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# Kujūla Kadphises' "Roman" Coin: an Issue for Merchants

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## Abstract

The paper studies a copper coin type issued during the reign of the Kuṣāṇ king Kujūla Kadphises (*ca.* 40/50–90 AD) called "Roman Emperor Type". These coins, dated towards the end of the first century AD, present on the obverse the image of a ruler recalling the imperial iconography of the Julio-Claudian period, and on the reverse Kujūla himself seated. The coin is a real innovation in the history of ancient Indian numismatics and can be the starting point to understand the political choices of Kujūla in a context still embryonic for the Kuṣāṇs. This paper, through the literary, epigraphic, and archaeological sources at our disposal, aims to demonstrate that the issuing was influenced not only by the halo of authority that the Romans had in India, but mainly by the economic and religious context of the city, which the sovereign used as a place of experimentation for this particular hybrid type of coin.

## Keywords

Kuṣāṇ empire – Kujūla Kadphises – numismatics – trade guilds – Taxila – international trade – merchants – Buddhism – Roman coins

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Numismatic sources are of the utmost importance for Kuşān history.<sup>1</sup> In particular, our knowledge of the expansion of Kujūla Kadphises from Bactria to the lower Indus valley (Sindh) owes much to archaeological monetary findings, which offer a valuable supplement to the concise Chinese sources.<sup>2</sup> Among the various monetary series issued by the ruler, one of the most challenging for historians and numismatists is the so-called “Roman Emperor type”, belonging to a rather late period of his reign.<sup>3</sup> These coins, struck in Taxila in a copper alloy, consist of 340 specimens, namely 12.36% of the total amount of Kujūla’s coins reported by Marshall’s excavations made in Taxila in the early 20th century.<sup>4</sup> The coins range from 2.40 to 3.80 g, with an average weight of 3.00 g, in a reduced Indian standard, defined as “Di-chalkon” by Mitchiner, “copper unit” in the ANS catalog and “tetradrachm” in the recent British Museum catalog.<sup>5</sup>

In order to better understand this coin type, the analysis of its issuing context could shed light on the choices made by Kujūla and his coin engravers, also in the light of overcoming the rooted bias on the strong influence exerted by Roman coins on the Kuşāns, which should not be denied, but reconsidered.<sup>6</sup>

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1 I express my gratitude to Nicoletta Celli, Omar Coloru, Joe Cribb, Erica Filippini, Andrea Gariboldi and Fabrizio Sinisi for their precious suggestions and help in order to enrich and improve this paper. That said all the conclusions are my own responsibility. The present article follows Falk & Bennett 2009 for the date of the Azes era, starting around 47/46 BC.

2 The three main sources are the *Shiji* (*Records of the grand historian*, written by Sima Tan and his son Sima Qian), the *Hanshu* (*Book of Former Han*, completed by the Ban family around 116 AD) and the *Hou Hanshu* (*Book of Later Han*, completed by Fan Ye around 445 AD); for a detailed overview on Chinese sources about Yuezhi and Kuşāns, and for main chronological issues, see Thierry 2005, 422–438. Against this expansion, Sinisi 2022.

3 Three specimens of the same type have been found in Begram (two) and Butkara I (one), see Göbl 1976, 21 (No. 68); Khan 2008, 15; Errington & Khera 2021, 154. The nomenclature adopted derives from the classification made by Jongeward & Cribb 2015, 34, Nos. 103–112; see also Khan 2008, 15, who calls it “Augustus Type”.

4 John Hubert Marshall was director of the excavations in Taxila between 1913 and 1934. The results were then published in three volumes, to which we refer in bibliography as Marshall 1951. Mitchiner (1978, 392, Nos. 2875–2879) postulated that the coins were struck in the mint of Central Chach, but Khan does not exclude at all that this series could have been struck in Taxila instead, considering the presence of a large number (80 out of 353) of fractioned coins in the area (Khan 2008, 14–15). Cribb & Bracey (forthcoming), 19, instead, place the mint in Taxila, considering the high concentration of specimens *in loco*, as already stated (Aram 1999, 32).

5 For measurements of weight standards, see Khan 2008, 18; regarding the nomenclature, see Mitchiner 1975–1976, 688; Jongeward & Cribb 2015, 34; Cribb & Bracey (forthcoming), 19.

6 See recently, in this regard, Bracey 2009, 26; 46–47 and Sinisi 2017, 848 on the influence exerted on coin studies by Robert Göbl, just to mention an example.

## 1 Taxila: a Brief Historical Survey

The Kuṣāṇ conquest of Taxila was only one small step in the long history of this important city, which stretches back to the mythological past of India.<sup>7</sup> Taxila, Greek adaptation of Takshaśilā, is located between the eastern bank of the river Indus and the Jhelum – the Hydaspes of the ancient sources – not so far from modern Islamabad in Pakistan.<sup>8</sup> Classic authors often mentioned this city as an important crossroads of cultures since its foundation, passed from the Achaemenids into the hands of Alexander the Great (c.326 BC) and then under the Mauryan empire of Chandragupta (c.321–297 BC).<sup>9</sup> The decline of the Mauryan empire left a deep wound in geopolitical context. Taxila in particular, after the death of Aśoka (c.232 BC), regained independence and became a sort of city-state managed with a great interference of local merchant guilds until the arrival of the Graeco-Bactrian rulers.<sup>10</sup> Most probably, Demetrios I (c.190–185/80 BC) was the first Greek king to exercise power over Taxila, maintained, with highs and lows, until the reign of Hippistratos (c.65–55 BC), who lost the city to Indo-Scythian rulers, as shown by coin progression and overstrikes.<sup>11</sup>

The Indo-Scythian rule of Taxila came to an end with the satrap Rājīvula, who followed Azes II (16–30 AD) in the early second part of the 1st century AD. According to coin sequences of the city, Kujūla took control of the city from the last Indo-Scythian satrap – but it is still unknown whether there was an Indo-Parthian incursion in the meantime, considering the presence of Gondophares (32–57 AD) and Abdagases (c.60–70 AD) in Gandhāra at the time.<sup>12</sup> The context of Gandhāra itself, at the end of the 1st century AD, is still not entirely clear to historians, and the subsequent clash between Kujūla and the Indo-Parthians lasted until the demise of the Kuṣāṇ ruler and continued during the years of his successor Wima Takto (90–105/113 AD). The same can be stated for Taxila, also due to the confusion created by the misattribution of certain coin types by Marshall. Recently, in this regard, Joe Cribb reexamined the coin sequences of the city, recognizing that the occupation of Taxila

7 Chakrabarti (1981, 35) mentions the foundation of the city in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, while its conquest by the king Janamejaya is recorded in the *Mahābhārata*.

8 See Salomon 2005, for the toponyms of Taxila.

9 Arr. *An.* v, 3, 5; 8, 2–5; Strabo xv, 28, Philost. *VA* II, 20. See also Taddei 1972, 32. Gandhāra became a satrapy of the Persian empire from 518 BC, as the Bisutūn Inscription tells us – see Bussagli 1984, 33.

10 Boppearachi & Pieper 1998, 43–44; Coloru 2009, 189.

11 Fröhlich 2008, 22; Coloru 2009, 259–260 for a detailed chronological account.

12 Cribb 2015, 30. On the Indo-Parthians, Rezakhani 2017, 30–31.

by Kujūla was followed by the Indo-Parthian conquest under the ruler Sasan (70–100 AD). Taxila would be recaptured by the Kuṣāṇs during the years of Wima Takto, as evidenced by archaeological coin finds of the Soter Megas type from the later phases.<sup>13</sup> This long fight for the conquest of Taxila and Gandhāra is justified by the great importance of the region since the Mauryan age, mainly for the trade routes leading both eastward and westward, but also for the religious links with the Buddhist context. The rich archaeological remains of the city allowed scholars to identify three main sites: the Bhir Mound, pertaining to the Achaemenid period; Sirkap, a citadel founded during the Indo-Greek kingdoms; Sirsukh, the Kuṣāṇ settlement later abandoned by Vasudeva (c.190–230 AD).<sup>14</sup>

The sources offer only a limited picture of the measures adopted by Kujūla after the conquest, as we will see later. Nonetheless, it is legitimate to wonder whether the usual habit of *imitatio* that Kujūla embraced in the coinage policy could be adopted as well in the other branches of power. Of course, a radical change should not be expected in any case, but all the coins and the inscriptions left from his period could lead us to think that at least the economic and religious environments were preserved.

