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**FACTORS IN THE LEGITIMATION OF THE KIDARITES POLITICAL RULE IN
NORTHERN INDIA**

Abstract

This article examines the factors that legitimized Kidarite political rule in Northern India, with special attention to symbolic, titular, and numismatic traditions connected with the imperial legacy of the Kushans. The study argues that the third-century crisis of the Kushan Empire did not eliminate the political language of sovereignty, administrative experience, and visual forms of authority that had developed in Gandhara, Punjab, and the northwestern regions of the Indian subcontinent. In the fourth and fifth centuries, the Kidarites entered this post-imperial environment and articulated their authority through recognizable forms inherited from the Kushan and Kushano-Sasanian worlds. The article combines numismatic evidence, Chinese documentary traditions, regional historiography, and scholarship on Gupta-period northwestern India. It also incorporates the methodological value of A. Khodjaev's work on ancient Chinese transcriptions of ethnonyms and toponyms, especially for understanding the Yuezhi/Kushan and Hephthalite contexts. The article concludes that Kidarites rule should not be reduced either to military conquest or to an intermediate episode between larger empires. Rather, it was a process of selective appropriation, adaptation, and political reuse of Kushan imperial memory. This approach makes it possible to interpret the Kidarites as active actors in the post-Kushan political order between Late Antique Central Asia and Northern India. This conclusion makes it possible to reassess the history of the Kidarites within the context of Late Antiquity.

Keywords: Kidarites; Kushans; Northern India; Gandhara; Punjab; political legitimacy; imperial legacy; numismatics; Chinese sources.

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**СОЛТҮСТІК ҮНДІСТАНДАҒЫ КИДАРИТТЕРДІҢ САЯСИ БИЛІГІН ЗАҢДАСТЫРУ
ФАКТОРЛАРЫ**

Аңдатпа

Бұл мақала Солтүстік Үндістандағы кидариттердің саяси билігінің орнығуын және оның кушандық империялық мұрамен байланысты символдық, титулдық және нумизматикалық дәстүрлер арқылы заңдастырылу тетіктерін талдайды. Зерттеу кидариттер билігін тек әскери жаулап алу немесе ірі империялар арасындағы өтпелі кезең ретінде түсіндіру жеткіліксіз екенін көрсетеді. Кушан империясының III ғасырдағы саяси дағдарысы Гандхара, Пенджаб және Үнді

субконтинентінің солтүстік-батыс аймақтарында қалыптасқан басқару тәжірибесінің, билік белгілерінің және саяси-идеологиялық тілдің толық жойылуына әкелмеді. Осындай постимпериялық жағдайда кидариттер IV–V ғасырларда өз билігін кушандық титулатура, монета соғу дәстүрі және аймақтық басқарудың таныс үлгілері арқылы танытты. Мақалада нумизматикалық деректер, қытай деректері, аймақтық тарихнама және Гупта дәуіріндегі солтүстік-батыс Үндістанға қатысты зерттеулер салыстырмалы түрде қарастырылады. А. Ходжаевтың ежелгі қытай деректеріндегі этнонимдер мен топонимдерді тарихи фонетика арқылы түсіндіру жөніндегі еңбегі де әдіснамалық тұрғыда пайдаланылды. Нәтижесінде кидариттер посткушандық саяси кеңістіктің пассивті қалдығы емес, империялық мұраны таңдамалы түрде игеріп, оны жаңа тарихи жағдайға бейімдеген белсенді саяси күш ретінде түсіндіріледі. Бұл тұжырым кидариттер тарихын кейінгі антикалық дәуір контекстінде қайта бағалауға мүмкіндік береді.

Түйінді сөздер: Кидариттер; Кушандар; Солтүстік Үндістан; Гандхара; Пенджаб; саяси заңдылық; империялық мұра; нумизматика; қытай деректері

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ФАКТОРЫ ЛЕГИТИМАЦИИ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОГО ГОСПОДСТВА КИДАРИТОВ В СЕВЕРНОЙ ИНДИИ

