



AZES

AZES, the name of two Indo-Scythian kings of the major dynasty ruling an empire based on the Punjab and Indus valley from about 50 BCE to CE 30. Regarded as Parthian by some scholars and Scythian by others, the dynasty is probably Scytho-Parthian, a composite people using both Śaka and Pahlava names, derived from the Scythian settlement in the Parthian province of Sīstān. Numismatists have distinguished the existence of two kings. Azes I has the obverse coin type of the king on horseback holding a couched spear, while Azes II has the horseman holding an upright whip. Bronze coins of Azes I are overstruck by [Azilises](#), showing that Azes I preceded Azilises; the coinage of Azes II is debased into billon, is copied by Gondophares, and is found in the later strata at Taxila.

Belonging to the Azes dynasty is the group of early Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions dated in the old Śaka era. Van Lohuizen de Leeuw (*The “Scythian” Period*, Leiden, 1949, pp. 1-50) relates the era to the Yue-chi conquest of Bactria in 129 BCE; but most scholars refer them to the Vikrama era of 58 BCE. The Taxila silver vase referring to a great Kushan king, like the Shahdaur inscription, has a high number date (136) with “Ayasa.” J. H. Marshall (“The Date of Kanishka,” *JRAS*, 1914, pp. 973-86) interpreted this as “in the era of Azes.” If correct, Azes’ accession would be in 58 BCE.

Azes I succeeded as king of kings to the empire previously ruled by Maues. His coinage was struck in three principal mints—at Pushkalavati in Gandhara, at Taxila, and in the middle Indus province (not Arachosia, where finds rarely contain his coinage). He retained the silver denominations and square coppers



with legends in Greek and Kharoṣṭhī that the Indo-Greeks had used, but instead of a royal portrait his obverse type was a mounted horseman with a couched lance.

Azes II succeeded the intervening ruler Azilises as king of kings in the north, but lost the middle Indus province, where Spalahores and Spalagadames struck coins with Vonones as king of kings (probably the same as the Parthian emperor from CE 8 to 12). Azes II probably added Jalālābād and Gard to the empire. An inscription of Tīravharṇa the satrap in year 83 (i.e., CE 25) was found at Jalālābād, and hoards of copper coins of Azes II are reported (*NC*, 1861, pp. 72-78). Azes II used the Zeus Nikephoros reverse for silver issues from Taxila and the Pallas types for his mint in Gandhara and experimented with the metrology of his new round copper denominations. At the end of his reign there was a major debasement of his silver coinage datable before CE 42 (Mac Dowall, “The Azes Hoard from Shaikhan Dheri,” *South Asian Archaeology*, London, 1973, p. 228). Drachms of Azes II of the Zeus Nikephoros type, first in silver then in billon, were struck in large quantities and are very common in finds from north Pakistan.

The empire was governed by satraps; and when the empire of Azes II began to break up, we find independent coinages of satraps such as Jihonika and Rajuvula, as well as of the *stratēgos* Aspavarma and the Kushan king Kujula, which copy the denominations and types of Azes II. Their Indo-Parthian and Kushan successors continued to use the old Śaka era of Azes for some time, presumably claiming some continuity with Azes.

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