

The Coins of Purugupta

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One of the enduring mysteries in Gupta history is whether or not the son of Kumāragupta I named Purugupta ever sat on the throne. If he did, he surely would have issued coins, so the related mystery in Gupta numismatics is whether or not he ever issued coins and, if he did, which coins are his? So far, no coins have definitively been assigned to him. In a recent paper,² I had suggested that the coins currently being assigned to an otherwise unknown “Candragupta III” are most probably issues of Purugupta. Although this paper has only just been published and therefore has not received full scrutiny of the scholarly community, it has been circulating in manuscript form since 2012 and there seems to be some resistance to the idea, at least partly motivated by an alternative view that the king identified on his coins as Prakāśāditya is probably Purugupta. But now, in another recent paper,³ I have shown that Prakāśāditya was not a Gupta king at all, but the Hūṇa king Toramāṇa. Therefore, we can safely reject the idea that the Prakāśāditya coins are the coins of Purugupta. This eliminates the major objection to my suggestion that the coins of the so-called “Candragupta III” are indeed the coins of Purugupta; there is therefore a need to revisit the discussion on the coins of this king. That is the purpose of this paper.

Who Was Purugupta?

There is no known contemporary inscription of Purugupta. We know of his existence from some seals and sealings of his successors: the Bhitārī seal of Kumāragupta II, the Nālandā clay sealing of Narasiṃhagupta, and the Nālandā clay sealing of Budhagupta.⁴ From these objects, which provide genealogies of the Gupta dynasty, we learn that Purugupta was the son of Kumāragupta (I) and the *mahādevī* Anantadevī. He is named as a *maharājadhirāja*. Two of his sons, Narasiṃhagupta and Budhagupta, were also emperors, as was his grandson Kumāragupta (II), son of Narasiṃhagupta. Further, from a clay sealing of Viṣṇugupta, the son of Kumāragupta II and grandson of Narasiṃhagupta, we learn that he (Viṣṇugupta) was also an emperor. Finally, a clay sealing of Vainyagupta, also from Nālandā, suggests that he was another son of Purugupta who sat on the throne; the sealing, which is incomplete, identifies Vainya’s father as ...rugupta, which most likely should be restored as Purugupta.

¹ Boston University. Over the years, many people have helped me to improve my understanding of Gupta history and coins through productive conversations and email exchanges. I would particularly like to acknowledge in this regard Shailen Bhandare, Joe Cribb, Harry Falk, Sanjeev Kumar and Ellen Raven.

² Pankaj Tandon: “The Succession after Kumāragupta I,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 24 No. 4, October 2014, pp. 557-572.

³ Pankaj Tandon: “The Identity of Prakāśāditya,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, forthcoming.

⁴ For a summary of the Gupta seals and sealings and their contents, see Parmeshwari Lal Gupta: *The Imperial Guptas*, Vārāṇasī: Vishwavidyalaya Prakashan, 1974, pp. 63-67.

The evidence of the sealings strongly suggests that Purugupta did indeed sit on the Gupta throne. He is identified as a *maharājadhirāja* and the son of the known emperor Kumāragupta I (hereafter referred to simply as Kumāragupta) and his principal (and only known) queen, Anantadevī. Five of his direct descendants (three sons, a grandson and a great-grandson) also occupied the throne, indicating that his was the principal (and only known) dynastic line. It stands to reason that he in fact occupied the throne, most probably as the direct successor of his father, Kumāragupta I. But virtually all scholars assume that Kumāragupta's successor was Skandagupta.

I would argue that in fact Purugupta, not Skandagupta, was the immediate successor of his father Kumāragupta. Most authors have presumed that Skandagupta succeeded Kumāragupta because there are known inscriptions of Skandagupta but none of Purugupta. Therefore, the concrete evidence for a Purugupta succession is missing. Nor are there any confirmed coins that could prove his succession. Indeed, there is a question of whether he even ever sat on the throne. Authors who consider that he might have occupied the throne generally assume that he must have done so after the death of Skandagupta. Against this is the simple fact that Skandagupta was almost certainly an illegitimate son of Kumāragupta and therefore had no rights of succession. Further, there is no evidence that Kumāragupta installed Skandagupta as his heir apparent. Therefore, it stands to reason that Purugupta, the only known son of Kumāragupta with rights of succession, in fact succeeded his father.

As this is an important part of the argument and fits with the numismatic information, it is worth spelling out in greater detail. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to look at a theory that was originally propounded by Hoernle and continues to have some currency: that in fact Skandagupta and Purugupta were the same person. Hoernle himself had originally suggested that Skandagupta and Purugupta must have been half-brothers, a view that is almost universally accepted today. However, in a 1909 paper,⁵ Hoernle revised his view to one where he asserted that “the two names Skandagupta and Purugupta ... belong to the same person.”⁶ This view was also adopted by Bhandarkar.⁷ Hoernle reached his conclusion following an elaborate argument that can be summarized as follows. We know from a Nālandā clay sealing that Narasiṃhagupta was the son of Purugupta. We know further from some gold coins of the Archer type that the king named *nara* on the obverse of these coins had the epithet *bālāditya* on the reverse; this leads to the conclusion that the *biruda* of Narasiṃhagupta was *bālāditya*. Now a 6th century text, *The Life of Vasubandhu* by Paramārtha,⁸ refers to a King Vikramāditya of Ayodhyā who was a patron of the Buddhist sage (Vasubandhu) and who sent his queen and crown prince Bālāditya to study with him.⁹ Further, it is mentioned that when Bālāditya succeeded to the throne, he invited Vasubandhu to come to Ayodhyā, confirming that Bālāditya did in fact become king. Since it is

⁵ A. F. Rudolph Hoernle: “Some Problems in Ancient Indian History: IV. The Identity of Yasodharman and Vikramāditya, and some corollaries,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, Jan. 1909, pp. 89-144.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁷ D.R. Bhandarkar: *Corpus Inscriptionum Indiacarum, Volume III: Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings* (B. Ch. Chhabra and G.S. Gai, eds.), New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1981, p. 82. Bhandarkar's argument was that accepting this identity simplifies Gupta chronology and he could find no strong argument against it.

⁸ J. Takakusu: “The life of Vasu-bandhu by Paramārtha (A.D. 499-569),” *T'oung Pao*, Second Series, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1904), pp. 269-296.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

reasonable to suppose that this Bālāditya was none other than Narasimhagupta, we can infer from this that Purugupta was also known as Vikramāditya. Finally, Hoernle points to a certain class of silver coins of Skandagupta (all of the Altar type) where the legend reads *paramabhāgavata śrī vikramāditya skandaguptah*¹⁰ and concludes from this that Skandagupta was also known as Vikramāditya. Since Purugupta and Skandagupta were both known as Vikramāditya, they must be one and the same person.

