Article by **Adrian David Hugh Bivar**

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KUSHAN DYNASTY I. DYNASTIC HISTORY

KUSHAN DYNASTY (Mid. Pers. Kušān, Bactrian Košano) of the 1st-3rd centuries CE.

i. Dynastic History

During the first to mid-third centuries CE, the empire of the Kushans (Mid. Pers. Kušān-šahr) represented a major world power in Central Asia and northern India. They were able to contend on equal terms with Parthia, and at times even gained the upper hand over these western neighbors. Their history has, however, until recently received minimal attention from Classical historians. This is because apparently their existence has been explicitly noted only once in Classical literature, by Bardaiṣan (see BARDESANES) of Edessa in his *Book of the Laws of Countries,* where he speaks of the "Laws of the Bactrians who are called Kushans" and remarks (allegations not yet confirmed elsewhere) on the luxurious lifestyle and promiscuous morals of their women. It is probable, too, that the celebrated allusions in *Prologue* 41 and 42 of Pompeius Trogus to the "Asiani (who became) kings of the Tochari" (*Reges Thocarorum Asiani)*, is a reference to the Kushans. Other mentions in Classical literature from the Imperial period of "the Bactrians" (*Bactriani)* may also sometimes cover notices of the Kushans.

It was only with the advance of modern research during the 19th century in

India and Afghanistan, and later in Central Asia, that the true importance of the Kushans began to be recognized. The increasing interest of numismatists in the enormously rich legacy of coinage coming to light in India soon began to reveal that a large part were issues of rulers using the epithet *Košano* "The Kushan." This coinage included a spectacular sequence of gold pieces, clear evidence of a kingdom enjoying huge prosperity (see COINAGE). Soon afterwards, as progress was made in the recovery and interpretation of lapidary inscriptions in India, it was found that many of these made mention of the same rulers named on the coins. Some of these inscriptions, from the northwest, mostly in what is today Pakistan, were written in the Kharoṣḥṭī alphabet and the Gandhari dialect of Prakrit; others, centering especially around the area of Mathura, were in the Brāhmī script, and in a dialect increasingly merging with Sanskrit. Many of these inscriptions mentioned the Kushan rulers who were also attested on the coins, notably Kanishka, Huvishka, and Vasudeva. Although several of these inscriptions were dated, uncertainty concerning the origin points of their eras, of which there were certainly more than one, gave rise to much controversy among historians on the absolute chronologies to which they related.

The foundation of the Kushan empire in Bactria and India was the result of a long series of ethnic migrations. Since the 7th century BCE, Chinese annals had recorded the presence of the Yuezhi (Yüeh Chih), close to the Chinese frontiers in Kansu (Gansu) (Haloun, 1937; Pulleyblank, p. 19). During the 1990s, sensational reports of the discovery of mummies in graves of the 2nd-1st millennia BCE along the northern side of the Tarim basin, noted that these bodies exhibited Indo-European rather than Chinese features: Tall stature, hirsute features, blond hair, and flowing moustaches all contrasted strikingly with the East Asian physical type. Scientific tests, such as blood grouping and DNA have been undertaken so far on a limited scale, but such results as are available tend to connect these individuals with the populations of Europe (Mallory and Mair, 2000).

It is plausible to link these findings with linguistic evidence relating to the Tarim region. Among the manuscripts recovered by Central Asian expeditions of the early 20th century were several in previously unknown languages. One group of these, written in a form of the Indian Brāhmi alphabet, presented unique features. These were Indo-European dialects of the *centum* type, similar to Greek or Celtic, and markedly distinct from languages such as Slavic, Iranian, and Sanskrit, which are of the *satem* variety. There is considerable

evidence for two dialects of this type, sometimes known as Agnean and Kuchean, or more generally, for reasons which will become clear, as Tocharian A and B. All these sites lie along the northern and eastern sides of the Tarim basin. These languages are today extinct, and the records that attest them are thought to belong to the seventh to ninth centuries CE. Such dates reflect the closing stages of their culture, but it may be assumed that the ancestral languages, and the people who spoke them, had existed in this region since remote times (Narain, p. 14).

