

# THE KIDARITE KINGDOM IN CENTRAL ASIA\*

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## Origin and rise of the Kidarites

The fourth century witnessed the appearance in Central Asia of a new wave of nomadic tribes known by a variety of names and recorded in numerous sources. By the Latin authors they were called Chionites, and by the Greek authors Kidarite Huns or 'Huns who are Kidarites'; in Indian chronicles they were known as Huna, in Armenian literature as both Honk' and Kushans, and in the Chinese annals as the Ta Yüeh-chih, or Lesser Yüeh-chih (i.e. the same name that denoted their forerunners in those lands, who founded the Kushan Empire). Their ruler was called Kidara or Chi-to-lo (Ancient Chinese, *kjie-tâ-lâ*). The use

\* See [Map 3](#).

of different names sometimes makes it difficult to evaluate the information provided by the written sources<sup>1</sup> and to reconstruct a general historical picture. An important prerequisite is to make a clear distinction between the Kidarites and another tribal group known as the Hephthalites (Hua, I-ta, Hep'tal, Tetal, Hephtal, Abdel and Hayatila in the sources; see also [Chapter 6](#)).<sup>2</sup>

The terms Huns and Chionites seem to reflect the general ethnic appellation of this people,<sup>3</sup> whereas Kidarites should be understood as a dynastic designation derived from the name of their king, Kidara. Kushan (widely used in the Armenian sources to designate the tribes and state of the Huns) and Ta Yüeh-chih (used in the Chinese sources) refer to the country where they established their kingdom, and may reflect their claims to be successors to the Kushan kings. The primary basis for identifying the Huns or Chionites with the Kidarites is the fact that they are called Kidarite Huns (or 'Huns who are Kidarites') by the fifth-century Byzantine author and historian Priscus.<sup>4</sup> None of the other information we possess (including numismatic data) contradicts this identification.

The earliest report on these peoples dates from *c.* 350 when, according to Ammianus Marcellinus (XVI, 9.4), the Chionites (i.e. the Kidarites) fought in Syria as allies of the Sasanian king, Shapur II (309–379), at the siege of Amida (the modern Diyarbekir). They were led by Grumbates, 'the new king of the Chionites, a middle-aged man, his face already deeply lined, possessing an outstanding intellect and famous for the multitude of his victories. With him was his son, a fine young man, who fell in the battle' (Ammianus Marcellinus, XVIII, 6.20; XIX, 1.7–11). The Chionites (i.e. the Kidarites) assisted the Sasanians because of an alliance they had concluded with Shapur II (Ammianus Marcellinus, XVII, 5.1), who at that time was driven to war against the enemy on the eastern borders of his kingdom.

## Early history of the Kidarites

Nothing is known about the history of the Kidarites before the second half of the fourth century. It has been suggested that they conquered K'ang-chü and Sogdiana in *c.* 300,

<sup>1</sup> Of the existing works, the most significant on Kidarite numismatics are Martin, 1937; Curiel, 1953; Göbl, 1967; and Enoki, 1969; 1970. See also Ter-Mkrtichyan, 1979.

<sup>2</sup> Trever, 1954.

<sup>3</sup> Neither here nor elsewhere does this term have any ethnolinguistic significance, since we know practically nothing definite about the language(s) of these peoples. Just as in the twelfth–thirteenth century the term 'Mongol' referred not only to those who spoke the Mongol language proper but also many other ethnolinguistic groups forming part of that society, so too could Huns and Chionites have apparently 'incorporated' ethnic groups speaking a variety of languages.

<sup>4</sup> The accounts of the Kidarites in this source have been subjected to repeated scrutiny. They were examined and compared with the data from Chinese sources by Enoki, 1969.

but the literary sources have not yet been corroborated by the archaeological evidence. Attempts have been made<sup>5</sup> to link the appearance of the Kidarites in Central Asia with the Karshi steppe in southern Sogdiana and to date this event to *c.* 420, but this has not been supported by further archaeological investigations in the region.<sup>6</sup>

The only corroboration of the presence of the Kidarites in Sogdiana is provided by early Sogdian coins (see also pages 128 et seq.) with the image of an archer on the reverse and the word *kydr* (Kidara) in the obverse legend.<sup>7</sup> These coins were minted in Samarkand from the first to the fifth century. But out of some 2,000 such coins, only 7 bear the name of Kidara, indicating that Kidarite rule was short-lived. The chronology of early Sogdian coinage of the archer type helps to date the coins with the name of Kidara, which cannot be earlier than the middle of the fourth century – thus the conquest of Sogdiana by the Kidarites cannot have occurred prior to this time.