For this reason, if we focus on iconography and inscriptions on the “Roman Emperor type” coins, we can see that they recall respectively the economic and religious context of this important city. Considering that Kujūla produced mainly coin imitations, applying only some changes to identify himself as the new ruler, all the features of this typology show strong innovation compared to the rest, since they do not recall the previous dominion, but a combination of a foreign and a local one. With all due caution, my point is that the monetary policy enjoyed by Taxila was conferred in particular for the productive interconnection between the preexisting Buddhist context and the markets along the Silk Roads, which contributed in the following years not only to the

13 Cribb 2014, 128; 2015, 30; 2018a, 28. It is necessary to add that recently the presence of Gondophares in Taxila has been questioned, since all the 107 coins ascribed to him in the city are imported, not issued there. See Fröhlich 2008, 70–71; Cribb 2015, 29–30. The Indo-Parthian control of the city should be limited to Sasan: after him, no other king is attested in the city. Gandhāra, in contrast, was still disputed until the reign of Soter Megas, see also Fröhlich 2008, 74.

14 The bibliography relating to Taxila is vast. The works by Rienjang (2018a, 2018b, 2018c) offer a valid and concise overview about the main archaeological problems and an updated state of the art. For the rest, Marshall 1951, even if older, remains the most complete opus on the topic (reexamined by Wheeler, Ghosh, Allchin and Erdösy, see Olivieri 2021, 391–392, who also highlighted that there are still important chronological problems concerning the first phase of Sirkap). Litvinsky (1994, 292) stated that the site of Sirsukh was founded by Soter Megas (Wima Takto).

growth of the city, but of the whole Kuṣāṇ kingdom. Thanks to the coin's iconography and inscriptions, Kujūla could send a strong message to local Indian merchants, the true engine of the economy.

## 2 The Economic Connection

In order to understand why Kujūla addressed Indian merchants, it is necessary to look at the economic context of Taxila. Indeed, it can be seen that the city's location and its role in the economy not only of Gandhāra, but also of the Silk Roads, had guaranteed it a prominent position. In fact, Taxila was the starting point of the so-called Uttarāpatha<sup>15</sup> – the Northern road – a place of convergence of many roads that, to the West, led to Bactria and Parthia once having crossed the Indus river and the Peshāwar valley, while to the East they led to China through India and Kashmir.<sup>16</sup> Besides this, another favorable element was guaranteed by the strategic position along the Indus, allowing merchants to easily reach the various river ports and the city of Barbarikon on the Indian Ocean.

The death of the Buddhist ruler Aśoka was one of the most important moments of Taxila, politically and economically. During the subsequent institutional vacuum, the city ended up in the hands of local rulers strongly influenced by trade guilds. The power of the guilds is a revolution that will leave a mark in Taxila, as monetary findings in the city amply demonstrate. The guilds, associations of craftsmen and traders headed by a chief,<sup>17</sup> once having increased their power and influence, began to issue their own coins, oblong in shape and with inscriptions bearing *Negamā* ("guild") or *Pamcanekame* ("five guilds").<sup>18</sup> These coins would serve as a starting point for the future "coins of Taxila", struck first by Demetrius I and then by Agathocles – quadrangular in shape and with an iconography strongly inspired by the Indian world.<sup>19</sup>

15 Neelis 2011, 202.

16 A more detailed account on Taxila's position in Fussman 1993, 84, 87. Even the military functionality ensured the success of this city from the Achaemenid era until the Kuṣāṇs: according to Fussman, Taxila was a key strategic center for a Central Asian kingdom which had to simultaneously exert a strong control to the east on the Gangetic plains or towards inner India.

17 Named *jeṭṭhaka* or *pramukha*, see Jātaka, No. 63 (Takka-Jātaka) for example. See Harmatta *et alii* 1994, 309–311; Benjamin 2015, 498.

18 *BMC India*, cxxv–cxxvi §146: the name could correspond to a plural of the Sanskrit *naigāma*, meaning "the traders". See also Tarn 1951, 161.

19 These coins are minted and not realized through the punch-marked technique, see Coloru 2009, 188.

Hence, the interference of trade guilds in the government of Taxila should not be too surprising, considering how constant the flow of people and goods was and how much their economic models inspired foreign rulers. Guilds or corporations (*śreṇī*) are attested in India since the remote past, as suggested by ancient Indian texts, unfortunately not always reliable because of the strong chronological stratification, which frustrate any attempt to reconstruct precise timeframes.<sup>20</sup> The Laws of Manu (*Manusmṛti*) and the *Arthaśāstra*, closer to the period under consideration although they inevitably meet the problems mentioned above,<sup>21</sup> often cite the guilds and the economic arrangements related to them, in particular Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* (IV, 2) reports on how merchants were subject to fines when they sought too high a profit, a practice which obviously must have been quite widespread, if it was necessary to adopt fines for deterrence.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to these earlier examples, the certain presence of a *śreṇī* in Mathurā during the time of the ruler Huvīṣka (c.151–190 AD), as well as the frequent mentions of merchant guilds in the Gupta period, leave us legitimately believing that even during the reign of Kujūla guilds played a prominent role, especially in a center like Taxila.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, since no literary or royal chancery texts have been handed down to us, this cannot be stated with certainty, and only a few inscriptions from the period of the Western Satraps suggest that corporations were stable entities that could not have sprung up recently, but had been rooted in the territory for years.<sup>24</sup> *A fortiori*, the area controlled by Rudradāman I (c.130–150 AD) included Sindh, at the mouth of the Indus, which, once upstream, allowed merchants to reach Taxila.<sup>25</sup>

The caste of merchants, named Vaiśya, is mentioned with severe criticism in Brahmanical texts as the Viṣṇu purāṇā, but, besides the stratified dating of

20 Already Gautama's *Dharmasūtra* (XI, 21) mentions the merchants among the legislative and judiciary processes. Olivelle (1999, xxxiii) places Gautama in the third century BC. Also, the *Mahāvastu* (III, IX) – a text pertaining to early Buddhism – mentions trade guilds, as noted by Chattopadhyay (1975, 191).

21 The Laws of Manu, also known as *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, is an Indian treatise on *dharmā* and could be dated between the 1st century BC and 2nd–3rd century AD; see Olivelle 2005, 18–25. Concerning the *Arthaśāstra*, this is a treatise on the state and the duties of the King, usually attributed to Kauṭilya, the teacher of Chandragupta Maurya. Its chronological range goes from 50 to 300 AD, see Olivelle 2013, 25–31.

22 See also *Manusmṛti* VIII, 219–220.

23 Mukherjee 1988, 366. For the Brāhmī inscription see *EI* XXI, 55–61, No. 10.

24 Chattopadhyay 1975, 191. For the inscriptions, see *EI* X (*App.*), Nos. 1133, 1137, 1162, 1165, 1180.

25 According to the Junagadh inscription of the śaka year 72, attesting the occupation of Sindh, see Puri 1994, 250.

the text, it is reasonable to assume that this opinion was not very widely shared in the Kuṣāṇ period, when trade was in fact the driving force of the economy and the society was more egalitarian.<sup>26</sup> Now, early Kuṣāṇs' attitude toward the caste system is not stated at all in ancient sources, but the archaeological attestations of later great works by the Vaiśyas suggest that there were no top-down impositions of a typically caste-like nature. Rather, the Buddhist heterodoxy would have more easily allowed merchants to accumulate wealth, not only for themselves, but also for offerings and donations to the monuments containing reliquaries (Stūpa). This element can be found in ancient texts, but is also highlighted by archaeology.<sup>27</sup> Maurizio Taddei, with all due caution, suggested that the extension of building enterprise to the Vaiśyas could attest their independence from the state authority. This can be inferred especially by the more economically affordable materials, such as stucco, but also by the arrangement of minor stūpas around the major ones in seemingly random positions, suggesting that rich merchants were also interested in their spiritual salvation.<sup>28</sup> However, this phenomenon probably reached its peak during the time of Kaniṣka.

Therefore, the presence of a Roman coin in a Buddhist context in Taxila during the first century AD as a donative in the Dharmarājikā stupa IV should not impress.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the Roman Empire started to explore the eastward sea route towards the Indian Ocean precisely in that period. After the annexation of Egypt, the first century AD became an age of international trade, cultural interchanges and relations between Rome and India, as the ancient sources clearly show us.<sup>30</sup> Among these, Pliny the Elder is of particular importance,

26 The *Viṣṇu-purāṇā* is a Hindu sacred text related to the God Viṣṇu and part of a major literary corpus (*purāṇās*, made of eighteen text, including myths, dialogues, rituals) probably realized during the Gupta age: Kulke & Rothermund 2004, 94. For the rest, see Liu 1988, 6.