The time gap between these two periods of evidence is bridged by historical indications from Chinese and Greek sources for the second century BCE, relating to the Yuezhi, or, as they are later called by the Greeks, the Tochari, a powerful horde who had long dominated the Kansu area, and who are plausibly identified as the ancestral speakers of the "Tocharian" dialects. They had been a numerous and powerful tribe, well able to maintain themselves against the encroachments of neighbors. However, the rising power of their northern borderers, the Xiong-nu/Hsiung-nu (probably ancestors of the later Huns), was beginning to make itself felt, and in 176 BCE the Yuezhi were heavily defeated by Maodun (d. 174 BCE), the rising chief (*shanyu)* of the Xiong-nu. A few years later, they were again decisively defeated by his son and successor Jizhu (entitled the *Laoshang)*, and their chieftain was killed. This was the notorious occasion when the skull of the defeated Yuezhi chief was made into a drinking-cup for the use of the conqueror (Konow, 1929, p. liii, citing the Chinese annals, the *Shi-Ki;* for this and parallel authorities, see Hulsewé and Loewe, p. 120).

This crushing reversal convinced the Yuezhi, though still a very numerous tribe, that they could no longer maintain their hold over their grazing-grounds in Kansu province in the face of the encroaching Xiong-nu. They began a long migration to the west, and eventually, around 140 BCE, emerged on the plains of present-day Kazakhstan. This area was at the time dominated by two confederacies of nomadic Iranian tribes. In the east, probably centered around the north shore of Lake Issyk Kul, were the group who, in Achaemenid times, had been known as the Sakā Haumavargā (Haoma-consuming Scythians; inscription DSe 24-25). Further west, around the lower course of the Syr Darya (Jaxartes) River, and the shore of the Aral Sea, was a similar confederacy known as the Sakā Tigraxaudā (Pointed-hat Scythians; DNa 25-26). The blow from the Yuezhi probably fell first on the former, whose ruling elite, not long before 100 BCE, migrated southwards by arduous mountain routes to cross the

Karakorum range into present-day Pakistan under the leadership of their chieftain Maues, whose name appears in the Indo-Greek (see INDO-GREEKS) coinage at Taxila after the demise of Archebius (ca. 100 BCE). On these coins, Maues already claims the title "Great King of Kings," implying a prominent status (see, e.g., Whitehead, I, p. 98, no.1; pl. X, 1; Jenkins, p. 14 and Pl. III, 1). It may be of interest to note that the commander of the Sakā contingent against Alexander at the Battle of Gaugamela was identically named Mauakes (Arrian, *Anabasis* 3.8.3) and was most likely a predecessor of Maues as a member of the same longstanding lineage.

The Yuezhi/Tochari continued to establish their domination north of the Oxus (Āmu Daryā) River, and the second Sakā confederacy were driven southwards, towards the frontier of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom. Forced to break through or perish, the Sakā contingent overwhelmed the defenses and drove westwards through Herat. They provided mercenaries to support the Parthian armies in their war against the Seleucid Antiochus Sidetes (129 BCE); denied remuneration since they had arrived late, they turned against the Parthians, with whom they fought a major battle the following year, which resulted in the defeat of the Parthians and the death of their king, Phraates II (128 BCE; Bivar, 1983a, p. 38; Debevoise, pp. 35-36). They then turned southwards, and past Herat to occupy Drangiana, which henceforth assumed the name of Sakastān, subsequently Sistān.

Meanwhile the Yuezhi/Tochari, hard on the heels of the Sakāi, in turn, so Justin records (42.2), collided with the Parthian frontier. The succeeding king, Artabanus I, led an expedition against them, but died (124/3 BCE) from a wound in the arm, perhaps from an arrow (Bivar, 1983a, pp. 38-39; Debevoise, pp. 37-38). Thereafter, the Tochari seem to have withdrawn to the east where their presence, so it seems, is attested by the excavations at Khalchayan, north of Oxus River. Here remarkable sculptures depict the Tochari princes, with bobbed hair, and slanting eyes of East Asian type, possible evidence of dynastic intermarriage with Chinese princesses sent to their rulers to seal alliances of their nations against the Xiong-nu. Friezes illustrate battle scenes in which the Tochari are depicted as horse-archers, defeating Sakā cavalry armed with lances and scale-armor. Images of similar type appear on an ivory panel from the excavations at Tak̲t-e Sangin (Litvinsky and Pichikiyan, Pl. VII), where the hunters are horse-archers with bobbed hair and long moustaches. That the figures from Khalchayan are not only Tochari, but specifically Kushans is suggested by the strong similarity between their portraits and

