



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Beauty on the beast

Raven, E.M.; Greaves, L.R.; Hardy, A.

Citation

Raven, E. M. (2016). Beauty on the beast. *Archaeology, Seals And Inscriptions, Iconography And Artistic Expression*, 261-281. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3249853>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licensed under Article 25fa Copyright Act/Law \(Amendment Taverne\)](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3249853>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

**Religion, Society, Trade and Kingship:
Archaeology and Art in South Asia
and along the Silk Road,
5500 BCE-5th Century CE**

Research Presented at the Twenty-third Conference of the
European Association for South Asian Archaeology and Art,
Cardiff, 2016

Volume 1

Archaeology, Seals and Inscriptions,
Iconography and Artistic Expression

Edited by

Laxshmi Rose Greaves and Adam Hardy

Dev Publishers & Distributors
New Delhi

Published by
Dev Publishers & Distributors
Second Floor, Prakashdeep,
22, Delhi Medical Association Road,
Darya Ganj, New Delhi – 110 002

www.devbooks.co.in

ISBN 978-93-81406-95-3

First published 2020
Copyright © 2020, Individual Contributors

Copyright reserved. Subject to the exceptions provided by the law, no part of this publication may be reproduced and/or published in print, by photocopying, on microfilm or in any other way without the written consent of the publisher; the same applies to whole or partial adaptations. The publisher retains the sole right to collect from third parties fees in respect of copying and/or take legal or other action for this purpose.

Printed in India

Beauty on the Beast

Ellen M. Raven

At the 16th meeting of South Asian Archaeology, held in Paris in 2001, I focused on Candragupta II's coins with the Lion-slayer portrait. As their name indicates, these coins show the king in close combat with a lion. I used them as a case study for criticizing the unsystematic ways in which Gupta coins had been classified thus far, and suggested a new method.

Six years later, at the 19th meeting in ravishing Ravenna in 2007, I turned to the reverse of the Gupta coins to examine the images of a goddess seated on a throne, a wicker stool, a lotus or a lion. Each of these recurs during successive reigns in the coin programme. My not so hidden agenda was to unravel systematic patterns of change, both in style and iconography, within the designs.

Another nine years have passed so fast and I now return to Candragupta's Lion-slayer coins. Not for lack of things to say on other types, but to focus on designing choices. I wish to illustrate how die engravers experimented with, and found solutions for, the visual formula of placing a deity (in this case a goddess) as actually sitting on a lion. We should realize that showing gods and goddesses seated on their emblematic mount, as a visual formula expressing their link, was a new phenomenon in the Indian visual language. Its introduction apparently went hand in hand with an increasingly popular narrative format for showing the divine.

ŚRĪ-LAKṢMĪ AND HER LION

Śrī-Lakṣmī, India's divine 'Lotus Lady' and most favoured goddess of prosperity, remains a favourite of scholars as well. In several recent articles, Doris Srinivasan discussed her iconography in seals, coins and sculptures up to the Medieval period from regions 'north of the Vindhyas', with a special focus on early northwestern finds.¹ Via art centres in the Kuṣāṇa realm, Śrī-Lakṣmī's iconography became enriched with the cornucopia or horn of plenty befitting a bringer of prosperity and supporter of kings.² Quite understandably, her lotus attribute stayed paramount. In an image from Mathura now in the National Museum in New Delhi, Śrī-Lakṣmī sits on her haunches in what some iconographers call a '*mātrkā*' position, the legs splayed. We may no longer recognize the baby that apparently once sat in her lap, but the lotus cannot be easily overlooked (Fig. 1)! What seems to have gone unnoticed is the fruit, probably her emblematic *śrī-phala* (the wood-apple) in the raised right hand.³ Vinay Gupta and Doris Srinivasan recognized the same fruit in the left hand of a goddess seated on a lion reclining to left, as shown in a panel from Kanawara (Fig. 2). This site lies in the Bharatpur district of Rajasthan, only 70 km from Mathura. Doris Srinivasan and Vinay Kumar Gupta identify her as Śrī-Lakṣmī and date the panel on the basis of its style to the Kuṣāṇa-Gupta transitional period of the mid-3rd to early 4th century CE, though I would be just as happy with a 'true' Gupta period dating.⁴

The lion was not new to Śrī-Lakṣmī's iconography though. In the early Northwest, by the time of King Azes II (who ruled towards the turn of the Christian era), a lion already accompanies the goddess on a

series of Azes' copper coins. The lion does not serve as a mount yet; Śrī-Lakṣmī stands on a lotus instead (Fig. 3).⁵ In her recent studies, Srinivasan offers many examples of how the lion became an accepted feature of Śrī-Lakṣmī's entourage.⁶ Anna Maria Quagliotti identified a circa third-century sculpture from Jandial at Taxila, now in the Taxila Museum, as Śrī-Lakṣmī (see note 1). It seems that not one, but even a couple of lions serve her as a mount. The back of the image, however, reveals that her seat is still actually a lion's *throne*.

