joy’), presided by *Akṣobhya* (East).
2. *Śrīmat* (‘magnificent’), presided by *Ratnasambhava* (South).
3. *Sukhāvātī* (‘blissful realm’), presided by *Amitābha* (West).
4. *Karmaprasiddhi* (‘accomplishing perfect action’), presided by *Amoghasiddhi* (North).
5. *Akaṅkṣha* (‘highest’), presided by *Vairocana* (Centre).

*Sukhāvātī* is the most important pure land described in the Pure Land Sūtras. After that the Buddhist idea of this pure land influenced the idea of *Vaikunṭha* – a pure land in the *Vaiṣṇava* tradition. The pure land of the latter was imagined much later than the pure land of Buddhism. *Vaikunṭha* is defined as a celestial home of Viṣṇu, located in the Capricorn constellation that is visible in the night sky moving

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<sup>7</sup> Edited and translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White.

gradually westward from different positions. Thus, we see here the same direction of West for localizing the pure land.

In the *Śrī Brahma-saṁhitā* (written after the 16th century, but reflecting a much more older tradition), the pure lands are described as *Gokula* in Zenith surrounded by four other pure lands:

The superexcellent station of Kṛṣṇa, which is known as *Gokula*, has thousands of petals and a corolla like that of a lotus sprouted from a part of His infinitary aspect, the whorl of the leaves being the actual abode of Kṛṣṇa. <...> There is a mysterious quadrangular place named *Śvetadvīpa* surrounding the outskirts of *Gokula*. *Śvetadvīpa* is divided into four parts on all sides. The abode of *Vāsudeva*, *Saṅkarṣaṇa*, *Pradyumna* and *Aniruddha* are separately located in each of these four parts. These four divided abodes are enveloped by the fourfold human requirements such as piety, wealth, passion and liberation, as also by the four *Vedas*, viz., *Ṛg*, *Sāma*, *Yajur* and *Atharva*, which deal with the mantra and which are the bases of achievements of the fourfold mundane requirements (*Śrī Brahma-saṁhitā* 5.1–26).<sup>8</sup>

The five pure lands we read here about are located in a similar way as in the Pure Land Buddhism: in Zenith, West, East, North, and South.

Let us show that we have a number of direct analogies for the Buddhist pure lands in Platonic texts which were obviously written much earlier (by about four or five centuries) than the first Pure Land Sūtras. These Platonic texts expressed a Greek theological doctrine about heaven adopted by most Greeks and continued and supported up to the end of Hellenistic civilization as such. In this Platonic teaching about pure lands, we also face a celestial context, though the astrological turn is missing here. To show the similarity of both pictures, let us compare the most significant ontologemes (fragments) from Plato's *Phaedrus* and appropriate fragments from the Pure Land Sūtras cited from Inagaki 2003.

The main ontologemes from the *Phaedrus* are summed up in the following table:

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<sup>8</sup> Translated by Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Goswami Ṭhākura.



<i>The ultimate level</i>	Zeus is the highest <b>O11</b>	The light of Zeus gives enlightenment <b>O12</b>	There is a pure land of Zeus <b>O13</b>	Zeus teaches the divine intelligence as a true path <b>O14</b>
<i>The level of gods</i>	Zeus is followed by other gods <b>O21</b>	Other Greek gods can teach <b>O22</b>	Zeus reveals the absolute knowledge in this land for all beings <b>O23</b>	The meal of Zeus for all higher beings <b>O24</b>
<i>The level of human beings</i>			Zeus shows the ultimate way for the deliverance from endless reincarnations. In these reincarnations the soul can spend three successive periods of a thousand years <b>O33</b>	Only philosophers can follow the path of Zeus and attain the ultimate reality <b>O34</b>

In the matrix form:

$$\begin{bmatrix} \mathbf{O11} & \mathbf{O12} & \mathbf{O13} & \mathbf{O14} \\ \mathbf{O21} & \mathbf{O22} & \mathbf{O23} & \mathbf{O24} \\ 0 & 0 & \mathbf{O33} & \mathbf{O34} \end{bmatrix}$$

We can show that the set of these ontologemes is injectively mapped into the set of ontologemes taken from the early Pure Land Sūtras presented as the following table:

<i>The ultimate level</i>	Amitāyus is the highest $f(\mathbf{O11}) = \mathbf{O'11}$	The light of Amitāyus gives enlightenment $f(\mathbf{O12}) = \mathbf{O'12}$	There is a pure land of Amitāyus $f(\mathbf{O13}) = \mathbf{O'13}$	Amitāyus teaches the <i>dharma</i> $f(\mathbf{O14}) = \mathbf{O'14}$
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<p>The level of gods</p>	<p>Amitāyus is followed by other buddhas <math>f(\mathbf{O21}) = \mathbf{O'21}</math></p>	<p>Other buddhas can teach <math>f(\mathbf{O22}) = \mathbf{O'22}</math></p>	<p>Amitāyus reveals the absolute knowledge in this land for all beings <math>f(\mathbf{O23}) = \mathbf{O'23}</math></p>	<p>The meal of Amitāyus <math>f(\mathbf{O24}) = \mathbf{O'24}</math></p>
<p>The level of human beings</p>			<p>Amitāyus shows the ultimate way for the deliverance from endless reincarnations. In these reincarnations it is possible to spend many thousands of <i>koṭis of kalpas</i> <math>f(\mathbf{O33}) = \mathbf{O'33}</math></p>	<p>Only in the practice of Pure Land Buddhism it is possible to attain the ultimate reality <math>f(\mathbf{O34}) = \mathbf{O'34}</math></p>

In the matrix form, we obtain the following result of mapping preserving the syntagmatic and paradigmatic orders:

$$\begin{bmatrix} \mathbf{O'11} & \mathbf{O'12} & \mathbf{O'13} & \mathbf{O'14} \\ \mathbf{O'21} & \mathbf{O'22} & \mathbf{O'23} & \mathbf{O'24} \\ 0 & 0 & \mathbf{O'33} & \mathbf{O'34} \end{bmatrix}$$

Now let us substantiate these ontologemes with quotes.

**O11.** Zeus is the highest: “the great leader in heaven” (*Phdr.* 247a).  
 $f(\mathbf{O11}) = \mathbf{O'11}$ . Amitāyus is the highest: “the majestic light of Buddha Amitāyus is the most exalted” (*Sukhāvativyūhasūtra* 270a, Takakusu 1988: N360).

**O21.** Zeus is followed by other gods: “followed by an army of gods and spirits, arrayed in eleven squadrons” (*Phdr.* 247a). His main attendants are Ares (*Phdr.* 252c), associated with war, and Apollo (*Phdr.* 253b; 265b), associated with wisdom.

