



**THE IMPLICATION OF THE DATA IN THE RABATAK INSCRIPTION OF  
 KANISHKA-I ON THE EXTENT OF THE KUSHANA EMPIRE- THE RECENT  
 FINDING**

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**Abstract**

*Epigraphy in recent years has become a significant source for the historical reconstruction. Particularly the area where there is scarcity of literary sources and other material remains, epigraphy plays a significant role. The role of the inscriptions has many a times proved so crucial that it has changed the established notions of history. The Rabatak inscription may be cited as the best example of it. This record has almost changed the course of the Kushana history which the scholars working on the history in general and Kushana history in particular have travelled approximately for last hundred years. This inscription gives an exhaustive account of the genealogy of the imperial Kushanas which until the discovery of the inscription was disputable among the scholars across the world. Apart from the genealogical description the epigraph throws a welcome light on the extent of the empire of Kanishka I, the greatest among the Kushana monarchs. The description attracts attention as it bears year one of Kanishka's regnal year as the date of its issuing. The present paper deals with the content of the Rabatak inscription and its implication on the extent of Kanishka's empire in northern India. The data of the epigraph under study has been corroborated with some other sources pertaining to the contemporary period of Indian history.*

**Keywords:** *Kushana, Kanishka-I, Rabataka, Hou Han-shu, Kshatrapa*



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An inscription belonging to the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, issued by the Kushana king Kanishka-I on a stone slab was discovered from Rabatak (Baghlan, Afghanistan) in 1993. It has been edited by N. Sims-Williams of the School of Oriental and African Studies. Several scholars like Joe Cribb, B.N. Mukherjee and N. Simms Williams himself have interpreted the data contained in the inscription.

The inscription is in Bactrian language and contains the data regarding the genealogy of the Kushanas, names of Greek and Indian gods and goddesses and names of certain provinces, cities and regions under Kanishka-I and so on.

The present paper deals with the cities and regions mentioned in the inscription. Kanishka-I is referred to issuing orders to the governors or rulers of the provinces and the heads of the cities. The areas mentioned in the inscription are *Koonadeano*, *Ozene*, *Kozambo*, *Zageda*, *palabotaro* and *Ziri-Tambo*. These regions are nowhere mentioned by Kujula and V'ima Kadphises while Kanishka-I is mentioning them in the year one of his reign.

When we go through the data and analyze it, certain questions arise like whether Kanishka-I got these territories in inheritance or they were actually conquered by him? The question here is not of the conquest but is of the time as the inscription bears the date of the year one as mentioned earlier. Is it possible for a ruler to conquer the above mentioned regions situated in the different parts of the country within one year?

Before discussing the regions mentioned in the inscription let us discuss in brief about the empire which Kanishka-I got from his ancestors in inheritance. Starting with Kujula Kadphises, we have the references in the *Hou Han-shu* that Ch'iu-Ch'iu- Ch'ueh or Kujula Kadphises made himself master of the rest of *Ta-hia* and invaded An-hsi, took away the country of Kao-fu and moreover destroyed P'u-ta and Chi-pin."<sup>1</sup> The statement of *Hou Han-shu* makes it clear that Kujula Kadphises conquered Kao-fu, identified with Kabul area from the An-hsi or the Arssacid Empire. If the information in the *Hou Han-shu* is correct, P'u-ta (identified in the Bactria) and Chi-pin (Kashmir region) were under Kujula Kadphises which clearly indicate the extent of his empire in the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent, now in Afghanistan. He is said to have conquered Taxila around c. 45-46 CE from the Parthians.<sup>2</sup> This progress of Kujula Kadphises may also be verified by the presence of his "seated male: Zeus standing with a scepter" type of coin in the region.<sup>3</sup>

After Kujula Kadphises, Vima Takto (Saddashkana) became the ruler as is being mentioned in the inscription under study. The authenticity of Vima Takto is still a debatable issue lacking consensus among the scholars. After Vima Takto, V'ima Kadphises ascended to the throne. Regarding the extent of the empire of V'ima Kadphises we may take into consideration an inscription on the pedestal of the image of a king at Mat (near Mathura). We have found a sanctuary or a *devakula* at Mat which is said to have been founded during the reign of V'ima Takshuma as we find a reference regarding this in another inscription found at the same site in which the temple (*devakula*) is referred to as belonging to the grandfather of Huvishka. It is known that V'ima Kadphises was grandfather of Huvishka.<sup>4</sup> Besides this the *Hou Han-shu* provides the information that Yen-kao-Chen conquered *T'ien-chi* or *Shen-tu* which made the Yueh-chih extremely rich. Yen- Kao- chen of the *Hou Han-shu* is identified

with V'ima Kadphises and Shen-tu as *Sindhu* or *Sindh*.<sup>5</sup> The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*<sup>6</sup> perhaps mentions the same territory which was included in the regions of Scythia.<sup>7</sup> It provides information regarding the struggle among the Parthian provinces of Scythia. These Parthians were probably the successors of Gondophares<sup>8</sup> who were in the Lower Indus country at the time of the invasion of Kushanas most probably V'ima Kadphises.

