

Horseman Coins of Candragupta III

Pankaj Tandon¹

There has been a growing consensus in recent years that certain gold coins of the Gupta series that had originally been attributed to Candragupta II must have been issued by a later king, who has come to be called Candragupta III. The coins are all of the Archer type, and have the name *candra* under the king's arm on the obverse. Further, the *biruda* on the reverse reads *śrī vikrama*; both legends thereby conform to the pattern of the coins of Candragupta II. However, they are distinguished from the Archer coins of Candragupta II in two critical ways: (i) they are all heavier than the dinaras of Candragupta II, and (ii) they all feature an object on the obverse of the coin, located between the face of the king and the figure of Garuḍa atop the standard at left, which is

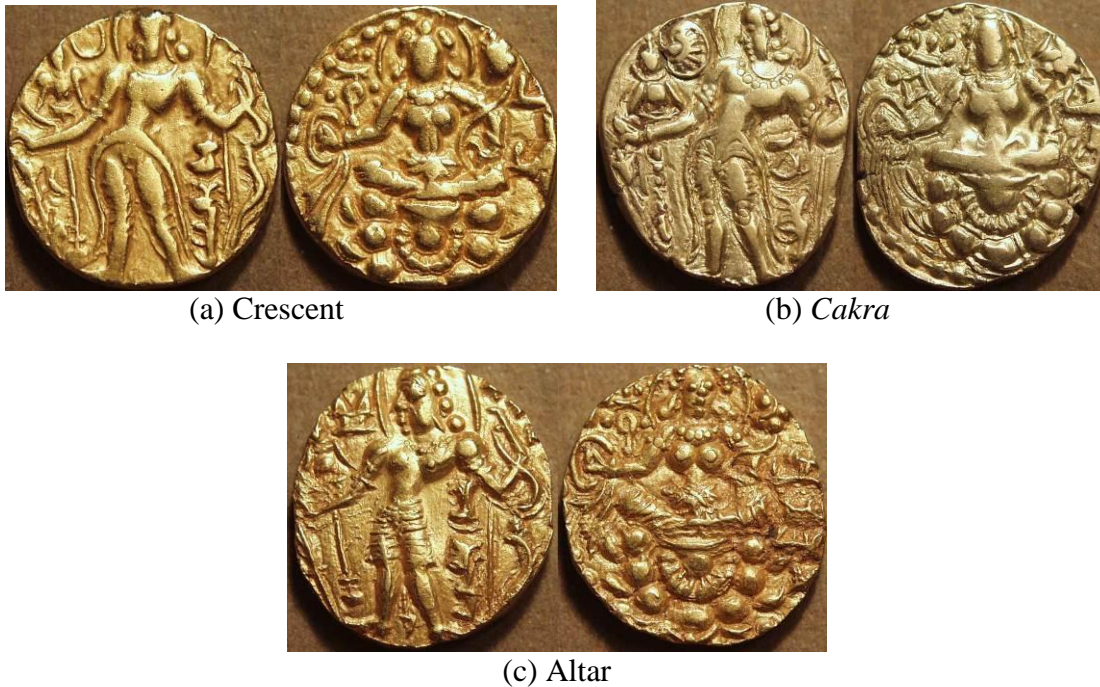


Figure 1: Examples of the three coin varieties assigned to Candragupta III

generally not seen on the coins of Candragupta II.² So far, three such objects have been identified in the literature: a crescent, a *cakra*, or wheel, and an unusual geometric

¹ Boston University. I wish to thank Shailendra Bhandare, Joe Cribb, Harry Falk, Sanjeev Kumar and Ellen Raven for their comments and helpful discussions on Gupta coins and history and for sharing with me coin images and other pertinent information on these coins. Ellen in particular generously shared with me her very valuable and very large database on Gupta coins, the DINARA database, which was of great help in this study. She also read earlier drafts very closely and gave me valuable and detailed comments. Although this paper was originally drafted while I was in Boston, it was revised and completed while I was a Fulbright-Nehru fellow at St. Stephen's College in Delhi. The support of both these organizations is gratefully acknowledged.

symbol which has been referred to as an architectural symbol and which I believe is meant to represent a fire altar. Figure 1 illustrates each of these coins.

Before I continue, I need to justify terming variety (c) from Figure 1 the “Altar variety,” rather than the “Architectural Symbol variety” as it has been known in the literature. I feel this symbol looks very much like the fire altar as it is depicted on Kushano-Sasanian coins. Figure 2 makes an illustrative comparison. Coin 2(a) is a gold dinar of the Kushano-Sasanian king Hormizd I and the detail of that coin shows the fire altar at which the king is sacrificing. If we compare this to the detail of the symbol from coin 1(c), the so-called “Architectural Symbol,” we can see that the fire altar on the coin 2(a) of Hormizd is virtually identical to the symbol from coin 1(c). This same shape represented the fire altars on all Kushano-Sasanian coins from Peroz I to Peroz III and then also on the coins of Kidara. Thus I would argue that this object on Candragupta III’s coins should be called the “Altar” rather than the “Architectural Symbol” as it has often been referred to in the literature so far.



