

Ashoka

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashoka>
"Aśoka" and "Asoka" redirect here. For other uses, see [Ashoka \(disambiguation\)](#).

Ashoka



A c. 1st century BCE/CE relief from [Sanchi](#), showing Ashoka on his chariot, visiting the [Nagas](#) at [Ramagrama](#).^{[1] [2]}

3rd [Mauryan Emperor](#)

Reign c. 268 – c. 232 BCE^[3]

Coronation 268 BCE^[3]

Predecessor [Bindusara](#)

Successor [Dasharatha](#)

	c. 304 BCE
Born	Pataliputra , Mauryan Empire (adjacent to present-day Patna , Bihar , India)
	232 BCE
Died	Pataliputra, modern-day Patna, Bihar, India
	Karuvaki (own inscriptions) Tishyaraksha (Sri Lankan and North Indian tradition) Padmavati (North Indian tradition)
Spouse	

- [Asandhimitra](#) (Sri Lankan tradition)
- [Devi](#) (Sri Lankan tradition)
- [Tivala](#) (own inscriptions)
- [Kunala](#) (North Indian tradition)
- [Mahendra](#) (Sri Lankan tradition)
- [Sanghamitra](#) (Sri Lankan tradition)
- [Jalauka](#) (*Rajatarangini*)
- [Charumati](#)

Dynasty [Maurya](#)

Father [Bindusara](#)

Mother Subhadrangi (North Indian tradition) or Dharma (Sri Lankan tradition); see [Mother of Ashoka](#)

Religion [Buddhism](#)

[Maurya Empire](#)

(322 - 180 BCE)



[Chandragupta](#)

322 - 297 BCE

[Bindusara](#)

297 - 272/268 BCE

[Ashoka](#)

272/268 - 232 BCE

[Dasharatha](#)

232 - 224 BCE

[Samprati](#)

224 - 215 BCE

[Shalishuka](#)

215 - 202 BCE

[Devavarman](#)

202 - 195 BCE

[Shatadhanvan](#)

195 - 187 BCE

[Brihadratha](#)

187 - 180 BCE

- [v](#)
- [t](#)
- [e](#)

Ashoka ([Brāhmi](#): *Asoka*,^[4] [IAST](#): *Aśoka*, English: [/əˈʃoʊkə/](#)) sometimes **Ashoka the Great**, was an [Indian emperor](#) of the [Maurya Dynasty](#), who ruled almost all of the [Indian subcontinent](#) from c. 268 to 232 BCE.^{[5][6]} The grandson of the founder of the Maurya Dynasty, [Chandragupta Maurya](#), Ashoka promoted the spread of [Buddhism](#) across ancient [Asia](#). Considered by many to be one of India's greatest emperors, Ashoka expanded Chandragupta's empire to reign over a realm stretching from present-day [Afghanistan](#) in the west to [Bangladesh](#) in the east. It covered the entire Indian subcontinent except for parts of present-day [Tamil Nadu](#), [Karnataka](#) and [Kerala](#). The empire's capital was [Pataliputra](#) (in [Magadha](#), present-day [Patna](#)), with provincial capitals at [Taxila](#) and [Ujjain](#).

Ashoka waged a destructive war against the state of [Kalinga](#) (modern [Odisha](#)),^[7] which he conquered in about 260 BCE.^[8] In about 263 BCE, he converted to Buddhism^[7] after witnessing the mass deaths of the [Kalinga War](#), which he had waged out of a desire for conquest and which reportedly directly resulted in more than 100,000 deaths and 150,000 deportations.^[9] He is remembered for the Ashoka pillars and edicts, for sending Buddhist monks to [Sri Lanka](#) and [Central Asia](#), and for establishing monuments marking several significant sites in the life of [Gautama Buddha](#).^[10]

Beyond the [Edicts of Ashoka](#), biographical information about him relies on legends written centuries later, such as the 2nd-century CE [Ashokavadana](#) ("*Narrative of Ashoka*", a part of the [Divyavadana](#)), and in the Sri Lankan text [Mahavamsa](#) ("*Great Chronicle*"). The emblem of the modern [Republic of India](#) is an adaptation of the [Lion Capital of Ashoka](#). His [Sanskrit](#) name "*Aśoka*" means "painless, without sorrow" (the [a privativum](#) and *śoka*, "pain, distress"). In his [edicts](#), he is referred to as *Devānāmpriya* (Pali *Devānāṃpiya* or "the Beloved of the Gods"), and *Priyadarśin* (Pali [Piyadasī](#) or "He who regards everyone with affection"). His fondness for his name's connection to the [Saraca asoca](#) tree, or "Ashoka tree", is also referenced in the *Ashokavadana*.

In [The Outline of History](#) (1920), [H.G. Wells](#) wrote, "Amidst the tens of thousands of names of monarchs that crowd the columns of history, their majesties and graciousnesses and serenities and royal highnesses and the like, the name of Ashoka shines, and shines, almost alone, a star."^[11]

Contents

- [1 Sources of information](#)
- [2 Names and titles](#)
- [3 Early life](#)
 - [3.1 Date](#)
 - [3.2 Ancestry](#)
- [4 As a prince](#)
 - [4.1 Rebellion at Takshashila](#)
 - [4.2 Governor of Ujjain](#)
- [5 Ascension to the throne](#)
 - [5.1 Date of ascension](#)
- [6 Reign before Buddhist influence](#)
- [7 Kalinga war and conversion to Buddhism](#)
 - [7.1 The war](#)
 - [7.2 First contact with Buddhism](#)
- [8 Reign after Buddhist influence](#)
 - [8.1 Stupas](#)
 - [8.2 Propagation of dhamma](#)
 - [8.3 Third Buddhist Council](#)
 - [8.4 Buddhist missions](#)
 - [8.5 Violence after conversion](#)
- [9 Last years](#)
 - [9.1 Tissarakkha as the queen](#)
 - [9.2 Death](#)
- [10 Family](#)
 - [10.1 Queens](#)
 - [10.2 Sons](#)
 - [10.3 Daughters](#)
 - [10.4 Brothers](#)
- [11 Imperial extent](#)
- [12 Religion and philosophy](#)
 - [12.1 Relationship with Buddhism](#)
 - [12.2 Other religions](#)
 - [12.3 Dharma](#)
 - [12.3.1 Animal welfare](#)
- [13 Foreign relations](#)
 - [13.1 Hellenistic world](#)
- [14 Legends about past lives](#)
- [15 Legacy](#)
 - [15.1 Architecture](#)
 - [15.2 Symbols](#)
 - [15.3 Inscriptions](#)
 - [15.4 Coinage](#)
- [16 Modern scholarship](#)

- [16.1 Rediscovery](#)
 - [16.2 Perceptions and historiography](#)
 - [16.3 Impact of pacifism](#)
- [17 In art, film and literature](#)
- [18 References](#)
 - [18.1 Bibliography](#)
- [19 Further reading](#)
- [20 External links](#)

Sources of information

Information about Ashoka comes from [his own inscriptions](#); other inscriptions that mention him or are possibly from his reign; and ancient literature, especially Buddhist texts. ^[12] These sources often contradict each other, although various historians have attempted to correlate their testimony. ^[13]



[Ashoka's Major Rock Edict](#) at [Junagadh](#) contains inscriptions by Ashoka (fourteen of the [Edicts of Ashoka](#)), [Rudradaman I](#) and [Skandagupta](#).

Inscriptions

Ashoka's own inscriptions are the earliest self-representations of an imperial power in the Indian subcontinent. ^[14] However, these inscriptions are focused mainly on the topic of [dhamma](#), and provide little information regarding other aspects of the Maurya state and society. ^[13] Even on the topic of *dhamma*, the content of these inscriptions cannot be taken at face value: in words of American academic [John S. Strong](#), it is sometimes useful to think of Ashoka's messages as propaganda by a politician whose aim is to present a favourable image of himself and his administration, rather than record historical facts. ^[15]

A small number of other inscriptions also provide some information about Ashoka. ^[13] For example, he finds a mention in the 2nd century [Junagadh rock inscription of Rudradaman](#). ^[16] [An inscription](#) discovered at [Sirkap](#) mentions a lost word beginning with "Priy", which is theorised to be Ashoka's title "Priyadarshi", although this is not certain. ^[17] Some other inscriptions, such as the [Sohgaura copper plate inscription](#), have been tentatively dated to Ashoka's period by a section of scholars, although this is contested by others. ^[18]

Buddhist legends

Much of the information about Ashoka comes from Buddhist legends, which present him as a great, ideal king.^[19] These legends appear in texts that are not contemporary to Ashoka, and were composed by Buddhist authors, who used various stories to illustrate the impact of their faith on Ashoka. This makes it necessary to exercise caution while relying on them for historical information.^[20] Among modern scholars, opinions range from downright dismissal of these legends as mythological to acceptance of all historical portions that seem plausible.^[21]

The Buddhist legends about Ashoka exist in several languages, including [Sanskrit](#), [Pali](#), [Tibetan](#), [Chinese](#), [Burmese](#), [Sinhala](#), [Thai](#), [Lao](#), and [Khotanese](#). All these legends can be traced to two primary traditions:^[22]

- the North Indian tradition preserved in the Sanskrit-language texts such as [Divyavadana](#) (including its constituent [Ashokavadana](#)); and Chinese sources such as *A-yü wang chuan* and *A-yü wang ching*.^[22]
- the Sri Lankan tradition preserved in Pali-language texts, such as [Dipavamsa](#), [Mahavamsa](#), *Vamsatthapakasini* (a commentary on *Mahavamsa*), Buddhaghosha's commentary on the Vinaya, and *Samanta-pasadika*.^{[22][16]}

There are several major differences between the two traditions. For example, the Sri Lankan tradition emphasises Ashoka's role in convening the [Third Buddhist council](#), and his dispatch of several missionaries to distant regions, including his son Mahinda to Sri Lanka.^[22] However, the North Indian tradition makes no mention of these events, and describes other events not found in the Sri Lankan tradition, such as a story about another son named Kunala.^[23]

Even while narrating the common stories, the two traditions diverge in several ways. For example, both *Ashokavadana* and *Mahavamsa* mention that Ashoka's queen [Tishyarakshita](#) had the [Bodhi Tree](#) destroyed. In *Ashokavadana*, the queen manages to have the tree healed after she realises her mistake. In the *Mahavamsa*, she permanently destroys the tree, but only after a branch of the tree has been transplanted in Sri Lanka.^[24] In another story, both the texts describe Ashoka's unsuccessful attempts to collect a relic of Gautama Buddha from [Ramagrama](#). In *Ashokavadana*, he fails to do so because he cannot match the devotion of the Nagas who hold the relic; however, in the *Mahavamsa*, he fails to do so because the Buddha had destined the relic to be enshrined by king [Dutthagamani](#) of Sri Lanka.^[25] Using such stories, the *Mahavamsa* glorifies Sri Lanka as the new preserve of Buddhism.^[26]



King Ashoka visits Ramagrama, to take relics of the Buddha from the [Nagas](#), but in vain. Southern gateway, Stupa 1, [Sanchi](#).^[2]

Other sources

Numismatic, sculptural, and archaeological evidence supplements research on Ashoka.^[27] Ashoka's name appears in the lists of Mauryan kings in the various [Puranas](#), but these texts do not provide further details about him, as their [Brahmanical](#) authors were not patronised by the Mauryans.^[28] Other texts, such as the [Arthashastra](#) and [Indica of Megasthenes](#), which provide general information about the Maurya period, can also be used to make inferences about Ashoka's reign.^[29] However, the *Arthashastra* is a normative text that focuses on an ideal rather than a historical state, and its dating to the Mauryan period is a subject of debate. The *Indica* is a [lost work](#), and only parts of it survive in form of paraphrases in later writings.^[13]

The 12th-century text [Rajatarangini](#) mentions a [Kashmiri](#) king [Ashoka of Gonandiya dynasty](#) who built several [stupas](#): some scholars, such as [Aurel Stein](#), have identified this king with the Maurya king Ashoka; others, such as [Ananda W. P. Guruge](#) dismiss this identification as inaccurate.^[30]

Alternative interpretation of the epigraphic evidence

The Edicts and their declared authors



Edicts in the name of [Piyadasi](#) or [Devanampiya](#) Piyadasi ("King Piyadasi"):

●: [Major Rock Edicts](#)

I: [Major Pillar Edicts](#)



Edicts in the name of Ashoka or just "[Devanampiya](#)" ("King"), or both together:

●: [Minor Rock Edicts](#)

I: [Minor Pillar Edicts](#)

The different areas covered by the two types of inscriptions, and their different content in respect to Buddhism, may point to different rulers. ^[31]

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](#). ^[31] This inscriptional evidence may suggest that these were two different rulers. ^[31] According to him, 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](#). ^[31] Also, the geographical spread of his inscription shows that Piyadasi ruled a vast Empire, contiguous with the [Seleucid Empire](#) in the West. ^[31]

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. ^[31] His inscriptions cover a very different and much smaller geographical area, clustering in Central India. ^[31] 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 millenium, and around the time of the [Kushan Empire](#). ^[31] The quality of the inscriptions of this Ashoka is significantly lower than the quality of the inscriptions of the earlier Piyadasi. ^[31]

Names and titles

Names and titles of Ashoka



"[Devānampiyasa](#) Asoka", in the [Maski Edict of Ashoka](#).



The name *A-so-ka* (, Asoka) in the [Maski Minor Rock Edict](#).



Ashoka's title "[Devanampiyena Piyadasi](#)" () in the [Lumbini Minor Pillar Edict](#).

The name "A-shoka" literally means "without sorrow". According to an [Ashokavadana](#) legend, his mother gave him this name because his birth removed her sorrows. ^[32]

The name [Priyadasi](#) is associated with Ashoka in the 3rd–4th century CE [Dipavamsa](#). ^{[33][34]} The term literally means "he who regards amiably", or "of gracious mien" ([Sanskrit](#): Priya-darshi). It may have been a [regnal name](#) adopted by Ashoka. ^[35]

Ashoka's inscriptions mention his title [Devanampiya](#) (Sanskrit: *Devanampriya*, "Beloved of the Gods"). The identification of Devanampiya and Ashoka as the same person is established by the [Maski](#) and Gujarra inscriptions, which use both these terms for the king. ^{[36][37]} The title was adopted by other kings, including the contemporary king [Devanampiya Tissa of Anuradhapura](#) and Ashoka's descendant [Dasharatha Maurya](#). ^[38]

Early life

Ashoka's own inscriptions do not describe his early life, and much of the information on this topic comes from apocryphal legends written hundreds of years after him. ^[39] While these legends include obviously fictitious details such as narratives of Ashoka's past lives, they include some plausible historical details about Ashoka's period. ^{[39][40]}

Date



The [Major Rock Edict No.13](#) of Ashoka, mentions the Greek kings [Antiochus](#), [Ptolemy](#), [Antigonus](#), [Magas](#) and [Alexander](#) by name, as recipients of his teachings.

The exact date of Ashoka's birth is not certain, as the extant contemporary Indian texts did not record such details. It is known that he lived in 3rd century BCE, as his inscriptions mention several contemporary rulers whose dates are known with more certainty, such as [Antiochus II Theos](#), [Ptolemy II Philadelphus](#), [Antigonus II Gonatas](#), [Magas of Cyrene](#), and Alexander (of [Epirus](#) or [Corinth](#)).^[41] Thus, Ashoka must have been born sometime in the late 4th century BCE or early 3rd century BCE (c. 304 BCE),^[42]

Pataliputra at the time of Ashoka



Ruins of pillared hall at [Kumrahar](#) site at Pataliputra.



The [Pataliputra capital](#), 4th – 3rd c. BCE.

Ashoka was probably born in the city of [Pataliputra](#). Remains of the city from around that time have been found through excavations in central areas of the modern city of [Patna](#).