NANA

The lion association is not exclusive to Śrī-Lakṣmī in the melting pot that the Northwest was, as it defines the iconography of multiple goddesses with roots that sometimes reach back into Babylonian times. In the Kuṣāṇa period, the most familiar of such goddesses is Nana or Nanaya.⁷ She comes with her own, distinctive iconography that may include a crescent above her head, a sceptre (sometimes mounted with a lion protome), a bowl or a sword. On the gold coins of the Kuṣāṇas, Nana is usually shown standing, without a lion in sight.⁸ In a series of gold coins issued for King Huviṣka, however, she sits sideways on a lion mount; both goddess and mount are looking towards the right (Fig. 4). The sceptre resting against the right shoulder and the bowl held in the left hand are sufficiently clear markers, but Nana is also identified by her name 'nano' (in Bactrian) along the edge of the coin.⁹

Nana seated on a lion recurs a century later in a gold coins series, probably for the Kuṣāṇa King Kaniṣka II (Fig. 5).¹⁰ In the 1960s, the single-known specimen was part of the N.S. Singhi collection in Kolkata. Its device was studied extensively by B.N. Mukherjee (1968). Nana sits to front, facing front, just as Śrī-Lakṣmī later will do on the Gupta coins. Nana extends an investiture fillet in her right hand, and supports a sceptre against her left shoulder. She rests her feet on a lotus pericarp, of which we can count the seeds.¹¹ The lion stands to left on all fours. Along the right margin the legend, which has been read as *nano šao*, 'royal Nana', confirms the identity of the goddess. When the coin was first published in 1933, M.F.C. Martin commented how its reverse was reminiscent of the goddess with cornucopia, seated



Figure 1: Seated Śrī-Lakṣmī with lotus, Mathura. Red, spotted sandstone, size unknown. Kuṣāṇa period. National Museum New Delhi 66.19. After S.P. Asthana, *Mathurā Kalā*, ed. by S.P. Gupta (New Delhi: National Museum, 1999), fig. 36.



Figure 2: Gaṇeśa together with Śrī-Lakṣmī seated on a lion. Spotted, red sandstone panel, Kanawara (Rajasthan). Width 64 cm, H. 41 cm. Photograph courtesy Vinay Kumar Gupta.

on a lion crouching to right, as depicted on the King-and-Queen coins of the Guptas. We will return to this similarity later.¹²

ARDOXŠO, ŚRĪ-LAKṢMĪ AND DURGĀ

The most popular of goddesses depicted on Kuṣāṇa coins was not Nana, but Ardoxšo, a Bactrian-Iranian goddess of good fortune favoured by the Kuṣāṇa kings.¹³ She may be shown seated or standing, but in coins issued in the name of third-century Kuṣāṇa kings her seated portrait is much more common. She sits to front on a throne, her feet resting on a lotus pericarp strewn with seeds. With her right hand she extends an investiture diadem in token of her support for the king's right to rule. A horn of plenty rests on her left shoulder (Fig. 6).

Obviously then, in the century preceding Gupta rule, it was quite customary in North India to depict a goddess signalling prosperity on the reverse of gold coins. Such a goddess indeed makes her appearance on the earliest of Gupta gold coins: probably first on those of Sceptre Type showing Samudragupta sacrificing at an altar (Fig. 7a), and soon also on coins of Archer Type (Fig. 7b) and on coins of King-and-Queen Type that seem meant to celebrate Samudragupta's descent from the illustrious Licchavis through his mother Kumāradevī (Figs 7c-d). The goddess depicted on the Sceptre Type and Archer Type coins sits on a throne, like Ardoxšo did before her. The goddess on the King-and-Queen Type coins sits on a lion, like Nana did before her on Kuṣāṇa coins. The mint masters no longer add a name label next to the deity portrayed, so her attributes are expected to identify her.

In each of these coin types, the goddess is given an investiture fillet in her right hand and a horn of plenty in the left. The variation is in the seat: either a throne or a lion, reclining either to left or to right. The attributes are not those specific for Nana, so we can rule her out. The horn of plenty on Kuṣāṇa coins points to Ardoxšo, but that goddess belongs to the Bactrian cultural heritage of the Kuṣāṇa kings, and with the demise of Kuṣāṇa rule, she lost her prominent role vis-à-vis kingship as expressed in coins, inscriptions, sculptures and seals of the Northwest and beyond.

Ardoxšo does not figure in imperial Gupta epigraphs or in contemporary seals, so it is highly unlikely that she would still be selected to share 'coin space' with Samudragupta on his Sceptre and Archer Type coins.¹⁴ In the 2010 conference in Ravenna, I argued that the coin portrait of the goddess seated on a throne, holding an investiture fillet and a horn of plenty, would have been meant to represent Śrī-Lakṣmī. In the



Figure 3: Śrī-Lakṣmī with lion on the obverse of a copper coin of the Indo-Scythic king, Azes II. On the reverse a bull. First century BCE. British Museum. After Gardner 1886: fig. 19.5.



Figure 4: Nana seated on lion on the reverse of a gold coin of the Kuṣāṇa King, Huviṣka (r. c. 155-189 CE). On the obverse a bust of the king holding a sceptre or mace. W. 7,89g, Ø 2,00 cm. British Museum 1888,1208.555. Acquired from Alexander Cunningham. Photograph courtesy of the British Museum COC188308.



Figure 5: *Nana seated on lion on the reverse of a gold coin of the Kuṣāṇa King, Kaniṣka II (r. c. 227-247 CE). On the obverse a king holding a trident and sacrificing at an altar. Whereabouts and Ø unknown. Perhaps still in N.S. Singhi collection. Photograph after B.N. Mukherjee 1969, cover illustrations.*



Figure 6: *Ardoxšo seated on a throne. On the obverse King Vasīṣka (r. c. 247-265 CE) holding a tall sceptre ('standard') while sacrificing at an altar. A trident behind. Gold coin, Kuṣāṇas; W. 7,88 g, Ø 2,20 cm, Tandon collection. Photograph courtesy of Pankaj Tandon.*

company of the Sceptre-bearing king and the Bow-bearing king, she would be deemed Rājya-Lakṣmī, the goddess of Royal Fortune, the divine consort of the Gupta royal hero.¹⁵

Regarding the goddess on the lion, some scholars preferred to cautiously call her 'goddess on lion'.¹⁶ Those that sought to identify her more properly, often called her Ambikā or Durgā.¹⁷ As Yuko Yokochi pointed out in her PhD study of the Warrior-Goddesses, 'Durgā' is often seen as the proper name of the Warrior Goddess



Figure 7a: Samudragupta, Sceptre Type gold coin, British Museum 1983,0215.1; W. 7,56 g, Ø 1,90 cm. DINARA database 5108. Photograph courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum COC307872.



