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Kumāra cum Kumāra

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ABSTRACT: The images on gold coins of Kumāragupta I feeding a peacock and of Kārttikeya riding his peacock appear part of a 'programme', traceable in coin imagery, coin legends and inscriptions, to glorify the king by reference to Kārttikeya's youth, heroism and glory. The enigmatic Apratigha Type coins fit into the pattern as well.

KEYWORDS: Guptas, gold coins, Kumāragupta I, Kārttikeya Type, Apratigha Type, peacock emblem, titles, *mahendra*, royal iconography, Gupta period

This paper¹ deals with certain gold coins of Kumāragupta I who, between c.415 and 450 CE, ruled over North India and the north of present day Bangladesh.² I will not dwell at length on typological issues, but instead would rather address the purport of the devices and legends found on these coins. Which message may 'the king', or at least his political advisors, have wished to convey? My focus will be mostly on the gold *dīnāras* of Kārttikeya Type (Figs 7–10), which were newly introduced at the time. In view of the kinship between Gupta coins and official epigraphs,³ we will first take a look at relevant inscriptions before moving to the new coins.

The label 'Gupta' as such is a wide net lifting many fishes from a vast 'Gupta period' ocean.⁴ But when we want more specifically Gupta-family related facts, the catch is alarmingly meagre. Epigraphists list c.fifty 'Gupta' inscriptions,⁵ but only seventeen out of these were actually authorized by a Gupta king. And of the four major rulers among them (Samudragupta, Candragupta II, Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta) only a handful of epigraphs have surfaced so far. These vary from elaborate panegyrics and land-grant charters to no more than a genealogical text with names and titles. That is why, in spite of the virtually unshakable reputation of the Gupta dynasty in historical and art historical studies, we actually know very

little about the individual members of this royal family other than what they meant to convey via inscriptions and coins.

Our epigraphic basis for getting to know Kumāragupta I is quite feeble indeed, as no personal royal epigraphs have surfaced so far. There are no indications for major political turmoil during most of his reign. It has been characterized by historians as 'prosperous and peaceful', until Hūṇa trouble started brewing at the North-West Frontier. That is probably why surveys of Gupta history customarily do not spend many pages on Kumāragupta's reign.⁶

Kumāragupta as Royal Benefactor

The fifth century CE usually serves as a kind of standard approximate dating for sculptures in an assumedly 'mature' Gupta style and Kumāragupta's reign fits comfortably within this time frame. That is why the absence of royal epigraphs documenting gifts by this king is surprising indeed. The building of temples for the Puranic deities starts to develop some momentum in this period, and both Buddhist and Jaina sacred sites must have attracted flocks of devotees. The members of the Gupta house, just as their feudatories and officers, may be expected to have been among the liberal patrons making this financially possible, but there is little to show for it.

In the absence of personal records of Kumāragupta I, we must turn to the few records of vassals that did surface, as students of this king's reign did before us. Two inscriptions have been exposed. One was noticed on a pillar raised at Bilsad (Bilsadh, Uttar Pradesh); it was engraved by the order of a pious vassal named Dhruvaśarman.⁷ The other epigraph is part of a number of inscriptions on a stone found at Gadhwa (Uttar Pradesh); it was inscribed by the order of a vassal now without a name.⁸ These inscriptions confirm that Kumāragupta I used the royal titles of *paramabhāgavata*, 'foremost of devotees of *bhagavat* (Vāsudeva-Viṣṇu)', *paramadaivata*, 'foremost of devotees of the god(s)', *paramabhaṭṭāraka*, 'the Lord Paramount', and *mahārājādhirāja*, 'Overlord over Great Kings'.⁹ The Tumain (Madhya Pradesh) stone inscription of the Gupta Year 116/434–35 CE¹⁰ describes Kumāragupta as '*mahendrakalpa*', as being 'like Mahendra' in protecting the earth with his own

arms as if she were his faithful wife.¹¹ 'Mahendra' is usually translated as 'the Great Indra', as in Indra, the leader of the thirty-three gods. An alternative interpretation, more befitting the context, presents itself, as we shall see below.

In the panegyric engraved on a tall sandstone pillar at Bhitari (Uttar Pradesh, Fig. 1), Skandagupta praises Kumāragupta I, in a rather brief fashion, for his fame and the innate power of his mighty intellect. Most of the inscription is devoted to the precarious adventures of Skandagupta himself during his rescue operation for the survival of the Gupta house. The opportunity to record this feat was the donation of a Viṣṇu image to a major temple. The pillar stands near brick-built Temple no. 1 on site BTR2 at Bhitari. This site may indeed represent the remains of the Viṣṇu Temple that received Skandagupta's new image, as various scholars have proposed. Vidula Jayaswal (2001: 75) has suggested that the construction of the



FIG. 1. Sandstone pillar at Bhitari (Uttar Pradesh) before the mound of the unexcavated Temple 1. Photograph Kern collection, Leiden University Library, no. P-042811.

Courtesy: Friends of the Kern Institute

temple was started by order of Kumāragupta I. Bricks engraved with his name are reported as having been part of its earliest façade, although it is not clear to me how these were employed originally. Apparently such engraved bricks were re-used as filler in a subsequent reconstruction of the temple (Constructional Stage II, Jayaswal 2001: 76).

Coins with Peacocks

Whether or not Kumāragupta I was involved with the temple at Bhitari, his realm must have been prosperous, judging from the steady issue of coins in gold, silver, copper and lead. Although the issue of gold *dīnāras* did not approximate that under Candragupta II in sheer output, it was still considerable (Fig. 2).¹² The diversity of devices created for the obverse and reverse sides of Kumāragupta’s coins reached an ultimate high, only to decline drastically under Skandagupta.

The Elephant-rider appears on two of these new coin series portraying the king engaged in a typical display of royal grandeur. At times this motif is combined with a show of deadly force, such as trampling a lion (Fig. 3a). The goddess with lotus, shown on the reverse of the latter series, turns towards a peacock on her right side (Fig. 3b). The gesture of her right hand suggests that she is feeding the bird something edible.¹³ The choice to include a peacock was not restricted to such new coin types. The pre-existing Tiger-slayer¹⁴

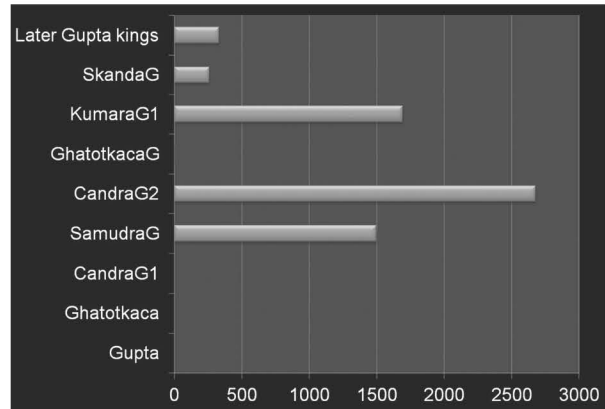


FIG. 2. Relative number of gold coins documented in DINARA database on 1.04.2015.

and Horseman¹⁵ designs were updated for issues of Kumāragupta I along similar lines.¹⁶ Whereas on coins of Samudragupta and Candragupta II the goddess is shown extending a diadem fillet in her right hand or displaying *varadamudrā* while dispensing coins,¹⁷ in the adapted series of the Horseman and Tiger-slayer Types she is shown feeding a peacock (Figs 4–5).¹⁸ In the silver repertoire the peacock was introduced as well as the central device for certain new series of silver coins (Fig. 6), next to familiar issues retaining the dynastic Garuḍa emblem.¹⁹ These coins carry a metrical Sanskrit legend in Brāhmī script translating to a rather formulaic legend which is found, in slight adaptations, on coins throughout Gupta times: ‘After having conquered the earth,



FIG. 3a–b. Obverse: Kumāragupta on elephant killing a lion. Reverse: Śrī, with lotus, feeding a peacock. Gold *dīnāra*, 7,61 g (117.4 grains, which is low for this type), dia. 1,9 cm. Pankaj Tandon coll., 584,04. *Courtesy*: Pankaj Tandon



FIG. 4a–b. Obverse: Kumāragupta on horseback; reverse: Śrī seated to left on a wicker stool, feeding fruits to a peacock at her feet; legend when complete *ajitamahendra*, ‘the unbeaten Mahendra’. Gold *dīnāra*, 7,84 g (121.1 grains), dia. 2 cm. Formerly Jucker coll., Basel, acc. no. G7.



FIG. 5. Obverse: Kumāragupta shooting a tiger; crescent banner in left field, *ku* in right field; reverse: Śrī, a lotus in her left hand, standing to left on a *makara*. She feeds fruits to a peacock. Legend when complete *kumāragupto 'dhirāja*, 'King of kings, Kumāragupta'. Gold *dināra*, 8,134 g (125.5 grains), dia. 1,90 cm. Shivlee collection. *Courtesy*: Jan Lingem



FIG. 6a–b. Obverse: Head of king to right; reverse: fan-tailed peacock; circular legend when complete *vijitavaniravanipatiḥ kumāragupto divaṃ jayati*, 'After having won the earth, King Kumāragupta wins heaven'. Silver *rūpaka*, 1,76 g (27.2 grains), dia. 1,5 cm. Pankaj Tandon coll. 4859–622,90. *Courtesy*: Pankaj Tandon

King Kumāragupta wins heaven'.²⁰ Although the exact processes behind the introduction of such a new device for Gupta silver pieces deserve a separate study, it may be pointed out that the selection of a peacock next to the familiar Garuḍa emblem of the Gupta house makes sense within the scope of coin manufacture in the name of Kumāragupta I, as we shall see below.

