

# History



The maximum extent of the Maurya Empire, as shown in many modern maps.

The Maurya dynasty ruled for 137 years<sup>[28]</sup> The cultural influence of the [Hellenistic](#) kingdoms founded in the Persianate regions of [Gandhara](#), and parts of India and Kashmir, influenced the artistic style and culture of these places.<sup>[29]</sup> After the death of [Alexander the Great](#) the founder of the Maurya dynasty, [Chandragupta Maurya](#), reconquered the [Indus Valley](#) and northwest India.<sup>[30]</sup> Alexander's armies were forced to retreat back to Gandhara.<sup>[29]</sup> Chandragupta then defeated [Seleucus](#) who [ceded](#) the Indus and [Swat](#) Valleys, Gandhara, and east [Arachosia](#).<sup>[30]</sup>

Chandragupta's grandson [Ashoka](#) fought a series of campaigns to extend Mauryan rule over northern and central India. There are no Greek and Persian influences in the works commissioned by Ashoka after his conversion to [Buddhism](#).<sup>[29]</sup>

## Founding of the dynasty

See also: [List of Mauryan rulers](#)

The Maurya Empire was founded by Chandragupta Maurya, with help from [Chanakya](#), at [Takshashila](#), a noted center of learning. According to several legends, Chanakya travelled to [Magadha](#), a kingdom that was large and militarily powerful and feared by its neighbours, but was insulted by its king [Dhana Nanda](#), of the [Nanda dynasty](#). Chanakya swore revenge and vowed to destroy the Nanda Empire.<sup>[31]</sup> Meanwhile, the conquering armies of [Alexander the Great](#) refused to cross the [Beas River](#) and advance further eastward, deterred by the prospect of battling [Magadha](#). Alexander returned to [Babylon](#) and re-deployed most of his troops west of the [Indus River](#). Soon after Alexander died in [Babylon](#) in 323 BCE, his empire fragmented into independent kingdoms led by his generals.<sup>[32]</sup>

The Greek generals [Eudemus](#) and [Peithon](#) ruled in the Indus Valley until around 317 BCE, when Chandragupta Maurya (with the help of Chanakya, who was now his advisor) orchestrated a rebellion to drive out the Greek governors, and subsequently brought the Indus Valley under the control of his new seat of power in Magadha.<sup>[10]</sup>

Chandragupta Maurya's rise to power is shrouded in mystery and controversy. On one hand, a number of ancient Indian accounts, such as the drama [Mudrarakshasa](#) (*Signet ring of Rakshasa* – *Rakshasa* was the prime minister of Magadha) by [Vishakhadatta](#), describe his royal ancestry and even link him with the Nanda family. A kshatriya clan known as the [Maurya](#)'s are referred to in the earliest [Buddhist texts](#), [Mahaparinibbana Sutta](#). However, any conclusions are hard to make without further historical evidence. Chandragupta first emerges in Greek accounts as "Sandrokottos". As a young man he is said to have met Alexander.<sup>[33]</sup> He is also said to have met the Nanda king, angered him, and made a narrow escape.<sup>[34]</sup> Chanakya's original intentions were to train army under Chandragupta's command.

## Conquest of Magadha

### Territorial evolution of the Mauryan Empire



• Territory of [Magadha](#) and the Maurya Empire between 600 and 180 BCE, including Chandragupta's overthrow of the Nanda Empire (321 BCE) and gains from the [Seleucid Empire](#) (303 BCE), the southward expansion (before 273 BCE), and Ashoka's conquest of [Kalinga](#) (261 BCE).<sup>[35]</sup>



• The same animation, modified in accordance with Kulke and Rothermund (see right). [Hermann Kulke](#) and [Dietmar Rothermund](#) believe that Ashoka's empire did not include large parts of India, which were controlled by autonomous tribes.<sup>[2]</sup>

Main articles: [Chandragupta Maurya](#), [Nanda Dynasty](#), and [Magadha](#)

Chanakya encouraged Chandragupta Maurya and his army to take over the throne of Magadha. Using his intelligence network, Chandragupta gathered many young men from across Magadha and other provinces, men upset over the corrupt and oppressive rule of king [Dhana Nanda](#), plus the resources necessary for his army to fight a long series of battles. These men included the former general of Taxila, accomplished students of Chanakya, the representative of King Parvataka, his son [Malayaketu](#), and the rulers of small states. The Macedonians (described as

[Yona](#) or Yavana in Indian sources) may then have participated, together with other groups, in the armed uprising of Chandragupta Maurya against the [Nanda dynasty](#).<sup>[36][37]</sup> The *Mudrarakshasa* of Visakhadutta as well as the [Jaina](#) work [Parisishtaparvan](#) talk of Chandragupta's alliance with the Himalayan king Parvataka, often identified with [Porus](#),<sup>[38][39]</sup> although this identification is not accepted by all historians.<sup>[40]</sup> This [Himalayan](#) alliance gave Chandragupta a composite and powerful army made up of [Yavanas](#) (Greeks), [Kambojas](#), [Shakas](#) (Scythians), [Kiratas](#) (Himalayans), [Parasikas](#) (Persians) and [Bahlikas](#) (Bactrians) who took [Pataliputra](#) (also called Kusumapura, "The City of Flowers"):<sup>[41]</sup>

"[Kusumapura](#) was besieged from every direction by the forces of Parvata and Chandragupta: Shakas, Yavanas, Kiratas, Kambojas, Parasikas, Bahlikas and others, assembled on the advice of Chanakya" in *Mudrarakshasa* 2 <sup>[42][41]</sup>

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

## Chandragupta Maurya

Main article: [Chandragupta Maurya](#)

Further information: [Seleucid–Mauryan war](#)



[Pataliputra](#), capital of the Mauryas. Ruins of pillared hall at Kumrahar site.



