The Rāmagrāma Stūpa and the Relics of the Buddha

A Thesis

Submitted to
Kathmandu University Centre for Buddhist Studies
At Rangjung Yeshe Institute

in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN BUDDHIST STUDIES

by

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Kathmandu, Nepal
August 2023
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Bibliography
Abstract

The Stūpa of Rāmagrāma was one of the most important earliest known pilgrimage sites of Buddhism. It is the only stūpa that still exists since Buddha’s time that has his relics enshrined within it. Since the last documented visit to Rāmagrāma by Xuanzang in the seventh century CE, it had disappeared from common knowledge, until being re-identified only in the end of the nineteenth century. This site, situated on an ancient Buddhist pilgrimage trail, can be easily visited nowadays in the Tarai region of Nepal. The Buddha is said to have explained that visiting the places associated with his own biography carry great blessings. I believe that bringing the Rāmagrāma Stūpa back to public view is of highest relevance.
Introduction

The Buddha’s relics were divided once after his parinirvāna, establishing the first stūpas, and again, to a much greater extent, later on by King Aśoka. The relics that were enshrined in the Rāmagrāma Stūpa though were spared, and are presumed to still be there. It is believed that any place the Buddha was present physically at is imbued with his presence and thus is considered a relic, and vice versa, the sites enshrining his relics, such as Rāmagrāma, still imbue Buddha’s presence.

This work takes into account all the primary textual sources mentioning the Rāmagrāma Stūpa, from roughly the fifth century BCE till the seventh century CE. After over twelve-hundred years of oblivion, the site of old was rediscovered, while archaeological examining of it had been conducted only from the 1960s onwards. This discussion follows a general historical sequence and includes among other related topics, a discussion of what relics and stūpas meant and represented in early Buddhism, as well as the process of ‘sacralization’ of the lands where the relic-stūpas were set, and the role nāgas played in doing so.

Chapter Overview

This work traces the long history of Stūpa of Rāmagrāma from its origins up to the present. The first chapter investigates the geographical boundaries of the ancient land of the Koliyas, where the stūpa is situated, the genealogical origins of the Buddha, along with the occasions he visited Koliya, before and after enlightenment, demonstrating his strong connection to this land. The second chapter overviews the

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1 Pāli: parinibbāna.
2 The first mention of pilgrimage sites in the Buddhist religion is mentioned in the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, where the Buddha extolls the merit of visiting the four-most sites, associated with his biography: where he was born, got enlightened, first taught the Dharma and where he finally passed away into parinirvāṇa. Later, this list got extended to eight sites, including four more sites of great teachings and events, and the eight stūpas enshrining the Buddha’s relics. Two centuries later, during the reign of King Aśoka, these sites became well-known, while other sites were added, which are included in a thirty-two sites list, associated with Buddha’s biography, that Aśoka pilgrimed to. Also mentioned are the fourteen stops the Buddha made during his last journey. These sites were all marked by Aśoka, and most of them were visited and identified by the famous Chinese Travelers Faxian and Xuanzang in the fourth and seventh centuries respectively. By the nineteenth century though, most of these sites had been long forgotten, and a renewed interest in the Buddha and his teachings begun in earnest, along with the identification of some of these sites, following the Chinese Travelers’ itineraries.
geographical, historical and political circumstances of the greater Middle Land, that was the ‘field’ in which the Buddha lived and his teachings, the Dharma, were nurtured. The Koliyas received their share of Buddha’s relics after his parinirvāṇa in Kuśinagara. The third chapter concerns the Buddha’s funeral, highlighting the production of his relics, and their subsequent division. Two-hundred years later, King Aśoka visited Rāmagrāma on a mission to collect and distribute Buddha’s relics throughout Greater India, as a conduit for spreading the Buddha’s teaching far and wide. Out of the original eight relic stūpas, only Rāmagrāma was not disturbed. The fourth chapter concerns King Aśoka’s pilgrimage to the sites of Buddha’s biography and in particular his visit to Rāmagrāma. The significance of relics, their classifications and their enshrinement in stūpas, are explained in chapter five. The Rāmagrāma Stūpa was an important pilgrimage site in the following centuries, as attested with the visits of Faxian and Xuanzang in the fourth and seventh centuries respectively. These well-known Chinese Travelers left documents of their visits, mentioning that the surrounding area was already in a state of desolation. The routes Faxian and Xuanzang took to Rāmagrāma and beyond it, the history of Buddhism in India at the time, as well as other well-known pilgrims in the vicinity in Medieval Times, are narrated in the sixth chapter. It was only in the end of the nineteenth century, with the renewed interest of antiquarians, orientalists and archaeologists that the Rāmagrāma Stūpa re-emerges into public view, along with the discoveries of the nearby sites of Lumbinī and Kapilavastu in Modern Nepal. The last chapter describes the land of the Tarai and the Tharu people who inhabited it since ancient times. Furthermore, the events that led to the identification of Rāmagrāma by William Hoey and a summary of the archaeological investigation done on the site in 1997 by Sukra Sagar Shrestha are included as well. The appendixes include important related details such as the dating of the Buddha with the languages used at his time, the Śramaṇa Movement,

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3 Pāli: Kusināra. In modern times this site is known as Kushinagar.
4 “Greater India” means here the territories that the Mauryan Empire had controlled. These include vast parts of today’s Pakistan and Afghanistan in the west, Orissa (Kalinga) in the east and large swaths of South India.
5 Also called “Terai”.

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Buddha’s last journey, and the Chinese Travelers reports on Rāmagrāma. This well over two and a half millennia history of the Rāmagrāma Stūpa is thus narrated here in a sequential manner as much as possible, while bringing to light various related topics I deemed important for this discussion.

Furthermore, the history of the Rāmagrāma Stūpa serves here as a center from which the story of the Buddha, his teachings and the history of Buddhism in India in general, are viewed as its surroundings.

Sources: Texts, Inscriptions, Foreign Travelogues and Archaeological Findings

There are four categories of primary sources of knowledge about early Buddhism. These are: texts, inscriptions, foreign travelogues and archaeological findings.\(^6\) These sources supplement each other and are examined individually throughout this work. The texts used here are primarily *sūtras*\(^7\) that narrate the life of the Buddha. Despite being transmitted orally for up to four hundred years before being set into writing, these *sūtras* are considered quite reliable,\(^8\) and are corroborated with texts of other religions, such as those of the Jains.\(^9\) Most of the texts used here are from the Pāli, but Sanskrit texts are studied as well, even though in some cases they might have less relevant information about the historical time of the Buddha.\(^10\) Examined closely are the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*,\(^11\) which describes the last days of the Buddha and his funeral, and the *Aśokāvadāna*, an important early Sanskrit scripture that narrates Aśoka’s deeds. King Aśoka left many inscriptions all over Greater India, telling us something about the life, traditions and law in India of three hundred BCE. In the nineteenth century, these re-discovered inscriptions helped to decipher the Brāhmī script and understand the history of the Mauryan Empire. The

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\(^{7}\) Pāli: *sutta*.

\(^{8}\) Thus these texts have two dates: when they were written down and the period on which they write about. For example: the *Rig Veda* was written down in the beginning to the mid-first millennium BC at the earliest, and refer to events that taking place a millennium previously (Fogelin, 2015, p. 12)


\(^{10}\) Law, B.N. (1933-34) *Geographical Data from Sanskrit Buddhist Literature*. Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Vol. 15, No. 1/2, pp. 1-38. JSTOR, p. 3. Though it seems that this view is an old scholarly one regarding the Pāli language as being the oldest language used for the Buddhist scriptures. It might well be connected to the fact that Pāli Buddhism was encountered by the West first.

\(^{11}\) Pāli: *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*. 
chapter on relics and stūpas gathers information from various texts, archaeological findings and inscriptions. The foreign travelers Faxian and Xuanzang left a wealth of information about Medieval India. Their respective travelogues helped the nineteenth century British Archaeologists to discover many sites of the Buddha, long forgotten, one of them being Rāmagrāma. The last chapter includes a summery of the archaeological discoveries in Rāmagrāma that demonstrate its great antiquity, as compared to other, old and well-known stūpas. Each of the proceeding seven chapters will relate its own primary and secondary sources.

A Note on Spelling and the Various Names of the Buddha

For the names of places and people I chose to use mainly the Sanskrit forms, but the Pāli version will be noted at its first mention. Common words such as Dharma, Sangha and nirvāṇa will be used throughout in their most common form, which is usually Sanskrit. The first chapter explains the origins of the names of Buddha’s paternal tribe, the Śākya (Pāli: Sakya) and that of his maternal side, the Koliya. The republics were to the most part named after their respective ruling nobility, for example the Śākyans were the nobles of Śākya.\(^\text{12}\) The historical Buddha is often referred to as Śākyamuni (sage of the Śākya people), who was born into the Gautama (Pāli: Gotama) clan.\(^\text{13}\) The social group of Śākya was larger than the Gautama clan, so that he is either referred to as Śākyamuni or as Gautama Buddha. His name up to leaving home was Siddhārtha (Pāli: Siddhattha), ‘He whose object has been attained’. After his enlightenment the Buddha is known either as the Buddha, ‘The Awakened One’, or as Tathāgata, ‘one who has arrived’.\(^\text{14}\) Other epithets used are the ‘Blessed One’, or Bhagavat and ‘The Conqueror’, or Jina.
Chapter One

The Land of Koliya and Siddhārtha’s Origins

“And the Koliyans of Rāmagāma heard likewise,
And they too sent an envoy with the demand:
‘The Blessed One was a warrior; we too are warriors.
We too are worthy of a share of the Blessed One’s bones.
We too will build a monument and hold a ceremony’

_Dīgha Nikāya II, 16_ ¹⁵

This quote, taken from the _Mahāparinibbāna Sutta_, introduces us to the Koliyan people and their capital of Rāmagrāma, who are the fifth in turn to demand a share of Buddha’s relics, after his_ Parinirvāṇa in Kuśinagara_. They claimed to be warriors too, like the Buddha, belonging to the same caste or family as that of the Buddha. The Koliyans were one out of eight recipients of Buddha’s relics, all pledging to build a stūpa on their received share of the relics and to celebrate them. ¹⁶ The Koliya representatives, on behalf of their local rāja, took their share of Buddha's relics and enshrined them in their home land at Rāmagrāma, their capital, situated on the northern fringes of the Middle Land. ¹⁷ Today, the ancient Koliya territory lies mostly within the borders of modern Nepal. This chapter will chart the probable geographical boundaries of the Koliya land of old as much as can be ascertained from today’s landscape, followed by the genealogical origins of the Koliya people, who are tightly bound to the Śākyans. Siddhārtha ¹⁸ spent some of his early years in Koliya, and when deciding to leave home and

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¹⁶ Sanskrit name, Pāli: Rāmagāma, the term “stūpa” and what it denotes will be elaborated upon in the next chapters.

¹⁷ The next chapter will define the ‘Middle Land’ in depth.

¹⁸ Pāli: Siddhattha. We shall use the Sanskrit name Siddhārtha as Buddha’s name up to his enlightenment.
become a śramaṇa, on the night of his departure, he rode from Kapilavastu through Koliya territory. After attaining enlightenment the Buddha again visited and taught in Koliya on more than one occasion, once even averting a war, as will be seen below. These points are highlighted here in order to demonstrate the Buddha’s strong connection to the Koliya tribe and their land, a connection that is still palpable these days, with his relics still eshrined in this land.

Large tracts of the land the Koliya tribe inhabited have been part of the Nepali Tarai region since 1816. The anthropology of the people inhabiting the Tarai region in general and in particular the ancient origins of the Tharu people, will be discussed in the last chapter. The sources that trace Siddhārtha’s genealogical roots below are mainly from Pāli Suttas, wherein the Buddha reminisced about his own childhood, while some sources are from Sanskrit Mahāyāna Sūtras, such as the Lalitavistara Sūtra. Details about the boundaries of the ancient Koliya land are from Sukra Sagar Shrestha’s archaeological report on Rāmagrāma and from my own travels and research in the vicinity.

**Location of the Rāmagrāma Stūpa and the Territory of the Koliya Tribe**

Situated in the Nawalparasi district of the Nepali Tarai area, the Rāmagrāma Stūpa stands at a height of 6.85 meters, at an altitude of 107 meters, the location being: 83”x 41’x 05” East Longitude and 27”x 29”x 55” North Longitude. The stūpa, locally known simply as Ramgram, is 5.3 kilometers away, in a south-easterly direction, from the Parasi market town, and a mere kilometer from the village of Deoria. The stūpa lies next to the Jharahi River, while on its other side is a small village called Ujjayini. The Rāmagrāma Stūpa is situated nine kilometers north of the Indian border town of Thuthibari, and close to fifty kilometers east of the Lumbinī grove. This stūpa is the only such structure found in the area at large.

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19 Pāli: samaṇa, a renunciate. This term is discussed in the next chapter and in appendix II.
20 These are the discourses of the Buddha as memorized and later written in the Pāli language. They were kept in Sri Lanka and later on in Burma and Thailand.
23 Or twenty-eight feet high. It is over sixty feet in diameter. More on the stūpa’s measurements in chapter seven.
its location and description fitting the itineraries of the medieval Chinese Travelers Faxian and Xuanzang, who visited this site on their route from Lumbinī to Kuśinagara, as we will learn in chapter six.

Nestled in the Siwalik Plains, the exact borders of the ancient Koliya tribe are difficult to ascertain precisely. In textual sources some of these borders are mentioned, such as the River Rohinī, but some areas need to be determined from existing landscapes, such as the Daune Hill and the Anoma River. Still, even though some of these places’ names remained or re-named, there are hardly any archaeological discoveries that can confirm them. We start with the southern part of the Koliyan area, which at Buddha’s time run deep into today’s India state of Uttar Pradesh, and bordered the Moriya Tribe on the south-east as well as the northern part of the Malla federacy in its south-west. This area is reported to have been a thick dense jungle.24 It is mentioned that on the fateful night when Siddhārtha left his home town of Kapilavastu, he and his charioteer Chandaka25 rode all night through the Śākya territory, crossing the Rohinī River into the Koliya area and then crossing the Anoma River and reaching further into Vṛji26 territory, to the south-east.27 The most probable site for the Anoma River is the area of today’s Triveni.28

24 The ancient Buddhist pilgrimage route, as traversed by Fa Xian and Xuanzang (the focus of chapter six) was in a west to east direction, from Śrāvasti to Kapilavatu, then Lumbini, Rāmagrāma, crossing the Anoma River to the renunciation site, and then south to Kuśinagara. Both Chinese Travelers mention a thick forest, more so Xuanzang, and perhaps from then on the jungle took over the few patches of cultivated land, so that by medieval times, from the eighth to the twelfth centuries, we notice that travelers going between India and Nepal, like Dharmasvamin, chose for the most part the more easterly route, in the area of ancient Mithila. By the early nineteenth century, at the time of the British-Nepal wars, the area was known to be infested with malaria. The ancient Koliya area that is within Nepali territory today, started to be inhabited and cultivated again from the mid-twentieth century. The Nepali government sent hill people, such as Tamangs, to occupy the Tarai, the reasoning being to demonstrate that this area is indeed ‘Nepal’. The Chitwan National Park, which today borders the east of ancient Koliya, is still a thick jungle to the most part nowadays.
25 Pāli: Channa. More about Chandaka’s fate is in the third chapter.
26 Pāli: Vajji.
27 Siddhārtha went first to Rājagṛha (Pāli: Rājagriha) in search for teachers and instructions. Initially he met there King Bimbisāra who, noticing Siddhārtha’s demeanor, proposed him to become a minister in Magadha. Siddhārtha of course declined this offer and continued his austerities.
28 More on Triveni: Situated about twenty-five kilometers south-west of the Rāmagrāma Stūpa, it is a definite ancient pilgrimage site, still active today. The modern Indian border is just across a bridge. On the further bank of the Narayani River, still within Nepali territory but approachable either by boat (impossible to cross in the rainy season) or from the Chitwan National Park side, there is a place said to be the Ashram (āśrama) of the Mahariṣī Vālmīki, author of the Rāmāyana. There is a very active cremation ground (śmaśāna) on the river bank (ghat/ghatā) in Triveni, serving a large area, as well as many Hindu temples. Also of interest in the vicinity, just three kilometers to the north-west, is Madar Baba, a Muslim pilgrimage site. Madar Baba was a Sunni Muslim saint of the fourteenth century, who lived here. There is a small mosque on this spot now. Annually,
As this current name suggests it is a confluence of three rivers, the Narayani being the main one of these.²⁹ It is not unlikely that the Narayani River, running from the Nepali Mountains in the north and southwards into India, is the Anoma River of old.³⁰ There used to be Aśokan Stūpas marking the spot of Siddhārtha’s self-renunciation on the south-eastern bank of the Anoma River.³¹ Faxian and Xuanzang noted these stūpas on their respective next stop after visiting Rāmagrāma. Nowadays though, these ancient stūpas are yet to be identified.³² Textual sources mention the Rohiṇī River to mark the boundary between the two ‘sister states’ of Śākya and Koliya. It is most probable that the Rohiṇī River, named so today, which is currently situated seventeen kilometers west of Parasi and twenty two kilometers east of Lumbinī, is the Rohiṇī of old, as these are reasonable distances for its location, having been reported to be situated between ancient Kapilavastu and Rāmagrāma.³³ Furthermore, it is mentioned that a dam was made on this river, serving the fields of both sides, the Śākyans and Koliyans. This led to a major conflict which the Buddha appeased. A large river bed is still discernible on the currently named Rohiṇī River.³⁴ It should be noted here that when Siddhārtha was born in Lumbinī, his mother Māyādevī³⁵ and her entourage were on their way to Koliya from Kapilavastu, to give birth in the maternal home, as was the custom in those days

³⁰ From Tarthang Rinpoche Group. 1994. Holy Places of the Buddha, Crystal Mirror Series, Vol. 9. Los Angeles, p. 33: Dharma Publications: The Lalitavistara Sūtra associates Anumaineya (Maneya), a place near Rāmagrāma, with the events that concluded Prince Siddhārtha’s home-departure. Traveling throughout the night, the Bodhisattva crossed the land of Śākyas, the land of Krodyas (Koliya), and the land of Mallas, arriving at day break to Anumaineya. Aśoka is said to have built a stūpa there where the Bodhisattva removed his ornaments and bid his charioteer farewell, and another stūpa nearby where he cut his own hair.

³¹ This is where Siddhārtha told his old companion and charioteer, Chandaka, to take his horse back and tell his father of this departure. More of Chandaka’s fate in chapter three.

³² There is much speculation regarding these stūpa’s whereabouts. It will be discussed briefly in chapter six on the Chinese Travelers’ routes. These stūpas are included within the thirty-two sites Aśoka pilgrimed to, listed in chapter four.

³³ The Rohiṇī River was re-named as such recently, with a board on the main road running from Parasi to Bhairawa, and is named so on current maps. The other many rivers crossing the current main road are all relatively small, while the Rohiṇī has a huge river-bed. After Bhairahawa, when traveling west, there is another big river bed, which can also be a candidate for the Rohiṇī of old. There are numerous small rivers that criss-cross the east-west road, running in a general north to south direction.

³⁴ The rivers in this whole area swell in the summers and most probably changed their courses frequently in the last two thousand five hundred years.

³⁵ Māyādevī was said to be named so due to her resemblance to the goddess (Allen, Charles. 2010. p. 1)
(and still is today). It is most probable that after being born, the party continued to Koliya and only later came back to Kapilavastu. In any case, it is evident that the young Siddhārtha spend large periods of his childhood in his maternal home.

To the northern border of ancient Koliya is the Mahābhārat Range, rising from about fifteen kilometers north of Rāmagrāma. This range of hills still forms a formidable geographical boundary, as they descend steeply into the Tarai. A steep part of this range, in a direct north-eastern direction from Koliya, is the Daune Hill, said to be Māyādevī’s retreat site. It can be visited easily nowadays, marked on the side of a trail that runs up to the Daune Devī temple from the Daune bus stop on the modern east-west highway.36

There are archeological findings in what is called today the village of Devdaha, which is situated thirty three kilometers further to the west on the same highway. Due to finding there a few ancient statues and brick walls, it was presumed, and still is, to be the old Koliyan capital. Sukra Sagar Shrestha of the Department of Archaeology (DoA) postulated a better candidate for the Koliya capital, and that is Panditpur, which is situated in much closer proximity to Rāmagrāma (just nine kilometers to its north-west, as the crow flies), a distance corroborated with the Chinese Pilgrims’ reports. The modern Devdaha is twenty-five kilometers from Rāmagrāma, which might be a bit too far a place for people to worship daily.39

Furthermore, the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra mentions the Buddha advising that the stūpas housing his relics are to be constructed beside crossroads, not far from towns, for the easy access by worshipers.40

36 The Daune Hills stand at a height of 1033 meters above sea level, overlooking the Chitwan National Park. In the vicinity is the Daune Devi temple, a Śiva temple and a Buddhist Kagyu (Tib. bka' brgyud) nunnery.37

37 On the left hand side of this trail there are some market ancient remains that cannot be unidentified with certainty.38

38 Literally: “pond of the gods”, Devadaha, today called simply ‘Devdaha’, is in the modern Rupandehi District. A pond as well as several temples close by can be visited easily nowadays. Furthermore, from nearby Sunwal, about eleven kilometers to the north, there is a temple near a pond called “Mahalpokhari”; Pokhari is a pond in Nepali.39

39 Ven. Dhammika is also of the opinion that ancient Devdaha has yet to be identified (Dhammika, Ven. S. 1992. Middle Land, Middle Way: A Pilgrim’s Guide to the Buddha’s India. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, p. 38). Local people in Parasi and Panditpur also believe in this hypothesis and told me about the place that is called Devdaha today of being a “commercial name”, merely because of it being situated on the main highway.40

40 “So that passers-by could pause and pay their respects and by their veneration gain in understanding and merit” (Allen, 2010, p. 9). And yet Rāmagrāma is mentioned as the Koliyan Capital in the quote from the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra. This fact can be ascribed to the later historical rendering of the sūtra: the stūpa of Rāmagrāma was already built and named as such when the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra was written down.
It might be the case that the republics had not just one main capital, but a few inhabited central locations. Shrestha found in Panditpur bricks marking a large ancient settlement, and also the surviving name of the place (‘city of scholars’) might indicate just that. Presently there is a temple there of a goddess that is worshiped with elephants statues, similar to the one that is inside the Kapilavastu Archeological Site, as well as in other similar temples in the Tarai region, which are simply called ‘Māyādevī’. These signs of ancient goddess worship are eminent in the nearby vicinity; Rāmagrāma itself was also worshiped as a goddess site until 1960.

The area of the Koliya tribe, at times called Koliyangara (‘city of Koliya’), consisted of only six Janapada, or districts, making it a comparatively small ‘kingdom’. The six Janapadas were: Uttarakā, Karakpatha, Kundadhavana, Sajjancla, Haliddvasana (a village the Buddha visited later) and Devadaha. The land was (and still is) flat and fertile, due to the monsoon rains still lingering for some time (land Inundation). There are vast amounts of vegetation, wildlife and various plants, while the land yields a rich product. Even though the sources about the Buddha’s early years are replete with stories of palaces and marbled halls, it is more plausible that both the Śākyas and Koliyas lived off the land and used timber to build their houses. They harnessed the rivers flowing in their territories to water the rich alluvial soil for growing rice in paddy-fields; rice being their staple food. They also exported their rice making it the source of their riches. Water-buffaloes grazed along the edges of the wetlands and in the further forests.

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41 In Devdaha the old goddess statue that was found there is also called ‘Māyādevī’.
42 Up until the late 1950s there was a local tradition of sacrificing a pig every three years on this mound, in order to appease the local goddess Kotadevi. ‘kot’ means ‘fort’, so it is the ‘goddess of the fort’. The locals believed this sacrifice ensured plentiful harvests, and the protection of their domestic animals. The pig was bought with money from the residents of the nearby villages of Deoria and Ujjaini. In 1960 an old resident came back from a pilgrimage to the Jagannath temple (Puri, Orissa) and ordered the sacrifice to stop (Shrestha, Sukra Sagar. 2006. Ramagram Excavation. Ancient Nepal, Number 163, Dec. 2006, Ramagram Issue. Lalitpur: Sajha Prakashan, Pulchok) Also there is a Kāli temple, merely three Kilometers to the south-west of the Rāmagrāma Stūpa which is also worshiped with the same elephant figurines (Pahli Bhagawati), with the name ‘Kot’ in its full name. Another goddess temple called ‘Kothai’ is in the border town of Belahiya, five kilometers south of Bhairahawa. Elephant statues abound in temples all along the Tarai region.
43 Shrestha, 2006, p. 5
44 Shrestha, 2006, p. 6
45 Allen, 2010, p. 2
46 Shrestha, 2006, p. 3
of their lands, the Śākyas and Koliyas are said to have been hunters and that they could tame wild elephants.

The Genealogy of the Śākya and Koliya Clans

As we have seen, the Koliya and Śākya lived in close proximity, the Rohiṇī River separating their territories. It is most probable that the origins of these two tribes can be traced to migrations from the east, more than three thousand years ago, but this is difficult to ascertain with certainty.47 Although the Śākyas are said to have been from the warrior (kṣatriya) caste, they were not part of the Vedic caste system (varṇa), as they lived far removed from the Vedic heartland in the west. As a result of their isolation, the Śākya and Koliya tribes developed close endogamous ties, leading them further away from any sort of Vedic caste system.48 As the Śākyas and Koliyas most probably did not belong to the Aryan race which migrated from the west in search of better cultivated land, it seems they were rather jungle dwellers of the Gangetic Plains who were driven back towards the Himalayan foothills by the advancing ‘Aryavanshi’.49

We turn now to the respective genealogical roots of the Koliyans and Śākyans, which are strongly interrelated. Although the narrative below can be termed as a ‘legend’ or ‘myth’, it cannot be separated completely from historical records because these stories passed on orally through many generations, and furthermore there are no other accounts which pre-date the more historically accurate Buddha’s time. Thus we can term the stories below as “legendary history”.50 These stories are related in the various editions of the Dhammapada,51 the Jatakas,52 the Tripiṭaka,53 and in particular the Divyāvadāna.54 These narrations are also present in the Sanskrit Mahāyāna Lalitavistara Sūtra, the Sri Lankan Mahāvaṁsa and in various

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48 “The custom of endogamy is abhorred by all good Hindus” (Allen, 2010, p. 4)
49 Allen, 2010, p. 1
50 Shrestha, 2006, p. 2
51 Skt: Dharmapada. The original version of the Dhammapada is in the Khuddaka Nikāya, a division of the Pāli Canon
52 Birth stories of the Buddha.
53 Pāli: Tripiṭaka, the three baskets of teachings.
54 Its thirty eight āvadānas, or stories, include the Aśokāvadāna which will be discussed in chapter four.
places of the Tibetan Kangyur and Tengyur. All the above texts include the same names but with different pronunciations. In the Ambattha Sutta the Buddha traces the origins of his own Śākya clan to Kosala where there was a legendary king called Okkāka. Okkāka had nine children with his Queen Hasta, four sons and five daughters. Queen Hasta had died and so the king married Amba with whom he bore Jayantu. Due to inner intrigue, Jayantu was going to be the successor, so King Okkāka was forced to expel his eldest nine children. They made their abode on the flank of the Himalayas, beside a lotus-pond where there was a big grove of teak (sāka) trees. There they met the Rishi Kapila who instructed them to settle in that very place and name their new kingdom ‘Kapila-vastu’. Hearing of this, King Okkāka exclaimed with great joy: “they are strong as sāka trees! They are real Śākyans!” The name ‘Śākya’ was thus derived from the strength of the sāka trees that abound in the Kapilavastu area. In order to maintain the purity of their clan, the eldest sister, Priya, became the queen mother, while the four sons married their remaining four sisters. Each couple bore eight sons and eight daughters respectively. The Ambattha Sutta quotes the Buddha explaining these endogamous ties: “out of fear of contaminating the stock they cohabited with their own sisters”. The queen mother, Priya, then contracted a very contagious form of leprosy, and walked alone eastwards, where she resided in a cave. At the same time, King Rāma of Benaras also contracted leprosy so that he abdicated the throne and retired to a forest in order to die peacefully. He ate whatever grains and leaves could be found, and was miraculously healed from his

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55 Shrestha, 2006, p. 2
56 Shrestha, 2006, p. 3
57 This Ambattha Sutta mentions only the names of the four brothers: Okkāmukha, Karanḍu, Hatthinīya and Sīnipura.
58 This name varies: Jayantu in Nepal, Jantu in Sri Lanka and Jayant in India.
59 Shrestha, 2006, p. 3
60 Sāku or sāl (Shorea robusta) trees.
61 The Name of Kapilavastu might derive alternatively from a previous Buddha with the same name (Shrestha, 2006, p. 3)
62 Allen, 2010, p. 1. Interestingly, the first scholar in modern time to connect the Śākya to the sāl-tree was William Hoey, discoverer of Rāmagrāma Stūpa. In a letter to the JRAS (Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society), dated April, 1906, he wrote “The application of the word ‘sāka’ in Northern India is to the sāl-tree...the sāl-tree is also called Sāku throughout the districts and provinces bordering Nepal...The Nepal Tarai forests are essentially sāl-forests, and Śākya obviously means ‘the people of the sāl-forests’” (Allen, 2010, p. 275)
63 Walsh, 1997, p. 114
leprosy by eating the leaves of Kola trees (*Nauclea Cordifolia*)\(^{64}\) in that area. Nearby, a tiger approached Queen Priya, but left having heard her terror-stricken screams. King Rāma heard these screams too and located her. He then healed her leprosy similarly with the Kola tree leaves. They fell in love, married and decided to stay there. King Rāma’s son, on hearing what has happened, build a well-equipped city for his father on that spot, which was called variously as Rāmagrāma (King Rāma’s city), Koliyanagara (‘Koliya town’ after the healing Kola trees’ leaves), Byaghrapura (‘trails of tigers’) and Devadaha (the area had many ponds where gods were said to be bathing in).\(^{65}\) These names were used interchangeably. Rāma and Priya bore sixteen sets of twins, totaling thirty-two sons. Once they came to age, their mother thought of her four brothers in Kapilavastu with their thirty-two daughters. These matches were soon fixed, and from then on the custom of intermarriages between the Rāmagrāman Koliyans and the Kapilavastu Sākyans continued well into historical times, to Siddhārtha’s own close relatives.

Starting with Siddhārtha’s grandparents, in Kapilavastu King Sinhahanu married Kanchana, who was the sister of the Devadahan king, Anjana. Anjana in turn married Jasodhara, the sister of King Sinhahanu of Kapilavastu. King Anjana and Jasodhara had a son called Suprabuddha who fathered Yaśodharā,\(^{66}\) Devadatta\(^{67}\) and another son called Dandapani. Suprabuddha’s sisters were Māyādevī, Siddhārtha’s mother, and Prajāpatī, Siddhārtha’s step mother,\(^{68}\) while his wife (mother of Māyādevī and Prajāpatī) was Amrita, sister of King Śuddhodana, Siddhārtha’s father.\(^{69}\) The sisters Māyādevī and Prajāpatī both married King Śuddhodana who was the eldest of five sons born to King Sinhahanu and Queen Kanchana. These close matrimonial alliances between the Śākyans and the Koliyans must have resulted from their relative isolation, being surrounded by thick forests to their south and the steep mountain ranges to their north.

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\(^{64}\) Known as the kolan tree, the bark of it is still used for fevers. Named also as the koila tree (*Bauhinia purpurria*), known variously as Mountain Ebony, Orchid or Camel’s Foot (Allen, 2010, p. 2)

\(^{65}\) Shrestha, 2006, p. 4

\(^{66}\) Pāli: Yasodharā, Siddhārtha’s future wife.

\(^{67}\) Later notoriously known as the ‘villain’ in Buddha’s life story, he was thus both a cousin and brother in law to the Buddha.

\(^{68}\) She was later known as Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī. She nursed the young Siddhārtha and in later years became the first *Bhikkunī* (Skt: *Bhikṣunī*), or fully ordained nun.

\(^{69}\) Pāli: Suddhōdana.
This isolation also tells us about lesser Aryan culture trappings in this area, in particular these close ties of endogamy.

The Buddha in Koliya: From Birth to Renunciation and Later Visits as a Buddha

Seven days after giving birth in Lumbinī, Siddhārtha’s mother, Māyādevī, passed away and her sister, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, the second wife of King Śuddhodana, took care of him just as if he was her own son. It is stated that the young Siddhārtha visited his maternal home of Devadaha on quite a few occasions throughout his childhood and adulthood, such that he clearly knew the territory well. On the night of his departure, when said to be twenty-nine years old, Siddhārtha left from Kapilavastu’s eastern gate, and then through the land of Koliya at great speed. After becoming a Buddha, he visited Koliya again, teaching the Dharma seven years after his enlightenment, in Haliddavasana, one of the districts of Koliyangara. This visit to Koliya happened on the same tour when the Buddha visited his own clan, the Śākyas.

Kudan, an archaeological site six kilometers south of Kapilavastu, is the scene of Buddha’s first visit to his hometown, where he met his father and ordained his son Rāhula. There is a stūpa marking the spot of Rāhula’s ordination on the left side when entering this site. Lastly, a major event is told in a number of sūtras, about the Buddha settling a heated dispute about irrigation water on the River Rohinī between the Śākyas and Koliya clans. Both sides had dammed the Rohinī to provide water for their own crops and while the summer progressed it became clear there would not be enough water for everyone. The dispute developed into arguments, and then to blows and insults about the origins of each clan. Infuriated after

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70 It might be that is was due to Siddhārtha’s intimate familiarity with the terrain.
71 This is the ancient site of Nyigrodharama (or Nikrodharam).
72 Modern Tilaurakot is next to Kapilavastu in Nepal. In Tilaurakot there is a mound, now a Śiva temple, which might have been built on an Aśokan pillar. Kudan can be easily visited today on the road that runs south of Tilaurakot to the border town of Khunwa.
74 Literally: ‘Obstacle’. Rāhula was an infant when the Buddha left home for his search.
75 A Śiva temple was built on this mound.
76 Such as in the Dhammapada commentary and in the mahābuddhavaṃsa.
hearing these insults, the respective nobles of the Śākya and Koliya sent their armed forces over. Seeing that a war is going to ensue, which would destroy both his kinsmen, the Buddha is said to have arrived immediately at the scene.\textsuperscript{77} Asking what was the cause of the dispute; the army generals could not answer and further asking the laborers around, they realized it started because of the water irrigation. The Buddha then asked the chieftains: “What is the value of water?”, “Not much” they answered. “And what is the value of a warrior?” the Buddha further asked and the answer was “A warrior, Revered One, is beyond price”. The Buddha finally exclaimed “It is not right that for a little water you would kill warriors which are beyond price”. The armies fell silent and dispersed.\textsuperscript{78} The next chapter will relate the wider picture of the Middle Land, where the Buddha meditated, traveled and taught for forty-five years.

\textsuperscript{77} The Buddha was in Śrāvastī, and is said to have arrived on the scene miraculously.

Chapter Two

The Middle Land: Geographical Settings with Historical and Socio-political Considerations

“Ānanda, there are four places the sight of which will arouse strong emotion in those with faith. Which four places? ‘Here the Tathāgata was born’ - this is the first. ‘Here the Tathāgata attained enlightenment’ - this is the second. ‘Here the Tathāgata set in motion the wheel of Dhamma’ - this is the third. ‘Here the Tathāgata attained final nirvāṇa without remainder’ - this is the fourth. And the monk, the nun, the layman or the laywoman who has faith should visit these places. And anyone who dies while making a pilgrimage to these shrines with a devoted heart, will, at the breaking up of the body at death, be reborn in heaven.”

Digha Nikāya, II, 16:141

This chapter narrates the geographical settings and socio-political themes of the ‘Middle Land’, where the historical Buddha Śākyamuni was born, traveled through, reached enlightenment, taught the Dharma and passed away into parinirvāṇa. It is the geographical boundary that supported him and his followers, the Sangha, in his lifetime and in the first couple of centuries of the development and codification of Buddha’s teaching, before it spread vastly to other lands. The Middle Land of roughly five-hundred BCE was bustling with rising urbanization, evolving far reaching trade, diversity of intellectual and political systems and many new innovations. This was a fertile ground, both materially and spiritually, for the rise of various ascetic movements, including that propagated by the Buddha.

This chapter (and the first two appendixes that relate to it), draw mainly from works of the contemporary historians Romila Thapar, H.W. Schumann, Hirakawa Akira, A.K. Warder, A.L. Basham and D.R. Regmi, along with further insights from the writings of B.N. Law, Wendy Doniger, Ven. S. Dhammika, Mo Soeng and Lars

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79 English translation from: Dhammika, 1992, p. 1
80 Sangha in Pāli, Saṅgha in Sanskrit.
81 Such as newly manufactured weapons made of iron.
A discussion on the dating of the Buddha and on the languages spoken at his times, as well as on the first scripts used to codify his teachings, are in appendix I.

