

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY**

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Ashoka

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The **Edicts of Ashoka** are a collection of more than thirty inscriptions on the [pillars](#), as well as boulders and cave walls, attributed to Emperor [Ashoka](#) of the [Mauryan Empire](#) who reigned from 268 BCE to 232 BCE.<sup>[1]</sup> Ashoka used the expression *Dhamma Lipi* ([Prakrit](#) in the [Brahmi script](#): [𑀘𑀓𑀭𑀺](#), "Inscriptions of the [Dharma](#)") to describe his own Edicts.<sup>[2]</sup> These inscriptions were dispersed throughout the areas of modern-day [Bangladesh](#), [India](#), [Nepal](#), [Afghanistan](#) and [Pakistan](#), and provide the first tangible evidence of [Buddhism](#). The edicts describe in detail Ashoka's view about [dhamma](#), an earnest attempt to solve some of the problems that a complex society faced.<sup>[3]</sup> According to the edicts, the extent of Buddhist proselytism during this period reached as far as the [Mediterranean](#), and many Buddhist monuments were created.

These inscriptions proclaim Ashoka's adherence to the Buddhist philosophy which, as in [Hinduism](#), is called [dharma](#), "Law". The inscriptions show his efforts to develop the Buddhist dharma throughout his kingdom. Although Buddhism as well as [Gautama Buddha](#) are

mentioned, the edicts focus on social and moral precepts rather than specific religious practices or the philosophical dimension of Buddhism. These were located in public places and were meant for people to read.

In these inscriptions, Ashoka refers to himself as "Beloved of the Gods" (*Devanampiya*). The identification of Devanampiya with Ashoka was confirmed by an inscription discovered in 1915 by C. Beadon, a British gold-mining engineer, at [Maski](#), a village in [Raichur district](#) of [Karnataka](#). Another minor rock edict, found at the village [Gujarra](#) in [Datia district](#) of [Madhya Pradesh](#), also used the name of Ashoka together with his titles: "*Devanampiya Piyadasi Asokaraja*".<sup>[4]</sup> The inscriptions found in the central and eastern part of India were written in [Magadhi Prakrit](#) using the [Brahmi script](#), while [Prakrit](#) using the [Kharoshthi](#) script, [Greek](#) and [Aramaic](#) were used in the northwest. These edicts were deciphered by British [archaeologist](#) and historian [James Prinsep](#).<sup>[5]</sup>

The inscriptions revolve around a few recurring themes: Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism, the description of his efforts to spread Buddhism, his moral and religious precepts, and his social and [animal welfare](#) program. The edicts were based on Ashoka's ideas on administration and behaviour of people towards one another and religion.

□ Besides a few inscriptions in [Greek](#) and [Aramaic](#) (which were discovered only in the 20th century), the Edicts were mostly written in the [Brahmi script](#) and sometimes in the [Kharoshthi script](#) in the northwest, two Indian scripts which had both become extinct around the 5th century CE, and were yet undeciphered at the time the Edicts were discovered and investigated in the 19th century.<sup>[7][8]</sup>

The first successful attempts at deciphering the ancient [Brahmi script](#) were made in 1836 by Norwegian scholar [Christian Lassen](#), who used the bilingual Greek-Brahmi coins of [Indo-Greek](#) king [Agathocles](#) to correctly and securely identify several Brahmi letters.<sup>[8]</sup> The task was then completed by [James Prinsep](#), an archaeologist, philologist, and official of the [East India Company](#), who was able to identify the rest of the Brahmi characters, with the help of [Major Cunningham](#).<sup>[8][9]</sup> In a series of results that he published in March 1838 Prinsep was able to translate the inscriptions on a large number of rock edicts found around India, and to provide, according to [Richard Salomon](#), a "virtually perfect" rendering of the full Brahmi alphabet.<sup>[10][5]</sup> The edicts in [Brahmi script](#) mentioned a King [Devanampriya](#) Piyadasi which Prinsep initially assumed was a Sri Lankan king.<sup>[11]</sup> He was then able to associate this title with Asoka on the basis of [Pali script](#) from Sri Lanka communicated to him by [George Turnour](#).<sup>[12][13]</sup>

The [Kharoshthi script](#), written from right to left, and associated with [Aramaic](#), was also deciphered by [James Prinsep](#) in parallel with [Christian Lassen](#), using the bilingual Greek-Kharoshthi coinage of the [Indo-Greek](#) and [Indo-Scythian](#) kings.<sup>[14][15]</sup> "Within the incredibly brief space of three years (1834-37) the mystery of both the Kharoshthi and Brahmi scripts (were unlocked), the effect of which was instantly to remove the thick crust of oblivion which for many centuries had concealed the character and the language of the earliest epigraphs".<sup>[14][16]</sup>

The Edicts are divided into four categories, according to their size (Minor or Major) and according to their medium (Rock or Pillar). Chronologically, the minor inscriptions tend to precede the larger ones, while rock inscriptions generally seem to have been started earlier than the pillar inscriptions:

- [Minor Rock Edicts](#): Edicts inscribed at the beginning of Ashoka's reign; in [Prakrit](#), [Greek](#) and [Aramaic](#).
- [Minor Pillar Edicts](#): Schism Edict, Queen's Edict, [Rummindei](#) Edict, [Nigali Sagar](#) Edict; in [Prakrit](#).
- [Major Rock Edicts](#): 14 Edicts (termed 1st to 14th) and 2 separate ones found in [Odisha](#); in [Prakrit](#) and [Greek](#).
- [Major Pillar Edicts](#): 7 Edicts, inscribed at the end of Ashoka's reign; in [Prakrit](#).

### General content

The [Minor Rock Edicts](#) (in which Ashoka is sometimes named in person, as in [Maski](#) and [Gujarra](#)) as well as the [Minor Pillar Edicts](#) are very religious in their content: they mention extensively the [Buddha](#) (and even previous Buddhas as in the [Nigali Sagar](#) inscription), the [Samgha](#), Buddhism and Buddhist scriptures (as in the [Bairat](#) Edict).<sup>[20]</sup>

On the contrary, the [Major Rock Edicts](#) and [Major Pillar Edicts](#) are essentially moral and political in nature: they never mention the Buddha or explicit Buddhist teachings, but are preoccupied with order, proper behaviour and non violence under the general concept of "[Dharma](#)", and they also focus on the administration of the state and positive relations with foreign countries as far as the [Hellenistic Mediterranean](#) of the mid-3rd century BCE.<sup>[20]</sup>

### Minor Rock Edicts[edit]

The [Minor Rock Edicts](#) of Ashoka (r.269-233 BCE) are rock inscriptions which form the earliest part of the Edicts of Ashoka. They predate [Ashoka's Major Rock Edicts](#).

Chronologically, the first known edict, sometimes classified as a Minor Rock Edict, is the [Kandahar Bilingual Rock Inscription](#), in Greek and in Aramaic, written in the 10th year of his reign (260 BCE) at the border of his empire with the [Hellenistic world](#), in the city of [Old Kandahar](#) in modern [Afghanistan](#).<sup>[17][18][19]</sup>

Ashoka then made the first edicts in the Indian language, written in the [Brahmi](#) script, from the 11th year of his reign (according to his own inscription, "two and a half years after becoming a secular Buddhist", i.e. two and a half years at least after returning from the [Kalinga conquest](#) of the eighth year of his reign, which is the starting point for his remorse towards the horrors of the war, and his gradual conversion to Buddhism). The texts of the inscriptions are rather short, the technical quality of the engraving of the inscriptions is generally very poor, and generally very inferior to the pillar edicts dated to the years 26 and 27 of Ashoka's reign.<sup>[21]</sup>

There are several slight variations in the content of these edicts, depending on location, but a common designation is usually used, with Minor Rock Edict N°1 (MRE1)<sup>[22]</sup> and a Minor Rock Edict N°2 (MRE2, which does not appear alone but always in combination with Edict N°1), the different versions being generally aggregated in most translations. The [Maski](#) version of Minor Rock Edict No.1 is historically particularly important in that it confirmed the association of the title "[Devanampriya](#)" with the name "Asoka", thereby clarifying the historical author of all these inscriptions.<sup>[23][24]</sup> In the [Gujarra](#) version of Minor Rock Edict No.1 also, the name of Ashoka is used together with his full title: [Devanampriya Piyadasi Asokaraja](#).<sup>[4]</sup>

There is also a unique Minor Rock Edict No.3, discovered next to [Bairat Temple](#), for the Buddhist clergy, which gives a list of Buddhist scriptures (most of them unknown today) which the clergy should study regularly.<sup>[26]</sup>

A few other inscriptions of Ashoka in [Aramaic](#), which are not strictly edicts, but tend to share a similar content, are sometimes also categorized as "Minor Rock Edicts". The dedicatory inscriptions of the [Barabar caves](#) are also sometimes classified among the Minor Rock Edicts of Ashoka.

The Minor Rock Edicts can be found throughout the territory of Ashoka, including in the frontier area near the [Hindu Kush](#), and are especially numerous in the southern, newly conquered, frontier areas of [Karnataka](#) and southern [Andhra Pradesh](#).

### **Minor Pillar Edicts**

The [Minor Pillar Edicts](#) of Ashoka refer to 5 separate minor Edicts inscribed on columns, the [Pillars of Ashoka](#).<sup>[27]</sup> These edicts are preceded chronologically by the Minor Rock Edicts and may have been made in parallel with the Major Rock Edicts.

The inscription technique is generally very poor compared for example to the later [Major Pillar Edicts](#), however the Minor Pillar Edicts are often associated with some of the artistically most sophisticated pillar capitals of Ashoka, such as the renowned [Lion Capital of Ashoka](#) which crowned the [Sarnath](#) Minor Pillar Edict, or the very similar, but less well preserved [Sanchi](#) lion [capital](#) which crowned the very clumsily inscribed Schism Edict of Sanchi.<sup>[28]</sup> According to Irwin, the Brahmi inscriptions on the Sarnath and Sanchi pillars were made by inexperienced Indian engravers at a time when stone engraving was still new in India, whereas the very refined Sarnath capital itself was made under the tutelage of craftsmen from the former [Achaemenid Empire](#), trained in Perso-Hellenistic statuary and employed by Ashoka.<sup>[29]</sup> This suggests that the most sophisticated capitals were actually the earliest in the sequence of [Ashokan pillars](#) and that style degraded over a short period of time.<sup>[28]</sup>

These edicts were probably made at the beginning of the reign of Ashoka (reigned 268-232 BCE), from the year 12 of his reign, that is, from 256 BCE.<sup>[30]</sup>

The Minor Pillar Edicts are the Schism Edict, warning of punishment for dissent in the [Samgha](#), the Queen's Edict, and the [Rummindei](#) Edict as well as the [Nigali Sagar](#) Edict which record Ashoka's visits and Buddhist dedications in the area corresponding to today's [Nepal](#). The Rummindei and Nigali Sagar edicts, inscribed on pillars erected by Ashoka later in his reign (19th and 20th year) display a high level of inscriptional technique with a good regularity in the lettering.<sup>[29]</sup>

### **Major Rock Edicts**

The [Major Rock Edicts](#) of [Ashoka](#) refer to 14 separate major Edicts, which are significantly detailed and extensive.<sup>[31]</sup> These Edicts were concerned with practical instructions in running the kingdom such as the design of irrigation systems and descriptions of Ashoka's beliefs in peaceful moral behavior. They contain little personal detail about his life.<sup>[32]</sup> These edicts are preceded chronologically by the Minor Rock Edicts.

Three languages were used, [Prakrit](#), [Greek](#) and [Aramaic](#). The edicts are composed in [non-standardized](#) and archaic forms of [Prakrit](#). Prakrit inscriptions were written in [Brahmi](#) and [Kharosthi](#) scripts, which even a commoner could read and understand. The inscriptions found in the area of Pakistan are in the [Kharoshthi](#) script. Other Edicts are written in Greek or Aramaic. The [Kandahar Greek Edict of Ashoka](#) (including portions of Edict No.13 and No.14) is in Greek only, and originally probably contained all the Major Rock Edicts 1-14.<sup>[33]</sup>

The Major Rock Edicts of Ashoka are inscribed on large rocks, except for the Kandahar version in Greek ([Kandahar Greek Edict of Ashoka](#)), written on a stone plaque belonging to a building.

The Major Edicts are not located in the heartland of Mauryan territory, traditionally centered on [Bihar](#), but on the frontiers of the territory controlled by Ashoka.<sup>[34]</sup>

### **Major Pillar Edicts**

The [Major Pillar Edicts](#) of Ashoka refer to seven separate major Edicts inscribed on columns, the [Pillars of Ashoka](#), which are significantly detailed and extensive.<sup>[27]</sup>

These edicts are preceded chronologically by the Minor Rock Edicts and the Major Rock Edicts, and constitute the most technically elegant of the inscriptions made by Ashoka. They were made at the end of his reign, from the years 26 and 27 of his reign, that is, from 237-236 BCE.<sup>[30]</sup> Chronologically they follow the fall of [Seleucid](#) power in [Central Asia](#) and the related rise of the [Parthian Empire](#) and the independent [Greco-Bactrian Kingdom](#) circa 250 BCE. Hellenistic rulers are not mentioned anymore in these last edicts, as they only appear in [Major Rock Edict](#) No.13 (and to a lesser extent Major Rock Edict No.2), which can be dated to about the 14th year of the reign of Ashoka circa 256–255.<sup>[35]</sup> The last Major Pillar Edicts (Edict No.7) is testamental in nature, making a summary of the accomplishments of Ashoka during his life.