The [Pataliputra capital](#), discovered at the [Bulandi Bagh](#) site of Pataliputra, 4th-3rd c. BCE.

After the [death of Alexander the Great](#) in 323 BCE, Chandragupta led a [series of campaigns](#) in 305 BCE to retake satrapies in the Indus Valley and northwest India.<sup>[30]</sup> When Alexander's remaining forces were [routed](#), returning westwards, Seleucus I Nicator fought to defend these territories. Not many details of the campaigns are known from ancient sources. Seleucus was defeated and retreated into the mountainous region of Afghanistan.<sup>[43]</sup>

The two rulers concluded a peace treaty in 303 BCE, including a marital alliance. Under its terms, Chandragupta received the satrapies of [Paropamisadae](#) ([Kamboja](#) and Gandhara) and [Arachosia](#) ([Kandahar](#)) and [Gedrosia](#) ([Balochistan](#)). Seleucus I received the 500 [war elephants](#) that were to have a decisive role in his victory against western [Hellenistic](#) kings at the [Battle of Ipsus](#) in 301 BCE. Diplomatic relations were established and several Greeks, such as the historian [Megasthenes](#), [Deimakos](#) and [Dionysius](#) resided at the Mauryan court.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

Megasthenes in particular was a notable Greek ambassador in the court of Chandragupta Maurya.<sup>[44]</sup> According to [Arrian](#), ambassador Megasthenes (c.350–c.290 BCE) lived in Arachosia and travelled to [Pataliputra](#).<sup>[45]</sup> Megasthenes' description of Mauryan society as freedom-loving gave Seleucus a means to avoid invasion, however, underlying Seleucus' decision was the improbability of success. In later years, Seleucus' successors maintained diplomatic relations with the Empire based on similar accounts from returning travellers.<sup>[30]</sup>

Chandragupta established a strong centralized state with an administration at Pataliputra, which, according to Megasthenes, was "surrounded by a wooden wall pierced by 64 gates and 570 towers". [Aelian](#), although not expressly quoting Megasthenes nor mentioning Pataliputra, described Indian palaces as superior in splendor to [Persia's Susa](#) or [Ectabana](#).<sup>[46]</sup> The architecture of the city seems to have had many similarities with Persian cities of the period.<sup>[47]</sup>

Chandragupta's son [Bindusara](#) extended the rule of the Mauryan empire towards southern India. The famous [Tamil](#) poet Mamulanar of the [Sangam literature](#) described how areas south of the [Deccan Plateau](#) which comprised Tamil country was invaded by the Maurya army using troops from Karnataka. Mamulanar states that Vadugar (people who resided in andhra-karnataka regions immediately to the north of Tamil nadu) formed the vanguard of the Mauryan army.<sup>[23][48]</sup> He also had a Greek ambassador at his court, named [Megasthenes](#).<sup>[49]</sup> According to [Plutarch](#) Chandragupta Maurya subdued entire India, Justin also observed that Chandragupta Maurya was "in possession of India", this is corroborated by Tamil sangam literature which

mentions about mauryan invasion with their south Indian allies and defeat of their rivals at Podiyil hill in [Tinnevelley district](#) in present-day [Tamil Nadu](#).<sup>[50][51]</sup>

Chandragupta renounced his throne and followed Jain teacher [Bhadrabahu](#).<sup>[52][53][54]</sup> He is said to have lived as an ascetic at [Shravanabelagola](#) for several years before fasting to death, as per the Jain practice of [sallekhana](#).<sup>[55]</sup>

## Bindusara

Main article: [Bindusara](#)



A silver coin of 1 [karshapana](#) of the Maurya empire, period of [Bindusara](#) Maurya about 297-272 BC, workshop of Pataliputra. **Obv:** Symbols with a Sun **Rev:** Symbol **Dimensions:** 14 x 11 mm **Weight:** 3.4 g.

Bindusara was born to [Chandragupta](#), the founder of the Mauryan Empire. This is attested by several sources, including the various [Puranas](#) and the [Mahavamsa](#).<sup>[56][full citation needed]</sup> He is attested by the Buddhist texts such as [Dipavamsa](#) and [Mahavamsa](#) ("Bindusaro"); the Jain texts such as *Parishishta-Parvan*; as well as the Hindu texts such as [Vishnu Purana](#) ("Vindusara").<sup>[57][58]</sup> According to the 12th century Jain writer [Hemachandra](#)'s *Parishishta-Parvan*, the name of Bindusara's mother was [Durdhara](#).<sup>[59]</sup> Some Greek sources also mention him by the name "Amitrochates" or its variations.<sup>[60][61]</sup>

