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A NOTE ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DEPICTION OF DEITIES PORTRAITURE ON MAUES COINS IN GANDHARA

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Abstract

The article emphasizes the importance of the deities portrayed on Maues' coins. He founded the Indo-Scythian dynasty and issued numerous coins with his name. His coins follow the Indo-Greek coinage system. However, he also introduced some new features, including a mounted king and the introduction of new deities. He maintained the deity scheme of Indo-Greeks and added some Indian ones. The Indo-Greek coins portray religious figures on one side obverse and the coins of Maues, sometimes, depict the deities on both sides. These deities were taken from different ideologies showing respect for other religions as well. The paper is aimed to investigate and highlight numerous deities depicted on Maues coins.

Keywords: Indo-Scythian, Maues, Religion, Deities, Coins, Gandhara, Portraiture, Greek

1. Introduction

The Indo-Scythian, a fascinating amalgamation of Indo-European and Central Asian cultures, left behind a rich legacy, particularly in numismatics over Gandhara (Grenet, 2015: 203-239). Among the prominent figures of this era, Maues stands out as a significant ruler whose coinage reflects not only political power but also religious and cultural nuances (Coloru, 2015: 173-199). Maues, the founder of Indo-Scythian, started his rule at the beginning of the 1st century BCE. It was c. 90 BCE when he defeated the Indo-Greek ruler, Hippistratus, at

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Taxila and established a new kingdom (Mac Dowall, 2007: 95-117; Bopearachchi, 2011: 259-83; Rahman, 2018: 101-122; Muhammad, & Jan 2023: 212- 223; Muhammad, & Jan 2023: 1179-1189). The newly established Kingdom at Taxila was later extended to Gandhara, Sindh, and the surrounding regions (Senior 2001: 10; 2007: 69; Samad 2011: 64-67; Ahmad, & Rehman, 2021: 42-54). Among other evidence, his rule is witnessed by inscriptions and a large number of coins (Rosenfield 1967: 126; Bopearachchi 1999: 124; Chopra et.al 2003: 116). The inscriptions often refer to him as Moga or Moasa is very important evidence for the presence of his rule (Muhammad, & Jan, 2023: 212-223). These inscriptions are found in Taxila, Salt Range, Fateh Jang (Attock), Shahdaur and Chilas (Dar, 1998: 217-219; 2006: 46; Marshall 1951: 45; Puri 1994: 193; Dani, 1983: 62-64). Apart from inscriptions, the coins of Maues are found in Hazara, Kashmir, Gandhara, and Swat Valley (Bivar 1984: 14; Narian 1957: 145; Samad, 2011; Siddiqui, 2014: 47). This evidence confirms his authority over the mentioned territories. However, he was later followed by a king of the Indo-Greek line rather than his own. Apollodotus-II (Sagar, 1992) of the Indo-Greek succeeded in gaining their lost territories which were once under Greek control (Bernard, 1994: 99-129; Mitchiner 1978: 307).

2. Historical Background of the Indo-Scythian in Gandhara

Cunningham mentioned three groups of Indo-Scythians known after the names of their chiefs. They were Vonones, Maues, and Nahapana (Cynarski, 2018: 1-7; Muhammad, & Jan 2023: 212-224). These rulers accompanied by their successors are recognized to have dominated ancient Gandhara in northwestern India, Sindh, south-eastern Afghanistan Punjab, and Kashmir (Nijjar, 2008; Samad, 2011). The same territories were ruled by the Indo-Parthians (Colliva, 2018: 89-110). The latter also adopted the coin design of earlier, the mint system and administrative system. Therefore, they are often called Scytho-Parthian (Hakal, & Zahra, 2022). This term was proposed by V.A. Smith and followed by others (Khan, G. R., 1998: 50). The Greeks and Persians called them Scythes and Saka respectively (Senior 2001: 7; Bonda, 2023, Beckwith, 2023). However, in Chinese annals, they are called Sai (Minns, 2010: 121). The present-day knowledge about the Sai dynasty tells us that about the 2nd BCE, they were living somewhere in the Ili Basin near Issikul Lake. They came into conflict with the Yue-Chi and were driven out of their homeland (Frumkin, 2022). At this point, they were divided into two groups (Edwardes, 1969: 23; Majumdar 1946: 56).