27 In the Dialogues of the Buddha (*Dīgha Nikāya*) the Illuminated suggests people to invest and accumulate wealth, see Davids 1899–1921, Volume III, 179–180 (footnote 188). See also Filigenzi 2002, 37–38, for similar implications of Buddhism already during the reign of Aśoka.

28 Taddei 1972, 90. The author is well-aware that socio-economic conclusions of this type cannot be inferred only by the artistic production: in fact, some choices (stucco for example) could have been made for territorial availability or for the easier and cheaper use of materials.

29 Marshall 1951, 277: the coin, ascribed to Augustus and issued in the mint of Lugdunum between 11–12 AD (MacDowall 1968, 141; Kuwayama 2007, 219), was found along with a golden casket as a donation, a silver coin of the Indo-Scythian king Azilises (1 BC–16 AD) and other ornamental objects.

30 A concise overview on the ancient sources attesting diplomatic and trade relationships between Rome and India is offered by Cobb 2018, 22–25 (trade), 120–123 (embassies and diplomatic policies).

especially when he refers to the great monetary flow drained from Indian markets (*HN* VI, 101; XII, 84).<sup>31</sup> This resulted in a vast amount of money exported in order to obtain precious and exotic goods, as the archeological data well explain.<sup>32</sup> International markets were at their apex between the reigns of Augustus (27 BC–14 AD) and Tiberius (14–37 AD), and coin finds in the Indian peninsula indicate the high level of coins exported, probably appreciated by Indian merchants not only for the intrinsic value but also as objects of art, like jewels.<sup>33</sup> Roman coins could have a symbolic value and not only an economic one, as they were recognized as artifacts worthy of the Buddha. It would be tempting to think that the iconography chosen by Kujūla was not casual, but a possible reference to the Roman context known to merchants, on whose caravans Buddhist monks were transported in order to spread their cult.<sup>34</sup> But, unfortunately, the clues in our possess are still not enough to state this for certainty, even if Taxila, in this case, could assume even more a predominant role as a place of experimentation by Kujūla, especially for the profitable relationship between religion and economy.

It should also be added that Kujūla's monetary policy appears to be even more aware of the territorial context than it appears. In fact, the coinage introduced by the Indo-Greek kings came to a phase of collapse during the first century AD, as shown by the progressively reduced weight standards and the lower amount of silver contained in each coin. The Hermaios series depicts this trend very much in detail, especially in the territories of the previous Indo-Scythian rulers. Now, this phenomenon, especially highlighted by numismatic scholars, would need a more comprehensive analysis, which considers the commercial relationships of the time, the literary evidence at our disposal, but also the archaeological remains, which could somehow correct this very negative vision.<sup>35</sup> That said, once the coins' weight dropped to 2 g.,

31 A certain moralistic tone in the author should not be forgotten.

32 This export is attested also by *Periplus Maris Erythraei* 12, see Nappo 2018, 559; for an overview of the archeological finds, see Suresh 2004.

33 Turner 1989, 20–24; Carlà & Marcone 2011, 188–189. Probably a great number of coins were melted down, see Nappo 2018, 569.

34 Neelis 2011, 36–37, but also 317.

35 Boppearachchi 1997, 198–199. Concerning the scale of this silver “crisis”, it is noteworthy that a similar trend also occurred in the Arsacid Empire, starting from the middle of the 1st century BC and lasting at least for the entire 1st century AD. This is shown by a marked contraction of issues in silver drachms, as pointed out by Sinisi (2018, 480–483), who suggests assessing this crisis in a wider scale, also considering that by the beginning of the 2nd century AD the Kuṣāṇ empire started issuing in gold as the only precious metal. That said, the subject must be evaluated with caution, since the Parthian empire never left silver coinage at all in western Iran; moreover, taking into account the context of Swāt



Kujūla tried to stabilize the coinage policy by experimenting in Taxila with the issue of the "Roman Emperor Type", along with the "Seated King type".<sup>36</sup> It is unknown whether this measure worked efficiently or not, but the several coin fractions found in Taxila could let us reasonably think that the first types became a sort of general standard at least in this important city of merchants.<sup>37</sup> His son Wima Takto would then create a general standard, adopting the Attic one "with didrachm and hemidrachm denominations of about 8.5 and 2.1 grams issued, which roughly corresponded with the Indian standard copper tetradrachm and drachm".<sup>38</sup> Not only that, but in this particular context Kujūla exploited the halo of authority of the Roman coin itself. In a period of monetary crisis and strong debasement of the silver percentage, it seems not by chance to recall a strong coin such as the *denarius*, whose silver content was a guarantee for merchants.<sup>39</sup> The coin of Kujūla is in copper alloy, but the iconographic reference served to instill in the merchants the certainty that even the local currency was based on a reality of stability and economic well-being, as in fact Rome was thought of in the first century AD. The *denarius* was a very strong currency on the markets and archaeological finds in India of treasures composed of Roman coins show, in addition to gold, a strong presence of silver *denarii*: an example is offered by the coin hoard of Akenpalle in Andhra Pradesh (south-eastern coast of India), composed entirely of Roman silver coins in a chronological range from Augustus to Nero, containing several imitations as well.<sup>40</sup> The percentage of silver in the *denarius*, before the Neronian reform, was very high, up to 98%, so the value was still competitive for merchants, even if compared to the Kuṣāṇ issues in base metal.<sup>41</sup> This, besides, explains the majority of Julio-Claudian coins in India, made of a higher silver content and not reduced, and these specimens could not be found in coeval Italy.<sup>42</sup>

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studied recently (Coloru *et alii* 2021), the authors describe a picture of technical innovations, thriving markets and building activity, which does not appear to correspond to an economic crisis.

36 See Cribb 2014, 108; Jongeward & Cribb 2015, 24.

37 Khan 2008, 16, 23.

38 Jongeward & Cribb 2015, 43.

39 See also Cribb 1998, 88.

40 In India there is a predominance of silver *denarii*, in particular concerning the first period of eastern trade, see Turner 1989, 20, 47. For the Akenpalle coin hoard, see also Cobb 2018, 256–261.

41 MacDowall 1997, 234. Kujūla's Roman Emperor Type coin contains *ca.* 1% of silver.

42 Also, the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* 8, 49 attests the export of roman silver *denarii*. See De Romanis 2012, 173–174.

### 3 The Religious Connection

Taxila's importance is not limited to its role in the international economy. Even before being a crossroads of goods, the city was already an important religious center, where a variety of cults coexisted. Thus, the close relationship between merchants and Buddhism – that we mentioned in the previous paragraph – is attested already during the reign of Kujūla, although very limited on the basis of the archaeological data. Indeed, Kurt Behrendt noted that after the occupation of Sirkap the building technique of Buddhist temples changed, while Kujūla's coins have been found in Buddhist contexts, for example in the Kunāla temple, in the Dharmarājikā Stupā T12 and in different areas of Sirkap.<sup>43</sup> This relationship between economics and religion should not be read as evidence of the sovereign's formal adherence to the faith, but rather as a legitimizing maintenance of the *status quo*, visible through expenses for building works, but also in coin deposits.

Furthermore, if it is necessary to exclude a Buddhist faith for Kujūla, the same could be stated for the worship of other gods. I personally think it highly improbable that Kujūla adhered to an Indian cult, also in the light of the Rabatak Inscription, which tells us that the Iranian gods confer the kingship to the Kuṣāṇ ruler Kaniška – even though this interpretation is not necessarily retroactive.<sup>44</sup>

It is also necessary to recall that Kujūla depicted Heracles, along with the inscription *dhramathidasa* (*steadfast in the law*), on the reverse of the last phase of his Hermaios coinage issued in Begram and also brought to Taxila. For this reason, I find myself in agreement with David Jongeward and Joe Cribb when they argue for the religious connection to the Kuṣāṇ god Oešo, assimilated to Heracles, which would in fact represent an *intepretatio graeca*, or a mere iconographical choice in order to represent the god.<sup>45</sup> Already Janos Harmatta mentioned this phenomenon, but referring to the Iranian God of victory Verethragna, which, however, does not prevent us from seeing a strong

43 Behrendt 2004, 257–258 (and footnote 8): the building technique shifted from rubble to diaper (ashlar) masonry, but the chronology of the archaeological data relies heavily on the coins. See also Marshall 1951, 149.