## Foundation of the Kidarite state

The alliance between the Kidarites and Shapur II did not apparently last long. The nature of the relations between the Kidarites and Sasanian Iran is indicated by the Kidarite issues of silver drachms, copying coins of the Sasanian kings.<sup>8</sup> Martin<sup>9</sup> takes the Kidarite coins of the Sasanian type as evidence of the existence of a Kidarite state as early as the last quarter of the fourth century and dates these coins as close as possible to the time when their Sasanian prototypes were issued. He suggests that the Sasanians recognized the Kidarite state, while the Kidarites themselves accepted Sasanian suzerainty, and puts other events – the Kidarite invasion of the Kushano-Sasanian kingdom, the Sasanian invasion under Shapur II and the ousting of the Kushano-Sasanian princes – in the same historical context, *c.* 350. He suggests that the Sasanians recognized the Kidarite state, while the Kidarites themselves accepted Sasanian suzerainty.

Enoki<sup>10</sup> has shown that the establishment of the kingdom of Kidara took place somewhat later, and Göbl<sup>11</sup> has dated the prototypes of the Kidarite drachms to the period of Shapur II and Shapur III (383–388).

<sup>5</sup> Kabanov, 1953; 1977.

<sup>6</sup> Isamidinov and Suleimanov, 1984.

<sup>7</sup> Zeimal, 1978, p. 208; 1983*b*, p. 251.

<sup>8</sup> Cunningham, 1895, was the first to make this observation.

<sup>9</sup> Martin, 1937.

<sup>10</sup> Enoki 1969; 1970.

<sup>11</sup> Göbl, 1967.

## Kidara's conquest of Gandhara and Kashmir

The most detailed account of Kidara's reign is provided by the Chinese chronicle, the *Pei-shih* [Annals of the Wei Dynasty], written in 643 and covering events between 386 and 581.<sup>12</sup> The original nucleus of the Kidarite state was the territory of Tokharistan (now northern Afghanistan and southern Uzbekistan and Tajikistan), which was previously part of the Kushan Empire and subsequently of the Kushano-Sasanians. The capital of the Kidarites, the city of Ying-chien-shih,<sup>13</sup> was probably located at the ancient capital of Bactria,<sup>14</sup> near Balkh. The lands of the Kidarites were known in Armenian sources as 'Kushan lands'.

The *Pei-shih* relates that Kidara, having mustered his troops, crossed the mountains and subjected Gandhara to his rule, as well as four other territories to the north of it.<sup>15</sup> Thus, during Kidara's reign, the Kidarite kingdom occupied vast territories to the north and south of the Hindu Kush. According to another passage from the *Pei-shih*, referring to the Lesser Yüeh-chih, the principal city of the Kidarites south of the Hindu Kush was situated near presentday Peshawar and called (in its Chinese transcription) Fu-lou-sha (Ancient Chinese, *pyəu-ləu-sa*, which probably represents Purushapura). Its ruler was Kidara's son, whose name is not mentioned.

Historians have found it difficult to determine the exact period of Kidara's reign, one reason being that, from the second half of the third century to the fifth century, news reaching China about events in the Western Regions was generally sporadic and patchy. Li Yen-nien, the author of the *Pei-shih*, writes that 'from the time of the Yan-wei (386–550/557) and Chin (265–480), the dynasties of the "Western Territories" swallowed each other up and it is not possible to obtain a clear idea of events that took place there at that time'. A painstaking textual analysis enabled Enoki (and Matsuda before him) to establish that information about Kidara in the *Pei-shih* was based on the report of Tung Wan sent to the West in 437.<sup>16</sup> From this we can infer that, although the Chinese sources do not provide

<sup>12</sup> Information about Kidara in another Chinese dynastic history, the mid-sixth century *Weishu* [History of the Wei], was borrowed entirely (with a few divergences in the transcription of place names) from the *Pei-shih* and has no significance of its own.

