

EXPLORING THE UNIQUE FEATURES OF AZES- I COINS IN GANDHARA: AN ADDITIONAL NOTE

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the distinctive features of Azes-I coins from Gandhara. Azes-I was a significant Indo-Scythian ruler who seized Gandhara in the mid-1st century BCE and defeated the Indo-Greek rulers around 57 BCE. His reign fostered development and stability in this diverse region. Azes-I expanded his territory considerably, reaching into Punjab, Gandhara, and parts of northwestern India. He maintained political stability through strategic alliances with local elites and by fostering economic growth, which supported a prosperous and unified kingdom. A notable feature of Azes-I coins is the extensive use of animal imagery, such as horses and lions, symbolizing power and strength. Most were round silver coins, with some copper, bearing bilingual legends in Greek and Kharosthi, underscoring his authority and appealing to diverse populations. Deities such as Zeus and Athena appeared on the coins, reflecting a fusion of Greek and local religious traditions. The obverse typically portrayed a bust of Azes-I, while the reverse depicted various deities or symbols, emphasizing the religious significance of his reign.

Keywords: Azes-I, Gandhara, Coins, Indo-Scythians, Taxila, Silver, Inscription, Animal Designs

1. INTRODUCTION

Azes-I, who succeeded Maues around (circa) 57 BCE (Cribb, 2015: 57-91; Widemann, 2000; 227-258) ruled over the same territories and did not significantly expand Maues' dominions (Bernard, 1994: 99-129; Siddiqui, 2014: 47). However, the abundance of Azes-I coins indicates his wealth and power (Gazerani, 2016: 11-44). Azes-I, one of the prominent and influential kings of the Indo-Scythian dynasty, left a significant numismatic legacy at various renowned sites across Gandhara and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan (Rahman,

2018: 101-122; Bopparachchi, 2017: 251). Numismatists have identified two kings named Azes (Neelis, 2007: 55-94). In 1951, Marshall distinguished between the coins of Azes-I and Azes-II based on numismatic evidence from the Taxila excavations. This distinction was further developed by G. K. Jen King in his dissertation. According to this classification, silver coins featuring a mounted king holding a transverse spear on the obverse are attributed to the reign of Azes-I (Mints, 2001: 251-286), while those depicting a mounted king holding a whip are

associated with the reign of Azes-II (Bopearachchi, 1993: 57, Ghosh, 2016: 1-2). Numerous Azes-I coins have been discovered in Taxila (Marshall, 2013; Bopearachchi, 2011: 259-83), as noted by Dani in his report on Shaikhan Dheri in Charsadda (Olivieri, Elisa, & Omar, 2022: 110-135). The excavations at Shaikhan Dheri yielded coins from different periods, including Indo-Greek, Indo-Scythian, Indo-Parthian, and Kushan. Based on this numismatic evidence, Dani established the chronology of Charsadda. Importantly, Dani also uncovered a hoard of Azes-I coins during the excavation at Shaikhan Dheri, which is currently stored in the SSAQ Museum (Pl. 9 to Pl. 16) (Dani, 1965).

Subsequently, Aziz Dheri, another important Gandharan site excavated by Nasim Khan, also recovered coins belonging to Azes-I, a famous ruler of the Indo-Scythian dynasty, which provide comprehensive information about the ruler in Gandhara and Pakistan (Shah Nazar, 1993; Nasim Khan, 2010). According to Senior Azes-I, he was one of the most important and powerful kings of the Indo-Scythian reign and his coins have been collected from Gandhara sites (Cribb, 2018: 7-34) which indicates that he ruled there for many years. Marshall equally mentioned a large number of coins from Taxila (Marshall, 1951, 2013; Dani, 1963; Nasim Khan, 2010: 7). The Bajaur reliquary, which is engraved in Kharoshthi, gives great respect to Azes-I and belonged to the Azes era. According to Van Lohuizen de Leeuw the engraving dates to the Vikrama era of 58 BCE (Leeuw, 1949: 1-50). On the other hand, it is considered that the Greek period may commence in 173 BCE. Which engraving indicates the Azes-I period started in 45 BCE (Marshall, 1914: 973-986). It has been confirmed that in 57 or 47 BCE Hippostratus- II the last Indo-Greek ruler defeated by the Indo-Scythian king (Kumar, 2009: 452). After capturing Taxila Azes-I established the kingdom and gradually extended his empire towards the Indus and Punjab (Bopearachchi & Rehman, 1995: 45). Now, ancient Sakala (Sialkot) vanished from the Indus, and the Greeks overcame Paropamisadae and Gandhara (Grenet, 2012: 1-22). The success of East Punjab Azes-I was also connected to Mathura in 58 BCE (Dar, 2006:

47, Lerner, 2001: 251-286, Muhammad, & Jan 2023: 1179-1189).

