

THE SAKAS (PART-2)

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In Sind Sagar Doab and Gandhara, the Indo-Greek rule was re-established. The Indo-Greeks to the east of the Jhelum, which had not been disturbed by Maues, continued to rule in that zone. In about the second quarter of the first century B.C. Arachosia passed into the hands of another group of rulers. Their coins have been discovered mainly within the limits of its territory. On the basis of the inscriptions on the coins of the group of rulers concerned, they can be divided into several classes. The first class bears the names of Vonones and Spalahora. The second class bears the names of Vonones and Spalagadama. The third class of coins mentions the name of Spalyris and Spalagadama. The fourth class of silver coins refers to Spalirises and Spalirisa.

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The fifth group of copper coins mentions Spalirises and Spalirisa. Thus Indo-Parthian coins show the rule of Parthian or Scytho-Parthians like Vonones and Spalirises in Arachosia (Kandahar area in South-east Afghanistan). Together with the above classes of coins we should consider another group of coins bearing the name of Azes on the obverse and on the reverse Azilises. Another group has these names in the reverse order. These groups of coins ultimately prove the existence of Azes I, Azilises and Azes II. Azes I, who probably began to rule in e. 58 B.C. hailed from Arachosia. He conquered Gandhara and the Sind Sagar Doab including Taxila. Azilises, his co-ruler and successor controlled an area to the west of the Indus.

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On the east, he probably extended his rule up to Mathura. The coins of the Scytho-Parthian ruler Vonones and his associates carries the device of Herakles on the reverse of their coins (naked, beardless Herakles with a lion skin over his left raised club in the half raised left hand and right hand crowning his head with a wreath). These coins are found mainly in the regions of Kandahar, Ghazni (both included in ancient Arachosia). Hence the Vonones type may be referred to that territory. Some coins of Vonones are found in Seistan, Kabul, Taxila and different places of the Punjab area of Pakistan. Thus, the provenances of coins locate the kingdom of the group concerned only in Arachosia and its vicinity. This inference is corroborated by the fact that not a single coin of

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Spalirises, who is to be associated with the Vonones group, has been discovered at Taxila. Only three coins of Spalirises and two of Spaliris, another member of that group were found at Begram . The number is too small to indicate the rule of the Vonones group in the Begram area. One Azes was associated with Spalirises, but his, direct relation with Vonones is not known and this Azes may not be taken as one of Vonones' associates. The names of the rulers of the group of Vonones as found from Indo Parthian coins betray Scythic as well as Parthian affiliations. Therefore, it should have its origin in the Saka-Pahlava or Scytho-Parthian area of Sakastana. Spalrises served as an associate of Vonones before becoming the sole ruler of Arachosia. Later he had to accept Azes I as his co-ruler. Stathmai Parthikm of Isidore of Charax (in the closing decades of the first century B.C.) states that "beyond (Zarangiana) is Sakastana of the Skythian (or Scythian) Sakai (or Sacae), which is

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also Paraitakene, schoeni. There are the city of Banda and the city of Min and the city of Palacenti and the city of Segal; in that place is the royal residence of the Sakai (or Sacae)... As far as this place, the land is under the rule of the Parthians.” Thus from the testimony of Isidore, we come to know that by the last quarter of the 1st century B.C. Sakastana or Seistan and Arachosia including the Kandahar area were within the Parthian empire. This inference is in a way supported by a section of chapter 96A of the Ch’ien Han-shu. So Arachosia was lost by the group of Azes I either towards the close of the reign of Azilises or rather in the beginning of the rule of Azes II. There is no indication of the reign of Azes II in the Mathura area Mathura region was under the Mahakshtrapa Rajula (Rajuvula).

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Since Soakastana, the two regions of the Parthian empire, are attested to by numismatic evidences. On some copper coins of Gondophares, we find the name of one Orthagnes. It appears that Orthagnes commenced his rule in Seistan swearing allegiance to the imperial Parthian throne some time before the rule of Gondophares, the first year of which corresponds to 20/21 A.D. The coins of Gondophares, based typologically on the issues of Orthagnes in Sakastana and Arachosia, allude to his rule in these areas. Gondophares also ruled over the lower Indus country. His family probably extended its authority upto the Mathura area.

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Saurashtra is mentioned by Ptolemy as a province of IndoScythia and is described as the region about the mouths of the Indus and the Gulf of Kanthi or Gulf of Kutch. In the second or the third quarter of the 2nd century A.D., Ptolemy enumerated Patalene, Syrastrane, and Aberia or Sabeiria as the provinces of Indo-Scythia. As a tract is not likely to be called after a people until some time after their first settlement in it, Ptolemy's evidence should indicate that the Scythian colonization of these provinces probably started long before the date of his Geographike Huphegesis i.e. the second or third quarter of the second century A.D. Thus the advent of the Sakas in the territory concerned might have taken place even before the dawn of the Christian Era. There is no evidence of a Saka migration to the lower Indus area in the period of the Achaemenids of Persia.

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So the Arsacid dynasty or the Imperial Parthians of the East, which ruled from c. 250 B.C. to c. A.D. 227 or A.D. 228/29, after ousting the Greek successors of the Achaemenids and Alexander, witnessed the first Saka activities in the lower Indus country. Ptolemy's provinces of Indo-Scythia coincides with two of the three territories indicated in the Jaina Kalakacharya-kaihanaka which were colonized by the Sagas or Sakas by the first century B.C. before the latter settled in Saurashtra. Also the Peripkms Tes Erythras Thalasses (or the Periplus Maris Erythraei), a text probably of the first century A.D. locates Scythia in the lower Indus area. Thus, the testimonies of the Kalakacharya-kathdnaka and Geographike Huphegesis not only indicate the presence of a Saka colony on the lower Indus including Patalene probably under the rule of the Imperial Parthians but also the activities of the Sakas or Scythians in Saurashtra.

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That Parthian rule continued in the Sindhu valley as late as the eighth decade of the first century A.D. is evidenced by the Periplus which says, "Before it (Barbaricum on the principal mouth of the Sindhu) there lies a small island and inland behind it is the metropolis of Scythia, Min-Nagara; it is subject to Parthian princes who are constantly driving each other out." The Scythian satrapal dynasty of Mathura seems to have been overthrown by Kanishka. The Kushapas did not totally uproot the numerous Saka principalities under subordinate chiefs. In the Rajasthan area, several tribal states appear to have submitted to the Saka-Scythians. In western Uttar Pradesh and adjoining region of Punjab, the Sakas dominated till the time of the early kings of the Gupta dynasty, but this Saka domination has not yet been detected in the archaeological strata.

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Thus the Saka Empire started declining after their defeat at the hands of the Satavahana Emperor Gautamiputra Satakarni. The Saka rule in northwest India and Pakistan came to an end after the death of Azes II (12 BC) when the region came under the Kushanas. In western India, their rule came to an end in the 4th century AD when the last Western Satrap Saka ruler Rudrasimha III was defeated by Chandragupta II of the Gupta empire.