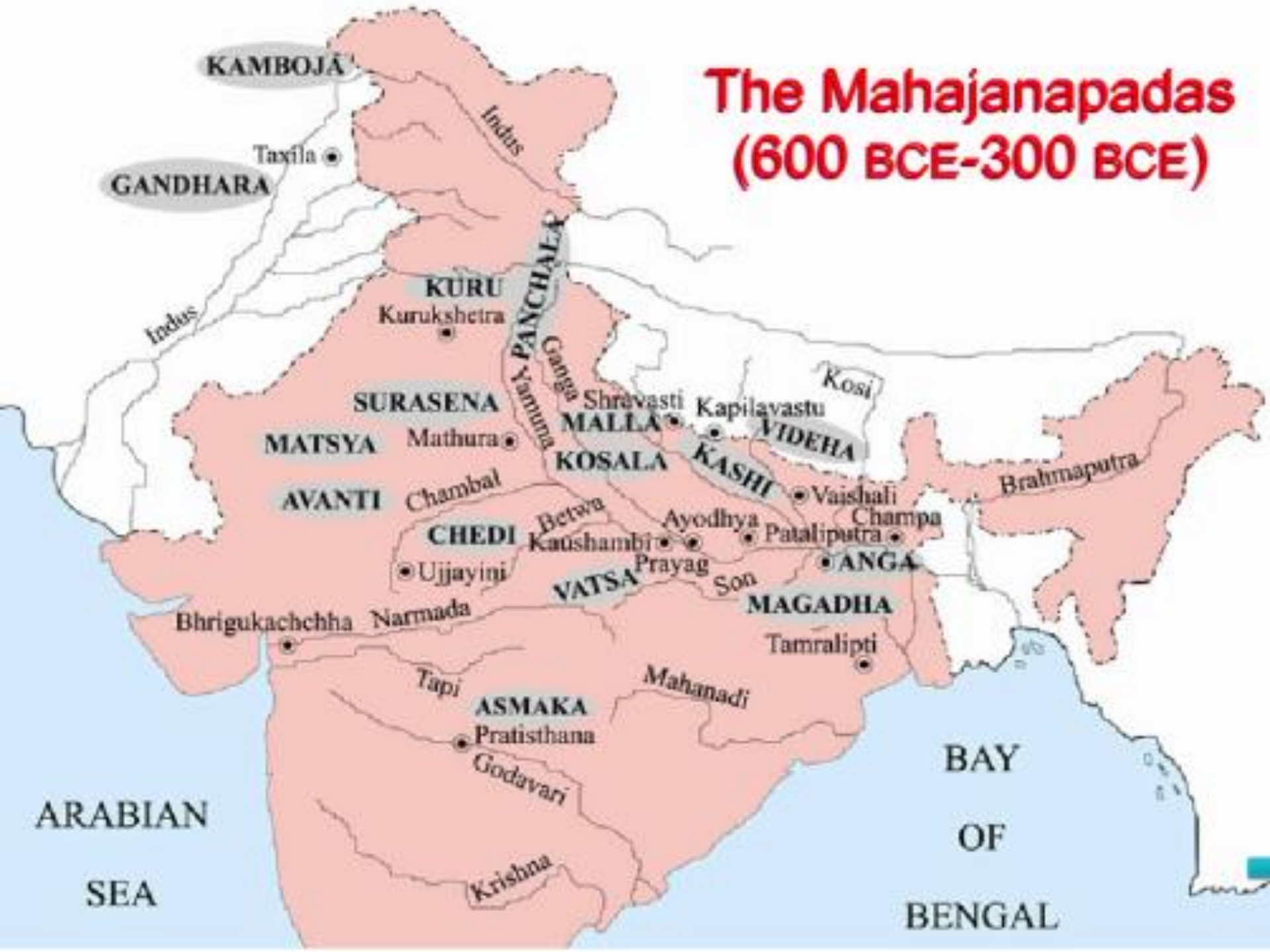


Buddhist Sociology:
A Community of Liberation
A Culture of Diversity
An Institution of Power

