

# CENTRAL ASIAN MIGRATIONS AND KUSHAN MATERIAL CULTURE IN KASHMIR

Mohamad Ajmal Shah

## Abstract

The most important feature of the history of Central Asia has been the movement of the nomadic races which not only affected the sedentary population of the region but brought about far-reaching changes in the history and cultures of the Persian, Chinese and the Indian empires. Kashmir somewhat secluded in nature and having tough topographical position still fell prey to these nomadic tribes. Kushans (Yu-Chi's in Chinese literature) were one among these tribes, who's invasion of Ki-Pin (Kashmir) has been rendered one of the greatest landmarks in the history of the region. Besides Rajatarangini of Kalhana, Kushan conquest of Kashmir has been mentioned by the Chinese historical as well as religious texts. Kalhana has mentioned that three Kushan Kings Hushka, Jushka and Kanishka have founded four towns in Kashmir valley. This literary evidence has been attested by the archaeological and numismatic evidence, which confirms the Kushan presence in Kashmir valley. There are more than sixty Kushan sites in Kashmir but very few sites have been excavated till now. Besides throwing light on the architecture of the Kushan period, these sites have yielded terracotta tiles and sculptures in large number. The hundreds of coins of Kushan Kings were also found from different corners of the Kashmir valley. With this background, this paper makes an attempt to highlight the importance of Kashmir valley during the Kushan period through the archaeological data retrieved from excavations and explorations. Also, an attempt has been made to understand the possible routes of Kushan migration into Kashmir valley.

## Keywords

Excavations, Explorations, Migration, Kushan, Material Culture, Kashmir, Routes, Central Asia, Archaeological Evidence.

## Origin and the Early Conquests

The name *Kushan* occurs in several slightly different forms in various Indian and Central Asian sources. In the Indian Kharoshthi inscriptions it is written as “*Gushana*”<sup>1</sup>, *Kushana*<sup>2</sup>, *Kursana*<sup>3</sup> and *Kusana*<sup>4</sup>. The Chinese version of the name is mentioned in *Hou-Han-Shu*, by *Fan-ye* as “*Koei-Shuang*” or “*Koei-Choang*” or “*Kwei-Shwang*”<sup>5</sup>. In the legends of dynastic coins the name *Kushan* is represented as, “*KOPANO*”<sup>6</sup>, “*KOPΣANO*”<sup>7</sup>, “*KOCANO*”<sup>8</sup> and “*XOPAN*”<sup>9</sup>. In 165 BC, a war broke

out between two nomad hoards living on the borders of the Chinese empire, the *Yueh-chih* and the *Hiung-nu*, in which the former were completely defeated and ousted from their territory. The *Yueh-chih* then marched westward with their flocks and herds in search of lands and pastures. On their way they faced another nomad horde, the *Wu-sun*. In the fight which ensued, the *Wu-sun* were wasted, their chief *Nanteou-mi* was killed. After this the *Yueh-chih* still marching westward, attacked the *Se* or *Sok* (*Se, Sok, Sai or Sakas*) which abandoned their territory to the *Yueh-chih* and migrated into *Ki-pin* to the South<sup>10</sup>. As the name *Sai*, considered to have been pronounced as *Sak* in Archaic Chinese, is equated with that of *Sakas*<sup>11</sup>, the great *Yueh-chih* seem to have conquered the country of the *Sakas*. Thus as an indirect result of the *Yueh-chih* conquest of the Issik-köl area, a *Saka* kingdom was established in the north-western part of the Indian sub-continent<sup>12</sup>. As *Ki-pin* was a term rendered to Kashmir by the Chinese historians it seems most probable that this *Saka* kingdom was established exactly in Kashmir. The famous Chinese source *Hou-Han-Shu* (Annals of the Later Han) compiled by *Fan Yeh* (445 AD) covers the period (25-220 AD) of the Han Dynasty clearly mentions that Kashmir (*Ki-pin*) was incorporated in the *Kushan* empire by its illustrious founder *Kujala Kadphises* sometime after his conquest of Kabul, parts of Western Bactria and North-West India. *Fan-Yeh* gives the following account of the *Kushan* conquest of India:

In old days the *Yueh-chih* were vanquished by the *Hsuing-nu*. They then went to *Ta-hsia* and divided the kingdom among five 'Yabgous', viz, those of *Hieou-mi*, *Choung-mi*, *Kouei-Chouang*, *Hitouen* and *Tou-mi*. More than hundred years after that, the *Yabgou* of *Kouei-Chouang* (*Kushan*) named *K'ieou-tsieou-kio* or *Ch'iu-chiu-ch'üeh* (*Kuzoulo* or *Kujala Kadphises*) attacked and vanquished the four other 'Yabgous' and called himself King; the name of his kingdom was *Kushan*. He invaded *Ngan-si* and took possession of the territory of *Kaofu* (Kabul). He also overcame *Pouta* and *Ki-pin* (Kashmir) and completely possessed these territories. *Ch'iu-chiu-ch'üeh* died at the age of more than eighty years, and his son *Yen-kao-chen* succeeded him as king. He in his turn destroyed *T'ien-chu* (India) and placed there general to control it. Since then, the *Yueh-chih* has been extremely rich and strong. In the various (Western) countries (their ruler) is always referred to as 'the king of *Kuei-shuang*', but the Han, basing themselves upon the old appellation,

speak about “the Great *Yüeh-chih*”<sup>13</sup>. The mentioned literary evidence of Chinese, Buddhist and Indian chronicles about the description of *Kushan* rule in Kashmir valley and its neighbouring regions has been confirmed by the archaeological discoveries from time to time. There have been no serious archaeological investigations in Kashmir so far, but a number of *Kushan* sites have come to light albeit by chance. Sixty eight (68) *Kushan* sites have been reported from Kashmir valley so far. Among all these only four sites have been to some extent excavated systematically, viz: Harwan, Semthan, Ushkur and Kanispore. The work at other potential sites such as, Hutmur, Hoinar-Lidroo, Doin Pather, Kutbal, Gurwet, Wangdoora and Ahan have not progressed beyond trial trenches.