2. Rule of Azes-I in Gandhara

It is important to note that the coins of the Azes-I have been recorded from several renowned archaeological sites of Gandhara (Widemann, 2000: 227-258). The Azes-I coinage spread from Sakastan Arachosia to Gandhara and Taxila where it replaced that of Hippostratus (Bivar, 1981: 47-58, Skinner, 2017). Soon after this enlargement of territory covered by the Azes-I coins, the reverse device of the silver denomination in Sakastan Arachosia was changed from Zeus Mithra to Ardoxsho goddess with lamp (Walton, 1978: 80; Loeschner, 2012: 137-194). In 58 BCE, Phraates III of Parthia was murdered by his sons Orodes II and Mithradates III, and after a civil war, Orodes accepted the surrender of his brother and executed him in 55 BCE (Sampson, 2020). Both Mithradates III and Orodes used the title king of kings which had been in abeyance except in one instance since the death of Mithradates II (Overtom, 2021: 238-268). At the same time, Sakastan Azes-I began issuing coins with the imperial title, which was used except on one striking, since the Vonones coinage had stopped (Fussman, 1994: 32; Nadooshan, Moosavi, & Pour, 2005: 123-127). Azes-I one of his successors instituted an era based on his accession, calculated from 58 BCE which later became known in India as the Vikrama Era (Senior, 2001: 32, Bivar; 2000, 69-75; Neelis, 2011: 65-181). The coincidence between the accession of Orodes-II and Azes-I and the reintroduction of the imperial title on both their coinages becomes even more striking when parallel with the story of Mithradates-II (Dabrowa, 2013: 53-62; Marshall, 2013; Siddiqui, 2014: 47), an era and coinage with pseudonyms for himself to be used by his Scythian satraps. However, in later times, an imperial coinage and era were initiated on the models of the earlier ones. It is, therefore, to the title of the analogy, the name Azes-I may be regarded as an assumed name of Orodes-II (Cribb, 2018: 7-34; Warraich, 2011; Cribb, 2015, 57-91).

The well-known analysis of Indo-Scythian (Azes-I) coinage published by Jenkins in 1955 attributes

the coinage of the Scythians to three main mints (Bodzek, 2014: 3-10; Stolyarik & Kleeberg, 2023; 218). One ascribed to the province of Arachosia may have been situated at Kandahar or even at Gardez (Wilson, 1841: 336; Cribb, 2015: 57-91). In this territory, the successor of Archebius was Vonones associated with Spalahores, then Spalyris and Spalagadama, and subsequently, Spalirises, who was finally associated with Azes-I. (Whitehead, 1914: 168, Boppearachchi, 2011: 259-83). Eventually Azes-I mints in his sole name as Great King of Kings to be succeeded by Azilises (Nadooshan, Arkan, Arkan, & Saffari, 2006: 195). The strange names Spapahora, Spalyris, Spalagadama, Spalirises, and the old Iranian Spada army appear to constitute the chief claim of the Scythians of Arachosia to be among the linguistic ancestors of the present-day Pushtu speakers (Gardner 1971: 68-102; Yarshater, 2015; Windfuhr, 2013: 81-118; Beckwith, 2023). Two Indo-Scythian rulers have been recognized based on Numismatists (Jenkins, 1955: 1). Azilises managed his rule in c. 58 at Taxila, the northwestern district, after Azes (Senior, 2001: 32). However, numismatists and researchers have recognized that the name of Azes-I and his grandson, named Azes, is the main Indo-Scythian emperor Azilises. Mitchiner examined that between 57 to 35 BCE, the area of Taxila, Bannu, and Chach, the Azes-I changed the exhaustion by Maues. Subsequently, he defeated the ruler of Hippostratus of the Indo-Greek dynasty in the eastern region of Hazara (Mitchiner, 1978: 117). It has been mentioned by numismatists and students that unmistakably referred to Azes-I ruled and administered Afghanistan, Paktiya, and Arachosia regions while displacing Taxila and Gandhara from Hippostratus after Vonones' family (Jenkin, 1955: 1-26; Dobbins, 1972: 193; Codrington, 2017: 15-57).