Historian Upinder Singh estimates that Bindusara ascended the throne around 297 BCE.<sup>[48]</sup> Bindusara, just 22 years old, inherited a large empire that consisted of what is now, Northern, Central and Eastern parts of [India](#) along with parts of [Afghanistan](#) and [Baluchistan](#). Bindusara extended this empire to the southern part of India, as far as what is now known as [Karnataka](#). He brought sixteen states under the Mauryan Empire and thus conquered almost all of the Indian peninsula (he is said to have conquered the 'land between the two seas' – the peninsular region between the [Bay of Bengal](#) and the [Arabian Sea](#)). Bindusara didn't conquer the friendly [Tamil](#) kingdoms of the [Cholas](#), ruled by King [Ilamcetcenni](#), the [Pandyas](#), and [Cheras](#). Apart from these southern states, [Kalinga](#) (modern Odisha) was the only kingdom in India that didn't form the part of Bindusara's empire.<sup>[62]</sup> It was later conquered by his son [Ashoka](#), who served as the viceroy of [Ujjaini](#) during his father's reign, which highlights the importance of the town.<sup>[63][64]</sup>

Bindusara's life has not been documented as well as that of his father Chandragupta or of his son Ashoka. Chanakya continued to serve as prime minister during his reign. According to the medieval Tibetan scholar Taranatha who visited India, Chanakya helped Bindusara "to destroy the nobles and kings of the sixteen kingdoms and thus to become absolute master of the territory between the eastern and western oceans."<sup>[65]</sup> During his rule, the citizens of [Taxila](#) revolted twice. The reason for the first revolt was the [maladministration](#) of [Susima](#), his eldest son. The

reason for the second revolt is unknown, but Bindusara could not suppress it in his lifetime. It was crushed by Ashoka after Bindusara's death.<sup>[66]</sup>

Bindusara maintained friendly diplomatic relations with the Hellenic World. [Deimachus](#) was the ambassador of [Seleucid](#) emperor [Antiochus I](#) at Bindusara's court.<sup>[67]</sup> [Diodorus](#) states that the king of Palibothra ([Pataliputra](#), the Mauryan capital) welcomed a Greek author, [Iambulus](#). This king is usually identified as Bindusara.<sup>[67]</sup> [Pliny](#) states that the Egyptian king [Philadelphus](#) sent an envoy named [Dionysius](#) to India.<sup>[68][69]</sup> According to Sailendra Nath Sen, this appears to have happened during Bindusara's reign.<sup>[67]</sup>

Unlike his father Chandragupta (who at a later stage converted to [Jainism](#)), Bindusara believed in the [Ajivika](#) sect. Bindusara's guru Pingalavatsa (Janasana) was a Brahmin<sup>[70]</sup> of the Ajivika sect. Bindusara's wife, Queen [Subhadra](#) (Queen Dharma/ Aggamahesi) was a Brahmin<sup>[71]</sup> also of the Ajivika sect from Champa (present Bhagalpur district). Bindusara is credited with giving several grants to Brahmin monasteries (*Brahmana-bhatto*).<sup>[72]</sup>

Historical evidence suggests that Bindusara died in the 270s BCE. According to Upinder Singh, Bindusara died around 273 BCE.<sup>[48]</sup> [Alain Daniélou](#) believes that he died around 274 BCE.<sup>[65]</sup> Sailendra Nath Sen believes that he died around 273-272 BCE, and that his death was followed by a four-year struggle of succession, after which his son [Ashoka](#) became the emperor in 269-268 BCE.<sup>[67]</sup> According to the [Mahavamsa](#), Bindusara reigned for 28 years.<sup>[73]</sup> The [Vayu Purana](#), which names Chandragupta's successor as "Bhadrasara", states that he ruled for 25 years.<sup>[74]</sup>

## Ashoka

Main article: [Ashoka](#)





[Ashoka pillar capital](#) at [Sarnath](#). ca. 250 BCE.



Ashoka pillar at [Vaishali](#).



Fragment of the 6th Pillar [Edict of Ashoka](#) (238 BCE), in [Brahmi](#), sandstone, [British Museum](#).

As a young prince, Ashoka (r. 272–232 BCE) was a brilliant commander who crushed revolts in Ujjain and Takshashila. As monarch he was ambitious and aggressive, re-asserting the Empire's superiority in southern and western India. But it was his conquest of [Kalinga](#) (262–261 BCE) which proved to be the pivotal event of his life. Ashoka used Kalinga to project power over a large region by building a fortification there and securing it as a possession.<sup>[75]</sup> Although Ashoka's army succeeded in overwhelming Kalinga forces of royal soldiers and civilian units, an

estimated 100,000 soldiers and civilians were killed in the furious warfare, including over 10,000 of Ashoka's own men. Hundreds of thousands of people were adversely affected by the destruction and fallout of war. When he personally witnessed the devastation, Ashoka began feeling remorse. Although the annexation of Kalinga was completed, Ashoka embraced the teachings of [Buddhism](#), and renounced war and violence. He sent out missionaries to travel around Asia and spread Buddhism to other countries.<sup>[[citation needed](#)]</sup>

Ashoka implemented principles of [ahimsa](#) by banning hunting and violent sports activity and ending indentured and forced labor (many thousands of people in war-ravaged Kalinga had been forced into hard labour and servitude). While he maintained a large and powerful army, to keep the peace and maintain authority, Ashoka expanded friendly relations with states across Asia and Europe, and he sponsored Buddhist missions. He undertook a massive public works building campaign across the country. Over 40 years of peace, harmony and prosperity made Ashoka one of the most successful and famous monarchs in Indian history. He remains an idealized figure of inspiration in modern India.<sup>[[citation needed](#)]</sup>

