



NĒZAK

NĒZAK (or Nizāk), dynastic name appearing on a long series of silver coins issued by a local dynasty in Kāpisā (in the region of Kabul; Sk. Kāpīśī) ca. late 7th century C.E., which at times ruled over Gandhara as well; it is also the name by which a dynasty in southern Toḡarestān is remembered in Arabic sources pertaining to the 7th-8th century.

The complete Middle Persian legend on the coins issued by the dynasty in Kāpisā is *nyčky MLKA* “*Nēzak-šāh*” (previously misread “*npky MLKA*” or “*nspk MLKA*” on the basis of debased issues). A connection with Mid. Pers. *nēzag* “spear” is possible, but this has not been established firmly so far. On the obverse of these coins there always appears a crown with wings and topped by a bull’s head. The coins have been dated to various periods between the 6th and 8th centuries C.E., but a decisive advance in dating them was made when references to a bull’s head in the crown of kings of Cao (i.e., Kāpisā) were recognized in Chinese sources deriving from the chronicle *Suishu*; the chronicle’s information on this country dates back to the late 6th or early 7th century C.E. (see Kuwayama, 1999). The winged crown derives from coin types issued by either Kawād I (500–506) or Hormizd IV (579-590); the reverse side, with a fire altar flanked by two attendants, also is Sasanian.

This dynasty seems to have emerged after the dissolution of the Hephthalite empire (see [HEPHTHALITES](#)) around 560. The Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang, who in 629 stayed in their capital, Kāpisā ([Begrām](#)), mentions that the king belonged to a family of *chali*, i.e., *ḡsatriyas*, which seems to indicate a local Hindu origin; but at the same time they claimed ancestry from the 5th-century



Hephtalite ruler Khingila, hence the name “Khingal dynasty” by which they are sometimes designated by scholars. One cannot exclude the possibility that they were originally a branch of the Hephtalites who had escaped from regions to the north of the Hindu Kush. Xuanzang also mentions their lavish endowments to Buddhist monasteries. (For Xuanzang’s account of the kings of Kāpisā, see Th. Watton, *On Yuan Chwang’s travels in India*, London, 1904-05, p. 123.) The abundance and quality of their coinage suggests access to the silver mines of the Panjšēr valley. The coins also show that at some stage this kingdom had to face the encroachment of a king called “Naraṇa,” possibly to be identified as Narendrāditya Khingila, a king of Kashmir mentioned in the *Rājatarangiṇi*. Some time between 661 and 680 the NĚzak-šāhi dynasty was replaced by the Torki-šāhi dynasty.

There was also a line of rulers in southern Toḡarestān who are called the “Tarkān Nizak” in Arabic writings about the conquests which took place between ca. 650 and 710. Almost all references have been gathered together by E. Esin in her article “Tarkhan Nizak or Tarkhan Tirek?” (1977), but it should be noted that she adopts an unusual form of the name, i.e., “Tarkhan Tirek,” which is found in only one surviving manuscript of Ebn A‘ṭam al-Kufi. Esin also claims that all the sources identify these rulers as Turks, despite the fact that Ḥamza Eṣfahāni calls the last one “the king of the Hephtalites” (ed. Gottwald, p. 63, line 12). Since the publication of Esin’s article it has been established (Kuwayama, 1989, 2002) that these rulers are identical with the *Yida Taihan* (the Chinese rendering of “Hephtalite tarkāns”), who are described as the rulers of a particular realm in Toḡarestān among the list of western realms that were theoretically under the supreme authority of China in 659 (Tangshu XLIII, B, pp. 6-9; see Chavannes, *Documents*, p. 69, n. 2). As their capital *Huolu* (Gur) was evidently situated in the vicinity of the ancient Kušān temple at Sorḡ Kotal (where a large fortified site still bears the name Qal‘a-ye ḡuri), the core of their realm probably encompassed the middle course of the Sorḡāb and the plateaus of Eškašem and Nahrin; this would have made them the eastern neighbors of the Rob kingdom (recently brought to light by the discovery of its Bactrian archives). These “Hephtalite tarkāns” may have originated from those Hephtalites who, in 560, had taken refuge south of the Oxus with their king (named as Fāḡāneš in the *Šāh-nāma*) after defeat at the hand of the Sasanians and Western Turks. How they may have been related to the above-mentioned NĚzak-šāh of Kāpisā, if at all, is a matter for speculation.

It is evident that the Tarḡan ruler had the ability to raise substantial military forces. In 718 he is reported as still being able to put 50,000 soldiers at the service of his overlord, the Turkish yabghu in Tokarestān (see Chavannes, *Documents*, pp. 200-01), and from the first mention of them in Arabic sources their sphere of influence extends far beyond the territory they actually held under their direct control. In 650-51, a Tarḡan Nizak took part in the military clashes at Marv, which eventually led to the assassination of the last Sasanian king Yazdgard III. From 703 to 710, the most famous representative of the line led an anti-Arab coalition of princes of southern Tokarestān and had himself gained direct control of strongholds in Bādḡis; he was finally captured by Qotayba b. Moslem in the castle of Korz (probably Kāfer Qal'a-ye Barfak on the upper Sorḡāb) and executed (Ṭabari, II, pp. 1218-27). Although later Arab sources do not mention rulers called "Tarḡan Nizak," embassies sent by the "Hephtalite kingdom" to China are reported as late as 748 (see Chavannes, *Documents*, "Notes additionnelles," p. 80).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

M. Alram, "Alchon und Nēzak. Zur Geschichte der iranischen Hunen in Mittelasien," in *La Persia e l'Asia centrale da Alessandro al X secolo*. Atti dei convegni Lincei, 127, Rome, 1996, pp. 517-54.

Idem, "A hoard of copper drachms from the Kāpiśa-Kabul region," *Silk Road Art and Archaeology* 6, 1999/2000, pp. 129-50.

E. Chavannes, *Documents sur le Toukiue (Turcs) occidentaux*, St. Petersburg, 1903, repr. with "Notes additionnelles sur les Tou-kiue (Turcs) occidentaux," Paris, n.d. E. Esin, "Tarkhan Nizak or Tarkhan Tirek?" *JAOS* 98, 1977, pp. 323-32.

R. N. Frye, "Napki Malka and the Kushano-Sasanians," in D. K. Kouymjian, ed., *Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy and History. Studies in Honor of George C. Miles*, Beirut, 1974, pp. 115-22.



R. Göbl, *Dokumente zur Geschichte der Iranischen Hunnen in Baktrien und Indien*, 4 vols., Wiesbaden, 1967.

F. Grenet, "Regional Interaction in Central Asia and Northwest India in the Kidarite and Hephtalite Periods," in N. Sims-Williams, ed., *Indo-Iranian Languages and Peoples*, Oxford, 2002, pp. 203-24, esp. pp. 214-18.

Sh. Kuwayama, "The Hephtalites in Tokharistan and Northwest India," *Zinbun: Annals of the Institute for Research in Humanities, Kyoto University* 24, 1989, pp. 89-134, esp. pp. 120-26; repr. with some modifications, in Sh. Kuwayama, *Across the Hindukush of the First Millennium. A Collection of the Papers*, Kyoto, 2002, pp. 107-39, esp. pp. 130-35.

Idem, "Historical Notes on Kāpīśī and Kābul in the Sixth-Eighth Centuries," *Zinbun* 34, 1999, pp. 25-77, esp. pp. 36-52.