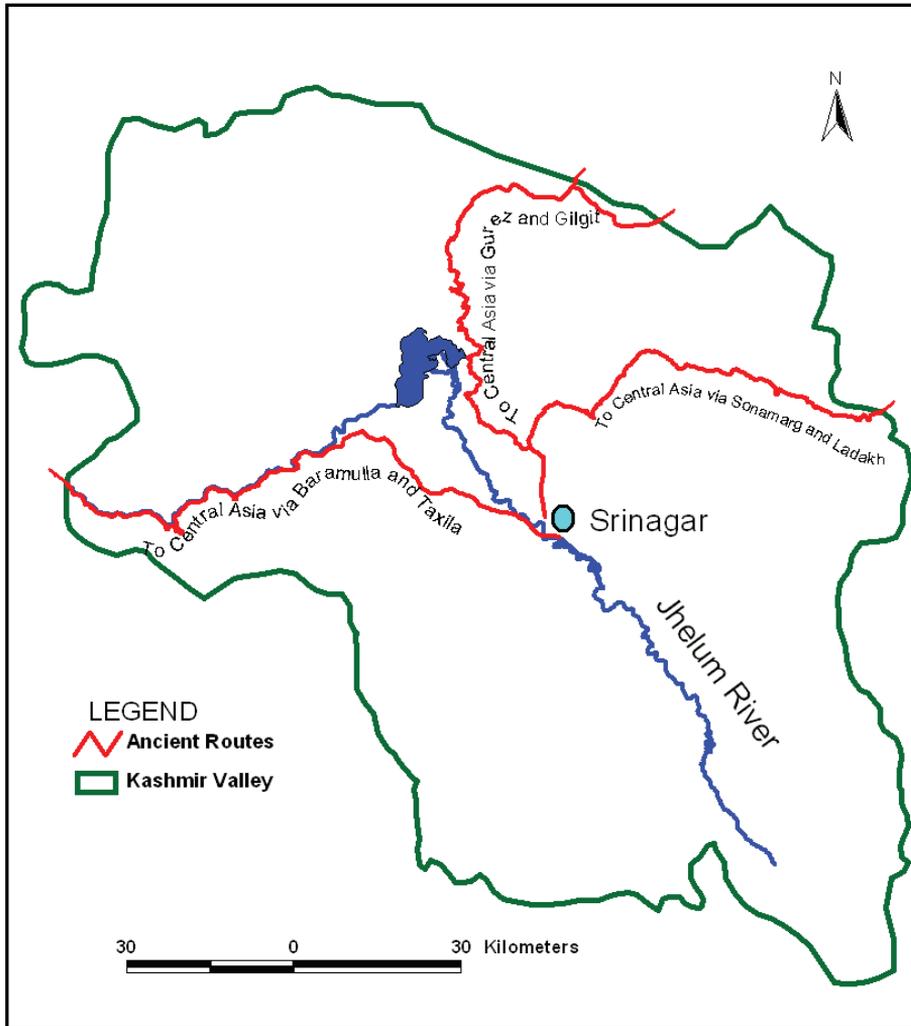
### **Routes and Migrations**

The archaeological evidence scattered along the ancient routes is the best evidence to look into the migrations during the *Kushan* period. There were three main routes traversed during the *Kushan* period in Kashmir valley (Figure 1). The route on which the exciting discovery of *Kujala Kadphises* coins were made at Turukpora<sup>14</sup> in Bandipora district links Kashmir valley with Astor, Gilgit, Chitral, Yasin, Badakshan, Tibet and further to Central Asia and China, via Bandipora-Gurez road<sup>15</sup>. This area was home to the *Kushan*'s long before they entered into Kashmir valley. *Kushan* inscriptions have been discovered in Chilas, Hunza and Gilgit also<sup>16</sup>. Mukherjee<sup>17</sup> points out that “A few dated graffiti on rock at Alam Bridge (Gilgit) refer to different years probably of the *Kanishka* Era. Those datable to *Kanishka-I*, may indicate authority of the king concerned over that area in the upper region of modern Kashmir”. According to Dani<sup>18</sup>, Kharoshti inscription at Chilas shows that *Kushan*'s have advanced into this part very early in their reign. His reading of the inscription, *Vimakadaphasa*, suggests that *Kushan* rule could be traced from the period of *Vima Kadaphises* onwards in upper reaches (Northern region) of Kashmir valley. At another place, Dani<sup>19</sup> has also recorded the three line inscription of the *Kushan* king *Vajheska*; the father of *Kanishka-II*, with a royal title *Kaisara* (seems Sassanian association). Dani<sup>20</sup> has also tried to read the name *Maharaja Uvima Kadhatphisa* in graffiti on a famous rock at Hunza. A p a r t from Kharoshti and Brahmi, Chinese inscriptions were also found in Bactrian, Parthian, Middle Persian and Sogdian languages<sup>21</sup> in and

around Chilas, Gilgit and Hunza is an excellent example of diverse ethnicity and frontiers of human civilization, which played a pivotal role in the moment of population from all directions. The rock carvings and inscriptions dating to 4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, has been also found at Helor Das<sup>22</sup> as well as at Nokkono Ghwand in Swat valley<sup>23</sup>. The valuable observation made by Jettmar<sup>24</sup> that, “Since the first century AD, a route used by merchants, Buddhist missionaries and pilgrims, artists and political envoys of the *Kusans*, existed between Kashmir and the Tarim Basin”. He on the basis of the extensive studies in the area and available inscriptions suggested that Chilas was a frontier district of the *Darada*-kingdom, which had its capital in the *Nilum/Kishanganga* valley (Dawar in Gurez valley, Kashmir could be identified as a capital of Darad territory), wherefrom trade between Central Asia and North-west India brought them substantial gains. Since 1979, over ten thousand petroglyphs and thousands of inscriptions were systematically explored in the Northern areas of Pakistan<sup>25</sup> including Gilgit, Baltistan, Diamir, Hunza, Chilas, which lie very close to the northern most districts of Kashmir valley, such as Gurez in Bandipore, where the presence of rock art is yet to be discovered, as no archaeological explorations were conducted due to the political turmoil in the area. Once done, it will surely add a lot of information to the present scenario of rock art and will highlight the relations between Central Asia and Kashmir through this region in the past.