One group went westward and reached Sogdiana. From there they went to Bactria and then went through Margiana settled in Parthia (Wheeler, 1987; Mukherjee 1975; Senior 2001: 8-9, Lyonnet, 2022: 46-64). Another one migrated southward, passing the Karakorum reached Kashmir and the northern mountain region of present-day Pakistan (Wheeler 1987; Mukherjee 1975; Senior 2001:8-9; Khan, 2020: 8-24). Their chief, Maues defeated the Indo-Greek ruler in 90 BCE. He extended his kingdom to Punjab and Gandhara. He ruled till 75 BCE and was followed by a Greek ruler Apollodotus- II who succeeded in regaining their lost territories from the Scythians (Bopearachchi & Rahman, 1999; Muhammad, & Jan 2023: 1179-1189). However, his successor, Azes I defeated Hippostratus, the last Indo-Greek ruler

in 57 BCE and put an end to the Indo-Greek rule in this region. He further enlarged his rule up to the Paropamisadae (Kabul Valley) and on the other side to east Punjab. He was followed by his son and successor Azilises who in turn was succeeded by Azes II (Senior 2001: 7, Bopearachchi, 2011: 259-283). It is said that this ruler further annexed Jalalabad and Gardez to his empire (Chopra 2003: 118). He was the last Indo-Scythian ruler and was followed by several satraps (Mitchiner 1975/6: 702; 1978: 313). The main sources of the reconstruction of Indo-Scythian history are Coins, Inscriptions, and Pottery (Simpson, & Pankova, 2021: 1-774). These coins usually display a mounted king bearing a Greek legend, on one side and a deity with a Kharoshthi legend on the other (Ali, I. & Zahir, 2006; Nasim Khan 1997: 21-33; Mac Dowall, 2007: 233-265).

3. Representation of Different Deities on Maues Coins

Maues was the founder king and a powerful Indo-Scythian ruler, who declared over the territories from Afghanistan, present-day Pakistan, and northwest India during the 1st century BCE (Cribb, 2020: 653-682; Muhammad, Sehrai, & Munsif, 2024: 1002-1029). He issued numerous coins in silver and copper. The coins minted during his reign exhibit a blend of Greek, Indian, and Central Asian influences, reflecting the multicultural environment of the region. The coins also display a variety of deities (Samad, 2011; Taasob, 2023: 178-188). The depiction of deities serves multiple purposes, including legitimizing his rule, asserting religious authority, and pacifying diverse religious sentiments within his realm (Frazer, 2023). His coinage played a crucial role in asserting his authority and propagating his image as a divine ruler (Taasob, 2020: 83-106). Some of the coins of Maues display deities on both sides (Cribb, 1997: 11-66). For instance, the coin type which is placed first in his catalogue by Senior/Mitchner depicts Zeus on one side and Nike on the other (Mitchiner 1975/6: 699-700; Bopearachchi & Rehman 1995: 682, 683 & 683, Senior). Another example is that of Selene and Nike (Mitchiner 1975/6: 728; Senior 2001: 172). This representation underscores the influence of Hellenistic culture in the region and Maues' strategic alignment with Greek traditions to enhance his prestige (Hadjipolycarpou, 2015: 127-153). In addition to Zeus (and other Greek deities), Maues coinage also features images of indigenous Indian deities, such as Balaram, Shiva, and Lakshmi (Wickramasinghe, 2021: 69-91). The inclusion of these Hindu divinities reflects Maues' efforts to integrate with the local populace and gain their support by acknowledging their religious beliefs. Using incorporating Hindu gods into his coinage, Maues portrayed himself as a ruler who respected and honored the diverse religious practices of his subjects.

4. Discussion

4.1 Zeus

Zeus, the king of the Greek gods, embodies power, authority, and justice. Often depicted with a flowing beard and holding a thunderbolt, his attributes symbolize his dominion over the heavens. Zeus's notable features on coins reflect his significance in ancient Greek culture. Coins often showcase his profile or full figure, emphasizing his divine status and role as

protector of the cosmos. His likeness on coins served not only as a representation of divine authority but also as a means of asserting political power, with rulers aligning themselves with Zeus's image to legitimize their reign. Thus, Zeus remains an enduring symbol of strength and leadership. On Maues coins, Zeus is depicted in various positions. Most often he is shown turning towards the left and sometimes towards the right (not found to the right and nor found alone yet). In some cases, he is shown enthroned. Furthermore, he is often depicted with Nike. In the latter type, Zeus is depicted on the obverse and Nike on the reverse.

