

West meets East: At the Borders of the *Oikoumene* and Beyond

Lecture 4 – The Empire of the Maurya

CLAH6007

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Rise of Chandragupta Maurya

- Chandragupta, known as Sandrocottus (or sometimes Androcottus) in Graeco-Roman sources.
- The precise origin and caste status of Chandragupta varies in sources – possibly a son of member of the Nanda royal court
 - power of the Nandas (80,000 horsemen, 200,000 footmen, 8,000 chariots, and 6,000 fighting elephants- cf. **Plutarch *Alexander* 62.3.**).
- Became implicated in a plot with his Brahman mentor Chāṇakya - able to capture the capital Pataliputra in 321 BC?

“Androcottus, when he was a young man, 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 *Alexander* 62.9.**

Indian Satrapies

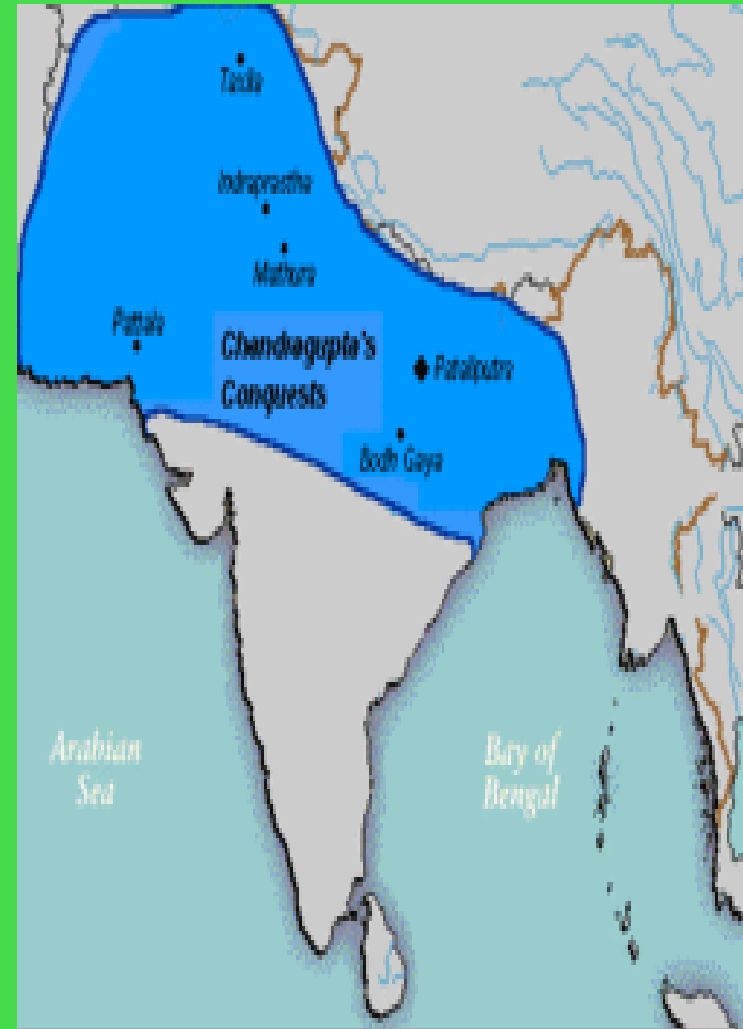
“... India, which, after the death of Alexander, had shaken, as it were, the yoke of servitude from its neck, and put his governors to death. The author of this liberation was Sandrocottus, who afterwards, however, turned their semblance of liberty into slavery; for, making himself king, he oppressed the people whom he had delivered from a foreign power, with a cruel tyranny. This man was of mean origin, but was stimulated to aspire to regal power by supernatural encouragement; for, having offended Alexander by his boldness of speech, and orders being given to kill him, he saved himself by swiftness of foot...” – **Justin 15.4.**



Peer to the Successor Kings

“Sandrocottus, having gained the throne in this way, took possession of India at the time when Seleucus was laying the foundations of his future greatness...” – **Justin *Epitome* 15.4.20.**

“...but often even listen with pleasure and voice their agreement, some, when the occasion allows, are in the habit of praising others whose aims and acts are the same as their own and whose general character is similar... Alexander by honouring Heracles, **and again Androcottus by honouring Alexander**, won esteem for themselves for similar merit...” – **Plutarch *On Praising Oneself Inoffensively* 542d.**



Seleucus and Chandragupta

- In 305 or 304 BC Seleucus I crosses over the Hindu Kush (more than 20 years after Alexander had done so) and entered the Indus valley.
- It is unclear whether a major pitched-battle was fought or, whom the might have been regarded as the victor.