$f(\mathbf{O21}) = \mathbf{O'21}$ . Amitāyus is followed by other buddhas: “when you see Amitāyus, you will also see innumerable buddhas of the ten directions” (*Amitāyurdhyānasūtra* 344a, Takakusu 1988: N365). Mahāsthā-

maprāpta, i.e. Vajrapāṇi (大勢至, *Dàshìzhì*), associated with war and power,<sup>9</sup> and Avalokiteśvara (觀世音, *Guānshìyīn*), associated with wisdom and mercy, are his main attendants (*Amitāyurdhyānasūtra* 344c).

**O12.** The light of Zeus gives enlightenment: “the sight of perfect and simple and calm and happy apparitions, which we saw in the pure light, being ourselves pure and not entombed in this which we carry about with us and call the body, in which we are imprisoned like an oyster in its shell” (*Phdr.* 250c).

*f*(**O12**) = **O’12.** The light of Amitāyus gives enlightenment: “the light of Amitāyus shines brilliantly, illuminating all the buddha lands of the ten directions” (*Sukhāvatīvyūhasūtra* 270b, Takakusu 1988: N360).

**O22.** Other Greek gods can teach: “those who are included among the twelve great gods and are accounted leaders, are assigned each to his place in the army” (*Phdr.* 247a).

*f*(**O22**) = **O’22.** Other buddhas can teach: “having visualized these innumerable buddhas, you will receive from each the prediction of your future buddhahood” (*Amitāyurdhyānasūtra* 343c, Takakusu 1988: N365).

**O13.** There is a pure land of Zeus: “there are many blessed sights and many ways hither and thither within the heaven, along which the blessed gods go to and fro attending each to his own duties; and whoever wishes, and is able, follows, for jealousy is excluded from the celestial band” (*Phdr.* 247a).

*f*(**O13**) = **O’13.** There is a pure land of Amitāyus: “in that buddha land, the earth is composed of seven kinds of jewels — namely, gold, silver, beryl, coral, amber, agate, and ruby — that have spontaneously appeared. The land itself is so vast, spreading boundlessly to the farthest extent, that it is impossible to know its limit” (*Sukhāvatīvyūhasūtra* 270a, Takakusu 1988: N360).

**O23.** Zeus reveals the absolute knowledge in this land for all beings: “for the colorless, formless, and intangible truly existing essence, with

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<sup>9</sup> He was depicted in India conforming to the Hellenistic iconography of Heracles (a bearded athletic man holding a club and a lion skin) at the time the Pure Land Buddhism has emerged.

which all true knowledge is concerned, holds this region and is visible only to the mind, the pilot of the soul” (*Phdr.* 247c).

*f*(O23) = O’23. Amitāyus reveals the absolute knowledge in this land for all beings: “that buddha land, like the realm of unconditioned nirvana, is pure and serene, resplendent and blissful. The *śrāvakas*, *bodhisattvas*, heavenly beings, and humans there have lofty and brilliant wisdom and are masters of the supernatural powers. They are all of one form, without any differences, but are called ‘heavenly beings’ and ‘humans’ simply by analogy with states of existence in other worlds” (*Sukhāvativyūhasūtra* 271c, Takakusu 1988: N360).

O33. Zeus shows the ultimate way for the deliverance from endless reincarnations. In these reincarnations the soul can spend three successive periods of a thousand years: “For each soul returns to the place whence it came in ten thousand years; for it does not gain its wings before that time has elapsed, except the soul of him who has been a guileless philosopher or a philosophical lover; these, when for three successive periods of a thousand years they have chosen such a life, after the third period of a thousand years become winged in the three thousandth year and go their way; but the rest, when they have finished their first life, receive judgment, and after the judgment some go to the places of correction under the earth and pay their penalty, while the others, made light and raised up into a heavenly place by justice, live in a manner worthy of the life they led in human form. But in the thousandth year both come to draw lots and choose their second life, each choosing whatever it wishes. Then a human soul may pass into the life of a beast, and a soul which was once human, may pass again from a beast into a man. For the soul which has never seen the truth can never pass into human form” (*Phdr.* 249ab).

*f*(O33) = O’33. Amitāyus shows the ultimate way for the deliverance from endless reincarnations. In these reincarnations it is possible to spend many thousands of *koṭis* of *kalpas*: “injustice and vice inevitably follow and are allowed to run their course unchecked until evil *karma* accumulates to the limit. Before they expect their lives to end, people meet sudden death and fall into evil realms, where they

will suffer excruciating torments for many lives. They will not be able to escape for many thousands of *koṭis* of *kalpas*” (*Sukhāvātīvyūhasūtra* 275ab, Takakusu 1988: N360).

**O14.** Zeus teaches the divine intelligence as a true path: “now the divine intelligence, since it is nurtured on mind and pure knowledge, and the intelligence of every soul which is capable of receiving that which befits it, rejoices in seeing reality for a space of time and by gazing upon truth is nourished and made happy until the revolution brings it again to the same place” (*Phdr.* 247d).

*f(O14) = O'14.* Amitāyus teaches *dharma*: “when Amitāyus preaches the *dharma* to *śrāvakas* and bodhisattvas, they all assemble in the seven-jeweled lecture hall” (*Sukhāvātīvyūhasūtra* 273c, Takakusu 1988: N360).

**O24.** The meal of Zeus for all beings: “but when they go to a feast and a banquet, they proceed steeply upward to the top of the vault of heaven, where the chariots of the gods, whose well matched horses obey the rein, advance easily, but the others with difficulty” (*Phdr.* 247a); “in the revolution it beholds absolute justice, temperance, and knowledge, not such knowledge as has a beginning and varies as it is associated with one or another of the things we call realities, but that which abides in the real eternal absolute; and in the same way it beholds and feeds upon the other eternal verities, after which, passing down again within the heaven, it goes home, and there the charioteer puts up the horses at the manger and feeds them with ambrosia and then gives them nectar to drink” (*Phdr.* 247e).

*f(O24) = O'24.* The meal of Amitāyus: “if, when I attain buddhahood, bodhisattvas in my land who would make offerings to buddhas through my divine power should not be able to reach immeasurable and innumerable *koṭis* of *nayutas* of buddha lands in as short a time as it takes to eat a meal, may I not attain perfect enlightenment” (*Sukhāvātīvyūhasūtra* 268b, Takakusu 1988: N360); “by the Buddha’s power, bodhisattvas of that land go to innumerable worlds of the ten directions, in as short a time as it takes to eat a meal, in order to pay homage

and make offerings to the buddhas and World-honored Ones” (*Sukhāvativyūhasūtra* 273c).