The [Edicts of Ashoka](#), set in stone, are found throughout the Subcontinent. Ranging from as far west as [Afghanistan](#) and as far south as Andhra ([Nellore District](#)), Ashoka's edicts state his policies and accomplishments. Although predominantly written in Prakrit, two of them were written in [Greek](#), and one in both Greek and [Aramaic](#). Ashoka's edicts refer to the Greeks, [Kambojas](#), and [Gandharas](#) as peoples forming a frontier region of his empire. They also attest to Ashoka's having sent envoys to the Greek rulers in the West as far as the Mediterranean. The edicts precisely name each of the rulers of the [Hellenic](#) world at the time such as *Amtiyoko* ([Antiochus](#)), *Tulamaya* ([Ptolemy](#)), *Amtikini* ([Antigonos](#)), *Maka* ([Magas](#)) and *Alikasudaro* ([Alexander](#)) as recipients of Ashoka's proselytism.<sup>[[citation needed](#)]</sup> The Edicts also accurately locate their territory "600 yojanas away" (a yojanas being about 7 miles), corresponding to the distance between the center of India and Greece (roughly 4,000 miles).<sup>[76]</sup>

## Decline

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

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

## Shunga coup (185 BCE)

Buddhist records such as the [Ashokavadana](#) write that the assassination of Brihadratha and the rise of the Shunga empire led to a wave of religious persecution for [Buddhists](#),<sup>[77]</sup> and a resurgence of [Hinduism](#). According to [Sir John Marshall](#),<sup>[78]</sup> Pushyamitra may have been the



main author of the persecutions, although later Shunga kings seem to have been more supportive of Buddhism. Other historians, such as [Etienne Lamotte](#)<sup>[79]</sup> and [Romila Thapar](#),<sup>[80]</sup> among others, have argued that archaeological evidence in favour of the allegations of persecution of Buddhists are lacking, and that the extent and magnitude of the atrocities have been exaggerated.

## Establishment of the Indo-Greek Kingdom (180 BCE)

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

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

## Administration



Statuettes of the Mauryan era

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

Historians theorise that the organisation of the Empire was in line with the extensive bureaucracy described by [Kautilya](#) in the [Arthashastra](#): a sophisticated civil service governed everything from municipal hygiene to international trade. The expansion and defense of the empire was made possible by what appears to have been one of the largest armies in the world during the [Iron Age](#).<sup>[81]</sup> According to Megasthenes, the empire wielded a military of 600,000 infantry, 30,000 cavalry, 8,000 chariots and 9,000 war elephants besides followers and attendants.<sup>[82]</sup> A vast [espionage](#) system collected intelligence for both internal and external security purposes. Having

renounced offensive warfare and expansionism, Ashoka nevertheless continued to maintain this large army, to protect the Empire and instill stability and peace across West and South Asia.<sup>[[citation needed](#)]</sup>

## Local Government

[Arthashastra](#) and [Megasthenes](#) accounts of [Pataliputra](#) describe the intricate municipal system formed by Maurya empire to govern its cities. A city counsel made up of thirty commissioners was divided into six committees or boards which governed the city. The first board fixed wages and looked after provided goods, second board made arrangement for foreign dignitaries, tourists and businessmen, third board made records and registrations, fourth looked after manufactured goods and sale of commodities, fifth board regulated trade, issued licenses and checked weights and measurements, sixth board collected sales taxes. Some cities such as taxila had autonomy to issue their own coins. The city counsel had officers who looked after public welfare such as maintenance of roads, public buildings, markets, hospitals, educational institutions etc.<sup>[[83](#)]</sup> The official head of the village was Gramika (in towns [Nagarika](#)).<sup>[[84](#)]</sup> The city counsel also had some magisterial powers.

## Economy

See also: [Economic history of India](#) and [Coinage of India](#)



Maurya statuette, 2nd century BCE.

For the first time in [South Asia](#), political unity and military security allowed for a common economic system and enhanced trade and commerce, with increased agricultural productivity. The previous situation involving hundreds of kingdoms, many small armies, powerful regional chieftains, and internecine warfare, gave way to a disciplined central authority. Farmers were freed of tax and crop collection burdens from regional kings, paying instead to a nationally administered and strict-but-fair system of taxation as advised by the principles in the *Arthashastra*. Chandragupta Maurya established a single currency across India, and a network of

regional governors and administrators and a civil service provided justice and security for merchants, farmers and traders. The Mauryan army wiped out many gangs of bandits, regional private armies, and powerful chieftains who sought to impose their own supremacy in small areas. Although regimental in revenue collection, Maurya also sponsored many public works and waterways to enhance productivity, while internal trade in India expanded greatly due to new-found political unity and internal peace.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

Under the Indo-Greek friendship treaty, and during Ashoka's reign, an international network of trade expanded. The [Khyber Pass](#), on the modern boundary of [Pakistan](#) and [Afghanistan](#), became a strategically important port of trade and intercourse with the outside world. Greek states and Hellenic kingdoms in West Asia became important trade partners of India. Trade also extended through the [Malay peninsula](#) into Southeast Asia. India's exports included silk goods and textiles, spices and exotic foods. The external world came across new scientific knowledge and technology with expanding trade with the Mauryan Empire. Ashoka also sponsored the construction of thousands of roads, waterways, canals, hospitals, rest-houses and other public works. The easing of many over-rigorous administrative practices, including those regarding taxation and crop collection, helped increase productivity and economic activity across the Empire.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

In many ways, the economic situation in the Mauryan Empire is analogous to the Roman Empire of several centuries later. Both had extensive trade connections and both had organizations similar to [corporations](#). While Rome had organizational entities which were largely used for public state-driven projects, Mauryan India had numerous private commercial entities. These existed purely for private commerce and developed before the Mauryan Empire itself.<sup>[85][unreliable source?]</sup>

#### Maurya Empire coinage



Hoard of mostly Mauryan coins.