The Geographical Boundaries of the Middle Land

The extent of the Middle Land, that can be also termed the ‘Central Gangetic Plain’ or the ‘Sacred Land of Buddhism’ was described in the Vinaya: “East to the town of Kajangala, South-East to the Salalavati River, South-West to the town of Satakannika, West to the Brahmin village of Thūna, and the Northern borders were the foothills of the Usiraddhaja Mountains.” Most of these places are hard to identify today, but this territory corresponds roughly to the present Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, together with the Nepali Tarai region. This landscape’s boundary extends from the foothills of the Himalayas to the banks of the Ganges River, about three hundred kilometers due south. To the most part this vast area is a flat land, but unlike it is seen these days, it used to be thickly wooded. The summers are hot, terminating in the greatly expected monsoon rains, while the winters can be quite cold. The Buddha himself is recorded to describe this land, known at the time as the “Rose-apple Continent”:

“Few in number are pleasant parks, pleasant groves, pleasant stretches of land and lakes, while more numerous are the steep rugged places, un-fordable rivers, dense thickets of scrub and thorns and inaccessible mountains”. This description, of quite a harsh environment, uttered over two thousand five

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83 Pāli: Majjhima Desa, Skt: Madhyadeśa.


86 Pāli: Jambudīpa. This will also refer to the territory of the Mauryans Empire possessed at its peak.

87 Anguttara Nikāya, 1:35, from Dhammika, p. 2
hundred years ago, still aptly describes the landscape we see today in large parts of this land. And yet, the Buddha also mentioned that it was a distinct advantage to be born in the Middle Land, walking along its dusty roads, with the towns and villages where he taught, and the forests where he meditated. The Central Gangetic Plain at that time was certainly one of the world’s cradles of civilization, giving rise to many ideas and innovations, the ascetic movement being an important one amongst them. It is interesting to note that the four foremost sacred places for Buddhists are all situated in groves, away from city centers, while the next set of four sacred sites were all cities where the Buddha taught. The former four sites are Lumbinī, Bodh Gayā, Sarnath and Kuśinagara, while the latter four are Rāgagrha, Śrāvasti, Vaiśālī and Saṅkassa. All these eight places are situated within the Middle Land’s boundary. These and other places of importance, such as those inhabited by the tribes who were recipients of Buddha’s relics, and places that are connected to Buddha’s biography, along with their rulers, policies and interconnections, will be mentioned as we continue.

The Ruling Kingdoms, Confederacies and Tribes in Buddha’s Time

The few centuries before the Buddha’s lifetime saw a shift of power from the western, more dominant Vedic areas of the Punjab, eastwards. The oldest Indian literary works, the Vedas, reflect a rural way of life, while in the Buddhist scriptures we find an urban culture, where rising towns were centers of commercial and political life. The Buddhist chronicles describe the political picture of the Central Gangetic Plain of the sixth century BCE as dominated by four kingdoms, a number of oligarchic republics and groups of tribes, totaling “sixteen Mahājanapadas”. The Four Kingdoms were Kosala, Vaṃsā, Avanti and Magadha, who controlled larger territories than the republics and tribes. The first, the kingdom

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88 Bodh Gayā was known as Uruvilvā, and Sarnath as Ṛṣipatana (Iṣipatana).
89 Pāli: Rājgir, Sāvatthi, Vesāli and Saṅkissa.
91 Thapar, 2002, pp.141-145: these urban centers started a few centuries before the Buddha’s time, Kosambī being the earliest. This urbanization and formation of states depended on surplus and professional crafts, such as iron in Rājgir. Specialized craftsmen used to congregate for the access of resources and distribution of craft items, and these developed into centers and towns. *Grama* was a smaller village, *nagara* was a town, and *nigama* was a trade center or river port.
92 Schumann, 1982, p. 2 and Thapar, 2002, p.138, mention that there were many smaller *Janapadas* as well.
of Kosala, lay north of the Ganges River, with its capital at Śrāvasti. During the Buddha’s life it was ruled successively by Mahākosala, Pasenadi and Viḍūḍabha. Kosala included its former capital of Ayodhyā and Vārāṇasī (or Benares), already an established pilgrimage center. The king of Kosala was an overlord of two republics and three tribal areas. These included the territories of the Śākya, Buddha’s own clan, and that of the Koliya, Buddha’s maternal clan. The Buddha spent his last twenty rainy season retreats at Śrāvasti, where many well-known teachings and events took place. The small kingdom of Vaṃsā was situated to the south-west of Kosala, at the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna rivers, where the ancient pilgrimage center of Prayāg is situated. Vaṃsā’s capital though was Kauśāmbī, while its king was Udena, son of Parantapa. To the south of the Ganges River was the kingdom of Avanti, its king, Pajjota, resided in Ujjjenī (Ujjain), and it had another, southern capital, called Māhissati. Avanti controlled the main trade route to central and south India, the Dakṣiṇapatha. This kingdom though was outside the domain the Buddha traveled and taught at, but was subsequently converted to Buddhism over the following two centuries. Magadha bordered Avanti in the latter’s east, and was bounded by the Ganges to its north. Rājagaha, the capital of Magadha, was a rich, naturally fortified town, known for large
deposits of iron, which were both exported and used for the local production of weapons. Already at that
time Magadha was beginning to expand, harboring plans to move its capital north to Pāṭaliputta, the future
center of the Mauryan Empire.100 The site of Buddha’s enlightenment, Bodh Gayā, is situated a few days
walk south of Rājagaha. The Magadhan King, Bimbisāra,101 who was in an alliance marriage with a sister
of King Prasenajit of Kosala,102 supported the Buddha and his monks greatly, as did his son, King
Ajātaśatru, who claimed the throne by parricide.103 Already during Buddha’s lifetime, Magadha annexed
Aṅga to its east, with its capital Campā, for getting an advantage on the river trade towards the Indian
Ocean, while with its main rival, Kosala, it went to war several times, eventually taking over Kāśī.104

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100 The capital city of Rājagṛha is about sixty miles south-east of Pāṭaliputta (modern Patna).
101 Bimbisāra is called Śrenīka or Seniya in Jain chronicles, Magadha being the central birth-place of the Jain religion too.
102 Pāli: Pasenadi.
103 Pāli: Ajātasattu: This happened seven years before the Buddha passed away. Later, King Ajātaśatru lost the crown to his
own son Anuruddhaka Udayabhaddra in the same way and some sources claim that there were five successive generations of
parricide, starting with Ajātaśatru, who died in 461 BCE (Schumman, 1982, p. 3). Furthermore, between these first rulers till the
great Mauryas, the Nandas ruled Magadha (they were not kṣatriyas, but śūdras).
104 More about the Magadhan-Kosala conflict: Kosala was already in slow decline in this period, its king, Prasenajit, seems to
have spent much time and wealth on holy men, both orthodox and otherwise. Kosala was also infested by robbers, while its
control was loose on its tribal chieftains and vassal kings. On the other hand, King Bimbisāra of Magadha seems to have been
an energetic resolute organizer, ruthlessly dismissing inefficient officers, calling village headsmen to conferences, building
roads and traveling in his kingdom for inspections. He maintained good terms with the kingdoms to his west, even exchanging
courtesies with far off Gandhāra. Nevertheless, he did take control of the kingdom of Aṅga with its capital Campā, a very
important port of the Ganges. From it, ships would sail out to the Bay of Bengal and down the coast to South India, bringing
jewels and spices which were already in high demand. He also got a part of Kāśī as a dowry of his chief queen, the sister of the
Kosalan King, Prasenajit. King Bimbisāra was deposed, imprisoned and killed by his son, Ajātaśatru, seven years before the
Buddha’s final march and passing away. Soon after this parricide, Ajātaśatru went to war with his aged uncle Prasenajit, taking
complete control of Kāśī. Not long after this, King Prasenajit of Kosala was deposed by his own son, Virūdhaka (Pāli:
Viḍūḍabha) who then massacred the Śākyas. This was due to an old slight: The proud Śākya clan gave a slave woman in
marriage to King Prasenajit who believed her to be of Śākyan nobility. Once Virūdhaka realized the origins of his mother, he
was furious and several times declared war on the Śākyans, which the Buddha managed to avert. Eventually he was successful,
and the site of the massacre can still be visited today, called Sagarahawa, in the Nepali Tarai. The Śākya recipients of Buddha’s
relics were probably survivors of this massacre. Once Virūdhaka took the throne of Kosala he deposed his father, Prasenajit,
who looked for shelter in Magadha, but King Ajātaśatru, his own nephew, let him die of exposure to cold after locking all the
gates of the city of Rājagṛha. It is said that Virūdhaka was destroyed soon after by a flood. Later, Kosala was incorporated into
Prasenajit, Ajātaśatru turned his attention to the confederation of the Vṛjī (Pāli: Vajjī), the early stages of this confrontation
happened around Buddha’s death period, around 483 BCE. Ajātaśatru later annexed the Vṛjī territories, and occupying its main
town, Vaiśāli. This was a long war that was won by Magadha thanks to their superior iron made weapons. It seems that the
above kings of Magadha were the first Indian rulers to conceive of a far reaching empire, perhaps taking example from the
Achaemenid Empire of Persia, ruled by Cyrus the Great (558-530 BCE). The Mauryan empire later controlled also Takṣaśilā, a
famed seat of learning, to where young bright men from Magadha were sent to (As was the case of Jīvaka Kaumārabhṛtya (Pāli:
Jīvaka Komārabhacca), Buddha’s own physician and follower). The Buddhist and Jaina texts do not give us much information
about the history after their respective founders’ death, but there is evidence that Magadha continued its expansionist policy,
controlling both banks of the Ganges from Kāśī to Bengal, and later going to war with Avanti in the south. Magadha thus
These four kingdoms were ruled by hereditary kings, or *mahārājas*, while the smaller republics, situated to the east of Kosala and to the north of Magadha, had a local *rāja* whose decisions were dependent on a council and on one of the greater maharajas. Such was the case of the Śākya republic that adjoined Kosala’s north and east fronts, where Buddha’s father, Šuddhodana, was the local *rāja*, while it was a vassal state dependent on the *mahārāja* of Kosala. These republics had an aristocratic-oligarchic character in the sense that their local governor or *rāja* was of the warrior caste, and the councils of these republics were reserved to members of this class alone. The rather geographically elongated Malla republic had two *rājas*, residing in Pāvā and Kuśināra. The Malla republic stretched to the south of Koliya and up to the northern bank of the Ganges River, bordering Vṛji in its east, and Kālāma and Kosala in its west. The Vṛji confederation included the Licchavī people with their capital at Vaiśālī, and the Videha republic, with its capital at Mithilā, along with several other tribal areas. The Licchavīs got a share of the relics from Buddha’s cremation, as the recipients of the relics were the republics and tribes that surrounded Kuśinagara, along with the powerful kingdom of Magadha. Besides the above monarchies and republics there were the tribes. Less is known about their political systems, but it seems that as opposed to the *rajās* of the republics, in the tribes the elders appointed their own *rajā*, and neither (the elders nor the *rajā* appointed) had to belong to the warrior caste. The Koliyas were one of the most

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105 Pāli: *khattiya*; Skt: *kṣatriya*. This is not to say that the caste, or *varna*, system existed in the Middle Land in the same way as in the Vedic heart-lands to the west. Nonetheless, they did have a class of slaves (Thapar, 2002, p. 148) so that these clans, such as the Śākya, had only two classes: the ruling class and slaves/ laborers (Doniger, Wendy. 2015. *The Hindus, an Alternative History*. New Delhi: Speaking Tiger Publications p. 165)

106 Schumman, 1982, p. 3

107 Pāvā is the site of the Buddha’s last meal, and Kuśinagara of his *Parinirvāṇa*, both towns receiving a share of the Buddha’s relics.

108 The Vṛji (Pāli: Vajji) tribe of the Licchavīs, even though being occupied and annexed after Buddha’s life by Magadha, managed to maintain their identity up to the fourth century CE when they became influential again.

109 Vaiśālī grew from a religious center (Thapar, 2002, p. 139), while ancient Mithilā is situated to the most part within current Nepali borders, Janakpur still being a religious center (claimed as the site of Rāma and Sītā’s marriage in the *Rāmāyana* epic)

110 It is interesting to speculate why Kosala did not demand a share of the relics. It might be the case that after the massacre of the Śākyas, which happened not long before Buddha’s final days, they were alienated, and in particular their king, Virūḍhaka, from the Śākyan and other followers of the Buddha (many of Buddha’s main disciples were Śākyan).
prominent of these tribes. Dwelling to the east to south-east of the Śākya republic, with the boundary being the Rohiṇī River, the Koliyan capital was Rāmagrāma, and its people had deep marriage links with the Śākyas, as we have seen in the previous chapter. The Moriya tribe had its capital at Pipphalīvana, their territory adjoining Koliya in its west. The Moriya representatives arrived late to the relics division, and settled for the ashes from the funeral pyre.\textsuperscript{111} The Kālāma tribe had their capital at Kesaputta, in the westward opening of the confluence of the Ganges with the Ghāra River.\textsuperscript{112} Beyond the villages that adjoined the towns (\textit{grāma}), were wastelands, forests (\textit{aranya}) and jungles, where previously hunting tribes lived. Because their natural hunting grounds and food gathering areas were reduced due to the kingdoms and cities taking over land for cultivation, the hunting tribes moved to the outskirts of the settlements, becoming the lowest \textit{Chandalas}, or untouchables. These kingdoms, republics and tribes lived in general peace, barring an occasional confrontation, usually due to irrigation and pasture-rights differences. There was no restriction on travel between these states.

These newly emerging commercial towns situated far from the western Vedic heartland, paved the way for a few important social changes. To begin with, the Brahmanic priests had much less power in the Middle Land, while the merchant class emerged to a degree that some merchants became even richer than kings.\textsuperscript{113} The republics, confederacies and tribes, being more tolerant than the kingdoms to individualistic and independent opinions as well as to non-orthodox views, felt it easy to dismiss Brahman political

\textsuperscript{111} We shall see in chapter four a connection that was made between the first Mauryan Emperor, Candragupta, to the Moriya tribe.
\textsuperscript{112} The actual confluence of these two rivers is near the modern Patna. The reason why the Kālāmas did not claim a share of Buddha’s relics, even though being situated close by to Kuśinagara, is probably because they have already lost their independence by that time to King Virūḍhaka of Kosala. Also, one of the first two teachers of the Buddha, Āḷāra Kālāma, belonged to this tribe, as his name suggests.
\textsuperscript{113} The Vṛji tribe of the Licchavis, even though being occupied and annexed after Buddha’s life by Magadha, managed to maintain their identity up to the fourth century AD when they became influential again.
\textsuperscript{113} Warder, A.K. [1970] 2004. \textit{Indian Buddhism}. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, pp. 28-29: This came from the development of trade as well as exploitation of natural resources, and the development of industry. One of the main struggles was between the Vṛji republic and the kingdom of Magadha, the latter being the least orthodox at the time, being far removed from Brahmanical influence, and developing a highly autocratic and centralized system of government (Brahmanism prescribed the duties of kings, rather than their powers, providing a variety of checks on their actions). In Buddha’s time, the struggle was in terms of economy, politics and administrative craft, for which the Brahmanical tradition had little to do with.
theories.\textsuperscript{114} The outskirts of these towns had groves and parks where philosophical and other “open spirit” discussions took place.\textsuperscript{115} It is not surprising that not just the Buddha emerged from such an environment, but also Mahāvīra, the founder of Jaina religion, came from the Jnatrika clan of the confederacy of Vṛji.\textsuperscript{116}

Both teachers were founders of heterodox religious philosophies that still survive. The Vṛji confederacy was an example for social harmony and respect for the individual. Eventually though, the power of centralized governments, with their increasing wealth and power, overwhelmed the smaller republics. The Buddha admired the Vṛji’s ancient customs, democratic government, respect to wise men and so on and in fact modeled the first monastic communities on these ideas, but indeed he did not see it as a far reaching solution to the problems of mankind.

The Buddha was thus born in a time and place that saw great changes, with an openness to new ideas and innovations, both on the material and spiritual planes. The Vedic culture and way of life was challenged, not merely by the new found riches of merchants and autocratic kings but by the ascetic movement in particular. The ‘śramaṇa movement’,\textsuperscript{117} that started about two centuries before Buddha’s time, was initiated by seekers of magical powers, but by the time of the Buddha, philosophical leaders of various sects begun to emerge and became quite popular.\textsuperscript{118} This coincided with the urbanization of the Middle Land, the rise of an educated middle class, and an easier connectivity through trade routes. This mercantile culture took over the Vedic agrarian society, and these developments challenged the caste system, as the new merchant-trader class arose, with its attendant social and financial power. It was this new class that supported the Buddha and his community the most, along with the other two dominant ascetic movements of the time, the Jains and the Ājīvikas.\textsuperscript{119} The idea of “merit-making”,\textsuperscript{120} was

\textsuperscript{114} Thapar, 2002, p. 151
\textsuperscript{115} Called kutuhala-shalas, literally: “the place for creating curiosity” (Thapar, 2002, p. 165)
\textsuperscript{116} Thapar, 2002, p. 149
\textsuperscript{117} There is speculation whether the modern Mongolian term of ‘Shaman’ (healer) is derived from the word ‘śramaṇa’. See Soeng, Mu. 2000. The Diamond Sutra, Transforming the Way We Perceive the World. Boston: Wisdom Publications, p. 9
\textsuperscript{118} Soeng, 2000, p. 4
\textsuperscript{119} Pāli: Ajīvika.
\textsuperscript{120}
prominent in the above three ascetic movements, and can be exemplified by the fact that Buddhism later spread through trade routes and the Jain lay community dealt almost exclusively in trade.\textsuperscript{121} The ascetic movements had their respective monastic settings or meeting places, but there were also the \textit{parivrājaka}, or the homeless wanderers, as was the Buddha in his six years of quest.\textsuperscript{122} The urbanizing world and the \textit{śramaṇas} had thus mutual beneficial effect on each other,\textsuperscript{123} the \textit{śramaṇas} being the new intellectuals of an inquisitive and innovative society, which in turn supports the \textit{śramaṇas} worldly needs. Paradoxically, we might doubt why the Buddha encouraged renunciation and ordination while many of his students were nobles, kings, and rich merchants. The answer is that the Buddha’s teachings brought a new rational and psychological analysis which greatly appealed to the rising intelligentsia, as opposed to the entrenched Vedic rituals and belief systems. Political and intellectual diversity thrived in Middle Land, along with greater mobility on a larger geographical territory. This situation also gave rise to the \textit{Upaniṣads}, which were later incorporated into the Vedas.\textsuperscript{124} Although living in the forests, gradually the \textit{śramaṇas} grouped into small communities and settled down. The conduct of these first monastic settlements was partly based on the \textit{Vṛjī} Republic’s constitution, meaning that the monks were independent of one another, without a supreme head. They met regularly to decide issues and conflicts upon a majority vote. These \textit{śramaṇa} communities, Buddhist and others, thus formed a kind of a separate society of their own, and this antagonized those states that became increasingly centralized, as was the case with Magadha.\textsuperscript{125} Already in Buddha’s lifetime, the first monastic settings and nunneries were established, mainly at the outskirts of

\textsuperscript{120} From Doniger, 2015, p. 165: “The development of the idea of merit or karma as something ‘to be earned, accumulated, occasionally transferred and eventually realized’, owes much to the post-Vedic moneyed economy. This means that where there is trade, people leave home; new commercial classes emerge; and above all, new ideas spread quickly and circulate freely”. At that time the Vedas did not constitute a closed canon, and there was no central temporal or religious authority to enforce a canon had there been one.

\textsuperscript{121} Even farming was considered non-meritorious for the Jains, as it harmed insects.

\textsuperscript{122} Soeng, 2000, p. 8

\textsuperscript{123} Soeng, 2000, p. 10

\textsuperscript{124} The dichotomy of city life vs. the forests is reflected in the name of the texts called \textit{āranyakas} (“jungle books”), to be studied in the forest. These, along with the \textit{Upaniṣads} and the \textit{Brāhmaṇams} were composed orally (\textit{śruti}), around the same time period of the Buddha. There is also a shift here in their language being more reader friendly (Doniger, 2015, pp. 166-7)

\textsuperscript{125} Warder, 1970, p. 37
towns. Appendix II is a brief overview of the main Śramana Movements of Buddha’s time, together with the names of their founders and their basic philosophical tenets. This will give a better context for the flourishing of new ideas in the era and place in which the Buddha and his teachings, the Dharma, arose, understood and found appeal at.
Chapter Three

Buddha’s Funeral and the Division of His Relics

“Ripe I am in years, my life-span determined. Now I go from you, having made myself my refuge. Monks, be untiring, mindful, disciplined, guarding your minds with well-collected thought. He who, tireless, keeps to law and discipline, leaving birth behind, will put an end to woe”

_Dīgha Nikāya II, 16, Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra_ ¹²⁶

The Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra: its Importance and Relevance

After teaching for forty-five years throughout the Middle Land, Buddha’s ‘last journey’ started from Rājagrha and ended in Kuśinagara, where he passed into final, complete nirvāṇa. This journey is traditionally divided into fourteen steps, where at each stop the Buddha gave last, important instructions to his disciples.¹²⁷ Kuśinagara is the scene of Buddha’s funeral and where his relics were divided afterwards to representatives of neighboring tribes, one of the recipients being the Koliyas of Rāmagrāma. These events are narrated in the _Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra._¹²⁸ This chapter concentrates on the Buddha’s funeral, highlighting the importance of the relics the Buddha is leaving behind after his cremation. This will demonstrate how the preparation of his body after his passing, and the funeral itself, lead directly to the preservation of his relics. The next major historical event after Buddha’s passing was the First Buddhist Council, held in order to compile and memorize what the Buddha has taught. These two events are interlinked: the Buddha is leaving behind him his corporal remains, in the form of relics, and his

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¹²⁶ Walshe, Maurice. 1987. _Thus Have I Heard: The Long Discourse of the Buddha (Dīgha Nikāya)_ London: Wisdom publications. pp. 253-54. This the Buddha uttered before leaving Vaiśālī, on his way to Kuśinagara, after proclaiming that he will pass away in three months’ time.


¹²⁸ Skt: _Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra_; Pāli: _Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta_; The former is distinguished from the _Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra._
teachings, the Dharma, are gathered after his *parinirvāṇa* for the benefit of his future followers.\(^\text{129}\) It is very probable that Buddha’s intention in his last journey was to ‘return home’ to his home town of Kapilavastu, as it is entailed by the route he and his small party took.\(^\text{130}\) Nevertheless, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* mentions Kuśinagara’s importance as Buddha’s *parinirvāṇa* site, and furthermore, the *sutta* that follows the *Mahapurinibbana Sutta* in the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the *Mahāsudassana Sutta*, narrates the story of Kuśinagara’s past glory.\(^\text{131}\)

The *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* is considered to be one of the early-most substantial fragments of Buddha’s biography. It has extant versions in Pāli, Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan, composed in this respective historical order. These four versions vary slightly, in that some events are mentioned in one or more of these languages and not in others. I mainly used here translations to English of the Pāli version,\(^\text{132}\) but other important variations from the other three editions will be noted.\(^\text{133}\) It is most probable that the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* was authored orally around two hundred years after the events told in it actually

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\(^\text{129}\) Out of triad of Buddhist refuge: the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, the Buddha himself is about to pass away, so that in order to fill up the great absence of the physical Buddha, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*’s concern is geared towards the future of the Dharma and Sangha on the one hand, which embody the future of Buddhism, while on the other hand it emphasis the relics for remembering the Buddha. This is dealt with in this *sūtra* in two main ways: first, the Buddha is to be remembered through his teaching, the Dharma, which is his foremost replacement, while the Sangha, or the community of his followers (mainly monks here), must understand the Dharma well, and memorize the teachings, along with the *pratimokṣa* (Pāli: *pratimokkha*) vows, for the benefit of future generations. This led to the first Buddhist council, held three months after the great passing. The second way for remembering the Buddha is his corporeal relics, the division of which is considered a very important event for the future followers of the Buddha. Therefore, the two things the Buddha is leaving behind him are the teachings and his physical relics. Many ancient pieces of art, found in archaeological sites, depict pictorially the Buddha-relics, their division and construction of *stūpas* over them. These were found in faraway places such as Sanchi, Amaravati and Gandhāra. We are also reminded of words of the great Buddhist Mādhyamaka philosopher, Nagārjuna, who has said that it is wrong to say that after the Buddha’s *parinirvāṇa* he still is, is not, both or neither (Strong, 2001, p. 163). Yet conventionally, and for our purposes here, even though the mortal Buddha passes away into “complete extinction”, he does continue, through his teachings (the Dharma), all his future followers (the Sangha) and through his relics (the Buddha).

\(^\text{130}\) This might be hinted at by the Buddha passing away with his head to the north (as he himself instructed) perhaps indicating reverence to his place of birth. The ‘last journey’ happened not long after the massacre of the Śākyas by the Kosalan King Virudhaka, as seen in the previous chapter.

\(^\text{131}\) *Dīgha Nikāya*, II. 17. See: Walshe, Maurice. 1987. *Thus Have I Heard: The Long Discourse of the Buddha (Dīgha Nikāya)* London: Wisdom publications, pp. 279-290. In the Pāli canon, of the thirty-four discourses (*Suttas*) that make up the *Dīgha Nikāya* (Collection of Long Discourses), the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, the sixteenth, is the longest.


\(^\text{133}\) Out of the various commentaries on this *sūtra*, I used to a large extent the ones done by John S. Strong, who has written extensively on Buddha’s relics, noted in the notes here, in appendix III and in the bibliography.
happened, and continued to be recited until being written down, first in Sri Lanka, a further two to three hundred years later, around the first century CE. The *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* is further regarded as the earliest document regarding relics and stūpas, and at times acts as a compilation of other *sūtras*, in particular repeating important Dharma teachings. The key events that are told in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* at each stop the Buddha made, up to his last stop at Kuśinagara, are narrated succinctly in appendix III. A further distinction that is argued by scholars is an interpretation of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* that says that the Dharma is mainly for the ordained Sangha while the relics are for the benefit of the devotional laity. Those who claim this rely on a quote in this *sūtra* where the Buddha exhorts his disciples (mainly the ordained Sangha that surrounded him) that it is more important to continue to practice rather than to worry about his funeral arrangements. This interpretation is far from being conclusive though, because ordained Sangha possessed and worshiped relics throughout the Buddhist world ever since the Buddha-relics came into being. Furthermore, the Buddha, later on in this *sūtra*, gave specific instructions that the funeral of a *Tathāgata*, should be as befitting that of a *chakravartin* king, which, as will be seen below, entails the preservation of relics.

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134 Gnanarama, Pategama Ven. PhD., *The Mission Accomplished: A historical analysis of the Mahaparinibbana Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya of the Pali Canon*. Ti-Sarana Buddhist Association (Singapore 1997). The *sutta* was compiled and written down reportedly by Buddhaghośa. The Chinese version was authored in the early fifth century CE.

135 The Buddha gave instructions in this *sūtra* on how and where to build stūpas, or funerary mounds, that house and protect the relics. Almost any scholarly book regarding relics and stūpas refers to the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* in one way or another.

136 Some of the stops along this ‘last journey’ can be traced today, while others are yet to be identified. It is important to mention the names of these stops as ‘relics’ in and of themselves, because any place the Buddha trod or stopped is also a pilgrimage site, and thus a relic of the Buddha, as will be discussed in chapter five on the various types of Buddha’s relics. It seems that in Aśokan times, all these stops the Buddha made were marked with stūpas and became pilgrimage sites, Faxian, and later Xuanzang, visited the important ones. This though is a matter of further investigation and research.

137 The term *śarīra-pūjā* can also mean the worship of the relics. Schopen goes into pains to distinguish this term, first it means “funeral arrangements”, which are not done by the monks, and later it means ‘relics’. See: Schopen, Gregory. 1997. *Bones, Stones and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archeology, Epigraphy and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India*.

138 This will be discussed with further detail at the end of this chapter. Interestingly, those proposing this distinction were mainly the first western scholars meeting with Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the late nineteenth century, like Paul Carus, basically having “protestant” views about Buddhism: that only the teachings matter, being a “rational” philosophy and not the devotional part of the Buddhist religion, such as the worship of relics. Schopen in his book argues that many inscriptions were found where the donor names were ordained Sangha members.

139 ‘*Tathāgata*’ is similar in Pāli and Sanskrit (tib. *de bzhin gshegs pa*): A person attaining perfection, a Buddha. It can either mean “thus gone one” (*tathā-gata*) or “thus came on” (*tathā-āgata*), the latter is preferred from the Chinese rendering.

140 Pāli: *cakkavatti*. A ‘wheel-turning’ monarch.
The Buddha’s Last Night and the Preparations for a Funeral as Befits a Cakravartin

The events told of the Buddha’s ‘last night’, and the miraculous events that ensued, vary in interesting ways in the four different versions of the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, reflecting later cultural adaptations to Buddhism, as will be noted below. Between two śāla trees, outside of Kuśinagara, the Buddha lies on his right side with his head to the north, in what became later the famous iconographic posture of the parinirvāṇa, and the trees burst into untimely bloom while divine music is heard from the skies. When the Buddha’s previous (and probably incompetent) attendant, Upamāna, stands in the way blocking the view, the Buddha scolds him, saying that many divinities came to watch the rare occasion of the Tathāgata’s parinirvāṇa. It is at this point in the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra that Ānanda says that after the passing away, there will be no chance for well-trained monks to see the Buddha and pay their respects. Buddha’s reply to Ānanda is the first recorded utterance about Buddhist pilgrimage: “Ānanda, there are four places the sight of which should arouse emotion in the faithful…” then listing the four-most places as we have seen, and continues: “the faithful monks and nuns, male and female lay-followers will visit those places, and any who die while making pilgrimage to these shrines with a devote heart will, at the breaking-up of the body after death, be reborn in a heavenly world”.

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141 Some believe the head facing north represents the direction towards his home town of Kapilavastu. Interestingly, Hindus still cremate their dead with their heads facing north. The blossoms and divine smell are considered a precursor of offerings to the Buddha, called in Pāli: Tathāgatassa pūjāya.
142 Pāli; Upavāna.
143 The Buddha explains to the surprised Ānanda that he scolded the elder Upamāna because the myriad of deities are upset since this is a rare occasion and the elder Upamāna, who was fanning the Buddha without being asked to do so, blocked their view (Strong, 2001, p. 138). In Pāli is termed: Tathāgataṃ dassanāya (“Seeing the Tathāgata”). More on it will follow in chapter five.
144 In particular for those monks who completed the rainy season retreat, it was customary to go to see the Buddha and pay their respects to him afterwards.
145 Samvejānīyāni: arousing a sense of urgency.
146 Even though this passage might have been inserted later, it is still considered the earliest mention of Buddhist pilgrimage sites, all connected to Buddha’s own biography. As noted previously: Bodh Gayā is the enlightenment place, Sarnath is the site the first teaching (turning of the wheel of Dharma), Lumbini is Siddhārtha’s birth place and Kuśinagara the parinirvāṇa site. Interestingly, Bodh Gayā does not seem to have become a pilgrimage site until King Aśoka’s time (no archaeological discoveries prior to Mauryan times were discovered there).
147 Walsh, 1987, pp. 263-264. Another similar translation of this famous verse opened chapter two. Some scholars argue that this first mention of “Buddhist Pilgrimage” was inserted into the sūtra in later times. The insertion of this passage at this point of the sūtra is significant because Ānanda is asking basically how could devotees “see” the Buddha after his passing away, and
After being questioned a couple of times, the Buddha is recorded to have said that his funeral should be done as befitting a *Cakravartin* King, the sequence of which can be divided into six parts:  

1. The body is wrapped in five hundred double layered shrouds.  
2. It is placed in an iron coffin filled with oil and covered with an iron lid (*The Sarcophagus*).  
3. The veneration of the Buddha’s body.  
4. Cremation on fire made of sweet-smelling woods.  
5. The collection and distribution of the relics.  
6. A *stūpa* is erected on a crossroad.  

These funeral arrangements were called *śarīra-pūjā*, literally meaning “worship of the body”. The funeral as befits a *Cakravartin* acts as a reminiscence of the events after Siddhārtha’s birth when it was foretold that he would be either a Buddha or a universal monarch (*Cakravartin*), by examining his bodily marks which displayed that he was a *Mahāpuruṣa* (‘great man’). This funeral, which includes the preservation of relics, also indicates the differentiation of Buddhist saints’ funerals from other *śramaṇas* or *sannyāsins*, who did not have their remains preserved. The four types of persons worthy of a stūpa, the Buddha mentions in this *sūtra* are: A *Tathāgata*, a *Pratyeka-Buddha*, a disciple of the *Tathāgata* and a wheel-turning monarch.

Continuing, Ānanda, Buddha’s attendant of twenty-five years, laments the approaching passing away. The Buddha in turn praises Ānanda’s services and qualities and reminds him of the impermanence of all

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148 Initially though, the Buddha replied to not worry about such things but to strive for the highest goal. Then he says that there are Brahmin and other householders that will take care of his body, meaning the actual funeral arrangements. The term *cakravartin* is first found in the *Maitrāyaṇa Upaniṣad* (1.4) dated to the fourth-fifth century BCE. Interestingly in this context, Alexander the Great’s mortal remains have been preserved as well. See: Cuevas, 2010, p. 33


150 Strong, 2001, p. 141: Literally translated as “the worship of the body”, but the meaning gears more towards “the funeral arrangements”. See: Cuevas, 2010, p. 33 (note 8)

151 Cuevas, 2010, p. 32. The sites where the astrologers and the sage Asita (Kaladevala or Kanhasiri) examined the baby Siddhārtha are part of the thirty-two places of pilgrimage visited by King Aśoka (listed in chapter four).

152 Pāli: *Pacceka-Buddha*, A solitary realizer. King Aśoka is considered to be the latter. When the Buddha relies to Ānanda about how his body should be cremated, to preserve the relics, the quote is: “As, Ānanda, they treat the body of a Wheel-Turning King, so should they treat the body of the *Tathāgata*.” In the Pāli: *Yathā kho Ānando rañño cakkavattissa sarīra patipajjanti, evaṃ Tathāgatassa sarīra patipajjitaṃ* ti (*Dīgha Nikāya*, II. 141).
things. The consoled Ānanda then wonders why the Tathāgata should pass away in such a desolate and insignificant place as Kuśinagara, and not in one of the great centers of the time, such as Śrāvasti, Sāketā, Campā, Benares, Vaiśālī or Rājagrha. The Buddha as an answer tells the story of a past life when he was the Cakravartin King Mahāsudarśana, in this very location which used to be a fabulous kingdom, so that dying in Kuśinagara is in a sense a “coming back home” for him.

Ānanda is sent to tell the people of Kuśinagara about Buddha’s imminent passing, so that they can pay their last respects, but since they are too numerous and the night is short, he sends them in groups, the woman first. The elder Subhadra then appears and wishes to receive direct teachings from the Buddha, because he does not trust their authenticity after Buddha’s passing. Ānanda does not let him approach, seeing his master is weak. The Buddha though overhears this confrontation and asks Subhadra to come closer. Subhadra asks the Buddha if the other six contemporary teachers have also gained enlightenment. The Buddha dismisses this question as unimportant and teaches the Dharma to this last disciple, who immediately converts, gets ordained and later is reported to have attained enlightenment.

153 Perhaps this is also because Ānanda was too busy as an attendant of the Buddha, that he himself was not able to reach the state of an Arhant yet. He was considered at the time to be a stream-enterer (Sotāpanna). Ānanda’s presence at the first Buddhist council was crucial, as he had the quality of ‘total recall’, remembering all the teachings he heard.

154 Sāketā was a town in Kosala. It was regarded in Buddha’s time as one of the six great cities of India, and was most probably the older capital of Kosala. The other five great cities are Campā, Rājagaha, Śrāvasti, Kosambi and Benares (Dīgha Nikāya, II. 146). Ānanda describes Kuśinagara as a “miserable little town of wattle-and-daub, right in the jungle in the back and beyond!” (Walshe, 1987, p. 266)

155 This story is contained in the Jataka tales (Buddha’s past life stories). The Samyutta Nikāya also has Buddha’s passing away story, and when the Buddha narrates the past glory of Kuśināra (Kuśinagara), it is borrowed from the Mahāsudassana Sūtra. Also, this inserted story might be a precursor for the Sukhavati Sūtra.

156 This created further opposition from Mahākāśyapa since one of the women wept on Buddha’s feet. Ānanda was the one convincing the Buddha in favor of female ordination, while Mahākāśyapa was against it, since it was said it will shorten the lifespan of the Dharma. This mention of Buddha’s feet can also be viewed as a precursor for the cult of worshiping Buddha’s feet, an early form of Buddhist worship (Strong, S. John. 2004. Relics of the Buddha, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 113). The people of Kuśinagara are called “Vāsetṭhas”.

157 Pāli: Subhadda.

158 The six great “heretical” teachers (in Pāli): Pūraṇa Kassapa, Makkhali Gosāla, Ajita Kesakambali, Pakudha Kaccāyana, Sañjaya Belatthaputta and Nigantha Nātaputta (the last one refers to Mahāvira, the founder of Jainism). Their views and the Buddha’s thoughts on their respective philosophies are narrated in the Sāmaññaphapa Sutta (“The Fruits of the Homeless Life”), Dīgha Nikāya, I. 2.