Аннотация

В статье анализируются факторы легитимации политического господства кидаритов в Северной Индии, прежде всего через символические, титулатурные и нумизматические традиции, связанные с имперским наследием кушанов. Автор исходит из того, что кризис Кушанской империи в III в. н. э. не означал исчезновения политического языка власти, управленческого опыта и визуальных форм суверенитета в Гандхаре, Пенджабе и северо-западных областях Индийского субконтинента. В IV–V вв. кидариты вошли в эту постимперскую среду и выразили свои властные притязания через узнаваемые формы кушанской традиции. В статье используются данные нумизматики, китайских письменных источников, региональной историографии и исследований по истории северо-западной Индии эпохи Гуптов. Особое внимание уделено методологической значимости монографии А. Ходжаева, где рассматриваются древнекитайские транскрипции этнонимов и топонимов, а также вопросы юэцжи и эфталитов. Делается вывод, что власть кидаритов не следует сводить к военной экспансии или промежуточному этапу между более крупными империями. Она представляла собой процесс избирательного освоения кушанского политического наследия, его адаптации к новым условиям и превращения в язык политической легитимности. Данный вывод позволяет переосмыслить историю кидаритов в контексте поздней античности.

Ключевые слова: кидариты; кушаны; Северная Индия; Гандхара; Пенджаб; политическая легитимность; имперское наследие; нумизматика; китайские источники

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KUZEY HİNDİSTAN'DA KİDARİTLERİN HAKİMİYETİNİN MEŞRULAŞMA FAKTÖRLERİ

Özet

Bu makale, Kuzey Hindistan'da Kidarit siyasi hâkimiyetinin meşrulaştırılma faktörlerini, özellikle Kuşan imparatorluk mirasıyla bağlantılı sembolik, unvansal ve nümizmatik gelenekler üzerinden incelemektedir. Çalışmanın temel varsayımı, Kuşan İmparatorluğu'nun III. yüzyıldaki siyasal krizinin Gandhara, Pencap ve Hint altkıtasının kuzeybatı bölgelerinde oluşmuş yönetim tecrübesini, egemenlik sembollerini ve siyasal-ideolojik dili bütünüyle ortadan kaldırmadığıdır. IV–V. yüzyıllarda Kidaritler bu post-imparatorluk ortamına girerek iktidar iddialarını Kuşan ve Kuşan-Sasani geleneklerinden miras kalan tanınabilir biçimler aracılığıyla ifade etmişlerdir. Makalede nümizmatik veriler, Çin yazılı kaynakları, bölgesel tarih yazımı ve Gupta dönemi kuzeybatı Hindistan tarihine ilişkin araştırmalar karşılaştırmalı biçimde ele alınmaktadır. Ayrıca A. Hocayev'in eski Çin kaynaklarında etnonim ve toponimlerin tarihsel fonetik temelinde açıklanmasına dair çalışması, özellikle Yueçi/Kuşan ve Eftalit bağlamlarının anlaşılması bakımından metodolojik açıdan değerlendirilmiştir. Sonuç olarak Kidarit hâkimiyeti yalnızca askerî fetih veya büyük imparatorluklar arasındaki geçici bir dönem olarak değil, Kuşan siyasal mirasının seçici biçimde benimsenmesi, yeni koşullara uyarlanması ve siyasal meşruiyet diline dönüştürülmesi süreci olarak yorumlanmaktadır. Bu sonuç, Kidaritler tarihinin Geç Antik Çağ bağlamında yeniden değerlendirilmesine imkân tanımaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kidaritler; Kuşanlar; Kuzey Hindistan; Gandhara; Pencap; siyasi meşruiyet; imparatorluk mirası; nümizmatik; Çin kaynakları.

Introduction.

The Kidarites occupy a complex position in the political history of Late Antique Central Asia and Northern India. They appeared after the decline of Kushan Empire(30 – 375 CE), but before the full rise of the Alchon and Hephthalites formations that later transformed the political maps of the northwestern subcontinent. For this reason, their rule has often been treated as a transitional episode: a brief instruction of a Hunnic group between the Kushans, Kushan-Sasanians and the Guptas(319-550). Such a description is convenient for chronological schemes, yet it does not explain how Kidarites authority was made intelligible in the regions over which it operated. The central question is therefore not only when the Kidarites entered Gandhara, Punjab, Kashmir and the connected regions south of Hindu Kush, but also how their rule was represented, accepted and legitimized in political environment already shaped by several centuries of Kushan imperial practice [1, pp. 119-123; 2, pp. 163-166].

The decline of the Kushan Empire in the third century CE did not erase the institutional and symbolic world that the Kushan had created. In Gandhara, Punjab, the Kabul valley and the northern approaches to the Indian subcontinent, Kushan political forms continued to function as a memory of sovereignty. Titels, royal images, coin types, administrative habits, religious patronage and long-distance trade routes remained meaningful even after imperial cohesion had weakened. The post-Kushan world was therefore not an empty political field. It was a field saturated with inherited symbols, expectations and regional practices. Any new dynasty or ruling group that wished to exercise power in this zone had to respond to that inheritance. The Kidarites did so not by simply restoring the Kushan Empire, but by selectively using elements of its political language.

