Attribution of the Nameless Coins of the Archer Type

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A long-standing problem in Gupta numismatics is the attribution of the coins of the late period Archer type which do not feature the king’s name under the arm. Almost all coins of the Archer type carry a shortened version of the king’s name in a vertical format somewhere on the obverse. For example, the coins of Samudragupta feature the legend samudra, the coins of Candragupta II bear the legend candra, and so on. Normally, this name is under the left arm, but sometimes it is in the right or even left field. The only exceptions are a few coins of Kumāragupta I, which eliminate the name under the arm but can still be identified by the king’s epithet śrī mahendra on the reverse, and the late period coins that are the subject of this paper. These coins are not attributable since they do not carry a name vertically on the obverse, for which reason I prefer to call them the “Nameless” coins, the obverse circular legend is typically off the flan (and remains unread), and the epithet on the reverse does not identify the king either. On almost all such coins, the epithet is śrī vikrama, the epithet used by Candragupta II, Candragupta III, and Budhagupta. On a few rare coins the epithet is parākrama. Although this epithet was used by Samudragupta, the coins are too heavy (over 9 gm) to allow an attribution to that king. Thus attribution of these coins also escapes us.

Auction catalogues usually attribute these coins to Purugupta or Budhagupta. On my last visit to the British Museum in August 2015, they were attributed to Budhagupta in the Museum’s trays. The reasons for making these attributions will be spelled out in detail in what follows. We will see that there is no substantial basis for an attribution to Purugupta and that the attribution to Budhagupta is not very convincing either.

This paper will make a radical new proposal: that the Nameless coins are not Gupta coins at all, but rather were issued by a branch of the Alchon Huns that included the kings Toramāṇa and Mihirakula. The proximate impetus for this suggestion is the discovery of a Nameless coin in the Lucknow Museum, with close stylistic affinity to all other Nameless coins, which carries the epithet śrī prakāśa on the reverse. Given the recent discovery that the presumed Gupta king Prakāśāditya was in fact the Hun king Toramāṇa, it seems virtually certain that the śrī prakāśa

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1 Boston University. I wish to thank Shailen Bhandare, Pratipal Bhatia, John Deyell and Ellen Raven for helpful discussions and Ellen for sharing images from the DINARA database. Early versions of this paper were presented at the Seventh Annual Seminar in Central Asian and Middle Eastern Numismatics in memoriam Boris Kochnev, Hofstra University, March 14, 2015, and the XV International Numismatic Congress, Taormina, Sicily, September 21, 2015. Financial support of a Neil Kreitman grant from the Royal Numismatic Society is gratefully acknowledged. The paper was finally written while I was a Fulbright-Nehru Scholar at the Indian Institute of Research in Numismatic Studies. The support of Fulbright and IIRNS is also gratefully acknowledged.


coin from the Lucknow Museum is also his. By extension, on grounds of the close stylistic similarity of other Nameless coins with the śrī prakāśa coin, it seems reasonable to suppose that the other Nameless coins are also Hun issues. Literary and find spot evidence, although scant, seems to be consistent with this conclusion.

A typical Nameless type coin is shown in Figure 1. The right field under the king’s arm does not feature a legend, nor is there space further to the right outside the bow to allow any legend to be present there either. The reverse epithet on this and most other coins is śrī vikrama. The coins conform to the heavy weight of what some call the late Gupta suvarṇa standard. The weight of the illustrated coin is 9.33 gm.

![Figure 1: A typical Nameless coin (Tandon collection #597.4)](image)

Previous Attributions

When Gupta coins were first being classified in the nineteenth century, all coins with the reverse legend śrī vikrama were assigned, quite understandably, to Candragupta II. Obviously that included the Nameless coins. For example, in his Indian Museum Catalogue, Vincent Smith classified five heavy weight Archer coins carrying the reverse epithet śrī vikrama to Candragupta II, calling them variety β, a type similar to his variety α (the usual Archer type) but with weight “exceeding 140 grains (suvarṇa).” Coins 30-32 (his sub-variety 1) carried the name candra or an indistinct name under the arm and need not concern us here. But coins 33 and 34

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4 After I saw the coin at the Lucknow Museum and realized its importance, I discovered that it had been published previously by B.N. Mukherji, who also concluded that it was issued by the same king who issued the Prakāśāditya gold coins. He did not connect it to the Nameless coins. See B.N. Mukherji: “Communication: 3. An Interesting Gold Coin,” Journal of the Asiatic Society (Calcutta), Vol. XXVII, No. 3, 1985, pp. 140-141.


6 They were apparently coins of Candragupta III and Budhagupta.
(sub-variety 2) did not feature a name under the arm and had weights of 142.1 gr (= 9.21 gm) and 146.2 gr (= 9.47 gm). Clearly these are too heavy to be coins of Candragupta II and we have long since gone past that attribution.