159 Even though usually a candidate had a four-month probation period, the Buddha instructed the monks present to ordain Subhadra there and then (Walshe, 1987, p. 269)
The Tibetan version of the *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra* adds at this point the story of the musician Sunanda.160

In the Sanskrit text The Buddha at this point tells the congregation surrounding him to keep reciting the *prātimokṣa* vows every fortnight, and this will act as their future teacher, while in the Pāli text, the Dharma and *Vinaya* play that role.161 Curiously, at this last moment the Buddha gives instructions about Chandaka, his charioteer and friend at the time of the great departure from home.162

At last, the Buddha asks those present if there are any more questions, doubts or uncertainties regarding the doctrine. He asks three times and all keep silent. The Buddha’s last words are: “Now, monks, I declare to you: all conditioned things are of a nature of decay- strive on untiringly”.163 The Pāli text is satisfied with the fact that there are no more questions regarding the Dharma, but the Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan texts add at this point that the Buddha uncovers his body (*rūpa*) to the assembly, displaying his thirty-two marks of a *Tathāgata*.164 The Buddha then passes through the eight levels of meditative absorptions,165 Ānanda thinking that the Buddha had already passed away. But Aniruddha,166 one of the ten foremost

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160 The Buddha plays for him a musical instrument with a thousand strings, and the fine melody continues even though the strings are cut one by one until nothing’s left. Sunanda is thoroughly impressed and converts.

161 Another great difference is made at this point between the Sanskrit and Pāli versions of the *Sūtra*. In the former the Buddha says that some vows can be changed with time, but in the latter what is mentioned is that “minor rules” may be abolished. This might well be a precursor, added later in the Sanskrit text, in light of the later division of the Sangha after the third Buddhist council (see in chapter four). Because Ānanda did not ask about which of these minor rules can be abolished, it was decided in the first council not to change anything.

162 It seems that the Buddha kept this to the last moment because it was a rather bothersome affair. The Buddha tells the nearby monks neither to instruct nor to admonish Chandaka (Pāli: Channa), who was a close alley of the young Siddhārtha and was later ordained, but kept some perverse views. This treatment is called *Brahmadaṇḍa*, or “Brahma-penalty”, and seemed to have helped Chandaka came back to his senses (Walshe, 1987, pp. 574-575, note 451)


164 This also acts as a kind of “closing of a cycle” in Buddha’s biography, because after his birth these same thirty-two signs were examined and it was prophesied that Siddhārtha will either become a great king or a Buddha. For a list of the thirty-two marks of a “Great Man” (*Mahāpuruṣa*), see Strong, 2001, p. 42. For a translation from the Sanskrit version of the *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra* of this section, see Strong, 2001, p. 141

165 These are the four *Jhānas*, or stages of concentration and then the “sphere of infinite space”, “sphere of infinite consciousness”, “sphere of no-thing-ness” and the “sphere of neither perception nor non-perception” (Walshe, 1987, pp. 270-271). This fourth level is the same level from which the Buddha attained enlightenment in Bodh Gayā.

disciples of the Buddha, who was known for his "divine vision", corrects those present, and instructs them about this process: that the Buddha is currently in the ‘sphere of cessation of feeling and perception’.

The Buddha then comes back down through all eight absorptions and back up to the fourth level, the highest state in the form realm, and passes into parinirvāṇa. The earth then quakes, accompanied by thunder, and the two śāla trees rain down blossoms on Buddha’s body while the gods Brahmā and Indra proclaim verses of impermanence. The elders Aniruddha and Ānanda then confirm that the Buddha has indeed passed away. The scene that is next described is that some monks are stricken by despair and cry in grief while others understand the last teachings of the impermanence of all things so that they control their emotions. The next morning Ānanda meets the local Mallas who arrive in great numbers, asking him how the cremation should be done. Ānanda explains what the Buddha had instructed: that the body of the Buddha should be treated as that of a Cakravartin King.

The Buddha’s Funeral

The Shrouds: It is said that Buddha’s body was wrapped in five-hundred shrouds. These cottons were called vihata-kappāsa, and were chosen due to their ability to soak oil better, thus becoming a great torch. A past Buddha called Mangala is said to have wrapped his own body similarly and igniting himself as an offering to a stūpa of another Buddha, and there is a similar story in the Lotus Sūtra, about

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167 Pāli: dibba-cakkhu.
168 Brahmā Sahampati’s verse: “All beings in the world, all bodies must break up: even the Teacher, peerless in the human world, the mighty Lord and perfect Buddha passed away” (Welshe, 1987, p. 271) The god Brahmā was also mentioned previously in Buddha’s biography as the one encouraging the Buddha to teach the Dharma to others after his enlightenment in Bodh Gayā. Initially the Buddha thought no one could understand what he discovered, realizing that his previous two teachers had passed away. The god Brahmā tells him that there are some with ‘less dust on their eyes’, the Buddha then proceeds to Sarnath, where his previous five companions dwell. For more about the types of earthquakes that accompany Buddha’s biography, see in appendix III.
169 Pāli: Sakka”, king of the gods who at times intervenes in the affairs of humans.
170 This is doubtful historically though, because as we have seen, Kuśinagara was a very poor area. Some believe this great amount of cloth was in order to preserve Buddha’s body for the seven days that passed from his passing away to the actual cremation. Perhaps also this lengthy time period was another means to distinguish Buddhist funerals from others, as the Hindus dispose of their dead quickly.
171 Cuevas, 2010, p. 34
the Bodhisattva Sarvasattvapriyadarśana. In China, self-immolation became a sort of a model devotional practice and relics were sought after from those who performed it. It is said that after the cremation of Buddha’s body, only two layers survived, the innermost and outermost, called cīvara, that were reminiscent of the Buddha as being a monk. The relics were then found neatly nestled between these two shrouds, so that there was no need to look for them in the ashes. These shrouds therefore did not wrap only Buddha’s body but his relics too, and these in turn were placed directly in a golden casket.

**The Sarcophagus:** The double iron oil vessel that served as Buddha’s coffin (Skt. *taila-droṇī;* Pāli. *tela-donī*), stands in contrast from usual Indian funerals where corpses are put directly on the cremation fire, at times along with the bier carrying them. Some scholars argue that iron was yet to be in common use at that time, so that it was probably a wooden box. Other scholars think that the oil filled sarcophagus had the objective of keeping Buddha’s body from decay for the week that passed until his chief disciple Mahākāśyapa arrived. Most probably though, the mention of an iron coffin was made in order to differentiate between the bodily remains (*śarīra*, the relics) and the ashes of the funeral pyre (*jvalanasya*

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172 Cuevas, 2010, p. 35
173 Cuevas, 2010, p. 35
174 The two surviving shrouds were said to be the most internal and the most external ones. Cuevas, 2010, p. 37: This point highlights the difference between a *Cakravartin* funeral of a Buddha and that of a mortal king, who did not leave home and subsequently did not leave *samsāra*. Originally the monks’ robes were called *pāṃśukūla*: “dust-heap robes”, which at times were gathered from cremation grounds. It can also be gleaned as a second ordination; the first being after Siddhārtha departed from his home, when he left the comforts of Kapilavastu, and settled for the robes of a hunter (Some texts say that these were closes of a dead girl picked up in a cremation ground). The Sanskrit and Tibetan versions call these remaining cloths “monastic robes” (Skt: *cīvra*, Tib: *chos gos*). See: Strong, S. John, 2004, pp. 104-105.
175 Cuevas, 2010, p. 38. Droṇa (Pāli. Doṇa) the Brahmin who divided the relics, as we can observe has the same name as the sarcophagus (*droṇa*), which can mean any wooden box or bucket for measuring grain (Cuevas, 2010, p. 40). Also, each part of the divided relics was called a “*droṇa*”. Furthermore, it is the same name for the vessel used by Droṇa for dividing the relics and for the container of relics interred in a stūpa. These connections of a similar word for the coffin, the Brahmin, the measures and the reliquary holding the relics were done with a purpose, highlighting the importance of preserving the Buddha relics.
176 Cuevas, 2010, p. 38: Iron being more prevalent at the time of composing this text, a few centuries later. In later editions of the *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra* the coffin was described as being made silver or gold.
177 Cuevas, 2010, p. 38: This is reminiscent of a scene in the *Rāmāyana*, where King Daśaratha’s body is kept in an oil vessel until his eldest son arrives. Another view is that Buddha’s body was kept in oil in order to transfer it to the Ganges River, and dispose it in the river as was (and still is) the custom with ascetics, the injunction being the disposition of the body of an ascetic into a river that flows to the sea. Yet another interpretation of the word for the vessel, ‘*droṇī*’, is that of a canoe, that is rowed to the middle of the Ganges River, but that of course would mean that it was made out of wood. This latter custom was described by Xuanzang (Cuevas, 2010, p. 38, note 38). The above interpretations would make it difficult to explain that actually it is said that The Buddha’s body was put in the oil vessel only after seven days from his passing (Cuevas, 2010, p. 39)
This is because the sarcophagus was not only serving as a coffin, but also as a reliquary container for the relics. It is then mentioned in the sutra that it was inside a golden kumbha that the Mallas kept the relics.\(^\text{178}\)

**The Veneration of the Buddha’s Body:** Although these acts are not specified in the funeral of a Cakravartin, in the Buddha’s own funeral these are implicit throughout.\(^\text{179}\) First, the divinities assembled and uttered verses expressing sorrow and impermanence. The Mallas of Kuśinagara then made a pūjā of venerating the Buddha by honoring his body with traditional offerings of flowers, cloth, perfumes, music, dance, lights etc.\(^\text{180}\) Because of being caught up in their devotion and festivities, each evening they say “it is too late to cremate the Lord’s body today. We shall do so tomorrow” and postpone the cremation for the next day.\(^\text{181}\) This happened for seven successive days.\(^\text{182}\) This activity, resembling a festival, can be seen as a prefiguration for the cult of relics, a celebration that will become a later important feature of the Buddhist religion. There is an obvious transformation at this point from the grief of Buddha’s passing into a celebration of his relics.\(^\text{183}\) On the seventh day though, the Mallas resolve to move the Buddha’s body to the cremation ground on time. The body though is suddenly too heavy to lift due to an intervention of the gods, who envisioned a different route than that planned by the local Mallas.\(^\text{184}\) Ānanda then lets the women approach and venerate Buddha’s body, one old woman letting tears drop on Buddha’s feet, discoloring the Buddha’s golden hue.\(^\text{185}\) Another reason for the delay might well have been that

\(^{178}\) A clay pot of jar, the name is used also for the vessel Droṇa used for dividing the relics (Cuevas, 2010, p. 40)

\(^{179}\) Cuevas, 2010, p. 41

\(^{180}\) Strong, 2001, p. 142

\(^{181}\) Walshe, 1987, p. 273

\(^{182}\) Usually funerals in India were, and are still done straight away. Perhaps the Malla people saw this occasion as a great time for merit making (Strong, 2001, p. 142)

\(^{183}\) Perhaps the Buddha relics can already be seen here as a kind of “eternal” Buddha, something of him, or of his presence, that can remain after his cremation.

\(^{184}\) Aniruddha tells the Mallas “your intention is one thing, but the intention of the devas is another” (Welshe, 1987, p. 273). The Mallas wanted to carry Buddha’s body out of the south gate of the city but the devas wished that it will be carried out of the north gate, then back in to the middle of the city and then out of the eastern gate, to the shrine of Makuṭa-Bandhana, where the Buddha-body was finally cremated.

\(^{185}\) This enraged Mahākāśyapa and might well be another anecdote of the rift between the two rising factions, Ānanda being the one more inclusive to women in the Sangha, while Mahākāśyapa had a stricter attitude. Scholars vary on what might have
Mahākāśyapa, Buddha’s foremost student at the time, was still away, and had reached Kuśinagara only a week after the Buddha’s passing. The fire could not be lit until Mahākāśyapa arrived, and when he did, he venerated Buddha’s feet which miraculously appear. The worship of Buddha’s feet (pāda) is important in a number of ways. First, the Buddha’s pāda was also considered a relic. Second, the story of the pāda’s magical appearance foreshadows the magical movement of relics. Lastly, the footprints of the Buddha in fact developed into a cult that can be viewed as an early form of worship of Buddha’s relics.

Mahākāśyapa, acting as Buddha’s ‘eldest son’, circumambulates Buddha’s body three times, covering one shoulder with his robe, and only then does the funeral pyre finally ignites by itself.

**Cremation:** From Buddha’s cremation onwards, this way for disposing the bodies of deceased monks became the norm, and yet, other forms such as immersion in a river, burial or leaving the body in a deserted place, were still allowed. While paralleling cremation of Buddhist monks with those of other Indian traditions (Hindu to the most part), the main difference is that for the latter it is a sacrificial rite

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186 The Buddha’s pāda was one of the insignia of Buddha up to the commencement of creating statues and other depictions of his form, a few centuries later, as will be seen in chapter five. For an interesting book from the Thai tradition about Buddha’s feet, see: Cicuzza, Claudio. 2011. *A Mirror Reflecting the Entire World, the Pāli Buddhapādanaṅgala or “Auspicious Signs of the Buddha’s Feet.” Critical Edition with English Translation.* Bangkok and Lumbini: Fragile Palm Leaves Foundation, Lumbini International Research Institute.

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190 It was considered a sign of respect towards the Buddha to uncover one’s right shoulder in his presence.
intended to ensure (a good) rebirth and the eradication of all bodily remnants while for the former it is a ritual with the intent of producing relics. Another distinction should be made between the cremations of Buddhist monks to the disposal of the body of other samnyāsins, who are distinctly not cremated: the samnyāsin ascetics have already renounced home and by extension renounced any family member who could do their death rites, because they have done their own mortuary rites when wandering forth. Since very ancient times and up to the present, Hindu samnyāsins are typically buried or immersed in a river, so that the funeral of a tathāgata is not only to be performed as befitting a Cakravartin, but is distinguished by the cremation aspect as well, contrary to that of other samnyāsins. According to the Pāli text, when the fire was finally extinguished, having consumed Buddha’s body entirely, nothing was left of Buddha’s body - “Neither skin, under-skin, flesh, sinew, nor joint-fluid”, nothing remained except relics. This was said to counteract any view that the relics might be formed from any unburned body part, like bones, as the sūtra further states that “Not even ash from the Buddha’s body remained”. The compiler of the Pāli Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta, Buddhaghosa, described the relics as: “like jasmine buds, washed pearls, nuggets of gold, in three sizes: as big as mustard seeds, broken grains of rice, and split green peas”. Buddha’s tooth relics and other bone relics, the cult of which developed in later historical contexts and in other lands, should be distinguished from these relics, the sarīrāni, collected directly after Buddha’s cremation. In sum, through this story it seems that the Buddha-relics are not made up or manufactured through any process from Buddha’s physical body; the relics are a separate kind of transformation of the Buddha after his parinirvāṇa, that are ‘processed’ through the cremation fire.

193 Cuevas, 2010, p. 44
194 Cuevas, 2010, p. 45. It is said that later heavy showers extinguished the fire, while the local Mallas poured scented-water on the pyre as well (Walshe, 1987, p. 275)
195 In this injunction the Buddha body is called sarīra while the relics are called sarīrāni.
196 Cuevas, 2010, p. 45
197 Later traditions suggest there were other relics, such as four of Buddha’s teeth, acquired by other people and divinities. Xuanzang, from the Chinese version of the sūtra, says that the relics distributed were only a third of the actual Buddha-relics. Another third went to the gods and another third to the nāgas, as in the quote that closes this chapter (Strong, 2004, p. 120)
The Collection and Distribution of the Relics: All four versions of the sūtra relate that the local Malla people collected and put all the Buddha-relics in one golden casket called kumbha which was transported to the center of the city of Kuśinagara and enshrined in a great hall, guarded by “cages of spears” and other protective methods, to ward off not just humans but spirits too. Nonetheless, the news spreads quickly and the first to react to the sad news of Buddha’s passing was King Ajātaśatru of Magadha. After recovering from the shock of hearing the news, he demands the relics. He sends a message to the Mallas saying: “The Blessed One was a kṣatriya, and so am I, I am worthy of building a stūpa and paying homage to the relics of the Blessed One”. Suspecting that the Mallas would not comply with his demand for the relics, he backs up his demand by setting out himself to Kuśinagara along with a great army. Soon after, representatives of the other neighboring tribes arrive, and similarly demand the relics: these are, in addition to the local Mallas of Kuśināra and King Ajātaśatru of Magadha, the Licchavis of Vaiśālī, the Sākyas of Kapilavastu, the Mallas of Pāvā, the Bulakas of Calakalpa, the Krauḍyas (Koliyas) of Rāmagrāma, and the Brahmans of Viṣṇudvīpa. Even though all these representatives demanded at least a share of the relics, ready to use force if necessary, the local Mallas refuse to share them, and according to some accounts even start to train their women and children to join their numerically inferior army. A bas-relief found in Sanchi depicts this scene, from which it is clear that tensions were high in Kuśinagara at that moment, while it is further related that the other representatives (except the Brahmans of Viṣṇudvīpa) gathered armies to collect the relics for themselves. It is possible that Buddha’s exhortation to build “a stūpa” for his relics was interpreted as just one stūpa containing all the relics. In any case, a

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198 Strong, 2004, p. 118. Later texts elaborated that the relics were guarded closely by a four-fold army consisting of elephants, horses, chariots and soldiers. Clearly, the local Malls did not expect that their own possession of the relics will go unchallenged. Also, his was done in order to foretell that the relics immediately became an object of dispute, each of nearby eight principalities claiming their (exclusive) right over them.
199 Walshe, 1987, pp. 275-76
201 Cuevas, 2010, p. 46
202 Initially it is said that the Buddha asked that his relics will be enshrined in a single stūpa at a crossroad, and two traditions tried to hold to this: In one of the Chinese versions of the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, it is written that there was only one stūpa
“war of the relics” never really ensued, and through negotiations it was agreed that the Brahmin Droṇa will decide, and he indeed does so, dividing the relics in a manner agreeable by all parties. He divides the relics into eight equal shares that will be respectfully taken and enshrined in stūpas in the recipients’ home lands. After the division of the relics, Droṇa asks and is granted permission to keep the urn (kumbha) with which the relics were measured, for himself, and he resolves to build a stūpa on it as well. Then, a young Brahmin from Pippalāyana arrives, and realizing that he had arrived too late, he is satisfied with obtaining the ashes of the cremation fire, that are granted to him, and likewise he vows to place them in a stūpa in his country. Thus in total there is a division of the relics into ten parts, the eight measures of relics, the vessel and the ashes.

with relics near Kuṇinagara, built there ninety days after the cremation. In another, Theravādin tradition, it is said that Mahākāśyapa later collected the relics from all ten sites (eight plus two, as we shall see below), albeit leaving a token amount at each, and enshrining all the relics in Rājagṛha. In this story it is related that Aśoka opened only this stūpa in order to collect all the relics. However, these stories remains uncommon and the explanations of only one relic stūpa didn’t hold sway (Strong, 2004, p. 121)

The scene of the armies getting ready for “A War on the Relics” was depicted in Gandhāra (now in the Cambridge University Museum) and in Amaravati (now in the Chennai Museum) (Shrestha, 2006, p. 6)

Pāli: Doṇa. His full name: Dhūmrasagotra.

Doṇa: “Listen, lords, to my proposal. Forbearance is the Buddha’s teaching. It is not right that strife should come from sharing out the best of man’s remains. Let’s all be joined in harmony and peace, in friendship sharing out portions eight: let stūpas far and wide be put up, that all may see – and gain in faith!” (Walshe, 1987, p. 276)

Cuevas, 2010, p. 46. The place where the division of relics occurred can be visited today, not far from the local stūpa of Makuṭa-Bandhana in Kuṇinagara, which is located a kilometer and a half from the site of the parinirvāṇa.

Cuevas, 2010, p. 46. There are various (later) stories where it is told that Droṇa smeared the inside of the urn with honey so that some of the relics would stick and he could keep them for himself. See: Ruppert, Brian D. 2000. Jewel in the ashes, Buddha Relics and Power in Early Medieval Japan. Harvard: Harvard East Asian Monographs, pp. 290-91

Pāli: Pipphalavana.

Cuevas, 2010, p. 47. The ashes of the embers from the pyre collected by the young Brahmin representative of Pippalāyana were considered very sacred, as well as Droṇa’s kumbha, and thus in most accounts of the division of Buddha’s relics, these are mentioned as ten parts. Phyllis Granoff connects the number ten with the Brahmanical custom of navaśṛṇḍha, where ten rice balls (piṇḍa) are placed for ten days after a death. Indeed, in some Gandhāran depictions of the division of the Buddha-relics, the relics (śarīra) divided, look like balls of rice. The theme of latecomers to the relic division scene brought up later retellings of this story. For example, Xuanzang narrates that King Uttarasena of Udyāna arrives, saying that the Buddha promised him a share of the relics. Xuanzang wrote that despite being resented by the other representatives, King Uttarasena did get a share of the relics as well (Cuevas, 2010, p. 47). Another tradition maintains that the division of the relics to the human representatives was made from just a third of the total sum of the relics, while the other two thirds went to the gods (taken on their behalf by Indra) and the nāgas, as is related in the quote that ends this chapter. This division to three main parts is told in: Ruppert, Brian D. 2000. Jewel in the ashes, Buddha Relics and Power in Early Medieval Japan. Harvard: Harvard East Asian Monographs, p. 290. In later versions Droṇa not just smeared the urn with honey, but also hid a tooth relic which Indra later steals from him (Cuevas, 2010, p. 47). In yet another Pāli tradition, Drona hides three teeth relics, and then Indra takes one, the nāga Jasyasena another and a man from Gandhāra the third, in yet again a division to the human, nāga and god realms.
The Stūpas: The last element in the Buddha funeral is the injunction that the relics should be enshrined in stūpas. Initially as we saw, this instruction was for a single stūpa, housing the Buddha-relics on a crossroads. This led to a few traditions that maintained their belief in only one stūpa, but eventually this did not hold sway, so that the eight stūpas narrative (plus the urn and ashes from the pyre) is the tradition that prevailed eventually throughout the Buddhist world. The sūtra does not tell us about the transportation of the relics to their respective countries, but later traditions expanded on it.

The Mahāparinibbāna Sutta ends with a praise that highlights the importance of the Rāmagāma share of the Buddha’s relics:

“Eight portions there were of the relics of him, The All-Seeing One, the greatest of men.
Seven in Jambudīpa are honored, and one in Rāmagāma, by kings of the Nāga race.
One tooth is honored in the Tavatimsa heaven, one in the realm of Kalinga,
And one by the Nāga kings. Through their brightness this bountiful earth
With its most excellent gifts is endowed; for thus the relics of the All-Seeing one are best honored
By those who are worthy of honor - by gods and nāgas
And lords of men, yea, by the highest of mankind.
Pay homage with clasped hands! For hard indeed it is

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210 In the Buddha’s words: “A stūpa should be erected at the crossroads for the Tathāgata, and whoever lays wreaths or put sweet perfumes and colors (probably meaning sandalwood) there with a devout heart, will reap benefit and happiness for a long time” (Walshe, 1987, p. 264) The name of the intersection of four great roads, on which it was instructed to build the single stūpa (Pāli: thūpa) is called cātummahāpathr. This can symbolize “four great directions”, meaning at important junction. Even though it can mean the center of a great city, stūpas were not placed there.

211 In one of the Chinese versions of the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra there is only one stūpa, built near Kuśinagara ninety days after the funeral. Jean Przyluski has argued that the most ancient narrative tradition is that of one stūpa in Rāmagrāma on the Ganges. Also, there is a later Theravada tradition that says that after the construction of the eight relic stūpas, Mahākāśyapa collected them and enshrined the bulk of the relics in one place, in Rājagṛha, and leaving only a token in the eight countries (Cuevas, 2010, p. 48). It is interesting to note that indeed from Aśokan times onwards, Rāmagrāma was known to be the only stūpa remaining intact out of the first eight stūpas.

212 Cuevas, 2010, p. 49. For example, in a commentary on the Dīgha Nikāya, there is a tale about the relics obtained by Ajātaśatru going to Magadha. The two hundred mile stretch is paved and bazaars spring up along the way, the relics carried in a golden casket and are put down where offerings of flowers are made. It is said about this journey of the relics from Kuśinagara, that after seven years, seven months and seven days, they still did not reach Rājagṛha. People who were forced to worship the relics and complained about it were said to later take birth in hell, which caused some monks to convince King Ajātaśatru to take the relics directly and enshrine them in a stūpa. The same source claims that the same story happened with the other shares of the relics.

213 This quote was most probably inserted into the Pāli Mahāparinibbāna Sutta in later times by the Sinhalese monks who compiled it. For more on Nāgas as the guardians of Buddha-relics, see chapter four.
Through hundreds of ages to meet with an All-Enlightened One!"\(^{214}\)

**Aftermath: the First Buddhist Council**

While Mahākāśyaā was still away at Pāvā, upon hearing the sad news of Buddha’s passing, one old monk was so happy hearing that the Buddha has died, that he exclaimed: “now no one will give us orders!”\(^{215}\) Mahākāśyapa kept silent but this caused him to plan a meeting of the elders in order to recite from memory all the teachings the Buddha had taught. This initial thought led the First Buddhist Council, which occurred three months after Buddha’s *parinirvāṇa* at the Saptaparni caves which overlook the city Rājagrha.\(^{216}\) Another reason for planning the First Buddhist Council was the recent demise of Mahāvīra, the founder of the Jain religion, which caused arguments regarding his succession.\(^{217}\) Being aware of that, the Buddha, in order to avoid such conflicts after his passing away, instructed that the Dharma will be his successor, and it was this Dharma that Mahākāśyapa wished to compile.

The *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* can be read in many ways. It can be seen as an important portion of the Buddha’s biography and also as a depiction of how early Buddhists dealt with the crisis presented to them with the passing away of the founder of their religion. The steps mentioned in the Buddha’s funeral as a *Cakravartin*, and the *śarīra-pūjā*, all lead to the production, collection and preservation of his relics. We can further view Buddha’s *parinirvāṇa* as a separation of the *Dharmakāya* (‘truth-body’) from the *Rūpakāya* (‘form-body’). The former remains as the teachings and the latter as the physical relics. We can

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\(^{215}\) His name is Subhada, not to be confused with the Subhadra that was Buddha’s last disciple.

\(^{216}\) Interestingly, In Butön’s (*bu ston rin chen grub*, 1290–1364) narration of the history of Buddhism, these two events (the *Parinirvāṇa* and the First Buddhist Council) are connected. See: Butön Rinchen Drup. 2013. *Butön’s History of Buddhism in India and Its Spread to Tibet: A Treasury of Priceless Scripture*, Translated by Lisa Stein and Ngawang Zangpo. Boston: Snow Lion pub. (Tsadra Foundation)

\(^{217}\) Mahāvīra was later depicted as the twenty-fourth Jain *Tīrthika* or “ford-maker”. It is important to note that Jainism’s founder was a contemporary to the Buddha. At times Mahāvīra and the Buddha taught in close proximity to each other in Rājagrha. While disciples reported to each teacher on the other’s activities, both teachers never met in person.
thus observe in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* an effort to collect both: the teaching, through Mahākaśyapa’s planning for the First Buddhist Council (where Ānanda recited all the discourses he heard, using his ‘total recall’ memory, and Upāli taught the *Vinaya*) and the physical Buddha-relics, through the representatives of the above eight tribes, all promising to build stūpas enshrining their respective share of the relics. The memory of the Buddha was thus preserved in these two ways: the First Buddhist Council represents the Dharma and the relic-stūpas represent the Buddha. Both the Dharma and the relics are therefore focal points for an ongoing relationship with the Buddha even after his death. Tradition holds that the Dharma will decline progressively until it will be totally forgotten and only then the future Buddha Maitreya will arrive. A similar belief is applied to the Buddha-relics: called the ‘parinirvāna of the relics’. This entails that prior to Maitreya’s arrival; all of Gautama’s relics will come together at Bodh Gayā and reassemble. It is foretold that, elevated in mid-air, the relic-body of the Buddha will then perform once again the double appearance of water and fire, as was displayed in Śrāvastī. This magical appearance will then be consumed by fire, marking the complete extinction of the teaching, heralding a dark age.

The *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* sets the tone for the origins of what was later called ‘the cult of relics’, or ‘the worship of relics’. It is widely recognized that the *sūtra* underwent development, as all its versions attest to a period before the sectarian divisions that took place approximately one-hundred to one-hundred

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218 Ānanda’s recitation from memory of all the Buddha taught in his twenty-five years of being Buddha’s attendant was accepted with great joy, the hearing participants feeling it is just as if the Buddha himself was teaching. Initially though, Ānanda could not join the First Buddhist Council because he was yet to reach the level of an Arhat, even though he was the only one remembering all of Buddha’s discourses (when committing to become Buddha’s attendant, Ānanda asked that every teaching the Buddha gives in his absence will be repeated to him personally). Eventually, at the last moment, Ānanda managed to achieve the state of an Arhat for everyone’s relief. When he himself passed away, he decided to do so in mid-air above the Ganges in Pāṭaliputra and his relics landed on both banks of the river. There used to be a stūpa commemorating him on the northern bank which cannot be found today.


220 Called also the “twin-miracle”.

221 Strong, 2001, p. 148. There is a hill in Bihar (the highest one in the predominantly flat state) about two hours drive from Bodh Gayā, called Gurpa hill (or Gurupādaka). Tradition has it that Mahākāśyapa is waiting there in samādhi for the advent of the next Buddha Maitreya, keeping there the robes he got from Śākyamuni Buddha to give Maitreya when the time comes.
and fifty years after the Buddha’s death. Andrè Bareau regards the sections on Buddha’s last hours, last counsels and parinirvāṇa, as the historical ‘kernel’ of the text which was compiled within several decades after the parinirvāṇa.²²² Bareau further dates the specification on the four pilgrimage sites and four persons worthy of a stūpa, to between the end of the third century BCE and the beginning of the first century CE.²²³ He made this distinction because these later incidents do not appear in all the versions of the sūtra. Furthermore, Gregory Schopen wrote that there is no inscriptional evidence of sectarian differences from before the second century CE.²²⁴ The important passage when the Buddha extols: “do not trouble yourselves with sarīra-pūja, but strive for the highest goal”, which came after Ānanda asks what to do with Buddha’s body, was interpreted in the past that monks should not busy themselves with relic-worship. Schopen’s convincing argument against this view is that both monks and laity worshipped relics. This he proved through inscriptive analysis, showing many ordained donors in many ancient stūpas.²²⁵ Schopen wrote that the term sarīra-pūja shifts its meaning from body to relics, so that Buddha’s injunction is that monks should not trouble themselves with the funeral rites, meaning that there was no sanction of monastics to participate in the cult of relic veneration.

²²³ Bareau, 1979, p. 65
²²⁴ Trainor, 1997, p. 53
²²⁵ Trainor, 1997, p. 55. In Sanchi and Bhārhūt, forty percent of the donated inscriptions found are from monks (from between the years one-hundred twenty to eighty BC). Also, archaeological evidence from second century BC rock-cut monasteries in Western India, had worship halls that were oriented around stūpas, which means that stūpa veneration was a central aspect in the life of monastics very early on. For the full discussion, see: “Monks and the Relic Cult in the Mahāparinibbāna-sutta, An Old Misunderstanding in Regard to Monastic Buddhism”, by Gregory Schopen (Schopen, Gregory. 1997. Bones, Stones and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archeology, Epigraphy and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press. pp. 99-113)
For Schopen, it is only after the cremation that *sarīra-pūja* means “relic-veneration”: *sarīra* in its singular form means ‘body’ while in its plural form it means ‘relics’.

It is further apparent that by Aśoka’s time, relic worship was prevalent in both monastic and lay life, all over India.

### Chapter Four

**King Aśoka: His Pilgrimage and the Spread of Buddhism with Relic-Stūpas**

“Today in Rāmagrāma the eighth stūpa stands
For in those days the nāgas guarded it with devotion.
The king did not take the relics from there
But left them alone and, full of faith, withdrew”

*Aśokāvadāna*

**The Life and Times of the Mauryan King Aśoka**

These days, the story of the great Mauryan King Aśoka is well-known, in books and movies for the popular audience, and for the Buddhist pilgrim too, as throughout Greater India there are abundant ancient monasteries, stūpas and pillars, said to have been constructed by his orders. And yet his story was forgotten in India for centuries, only to be discovered progressively in the nineteenth century by British Orientalists. In Modern India Aśoka’s symbols, such as the wheel (Skt: *cakra*, Pāli: *cakka*) and the four faced lion capital, decorate India’s flag and bank notes respectively. On the discovery of Aśoka’s past the reader in referred to Charles Allen’s important book “Ashoka: The Search for India’s Lost Emperor”. On how the ancient past of Aśoka’s empire continues to influence Modern India, Himanshu Prabha Ray’s

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227 This is the same time period that Buddhism arrived in Sri Lanka. The first stūpa on the island, the Thūpārāma thūpa at Anurādhapure, was built according to tradition by King Devānampiyatissa over relics of the Buddha that were acquired from Aśoka and from Sakka, king of the *devas* (Trainor, 1997, p. 61 and pp. 90-91)

228 Strong, 1983, p. 219


“The Return of the Buddha, Ancient Symbols for a New Nation” is highly recommended. The sources for what is known today about the life and times of King Aśoka are gathered mainly from the Sanskrit text, the Aṣokāvadāna, from narrations of his story in other Asian countries and from the deciphering of the edicts Aśoka left all over Greater India.

Candragupta Maurya, Asoka’s grandfather, ascended the throne at around the year 320 BCE. One account writes that he was an illegitimate son of a Nanda prince with a slave girl called Mura, while another account has it that he was a mercenary cavalry man from the Aśvaka tribe from beyond the Indus. Buddhist and Jain literature indicates that he came from the Moriya tribe of Pipphalīvana, which was situated in the harsh land between Koligrama (the Koliyas land of Rāmagrāma) and the Mallas of Kuśinagara. Candragupta transformed at great speed the eighteen Mahājanapadas of old into one large kingdom that stretched from the eastern to the western seas and to the north west of Sindh. Two decades later, Candragupta handed the throne to his son Bindusara in order to become a Jain ascetic under the tutelage of a Jain saint in South India, ending his life with self-inflicted starvation in a cave. Bindusara continued to extend the Mauryan Empire deeper into South India, barring the friendly Dravidian states, and the unfriendly Kaliṅga state in the east. It is around the year 270 BCE that Bindusara passed away and

231 Ray, Himanshu Prabha. 2014. The Return of the Buddha, Ancient Symbols for a New Nation. New Delhi: Routledge. Replicating King Aśoka’s status by local kings was done throughout Asia over the past two-millennia.
232 The Sanskrit Aṣokāvadāna forms a small portion of the voluminous Sanskrit text, the Dīvyāvadāna (it is only extent as part of the latter, and in two Chinese texts: the A-yu wang chuan and the A-yu wang ching). The Aṣokāvadāna is dated to around the second century CE, based on early traditional materials, and was composed in northwest India (most probably in Mathura) by Sarvāstivādin circles. Translations of it enjoyed popularity in Central Asia, China, Japan and Korea.
234 The Greek ambassador to Pāṭliputta, Megasthenes, dated Candragupta (Gk. Sandrokottos) accession to the throne to 321 BCE.
235 Gk. Assakenoi.
236 Allen, Charles. 2010. The Buddha and Dr. Fuhrer, An Archeological Scandal. London: Penguin Books, p. 16. It is remembered that the representatives from Pipphalīvana (or Pippalāyana) came too late to the division of Buddha’s relics and settled for his ashes. It might well be that Pipphalīvana had some Śākyas living with them too, after the being scattered following King Virūḍhaka massacre of the Śākyas. In any case these origins also act as a legitimization of the Mauryans as inheritors of the Buddha’s teachings, in this case the ashes from his funeral pyre. This connection was probably highlighted given Candragupta’s humble origins (Allen, 2010, p. 16)
after about four years he was succeeded by his son Aśoka (lit. ‘Without Sorrow’), who killed his brothers and then embarked on a campaign to subdue the unruly Kaliṅgas.\(^ {237} \) A day after this war, Aśoka was reviewing the enormous damage and loss of life, and cried in despair “what have I done?” Aśoka’s first wife, Queen Devī, who was a devout Buddhist, upon hearing the consequences of the king’s actions, left him in disgust. When back home in Pāṭaliputra, Aśoka was haunted by nightmares, and was eventually comforted by his nephew, a Buddhist monk, whose father Aśoka had killed. Subsequently, on the seventh year since ascending the throne, Aśoka was converted to the Buddhist faith by the fifth great elder in line, the Venerable Upagupta. From that time on, King Aśoka was not known any longer as Candashoka (‘Merciless-Aśoka’) but as Dhammashoka (‘Dharma-Aśoka’),\(^ {238} \) while on his imperial edicts he was known as Devanamapriya priyadasi (‘Beloved of the Gods who loves all’). Consulting with his preceptor Upagupta it was decided to uphold, preserve and propagate the Buddha-Dharma throughout the empire.\(^ {239} \) The way to spread the Dharma (along with his rule) was to distribute the Buddha-relics by first opening the eight relic stūpas and then re-burying their sacred content in allegedly eighty-four thousand new stūpas. According to the Aśokāvadāna or ‘Narrative of Aśoka’,\(^ {240} \) there was initial resistance from local communities, so that the king had to use his army as a ‘backup’ in order to open the first of these stūpas, the one in Rājagriha.\(^ {241} \) And yet, the texts also mention that the king repaired the damaged structures,
leaving a portion of the relics within them.\textsuperscript{242} After opening the first seven stūpas he reached the stūpa of Rāmagrāma and found it guarded by a local nāga, who refused to allow him to open it, and therefore the relics are said to have remained there.\textsuperscript{243}

After distributing the relics far and wide, Aśoka wished to undertake a pilgrimage to the places blessed by the Buddha and honor them with marks that can be left for posterity, the well-known aforementioned Aśokan-edicts.\textsuperscript{244} In his twenty-first year as king, Aśoka visited Lumbinī where he erected an edict and a stūpa, while exempting the local populace from taxes.\textsuperscript{245} It is noteworthy that on these pilgrimages, King Aśoka traveled with four battalions of troops.\textsuperscript{246} This pilgrimage was focused on thirty-two sites associated with the biography of the Buddha, as well as sites connected to previous Buddhas, identified through Upagupta’s divine eye.