Ancestry

Ashoka's own inscriptions are fairly detailed, but make no mention of his ancestors.^[43] Other sources, such as the [Puranas](#) and the [Mahavamsa](#) state that his father was the Mauryan emperor [Bindusara](#), and his grandfather was [Chandragupta](#) – the founder of the Empire.^[44] The *Ashokavadana* also names his father as Bindusara, but traces his ancestry to Buddha's contemporary king [Bimbisara](#), through [Ajatashatru](#), [Udayin](#), Munda, Kakavarnin, Sahalin, Tulakuchi, Mahamandala, [Prasenajit](#), and [Nanda](#).^[45] The 16th century Tibetan monk [Taranatha](#), whose account is a distorted version of the earlier traditions,^[29] describes Ashoka as the illegitimate son of king Nemita of Champarana from the daughter of a merchant.^[46]

Ashokavadana states that [Ashoka's mother](#) was the daughter of a Brahmin from [Champa](#), and was prophesized to marry a king. Accordingly, her father took her to Pataliputra, where she was inducted into Bindusara's harem, and ultimately, became his chief queen.^[47] The *Ashokavadana* does not mention her by name,^[48] although other legends provide different names for her.^[49] For example, the *Asokavadanamala* calls her Subhadrangi.^{[50][51]} The *Vamsatthapakasini* or *Mahavamsa-tika*, a commentary on *Mahavamsa*, calls her "Dharma" ("Dhamma" in [Pali](#)), and states that she belonged to the Moriya [Kshatriya](#) clan.^[51] A *Divyavadana* legend calls her Janapada-kalyani;^[40] according to scholar [Ananda W. P. Guruge](#), this is not a name, but an epithet.^[50]

According to the 2nd century historian [Appian](#), Chandragupta entered into a marital alliance with the Greek ruler [Seleucus I Nicator](#), which has led to speculation that either Chandragupta or his son Bindusara married a Greek princess. However, there is no evidence that Ashoka's mother or grandmother was Greek, and the idea has been dismissed by most historians.^[52]

As a prince

According to the *Ashokavadana*, Bindusara disliked Ashoka because of his rough skin. One day, Bindusara asked the ascetic Pingala-vatsajiva to determine which of his sons was being worthy of his successor. On the ascetic's advice, he asked all the princes to assemble at the Garden of the Golden Pavilion. Ashoka was reluctant to go because his father disliked him, but his mother convinced him to do so. When minister Radhagupta saw Ashoka leaving the capital for the Garden, he offered to provide the prince a royal elephant for the travel.^[53] At the Garden, Pingala-vatsajiva examined the princes and realised that Ashoka would be the next king. To avoid annoying Bindusara, the ascetic refused to name the

successor. Instead, he said that one who had the best mount, seat, drink, vessel and food would be the next king; each time, Ashoka declared that he met the criterion. Later, he told Ashoka's mother that her son would be the next king, and on her advice, left the kingdom to avoid Bindusara's wrath.^[54]

While legends suggest that Bindusara disliked Ashoka's ugly appearance, they also state that Bindusara gave him important responsibilities, such as suppressing a revolt in Takshashila (according to north Indian tradition), and governing Ujjain (according to Sri Lankan tradition). This suggests that Bindusara was impressed by the other qualities of the prince.^[55] Another possibility is that he sent Ashoka to distant regions to keep him away from the imperial capital.^[56]

Rebellion at Takshashila



Aramaic Inscription from Taxila.

The [Aramaic Inscription of Taxila](#) probably mentions Ashoka.

According to the *Ashokavadana*, Bindusara dispatched prince Ashoka to suppress a rebellion in the city of [Takshashila](#)^[57] (present-day [Bhir Mound](#)^[58]). This episode is not mentioned in the Sri Lankan tradition, which instead states that Bindusara sent Ashoka to govern Ujjain. Two other Buddhist texts - *Ashoka-sutra* and *Kunala-sutra* - state that Bindusara appointed Ashoka as a viceroy in [Gandhara](#) (where Takshashila was located), not Ujjain.^[59]

The *Ashokavadana* states that Bindusara provided Ashoka with a fourfold-army (comprising cavalry, elephants, chariots and infantry), but refused to provide any weapons for this army. Ashoka declared that weapons would appear before him if he was worthy of being a king, and then, the deities emerged from the earth,

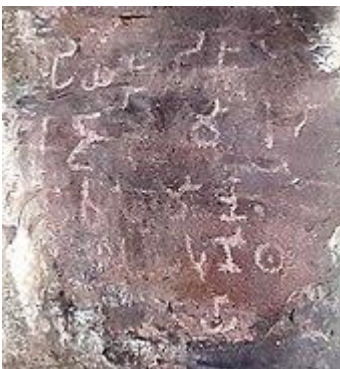
and provided weapons to the army. When Ashoka reached Takshashila, the citizens welcomed him, and told him that their rebellion was only against the evil ministers, not the king. Sometime later, Ashoka was similarly welcomed in the [Khasa](#) territory, and the gods declared that he would go on to conquer the whole earth. ^[57]

Takshashila was a prosperous and geopolitically important city, and historical evidence proves that by Ashoka's time, it was well-connected to the Mauryan capital Pataliputra by the *Uttarapatha* trade route. ^[59] However, no extant contemporary source mentions the Takshashila rebellion, and none of Ashoka's own records state that he ever visited the city. ^[60] That said, the historicity of the legend about Ashoka's involvement in the Takshashila rebellion maybe corroborated by [an Aramaic-language inscription](#) discovered at [Sirkap](#) near Taxila. The inscription includes a name that begins with the letters "prydr", and most scholars restore it as "Priyadarshi", which was a title of Ashoka. ^[55] Another evidence of Ashoka's connection to the city may be the name of the [Dharmarajika Stupa](#) near Taxila; the name suggests that it was built by Ashoka ("Dharma-rajā"). ^[61]

The story about the deities miraculously bringing weapons to Ashoka may be the text's way of deifying Ashoka; or of indicating that Bindusara - who disliked Ashoka - wanted him to fail in Takshashila. ^[62]

Governor of Ujjain

According to the *Mahavamsa*, Bindusara appointed Ashoka as the viceroy of present-day [Ujjain](#) (Ujjeni), ^[55] which was an important administrative and commercial centre in the Avanti province of central India. ^[63] This tradition is corroborated by the [Saru Maru](#) inscription discovered in central India; this inscription states that he visited the place as a prince. ^[64] Ashoka's own [rock edict](#) mentions the presence of a prince viceroy at Ujjain during his reign, ^[65] which further supports the tradition that he himself served as a viceroy at Ujjain. ^[66]



The [Saru Maru commemorative inscription](#) seems to mention the presence of Ashoka in the area of Ujjain as he was still a Prince.

Pataliputra was connected to Ujjain by multiple routes in Ashoka's time, and on the way, Ashoka's entourage may have encamped at Rupnath, where his inscription has been found. ^[67]

According to the Sri Lankan tradition, on his way to Ujjain, Ashoka visited [Vidisha](#), where he fell in love with a beautiful woman. According to the *Dipamvamsa* and *Mahavamsa*, the woman was [Devi](#) - the daughter of a merchant. According to the *Mahabodhi-vamsa*, she was Vidisha-Mahadevi, and belonged to the [Shakya](#) clan of [Gautama Buddha](#). The Shakya connection may have been fabricated by the Buddhist chroniclers in an attempt to connect Ashoka's family to Buddha. ^[68] The Buddhist texts allude to her being a Buddhist in her later years, but do not describe her conversion to Buddhism. Therefore, it is likely that she was already a Buddhist when she met Ashoka. ^[69]

The *Mahavamsa* states that Devi gave birth to Ashoka's son [Mahinda](#) in Ujjain, and two years later, to a daughter named [Sanghamitta](#). ^[70] According to the *Mahavamsa*, Ashoka's son Mahinda was ordained at the age of 20 years, during the sixth year of Ashoka's reign. That means, Mahinda must have been 14 years old when Ashoka ascended the throne. Even if Mahinda was born when Ashoka was as young as 20 years old, Ashoka must have ascended the throne at the age of 34 years, which means he must have served as a viceroy for several years. ^[71]

Ascension to the throne

Legends suggest that Ashoka was not the crown prince, and his ascension on the throne was disputed. ^[72]

Ashokavadana states that Bindusara's eldest son Susima once once slapped a bald minister on his head in jest. The minister worried that after ascending the throne, [Susima](#) may jokingly hurt him with a sword. Therefore, he instigated five hundred ministers to support Ashoka's claim to the throne when the time came, noting that Ashoka was predicted to become a [chakravartin](#) (universal ruler). ^[73] Sometime later, Takshashila rebelled again, and Bindusara dispatched Susima to curb the rebellion. Shortly after, Bindusara fell extremely ill, and expected to die soon. Susima was still in Takshashila, having been unsuccessful in suppressing the rebellion. Bindusara recalled him to the capital, and asked Ashoka to march to Takshashila. ^[74] However, the ministers told him that Ashoka was ill, and suggested that he temporarily install Ashoka on the throne until Susima's return from Takshashila. ^[73] When Bindusara refused to do so, Ashoka declared that if the throne was rightfully his, the gods would crown him as the next king. At that instance, the gods did so, Bindusara died, and Ashoka's authority extended to the entire world, including the [Yaksha](#) territory located above the earth, and the [Naga](#) territory located below the earth. ^[74] When Susima returned to the capital, Ashoka's newly-appointed prime minister Radhagupta tricked him into a pit of charcoal. Susima died a painful death, and his general Bhadrayudha became a Buddhist monk. ^[75]

The *Mahavamsa* states that when Bindusara fell sick, Ashoka returned to Pataliputra from Ujjain, and gained control of the capital. After his father's death, Ashoka had his eldest brother killed, and ascended the throne.^[69] The text also states that Ashoka killed ninety-nine of his half-brothers, including Sumana.^[65] The *Dipavamsa* states that he killed a hundred of his brothers, and was crowned four years later.^[73] The *Vamsatthapakasini* adds that an Ajivika ascetic had predicted this massacre based on the interpretation of a dream of Ashoka's mother.^[76] According to these accounts, only Ashoka's uterine brother Tissa was spared.^[77] Other sources name the surviving brother Vitashoka, Vigatashoka, Sudatta (So-ta-to in *A-yi-uang-chuan*), or Sugatra (Siu-ka-tu-lu in *Fen-pie-kung-te-hun*).^[77]

The figures such as 99 and 100 are exaggerated, and seem to be a way of stating that Ashoka killed several of his brothers.^[73] Taranatha states that Ashoka, who was an illegitimate son of his predecessor, killed six legitimate princes to ascend the throne.^[46] It is possible that Ashoka was not the rightful heir to the throne, and killed a brother (or brothers) to acquire the throne. However, the story has obviously been exaggerated by the Buddhist sources, which attempt to portray him as an evil person before his conversion to Buddhism. Ashoka's Rock Edict No. 5 mentions officers whose duties include supervising the welfare of "the families of his brothers, sisters, and other relatives". This suggests that more than one of his brothers survived his ascension, although some scholars oppose this suggestion, arguing that the inscription talks only about the *families* of his brothers", not the brothers themselves.^[77]

Date of ascension

According to the Sri Lankan texts *Mahavamsa* and the *Dipavamsa*, Ashoka ascended the throne 218 years after the death of Gautama Buddha, and ruled for 37 years.^[78] The date of the Buddha's death is itself a matter of debate,^[79] and the North Indian tradition states that Ashoka ruled a hundred years after the Buddha's death, which has led to further debates about the date.^[23]

Assuming that the Sri Lankan tradition is correct, and assuming that the Buddha died in 483 BCE - a date proposed by several scholars - Ashoka must have ascended the throne in 265 BCE.^[79] The Puranas state that Ashoka's father Bindusara reigned for 25 years, not 28 years as specified in the Sri Lankan tradition.^[44] If this is true, Ashoka's ascension can be dated three years earlier, to 268 BCE. Alternatively, if the Sri Lankan tradition is correct, but if we assume that the Buddha died in 486 BCE (a date supported by the Cantonese Dotted Record), Ashoka's ascension can be dated to 268 BCE.^[79] The *Mahavamsa* states that Ashoka consecrated himself as the king four years after becoming a sovereign. This interregnum can be explained assuming that he fought a war of succession with other sons of Bindusara during these four years.^[80]

The *Ashokavadana* contains a story about Ashoka's minister Yashas hiding the sun with his hand. Professor P. H. L. Eggermont theorised that this story was a reference to a partial solar eclipse that was seen in northern India on 4 May 249 BCE.^[81] According to the *Ashokavadana*, Ashoka went on a pilgrimage to various Buddhist sites sometime after this eclipse. Ashoka's Rummindei pillar inscription states that he visited [Lumbini](#) during his 21st regnal year. Assuming this visit was a part of the pilgrimage described in the text, and assuming that Ashoka visited Lumbini around 1-2 years after the solar eclipse, the ascension date of 268-269 BCE seems more likely.^{[79][41]} However, this theory is not universally accepted. For example, according to [John S. Strong](#), the event described in the *Ashokavadana* has nothing to do with chronology, and Eggermont's interpretation grossly ignores literary and religious context of the legend.^[82]

Reign before Buddhist influence

Both Sri Lankan and north Indian traditions assert that Ashoka was a violent person before his conversion to Buddhism.^[83] Taranatha also states that Ashoka was initially called "Kamashoka" because he spent many years in pleasurable pursuits (*kama*); he was then called "Chandashoka" ("Ashoka the fierce"), because he spent some years performing extremely wicked deeds; and finally, he came to be known as Dhammashoka ("Ashoka the righteous") after his conversion to Buddhism.^[84]

The *Ashokavadana* also calls him "Chandashoka", and describes several of his cruel acts:^[85]

- The ministers who had helped him ascend the throne started treating him with contempt after his ascension. To test their loyalty, Ashoka gave them the absurd order of cutting down every flower-and fruit-bearing tree. When they failed to carry out this order, Ashoka personally cut off heads of 500 ministers.^[85]
- One day, during a stroll at a park, Ashoka and his concubines came across a beautiful [Ashoka tree](#). The sight put him in a sensual mood, but the women did not enjoy caressing his rough skin. Sometime later, when Ashoka fell asleep, the resentful women chopped the flowers and the branches of his namesake tree. After Ashoka woke up, he burnt 500 of his concubines to death as a punishment.^[86]
- Alarmed by the king's personal involvement in such massacres, the prime minister Radha-gupta proposed hiring an executioner to carry out future mass killings, so as to leave the king unsullied. Girika, a Magadha village boy who boasted that he could execute the whole of [Jambudvipa](#), was hired for the purpose. He came to be known as Chandagirika ("Girika the fierce"), and on his request, Ashoka built a jail in Pataliputra.^[86] Called [Ashoka's Hell](#), the jail looked lovely from outside, but inside it, Girika brutally tortured the prisoners.^[87]

The 5th century Chinese traveller [Faxian](#) states that Ashoka personally visited the underworld to study the methods of torture there, and then invented his own methods. The 7th century traveller [Xuanzang](#) claims to have seen a pillar marking the site of Ashoka's "Hell". ^[84]

The *Mahavamsa* also briefly alludes to Ashoka's cruelty, stating that Ashoka was earlier called Chandashoka because of his evil deeds, but came to be called Dharmashoka because of his pious acts after his conversion to Buddhism. ^[88] However, unlike the north Indian tradition, the Sri Lankan texts do not mention any specific evil deeds performed by Ashoka, except his killing of 99 of his brothers. ^[83]

Such descriptions of Ashoka as an evil person before his conversion to Buddhism appear to be a fabrication of the Buddhist authors, ^[84] who attempted to present the change that Buddhism brought to him as a miracle. ^[83] In an attempt to dramatise this change, such legends exaggerate Ashoka's past wickedness and his piousness after the conversion. ^[89]

Kalinga war and conversion to Buddhism



[Kanaganahalli](#) inscribed panel portraying Asoka with [Brahmi](#) label "King Asoka", 1st-3rd century CE. ^[90]

Ashoka's own inscriptions mention that he conquered the [Kalinga](#) region during his 8th regnal year: the destruction caused during the war made him repent violence, and in the subsequent years, he was drawn towards Buddhism. ^[91] Edict 13 of the [Edicts of Ashoka](#) Rock Inscriptions expresses the great remorse the king felt after observing the destruction of Kalinga:

Directly after the Kalingas had been annexed began His Sacred Majesty's zealous protection of the Law of Piety, his love of that Law, and his inculcation of that Law. Thence arises the remorse of His Sacred Majesty for having conquered

the Kalingas, because the conquest of a country previously unconquered involves the slaughter, death, and carrying away captive of the people. That is a matter of profound sorrow and regret to His Sacred Majesty.^[92]

On the other hand, the Sri Lankan tradition suggests that Ashoka was already a devoted Buddhist by his 8th regnal year, having converted to Buddhism during his 4th regnal year, and having constructed 84,000 viharas during his 5th – 7th regnal years.^[91] The Buddhist legends make no mention of Kalinga campaign.^[93]

Based on Sri Lankan tradition, some scholars – such as Eggermont – believe that Ashoka converted to Buddhism *before* the Kalinga war.^[94] Critics of this theory argue that if Ashoka was already a Buddhist, he would not have waged the violent Kalinga War. Eggermont explains this anomaly by theorising that Ashoka had his own interpretation of the “[Middle Way](#)”.^[95]

