

THE KUSHANS*

*B. N. Puri***Contents**

The Early Kushans	239
The date of Kanishka	242
The Great Kushans	245
Relations with Iran	247
Relations with China	248
Relations with Rome	249
Relations with north-eastern India	249
Relations with the Saka satraps	250
The Kushan political system	252
Kushan administration	254

THE rise of the empire of the Kushans is an important landmark in the history of Central Asia. Known to Chinese historians as Kuei-shuang,¹ they were one of the important tribes of the Great Yüeh-chih who had been driven out from their original homeland by another warring tribe, the Hsiung-nu (Huns) and had settled in northern Bactria (see Chapter 7).

The Early Kushans

The *Hou Han-shu* (Annals of the Later Han), compiled by Fan Yeh (c. A.D. 446), based mainly on the report submitted to the Chinese emperor by General Pan Yung in or before

* See Map 4.

¹ Pulleyblank, 1962, pp. 206 et seq.

A.D. 125, describes their rise. Ch'iu-chiu-ch'üeh (Kujula Kadphises), the *yabghu* of Kuei-shuang, attacked and destroyed the other four *yabghu* and made himself King of the Yüeh-chih. He attacked An-hsi (Parthia) and took the territory of Kao-fu (Kabul). He also overthrew P'u-ta (Puṣkalāvātī) and Chi-pin (Kashmir) and annexed these countries.² It was argued by Jitzuzo that the five *yabghu* already existed in Bactria when the Yüeh-chih arrived, and so the Kushans could not have been the Yüeh-chih. Some scholars, therefore, refer to the Saka-Kushans in the Yüeh-chih hoard.³ But Tarn⁴ regards this theory as an unhappy offshoot of an elementary blunder that started the belief in a Saka conquest of Graeco-Bactria; most scholars now agree that the *Hou Han-shu* gives an authentic account that is trustworthy. The chronology, however, of these events relating to the rise and consolidation of the Kingdom of Kuei-shuang is disputed because it is closely related to the history of the Great Kushans and the date of Kanishka. excavations at Taxila and elsewhere have conclusively settled the old argument as to whether the Kadphises preceded the Kanishka group of kings⁵ as coins of the Kadphises group, but not of Kanishka, Huvishka, etc., are found in the Early Kushan levels of Sirkap. The *Hou Han-shu* further informs us that Ch'iu-chiu-ch'üeh (Kujula Kadphises) died at an age of more than 80 and was succeeded by his son Yen-kao-chen (Vima Kadphises), who in turn destroyed T'ien-chu (India) and placed a general there to control it. The Chinese annals seem to provide a *terminus ante quem* for the Kadphises rulers of A.D. 125, the date of Pan Yung's report.

Two series of dated inscriptions provide a more precise chronological framework for the rise of the Early Kushans. The first series bears a sequence of dates, some of which are qualified by *Ayasa* ('in the era of Azes') (see Chapter 8). The Takht-i Bahi inscription of the Indo-Parthian king Gondophares is dated in the twenty-sixth year of his reign and Year 103 of the era.⁶ Its reference to *erjhuna kapa* suggests the presence of Kujula Kadphises as a prince at the court of the Indo-Parthian king. The Panjtar stone inscription dated Year 122 of the era, nineteen years later,⁷ is dated in the reign of an unnamed king described as the *Guṣana mahārāja*. This same term '*Guṣana*' occurs in the Manikyala inscription of the time of Kanishka⁸ which describes Lala as *Guṣanava-śasaṃvardhaka*, 'the increaser of the Kushan race'. '*Guṣana*' therefore stands for '*Kuṣana*'. The Taxila silver-scroll inscription of Year 136 *Ayasa* – of the era of Azes – gives as ruler an unnamed king, 'the Great King, the King of Kings, the Son of Heaven, the Kushan'. The nameless king with high titles has

² Pulleyblank, 1968, pp. 247–58; Zürcher, 1968, pp. 346–90.

³ Maenchen-Helfen, 1945, pp. 71–81; Puri, 1965, pp. 1 et seq.

⁴ Tarn, 1951, p. 287.

⁵ Marshall, 1951.