those on coin series bearing the legend *Turanountos Hēraiou sanaβ koÞanou.* Here, the third character of the last word, resembling two consecutive Greek letter *ro* s, is understood as representing the character *san,* which in later Kushan inscriptions renders the sound of *š.* Therefore one could conclude that Heraus/Heraeus was a member of the Kushan tribe. An exhaustive discussion of these coins is provided by Cribb (1993), but his conclusion that the name of the ruler in question is not Heraus but Kushan, and that he is identical with Kujula Kadphises, seems rather paradoxical. (This revives the suggestion of Jayaswal, 1920, esp. pp. 17-19.)

According to the Chinese chronicle, the *Hou han-shu,* the territory gained by the Yuezhi in Bactria was divided between five tribal or regional chiefs (*hi-hou),* those of Hiu-mi, Shuang-mi, Kuei-shang, Hi-tun, and Tu-mi. It is clear that the Kuei-shang represent the Kushans, but the others are difficult to identify. That Heraus was therefore the tribal chief of the Kuei-shang (Kushan) section of the Tochari, ruling towards the end of the first century BCE, or during the first century CE, seems probable enough. A coin discovered during 1992, allegedly from Badaḵšān but afterwards said to have been from Mir Zakah in Paktiā province, showing a helmeted ruler on the obverse, and a "king on prancing horse" on the reverse, and bearing an Iranian name, Naštēn, son of Xšatran, may also be an issue of one of these regional chiefs, evidently not a Kushan (Bopearachchi and Grenet, p. 306: "This does not rule out the theory that Naštēn may have ruled north of the Hindu Kush under a Yue-chi domination that was still not consolidated"). On epigraphic grounds, the editors date him after 50 BCE.

The *Hou han-shu* reports "More than a hundred years after this [i.e., the Yuezhi migration], the *hi-hou* of Kuei-shang, called K'iu-tsiu-k'io, attacked the four other *hi-hou;* he styled himself king; the name of his kingdom was Kuei-shang. He invaded An-si [Parthia] and seized the territory of Kao-fu [Kabul]; moreover he triumphed over Pu-ta and Ki-pin [Kashmir?] and entirely possessed those kingdoms. K'iu-tsiu-k'io died more than eighty years old" (Konow, 1929, p. lxii). K'iu-tsiu-k'io is generally identified with the Kushan king Kujula Kadphises, named on late imitations of the Indo-Greek Hermaeus coin series in the Kabul valley region, and subsequently as the "Prince Kapa" on the celebrated Takht-i Bahi (remains of a Buddhist monastery in Pakistan) inscription (Konow, 1929, p. 62). There he appears as subordinate to the Indo-Parthian ruler Gondophares. The inscription is dated to the latter's twenty-sixth year, and the year 103 of an era that is evidently the Azes/Vikrama Era of

58 BCE. Thus the Azes date of the inscription is 103 – 58 = 45 CE, and the first year of Gondophares (presumably at Taxila) is 45 – 26 = 19 CE.

A plausible reconstruction of events at the start of the Christian Era would be along the following lines: The last member of the Indo-Scythian dynasty was Azes II, whom we believe to have still been ruling Arachosia and the Punjab in 6 CE. In the phrase of Trogus (*Prologue* 42.2.2) *Reges Tocharorum Asiani interitusque Saraucarum* "The Asiani (becoming) kings of the Tochari, and the destruction of the Saraucae," the second clause relates to the collapse of the Indo-Scythian (Sakā) empire, with the demise of Azes II, which may have occurred towards 9 CE. "Asiani," as the name appears in the text, refers to the Kushans (there may be here a scribal error in the Latin) and describes the assertion by Kujula of his rule over the whole Tochari confederacy. This is likely to have taken place not long after, though the event was not necessarily connected with the Indo-Scythian defeat. Possibly that was the achievement of the Indo-Parthian prince Gondophares. A hoard of rare silver coins of Kujula found at Taxila (Marshall, I, p. 68; II, p. 841; III, Pl. 243, nos. 258-60) suggests that he may, after advancing down the Kabul River valley, have briefly occupied that city. By 19 CE, however, Gondophares, progressing through Drangiana and Arachosia, had asserted his control at Taxila and obliged Kujula to acknowledge his suzerainty, if only nominally. Finds of Gondophares' coins in the Kabul area also suggest that his forces may have made a temporary incursion there also, penetrating from Arachosia via the Kandahar-Kabul main road. Kujula would have retained control of the Indus west bank, with headquarters on the Kabul River at Nagarahāra (Jalālābād), besides his original territories north of the Hindu Kush and beyond the Oxus/Āmu Daryā River.