Some earlier writers believed that Ashoka *dramatically* converted to Buddhism after seeing the suffering caused by the war, since his Major Rock Edict 13 states that he became closer to the dhamma after the annexation of Kalinga.^[93] However, even if Ashoka converted to Buddhism *after* the war, epigraphic evidence suggests that his conversion was a *gradual* process rather than a dramatic event.^[93] For example, in a Minor Rock Edict issued during his 13th regnal year (five years after the Kalinga campaign), he states that he had been an [upasaka](#) (lay Buddhist) for more than two and a half years, but did not make much progress; in the past year, he was drawn closer to the sangha, and became a more ardent follower.^[93]

The war

According to Ashoka’s Major Rock Edict 13, he conquered Kalinga 8 years after his ascension to the throne. The edict states that during his conquest of Kalinga, 100,000 men and animals were killed in action; many times that number “perished”; and 150,000 men and animals were carried away from Kalinga as captives. Ashoka states that the repentance of these sufferings caused him to devote himself to the practice and propagation of dharma.^[96] He proclaims that he now considered the slaughter, death and deportation caused during the conquest of a country painful and deplorable; and that he considered the suffering caused to the religious people and householders even more deplorable.^[96]

This edict has been found inscribed at several places, including Erragudi, Girnar, Kalsi, Maneshra, Shahbazgarhi and Kandahar.^[97] However, is omitted in Ashoka’s inscriptions found in the Kalinga region, where the Rock Edicts 13 and 14 have been replaced by two separate edicts that make no mention of Ashoka’s remorse. It is possible that Ashoka did not consider it politically appropriate to make such a confession to the people of Kalinga.^[98] Another possibility is the Kalinga war and its consequences, as described in Ashoka’s rock edicts, are

"more imaginary than real": this description is meant to impress those far removed from the scene, and thus, unable to verify its accuracy. ^[99]

Ancient sources do not mention any other military activity of Ashoka, although the 16th century writer [Taranatha](#) claims that Ashoka conquered the entire Jambudvipa. ^[94]

First contact with Buddhism

Different sources give different accounts of Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism. ^[84]

According to Sri Lankan tradition, Ashoka's father Bindusara was a devotee of [Brahmanism](#), and his mother Dharma was a devotee of [Ajivikas](#). ^[100] The [Samantapasadika](#) states that Ashoka followed non-Buddhist sects during the first three years of his reign. ^[101] The Sri Lankan texts add that Ashoka was not happy with the behaviour of the Brahmins who received his alms daily. His courtiers produced some Ajivika and Nigantha teachers before him, but these also failed to impress him. ^[102]

The *Dipavamsa* states that Ashoka invited several non-Buddhist religious leaders to his palace, and bestowed great gifts upon them in hope that they would be able to answer a question posed by the king. The text does not state what the question was, but mentions that none of the invitees were able to answer it. ^[103] One day, Ashoka saw a young Buddhist monk called Nigrodha (or Nyagrodha), who was looking for alms on a road in Pataliputra. ^[103] He was the king's nephew, although the king was not aware of this: ^[104] he was a posthumous son of Ashoka's eldest brother Sumana, whom Ashoka had killed during the conflict for the throne. ^[105] Ashoka was impressed by Nigrodha's tranquil and fearless appearance, and asked him to teach him his faith. In response, Nigrodha offered him a sermon on [appamada](#) (earnestness). ^[103] Impressed by the sermon, Ashoka offered Nigrodha 400,000 silver coins and 8 daily portions of rice. ^[106] The king became a Buddhist upasaka, and started visiting the [Kukkutarama](#) shrine at Pataliputra. At the temple, he met the Buddhist monk [Moggaliputta Tissa](#), and became more devoted to the Buddhist faith. ^[102] The veracity of this story is not certain. ^[106] This legend about Ashoka's search for a worthy teacher may be aimed at explaining why Ashoka did not adopt Jainism, another major contemporary faith that advocates non-violence and compassion. The legend suggests that Ashoka was not attracted to Buddhism because he was looking for such a faith, rather, for a competent spiritual teacher. ^[107] The Sri Lankan tradition adds that during his 6th regnal year, Ashoka's son Mahinda became a Buddhist monk, and his daughter became a Buddhist nun. ^[108]

A story in *Divyavadana* attributes Ashoka's conversion to the Buddhist monk Samudra, who was an ex-merchant from Shravasti. According to this account, Samudra was imprisoned in Ashoka's "Hell", but saved himself using his miraculous powers. When Ashoka heard about this, he visited the monk, and was

further impressed by a series of miracles performed by the monk. He then became a Buddhist.^[109] A story in the *Ashokavadana* states that Samudra was a merchant's son, and was a 12-year-old boy when he met Ashoka; this account seems to be influenced by the Nigrodha story.^[94]

The A-yu-wang-chuan states that a 7-year-old Buddhist converted Ashoka. Another story claims that the young boy ate 500 [Brahmanas](#) who were harassing Ashoka for being interested in Buddhism; these Brahmanas later miraculously turned into Buddhist [bhikkus](#) at the Kukkutarama monastery, where Ashoka paid a visit.^[109]

Several Buddhist establishments existed in various parts of India by the time of Ashoka's ascension. It is not clear which branch of the Buddhist sangha influenced him, but the one at his capital [Pataliputra](#) is a good candidate.^[110] Another good candidate is the one at [Mahabodhi](#): the Major Rock Edict 8 records his visit to the [Bodhi Tree](#) - the place of Buddha's enlightenment at Mahabodhi - after his 10th regnal year, and the minor rock edict issued during his 13th regnal year suggests that he had become a Buddhist around the same time.^{[110][93]}

Reign after Buddhist influence

Stupas



Illustration of the original temple built by Asoka at Bodh-Gaya on the location of the [Mahabodhi Temple](#), sculpture of the [Satavahana](#) period at [Sanchi](#), 1st century CE. The British restoration was done under guidance from [Weligama Sri Sumangala](#).^[111]



Stupa of [Sanchi](#). The central stupa was built during the Mauryas, and enlarged during the [Sungas](#), but the decorative gateway is dated to the later dynasty of the [Satavahanas](#).

Both *Mahavamsa* and *Ashokavadana* state that Ashoka constructed 84,000 stupas or viharas. ^[112] According to the *Mahavamsa*, this activity took place during his 5th – 7th regnal years. ^[108]

The *Ashokavadana* states that Ashoka collected seven out of the eight relics of Gautama Buddha, and had their portions kept in 84,000 boxes made of gold, silver, [cat's eye](#), and crystal. He ordered construction of 84,000 stupas throughout the earth, in towns that had a population of 100,000 or more. He told Elder Yashas, a monk at the Kukkutarama monastery, that he wanted these stupas to be completed on the same day. Yashas stated that he would signal the completion time by eclipsing the sun with his hand. When he did so, the 84,000 stupas were completed at once. ^[25]

The *Mahavamsa* states that Ashoka ordered construction of 84,000 viharas (monasteries) rather than the stupas to house the relics. ^[113] Like *Ashokavadana*, the *Mahavamsa* describes Ashoka's collection of the relics, but does not mention this episode in the context of the construction activities. ^[113] It states that Ashoka decided to construct the 84,000 viharas when Moggaliputta Tissa told him that there were 84,000 sections of the Buddha's Dhamma. ^[114] Ashoka himself began the construction of the Ashokarama vihara, and ordered subordinate kings to build the other viharas. Ashokarama was completed by the miraculous power of Thera Indagutta, and the news about the completion of the 84,000 viharas arrived from various cities on the same day. ^[25]

The number 84,000 is an obvious exaggeration, and it appears that in the later period, the construction of almost every old stupa was attributed to Ashoka. ^[115]

The construction of following stupas and viharas is credited to Ashoka: ^[citation needed]

- [Sanchi](#), [Madhya Pradesh](#), India
- [Dhamek Stupa](#), [Sarnath](#), [Uttar Pradesh](#), India
- [Mahabodhi Temple](#), [Bihar](#), India
- [Barabar Caves](#), [Bihar](#), India
- [Nalanda](#) Mahavihara (some portions like Sariputta Stupa), [Bihar](#), India

- [Taxila](#) University (some portions like [Dharmarajika](#) Stupa and Kunala Stupa), [Taxila](#), Pakistan
- [Bhir Mound](#) (*reconstructed*), [Taxila](#), Pakistan
- [Bharhut stupa](#), [Madhya Pradesh](#), India
- [Deorkothar](#) Stupa, [Madhya Pradesh](#), India
- [Butkara Stupa](#), [Swat](#), Pakistan
- [Sannati](#) Stupa, [Karnataka](#), India
- Mir Rukun Stupa, [Nawabshah](#), [Pakistan](#)

Propagation of dhamma

Ashoka's rock edicts suggest that during his 8th - 9th regnal years, he made a pilgrimage to the Bodhi Tree, started propagating dhamma, and performed social welfare activities. The welfare activities included establishment of medical treatment facilities for humans and animals; plantation of medicinal herbs; and digging of wells and plantation of trees along the roads. These activities were conducted in the neighbouring kingdoms, including those of the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Satiyaputras, Tamraparni, the Greek kingdom of Antiyoka. ^[116]

The edicts also state that during his 10th - 11th regnal years, Ashoka became closer to the Buddhist sangha, and went on a tour of the empire that lasted for at least 256 days. ^[116]

By his 12th regnal year, Ashoka had started inscribing edicts to propagate dhamma, having ordered his officers (*rajjukas* and *pradesikas*) to tour their jurisdictions every five years for inspection and for preaching *dhamma*. By the next year, he had set up the post of the *dharma-mahamatra*. ^[116]

During his 14th regnal year, he commissioned the enlargement of the stupa of Buddha Kanakamuni. ^[116]

Third Buddhist Council



Ashoka and Monk [Moggaliputta-Tissa](#) at the [Third Buddhist Council](#). Nava Jetavana, [Shravasti](#).

The Sri Lankan tradition presents a greater role for Ashoka in the Buddhist community. ^[22] In this tradition, Ashoka starts feeding monks on a large scale.

His lavish patronage to the state patronage leads to many fake monks joining the sangha. The true Buddhist monks refuse to co-operate with these fake monks, and therefore, no [uposatha](#) ceremony is held for seven years. The king attempts to eradicate the fake monks, but during this attempt, an over-zealous minister ends up killing some real monks. The king then invites the elder monk [Moggaliputta-Tissa](#), to help him expel non-Buddhists from the monastery founded by him at Pataliputra. ^[104] 60,000 monks ([bhikkhus](#)) convicted of being heretical are defrocked in the ensuing process. ^[22] The uposatha ceremony is then held, and Tissa subsequently organises the [Third Buddhist council](#), ^[117] during the 17th regnal year of Ashoka. ^[118] Tissa compiles [Kathavatthu](#), a text that reaffirms Theravadin orthodoxy on several points. ^[117]

The North Indian tradition makes no mention of these events, which has led to doubts about the historicity of the Third Buddhist council. ^[23]

[Richard Gombrich](#) argues that the non-corroboration of this story by inscriptional evidence cannot be used to dismiss it as completely unhistorical, as several of Ashoka's inscriptions may have been lost. ^[117] Gombrich also argues that Ashoka's inscriptions prove that he was interested in maintaining the "unanimity and purity" of the Sangha. ^[119] For example, in his Minor Rock Edict 3, Ashoka recommends the members of the Sangha to study certain texts (most of which remain unidentified). Similarly, in an inscription found at Sanchi, Sarnath, and Kosam, Ashoka mandates that the dissident members of the sangha should be expelled, and expresses his desire to the Sangha remain united and flourish. ^{[120][121]}

The 8th century Buddhist pilgrim [Yijing](#) records another story about Ashoka's involvement in the Buddhist sangha. According to this story, the earlier king [Bimbisara](#), who was a contemporary of the Gautama Buddha, once saw 18 fragments of a cloth and a stick in a dream. The Buddha interpreted the dream to mean that his philosophy would be divided into 18 schools after his death, and predicted that a king called Ashoka would unite these schools over a hundred years later. ^[76]

Buddhist missions

In the Sri Lankan tradition, [Moggaliputta-Tissa](#) - who is patronised by Ashoka - sends out nine Buddhist missions to spread Buddhism in the "border areas" in c. 250 BCE. This tradition does not credit Ashoka directly with sending these missions. Each mission comprises five monks, and is headed by an elder. ^[122] To Sri Lanka, he sent his own son Mahinda, accompanied by four other Theras - Itthiya, Uttiya, Sambala and Bhaddasala. ^[22] Next, with Moggaliputta-Tissa's help, Ashoka sent Buddhist missionaries to distant regions such as Kashmir, Gandhara, Himalayas, the land of the Yonas (Greeks), Maharashtra, Suvannabhumi, and Sri Lanka. ^[22]

The Sri Lankan tradition dates these missions to Ashoka's 18th regnal year, naming the following missionaries:^[116]

- Mahinda to Sri Lanka
- Majjhantika to Kashmir and Gandhara
- Mahadeva to Mahisa-mandala (possibly modern Mysore region)
- Rakkhita to Vanavasa
- Dhammarakkhita the Greek to Aparantaka (western India)
- Maha-dhamma-rakkhita to Maharashtra
- Maharakkhita to the Greek country
- Majjhima to the Himalayas
- Soṇa and Uttara to Suvannabhūmi (possibly Lower Burma and Thailand)

The tradition adds that during his 19th regnal year, Ashoka's daughter Sanghamitta went to Sri Lanka to establish an order of nuns, taking a sapling of the sacred Bodhi Tree with her.^{[122][118]}

The North Indian tradition makes no mention of these events.^[123] Ashoka's own inscriptions also appear to omit any mention of these events, recording only one of his activities during this period: in his 19th regnal year, he donated the Khalatika Cave to ascetics to provide them a shelter during the rainy season. Ashoka's [Pillar Edicts](#) suggest that during the next year, he made pilgrimage to Lumbini – the place of Buddha's birth, and to the stupa of the Buddha Kanakamuni.^[118]

The Rock Edict XIII states that Ashoka's won a "dhamma victory" by sending messengers to five kings and several other kingdoms. Whether these missions correspond to the Buddhist missions recorded in the Buddhist chronicles is debated.^[123] Indologist [Etienne Lamotte](#) argues that the "dhamma" missionaries mentioned in Ashoka's inscriptions were probably not Buddhist monks, as this "dhamma" was not same as "Buddhism".^[124] Moreover, the lists of destinations of the missions and the dates of the missions mentioned in the inscriptions do not tally the ones mentioned in the Buddhist legends.^[125]

Other scholars, such as [Erich Frauwallner](#) and [Richard Gombrich](#), believe that the missions mentioned in the Sri Lankan tradition are historical.^[125] According to these scholars, a part of this story is corroborated by archaeological evidence: the *Vinaya Nidana* mentions names of five monks, who are said to have gone to the Himalayan region; three of these names have been found inscribed on relic caskets found at [Bhilsa](#) (near [Vidisha](#)). These caskets have been dated to early 2nd century BCE, and the inscription states that the monks are of the Himalayan school.^[122] The missions may have set out from Vidisha in central India, as the caskets were discovered there, and as Mahinda is said to have stayed there for a month before setting out for Sri Lanka.^[126]

According to Gombrich, the mission may have included representatives of other religions, and thus, Lamotte's objection about "dhamma" is not valid. The

Buddhist chroniclers may have decided not to mention these non-Buddhists, so as not to sideline Buddhism. ^[127] Frauwallner and Gombrich also believe that Ashoka was directly responsible for the missions, since only a resourceful ruler could have sponsored such activities. The Sri Lankan chronicles, which belong to the Theravada school, exaggerate the role of the Theravadin monk Moggaliputta-Tissa in order to glorify their sect. ^[127]

Some historians argue that Buddhism became a major religion because of Ashoka's royal patronage. ^[128] However, epigraphic evidence suggests that the spread of Buddhism in north-western India and Deccan region was less because of Ashoka's missions, and more because of merchants, traders, landowners and the artisan guilds who supported Buddhist establishments. ^[129]

Violence after conversion

According to the *Ashokavadana*, Ashoka resorted to violence even after converting to Buddhism. For example: ^[130]

- He slowly tortured Chandagirika to death in the "hell" prison. ^[130]
- He ordered a massacre of 18,000 heretics for a misdeed of one. ^[130]
- He launched a pogrom against the Jains, announcing a bounty on the head of any heretic; this results in the beheading of his own brother - Vitashoka. ^[130]

