

University of Mary Washington

Eagle Scholar

Student Research Submissions

Spring 4-28-2020

Menander: A Greco-Buddhist King?

Jacob Kolodny

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.umw.edu/student_research



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kolodny, Jacob, "Menander: A Greco-Buddhist King?" (2020). *Student Research Submissions*. 348.
https://scholar.umw.edu/student_research/348

This Honors Project is brought to you for free and open access by Eagle Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Research Submissions by an authorized administrator of Eagle Scholar. For more information, please contact archives@umw.edu.

Menander: A Greco-Buddhist King?

Jacob Kolodny

HIST 485

4/6/2020

Abstract

Ever since western scholars became aware of the Buddhist text the *Milindapanha*, where a Greek king conversed with a Buddhist monk, a debate has raged over whether Menander, the Indo-Greek king identified with the king in the work, did what his counterpart was said to have done and converted to Buddhism. While numismatic and textual evidence has allowed for the placement of Menander to within the middle of the second century BCE, where the elements for such a conversion would have existed, those same sources do not allow for any clear picture on the matter. The lack of verifiable information on Menander has meant that much of the literature on him has been clouded by speculation and conjecture. While there are some hints in the textual as well as numismatic sources that he had at the very least a positive relationship with his Buddhist subjects, to speculate any further would be to go beyond what can be known with certainty.

Of all of the Indo-Greek rulers, Menander has long occupied the most interest of historians as well as numismatists. Menander is the only Indo-Greek king who is named in Classical sources, and his coins have been the most numerous find of any Indo-Greek ruler. To top it all off, Menander is also the only Indo-Greek ruler to not just be mentioned by name in an Eastern text, but also to have an entire work dedicated to him in the form of the *Milindapanha*. The *Milindapanha* is a Buddhist Pali text which purports to record a dialogue which occurred between Milinda, a Greek King, and Nagasena, a Buddhist monk, at the end of which King Milinda converts to Buddhism. Since its revelation to western scholars in the late nineteenth century, there has been a debate over whether or not Menander, as the work says, did convert to Buddhism. This work seeks to contribute to that discussion by examining two main points, the first being whether Menander can be dated to a period where such a conversion would have been feasible, and the second over whether or not enough evidence exists to support that such a conversion ever occurred. While through the use of numismatic as well as textual evidence Menander can be dated to the middle of the second century BCE, when Greek rule in the Far East and India as a whole was undergoing major transformational changes in both political as well as religious spheres that would make a positive relationship with Buddhism desirable, there is little in the way of verifiable evidence to show whether or not he did convert.

Numismatics has long occupied the focus of Indo-Greek studies since the establishment of the field during the late nineteenth century, with Menander being no exception. Part of the reason for this focus on numismatic material is that it was the first archaeological evidence that could be readily identified with the Indo-Greeks. As early as the seventeenth century, numismatic scholars have attempted to interpret – with varying degrees of success – the ever-increasing number of known Indo-Greek coins. Since the 1980s the number of Indo-Greek coins

identified has grown at an exponential rate due in large part to the systematic looting and destruction that has wracked Afghanistan as a result of the volatility of the region. Tens of thousands of never before seen Indo-Greek coins have emerged in auction houses across the world, with hundreds of thousands more likely being stored within Swiss vaults for future sale.¹ While these are certainly not the best conditions for conducting research, Indo-Greek numismatists – led by Osmund Bopearachchi – have found success by engaging in rescue archeology to at the very least ensure the documentation of these new coins. This work has allowed for a greater understanding of Indo-Greek numismatics than ever before, which for a figure as illusive as Menander is incredibly important.

One of the primary focuses of Indo-Greek numismatists has been the establishment the chronology of the Indo-Greek kings. Without a basic understanding of what king ruled when or which king succeeded who, it is incredibly difficult to establish a basic idea of the environment within which Menander ruled. A Menander who succeeded Demetrius I at the start of the second century BCE would have been in a much different situation than one who came to power during the rule of Eucratides I during the middle of it. Even establishing whether Menander ruled during the first or second century BCE has very broad implications when it comes to understanding what kind of relationship he may have had with Buddhism, as he could have begun his reign either at the apex of Greek rule in the Far East, or at a time when nomadic incursions and civil wars destabilized the region. In tackling the chronological conundrum, numismatists have turned to a number of methods. The first method is creating a chronological framework for Indo-Greek kings based off the existing Classical literature. The beginnings of the Indo-Greek era are the

¹ Osmund Bopearachchi, *From Bactria to Taprobane: Selected Works of Osmund Bopearachchi, vol. 1, Central Asian and Indian Numismatics* (New Dehli, Manohar 2015), 628.

most well documented due to the survival of parts of Justin's, Polybius's, and Strabo's works. In book 42 of his epitome of Trogus, Justin writes that during a war between "between the two royal brothers Seleucus and Antiochus . . . Theodotus, governor of the thousand Bactrian cities, also rebelled and had himself declared king."² Justin also mentions that during this same period, the Seleucid government within Parthia was usurped by Arsaces, the first king of Parthia and founder of the Arsacid dynasty. By being able to connect the less documented Theodotus, or Diodotus in Greek, with his more well known Seleucid and Parthian counterparts, scholars have been able to establish the independence of Bactria as occurring during the beginning of the second half of the third century BCE. Similar comparisons also exist for other Greek rulers, such as Eucratides I and Demetrius I with Mithridates of Parthia and Euthydemus with Antiochus III.³

Menander is not lucky enough to be placed against a similar figure for comparison, but he does have a comparison of the second degree. In book 11 of his *Geographica*, Strabo gives a brief history of the Eastern Greeks, saying that:

The Hellenes who revolted became so powerful because of the quality of the territory they became the masters of both Ariane and the Indians (as Apollodoros of Artemita says), subduing more peoples than Alexander, especially under Menandros, if he did cross the Hypanisis toward the east and went as far as Isamos. Some he [subdued himself] and others [had been subdued] by Demetrios the son of Euthydemus, king of the Baktrians.⁴

The second line is of the most importance in placing Menander chronologically, as Strabo states that Menander's conquests took place after those of Demetrius I. Since the date of Demetrius I's rule is established in Justin's work as starting around the time of Mithridates— which is generally agreed as beginning around the turn of the second century BCE – and as Strabo wrote his work

² Marcus Junianus Justin, *Justin: Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus*, trans. J.C. Yardley, Classical Resources Series, no. 3 (Atlanta: American Philological Association, 1994), 256.

³ Justin, 256. Polybius, *The Histories*, trans. W. R. Patton (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1922), 4: 301.

⁴ Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, trans. Duane W. Roller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 497.

sometime around the end of the first century BCE, the literature places Menander as somewhere between the two.

The classical literature allows for a rough estimate of a hundred years for when Menander ruled, but because of his placement as the last named Indo-Greek king chronologically the literature not particularly helpful in estimating the start or end date of his rule. The lack of specific dates on the part of Strabo means that without additional sources it would be difficult to tell whether Menander ruled five years after Demetrios or fifty. This ambiguity is only increased when it is considered that the Indo-Greek kings named within Classical literature make up only a fraction of those found on their coinage, with only seven of the forty-six Eastern Greek kings having their names mentioned at all.⁵ Those same coins, however, provide the second method in terms of chronologically placing the Indo-Greek kings: monograms. Monograms are small marks on the coins which are usually used to indicate where a coin was made or who designed it. While for the most part the exact meaning of the monograms has long been lost, making it difficult to determine where the coins were made, they are still useful for chronological purposes. When a mint changed hands – either due to succession or more violent means – the kings would often continue to utilize the same monograms, allowing numismatists to establish connections between rulers which may not have been known otherwise.