This cannot be said about the attribution made by Allan in his British Museum Catalogue, who attributed the coins to Puragupta. His entry for Puragupta, as he spelled the name, lists four coins, one (Var. α) with the name pura under the arm, and three (all in Var. β) without any name. Of the three Nameless coins, two were in the British Museum’s collection and one in the Burn collection. Because of the persistence of this attribution in the imagination of many even today, it is worth quoting Allan’s entire discussion on the matter:

We are now able to attribute coins to Puragupta with certainty; they are all of the Archer type, and closely resemble in style Skandagupta’s heavier issues. The specimen illustrated on Pl. XXI. 24 has been in the British Museum since 1893 as a coin of Candragupta II, an attribution based on the reverse legend Śrī-Vikramah; the second specimen (Pl. XXI. 25) was recently acquired. The weights of these specimens (142.7 and 141.4 grains respectively) (= 9.25 and 9.16 grams, conversions added) rendered their attribution to Candragupta II improbable, and the evidence of style suggested Skandagupta; the question whether these coins [footnote: I. M. Cat., i, p. 107, nos. 33 and 34, must now also be ascribed to Puragupta.] and a third in Mr. Burn’s collection were to be attributed to Skandagupta or, as we suspected, to Puragupta was settled when we found in Dr. Hoey’s collection a similar coin with the reverse legend Śrī-Vikramah, and the name Pura beneath the l. arm (Pl. XXI. 23). The coins may therefore be divided into two varieties according as they bear the name or not.

To summarize: Allan attributed the Nameless coins to Puragupta because he thought he had found a coin with the name pura under the arm which also (like the Nameless coins) had the epithet śrī vikrama on the reverse. Otherwise, he thought they should perhaps be attributed to Skandagupta on grounds of stylistic similarity.

Unfortunately, Allan’s reasoning met with a serious barrier. The Hoey coin, which is now in the British Museum and is illustrated in Figure 2, turned out to be a coin not of Puragupta, but rather of Budhagupta. The fact that the name under the arm read budha instead of pura was first pointed out by S.K. Saraswati. Although this view was initially controversial, subsequent discoveries of additional coins that clearly read budha have made it now a widely accepted revision of Allan’s reading. Given that the named coin was no longer Puragupta’s, there seems to be no logical reason to suppose that the Nameless coins are his either. Therefore, the attribution of the Nameless coins to Puragupta, which persists in many quarters, is completely untenable. It stems from a reading of Allan without any knowledge of the subsequent literature around his classification.

Allan spelled the name Puragupta, although we now know that the correct spelling is Purugupta.


Allan, ibid., p. cii.


The logical consequence of the reassignment of Allan’s Puragupta coin to Budhagupta would be to also reassign the Nameless coins to Budhagupta. This is the approach taken by Altekar, in his comprehensive catalogue of Gupta coinage. Noting that the Nameless coins “show a general resemblance to the coins of Budhagupta in type, size and weight,” he concludes that “it is likely that they may have been issued by the same ruler.”\(^{12}\) However, he expresses some reservations, saying that we “cannot … altogether exclude the possibility of the coins without the name Budha on the obverse and with the biruda Vikrama on the reverse being issued by a hither-to-unknown Gupta emperor of the 5\(^{th}\) or the early 6\(^{th}\) century A.D.” But he concludes his discussion with the statement that it is “best to assume that the heavy weight Archer type coins with the legend Vikrama on the reverse were issued by Budhagupta, who is now definitely known to have adopted that epithet.”

**Figure 2: The Hoey coin, attributed originally to Purugupta, but later to Budhagupta\(^{13}\)**

P.L. Gupta follows Altekar’s lead explicitly. In the catalogue of coins at Bharat Kala Bhavan, he reviews how the Nameless coins were thought to be coins of Candragupta II, then assigned to Purugupta by Allan, but then tentatively reassigned by Altekar to Budhagupta. He concludes: “At present, they are taken to be coins of Budhagupta.”\(^{14}\) By his hesitant wording, Gupta seems to leave the door open for a reattribution, as did Altekar.

So are the Nameless coins issues of Budhagupta? They are of the correct weight, and most of them bear the epithet śrī vikrama on the reverse, as do the coins of Budhagupta. These make up the total case for the attribution and, absent any other information, might be considered a reasonable choice. Against this, however, must be placed the observation that the Nameless

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\(^{13}\) Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum.

coins are stylistically quite distinct from any of the named coins of Budhagupta and, indeed, from any other Gupta coins. The stylistic differences will become apparent in the discussion that follows. If the coins are of Budhagupta, it would have to be admitted that they form a group completely distinct from his other coins, perhaps because they were made at a different mint. But no later Gupta coins show any affiliation with these coins either, which would imply that this separate mint of Budhagupta did not mint coins for any of his successors. Further, the attribution to Budhagupta is based largely on the use of the epithet śrī vikrama. However, we now know of Nameless coins with the epithets śrī prakāśa and parākrama. If only the śrī vikrama coins are Budhagupta’s, who issued the śrī prakāśa and parākrama coins? These objections make the attribution of the Nameless coins to Budhagupta highly questionable. The śrī prakāśa coin provides crucial new information that will yield an alternative, and much more convincing, attribution. That coin is presented in the next section.

The śrī prakāśa coin

The śrī prakāśa coin is presented in Figure 3. It looks very much like most other Nameless coins, with a nimbate king standing in the usual Archer pose on the obverse and a nimbate goddess Lakṣmī seated facing on a lotus, holding a lotus and a diadem; the one difference is the reverse legend, which distinctly reads śrī prakāśa instead of the usual śrī vikrama. In light of the recent finding that the horse-rider lion-slayer coins with the reverse legend śrī prakāśaditya are the coins of the Hun king Toramāṇa, it seems safe to attribute the śrī prakāśa coin also to him. Thus at least this one Nameless coin can quite convincingly be regarded as a Hun issue.