Thus we may say that the extent of the empire of V'ima Kadphises should be at least up to Mathura in the Eastern India and the Sindhu region in the Western India if not beyond.

Till now we have discussed the Kushana Empire at the time of Kanishka's accession to the throne. Now we shall deal with the provinces and cities one by one which Kanishka-I boasts of or claims having within his empire in the year one of his reign. For our convenience we may study it in two parts:

1. Cities or provinces in eastern India
2. Cities or provinces in western India

The cities in eastern India as mentioned in the record are *Kozambo*, *Zageda*, *Palabotaro* and *Ziri-Tambo*. *Kozambo* may be identified with Kausambi which was the capital of Vatsa Mahajanapada and at present it is known as Kosam in the Allhabad district of Uttar Pradesh. Some inscriptions of the reign of Kanishka-I have been discovered from Kausambi. An inscription of year 2 for example refers to Kanishka who may be identified with Kanishka-I.<sup>9</sup>

Besides this G.R. Sharma, while excavating Kausambi has found two more inscriptions. Common in both of them is the name of the nun (*bhikhuni*) Buddhmitra.<sup>10</sup> The first epigraph read:

1. *Maharajasa Kan (i) ska.....5 (?)*  
*Bodhisattvam part (i)*
- 2 *Yati bhikhuni Buddhmitra (trepitika Bhagava)*

The inscription is same like that of the inscription of year 2 of Kanishka-I. It is engraved on the base of a Mathura (Karri) red sand-stone Bodhisattva image.

The second record also shares the same feature of the religious act of Buddhmitra.<sup>11</sup>

It read:

- 1 *Maharajasya.....6 He 3.....*
- 2 *Buddhamitraye trepitikaye*
- 3 *pito bhagavato Buddhasya ca (m) krame.*

Kanishka's name is clearly mentioned in the first epigraph but in the second epigraph it is missing but the style of sculpture and manner of dating and above all the mention of the nun Buddhmitra makes it almost clear that it should be during the time of Kanishka-I.<sup>12</sup>

A sealing found from Kausambi is another valuable finding. It is rectangular in shape and has the impression of the double threads in the lug which clearly indicates that it was affixed to some royal document.<sup>13</sup> Its back bears the finger prints.

The legend read:

1. (M)aharajasya rajati
2. rajasya devaputrasya
3. Kaniskasya Prayo
4. ga

Besides these evidences the excavations have brought up a large number of Kushana coins all of copper, struck in the name of Kanishka, Huvishka and Vasudeva.<sup>14</sup>

All these evidences from Kausambi definitely make us to believe that Kausambi must be a territory of Kushanas during the reign of Kanishka-I

*Zagedo* has been identified with Saketa near Ayodhya in the Fyzabad district of Uttar Pradesh. The Tibetan work *Li-yul-gyi lo-rgys* states that "originally king Kanika, the king of Guzan and Li ruler, king Vijayakirti and others led an army into India and captured a city named So-ked."<sup>15</sup>

The *Hon Han-shu* also has the reference to the conquest of the Yueh-Chi of a country called Tung-li with its capital at Sha-Chi.<sup>16</sup> Kanika may be identified as Kanishka-I, So-Ked and Sha-Chi as Saketa and Tung-Li with Kosala. Like Saketa, Sravasti was also within the boundaries of Kosala.<sup>17</sup> An Inscription from Sahet-Mahet or Sravasti records an act of merit by a monk in the reign of Kanishka-I.<sup>18</sup> In an excavation in a monastery at Sahet-Mahet the copper coins of Kanishka, Huvishka, Vasudeva-I and Vasudeva-II are found.<sup>19</sup> In a hoard of copper coins found at Tilaurakot (Nepalese Terai) an Indo Greek coin, two coins of Agnimitra, 1804 coins of V'ima Kadphises, Kanishka-I and Huvishka and 379 pieces of Ayumitra and Satyamitra have been found.<sup>20</sup>

Thus the evidences show that *Zagedo* or Saketa and the surrounding territories were under Kanishka-I.

