

Indology's Pulse
ARTS IN CONTEXT

Essays Presented to Doris Meth Srinivasan in
Admiration of Her Scholarly Research

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INDOLOGY'S PULSE: ARTS IN CONTEXT

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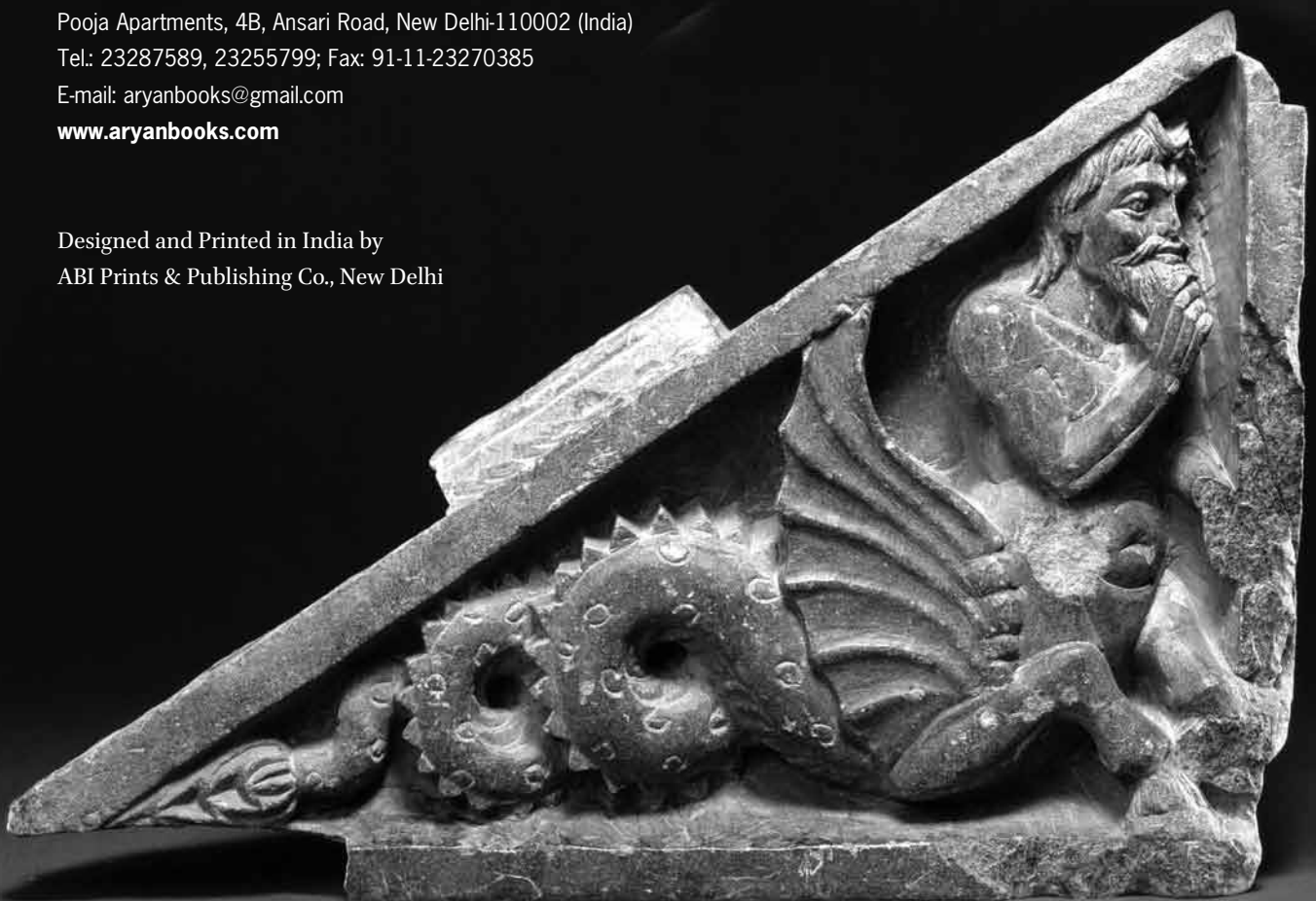
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1 1

From Third Grade to Top Rate: The Discovery of Gupta Coin Styles, and a Mint Group Study for Kumāragupta I*

Ellen M. Raven

Collectors today hanker for Gupta gold coins as never before and coin trade reflects this through steadily increasing prices. In their Auction 71 of 29 September 2011, Baldwin auctioneers offered an Aśvamedha Type coin attributed to Samudragupta. Such Aśvamedha coins are noteworthy for their highly attractive, low relief engravings of the sacrificial steed on the obverse and a graceful lady, representing either the queen or the goddess Śrī, on the reverse side. These coins are not rare, contrary to Aśvamedha coins of Kumāragupta I, of which far less were brought into circulation. Although attributed to Samudragupta, the auctioned coin actually carries the legends and designs typical for the Aśvamedha coins of his grandson (Fig. 11.1).

Kumāragupta's Aśvamedha coins exist in two varieties: one with the horse standing to right, and the other showing the animal placed in the opposite direction. Of the latter, I have so far documented only three specimens; two of these came to light in the 1946 Bayana hoard found on the lands of the Mahārāja of Bharatpur, Lt.-Col. Sri Brajendra Singhji. He selected one coin for his personal coin cabinet, while the second Bayana Aśvamedha coin went to the Bharat Kala Bhavan in Varanasi. The Baldwin's sale now evidenced a third specimen, from the collection of Yashoda Singh. It came up for sale for a discerning collector with deep pockets – the coin was eventually sold for the staggering price of GBP 21,000 (USD 32,893). Exclusiveness comes at a hefty price!

Other factors besides exclusivity that attract collectors are the extent to which the Sanskrit legends are visible on the flan, the quality of striking, and the degree of wear. And, just as with art in stone and other media, certain styles and specific



Fig. 11.1a–b. Aśvamedha Type, Private collection.

iconographies prove more popular than others. These different styles are the focus of this paper for my room matey Doris Srinivasan. The discussion has been organised into two parts: first I will examine into detail the history of the gradual discovery of styles in Gupta coins in the course of the 20th century. Subsequently, I will focus on one particular group of coins from the time of Kumāragupta I that share a particular style. I will argue that they were all produced at the same mint in approximately the same period under Kumāragupta. They form part of two closely related groups labelled Mint Groups 7 and 8 in my ongoing mint-idiomatic analysis. I aim to show how a study of styles such as evident in the coins of these two groups may help us to understand both the diversity in the corpus of Gupta gold coins and their underlying coherence.

PART I: BEAUTY IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Stylistic beauty was an important criterion for Vincent Smith, one of the early scholars writing on Gupta coins around the turn of the 20th century. He wrote the first true catalogues for the corpus (1884; 1889), which served both scholars and collectors well until his work was superseded by John Allan's *catalogue raisonnée* on the Gupta coins in the British Museum (1914).

Although Smith must have spent numerous hours handling Gupta coins, apparently he was not truly impressed by their art. Almost grudgingly, he admitted that “certain coins of Samudragupta

and his son Chandragupta II ... are the most artistic Hindu coins ever struck”. He immediately showed his true colours by adding that these are “almost the only Hindu coins which can be considered as works of art”. And the colours are those of European classicism. “Even the best of those gold pieces – such as the Tiger and Archer types of Samudragupta and the Lion-trampler type of Chandragupta II ... are of only moderate excellence when compared with Greek or even Roman issues” (1914–15: 18). Smith considered only the early coins of the Guptas deserving of the label “artistic”. In his view, the execution of Gupta coins started to show signs of degeneration under Candragupta II. The process continued under Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta, leading to “barbarous” designs for the later imperial Guptas such as Narasimhagupta by the end of the 5th century. And even the finest Gupta coins have only a “second or third rate artistic quality”, so Smith opined. He did not bother to discuss the artistic details of the coins to any serious extent, but instead was more intent on pointing out how they exemplified a skilful assimilation and Hinduisation of European ideas and models. Likewise, he did not bother to illustrate any of the coins, neither the “third rate artistic” ones, let alone the degenerate, semi-barbarous and barbarous ones.¹ Smith's readers thus did not get the opportunity to judge the fairness of these qualifications.

The importance of Vincent Smith's article for the study of Gupta gold coins lies in the fact that he discusses Gupta gold coins in the context of sculptural achievements of the Gupta period. Smith praises specific Hindu and Buddhist sculptures, all well-known pieces by now, for their agreeable poses, beautiful modelling, easy and graceful attitudes, freshness and vitality of treatment “combined with a sentiment of refined restraint which is wanting in much Hindu art” (1914–15: 24–25). This praise again gets a wry twist, when Smith points out that “the snub-nosed Tibetan features of the faces in the Bharhut and Sanchi reliefs are replaced by the regular contours of the high-class Aryan

countenance, with immense improvement in the attractiveness of the figures". He concludes that this "peculiar character of the Gupta sculpture seems to me to be undoubtedly derived from Greece" (*ibid.*: 25).

It remains rather obscure why Smith failed to notice the qualities of Gupta sculptural arts in the devices created for Gupta gold coins. Possibly he never bothered to actually compare their imagery with images in stone and other media for styles and iconographies. At least, his article does not show any results of such an exercise, whereas Smith was in a position to handle both kinds of materials confidently.

As fate would have it, Smith's treatment of the Gupta coins did not do much harm to their status, as John Allan's 1914 catalogue, with its factual treatment, sharp analysis and excellent illustrations, was to ensure a continued and increasing interest in Gupta coins from the side of scholars and collectors alike. Allan steers clear from any explicit discussion of the artistry (or assumed absence thereof) or the stylistic diversity of the coins. Throughout his book he remains focused on the numismatic aspects. The same approach characterises the works of Anand Sadashiv Altekar (1954; 1957) and Parmeshwari Lal Gupta (1974–79; Gupta & Srivastava 1981). Occasionally they comment on qualities such as gracefulness, natural modelling and energetic posturing, and on the artistic beauty of certain designs. However, they do not attempt to use stylistic differences as meaningful factors in developing either a chronology of their numismatic manufacture or a distribution map of certain coin series. As a result, neither scholar manages to get a methodical grip on the internal sequence of issues within each reign. Obvious queries such as on the number of mints and their possible locations have therefore remained largely unanswered so far.²

STUDYING ROYAL PORTRAITURE

Ascertaining the role of mints, approximating their possible locations, estimating the time span of their coin manufacture and defining the contours of their

coin output, all these steps are directly comparable to steps in studying the 'life' of specific sculptural schools in the Gupta period. The study of styles in Gupta sculpture has progressed considerably since the time of Vincent Smith, whereas the study of styles in Gupta numismatic art is still in its infancy. Quite understandably then, any parallels between these two media of art could not be studied systematically so far.³ Of course important questions need to be asked: to what extent can miniature engraving in metal reflect the styles of works in stone, terracotta and paint? Do differences in medium present a problem? Does the fact that die-engravers and sculptors likely came from different sectors of the crafts community undermine the validity of a comparison? These are vital matters to consider when interpreting the results of any comparisons. However, first more ground work needs to be done regarding styles in the coins themselves. Style as an ingredient is as variable in the make-up of Gupta coins as it is in Gupta sculptural arts. Nevertheless, it has taken most of the 20th century before this was realised.