This article argues that Kidarites political legitimacy in Northern India was constructed through three mutually reinforcing mechanisms. The first was the appropriation of Kushan and Kushan-Sasanian titulature, which allowed Kidarites rulers to present their sovereignty within a familiar language of imperial authority. The second was the adaptation of coinage traditions. Kidarites coins did not merely

imitate earlier models; they translated older visual grammars of kingship into a new dynastic setting. The third was the occupation of a frontier-imperial geography, especially Gandhara, Punjab, Kashmir, and the routes between Bactria, Kabul, and the upper Indus basin. In these areas, Kushan political memory retained practical value, and coinage could circulate not only as money but also as a public medium of authority [3, pp. 15-16; 4, pp. 91-93].

The problem is also historiographical. Since the documentary record for the Kidarites is fragmented, their history must be reconstructed from a combination of Chinese dynastic accounts, Buddhist travel narratives, numismatic sequences, seals, later regional traditions, and comparative studies of the Iranian Huns. The article therefore treats legitimacy as a historical process rather than a formal legal category. In the conditions of Late Antique Inner Asia and Northern India, legitimate rule was produced when military control was translated into locally recognizable forms of sovereignty. The Kidarites were successful to the extent that they could make their power appear continuous with the imperial traditions that had preceded them. This approach helps to move beyond the narrow idea of the Kidarites as merely a conquering group and instead places them within a broader post-imperial history of political adaptation.

The relevance of A. Khodjaev's monograph for the present study lies in its source-critical treatment of ancient Chinese materials. Although Khodjaev's work is devoted primarily to the history of ancient Turks, Yuezhi/Ruzie, and Hephthalites, it is valuable for the methodology of reading Chinese transcriptions, especially the problem of identifying non-Chinese ethnonyms, toponyms, and personal names by means of historical rather than modern pronunciation [5, pp. 5–7, 19–23]. For the study of the Kidarites, this is important because their history is connected with the same source environment: Chinese accounts of Inner Asian peoples, the Yuezhi-Kushan legacy, and the later Hephthalite context. Khodjaev's discussion of the Yuezhi/Ruzie and the transformation of their political movement into the Kushan kingdom provides an additional comparative frame for understanding why a later group such as the Kidarites could rely on Kushan memory as a resource of legitimacy [5, pp. 94–163].

Materials and methods

The study is based on a comparative and source-critical method. The primary evidence consists of three groups of materials. The first group includes Chinese written sources and the modern scholarship that has reexamined them. In particular, the reports associated with Kidara (c. 350-390 CE) and the movement of the Kidarites across the mountains into Gandhara are essential for reconstructing the historical framework of the dynasty. The second group consists of numismatic materials: coin types, legends, royal busts, minting patterns, and regional circulation. The third group includes epigraphic, sigillographic, and historiographical data from the broader Indo-Iranian frontier. Because no single source category is sufficient on its own, the method used here is synthetic: textual evidence establishes the historical problem, while coins and seals clarify how sovereignty was represented in practice. The methodological value of Chinese sources is clear, but these sources must be handled carefully. Chinese dynastic histories were produced within their own political worldview, and their descriptions of non-Chinese peoples often reflect imperial categories rather than neutral ethnographic observation. Khodjaev emphasizes precisely this difficulty. He notes that the use of modern readings of Chinese characters may obscure the original sound of ethnonyms and toponyms and that older pronunciations are necessary when identifying non-Chinese names recorded in Chinese script [5, pp. 7, 19-23]. This observation is not applied here in a mechanical way; rather, it serves as a warning against treating terms such as Yuezhi, Huna, or Hephthalite as fixed and self-evident labels. The same caution is needed for the Kidarite context, where external designations may not correspond exactly to the self-representation visible in coinage.

Khodjaev's monograph is also used as a comparative source for the Yuezhi-Kushan and Hephthalite background. His treatment of the Yuezhi/Ruzie problem highlights the long history of Inner Asian movements into the Oxus and northwestern Indian zones, while his discussion of Hephthalite origins demonstrates the difficulties of reconstructing ethnicity from language, external naming, and later political tradition [6, pp. 94-163, 177-196]. These sections are relevant because the Kidarites operated between the earlier Kushan-Yuezhi memory and the later Hephthalite political world. The article does not adopt every

ethnic conclusion proposed by Khodjaev; instead, it uses his work to strengthen the source-critical dimension of the research and to show how Chinese evidence can illuminate the wider historical environment in which Kidarites legitimacy was formed.

