

Maps of Ancient Buddhist India

drawn and compiled by

Ānandajoti Bhikkhu

(Revised May 2013)

Preface

Here you will find presented a number of maps of places in Ancient Asia to help as a reference for those interested in understanding the geography and history presented in Buddhist texts. A number of them have been prepared specially for this section, and others accompany particular texts and translations that are presented elsewhere on this website. The intention is to add to this section as and when the need arises.

I have included modern place names in some of the maps so as to help orientate the reader, who may not be familiar with the geography of Asia. I have also annotated the maps to give sources and further relevant information that could not be included elsewhere.

I have now given a a number of talks based on these maps, and then made videos out of them, including additional information and photographs, etc. where relevant. They can be accessed on YouTube:

1. [The Early Life of the Buddha](#)
2. [The Last Year of the Buddha's Life](#)
3. [Asoka and the Missions](#)
4. [The Spread of Buddhism throughout Asia](#)
5. [Representing the Buddha](#)

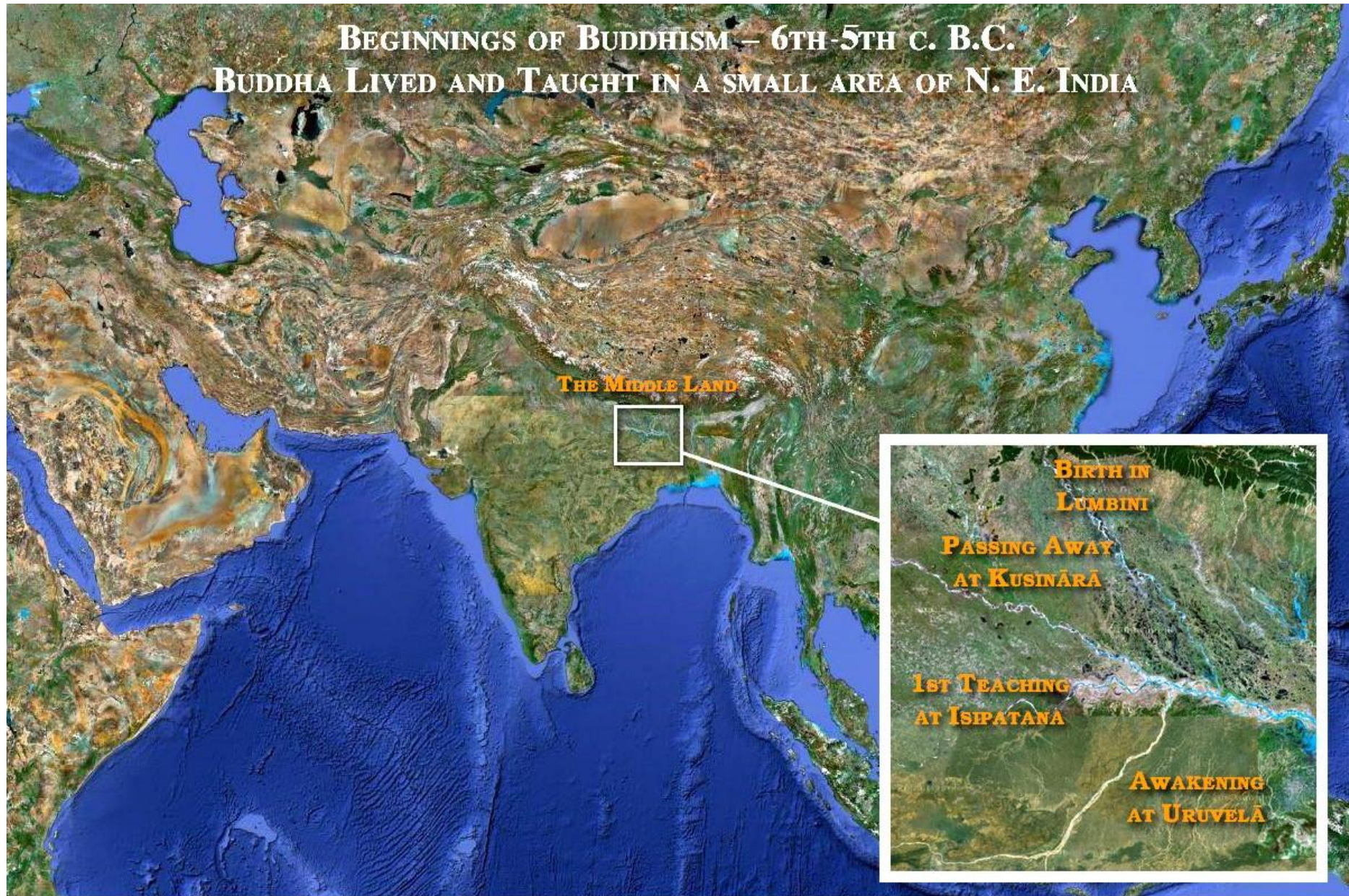
My main sources for information in compiling the maps, besides the traditional Texts, Commentaries and Chronicles, have been the following:

- Geography of Early Buddhism by B.C. Law
- Dictionary of Pali Proper Names by G.P. Malalasekera
- Buddhist India by T.W. Rhys-Davids
- Middle Land, Middle Way by S. Dhammika

Many other books have incidental information, including the various annotated translations I have consulted during the course of this work. I am particularly grateful to Bhante S. Dhammika for checking the maps through for me and making many useful suggestions and corrections, which has helped improve them considerably.

Ānandajoti Bhikkhu
August 2012

Sāsanavaḍḍhana - The Growth of the Dispensation



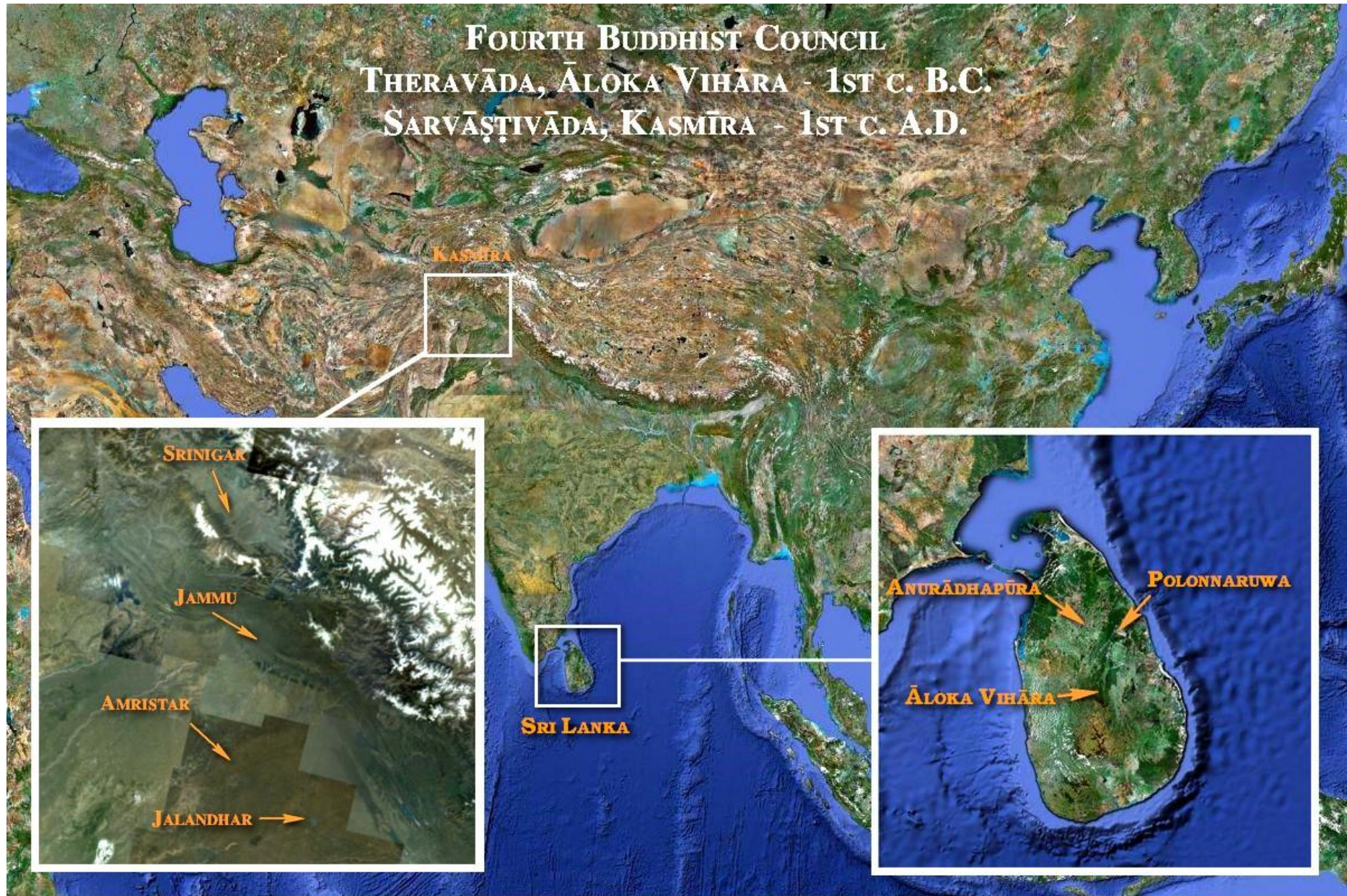
Sāsanavaḍḍhana - The Growth of the Dispensation