The Kārttikeya Type Coins

In yet another coin series first created in the time of Kumāragupta I, that of the Kārttikeya Type, the peacock features even twice; once on the obverse next to the king who is feeding fruits to



FIG. 7a–b. Variable 1. Group 4, Var. KAR–1. Obverse: Kumāragupta feeding a peacock; reverse: Kārttikeya seated on his peacock mount, armed with a spear and dispensing coins with his right hand. Gold *dināra*, 8,27 g (127.1 grains). Pankaj Tandon coll. 4843A–591.01. *Courtesy*: Pankaj Tandon

it, and a second time on the reverse as the mount of Kārttikeya.²¹ Perhaps the most eloquent praises of this particular coin design were sung by Barbara Stoler Miller, when she described it as 'a highly original coin, which surely ranks with the finest objects of ancient miniature art for the complexity and vigour of its composition ...' (1994: 62).

The Kārttikeya Type²² coins exist in two basic design variables, which one may easily distinguish on the basis of perspective: in the first variable the young god on the reverse is shown in three-quarter view from the right (Figs 7b–8b), whereas in the second variable he appears in frontal view (Figs 9b–10b).²³ Both kinds of designs (left-facing and frontal) are found among Kārttikeya Type coins present in three different mintidiomatic groups from the time of Kumāragupta I, viz., Group 3, 4 and 10.²⁴ The division into groups is not essential for the focus of this paper, so minute design differences between coins of either group may only be referred to in passing.

Let us first look at the obverse of the first variable (Fig. 7a), as exemplified by a coin in Group 4 (see Table 1). The king stands to left (his right) in an elegantly flexed posture, feet apart, with his right hip slightly pushed outwards. His head has been slightly tilted towards the bird at his feet. The peacock has spread its tail-feathers behind.

Kumāragupta extends his raised right hand in such a way that a twig with fruits dangles near the peacock's head, allowing it to actually pick one. Traditionally these fruits are said to be grapes.²⁵ Apparently peacocks are not very particular about the food that is presented to them. They are described as 'omnivorous birds' feeding on seeds, fruits, roots and grass just as easily as on white ants and spiders, lizards, frogs and even snakes.²⁶ In this case the engravers may have intended to represent grapes or similar fruit growing on twigs.

The king wears his hair in a topknot with curls draped along the nape of his neck, leaving his earrings barely visible. On coins of Group 3 the engraver has added a short pearl-chain dropping down from the topknot (Fig. 8a). A necklace of large beads and a plain, narrow necklace grace the king's muscular and broad bare torso. A wide *dupaṭṭā* or sash, tied with a pleated knot at the waist, waves down along his left side in boldly curving pleats.²⁷ The king wears a loin cloth²⁸ that seems to cling to his body in a rendering dictated by the stylistic idiom of Gupta period art. A wide

and tallish halo with a plain edge frames the king's head, and narrow bracelets adorn his wrists. The king wears rings on his fingers, probably on both hands. In his right hand, between excessively curved fingers, he holds the twig with fruits. The king curves the index-finger of his left hand in an even more tightly curved mode.

In Variable 2 of the Kārttikeya Type, with the frontal facing deity on the reverse, it is only the posture of the king on the obverse, turned to left (his right) towards the bird, and the gesture of his raised right hand, palm downwards, that indicate the act of feeding. The fruits have not been clearly depicted (Figs 9a–10a). On the coin from Group 4 (Fig. 9a) Kumāragupta stands to left (his right) in a forceful, slightly flexed posture with his left hip slightly pushed outwards, leaning mostly on his left leg. He looks down towards the peacock at his feet and extends his raised right hand, the index finger pointing upwards. The bird neighs its head, the tail feathers curving behind. The king rests his left hand on his hip. He wears his hair in wavy curls that are draped along his head in an ornate, curvaceous hairdo



FIG. 8a–b. Variable 1. Group 3, Var. KAR–1.2 showing Kārttikeya dispensing coins with his right hand. Gold *ḍināra*, 8.26 g (127.5 grains), dia. 1.98 cm. Bharat Kala Bhavan, acc. no. 114 = G&S 1981, no. 192 = ex BH no. 1695, fig. 26.5



FIG. 9a–b. Variable 2. Group 4, Var. KAR–2.2. Obverse: Kumāragupta feeding a peacock; reverse: Kārttikeya seated on his peacock mount, armed with a spear and dispensing coins with his right hand. Gold *dināra*, 8,26 g (127.5 grains), dia. 2,06 cm. Bharat Kala Bhavan, acc. no. 112, Gupta and Srivastava 1981, no. 193

that is typical for the mature Gupta-period style. It leaves his earrings barely visible. A necklace of beads graces his muscular and broad, bare torso. The waist is even narrower than in the portrait of Variable 1 described earlier. A plain and rather short loin cloth covers the legs in clinging mode. A sash, tied with a narrow, pleated knot at the waist, hangs down along the left side, while billowing towards the king's left leg. A wide and tallish halo with a plain edge frames the king's



FIG. 10a–b. Variable 2. Group 10, Var. KAR-1. Gold *dināra*, 8,17 g (126.1 grains). Baldwin's, auction 74 (9.5.2012), lot 1234. Courtesy: A. H. Baldwin

head, while armlets and bracelets adorn his arms. In the parallel design of Group 10, done in a quite different style, the king has placed his right foot behind the left one. On his curls rests a crown with a central ornament (Fig. 10a).

In either variable the circular Sanskrit legend *jayati svagūṇair guṇa... mahendrakumārah*, so far not fully read with certainty, praises the victorious king for his virtues that earned him his success. The characters are difficult to decipher and the middle section of the text is usually off the flan.²⁹ The coins measure *c.* 1.90–2.0 cm in diameter and weigh approximately 8.2 g (see Table 1 for details).

On the reverse of these coins Kārttikeya rides his peacock mount (Figs 7b–10b).³⁰ He sits with folded legs on the back of the bird, either turned slightly to our left and thus visible in three-quarter view (Variable 1), or in full frontal position (Variable 2).³¹ Kumāra rests his characteristic weapon, a spear (Sanskrit *śakti*) against his left arm, while extending his right hand in *varadamudrā*, with the fingers distinctly

spread to scatter coins.³² Because of the three-quarter view in Variable 1, the right hand of Kārttikeya is off the flan in most such coins, which makes it difficult to recognize the nature of the gesture in those particular coins. That is probably why J.N. Banerjea assumed that the deity was showing the *varada* pose only. Altekar's analysis was not very helpful, as he described Kārttikeya as 'apparently scattering something by r. hand over an indistinct object before him' (1957: 205). When describing a Kārttikeya coin on display in the 2007 exhibition on Gupta art in Paris, Rita Sharma even assumed that the deity is 'sprinkling incense on altar as part of a ceremony' (*The Golden Age* 2007: 129).³³ Altekar may have led us on a wrong trail, as there is no separate object below other than the landscaped support for the peacock (discussed below). And there is no reason whatsoever to explain Kārttikeya's iconography as indicating his involvement in a ceremony at an altar.

A coin of Variable 1 now in the Bharat Kala Bhavan collection (Table 1, coin no. 19) reveals traces of three coins dropping from the palm of the deity's hand. The gift of money is quite evident on many coins of the second variable, with the front-facing, mounted god (Figs 9b and 10b).³⁴

Kārttikeya's hairdo varies. When in three-quarter view, he wears his hair in three thick, wide curls with clearly indicated strands of hair. His left earring is quite prominent (Fig. 7b). On coins with the frontal view, the deity's hair has been tied up, with two of the three locks of hair of the typical *trisikhā* hairdo of a young prince curving down onto his shoulders.³⁵ A crescent-shaped hair ornament adorns the central hair bun. The tall earrings are in clear view (Fig. 9b). The tiger-claw necklace of a young prince, occasionally given to Kārttikeya in sculptural arts of the later Gupta period,³⁶ is not part of his numismatic iconography. On coins of Variable 1 the deity has been given a pearl-chain instead, as quite commonly worn by royal males in Gupta imagery (Figs 7b–8b), whereas on those of Variable 2 the god wears a beaded necklace occasionally combined with a plain necklace (Figs 9b–10b).

Another noticeable difference lies in the presence or absence of a halo: in Variable 1 Kārttikeya is mostly nimbat, but on coins of Variable 2 the halo is absent.³⁷

The peacock, raising its neck in front of Kārttikeya's torso, has turned its head towards the left side of the coin, as if hoping for edible fruit instead of coins. On coins of Variable 1 the bird is relatively tall with a prominent chest and tall wings that are spread out along the bird's body (Figs 7b–8b), but they do not cover the rider's crossed legs to the extent as seen on coins with the front-facing image (Figs 9b–10b). There the bird is relatively small, with a less prominent breast. It has spread its wings fairly low and wide, their feathers indicated along the upper and lower side. The engraver has tried to suggest that the wings actually support the legs of the rider. In some engravings the deity's feet protrude from underneath the wings (Fig. 9b). The positioning of the bird's claws also varies—directed forward in coins with three-quarter rendering (Figs 7b–8b) against more sideward in those with frontal positioning (Figs 9b–10b).