As indicated above, Vincent Smith did not seriously involve Gupta coins in his assessment of Gupta sculptural excellence. Along the same vein, Stella Kramrisch, in her 1931 article on figural sculpture of the Gupta period, completely ignored the evidence of numismatic figural representation. Instead, she focused primarily on establishing stylistic schools among the surviving sculptures.

S.K. Saraswati eloquently described the emergence in the Gupta period of a new canon of beauty, leading to a new aesthetic ideal based upon an explicit understanding of the human body in its inherent softness and suppleness (1957: 123–24). Subsequently, James Harle greatly enhanced our understanding of Gupta sculptural excellence through his seminal *Gupta Sculpture* (1974), which offered stunning enlargements of both well-known and less familiar pieces. Harle also added a plate with enlargements of four Gupta gold coins.⁴ It is remarkable that out of these four coins, three belong to the post-Candragupta II phase,

which Smith had characterised as producing only degenerate designs! Unfortunately, Harle did not in any way discuss the coins or involve them in his assessment of Gupta sculptural performance. Nor did he explain why he chose in particular these four coins from the Ashmolean Museum and British Museum collections.

In a landmark exhibition entitled “The Ideal Image”, held at the Asia House Gallery in 1978, Pratapaditya Pal showed how artistic practices, religious concepts and specific iconographies, as developed in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods, became touchstones for Hindu and Buddhist sculptural work in other regions of South and Southeast Asia. He included beautifully reproduced images of five gold coins from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art,⁵ and indeed the idealised royal images on these coins fitted the aim of the exhibition perfectly. Pal found the coins “of great art-historical interest”, but he focused primarily on the portrait-value of their images. He considered these “the only examples of imperial portraits known” (1978: 55). Pal commented on the “Scythian costume” which “all the emperors are shown wearing”⁶ and observed that the halos behind the kings’ heads leave little doubt about their claim to divinity or divine right of kingship (*ibid.*: 16). Clearly Pal’s interest was in the concept of kingship and the iconography thereof, rather than in the sculptural or stylistic qualities of the coin designs.⁷

The view that the images on Gupta gold coins reflect a genuine interest of the Gupta kings rather than a projection of idealised rulership persists in many studies that involve Gupta coins. This is evident in Joanna Williams’ 1982 handbook on *The Art of Gupta India: Empire and Province*. She discusses the King-and-Queen Type coins with the portraits of Candragupta I and Kumāradevī. Williams attributes them to Candragupta and, triggered by the costume of the royal couple “continuing Kushan numismatic imagery”, she observes that “no sculptural innovations are yet perceptible” (1982: 22). Williams finds the images conservative and part of a bygone age. “With

Samudragupta the Gupta empire came into being” (*ibid.*: 22). She then points out that Samudragupta on his coins of the Battle-axe Type still retains his Kushan costume, but his pose replaces the previous rigidity with a more relaxed *déhanchement*.⁸ This change to more explicitly bent postures is generally considered to signal the arrival of the Gupta style. On his Tiger-slayer coins Samudragupta “sheds his tunic for a *dhotī* and crown”, another sign of the new age. Accompanying the king on the reverse is no longer a ‘Kushan’ goddess holding a cornucopia, but an Indian river goddess such as Gaṅgā (*ibid.*: 24).

Williams directs our attention to the stylistic qualities and new iconographies of these coin designs. But her true interest lies in what these coins tell us about the Gupta kings and their vision of kingship. Thus, the coins of Candragupta II would indicate a shift from the more martial concerns of his father to images of potential power. The designs show a number of breaks with the Kushan past, indicating a new self-assurance and the deliberate assumption of identity (*ibid.*: 27). Williams points out that Kumāragupta I continued four types of his father, revived four types that had been discontinued earlier and introduced several new designs. He thus showed an awareness of dynastic tradition of a particularly self-conscious kind, through deliberately invoking the period of greatest Gupta glory, that of Samudragupta, and contributing to this numismatic programme wholeheartedly (*ibid.*: 64).⁹ Williams’ focus on the choice of types may have been the main reason for not integrating the coins into her discussion of Gupta sculptural styles. Just as Pratapaditya Pal before her, she was mostly intrigued by Gupta kingship as reflected in the numismatic programme. As a result, her study did not invite scholars to explore Gupta numismatic art for stylistic diversity as such.

STUDYING GUPTA PERIOD STYLES

Numismatists read and write numismatic studies; art historians read and write art historic studies; and the twain meet and greet, but seldom join forces to study styles in Gupta art. The numismatist and

historian B.N. Mukherjee, finally, made a definite case that there is art in Gupta coin design that can be captured in more than only general laudatory phrases. He lectured on the topic at the State Museum in Lucknow (Lakhnau), and published his findings between 1981 and 1985.

Most influential and explicit is his *Art in Gupta and Post-Gupta Coinages of Northern India*, out in 1985.¹⁰ Mukherjee holds a plea for the study of style in Gupta gold coins to determine their links with other media of art. He mentions style features considered to fit Gupta sculptural idiom in a larger sense, such as a “gliding linearism and a subtle sense of movement [that] characterise the figures”. While “the royal male figures ... exude strength, robustness and vitality, ... royal or divine female figures have soft, graceful and slender forms and refined (often sensuous) contours” (1985: 20-21).

Mukherjee pointed out that all these characteristics are discernible in well-executed stone sculptures of the Gupta period as well, particularly in those produced in the Sarnath and Mathura idioms (*ibid.*: 21). He compares the standing postures of Gaṅgā on the Tiger-slayer Type coins of Samudragupta and Kumāragupta I with those of river-goddesses in stone from the same age (*ibid.*: 21). He convincingly argued that the die engravers shared the ideals of their colleagues working in different media. Mukherjee did not, however, go into specific stylistic comparisons between these media other than pointing to the two well-known centres of Mathura and Sarnath. Even more surprisingly, he did not attempt to distinguish at least a few recognisable styles within the Gupta coin designs as such.

Barbara Stoler Miller did remark on the stylistic affinities between certain Aśvamedha Type coins and those of Lyrist Type of Samudragupta, “suggesting that they may have been designed and minted as a pair” (1992: 60). She mentions a control mark unknown on any other coins to confirm this.¹¹ She was spot on about the stylistic closeness of the two designs, and I agree that these must have been

issued from the same mint, as many mint-idiomatic features can corroborate.¹²

Chhanda Mukherjee’s 1991 *Gupta Numismatic Art: An Artistic and Iconographic Study* did not deliver a stylistic unravelling either. She restricted herself to signalling three stages “in the process of representation of the obverse and reverse figures” (*ibid.*: 64). In the first stage, the human and divine figures are given a certain amount of rigidity (described as a phase “in which the Kushāṇa influence is very much prominent”). The second, intermediate, stage is characterised by flexibility in body contours and soft grace. In the last stage, both human and divine figures become rather conventionalised, showing an unusual tendency to depict rather overemphasised muscular features (*ibid.*: 64–65). In this last phase “the Gupta coinage lost its artistic excellence to a considerable extent”.

This reconstruction exemplifies a trend seen in more writings on Gupta coins: it visualises a three-step evolutionary process visible in shapes and shaping. Rigidity and angularity are interpreted as signalling immaturity and the dependence on Kushan prototypes of the first phase. Conventionalisation and muscularity are seen as signs of the third phase, that of decline. Flexibility, gliding linearism, a subtle sense of movement, good proportioning, soft, graceful and slender forms and refined contours, however, define the glorious middle stage. This stylistic evolution is seen as running parallel to an iconographic and metrological evolution reflecting a deliberate policy of Indianisation of the coins. In that model, a short phase of ‘slavishly’ copying devices, stances and costumes from Kushan coins is followed by a phase in which ‘truly Indian’ royal imagery, attributes and legends replace the inherited design elements.¹³ Skandagupta, finally, is cast in the role of the king who introduced the ‘truly Indian’ *suvarṇa* weight standard of 144 grains (9.33 g) for the Gupta gold coins to complete the Indianisation process.¹⁴

Mukherjee’s chapter on the artistic features of Gupta coins focuses more on iconography than

on style. She does comment on hairstyles, facial features and stature occasionally, but unfortunately by broad reference to types only,¹⁵ rather than to specific varieties of these types. Mukherjee reproduced the line drawings of Gupta coins that were originally prepared by Nanda Lal Bose, Asit Kumar Haldar and P. Neogy for Radha Kumud Mookerji's *The Gupta Empire* (1947; here 2nd ed. 1952). These drawings were not meant to serve a numismatic purpose. They only show coin-like circles carrying isolated images of kings and goddesses. For a stylistic study these images are of no use, as they betray a high degree of idealised standardisation. All kings have similar faces; all goddesses are buxom, slender-waisted and broad-hipped, with near-identical facial features and body ornaments. Inadvertently, these drawings have cast a veil over the much wider stylistic spectrum hidden underneath.¹⁶

In the next major study of Gupta period art, *The Golden Age: Gupta Art – Empire, Province and Influence* (1991), the editor, Karl Khandalavala, emphasised how we should be aware of the stylistic diversity characterising sculptural arts of the Gupta period:

In any analysis of Gupta sculpture, one circumstance, too often overlooked, is that it did not conform to a single pattern. It must not be forgotten that there were several different workshops whose creations varied one from the other in greater or less degree. ... If these factors are borne in mind, many of the controversies which prevail, on dating in particular, would be viewed beyond the pale of hidebound methodology limited to only certain stylistic features and considerations (1991: xiii).

Khandalavala tells us to expect regional styles, differences between artists employed at the same workshop, different *tempi* in the application of certain iconographies and styles. How unfortunate that he did not once refer to the evidence offered by Gupta coins, even though he had invited R. Vanaja, keeper of the numismatic collections at the National Museum, New Delhi, to contribute a chapter on Gupta coinage (Vanaja 1991). Just as Pal and Williams before her, Vanaja mostly focused on

Gupta kingship as expressed through the designs. She provides a summary survey of Gupta coin issues, in which she indicates that the figures of the rulers and the deities conform to the stylised human form of Gupta classicism and its quest for spiritualism. “The most remarkable feature is the natural affinity between idea and form, interrelating abstract political and religious ideas” (1991: 110). In her conclusion, Vanaja summarises the basic iconographic programme which, in her view, focuses on goddesses such as Śrī-Lakṣmī, Gaṅgā and Ambikā, and on Kārttikeya.

DISCERNING STYLES IN GUPTA COINS

Khandalavala's plea eventually did have a positive effect on the study of styles in Gupta coins. M.C. Joshi, in his introduction to the catalogue of the 2007 exhibition on Gupta sculptural arts in Paris, discusses “the sculptural art in coinage” (*ibid.*: 55–57). He emphasises that “art reflected in the coins of the Gupta Age, especially the gold coins issued by the Gupta ruler, is as significant as the contemporary sculptures in other media”. Joshi then focuses on explaining some of the royal portraiture, the intended iconography of the devices, and the combined occurrence with verses in Sanskrit. Inevitably, the processes of ‘de-Kushanisation’ (a term not used by Joshi) and gradual Indianisation get mentioned.