![Figure 3: The śrī prakāśa coin, Lucknow Museum (accession # 11626)](image)

Weight = 9.402 gm, Diameter = 20 mm, Die Axis = 12 o’clock

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15 Recall (footnote 4 above) that B.N. Mukerji had also argued for the śrī prakāśa coin to have been issued by Prakāśaditya.

16 Some might argue that an alternative possible assignment of the śrī prakāśa coin would be to the Aulīkara king Prakāśadharmar, who, according to the Risthal Inscription, defeated Toramāṇa. I will consider (and reject) this possibility a little later.
Figure 4: Comparing the śrī prakāśa coin with other Nameless coins and with Gupta coins

17 Coin (b) Classical Numismatic Gallery, Auction 20 lot 127; coins (g) and (h) © The Trustees of the British Museum, photos, courtesy Joe Cribb.
But the śrī prakāśa coin in fact closely resembles in style all other Nameless coins and is quite distinct in many respects from the coins of Budhagupta and indeed the other late Gupta rulers. I include among the Nameless coins the two known coins with the reverse legend parākrama which are also as yet not properly attributed. In what follows, I will consider several different aspects of the design or style of the coins in order to show that the Nameless coins form a separate and quite homogenous group with many common elements quite distinct from all other Gupta coins. Figure 4 shows eight coins to illustrate the various points to be made. There are four Nameless coins, including the śrī prakāśa coin, a parākrama coin, and two of the more common śrī vikrama coins. Also shown are four Gupta coins, one of Kumāragupta II, two of Budhagupta (since he is the prime candidate to whom these coins might otherwise be attributed), and one of Vainyagupta. These were the three kings who most likely ruled immediately after Skandagupta, so their coins are roughly contemporary with the Nameless coins. A detailed discussion of the differences between these two groups of coins follows:

**Figure of the king:** In the nameless coins, the figure of the king is rather stiff and lacks the greater naturalism seen on the Gupta coins. There tends to be less sway in the body and the legs are more or less parallel to one another, making the king look like he’s standing at attention. The Gupta coins show the legs more spread, the body has more sway and the king looks like he is at greater ease. The coins in Figure 4 illustrate the difference quite vividly.

![Dhotis on Nameless Coins](image)

(a) (b) (c) (d)

**Dhotis on Nameless Coins**

![Dhotis on Gupta Coins](image)

(e) (f) (g) (h)

**Dhotis on Gupta Coins**

**Figure 5: Comparing Nameless and Gupta Coins: Dhotis**

**Dhoti:** The Nameless coins show the king’s dhoti with a series of horizontal parallel lines that, once again, look very artificial. When the Gupta coins show some lines on the dhoti, they do not stretch all the way across the legs, are drawn at an oblique angle and look much more
naturalistic. The shape of the *dhoti* is also quite different, as we see in Figure 5. All details are from the same coins as in Figure 4.

**Sash and loop:** The Nameless coins all show the king wearing a sash, a length of which hangs parallel to the outline of his lower garment. There is always a prominent loop to indicate a sash knot. This design feature may have been borrowed from the coins of Kumāragupta II and is seen on ALL Nameless coins. The knot of course should be at the waist, as seen on the coin of Kumāragupta II (coin (e) in Figure 6), but on most Nameless coins it has migrated to somewhere along the length of sash that is hanging down. The loop is seen on a very few coins of Skandagupta and quite regularly on coins of Kumāragupta II; it is never seen on coins of Budhagupta or any of the other later Gupta rulers, as is clearly demonstrated by the examples in Figure 6. This suggests the possibility that the model for the design of the Nameless coins was a coin of Kumāragupta II. The loop in the sash is one of the signature features of the Nameless type.

![Sashes and Loops on Nameless Coins](image)

**Figure 6: Comparing Nameless and Gupta Coins: Sashes**

**The king’s hands:** The hands, and more specifically the fingers, of the king are usually represented by two parallel lines, somewhat like the jaws of a vise, as we see in Figure 7. This is another example of the way in which the king’s figure on the Nameless coins is very stiff and unnatural. On Gupta coins, the king’s fingers are normally longer and have more curvature to them.
Figure 7: Comparing Nameless and Gupta Coins: Hands

**Lakshmi’s hair:** Another signature feature of the Nameless coins is their rendition of Lakshmi’s hair on the reverse. The hair is rendered almost like a hat, with a long, almost-horizontal section that looks like a brim, with a vertical section sticking up in the middle. A glance at the Gupta coins in Figure 8 shows that such a rendition is never seen on any Gupta coins. This feature serves as a second very clear and significant differentiator of the Nameless coins from all other Archer type coins.

Figure 8: Comparing Nameless and Gupta Coins: Lakshmi’s Hairstyle
The series of stylistic features just discussed serves to strongly suggest that the Nameless coins form a distinct group from all other Archer style coins. If they were issues of Budhagupta, it would have to be the case that they were coined in a mint separate from the rest of his (named) issues. More importantly, we would expect them to then have some successors in the coinage of Vainyagupta or later Gupta kings, which is not something we see. We would also be left with the need to explain the śrī prakāśa and parākrama coins. Why would Budhagupta issue coins with these different epithets?