According to the *Ashokavadana*, a non-Buddhist in [Pundravardhana](#) drew a picture showing the Buddha bowing at the feet of the Nirgrantha leader Jnatiputra. The term nirgrantha ("free from bonds") was originally used for a pre-Jaina ascetic order, but later came to be used for Jain monks. ^[131] "Jnatiputra" is identified with [Mahavira](#), 24th Tirthankara of [Jainism](#). The legend states that on complaint from a Buddhist devotee, Ashoka issued an order to arrest the non-Buddhist artist, and subsequently, another order to kill all the [Ajivikas](#) in Pundravardhana. Around 18,000 followers of the Ajivika sect were executed as a result of this order. ^{[132][133]} Sometime later, another Nirgrantha follower in [Pataliputra](#) drew a similar picture. Ashoka burnt him and his entire family alive in their house. ^[133] He also announced an award of one [dinara](#) (silver coin) to anyone who brought him the head of a Nirgrantha heretic. According to *Ashokavadana*, as a result of this order, his own brother was mistaken for a heretic and killed by a cowherd. ^[132] Ashoka realised his mistake, and withdrew the order. ^[131]

For several reasons, scholars say, these stories of persecutions of rival sects by Ashoka appear to be clear fabrications arising out of sectarian propaganda. ^{[133][134][135]}

Last years

Tissarakkha as the queen

Ashoka's last dated inscription – the [Pillar Edict 4](#) is from his 26th regnal year. ^[118] The only source of information about Ashoka's later years are the Buddhist legends. The Sri Lankan tradition states that Ashoka's queen Asandhamitta died during his 29th regnal year, and in his 32nd regnal year, his wife Tissarakkha was given the title of queen. ^[118]

Both *Mahavamsa* and *Ashokavadana* state that Ashoka extended favours and attention to the [Bodhi Tree](#), and a jealous Tissarakkha mistook "Bodhi" to be a mistress of Ashoka. She then used black magic to make the tree wither. ^[136] According to the *Ashokavadana*, she hired a sorceress to do the job, and when Ashoka explained that "Bodhi" was the name of a tree, she had the sorceress heal the tree. ^[137] According to the *Mahavamsa*, she completely destroyed the tree, ^[138] during Ashoka's 34th regnal year. ^[118]

The *Ashokavadana* states that Tissarakkha (called "Tishyarakshita" here) made sexual advances towards Ashoka's son Kunala, but Kunala rejected her. Subsequently, Ashoka granted Tissarakkha kingship for seven days, and during this period, she tortured and blinded Kunala. ^[139] Ashoka then threatened to "tear out her eyes, rip open her body with sharp rakes, impale her alive on a spit, cut off her nose with a saw, cut out her tongue with a razor." Kunala regained his eyesight miraculously, and pleaded for mercy on the queen, but Ashoka had her executed anyway. ^[136] Kshemendra's *Avadana-kalpa-lata* also narrates this legend, but seeks to improve Ashoka's image by stating that he forgave the queen after Kunala regained his eyesight. ^[140]

Death

According to the Sri Lankan tradition, Ashoka died during his 37th regnal year, ^[118] which suggests that he died around 232 BCE. ^[141]

According to the *Ashokavadana*, the emperor fell severely ill during his last days. He started using state funds to make donations to the Buddhist sangha, prompting his ministers to deny him access to the state treasury. Ashoka then started donating his personal possessions, but was similarly restricted from doing so. On his deathbed, his only possession was the half of a [myrobalan fruit](#), which he offered to the sangha as his final donation. ^[142] Such legends encourage generous donations to the *sangha* and highlight the role of the kingship in supporting the Buddhist faith. ^[40]

Legend states that during his cremation, his body burned for seven days and nights. ^[143]

Family



A king – most probably Ashoka – with his two queens and three attendants, in a relief at [Sanchi](#).^[2] The king's identification with Ashoka is suggested by a similar relief at [Kanaganahalli](#), which bears his name.^{[144][2]}



Ashoka with his queen, at [Kanaganahalli](#) near [Sannati](#), 1st – 3rd century CE. The relief bears the inscription "Rāya Asoko" (, "King Ashoka") in [Brahmi script](#). It depicts the king with his queen, two attendants bearing fly-whisks, and one attendant bearing an umbrella.^{[144][2]}



Emperor Ashoka and his Queen at the [Deer Park](#). [Sanchi](#) relief. ^[2]

Queens

Various sources mention five consorts of Ashoka: [Devi](#) (or Vedisa-Mahadevi-Shakyakumari), [Karuvaki](#), [Asandhimitra](#) (Pali: Asandhimitta), [Padmavati](#), and [Tishyarakshita](#) (Pali: Tissarakkha). ^[145]

Kaurvaki is the only queen of Ashoka known from his own inscriptions: she is mentioned in an edict inscribed on a pillar at Allahabad. The inscription names her as the mother of prince Tivara, and orders the royal officers (mahamattas) to record her religious and charitable donations. ^[80] According to one theory, Tishyarakshita was the regnal name of Kaurvaki. ^[80]

According to the *Mahavamsa*, Ashoka's chief queen was Asandhimitta, who died four years before him. ^[80] It states that she was born as Ashoka's queen because in a previous life, she directed a [pratyekabuddha](#) to a honey merchant (who was later reborn as Ashoka). ^[146] Some later texts also state that she additionally gave the pratyekabuddha a piece of cloth made by her. ^[147] These texts include the *Dasavatthupparakana*, the so-called Cambodian or Extended *Mahavamsa* (possibly from 9th - 10th centuries), and the *Trai Bhumi Katha* (15th century). ^[147] These texts narrate another story: one day, Ashoka mocked Asandhamitta was enjoying a tasty piece of sugarcane without having earned it through her karma. Asandhamitta replied that all her enjoyments resulted from merit resulting from her own karma. Ashoka then challenged her to prove this by procuring 60,000 robes as an offering for monks. ^[147] At night, the guardian gods informed her about her past gift to the pratyekabuddha, and next day, she was able to miraculously procure the 60,000 robes. An impressed Ashoka makes her his

favourite queen, and even offers to make her a sovereign ruler. Asandhamitta refuses the offer, but still invokes the jealousy of Ashoka's 16,000 other wives. Ashoka proves her superiority by having 16,000 identical cakes baked with his royal seal hidden in only one of them. Each wife is asked to choose a cake, and only Asandhamitta gets the one with the royal seal.^[148] The *Trai Bhumi Katha* claims that it was Asandhamitta who encouraged her husband to become a Buddhist, and to construct 84,000 stupas and 84,000 viharas.^[149]

According to *Mahavamsa*, after Asandhamitta's death, [Tissarakkha](#) became the chief queen.^[80] The *Ashokavadana* does not mention Asandhamitta at all, but does mention Tissarakkha as Tishyarakshita.^[139] The *Divyavadana* mentions another queen called Padmavati, who was the mother of the crown-prince Kunala.^[80]

As mentioned above, according to the Sri Lankan tradition, Ashoka fell in love with Devi (or Vidisha-Mahadevi), as a prince in central India.^[68] After Ashoka's ascension to the throne, Devi chose to remain at Vidisha than move to the royal capital Pataliputra. According to the *Mahavmsa*, Ashoka's chief queen was Asandhamitta, not Devi: the text does not talk of any connection between the two women, so it is unlikely that Asandhamitta was another name for Devi.^[150] The Sri Lankan tradition uses the word *samvasa* to describe the relationship between Ashoka and Devi, which modern scholars variously interpret as sexual relations outside marriage, or co-residence as a married couple.^[151] Those who argue that Ashoka did not marry Devi argue that their theory is corroborated by the fact that Devi did not become Ashoka's chief queen in Pataliputra after his ascension.^[66] The *Dipavamsa* refers to two children of Ashoka and Devi - Mahinda and [Sanghamitta](#).^[152]

Sons

Tivara, the son of Ashoka and Karuvaki, is the only of Ashoka's sons to be mentioned by name in the inscriptions.^[80]

According to North Indian tradition, Ashoka had a son named Kunala.^[23] Kunala had a son named Samprati.^[80]

The Sri Lankan tradition mentions a son called Mahinda, who was sent to Sri Lanka as a Buddhist missionary; this son is not mentioned at all in the North Indian tradition.^[22] The Chinese pilgrim [Xuanzang](#) states that Mahinda was Ashoka's younger brother (Vitashoka or Vigatashoka) rather than his illegitimate son.^[153]

The *Divyavadana* mentions the crown-prince Kunala alias Dharmavivardhana, who was a son of queen Padmavati. According to Faxian, Dharmavivardhana was appointed as the governor of Gandhara.^[80]

The *Rajatarangini* mentions Jalauka as a son of Ashoka.^[80]

Daughters

According to Sri Lankan tradition, Ashoka had a daughter named Sanghamitta, who became a Buddhist nun. ^[108] A section of historians, such as [Romila Thapar](#), doubt the historicity of Sanghamitta, based on the following points: ^[154]

- The name "Sanghamitta", which literally means the friend of the Buddhist Order (sangha), is unusual, and the story of her going to Ceylon so that the Ceylonese queen could be ordained appears to be an exaggeration. ^[150]
- The *Mahavamsa* states that she married Ashoka's nephew Agnibrahma, and the couple had a son named Sumana. The contemporary laws regarding exogamy would have forbidden such a marriage between first cousins. ^[153]
- According to the *Mahavamsa*, she was 18 years old when she was ordained as a nun. ^[150] The narrative suggests that she was married two years earlier, and that her husband as well as her child were ordained. It is unlikely that she would have been allowed to become a nun with such a young child. ^[153]

Another source mentions that Ashoka had a daughter named Charumati, who married a kshatriya named Devapala. ^[80]

Brothers

According to the *Ashokavadana*, Ashoka had an elder half-brother named Susima. ^[45] According to the Sri Lankan tradition, Ashoka killed his 99 half-brothers. ^[104]

Various sources mention that one of Ashoka's brothers survived his ascension, and narrate stories about his role in the Buddhist community. ^[155]

- According to Sri Lankan tradition, this brother was Tissa, who initially lived a luxurious life, without worrying about the world. To teach him a lesson, Ashoka put him on the throne for a few days, then accused him of being an usurper, and sentenced him to die after seven days. During these seven days, Tissa realised that the Buddhist monks gave up pleasure because they were aware of the eventual death. He then left the palace, and became an *arhat*. ^[77]
- The Theragatha commentary calls this brother Vitashoka. According to this legend, one day, Vitashoka saw a grey hair on his head, and realised that he had become old. He then retired to a monastery, and became an arhat. ^[131]
- Faxian calls the younger brother Mahendra, and states that Ashoka shamed him for his immoral behaviour. The brother then retired to a dark cave, where he meditated, and became an arhat. Ashoka invited him to return to the family, but he preferred to live alone on a hill. So, Ashoka had a hill built for him within Pataliputra. ^[131]

- The Ashoka-vadana states that Ashoka's brother was mistaken for a Nirgrantha, and killed during a massacre of the Nirgranthas ordered by Ashoka. ^[131]

Imperial extent



Ashoka's empire stretched from [Afghanistan](#) to [Bengal](#) to southern [India](#). Several modern maps depict it as covering nearly all of the Indian subcontinent, except the southern tip. ^[156]

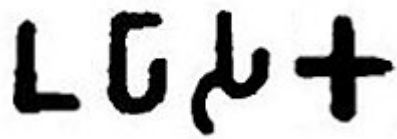


[Hermann Kulke](#) and [Dietmar Rothermund](#) believe that Ashoka's empire did not include large parts of India, which were controlled by autonomous tribes. ^[156]

The extent of the territory controlled by Ashoka's predecessors is not certain, but it is possible that the empire of his grandfather Chandragupta extended northern India from western coast (Arabian Sea) to the eastern coast (Bay of Bengal), covering nearly two-thirds of the [Indian subcontinent](#). Bindusara and Ashoka appear to have extended the empire southwards. ^[157] The distribution of Ashoka's inscriptions suggests that his empire included almost the entire [Indian subcontinent](#), except its southernmost parts. The Rock Edicts 2 and 13 suggest that these southernmost parts were controlled by the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Keralaputras, and the Satiyaputras. In the north-west, Ashoka's kingdom extended up to [Kandahar](#), to the east of the [Seleucid Empire](#) ruled by [Antiochus II](#). ^[2] The capital of Ashoka's empire was [Pataliputra](#) in the [Magadha](#) region. ^[157]

Religion and philosophy

Relationship with Buddhism



The word [Upāsaka](#) (, "Buddhist lay follower", in the [Brahmi script](#)), used by Ashoka in his [Minor Rock Edict](#) No.1 to describe his affiliation to Buddhism (circa 258 BCE).

The Buddhist legends state that Ashoka converted to Buddhism,^[158] although this has been debated by a section of scholars.^[159] The [Minor Rock Edict 1](#) leaves no doubt that Ashoka was a follower of Buddhism. In this edict, he calls himself an [upasaka](#) (a lay follower of Buddhism) and a *sakya* (i.e. Buddhist, after Gautama Buddha's title *Shakya-Muni*).^[160] This and several other edicts are evidence of his Buddhist affiliation:^[161]

- In his Minor Rock Edict 1, Ashoka adds that he did not make much progress for a year after becoming an *upasaka*, but then, he "went to" the Sangha, and made more progress. It is not certain what "going to" the Sangha means – the Buddhist tradition that he lived with monks may be an exaggeration, but it clearly means that Ashoka was drawn closer to Buddhism.^[162]
- In his Minor Rock Edict 3, he calls himself an *upasaka*, and records his faith in the Buddha and the Sangha.^{[163][164]}
- In the [Major Rock Edict 8](#), he records his visit to Sambodhi (the sacred Bodhi Tree at Bodh Gaya), ten years after his coronation.^[164]
- In the [Lumbini \(Rumminidei\) inscription](#), he records his visit to the Buddha's birthplace, and declares his reverence for the Buddha and the sangha.^[82]
- In the Nigalisagar inscription, he records his doubling in size of a stupa dedicated to a former Buddha, and his visit to the site for worship.^[120]
- Some of his inscriptions reflect his interest in maintaining the Buddhist sangha (see [#Purification of sangha](#) below).^[120]
- The [Saru Maru](#) inscription states that Ashoka dispatched the message while travelling to Upunita-vihara in Manema-desha. Although the identity of the destination is not certain, it was obviously a Buddhist monastery ([vihara](#)).^[165]

Other religions

A legend in the Buddhist text *Vamsatthapakasini* states that an Ajivika ascetic invited to interpret a dream of Ashoka's mother had predicted that he would patronise Buddhism and destroy 96 heretical sects.^[76] However, such assertions are directly contradicted by Ashoka's own inscriptions. Ashoka's edicts, such as

the Rock Edicts 6, 7, and 12, emphasise tolerance of all sects.^[166] Similarly, in his [Rock Edict 12](#), Ashoka honours people of all faiths.^[167] In his inscriptions, Ashoka dedicates caves to non-Buddhist ascetics, and repeatedly states that both Brahmins and shramanas deserved respect. He also tells people "not to denigrate other sects, but to inform themselves about them".^[162]

In fact, there is no evidence that Buddhism was a state religion under Ashoka.^[168] None of Ashoka's extant edicts record his direct donations to the Buddhists. One inscription records donations by his queen [Karuvaki](#), while the emperor is known to have donated the [Barabar Caves](#) to the [Ajivikas](#).^[169] There are some indirect references to his donations to Buddhists. For example, the Nigalisagar Pillar inscription records his enlargement of the Konakamana stupa.^[170] Similarly, the [Lumbini \(Rumminidei\) inscription](#) states that he exempted the village of Buddha's birth from the land tax, and reduced the revenue tax to one-eighth.^[171]

Ashoka appointed the *dhamma-mahamatta* officers, whose duties included the welfare of various religious sects, including the Buddhist sangha, Brahmins, Ajivikas, and Nirgranthas. The Rock Edicts 8 and 12, and the Pillar Edict 7, mandate donations to all religious sects.^[172]

Ashoka's [Minor Rock Edict 1](#) contains the phrase "*amissā devā*". According to one interpretation, the term "*amissā*" derives from the word "*amṛṣā*" ("false"), and thus, the phrase is a reference to Ashoka's belief in "true" and "false" gods. However, it is more likely that the term derives from the word "*amiśrā*" ("not mingled"), and the phrase refers to celestial beings who did not mingle with humans. The inscription claims that the righteousness generated by adoption of dhamma by the humans attracted even the celestial gods who did not mingle with humans.^[173]

Dharma

Main article: [Ashoka's policy of Dhamma](#)

Ashoka's various inscriptions suggest that he devoted himself to the propagation of "Dharma" (Pali: Dhamma), a term that refers to the teachings of [Gautama Buddha](#) in the Buddhist circles.^[174] However, Ashoka's own inscriptions do not mention Buddhist doctrines such as the [Four Noble Truths](#) or [Nirvana](#).^[82] The word "Dharma" has various connotations in the [Indian religions](#), and can be generally translated as "law, duty, or righteousness".^[174] In the Kandahar inscriptions of Ashoka, the word "Dharma" has been translated as [eusebeia](#) (Greek) and qsyth (Aramaic), which further suggests that his "Dharma" meant something more generic than Buddhism.^[159]

