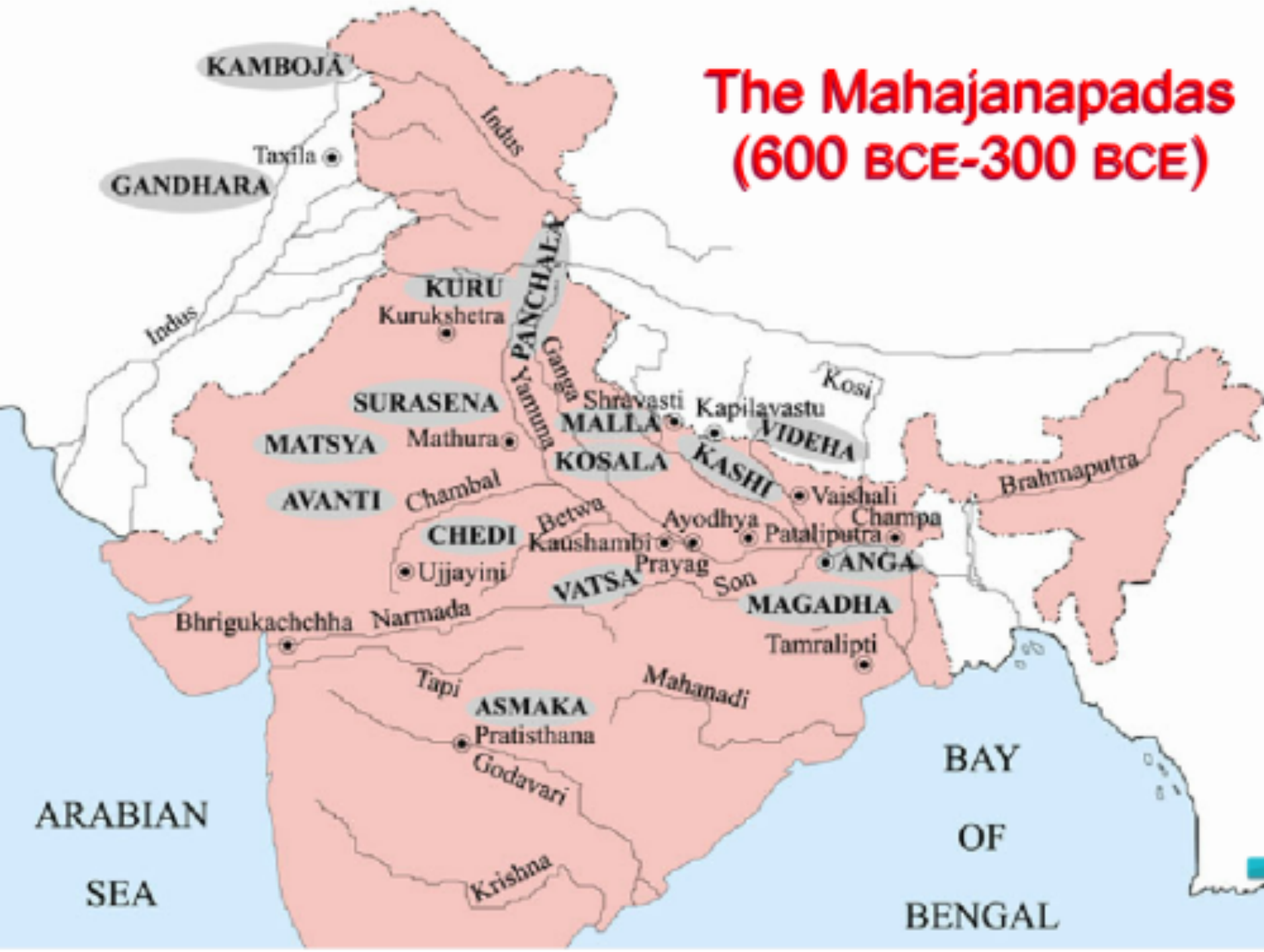


Buddhist Sociology:
A Community of Liberation
A Culture of Diversity
An Institution of Power