Aśoka is also known for having hosted the Third Buddhist Council. A hundred years after the First Buddhist Council, a second Council was convened in Vaiśālī, after monks from the Vṛji tribe followed points which were regarded as unorthodox, so that the Sangha split and the Vṛji monks were later known as the Mahāsāṃghikas.\textsuperscript{247} The split widened, so that by the time of Aśoka there were eighteen sub-schools.\textsuperscript{248} The Third Buddhist Council was convened in Pātaliputra, presided by Moggaliputta Tissa, who then compiled the Kathāvatthu (‘points of controversy’), refuting the Vṛji’s arguments. The council was

\textsuperscript{242} This claim is testified in the oldest stūpas found, like the one in Vaiśālī, and even in Rāmagrāma there is evidence of Mauryan period brick bats (the bricks used to construct stūpas), as we shall learn in the last chapter.

\textsuperscript{243} Here, Charles Allen has an idea that the locals, the Koliyas or their descendants, being snake worshippers of the sacred cobra Naag, revered as the guardian of the Buddha, fought to dissuade Aśoka from opening this stūpa. His idea comes from the question as to why Aśoka needed a great army to follow him. See: Allen, 2010, p. 19

\textsuperscript{244} The pillars, with their inscriptions were made of a single piece of sandstone, up to fifty feet length and weighing in tons, and all came from the same quarry on the banks of the Ganges, which is identified as Chunar near Varanasi (see: Allen, Charles. 2012. Ashoka: The Search for India’s Lost Emperor. London: Abacus). The pillars were transported hundreds of miles before being erected and capped with carved statues of elephants, bulls, lions or horses (Allen, 2010, p. 62)

\textsuperscript{245} This is attested to in the well-known Aśokan Pillar situated in Lumbinī.

\textsuperscript{246} Allen, 2010, p. 17

\textsuperscript{247} Ahir, 1995, pp. 79-80. The Mahāsāṃghikas might well have been the beginning of Mahāyāna movement, at least in terms of the Vinaya.

attended by a thousand eminent monks and lasted nine months. The Pāli Tripiṭaka was recited in this council and was given its final shape. It is noteworthy that this council is only mentioned in Sinhalese texts.²⁴⁹

King Aśoka ruled for thirty-eight years before becoming a monk, and from then onwards his empire started to decline. Apart from his son and daughter going to Ceylon,²⁵⁰ less is known of his daughter going northwards to Nepal. Even though it is not mentioned in the Aśokāvadāna that Aśoka visited the Nepal valley,²⁵¹ in Nepali legends he did go there,²⁵² along with the monk Upagupta and his daughter Carumati,²⁵³ who married a local warrior called Devapala.²⁵⁴ This couple is said to have established two viharas while Aśoka himself is credited with founding the city of Devapattana (Patan), building there five memorial stūpas honoring Buddha Śākyamuni and previous Buddhas.²⁵⁵

**King Aśoka’s Visit to Rāmagrāma and His Mission to Spread the Relics to Eighty-Four Thousand Dharmarājikās**

King Aśoka’s great act of building eighty-four thousand stūpas gave him the title that became a motif throughout Asia: ‘Aśoka, builder of eighty-four thousand stūpas’.²⁵⁶ The story of Aśoka as told in the Aśokāvadāna, begins from his previous life, when as a boy, having nothing to offer the passing Buddha, picks up and hands him dirt (with a pure motivation). Then and there it is told that the Buddha predicts that this boy in the future will greatly benefit the Dharma.²⁵⁷ The Aśokāvadāna divides this section into

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²⁴⁹ The canon recited was taken to Sri Lanka by Mahinda, divided into the three Piṭakas: Vinaya, Sutta and Abhidhamma (Ahir, 1995, p. 82)
²⁵⁰ Ceylon, Sri Lanka and Sinhala are used interchangeably.
²⁵¹ In medieval times it was called ‘Nevala’, meaning the Kathmandu Valley.
²⁵³ This is Chabahil stūpa near Boudhanath, known also as the ‘Carumati stūpa’.
²⁵⁴ This is the time period of the reign of Rājā Sthunko, the fourteenth ruler of the Kirat dynasty.
²⁵⁵ These stūpas can be visited nowadays: they are situated at the four corners of modern Patan, along with a central one, situated next to a pond. There is no hard evidence of dating these stūpas as far back as the third century BCE.
²⁵⁶ Strong, 1983, p. 110. This title of “Aśoka, builder of the eighty-four thousand stūpas” was known as far as Japan (Strong, 1983, p. 109)
²⁵⁷ Strong, 1983, p. 110
two parts: the collection of the relics and the simultaneous completion of the new stūpas.\textsuperscript{258} The first part begins with the king going with a fourfold army to the droṇa stūpa of Ajātaśatru. He broke it open, took all the relics out, and put back a portion, setting up a new stūpa, as a token of devotion.\textsuperscript{259} The same occurs with the second to the seventh droṇa stūpas.\textsuperscript{260} Then proceeding to Rāmagrāma, the nāgas residing there took him down to their palace and told him: ”we here pay homage to our droṇa stūpa”. Aśoka, therefore, let them keep their relics intact, and the nāga king himself escorts him back from the palace. The Aśokāvadāna concluded: “Today in Rāmagrāma the eighth stūpa stands, for in those days the nāgas guarded it with devotion. The king did not take the relics from there but left them alone and, full of faith, withdrew”.\textsuperscript{261} This was interpreted that Aśoka could not match the offerings the nāgas made to this relic-stūpa, as was told later similarly by Faxian and Xuanzang. This scene was also popularly depicted on bas-reliefs found in Sanchi and Amaravati.\textsuperscript{262} The fact that the Rāmagrāma relics acted as a precious, ‘coveted trope’, particularly in Sinhalese chronicles, can be seen from later alternative narrations about their fate: The Mahāvamsa for example, which emphasize the story of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, narrates that King

\textsuperscript{258} The day of the simultaneous completion of the task of building the eighty-four thousand stūpas was marked also with the birth of his son Kunāla.

\textsuperscript{259} Strong, 1983, p. 219

\textsuperscript{260} The relic-stūpas are called here droṇa stūpas because of enshrining one drone (literally ‘a measure’) of relics, and also due to the Brahmin named Droṇa who mediated the relics’s division.

\textsuperscript{261} The full translation of this section from the original Sanskrit of the Aśokāvadāna by John S. Strong: “Then King Aśoka, intending to distribute far and wide the bodily relics of the Blessed One, went together with a fourfold army to the droṇa stūpa that Ajātaśatru had built. He broke it open, took out all the relics, and putting back a portion of them, set up a new stūpa. He did the same with the second droṇa stūpa and so on up to the seventh one, removing the relics from each of them and then setting up new stūpas as tokens of his devotion. Then he proceeded to Rāmagrāma. There the nāgas took him down to the nāga palace and told him:”We here pay homage to our droṇa stūpa”. Aśoka. Therefore, let them keep their relics intact, and the nāga king himself escorted him back up from the palace. Indeed as it is said: “Today in Rāmagrāma the eighth stūpa stands. For in those days the nāgas guarded it with devotion. The king did not take the relics from there. But left them alone and, full of faith, withdrew” (Strong, S. John. 1983. p. 219) John S. Strong further mentions that according to some texts the town of Rāmagrāma was flooded by the Ganges not longer after getting their share of relics and building a stūpa, so that the relics swept away and sunk to the underwater palace of the nāgas, where they continued to worship them (Strong, 1983, p. 111). The Archaeologist of Rāmagrāma, sukar sagar Shrestha, is of the opinion that it was local nāga people who did not let Aśoka open the stūpa (Shrestha, 2006, p. 7)

Duṭṭhagāmaṇi\textsuperscript{263} succeeded where Aśoka supposedly failed, and obtained the Rāmagrāma relics.\textsuperscript{264} And yet, there are other Sanskrit traditions that maintain that Aśoka did retrieve the relics from the nāgas, such as in the \textit{Samyuktāgama},\textsuperscript{265} where in its last section it is told that King Ajātaśatru deposited all the Buddha relics in the Ganges, guarded by a huge revolving-wheel with sharp swords. Aśoka manages to stop this wheel, but is confronted by a nāga and the only way to pass it is by being ‘heavier’ in merit, which Aśoka then hastens to perform and then takes away the relics.\textsuperscript{266}

The \textit{Aśokāvadāna} continues with the preparations for having eighty-four thousand boxes made of gold, silver, cat’s-eye and crystal, and placing the retrieved relics inside them. Also prepared are the same number of urns and inscription plates.\textsuperscript{267} These were given to the \textit{yakṣas}\textsuperscript{268} for distribution to the eighty-four thousand \textit{dharmarājikās} (monuments pertaining to the King of Dharma’), built “throughout the earth, as far as the surrounding ocean, in small, great, and middle-sized towns, wherever there was [a population] of one hundred thousand [persons]”.\textsuperscript{269} An interesting anecdote is told in the \textit{Aśokāvadāna}: Takṣaśilā, having a population of thirty-six hundred thousand, request thirty-six shares of relics. Aśoka turns them down by threatening to execute thirty-five hundred thousand of them!\textsuperscript{270} Nonetheless, his harsh threat is attributed in the text to his skillful means.\textsuperscript{271} The relics must be evenly spread in \textit{Jambudvīpa}, and similarly, all reliquaries have the same amount of relics inserted in them. Aśoka then asks an elder called Yaśas, in the monastery of Kukkuṭārāma to single out the moment when all the stūpas are complete. Yaśas

\textsuperscript{263} Ruled between the years 101 to 77 BCE.

\textsuperscript{264} Strong, 1983, p. 113: Later in this tale, Sonuttara, on Duṭṭhagāmaṇi’s behalf, descends to the Nāga place where he accuses the snake lords of not honoring the Buddha properly, and proceeds to steal the relics and returning with them to Sri Lanka, were they are enshrined in great ceremony. Strong writes that “the legend is twisted to spawn a later Sinhalese tradition that these relics had been revered for enshrinement in the Great Stūpa on the Island of Sri Lanka” (Strong, 1983, p. 113).

\textsuperscript{265} This text only survived in Chinese, called the \textit{A-yu- wang chuan}. The Sanskrit original is lost.

\textsuperscript{266} Strong, 1983, pp. 113-14 and also see in Strong, 2004, pp. 127-136.

\textsuperscript{267} Strong, 1983, p. 219

\textsuperscript{268} Pāli: \textit{Yakkhas}. A class of semi-divine beings.

\textsuperscript{269} Strong, 1983, pp. 219-20

\textsuperscript{270} Strong, 1983, p. 115

\textsuperscript{271} Strong, 1983, p. 220
agrees to do so by eclipsing the sun with his gesture,\textsuperscript{272} and then the text says: “From those seven reliquaries of old the Mauryan took away the relics of the sage, and built on this earth in one day eighty-four thousand stūpas, resplendent as the autumn clouds”.\textsuperscript{273}

The Dharmarājikā stūpas connect Aśoka to the Buddha: we can interpret the simultaneous completion of this task with the accomplishment of both the rūpakāya and dharmakāya: the former is represented by Buddha’s eighty-four thousand body parts/ relics, representing ‘form’, and the latter with the number of sections of Dharma, the teaching.\textsuperscript{274} Another tradition related an ancient system that regards the human body as having eighty-four thousand tiny parts, kind of ‘atoms’, which can be interpreted as honoring the eighty-four thousand parts of Buddha’s body. Dividing the relics to this number was done so that Buddha’s body is symbolically reconstructed throughout Aśoka’s empire, or realm. Even though this number might be just symbolic, there is no doubt that many Dharmarājikās were built, with relic caskets interred in them, as found in far-reaching archaeological sites. Xuanzang lists and describes over a hundred Dharmarājikās he visited,\textsuperscript{275} and a dozen stūpas having “a ching (measure) of relics of the Buddha”.\textsuperscript{276}

King Aśoka’s Pilgrimage to Buddha’s Thirty-Two Sites

\textsuperscript{272} This great eclipse, dated by astronomical means, helped scholars with the dates concerning Aśoka’s rule (See: Thapar, Romila. [1973] 1998. Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 20 and pp. 64-65
\textsuperscript{273} From the Aśokāvadāna (Strong, 1983, p. 220)
\textsuperscript{274} It is noted that when launching this campaign, King Aśoka asked his preceptor, Moggaliputta Tissa: “how great is the content of the Dharma taught by the Buddha”? The reply being “there are eighty-four thousand sections of the Dharma”. Aśoka then said “each one of them will I honor with a stūpa”.
\textsuperscript{275} Ahir, 1995, p. 110, and p. 113: Ahir is of the opinion that the Piprahwa Stūpa that yielded many relics in 1972, is of the original eight stūpas and that it was the only one (except Rāmagrāma that remains unopened) from the original eight relic stūpas that remained. The inscription found on the casket of Piprahwa Stūpa says: “Devaputra Vihare Kapilavastu Bhikkhu Sangha” and “Maha Kapilavastu Bhikkhu Sanghas” in Brahmi script of the first century CE. According to this, this was the share the Śākyas procured. Ahir further lists five locations where Dharmarājikās containing relics were discovered: Bhattiprolu Stūpa in Andhra Pradesh, discovered in 1891; Peshawar Stūpa, 1909; Dharmarajika Stūpa, Taxila, 1914; Nagarjunakonda Stūpa Andhra Pradesh, 1928; Devonmori Stūpa in Gujarat, 1962. Another casket found in Sarnath was lost from the Dharmarajika Stūpa there, dismantled for its bricks by Jagat Singh in 1794; the relics from it were thrown to the Ganges (Ahir, p. 114)
\textsuperscript{276} Ahir, p. 114: a few of these were in Jetavana (Śrāvastī) Mahāsala near Arrah (Patna) and in Kashmir. These stūpas were never identified.
In the eleventh year of his reign, King Aśoka commenced the ‘royal tours of pilgrimage’, and on his twenty-first year he went in Buddha’s footsteps of the aforementioned ‘last journey’, starting from Pāṭaliputra, crossing the Ganges to Vaiśālī, then to Kuśināgar and through the Tarai region to Lumbinī, which clearly was the convenient geographical route. From Lumbinī the party embarks on a pilgrimage to the places associated with Buddha’s biography. The Aśokāvadāna though, follows this pilgrimage in the traditional sequence of the events in Buddha’s life-story, a list of thirty-two places marking Buddha’s biography. Initially, Aśoka meets with Upagupta and brings up his wish to honor the places where the Blessed One lived and mark them with signs. Upagupta answers that this intention is magnificent and that he will show him the sites this very day adding: “The places where the Blessed One lived, we will honor with folded hands, and mark them with signs so that there will be no doubt”. With a fourfold army and with flowers, perfumes etc. they start this tour in Lumbinī, where Upagupta says: “This is the first of the caityas (commemorative monuments) of the Buddha whose eye is supreme. Here, as soon as he was born, the Sage took seven steps on the earth, looked down at the four directions, and spoke these words: ‘this is my last birth, I’ll not dwell in a womb again’”. Moving physically from place to place, Aśoka and Upagupta retrace and remember the events of the life of the Buddha. This marks the early-most documented pilgrimage to sites associated with Buddha’s biography. Aśoka wishes to experience the presence of the Buddha at each site, so that Upagupta calls the local divinities who saw the Buddha with

277 Allen, 2010, p. 82. This is from an Aśoka history book written by Vincent Smith. Today this route passes through the modern Muzaffarpur and Champaran districts of the state of Bihar and into Uttar Pradesh and then the Nepali Tarai.

278 The Fourteen Stops of Buddha’s last journey are narrated in Appendix I

279 If we would have followed these thirty-two sites as is done in its literal sequence, the party would go from Lumbinī, to Kapilavastu, then to the renunciation site south-east of Koliya and from there down to Magadha. Then south to the Bodh Gayā area, to Sarnath and back, up again to Magadha, then westwards to Śrāvastī and Sankissa, and back east to Kuśinagara. It is doubtless an inconvenient long route.

280 The Aśokāvadāna (Strong, 1983, p. 244)

281 The Aśokāvadāna (Strong, 1983, p. 244-45)

282 Strong, 1983, p. 120

283 It is unknown how much of pilgrimage in Buddha’s footsteps was done up to Mauryan times. There is scant evidence of it. It might have been that some ascetics visited Bodh Gayā, as it was frequented by ascetics well before the Buddha sat there. See on the significance of Bodh Gayā as the place of Buddha’s enlightenment: Blomfield, Vishvapani. 2011. Gautama Buddha, the Life and Teachings of the Awakened One. London: Quercus.
their own eyes, to narrate to Aśoka what they saw. This brings Aśoka to ecstatic devotion. Mentioned is a tree-spirit in Lumbinī and the nāga Kālika (or Muchalinda) in Bodh Gayā. At each site Aśoka is reported to have built a caitya. The difference between a ceitya and a stūpa is that the latter contains relics while the former is associated with places of pilgrimage, ancient sanctuaries, grooves and trees. A caitya is a monument intended to recall (anu-smṛ) in the faithful’s mind an important event from Buddha’s life, which gives rise to meritorious thoughts.\(^{284}\) The number thirty-two, for the number of sites in Asoka’s pilgrimage, is reminiscent of the Buddha’s thirty-two marks of a great man (Mahāpuruṣa). In order to achieve this fixed number, two of the sites listed below are repeated (the astrologers’ and the mastering of martial arts sites). The text does not actually mentions that there are thirty two ceityas, but merely tells the reader at each site: “over here” or “in this place” (Skt. asmin pradeśa). The number thirty-two also hints at Asoka’s own achievement as a Cakravartin, a term that implies either Buddhahood or great kingship, in this case meaning the latter. This pilgrimage symbolically reconstructs the body of a Mahāpuruṣa: of the Buddha Cakravartin on the one hand and of Aśoka on the other hand, enacting all these places, marking his own “Cakravartin- hood”.\(^{285}\) Furthermore, in Indian cosmology the number thirty-two is a popular way to arrange symmetrically units around a center; Indra’s heaven for example has thirty-two gods arraigned around Mount Meru.\(^{286}\) This same maṇḍala-like pattern also found place in earthly kingdoms, such as the Mon Kingdom of lower Burma, that was divided into thirty-two districts, all united by a cult of a relics of the Buddha, that miraculously multiplied into thirty-two parts when imported from India.\(^{287}\)

Similarly, as with the simultaneous construction of eighty-four thousand stūpas, Aśoka’s pilgrimage


\(^{285}\) Strong, 1983, pp. 124-125

\(^{286}\) Strong, 1983, p. 124

signifies an overlap between him and the Buddha, as these two great events that are told in the

Aṣokāvadāna establish and sanctify Aśoka rāja as a Cakravartin.

The Thirty-Two Sites of Aśoka’s Pilgrimage in Buddha’s Footsteps:288

1. The Lumbinī wood
2. The place where Siddhārtha’s father was shown his son and fell at his feet upon seeing the thirty-two marks on his body
3. The temple of the Śākya clan where Siddhārtha was presented to the gods
4. The place where he was shown to the fortune tellers
5. The place where Asita predicted he would become a Buddha
6. The place where he was nourished by Mahāprajapatī
7. The place where he learned the art of writing
8. Where he mastered the martial arts
9. Where he trained in martial arts
10. The place where he perused pleasure with his sixty-thousand wives
11. The place where he saw the old man, sick man, and dead man
12. The Jambu tree in the shade of which he meditated
13. The gate through which he left Kapilavastu on the Great Departure289
14. Where he sent back his groom (Chanda) and his horse
15. Where he exchanged his princely cloths for the robe of a hunter
16. The hermitage of the potter
17. The place where King Bimbisāra offered him half of his kingdom290
18. Where he met his teachers Āḷāra Kālāma and Udraka Rāmaputra291
19. The place where he practiced fierce austerities for six years292

288 Strong, S. John. 1989. *The Legend of King Aśoka, a Study and Translation of the Aṣokāvadāna*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. pp. 123-124. These sites are an interest for further investigation and study in the sense that some of these sites have already been sanctuaries, or places of religious significance, even before the Buddha’s time. Both Faxian and Xuanzang were well-aware of these thirty-two sites in their respective pilgrimages, locating most of them, specifically those in the Kapilavastu area, which are yet to be identified with certainty nowadays.

289 All the places from the second to the thirteenth were around Kapilavastu

290 This is in Rājagṛha, when King Bimbisāra was impressed with Siddhārtha’s demeanor and asked him to join him as a minister.

291 Pāli: Uddaka Rāmaputta.

292 Usually identified with the Mahākala Cave near Gayā, but most probably Siddhārtha practiced austerities in different places in the region.
20. Where he was offered the milk-rice by Sujata

21. Where the Nāga King Muchilinda met him on the road to Bodh Gayā

22. The Bodhi-tree of enlightenment

23. The place where he received four stone begging bowls from the gods

24. Where he received alms from the two merchants, Trāpuṣa and Bhallika

25. The place where he was praised by the Ājīvika

26. The deer park in Sarnath

27. The place where a thousand ascetics were converted

28. The place where King Bimbisāra perceived the truths

29. Where the Buddha taught the Dharma to Indra

30. The place of the great miracle

31. The place where he came down from the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven

32. the parinirvāṇa place in Kuśināgar

It is clear both textually and archaeologically that relics played a great role in the popularization and geographical spread of the Buddhist tradition, in particular under Aśoka. Until Aśokan times, Buddhism had a limited sphere of influence as it was confined to Magadha with some followers in Avanti and along India’s western coast. The later Pāli text, the Dīpavamsa, relates also to eighty-four thousand monasteries (ārāma) that Aśoka built in eighty-four thousand towns to honor the eighty-four thousand sections of the Dharma. The Sri Lankan thirteenth century text, the Thūpavamsa, relates that the

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293 This place was identified in the 1990’s with a stūpa found on the other side of the Nirañjanā River in Bodh Gayā, where further on there is a little temple supposedly marking this spot.

294 The pond inside the Bodh Gayā compound marking this is wrong, as the actual site is a further two kilometers to the south. Usually pilgrims to Bodh Gayā see a pond with a statue of the Buddha protected by the nāga in the main compound close to the Bodhi-tree. The “Muchalinda Pond” is in fact about two kilometers to the south, where there is a small pond in the midst of a small village, called aptly the “Muchalinda Pond”.

295 Also in the Bodh Gayā vicinity, they received hair and nail relics from the Buddha. In Burma, Trāpuṣa and Bhallika, who were the first people the Buddha encountered after his enlightenment, are considered to have come from that land.

296 This was on the Buddha’s way from Bodh Gayā to Sarnath. His name is Ājīvika Upaga.

297 This place is attributed to the Gayaśīrṣa Hill near Gayā.

298 This might well be the Indasala Cave near Rājagṛha.

299 Śrāvasti.

300 Sankissa.

301 Trainor, 1997, pp. 39-40

302 A Sinhalese text from the fourth-fifth century CE.

303 Dīpavamsa 6. 95-96.
Rāmagrāma relics came to the Mahāthūpa (Ruvanavalisāya) of Anurādhapura. This served to link the original Buddha relics to Sri Lanka. The popular story where Aśoka was not able to remove them, made the Rāmagrāma relics highly prized, so that mentioning that these relics reached Sri Lanka served as a conduit to sanctify Buddhism on the Island.\(^{304}\) An inscription found on an Aśokan pillar in Uttar Pradesh, says: “Two hundred and fifty six nights are over since the relics of the Buddha were enshrined”.\(^{305}\) It is important to note that the Aśokan pillars that were found are but few, as compared to the amount seen and described by the Chinese Travelers.

**On Nāgas, and Their Role as Guardians of Relics**

Nāgas played a great role from early on in Buddha’s life. It is said that when born in Lumbinī, two nāgas washed his body. Similarly it is the great Nāga King Muchalinda who protects him during and after achieving enlightenment in Bodh Gayā.\(^{306}\) Later, it is the local nāga at the Rāmagrāma Stūpa that dissuades King Aśoka from removing the relics from it.\(^{307}\) This section will overview in short what exactly are nāgas, their symbolism in Ancient India, and their role in protecting the Buddha, his teachings and in particular his relics.

Nāgas were a vital and dynamic component to religious and social life in early South Asian history. Buddhist institutions and ruling dynasties would have gained a degree of social legitimacy through their purposeful and conscious association with nāgas, as seen from inscriptions and sculptures, in particular

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\(^{304}\) Trainor, 1997, p. 41

\(^{305}\) Trainor, 1997, p. 42

\(^{306}\) In Aśoka’s Pilgrimage, when in Bodh Gayā, Upagupta calls on the Nāga King (here called Kālika) to come forth and tell the story of Buddha’s enlightenment. This brings Aśoka to tears of devotion (Strong, 1983, pp. 249-250)

\(^{307}\) In several Jātaka stories the Buddha’s past lives are described as that of a nāga. According to Kevin Trainor Nāgas are powerful beings who dwell under the earth, in mountains, and in bodies of water, they are connected with rain and fertility. Nāgas are depicted as guardians of jewels and treasures (relics are considered as a treasure, and where relics were found, they were usually interred along with precious stones). Nāgas are subservient to the Buddha, some of whom were subdued and converted by him. Nonetheless, because of their non-human status, they cannot gain liberation, despite their powers (Trainor, 1997, p. 126)
from Amaravati. According to the Mahāvagga of the Pāli Vinaya, the Buddha spent the third week after his enlightenment seated in meditation. A great storm arose and the great Nāga King Muchalinda protected the Buddha by wrapping his serpent body around the Buddha seven times and extending his hoods to keep the rain off. After seven days of protecting the Buddha from cold, heat, flies and storms, the nāga took a human form and bowed before the Buddha to receive his blessing. Nāgas are a specific type of snake-like demigods linked with water and its associated qualities of fertility and health. In artwork they are typically depicted as humans with multiple cobra hoods arrayed behind their heads, or as multi-hooded serpents. Images of Muchalinda protecting the Buddha were exacted from the beginning of the second century CE, the earliest examples were found in Buddhist sites in Andhra Pradesh. In Amaravati, nāgas are not merely depicted in conjunction with the Buddha, but were a dominant artistic motif, appearing as independent icons, in narrative reliefs, and as decorative elements on the wide array of stonework associated with monastic complexes. The Sanskrit word ‘nāga’ can denote a wide variety of things, including even elephants and clouds. From the late nineteenth century though, nāgas came to denote ‘Non-Aryan’ communities, simple tribal or ‘jungle people’, so that when the word ‘nāga’ was encountered in a text or inscription, it was understood (mainly by nineteenth British Indologists) to be a reference to tribal or isolated communities that existed outside the cultural influence of Sanskritized society. Nāgas thus meant an ethnic group, a caste category or a religious sect outside the mainstream, in all cases still referred to as human communities, and not to the ophidian demigods they were. An example is the Sātavāhana dynasty that constructed Amaravati, which was tied to a female nāga ancestor called Queen Nāganika, which was interpreted that she was from a Non-Aryan nāga tribe. This grave misunderstanding can be viewed as racial prejudice, starting with James Fergusson in the 1880s. He was amongst the first to

309 Hawkes, 2009, p. 94
310 Hawkes, 2009, p. 95
311 In this sense, it can very well also refer to the Tharu people of the Tarai region in Nepal, discussed in the last chapter.
connect race with the veneration of nāgas. This mistake continued with Vincent Smith in 1919.313 This mistake continued with Vincent Smith in 1919.

Therefore, through a ‘semiotic sleight of hand’, nāgas were transformed from serpent-like demigods, into references to people who worshiped such demigods, and finally, became a racial denigration for groups of people.314 Yet, there were communities who self-identified as nāgas, such as a group of people that was active in the Vidiśā region between the first to the fourth centuries CE, calling themselves nāgakula, which is a type of local clan or an oligarchy name. Also, examples of nāgas in royal lines abound from Kashmir to Andhra Pradesh, from Taxila to Cambodia, so that it is an impossible idea to conceive that nāgas formed any one big single group or dynasty.

Nāgas were a vital and dynamic component of religious life in early South Asia, but never functioned as the sole preserve of a single caste or race. Many inscriptions of donor names found in stūpa sites bare the name nāga or some form of it, like ‘nika’ which means nāga in Tamil language.315 The famous stūpa sites of Sanchi, Amaravati and Bharhut, all have a significant percentage of inscriptions of donors named nāga.316 By all accounts, large amounts of people continued to be called ‘nāga’ over many centuries and across large geographical regions.317 The diverse span of time periods, sacred locations and occupational backgrounds that are associated with nāgas suggests that the affiliation with the term nāga functioned as an indication of respect, adding value to an individual, to a group, or to a location having this name.318 In

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312 In his book Tree and Serpent Worship (London: J. Murray, 1868) Fergusson insists that nor Aryan nor Dravidian communities’ ever worshipped serpents and even that serpent worship is the reserve of lower intellectual Turanian races.


314 Hawkes, 2009, p. 97

315 Hawkes, 2009, p. 98

316 Hawkes, 2009, p. 99. Sanchi is from the third century BCE, but the majority of the monuments there are from the first century CE; Amaravati peaked between the second to third centuries CE; Bharhut started in the second century BCE.

317 Names in India in many cases revealed religious affiliation, or invoked the name of a favored deity, category of demigod, teacher or religious concept, so that the name nāga most probably had a similar religious status as names invoking the Buddha, Dharma, Vedic gods such as Soma or Indra etc. these names were not associated with any caste or religious status. Moreover, the evidence from inscriptions shows that individuals from diverse religious status all had access and interest in nāgas (Hawkes, 2009, p. 99)

318 An example of well-known association of nāga and royalty: The Pallava dynasty stretches back to the third century CE, reaching its peak in southern India in the sixth and seventh centuries CE. There are two inscriptions and a textual account (the Maṇimékhalai) that boast a union between a nāga female, a nāginī, and the progenitor of the Pallava line called variously
the Sātavāhana case, nāgas are not a specific ethnic or social category because they are sculpturally represented in both ophidian and human forms, depicted as decorative elements and also as more iconic large scale representations. Most visible and widespread though, nāgas appear on relief carvings that represent narrative scenes of worship. The object of this veneration is Buddhist, such as Buddha’s footprints, head-dress, relic casket or stūpa. The nāgas are depicted showing their devotion to Buddha’s symbols and the Dharma. According to the Dīgha Nikāya, in the last (and perhaps added later) verse from the Mahaparinibbana Sutta, the nāgas acquired a full eighth of the Buddha’s bodily relics and worshiped them all in one grand stūpa in Rāmagrāma, rather than divide them into many. These are represented in several reliefs in Amaravati. The Nāga Muchalinda images of the second century CE, found in Andhra, acts as both a guardian and a devotee of the Buddha. The nāgas are rarely portrayed as conquered opponents or unwilling captives, but more frequently the nāga is an attendant, guardian, devotee or companion. A wide range of royal houses made an effort to link their family to nāga ancestors, such as with the case of the Sātavāhana Dynasty we saw. In a seventh century CE text, the Harṣacarita, a magical necklace made by the nāga king Vāsuki is given to the Buddhist monk Nāgārjuna, who in turn gives it to the Sātavāhana King. This trope demonstrates legitimacy to the throne. In a similar

Aśvatthāman or Vīrakūrcha. In the late nineteenth century it was thought to be a union between an Aryan dynasty and an autochthonous non-Aryan princess. In some versions of the tale she is referred to as an apsara, a category of female divinity. In a fifth century inscription from Dhānyakaṭaka (synonymous with Amaravati) she is not referred to as nāginī but as one of Indra’s heavenly maidens (surēndra-kanyā). In this case, nāga does not identify with a tribe but refer directly to ophidian demigods, suggesting a divine pedigree (Hawkes, 2009, pp. 101-102) For example one image depicts a Jātaka tale (Campeyya or Śankhapāla) where a devoted nāga is captured but prefers to endure suffering rather than hurt his captures. He is then freed by a wise man who is rewarded by the grateful nāga. Another sculpture depicts a king addressing a court full of nāgas. This may well represent a scene from the Divyāvadāna, where King Aśoka visits the land of nāgas in order to procure relics of the Buddha from the Rāmagrāma Stūpa (Hawkes, 2009, p. 105-106) as we have seen. This verse in full ended the previous chapter. Rhys-Davids, 1910: ii 188-91. The Nāgas both worship and decorate the structures of Amaravati, using their own bodies as garlands. These were also borrowed into other Indian traditions: In these non-Buddhist cases the nāgas are guarding, flanking or otherwise subservient to the central image. Nāgas do not feature merely in Buddhist traditions, but in Jain and Vaishnavite nāgas are also of the earliest figures to be depicted. For examples: Kṛṣṇa’s brother Balarāma has cobra hoods and Viṣṇu has a relationship with the cosmic serpent Śeṣa. In the Jain tradition the Jina Pārśvanātha is protected by a serpent (Hawkes, 2009, pp. 107-108)
vein, the Prajñāpāramita Sūtras are associated with Nāgārjuna, who is said to have discovered them in the land of nāgas rather than authoring them himself. In this sense, a newly appearing Mahāyāna text is given double legitimacy, linking it to a great monk and to the nāgas. Nāgārjuna rediscovered these teachings, and their presence among the nāgas aids in establishing their value.\textsuperscript{325} John S. Strong notes that Buddhist relics, with great consistency, are said to pass through the hands of nāgas before residing in stūpas of human construction.\textsuperscript{326} This ‘passage through nāgas’ marks a transition from low to higher status, meaning that the association between relics and nāgas provides a further sanction of the relics’s sacredness.\textsuperscript{327} Being intimately associated with water, nāgas also share some of the purifying qualities of it. Nāgas are furthermore portrayed on doorways of ancient temples such as in Ajanta and Pītakhora, the doorways signify purification, or a cleansing process of negative effects. Nāgas mark a transition to something new and better, an alchemical process, so that even candidates for ordination into the Theravāda monastic order, are referred to as ‘nāgas’ prior to becoming monks.\textsuperscript{328} A potential monk cannot become ordained without becoming ‘nāga’ first, but then when becoming a monk, he ceases to be ‘nāga’, since nāgas are not allowed to enter the Sangha.\textsuperscript{329} The nāga state is thus something that needs to be abandoned, but also a state that needs to be passed through, as a kind of ‘rite of passage’. Nāgas were placed alongside new images, new lineages, and new ideas with remarkable regularity. This speaks of their popularity because their presence seems to have sanctioned new concepts, as well as easing moments of political, religious or ideological transition.\textsuperscript{330} Continuity must have been essential to the nāgas legitimacy, because just as authors would often claim their texts were written by sages long gone, or every

\textsuperscript{325} Hawkes, 2009, p. 110
\textsuperscript{326} Strong, 2004, pp. 168-69 and p. 194
\textsuperscript{327} Hawkes, 2009, p. 110
\textsuperscript{328} Strong, 2004, p. 168
\textsuperscript{329} According to the Vinaya, animals and spirits cannot become ordained. There is a story about a nāga who disguised himself as human in order to become ordained but was excommunicated by the Buddha when his true identity was revealed (Strong, 2004, p. 168)
\textsuperscript{330} Or in other words nāgas can be seen as a sort of semi-divine “celebrity endorsement”.
law in the Vinaya is attributed directly to the Buddha himself, so attaching new to old has been a critical aspect of innovation, as can be seen from the nāgas’ continuing role.  

Chapter Five

Relics in the Buddhist Tradition

“We like jasmine buds, washed pearls, nuggets of gold, in three sizes: as big as mustard seeds, broken grains of rice, and split green peas”

Mahāparinibbāna Sutta

Relics as a Representation of the Buddha-Refuge

The three jewels: Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, called ‘tri-ratna’, are closely related: The Buddha taught the Dharma that is the path practiced by the Sangha. Despite having many followers and great disciples in his lifetime, the Buddha refused to appoint a successor, announcing that the Dharma would be the guide. And yet, the Buddha’s physical presence, after his passing away, created an absence that was hard to cope with. This absence was initially filled up with the preservation of Buddha’s relics, and in later times with his images, such as statues and paintings. The earliest depictions or statues of the Buddha are dated to the first century CE, six centuries after his parinirvāṇa. In the first few centuries after the great

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331 It would be interesting to speculate that the fact that the Rāmagrāma Stūpa was never opened all the way through to where the relics were or supposed to still be, might be attributed to the ongoing nāga presence guarding the site. Treasure hunters did dig into the stūpa, but according to the archaeological investigation we will see in chapter seven, they did not go to the core of it. Similarly the Nepal Archaeological Department never dug all the way inside, in ‘respect’ to the long story of this stūpa.

332 Cuevas, 2010, p. 45. Description of the relics the Buddha left after his cremation, described by the compiler of the Pāli Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, Buddhaghosa.


334 The teachings were gathered and recited three months after the parinirvāṇa as we have seen, along with the Vinaya, or monastic rules, recited for the benefit of the Sangha.