Jonathan S. Watts
Keio University
Tokyo, Japan



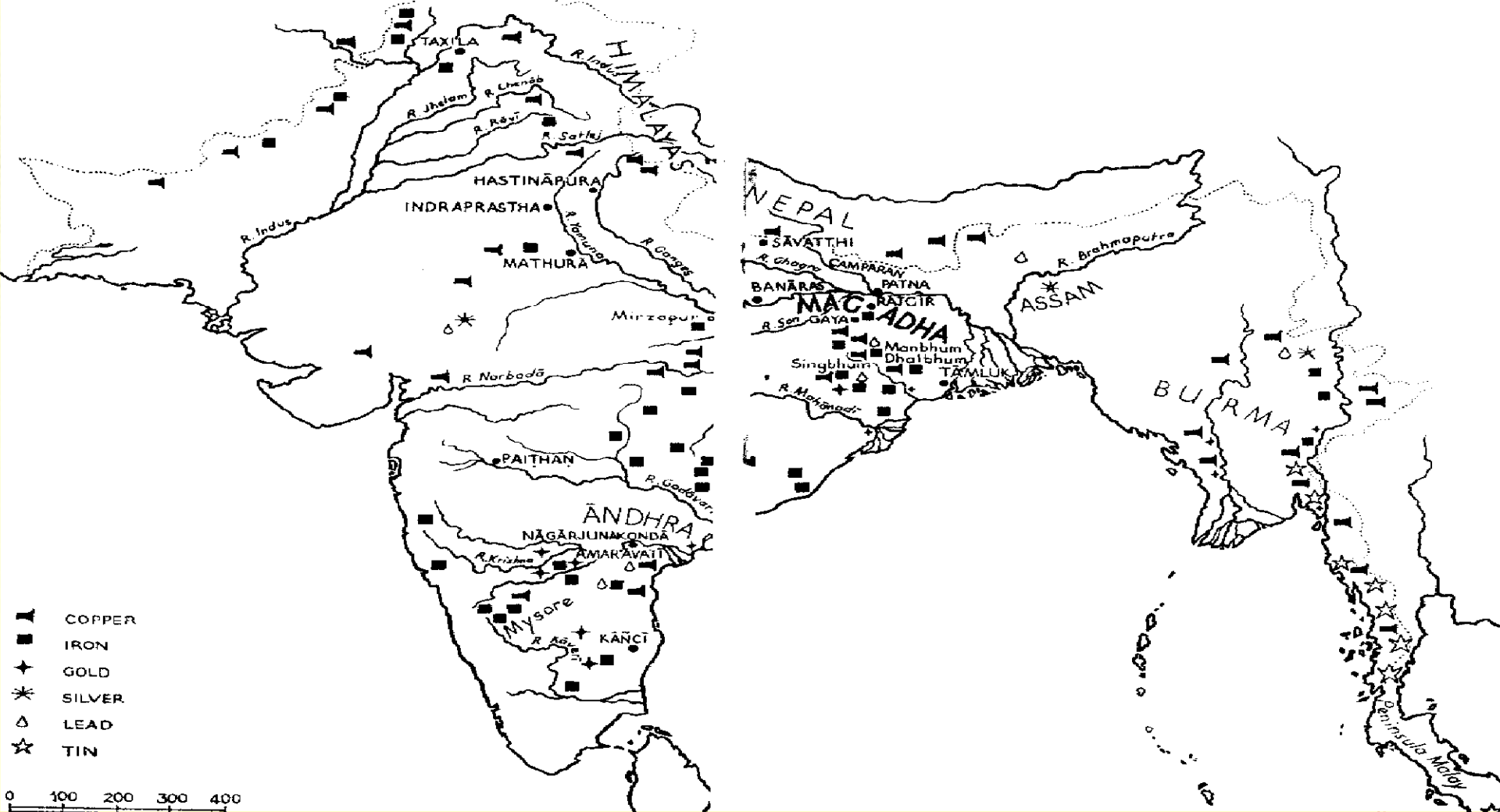
The Mahajanapadas (600 BCE-300 BCE)





India
at the
time of
the Buddha:

A Politics of
Power



- ❖ Advent of the Iron Age in the 8th century BC, revolutions in human lifestyle and social organization
- ❖ Emergence of new towns and cities (Savatthi, Vesali, Patna, and Rajgir) along the trade route → into present-day Pakistan, Afghanistan, linking up with the Silk Road, and also to southern India.
- ❖ no common ritual or language but “common needs satisfied by reciprocal exchange”.
- ❖ a *civilizational process*, in that numerous peoples of different origins and cultural practices were being bonded together to create *qualitatively new economic, political,*

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
against 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. Brahmins (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.