Surprisingly enough, Joshi seemed not so much intent on finding similarities in style between coins and other media. Instead, he focused more on finding differences between them. He pointed out that Gupta coinage in gold was basically connected with the craft and art traditions of goldsmithery. “It is on this account that the artistic manipulation on the coins is stylistically different from stone, clay or metal sculptures” (*ibid.*: 56). Joshi mentions in particular the “idealized realism”. He points out that in most portraits of the king and in some of the figures on the reverse, attempts have been made to give their bodies a conspicuous muscular treatment. This would illustrate a deep impress of the

Hellenistic art tradition, which was possibly popular amongst the goldsmiths of the Gupta period (*ibid.*: 57). Joshi then suggests that the mint masters used the realism of Hellenistic art to express the idealised personality of the emperor as also described by Kālidāsa. An East-meets-West encounter (my words) of a numismatic kind, it would seem. Be that as it may, Joshi may have been right in directing our attention to the role of gem engravers in infusing certain style elements (such as muscularity, certain postures, ornaments and hairstyles) derived from the Gandhāran gem-making traditions into styles current in the Gupta sculptural arena.

Joshi goes further than any scholar before him in pointing out that “in some cases, the intricacies of portrayal and thematic treatment on the coinage appear aesthetically more advanced than the sculptural art in stone” (*ibid.*: 55–56). And he believes that the art elements on gold coins of Samudragupta and Candragupta II “served as the forerunner of the artistic trends” in stone sculpture from the time of Kumāragupta I. I would argue that the time gap, if there was any, was smaller.¹⁷ Anyway, before tackling the complexities of chronological matching, we need to better understand the stylistic diversity of the Gupta coin corpus itself. Via digital routes it is now much easier than before to study coins in close-up and compare them for their style, iconography and technique. Auctioned coins, which are usually poorly documented nowadays except for visuals and price tags, may expand our visual resources even more.

PART II: INNOVATION AND RECREATION AT A MINT ‘OF’ KUMĀRAGUPTA I

Our examination of a coherent, but type-wise quite diverse, set of coins struck for Kumāragupta I will show how unjust Vincent Smith’s derogatory remarks were. As it happens, most of Kumāragupta’s coin types are represented in the set: the well-established Archer, Horseman, Lion-slayer and Chattra Types, the new Apratigha, Rhinoceros-slayer, Elephant-rider and Elephant-rider-Lion-slayer Types, and the revived Lyrist, Aśvamedha

and King-and-Queen Types first seen under Samudragupta. These coins of Kumāragupta I from this particular mint are very rare nowadays. Altogether, they are presently documented by less than 100 specimens among some 1600 recorded so far for Kumāragupta I in the DINARA database.¹⁸ Each of these types has its own iconography and specific legends, which are the most conspicuous variables. These variables are balanced by unmistakable similarities in styles, palaeography and fabric. In my mint-idiomatic analysis they belong to two related groups, those of Mint Groups 7 and 8. We will start our tour with the coins of Lion-slayer Type, as quite recently, these were the subject of a detailed scrutiny by Pankaj Tandon in the summer 2012 issue of the *Journal of the Oriental Numismatic Society*.

MINT GROUP 8: LION-SLAYER TYPE

The first variety of Kumāragupta’s Lion-slayer coins¹⁹ considered here shows the king not actually shooting the lion with bow and arrow (which is the usual pose), but standing straight, while pressing the bow against his left or right hip (**Fig. 11.2**).²⁰ The king has closely cropped, curly hair and sharp facial features. His fairly slender body shows a bare, muscular torso over a smooth *dhotī*. The king has placed his left foot on the left hind leg of the lion, a pose which Vincent Smith long ago dubbed that of the “Lion-trampler” (1884: 184).²¹ Of the circular legend on the obverse only the section between XII and II o’clock is visible on the flan. It starts with *sihanivārī*, “he who wards off the lion”.²² The goddess on the reverse sits in *līlāsana*, with her left leg folded in front and her right leg hanging down, on a lotus supported by a lion reclining to right.²³ Tandon points out that Gupta’s 1993 description of the image of Śrī on the coin in the collection of the State Museum, Lucknow, was radically incorrect. Gupta thought that the goddess holds a noose in her left hand and a skull garland in her right hand. Tandon recognised a lotus stalk in the left hand; he found no evidence of a garland or any other object in the right hand. I will return to the object in the



Fig. 11.2a–b. Lion-slayer Type, State Museum, Lucknow, acc.no. 11586.

left hand below, but I agree with P.L. Gupta that the goddess holds a second attribute in the opposite hand, though definitely not a skull garland. It looks like a thin beaded string passing across her right wrist and through her fingers. Perhaps it represents the short stem of a flower that did not make it to the flan. The facial features of the slender goddess, with high, round breasts, have worn away.

A similar coin, in Tandon's own collection, was struck from a different pair of dies, as is evident from the lower positioning of the lion, from the position of the king's bow, from a slightly different circular legend on the obverse (which contains the title "*nṛpādhipatiḥ*"²⁴) and from different attributes of Śrī (Fig. 11.3; Col.pl. 3). In her right hand she holds a lotus, which rises on a thin and winding stalk in the left field. The pericarp is turned towards the face of the goddess. In her left hand she holds the thin stem of what looks like a wide-open flower with three distinct seed-boxes rising up in a row. This does not at all look like the *padma* usually held



Fig. 11.3a–b. Lion-slayer Type, Pankaj Tandon [Col.pl. 3].

by Śrī, but more like a floral interpretation of the attribute that was held by the goddess in the time of Samudragupta and the early years of Candragupta II, *viz.*, a cornucopia. The curvaceous stem rules out that the die-engraver still intended to show a horn-like attribute. The semblance of round fruits or jewels bulging out of a wide vessel, which defined the shaping of the cornucopia on early Gupta coins, persists in an adapted form here.

Tandon added a third Lion-slayer coin, again from the State Museum, Lucknow, which shows a third version of the same theme (Fig. 11.4). The reverse is very similar in execution, but the obverse differs in showing the king in the archer's *pratyālīḍha* posture (with left leg stretched and right leg bent), pulling the bowstring to shoot the lion. Kumāragupta puts his left foot close to the lion's body, while stepping out with the right. Numismatists normally use Vincent Smith's label 'lion-combatant' to characterise the scene.²⁵

Tandon concluded that these three Lion-slayer Type coins must have been made at the same place and more or less at the same time (2012: 23). He suggested an eastern Indian provenance because of the letter *śrī* in the reverse left field of the first variety, as "later gold coins from Bengal frequently have this title accompanying the image of Lakshmi" (*ibid.*: 22).²⁶ However, there is a considerable time gap between Kumāragupta's Lion-slayer coins and the early Medieval coins with the letter *śrī* in the



Fig. 11.4a–b. Lion-slayer Type, State Museum, Lucknow, acc.no. 11594.

left field. Coins of the later imperial Gupta kings do not carry it. For these reasons I prefer Tandon's alternative explanation, *viz.* that *śrī* is the first part of the king's epithet. Our mint-idiomatic analysis supports this, as I will show.

A fourth Lion-slayer design, not discussed by Pankaj Tandon, also fits in this group. It appears on a unique coin from the Bayana hoard that was selected for the Mahārāja's cabinet (Fig. 11.5).²⁷ The coin shows the king standing, turned slightly to his left (our right) in *ālīḍha* stance (with left knee bent, right leg stretched) while looking to his right (our left), pulling the string of the bow in his right hand to shoot an arrow at a rearing lion falling backwards in the left field. The king has been given a fairly small head over a strongly built body on sturdy legs. He has delicate, sharply drawn facial features with a less explicitly hooked nose and beautifully accented eyebrows. His hair shows rows of neat curls curving tightly along his skull. Kumāragupta wears a tailed coat with extremely long, waving tails over closely hugging breeches stuck in boots. His coat is decorated with beads along the collar and down the



Fig. 11.5a–b. Lion-slayer Type, Bayana hoard, thence in Bharatpur Palace coin cabinet.

front. A thin sash has been tied across the waist and secured with a delicate knot.

The nimbate goddess on the reverse sits to front in *līlāsana* on a lion reclining to left, her right leg folded and tucked up, the left hanging down. She wears a bodice with long sleeves over a lower garment reaching to just above her anklets and carries the usual ornaments. For lack of a clear illustration, it is quite difficult to identify the object that Śrī lifts up in her right hand. Even Altekar could not make it out. It looks like a flower cup with five outcurving petals on a basis of round pellets resting on the tiny hand of the goddess. Underneath there appears to be a shimmer of a thin stalk rising along the *tamgha*. With her left hand, resting in her lap, Śrī holds the stalk of a lotus with pointed petals that will return in a Horseman design below (Fig. 11.9b). The left field has just enough room left to accommodate the geometric *tamgha* near IX o'clock, while opposite the epithet *śrī-mahendrasinḥa*, in tight and square *akṣaras*, barely fits in.

MINT GROUPS 7–8: ARCHER TYPE

Tandon's study focused on coins of one type (Lion-slayer), a method with a long and strong tradition in Gupta numismatics, but one that comes with built-in tunnel vision. A comparative study of coins within a mint-idiomatic group, although creating new boundaries, nevertheless helps to widen our visual scope and understand details that might otherwise have remained unclear or unexplained. A shared mint-idiomatic profile is best explained in this method by hypothesising that mint-idiomatically related coins were indeed manufactured at the same mint, in approximately the same period. Such designs were not necessarily done by one and the same die maker. Different, but apparently related, substyles can definitely be made out. This is immediately evident for the rare Archer Type coins surviving in these two mint-idiomatic groups from the time of Kumāragupta.²⁸

The coins of a first Archer variety (Fig. 11.6) carry on the obverse Kumāragupta standing to left,



Fig. 11.6a–b. Archer Type. State Museum, Lucknow, acc.no. 11590.

resting his right hand on a long arrow and pushing a tall bow outwards with his left hand. His name appears abbreviated as *ku* underneath a crescent under his left arm.²⁹ He wears a smoothly clinging, tailed tunic with long sleeves and billowing tails over equally smooth, clinging breeches and half-long boots. Kumāragupta wears his hair in low curls tightly curving along his skull.³⁰ His facial features are sharp, with small, round eyes, a hook-like nose, straight lips and a pointed chin. He wears large *kunḍala* earrings. He has tied a narrow belt across his waist. The muscles of his chest shimmer through the textile of his tunic. In the left field rises the Garuḍa-banner with a lathe-turned staff. Garuḍa stands facing front on round feet, his wings curving outwards horizontally. The circular legend, which ran all around, shows relatively big *akṣaras* that are largely off the flan. Of many *akṣaras* only a basis or tail part is just visible. Altekar could decipher *śrī* at XII o'clock and *ku* at I o'clock (1950) and remains of blurred letters between III and VI. Perhaps the conjunct *ndra* appears beneath the feet of the king (as in *mahendra*).