**O34.** Only philosophers can follow the path of Zeus and attain the ultimate reality: “and therefore it is just that the mind of the philosopher only has wings, for he is always, so far as he is able, in communion through memory with those things the communion with which causes God to be divine” (*Phdr.* 249c).

*f*(**O34**) = **O’34.** Only in the practice of Pure Land Buddhism it is possible to attain the Land of Peace and Bliss: “anyone who sincerely desires birth in the Land of Peace and Bliss is able to attain purity of wisdom and supremacy in virtue. You should not follow the urges of the passions, break the precepts, or fall behind others in the practice of the Way” (*Sukhāvativyūhasūtra* 275b, Takakusu 1988: N360).

Thus, we have shown that the ontological descriptions from the *Phaedrus* and the Pure Land Sūtras are *structurally similar* if we ignore different cultural contexts (e.g., in the *Phaedrus* there are no mantras).

Plato is rather succinct, concise and laconic in his narrative. Instead of describing the pure lands in detail, he just declares that in the pure lands “there are many blessed sights and many ways hither and thither within the heaven” (*Phdr.* 247a). Nevertheless, almost for each Platonic ontological image we can explore an appropriate ontological image in the Pure Land Sūtras. For example, for the image “philosophers, they see the pure land of Zeus”, there is an analogical image “Buddhists who follow the way of Amitāyus and visualize his pure lands”. Plato and the authors of the Pure Land Sūtras proposed similar ontologies with a similar kernel of structures. At the same time the Buddhist ontology is more extensive and complex. Both ontologies introduce a kind of teaching about heaven within the framework of philosophical monism. Moreover, in both ontologies we find a kind of *eternalism* claiming that each individuality may attain actuality and then become eternal. The point is that in the celestial cycles of both Zeus and Amitāyus, there is no place for repetitions, hence there is no place for astrology as a science studying these repetitions. Each human being can become the follower of Zeus or Amitāyus and preserve his or her individuality forever.

3. *Fragments from the Lost Greco-Buddhist Texts*

We can show that some ontologemes mentioned above and formulated first in the 5th–4th centuries B.C. are well confirmed later archaeologically at a number of sites in Bactria and Gandhāra (today's Afghanistan and Pakistan) dated from the 3rd century B.C. to the early 5th century A.D. It means that they have been disseminated through Hellenism in later cultures of North India. Let us start with the ontologeme **O34**: “only philosophers can follow the path of Zeus and attain the ultimate reality”. There is a philosophical fragment<sup>10</sup> written in Greek, excavated in Aī Khanoum (Afghanistan), the first capital of the Greeks in North India before its relocation to Taxila (Punjab), and dated to ca. 140–120 B.C., which contains a lot of Platonic terms such as “ideas” (ιδέαι), “reason” (αἰτία), “each individually” (καθ’ ἐκάστην), “equality” (ισότης), “the first reason of reasons” (πρῶτον τῶν αἰτίων), etc. Meanwhile, we find some quite Buddhist descriptions as well: (i) “generating and destructing all the intelligent entities are forever” (γένεσιν εἶναι καὶ τὴν φθορὰν αἰδίδιον τὴν τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἀναγκαῖον), which hints at the wheel of reincarnation (*samsāra*) mentioned as a significant ontologeme in the *Phaedrus*, too; (ii) “no-thing of nothing” (οὐθέν οὐθενός) which hints at the concept of *śūnyatā*. Thus, knowledge of Platonic discourse in the territories of today's Afghanistan and Pakistan at the time of Hellenistic dynasties in India is confirmed, since we have this document, the direct evidence containing the pure Platonic term ἰδέαι.

In addition to **O34**, there is another confirmed ontologeme, namely *f*(**O34**) = **O'34**: “only in the practice of Pure Land Buddhism it is possible to attain the ultimate reality.” The point is that the earliest Pure Land Sūtras were written in the region of Bactria, Gandhāra, and Kashmir, where Greek and Gāndhārī were two official languages from 326 B.C. to 127 A.D. While Greek was used for edicts, business and tax documents, Gāndhārī was reserved for philosophy and religion. The fall of the last Greek dynasty that ruled in Eastern Punjab occurred ca. 10–30 A.D. But Hellenism as a cultural mix was carried on by various Śaka dy-

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<sup>10</sup> See Rapin 1992: 117, pl. 52.

nasties, first of all by the Kuṣāṇa Kingdom and the Western Kṣatrapa Kingdom. In particular, they continued to use Greek as an official language. Only in the 2nd century A.D. did they decide to replace Greek by Bactrian in the Kuṣāṇa Empire and by a Prakrit in the Western Kṣatrapa Kingdom. But both continued to use the Greek letters in their texts. So in 127 A.D., according to the edict of Kanīṣka (the Rabatak inscription), the Greek language (Bactrian ἰωνάγγο, 'Ionian') was replaced by the Bactrian proper (Bactrian ἀριαο, 'Aryan'), and the latter existed as a new official language of Gandhāra up to the 8th century A.D., still using the Greek alphabet. In the 5th century A.D., Gāndhārī was replaced by Sanskrit, and Sanskrit remained an official language up to the fall of the Hindu Shahi dynasty in 1026.

Hellenism persevered in the world of the Bactrian language. For instance, here are some deities of Kuṣāṇas according to their inscriptions in Bactrian and/or Greek: Ἀνημοσ (Greek Ἄνεμος), Ζαοοσ (Greek Ζεύς), Ἡρακιλο (Greek Ἡρακλῆς), Ἡλιοσ (Greek Ἥλιος), Ἡφαιστοσ (Greek Ἥφαιστος), Νανα (Greek Νάνα; Sumerian *Nanāya*), Οανινδο ("Victory"), Ορλαγνο ("Mars"); Ριβτι, Ριβτο ("Athena"), Σαληνη (Greek Σελήνη), Σαραπο (Greek Σάραπις), along with many others.<sup>11</sup> These deities are undoubtedly Hellenistic. Furthermore, in the world of the Bactrian language, the Hellenistic standards of business documentation and many forms of Hellenistic legality were continued to be applied.

For these reasons, the world of Bactrian language remained the main island of Hellenistic legacy in India after the fall of the last Greek dynasty in the 1st century A.D. This legacy was continued even after 400 A.D. (the fall of the Kuṣāṇa Empire). It may be readily shown thanks to the extant artifacts and text fragments.