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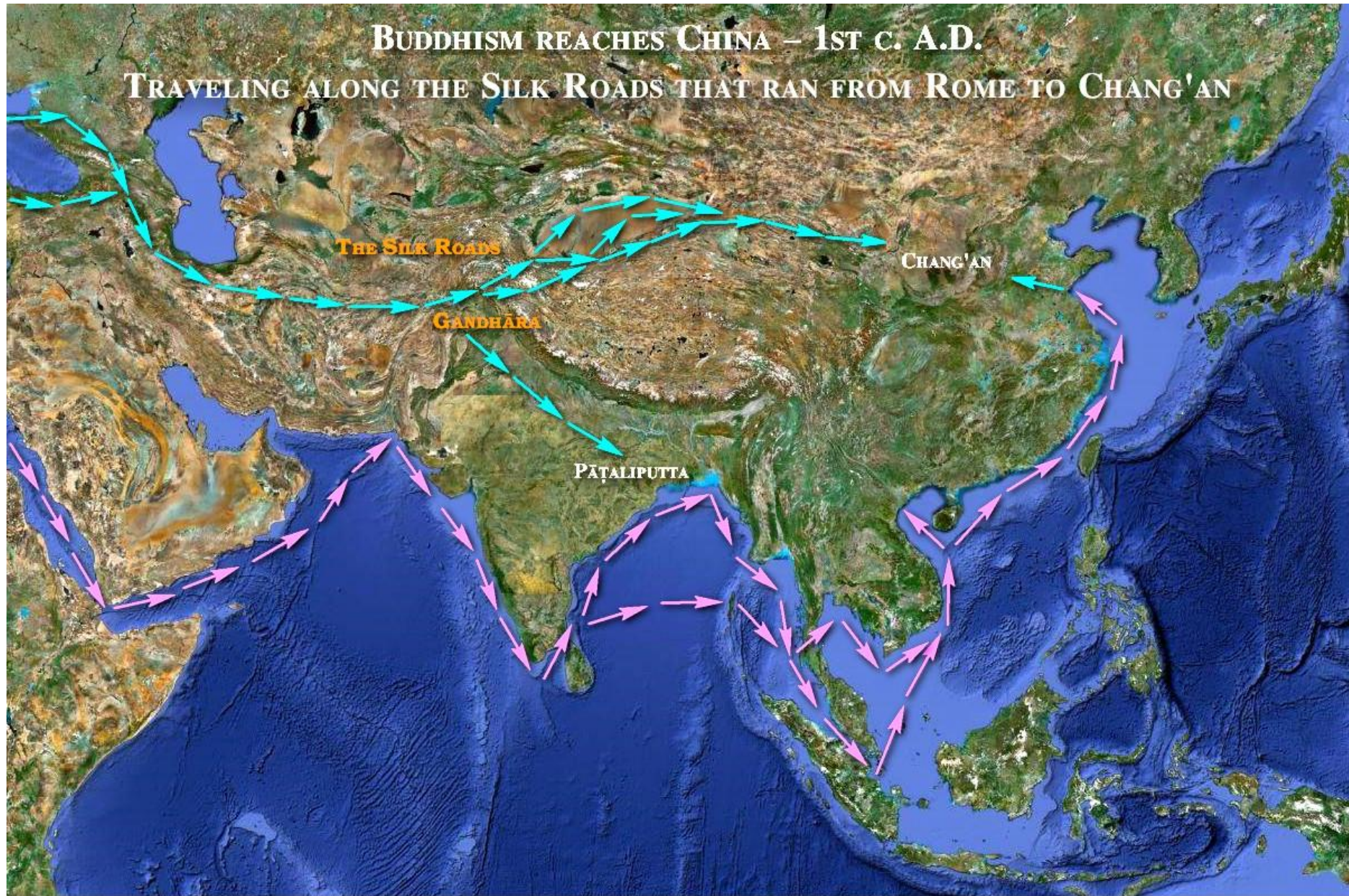
Sāsanavaḍḍhana - The Growth of the Dispensation



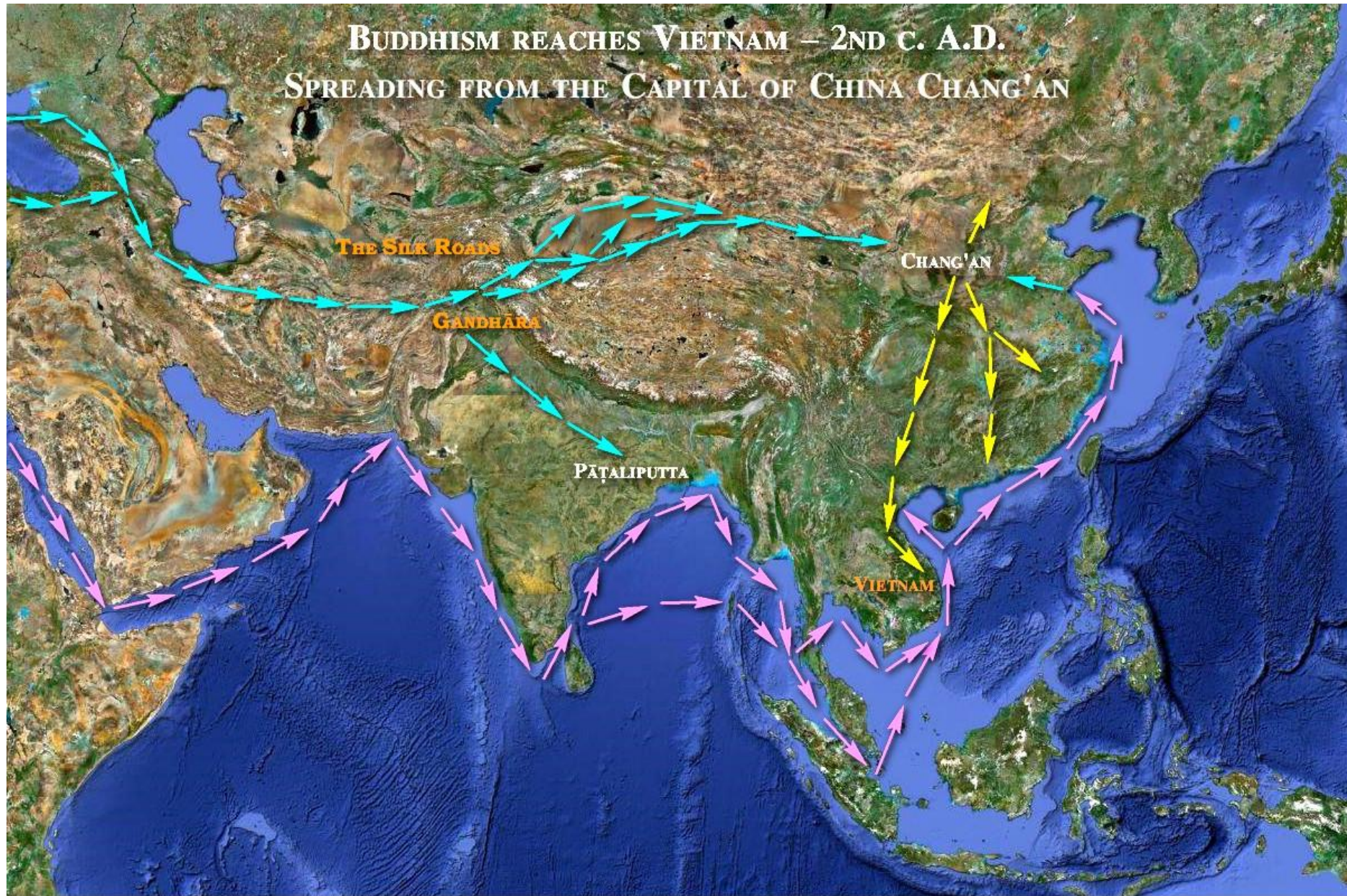
Sāsanavaḍḍhana - The Growth of the Dispensation