In either design the peacock has spread its tall tail-feathers behind Kārttikeya's back, but in the frontal image the feathers with their imposing 'eyes' reach much higher than on the coins with three-quarter view. The tail creates an impressive feathery backrest serving as a shiny body mandorla which might easily evoke the association with the fiery glow of *tejas* mentioned in the Bilsad inscription.

In the right field, to the left of Kārttikeya, appears the king's honorary epithet (*biruda*), which in Kumāragupta I's case always includes the name 'Mahendra'. In this case the legend reads *mahendrakumāraḥ*.

What is the intended meaning of the scene on the reverse? The usual Gupta format for the reverse would prescribe a deity showing his/her favours to the Gupta king and thus indirectly to the latter's subjects. When translating the idea of divine support into iconographic visuals, the artists frequently used the motif of the dispensing of jewels or coins, both in numismatic and in sculptural imagery.³⁸ This is the role in which we

find Śrī-Lakṣmī in numerous other Gupta coin designs, and Viṣṇu's *cakrapuruṣa* on very rare coins of Candragupta II.³⁹ And as we have seen, Kārttikeya's image, as spender of wealth, was adapted to conform to the format.

The basis underneath the mounted deity has always been misunderstood as a platform or pedestal of some kind. J.N. Banerjea (1956: 144), and probably in his wake Upendra Thakur (1974: 306) described it as 'an elaborate *pañcaratha* pedestal', thereby leading us towards interpreting the image as that of an icon installed in a temple. A similar view apparently underlies the vision of the BBC-editors, when off late they referred to Kārttikeya's image on Kumāragupta's gold coins in their 'History of the World through 100 objects in the British Museum' as 'shown standing on a plinth' 'What we're looking at is a statue of the god as you would see it in a temple, just the sort of statue that Kumaragupta himself might have commissioned. It's a tradition of temple imagery that emerges here, and continues to the present day.'⁴⁰

Parallels in sculptural art and paintings of the Gupta-Vākāṭaka period, however, tell a different story. They reveal that the so-called 'platform' actually represents a stylized mountainous landscape; perhaps Mount Himāvat, where Kārttikeya grew up, or it may refer to Mount Krauñca, where he attacked a demon hiding in the mountain. Similar cubist renderings of rocky landscapes can easily be traced in Gupta period sculptures in stone and terracotta, as well as in cave paintings at Ajanta (Maharashtra). Not only do we find them in the settings of *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes, but also in background renderings suggesting the wilderness inhabited by recluses, mythic creatures such as *naras* and *kinṇaras*, and animals living in the wild.⁴¹

Devotion to Skanda-Kumāra

Introducing Kārttikeya as a reverse device was an innovative step, one which is usually explained as an unmistakable indicator of Kumāragupta's special devotion to the deity.⁴² The popularity of Skanda-Kumāra, which is quite evident through

both coins and sculptures from the pre-Kuṣāṇa period onwards,⁴³ indeed continued unabated throughout Gupta times. P.K. Agrawala suggested that Candragupta II instilled a special devotion in his son by naming him 'Kumāra'. Kumāragupta I in his turn would have followed in his father's footsteps by naming his second son after Skanda as well. Prithvi Kumar Agrawala even suggested that Kumāragupta 'considered himself an incarnation of Skanda' (1967: 76).

Not surprisingly, near-contemporaries of Kumāragupta seem to have been well aware of the special bond that had existed between this Gupta ruler and the martial deity. We may gather epigraphic support for this from a short phrase in an inscription engraved by the order of Anantasena, a minister of Skandagupta. The text was discovered on a pillar at the gate of the old fort of Bihar town.⁴⁴ It describes Kumāragupta as *bhūvi svāmineyaḥ khyātaḥ svakīrttyā*. The fragmentary state of the remaining lines makes a correct interpretation difficult, but the phrase seems to describe the king as 'renowned on earth by his own fame (and) guided by Svāmi'. Perhaps the term *svāmineya* should be understood as a descriptive phrase parallel to the much more familiar title *paramabhāgavata*, meaning 'foremost of devotees of the Bhagavat' (Vāsudeva-Viṣṇu). Svāmi, 'the Lord' would then be short for Svāmī-Mahāsenā, the deity to whom, according to the inscription of Dhruvaśarman mentioned earlier, the temple at Bilsad was dedicated, and who is no other than Kārttikeya himself.⁴⁵

Kārttikeya Riding the Peacock in Sculptural Art

Kumāragupta may or may not have been a royal benefactor to the Bilsad temple, but—contrary to what P.K. Agrawala (1967: 75) suggests—the inscription from 415–16 CE, engraved on a pillar near the entrance, does not mention the king's involvement in either building or expanding it.⁴⁶ The temple may have been raised during the rule of Candragupta II, but at present there is no proof to support this.

No Kārttikeya image has been recovered from the ruins, but Dhruvaśarman, who is on

record as donating a gateway and an almshouse to the complex, describes the image of god Brahmaṇya, viz., Kārttikeya, under worship in the temple as being of wondrous form (*adbhuta mūrti*) and surrounded by the lustre (*tejas*) of the three worlds.⁴⁷ His choice of words aptly expresses his marvel at the appearance of this *mūrti*. Could it be that he felt impressed, not only by the sculptural quality of the image, but even more so by an innovative iconography? Was Kārttikeya shown riding on his peacock as if seated on a jewel-studded throne hovering in the sky, with the bird's tail feathers surrounding the god's body as a lustrous circle?

Such icons do first appear in the Gupta period, following a visual concept that was probably developed by the Mathura school. Once introduced, this iconography rapidly gained great popularity, next to that of the tradition-honoured standing *mūrti*.⁴⁸ The Gupta-period seated images derive from Mathura's conceptualization of the god as 'the youthful commander of the army of the gods' as discussed by Doris Srinivasan (1997–98: 242, 253 and fns 19, 50). Both the epics and the *Purāṇas* make frequent reference to Kārttikeya as the *senāpati* of the divine army (Srinivasan 1997–98: 243). When translated into stone or gold, the youth and beauty of the god are emphasized by showing his muscular build beautifully contrasting with gorgeous ornaments. In his mounted images Kārttikeya sits with his legs folded behind the spread-out wings of the bird facing outwards, as witnessed in fifth-century Kārttikeya images from Udayagiri⁴⁹ and the region of Mathura.⁵⁰ Both on the coins and in sculpted works Kārttikeya's feet may or may not be visible.⁵¹

The poet Kālidāsa is on record as perhaps offering the earliest literary reference for Guha-Skanda riding his peacock, when he describes the multi-coloured splendour of Prince Aja, the son of King Raghu, seated on a jewelled throne with rich-hued tapestry, as resembling 'Guha riding on the back of a peacock'.⁵²

For Kārttikeya's seated image on the gold coins the die-engravers chose (or were instructed) to show him making the gesture of spending

wealth in the form of coins. In most sculptural representations of Kārttikeya from Gupta ateliers the fragmentary state no longer allows us to identify the exact gesture or the attribute in the right hand. The image from Varanasi in Bharat Kala Bhavan shows the deity feeding a pomegranate to his peacock mount.

Were the Gupta die-engravers first to invent this apparition of Kārttikeya riding on his peacock and did the sculptors then follow suit? I find this unlikely, as an iconographic innovation towards showing deities such as Vāsudeva, Kṛṣṇa or Kārttikeya actually riding their emblematic animals was well on its way by the early Gupta period. This new iconography, which moved beyond the imposing—but relatively static—quality of the frontally standing image, must have dramatically deepened the visual impact of Hindu divine imagery.⁵³ The new mode, also reflected in Puranic tales of the gods, coincided chronologically with the introduction of divine imagery in niches on the outside walls of terraces and walls of brick-built or stone temples of the age.

The die-engravers then may have taken their visual cue from a famous and possibly recently installed 'wondrous' image of Kārttikeya towering over his *mayūra* in this new fashion. This may have been the icon under worship at Bilsad, but there is no way of ascertaining this. J.N. Banerjea (1956: 144) and Upendra Thakur (1974: 306) reached a similar conclusion. J.N. Banerjea, on the one hand, emphasized that 'the iconographic importance of the type cannot be too sufficiently stressed'. Thakur, on the other hand, while paraphrasing Banerjea, held that the image on the Kārttikeya Type coins was 'just a replica of the image of the favourite deity (Kārttikeya) enshrined in a temple built by the Gupta king in the royal capital'. By adding the qualification 'just' to Banerjea's statement, Thakur in fact downplayed the significance of the new coin device. Instead we should realize that the sheer phenomenon that Kārttikeya makes his appearance on these coins is both uncommon and significant, for more than iconographic reasons alone.

First, the number of deities appearing on Gupta coins is quite restricted. The iconographic programme of the entire series is not nearly as 'dominated' by Vaiṣṇava iconography as Barbara Stoler Miller and others have suggested (1992: 62). Pride of place goes to the goddess of royal splendour and wealth, Śrī or Rājyā-Śrī, who may appear standing or seated, with attributes and gestures visualizing her support of Gupta kingship in the form of a blessing or the bestowing of wealth. A lotus attribute, a lotus seat or a lotus support iconographically confirm her identity, although she may also appear seated on a lion or a wicker-stool instead. The river goddess Gaṅgā, standing on a *makara*, graces the Tiger-slayer coins of Samudragupta and Kumāragupta I (Fig 5b). The support of Viṣṇu for Gupta kingship was expressed through the presence of his personified flaming wheel, the *sudarśanacakra*, on the extremely rare coins of Cakravikrama Type struck for Candragupta II.⁵⁴ And although Garuḍa is indeed Viṣṇu's emblem, the mythic bird mostly figures on the Gupta coins as the dynasty's sign of power in its own right, so it seems (Raven 1994a).