It is difficult to make a case for any other Gupta king to have issued these coins. Stylistically, the Nameless coins are very different from Gupta coins. Further, each of the known Gupta kings had his own distinct epithet and there is no reason to expect that coins with any other epithets would be issued. And manufacturing some new, unknown Gupta kings seems to be a far-fetched and perilous course to take. For example, in a post on his Facebook page, Sanjeev Kumar implicitly assigned the parākrama coins to a king named Samudragupta II. It is not clear what the justification for such an attribution would be, unless reference is being made to a king of that name posited by P.L. Gupta on the basis of a heavy weight coin with the obverse legend samudra in the Lucknow Museum. However, I have examined that coin personally and feel quite conclusively that it is a forgery. The coin is illustrated in Figure 9. In any case, it does not bear a stylistic affinity to the Nameless coins with the parākrama legend, so this attribution seems highly unlikely. And given that there are Nameless coins with three different epithets, we would need to propose the existence of three other Gupta kings of whom we have no other knowledge. This seems far-fetched.

Figure 9: Heavy weight (8.78 g) samudra coin (Lucknow Museum #11402), a probable forgery

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19 Gupta and Srivastava, op. cit., p. 2.
A far more reasonable solution to the problem of attribution is to look at the Huns; we turn to this in the next section.

The Case for the Nameless Coins to be Hun Issues

The most immediate argument of course for attributing the Nameless coins to the Huns is the fact that the śrī prakāśa coin is surely a coin of Toramāṇa. Not only is the epithet on the coin the same as the one Toramāṇa used on the Prakāśaditya coins, it stands to reason that he would have issued Archer type coins, since they were the canonical Gupta coin type. The letter forms on the two coins are also virtually identical.

We already know that Toramāṇa issued silver and copper coins on the model of Gupta prototypes. Toramāṇa issued silver coins based on the Gupta madhyadeśa type, with a portrait head on the obverse and a peacock surrounded by a legend in Brāhmī on the reverse. Figure 10 shows a coin of Budhagupta of this type along with a Toramāṇa coin that imitates it. We see that the execution of the Toramāṇa coin is much cruder and the head faces left rather than right, but otherwise it is a close imitation, with virtually the same legend other than of course the king’s name.20 These coins are found in Mālwa, which is probably where they were struck.

![Figure 10: Silver Coins of Budhagupta (left) and Toramāṇa (right)](image)

Toramāṇa also issued copper coins that resemble Gupta prototypes. The first coin in Figure 11 shows a copper coin of Candragupta II, which features a head left and a reverse that is divided into two parts by a horizontal line. The upper register displays an image of Garuḍa and the lower register contains the king’s name, candragupta. The second coin shows a copper coin of Toramāṇa that has virtually the same design. The bust of the king on the obverse faces right rather than left, but the reverse has the same structure of two registers formed by a separating line, with the upper register displaying a dynastic symbol (here a solar disc or wheel) and the lower register containing the king’s name, here shortened to tora. Both reverses feature dotted borders. This Toramāṇa type and similar Gupta coins using the same basic format and with the obverse head facing right have been found in the excavations at Sanghol,22 and therefore it is

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20 The legend on the Budhagupta coin is vijitāvaniravanipati śrī budhagupta divaṁ jayati, while that on the Toramāṇa coin is vijitāvaniravanipati śrī toramāṇa divaṁ jayati.
21 The Budhagupta coin is from the Shivlee collection, photo, courtesy Sanjeev Kumar; the Toramāṇa coin is from the British Museum, photo, courtesy Shailen Bhandare.
22 See G.B. Sharma: Coins Seals and Sealings from Sanghol, Chandigarh: Punjab Department of Cultural Affairs, Archaeology and Museums, 1986.
likely they were struck in that area. Very much like the silver coins, then, Toramāṇa imitated Gupta copper coins. In both cases, the design closely followed the Gupta format.

Figure 11: Copper Coins of Candragupta II (left) and Toramāṇa (right)

Would Toramāṇa not then have issued gold coins on the Gupta model as well? Indeed, given what we know about the copper and silver issues, it would be surprising if he did not. And, were he to issue gold coins on the Gupta model, would he not issue Archer type coins, the most common and pervasive type of Gupta gold coin? Thus, attributing the śrī prakāśa coin to Toramāṇa seems like the obvious thing to do.

The next question to ask then is, how about the Nameless coins with the śrī vikrama and parākrama legends? As I have argued in the previous section, these coins are stylistically very similar to the śrī prakāśa coin, and indeed form a highly homogenous group of coins quite distinct from Gupta coins. Therefore, a Hun origin for these coins also seems very plausible. We know that Toramāṇa was not the only Hun king to have issued coins on the Gupta model; several other Hun kings also issued copper coins based on the basic Gupta design, and we also know that Mihirakula, who is known from the Gwalior inscription to have been Toramāṇa’s son, issued copper coins too. It therefore seems quite likely that one or more of these Hun kings may have issued Archer type gold coins as well.

Apart from the coin type illustrated in Figure 11, there are also somewhat cruder copper coins on the same pattern in which the epithet śrī prakāśāditya is substituted for the short form name tora (see coin (a) in Figure 12). These were probably also issued by Toramāṇa although that identification is not important to the argument; undoubtedly these were Hunnic issues. Other coins belonging to the same series have the legends śrī uditāditya and śrī vaysāra or śrī vaysīra (coins (b) and (c) in the Figure). Figure 12 also illustrates a copper coin of Mihirakula, which has a somewhat modified design. The bust right on the obverse is accompanied by a legend in Brāhmī that reads śrī mihiragula. The reverse features a bull left perhaps standing on a ground line which serves as the divider between the two registers on the coin; the legend below reads jayatu vriṣa. Any or all of these issuers of Gupta style coppers could well have issued Archer type gold coins and could therefore be the issuers of some of the Nameless coins. Thus in principle it would not be difficult to see that three different Hun kings issued gold coins of the Archer type, i.e., the Nameless coins.