⁶ Konow, 1929, pp. 57–62.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 67–70.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 145–50.

the same context as the nameless king of the Early Kushan coins struck with the titles of the King of Kings, the Great, the Saviour, which can now be placed after the coinage of Gondophares and the local issues of Kujula, but before the standard uniform coinage of Vima Kadphises.⁹ It is clear that the prince of the Takht-i Bahi inscription in Year 103 and the ruler of the Panjtar stone inscription in Year 122 has extended his empire substantially by the time of the Taxila silver-scroll inscription in Year 136 and adopted high-sounding titles. The sequence of events clearly suggests that the three inscriptions refer to the same person, who belongs to the period before the New Era was introduced by Kanishka; and that the nameless king of both the coins and these inscriptions represents the later stages of the rule of Kujula Kadphises after he had captured P'u-ta (Puṣkalāvati) and Chi-pin (Kashmir). Kujula Kadphises is said to have lived for more than eighty years. He played the key role in establishing the Kushan Empire and his coins are very numerous in the finds from the Early Kushan city of Sirkap.

If the credibility of the Khalatse inscription¹⁰ is accepted, identifying Uvima Kavthisa with Vima Kadphises, then the octogenarian father Kujula Kadphises should be assigned a long reign of about fifty years, terminating somewhere between Years 160 and 165 of this era, with a reign of twenty to thirty years for Vima Kadphises, his son. It is now generally accepted that this era of Azes (*Ayasa*) may well have begun at the same time as the Vikrama era of 58 B.C. (see Chapter 8). The dates assigned, then, to Kujula Kadphises would include A.D. 45 (Takht-i Bahi), A.D. 64 (Panjtar) and A.D. 78 (Taxila silver scroll), and the dates of Vima Kadphises would include A.D. 127 (Khalatse).

The second series of dated inscriptions includes the Taxila silver vase of Jihonika the satrap dated Year 191.¹¹ This used to be attributed to the series of dates in the Azes era, but MacDowall¹² has shown that Jihonika's context falls after the reign of Azes II and before Kujula Kadphises in the decade A.D. 30–40, and the date must therefore be attributed to an Indo-Bactrian era.¹³ The trilingual inscription at Dasht-i Nawur of Vima Kadphises is dated Year 279.¹⁴ The unfinished inscription from Surkh Kotal of Kanishka is dated Year 279¹⁵ and that of Kadphises is dated Year 299.¹⁶ Both these inscriptions, as the Taxila silver-vase inscription of Jihonika, belong to the same Graeco-Bactrian era, probably the era of Eucratides beginning with his accession around 170 B.C. (see Chapter 17). The dates

⁹ MacDowall, 1968b, pp. 28–48.

¹⁰ Konow, 1929, pp. 79–81.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 81–2.

¹² MacDowall, 1973, pp. 215–30.

¹³ Tarn, 1951, pp. 494–502; Bivar, 1963, pp. 489 et seq.

¹⁴ Fussman, 1974, pp. 8–22.

¹⁵ Bivar, 1963, pp. 498–502.

¹⁶ Harmatta, 1965, pp. 164–95.

then assigned to Vima Kadphises would include A.D. 109 (Dasht-i Nawur) and 129 (Surkh Kotal).

Some scholars associate Kanishka with the Saka era of A.D. 78 and consequently have to place Kujula Kadphises and Vima Kadphises before that date. To maintain consistency they have to find earlier reference dates for the two eras. For example, Fussman¹⁷ links Year 279 with a Graeco-Bactrian era of independence from the Seleucids in 247 B.C. to give dates of A.D. 32 and 52 for Vima Kadphises. The problems surrounding Kanishka's dating call for detailed consideration.

The date of Kanishka

The date of Kanishka does not stand in isolation. In his time the Kushan Empire covered a vast amount of territory from Bactria to Benares and from Kashmir to Sind, and Kushan coins have also been found in recent excavations in Chorasmia, Khotan and eastern Iran. There is now substantial agreement on most points concerning the relative chronology of the Kushans, but the absolute date of the reference point for the era of Kanishka remains hotly disputed. It is now agreed that it cannot have been the Vikrama era of 58 B.C. which was proposed by Fleet and Kennedy.¹⁸ But the dates advocated still range from A.D. 78 (the Saka era), which is still supported by many Indian scholars, to A.D. 278, once proposed by Bhandarkar¹⁹ and Majumdar²⁰ and now supported by Zeimal.²¹

The consideration of any of the dates proposed must be fully reconciled with other established historical sequences of which the absolute dating is firmly established, in particular the Guptas and Western Satraps. The establishment of the Imperial Gupta dynasty by Candragupta in A.D. 319, and the intervening kingdoms and republican states that came from the Kushan dynasty and before the Guptas in India – the Nāgas, Yaudheyas, Mālavas, Arjunayanas, Kunindas and Madras – provide a firm *terminus ante quem* for the Kushan dynasty in Indian history. The context of the Western Satrap Rudradāman and his occupation of Sind, Sauvira and Malwa before Saka Year 72 (A.D. 150) in the Junagadh inscription²² cannot be disputed, nor can his independent status be questioned. He claims in this inscription that he had personally acquired the status of *mahākṣatrapa* through his own prowess and strength.²³ If Kanishka is taken to be the founder of the Saka era of

¹⁷ Fussman, 1974.

