

# Polytheism Idolatry Worship of Kushan-Iranian Faith based on Coins and others Documents

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Type of Article: **Research**

Pp: 89-112

Received: 2025/01/05; Revised: 2025/02/07; Accepted: 2025/02/11

<https://doi.org/10.22034/PJAS.1237>

## Abstract

This paper stresses on the polytheistic idolatry worship of the Kushans and Iranian faith as evidenced by coins, relics and documents particularly in the field of numismatics, and historical data. This study can draw the following conclusions, the roots of Dayuezhi Iranian faith's idolatry worship can be traced back to a combination of orthodox Zoroastrianism and indigenous Iranian faith during the Dayuezhi period. In this period, Dayuezhi used the image of lion to be a symbol of the Iranian goddess Nana on coin. The Kushan culture was influenced by Greek religious art, and later by Buddhist statuary art, but the current archaeological materials have not yet found evidence of existing Iranian deities relics and documents during the early decades of the reign of the Kushan emperors such as Kujula Kadphises, Wima Taktu, and Wima Kadphises; In fact, polytheistic idolatry worship within the Iranian faith became fully established and flourished during the reigns of Kaniska and Huvishka. In this period, the Iranian faith deities Nana, Mirro, Mao, Orlagno, Athsho, Ardoxsho, Manaobago, Pharro, Lrooaspo, Mozdoano and Oado appear on Kaniska's coins, and the Iranian faith deities Ardoxsho, Mirro, Mao, Nana, Shaoreo, Athsho, Oanindo, Oaxsho, Mozdoano, Sarapis, Rishti, Teiro, Ahura Mazda, Ashaixsho, Lrooaspo, Yamsho and Oado appear on Huvishka's coins. Kushano-Sasanian coins revealed information about the rise of Iranian orthodox Zoroastrianism under Sasanian Persia which had conquered the region. The practice of polytheistic idolatry in Iranian faith was gradually declining during the late Kushan and Kushano-Sasanian periods. This decline continued into the Kidara Kushan period as evidenced by the coins.

**Keywords:** Coin, Kushan, Iranian, Idolatry, Polytheism.



**Parseh Journal of Archaeological Studies (PJAS)**

Journal of Archeology Department of Archeology Research Institute, Cultural Heritage and Tourism Research Institute (RICT), Tehran, Iran

**Publisher:** Cultural Heritage and Tourism Research Institute (RICT).

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**Citations:** Yuan, W., (2025). "Polytheism Idolatry Worship of Kushan-Iranian Faith based on Coins and others Documents". *Parseh J Archaeol Stud.*, 9(31): 89-112.

**Home page of this Article:** <https://journal.richt.ir/mbp/article-1-1237-en.html>

## Introduction

Research on the polytheistic idolatry of the Kushan- Iranian Faith dates back to discussion of the pantheon on Indo-Saka coins in the late 19th century; it has a history of over 100 years. In the past twenty years, scholars have conducted further studies on the polytheistic idolatry of the Kushan-Iranian faith; This was made possible through the deciphering of the Rabatak Inscription and the establishment of the Kushan Chronology. The polytheistic idolatry of the Iranian faith is prominently displayed on Kushan coins, particularly those of Kaniska and Huvishka. Therefore, the focus of the research has been also on these materials (Sun, 2019: 206-223). The author, hereby, tries to overall analyze the polytheism idolatry worship of the Kushan-Iranian faith from the Dayuezhi (1st century BC) to the Kidarite Kushan (5th century AD) referring to numismatics and other cultural materials.

According to research in religious studies, Zoroastrianism that originated in Iran comes in two different types, Persianization Zoroastrianism and Sogdian Mazdeism face in Central Asia. In religious rituals, there are significant differences between the two in the following two aspects. first, in terms of pantheon, Zoroastrianism basically belongs to a dualism, with the most Supreme God being Ahura Mazda. On the other hand, Sogdian Mazdeism is polytheistic religion, worshiping the gods of Zoroastrianism while also absorbing other deities such as Nana; Second, in terms of imagery, Zoroastrianism does not practice idolatry worship while Sogdian Mazdeism incorporates many idolatrous elements (Cai, 2010: 32). There are close relationship between Sogdian Mazdeism which was popular in Sogdiana / Central Asia and the Iranian religious-cultural beliefs of the Kushan. The images of Iranian religion-culture on some Kushan coins even influenced on Chinese statues since the Eastern Han Dynasty (Zhu, 2017: 137-145). Therefore, the author attempts to interpret the polytheism idolatry worship of the Kushan-Iranian faith through coins and other documents.

## Polytheism Idolatry Worship of Iranian Faith in the period of Dayuezhi

Around 135 BC, the Dayuezhi People arrived in Northern Bactria, Central Asia, and indirectly ruled Bactria (Daxia), according to observations made by Zhang Qian during his first mission to the West Regions in 128 BC. During this time, Dayuezhi “had the same custom as the Xiongnu” (Sima, 1963: 3161) at this time. By the period described in the Hanshu, the Dayuezhi had become “known for having the same land, products, customs and coins as Anxi (Parthia)” (Ban, 1964: 3890). At this time, Anxi was ruled by the Parthian Dynasty and mainly believed in Zoroastrianism in terms of religion. The Dayuezhi who shared the same custom as Anxi, also practiced Zoroastrianism, as evidenced by Bactrian embroidered textiles unearthed from Noyon uul (north Mongolia) around the 1st century BC. One of the textiles depicts 13 male figures; On the far right a priest figure can be clearly seen; To the left of priest is the altar for Zoroastrian Fire. To

the left of the altar is a male figure, who holds tribute in hand and wears a nomadic style power headband on his head. This man is likely the Dayuezhi monarch; Behind him are 11 warriors and knights who are presumably his followers. All the costume elements depicted in this embroidered textile are styled in red or white (Yatsenko, 2012: 39-48). This also corresponds to the Dayuezhi (Kushan) clothing customs in Bactria as recorded in the *Nanzhouyiwuzhi* written by Wan Zhen in the Wu State of the Three Kingdoms. This book states: “Dayuezhi is located about 7000 li north of Tianzhu (India); The land is high, dry and remote... and the people have red and white dress (Wan, 1963: 3162)”. The figure composition on this embroidered textile is very similar to the composition of what could be a Sasanian Persian King and Priest on a Zoroastrian Fire Worship Altar positioned on the left and right sides respectively on the reverse of Sasanian Persian coins from later ages. This embroidered textile can be regarded as an evidence of the popularity of Zoroastrianism, a non-idol worship, monotheistic among the Dayuezhi people. Moreover, it should be noted that Zoroastrianism in Iran was also influenced by Hellenism. Idol worship began to appear when Iran was ruled by Hellenistic dynasties such as the Seleucid Empire. There are Greek and Parthian inscriptions on a bronze nude statue of Verethragna, the Zoroastrian God of War, from Seleucid period. The Greek inscription on the statue is about the temples of the Greek Gods Hercules and Apollo; The Parthian inscriptions equate these temples to the Zoroastrian Gods, Verethragna (God of War) and Tir (God of Rain) (Curtis, 2007: 423).