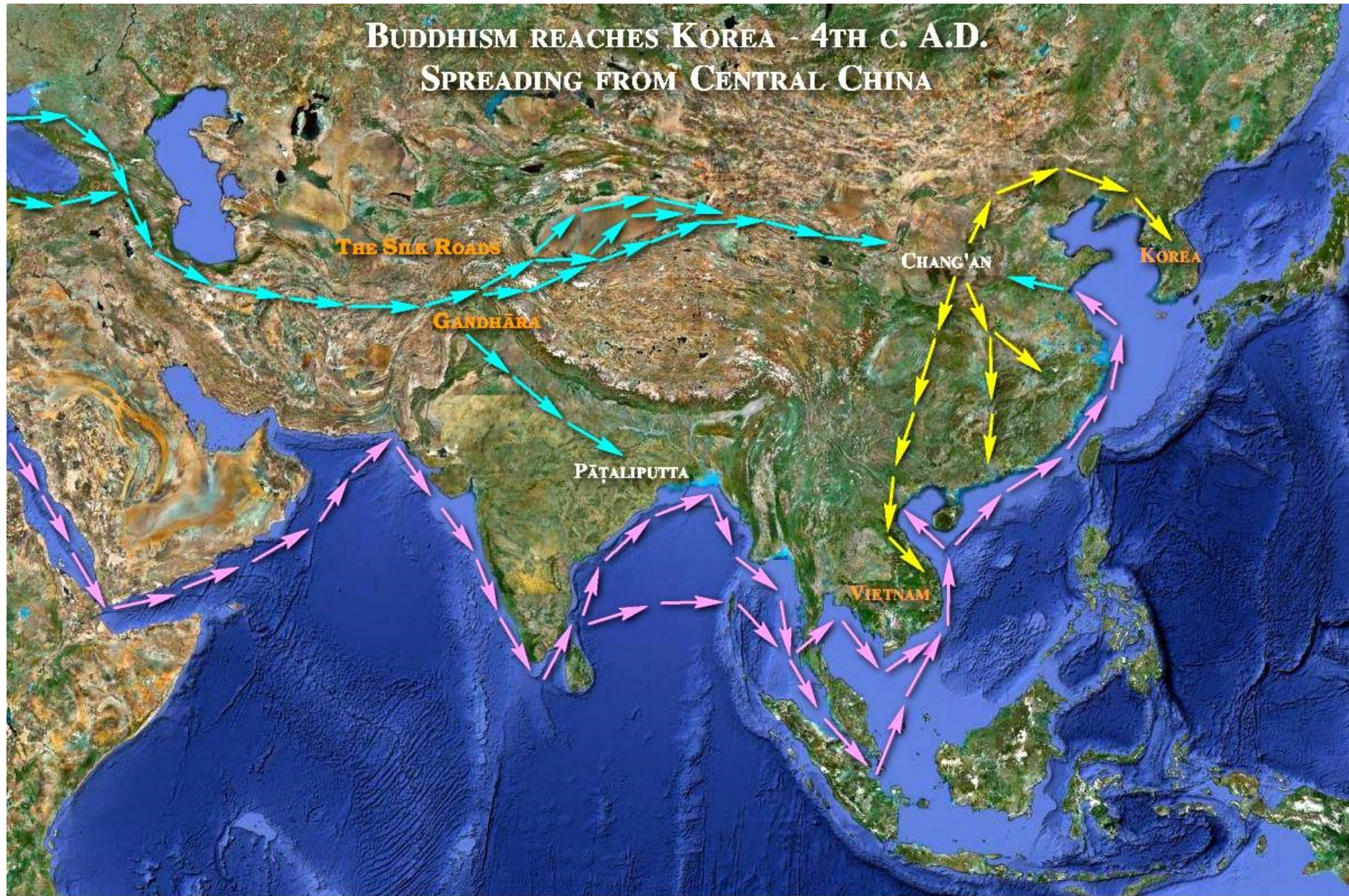
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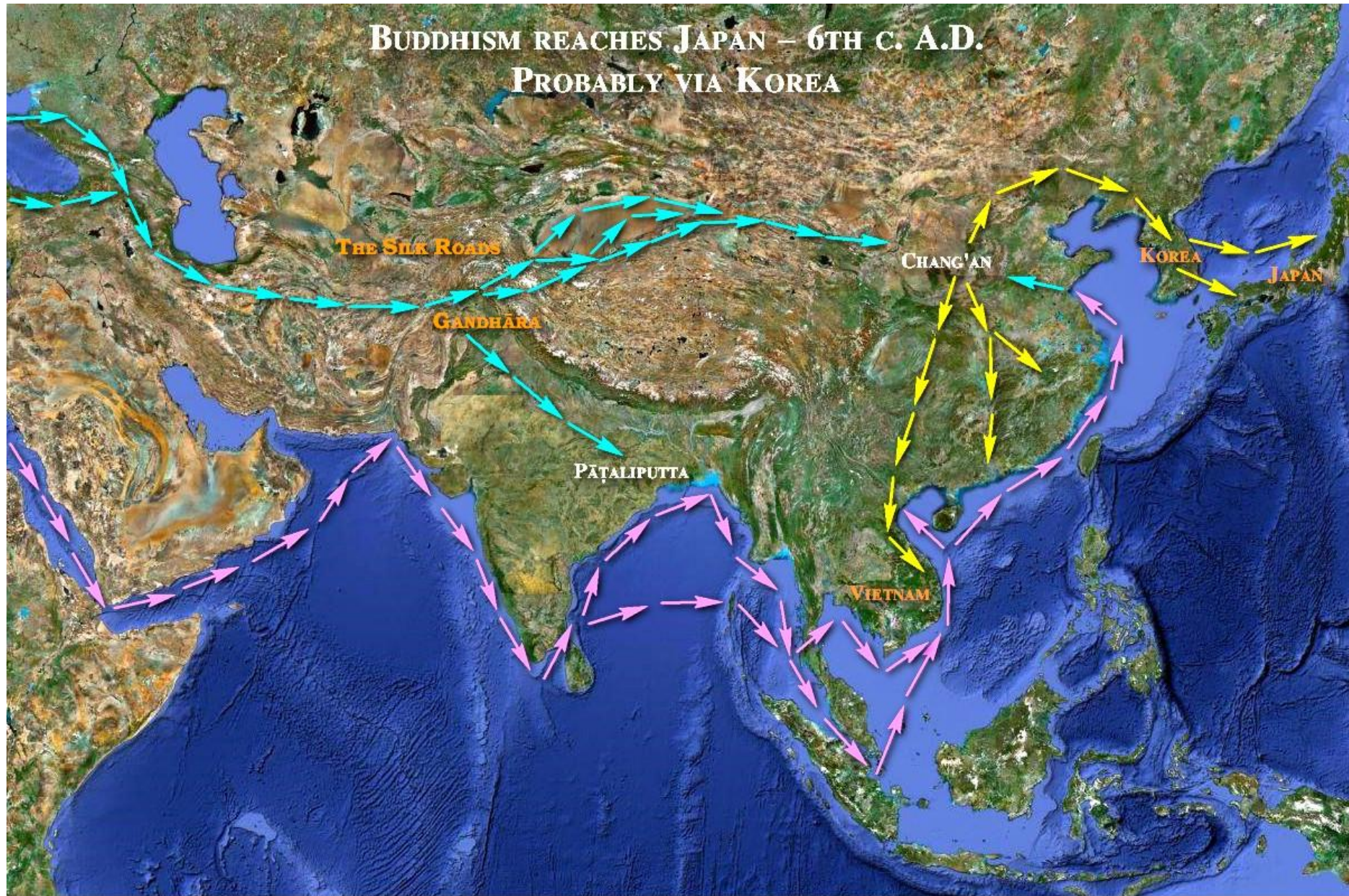
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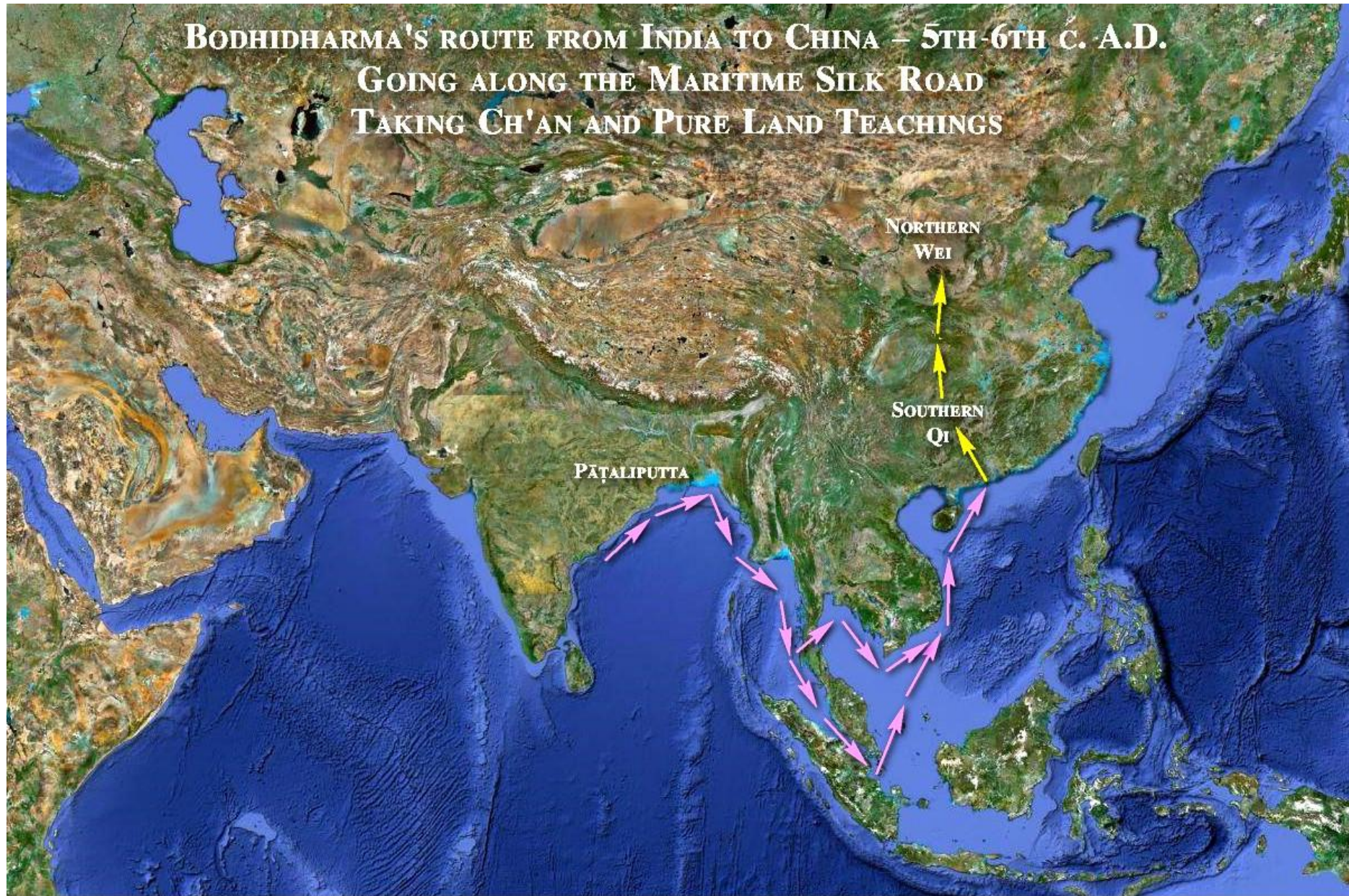
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Jambudīpe Buddhābhikkhākalā Paramparā - Indian Buddhist Art Schools



Jambudīpe Buddhabhattikakalā Paramparā - Indian Buddhist Art Schools

The remains from the Mauryan period are very few, they consist mainly of the Asokan Rock Edicts and the Pillars, which are normally inscribed and surmounted by lions, elephants or bulls (only a small selection of them are shown here). In Kumraha on the edge of modern day Patna are old architectural remains of the ancient city walls, and from Didarganj on the banks on the Ganges a splendid human-size Yakṣinī modelled in the round, and highly polished, has been found. The excavated rock caves at Barabar, although later inhabited by Buddhists, were carved out for the Ājīvaka sect, but their main importance lies in the fact that they provided the models for the great rock cave complexes at Ajāntā, Ellora and elsewhere in the coming centuries.

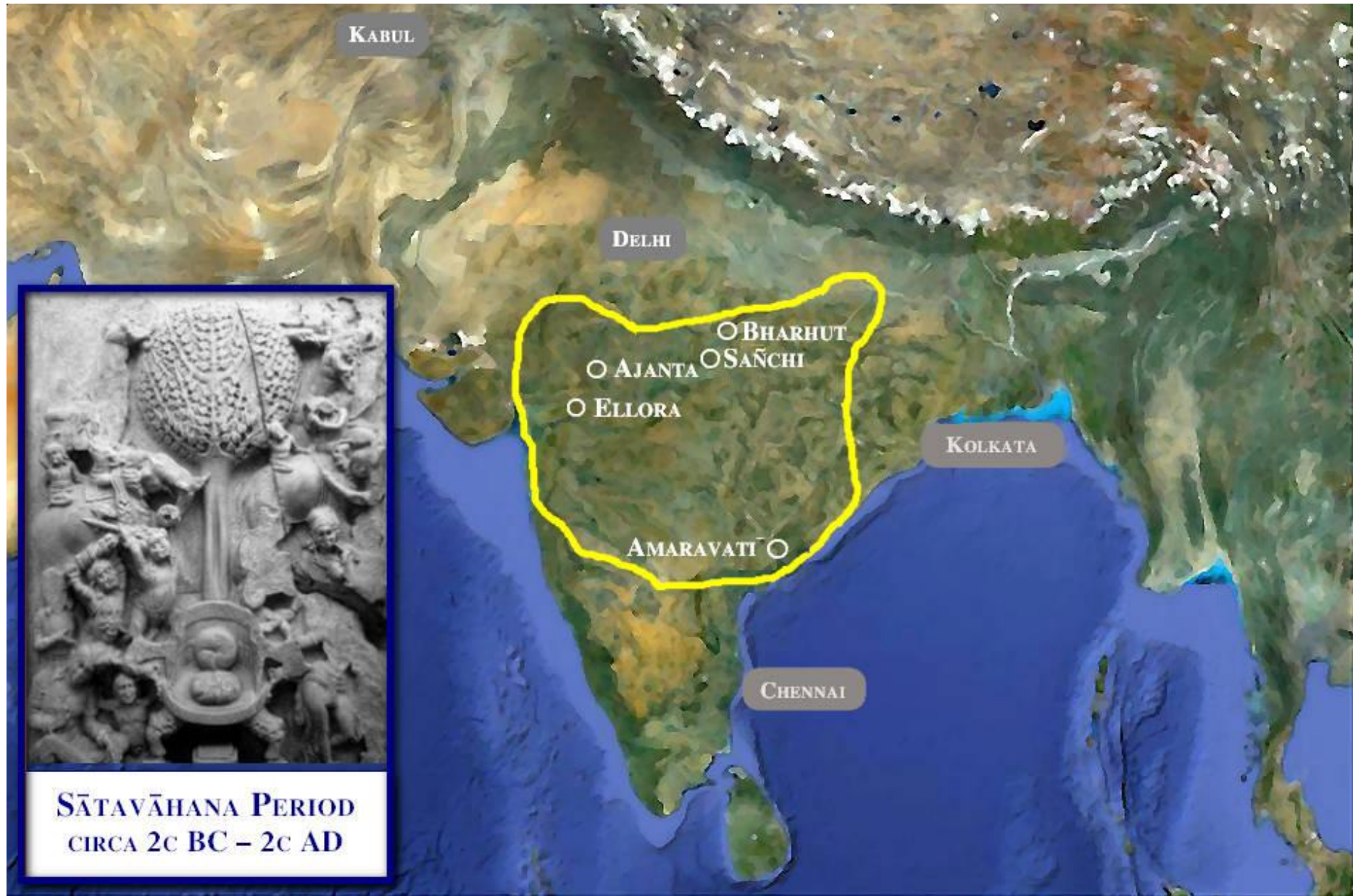
Jambudīpe Buddhābhikkakalā Paramparā - Indian Buddhist Art Schools



Jambudīpe Buddhabhattikakalā Paramparā - Indian Buddhist Art Schools

After the fall of the Mauryans a new dynasty arose called the Sungas. The stūpas at Sāñchi and Bhārhut, although originally built during the Mauryan period, were rebuilt and expanded during the Sunga period, and it is the work carried out beginning at this later period that we see today, including the dome, the stone casing and the harmika. It was also during their reign that the Chaitya at the Bhaja Caves at Karli in Maharashtra was built.

