



INDO-SCYTHIAN DYNASTY

INDO-SCYTHIAN DYNASTY from Maues, the first (Indo-)Scythian king of India (ca. 120-85 BCE) to the mid-1st century CE. When precisely and under what circumstances Maues arrived in India is uncertain, but the expulsion of the Scythian (Saka/Sai) peoples from Central Asia is referred to in the Han Shu, where the cause given is their confrontation with the Ta Yüeh-chih, themselves undergoing an enforced migration. It is stated (Hulsewe, p. 144) that “when the Ta Yüeh-chih turned west, defeated and expelled the king of the Sai, the latter moved south and crossed over the Suspended Crossing.” That this route (from the Pamirs into the Gilgit valley) was used in Maues’ time is confirmed by the discovery of inscriptions in the Chilas/Gilgit area bearing his name (Dani, 1983 and 1995, pp. 52, 55). Another alternative route to Kashmir (Chi-pin) was via Ferghana [see [FARGĀNA](#)] (Ta Yüan) and the Dora Pass (see Torday, p. 271). During this same period when Maues ruled in Kashmir and Hazara (district, North-West Frontier Province, Pakistan), an event took place in Ferghana (Hulsewe, p. 135), which has some bearing on both his name and a possible Ferghana origin. The king of Ferghana at the turn of the first century BCE was one Wu-Kua (Miwo/Miu-kwâ/kwa)—a name which may be an alternative form of Maues (Moa/Moga /Mauakes; see Torday, pp. 380-81). This other Maues/Miu-kwa, besieged by a Chinese army, was beheaded by his own people, who then submitted to a ruler chosen by the invaders.

With so little else revealing the history of this period, it is left to an analysis of the surviving numismatic material to suggest the sequence of events during and after the reign of Maues. Before his arrival, the coinage of northwestern



India consisted primarily of bilingual Indo-Greek coins (see [INDO-GREEKS](#)), the silver issues of which portray the ruler on the obverse with a Greek legend around, and a Hellenistic deity on the reverse with a Kharoṣṭhī legend around (Bopearachchi, 1991). These Indo-Greek kings seem to have formed alliances amongst themselves and the reverse deities probably indicate the dynastic lineage of the issuer (Senior, 2005, pp. xxvi-xxvii).

Maues' coins do not bear portraits, and on his issues and those of subsequent rulers the deities depicted represent more an association with particular regions rather than dynastic relationships. With the discovery of some bronze coins of Indo-Greek type ([PLATE I, no. 1](#)) on which the ruler, Artemidoros, boldly states that he is the son of Maues (Senior, 1998, pp. 55-56; 2004; 2005), we now know that rulers having Greek names (and issuing Greek-style coins with portraits) were not necessarily Greek at all, but that some were partly, if not wholly, Scythian. This fact has a great bearing on our understanding of the coinage, since it now appears that we are dealing with a fusion between Greeks and Scythians more than a confrontation. From this period, the fact that coins were struck on the Indo-Greek model, with a portrait, or on the Indo-Scythian one, without, probably tells us less about the racial origins of the issuer than previously thought.

A clearer picture of the chronology and relationships between the Indo-Greek kings and Maues has been obtained from hoard evidence and monogram sequences. The order of kings has been confirmed by the identification of overstruck coins, since the issuer of the undertype must be either earlier than or contemporary with the king who overstruck his coins (Senior, 2004-05; Bopearachchi, 1989). Overstriking can take place when there is a shortage of metal for a new coinage, but it sometimes signifies hostile incursion by a new ruler. Maues' encroachment into Indo-Greek territory doesn't appear to have been violent: he didn't restrike their coins, and only one uncertain overstrike on his exists. He issued silver coins for three principal provinces (Senior, 2001, I, pp. 29-35);

(1) In Hazara and Kashmir, his eastern province, he struck the beautiful "Female City deity enthroned right [obv.] – Zeus Nikephoros left [rev.]" type ([PLATE I, no. 2](#)). Known previously from just one specimen in Lahore museum, all subsequent examples have surfaced in Kashmir, confirming that this province was indeed where they circulated. The bronze denominations bear types that show either the king mounted on horseback (which becomes the commonest silver type for subsequent Indo-Scythian monarchs) or mainly



non-Greek deities. This was probably the first province occupied by Maues, and one seemingly not previously occupied by the Indo-Greeks.

(2) In Taxila province (to the west of Hazara), he struck his commonest silver issue “Zeus left – Nike right” (PLATE I, no. 3). The bronze coin types are predominantly animals (bull, elephant) which had appeared on the city’s coinage even before the Greek occupation. Other coins show Greek (Apollo, tripod, Zeus-Nikephoros, Artemis) or Parthian (horse, bowcase) influences. By far the commonest bronze is an imitation of the Bactrian king Demetrios I (ca. 186-170), the probable founder of the “Greek era” of 186 BCE (see below). Maues was thus probably laying claim to be his successor, not only as the founder of a dynasty, but as a conqueror of India.