“The whole region from Phrygia to the Indus was subject to Seleucus. He crossed the Indus and waged war with Sandrocottus, 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 Syr. 55.**

Terms of the Treaty

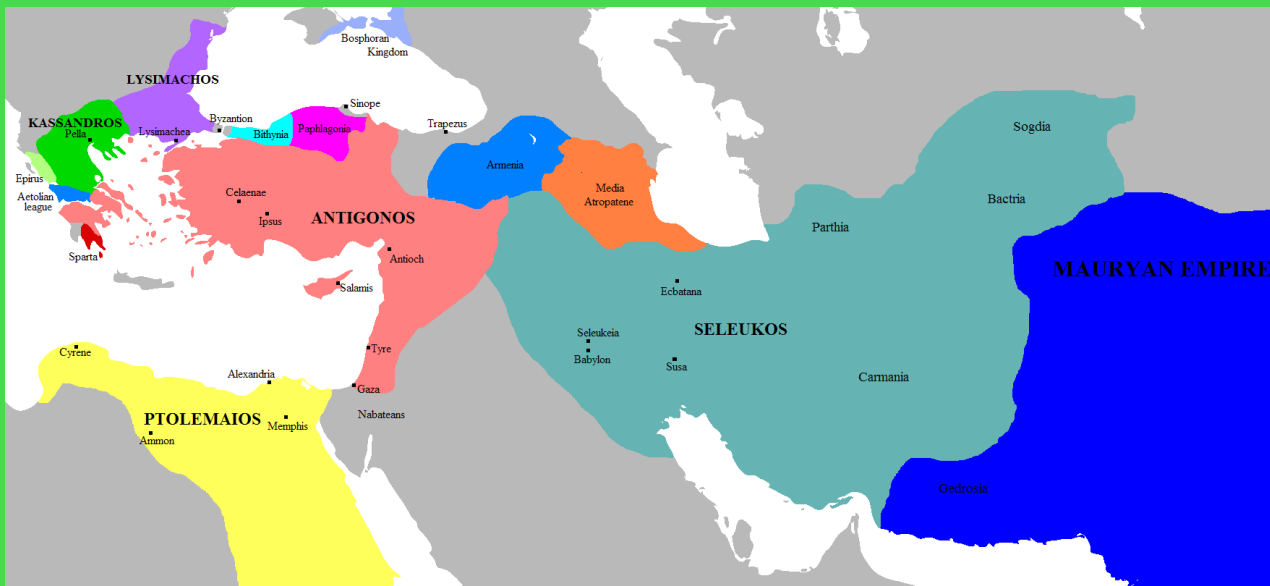
The following seem to be the main agreements recorded by Strabo, Appian and Justin:

- 1 – Seleucus relinquishes the following satrapies to Chandragupta – Gandhara (northern Pakistan and north-eastern Afghanistan), Parapamisadae (Hindu Kush – eastern Afghanistan), and the eastern part of Gedrosia (south-western Pakistan and south-eastern Iran); possibly also Arachosia (southern Afghanistan and up to the Indus) and Aria (valley of the Hari River – Afghanistan) as far as Herat.
- 2 – Chandragupta gives Seleucus 500 war elephants.
- 3 – two kings joined by a marriage alliance, probably Chandragupta married a female relative of Seleucus.

“For Androcottus, who reigned there not long afterwards, made a present to Seleucus of five hundred elephants, and with an army of six hundred thousand men overran and subdued all India.” – **Plutarch *Alexander* 62.4.**

Establishment of an Eastern Border

- Seleucus ceded territories he could probably not have feasibly held and gained a secure frontier in the East – attention could now be focused in Antigonos Monophthalmus.
- Chandragupta gained territory in the northwest to expand into and may have alleviated logistical burden for his return march by giving over 500 elephants.
- Kosmin (2014) - This delimitation marked boundary of Seleucid power and marked a departure from the Achaemenid and Alexandrian pretensions to universal power?
- Unlike on the Seleucid's western frontier there was no known attempt by the Seleucids to reconquer the ceded territory or redefine the border.