Figure 7b: Samudragupta, Archer Type gold coin, British Museum 1910,0403.13; W. 7,63 g, Ø 2,20 cm. DINARA database 712. Photograph courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum COC12659.



Figure 7cW: Samudragupta, King-and-Queen Type gold coin, lion to left. Spink, auction 17006 (25/09/2017), lot 133. W. 7,26 g, \varnothing unknown. DINARA database 1254. Photograph courtesy of Spink & Son.



Figure 7d: Samudragupta, King-and-Queen Type gold coin, lion to right, Oswal; W. 7,33 g, \varnothing 2,10 cm. DINARA database 556. Photograph courtesy of Oswal.

in India and among scholars inside and outside India'.¹⁸ But should we relate the Warrior-Goddess tradition to these early Gupta coins? I do not think so. Artists in the Kuṣāṇa and Gupta periods developed a specific iconography for the depiction of the Warrior-Goddess killing the demon Mahiṣa. The earliest phase in that evolution has been linked to workshops in Mathura. One or two lions may serve the goddess as a mount in

the iconography of the fight, but not predominantly so.¹⁹ Yokochi also pointed out that the lion is absent in Gupta period Mahiṣāsūramardīnī imagery.²⁰

The goddesses seated on a lion or a throne that we examine in this paper better fit into a category that Yokochi designated as ‘Consort Goddess’ (next to the ‘Warrior Goddess’ and the ‘Supreme Goddess’):²¹ ‘When a goddess coupled with a God figure is considered to incorporate many other goddesses into herself as her manifestations, she will be called the Consort Goddess. There are several figures of the Consort Goddess according to religious affiliation; Pārvatī is usually the Consort Goddess for the Śaivas and Śrī-Lakṣmī for the Vaiṣṇavas.’²² A terracotta roundel from Śrāvastī, now in the State Museum Lucknow, shows us an image of a goddess that fits in the category of ‘Consort Goddesses’. She is armed with a trident, but at the same time comfortably seated on a lion recumbent to left. Style attributes the panel to the Gupta period. A vertical third eye sits on the forehead, indicating the Śaiva affiliation of this divine lady, who is conventionally identified as Durgā (Fig. 8).

The lion-mounted goddess on the coins of King-and-Queen Type (Figs 7c-d) did not bring any such attributes to identify her other than those associated with prosperity and kingship. In this case, the goddess is consort not to Viṣṇu, but to the Gupta king shown on the obverse, as his human equivalent and protector of the earth. And the goddess par excellence in this role for the Gupta kings is undoubtedly Śrī-Lakṣmī.²³

LICCHAVIS

The presence of the lion has led some scholars to seek a link with Vaiśālī, the capital of the Licchavis. They are indeed mentioned in the legend *licchavayaḥ* next to the goddess. This whole coin design is about the impressive ancestry of Samudragupta and his links through to the Licchavis via his mother, Kumāradevī. In the same vein, one of the titles given to him in the imperial inscriptions is *licchavi-dauhitra*, ‘the son of the daughter of the Licchavi’ (ruler).²⁴ An ancestry to boast about, by all means.

Trading the throne for the lion may indeed have been intended to visually link the goddess to Kumāradevī’s home town, although definite proof is not easy to find, as Altekar already pointed out.²⁵ The choice for a lion seat was not accompanied by adding ‘Durgā’ attributes though, so the introduction of the lion mount (for its own reasons possibly related to the Licchavis or Vaiśālī) need not necessarily mean that the goddess herself became Durgā. The lack of a specific ‘Durgā’ attribute and the attributes symbolizing prosperity and blessing point in the same direction. Adding the emblematic lion did not go against Śrī-Lakṣmī’s flexible iconography, which could portray her on a lotus, a throne, or a lion, as we have seen.

The rare Nana image on the unique coin of Kaniṣka II mentioned earlier (Fig. 5) obviously was not the direct visual model for the designing of the goddess-seated-on-a-lion device for the King-and-Queen coins,



Figure 8: *Durgā with trident seated on a lion. Terracotta roundel from Śrāvastī, now in the State Museum Lucknow B.592. Photograph J.E. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw. Courtesy of the Kern collection, Leiden University.*

nor was that of the earlier Nana coins of Huviṣka. The heraldic lion mount of Nana has made way for a reclining lion resting its head on its paws. The die engravers may have found inspiration in existing imagery of a reclining lion serving as a mount, of which the Kanawara panel (Fig. 2) presents an excellent example.

ADAPTING BY SUBSTITUTION

When ordered to carve an image of a goddess seated on a lion²⁶ for a new series of gold coins, the engravers appear to have adapted the image of Śrī-Lakṣmī seated on a throne as employed in the Sceptre Type and Archer Type coins (figs 7a-b). They ‘took away’ the throne and inserted a reclining lion instead, but kept the rest pretty much intact, judging from the close stylistic and iconographic similarities between the coins.²⁷

The scenario presented here puts the Sceptre Type into existence *before* the King-and-Queen Type coins, a chronology which is by no means self-evident, certain or undisputed. Scholars still come up with different answers to the question for whom the first Gupta coins in gold were struck (either Samudragupta or his father, Candragupta I). And there is no consensus on which of these two kings sanctioned the issue of the King-and-Queen Type coins with the goddess-on-lion device.²⁸

Back in 1914, John Allan pointed out the closeness of the Sceptre Type coins with the seated Śrī-Lakṣmī to Kuṣāṇa coins with the seated Ardoxšo. He found the King-and-Queen coins ‘one step removed from this prototype by the addition of the figure of the queen on the obverse and the substitution of a lion for the throne on the reverse.’²⁹ He attributes both the sceptre type and the King-and-Queen type coins to Samudragupta.