44 Bactria may have also been reached by the Buddhist faith already during the Graeco-Bactrian kingdoms; see Coloru 2009, 279–281 for a general overview on Buddhism among the Greek population, and in this regard the Indian text *Milindapañha* remains the most interesting testimony (see also Kubica 2021 for a different interpretation on the text). For the Rabatak Inscription and its religious connections, see, *inter alia*, Gnoli 2009.

45 Jongeward & Cribb 2015, 23, 260, 264–265.

interconnection among all these deities, bearing attributes of victory and protection of kingship.<sup>46</sup>

This multi-faceted picture fits well with the religious context of Taxila, as the Panjtār inscription (a location very close to Taxila) and the Taxila Silver Scroll may allow to think. A hybrid context, not at all upset by Kujūla, in which Hinduism and Buddhism coexisted, probably among other cults.<sup>47</sup>

Even if the two Gāndhārī inscriptions do not clearly state the ruler's name, the titles reasonably allow that the reference is to Kujūla: the former reports *maharayasa Gushaṇasa* ("of the great Kuṣāṇ king"), while the latter *mahārājasa rājātirājasa devaputrasa khuṣaṇasa* ("of the Great king, king of kings, son of the God, the Kuṣāṇ"). The royal title in the Silver Scroll in particular is identical to the one found on the Bull and Camel coin type of Kujūla from Kashmir, based on the model of the śaka satrap Zeionises (c.10–40 AD).<sup>48</sup> Thus, the Panjtār Inscription, if compared to the other inscription, offers both political and religious information. Firstly, the progress of the royal titles of Kujūla, who is not yet a *devaputra* ("son of God") in 75 AD, probably shortly before reaching Taxila. Secondly, the religious context, considering the ambiguity of terms highlighted by Konow: Moika, son of Urumuja, offers two trees to a *śivathala*, meaning either "auspicious ground" or "Śiva Sanctuary".<sup>49</sup> Even if Konow tends to the former interpretation, it should not exclude the presence of the cult of Śiva in the area. The Taxila Silver Scroll, in contrast, pertains to the city's Buddhist context, and mentions a Bactrian man, named Urasaka, who makes a donation in the Dharmarājikā Stupā. The beneficiary of the offering is almost certainly Kujūla, for the reward of his health "in honor of all buddhas, in honor of

46 Harmatta *et alii* 1994, 317–319.

47 For Panjtār, see Konow 1929, 67–70; *CKI* 59, for the Taxila Silver Scroll, see Konow 1929, 70–77; Baums 2012, 237; *CKI* 60. It is also necessary to remind of the spread of Buddhism in the neighboring Swāt valley, see Filigenzi 2002.

48 Jongeward & Cribb 2015, 35–36, Nos. 114–124. The inscription can be found on the reverse, but also includes the name *kuyula katakaphasa*, and sometimes the variant with *katakaphsasa* and *mahadasa* ("great"). Jihonika/Zeionises ruled in Gandhāra and Punjab and issued the coin type with a bull and a lion imitated by Kujūla, see Alram 1999, 30; Neelis 2007, 82. The same title can be found on the inscription of Seṇavarma, in which Kujūla is defined as *mahārāja rājātirāja devaputra*, see Baums 2012, 227–233. Falk (2015, 94) notes that this is the earliest epigraphic attestation of the epithet *devaputra* related to a Kuṣāṇ ruler, placing the inscription around c.70 AD.

49 Konow 1929, 69. Albery (2020, 257), instead, tends to interpret the donor as clearly devoted to Śiva.

solitary buddhas, in honor of saints, in honor of all beings, in honor of mother and father, in honor of friends, intimates, relatives, and blood relatives [...]”.<sup>50</sup>

That said, the different sources at our disposal describe a context which implies a predominance of Buddhism in Taxila, flanked by other religious practices both Indian and of foreign origin. These cults are shown primarily by the coinage history of the Indo-Greek kingdoms, considering that, from the time of Agathocles, Hindu deities were depicted on the Indian bilingual coins, such as Balarāma-Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, gods of the Bhāgavata cult.<sup>51</sup> The influence of the Hindu creed did not take long to take hold on the city’s Greek-speakers as well, and the pivotal example is the Besnagar inscription, in which Heliodorus, ambassador from Taxila of the King Antialcidas (c.115–95 BC), defines himself as a Bhāgavata.<sup>52</sup> The same religious habit is confirmed by the later monetary iconography of Maues, as his Taxila copper issues show different iconographies related to a Hindu pantheon.<sup>53</sup>

Along with the monetary tradition, also archaeological excavations have unearthed several remains of buildings pertaining to other cults. In Sirkap in particular, before the Kuṣāṇs, at least two temples have been ascribed to the Hindu faith: the Jaṇḍiāl C temple and the Moḥrā Maliārāñ temple, both recently studied and reconsidered by Claude Rapin.<sup>54</sup> The author hypothesizes, in

50 Translation by Baums 2012, 237. Albery (2020, 260) hypothesizes that the reference to the health of Kujūla assumes an even more interesting value, since from a simple ritual formula we could deduce that the king was really in a precarious situation. Fussman, instead, tends to be more cautious concerning the health of the ruler (but also about the name, stating that it could be Kujūla, Soter Megas or Wima as well), see Falk 2015, 97.

51 Boppearachchi 1991, 57; Coloru 2009, 204–205; Glenn 2020, 127.

52 Coloru 2009, 278. Heliodorus was sent by Antialcidas to the Sunga king Bhāgabhadra in Vidisā (Tarn 1951, 313, even if there are some problems concerning the identity of this king; see also *EI X (App.)*, No. 669). It is legitimate to state, according to Coloru 2009, 248, that Antialcidas exerted power over Taxila, considering that archaeological excavations have brought to light 17 copper coins of the king in the city. A *status questionis* about the figure of Heliodorus, on his culture and identity, especially in relation to the ethnic point of view, in Mairs 2013, 119–123.

53 Agathocles and the Indo-Greek sovereigns made practical choices concerning the bilingual issues, but Widemann (2003, 120), advances the hypothesis that Maues wanted to follow a sort of Panhellenic ideology in his issues, aiming to resemble more an Indo-Greek king than a Saka one: “Maues took care not to crash or reject Greek religion that remained the first official one of the state, the only one represented on his silver coinage. Maues settled some kind of official religious pluralism, corresponding better to the actual social situation, supposing tolerance and mutual respect with a royal guarantee, a quite remarkable achievement for the time” (Widemann 2003, 116). Examples of Indian images on Maues coinage in *Senior*, Maues Type 9.1 and 20.1.

54 Rapin 1995, 281–291. The Jaṇḍiāl C temple shows a double language, mainly Hellenistic for the architecture but Indian for the cult. In contrast, the Moḥrā Maliārāñ temple

particular concerning the former, an early form of Viṣṇuism strongly flanked by Greek attributes of Heracles, often assimilated with Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa. Heracles' iconography had a great success in Indian cults, not only for its juxtaposition with the *avatāra* of Viṣṇu (Kṛṣṇa) and with other local deities such as Oeṣo (especially for the Kuṣāṅs) and Śiva, but also in the later assimilation with Vajrapani, guardian of the Buddha Sakyamuni.<sup>55</sup> And, as we have seen above, Kujūla clearly understood the role of this demigod in the local pantheon.<sup>56</sup>

Buddhism is mainly attested in Taxila by literary texts, inscriptions, and archaeology. It is known from the *Jātakas* (the previous lives of the Buddha) that the great wealth in the city served as a primary source of attraction for scholars, both students and teachers. Also, the mythological and literary tradition on the bodhisattvas and Buddhist rulers encouraged many pilgrims from China to visit the sacred places in person, leaving us valuable evidence in this regard.<sup>57</sup> However, the most evident testimony of the Buddhist presence in Taxila dates back at least to the 3rd century BC and is given by the building complexes, circular planned sanctuaries (Stupā) built in order to contain the relics of the Buddha. Without entering too much in technical details, it will be enough to remind that, among the large number of Buddhist remains near to the citadel of Sirkap, the Dharmarājikā Stūpa was the major complex of the bordering area, whose core was founded already during the time of Aśoka.<sup>58</sup>

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displays a complex architecture, maybe a syncretistic form made of Mesopotamian or Iranian features, but an Indianized or Buddhist cult, as indicated by the plastic remains pertaining, probably, to the time of Azes.