On two types of Dayuezhi coins, there appear to be symbols of the Iranian goddess Nana. One is the Sapadbizes coin, with the obverse pattern showing the portrait of a monarch wearing a Greek style helmet. The edge of the obverse has a Greek legend,  $\text{CAPIA}\Delta\text{BIZHC}$ , while the reverse pattern features a standing lion, a crescent underneath. Both sides, also, have Greek inscriptions  $\text{NANAIA}$  (Fig. 1) (Bopearachchi & Pieper, 1998: 271). This approach of using animal shapes to refer to deities is different from the anthropomorphism custom of contemporary Hellenized religious art in Central Asia. It is closer to the religious art custom of using symbols from early Buddhist art such as the bodhi tree, dharma chakra, throne, tiara and footprints (the carvings of Sanchi and Barhut from the 2nd century BC to 1st century AD) show the image of Sakyamuni (Filigenzi, 2015: 162). It should be pointed out that there are other lion-shape on Dayuezhi relics from this period; For example, the gold belt found in tomb No. 4 of Tillya Tepe features nine decorative rings, each depicting a female lion riding. Additionally, an Indian gold coin obtained from the same tomb, shows a walking lion on one side with a Kharosthi inscriptions that read: “Sih(o) vigatabhay(o)” (a bold as a lion) (Fig. 2). Also, I should add a lion-shaped amber that was unearthed in tomb No. 5 of Tillya Tepe (Fig. 3). However, these relics do not have definitive inscriptions that specifically refer to the deities they represent. Therefore, at this stage, we cannot attribute these arbitrary claims to the goddess Nana (Sarianidi, 1985: 250-251, 254, 257; Yuan, 2018: 63, 67).



Fig. 1: Goddess Nana is depicted on the Dayuezhi coin (<https://www.zeno.ru/showphoto.php?photo=285885>).



Fig. 2: The Indian gold coin was unearthed in Tomb No. 3 of Tillya Tepe (After: Sarianidi, 1985: 192)



Fig. 3: The lion-shaped amber was discovered in tomb No. 5 of Tillya Tepe, from the Han Dynasty period (After: Sarianidi, 1985: 135)

Some scholars even believe that the lion-shaped amber unearthed in tomb No. 5 of Tillya Tepe comes from the Han Dynasty (Zhao, 2008: 134), so we cannot attribute it to the goddess Nana.

### **Polytheism Idolatry Worship of Iranian Faith in Kushan Empire**

The current archaeological materials have not yet found evidence of existing Iranian deities relics and documents during the early decades of the reign of the Kushan emperors such as Kujula Kadphises, Wima Taktu, and Wima Kadphises (Falk, 2015: 108). For this reason, some scholars explain that the ruling center of the Kushan Empire was in northwest India during this stage. The Kushan Empire mainly absorbed cultural factors and coin structure from northwest India (Yang, 2010: 109), so there is no evidence available of existing Iranian deities' relics or documents.

Kaniska ascended to the throne in 127/128 AD; From the perspectives of numismatics, epigraphy, and philology, Kaniska promoted extensive and profound religious reforms. Numerous deities of Iranian and Indian appeared on Kaniska's coins. The Rabatak Inscription: "σινδαδο σθηια ι ιωναγγο οασο οξοαστο ταδηια αριαο" (and he issued a Greek edict (and) then he put it into Aryan) (Sims-Williams, 2004: 56; Luo, 2011: 120). So, Kaniska coins can be divided into two types based on the different inscriptions (legends). The first type is Greek inscription coins before the erection of the Rabatak Stele in 132 AD. (in the 6th year of the Kaniska reign); The second late type is Bactrian script (i.e. the so-called Aryan/αριαο (language) on the Rabatak Stele) on the coins.

One of the Iranian deities, Nana, and Helios, a Greek sun deity closely related to Iranian gods, appear on the Kaniska coins in Greek. On these coins, the goddess Nana is depicted in three-quarter profile facing right, her head surrounded by a halo topped with a crescent; Her hair is held in place by a diadem with two ribbons flowing to the left to left, and she has a bun at the back. She is wearing a sleeved, ankle-length loosely fitting robe; She is holding a wand with lion-protome in her right hand, a bowl in the left; to right, there is a tanga and that is dotted border (pearl pattern). The Greek legend to the left: "NANAIA". (Jongeward & Cribb & Donovan, 2015: 275) From the image, it can be seen that compared to the use of lions to represent the goddess Nana during the period of Dayuezhi, in the period of Kaniska, the use of human images to represent the goddess Nana was changed. The wand with lion-protome in her hand implies a close connection between the goddess Nana and lion (Fig. 4).

On Kaniska's coins, Greek deity Helios is depicted standing facing left with a radiate halo surrounding his head; He is wearing a diadem with ribbons to the right; a cloak around his shoulders that is double clasped at the chest, a belted tunic and boots; He is making a gesture of blessing with his bent arm and extended right hand while clasping the hilt of a sword with his left hand on hip; There is a tanga to the left and a dotted border Greek legends to the right: HAIOC. (Fig. 5) (Jongeward & Cribb & Donovan, 2015: 269).



Fig. 4: Goddess Nana is depicted on the Greek epigraph coin of Kushan Kaniska (<https://www.zeno.ru/showphoto.php?photo=285459>).



Fig. 5: Helios is depicted on the Greek coin of Kushan king Kanishka (<https://www.zeno.ru/showphoto.php?photo=236712>).