Almost immediately after its emergence (i.e. since *ca.* the 2nd century A.D.), the Pure Land Sūtras started to be translated from Gāndhārī into Chinese by Kuṣāṇa scholars such as Lokakṣema. Many fragments of Buddhist scriptures dated from the 1st century A.D. to the 5th century A.D. were excavated in Gandhāra. These fragments show that it was exactly in this region, that the Mahāyāna Buddhism has arisen. For

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<sup>11</sup> See Jongeward, Cribb 2015.



instance, the small birch-bark fragment in the Schøyen collection (MS 2381/40), copied in the script Gilgit/Bamiyan type I, contains the text that corresponds to chapter 3 of the *Lotus Sūtra*, the next two fragments (MS 2381/2, MS 2382/271) correspond to chapter 3, and the four further fragments (MS 2381/1a, 1b, 20, 82), to chapter 22 of the same *sūtra*.<sup>12</sup>

Among the texts in Gāndhārī or Hybrid Sanskrit excavated in Afghanistan and Pakistan, there are some Buddhist texts written in the Bactrian language and in the Greek script.<sup>13</sup> They contain homages to a series of buddhas and bodhisattvas, including Candrabhānu and Lokeśvararāja, who appear in the Pure Land Sūtras. One of these extant Bactrian documents is a manuscript dated to the 5th century A.D. At that time the Greeks were completely assimilated and represented just one of the higher Indian casts (*Yavana*). This manuscript is made from leather which was not typical for Indian texts at all (the Indians preferred palm leaves or birch barks for writing) and is a mark of the Hellenistic style of copying books. Thus, it is one of the direct evidences that some Hellenized forms of the Mahāyāna Buddhism could have been transmitted up to the 5th century A.D. It is a good archaeological confirmation for the ontologeme  $f(\mathbf{O34}) = \mathbf{O'34}$ : “only in the practice of Pure Land Buddhism it is possible to attain the ultimate reality.” This finding describes homage to different buddhas and *bodhisattvas*, consisting of the names which occur in the Pure Land Sūtras. Let us quote this Bactrian Buddhist Manuscript (BBM):<sup>14</sup>

Recto

ρ'α' (= 101)

1. στο σιδασο μαρ[ο ποναδο ταδο] βαν[δ]αγο ...σαγοδοχοτο χοασοανδο  
And whatever [merit may be] herefrom, [so] may [...]bandag (and) [...]sag-dukht .....
2. αλο μαδο αλο πιδο αλο λογοδο αλο πορ]ανο αλο χο[α]υο αλο βραδρανο αλο  
with (their) mothers, f[athers, daughters, son]s, sisters (and) brothers, (and) with
3. οισπο παρολω[γοσιγιο] βι]ραδο στο σιδ[α]ς]ο μαρο μισο ποναδο  
all (their) decease[ed relatives, obtai]n (it); and whatever further merit may be herefrom,

<sup>12</sup> See Matsuda 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Braarvig, Liland 2010: 72–73 and Sims-Williams 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Sims-Williams 2000: 276 and pl. xi. The translation is slightly modified.

4. *ταδο περιητο* [ ]*δη ολο αλα μαδο αλο πιδο* [α]λο *χοαυ[ο]*  
so [may] (our) heirs [with their husbands] (and) wives, (and) the mothers, fathers, sisters,
5. *αλο βραδ[α]ρανο*[ ] *α]βιρ[αδο] οτο σιδασο μαρο μισο ποναδο*  
(and) brothers (of the latter) [.....] obtain (it); and further merit may be herefrom,
6. *ταδο σιδο <μανο> μω[σ]ο μ[ ]* *αρ[ ] ο οαυαμο αλο αστο οταγο οισ-*  
so whatever [servants] now [belong] to my ..... dwelling or home — may they all
7. *π[ο] βοδ[·]γο αβ[ι]ραδο στο σιδασο μαρο μισο ]πογαδο ·[·]βανοβανδα<γο>*  
..... ob[tain it; and whatever further] merit may be [herefrom], so may [.....]ban-bandag,
8. *κ[ι]δο λιβο το*[ ] *]δο αβιραδ[ο] ναμωο βο-*  
who [copied] the text, [.....] obtain (it). Homage to the bu-

Verso

1. *δηο σιδασο μαρ[ο μισο ποναδο ταδο ]* .....*σο μαργο* ..... *μορδο*  
ddha. Whatever [further merit may be] herefrom, [so may .....] (both) dead
2. *οδο ζορανδαγο* [ ] .....*ο ναμωο σακομανο*  
and living [.....] obtain it]. Homage to śākyamuni
3. *βοδδο ναμωο*[ ] *ναμωο λωγρασφαροραζα βοδδο να-*  
buddha, homage [to ..... buddha, h]omage to Lokeśvararāja buddha, ho-
4. *μωο σιρογρ·*[ ] *ρβ·*..... *βοδδο ναμωο ραδαγοκ-*  
mage to ..... [..... buddha, homage to .....]..... buddha, homage to Ratnak-
5. *ωταμο βοδδ[ο] ναμωο ]ο β[ο]δδ[ο] ναμωο σανδαροβανο βο-*  
ottama buddh[a, homage to .....] buddha, homage to Candrabhānu bu-
6. *δδο ναμωο ρ[ ]* *να]μωο ραδανοζανο βοδδο ναμ-*  
ddha, homage to R[atna(?)-..... buddha, ho]mage to Ratna..... buddha, hom-
7. *ωο ραδανο-*[ ] *σο]μηροβηραμο βοδδο ναμω-*  
age to Ratna[..... buddha, homage to Su]meru..... buddha, homage
8. *ο σουμεροκ·*[ ] *βοζο βοδδο ναμωο ζι-ο βοδδο [ ]*  
to Sumeruk[alpa buddha, homage to .....]..... buddha, homage to ..... buddha ...

As we see, this text tells us about a pure land (*buddhakṣetra*, 佛土, *fótu*), where we can settle together with our wives, mothers, fathers,

daughters, sons, sisters, brothers, and with all their relatives irrespective of our merits. It is an idea which is very close to the Pure Land Buddhism or it is one of its earliest forms.