The Major Pillar Edicts of Ashoka were exclusively inscribed on the [Pillars of Ashoka](#) or fragments thereof, at [Kausambi](#) (now [Allahabad pillar](#)), [Topra Kalan](#), [Meerut](#), [Lauriya-Araraj](#), [Lauria Nandangarh](#), [Rampurva \(Champanan\)](#), and fragments of these in Aramaic ([Kandahar, Edict No.7](#) and [Pul-i-Darunteh, Edict No.5 or No.7](#) in [Afghanistan](#))<sup>[36][37]</sup> However several pillars, such as the bull pillar of [Rampurva](#), or the pillar of [Vaishali](#) do not have inscriptions, which, together with their lack of proper foundation stones and their particular style, led some authors to suggest that they were in fact pre-Ashokan.<sup>[38][39]</sup>



The Major Pillar Edicts (excluding the two fragments of translations found in modern [Afghanistan](#)) are all located in central India.<sup>[40]</sup>

The Pillars of Ashoka are stylistically very close to an important Buddhist monument, also built by Ashoka in [Bodh Gaya](#), at the location where the [Buddha](#) had reached enlightenment some 200 years earlier: the [Diamond Throne](#).<sup>[41][42]</sup> The sculpted decorations on the Diamond Throne clearly echo the decorations found on the Pillars of Ashoka.<sup>[43]</sup> The Pillars dated to the end of Ashoka's reign are associated with pillar capitals that tend to be more solemn and less elegant than the earlier capitals, such as those of Sanchi or Sarnath. This led some authors to suggest that the artistic level under Ashoka tended to fall towards the end of his reign.<sup>[44]</sup>

Languages of the Edicts[[edit](#)]

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Three languages were used: [Ashokan Prakrit](#), [Greek](#) (the language of the neighbouring [Greco-Bactrian](#) kingdom and the Greek communities in Ashoka's realm) and [Aramaic](#) (the official language of the former [Achaemenid Empire](#)). The Prakrit displayed local variations, from early [Gandhari](#) in the northwest, to [Old Ardhamagadhi](#) in the east, where it was the "chancery language" of the court.<sup>[45]</sup> The language level of the Prakrit inscriptions tends to be rather informal or colloquial.<sup>[46]</sup>

Four scripts were used. Prakrit inscriptions were written in the [Brahmi](#) and [Kharosthi](#) scripts, the latter for the area of modern Pakistan. The Greek and Aramaic inscriptions used their respective scripts, in the northwestern areas of Ashoka's territory, in modern [Pakistan](#) and [Afghanistan](#).

While most Edicts were in [Ashokan Prakrit](#), a few were written in Greek or Aramaic. The [Kandahar Rock Inscription](#) is bilingual Greek-Aramaic. The [Kandahar Greek Edict of Ashoka](#) is in Greek only, and originally probably contained all the Major Rock Edicts 1-14. The Greek language used in the inscription is of a very high level and displays philosophical refinement. It also displays an in-depth understanding of the political language of the Hellenic world in the 3rd century BCE. This suggests the presence of a highly cultured Greek presence in Kandahar at that time.<sup>[47]</sup>

By contrast, in the rock edicts engraved in southern India in the newly conquered territories of [Karnataka](#) and [Andhra Pradesh](#), Ashoka only used the [Prakrit](#) of the North as the language of communication, with the [Brahmi](#) script, and not the local [Dravidian](#) idiom, which can be interpreted as a kind of authoritarianism in respect to the southern territories.<sup>[48]</sup>

Ashoka's edicts were the first written inscriptions in India after the ancient city of [Harrapa](#) fell to ruin.<sup>[49]</sup> Due to the influence of Ashoka's Prakrit inscriptions, Prakrit would remain the main inscriptional language for the following centuries, until the rise of inscriptional [Sanskrit](#) from the 1st century CE.<sup>[46]</sup>

Content of the Edicts[[edit](#)]

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The Dharma preached by Ashoka is explained mainly in term of moral precepts, based on the doing of good deeds, respect for others, generosity and purity. The expressions used by Ashoka to express the Dharma, were the [Prakrit](#) word [Dhamma](#), the Greek word [Eusebeia](#) (in the [Kandahar Bilingual Rock Inscription](#) and the [Kandahar Greek Edict of Ashoka](#)), and the [Aramaic](#) word *Qsy*t ("Truth") (in the [Kandahar Bilingual Rock Inscription](#)).<sup>[50]</sup>

## **Moral precepts**

Dharma is good. And what is Dharma? It is having few faults and many good deeds, mercy, charity, truthfulness and purity. (Major Pillar Edict No.2)<sup>[51]</sup>

Thus the glory of Dhamma will increase throughout the world, and it will be endorsed in the form of mercy, charity, truthfulness, purity, gentleness, and virtue. (Major Pillar Edict No. 7)<sup>[27]</sup>

### **Benevolence**

Ashoka's Dharma meant that he used his power to try to make life better for his people and he also tried to change the way people thought and lived. He also thought that dharma meant doing the right thing.

### **Kindness to prisoners**

Ashoka showed great concern for fairness in the exercise of justice, caution and tolerance in the application of sentences, and regularly pardoned prisoners.

But it is desirable that there should be uniformity in judicial procedure and punishment. This is my instruction from now on. Men who are imprisoned or sentenced to death are to be given three days respite. Thus their relations may plead for their lives, or, if there is no one to plead for them, they may make donations or undertake a fast for a better rebirth in the next life. For it is my wish that they should gain the next world. (Major Pillar Edict No. 4)<sup>[27]</sup>

In the period [from my consecration] to [the anniversary on which] I had been consecrated twenty-six years, twenty-five releases of prisoners have been made. (Major Pillar Edict No. 5)<sup>[27]</sup>

The Mauryan empire was the first Indian empire to unify the country and it had a clear-cut policy of exploiting as well as protecting natural resources with specific officials tasked with protection duty. When Ashoka embraced Buddhism in the latter part of his reign, he brought about

significant changes in his style of governance, which included providing protection to fauna, and even relinquished the royal hunt. He was perhaps the first ruler in history to advocate conservation measures for wildlife. Reference to these can be seen inscribed on the stone edicts.<sup>[52][53]</sup>

This rescript on morality has been caused to be written by Devanampriya Priyadarsin. Here no living being must be killed and sacrificed. And also no festival meeting must be held. For king Devanampriya Priyadarsin sees much evil in festival meetings. And there are also some festival meetings which are considered meritorious by king Devanampriya Priyadarsin. Formerly in the kitchen of king Devanampriya Priyadarsin many hundred thousands of animals were killed daily for the sake of curry. But now, when this rescript on morality is caused to be written, then only three animals are being killed (daily), (viz.) two peacocks (and) one deer, but even this deer not regularly. But even these three animals shall not be killed (in future). (Major Rock Edict No.1)<sup>[54][27]</sup>

King Devanampriya Priyadarsin speaks thus. (When I had been) anointed twenty-six years, the following animals were declared by me inviolable, viz. parrots, mainas, the aruna, ruddy geese, wild geese, the nandimukha, the gelata, bats, queen-ants, terrapins, boneless fish, the vedaveyaka, the Ganga-puputaka, skate-fish, tortoises and porcupines, squirrels (?), the srimara, bulls set at liberty, iguanas (?), the rhinoceros, white doves, domestic doves, (and) all the quadrupeds which are neither useful nor edible. Those [she-goats], ewes, and sows (which are) either with young or in milk, are inviolable, and also those (of their) young ones (which are) less than six months old. Cocks must not be caponed. Husks containing living animals must not be burnt. Forests must not be burnt either uselessly or in order to destroy (living beings). Living animals must not be fed with (other) living animals. (Major Pillar Edict No.5)<sup>[55][27]</sup>

Ashoka advocated restraint in the number that had to be killed for consumption, protected some of them, and in general condemned violent acts against animals, such as [castration](#).

However, the edicts of Ashoka reflect more the desire of rulers than actual events; the mention of a 100 'panas' (coins) fine for poaching deer in royal hunting preserves shows that rule-breakers did exist. The legal restrictions conflicted with the practices then freely exercised by the common people in hunting, felling, fishing and setting fires in forests.<sup>[53]</sup>

## **Religious**

### **Buddhism**

Explicit mentions of Buddhism or the Buddha only appear in the [Minor Rock Edicts](#) and the [Minor Pillar Edicts](#).<sup>[20]</sup> Beyond affirming himself as a Buddhist and spreading the moral virtues of Buddhism, Ashoka also insisted that the word of the Buddha be read and followed, in particular in monastic circles (the [Sanghas](#)), in a unique edict ([Minor Rock Edict No.3](#)), found in front of the [Bairat Temple](#)<sup>[58]</sup>

I have been a Buddhist layman ("Budha-[Shake](#)" in the Maski edict, *upāshake* in others)<sup>[59]</sup> for more than two and a half years, but for a year I did not make much progress. Now for more than a year I have drawn closer to the [Order](#) and have become more ardent. (Minor Rock Edict No.1)<sup>[27]</sup>

The king of Magadha, Piyadassi, greets the Order and wishes it prosperity and freedom from care. You know Sirs, how deep is my respect for and faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha [i.e. the Buddhist creed]. Sirs, whatever was spoken by the Lord Buddha was well spoken. (Minor Rock Edict No.3)<sup>[27]</sup>

These sermons on Dhamma, Sirs - the Excellence of the Discipline, the Lineage of the Noble One, the Future Fears, the Verses of the Sage, the Sutra of Silence, the Question, of Upatissa, and the Admonition spoken by the Lord Buddha to [Rahula](#) on the subject of false speech - these sermons on the Dhamma, Sirs, I desire that many monks and nuns should hear frequently and meditate upon, and likewise laymen and laywomen. (Minor Rock Edict No.3)<sup>[27]</sup>

Ashoka also expressed his devotion for the [Buddhas of the past](#), such as the [Konāgamana Buddha](#), for whom he enlarged a [stupa](#) in the 14th year of his reign, and made a dedication and set up a pillar during a visit in person in the 20th year of his reign, as described in his [Minor Pillar Edict of Nigali Sagar](#), in modern [Nepal](#).<sup>[60][61]</sup>

### **Belief in a next world**

By doing so, there is gain in this world, and in the next there is infinite merit, through the gift of Dhamma. (Major Rock Edict No.11) <sup>[27]</sup>

It is hard to obtain happiness in this world and the next without extreme love of Dhamma, much vigilance, much obedience, much fear of sin, and extreme energy. (Major Pillar Edict No. 1)<sup>[27]</sup>

Far from being [sectarian](#), Ashoka, based on a belief that all religions shared a common, positive essence, encouraged tolerance and understanding of other religions.

The Beloved of the Gods, the king Piyadassi, wishes that all sect may dwell in all places, for all seek self-control and purity of mind. (Major Rock Edict No.7)<sup>[27]</sup>

For whosoever praises his own sect or blames other sects, — all (this) out of pure devotion to his own sect, (i.e.) with the view of glorifying his own sect, — if he is acting thus, he rather injures his own sect very severely. But concord is meritorious, (i.e.) that they should both hear and obey each other's morals. For this is the desire of Devanampriya, (viz.) that all sects should be both

full of learning and pure in doctrine. And those who are attached to their respective (sects), ought to be spoken to (as follows). Devanampriya does not value either gifts or honours so (highly) as (this), (viz.) that a promotion of the essentials of all sects should take place. (Major Rock Edict No.12<sup>[62][27]</sup>)

### **Social and animal welfare**<sup>[edit]</sup>

According to the edicts, Ashoka took great care of the welfare of his subjects (human and animal), and those beyond his borders, spreading the use of medicinal treatments, improving roadside facilities for more comfortable travel, and establishing "officers of the faith" throughout his territories to survey the welfare of the population and the propagation of the Dharma. The Greek king Antiochos ("the Yona king named Antiyoga" in the text of the Edicts) is also named as a recipient of Ashoka's generosity, together with the other kings neighbouring him.<sup>[63]</sup>

Everywhere in the dominions of king Devanampriya Priyadarsin and (of those) who (are his) borderers, such as the Chodas, the Pandyas, the Satiyaputa,<sup>[note 1]</sup> the Kelalaputa,<sup>[note 2]</sup> Tamraparni, the Yona king named Antiyoga, and the other kings who are the neighbours of this Antiyoga, everywhere two (kinds of) medical treatment were established by king Devanampriya Priyadarsin, (viz.) medical treatment for men and medical treatment for cattle. Wherever there were no herbs beneficial to men and beneficial to cattle, everywhere they were caused to be imported and to be planted. Likewise, wherever there were no roots and fruits, everywhere they were caused to be imported and to be planted. On the roads trees were planted, and wells were caused to be dug for the use of cattle and men. (Major Rock Edict No. 2, Khalsi version)<sup>[67][27]</sup>

### **Roadside facilities**

On the roads [banyan](#)-trees were caused to be planted by me, (in order that) they might afford shade to cattle and men, (and) [mango](#)-groves were caused to be planted. And (at intervals) of eight kos wells were caused to be dug by me, and flights of steps (for descending into the water) were caused to be built. Numerous drinking-places were caused to be established by me, here and there, for the enjoyment of cattle and men. [But] this so-called enjoyment (is) [of little consequence]. For with various comforts have the people been blessed both by former kings and by myself. But by me this has been done for the following purpose: that they might conform to that practice of morality. (Major Pillar Edict No.7)<sup>[55][27]</sup>

### **Officers of the faith**

Now, in times past (officers) called [Mahamatras](#) of morality did not exist before. Mahdmatras of morality were appointed by me (when I had been) anointed thirteen years. These are occupied with all sects in establishing morality, in promoting morality, and for the welfare and happiness of those who are devoted to morality (even) among the [Yona](#), [Kambojas](#), and [Gandharas](#), and whatever other western borderers (of mine there are). They are occupied with servants and masters, with Brahmanas and Ibhiyas, with the destitute; (and) with the aged, for the welfare and happiness of those who are devoted to morality, (and) in releasing (them) from the fetters (of worldly life). (Major Rock Edict No.5)<sup>[68][27]</sup>

### **Birthplace of the historical Buddha**

*Main article: [Lumbini pillar inscription](#)*

In a particularly famous Edict, the Rummindei Edict in [Lumbini, Nepal](#), Ashoka describes his visit in the 21st year of his reign, and mentions Lumbini as the birthplace of the Buddha. He also,



for the first time in historical records, uses the epithet "Sakyamuni" (Sage of the [Shakyas](#)), to describe the historical Buddha.<sup>[69]</sup>

Ashoka's

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In order to propagate welfare, Ashoka explains that he sent emissaries and medicinal plants to the [Hellenistic](#) kings as far as the Mediterranean, and to people throughout [India](#), claiming that Dharma had been achieved in all their territories as well. He names the Greek rulers of the time, inheritors of the conquest of [Alexander the Great](#), from [Bactria](#) to as far as [Greece](#) and [North Africa](#), as recipients of the Dharma, displaying a clear grasp of the political situation at the time.<sup>[73][74][75]</sup>

### **Proselytism beyond India**[\[edit\]](#)

Now, it is the conquest by the Dharma that the Beloved of the Gods considers as the best conquest. And this one (the conquest by the Dharma) was won here, on the borders, and even 600 [yojanas](#) (leagues) from here, where the king [Antiochos](#) reigns, and beyond where reign the four kings [Ptolemy](#), [Antigonos](#), [Magas](#) and [Alexander](#), likewise in the south, where live the [Cholas](#), the [Pandyas](#), and as far as [Tamraparni](#).