In support of Allan’s scenario, I would add that the King-and-Queen coins show no signs of trying out how to place Śrī-Lakṣmī on her lion mount, of not-so-successful renderings that would soon be discarded.³⁰ We find no obvious experimental solutions before a format became ‘standardized’. It looks then as if the mints were instructed to use the reverse of the Sceptre Type as a model (Figs 7a-c, 9a-b).³¹ Oddly enough, the situation became quite different under Candragupta II, as we shall presently see.



Figure 9a: Samudragupta, Sceptre Type gold coin, ex Jucker collection G18; W. 6,92 g, Ø 2,05 cm. DINARA database 1145. Photograph Ellen M. Raven.



Figure 9b: *Samudragupta, King-and-Queen Type gold coin.* Tandon collection 586,08; W. 7,44 g, Ø 2,00 cm. DINARA database 4309. Photograph courtesy of Pankaj Tandon.

INTENDED ICONOGRAPHY

The motif of Śrī-Lakṣmī seated on a lion was retained for certain coin series of subsequent Gupta kings. According to Srinivasan, this was mostly because Gupta kings favoured her for the reverse of their gold coins; especially the *enthroned* image. The lion-as-throne fitted the bill. However, thinking in terms of a motif ‘surviving’ *because* it can serve as a throne and *because* the lion has royal connotations, could make us overlook an important aspect of the planning that must have steered Gupta coin imaging: that there was an intended iconography behind the ‘look’ of the coin *ensemble*, obverse and reverse devices and legends on two sides working in unison. It cannot be coincidental that the motif survived especially in the Lion-slayer Type, from the time of Candragupta II (Fig. 10) up to that of Skandagupta (Fig. 11).

We may envision a scenario in which an official overseer of coin design broadly coordinated the coin programme for issues in different metals. He must have pondered what best to pair the Lion-slaying king with. Pragmatically, he may have instructed the mints to set their engravers at work to create a device involving the goddess of prosperity (as the goddess-of-choice for ‘officially’ sanctioned coin and seal issues) together with a lion serving her as a willing mount.

In my contribution for *South Asian Archaeology 2001*, which focused on methods of classification, I suggested why Śrī-Lakṣmī was given a lion seat. ‘The king defeats the lion, thus showing his courage, physical fitness and strength. A king who defeats the lion can make a lion serve his divine consort, the goddess of Royal Fortune, as a mount. The king’s lion’s courage is also captured in his epithet “*siṃhavikrama-*” inserted in the right field’.³²

The obverse image of Candragupta II in close combat with a ferocious lion and killing it, was not the first Gupta ‘king-conquers-beast’ motif, as Samudragupta had been shown killing a tiger on his magnificent Tiger-slayer coins (Fig. 12). Introducing a lion as opponent was new, and may well have been inspired by Sasanian imagery of a king chasing lions.³³



Figure 10: *Candragupta II, Lion-slayer Type gold coin with king trampling the lion. Tandon collection 438,03; W. 7,70 g, Ø unknown. DINARA database 4339. Photograph courtesy of Pankaj Tandon.*



Figure 11: *Skandagupta, Lion-slayer Type gold coin Dhananjaya collection; W. 9,23 g, Ø 2,10 cm. DINARA database 7213. Photograph courtesy of Dhananjaya.*



Figure 12: Samudragupta, Tiger-slayer Type gold coin. State Museum Lucknow 3174; W. 7.46 g, \varnothing 2.20 cm. DINARA database 1287. Photograph courtesy of Pankaj Tandon.

EXPERIMENTS

Still, there must have been limited familiarity on the part of the engravers with the new format and, surprisingly really, considerable room for artistic input. The coins are evidence that there was no strict instruction in place to use the composition of the existing King-and-Queen coins as the model to emulate. The engravers do not seem to have been in the least bit inclined to copy the earlier composition. In fact, the perplexing diversity in the designs for the images both of Candragupta II fighting the lion and Śrī-Lakṣmī seated on her lion mount, suggests that there may even have been a call for inventiveness.

Śrī-Lakṣmī's attributes vary to some extent, but stay within expected iconographic boundaries. In her left hand she may hold a cornucopia, which soon gets competition from the lotus. With her right hand she keeps extending the investiture fillet, a most persistent attribute in Gupta coin designing. At times the investiture fillet makes way for a *varadamudrā* or, less often, a lotus (but then the cornucopia is left out). In designs that I would date later in the reign, Śrī-Lakṣmī is mostly showering coins with her right hand in *varadamudrā* and holding a lotus in her left hand.

SEATING THE GODDESS

Especially in the early years of Candragupta II's reign, we come across a wide array of ways to make Śrī-Lakṣmī sit on her mount, sometimes decidedly *less* comfortably. Unlike before, the engravers now use various sitting postures, both familiar and unfamiliar, next to the familiar *bhadrāsana* with two legs pendant, also sometimes referred to as the 'European sitting posture' (Fig 13). Śrī-Lakṣmī may sit with legs folded in *paryāṅkāsana* (Fig. 14), a spectacular *ardhaparyāṅkāsana* with one leg folded, the other hanging down elegantly (Fig. 15), in *lalitāsana* with right or left leg resting on the curly manes of the lion (Fig. 10) and even



Figure 13: Candragupta II, Lion-slayer Type gold coin. Goddess seated in *bhadraṣana*. Baldwin's, New York auction 20 (07/01/2009), lot 510; W. 7,87 g, Ø unknown. DINARA database 163. Photograph courtesy of A.H. Baldwin & Son.