Many names from this short document are significantly corrupted. For instance, we can read just a name fragment ραδανο·⟨...⟩ βοδδο (*Ratna*·⟨...⟩ Buddha). In the Mahāyāna Sūtras, there are several names corresponding to this fragment: *Ratna*-candra, *Ratna*-abhibhāsa, *Saptaratna*-bhivṛṣṭa, *Ratna*-ketu, *Ratna*-śrī, and so on. Also, there is *Ratnākara* (“My Jewel”), the Tathāgata of the Eastern quarter of the pure lands (*dpang-skong-phyag-brgya-pa*, *Kangyur* vol. 68, fol. 1b). Another corrupted name that may be read as [σ]μηροβηραμο βοδδο ([*Su*]meru-*brahma* Buddha) might have exposed a superiority over Brahma as well as Sumeru, the Lord of the Mountains, e.g. *Abhibhūya*-*sumerubrahmā* Buddha (from Sanskrit: “the Buddha of Superiority over Brahma and Sumeru (the Lord of Montains)”) probably to denote a Tathāgata of the Zenith pure lands. [*Su*]merubrahma Buddha likely corresponds to the name 須彌天冠, *Xūmí-tiānguān*, “Heaven Crowned over Mount Sumeru” in the *Sukhāvativyūhasūtra* (266c23, Takakusu 1988: N360). Another Tathāgata of the Zenith pure lands is presented by *Sumerukalpa* Buddha (須彌等曜, *Xūmí-děngyào*, “Glorious like Mount Sumeru”, 266c23, Takakusu 1988: N360). And it is a possible reading of the corrupted name σμηροκ·⟨...⟩ βοδδο (*Sumeruk*[*alpa*] Buddha).

Some names from BBM can be well read and all of them have appropriate correspondences in the *Sukhāvativyūhasūtra* reconstructed by us in Section 2. They occur among the names of the above mentioned buddhas. Thus, there is a complete name σακομοανο βοδδο (*Śākya-muni* Buddha), the Tathāgata of the North pure lands. Also, there is the following complete name: λωγοασφαροραζα βοδδο (*Lokeśvararāja* Buddha, 世自在王, *Shizizài-wáng*, “World-Sovereign King”). It is one of the most important names in the *Sukhāvativyūhasūtra*. This buddha is mentioned as a teacher of the bodhisattva Dharmākara:

a buddha named *Lokeśvararāja*, the Tathāgata, Arhat, Fully Enlightened One, Possessed of Wisdom and Practice, Well-gone One, Knower of the World, Unsurpassed One, Tamer of Beings, Teacher of Gods and

Humans, and Enlightened and World-honored One (*Sukhāvativyūhasūtra* 267a, Takakusu 1988: N360).

The *Lokeśvararāja* Buddha possesses sacral knowledge about the pure lands (*Sukhāvativyūhasūtra* 267c, Takakusu 1988: N360).

The next complete names are as follows: ραδανοκωταμο βοδδο (*Ratnottama* Buddha or *Ratnaketu* Buddha), σανδαραβοανο βοδδο (*Candrabhānu* Buddha), ραδανοζανο βοδδο (*Ratnajaya* Buddha). All three are mentioned in the *Sukhāvativyūhasūtra* (266c23, Takakusu 1988: N360):

*Ratnottama* or *Ratnaketu* (寶炎, *Bǎoyán*, “Best Jewel” or “Flame of Jewels”),

*Candrabhānu* (月光, *Yuèguāng*, “Moon Light”), and

*Ratnajaya* (威神, *Wēishén*, “Majestic Victory”).

The complete name ραδανοζανο βοδδο (*Ratnajaya* Buddha) is mentioned as “Precious Conqueror” in the Japan Pure Land *Sūtra Ninnōkyō* (the *Sūtra of Benevolent Kings*), and this Bodhisattva is associated with the North-West pure lands there.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, the text BBM is devoted to a pure land and it belongs within the syncretic Greco-Buddhist culture. It is one of the earliest excavated documents of Pure Land Buddhism (maybe the earliest one) and it is demonstrating some Hellenistic (more precisely Greco-Buddhist) roots of this teaching. It is good archaeological evidence for the mapped ontologeme  $f(\mathbf{O34}) = \mathbf{O'34}$ : “only in the practice of Pure Land Buddhism it is possible to attain the ultimate reality” that it existed within the syncretic Hellenistic-Buddhist culture of Bactria and Gandhāra.

#### 4. Some Direct Evidence of the Influence of Greek Astrology on the Indian One at the Time of the Early Sūtras of Mahāyāna

The Pure Land Buddhism has no astrological aspects, but it contains a teaching on the heavenly universe with its division into Zenith, East,

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<sup>15</sup> Visser 1935: 127.

West, North, and South. Consequently, there is a celestial dimension of this doctrine. Therefore, we can reconstruct an astral context for the Pure Land Buddhism and check whether we can trace back some Hellenistic influences there as well. This context shall be an archaeological and textual confirmation for the ontologemes **O11** “Zeus is the highest” and **O21** “Zeus is followed by other gods” (represented by constellations) as well as for the mapped ontologemes  $f(\mathbf{O11}) = \mathbf{O'11}$  “Amitāyus is the highest” and  $f(\mathbf{O21}) = \mathbf{O'21}$  “Amitāyus is followed by other budhas” (represented by constellations).

Let us recall that in the Greek-Macedonian astrology there were used the following names for the 12 months: Δίος (October), Ἀπελλαῖος (November), Αὐθυναῖος or Αὐδναῖος (December), Περίτιος (January), Δύστρος (February), Ξανδικός or Ξανθικός (March), Ξανδικός Ἐμβόλιμος (intercalated 6 times over a 19-year cycle), Ἀρτεμίσιος or Ἀρταμίτιος (April), Δαίσιος (May), Πάνημος or Πάναμος (June), Λώιος (July), Γορπιαῖος (August), Ὑπερβερεταῖος (September), Ὑπερβερεταῖος Ἐμβόλιμος (intercalated once over a 19-year cycle).

In the Buddhist inscriptions written in the Kharoṣṭhī script and in the Gāndhārī language excavated in the region called conventionally Gandhāra and dated from the 1st century A.D. to the 3rd century A.D., the following eight Greco-Macedonian months have been recently identified after decoding: Ἀρτεμίσιος, Δαίσιος, Πάνημος, Λώιος, Γορπιαῖος, Ἀπελλαῖος, Αὐθυναῖος, and Ξανδικός.<sup>16</sup>

Let us illustrate the context of such inscriptions. For instance, in one of the Senior pots of the *Kaniṣka* era (the 1st–2nd centuries A.D.) we find two inscriptions. The first one reads:

1. [sa]ba[tsa]ra [ba>(\*da)[śa>(\*mi) ma[se] a[vadu]nake sa[ste]hi (\*paca)hi i[śa] (\*kṣuṇa)mi [prati]tha[vi]? [matrapi]tra-p[uya]e sarva[śatva]na [p]u (\*ya)[e]
2. r(\*o)haṇasa maṣumatraputrasa

In the year [twelve], in the month *Avadunaka*, after (\*five) days; at this time [this] was established in honor of [his] father and mother, in honor of all beings; [donation] of *Rohaṇa*, son of *Masumatra*.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> See Salomon 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Salomon 2003: 76. Italics added here and elsewhere.