— *Extract from [Major Rock Edict No.13](#)*.<sup>[76]</sup>

The distance of 600 yojanas (4,800 to 6,000 miles) corresponds roughly to the distance between the center of India and Greece.<sup>[63]</sup>

In the [Gandhari](#) original Antiochos is referred to as "*Amtiyoge nama [Yona-rajā](#)*" (lit. "The Greek king by the name of Antiokos"), beyond whom live the four other kings: "*param ca tena Atiyogena cature 4 rajani Tulamaye nama Amtekine nama Makā nama Alikasudaro nama*" (lit.

"And beyond Antiochus, four kings by the name of Ptolemy, the name of Antigonos, the name of Magas, the name Alexander".<sup>[77]</sup>

- **Amtiyaka** (𐎠𐎢𐎥𐎢) or Amtiyoga (𐎠𐎢𐎥𐎢), refers to [Antiochus II Theos](#) of Syria (261–246 BCE), who controlled the [Seleucid Empire](#) from [Syria](#) to [Bactria](#) in the east from 305 to 250 BCE, and was therefore a direct neighbor of Ashoka.<sup>[63][78]</sup>
- **Tulamāya** (𐎠𐎢𐎥𐎢) refers to [Ptolemy II Philadelphos](#) of Egypt (285–247 BCE), king of the dynasty founded by [Ptolemy I](#), a former general of Alexander the Great, in [Egypt](#).<sup>[63][78]</sup>
- **Amtékina** (𐎠𐎢𐎥𐎢) refers to [Antigonos II Gonatas](#) of [Macedon](#) (278–239 BCE).<sup>[63][78]</sup>
- **Makā** (𐎠𐎢) refers to [Magas of Cyrene](#) (300–258 BCE).<sup>[63][78]</sup>
- **Alikyaşadala** (𐎠𐎢𐎥𐎢𐎠𐎢) refers to [Alexander II of Epirus](#) (272–258 BCE).<sup>[63][78]</sup>

It is not clear in Hellenic records whether these emissaries were actually received, or had any influence on the Hellenic world. But the existence of the edicts in a very high-level Greek literary and philosophical language testifies to the high sophistication of the Greek community of Kandahar, and to a true communication between Greek intellectuals and Indian thought.<sup>[80][81]</sup> According to historian [Louis Robert](#), it becomes quite likely that these Kandahar Greeks who were very familiar with Indian culture could in turn transmit Indian ideas to the philosophical circles of the Mediterranean world, in [Seleucia](#), [Antioch](#), [Alexandria](#), [Pella](#) or [Cyrene](#).<sup>[81]</sup> He suggests that the famous Ashoka

emissaries sent to the Western Hellenistic Courts according to Ashoka's Major Rock Edict No.13 were in fact Greek subjects and citizens of Kandahar, who had the full capacity to carry out these embassies.<sup>[81]</sup>

Another document, the *Mahavamsa* (XII, 1st paragraph),<sup>[82]</sup> also states that in the 17th year of his reign, at the end of the Third Buddhist Council, Ashoka sent Buddhist missionaries to eight parts of Southern Asia and the "country of the Yonas" (Greeks) to propagate Buddhism.<sup>[83]</sup>

### **Presence in the West**

Overall, the evidence for the presence of Buddhists in the west from that time is very meager.<sup>[84]</sup> But some scholars point to the possible presence of Buddhist communities in the Hellenistic world, in particular in Alexandria.<sup>[85]</sup> Dio Chrysostum wrote to Alexandrians that there are "Indians who view the spectacles with you and are with you on all occasions" (Oratio.XXXII.373).<sup>[86][87][85]</sup> According to Ptolemy also, Indians were present in Alexandria, to whom he was much indebted for his knowledge of India (As.Res.III.53).<sup>[88]</sup> Clement of Alexandria too mentioned the presence of Indians in Alexandria.<sup>[89]</sup> A possible Buddhist gravestone from the Ptolemaic period has been found by Flinders Petrie, decorated with a depiction of what may be Wheel of the Law and Trishula.<sup>[85][90]</sup> According to the 11th century Muslim historian Al-Biruni, before the advent of Islam, Buddhists were present in Western Asia as far as the frontiers of Syria.<sup>[91][92]</sup>

Colonial era scholars such as Rhys Davids have attributed Ashoka's claims of "Dharmic conquest" to mere vanity, and expressed disbelief that Greeks could have been in any way influenced by Indian thought.<sup>[94]</sup>

But numerous authors have noted the parallels between [Buddhism](#), [Cyrenaicism](#) and [Epicureanism](#), which all strive for a state of [ataraxia](#) ("equanimity") away from the sorrows of life.<sup>[95][96][97]</sup> The positions of philosophers such as [Hegesias of Cyrene](#) were close to [Buddhism](#), his ideas recalling the Buddhist doctrine of suffering: he lived in the city of [Cyrene](#) where [Magas](#) ruled, the same Magas under whom the Dharma prospered according to Ashoka, and he may have been influenced by Ashoka's missionaries.<sup>[97][98][99][100]</sup>

The religious communities of the [Essenes](#) of [Palestine](#) and the [Therapeutae](#) of [Alexandria](#) may also have been communities based on the model of [Buddhist monasticism](#), following Ashoka's missions.<sup>[101][102][103]</sup> According to [semitologist André Dupont-Sommer](#), speaking about the consequences of Ashoka's proselytism: "It is India which would be, according to us, at the beginning of this vast monastic current which shone with a strong brightness during about three centuries in [Judaism](#) itself".<sup>[104]</sup> This influence would even contribute, according to André Dupont-Sommer, to the emergence of [Christianity](#): "Thus was prepared the ground on which Christianity, that sect of Jewish origin influenced by the Essenes, which was so quickly and so powerfully to conquer a very large part of the world."<sup>[105][102]</sup>

### **Proselytism within Ashoka's territories**[\[edit\]](#)

Inside India proper, in the realm of Ashoka, many different populations were the object of the King's proselytism. Greek communities also lived in the northwest of the Mauryan empire, currently in Pakistan, notably ancient [Gandhara](#), and in the region of [Gedrosia](#), nowadays in Southern Afghanistan, following the conquest and the colonization efforts of Alexander the Great around 323 BCE. These communities therefore seem to have been still significant during the reign of Ashoka. The [Kambojas](#) are a people of [Central Asian](#) origin who had settled first

in [Arachosia](#) and [Drangiana](#) (today's southern [Afghanistan](#)), and in some of the other areas in the northwestern Indian subcontinent in [Sindhu](#), [Gujarat](#) and [Sauvira](#). The Nabhakas, the Nabhapamkits, the Bhojas, the Pitinikas, the [Andhras](#) and the [Palidas](#) were other people under Ashoka's rule:

Here in the king's domain among the Greeks, the [Kambojas](#), the Nabhakas, the Nabhapamkits, the Bhojas, the Pitinikas, the [Andhras](#) and the [Palidas](#), everywhere people are following Beloved-of-the-Gods' instructions in Dhamma. Rock Edict Nb13 (S. Dhammika)

The inscriptions of Ashoka may show [Achaemenid](#) influences, including formulaic parallels with [Achaemenid](#) inscriptions, presence of [Iranian](#) loanwords (in [Aramaic](#) inscriptions), and the very act of engraving edicts on rocks and mountains (compare for example [Behistun inscription](#)).<sup>[107][108]</sup> To describe his own Edicts, Ashoka used the word [Lipi](#) (𑀮𑀸𑀯𑀭), now generally simply translated as "writing" or "inscription". It is thought the word "lipi", which is also orthographed "dipi" (𑀮𑀸𑀯𑀭) in the two [Kharosthi](#) versions of the rock edicts,<sup>[note 3]</sup> comes from an [Old Persian](#) prototype *dipî* (𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣) also meaning "inscription", which is used for example by [Darius I](#) in his [Behistun inscription](#),<sup>[note 4]</sup> suggesting borrowing and diffusion.<sup>[109][110][111]</sup> There are other borrowings of [Old Persian](#) terms for writing-related words in the Edicts of Ahoka, such as *nipista* or *nipesita* (𑀮𑀸𑀯𑀭𑀢𑀺𑀯𑀭, "written" and "made to be written") in the [Kharoshthi](#) version of [Major Rock Edict](#) No.4, which can be related to the word *nipištā* (𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎤𐎥𐎦, "written") from the *daiva* inscription of [Xerxes](#) at [Persepolis](#).<sup>[112]</sup>

### **Hellenistic inscriptions**<sup>[edit]</sup>

It has also been suggested that inscriptions bearing the [Delphic maxims](#) from the [Seven Sages of Greece](#), inscribed by philosopher [Clearchus of Soli](#) in the neighbouring city of [Ai-](#)

[Khanoum](#) circa 300 BCE, may have influenced the writings of Ashoka.<sup>[113][114]</sup> These Greek inscriptions, located in the central square of Ai-Khanoum, put forward traditional Greek moral rules which are very close to the Edicts, both in term of formulation and content.<sup>[114][115]</sup>

The first examples of the [Hindu-Arabic numeral system](#) appeared in the [Brahmi numerals](#) used in the Edicts of Ashoka, in which a few numerals are found, although the system is not yet positional (the [zero](#), together with a mature positional system, was invented much later around the 6th century CE) and involves different symbols for units, dozens or hundreds.<sup>[116]</sup> This system is later further documented with more numerals in the [Nanaghat inscriptions](#) (1st century BCE), and later in the [Nasik Caves](#) inscriptions (2nd century CE), to acquire designs which are largely similar to the [Hindu-Arabic numerals](#) used today.<sup>[117][118][119]</sup>

The number "6" in particular appears in [Minor Rock Edict](#) No.1 when Ashoka explains he has "been on tour for 256 days". The evolution to the modern glyph for 6 appears rather straightforward. It was written in one stroke, somewhat like a cursive lowercase "e". Gradually, the upper part of the stroke (above the central squiggle) became more curved, while the lower part of the stroke (below the central squiggle) became straighter. The Arabs dropped the part of the stroke below the squiggle. From there, the European evolution to the modern 6 was very straightforward, aside from a flirtation with a glyph that looked more like an uppercase G.<sup>[120]</sup>

Ashokan inscriptions in [Prakrit](#) precede by several centuries inscriptions in [Sanskrit](#), probably owing to the great prestige which Ashokan inscriptions gave to the Prakrit language.<sup>[122]</sup> Louis Renou called it "the great linguistical [paradox](#) of India" that the Sanskrit inscriptions appear later than [Prakrit](#) inscriptions, although Prakrit is considered as a descendant of the Sanskrit language.<sup>[122]</sup>

Ashoka was probably the first Indian ruler to create stone inscriptions, and in doing so, he began an important Indian tradition of royal epigraphical inscriptions.<sup>[121]</sup> The earliest known stone inscriptions in Sanskrit are in the Brahmi script from the first century BCE.<sup>[122]</sup> These early Sanskrit inscriptions include the [Ayodhyā](#) (Uttar Pradesh) and [Hāthībādā-Ghosundī](#) (near [Chittorgarh](#), Rajasthan) inscriptions.<sup>[122][123]</sup> Other important inscriptions dated to the 1st century BCE, in relatively accurate classical Sanskrit and Brahmi script are the [Yavanarajya inscription](#) on a red sandstone slab and the long [Naneghat inscription](#) on the wall of a cave rest stop in the Western Ghats.<sup>[124]</sup> Besides these few examples from the 1st century BCE, the bulk of early Sanskrit inscriptions were made from the 1st and 2nd-century CE by the [Indo-Scythian Northern Satraps](#) in [Mathura](#) (Uttar Pradesh), and the [Western Satraps](#) in [Gujarat](#) and [Maharashtra](#).<sup>[125]</sup> According to Salomon, the Scythian rulers of northern and western India while not the originators, were promoters of the use of Sanskrit language for inscriptions, and "their motivation in promoting Sanskrit was presumably a desire to establish themselves as legitimate Indian or at least Indianized rulers and to curry the favor of the educated Brahmanical elite".<sup>[126]</sup>

The [Brahmi script](#) used in the Edicts of Ashoka, as well as the [Prakrit](#) language of these inscriptions was in popular use down through the [Kushan period](#), and remained readable down to the 4th century CE during the [Gupta period](#). After that time the script underwent significant evolutions which rendered the Ashokan inscriptions unreadable. This still means that Ashoka's Edicts were for everyone to see and understand for a period of nearly 700 years in India, suggesting that they remained significantly influential for a long time.<sup>[127]</sup>

According to some scholars such as [Christopher I. Beckwith](#), Ashoka, whose name only appears in the [Minor Rock Edicts](#), should be differentiated from the ruler [Piyadasi](#),

or [Devanampiya](#) Piyadasi (i.e. "Beloved of the Gods Piyadasi", "Beloved of the Gods" being a fairly widespread title for "King"), who is named as the author of the [Major Pillar Edicts](#) and the [Major Rock Edicts](#).<sup>[128]</sup> Beckwith also highlights the fact that Buddhism nor the Buddha are mentioned in the Major Edicts, but only in the Minor Edicts.<sup>[129]</sup> Further, the Buddhist notions described in the Minor Edicts (such as the Buddhist [canonical](#) writings in Minor Edict No.3 at [Bairat](#), the mention of a Buddha of the past [Kanakamuni Buddha](#) in the [Nigali Sagar](#) Minor Pillar Edict) are more characteristic of the "Normative Buddhism" of the [Saka-Kushan](#) period around the 2nd century CE.<sup>[129]</sup>

This inscriptional evidence may suggest that [Piyadasi](#) and Ashoka were two different rulers.<sup>[128]</sup> According to Beckwith, Piyadasi was living in the 3rd century BCE, probably the son of [Chandragupta Maurya](#) known to the Greeks as [Amitrochates](#), and only advocating for piety ("[Dharma](#)") in his [Major Pillar Edicts](#) and [Major Rock Edicts](#), without ever mentioning [Buddhism](#), the [Buddha](#) or the [Samgha](#).<sup>[128]</sup> Since he does mention a pilgrimage to *Sambhodi* ([Bodh Gaya](#), in [Major Rock Edict](#) No.8) however, he may have adhered to an "early, pietistic, popular" form of Buddhism.<sup>[130]</sup> Also, the geographical spread of his inscription shows that Piyadasi ruled a vast Empire, contiguous with the [Seleucid Empire](#) in the West.<sup>[128]</sup>