So next to the two goddesses and Viṣṇu's personified wheel-*puruṣa*, Kārttikeya is the only deity to make his appearance, and only so in one particular series of Kumāragupta's gold coins.⁵⁵ By all means this numismatic move looks like an exceptional step, one which must have been well meditated. A step which may have been intended to go beyond simply 'replicating' an impressive image in an equally impressive temple complex.

Approaching Skanda

Why did the peace-loving and intellectual Kumāragupta I chose to express a special bond with this young and valiant deity known in contemporary inscriptions under the names of Svāmi, Mahāsenā, Guha and Subrahmaṇya?⁵⁶ A deity who was known to have a clearly demonic side as well? A deity who was anointed by Brahmā to become the commander of the gods, the Great Leader or Mahendra? Why did Kumāragupta make the peacock emblem of Skanda his own emblem, next to the dynastic Garuḍa?

Barbara Stoler Miller interpreted the issue of the Kārttikeya coin type as a manifestation of the 'Saivite undercurrent of Gupta dynastic religion'. She found that the coin type marked 'a definite break with the Vaiṣṇava iconography that dominates the coinage of his [Kumāragupta's] grandfather and father'. On this coin 'the king is shown making an offering to a peacock' and we find 'Kārttikeya riding on a peacock in full array...'. She concluded that the devices and coin legends were evidence of Kumāragupta expressing 'his own Saivite preference' (1992: 62), even though she had to admit that the king preserved 'his family's Vaiṣṇava allegiance in the majority of his official records' (1992: 62).

Stoler Miller was undoubtedly correct in pointing out that Gupta dynastic bhāgavatism did not preclude individual rulers' allegiance to other Hindu gods such as Śiva or Kārttikeya. But if we would follow Stoler Miller in interpreting the Kārttikeya Type as officially signalling the king's shift to Śaivism, we would probably miss its intended meaning.

A not-too-hidden clue to this intended meaning rests in the obverse device of the king feeding a peacock (Figs 7a–10a). Stoler Miller interpreted this gesture as an act of obeisance, with the king 'making an offering to a peacock', which is 'the vehicle of the war-god aspect of Śiva's son' (1992: 62). However, seeing the force of allegoric language in visual and literary arts of the Gupta age,⁵⁷ we may need to look beyond the surface image of the king offering something to a peacock, and sense the powerful iconography of a young valiant man of royal appearance and 'his' peacock. There is little doubt: the coin device brings the king on a par with Skanda himself, as also argued by Jai Prakash Singh (1977: 127).

Next to images, titles were another powerful means to achieve the same. In what certainly looks like a systematic program to present the royal *persona*, Kumāragupta—or more likely his political advisors—demanded that the laudatory titles used in official documents such as coin legends and inscriptions, one way or another included the title 'Mahendra'. Scholars persistently translate 'Mahendra' to mean 'the

great Indra’, as indicated earlier. Along the same line Chhanda Mukherjee argued that both the Kārttikeya coins and the legend *mahendrakumāra* prove ‘that the king claimed filial relationship with Mahendra, the king of gods in heaven’ (1991: 11).

Directing our focus on Indra, however, would make us miss the significance of the images on the Kārttikeya coins and their legends. Once we visualize these numismatic clues in the wider context offered by other references to Kārttikeya in inscriptions and imagery of the period, it seems obvious that the designation ‘Mahendra’, used either on its own or in a compound, was deliberately and systematically employed. It was meant to evoke the powerful and mythic concept of Kārttikeya as the young general (*mahendra*) of the gods. There is nothing coincidental about the fact that both the obverse and the reverse legends on the Kārttikeya Type coins call Kumāragupta *mahendrakumāra*. Other coin designs mostly include variations on ‘*mahendra*’, such as *siṃhamahendra*, ‘the lion who is Mahendra’ on his Lion-slayer coins, *ajitamahendra*, ‘the unconquered Mahendra’ on his Horseman coins,

and many similar combinations using the divine generalissimo’s imago to underscore what the images portray.

Apratigha, ‘the invincible’

There is even more supporting numismatic evidence in the form of the device on the most enigmatic of coins devised for Kumāragupta I, those of Apratigha Type (Figs 11a–b; Table 2).⁵⁸ One specimen from the Bayana hoard, now in the collection of the National Museum in New Delhi, was on display in the Paris 2007 exhibition and the catalogue offers fine enlargements (*The Golden Age* 2007: 130).

The pivotal figure in the composition is a male person standing facing front, his feet placed sideways. He has raised his hands in front of his chest. Due to abrasion, these have usually worn away, but their posture has been described as that of ‘folded hands’. Facial features have worn away too. The male’s haloless head is crowned by a topknot tied with a thin fillet. His earlobes are adorned with round ear studs. A thin line surrounds the neck—either a necklace or the hem of a garment covering the torso. From the



FIG. 11a–b. Apratigha Type coin showing Kumāragupta receiving the dynastic banner; reverse: Śrī seated on a lotus, with a lotus in her right hand; gold *ḍināra*, 7.84 g (121.0 grains), dia. 1.85 cm. State Museum Lucknow, acc. no. 11403

waist down the man wears a long *dhotī* with pleats running across the hips and legs in an oblique fashion in opposite directions. One of its slips falls to the ground between his legs. Possibly the man wears a thin belt tied at the waist. He goes barefoot.⁵⁹

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 part of the legend runs from top to bottom, the second part in the opposite direction. The legend obviously identifies the central figure as Kumāragupta. Most scholars are convinced that he is shown while abdicating his throne in order to become a mendicant. Rita Sharma's description of the Apratigha coin displayed in Paris represents that view.⁶⁰ I restate my case, presented first in my 1991 PhD thesis, that this is no mendicant we see here, but a young prince. He stands with his hair tied into a bun (or a thick cranial lock?) on the top of his head. Sometimes a crescent-shaped ornament seems traceable underneath the central bun. Earrings adorn his ears. In all these outward aspects he resembles the young and heroic Kārttikeya of the coins.⁶¹ Most surface details of the young man's clothing have worn away on the recovered Apratigha coins (see Table 2), but we may, with considerable difficulty and by studying various coins, recognize a necklace, probably an upper garment with sleeves and a long lower garment with pleats down the centre. Kumāragupta has brought his hands together in front of his chest. This may be interpreted as a gesture of respect towards the man on his right offering him the dynastic Garuḍa-banner and the lady on his left gesturing. They may represent his royal parents.⁶²

The obverse legend has defied reading and interpretation ever since the first coin surfaced in the nineteenth century, and several scholars have postponed deciding upon the meaning of the device until the legend has been deciphered. At present we do not know whether the king's title *mahendra* is part of the legend, but if so, it would not surprise us, as the device must be part of the same concerted moves to emphasize the

bond between Kumāragupta and Kārttikeya.

The Sanskrit legend in Brāhmī script on the reverse, next to the image of seated Śrī holding up a lotus in her right hand, announces that the king is 'invincible', *apratigha*. He is about to take up the role of the valiant war-leader for the Gupta forces, with varying success, as history has shown. Luckily his son Skandagupta eventually did act the part, as his name had predicted.

King Kumāra and the Divine

Finally, do the iconography and the legends of Kumāragupta I's coins considered in this paper claim a full, divine status for this Gupta king? No, they do not, and neither do the inscriptions of the Gupta period referring to him. Next to imperial titles such as *mahārājadhīrāja* or *paramabhaṭṭāraka*, in epigraphs Kumāragupta is given titles that indicate his role as prime devotee of Viṣṇu or 'the gods' or relate him to Mahendra.⁶³ Images and inscriptions on the coins frequently link him to Mahendra as well, as we have seen. They emphasize Kumāragupta's role as a paramount and virtuous king, who is courageous as a lion, strong as a tiger and—befitting his royal stature—invincible. According to ancient texts on Indian kingship, the ideal king is indeed expected to be ambitious, desirous of victory, and successful in his endeavour to expand his realm. After completing his tour of conquests, his prime duty is to protect the inhabitants of his empire and guarantee that these can live their lives in accordance with *dharma*.

The ruler is also a lord of riches, who is expected to display wealth and power, as the coins amply illustrate. One of the prime events to fulfil such high expectations on an appropriate level was the royal Aśvamedha sacrifice, and Kumāragupta lived up to expectations, so his Aśvamedha coins keep reminding us.

Certain Sanskrit texts on royal consecration ceremonies indicate that the royal candidate is not only eager to conquer the world, but also 'desirous of the heavenly space' and the coin legends of the Gupta kings confirm this ambition. After slaying his foes, so the coin legends assure us, the king's victories secured him sovereign rule

over the earth, while his many virtues will secure his conquest of heaven.

