

Portraits Drachmas the Western Satraps

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These coins are often sold as "Indo-Greek drachmas." They retail for \$5 to \$15 depending on the condition and variety. They date from 150 to 450 AD. There were several types in the series. All of the coins had the same fabric and many had similar obverses and reverses. My reference is Second Supplementary Catalog of Coins to Volume One, by S. P. Basu, curator of the Indian museum, Calcutta, published by the Indian Museum in 1977.

The coins come from the Sakas of Western India and date from 110 to 456 AD. They run from about 2.0 to 2.5 grams, and from 15 to 17 mm. There are several distinct types, though the main type was continued through several changes in dynasties. The first coin in the series was issued from the satrap Nahapana, whose portrait appears on the obverse. The reverse features a thunderbolt and arrow. These were issued from 110 to 124 AD.

At first, the ascension of Gautamiputra in 125 AD changed only the reverse. These were stamped over the coins of his predecessor. The new reverses have orbs, each with a pellet in the center. Following this issue, Gautamiputra had another with three arches struck over the face of Nahapana.

In 130 AD, Rudradaman I, son of Jayadaman established a line of ten rulers of the Castana family. Even though the satrapy passed to the Rudrashima family in 303 AD, the type remained constant until 378 AD, when the Guptas annexed the area. In fact, the type was also used by the Traikutaka Dynasty from 207 through 456 AD when they also were eclipsed by the rising Guptas. All of the coins of both the Castanas and Traikutakas show the satrap on the obverse with three peaks on the reverse.

All of the satraps look pretty much the same. The engravers were accomplished enough that we can see some differences in the eyes, noses, hair and hats of rulers. Viradaman (234 - 238) has a Greek nose, straight from the forehead with no bridge. His brother, Damajadasri III (250-254), has a hooked nose. Rudrasimha II (305-313) wears a squarish cap. His brother Yasodaman II has a rounded cap. These small features can be used to differentiate each of the 13 satraps who appear on the coins.

The best way to identify the rulers, of course, is to read Brahmic script. The full name of the satrap surrounds the three peaks. Each letter begins at the rim and descends toward the center. A typical inscription says:

"Rajna Mahaksatrapasa Svami Rudradamaputrassa Rajna Mahasatrapasa Svami Rudrasenasa." This identifies the father (Rudradam) and current ruler (Rudrasena). The word "raj" is equivalent to the western "rex."

"Maha" is the eastern form of "mega." (Maharaja would be Magnum Rex.) You can see the word "satrap" in there. "Svami" is "master." Swa-mi is etymologically the same as mon-sieur. If you want to find these words in the Brahmic script, you might benefit from a visit to a large university library.