On the contrary, for Beckwith, Ashoka himself was a later king of the 1st-2nd century CE, whose name only appears explicitly in the [Minor Rock Edicts](#) and allusively in the [Minor Pillar Edicts](#), and who does mention the Buddha and the [Samgha](#), explicitly promoting Buddhism.<sup>[128]</sup> He may have been an unknown or possibly invented ruler named Devanampriya Asoka, with the intent of propagating a later, more institutional version of the Buddhist faith.<sup>[129][131]</sup> His inscriptions cover a very different and much smaller geographical area, clustering in Central India.<sup>[128]</sup> According to Beckwith, the inscriptions of this later Ashoka were



typical of the later forms of "normative Buddhism", which are well attested from inscriptions and Gandhari manuscripts dated to the turn of the millennium, and around the time of the [Kushan Empire](#).<sup>[128]</sup> The quality of the inscriptions of this Ashoka is significantly lower than the quality of the inscriptions of the earlier Piyadasi.<sup>[128]</sup>

However, many of Beckwith's methodologies and interpretations concerning early Buddhism, inscriptions, and archaeological sites have been criticized by other scholars, such as [Johannes Bronkhorst](#) and [Osmund Bopearachchi](#).<sup>[132][133]</sup>

## Maurya Empire

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The **Maurya Empire** was a [geographically extensive Iron Age historical power](#) based in [Magadha](#) and founded by [Chandragupta Maurya](#), which dominated [the Indian subcontinent](#) between 322 and 185 BCE. Comprising the majority of [South Asia](#), the Maurya Empire was centralized by the conquest of the [Indo-Gangetic Plain](#), and its capital city was located at [Pataliputra](#) (modern [Patna](#)).<sup>[15][16]</sup> The empire was the [largest political entity that has existed in the Indian subcontinent](#), extending over 5 million square kilometres (1.9 million square miles) at its zenith under [Ashoka](#).<sup>[17]</sup>

Chandragupta Maurya raised an army, with the assistance of [Chanakya](#), author of [Arthashastra](#),<sup>[18]</sup> and overthrew the [Nanda Empire](#) in c. 322 BCE. Chandragupta rapidly expanded his power westwards across central and western India by conquering the [satraps](#) left by [Alexander the Great](#), and by 317 BCE the empire had fully occupied northwestern India.<sup>[19]</sup> The Mauryan Empire then defeated [Seleucus I](#), a [diadochus](#) and founder of the [Seleucid Empire](#), during the [Seleucid–Mauryan war](#), thus acquiring territory west of the [Indus River](#).<sup>[20][21]</sup>

At its greatest extent, the empire stretched along the natural boundary of the [Himalayas](#), to the east into [Bengal](#), to the west into what is present-day [Balochistan](#), [Pakistan](#) and the [Hindu Kush](#) mountains of what is now eastern [Afghanistan](#).<sup>[22]</sup> The dynasty expanded into India's southern regions<sup>[23][24]</sup> by the reign of the emperor [Bindusara](#), but it excluded [Kalinga](#) (modern [Odisha](#)), until it was conquered by Ashoka.<sup>[25]</sup> It declined for about 50 years after Ashoka's rule, and dissolved in 185 BCE with the foundation of the [Shunga dynasty](#) in [Magadha](#).

Under Chandragupta Maurya and his successors, internal and external trade, agriculture, and economic activities thrived and expanded across South Asia due to the creation of a single and efficient system of finance, administration, and security. The Maurya dynasty built the [Grand Trunk Road](#), one of [Asia](#)'s oldest and longest trade networks, connecting the north of the Indian subcontinent from east to west.<sup>[26]</sup> After the [Kalinga War](#), the Empire experienced nearly half a century of centralized rule under Ashoka. Chandragupta Maurya's embrace of [Jainism](#) increased socio-religious reform across South Asia, while Ashoka's embrace of [Buddhism](#) and sponsorship of Buddhist missionaries allowed for the expansion of that faith into [Sri Lanka](#), northwest India, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, Egypt, and Hellenistic Europe.<sup>[27]</sup>

The population of the empire has been estimated to be about 50–60 million, making the Mauryan Empire one of the most populous empires of antiquity.<sup>[28][29]</sup> Archaeologically, the period of Mauryan rule in South Asia falls into the era of [Northern Black Polished Ware](#) (NBPW). The [Arthashastra](#)<sup>[30]</sup> and the [Edicts of Ashoka](#) are the primary sources of written records of Mauryan times. The [Lion Capital of Ashoka](#) at [Sarnath](#) is the national [emblem](#) of the modern Republic of India.



The name "Maurya" does not occur in [Ashoka's inscriptions](#), or the contemporary Greek accounts such as [Megasthenes's Indica](#), but it is attested by the following sources.<sup>[31]</sup>

- The [Junagadh rock inscription of Rudradaman](#) (c. 150 CE) prefixes "Maurya" to the names Chandragupta and Ashoka.<sup>[31]</sup>
- The [Puranas](#) (c. 4th century CE or earlier) use Maurya as a dynastic appellation.<sup>[31]</sup>
- The Buddhist texts state that Chandragupta belonged to the "Moriya" clan of the Shakyas, the tribe to which [Gautama Buddha](#) belonged.<sup>[31]</sup>
- The Jain texts state that Chandragupta was the son of a royal superintendent of peacocks (*mayura-poshaka*).<sup>[31]</sup>
- [Tamil Sangam literature](#) also designate them as 'moriyar' and mention them after the [Nandas](#)<sup>[32]</sup>
- [Kuntala](#) inscription (from the town of Bandanikke, [North Mysore](#)) of 12th century AD chronologically mention Mauryya as one of the dynasties which ruled the region.<sup>[33]</sup>

According to some scholars, Kharavela's [Hathigumpha inscription](#) (2nd-1st century BC) mentions era of Maurya Empire as Muriya Kala (Mauryan era),<sup>[34]</sup> but this reading is disputed: other scholars—such as epigraphist [D. C. Sircar](#)—read the phrase as mukhiya-kala ("the principal art").<sup>[35]</sup>

According to the Buddhist tradition, the ancestors of the Maurya kings had settled in a region where peacocks (*mora* in [Pali](#)) were abundant. Therefore, they came to be known as "Moriyas",

literally, "belonging to the place of peacocks". According to another Buddhist account, these ancestors built a city called Moriya-nagara ("Moriya-city"), which was so called, because it was built with the "bricks coloured like peacocks' necks".<sup>[36]</sup>

The dynasty's connection to the peacocks, as mentioned in the Buddhist and Jain traditions, seems to be corroborated by archaeological evidence. For example, peacock figures are found on the [Ashoka pillar at Nandangarh](#) and several sculptures on the Great Stupa of [Sanchi](#). Based on this evidence, modern scholars theorize that the peacock may have been the dynasty's emblem.<sup>[37]</sup>

Some later authors, such as Dhundiraja (a commentator on the [Mudrarakshasa](#)) and an annotator of the [Vishnu Purana](#), state that the word "Maurya" is derived from Mura and the mother of the first Maurya king. However, the Puranas themselves make no mention of Mura and do not talk of any relation between the Nanda and the Maurya dynasties.<sup>[38]</sup> Dhundiraja's derivation of the word seems to be his own invention: according to the Sanskrit rules, the derivative of the feminine name Mura ([IAST](#): Murā) would be "Maureya"; the term "Maurya" can only be derived from the masculine "Mura".<sup>[39]</sup>

Prior to the Maurya Empire, the [Nanda Empire](#) ruled over most of the Indian Subcontinent. The Nanda Empire was a large, militaristic, and economically powerful empire due to conquering the [Mahajanapadas](#). According to several legends, Chanakya travelled to [Pataliputra](#), [Magadha](#), the capital of the [Nanda Empire](#) where Chanakya worked for the Nandas as a minister. However, Chanakya was insulted by the Emperor [Dhana Nanda](#), of the [Nanda dynasty](#) and Chanakya swore revenge and vowed to destroy the Nanda Empire.<sup>[40]</sup> He had to flee in order to save his life and went to Taxila, a notable center of learning, to work as a teacher. On one of his travels, Chanakya witnessed some young men playing a rural game

practicing a pitched battle. He was impressed by the young Chandragupta and saw royal qualities in him as someone fit to rule.

Meanwhile, [Alexander the Great](#) was leading his Indian campaigns and ventured into Punjab. His army mutinied at the [Beas River](#) and refused to advance further eastward when confronted by another army. Alexander returned to [Babylon](#) and re-deployed most of his troops west of the [Indus River](#). Soon after Alexander died in [Babylon](#) in 323 BCE, his empire fragmented into independent kingdoms led by his generals.<sup>[41]</sup>

The Maurya Empire was established in the [Greater Punjab](#) region under the leadership of Chandragupta Maurya and his mentor Chanakya. Chandragupta was taken to [Taxila](#) by Chanakya and was tutored about statecraft and governing. Requiring an army Chandragupta recruited and annexing local [military republics](#) such as the [Yaudheyas](#) that had resisted Alexander's Empire. The Mauryan army quickly rose to become the prominent regional power in the North West of the Indian Subcontinent. The Mauryan army then conquered the satraps established by the Macedonians.<sup>[42]</sup> Ancient Greek historians Nearchus, Onesicritus and Aristobolus have provided a lot of information about the Mauryan empire.<sup>[43]</sup> The Greek generals [Eudemus](#) and [Peithon](#) ruled in the Indus Valley until around 317 BCE, when Chandragupta Maurya (with the help of Chanakya, who was now his advisor) fought and drove out the Greek governors, and subsequently brought the Indus Valley under the control of his new seat of power in Magadha.<sup>[19]</sup>

Chandragupta Maurya's ancestry is shrouded in mystery and controversy. On one hand, a number of ancient Indian accounts, such as the drama [Mudrarakshasa](#) (*Signet ring of Rakshasa – Rakshasa* was the prime minister of Magadha) by [Vishakhadatta](#), describe his royal ancestry and even link him with the Nanda family. A kshatriya clan known as the Mauryas are referred to in

the earliest [Buddhist texts](#), [Mahaparinibbana Sutta](#). However, any conclusions are hard to make without further historical evidence. Chandragupta first emerges in Greek accounts as "Sandrokottos". As a young man he is said to have met Alexander.<sup>[44]</sup> Chanakya is said to have met the Nanda king, angered him, and made a narrow escape.<sup>[45]</sup>

Chanakya encouraged Chandragupta Maurya and his army to take over the throne of Magadha. Using his intelligence network, Chandragupta gathered many young men from across Magadha and other provinces, men upset over the corrupt and oppressive rule of king [Dhana Nanda](#), plus the resources necessary for his army to fight a long series of battles. These men included the former general of Taxila, accomplished students of Chanakya, the representative of King Parvataka, his son [Malayaketu](#), and the rulers of small states. The Macedonians (described as [Yona](#) or Yavana in Indian sources) may then have participated, together with other groups, in the armed uprising of Chandragupta Maurya against the [Nanda dynasty](#).<sup>[47][48]</sup> The *Mudrarakshasa* of Visakhadutta as well as the [Jaina](#) work [Parisishtaparvan](#) talk of Chandragupta's alliance with the Himalayan king Parvataka, often identified with [Porus](#),<sup>[49][50]</sup> although this identification is not accepted by all historians.<sup>[51]</sup> This [Himalayan](#) alliance gave Chandragupta a composite and powerful army made up of [Yavanas](#) (Greeks), [Kambojas](#), [Shakas](#) (Scythians), [Kiratas](#) (Himalayans), [Parasikas](#) (Persians) and [Bahlikas](#) (Bactrians) who took [Pataliputra](#) (also called Kusumapura, "The City of Flowers").<sup>[52]</sup>

[Kusumapura](#) was besieged from every direction by the forces of Parvata and Chandragupta: Shakas, Yavanas, Kiratas, Kambojas, Parasikas, Bahlikas and others, assembled on the advice of Chanakya

— *In Mudrarakshasa* 2<sup>[53][52]</sup>

Preparing to invade Pataliputra, Maurya came up with a strategy. A battle was announced and the Magadhan army was drawn from the city to a distant battlefield to engage with Maurya's forces. Maurya's general and spies meanwhile bribed the corrupt general of Nanda. He also managed to create an atmosphere of civil war in the kingdom, which culminated in the death of the heir to the throne. Chanakya managed to win over popular sentiment. Ultimately Nanda resigned, handing power to Chandragupta, and went into exile and was never heard of again. Chanakya contacted the prime minister, Rakshasas, and made him understand that his loyalty was to Magadha, not to the Nanda dynasty, insisting that he continue in office. Chanakya also reiterated that choosing to resist would start a war that would severely affect Magadha and destroy the city. Rakshasa accepted Chanakya's reasoning, and Chandragupta Maurya was legitimately installed as the new King of Magadha. Rakshasa became Chandragupta's chief advisor, and Chanakya assumed the position of an elder statesman.