There was issued in the name of Kujula an extremely varied coinage, in several districts and almost entirely in copper (COINAGE). As noted above, the *Hou han-shu* attests that he lived for more than eighty years. Unfortunately, we do not know the date of his accession, or his age at that time. He probably became king of the Tochari around the commencement of the Christian Era, already in his thirties, and could have lived until nearly 50 CE.

Our understanding of the succession after his death is fragmentary. A Kharoṣṭhī inscription (Bailey, 1980, p. 23; cf. Salomon, 1986 and von Hinüber, 2003) mentions one Ṣadaskaṇo, a son of the "Great King, King of Kings, Kuyula Kataph¢a," and who enjoys the title *devaputra* "Son of the god(s)." In some ways reminiscent of the Roman Imperial title *divi filius,* it is not clear that, like

its Latin equivalent, it necessarily implies that the parent is deceased. The Kushan emperor, however, is not prominently placed in the inscription, and the only dating is in the 14th regnal year of the local raja of Oḍi, Seṇavarma, son of Ayidaseṇa. One could therefore conclude, though without claiming absolute certainty, that at this time Kujula had recently passed away. One might infer that at this moment the succession was not clear, since Saḍaskaṇo, at any rate under that name, did not in fact succeed to the imperial dignity.

The most prominent coin series following on the demise of Kujula is that which has been called that of the Nameless King, since it bears merely the Greek titles Basileùs Basiléōn Sōtēr Mégas "King of Kings, Great Savior." Also, several Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions datable after the middle of the first century CE appear not to name the reigning Kushan emperor, referring only to "The King of Kings, son of the God(s), the Kushan." They are the Panjtar Stone Inscription of 122 Vikrama/64 CE, the Kalawan Copper Plate of 124 Vikrama/76 CE, and the Taxila Silver Scroll of 136 Vikrama/78 CE. These, again, could be epigraphs of the "Nameless King" (Konow, 1929, p. 67; 1932, p. 949; 1929, p. 70).

The discovery of the Rabatak Bactrian inscription provides a complete genealogy of Kanishka the Great (Sims-Williams and Cribb, p. 80), showing Kujula Kadphises as his great-grandfather and his grandfather as Vima Taktu, also designated as king. It is possible to infer from this that Vima Taktu was the Nameless King—a conclusion strengthened by the existence of a unique copper coin with the *tamgha* of Sōtēr Megas and an obverse Greek inscription OOHMO TAKT[.] *ooēmo takt[.]* (Cribb, 1995-96, pp. 98, 118, 142, fig. 15.f., type 8)—or else that Vima Taktu was the throne name of Saḍaskaṇo. Yet these conclusions are by no means inevitable. The scarcity of coins explicitly naming Vima Taktu does not suggest a long or prosperous reign. Yet at the same time the extensive coin issues for the "Nameless King," Sōtēr Megas, suggest Kushan expansion in several directions, and the capture of Mathura by the Kushans was apparently an event of the Sōtēr Megas period (Cribb, 1995-96, pp. 100, 123). One might then suspect a period of dynastic disputes, with mints reluctant to declare openly for any individual candidate, a situation familiar from other coin series. At the same time, Joe Cribb contends that Kujula was identical with Heraus, whose silver coinages are well known north of the Hindu Kush (Cribb, 1993, p. 131). This conclusion is based on the fact that certain rare copper coins which appear to bear the types of Heraus carry a Kharoṣṭhī inscription naming Kujula (*maharayasa rayatirayasa /devaputra kuyula kata* [sic] *kapasa)*. In this earlier paper Cribb regards the immediate

successor to these issues as being the bull-and-camel issues of Vima Kadphises, but in the later article (Cribb, 1995-96, p. 97) these issues are re-attributed to the newly established ruler Vima Taktu. Cribb (1993, pp. 119, 123) is inclined to ascribe the bull-and-camel series as local issues of Kashmir, a relatively isolated context, where uncertainties concerning a disputed succession might have been current. Several writers have, however, queried the identification of Vima Taktu (Fussman, 1998, pp. 620-21; MacDowall, p. 163), on the ground that the relevant readings rely on conjectural restorations of damaged inscriptions and coins.

