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A RHINOCEROS SLAYER TYPE COIN OF KUMĀRAGUPTA I

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The Provincial Museum, Lucknow, has been singularly fortunate in purchasing recently an exceedingly rare type of coin of Kumāragupta I (415-455 A.D.), son of the great Gupta Emperor Chandragupta II, Vikramāditya. This coin is said to have been originally found in Khairabad (District Sitapur) and sold in Lucknow market by a bullion dealer for 500/- It subsequently came into the possession of Lala Nanak Chand Kapoor, a bullion-broker, from whom it was purchased for the Provincial Museum Lucknow, through my efforts. The coin weighs 124 grains, contains 80 per cent pure gold and measures .72" in diameter.

The coin which is enlarged on the plate to 1.5 size (Pl. III, 7), is of the Rhinoceros-slayer type and represents on its obverse Emperor Kumāragupta wearing a buttoned coat, trousers and jewellery and riding a fully caparisoned horse. He is leaning forward to hit a rhinoceros with a sword, which he holds in the right hand drawn behind. The rhinoceros bravely stands at bay, turning back its head to attack the king. The animal is beautifully delineated, with unicorn on the head, left eye, both the ears and circular scales over the body, all being very artistically portrayed. On the margin is the legend in the usual Gupta Brāhmī script and Sanskrit language running thus: (Bharṭa-khadga-trātā Kumāragupta vijayatyā (niś'am) i.e. 'Ever victorious is the Lord Kumāragupta who is *khadga-trātā*, i.e. a protector by the sword (*khadgena-trātā*) from the rhinoceros (*khadgebhyas-trātā*); letters *Kumāragupta* are fairly distinct between I and III, though partly truncated (Pl. III, 7).

The reverse of the coin shows Goddess Gaṅgā standing on her vehicle crocodile and behind her a female attendant holding parasol over her head. The legend on this side of the coin runs as: *Sri Mahendrakhadga*, i.e. 'Sri Mahendra, the swordsman or Sri Mahendra, the slayer of Rhinoceros'. It is significant to note the pun on the word "*khadga*" in

[1. The meaning of this enigmatic expression is difficult to make out. A. S. A.]

both the legends, which means in Sanskrit a "sword" as well as a 'rhinoceros'.

Pl. III '7.

The portrayal of rhinoceros on the coin, illustrated here, is very important as it suggests that nearly 1500 years ago this animal was very frequently met with in Āryāvartta, although it has since become entirely extinct from here. Or alternatively it may suggest that Assam (ancient *Kāmarūpa*),—the marshy jungles of which are even today the abode of rhinoceroses,—was included in the vast empire of Kumāragupta I and that sometime during his life-time the king had visited the place and hunted there these wild and hefty animals. The latter view, however, appears more plausible, as it is supported by similar coin types of other Imperial Gupta Emperors, e.g., the tiger-slayer types of Samudragupta, marking his conquest of East Bengal and Assam (*Samatata-Varāha-Kāmarūpa*) areas, where alone the tigers are found and the lion-slayer type of Chandragupta II commemorating his conquest of Kathiawar—the only place where lions are found in India. We know from other sources that Kumāragupta I inherited a vast empire from his father Chandragupta II, which included both Kathiawar and Assam, and it is very probable that he might have visited both these parts of his empire, hunted lions and rhinoceroses and perpetuated these exploits on his coins.

The recent Bayana hoard found in Bharatpur State (Matsya Union) has brought to light four such coins of this date, but they are still in private custody of His Highness the Maharaja forming his personal property. Our coin is, therefore, the first specimen of its kind which is displayed in a public institution and can be easily seen by numismatists desirous of studying or examining it. Besides, it is easily the best of all the specimens of this type so far available on account of its being very well-preserved.

1. Kathiawar was not included in the Empire of Samudragupta and hence the absence of Lion-slayer type in his coinage.
2. Possibly the conquest of Western India kept the king engaged for long and as such he could not find time to visit the eastern part of his empire; and hence the absence of Tiger-slayer type in his coinage.
3. *J. N. S. I.* Vol. VIII. Pt. II. Dec. 1946. p. 183.
4. Since writing these pages it has been learnt that quite recently the Bharat Kala Bhawan, Banaras, has secured one of the above four coins of rhinoceros-slayer type from the Bayana hoard for its cabinet.