During the consecration ritual, a number of gods, mentioned by name in the texts, authorize the new ruler to be victorious. They do so by letting him share in their divine qualities (Gonda 1956–57: 36). One of the prime qualities that gods and the anointed king share through this ritual of power transfer is *tejas*, fiery energy as ‘the brilliant principle of supra-normal might and

dignity (Gonda 1956–57: 70). As a ‘shareholder’ of divine energy, the just king comes as close to the divine as a human representative on earth of divine powers in heaven can be.

As for Kumāragupta I, the interplay of imagery, coin legends and epigraphs appears to deliberately move him closest to the radiating *tejas* of Skanda-Kārttikeya. The undeniable force of allusion to that martial deity’s mythic exploits, his youth and glory must have worked wonders.⁶⁴

Table 1: Kumāragupta I—Kārttikeya Type; DINARA database 01.04.2015

No.	Group	Altekar	Weight (g)	Weight (grains)	Dia.	Collection	Publications
	<i>Group 3 Variety 1.1</i>						
1	KG1.03 KAR-1.1	A	8,22	126.9		Auction, 1233	Baldwin’s 74 (9.5.2012)
2	KG1.03 KAR-1.1	A	8,11	125.2		Auction, 13	Todywalla 39 (25.12.2008)
3	KG1.03 KAR-1.1	A				Vikram Chand, 2.03.12	
4	KG1.03 KAR-1.1	A	8,268	127.6		Hermitage St. Petersburg	Allan 1914: 85, fig. 15.11
	<i>Group 3 Variety 1.2</i>						
5	KG1.03 KAR-1.2	A	8,087	124.8	1,95	BhKBh Varanasi, 114	Altekar 1954: no. 1695, fig. 26.5; G&S 1981: no. 192, fig. 11.192
6	KG1.03 KAR-1.2	A	7,646	118.0	2,03	Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya	Altekar 1949: 55, fig. 1.13
	<i>Group 10 Variety 1</i>						
7	KG1.10 KAR-1	B	8,17	126.1		Auction	Baldwin’s 74 (19.05.2012), lot 1234
8	KG1.10 KAR-1	B	8,05	124.2		State Museum Lucknow (unknown acc. no.)	Pandey 1985: 88, fig. 4.4
9	KG1.10 KAR-1	B				unknown	Sastri 1917: pl. 7, centre
	<i>Group 4 Variety 1</i>						
10	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,27	127.6	2,00	Auction, 569	Baldwin’s NY 14 (10.1.2007)
11	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,30	128.1		Auction, 322	Baldwin’s NY 17 (9.1.2008)
12	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,24	127.1		Auction, 329	Baldwin’s NY 17 (9.1.2008)
13	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	7,92	122.2		Auction, 496	Baldwin’s NY 30 (9.1.2013)
14	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,13	125.5		Auction, 3915	Oswal 39 (2012)
15	KG1.04 KAR-1	A				Auction, 47	Todywalla 26 (12.04.2008)
16	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,30	128.1	1,90	Berlin Bode Ms	
17	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,26	127.5	1,85	Berlin Bode Ms	

No.	Group	Altekar	Weight (g)	Weight (grains)	Dia.	Collection	Publications
18	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,10	125.0	1,93	BhKBh Varanasi, 8642	G&S 1981: no. 190, fig. 11.190
19	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,21	126.7	1,99	BhKBh Varanasi, 113	Altekar 1954: no. 1700, fig. 26.10; G&S 1981: no. 189, fig. 11.189
20	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,10	125.0	1,97	BhKBh Varanasi, 111	G&S 1981: no. 191, fig. 11.191
21	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,204	126.6	1,98	Bharatpur Palace Cabinet	Altekar 1954: no. 1696, fig. 26.6
22	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,32	128.4	2,03	British Museum	Smith 1884: 195, fig. 4.1; Smith 1889: 105, fig. 3.1; Allan 1914: no. 248, fig. 15.5
23	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,217	126.8	2,03	British Museum	Allan 1914: no. 249, fig. 15.6
24	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,197	126.5	2,03	British Museum	Smith 1884: 195; Smith 1889: 105; Allan 1914: no. 250, fig. 15.7
25	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,327	128.5	1,91	British Museum	Smith 1893: 121, fig. 3.8; Allan 1914: no. 251, fig. 15.8
26	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,314	128.3	1,91	British Museum	Smith 1893: 121; Allan 1914: no. 252, fig. 15.9
27	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,307	128.5	2,16	British Museum	Smith 1889: 105; Allan 1914: no. 253, fig. 15.10
28	KG1.04 KAR-1	A				British Museum, 1914 J.W. Ricketts 11 7 1	
29	KG1.04 KAR-1	A				Vikram Chand, 2.03.11	
30	KG1.04 KAR-1	A				Vikram Chand, 3.01.66	
31	KG1.04 KAR-1	A				Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, 19334	
32	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,26	127.6		Deepak Dhaadha	Classical Numismatic Gallery 15 (2.2.2014), lot 30
33	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,21	126.7	2,01	Distributed BH	Altekar 1954: no. 1692, fig. 26.2
34	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,242	127.2	1,98	Distributed BH	Altekar 1954: no. 1693, fig. 26.3
35	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,333	128.6		E.C. Bayley (1889)	Smith 1884: 152; Smith 1893:49; Altekar 1957: 310
36	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,33	128.6	1,90	Formerly Jucker, G12	
37	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,06	124.4	1,75	Formerly Skanda	Spink-Taisei 1991: no. 140

No.	Group	Altekar	Weight (g)	Weight (grains)	Dia.	Collection	Publications
38	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,23	127.1	1,92	GMMathura, 53	
39	KG1.04 KAR-1	A				Hermitage St Petersburg	Allan 1914: 85 reference
40	KG1.04 KAR-1	A				Hermitage St Petersburg	Allan 1914: 85 reference
41	KG1.04 KAR-1	A				Hermitage St Petersburg	Allan 1914: 86 reference
42	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,272	127.7	1,97	Indian Museum Kolkata	Smith 1906: 113, no. 30 Mukherjee 1990: fig. 87
43	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,242	127.2	1,88	Indian Museum Kolkata	Smith 1906: 114, no. 31, fig. 16.3
44	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,165	126.0	1,91	Indian Museum Kolkata	Smith 1906: 114, no. 32
45	KG1.04 KAR-1	A				N.S. Singhi, Kolkata, 157	
46	KG1.04 KAR-1	A				N.S. Singhi, Kolkata, 158	
47	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,225	126.9	1,80	National Museum New Delhi, 51.77/6	Altekar 1954: no. 1691, fig. 26.1
48	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,302	128.1	1,80	National Museum New Delhi, 51.77/64	Altekar 1954: no. 1694, fig. 26.4; Chhabra 1986: no. 582, fig. 39.12
49	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,238	127.1	1,80	National Museum New Delhi, 51.50/47	Altekar 1954: no. 1697 fig. 26.7; Chhabra 1986: no. 580, fig. 39.10
50	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,165	126.0	1,80	National Museum New Delhi, 51.77/65	Altekar 1954: no. 1698 fig. 26.8; Chhabra 1986: no. 583, fig. 39.13
51	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,262	127.5	1,80	National Museum New Delhi, 51.77/67	Altekar 1954: no. 1699, fig. 26.9 Chhabra 1986: no. 585, fig. 39.15
52	KG1.04 KAR-1	A				B.S. Sitholey, Lucknow	Sitholey 1948: fig. 8.8
53	KG1.04 KAR-1	A				Swiney	Wilson 1841: 425, no. 13, fig. 18.13
54	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,28	127.8	2,00	Pankaj Tandon, 591,05	CoinIndia
55	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,19	126.4		Pankaj Tandon, 182,15	
56	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,12	125.3		Pankaj Tandon, 422,27	
57	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,27	127.6		Pankaj Tandon, 591,01	

No.	Group	Altekar	Weight (g)	Weight (grains)	Dia.	Collection	Publications
58	KG1.04 KAR-1	A	8,174	126.2		trade	
59	KG1.04 KAR-1	A				unknown	zeno.ru 28518
	<i>Group 4 Variety 2.1</i>						
60	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B	8,20	126.6		Auction, 1667	Baldwin's 65 (4.5.2010)
61	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B	8,24	127.2		Auction, 330	Baldwin's NY 17 (9.1.2008)
62	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B	8,20	126.6	2,00	Auction, 1234	Baldwin's 45 (3.5.2006)
63	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B				Auction, 1195	CNG Triton 9 (9.1.2006); zeno.ru 28468
64	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B				Auction, 1034	Spink (7.10.1987)
65	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B	8,20	126.5		Auction, 16	Classical Numismatic Gallery 3 (2011)
66	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B	8,31	128.2		Auction, 192	Gemini 11 (11.1.2006)
67	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B	8,11	125.2		Auction, 18	Oswal 21 (2011)
68	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B	8,29	127.9	1,80	Berlin Bode Ms	
69	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B	8,277	127.7	2,00	Berlin Bode Ms	Wilson 1841: pl. 18.13
70	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B	8,26	127.5	1,98	BhKBh Varanasi, 8643	G&S 1981: no. 194, fig. 11.194
71	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B	8,165	126.0	2,03	British Museum	Kittoe 1852: 397, no. 3, fig. 12.7; Smith 1884: 195, fig. 4.2; Smith 1889: 105, fig. 3.2; Allan 1914: no. 254, fig. 15.12
72	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B	ring		1,91	British Museum	Smith 1883: 121, fig. 3.9; Allan 1914: no. 255, fig. 15.13
73	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B	8,281	127.8	1,91	British Museum	Smith 1889: 105; Allan 1914: no. 256, fig. 15.14
74	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B	8,222	126.9		no spec	
75	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B	8,307	128.2		E.C. Bayley (1889)	Smith 1884: 152; Smith 1893: 49; Altekar 1957: 310; Ahmad 1989: 156
76	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B	8,12	125.3		Deepak Dhaadha	Spink 13012 (2013), lot 97
77	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B				Hermitage St Petersburg	Allan 1914: 86 reference
78	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B				Hermitage St Petersburg	Allan 1914: 86 reference
79	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B	8,23	127.0	2,03	Indian Museum Kolkata	Smith 1906: 114, no. 33; Mode 1973: 24, coin no. 8
80	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B	8,242	127.2	1,96	Indian Museum Kolkata	Smith 1906: 114, no. 34
81	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B	8,197	126.5	1,80	National Museum New Delhi, 51.50/48	Altekar 1954: no. 1701, fig. 26.11; Chhabra 1986: no. 581, fig. 39.11