The Iranian faith deities Nana, Mirro, Mao, Orlagno, Athsho, Ardoxsho, Manaobago, Pharro, Lrooaspo, Mozdoano and Oado appear on Kaniska's Bactrian coins (Bracey, 2012: 203), inscribed as personified expressions. Now we will describe several of these important deities in more detail.

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The image of the goddess Nana on Kaniska's Bactrian inscribed coins is similar to the image of goddess Nana on Kaniska's Greek inscribed coins. The Bactrian epigraph on some types of coins is NANA (Fig. 6); Meanwhile, there are other coin types of Bactrian epigraphs that use the higher title NANAPAO (king of Nana). Considering the inscription on the Rabatak reads, *ασο νανα οδο ασο οισποανο μι βαγανο ι βαοδανι αβορδο κιδι ωγο χρονο* (who has obtained the kingship from Nana and from all the gods, who has inaugurated the year one) (Sims-Williams, 2004: 55; Luo Shuai, 2011: 120). One Bactrian epigraph on the silver plate from 10th year of Kanishka (136 AD) reads: *[νανα π]ιδο[ ι ωγα ]χρονα αβο βαονανο βαο κανηρικι κοβανο* ([in] the year [one, Nana] bestowed the kingship upon the King of Kings, Kanishka the Kushan (Sims-



Fig. 6: Nana is depicted on the Bactrian epigraph coin of Kushan King Kanishka (<https://www.zeno.ru/showphoto.php?photo=78564,78565>).

Williams, 2015: 255-264). In Kaniska's perspective, his kingship is believed to be granted by goddess Nana; As a result, the title of goddess Nana has also been changed to NANAPAO (king of Nana), which holds a higher status than the titles of other Iranian deities. Interestingly, the representation of Ahura Mazda, the supreme god of Zoroastrianism has not been found on Kanishka coins. Furthermore, on the coins of Huviska (God), who succeeded Kanishka to the throne of Kushan, the representation of Ahura Mazda's proportion is also less than 1% (Bracey, 2012: 203). Thus, in the pantheon of Kushan King Kanishka, the status of Nana is higher than that of Ahura Mazda, the orthodox supreme god of Zoroastrianism.

On the Bactrian epigraph coin of Kushan Kaniska, Mirro's figure is directly equated with Helios, as depicted on the Greek epigraph coin of Kushan Kaniska. However, the inscription has been replaced with Bactrian MIIPO instead of the Greek HAIIOC. This suggests that some Iranian deity designs directly adopted Greek deity designs that corresponded to their godhood during the idolization Iranian deities in the Kaniska era (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7: Mirro is depicted on the Bactrian epigraph coin of Kushan Kanishka (<https://www.zeno.ru/showphoto.php?photo=305566>).

1908, The Kaniska bronze reliquary was unearthed from the Kaniska stupa site, near present-day Peshawar, Pakistan. On the lid of this reliquary, there is a scene depicting Indra and Barhma entreating the Buddha to Preach. The reliquary features

three groups of scenes; The first group shows Indra and Barhma entreat the Buddha to preach, the second group depicts Buddha and his double Bodhisattva disciples, and the third group shows the Iranian deities Mirro and Mao protecting the Kushan ruler. The rulers depicted on this reliquary from Kushan, Mirro and Mao are more similar to those on Huviska coins than on Kaniska coins. Some scholars infer that this reliquary dates back to the reign of Huviska (153 to 191 AD). They interpret the Kharosthi inscriptions, (mahara)jasa kaniskasa, as referring to the construction of a temple for King Kaniska (Errington, 2002: 101-120), rather than indicating that the reliquary belongs to the reign of King Kanishka. This statement makes a crucial assumption that the modelings of Mirro and Mao on the Kaniska bronze reliquary imitate the modelings of Mirro and Mao on Huviska coins, rather than the opposite. However, with the existing materials, this assumption cannot be confirmed or falsified at all. Therefore, deriving relevant conclusions from this assumption is also unreliable. However, it can be estimated



Fig. 8: Kushan King, Mirro and Mao are depicted on Kanishka's bronze reliquary (After: Errington, 2002: 119).



Fig. 9: Ardoxsho is depicted on a Kushan Huviska coin (<https://www.zeno.ru/showphoto.php?photo=285472>).



that Iranian idolatrous deities are depicted on Buddhist reliquary, reflecting a close relationship between Buddhist statues and the idolization of Iranian deities during the Kushan reign of King Kanishka and Huviska (Fig. 8).

In addition to the coins and reliquary, the Rabatak inscription describes the polytheism idolatry worship of Kushan's Iranian faith in the reign of Kanishka. The relevant inscriptions are as follows:

9. αγανο κιδι μαρο κιδι ανδιμανι (ο)φαρρο ομμα οσηλδι ια αμγα νανα οδο ια αμ-

10. γα ομμα αορομοζδο μοζδοανο σροβαρδο (κ)ιδι υνδοαο μαασηγο ριζδι οδοβιζαγο ριζδι ναρασαιο μιορ οτηια ουδοα-

11. νο πιδγρβο φρομαδο κιδ[ι] ειμοανο βαγανο κιδι μασκα νιβιχτιγενδι

9. (For these gods) who have come hither into the presence of the glorious Umma, that (is), the above-mentioned Nana and the

10. above-mentioned Umma, Aurmuzd, Muzhduwan, Sroshard – who in Indian is called Mahāsena and is called Visākha - Narasa, (and) Mihir; And he

11. gave orders the make of images of the same, (namely) of these gods who inscribed hereupon (Sims-Williams, 2004: 56; Luo, 2011: 120, 130)

In this inscription, Nana, Aurmuzd, Muzhduwan, Sroshard (Srosh), Narsa (Narsi) and Mihr are Iranian deities. Nana, Muzhduwan and Mihr (namely Mirro) have appeared on Kaniska coins, while Aurmuzd appears on Huviska coins. As seen from this inscription, the Kushan King directly orders the craftsman who created these statues of Iranian deities. Some idols of these deities are not found on the currently unearthed Kushan coins.