Take, for example, the monograms of two kings whose relationship and chronology are established by literary sources – Demetrius I and his father, Euthydemus. Both have coins which share the monograms  and . The first monogram first appears on the coins of

⁵ Oliver D. Hoover, *Handbook of Coins of Bactria and Ancient India: Including Sogdiana, Margiana, Areia, and the Indo-Greek, Indo-Skythian, and Native Indian States South of the Hindu Kush, Fifth Century BC to First Century AD*, The Handbook of Greek Coinage Series, no. 12 (Lancaster, PA; London: Classical Numismatic Group, 2013), VIII.

Euthydemus's predecessors Diodotus I and II and last appears on those of Demetrius, while the second first appears on the coins of Euthydemus and is shared by multiple kings after Demetrius.⁶ By looking at when monograms appear and disappear within the coin record, numismatists have been able to craft a more accurate chronology than the classical literature would allow. In the case of Menander, he shares multiple monograms with a figure who is dated within the classical literature: Eucratides I. Eucratides I and Menander share the monogram  and , and a partial match in  and . While two other kings, Antimachos II and Zoilos I, share the same three monograms, the monograms still place Menander firmly within the immediate timespan of Eucratides, and thus sometime within the second century CE.

The final piece to the puzzle of placing Menander within a chronology lies with another aspect of coins: their legends. Legends are the writing on the coins, which in the case of the Indo-Greeks usually included the title, name, and epithet of the king who minted them.

More important in the context of placing Menander is the language used and the direction of the text on the coins. Menander was among the first kings to have the native Indian script Kharosthi on the reverse of his Indian-standard silver coins. Other than Apollodotus I and Eucratides I, no other king from the literature had coins with Kharosthi or any native language on them. As Apollodotus I, Eucratides I, and Menander are also three of the four kings mentioned in the literature as ruling in India, with Demetrius I being the first Eastern Greek king to rule there and the only one not to have a bi-lingual coin, it is likely that bi-lingual coins were a later



Figure 1.
Menander, Silver drachma
(Indian standard), Obverse,
Coin India.

⁶ Osmund Bopearachchi, *Monnaies Greco-Bactriennes Et Indo-Grecques: Catalogue Raisonne* (Paris: Bibliotheque Nationale, 1991), 39

development. The reason why the direction of the legend is important for placing Menander is because his round bi-lingual silver coins appear in two distinct styles. The first kind, seen in figure 1, has Greek legends that appear in a continual clockwise direction on the obverses and a continual counterclockwise direction Kharosthi script on the reverses, starting from the top. The second kind, seen in figure 2, instead have semi-circular legends starting from the left on the obverse and right on the reverse. Only two other Indo-Greek kings –



Figure 2.
Menander, Silver drachma
(Indian standard), Obverse.
Note that on the title and
epithet are on the top, while
the name goes across the
bottom. Coin India.

Apollodotus I and Antimachos II – make use of a similar kind of legend, while the second kind is utilized by in every other kings' bilingual coins, including Eucratides.⁷ A. D. H. Bivar was the first to identify the relationship between the legends and the chronology of Apollodotus I, Antimachos II, and Menander I, arguing that it was likely that “it is the issues with continuous legends which are of earlier date, and those divided legends which are later.”⁸ Osmund Bopearachchi would extrapolate on Bivar's earlier work, speculating that Eucratides I was the first king to use the second style of legend, adopting it after his usurpation of the Bactrian throne and subsequent campaign in India. Bopearachchi speculates that it was during that time Eucratides I captured the areas where some of the coins of Menander were produced, resulting in his and Menander's bi-lingual coins sharing the similar monograms, and that Menander went on to recover those territories and adopt the new style of legends implemented under Eucratides.

⁷ Bopearachchi, *Indo-Greek, Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian Coins in the Smithsonian Institute* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1993), 44.

⁸ A. D. H. Bivar, “The Sequence of Menander's Drachmae,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 2 (1970): 123. In proving his argument, Bivar looked not just at the legends but at the images and monograms on the coins, with the most notable evidence being that the bi-lingual owl coins that had by that point been largely accepted as being produced early in Menander's reign being exclusively of the first type of legend.

While Antimachos II can be placed as preceding Eucratides and Menander due to his coins sharing of the monograms and legend type of Menander's coins but not those of Eucratides, the literature supports Apollodotus II's placement before Menander. In two different sources where Menander appears, Apollodotus II directly precedes him. In one of the prologues of the *Epitome of the Phillip History of Pompeius Trogus*, Justin writes that in the forty-first book of Trogus's original work "there is also some Indian history, namely the achievements of the Indian kings Apollodotus and Menander."⁹ Additionally, in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, a travel guide written around the beginning of the first millennium, the writer mentions that circulating in the city of Barygaza – the modern day city of Bharuch in India – were "ancient drachma . . . coming from this country [Bactria], bearing inscriptions in Greek letters, and the devices of those who reigned after Alexander, Apollodotus and Menander."¹⁰ The placement of Menander after Apollodotus II in Justin's historical work indicates that it was done so for chronological purposes, while the similar structure in the *Periplus* acts as confirmation.

A third method which numismatists have used to determine the chronology of the Indo-Greeks, and one which acts as the final piece in the puzzle for placing Menander, is coin hoards. During a time when the safety of money could not be guaranteed, such as when it was stored in the home or when the owner needed to flee quickly from some kind of threat, individuals would (and still do) act to protect their wealth by hiding it, which in the case of a durable commodity like coins meant burying it. While these kinds of hoards were often recovered by their owners some, for one reason or another, never were.¹¹ The unrecovered coin hoards act as time capsules for the monetary situation of whenever and wherever they were buried, often acting as a

⁹ Justin, 285.

¹⁰ *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea: Travel and Trade in the Indian Ocean by a Merchant of the First Century*, trans. Wilfred H. Schoff (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1912), 41-2.

¹¹ Philip Grierson, *Numismatics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 126.

sampling for what coins had been in circulation at the time, or at the very least had been available before the hoard was hidden.¹² As such, the coin hoards of the Eastern Greeks act as another method of establishing the chronological relationship of the Indo-Greek kings. Take, for example, the third Ai Khanoum hoard. Discovered in the vicinity of the ruined Greco-Bactrian city known to the locals as Ai Khanoum by an Afghan farmer in 1973, it consisted of around 140 silver coins. While the hoard was quickly sold off and disappeared into the international market, it reappeared in 1975 at a New York auction house, where “Nancy M. Waggoner of the American Numismatic Society was able to complete a hasty inventory” before it once again disappeared.¹³ While the hoard did contain the coins of some non-Greco-Bactrian rulers such as Alexander the Great and the Seleucids, the bulk of the hoard consisted of the coins of eight Eastern Greek rulers, including Diodotus, Euthydemus, Demetrius and Eucratides. The breadth of the hoard indicates that it likely was a savings hoard, or one whose owners over a long period of time added pieces to.¹⁴ As such, it does not likely represent what was in circulation at the time, especially since the majority of the hoard consisted of the coins of Euthydemus, one of the earliest of the independent eastern Greek kings. When sorted based on the literary and monographic evidence, as well as in comparison with the other Ai Khanoum hoards Eucratides emerges as the last ruler on the list, and likely the ruler during whose reign the hoard was lost.