<sup>13</sup> In the *Wei-shu*, the Kidarites are said to have transferred their capital to another city called Liu-chien-shih. However, Enoki has clearly shown that both cities are in fact one and the same, because the accounts regarding the Kidarites' transfer of their capital were misunderstood by the author of the *Wei-shu*, who tried to explain why the capital of the Ta Yüeh-chih was called by a different name at the time of the Han and the Northern Wei (Enoki, 1969, pp. 8–10).

<sup>14</sup> The 'city of Balaam', referred to as the capital of the 'Kidarite Huns' by Priscus of Panium, evidently corresponds to Bactria-Balkh. For geographical details of events relating to the struggle between the Sasanians and the Kidarites and then the Hephthalites in the fifth century, see Marshak, 1971.

<sup>15</sup> Zürcher, 1968, p. 373; Enoki, 1969, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Enoki, 1969, pp. 8–9.

any dates in connection with Kidara, the *Pei-shih* describes the situation as it existed in c. 437. On the other hand, Kidara's rise to power, the founding of his state and the annexation of the territories to the south of the Hindu Kush (including Gandhara) should be dated to an earlier period, that is to say, some time between 390 and 430, but probably before 410.

The Kidarites' advance to the south-east apparently continued even in the middle of the fifth century. This is indirectly proved by Indian inscriptions depicting the events which befell the Gupta king, Kumaragupta I (413–455), when a considerable portion of central and western Panjab was under Kidarite rule. Thus, it was in the first half of the fifth century that the greatest territorial expansion of the Kidarite state occurred.

## The decline of the Kidarites

Indian sources, which refer to all nomadic conquerors (Kidarites and Hephthalites alike) as Hunas, cast little light on the final stage of the Kidarite state, during which it came into conflict with the Guptas. Having captured Gandhara, the Kidarites apparently tried to build on their success and extend their territories eastwards into India. The only evidence of the war between the Kidarites and the Guptas is the mention of Huna invaders in Indian inscriptions referring to the reign of Skandagupta (455–467).

The first encounter between the two rival powers apparently took place in the reign of Skandagupta's father and predecessor, Kumaragupta I. On the evidence of the Bhitari pillar inscription, towards the end of that king's reign the Gupta state was on the verge of extinction. In this critical situation, Kumaragupta I put his son and heir in command of the army with the task of restoring the country's power.<sup>17</sup> Before Skandagupta and his army had 'established his lineage that had been made to totter' (line 14), he suffered many hardships. According to the inscription, there were times when he had to 'spend a night sleeping on the bare earth' (line 10).

It seems that the enemies who threatened the very existence of the Gupta state included not only their feudatories, the Pushyamitras, but also the Kidarites. In the Junagadh inscription,<sup>18</sup> which dates from c. 457 and also refers to the reign of Skandagupta, it is obviously the Kidarites (or the Hephthalites; see pages 141–2) who are referred to under the name of the Mlecchas. Skandagupta's victories over them were described as the conquest 'of the whole world'. It is hard to establish what this claim implies in terms of geographical fact, but it appears that Skandagupta's armies repulsed the Kidarite invasion somewhere on the

<sup>17</sup> Fleet, 1888, No. 13, lines 10–14.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., No. 14.

River Sutlej (or perhaps further east). Thus, even after Skandagupta's victories, central and western Panjab probably remained in the hands of the invaders,<sup>19</sup> although he had managed to stop their advance eastwards.

Yet another inscription – the Kahaum inscription (460–461)<sup>20</sup> – already describes Skandagupta's reign as 'peaceful' and calls him the 'commander of a hundred kings'. On some silver coins, Skandagupta is given the honorific title of *Vikramāditya* earlier bestowed on his famous grandfather, Chandragupta II (c. 375–413). Numismatic evidence shows, however, that war with the Kidarites and other enemies had exhausted the strength of the Guptas: considerably fewer gold coins were minted under Skandagupta than under his predecessors, and the quality of the metal was poorer. Despite the victories over the Hunas, the inscriptions show that the Gupta state had already lost a considerable area of its Western Territories by the beginning of Skandagupta's reign. The most striking proof of this is the total absence of Gupta coins in the western regions of India and in Pakistan.<sup>21</sup>

The war between the Guptas and the Hunas is reflected in a semilegendary form in other Indian sources, in particular in Book XVIII of Somadeva's *Kathāsaritsāgara* (a collection of folk tales in Sanskrit literature in the eleventh century), where these events are described from roughly the same viewpoint as in the inscriptions of Skandagupta's reign. Despite the triumphant tone of the inscriptions, the might of the Guptas declined after these encounters, while the Kidarite state continued to exist in western Panjab.