4.2 Nike

Nike is the Greek goddess of victory, symbolizing triumph and success. She is known for her grace and swiftness and indicates the triumph of spirit over hardship. Often depicted with wings, Nike shows enthusiasm and energy. Her attributes include a palm branch and a wreath, representing peace and prosperity, and symbolizing victory respectively. As far as her depiction of coins throughout history, she signifies the endorsement of divine favor for rulers. From ancient to modern times, particularly in Greek, her presence on currency highlights the importance of victory and achievement in human endeavors, thus, immortalizing her as a timeless icon of triumph and excellence.

4.3 Apollo

Apollo, son of Zeus and Leto, is the Greek god of prophecy, music, healing, and archery. He embodies a variety of attributes. Often depicted with a lyre which symbolizes his musical competency, and a laurel wreath, signifying victory and poetic achievement, Apollo conveys artistic and athletic excellence. His radiant presence on coins and art often showcases his handsome look, with long, flowing hair and a calm expression, reflecting his eternal youth and beauty. On the coins, he is represented in various forms. The Maues coins portray him standing holding an arrow and bow.

4.4 Selene

Selene, the ancient Greek goddess of the moon, is renowned for her ethereal beauty and charm. Depicted with a serene countenance, she often appears riding a chariot drawn by two horses or with a crescent moon adorning her head. Her attributes symbolize the cycle of the moon, reflecting both light and darkness. On the ancient coins, Selene is often portrayed in exquisite detail, showcasing her divine grace and power. On the coins of Maues, she is shown standing facing, holding a scepter, and flanked by two stars showing her celestial influence.

4.5 Artemis

Another Greek deity found on Maues coins is Artemis. Artemis, the twin sister of Apollo, embodies various attributes that have been shown on coins and sculptures throughout history.

She is the Greek goddess of the hunt, wilderness, and childbirth, and symbolizes strength, independence, and fertility. Having a bow and arrow, Artemis showcases her competency as a skilled huntress, sometimes accompanied by a hunting dog, embodying both grace and wildness.

4.6 Heracles

Heracles, the iconic figure of Greek mythology, epitomizes strength and courage. He is often depicted clad in a lion's skin and having a club. His attributes symbolize his triumph over the Nemean Lion, one of his twelve labors. Heracles' depiction on coins has a long history as he was continuously used from the time of Alexander. The Bactrian Greeks also depicted his image on their coins and so on the Indo-Scythian. Notable features of Heracles on coins include his muscular physique and his association with divine lineage, being the son of Zeus. Coins often depict him in heroic poses, showcasing his legendary achievements.

4.7 Balaram

Balarama, the elder brother of Krishna in Hindu mythology, embodies strength, loyalty, and righteousness. He symbolizes protection and support. Often depicted with a plow, he signifies agricultural fertility and perseverance. On coins, Balarama is depicted in various forms, reflecting his divine and earthly attributes. Notable features on coins may include his iconic plow, his association with Krishna, and symbols representing his protective nature and agricultural significance.

4.8 Poseidon

Poseidon is the Greek god of the sea in Greek mythology. He was often depicted on ancient coins as a powerful figure with a forceful presence. He was typically portrayed with a strong physique, often using his trident, a symbol of his authority over the oceans. Poseidon's attributes on coins symbolized the importance of maritime trade and navigation to ancient societies, as well as their reverence for the sea and its unpredictable yet essential nature. Poseidon is also associated with horses, as he was believed to have created them, and is also represented on coins through the inclusion of horses.

4.9 Helios

Helios is considered the sun god in Greek mythology and is often depicted on ancient coins due to his significance in ancient Mediterranean cultures. He is portrayed as a handsome youth with a radiant crown, Helios symbolizes energy and enlightenment. His attributes include a chariot drawn by fiery horses, a radiant nimbus, and often holding a celestial object. On ancient coins, Helios's depiction served multiple purposes. It symbolized the power and authority of the issuing city or ruler, as well as prosperity and abundance linked with sunlight. Moreover, his image conveyed religious and cultural beliefs, emphasizing the significance of solar worship in ancient societies. Helios's presence on coins reinforced

connections between the divine, the natural world, and earthly prosperity, imparting a sense of divine favor upon the currency and its issuer (king). The mint master of Maues depicted him in a chariot drawn by two horses. He is holding a scepter in his right hand.