Menander benefits greatly from the discovery of multiple hoards containing his coins, hoards which greatly corroborate the information deduced from the legends on his and his contemporaries’ coins. The Bajaur hoards, the first two discovered in 1942 and a third in 1993 in north-western Pakistan, and consisting of more than 2600 coins, include those of “Apollodotus I,

¹² Grierson, 130.

¹³ Frank Holt, “The Euthydemid Coinage of Bactria: Further Hoard Evidence from Ai Khanoum,” *Revue Numismatique* 23 (1981): 8.

¹⁴ Holt, 1981, 26.

Antimachus II and Menander” whose relationship with regard to their legends has already been noted.¹⁵ Discovered in the same year as the third Bajaur hoard and also in north-western Pakistan was the Mian Khan Sanghou hoard. While much smaller than the Bajaur hoards – consisting of only 83 silver coins – the Mian Khan Sanghou hoard contained the coins of the three previously mentioned kings, in addition to Zoilus I. The Siranwali hoards, made up of about seven hundred coins, had a similar makeup, but with the coins of Amyntas, Lysias, and Philoxenus instead of Zoilus I. Additionally, coins of Menander were found in hoards which also contained those of Apollodotus or Antimachus, such as in the Attock hoard which contained a number of the other kings found in the Siranwali hoards. More notable is their absence in the 1994 Sarai Saleh hoard, which while broken up and sold before it could be properly cataloged, contained not just Indo-Greek but also Indo-Scythian coins. The lack of coins of Apollodotus I and Antimachus II in the Sarai Saleh hoard, which contain rulers which can categorically be dated as later than Menander, and their presence in the Bajaur and Mian Khan Sanghou hoards is a strong indicator that both were likely to have been predecessors of Menander in India.

Yet the most important hoard find with regards to firmly establishing the timeframe of Menander is the Wesa hoard. Discovered just a month after the Mian Khan Sanghou hoard in the village of Wesa in Pakistan, and containing around 1200 Indo-Greek coins, the Wesa Hoard had a largely similar composition in terms of rulers to the Bajaur and Mian Khan Sanghou hoards, with those of Apollodotus, Antimachus II, Menander I, Lysias and Antialcidas being present.¹⁶ They were not the only rulers whose coins were found in the hoard, however, as one other ruler was represented by a singular, bi-lingual silver coin: Eucratides I. It is the “first silver bilingual

¹⁵ Bopearachchi, 2015, 336.

¹⁶ Bopearachchi, 2015, 336.

issue of this king ever attested in a hoard with coins of Apollodotus I, Antimachus II and Menander I,” and when compared with other coins within the hoard, supports many of the previously mentioned arguments.¹⁷ While most of the Wesa hoard appears to have been sold off, Aman uh Rahman, a Pakistani numismatist and collector, was able to obtain both the aforementioned coin of Eucratides I as well as fourteen coins of Menander I’s. The monogram on Eucratides I’s coin was one of those identified by Bopearachchi as likely being shared by Menander and Antimachus in the form of , and was present on one of the coins of Menander from the Wesa hoard in Rahman’s collection. Additionally, all of the coins of Menander I identified as being from the Wesa hoard were of the second  legend type. While one coin in one hoard is certainly not confirmation for any kind of trend, it is at the very least an indicator that the placement of Menander’s reign around 150 BCE, utilizing the legends and monograms of his contemporaries has some merit.

Dating Menander to the middle of the second century BCE has important implications in understanding what kind of relationship he had with Buddhism, both within the context of the political, social, and religious nature in India at the time, and the situation for the Greeks in Central Asia as a whole. Eucratides I is often identified as the last of the great Greco-Bactrian kings, as forty years after the start of his rule in 171 BCE most of Bactria had fallen outside of Greek rule. While the end of Greek rule in Bactria is a rather murky subject in the western sources, with Strabo mentioning that the most famous nomads east of the Hyrkanian Sea were “those who took Baktriane away from the Hellenes,” within two Chinese sources a much clearer narrative emerges.¹⁸ In the sections related to Chinese interactions with Central Asia in the first

¹⁷ Bopearachchi, 2015, 399.

¹⁸ Strabo, 493

century CE work the *Han Shu*, or *Annals of the Early Han*, and the first century BCE work the *Shi Ji*, or *Records of the Grand Historian*, there is mention of a semi-nomadic federation of peoples located on the western edge of Gansu known as the Yuezhi.¹⁹ During the early second century BCE, the Yuezhi were engaged in a protracted conflict with another federation located to its east, the Xiongnu, who after inflicting a series of defeats would eventually force the displacement of much of the Yuezhi, who fled westward.²⁰ By the time the Han diplomat Zhang Qian reached them in an attempt to establish an alliance against the Xiongnu in 128 BCE, the king of the Yuezhi had taken over Sogdia (modern day Tajikistan) and “had forced the kingdom of Daxia [Bactria] to recognize his sovereignty.”²¹ While there is some disagreement over whether it was the Yuezhi, Scythians, or even the Parthians who defeated the Bactrians, by 128 BCE Greek hegemony over Bactria had come to an end.

What exactly led to this collapse in Greek power is uncertain, but there are a few clues as to what might have contributed to the fall of Greek Central Asia. The death of Eucratides I was likely a primary cause, as the method through which he died and the date at which it may have happened signaled the creation of a power vacuum in Bactria just before external threats emerged to challenge Greek rule in the region. Justin writes that after Eucratides’ successful campaign in India that:

During his return journey from India, he was murdered by his son, whom he had made his partner in royal power. The son did not conceal his parricide and, as though he had killed an enemy rather than his father, drove his chariot through his blood, ordering the corpse to be cast aside unburied.²²

¹⁹ Craig G. R. Benjamin, *The Yuezhi: Origin, Migration and the Conquest of Northern Bactria*, Silk Road Studies, no. 14, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2007), 52-9.

²⁰ Benjamin, 2007, 73.

²¹ *Shi Ji*, as quoted in Craig G. R. Benjamin, *The Yuezhi: Origin, Migration and the Conquest of Northern Bactria*, Silk Road Studies, no. 14, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2007), 190.

²² Justin, 285.

As for when he died, during the archeological excavation of Ai-Khanoum there was discovered in the treasury an administrative document dated to an unknown king's twenty-fourth regnal year. As archeological evidence shows that the city had been attacked by some outside force and abandoned by the Greeks during the second half of the second century BCE, the regnal year has been interpreted as being that of Eucratides I. As a result, most scholars place the end of his reign at around 145 BCE, at the time of the Greek abandonment of the city.²³ While what exactly happened during the fifteen year period between the likely death of Eucratides I and the establishment of Yuezhi rule in Bactria is difficult to determine for certain, the lack of Indian coinage among the successors of Eucratides I and the dominance of Indian standard among Menander's successors strongly indicates that Menander's rule marked the end of Greek kingdoms straddling both Central Asia and India, and the beginning of Greek kings viewing themselves firmly within an Indian context.

Just as Bactria was beginning in 145 BCE to see the overthrow of its existing political structure, India had been for the past forty years undergoing the effects of its own political as well as religious upheaval. The Mauryan Empire, the first Indian state to unify most of the subcontinent, had ended forty years earlier with the death of the last Mauryan emperor, Brihadratha, at the hands of his general. While that general, Pushyamitra Shunga, would go on to establish a successor state to the Mauryan in the form of the Shunga kingdom, he was only successful in retaining control of the Gangetic plain, with most of the outlying regions of the empire falling in the hands of local rulers and officials.²⁴ It was during this period of chaos that

²³ Frank Lee Holt, *Lost World of the Golden King: In Search of Ancient Afghanistan*, Hellenistic Culture and Society, no. 53 (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 2012), 103.