¹⁸ Vallée Poussin, 1930, pp. 346 et seq.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Majumdar, 1968, pp. 150 et seq.

²¹ Zeimal, 1974, pp. 292 et seq.

²² Kielhorn, 1905/06, pp. 36 et seq.

²³ Raychaudhuri, 1953, pp. 424 et seq.

A.D. 78, the dates of his successors Huvishka and Vāsudeva would clash with those of Rudradāman, and it cannot be proved that Rudradāman or his family were ever subordinate to the Kushans.

Another fixed date that must be considered is the dispatch by Po-t'iao, King of the Great Yüeh-chih, of an envoy with tribute to the Wei as a token of his affection, on the day Kuei-mao (26 January) A.D. 230 (*San-kuo-chih*, 'Memoirs of the Three Kingdoms', 3.6a).

Po-t'iao has been identified with Vāsudeva.²⁴ Advocates of a date in the second century for the era of Kanishka identify him with Vāsudeva I, while those arguing for the A.D. 78 date regard him as later ruler, Vāsudeva II. Ghirshman²⁵ dates the era of Kanishka to A.D. 144 because of his excavations at Begram and the evidence of the trilingual inscription of the Sasanian emperor Shapur I at Naqsh-i Rostam. The Begram excavations suggest three chronological stages. The first phase predates Kanishka, yielding coins of Kujula Kadphises and Vima Kadphises along with those of the Indo-Greek and Scytho-Parthian rulers. The second phase contains coins of Kanishka, Huvishka and Vāsudeva, and ends with a major destruction that Ghirshman associates with the conquests of Shapur I. He argues that the conquests of Shapur I provide the terminating point of the second dynasty of the Kushans, and that Shapur's conquest should be placed between his accession in A.D. 241 and his second war against the Romans (A.D. 251–52). The latest coins found in the city of Begram were those of Vāsudeva, the Po-t'iao of the Chinese *San-kuo-chih* and the same person as Vehsadjan, King of the Kushans, mentioned by the Armenian Moses of Khorene. However interpreted, the Sasanian conquest of the western Kushan provinces is a further fixed point which must be considered. Shapur I's inscription on the Ka^cbe of Zoroaster at Naqsh-i Rostam claims to have incorporated the Kingdom of the Kushans up to Peshawar in the Sasanian Empire.²⁶ The inscription does not mention the date of the destruction of the Kushans leading to this. In fact, it only records the inclusion of part of the Kushan Empire, which could be the result of a conquest either by Ardashir or by Shapur I and which could have taken place at any time between A.D. 223 and 262. Narain²⁷ argues that Ghirshman's date for the destruction of Begram II (based on two hypotheses – finds of eight poor coins of Vāsudeva I and Shapur's eastern campaign) stands unproved; he claims the numismatic evidence goes clearly against any classification of the Kushans into three dynasties, and argues for an intermediate date of A.D. 103 for the accession of Kanishka.

²⁴ Zürcher, 1968, p. 371.

²⁵ Ghirshman, 1946.

²⁶ Maricq, 1958b, pp. 295–360.

²⁷ Narain, 1968, pp. 206–39.

Pulleyblank²⁸ supports Ghirshman's date of A.D. 144 from other evidence. Late Buddhist traditions connect Kanishka with Khotan and there is strong circumstantial evidence for Kushan penetration into the Tarim basin from the use of north-west Indian Prakrit as an administrative language, and from the finds of copper coins of Kanishka at Khotan. Pulleyblank argued that there could not have been any Kushan invasion before A.D. 175. Göbl²⁹ initially supported this chronology of A.D. 144 with an analysis of Kushan coin types which, he argued, were copied from Roman coins – Vima drawing from Trajan, Kanishka from Hadrian and Huvishka from Antonius Pius. But later Göbl³⁰ changed his view to A.D. 232 from a linkage he found between the Sasanian gold coinage of Shapur II struck at Merv and the Kushano-Sasanian coinage of Hormizd I at the beginning of the Kushano-Sasanian series. Majumdar³¹ drew attention to similarities between Kushan and Early Gupta forms in iconography and palaeography, and connected Kanishka's accession with the beginning of the well-known era of A.D. 248/49. Zeimal³² went further and suggested A.D. 278. Endorsing Bhandarkar's 1899 suggestion that the beginning of the era should be equated with the Saka era of A.D. 78, he regarded Kanishka's era as the third century, from A.D. 278. But any of these late dates placing the Great Kushans (the dynasty of Kanishka) in the third/fourth centuries A.D. would involve a clash not only with the Guptas but also with several other tribes ruling independently between the Later Kushans and the Imperial Guptas.³³