Silver punch mark coin of the Maurya empire, with symbols of wheel and elephant. 3rd century BCE.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>



Mauryan coin with arched hill symbol on reverse. [\[citation needed\]](#)



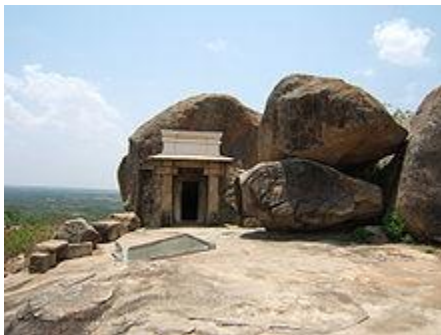
Mauryan Empire coin. Circa late 4th-2nd century BCE. [\[citation needed\]](#)



Mauryan Empire, Emperor [Salisuka](#) or later. Circa 207-194 BCE. [\[86\]](#)

## Religion

### Jainism



Bhadrabahu Cave, [Shravanabelagola](#) where [Chandragupta](#) is said to have died

Chandragupta Maurya embraced [Jainism](#) after retiring, when he renounced his throne and material possessions to join a wandering group of Jain monks. Chandragupta was a disciple of the Jain monk [Acharya Bhadrabahu](#). It is said that in his last days, he observed the rigorous but self-purifying Jain ritual of [santhara](#) (fast unto death), at [Shravana Belgola](#) in [Karnataka](#).<sup>[\[87\]](#)[\[54\]](#)[\[88\]](#)[\[53\]](#)</sup> [Samprati](#), the grandson of [Ashoka](#), also patronized Jainism. Samprati was influenced by the teachings of Jain monks like Suhastin and he is said to have built 125,000

[derasars](#) across India.<sup>[89]</sup> Some of them are still found in the towns of Ahmedabad, Viramgam, Ujjain, and Palitana.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> It is also said that just like Ashoka, Samprati sent messengers and preachers to [Greece](#), [Persia](#) and the [Middle East](#) for the spread of Jainism, but, to date, no research has been done in this area.<sup>[90][91]</sup>

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

## Buddhism



The [stupa](#), which contained the relics of Buddha, at the center of the [Sanchi](#) complex was originally built by the Maurya Empire, but the balustrade around it is [Sunga](#), and the decorative gateways are from the later [Satavahana](#) period.



The [Dharmarajika stupa](#) in [Taxila](#), modern [Pakistan](#), is also thought to have been established by Emperor [Asoka](#).

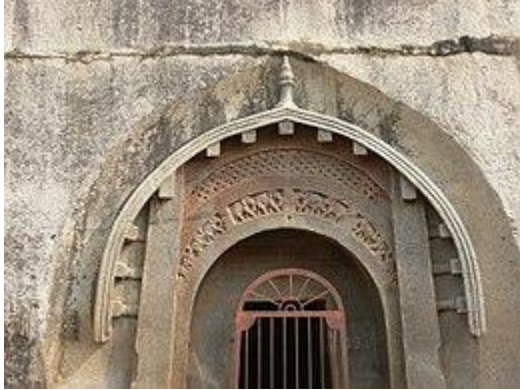
[Magadha](#), the centre of the empire, was also the birthplace of [Buddhism](#). Ashoka initially practised Hinduism but later embraced Buddhism; following the [Kalinga War](#), he renounced expansionism and aggression, and the harsher injunctions of the [Arthashastra](#) on the use of force, intensive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



embraced Buddhism and played a large role in spreading the religion across the Mauryan Empire.<sup>[92]</sup>

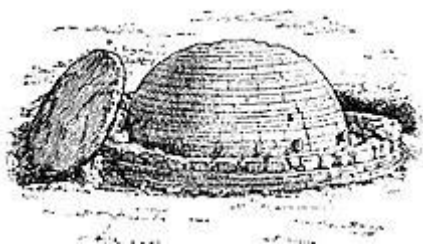
## Architectural remains

Main articles: [Edicts of Ashoka](#), [Sanchi Stupa](#), and [Mauryan art](#)



Mauryan architecture in the [Barabar Caves](#). [Lomas Rishi Cave](#). 3rd century BCE.

The greatest monument of this period, executed in the reign of [Chandragupta Maurya](#), was the old palace at the site of [Kumhrar](#). Excavations at the site of [Kumhrar](#) nearby have unearthed the remains of the palace. The palace is thought to have been an aggregate of buildings, the most important of which was an immense pillared hall supported on a high substratum of timbers. The pillars were set in regular rows, thus dividing the hall into a number of smaller square bays. The number of columns is 80, each about 7 meters high. According to the eyewitness account of [Megasthenes](#), the palace was chiefly constructed of timber, and was considered to exceed in splendour and magnificence the palaces of Susa and Ecbatana, its gilded pillars being adorned with golden vines and silver birds. The buildings stood in an extensive park studded with fish ponds and furnished with a great variety of ornamental trees and shrubs.<sup>[93]</sup><sup>[better source needed]</sup> Kautilya's [Arthashastra](#) also gives the method of palace construction from this period. Later fragments of stone pillars, including one nearly complete, with their round tapering shafts and smooth polish, indicate that Ashoka was responsible for the construction of the stone columns which replaced the earlier wooden ones.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>



An early [stupa](#), 6 meters in diameter, with fallen umbrella on side. Chakpat, near [Chakdara](#). Probably Maurya, 3rd century BCE.