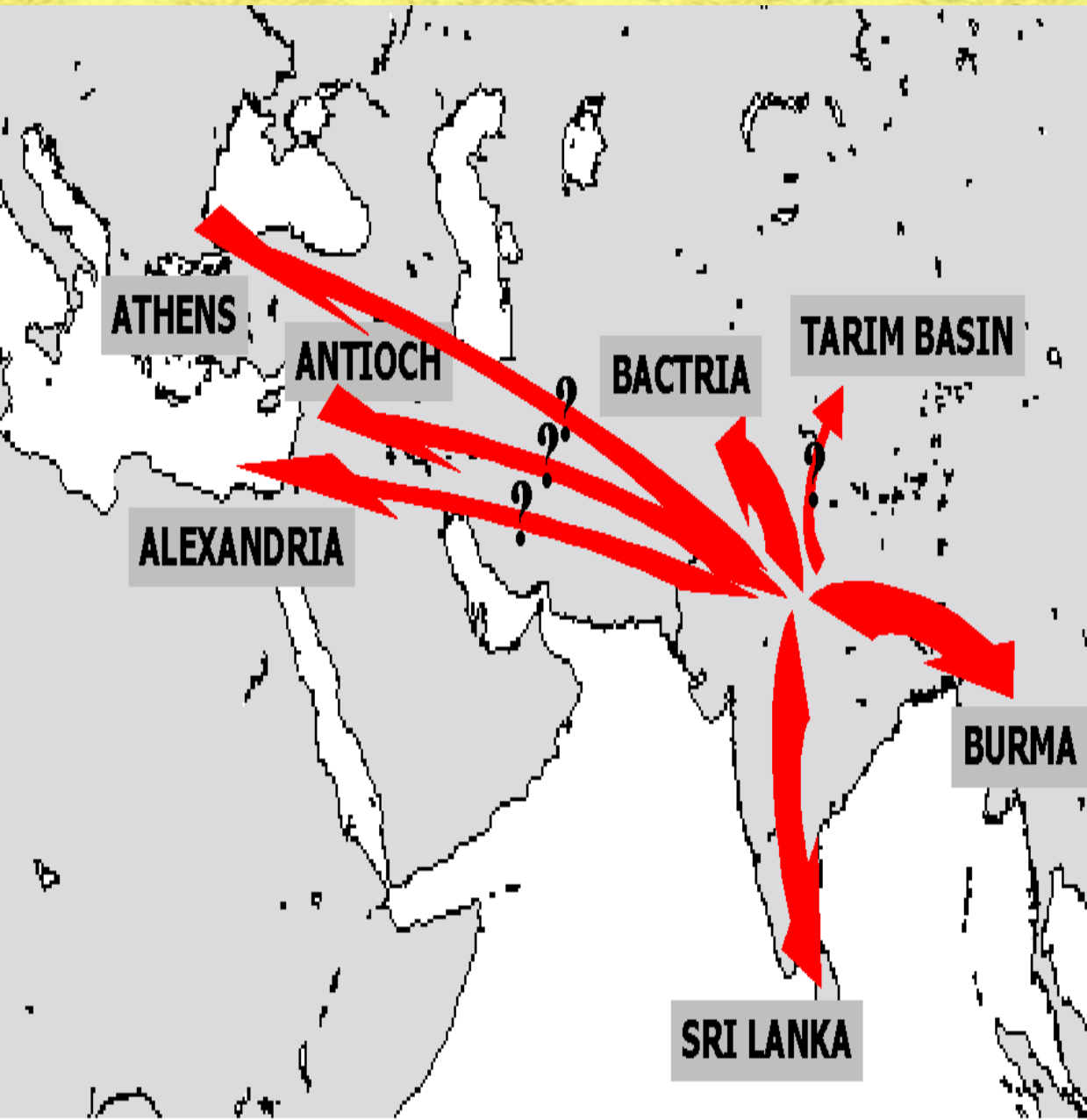
India at the time of the Buddha: “Positive Disintegration”

- “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 1) individual cultivation with 2) 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

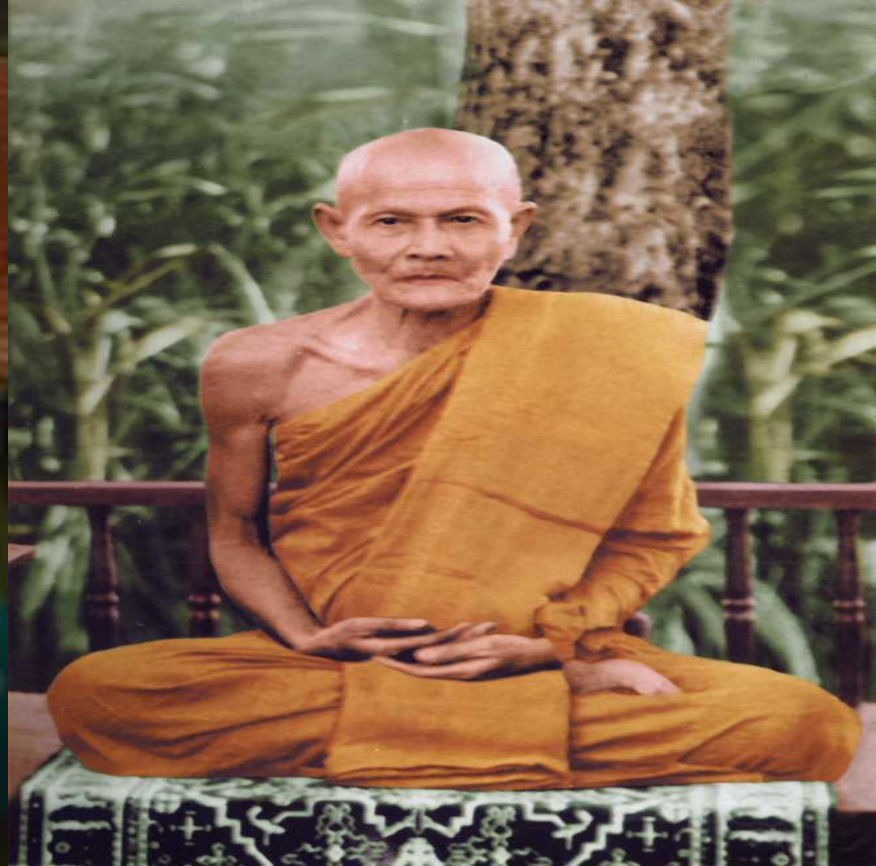
The Reign of Ashoka (r. 270–232 B.C.)
inheritor of the Mauryan Dynasty of Maghada