The highest concentration of *Kushan* sites is in Baramulla district numbering more than forty six (46). These sites are located on the ancient route which connected Kashmir valley with Hazara (Urasa), Taxila (Jandial) and other important sites of the *Kushan* period in Pakistan<sup>26</sup> through Baramulla Jehlum valley road. Aurel Stein in his supplement to the translation of *Rajatarangini* of *Kalhana*<sup>27</sup> and elsewhere<sup>28</sup> has given a clear picture and description of these routes and their importance in ancient times as the entrance to the valley of Kashmir. The mention of Baramulla route has come from *Hieun Tsang* (7<sup>th</sup> century AD) and *Ou-Kong* (8<sup>th</sup> century AD), who while coming from ancient Gandhara and Urasa, followed it on their way to Kashmir and this route was known to *Alberuni* (11<sup>th</sup> century AD) as well. As Baramulla route passed through Hazara and Taxila, (*Kushan* sites in Pakistan), it enjoyed great importance during *Kushan* period. *Rajatarangini* has mentioned about *Kushan* kings, who have built three cities in Kashmir (Hushkapur,

**Fig. 1**  
**Ancient Trade and Migration Routes from**  
**Kashmir Valley to Central Asia**



Jushkapur and Kanishkapur by *Hushka*, *Jushka* and *Kanishka*), among which two (Hushkapur and Kanishkapur as modern Ushkur and Kanispor) have already been located in Baramulla district. As per the third city (Jushkapur) is concerned it has been located by Cunnigham<sup>29</sup> in Srinagar near Zukur. There is strong need to re-think on the identification of the third city made by Cunnigham as Zukur, where no such archaeological evidence has been confirmed. To Mani<sup>30</sup> it seems that Jushkapur lies near to other two cities and therefore the village Zugiyar near Fatehgarh may represent it, as later temples, sculptures and

images have been noticed in the area. This fact could be confirmed by the statement of *Hieun Tsang*, who mentions about spending the night at a temple after visiting many monuments at Ushkur<sup>31</sup>. Local traditions also support this, as people believe that there are many sites deep into the forest around Ushkur of huge archaeological importance. Due to some unavoidable circumstances and restrictions these sites could not be located and hence remains hidden for the future archaeologist to explore. Except from *Kalhan's Rajatarangini* there is no other evidence of Jushka as a *Kushan* king, as not even a single coin bearing the name Jushka has been found so far. *Kalhana* not only credits this King with the foundation of Jushkapur, but he even mentions him as a founder of another town Jayasvamipura, which Aurel Stein himself was unable to trace. Whatever be the case, it is quite clear that Baramulla owing to its geographical position on the trade route as well as its close proximity and connectivity to other major *Kushan* sites such as Taxila in Pakistan has remained one of the favourable spots for the building activities during the *Kushan* period.

The strong evidence has come from the Khaltse inscription of Ladakh in Kharoshti, mentions the name of *Vima Kadphises* as *Uvima Kavthisasa* of the year 187<sup>32</sup>. This inscription is situated on the ancient trade route from Kashmir towards Central Asia and China. Apart from these inscriptions the only monument which could be linked traditionally with *Kanishka* in Ladakh is “*Kanika Chorten*”, near Sani monastery in Zanaskar, as the name refers to *Kanishka*, the *Kushan* king<sup>33</sup>.

### **Archaeological Evidence**

The extensively excavated site of Harwan has revealed the structural evidence in the shape of pebble, diaper-pebble and rubble masonry. The structures excavated at Harwan are the best examples of the method employed by the *Kushan* artist can be seen either as an independent development of building activity in Kashmir or may have been influenced from Taxila, where same masonry has been adopted during *Kushan* period<sup>34</sup>. The Apsidal temple, the three tier stupa and monastery are the important structures at Harwan. The other excavations at Ushkur<sup>35</sup>, Semthan<sup>36</sup> and Kanispur<sup>37</sup> have also yielded similar type of constructional techniques employed during *Kushan* period. Some of the sites, such as Hoinar, Hutmur, Kutbal and Ahan, where only trial excavations have been undertaken have also revealed similar evidence.