It is worth noting that “the first *Kuṣāṇa* century” (or “the first *Kaniṣka* era”) is the date 127 A.D. So the year 12 means 127 + 12 = 139 A.D. The second inscription, on the lid, is as follows:

[sa]batsara 10 [2] maṣ[u] a[vadu] saste 4 1 ? ? ? ? rohaṇeṇa maṣumatra-putreṇa thu[ba]m[i] sava[ṣatvaṇa pu>(\*ya)

Year 12, month *Avadu[naka]*, after 5 days, (\*established?) by *Rohaṇa*, son of *Masumatra*, in the *stūpa*, in honor of all beings.<sup>18</sup>

*Avadunaka* is understood here by Richard Salomon as the month of Ἀύδυναιός. In the next fragment from Gandhāra, *Khsaṃdika* is interpreted by him as Ξανδικός:

sam 20 4 khsaṃdikas[a] di [2] thubaṃmi baūtaaṇami acaryaṇa dharmagutakaṇa parigrahami

(Given in) the year 24, day 2 (?) of *Khsaṃdika* (Xandikos = Ξανδικός) to the *stūpa* at *Baūtaaṇa*, in the possession of the *Dharmaguptaka* masters.<sup>19</sup>

The year 24 means 127 + 24 = 151 A.D.

In the Wardak inscription, dated to the *Kaniṣka* year 51 (178 A.D.) during the reign of *Huviṣka*, the month name is also loaned from Greek: *masye arthamisiya sastehi* 10 4 1 “in the month *Arthamisiya* [Ἀρτεμίσιος], after fifteen days”.<sup>20</sup> A similar dating formula with a Greek month name appears in the next find-spot of the Senior pot: *sambatsarae aṭhaviṣatihi* 20 4 4 *mase apelaē sastehi daśahi* 10 *īsa kṣuṇaṃmi* “in the year twenty-eight, 28 [i.e. 155 A.D.], in the month *Apelaē* [Apelaios = Ἀπελλαιός], after ten days, 10; at this time...”.<sup>21</sup> Another example of the Greek month name, decoded by Sten Konow: *sam* 10 4 4 *masye arthamisiya sastehi* 10 *ī[s]e kṣuṇaṃm(r)i* “Year 18 [i.e. 145 A.D.], in the month *Arthamisiya* [Ἀρτεμίσιος], after 10 days; at this time...”.<sup>22</sup>

It is worth noting that in the *Kaniṣka* era (after 127 A.D.) the Greco-Macedonian month names were preferred to the Indian ones. At the

<sup>18</sup> Salomon 2003: 76.

<sup>19</sup> Salomon 2011: 168.

<sup>20</sup> Konow 1929: 170.

<sup>21</sup> Salomon 2003: 76–77.

<sup>22</sup> Konow 1929: 151–152.

same time, they also occur much earlier, e.g. in the Taxila copper plate of Patika,<sup>23</sup> dated in the month *Panema* [Πάνημος].

One may conclude that the Greek-Macedonian calendar used in Gandhāra is also direct evidence that a kind of Greek astrology and astronomy has been adopted by the Buddhist community at that time, since any calendar takes a significant part in compatible astrological and astronomical lore.

Furthermore, the medieval Hindu astrology used a lot of loanwords from Greek: (i) an angular sign: *kendra* (κέντρον); (ii) Sun: *heli* (ἥλιος); (iii) diameter: *jāmitra* (διάμετρον); (iv) the planet Jupiter: *jyau* (Ζεύς); (v) the planet Mars: *āra* (Ἄρης), and many others.

Let us note that one of the first treatises of Indian astrology is represented by the *Yavanajātaka* (“*Jātaka* of the Greeks”) recently reconstructed by David Pingree.<sup>24</sup> This treatise was a translation of a book written in Greek and devoted to astrology; the translation was made first in the 2nd century A.D. by Yavaneśvara and later versified by Sphujidhvaja in the 3rd century A.D. It is from this book that the Greek astrological terminology was adopted in the medieval Hindu astrology together with some modes of calculation.

Starting from the Sumerian period (ca. 3000–2500 B.C.), we have many ancient texts devoted to the matters of astronomy, astrology, and calendar systems, and all these texts do not separate these disciplines like it occurs nowadays (in the modern culture). The point is that in all known ancient cultures astronomy, astrology, and calendar systems belong together as one system of knowledge. The celestial (astronomical/astrological) aspect is also prominent in the Platonic works, especially in his descriptions of the pure lands. The same aspect is readily traced among the artifacts of Gandhāra (e.g., in the Greek names of months in the Buddhist inscriptions, in many occurrences of the following two names in Greco-Bactrian: Ζαοου in genitive (Greek Ζεύς), Ηρακιλο (Greek Ἡρακλῆς), who have a strong celestial/astronomical/astrological meaning, etc.). As a result, by apply-

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<sup>23</sup> Konow 1929: 28.

<sup>24</sup> See Pingree 1981.

ing the methods of archaeology of philosophy, we may conclude that there was a form of religious syncretism in a lost general joint system of calendar, astronomy, and astrology as a cultural context of **O11**, **O21**,  $f(\mathbf{O11}) = \mathbf{O'11}$ ,  $f(\mathbf{O21}) = \mathbf{O'21}$ .

The Greek astrology was not only a tool for divination, but also an ontological picture of the world, where Zeus was the supreme lord (the ontologemes **O11** “Zeus is the highest” and **O21** “Zeus is followed by other gods”). Thus, the heaven was regarded as the territory of Zeus: ἐν Διὶ πατρὶ (“in the heaven of Zeus”). He established the signs in heaven and marked out the constellations to set the seasons and time and to “give to men the right signs of the seasons” allowing them to work “for the planting of trees and for casting all manner of seeds”:

From Zeus [Διὸς] let us begin; him do we mortals never leave unnamed; full of Zeus are all the streets and all the market-places of men; full is the sea and the havens thereof; always we all have need of Zeus. For we are also his offspring; and he in his kindness unto men giveth favourable signs and wakeneth the people to work, reminding them of livelihood. He tells what time the soil is best for the labour of the ox and for the mattock, and what time the seasons are favourable both for the planting of trees and for casting all manner of seeds. For himself it was who set the signs in heaven, and marked out the constellations, and for the year devised what stars chiefly should give to men right signs of the seasons, to the end that all things might grow unfailingly. Wherefore him do men ever worship first and last (Arat. 1–15).<sup>25</sup>

This text belongs to Aratus, a Greek didactic poet, who wrote a prominent hexameter poem on astrology, the *Phaenomena* (Φαινόμενα καὶ Διοσημεῖα). It is the oldest extant Greek in-depth description of all the constellations and their meanings. He was probably a Phoenician, being a native of Soli in Cilicia or Tarsus, and a friend of the Stoic philosopher Zeno who was certainly a Phoenician. Aratus was a disciple of the Peripatetic philosopher Praxiphanes in Athens. He was invited to the court of Antiochus I Soter, the king of the Hellenistic Seleucid Empire that at the height of its power included central Anatolia, Persia, the Levant, Mesopotamia, and today’s Kuwait, Afghanistan,

<sup>25</sup> Here and elsewhere, the translation by G.R. Mair.



and parts of today's Pakistan and Turkmenistan. So Aratus has visited in the 3rd century B.C. the state that included countries with Indoaryan culture.