The inscriptions suggest that for Ashoka, Dharma meant "a moral polity of active social concern, religious tolerance, ecological awareness, the observance of common ethical precepts, and the renunciation of war."^[174] For example:

- Abolition of the death penalty (Pillar Edict IV)^[162]
- Plantation of banyan trees and mango groves, and construction of resthouses and wells, every half a mile along the roads. (Pillar Edict 7).^[167]
- Restriction on killing of animals in the royal kitchen (Rock Edict 1);^[167] the number of animals killed was limited to two peacocks and a deer daily, and in future, even these animals were not to be killed.^[162]
- Provision of medical facilities for humans and animals (Rock Edict 2).^[167]
- Encouragement of obedience to parents, "generosity toward priests and ascetics, and frugality in spending" (Rock Edict 3).^[167]
- He "commissions officers to work for the welfare and happiness of the poor and aged" (Rock Edict 5)^[167]
- Promotion of "the welfare of all beings so as to pay off his debt to living creatures and to work for their happiness in this world and the next." (Rock Edict 6)^[167]

Modern scholars have variously understood this *dhamma* as a Buddhist lay ethic, a set of politico-moral ideas, a "sort of universal religion", or as an Ashokan innovation. On the other hand, it has also been interpreted as an *essentially political* ideology that sought to knit together a vast and diverse empire.^[14]

Ashoka instituted a new category of officers called the *dhamma-mahamattas*, who were tasked with the welfare of the aged, the infirm, the women and children, and various religious sects. They were also sent on diplomatic missions to the Hellenistic kingdoms of west Asia, in order to propagate the dhamma.^[172]

Historically, the image of Ashoka in the global Buddhist circles was based on legends (such as those mentioned in the [Ashokavadana](#)) rather than his rock edicts. This was because the Brahmi script in which these edicts were written was forgotten soon and remained undeciphered until its study by James Prinsep in the 19th century.^[175] The writings of the Chinese Buddhist pilgrims such as Faxian and Xuanzang suggest that Ashoka's inscriptions mark the important sites associated with Gautama Buddha. These writers attribute Buddhism-related content to Ashoka's edicts, but this content does not match with the actual text of the inscriptions as determined by modern scholars after the decipherment of the Brahmi script. It is likely that the script was forgotten by the time of Faxian, who probably relied on local guides; these guides may have made up some Buddhism-related interpretations to gratify him, or may have themselves relied on faulty translations based on oral traditions. Xuanzang may have encountered a similar situation, or may have taken the supposed content of the inscriptions from Faxian's writings.^[176] This theory is corroborated by the fact that some Brahmin scholars are known to have similarly come up with a fanciful interpretation of Ashoka pillar inscriptions, when requested to decipher them by

the 14th century Muslim king [Firuz Shah Tughlaq](#). According to Shams-i Siraj's *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi*, after the king had these pillar transported from [Topra](#) and Mirat to Delhi as war trophies, these Brahmins told him that the inscriptions prophesized that nobody would be able to remove the pillars except a king named Firuz. Moreover, by this time, there were local traditions that attributed the erection of these pillars to the legendary hero [Bhima](#).^[177]

According to scholars such as Richard Gombrich, Ashoka's dharma shows Buddhist influence. For example, the Kalinga Separate Edict I seems to be inspired by Buddha's *Advice to Sigala* and his other sermons.^[162]

Animal welfare

Ashoka's rock edicts declare that injuring living things is not good, and no animal should be sacrificed for slaughter.^[178] However, he did not prohibit common cattle slaughter or beef eating.^[179]

He imposed a ban on killing of "all four-footed creatures that are neither useful nor edible", and of specific animal species including several birds, certain types of fish and bulls among others. He also banned killing of female goats, sheep and pigs that were nursing their young; as well as their young up to the age of six months. He also banned killing of all fish and [castration](#) of animals during certain periods such as [Chaturmasa](#) and [Uposatha](#).^{[180][181]}

Ashoka also abolished the royal hunting of animals and restricted the slaying of animals for food in the royal residence.^[182] Because he banned hunting, created many veterinary clinics and eliminated meat eating on many holidays, the Mauryan Empire under Ashoka has been described as "one of the very few instances in world history of a government treating its animals as citizens who are as deserving of its protection as the human residents".^[183]

Foreign relations



Territories "conquered by the Dharma" according to [Major Rock Edict No. 13](#) of Ashoka (260 – 218 BCE).^{[184][185]}

It is well known that Ashoka sent *dūtas* or emissaries to convey messages or letters, written or oral (rather both), to various people. The VIth Rock Edict about "oral orders" reveals this. It was later confirmed that it was not unusual

to add oral messages to written ones, and the content of Ashoka's messages can be inferred likewise from the XIIIth Rock Edict: They were meant to spread his *dhammavijaya*, which he considered the highest victory and which he wished to propagate everywhere (including far beyond India). There is obvious and undeniable trace of cultural contact through the adoption of the [Kharosthi](#) script, and the idea of installing inscriptions might have travelled with this script, as [Achaemenid](#) influence is seen in some of the formulations used by Ashoka in his inscriptions. This indicates to us that Ashoka was indeed in contact with other cultures, and was an active part in mingling and spreading new cultural ideas beyond his own immediate walls. ^[186]

Hellenistic world

In his rock edicts, Ashoka states that he had encouraged the transmission of Buddhism to the [Hellenistic kingdoms](#) to the west and that the Greeks in his dominion were converts to Buddhism and recipients of his envoys:

Now it is conquest by Dhamma that Beloved-of-the-Gods considers to be the best conquest. And it (conquest by Dhamma) has been won here, on the borders, even six hundred yojanas 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.

Here in the king's domain among the Greeks, the Kambojas, the Nabhakas, the Nabhapamktis, the Bhojas, the Pitinikas, the Andhras and the Palidas, everywhere people are following Beloved-of-the-Gods' instructions in Dhamma. Even where Beloved-of-the-Gods' envoys have not been, these people too, having heard of the practice of Dhamma and the ordinances and instructions in Dhamma given by Beloved-of-the-Gods, are following it and will continue to do so.

— [Edicts of Ashoka](#), [Rock Edict](#) (S. Dhammika)^[187]

It is possible, but not certain, that Ashoka received letters from Greek rulers and was acquainted with the Hellenistic royal orders in the same way as he perhaps knew of the inscriptions of the Achaemenid kings, given the presence of ambassadors of Hellenistic kings in India (as well as the *dūtas* sent by Ashoka himself). ^[186] [Dionysius](#) is reported to have been such a Greek ambassador at the court of Ashoka, sent by [Ptolemy II Philadelphus](#), ^[188] who himself is mentioned in the [Edicts of Ashoka](#) as a recipient of the Buddhist proselytism of Ashoka. Some Hellenistic philosophers, such as [Hegesias of Cyrene](#), who probably lived under the rule of King [Magas](#), one of the supposed recipients of Buddhist emissaries from Asoka, are sometimes thought to have been influenced by Buddhist teachings. ^[189]

The Greeks in India even seem to have played an active role in the propagation 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 spreading Buddhism (the [Mahavamsa](#), XII).^[190]

Some Greeks (Yavana) may have played an administrative role in the territories ruled by Ashoka. The Girnar inscription of [Rudradaman](#) records that during the rule of Ashoka, a [Yavana](#) Governor was in charge in the area of [Girnar](#), [Gujarat](#), mentioning his role in the construction of a water reservoir.^[191]

It is thought that Ashoka's palace at Patna was modelled after the Achaemenid palace of [Persepolis](#).^[192]

Legends about past lives

Buddhist legends mention stories about Ashoka's past lives. According to a *Mahavamsa* story, Ashoka, Nigrodha and Devnampiya Tissa were brothers in a previous life. In that life, a [pratyekabuddha](#) was looking for honey to cure another, sick pratyekabuddha. A woman directed him to a honey shop owned by the three brothers. Ashoka generously donated honey to the pratyekabuddha, and wished to become the sovereign ruler of Jambudvipa for this act of merit.^[193] The woman wished to become his queen, and was reborn as Ashoka's wife Asandhamitta.^[146] Later Pali texts credit her with an additional act of merit: she gifted the pratyekabuddha a piece of cloth made by her. These texts include the *Dasavatthupparakana*, the so-called Cambodian or Extended *Mahavamsa* (possibly from 9th - 10th centuries), and the *Trai Bhumi Katha* (15th century).^[147]

According to an *Ashokavadana* story, Ashoka was born as Jaya in a prominent family of Rajagriha. When he was a little boy, he gave the Gautama Buddha dirt imagining it to be food. The Buddha approved of the donation, and Jaya declared that he would become a king by this act of merit. The text also states that Jaya's companion Vijaya was reborn as Ashoka's prime-minister Radhagupta.^[194] In the later life, the Buddhist monk Upagupta tells Ashoka that his rough skin was caused by the impure gift of dirt in the previous life.^[130] Some later texts repeat this story, without mentioning the negative implications of gifting dirt; these texts include Kumaralata's *Kalpavandana*, Aryashura's *Jataka-mala*, and the *Mahakarmavibhanga*. The Chinese writer Pao Ch'eng's *Shih chia ju lai ying hua lu* asserts that an insignificant act like gifting dirt could not have been meritorious enough to cause Ashoka's future greatness. Instead, the text claims that in another past life, Ashoka commissioned a large number of Buddha statues as a king, and this act of merit caused him to become a great emperor in the next life.^[195]

The 14th century Pali-language fairy tale *Dasavatthupparakana* (possibly from c. 14th century) combines the stories about the merchant's gift of honey, and the boy's gift of dirt. It narrates a slightly different version of the *Mahavamsa* story, stating that it took place before the birth of the Gautama Buddha. It then states that the merchant was reborn as the boy who gifted dirt to the

Buddha; however, in this case, the Buddha his attendant to [Ānanda](#) to create [plaster](#) from the dirt, which is used repair cracks in the monastery walls.^[196]

Legacy

Architecture

Besides the various stupas attributed to Ashoka, the [pillars erected by him](#) survive at various places in the Indian subcontinent.

Ashoka is often credited with the beginning of stone architecture in India, possibly following the introduction of stone-building techniques by the [Greeks after Alexander the Great](#).^[197] Before Ashoka's time, buildings were probably built in non-permanent material, such as wood, [bamboo](#) or [thatch](#).^{[197][198]} Ashoka may have rebuilt his palace in [Pataliputra](#) by replacing wooden material by stone,^[199] and may also have used the help of foreign craftsmen.^[200] Ashoka also innovated by using the permanent qualities of stone for his written [edicts](#), as well as his pillars with Buddhist symbolism.



The Ashokan pillar at [Lumbini](#), [Nepal](#), Buddha's birthplace



The [Diamond throne](#) at the [Mahabodhi Temple](#), attributed to Ashoka



Front frieze of the Diamond throne



Mauryan ringstone, with standing goddess. Northwest Pakistan. 3rd century BCE. [British Museum](#)



[Rampurva bull capital](#), detail of the [abacus](#), with two ["flame palmettes"](#) framing a lotus surrounded by small rosette flowers.

Symbols

Symbols of Ashoka



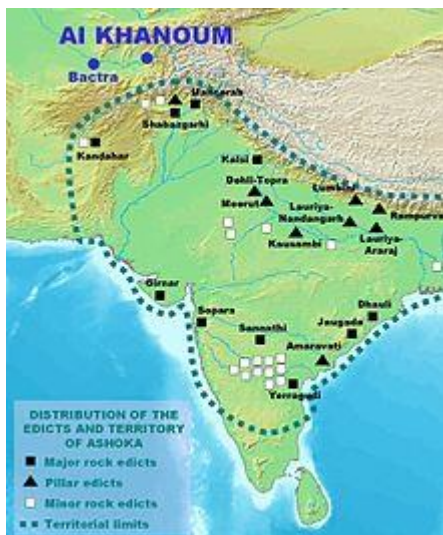
[Ashoka's pillar](#) capital of [Sarnath](#). This sculpture has been adopted as the [National Emblem of India](#).



[Ashoka Chakra](#), *"the wheel of Righteousness"* (Dharma in [Sanskrit](#) or Dhamma in [Pali](#)) "

Ashokan capitals were highly realistic and used a characteristic polished finish, [Mauryan polish](#), giving a shiny appearance to the stone surface. ^{[[citation needed](#)]}
[Lion Capital of Ashoka](#), the capital of one of the pillars erected by Ashoka features a carving of a spoked wheel, known as the [Ashoka Chakra](#). This wheel represents the wheel of Dhamma set in motion by the Gautama Buddha, and appears on the flag of modern India. This capital also features sculptures of lions, which appear on the seal of India. ^{[[157](#)]}

Inscriptions



Distribution of the [Edicts of Ashoka](#), and location of the contemporary Greek city of [Ai-Khanoum](#).^[201]



The [Kandahar Edict of Ashoka](#), a bilingual inscription (in Greek and [Aramaic](#)) by King Ashoka, discovered at [Kandahar](#) ([National Museum of Afghanistan](#)).

The edicts of Ashoka are a collection of 33 inscriptions on the [Pillars of Ashoka](#), as well as boulders and cave walls, issued during his reign.^[failed verification] These inscriptions are dispersed throughout modern-day Pakistan and India, and represent the first tangible evidence of Buddhism. The edicts describe in detail the first wide expansion of Buddhism through the sponsorship of one of the most powerful kings of Indian history, offering more information about Ashoka's proselytism, moral precepts, religious precepts, and his notions of social and animal welfare.^[202]

Before Ashoka, the royal communications appear to have been written on perishable materials such as palm leaves, birch barks, cotton cloth, and possibly wooden boards. While Ashoka's administration would have continued to use these materials, Ashoka also had his messages inscribed on rock edicts.^[203] Ashoka probably got the idea of putting up these inscriptions from the neighbouring [Achaemenid empire](#).^[162] It is likely that Ashoka's messages were also

inscribed on more perishable materials, such as wood, and sent to various parts of the empire. None of these records survive now. ^[17]

Scholars are still attempting to analyse both the expressed and implied political ideas of the Edicts (particularly in regard to imperial vision), and make inferences pertaining to how that vision was grappling with problems and political realities of a "virtually subcontinental, and culturally and economically highly variegated, 3rd century BCE Indian empire. ^[13] Nonetheless, it remains clear that Ashoka's Inscriptions represent the earliest corpus of royal inscriptions in the Indian subcontinent, and therefore prove to be a very important innovation in royal practices." ^[202]

Most of Ashoka's inscriptions are written in a mixture of various [Prakrit](#) dialects, in the [Brahmi](#) script. ^[204]

Several of Ashoka's inscriptions appear to have been set up near towns, on important routes, and at places of religious significance. ^[205] Many of the inscriptions have been discovered in hills, rock shelters, and places of local significance. ^[206] Various theories have been put forward about why Ashoka or his officials chose such places, including that they were centres of megalithic cultures, ^[207] were regarded as sacred spots in Ashoka's time, or that their physical grandeur may be symbolic of spiritual dominance. ^[208] Ashoka's inscriptions have not been found at major cities of the Maurya empire, such as Pataliputra, Vidisha, Ujjayini, and Taxila. ^[206] It is possible that many of these inscriptions are lost; the 7th century Chinese pilgrim [Xuanzang](#) refers to some of Ashoka's pillar edicts, which have not been discovered by modern researchers. ^[205]

It appears that Ashoka dispatched every message to his provincial governors, who in turn, relayed it to various officials in their territory. ^[209] For example, the [Minor Rock Edict 1](#) appears in several versions at multiple places: all the versions state that Ashoka issued the proclamation while on a tour, having spent 256 days on tour. The number 256 indicates that the message was dispatched simultaneously to various places. ^[210] Three versions of a message, found at edicts in the neighbouring places in Karnataka (Brahmagiri, Siddapura, and Jatinga-Rameshwara), were sent from the southern province's capital Suvarnagiri to various places. All three versions contain the same message, preceded by an initial greeting from the *arya-putra* (presumably Ashoka's son and the provincial governor) and the *mahamatras* (officials) in Suvarnagiri. ^[209]

Coinage

The [caduceus](#) appears as a symbol of the [punch-marked coins](#) of the [Maurya Empire](#) in India, in the 3rd - 2nd century BCE. Numismatic research suggests that this symbol was the symbol of king Ashoka, his personal "[Mudra](#)". ^[211] This symbol was not used on the pre-Mauryan punch-marked coins, but only on coins of the Maurya

period, together with the [three arched-hill symbol](#), the "peacock on the hill", the [triskelis](#) and the [Taxila](#) mark.^[212]



•

Caduceus symbol on a Maurya-era [punch-marked coin](#)



•

A punch-marked coin attributed to Ashoka^[213]



•

A Maurya-era silver coin of 1 [karshapana](#), possibly from Ashoka's period, workshop of Mathura. **Obverse:** Symbols including a sun and an animal
Reverse: Symbol **Dimensions:** 13.92 x 11.75 mm **Weight:** 3.4 g.