335 The Buddha himself actually sanctioned initially the depiction of him, so that by Aśokan times there were still no depictions of the Buddha. It is said that before the commencement of statues of the Buddha, monks used to visualize his form in their meditations. The first Buddha statues were made in Mathura, with a distinct Greek influence. See: Allen, 2012, p. 338
passing away, the Buddha’s presence was symbolized by his feet (Pāda),\footnote{See: Cicuzza, Claudio. 2011. *A Mirror Reflecting the Entire World, the Pāli Buddhapādanaṅgala or “Auspicious Signs of the Buddha’s Feet*. Critical Edition with English Translation. Bangkok and Lumbini: Fragile Palm Leaves Foundation, Lumbini International Research Institute.} and the Bodhi tree. In the *Milinda pañha*,\footnote{The *Milinda Pañha* or the ”Questions of King Milinda” is a well-known North-West Indian Theravādin text which dates from between the first century BCE to the second century CE, and is held in high regard in Sri Lanka.} King Milinda asks the monk Nāgasena to define the Buddha’s ‘general shop’, and the answer is: “The lord’s general shop, O King, is the nine-limbed speech of the Buddha, the shrines for his bodily relics and the things he used and the jewel of the Sangha”\footnote{Pāli: *Sabbāpanām kho maharaja bhagavato navangāṃ buddhavacanāṃ sārārikāni pāribhogikāni cetiyāni samgharatanā* (Hawkes, 2009, p. 42 and p. 50).} These words are a commentary on the *tri-ratna*: ‘Speech of the Buddha’ means the Dharma and the ‘jewel of the Sangha’ is the monastic community. ‘Shrines for his bodily relics and the things he used’ shows that Buddha’s bodily remains and the things he used in his lifetime, such as his begging bowl, represent the Buddha in this *tri-ratna* framework.\footnote{Hawkes, 2009, p. 43. In Tibetan Buddhism, Buddha’s body, speech and mind are represented on altars as a statue of the Buddha, a text and a stūpa, respectively.} Nāgasena’s statement above demonstrates that before images of the Buddha became wide spread, the Buddha was understood to be a ‘shrine containing relics’. The word used by Nāgasena for these relic-shrines is ‘cetiya’, which in this context is synonymous with stūpa.\footnote{We saw the distinction between the two in the previous chapter, where a stūpa necessarily has relics enshrined within it and cetiya does not have to contain relics, but acts as a ‘commemoration’ of the Buddha.}

That the Buddha within the *tri-ratna* is indeed seen as his own relics, can be further understood from a scene told in the *Mahāvaṃsa*,\footnote{The *Mahāvaṃsa* recounts the early days of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. This famous quote is from *Mahāvaṃsa* 17.3} where King Aśoka’s son, Mahinda,\footnote{He was the first-born son of the Mauryan emperor Aśoka from his wife Devī and the elder brother of Saṅghamittā (Skt. Saṅghamittrā). Mahinda and Saṅghamittā are credited to have brought the Buddha’s teachings to Sri Lanka.} having brought the Buddhist teachings to Sri Lanka, wishes to return to India after the first rainy retreat there. Mahinda told the local Sri Lankan King Devānapīya Tissa: “O great king; it has been a long time since we have seen Our Teacher, the Fully Enlightened One; we have dwelt without a refuge; there is nothing here for us to worship”, the king, confused by this statement replies back to Mahinda “But did you not tell me, Sir, that the Fully Enlightened One has passed away?” Mahinda’s reply succinctly sums up the efficacy and

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\textsuperscript{337} The *Milinda Pañha* or the ”Questions of King Milinda” is a well-known North-West Indian Theravādin text which dates from between the first century BCE to the second century CE, and is held in high regard in Sri Lanka.

\textsuperscript{338} Pāli: *Sabbāpanām kho maharaja bhagavato navangāṃ buddhavacanāṃ sārārikāni pāribhogikāni cetiyāni samgharatanā* (Hawkes, 2009, p. 42 and p. 50).

\textsuperscript{339} Hawkes, 2009, p. 43. In Tibetan Buddhism, Buddha’s body, speech and mind are represented on altars as a statue of the Buddha, a text and a stūpa, respectively.

\textsuperscript{340} We saw the distinction between the two in the previous chapter, where a stūpa necessarily has relics enshrined within it and cetiya does not have to contain relics, but acts as a ‘commemoration’ of the Buddha.

\textsuperscript{341} The *Mahāvaṃsa* recounts the early days of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. This famous quote is from *Mahāvaṃsa* 17.3

\textsuperscript{342} He was the first-born son of the Mauryan emperor Aśoka from his wife Devī and the elder brother of Saṅghamittā (Skt. Saṅghamittrā). Mahinda and Saṅghamittā are credited to have brought the Buddha’s teachings to Sri Lanka.
importance of the Buddha-relics: “When the relics are seen, the Buddha is seen”. Soon after, relics of the Buddha arrived to the Island of Sri Lanka. This episode serves to show how the dispensation of early Buddhism went along with the movement of relics, in that the full establishment of Buddhism, through the tri-ratna, in faraway places, involved not only the Dharma and the Sangha, but the holy relics too, representing the Buddha jewel. When Mahinda says “to see” (the relics), in Sanskrit it is from the root verb drś, “to see”, “to realize”, “to know”, which is the same word that is used when the gods wanted to see the Buddha’s passing away, the gods wish “to have darśana” of the Buddha’s passing moment. Also, when the Buddha first mentions pilgrimage to the four-most sites, as a reply to Ānanda, the word *darśan* is chosen for it. The relics started to play a major role soon after the Buddha’s passing, with the remains collected after Buddha’s cremation considered the most precious ones. Afterwards, King Aśoka disseminated these relics far and wide along with the Dharma and with the ordination lineage, completing the tri-ratna as well. Great care was taken to preserve and safeguard the relics in early times, so that usually they were kept in monastic settings. This is confirmed textually when the Buddha instructs that the relics of Śāriputra should be held by monks and not by lay disciples. A genre of literature called “vamsa” developed in Sri Lanka in order to trace the authenticity of the teachings and the relics to the Buddha himself. These Sinhalese texts are detailed narratives charting the movement of Buddha’s relics from the funeral pyre at Kuśinagara till their resting place in Sri Lanka, and describe how these relics sanctify the far reaching lands Buddhism made its way to. Archeological findings corroborate the fact that

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344 Trainor, 1997, p. 173. Another connection for ‘seeing’ and ‘knowing’ is that he Dharma is characterized by ehi-passika “come and see”. Penetrating into the nature of things as they are (yāthabhūtaṃ) is done by “knowing and seeing”, ūṇa-dassana (Trainor, 1997, p. 176)  
345 Pāli: Cattāri imāni ānanda saddhassa kulaputtassa dassanīyāni saṃvejanī thānāni, “Ānanda, there are these four places that a devout son of a good family must do *darśan* of, and powerfully experience” (Schopen, 1997, p. 116)  
346 Even in his lifetime, the Buddha’s hair and nails were prized as relics, with their own sacred narratives.  
347 Hawkes, 2009, p. 44. The relics of Buddha’s main disciples have also become important objects of veneration. Those of Śāriputra were found in a stūpa in Sanchi. Ānanda nevertheless was not cremated but passed into parinirvāṇa in the middle of the Ganges River.
many ancient stūpas were opened at certain times, in many cases in order to further disseminate the relics.\textsuperscript{348}

**A Classification of Buddha’s Relics: Sārīrika dhātu, Pāribhogika dhātu, Uddesika dhātu**

*Sārīrika dhātu*, or ‘essence of Buddha’s body’, are Buddha’s corporal relics, the most important ones. They are powerful objects in and of themselves, and are not mere reminders or tokens of the Buddha because the presence of the Buddha-relics equaled the presence of the Buddha himself.\textsuperscript{349} Building new stūpas with genuine relics inserted within them, created new places of religious significance and power, or in other words, pilgrimage sites. Relics, from these early times onwards, were regarded as possessing life. On the Shinkot\textsuperscript{350} reliquary it is said “[this is] the body, endowed with life, of the Blessed Buddha”.\textsuperscript{351} In textual accounts there are descriptions of relics having a force that resembles life itself, called *jīvitasannībha*.\textsuperscript{352} So relics, having a ‘living presence’, just as the Buddha has, have a capacity to form marvels (*pāṭhīra*) like flying in the air, emitting light rays, and assume an appearance of a great being (*mahāpurūṣa*).\textsuperscript{353} The Buddha’s relics have a living energy because they contain his elemental essence, called *dhātu*, a term used consistently in Buddhism to describe relics.\textsuperscript{354} The funeral pyre of Buddha’s cremation is seen as a furnace that refined Buddha’s corporal remains into their essential elements, so that instead of charred bones, spherical, pearls-like objects were found.\textsuperscript{355} Still nowadays, following a cremation of a Buddhist master, these pearl-like relics are sought for in a funeral pyre of a deceased

\textsuperscript{348} Hawkes, 2009, p. 44 and p. 50
\textsuperscript{349} Hawkes, 2009, p. 45
\textsuperscript{350} Found in Gandhāra.
\textsuperscript{352} Hawkes, 2009, p. 45. See: Trainor, 1997, p. 99, note. 8
\textsuperscript{353} Trainor, 1997, p. 168-169
\textsuperscript{354} Hawkes, 2009, p. 45
\textsuperscript{355} Such as the Recovered relics that were identified as belonging to the Buddha in Qingshan in China: they look like pearls or crystallized grains (Hawkes, 2009, p. 45)
teacher. The relics are considered the saint’s *dhātu* or spiritual essence. The eight relic stūpas constructed by the eight Brāhmin and Kṣatriya representatives belong to this category, while the ashes from the pyre as well as Droṇa’s pot belong to the second, the *Pāribhogika* category.

*Pāribhogika dhātu* refers to objects that were used or enjoyed by the Buddha, being sanctified by his presence. These types of relics were also mentioned in the *Milinda paṇha* and were well-known by the fifth century CE, as shown by commentaries on the *Jātaka* tales. These ‘relics of use’ include Buddha’s begging bowl, robe etc. but most prominent of these is the Bodhi Tree in Bodh Gayā. This is because the Buddha ‘used’ it when achieving enlightenment, sitting underneath it, so that the Bodhi Tree is intimately associated with Buddha’s identity and spiritual achievement. The tree from Bodh Gayā was venerated at least from Aśokan times, when he is reputed to have built a fence around it and an elaborated stone slab underneath it, called the *vajrāsana*, said to be located exactly on the spot the Buddha sat to meditate. The tree is also believed to be a living link to the Buddha and his times, imbued with Buddha’s living presence, so that in this sense the Bodhi Tree is analogous to his corporal remains. Just as with the corporal relics, the Bodhi Tree was transported to other lands, beyond its original seat in Bodh Gayā. A sapling of it was transported to Anurādhapura, the first capital of Sri Lanka, in the third century BCE, and further saplings were planted in newly built monasteries throughout the Island, placed in an enclosure called *bodhighara*, or ‘house for the Bodhi Tree’.

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356 Quite recently, a week after the cremation of Chokling Rinpoche in Boudhanath, the relics were searched for in the ashes and found, this happened in an open event, for all to see, on Friday, the third of March, 2023. To read more about the process of relics, see: Germano, David and Trainor, Kevin (Editors). 2004. *Embodying the Dharma: Buddhist Relic Veneration in Asia*. Albany: State University of New York Press.


358 Hawkes, 2009, p. 45

359 The full list: Buddha’s robes, alms bowl, walking staff, bed-covering, drinking vessel, belt, bathing cloth, sitting mat, coverlet, fire-stick, water-strainer, razor, and needle case.

360 Or the “diamond throne” (tib. *rdorje den*). It is said that all Buddhas of the past and future in this ‘fortunate aeon’ have, and will, reach enlightenment on that spot.

361 Similarly as *bodhighara* (Bodhi-tree with enclosure), there is a *cetiyaghara* (enclosure of *cetiya*) and a *paṭimāghara* (Buddha image with enclosure).
the residential dwelling of monks or nuns, also a stūpa with relics.\footnote{In Buddhaghosa’s commentary on the Anguttara-nikāya, when describing what constitutes a monastery, he writes that even a “hut of leaves”, a paṇnasālā, can be considered a monastery, a vihāra, if it was constructed for the Sangha, if it has a cetiya, if the Dharma can be heard there, and if it meets the basic needs of monks who might stop there. By the time of Buddhaghosa (fifth century CE) it is clear that nearly every Buddhist monastery in Sri Lanka has its own stūpa enshrining relics. See: Trainor, 1997, p. 89. This is also strikingly similar to the description of Xuanzang, mentioning there is a ‘hut’ (paṇnasālā) for the monks/ caretakers near the Rāmagrāma Stūpa. See in the next chapter and in appendix II.} Another ancient symbol is the ‘chakra’, that represents the inauguration of the Buddha’s career as a teacher in Sarnath, teaching his first five disciples,\footnote{These are Kaundinya, Assaji, Bhaddiya, Vappa and Mahanama.} known as the ‘turning the wheel of Dharma’.\footnote{Skt. Dharmacakra; Pāli: dhammacakka.} The Buddha’s footprints, called ‘buddhapada’, were also a significant representation of the Buddha in early times, indicating Buddha’s ‘mark’, on the world.\footnote{Hawkes, 2009, p. 47} That the Buddha’s footprints were a subject of veneration in their own right is demonstrated by stone plaques and seals found in many old sites.\footnote{In particular at Bodh Gayā.} These symbols: the tree, wheel, footprints and stūpa, were all used widely from the inception of Buddhist art in the second century BCE and onwards.\footnote{It is tempting to categorize these four Pāribhogika dhātu to match the four-most places of Buddha’s biography. If doing so then Lumbini is represented by the buddhapada (the seven steps he took when born), Bodh Gayā is represented by the Bodhi Tree (under which he attained enlightenment), Sarnath by the chakra (where he turned the wheel of Dharma), and Kuśinagara by the stūpa (cremation site).} The four-most places of Lumbinī, Bodh Gayā, Sarnath and Kuśinagara are also considered to belong to the Pāribhogika dhātu category, being cetiyas themselves, and termed Paribhoga-cetiya.\footnote{Paribhoga-cetiya in Thai rendering (Skilling, 2009, p. 124)}

_Uddesika dhātu_, or ‘relics of indication’, developed as a formal category with the emergence of Buddha images from around the second century CE. The _Dhātuvaṃsa_\footnote{This is a fourteenth century Sri Lankan historical text. In general, the Pāli fourth- fifth century Dīpavamsa “the Chronicle of the Island” and the fourteenth century Dhātuvaṃsa “The Chronicle of the Relics”, are the primary textual sources for analyzing relic veneration in the Sinhala Buddhist tradition (see: Trainor, 1997, p. 25).} tries to authenticate the sanctity of images by relating how relics attach themselves to Buddha images of their own accord.\footnote{It relates the deposition of Buddha’s forehead bone and hair-relic in the Mahāmaṅgala Stūpa in Sri Lanka: it is told therein how the relics miraculously, through their own power, attached themselves to a golden image of the Buddha. These events are assigned anachronistically to the reign of King Kākavāṇaṭissa of the second century BC.} The relics have their own power because of being imbued with Buddha’s living presence, so that in fact they are the
Buddha sanctioning himself.\textsuperscript{371} In the \textit{Buddhānusmṛti}, or the ‘remembrance of the Buddha’ meditation practice,\textsuperscript{372} one is supposed to reflect on the Buddha and his virtues with trusting faith, so that one can come to see and understand the Buddha.\textsuperscript{373} The assumption done here is that by seeing the Buddha, one will actually come to know him too. In the \textit{Samyutta Nikāya} the Buddha is quoted as saying: “He who sees the dhamma sees me; he who sees me sees the dhamma”.\textsuperscript{374} When taking refuge in the Buddha, the faithful do not do so with regard to the Buddha’s corruptible form, but to his sublime qualities that were perfected over numerous lifetimes, and embodied in his last incarnation. In the division of Buddha’s body into the rūpakāya and the dharmakāya, the rūpakāya represents Buddha’s physical body while the dharmakāya represents the Buddha’s teachings. Just as the Buddha’s sublime essence is distilled into his relics, the elemental \textit{dhātu}, so in a similar manner the teachings of dependent origination (\textit{pratītyasamutpāda}), distills the Buddha’s teachings: “The Buddha alone has explained the conditions that arise from causes and he, the great mendicant, has also proclaimed their confinement”.\textsuperscript{375} This famous verse has its own talismanic properties, becoming a great source of speculation in its own right.\textsuperscript{376} More early equations between ‘seeing’ and ‘knowing’ the Buddha, come from the \textit{Majjhima Nikāya}: “He who sees the \textit{pratītyasamutpāda} sees the Dhamma, and he who sees the Dhamma sees the \textit{pratītyasamutpāda}”.\textsuperscript{377} This can be alternatively understood as a fourth category of relics, as listed by the nineteenth century Thai master Somdet Phra Saṅghrāja,\textsuperscript{378} who called it \textit{dhamma-cetiya}.\textsuperscript{379} An Indian work, surviving in Tibetan and Chinese, called the “\textit{Sūtra on the Merit of Building a Stūpa}” quotes the

\begin{footnotes}
\item Hawkes, 2009, p. 47
\item More on it from the \textit{Visuddhimagga} below.
\item ‘seeing’ can be ephemeral or substantial, the latter can be learned from Xuanzang’s personal account of seeing the Buddha’s shadow in a meditation cave in Gandhāra. On this story and more, see: Germano, David and Trainor, Kevin (Editors). 2004. \textit{Embodying the Dharma: Buddhist Relic Veneration in Asia.} Albany: State University of New York Press
\item \textit{Samyutta Nikāya} (3:120)
\item Hawkes, 2009, p. 49. \textit{Ye dharma hetuprabhavā hetum teṣām tathāgato byavadat teṣām cay o nirodha evaṃvādī mahāśravanah}. It is also the statement Śāriputra heard when initially gaining faith in the Buddha. After hearing this verse he searched for the Buddha and then joined his order.
\item Hawkes, 2009, p. 49
\item \textit{Majjhima Nikāya} 1:190-1
\item 1803- 1899
\item Skilling, 2009, p. 125
\end{footnotes}
Buddha, where after discoursing on the merit of building a stūpa, comments on the above ‘hymn of dependent origination’: “Noble son, this verse signifies the dharmakāya of the Buddha. You should write this verse and place it in a stūpa. If a living being understood the import of causes you show, know that this person would then see the Buddha”. Pratītyasamutpāda is thus the dharmakāya of the Buddha; it embodies the Buddha-Dharma and is thus a valid dhātu in every respect, so that understanding it is equated to seeing the Buddha. Since the fifth century CE stūpas have been built all over Asia containing the word of the Buddha as a relic. This added further validation for the Uddesika dhātu, the verse on dependent origination being thus a relic of indication, inscribed on stone statues regularly ever since. The “Noble Treatise of the Great Vehicle on Dependent Origination”380 developed further the idea of the equation of knowing and seeing by stating: ‘this pratītyasamutpāda is the dharmakāya of the Buddha. He who sees the pratītyasamutpāda sees the Buddha”.381 This is the experience of a devoted practitioner gazing at an image of the Buddha that is inscribed with the ‘hymn of dependent origination’: she or he sees the Buddha and then gets know him.

Other Classifications of Relics, and the Origins of Stūpas

The relics that Buddha Śākyamuni left after his parinirvāṇa in Kuśinagara, discussed in this work, although considered the main ones, are only one category of Buddha’s relics. John S. Strong’s book “Relics of the Buddha” is a comprehensive overview of these and other types of relics of the Buddha.382 In his work, Strong discussed the relics of Previous Buddhas, those of the Bodhisattva, meaning Buddha’s past lives while still on the path, and relics that Śākyamuni Buddha left while still alive, such as his hair and nails. Many traditions developed in the various Asian Buddhist lands over these relics, as well as other relics that were said to have been left after Buddha’s funeral, such as his tooth relics. The reader is referred to Strong’s book to learn about all these other traditions of Buddha-relics, which are regretfully

380 Skt. Āryapratītyasamutpādanāmahāyānasūtra.
381 Hawkes, 2009, p. 49
beyond the scope of this work. Kevin Trainor’s 1997 book: “Relics, Ritual, and Representation in Buddhism: Rematerializing the Sri Lankan Theravāda Tradition”, was groundbreaking as the first full research about relics, at least from Sri Lankan perspective and that of early Indian Buddhism.\(^{383}\) In his work, Trainor begins by telling the story of the first encounter of a western scholar studying Buddhism and his misunderstanding regarding the separation Buddhist philosophy from its active daily devotional sphere. This misunderstanding was about ‘what is authentic Buddhism’, and was influenced from the way in which the first Buddhist western scholars regarded Buddhism in a ‘protestant’ light.\(^{384}\) Paul Carus thought pure Buddhism to be merely the teachings and disregarded any form of worship of objects. In an interesting correspondence, Carus declined a gift of genuine relics by a Sri Lankan monk called Ven. Seelakkhandha, after the latter read Carus’ book “Gospel of the Buddha”.\(^{385}\) Carus replied: “I do not care for relics of human bodies, bones, teeth or anything of that kind”. Seelakkhandha concluded that Carus did not understand what he was offered and wrote him back a letter, which is interesting for our purposes here: “We do not regard bones etc., of ordinary human beings. But relics of Buddha and Arhats, lasting monuments of their virtue, are more valuable to us than any worldly possession. These are very rare, too, and are obtained from the ruins of ancient dāgābas (stūpas). I have with me a relic of Buddha found in a golden casket within a dāgāba (now in ruins), built two-thousand years ago. If you are willing to have this, I shall send it to you as a token of the regard in which you hold the Lord Buddha and his religion. These relics are not used by us as ornaments, but they are held most sacred. There is nothing more valuable to a Buddhist than a genuine relic”.\(^{386}\) Furthermore, Trainor adds that relic veneration functions as a “technology of remembrance and representation”, that they “connect with powerful figures from the


\(^{384}\) I term it ‘protestant’ here, in the sense that these pioneer western scholars of Buddhism in the nineteenth century thought the Buddha to be merely a ‘rational’ teacher whose teachings challenged the entrenched beliefs of the Brahmins.

\(^{385}\) This book was one of the first of its kind, introducing the west to the Buddha and his teachings. Published in 1894, it was modeled on the New Testament (Carus, Paul. 1917. The Gospel of the Buddha. Universal Digital Library: The Open Court Publishing Company).

\(^{386}\) Trainor, 1997, pp. 21-22
past”, and it is consistently affirmed in the Theravāda tradition that the Buddha is present in his relics. Relics and images serve for merit-making, so that through their material presence they present the worshiper with a sense of ‘presence’ of the Buddha, the relic connecting the devotee to the Buddha through space and time.

As for the origins of stūpas in India, there is a Vedic text called Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa that details how to construct a burial mound called śmaśāna, but it remains unclear for whom it was done. A traditional Buddhist view about the origins of the shape of the stūpa is told by Xuanzang. He wrote that the Buddha piled up his three robes, folded them in squares that were graduated in size from large to small, bottom to top, inverting his alms bowl on top, and topping it with his mendicant’s staff. Tradition has it that the first to construct a stūpa were Trapuṣa and Bhallika, who met the Buddha after his enlightenment, and were given his hair and nails as relics. In pre-Buddhist times a cetiya came to denote a sacred tree or grove. Numerous cetiyas are mentioned in Buddhist texts as favorite places for meditation for the Buddha and his followers, and for other wandering recluses. These places attracted nearby local residents who provided alms to the mendicants. The association of specific cetiyas with yakkhas is common in early Buddhist texts, where it is told that the Buddha was dwelling in various cetiyas including the Gotamaka cetiya, a resident of the yakkha Gotamaka. Buddhaghosa glosses cetiyāni as ‘yakṣa-

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387 Trainor, 1997, p. 27. In Sri Lanka there is a pilgrimage route of sixteen relic stūpas. The Thūpārāma thūpa at Anurādhapure is believed to have a ninth of the portion of relics remaining from Buddha’s cremation.
388 Trainor, 1997, p. 30
389 Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa, 13.8.1-4 (Trainor, 1997, p. 32). The site of Lauḍīya-Nandangaṁh was thought by Alexander Cunningham to be a Vedic precursor of the Buddhist stūpa.
391 The base of the Stupa represents Buddha’s legs and feet, the dome, his torso, the central axis, his spinal column, and the harmika, or top, his head. (See: Ray, Reginald A. 1994 [1999] Buddhist Saints In India, A Study in Buddhist Values & Orientations. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 326
392 Trainor, 1997, p. 33 and Strong, 2004, pp. 71-72. This ‘hair-and-nail’ stūpa was called ‘keśanakhaṁstūpa’ (Strong, 2004, p. 72)
393 Pāli: samaṇa.
394 Skt. yakṣas: A class of a semi-divine being.
When the Buddha predicted about the Vr̥jī’s prosperous future, he said so in the context of venerating their cetiyas, meaning certain sacred trees or groves inhabited by yakhas. ‘Cetiya’ is the term used for the Buddha’s initial four-most places (Lumbinī, Bodh Gayā, Sarnath and Kusināra), which in this case do not contain relics. The Sanskrit word “stūpa” occurs twice in the Rg Veda, but with in different context, meaning “a knot of hair”, “the upper part of the head”, or “a summit”. The earliest Buddhist usage of the term “stūpa” was found in the Aśokan inscription of Nāgali-Sāgar in the Nepali Tarai, where it says that Aśoka enlarged the “thube” of the Buddha. The etymology of the word comes for the Sanskrit root stūp, meaning “to heap up, pile, erect”, while Cetiya is derived from citā, “a funeral pile”, stemming from the root ci “to pile up, arrange”, it can also mean “individual soul”. The root cit means “to perceive”, “fix the mind upon” and “attend to something”. In Pāli cetiya came to mean “an object or person worthy of veneration”. For further information about stūpas, the compilation book “Buddhist Stupas in South Asia” is highly recommended. In it there are various articles by leading scholars on the origins of stūpas in India, their discovery, symbolism, geography, art and much more.

The Sanctification of Sites with Buddha-Relics

When analyzing how relic shrines became sanctified, of particular importance is the engagement of the Buddha with a certain place. Relics, as embodying Buddha, do not merely reflect the presence of the

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395 Trainor, 1997, p. 34
396 See Buddha’s last journey in Appendix III.
397 Trainor, 1997, p. 34
398 Trainor, 1997, p. 35
399 Rg Veda 1.24.7 and 7.2.1
400 This pillar can easily be visited today, situated a few kilometers to the east of Kapilavastu.
401 Trainor, 1997, p. 36. Konākamana is considered the twenty-second out of twenty-four Buddhas that came prior to Śākyamuni Buddha (see the full list of twenty-five Buddhas in Strong, 2004, p. 29)
402 Paul Mus who wrote about the Bārābudur Stūpa, thinks that the origins of stūpa are from the Brahmanic centered sacrifice called agnicayana (Trainor, 1997, p. 37)
Buddha, but impart sacredness to the location of the relic shrine. With this, the merit-gaining of visiting relic sites was established. From Mauryan times onwards, locations of past Buddhas were added, in this way new Buddhist sites became associated with locations of pre-existent sacred significance and co-opted these locations into Buddhist sacred geography. In the first centuries CE, along with the proliferation of Buddhist monasteries situated just outside urban centers, on easily accessible trade routes, began the sanctification of these sites. As Buddhist pilgrimage sites were promulgated with Buddha’s relics, which were interred in Stūpas, these become powerful tools for merit making. What makes a sanctified shrine of a Buddha is examined from the Divyāvadāna, or ‘divine stories’, in the “story of the Toyikā Festival” (Toyikāmahā-avadāna). In it, the Buddha and Ānanda walk in a place called Toyikā and a Brahmin is not sure whether to salute the Buddha or to continue to plow his field. Seeing this, the Buddha mentions to Ānanda that this Brahmin is missing an opportunity to gain great merit because saluting him will include another merit because, unknown, under that very ground lay the ‘perfectly located’ relics of a previous Buddha, Kāśyapa. The meaning is that it is being in the presence of the object of veneration that allows for a skillful way of practice (upāya). In this sense, ritual action from a distance does not reap the full rewards, or in other words, the further we are from the relics, their efficacy is lessened. Ānanda is quick to ask the Buddha to sit on this spot, so that the earth there will be used by two perfectly awakened Buddhas, the act of sitting there seems more important than merely passing by there. This is the ‘making article Andy Rothman examines how it was that relic shrines were created and venerated in the early historic period. He reconstructs the aspects that marked and defined a Buddhist site as sacred, through the Toyika story.

Hawkes, 2009, p. 51

Divyāvadāna 76.10-80.10 and 465.10-469.19. a vast compilation of Indian Buddhist narratives from the first centuries CE

The Toyikā story is narrated also in Schopen, 1997, pp. 131-133

Furthermore, this story differentiates two forms of ritual action. One is abhivādana and the other vandana. The former means ‘respectfully greeting’ while the latter means ‘venerating’. Abhivādana is more like rising up and making a salutation to an elder and vandana has the sense of actually bowing down, touching the teacher’s feet with one’s head. The latter has a stronger karmic efficacy.

Hawkes, 2009, p. 52
use of’ type of relic (Pāribhogika dhātu) we have seen. The bones of the past Buddha Kāśyapa, being there at Toyikā, are ‘using’ the spot, and the Buddha being asked to sit there, is anachronistic to the Bodhi Tree as a relic of use, having sat beneath it in Bodh Gayā. The logic behind ‘making use’ of the place in the Toyikā story is primarily done for promoting pilgrimage to shrines of the Buddha. This is done by Buddha’s actual physical contact with the place, so that it seems plausible that any place the Buddha stopped at is sacred, and is a shrine, and thus an object for merit making. In this story, the Buddha then asks the monks present if they would like to see the ‘undisturbed assemblage of remains’ (śarīra) of the perfectly awakened Kāśyapa, a sight of which can cause faith in the monks’ hearts. Some nāgas then raise these remains, the Buddha telling the monks to grasp their appearance, and then it disappears. One lay disciple, though, circumambulates the site where these relics assembled, forming the thought ―how much merit shall I get from respectfully walking around this place?‖, and the Buddha, knowing others’ minds, then proclaims to the crowd: “hundreds of thousands of gold coins or nuggets are not equal to the wise man, faithful in mind, who walks around shrines of the Buddha”. In a similar manner, another lay disciple offers a lump of clay with a similar thought in mind, and the Buddha proclaims a similar verse, replacing the circumambulation with the lamp. Similarly it is with pearl offerings, lovely flowers, perfume etc. After the Buddha transforms the site to one used by two perfectly awakened Buddhas, he makes

410 In the version of the Toyikā story told in the Dhammapada-āṭṭhakathā the Buddha tells the Brahmin that there are three kinds of shrines: for bodily remains, memorial shrines, and shrines of use. The great fifth century AD master, Buddhaghosa, clarifies this in his commentary to the Khuddakapāṭha: The Bodhi Tree is a shrine of use, an image of the Buddha is a memorial shrine and a stūpa with a reliquary that contains a relic is a relic shrine Paramaramattajotikā, I, 221-2 (Hawkes, 2009, p. 6)

411 Hawkes, 2009, p. 61, n. 12: in the last verses of the Buddhavamsa, one of the latest editions to the Pāli canon, many other ‘relics of use’ are mentioned (pāribhogika dhātu): Buddha’s alms bowl, walking staff, robes, bed covering and drinking vessel, but it is only his ‘sitting mat’ (nisīdana), that is apparently activated by the act of sitting- what Ānanda spread for the Buddha on the ground of Toyikā. Schopen further states that monastics are to ‘make use’ of donations given to them, so that the donors will accumulate merit (1996: 112ff), ‘merit resulting from use’: paribhogānvyaṃ punyam. Merit is made in this story by transforming a place into a more efficacious field of merit for future donors.

412 In the ‘Story of Kunāla’ (Kunāla-avadāna) from the Asokāvadāna, Upagupta takes King Aśoka to various sites associated with Buddha’s life, explaining what event happened in each place, as we have seen in chapter four. We should note also places the Buddha walked at as shrines, as is marked in the Bodh Gayā site by “footprint shrines” (padacetiya), where the Buddha practiced walking meditation after his enlightenment.

413 Hawkes, 2009, p. 56

414 Hawkes, 2009, p. 57
visible again the vision of Kāśyapa’s remains, so that they are seen and bring up faith in the devotees’ minds. This ritual practice of seeing (darśana) usually means seeing the Buddha, developing faith and then making an offering to him. The Divyāvadāna states: “One may honor [a Buddha] still living, as well as one passed into final nirvāṇa. Cultivating faith equally in one’s mind, here there is no difference in merit”. This means that the merit accrued is similar with a living Buddha or with the remains of one who had passed, such as those of Kāśyapa. The implications here are that there is no distinctions between a living Buddha and an assemblage of his relics, both are equally an object of worship, and both equally make the same opportunity to create merit. Nonetheless, in this story, the assemblage of relics disappears, which brings up the explanation that it is enough to be in the presence of the relics, so that it is not necessary to actually see them. Furthermore, the ritual done in this sacred place is quite easy, so that multitudes of beings can easily visit, offer something and accrue merit. The argument of sūtras relating these kinds of tales is clear: sites, having been made of use by the Buddha should be visited, and if offerings in their presence are made, the results will be extraordinary.

Furthermore, the Toyikā story adds another element, which is a proverbial ‘land grab’. This means that by incorporating previous Buddhas, the Buddhist dispensation takes over sites of other divinities. John S. Strong explains: “The cult of previous buddhas, in fact, would seem to have been an ideal way for incorporating non-buddhist, pre-buddhist or brahmanical elements into the Buddhist fold. By identifying indigenous divinities and local sacred places with past Buddhas, Buddhists could effectively ‘convert’ them to Buddhism while still maintaining them at a distance”. A version of this story as told in the Pāli Dhammapada-atṭhakathā mentions that the site was not merely of a Brahmin’s land, but that the Toyikā

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415 Divyāvadāna (79, 19-20)  
416 Schopen, 1997, p. 132  
417 Hawkes, 2009, p. 58  
site was worshiped as a site of a local divinity (devatthāna, or ‘god place’). The Brahmin in this version actually venerates the divinity instead of the Buddha, saying that it is an old local custom. The Buddha then says that this site is actually a ‘cetiyaṭṭhāna’, a cetiya place, not a deva place, and relates that it was Buddha Kāśyapa’s golden stūpa. A replica of this stūpa, through Buddha’s power, then appears in the air. This is enough to convert the Brahmin and the shrine to Buddhism. In the “story of a Brahmin named Indra’ (Indrabrāhmaṇa-avadāna), that is also from the Divyāvadāna, it is told that the Buddha tells the Brahmin Indra to look under the pit in his home used for the sacrificial fire to find a ‘post’ (yasṭī) made of sandalwood (gośīrṣa), the length of Buddha’s body. The Brahmin does so, finds it, develops faith, asks for teachings and attains the state of stream-enterer. He later asks to celebrate a festival with this yasṭī and permission is granted. This festival, where many Brahmins came to gain religious merit, we are told, was called later Indramaha (‘Indra’s festival’). This is a well-known Brahmanical festival in Sanskrit sources, originating with a gift of a post by the god Indra. Here though, a Brahmin festival became a Buddhist one, and many Brahmins are shown to have become Buddhists. Many lamps of clay were henceforth offered there, the mountain of clay becoming a stūpa, making it a ‘commemorative stūpa’. The Divyāvadāna makes clear its intention to transform the Toyikā site into a powerful ‘shrine of the Buddha’, and hence a place of pilgrimage.

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419 Pāli: Todeyya. The location of the Toyikā site is unknown, but is said to have been not far from Śrāvastī.
420 Hawkes, 2009, p. 59
421 Pāli: sotāpanna.
422 Hawkes, 2009, pp. 59-60
423 This site remains unidentified.
Chapter Six

The Chinese Pilgrims’ Visits to Rāmagrāma

“Five yojanas east of the Buddha’s birthplace, there was a country called Rāmagrāma. The king of this country obtained a share of the Buddha’s relics, brought them home, built a stūpa, and named it Rāmagrāma”

Faxian, Gao Seng Faxian Zhuan

Buddhist History of India after the Maurya Empire

Aśoka’s example of empire building along with the dissemination of Buddhism was an ideal example for Buddhism’s future association with political power throughout Asia. In the year 185 BCE, the ninth and last in the Mauryan line of kings was assassinated by the army commander Puṣyamitra Śuṅga. Buddhist chronicles portray the founder of the Śuṅga Empire as a Brahmin Śaivite hostile to Buddhism, setting off to destroy it in Magadha, even though his successors continued to give Buddhism royal patronage, in particular in Central India, as evidenced from the great stūpas of Sanchi and Barhut. The last of the Śuṅgas was assassinated by a slave-girl in 73 BCE and Magadha became from then on a Mahājanapada in name only. While in the mid-first century CE a Jain king from Kaliṅga ruled and protected Buddhism, the center of power had already shifted to Gandhāra, where the Bactrians gave way to the Shakas, who in turn gave way to the Kushan nomads from central Asia. In the second and third centuries CE, the Kushan capitals of Kapisa (Kabul) and Puruṣapura (Peshawar), were the axis of the trade routes between China and Rome. Under the great Kushan Emperor, King Kaniṣka, who ruled between the years 127 to 150 CE, raiding parties ravaged the Gangetic plains as far as Pāṭaliputra,

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425 Allen, 2010, p. 84. Buddhism also prospered in post-Asokan times in North-Western India under the Graeco-Bactrian ruler Menander.
426 Literally: “City of Men”.