(3) In the northwest region his silver bears the type of “Artemis and driver in two-horsed chariot – Enthroned Zeus” (PLATE I, no. 4); the design of the reverse is similar to one of Antialcidas (130–120). Some of his drachms are square, imitating those of the last major Indo-Greek king in the region, Philoxenos (ca. 125-110). Here the bronze coins are scarce and show either Zeus, Nike, a lunar deity, or other uncertain male/female deities.

Maues possibly attempted to unify his currency system, since a final phase introduced a new bronze type with “Poseidon – *yakshi* [female fertility figure] amongst vines” being issued in all three provinces.

Maues did not displace all the Indo-Greek kings in these last two provinces, and several continued to strike coins during his lifetime and those of his Indo-Scythian successors. Just as the Scythians in Central Asia had often formed federations or alliances, these Indo-Greeks too ruled with a system of joint or associate kings. It is quite likely that marriages took place between the Scythian and Greek peoples in accordance with the precedents set by both Alexander the Great and Seleucos Nikator. Maues may have used similar alliances and marriages to control his empire.

One remarkable coin issue of Maues bears the types of his Kashmir province but a monogram associated with Taxila and struck jointly in his name and that of Queen Machene (PLATE I, no. 5). Though Machene is not a Greek name, it is quite possible that this issue commemorated an alliance (probably through matrimony) between Maues and a powerful Indo-Greek family in Taxila. The recent reordering of Indo-Greek kings mentioned above shows that two other such “joint” issues were struck during this period: Strato (ca. 105- 85/80) with



Agathocleia (PLATE I, no. 6), and Hermaios (ca. 105-90) with Calliope (PLATE I, no. 7). Coins of the latter type are found overstruck with dies bearing the name of Artemidoros (the son of Maues; PLATE I, no. 8)—evidence which places them in this time frame. It may well be that Hermaios was related to Maues (both using an identical “Enthroned Zeus” reverse type), whereas his wife Calliope may have been the daughter of Philoxenos (both use the “King on Prancing Horse” type). A rare issue was even struck that bore just these two reverse types without a portrait, the usual determinant of what are regarded as Indo-Scythian coins (Senior, 1998, pl. 1, no. 2). Both Strato and Hermaios introduced Scytho-Parthian designs on their bronze coins. For example, one early issue of Maues has a “walking horse – bowcase,” while on some Strato coins we find a “bowcase,” and the sole bronze reverse for Hermaios is the same “walking horse” type.

The epithet “King of Kings” was thus earned by Maues, and the subsequent or contemporary adoption of this title by Mithradates II (appearing first from ca. 109 BCE on cuneiform tablets [Sellwood, p. 63]) might have been so as not to appear Maues’ inferior. Previous authors who considered that Maues had arrived in India from the west assumed the situation was the reverse, and that Maues therefore postdated Mithradates.

At some time before Maues’ demise, a further invasion of Scythians took place, and this second group did arrive from the west, via the Hindu Kush. These Scythians had earlier occupied Bactria, the Greek province north of the Hindu Kush, and the last surviving Bactrian Greek ruler there was Heliocles I (ca. 135–100). It would appear that he had a son, Heliocles II (ca. 100/95–85), whom the invading Scythians forced over the Hindu Kush, where he then appropriated territory, particularly from Strato and Hermaios, during the lifetime of Maues. He struck silver coins bearing the same reverse deity (“Thundering Zeus”) as his father, and overstruck prolifically the bronze issues of Strato and, to a lesser extent, Hermaios. This invasion may have signaled the early demise of Hermaios, whose lifetime issues are quite scarce.

Maues died circa 85/80 BCE when the western Scythians followed Heliocles II into India and began to strike their own coinage. Their first issues were purely imitations of the Hermaios silver coinage (PLATE I, no. 9), and in fact this series of “Posthumous Hermaios” coins continued to be issued for many decades following (Senior, 1999). Why they chose to imitate the silver coins of Hermaios is not known, but it may have been due to his possible relationship



with Maues. For lower denomination coins they imitated the bronzes of two earlier Bactrian rulers, Apollodotos I (ca. 175-165) and Eukratides (ca. 171-139). These western Scythians may have been organized into a loose federation of some kind, but one leader amongst them, with the Parthian name Vonones (ca. 85-65), began to strike coins jointly with his brother Spalahores (PLATE I, no. 10) and nephew Spalagadames. The obverse on their silver coins is a “King mounted right with spear” taken from the bronze coins of Maues, while the reverse is “Thundering Zeus” taken from the silver issues of Heliocles II, whom they had supplanted by this time. A further subordinate of Vonones was Spalirises, who at first struck coins jointly with that king, then as sole king, and finally as joint king with Azes (q.v.). Azes may have been dynastically linked to the house of Maues (he imitated his Taxila silver issue; Senior, 1998, pl. III, 19). The lower denomination bronzes for the Vonones “family” share types with those of a contemporary Indo-Greek king, Amyntas (ca. 80-65), whose silver “Enthroned Zeus” reverses are similar to those of Maues.