Many scholars have identified the accession of Kanishka with the Saka era of A.D. 78. Rapson³⁴ argued that the date on the coins and inscriptions of the Western Satraps of Surashtra and Malwa should start in Kanishka's reign in A.D. 78, but because of its long use by the Saka Western Satraps it became known in India as the Saka era, which effectively disguised its origin and perplexed modern scholars. Tolstov³⁵ found an era of A.D. 78 used in Chorasmia. Basham³⁶ also noted that the era of A.D. 78 was used by the Magha kings of Kauśambi and was equated with the Licchavi era used in Nepal; he argued that such wide use of an era was only possible with the patronage of a great power, which could only be the Kushans. But the difficulties in reconciling the presence of Rudradāman (the powerful Western Satrap), who was independent of the Kushans, campaigning against

²⁸ Pulleyblank, 1968, pp. 247 et seq.

²⁹ Göbl, 1960, pp. 75–91; 1968, pp. 103–13.

³⁰ Göbl, 1984, p. 52, 82.

³¹ Majumdar, 1968, pp. 150 et seq.

³² Zeimal, 1974, pp. 292–301.

³³ Fleet, 1892, pp. 1 et seq.

³⁴ Rapson, 1922, p. 585.

³⁵ Tolstov, 1968, pp. 304–26.

³⁶ Basham, 1968, pp. XII–XIII.

the Yaudheyas, in the lower Indus and Malwa between A.D. 130 and 150, in territory that was part of the fully established Kushan Empire, led Puri³⁷ to suggest that the era of Kanishka might have started around A.D. 142. A date in the early second century A.D. certainly seems to fit better the evidence of associated Kushan and Roman coin finds³⁸ and the careful analysis of events under Shapur I by Harmatta,³⁹ but the issue still remains open, awaiting new evidence and an analytical reconstruction that adequately explains and takes full cognizance of the fixed points of externally dated events.

The Great Kushans

The chronological framework of the dynasty of the Great Kushans is provided by the series of inscriptions dated in the era of Kanishka. Inscriptions are known of Kanishka dated Years 1–23, of Vasishka dated Years 24 and 28, of Huvishka dated Years 28–60 and of Vāsudeva dated Years 67–98.⁴⁰ There is another inscription of Year 41 from Ara of a Kanishka, son of Vajheshka, with the titles ‘*mahārāja rājatirāja devaputra*’ and ‘*Kaisara*’. Year 41 falls in the middle of the reign of Huvishka. Smith, Puri and Banerji⁴¹ identified him with the Great Kanishka and suggested that with advancing years and pressure of military affairs in Central Asia, Kanishka had left his son Vasishka as viceroy in India. Vasishka predeceased his father and was replaced by his brother Huvishka. But it could as well be proposed that this Kanishka was another ruler who held the western part of the Kushan Empire in Year 41, perhaps a brother of Huvishka associated with him in power or a member of a collateral branch who usurped power for a time in part of the empire. There are several other possibilities such as the division of the empire between two brothers, Vasishka and Huvishka, on Kanishka’s death, with a second Kanishka succeeding his father and finally becoming sole Kushan emperor.⁴² But there is another possibility, that both Vasishka and his son Kanishka belong to a separate group of kings after the Great Kushans (Kanishka, Huvishka and Vāsudeva).

There is also a reference to another Kushan ruler, Vaskushana, in an inscription⁴³ dated Year 22 from Sanchi. He could not have ruled independently in this area when Kanishka was alive. It is, therefore, tempting to identify this Vaskushana with Vasishka. While a king called Vasishka is not known in the coin series of the Great Kushans, a king of this name is

³⁷ Puri, 1965.

³⁸ MacDowall, 1968a, pp. 134–54.

³⁹ Harmatta, 1965, pp. 186 et seq.