### **Chandragupta Maurya**

After the [death of Alexander the Great](#) in 323 BCE, Chandragupta led a [series of campaigns](#) in 305 BCE to take satrapies in the Indus Valley and northwest India.<sup>[54]</sup> When Alexander's remaining forces were [routed](#), returning westwards, Seleucus I Nicator fought to defend these territories. Not many details of the campaigns are known from ancient sources. Seleucus was defeated and retreated into the mountainous region of Afghanistan.<sup>[55]</sup>

The two rulers concluded a peace treaty in 303 BCE, including a marital alliance. Under its terms, Chandragupta received the satrapies of [Paropamisadae](#) ([Kamboja](#) and Gandhara) and [Arachosia](#) ([Kandahar](#)) and [Gedrosia](#) ([Balochistan](#)). Seleucus I received the 500 [war](#)

[elephants](#) that were to have a decisive role in his victory against western [Hellenistic](#) kings at the [Battle of Ipsus](#) in 301 BCE. Diplomatic relations were established and several Greeks, such as the historian [Megasthenes](#), [Deimakos](#) and [Dionysius](#) resided at the Mauryan court.<sup>[56]</sup>

Megasthenes in particular was a notable Greek ambassador in the court of Chandragupta Maurya.<sup>[57]</sup> According to [Arrian](#), ambassador Megasthenes (c. 350 – c. 290 BCE) lived in Arachosia and travelled to [Pataliputra](#).<sup>[58]</sup> Megasthenes' description of Mauryan society as freedom-loving gave Seleucus a means to avoid invasion, however, underlying Seleucus' decision was the improbability of success. In later years, Seleucus' successors maintained diplomatic relations with the Empire based on similar accounts from returning travellers.<sup>[54]</sup>

Chandragupta established a strong centralised state with an administration at Pataliputra, which, according to Megasthenes, was "surrounded by a wooden wall pierced by 64 gates and 570 towers". [Aelian](#), although not expressly quoting Megasthenes nor mentioning Pataliputra, described Indian palaces as superior in splendor to [Persia's Susa](#) or [Ectabana](#).<sup>[59]</sup> The architecture of the city seems to have had many similarities with Persian cities of the period.<sup>[60]</sup>

Chandragupta's son [Bindusara](#) extended the rule of the Mauryan empire towards southern India. The famous [Tamil](#) poet Mamulanar of the [Sangam literature](#) described how areas south of the [Deccan Plateau](#) which comprised Tamil country was invaded by the Maurya army using troops from Karnataka. Mamulanar states that Vadugar (people who resided in Andhra-Karnataka regions immediately to the north of Tamil Nadu) formed the vanguard of the Mauryan army.<sup>[32][61]</sup> He also had a Greek ambassador at his court, named [Deimachus](#).<sup>[62]</sup> According to [Plutarch](#) Chandragupta Maurya subdued entire India, Justin also observed that Chandragupta Maurya was "in possession of India"; this is corroborated by Tamil sangam literature which



mentions about Mauryan invasion with their south Indian allies and defeat of their rivals at Podiyil hill in [Tirunelveli district](#) in present-day [Tamil Nadu](#).<sup>[63][64]</sup>

Chandragupta renounced his throne and followed Jain teacher [Bhadrabahu](#).<sup>[65][66][67]</sup> He is said to have lived as an ascetic at [Shravanabelagola](#) for several years before fasting to death, as per the Jain practice of [sallekhana](#).<sup>[68]</sup>

## **Bindusara**

Bindusara was born to [Chandragupta](#), the founder of the Mauryan Empire. This is attested by several sources, including the various [Puranas](#) and the [Mahavamsa](#).<sup>[69][full citation needed]</sup> He is attested by the Buddhist texts such as [Dipavamsa](#) and [Mahavamsa](#) ("Bindusaro"); the Jain texts such as *Parishishta-Parvan*; as well as the Hindu texts such as [Vishnu Purana](#) ("Vindusara").<sup>[70][71]</sup> According to the 12th century Jain writer [Hemachandra](#)'s *Parishishta-Parvan*, the name of Bindusara's mother was [Durdhara](#).<sup>[72]</sup> Some Greek sources also mention him by the name "Amitrochates" or its variations.<sup>[73][74]</sup>

Historian Upinder Singh estimates that Bindusara ascended the throne around 297 BCE.<sup>[61]</sup> Bindusara, just 22 years old, inherited a large empire that consisted of what is now, Northern, Central and Eastern parts of [India](#) along with parts of [Afghanistan](#) and [Baluchistan](#). Bindusara extended this empire to the southern part of India, as far as what is now known as [Karnataka](#). He brought sixteen states under the Mauryan Empire and thus conquered almost all of the Indian peninsula (he is said to have conquered the 'land between the two seas' – the peninsular region between the [Bay of Bengal](#) and the [Arabian Sea](#)). Bindusara did not conquer the friendly [Tamil](#) kingdoms of the [Cholas](#), ruled by King [Ilamcetcenni](#), the [Pandyas](#), and [Cheras](#). Apart from these southern states, [Kalinga](#) (modern Odisha) was the only kingdom in

India that did not form part of Bindusara's empire.<sup>[75]</sup> It was later conquered by his son [Ashoka](#), who served as the viceroy of [Ujjaini](#) during his father's reign, which highlights the importance of the town.<sup>[76][77]</sup>

Bindusara's life has not been documented as well as that of his father Chandragupta or of his son Ashoka. Chanakya continued to serve as prime minister during his reign. According to the medieval Tibetan scholar Taranatha who visited India, Chanakya helped Bindusara "to destroy the nobles and kings of the sixteen kingdoms and thus to become absolute master of the territory between the eastern and western oceans".<sup>[78]</sup> During his rule, the citizens of [Taxila](#) revolted twice. The reason for the first revolt was the maladministration of [Susima](#), his eldest son. The reason for the second revolt is unknown, but Bindusara could not suppress it in his lifetime. It was crushed by Ashoka after Bindusara's death.<sup>[79]</sup>

Bindusara maintained friendly diplomatic relations with the Hellenic world. [Deimachus](#) was the ambassador of [Seleucid](#) emperor [Antiochus I](#) at Bindusara's court.<sup>[80]</sup> [Diodorus](#) states that the king of Palibothra ([Pataliputra](#), the Mauryan capital) welcomed a Greek author, [Iambulus](#). This king is usually identified as Bindusara.<sup>[80]</sup> [Pliny](#) states that the Egyptian king [Philadelphus](#) sent an envoy named [Dionysius](#) to India.<sup>[81][82]</sup> According to Sailendra Nath Sen, this appears to have happened during Bindusara's reign.<sup>[80]</sup>

Unlike his father Chandragupta (who at a later stage converted to [Jainism](#)), Bindusara believed in the [Ajivika](#) sect. Bindusara's guru Pingalavatsa (Janasana) was a Brahmin<sup>[83]</sup> of the Ajivika sect. Bindusara's wife, Queen [Subhadra](#)ngi (Queen Dharma/ Aggamahesi) was a Brahmin<sup>[84]</sup> also of the Ajivika sect from Champa (present Bhagalpur district). Bindusara is credited with giving several grants to Brahmin monasteries (*Brahmana-bhatto*).<sup>[85]</sup>

Historical evidence suggests that Bindusara died in the 270s BCE. According to Upinder Singh, Bindusara died around 273 BCE.<sup>[61]</sup> [Alain Daniélou](#) believes that he died around 274 BCE.<sup>[78]</sup> Sailendra Nath Sen believes that he died around 273–272 BCE, and that his death was followed by a four-year struggle of succession, after which his son [Ashoka](#) became the emperor in 269–268 BCE.<sup>[80]</sup> According to the [Mahavamsa](#), Bindusara reigned for 28 years.<sup>[86]</sup> The [Vayu Purana](#), which names Chandragupta's successor as "Bhadrasara", states that he ruled for 25 years.<sup>[87]</sup>

## **Ashoka**

As a young prince, Ashoka (r. 272–232 BCE) was a brilliant commander who crushed revolts in Ujjain and Takshashila. As monarch he was ambitious and aggressive, re-asserting the Empire's superiority in southern and western India. But it was his conquest of [Kalinga](#) (262–261 BCE) which proved to be the pivotal event of his life. Ashoka used Kalinga to project power over a large region by building a fortification there and securing it as a possession.<sup>[88]</sup> Although Ashoka's army succeeded in overwhelming Kalinga forces of royal soldiers and civilian units, an estimated 100,000 soldiers and civilians were killed in the furious warfare, including over 10,000 of Ashoka's own men. Hundreds of thousands of people were adversely affected by the destruction and fallout of war. When he personally witnessed the devastation, Ashoka began feeling remorse. Although the annexation of Kalinga was completed, Ashoka embraced the teachings of [Buddhism](#), and renounced war and violence. He sent out missionaries to travel around Asia and spread Buddhism to other countries.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

Ashoka implemented principles of [ahimsa](#) by banning hunting and violent sports activity and ending indentured and forced labor (many thousands of people in war-ravaged Kalinga had been forced into hard labour and servitude). While he maintained a large and powerful army, to keep

the peace and maintain authority, Ashoka expanded friendly relations with states across Asia and Europe, and he sponsored Buddhist missions. He undertook a massive public works building campaign across the country. Over 40 years of peace, harmony and prosperity made Ashoka one of the most successful and famous monarchs in Indian history. He remains an idealized figure of inspiration in modern India.<sup>[*citation needed*]</sup>

The [Edicts of Ashoka](#), set in stone, are found throughout the Subcontinent. Ranging from as far west as [Afghanistan](#) and as far south as Andhra ([Nellore District](#)), Ashoka's edicts state his policies and accomplishments. Although predominantly written in Prakrit, two of them were written in [Greek](#), and one in both Greek and [Aramaic](#). Ashoka's edicts refer to the Greeks, [Kambojas](#), and [Gandharas](#) as peoples forming a frontier region of his empire. They also attest to Ashoka's having sent envoys to the Greek rulers in the West as far as the Mediterranean. The edicts precisely name each of the rulers of the [Hellenic](#) world at the time such as *Amiyoko* ([Antiochus](#)), *Tulamaya* ([Ptolemy](#)), *Antikini* ([Antigonos](#)), *Maka* ([Magas](#)) and *Alikasudaro* ([Alexander](#)) as recipients of Ashoka's proselytism.<sup>[*citation needed*]</sup> The Edicts also accurately locate their territory "600 yojanas away" (a yojanas being about 7 miles), corresponding to the distance between the center of India and Greece (roughly 4,000 miles).<sup>[89]</sup>

## **Decline**<sup>[[edit](#)]</sup>

Ashoka was followed for 50 years by a succession of weaker kings. He was succeeded by [Dasharatha Maurya](#), who was Ashoka's grandson. None of Ashoka's sons could ascend the throne after him. Mahendra, his first born, was on to spread [Buddhism](#) in the world. [Kunala Maurya](#) was blind hence couldn't ascend the throne and Tivala, son of Kaurwaki, died even earlier than Ashoka. Another son, Jalauka, does not have much story behind him.

The empire lost many territories under Dasharatha, which were later reconquered by [Samprati](#), Kunala's son. Post Samprati, the Mauryas slowly lost many territories. In 180 BCE, [Brihadratha Maurya](#), was killed by his general [Pushyamitra Shunga](#) in a military parade without any heir. Hence, the great Maurya empire finally ended, giving rise to the [Shunga Empire](#).

Reasons advanced for the decline include the succession of weak kings after Aśoka Maurya, the partition of the empire into two, the growing independence of some areas within the empire, such as that ruled by [Sophagasenus](#), a top-heavy administration where authority was entirely in the hands of a few persons, an absence of any national consciousness,<sup>[90]</sup> the pure scale of the empire making it unwieldy, and invasion by the [Greco-Bactrian Empire](#).

Some historians, such as [H. C. Raychaudhuri](#), have argued that Ashoka's pacifism undermined the "military backbone" of the Maurya empire. Others, such as [Romila Thapar](#), have suggested that the extent and impact of his pacifism have been "grossly exaggerated".<sup>[91]</sup>

### **Shunga coup (185 BCE)**[\[edit\]](#)

Buddhist records such as the [Ashokavadana](#) write that the assassination of Brihadratha and the rise of the Shunga empire led to a wave of religious persecution for [Buddhists](#),<sup>[92]</sup> and a resurgence of [Hinduism](#). According to [Sir John Marshall](#),<sup>[93]</sup> Pushyamitra may have been the main author of the persecutions, although later Shunga kings seem to have been more supportive of Buddhism. Other historians, such as [Etienne Lamotte](#)<sup>[94]</sup> and [Romila Thapar](#),<sup>[95]</sup> among others, have argued that archaeological evidence in favour of the allegations of persecution of Buddhists are lacking, and that the extent and magnitude of the atrocities have been exaggerated.

### **Establishment of the Indo-Greek Kingdom (180 BCE)**[\[edit\]](#)

*Main article: [Indo-Greek Kingdom](#)*

The fall of the Mauryas left the [Khyber Pass](#) unguarded, and a wave of foreign invasion followed. The [Greco-Bactrian](#) king, [Demetrius](#), capitalized on the break-up, and he conquered southern Afghanistan and parts of northwestern India around 180 BCE, forming the [Indo-Greek Kingdom](#). The Indo-Greeks would maintain holdings on the trans-Indus region, and make forays into central India, for about a century. Under them, Buddhism flourished, and one of their kings, [Menander](#), became a famous figure of Buddhism; he was to establish a new capital of Sagala, the modern city of [Sialkot](#). However, the extent of their domains and the lengths of their rule are subject to much debate. Numismatic evidence indicates that they retained holdings in the subcontinent right up to the birth of Christ. Although the extent of their successes against indigenous powers such as the [Shungas](#), [Satavahanas](#), and [Kalingas](#) are unclear, what is clear is that Scythian tribes, renamed [Indo-Scythians](#), brought about the demise of the Indo-Greeks from around 70 BCE and retained lands in the trans-Indus, the region of [Mathura](#), and Gujarat.<sup>[[citation needed](#)]</sup>

Military[[edit](#)]

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Megasthenes mentions military command consisting of six boards of five members each, (i) [Navy](#) (ii) military transport (iii) [Infantry](#) (iv) [Cavalry](#) with [Catapults](#)(v) [Chariot divisions](#) and (vi) [Elephants](#).<sup>[96]</sup>

The Empire was divided into four provinces, with the imperial capital at [Pataliputra](#). From Ashokan edicts, the names of the four provincial capitals are [Tosali](#) (in the east), [Ujjain](#) (in the west), [Suvarnagiri](#) (in the south), and [Taxila](#) (in the north). The head of the provincial administration was the *Kumara* (royal prince), who governed the provinces as king's representative. The *kumara* was assisted by Mahamatyas and council of ministers. This organizational structure was reflected at the imperial level with the Emperor and

his *Mantriparishad* (Council of Ministers).<sup>[citation needed]</sup> The Mauryans established a well developed coin minting system. Coins were mostly made of silver and copper. Certain gold coins were in circulation as well. The coins were widely used for trade and commerce<sup>[97]</sup>

Historians theorise that the organisation of the Empire was in line with the extensive bureaucracy described by [Kautilya](#) in the [Arthashastra](#): a sophisticated civil service governed everything from municipal hygiene to international trade. The expansion and defense of the empire was made possible by what appears to have been one of the largest armies in the world during the [Iron Age](#).<sup>[98]</sup> According to Megasthenes, the empire wielded a military of 600,000 infantry, 30,000 cavalry, 8,000 chariots and 9,000 war elephants besides followers and attendants.<sup>[99]</sup> A vast [espionage](#) system collected intelligence for both internal and external security purposes. Having renounced offensive warfare and expansionism, Ashoka nevertheless continued to maintain this large army, to protect the Empire and instil stability and peace across West and South Asia.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> Even though large parts were under the control of Mauryan empire the spread of information and imperial message was limited since many parts were inaccessible and were situated far away from capital of empire.<sup>[100]</sup>

### **Local government**<sup>[edit]</sup>

[Arthashastra](#) and [Megasthenes](#) accounts of [Pataliputra](#) describe the intricate municipal system formed by Maurya empire to govern its cities. A city council made up of thirty commissioners was divided into six committees or boards which governed the city. The first board fixed wages and looked after provided goods, second board made arrangement for foreign dignitaries, tourists and businessmen, third board made records and registrations, fourth looked after manufactured goods and sale of commodities, fifth board regulated trade, issued licenses and checked weights and measurements, sixth board collected sales taxes. Some cities such as Taxila had autonomy to

issue their own coins. The city counsel had officers who looked after public welfare such as maintenance of roads, public buildings, markets, hospitals, educational institutions etc.<sup>[101]</sup> The official head of the village was Gramika (in towns [Nagarika](#)).<sup>[102]</sup> The city counsel also had some magisterial powers.