The reverse shows Śrī, already familiar to us from the Lion-slayer coins, but now seated on a wide lotus pericarp, with five of its petals intricately carved. We may notice her small, squarish feet placed one atop the other on the seat. We can see

her crossed legs from a slightly higher perspective than usual. In her right hand Śrī lifts a flower to her face. The Lucknow Museum coin has retained more of the flower and helps to confirm the attribute for the second Lion-slayer coin (Fig. 11.3b).³¹ In her left hand the goddess holds the enigmatic floral cornucopia, which again resembles a flower on a long and thin, winding stem. In the left field appears a beautiful auspicious conch. The insertion of an auspicious symbol rather than a geometric *tamgha* is not uncommon in Kumāragupta's time, but usually that would be a *śrīvatsa* symbol.³² In this Archer design we find a conch, by all means an auspicious equivalent. In the right field, along the edge, runs the "faint and truncated" legend *śramahanda*, standing for "*śrīmahendra*". A chain of pearls, meant to surround the entire design, appears below.

The obverse of a second Archer variety (Fig. 11.7) closely resembles that of the first (Fig. 11.6a), except for one striking difference: the abbreviated form of the king's name (*ku*) has been left out.³³ The king's hairdo looks more natural than in Variety 1, with slightly bigger curls. The clothing is equally smooth and clings to the king's body. The tails of the coat are marginally shorter and the belt is absent. As was to be expected, the Garuḍa-banner has a lathe-turned staff and the shaping of



Fig. 11.7a–b. Archer Type, National Museum, New Delhi, acc.no. 51.50/73.

the bird is closely similar. The circular legend shows the familiar, relatively big, letters. They came only partly on the flan in the single coin documented so far. Altekar reconstructed the verse on this unique coin (Bayana hoard no. 1375) as *jayati mahītaṃśrī kumāraguptaḥ*, to be read from VIII o'clock onwards.

The reverse (Fig. 11.7b) is stylistically quite different from that of the first Archer Type coin (Fig. 11.6b), as its view of the nimbate goddess offers the common frontal perspective (so we can see little of the thighs). She sits on a high, seven-petalled lotus seat. Śrī wears her hair in a flat, wide hairdo with a low, wide bun fixed on top. In her raised right hand she lifts a lotus with five round petals. In her left hand she holds the thin stalk of a hybrid attribute that no longer resembles a horn of plenty, but directly descends from it. A geometric symbol fills the lower left field, while the king's epithet *śrīmahendraḥ*, in tightly placed, square and neat *akṣaras*, curves along the left side of the goddess.

MINT GROUP 8: HORSEMAN TYPE

The king with the flattish curls and the sharp facial features with prominent eyebrows, round eyes and a hook nose (Fig. 11.6a) recurs on coins of Horseman Type (Fig. 11.8).³⁴ These coins are relatively more numerous than those of the other types, a distribution pattern seen under Kumāragupta I in other mint-idiomatic groups as well.³⁵ The king rides to right, resting his right hand near his hip, possibly on the hilt of a short dagger or sword in a sheath. He carries a bow in his left hand. He wears a coat with button-like ornaments down the front over trousers

and low boots with straps on the ankles.³⁶ The horse has closely cropped manes and dons a crest ornament. Along the neck and across the buttocks are strings with dangling round ornaments, apparently engraved with decorations. The circular legend, in square, tight lettering, starts at VII o'clock and has been read as *pr̥thivītalesvarendraḥ kumāragupto jayatyajitaḥ*, “the invincible Kumāragupta, a veritable Indra on the surface of the earth, is victorious”.³⁷

Nimbate Śrī on the reverse sits to left on a wicker stool, her tiny feet together and her knees slightly ajar. The goddess again wears her hair tied into a bun at the back of her head. Her long *dhotī* has been secured at the waist with a beaded string. On her hip we notice a girdle. Other ornaments include earrings, a necklace and bracelets. With her right hand raised, palm upwards, she feeds several round fruits to a peacock at her side, its tail feathers in the air. In her left hand, on her hip, Śrī holds the stem of the cornucopia turned into a flower. In the left field appears a lozenge-shaped geometric symbol. In the right field appears the king's epithet *ajitamahendraḥ* in neat, square *akṣaras*. A border of beads encircles the entire scene. In a second variety, the floral-cornucopia flower has been replaced by a lotus with widely spaced, elongated petals (Fig. 11.9) resembling the flower on one of the Lion-slayer coins discussed earlier (Fig. 11.5b).³⁸

The designs for these particular Horseman coins exemplify, even more than the related Lion-slayer and Archer designs, a gradual shift towards



Fig. 11.8a–b. Horseman Type, Baldwin's Auction 26 (9 May 2001), Lot 1013.



| Fig. 11.9a–b. Horseman Type, Private collection.

a different shaping. It prefers slightly angular and sharp profiles, heads and postures over more curvaceous ones. The virtual framing formats for the king on horseback or the goddess seated on her wicker stool appear somewhat flattened. We may notice, for instance, the victorious pose that Kumāragupta assumes after shooting the lion – hands placed on the hips, the shoulders raised, elbows pressing outwards, the face to the right in side-profile view, with hook nose and pointed chin emphasising a more overt angularity and slight stylisation of the portrait (Fig. 11.2a). Such changes in the stylistic visuality of coin workmanship under Kumāragupta I have evoked different responses in scholars. Vincent Smith resented these changes, as the resultant designs no longer complied with the ideal of smooth linearity. Others have complimented the mint masters of Kumāragupta I for the artistry of their coins. It seems, however, that

these scholars mostly had the type diversity in mind rather than the styles.

MINT GROUP 8: RHINOCEROS-SLAYER TYPE

The new Rhinoceros-slayer Type coins are artistically innovative and also reveal the move towards a different style (Fig. 11.10). This coin type was one of the novelties brought to light by the Bayana hoard find of 1946. Apparently, one of Kumāragupta's mint-masters expanded the range of so-called hunter types (showing the king in combat with a tiger or a lion) with a lively scene showing how he slays a rhinoceros.³⁹ The animal turns its head towards its mighty opponent, while the king keeps his sword ready in his right hand, about to stab the rhino. The diagonally opposed adversaries and the exchange of glances give the scene a striking dynamism. The Sanskrit verse around the scene similarly reflects the clash of opposing powers, as it praises the victorious king for protecting from the rhinoceros (*khadga*) by means of his sword (*khadga*).⁴⁰ In terms of style, we may recognise the sharp facial features of the king with the hook nose and the closely cropped curls. His coat and long trousers apparently are the normal riding gear of the time, as seen earlier in the related Horseman Type (Figs. 11.8a, 11.9a).

The goddess on the reverse stands in three-quarter view turned to our left, balancing on a



| Fig. 11.10a–b. Rhinoceros-slayer Type, N.S. Singhi collection (in the 1980s).

makara. Her mount identifies her as the goddess Gaṅgā. A female attendant, much smaller than the goddess, stands to right, while looking over her right shoulder towards the parasol, which she lifts above her mistress. The shaft of the dainty parasol is lathe-turned. Had Vincent Smith come across any of these coins, their style would have boosted his conviction that Gupta coin arts were indeed declining under Kumāragupta. The engraver has placed Gaṅgā in the centre of the design. He has emphasised the river-goddess' divine beauty and fertility through an emphatically flexed body posture and voluptuous hips. Her head is flexed downward slightly more than seen before. Her clothing is so thin and clinging that not only the contours of breasts, belly, hips and knees can be made out, but also the nipples of her breasts and the *pudenda*. The ends of her veil-like clothing between her right leg and the head of the *makara* mount can be made out on certain well-preserved coins.⁴² With her right hand Gaṅgā holds a lotus that rises from the trunk of the *makara*. The artist did not try to depict the hand as actually clutching the stem. The position of the arm varies a bit – depending on the die it is directed either slightly down or raised slightly up. Śrī's left hand hangs down along her side. As we have noticed earlier, fairly small heads characterise this style, and this feature is quite noticeable in the image of Gaṅgā, who has been given a square face, a tiny, turned-up nose and a pointed chin. She wears her hair tied into a bun at the back of her head. Ornaments include *kunḍalas*, a beaded necklace, armlets, bracelets and anklets. The usual geometric *tamgha* and the king's epithet have traded places, which is quite uncommon outside this particular mint-idiomatic group. The *biruda* reads *śrīmahendrakhaḍga*, fully in keeping with the way in which Kumāragupta's titles were normally composed – one part *mahendra*, the other part referring to the pivotal aspect of the design. Quite importantly, the Rhinoceros-slayer coins exist only in Mint Group 8.

MINT GROUP 7: ELEPHANT-RIDER TYPE

Kumāragupta's mint masters also added the ancient Indian theme of the king goading a majestic elephant to the iconographic programme of Gupta gold coins.⁴² Coins of this type are found only in Mint Group 7 (Fig. 11.11). The king straddles atop the mighty beast, his legs covered by its ears. He lifts a goad in his right hand. An attendant crouches behind, raising the royal umbrella above his master.⁴³ A fillet waves down from the umbrella's shaft. The stylistic affinity with other designs from the group is evident in the king's curly hairdo, his sharp facial features and the muscularity of his bare torso. The attendant has been given similar features in a slightly coarser fashion. His lank body curves forward, more or less following the edge of the coin. As in the related designs, the circular legend on the obverse has been carved in square *akṣaras* distributed along the edge with ample interspacing. Altekar (1957: 194) suggested that the Elephant-rider motif is connected with sport, but this is unlikely considering the nature of the Sanskrit verse, which starts from II o'clock: *kṣataripu-kumāragupto rājatrātā jayati ripūn*, "Kumāragupta, who has destroyed his enemies and who protects kings, is victorious over his foes". Again it is the king's heroic defeat of his enemies that sets the tone.⁴⁴ Sivaramamurti (1983: 20–21) drew attention to the literary equivalent offered by Kālidāsa in his description of King Atithi "riding the elephant in all splendour with parasol held over his head, parasol denied to all others and vouchsafed for him alone,



Fig. 11.11a–b. Elephant-rider Type, National Museum, New Delhi, acc.no. 51.50/53, from the Bayana hoard.

making him emperor of all the domain on earth like Indra in heaven”.

The reverse shows Śrī standing to front on a lotus with beautifully shaped leaves. With her right hand she holds a lotus which has sprung from a large lotus treasure or *nidhi* at her feet. Another flower branches off towards the edge. Her left hand presses against her hip an ultra-thin stalk of the – by now – familiar attribute midway between a cornucopia and a lotus. More rare is the die variety in which she extends her left hand towards the edge, while holding the thin stalk. At her left foot a *śaṅkhanidhi* balances delicately on its tip. As usual in this group, the die-engraver has emphasised Śrī’s wide and flat hairdo, the high, round breasts, the wide hips and ample thighs. A long sash with forked ends has been draped across her shoulders. In most coins the halo has an ornamental shape with beading all around. The king’s title in the right field reads *śrīmahendraḡajaḡ*, in tight, square *aḡśaras*. In keeping with the nature of the legends on the reverse of these Gupta coins, the text would translate best as “The honourable Mahendra who is (like) the elephant”. Altekar chose to translate the legend as “The elephant of king Mahendra” instead (1957: 195).