Jambudīpe Buddhābhikkakalā Paramparā - Indian Buddhist Art Schools



Jambudīpe Buddhabhattikakalā Paramparā - Indian Buddhist Art Schools

With the collapse of the Mauryan Empire, the kingdoms in the south of India were united by the Sātavāhana dynasty, and it is during this time that the great railings at Sāñchi, Bhārhut and Amaravati were made. The elaborate carvings found on these monuments are the main sources for the aniconic period of Buddhist art, in which the Buddha was represented only by symbols, such as the Vajrāsana, the Bodhi Tree, the Dhamma-Wheel and the Siripāda, or Holy Feet. It was also at this time that the rock-cut Temples at Ajāntā and Ellora and the other cave complexes in the western regions were first carved out. The Sātavāhanas were succeeded by the short-lived Ikshvāku dynasty (2c AD–3c AD), and it was during this time when the great stūpas were built at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa and elsewhere.

Jambudīpe Buddhabhikkakalā Paramparā - Indian Buddhist Art Schools



Jambudīpe Buddhabhāttikakalā Paramparā - Indian Buddhist Art Schools

Following the invasions of Alexandria in the 3rd century B.C., many of the Greek forces settled on the borders of India, giving rise to the syncetric Greco-Indic civilisations at Gandhāra, in what is modern day Pakistan and Afghanistan. In this confluence of cultures the first statues and reliefs of the Buddha were made. They were evidently modelled on the Greek statues of Apollo, and present the Buddha with Caucasian facial features, and flowing, wavy hair on the head. The halo behind the Buddha's head is plain. During the Kuṣāṇ period (1c AD–3c AD) this empire stretched right into the heartland of India, and also gave rise to the great and influential atelier at Mathura.

Jambudīpe Buddhābhikkakalā Paramparā - Indian Buddhist Art Schools



Jambudīpe Buddhabhattikakalā Paramparā - Indian Buddhist Art Schools

The Gupta Empire was centered around their capital at Pāṭaliputra in modern-day Bihar, and is normally thought of as the Golden Age of Indian artistic creation. It is during this period that the murals we find in Ajāntā and Ellora were begun, which provide the earliest examples of Indian painting. Also during this time the great universities at Nālanda, Vikrāmaśīla and elsewhere were built, and they in turn gave rise to great schools of sculpture and bronze casting, all with classical elegance. In this period the Buddha figures are modelled with the characteristic curly ringlets of hair, and sheen-like close-fitting robes. The halos are normally decorated in this period.

Jambudīpe Buddhābhikkakalā Paramparā - Indian Buddhist Art Schools



Jambudīpe Buddhahattikakalā Paramparā - Indian Buddhist Art Schools

The Pāla Empire grew up in the eastern areas of India, in what is now Bihar and Bengal, both east and west, but during the height of their power their Empire also reached as far as the Kabul valley in modern-day Afghanistan. The universities were still flourishing during this time, and there are very many architectural and sculptural remains from this period. The art of this period is much more elaborate and intricate in style. We see at this time a great flourishing of representations of the various Bodhisattvas and gods in the developed Buddhist pantheon. It was towards the end of their reign that the Muslim invasions finally brought Buddhism to an end in India, and with it the Buddhist art traditions there. Before that had happened though, Buddhist culture and art had spread all over Asia.

Photo Credits:

on Map 1 (Asokan Capital): mself

on Map 2 (Bhaja Cave): Elroy Serrao

on Map 3 (Amaravati Relief): Gurubrahma

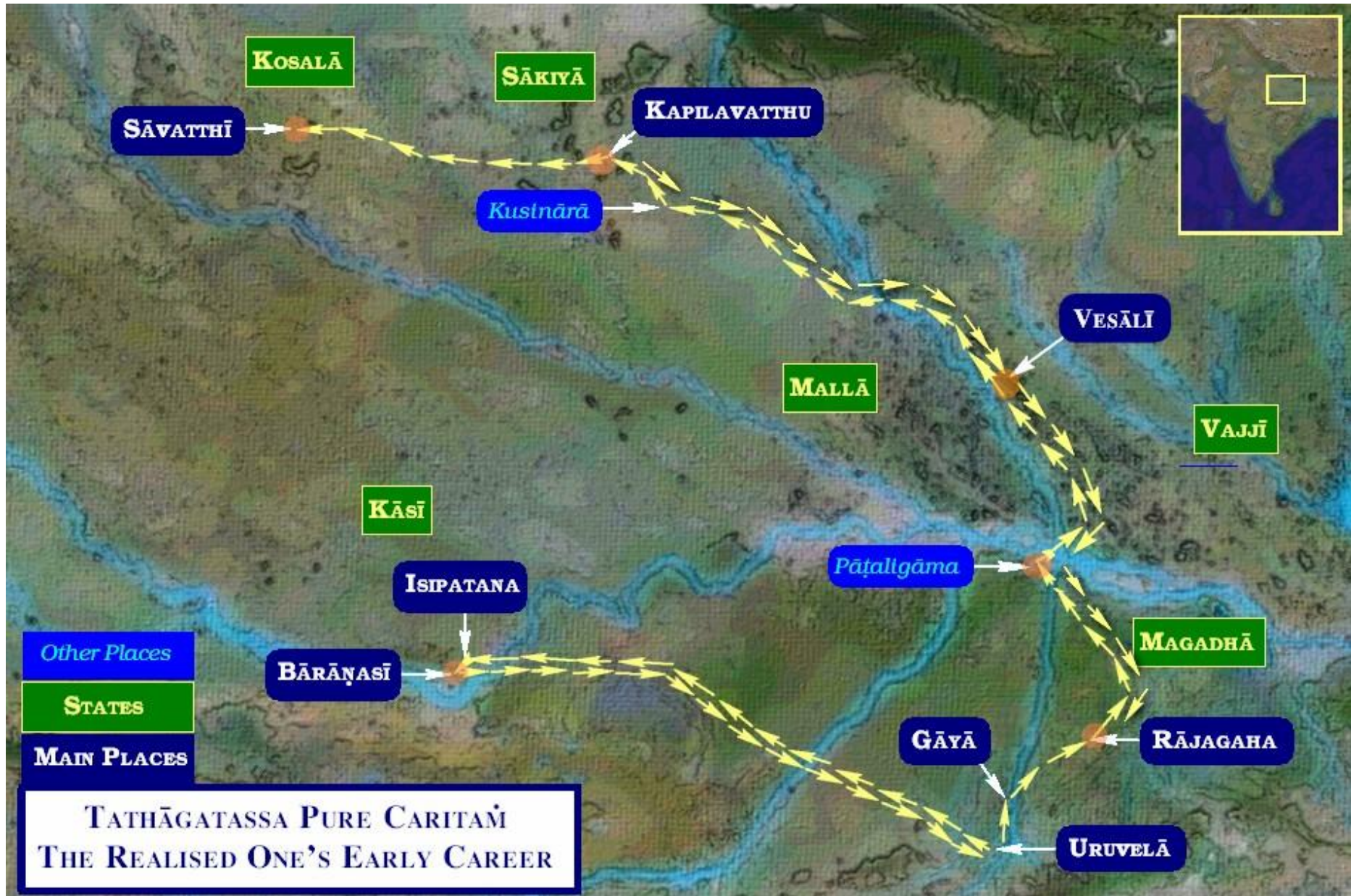
on Map 4 (Gandhāran Buddha Head): Phg

on Map 5 (Standing Buddha): Ānandajoti Bhikkhu

on Map 6 (Bronze Sitting Buddha): Ānandajoti Bhikkhu

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Tathāgatassa Pure Cāritam - The Buddha's Early Career



Tathāgatassa Pure Cāritam - The Buddha's Early Career

What follows is based on the account in the Mahākhanda section of the Vinaya Mahāvagga, and the traditional histories such as the Jātaka Nidānakathā, and the Jinavaṃsa:

After Awakening at the foot of the Bodhi tree in Uruvelā the Buddha spent the following 7 weeks in a number of locations in the same area. He then travelled to Isipatana, where his former companions, the group of five (*pañcavaggiya*) ascetics were staying. The walking tour appears to have taken around a week, as he arrived on the Full Moon night of Āsālha.

That night he preached his first recorded discourse, and thereby set the Dhamma-Wheel rolling, at the end of which Aññāta Koṇḍañña became the first person to attain path and fruit in the present Sāsana. In the next few days he and his four companions all became Worthy Ones (*Arahanta*). The Buddha spent the first Vassāna in the Deer-Park at Isipatana, and in a short time converted first Yasa, and then 50 of his friends, who also all became Worthy Ones.

At the end of the Rain's Retreat the Buddha walked back to Uruvelā, where he converted the three Kassapa brothers and their 1,000 disciples. From there he travelled to the Magadhan capital Rājagaha, where he was presented with his first monastery, the Bamboo Wood (*Veļuvana*) by King Bimbisāra.

Five months had passed since leaving Isipatana and it was now Springtime. Kāludāyī arrived from Kapilavatthu, and invited the Buddha to return to his home town. There he converted his former Wife, his Father, and ordained his Son, and other family members, including Nanda and Ānanda.

While he was there the rich merchant Anāthapiṇḍika arrived and invited him to Sāvattī, where he bought and presented him with the Jeta's Wood monastery. At this point the early histories break off, perhaps because the Sāsana was safely established by this time. Although we know a lot about the Buddha's ministry, the chronology is not picked up again until the Mahāparinibbānasutta opens about one year before the Final Emancipation at Kusinārā.

Tathāgatassa Vassā - The Realised One's Rains Retreats



Tathāgatassa Vassā - The Realised One's Rains Retreats

This map shows the various places where the Buddha spent his Rain's Retreats according to the information related in the Introduction to the Commentary on the Buddhavaṃsa, which is also followed by Ven. Medhaṅkara in Jinacarita. Most of them are well known, and appear in the Discourses many times. Of the Retreats we are sure about note that they all were taken in the Middle Lands (*Majjhimadesa*).

Some of the places we cannot identify. These include the 6th retreat on Mount Maṅkula;¹ 8th at Bhesakalā Wood in the Bhagga Country; 13th, 18th and 19th on Mount Cāliya.² Others are only vaguely known, such as Silk-Cotton Wood, Pārileyya and Verañjā, all of which were around Kosambī. The exact position of Āḷavī is also not known, but must have been in the Vajjī Country where there were many yakkha shrines. According to tradition the 7th Rains Retreat was spent in Tāvatiṃsa teaching the Abhidhamma to his Mother, who had been reborn as a Devaputta.