3. Features of Azes-I coins in Gandhara

Azes-I coins are prominent for their use of animal imagery, such as horses and lions, which symbolize power and strength (Muhammad & Jan 2023; 1179-1189). The coins were mostly round and made of silver, with some copper examples (Boppearachchi, 2017;15-48). They featured bilingual legends in Greek and Kharosthi,

highlighting his authority and appealing to diverse inhabitants (Morris, 2021; 449-490). Deities like Zeus and Athena were depicted on the coins, reflecting a blend of Greek and local religious traditions. The obverse typically showed a bust of Azes-I, while the reverse depicted various deities or symbols, emphasizing the syncretic cultural environment of his rule (Francfort, 2022; 55-81).

3.1 Weight System

Azes-I, one of the prominent Indo-Scythian rulers, generally adhered to Indian weight systems for coinage, including denominations like drachms and tetradrachms (Lerner, 2001; 251-286; Widemann, 2003; 95-125). The highest denominations were mainly used for silver coins, while copper coins were issued in smaller values to support local trade. Initially, the coins minted during Azes-I maintained high quality and silver purity (Jansari, 2018; 71-98). However, over time, a clear decline occurred in the later stages of the dynasty, with the coinage becoming increasingly debased and silver content dropping significantly (Mitchiner, 1976: 701; Dobbins, 1972, 19-24). The later phase also saw consistent use of copper, indicating monetary inflation. This trend continued into Azes-II's reign, with coins showing substantial debasement and the introduction of billion coins. The pattern of inflation persisted in the era of Kujula Kadphises, the founding ruler of the Kushan dynasty, as evidenced by coins of reduced weight (MacDowall, 2007; 255; Lerner, 1993; Cribb, 2018; 7-34).

3.2 Metal and Shape

The Azes-I coins are mainly struck in silver and copper. The use of gold during this period is not yet known (Cribb, 2015; 57-91; Boppearachchi, 2011; 259-83). The coins were shaped as round and square (Assar, 2020: 62-112). The round coins appear to have circulated in the western territories of the Indo-Scythian Empire, while the square-shaped ones were found in the eastern regions (Jain, 1962: 95; Wickramasinghe, 2021; 69-91). Earlier, many coins from the Indo-Greek period were round. At the same time, square-shaped coins were first introduced in copper and later in silver (Akin, Bard, & Akin, 2016; Muhammad & Jan

2023; 1179-1189). These two different shapes of coins were minted simultaneously and circulated within the empire for everyday use (Bopearachchi, 1989: 51).

3.2 Use of Legends

As Azes-I extended his rule into Northwestern India, he continued the use of a unique coinage style that included bilingual inscriptions. On most of these coins, one side showed Greek text, while the other side had its Prakrit translation, usually written in the Kharoshthi script, which was widely used in the region (Halkias, 2014; 65-116; Marshall, 1947; 3-32; MacDowall, 2007; 233-265; Muhammad & Jan 2023; 212-224; Warrach, 2011). In some areas, the Brahmi script was also used for local inscriptions (Taasob, 2018; 71-84; MacDowall, 2007; 95-117). This bilingual coin system, introduced under rulers like Azes-I, was an important development in the history of Indian coins. It helped bridge cultural and language differences, making it easier for people from various backgrounds to understand and accept the coins (MacDowall, 2007: 98). The use of local scripts and languages allowed for smoother trade and increased public trust in the currency. These bilingual coins also encouraged regional trade and supported economic unity by using writing systems familiar to local communities (Chatterjee, 1998: 193; Bopearachchi, 1990: 79-103; Wickramasinghe, 2021; 69-91). Although Indian coin makers took some time to match the fine craftsmanship of earlier designs, the influence of the Azes-I coin style can be seen in later Indian coins (Samad, 2012; Sircar, 2008; 8). Moreover, using the Kharoshthi script alongside Greek, Azes-I and his predecessors made it easier for the local population to understand the authority of the ruler and the purpose of the coins (Thapar, 2004; 216). This format with Greek text on one side and

Prakrit in Kharoshthi on the other was first used by early rulers like Agathocles and Pantaleon and became a popular standard for those who followed (Mitchiner, 1975/76;150-151; Wickramasinghe, 2021; 69-91).