²⁴ Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 92-3.

the Greco-Bactrians, first under Demetrius I and then his successors, would begin to expand into north-western India. Greeks had been living in the region since the time of Alexander Great's invasion of India in the cities and military encampments he had established, but in the period following his death and the division of his empire had come under Mauryan rule. This initial conquest likely only included Gandhara and other parts of the upper Indus river valley, as soon after the invasion occurred Eucratides emerged to usurp the Bactrian throne, plunging the realm into civil war and distracting the Greeks from any further conquests.



Figure 3. Demetrius I, Silver tetradrachm, Obverse. The elephant skull cap is similar to ones that appear on some coins of Alexander the Great, indicating his conquest of India. Coin India.

Pushyamitra's usurpation of the Mauryan throne also represented a sudden shift away from the religious policies promoted under the Mauryans. In the period before the rise of the Mauryans in the third century BCE, India had seen an increasing pluralism in religious thought. Before the sixth century BCE, the Vedic religion of the northern part of the subcontinent was dominated by members of the Brahmin varna, or caste, who occupied the top of India's social structure and were tasked with memorizing the Vedas and performing religious ceremonies.²⁵ Yet, as the Indo-Aryan sphere grew and expanded to include areas which had had little no Vedic influence, and as members of lower varnas grew in wealth but not in social status, new ideas and concepts began to emerge which rejected the Brahminical dominance over religious matters. Buddhism was one of the many heterodox traditions to emerge during this period, having been started by the former ascetic and member of the Kshatriya, or noble, varna Siddhartha Gautama sometime in the fifth century BCE. The Buddha, as he is more commonly known, built upon earlier Vedic ideas of reincarnation and karma to develop a philosophy on the basis that while

²⁵ Thapar, 44.

suffering was an inherent part of existence, there was a path one could follow to escape from the cyclical nature of it and achieve enlightenment. Part of the ability of Buddhism to gain popularity was the universality of religion. Unlike in Brahminic Hinduism, where those born outside of the four varnas were considered to be of the lowest class, in Buddhism anyone could follow the eightfold path to enlightenment, including women. Another important element was that Buddhism promoted egalitarianism among members of the Sunga, or Buddhist community, and the idea that acts of charity, especially towards those members of the Buddhist priesthood, resulted in the creation of positive karma which could further ones progress down the path to enlightenment. For members of the Vaishya, or merchant, varna, who while economically prosperous were nonetheless considered to be of a lower stature to those members of the Brahmin or Kshatriya varnas, Buddhism's egalitarian nature and promise of future rewards proved to be rather popular, with merchants contributing to temples and allowing for the continual expansion of the priesthood. By the time Chandragupta Maurya founded the Mauryan Dynasty in 322 BCE, Buddhism had spread from its place of origin in the eastern Gangetic plain to many of the major urbans of the northern subcontinent.

The Mauryan dynasty has been associated with Buddhism due to the relationship the third Mauryan emperor, Ashoka, had with it. During his reign the Mauryan empire reached its greatest extent due to his campaigning in the southern part of the peninsula. After one particularly brutal conquest against the Kalingas, when "one hundred and fifty thousand were deported, one hundred thousand were killed and many more died (from other causes)," Ashoka said in one of the numerous inscriptions he had commissioned during his reign that he felt "deep

remorse for having conquered the Kalingas.”²⁶ Seeking an answer to why he felt this way and how he could rectify it, Ashoka reported that he eventually “came to feel a strong inclination towards the Dhamma, a love for the Dhamma and for instruction in Dhamma,” “dhamma” referring to the teachings of the Buddha.²⁷ After his conversion to Buddhism, Ashoka became a great benefactor for Buddhism, supporting the construction of numerous temples and large reliquaries for Buddhist artifacts known as “stupas.” Ashoka’s efforts to promote Buddhism were not merely reserved to funding construction projects, he was also a major promoter of Buddhist missionary efforts. In the same inscription where he discusses the reasons for his conversion to Buddhism, Ashoka also said that he considered “conquest by Dhamma . . . to be the best conquest,” both abroad and “in the king's domain among the Greeks, the Kambojas, the Nabhakas, the Nabhapamkites, the Bhojas, the Pitinikas, the Andhras and the Palidas.”²⁸

Buddhism was not the only heterodox movement critical of mainstream Indian religious traditions to emerge during this period, nor was Ashoka the only supporter of these movements. The Jain and Ajivika sects, which practiced more extreme forms of asceticism, both emerged around the same time as Buddhism and were its principle competitors for converts as well as kingly support. In Jain tradition, Ashoka’s grandfather Chandragupta “abdicated and handed power to his son, Bindusara” after he became a Jain, while Bindusara “supported ascetic sects including the Ajivikas.”²⁹ The Nandas, who ruled in the region of Magadha where Buddhism had originated and would make up the core of the Mauryan empire after they had been overthrown by Chandragupta, were Jains, and their predecessors were likely to have been non-Brahmanical

²⁶ Ven. S. Dhammika, “The Edicts of King Ashoka,” Colorado State, accessed April 3, 2020. <https://www.cs.colostate.edu/~malaiya/ashoka.html>.

²⁷ Dhammika.

²⁸ Dhammika.

²⁹ Richard Stoneman, *The Greek Experience of India: From Alexander to the Indo-Greeks*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012) 151, 162.

as well.³⁰ And while Ashoka may have been adamant about his own conversion to Buddhism, it did not mean that he was not also a supporter of other ascetic sects. Like his father, Ashoka also gave patronage to the Ajivikas, such as when he provided “them with caves in the Barbar hills where they could pursue their way of life.”³¹

Up until the rise of the Sunga dynasty in the second century BCE, these heterodox religious movements benefited greatly from state sponsorship provided by the Mauryans. Pushyamitra Sunga, unlike the Mauryans, was a member of the Brahmin varna, and was supportive of a restoration of Brahminic clerical dominance. Pushyamitra engaged in a number of activities which symbolized this return to form, such as the two horse sacrifices which he oversaw during his reign, a traditional practice among Brahminic kings but anathema to the pacifistic Buddhists and Jains.³² Buddhist sources such as the Divyavadana cast Pushyamitra in a rather dark light, accusing him of engaging in a persecution against Buddhists, both through the destruction of Buddhist holy sites as well in one case supporting the killing of monks. Archeological evidence indicates that such a persecution was unlikely to have been as widespread or as destructive as the Divyavadana implies, as during Pushyamitra’s reign there occurred a number of Buddhist building projects.³³ In all likelihood the greatest impact of Sunga rule on Buddhists and other heterodox groups was the cessation of state support for their activities which, given the prolific nature of sponsorship during the Mauryan dynasty, would have been a significant blow to most of these groups.

³⁰ Stoneman, 151.

³¹ Stoneman, 316.

³² Prashan Srivastava, *The Successors of the Mauryas: A Political History Based on Coins and Inscriptions*, (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 2017), 20-1.

³³ Srivastava, 21.