The practice of depicting deities from various religious beliefs on Kaniska coins was inherited by Huviska. The variety of Iranian deities depicted on Huviska coins was further expanded to 18 deities: Ardoxsho (25%), Mirro (20%), Mao (12%), Nana (11%), Shaoreo (5%), Athsho (2%), Oanindo (1%), Oaxsho (1%), Modano (1%), Sarapis (1%), Rishti (less than 1%), Teiro (less than 1%), Ahura Mazda (less than 1%), Ashaixsho (less than 1%), Lrooaspo (less than 1%), Yamsho (less than 1%) and Oado (n/a) on Huviska coins (Bracey, 2012: 203).

The image of Ahura Mazda on Huviska coins shows the deity facing left, with a halo, holding a staff in the left hand, diadem in extended right hand, there is a Bactrian legend to the right: ωOPOMOZΔO (Jongeward & Cribb & Donovan, 2015: 291). It is evident that Ahura Mazda on Huviska coins is also depicted using personification. However, in the Parthian era, near the same period as the Kushan, Ahura Mazda's image follows the traditions of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty. He is represented by a portrait of a human head with two wings, a winged solar disk, and a human head with a winged solar disk on Parthian seals and the coins of subordinate governors of Frataraka (Sun, 2015: 99-108). This shows that the image of Ahura Mazda on Huviska coins is completely different from the image of Ahura Mazda in Persian specific territories. The image of Ahura Mazda on Huviska coins is independently generated based on the Kushan coins.

In addition to Mirro, Mao and Ahura Mazda as mentioned earlier, it is also noted that the ratio of the goddess Nana based on Huviska coins has significantly decreased compared to Kaniska coins. In Huviska coins, Ardoxsho, the goddess of harvest, is the most frequently seen Iranian deity idol with a 25% proportion (Fig. 9). The proportion of Pharro has also increased to 11% (Fig. 10), which is now equivalent to the proportion of the Goddess Nana. The proportions of Mirro and Mao have changed slightly during the Huviska era, the status of the goddess Nana, who symbolizes the divine right of kings, has declined in terms of the proportion of coins alone. Instead, Ardoxsho, the goddess of harvest and wealth, and Pharro, the god of wealth, have risen in status. *Fufazang Yinyuanzhuan*, a biography of Buddhism, describes the end of Kaniska's rule, as follows.



Fig. 10: Pharro is depicted on a Kushan Huviska coin (<https://www.zeno.ru/showphoto.php?photo=285466>).

Then, the minister gathered brave generals and prepared four armies. All of their opponents were defeated just as the grass is destroyed by hail. People from three different seas (or regions) succumbed while on patrol Kaniṣhka's horse broke its leg. The king said to his horse: "I have conquered three seas (or regions). All submit to me except the North Sea. If I acquire it, I will no longer ride on you. Now my career is not yet fulfilled, so, why do you behave like this?" Upon hearing this, Kaniṣhka's ministers spoke amongst themselves: "The king is insatiable and wants to conquer all four seas. (Then we would have to) serve in remote frontiers away from our family members and relatives. When will this suffering end? We should cooperate to get rid of him, then we will be happy". When the king fell ill, they covered him with a quilt and a man sat on top of it; In no time, the king was dead".

If the record of *Fufazang Yinyuanzhuan* is accurate, then during the Huviska era, the shift in the status of the goddess Nana, who symbolizes the divine right of kings, and the elevation of the goddess Ardoxsho, who represents harvest and wealth, along with the god of wealth Pharro, can be attributed to Kanishka's exhaustion and subsequent assassination by his subordinates. This event led to a decline in the royal power of Kushan. The new ruler, Huviska, placed value on agriculture and wealth, which resulted in changes in the proportion of different deities on his coins.

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Despite the coin and reliquary, there is also a textile depicting the image of Huviska ascending to the throne; This textile, which is severely damaged, can be related to the Kushan's Iranian faith; The work depicts two men behind the coronation of Huviska in the remaining left half. Some scholars suggest that these men may be Zoroastrian priests preparing to worship the sacred flame (Grenet, 2015: 225-227); However, there is still a lack of direct evidence linking the textile to the Kushan's Iranian faith.

In 2004, the Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired four Kushan ceramic flat paintings from Bactria. Three complete ceramic flat paintings depict respectively worshipers dressed in Kushan style clothing with their hands clasped in adoration, as well as anthropomorphic deities. Although damaged, the four paintings still show an anthropomorphic deity. Two of the works show the deity Shiva / Oesho, one depicts the deity of Iranian wealth Pharro (Fig. 11), and the fourth is uncertain as to whether it shows the Greek deity Zeus / Serapis or the Iranian deity Ohrmazd (Fig. 12). These four paintings date back to the third century AD. by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. When considering the content, it reflects, the Sasanian Persian cultural influence is clearly absent during the era of Kushano-Sasanian. Instead, the Kushan Pantheon is prominent during the reigns of Kaniska and Huviska. Therefore, we can infer that these four paintings belong to be the reigns of Kaniska and Huviska (127 to 187 AD).

During the Vasudeva period followed the reign of Huviska in Kushan significant changes occurred in both the Kushan political situation and the deities depicted on Kushan coins. On one hand, the emerging Sasanian Persians had conquered important areas such as Bactria, Gandhara, Taxila and etc., which were originally under Kushan rule. On the other hand, the Vasudeva coins also changed the characteristics of the Iranian and Indian pantheon seen on the Kaniska and Huviska coins, introducing only Indian deity of Shiva / Oesho.

From the late Kushan period onwards, the Kushans reconquered Gandhara and Taxila. The Iranian goddess of harvest and wealth, Ardoxsho, appeared successively on the coins of Kaniska II, Vasiska, Kaniska III, Vasudeva II, Mahi, Shaka, Kipunadha and Gadahara (Du, 2012: 149-171). The Bactrian script, APΔOXPO, in was appeared on the coins of Kaniska II and Vasiska, but afterwards, the inscriptions (legends) disappeared or became unreadable (Jongeward & Cribb & Donovan, 2015: 264-297). The image of goddess Ardoxsho on coins was gradually linearization and stylization, the identity of Ardoxsho can only be identified by its profile (figs. 13-14). Therefore,



Fig. 11: The deity of wealth Pharro and a worshipper are depicted on a painted ceramic (<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/327829>).

from the perspective of coins, the polytheism idolatry worship of Iranian faith was in a continuous decline process during late Kushan era.