Figure 14: Candragupta II, Lion-slayer Type gold coin. Goddess seated in *paryāṅkāṣana*. Bharat Kala Bhavan 8625; W. 7,74 g, Ø unknown. DINARA database 1575. Photograph after Allan 1914, p. 40, fig. 8.16.

in *mahārājālāsana*, precariously balancing on the back of her mount with one leg folded beneath her and the other leg supporting an arm (Figs 16-17).

She may be seen hovering above the animal (Figs 18, 21) or, quite the opposite, seated firmly as if on horseback (Figs 19-20). She may lean comfortably backwards, or stretch one or both legs forward across



Figure 15: *Candragupta II, Lion-slayer Type gold coin. Goddess seated in ardhaparyāṅkāsa. British Museum 1847,1201.363; W. 7.97 g, Ø 2,30 cm. DINARA database 1514. Photograph courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum COC307974.*



Figure 16: *Candragupta II, Lion-slayer Type gold coin. Goddess seated in mahārājālāsana. State Museum Lucknow 3148; W. 7.53 g, Ø 1,90 cm. DINARA database 1504. Photograph courtesy of Pankaj Tandon.*

the lion's manes (Fig. 21). She may look to front, left or right, and may sit to front or left. This variety is unparalleled in Gupta design history, both before and afterwards.

The occasional presence of horizontal beaded beams or vertical uprights behind the goddess in early Lion-slayer coins (cp. Fig. 15) has been explained as parts of a throne backrest. We may also notice such



Figure 17: *Candragupta II, Lion-slayer Type gold coin. Goddess seated in mahārājātilāsana. Paras collection 159; W. 7,80 g, Ø 1,80 cm. DINARA database 7574. Photograph courtesy of Pankaj Tandon.*



Figure 18: *Candragupta II, Lion-slayer Type gold coin. Goddess hovering above back of lion. Classical Numismatic Gallery, auction 15 (02/02/2014), lot 24; W. 7,83 g, Ø unknown. DINARA database 7409. Photograph courtesy of the Classical Numismatic Gallery.*

elements in the King-and-Queen Type coins. Such backrest elements do indeed go back to throne imagery as inherited from the Kuṣāṇa image repertoire (Fig. 6), and logically, they could have been discarded when the lion mount was first introduced. Some engravers did so, while others retained parts of vertical and horizontal framing as framing background elements.



Figure 19: *Candragupta II, Lion-slayer Type gold coin. Goddess seated astride. State Museum Lucknow 10586; W. 7,78 g, Ø 2,00 cm. DINARA database 8054. Photograph courtesy of Pankaj Tandon.*



Figure 20: *Candragupta II, Lion-slayer Type gold coin. Goddess seated astride, holding lotus. Private collection, ex Classical Numismatic Gallery, auction 5 (2011), lot .114; W. 7,70 g, Ø unknown. DINARA database 5970. Photograph courtesy of the Classical Numismatic Gallery.*

Recently, Sanjeev Kumar has argued that in Lion-slayer coins where such backrest traces exist, the intention was to show Śrī-Lakṣmī seated on a throne, while resting her feet on a lion (Fig. 22).³⁴ He prefers to attribute those coins to Candragupta I. The type would then have been reintroduced under Candragupta II with designs in which the goddess sits on a lion instead. These new devices would then illustrate an



Figure 21: *Candragupta II, Lion-slayer Type gold coin. Goddess seated with left leg stretched forward over the head of the lion (right leg pendant?). Government Museum Mathura 49; W. 7,87 g, Ø 2,00 cm. DINARA database 1813. Photograph courtesy of Pankaj Tandon.*

Indianizing evolution of the device which gradually discards the throne as a seat element. The division of the Lion-slayer coins over Candragupta I and Candragupta II is part of a novel theory that moves several series of early Gupta gold so far attributed to Candragupta II back to the time of his grandfather, Candragupta I. These reattributions are fraught with problems that I cannot go into within the context of this paper.

From a methodological point of view, however, I find it questionable that Kumar adjusts his descriptions of the same *Lion-slayer* coin to a preferred attribution: When the coin is attributed to Candragupta I, the goddess sits on a throne, while resting her feet on the lion; when the coin is attributed by Kumar to Candragupta II, Śrī-Lakṣmī is 'sitting in a *vāmārdhaparyāṅka* pose [so with her right leg folded and left leg pendant ER] on a sleeping lion' (Fig. 22).³⁵ Even more curious is the fact that Kumar finds 'remnants of a throne' behind the lion seat in certain King-and-Queen coins (cp. Fig. 7d) no reason to adapt his description of the device as the goddess (in his view Ardoxšo) *seated on a lion* facing to the left or to the right.³⁶

POSITIONING THE LION

The positioning of the lion on Samudragupta's King-and-Queen Type coins on the one hand and on Candragupta II's Lion-slayer coins on the other hand, is hugely different. On the earlier coins the beast rests its heads on its front paws, in what Doris Srinivasan called a 'docile' pose. The animal lies with its head facing either to left or to right, and that is about what it amounts to by way of movement (Figs 7c-d).