Figure 2: Comparing the symbol on coin 1(c) with coin of Hormizd I

In this paper, I will present a new coin variety of the Archer type and an entirely new coin type that shed important new light on Candragupta III. The new variety of the Archer type features an object on the obverse that has not hitherto been noted: a radiate sun. I will present six examples of this variety. The new type consists of the first known Horseman type coins of Candragupta III. I will present two examples of this type and show why these are probably coins of the same king who issued the heavy weight Archer coins. In addition, I will note a coin variety that has been published by Sanjeev Kumar on the website of the Shivlee Collection,³ where the obverse object appears to be a *śrīvatsa*, and examine the relationship of this coin to the others in the series. Finally, I will briefly

² It is possible that a few coins of Candragupta II do carry an object in this position; the attribution of these coins needs to be reexamined closely. The twin features of an extra object and the legend *candra* on the obverse distinguish these coins from another group of heavy weight Archer type coins which have no obverse legend and no object in front of the king’s face. Those coins tend to be heavier and larger and clearly were issued much later in time than the coins under discussion. Examples of these include coins 24-26 on Plate XXI of John Allan: *Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Śaśānka, King of Gauda*, London: British Museum, 1914. Work still remains to be done to determine the issuer or issuers of these coins.

³ Class I coin on the Candragupta III page at the Shivlee Collection website: <http://shivlee.com/Candraguptaiii.html>, accessed June 9, 2011.

explore the implications of these new coins for the dating and possible identification of the king called Candragupta III.

Brief Survey of the Literature

The existence of a Candragupta III was suggested as early as 1914 by John Allan.⁴ He included in the issues of this king a few coins from the British Museum and a heavy weight coin from the Indian Museum, Calcutta, that had been published by Vincent Smith as a posthumous issue of Candragupta II.⁵ The British Museum coins turned out to be issues of Vainyagupta, but the Indian Museum coin remained the subject of some debate. Some scholars⁶ argued that it was an issue of Candragupta II on the suvarṇa standard, as it weighed 9.19 g, while others, notably A.S. Altekar,⁷ suggested that it was more likely to be an issue of a later king, called Candragupta III, who probably ruled some time in the second half of the fifth century. Despite holding this view, however, Altekar made no mention of any Candragupta III in his study of the Bayana hoard⁸ or in his corpus of Gupta coins.⁹

Nevertheless, others were continuing to examine the possibility of a Candragupta III. B.P. Sinha supported the idea of this king, but suggested that Candragupta III was a son of Kumāragupta I and a claimant to the throne upon his father's death.¹⁰ It should be noted that there is a sense in which Sinha's Candragupta III is not the same king as the one under discussion here. Sinha was writing at a time when the coins Allan had assigned to Purugupta were still being attributed to him, as it had not yet been realized that the named coins belonged to Budhagupta. And, although the coins Sinha assigned to Candragupta III included the Indian Museum coin (of the Altar variety), the rest of the coins were later, heavier issues that are no longer regarded as issues of that king. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the Indian Museum coin was included, and Sinha thought the issuer of that coin ruled soon after Kumāragupta I and was probably his son. Nisar Ahmad, working with essentially the same group of coins as was Sinha, and apparently unaware of Sinha's work, agreed with the notion of a third Candragupta, but suggested that he ruled much later, between Prakāśaditya and Narasiṃhagupta.¹¹ His analysis depended heavily on the weight of the coins and, as I remarked earlier, he was working with coins that almost all were much heavier (over 9 g) and which would be classified today as belonging to later Gupta rulers. P.L. Gupta, again working with the same group of coins, also agreed with the existence of this ruler, but

⁴ Allan, *op. cit.*, p. liii, particularly fn 1 where the Indian Museum coin is discussed.

⁵ Vincent A. Smith: *Catalogue of the Coins in the Indian Museum Calcutta*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906, plate XV, number 12.

⁶ For example, Rabis C. Kar: "A new gold coin of Skandagupta from N. Bengal," *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, Vol. 7, 1945, pp. 13-17.

⁷ A.S. Altekar: comment [as Chief Editor] on article by Kar, *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, Vol. 7, 1945, pp. 17-18.

⁸ A.S. Altekar: *Catalogue of the Gupta Gold Coins in the Bayana Hoard*, Bombay: The Numismatic Society of India, 1954.

⁹ A.S. Altekar: *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, Varanasi: The Numismatic Society of India, Banaras Hindu University, 1957.