⁴⁰ Puri, 1965, 1977, pp. 101–61; Janert, 1961.

⁴¹ Smith, 1924, p. 286; Puri, 1977, pp. 159–60; Banerji, 1908, pp. 58 et seq.

⁴² Konow, 1929, p. 163.

⁴³ Marshall and Foucher, 1947, Vol. I, p. 386; Lohuizen-de Leeuw, 1949, p. 314.

TABLE 1. Chronological framework of rulers

Rulers	Era dates			
	Graeco-Bactrian	Azes	Kanishka	Later Kushans
<i>Sakas</i>				
Jihoṅika the satrap	191			
<i>Early Kushans</i>				
Kujula Kadphises		103		
Nameless king		122 and 136		
Vima Kadphises	279 ¹	184(7)		
<i>Great Kushans</i>				
Kanishka			1–23	
Huvishka			28–60	
Vāsudeva			67–99	
<i>Later Kushans</i>				
Kanishka II				14
Vasishka				20, 22, 24, 28
Kanishka III				31, 41

The date is read as 285 by Marien and 299 by Harmatta.

known in the coinage of the Later Kushans after Vāsudeva.⁴⁴ It can therefore be suggested that Vaskushana, a Kushan *mahārāja* in Year 22 and the Kanishka of the Ara inscription in Year 41, belong to the period after the century of the Great Kushans. These Later Kushan rulers would include both Vasishka and his son Kanishka, and perhaps another Kanishka known from the Mathura inscription of Year 14 which on palaeographic grounds comes closer to the Gupta period.⁴⁵ Such a chronological framework can cut the Gordian knot created by the Ara inscription; the Kanishka in the Surkh Kotal inscription dated Year 31⁴⁶ seems to be the same Late Kushan ruler.

In the light of these inscriptions, Table 1 sets out a chronological framework of the Early, Great and Later Kushan rulers. The last ruler, Kanishka, may then have been a contemporary of the later Indian dynasties preceding the Early Guptas. There is clearly a second era of the Later Kushans in the inscriptions from Mathura, and evidence for a Later Kushan era starting in A.D. 234 and used on coins of Tekin Shah, King of Udabhāṇḍapura, and the Tochi valley inscriptions. This has led some scholars (Harmatta, Humbach, MacDowall) to place the beginning of the Kanishka era itself in A.D. 134, a century before the commencement of the second Kushan era.

⁴⁴ Göbl, 1984, pp. 58–78.

⁴⁵ Puri, 1965, pp. 70 et seq.

⁴⁶ Maricq, 1958a, pp. 345 et seq.

Relations with Iran

Kujula Kadphises is mentioned as a prince (*erjhuna Kapa*) at the court of the Indo-Parthian king Gondophares in the Takht-i Bahi inscription of Year 103 (A.D. 45). According to the *Hou Han-shu*, Kujula is said to have attacked An-hsi (Parthia) and taken the territory of Kao-fu (Kabul). It is difficult to explain the presence of a Kushan prince at the Indo-Parthian court in Taxila, but it is clear that eventually Kujula Kadphises reconquered the province of Kāpiśa and Kabul from the Indo-Parthians and then captured the Indus provinces of the Indo-Parthians, including Taxila, from the successors of Gondophares.⁴⁷ Vima Kadphises (Fig. 1) seems to have profited from the weakness of the Indo-Parthians to seize all the Indus valley up to Sind. At the height of their power under Kanishka, the Kushans did not seem to be interested in territorial gains at the expense of their neighbours, the Parthians. Buddhist tradition refers to a war by Kanishka against the Parthians and according to Ghirshman⁴⁸ it might have taken place in the reign of Vologases III, probably occasioned by a Parthian attempt to recover some of the Iranian provinces captured by the Kushans from the Indo-Parthians.



FIG. 1. Statue of Vima Kadphises sitting on a lion throne. Mathura.

⁴⁷ Banerjea, 1957.

⁴⁸ Ghirshman, 1978, p. 262.