In the more Eastern provinces of Taxila and Hazara/Kashmir the situation after Maues is more complicated. There is no doubt that Azilises (q.v.; ca. 80-50?) inherited Hazara and struck some beautiful coins there, one with a purely Indian deity, Lakshmi (PLATE I, no. 11). Elsewhere, another king but with a Greek name, Telephos (ca. 80-70), struck portraitless Indo-Scythian coins with Indian deities on the reverse (PLATE I, no. 12) and bearing a monogram known otherwise only from the coins of Maues. He could well have been a member of Maues’ family, as could Peucolaos (ca. 75), who adopted the “Zeus left” type from his Taxila issues. Artemidoros (ca. 100–80), the only confirmed son of Maues, may have been in rebellion, since he was without a major mint city. His very rare issues seem to have been struck mostly before his father’s death.

In Taxila, the capital of Gandhara, it would appear that the Indo-Greek Apollodotos II (ca. 85-65) acceded to power, but his relationship to Maues is not known. However, a unique commemorative tetradrachm or medal is known, which appears to be a joint issue between Apollodotos and a Scythian king (Senior, 1998, pl. II, 16). It has the name and portrait of Apollodotos on the obverse, but a mounted horseman, Scythian titles, and an uncertain name on the reverse. During this period of ca. 80-60 BCE therefore, there circulated concurrently in Gandhara/Kashmir, coins of: Vonones, Azilises, the “Posthumous Hermaios” issuers, plus several rulers with Greek names, mostly of Indo-Greek type.



In 58/57 BCE the Vikrama era began, and it is now generally considered that this was founded by Azes, in whose named era an increasing number of inscriptions are being discovered. By this date Azes was sole heir to the Vonones family and occupied most of the western Gandharan provinces, though some outlying areas continued to strike “Posthumous-Hermaios” coins. Taxila was in the hands of Hippostratos (ca. 65-55), who struck Indo-Greek style coins but used reverses of either a mounted king or a female deity and on some coins added a Scythian title. Azilises had expanded his territory from Hazara/Kashmir (where he struck coins on which he is mounted and holding a whip; [PLATE II, no. 14](#)) into the provinces previously held by the Vonones family (where he struck coins on which he is mounted and holding a spear). For a period of time both Azes ([PLATE II, no. 13](#)) and Azilises ([PLATE II, no. 14](#)) existed alongside each other, but whether in confrontation or co-operation is not certain. What is known, however, is that Azes eventually becomes sole ruler in all the provinces of Gandhara and, on taking Hazara, he adopted the “mounted king with whip” type ([PLATE II, no. 15](#)). A small dynasty of rulers with Greek names continued to strike Indo-Greek style drachms and bronzes in the extreme east and Jammu area until about 10 BCE (Senior, 1997).

A Scythian satrap, Zeionises, “son of Manigula, brother of the King” (Konow p. 82), issued coins during and after Azes’ lifetime, while several other rajas and satraps seem to have risen to prominence after his demise, such as Kharahostes and his son Hajatriasa. Several of these also appear in inscriptions, and prominent amongst them are Rajavula and his son Sodasa, who migrated south from Kashmir to Mathura. The Mathura Lion capital inscription (Konow pp. 30–49), dedicated to Rajuvulas queen, refers to “the illustrious king Muki [Maues],” showing that his memory was still revered. The inscription mentions other rajas and satraps and ends “in honor of the whole Sakastana” indicating that, however administered, the Scythian-occupied territory was seen as an entirety. One dynasty, the Kshaharata Satraps, who first emerged in Hazara/Gandhara, may have been Zoroastrians (see the coin of Hospises; Senior, 2005, p. 19). They too migrated south, to Sind/Gujerat, and then under Nahapana (ca. 20 BCE-15 CE?) spread Scythian influence into parts of central India.