Jonathan S. Watts
Keio University
Tokyo, Japan



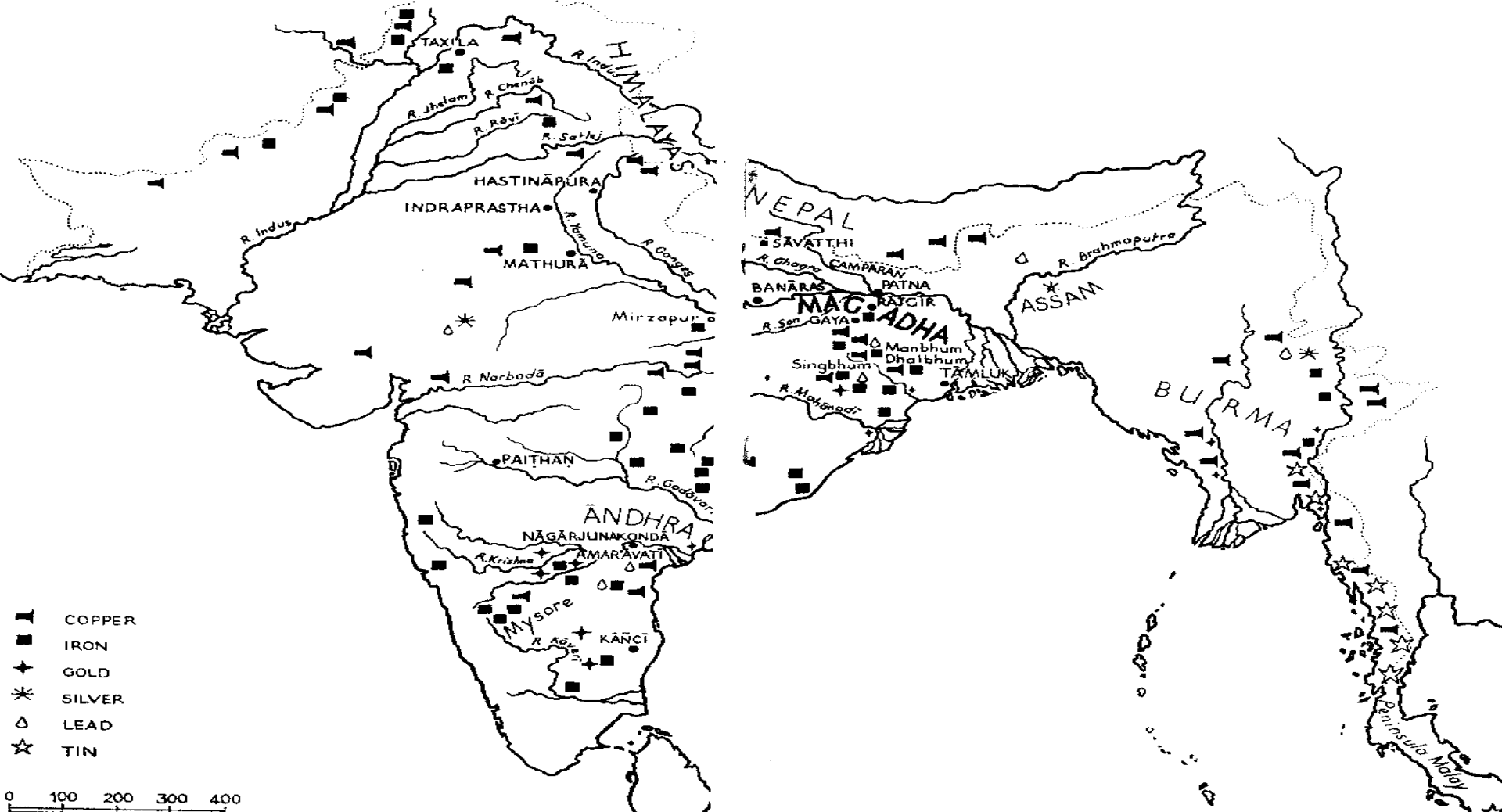
The Mahajanapadas (600 BCE-300 BCE)





India
at the
time of
the Buddha:

A Politics of
Power



The time of the Buddha (563–483 BC) was one of great change and dynamism in the upper and middle reaches of the Ganges valley in northeast India. The advent of the Iron Age in the eighth century BC spurred a whole series of revolutions in human lifestyle and social organization, principally in the transformation of agricultural methods to open vast tracts of land for surplus production. The towns and cities mentioned in the Buddha's discourses, such as Savatthi, Vesali, Patna, and Rajgir, all lay on the very dynamic and bustling trade route to the northwest reaching up into present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan and linking up with the Silk Road. They also connected to trade routes going south into the hinterland towards modern day Mumbai. The factor that held people together along these trade routes from the east to the northwest and to the southwest was not common ritual or language but "a whole aggregate of common needs satisfied by reciprocal exchange" (Kosambi 1969, 120). What was emerging here was a *civilizational process*, in that numerous peoples of different origins and cultural practices were being bonded together to create *qualitatively new economic, political, cultural, and, to be certain, religious forms*.

India at the time of the Buddha: A Culture of Diversity

- New social classes:

1. property-owning, agrarian farmers
2. urban-based merchants (setṭhi)

Vedic Brahmanism and its animal sacrifices (yajña) with the requisitioning of cattle and other animals without payment were an intolerable waste.

- economic dynamics \leftrightarrow new social ethic of freedom reciprocal exchange across geographical, ethnic, and class boundaries.
- New spiritualities rejecting ritual:
Ajivikas (material karmic determinism), Jains (material karmic non-violence)
- The Buddha taught:
 - 1) intentional karmic non-violence based on causes and conditions
mysticism or lengthy speculation
against the mythic legitimization of caste and patriarchy
against the ritualism and waste of Vedic sacrifice (*yajña*)
 - 2) cosmopolitan and universal ethics
Taught about good governance, poverty, & resource management
 - 3) communicated in an everyday language and plain style

India at the time of the Buddha: Cosmic View Conditions Social Order?

- The Brahman's ritualized karmic action:

Brahman (absolute reality) / *Atman* (eternal soul) =>
centralized source of creative power from which all
emanates. Brahmans (priests) interpret and control that
power in a hierarchical class/caste system =>
autocratic feudalism

- The Buddha's ethical karmic action:

An-atman (no-self) =>
creative power exists everywhere in a semi-anarchic web of
causes and conditions. Ethical karmic action is the way for
all sentient beings to find harmony within this web
through meditation, ethics, and wisdom. =>
egalitarian democracy

Buddhist Social Ethics

The Buddha developed different sets of ethical norms to guide the maintenance of various communities that supported responsible communication through mutual respect, self-restraint, and the proper use of speech

- 1) Monastic *vinaya* (227 for men, 311 for women)
- 2) householder *panca-sila* (“5 virtues” of no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no lying, no abuse of intoxicants)
- 3) for an “ethical king” (*dhammarāja*)
- 4) republican congresses (the monastic *vinaya* were based on the rules which the Buddha learned from his own tribal republic)

The Sangha:

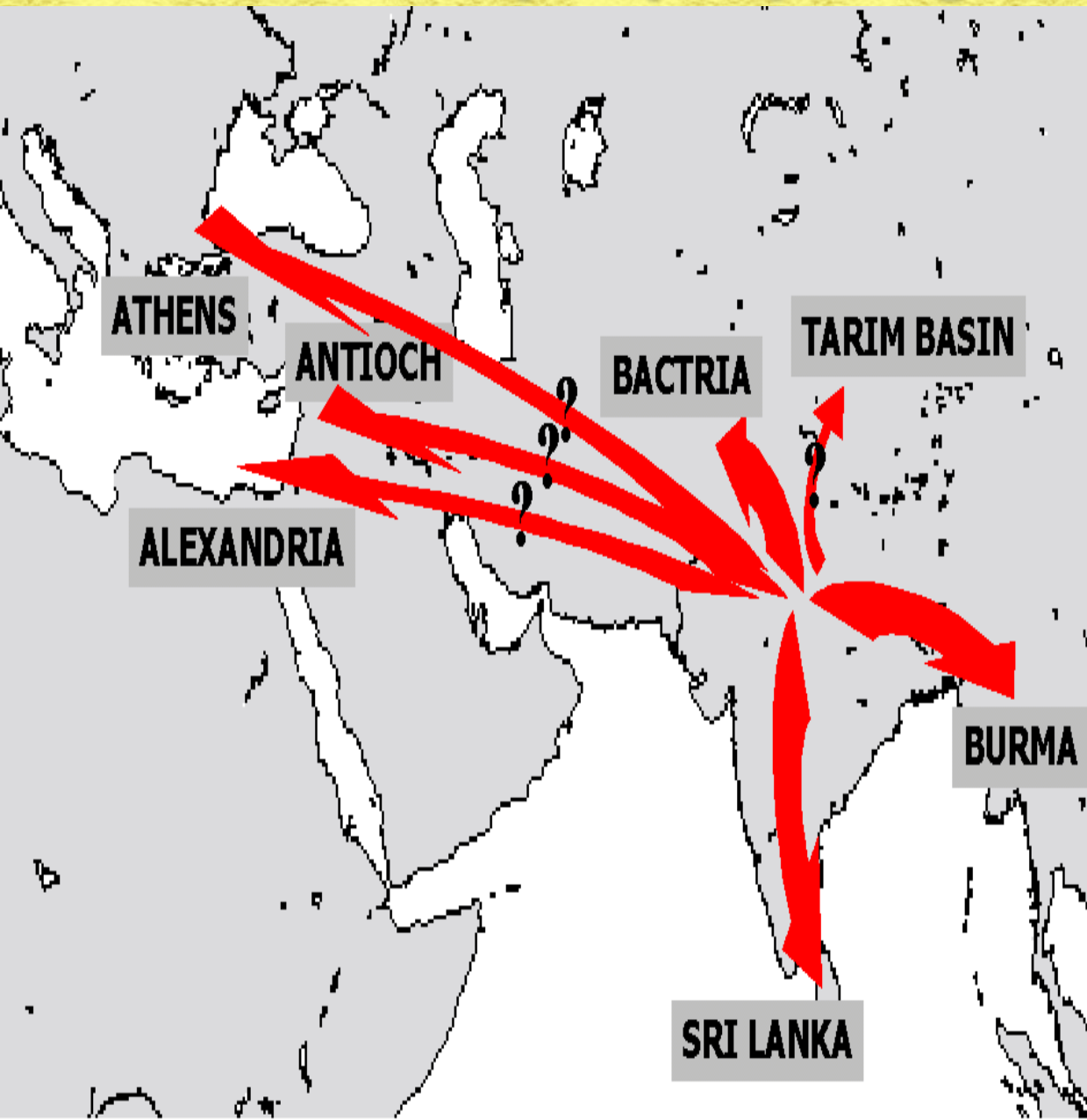
An Ideal of Community of 4 Groups

- The 4 Assemblies: ordained men & women, lay men & women
- A middle way between secularized popular religion focused on ritual karma (Brahmanism) & escapist spirituality of ascetic karma (Upanishadic yogis)
- A system of reciprocity based on giving (*dāna*) in which lay people provide monastics with material requisites and monastics offer instructions on the teachings and practice.

India at the time of the Buddha: “Positive Disintegration”

