

## Initial presence of Greeks in India

- After Alexander invaded northwest part of the subcontinent, one of his generals, Seleucus Nicator, founded the Seleucid Empire.
- In Seleucus's conflict with the mighty Chandragupta Maurya, he ceded large parts to the west of the Indus, including the Hindu Kush, present-day Afghanistan and Balochistan to the Mauryan king.
- After this, Megasthenes was sent to reside at Chandragupta Maurya's court. Other Greek residents at Mauryan courts were Deimachus and Dionysius.
- Greek populations lived in the north-western part of the Mauryan Empire as evident from Ashoka's edicts.
- Mauryas also had departments to take care of foreigners like Yavanas (Greeks) and Persians.
- In ancient Indian sources, Greeks were called Yavanas (Sanskrit) and Yonas (Pali).

## Indo-Greek Kingdom

- The Indo-Greek kingdom was ruled by over 30 Hellenistic (Greek) kings in the northwest and north India from the 2nd century BC to the beginning of the first century AD.
- The kingdom started when Graeco-Bactrian king Demetrius (son of Euthydemus I) invaded India around 180 BC. He conquered southern Afghanistan and parts of Punjab.
- The Indo-Greek kings imbibed Indian culture and became political entities with a mix of Greek and Indian culture.
- For about 25 years, the Indo-Greek kingdoms were under the Euthydemid rule.
- Many coins have been unearthed of these kings and most of the information we get about them is from these coins. Coins have been found with Indian and Greek inscriptions. Many coins have been found with images of Indian deities also. The Indo-Greek kings did this to perhaps placate the population most of whom were not Greeks.
- The civil wars among the many Bactrian kings after the death of Demetrius facilitated the independent kingdom of Apollodotus I who, in this way, can be regarded as the first proper Indo-Greek king (whose rule was not from Bactria).
- His kingdom included Gandhara and western Punjab.
- Most of the Indo-Greek kings were Buddhists and Buddhism flourished under their rule.
- Greek influence is mostly seen in art and sculpture, particularly the Gandhara School of art.

## Menander I (Reign: 155 or 150 BC – 130 BC)

- Menander I Soter was also known as Minedra, Minadra or Milinda (in Pali).
- He was initially a king of Bactria. His empire extended from Kabul river valley in the west to the Ravi River in the east; and from Swat valley in the north to Arachosia (Helmand in Afghanistan).
- According to some Indian sources, he went as far as Rajasthan and Pataliputra.
- He converted to Buddhism and patronised the faith.
- He died in 130 BC and was succeeded by his son Strato I.
- The Milinda Panha (composed around 100 BC) records a dialogue between Milinda and the Buddhist sage Nagasena. Originally written in Sanskrit, only the Pali version is available now. In the work, Milinda is described as a wise, learned and able king. At the end of it, Milinda accepts Buddhism and converts.

## Decline of the Indo-Greek kingdom

- The last Indo-Greek king was Strato II. He ruled the Punjab region until 55 BC, some say until 10 AD.
- Their rule ended with the invasions of the Indo-Scythians (Sakas).
- It is believed that Greek people lived for several centuries more in India under the Indo-Parthians and the Kushans.