Hoernle's theory has not found much acceptance. Allan rejected it, at least partly because he thought he had discovered a coin of Purugupta with the legend *pura*, showing that he was different from Skandagupta. This coin will be discussed in detail in the next section, but suffice it to say here that ultimately it proved to be an issue of Budhagupta, not Purugupta, so Allan's major objection would now be moot. But Hoernle's theory is also rejected by almost all other authors. Altekar, for example, referring to the fact that there are no inscriptions of Purugupta, asks the rhetorical question: "why should the name Purugupta occur only on seals and not in any of the inscriptions?"¹¹ P.L. Gupta has the same objection, pointing out that "There are instances ... where a king is known to have two or more names ... But in such cases, only one of the two names was always used in the official records and they took no cognizance of the other name. So, it seems highly unconvincing that the same person would be called Skanda Gupta in his coins and inscriptions and Puru Gupta in the inscriptions of his descendants. Therefore it is almost certain that Puru Gupta and Skanda Gupta were two different persons and were step-brothers."¹²

To these objections, I would add three more. First, Hoernle's theory rests crucially on his assertion that Skandagupta and Purugupta were both known as Vikramāditya. However, it seems unwarranted to assume they are one and the same person just because they both adopted the same title. Several Gupta kings adopted the *vikrama* epithet. For example, the coins of Budhagupta also carry the epithet *śrī vikrama* on the reverse, but nobody would dream of suggesting that Budhagupta was the same as Skandagupta! So why does it follow that Skandagupta and Purugupta must be the same if they both used the *vikrama* epithet? Second, it is worth noting that the normal epithet for Skandagupta was *kramāditya*; the silver coins bearing the title *vikramāditya* are quite rare and are also quite crude, suggesting that they were not really a major part of that king's coinage. Indeed, it is quite possible that these coins were not Skandagupta issues at all and were issued posthumously in his name, as was suggested by Shailen Bhandare in a private communication. In their study of these coins, Maheshwari and Rath point out that the silver content of Skandagupta's Altar type coins varies between 22% and almost zero!¹³ By contrast, his Garuḍa coins had a silver content of between 81 and 75%. This strongly suggests that the Vikramāditya coins did not belong to Skandagupta's main series and supports Bhandare's contention that the Altar coins may have been issued posthumously. This would imply that Skandagupta was in fact *not* known as *vikramāditya*. Third, and even more

¹⁰ See John Allan: *A Catalogue of the Indian Coins in the British Museum: Coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Sasanka, King of Gauda*, London: British Museum, 1914, p. 122 or A.S. Altekar: *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, Varanasi: The Numismatic Society of India, Banaras Hindu University, 1957, p. 254.

¹¹ Altekar, *Coinage*, *ibid.*, p. 262.

¹² Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 345.

¹³ K.K. Maheshwari and Biswajeet Rath: "Fire Altar type coins of Skandagupta: Towards a Typological and Chronological Definition," in K.K. Maheshwari and Biswajeet Rath (eds.): *Numismatic Panorama (Essays in honour of Late Sh. S.M. Shukla)*, New Delhi: Harman Publishing House, p. 186.

important, if Skandagupta and Purugupta were the same person, Skandagupta's mother would have been Anantadevī (who we know was Purugupta's mother) and surely she would have been named in the genealogical lists that include Skandagupta. But in no such list is Skandagupta's mother named, even though the names of the mothers of every other Gupta king from Samudragupta on are listed. This is clear evidence that Skandagupta's mother was *not* Anantadevī and hence was not the same as Purugupta's mother. Ergo, Skandagupta and Purugupta could not have been the same person.

This last point relates to a recent attempt to revive the theory that Skandagupta and Purugupta were the same person. In a 2010 paper, Sanjeev Kumar named Purugupta as “the son of ... Kumāragupta I, and assumed to be the same as Skandagupta.”¹⁴ Kumar does not offer an explanation, but apparently bases his assumption on the views of Bhandarkar that were mentioned earlier.¹⁵ His endorsement of Bhandarkar's belief may stem from another statement he made in his paper, where he mentioned that the “Bihar stone pillar inscriptions (*sic.*) of Budhagupta refers to Skandagupta as the son of Kumāragupta I and Anantadevi, (with no mention of Purugupta).”¹⁶ However, this statement has no real basis. It is true that Bhandarkar, in his translation of the Bihar stone pillar inscription, which Fleet had ascribed to Skandagupta and which he assigns to Budhagupta,¹⁷ presents the following rendition of lines 21-23:

- 21 [... tat-pād-ānuddhyā]tō mahādēvyām **Dhruvadēvyām**=
 22 [utapannaḥ paramabhāgavatō mahārājādhirāja-śrī-**Kumāraguptas**=tasya] putras=
 tat-pād-ānuddhyātaḥ
 23 [mahādēvyām=**Anantadēvyām**=utpannaḥ paramabhāgavatō mahārājādhirāja-śrī-
Ska]ndaguptaḥ [||] ...¹⁸

Line 21 does name Dhruvadevī, who we know from other genealogical lists was the mother of Kumāragupta, so we know the next line must name him even though his name is not visible on the inscription. But we don't know if Kumāragupta's wife's name was truly on line 23 as Bhandarkar has rendered it ... the name of Anantadevī has been added on a speculative basis by Bhandarkar (note that the name is within the square brackets that represent guessed interpolations). Thus, even if line 23 does name Skandagupta, *his mother's name is not visible* and so we cannot assert that Anantadevī was his mother as Kumar has done.

Further, there is a question of whether line 23 in fact names Skandagupta at all. Bhandarkar renders the name as [Ska]ndagupta, indicating that the first letter is not visible at all, while the second letter is being read as *nda*. But this reading is by no means unambiguous. It is worth pointing out that the pillar, which was discovered around 1839, is in very poor condition.

¹⁴ Sanjeev Kumar: “New discoveries and varieties in Gupta coinage,” *Journal of the Oriental Numismatic Society*, No. 204 (Summer 2010), p. 21.

¹⁵ See footnote 7 above.

¹⁶ Kumar, *ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁷ It should be noted that Bhandarkar's assignment of this inscription to Budhagupta is purely speculative, since the name of the king during whose reign it was inscribed is completely missing from the visible part of the inscription. Bhandarkar simply inserted the name of Budhagupta as his guess. It appears plausible that the inscription should be assigned to a grandson of Kumāragupta I, and Bhandarkar concluded it was “possibly Budhagupta as he had a longer reign than any of his brothers.” See Bhandarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

¹⁸ Bhandarkar, *ibid.*, p. 348.

