

The Indo Greek

The Indo-Greek Kingdom was spread across from the north and north-west part of the Indian subcontinent. The Greeks of Bactria were formerly satraps or subordinate rulers in the Seleucid Empire of West Asia. The Seleucid Empire in turn was founded by Seleucus Nicator who was one of the four Generals under Alexander the Great.

After the Death of Alexander, his four generals divided his kingdom into 4 parts and Seleucus ruled over the Eastern provinces which in part comprised of Bactria. Diodotus I is believed to be a satrap in the Seleucid Empire. Things changed when Diodotus I in the 3rd century BC was successful in proclaiming independence from the Seleucid Empire and establishing the Bactrian Greek Kingdom.

They extended their empire to the south of the Hindu Kush in the 2nd century BC. By 145 BC the Indo-Greeks lost Bactria but still ruled the north-western part of the subcontinent for many decades.

The Indo Greek ruler of Bactria, Menander (155 - 130 BC) who went by the name Milinda had conquered much of the northern India. He was highly revered Buddhist who finds mention in books such as the Milind Panha where his conversations with the sage Nagasena are elucidated.



Map showing the Greco-Bactrian kingdom

Image source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greco-Bactrian_Kingdom

Indo-Greek Coins

Coins of the Indo-Greeks were made of gold, silver, copper and nickel. The coins feature portraits of the



Menander I

Image source: www.columbia.edu



Eucratides I

Image source: okaboo.com

Ruler on the obverse and Greek deities on the reverse side. Motifs on the reverse side also carried Indian religious symbols. Each coin was made by following the attic weight standard method. Rulers like Menander issued coins in both the attic weight standard as well as the Indian weight standard. Circular and Square was one of their common shapes. They had bilingual inscriptions in Kharoshthi and Greek. Very few have been found with Brahmi inscriptions. According to Osmund Bopearachchi the term Graeco-Bactrian is used, as a rule, for the coins issued by the Greek kings who ruled Bactria-Sogdiana north of the Hindu Kush. These coins were minted in conformity with the Attic standard and they bear Greek legends. The designation also applies to coins bearing the same characteristics which were issued by the kings who reigned in the heavily Hellenized regions bordering the southern slopes of the Hindu

Kush. The coins issued by the Greek kings who reigned south of the Hindu Kush but intended for their Indian speaking subjects in territories of Indian Culture are designated as Indo- Greek. They are minted according to the Indian Standard carrying bilingual legends in Greek on the obverse and in Kharoshthi or very rarely Brahmi characters on the reverse.

Many names of the Indo-Greek rulers have been deciphered with the help of the coins that have been discovered. 34 Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek kings have been known only because of the coins though in recent years more rulers are being discovered through new find spots. The different monograms, letters and numbers on the coins have however made the process of interpreting them difficult.

It must be noted that Indo Greek history is reconstructed from **three** main sources:

A. Ancient Text and Inscriptions: Greek, Latin, Indian and Chinese textual sources do record some important events or mentioning the names of Graeco Bactrian kings. They are at times difficult to interpret and therefore they do not play an important role in the reconstruction of the Graeco Bactrian or Indo Greek history but they do establish a few chronological markers which form the framework wherein some reconstruction of history is possible for e.g.



The Ruins of Ai Khanum

Image Source: http://www.livius.org/site/assets/files/7527/ai_khanum.jpg

Justin's History of the World abbreviated from Pompeius Trogus(XLI, 4) points out a certain Diodotos, a Seleucid satrap of Bactria, revolted against Antiochos II and declared independence.



The ruins of the main road at Sirkap (Taxila)

Image Source: <http://www.livius.org/pictures/pakistan/taxila/sirkap/sirkap-main-road/>

B Various data obtained from archaeological excavations: The Archaeological sites of Taxila in Pakistan and Ai Khanum in Afghanistan are the two important sites concerning the Indo Greeks. Taxila yielded very little artifacts other than coins from the Greek level which has hardly been excavated. Ai-Khanum on the other hand has been excavated extensively which resulted in the finding of a vast Greek city situated at the junction of the amu Daria and the Kokcha rivers in Northern Afghanistan.

Ai Khanum excavations led to the unearthing of many sculptures. Some of them were influenced by Hellenistic taste, while the others were an amalgamation of Persian architecture. A few examples are a citadel with two towers, magnanimous palace of Greco-Bactrian architecture, a classical theater, a gymnasium and two miles long ramparts.

The archeological site of Taxila, had artifacts such as a fluted cup, stone palette with an individual being crowned by a woman, man with a moustache and more. The remains of the city that prospered

under the Indo-Greek rule are shown in the image below:

C. Coins: Due to the scarcity of textual and archaeological evidence, Coins as numismatic data constitute the main source of the reconstruction of the history of



Gold 20-stater of Eucratides

Image Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:EucratidesStatere.jpg>

This coin, the largest surviving gold coin from Antiquity, was originally found in Bukhara, and later acquired by Napoleon III. The coin weighs 169.2 grams, and has a diameter of 58 millimeters.

the Greeks in Bactria and India. From this numismatic data we can conclude the existence of more than 40 different names of the Indo-Greek kings whereas the written

sources mention only seven.

The coins carry a great deal of information to understand their role in a historical context.

This information is conveyed to us in different ways:-

- Minting Techniques
- Monograms
- Metrology
- Iconography

e. Find spots: which evaluate geographical location of different kingdoms

f. Overstrikes: from one king to another indicating succession of reigns

Religion

Buddhism

The kingdom of Indo-Greeks had a thriving Buddhist faith. Indian literature mentioned them as “Yavanas.” For example, the mention of Antialcidas on the Heliodorus pillar in Vidisha. The Column was set up as a Garuda Pillar in honor of God Vasudeva by Heliodorus, A greek inhabitant of Taxila.

The Buddhist scripture- Majjhima Nikaya stated that the land of yavanas had only two classes of people namely the Aryas and Dasas (masters and slaves).

The Buddhist monk Mahadhammarakkhita from the city of Alasandra (possibly Alexandria, city founded by Alexander the great) is said to have travelled with 30,000 monks for the foundation ceremony of the Maha Stupa at Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka. This underlines the importance of Buddhism among the Greek.



Heliodorus Pillar at Vidisha

Image Source: <http://im.hunt.in/cg/vidisha/City-Guide/khamb.jpg>



Greek Buddhist devotees, holding plantain leaves, in purely Hellenistic style, inside Corinthian columns

Image source: <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/ff/f1/GandharaDonorFrieze2.JPG>

Hinduism

Indo-Greek king Agathocles is known to be the first one to issue the bilingual coins around 180 BC. Some of these coins represent Hindu deities such as Krishna's brother, Balarama, with his plough (hala) and pestle (masala). Such evidence suggests that the Indian religious traditions were prevalent during their reign.



Coin of Agathocles with representation of Balarama on the reverse

Image Source: <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/a/a4/Agathokles.jpg/330px-Agathokles.jpg>

Economy

There is not a lot of information about the economy of the Indo-Greeks. However, the plentiful coins tend to suggest they had a flourishing monetary economy. Since their coins were bilingual, square (Indian style) and round (Greek style) in shape, they could have been circulated all over India. Neighboring kingdoms had adopted the Indo-Greek monetary conventions which mean that they also carried cross border trade.

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Zoroastrianism

Persian culture also influenced the western Indo-Greeks. The Persian Zoroastrian God- Mithra can be found on many of their coins. He has also been represented in a seated position with a small protrusion on his head in the coins of Hermaeus.