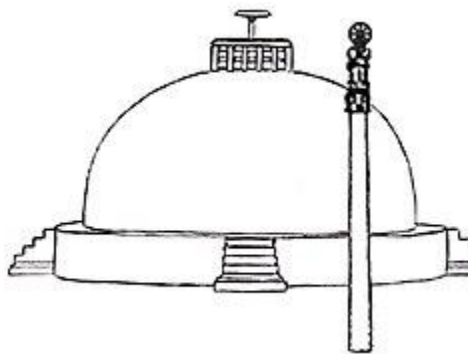
During the Ashokan period, stonework was of a highly diversified order and comprised lofty free-standing pillars, railings of [stupas](#), lion thrones and other colossal figures. The use of stone



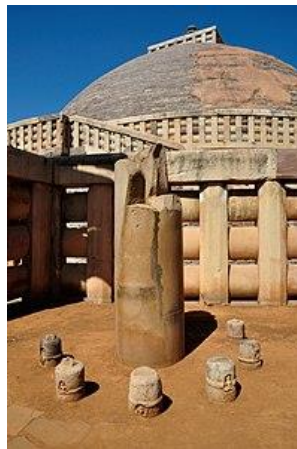
had reached such great perfection during this time that even small fragments of stone art were given a high lustrous polish resembling fine enamel. This period marked the beginning of the Buddhist school of architecture. Ashoka was responsible for the construction of several [stupas](#), which were large domes and bearing symbols of Buddha. The most important ones are located at [Sanchi](#), [Bharhut](#), [Amaravati](#), [Bodhgaya](#) and [Nagarjunakonda](#). The most widespread examples of Mauryan architecture are the [Ashoka pillars](#) and carved edicts of Ashoka, often exquisitely decorated, with more than 40 spread throughout the [Indian subcontinent](#).<sup>[94]</sup><sup>[better source needed]</sup>

The peacock was a dynastic symbol of Mauryans, as depicted by Ashoka's pillars at Nandangarh and Sanchi Stupa.<sup>[25]</sup>

#### Maurya structures and decorations at [Sanchi](#) (3rd century BCE)



Approximate reconstitution of the Great Stupa at [Sanchi](#) under the [Mauryas](#).



Remains of the [Ashokan Pillar](#) in polished stone (right of the Southern Gateway).



Remains of the shaft of the pillar of Ashoka, under a shed near the Southern Gateway.



Pillar and its inscription (the "Schism Edict") upon discovery.



The capital nowadays. [\[95\]](#)

## Natural history



The two [Yakshas](#), possibly 3rd century BCE, found in [Pataliputra](#).

The protection of animals in India became serious business by the time of the Maurya dynasty; being the first empire to provide a unified political entity in India, the attitude of the Mauryas towards forests, their denizens, and fauna in general is of interest.<sup>[96]</sup>

The Mauryas firstly looked at forests as resources. For them, the most important forest product was the elephant. Military might in those times depended not only upon horses and men but also [battle-elephants](#); these played a role in the defeat of [Seleucus](#), one of [Alexander](#)'s former generals. The Mauryas sought to preserve supplies of elephants since it was cheaper and took less time to catch, tame and train wild elephants than to raise them. [Kautilya](#)'s [Arthashastra](#) contains not only maxims on ancient statecraft, but also unambiguously specifies the responsibilities of officials such as the *Protector of the Elephant Forests*.<sup>[97]</sup>

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

— [Arthashastra](#)

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

The Mauryas valued certain forest tracts in strategic or economic terms and instituted curbs and control measures over them. They regarded all forest tribes with distrust and controlled them with bribery and political subjugation. They employed some of them, the food-gatherers or *aranyaca* to guard borders and trap animals. The sometimes tense and conflict-ridden relationship nevertheless enabled the Mauryas to guard their vast empire.<sup>[98]</sup>

When [Ashoka](#) embraced [Buddhism](#) in the latter part of his reign, he brought about significant changes in his style of governance, which included providing protection to fauna, and even relinquished the royal hunt. He was the first ruler in history<sup>[[failed verification](#)]</sup> to advocate [conservation](#) measures for wildlife and even had rules inscribed in stone edicts. The edicts proclaim that many followed the king's example in giving up the slaughter of animals; one of them proudly states:<sup>[98]</sup>

Our king killed very few animals.

— [Edict on Fifth Pillar](#)

However, the edicts of Ashoka reflect more the desire of rulers than actual events; the mention of a 100 'panas' (coins) fine for poaching deer in royal hunting preserves shows that rule-breakers did exist. The legal restrictions conflicted with the practices freely exercised by the common people in hunting, felling, fishing and setting fires in forests.<sup>[98]</sup>

## Contacts with the Hellenistic world



Mauryan ringstone, with standing goddess. Northwest Pakistan. 3rd Century BCE

## Foundation of the Empire

Relations with the Hellenistic world may have started from the very beginning of the Maurya Empire. [Plutarch](#) reports that Chandragupta Maurya met with [Alexander the Great](#), probably around [Taxila](#) in the northwest:<sup>[99]</sup>