¹⁰ B.P. Sinha: *The Decline of the Kingdom of Magadha*, Patna, 1954.

¹¹ Nisar Ahmad: "On some suvarṇa standard coins of Chandra," *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, Vol. 26-27, 1965, pp. 177-183.

placed him between Budhagupta and Vainyagupta.¹² It was Gupta who first pointed out the presence of the object between the king's face and the Garuḍa banner. In the case of the Indian Museum coin, this was the architectural symbol or altar.

It was only in a subsequent paper¹³ that Gupta gathered together the coin series that we now associate with Candragupta III, extending the corpus of coins to another Altar type coin in the collection of Bhārat Kalā Bhavan¹⁴ and seven other heavy weight coins from the British Museum's collection that had objects (crescents and *cakras*) in front of the king's face and that had been assigned to Candragupta II. The new coins were lighter than the Altar coins, but heavier than most Candragupta II dinars. None of these coins are heavy enough to be classified as being on the suvarṇa standard. Implicitly, the heavy weight coins on the suvarṇa standard that had previously been lumped together with the Indian Museum Altar type coin were now, correctly, separated from the coins with the additional obverse object.

Nisar Ahmad examined these new coins and concluded that they belonged to two groups, basing his analysis essentially on the weights of the different coin varieties. He assigned the Crescent and *Cakra* coins to a Candragupta III ruling between Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta, and the Altar coins to a Candragupta IV ruling some time after Skandagupta.¹⁵ Ellen Raven discovered even more examples of all three varieties of coins, from the Lucknow State Museum, the Mathura Museum, and from private collections.¹⁶ By a careful analysis of the coins' styles, Raven concluded that they must have been issued shortly after the reign of Kumāragupta I ("between c. A.D. 450-455") and that therefore Candragupta III was probably a son of Kumāragupta, echoing the old conclusion of B.P. Sinha. Finally, P.L. Gupta, apparently in response to Nisar Ahmad's paper, and without reference to Raven's, also added the Lucknow State Museum coins to his analysis, but rejected Ahmad's suggestions and stuck to his conclusion that Candragupta III must have ruled some time around the time of Vainyagupta and Narasiṃhagupta.¹⁷

To summarize, there is broad agreement that the heavy weight Archer type coins featuring objects in front of the King's face were not the issues of Candragupta II, but of a later king or kings also named Candragupta. There are, however, three divergent views on the question of when these coins were issued. Raven argued, as did B.P. Sinha, that

¹² Parmeshwari Lal Gupta: *The Imperial Guptas*, Varanasi: Vishwavidyalaya Prakashan, 1974. Gupta was strongly motivated in his analysis by the claim that the *mañjuśrī-mūlakalpa* reported a king named Candra who ruled after Deva and before Dvadāśa (see p. 356). Gupta identified Deva as Budha Gupta and Dvadāśa as Vainya Gupta Dvadāśaditya. However, neither I nor Harry Falk could find any such references in the stanzas quoted by Gupta and Falk, in a private communication, said he found no such reference anywhere in the text. This therefore appears to be quite a mystery, but, in any case, we will see that the coins we are discussing were unquestionably issued between the reigns of Kumaragupta I and Skandagupta and therefore could not have been issued by any king named Candra ruling around the time of Vainyagupta.

¹³ Parmeshwari Lal Gupta: "Heavy Weight Coins of Candragupta," *Numismatic Digest*, Vol. V, Part II, December 1981, pp. 36-43.

¹⁴ Parmeshwari Lal Gupta and Sarojini Srivastava: *Gupta Gold Coins in Bhārat Kalā Bhavan*, Vārāṇasī: Bhārat Kalā Bhavan, 1981, coin 218.

¹⁵ Nisar Ahmad: "Chandragupta III," *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, Vol. 46-47, 1984, pp. 91-95.

¹⁶ Ellen Raven: "Candragupta III: Tracing the Coins of a Gupta King," *South Asian Archaeology*, 1989, pp. 441-448.

¹⁷ Parmeshwari Lal Gupta: "Candragupta III and his Coins," *Numismatic Digest*, Vol. 16, 1992, pp. 66-79.

they were issued between the reigns of Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta. P.L. Gupta believed they were issued later, perhaps around the time of Vainyagupta. Finally, Ahmad, bridging the two, suggested that the Crescent and *Cakra* coins were the issues of a Candragupta III, ruling between Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta, while the Altar coins were issued later by a Candragupta IV, ruling sometime after Skandagupta. The new coins presented in this paper will shed important new light on this discussion.