Thus, in the Greek astrology Zeus is the supreme lord (**O11** and **O21**). In the *Bṛhat Parāśara Horā Śāstra* (a foundational compilation of Indian astrology written not earlier than in the 7th century), the heaven is treated as the territory of Nārāyaṇa (Śrī Viṣṇu), therefore Nārāyaṇa in the Hindu astrology plays the role of Zeus (the Vaishnava mapping for **O11** and **O21**):

Śrī Viṣṇu who is the Lord (of all matters), who has undefiled spirit, who is endowed with the three *guṇas*, although he transcends the grip of *guṇas* (*gunātīta*), who is the Author of this Universe, who is glorious, who is the Cause and who is endowed with valour, has no beginning. He authored the Universe and administers it with a quarter of his power (*Bṛhat Parāśara Horā Śāstra* 1.9–11; translated by R. Santhanam).

In the Pure Land Sūtras, there is no astrology at all, but these texts are an essential addition to *lokanirdeśa* (the Buddhist teaching on the structure of the universe), and in the same way as Zeus for the Greeks and Nārāyaṇa for the Vaishnavs, Amitāyus is regarded as a supreme lord of the heaven ( $f(\mathbf{O11}) = \mathbf{O'11}$  and  $f(\mathbf{O21}) = \mathbf{O'21}$ ).

In the Greek (Latin) astrology, Zeus (Jupiter) has a celestial companion, namely Heracles (Hercules), who was traditionally considered a constellation named *The Kneeler*:

Ingeniculus (the Kneeler, i.e. Heracles) rises in the last degrees of Pisces. It is called in Greek *Engonasis*. Those who are born with this star rising will be wise, clever, trained in various tricks, liars who deceive people with different kinds of plots; they are always aggressive and display unbridled hostility (Firm. *Math.* 8.17.4).<sup>26</sup>

Right there in its orbit wheels a Phantom form, like to a man that strives at a task. That sign no man knows how to read clearly, nor what task he is bent, but men simply call him On His Knees [Ἐν γόνασιν or Ἐγγόνασιν, 'the Kneeler']. Now that Phantom, that toils on his knees, seems to sit on bended knee, and from both his shoulders

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<sup>26</sup> Translated by Jean Rhys Bram (1975: 280).

his hands are upraised and stretch, one this way, one that, a fathom's length. Over the middle of the head of the crooked Dragon [Δράκων], he has the tip of his right foot (Arat. 63–69).

But the Phantom On His Knees sinks all save knee and left foot beneath the stormy ocean (Arat. 592–593).

The same constellations including the Kneeler are enumerated by Geminus of Rhodes (3.8). Eratosthenes of Cyrene associated the Kneeler with Heracles (Οὔτος, φασίν, Ἡρακλῆς ἐστὶν ὁ ἐπὶ τοῦ Ὀφειῶς βεβηκῶς, *Cat.* 1.4). Dionysius of Halicarnassus noted that Heracles must have become immortal because of his virtue (διαμείψαντα τὴν θνητὴν φύσιν ἀθάνατον γενέσθαι δι' ἀρετῆν, 1.40.2).

In the Hindu astrology, the celestial location quite similar to the Greek (Latin) constellation of Heracles (Hercules) is called Abhijit, the 28th *nakṣatra* (constellation). In the *Sārāvalī*, the Hindu astrological fundamental book written by Kalyāṇavarman in ca. 800 A.D., Abhijit is a sign which predicts becoming a king:

*jāyate 'bhijiti yaḥ śubhakarmā bhūpatirbhavati so 'tulavīryaḥ |  
nīcaveśmakulajo 'pi naro 'smin rājayoga iti na vyapadeśaḥ ||*

One born in Abhijit *nakṣatra* will become a lord of the earth though with auspicious action, unequaled strength, and born of a family of an inferior dwelling. There is a *Rāja yoga* in this, even for a man with no name (*Sārāvalī* 86; translated by M.D. Neely).

The point is that it is believed that Kṛṣṇa was born under this constellation. Abhijit is a *bhakti* and *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. Thus, this sign allows a righteous person to attain to heaven:

*dugdham tvabhijite yoge dattvā madhu ghr̥tāplutam |  
dharmanityo manīṣibhyaḥ svargaloke mahīyate ||*

By making a gift under the conjunction called Abhijit, of milk with honey and ghee unto men of wisdom, a righteous person attains to heaven and becomes an object of attention and honour there (*Mahābhārata* 13.63.27; translated by K.M. Ganguli).

This sign allows human beings to attain to high knowledge, too:

*śrāddhaṃ tvabhijitā kurvanvidyāṃ śreṣṭhāmavāpnuyāt*

By doing it under the constellation Abhijit one attains to high knowledge (*Mahābhārata* 13.89.11; translated by K.M. Ganguli).

Hence, the constellation of Abhijit is a Hindu analogue for the Greek constellation of Heracles even according to their celestial location, prognoses and connotations approximating those of Heracles, the Kneeler. In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (written after the 8th century A.D.), we read:

*saṃvatsaro 'smy animiṣāṃ ṛtūnāṃ madhu-mādhavau |*  
*māsānāṃ mārgaśiṛṣo 'haṃ nakṣatrāṇāṃ tathābhijit ||*

Among all the divisions of Time, I am a year (*saṃvatsara*) and among all seasons, I am the spring. Among the months [of a year], I am Mārgaśiṛṣa, and among all constellations of stars, I am Abhijit (*Bhāgavata-purāṇa* 11.16.27).