It was probably not Skandagupta's victories but a new wave of nomadic invaders from the north – this time Hephthalites – that put an end to the Kidarite state in Gandhara and Panjab. The surviving sources give no clues as to how power passed from the Kidarites to the Hephthalites<sup>22</sup> – whether as the result of a clash between opposing armies or of the overthrow of one dynasty by another (in a 'palace revolution'). It is known, however, that the name Kidara was kept, although now as an honorific title (meaning 'honoured', 'hero', 'valiant'), long after the Kidarite state had ceased to exist,<sup>23</sup> just as the original Kidara used to style himself on coins *Kuṣana Śahi* (king of Kushan) many years after the fall of the Empire of the Kushans.

<sup>19</sup> Altekar, 1954, p. xxxiv.

<sup>20</sup> Fleet, 1888, No. 15.

<sup>21</sup> Allan, 1914, p. xlix.

<sup>22</sup> This is probably not the event narrated in the 97th chapter of the *Pei-shih*, in the section dealing with the territory of the Lesser Yüeh-chih, whose capital was the city of Fu-lou-sha or Peshawar: 'Their king was originally a son of the Great Yüeh-chih king Chi-to-lo. When Chi-to-lo had moved westward under pressure of the Hsiung-nu, he ordered his son to hold this city' (Zürcher, 1968, p. 373).

<sup>23</sup> Harmatta, 1984, pp. 188–9.

## The new conquest of Bactria by the Sasanians (467)

During the second quarter of the fifth century the Kidarite state was again involved in serious fighting to the west with the Sasanian kings, who could not accept the loss of the territories they had conquered earlier from the Kushan Empire. Yazdgird II (438–457) took active measures to restore them to Sasanian rule and several eastern campaigns were undertaken during his reign. The struggle continued under Hormizd III (457–459) and also under Peroz (459–484).

Western sources – Armenian,<sup>24</sup> Greek, Syriac and others – provide much information about the deeds of Yazdgird II and subsequent Sasanian kings in the east but, as mentioned above, give different names for Iran's enemies. Often the 'land of the Kushans' or 'Kushan regions' are mentioned, which suggests that the term 'Kushan' may be understood not so much in an ethnic sense as to mean the inhabitants of the 'land of the Kushans', that is the former territory of the Kushan Empire (or, more narrowly, the Kushano-Sasanians). The Hephthalites, who are mentioned from the second half of the fifth century, appear on the historical scene here, as in India, much later than the Kidarites and as a tribal group distinct from and apparently sometimes hostile to them.

Western, and especially Armenian, authors had a somewhat vague conception of the geography of the areas where the campaigns of Yazdgird II and Peroz took place, and this has led to conflicting readings and a confusion that is reflected in the conclusions of modern researchers.<sup>25</sup> The theory that these battles took place not only in the territory of northern Afghanistan but also near the Caspian Sea<sup>26</sup> has proved implausible.<sup>27</sup> There are no grounds for identifying two arenas of military action: all the fighting occurred mainly in, or in the immediate vicinity of, Tokharistan (one of Yazdgird II's battles was at Mervi Rud), and the Sasanians' main stronghold in the east was Merv.

Yazdgird II's first eastern campaign was in 442. By 449 the advantage was on his side, and the *Kushanshah* (king of the Kushans) had been rendered powerless. The Sasanian army laid waste territories subject to the Kidarites and took fortresses. During the campaign of 450, Taliqan was captured. Nevertheless, the struggle continued, and sometimes the

<sup>24</sup> For a collection of references to the Sasanian wars in the east in Armenian sources, see Ter-Mkrtichyan, 1979, but bearing in mind their evaluation by Lukonin; 1969a; 1969b.