The use of the Brahmi script on coins helped rulers like Azes-I connect with local people by using their own languages. This step also supported the spread of literacy in the region. The combination of Azes-I Greek-style elements with Indian scripts like Brahmi shows how cultures came together and influenced each other (Singh, 2007; 136; Coningham, Allchin, Batt, & Lucy, 1996; 73-97; Cribb, 2003; 1-19). On the front side of square coins, a dancing female figure is often shown. Scholars believe this figure represents the Hindu goddess Lakshmi, who is associated with wealth and prosperity (Mishra & Shahi, 2023; 403-416). The back side of the coin usually features a lion in an incuse design, a symbol of power and authority often found in earlier Greek-style art (Salomon, 1998). A special feature of the coins issued during and after Azes-I reign was the use of more than one script, especially Kharoshthi and Brahmi. This bilingual approach expanded the coins political and cultural impact. It also helped modern scholars understand and decipher ancient Indian writing systems, since they could compare the Indian text with the known Greek alphabet (Stoneman, 2019).

The decision by rulers like Azes-I to include the Kharoshthi script had long-term effects. Kharoshthi later became the main script in northwestern India for official and religious use (Bopearachchi & Rahman, 1995; 156). However, the earliest ruler to adopt Kharoshthi on coins played a significant role in its spread across the region (MacDowall, 2007; 244; Bopearachchi & Rahman, 1995; 94; Falk, 2018; 43-66; Mairs, 2021).

Table: 1 Showing Bilingual Legends (Kharoshthi & Greek) on Azes-I Coins

Indo-Scythians King	Greek and Kharoshthi (Legends)
Azes-I	ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΩΝ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΖΟΥ Maharaja Rajarasa Mahatasa Ayasa Maharajasa Rajarasa Mahatasa Ayilisasa ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΩΝ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΖΟΥ Maharaja Rajarasa Mahatasa Ayasa ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΩΝ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΖΟΥ Maharaja Rajarasa Mahatasa Ayasa

The depiction of animals and divine figures on the coinage of Greek, Indo-Scythian, Parthian, and Kushan rulers offers a compelling glimpse into the political, cultural, and religious ideologies of these ancient societies (Schlumberger, 1983; 1030; Morris, 2021; Cribb, 1997; 11-66; Falk, 2019, 1-55; MacDowall, 2007; 233-265). While coins primarily functioned as currency, they also served as powerful tools for conveying symbolic messages. The imagery used often reflected the spiritual beliefs and societal values of the communities that produced and used it. Interpretations of these animal and deity motifs varied according to regional and cultural contexts. For instance, the coinage of King Maues is particularly notable for featuring animals such as the elephant and the bull symbols, deeply rooted in Indian religious traditions. The elephant was often associated with Indra, the god of rain and storms, while the bull symbolized Shiva, a major deity of strength and transformation (Bopearachchi, 2016; Cribb, 1997; 11-66; Falk, 2019; 1-55). These symbols were not mere decorations but acted as meaningful representations that resonated with the local population familiar with their religious importance.

Moreover, the bilingual inscriptions found on the coins of Indo-Greek (Strauch, 2011; 155; Muhammad & Jan 2023; 212-224), Azes-I underscore the linguistic and cultural diversity of their vast and multi-ethnic realms (Samad, 2011; 206; Morris, 2021; 159; Soper, 1951). This multilingual approach not only improved communication but also reflected the ruler's efforts to legitimize their authority across different communities. The presence of multiple languages