Modern scholarship

Rediscovery

Ashoka had almost been forgotten, but in the 19th century [James Prinsep](#) contributed in the revelation of historical sources. After deciphering the [Brahmi script](#), Prinsep had originally identified the "[Priyadasi](#)" of the inscriptions he found with the King of [Ceylon Devanampiya Tissa](#). However, in 1837, [George Turnour](#) discovered an important Sri Lankan manuscript ([Dipavamsa](#), or "Island Chronicle") associating Piyadasi with Ashoka:

Two hundred and eighteen years after the beatitude of the [Buddha](#), was the inauguration of Piyadassi, ... who, the grandson of Chandragupta, and the son of Bindusara, was at the time Governor of [Ujjayani](#).

— [Dipavamsa](#).^[214]



The [Minor Rock Edict](#) of [Maski](#) mentions the author as "Devanampriya Asoka", definitively linking both names, and confirming Ashoka as the author of the famous [Edicts](#).

Since then, the association of "Devanampriya Priyadarsin" with Ashoka was confirmed through various inscriptions, and especially confirmed in the [Minor Rock Edict](#) inscription discovered in [Maski](#), directly associating Ashoka with his regnal title Devanampriya ("Beloved-of-the-Gods"):^{[215][216]}

[A proclamation] of Devanampriya Asoka.

Two and a half years [and somewhat more] (have passed) since I am a [Buddha-Sakya](#).

[A year and] somewhat more (has passed) [since] I have visited the [Samgha](#) and have shown zeal.

Those gods who formerly had been unmingled (with men) in [Jambudvipa](#), have now become mingled (with them).

This object can be reached even by a lowly (person) who is devoted to morality. One must not think thus, - (viz.) that only an exalted (person) may reach this. Both the lowly and the exalted must be told : "If you act thus, this matter (will be) prosperous and of long duration, and will thus progress to one and a half.

— [Maski Minor Rock Edict](#) of Ashoka.^[217]

Another important historian was British [archaeologist John Hubert Marshall](#), who was director-General of the [Archaeological Survey of India](#). His main interests were [Sanchi](#) and [Sarnath](#), in addition to [Harappa](#) and [Mohenjodaro](#). Sir [Alexander Cunningham](#), a British archaeologist and army engineer, and often known as the father of the [Archaeological Survey of India](#), unveiled heritage sites like the [Bharhut](#) Stupa, Sarnath, Sanchi, and the Mahabodhi Temple. [Mortimer Wheeler](#), a British archaeologist, also exposed Ashokan historical sources, especially the [Taxila](#).^[citation needed]

Perceptions and historiography

The use of Buddhist sources in reconstructing the life of Ashoka has had a strong influence on perceptions of Ashoka, as well as the interpretations of his

Edicts. Building on traditional accounts, early scholars regarded Ashoka as a primarily Buddhist monarch who underwent a conversion to Buddhism and was actively engaged in sponsoring and supporting the Buddhist monastic institution. Some scholars have tended to question this assessment. Romila Thappar writes about Ashoka that "We need to see him both as a statesman in the context of inheriting and sustaining an empire in a particular historical period, and as a person with a strong commitment to changing society through what might be called the propagation of social ethics."^[218] The only source of information not attributable to Buddhist sources are the Ashokan Edicts, and these do not explicitly state that Ashoka was a Buddhist. In his edicts, Ashoka expresses support for all the major religions of his time: [Buddhism](#), [Brahmanism](#), [Jainism](#), and [Ajivikaism](#), and his edicts addressed to the population at large (there are some addressed specifically to Buddhists; this is not the case for the other religions) generally focus on moral themes members of all the religions would accept. For example, Amartya Sen writes, "The Indian Emperor Ashoka in the third century BCE presented many political inscriptions in favor of tolerance and individual freedom, both as a part of state policy and in the relation of different people to each other".^[219]

However, the edicts alone strongly *indicate* that he was a Buddhist. In one edict he belittles rituals, and he banned Vedic animal sacrifices; these strongly suggest that he at least did not look to the Vedic tradition for guidance. Furthermore, many edicts are expressed to Buddhists alone; in one, Ashoka declares himself to be an "[upasaka](#)", and in another he demonstrates a close familiarity with Buddhist texts. He erected rock pillars at Buddhist holy sites, but did not do so for the sites of other religions. He also used the word "[dhamma](#)" to refer to qualities of the heart that underlie moral action; this was an exclusively Buddhist use of the word. However, he used the word more in the spirit than as a strict code of conduct. Romila Thappar writes, "His dhamma did not derive from divine inspiration, even if its observance promised heaven. It was more in keeping with the ethic conditioned by the logic of given situations. His logic of Dhamma was intended to influence the conduct of categories of people, in relation to each other. Especially where they involved unequal relationships."^[218] Finally, he promotes ideals that correspond to the first three steps of the Buddha's graduated discourse.^[220]

Much of the knowledge about Ashoka comes from the [several inscriptions](#) that he had carved on pillars and rocks throughout the empire. All his inscriptions present him as compassionate and loving. In the Kalinga rock edicts, he addresses his people as his "children" and mentions that as a father he desires their good.^[221]

Impact of pacifism

After Ashoka's death, the Maurya empire declined rapidly. The various Puranas provide different details about Ashoka's successors, but all agree that they had

relatively short reigns. The empire seems to have weakened, fragmented, and suffered an invasion from the [Bactrian Greeks](#).^[144]

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".^[222]

In art, film and literature



A c. 1910 painting by [Abanindranath Tagore](#) (1871 – 1951) depicting Ashoka's queen standing in front of the railings of the Buddhist monument at [Sanchi](#) ([Raisen district](#), [Madhya Pradesh](#)).

- [Jaishankar Prasad](#) composed *Ashoka ki Chinta* (*Ashoka's Anxiety*), a poem that portrays Ashoka's feelings during the war on Kalinga.
- *Ashok Kumar* is a 1941 [Tamil](#) film directed by Raja Chandrasekhar. The film stars [Chittor V. Nagaiah](#) as Ashoka.
- *Uttar-Priyadarshi* (The Final Beatitude), a verse-play written by poet [Agyeya](#) depicting his redemption, was adapted to stage in 1996 by theatre director, [Ratan Thiyam](#) and has since been performed in many parts of the world.^{[223][224]}
- In 1973, [Amar Chitra Katha](#) released a graphic novel based on the life of Ashoka.
- In [Piers Anthony](#)'s series of [space opera](#) novels, the main character mentions Ashoka as a model for administrators to strive for.
- *Asoka* is a 2001 epic Indian historical drama film directed and co-written by [Santosh Sivan](#). The film stars [Shah Rukh Khan](#) as Ashoka.
- In 2002, [Mason Jennings](#) released the song "Emperor Ashoka" on his [Living in the Moment EP](#). It is based on the life of Ashoka.

- In 2013, Christopher C. Doyle released his debut novel, [*The Mahabharata Secret*](#), in which he wrote about Ashoka hiding a dangerous secret for the well-being of India.
- 2014's [*The Emperor's Riddles*](#), a fiction mystery thriller novel by Satyarth Nayak, traces the evolution of Ashoka and his esoteric legend of the Nine Unknown Men.
- In 2015, [*Chakravartin Ashoka Samrat*](#), a television serial by [Ashok Banker](#), based on the life of Ashoka, began airing on [Colors TV](#).
- *The Legend of Kunal* is an upcoming film based on the life of [Kunal](#), the son of Ashoka. The movie will be directed by [Chandraprakash Dwivedi](#). The role of Ashoka is to be played by [Amitabh Bachchan](#), and the role of Kunal is played by [Arjun Rampal](#).^[225]
- [Bharatvarsh \(TV Series\)](#) is an Indian television historical documentary series, hosted by actor-director [Anupam Kher](#) on Hindi news channel [ABP News](#).^[226] The series stars [Aham Sharma](#) as Ashoka.

References

1.

- [Lahiri 2015](#), pp. 295 – 296.
- [Singh 2017](#), p. 162.
- [Singh 2008](#), p. 331.
- In his contemporary [Maski Minor Rock Edict](#) his name is written in the [Brahmi script](#) as *Devanampriya Asoka*. [*Inscriptions of Asoka. New Edition by E. Hultzsch \(in Sanskrit\). 1925. pp. 174 – 175.*](#)
- *Chandra, Amulya (14 May 2015). "Ashoka / biography - emperor of India". [Britannica.com](#). Archived from the original on 21 August 2015. Retrieved 9 August 2015.*
- [Thapar 1980](#), p. 51.
- [Bentley 1993](#), p. 44.
- [Kalinga](#) had been conquered by the preceding [Nanda Dynasty](#) but subsequently broke free until it was reconquered by Ashoka c. 260 BCE. (Raychaudhuri, H. C. ; Mukherjee, B. N. 1996. *Political History of Ancient India: From the Accession of Parikshit to the Extinction of the Gupta Dynasty*. Oxford University Press, pp. 204 – 9, pp. 270 – 71)
- [Bentley 1993](#), p. 45.
- [Bentley 1993](#), p. 46.
- *Nayanjot Lahiri (5 August 2015). [Ashoka in Ancient India](#). Harvard University Press. pp. 20 – . ISBN 978-0-674-91525-1.*
- [Thapar 1961](#), pp. 5 – 8.
- [Singh 2012](#), p. 132.
- [Singh 2012](#), p. 131.
- [Strong 1995](#), p. 141.
- [Thapar 1961](#), p. 8.
- [Thapar 1961](#), p. 7.

- • [Thapar 1961](#), pp. 7 – 8.
- • [Singh 2008](#), pp. 331 – 332.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), pp. 8 – 9.
- • [Strong 1989](#), p. 12.
- • [Strong 1995](#), p. 143.
- • [Strong 1995](#), p. 144.
- • [Strong 1995](#), pp. 152 – 154.
- • [Strong 1995](#), p. 155.
- • [Strong 1995](#), pp. 154 – 157.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), p. 11.
- • [Thapar 1995](#), p. 15.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), p. 9.
- • [Guruge, Review 1995](#), pp. 185–188.
- • [Beckwith, Christopher I. \(2017\). *Greek Buddha: Pyrrho's Encounter with Early Buddhism in Central Asia*. Princeton University Press. pp. 226 – 250. ISBN 978-0-691-17632-1.](#)
- • [Strong 1989](#), p. 205.
- • [Allen, Charles \(2012\). *Ashoka: The Search for India's Lost Emperor*. Little, Brown Book Group. p. 79. ISBN 9781408703885.](#)
- • [The Dîpavamsa: An Ancient Buddhist Historical Record. Williams and Norgate. 1879. pp. 147 – 148.](#)
- • [Thapar 1961](#), pp. 226 – 227.
- • [Strong 1989](#), p. 11.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 129.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), p. 226.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 27.
- • [Singh 2008](#), p. 332.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 25.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 24.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 26.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), p. 13.
- • [Strong 1989](#), p. 204.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), pp. 25 – 26.
- • [Strong 1989](#), pp. 204 – 205.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 323: "In the Ashokavadana, Ashoka's mother is not named."
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 31.
- • [Guruge 1993](#), p. 19.
- • [Mookerji 1962](#), p. 2.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), p. 20.
- • [Strong 1989](#), p. 206.
- • [Strong 1989](#), p. 207.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), p. 21.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 65.
- • [Strong 1989](#), p. 208.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 66.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 70.

- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 66–67.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 68.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 67.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), pp. 89 – 90.
- • [Allen 2012](#), p. 154.
- • [Guruge 1993](#), p. 28.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 98.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), pp. 94 – 95.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), pp. 22 – 23.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 101.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 97.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), pp. 24 – 25.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), p. 25.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 102.
- • [Strong 1989](#), p. 209.
- • [Strong 1989](#), p. 210.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), p. 26.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), p. 27.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), pp. 13 – 14.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), p. 14.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), p. 30.
- • [Strong 1989](#), pp. 12 – 13.
- • [Strong 1989](#), p. 13.
- • [Guruge, Unresolved 1995](#), p. 46.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), p. 29.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 105.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 106.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), pp. 106 – 107.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 107.
- • *Charles Drekmeier (1962). [Kingship and Community in Early India](#). Stanford University Press. p. 173. ISBN 978-0-8047-0114-3. Retrieved 30 October 2012.*
- • [Indian Archaeology 1997-98](#) (PDF). ASI. p. Plate 72.
- • [Guruge, Unresolved 1995](#), pp. 49 – 50.
- • [Smith, Vincent \(1920\). *Asoka: The Buddhist Emperor of India*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. p. 185 – via \[Wikisource\]\(#\).](#)
- • [Thapar 1995](#), p. 18.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), p. 36.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), p. 33.
- • [Guruge, Unresolved 1995](#), p. 38.
- • [Guruge, Unresolved 1995](#), p. 37.
- • [Thapar 1995](#), pp. 30 – 31.
- • [Guruge, Unresolved 1995](#), p. 56.
- • [Guruge, Unresolved 1995](#), p. 42.
- • [Guruge, Unresolved 1995](#), p. 43.
- • [Guruge, Unresolved 1995](#), p. 47.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 109.

- • [Gombrich 1995](#), p. 7.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), p. 34.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 110.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 108.
- • [Guruge, Unresolved 1995](#), p. 49.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), p. 35.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 135.
- • Goonatilake, Hema (30 May 2010). *"Edwin Arnold and the Sri Lanka connection"*. *The Sunday Times*. Colombo. [Archived](#) from the original on 10 November 2013.
- • [Strong 1995](#), pp. 154 – 155.
- • [Strong 1995](#), p. 158.
- • [Strong 1995](#), p. 159.
- • [Gombrich 1995](#), pp. 6 – 7.
- • [Guruge, Unresolved 1995](#), p. 50.
- • [Gombrich 1995](#), p. 8.
- • [Guruge, Unresolved 1995](#), p. 51.
- • [Gombrich 1995](#), pp. 8 – 9.
- • [Gombrich 1995](#), p. 5.
- • [Guruge, Unresolved 1995](#), p. 45.
- • [Gombrich 1995](#), p. 10.
- • [Gombrich 1995](#), p. 6.
- • [Gombrich 1995](#), pp. 10 – 11.
- • [Gombrich 1995](#), p. 11.
- • [Gombrich 1995](#), pp. 11 – 12.
- • [Gombrich 1995](#), p. 12.
- • [Thapar 1995](#), p. 32.
- • [Thapar 1995](#), p. 36.
- • [Strong 1995](#), p. 149.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), p. 28.
- • [Strong 1989](#), p. 232.
- • Beni Madhab Barua (5 May 2010). *The Ajivikas*. General Books. pp. 68 – 69. [ISBN 978-1-152-74433-2](#). Retrieved 30 October 2012.
- • [Steven L. Danver](#) (22 December 2010). *Popular Controversies in World History: Investigating History's Intriguing Questions: Investigating History's Intriguing Questions*. ABC-CLIO. p. 99. [ISBN 978-1-59884-078-0](#). Retrieved 23 May 2013.
- • Le Phuoc (March 2010). *Buddhist Architecture*. Grafikol. p. 32. [ISBN 978-0-9844043-0-8](#). Retrieved 23 May 2013.
- • [Strong 1995](#), p. 152.
- • [Strong 1995](#), pp. 152 – 153.
- • [Strong 1995](#), p. 153.
- • [Strong 1995](#), p. 151.
- • [Strong 1995](#), p. 165.
- • [Kosmin 2014](#), p. 36.
- • [Strong 1989](#), p. 18.