MINT GROUP 7: ELEPHANT-RIDER-LION-SLAYER TYPE

In a related design, again exclusive to Mint Group 7 so it appears, the king rides to right on his elephant, accompanied by an attendant holding a parasol (Fig. 11.12; Col.pl. 4).⁴⁵ Until the discovery of the Bayana hoard, this type was only known through a cast of a coin that had vanished subsequently. The king raises his right hand into the air; his left hand is not visible. Notice how, as in the image of Śrī on the related Rhinoceros-slayer design (Fig. 11.10b), the hand is rather stylised and shows mostly a thumb and the profile of one finger. The king’s sharp facial features stand out in profile, and so does his lank body. The shape of his mouth varies, with lips either curved up or emphatically curved down in a



Fig. 11.12a–b. Elephant-rider-Lion-slayer Type, National Museum, New Delhi, acc.no. 51.39/43, ascribed to the Bayana hoard [Col.pl. 4].

haughty grimace. The ferocious elephant, its strong trunk almost touching the edge of the coin, crushes a lion beneath its left front paw. Altekar has restored the Sanskrit verse on the coin as probably reading *ḡṣataripu-kumāragupto rājatrātā jayati ripūn*, as in the Elephant-rider Type. It runs from XII o’clock (1957: 195–97).

The goddess on the reverse stands to front, but slightly turned to her left, our right. Her body sways in an extremely alluring *déhançement*, her knee turned outwards, thus subtly balancing out her sideward glance, with head turned towards the peacock in the left field. The bird, with tail feathers in the air, raises its head towards Śrī’s hand, evidently expecting to receive the round small fruits held ready by her. Again we may notice the stylised rendering of the hand. With her left hand, pressed against her hip, Śrī holds the stem of a lotus with elongated petals. The goddess wears her hair tied into a bun in the nape of her neck. She wears a thin, clinging garment that billows around her arms near the elbows and along the shins. A long sash, with forked ends, has been draped around the shoulders and arms. The similarity in body contours to other designs described above is evident in the high, round breasts over the thin waist, the wide hips and voluptuous thighs. Quite remarkably, the king’s long epithet runs in a curving fashion along the edge from XI o’clock. The text reads *siḡhanihanta-mahendraḡajaḡ*, “Mahendra, the lion-killer, who is (like) the elephant”. This interpretation, equating the king with the ferocious, deadly elephant, is

in line with the usual meaning of such epithets qualifying the Gupta king's special qualities. I believe it improves Altekar's translation with "The elephant of king Mahendra, destroyer of the lion" (1957: 196).

MINT GROUP 7: LYRIST TYPE

Kumāragupta's Lyrist Type recalls a series from the time of Samudragupta, which is a great favourite among coin collectors for its sculptural finesse. Altekar did not express much enthusiasm about the later series, qualified by him as "an effort to revive the Lyrist type of Samudragupta" (1957: 211). Similarly, Ajit Ghose found that "it cannot claim to be equally beautiful" (1960: 178). I beg to differ, as Kumāragupta's die-engravers seem to have handled the theme with equal ease, adding some of the most alluring images to the corpus (Fig. 11.13). The Lyrist coins are particular to Mint Group 7 only.⁴⁶

The obverse shows the king seated on a low seat with a high back. He touches the strings of the *vīṇā* on his lap with the fingers of both hands. The way in which the fingers are spread out, forming a circle, is particularly noteworthy. The king has a lean, well-built body. Its bare torso subtly contrasts with the beaded ornaments on the neck and upper arms, in the best Gupta designing tradition. The *vīṇā* hides the king's *dhotī* from view. Kumāragupta has a tall face with regular features, and his hair shows

low, wavy curls curving down the nape of his neck. Perhaps he wears a diadem with a frontal ornament. The short fillet visible above the left shoulder, though at first sight part of a diadem, more likely goes with the beaded necklace. More designs from this group show such fillets waving behind the king's shoulder. Multiple thin, ornamental strands, with one bead clearly visible, wave down from the crest on the king's head. The earring carries a roundish stone.

The stylistic rendering of this coin is different from that of the portraits with the sharp-featured king, but it resembles that of the Archer Type without the legend *ku* in the obverse field (Fig. 11.7a). The perspective on the throne is slightly different from that seen in Samudragupta's coins, as the backrest is placed towards the background rather than in three-quarter view to the right. The obverse legend starts on I o'clock and reads *mahārājādhirāja-śrī-kumāragupta*, a simple formula following the format of Samudragupta's Lyrist coins in the combination of royal title and name.⁴⁷

On Samudragupta's Lyrist coins, the lady on the reverse has a nimbus and sits on a wicker stool. She holds a fillet and a lotus, and is always identified as Śrī. On Kumāragupta's Lyrist coins, the lady is not nimbate, and she sits on a low seat with a backrest. For these two reasons, Altekar suggested that she is not a goddess but the queen sitting at ease in the



Fig. 11.13a–b. Lyrist Type, National Museum, New Delhi, acc.no. 51.50/50, from the Bayana hoard.

palace hall, listening to her husband singing and playing the *vīṇā*. S.V. Sohoni (1956b; 1957b) argued that the coin shows the queen awaiting her husband about to return home after the war. He interpreted the attribute in her right hand as a mirror rather than a lotus.

I am not convinced that the mint masters would introduce such a major change in the Lyrist Type iconography. There is ample evidence for the representation of Śrī without halo on Gupta coins, so the absence of that feature cannot prove this lady's human nature.⁴⁸ She is tall and well built with high, small breasts and ample hips. She lifts a flower to her face, while leaning on her left hand placed on the seat behind her. The laces of her *mekhalā* girdle, which secures her lower garment around the hips, can be clearly made out, but there is no trace of an upper garment other than a thin sash waving across her shoulders. Ornaments include *kuṇḍalas*, a beaded necklace, bracelets and anklets. As in the time of Samudragupta, the king's name is repeated on the reverse, here in the form of *kumāragupta*. It has been inserted in the left field, a position never given to the *biruda* in the earlier Lyrist coins, but not uncommon in the present group, as the Rhinoceros-slayer Type (Fig. 11.10b) has shown.

MINT GROUP 7: AŚVAMEDHA TYPE

Several visual characteristics of the ultra-expensive Aśvamedha coin auctioned at Baldwin's (Fig. 11.1) suggest that this type too deserves a place in the mint-idiomatic ensemble considered here. Some have criticised Kumāragupta's die engravers for not matching the equine imagery of Samudragupta's Aśvamedha Type, but undeservedly in my view. The beautifully proportioned horse stands to left, tied to the sacrificial stake (*yūpa*) which rises from a two-tier, square platform. A fillet secured at the top of the *yūpa* flies to the right above the horse. It has sharply forked ends. The horse wears an ornamental breast cloth tied with a fillet. Faithful to the original design, the letter *si* (possibly standing for *siddham*, "prosperity") appears below the horse, here close



Fig. 11.14a–b. Aśvamedha Type, British Museum, London, acc.no. 1894,0506.962.

to the edge. In a second variety, of which more specimens have been preserved, the horse stands to right (Fig. 11.14). It does not carry the letter *si*. Altekār could not decipher the full circular legend on the obverse, but suggested that, from IX o'clock, it reads *devo jitaśatruḥ kumāraguptodhirājā*, "King Kumāragupta, the supreme lord, who has conquered his enemies" (1957: 200).

The nimbate lady on the reverse stands to our left in a curvaceous posture with hip thrust outwards. The Baldwin's coin reveals that on the variety with horse to left, she stands on a lotus, of which the petal tips just protrude beneath her feet (Fig. 11.1b); on the coins with horse to right no support has been engraved. The lady has high, round breasts, broad hips and full thighs. Her face shows fairly coarse features and a prominent nose. Her hair has been tied into a bun at the nape of her neck. She holds a fly-whisk with a lathe-turned handle in her right hand; its yak's tail waves behind her head. In her left hand she holds a short piece of cloth with dovetail ends. Her garment clings so closely to the body that we can only discern a small trace between the feet. A thin sash with dovetailed ends has been draped around the shoulders and drops down on either side along the arms. Ornaments include *kuṇḍalas*, a fine, beaded necklace, armlets and what look like bracelets (or could be sleeve ends). Oddly enough, the image combines a curvaceous posture and voluptuous body shape with a slight angularity of gestures and stiff arm postures. In the left field appears a lathe-turned staff on a small round base. It supports a

śrīvatsa symbol. A broad piece of cloth with forked end waves from its top. The king's epithet, engraved in square, tightly spaced letters along the rim in the right field, reads *śrī aśvamedhamahendraḥ*, “the noble Mahendra of the Aśvamedha”.

MINT GROUP 7: APRATIGHA TYPE

There is no end to the surprising results of our analysis of coins sharing the idiom of Mint Groups 7 or 8. It even offers us important visual hooks to tie in the enigmatic coins of Kumāragupta's Apratigha Type (Fig. 11.15). Recently, I have proposed to interpret this uncommon device as part of a deliberate effort to emphasise the innate connections between the king and Kārttikeya (Raven 2015). Our scrutiny of the linked designs of Mint Groups 7 and 8 now helps to recognise the return of distinctive visual elements in the Apratigha coins as well.

The pivotal figure on the obverse is a male person standing facing front, his feet turned outwards. He has folded his raised hands in front of his chest. Facial features have worn away. The male's haloless head is crowned by a topknot or cranial tuft of hair tied with a thin fillet. Sometimes a crescent-shaped ornament seems traceable underneath the central bun. The earlobes are adorned with round ear studs or earrings. Most surface details of the man's clothing have worn away on the recovered

Apratigha coins, but we may, with considerable difficulty and by studying various coins, recognise a necklace, an upper garment with sleeves and a long *dhotī* with pleats running down the centre and along the legs in an oblique fashion in opposite directions. Possibly the man wears a thin belt tied at the waist. He goes barefoot.⁴⁹

On either side of the central figure appears part of a name – *kumāra* on his left and *gupta* or *guptaḥ* on his right side. The characters have been carved on a vertical plane; the first half of the legend runs from top to bottom, the second half in the opposite direction. Most scholars are convinced that here the king is shown abdicating his throne in order to become a mendicant.⁵⁰ However, this is no mendicant, but a young prince.⁵¹ He folds his hands together in respect for the man on his right offering him the dynastic Garuḍa-banner and the lady on his left gesturing. They probably represent his royal parents.⁵² It has been suggested that the man with the Garuḍa-banner holds a shield in his left hand, but more likely it is another instance of the rather awkward and angularly bent positioning of the left arm and hand as also seen on a particular, related Lion-slayer coin discussed above and illustrated in Fig. 11.2a. The shaping and placement of the characters in the circular legend (so far unread) are also comparable to those in that particular Lion design.



| Fig. 11.15a–b. Apratigha Type, State Museum, Lucknow, acc.no. 11403.