The ascendancy of the Kushans posed a continuing threat to Parthia's eastern boundary. Eventually the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, Ardashir attacked the Kushans and conquered Margiana, Carmania and Sistan.⁴⁹ Tabari says that the kings of the Kushans, of Turan and of Makran submitted without battle to Ardashir and kept their territories as vassals.⁵⁰ Ardashir's successor Shapur I, claims among his provinces Sind and the country of the Kushans up to Peshawar in his inscription in the Ka'be of Zoroaster.⁵¹ The Kushan dynasty of Kanishka was deposed and replaced in the north by another line of Kushano-Sasanian princes ruling a considerably reduced kingdom, and recognizing the suzerainty of the Sasanians, at least for a time. There was a serious revolt in the eastern Sasanian provinces in the time of Bahram II (A.D. 276–93), when the king's brother, who was viceroy in Sistan, attempted to seize the throne, and the Kushan king supported him. Peace was restored with the marriage of Hormizd II, son and successor of Narseh (A.D. 303–09), to a Kushan princess.⁵² The death of Hormizd II left a minor, Shapur II, on the Sasanian throne. The Kushans took advantage of this, and the internal disorders in Iran, to recover the lost territory, but Shapur II, on attaining his majority, waged a new war against the Kushans and decisively defeated them.

Relations with China

The *Hou Han-shu* provides information only about the Kadphises rulers and refers to the failure of a Kushan army sent against the Chinese general Pan Ch'ao. The Chinese general's successful policy in Central Asia coincided with the Kushan conquest of northern India and led to a conflict of interest with the political aspirations of Vima Kadphises (see Chapter 10).

Rivalry between the Kushans and the Chinese in Central Asia seems to have continued up to the time of Vāsudeva. The Chinese work, the *San-kuo-chih*, compiled by Ch'en Shou (A.D. 233–97), records that the King of the Great Yüeh-chih, Po-t'iao, sent an envoy with tribute to China and was given the honorary title of 'King of the Yüeh-chih who shows affection towards the Wei'. Po-t'iao has been identified with Vāsudeva, either Vāsudeva I or Vāsudeva II, depending on the chronology favoured by the scholar concerned.

⁴⁹ Ghirshman, 1946, pp. 100 et seq.; Narain, 1968, pp. 211–12.

⁵⁰ Maricq, 1968, pp. 182–4.

⁵¹ Maricq, 1958b, pp. 295–360.

⁵² Ghirshman, 1978, p. 296.

Relations with Rome

According to Dio Cassius⁵³ many embassies came to Augustus, and the Indians, having previously proclaimed a treaty of alliance, concluded it with the presentation of gifts including tigers, animals that the Romans saw for the first time. Florus, writing in the time of Trajan (A.D. 98–117),⁵⁴ refers to the arrival in Rome of several embassies, especially from the Indians. Political relations, seen in the dispatch of embassies, seem to be connected with trade contacts and commercial transactions related to the silk trade. Some of the copper coins of Kujula Kadphises have an obverse head closely copied from the portraits on the Julio-Claudian silver denarii of Augustus and Tiberius, and show the Kushan emperor sitting on a curule chair which appears on the reverse of Roman coins of Claudius and may well represent a gift from a Roman emperor. Roman aurei and denarii were used extensively in Roman sea trade with India, which traded in silk and spices. Pliny (*Natural History* XII.10.41) refers to the serious drain of Roman coins exported to India. The gold coinage introduced by Vima Kadphises used a gold dinar that copied the weight standard of the Roman gold aureus,⁵⁵ and the impact of Graeco-Roman art in Gandhāra sheds light on the cultural and commercial relations between the Kushan Empire and the Roman world.

Relations with north-eastern India

The extension of the Kushan Empire in northern India seems to have been the achievement of Kanishka (Fig. 2), whose inscriptions are found at Mathura, Kauśambi and Sarnath. The distribution of copper Kushan coins of Kanishka and Huvishka extends as far as Patna and Gaya in eastern India.⁵⁶ The *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* and the *Hou Han-shu* show Kanishka's hold over Kashmir and parts of central and south-western India.⁵⁷ The reference in the *Śrīdharmapīṭakanidānasūtra* to the defeat of the King of Pāṭaliputra, when Kanishka demanded a large indemnity but agreed to accept Aśvaghōṣa, the Buddha's alms bowl and a compassionate cock, confirms Kushan activities in north-east India.

After Huvishka, the Kushans lost some more distant territories in eastern India, but Mathura long remained under Kushan rule. The long series of inscriptions found there continues up to Year 57 of the second Kushan era under the Later Kushans,⁵⁸ and it has been thought that Mathura was a second capital of the Kushans for the eastern region

⁵³ McCrindle, 1901, p. 212.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 213.

⁵⁵ Sewell, 1904, p. 591; MacDowall, 1960, pp. 63 et seq.

⁵⁶ Majumdar, 1932, pp. 127 et seq.; Banerji, 1951, pp. 107 et seq.; Gupta, 1953, pp. 185 et seq.