### **Polytheism Idolatry and Worship of Iranian Faith in Kushano-Sasanian Periods**

Contemporaneous with the late Kushan era, the Sasanian Persian Dynasty established the Kushano-Sasanian, the historical chronology of the Kushano-Sasanian after conquering regions like Bactria. The historical chronology of the Kushano-sasanian is ambiguous, leading scholars to propose a tentative chronology based on evidence such as coins and literature. They place the era of the Kushano-Sasanian kings between 230 and 350 AD., and arrange the order of their rule accordingly (Cribb, 1990: 171). Hormizd I and Hormizd II, who dominated Kushano-Sasanian from 270 to 303 AD. Hormizd's name is derived from the name of the supreme God, Ahura Mazda (Gong & Yan, 1998: 155). Similarly, the Kushans once named their kings after deities such as, Vasudeva, the Indian deity Krishna (Jongeward & Cribb & Donovan, 2015: 135).



Fig. 12: The deities Zeus / Serapis / and Ohrmazd along with a worshiper are depicted on a painted ceramic (<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/327830>).



Fig. 13: Ardoxsho and Kushan Kaniska II coin (<https://www.zeno.ru/showphoto.php?photo=280101>).



Fig. 14: Ardoxsho on Kushan Vasudeva II coin (<https://www.zeno.ru/showphoto.php?photo=96496>).

Moreover, the names of Hormizd I and Hormizd II can be seen in a Bactrian document from the Kushano-Sasanian era. Also, this name has been confirmed in the Post-Sasanian documents discovered in northern Afghanistan; This name is often referred to as  $\omega\rho\mu\omega\zeta\delta\omicron$  or  $\omega\rho\rho\mu\omega\zeta\delta\omicron$  (all are different spelling forms of “Ahura Mazda”). One set of letters can clearly state its era as the reign of Waeahran in Kushano-Sasanian (359/360 AD.). Among them, a lord and a weaver named  $\omega\rho\mu\omega\zeta\delta\omicron$  mentioned (Sims-Williams, 2000: 38, 39, 48, 49, 50, 52, 53, 160, 161, 166, 167, 234; Sims-Williams, 2014: 45, 162, 166, 291, 294, 295, 656). In fact, in the Kushano-Sasanian era, many individuals took inspiration for their names from “Ahura Mazda” including the monarchs, lords and common people of the period. As a result, the worship of Ahura Mazda became the mainstream practice among various social classes.

In terms of gold and copper coins, Kushano-Sasanian kings inherited the style of the Kushan Dynasty, especially Vasudeva coins. One copper coin, minted by an unknown king, who ruled Bactria around 230 AD. features the portrait of the monarch on the obverse. This coin also contains the Pahlavi inscription “kwsan mlka mlwy mlka” (Kushan King Merv King); The reverse of the coin showcases the Iranian water goddess, Anahita. She is depicted standing with her head turned to the left (profile), facing the standing king; With her right hand, she is bestowing a Kushan style crown upon the king. The king is wearing a Sasanian style tunic, and his right hand is making a gesture of accepting the crown bestowed by the goddess Anahita. This is an interpretable part of the Pahlavi inscription: ‘anhyt(y) mrwta / kwsan mlka mlwy mlka’ (Lady Anahita, Kushan King Merv King) (Fig. 15). During the Sasanian Persian Dynasty era, the names and images of Anahita and Nana were widely merged (Yang, 2010: 105); but another viewpoint is that Kushan deity Nana in Bactrian script is Sasanian deity Anahita in Farsi (Gribb, 1998: 91-92). The goddess Nana bestowed the title upon a Kushan king in Kaniska’s reign. This coin represents the goddess Anahita bestowing the title to the Kushano-Sasanian king in the Sasanian Persian period. Later, the Iranian sun deity Mirro (Mithra) and water goddess, Anahita, appear on the copper coin of Kushano-Sasanian King Ardashir. Specifically, there is a Pahlavi inscription ‘mzdysn bgy arthshtr rba



Fig. 15: The Kushano-Sasanian coin featuring the goddess Anahita, grants the king divine rights (<https://www.zeno.ru/showphoto.php?photo=151355>).

kwshan mlka' (Mazda-worshipper, Ardashir, the great Kushan king) on the obverse of the work known as Anahita's coin. On the coin of Hormizd II, Anahita or Nana emerges as a half-figure from the top of the Sasanian fire altar (Jongeward & Cribb & Donovan, 2015: 202, 203, 204, 217; Sinisi, 2015: 208). However, in the Sasanian mainland, on some coins, Lord God Ahura Mazda or the monarch himself emerges as a half-figure from the top of the Sasanian fire altar (Gong & Yan, 1998: 212). On the Ardashir copper coin, struck in Balkh, the god Mithra is depicted seated; He holds a sword in his left hand, appears to hold a crown in his right hand, and is wearing a Sasanian trousers. The coin features the Bactrian inscription BOFO MIYPO (god Mithra) (Sinisi, 2015: 204). This combination suggests a fusion of Zoroastrian Ahura Mazda worship and rituals in the Iranian mainland with the idols of Iranian deities in the Kushan region.

The silver, and partially gold, copper coins of Kushano-Sasanian use the style of the Sasanian Persian coin. The obverse of this coin features the portrait of the Kushano-Sasanian monarch, while the reverse features the fire-altar and two priests (Li, 2008: 216-224). This is a manifestation of aniconism in orthodox Persian Zoroastrianism. Obviously, with the conquest of Bactria and other places by the Sasanians, orthodox Persian Zoroastrianism spread once again in Bactria and other places during the era of Kushano-Sasanian. It is worth pointing out that there has always been a debate in the academic community regarding the identity of the two priests on both sides of the fire altar on the reverse of Sasanian Persian silver coins. However, on the Sasanian Persian silver coins starting from Varahran II, one of the priests wears a crown on his head, indicating that he is the monarch (Gong & Yan, 1998: 211).