Besides this we have the inscription of year 3 of Kanishka's reign from Sarnath which records the dedication made by Friar Bala. The inscription states that the image (of a Bodhisattva) and his umbrella with a post, gifted by Bala, were erected at Baranasi

(Varanasi). This record further provides the information that Kshatrapa Vanaspara and Kharapallana were associated with the merit. The inscription on the image states that this gift of Bala was actually installed by Mahakshatrapa Kharapallana and Kshatrapa Vanaspara.<sup>21</sup>

It may be noted that these Kshatrapas must be acting on the behalf of their ruler or sovereign who should be Kanishka-I. Hence Banaras (Varanasi) and Sarnath should be under his rule.

*Palabotra* that is *Palibothra* as also mentioned in the Greek writings may be identified with Patliputra, the capital of the Magadha Mahajanapadha. It is now known as Patna and is situated in south west Bihar.

Chinese sources provide the information regarding the activities of the Kushanas in the eastern India beyond Kosala and Kasi. The *Ta Chuang-yen-lun-ching*, the Chinese translation of Kumarlata's *Kalpanamandikta* done by Kumarjiva states, "among the *Chu-Sha* (Kushana) race there was a king named Chen-tan Chia-ni-Cha who made a punitive campaign against *Tung T'ien-Chu*. When had been pacified his majestic power made (that territory) tremble and his success was complete, and he returned to his native country".<sup>22</sup> In this description Chen-tan Chia-ni-Cha may be identified with Kanishka-I and T'ien-Chu as eastern India.

Chinese pilgrim Yuan Chwang narrates the story that the king of Patliputra is attacked by the king of the Yueh-chih called Chen-tan Chia-ni-Cha (Identified with Kanishka-I) and as a ransom he offers the most valuable things of his kingdom; the sage Asvaghosa, the Buddha's alms bowl and luck bringing cock.<sup>23</sup>

Another Chinese pilgrim Fa-hsien narrates the same story and claims that he had seen the Buddha's alms bowl.<sup>24</sup>

On the basis of these evidences we may say that the king of Patliputra had accepted the sovereignty of the Kushana ruler Kanishka-I

Ziri-Tambo is identified by B.N. Mukherjee with Champa or Sri Champa, in Baghalpur district of Bihar once the capital of Anga Mahajanapadha. But there is no reference of Kushana rule from this region. The only evidence is of a family having the title Meu-lun some where in north Bihar region and that too in the third century CE. If we assume the title of Kanishka-I a Muroda (*Murunda*) in the *Zeda* inscription<sup>25</sup> as similar to that of Meu-lun still, there is the problem of the date. Hence it is not clear that to which place Kanishka-I is mentioning as *Ziri-Tambo*.

After discussing the cities and provinces in eastern India now we shall discuss the regions of western India mentioned in the Rabatak inscription. These regions are *Koonadeano* and *Ozene*.

*Koonadeano* or Kaundinya has been identified with Kaundinyapura in the Amraoti district of Vidarbha or Berar in Maharashtra<sup>26</sup> and *Ozene* is identified with Ujjayini, the capital of Avanti Mahajanapada or the modern Ujjain in western Madhya Pradesh<sup>27</sup>

Taranatha in his work *Rgya-gar-chos-hbyun* states that Kanika was chosen as sovereign in the land of Tili and Malwa.<sup>28</sup> In the same way Sumpa Khan- Po mentions Kanika as a king of Palowa and Dili.<sup>29</sup> Malawa may have been written as Palawa by mistake. Sumpa states that Kanika and Asvaghosa were contemporaries.

Taranatha refers to the region of Malava under Kanika where diamond mines had been discovered. The word Akara literally means “mine”. These may be the same places or Akara may be a part of Malwa. Akara was first mentioned by Gautami Balashri in Nasik cave inscription where she describes Gautamiputra Satakarni as the lord of Akara. Junagarh inscription of Rudradaman-I also mentions Akaravanti as parts of his domains.<sup>30</sup> Ptolmey also refers to the same place where diamonds are found, he names it kosa<sup>31</sup> near the Oundian (Vindhyan) range on the bank of the Namados (Narmada) which should be in eastern Malwa.

Kushana rule in eastern Malwa may be traced through the inscription of Vas Kushana (Vasishka) of year 22 and of year 28 in Sanchi.<sup>32</sup> Since Kanishka-I ruled upto year 23 hence Sanchi should be in the empire of Kanishka –I.