⁵⁷ Thomas, 1935.

⁵⁸ Rosenfield, 1967, pp. 270–3.



FIG. 2. Statue of Kanishka I. Mathura.

(Fig. 3). The appointment of satraps for Mathura, as at Sarnath, points to a determined control over the region. Huvishka's reign was a period of political security and economic prosperity. The extensive range of gold coins of Huvishka, retaining a good weight standard and high gold purity, suggests economic stability closely associated with political stability. Vāsudeva's long rule of more than thirty years was equally characterized by political stability at home. After Vāsudeva, the Kushans lost more territory to a series of new dynasties and republican states.

Relations with the Saka satraps

It has been suggested by some scholars⁵⁹ that the Kushans had a radical affinity with the Sakas and were a Saka clan. The term 'Saka' has been used in a very imprecise way, and it is possible that the Kushans may have been the descendants of some of the Sakas

⁵⁹ Maenchen-Helfen, 1945, pp. 71 et seq.



FIG. 3. Statue of sitting Buddha from the Kushan age. Mathura.

mentioned by Herodotus. According to the *Kālakācaryakathānaka*,⁶⁰ the Sakas of the Indus conquered Surashtra and Malwa shortly before the beginning of the Vikrama era (57 B.C.), but were ousted by Vikramāditya. After a lapse of 135 years (c. A.D. 78) a new Saka came and reestablished the Saka dominion there. It has been suggested that the second conquest was associated with Vima Kadphises and his satraps ruled as the Saka satraps of western India, without any regal appellation like *mahārāja*. But they also used the title of *mahākṣatrapa* which could mean either the attainment of independence or promotion in the administrative hierarchy. The expression ‘*svayamadhigata mahākṣatrapa nāmaḥ*’ in the Junagadh inscription⁶¹ of Rudra-dāman is especially significant. While there is no specific evidence that the Saka satraps of western India ever owed allegiance to Vima Kadphises, circumstantial evidence, as also that adduced by the *Hou Han-shu*, suggests his

⁶⁰ Jacobi, 1880, pp. 247 et seq.; Konow, 1929 pp. XXVI–XXVIII.

⁶¹ *Epigraphica Indica*, p. 82.

conquest of Sind or the Indus region and his association with the Saka satraps who used the Saka era, probably founded by their overlord, in their records.

The Kushans held the lower Indus valley. An inscription of Kanishka Year 11 was found at Sui Vihar near Bahawalpur, and there have been finds of Later Kushan coins from the stupa site at Mohenjo-daro⁶² and at Jhukar, about 30 km to the north.⁶³ The find of potsherds with Kharoṣṭhī lettering at Tor Dheri in the Loralai District of Baluchistan⁶⁴ may suggest an expansion of Kushan power in that region. But Kushan rule in Sind and Sauvira (modern Multan) seems to conflict with the claims of the Western Satrap Rudradāman, recorded in his Junagadh inscription of A.D. 150. This could be reconciled if we presume that he was a satrap of Kanishka, for which there is no evidence, or that he preceded Kanishka, which seems more probable (see discussion on the date of Kanishka above).

The Kushan political system

The divinity of kingship seems to have been the most conspicuous element in the Kushan political system. Their kings were not only accorded the title of *'devaputra'*⁶⁵ (Son of God), corresponding to the Chinese imperial title *'t'ien-tzū'* (Son of Heaven), but were deified after death and their statues were set up in a *devakula* (god house). Such statues of Kushan rulers have been recovered from excavations at Mat, near Mathura, and from Surkh Kotal in Afghanistan. It is probable that the statue of the deified Huvishka was erected in the lifetime of the ruler.⁶⁶ The Kushan rulers were secularist in one sense, in that they depicted divinities from different pantheons on their coins, but religion and polity were interlinked. The Mat inscription of Huvishka⁶⁷ refers to him as 'steadfast in the true law', a title also borne by the first Kushan king, Kujula Kadphises on his coins. It is further recorded that on account of his devotion, the kingdom was conferred on the grand father of Huvishka by Sarva (which is another name for the god Śiva) and Candavira (a name connected with the moon).

The Kushan kings assumed high-sounding titles⁶⁸ borrowed, like the divinities on their coins, from different regions and civilizations. They use the Indian titlature *'mahārāja rājatirāja'* (Great King, the King of Kings), its Iranian counterpart *'šaonano šao'* and its Greek counterpart *'Basileus Basileon'* (Fig. 4). These titles, no doubt, indicate Kushan

⁶² Marshall, 1932, p. 127.