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23 First coin, British Museum, photo, courtesy Joe Cribb; second coin Tandon collection (#663.21).
One natural question to ask in this context is, where are the Nameless coins found? If they are found, for example, in Bengal, we would have to conclude that they are probably not Hun issues, because it is very unlikely that the Huns ever made it as far east as that. Unfortunately, we have little solid hoard evidence on find spots, particularly because the Nameless coins have not been seen as a separate category worth recording. Nevertheless, what little evidence we have is consistent with a Hun origin. In her reconstruction of the well-known Kalighat hoard, which was found in Bengal in 1783, Majumdar reports no Nameless coins. And, in his report on the Murshidabad hoard, found in Bangladesh in 2013, Karan Singh similarly reports no Nameless coins. Further, knowledgeable sources in the trade say that the Nameless coins are found almost exclusively in eastern Uttar Pradesh, particularly around the area of Varanasi. These sources say that the two parākrama coins were found in a hoard uncovered in Chandauli, a town near Varanasi, along with some other Nameless coins and some Gupta coins.

Now there are no inscriptions or other sorts of archaeological evidence to confirm that the Huns ever made it as far east as eastern Uttar Pradesh. However, a sealing of Toramāṇa and another with the legend hūnarāja, which may well be his also but in any case is obviously

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24 All coins are from the British Museum, photos courtesy Joe Cribb.
26 Karan Singh: “The Murshidabad hoard of Gupta coins,” Journal of the Oriental Numismatic Society, 221 (Autumn 2014), pp. 22-25. Ranvijay Singh, a well-known coin dealer from Lucknow, has challenged Karan Singh’s reconstruction of the hoard, saying that he had seen the whole hoard when it first came to the market, and its composition was different from that reported by Karan. However, Ranvijay also reported that the hoard did not contain any Nameless coins.
Hunnic, have been found in Kauśāmbī, and Thaplyal has argued convincingly that at least the Toramāṇa sealing was in fact made there rather than brought from elsewhere. Also, certain barbed arrowheads of Hun type were also found in the excavations at Kauśāmbī. While arrowheads could certainly travel long distances, their presence in combination with the sealing further corroborates the presence of the Huns in that city. It is quite plausible, therefore, that they may have advanced as far as eastern Uttar Pradesh. After all, Varanasi is only 133 km (83 miles) from Kauśāmbī, while Kauśāmbī is about 530 km (330 miles) from Eran, where there is an inscription of Toramāṇa.

![Figure 13: Map of places with Hun connections](image)

The map in Figure 13 highlights places with known Hun connections. Given the wide area over which these places are spread, the extension of their sphere of activity to the area of Varanasi does not seem at all far-fetched.

One more piece of circumstantial evidence on the find spots of the Nameless coins is that, while the Uttar Pradesh State Museums (Lucknow and Mathura) possess eight Nameless coins in their collections (including the śrī prakāśa coin), the state museum of Bihar, the Patna Museum, has none. Although this in no way proves anything, it does reinforce the suggestion that the coins

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27 The legend toramāṇa is struck on top of the seal of the Ghoshitārāma monastery, which was located and has been found in that city. See K.K. Thaplyal: Studies in Ancient Indian Seals, Lucknow: Akhila Bharatiya Sanskrit Parishad, 1972, pp. 61-62. I am indebted to Professor Thaplyal for bringing this seal to my attention.
are found in Uttar Pradesh but not further east, thereby strengthening the case for the coins to be Hun, and not Gupta, issues. Had they been Gupta issues, there would be no reason at all not to find them in Bihar.

There is also some limited literary evidence that would support the notion of a Hun presence in the Varanasi area. However, before we can explore this, we need to digress to discuss late Gupta chronology, which seems to be quite unsettled at the moment. In particular, since the literary evidence involves the identification of the king Bālāditya in the account of Xuanzang with the Gupta king who issued coins with the epithet bālāditya, we need to explore views that would deny such an identification.

Digression on Late Gupta Chronology

In order to keep this digression as brief as possible, I will focus only on the chronology following Kumāragupta I. In his recent survey of Gupta political history, Thaplyal presents no less than four possible chronologies after Kumāragupta I, citing different authors, without deciding on which of them he himself prefers. And that does not include all the chronologies that have been proposed! For example, in a recent paper, Willis presented the following chronology:

1. Kumāragupta I (c. 415-447)
2. Ghaṭotkacaguṇa (c. 448-455)
3. Skandaguṇa (c. 456-467)
4. Narasiṁhaguṇa (c. 467-474 ?)
5. Kumāragupta II (c. 474-476)
6. Budhaguṇa (c. 477-488)
7. Vainyaguṇa (c. 508)
8. Viṣṇugupta (c. 515 ?)

Since there are no inscriptions or seals that yield dates for Narasiṁhaguṇa, Willis forces him into the gap between the last known date of Skandaguṇa and the only known date of Kumāragupta II. He entirely denies the existence of a Kumāragupta III, since there is no independent verification that such a king existed. Willis insists that the Kumāragupta named in a Sarnath Buddha image inscription dated GE 154 (= 473-74 CE) is the same as the Kumāragupta named as the son of Narasiṁhaguṇa in the Bhitarā billon seal and on clay sealings found at Nalanda. That is why Narasiṁhaguṇa needs to be squeezed into the few years between Skandaguṇa and the date on the Sarnath Buddha image.