The numismatic method follows the work of R. Göbl and J. Cribb, who demonstrated that Kidarites coinage must be read as a historical document rather than as a secondary imitation of Kushan models [6, pp. 91–146; 7]. Coins preserve the public grammar of kingship: the image of the ruler, the placement of titles, the continuation or transformation of iconographic types, and the geographical range of monetary circulation. In the case of the Kidarites, coinage is especially important because written evidence is limited and uneven. If a dynasty issues coins that continue earlier imperial types while introducing new names and claims, this is not a neutral economic act. It is a deliberate political statement. Therefore, the article reads Kidarites coins as instruments of legitimation, not merely as objects of monetary history.

The analytical framework is built around the concept of post-imperial legitimacy. In post-imperial conditions, political authority is rarely created from nothing. It is often produced through the reuse of institutions and symbols that remain socially meaningful after the decline of the imperial center. The Kidarites are studied here as a case of selective appropriation: they used those elements of Kushan political culture that could help transform military power into accepted rule. This framework also allows comparison with other groups, especially the Chionites, Alchons, and Hephthalites. The point of comparison is not only origin or chronology, but the degree to which each group used or rejected the Kushan symbolic inheritance.

Analysis and results

The first result of the analysis is that Kidarite rule in Northern India must be placed within a wider post-Kushan reorganization of power. The Kidarites did not emerge as a purely Indian frontier dynasty. Their political formation was connected with Bactria and Tokharistan, and only later did their power extend south of the Hindu Kush. This north-south axis is essential. Bactria, Kabul, Gandhara, and Punjab had long been connected by routes that linked Central Asia with the Indian subcontinent. Control over this corridor meant control not only over territory but also over trade, military mobility, and the symbolic geography of Kushan kingship. The Kidarites entered precisely this corridor and used its inherited political structures to establish their own authority [1, pp. 122–123; 8, pp. 15–16].

Chinese sources and their modern interpreters indicate that Kidara's rise belongs to the late fourth or early fifth century, with the southward expansion into Gandhara occurring before the middle of the fifth century. Enoki and Wan have shown that the documentary tradition surrounding Kidara is difficult but not unusable. The reports should not be read as a simple migration story; they should be understood as evidence for a political movement that connected the northern side of the Hindu Kush with Gandhara and the northwestern subcontinent [9, pp. 1–26; 6, pp. 13–38; 10, pp. 243–301]. This movement placed the Kidarites in the very region where Kushan imperial memory was strongest. The conquest or occupation of Gandhara thus had a double meaning: it was a strategic success and a symbolic entrance into one of the principal historical spaces of Kushan sovereignty. Gandhara was not a marginal frontier. It was a political and cultural region shaped by urban centers, Buddhist institutions, trade routes, and the memory of Kushan patronage. Purushapura, Taxila, the Swat valley, and the routes to Kashmir and Punjab had long served as points of connection between Central Asia and India. When the Kidarites established themselves in this area, they did not operate in a social vacuum. They encountered local elites, religious communities, merchants, and monetary users already familiar with Kushan forms of authority. The use of inherited symbols was therefore a rational strategy. It allowed the Kidarites to communicate sovereignty in a language that the region already understood.

The second result concerns titulature. Titles were one of the most important instruments of post-imperial legitimacy. In a world where dynastic authority had to be represented across linguistic and cultural boundaries, a title was more than a word. It signaled rank, sovereignty, and continuity. The Kidarites used names and formulas that connected their rulers with the Kushan sphere. This was not a complete restoration of Kushan titulature, nor was it an accidental survival. It was a selective adoption of

terms that could make Kidarites rule appear legitimate within the political memory of the region. Such titulary strategies are especially visible when read together with coin legends and seals [6, pp. 105–116; 8, p. 339].

The Bactrian and Indo-Iranian contexts are particularly important here. The Kidarites operated in a multilingual world in which Bactrian, Middle Iranian, Sanskritic, and Prakrit forms could overlap with Chinese and later Arabic-Persian descriptions. A ruler's title could carry different resonances for different audiences. For this reason, the legitimacy of the Kidarites should not be reduced to one ethnic or linguistic identity. It was produced through a combination of signals. The same ruler could be seen as a military leader by one audience, a successor to Kushan kingship by another, and part of the wider Hunnic horizon by external observers. This multi-layered character explains why the Kidarites have often been difficult to classify in modern historiography.