<sup>25</sup> For example, there were two Chols (one in the region of Gurgan and one in that of Darband), two Taliqans (one in Khurasan and one in Tokharistan), etc. Some names have been found to be distorted. For further details, see Marshak, 1971.

<sup>26</sup> Marquart, 1901, pp. 55, 211–12; Mandel'shtam, 1958, p. 72.

<sup>27</sup> Marshak, 1971.

balance was in favour of the Kidarites. Their refusal to pay tribute to Yazdgird, mentioned by Priscus, prompted renewed military action by the Sasanians in 456. As a result, the Kidarites came close to losing all their territories in Tokharistan. This was prevented only by the outbreak of civil war (457–459) between Yazdgird II's sons – Hormizd III, who had succeeded his father on the throne of Iran in 457, and Peroz, who at that time ruled as governor in the 'Kushan regions'. The war between the brothers continued for two years and ended in victory for Peroz, who owed it to the help of the Hephthalites and handed Taliqan over to them.

When war with Iran broke out again in the 460s, Balkh (Po-ho or *b'âklâ* in the Ancient Chinese sources) was in the possession of the Kidarites, if we accept that the town of Balaam mentioned by Priscus is in fact Balkh.<sup>28</sup> At that time, the ruler of the Kidarites was Kunkhas, whose father (the source does not name him) had earlier refused to continue to pay tribute to the Sasanians. Peroz, however, no longer had the strength to continue the eastern campaign; in 464, according to Priscus, the envoys of Peroz turned to Byzantium for financial support to ward off invasion by the Kidarites but it was refused.

In an attempt to put an end to the war, Peroz made peace overtures to King Kunkhas, offering him his sister's hand in marriage, but sent him a woman of lowly birth instead. The deception was soon discovered and Kunkhas decided to seek revenge. He asked Peroz to send him experienced Iranian officers to lead his troops. Peroz sent 300 of these 'military instructors', but when they arrived Kunkhas ordered a number of them to be killed and sent the others back mutilated to Iran, with the message that this was his revenge for Peroz's deception. The ensuing war against Kunkhas and the Kidarites ended in 467 with the capture of their capital city of 'Balaam'. It appears that the Hephthalites were again Peroz's allies, as they had been in his struggle with Hormizd for the throne of Iran. This put a final end to Kidarite rule in Tokharistan. After their defeat the Kidarites were probably forced to retreat to Gandhara, where, as previously mentioned, the Hephthalites again caught up with them at the end of the fifth century.

## Economy, society and polity

The written sources give no details of the Kidarite conquest of Tokharistan, Gandhara and the other regions that came under their rule. However, archaeological data are available for the study of the Kidarite state, although only for certain areas and tentatively. In certain regions of the right bank of the Amu Darya (northern Tokharistan) many towns were largely

<sup>28</sup> It has been suggested that the cities of Balaam and Bolo refer to the site of Er-kurgan in the Karshi steppe of southern Sogdiana (Kabanov, 1953; 1977).

destroyed and whole oases laid waste during the last quarter of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth. It is probable that this was caused by military and political strife rather than by social and economic upheavals resulting from the natural development of society. The huge town of Shahr-i Nau (40 km west of the modern Dushanbe), which came into being in Kushan times under Vima Kadphises or Kanishka I and was surrounded by a strong defensive wall that was 7 km long and more than 8 m high, with towers every 25 m, was abandoned at the turn of the fifth century like many other settlements in the Hissar valley. Since the valley was beyond the reach of the Sasanian armies, the destruction and laying waste of the area is likely to have been connected with the Kidarite invasion. In Kobadian, on the other hand, the abandonment of the Bishkent valley and the Shah oasis<sup>29</sup> and the destruction of Kay Kobad Shah and a number of other towns and settlements can be attributed both to the Kidarite invasion and to the Sasanian occupation.

The picture is similar in the region of the Surkhan Darya, where the site of Dalverzintepete and other settlements were laid waste at this same time (in particular, in oases such as Band-i Khan on the right-bank tributaries of the Surkhan Darya). Here also, it can only be assumed that the destruction of economic life was connected with the Kidarites, but so far no positive traces of their presence have been found either in the Surkhan Darya valley or in southern Tajikistan.