No.	Group	Altekar	Weight (g)	Weight (grains)	Dia.	Collection	Publications
82	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B	8,30	128.1		Pankaj Tandon, 591,04	
83	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B			2,00	Peggy Delmé-Radcliffe	Mitchiner 1978: no. 4843
84	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B	8,26	127.5	1,75	Shivlee 1191	Spink-Taisci 1991: no. 139; Browne 1993-94: 162, 2, pl. 18, 2
85	KG1.04 KAR-2.1	B	8,22	126.9		trade	
	<i>Group 4 Variety 2.2</i>						
86	KG1.04 KAR-2.2	B				Auction, 909	Baldwin's 47 (25.9.2006)
87	KG1.04 KAR-2.2	B	8,30	128.1		Auction, 1233	Baldwin's 45 (3.5.2006)
88	KG1.04 KAR-2.2	B	8,26	127.5	2,06	BhKBh Varanasi, 112	Altekar 1954: no. 1703, fig. 26.13; G&S 1981: no. 193, fig. 11.193
89	KG1.04 KAR-2.2	B	8,23	127.0	2,03	Bharatpur Palace Cabinet	Altekar 1954: no. 1702, fig. 26.12
90	KG1.04 KAR-2.2	B	8,175	126.2	1,98	GMMathura, 26	
91	KG1.04 KAR-2.2	B	8,20	126.5		Shivlee 1193	
92	KG1.04 KAR-2.2	B	8,28	127.8	2,00	Auction, 568	Baldwin's NY 14 (10.1.2007)
93	tbe	tbe				State Museum Lucknow	reference Ahmad 1989: 153
	6 coins of unknown variety	unkn				unknown	Smith 1884: 152; Smith 1893: 49; Altekar 1957: 310
	2 coins of unknown variety	unkn				unknown	Smith 1893: 47; Altekar 1957: 307

Table 2: Kumāragupta I—Apratigha Type; DINARA database 01.04.2015

No.	Group	Weight (g)	Weight (grains)	Diam.	Collection	Publications
	<i>Group 7 Variety 1.1</i>					
1	KG1.07 APR-1.1	7,80	120.4	1,90	BhKBh Varanasi, 115	Altekar 1954: no. 1816, fig. 31.10; G&S 1981: no. 197; Raven 1994a: fig. d133; Raven 1994b: fig. 12
2	KG1.07 APR-1.1	7,841	121.0	1,80	Bharatpur Palace Cabinet	Altekar 1954: no. 1817, fig. 31.11
3	KG1.07 APR-1.1	7,452	115.0	1,91	British Museum	Smith 1883: 144; Smith 1889: 109, fig. 3.4; Allan 1914: no. 257, fig. 15.15
4	KG1.07 APR-1.1	7,808	120.5	1,98	Distributed BH	Altekar 1954: no. 1818, fig. 31.12
5	KG1.07 APR-1.1	7,925	122.3	1,85	Distributed BH	Altekar 1954: no. 1819, fig. 31.13
6	KG1.07 APR-1.1	7,91	122.1	1,85	Formerly Skanda	Spink-Taisei 1991: no. 136
7	KG1.07 APR-1.1	7,91	122.1	1,78	H.C. Poddar	Ghose 1960: 179, fig. 9.2
8	KG1.07 APR-1.1	7,954	122.7	1,85	Indian Museum Kolkata, C 2307	Mukherjee 1990: no. 93
9	KG1.07 APR-1.1	7,813	120.6	1,80	National Museum New Delhi, 51.77/61	Altekar 1954: no. 1813, fig. 31.7; Chhabra 1986: no. 359, fig. 24.14
10	KG1.07 APR-1.1	7,97	123.0	1,91	National Museum New Delhi, 51.77/59	Altekar 1954: no. 1812, fig. 31.6; Vanaja 1983: no. 78; Chhabra 1986: no. 357, fig. 24.12;
11	KG1.07 APR-1.1	7,836	120.9	1,70	National Museum New Delhi, 51.77/60	Altekar 1954: no. 1814, fig. 31.8; Chhabra 1986: no. 358, fig. 24.13
12	KG1.07 APR-1.1	7,90	121.9	1,90	Pankaj Tandon, 394,00	http://coinindia.com/ galleries-kumaragupta.html
13	KG1.07 APR-1.1				Private collection	
14	KG1.07 APR-1.1	7,84	121.0	1,85	State Museum Lucknow, 11403	Pandey 1985: 89, fig. 4.6
15	KG1.07 APR-1.1	7,77	119.9	1,70	Vikram Chand, 2.03.13	
	<i>Group 7 Variety 1.2</i>					
16	KG1.07 APR-1.2	7,873	121.5	1,80	National Museum New Delhi, 51.50/61	Altekar 1954: no. 1815, fig. 31.9; Chhabra 1986: no. 356, fig. 24.11
17	KG1.07 APR-1.2				N.S. Singhi, Kolkata	

NOTES

1. This paper was presented at the South Asian Archaeology conference held in Vienna in July 2010 and was in press since 2011 for the proceedings. I would like to thank the editors of *Pratna Samiksha* for accepting it for their journal. The original text has been only minimally changed for contents. At least two pertinent contributions on the subject since 2011 are Richard Mann's *The Rise of Mahāsena: The Transformation of Skanda-Kārttikeya in North India from the Kuṣāṇa to Gupta Empires* in 2012 and Cédric Ferrier's 'Skanda/Kārttikeya and the Imperial Guptas: Coinage, Religion and Political Ideology (4th–5th century CE)' in 2014.

2. The first known date for Kumāragupta's reign, of Gupta Year 96 (equivalent to 415–416 CE) is found in the Bilsad stone pillar inscription discussed below. One of the last dates has been read on a silver coin with peacock device in the British Museum (cat. no. 385). It has been read as 1-30-5, which in Gupta era years would be equivalent to 454 CE (Altekar 1957: 230-s1). However, the reading is contested and I could not make adequate sense of it. In a personal communication (mail exchange August 2011) Shailendra Bhandare of the Ashmolean Museum Oxford expressed his view that all dates read on any of the Peacock Type silver coins are doubtful and should not be taken seriously. "'Dates" have been read on coins of this type struck by other dynasties as well, and they too are without any substantiation.' The latest date for Kumāragupta I read by Bhandare on a silver coin with Garuḍa device ('the Gujarat Type') is GY 124; see Gupta 1974, 1: 99 and Bhandare 2005–06: 94. Bhandare also indicated to me that the dates of GY 134 and GY 136 have been read on lead coins struck for the next king, Skandagupta. They turned up in Indian coin auctions (mail message 22.8.2011).

3. Ashvini Agrawal (1989) provides a useful survey of the kind of primary source materials available for the study of Gupta history. Among more recently published studies, those by Fred Virkus (2001, 2004) and S.R. Goyal (2005: Chapter 2) emphasize the coherence and shared purpose of Gupta coins and inscriptions. P.L. Gupta's two volume work from 1974 is still the most elaborate historical survey with attention for all kinds of relevant sources on the Guptas.

4. I have used 'Gupta period' between quotation marks for several reasons. This period indicator is commonly used in numismatic and art historic

studies of ancient India to capture the time span of two-and-a-half centuries between 300 and 550 CE in North India's history. Nevertheless, we should always keep in mind that dynastic labels may easily be overinterpreted and give the kings lending their names to the terms more importance than is historically evident. Similarly, period indicators using the names of a ruling house should be applied to their proper regional context only. For a study of Gupta coins the use of 'Gupta period' to describe their contextual timeframe is perfectly acceptable.

5. Four inscriptions of Samudragupta, three of his eldest son, Rāmagupta, eight of his younger son, Candragupta II, fourteen of Kumāragupta I, one of his brother, Ghaṭotkaca, seven of his son, Skandagupta, and fourteen or so of the later Gupta kings. J.F. Fleet's edition of the original texts and translations, revised and with an updated historical introduction, are available in Bhandarkar 1981. D.C. Sircar's work offers Sanskrit texts in Devanāgarī script, but without translations. Prithvi Kumar Agrawala and Om Prakash Khaneja 1983 provide Sanskrit texts in Devanāgarī script and illustrations of the inscribed objects.