A new variety of the Archer type: the Sun variety

Figure 3 shows six examples of a coin variety not previously published: a “Candragupta” Archer type with a radiate sun on the obverse. Four of the coins are from



Figure 3: Archer coins of Candragupta with Sun symbol

my personal collection, the fifth appeared recently in a public auction,¹⁸ and the sixth is from a private North American collection.¹⁹ The presence of an object in front of the

¹⁸ Classical Numismatic Gallery, Auction 2, Mumbai, 18 December 2010, lot 31. Photo used by kind permission of Classical Numismatic Gallery. In the description of the lot, the cataloguer says “Such a coin

king's face suggests that these are also coins of Candragupta III, but the first thing to note about these coins is that they are quite a bit lighter than the other coins assigned to this king. Table 1 summarizes weight data for the first five coins²⁰ and the other Archer type coins of Candragupta III, based on coins previously published and a few more that have come to light subsequently.²¹ Data from a total of 49 coins is included. We see from the table that the average weight of the Sun coins is 8.02 g, compared to 8.30 g, 8.42 g, and 8.73 g for the Crescent, *Cakra* and Altar coins respectively. In fact, the weight range of the Sun coins, with the possible exception of the one coin at 8.22 g, seems well within the range of Candragupta II coins, albeit among the heavier types. Might these coins therefore be issues of that illustrious king? More work needs to be done before definitive attributions can be made.

Table 1: Weight pattern of different Archer varieties

Coin variety	# of coins	Average weight	Min Weight	Max weight
Sun	5	8.02	7.87	8.22
Crescent	16	8.30	7.87	8.56
Cakra	18	8.42	7.83	8.61
Altar	10	8.73	8.56	9.19

However, the weight alone is not a sufficient reason to assign these coins to Candragupta II, as they seem to belong with the other coins of Candragupta III for other reasons. In particular, I have noticed that the coins of Candragupta III can be divided into two groups, depending on the form of the geometric symbol, or *tamgha*, seen at the top left of the reverse of each coin. Figure 4 shows details of these two symbol types. One has in its center a circle modified by a kind of “tail” that makes the shape resemble a stylized conch, while the other has a diamond-like shape in its center. For example, if we look at the coins in Figure 1, we see that coins 1(a) and 1(c) have the circle symbol, while coin 1(b) has the diamond symbol. These are the only two forms of the reverse symbol seen on the coins of Candragupta III, and the same two symbols, and these alone, are seen on the Sun symbol coins.

Although she did not focus on the forms of the *tamghas*, Raven separated the Crescent and *Cakra* coins into two groups also, doing so on the basis of differences in style, particularly in the treatment of the figure of Garuḍa.²² I believe Raven's groupings

with a Sun type symbol in front of the king's face exists in heavier weight standard of 8.5g.” However, no such coin has previously been published; the reference pointed to in the catalogue (Ellen Raven: *Gupta Gold Coins with Garuḍa-Banner*, p. 317) discusses only the Crescent and *Cakra* varieties. Neither of the other coins referenced as “similar” to this lot (BMC pl. VII, 7 and Bayana Hoard pl. X, 2) have sun symbols on them. This coin has also been subsequently published on the Candragupta III page at the Shivlee Collection website: <http://shivlee.com/Candraguptaiii.html>, accessed June 9, 2011.

¹⁹ Although I acquired my coins from two different sources, I have been told that these sun type coins were found in a single hoard from Bangladesh, which was then dispersed through the Kolkata market. I have been unable to ascertain how many Sun symbol coins were found.

²⁰ Unfortunately, I do not have details for coin 3(f).

²¹ A detailed coin list of the different types is available in the Appendix Table. I especially thank Ellen Raven for generously sharing her data base of these coins, the DINARA database, with me.

²² Interestingly, Raven did not group the Altar coins. It turns out that every Altar coin whose image I have been able to examine (10 coins in all) features the circle symbol. Thus they all seem to belong to one group.



Figure 4: Details of *tamghas* or reverse symbols

correlate perfectly with the differences in the reverse symbol. Her Crescent first group design and *Cakra* second group design carry the diamond *tamghas*, while her Crescent second group design and *Cakra* first group design carry the circle *tamghas*.²³ The Sun symbol coins also divide into two groups along exactly the same lines; coins 3(a) and 3(b) feature the circle symbol, while the other four coins in Figure 3 feature the diamond symbol. The fact that these coins feature only these two symbols out of the much larger variety on all of Candragupta II's coins suggests that they may also be coins of Candragupta III.

The coins resemble the other coins of Candragupta III in another way also. From all the coins and color coin images that I have seen, it appears that the coins with the circle symbol are of better gold, as judged by their more golden color, while the coins with the diamond symbol are paler. The Sun symbol coins conform to this pattern. This would suggest that the Sun symbol coins could well belong with the other symbol coins and so could be classified as coins of Candragupta III like the others.