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returning to Puruṣapura laden with booty of Buddhist trophies, including relics of the Buddha taken from Pāṭaliputra and Rājagṛha, which were interred in a great stūpa at Puruṣapura (later visited by both Faxian and Xuanzang). According to Buddhist texts, King Kaniṣka was converted to the Buddhist faith by the great scholar Aśvaghoṣa, and then hosted the Forth Buddhist Council in Kashmir. Under his patronage Graeco-Buddhist art developed, the influence of which extended back across to Magadha. Kaniṣka was also the first ruler to show images of the Buddha on coins, and his successors restored and enlarged Buddhist monasteries and stūpas (including Rāmagrāma). This second golden age of Buddhism continued well into the third century CE, when the Kushan Empire finally fragmented and declined. In Magadha at the time were the Bharshivas who burned down Buddhist monasteries, but after a period of political confusion, the next new powerful dynasty to emerge were the Guptas, who probably originated from Bengal. In about 320 CE, Candragupta formed an alliance with the much weaker Licchavis of Vaiśāli through marriage, and thus restored Magadha somewhat closer to its former glory. His son, Samudragupta expanded the kingdom further by brilliant military campaigns that added some twenty kingdoms to the emerging Gupta Empire. Samudragupta’s second son, Candragupta the Second extended the Gupta Empire further, from coast to coast. His forty year reign, where he is reported to have “annihilated the Mlecchas completely”, is seen as a third Buddhist golden age, which saw a flowering in various topics such as literature, mathematics, science and astronomy, centered in the royal court of Pāṭaliputra. Although he was himself a Vaiśnava, Candragupta the Second supported both Jain and Buddhist communities. It was during his reign (about twenty-five years or so into it) that Faxian entered the western borders of the Gupta Empire in Gandhāra.

427 Author of the Sanskrit epic the Buddhacharita (Acts of the Buddha). The Fourth Buddhist Council in Kashmir was precided by the scholar Vasumitra. This is the Sarvāstivāda council, not to be confused with the Theravāda Fourth Buddhist Council, held in the first century BCE in Sri Lanka.
428 Allen, 2010, p. 85
429 We shall see in the last chapter that archaeological findings at the site found bricks that identify to Kushan times.
430 Not to be confused with the Mauryan Candragupta, Aśoka’s grandfather.
431 Allen, 2010, p. 85
432 Allen, 2010, p. 85
Faxian, and even more so Xuanzang, enjoyed great popularity in China after their successful returns and throughout the centuries ever since. There are numerous books about their lifes and travels. The documented pilgrimages they undertook were crucial for the nineteenth century identification of many sites sacred to Buddhism. At the same time, many sites they have visited still remain as guess-work for present archaeologists and adventurers trying to locate them. In this chapter though, the discussion is limited to mainly narrating the part of their respective travelogues from entering India and the routes they took to reach Rāmagrāma. Of particular interest here are their respective pilgrimage and reports of the area of Kapilavastu and Lumbinī, which provided valuable indications as to Rāmagrāma’s location. The political situation in India at large, in the time between these two celebrated pilgrims’s respective visits, and after Xauazang’s time, will be followed briefly too. The full narration of their visits to Rāmagrāma is featured in appendix IV.

Faxian and His Visit to Rāmagrāma

Faxian entered India from Gandhāra in the year 401 CE, at the time of the Gupta Empire, ruled by Chandragupta the Second. With his companion Tao-chin, Faxian crossed the “land of five rivers” (today’s Punjab), and they were impressed with the order prevailing throughout the country, attributing it to the lasting effects of the Dharma of the Buddha as propagated by Aśoka. Faxian was further impressed with

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434 The first translations was into French by Stanislas Julien, called Voyages du pelerin Hiouen-tsang in 1853, bringing to light Xuanzang’s travels to India in 631 CE (Allen, 2010, p. 63) This was a first known detailed record giving approximate measurements and descriptions of many important and long lost sites of Buddhism. This translation helped Alexander Cunningham to locate sites associated with the Buddha, long forgotten, such as Rājagṛha. The English translation by Samuel Beal, 1884, James Legge, 1886, and Fa Xian travelogue further helped the orientalists to search for the locations of the long lost sites of Buddhism (Allen, 2010, p. 68)

435 Chinese: 法顯

436 Faxian reports that people were free to come and go, criminals simply fined, that people are not killing living creatures, do not eat garlic and onion and avoid alcohol.
the atmosphere of religious tolerance, and the respect shown by local rulers to Buddhist communities. The summer of the year 404 was passed in Mathura, on the banks of the Yamuna River, where Hindu, Jain and Buddhist communities lived side by side in harmony. From there, going further east, the party reached Kannauj, where Faxian stayed in a Theravāda monastery.

From Kannauj they traveled eight *yojanas* to reach Śrāvastī. Faxian and his companions found Buddhism well in decline from Śrāvastī onwards to the east, towards the Middle Land of old, reporting the prevelance of hostile Brahmins. They were saddened to see the present situation of Śrāvastī, where Buddha taught for twenty rainy seasons, but nonetheless, a few remaining local monks helped them to find the important sites nearby, such as the Jetavana Grove. Four *li* south-east from Śrāvastī, Faxian noted a *tope* for marking the place where Buddha met the Kosalan King Virūḍhaka, standing on the road and not letting him attack his own clansmen, the Śākyans. From there they set out to Kapilavastu and its vicinity, visiting the birthplaces of the previous Buddhas Krakucchaṇḍa and Kanakamuni, the latter situated one *yojana* east to Kapilavastu. They were shocked to find Kapilavastu in desolation and ruins, with very few inhabitants. In Faxian’s words: “The Country of Kapilavastu was extremely desolate, with only a few scattered people living there. The roads were frightening. There were white elephants and

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437 Allen, 2010, p. 86; Faxian further stated that some rules, like the seating arrangements of kings and laity are a continuation in form from Buddha’s time.
438 Nicknamed ‘the peacock city’.
439 Allen, 2010, p. 87: *li*: a Chinese ancient measurement, of about 360 paces, which is much less than the modern 500 meters it represents. *Yojana*: an ancient Indian measurement representing the distance covered in a day’s march by a royal army. Alexander Cunningham worked out that there were less than six *li* to one mile and 6.71 miles to one *yojana*. This was later followed by the next generation of archaeologists, tracing the Chinese Traveler’s routes. It is important to note though that both Chinese were scholar monks, not geographers, so that their measurements should not be taken at face value. The pilgrims, and later, they’re respective scribes, did mistakes, as well as the first Europeans translating their accounts. For example Faxian wrote he went south to Śrāvastī, but it is east, and the distance to it from Kannauj is twice as much (Allen, 2010, p .88).
440 Furthermore, the direction ‘east’ to kuśinagar was actually south, the reason for this was that ‘east’ meant at times a “continuation in a sacred direction”, See: Deeg, Max. 2003. The Places Where Siddhārtha Trod: Lumbini and Kapilavastu. Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute, Occasional Papers, 3. p. 15.
441 Pāli: Viḍūḍabha. This is noteworthy because the Śākyans were later masacarred and the remaining inhabitants scattered, which might be the answer for the relic stūpa situated in Piprihawa in modern India, meaning that Śākyan survivors obtained a share of Buddha’s relics after his cremation.
442 Pāli: Kakusandha and Konṇāgamana.
lions. Nobody should travel there without taking precautions”.\textsuperscript{443} To Lumbinī it was 50 li due east,\textsuperscript{444} where local monks still drank water from the well in the Lumbinī garden where two nāgas washed Siddhārtha’s body after he was born.

Now, from Lumbinī “Five yojanas east of the Buddha’s birthplace, there was a country called Rāmagrāma. The king of this country obtained a share of the Buddha’s relics, brought them home, built a stūpa, and named it Rāmagrāma”.\textsuperscript{445} Faxian located the Rāmagrāma Stūpa without much difficulty it seems, though mentioning that the country east of Lumbinī was even more desolate.\textsuperscript{446} He goes on to tell the story of the nāga and Aśoka:” Beside the stūpa was a pond in which a dragon lived.\textsuperscript{447} The dragon kept constant watch over the stūpa and made offerings to it day and night. When King Aśoka was in this world, he intended to demolish eight stūpas and construct eighty-four thousand new ones. He had already pulled down seven stūpas and had come to destroy this one. The dragon appeared, took the king to its palace, and showed him all its offerings. The dragon then said to the king, ‘If your offerings are better than mine, then destroy this stūpa and take away the relics. I will not quarrel with you’. Realizing that the dragon’s offerings were not of this world, King Aśoka returned to his home”.\textsuperscript{448} In his narration Faxian highlights an ancient tale of elephants making offerings to the relic-stūpa, and what happened afterward: “As it was a deserted place with no one to keep it clean, a herd of elephants often came with water in their trunks to sprinkle on the ground. They also offered various kinds of flowers to the stūpa. Once a monk came from another country to worship the stūpa and was frightened by the sight of the elephants. Hiding behind a

\textsuperscript{443} Rongxi, Li. 2002. GaoSeng Faxian Zhan; The Journey of the Eminent Monk Faxian: A Record of the Journey to India of Shi Faxian, a Śramaṇa of the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420). Translated from the Chinese of Faxian (Taishō Volume 51, Number 2085). In: Lives of Great Monks and Nuns. BDK English Tripiṭaka 76-VII. Berkeley, California: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research. p. 186. Both Faxian and Xuanzang described Kapilavastu in detail (the latter more so), such as the eastern gate Siddhārtha left his father’s palace from, and Kudan, the place where the Buddha met his father when returning home for the first time after enlightenment (Allen, 2010, p. 91)

\textsuperscript{444} This is about eight miles.

\textsuperscript{445} Rongxi, Li. 2002. p. 186

\textsuperscript{446} Allen, 2010, p. 92

\textsuperscript{447} ‘Dragon’ appears in most Chinese translations to denote ‘nāga’.

\textsuperscript{448} Rongxi, Li. 2002. p. 186-87
tree, he saw that the elephants presented offerings in a proper way. He deplored the fact that because there was no monastery with monks to look after the stūpa, the elephants had to keep it clean. Thus he renounced the status of fully ordained monk and became a novice. He cut weeds and plants, leveled the ground, and made the place clean and tidy. He exhorted the king to build a monastery there and volunteered to be its abbot. Monks were now living in this monastery. This event occurred recently, and since then the abbots of this monastery have always been novices”.\textsuperscript{449} Importantly, Faxian says that these events happen “recently” and that there are still novice-monks residing there in his time.

From Rāmagrāma, continuing in Faxian’s words: “Three yojana\textsuperscript{450} to the east was the place where Prince Siddhārtha ordered (his servant) Chandaka to return home with his white horse. A stūpa had also been built there. Going four yojana\textsuperscript{ further east, the party came to the Charcoal Stūpa,\textsuperscript{451} where there was also a monastery. Continuing east for twelve yojanas, they came to the city of Kuśinagara”.\textsuperscript{452} In Kuśinagara Faxian said he visited the sites where the Buddha’s golden coffin was given offerings for seven days and where the eight kings divided the relics, saying that all these places had topes and monasteries, with but few inhabitants and monks.\textsuperscript{453} From there Faxian’s party reached Vaiśālī and then crossed the Ganges to Paṭāliputra, where Aśoka’s palace and other Buddhist edifices were still standing.\textsuperscript{454}

The route Faxian took, that later Xuanzang undertook in a similar fashion, covered the main Buddhist sites of the time. The part of the journey from Kuśinagara, through Vaiśālī to Paṭāliputra, is the one (in opposite sequence) the Buddha took on his ‘last journey’, while many sites they visited around Kapilavastu and the place of renunciation south of Rāmagrāma towards Kuśinagara, are places Aśoka marked on his great pilgrimage to the thirty-two sites. Apart from Rāmagrāma the two Chinese pilgrims

\textsuperscript{449} Rongxi, Li. 2002. p. 187. Interestingly, as we saw in a note in the first chapter, throughout the region from Kapilavastu to Rāmagrāma, there are many local temples where inside them there are elephant figurings.
\textsuperscript{450} Max Deeg emphasizes that the general direction of ‘east’ can be interpreted as a metaphor, because here in fact the direction is west. See: Deeg, 2003, p. 15
\textsuperscript{451} This is presumably the stupa that the Moriyas built on the ashes they have obtained.
\textsuperscript{452} Rongxi, Li. 2002. p. 187
\textsuperscript{453} Allen, 2010, p. 93
\textsuperscript{454} Allen, 2010, p. 94
visited the relic stūpas of Vaiśālī and Rājagrha. Faxian departed India in 415 CE, so that 216 years later, Xuanzang \(^{455}\) arrived on the north-western border of the Indian sub-continent, in the year 631. During the time between the two Chinese Travelers, India had undergone a series of major upheavals which caused Buddhism to lose even more ground. A new wave of ‘Mlecchas’ came from Central Asia, calling themselves ‘Huna’, known to the Greeks as the ‘Hephthalites’, or ‘White Huns’. They first appeared on the Indian scene at a time when the Gupta Empire was threatened from South India by the Puṣyamitras. At around the year 475 CE, Kumaragupta the Second defeated the Puṣyamitras and repulsed the first wave of the Huns, but the second attack, in 480, led by the Hun warlord Toramana, forced the Guptas to retreat. More attacks came under Toramana’s successor, Mihirakula, who persecuted Buddhists and destroyed their monasteries. The Guptas withdrew all the way back east to Magadha, and managed to cling to it, until their last significant ruler, Viṣṇugupta was ousted in 550. \(^{456}\) The following years saw the rise of militant Śaivism, led by King Śaśāṃka of Bengal, founder of the Gauda Kingdom. Śaśāṃka assaulted Buddhist centers in Bihar, most notably Bodh Gayā, where the Bodhi Tree was cut down; its roots dug out and burned, with the ground being soaked with sugar-cane juice to ensure it will not grow back. At this same period the various Prakrit languages, such as Pāli, were formalized into Sanskrit, which from then on became the dominant literary language of Northern India and of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Northern India was then divided to different independent rulers, to the Huns and other such invaders from the north-west. This process further saw the emergence of the Rajputs in central-west India (today’s Rajasthan). Out of this struggle, the Vardhana (or Puṣyabhūti) dynasty emerged, its third in line, Harsha Vardhana, killed the last of the Guptas in battle and annexed Magadha. From his capital city of Kannauj, Harsha Vardhana marched against the anti-Buddhist King Śaśāṃka, and having defeated him, he brought Bihar, Bengal and Orissa under his authority. Even though King Harsha was nominally a Śaivite, raised by his father as a

\(^{455}\) Chinese: 玄奘
\(^{456}\) Allen, 2010, p. 94
worshipper of the sun god Sūrya, he may have been converted to Buddhism before his death. In a similar manner to Aśoka, Kaniṣka and the Second Chandragupta before him, Harsha extended royal patronage to all faiths under his umbrella, and similarly, he too lived long enough to ensure the consolidation of his rule.  

**Xuanzang and his Visit to Rāmagrāma**

Xuanzang was in India during King Harsha’s latter years of rule, a time of relative stability. Entering the Gangetic plains in the year 634 CE, Xuanzang was impressed as Faxian had been, by what he saw. Even though the city of Mathura was dominated by Hindu temples of Śiva and Viṣṇu, the two main Buddhist schools of Mahāyāna and Theravāda were well-supported there, with over two thousand monks in their respective monasteries. Like Faxian, Xuanzang continued to Kannauj, by then a thriving cultural and religious center, having reportedly hundred Buddhist monasteries. He too studied Pāli in Kannauj in a Theravāda monastery, and then moved on towards Śrāvastī, but by a longer path than that traveled by his predecessor, taking note of other sites associated with Śākyamuni and the three other previous Buddhas. It was on this route that he reached Prayag (modern Allahabad), on the confluence of the Yamuna and Ganges rivers. He then continued to the nearby ancient city of Kosambi, only to find Buddhist monasteries in ruins and a large number of Hindu devotees. Then Xuanzang re-crossed the Ganges towards Śrāvastī, traveling through the ancient Hindu town of Saketa (Ayodhyā). It was five-hundred lī from Ayodhyā to Śrāvastī in a north-easterly direction. Xuanzang was shocked by the devastation of

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457 Allen, 2010, p. 95
458 It might be the case that Xuanzang, well-aware of Faxian’s travels, went purposefully on similar routes and to similar sites, and even studying in some places in the same manner. Nevertheless, his journal is much more extensive and detailed than that of Faxian, the latter regarded as a pioneer. When Xuanzang mentions Nepal, he does so from what he is hearing from people, without actually traveling there. This example shows the difficulty in knowing to which places he actually gone to, and those he describes out of secondhand knowledge.
459 Xuanzang witnessed a ‘Kumbha-mela’ there. Today it is still the main site of a Kumbha-mela that happens in Allahabad every twelve years.
460 Skt: Kaushambi.
461 The Buddha and Mahāvīra both visited Saketa. Today known as Ayodhyā, it is the seat of great controversy these days after the mosque that was built above a Hindu temple there in the sixteenth century, was partly destroyed. The site is claimed by both Hindus and Muslims.
Śrāvastī, mentioning that even the Jetavana Monastery now lay in ruins. It is noteworthy that Xuanzang was in general more detailed in his account than Faxian.  

Proceeding towards Kapilavastu, Xuanzang went similarly to the previous Buddhas Krakucchaṃda and Kanakamuni’s places, but then he made an excursion to Buddha Kāśyapa’s birth place, in a north-westerly direction, witnessing there a relic stūpa of Buddha Kāśyapa built by Aśoka. From there he went directly to Kapilavastu, five-hundred li or so to the north-east. Like Faxian he found Buddha’s home-town in ruins, “long deserted”, with very few peopled villages, and importantly saying that there were ten deserted cities there. Xuanzang located many spots, in and around Kapilavastu, related with Siddhārtha’s life in the palace, such as Mahāmāya’s sleeping palace, where the ‘spiritual conception’ happened, and outside of the four city gates: representatives of the four things Prince Siddhārtha saw on his outings: the old man, diseased man, dead man and a śramaṇa ascetic. Xuanzang also saw a stūpa marking the site where Siddhārtha sat under a tree watching the ploughing festival, when he entered deep contemplation.

North-west of the capital, Xuanzang reported thousands of stūpas indicating where the Śākyas were slaughtered. Xuanzang visited Kudan, just as Faxian did, but also many other sites in the vicinity

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462 For examples: Xuanzang mentions two Aśokan pillars that Faxian did not mention (Faxian held these pillars in lesser regard). On the place marked where the Buddha prevented Virūḍhaka from attacking the Śākyas, Xuanzang narrates: “The Kosalan King, Virūḍhaka asked the Buddha as for why he is seated under a withered tree and not under any of the large green trees. The Buddha then said that the Śākya tribe similarly like the branches and leaves about to perish, so what shade can there be for one belonging to it? This caused Virūḍhaka to disband his army and return”. (Allen, 2010, p. 97-98)

463 Pāli: Kassapa.

464 Allen, 2010, p. 98. It is interesting to speculate if this site, 16 li from Śrāvastī is the Toyikā site, mentioned in the previous chapter.


466 This is an important note that can give an answer to the Kapilavastu debate, that simply there was more than just one city there.

467 As we saw the Buddha’s descent from the Tuṣita (Pāli: Tusita) heaven to his mother’s womb was followed by an earthquake. It is in later Mahāyāna traditions, that Buddha’s life story is divined into twelve acts. See: Chögyal, Tenzin. 2015. The Life of the Buddha. Translated by Kurtis R. Schaeffer. New York: Penguin Books.

468 The latter places are on Aśoka’s pilgrimage list but the former is not, but undoubtedly marked by him as well. In any case in Aśoka’s pilgrimage these events are told as just one site, where here they are refered to places outside the four gates of Kapilavastu.

469 This place was reportedly forty li away to the north-east. Again, this site is on King Aśoka’s list of pilgrimage. Xuanzang also saw the site marking Siddhārth’s mastering the martial arts.

470 Allen, 2010, p. 99. This is the site of today’s Sagarahawa in the Nepali Tarai.

471 Where Buddha met his father on his first visit home after enlightenment, see in chapter one.
missed by Faxian, so that at this point there are differences in the location of some sites the two Chinese Travelers had gone to.\textsuperscript{472} While Faxian went from Kapilavastu directly to Lumbinī, Xuanzang went there indirectly, visiting the ‘Arrow Well’, a sacred spring where there was a stūpa marking the spot where Siddhārtha’s arrow landed, and only from there he went to Lumbinī, where he saw a stūpa marking the Buddha’s birth spot.\textsuperscript{473} From Lumbinī, he took the same route eastwards to Rāmagrāma as taken by Faxian, and experienced similar difficulties: “From here going eastward for more than two hundred \textit{li}\textsuperscript{474} through a wild jungle, I reached the country of Rāma (Lan-mo in Chinese). The country of Rāma has been deserted for many years and it has no boundary marks. The towns and villages are in ruins and are sparsely populated. To the southeast of the old capital city\textsuperscript{475} is a brick stūpa less than one hundred feet high,\textsuperscript{476} built by a former king of this country”.\textsuperscript{477} In general Xuanzang narrates the same story about this stūpa as did Faxian, but with greater detail, for example mentioning the place where the nāga came to meet Aśoka was marked. Xuanzang then describes the local surroundings: “Not far from the stūpa is a monastery with a few monks. It is a quiet and clean place under the management of a \textit{śrāmanera} (novice). Monks coming from distant places are well received with hospitality and invited to stay for three days to

\textsuperscript{472} The difference is that while Faxian located the Krakucchaṃda site to Na-pei-kea (Kapilavastu), 12 \textit{yojana} south-east of Śrāvastī and one \textit{yojana} south of Kanakamuni’s site, which was itself one \textit{yojana} west of Kapilavastu, Xuanzang however places Krakucchaṃda fifty \textit{li} south of Kapilavastu, and Kanakamuni a lesser distance south-east of Kapilavastu (Allen, 2010, p. 101)

\textsuperscript{473} Xuanzang mentions in seeing Lumbinī also pure water tanks with stūpas, and a pillar with horse on top, build by Aśoka rāja, as well as an ‘Oil River’ nearby (Allen, 2010, p. 103). It is interesting to speculate why both travelers do not mention the stūpa of Piprāhvā (Ganwāria), where relics of the Buddha were found, and might well be the relic stūpa with the Śākyan share of the relics. Max Deeg is of the opining that it lay too south of the routes the Chinese Travelers took from Lumbinī to Rāmagrāma, so that it might have been neglected and forgotten already by the fourth century CE (Deeg, 2003, p. 35)

\textsuperscript{474} \textit{Li} (Chinese: 里, \textit{li}, or 市里, \textit{shi li}), also known as the Chinese mile, is a traditional Chinese unit of distance. The \textit{li} has varied considerably over time but was usually about one third of an English mile and now has a standardized length of a half-kilometer (500 meters or 1,640 feet or 0.311 miles). This is then divided into 1,500 \textit{chi} or ‘Chinese feet’.

\textsuperscript{475} This point is very important in showing that today’s village Panditpur, about nine kilometers north-west from Rāmagrāma, most probably is the old capital Xuanzang mentions.

\textsuperscript{476} It is a lesser measurement length than a foot, which is roughly a third of a meter: The \textit{chi} (Tongyong Pinyin \textit{chh}) is a traditional Chinese unit of length. Although it is often translated as the "Chinese foot", its length was originally derived from the distance measured by a human hand, from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the forefinger, and is similar to the ancient span.

\textsuperscript{477} Rongxi, Li. 1996. \textit{The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions}. Translated by the Tripiṭaka-Master Xuanzang under Imperial Order Composed by Śramaṇa Bianji of the Great Zongchi Monastery. p. 159 (181)
receive offerings of the four monastic requisites”. Xuanzang then writes in great detail the story of the local śrāmanera who took care of the site.

From Rāmagrāma, in a similar route as Faxian’s before him, Xuanzang went a hundred li, through a “great forest”, south-east to the place of Siddhārtha’s renunciation, the “hair-cutting” site and where he released his chareeoteer Chandaka. From there he continued further “east” to Kuśinagara, a deserted city by now. In Kuśinagara Xuanzang saw the grove of sāl trees, and a stūpa nearby built by Aśoka, a stone pillar, and a brick temple containing a giant statue of the Buddha in the parinirvāṇa posture, with its head towards the north. He too mentions a “charcoal Stūpa” containing the ashes of the Buddha.

Xuanzang later crossed the Ganges and settled in Nālandā for several years, returning to China laden with over a thousand texts. As a direct result of Xuanzang’s visit to India, King Harsha sent an embassy to China, establishing the first diplomatic link between the two countries. According to the Tibetan chronicle The White Annals, the Chinese responded with their own mission, which reached India through Nepal, only to find that King Harsha has passed away, his throne captured by his chief minister Arjuna. The latter forced this Chinese mission to withdraw back to Tibet. As a result of this, a combined Tibetan and Nepali army later invaded India, defeated Arjuna in battle and sending him and his family in chains to China.

The Decline of Buddhism in India

When the Vardhana Empire declined, the Gangetic plains descended again into small warring states. This fragmentation of India’s partial unity lasted till the end of the twelfth century, when the extensive

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478 Rongxi, Li. 1996, p. 160; 182. The “four requisites” are: food, drink, clothing and medicine. The mention of a nearby monastery was of great importance as we shall see in the next chapter on the archaeological discoveries at Rāmagrāma.

479 Two versions of the full description of Xuanzang’s visit to Rāmagrāma can be read in appendix II.

480 This measurement of Xuanzang means that these two, yet to be identified Aśokan stūpas, are close to the modern border, south to south-east of Triveni.

481 As seen, according to Max Deeg, “east” in many cases meant continuing in the same direction; here it is south-east.

482 As we saw the Moriya representative from Pipphalīvana, promised to build stūpa on the ashes they obtained. The “Charcoal Stūpa” should be located somewhere north of Kuśinagara.


484 Allen, 2010, p. 104. This happened in the year 648 CE.
conquests of Muhammad of Ghori brought most of these provinces under the sway of the Sultans of Delhi. From the ninth century onwards, Hinduism experienced a great revival, spearheaded by the Brahmin reformer, Ādi Śaṅkarācārya. Both these causes: the Muslim invasions and the Hindu revival were the main external causes that brought Buddhism to the verge of extinction in the land of its birth, after flourishing there for about one thousand and seven-hundred years. At these ‘medieval times’, the figure of the Buddha was absorbed into the Hindu pantheon as a ninth avatar of the god Viṣṇu. Only in Bengal and Bihar Buddhism still prospered (mainly in large monastic centers like Nālandā in South Bihar and Udantapuri and Vikramśilā in East Bihar), under the patronage of the Pāla kings, whose title-name “pal”, means “protector”. Their founder, Gopala, came to power in Gaur, West Bengal, in about 755 CE, remarkably by a process of democratic election. His successors, Dharmapala and Devapala expanded the empire westwards to Mathura, and helped with the spread of the emerging Tantric teachings, also towards the Kathmandu Valley and to the spice-islands of south-east Asia. In the last decade of the eleventh century, the last of the Pāla Kings was overthrown by the orthodox Hindu founder of the Sena dynasty. From then on Buddhism in India went into rapid and terminal decline. At about this same time period Muslim Sufi refugees came to India from Afghanistan and Central Asia, fleeing the Mongols. Some evidence suggests that there were mass conversions of Buddhists in India to Islam (as propagated by the Sufis), in response to the Sena’s hard line religious orthodoxy. But Muslim iconoclasts played their part too. In 1193 the Turkish warlord Qutb-ud-Din took Delhi, and set a pattern of building mosques on top of Hindu temples, starting with Delhi’s first mosque, the Qubbat al-Islam, built on top a Hindu temple

485 He was active most probably in the middle of the eighth century CE, a great synthesizer of Advaita Vedānta.
486 Allen, 2010, p. 104. For more about the Muslim conquests and the decline of Buddhism in India, see: McKeown, Arthur Philip. 2010. From Bodh Gaya to Lhasa to Beijing: The Life and Times of Sariputra (c. 1335-1426), Last Abbot of Bodh Gaya, PhD thesis. Cambridge, Mass: The Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Harvard University.
488 As well as in many small monastic compounds in Orissa (called Odisha in Modern India).
489 Allen, 2010, p. 104
490 Ruling from Bengal in the eleventh and twelvth centuries, the Senas traced their origins to Karnataka.
491 Allen, 2010, p. 105
that was founded by the conquered Rajput, Prithvi Raj. Qutb-ud-Din’s leading general, Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji, burned not just Nālandā and Vikramśilā, but virtually all Buddhist monasteries in the Gangetic Plains, so that by the end of the twelfth century, Buddhism had by all practical means disappeared from the Middle Land.\(^492\) In the next centuries, the great Buddhist monasteries and stūpas were reclaimed by nature, plundered for bricks by builders, or ravaged by treasure-seekers.

**Medieval Times: Routes between India and the Kathmandu Valley**

The most well-known medieval Buddhist master, traveling from India to Nepal (and onwards to Tibet) was Atiśa Dīpankara,\(^493\) who left India to reach Nepal at around the year 1040. The route he used is over a hundred kilometers east of Rāmagrāma, in today’s area of Mithila.\(^494\) Other documented medieval travelers in the same vicinity are the Tibetan monk Dharmasvamin,\(^495\) in the thirteenth century and Vanaratna,\(^496\) in the fifteenth century. It is at these times, when Buddhism in India was experiencing rapid decline, that the Kathmandu Valley (Nepal),\(^497\) started to flourish with its own monasteries and stūpas.

The area of Mithila was the main route used between the two countries, so that the area of Kapilavastu and Rāmagrāma became all the more neglected and forgotten. Parts of the Licchavi tribe migrated northwards to Nepal from around the first century CE and by the fourth century they became the rulers of Nepal.\(^498\)

The Tharu people, featured in the next chapter, who occupied large swaths of the Tarai in the nineteenth century, might well be descendants of the Śākya and Koliya clans.\(^499\)

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\(^492\) Allen, 2010, p. 105
\(^494\) For the most part the territory of ancient Mithila is in today’s Nepal, and some parts are in Northern Bihar. This area was called “Champaran” in British India, and “Tirhut” before that.
\(^495\) Chag Lo-tsa-ba Chos-rje-dpal (1197-1264)
\(^496\) (1384-1468)
\(^497\) Importantly, today’s Kathmandu Valley was called Nepal, and it still does so to by some Newaris.
\(^499\) Regmi, 1965, p. 5
From Mithila two routes reached the Kathmandu valley: the more eastern route, which was used by a fourteenth century Bengali Muslim invading force, reaching the Kathmandu valley through the area of modern Panauti and Banepa, while the western path, taken by Atiśa, runs through modern Hetauda and reaches Kathmandu through Pharping. The 648 CE invading Chinese army of Xuanzang’s period passed in a similar route, through Kuti, going all the way to North Bihar. Interestingly, the Sarvāstivādavinaya relates that the Buddha warned Ānanda about the risks involved in traveling north (meaning Nepal). This means that there was certainly knowledge about the Nepal Valley even prior to Buddha’s time.

Also from the Jaina Svetambara tradition there is a mention of the ascetic Bhadrabahu doing penance in Nepal. King Aśoka’s visit to Kathmandu is doubtful as we have seen, because all the information about it comes from later chronicles, starting from the fourteenth century. Nepal did however, feature in Aśokan maps of India, but he does not seem to have had any suzerainty over it. The Lichhavis were pressed from the south by the Kushana Empire and those Lichhavis who escaped their homeland and migrated to Nepal probably brought their Buddhist heritage with them. Around the year 350 CE King Jayadeva shifted his rule from Vaiśālī to Nepal proper. The end of the Licchhavi rule in Nepal is dated to 740 CE. The Mallas, ruling Nepal from the ninth to eleventh centuries, extended its borders down to the Tarai as far as the river Gandak. Even though there was no local dynasty in the Tarai at this time, the Indian Pāla dynasty claimed the area of Mithila. In 1349, Shams ud-din Illyas of Bengal invaded Nepal, and demolished Pashupatinath and Swayambhunath, but left soon after. This invasion came from the Tirhut-Janakpur area, and up through Modern Banepa. Their retreat back was taken in a more westerly route, in close proximity to today’s highway. Also mentioned is a flight from Tirhut by Harasimhadeva in 1326, called the

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500 Regmi, 1965, p. 393. Kirkpatrick, in 1793, travelled this whole route, and in the Tarai he came out at Janakpur or Simraongarh which is a short distance to the west of Janakpur. This area seems to have been populated all through the medieval times.


502 The snow clad Himalayas can be seen easily from Gorakhpur in India on a bright day.

503 Regmi, 1965, p. 59

504 Regmi, 1965, p. 321. Although large parts of Bihar had already came under Muslim domination then, the Mithila area did not.
“Tirhutiya” invasion of Nepal. Dharmasvamin was in Nepal for eight years between 1226 to 1234, and then visited Tirhut, Nālandā, Bodh Gayā and more Buddhist pilgrimage sites associated with Buddha Śākyamuni. Vanaratna, who died in Nepal in 1469 travelled a few times between Nepal and Tibet and stayed in Kathmandu for long periods of time.

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505 Regmi, 1965. p. 258
Chapter 7

The Modern Discovery of Rāmagrāma

“The country of Rāma has been deserted for many years and it has no boundary marks. The towns and villages are in ruins and are sparsely populated. To the southeast of the old capital city is a brick stūpa less than one hundred feet high”

Xuanzang, the Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions

The modern discovery of Rāmagrāma happened in the context of the efforts to locate Lumbinī and Kapilavastu, by mainly British Orientalists, in the late nineteenth century. The British Raj, named initially as the ‘East India Company’, encroached on India from the seventeenth century onwards, having mainly colonialist and plunder objectives. The events of how the British took over India from the declining Mughal Empire and other local powers, such as the Marathas, are narrated by Willian Dalrymple in “The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company”. This is an important book because it details the events that led the British to control India mainly from local historical documents and not merely told from the usual British side. Nonetheless, there were a small percentage of British colonialists who were fascinated with India’s past, so that they gradually discovered many old and neglected monuments, the long forgotten monasteries, stūpas and temples. Of great importance were Alexander Cunningham, the first Director-General of the ASI (Archaeological Survey of India), and James Prinsep, decipherer of the Brāhmī script. On these pioneer explorers and many others, it is recommended to read Charles Allen’s Book “Buddha and the Sahibs”, and John Keay’s book “India Discovered, the

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508 After the events of the “Sepoy Mutiny” of 1857, India was turned officially to the Britain Crown.
510 The ASI was founded in Culcutta (Kolkata) in 1861.
In this chapter the focus is on another orientalist, William Hoey, who was the first to identify a mound he saw in the Nepali Tarai region with the Rāmagrāma Stūpa of old. We start though with a description of the Tarai region and its people, in particular the Tharu people, who inhabited this region when the first western explorers came there in the late nineteenth century.

**The Tarai Region and the Tharu People**

Just as the people of Nepal who live in its north, on the border regions with Tibet, speak Tibetan dialects, so do the people of the Tarai speak Indian dialects. In the Tarai though the diversity is great: from Bengali, Mithili and Bhojpuri languages in the eastern to the central Tarai, to Hindi and Urdu from the central Tarai to its west. There are also groups of indigenous languages, such as Tharu, Danuar, Dhangar and Satar. The main language in the vast area west of Sarlahi (Mithila) to Rupandehi (Lumbini area) is Bhojpuri. Hindi is all the more spoken these days, as well as Modern Nepali that is taught in schools. In general the Tarai region has flat geographical features. This continuous flat plain is the northern edge of the vast Gangetic Basin of North India. The altitude is not over two hundred fifty meters feet above sea level at any point, the climate being of the tropical monsoon type, very hot and wet during the summer with milder to cold winters. The land is very fertile, dissected with many rivers that mainly run in a northern-southern direction. The land yields rice, wheat, jute, sugar cane, tobacco and various pulses. A lot of the produce is sold over the border to India. The Tarai is considered the ‘food basket’ of Nepal, due to its large produce. Although the social and economic organization of the Tarai people at large is similar to that of the Brahmins, Chhetris, and the occupational castes of the hill regions of Nepal, due to the influence of nearby India, their way of life is more like that practiced in northern India. The vast

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513 This geographical division is similar also with religions and social customs.
515 Bista, 1967, p. 130. The British even developed a hat with two layers of felt called ‘double tarai’, to block the penetration of the sun in the scorching summers (Allen, 2010, p. x)
516 The local corruption of ‘Kśatrita’, or warrior caste.
majority is Hindu, but there are large pockets of Muslims too. The Tarai Hindus are more orthodox in
their beliefs than those of the Nepali Hindu hill people. Apart for the areas of the Tarai with populations
of Tharu, Danuar and other related Nepali people, the movement of most of the people of the Tarai to
India and back is unrestricted. For them, social and kinship ties, like marriages, are of a much greater
importance than political boundaries. Agriculture is the primary occupation, though the area has been
industrialized more since the 1970s. The caste system is prevalent, and coincides with economic status.
The Brahmans, Rajputs and Kayasthas castes are further divided into sub-castes. The Brahmans fall into
two main groups: the Maithili and Patra, the former are rich land owners, money lenders and zamindars
(village registers and revenue collectors), while the latter act as priests in ceremonies such as funeral
rites. The Rajputs are Kśatriyas, and prefer to be called as such in order to distinguish themselves from
the hill Kśatriyas (Chhetri). In the Tarai the Kśatriyas are to the most part land owners and money lenders.
Baniyas are traders and shop keepers, Gwalas tend cattle and sell the milk, ghee and curd, Hajams are the
barbers and are in high demand in weddings and funerals. A Mali is a gardener-florist, Barais prepare pan,
Haluwais are confectioners, making sweets for wedding feasts. Mallahas are fishermen and boatmen,
Koiris grow vegetables, Badahi are carpenters and the Lohars specialize in iron-smiting. Telis press oil,
Dhobis are washer-men. The menial jobs are done by the Halkhors and Mesters, while the Dushad are
responsible to dispose carcasses and take care of the cremation grounds. The Chamars are also of a low
caste, and the Tatmas and Khataves are agricultural laborers, the latter are called ‘Mushahar’ because they
eat rats. These castes are strictly Hindu, who worship all the deities of the Hindu pantheon: Brahmā,
Viṣṇu, Śiva, Gaṇeṣa, Durgā etc, each village having at least one temple. The most well-known Hindu

517 as well as of those who live also in Northern Indian hill territories west and east to Nepal, Such as Darjeeling east of Nepal and Grahwal to its west, both areas abound with Nepali people, many of whom migrated there to work in British tea plantations in the nineteenth century.
518 Bista, 1967, p. 131
519 Bista, 1967, p. 132
520 Bista, 1967, p. 133
The pilgrimage site of the Tarai is Janakpur.\textsuperscript{521} The main religious festival, amongst many, is Dashain, or durga puja, which occurs around October, followed by divali.\textsuperscript{522} Holi that happens around March is another major festival. Almost every family keeps a gossain; a family alters, where Durgā, Bhagavatī or Devī are worshipped. They all cremate their dead.\textsuperscript{523} The Tharus is the tribe with the oldest origins found in the Tarai. They usually live close to heavily forested regions, such as Chitwan, and have their own language, which was greatly influenced in the last two centuries from Hindi, Bhojpuri and Maithili.\textsuperscript{524} More recently, the people who live in the Tarai are called Madheshi, for whom the word madesh means the land itself, madesh meaning “plains country”.\textsuperscript{525}

The Tarai’s rivers and streams continue to provide a rich habitat for migratory birds and to the permanent ones, the Sarus Cranes.\textsuperscript{526} The national parks, such as Chitwan, are the last resorts of tigers, rhinos, elephants and wild buffalos.\textsuperscript{527} The word Tarai actually means ‘damp country’.\textsuperscript{528} The Tarai’s northern strip, with scores of rivers running from north to south, was called by the British ‘The Upper’ or ‘Nepal Tarai’, and by the Nepalis as ‘char khose jhaari’, the forest that is ‘four khos wide’, khos being the measure for the furthest distance a cow’s mooing can be heard (about two to three miles).\textsuperscript{529} This eight- to twelve-mile wide forest section was largely made of sal trees, known locally as sak. It is the physical boundary where the Himalāyan foothills end and the Gangetic plain begins. The Nawabs and Rājās of both sides of the Nepali-Indian border considered the Tarai as a death trap.\textsuperscript{530} For the Nawabs of Oude, this area was of little value, apart for its timber, so that they allowed the Gorkha hill-men to take it over.