## Economy

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For the first time in [South Asia](#), political unity and military security allowed for a common economic system and enhanced trade and commerce, with increased agricultural productivity. The previous situation involving hundreds of kingdoms, many small armies, powerful regional chieftains, and internecine warfare, gave way to a disciplined central authority. Farmers were freed of tax and crop collection burdens from regional kings, paying instead to a nationally administered and strict-but-fair system of taxation as advised by the principles in the *Arthashastra*. Chandragupta Maurya established a single currency across India, and a network of regional governors and administrators and a civil service provided justice and security for merchants, farmers and traders. The Mauryan army wiped out many gangs of bandits, regional private armies, and powerful chieftains who sought to impose their own supremacy in small areas. Although regimental in revenue collection, Maurya also sponsored many public works and waterways to enhance productivity, while internal trade in India expanded greatly due to new-found political unity and internal peace.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

Under the Indo-Greek friendship treaty, and during Ashoka's reign, an international network of trade expanded. The [Khyber Pass](#), on the modern boundary of [Pakistan](#) and [Afghanistan](#), became a strategically important port of trade and intercourse with the outside world. Greek states and Hellenic kingdoms in West Asia became important trade partners of India. Trade also extended through the [Malay peninsula](#) into Southeast Asia. India's exports included silk goods and textiles,



spices and exotic foods. The external world came across new scientific knowledge and technology with expanding trade with the Mauryan Empire. Ashoka also sponsored the construction of thousands of roads, waterways, canals, hospitals, rest-houses and other public works. The easing of many over-rigorous administrative practices, including those regarding taxation and crop collection, helped increase productivity and economic activity across the Empire.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

In many ways, the economic situation in the Mauryan Empire is analogous to the Roman Empire of several centuries later. Both had extensive trade connections and both had organizations similar to [corporations](#). While Rome had organizational entities which were largely used for public state-driven projects, Mauryan India had numerous private commercial entities. These existed purely for private commerce and developed before the Mauryan Empire itself.<sup>[103][unreliable source?]</sup>

Religion<sup>[edit]</sup>

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In the early period of empire Hinduism was an important religion.<sup>[105]</sup> The Mauryans favored a multi religion society. Minor religious sects such as ajivikas also received patronage.

## **Jainism**

Chandragupta Maurya embraced [Jainism](#) after retiring, when he renounced his throne and material possessions to join a wandering group of Jain monks. Chandragupta was a disciple of the Jain monk [Acharya Bhadrabahu](#). It is said that in his last days, he observed the rigorous but self-purifying Jain ritual of [santhara](#) (fast unto death), at [Shravana Belgola](#) in [Karnataka](#).<sup>[106][67][107][66]</sup> [Samprati](#), the grandson of [Ashoka](#), also patronized Jainism. Samprati was influenced by the teachings of Jain monks like [Suhastin](#) and he is said to have built

125,000 [derasars](#) across India.<sup>[108]</sup> Some of them are still found in the towns of Ahmedabad, Viramgam, Ujjain, and Palitana.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> It is also said that just like Ashoka, Samprati sent messengers and preachers to [Greece](#), [Persia](#) and the [Middle East](#) for the spread of Jainism, but, to date, no research has been done in this area.<sup>[109][110]</sup>

Thus, Jainism became a vital force under the Mauryan Rule. Chandragupta and Samprati are credited for the spread of Jainism in [South India](#). Hundreds of thousands of temples and stupas are said to have been erected during their reigns

[Magadha](#), the centre of the empire, was also the birthplace of [Buddhism](#). Ashoka initially practised Hinduism<sup>[citation needed]</sup> but later embraced Buddhism; following the [Kalinga War](#), he renounced expansionism and aggression, and the harsher injunctions of the [Arthashastra](#) on the use of force, intensive policing, and ruthless measures for tax collection and against rebels. Ashoka sent a mission led by his son [Mahinda](#) and daughter [Sanghamitta](#) to [Sri Lanka](#), whose king [Tissa](#) was so charmed with Buddhist ideals that he adopted them himself and made Buddhism the state religion. Ashoka sent many Buddhist missions to [West Asia](#), [Greece](#) and [South East Asia](#), and commissioned the construction of monasteries and schools, as well as the publication of Buddhist literature across the empire. He is believed to have built as many as 84,000 stupas across India, such as [Sanchi](#) and [Mahabodhi Temple](#), and he increased the popularity of Buddhism in [Afghanistan](#), [Thailand](#) and [North Asia](#) including [Siberia](#). Ashoka helped convene the [Third Buddhist Council](#) of India's and South Asia's Buddhist orders near his capital, a council that undertook much work of reform and expansion of the Buddhist religion. Indian merchants embraced Buddhism and played a large role in spreading the religion across the Mauryan Empire.<sup>[111]</sup>

Architectural

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The greatest monument of this period, executed in the reign of [Chandragupta Maurya](#), was the old palace at Paliputra, modern [Kumhrar](#) in [Patna](#). Excavations have unearthed the remains of the palace, which is thought to have been an group of several buildings, the most important of which was an immense pillared hall supported on a high substratum of timbers. The pillars were set in regular rows, thus dividing the hall into a number of smaller square bays. The number of columns is 80, each about 7 meters high. According to the eyewitness account of [Megasthenes](#), the palace was chiefly constructed of timber, and was considered to exceed in splendour and magnificence the palaces of Susa and Ecbatana, its gilded pillars being adorned with golden vines and silver birds. The buildings stood in an extensive park studded with fish ponds and furnished with a great variety of ornamental trees and shrubs.<sup>[112][*better source needed*]</sup> Kautilya's [Arthashastra](#) also gives the method of palace construction from this period. Later fragments of stone pillars, including one nearly complete, with their round tapering shafts and smooth polish, indicate that Ashoka was responsible for the construction of the stone columns which replaced the earlier wooden ones.<sup>[*citation needed*]</sup>

During the Ashokan period, stonework was of a highly diversified order and comprised lofty free-standing pillars, railings of [stupas](#), lion thrones and other colossal figures. The use of stone had reached such great perfection during this time that even small fragments of stone art were given a high lustrous polish resembling fine enamel. This period marked the beginning of the Buddhist school of architecture. Ashoka was responsible for the construction of several [stupas](#), which were large domes and bearing symbols of Buddha. The most important ones are located at [Sanchi](#), [Bharhut](#), [Amaravati](#), [Bodhgaya](#) and [Nagarjunakonda](#). The most widespread examples

of Mauryan architecture are the [Ashoka pillars](#) and carved edicts of Ashoka, often exquisitely decorated, with more than 40 spread throughout the [Indian subcontinent](#).<sup>[113]</sup><sup>[*better source needed*]</sup>

The protection of animals in India was advocated by the time of the Maurya dynasty; being the first empire to provide a unified political entity in India, the attitude of the Mauryas towards forests, their denizens, and fauna in general is of interest.<sup>[116]</sup>

The Mauryas firstly looked at forests as resources. For them, the most important forest product was the elephant. Military might in those times depended not only upon horses and men but also [battle-elephants](#); these played a role in the defeat of [Seleucus](#), one of [Alexander's](#) former generals. The Mauryas sought to preserve supplies of elephants since it was cheaper and took less time to catch, tame and train wild elephants than to raise them. [Kautilya's](#) *Arthashastra* contains not only maxims on ancient statecraft, but also unambiguously specifies the responsibilities of officials such as the *Protector of the Elephant Forests*.<sup>[117]</sup>

On the border of the forest, he should establish a forest for elephants guarded by foresters. The Office of the Chief Elephant Forester should with the help of guards protect the elephants in any terrain. The slaying of an elephant is punishable by death.

—[Arthashastra](#)

The Mauryas also designated separate forests to protect supplies of timber, as well as lions and tigers for skins. Elsewhere the *Protector of Animals* also worked to eliminate thieves, tigers and other predators to render the woods safe for grazing cattle.<sup>[*citation needed*]</sup>

The Mauryas valued certain forest tracts in strategic or economic terms and instituted curbs and control measures over them. They regarded all forest tribes with distrust and controlled them

with bribery and political subjugation. They employed some of them, the food-gatherers or *aranyaca* to guard borders and trap animals. The sometimes tense and conflict-ridden relationship nevertheless enabled the Mauryas to guard their vast empire.<sup>[118]</sup>

When [Ashoka](#) embraced [Buddhism](#) in the latter part of his reign, he brought about significant changes in his style of governance, which included providing protection to fauna, and even relinquished the royal hunt. He was the first ruler in history<sup>[failed verification]</sup> to advocate [conservation](#) measures for wildlife and even had rules inscribed in stone edicts. The edicts proclaim that many followed the king's example in giving up the slaughter of animals; one of them proudly states:<sup>[118]</sup>

Our king killed very few animals.

— [Edict on Fifth Pillar](#)

However, the edicts of Ashoka reflect more the desire of rulers than actual events; the mention of a 100 'panas' (coins) fine for poaching deer in royal hunting preserves shows that rule-breakers did exist. The legal restrictions conflicted with the practices freely exercised by the common people in hunting, felling, fishing and setting fires in forests.<sup>[118]</sup>

### **Foundation of the Empire**[\[edit\]](#)

Relations with the Hellenistic world may have started from the very beginning of the Maurya Empire. [Plutarch](#) reports that Chandragupta Maurya met with [Alexander the Great](#), probably around [Taxila](#) in the northwest:<sup>[119]</sup>

Sandrocottus, when he was a stripling, saw Alexander himself, and we are told that he often said in later times that Alexander narrowly missed making himself master of the country, since its king was hated and despised on account of his baseness and low birth.

— *Plutarch* 62-4<sup>[120][119]</sup>

### **Reconquest of the Northwest (c. 317–316 BCE)**<sup>[edit]</sup>

Chandragupta ultimately occupied Northwestern India, in the territories formerly ruled by the Greeks, where he fought the satraps (described as "Prefects" in Western sources) left in place after Alexander (Justin), among whom may have been [Eudemus](#), ruler in the western Punjab until his departure in 317 BCE or [Peithon, son of Agenor](#), ruler of the Greek colonies along the Indus until his departure for [Babylon](#) in 316 BCE.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

India, after the death of Alexander, had assassinated his prefects, as if shaking the burden of servitude. The author of this liberation was Sandracottos, but he had transformed liberation in servitude after victory, since, after taking the throne, he himself oppressed the very people he has liberated from foreign domination.

— *Justin* XV.4.12–13<sup>[121]</sup>

Later, as he was preparing war against the prefects of Alexander, a huge wild elephant went to him and took him on his back as if tame, and he became a remarkable fighter and war leader. Having thus acquired royal power, Sandracottos possessed India at the time Seleucos was preparing future glory.

<sup>[122]</sup>

[Seleucus I Nicator](#), the Macedonian [satrap](#) of the [Asian](#) portion of Alexander's former empire, conquered and put under his own authority eastern territories as far as Bactria and the Indus ([Appian](#), *History of Rome*, The Syrian Wars 55), until in 305 BCE he entered into a confrontation with Emperor Chandragupta:

Always lying in wait for the neighbouring nations, strong in arms and persuasive in council, he [Seleucus] acquired Mesopotamia, Armenia, 'Seleucid' Cappadocia, Persis, Parthia, Bactria, Arabia, Tapouria, Sogdia, Arachosia, Hyrcania, and other adjacent peoples that had been subdued by Alexander, as far as the river Indus, so that the boundaries of his empire were the most extensive in Asia after that of Alexander. The whole region from Phrygia to the Indus was subject to Seleucus.

— [Appian](#), *History of Rome, "The Syrian Wars"* 55<sup>[123]</sup>

Though no accounts of the conflict remain, it is clear that Seleucus fared poorly against the Indian Emperor as he failed to conquer any territory, and in fact was forced to surrender much that was already his. Regardless, Seleucus and Chandragupta ultimately reached a settlement and through a treaty sealed in 305 BCE, Seleucus, according to Strabo, ceded a number of territories to Chandragupta, including eastern [Afghanistan](#) and [Balochistan](#).<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

### **Marriage alliance**<sup>[edit]</sup>

Chandragupta and [Seleucus](#) concluded a peace treaty and a marriage alliance in 303 BCE. Chandragupta received vast territories and in a return gave Seleucus 500 [war elephants](#),<sup>[124][125][126][127][128]</sup> a military asset which would play a decisive role at the [Battle of Ipsus](#) in 301 BCE.<sup>[129]</sup> In addition to this treaty, Seleucus dispatched an ambassador, [Megasthenes](#), to Chandragupta, and later [Deimakos](#) to his son [Bindusara](#), at the Mauryan court at [Pataliputra](#) (modern [Patna](#) in [Bihar](#)). Later, [Ptolemy II Philadelphus](#), the ruler of [Ptolemaic Egypt](#) and contemporary of [Ashoka](#), is also recorded by [Pliny the Elder](#) as having sent an ambassador named [Dionysius](#) to the Mauryan court.<sup>[130][better source needed]</sup>

Mainstream scholarship asserts that Chandragupta received vast territory west of the Indus, including the [Hindu Kush](#), modern-day [Afghanistan](#), and the [Balochistan](#) province of [Pakistan](#).<sup>[131][132]</sup> Archaeologically, concrete indications of Mauryan rule, such as the inscriptions of the [Edicts of Ashoka](#), are known as far as [Kandahar](#) in southern Afghanistan.

He (Seleucus) crossed the Indus and waged war with Sandrocottus [Maurya], king of the Indians, who dwelt on the banks of that stream, until they came to an understanding with each other and contracted a marriage relationship.

— [Appian](#), *History of Rome, The Syrian Wars* [55](#)

After having made a treaty with him (Sandrakotos) and put in order the Orient situation, Seleucos went to war against [Antigonus](#).