According to Bhandarkar, it stands upside down in a house where it supports the roof and where the lines containing the king's names are no longer accessible as they are hidden by other parts of the structure. Thus we must rely on the rather poor photographs and lithographs that have been published in the past. Panel (a) in Figure 1 shows the name which Bhandarkar read as *[ska]ndaguptaḥ* from the photograph of the inscription published in his book (plate XLI). Although the last two letters quite clearly read *guptaḥ*, we can hardly be sure that the first two letters read *skanda*. Opposing this reading, Rajendralala Mitra had read the name in 1869 as *ptaruguptaḥ*,¹⁹ which ought to be *puruguptaḥ*. Mitra had at his disposal an ink copy of a baked clay impression of the inscription prepared by one Major Hollings in 1861, when the condition of the pillar might have been quite a bit better than it was when G.S. Gai photographed it for the Bhandarkar volume. The second panel in Figure 1 shows the name in question from the facsimile published by Mitra. Looking at both the photograph and the ink drawing, the second letter looks more like *ru* than *nda*. As for the first letter, the conjoined *ta* seen on the ink drawing seems inconsistent with the photograph. But looking at both sources, a reading of *pu* is better supported than *ska*. Since we know that the sons of Purugupta did occupy the Gupta throne, while we know of no son of Skandagupta who did so, the reading of the name as *puruguptaḥ* seems quite plausible.

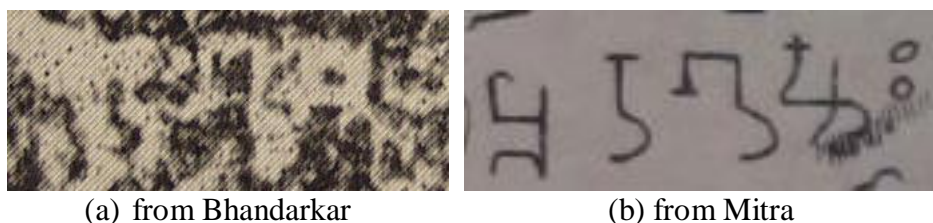


Figure 1: Details of the name on the Bihar pillar inscription

Therefore, the Bihar stone pillar inscription does not provide any evidence that the mother of Skandagupta was Anantadevī. Most probably, the inscription does not refer to Skandagupta at all. Even if it does, there is no clear evidence that his mother was named as Anantadevī. We must therefore rely on the Bhitārī pillar inscription, where the name of Skandagupta's mother is pointedly omitted. Thus it seems quite clear that Anantadevī was not Skandagupta's mother and therefore that Skandagupta and Purugupta were not the same person, but half-brothers as Hoernle had originally suggested and as is widely held today by most scholars.

We now turn back to the detailed analysis of why it is likely that Kumāragupta was succeeded by Purugupta and not Skandagupta. There are several points to be made. First, there is a gap in the known dates of Kumāragupta and Skandagupta. The last confirmed date for Kumāragupta is Gupta era (GE) 128 (= 448 CE) from a Dāmodarpur copper plate, and the earliest confirmed date for Skandagupta is GE 136 (= 456 CE) from the Junāgaḍh rock inscription.²⁰ Thus there is a gap of around 8 years during which another Gupta king could have

¹⁹ Babu Rajendralala Mitra: "Notes on Gupta Inscriptions from Apsar and Behar," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XXXV, Part I, No. IV, July 1867, pp. 267-278. See

²⁰ See Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 23 and 31. Gupta cites the Mankuwār Buddha image inscription as the last inscription for Kumāragupta, listing its date as GE 129. However, D.C. Sircar: "Indological Notes: 4. Date of the Mankuwar Buddha Inscription of the Time of Kumāragupta I," *Journal of Ancient Indian History* 3 (1969-70), pp. 133-137, has

ruled. More specifically, there is a gap during which it is quite possible that Skandagupta was not the king and was not issuing coins.

Second, and more important, Skandagupta was surely not the legitimate heir, while Purugupta was. The various seals and sealings that provide the genealogy of Purugupta list the father and mother of every king from Samudragupta to Kumāragupta II (leaving out Skandagupta, who is never mentioned). From these we learn that Purugupta was the son of the *maharājadhirāja* Kumāragupta (I) and the *mahādevī* Anantadevī. Thus his royalty is clear and unambiguous. But no inscription of Skandagupta provides his mother's name. To the contrary, the Bhitari pillar inscription provides the names of both parents of Samudragupta, Candragupta II and Kumāragupta, but fails to name Skandagupta's mother. In a pattern where the father and mother of each successive king are identified, the absence of Skandagupta's mother's name is very conspicuous. Indeed, the inscription even refers to her in verse 6 but does not give us her name.²¹ The omission is so glaring that it can lead to only one inference, that Skandagupta's mother was not royal. P.L. Gupta came to the conclusion that Skandagupta's mother "in all probability had an extremely low rank, not unlikely of a mistress, concubine or a slave-girl in the royal harem."²² Bakker went even further, asserting that Skandagupta was "a bastard son of Kumāragupta" and "a boy from the harem."²³ We can conclude with confidence that Skandagupta was not a legitimate heir and therefore would not have come naturally to the throne upon his father's death.

Third, it seems fairly clear that Skandagupta was not nominated as heir to the throne by his father either. It could be thought plausible that Kumāragupta may have wished his son Skandagupta to succeed him even though he was not the legitimate heir. We know that Skandagupta had defended the borders of the empire against invaders from the west.²⁴ His father may then have thought him fittest to succeed him. Samudragupta is known to have preferred his younger son Candragupta II over the legitimate heir Rāmagupta. Indeed, Skandagupta himself informs us of this in his Bihar pillar inscription when he tells us that Candragupta "was accepted by" his father,²⁵ which Allan has interpreted as indicating that Samudragupta chose Candragupta

argued that the date on that inscription is 109, not 129, and Willis agrees with this; see Michael Willis: "Later Gupta History: Inscriptions, Coins and Historical Ideology," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, 15, No. 2 (2005), p. 136.

²¹ The inscription says that Skandagupta "conquered (*his*) enemies by the strength of (*his*) arm, and established again the ruined fortunes of (*his*) lineage; and then, crying "the victory has been achieved," betook himself to (*his*) mother, whose eyes were full of tears from joy, just as Kṛṣṇa, when he had slain (*his*) enemies, betook himself to (*his* mother) Devakī" (J.F. Fleet, *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and their Successors*, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Vol. III, Calcutta: Government of India, Central Publications Branch, 1888, pp. 54-56). Given that the inscription is drawing a parallel between Kṛṣṇa and his mother Devakī on the one hand and Skandagupta and his mother on the other, it is surprising that Devakī's name is mentioned but Skandagupta's mother's name is not.

²² Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 330.

²³ Hans Bakker: "A Theatre of Broken Dreams: Vidiśā in the Days of Gupta Hegemony," Chapter 9 in Martin Brandtner and Shishir Kumar Panda (eds.): *Interrogating History: Essays for Hermann Kulke*, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2006, p. 178.

