



INDO-GREEK DYNASTY

INDO-GREEK DYNASTY, Greco-Bactrian kings who ruled over the region south of the Hindu Kush in the second and first century B.C.E. Alexander of Macedon's conquest of the Achaemenid satrapies of Bactria and Sogdia in Central Asia and the Indian territories south of the Hindu Kush (Hendukosh) plunged these regions into a political upheaval with far-reaching consequences. According to the Roman historian Justin (41.4, based on Pompeius Trogus's *Historiae Philippicae*), when Arsaces was about to throw off the yoke of the Seleucids in Parthia (around mid-third century B.C.E.), Diodotus, the Seleucid satrap of Bactria, also revolted against his suzerain and established an independent kingdom there. This state, which soon extended to embrace the whole of Bactria and Sogdia north of the Hindu Kush, is designated as the Greco-Bactrian kingdom. Its rulers minted coins in Attic standard and with legends in Greek. Some of them, those who reigned over the region south of the Hindu Kush, are referred to as the Indo-Greeks. The reconstruction of the history of the Indo-Greeks and their nomadic successors depends mainly on numismatic evidence. Other sources (ancient texts and inscriptions and various data obtained from archeological investigations) are important but secondary compared to the vast and rich information adducible from the coins.

The Indo-Greek kings struck coins with bilingual legends, usually in Greek on the obverse and in an Indian language (Prakrit in Kharoṣṭhī or, very rarely, in Brāhmī script) on the reverse. The standard differed: Attic was used in the north, but the so-called Indian standard was employed for the coins minted for



their Indian-speaking subjects in the territories of Indian culture. On the basis of numismatic evidence, minting techniques, iconography, and metrology, the issues of Agathocles and Pantaleon are considered to be the oldest of all the bilingual coins that circulated there. The technical aspects of the minting methods and the irregular shape of these rectangular coins remind us of the process used for the so-called Taxila-type coinage. Perhaps the most important feature of these coins is their purely indigenous iconography. Apollodotus I was certainly a close contemporary of Agathocles, Pantaleon, and Antimachus I. This chronological order, now well established from numismatic evidence, shows that Apollodotus I originated the drachm of 2.45 g. weight with a bilingual legend and struck according to the "Indian standard," which became the standard for all the Indo-Greek territories, even long after the disappearance of Greek power in India.

Eucratides I (171-145 B.C.E.), contemporary of Antimachus I and Apollodotus I, who became a powerful king in Bactria, invaded parts of India. His successor Heliocles I (145-130 B.C.E.) was the last Greek king to reign in Bactria. Once the Yüeh-chih tribes overpowered him, the Greco-Bactrians lost control of the provinces north of the Hindu Kush. However, the rule of the Indo-Greeks over territories south of the Hindu Kush lasted for a further 150 years, finally collapsing under the pressure of the Yüeh-chih and Scythian (Saka) invasions.

Menander I (165-130 B.C.E.), a contemporary of Eucratides, was no doubt the most important Greek king who ever ruled in the Indian territories. He was the only Greek king in India who made a clearly identifiable appearance in Indian literature, and his reputation as a good king gave rise to legends that inspired some classical writers. He excels all the Greek kings who ruled before and after him in India, not only in the number of coins, but also in the number of different dies, series (both silver and bronze), and monograms. The Indo-Greek successors of Menander are known almost entirely from their coins, and any chronological sequence proposed for them must be based purely on numismatic evidence, especially the hoard compositions, overstrikes, monogram pattern, geographical distribution of coins, and their stylistic features.

Zoilus I, along with Agathocleia and Strato I, was the immediate successor of Menander. It is generally agreed that Queen Agathocleia, whose name and portrait appear on a number of coins either alone or in conjunction with those of Strato, was the mother of the latter. When the coins of Agathocleia are set in chronological sequence, we can indeed observe that Agathocleia was regent



during the infancy of her son Strato.

Among the other Indo-Greek kings, the reigns of Lysias, Antialcidas, Philoxenus, and Archebius were noteworthy. According to the inscription in Brāhmī of the Besnagar column (also known as Vidisha) bearing a dedication to the Indian god Vasudeva, the Greek Heliodorus, an inhabitant of Taxila, was the ambassador to the Greek sovereign Antialcidas.

The Yüeh-chih, who had already invaded Bactria, crossed the Hindu Kush mountains, the natural barrier which had protected the Mauryan empire from the Greek expansion and had subsequently buttressed the Indo-Greek kingdom from nomadic invasion. Then, fifty years later (about 70 B.C.E.), they conquered the Paropamisadae and Gandhara, dethroning Hermaeus. Having penetrated into the Paropamisadae, these nomadic conquerors began, as they were accustomed to, to imitate the coins of Hermaeus (q.v.), the last Greek king to rule in these regions.

About 85 B.C.E. a Scythian prince named Maues occupied Taxila. The Greeks, led by Apollodotus II, were subsequently able to regain the lost territories of the Punjab. However, another Scythian prince, Azes I, who dethroned Hippostratus, the last Greek king to reign in the western Punjab, including Taxila and Pushkalavati (Puṣkalāvati), definitively expelled them from this region in about 55 B.C.E. The overstrikes give a very clear chronological sequence for the Greek and Scythian kings who were the successors of Maues in Taxila and Pushkalavati. Gondophares, the founder of the Indo-Parthian kingdom (q.v.), came to power towards the end of the reign of Azes II. In about 10 C.E. the Scythian Rajuvula, the satrap of Mathura (in the middle Ganges valley), conquered the last Greek bastion that had survived at Sagala (Sialkot) in the eastern Punjab, and thus under the reign of Strato II Greek power in India came to an end. A few years later the great Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian empires collapsed under the onslaught of the Kushans led by Kujula Kadphises. The final phase of the Greeks and the emergence of Indo-Scythians and Indo-Parthians are dated by setting the numismatic sequence within the context of literary references.



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