By the time of Menander's rule during the beginning of the latter half of the second century BCE, the Indo-Greeks found themselves within a precarious situation. To the west was Bactria, which had served as the launching pad and main source of support for the invasion of India but had fallen into first the hands of a hostile dynasty, which signaled the beginning of the separation between the Greeks of Bactria and India. To the east ruled the Sunga dynasty hostile to the Greeks both for their excursions into their territory as well as for being considered outsiders within the Brahmanical religious and societal framework they were trying to promote. With the loss of support from Bactria and the need to solidify control over his largely non-Greek population, establishing that Menander had converted to Buddhism or at the very least supported it within his realm would go a long way to explaining the methods through which the Indo-Greeks maintained their rule in India from the second century to the start of the first millennium. The time period and the area which Menander ruled lend some credence to this theory, as the Sunga disfavorment of Buddhism may have allowed Menander to assume the mantle as the patron of Buddhism from the Mauryans. The question then remains as to what evidence exists that would support his conversion to Buddhism, and whether it was substantive enough to hold up to scrutiny.

One of the most prominent pieces of evidence for Menander's positive relationship with Buddhism is the *Milindapanha*, or *Milinda's Question*, a Buddhist Pali text composed some time around the start of the first millennium which purports to represent a conversation that took place between King Milinda and the Buddhist monk Nagasena.³⁴ Milinda, who was "rich, of great wealth and great prosperity" and had "armed forces . . . without end," sought a learned man who

³⁴ *Milinda's Questions*, trans. I.B. Horner. (London: The Pali Text Society, 1963.)

“could converse with me and dispel my thoughts.”³⁵ After conversing with a number of people who failed to dispel his doubts, he eventually met Nagasena, a Buddhist monk who was the reincarnation of the god Mahasena. After engaging in a lengthy conversation about various Buddhist philosophical, Milinda was completely convinced by Nagasena about the merits of Buddhism, abdicated his kingdom to his son to become Nagasena’s disciple, and achieved enlightenment. Since its introduction to western scholars in the late nineteenth century, Menander has been identified with the figure of Milinda within the work, as there exist some indicators which connect Milinda with him. Milinda is identified in the work as Yavana, or Greek, and traveled “surrounded by five hundred Bactrian Greeks.”³⁶ He was also reported to have ruled over Sagala, which has been identified with the north-western Indian city of Sangala that Alexander the Great had reconsecrated after he had razed the original.³⁷ Both indicate that Milinda was an Indo-Greek king, and Menander has the only name remotely allegorical to it. Yet while Milinda may have been Menander, questions arise as to whether or not the text is entirely accurate when it comes to describing the actual person of Menander.

For one, the ending of the work where Menander abdicates directly contradicts one of the few western sources that exist on Menander. When Plutarch discusses in his *Moralia* of the need of rulers to maintain the goodwill of their people, he compares what happened after the death of Dionysius II of Syracuse to Menander, a “good king of the Bactrians.”³⁸ While Dionysius’s wife and daughters were murdered by “the men of Italy,” after Menander “died in camp” he was

³⁵ *Milinda’s Questions*, 5-6.

³⁶ *Milinda’s Questions*, 7.

³⁷ Arrian, *Alexander the Great: The Anabasis and the Indica*, trans. Martin Hammond, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 159-60.

³⁸ Plutarch, *Moralia*, trans. Harold North Foster, Loeb Classical Library, no. 321 (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1936), 10: 279.

celebrated by his cities.³⁹ What is important to note here is that word used by Plutarch for camp was στρατόπεδο, which when translated literally means a military encampment. If Menander had abdicated his throne and entered the monkhood as was stated in the *Milindapanha*, then it would have been rather unlikely that he died as Plutarch implies while out on campaign. The other major piece of evidence which indicates that much of the current Pali work was likely composed at a later date is the existence of a fourth century Chinese translation of the *Milindapanha*, known as the “Sutra of the bhiksu Nagasena.”⁴⁰ The Chinese version of the text is considerable shorter than the Pali one, consisting “only of the second and third books and a small part of the first.”⁴¹ While it is always a possibility that the Chinese translation was incomplete, the much more plausible explanation for the discrepancies was that the Pali version of the work continued to be developed after it had been translated, as the work is still a canonical text in some south-east Asian Buddhist traditions. So, while the identifiers for Menander as Milinda were likely from the original version of the work, the conversion of Milinda that concludes the text is much more suspect.

There does exist, however, other textual evidence which may support Menander’s conversion to Buddhism. Plutarch, in his discussion of what occurred after Menander’s death, gives an account of what happened to Menander’s body:

The cities celebrated his funeral as usual in other respects, but in respect to his remains they put forth rival claims and only with difficulty came to terms, agreeing that they should divide the ashes equally and go away and should erect monuments to him in all their cities.⁴²

³⁹ Plutarch, 278-9.

⁴⁰ *Milinda’s Questions*, XXXI.

⁴¹ *Milinda’s Questions*, XXXI.

⁴² Plutarch, 279.

Cremation, while not unknown to the Greeks, was certainly not their preferred method of burial, but in native Indian traditions it had long been the common practice. Among Buddhists the practice had been used since the very beginning of the tradition, as when the Buddha died at the age of eighty – purportedly from food poisoning – his body was exposed for seven days before being burned on a funeral pyre.⁴³ Menander’s cremation was not the only part of the passage reminiscent of what happened to the Buddha after he died, as the fighting that occurred over possession of his ashes is remarkably similar to the relics of the Buddha in the aftermath of his death. When the Buddha had been cremated, his “relics were collected by the Mallas of Kusinagara.”⁴⁴ When seven of “the neighboring countries . . . demanded their share” of the relics they were initially rebuffed, but eventually an agreement was reached between the different states where they would equally split possession of the relics.⁴⁵ Afterwards, ten *stupas* were built to contain the relics as well as the urn which had held them and the ashes from the funeral pyre. The cities in Plutarch’s work acted in very much the same way as the countries did after the death of the Buddha, dividing Menander’s remains amongst themselves and afterward creating monuments to him. Yet, while the Menander of Plutarch’s work may reflect parallels to the Buddha, it is by no means confirmation in any way of his religious meanings. W. W. Tarn, a classicist who was perhaps the most vocal opponent when it came the possibility of Menander’s conversions, argues that while it was likely that the cities had created *stupas* to house the ashes of Menander, they were only giving him “the honours which tradition said should be paid to a dead Chakravartin,” or great conqueror.⁴⁶

⁴³ Etienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism: From the Origins to the Saka Era*, trans. Sara-Webb-Boin, Publications de l’Institut Orientaliste de Louvain, no.36 (Louvain, Belgium: Peeters Press, 1988), 22-3.

⁴⁴ Lamotte, 23.

⁴⁵ Lamotte, 23.

⁴⁶ W. W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, 2nd rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 264.

The reason for Tarn to attribute Menander with the term is because of the next source of evidence when it comes to deducing the religion of Menander: numismatics. Because of the centrality that numismatics often takes on for understanding the Indo-Greeks due to coins being one of the few pieces of archeological evidence attributed to them, it is no surprise that scholars turned to them to give clarity to the information presented in the textual evidence. Whereas the placement of Menander within the Indo-Greek chronology was based off of monograms and legend directions of his coins, it is their images and epigraphs which have taken precedence when it comes to understanding his relationship with Buddhism. Greeks had long made use of divine figures and religious imagery on their coins, likely both as a method of showing “political legitimacy and affirmation” for the state or ruler which issued them, as well as infusing the coin with the “energy of objects, gods or deities depicted.”⁴⁷ As such, if there were coins of Menander found which contained Buddhist related imagery, then it could be construed that at the very least he saw Buddhism as some kind of legitimizing or rightful force.