— [Junianus Justinus](#), *Historiarum Philippicarum, libri XLIV, XV.4.15*

The treaty on "[Epigamia](#)" implies lawful marriage between Greeks and Indians was recognized at the State level, although it is unclear whether it occurred among dynastic rulers or common people, or both.<sup>[[citation needed](#)]</sup>

### **Exchange of presents**[\[edit\]](#)

Classical sources have also recorded that following their treaty, Chandragupta and Seleucus exchanged presents, such as when Chandragupta sent various [aphrodisiacs](#) to Seleucus:<sup>[73]</sup>

And Theophrastus says that some contrivances are of wondrous efficacy in such matters [as to make people more amorous]. And Phylarchus confirms him, by reference to some of the presents which Sandrakottus, the king of the Indians, sent to Seleucus; which were to act like charms in producing a wonderful degree of affection, while some, on the contrary, were to banish love.



—[Athenaeus of Naucratis, \*The deipnosophists\*, Book I, chapter 32](#)<sup>[133]</sup>

His son [Bindusara](#) 'Amitraghata' (Slayer of Enemies) also is recorded in Classical sources as having exchanged presents with [Antiochus I](#):<sup>[73]</sup>

But dried figs were so very much sought after by all men (for really, as [Aristophanes](#) says, "There's really nothing nicer than dried figs"), that even Amirochates, the king of the Indians, wrote to [Antiochus](#), entreating him (it is [Hegesander](#) who tells this story) to buy and send him some sweet wine, and some dried figs, and a [sophist](#); and that Antiochus wrote to him in answer, "The dry figs and the sweet wine we will send you; but it is not lawful for a sophist to be sold in Greece.

—[Athenaeus, \*Deipnosophistae\* XIV.67](#)<sup>[134]</sup>

An influential and large Greek population was present in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent under Ashoka's rule, possibly remnants of Alexander's conquests in the Indus Valley region. In the [Rock Edicts of Ashoka](#), some of them inscribed in Greek, Ashoka states that the Greeks within his dominion were converted to Buddhism:

Here in the king's dominion among the [Greeks](#), the [Kambojas](#), the Nabhakas, the Nabhapamkites, the Bhojas, the Pitinikas, the [Andhras](#) and the Palidas, everywhere people are following Beloved-of-the-Gods' instructions in [Dharma](#).

—([Rock Edict Number 13](#))

Now, in times past (officers) called [Mahamatras](#) of morality did not exist before. Mahamatras of morality were appointed by me (when I had been) anointed thirteen years. These are occupied with all sects in establishing morality, in promoting morality, and for the welfare and happiness

of those who are devoted to morality (even) among the [Greeks](#), [Kambojas](#) and [Gandharas](#), and whatever other western borderers (of mine there are).

— ([Rock Edict Number 5](#))

Fragments of Edict 13 have been found in Greek, and a full Edict, written in both Greek and Aramaic, has been discovered in [Kandahar](#). It is said to be written in excellent Classical Greek, using sophisticated philosophical terms. In this Edict, Ashoka uses the word [Eusebeia](#) ("[Piety](#)") as the Greek translation for the ubiquitous "[Dharma](#)" of his other Edicts written in [Prakrit](#).<sup>[*non-primary source needed*]</sup>

Ten years (of reign) having been completed, King Piodasses (Ashoka) made known (the doctrine of) Piety (*εὐσέβεια*, [Eusebeia](#)) to men; and from this moment he has made men more pious, and everything thrives throughout the whole world. And the king abstains from (killing) living beings, and other men and those who (are) huntsmen and fishermen of the king have desisted from hunting. And if some (were) intemperate, they have ceased from their intemperance as was in their power; and obedient to their father and mother and to the elders, in opposition to the past also in the future, by so acting on every occasion, they will live better and more happily.

Also, in the [Edicts of Ashoka](#), Ashoka mentions the Hellenistic kings of the period as recipients of his [Buddhist](#) proselytism, although no Western historical record of this event remains:

The conquest by [Dharma](#) has been won here, on the borders, and even six hundred [yojanas](#) (5,400–9,600 km) away, where the Greek king [Antiochos](#) rules, beyond there where the four kings named [Ptolemy](#), [Antigonos](#), [Magas](#) and [Alexander](#) rule, likewise in the south among the [Cholas](#), the [Pandyas](#), and as far as [Tamraparni](#) ([Sri Lanka](#)).

— [Edicts of Ashoka](#), 13th Rock Edict, S. Dhammika.<sup>[*non-primary source needed*]</sup>

Ashoka also encouraged the development of [herbal medicine](#), for men and animals, in their territories:

Everywhere within Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi's [Ashoka's] domain, and among the people beyond the borders, the [Cholas](#), the [Pandyas](#), the Satiyaputras, the Keralaputras, as far as [Tamraparni](#) and where the Greek king [Antiochos](#) rules, and among the kings who are neighbors of Antiochos, everywhere has Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, made provision for two types of medical treatment: medical treatment for humans and medical treatment for animals. Wherever medical herbs suitable for humans or animals are not available, I have had them imported and grown. Wherever medical roots or fruits are not available I have had them imported and grown. Along roads I have had wells dug and trees planted for the benefit of humans and animals.

— [2nd Rock Edict](#)<sup>[*non-primary source needed*]</sup>

The Greeks in India even seem to have played an active role in the spread of Buddhism, as some of the emissaries of Ashoka, such as [Dharmaraksita](#), are described in [Pali](#) sources as leading Greek ("[Yona](#)") Buddhist monks, active in Buddhist proselytism (the [Mahavamsa](#), XII<sup>[138]</sup><sup>[*non-primary source needed*]</sup>).

**[Subhagasena and Antiochos III \(206 BCE\)](#)**<sup>[*edit*]</sup>

[Sophagasenus](#) was an Indian [Mauryan](#) ruler of the 3rd century BCE, described in ancient Greek sources, and named Subhagasena or Subhashasena in [Prakrit](#). His name is mentioned in the list of Mauryan princes,<sup>[*citation needed*]</sup> and also in the list of the Yadava dynasty, as a descendant of Pradyumna. He may have been a grandson of [Ashoka](#), or [Kunala](#), the son of Ashoka. He ruled an area south of the [Hindu Kush](#), possibly in [Gandhara](#). [Antiochos III](#), the [Seleucid](#) king, after

having made peace with [Euthydemus](#) in [Bactria](#), went to India in 206 BCE and is said to have renewed his friendship with the Indian king there:

He (Antiochus) crossed the Caucasus and descended into India; renewed his friendship with Sophagasenus the king of the Indians; received more elephants, until he had a hundred and fifty altogether; and having once more provisioned his troops, set out again personally with his army: leaving Androstenes of Cyzicus the duty of taking home the treasure which this king had agreed to hand over to him.

— *[Polybius 11.39](#)*<sup>[*non-primary source needed*]</sup>

Timeline[[edit](#)]

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- 322 BCE: Chandragupta Maurya founded the Mauryan Empire by defeating the Nanda Dynasty.
- 317–316 BCE: Chandragupta Maurya conquers the Northwest of the Indian subcontinent.
- 305–303 BCE: Chandragupta Maurya gains territory from the Seleucid Empire.
- 298–269 BCE: Reign of Bindusara, Chandragupta's son. He conquers parts of Deccan, southern India.
- 269–232 BCE: The Mauryan Empire reaches its height under Ashoka, Chandragupta's grandson.
- 261 BCE: Ashoka conquers the kingdom of Kalinga.
- 250 BCE: Ashoka builds Buddhist stupas and erects pillars bearing inscriptions.

- 184 BCE: The empire collapses when Brihadratha, the last emperor, is killed by [Pushyamitra Shunga](#), a Mauryan general and the founder of the [Shunga Empire](#).

## Shunga

The **Shunga Empire** (IAST: *Śuṅga*) was an ancient Indian dynasty from [Magadha](#) that controlled areas of the central and eastern [Indian subcontinent](#) from around 185 to 75 BCE. The dynasty was established by [Pushyamitra Shunga](#), after the fall of the [Maurya Empire](#). Its capital was [Pataliputra](#), but later emperors such as [Bhagabhadra](#) also held court at Besnagar (modern [Vidisha](#)) in eastern [Malwa](#).<sup>[1]</sup>

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Pushyamitra Shunga ruled for 36 years and was succeeded by his son [Agnimitra](#). There were ten Shunga rulers. However, after the death of Agnimitra, the second king of the dynasty, the empire rapidly disintegrated.<sup>[2]</sup> inscriptions and coins indicate that much of northern and central India consisted of small kingdoms and city-states that were independent of any Shunga hegemony.<sup>[3]</sup> The dynasty is noted for its numerous wars with both foreign and indigenous powers. They fought the [Kalinga](#), the [Satavahana dynasty](#), the [Indo-Greek Kingdom](#) and possibly the [Panchalas](#) and [Mitrans of Mathura](#).

Art, education, philosophy, and other forms of learning flourished during this period including small terracotta images, larger stone sculptures, and architectural monuments such as the stupa at [Bharhut](#), and the renowned Great Stupa at [Sanchi](#). Shunga rulers helped to establish the tradition of royal sponsorship of learning and art. The script used by the empire was a variant of [Brahmi script](#) and was used to write [Sanskrit](#).

The Shunga Empire played an imperative role in patronising culture at a time when some of the most important developments in [Hindu](#) thought were taking place. [Patanjali's Mahābhāṣya](#) was composed in this period. Artistry also progressed with the rise of the Mathura art style.

The last of the Shunga emperors was [Devabhuti](#) (83–73 BCE). He was assassinated by his minister ([Vasudeva Kanva](#)) and is said to have been overfond of the company of women. The Shunga dynasty was then replaced by the subsequent [Kanvas](#). The [Kanva dynasty](#) succeeded the Shungas around 73 BCE.



The Shunga dynasty was a [Brahmin](#) dynasty,<sup>[4]</sup> established in 185 BCE, about 50 years after [Ashoka's](#) death, when the emperor [Brihadratha Maurya](#), the last ruler of the [Maurya Empire](#), was assassinated by his *Senānī* or [commander-in-chief](#), [Pushyamitra Shunga](#),<sup>[5]</sup> while he was reviewing the Guard of Honour of his forces. Pushyamitra Shunga then ascended the throne.<sup>[6]</sup>

Pushyamitra Shunga became the ruler of [Magadha](#) and neighbouring territories. His realm essentially covered the central parts of the old [Mauryan Empire](#).<sup>[7]</sup> The Shunga definitely had control of the central city of [Ayodhya](#) in northern central India, as is proved by the [Dhanadeva-Ayodhya inscription](#).<sup>[7]</sup> However, the city of [Mathura](#) further west never seems to have been under the direct control of the Shungas, as no archaeological evidence of a Shunga presence has ever been found in Mathura.<sup>[8]</sup> On the contrary, according to the [Yavanarajya inscription](#), Mathura was probably under the control of [Indo-Greeks](#) from some time between 180 BCE and 100 BCE, and remained so as late as 70 BCE.<sup>[8]</sup>

Some ancient sources however claim a greater extent for the Shunga Empire: the [Asokavadana](#) account of the [Divyavadana](#) claims that the Shungas sent an army to persecute Buddhist monks as far as [Sakala](#) ([Sialkot](#)) in the [Punjab region](#) in the northwest:

... Pushyamitra equipped a fourfold army, and intending to destroy the Buddhist religion, he went to the [Kukkutarama](#) (in [Pataliputra](#)). ... Pushyamitra therefore destroyed the [sangharama](#), killed the monks there, and departed. ... After some time, he arrived in [Sakala](#), and proclaimed that he would give a ... reward to whoever brought him the head of a Buddhist monk.<sup>[9]:293</sup>

Also, the [Malavikagnimitra](#) claims that the empire of Pushyamitra extended to the [Narmada River](#) in the south. They may also have controlled the city of [Ujjain](#).<sup>[7]</sup> Meanwhile, [Kabul](#) and much of the Punjab passed into the hands of the [Indo-Greeks](#) and the [Deccan Plateau](#) to the [Satavahana dynasty](#).

Pushyamitra died after ruling for 36 years (187–151 BCE). He was succeeded by son [Agnimitra](#). This prince is the hero of a famous drama by one of India's greatest playwrights, [Kālidāsa](#). Agnimitra was viceroy of Vidisha when the story takes place.

The power of the Shungas gradually weakened. It is said that there were ten Shunga emperors. The Shungas were succeeded by the [Kanva dynasty](#) around 73 BCE.

## Buddhism

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Following the Mauryans, the first [Brahmin](#) emperor was Pushyamitra Shunga, and is believed by some historians to have persecuted Buddhists and contributed to a resurgence of [Brahmanism](#) that forced Buddhism outwards to [Kashmir](#), [Gandhara](#) and [Bactria](#).<sup>[10]</sup> Buddhist scripture such as the [Asokavadana](#) account of the [Divyavadana](#) and ancient Tibetan historian [Taranatha](#) have written about persecution of Buddhists. Pushyamitra is said to have

burned down Buddhist monasteries, destroyed stupas, massacred Buddhist monks and put rewards on their heads, but some consider these stories as probable exaggerations.<sup>[10][11]</sup>

"... Pushyamitra equipped a fourfold army, and intending to destroy the Buddhist religion, he went to the [Kukkutarama](#). ... Pushyamitra therefore destroyed the [sangharama](#), killed the monks there, and departed. ... After some time, he arrived in [Sakala](#), and proclaimed that he would give a ... reward to whoever brought him the head of a Buddhist monk."

— [Asokavadana](#) account of the [Divyavadana](#)<sup>[12]:293</sup>

Indian [Puranic](#) sources also, such as the [Pratisarga Parva](#) of the [Bhavishya Purana](#), describe the resurgence of Brahmanism following the [Maurya Dynasty](#), and the killing of millions of Buddhists:

"At this time (after the rule of [Chandragupta](#), [Bindusara](#) and [Ashoka](#)) the best of the [brahmanas](#), Kanyakubja, performed sacrifice on the top of a mountain named Arbuda. By the influence of [Vedic](#) mantras, four [Kshatriyas](#) appeared from the [yajna](#) (sacrifice). (...) They kept Ashoka under their control and annihilated all the Buddhists. It is said there were 4 million Buddhists and all of them were killed by uncommon weapons".