on ancient coinages likely reflects a strategic effort by rulers to communicate with the region's diverse populations, thereby reinforcing their legitimacy and authority (Pratapaditya, 1986; 75; Kurke, 2021). For example, images of Greek deities such as Hercules and Artemis are frequently found alongside Indian symbols like lions (Ghosh, 2020; 570-579), humped bulls, and elephants, reflecting a significant level of cross-cultural interaction and adaptation during these periods (Bopearachchi & Rahman, 1995; 687). The interpretation of such symbols is further enriched through the lens of Sanskrit literature, which provides the cultural and religious significance of these images (Verdon, 2015). Horses are another notable motif, often featured on coins, highlighting their importance in ancient warfare, status, and ceremonial life (Bopearachchi & Rahman, 1995; 688-689). Furthermore, some copper coins display weapons like bows and quiver symbols that emphasize martial values and the role of archery and hunting in Indo-Scythian society (Mitchiner, 1975; 96-97; Senior, 2001; 31-32).

3.4 Deities

Azes-I, one of the most important and eminent Indo-Scythian kings, ruled over the region of Gandhara, today northern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan. He issued many types of coins that had two languages (Greek and Kharoshthi) and featured symbols and deities from different cultures. His coins show a rich mix of Greek, Scythian (Iranian), and Indian religious traditions. These deities helped him connect with different communities in his multicultural empire. One of the most common gods on his coins is Zeus, the

Greek king of the gods. Zeus is usually shown sitting on a throne, holding a thunderbolt or scepter (Mitchiner, 1975; Bopearachchi, 2011; 259-283). This image comes from earlier Indo-Greek rulers. Zeus symbolized power, law, and the sky. While showing Zeus, Azes I showed that he was a strong and rightful king, which appealed to the people in Gandhara who followed Greek culture (Senior, 2005; Mitchiner, 1975; Bopearachchi, 2011; 259-283). Another Greek goddess found on Azes I coins is Athena, the goddess of wisdom and war. She is shown wearing a helmet and holding a spear and shield. Athena represented smart leadership and protection. Her image was borrowed from Greek coinage and continued by Azes-I to show his ability to rule wisely and defend his people. Heracles is another figure used by Azes-I. He is shown either standing or sitting, often holding a club and wearing a lion skin. Heracles was a famous hero in Greek mythology and was a symbol of strength and bravery. Azes-I used Heracles to show his own courage and to continue a familiar Greek tradition (Mitchiner, 1975; Bopearachchi, 2011; 259-283). Azes-I also included Indian deities on his coins to appeal to local Indian communities, especially followers of Hinduism. One such god is Shiva, possibly shown holding a trident (trishula) or standing beside a bull (Nandi). Shiva represents change, destruction, and divine energy. His image shows that Azes-I respected local Indian religious beliefs. Another important Indian goddess shown on Azes-I coins is Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity (Wolfgram, 2000; 75-79). She is usually shown as a standing or seated female figure holding lotus flowers. Her presence on coins symbolized blessings, good fortune, and an abundance of qualities that the ruler wanted to offer his people. Through these coins, Azes-I showed a blend of cultures and religions. His use of both Greek and Indian gods helped him build trust and gain support from people of different backgrounds living in Gandhara. These deities were not only religious symbols but also tools to show the ruler power, kindness, and connection to the divine.

Among the local divinities incorporated were Shiva, Lakshmi, and the city goddess (Hussain,

2022; 167-188). Meanwhile, traditional Greek gods such as Zeus, Athena, Poseidon, Nike, Heracles, Hephaistos, the Dioscuri, and Hermes continued to appear on their coinage (Senior, 2005; Mitchiner, 1975; Bopearachchi, 2011; 259-283). Local figures like Shiva, Lakshmi, and Yakshi were particularly prominent on the coins of rulers like Azes-I, demonstrating a conscious integration of Indian religious symbols into royal iconography (Wolfgram, 2000; 75-79). In several cases, symbolic emblems associated with these deities also appeared on the reverse sides of Azes-I coins (Ghosh, 2017; 1-14).