"Sandrocottus, when he was a stripling, saw Alexander himself, and we are told that he often said in later times that Alexander narrowly missed making himself master of the country, since its king was hated and despised on account of his baseness and low birth".  
Plutarch 62-4<sup>[100][99]</sup>

## Reconquest of the Northwest (c. 317–316 BCE)

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

"India, after the death of Alexander, had assassinated his prefects, as if shaking the burden of servitude. The author of this liberation was Sandracottos, but he had transformed liberation in servitude after victory, since, after taking the throne, he himself oppressed the very people he has liberated from foreign domination" Justin XV.4.12–13<sup>[101]</sup>

"Later, as he was preparing war against the prefects of Alexander, a huge wild elephant went to him and took him on his back as if tame, and he became a remarkable fighter and war leader. Having thus acquired royal power, Sandracottos possessed India at the time Seleucos was preparing future glory." Justin XV.4.19<sup>[102]</sup>

## Conflict and alliance with Seleucus (305 BCE)

Main article: [Seleucid–Mauryan war](#)



A map showing the north western border of Maurya Empire, including its various neighboring states.

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

"Always lying in wait for the neighbouring nations, strong in arms and persuasive in council, he [Seleucus] acquired Mesopotamia, Armenia, 'Seleucid' Cappadocia, Persis, Parthia, Bactria, Arabia, Tapouria, Sogdia, Arachosia, Hyrcania, and other adjacent peoples that had been subdued by Alexander, as far as the river Indus, so that the boundaries of his empire were the most extensive in Asia after that of Alexander. The whole region from Phrygia to the Indus was subject to Seleucus".  
[Appian](#), *History of Rome*, The Syrian Wars 55<sup>[103]</sup>

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

## Marital alliance

Chandragupta and [Seleucus](#) concluded a peace treaty and a marital alliance in 303 BCE. Chandragupta received vast territories and in a return gave Seleucus 500 [war elephants](#).<sup>[104][105][106][107][108]</sup> a military asset which would play a decisive role at the [Battle of Ipsus](#) in 301 BCE.<sup>[109]</sup> In addition to this treaty, Seleucus dispatched an ambassador,

[Megasthenes](#), to Chandragupta, and later [Deimakos](#) to his son [Bindusara](#), at the Mauryan court at [Pataliputra](#) (modern [Patna](#) in [Bihar](#)). Later, [Ptolemy II Philadelphus](#), the ruler of [Ptolemaic Egypt](#) and contemporary of [Ashoka](#), is also recorded by [Pliny the Elder](#) as having sent an ambassador named [Dionysius](#) to the Mauryan court.<sup>[110][better source needed]</sup>

Mainstream scholarship asserts that Chandragupta received vast territory west of the Indus, including the [Hindu Kush](#), modern-day [Afghanistan](#), and the [Balochistan](#) province of [Pakistan](#).<sup>[111][112]</sup> Archaeologically, concrete indications of Mauryan rule, such as the inscriptions of the [Edicts of Ashoka](#), are known as far as [Kandahar](#) in southern Afghanistan.

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

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

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

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

## Exchange of presents

Classical sources have also recorded that following their treaty, Chandragupta and Seleucus exchanged presents, such as when Chandragupta sent various [aphrodisiacs](#) to Seleucus:<sup>[60]</sup>

"And Theophrastus says that some contrivances are of wondrous efficacy in such matters [as to make people more amorous]. And Phylarchus confirms him, by reference to some of the presents which Sandrakottus, the king of the Indians, sent to Seleucus; which were to act like charms in producing a wonderful degree of affection, while some, on the contrary, were to banish love." [Athenaeus of Naucratis](#), "[The deipnosophists](#)" Book I, chapter 32<sup>[113]</sup>

His son [Bindusara](#) 'Amitraghata' (Slayer of Enemies) also is recorded in Classical sources as having exchanged presents with [Antiochus I](#):<sup>[60]</sup>

"But dried figs were so very much sought after by all men (for really, as [Aristophanes](#) says, "There's really nothing nicer than dried figs"), that even Amittrochates, the king of the Indians, wrote to [Antiochus](#), entreating him (it is [Hegesander](#) who tells this story) to buy and send him some sweet wine, and some dried figs, and a [sophist](#); and that Antiochus wrote to him in answer, "The dry figs and the sweet wine we will send you; but it is not lawful for a sophist to be sold in Greece." [Athenaeus](#), "[Deipnosophistae](#)" XIV.67<sup>[114]</sup>



## Greek population in India

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

"Here in the king's dominion among the [Greeks](#), the [Kambojas](#), the Nabhakas, the Nabhapamkits, the Bhojas, the Pitinikas, the [Andhras](#) and the Palidas, everywhere people are following Beloved-of-the-Gods' instructions in [Dharma](#)." ([Rock Edict Number 13](#))



An Edict of Ashoka in Shahbazgarhi, KPK, Pakistan.

"Now, in times past (officers) called [Mahamatras](#) of morality did not exist before. Mahamatras of morality were appointed by me (when I had been) anointed thirteen years. These are occupied with all sects in establishing morality, in promoting morality, and for the welfare and happiness of those who are devoted to morality (even) among the [Greeks](#), [Kambojas](#) and [Gandharas](#), and whatever other western borderers (of mine there are)." ([Rock Edict Number 5](#))



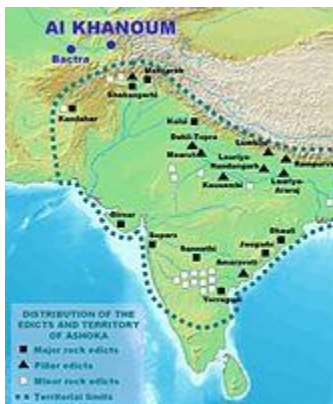
The [Kandahar Edict of Ashoka](#), a bilingual edict ([Greek](#) and [Aramaic](#)) by king Ashoka, from [Kandahar](#). [Kabul](#) Museum. (Click image for translation).