At the same time, the low weight of these coins remains a feature still requiring explanation. Further, there are other coins, apparently lacking any obverse symbol, and hence being assigned presently to Candragupta II, that carry these reverse symbols. In her comprehensive study of Gupta coins featuring the Garuḍa banner, Raven compiled a list of all the reverse symbols she could distinguish, and then provided a concordance of the symbols with the coins in her study.²⁴ We see that the circle symbol corresponds with Raven's symbol 5/16 and the diamond symbol with symbol 5/12. It is worth noting that a distinguishing feature of symbol 5/16 is that there are two lines running more or less horizontally, one being flat (or slightly concave upward) and one being concave downward. A distinguishing feature of symbol 5/12 is that the horizontal line has dots at either end. These features are helpful in diagnosing the symbols when the strike of the coin is less than perfect.

What exactly the groups represent is not known, and Raven did not speculate on this matter. Perhaps they represent the products of different mints.

²³ In a private communication, Raven confirmed that this correlation does appear to be correct.

²⁴ Ellen Raven: *Gupta Gold Coins with Garuḍa-Banner*, Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1994, pp. xlix-xl and xliii.

If we now look at which coins in Raven's study feature these symbols, we find that a relatively large number of Candragupta II coins but only a small number of Kumāragupta coins do. Although I have not been able to undertake a detailed analysis of these coins, it appears that the Candragupta II coins that feature these symbols are all relatively heavy and belong to Candragupta's heaviest weight standard of around 127 grains. Thus it could be that these symbols came into use relatively late in Candragupta's reign, were used sparsely in Kumāragupta's reign, and then were used on all the coins of Candragupta III. This is one possibility and it raises the question of why these symbols were not used more consistently through Kumāragupta's reign. Another possibility is that *all* of the coins carrying these symbols and the name *candra* were issued by Candragupta III. In that case, the reverse symbols would have come into first use late in Kumāragupta's reign, and then would have been continued during the reign of Candragupta III. I do not believe we have enough information to resolve this issue; we need more evidence to come to a firm conclusion.

A coin with a *Śrīvatsa* symbol

As part of the Shivlee Collection, Sanjeev Kumar has published on the web another new variety of the Archer type of Candragupta III, pictured in Figure 5,²⁵ which features as the obverse object a symbol that seems to be a *śrīvatsa*. In style and in the presence of the legends *candra* on the obverse and *śrī vikrama* on the reverse, the coin seems to fit well with the rest of the Candragupta III series. Further, the reverse symbol, or *tamgha*, seems to be of the diamond type, and conforms to the shape of the diamond symbol on other coins, with prominent dots at each of the lower three corners of the diamond and at either end of the horizontal line above the diamond. The weight of the coin, given as 9.1 g, is heavier than most Candragupta III coins and suggests an



Figure 5: The Archer type coin with *Śrīvatsa* symbol, 9.1 g

²⁵ The coin was published on <http://shivlee.com/Candraguptaiiii.html> (accessed June 9, 2011) and the photo is reproduced here by the kind permission of Sanjeev Kumar.

association with the Altar coins, one of which is known to weigh 9.19 g (see Appendix Table 1). As I noted earlier, all known Altar coins feature the circle symbol on the reverse. It might therefore appear that the *Śrīvatsa* coin might be the “diamond symbol” counterpart of the Altar variety. A further piece of evidence consistent with this notion is that, from the color photograph available on the Shivee website, it appears that the *Śrīvatsa* coin is pale, just as all the Diamond symbol coins of the other varieties are pale in comparison to the Circle coins. If the reverse symbols serve as mint markers, it is quite plausible that the *Śrīvatsa* coin was minted at the “Diamond” mint at the time that the last of the Altar coins were being minted at the “Circle” mint. In this way, it fills a gap, as it were, in the coin series, as no Altar coin was hitherto known featuring the Diamond symbol. Appendix Table 2 shows the sequences of each of the obverse types classified according to the reverse symbols, and illustrates how this *Śrīvatsa* variety fits into the sequence.

A new coin type: the Horseman type of Candragupta III

So far, all the coins attributed to Candragupta III have been Archer type coins. The only Horseman coins known to have been issued after Kumāragupta are the solitary Horseman type of Skandagupta in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford and the coins of Prakāśaditya, which are quite different in design and execution and, quite possibly, are not Gupta coins at all.²⁶ Figure 6 presents two new Horseman type coins I acquired some years ago. I believe they are the first known Horseman coins of Candragupta III. Although the coins are from different dies, they both show the king riding a horse right on the obverse and a goddess (presumably Lakshmi) seated left on a crude stool, leaning on her left hand and holding up a lotus blossom with her right. A peacock stands before her. The reverse legend on both coins is *śrīrajitavikrama*, which is a rendition of *śrīh ajitavikrama* under the rules of *saṃdhi*.²⁷ From coin 6(a), we can read the first part of the obverse circular legend to be *śrī...candragupta*, while from coin 6(b) we can see that the end of the legend reads *...ta divam*, presumably for *jayati divam*. While this legend and the *biruda* might suggest that these coins are of Candragupta II, the fact is that the Horseman type of Candragupta II never used a legend resembling this; the legend on his Horseman coins was always

paramabhāgavata mahārājadhirāja śrī candraguptaḥ.