²⁴ The invaders are called the Puṣyamitras by Fleet, but are left nameless in the Bhandarkar edition of the Bhitari inscription. See Fleet: *op. cit.*, pp. 53-54 and Bhandarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

²⁵ See Fleet, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-52.

II “out of his many sons as the best fitted to succeed him.”²⁶ And, in the Allahabad inscription, we are informed that Samudragupta

“was bidden by (*his*) father,--who, exclaiming "Verily (*he is*) worthy," embraced (*him*) with the hairs of (*his*) body standing erect (*through pleasure*) (*and thus*) indicative of (*his*) sentiments, and scanned (*him*) with an eye turning round and round in affection, (*and*) laden with tears (*of joy*), (*and*) perceptive of (*his noble*) nature,-[to govern of a surety] the whole world”²⁷

Thus there were clear precedents that Skandagupta could have used to announce that his father had chosen him as his successor. But in no inscription does Skandagupta proclaim this.

On the contrary, Skandagupta tells us explicitly that he came to power by good fortune. For example, the Junāgaḍh rock inscription reads in part:

“Skandagupta, of great glory, the abode of kingly qualities, who, when (*his*) father by his own power had attained the position of being a friend of the gods, bowed down his enemies and made subject to himself the (*whole*) earth, ... (*and*) whom the goddess of fortune and splendour of her own accord selected as her husband ...”²⁸

Thus it is “the goddess of fortune and splendor” who brought him to the throne, not his hereditary right or his father’s choice.

If Skandagupta did not come to the throne by hereditary right or by his father’s choice, might he nevertheless have succeeded his father through a power grab after his father’s death? This also appears unlikely. As I have argued elsewhere,²⁹ there is evidence that Skandagupta was involved in a violent struggle after his father’s passing, but this struggle was almost certainly with the Hūnas or other invaders from the west, not with members of his own family. In the Bhitārī pillar inscription, we are told that Skandagupta, “when (*his*) father had attained the skies, conquered (*his*) enemies by the strength of (*his*) arm, and established again the ruined fortunes of (*his*) lineage” and that he “joined in close conflict with the Hūnas.”³⁰ And the Junāgaḍh rock inscription tells us that “when (*his*) father by his own power had attained the position of being a friend of the gods,” he “bowed down his enemies ... in the countries of the *mlēchchhas*.”³¹ The repeated declarations of how he protected and restored his lineage and the naming of his enemies as the Hūnas and the *mlēchchhas* make it quite clear that Skandagupta was not involved in an intrafamilial struggle but was protecting the empire against foreign invasion.

P.L. Gupta also argued that Skandagupta and Purugupta must not have had a power struggle. As he pointed out, had “Skanda Gupta succeeded to throne after a struggle with Puru Gupta, as a shrewd statesman, he would have never allowed him or his descendants to survive;

²⁶ Allan: *op. cit.*, pp. xxxiv-xxxv.

²⁷ Fleet, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-17, consulted online at <http://www.sdstate.edu/projectsouthasia/upload/Allahabad-Posthumous.pdf>

²⁸ Fleet, *ibid.*, pp. 61-65, consulted online at <http://www.sdstate.edu/projectsouthasia/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&PageID=853536>.

²⁹ Tandon: “The Succession after Kumāragupta I,” *op. cit.*

³⁰ Fleet, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

³¹ Fleet, *ibid.*, p. 61.

who, if alive, could not but be a constant danger to his life and throne.”³² Willis also argued that the two half-brothers could not have been at war, “that Skandagupta made peace with his legitimate half-brother Purugupta,” that Purugupta’s “side of the family continued to flourish in the Gupta heartland” and his “descendants eventually found their way to the throne.”³³

To summarize, the prevailing assumption has been that Kumāragupta was succeeded by his son Skandagupta. This view has seemed logical because there is no accepted contemporary evidence of any other king having succeeded Kumāragupta, while there are inscriptions and coins of Skandagupta. On the other hand, the evidence of Skandagupta’s own inscriptions is that

- (a) he was not a legitimate son and hence not entitled to the throne by heredity,
- (b) he was not nominated to the throne by his father either, and
- (c) he did not seize power in a struggle with his half-brother or brothers.

It therefore seems that the traditional assumption may not be correct. This conclusion is buttressed by the fact that there is later epigraphic evidence telling us that Kumāragupta’s legitimate son Purugupta must have in fact reigned at some point of time, because he is referred to as a *maharājadhirāja* and five of his descendants also occupied the Gupta throne. Since there is a gap in the known dates of Kumāragupta and Skandagupta, it seems quite likely that Purugupta in fact inherited the throne and was the sole ruler of the Gupta empire for at least a few years. What we need to cement this conclusion is some contemporary corroboration such as coins issued by Purugupta. We will turn now to the question of whether or not Purugupta issued coins.

Previous Attempts to Assign Coins to Purugupta

The main barrier standing in the way of identifying Purugupta as one of the sitting Gupta emperors is the lack of any direct contemporary evidence of his reign, including coins. If we could identify his coins, the succession after Kumāragupta, the relationship between Purugupta and Skandagupta, and subsequent Gupta dynastic history could all be explained in a coherent sequence of events. Thus identifying Purugupta’s coins is central to an understanding of this period of Indian history.

The only assignment of coins to Purugupta on the basis of a direct reading of a coin was by Allan.³⁴ He believed he had found a coin of the Archer type, in the collection of one Dr. Hoey, which had the legend *pura* under the king’s arm, and he naturally assigned this to Pura- or Purugupta. In addition, he assigned also to Purugupta a series of coins that resembled this coin. The Hoey coin carried a *biruda* on the reverse that read *śrī vikrama* and an obverse circular legend that began *para...*, perhaps echoing the legend on some Archer type coins of Skandagupta that begin with the word *parahitakārī*. There are a number of Archer type coins known that lack a king’s name under the arm, but otherwise resemble the Hoey coin, in that they feature the legend *śrī vikrama* on the reverse and have an obverse circular legend that begins *para...* Because of their similarity to the Hoey coin, Allan assigned all such coins also to Purugupta. For convenience of discussion, these coins will be called the “nameless” coins in what follows.

³² Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 346.

³³ Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 137

³⁴ Allan: *op. cit.*, pp. 134-135 (Plate XXI, 23-26).

Allan's reading of *pura* on the Hoey coin was challenged by Saraswati,³⁵ who suggested that the legend read *budha* and that the coin should therefore be assigned to Budhagupta. This view was supported by some and opposed by others, so the matter remained unsettled until other examples of the type emerged where the legend clearly read *budha*.³⁶ This put an end to the view that the Hoey coin belonged to Purugupta. By extension, there is no longer a reason to treat the nameless coins as those of Purugupta either, although some still do assign those coins to him, probably on the basis of the (now disproved) Allan attribution.