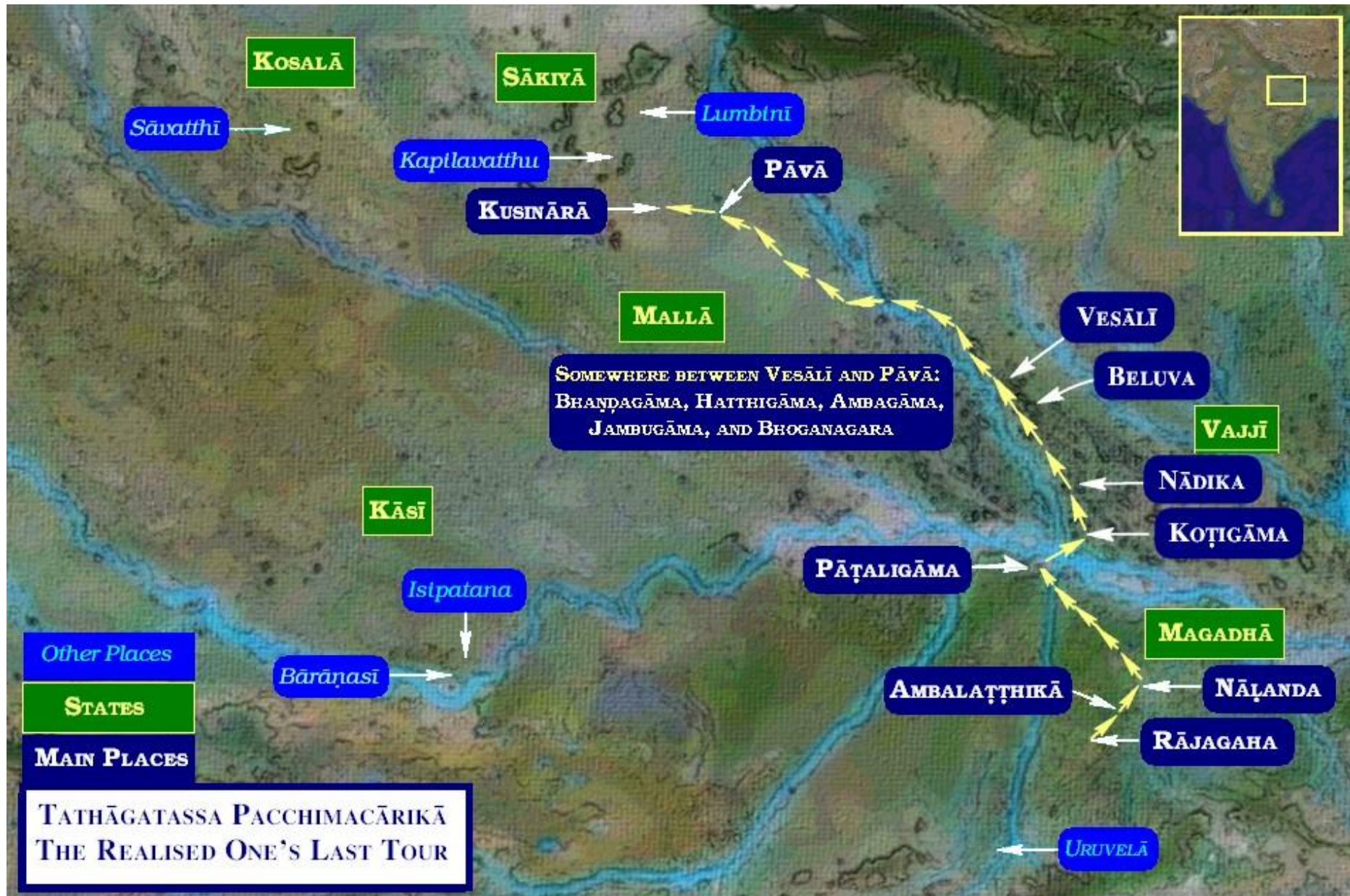
The information given in the Commentary inexplicably omits the last Rain's Retreat spent by the Buddha, which was at the village of Beluva, within walking distance of Vesālī, as related in the Mahāparinibbānasuttam. A text and translation of the relevant section of the Commentary to Buddhavaṃsa follows (for a later, and more poetic description of the Rains Retreats, see [Jinacaritam](#)):

After setting the Dhamma Wheel Rolling in Isipatana and making 180,000,000 Brahmās imbibe the immortal ambrosia during the first Rains Retreat he dwelt at the Deer Park in Isipatana relying on Bārāṇasī (for alms); the second Rains retreat was in the Great Monastery at Bamboo Wood, relying on Rājagaha; the third and fourth likewise (he was) also there; the fifth was in the Gabled House Hall in the Great Wood relying on Vesālī; the sixth on Mount Maṅkula; the seventh in the realm of the 33 gods (*Tāvatiṃsa*); the eighth in the Bhesakalā Wood, relying on the Crocodile Hill amongst the Bhaggas; the ninth near Kosambī; the tenth in the Pārileyyaka grove; the eleventh in the brāhmin village of Nāḷa (in Magadhā); the twelfth near Verañjā; the thirteenth on Mount Cāliya; the fourteenth in the Jeta's Wood great Monastery (near Sāvattthī); the fifteenth near the great city of Kapilavatthu (his home town, amongst the Sākiyans); having tamed (the yakkha) Āḷavaka and making 84,000 creatures imbibe the immortal ambrosia, (he spent) the sixteenth at Āḷavī; the seventeenth was surely near Rājagaha (perhaps in Bamboo Wood); then the eighteenth on mount Cāliya; but the nineteenth and twentieth Rains Retreat he dwelt near to Rājagaha (perhaps in Bamboo Wood) ... But from there onwards he surely relied on Sāvattthī dwelling in the Great Monastery in Jeta's Wood and the Eastern Monastery because it had constant supplies (of requisites for the large gathering of monks).

¹ ChS: Makula.

² ChS: Cālīka.

Tathāgatassa Pacchimā Cārikā - The Realised One's Last Tour



Tathāgatassa Pacchimā Cārikā - The Realised One's Last Tour

The last year of the Buddha's life is recorded in the Mahāparinibbānasutta of the Dīghanikāya (DN 16), which records his last walking tour in the Middle Country (*Majjhimadesa*). Before the beginning of the Rains Retreat (*Vassāna*) the Buddha walked from Rājagaha to Vesālī where he stayed for a number of months. Eventually the Buddha left Vesālī and started walking North and attained Complete Emancipation (*Parinibbāna*) at Kusinārā.

Looking at the map it very much appears as though the Buddha was actually heading for his home town of Kapilavatthu but succumbed to his illness on the way. The Buddha fell ill with dysentery in Pāvā and according to the very sad story in the Commentary, on the last day of his tour he actually had to sit down and rest no less than 25 times before reaching Kusinārā in the evening.

Sarīravibhāgo - The Distribution of the Relics



Sarāvibhāgo - The Distribution of the Relics

The exact positions of Pippalivana, Allakappa, and Veṭhadīpa are not known. One of the more interesting things this map brings out is that Sāvattihī and Bārāṇasī did not get a share of the relics, and apart from the relics that were taken to Vesālī and Rājagaha, all the others were distributed locally.

from Mahāparinibbānasuttam

- Then the Magadhan King Ajātasattu, the son of Lady Wisdom, made a Shrine for the Gracious One's bodily relics at Rājagaha and held a festival.
- The Licchavīs from Vesālī made a Shrine for the Gracious One's bodily relics at Vesālī and held a festival.
- The Sakyas from Kapilavatthu made a Shrine for the Gracious One's bodily relics at Kapilavatthu and held a festival.
- The Bulas of Allakappa made a Shrine for the Gracious One's bodily relics at Allakappa and held a festival.
- The Koliyas of Rāmagāma made a Shrine for the Gracious One's bodily relics at Rāmagāma and held a festival.
- The Veṭhadīpaka brahmin made a Shrine for the Gracious One's bodily relics at Veṭhadīpa and held a festival.
- The Mallas of Pāvā made a Shrine for the Gracious One's bodily relics at Pāvā and held a festival.
- The Mallas of Kusinārā made a Shrine for the Gracious One's bodily relics at Kusinārā and held a festival.
- Doṇa the brahmin made a Shrine for the urn and held a festival.
- The Moriyās of Pippalivana made a Shrine for the ashes at Pippalivana and held a festival.
- Thus there were eight Shrines for the bodily relics, the Vessel Shrine was the ninth, and the Ashes Shrine was the tenth, and so it was former times.

Cattāri Saṁvejanīyāni Ṭhānāni - The Four Places that Produce Enthusiasm

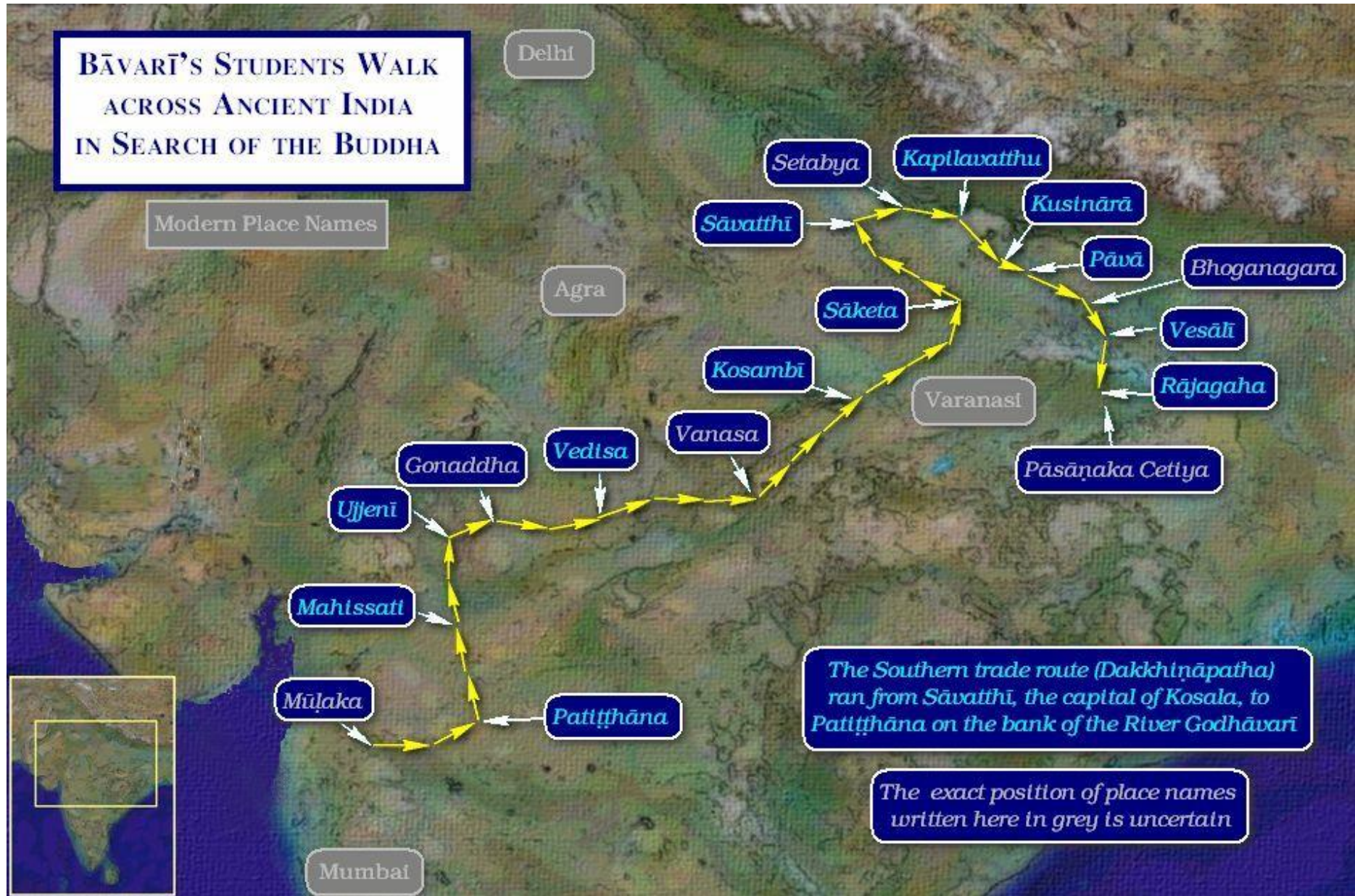


Cattāri Saṃvejanīyāni Ṭhānāni - The Four Places that Produce Enthusiasm

from Mahāparinibbānasuttam, Section 35:

These are the four places, Ānanda, that are to be seen that produce enthusiasm for a faithful man of good family. Faithful monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen will come, (thinking): ‘Here the Realised One was born’, ‘Here the Realised One awoke to the unsurpassed and Perfect Awakening’, ‘Here the Realised One set rolling the Wheel of the Teaching’, ‘Here the Realised One was Completely Emancipated in the Emancipation-element which has no basis for attachment remaining’, and whoever, Ānanda, will die while on pilgrimage to the Shrines with a confident mind they will all, at the break-up of the body, after death, re-arise in a fortunate destiny, in a heavenly world.

Bāvarissa Mānavacārikā Jambudīpe- Bāvarī's Students' Walk across Ancient India



Bāvarissa Māṇavacārikā Jambudīpe- Bāvarī's Students' Walk across Ancient India

from Pārāyanavaggo, verses 31-38:

After hearing Bāvarī's words, the sixteen brahmin students ... set out for the North. From Mūḷaka to Patiṭṭhāna first, then on to Mahissati, to Ujjenī, and Gonaddha, to Vedisa, and to the place called Vanasa, to Kosambī, and Sāketa, and Sāvattḥī, the city supreme, to Setabya, and Kapilavatthu, and to the city of Kusinārā, to Pāvā, to Bhoganagara, to Vesālī, to the Magadhan city (Rājagaha), and to the Pāsāṇaka Shrine, delightful, it is the mind's delight.

Bāvarī had left Sāvattḥī, the capital of Kosala, some time before and retired to a very remote place on the bank of the Godhāvarī River, which was about as far south as the Ariyans had penetrated at that time. There students gathered around him, including 16 who became teachers in their own right. When Bāvarī heard that a Sambuddha had arisen in the world he sent his students to question him. They first headed for Sāvattḥī itself, where the Buddha had been staying, but when he saw them coming, realising that they were not mature enough, he withdrew to Rājagaha and to the Pāsāṇaka Shrine. Their walking tour covered a distance of some 1,800 kilometres.

Soḷasa Mahājanapadā - The 16 Great States



Soḷasa Mahājanapadā - The 16 Great States

In two places in the Aṅguttaranikāya (Uposathasuttaṃ, Bk. 3.71; Vitthatūposathasuttaṃ, Bk. 8.42) we find the following list of great states (Mahājanapadā): Aṅgā, Magadhā, Kāsī, Kosalā, Vajjī, Mallā, Cetī, Vaṃsā,³ Kurū, Pañcālā, Macchā, Sūrasenā, Assakā, Avantī, Gandhārā, Kambojā.

We sometimes come across other forms of this list, so that at Janavasabhasuttaṃ (DN 18) only the following ten are mentioned: Kāsī, Kosalā, Vajjī, Mallā, Cetī, Vaṃsā, Kurū, Pañcālā, Macchā,⁴ Sūrasenā. Interestingly, the Sākiyas and the Koḷiyans are omitted from these lists, perhaps they were not considered as great states, being too small in size.

Below is a list of the State Capitals, and their Kings where they are known. The most important ones by far are the first two. Remember that the Buddha lived for 80 years and the political situation was always changing:

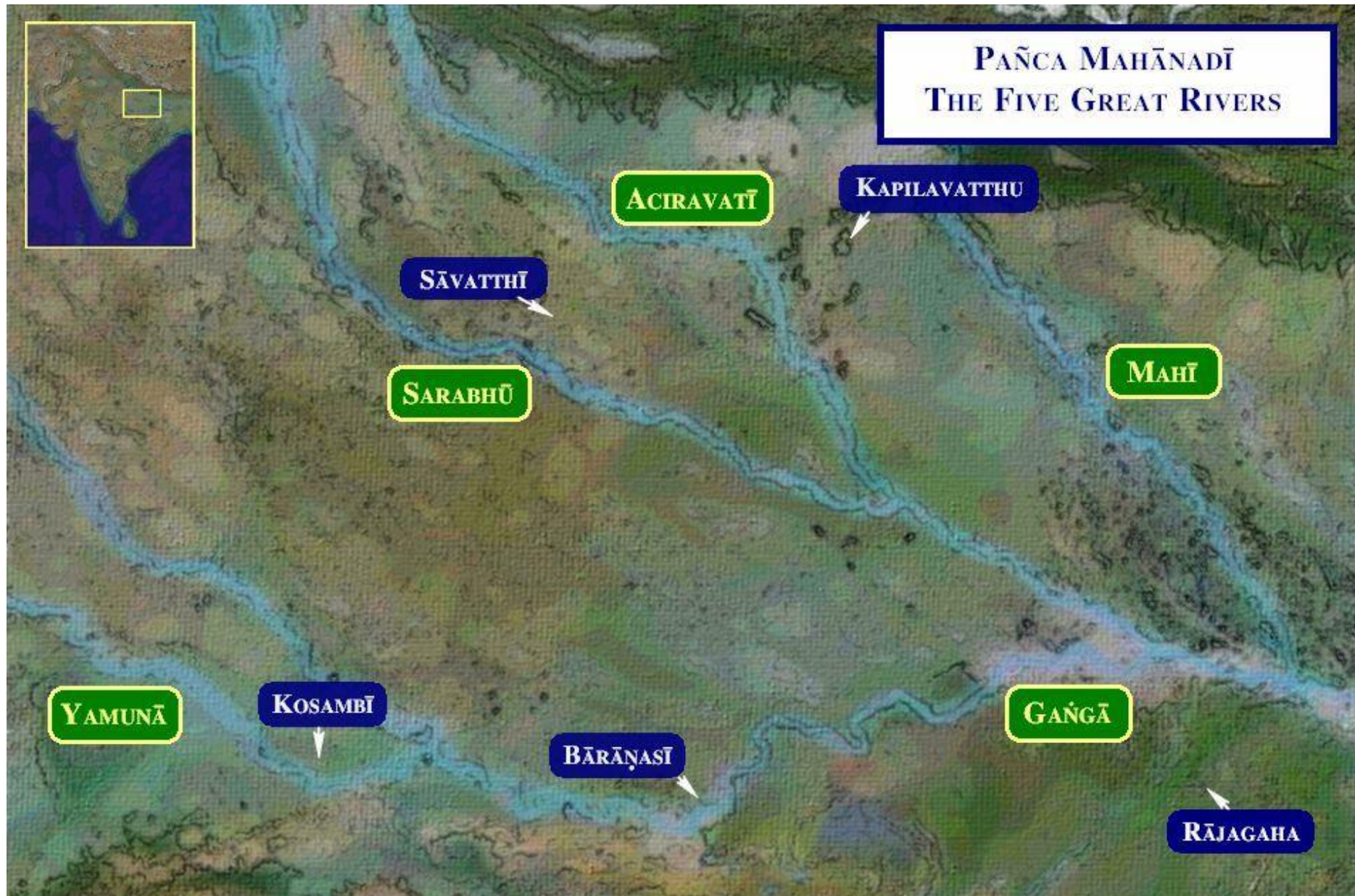
- Magadhā (Capital: Rājagaha; King Bimbisāra, later Ajātasattu)
- Kosalā (Capital: Sāvattihī; King Pasenadi)

- Aṅgā (Capital: Campā)
- Kāsī (Capital: Bārānasī)
- Vajjī (Republic)
- Mallā (Republic) [Sākiyā (Republic), Koḷiyā (Republic)]
- Vaṃsā (Capital: Kosambī, King Udena)
- Cetī (Sotthivatī)
- Kurū (Capital: Indapatta)
- Pañcālā
- Macchā (Capital: Virāṭanagara; King Virāṭa)
- Sūrasenā (Capital: Mathurā)
- Assakā (Capital: Potana)
- Avantī (Capital: Ujjenī in the North, Māhissatī in the South; King Vessabhū)
- Gandhārā (Capital: Takkasilā)
- Kambojā.

³ ChS: Vaṅgā.

⁴ ChS: Majjhā.

Pañca Mahānadī - The Five Great Rivers



Pañca Mahānadī - The Five Great Rivers

from Udāna 5-5: Uposathasuttam (45)

Seyyathā pi bhikkhave yā kāci mahānadiyo, seyyathīdam:

Just as, monks, whatever great rivers there are, that is to say:

Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Aciravatī, Sarabhū, Mahī, tā mahāsamuddam patvā jahanti pūrimāni nāmagottāni,

The Gaṅgā, the Yamunā, the Aciravatī, the Sarabhū, and the Mahī, having arrived at the great ocean, give up their former lineages and names,

mahāsamuddo tveva saṅkham gacchanti, evam-eva kho bhikkhave cattāro me vaṇṇā:

and are then designated as the great ocean, so, monks, there are these four classes:

Khattiyā, Brāhmaṇā, Vessā, Suddā, te Tathāgatappavedite Dhammavinaye agārasmā anagāriyam pabbajitvā,

Khattiyas, Brāhmaṇas, Vessas, and Suddas, who, having gone forth from the home to homelessness in the Dhamma and Discipline taught by the Realised One,

jahanti purimāni nāmagottāni, samaṇā Sakyaputtīyā tveva saṅkham gacchanti.

give up their former lineages and names, and are then designated as Sakyan ascetics.

Yaṃ bhikkhave cattāro me vaṇṇā:

That, monks, there are these four classes:

Khattiyā, Brāhmaṇā, Vessā, Suddhā, te Tathāgatappavedite Dhammavinaye agārasmā anagāriyam pabbajitvā,

Khattiyas, Brāhmaṇas, Vessas, and Suddas, who, having gone forth from the home to homelessness in the Dhamma and Discipline taught by the Realised One,

jahanti purimāni nāmagottāni, samaṇā Sakyaputtīyā tveva saṅkham gacchanti,

give up their former lineages and names, and are then designated as Sakyan ascetics,

ayam-pi bhikkhave imasmim Dhammavinaye catuttho acchariyo abbhutadhammo,

is the fourth wonderful and marvellous thing, monks, about this Dhamma and Discipline,

yaṃ disvā disvā bhikkhū imasmim Dhammavinaye abhiramanti.

which, having seen and considered, the monks delight in this Dhamma and Discipline.