Fragments of Edict 13 have been found in Greek, and a full Edict, written in both Greek and Aramaic, has been discovered in [Kandahar](#). It is said to be written in excellent Classical Greek, using sophisticated philosophical terms. In this Edict, Ashoka uses the word [Eusebeia](#) ("[Piety](#)")

as the Greek translation for the ubiquitous "[Dharma](#)" of his other Edicts written in [Prakrit](#):<sup>[non-primary source needed]</sup>

"Ten years (of reign) having been completed, King Piodasses (Ashoka) made known (the doctrine of) Piety (*εὐσέβεια*, [Eusebeia](#)) to men; and from this moment he has made men more pious, and everything thrives throughout the whole world. And the king abstains from (killing) living beings, and other men and those who (are) huntsmen and fishermen of the king have desisted from hunting. And if some (were) intemperate, they have ceased from their intemperance as was in their power; and obedient to their father and mother and to the elders, in opposition to the past also in the future, by so acting on every occasion, they will live better and more happily". (Trans. by G.P. Carratelli [\[1\]](#))<sup>[unreliable source?]</sup>

### Buddhist missions to the West (c. 250 BCE)



The distribution of the [Edicts of Ashoka](#).<sup>[115]</sup>



Map of the Buddhist missions during the reign of [Ashoka](#).



• Territories "conquered by the Dharma" according to [Major Rock Edict No.13](#) of Ashoka (260–218 BCE).<sup>[116][117]</sup>

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

"The conquest by [Dharma](#) has been won here, on the borders, and even six hundred [yojanas](#) (5,400–9,600 km) away, where the Greek king [Antiochos](#) rules, beyond there where the four kings named [Ptolemy](#), [Antigonos](#), [Magas](#) and [Alexander](#) rule, likewise in the south among the [Cholas](#), the [Pandyas](#), and as far as [Tamraparni](#) ([Sri Lanka](#))." ([Edicts of Ashoka](#), 13th Rock Edict, S. Dhammika).<sup>[non-primary source needed]</sup>

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

"Everywhere within Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi's [Ashoka's] domain, and among the people beyond the borders, the [Cholas](#), the [Pandyas](#), the Satiyaputras, the Keralaputras, as far as [Tamraparni](#) and where the Greek king [Antiochos](#) rules, and among the kings who are neighbors of Antiochos, everywhere has Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, made provision for two types of medical treatment: medical treatment for humans and medical treatment for animals. Wherever medical herbs suitable for humans or animals are not available, I have had them imported and grown. Wherever medical roots or fruits are not available I have had them imported and grown. Along roads I have had wells dug and trees planted for the benefit of humans and animals". [2nd Rock Edict](#)<sup>[non-primary source needed]</sup>

The Greeks in India even seem to have played an active role in the 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 Buddhist proselytism (the [Mahavamsa](#), XII<sup>[118]</sup><sup>[non-primary source needed]</sup>).

## Subhagasena and Antiochos III (206 BCE)

[Sophagasenus](#) was an Indian [Mauryan](#) ruler of the 3rd century BCE, described in ancient Greek sources, and named Subhagasena or Subhashasena in [Prakrit](#). His name is mentioned in the list

of Mauryan princes<sup>[[citation needed](#)]</sup>, and also in the list of the Yadava dynasty, as a descendant of Pradyumna. He may have been a grandson of [Ashoka](#), or [Kunala](#), the son of Ashoka. He ruled an area south of the [Hindu Kush](#), possibly in [Gandhara](#). [Antiochos III](#), the [Seleucid](#) king, after having made peace with [Euthydemus](#) in [Bactria](#), went to India in 206 BCE and is said to have renewed his friendship with the Indian king there:

"He (Antiochus) crossed the Caucasus and descended into India; renewed his friendship with Sophagasenus the king of the Indians; received more elephants, until he had a hundred and fifty altogether; and having once more provisioned his troops, set out again personally with his army: leaving Androstenes of Cyzicus the duty of taking home the treasure which this king had agreed to hand over to him". [Polybius 11.39](#)<sup>[[non-primary source needed](#)]</sup>

## Timeline

- 322 BCE: Chandragupta Maurya founded the Mauryan Empire by overthrowing the Nanda Dynasty.
- 317–316 BCE: Chandragupta Maurya conquers the Northwest of the Indian subcontinent.
- 305–303 BCE: Chandragupta Maurya gains territory from the Seleucid Empire.
- 298–269 BCE: Reign of Bindusara, Chandragupta's son. He conquers parts of Deccan, southern India.
- 269–232 BCE: The Mauryan Empire reaches its height under Ashoka, Chandragupta's grandson.
- 261 BCE: Ashoka conquers the kingdom of Kalinga.
- 250 BCE: Ashoka builds Buddhist stupas and erects pillars bearing inscriptions.
- 184 BCE: The empire collapses when Brihadaratha, the last emperor, is killed by [Pushyamitra Shunga](#), a Mauryan general and the founder of the [Shunga Empire](#).