On the other hand, variety C²⁸ of Kumāragupta’s Horseman type carries the legend *kṣitipatirajito vijayī kumāragupto divam jayati.*

It seems therefore that these two coins of Candragupta III follow in this latter tradition.

The obverse legend is just one of the key factors differentiating these coins from those of Candragupta II, thereby suggesting that they are indeed issues of Candragupta III. While the reverse legend of *śrīrajitavikrama* echoes Candragupta II’s *ajitavikrama*, the addition of the word *śrīh* and the subsequent *saṃdhi* do render it distinct. The weight of the coins, 8.40 g and 8.39 g, are clearly above the normal range

²⁶ Robert Göbl suggested that the Prakāśaditya coins are issues of a Hun king, perhaps Torāmāṇa. See his paper “Das Antlitz des Fremden: Der Hunnenkönig Prakasaditya in der Münzprägung der Gupta-Dynastie,” *Anzeiger der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse*, Vol. 126, 1990, pp. 131-138. I am indebted to Joe Cribb for bringing this paper to my attention.

²⁷ I am indebted to Shailendra Bhandare on this point.

²⁸ Under the classification of Altekār’s *Corpus*.



(a) Inv# 512.07: 8.40 g, 19 mm



(b) Inv# 586.11: 8.39 g, 19 mm

Figure 6: Horseman Coins of Candragupta III

for Candragupta II and indeed coincide very closely with Candragupta III's Crescent and *Cakra* varieties. Most Candragupta II Horseman coins have a symbol (*tamgha*) on the reverse left, while almost none of Kumāragupta's Horseman type coins do; these coins do not carry the symbol. On Candragupta II's coins, Lakshmi is invariably seated on a wicker stool; here she is seated on a crude flat stool or simple couch. Finally, the presence of the peacock on the reverse is a decisive factor. The peacock was never used on any Horseman coins of Candragupta II, only on coins of Kumāragupta I. The coins in Figure 6 seem to combine two different designs of Kumāragupta's Horseman type. In the

coins of Kumāragupta that include a peacock, Lakshmi is always depicted as feeding the peacock, and hence is shown holding the grapes she is feeding to the peacock. On some coins without the peacock, she is shown simply holding a lotus blossom in front of her. Here, we have a peacock standing in front of Lakshmi, but she is not feeding it but rather is holding a lotus blossom in front of her. Thus we have a combination of the Kumāragupta designs. Further, the weight of the coins exceeds the weight of Kumāragupta's coins. Thus it seems veritably certain that these Horseman coins were issued after the reign of Kumāragupta I, not before. It also seems veritably certain that these coins were issued by the same king who issued the Crescent and *Cakra* variants of the Archer type: a king we are so far calling Candragupta III. We see the name *candragupta* in the obverse legend and the *biruda* on the reverse is a logical variant of the legend *śrī vikrama* of the Archer type.

A natural question to ask in the context of these Horseman type coins is, how do they compare to the unique Horseman coin of Skandagupta?²⁹ Figure 7 provides an image of that coin, in panel (a), along with a Horseman type coin of Kumāragupta I that is very similar to it. We see that the Skandagupta coin differs markedly from the Candragupta III coins. The rider on the obverse is facing left and the horse does not appear to be elaborately decorated as it is on the Candragupta III coins. On the reverse, Lakshmi is seated on a wicker stool rather than a crude couch, and there is no peacock. Lakshmi holds a diadem rather than a lotus blossom. Thus there are many points of distinction between the Skandagupta coin and those of Candragupta III. In contrast, the Skandagupta coin closely parallels the Kumāragupta I coin in panel 5(b), although it does differ on the weight. The Skandagupta coin weighs 9.1 g; it is therefore on the *suvarṇa* standard and must have been issued after Skandagupta's monetary reform.



Figure 7: Horseman coins of Skandagupta and Kumāragupta I

This comparison, along with a consideration of the Candragupta III coins, suggests that the introduction of the peacock on the reverse of the Kumāragupta coins was probably not implemented at all the Gupta mints. If both the Skandagupta coin and the Candragupta III coins were issued at mints where Kumāragupta had been issuing

²⁹ Some authors dispute that this coin is an issue of Skandagupta, but the reverse *biruda* clearly reads *kramajita*, which would be the logical *biruda* to see on a Horseman coin of Skandagupta. Further, a comparison with the Kumāragupta coin in 7(b) shows the similarity between the two types, indicating that the Skandagupta coin was probably minted relatively close in time to the Kumāragupta one. I thank Shailendra Bhandare for providing me with the images of the Oxford coin and for permission to publish it here.