The trouble with Willis’s chronology is that it is based entirely on his own interpretation of the inscriptions, and pays absolutely no attention to the physical evidence of the coins. He offers no explanation for the existence of two entirely different styles and fabrics of coins issued by kings named Kumāra, nor does he take into account that the coins of Narasiṁhaguṇa clearly follow those of the first Kumāra (Kumāragupta II) and deteriorate into a series that undoubtedly...

precedes the very base and degenerate coins of the second Kumāra (Kumāragupta III), who in turn must closely precede Viṣṇugupta. He was led by a similar lack of attention to the coin evidence to propose that Kumāragupta I’s brother Ghaṭotkacaguṣa preceded Skandagupta, an impossibility given that the ghațo coin he cited was obviously issued after Skandagupta’s reign; it is too heavy and large to have been issued prior to it.\(^{30}\)

Willis asserts that the “existence or otherwise of the three Kumāraguptas rests on the idea that Narasimhagupta Bālāditya, known from coins and seals, is the same person as Bālāditya, the ardent Buddhist king who opposed Mihirakula according to Xuan Zang.” This is not really true. While some may find this idea attractive, the real reason to posit the existence of three Kumāraguptas, expressly laid out in a 1950 paper by P.L. Gupta and discussed at length in his comprehensive survey of Gupta political history,\(^{31}\) is to best explain the evidence of the coins. Kumāragupta I is well-attested and non-controversial; the key question is whether there was only one Kumāragupta after Skandagupta or were there two? Now there are two quite distinct coin series, each issued by a Kumāragupta; one is of finer style and higher gold content than the coins of Narasimhagupta, while the other is of cruder style and lower gold content. Figure 14 illustrates examples of each series. The difference in fineness of style is so obvious as to hardly require comment. Allan, in his British Museum catalogue, assigned both of these series of coins to Kumāragupta II.\(^{32}\) But, as pointed out by several authors and discussed in detail by Gupta, this assignment is untenable.

![Figure 14: Comparing Coins of Kumāragupta II and Kumāragupta III](image)

Rather, Gupta points out, the coins suggest the following chronology, based on the weight and gold content of the coins:\(^{33}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>King</th>
<th>Weight in grains</th>
<th>Gold percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kumāra Gupta II (Allan’s Class I)</td>
<td>139 - 143</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budha Gupta</td>
<td>141.4 - 144.5</td>
<td>77% - 72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vainya Gupta</td>
<td>144.5 - 148</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^{31}\) See Gupta, *op. cit.*, pp. 179-182.

\(^{32}\) Allan, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-143.

\(^{33}\) Table from Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 181.
While studying the coins at the Uttar Pradesh State Museums, I myself measured specific gravity (SG) for all of the 330 Gupta gold coins in the Museums’ collections and found a similar pattern. The average weight of the coins tends to rise in the sequence presented above, while the SG tends to fall. The same chronology is obtained if we use stylistic considerations to order the coins. In particular, the two Kumāraguptas sandwich Narasiṃhagupta. Thus Narasiṃhagupta ruled after Kumāragupta II and this chronology allows us to identify the Bālāditya in the account of Xuanzang with the Gupta king who issued coins with the epithet bālāditya. This identification becomes possible not because of the desire to make this connection, but because of the physical evidence of the coins.34

Literary Evidence on Find Spots

We return now to a consideration of the literary evidence that accounts for the possible discovery of Hun coins in eastern Uttar Pradesh. In his account of Indian history, Xuanzang reported in great detail on the interaction between Mihirakula and the king of Magadha, Bālāditya. He reported that Baladitya, on hearing of Mihirakula’s cruelty towards the Buddhist monks, “strictly guarded the frontiers of his kingdom and refused to pay tribute. Then Ta-tsu (Mihirakula) raised an army to punish his rebellion.”35 This suggests that Mihirakula was based not far from Magadha and that, in any case, he invaded that state at least once. Xuanzang goes on to report how Bālāditya hid himself on an island in face of the Hun invasion but was then able to ambush the Hun detachment and take Mihirakula prisoner. This supports the possibility of Mihirakula’s presence in Magadha, the modern state of Bihar, which is even further east than Uttar Pradesh.

Although historians do not regard Xuanzang very reliable on all his points, the coin evidence would certainly be consistent with this account. Further, there is one other piece of literary evidence that would support Xuanzang’s account. Notice that he had said Bālāditya “refused to pay tribute” and that Mihirakula wanted to punish “his rebellion.” This would mean that the Gupta Empire at the time was feudatory to the Huns and was therefore required to pay tribute and that a refusal to do so constituted a rebellion. How did that come to be? There is no inscriptive evidence on the matter. But the Mañjuśrī-mūlakalpa perhaps provides a clue to this.36 In Jayaswal’s reading and interpretation, the text tells us that a great king from the west with the initial H (Hūṇa?) or A (Alchon?) occupied the banks of the Ganges in the east and installed a Kshatriya boy as king in Nandapura. Having done that, he retired to Vārāṇasī (emphasis added), soon after which he fell ill. He installed his son Graha as king and died thereafter. Jayaswal suggests that the great king from the west was Toramāṇa, that his son Graha (planet) was Mihirakula (the sun is considered a planet in the ancient Indian astronomical