One of the important features of *Kushan* sites in Kashmir valley are the terracotta tiles. These tiles have been reported from almost all sites which have been subject to minor or major excavations. The first site which revealed terracotta tile pavement around apsidal stupa is Harwan. Same tile Pavements have been reported from Hutmur and Kutbal in Anantnag district. On the basis of the study of these tiles from the then only site of Harwan many theories were propounded by scholars. The theories which related these tiles with Parthians<sup>38</sup>, Huns<sup>39</sup> and Ajvikas<sup>40</sup> can now be easily refuted on the basis that tile making industry has its origin in Kashmir and that too within the *Kushan* period<sup>41</sup>. The evidence available now from more than twelve sites in Kashmir has revealed the stages of development of this unique art. The other important art which flourished during the *Kushan* period in Kashmir valley is terracotta sculptural art. Due to the non-availability of the raw material of schist stone of Gandhara or red sand stone of Mathura, the *Kushan* artist was confined to terracotta in Kashmir valley has been proved from many excavated sites. Not even a single complete sculpture of the period has been reported from anywhere in Kashmir, but fragmentary parts of the body, life size terracotta heads and some ornamental decorations of Sculptures have come from the excavations at Ushkur, Harwan and Kanispur. Small figurines have been reported from Semthan and Ushkur as well. Scholars are not unanimous on the date of these sculptures. Paul<sup>42</sup> has dated these terracotta heads to 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, while as Fabri believes that these belong to the Lalittaditya's period, and hence dated as 700-730 AD. In the light of the new evidence from Kanispur in Kashmir<sup>43</sup> and Akhnur in Jammu region<sup>44</sup>, where terracotta and stucco fragments have been reported it can be safely suggested that these terracotta heads are very much *Kushan* rather than of pre or post-*Kushan* period. The abundant finds of comparable material has come from the Taxilan monasteries like Dharmarajika, Kalawan, Mohara Moradu, Bhamala and Jaulian. Marshall<sup>45</sup> dated the terracotta and stucco art of these places between fourth-fifth centuries AD.

Coins form one of the main constituent of the *Kushan* studies in Kashmir valley. There are more than five hundred *Kushan* coins found in Kashmir valley and are stored in different museums. These coins starting from *Kujala Kadphises* to *Vajheshka* (*Vasudeva*) is an important source to know about the *Kushan* period, their religion, aesthetics, and metallurgy. In 1984, a coin hoard of *Kujala Kadphises* was discovered

at Turukpora in Bandipora district<sup>46</sup>. One more coin hoard was reported from Chogul in Kupwara district, which yielded three coins of *Kujala Kadphises*<sup>47</sup>. Very few coins of the *Kushan* period have been retrieved from excavations. Deities like *MAO*, *MIRO*, *NANA*, *OESHO*, *OADO*, *MANAOBAGO* and *ATSHO* have been depicted on *Kushan* coins found so far in Kashmir valley. The existence of mint centres has not been confirmed yet from anywhere in Kashmir.

### **Conclusion**

The group of rocks at Hunza, and the evidence from Chilas, Alam Bridge and Khaltse (Ladakh) bears several inscriptions indicating *Kushan* rule spanning from *Vima Kadphises* to *Kanishka* and further to *Vajheshka*, suggesting these regions could well have been in *Ki-pin* (Kashmir) conquered by *Kujala Kadphises* according to the Chinese Annals. The coins of *Kujala Kadphises* found in Kashmir further testify this fact. At the same time it is certain that the amount of evidence we have does not testify directly that any ruler of *Kushan* dynasty had ever reached Ladakh. The most probable inference seems that the whole region from Ladakh to Pamirs might have accepted overlordship of *Kushan's* and the popularity of these rulers among people might have caused to inscribe their names on stones throughout this vast region. The pattern of evidence along these routes has certainly shown that the conquest of Kashmir was first undertaken by *Kujala Kadphises* through northern route of Gilgit. Later on the distribution and rise of settlements along the river Jehlum on the *Karewas* in Baramulla district further flourished during *Kanishka's* time. Besides the cities founded by *Kanishka* and *Huvishka*, Baramulla was an important centre of activity during the *Kushan* period as it lies near to Taxila- one of the important centre of the *Kushan* period in Pakistan. The scattered evidence of terracotta art in Kashmir valley in the form of tiles and sculptures with structural evidence presents an emerging picture of the flourishing *Kushan* art in Kashmir valley. Archaeological evidence gathered across Kashmir valley suggests that the *Kushan* period in Kashmir was one of the important epochs in the ancient history of Kashmir.

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