6. By way of example, notice the assessment of Kumāragupta I by Goyal (2005: 322). Fred Virkus (2004: 71) pointed out that Kumāragupta did continue an ongoing process of expansion of Gupta territory towards the south and southwest of Bengal. On the west side of the kingdom the Gupta king succeeded in subduing the Aulikaras of Daśapura.

7. On the inscription of Dhruvaśarman at Bilsad, see Bhandarkar 1981: 267–70; Virkus 2004: 97–8.

8. On the inscriptions at Garhwa (= Gadhwa), see Bhandarkar 1981: 75, 270–1, pl. 17 and Ahmad 1996.

9. D.C. Sircar (1966: 52, 185, 236) offers useful explanations and inscriptional parallels for the use of these Sanskrit titles.

10. On the inscription found at Tumain, see Bhandarkar 1981: 276–9.

11. A verse in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* has been interpreted as perhaps reflecting a tradition on the erstwhile regional rule of Samudragupta, Candragupta II and Kumāragupta I. The third ruler mentioned is called 'Mahendraḥ'; Agrawal 1989: 34.

12. Unfortunately we still have no reliable basis for estimating the absolute amount of gold coins issued for the Gupta kings.

13. Altekar 1957: 194–7, figs 12.14–15, 13.2.

See also the design with Elephant riding to left, no lion shown, in the CoinIndia website at <http://coinindia.com/Kumara-4843ff-344.34.jpg> (accessed 11.4.2015). In that series the goddess Śrī on the reverse is not accompanied by a peacock, but is flanked by two treasures, the lotus treasure or *padmanidhi* and the conch treasure or *śaṅkhanidhi*. She holds a lotus in each hand. Enlargements of the coin, with the elephant riding to right while the king slays a lion, can be found on the CoinIndia website at <http://coinindia.com/Kumara-4843ff-584.04.jpg> (accessed on 11.4.2015).

14. See for on line enlargements of specimens of Samudragupta's Tiger-slayer coins the specimen on the CoinIndia website at <http://coinindia.com/Samudra-4792tigerB-491.10.jpg> (accessed on 11.4.2015).

15. Various coins of Candragupta II on horseback can be found on the CoinIndia website at <http://coinindia.com/galleries-chandragupta2.html> (accessed on 11.4.2015).

16. Altekar 1957: 174–83, 190–4, figs 10.11–15, 11.1–13, 12.11–13.

17. See e.g., her image on an early Archer Type design created for Candragupta II on the CoinIndia webpage at <http://coinindia.com/Chandra-4808A-344.29.jpg> (accessed on 11.4.2015), where she is liberally donating coins with her right hand.

18. See the series with Horseman Type coins and Tiger-slayer coins of Kumāragupta I on the CoinIndia website at <http://coinindia.com/galleries-kumaragupta.html> (accessed on 11.4.2015).

19. They turn up mostly in the area of Uttar Pradesh. The CoinIndia pages also offer useful overviews of different devices employed on Kumāragupta's silver coins.

20. See note 2. Altekar 1957: 228–32, figs 17.22–6. These coins weigh c. 1.95 g (30 grains) and measure between c. 1.40 and 1.50 cm. These coins, called *rūpaka* in the Baigram copperplate inscription from the time of Kumāragupta I, carry script markings engraved in front of the king's face that have been interpreted as dates of issue. The Baigram copperplate inscription was published by Basak in 1931–32. It carries a date of Gupta Year 128, which is the equivalent of 447/448 CE.

21. In the course of the twentieth century it became more and more customary to refer to Gupta coin studies from the time of John Allan (1914) onwards. We could easily overlook or forget the basis that was built by James Prinsep, Edward Thomas, Alexander Cunningham, J.F. Fleet and in particular

Vincent Smith. The digital age makes their work more easily accessible now. On Kārttikeya Type coins, see e.g. Smith 1884: 194–6; Smith 1889: 105–6; Smith 1893: 121–2; Smith 1894: 174–5; Smith 1906: 113–4; Allan 1914: xcii, 84–5, figs 15.5–11; Altekar 1954: ci–cii, 272–5, figs 26.1–13; Altekar 1957: 203–6, figs 13.11–4; Chattopadhyay 1977: 224; Gupta and Srivastava 1981: 74–5, figs 9.189–94; Chhabra 1986: xxxiv–xxxv, 92–3, figs 39.10–5; Ahmad 1989; Goyal 1994: 72–4, figs 11.4–6, 12.1.

22. The debate on the most appropriate name for the type will probably never subside. See for a short summary, e.g. Singh 1977: 124–5.

23. In Altekar's 1957 handbook, the two varieties are called A and B. Chhanda Mukherjee did not distinguish separate varieties (1991: 93). The new nomenclature is part of a new grouping of Gupta gold coins developed by me in recent years. These coins belong to the fourth group of coins noticed among those of Kumāragupta I (KG1.04) and carry the type/variety denomination KAR-1 and KAR-2. These are not chronological indicators but mint-idiomatic markers. A group usually consists of coins of different types (Archer, Horseman, etc.).

24. Whether or not the two varieties were issued from different mints is a matter still under study. On the basis of recorded find spots, Nisar Ahmad has suggested that these coins were struck in mints of eastern Uttar Pradesh (1989: 153–4). More mint-idiomatic analyses seem necessary to confirm such hard-core facts for the manufacture of Gupta coins. Close mintidiomatic links with coins struck for Candragupta II suggest that the Kārttikeya coins discussed in this paper may have been issued quite early in Kumāragupta's reign.

25. A question by Prof. Harry Falk after the presentation in Vienna of this paper regarding this interpretation made me look again at the grounds for this identification and the way in which the fruits were depicted.

26. Mukherjee 1979: 12.

27. Ghurye 1951: 109 explains the male clothing items, such as the *dhotī* and the *dupattā* seen to be worn by male figures in the early centuries CE and continuing in Gupta royal portraits. Moti Chandra (1973: 78) describes Kumāragupta's clothing on his coins as a tunic (not for the Kārttikeya Type coins), waist-cloth and waist-band.

28. Ghurye tends to call this lower garment a *lungī* rather than a *dhotī*. He describes it as a piece of cloth simply wound around the loins once or twice without

any pleats. He refers in particular to depictions in murals at Ajanta. 'The "lungi" worn by the gentlemen of Ajanta hardly extends beyond the knees' (Ghurye 1951: 103–4, 117). Moti Chandra adduced evidence from Bāṇa's *Harṣacarita*, a post-Gupta period text, on royal costumes of the Gupta period. Harṣa is said to wear a *dhotī* and a star-spangled scarf. The white *dhotī* was often decorated with a *haṃsa* pattern, and so could the *dupattā* be (Chandra 1973: 60). The geese patterns remained popular for nobility also in later ages, as is evident from numerous Jaina manuscript paintings featuring kings.

29. Gerald Browne reconstructed the middle part as reading *guṇarāśir vṛtrani[hantiṛ-mahendrakumārah]*, 'with an abundance of virtues, Mahendrakumāra, the destroyer of Vṛtra'... (1993–94: 162–3). I found it difficult to follow in particular the latter part of the reconstruction by means of the coin used, which is from the Skanda collection (Spink-Taisei 1991: no. 139) and, via the Gerald M. Browne collection, is now in the Shivlee collection. Browne refers to earlier discussions on the reading of the legend (1993–94: 162–3).

30. Smith first mistook Kārttikeya for a goddess, and Altekar admitted that 'the breasts of the figure are prominent' (1957: 204). In 1989 Nisar Ahmad still finds that on some coins Kārttikeya 'appears as goddess' (1989: 150). Apparently we are still insufficiently receptive to the stylistic dictates of Gupta numismatic imagery.

31. The Kārttikeya coin shown in the Paris exhibition (*The Golden Age* 2007: 128–9) is described as showing the three-quarter view, but this is incorrect. The die has struck the coin flan slightly off-centre and a bit tilted. This may create an optical illusion of seeing the image in side-view.

32. According to Mukherjee, Kārttikeya 'appears to scatter something over an indistinct object' (1991: 93), but the motive of the scattering of coins is well established in the visual repertoire of Gupta gold coin design. The scattering is not directed towards 'an indistinct object', but towards the devotee.

33. Apparently elaborating the description given by John Allan back in 1914 (p. 84).

34. As also noticed by Ahmad 1989: 150.

35. Various Sanskrit terms, from different texts, are reproduced in art historical literature to describe a hairdo with three long locks, as befitting the garb of a young, princely figure: *trisikhā*, *sikhāṇḍikā*, *sikhāṇḍaka*, *kākapakṣa*, *tricitra*, *vāsikābaddhamakuṭa*. Cp. Mallmann 1964: 33; Agrawala 1967: 64–5. We find this hairdo in

representations of Kṛṣṇa, Mañjuśrī and Kārttikeya. Liebert's iconographic dictionary offers little support for either understanding or applying these various terms. Banerjea 1956: 287–8 quotes unnamed lexicons as explaining *kākapakṣa* as a type of hairdo arranging the hair on the two sides of the head. Apparently this needs to be differentiated from the hairdo arranged in three locks of hair. Moti Chandra (1973: 225–6) adduces terms from the *Amarakośa* lexicon to explain a Gupta period hairdo in which a lock of hair falling on the forehead was called *bhramaraka*, and the locks of hair falling on the sides were called *sikhāṇḍaka*. He calls this the *sikhāṇḍaka* hairstyle and refers to an Ajanta example. That hairstyle is not the specific three-locked hairdress of a young prince though. According to the *Amarakośa* (2,6,97) a *sikhā* is the hair lock worn by Hindu men on the top of the head or scalp. It had two other names, *cūḍā* and *keśapāśī* (Chandra 1940: 138).

