

Ramagupta — did he exist?

SEM - I
CC - 3T

Many years ago, three passages of a lost play, the Devi-Chandragupta or Vishakhadatta (generally identified with the play wrote Vishakhadatta), were found in a manuscript of Bhoja's Shringara-prakash, while six passages were found in a manuscript of Ramachandra and Gunachandra's Natya-darpana. Taken together, these passages tell the following story:

There was a King named Ramagupta, whose Kingdom was invaded by a powerful Shaka King. On the advice of his minister, instead of facing the invader, Ramagupta bought peace by agreeing to hand over his queen Dhruvadevi to the enemy. The King's younger brother Kumara was incensed at this dishonourable capitulation. He entered the Shaka camp disguised as Dhruvadevi and killed the enemy king. Later he killed his brother as well and married his sister-in-law. There are reverberations of these dramatic events in later texts such as Bana Bhatta's Harshacharita and Shankaraya's commentary on this text. An 11th century Persian work called the Majma'at-ut Tawarikh by Abul Hasan Ali offers the additional information that Chandragupta's killing of the Shaka King increased his popularity among his subjects, that this made Ramagupta jealous, and that Chandragupta pretended to be insane prior to killing his brother. Allusions to these sensational events in 9th/10th century Rashtrakuta inscriptions indicate that their memory lingered for a very long time.

Certain coins found at Baryana in Rajasthan have a legend that has been read as 'Kacha' or 'Rama'. Subsequently, copper coins that can definitely be assigned to Ramagupta were found at Bhilse in

central India, These bore the garuda emblem and were similar to Chandragupta's coins in style, fabric, and weight standard. Further, three images of Jain tirthankaras found at Durjanpura near Vidisha in central India have inscriptions recording their installation by maharajadhiraja Ramagupta. There is a view that this represents a later Gupta King, but many historians see this as clinching evidence of the historicity of a brother of Chandragupta II ~~was~~ named Ramagupta. Coins and inscriptions thus seem to support the story of the Devi-Chandragupta.

Gupta inscriptions indicate that Chandragupta had a wife named Dhruvadevi and had children by her, but do not mention Ramagupta at all. This is not all that surprising, as the genealogies mention only those kings who came in the direct line of succession. Since the succession passed to Chandragupta and his sons, Ramagupta is ignored. Another example of this is the case of the later king Skandagupta, after whose ~~own~~ reign the succession passed to the descendants of his brother Purugupta. Hence, Skandagupta is not mentioned in the genealogies in his successor's inscriptions.