A third group of Scythians (usually referred to as Indo-Parthians; see [INDO-PARTHIAN DYNASTY](#)) which had been settled in the Parthian province of Sakastan (Seistan) by Mithradates II (ca. 123–88) now began to make its presence felt. Under their leader, Gondophares I (ca. 50-5 BCE?; see



GONDOPHARES), they expanded their empire eastwards and arrived in Gandhara in the second decade BCE. The Takht-i-Bahi inscription (Konow, pp. 57-62) refers to a Gondophares and is dated in his 26th year, year 103 of an unspecified era, which, if accepted as the Azes/Vikrama era, would place a Gondophares as ruling from ca. 19 to 45+ CE. Since the coins of Gondophares I (PLATE II, nos. 16, A) can be shown to immediately follow those of Azes, previous authors tried to fill the gap from 58/7 BCE to 19 CE by creating two kings called Azes from his known coinage (Jenkins). It can be clearly shown that Gondophares I ruled in the last half of the first century BCE (Senior, 2001 and 2005), and therefore the Takht-i-Bahi inscription must either be dated in an earlier era (of Maues?) or, as seems most likely, refer to a different and later king called Gondophares.

A new inscription (Salomon) helps solve this problem. It is dated in year 27 of the reign of King Vijayamitra, King of the Apraca, 73rd year of Azes, and 201st year of the Yona (or Greek) era, which places the latter era as beginning in 186/5 BCE (probably founded by Demetrios I) and the reign of Vijayamitra from ca. 12 BCE to 15+ CE. The latest known dated inscription of Vijayamitra (Sadakata) gives his regnal year as 32, i.e., ca. 19 CE.

A series of coins bearing the name of Azes (corrupt in Greek) on a slightly heavier standard than his lifetime issues (PLATE II, no. 17) were struck posthumously and culminate in some very rare issues bearing the name of Indravasu, Vijayamitra's son (PLATE II, no. 18). These "posthumous Azes" issues are considered to have been struck by Vijayamitra, and their inception began during the period when Gondophares I entered Gandhara and introduced this heavier standard. It appears that Gondophares I ruled by allowing contemporary Satraps and Rajas to maintain their autonomy under him. Whereas in his western provinces, in present-day Afghanistan, Gondophares I (PLATE II, no. A) was succeeded by Gondophares II Sarpedones, then Gondophares III Gadana/Orthagnes (PLATE II, no. B), his Gandharan province went to his nephew Abdagases (q.v., who never acquired the title "Gondophares"; PLATE II, no. 19). During the rule of the latter king, Vijayamitra continued to strike his "Posthumous Azes" coins, though somewhat more debased, but in ca. 19 CE, on his demise and that of Indravasu, a related Apraca general called Aspavarma succeeded (PLATE II, no. 20). At about the same time, ca. 19/20 CE, Abdagases was supplanted as king in Gandhara, not by a member of the family of Gondophares I, but by Gondophares IV Sases (PLATE II, nos. 21, C), who also appears to be from this



Apraca family (“Sases, son of the brother of Aspa” appears on some coins). He would therefore be the Gondophares of the Takht-i-Bahi inscription. Leaving his relative Aspavarma ruling independently, Gondophares-Sases proceeded to unite the territories held previously by his illustrious predecessors, Maues, Azes, and Gondophares I. At sometime post-45 CE, however, the Scythian occupation of India, begun by Maues, completely ended when the area was overrun by the Kushan (see [KUSHAN DYNASTY](#) at [iranica.com](#)).

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PLATE I. Coins of the Indo-Scythians and related: silver tetradrachms (where not otherwise stated). 1. Æ, 22 x 24 mm, Artemidoros, son of Maues. 2. 25 mm, Maues. 3. 29 mm, Maues. 4. 30 mm, Maues. 5. 26 mm, Machene with Maues. 6. 28 mm, Strato with Agathocleia. 7. 28 mm, Hermaios with Calliope. 8. 26 mm, Artemidoros. 9. 29 mm, Posthumous-Hermaios. 10. 26 mm, Vonones with Spalahores. 11. 26 mm, Azilises. 12. 12 mm, Telephos. (All coins from the collection of the author).

PLATE II. Coins of the Indo-Scythians and related: silver tetradrachms (where not otherwise stated). 13. 26 mm, Azes. 14. 26 mm, Azilises. 15. 26 mm, Azes. 16. 22 mm, Gondophares I. 17. 23 mm, Posthumous-Azes (Apracaraja Vijayamitra). 18. 21 mm, Apracaraja Indravasu. 19. 21 mm, Abdagases. 20. 22 mm, Aspavarma. 21. 21 mm, Gondophares-Sases. A. Æ tetradrachm (from Arachosia), 26 mm, Gondophares I. B. Æ tetradrachm, 22 mm, Orthagnes /Gadana-Gondophares. C. Æ tetradrachm, 22 mm, Gondophares-Sases. (All



coins from the collection of the author.)