- • Strong, John (2007). [Relics of the Buddha](#). Motilal Banarsidass Publishers. p. 149. [ISBN 978-81-208-3139-1](#).
- • [Singh 2008](#), p. 333.
- • [Mookerji 1962](#), p. 9.
- • [Strong 1995](#), pp. 146 – 147.
- • [Strong 1995](#), p. 166.
- • [Strong 1995](#), p. 167.
- • [Strong 1995](#), pp. 167 – 168.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), p. 23.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 97–98.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), p. 22.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), p. 24.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), pp. 23 – 24.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), pp. 27 – 28.
- • Hermann Kulke; Dietmar Rothermund (2004). [A History of India](#). Psychology Press. pp. 69 – 70. [ISBN 978-0-415-32920-0](#).
- • [Gombrich 1995](#), p. 1.
- • [Strong 1989](#), p. 15.
- • [Strong 1995](#), p. 142.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 134.
- • [Guruge, Unresolved 1995](#), pp. 43 – 44.
- • [Gombrich 1995](#), p. 3.
- • [Thapar 1995](#), pp. 19 – 20.
- • [Guruge, Unresolved 1995](#), p. 44.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 157.
- • [Thapar 1995](#), p. 29.
- • [Strong 1989](#), p. 4.
- • [Thapar 1961](#), p. 37.
- • [Thapar 1995](#), p. 19.
- • [Thapar 1995](#), pp. 20 – 21.
- • [Thapar 1995](#), p. 20.
- • [Thapar 1995](#), p. 31.
- • [Thapar 1995](#), pp. 21 – 22.
- • [Strong 1989](#), pp. 3 – 4.
- • [Strong 1989](#), p. 5.
- • [Strong 1989](#), pp. 6 – 9.
- • [Strong 1989](#), pp. 9 – 10.
- • [Fitzgerald 2004](#), p. 120.
- • Simoons, Frederick J. (1994). [Eat Not This Flesh: Food Avoidances from Prehistory to the Present](#) (2nd ed.). Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. p. 108. [ISBN 978-0-299-14254-4](#).
- • ["The Edicts of King Asoka"](#). Translated by Dhammika, Ven. S. Buddhist Publication Society. 1994. [Archived](#) from the original on 10 May 2016.
- • D. R. Bhandarkar, R. G. Bhandarkar (2000). [Asoka](#). Asian Educational Services. pp. 314 – 315. [ISBN 9788120613331](#).

- • *Gerald Irving A. Dare Draper; Michael A. Meyer; H. McCoubrey (1998). [Reflections on Law and Armed Conflicts: The Selected Works on the Laws of War by the Late Professor Colonel G. I. A. D. Draper, Obe.](#) Martinus Nijhoff Publishers. p. 44. [ISBN 978-90-411-0557-8](#). Retrieved 30 October 2012.*
- • *[Phelps, Norm \(2007\). \[The Longest Struggle: Animal Advocacy from Pythagoras to Peta.\]\(#\) Lantern Books. \[ISBN 978-1590561065\]\(#\).](#)*
- • *[Kosmin 2014](#), p. 57.*
- • Thomas Mc Evilly "The shape of ancient thought", Allworth Press, New York, 2002, p. 368
- • *Oskar von Hinüber (2010). "Did Hellenistic Kings Send Letters to Aśoka?". [Journal of the American Oriental Society](#). Freiburg. **130** (2): 262 – 265.*
- • *[The Edicts of King Ashoka: an English rendering by Ven. S. Dhammika Archived](#) 10 May 2016 at the [Wayback Machine](#). Access to Insight: Readings in Theravāda Buddhism. Last accessed 1 September 2011.*
- • *[Pliny the Elder, "The Natural History", 6, 21](#)*
- • *[Preus, Anthony \(2015\). \[Historical Dictionary of Ancient Greek Philosophy\]\(#\). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. p. 184. \[ISBN 978-1-4422-4639-3\]\(#\).](#)*
- • Full text of the *Mahavamsa* [Click chapter XII Archived](#) 5 September 2006 at the [Wayback Machine](#)
- • The Idea of Ancient India: Essays on Religion, Politics, and Archaeology by Upinder Singh [p.18](#)
- • *De la Croix, Horst; Tansey, Richard G. ; Kirkpatrick, Diane (1991). [Gardner's Art Through the Ages](#) (9th ed.). Thomson/Wadsworth. p. 428. [ISBN 0-15-503769-2](#).*
- • *[Strong 1995](#), p. 146.*
- • *[Strong 1995](#), p. 147.*
- • *[Strong 1995](#), p. 163.*
- • *[Strong 1995](#), p. 163–165.*
- • *[Introduction to Indian Architecture Bindia Thapar, Tuttle Publishing, 2012, p.21](#) "Ashoka used the knowledge of stone craft to begin the tradition of stone architecture in India, dedicated to Buddhism."*
- • *[Gardner's Art through the Ages: Non-Western Perspectives, Fred S. Kleiner, Cengage Learning, 2009, p14](#)*
- • *[Mookerji 1962](#), p. 96.*
- • "Ashoka was known to be a great builder who may have even imported craftsmen from abroad to build royal monuments." *Monuments, Power and Poverty in India: From Ashoka to the Raj*, A. S. Bhalla, I.B.Tauris, 2015 p.18 [\[1\]](#)
- • Reference: "India: The Ancient Past" p.113, Burjor Avari, Routledge, [ISBN 0-415-35615-6](#)
- • *[Singh 2012](#).*
- • *[Lahiri 2015](#), pp. 120 – 121.*
- • *[Lahiri 2015](#), p. 126.*
- • *[Thapar 1961](#), p. 6.*
- • *[Lahiri 2015](#), p. 143.*
- • *[Thapar 1995](#), p. 23.*
- • *[Lahiri 2015](#), pp. 143 – 157.*

- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 127.
- • [Lahiri 2015](#), p. 133.
- • Indian Numismatics, Damodar Dharmanand Kosambi, Orient Blackswan, 1981, p. 73 [\[2\]](#)
- • Malwa Through the Ages, from the Earliest Times to 1305 A.D, Kailash Chand Jain, Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 1972, p.134 [\[3\]](#)
- • *Mitchiner, Michael (1978). Oriental Coins & Their Values: The Ancient and Classical World 600 B.C. – A.D. 650. Hawkins Publications. p. 544. ISBN 978-0-9041731-6-1.*
- • [Allen 2012](#), p. 79.
- • [The Cambridge Shorter History of India](#). CUP Archive. p. 42.
- • *Gupta, Subhadra Sen (2009). Ashoka. Penguin UK. p. 13. ISBN 9788184758078.*
- • [Inscriptions of Asoka. New Edition by E. Hultzsch \(in Sanskrit\). 1925. pp. 174 – 175.](#)
- • *Thappar, Romila (7 – 13 November 2009). "Ashoka – A Retrospective". Economic and Political Weekly. 44 (45): 31 – 37.*
- • *Sen, Amartya (Summer 1998). "Universal Truths and the Westernizing Illusion". Harvard International Review. 20 (3): 40 – 43.*
- • Richard Robinson, Willard Johnson, and Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Buddhist Religions*, fifth ed., Wadsworth 2005, page 59.
- • [The Edicts of King Ashoka Archived](#) 28 March 2014 at the [Wayback Machine](#), English translation (1993) by Ven. S. Dhammika. ISBN 955-24-0104-6. Retrieved on: 21 February 2009
- • [Singh 2012](#), p. 131, 143.
- • *Jefferson, Margo (27 October 2000). "Next Wave Festival Review; In Stirring Ritual Steps, Past and Present Unfold". The New York Times.*
- • *Renouf, Renee (December 2000). "Review: Uttarpriyadarshi". Balletco. Archived from the original on 5 February 2012.*
- • ["The Legend of Kunal". filmifeat.com. Archived from the original on 6 September 2016. Retrieved 7 June 2016.](#)

226. • ["‘Bharatvarsh’ – ABP News brings a captivating saga of legendary Indians with Anupam Kher". 19 August 2016. Archived from the original on 26 August 2016.](#)

Bibliography

- [Allen, Charles \(2012\). Ashoka: The Search for India's Lost Emperor. Hachette. ISBN 978-1-408-70388-5.](#)
- [Bentley, Jerry \(1993\). Old World Encounters: Cross-Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times. New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 9780195076400.](#)
- [Fitzgerald, James L., ed. \(2004\). The Mahabharata. 7. The University of Chicago Press. ISBN 0-226-25250-7.](#)

- [Gombrich, Richard](#) (1995). "Aśoka - The Great Upāsaka". In Anuradha Seneviratna (ed.). [King Aśoka and Buddhism: Historical and Literary Studies](#). Buddhist Publication Society. ISBN 978-955-24-0065-0.
- [Guruge, Ananda W. P.](#) (1993). [Aśoka, the Righteous: A Definitive Biography](#). Central Cultural Fund. ISBN 978-955-9226-00-0.
- [Guruge, Ananda W. P.](#) (1995). "Emperor Aśoka and Buddhism: Unresolved Discrepancies between Buddhist Tradition & Aśokan Inscriptions". In Anuradha Seneviratna (ed.). [King Aśoka and Buddhism: Historical and Literary Studies](#). Buddhist Publication Society. ISBN 978-955-24-0065-0.
- [Guruge, Ananda W. P.](#) (1995). "Emperor Aśoka's Place in History: A Review of Prevalent Opinions". In Anuradha Seneviratna (ed.). [King Aśoka and Buddhism: Historical and Literary Studies](#). Buddhist Publication Society. ISBN 978-955-24-0065-0.
- [Kosmin, Paul J.](#) (2014), [The Land of the Elephant Kings: Space, Territory, and Ideology in Seleucid Empire](#), [Harvard University Press](#), ISBN 978-0-674-72882-0
- [Lahiri, Nayanjot](#) (2015). [Ashoka in Ancient India](#). Harvard University Press. ISBN 9780674057777.
- [Mookerji, Radhakumud](#) (1962). [Aśoka](#) (3rd revised ed.). Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. ISBN 978-81-208-0582-8.
- [Singh, Upinder](#) (2017). [Political Violence in Ancient India](#). Harvard University Press. ISBN 978-0-674-97527-9.
- [Singh, Upinder](#) (2008). [A history of ancient and early medieval India : from the Stone Age to the 12th century](#). New Delhi: [Pearson Education](#). ISBN 978-81-317-1120-0.
- [Singh, Upinder](#) (2012). "Governing the State and the Self: Political Philosophy and Practice in the Edicts of Aśoka". *South Asian Studies*. University of Delhi. 28 (2): 131 - 145. doi:[10.1080/02666030.2012.725581](#).
- [Strong, John S.](#) (1995). "Images of Aśoka: Some Indian and Sri Lankan Legends and their Development". In Anuradha Seneviratna (ed.). [King Aśoka and Buddhism: Historical and Literary Studies](#). Buddhist Publication Society. ISBN 978-955-24-0065-0.
- [Strong, John S.](#) (1989). [The Legend of King Aśoka: A Study and Translation of the Aśokāvadāna](#). Motilal Banarsidass. ISBN 978-81-208-0616-0.
- [Thapar, Romila](#) (1995). "Aśoka and Buddhism as Reflected in the Aśokan Edicts". In Anuradha Seneviratna (ed.). [King Aśoka and Buddhism: Historical and Literary Studies](#). Buddhist Publication Society. ISBN 978-955-24-0065-0.
- [Thapar, Romila](#) (1961). [Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas](#). Oxford University Press.

Further reading

-  [India portal](#)
-  [Religion portal](#)

-  [History portal](#)

-  [Biography portal](#)

- Harry Falk (2006). [*Aśokan Sites and Artefacts: A Source-book with Bibliography*](#). Von Zabern. [ISBN 978-3-8053-3712-0](#).
- Patrick Olivelle; Janice Leoshko; Himanshu Prabha Ray (2012). [*Reimagining Asoka: Memory and History*](#). Oxford University Press India. [ISBN 978-0-19-807800-5](#).
- E. Hultzsch (1925). [*Inscriptions of Asoka: New Edition*](#). Government of India.
- Rongxi, Li (1993). [*The Biographical Scripture of King Aśoka: Translated from the Chinese of Samghapāla*](#) (PDF). Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research. [ISBN 978-0-9625618-4-9](#).
- Nikam, N. A.; McKeon, Richard (1959). [*The Edicts of Aśoka*](#). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- James Merry MacPhail (1918). [*Asoka*](#). London: Oxford University Press.

External links

-  Media related to [Ashoka](#) at Wikimedia Commons
-  Quotations related to [Ashoka](#) at Wikiquote
- Chisholm, Hugh, ed. (1911). [*"Asoka"*](#). *Encyclopædia Britannica* (11th ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- [Ashoka](#) at [Curlie](#)
- BBC Radio 4: Sunil Khilnani, [*Incarnations: Ashoka*](#).
- BBC Radio 4: Melvyn Bragg with Richard Gombrich et al., [*In Our Time, Ashoka the Great*](#).

[Edicts of Ashoka](#)

(Ruled 269 – 232 BCE)

Regnal years of Ashoka	Type of Edict (and location of the inscriptions)	Geographical location
------------------------	--	-----------------------

Year 8 *End of the [Kalinga war](#) and conversion to the "[Dharma](#)"*



[Bahapur](#)

[Gujarra](#)

[Saru Maru](#)

[Rupnath](#)

[Bhabru](#)

[Taxila](#)

[\(Aramaic\)](#)

[Laghman](#)

[\(Aramaic\)](#)

[Bairat](#)

[Barabar](#)

[Maski](#)

[Palkigundu](#)

[Gavimath](#)

[Jatinga/Rameshwara](#)

[Rajula/Mandagiri](#)

[Brahmagiri](#)

[Udegolam](#)

 Location of the [Minor Rock Edicts](#) (Edicts 1, 2 & 3)
 Other inscriptions often classified as Minor Rock Edicts.

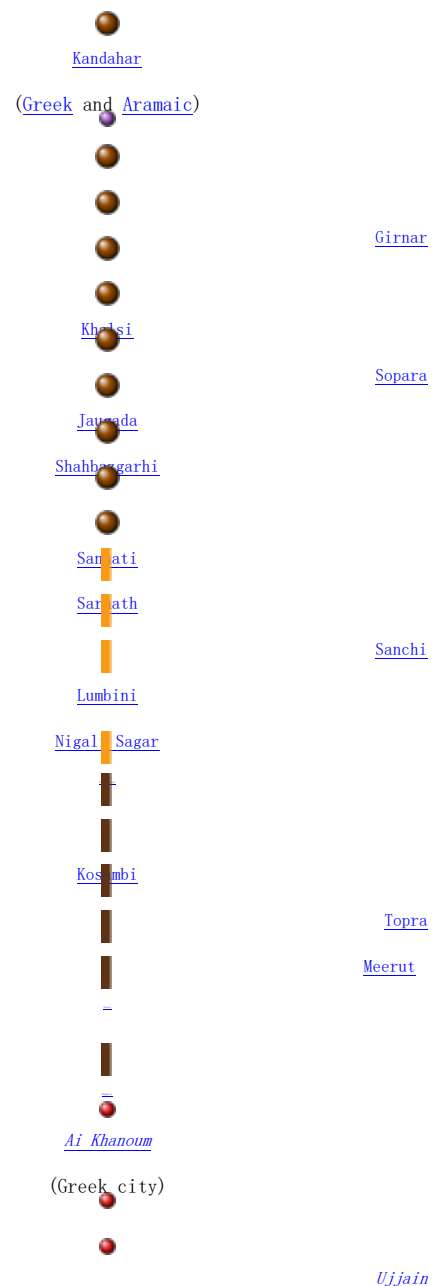
Year
 10 [\[1\]](#)

Minor Rock Edicts
Kandahar Bilingual Rock Inscription (in Greek and Aramaic , Kandahar)
Minor Rock Edicts in Aramaic : Laghman Inscription , Taxila inscription

[Related events:](#)

Visit to the [Bodhi tree](#) in [Bodh Gaya](#)
 Construction of the [Mahabodhi Temple](#) and [Diamond throne](#) in Bodh Gaya
 Predication throughout India.
 Dissenssions in the [Sangha Third Buddhist Council](#)

[Siddapur](#)
[Nittur](#)
[Ahraura](#)
[Sasaram](#)



● Location of the Major Rock Edicts.	Year 11	Minor Rock Edicts (n° 1, n° 2 and n° 3) (Panguraria , Maski , Palkigundu and Gavimath , Bahapur/Srinivasपुरi , Bairat , Ahraura , Gujarra , Sasaram , Rajula , Mandagiri , Yerragudi , Udegolam , Nittur , Brahmagiri , Siddapur , Jatinga-Rameshwara)	In Indian language: Sohgaura inscription Erection of the Pillars of Ashoka
■ Location of the Minor Pillar Edicts.	and later		
■ Original location of the Major Pillar Edicts.		Barabar Caves inscriptions	Major Rock Edicts
● <i>Capital cities</i>		Minor Pillar Edicts	Major Rock Edicts in Greek: Edicts n° 12-13 (Kandahar) Major Rock Edicts in Indian language: Edicts No. 1 ~ No. 14 (in Kharoshthi script: Shahbazgarhi , Mansehra Edicts (in Brahmi script: Kalsi , Girnar , Sopara , Sannati , Yerragudi , Delhi Edicts) Major Rock Edicts 1-10, 14, Separate Edicts 1&2 : (Dhauli , Jaugada)
	Year 12 and later ^[1]	Schism Edict , Queen's Edict (Sarnath Sanchi Allahabad) Lumbini inscription , Nigali Sagar inscription	
		Major Pillar Edicts	
	Year 26, 27 and later ^[1]	In Indian language: Major Pillar Edicts No. 1 ~ No. 7 (Allahabad pillar Delhi pillar Topra Kalan Rampurva Lauria Nandangarh Lauriya-Araraj Amaravati) Derived inscriptions in Aramaic , on rock: Kandahar, Edict No. 7 ^{[2][3]} and Pul-i-Darunteh, Edict No. 5 or No. 7 ^[4]	

1.