Unfortunately, the numismatic evidence gives very little credence when it comes to establishing the relationship which Menander had with Buddhism. Menander, who of the Indo-Greek kings is the most prolific in terms of the quantity of both types and amount of coins which have been found, has very few coins which can in any way be connected with Buddhist, or even Indian, religious symbolism. The vast majority of his silver coins depict himself on the obverse, and Athena Alkidemos, Athena defender of



Figure 4.
Menander I, Silver drachm
(Indian standard), reverse,
depicting Athena Alkidemos
holding a shield in one hand
and a thunderbolt in the other.
Coin India.

⁴⁷ Maria Beatriz Borba Florzano, “In God We Trust: Gods and God-like Entities on Ancient Greek Coins,” in *Typoi: Greek and Roman Coins Seen Through their Images, Noble Issuers, Humble Users?*, ed. P. P. Iossif, Fr. De Callatay, R. Veymiers (Liege, Belgium: University of Liege Press, 2018), 98, 108.

the people, or Athena Promachos, Athena who fights at the front, on the reverse, the only deviation being a rare series of silver coins which depict an owl on the reverse.⁴⁸ Menander was the first Indo-Greek ruler to have Athena on their coins, and Tarn saw Menander's adoption of this clearly Greek deity as an indication of his Hellenistic leanings.⁴⁹ Such an explanation is rather flawed, however, as Buddhist cosmology readily allows a place for Greek deities within it. For example, the Buddhist Kushana dynasty, who had been a part of the Yuezhi and went on to control most of north-western India, depicted a variety of "deities from the Greek, Persian and Indian pantheon like Helois, Nana, Mithra, Atsho, Mao, Oado, Buddha and Siva" on their coins.⁵⁰ Menander's bronze coinage, while much varied both in the images depicted on the obverse and reverse, is almost as devoid as his silver when it comes to potential Buddhist imagery. The majority of his bronze issues depict Athena on the obverse, with the reverse consisting of images of either winged Nike, a gorgon head shield, or a horse. Other series include an elephant on the obverse and a club or elephant hook on the reverse, an ox on the obverse and a tripod on the reverse, a boar on the obverse and a palm frond on the reverse, and Menander on the obverse and Athena on the reverse, none of which have any real direct connection with Buddhist iconography.

There does, however, exist one example of a coin of Menander's which has long interested scholars due to its potential Buddhist connotations. Discovered by Charles Masson during an archeological expedition to the Afghan town of Begram in the early 1830s, the small bronze square coin has the typical Greek and Kharoshthi legend seen on Menander's bi-lingual coins, and a palm frond on the reverse. The important aspect of the coin, however, is the image

⁴⁸ Hoover, 65.

⁴⁹ Tarn, 269.

⁵⁰ Wilfried Pieper, *Ancient Indian Coins Revisited* (Lancaster, PA; London: Classical Numismatic Group, 2013), 130.

depicted on the obverse, showing an eight-spoked wheel.⁵¹ The eight-spoked wheel is perhaps the most recognizable image related to Buddhism, as it portrays many of the core messages within it. The eight spokes of the wheel represent the eight-fold path to enlightenment, and the sermon in which Buddha explained the four noble truths is called the “Turning the Wheel of the Dharma” due to it representing the introduction of *dharma* into this world. As a result of the wheel’s connection to Buddhism, many scholars have attempted to link Menander with Buddhism through the coin. In his 1884 work *Coins of Alexander’s Successors in the East: Bactria, Ariana & India*, Alexander Cunningham was the first to attribute the wheel on the coin as probably being a result of “some acknowledgement of his [Menander’s] leanings towards Buddhism.”⁵² Tarn, however, rejects the possibility that the wheel was being used in this context as a strictly Buddhist symbol, as he argues that it was more likely a representation of Menander as a *Chakravartin*, which when literally translated means world-turner. A. K. Narain, the most prominent proponent of Menander’s Buddhist inclinations, rejects Tarn’s argument, saying that while the term *Chakravartin* likely predates Buddhism, by the time the symbol of an eight-spoked wheel appeared on coins in India it had become most associated with Buddhism.⁵³ The Buddha had been described as a *Chakravartin* due to his turning of the wheel of *dhamma*, while the Mauryans adopted the term because of both their territorial and spiritual conquests.



Figure 5.
Menander, Bronze
Half unit.
British Museum.

What is important to note is that Menander was not the first to issue a coin in India which had an eight-spoked wheel on it. While the Greeks introduced the usage of round coins with

⁵¹ Charles Masson, “Second Memoir on the Ancient Coins Found at Begram, in the Kohistan of Kabul,” in *The Journal of the Asiatic Society*, ed. James Prinsep (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1836) 5, 1-27.

⁵² Alexander Cunningham, *Coins of Alexander’s Successors in the East: Bactria, Ariana, and India* (1884; repr., Chicago: Argonaut, 1969), 274.

⁵³ A. K. Narain, *The Indo-Greeks* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 98.

icons and legends into the subcontinent, Indians had been producing their own coins since at least the fifth century BCE.⁵⁴ The most common type until the end of the Mauryan dynasty were silver coins of irregular shape cut from sheets or bars to correspond with a specific weight, then punch marked using a variety of symbols.⁵⁵ The eight-spoked wheel first shows up on punch-marked coins originating from Magadha, appearing both within a square or rectangle box and without one. Magadha, as has already been noted, was the region from which Buddhism first originated during the fifth century BCE, around the same time when these punch-marked silver coins first appeared. It is tempting then, as A. K. Narain has, to use them as an example of the influence of Buddhism on coinage as well as the influence of Indian coinage on Greek coinage. There are, however, a few problems with following that route. The first is that it is difficult to determine what the actual meaning for the punch marks are. Magadha punch mark coins have around four to five marks on them, with some having only one. Ubiquitous to all of the Magadha coins is a six-armed symbol, while the coins with multiple punch marks also have a sun symbol.⁵⁶ These recurring symbols likely acted as identifier marks to show who was producing the coins. The last two or three punch marks on those coins with four or five have a far wider variety and were “taken from the living world such as plants and animals or they represent some kind of tools, weapons or just geometrical and abstract symbols.”⁵⁷ Wheels were just one of the many possible marks on the coins. In such a context, it is impossible to tell whether a wheel was being marked on the coins as some symbol of religious devotion, or it was just a wheel.



Figure 6.
Silver karshapana.
Coin India.

⁵⁴ Pieper, 13.

⁵⁵ Pieper, 18.

⁵⁶ Pieper, 26.

⁵⁷ Pieper, 26.

The other problem when it comes to using the coin as a means of interpreting Menander's religious inclinations is the rarity of it. Of the hundreds of Menander's coins which have been identified only a singular coin, the one which Masson obtained in the 1830s, has ever been discovered with a wheel on it. Using one coin to make any sort of argument is already tenuous at best, but what makes it even worse is that the coin with the eight-spoked wheel is made from bronze. The rarity of a specific type of gold coin can be explained away due to the material value of the coin. If someone lost a gold coin, they certainly would put in the effort to recover it. The same case can be made for silver coins, as for the average person they would be the currency of value which they would use. And because gold and silver coins hold significant value, they are usually the coins found deposited in hoards. Yet bronze coins, due to their wide circulation as well as their lower value, have far fewer reasons to be rare. Unless the person doing so was rather poor, there would have been very little reason to save or store bronze coins, and to lose a bronze coin would be more akin to losing a penny than a quarter. As a result of this, during excavations most of the coins which are discovered usually are bronze, with the odd silver coin thrown in.⁵⁸ While it is always a possibility that the reason for the rarity of the wheel coin type is because of the difficulties in conducting excavations in the region where Menander ruled, a more plausible scenario is that the wheel coin type represents either a local mint's production of coinage for use in that area, or a very limited run. As such, the solitary coin can not be used in as a measure for Menander's relationship with Buddhism.