Zeus, a major figure in Greek mythology, was featured on earlier coins issued by Indo-Greek rulers such as Menander I and Apollodotus I, showing continuity in religious iconography (Kolodny, 2020; Mitchiner, 1976). The depiction of Zeus on Indo-Scythian coins indicates not only the enduring influence of Greek art and religion but also the cultural adaptation by Central Asian nomads who had entered the Indian subcontinent (Kilinski, 2013; Senior, 2001; 150; Muhammad & Jan 2023; 212-223). Interestingly, some imitation coins attributed to Azes-I, which also portray Zeus on the reverse, may not have been minted by Azes-I himself, but by semi-autonomous local rulers during his time (Cribb, 2014; 134). These coins feature various designs of Zeus holding a scepter, which appear in different stylistic forms: a plain rod with a dot above, a shaft with three dots, or a beaded or pearl-like scepter (Dobbins, 1980; 31-53). In contrast, Gondophares, a prominent Indo-Parthian ruler, particularly did not issue any coins bearing the image of Zeus Nikephoros (Senior, 2001; 94).

3.5 Obverse and Reverse

Azes-I issued coins with different front (obverse) and back (reverse) designs, which were influenced by earlier Indo-Greek coins. On most coins, the front side shows the king riding a horse to the right, wearing a crown (diadem) and chainmail armor, and holding a whip or sometimes a spear in his right hand. In some coins, the king is shown holding an elephant goad or a lance instead of a whip or spear (Skupniewicz, 2015; 251-284). Other types of front designs include the king

sitting cross-legged on a throne, and in some cases, coins also show animals like camels, bulls, lions, or elephants (Senior, 2001; 105-106). Some imitation coins, especially those linked to Azes-II, show the king in a Parthian style, without the crown. These coins are believed to have been made in Taxila and Gandhara, and this design was later used by Azilizes, another ruler. Similar styles also appear on the coins of Mujatria, from the Kharahostes family (Senior, 2001; 21), and other differences in how the king is shown on these coins. These different designs can be seen on imitation coins of Azes-II and on the coins of Aśpavarma, a general from the Aparacha region. Later, the king crown with double ribbon ties at the back became a common feature on Indo-Parthian coins (Senior, 2001; 105-106).

3.6 Animal Representation

One of the most noticeable features of Azes-I coins is the frequent use of animal images, a tradition that was also followed by later kings and dynasties. These coins are highly valued in the study of ancient money because they show a wide variety of animals, including elephants, lions, bulls, and horses (Frumkin, 2022; Mukherjee & Dasgupta, 2023). What makes these coins especially interesting is how they mix Greek and Indian styles in their artwork. For example, some of Azes-I coins and those of related rulers like Azilises and Azes-II show elephants drawn in a Greek style, often with a helmeted rider. Others show elephants in a traditional Indian style, decorated with rich coverings and led by a mahout, or elephant driver (Robbins, 2002; Mitchiner, 1975/76; 707). These coins are a great example of the combination of Greek and Indian cultures that existed during the time of Azes-I. Along with elephants, lions, bulls, and horses are also commonly shown on these coins. These animals likely had symbolic meanings, possibly representing power, strength, protection, or royal authority (Muhammad & Jan 2023: 212-223).

On the coins issued by Azes-I, animals like elephants, lions, bulls, and horses appear frequently, each carrying a symbolic meaning. Elephants, often shown with riders and war equipment, most likely represent their important

role in battle and royal processions. Lions are usually linked with power and royal authority, while bulls and horses also hold special cultural and religious meanings (Bopearachchi & Rahman, 1995; 687). Some researchers believe that the elephant on these coins may represent the god Indra, a major deity in Indian tradition, while the bull is thought to symbolize Shiva, one of the principal gods in Hinduism. In several coin designs, the front (obverse) side shows a divine figure, while the back (reverse) side features an animal (Cribb, 1997; 11-66). One well-known example is the image of the Greek hero Heracles (Hercules) on the obverse. He is shown standing, holding a club, and wearing a lion's skin, symbolizing strength and courage. On the reverse side of such coins, a lion walking left is often seen, which some scholars interpret as a reference to the sun god Surya in Sanskrit literature (Pratapaditya, 1986; 75). In other coin types, the Greek goddess Artemis is shown on the obverse, while a humped bull appears on the reverse, again linking Greek and Indian religious ideas (Mitchiner, 1975/76; 2196). Some coins also display the head of an elephant facing left, enclosed within a border, with a small dot or pellet on the obverse. In addition, some copper coins feature a standing horse on one side and a bow with a quiver on the other, possibly highlighting the importance of horses in warfare and hunting (Bopearachchi & Rahman, 1995; 689).