- Yailenko, Les maximes delphiques d'Aï Khanoum et la formation de la doctrine du dhamma d'Asoka, 1990, [p. 243](#).
- • Inscriptions of Asoka de D.C. Sircar [p. 30](#)
- • Handbuch der Orientalistik de Kurt A. Behrendt [p. 39](#)
- 4. • Handbuch der Orientalistik de Kurt A. Behrendt [p. 39](#)

- [v](#)
- [t](#)
- [e](#)

Topics in Buddhism

Authority control

- BIBSYS: 90658787
- BNF: cb12145542z (data)
- GND: 118504703
- ISNI: 0000 0001 1477 1875
- LCCN: n50002053
- NKC: xx0004667
- NLI: 000012406
- NTA: 069820724
- SUDOC: 029935318
- Trove: 1081053
- VIAF: 300985478
- WorldCat Identities (via VIAF): 300985478

Categories:

- Ashoka
- 3rd-century BC Indian monarchs
- Ancient history of Afghanistan
- Ancient history of Pakistan
- Buddhist pacifists
- Indian pacifists
- People from Patna
- 3rd-century BC deaths
- 3rd-century Buddhism
- Indian Buddhist monarchs

Expansion of the Maurya Empire

<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-hccc-worldcivilization/chapter/expansion-of-the-maurya-empire/>

Learning Objective

- Understand the expansion of the Maurya Empire

Key Points

- The Seleucid Empire tried and failed to reconquer the northwestern part of the Maurya Empire during the Seleucid–Mauryan war, from 305–303 BCE.
- As part of the peace offering, the Maurya Empire gained five territories in exchange for 500 war elephants.
- Several Greeks remained at the Mauryan court as ambassadors to the Hellenistic world.
- Chandragupta Maurya was succeeded by his son, Bindusara, in 298 BCE, and then by Bindusara's son, Ashoka the Great, in 272 BCE.
- Under Ashoka the Great, the Maurya Empire expanded into the southern part of the Indian subcontinent.
- Ashoka erected the Edicts of Ashoka, which state his policies and accomplishments, and which were written in both Greek and Sanskrit.

Terms

satrapies

The governors of the provinces of the ancient Median and Achaemenid (Persian) Empires, and several of their successors, such as the Sasanian Empire and the Hellenistic empires.

Edicts of Ashoka

Stone edicts that depicted the policies and accomplishments of Ashoka the Great, and were written in both Greek and Sanskrit.

Ashoka the Great

Lived 304–232 BCE. As the king of the Maurya Empire, he conquered the Indian subcontinent.

Seleucus

The king of the Seleucid Empire who tried to reconquer northwestern India, but lost the Seleucid–Mauryan War.

The Seleucid–Mauryan War

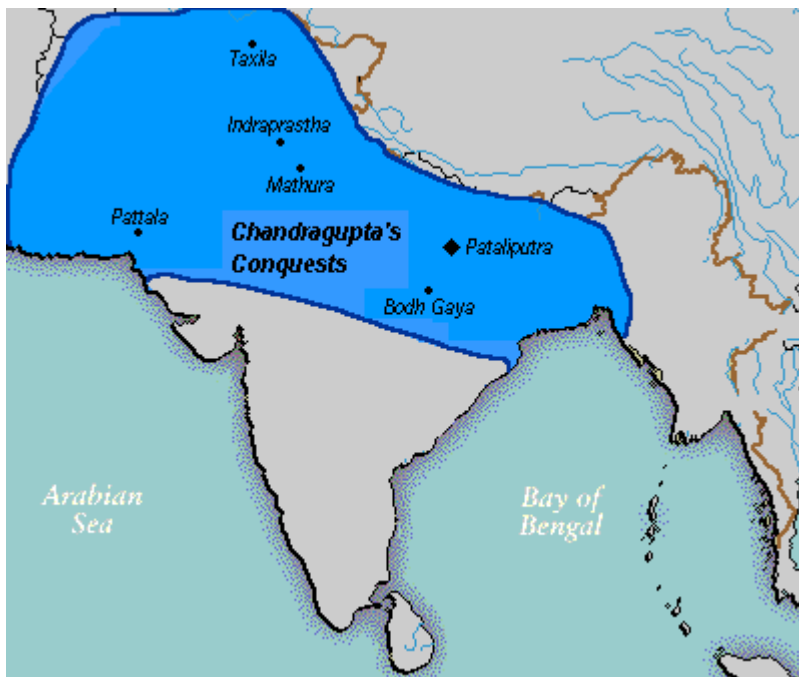
In 305 BCE, Emperor Chandragupta Maurya led a series of campaigns to retake the satrapies left behind by Alexander the Great when he returned westward. Seleucus I fought to defend these territories, but both sides made peace in 303 BCE.

Seleucus, one of Alexander's generals, received Babylonia and, from there, expanded his dominions to include much of Alexander's near eastern territories. Seleucus established himself in Babylon in 312 BC, the year used as the

foundation date of the Seleucid Empire. He ruled not only Babylonia, but the entire enormous eastern part of Alexander's empire. The Seleucid Empire was a major center of Hellenistic culture. In the areas where a Greek-Macedonian political elite dominated (mostly urban), it maintained the preeminence of Greek customs.

In 305 BCE, Seleucus I tried to reconquer the northwestern parts of India in order to claim them for the growing Seleucid Empire. Little is known of the campaign in which Chandragupta fought with Seleucus over the Indus Valley and the region of Gandhara—a very wealthy kingdom that had submitted decades earlier to Alexander the Great.

Seleucus lost the Seleucid-Mauryan War, and the two rulers reconciled with a peace treaty. The Greeks offered a Macedonian princess for marriage to Chandragupta, and several territories, including the satrapies of Paropamisade (modern-day Kamboja and Gandhara), Arachosia (modern-day Kandahar), and Gedrosia (modern-day Balochistan). In return, Chandragupta sent 500 war elephants, a military asset which would play a decisive role in Seleucus' victory against western Hellenistic kings at the Battle of Ipsus in 301 BCE.

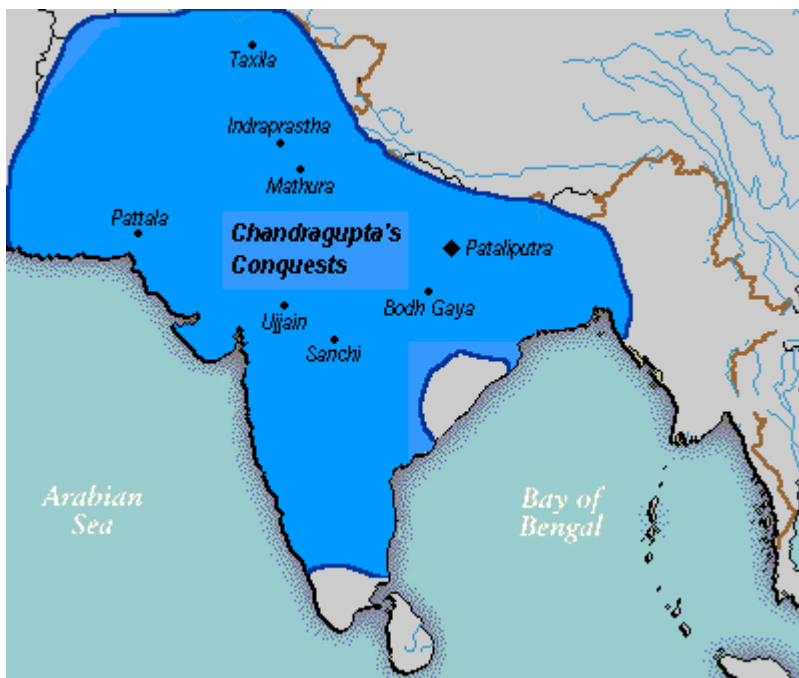


The Maurya Empire c. 305 BCE. Chandragupta extended the borders of the Maurya Empire toward Seleucid Persia, after defeating Seleucus c. 305 BCE.

In addition to this treaty, Seleucus dispatched two Greek ambassadors, Megasthenes and, later, Deimakos, to the Mauryan court at Pataliputra. Later, Ptolemy II Philadelphus, the ruler of Ptolemaic Egypt, sent an ambassador named Dionysius to the Mauryan court. Thus, continuing ties between the Hellenistic world and the Mauryan Empire.

Expansion Under Bindusara

Chandragupta Maurya ruled from 322 BCE until his voluntary retirement and abdication, in favor of his son, Bindusara, in 298 BCE. Bindusara (320–272 BCE) was the son of Maurya and his queen, Durdhara. During his reign, Bindusara expanded the Maurya Empire southward, with Chanakya as his advisor. He brought 16 states under the Maurya Empire and thus conquered almost all of the Indian peninsula. Bindusara ignored the friendly Dravidian kingdoms of the Cholas, ruled by King Ilamcetcenni, the Pandyas, and Cheras. Apart from these southern states, Kalinga (modern-day Odisha) was the only kingdom in India independent from Bindusara's empire.

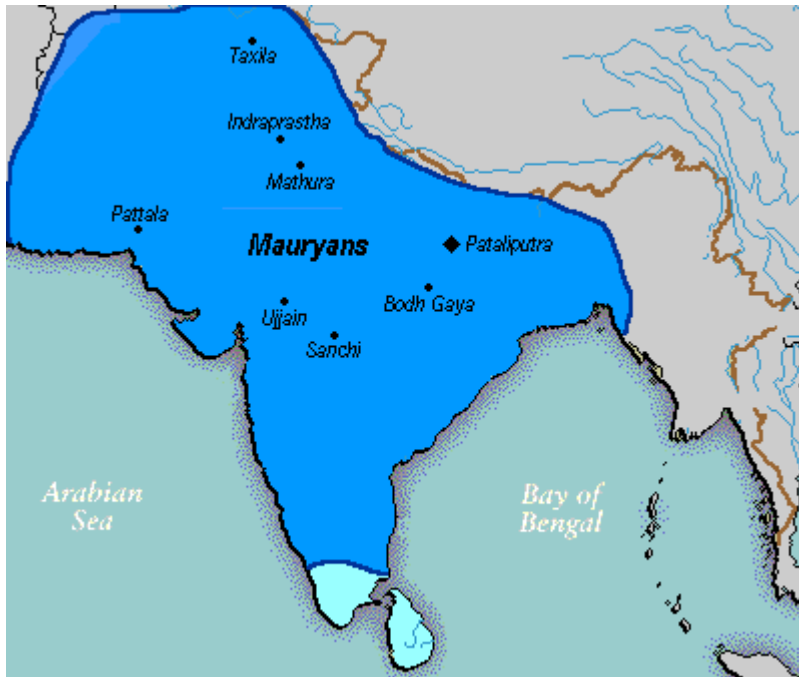


The Maurya Empire c. 290 BCE. Bindusara (ruler 298–272 BCE) extended the borders of the empire southward into the Deccan Plateau c. 290 BCE.

Ashoka the Great

Bindusara died in 272 BCE, and was succeeded by his son, Ashoka the Great (304–232 BCE). As a young prince, Ashoka (r. 272–232 BCE) was a brilliant commander who crushed revolts in Ujjain and Taxila. As monarch, he was ambitious and aggressive, reasserting the Empire's superiority in southern and western India. But it was his conquest of Kalinga (262–261 BCE) that proved to be the pivotal event of his life. 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.



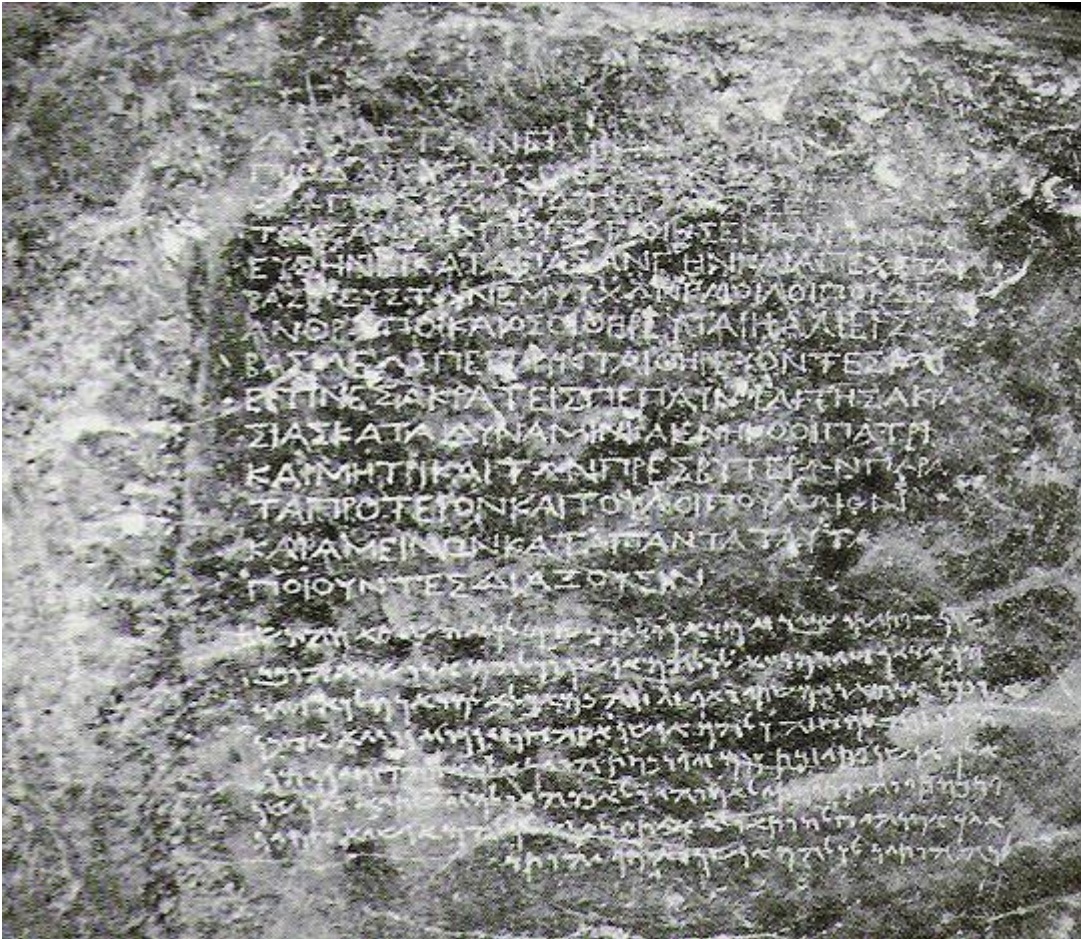
Extent of the Maurya Empire at its height in 265 BCE. Ashoka the Great extended into Kalinga during the Kalinga War c. 265 BCE, and established superiority over the southern kingdoms.

As ruler, Ashoka implemented principles of ahimsa (the principle of “to not injure”) by banning hunting and violent sports activities, and ending indentured and forced labor (many thousands of people in war-ravaged Kalinga had been forced into hard labor and servitude). While he maintained a large and powerful army to keep the peace, Ashoka expanded friendly relations with states across Asia and Europe, and sponsored Buddhist missions. He undertook a massive public works building campaign across the country. Among these works were the construction of *stupas*, or Buddhist religious structures, containing relics. One notable stupa created during the reign of Ashoka was The Great Stupa, which stands in Sanchi, India. 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.

The Edicts of Ashoka

Perhaps one of the greatest-known accomplishments of Ashoka was his creation of his edicts, which were erected between 269 BCE and 232 BCE. 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 envoys' travels to the Greek rulers in the west as far as the Mediterranean. Ashoka's edicts also mentioned social and cultural attributes of his empire, emphasizing Buddhism, though not condemning other religions. For this, the Edicts of Ashoka are known as an early document that promoted religious tolerance.



An Edict of Asoka. Bilingual inscription (Greek and Aramaic) by king Asoka, from Kandahar. Kabul Museum.