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narasiṃha Gupta (Class I)</th>
<th>144.5 - 148</th>
<th>70%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narasiṃha Gupta (Class II)</td>
<td>143.5 - 147</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kumāra Gupta III (Allan’s Class II)</td>
<td>147 - 148.1</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viṣṇu Gupta</td>
<td>149 - 150</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

34 Willis cites other “problems” with this chronology, none of which stand up to scrutiny, but this is not the place to address them; I will do so in a subsequent paper.
35 The discussion here is based on the summary in Gupta, op. cit., p. 159-161.
36 The following discussion is based upon the summary in P.L. Gupta, op. cit., pp. 126-128.
system) and that the text records an episode in which Toramāṇa subdued the Guptas from his base in Varanasi, died there, and was succeeded by his son Mihirakula. P.L. Gupta seems to endorse this interpretation, saying that “these passages probably refer to the Hūṇa invasion, which we know took place in the later Gupta period.”

Most historians do not regard Xuanzang’s accounts and those of the Mañjuśrī-mūlakalpa as very reliable, and we therefore have to approach these accounts with caution. However, in this particular case, the two accounts are complementary and therefore mutually reinforcing, since the Mañjuśrī-mūlakalpa asserts that the Guptas became feudatories of the Huns following the latter’s war of conquest and Xuanzang discusses Bālāditya’s refusal to pay tribute. Further, these two mutually reinforcing literary accounts are supported by the known Hun presence not far away in Kauśāmbī, and now further supported by the numismatic evidence of the Gupta style Hun coin issues, said to be found in the Varanasi area.

The information on the find spots of the Nameless coins being in eastern Uttar Pradesh, and the supporting literary accounts, also shed light on one other aspect of this attribution. Some might propose that the Nameless coins might have been issued by the Aulīkaras. We know from the Risthal inscription that the Aulīkara king Prakāśadharmāna had defeated Toramāṇa. Might he not have felt powerful enough to issue gold coins? And might not the śrī prakāśa coin be his? The fact that the find spots of the Nameless coins are in eastern UP puts considerable doubt on this speculation. There is no indication that Prakāśadharmāna ever engaged in an extended campaign outside the Aulīkara domains. It is therefore highly unlikely that he would have issued coins that are found in eastern UP. Besides, there is not much evidence that the Aulīkaras were issuing coins on the Gupta model. The only coins that are tentatively attributed to them at this time by Shailen Bhandare are certain lead coins with a conch shell on one side and the legend jitam bhagavata padmanabhe (see Figure 15), some anepigraphic lead coins of similar fabric, and a few tiny copper coins also found in Mandasor. The third coin in Figure 15 is a small copper coin (0.78 gm), apparently found in Mandasor, that bears the legend śrī mahārāja naravama. Naravarman is known from several inscriptions from Mandasor, but this may be his first known coin and the first coin to name an Aulīkara king. It hardly seems likely that the Aulīkaras would jump from these minor issues to producing Gupta style gold coins.

Figure 15: Aulīkara Coins

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37 Gupta, op. cit., p. 128.
38 I thank Shailen Bhandare for sharing his insights and opinions on Aulīkara coins. The tentative attribution of these coins to the Aulīkaras was expressed in a private email.
39 First coin, Pieper collection, photo, courtesy Wilfried Pieper; drawing of first coin kindly provided by Wilfried; third coin, photo, courtesy Shailen Bhandare.
Similarly, in case some might wonder if the Nameless coins might have been issued by the Vākātakas, who also grew in power towards the end of the Gupta period, this is also highly unlikely. The Vākātakas, like the Aulīkaras, seem to have issued very little coinage; what they did was mostly in copper and lead. The coins do not show any Gupta influence. The coinage has been surveyed by Kulkarni and the interested reader is referred to his paper.\(^{40}\)

In summary, I believe a strong case can be made that all of the Nameless coins, regardless of the epithet used on the reverse, were Hun issues. This conclusion is consistent with the find spots, it makes eminent sense in light of the rest of the Hun coinage, and there is a direct connection of the śrī prakāśa coin to Toramāṇa. It is virtually certain that they were not Gupta issues, given the stylistic differences with all confirmed Gupta coins, the likely authorship of the śrī prakāśa coin by Toramāṇa, the close stylistic similarities among the coins of the group, and the localization of the find spots to eastern Uttar Pradesh.

**Dating and Further Attributions**

There is a widespread belief, although not a complete consensus, that Mihirakula commenced his reign around the year 515. This date was first proposed by Fleet in 1886,\(^{41}\) and has been widely accepted since then.\(^{42}\) The basic argument stems from three inscriptions. The Gwalior Fort inscription was inscribed in the year 15 of Mihirakula’s reign. The Mandasor column inscription of the Aulīkara king Yaśodharman, which is undated, tells us that he defeated Mihirakula. Finally, another inscription of Yaśodharman in Mandasor gives us a date of 532-33 CE. Since both inscriptions of Yaśodharman were carved by the same scribe Govinda, we guess that they were inscribed at around the same time. Thus the defeat of Mihirakula by Yaśodharman must have occurred around the year 530. Finally, Fleet also guessed that the Gwalior Fort inscription was probably inscribed “near the end of his Indian career” “considering all that he did subsequently in Kaśmīr and Gāndhāra.” Therefore, he concluded, the Gwalior inscription must have been inscribed around 530 and so the reign must have begun around 515.