The other numismatic evidence which has been used to try to connect Menander with Buddhism is a rare series with an epithet dissimilar to most of his coins. Whereas most of Menander's coins legends read ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΣΩΤΗΡΟΣ ΜΕΝΑΝΔΡΟΥ, or King Menander the

⁵⁸ Grierson, 156.

Savior, a small number of silver and bronze coins have been found with the legend ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΔΙΚΑΟΥ ΜΕΝΑΝΔΡΟΥ, or King Menander the Just.

The importance of the legend lies not just in the change in epithet from savior to just, but also in how that epithet is translated. In the Kharosthi script on the reverse of the coins, the legends of these coins read

MAHARAJASA DHARMIKASA MENADRASA. The word *dharmikasa* that appears on these coins has been seen as being related to the Pali word *dhammiko*, meaning one who is righteous.

What is interesting about the word *dhammiko* is that it often used alongside *dhamma-raja*, or king under the *dhamma*, in Pali texts as “the description of the ideal king.”⁵⁹ While the translator of the first English edition of the

Milindapanha, T. W. Rhys Davids, saw the use of the word *dharmikasa* by

Menander as merely the best available word for translating the Greek δικαίου,

A. K. Narain argues that the usage of *dharmikasa* was a purposeful choice on

the part of the creator of the coin. Narain asserts that based on the difference in the appearance of the portrait of Menander on the δικαίου coins (figure 8.) as opposed to the σωτήρος ones (figures 1. and 2.), the δικαίου coins were minted later in his life, after he had converted to Buddhism.⁶⁰

More important, however, than the appearance of *dharmikasa* on certain coins of Menander is the different icons that appear on these coins. On a number of the square bronze δικαίου coins there appear figures making a hand gesture using their right hand. The gesture appears to be the pressing of an unknown digit against the thumb.⁶¹ Both the figure and the gesture do not appear on any of the coins of Menander’s predecessors. The reason why this



Figure 7.
Menander, Silver
drachm, Reverse.
Coin India



Figure 8.
Menander, Silver
drachm, Obverse.
Coin India.

⁵⁹ *The Questions of King Milinda*, trans. T. W. Rhys Davids, *The Sacred Books of the East* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1890-1894), 1: XXII.

⁶⁰ Narain, 100.

⁶¹ For a picture of the coin, see Boppearachchi, 1991,

figure, and specifically the gesture it is making is important is because within Buddhist tradition there are certain hand gestures that have spiritual significance. The symbolic gestures, called *mudras*, are used in Buddhism both for ritualistic and iconographic purposes, with the latter being the more important in this case.⁶² Of the various *mudras*, the one which the gesture on the coin most resembles is that of the *Vitarka Mudra*, which is “formed by joining the tips of the thumb and index finger together to form a circle, keeping the other three fingers pointing straight up.”⁶³ Also known as the teaching mudra, the *Vitarka Mudra* “represents the Buddha’s first teaching after becoming enlightened,” as the circle formed by the thumb and index figure “symbolizes the ‘Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma’ or Dharmachakra.”⁶⁴ While the gesture that appears on the coins can have other meanings, as similar gestures that appear on other coins are usually indicative of a deity giving some kind of blessing, the fact that it appears on coins alongside the *dharmikasa* gives some credence to Narain’s assertion that the minter of the δικάίου coins was purposefully incorporating Buddhist iconography and symbology into their coinage

If these coins could actually be counted among those minted by Menander, as in any case they would be, due to the relationship between *dharmikasa* and *dhammiko* as well as the potential meaning of the hand gestures on the coins, they would be the strongest piece linking Menander with Buddhism. The problem, however, is that it is very likely that Menander Dikaios and Menander Soter are in fact two separate figures. Most of the earliest literature share the sentiment of Narain that the Menander that appears on the δικάίου coins was likely to have been

⁶² E. Dale Saunders, *Mudra: A Study of Symbolic Gestures in Japanese Buddhist Sculpture* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1960), 3-4.

⁶³ “Mudras: Meaning of Sacred Hand Gestures,” Tibetan Nuns Project, accessed June 6, 2020. <https://tnp.org/mudras-meaning-of-sacred-hand-gestures/>.

⁶⁴ “Mudras: Meaning of Sacred Hand Gestures.”

an older version of the one who had the σωτήρος coins, yet these speculations were largely just based off the images that appear on the coins. First hypothesized by A. N. Lahiri and popularized by Osmund Bopearachchi is the idea that Menander the Just was much more likely to have been a successor of Menander the Savior.⁶⁵ The reasoning behind this hypothesis is two-fold, first in the difference in monograms and second in the difference in icons. Menander Δικαίου has two unique monograms,  and , which are “unique to him and disappear with him,” the monograms  and  which he shares only Amyntas, the monograms  and  which first appear on the coins of Strato I, and the monogram  which appears first on the coins of Diomedes, a “contemporary of Amyntas.”⁶⁶ None are monograms that appear on the coins of Menander Soter, nor on any of those of his contemporaries. The other problem which Bopearachchi notes is that “none of the types of Menander Dikaios is shared by Menander Soter.”⁶⁷ While Athena does appear on some of the coins of bronze coins of Menander Dikaios, she does not appear on his silver coins. unlike her almost ubiquitous appearance on those of Menander Soter, nor is she the Athena Alkidemos which Menander Soter had introduced. Whereas Athena Alkidemos holds lightning in her right hand, the Athena of Menander Dikaios shows an empty outstretched palm. None of the other icons which appear on the silver coins of Menander Dikaios, a sitting Zeus, a winged Nike, and a king on a horse, appear on those of Menander Soter, while all of the bronze reverse coins of Menander Dikaios has a lion, either sitting or walking.⁶⁸ While there is still some debate over what kind of relationship Menander

⁶⁵ Osmund Bopearachchi, *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum: The Collection of the Numismatic Society* (New York: The American Numismatic Society, 1998), 9.

⁶⁶ Bopearachchi, 2015, 220.

⁶⁷ Bopearachchi, 2015, 220

⁶⁸ Bopearachchi, 2015, 221.

Dikaios had with Menander Soter, whether he be his grandson or just someone who shared his name, as well as with Buddhism, the consensus is that they were indeed different people.

One possibility that has been brought up since the introduction of the hypothesis that Menander Soter and Menander Dikaios were two different people is that it was in fact that latter who was the subject of the *Milindapanha* and even the other western works, and not his predecessor. This hypothesis, however, has largely been rejected because numismatic evidence, both in the amount of it as well as its dating. Menander Soter has already been noted for the prolific number of his coins discovered, so the idea that his coins were still in circulation when the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* was written is not unlikely. Additionally, the speculated source for the western works which mention Menander, Apollodorus of Artemita, has been dated to the beginning of the first century BCE, which likely predates Menander Dikaios.⁶⁹ As for the *Milindapanha*, while Menander Dikaios's coins do show that he likely did have some kind of relationship with Buddhism, and may have even converted, given the well-known nature of Menander Soter, it is still the safer bet for him to have been the subject of the work.