The reverse shows us Śrī seated with folded legs on the two layers of delicately shaped petals of a lotus rising from VI o'clock (in the related Lion-slayer design in Fig. 11.2b the lower layer of petals made way for the lion mount). Her tiny, squarish right foot has been placed over the left one. She raises her right arm up, bringing a lotus with big, round petals towards her face. The gesture is strikingly similar to that given to her in the Lion-slayer coins (Figs. 11.2b, 11.3b, 11.4b, 11.5b), the related Archer Type designs (Figs. 11.6b, 11.7b), the Elephant-rider Type design (Fig. 11.11b) and the Lyrist Type design (Fig. 11.13b). More importantly, this gesture is not seen in her portraits from other mints of this time. The stem of the flower attribute rises up from the lotus seat below. The tiny left hand is placed akimbo on the left hip, again flexed in a way closely resembling that of other portraits in this group (cp. e.g., the Lion-slayer coin in Fig. 11.5b). Śrī appears to wear a diadem with a central crest, and her hair has been tied into ornamental locks framing her skull. One fillet of the diadem waves above her left shoulder. Śrī's body is fairly lithe, with small, high breasts over a thin waist. A thin *uttarīya* has been draped across her arms; two ends fly up near the *biruda*. No traces of an upper bodice can be seen, but thin pleats reveal that a lower garment covers the folded legs. The compact and rather fat halo has an equally familiar ring to it (cp. Figs. 11.5b, 11.7b, 11.9b). As in most designs from this mint, the *biruda apratigha* has been engraved in tightly spaced, square *akṣaras* curving gently some distance from the edge. The slightly lowered placement of the geometric *tamgha* in the opposite field is uncommon in designs from other mint groups, but fits that of Mint Groups 7 and 8 like a glove. The addition of a crescent, both on the obverse and on the reverse, appears to be quite specific and deliberate for the Apratigha design.

FINALLY ...

The coalescing bond of a shared mint idiom pervades through all the coins discussed above.

It filters through in body contours, in the use of a small and specific range of facial features and hairstyles, in postures of body, heads, hands and feet, in fittings of banners and handles, in attributes and the shaping thereof. It also expresses itself in the palaeography of the legends and in choices where and how to place the legends and the symbols. The extent to which the shared idiom shines through may vary per coin type, and may differ for either side of one particular die pair. Each side of a coin is a new ensemble of device features, which is why we have to weigh the evidence that obverse and reverse together offer us.

Mint groups such as these can be recognised throughout the corpus.⁵³ The coins of Samudragupta can be organised into eight such groups at least. This has gone largely unnoticed because of the persistent focus on either the 'Kushanness' or the 'Indianness' of specific coin series.⁵⁴ All of Candragupta II's coins, when shaken through a mint-idiomatic sieve, make fourteen such mint groups maximally. Those of Kumāragupta I exist in a similar diversity of some twelve groups. Some of these may be linked to those of Candragupta II, others are new. Under Skandagupta mint-idiomatic diversity goes down to probably five different groups. The coins struck for the kings ruling after Skandagupta generally reveal two mint groups in each reign on average.

Identifying these mint groups is not just aimed at creating a new system to classify Gupta coins. It is a method ultimately zooming in on questions as to when and where these coins were minted. Mint groups can and do share styles, palaeographies and fabric with other groups. Such connections exist mostly between groups from the same reign, but frequently also between groups from consecutive reigns.⁵⁵ It appears then that mint groups with overt mint-idiomatic links were indeed manufactured at one and the same mint. Unfortunately, contemporary documents offer no insight into the actual set-up of coin minting in the name of Gupta kings. So far we have been able

to only speculate about the number of mints that may have been operational. We cannot rule out the possibility that even coins with very different mint-idiomatic profiles may still have been minted at the same location, but possibly by different teams. In the latter case one would have to accept that coins even of different weights and sizes could be produced simultaneously at the same location. This raises economic questions as to the extent to which standardisation was expected or required.

As many more questions can be raised than answers can be given, for the time being we had best first focus on the hypothesis that at a given moment mints produced coins with a distinct mint-idiomatic profile. Kumāragupta's coins of Mint Groups 7 and 8 do reveal such a close mint-idiomatic kinship. We can visualise them as the product of an extremely versatile team at one of Kumāragupta's mints. The quantitative output of coins with this profile appears to have been limited. Why this is the case we do not know. More surprising is the outcome that this particular mint appears to have been the direct and sole source for nearly all of Kumāragupta's new designs (from the enigmatic Apratigha Type, through the Elephant-rider and Elephant-rider-Lion-slayer Types to the Rhinoceros-slayer Type). The notable exceptions are the new series of Kārttikeya Type and Swordsman Type, to which the mint apparently did not contribute. This mint revived devices from the time of Samudragupta (the Aśvamedha and Lyrist Types). In addition, it also brought out coins in types produced at other mints in the realm as well, such as the Horseman, Lion-slayer and Archer Types.⁵⁶ If we would ignore the coins manufactured here, the range of types brought into circulation under Kumāragupta I would not have been any more diverse than under his predecessors. This means that we can no longer accept as a general assessment that "the numismatic activity of the reign of Kumāragupta I was more intense and varied" than before (Altekar 1957: 165). Innovations did happen, but apparently at the level of specific

mints. New designs and matching legends were introduced, but apparently these did not get follow-up at other mints. Clearly, the processes of the introduction and eventual abolishment of Gupta coin devices need further scrutiny.

DETAILED INFORMATION ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 11.1. Obverse (a): Sacrificial horse standing to left next to a *yūpa*. Reverse (b): Queen or goddess Śrī, standing to left with fly-whisk on right shoulder and cloth in left hand. On her side a ceremonial standard carrying a *śrīvatsa* symbol; details of legends discussed in main text. Gold *dīnāra*, Aśvamedha Type, time of Kumāragupta I, weight 8.30 g with loop (128.1 grains), diameter unknown. Offered at Baldwin's Auction 71 (29/09/2011), Lot 1012, ex Yashoda Singh collection, now Private collection. DINARA 6120. Photographs courtesy of Sanjeev Kumar.

Fig. 11.2. Obverse (a): Kumāragupta, armed with a bow, tramples on a lion. Reverse (b): Śrī, seated on a lion reclining to right; she holds a flower in her right hand (hereafter 'rh') and what looks like a floral cornucopia in her left hand (hereafter 'lh'); details of legends discussed in main text. Gold *dīnāra*, Lion-slayer Type, weight 8.14 g (125.6 grains), diameter 1.93 cm. Collection State Museum, Lucknow, acc.no. 11586. Pandey 1985: 87, fig. 4.1; Pal 1993; Tandon 2012: figs. 1–2; DINARA 3462. Photographs courtesy of Pankaj Tandon.

Fig. 11.3. Obverse (a): Kumāragupta, armed with a bow, tramples on a lion. Reverse (b): Śrī, seated on a lion reclining to right; she holds a flower (rh) and what looks like a floral cornucopia (lh); details of legends discussed in main text. Gold *dīnāra*, Lion-slayer Type, weight 8.27 g

(127.6 grains), diameter unknown. Collection Pankaj Tandon. Tandon 2012: figs. 3–4. DINARA 3458. Photographs courtesy of Pankaj Tandon [Col.pl. 3].

- Fig. 11.4.** Obverse (a): Kumāragupta, armed with a bow, shoots a lion. Reverse (b): Śrī, seated on a lion reclining to right; she holds a flower (rh) and what looks like a floral cornucopia (lh); details of legends discussed in main text. Gold *dīnāra*, Lion-slayer Type, weight 8.12 g (125.3 grains), diameter 1.80 cm. State Museum, Lucknow, acc.no. 11594. Tandon 2012: fig. 5. DINARA 6659. Photographs courtesy of Pankaj Tandon.
- Fig. 11.5.** Obverse (a): Kumāragupta, armed with a bow, shoots a lion. Reverse (b): Śrī, seated on a lion reclining to left; she holds an unidentified object (rh) and a lotus (lh); details of legends discussed in main text; geometric symbol near IX o'clock. Gold *dīnāra*, Lion-slayer Type, weight 8.16 g (126.0 grains), diameter 2.16 cm. Bayana hoard, thence in Bharatpur Palace coin cabinet. Altekār 1954: no. 1764, fig. 28.13. DINARA 3394.
- Fig. 11.6.** Obverse (a): Kumāragupta armed with a bow and arrow; *garuḍadhvaja* in left field. Reverse (b): Śrī, seated to front on a lotus; she holds a flower (rh) and what looks like a floral cornucopia (lh); details of legends discussed in main text; *śaṅkhanidhi* near IX o'clock. Gold *dīnāra*, Archer Type, weight 8.33 g (128.5 grains), diameter 1.80 cm. State Museum, Lucknow, acc.no. 11590; Altekār 1950: 124–25, fig. 10.7; Raven 1994a: figs. c140, d126. DINARA 4005. Photographs courtesy of Gritli von Mitterwallner.
- Fig. 11.7.** Obverse (a): Kumāragupta armed with a bow and arrow; *garuḍadhvaja* in left field. Reverse (b): Śrī, seated to front on a

lotus; she holds a lotus flower (rh) and a floral cornucopia (lh); details of legends discussed in main text; geometric symbol near IX o'clock. Gold *dīnāra*, Archer Type, weight 8.25 g (127.3 grains), diameter 2.00 cm. National Museum, New Delhi, acc.no. 51.50/73; Altekār 1954: no. 1375, fig. 21.5; Chhabra 1986: no. 441, fig. 30.6. DINARA 3820. Photographs courtesy of National Museum, New Delhi.

- Fig. 11.8.** Obverse (a): Kumāragupta on horseback, armed with a bow. Reverse (b): Śrī, seated on a wicker stool, feeding fruit to a peacock (rh); she holds a floral cornucopia (lh); details of legends discussed in main text; geometric symbol near X o'clock. Gold *dīnāra*, Horseman Type, weight 8.30 g (128.1 grains), diameter 2.00 cm. Baldwin's Auction 26 (09/05/2001), Lot 1013. DINARA 354. Photographs courtesy of A.H. Baldwin.
- Fig. 11.9.** Obverse (a): Kumāragupta on horseback, armed with a bow. Reverse (b): Śrī, seated on a wicker stool, feeding fruit to a peacock (rh); she holds a lotus (lh); details of legends discussed in main text; geometric symbol near X o'clock. Gold *dīnāra*, Horseman Type, weight 8.30 g (128.1 grains), diameter 2.00 cm. Private collection. Ex Album catalogue 54 (1988), Lot 845; ex Spink (05/10/1988), Lot 8; ex Skanda collection, sold as Spink-Taisei 1991: no. 132; ex Gerald M. Browne collection. DINARA 3257. Photographs courtesy of Sanjeev Kumar.
- Fig. 11.10.** Obverse (a): Kumāragupta on horseback, armed with a sword, attacking a rhinoceros. Reverse (b): Gaṅgā standing on a *makara*, while an attendant holds a parasol above her. The goddess holds (rh) a lotus rising from the trunk of her mount; details of legends discussed in main text; geometric symbol near

II o'clock. Gold *dīnāra*, Rhinoceros-slayer Type, weight and size unknown. In N.S. Singhi collection in 1980s. DINARA 3568. Photographs courtesy American Institute of Indian Studies, neg.no. 27-13A, AIIS list 2011, no. 35136.