Royal Gift Giving

“Phylarchus says that among the presents which the Indian king Sandrocottus sent to Seleucus there were aphrodisiacs so potent that when placed under the feet of lovers they caused, in some, ejaculations like those of fowls, but in others they inhibited them altogether.” – **Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* 1.18d-e = Phylarchus *FGrHist* 81.**

“...even Amitrochates [Bindusara], the king of the Indians, wrote to Antiochus [I], 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 dried figs and the sweet wine we will send you; but it is not lawful for a sophist to be sold in Greece.’” – **(14.652f-653a).**

- Gift giving appears to be of a ethnographic character – reflecting the sources paradoxographical interests?

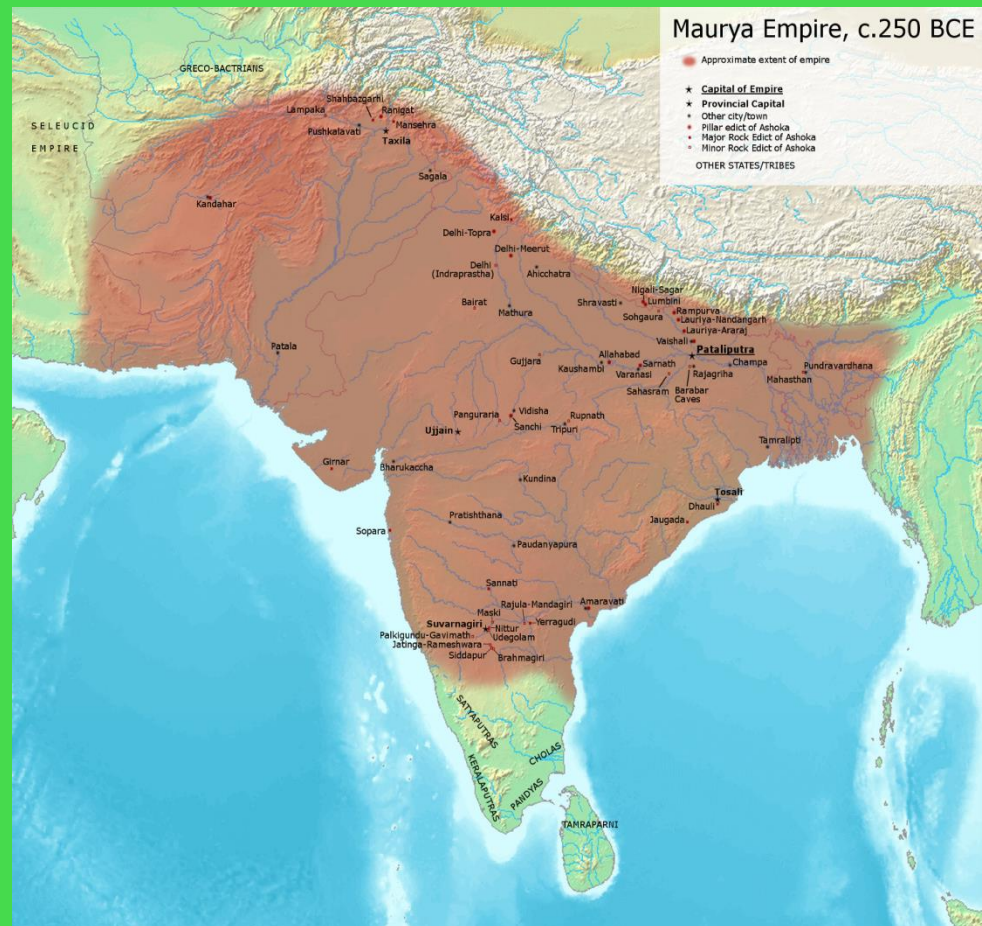
Bindusara

- Bindusara (298-272 BC) was known in Graeco-Roman sources as Amitrochates – probably from his throne name Amitraghata (“slayer of foes”).
- The Jaina tradition claims that towards the end of Chandragupta’s life, now a fervent follower of Jainism abdicated in favour of his son Bindusara and became an ascetic.
- Bindusara campaigns in southern Deccan.