Anotattasaro ca Sinerupabbato ca - Mount Sineru and Lake Anotatta



Pañca Mahānadī - The Five Great Rivers

The Buddha is said to have traversed the great distance from Uruvelā to the Himālayas to spend the day at Lake Anotatta during the time he was trying to convert the Uruvelā Kassapa, shortly after the Awakening, but the latter was still not convinced of the Buddha's superiority. It is mentioned as one of the seven great lakes in the Himālayas (AN Bk. 7.66. The others are named as Sīhapapāta, Rathakāra, Kaṇṇamuṇḍā, Kuṇāla, Chaddanta, Mandākinī).

In the same Aṅguttara discourse Mount Sineru is mentioned as the King of Mountains (*Pabbatarājā*). The mountain is also known in the Pāli texts as Neru, Mahāmeru, Meru and Kelasa. It is identified now with Mount Kailash in western Tibet. The Lake Anotatta, which is identified with Lake Manasarovar is on the rocky plains (*silātala*) in front of the mountain range.

Sineru takes on mythical proportions in the Commentaries, where the Tāvatiṃsa Heaven is said to be positioned on its summit, and the abode of the Demons at its base (SnA ii.485).

Jambudīpaṃ: Buddhato Asokassa - India: From the Buddha to Asoka

During the Lord Buddha's time Magadha was only one of many monarchies and republics in northern India, with its capital at Rājagaha. King Bimbisāra was one of the Buddha's main patrons, and gave him his first monastery near the capital.

After his passing King Bimbisāra's son, Ajātasattu, who had killed his father and ascended the throne, managed to overthrow the republics of the Vajjians amongst others, and consolidate his hold on Kāsi. He was killed by his son Udāyabhadra, and a series of patricides took place over the following generations.

That dynasty was eventually overthrown and during the time of the Sisunāgas and the ten Nanda Kings, the capital moved to Pāṭaliputta, and the area they controlled expanded to most of the sub-Himalayan Region. When the Greek King Alexandra entered India, his troops mutinied and refused to cross the Ganges and attack the Nandian Empire, fearing for their lives.

That dynasty was overthrown by one of the great Indian Emperors, Candagutta, who greatly expanded the empire to the west and the south, and, following the advice of his minister Kautilya, the author of the Arthaśāstra, by the time he was twenty he was in control of most of India.

Under his grandson King Asoka the Empire reached its greatest extent, incorporating most of present day India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. Asoka ruled this vast empire from his capital, and sent out religious missions to the border areas, which went beyond his borders to Śrī Laṅkā in the south; Suvaṇṇabhūmi in the east, and according to Rock Edicts XIII missions were also sent to Egypt and Greece in the west.

Jambudīpam: Buddhato Asokassa - India: From the Buddha to Asoka



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Northern Black Polished Ware (7th-2nd centuries BC)



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The map above shows some of the main archeological sites associated with the spread of Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) during the time of Asoka, although only the main sites are shown here as the ware has been found at over 1,500 sites by now. The Iron-Age culture which produced it appears to have been centered around the Middle Land, and was at its height during the period when Buddhism was on the rise, and is therefore the background culture to the discourses.

Between the 6th and 3rd centuries Indian society was undergoing dramatic and fundamental changes. The most significant of these, all of them connected, were the easy availability of iron, a rise in agricultural production, the growth of large towns and cities, and the beginning of a market economy and trade, and of centralized government. Iron made it possible to open up much more land for agriculture meaning that more food was available. The discovery of the technique of transplantation at around the same time also contributed to a food surplus. This caused an explosion in the population which in turn led to the development of the first large towns and cities in northern India.

In the political domain these changes caused the decline of the so-called tribal republics such as the Sakyans and the Vajjians, which had been governed by elected councils, and the growth of kingdoms such as Kosala and Magadha, with the latter eventually absorbing the former as well as the Vajjian and Licchivi republics and within 100 years of the Buddha's parinibbāna becoming the vast Mauryan Empire.

Evidence of the growing wealth and technological sophistication of the time was the development of a very distinct type of pottery archaeologists call Northern Black Polished Ware. This pottery is somewhat misnamed, as it is found in the south of India, as well as in the north, and is sometimes brown in colour. But typically it has a black, shiny, almost metallic sheen and exactly how it was made remains unexplained. It was first produced in Magadha and reached its most developed form between 500 and 300 BCE, corresponding with the beginning of Buddhism.

This is important as it helps in dating archaeological sites associated with the Buddha and with the first Buddhists. It also helps map the expansion of Asoka's empire which introduced NBPW technology as it spread, taking Buddhism with it.

Brahmanism, the religion that had prevailed up till this time, was a rural-based religion whose central sacrament was the sacrifice which involved killing of sometimes large numbers of domestic animal. The newly emerging town dwellers, and especially the tradesmen and merchants were looking for an ideology that made sense within an urban setting and particularly one that did not involve expensive and wasteful rituals.

It was at this point that first Mahāvīra, the founder of Jainism, and then the Buddha arrived on the scene. These changes influenced some of the issues the Buddha addresses which meant that his Dhamma had a ready audience. It is clear from the suttas that the Buddha's most significant supporters were merchants (e.g. Anathapiṇḍaka, Ghosita and Kukkuṭa) and townsfolk. It is also interesting that quite a few of his discourses address ethics and practices related to business and finances.

Northern Black Polished Ware (7th-2nd centuries BC)

One of the central themes of the Dhamma is that ethical behaviour and not rituals are important in the spiritual life. It is true that the Buddha often praised forest living, at least for monks and nuns, but this seems to have been mainly a nostalgic nod to the past. Of the earliest Buddhist monasteries discovered by archaeologists, all are within easy walking distance of a town or city, and one, the Ghositarama, is actually within the city walls of Kosambi.

Other ascetics groups were allowed to pick fruit and dig roots from the forest, whereas the Vinaya rules forbade monks and nuns from doing this, meaning that they had to be near habitation in order to get their food, and so Buddhism started as the religion of urban-dwellers.

The Buddha could have met with strong opposition from the powerful elites, i.e. rulers and the Brahmans who were their spiritual advisors. But while he was sometimes openly critical of Brahmanical rituals and Brahman complacency, he more commonly adopted their terminology and mythology, saying what they 'really meant' was exactly what he himself taught, rather than condemning and dismissing them.

The Buddha's rejection of caste may also have contributed to the early success of the Dhamma. While few suttas are addressed to low caste or outcaste individuals, many undermine caste ideology. This must have made the Dhamma attractive to low castes and outcastes living in cities where social mobility was more possible than in the villages.

One more factor contributing to the rapid growth of the Buddha's Dhamma was the extraordinary mobility of he and his monks. Strong central governments administrating large areas allowed for the opening up of roads, the construction of bridges and the control of banditry. The purpose of this was to promote trade but it also enabled the Buddha and his monks to travel widely. The suttas are full of references to the Buddha or his monks making long journeys, from one town or city to another. In a world without books this allowed thousands of people to hear the Buddha's message, thus contributing greatly to its acceptance.

Text by Ven. S. Dhammika, written for this page, January 27th 2013

Pesnakāle Laṅkāḍīpe - Lanka at the time of the Missions

from Extended Mahāvamsa, Chapter XX

Mahāvihāraṃ paṭhamam, dutiyam Cetiyaṃ subham,

First the Great Monastery, second the lovely Cetiya (monastery),

Thūpārāmaṃ tu tatiyaṃ, Thūpapubbaṅgamaṃ subham, [27]

but the Sanctuary monastery was third, preceding the lovely Sanctuary (itself),

catuttham tu Mahābodhipatiṭṭhāpanakāraṇam.

and fourth he had the Great Bodhi planted.

Mahācetiyaṭṭhānamhi silāyūpassa cārūno [28]

* Fifthly, he established the beautiful stone pillar (marking) the Great Shrine

Sambuddhagīvādhātussa patiṭṭhāpanapañcamam,

and (inside it) the relic of the Sambuddha's neck (bone),

Issarasamaṇam chaṭṭham, Tissavāpiṃ tu sattamaṃ, [29]

the Nobles Ascetics' (monastery) was sixth, the Tissa tank seventh,

aṭṭhamam Paṭhamathūpaṃ, navamaṃ Vessagirivhayaṃ,

eighth was the First Sanctuary, ninth the (monastery) called Trader's Mountain,

Upāsikāvihāraṇ-ca tathā Hatthāḷhakāvayaṃ, [30]

The Lay-Womens' Monastery, and then the (one) called the Elephant's Measure.

Pesnakāle Laṅkadīpe - Lanka at the time of the Missions

Kāretvā bhattasālam so Mahāpālikam-avhayam,
Having made a reception hall called the Great Range,

pāṭiyekkam pāṭiyekkam, sampannaparivāritam, [33]
for each of the assemblies separately,

vatthabhojanapānādi, upakaraṇasampadam,
* the King furnished (it) with (all) utensils,

tassev' Ubhatosaṅghassa adāsi Manujādhipo. [34]
and gave clothes, food, drinks and so on for both Communities.

...