The third result is the centrality of coinage. Kidarites coins are the strongest evidence for the political program of the dynasty. J. Cribb's reconstruction of Kidarites numismatics demonstrates that the coinage continued several Kushan and Kushano-Sasanian features while adding new names and dynastic markers [6, pp. 91–146]. The royal bust, the use of inherited iconographic schemes, and the placement of legends show that Kidarites coinage was not a mere local imitation. It was a medium through which old forms of sovereignty were reactivated. R. Göbl's corpus also shows that the types and legends of the Iranian Huns in Bactria and India were not random, but belonged to a structured field of political representation [4].

Coins had a special power in regions such as Gandhara, Punjab, and Kashmir because they circulated widely and repeatedly displayed the ruler's image. In a society where most people would not encounter royal inscriptions or court ceremonies, coinage was one of the most visible instruments of sovereignty. A coin could combine economic function with ideological communication. By retaining recognizable Kushan-derived types, the Kidarites reduced the distance between old and new authority. By adding their own names and titles, they inserted themselves into the same grammar of rule. Thus, coinage helped transform conquest into governable authority. The Kidarites use of coinage also shows that legitimacy was selective rather than total. The Kidarites did not preserve every element of Kushan political culture. They chose those features that remained effective in the fifth-century environment: royal portraiture, imperial titulature, weight and design conventions, and religious or dynastic symbols. This selectivity is crucial. It demonstrates that Kidarites legitimacy was not a passive inheritance. It was an active process of political editing. Earlier signs were retained when they could support new claims and modified when they had to serve new conditions. The result was neither pure continuity nor complete rupture, but a hybrid form of post-imperial sovereignty. The geographical spread of Kidarites coins supports this interpretation. Their presence in Gandhara, Punjab, and Kashmir indicates that Kidarites authority had a real regional basis, even if it did not cover all of Northern India in a uniform way. Cribb and Karan Singh's study of unusual Kidarites coin types from fifth-century Kashmir is especially important because it shows that Kidarites monetary forms could be adapted in local settings and continue to circulate beyond the immediate center of power [7, pp. 7–12]. This suggests that the political language created by Kidarites coinage was not limited to the court. It entered regional monetary habits and could survive as a recognized form even where political control was fluid.

The fourth result concerns the relationship between Kidarites rule and the Gupta world. The Kidarites did not replace the Guptas in the core Ganges basin, and it would be misleading to describe their power as domination over all Northern India. Their significance lay rather in the northwestern horizon of Gupta-period politics. The Bhitari pillar inscription of Skandagupta and the wider Huna problem show that pressure from the northwest became a major political issue for the Guptas [11, pp. 54–56; 12, pp. 271–280]. However, the term Huna must be used cautiously. It could include different groups at different times, and the Kidarites should not be collapsed into a single undifferentiated wave of invaders. They were part of a wider frontier environment, but their specific mode of legitimacy was distinct.

A.Kumar's review of the Hunas in India rightly emphasizes the need to distinguish among the groups that appear in Indian and Central Asian contexts [12, pp. 182–196]. The Kidarites, Alchons, and Hephthalites were interconnected, but they were not identical. Their chronological positions, coinage traditions, political centers, and relationships with India differed. The Kidarites were among the earliest groups to establish a stable political presence in the post-Kushan northwest. Their legitimacy was therefore especially dependent on their ability to appear as successors within a Kushanized political landscape. Later groups could rely more heavily on new military prestige or different forms of regional domination, but the Kidarites had to negotiate with the still-active memory of Kushan sovereignty.

The comparative perspective with the Hephthalites is instructive. Khodjaev's discussion of the Hephthalites shows the difficulties that arise when ethnicity, language of administration, and external naming are treated as identical [5, pp. 177–196]. This caution is relevant for the Kidarites as well. Their rule cannot be explained simply by labeling them as Huns, Turks, or Iranians. What mattered politically in Gandhara and Punjab was not an abstract ethnic category, but the ability to use recognized forms of kingship. The Kidarites could belong to a wider Inner Asian horizon while still presenting themselves locally through Kushan-derived symbols. Their legitimacy was therefore situational and regional.