Rise of Ashoka

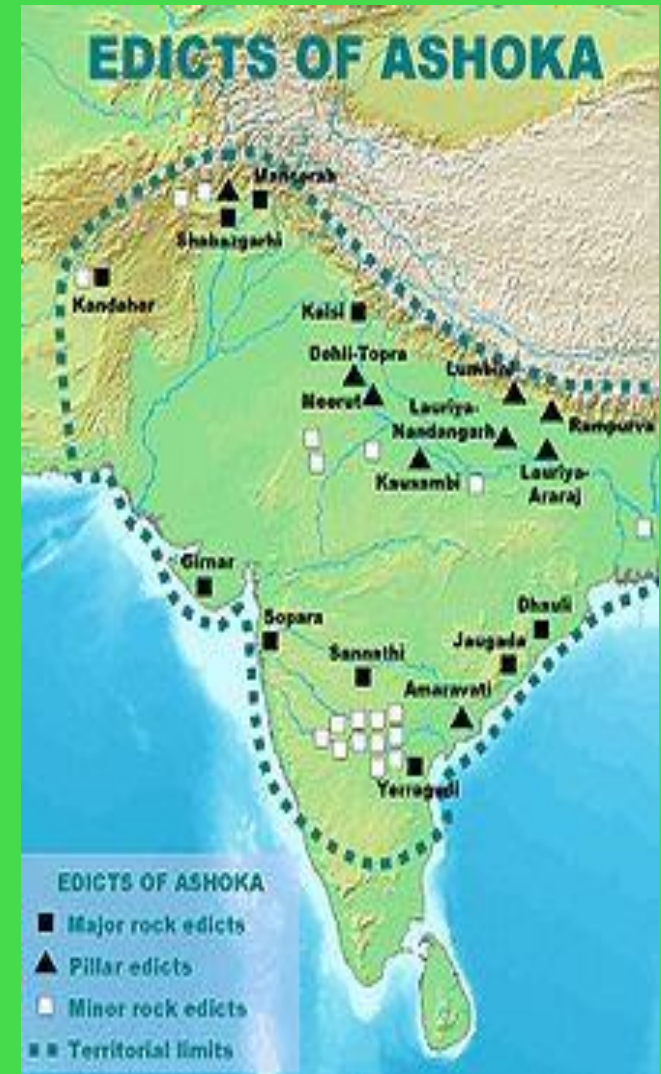
- Following death of Bindusara 273/2 BC struggle for succession.
- Ashoka succeeds to the throne in 269/8 BC.
- After conquest of eastern Indian - state of Kalinga - in his eight regnal year he forsook all wars of aggression.
- Converts to a pacifist form of Buddhism and takes a zeal for spreading *Dhamma/Dharma* (Buddhist concept of universal law/righteousness).
- This is expressed in numerous epigraphs across the Indian subcontinent.



Ashoka's Thirteenth Major Rock Edict

- The spreading of *Dhamma*:

“Except among the Greeks, there is no land where the religious orders of Brahmans and *śramaṇas* are not to be found...The Beloved of the Gods considers victory by *Dhamma* to be the foremost victory. And moreover the Beloved of the Gods has gained this victory on all his frontiers to a distance of six hundred *yojanas* [c. 4,800 km], where the reigns the Greek king named Antiochus, and beyond the realm of that Antiochus [Soter] in the lands of the four kings named Ptolemy [Philadelphus], Antigonus [Gontas], Megas [of Cyrene], and Alexander [of Epirus]...” - see Thapar (2012).



The Second Major Rock Edict

“Everywhere in the Empire of the Beloved of the Gods, the King Piyadassi [Ashoka], and even in the lands on its frontiers.....and as far as Ceylon [Sri Lanka], and of the Greek king named Antiochus and of those kings who are neighbours of that Antiochus, everywhere medical services of the Beloved of the Gods, the King Piyadassi, have been provided. These consist of the medical care of man and the care of animals. Medical herbs whether useful to man or to beast, have been brought and planted wherever they did not grow...” - see Thapar (2012).

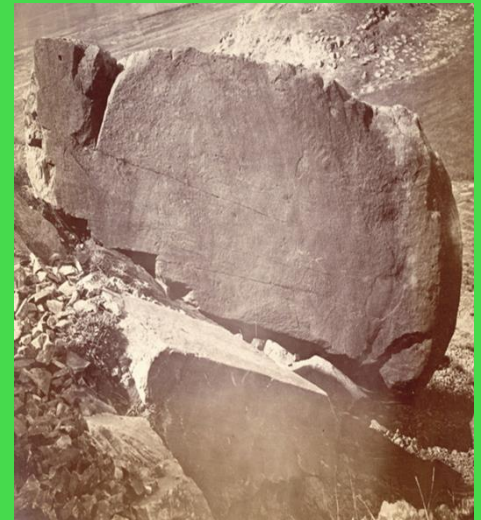
- *Mahavamsa* – Third Buddhist Council (c.250 BCs) – mission of Maharakkhita to the land of the Yonas.
- Tarantha *History of Buddhism in India* (1608).
- Song Yun (518-521) and Hsuan-tsang / Xuanzang (629-645).