3.7 Style and Pattern

It is widely known that Azes-I, a powerful ruler, took control of several regions such as Gandhara, Punjab, Kashmir, and Sindh, after defeating the Indo-Greek kings (Muhammad, Sehrai, & Munsif, 2024; 1002-1029; Coloru, 2015; 173-199; Torrens, 1852; 15-40). After this conquest, Azes-I adopted some features from the Indo-Greek coinage system, especially in certain regions (MacDowall, 1985; 115; Mukherjee, 1970; 144). However, the coins of Azes-I also introduced major changes. Unlike the Indo-Greek coins, which usually showed a king portrait on the front with a deity on the back, Azes-I coins followed a different style (Michon, 2007). His coins generally showed the king on horseback on the front, along

with a Greek inscription, while the back featured a deity or animal with a Kharoshthi inscription (Khan, 1998; 50). In many ways, the coins of Azes-I represent a transition between the earlier Indo-Greek and later Kushan coin traditions (MacDowall, 2007; 233-265). Azes-I moved away from showing the king face and instead used a horse-riding image on most coins. The king is often shown holding objects such as a spear, whip, or sword, while the reverse side includes religious figures or animals (Bopearachchi, 1989; 51). Later rulers, such as the Indo-Parthians, continued using this same style in their coins. However, compared to the finely detailed coins of the Indo-Greeks, the coin designs of Azes-I are often seen as less refined in quality and artistic value (Marcinkiewicz, 2016).

4. Conclusion

Azes-I, an Indo-Scythian ruler, played a critical role in the establishment of control over Gandhara in the 1st century BCE. This study explores the unique features of Azes-I coinage, their historical significance, and the context of his reign, including his alliances and territorial expansions. Azes-I rose to power by overthrowing the Indo-Greek rulers in Gandhara, a region in modern-day Pakistan, around 57 BCE. The context of his reign is further enriched by regional political developments, such as the power struggles within the Parthian Empire, specifically the assassination of Phraates-III by his sons Orodes-II and Mithradates-III in 58 BCE, and the subsequent civil war. These events indirectly influenced Azes-I own political maneuvers, particularly in terms of his coinage, which reflects an era of imperial expansion and consolidation. The coinage of Azes-I stands out due to its bilingual inscriptions and symbolic iconography, which catered to both Greek and local populations.

The coins were typically round and made of silver, though copper coins were also common. One of the most striking features of Azes-I coins is the use of bilingual legends in Greek and Kharosthi scripts. The reverse, the Kharosthi inscriptions were aimed at appealing to local populations, emphasizing Azes-I role as a ruler for both Greek and indigenous communities. Deities such as Zeus and Athena, borrowed from Greek

traditions, were prominently depicted, symbolizing continuity with the previous Greek rule. At the same time, these depictions likely resonated with local elites who had absorbed elements of Greek culture. A critical aspect of Azes-I rule was his adoption of imperial titles, which reflected his ambition to elevate his status to that of a supreme monarch. His coins often bore the title "king of kings," a prestigious designation that had been used by the Parthians but fell into abeyance during their internal conflicts. By adopting this title, Azes-I asserted his position as a powerful ruler, both within the Indo-Scythian realm and in the broader context of South and Central Asian politics. Azes-I also introduced an era based on his accession, later known as the Vikrama Era in India, which highlights the long-lasting impact of his reign on the region calendar system and historical chronology. The coinage of Azes-I offers a rich source of information and the reconstruction of the political, economic, and cultural landscape of 1st century BCE Gandhara.

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Pl. 1



Pl. 2



Pl. 3



Pl. 4



Pl. 5



Pl. 6



Pl. 7



Pl. 8



Pl. 9

Pl. 10



Pl. 11

Pl. 12

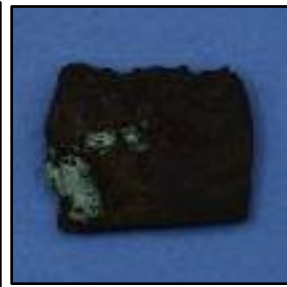


Pl. 13

Pl. 14



Pl. 15



Pl. 16



Pl. 17



Pl. 18



Pl. 19



Pl. 20



Pl. 21



Pl. 22



Pl. 23



Pl. 24