- 55 See Bussagli 1984, 143, but also Hsing 2005, 118. The identification with Vajrapani took place probably only after the birth of the Buddha image during the first century AD (Errington & Cribb 1992, 37). Noteworthy is the worship of an Indian Heracles in Mathurā, to be identified as Kṛṣṇa, according to the account of Megasthenes (Coloru 2009, 279). Most probably, these elements influenced the Kuṣāṅs after Kujūla once reached Mathurā.
- 56 Jongeward & Cribb 2015, 259. An important role was also interpreted in the arrival of Roman coins through trade. It remains an open point whether Kujūla adopted the title *dhramathidasa* in Begram only as a reference for the local Indian substratum or as a title equivalent to ΔΙΚΑΙΟΣ. One might wonder as well why this title is lacking on the obverse. Certainly, Kujūla seems to lean more towards Indian rather than Greek religious epithets.
- 57 Taxila is defined as center of learning in different stories, for example in the *Asātamanta-jātaka* or *Pañcāvudha-jātaka*, both contained in the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā*, a Pāli collection of stories – dated from the 3rd century BC to the 6th century AD – affiliated to the Theravāda Buddhism. For the Chinese chronicles, worthy of mention is the voyage to India of the monks Xuanzang (Li 1996, 41–71) and Faxian (Li & Dalia 2002, 170), where they visited also Gandhāra and Taxila. See Neelis 2011, 202.
- 58 Behrendt 2004, 25, 41–45 excludes the Mauryan origin for the Dharmarājikā; not of the same opinion Neelis 2011, 203.

Therefore, the few data offered by Taxila reasonably allows to picture a cultural and religious *entrepôt* where anyone living there could freely profess their faith. The clues we have about Kujūla, however, increasingly lead us to believe that his choice to adopt the epithet *sachadhramathidasa* was more instrumental than a reflection of his real devotion in the city. Moreover, even if the ruler's monetary policy does not include his faith, the Buddhist Urasaka makes a donation for the wealth of the ruler. This should not surprise, considering that for a man of Buddhist faith it would have been easier to accept a sovereign of a different devotion, and it is legitimate to think that the Buddhist substratum would have accepted a ruler with a different faith, especially if he guaranteed noteworthy economic welfare. For this reason, a Roman coin found in the Dharmarājikā Stūpa could highlight the fact that trade relations had an important value, at least for Buddhist merchants, accustomed to trading relations with the Romans. But there are still no proofs that the ruler had recognized in the Indian merchants the partners of the true faith, in which he wanted to be depicted as steadfast.

#### 4 The Coin: Dates and Iconography

Now that we have seen the context of Taxila, it is possible to analyze the coins according to the data gathered in the previous paragraphs. For this type, the dates of issue that I propose rely on the acknowledgement of the authority of Kujūla Kadphises in Gandhāra between 75 and 90 AD, as can be inferred by a few inscriptions available to us.<sup>59</sup> This specific issue in Taxila, in addition to reflecting a political phase in which Kujūla ruled for a long time and could afford to issue in his own name as a sign of authority, could also be a strong reference to the conflict that kept him engaged with the Indo-Parthian kingdom for several years. The date 75 AD is based on the Panjtār inscription, dated to year 122 of the Azes era, and found in a locality not particularly distant from Taxila (in the Peshāwar district) which may offer a valid *terminus post quem*. It is obviously not possible, at the present state of our knowledge, to establish how much later Kujūla reached Taxila, but I believe that in this sense the dating offered by the Taxila Silver Scroll (136 Azes, *i.e.* 89/90 AD), should be interpreted more as a *terminus ante quem* than as the beginning of the sovereign's rule in the city. If it were otherwise, it would limit the chronological range too much and would not justify the considerable amount of Kujūla-related coin finds

59 Cribb 2007, 353, footnote 80 assigns a chronological range for this coin type from 80 to 90 AD.

in the archaeological context of the city, which are not limited to this type of coin. That said, stressing the name "Kujūla" in the issues would have indicated the new Kuṣāṇ domination after a long series of conflicts, as also evidenced by the coins of the cross-legged king type, whose reverse has a design in common with the Indo-Parthians, depicting Zeus making a blessing gesture.<sup>60</sup>

The obverse of the "Roman Emperor type" (fig. 1) depicts a diademed head, facing right, of a Roman ruler of the Julio-Claudian dynasty.<sup>61</sup> The reverse depicts a figure slightly facing right in a central Asian dress (pointed headgear, opened jacket, trousers and boots), identified with Kujūla itself, seated on what appears as a roman *sella curulis*; the sovereign, flanked to the left by the circular tripartite  $\odot$  *tamgha*, holds an object with the extended right arm and wields a sword hilt with the left hand at the waist.<sup>62</sup>

Often, the state of preservation of the coins does not allow to distinguish clearly what the ruler is holding with his right extended arm. According to the graphic reconstruction made by John Rosenfield in 1967, the sovereign, apparently, holds a small club, in my personal opinion never clearly visible in any specimen. Giving a closer look, Kujūla seems rather to hold a *torquis* with his right extended arm, on the model of the issues of Maues in Taxila (fig. 2), in their turn very similar to the reverses of Hermaios, the Indo-Greek ruler of Paropamisadae at the beginning of the 1st century BC.<sup>63</sup> Not coincidentally, Kujūla himself imitates the issues of Hermaios in Begram and there are examples of coins issued during the period of the Kuṣāṇ ruler in the mint of Akra

60 See Alam 1999, 28, but also Cribb 2018a, 15–16. The mentioned inscriptions will be dealt with later, see Konow 1929, *passim*. The reverse design (depicting a draped Zeus facing right, holding a *torquis* and a vertical sceptre) is in common with the copper drachms and tetradrachms issued in Gandhāra by Abdagases, see Senior, Abdagases Types 226–230.

61 Mahler 2008, 297–298, identifies two groups of portraits, one with squarer features and one with more rounded traits.

62 To all effects, the image does not allow a totally accurate reconstruction of the head of the sovereign. What looks like a headdress, in reality, could be the simple hair of the sovereign, already seen on the "Heraios" coins, but in an elongated form and with a dot on top (attributable, perhaps, to the engravers); see Sinisi 2020, 385, footnote 81. This particular *tamgha*, a sort of control mark, is typical of Kujūla's coinage, and in the "Roman Emperor Type" can be found along with the Kharoṣṭhi letter *bra* 𑀧 on the right, sometimes missing (Mitchiner 1978, Nos. 2878–2879). For this still debated feature of Kuṣāṇ coinage, see Jongeward & Cribb 2015, 303–304. A similar *tamgha*, but with a circle at the base of the three spokes, can be found on the coins of Mujatria in the name of Azes II, see Cribb 2015, 33.

63 Rosenfield 1967, 14 (followed by Mahler 2008, 299). The club has a short slightly curved handle, and an oval termination. On Hermaios, see Bopearachchi 1997; Senior 2000.



FIGURE 1 “Roman Emperor Type” copper coin of Kujūla Kadphises (ANS 1973.56.220)  
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AMERICAN NUMISMATIC SOCIETY



FIGURE 2 Tetradrachm of Maues, showing Zeus holding a *torquis* (after Classical Numismatic Group, LLC, 75, Lot: 673)

(Bannu district in present-day Pakistan) showing Zeus seated on the reverse holding a *torquis*.<sup>64</sup>

64 Specimens on which a *torquis* can be clearly seen held by Kujūla: Mitchiner 1975–1976, 1053 a–b; Jongeward & Cribb 2015, Nos. 103, 104, 105, 108 (ANS online Nos. 1944.100.29797; 1944.100.29808; 1973.56.220; 1997.66.2902). According to a recent study (Moon-Ja 2003), which does not include the *torquis* as an object held in hand, but only worn, the *torquis* could represent the religious responsibilities of the leader wearing it. We do not know, anyway, if in the Indo-Scythian habits it was related to the kingship or to the charisma of the bearer. See also Boppearachchi 1991, Hermaios 22, pl. 60, No. 179 for a similar



However, the similarities are not limited to this object, but also to the chair itself. Indeed, coins from south of the Hindukush, issued in the period of Kujūla again in the mint of Akra, depict on the reverse side a left-facing goddess, probably a Tyche, seated on what resembles a curule chair and extending her right hand making a gesture or holding an object. These imitations are based on coins of Azes II, in which the goddess is depicted holding a *torquis* with her right hand.<sup>65</sup> This is apparently a surprising number of local models from which the engravers of the Kujūla coins may have drawn inspiration.

