

THE RHINOCEROS-SLAYER TYPE OF KUMĀRAGUPTA I AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

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In *JNSI*, Vol. XLIII, Pt. I, 1981, pp. 67ff. a note on the rhinoceros-slayer type gold coins of Kumāragupta I is published. The author of this note has suggested that Kumāragupta was in occupation of Assam which indirectly suggests that the issue of this type by the king refers to his conquest or re-conquest of the Assam region. Earlier M.M. Nagar¹ suggested, for the first time that Assam was included in the vast kingdom of Kumāragupta I where he hunted these animals. Elsewhere the author suggests in the same note that Kumāragupta's kingdom included both Kathiawar and Assam and he may have visited these parts of his empire to hunt lions and rhinoceroses and later he commemorated these expeditions through the issue of his coins.

Nagar was supported by P.J. Chinmulgund.² The view that these coins refer to the conquests of Kumāragupta and other Gupta kings later came to be criticised by some scholars.³ We however feel that there is no reason to deduce any political or military conclusions from these coin-types of Kumāragupta. S.V. Sohoni⁴ has also discussed the rhinoceros slayer type and concluded that Kumāragupta is represented here as *Śringahartā*. A cup made up of rhino horn was required at the *Śrādha* ceremony to offer libations. Thus Sohoni believed that the type has a religious significance. This view again has been examined at length⁵ and it is pointed out that the type is a *mṛigaya* or hunting type. In yet another paper⁶ on the *Mṛigayā* type it is suggested that these coins indicate the love of these kings for the big game and nothing more.

The question as to where Kumāragupta hunted these animals is also discussed in these papers. Sohoni held that these were hunted in the

1. *JNSI* XI, Pt. I, 1949, p. 8. -
2. *Ibid*, XVII, Pt. II, pp. 105-06. -
3. *Ibid*, XXIV, p. 152 ff.
4. *Ibid*, XVIII, pt. II, p. 178 ff. -
5. *Ibid*, XXV, pt. II, p. 29 ff. -
6. *Ibid*, XXIV, p. 152 ff.

Chaitwan area of Nepal, close to Vaiśālī. This was more convenient for Kumārāgupta than the distant region of Assam. In the paper on the Mṛigayā types of the Gupta's it is suggested that the Guptas maintained forest preserves near their capital and hunted wild animals in them. This inference has been made on the basis of textual evidence.

The present habitat of the rhino need not be taken to show that Kumārāgupta went to a particular region to hunt these animals. S. H. Prater¹ suggests that formerly 'the rhino was extensively distributed in the Indian peninsula'. D. C. Sircar also suggests on the authority of Al-Biruni that "the gaṇḍā exists in large numbers in India, more particularly about the Ganges". If the rhino was available in the valley of the Gaṅgā during the time of Al-Biruni it must have been available in this region during the Gupta period as well. Therefore, the rhinoceros-slayer type can not be associated with the conquest or reconquest of Assam by Kumārāgupta I.

Besides, there is no other evidence to suggest Kumārāgupta's rule over the valley of the Brahmaputra. There is only one specific mention of Assam in the Allahabad pillar inscription which refers to Samatāṭa, Davāka and Kāmarūpa as frontier kingdoms. The inclusion of Samatāṭa in the list of frontier kingdoms suggests that even the whole of Bengal was not included in Samudragupta's kingdom.

1. *The Book of Indian Animals*, p. 191 ff.
2. *JNSI*, XXVIII, pt. II, pp. 211-13.