5. Conclusion

The depiction of deities on the coins of Maues, provides extremely significant religious, cultural, and political dynamics of Gandhara and northwestern regions of the Indian subcontinent. Through a careful examination of these numismatic evidence and artifacts, one can determine the complex relationship between Greek, Indian, and Central Asian influences, as well as the ruler logical approach to governance and power consolidation. Maues coinage stands as an authentication of the glowing exchange of ideas and beliefs at the crossroads of civilizations during that period, leaving a permanent legacy in the chronicles of history. In a different place religious consequence, the depiction of deities on Maues coins served as symbols of power and divine authorization. The presence of revered gods alongside the ruler portrait conveyed the message of divine favor and legitimacy, highlighting Maues claim to kingship. The images of deities were strategically placed to emphasize Maues close association with the divine scope, subsequently enhancing his authority. The depictions of Zeus on Maues coins, often seated enthroned or holding a thunderbolt, were potent symbols of the ruler strength and legitimacy. Nike appearance on coins emphasized the ruler military victories and success. Apollo depiction with a bow and arrow on Maues coins likely strained athletic ability and divine favor in both artistic and martial achievements. Artemis on coins represented protection, independence, and fertility, emphasizing the ruler role as a provider and guardian of the land. Heracles image, common since the time of Alexander the Great, would have evoked courage and heroism. Poseidon depiction, often with a trident, underlined control over the seas, essential for trade, or power over natural forces. Helios presence on Maues coins suggested prosperity and divine energy favoring the reign. However, Balarama, representing Hindu influence, was established in the Indo-Scythian period, and it concerns local traditions with Greek deities.

6. Catalogue of Maues Coins

Type I: Zeus and Winked Nike

Obv: Zeus standing front, head to the left, raising his right hand in benediction and holding a scepter in his left.

Rev: Nike advancing to the right, holding a wreath in her right hand and palm frond in her left.

Type II: Zeus and Male Deity

Obv. Zeus standing as on No. 1?

Rev. Male/Female deity standing facing.

Type III: Zeus Nikephoros and Zeus

Obv. Enthroned Zeus Nikephoros to left, holding a scepter in his left hand? forepart of an elephant to the right in the left field.

Rev. Zeus stands facing, holding palm, club, and lion skin.

Type IV: Enthroned Zeus and Female Deity

Obv: Zeus enthroned on a high back thrown slightly left and holding a thunderbolt in the right hand.

Rev: Female Deity/Yakshi having scepter/spear/trident across the body and holding an object in raised right hand

Type V: Radiate Deity and Enthroned Zeus

Obv: Radiate deity (most probably Helios?), holding scepter, and driver, holding wand and reins, in biga to right.

Rev: Zeus enthroned facing slightly left, extending hand in benediction, and holding a scepter

Type VI: Selene and Winged Nike

Obv: Selene standing facing, left hand on hip holding scepter in right hand flanked by two stars.

Rev. Winged Nike is standing left holding a wreath/object in the right hand.

Type VII: Apollo and Tripod

Obv: Apollo standing facing, holding bow in left hand and arrow in right.

Rev: Tripod within rectangular dotted border

Type VIII: Artemis and Bull

Obv. Artemis, nimbate, (radiate?), standing in front, holding the fold of her drapery in her left hand.

Rev. Zebu (bull) walking left.

Type IX: Heracles and Lion

Obv. Heracles standing facing (in lion skin) and holding the club.

Rev. Lion walking left (with upraised tail)

Type X: Balaram and Female Deity

Obv. Balarama holding club and ploughshare.

Rev. Female deity standing right offering garland.

Type XI: Maues and Mecheny

Obv. Mounted king to right

Rev. Winged Machene to right holding diadem/cornucopia in his/her right hand.

Type XII: Poseidon and Yakshi

Obv. Poseidon standing facing, making a benediction gesture, and holding a trident, foot over the river.

Rev. Yakshi is standing between vines.

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Plates



Pl. 1



Pl. 2



Pl. 3



Pl. 4



Pl. 5



Pl. 6



Pl. 7



Pl. 8



Pl. 9



Pl. 10



Pl. 11



Pl. 12