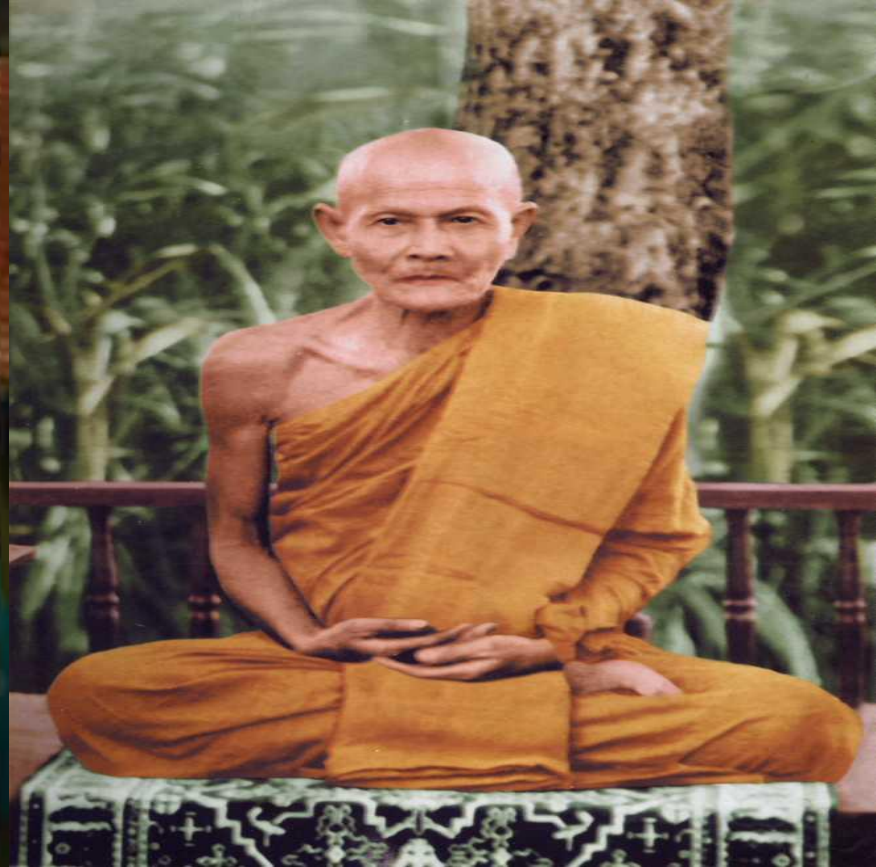
- “positive disintegration”: a growth in
 1. diversification and differentiation (social classes and spiritual movements) as well as
 2. integration and consolidation (economic expansion and administrative and political consolidation).
 - Reciprocal exchange: in economic trade and in the Buddha’s vision a civilizational movement based on combining individual cultivation with social ethics based on non-violent communication.
 - both differentiating and integrating
 - the religious and the secular
 - the personal and the social
- Monks forbidden to be involved in political or economic affairs BUT
Established systems of Buddhist ethics for both
monarchies and republics
merchants and capitalists.

The Reign of Ashoka (r. 270–232 B.C.)
inheritor of the Mauryan Dynasty of Maghada



Ashokan Statecraft : Model of “Positive Disintegration”

- new form of statecraft: *Arthaśāstra* → *Dharma Vijaya* “Conquest through Morality” as the way to integrate progressively more diverse groups of people into one civilization:
 - 1) public works: hospitals, pharmacies, & free medical care, resting places & wells for travelers
 - 2) environmental edicts: limit destruction of forests & wilderness for commercial use
 - 3) Rituals & superstitions → ethical tenets: banned the *yajña* & fire (*agni*) sacrifices
 - 4) new class of minister: *dharma-mahāmātra* (“minister of morality”) to examine complaints of law-abiding groups and their beliefs.
 - 5) tolerance of other faiths & donations to all legitimate religious communities
 - 6) *Dharma vijaya*: used non-Buddhist terms in Aramaic and Greek inscriptions in northwest parts of the empire to communicate civilizational ethics (dharma = “good conduct” not Buddha’s teaching)



- Growth of great monasteries by patronage from political and economic elites
- Played significant role in transnational trade: located along the trade routes, serving as rest stops, supply houses, banking houses, and venues to sell goods.
- Integration of monk splits:
 - 1) Meditation monks (*vipassanā dhura*): tried to maintain the original and more ascetic style of the wandering monk, Nirvana is attainable, but only by secluded asceticism
 - 2) Scholar monks (*gantha dhura*): lived in large monasteries, Nirvana becomes something for another lifetime.

Both became less connected to the laity and the dynamic balance of reciprocal *dana*.

Development of “Popular Buddhism”