### **Polytheism Idolatry Worship of Iranian Faith in Kidara Kushan Period**

Following the Kushano-Sasanian period, Kidara dominated Bactria and Gandhara. In Chinese historical records, the Weishu, Biography of the Western Regions describes Kidara as Yuezhi (Kushan) (Wei, 1974: 2275, 2277). However, in Byzantine historical records, the history of Priscus describes Kidara as a Hun (Yu, 2018: 1-6). Clearly, the Kidara who ruled over the Sogdians identified themselves as both Huns and Kushans

(Vondrovec, 2014: 48) based on a Bactrian inscription unearthed in the Sogdian region: (ρ?) ζ[...]ο βαγο ολαργο υοναν(ο) βαο ο(α)ζ(αρκ)ο (κ)οβανοβαο σαμ(α)ρκ(α)[v]δο (αφβ)μ(α)νο (... lord Ularg, the king of Huns, the great Kushan-shah, the afshiyani of Samarkand). Meanwhile, both Chinese and Byzantine historical records only refer to them by one of these names (Chinese historical records refer to Kushan and Byzantine historical record to Hun).

The style of the silver coins sent to Kidara Kushan is influenced by Sasanian Persia and Kushano-Sasanian silver coins. The reverse of this series of the coin features the fire altar and two priests. One of the silver coins has a Brahmi inscription: “duddhami” in the blank space, which means ‘buddhami’ (Vondrovec, 2014: 68). Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and Brahmanism were all confused in the Bactrian region following the Kushan Dynasty. Xuanzang, during the early Tang Dynasty, also documented some stories of religious competition in this area in his book *“Records of the Western Regions of the Great Tang Dynasty”*. The text writes:

In the past Xitiedamodi (\*Dar-i Mašit) Country didn’t believe in Buddhism rather than Evil God, Buddhism was introduced hundreds of years ago. At first, the beloved son of this king was sick; all medical skills had been exhausted, but there was no therapeutic effect. The king went to the Temple of Heaven, and conducted worship. The temple’s abbot spoke for God, “don’t worry, the king’s son will definitely recover”. The king was very happy to hear this and went back. On the way, the king encountered a well-physiognomy monk. The king was surprised by the monk’s attire, so he asked the monk where he came from. The monk who had already achieved enlightenment and was dressed in a manner to promote Buddhism, replied to the king, saying: “I am Tathagata’s student, so-called Buddhist monk”. The king asked because he was very worried for his son: “My son is sick, and life and death are unpredictable”. The monk replied: “The gods of your ancestors can be summoned back, but your beloved son is beyond hope”. The king said: “The Heaven God has declared that my son is not die, while the monk said my son will die; how can I trust the words of a charlatan monk who claims otherwise?” The king returned to the palace with a peace of mind, only to discover that his beloved son had already passed away. The king concealed his son’s death and once again sought the device of the abbot of Heaven Temple; The abbot still said: “your son will not die, his illness will heal”. The king became angry and ordered someone to bind the abbot. He said: “You guys form a gang that tyrannically abuses power. My son is already dead, yet you claimed he would be healed; it is unbearable to deceive people like this. I must kill the abbot and destroy the temple”. Therefore, the king killed the abbot, eliminated the idol, and threw them into the Oxus River. On his way back, the king once again met the monk, whom he respectfully worshiped and said: “I did not receive good guidance before, which is why I have been lost in heterodoxy for so long. This corruption has been passed down to the present day. I hope you can come to my palace!” The monk accepted the invitation and went to the king’s palace. After



burying his son, the king said to the monk: “The constant flow of life and death in this world. My son was sick and when I asked about his fate, the God deceived me by saying that he would be in heal. What you said earlier was indeed correct. This proves that Buddhism is trustworthy. Please have mercy on me and guide this confused disciple!” The king then invited the monk to plan a temple, and following the rules of Buddhism, they built temples. Henceforth, Buddhism has become prosperous (Xuanzang & Bianji, 1985:976-977).

Apart from clear evidence, it is still difficult to distinguish whether the heterodox heaven god in the old haunt of Tochari mentioned by Xuanzang belongs to Zoroastrianism or the worship of Mahavairocana (Shiva) in Brahmanism. However, this story can illustrate that hundreds of years before the early Tang Dynasty, Buddhism had fierce competition with other religions in Bactria. This drachm of Kidara Kushan, which features both Persian Orthodox Zoroastrian priests and a fire altar, as well as Buddhist related inscriptions, can be considered a symbol of the competition between Zoroastrianism and Buddhism.

Some of the Kidara Kushan copper coins inherit the styles reminiscent of the late Kushans. On these coins, there is the image of the goddess Ardoxsho, but the linearity and stylization of the statue are more pronounced; there is no legends with Ardoxsho image; her identity can only be identified by the cornucopia she holds in her hand (Fig. 16) (Vondrovec, 2014: 79, 81, 93). Additionally, there is a solitary fire altar on another Kidara Kushan coin, with a similar image of fire altar appearing on a seal (Callieri, 1998: 70). This indicates that the idolatry of Iranian polytheism further declined during the Kidara Kushan era.



Fig. 16: Ardoxsho is depicted on a Kidara Kushan coin (<https://www.zeno.ru/showphoto.php?photo=197629>).

## Conclusion

In summary, the idolatrous worship of Dayuezhi’s Iranian faith was influenced by both orthodox Zoroastrianism and indigenous Iranian faith during that time. Kushan was influenced by Greek religious art and also by Buddhism statuary art. The worship of polytheistic idolatry in Iranian faith had been entirely established and flourished during the reigns of Kaniska and Huvishka. The coins of the Kushano-Sasanian era have provided information about the orthodox Zoroastrianism of Sasanian Persia which had conquered the region. Consequently, the worship of polytheism idols in Iranian

faith began to gradually decline during the late Kushan and Kushano-Sasanian periods. Polytheism, the idolatrous worship in Iranian faith was further declining towards the end of the Kidara Kushan period as evidenced by the coins.

### Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Daryoosh Akbarzadeh for he proofreading my thesis and writing the Persian abstract. I also appreciate Qi Xiaoqing's assistance in coordinating.