Thus there are no known coins where the name *puru* or *purugupta* has been read and therefore no coins that can unhesitatingly be assigned to him. We are forced into the realm of speculation. The earliest speculative attempt to assign coins to Purugupta was by Hoernle.³⁷ Writing in 1889 about the then newly discovered sealing of Kumāragupta II, he proposed that the coins bearing the *biruda* Prakāśāditya could perhaps be assigned to Purugupta. He did not offer an explanation, but the implicit argument, spelled out later by Allan,³⁸ was that no coins were known at the time for Purugupta, and it had not yet been possible to attribute the coins of Prakāśāditya to any known Gupta king, so perhaps the Prakāśāditya coins belonged to Purugupta. Although Allan rejected this identification (since he thought he had identified the coins of Purugupta), he did point out another argument in support of it. The Bharsar hoard contained coins of the known Gupta kings up to Skandagupta in addition to those of Prakāśāditya; it would therefore be reasonable to suppose that Prakāśāditya ruled soon after Skandagupta, which made the identification with Purugupta seem quite plausible.

After Allan's apparent "discovery" of the coins of Purugupta, the attribution of the Prakāśāditya coins to that king fell out of favor, but it came back into vogue once the so-called Purugupta coins turned out to be those of Budhagupta. Altekar, for example, pointed out that the find spots of Prakāśāditya's coins indicated that he did not rule in eastern India, hence he did not belong to the later Guptas who were confined to that region. In particular, he repeated Allan's observation that, in the Bharsar hoard, the latest coins are of Skandagupta and Prakāśāditya, suggesting that Prakāśāditya ruled around the time of Skandagupta. This and other evidence, seemed to Altekar to "point to the identification of Prakāśāditya with Purugupta," although he stressed that this "proposed identification ... is only a probable theory; it may be confirmed or disproved by the discovery of fresh evidence."³⁹

The most thorough exposition for the identification of Prakāśāditya with Purugupta is due to Ashvini Agrawal, who took up a careful analysis of Prakāśāditya's coins in 1992.⁴⁰ He

³⁵ S.K. Saraswati: *Indian Culture*, Vol. I, p. 692, reported by A.S. Altekar: *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, Varanasi: The Numismatic Society of India, Banaras Hindu University, 1957, p. 263. See also the discussion about this debate in S.R. Goyal: *An Introduction to Gupta Numismatics*, Jodhpur; Kusumanjali Prakashan, 1994, pp. 83-84.

³⁶ First reported by A.S. Altekar: "Gold Coins of Budhagupta," *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, Vol. X, June 1948, p. 78. See also P.L. Gupta: "Later Imperial Guptas: Chronology and Political history," *Indian Historical Quarterly*, XXVI, December 1950, pp. 253-262 for a fuller discussion. One of the new coins was published in Parmeshwari Lal Gupta and Sarojini Srivastava: *Gupta Gold Coins in Bharat Kala Bhavan*, Varanasi: Bharat Kala Bhavan, 1981, plate XII, number 215. The *budha* is indeed very clear.

³⁷ A.F.R. Hoernle: "Inscribed Seal of Kumāra Gupta II," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1989, pp. 93-94.

³⁸ Allan, *op. cit.*, p. li.

³⁹ Altekar, *op. cit.*, pp. 284-285. Altekar points out that Allan had also considered this identification a possibility.

⁴⁰ Ashvini Agrawal: "The Prakāśāditya Problem: A Reappraisal," *Numismatic Studies*, II (1992), pp. 107-118.

conducted an exhaustive review of the literature and noted that there was no clear consensus on the identity of this king. He then gathered all the available information on several aspects of the coinage: the diameter of the coins, their weight, their metal composition, the presence of the letter underneath the horse, and the type of reverse symbol on the coins. Comparing this information for Prakāśāditya's coins with all other coins of the Gupta series, he asserted that "it becomes absolutely clear that Prakāśāditya has to be placed sometime after Skandagupta, alongwith Ghaṭotkachagupta and Kumāragupta II and to some extent with Budhagupta but definitely before Vainyagupta, Narasimhagupta, Kumāragupta III and Vishṇugupta."⁴¹ Agrawal then reached his final conclusion. "Once we place Prakāśāditya at his correct place, alongwith Ghaṭotkachagupta and Kumāragupta II, his identity becomes clear. It is well known that there was a change in the line of succession sometime after the death of Skandagupta leading Purugupta and his successors to the imperial Gupta throne. It is simple to infer that this *Mahārājādhirāja* Purugupta, known from the Bhitari silver-copper seal of Kumāragupta III and other inscriptions, ascended the throne after the death of his brother Skandagupta and issued the ... Horseman-lion slayer types in the name of Prakāśāditya which apparently was his epithet."⁴² Essentially, therefore, Agrawal reaffirmed the old argument identifying Prakāśāditya as Purugupta, using the same reasoning that the coins could be dated to that time period and we had no other candidate coins for Purugupta.

This view continues to be popular. Auction houses often attribute Prakāśāditya's coins to Purugupta.⁴³ And recently Ellen Raven is reported to have identified Prakāśāditya as Purugupta at a conference of the Oriental Numismatic Society.⁴⁴

However, in a recent paper,⁴⁵ I have shown conclusively that Prakāśāditya was in fact the Hūṇa king Toramāṇa. Robert Göbl⁴⁶ had already argued quite persuasively that Prakāśāditya was not a Gupta at all, but a Hūṇa king, and had speculated that he was none other than Toramāṇa. Göbl's main argument was that Prakāśāditya is shown wearing a crown with a crescent ornament at the forehead; this crown is clearly Hūṇa and not Gupta. The crown can be seen in the Prakāśāditya coin in Figure 2. In my paper, I reinforce this argument with two important new elements. First, I show that the unusual obverse design on Prakāśāditya's coins, which has no clear Gupta precursor, can in fact be traced to a Sasanian motif featuring the mounted hunter-king and seen very clearly in a silver dish at the British Museum. Figure 2 places the silver dish side by side with the obverse of a Prakāśāditya coin and the similarity is unmistakable. It would be highly unlikely for a Gupta king to model his coinage on a Sasanian theme, but this would be quite normal on a Hūṇa coin, as many Hūṇa coins are based on Sasanian prototypes. Second, provide a near-complete reading of the obverse legend on Prakāśāditya's coins, a legend which I

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 115-116.

⁴³ For example, Classical Numismatic Group, Auction 85, lot 570, September 15, 2010, is listed as a gold dinar of Purugupta Prakasaditya.