The areas of Akara, Avanti and Vidarbha were under the western Kshatrapas who were the viceroys of the Kushanas. The relations of the Kushanas with the Kshatrapas of western India can be studied in the light of the *Hou Han-shu* and the *Kalkacharyakathanka*. The *Hou Han-shu* records the conquests of V'ima Kadphises of Tien-chu or Shen-tu as discussed earlier and this is possibly recorded in the *Kalkacharyakathanka* as his conquest. But later the Satavahana king Gautamiputra Satakarni claims the areas namely Asika, Asmaka, Mulaka, Saurashtra, Kukura, Aparant, Anupa, Vidarbha, and Akaravanti, under his reign. In fact, these areas are claimed under him by his mother Gautami Balsri in the Nasik prasasti.<sup>33</sup> Gautamiputra Satakarni probably defeated Nahapana in his 18<sup>th</sup> regnal year as his claims of regrating a land in the territory of Govardhana (including Nasik) which were under the control of Usvadata, the governer of Nahapana in a part of the western Deccan including Nasik.



If we take the date of accession of Gautamiputra Satakarni around c. 80-82 CE and he is doing all this in his 18<sup>th</sup> regnal year, he must have conquered the territories of Nahapana around c. 98-100 CE. He should have possessed these territories up to c. 106 CE as year 24 is his last known regnal year. Chashtana on the other side was the viceroy of the Kushanas in Kachchha (Nasik, Ujjain, and Broach) areas. Earlier he used the title Kshatrapa and later Mahakshatrapa. If Satavahanas were occupying their territories then the family of Chashtana particularly he himself and his grandson Rudradaman-I had to wait till c. 128-130 CE to declare themselves as Mahakshatrapas or the independent sovereign because after Gautamiputra Satakarni, his son Vasishthiputra Pulumavi ruled for 22 years hence the date goes to  $106 + 22 = 128$  CE.

However, in year 72 Rudradaman in his Junagarh inscription claims that he has attained the status of Mahakshatrapa himself (*svayamadhigatamahakshatrapanamah*) and claims the possession of the territories of Akara, Avanti, Sindhu and Sauvira, Malwa, Aparanta (north-western Deccan) and eastern Gujarat etc.<sup>34</sup> Most of these areas were wrested by his family from the Satavahnas. Thus we may say that the Kshatrapas were earlier the viceroys of the Kushanas particularly V<sup>ṛ</sup>ima Kadphises and Kanishka-I. Later they became independent as Rudradaman claims. Besides the western Kshatrapas there are instances of several Kushana Kshatrapas and Mahakshatrapas like Kharaapallana and Vanaspara (mentioned in sarnath inscription), Liaka (in Zeda inscription), Vespasi (Manikiala), Kapisa Kshatrapa, the son of the Kshatrapa G(r)-anavhryaka (Manikiala Bronze Casket) etc.<sup>35</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Through the close and careful examination of the statement of Kanishka-I regarding his extent of empire in the Rabatak inscription we come to the conclusion that there is no doubt that most of the provinces and regions were under Kanishka-I. The other sources which throw light on the Kushana history also contain almost same information regarding the empire of Kanishka-I as that in the Rabatak inscription. One thing is clear that the eastern Indian regions mentioned in the inscription were subdued by Kanishka-I himself because the empire of his predecessor V<sup>ṛ</sup>ima Kadphises was up to Mathura as discussed earlier. Kausambi, Saketa, Sahet-Mahet, Sarnatha and Patliputra etc. cities or regions are the proof of Kanishka's achievements. When we examine the territories of western India, we come to the conclusion that these probably were conquered by yen-kaio-chen or V<sup>ṛ</sup>ima Kadphises because we have never come across any definite evidence that Kanishka-I himself conquered the

regions of western India mentioned in the Rabatak inscription. The possibility is that he may have got them in inheritance.

The second question still remains unanswered whether these territories were conquered by Kanishka-I in his I<sup>st</sup> regnal year or before that. Practically speaking it is not possible for any one to conquer such a vast area within one year and that too in the first regnal year. The possibility is that he might have won one or two territories and others might have accepted his sovereignty. The other possibility is that he might have ruled as a co-ruler of V<sup>ima</sup> Kadphises as it was not uncommon among the Kushanas as we have the references of the later rulers in the dynasty like Kanishka-Vasishka ruling jointly the example of which is the Sanchi inscription of Vaskushana of year 22. While ruling jointly with V<sup>ima</sup> Kadphises he might have won these regions sometimes during the last years of V<sup>ima</sup> Kadphises and slightly before he himself ascended to the throne.

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