Most lion mounts on the coins of Candragupta II still look somewhat subdued, but they take on many different poses: standing on four feet (Figs 14, 18) or lying down, facing to left or right, sometimes roaring (Fig. 20), or facing forward, watching out (Fig. 13). The latter position closely resembles that in the Kanawara sculpture (Fig. 2), but the engraver has placed the goddess higher on the mount, while the sculptor has draped the lion around the goddess, apparently still faithful to the *mātrkā* position.



Figure 22: Candragupta II, Lion-slayer Type gold coin. Goddess hovers above the lion. Traces of backrest in left field. Private collection 1158; W. 7,84 g, Ø 2,00 cm. DINARA database 16313. Photograph courtesy of Jan Lingen.

A FEW PARALLELS

For the *lalitāsana* rendering, the engravers may have been inspired by goddess-on-lion imagery exemplified by the beautiful terracotta medallion from ancient Śrāvastī that shows Durgā on her lion mount (Fig. 8). Here too the tendency of engravers to place the goddess higher on the lion than sculptors do is evident.

The sculptors that embellished the brick temples of the Gupta age with terracotta panelling left us many successful visuals of how to combine riders and mounts. A close parallel for Śrī-Lakṣmī seated astride her lion is offered by a terracotta medallion now in the Museum für Asiatische Kunst in Berlin (Fig. 23). In the medallion the lion emerges from between the legs of its rider, while the coin engraver portrays the goddess as if she is seated on a wicker stool, but puts in a lion instead.



Figure 23: Female figure riding a winged lion. Terracotta medallion, Gupta period, 21,5 x 26,6 cm. Museum für Asiatische Kunst Berlin, SMB I 5866. Photograph courtesy of the BPK/Museum für Asiatische Kunst, SMB.

The iconographic and stylistic parallels between reliefs in terracotta and stone panels on the one hand and Gupta coin engravings on the other are still largely unexplored. Going down a road to study these in unison ideally will need to involve not only published works of art, but also sculptures that lie in museum storage and items of art and craft that were archived through photography and drawings prepared during excavations. Similarly, we may wonder to what extent seal devices and ornamental imagery developed for

jewellery such as earrings, pendants and necklaces, hairpins and belts may have provided a ‘catalogue’ of design solutions for engravers to work with.

DIVERSITY WITHIN A PATTERN

Finally, although first impressions suggest otherwise, this diversity in the imagery of Śrī-Lakṣmī on her lion mount on coins of Candragupta II is not random. It constitutes one of the numerous threads in an ultra-complex, mintidiomatic patterning that I have seen emerging through a comparative analysis of the entire corpus of gold coins. Mints distinguished themselves and their coins through iconographies and styles, through choices for fabric, through selections of symbols, through shaping of legends and scripts. Unravelling this patterning helps us plot compositional choices such as those delineated in this paper, that were made by engravers and coin technicians operating at different mints. We may also then recognize gradual changes in the pattern. And while a slight understanding of the evolutionary pattern is gradually churned from this ocean of gold, the sheer diversity remains something to marvel at and admire.

NOTES

1. I would like to thank my long-time friend and colleague, Doris Srinivasan, for our engaging talks and mail exchanges on Śrī-Lakṣmī in the entourage of the Gupta kings. It makes the iconography of the coins come alive!
2. Gérard Fussman, Doris Meth Srinivasan, Anna-Maria Quagliotti and many others have shown that the cornucopia can identify Śrī in the art of Gandhāra: Gérard Fussman, ‘Une Statuette Gandharienne de la Déesse Śrī’, *Annali Istituto Universitario Orientale Napoli*, 48.1 (1988), pp. 1-9. The image is also discussed and illustrated by Doris Meth Srinivasan, ‘Lakṣmī on the Lion’, in *South Asian Archaeology and Art. Vol. 1: Changing Forms and Cultural Identity; Religious and Secular Iconographies*, ed. by Deborah Klimburg-Salter (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), pp. 246-261 (pp. 250-252); Doris Meth Srinivasan, ‘Śrī-Lakṣmī in Early Art: Incorporating the North-western Evidence’, *South Asian Studies* 26.1 (2010), pp. 77-95; Anna Maria Quagliotti, ‘In den Buddhismus integrierte Gottheiten’, in *Gandhara: das Buddhistische Erbe Pakistans; Legenden, Klöster und Paradiese*, ed. by Christian Luczanits (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2008), pp. 126-129, 339 (p. 129). See also Ellen M. Raven, ‘The Seated Lady and the Gupta King’, in *South Asian Archaeology 2007. Vol. II. Historic periods*, ed. by Pierfrancesco Callieri and Luca Colliva (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010), pp. 259-273 (pp. 259-261). The cornucopia is carried over into imagery of Śrī-Lakṣmī in the art of Kashmir in the post-Gupta period.
3. The wood-apple is a fruit of the *bilva* tree, and an attribute of various gods and goddesses, including Śrī-Lakṣmī. Cp. Gösta Liebert, *Iconographic Dictionary of the Indian Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), p. 280.
4. Whilst on the threshold of sending this paper off to the editors, Vinay Kumar Gupta alerted me to his detailed analysis of the Kanawara panel published in 2013. There he examined in particular the possible reasons for the pairing of Śrī-Lakṣmī with Gaṇeśa. I would like to thank Vinay for sharing this important paper and the image reproduced here as Fig. 2: Vinay Kumar Gupta, ‘A Unique Sculptural Panel of Śrī-Lakṣmī – Gaṇeśa from Braj Region’, *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, N.S. 28-29 (2011-2012 and 2012-2013), pp. 109-117.
5. These coins are rare. Percy Gardner described a specimen in the British Museum: Percy Gardner, *The Coins of the Greek and Scythic Kings of Bactria and India in the British Museum*, ed. by Reginald Stuart Poole (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1886), p. 85, coin 137, fig. 19.5. R.B. Whitehead reported on a second specimen in the Lahore Museum: R.B. Whitehead, *Catalogue of Coins in the Panjab Museum, Lahore. Vol. I. Indo-Greek Coins*. Reprint of the 1914 ed. (Chicago: Argonaut, 1969), p. 129, coin 308, fig. 12.308.
6. Srinivasan’s articles offer ample illustrations and referencing to many other, seminal studies on Śrī-Lakṣmī’s iconography.