⁶³ Majumdar, 1934, p. 7.

⁶⁴ Konow, 1929, pp. 173–7.

⁶⁵ Thomas, 1935 pp. 97 et seq.; Sharma, 1959, p. 177.

⁶⁶ Janert, 1961, p. 145.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 144.

⁶⁸ Puri, 1939/40, pp. 433–41.



FIG. 4. Coin of Kanishka I with Greek legend and the title '*Basileus Basileon*'

paramountcy over areas where lesser princes and feudal lords retained local power. In the Ara inscription, the Later Kanishka also has the title '*Kaisara*', the equivalent of 'Caesar' used by Roman emperors, suggesting Kushan contact with Rome and a claim to comparable status. Some titles were borrowed from their Bactrian, Saka and Indo-Parthian predecessors. It has been suggested that they also inherited a system of joint rule, but there is no numismatic evidence for this. No Kushan coin portrays two rulers. The argument for supposed joint rule is based on inscriptions that seem to show kings with overlapping dates: an inscription of '*Vaskuṣāna*' (identified with Vasishka) from Sanchi with the title '*rāja*' dated Year 22 when Kanishka was king and the Ara inscription dated Year 41 when Huvishka was king. But both these inscriptions are dated in the Later Kushan era. There is consequently no overlapping, and the dual kingship known in the Indo-Parthian political system does not seem to have been practised under the Kushans.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Puri, 1965, pp. 79–87.

Kushan administration

The vast Kushan Empire, extending from Central Asia to Bihar and from Kashmir to Sind, containing peoples of different nationalities and religions with a heterogeneous socio-economic background, was governed through an organized administrative system, probably in three tiers, at central, provincial and local levels. The king seems to have possessed unfettered powers, as we find no reference in the Kushan records to any advisory body or to councillors corresponding to *amātyas* and *sachivas* of the Mauryan period. The Kushans seem to have followed the earlier existing pattern of the Indo-Greeks and Parthians by appointing *kṣatrapas* and *mahākṣatrapas* for different units of the empire. Inscriptions provide the names of some such *kṣatrapas* some foreign, like Vanaspara, and the *mahākṣatrapa* Kharapallāna at Varanasi, Naṃda at Mathura, Veśpasi and Lala, a scion of the Kushan family, Liaka, and an unknown satrap, son of the satrap Graṇavhryaka at Kāpiśa (Begram). Some inscriptions show that certain appointments were hereditary.

They mention other officials performing both civil and military functions, called ‘*daṇḍanāyaka*’ and ‘*mahādaṇḍanāyaka*’. The two terms are found in numerous inscriptions throughout India, suggesting the prevalence of this feudal element – as one might presume – in the administrative set-up of different ruling families over a considerable period of time. They were charged with administrative and military responsibilities in different areas. The *daṇḍanāyaka* was presumably the wielder of the rod (*daṇḍa*), acting both as commissioner of police to prevent crime and as a judge or criminal magistrate administering justice. He could also perform military functions although he is distinguished from the *senānī* or real commander. He is also differentiated from the *daṇḍapāśika* of the later records which probably signifies someone carrying fetters (*pāśa*).

The places where inscriptions mentioning satraps and other officials have been found indicate localities for which they were responsible. Satraps are known for Kāpiśa (Begram), Manikyāla (near Rawalpindi), Und (west of the Indus), Mathura, Varanasi, etc. There may have been satraps for other parts of the empire, but the evidence on this point is wanting. The relations between *kṣatrapas* and *daṇḍanāyakas* are no longer defined, but it may be assumed that *kṣatrapas* were definitely at a higher administrative level than the *daṇḍanāyakas*. The use of foreigners alone at the higher level of political organization ensured efficiency and minimized the chances of internal dissension and disorder, but this principle was not applied at local village level. The inscriptions mention two terms – ‘*grāmika*’ and ‘*padrapāla*’ – both signifying ‘village headman’, who collected the king’s dues and took cognizance of crimes in his area. There is no information about the local government that we find later in the Gupta period.

The scanty information available suggests that the Kushan rulers accepted the prevalent Indian and Chinese concept of the divinity of kingship, and borrowed the Achaemenid and subsequently Indo-Greek and Indo-Parthian system of appointing satraps as provincial governors, while the feudal lord (*daṇḍanāyaka*) was their own creation. The title is no doubt Indian, but all feudal lords known to have been associated with the Kushan administration were foreigners.