Menander Soter ruled during the middle of the second century BCE, at a time when a great number of changes were occurring in the world around him. Bactria, the homeland of the Indo-Greek rulers, had fallen to a usurper and was undergoing a sharp decline. India was still suffering the upheavals caused by the collapse of the Mauryan empire, with the Indo-Greek territories ever threatened by the rump state of the empire that was the Sunga dynasty. Buddhists had lost their greatest patrons in the form of the Mauryans, but were still steadily increasing in numbers and continuing to spread into the western part of the subcontinent. Combined with the

⁶⁹ "Apollodorus of Artemita," Encyclopædia Iranica, accessed April 6, 2020. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/apollodorus-of-artimita-historian>.

knowledge of the *Milindapanha*, this scenario has long tempted scholars to try and infer what kind of relationship Menander, the greatest of the Indo-Greek kings, had with Buddhism. Some, like Tarn, portrayed Menander as a Hellenistic king aloof to the religion of his subjects and still continuing the ways of his forefathers, while others like Narain have seen Menander as the ultimate representation of East meeting West, adopting the ways of the Indians while also introducing to them hitherto unknown Greek concepts. Both views, however, do not hold up under scrutiny, as the textual as well as numismatic evidence just does not give either much credence. The parts of the *Milindapanha* which discuss Menander's conversion to Buddhism were likely added at a much later date. And while Plutarch may have described the events that occurred after Menander's death in a manner similar to those of the Buddha, it does not really serve as an indication as to what Menander may have believed. In terms of numismatic evidence even less exists, as only one coin exists which can be confirmed as being of the Menander known in western sources having any semblance of Buddhist iconography, as the others are likely from a similarly named successor. So, while Menander can be dated to a period during which he would have been engaging with and have a reason to want support from Buddhists, to attempt to go beyond that would serve only to engage in needless speculation.

Bibliography

- Arrian. *Alexander the Great: The Anabasis and the Indica*. Translated by Martin Hammond. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- “Apollodorus of Artemita.” Encyclopædia Iranica. Accessed April 6, 2020.
<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/apollodorus-of-artimita-historian>.
- Benjamin, Craig. *The Yuezhi: Origin, Migration and the Conquest of Northern Bactria*. Silk Road Studies, no. 14. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2007.
- Bivar, A. D. H. "The Sequence of Menander's Drachmae." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 2 (1970): 123-36.
- Bopearachchi, Osmund. *An Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian Coin Hoard from Bara (Pakistan)*. Seattle: Amir Nawaz Khan, 2003.
- Bopearachchi, Osmund. *From Bactria to Taprobane: Selected Works of Osmund Bopearachchi*. 2 vols. New Delhi: Manohar, 2015.
- Bopearachchi, Osmund. *Indo-Greek, Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian coins in the Smithsonian Institution*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1993.
- Bopearachchi, Osmund. *Monnaies Gréco-Bactriennes et Indo-Grecques: Catalogue Raisonné*. Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1991.
- Bopearachchi, Osmund. *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum: The Collection of the American Numismatic Society*. Vol. 9. New York: American Numismatic Society, 1998.
- Bopearachchi, Osmund, and Aman ur Rahman. *Pre-Kushana Coins in Pakistan*. Karachi, Pakistan: Iftikhar Rasul IRM Associates, 1995.
- Coin India: The Virtual Museum of Indian Coins. Accessed April 6, 2020.
<http://coinindia.com/home.html>.
- Cunningham, A. *Coins of Alexander's successors in the East: Bactria, Ariana & India*. Chicago, Argonaut, 1969.
- Gardener, Percy. *Catalogue of Coins in the British Museum*. Vol. 1. London: British Museum, 1886.

- Glenn, Simon. "Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek Coins A Bibliography of the Numismatics of the Hellenistic Far East." Hellenistic Central Asia Research Network. Accessed January 24, 2020. <https://hellenisticfareast.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/glenn-2016-hfe-numismatic-bibliography.pdf>.
- Grierson, Philip. *Numismatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- Holt, Frank Lee. *Lost World of the Golden King: In Search of Ancient Afghanistan*. Hellenistic Culture and Society, no. 53. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.
- Holt, Frank Lee. "The Euthydemid Coinage of Bactria: Further Hoard Evidence from Ai Khanoum." *Revue Numismatique* 23 (1981): 7-44.
- Holt, Frank Lee. *Thundering Zeus: The Making of Hellenistic Bactria*. Hellenistic Culture and Society, no. 32. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Hoover, Oliver D. *Handbook of Coins of Bactria and Ancient India: Including Sogdiana, Margiana, Areia, and the Indo-Greek, Indo-Skythian, and Native Indian States South of the Hindu Kush, Fifth Century BC to First Century AD*. The Handbook of Greek Coinage Series, no. 12. Lancaster, PA; London: Classical Numismatic Group, 2013.
- Iossif, Panagiotis, François de Callataÿ, and Richard Veymiers, eds. *TYPOI: Greek and Roman Coins Seen Through Their Images: "Noble" Issuers, "Humble" Users?* Liege, Belgium: Liege University Press, 2018.
- Justinus, Marcus Junianus. *Justin: Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus*. Translated by J.C. Yardley. Classical Resources Series, no. 3. Atlanta: American Philological Association, 1994.
- Lamotte, Étienne. *History of Indian Buddhism: From the Origins to the Saka Era*. Translated by Sara Webb-Boin. Publications de l'Institut Orientaliste de Louvain, no. 36. Louvain, Belgium: Peeters Press, 1988.
- Mairs, Rachel. *The Hellenistic Far East: Archaeology, Language, and Identity in Greek Central Asia*. Oakland: University of California, 2014.
- "Menander Eight-Spoked Wheel." British Museum. Accessed April 6, 2020. https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?images=true&objectId=930456&partId=1.
- Mitchiner, Michael. *Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian Coinage*. 9 vols. London: Hawkins Publication, 1975-1976.

- “Mudras: Meaning of Sacred Hand Gestures.” Tibetan Nuns Project. Accessed June 6, 2020.
<https://tnp.org/mudras-meaning-of-sacred-hand-gestures/>.
- Narain, A.K. *The Coins of the Indo-Greek Kings*. Bombay: The Numismatic Society of India, 1955.
- Narain, A.K. *The Indo-Greeks*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957.
- Pieper, Wilfried. *Ancient Indian Coins Revisited*. Lancaster, PA; London: Classical Numismatic Group, 2013.
- Plutarch. *Moralia*. Vol. 10. Translated by Harold North Foster. Loeb Classical Library, no. 321. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1936.
- Saunders, E. Dale. *Mudra: A Study of Symbolic Gestures in Japanese Buddhist Sculpture*. London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1960.
- Srivastava, Prashant. *The Successors of the Mauryas: A Political History Based on Coins and Inscriptions*. Delhi: Agam Kala Prakshan, 2017.
- Tarn, W. W. *The Greeks in Bactria and India*. 2nd rev. ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951.
- The Questions of King Milinda*. Translated by T. W. Rhys Davids. Vol. 1. The Sacred Books of the East. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1890.
- Whitehead, R. B. *Catalogue of Coins in the Panjab Museum, Lahore*. Vol. 1. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914.
- Whitehead, R. B. *Indo-Greek Numismatics*. Chicago: Argonaut, 1969.

I hereby declare upon my word of honor that I have neither given nor received unauthorized help on this work.

Jacob Kolodny