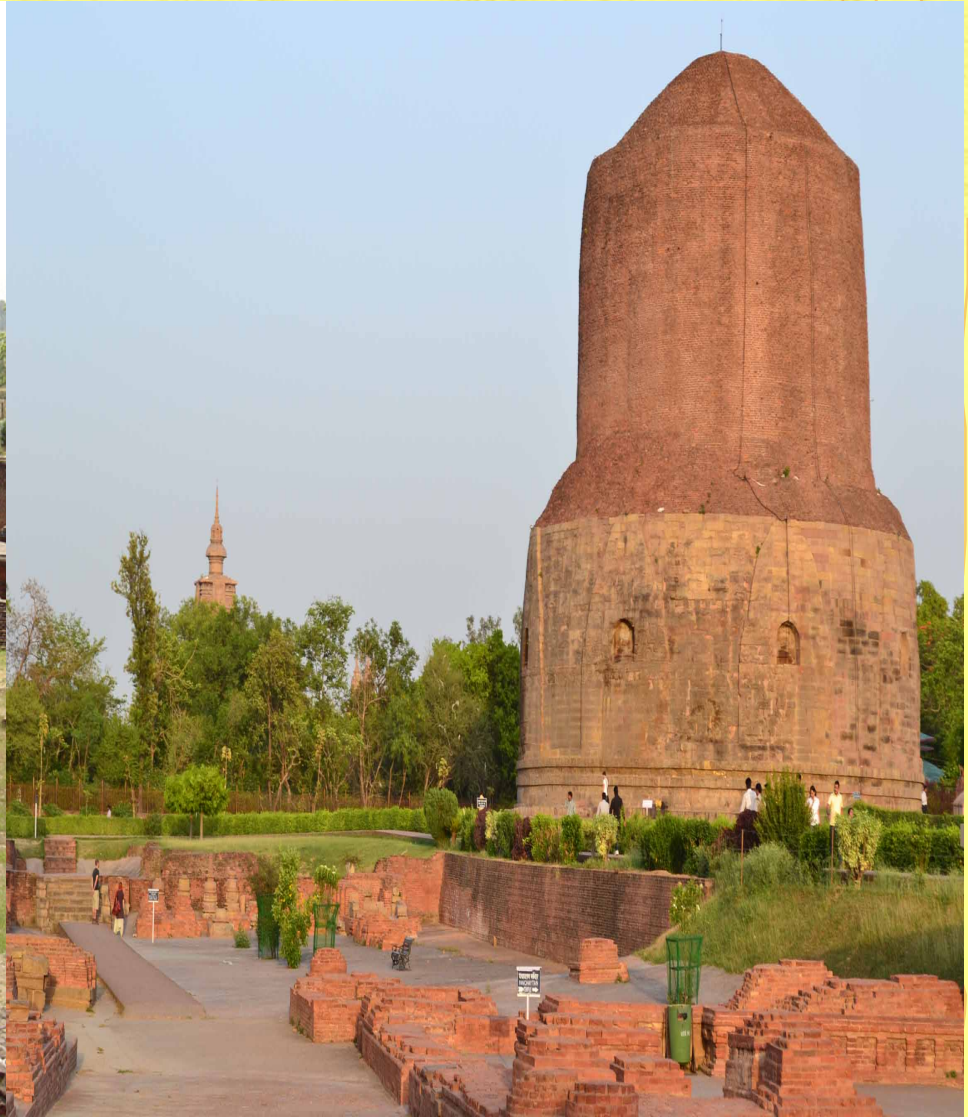
- As the monk became less accessible, he became more stereotyped or mythical
- 1) myth of the monk's sacred poverty:
 - ◆ More spiritual power of monk through ascetic poverty (*sīla*) → more merit (*puñña*) for lay person through donations (*dāna*) →
 - ◆ ethical karma → ritualized Brahmanistic karma for a better rebirth
 - ◆ Political and economic elites legitimizated their power
- 2) The myth of the monk as a “world renouncer”
 - ◆ monk *should be* unconcerned with mundane social matters, especially political ones.
 - ◆ Sangha = ideal community & repository of society's moral values
 - ◆ needs protection & regulation for continued prosperity of nation by political elite, especially the monarch.