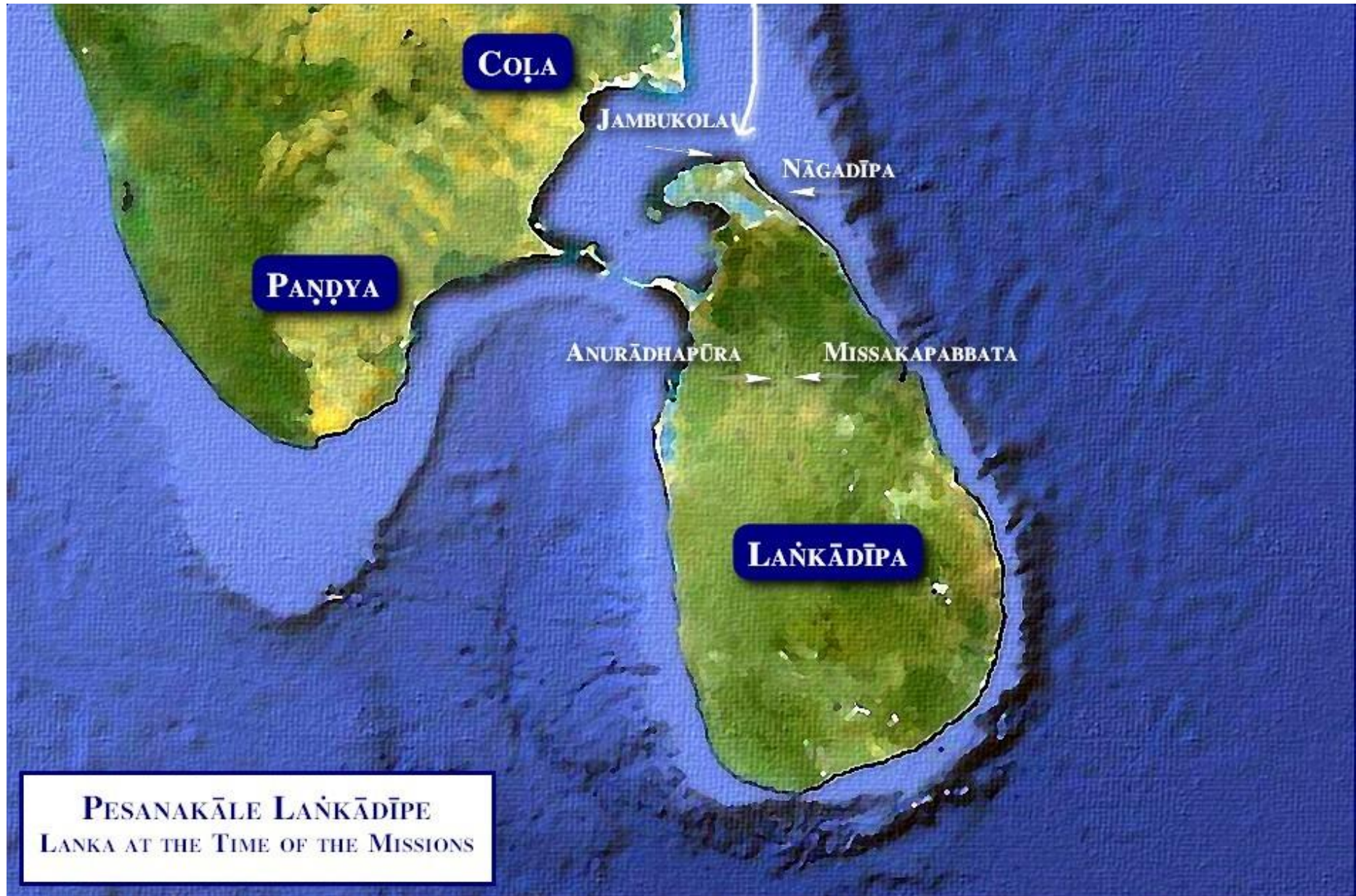
Nāgadīpe Jambukole vihāre tamhi paṭṭane
In the port of Jambukola (he built) the monasteries (known as)

Tissamahāvihāraṅ-ca, Pācīnārāmam-eva ca, [36]
Tissa's Great monastery, and the Eastern monastery,

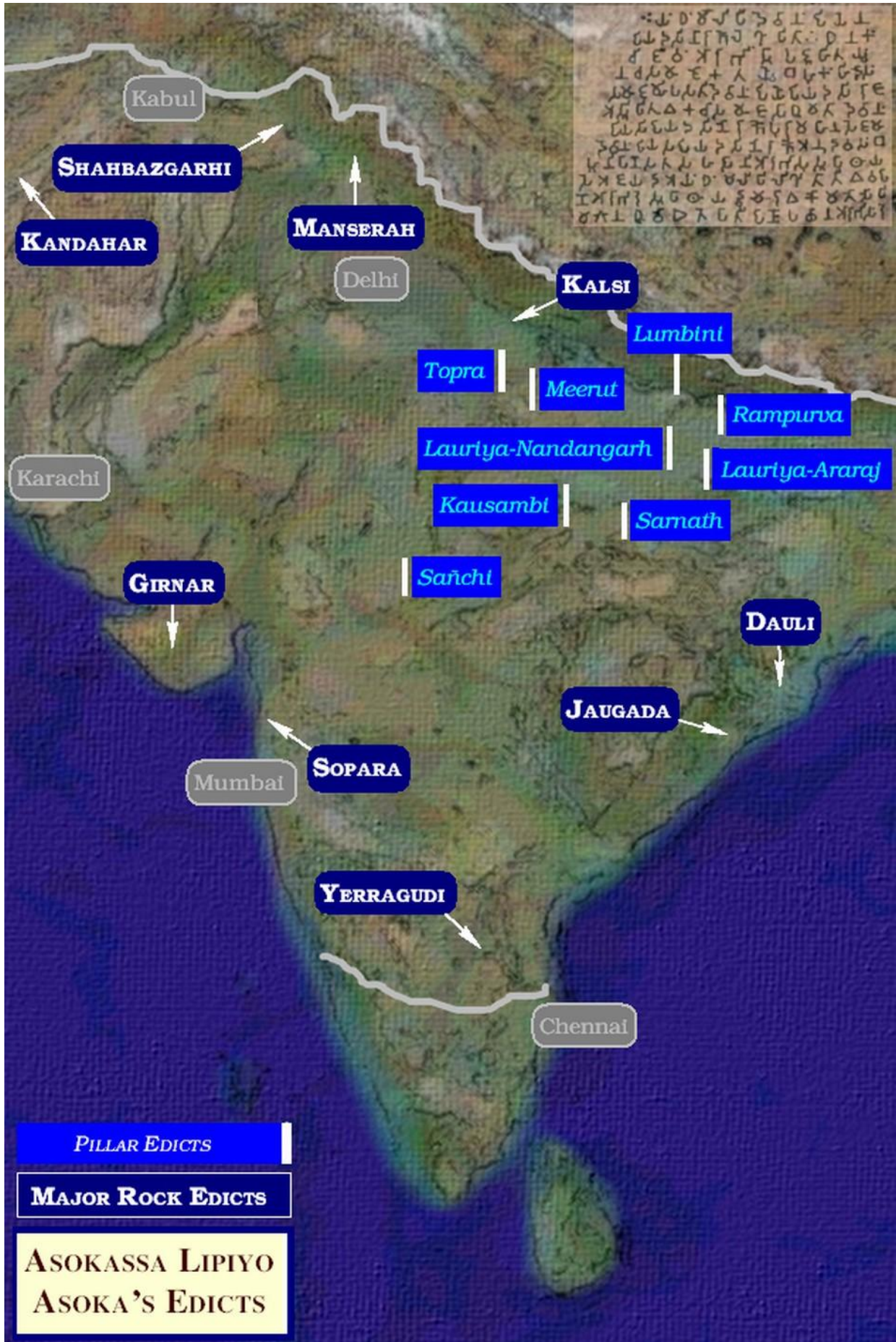
ettakamhi vihāramhi bahudānam nirantaram
* and in all these monasteries he continually had

paṭiyattam paṭiyattam sakkaccam pi dine dine. [37]
great donations prepared with respect day by day.

Pesanakāle Laṅkāḍīpe - Lanka at the time of the Missions



Asokassa Pesanā - Asoka's Missions

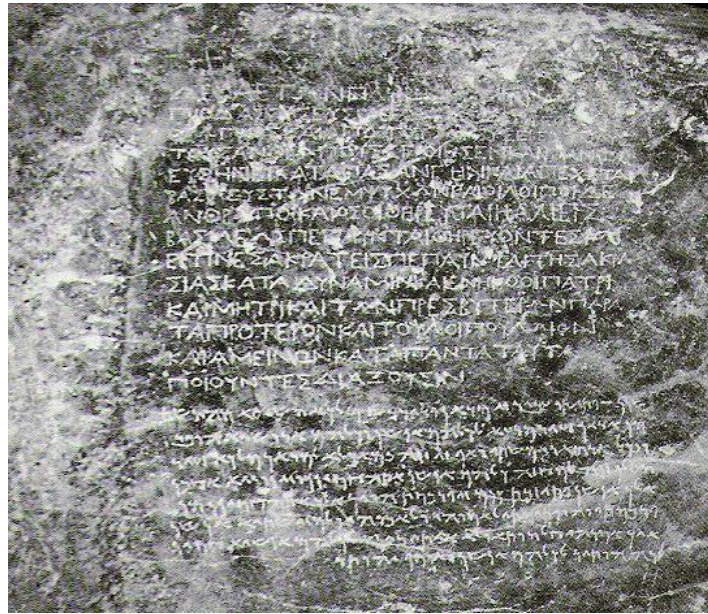


Asokassa Pesanà - Asoka's Missions

Translation of Inset written in Brāhmī script at Girnar (by S. Dhammika):

Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, has caused this Dhamma edict to be written. Here (in my domain) no living beings are to be slaughtered or offered in sacrifice. Nor should festivals be held, for Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, sees much to object to in such festivals, although there are some festivals that Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, does approve of.

Formerly, in the kitchen of Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, hundreds of thousands of animals were killed every day to make curry. But now with the writing of this Dhamma edict only three creatures, two peacocks and a deer are killed, and the deer not always. And in time, not even these three creatures will be killed.



Kandahar Inscription

*Translation of Inscription written in Greek (top)
and Aramaic (bottom) at Kandahar (by G.P. Carratelli):*

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

Dharmapadāni Āyatanāni - Where the Dhammapada-s were found



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The Buddha taught mainly in and around the North-Eastern area of India which was known as the Majjhimadesa (the Middle Country), and after his Final Emancipation his teachings were originally collected there. It is curious indeed that although first taught and collected in India none of the texts we now possess today actually come from there, but have survived in the border countries long after all traces of the books were lost in their Homeland in the Middle Ages.

The Pāli Tipiṭaka has been passed down through the Śrī Laṅkan Saṅgha; various Sankritised Prakrit texts, which were written down on birch bark, survived in the deserts in Central Asia; and others rescensions have been found in Nepal and Tibet. The oldest book that has come down to us from Ancient times is a rescension of the Dhammapada preserved in the Gāndhārī dialect. Unfortunately for us it was ripped into 3 pieces and sold off to explorers in the late 19th century; one part went to Paris, another went to St. Petersburg, and a third part went missing altogether.

The edition of the text we now know as the Patna Dhammapada was found in an unknown Tibetan monastery by Rāhula Saṁskṛtāyana sometime in the 1930s. There is one set of photographs of the work,⁵ and parts of it are obscured so that they cannot be read properly. What happened to the work after the Chinese invasion of Tibet in the 1950s is not known at present. It was possibly removed to Beijing, but there is no confirmation of this.

Literally hundreds of manuscript fragments of the Udānavarga have been found in the Central Asian deserts, which testifies to the popularity of the work. Piecing them all together again to form a coherent text was a mammoth undertaking performed by Dr. Bernhard in the 1950s (published 1965-67). It appears now however that he has mixed up two different rescensions of the work⁶ so that the value of his undertaking has been somewhat diminished with time. Recently a new edition has been made of one of the rescensions by H. Hakatani entitled *Udanavarga de Subasi*.⁷

The testimonies for the Pāli rescension of the work were mainly written on perishable ola-leaves and date back only a few centuries, but there are very many of them, and they also are corroborated by other works, so there can be no doubt about the age of the work. It appears that the Śrī Laṅkan Saṅgha has very faithfully passed the work down over the millennium, which we can be sure of, as the text contains many readings that are unmetrical and even ungrammatical, but which have not been cleaned up or revised by the recitors, which they would have been had the texts been tampered with.

⁵ The name is derived from the current location of the photographs in the J.P. Jayaswal Research Institute of Patna.

⁶ Lambert Schmithausen 1970: *Zu den Rezensionen des Udanavarga* in *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Sudasiens*, vol 14 pp 47-124.

⁷ Published by Publications de l'Institut de civilisation indienne, Paris.