The Yuezhi-Kushan background provides another important comparative layer. Khodjaev's analysis of the Yuezhi/Ruzie tradition and the movement toward the Kushan kingdom highlights how Inner Asian groups could enter the Oxus and northwestern Indian zones and gradually create new imperial forms [5, pp. 94–163]. The Kidarites did not repeat the Yuezhi-Kushan process in full, but they entered a world made intelligible by that earlier transformation. The memory of the Yuezhi-Kushan passage from mobility to monarchy created a precedent. A later group moving through Bactria and Gandhara could make claims to authority by adopting the symbolic residue of that precedent. This does not mean that the Kidarites were direct ethnic descendants of the Kushans. It means that Kushan political memory remained available as a legitimizing resource.

This point is essential for avoiding an overly ethnic interpretation of legitimacy. The Kidarites did not have to prove biological descent from the Kushans in order to use Kushan political language. In late antique political culture, legitimacy could be created through appropriation, performance, and recognition. If regional elites, merchants, and monetary users accepted Kidarites coinage as valid, and if the titles and images used by the rulers were intelligible within the established political grammar, then legitimacy existed as a practical relationship. It was not a fixed legal status but a social and symbolic process.

The fifth result concerns regional administration. Direct evidence for Kidarites administrative structures is limited, yet the continuity of monetary forms and regional circulation suggests that the Kidarites did not rule only through episodic raiding. Their power must have involved some degree of control over urban centers, mints, trade routes, and local intermediaries. A purely military presence would not easily explain the production and circulation of coinage in multiple regions. The Kidarites seem to have used existing frameworks rather than destroying them. This is another sign of post-imperial adaptation. They occupied structures that had been shaped by earlier regimes and repurposed them for their own rule.

The Indian historiographical perspective strengthens this conclusion. Indian scholarship has often discussed the Kidarites within the wider context of Gupta decline, Huna pressure, and the political history of the northwest. Atreyi Ray's dissertation and later studies show that the Huna problem cannot be separated from regional politics in Punjab, Kashmir, and Gandhara [13, p. 51]. Yet an exclusive focus on invasion can obscure the mechanisms by which rule was stabilized after military entry. The Kidarites were important not only because they entered northwestern India, but because they adapted themselves to the symbolic and monetary environment of the region. The Kidarites also demonstrate that the history of Northern India in the fifth century cannot be written only from the perspective of the Gupta center. The northwest had its own political dynamics. Gandhara, Kashmir, and Punjab were not simply borderlands waiting to be absorbed or attacked. They were regions with their own histories of imperial memory and transregional connection. The Kidarites' success depended on those regional dynamics. Their rule makes

sense when the northwest is treated as an active historical zone rather than as a passive edge of the Gupta world [14].

Conclusion

The Kidarites' political rule in Northern India cannot be adequately explained as the result of military conquest alone. Their authority emerged in a post-imperial environment in which Kushan political forms continued to carry symbolic and practical weight. The decline of the Kushan Empire did not destroy the language of sovereignty in Gandhara, Punjab, Kashmir, and the corridors connecting Bactria with the upper Indus. Instead, it created a space in which later rulers could reuse, adapt, and reinterpret inherited forms. The Kidarites were among the most important actors in this process.

The article has shown that Kidarite legitimacy rested on three main mechanisms: the selective adoption of Kushan and Kushano-Sasanian titulature, the use of coinage as a public medium of sovereignty, and the occupation of a frontier-imperial geography where Kushan memory remained meaningful. Numismatic evidence is especially important because it demonstrates that the Kidarites did not simply imitate earlier models. They transformed them. By placing new names and claims within recognizable visual and titular forms, they converted imperial memory into a new political resource.

The inclusion of Khodjaev's work has strengthened the methodological basis of the article by emphasizing the importance of Chinese source criticism, historical phonetics, and careful treatment of ethnonyms and toponyms. His discussions of the Yuezhi/Ruzie and Hephthalite problems show that the history of Central Asian groups cannot be reconstructed by relying on modern readings or simplified ethnic labels. This caution is equally necessary for the Kidarites. Their legitimacy was not reducible to ethnic origin. It was created through the practical and symbolic recognition of their authority in a post-Kushan political environment. The broader implication is that the end of an empire should not be understood only as collapse. It may also be a period in which imperial forms continue to circulate, acquire new meanings, and support new political structures. The Kidarite case shows how post-imperial sovereignty was made through reuse: of titles, coins, images, routes, and memories. This perspective provides a more nuanced understanding of the political history of the fifth-century Indo-Iranian frontier and opens the way for further research on the connections between numismatics, Chinese sources, and regional forms of legitimacy.

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