In the region of today's Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, and even in some lands of North India such as Mathura, the excavations produced a great number of images of Hellenistic deities dated from the 4th century B.C. to the 4th or even 5th century A.D. For instance, the images of Zeus and Heracles were quite often minted with accompanying Greek inscriptions or without them on the coins of various dynasties of North India, Indo-Greeks, Indo-Parthians, Indo-Scythians, Kuṣāṇas, and their assorted satraps. Usually, Zeus was depicted as standing and holding Nike (the Hellenic goddess of victory) or as an enthroned deity, see Fig. 1. Heracles was depicted conventionally as a deity holding a club and a lion skin, see Fig. 2 and 3. In the 2nd century A.D., the Kuṣāṇa Empire was quite extensive, including the territories of North India up to Varanasi as well as the whole territory of contemporary Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, along with some portions of Turkmenistan. At that time, Zeus and Heracles remained quite popular. Zeus was spelled Ζεοοοσ (*Zeus*) in Greco-Bactrian and Heracles, Ηρακιλο (*Herakilo*) or Ηρκιλο (*Herkilo*). It is worth remembering that Bactrian along with Gāndhārī were two main languages of the Kuṣāṇa Empire since 127 A.D. One of the last images of Heracles on the Kuṣāṇa coins is exemplified in Fig. 3.



Figure 1. Posthumous imitation of Hermaios (Ἑρμαῖος, ca. 90–70 B.C.), the Indo-Greek king of the Eucratid Dynasty. This posthumous issue is attributed to the Indo-Scythian or Kuṣāṇa rulers of Hermaios' former territories. *Material:* Silver drachm (16 x 18 mm, 1.94 g). *Obverse:* The diademed and draped bust of Hermaios turned right; the Greek legend around: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΣΩΤΗΡΟΣ / ΕΡΜΑΙΟΥ. *Reverse:* Zeus enthroned slightly to the left, making the gesture of benediction and holding a scepter; the Gāndhārī legend around in the Kharoṣṭhī script: *maharajasa tratarasa / heramayasa*.



Figure 2. Azilises (Greek/Bactrian: ΑΖΙΑΙΚΟΣ, ca. 60–35 B.C.), the Indo-Scythian king of Gandhāra. *Material:* Copper 1/4 unit (17 x 18 mm, 2.58 g). *Obverse:* The diademed king mounted on a horse turned right, within the square border; the corrupted

Greek legend around: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ / ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ / ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ // ΑΖΙΛΙΣΟΥ. Reverse: Heracles seated on a rock, holding a club in his right hand, a monogram below left, all within the square border; the corrupted Gāndhārī legend around in the Kharoṣṭhī script: maharajasa / mahatasa / ayiliṣasa.



Figure 3. Huviṣka (Bactrian: ΟΟΗΔΚΙ, ca. 140–180 A.D.), the king of Kuṣāṇa dynasty who was the ruler of the Kuṣāṇa Empire at the peak of its power covering today's Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, North of India and South of Turkmenistan. Material: Copper tetrachm (24 mm, 9.99 g). Obverse: The king riding an elephant facing right, holding an elephant goad; the corrupted Bactrian legend around: ΔΑΟΝΑΝΟ ΔΑΟ ΟΟΗΔΚΙ ΚΟΔΑΝΟ. Reverse: Hercules facing left with a halo, holding the club and lion skin in the left hand and holding the diadem for the king in his right hand; a tamgha on the left; the corrupted Bactrian legend on the right: ΗΡΚΙΛΟ.

In Gandhāra, Heracles came to be considered a protector of Buddhism: in the *Sukhāvativyūhasūtra* (Takakusu 1988: №360), he is called *Mahāsthāmaprāpta*, 大勢至, *Dàshìzhì*, by one of the names of Vajrapāṇi. Now there is a consensus among historians that Heracles is Vajrapāṇi for the Buddhists and this opinion is commonly expressed in the catalogues of most museum, including the British Museum, see Fig. 4. In the Greek mythology, Heracles, born as a human being, ascended to heaven after all of his labors and finally became a constellation. This means that now Zeus is followed by him on the sky (O21), in the pure lands in the Platonic meaning. So even the character of Heracles who accompanies Zeus in heaven is now the same as the character of Vajrapāṇi who accompanies Amitāyus in the pure lands of the latter ( $f(O21) = O'21$ ).



Figure 4. Fragment of a panel showing the haloed Buddha and Vajrapāṇi (Heracles) behind him with other figures attending the Buddha. *Museum number:* 1947,1016.1 British Museum. *School/style:* Gandhāra School. *Culture/period:* Kuṣāṇa. *Date:* 2nd century – 3rd century A.D. *Materials:* schist. *Technique:* carved. *Dimensions:* 37.2 cm (height); 78.8 cm (width); 5.4 cm (diameter). *Acquisition date:* 1947.

To sum up, we can trace back the influences of Greek astrology on its Hindu counterpart, and within this cultural context Zeus was treated as Nārāyaṇa for the Vaishnavs (and Amitāyus for the Buddhists) as well as Heracles was treated as Abhijit for the Vaishnavs (and Vajrapāṇi for the Buddhists). This shows a cultural diffusion between Hellenistic and Indoaryan religions at the time of writing the first Pure Land Sūtras which is an archaeological confirmation for **O11**, **O21**,  $f(\mathbf{O11}) = \mathbf{O'11}$ ,  $f(\mathbf{O21}) = \mathbf{O'21}$ . Within this diffusion, some Hellenistic philosophical ideas such as the Platonic teaching about heaven from the *Phaedrus* could have put down roots in Gandhāra indeed.

### 5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have drawn the conclusion that the teaching about heaven from the *Phaedrus* could have influenced the teaching about heaven of the Pure Land Sūtras. In drawing this conclusion, I have applied the new methodology called *archaeology of philosophy*. This conclusion may be represented in the following sum total according to Mill's methods:

1. The Platonic dialogue *Phaedrus* is a teaching about heaven within the framework of monistic philosophy.
2. The *Phaedrus* has structural similarity to the Pure Land Sūtras.
3. The Pure Land Sūtras are an example of Buddhist teaching about heaven within the framework of monistic philosophy.
4. The *Phaedrus* is a Greek teaching about pure lands.
5. The Pure Land Sūtras are a Buddhist teaching about pure lands.
6. The earliest fragments of Pure Land Buddhism appeared in Gandhāra at the time of strong Hellenistic influence and Greco-Buddhist syncretic culture.
7. The Greek teaching about heaven or pure lands has a Greek astrological context.
8. The same Greek astrological context is reconstructed in Gandhāra at the time of Hellenistic influence and Greco-Buddhist syncretic culture.

Therefore, quite probably, the Platonic teaching about heaven within the framework of monistic philosophy, along with the Greek teaching about pure lands, could have influenced the Buddhist teaching about heaven within the framework of monistic philosophy, along with the Buddhist teaching about pure lands in Gandhāra in the Greek astrological context.

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