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## ریشه‌های بت پرستی شرک‌آمیز کوشانی-ایرانی بر پایه سکه‌ها و دیگر اسناد تاریخی

وی یوان<sup>I</sup>

نوع مقاله: پژوهشی  
 صص: ۱۱۲ - ۸۹

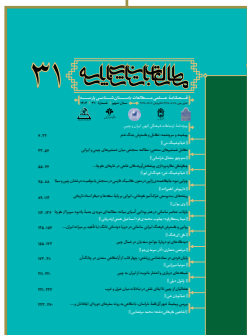
تاریخ دریافت: ۱۴۰۳/۱۰/۱۶؛ تاریخ بازنگری: ۱۴۰۳/۱۱/۱۸؛ تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۳/۱۱/۲۲

شناسه دیجیتال (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.22034/PJAS.1237>

### چکیده

این پژوهش بر بت پرستی شرک‌آمیز دین کوشانی-ایرانی، بر پایه سکه‌ها، آثار باستانی و دیگر اسناد تأکید دارد؛ با وجود این، مطالعات سکه‌شناسی اساس این جستار خواهد بود. این مطالعه می‌تواند در بردارنده نتایج پیش‌رو است؛ ریشه‌های بت پرستی دین ایرانی-دایوئه‌ژی (Dayuezhi): کوشان در منابع چینی؛ م. را می‌توان نتیجه ترکیبی از ارتدوکس (بدعت) زرتشتی و عناصر دین بومی ایرانی به دوره دایوئه‌ژی ارزیابی کرد؛ هم‌چنین فرهنگ کوشانیان به شدت تحت تأثیر هنر دینی یونان و سپسین‌تر از هنر پیکرتراشی بودایی قرار گرفت. در واقع، پرستش چندخدایی برگرفته از باور زرتشتی) ایرانی به دوران پادشاهی «کانیشکا» و «هویشکا» کاملاً تثبیت و شکوفا شد. از شمار ایزدان ایرانی می‌توان به ایزد «نه‌نه» (Na Na) «مهر» (Mirro)، «ماه» (Mao)، «بهرام» (Orlagno)، «آذر» (Athsho)، «اشی» (Ardoxsho)، «وهومن» (Manaobago) ... اشاره کرد. سکه‌های کوشانی-ساسانی داده‌هایی در مورد پیدایی ارتدوکس زرتشتی در زمان ساسانیان که منطقه را گشودند، به دست می‌دهند. روایی بت پرستی شرک‌آمیز در آئین ایرانی به تدریج و به پایان دوره کوشانی و کوشانی-ساسانی رو به کاهش گذاشت. این کم‌رنگی، آن‌گونه که از سکه‌ها پیداست، تا به دوره «کیداری-کوشانی» ادامه یافت.

**کلیدواژگان:** سکه، کوشان، ایران، بت پرستی، شرک.



فصلنامه علمی مطالعات باستان‌شناسی پارسه  
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ارجاع به مقاله: وی، یوان، و، «ریشه‌های بت پرستی شرک‌آمیز کوشانی-ایرانی بر پایه سکه‌ها و دیگر اسناد تاریخی». مطالعات باستان‌شناسی پارسه، ۹ (۳۱): ۸۹-۱۱۲. <https://doi.org/10.22034/PJAS.1237>  
 صفحه اصلی مقاله در سامانه نشریه: <https://journal.richt.ir/mbp/article-1-1237-fa.html>

## مقدمه

پژوهش در موضوع ریشه‌های بت‌پرستی شرک‌آمیز کوشانی-ایرانی با مباحث دینی (خدایان) هندوسکایی و بر پایه سکه‌شناسی به سده ۱۹ م. برمی‌گردد. پژوهش‌های دو دهه گذشته درباره دین کوشانی-ایرانی به دستاوردهای جدیدی فرجامیده است. باوجود این، نگارنده تلاش خواهد کرد تا این موضوع را بر پایه سکه‌های موجود از دوره دایوئه‌ژی (سده نخست میلادی، از زمان نامیدن این قوم بدین نام در منابع چینی)، و دوره معروف به «کوشانی-ایرانی» و نیز «کیداری-کوشانی» تحلیل نماید.

بس آشکار است که دین زرتشتی از راه دو مسیر، یعنی سنت اصیل زرتشتی با خاستگاه سرزمین اصلی ایران و دیگری زرتشتی سغدی شده، آسیای میانه را تحت تأثیر خود قرار داد. در دین اصیل، اورمزد خدای برتر، اما در زرتشتی سغدی، که ایزدان زرتشتی حفظ شده‌اند، خدایان دیگر چون ایزدبانو «نه‌نه» (نانی) نیز وارد شده است؛ افزون‌تر، سغدی‌ان در نوع نگارش و پیکرنگاری، که درهم‌آمیخته با عناصر غیر زرتشتی است، با زرتشتیان ساسانی (که فاقد آن است) تفاوت بسیار دارند؛ از سویی دیگر، پیوندهای فرهنگی نزدیکی میان سغدی‌ان و کوشانیان در آسیای میانه نیز دیده می‌شود. برخی از عناصر فرهنگی ایران از راه سکه‌های کوشانی، «هان شرقی» چین را نیز تحت تأثیر خود قرار داد.

بر اساس مشاهدات «ژانگ شیان»، در نخستین ماموریتش به «مرزهای غربی» به سال ۱۲۸ پ.م.، گروه دایوئه‌ژی در حدود ۱۳۵ پ.م.، به شمال بلخ در آسیای مرکزی رسیدند و به‌طور غیرمستقیم بر بلخ (داشی) حکومت کردند. این گروه باورهایی نزدیک به مردم «آن-شی» (اشکانی) داشت و زرتشتی‌گری در میان آنان روایی داشت. یکی از پارچه‌ها به دست آمده از سده نخست میلادی از مغولستان در بردارنده نگاره ۱۳ مرد است. در گوشه سمت راست، نگاره یک موبد آشکارا دیده می‌شود؛ در سمت چپ این موبد، نگاره آتشدان زرتشتی نگاریده شده است. باوجود این، در سمت چپ آتشدان، نگاره مردی پیشکش در دست و با یک پیشانی‌بند از نوع پیشانی‌بند گروه‌های بیابانگرد (آسیای میانه) دیده می‌شود. این مرد به گمانی پادشاه دایوئه‌ژی است. این نگاره نمونه‌برداری از نگاره‌های موجود بر روی سکه‌های ساسانی که بازتابی از آتشدان زرتشتی و نگاره شاه است. لباس این شخص همان است که دایوئه‌ژی (کوشانیان) در بلخ بر تن داشته و کتاب نان-ژو-ای-وو-ژی (Nanzhouyiwuzhi) از «وان ژن» (Wan Zhen) آن را به توصیف آورده است. این کتاب توصیفی دقیق از موقعیت و پوشش این گروه به دست می‌دهد. باوجود این، نمی‌توان منکر درهم‌آمیختگی عناصر هلنی با میراث زرتشتی در این کران جغرافیایی شد. پیکرپرستی در ایران به روزگار کهن و دوره سلوکی برمی‌گردد.