Nevertheless, the Roman elements spurred modern historiography to produce a vast amount of bibliography on the iconographic models of reference and on the usefulness of the coin for the periodization of Kujūla – being able to ascribe him with certainty to the first century AD.<sup>66</sup> However, the most important implication for this coin is its identification as a further proof of the market and diplomatic relations between Rome and India.<sup>67</sup> Even if the recent contribution of Karl-Uwe Mahler<sup>68</sup> offered a detailed account of the coin from an iconographical point of view and for the models on which it depends, it will be useful to add a note to the relevance of iconography and to reflect on some information that the coin itself can offer us. For example, the metal (copper alloy) indicates a local use of the coin, not conceived as an instrument of foreign trade, while the titles in the legend and the language in which they are written can show us the message they wanted to transmit, but above all the audience they addressed.<sup>69</sup> In addition to the titling, even the place of

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specimen. I am convinced, in any case, that the *torquis* cannot be confused with a hand gesture, because the object is very evident. For the coins of Maues, see *Senior*, Maues Type 2.IT (tetradrachms) and 2.ID (drachms). For the mint of Akra, which issued imitation coins of Kujūla, but probably never sanctioned by the Kuṣān, see Cribb & Bracey (forthcoming), 26.

65 According to Cribb & Bracey (forthcoming), 30, the model is the coinage of Azes II, imitated in the mint of Akra, for which see *Senior*, posthumous Azes Types 122–124 (attributed by the authors to the time of Kujūla). The original model could be *Senior*, Azes Type 94(a).ID, in its turn recalling a coin of Maues (type 3, on chair), but see also Azes Type 101 (*Senior* excludes the existence of Azes II at all, see Fröhlich 2008, 38).

66 See, for example, Rosenfield 1967, 13–14, Type II, coins 4–5; MacDowall 1968, 141; Errington & Cribb 1992, 66–69, footnote 35.

67 MacDowall 1997, 234–236, Jongeward & Cribb 2015, 23; Benjamin 2018, 186.

68 Mahler 2008.

69 For this reason, it is not necessary to compare their light weight to the Roman one, as made by MacDowall (1997, 234). The weight is more similar to the Indian standard, adopted by the Indo-Greek kings and based on the Mauryan *Karshapanas* (punch-marked debased silver coins weighing around 3.45 g.); see Cribb 2007, 340, but also Jongeward & Cribb 2015, 34, in which the Roman Emperor Type is defined as “Reduced Indo-Greek Standard copper unit”.

circulation, Taxila, as we have seen, can help us understand why it was chosen as the only area of circulation of this type of coin.

The coin was one of the most powerful and, in the meantime, easy means to reach the majority of the population, and it is difficult to believe that there was not a strategy behind the choice of iconography and legends. For his long reign, the ruler adopted the monetary weight and iconography of the kingdoms passed under his control. It is necessary to remember that the reign of Kujūla is in a phase of transition between the era of the *yabgus* and the kings, switching from a regional dominion to a supranational one. In this embryonal phase, during which the sovereign probably had to face radical changes concerning languages, administration, and many other issues, he could experiment new approaches in order to create a unified reign. Not altering local monetary systems was one of those expedients, because, before giving birth to a new empire with a vast amount of subject, it is necessary to create continuity, both ideological and legitimizing.<sup>70</sup> Iconography, in this particular case, is the immediate medium through which this mechanism could happen, leading us to think that the images depicted on the coins were looked at, and had to be carefully chosen.<sup>71</sup>

The legend, in contrast, conveyed the new dynastic message, including the name of the king and his royal epithets, and a scrupulous attention had to be paid to languages, because conquest brings under control different new cultures. We do not have enough evidence to state whether or not it was important to the ruler that his subjects were able to read the legends, but in any case it seems safe to assume that bilingual legends in Central Asia served a practical reason above all, due to the large presence of subjects of Indian language and culture, along with the Greek-speakers. Not accidentally the emissions north of the Hindu-Kush at the time of Agathocles and Pantaleo remained exclusively monolingual, in order to underline an intent which did not exactly respond to issues of social and cultural integration, as well as the “Heraios” coins issued by Kujūla in Bactria.<sup>72</sup> Therefore Kujūla, by depicting a

70 As happened, for example, in the case of Hermaios: this sovereign ruled in Paropamisadae and Arachosia between c.90 and 70 BC until its final defeat by the nomadic hordes. This event can be highlighted by the coin imitations, based on his model, that appeared from 70 BC onwards, see Coloru 2009, 256. Considering that this area was contended for a long time, it is evident how the new political realities tried to create continuity by imitating the previous coinage.

71 It will be useful to remember the late case of Taprobanê narrated by Cosmas Indicopleustes (*Christian Topography* XI, 17–19), in which great importance is given to the image on the coin, along with the precious metal; see Boppearachchi 2006, 181–182.

72 Pantaleo (190–185 BC) and Agathocles (185–170 BC), but also Apollodotus (174–165 BC), Graeco-Bactrian sovereigns who conquered a consistent part of the former Mauryan

Roman head, is sending to his subjects, perhaps for the first time, a very strong message of self-legitimization, which is nothing else than imperial propaganda, but recalling a foreign power, and in the meantime also legitimizing the coin itself. If anything, one may wonder why Rome and not, for example, the bordering Arsacid or Chinese Empires: the answer could be related to international markets.<sup>73</sup>

That said, despite the conclusions of Mahler, there are still several focal points open, in particular about the iconography of the reverse: the author concludes that the obverse depicts a portrait of Augustus and the reverse borrows from Indo-Scythian models, adapting to them a *sella curulis* received as a gift from the Roman Empire – a point of view strongly influenced by the historiography of the 20th century, mainly focused on looking for Roman models for the Kuṣāṇs.<sup>74</sup> Not of the same opinion is Fabrizio Sinisi, who mentions the local folding stools (*diphroi*) “known in a wider area stretching from Gandhara and the Kushanshahr to western Iran”.<sup>75</sup>

The solution that I propose here is slightly different. Kujūla did not adopt an Indo-Scythian model and adapt to it a *sella curulis*, but did the exact contrary: he adopted the most known Roman model in circulation and adapted an Indo-Scythian tradition to it. If one considers the possible intentions of the ruler, it was necessary for him to have this new type recognized and accepted, also in the light of his economic reform. For the striking similarity, the obverse recalls clearly a Roman coin, but, considering the smaller modifications adopted by Kujūla in his coin iconography, it would not sound unreasonable

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kingdom, inaugurated the habit of issuing bilingual coins, both Greek on the obverse and Brāhmī or Kharoṣṭhi on the reverse; see Errington & Cribb 1992, 62; Giuliano 2002, 66; Coloru 2009, 204–206. On Heraios identified as Kujūla, see Cribb 1993.

73 There is no need to look for a solution in the diplomatic and military relationships, as suggested by Mahler 2008, 314. In fact, the available Roman literary sources do not allow to assume this kind of relationship, because the ambassadorships coming from India, at that time, could not have been made by the Kuṣāṇs, let alone Kujūla. India (meant as the territories beyond the river Indus) passed under Kuṣāṇ control not earlier than the reign of Wima Takto (after 90 AD), see *Hou Hanshu* 118.9a; Thierry 2005, 493; Jongeward & Cribb 2015, 40. Instead, at least for the Julio-Claudian period, it would be better to look up Bactria in the sources, but with the awareness that its inhabitants then were Yuezhi, not yet Kuṣāṇs.

74 Mahler (2008, 309) mainly follows Allan (1934, 74) and (MacDowall 1968), 144. The finding in Taxila of what seems to be a *sella curulis* (Marshall 1951, Volume 111, pl. 170) is not, in itself, a proof that it is the same that, according to the author, the Kuṣāṇs received as a token of alliance. Even more difficult would be to argue that a Yuezhi *yabgu* had received it and that Kujūla had inherited it from him. The folding stool found by Marshall was, in all likelihood, a local product.

75 Sinisi 2017, 873, see also footnote 122.

to retain that he borrowed a reverse from a Roman coin as well, but replacing the entire figure with a local reference in the exact same position, *i.e.*, the sovereign in the Indo-Scythian apparel on a *diphros*, such as the one found in Taxila, as well as the known local coinage found in Gandhāra.<sup>76</sup> In this way, he could be recognized by his subjects thanks both to the iconography and the inscription, but on a coin recalling entirely a Roman pattern, giving also trustworthiness to the coin itself.

The search for a prototype led various authors to look for the most diverse examples. In this case, Occam's razor will be adopted: the most similar and, for now, most present type of coin in India known to merchants could serve as a perfect prototype.