Greeks within Ashoka's Empire

Thirteenth Major Rock Edict: “Likewise here in the imperial territories among the Greeks and the Kambojas [Indo-Iranians]... everywhere the people follow the Beloved of the Gods’ instructions in *Dhamma*.” See Thapar (2012).

- Descendants of Ionian Colonists (Persian *Yauna* – Prakrit *Yona* – Sanskrit *Yavana*). Also those settled by Alexander.

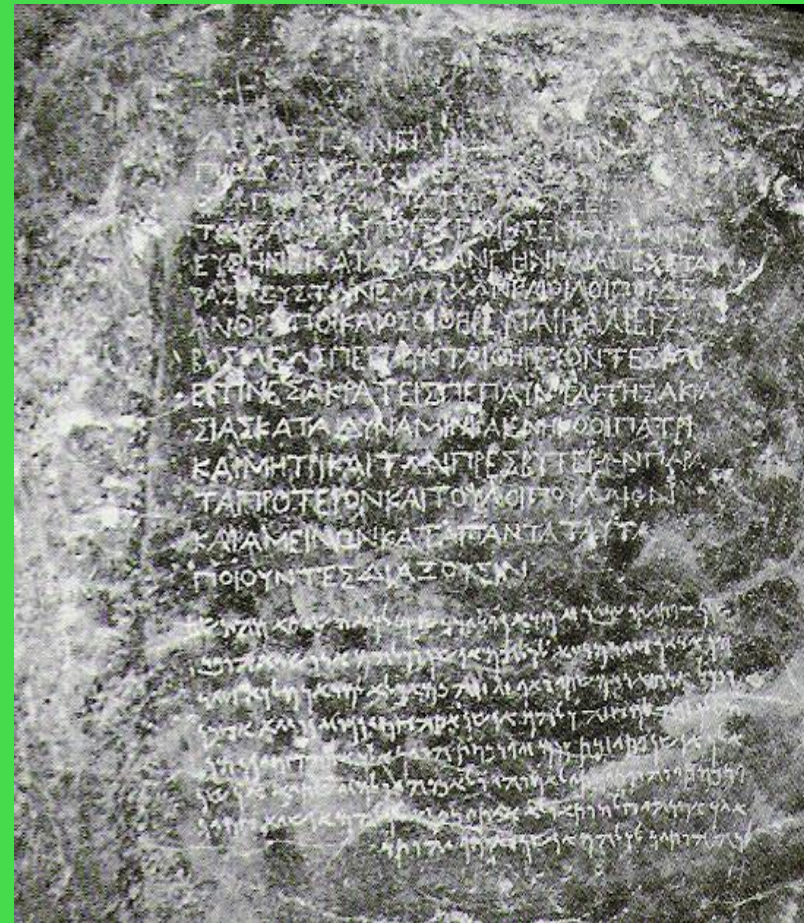
Fifth Major Rock Edict: “In the past there were no officers of *Dhamma*. It was I who first appointed them, when I had been consecrated for thirteen years. They are busy in all sects, establishing *Dhamma*, increasing *Dhamma*, and attending to the welfare and happiness of those who are devoted to *Dhamma*, among the Greeks, the Kambojas....” - See Thapar (2012).



Bilingual Greek and Aramaic inscription at Kandahar



“Ten years being complete, our lord the king Piyadassi, showed piety [*Dhamma*] to men..... And the king refrains from [eating] living beings, and indeed other men and whosoever [were] the king’s huntsmen and fishermen have ceased from hunting....” – see Basham (1958).



Religious Syncretism

- Alexandria-of-the-Caucasus/ *Alasandra-of-the-Yonas* (modern Bagram)?
- Popularity of Buddhism Vs early Brahmanism
- Brahminical Hinduism – The caste System
 - Brahmins (priests).
 - Ksatriyas (warriors and rulers).
 - Vaishyas (farmers/merchants/artisans).
 - Shudras (labourers).
 - Untouchables (polluted labourers).

Later Mauryas

- Death of Ashoka around 233-32 BC followed by succession of weaker kings.
- Partition of Empire into Eastern and Western parts under Kunāla and Daśārtha.
- Alienation of the Brahmins? - *dhamma-mahāmattas*? *gopas*? – Ashokan policy of non-violence?
- Assassination of last king Bṛhadratha by Puṣyamitra – establishment of the Sunga dynasty.