The Buddhist religious centre in Old Termez, destroyed probably in the 360s–370s by the Sasanians, already lay in ruins; yet the mass burials of the victims of an epidemic, or some sort of catastrophe, in the abandoned buildings and caves of these monasteries date from the time of the Kidarites. More such examples can be given – the late fourth to the fifth century was obviously a violent time in northern Tokharistan. If such devastation and massacres were indeed the result of the arrival of the Kidarites (which is as yet only a hypothesis), then having passed through these regions ‘with fire and the sword’, they must very soon have moved south,<sup>30</sup> beyond the Amu Darya, where they were victorious over the Sasanian *Kushanshahs*.

The picture is rather different in the Karshi steppe, where archaeological evidence reveals a considerable change in the composition of the population in the fourth century. In particular, this can be seen from a sharp increase in modelled ceramics with characteristics typical of the Kaunchi-Dzhety-Asar archaeological sites (on the middle reaches of the Syr Darya, or Jaxartes). Further investigations should clarify whether this is connected with

<sup>29</sup> Litvinsky and Sedov, 1983.

<sup>30</sup> On the right bank of the Amu Darya a large number of tombs (including tumuli) have now been investigated, but the vast majority of them belong to the Tokharo-Yüeh-chih and Kushan periods (Litvinsky and Sedov, 1984). So far, the right bank of the Amu Darya has yielded hardly any tumuli that can even tentatively be linked to the Kidarites.

the arrival of large groups of nomads from the north (who might well have been Kidarites) in the Karshi oasis. It is clear, however, that the oasis did not suffer destruction and subsequent abandonment on the same scale as that noted in the regions of southern Tajikistan and the Surkhan Darya.<sup>31</sup> Archaeological investigations in other parts of the old Kidarite state will doubtless bring to light other patterns of interrelationships between the invaders and the local population.

Our knowledge of the organization of the Kidarite state and the way the conquered territories were governed is just as fragmentary. It is tempting to draw an analogy with the vast state of the Kushans. This is not only because the Kidarites claimed to be the successors to the glorious Empire of the Kushans; a no less important factor is that the former nomadic invaders came into possession of vast territories inhabited by settled agricultural peoples with a culture and traditions dating back many centuries, just as had been the case with the Tokharians (or Yüeh-chih), who created the Kushan Empire. It seems likely that the administrative and government structure created by the Kushans was left largely intact under the Kidarites.

## Monetary system and trade

The *Pei-shih* (Chapters 7, 13) mentions that the Kidarites, whom it refers to as the Ta Yüeh-chih (Lesser Yüeh-chih), 'have money made of gold and silver'.<sup>32</sup> This information is confirmed by the evidence of their coins. The first comprehensive attempt to categorize and interpret Kidarite coins was undertaken by Cunningham.<sup>33</sup> Martin, Ghirshman and Curiel<sup>34</sup> subsequently made important contributions in the field, but the most detailed study of the Kidarite coinage is that of Göbl.<sup>35</sup> Gold, silver and copper Kidarite coins are now known (Figs 1–3). There are no grounds for maintaining that the Kidarites had a separate monetary system as in the case of Kujula Kadphises' early issues; their coinage was characterized by an adaptation to the local issues in each area they conquered. In Sogdiana small silver coins were issued (drachms reduced to 0.4–0.3 g). They followed the design of early Sogdian coins, with the ruler's head facing right on the obverse and a standing archer on the reverse, adding the word *kydr* (Kidara) written in Sogdian on the obverse.<sup>36</sup>

In Tokharistan gold dinars were issued in the name of Kidara, following the gold coins of the Kushano-Sasanians both iconographically and technically (on the obverse, a king,

<sup>31</sup> Isamiddinov and Suleimanov, 1984.

<sup>32</sup> Zürcher, 1968, p. 373.

<sup>33</sup> Cunningham, 1895, pp. 55–73.

<sup>34</sup> Martin, 1937; Ghirshman, 1948; Curiel, 1953.

<sup>35</sup> Göbl, 1967; 1984.