Despite the problems associated with the succession to Kujula and the still uncertain status of Vima Taktu, with the opening of the next reign, namely that of Vima Kadphises, a unified coinage attests an undivided kingdom and rising prosperity. Besides a standardized and well-executed copper currency, an important gold coinage makes its appearance, clear evidence of spectacular commercial activity. This no doubt resulted from expanding trade on the Silk Road, on the one hand with China exporting that staple commodity together with lacquer and, no doubt, other typical manufactures; and on the other hand with Rome's imports of those and other eastern luxuries being largely financed, as in South India, by volumes of silver, and also of gold, coins. Other western exports certainly included fine glassware, art objects, and "nice-looking girls for concubinage" (*Periplus of the Erythraean Sea,* Chap. 49: *... húelos argē´... dēnárion chrusoûn kai arguroûn... parthénoi eueideîs pròs pallakeían)*. At the same time, local products from India, most typically ivory, would have traveled in both directions.

The growing affluence of the middlemen in these transactions began to manifest itself in the construction of new Buddhist monuments, of which the foundation dates are to some extent fixed by deposits of coins in their interiors. The gold casket of Bimārān, from the neighborhood of Jalālābād, Afghanistan, was perhaps the earliest example of Gandhara iconography. It should be dated to the reign of Kujula, because of the inclusion in the deposit of several copper coins which, though carrying the types of Azes II, are shown, by the presence of a "Catherine-wheel" symbol in the field, to be posthumous imitations actually put out by Kujula, who uses a similar symbol on an explicit issue of his coins. These items could be dated before around 50 CE, together, no doubt, with the stupa of which they formed a central feature. Again, the substantial stupa complexes at Manikiyala near Rawalpindi, and at Guldarra [Goldarra] near Kabul, both have primary deposits dated by gold pieces of

Vima Kadphises. Although that ruler's accession is not precisely fixed, it is likely to have fallen around 100 CE. The proliferation of Gandhara-style sculpture, characterized by the human Buddha figure with classical draperies, is likely to have been in full swing by this time, and to have originated at Nagarahāra near Jalālābād already in the time of Kujula (Bivar, 1991).

The sponsors of this flowering of architecture and sculpture would have been principally the Indian merchant communities, who were benefiting hugely from this expansion of trade. Many of the artists who executed their commissions would have been persons of Greek descent and training, several Greek names having been found in association with work of this period. The Kushans appear to have continued the use of the Greek alphabet for writing the local Bactrian language, a practice in all probability pioneered by the Greco-Bactrians, and even for many years to have used the language itself for their coin inscriptions. They may well have found the surviving Greeks useful as clerks and administrators, and also countenanced their employment as sculptors and architects.

In addition to the Gandhara School of sculpture and art, vehicle of the Prakrit-speaking Buddhist element of the population and probably financed by the profits of traders, the Kushan empire seems to have supported another, dynastically oriented, school of sculpture, coinage, and glyptic that one may call the Royal Kushan school. This was chiefly devoted to renderings of royal figures, sculptured in the round, or engraved in high relief, and portraying court scenes and finery, equestrian figures, and elephant- or camel-riders.

In general, the Kushan rulers seem to have acquired a reputation for humane and tolerant rule, an attitude that the religious eclecticism of their later coinage seems to substantiate. On the coinage of Vima Kadphises, however, only one deity is represented. This was the figure of the Hindu god S´iva, often accompanied by his vehicle, the bull Nandi. He was rendered with two or four arms, ithyphallic, and later frequently triple-faced, with some or all of his customary attributes: the trident (*triśula)* often with attached axe-blade, the water-pot, and the animal-skin. The Śiva image appears in every succeeding Kushan reign, and we know that his name in Bactrian, for the Kushans, was OHÞO Vēš, corresponding to the Iranian wind-god Vayu. Since Śiva "the Destroyer" had clearly some aspects of an underworld god, one may understand this aspect of the identification. On the Kushano-Sasanian coins with Pahlavi inscriptions, the corresponding deity seems to be Mithra, whose cult—at least when introduced into the Roman world—has likewise an esoteric

character. (For evidence of esoteric elements in early Mithraism, see Bivar, 2005, esp. p. 349.).