بر روی دو گونه از سکه‌های دایوئه‌ژی (کوشانی)، نگاره ایزدبانوی ایرانی «نه‌نه» به خوبی دیده می‌شود؛ یکی از این سکه‌ها از آن «سپدبیز» (Sapadbizes)، فرمانروای بلخ باختری) یونانی است. این سکه آشکارا دارای نام وی به یونانی، نام ایزدبانوی ایرانی و نشان «هلال ماه» است. آثار دیگری نیز از گورهای «تیلیاتپه» (Tillya Tepe) چون سکه‌های زرین هندی با نوشته‌های «خروشتی» به دست آمده است که هرچند

برای این موضوع (بالا) مهم، اما نمی‌توان با اطمینان به پیوند آن‌ها با ایزدبانوی ایرانی گواهی کرد.

داده‌های باستان‌شناختی در دسترس هیچ نشانی از ایزدان ایرانی در ده‌های نخستین کوشانی چون دوره شاهانی «کوجولا کدفیز» (Kujula Kadphises)، «ویمه تکتو» (Wima Taktu) و «ویمه کدفیز» (Wima Kadphises) مانند آن به دست نمی‌دهد. با بر تخت نشینی کانیشکا (۱۲۸/۱۲۷ م.) شاهد پیدایی عناصری چون نگاره ایزدان هندی و ایرانی به فراوانی بر روی سکه‌ها هستیم؛ او دگرگونی بنیادی در سکه‌ها آفرید. کتیبه «استل ربتک» نیز گواه این موضوع است. سکه‌های وی به دو گونه دارای کتیبه‌های یونانی و گونه دیگر دارای کتیبه بلخی قابل فهم است. نگاره «نه نه»، ایزد ایرانی، در کنار «هلیوس»، ایزد یونانی خورشید (که به همتای ایرانی خود بس همانند است) بر روی سکه‌های وی به پیدایی می‌آیند. بر روی این سکه‌ها، ایزد ایرانی با هاله نور و هلال ماه در بالای سر نگاریده شده است. در سنجش با نگاره‌های شیر به عنوان نماد ایزد بانوی نه نه به دوره دایوژی پیش کانیشکا، شاهد تغییر به استفاده از نگاره‌های انسانی برای نمایش نگاره ایزدبانو در دوره این شاه هستیم. افزون‌تر، ایزدان ایرانی چون: «نه نه» (Na Na) «مهر» (Mirro)، «ماه» (Mao)، «بهرام» (Orlagno)، «آذر» (Athsho)، «اشی» (Ardoxsho)، «وهومن» (Manaobago)، «فره» (Pharro)، «ایزد اسب» (Lrooaspo)، «ایزد بخشندگی» (Mozdoosano) برابر با شیوای هندی، «وایو» (Oado) بر روی گونه سکه‌های کانیشکا با کتیبه‌های بلخی دیده می‌شوند. با وجود این، نگاره نه نه بر روی سکه‌های کانیشکا با نوشته بلخی همانند همین نگاره بر روی سکه‌های وی با کتیبه‌های بلخی است. بر روی یکی از ظروف سیمین مربوط به سال ۱۰ از پادشاهی کانیشکا آشکارا چنین آمده است که: «نه نه شاهی را به کانیشکا، شاه شاهان، شاه کوشان ارزانی فرمود.» افزون‌تر، به دوره وی عنوان «ایزدبانو نه نه» به «شاه نه نه» دگرگون شده است. هم‌چنین، نگاره‌ای از اورمزد بر روی سکه‌های کانیشکا یافت نمی‌شود. بایسته بیادآوری است که بر روی سکه‌های «هویشکا»، جانشین کانیشکا، نیز نگاره اورمزد بر روی سکه‌ها بس ناچیز است. واقعیت این است که جایگاه ایزدبانو نه نه در دایره خدایان دوره کانیشکا در بالاترین مرتبه قرار دارد.

بر روی سکه‌های کانیشکا، ایزد «مهر و هلیوس» یونانی یکسان (برابر) نگاریده شده‌اند؛ ایزد «بهرام و ایندار» با هم بر روی یک اثر مفرغی از پیشاور (پاکستان) دیده می‌شوند. بر روی همین اثر، ایزدان ماه و مهر در پشتی از شاهی کانیشکا، وی را یاور هستند. نگاره این ایزدان، ماه و مهر، دقیقاً همانند نگاره‌های این دو بر روی سکه‌های هویشکا (نه کانیشکا) است. ایزدان ایرانی دوره کوشانی از راه نوشته «استل ربتک» نیز شناخته شده‌اند؛ از این شمار باید به «نه نه»، اورمزد، سروش، نرسی و مهر اشاره کرد.

### نتیجه‌گیری

واقعیت این است که دایوژی (کوشانیان) هم از ارتدکس زرتشتی و هم دین هندی به شدت تحت تأثیر قرار گرفت. افزون‌تر، نمی‌توان منکر نفوذ هنر یونانی و شیوه

پیکرنگاری بودایی شد. اسناد و مدارک روشن به‌ویژه منابع چینی از رقابت و آمیزش دین‌های مختلف در کران جغرافیایی بلخ سخن داده است؛ این آمیزش به دوران کهن‌سال و به پیش از دوره شاهنشاهی تانگ (چین) برمی‌گردد. سکه‌های کیداری-کوشانی از یک‌سو دارای نگاره آتشدان و موبدان پارسی زرتشتی است؛ و از سوی دیگر، دربردارنده نوشته و نمادهای بودایی است. این اسناد کمترین میراث شناخت رقابت و درهم‌آمیختگی ادیان متفاوت در این کران جغرافیایی است. این آمیزه دینی به دوران پادشاهی کانیشکا و سپس هویشکا به شکوفایی تمام رسید.