- Fig. 11.11.** Obverse (a): Kumāragupta riding an elephant to left, accompanied by an attendant holding a parasol. Reverse (b): Śrī standing on a lotus, holding a flower (rh) and what looks like a floral cornucopia (lh); *padmanidhi* in lower left quadrant and *śaṅkhanidhi* in lower right quadrant; details of legends discussed in main text. Gold *dīnāra*, Elephant-rider Type, weight 8.36 g (129.0 grains), diameter 2.00 cm. National Museum, New Delhi, acc.no. 51.50/53. From the Bayana hoard, Altekar 1954: no. 1807, fig. 31.1; Chhabra 1986: no. 444, fig. 30.9. DINARA 3467. Photographs courtesy of National Museum, New Delhi.
- Fig. 11.12.** Obverse (a): Kumāragupta riding an elephant to right, attacking a lion; he is accompanied by an attendant holding a parasol. Reverse (b): Śrī standing, offering a piece of fruit to a peacock on her right side (rh) and holding a lotus (lh); details of legends discussed in main text. Gold *dīnāra*, Elephant-rider-Lion-slayer Type, weight 8.00 g (123.5 grains), diameter 2.00 cm. National Museum, New Delhi, acc.no. 51.39/43. Ascribed to the Bayana hoard, but not traceable in Altekar 1954 or Chhabra 1986 catalogues. DINARA 3473. Photographs courtesy of National Museum, New Delhi [Col.pl. 4].
- Fig. 11.13.** Obverse (a): Kumāragupta playing a *vīṇā*, while seated on a low seat.

Reverse (b): Śrī seated on a low seat, holding a lotus (rh); details of legends discussed in main text. Gold *dīnāra*, Lyrist Type, weight 8.17 g (126.1 grains), diameter 2.00 cm. National Museum, New Delhi, acc.no. 51.50/50. From the Bayana hoard, Altekar 1954: no. 1811, fig. 31.5; Lath 1977: fig. 8.9; Chhabra 1986: no. 607, fig. 41.7. DINARA 3496. Photographs courtesy of National Museum, New Delhi.

- Fig. 11.14.** Obverse (a): Sacrificial horse standing to right next to a *yūpa*. Reverse (b): queen or goddess Śrī, with fly-whisk on right shoulder and cloth in left hand. At her side a ceremonial standard carrying a *śrīvatsa* symbol; details of legends discussed in main text. Gold *dīnāra*, Aśvamedha Type, time of Kumāragupta I, weight 8.04 g (124.1 grains), diameter 1.90 cm. British Museum, London, acc. no. 1894,0506.962; Smith 1889: 110, fig. 3.5; Allan 1914: no. 203, fig. 12.13; BM online database COC308072. DINARA 3474. Photographs © Trustees of the British Museum.
- Fig. 11.15.** Obverse (a): Kumāragupta receiving the dynastic banner from a man and a woman, probably representing his parents. Reverse (b): Śrī seated on a lotus, holding a lotus (rh); a geometric symbol on IX o'clock, a small crescent on I o'clock. Details of legends discussed in main text. Gold *dīnāra*, Apratigha Type, weight 7.84 g (121 grains), diameter 1.85 cm. State Museum, Lucknow, acc. no. 11403; Pandey 1985: 89, fig. 4.6; Raven 2015, fig. 10. DINARA 3507. Photographs: Ellen M. Raven.

NOTES

- * Images are not to scale. For photo credits see the separate section with detailed information on the illustrations on pp. 213–15.
1. This Europe-focused position of Vincent Smith in the debate on early Indian history has been commented upon by subsequent historians. See for a summary Goyal 1997: 18–19.
 2. In my PhD thesis (Raven 1994a) I introduced the concept of mint idioms and recognised what looks like the contours of work at two or three mints for the reigns of Samudragupta, Candragupta II and Kumāragupta I.
 3. For recent studies of particular styles in Gupta coins, see mostly Raven 1994a; 1994b; 2001; 2005; 2010; 2012.
 4. Harle 1974: pl. 2. A coin of King-and-Queen Type attributed by James Harle to Candragupta I (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford) and three coins of Kumāragupta I: of the Rhinoceros-slayer Type (British Museum), Horseman Type (Ashmolean Museum) and Kārttikeya Type (Ashmolean Museum).
 5. A King-and-Queen Type coin of Samudragupta (attributed by Pal to Candragupta I); a Lyrist Type coin of Samudragupta; an Archer Type coin of Candragupta II; an Elephant-rider-Lion-slayer Type coin of Kumāragupta I and a Horseman Type coin of the same king. The fifth coin was struck for a later Kushan king; Pal 1978: fig. 1a–f.
 6. The label ‘Scythian costume’ hardly captures the diverse costume styles that even these few coins display, and does not apply to the king’s costume on most of the coins shown anyway.
 7. Although he does not explicitly say so, it appears that Pal suggests that the iconography and concept of Candragupta II riding on horseback, as shown on his Horseman Type coins, provided an iconographic model for the representation of Kalkin, the tenth *avatāra* of Viṣṇu (1978: 26).
 8. It is rather odd to find that the King-and-Queen Type coin that Williams selected for her book portrays the royal couple in quite relaxed poses that are directly comparable to those in the Battle-axe Type coin illustrated by her as well. The underlying problems are twofold. First, the attribution of the King-and-Queen Type coins is disputed; some scholars (including Joanna Williams) attribute them to Candragupta I, while others attribute them to Samudragupta. I favour the latter attribution. Secondly, the King-and-Queen Type coins come in many styles using different poses, from quite rigid to fairly relaxed with explicit *déhançement* (Raven 2010). So it is rather dangerous to base a chronology on the use of different poses assumed to characterise earlier and later works of art respectively.
 9. Studying the royal imagery of the Gupta kings for their intended iconography of kingship is by all means a legitimate approach, as it makes us acutely aware of the dynastic and legitimising themes that closely link Gupta epigraphs and coins. Barbara Stoler Miller studied the close resonance between the representations of Gupta royalty on their coins, in their inscriptions and in the poetry of the age (1992).
 10. S.R. Goyal’s chapter (2000) on the numismatic art of the imperial Guptas relies heavily on B.N. Mukherjee’s publications on the topic.
 11. Probably she was referring to the letter *si* beneath the horse on the Aśvamedha Type coins and beneath the seated king on the Lyrist Type coins. Personal communication (27/02/2013) with Joe Cribb, who assisted Barbara Stoler Miller during her visit to the British Museum.
 12. It is tempting to assume that every issue of the Aśvamedha Type was accompanied by a series of Lyrist coins in the same idiom. However, Mint Group SG.04 (out of the eight, or perhaps nine, groups identified among the gold coins of Samudragupta) contains coins of Aśvamedha, King-and-Queen and Sceptre Type, but no related Lyrist Type coins. See these coins in what was called Group SG.07 in Raven 2010. Since that time, I have brought down the number of different groups discernible among coins struck for Samudragupta from 18 to eight or nine maximum, thus successfully simplifying their classification and improving the visibility of their interconnections.
 13. Ujjwal Kumar Saha describes a few different dress styles seen on Gupta gold coins and offers some drawings with details. The overarching theme is the waning influence of Kushan coin design signalled by an increased occurrence of “indigenous costumes” (Indian *dhotī* or *antarīya*, the *kāyabandha* sash, the *uttarīya* upper garment) or an “indigenous touch to foreign costumes” such as to the “Kuṣāṇa tunic”, the “Kuṣāṇa trousers” and the “Kuṣāṇa boots” (2008: 49).
 14. See Raven 2006 for a discussion of these theories and references to relevant literature.
 15. E.g., “the initial issues like the standard-type coins of Samudragupta” (Mukherjee 1991: 65).

16. Chhanda Mukherjee did not credit the drawings to Nanda Lal Bose, Asit Kumar Halder and P. Neogy. R.K. Mookerji credits them in his preface to the first edition of *The Gupta Empire* in 1947. It is unfortunate and rather puzzling why Mukherjee restricted the illustrative part of her work mostly to these line drawings next to small images of a poor quality showing either obverse or reverse sides of anonymised gold coins only.
17. At the 2011 Bengal Art conference, I discussed several close stylistic parallels between Samudragupta's Aśvamedha Type coins and certain early Archer Type coins of Candragupta II on the one hand, and several Jaina sculptures found near the Sonabhandar cave at Rajgir and at Patna on the other. The latter have been attributed by Joanna Williams (1986: 35) to the time of Candragupta II. See Raven 2012.
18. Since 2009, I have documented some 7,000 gold coins of the Guptas in an Access-based database. I have compiled images and metadata on published and unpublished coins. This is an ongoing process. I want to express my gratitude to those collectors and curators of numismatic collections and photographic collections that have supplied relevant materials for inclusion or have given permission for the inclusion of images therein. Presently the database serves as a research data depository for my ongoing mint-idiomatic analysis. Hopefully the database can be made available online after the completion of the catalogue.
19. The standard reference text for Kumāragupta's Lion-slayer Type is Altekār 1957: 185–90. He was not impressed, as they compared unfavourably with the Lion-slayer coins created for Candragupta II. P.L. Gupta (1993) published a specimen of this particular set. Jai Prakash (1962) discussed the Gupta coins with Tiger-slayer, Lion-slayer, Elephant-rider-Lion-slayer, Rhinoceros-slayer and Horseman-Lion-slayer devices and argued that these indicate the fondness of the Gupta rulers for hunting. S.V. Sohoni published two coins (1969b).
20. This coin is in the collection of the State Museum, Lucknow; acc.no. 11586 (Pandey 1985: 87, fig. 4.1). Another specimen is in the Tandon collection.
21. Smith refers to earlier descriptions of the Lion-slayer Type coins of Candragupta II by Edward Thomas, but apparently Smith was the first cataloguer to use the appellation for the device on a regular basis.
22. As read by Pankaj Tandon, Shailendra Bhandare and Harry Falk (Tandon 2012: fn. 25).
23. Rajwant Rao recently considered the explanations that have been offered by various scholars for the device of a goddess seated on a lion (2008), but left the options open. Meenakshi and Swastik Singh interpreted the device as a representation of the goddess Sarvamaṅgalā (2008).
24. The first two *akṣaras* before this title are difficult to decipher.
25. State Museum, Lucknow, acc.no. 11594; weight 8.12 g (125.3 grains), diameter 1.80 cm, die-axis XII o'clock; Tandon 2012: fig. 5. The legend is blurred and perhaps includes the word *rāja* after four opening characters.
26. Tandon meant the placement of *śrī* on gold coins attributed by him to the Pāla Kings Dharmapāla and Devapāla, who ruled around the turn of the 9th century, and to slightly earlier, 8th-century issues known as the Bālamrgāṅka coins and others in the same series (Tandon 2006); personal communication, 03/02/2013. Earlier Parmeshwari Lal Gupta read the letter as 'g' or 'gu' (1993: 38).
27. Altekār 1954: no. 1764, fig. 28.13.
28. The standard reference text for Kumāragupta's Archer Type is Altekār 1957: 165–74, 358. He found the surprising and pleasing variety seen in the Archer Type of Candragupta II missing here. "It appears that Kumāragupta's mint-masters did not think worth their while to spend their ingenuity on this common and hackneyed type" (*ibid.*: 167). As we shall see, the Archer Type designs from Mint Groups 7–8 are far from "common".
29. State Museum, Lucknow, acc.no. 11590; Altekār 1950: 124–25, fig. 10.7; Raven 1994a: figs. c140, d126; photographs courtesy Gritli von Mitterwallner. Presently I know of only one other published specimen, which was offered for sale by the Baden-Württembergische Bank in their *Münzenliste* of 1981 as Lot no. 2298.
30. Altekār (1950: 124) thinks that the king is shown wearing a cap, and this is indeed the first impression, but I feel that curls were intended.
31. Altekār interprets the attribute in the right hand as a noose, possibly by force of expecting a well-known iconographic pattern (as he identifies the attribute in the left hand as a lotus). Recognising a 'noose' in the attribute in the right hand of the goddess has a long history in Gupta numismatics, in spite of the iconographic absurdity of this identification.
32. A *śrīvatsa* occurs for instance in the left field of Horseman coins of Altekār's Var. IIB (in Mint Group KG1.06 in the new classification, as yet