Horseman type coins, it appears that one of the Kumāragupta mints featured a peacock on the reverses, while the other did not.

In any event, it seems quite clear that the Horseman coins of Candragupta III were issued after the reign of Kumāragupta I and before the introduction of the *suvarṇa* standard by Skandagupta. Raven's analysis of the Archer type coins had led her to the same conclusion for those coins: that they were issued between the reigns of Kumāragupta I and Skandagupta. The fabric, metallic composition, size, weight and style of the coins all conform to the "small" format of the coins of the various dinar standards, *i.e.*, to the coins of all of the Guptas up to the time of Skandagupta's reform and the change to the "large format" *suvarṇa* standard. The Horseman coins add to this already strong evidence, making the case quite overwhelming. There remains little doubt that most of the known coins of Candragupta III were issued immediately after the reign of Kumāragupta I and before Skandagupta's introduction of the *suvarṇa* standard. Thus they would have been minted either before the commencement of Skandagupta's reign or contemporaneous to the early years of that reign.

I would argue that we can go beyond this conclusion. If we accept the Sun coins as belonging to Candragupta III, we see that his coins conformed to at least four distinct weight standards and culminated in coins of the *suvarṇa* standard, since we know of one Altar coin and now the *Śrīvatsa* coin that belong to this weight standard. Looking at Table 1 again, we see that the average weight of the Sun, Crescent and *Cakra* varieties were 8.02, 8.30 and 8.42 g respectively, with the maximum weights of each type being 8.22, 8.56 and 8.61 g respectively. According to Altekar, Skandagupta's initial coinage was minted to a standard of 8.55 g.³⁰ It would therefore appear that the first three Archer varieties of Candragupta III (along with the Horseman type at around 8.40 g) were issued prior to the ascension of Skandagupta. However, the Altar coins of Candragupta III have an average (maximum) weight of 8.56 g (9.19 g), which clearly overlaps Skandagupta's coin weights. I believe the conclusion is inescapable: Candragupta III began issuing coins immediately after the death of Kumāragupta I and before the ascension of Skandagupta, and continued to do so for at least some time after Skandagupta began issuing coins of his own.

Might Candragupta III have been Purugupta?

Who was Candragupta III? Raven concludes her paper on this king by suggesting that he was "another son of Kumāragupta I."³¹ Similarly, Ahmad concludes his paper with a similar phrase, suggesting that he "might have been a son of Kumāragupta I and the elder brother of Skandagupta."³² Implicitly, both Raven and Ahmad assume that Candragupta III was chronologically prior to Skandagupta. P.L. Gupta asserted that he was a king who ruled some time between Budhagupta and Vainyagupta, but we could perhaps discard this idea in light of the clear conclusion that the coins were issued immediately after the reign of Kumāragupta I. Thus the existing theories suggest that Candragupta III was a son of Kumāragupta I who was then succeeded by Skandagupta or a rival claimant to the throne eventually attained by Skandagupta. Implicitly, he disappeared from the scene once Skandagupta came to power.

³⁰ Altekar: *Coinage, op. cit.*, Chapter X.

³¹ Raven, "Candragupta III," *op. cit.*, p. 447.

³² Ahmad, "Chandragupta III," *op. cit.*, p. 95.

But things get more complicated once we realize that Candragupta III not only did not disappear from the scene, but that he continued to issue coins and therefore to enjoy imperial status. For this reason, I would like to propose the possibility that Candragupta III was none other than Purugupta, the only son of Kumāragupta I other than Skandagupta about whom we have definitive evidence. Identifying Candragupta III as Purugupta would then free us from having to posit the existence of another son of Kumāragupta, one who left no other trace of his life. Further, it would explain the fact that it was descendants of Purugupta who succeeded Skandagupta. Finally, it would allow us to identify the coins of Purugupta, a king for whom all previously proposed coins have proven to be incorrectly attributed. I argue a more detailed case for this identification in a companion paper to this one.³³

Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented two new coin types that can be assigned to Candragupta III, a king about whom we know very little other than that he issued a series of coins sometime after the reign of Kumāragupta I. The coins add to the already strong evidence that the coins of Candragupta III were issued immediately after the reign of Kumāragupta I. Some of the coins in fact appear to be contemporary with the coins of Skandagupta, stretching even into the time after his monetary reform and the introduction of the *suvarṇa* standard. I suggest that we can perhaps identify Candragupta III as none other than Purugupta, a point I discuss in detail in a companion paper to this one.