⁴⁴ E. Raven: "Gupta coins from the collection of the former Ethnological Museum, Rotterdam," presented at the meeting of the Oriental Numismatic Society, Utrecht, October 15, 2011, reported in the *Journal of the Oriental Numismatic Society* 209 (Autumn 2011), pp. 2-3.

⁴⁵ Pankaj Tandon: "The Identity of Prakāśāditya," *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ R. Göbl: "Das Antlitz des Fremden: Der Hunnenkönig Prakasaditya in der Münzprägung der Gupta-Dynastie," *Anzeiger der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse*, 126 (1990), pp. 131-138.



Figure 2: Sasanian Silver plate⁴⁷ compared with Prakāśāditya coin

had not yet been read and which reveals the true name of the issuer. The legend reads:

avanipatitoramā(ṇo) vijitya vasudhām divam jayati.

This legend closely matches the known legend on silver coins of Toramāṇa that were based on Gupta prototypes. The legend on those coins is:

*vijitāvaniravanipati śrī toramāṇa divam jayati.*⁴⁸

The similarity of this legend to the reading of the gold coin legend is obvious and further strengthens our confidence in the reading. Thus we can be quite sure that Prakāśāditya was the adopted *biruda* of Toramāṇa and we can put to rest the theory that the Prakāśāditya coins were issues of Purugupta.

The only other attempt to assign coins to Purugupta on a speculative basis is by Sanjeev Kumar who discovered a new variety of the Archer type on which he read the name *śrī parākramāditya* in the obverse circular legend and the *biruda parākramah* on the reverse.⁴⁹ Kumar suggested that this might be an issue of Purugupta. His argument was that the use of the title *parākramah* indicated a king with huge ambitions and only Skandagupta fit that description. Further, he assumed that Skandagupta and Purugupta were one and the same. This theory was discussed above and its flaws were pointed out. Quite clearly, Skandagupta and Purugupta were distinct persons and so this coin would not have been Purugupta's if it was Skandagupta's. In any case, the style and weight of the coin (9.46g) point to a much later date of issue.

⁴⁷ The plate is thought to have been made in the time of the Sasanian emperor Varahran V (ruled 420-438) since the crown worn by the king is specific to that ruler. Plate image © The Trustees of the British Museum, object number ME 124092, accessed online. Prakāśāditya coin from Gemini auction II, lot 195.

⁴⁸ See R. Göbl: *Dokumente zur Geschichte der Iranischen Hunnen in Baktrien und Indien*, Band I (Wiesbaden, 1967), p. 119. Göbl rendered the last two words of the legend as *deva jayati*, but it appears no coin he saw showed the diacritics in the second-to-last word to permit a full reading.

⁴⁹ Kumar, *op. cit.*

At the end of all these proposals and discussions, the conclusion is that there are no recognized coins known for Purugupta. The most popular proposal, identifying the coins of Prakāśāditya as his, has now been proven wrong, and there are no other viable candidates.

The Coins of “Candragupta III”

In recent years, certain gold coins of the Gupta series that had originally been attributed to Candragupta II have begun to be assigned to a later king, who has come to be called Candragupta III. Although a “Candragupta III” has been talked about for over a century, early mentions of such a king were in the context of later Gupta coins that have now been reassigned to other kings or are still unattributed. The Candragupta III being discussed here issued a series of coins, the first few of which were first properly identified and collected into a group by P.L. Gupta⁵⁰ and Gupta and Srivastava.⁵¹ The coins were also studied by Nisar Ahmed⁵² and the series was extended by Ellen Raven.⁵³ The coinage was surveyed in a 2013 paper, in which the series was further extended and the first coins of the Horseman type for this king were also identified.⁵⁴

The known coins of this king are of two types: the Archer type and the Horseman type. The Archer type coins feature an obverse with the usual left-facing archer-king and the name *candra* inscribed vertically under the arm. The reverse depicts a goddess (presumably Lakṣmī) seated on a lotus and the inscription *śrī vikrama*. At first glance, therefore, they look like coins of Candragupta II, and had been classified as such. But they differ from the usual coins of Candragupta II in two important respects. First, they generally weigh more than the coins of Candragupta II and, on average, more even than the coins of Kumāragupta, suggesting that they were issued after that king’s reign. Second, and more important, they carry one of several possible symbols on the obverse between the king’s face and the Garuḍa banner at left.⁵⁵ The symbols so far identified include a radiate sun, a crescent moon, a *cakra* or discus, a fire altar, and a *śrīvatsa*. There are also more subtle stylistic features that distinguish these coins from those of Candragupta II, which have been elaborated upon by Ellen Raven in her paper. The different varieties of the type are shown in Figure 3, where they are arranged into two series, distinguished by various style characteristics, but most easily by the pronged symbol or *tamgha* seen in the reverse left field. Figure 4 shows details of these symbols, which I have called the Circle symbol and the Diamond symbol.⁵⁶ The two series may have been the products of two different mints or two different workshops. Besides the differences in style, the coins from the

⁵⁰ Parmeshwari Lal Gupta: “Heavy Weight Coins of Candragupta,” *Numismatic Digest*, Vol. V, Part II, December 1981, pp. 36-43.

⁵¹ Parmeshwari Lal Gupta and Sarojini Srivastava: *op. cit.*, coin 218.

⁵² Nisar Ahmad: “Candragupta III,” *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, Vol. 46-47, 1984, pp. 91-95.

⁵³ Ellen Raven: “Candragupta III: Tracing the Coins of a Gupta King,” *South Asian Archaeology*, 1989, pp. 441-448.

⁵⁴ Pankaj Tandon: “Horseman Coins of Candragupta III,” *The Numismatic Chronicle*, 173 (2013), pp. 171-185. In what follows, I draw heavily upon this paper.

⁵⁵ It is worth emphasizing that the symbol is *between* the king’s face and the image of Garuḍa. Raven has pointed out that there do exist Archer coins of Candragupta II that display a crescent *above* the Garuḍa.

⁵⁶ In Raven’s listing of symbol types, these are symbol 5/12 (Diamond type) and 5/16 (Circle type); see Ellen Raven: *Gupta Gold Coins with Garuḍa-Banner*, Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1994, pp. xlix-l.

two series differ markedly in color, with the Circle symbol coins being yellower, suggesting a higher gold content.