Mahler excluded from his list of prototypes the PONTIF MAXIM coin of Tiberius with the reverse of Livia seated on a throne,<sup>77</sup> because, to all effects, the portrait on the obverse does not coincide with the image adopted by Kujūla (fig. 3).<sup>78</sup> If we consider the greater number of the PONTIF MAXIM type found in India (3,008 *denarii*, 53.18 % of the total), along with the Augustus coin type of Lucius and Gaius Caesar (*RIC Augustus 2*, 206 and *ff.*), it could offer an effective explanation for the choice made by Kujūla Kadphises, being the most attested type probably for the intrinsic good quality, coming directly from the mint and issued uninterruptedly for the entire reign of Tiberius.<sup>79</sup> Mahler, curiously, ignores the discovery in Taxila of a *denarius* of Augustus (*RIC Augustus 2*, 220) which could serve as well as prototype, showing the bust of the sovereign on the obverse and a seated figure on the reverse, a striking similarity to *RIC Tiberius 2*, 25 (fig. 4).<sup>80</sup> Unfortunately, coin finds from India do not allow to state for certain its role as prototype, amounting only to four, a number too small – even if it could have been higher, if we consider the many problems related to the discovery of monetary treasures in India.<sup>81</sup> That said,

76 Marshall 1951, Volume III, pl. 170. Moreover, the piece of fabric found in Noin Ula (Mongolia), in which a similar stool is depicted, can furtherly link this object with the sphere of power, as suggested by Francfort 2020, 29, footnote 53; see also Sinisi 2020, 384–385.

77 *RIC Tiberius 2*, 25–26.

78 Mahler 2008, 300.

79 See De Romanis 2012, 171, footnote 46 (for the numbers); Cobb 2018, 259 (mints and reflections). That said, the Lucius and Gaius coin, albeit showing a valid obverse, portraits a reverse incompatible with the coin issued by Kujūla, depicting the brothers at the sides of two shields and spears. See also Mahler 2008, 301.

80 See *ASIANRep* 1937, pl. VIII (b); Marshall 1951, 293; Kuwayama 2007, 219.

81 The one from Taxila is erroneously attributed to Tiberius – perhaps due to the striking similarity with the PONTIF MAXIM one and the poor state of the iconographic documentation – while the other three are from the Akenpalle coin hoard. See Turner 1989, 47–78.



FIGURE 3 Silver Denarius of Tiberius, minted in Lugdunum (*RIC Tiberius 2, 26*) (*ANS 1935.117.35*)

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AMERICAN NUMISMATIC SOCIETY



FIGURE 4 Silver Denarius of Augustus, minted in Lugdunum (*RIC Augustus 2, 220*) (*ANS 1944.100.39120*)

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AMERICAN NUMISMATIC SOCIETY

a single coin find from Taxila definitely means something, if compared to the general absence of Roman coins in Pakistan.<sup>82</sup>

82 Recently, Harry Falk suggested *RIC Augustus 2, 270* as prototype. Even if plausible, I think that the western point of view related to the *sella curulis*, depicted on the specimen, plays an important role in the analysis of the author (Falk 2015–2019, 6): only one coin of this type has been found in India, probably because it was not suited for trade, considering also the era of the issue (29–27 BC), struck in order to commemorate the victory of Actium. Mahler (2008, 302), already discussed this coin, but discarded its reverse

The smaller number of finds of the Claudius coins with Constantia seated on the reverse,<sup>83</sup> along with the remarkable differences in both the obverse bust and the draped seated figure on the reverse, lead me to exclude this coin from the possible prototypes. Similar models issued by Emperor Nero<sup>84</sup> should also be excluded, since they not only show marked differences in the iconography, especially of the bust, but have not even been found in India, with the exception of a very few specimens.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, considering the absence of similar models after the reign of Nero, when trade relationships with India slowed down due to the lower quantity of silver in the coins, the identification of the issuing authority cannot be pushed forward in time.

Therefore, this could be the unique case in which Kujūla did not recall only a local model, but also a foreign one, adapting to it all the local features recognizable by his subjects. Whether the prototype is *RIC Augustus 2, 220* or *RIC Tiberius 2, 25*, only time and new discoveries will tell, but it seems safe to assume that this issue is the first real example of a Kuṣāṇ hybrid coin, containing Roman influences (Julio-Claudian bust and seated sovereign facing right) exploited for market reasons, but picking up from Taxila and Gandhāra's Indo-Scythian past (the Zeus of Maues on a throne bearing the *torquis* or the coinage of Azes II) and from the steppe costume of Central Asia (clothing and diphros).<sup>86</sup>

## 5 Epigraphic Questions

The inscription is bilingual, Greek on the obverse and Kharoṣṭhi on the reverse, following to the model of the Indo-Greek coinage. The Greek alphabet displays the name and the title of the king (clockwise) ΧΟΡΑΝΕΥ ΖΑΟΥΥ ΚΟΖΟΛΑ ΚΑΔΑΦΕΣ (“of the Kuṣāṇ King yabgu Kujūla Kadphises”). The Kharoṣṭhi

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from the possible prototypes. Similar reasons can be advanced in order to discard *RIC Augustus 200*, mentioned in the recent British Museum catalog of Cribb & Bracey (forthcoming), 19.

83 *RIC Claudius 2, 2*; 13; 14.

84 *RIC Nero 2, 60*, for example.

85 This evaluation has been made from data contained in Turner 1989, *passim*. *RIC Nero 2, 60* should be considered as an exemplifying model of a larger quantity, including Nos. 48, 49, 52, 53 and so on.

86 For example, Mahler (2008, 309) mentions a specimen of Azilises among the local coinage used as model, especially concerning the seated sovereign. Even if the hands' position is similar to the one depicted on the coin of Kujūla, it is more plausible to think that Azilises imitated Hermaios, in particular for the figure depicted (Zeus) and for the size of the throne as well, see Mitchiner 1978, 323, Nos. 2247–2248.

alphabet, in the Prakrit Gāndhārī language, has (anticlockwise) *kuyula kaph-sasa sachadhramathidasa kuṣaṇasa yauasa* ("of Kujūla Kadphises, steadfast in the true dharma/law, Kuṣaṇ yabgu").<sup>87</sup>

From the monetary legend we can derive, with all due caution, some reflections on the geo-political and propagandistic choices made by Kujūla. First of all, the presence of the name may indicate a rather late part of his reign, in which, after the eastward expansion to the Punjab, the sovereign acquired confidence and charisma. Moreover, it is legitimate to think that the late mention of his own name may also recall the long conflict that kept Kujūla and the Indo-Parthian sovereigns engaged for years.<sup>88</sup>

Concerning the languages, as we have seen, Kujūla adopts a bilingual inscription, according to the *imitatio* of the Indo-Greek numismatic practices: the obverse addressed the Greek-speakers, to which also refers the scheme with bust facing right and inscription running around the figure. The titles used by the ruler are specific, effectively hinting at the aura of authority Kujūla gained over the course of his long reign. Yet, he adopted the Greek title ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ only in the late silver issues imitating the Indo-Parthian rulers.<sup>89</sup> Kujūla, in Greek, has always carried the title of *yabgu* until the end of his life – on whose origin there is much debate, and which can be linked, in a nutshell, to a nomadic kingship<sup>90</sup> – or ΣΥ, meaning "King" in Bactrian language (*shao*).<sup>91</sup> The title

87 Cribb & Bracey (forthcoming), 19.

88 See Alam 1999, 28. Overstrikes between the Heracles monetary type issued by Kujūla and the 'Nike' type issued by Gondophares are known from the Kapiśa/Kabul area. It is not mandatory to conclude that every overstrike meant a reconquest of the territory: Alam suggested cautiously that the two coins circulated together in their areas of influence, often disputed between the two sovereigns.

89 On the reverse of different coin types (mainly the Hermaios imitation and the "Bull and Camel type" from Kashmir) Kujūla is defined in the local language as *maharaja rajatiraja* "King of Kings", or *maharaja mahada* "Great King"; Jongeward & Cribb 2015, 23. Kujūla uses the Greek title ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ only in his silver issues from Sindh recalling the Indo-Parthian rulers: we find a blundered ΒΑΣΙΛ[...] and ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΧΟΡΕΑΝ (uncertain location, probably Sindh), as the Persian title "King of Kings", see Cribb & Bracey (forthcoming), 5–6, types A.S3-i 1/4 u and A.S4-1 1/4 u.