Decline of Buddhism in India

Ruins of Nalanda University



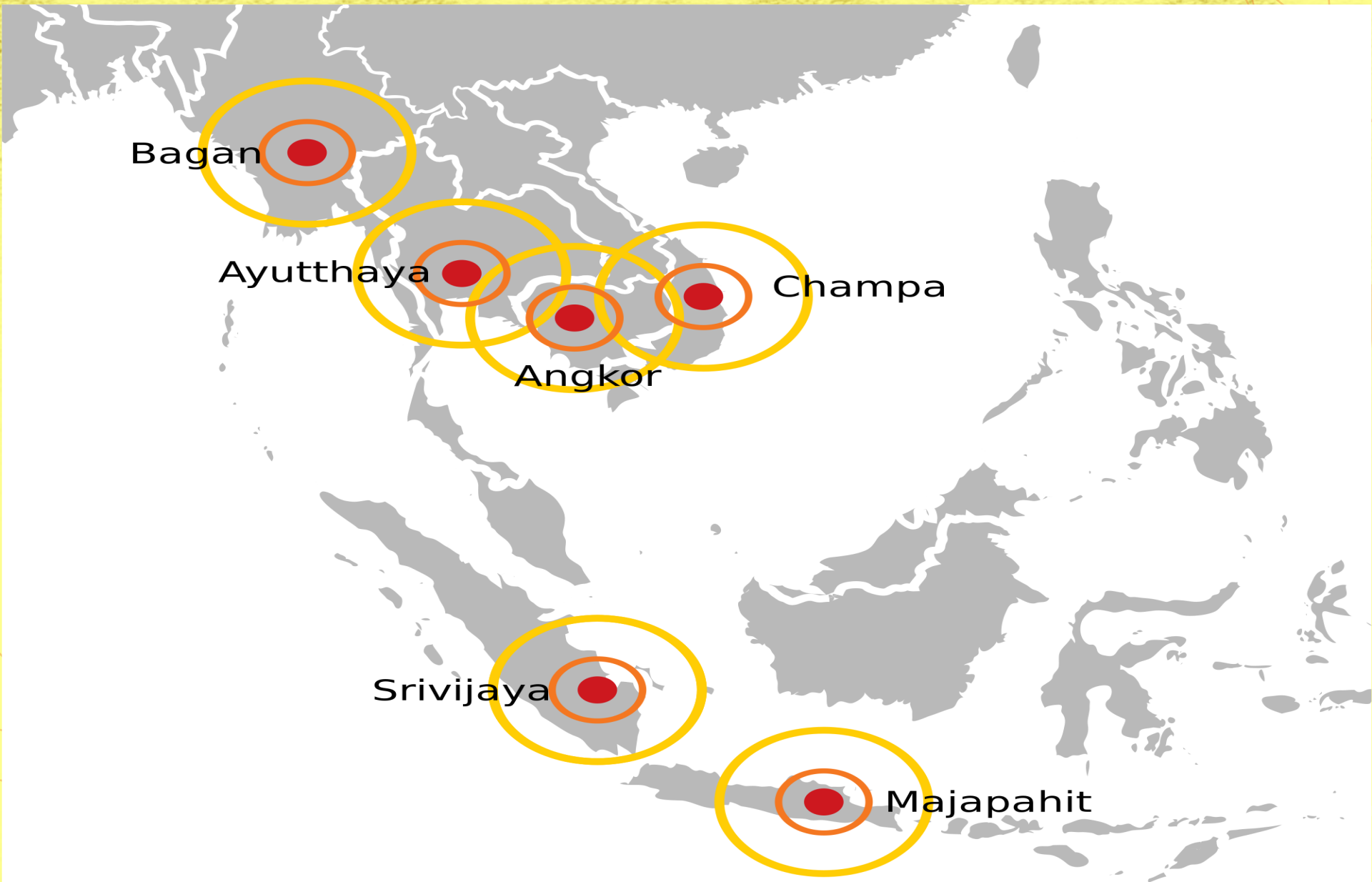
Ruins of the Dhamek Stupa in Sarnath







Galactic Polities: Decentralized Power



Small is Beautiful: Integration of Monastic & Lay Life through Reciprocal *Dana*



Institutionalized Buddhism: Power, Class, Patriarchy

- Buddha's vision: delicate balance between religion, state, and market
- Institutionalized Buddhism: Monarch is a god-king (devarāja) who protects Buddhism, while social elites make large donations to the temple. Power is sacralized and legitimized.
- Case Study: Sri Lanka
 - 1) By 2nd cent. CE, monasteries have large tracts of land receiving all produce and profit, worked by female and male servants or slaves.
 - 2) By 10th cent., some monks received special salaries, attendants, and other expenses, usually according to the rank and status of their families
 - 3) Monarchs became directly involved in the Sangha, making appointments to high ranks, adjudicating conflicts over incumbencies, and regularly purging the order of rogue elements.
 - 4) Vedic culture permeated the Sangha, which developed rules against the ordination of low-caste persons and eventually developed entire orders associated with single castes
 - 5) Between the 11th and 13th centuries, the order of nuns (*bhikkhuni*) died out and became forbidden to re-establish