<sup>36</sup> Zeimal, 1978, p. 208, Pl. III, 11; 1983b, p. 251, Pl. 21, 10.

facing left, standing before an altar; on the reverse, Shiva with his bull, Nandi), which in their turn can be traced back to the last coins of the Kushan king, Vasudeva I.<sup>37</sup> The Tokharian issues of Kidarite coins bear an inscription in Bactrian (*Bago Kidara Vazurka Košanošao*), with the title ‘the great king of the Kushans’.

The silver coins of Sasanian type can be attributed to Gandhara and the area around. They have the ruler’s bust facing right<sup>38</sup> or *en face* on the obverse;<sup>39</sup> and on the reverse, the traditional iconographic type for Sasanian coins – a fire altar between two standing figures and copper coins of the same type.<sup>40</sup>



FIG. 1. Kidarite coins with the inscription 𐰽𐰺𐰍.

<sup>37</sup> Göbl, 1967, Vol. III, Table 4 – XIII A, XIII B, XIV; 1984, Tables 67-9, Nos. 735-41.

<sup>38</sup> Göbl, 1967, issues 14, 19-24.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., issues 11-13, 15-18.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., issues 25-8.



FIG. 2. Kidarite coins.

In their Indian territories the Kidarites also issued gold coins<sup>41</sup> based on the model of the Late Kushan dinars with the name of Kanishka (III or, if one follows Göbl, II).<sup>42</sup> The Kidarite coins of this group bear the name of Kidara written in Brāhmī script, together with the names of dependent rulers or successors of Kidara, on the obverse. The earliest coins are the early Sogdian issues with the name of Kidara (not earlier than the mid-fourth century). As Göbl has convincingly shown, the Kidarite coins of Sasanian type follow the drachms of Shapur II and Shapur III, minted on former Kushan territory,<sup>43</sup> and should therefore be dated to the closing decades of the fourth century and the very beginning of the fifth.<sup>44</sup> The gold Kidarite coins issued in Tokharistan and in India can be dated more

<sup>41</sup> Göbl, 1984, Tables 46, 47, Nos. 612–15.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., Table 33, Nos. 538–53.

<sup>43</sup> Göbl, 1967, issues 1–10.

<sup>44</sup> There are no grounds for dating these Kidarite coins of Sasanian model to the time of Shapur II and Shapur III and concluding that the Kidarites were originally allies of the Sasanian *shahs* in their war against



FIG. 3. Kidarite coins.

fully. Their issue probably began only in the fifth century (perhaps in its early years) and came to an end during the second half of that century.

As well as gold and silver coins, copper anepigraphic coins, minted on the model of the latest copper coins of the Kushan kings, Huvishka, Vasudeva I and Kanishka III (or II), were widespread throughout the entire territory of the Kidarite state. They were obviously used as small change, as can be seen from the quantities in which they were minted.<sup>45</sup> These copper coins show the same characteristics as the gold and silver Kidarite coins mentioned above – a deliberate adaptation to the existing currency in the conquered territories, reproducing (with varying degrees of divergence from the model) the coinage that

the kingdom of Kushan. Enoki (1970, pp. 34–5) put forward serious arguments against such a supposition: Kidara himself had nothing in common with Shapur II, although he used his coins as a model for his own.

<sup>45</sup> For the many discoveries of ‘copies’ of coins of Vasudeva I and Kanishka III (or II) on the right bank of the Amu Darya, see Zeimal, 1983a, pp. 231–4, 241–56. Vast numbers of them have also been found on the territories of Afghanistan, Pakistan and the north-west of India (Wilson, 1841; Cunningham, 1895; Göbl, 1976; Cribb, 1981).

was customary in a particular market. As was the case during the reign of Kujula Kadphises, the Kidarites were clearly not yet aware of the political significance of coining money. This probably explains, first, why they followed alien iconographic models and, second, why certain gold and silver issues – and almost all the copper coins – had no name on them (with the exception of the copper coins of the Sasanian model mentioned above and issued in the name of Kidarite satraps).

Thus, the Kidarite monetary system did not disturb the economic life of the regions that came under their rule but, on the contrary, created favourable conditions for maintaining the established traditions in local trade. The numerous discoveries of imported articles in strata of the Kidarite period are proof of the existence of a flourishing international trade network and wide trading links between the various regions of the Kidarite state.