36. See e.g. the sandstone image of a standing Kārttikeya with beautiful *trisikhin* hairdo and a tiger-claw necklace, in the 1970s still part of the Pan-Asian collection; Pal 1978: fig. 43.

37. Mukherjee (1991: 92) mentions only the nimbate design.

38. As also pointed out for this coin type by Singh 1977. He suggested that 'out of kingly vanity Kumāragupta avoided having himself depicted on the reverse as a recipient of anything from Kārttikeya'. I feel that he was thinking too much in terms of the Cakravikrama Type iconography (which has an obverse device showing Candragupta II receiving blessings from Viṣṇu's *cakrapuruṣa*) and sought to explain the Kārttikeya coin device on the basis of an assumed flaw in the king's character rather than through the visual power of Kārttikeya's new iconography (1977: 126–7).

39. Jai Prakash Singh compares the two devices to understand their intended meaning (1977: 125–7).

40. http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/objects/Hcfl5uGzS8Gn-Ih_cVCikQ. Text explaining object no. 42, an Aśvamedha coin struck for Kumāragupta I.

41. Rocky landscapes are particularly noticeable in depictions of semi-mythic beings and jungle animals. See e.g., discussions and illustrations offered by Raven 1990 and Zin 2008.

42. Many scholars have commented on Kumāragupta's devotion to Kārttikeya. See Agrawala 1967: 77; Sahai 1975: 107; Sinha 1979: 92–4 and many others. Jai Prakash Singh strongly rejected

Altekar's suggestion that the coins were intended as a numismatic homage to Kārttikeya (1977: 126).

43. The popularity of the young and valiant Kārttikeya in early Indian culture has a parallel in the fondness of art historians for the study of his literary life, cult and iconography. It is therefore easy to overlook both images and studies thereof. This paper refers to images and publications that were relevant for our understanding of Kārttikeya's appearance on the gold coins without pretence of completeness. Useful surveys are provided by J.N. Banerjea (1956: 144–5, 363–7), Prithvi Kumar Agrawala (1967), Asim Kumar Chatterjee (1970), Rao (1971, 2, 2: 415–51; Upendra Thakur (1974; 1981), Bhagwant Sahai (1975: Chapter 9), Kanchan Sinha (1979) and Doris Srinivasan (1997–98).

44. Bhandarkar 1981: 345–50.

45. Bhandarkar 1981: 267–70. After the presentation at the conference, Prof. Harry Falk of Berlin University suggested that the Sanskrit term *soāmineyaḥ* more probably would have to be interpreted as a matronymic, 'Son of Svāmini'. I have not been able to find corroborative epigraphic evidence to indicate that Queen Dhruvadevi was referred to as Svāmini, but we need to keep this suggestion in mind.

46. It does offer the first Gupta era date for Kumāragupta's reign (Gupta era 96).

47. ...*bhagavatas trailokya-tejas-saṃbhāra-saṃ/bhṛ/ tādbhuta-mūrtter brahmaṇya-devasya.....[n]ivāsinaḥ soāmi-mahāsenasy=āyatane=smin...* 'at this temple of Lord Mahāsena, the divine (one), whose wondrous body is produced out of the mass of the lustre of the three worlds; who is the god Brahmaṇya; (and) who resides at ...' (adapted from Bhandarkar 1981: 269–70, lines 7–8).

48. E.g. Agrawala 1967: 84–5; Chatterjee 1969; Thakur 1981: 63; Agrawala 1992; Srinivasan 1997–98: 241–3. Texts offering iconographies for the imagery of Kārttikeya are referred to by Agrawala 1967; Thakur 1981: 17–8; Sinha 1979: 44–7; Srinivasan 1997–98, inter alia.

49. Images of Kārttikeya seated on a peacock that appear to pre-date AD 500: from Madhubhan (Mathura), red sandstone, Government Museum Mathura (GMM), acc. no. 1579, Diskalkar 1932: 49, AIIS, photo 52522; from Madani, sandstone image, GMM, acc. no. 466 (Diskalkar 1932: 48, AIIS, photo 44639); Udayagiri, either in Cave 5 on the west wall (AIIS, photo 930) or Cave 6, north wall (AIIS, photo 39978); I was unable to ascertain the exact location; from Kampil (UP), fragmentary

buff sandstone image, State Museum Lucknow, acc. no. 54.37, Joshi 1972: 111.

50. J.E. Dawson, while describing a Skanda from Mathura, suggested that this posture 'draws its inspiration from the ancient tradition of architectural decoration dating from the first century AD', becoming a 'particularly popular convention in the Gupta period brick architecture. ... Such plaques usually show a human head or a figure ... peering out of a semi-circular frame or a caitya window' (Dawson 2007: 228). Although *candraśāla* images indeed achieve an optimal impact through frontality, the forward stance of divine imagery in Gupta art, whether as individual *mūrtis* in the temple or in terracotta or stone panels on the temple walls, appears firmly rooted in accepted conventions for the depiction of the divine that had developed from the Śūṅga period onwards.

51. Sculptural art reveals several other possible ways in which Kārttikeya could sit on the bird: astride with both legs pendent, as in Gandhāran examples, or in sculpture influenced by Gandhāran prototypes (SML, acc. no. 49.45, Joshi 1972: 110, pl. 7), or astride with one leg passing in front of the bird's chest. A Kārttikeya seated that way, found at Gayaghat in Varanasi and probably dating back to the late fifth century CE, is the best known example. It heads a series of similar post-Gupta and later sculptural renditions of the theme (Asher 1980: 41; Williams 1982: fig. 103; Biswas and Jha 1985: 12–3, 45 with references, fig. 20 in black-and-white and colour).

52. *Raghuvamśa* 6.4: ... *mayūrapṛṣṭhāśrayiṇa guhena*', Devadhar 1986, 2: 98; Sivaramamurti 1983: 22–3.

53. Such images did not replace the earlier forms, but came in addition to them. The majority of Gupta period images still follow the standing mode.

54. Altekar 1957: 145–50, figs 9.8–9. Some scholars still subscribe to the view that this is an image of Viṣṇu (e.g. Mukherjee 1991: 91), but neither the iconography of the standing male nor the *biruda cakravikrama* on the reverse supports such an interpretation. C. Sivaramamurti and V.S. Agrawala provided details on the *sudarśana* context that won Altekar over. For the iconographic context of the motif beyond the coins of Candragupta II, see Begley 1973: 44–5. He offers an enlargement of the Bayana hoard coin image in his fig. 8.

55. Some scholars identify the seated couple on the reverse of rare Sceptre Type coins struck for Candragupta II as Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī. So far I have not come across convincing iconographic proof to support this, but I did not venture into a thorough

iconographic analysis of the device so far. For a discussion of these coins (also sometimes known as 'King and Queen on Couch Type coins'), see Altekar 1957: 138–43, fig. 9.6; Gupta and Srivastava 1981: 14–5, 46–7, figs 4.60–1.

56. 'Svāmin' in the Bihar stone pillar inscription; 'Svāmi-Mahāsena' and 'Subrahmanya' in the Bilas stone pillar inscription.

57. Frederick Asher's 1983 paper and responses to his views are a good starting point for reading up on this aspect of Gupta period art in all its facets.

58. Allan 1914: xcii, 87, fig. 15.15; Altekar 1954: cx–cxii, 303–6, figs 31.6–13; Altekar 1957: 207–10, figs 14.1–3; Gupta and Srivastava 1981: 8, 76, fig. 11.197; Chhabra 1986: xxx–xxxii; detailed discussion and references are also offered by Raven 1994a: 41–4, 433–9, figs c149–9a. See an excellent enlargement of an Apratigha coin on the CoinIndia website at <http://coinindia.com/Kumara-4844-394.jpg> (accessed 11.4.2015).

59. This description is based on a first-hand study of many specimens back in 1989, using a strong magnifying glass. Digital photography now allows us to enlarge images, but most of these coins are quite worn and retain only part of the original iconography.

60. Adherents of this interpretation hold that the Apratigha coin series was brought out towards the end of the reign of Kumāragupta I. Numismatic evidence has never been presented to underpin this view, and

the weight of the coins (around 7.8 g) suggests an issue early in this king's reign.

61. 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 and 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, Biswas and Jha 1985: fig. 4.9.

62. I have dealt at some length with the interpretation of the device in a separate article (Raven 2004–05: 83).

63. E.g. *paramabhaṭṭāraka* in the Mathura image inscription, Bhandarkar 1981: no. 18); *paramabhāgavata* in inscriptions recovered at Gadhwa (Bhandarkar no. 17) and Bhitari (no. 31); *paramadaivata* ('the foremost among the devoted') in copperplate inscriptions found at Dhainadaha (no. 19) and Damodarpur (nos 22 and 24).

64. In his recent study of Skanda-Kārttikeya, Richard Mann argued that there was little evidence for a broad-based popular and independent cult centering on Kumāra during Gupta rule. He does acknowledge Kārttikeya's role as a divine support for Kumāragupta I, only to become 'a secondary Śaiva figure by the sixth century CE' (2012: 230).

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