7. John M. Rosenfield, *The Dynastic Arts of the Kushans* (Berkeley [etc.]: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 83-87; D.T. Potts, 'Nana in Bactria', *Silk Road Art and Archaeology*, 7 (2001), pp. 23-35; Madhuvanti Ghose, 'Nana: the "Original" Goddess on the Lion', *Journal of Inner Asian Art and Archaeology*, 1 (2006), pp. 97-112; Joan Goodnick Westenholz, 'Trading the Symbols of the Goddess Nanaya', in *Religions and Trade: Religious Formation, Transformation and Cross-cultural Exchange between East and West*, ed. by Peter Wick and Volker Rabens (Leiden [etc.]: Brill, 2014), pp. 167-229 (fig. 4: seal intaglio depicting Nana seated on a lion, Kuṣāṇa period, now in the British Museum; pp. 188-191 deals with evidence for Nana in the Kuṣāṇa realm); Srinivasan 2016, p. 250.
8. The CoinIndia website of Pankaj Tandon provides excellent background information and enlargements for Kuṣāṇa coins. The pantheon of deities on their coins expanded markedly in the reign of Kaniṣka I. Nana is one of the new arrivals (<http://coinindia.com/galleries-kanishka.html>). I am indebted (as many times before) to Pankaj for allowing me to use splendid illustrations of coins from his collection for this paper.
9. Ghose, p. 99, fig 8.
10. B.N. Mukherjee, *Nanā on Lion: A Study in Kushāṇa Numismatic Art* (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1969). The coin was first published by M.F.C. Martin, 'Some New Kushan Gold Coins', *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 29 (1933), Numismatic Supplement 44, pp. 7N-9N. B.N. Mukherjee attributed the coin to Kaniṣka III, while Robert Göbl assigns it (as his series S 660/1) to Kaniṣka II (r. c. 227-247 CE): Robert Göbl, *System und Chronologie der Münzprägung des Kušanreiches* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1984), pp. 74-76. Pankaj Tandon supports him in this, 'given the style of the obverse, which closely follows the coins of Vāsudeva I' (personal communication, 03/02/2018). Göbl suggested that a coin die, used for striking gold coins of Vāsudeva I with an image of the god Oešo leaning against his bull mount, was partly recut to create the image of the goddess Nana seated on a lion.
11. Robert Göbl calls this a 'pearl foot mat' (*Perlenfussmatte*) and many numismatists seem to agree with him and do not identify this element as a lotus pericarp dotted with seeds.
12. Martin, p. 8N.
13. Rosenfield, p. 74; Srinivasan 2016, p. 250.
14. Recently, Sanjeev Kumar argued that she is Ardoxšo holding a cornucopia, who only 'eventually evolved into the Goddess Lakshmi holding a lotus flower'. The first experiments for such a transition would become visible at the end of Samudragupta's reign, when attributes of Lakṣmī start to creep into the design of Ardoxšo. Only when the lotus has replaced the cornucopia and the throne has given way to the lotus seat, then the intended identity would have changed, from Ardoxšo to Śrī-Lakṣmī. This view fits in the, still current, theory on the gradual Indianization of Gupta coin designs. Sanjeev Kumar, *Treasures of the Gupta Empire: A Catalogue of Coins of the Gupta Dynasty and Later Guptas, Śāsāṅka and Coinage of Bengal* (USA: Shivee Trust, 2017), pp. 43, 49. I have considered the implications of expecting such an evolutionary process in Raven 2010, p. 262.
15. See Raven 2010, p. 260, also for references to more studies on this issue. Over the last century, most numismatists have identified her as Śrī-Lakṣmī, though Anand Sadashiv Altekar still had some doubts. Parmeshwari Lal Gupta thought she still represents Ardoxšo, and so does Sanjeev Kumar.
16. Many of the publications dealing with the King-and-Queen Type focus on the royal pair on the obverse and the attribution of the series rather than on the device of the goddess on the lion.
17. John Allan suggested as possibilities Lakṣmī and Mahādevī (Durgā, Ambikā); John Allan *Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Śāsāṅka, King of Gauḍa* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1914), pp. lxxiii-lxxiv. Jitendra Nath Banerjea preferred to call her Ambikā (Umā): Jitendra Nath Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography* (2nd ed., Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1956), p. 127. For Ambikā as a name of Durgā, see Vidya Dehejia, *Devi: The Great Goddess; Female Divinity in South Asian Art* (Washington: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery / Ahmedabad: Mapin / Munich: Prestel, 1999), p. 304.
18. Yuko Yokochi, *The Rise of the Warrior Goddess in Ancient India: A Study of the Myth Cycle of Kauṣīkī-Vindhyavāsini in the Skandapurāṇa*. PhD thesis (Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2005), p. 18.
19. Doris Srinivasan illustrates a large number of early Warrior-Goddess images from the Mathura school: Doris Srinivasan, *Many Heads, Arms and Eyes: Origins, Meaning and Form of Multiplicity in Indian Art* (Leiden [etc.]: Brill, 1997), Chapter 20 and figs 20.11-20.25. Among those that are still intact, we may notice a reclining lion stretched

behind the goddess, its front legs crossed, in a sculpture preserved in the State Museum Lucknow (G332) and two lions serving as a mount in a well-known panel in the Museum für Asiatische Kunst in Berlin (MIK I 5817).