Although I see some logical problems with this argument, a reassessment of this date, given the range of authorities who have accepted it, is far beyond the scope of this paper. In any case, a mild support for it has emerged since Fleet’s time in the form of the Risthal inscription, dated to the year 515, which tells us about the victory of Prakāśadharman, presumably Yaśodharman’s father, over Toramāṇa. Salomon has argued that this inscription proves that Toramāṇa was still alive in 515.\(^{43}\) I’m not sure I agree, since the inscription is to mark the dedication of a temple and the construction of a water tank, events that may have occurred well after the battle against Toramāṇa, which may have been Prakāśadharman’s greatest achievement and may well have occurred some years previously. Nevertheless, we are probably not too far off the correct date if we take 515 for the year when Toramāṇa died and Mihirakula began his reign.

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If the accounts of the *Maṅjuśrī-mūlakalpa* and Xuanzang are accepted, those two events took place in the Varanasi area. We may then presume that the conflict between Mihirakula and Bālāditya took place shortly thereafter, perhaps sometime between 515 and 520. At the end of that conflict, the Huns were expelled from the area and the production of the Nameless coins would have ceased. That production would have started some time during the earlier part of the 6th century, once Toramāṇa commenced his campaign in the Gupta heartland. This gives us a time frame for the dating of the Nameless coins of sometime between 500 and 520. This agrees with the evidence from the coins that they were produced perhaps after the reign of Budhagupta.

In terms of specific attributions, naturally the *śrī prakāśa* coin would be attributed to Toramāṇa. We would also like to know who issued the other coins, particularly the *parākrama* coins. Sanjeev Kumar published one of these coins and asserted that it was an issue of Skandagupta, who he believed was identical with Purugupta. It is not clear that this attribution is well-founded. The coin shows little relationship to the coins of Skandagupta and most authors believe that Skandagupta and Purugupta were half-brothers and not the same person. In any case, in a private email, Kumar informed me that he had abandoned this attribution but did not have another one to offer. As of now, no other proposal for the issuer of these coins has been made. Leaving aside the evidence of Xuanzang, the candidates to have issued the Nameless coins include Toramāṇa, who surely issued a relatively large number of coins, either of the other issuers of the Gupta-style coppers known from the Punjab area, Uditāditya and Vaysāra, and Mihirakula.

If we do accept the account of Xuanzang, then it would appear that there would be just three possible kings who issued the Nameless coins: Toramāṇa, Mihirakula and Mihirakula’s unnamed brother, with whom, we are told, Mihirakula left his army when he went in pursuit of Bālāditya. This brother could be the previously mentioned Uditāditya (more likely, considering the solar-themed name) or Vaysāra, or we simply don’t know his name.

As for the *parākrama* coins, it would be tempting to speculate that they may have been issued by Mihirakula. In this context, the circumstances of their discovery, as related by Ranvijay Singh, the Lucknow dealer, are very interesting albeit impossible to substantiate. According to Mr. Singh, the *parākrama* coins were found as part of a large hoard of approximately one thousand gold coins in the district of Chandauli, near Varanasi. He said that he had heard that jewelry was also found in the treasure, but he had not seen any of it. The coins included coins of every Gupta king from Samudragupta to Budhagupta, plus the the *parākrama* coins and around twenty five or so other Nameless coins of the *śrī vikrama* type. If this is true, the hoard would surely have been a treasury, most probably of the Hun king, perhaps buried during the turmoil surrounding the conflict between Mihirakula and Bālāditya. The Gupta coins may have been loot or tribute from when Toramāṇa attacked and defeated the Gupta army, and the Nameless coins would have been the product of the Hun mint in the area. Note that the

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45 See the detailed discussion on this issue in my paper “The Succession after Kumāragupta I,” *op.cit*.
46 Although in 2014 he asserted that it was an issue of a king he called Samudragupta II; see footnote 17 above and the discussion around that.
discovery of such a hoard in the Varanasi area would constitute a further piece of information in support of the story about Mihirakula and Bālāditya suggested by the accounts of the Mañjuśrī-mūlakalpa and Xuanzang, since that turmoil would account for the burial of a treasury hoard.

Interestingly, both the parākrama coins whose images I have seen seem to be in mint condition. Thus they may have been struck shortly before the hoard was buried. Whether this means that they were struck by Mihirakula or by his brother cannot be known at this time. In any case, this discussion has been based on information of a very informal nature. If the description of the hoard by Ranvijay Singh is at all true, the excavation of the hoard under proper archaeological conditions would have been of immense historical value, and it is indeed a tremendous loss that such a controlled excavation did not take place.

In the present state of our knowledge, attributions of specific coins other than the śrī prakāśa coin must remain speculative. The main purpose of this paper was to suggest that the Nameless coins were most probably Hun issues. The main argument justifying this suggestion has two components: (i) the Nameless coins form a stylistic group quite distinct from other Archer type coins, and (ii) one of the Nameless coins, with the legend śrī prakāśa, is most probably an issue of Toramāṇa. This leads to the natural conclusion that the Nameless coins were all Hun issues. It appears likely that the Nameless coins were issued by at least three separate kings (because they feature three different royal epithets); while there are no candidate Gupta kings to assign the coins to, there are several Hun kings who could fulfill this role. Finally, the accounts of the Mañjuśrī-mūlakalpa and Xuanzang seem to support this conclusion. I would therefore argue that the Nameless coins should be removed from the list of issues of the Gupta kings and reassigned to the Huns.

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47 It is possible that the coin illustrated in Figure 1, which I acquired in 2006, and is also in close to mint condition, came from the same hoard.