The next Kushan ruler of the lineage was the celebrated Kanishka I, the Great, whose accession date has long been a contentious problem for scholarship. Though a wide range of options have been mooted, the question now appears to be nearing solution. An important series of scholars, including Vincent A. Smith (1903, p. 31) and Sir John Marshall (I, p. 71), favored an approximation falling around 125 CE, for Kanishka's installation. It was known that the dates of inscriptions ascribable to the era founded by Kanishka extended over a period of nearly 100 years. At the same time the inscription of the Sasanian Šāpur I at Kaʿba-ye Zardošt near Persepolis claims that Kušān-šahr "The Kushan Empire" was largely in Sasanian hands during his reign (241-72 CE; Maricq, p. 306). Indeed, a passage of Ṭabari mentions an invasion of Kushan territory already in the time of Ardašir I (r. 226-41 CE), in which the easterners suffered a sanguinary defeat, and many of their western provinces submitted to the Persians (Ṭabari, I, pp. 819-20; tr. V, pp. 14-15; Smith, 1920). Nicholas Sims-Williams (1999), following a lead of Helmut Humbach, has deduced from the later Bactrian documents that the era they attest should begin in 233 CE and could record the consolidation of Sasanian rule over Kushan territory. However, a recent study by de Blois shows that this era was more probably that of the establishment of the Sasanian dynasty in 223 C.E. (see Sims-Williams and de Blois). There also exist Brāhmī inscriptions of the Kushan ruler Vasudeva dated in the era of Kanishka up to the year 98. Later inscriptions then appear seemingly with omitted hundreds, or perhaps with a re-started era commencing close to or at the year 100.

A recent article by Harry Falk (p. 126) reinterprets a passage of the early Sanskrit astronomical text *Yavanajātaka,* by Sphujiddhvaja, to signify that a Kushan Era commences 149 years after the start of the Śaka Era. Since the Śaka Era began in 78 CE, this Kushan Era would begin in 227 CE (78 + 149 = 227). It is now generally agreed, as we have seen, that at or about the year 100 of the era of Kanishka, a new count was begun by the succeeding Kushan rulers. Thus the era indicated by the *Yavanajātaka* should be this second Kushan Era, and the original era founded by Kanishka would be 100 years earlier. Thus the era of Kanishka would begin in 127/8 CE.

This solution coincides closely with the one that was argued many years ago by W. E. van Wijk (admittedly on enigmatic grounds) and maintained by many British scholars such as Vincent Smith and Sir John Marshall, which places the

start of the Kanishka Era in 125 or 128-29 C.E. (see above). One may conclude that Falk's solution is in fact the definitive one and should henceforth provide the basis for converting epigraphic dates. Then inscriptions attributable to the first Kanishka would run from the year 2 (i.e., 128-29 CE) to year 23 (149-50 CE), those of Huvishka (see HUVIŠKA) from year 28 (i.e., 154-55 CE) to year 60 (186-87 CE), and those of Vasudeva from year 64 or 67 (i.e., 189-90 or 193-94 CE) to 98 (224-25 CE).

There is now some agreement that there follows a second Kushan century running from 227-28 and accommodating such Kushan rulers as Kanishka II, Vasishka (at least years 24-28), Kanishka III, son of Vasishka (year 41), and perhaps even a Vasudeva II. These rulers are known chiefly from the coin series, but the dates for the second and third are substantiated by inscriptions (see below).

The city especially associated with Kanishka I is Peshawar, where he is credited with the foundation of the great stupa and vihara complex to the southeast of the city, known in the past as Shāh-jī kī Ḍherī. This stupa was one of the largest to have been recorded in the subcontinent (Dobbins, 1971 p. 22). The most important find of the excavations conducted by David Spooner in 1908 (see Spooner, 1908-09) was the object termed the Kanishka Reliquary, a cylindrical casket in gilded bronze with relief decoration in the Gandhara style. The body of the casket has a figural frieze, showing a garland supported by *putti,* and, at what is evidently the front, the frontal figure of a Kushan prince in the characteristic costume of kaftan and trousers. On the opposite side, above the garland, is the seated figure of a Buddha with monastic robe and halo, and worshippers at either side. Above this, the vertical rim of lid carries a further frieze of flying geese. These birds would be associated with the legend that the geese (*haṁsa)* migrating through Gandhara represent the souls of the deceased, permitted to visit their lifetime home for one day in the season. This theme would be appropriate for a cremation casket. The knob on the center of the lid has the form of a seated Buddha, with a standing companion at either side. He is facing directly above the figure of the Kushan prince, which accordingly should represent the front aspect of the casket (illus. in Spooner, 1908-09, pls. 12-13; Mukherjee, pls. xiv-xv; Errington, pp. 116, 119, 120).