## Life-style, culture and ideology

In the words of the *Pei-shih*, the Kidarites ‘move around following their herds of cattle; they also [in this respect] resemble the Hsiung-nu’.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, it is known that there were Kidarite capitals both in Gandhara and in Tokharistan, and thus that they lived in towns. This is only an apparent contradiction, as there have been many cases in history when nomads (or recently settled nomads), after establishing their rule over large groups of states, have, while wholly or partially preserving their traditional life-style, successfully adapted to the culture and life-style of the subordinate peoples.

It would therefore be more accurate to think of the Kidarite state not as a unified society but as one with a clear distinction between the conquerors – the ruling group – and their subject peoples, the latter preserving their own traditions. It appears that the most important elements in the overall organization and development of the state were the clan and tribal organizations traditional to all nomadic peoples; these were inevitably reflected in the administrative structure of the state and in the organization of its army – the main support of the ruling dynasty. It should be stressed, however, that in such conglomerate states, the rulers quickly assimilated the main achievements of the conquered peoples’ cultures. The Kidarites were no exception, although the written sources mention only the unsuccessful attempt of the Kidarite ruler Kunkhas to marry into the Sasanian dynasty (see above).

The coins make it possible to follow this process of adaptation by the Kidarites in much greater detail. We do not know what language the Kidarites spoke, but the coinages

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<sup>46</sup> Zürcher, 1968, pp. 373–4.

they issued show inscriptions in Sogdian,<sup>47</sup> Bactrian,<sup>48</sup> Middle Persian<sup>49</sup> and Brāhmī.<sup>50</sup> Kidarite coins display a wide range of iconographic borrowings, reflecting the world of Sogdian artistic culture, and the official art of the Sasanians and the art of post-Kushan India. Yet it is hard to judge to what degree all these foreign elements penetrated the culture of the Kidarites themselves, and how deeply they were assimilated. It should be remembered that the elements of alien cultures reflected by the coins were the direct result of the Kidarites' adaptation to the conditions of the regions conquered by them, and of their intention that the coinage they issued should be familiar to the local market. Moreover, just as there is no basis for assuming (on the evidence of the coins) that the Kidarites had a mastery of all the languages and scripts used in inscriptions on their coins, the iconography of Kidarite coins cannot be regarded as a reflection of their artistic tastes. We have hardly any knowledge of a specifically Kidarite art that is directly linked to the rulers of the state; it is possible to speak only of works of art of the Kidarite period, created by craftsmen and artists in the countries conquered by them but following standards and traditions that had no direct connection with the conquerors.

It appears that the Kidarites' beliefs had not yet developed into a rigid religious system, which must have encouraged (or at least not hindered) their receptiveness to the religious ideology they encountered in the lands they subdued – a local variety of Zoroastrianism (Mazdaism) in Tokharistan, various expressions of Buddhism and Hinduism in the territory of Gandhara and also, probably, the official Sasanian doctrine. There are no grounds for assuming that the Kidarites were Buddhists simply because the Chinese sources report the existence of famed Buddhist shrines in the Kidarite capital in Gandhara. At the same time, there is nothing to indicate active resistance to any of these religions on the part of the Kidarites. During the Kidarite period the Buddhist religious centre in Old Termez lay in ruins, like many other Buddhist sites in Tokharistan, but its destruction (as already mentioned) seems to be linked to the religious intolerance of the Sasanians. There are no traces of restoration work during the Kidarite period; the partial restoration of the monastery took place later, apparently during the second half of the sixth century.

The key to understanding the ideology of the Kidarite rulers probably lies in their tendency to consider themselves the heirs of the Kushan kings (many expressions of which have been mentioned above). Indeed, this is how they were seen by the neighbouring peoples. It is for future investigations (especially in the field of archaeology) to show how profoundly and consistently the Kushan heritage was assimilated by the Kidarites.

<sup>47</sup> Zeimal, 1978, p. 208, Pl. III, II; Zeimal, 1983b, p. 251, Pl. 21, 10.

<sup>48</sup> Göbl, 1984, Tables 67–9, Nos. 735–41.

<sup>49</sup> Göbl, 1967, issue 15.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., issues 11–28; 1984, Tables 46, 47, Nos. 612–15.