— [Pratisarga Parva](#)<sup>[13]</sup>

Pushyamitra is known to have revived the supremacy of the [Bramahnic](#) religion and reestablished animal sacrifices ([Yajnas](#)) that had been prohibited by [Ashoka](#).<sup>[11]</sup>

Later Shunga emperors were seen as amenable to Buddhism and as having contributed to the building of the stupa at [Bharhut](#).<sup>[14]</sup> During his reign the buddhist monuments of [Bharhut](#) and [Sanchi](#) were renovated and further improved. There is enough evidence to show that [Pushyamitra](#) patronised buddhist art.<sup>[15]</sup> However, given the rather decentralised and



fragmentary nature of the Shunga state, with many cities actually issuing their own coinage, as well as the relative dislike of the Shungas for the Buddhist religion, some authors argue that the constructions of that period in [Sanchi](#) for example cannot really be called "Shunga". They were not the result of royal sponsorship, in contrast with what happened during the Mauryas, and most of the dedications at Sanchi were private or collective, rather than the result of royal patronage.<sup>[16]</sup>

Some writers believe that Brahmanism competed in political and spiritual realm with Buddhism<sup>[10]</sup> in the [Gangetic plains](#). Buddhism flourished in the realms of the Bactrian kings.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

Some Indian scholars are of the opinion that the orthodox Shunga emperors were not intolerant towards Buddhism and that Buddhism prospered during the time of the Shunga emperors. The existence of Buddhism in Bengal in the Shunga period can also be inferred from a terracotta tablet that was found at [Tamralipti](#) and is on exhibit at the [Asutosh Museum](#) in Kolkata.

### **Royal dedications**<sup>[edit]</sup>

Two dedication by a king [Brahmamitra](#) and a king Indragnimitra are recorded at the [Mahabodhi Temple](#) in [Bodh Gaya](#), and have been claimed to show Sunga support for Buddhism. These kings however are essentially unknown, and do not form a part of the Shunga recorded genealogy, but they are thought to be post-[Ashokan](#) and to belong to the period of Sunga rule.<sup>[17][18]</sup> A [Brahmamitra](#) is known otherwise as a local ruler of [Mathura](#), but Indragnimitra is unknown, and according to some authors, Indragnimitra is in fact not even mentioned as a king in the actual inscription.<sup>[18][19]</sup>

- An inscription at Bodh Gaya at the [Mahabodhi Temple](#) records the construction of the temple as follows:

*"The gift of Nagadevi the wife of King [Brahmamitra](#)."*

- Another inscription reads:

*"The gift of Kurangi, the mother of living sons and the wife of King Indragnimitra, son of Kosiki. The gift also of Srīma of the royal palace shrine.<sup>[20][21]</sup>"*

[Cunningham](#) has regretted the loss of the latter part of these important records. As regards the first coping inscription, he has found traces of eleven Brahmi letters after "*Kuramgiye danam*", the first nine of which read "*rajapasada-cetika sa*". Bloch reads these nine letters as "*raja-pasada-cetikasa*" and translates this expression in relation to the preceding words:

"(the gift of Kurangi, the wife of Indragnimitra and the mother of living sons), "to the caitya (cetika) of the noble temple", taking the word raja before pasada as an epithet on ornans, distinguishing the temple as a particularly large and stately building similar to such expressions as rajahastin 'a noble elephant', rajahamsa `a goose (as distinguished from hamsa 'a duck'), etc."

Cunningham has translated the expression by "the royal palace, the caitya", suggesting that "the mention of the raja-

pasada would seem to connect the donor with the king's family." Luders doubtfully suggests "to the king's temple" as a rendering of "raja-pasada-cetikasa."

### **Shunga period contributions in Sanchi**[\[edit\]](#)

*Main article:* [Sanchi](#)

On the basis of [Ashokavadana](#), it is presumed that the stupa may have been vandalised at one point sometime in the 2nd century BCE, an event some have related to the rise of the Shunga emperor Pushyamitra Shunga who overtook the Mauryan Empire as an army general. It has been suggested that Pushyamitra may have destroyed the original stupa, and his son [Agnimitra](#) rebuilt it.<sup>[22]</sup> The original brick stupa was covered with stone during the Shunga period.

### **Great Stupa (No 1)**[\[edit\]](#)

During the later rule of the Shunga, the stupa was expanded with stone slabs to almost twice its original size. The dome was flattened near the top and crowned by three superimposed parasols within a square railing. With its many tiers it was a symbol of the [dharma](#), the Wheel of the Law. The dome was set on a high circular drum meant for [circumambulation](#), which could be accessed via a double staircase. A second stone pathway at ground level was enclosed by a stone balustrade. The railing around Stupa 1 do not have artistic reliefs. These are only slabs, with some dedicatory inscriptions. These elements are dated to circa 150 BCE.<sup>[23]</sup>

### **Stupa No2 and Stupa No3**[\[edit\]](#)

The buildings which seem to have been commissioned during the rule of the Shungas are the Second and Third [stupas](#) (but not the highly decorated gateways, which are from the following [Satavahana](#) period, as known from inscriptions), and the ground balustrade and stone casing of the Great Stupa (Stupa No 1). The [Relics of Sariputra and Mahamoggallana](#) are said to have been placed in Stupa No 3.<sup>[24]</sup> These are dated to circa 115 BCE for the medallions, 80 BCE for the gateway carvings,<sup>[25]</sup> slightly after the reliefs of [Bharhut](#), with some reworks down to the 1st century CE.<sup>[23][25]</sup>

The style of the Shunga period decorations at Sanchi bear a close similarity to those of [Bharhut](#), as well as the peripheral balustrades at [Bodh Gaya](#), which are thought to be the oldest of the three.

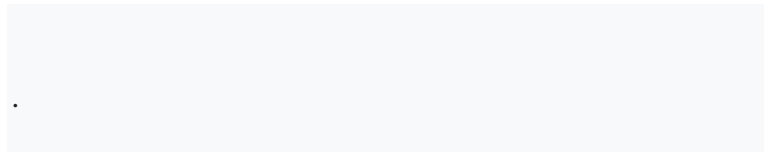
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War and conflict characterised the Shunga period. They are known to have warred with the [Kalingas](#), [Satavahanas](#), the [Indo-Greeks](#), and possibly the [Panchalas](#) and [Mathuras](#).<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

The Shunga Empire's wars with the Indo-Greek Kingdom figure greatly in the history of this period. From around 180 BCE the [Greco-Bactrian](#) ruler [Demetrius](#) conquered the Kabul Valley and is theorised to have advanced into the trans-Indus to confront the Shungas.<sup>[11]</sup> The Indo-

Greek [Menander I](#) is credited with either joining or leading a campaign to [Pataliputra](#) with other Indian rulers; however, very little is known about the exact nature and success of the campaign. The net result of these wars remains uncertain.<sup>[*citation needed*]</sup>



### **Literary evidence**<sup>[[edit](#)]</sup>

Several works, such as the [Mahabharata](#) and the [Yuga Purana](#) describe the conflict between the Shungas and the Indo-Greeks.

### **Military expeditions of the Shungas**<sup>[[edit](#)]</sup>

Scriptures such as the [Ashokavadana](#) claim that Pushyamitra toppled Emperor [Brahaditha](#) and killed many Buddhist monks.<sup>[28]</sup> Then it describes how Pushyamitra sent an army to [Pataliputra](#) and as far as Sakala ([Sialkot](#)), in the [Punjab](#), to persecute Buddhist monks.<sup>[29]</sup>

### **War with the Yavanas (Greeks)**<sup>[[edit](#)]</sup>

The [Indo-Greeks](#), called [Yavanas](#) in Indian sources, either led by [Demetrius I](#) or [Menander I](#), then invaded India, possibly receiving the help of Buddhists.<sup>[30]</sup> Menander in particular is described as a convert to Buddhism in the [Milindapanha](#).

The Hindu text of the [Yuga Purana](#), which describes Indian historical events in the form of a prophecy,<sup>[31][note 1]</sup> relates the attack of the Indo-Greeks on the Shunga capital [Pataliputra](#), a magnificent fortified city with 570 towers and 64 gates according to [Megasthenes](#),<sup>[33]</sup> and describes the impending war for city:

"Then, after having approached [Saketa](#) together with the [Panchalas](#) and the [Mathuras](#), the Yavanas, valiant in battle, will reach Kusumadhvaja ["the town of the flower-standard", [Pataliputra](#)]. Then, once Puspapura [another name of Pataliputra] has been reached and its celebrated mud[-walls] cast down, all the realm will be in disorder." (*Yuga Purana*, Paragraph 47–48, 2002 edition)

However, the Yuga Purana indicates that the Yavanas (Indo-Greeks) did not remain for long in Pataliputra, as they were faced with a civil war in [Bactria](#).

Western sources also suggest that this new offensive of the Greeks into India led them as far as the capital [Pataliputra](#).<sup>[34]</sup>

Those who came after [Alexander](#) went to the [Ganges](#) and [Pataliputra](#)

— *Strabo*, 15.698

### **Battle on the Sindhu river**<sup>[edit]</sup>

An account of a direct battle between the Greeks and the Shunga is also found in the *Mālavikāgnimitram*, a play by [Kālidāsa](#) which describes a battle between a squadron of Greek cavalymen and [Vasumitra](#), the grandson of [Pushyamitra](#), accompanied by a hundred soldiers on the "Sindhu river", in which the Indians defeated a squadron of Greeks and Pushyamitra successfully completed the [Ashvamedha](#) Yagna.<sup>[35]</sup> This river may be the [Indus river](#) in the northwest, but such expansion by the Shungas is unlikely, and it is more probable that the river mentioned in the text is the [Sindh River](#) or the [Kali Sindh River](#) in the [Ganges Basin](#).<sup>[36]</sup>

### **Epigraphic and archaeological evidence**<sup>[edit]</sup>

#### **Dhanadeva-Ayodhya inscription**<sup>[edit]</sup>

Ultimately, Shunga rule seems to have extended to the area of Ayodhya. Shunga inscriptions are known as far as [Ayodhya](#) in northern central India;<sup>[7]</sup> in particular, the [Dhanadeva-Ayodhya inscription](#) refers to a local king [Dhanadeva](#), who claimed to be the sixth descendant of Pushyamitra Shunga. The inscription also records that Pushyamitra performed two [Ashvamedhas](#) (victory sacrifices) in Ayodhya.<sup>[37]</sup>

The Greeks seem to have maintained control of Mathura. The [Yavanarajya inscription](#), also called the "Maghera inscription", discovered in [Mathura](#), suggests that the Indo-Greeks were in control of Mathura during the 1st century BCE.<sup>[38][39]</sup> The inscription is important in that it mentions the date of its dedication as "The last day of year 116 of [Yavana](#) hegemony (*Yavanarajya*)". It is considered that this inscription is attesting the control of the [Indo-Greeks](#) in the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE in Mathura, a fact that is also confirmed by numismatic and literary evidence.<sup>[8]</sup> Moreover, it doesn't seem that the Shungas ever ruled in Mathura or [Surasena](#) since no Shunga coins or inscriptions have been found there.<sup>[8]</sup>

The [Anushasana Parva](#) of the [Mahabharata](#) affirms that the city of Mathura was under the joint control of the [Yavanas](#) and the [Kambojas](#).<sup>[40]</sup>

Later however, it seems the city of Mathura was retaken from them, if not by the Shungas themselves, then probably by other indigenous rulers such as the [Datta dynasty](#) or the [Mitra dynasty](#), or more probably by the [Indo-Scythian Northern Satraps](#) under [Rajuvula](#). In the region of Mathura, the [Arjunayanas](#) and [Yaudheyas](#) mention military



victories on their coins ("Victory of the Arjunayanas", "Victory of the Yaudheyas"), and during the 1st century BCE, the [Trigartas](#), [Audumbaras](#) and finally the [Kunindas](#) also started to mint their own coins, thus affirming independence from the Indo-Greeks, although the style of their coins was often derived from that of the Indo-Greeks.

Very little can be said with great certainty. However, what does appear clear is that the two realms appeared to have established normalised diplomatic relations in the succeeding reigns of their respective rulers. The Indo-Greeks and the Shungas seem to have reconciled and exchanged diplomatic missions around 110 BCE, as indicated by the [Heliodorus pillar](#), which records the dispatch of a Greek ambassador named [Heliodorus](#), from the court of the [Indo-Greek](#) king [Antialcidas](#), to the court of the Shunga emperor [Bhagabhadra](#) at the site of [Vidisha](#) in central [India](#).

Decline[[edit](#)]

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The last king of Sungas, [Devabhuti](#) was assassinated by his minister [Vasudeva Kanva](#), who then established [Kanva dynasty](#).<sup>[6]</sup> According to the Puranas: "The [Andhra Simuka](#) will assail the [Kanvayanas](#) and

Susarman, and destroy the remains of the Sungas' power and will obtain this earth."<sup>[41]</sup>

Art[[edit](#)]

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The Shunga art style differed somewhat from imperial [Mauryan art](#), which was influenced by [Persian art](#). In both, continuing elements of folk art and cults of the [Mother goddess](#) appear in popular art, but are now produced with more skill in more monumental forms. The Shunga style was thus seen as 'more Indian' and is often described as the more indigenous.<sup>[42]</sup>

Art, education, philosophy, and other learning flowered during this period. Most notably, Patanjali's Yoga Sutras and Mahabhashya were composed in this period. It is also noted for its subsequent mention in the *Malavikaagnimitra*. This work was composed by Kalidasa in the later Gupta period, and romanticised the love of Malavika and King Agnimitra, with a background of court intrigue.

Artistry on the subcontinent also progressed with the rise of the Mathura school, which is considered the indigenous counterpart to the more Hellenistic Gandhara school ([Greco-Buddhist art](#)) of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

During the historical Shunga period (185 to 73 BCE), Buddhist activity also managed to survive somewhat in central India ([Madhya Pradesh](#)) as suggested by some architectural expansions that were done at the [stupas](#) of [Sanchi](#) and [Bharhut](#), originally started under Emperor Ashoka. It remains uncertain whether these works were due to the weakness of the control of the Shungas in these areas, or a sign of tolerance on their part.

Script[[edit](#)]

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The script used by the Shunga was a variant of [Brahmi](#), and was used to write the Sanskrit language. The script is thought to be an intermediary between the [Maurya](#) and the [Kalinga](#) Brahmi scripts.<sup>[43]</sup>

List of Shunga Emperors[[edit](#)]

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Emperor	Reign <sup>[<a href="#">citation needed</a>]</sup>
<a href="#">Pushyamitra Shunga</a>	185–149 BCE
<a href="#">Agnimitra</a>	149–141 BCE

<u>Vasujyeshtha</u>	141–131 BCE
<u>Vasumitra</u>	131–124 BCE
Bhadra	124–122 BCE
Pulindaka	122–119 BCE
<u>Ghosha</u>	119–108 BCE
Vajramitra	108–94 BCE
<u>Bhagabhadra</u>	94–83 BCE
<u>Devabhuti</u>	83–73 BCE

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