The later interpretation of the Kharoṣṭhī inscription on the casket by B. N. Mukherjee (1964) differs somewhat from the original edition by Sten Konow (1929, pp. 135-37). Both authors agree that the text records a dedication by

Kanishka and in the Vihara Kanishka, also in the monastery of Mahasena (who is presumably the abbot). Mukherjee does not, however, find the date of year 1, and further reads the name of the city as Kanishkapura. The phrase *dasa Agisala navakarmia* in the penultimate line could well signify "the slave Agesila was the architect," and the possibility that the words designate a Greek architect named Agesilaus should not be ruled out. This suggestion has been vigorously denied by Indologists, but the discovery of other Greek names associated with works of the Gandhara period, especially that of Palamedes (Curiel, 1954, pp. 194-97) at Surkh Kotal [Sorḵ Kōtal] shows that such participation was possible. (On the inscription, see further, Fussman, 1987, p. 79; Falk, 2002.)

The patronage of Buddhism by the Kushan rulers is attested by the appearance of Buddha among the divinities portrayed upon the coinage of Kanishka. This image may celebrate the Third Buddhist Conference, which, according to Buddhist tradition, was convened during this reign. One should not, however, suppose that the Kushans themselves professed Buddhism, and the predominance of coin types reflecting a variety of Iranian religion suggests that they practiced an eclectic form of Zoroastrianism. Specific to that faith were renderings of three of the six Amahraspands (see AMƎŠA SPƎNTA), Šaoreoro (Šahrewar), Ashaeixsho, and Manaobago, if the last two are correctly identified with Ardwahišt and Wahman. At the same time, representations of "pagan Iranian" or possibly Mithraic deities, such as Mithra, Nana, Vərəθraγna (Orlagno, Wahrām "Mars"), and Tīr "Mercury" (not Tistriya "Sirius," as later conceived) are prominent. The figuring of Vēš "Vayu" in the form of the Brahmanical Śiva was already mentioned. Several classical deities appear, including Serapis (Göbl, p. 69; photo no. 185) and Heracles. Again, there are several enigmatic figures such as Mozdooano (probably not identical with Ahura Mazdā) with his two-headed horse. Ahura Mazdā, the supreme deity of Zoroastrianism, is in fact a rare type, if reported specimens are genuine at all (Göbl, p. 65).

The coinage of Huvishka is especially varied, including a large number of gold, and many copper, issues. It is indeed iconographically one of the richest coinages of any historic period. The fullest repertoire is provided by the album of Robert Göbl (pp. 64-76, with some reservations; pls. 10-27), illustrating many of the types already discussed. A feature of the coinage is that there are two main obverse portraits, one with rounded helmet with crescent ornament, the second with conical, jeweled crown, each shown in a variety of postures. Since

the first of these appears chronologically earlier yet has the more elderly appearance, and the reign covers the long span of thirty-two years, a suspicion has been entertained that there were two successive kings named Huvishka, but this has not been confirmed. In a long-lived dynasty, a reign of this length is nothing improbable. Many inscriptions naming Huvishka have been recorded in and around Mathura. The bronze vase inscription of the year 51 from Wardak in Afghanistan (Konow, 1929, p. 170) also mentions Huvishka, evidently reigning there also. The Surkh Kotal temple ("Kanishka's Victory Temple") was restored in the year 31, presumably under Huvishka, but here the inscription does not name the ruler. Kanishka and Huvishka are also mentioned in the Kashmir chronicle, the *Rajātaraṇµgiṇī,* and credited with the foundation of the cities Kaniṣkapura, Juṣkapura, and Huṣkapura (Stein, tr., 1900, I, p. 30).