³³ Pankaj Tandon: “The Succession after Kumāragupta I,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, forthcoming, (2012 or 2013).

Appendix Table 1
Weight patterns of the Candragupta III coins³⁴

Description	Weight		Reverse
	g	gr	
Sun variety			
Tandon Collection 597.10	7.87	121.45	Diamond
Tandon Collection 586.03	7.91	122.07	Diamond
Tandon Collection 591.02	7.98	123.15	Circle
Classical Numismatic Gallery 2.031	8.10	125.00	Diamond
Tandon Collection 586.06	8.22	126.85	Circle
Average=	8.02	123.71	
Crescent variety			
British Museum 93 - Raven-CG 3, p. 441	7.87	121.50	Diamond
Shivlee Collection IIB	8.14	125.62	Diamond
Shivlee Collection IIB	8.20	126.55	Diamond
British Museum 94 - Raven-CG 3, p. 441	8.20	126.60	Diamond
British Museum 95 - Raven-CG 3, p. 441	8.21	126.70	Diamond
Tandon Collection 586.05	8.28	127.78	Circle
Raven-CG 3, p. 443, Lucknow State Museum 11660	8.32	128.40	
Baldwin 31.441	8.32	128.40	Diamond
Hong Kong 43.843	8.33	128.55	Diamond
Chhabra, p. 51, National Museum 266, Bayana Hoard	8.36	128.95	Diamond
Chhabra, p. 51, National Museum 264, Bayana Hoard	8.37	129.22	Diamond
Mathura Museum 756	8.38	129.29	
Baldwin 40.662	8.39	129.48	Circle
ANS1949.66.6	8.41	129.80	Diamond
Raven-CG 3, p. 443, Lucknow State Museum 2264	8.42	129.94	Diamond
Shivlee Collection IIB	8.56	132.10	
Average=	8.30	128.05	
Cakra variety			
Tandon Collection 570	7.83	120.84	Diamond
Shivlee Collection IIC	8.37	129.17	Diamond
Raven-CG 3, p. 444, Poddar Coll.	8.39	129.48	
Raven-CG 3, p. 444, Poddar Coll.	8.39	129.48	
British Museum 98 - Raven-CG 3, p. 443	8.39	129.50	Diamond
PL Gupta, p. 76, Lucknow Museum	8.40	129.63	
Maheshwari Collection	8.40	129.63	
Tandon Collection 468.31	8.41	129.79	
Raven-CG 3, p. 444, Lucknow 3958	8.41	129.79	Diamond
Raven-CG 3, p. 444, Lucknow 11631	8.44	130.25	
PL Gupta, p. 76, Lucknow Museum, same as 11631?	8.44	130.25	
Baldwin 31.440	8.44	130.25	Circle
British Museum 99 - Raven-CG 3, p. 443	8.46	130.50	Circle
Maheshwari Collection	8.50	131.18	
British Museum 96 - Raven-CG 3, p. 443	8.53	131.70	Diamond

³⁴ I am greatly indebted to Sanjeev Kumar and, especially, Ellen Raven for sharing with me details of coins in their databases.

Sanjeev Kumar ppt	8.54	131.79	
British Museum 97 - Raven-CG 3, p. 443	8.59	132.50	Diamond
Raven-CG 3, p. 444, Lucknow 11693	8.61	132.87	Circle
Average=	8.42	129.92	
Altar variety			
Shivlee Collection IIR	8.56	132.10	Circle
Baldwin 31.455	8.60	132.72	Circle
Raven-CG 3, p. 445, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Gupta+Śrīvastava 218	8.68	133.95	Circle
Sanjeev Kumar ppt	8.70	134.26	Circle
Baldwin 31.457	8.70	134.26	Circle
Baldwin 40.670	8.70	134.26	Circle
Tandon Collection 182.17	8.71	134.42	Circle
Baldwin 31.456	8.72	134.57	Circle
Tandon Collection 589.01	8.73	134.72	Circle
Raven-CG 3, p. 445, National Museum, Smith 1906, pl XV.12	9.19	141.82	
Raven-CG 3, p. 445, Singhi Coll.			Circle
Average=	8.73	134.71	
Śrīvatsa variety			
Shivlee Collection	9.1		Diamond
Average=	9.1		
Horseman type			
Tandon Collection 512.07	8.40	129.63	n.a.
Tandon Collection 586.11	8.39	129.48	n.a.
Average=	8.40	129.55	

Appendix Table 2
Candragupta III Archer Coins sorted by Reverse Symbol

	Circle Symbol	Diamond Symbol
Sun variety		
Crescent variety		
Cakra variety		
Altar variety		None known
Śrīvatsa variety	None known	