\textsuperscript{521} Today it is the Dhanush district of Mithila.
\textsuperscript{522} Bista, 1967, p. 139. Dashain is called Tihar by the Nepali hill peoples.
\textsuperscript{523} Bista, 1967, p. 140
\textsuperscript{524} Bista, 1967, p. 141
\textsuperscript{525} This is in opposition to the hill-dwellers, called Pahadis.
\textsuperscript{526} The Sarus Cranes pair for life, which made them a symbol of good fortune, a fact that might have saved them from being shot to extinction.
\textsuperscript{527} Allen, 2010, p. ix
\textsuperscript{528} Allen, 2010, p. 34
\textsuperscript{529} Allen, 2010, p. 35
\textsuperscript{530} The modern border was finally settled in 1822.
The Gorkhas started to encroach on these plains after conquering the Kathmandu Valley in the late eighteenth century. The Tarai death trap was locally known as *ayul*, considered to be poisonous air, and imagined to be spread by the breath of large serpents. A more rational explanation is that in spring the ground was covered by fallen leaves which were rotten with the first rains of the hot season and then putrefied, signaling the beginning of the ‘unhealthy season’ that continued till the cold season. The *ayul* was termed by the British “The Tarai Fever”, a very virulent form of malaria that deemed the area impossible for human settlement. The Tarai Fever worsened when traveling to the Tarai’s northern parts, while in daylight it was considered safe (by the British). The British have learned from their own experience about this danger, which the Indians of Oude knew about for centuries, a fact that kept them away. The Tarai fever was lethal for the Gorkhas and other Nepali hill tribes as well, so that for centuries it has been a no-man’s-land, a barrier, inhabited only by the Tharu jungle-dwellers, who lived in this region a very long time, a fact attested to due to their resistance to the Tarai Fever.

Calling themselves *ban-rajas*, or ‘forest-kings’, the Tharus enjoyed centuries of independence, freely roaming the Tarai jungles. Slowly over the centuries, they started to become ‘Hindu-ised’, particularly in the Southern Tarai. Francis Buchanan, already in 1814, when surveying the Gorakhpur area, noted the distinct “Tartar-Chinese” features of the Tharu people and the ancient monuments in their territories of which they laid claim to. It was obvious to Buchanan that these monuments where absolutely prior to any Brahamanic claims. Buchanan also noted how the Tharus were feared by the Hindus, in particular the

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531 The Gorkha conquest of the Kathmandu Valley was in 1768.
532 Allen, 2010, p. 35
533 Oude was annexed by the British in 1858 and together with the adjasent territories, was called the North-Western Provinces of Oude (NWP&O), and afterwards renamed the United Provinces. With Indian independence in 1947, the United Provinces became Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.
534 Allen, 2010, p. 36. When Dr. Alois Anton Führer (1853-1930) came to the Tarai in the winter of 1889-90 most of the land of the Tarai was unoccupied for centuries barring the Tharu people. All there was to be seen were the large mounds. Dr. Führer said “the villagers ascribe (these mounds) to the Tharus (Allen, 2010, p. 106)
535 Read about Buchanan, who was also the first in modern times to have visited Bodh Gayā, in: Allen, Charles. 2003. *The Buddha and the Sahibs, The Men Who Discovered India’s Lost Religion*. London: Hodder, John Murray Publications. Buchanan was also the first modern explorer to note the great pillars in the area of modern Uttar Pradesh he surveyed (Allen. 2010, p.61). Buchanan, in his long surveys of the land even noted the ruins of Nālandā, a discovery that was shelved for a few decades.
Tharu women, and reported that the Tharus ate ‘impure’ meat, like of pig and fowls. Writing about them in 1897, Dr. Anton Führer mentioned that the Tharu men hunt and fish while their women sow, weed and harvest. Their houses were made of wood and grass, plastered over with red mud, while their villages were set a mile to two apart. These houses were raised on poles and were large and spacious, in order to provide protection from damp and malaria. Every small Tharu village was self-governing and matters of dispute were settled by a council of elders or by a head-man, called chaudhari. Dr. Führer also wrote that for the most part the Tharus are peaceful, honest and good-natured, following the customs of their ancestors.

The ancient roots and connection of the Tharus to the Tarai land dismisses a modern theory that they are descendants from the Thar Desert of Rajasthan, migrating to Nepal sometime between the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. In 1854, the Rana rulers of Nepal, in a civil code called Mulki, designated the Tharu people as low caste Hindus. Because of this degradation, and being described humiliatingly as “enslaved alcohol drinkers”, the Tharus, like other low social groups in India, reacted to this discrimination by claiming descent from a royal clan, in this case from Rajputs of the Thar Desert. There were other groups who claimed descent from Rajasthan, some of whom migrated westwards in the face of the Islamic conquests at around the fourteenth century. The truth of the matter though is that the Tharu’s high immunity to malaria points to a much longer residence in the Tarai. Other indications for their ancient long roots in the Tarai region are the Tharu’s absence of caste divisions, abhorrence for animal sacrifice, and having no particular respect to cows, all indicating a lack of connection to the Hindus of

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536 Allen, 2010, pp. 56-57
538 The Tharu people did not use cow dung as is done southwards in India.
539 Allen, 2010, p. 36
540 Allen, 2010, p. 37
541 Allen, 2010, p. 38
India. Not just that, but the Tharus had their own history of persecution by Hindus. Connecting them further to the remote past, perhaps even to the Śākyas and Koliyas, is their habit of building mounds over cremated remains and their fondness for endogamy. In Tharu folklore there is even mention that in the great ruined cities in their territories, once lived great kings, producing two great conquerors of men.\textsuperscript{542} Another notable aspect is that the Tharus were feared by the hill-men to their north and the plain-dwellers to their south, the latter considered the Tharu women to be enchantresses and witches.\textsuperscript{543}

The Tarai Fever served the Tharus well for generations, keeping them free of invaders, but this changed in the nineteenth century when their land faced encroachment from both sides of the border for timber and cultivation. Moreover, their forests were being set on fire in the spring so that cattle could feed on new grass. As hunter-gatherers this was very damaging for the Tharus as well as to the local wild animals: tigers, rhinos and wild buffaloes, all being forced out of their natural habitat. This encroachment was done mainly from Gorakhpur in India. During the battle between the British and Gorkhas before the border was secured in a 1816 treaty,\textsuperscript{544} the British, in order to deprive Nepal from resources, removed many Tharus from the Butwal area and resettled them in Gorakhpur, sixty five miles due south.\textsuperscript{545} Because of this resettlement the lands the Tharus occupied within Nepali borders were abandoned. In 1834, it was decided to bring the land north of Gorakhpur into cultivation, leasing the lands to Anglo-Indians for fifty years at least. One of these leases was for the Birdpore House, where Buddha-relics in a mound in Piprāhvā were discovered in January 1898. These grants were a disaster, the Tarai Fever hitting hard on both British and Indian laborers.\textsuperscript{546} Nepal’s rulers in the last decade of the nineteenth century, the Ranas, recognized that they had to be on good terms with the British Raj, while keeping them at a

\textsuperscript{543} Allen, 2010, p. 39
\textsuperscript{544} The Treaty of Sugauli was signed in March 4\textsuperscript{th}, 1816. For more about the British-Gorkha wars see: Allen, Charles. 2015. \textit{The Prisoner of Kathmandu, Brian Hodgson in Nepal 1820-43}. New Delhi: Speaking Tiger Pub.
\textsuperscript{545} Allen, 2010, p. 40. Butwal is about twenty-five kilometers north of the Sonali border crossing, well inside today’s Nepal.
\textsuperscript{546} Allen, 2010, p. 45
distance. This entailed that since the peace treaty of 1816 there had to be a British resident in Kathmandu,\textsuperscript{547} while General Khadga Shumsher Rana,\textsuperscript{548} was the Nepali representative in the Tarai.\textsuperscript{549} No effort was made to build roads connecting Kathmandu to India, the Tarai stretch acting as a natural barrier with British India as well as a hunting ground for the Ranas in the cold weather. The British needed timber for their fast growing network of rail in India, and so they turned to General Khadga. The local Tharus generally declined to help, refusing to destroy their own natural habitat, so that labor from India was brought in to the Tarai, many of which Muslim, but also Nepali hill-men. This led to large scale deforestation, the building of settlements and the clearing of land for agriculture, while the new settlers regarded the tribal Tharu people as savages. Bricks were used for building material, of which much was taken from the ancient \textit{kots}.\textsuperscript{550} Stone images that were found were incorporated in modern Hindu temples.\textsuperscript{551} Also, idol-breaking by Muslims went well into the nineteenth century in the Gangetic Plains, this form of iconoclasm happened also in the Tarai in the 1890s. After a decade in exile in the Tarai, General Khadga Shumsher was an authority on the Western Tarai, and in reality was the first in modern times to identify the site of Lumbini.\textsuperscript{552}

\textbf{William Hoey and the Modern Discovery of Rāmagrāma}

It is within the context of the enthusiastic search for sites relating to the Buddha’s life story in the nineteenth century, and the uncovering of India’s great Buddhist past, that Alexander Cunningham suggested in 1861 that Rāmagrāma should be looked for near the Deokali village in the Basti district,\textsuperscript{553}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[548] General Khadga Shumsher Rana is actually the first in modern times to locate ancient Lumbini, Dr. Führer come to see the General’s discovery of the Aśokan pillar and then claimed the discovery for himself.
\item[549] Allen, 2010, p. 43. General Khadga Shumsher Rana’s brother, Prime Minister Bir Shumshar Rana, exiled him from the Kathmandu Valley in 1885 (most probably out of fear of a \textit{coup}).
\item[550] As we have seen, this word was, and still is, used for an ancient mound in the Tarai Region.
\item[551] An example is the Śiva linga in a modern Hindu temple in Tilaurakot that might well be an unfound Aśokan pillar that market Kanakamuni Buddha’s site, visited by Xuanzang. See: Deeg, 2003, p. 42, note 165
\item[552] Dec. 1st, 1896 is the official date of Lumbinī being discovered (Shrestha, 2006, p. 7)
\item[553] Nowadays it is located in Uttar Pradesh.
\end{footnotes}
Archibald Campbell Carlyle,\textsuperscript{554} in 1875, suggested it to be in Rampur Deoria.\textsuperscript{555} Both archaeologists were guessing these locations through their respective interpretations of Faxian’s and Xuanzang’s travel manuals. In the late 1870s, Thomas Watters\textsuperscript{556} suggested to drop the ideas of Cunningham and Carleyle regarding Rāmagrāma’s location, and look for it in the Nepali Tarai.\textsuperscript{557} This was further certified when Cunningham’s discovery of Śrāvastī was confirmed in 1876,\textsuperscript{558} and with the discovery of Lumbinī in 1896, there was a reference point from which to look for Kapilavastu and Rāmagrāma, the latter on the border lines of India and Nepal, east of Lumbinī, as stated by both Faxian and Xuanzang. Vincent Smith,\textsuperscript{559} after his retirement, wrote that the search for ancient Rāmagrāma should be conducted along the northern boundary of Gorakhpur, on both sides of the border, and should be found north-north-east of Nichlaul, within Nepali territory, near Dharmauli.\textsuperscript{560} At the same time that the ASI archaeologist, P. C. Mukherji,\textsuperscript{561} was digging in and around Kapilavastu in the winter season of 1898-1899, Dr. L.A.

\textsuperscript{554} Archibald Campbell Carlyle (1831–1897) was an English archaeologist that was one of Alexander Cunningham’s two assistants from 1871 (the other was J. D. Beglar). He was responsible for the Agra region.

\textsuperscript{555} Also in Uttar Pradesh, it is north-eastern side, not far from the Nepali border.

\textsuperscript{556} Thomas Watters was a specialist in the old Chinese language as well as Sanskrit, and was the first translator into English of Xuanzang travels. See: Watters, Thomas. [1904] 1996. On Yuan Chwang’s Travels in India AD 629-645. Edited After His Death By T.W. Rhys Davids and S.W. Bushell. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd.

\textsuperscript{557} Watters: “It is unnecessary now to notice the opinions of General Cunningham and Mr. Carllyle as to the modern representation of Rāma of our pilgrims. Further research in Nepal Tarai may lead to the discovery of some trustworthy indication as the site of old city” (Watters, [1904] 1996, p. 20)

\textsuperscript{558} Alexander Cunningham first located Śrāvastī in 1863 and in 1876 he conducted the first serious excavation there.

\textsuperscript{559} Vincent Arthur Smith (3 June 1843 – 6 February 1920) was an Irish Indologist, historian, member of the Indian Civil Service, and curator. He was one of the prominent figures in Indian historiography during the British Raj. In the 1890s, he exposed the forgeries of Alois Anton Führer, then working for the Archaeological Survey of India in Kapilavastu, who Smith caught in the act of making fake inscriptions. Smith wrote the first biography on Asoka (Vincent A. Smith. 1901 Asoka, the Buddhist Emperor of India) and Early History of India, published in 1904. In his words, this was “the first attempt to present a narrative of the leading events in Indian history for eighteen centuries, drawing on all the epistemological, genealogical, numismatic and archaeological research available”. According to Allen, Smith had the best grasp at the time of ancient Indian history, and Asoka’s significance, than his contemporaries (Allen, 2010, p. 81)

\textsuperscript{560} Smith wrote this in the preface of in the preface for P.C. Mukherji’s “Report on a Tour of Exploration of the Antiquities in the Tarai-Nepal” (Shrestha, 2006, p. 7)

\textsuperscript{561} P.C. Mukherji wrote that the Koliyan capital could be found in nepali territory north of the frontier, a little north-east from the Nichlaul Police Station, in a village called Dharmauli (or Dharmapuri), a name resembling Buddhist connotations. (Mukherji P.C. 1969. Antiquities of Kapilavastu (Tarai of Nepal), Indological Book House, India, pp. 18-19) Mukherji was a renowned excavator in the Nepali Tarai in the end of the nineteenth century. He did not go to search for Rāmagrāma, but gave very good indications for its whereabouts, writing from the area of Lumbinī and Kapilavastu, where he was trying to identify the latter. In his own words: “The investigation might be followed up in the eastern Tarai in effect being made specifically to fix the site of Rāmagrāma, which is probably north of Gorakhpur district” (Shrestha, 2006, p.8)
Waddell\textsuperscript{562} and Dr. William Hoey, accompanied by General Khadga Shumsher, decided to travel in a north-eastern direction through the Nepali Tarai to the village of Saina-Maina (today’s Devdaha), thirty-five miles from Lumbini.\textsuperscript{563} After Kapilavastu, and in particular Lumbinī, were identified, both orientalists decided to continue to search in Faxian’s and Xuanzang’s footsteps. General Khadga Shumsher invited Waddell and Hoey to see an excavation he himself had done, where he uncovered a small statue of the Buddha and another one of a mother suckling a child, which he concluded might well be the location of Devdaha, Buddha’s long lost ancestral home.\textsuperscript{564} Dr. Waddell decided the search in that area was futile, writing afterwards: “it is a difficult task as the country had never been surveyed, and the Nepalese knew little about it, and the settlers are all recent colonists mostly from British India who have cleared the forest but have no traditions whatsoever as to the ruins found there”. He went back to Mukherji in the Kapilavastu area for more research and then returned to his official duties in Culcutta.\textsuperscript{565} As a guest of General Khadga Shumsher in Saina-Maina, Dr. Hoey learned that the sub-district\textsuperscript{566} to the south-east of where they were staying was called Bhaghaura. This sounded very similar, in Hoey’s ears, to Byaghrapura (‘trails of tigers’), one of the ancient names of Rāmagrāma, as we saw in the first chapter. Dr. Hoey also agreed to the General’s theory that the river that flows west of Saina-Maina was the Rohinī of old.\textsuperscript{567} From

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\textsuperscript{562} Lieutenant Colonel Laurence Austine Waddell (29 May 1854 – 19 September 1938) was a Scottish explorer, Professor of Tibetan, Professor of Chemistry and Pathology, Indian Army surgeon, collector in Tibet, and amateur archaeologist.
\textsuperscript{563} Allen, 2010, p. 193
\textsuperscript{564} The statues found can be seen in today’s Devdaha, about a kilometer south of the main highway.
\textsuperscript{565} Allen, 2010, p. 197. Waddell was keener on resolving the two Kapilavastus issue, as it was in Jan. 1898 that the Piprāhvā Kot was found (containing the relics the Sākya clan received, clearly written on the relics’s container), sparking the ongoing debate about the two Kapilavastus. The Piprāhvā kot was opened with the help of Tharu Coolies, the area of it, a few kilometers south-west of Lumbini was a swamp at the time. Read about the discovery of the Buddha-relics in Piprahwa and the “two-Kapilavast Issue” in Charles Allen’s “The Buddha and Dr. Fuhrer, An Archeological Scandal”(Allen, Charles. 2010. The Buddha and Dr. Fuhrer, An Archeological Scandal. London: Penguin Books)
\textsuperscript{566} Sub-division or Tappa.
\textsuperscript{567} As we saw in the first chapter, the Rohinī River, which merges into the Rapti River near Gorakhpur, is mentioned in the Buddhist chronicles as the border between Kapilvastu and the Koliya city variously named as Koli, Devdaha or Byaghrapura. The Rohinī flows about fifteen miles east of Tilaurkot and its eastern branch, a further three miles to the east, is called Baghela, which is also the name of this sub-district.
\end{flushleft}
there, Dr Hoey traveled alone back towards the Indian border, but in an indirect route, south-east through the sub-districts of Bhagahura and the little market town of Parasi Bazar. About four miles south of Parasi on a bend of the River Jharahi, Hoey saw an impressively large and undisturbed stūpa. He calculated it to be thirty-seven miles east of Lumbinī, a distance that agrees with Faxian’s calculation of five yojanas. Dr. Hoey concluded that this must be the long lost Rāmagrāma Stūpa of Koliyagrama, a fact making him the first in modern times to have located it.

Like Vincent Smith, William Hoey was an anglo-Irish, who have learned Sanskrit and served in the NWP&O. Hoey was initially attached to Oude, where he served as assistant commissioner and junior magistrate in a number of districts that included Sultanpur, Fyzabad Gonda, Unao and Lucknow. He was encouraged to ‘tour’ during the cold season, in order to know the land and its peoples. This enabled Hoey to become an authority on the antiquities of the districts he served at. After about a decade of service, he went home on leave, got married and did a doctorate, which was based in part on his translation from German into English of Oldenburg’s “Buddha: His Life, Doctrine and Order”, published in 1882. Hoey was also proficient in Hindi, Urdu, Persian and Sanskrit, making a name for himself as an amateur Indologist. Shortly after the publication of Samuel Beal’s Si-Yu-Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World by Hiuen Tsiang, in December 1884, Hoey was posted for a second time in Gonda District, where the remains of Śrāvastī lay, so that he re-examined the ruins which Cunningham discovered in 1863. He excavated there for two months and agreed that these are indeed the ruins of ancient Śrāvastī, as described

568 Meaning without the General, Dr. Hoey was surely accompanied by servants and a secretay at least, who are hardly ever mentioned. Most probably he went back to his post in Gorakhpur.
569 Allen, 2010, p. 197
570 Allen, 2010, p. 198. Allen further writes that modern Buddhist archaeology tends to agree with this, and it is due to religious reasons that the stūpa of Rāmagrāma remains undisturbed to this day, “keeping whatever secrets it may hold” (Allen, 2010, p. 198).
571 Dr. Hoey also mistakenly noted an Aśokan Pillar Capital four miles to the stūpa’s north, though this was from a temple in Bardgoria that was dragged by the river, today situated safely in Bhataudi, near the highway (Shrestha, 2006, p. 8)
572 The British times north-west provinces and Oude.
573 See details of this now rare book in: https://www.indianculture.gov.in/rarebooks/buddha-his-life-his-doctrine-his-order
574 At the time the area of Śrāvastī was known as Sahet-Mahet.
by Xuanzang. In 1889 Hoey was appointed to the other side of Oude, in the Banda district, not far from the ancient city of Kannauj, were he obtained a few bronze Buddha statues from the nearby ruins of Dhanesar-Khera. After a second leave, in 1892 Hoey was transferred to Gorakhpur, where he was appointed to the post of Magistrate and Collector of Gorakhpur Division, and where he could easily explore the Kuśinagara area, to Gorakhpur’s south-east. It was under this post that he begun to cast his eyes towards the nearby Nepali border, for locating Kapilavastu, Lumbinī and Rāmagrāma. In 1893 he started to correspond with General Khadha Shumsher, the then governor of Tausem (Tamsem). It was in the next couple of years that the Nigliva Sagar Aśoka edict was re- discovered, leading the way to the discovery of Lumbinī in 1896. The opening of the stūpa in Piprāhwā followed in 1898, and along with the excavations in Kapilavastu within Nepali borders, the discovery of Rāmagrāma was next in line.

**Archaeological Description of the Ancient Stūpa of Rāmagrāma**

The next time the site of Rāmagrāma was retraced was in 1964 by S.B. Deo, but he merely mentioned it as a mound worthy of excavation. It is then claimed that Bhikkhu Shakyananda was the first to hang a signboard next to the site in 1965. In 1972, Babu Krishna Rijal from the department of archaeology together with LDT (Lumbini Development Trust) officials visited the site and published about it for the first time. Of significance is that the course of the nearby Jharahi River was diverted in 1986-7, which must have damaged some archaeological remains. In 1996, HM Government of Nepal applied to

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575 In will be remembered that both Faxian and Xuanzang spent time in Kannauj before going towards Śrāvastī.
576 One of these statues is now in the British Museum, another in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Kansas City, and the third is either lost or is in the Bangkok Museum (Allen, 2010, p. 112).
577 Allen, 2010, p. 112. There he found the “Sogaura plate” in Brāhmī language, possibly the earliest found in India, now lost. A picture of a rubbing of it is in Allen, 2010, p. 113. Kuśinagara was identified by Cunningham in the winter of 1861-2.
578 Allen, 2010, pp. 118-119
579 It was known locally as “Bhim Sen’s smoking pipe” (Allen, 2010, p. 125)
580 This stūpa was opened by William Peppe on the 18th of January, 1898.
582 Bhichhu Kaundanya: 26 (Sherestha, 2006, p. 8)
583 Rijal: 1978-56 (Sherestha, 2006, p. 8)
584 The diverting of the River Jharahi: it was flowing south of the stūpa where it endangered the site (area of the bamboo grove) and moved to the eastern side of the stupa by a new channel. Although this diversion was successful (because the older current
UNESCO\textsuperscript{585} to recognize Lumbinī, Kapilvastu and Rāmagrāma as World Heritage Sites, but only Lumbinī received immediate recognition. UNESCO nonetheless sent a team to investigate all the above three sites in September 1997, headed by the archaeologist Robin Coningham and the geophysicist Armin Schmidt. This team explored Rāmagrāma from September 9\textsuperscript{th} to 13\textsuperscript{th}, their aim being to locate subsurface archeological remains, which they located in three areas around the stūpa that had brick remains.\textsuperscript{586} This team believed the stūpa to belong to the Kushana period.\textsuperscript{587} After this survey it was decided to check the result of the survey with an excavation, and this happened in six seasons, from 1999 to 2004,\textsuperscript{588} by Sukra Sagar Shrestha.

As for the results of these excavations, having dug a trench inside the stūpa without going to its core, Shrestha reports that it is certainly “a decorated stūpa, with multi-tiered plinths of carved bricks, evolving over a few stages”.\textsuperscript{589} The stūpa has been of course damaged over its long history, both by natural elements (like floods and the trees growing in it) and human vandalism (treasure hunters). The north and south sides of the stūpa are more destroyed in their lower parts, while the upper parts are more destroyed in the east and west sides of it.\textsuperscript{590} There is evidence of a circular structure that can be detected below the threatened stūpa), the problem was that the new course of the river damaged another site with remains, these archeological remains were cut and thrown away in 1989 (Shrestha, 2006, p. 9).

\begin{itemize}
\item United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
\item The first, the ‘unlucky field’ (called so by the locality because nothing seemed to grow there well, indicating the bricks underneath) brought positive results (walls made of bricks can be seen there today), the second, a bamboo grove to the south of the stūpa (where the River Jharahi used to flow next to) now a dried-up river bank. Locals reported that in 1986 they tried to bury there a dead sadhu but met bricks when digging. The third is the stūpa itself.
\item Not later than the third century CE. : Coningham, R. and Armin Schmidt, “Non-Destructive Archaeological Investigation (Report and Recommendations of a UNESCO Mission) submitted to UNESCO and DOA- 1997. p. 57: “As the area was under cultivation, no shallow features were expected. This is reflected by the lack of clear anomalies from the resistance survey. However, the magnetometer result show strong positive anomalies which appear to be related to a rectangular structure of about ten meters in length. The outline of the anomalies is rather blurred, which indicates a greater depth of these features. It is possible that the anomaly is caused by buried brick structures related to the exposed walls (to the north of the grid)”
\item 85 trenches measuring 4x4 were cut, in 12 places the cutting reached the natural level, which was in depth of 2.4 to 3.3 meters, which shows the area to be undulated (having a wavy surface, edge, or markings), unlike the flat surface seen (Shrestha, 2006, p. 64). Shrestha believes that the survey for Subsurface Archeological Remains was not conclusive because it reached to just about a meter and a half under the surface. In his opinion, the whole island area where the stupa is situated is filled with stupas, monasteries, paved yards and paths (Shrestha, 2006, p.65)
\item In the north side the structure is almost rooted to the last layer of the foundation, leaving only two complete bricks and three brickbats. The south is almost completely rooted out, most probably as a result of a past flood (Shrestha, 2006, p. 11)
\end{itemize}
base of the stūpa, that might well be of Mauryan times.\textsuperscript{591} Above it is a square structure with extensions on all four sides that rests on the circular structure. These are two different plans and elevation, the Mauryan one is the early circular structure, and on top of it the square structure that is formed into a cruciform. The next levels are a praying platform and a lower monastic structure, later elevated for a monastic complex. Around the structure are blockades, constructed in order to save the structure from floods. There are also signs of votive stūpas around.\textsuperscript{592} With the aid of a Carbon-14 test, the results of charcoal samples collected from the monastery complex, relate them to the Gupta period. The praying platform is constructed with bricks sized: 5/5 x 26.5 x 34/35 centimeters, while the cruciform structure of the stūpa has two sizes of bricks, which are similar in size to those of the praying platform (on the west side) and the circular structure of the stūpa. The lowest structure of the circular stupa has the largest bricks, sized 6/7 x 26/27 x 39/40.

What these various brick sizes mean is that the stūpa was enlarged in different periods: The Gupta period brick sizes are 4/5 x 18/19 x 26/27, the Sunga/ Kushana brick sizes are 5/6 x 26/27 x 34/35, while the older Mauryan brick sizes are 6/7 x 27/28 x 40/41. The square base has two phases, one on top of the other, while the platform blockade was constructed later. The external structure is rooted out in the south side, but its decorative elements can be seen in the other three sides. The monastic walls also display two phases: the lower part datable from the Sunga/Kushana period and above it, it is from the Gupta period.\textsuperscript{593} It can be safely surmised that such a big structure was not build for any other purpose but to protect something extremely precious. The protective structure is from the Mauryan period while in the Kushana period the stūpa was raised to its decorative structure. The relics of the Buddha must be in a mud structure, deep inside the stūpa, inside the area below the octagonal structure. This description for an inner mud

\textsuperscript{591} Because these are similar bricks as those found in Lumbini, which are a mix of Mauryan time bricks and later ones. The sizes of these bricks are: 5/6 x 24/26 x 34/35 centimeters, while the Mauryan size bricks are: 6/7 x 26/27 x 39/40 centimeters (Shrestha, 2006, p. 11)
\textsuperscript{592} Shrestha, 2006, p. 11. The Gupta era brick sizes are: 4/5 x 18/19 x 26/27 centimeters.
\textsuperscript{593} Shrestha, 2006, p. 12
structure is not unlike those found in Vaiśālī and Piprāhwā. Shrestha guesses the diameter of the mud structure, holding the relics, to be less than twenty meters, with its height being no more than six meters. The aim of the excavation conducted by Shrestha was not to harm any structure, or cut and replace any part of it, but just to remove debris that was collected over the centuries. The earliest phase of the stūpa must be deep inside the lowest circular structure, and the relics, if any, would be placed well below the present surface level in a depth of at least three meters. The center of the stūpa was not opened down to its core, only its surroundings, so that the structure itself was unaffected. Xuanzang description of a “100 chih brick stūpa” is by all means correct. Furthermore, the distal location of Rāmagrāma mentioned by the Faxian and Xuanzang fits as well, and there are no other prominent stūpas between Lumbinī and the Narayani River to the east, the Siwalik Mountains in north, nor to the further south. Epigraphical records, or any seal that mentions that this is indeed Rāmagrāma, where not discovered, but there is still hope to find one, as there are many areas around the stūpa that can still be excavated. It was decided wisely to continue to respect whatever might ley inside the stūpa, and keep it undisturbed, as was done since ancient times.

Epilogue: Recollecting the Buddha and Paying Respect at a Relic-Stūpa

594 In Vaiśālī, the core of the stūpa found there is dated to the fifth century BCE (its size is only 7.8 meters in diameter, while its height 3.3 meters), with evidence of three enlargements, relating it all the way to the narration of the share of the relics the Licchavis took. The first of these enlargements dates probably to Mauryan times. This is a great evidence of corroborating archaeology with textual reference. In Piprāhwā, the earliest construction level is dated to the fourth-fifth centuries BC. The relics found there might well correspond to the relics the Śākyas got. Yet, epigraphical analysis dates this stūpa to not before Mauryan times. Later on, K.M. Srivastara excavated two additional relinquaries from the core of the earliest stūpa, dated to the fourth-fifth centuries BCE, along with evidence of identifying the site with Kapilavastu. From the legends surrounding Aśoka it is clear that at Mauryan times there is support to the sāsana and the building of stūpas and these two factors are in close relationship. Vaiśālī and Piprāhwā are the earliest datable stūpas found so far (Trainor, 1997, p. 44).

595 The Mauryans erected the brick veneering with big bricks (6/7 x 26/27 x 39/40), covering the mud structure in a round shape. These bricks are seen now below the cruciform structure (Shrestha, 2010, p. 14).

596 Shrestha, 2006, p. 30

597 We have seen that this measurement is the distance measured by a human hand, from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the forefinger, when the palm is stretched. This measurement, common in ancient times, is called bita in Nepali, kula in Newari and Bita in Bhojpuri. 100 chih would thus be 66.6 ft / 800" (inches) or approximately twenty meters. This is double the actual size, but if the dome had a truncated shape like in Kuśinagara, then it will be very close to what Xuanzang reported (Shrestha, 2006, p. 31).

598 Xuanzang mentioned an inscription left by Asoka.
In the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa provides testimony to the value of viewing the physical body of the Buddha, connecting it with the meditational practice known as ‘recollection of the Buddha’ (*Buddhānussati*), which is centered on the following Pāli verse that lists the various qualities of the Buddha: “He has glory of all limbs, perfect in every aspect, capable of producing serene joy in the eyes of the people eager to see his material body (*rūpakāya*)”.\(^{599}\) Buddhaghosa comments: “When a bhikkhu is devoted to this recollection of the Buddha, he is respectful and deferential towards the Master. He attains fullness of faith, mindfulness, understanding and merit. He has much happiness and gladness. He conquerors fear and dread. He is able to endure pain. He comes to feel as if he were living in the Master’s presence. And his body, when the recollection of Buddha’s special qualities dwells in it, becomes as worthy of veneration as a shrine room. His mind tends towards the plane of the Buddhas. When he encounters an opportunity for transgression, he has awareness and conscience and shame as vivid as though he were face to face with the Master”.\(^{600}\)

Lastly, when visiting a relic stūpa of the Buddha, there is a traditional beautiful procedure, or *pūja*, one can perform when offering it flower. First one takes her or his shoes off and then, holding the flower in a gesture of respect (*Añjali Mudrā*) the flower is offered with the right hand. One then does three circumambulations of the stūpa, repeating the gesture of respect in its four or eight directions. When making the offering or immediately afterwards, one may chant: “This heap of flowers, which has colour and scent, I offer at the blessed lotus feet of the lord of sages. I make offerings to the Buddha with this

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\(^{599}\) Buddhaghosa. 1976. *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)* translated by Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli. 3 vols. Berkeley: Shambhala (1.228). This is part of the ‘six recollections’, the first being the “Recollection of the Enlightened One”. The other recollections are of the Dhamma, Sangha, Virtue, Generosity and Deities (Nāṇamoli, [1956] 2010, pp.186-224

\(^{600}\) Buddhaghosa. 1976. *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)* translated by by Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli. 3 vols. Berkeley: Shambhala (1.230). From early inscriptions at Mihintale in Sri Lanka, it is known that monks there were expected to practice a fourfold meditation that included a recollection of the virtuous qualities of the Buddha, each day before eating their morning meal.
flower, and by this merit may there be release (mokṣa). Just as this flower fades, so my body goes into destruction”.

601 Trainor, 1997, p. 154: this Pāli vesre: Vaṭṭa-gandha-guṇopetam etam kusuma-santatiṃ / Pūjayāmi munindassa siripāda-saroruhe / Pūjemi Buddhāṃ kusumen’ anena puṇṇenam- etena ca hotu mokkhaṃ / Pupphaṃ milāyati yathā idaṃ me kayo tathā yāti vinnāsabhāvaṃ
Appendix I: Dating the Buddha and the Languages and Scripts Used

The Buddha was treated here as an historical figure, though at times mention has been made of stories about the Buddha traveling miraculously to far off places. The exact dates of the Buddha life are still debatable, generally varying by about a hundred years. Here I decided to adhere to the chronology of the Theravāda sources, corroborated with Greek sources, because a majority of scholars consider it accurate to the most part. The consensus being that the Buddha was born in 563 BCE and passed away in 483 BCE. These dates are reached in the following way: first, Greek historians chronicled that Alexander the Great reached the banks of India, in today’s Punjab region, in 327 BCE. In 303 BCE the Maurya King Candragupta had a territorial agreement with Seleukos Nikator, Alexander’s former general who ruled over Babylonia. The Greek ambassador to Pāṭliputta, Megasthenes, dated Candragupta (Gk. Sandrokottos) accession to the throne to 321 BCE. According to the Sri Lankan Chronicles, the Dīpavaṁsa and Mahāvaṁsa, Candragupta reigned twenty-four years, then his son, Bindusāra, for twenty-eight years, and then another four years lasted till Aśoka successfully eliminated his brothers and anointed himself as king. This latter event is dated to 265 BCE, and thus two hundred and eighteen years after Buddha’s passing. Both chronicles state that King Aśoka’s coronation was two-hundred and eighteen years after the final passing of the Buddha, which is thus fixed to 483 BC. This was the Sanskritist Wilhelm Geiger’s calculation. Other calculations might vary Buddha’s dates to some degree: The Jains record Mahāvīra, a contemporary of the Buddha, to have lived from 548 BCE to 476 BCE, which is problematic because it means Mahāvīra out-lived the Buddha by seven years, while in the Buddhist texts it

602 As in the cases of Sri Lanka and Burma.
603 See “When Did the Buddha Lived, The Controversy On the Dating of the Historical Buddha” edited by Heinz Bechert, Sri Satguru Publications, Delhi 1995. (Selected Papers Based on a Symposium Held under the Auspices of the Academy of Sciences in Göttingen)
604 In some Tibetan historical manuscripts the Buddha’s dates are pushed further back by four hundred years.
605 Schumann, 1982, p. 10
606 These were written down in Sri Lanka between the fourth and sixth centuries AD.
607 Schumann, 1982, p. 10
608 Akira, 1990, p. 22
is written that Buddha is informed of Mahāvīra’s passing. There are also other calculations of various
western and eastern scholars that vary the dates to about twenty years sooner or later. The prominent
modern Japanese scholar, Ui Hakuju, basing on Northern Buddhist traditions, has argued than only one
hundred and sixteen years passed between the Buddha’s parinirvāṇa to Aśoka’s succession of the throne.
This argument is based on the fact that during the Sri Lankan two-hundred and eighteen years calculation,
only five ruling kings are mentioned, which is too long of a period for it (if only the ruling years of kings
are calculated). And yet, the Sri Lankan chronicles are considered more reliable because they list not
just these five successive kings, but also the lineage of the five masters of Vinaya between the time
periods of the Buddha to that of Aśoka: Upāli, Dāsaka, Sonaka, Siggava and Moggaliputta Tissa. Thus
the northern calculation differs from the southern one by a century or so. Because of the wider acceptance
by scholars of two hundred and eighteen years passing from Buddha’s parinirvāṇa to King Aśoka’s
coronation, the southern, Sri Lankan dating is thus chosen as the more accurate one.