- unpublished). See for instance a British Museum specimen, acc.no. OR.9463, to be viewed online at <http://collection.britishmuseum.org/id/object/COC308096> (accessed on 22/12/2016).
33. National Museum, New Delhi, acc.no. 51.50/73; from the Bayana hoard, Altekār 1954: no. 1375, fig. 21.5; Chhabra 1986: no. 441, fig. 30.6.
 34. The standard reference text for Kumāragupta's Horseman Type is Altekār 1957: 174–83, 358. These particular coins belong to Altekār's Variety IID. He pointed out that each variety in this type has its own distinctive features in the direction of the horse, the types of its saddle-ornamentation, the weapons of the king, the legend on the obverse and the details of the motif on the reverse. Sohoni (1960) argued that the horse-rider device presents the king in a moment of pleasure. Likewise, P.L. Gupta held that Kumāragupta appeared to have been fond of horse and elephant riding, hunting rhinoceros and slaying lions and tigers (1991). Jai Prakash Singh objected to the idea that the type was issued merely to show the king's horsemanship or his hunting based on skills in archery. However, he did not offer an alternative explanation at the time (1970).
 35. So far, I have documented some 17 specimens, in museum and private collections. E.g., British Museum, acc.no. 1913.1111.3, Allan 1914: 218a; available in Collection online; National Museum, New Delhi, acc.no. 51.77/121, from the Bayana hoard, Altekār 1954: no. 1690; Chhabra 1986: no. 579, fig. 39.9; Bharat Kala Bhavan, acc.no. 93, from the Bayana hoard, Altekār 1954: no. 1688, fig. 25.14; Gupta & Srivastava 1981: no. 164, fig. 9.164; Bharat Kala Bhavan, acc.no. 8842, Gupta & Srivastava 1981: no. 163, fig. 10.163; Bharat Kala Bhavan, acc.no. 94, from the Bayana hoard, Gupta & Srivastava 1981: no. 165; not traceable to a specific coin in Altekār 1954; National Museum, New Delhi, acc.no. 51.50/66, from the Bayana hoard, Altekār 1954: no. 1684, fig. 25.11; Chhabra 1986: no. 577, fig. 39.7; National Museum, New Delhi, acc. no. 51.77/120, from the Bayana hoard, Altekār 1954: no. 1686, Chhabra 1986: no. 578, fig. 39.8. Several more specimens were distributed from the Bayana hoard, including Altekār 1954: no. 1685 (fig. 25.12) and no. 1687 (fig. 25.13). A private collection also contains a specimen, formerly in the Gerald M. Browne collection (ex Skanda collection; Spink-Taisei 1991: no. 132; ex Album 1988: cat. no. 54, Lot no. 845).
 36. These coins exist in several dies with slight differences in details, which are not easy to make out in published images.
 37. Altekār 1957: 182. I could not match this legend with every die version of this type on record, but would need access to better images or to actual coins to reconstruct text variants with more certainty.
 38. Bharat Kala Bhavan, acc.no. 8842 (see note 35); Bharat Kala Bhavan, acc.no. 94 (see note 35); Bayana hoard no. 1687 (see note 35); National Museum, New Delhi, specimens nos. 51.50/66 and 51.77/120, also referred to in note 35, and the coin in private hands mentioned earlier.
 39. There are relatively few studies on the depiction of the rhinoceros in Indian art. Joachim Bautze's paper read at the South Asian Archaeology conference in 1983 is one of the best available (1985). He describes Kumāragupta's Rhinoceros-slayer coins on p. 416. L.C. Rookmaaker discussed William Daniell's depictions of the rhinoceros (1999). The standard reference text for the Rhinoceros Type is Altekār 1957: 197–200; other numismatic studies dedicated in particular to coins of this type are by M.M. Nagar (1949), P.J. Chinmulgund (1955), B.N. Mukherjee (1955), S.V. Sohoni (1955, also in 1956a), Jai Prakash (1963), D.C. Sircar (1966), Y.B. Singh (1981) and A.N. Singh (1983). In 1957, J. Walker reported on the acquisition of a specimen by the British Museum. In 1960, Ajit Ghose published a specimen from H.P. Poddar's collection.
 40. Altekār (1957: 197) explains: "The legend is metrical and makes a pun upon the word *khadga*, which means both a sword and a rhinoceros; it reads, *Bhartā khadgatrātā Kumāragupto jayatyaniśam ...*; 'Ever victorious is the lord Kumāragupta, who is *khadgatrātā*, protector by the sword (*khadgena trātā*) from the rhinoceros (*khadgāt trātā*).'" One specimen from the Bayana hoard is presented in the 1981 catalogue of the Bharat Kala Bhavan (Gupta & Srivastava 1981: 72). The type occasionally turns up in studies of the hunt motif in the Gupta coin repertoire, as in e.g., Srivastava 2001. Pankaj Tandon also illustrates a Rhinoceros-slayer coin to show the Gupta-period use of the less common motif of the mounted king as a hunter (2006: fig. 2).
 41. The excellent enlargement of the British Museum specimen acquired in 1955 (acc.no. 1955.0407.1) shows the diaphanous garment billowing below; see in Collection online.
 42. The standard reference text for the Elephant-rider Type is Altekār 1957: 194–95. See also Sohoni 1957a; 1969a; Ghose 1960; Mukherjee 1991: 22. Gupta and Srivastava published two specimens in

- the Bharat Kala Bhavan collection; one from the Bayana hoard, the other from the D.C. Hamilton collection acquired by the museum in 1956 (Gupta & Srivastava 1981: 24, 72–73).
43. Rabis C. Kar (1947) proposed to identify the attendant holding the parasol over Kumāragupta I mounted on an elephant as a *vāmana* signalling the king's claim to the status of *bhadramahāpuruṣa*, the ruler par excellence of Madhyadeśa.
 44. Establishing to what extent the iconography of the device was influenced by a Kushan-period use of the elephant-rider motif deserves a separate study.
 45. The standard reference text for the Elephant-rider-Lion-slayer Type is Altekar 1957: 195–97. See also i.a. Sastri 1917; Ghose 1960; Srivastava 2001. Gupta & Srivastava (1981: 73–74) published a Bayana hoard specimen now in the Bharat Kala Bhavan.
 46. The standard reference text for the Lyrist Type is Altekar 1957: 211–12. See also i.a. Sohoni 1956b = Sohoni 1957b; Ghose 1960; Lath 1977; Mukherjee 1986; Bandyopadhyay 1987.
 47. Kaufmann *et al.* 1981 shortly refer to the 'well-known' Lyrist coin types of Samudragupta and Kumāragupta in their study of musical instruments in Indian art and literature. The obvious parallels with several Gupta period images illustrated (but not discussed) reveal how the iconography of the *vīṇā*-player informed the coin images. Monika Zin (2004) offers a detailed study of textual and visual sources on the different kinds of ancient Indian harps and lyres, but she does not discuss Samudragupta's Lyrist Type design. The designation of the coin type is slightly off mark, as the instrument is not a lyre but a harp, as has been pointed out before.
 48. Śrī is given a halo in most series of Candragupta II's Archer Type coins, but she appears without in several series; e.g. in those of Mint Group CG2.09 (unpublished classification; cp. Raven 1994a: Var. II.8). One may find beautiful examples in the British Museum online database, e.g. the coins with acc.nos. 1853,0301.377, 1894,0507.511 and 1910,0403.22. Quite interestingly, Śrī is also without halo on coins of Group CG2.12. This group includes (albeit provisionally) the rather enigmatic Archer Type coins that carry on their obverse an additional symbol (a crescent, a wheel or a sun). Whether this feature helps us place such coins more securely in the mint-idiomatic landscape remains to be seen.
 49. This description is based on a first-hand study of many specimens back in 1989 with the help of a strong magnifying glass. Digital photography now allows us to enlarge coin images, but most of these Apratigha coins are worn and retain only a part of the iconography given.
 50. Adherents of this interpretation hold that the Apratigha coin series was brought out towards the end of the reign of Kumāragupta. Numismatic evidence to underpin this chronology has never been presented and the weight of the coins (around 7.8 g) suggests an issue early in this king's reign.
 51. Close sculptural parallels from Gupta art for what might be a headdress with locks on the Apratigha coins are offered by the image of Kārttikeya seated on his peacock from Varanasi mentioned earlier (now Bharat Kala Bhavan, acc.no. 156; Biswas & Jha 1985: no. 22, fig. 12.20) and the well-known image of Kṛṣṇa Govardhanadhārin from Varanasi, also in Bharat Kala Bhavan, acc.no. 147 (*ibid.*: fig. 4.9).
 52. I have dealt at some length with the interpretation of the device in a separate article (Raven 2006: 83).
 53. Each group consists of different types (Archer, Horseman, etc.), as exemplified in this paper, while many types in their turn exist in varieties.
 54. In particular the stylistic and iconographic differences between coins of Samudragupta led to the concept of mint groups (Raven 1994a; 1994b).
 55. I have shown this in my 2012 study of styles in the later coins of Candragupta II and early coins of Kumāragupta I.
 56. The notable exception is Kumāragupta's Chattra Type series (three documented in the DINARA database so far). Two of these belong to Mint Group KG1.09, which includes coins of Archer, Chattra, Horseman, King-and-Queen and Lion-slayer Types. One Chattra coin, from the Bayana hoard, is now in the National Museum, New Delhi (acc.no. 51.50/46; Chhabra 1986: no. 443, fig. 30.8). Another specimen from the hoard, which was selected for the cabinet of the Mahārāja of Bharatpur (Altekar 1954: no. 1705, fig. 26.15), is now in a private collection. All these coins of Mint Group KG1.09 are rare. Among them, the King-and-Queen Type coin, from a third revived series first introduced under Samudragupta, also came to light through the Bayana hoard and was likewise selected for the cabinet of the Mahārāja of Bharatpur (Altekar 1954: no. 1820, fig. 31.14). Mint Group KG1.01 also includes a solitary Chattra coin (now Bharat Kala Bhavan, acc.no. 121; Gupta & Srivastava 1981: no. 188).

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