Megasthenes' *Indika*

- It is generally considered that sometime after the treaty between Chandragupta and Seleucus I, Megasthenes was sent as Seleucid ambassador to Chandragupta's court at Pataliputra on the Ganges – contra Bosworth.
- At some point during or after his tenure in India Megasthenes publishes his treatise the *Indika*.

“...but also by other Greek authors who spent time with the Indian Kings, such as Megasthenes and Dionysus, who was sent by [Ptolemy II] Philadelphus to report on the manpower of these people.” – **Pliny NH 6.21.58.**

“...they were sent on an ambassadorial mission to Palimbothra [Pataliputra] - Megasthenes to Sandrocottus, Deïmachus to Amitrochates the son of Sandrocottus...” – **Strabo Geog. 2.1.9.**

- His work has to be reconstructed on the basis of quotations, paraphrases and allusions by later authors.
- His work, even in much later centuries, remained the most authoritative work on India's interior and the Gangetic basin.
- The reconstruction of the structure of the *Indika* is aided by unity of Diodorus' epitome and basic similarity to Hecataeus of Abdera's *Aigyptiaca*. The work probably originally in three books:
 - geography, natural history and climate
 - early civilisation and development
 - customs and administration of the contemporary Mauryan state
- Dionysus is represented as the force that brought civilisation to India – lack of urbanism and religious piety.

- Heracles arrives many generations later:
 - “And with regard to Heracles they say that he was born among them and they assign to him, in common with the Greeks, both the club and the lion's skin... he became the founder of not a few cities, the most renowned and largest of which he called Palimbothra...” - **Diodorus Siculus 2.39.1-4.**
- In Megasthenes account India is transformed from a land of wandering nomads to a place with countless cities – Palimbothra the most impressive:
 - “It is said that Palimbothra lies at the confluence of the Ganges and the other river, a city eighty stadia in length [14.8 to 15.4 kilometres] and fifteen in breadth [2.8 to 2.9 kilometres], in the shape of a parallelogram, and surrounded by a wooden wall that is perforated so that arrows can be shot through the holes; and that in front of the wall lies a trench used both for defence and as a receptacle of the sewage that flows from the city; and that the tribe of people amongst whom this city is situated is called the Prasii and is far superior to all the rest; and that the reigning king must be surnamed after the city, being called Palimbothrus in addition to his own family name, as, for example, King Sandrocottus to whom Megasthenes was sent on an embassy.” – **Strabo *Geog.* 15.1.36.**

Pre-Megasthenes

- Pre-Megasthenic geography:
 - civilised core of Indian civilisation Indus basin
 - Indus paradoxically frontier, centre and main artery of travel
 - to the south and east of the Indus increased barbarism, utopianism, freakishness
 - Indus enclosed by a great desert to the east
 - Ctesias – Pygmies live in deep heart of India, serve in royal army
 - Dogheads, who live between Indus and the mountains, give gifts to the royal court on five year basis
- Alexander's campaigns in India had permitted for first time since Scylax' expedition, autopsy and first-hand investigation – nevertheless Macedonian army still largely confined to the Punjab – Indus valley still of primacy.

A New Autopsy

- Change to India's shape – it is rotated 90° and reduced in size.
- India now has a terminal oceanic boundary to the south and east (as well as the recognised one to the west).
- India now centred on the Ganges valley – this area is now associated with normative humanity.
- India is now an organised space, a territorialised kingdom with its own centre and peripheries.
- The centre is at Palimbothra (Pataliputra) – India's peripheries now lie **between** its centre and the Greek world – the peripheries are the mountains of northwest India – peripheries both for the Mauryan Kingdom and the Seleucid Empire.

End of Utopia?

- Normalisation of India by Megasthenes – no longer a timeless, idealised space at the edge of the earth.
- Ctesias – an eternal India of perfect justice, devoted subjects and natural abundance.
- Megasthenes *Indika* is not free of utopian tropes:
 - superabundance guarantees double harvest – earth veined with precious metals
 - lands inhabitants are beautiful, skilled, and there are no slaves – seven tiered “caste system” with philosophers on top.
 - rely on unwritten law and avoid litigation
- Contra:
 - The lands productivity is a result of management by the Mauryan state not a toil-less or spontaneous production of nature – farmers meant to be untouched in times of war
 - crimes are kept in check with harsh physical punishments
 - monarch requires a network of spies and courtesans and king forces to change bed every night because of plots

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