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

Figure 3: Archer type coins of Candragupta III⁵⁷

⁵⁷ From Appendix Table 2 in Tandon, "Horseman Coins of Candragupta III," *op. cit.*



(a) Circle symbol

(b) Diamond symbol

Figure 4: Details of *tamghas* or reverse symbols⁵⁸

The dating of these coins has been a matter of some debate. P.L. Gupta argued that they should be attributed to one Candragupta mentioned in the *mañjuśrī-mūlakalpa* as ruling after a king named Deva and before a king named Dvadāśa.⁵⁹ Gupta identified Deva as Budhagupta and quite clearly Dvadāśa can be identified as Vainyagupta, whose *biruda* as seen from his coins was *dvadāśāditya*. Thus Gupta placed Candragupta III just before Vainyagupta. However, there is a strong reason to know that this dating is too late. Contrary to Gupta's claim that the Bayana hoard contained no coins of Candragupta III, Raven has pointed out that there were at least two coins in the hoard that do belong to that king.⁶⁰ Since the hoard consisted almost entirely of coins of the early Gupta kings up to Kumāragupta, with one coin of Skandagupta and no coins of any later Gupta king, the presence of two coins of Candragupta III in the hoard makes it quite clear that they were issued around the same time as those of Skandagupta. They could not have been issued around the time of Vainyagupta.

This finding agrees with the conclusions reached by most other authors. B.P. Sinha suggested the existence of a Candragupta III who was a son of Kumāragupta and a claimant to the throne upon his father's death.⁶¹ Nisar Ahmad divided the coins into two groups, assigning the lighter coins with crescent and *cakra* symbols to a Candragupta III ruling after Kumāragupta and before Skandagupta and the heavier coins with the altar symbol to a Candragupta IV ruling after Skandagupta. This division, however, is untenable, considering the close similarity in style between the various varieties of the Archer coins; they clearly belong to one series. Finally, Raven undertook the most careful analysis of the coins, including their weights and styles, and concluded unequivocally that they were issued between the reigns of Kumāragupta and Skandagupta ("between c. A.D. 450-455"). She therefore opined that Candragupta III must have been another son (other than Skandagupta or Purugupta) of Kumāragupta who is otherwise unknown to us. Since the coins of Skandagupta are known, while the coins of Purugupta are not,

⁵⁸ From Table 4 in Tandon, "Horseman Coins of Candragupta III," *ibid.*

⁵⁹ See Gupta: *The Imperial Guptas*, *op. cit.*, p. 356.

⁶⁰ See Raven, "Candragupta III: Tracing the Coins of a Gupta King," *op. cit.*, p. 442. The coins are numbers 264 and 266 in Bahadur Chand Chhabra: *Catalogue of the Gupta Gold Coins of the Bayana Hoard in the National Museum*, New Delhi: National Museum, 1986, p. 51 and illustrated in plate XVIII (coins 9 and 11).

⁶¹ B.P. Sinha: *The Decline of the Kingdom of Magadha*, Patna, 1954. The coins assigned by Sinha to this Candragupta III included one coin that is presently under discussion and also many others that are now regarded as belonging to later rulers.

it seems that a more logical conclusion would be that these must be the coins of Purugupta, a point to which we will return.

In addition to the Archer type coins, two coins of the Horseman type for this king are also known and are illustrated in Figure 5. The coins carry a reverse legend not seen on any coins of Candragupta II: *śrīrajitavikrama*.⁶² This is similar to the normal *ajitavikrama* seen on coins of Candragupta II, but the addition of the word *śrī* makes it quite distinct. Further, although the complete obverse legend is not visible on the coins, we can see that it reads in part *śrī candragupta ... jayati divam*. This legend is also never seen on coins of Candragupta II. Further still, the reverse design features the goddess seated left on a rough platform (as opposed to the decorated stool always seen on coins of Candragupta II) with a peacock in the left field. No peacock was ever featured on a coin of Candragupta II, although it is often seen on Horseman coins of Kumāragupta. All these factors suggest that these two coins were not issues of Candragupta I. Finally, the weights of the coins, 8.39 gm. and 8.40 gm. make it quite apparent that these coins were issued shortly after the reign of Kumāragupta. The weights agree with the weights seen on the Archer type coins with crescent and *cakra* symbols; thus these coins fit in quite clearly with the coins of Candragupta III. And they add a strong new piece of evidence to suggest that Candragupta III ruled immediately after Kumāragupta and started issuing coins before Skandagupta.



Figure 5: Horseman Coins of Candragupta III⁶³

The argument to identify Candragupta III with Purugupta

The previous section makes it quite clear that the coins of the king being called Candragupta III were issued immediately following the death of Kumāragupta. This was certainly the conclusion of Raven, whose detailed study of these coins was the most comprehensive up to that time. Raven concluded that the coins were issued after the death of Kumāragupta and before the ascension of Skandagupta, dating them to c. 450-455. Nisar Ahmad, on the other hand, divided the coins into two groups, arguing that the lighter coins (the Crescent and Cakra varieties) were issued between Kumāragupta and Skandagupta, while the heavier Altar coins were issued after the reign of Skandagupta. I have argued that this view is untenable because the coins clearly constitute an unbroken series. But I have also argued that Ahmad's view that the Altar coins do not seem to pre-date the reign of Skandagupta can be accommodated

⁶² This is a rendition of *śrīh ajitavikrama* under the rules of *saṃdhi*. I am indebted to Shailen Bhandare on this point.

⁶³ From Table 6 in Tandon, "Horseman Coins of Candragupta III," *op. cit.*

if we allow for the possibility that Candragupta III and Skandagupta may have issued coins *in parallel*. Most authors have tried to fit the coins into a chronological sequence and then the fact that both Skandagupta and Candragupta III issued coins in both a dinar and a *suvarṇa* standard creates a problem. This could be resolved if we allow for the coins to be issued at the same time, perhaps in different places. In the scenario I propose, Candragupta III started issuing coins (the Sun variety) immediately after the death of his father Kumāragupta and then issued the Crescent and Cakra coins, in that order. At some point during this period, Skandagupta started issuing coins as well, perhaps in the western part of the empire, even while Candragupta III continued to issue coins, perhaps in the east. Subsequently, both kings moved to a *suvarṇa* standard, which is the time when at least some of Candragupta III's Altar coins were issued. In his analysis of the Junāgaḍh inscription, Willis had concluded that "Skandagupta made peace with his legitimate half-brother Purugupta,"⁶⁴ and perhaps this "peace" included an understanding that each king could have his own sphere of influence.

So who was Candragupta III? The most logical identification would be that he was a son of Kumāragupta, and this is as far as most authors go. We have already seen the argument that Skandagupta was in all likelihood not a legitimate son of Kumāragupta and therefore was not the natural heir of his father. The natural heir would have been a son with the principal queen. The only queen of Kumāragupta who we know of was the *mahādevī* Anantadevī and the only son of the *mahādevī* Anantadevī that we know of was Purugupta. Therefore it seems that the most natural conclusion would be that Candragupta III was none other than Purugupta. We know that Purugupta was a *maharājadhira* and that at least five of his descendants sat on the Gupta throne. It is therefore logical that he would have issued coins, but so far none of his coins have been identified. The coins of Candragupta III were issued at precisely the time when Purugupta, if he was the natural heir of his father, would have ruled. We have no information of any other son of Kumāragupta. The logical answer to this puzzle is that Candragupta III and Purugupta were one and the same person. The alternative would be to posit that Candragupta III was an otherwise unknown son of Kumāragupta and that Purugupta, although all the evidence indicates that he sat on the throne, did not issue coins, since at this point there are no other candidate coins to be assigned to him. It seems unlikely that both these things could be true: that a king of the Guptas who issued six different varieties of coins left no other trace of his existence, *and* that another king of the Guptas, five of whose descendants occupied the throne and left ample evidence of their forebear, issued no coins. We have a coin series with no king and a king with no coin series, both at precisely the same time ... surely they belong together.