90 For a general overview on the title see Falk 2010, 76–77; Sims-Williams & de La Vaissière 2012; Cribb 2018b. This title disappeared with him, only to reappear centuries later during the invasion of the Hephthalites. The reliquary inscription of Priyavaṃśa, dated c.80 AD, probably refers to Kujūla according to the term *yāūasa* (*yabgu*), see Baums 2012, 235, footnote 28 (CKI 331).

91 As shown in the Rabatak Inscription (line 14) in the title *Shaonano Shao*, see Sims-Williams & Cribb 1995/1996, 80 (text) and 95 (glossary). Another element not to be ignored is the absence of titles and iconography that refer to the adjacent Arsacid Empire. It is unknown whether Kujūla was in conflict or not with them but, from the earliest coin series, as Falk points out, Kujūla never used terms such as ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΟΝΤΟΣ, typical of Parthian issues,

*yabgu* is abandoned by his successor, Wima Takto, who finds himself in the hands of a reign more structured, and will need consequently to adopt a different register, already inaugurated by Kujūla in the last years of his rule, with the Soter Megas coinage.<sup>92</sup>

On the reverse can be found the inscription in Kharoṣṭhī, the writing system of the local language in Gandhāra. It is important to emphasize the different amount of information contained in the legend in this language: in addition to name and title, there is a reference of religious nature – “steadfast in the true dharma/law” –, whereas the same epithet is lacking in the obverse (one would expect ΔΙΚΑΙΟΣ).<sup>93</sup> In order to understand this choice in Kujūla’s message, one must evaluate the reasons why the ruler decided to appear, only in the eyes of his Gāndhārī-speaking subjects, as law-abiding, namely pious. The religious context at that time in Gandhāra was quite varied, so it should not surprise a monetary phraseology so ambiguous, that all in all winked at the same time to the Buddhist cult but also to the Hindu one, both dharma promoters.<sup>94</sup> Most of all, this epithet was necessary for a king searching for popular support, considering that being faithful to the law was a quality required for an Indian sovereign.<sup>95</sup> In the past, mainly due to this title and an issue with the king sitting in the lotus position, Kujūla was ascribed to the Buddhist faith.<sup>96</sup> This is not the case, as demonstrated by many scholars, pointing out that the iconography falls perfectly within the custom of the ruler, who imitates the issues of his predecessors, the Indo-Scythian kings Maues and Azes in this specific

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but rather the variant ΤΥΡΑΝΝΟΥΝΤΟΣ, as if to show the difference between a ruler “of royal blood” and a self-made one, see Falk 2014, 5; the choices made by Kujūla for his titles are far from being understood. Probably he decided to underline his Yuezhi heritage by adopting titles such ΣΥ or ΖΑΘΟΥ, but in absence of any hint it is legitimate to think that the reasons should have been mostly practical, in order to be recognized by the different ethnic groups of his territories according to their numismatic legacies. See also Cribb 2018b, 14.

92 See Cribb 2014.

93 Jongeward & Cribb 2015, 23, also report that the title was an adaptation of *dhrami*[*k*]a used by the former rulers of the Gandhāra region translating the Greek title ΔΙΚΑΙΟΣ. Muccioli (2013, 317) in contrast, suggests that the title could be translated with *Eusebes*.

94 Harmatta *et alii* (1994, 313–315) offers an overview of the religious context in Bactria and bordering areas before Kuṣāṇ arrival; concerning the Buddhist context, see Puri 1987, 89–104; Neelis 2011, 229–256; Alberly 2020.

95 Jongeward & Cribb 2015, 23.

96 A state of the art in Michon 2015, 142–143, footnotes 96, 99. This thesis dates back to the 19th century and was already refused during the 20th.



case.<sup>97</sup> Thus, it is not necessarily a reference to personal worship that we see written on the coin, since there is no evidence to assert any kind of cultic imposition, from the numismatics, by early Kuṣāṅṣ on their subjects. It will be also useful to remember that Kujūla started his conquest from Bactria, where a variety of cults coexisted at least from the 3rd century BC.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, it is more reasonable to believe that Kujūla simply adopted religious measures on his coins in order to meet, propagandistically, local cultures. Because of this, the epithet *sachadhramathidasa*, specific to this issue, could be explained thanks to Taxila and its economic and religious environment.

## 6 Conclusions

In the light of what the sources offer us about the long reign of Kujūla, it is possible to see how the king, in the last years of his reign, decided to experiment through the numismatic channel some expedient for a proto unification. During his eastward expansion Kujūla always respected the previous monetary customs, probably for practical reasons, with the propagandistic purpose of not upsetting the economic context and thus gaining the support of the conquered populations – coin legends varied, but the weight standard remained the same, as did the iconographies most often. The “Roman Emperor Type” coin, in contrast, presents itself as a novelty, and one could almost speculate that there is a strategy behind the choice of recalling the distant Roman Empire for a specimen that circulated mainly in local markets. Indeed, all the main features of the coin fit within a local context, as indicated by the monetary weight, the material itself (copper), but especially the legend in Gāndhārī, including among its epithets also an ambiguous and inclusive reference to the religious context of the city.

The whole iconography, instead, recalled a very specific register, referred to the economic tendency along the Indus River, namely a strong trade relation with Roman merchants, but also the strong value of the Roman *denarius* itself, a proper economic guarantee. Not only that, but also the choice to adopt a Roman head on the obverse and the replacement of the Roman iconography with local features clearly underlines the direction of Kujūla's

97 Already Marshall (1951, 792) and Rosenfield (1967, 15) noted this similarity; see also the recent contribution by Sinisi 2017, 857–858.

98 See, for example, Harmatta *et alii* 1994, 313–315.

self-legitimization, but still humble towards the gods and close to his subjects, being “steadfast in the true law”.

It would be difficult to assess how much Kujūla could be interested in exploiting international markets, but it would have been more practical for him to consolidate his territories by promoting inner economy and leaving decisional power to local guilds, as can be inferred from the great amount of copper coins found in Taxila during the reign of Kujūla. The preexisting international trades could be exploited anyway, without interfering but giving a strong message to Indian merchants, accustomed to trade relations with the Romans, in a picture of general *laissez-faire*.

If we consider that Taxila had an important role both as commercial and religious hub, it is legitimate to think that precisely for this reason Kujūla introduced here a currency which could create a new monetary standard for his empire and meet the needs of local merchants, especially the city guilds. Not by chance, in fact, with the arrival of Kujūla, Sirkap saw a change in its building program, to be ascribed above all to the Buddhist enterprise. Therefore, the fact that among the Buddhist donations in the city there was a Roman coin can lead us to re-evaluate the economic context of that time in a more positive light, composed of branching markets and relationships, which would continue to flourish during the following century.

Thus, Kujūla represents an important model for the choices made by successors with regard to the monetary policy, a model certainly still far from a solid idea of empire, perhaps still Yuezhi in the economic perspective, but decisive for the future developments of the Kuṣāṇ empire.

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## Abbreviations

<i>ANS</i>	<i>The American Numismatic Society</i> .
<i>ASIANRep</i>	Blakiston, J.F., ed. (1937). <i>Archaeological Survey of India. Annual Report 1934–1935</i> . Delhi: Manager of Publications.
<i>BMC</i>	Allan, J. (1936). <i>Catalogue of the Coins of Ancient India in the British Museum</i> . London: British Museum.
<i>CKI</i>	<i>Corpus of Kharoṣṭhi Inscriptions</i> (Baums and Glass, <a href="http://www.gandhari.org">www.gandhari.org</a> ).
<i>EI</i>	<i>Epigraphia Indica</i> .
<i>EI X</i> (App.)	Lüders, H. (1912). <i>A list of Brahmi Inscriptions</i> . Appendix to <i>Epigraphia Indica, Volume 10</i> . Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing.
<i>EI XXI</i>	Sastri, H., Dikshit, K.N., eds. (1931–1932). <i>Epigraphia Indica, Volume XXI</i> . Delhi: Manager of Publications.



- Jātaka* Jātaka Stories, online database of the University of Edinburgh  
[<https://jatakastories.div.ed.ac.uk/>].
- RIC* Sutherland, C.H.V. & Carson, R.A.G. (1984). *Roman Imperial Coinage*,  
Volume 1: *From 31 BC to AD 69 – Augustus to Vitellius* (rev. ed.). London:  
Spink & son.
- Senior* Senior, Robert C. (2001 and 2006). *Indo-Scythian Coins and History*.  
London: Classical Numismatic Press: vols. 1–3 (2001); vol. 4 (2006).