20. Yokochi, pp. 133, 152-153.
21. Yokochi, p. 16.
22. Doris Srinivasan explains how Śrī-Lakṣmī chooses Viṣṇu as her consort, next to other kings, be they divine or human. However, she only dwells with victorious kings. 'As soon as kingship is taken away, Śrī-Lakṣmī leaves': Doris Meth Srinivasan, 'Lakṣmī's Choice', in *South Asian Archaeology and Art. Vol. 2. South Asian Religions and Visual Forms in their Archaeological Context*, ed. by Vincent Lefèvre, Aurore Didier and Benjamin Mutin (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), pp. 697-714 (p. 701).
23. Cp. also Shive Nandan Misra, 'The Simhavahini on the Gupta Coins', *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, 30 (1968), pp. 80-83.
24. Thomas R. Trautmann, 'Licchavi-dauhitra', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1 (1972), pp. 1-15. He argues that this title could have been intended first to distinguish Samudragupta's descent from that of half-brothers; secondly, his, because of the political support his mother's family could provide; and thirdly, to emphasize the special purity or illustriousness of his descent.
25. A.S. Altekar, *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire* (Varanasi: Numismatic Society of India, Banaras Hindu University, 1957), pp. 31-32. Kiran Kumar Thaplyal offers an in-depth review of the various theories and opinions regarding the relationship between the Guptas and the Licchavis of Vaiśālī. His Appendix I deals with the King-and-Queen Type coins of Samudragupta and provides detailed referencing to existent literature: Kiran Kumar Thaplyal, *The Imperial Guptas: A Political History* (New Delhi: Aryan, 2012), pp. 56-60, 349-364. Thaplyal accepts V.S. Agrawala's suggestion that the coins are a Licchavi issue. One of the strongest arguments put forward by him (and by most scholars that wish to attribute these coins to Candragupta I) is that Samudragupta's name is not found in the legends on the coins. Also compare Kiran Kumar Thaplyal, "Candragupta-Kumaradevi" Commemorative Medals', *Purātattva*, 12 (1980-1981), pp. 152-154. He identified the goddess on the lion as Durgā, without further elucidation.
26. S.V. Sohoni's idea that Śrī-Lakṣmī does not sit on a lion, but on a throne with an ornamental lion design on the front side, is unconvincing: S.V. Sohoni, 'Chandragupta-Kumāradevī Coin Type: A Re-examination', *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, 19.1 (1957), pp. 145-154 (p. 154).
27. The Gupta coin corpus in fact includes many such close iconographic and stylistic parallels, of which this is a striking example.
28. In his recent study, Sanjeev Kumar reattributes no less than six coin types to Candragupta I, mostly including series that usually have been regarded as early issues of Candragupta II. Kumar also offers extensive new XRF analysis data on the metal content of many coins. He argues that the King-and-Queen Type coins were 'the earliest coins issued by the Gupta kings, showing the highest purity of gold' (92-94 %). Kumar, p. 171.
29. Allan 1914, p. lxxv. In the 1980s, the numismatist Nisar Ahmad published an extensive comparison of the arguments put forward by John Allan and Anand Sadashiv Altekar on the relative sequencing of the Sceptre Type and King-and-Queen Type coins. He also added his own analysis of design elements and fabric and concluded that 'Samudragupta struck the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī type coins just after the commencement of his Standard type [here called Sceptre Type ER], with the aim to commemorate his parent[s] and the maternal lineage': Nisar Ahmad, 'Chandragupta-Kumāradevī Type of the Gupta Coinage: Examination of Arguments of Allan and Altekar on the Question of its Issuer', *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, 53 (1991), pp. 100-113 (p. 112).
30. The relative paucity of compositional variations within the type may have been one reason why Altekar did not attempt to develop a typology in his handbook of 1957, pp. 26-35.
31. An updated assessment of the relative sequence of coins recently re-attributed to Candragupta I needs to weigh many factors for each of the coin series involved; not only regarding their iconography and style, but also regarding fabric, symbols, hoard evidence etc. The high gold content of most King-and-Queen Type coins is one important aspect to consider therein.
32. Ellen M. Raven, 'Candragupta II, the Lion-Slayer', in *South Asian Archaeology 2001*, ed. by Catherine Jarrige and Vincent Lefèvre (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 2005), pp. 615-622 (p. 621, note 6). S.V. Sohoni was adamantly against interpreting the lady as a goddess. 'It would have been not only very bad manners but full

proof of the utmost lack of devotion, to have shown, on the obverse, her mount being shot at or killed by the king. Not only must deity be respected, but her mount as well'. He therefore accepted B.S. Sitholey's suggestion that she represents the queen, who 'could sit like that on a lion shot by the king. It is a case of warrantable pride in and a graceful tribute to the king's prowess and is very human' (as quoted by Sohoni). Quite understandably, this theory fell on barren ground: S.V. Sohoni, 'Depiction of Lion-throne or Lion on Early Gupta Coinage', *The Indian Numismatic Chronicle*, 1 (1960), pp. 26-32.

33. The extent to which Gupta royal imagery is indebted to Sasanian royal portraiture still awaits a systematic approach, but the parallels are quite telling; not so much those in Sasanian coin imagery, but in devices for seals and in decorations on silverware of kings on a hunt, either mounted on horseback or on foot.
34. Kumar, pp. 171, 180-181.
35. Kumar, p. 273.
36. Kumar, pp. 172-173.