Though the copious gold coinage suggests an epoch of spectacular prosperity, it is probable that the reign of Huvishka also covered one of history's greatest humanitarian disasters. Notoriously, the pandemic of smallpox usually known as the Plague of Marcus Aurelius struck the Roman empire in 166 CE, having been acquired in the previous year by soldiers taking part in the expedition to Ctesiphon. That the reservoir of the infection lay in South Asia, as it has remained until quite recent times, is evident enough. The proliferation in the art of Gandhara of images of Hāritī, Goddess of Smallpox, clearly indicates local preoccupation with this danger at the time. The appearance of images of the Buddha on the coinage of Kanishka shows that the art of Gandhara was then in full production. If the present writer's previous attribution (Bivar, 1970, p. 18) of the Skārah Dˇherī Hāritī image to 136 CE is correct, this date will fall into the reign of Kanishka, representing an early preoccupation with the epidemic. Production of the large number of stylistically more developed Hāritī figures in Gandhara sculpture should reflect rising anxiety at the spread of the infection. Evidence is found for subsequent plague deaths in Southern Arabia, and even in China, as the virus spread along the flourishing trade routes (Smith, 1924, pp. 288-89; Bivar, 1970).

The reign of the subsequent emperor, Vasudeva lasted twenty-six years. One may guess that the empire had been weakened by the epidemic, no less than was that of Rome. When, with the rise of the Sasanian Empire in Persia, an external threat appeared, the Kushan state was no longer able to mount effective resistance. Whether Vasudeva's death was the signal for the Persian invasion or its result is at present uncertain. On our chronology the list of

inscriptions for Vasudeva at Mathura ceases in 225 CE, and in the following year Ardašir's control of Persia was decisively established. Before long the Persians were embarked on their conquest of the Kushan Empire, a task which must have taken several years, and which established their control up to the River Indus. Peshawar seems to have remained in Kushan hands, at least intermittently (see the Kaʿba-ye Zardošt inscription of Šāpūr I: "bis vor Pešāwar," Huyse, I, p. 24).

After the loss of their western territories, succeeding Kushan rulers withdrew towards the east, where the main focus of their activities was at Mathura. Some doubts remain as to the succession of following rulers and the attribution of their coins and inscriptions. That Vasudeva I was succeeded by a second Kanishka seems sufficiently clear. His name on the coins is written in the nominative case, KANHÞKO, rather than in the oblique case KANHÞKI, as on coins of the first Kanishka, who followed Greek practice in naming the issuer of a coin in the genitive. The dominant, perhaps the exclusive, reverse type of Kanishka II is a seated Ardoxšo. He seems to have achieved some temporary successes against the Persian invaders and to have inaugurated a second Kushan Era one hundred years after the commencement of that of Kanishka I. His successor in the eastern territories appears to have been a king called Vasishka, who is named in four inscriptions. One of these in Brāhmi from Isapur, now at Mathura (Lüders, pp. 125-26), is dated to the year 24 of the new era (227 + 24 – 1 = 250 CE). Another fragmentary text (Lüders, p. 63) has the year 28 of the same king. Yet Vasishka's rule evidently extended to the Indus, as he is named in a Kharoṣṭhi inscription from Kamra near Attock (Mukherjee, 1973, p. 111). He appears again as the father of a third Kanishka in the Ara inscription of the year 41 of the new Kushan era (227 + 41 – 1 = 267 CE) (Konow, 1929, p. 162). The find-spot of this inscription is once more close to the Indus, and it is curious that this third Kanishka is believed to have used the Roman title *kaisara* in his protocol.

The coinage of Vasishka remained unrecognized for a long time, but Robert Göbl (p. 77) claimed to have identified it from a well-preserved specimen at Peshawar. By this date, in the third century, the coinage becomes difficult to read, since the flans are increasingly smaller than the dies, and parts of the marginal legend disappear off the flan. The Bactrian inscriptions are, moreover, frequently blundered. The obverse legend starting at 5 or 11 o'clock is said to be disposed BA – ZHÞKO (*ba – zēško)*. However, few legible specimens can be adduced, and identification may largely depend on the

specific Brāhmi *akṣara*s in the reverse fields. There are also believed to be issues attributable to a second Vasudeva, but the gold coinage, though copious, becomes increasingly obscure and fragmented in structure, with names of apparently local rulers appearing in Brāhmi script on the flans. With the inauguration of the Gupta dynasty in Bihar from 320 CE, the epoch of the Kushan successors was at an end.

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(A. D. H. Bivar)

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