Raven had posited the existence of a Candragupta III different from Purugupta because she believed the theory that the coins of Prakāśāditya were issued by Purugupta. But now that we know that Prakāśāditya was actually the Hūṇa king Toramāṇa, we can safely eliminate this theory. We are then back to the question of which coins would be those of Purugupta. Again, the logical answer would be that the coins of the so-called Candragupta III are in fact those of Purugupta.

Despite the logical nature of this argument, it is still speculative, although less so than the theory that Prakāśāditya and Purugupta were the same, a theory that has enjoyed considerable popularity over the years. The dating of the Candragupta III coins fits much more precisely with

⁶⁴ Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

the requirements we would have for the coins of Purugupta than do the coins of Prakāśāditya. The fact that two coins of Candragupta III were in the Bayana hoard is particularly telling in this connection. Nevertheless, doubters of this identification may ask why Purugupta's coins do not feature the name *puru* on them, substituting rather the name *candra* under the king's arm and the epithet *śrī vikrama* on the reverse.

To these doubts, I have no direct answer, but can provide evidence that suggests that Purugupta was indeed known as Candragupta and did employ the epithet *vikramāditya*. The latter detail we have in fact already seen earlier when discussing Hoernle's theory that Skandagupta and Purugupta were the same person. Although the overall argument was rejected, a part of the argument that was valid was that the evidence of Paramārtha's *The Life of Vasubandhu* is that the father of Bālāditya (i.e. of Narasiṃhagupta) was known as Vikramāditya. And we know from a Nālandā clay sealing that Narasiṃhagupta was the son of Purugupta. Thus Purugupta was known as Vikramāditya and this would account for the epithet *śrī vikrama* on the reverse of Candragupta III coins, assuming they are the coins of Purugupta.

How about the name *candra* seen on the obverse of these coins? There is one piece of evidence that might support the idea that Purugupta was also known as Candragupta. Allan points to a couplet from the *Kāvyaḷaṅkārasūtravṛtti* of Vāmana which refers to a son of Candragupta being the support of a great sage:⁶⁵

So 'yam samprati candraguptatanayaś candraprakāśo

Jāto bhūpatir āsrayaḥ kṛtadhiyām diṣṭyā kṛtārthaśramaḥ.

Allan argues that the sage being referred to is Vasubandhu and assumes that the son of Candragupta being identified must be Kumāragupta.⁶⁶ But there is no evidence that Kumāragupta was ever the student of a great sage. And identifying the son as Kumāragupta is incompatible with Takakusu's dating of Vasubandhu to 420-500.⁶⁷ Since Kumāragupta reigned c. 415-450, he could not have been the patron to whom Vāmana is referring. It is worth noting in this connection that Takakusu's dating of Vasubandhu is in fact the earliest of any estimate; both Max Müller and M. Sylvain Lévi dated him in the sixth century, which would render the identification of his patron as Kumāragupta even more problematic.⁶⁸ An alternative interpretation of the couplet is that the *tanaya* being mentioned was Narasiṃhagupta Bālāditya. We know from the testimony of Paramārtha that Narasiṃhagupta was a student of Vasubandhu, and that, when he became king, he invited the sage to his capital and became his special patron. Thus it seems quite plausible that Vāmana was referring to Narasiṃhagupta in his couplet and that therefore the father Candragupta who is mentioned in it was none other than Purugupta, the father of Narasiṃhagupta.⁶⁹ This would account for the name *candra* seen on the obverse of the coins of Candragupta III/Purugupta.

⁶⁵ Allan, *op. cit.*, pp. xliii-xliv, fn 3.

⁶⁶ There is considerable debate around the interpretation of this passage. For a review of the various opinions, see Gupta: *The Imperial Guptas*, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-148.

⁶⁷ J. Takakusu: "A Study of Paramārtha's Life of Vasu-Bandhu; and the Date of Vasu-Bandhu," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1905, p. 43.

⁶⁸ See the discussion in Takakusu, *ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

⁶⁹ One other small tidbit that is worth noting is that several authors have read the name of Purugupta's queen on the Nālanda clay sealings as Candradevī. If Purugupta adopted the name Candragupta, might his queen have adopted the name Candradevī? This may simply be a coincidence, but nevertheless this is a detail worth noting.

Why did Purugupta adopt the name Candragupta? In a sense, this question requires no answer, because kings routinely adopted names that would enhance their prestige. Just as his grandfather Candragupta II had adopted the name of *his* grandfather Candragupta I, Purugupta may have wanted to keep the family tradition alive. One of his sons was known as Kumāragupta like his grandfather. So something of a pattern was developing and the adoption of the name may have simply been part of that. It may also have been the case that, although there was no direct confrontation between Purugupta and Skandagupta, the former may have felt somewhat threatened by his warrior half-brother. Purugupta was perhaps a gentle soul, interested more in philosophy than war, engaging with the Buddhist sage Vasubandhu and pushing his son Narasiṃhagupta in the same direction. He may have felt the need to wrap himself in the mantle of his illustrious grandfather to emphasize his right of succession to the throne.

We can also then ask a follow-up question: why did Purugupta's descendants start calling him Purugupta rather than his adopted name of Candragupta? This also has no simple answer. It could have been simply to distinguish him from the two earlier Candraguptas. Or it may have been used to emphasize the rights of his descendants. The name *Puru* figures prominently in historical legend: Puru was an ancestor of King Bharat, after whom *Bhārat-varṣa* is named, and was therefore an ancestor of the famous Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas of the *Mahābhārata*. Purugupta's descendants may have felt this name emphasized their royal ancestry and claim to the throne.

By no means can I claim to have proven that Candragupta III was the same as Purugupta. However, this theory seems the most plausible way to attribute the coins of the king who is being called Candragupta III. The dating of the coins fits perfectly. The using of the name *candra* and the epithet *śrī vikrama* have also received plausible support. Purugupta would finally be assigned a coinage as has long been sought by the numismatic community. And the logjam of trying to fit many kings into a short period after the death of Skandagupta is somewhat relieved by dating Purugupta as commencing his reign *before* Skandagupta. I believe that this is the strongest case that has yet been made to discover the coins of Purugupta.