In the larger area of India of five-hundred BCE, on the one hand there was the Vedic Sanskrit language
of ritual and on the other hand was the vernacular, Indo-Aryan language family from which Prakrit was
derived. The great grammarian Pāṇini wrote about spoken Sanskrit (bhasha), in contrast to the ritualistic
Vedic Sanskrit. Prakrit was popular in the towns and villages, with local variations: The western
variation was Šaurasenī and the eastern one Māgadhī. The Buddha taught in a variety of Māgadhī,

609 1882-1963
610 Akira, 1990, p. 20
611 The Northern tradition maintains five ‘patriarchs’ in this period: Mahākāśyapa, Ānanda, Madhyāntika, Śāṇakavāsī, and Upagupta.
612 Pāli: parinibbāṇa.
613 Richard Gombrich in “Discovering the Buddha’s Date” (first read at the International Association of the History of Religions Conference in Rome in 1990) is of the view that there were one hundred and thirty six years between Buddha’s parinirvāṇa and King Aśoka’s coronation (Allen, p. 8 and p. 275). This view is closer to a “middle-way” view between the Southern and Northern date calculations for the Buddha.
614 Doniger, 2015, p. 167
615 Thapar, 2002, p. 164
adapting his language to his audience. The Buddha’s teachings were collected in the first two Buddhist councils of Rāgagrha and Vaiśālī, and transmitted across India in Aśoka’s time, adapting to local languages, so that when the eighteen schools developed, the scriptures were in a variety of languages. By the time these collections were written down, at around the first century BCE, they were recorded in a number of Prakrit languages, one being Pāli, an associated Indo-Aryan language, and another being Gāndhārī, a north-western form of Prakrit. Pāli was a more refined spoken aspect of the local vernaculars of Prakrit and Māgadhī. The Buddha’s discourses were initially recited in Pāli and were written down in Sri Lanka four centuries later, forming the only complete Tripitaka, according to the Mahāvihāravāsin Theravādin School. The Theravāda School, initially preserved in Sri Lanka, continued to flourish in South-East Asia.

The first two popular scripts used were Brāhmī in India and Kharoṣṭī in Central Asia. Kharoṣṭī, which was a more regional script, died out already in the third century CE, while Brāhmī evolved into northern and southern forms, and is considered the mother script of not just most of the Indian scripts, but also of those of Tibet, Sri Lanka and South-East Asia. Northern Brāhmī later developed into the Kuśāna, Gupta and Nāgarī scripts, whiles the southern one into the Pallava script, which evolved into the South-East Asian scripts. These scripts were not used exclusively by Buddhist, but were shared by Jains and Brahman, and further used for secular purposes. The Aśokan pillars, found all over India were in the Brāhmī script.

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617 Skilling, 2009, p. 18
619 Skilling, 2009, p. 19
620 Skilling, 2009, p. 20
Appendix II: The Śramaṇa Movement

Simply put, the śramaṇas’ aim was the claim to discover truth, rejecting the so called revealed truth of the Vedas. They were thinkers, philosophers and even astronomers, mathematicians and medicine-men, studying nature, within and without, while trying various ascetic practices. They further sought by their own efforts to find answers through reasoning and investigation. Generally, the śramaṇas did not believe that the natural world was controlled by some god or creator. However, it is noteworthy that most of the śramaṇas believed in some kind of transmigration, whether of the soul (ātman) or not, and it seems also that many people at that time had some kind of memory of their past life. The Buddha’s sect was one out of many śramaṇa schools and sub-schools and relatively did not attract the biggest following at the time. The Buddha rejected authority, while advocating direct experience as paramount, teaching a moral and physical law of causation. Furthermore he taught that the universe is subject to natural laws only, while the aim is the finality of transmigration, resulting in peace. Moral conduct thus affects transmigration, and is of utmost importance initially. Besides the Buddhist and Jains, the other main organized śramaṇa schools were the Ājīvika, Lokāyata and Ajñāna. These have somewhat obscure origins, so that they are traced mainly from the Buddhist and Jaina texts.

Gośāla was the leader of the Ājīvikas (‘śramaṇa way of life’) and his central doctrine was that of fatalism. Gośāla, who was revered later as a ‘silent sage’, taught that each individual transmigrates in every possible type of existence until lastly attaining final peace as a Ājīvika wonderer. The Ājīvikas were known for their divinations and interpretation of dreams and were thus employed by kings. This was possible because for them, all events were determined in advance by destiny, called Niyati. Another leader

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622 Warder, 1970, p. 32
623 Warder, 1970, p. 33
624 Warder, 1970, p. 35
625 Gośāla died at 488 BC (when his dates correspond to the Buddha dates as being 566 to 486 BC).
626 Warder, 1970, p. 38
of the Ājīvikas was Pūraṇa,\textsuperscript{627} who advocated ‘inaction’ (akриyā), meaning that actions do not produce effects or influence the future, thus rejecting moral causation. Another teacher named Kakuda\textsuperscript{628} taught the doctrine of the constituent elements of the universe, which were uncreated and un-dissectible. These constituents are rigid and undergo no transformation or interaction, listing seven elements that constitute all of phenomena: earth, water, heat, air, happiness, unhappiness and soul/life (jīva). The Ājīvikas survived in India for the next fifteen centuries.\textsuperscript{629}

The Lokāyata (‘natural science’/‘investigation of nature’) was a materialist school. Asserting complete freedom (as opposed to the Ājīvikas), they were known as the ‘Do-as-you-like’ (yadṛcchāvāda) school, where everything happens through the spontaneous actions of itself, the ‘own-being (svabhāva). Although agreeing with the Ājīvikas in rejecting moral causation, it was done from opposite reasons: for the Lokāyatas all acts are spontaneous and not determined by anything, moreover there is no soul and no transmigration. Their aim is still happiness, but that of the sense pleasures (Kāma). Happiness for the Lokāyatas is indeed transient, but is more prevalent than unhappiness, as opposed to in Buddhist doctrine,\textsuperscript{630} preaching that one should overcome difficulties in order to experience increased pleasure.\textsuperscript{631} For them, only four basic material elements existed: earth, water, heat and air, while all other realities, including consciousness, arise from a combination of these elements. Ajita was the most prominent teacher of the Lokāyata School in the Buddha’s time, but its founder was regarded later as Brhaspati, who composed their foundational text, or sūtra.

The leader of the Jains, Mahāvīra, called the Jīna (‘liberated great teacher’), taught a doctrine of the transmigration of an eternal soul, not unlike Ājīvika’s, which could attain perfect happiness through a

\textsuperscript{627} Pūraṇa died in 503 BC.
\textsuperscript{628} Pāli: Pākudha.
\textsuperscript{630} Unhappiness, suffering or uneasiness, Pāli: Dukka, Skt: Dukha. This is the first noble truth in of Buddhist Doctrine.
\textsuperscript{631} Warder, 1970, p. 39
cessation of transmigration, in a kind of supreme heaven. But unlike the Ājīvikas, the Jains asserted free will, which had to be strenuously exercised in order to attain supreme bliss. The Jains taught a moral causation where one should exhaust past negative actions through severe asceticism, bordering self-torture, until the soul is free from incarnation. Of all the Indian religions, the Jains have been the most scrupulous with the ethics of not taking life. In later centuries the Jaina religion spread to the south of Magadha, and although it is still a major religion, it did not spread outside of India as did Buddhism and Hinduism.

Lastly, the Ajñāna, or Agnostics, maintained that no conclusive knowledge about any philosophical debate is tenable. They were against arguments altogether, maintaining that refraining from these leads to peace of mind, and so advocating friendship. They taught that the arguments of others, about the nature of the soul in particular, were mutually contradictory. At the time of the Buddha, Sanjaya was the well-known leader of the Ajñāna School, promoting a variety of skeptic thought, but there are no primary sources on this school. Interestingly, Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana, Buddha’s two foremost disciples, were followers of Sanjaya before switching camps. The first three Mauryan great kings, Candragupta, Bindusara and Aśoka, supported to varying degrees all these schools.

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632 Warder, 1970, p. 40. Aśoka’s grandfather, Candragupta, is considered to have been a Jaina devotee.
634 Skt: Sañjayin. He features as one of the six heretics taught in Buddhism. The term for these ‘heretics’ is tirthinakaras, which actually means ‘makers of fords’, a term they used for themselves too (Thapar, p. 166)
635 Pāli: Sāriputta and Moggallāna. Both passed away about a year before the Buddha’s final passing.
636 Warder, 1970, p. 41
Appendix III: Buddha’s Last Journey from Rājagṛha to Kuśinagara

The Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra begins its narration of Buddha’s aforementioned ‘last journey’ in Vulture peak near Rājagṛha, where the Buddha, aged eighty, receives a visit from Varṣākāra, a minister representing King Ajātaśatru, whose wish was to expand his kingdom by attacking the Vṛjis. As a reply, the Buddha tells the minister about seven great qualities the Vṛji people possess, so that as long as they have these, they will remain safe. The Buddha then makes seven parallel points regarding the Sangha. Along with Ānanda, Buddha’s devoted attendant and cousin, and a large community of monks, the Buddha then proceeds to Ambalaṭṭhikā, where he gives a presentation of the entire Buddhist path to enlightenment, divided into the three main sections: morality, concentration and wisdom. The next stop is the village of Nālandā, the birth place of Śāriputra, one of Buddha’s foremost disciples. This may well be a later addition to this sūtra, because Śāriputra, as well as Maudgalyāyana, had already passed away the previous year. In any case, Śāriputra praises the Buddha, who in turn initiates a debate with him, saying: “how can you be sure I am fully enlightened? Have you seen the minds of the past buddhas?” This interesting anecdote can be viewed at as a precursor for the future fame of Nālandā as a Buddhist university, which was well-known for its traditions of debate. The next stop is the village of Pātaligrāma, where the Buddha meets again Varṣākāra, who plans to build a fort at this site for King

637 The place where, according to Mahāyāna Buddhists, the Buddha taught the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras, that include the well-known Heart Sūtra. Pāli: Gijjhakūṭa, skt: Grdhakūṭa, Tib: bya rgod phung po’i ri. On the other side of this ridge is the Indasala cave where the Buddha used to retire to meditate, and where he taught the god Indra (Sakka) the Sakkapañha Sutta (Dīgha Nikāya II, 21). These sites can be visited today.
638 Hold regular and frequent assemblies, meet in harmony, to not change the rules of their tradition, honor their elders, to not abduct women from other tribes, revere their shrines, and make provisions for holy men (Strong, 2001, p. 127)
639 Hold regular and frequent assemblies, meet in harmony, to not change the rules of training, honor their superiors who were ordained before them, to not fall prey to worldly desires, remain devoted to forest hermitages, and preserve their personal mindfulness (Strong, 2001, p. 127)
640 “This is morality, this is concentration, this is wisdom. Concentration, when imbued with morality, brings great fruit and profit. Wisdom, when imbued with concentration, brings great fruit and profit. The mind imbued with wisdom becomes completely free from the corruptions, that is the corruption of sensuality, of becoming, of false views and of ignorance” (Walshe, 1987, p. 234)
641 Usually both are depicted to the right and left sides of the Buddha as his two foremost disciples. It seems that Śāriputa is added to the sūtra also to highlight his importance, just as he also appears in many other later Mahāyāna sūtras.
642 We can also view this scene in the sense that mere faith is not enough on the Buddhist path; actual knowledge and certainty are of more importance.
Ajātaśatru, with the intention to move the capital of Magadha from Rājagṛha to this current village, situated on the banks of the Ganges River.643 With his divine eye, the Buddha sees many deities gathered in this place, and predicts that it will become a great city, but this would happen only if lay people would learn how to make suitable offerings to the ordained Sangha and thus gain merit, which will be then transferred to the pleased local deities who in turn will protect the place from harmful influences.644 The Buddha then crosses the swelling Ganges River to its northern bank.645 The sūtra says that he and other Arhants miraculously flew over the river, while for the rest, this crossing was much more difficult, some were swimming and some built a raft.646

The next stop in the journey’s north to north-western direction is Kuṭigrāmakā. Here the Buddha teaches on the Four Noble Truths and adds that when understood correctly, there is no more thirst for existence, and thus no more rebirths.647 The party then reaches Nādikā,648 where many people have recently passed away.649 The Buddha consoles the local people with predictions of the realms of rebirth for the recently deceased. After about a hundred such predictions, the Buddha teaches Ānanda the “mirror of Dharma”, a practice where one can know for oneself his or her future rebirth and enlightenment.650

643 Ajātaśatru’s son, Udayi, moved the Magadhan kingdom to Pāṭaliputra. (today known as Patna, and which served as King Aśoka’s Mauryan capital, Pāṭaliputra, two centuries later).
644 This anecdote can also mean that the future greatness of the Mauryan capital of Pāṭaliputra will depend on the support of its citizens to the Buddhist community. (Strong, 2001, p. 128)
645 The mention of the swelling Ganges River might indicate the dating of the month of this happening: at the beginning of the rainy season, prior to the traditional rains retreat. Each year in the last forty-five years of his teaching career, the Buddha, along with his followers, stopped at this season for the “rainy season retreat”, a tradition that continues to the present (Pāli: vassa, meaning “rains”).
646 This event can be seen as an allegory for the “crossing the stream of samsāra”, a common metaphor in Buddhist teachings, so that the various abilities of the others to cross it, can be compared to the levels of listeners (śrāvaka) and solitary realizers (pratyekabuddha) (Strong, 2001, p. 129)
647 The truths of suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the eight-fold path leading to cessation, as taught by the Buddha in the first sermon in Sarnath, to his first five disciples. The full quote: “By virtue of not seeing the Four Noble Truths as they are, the road that you and I have wondered is long. These truths being seen, the thirst for existence is cut off, the rounds of rebirths is destroyed, rebirth is now no more (Strong, 2001, p. 129)
648 The Buddha, Ānanda and a large company of monks stayed there in a place known as the “brick house” (to distinguish it from other wood and mud houses).
649 This might well be connected to a famine the area experienced at that time.
650 It is actually not an esoteric teaching, but simply that by having clear faith (prasāda) in the three jewels, one will be assure of not being reborn in the lower realms, and being destined to liberation. This assurance is clear seeing, just as looking in a clean mirror.
Next is the great city of Vaiśālī,\textsuperscript{651} Where the main character is the courtesan Āmrapāli, who takes great pleasure in hosting the Buddha and his monks.\textsuperscript{652} She is confronted by Licchavi youths,\textsuperscript{653} who wish to take away from Āmrapāli the honor of serving the Buddha. Āmrapāli though does not concede to their wish, even in exchange for great riches. She actually donates her own pleasure garden to Buddha’s Sangha, making clear her pure motivation.\textsuperscript{654} The Licchavi youths still persist and ask the Buddha, but he, showing his great fair-mindedness and un-biasness in this confrontation between two different kinds of lay supporters, tells the youths that Āmarpāli is hosting him. The Buddha exhorts his disciples to maintain vigilance and mindfulness.\textsuperscript{655}

The Buddha decides to spend the rainy retreat nearby, in Veṇugrāmaka. In order not to burden the locality which is experiencing a famine, he sends his congregation of monks to do their own respective retreats elsewhere in the vicinity. Here the Blessed One becomes severely ill, but keeps his sickness at bay through his meditative concentration abilities.\textsuperscript{656} Ānanda is relieved when the Buddha slightly recovers but is worried because his master has not made any statement about his successor. The Buddha tells him in return that everything needed was already taught, equally to all: all his disciples should be “an island unto themselves”, being their own refuge, and the teachings, the Dharma, is their sole resort.\textsuperscript{657}

\textsuperscript{651} Vaiśālī is a well-known scene for Mahāyāna Sūtras too, such as the Vimalakīrti Nirdēśa. An interesting anecdote from the Vimalakīrti Sūtra is when the Buddha turns Vaiśālī into a pure land for all to see: Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse. \textit{The Sūtra of The Teaching of Vimalakīrti, A Celebrity Falls Sick.} Translated by Robert A.F. Thurman. 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha. Vaiśālī was later incorporated as one of the eight foremost places for Buddhists, along with Rājagaha, Śrāvasti and Sārīkassa.

\textsuperscript{652} Her place, a mango grove, is known as “Āmrapāli’s wood”.

\textsuperscript{653} The Licchavi youths’ splendor was described as brilliant as the gods from the heaven of Indra.

\textsuperscript{654} She also has a son who was ordained recently and whom she wishes to become a follower of the Buddha. Interestingly, this son’s father is king Bimbisāra, the late king of Magadha (King Ajātaśatru’s father). Later, after the events narrated here, Āmarpāli becomes a nun and is said to have reached enlightenment. Her song of realization features in the Therīgāthā, ‘verses of the elder nuns’.

\textsuperscript{655} On the one hand the monks are treated by Āmarpāli, who, even though beyond her youth, is still described as highly beautiful (as well as her other young lady attendants), and on the other hand the monks see the Licchavi youths, with their dazzling riches and finery. The connection between the monks seeing Āmarpāli and her entourage of ladies and the immediate exhortation of the Buddha to his monks to be mindful and vigilant was not lost to the fifth-century Theravāda commentator Buddhaghosa, who highlighted this.

\textsuperscript{656} The Buddha confides here to Ānanda that this was not easy: it is only when he withdrew from outward things and cut off sensory perceptions by entering a trance, that he managed to feel comfortable (Strong, 2001, p. 131)

\textsuperscript{657} Strong, 2001, p. 132
area of Vaiśālī, the Buddha spends an afternoon at the Cāpāla shrine. There he tells Ānanda three times that a Tathāgata such as himself can prolong his life, even up to a full aeon. Ānanda though fails to understand this opportunity to ask the Buddha to live longer. In some Buddhist traditions Ānanda is berated for this, in particular by Buddha’s foremost disciple of the time, Mahākāśyapa. Under a tree nearby, Māra, the Buddha’s nemesis, approaches and asks him to immediately turn into complete extinction. The Buddha says that he will do so when the community of monks, nuns and lay followers are all well established in the Dharma, but Māra argues that this is indeed the case. Finally the Buddha relents, recognizing that his teachings are well established, and agrees to pass into complete extinction after three months. This definitive proclamation causes an earthquake to occur, bringing up a discourse on eight causes for earthquakes. The Buddha then proclaims “Ripe I am in years…” looks back one last time at Vaiśālī, and proceeds to Bhaṇḍagāma, where he expounds about morality, meditation, wisdom and liberation.

The next stops recorded are Hatthigāma, Ambagāma and Jambugāma, where the Buddha delivers similar discourses. Then, at Bhoganagarka, the Buddha preaches about the four criteria for authentic


659 As is well known, Māra is the personification of obstacles and under the Bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya he did his best to disrupt Siddhārtha’s meditation on the fateful night when he became a fully enlightened Buddha.

660 The first earthquake is is caused by natural, ‘elemental’ causes, the second by certain type of ascetics with psychic powers, and the last six, connected to Buddha’s biography are: when descending from Tuṣita Heaven, when he was born in Lumbinī, when attaining enlightenment at Bodh Gaya, when preaching the first sermon in Sarnath, when renouncing the remainder of his possible lifespan (the earthquake that just occurred in our narration), and when passing into parinirvāṇa in Kuśinagara (Walshe, 1987, pp. 247-248)

661 The full quote opened chapter three (“Ripe I am in years, my life-span determined. Now I go from you, having made myself my refuge. Monks, be unting, mindful, disciplined, guarding your minds with well-collected thought. He who, tireless, keeps to law and discipline, leaving birth behind, will put an end to woe” Dīgha Nikāya II, 16, Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra).

662 Vaiśālī was definitely one of Buddha’s most favorite towns and was a scene of many events in his lifetime. The sutta says that the Buddha looked back at Vaiśālī with an “elephant look”, meaning that he turned his whole body, as apparently elephants do (Walshe, 1987, p. 571, note 415)

663 “Morality, samādhi, wisdom and final release, these glorious things Gotama came to know. The Dhamma he’d discerned he taught his monks; He whose vision ended woe to Nibbāna’s gone” (Walshe, 1997, p. 254)

664 Walshe, 1997, p. 255

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teachings. The small party then reaches Pāvā (or Pāpā), where Cunda invites the Buddha and a few attendant monks for a meal, later dubbed as the “last meal”. Ever since, future generations of scholars speculated, and still do so, about what this dish might have contained, the Pāli text calling it sūkaramaddava. The Blessed One orders that no one else should eat from it but himself, and later proclaims that Cunda will get the full merit of feeding the Tathāgata, and no one should ever reprimand him for an act of poisoning because he prepared the meal with full devotion and care. This meal is finally praised by the Buddha as especially meritorious and is compared to Sujātā’s offering the milk-rice prior to his enlightenment in Bodh Gayā: One meal leading to Buddha’s nirvāṇa, and the other to his parinirvāṇa. This meal caused the Buddha to become severely sick.

Lastly the small congregation of monks head to Kuśinagar, and while stopping at the nearby Hiranyavatī River, the Buddha asks Ānanda for water, but Ānanda sees the water as very dirty since a caravan just passed there. The Buddha insists three times and Ānanda, to his astonishment, discovers that the water suddenly became clear. At that same place Putkasa, a student of Ārāda Kālāma, Siddhārtha Gautama’s own teacher at the beginning of his austerities, suddenly appears. After this meeting, Putkasa

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665 The Buddha at this point has clearly the future fate of his disciples in his mind, regarding the teachings, so that he teaches the following four criteria for authentic teachings: A monk claiming to have heard a teaching from the Buddha himself, from an established community of monks, a number of learned monks, or from a single learned monk. Having listened is that way to one of these four criteria without judgment, one should then investigate if it is in line with accepted disciplinary code, and only then accept it as the word of the Buddha (Pāli: Buddhavacana) (Strong, 2001, pp. 133-4)

666 Pāvā, today known as Padrauna, is twenty-three Kilometers north-east from Kuśinagar. The stūpa King Aśoka built at this site of the last meal can still be visited today.

667 Sūkaramaddava can refer to either a type of mushroom that looks like a pig’s ear, or another kind of fungus, perhaps something pigs like to eat (the translation of sūkaramaddava is “pig’s delight”). It also might well have been actually a dish made of pork (Strong, 2001, pp. 134-35)

668 An esoteric explanation is that this food is indigestible for humans, because the gods enhanced it with an elixir, and also this mix is indigestible for the gods because of containing human food (Strong, 2001, p. 135)

669 “And after having eaten the meal provided by Cunda, the Lord was attacked by severe sickness with bloody diarrhea, and with sharp pains as if he were about to die” (Walshe, 1987, p. 257)

670 Also called Kakkutthā River.

671 Pāli: Pukkusa.

672 Pāli: Āḷāra Kālāma.
understands Buddha’s superiority over his teacher in terms of concentrated absorption, and takes refuge. Putkasa offers the Buddha a pair of magnificent golden robes, and when Ānanda helps the Buddha to put them on, he notices a golden hue radiating from the his body, and in return, to his marvel, the Buddha tells Ānanda about two occasions when the Tathāgata body becomes golden: on the day of enlightenment and prior to his parinirvāṇa. At the Hiraṇyavatī River the Buddha takes his last bath, and proceeds to the nearby Kuśinagara.

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673 Initially Putkasa admiringly tells the Buddha of how his teacher Ārāda Kālāma sat in absorption oblivious of five hundred bullock carts passing next to him. The Buddha in turn tells him that once while doing walking meditation, he was oblivious of a thunderstorm that killed two farmers and four oxen. This impressed Putsaka greatly.

674 These events can be viewed as links in Buddha’s biography to previous important events, ‘closing a cycle’ so to speak: linking Buddha’s last meal to the one prior to enlightenment and hearing about one of Buddha’s first teachers from the time when he sought the path after his renunciation of home. Upon reaching enlightenment in Bodh Gayā, The Buddha first wanted to teach his first two teachers, but with his divine eye saw that they have already passed away.
Appendix IV: The Reports on Rāmagrāma of Faxian and Xuanzang

Faxian\(^{675}\)

The Country of Kapilavastu was extremely desolate, with only a few scattered people living there. The roads were frightening. There were white elephants and lions. Nobody should travel there without taking precautions. Five \textit{yojanas}\(^{676}\) east of the Buddha’s birthplace, there was a country called Rāmagrāma. The king of this country obtained a share of the Buddha’s relics, brought them home, built a stūpa, and named it Rāmagrāma. Beside the stūpa was a pond in which a dragon lived. The dragon kept constant watch over the stūpa and made offerings to it day and night. When King Aśoka was in this world, he intended to demolish eight stūpas and construct eighty-four thousand new ones. He had already pulled down seven stūpas and had come to destroy this one. The dragon appeared, took the king to its palace, and showed him all its offerings. The dragon then said to the king, “If your offerings are better than mine, then destroy this stūpa and take away the relics. I will not quarrel with you.” Realizing that the dragon’s offerings were not of this world, King Aśoka returned to his home. As it was a deserted place with no one to keep it clean, a herd of elephants often came with water in their trunks to sprinkle on the ground. They also offered various kinds of flowers to the stūpa. Once a monk came from another country to worship the stūpa and was frightened by the sight of the elephants. Hiding behind a tree, he saw that the elephants presented offerings in a proper way. He deplored the fact that because there was no monastery with monks to look after the stūpa, the elephants had to keep it clean. Thus he renounced the status of fully ordained monk and became a novice. He cut weeds and plants, leveled the ground, and made the place clean and tidy. He exhorted the king to build a monastery there and volunteered to be its abbot. Monks were now living in


\(^{676}\) \textit{Yojana}: a measure of distance that was used in ancient India, and then in Thailand and Burma as well. A \textit{yojana} is about twelve to fifteen kilometer long.
this monastery. This event occurred recently, and since then the abbots of this monastery have always been novices. Three yojanas to the east was the place where Prince Siddhārtha ordered (his servant) Chandaka to return home with his white horse. A stūpa had also been built there. Going four yojanas further east, the party came to the Charcoal Stūpa, where there was also a monastery. Continuing east for twelve yojanas, they came to the city of Kuśinagara.

Xuanzang

From here going eastward for more than two hundred li through a wild jungle, I reached the country of Rāma[grāma] (in the domain of Central India). The country of Rāma has been deserted for many years and it has no boundary marks. The towns and villages are in ruins and are sparsely populated. To the southeast of the old capital city is a brick stūpa less than one hundred feet high, built by a former king of this country. When the Tathāgata had entered nirvāṇa the king of this country obtained a portion of his relic bones, which he brought back to his own country; he built this stūpa for paying homage to his share of the relics. It shows spiritual manifestations from time to time and often emits a divine light. Beside the stūpa is a clear pool from which a dragon often emerges in the shape of a snake to worship the stūpa, circumambulating it from left to right. Wild elephants come in groups to pick flowers and scatter them on the stūpa, which has been under spiritual protection without cease. When King Aśoka was constructing more stūpas for the dissemination of the Buddha’s relic bones, he opened up the stūpas formerly built in seven countries to take out the relic bones [for redistribution]. When he came to this country and was about to start working [on the stūpa], the dragon of the pool, fearing that he might be deprived of the relics, appeared as a Brahman and halted the king’s elephant, saying, “Your Majesty’s goodwill extends to

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677 From: Rongxi, Li. 1996. The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions. Translated by the Tripiṭaka- Master Xuanzang under Imperial Order Composed by Śramaṇa Bianji of the Great Zongchi Monastery. pp. 159-162 (181-184)
678 Li (Chinese: 里, lǐ, or 市里, shìlǐ), also known as the Chinese mile, is a traditional Chinese unit of distance. The li has varied considerably over time but was usually about one third of an English mile and now has a standardized length of a half-kilometer (500 meters or 1,640 feet or 0.311 miles). This is then divided into 1,500 chi or "Chinese feet".
679 It is a lesser measurement than a foot, which is roughly a third of a meter: The chi (In Tongyong Pinyin chǐ) is a traditional Chinese unit of length. Although it is often translated as the "Chinese foot", its length was originally derived from the distance measured by a human hand, from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the forefinger, and is similar to the ancient span.
the Buddha-dharma and you have widely cultivated the field of blessedness. I venture to invite you to
deign to visit my abode.” The king said, “Where is your home? Is it far away or nearby?” The Brahman
said, “I am the dragon king of this pool. As Your Majesty wishes to perform superior deeds of
blessedness, I have ventured to come and beg for an interview.” At his invitation, the king entered the
dragon’s palace and, after sitting for a while, the dragon said, “Due to my past evil deeds I have been born
in the shape of a dragon. I make offerings to the Buddha’s relics in the hope that I may eliminate my sins
and faults. I wish for you to come see and worship the relics in person.” Seeing the dragon’s paraphernalia
for worshiping the relics, the king was awed by their splendor and said, “These utensils for making
offerings are not to be seen in the human world.” The dragon said, “If that is so, I pray that you will not
demolish them”. Thinking that he was not equal to the dragon in power; King Aśoka relinquished
the idea of opening up that stūpa. A mound marks the spot where he came out of the pool. Not far from the stūpa is
a monastery with few monks. It is a quiet and clean place under the management of a śrāmaṇera (novice).
Monks coming from distant places are well received with hospitality and invited to stay for three days to
receive offerings of the four monastic requisites”. The local people say that once a bhikṣu came with some
fellow monks from a distant place to worship the stūpa and they saw a group of elephants bustling about,
weeding grass with their tusks and sprinkling water with their trunks, each of them holding different kinds
of flowers to make offerings. At this sight the monks were deeply moved and sighed with pity. One of the
bhikṣus relinquished his position as a fully ordained monk in order to stay behind [as a śrāmaṇera] to
attend the stūpa. He said farewell to the other monks, saying, “I am lucky to have become a member,
though an incompetent one, of the community of monks. Through the passage of time I have made no
achievement in my spiritual practice. As this stūpa contains the Buddha’s relics, the elephants are inspired
by his holy virtues to come to keep the place clean. I am willing to stay here to work together with them.
If I can spend the rest of my life here I will be very fortunate indeed.” The other monks told him, “It is a
good idea and we are so ignorant as not to have thought of it ourselves. Please take care of yourself and do not fail in your superior deed.” Having parted from his companions, the śrāmaṇera repeated his sincere vow and lived alone happily with the intention of living in this manner until the end of his life. He built a thatched hut and channeled water into a tank. He plucked seasonal flowers [as offerings] and kept the place clean by sprinkling water and sweeping the ground, doing this for many years in succession without changing his mind. The kings of the neighboring countries heard about him [and felt] deep respect; they vied with one another to donate money and valuables for the construction of a monastery and invited the śrāmaṇera to supervise the monastic affairs. Since then the abbot of this monastery has always been a śrāmaṇera, in memory of the original institution”. Going east from Śrāmaṇera Monastery for more than a hundred li through a big forest, I reached a great stupa built by King Aśoka at the place where Prince Siddhārtha halted after he had gone out over the city wall, taken off his precious garments, untied his necklace, and asked his servant, Chandaka, 680 to return to the palace. The prince went over the city wall at midnight and reached this place at daybreak, and, having fulfilled his cherished desire, he said to himself, “This is the place where I escape from prison, unfasten the fetters, and unyoke myself at last!” He removed the maṇi pearl from his crown and said to his servant, “Take this pearl and go home to inform my father, the king, that my present retirement to a distant place is not an inconsiderate departure from home; I have done so because I wish to cut off what is impermanent and abandon all that causes pain and distress.” Chandaka (formerly called Cheli erroneously) said, “How can I have the mind to drive the empty carriage home?” The prince consoled the servant with good words, and Chandaka became awakened and returned home. On the east of the stūpa where the carriage was sent home there is a jambu tree 681 whose branches and leaves have withered, but the decayed trunk is still there. Beside the tree is a small stūpa marking the place where the prince changed his remaining precious garments for a deerskin

680 Pāli: Channa.
681 Eugenia jambolana.
robe. Although he had already cut off his hair, changed his clothes, and taken off his pearl necklace, the prince still had his royal robe with him. He thought, “This robe is too luxurious; what shall I do for a change [of clothes]?” At that moment a heavenly being of Śuddhavāsa (“Heaven of Pure Abode”) appeared as a hunter, wearing a deerskin robe, holding a bow and carrying some arrows. The prince, holding out his robe, said to the hunter, “I wish to exchange this [clothing] for yours. Will you kindly consent?” The hunter agreed. The prince then took off his upper garment and handed it to the hunter, who resumed his heavenly form and flew away through the air with the garment he had bartered. Not far away from the place where Prince Siddhārtha changed his clothes is a stūpa built by King Aśoka at the spot where the prince had his hair shaved off. The prince asked for a razor from Chandaka and cut off his own locks, which Indra received and brought to his heavenly palace for worship. At that time a celestial being of the Heaven of Pure Abode appeared as a barber, approaching slowly with a razor in his hand. The prince asked him, “Can you shave my head? Please give me the tonsure.” Accordingly the transformed figure shaved his head. The exact time when the prince left home by going over the city wall, in order to become a monk, is uncertain. Some say it was when the Bodhisattva was nineteen years old; others say he was twenty-nine years old at the time. It is said that Prince Siddhārtha renounced home on the eighth day of the second half of the month of Vaiśākha, corresponding to the eighth day of the third month of our calendar; or that it was on the fifteenth day of the second half of the month of Vaiśākha, corresponding to the fifteenth day of the third month of our calendar. From the stūpa where the prince had his head shaved, going southeast for one hundred eighty or ninety li through a wilderness, I reached a banyan grove in which there is a stūpa over thirty feet high. When the Tathāgata entered nirvāṇa and his relics were distributed, the Brahman who had not obtained a share of the relics collected the ashes and charcoal from the ground of the niṣṭapana (meaning “burning,” formerly known as shewei by mistake) and brought them home; they built this holy reliquary for worship. Since then it has manifested many miracles and
most of the sick people who have prayed for recovery here have received a response. In the old monastery
beside the ash and charcoal stupa are places where the four past Buddhas sat and walked up and down. On
both sides of the old monastery are several hundred stūpas, among which a large one was built by King
Aśoka. Although its lofty foundation has collapsed it is still over one hundred feet in height.

A Second Version on Xuanzang

Traveling eastward from here through a wild forest for more than five hundred li, the Master reached
the country of Rāmagrāma (in the domain of Central India), which was sparsely inhabited. To the east of
the old city, there was a brick stūpa more than fifty feet high. After the nirvāṇa of the Tathāgata, the then
king of this country obtained a share of the relics, and when he returned home he built this stūpa for the
preservation of the relics. It often issued a bright light. Beside the stūpa was a dragon’s pond. The dragon
frequently took the form of a human being to circumambulate the stūpa; and wild elephants always came
with flowers to offer to it. Not far from the stūpa there was a monastery with a śrāmaṇera (novice) as its
abbot. According to a legend, once a bhikṣu (monk) invited some of his fellow monks to come here from a
far distance to worship the stupa. They saw that wild elephants placed flowers in front of the stūpa,
removed the weeds with their tusks, and sprayed water with their trunks. At this sight the monks were
quite moved. One of them gave up the major rules observed by a fully ordained bhikṣu and volunteered to
stay there as a novice to serve at the place. He said to the other monks, “the elephants are animals and yet
they know to pay respect to the stūpa by offering flowers to it and by spraying water and sweeping the
ground clean. I am a human being and have renounced my home to become a monk under the Buddha.
How could I not engage myself to serve at this place when I see with my own eyes that it is in such a
desolate and neglected condition?” thus he took leave of the other monks and stayed behind. He built a
house, dredged the pond, planted flowers, and grew fruits through the cold and hot seasons without feeling

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tired. When the people of the neighboring countries heard about this, they donated money and valuables for the construction of a monastery through collective effort, and also invited the śrāmaṇera to be the abbot and take charge of the monastery’s affairs. Since then the abbots had always been succeeded by śrāmaṇeras as a tradition. In a big forest to the east of the Śrāmaṇera Monastery, the Master travelled for more than a hundred li. There was a stūpa built by King Aśoka at the place where the Prince, after having come out of the city, doffed his precious robe, took off his royal crown, untied the pearl from his topknot, and handed them all to Chandaka to be taken back home. A stūpa was also built to mark the place where the Prince had cut off his hair. Coming out of the forest, the Master reached the country of Kuśinagara, which was in an extremely deserted and isolated condition.”
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