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”

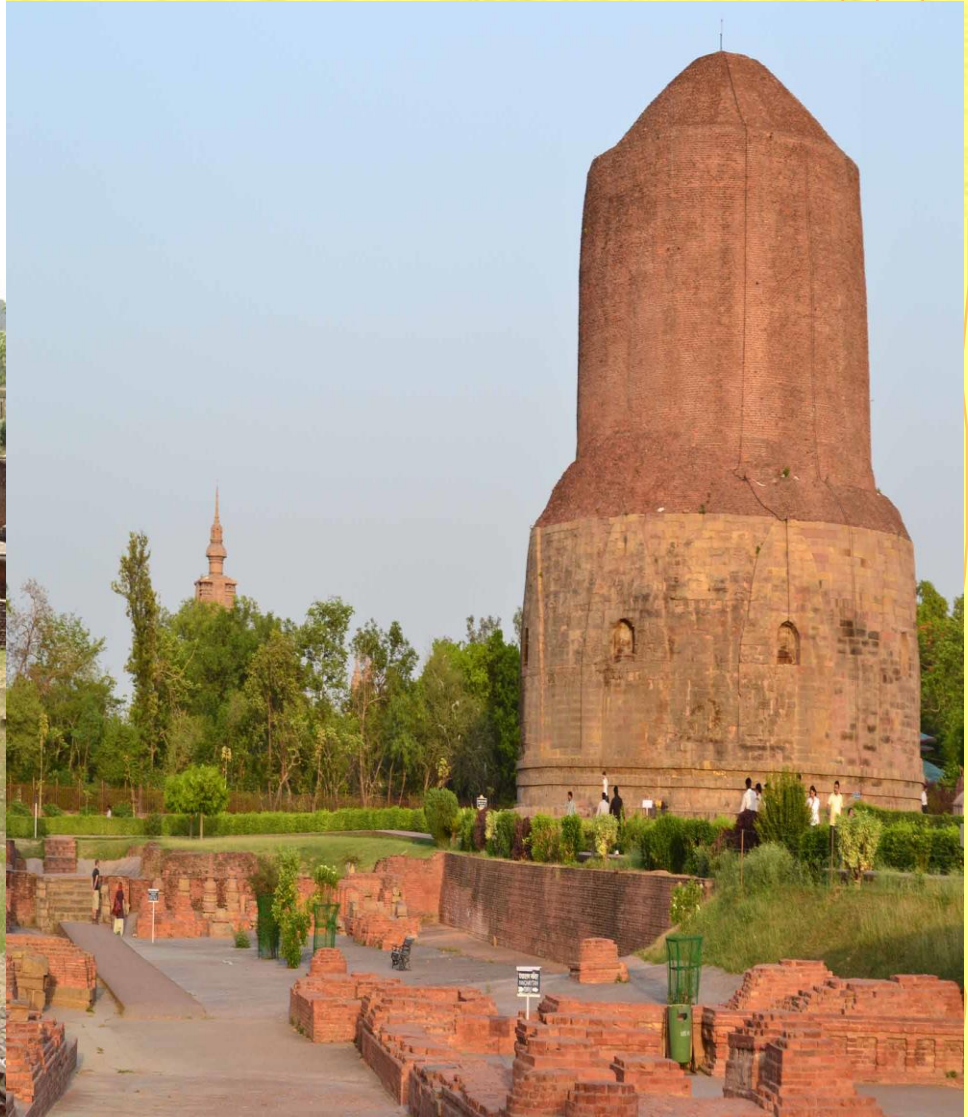
- As the monk became less accessible, he became more stereotyped or mythical
- 1) myth of the monk's sacred poverty:
 - ◆ More spiritual power of monk through ascetic poverty (*sīla*) → more merit (*puñña*) for lay person through donations (*dāna*) →
 - ◆ ethical karma → ritualized Brahmanistic karma 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



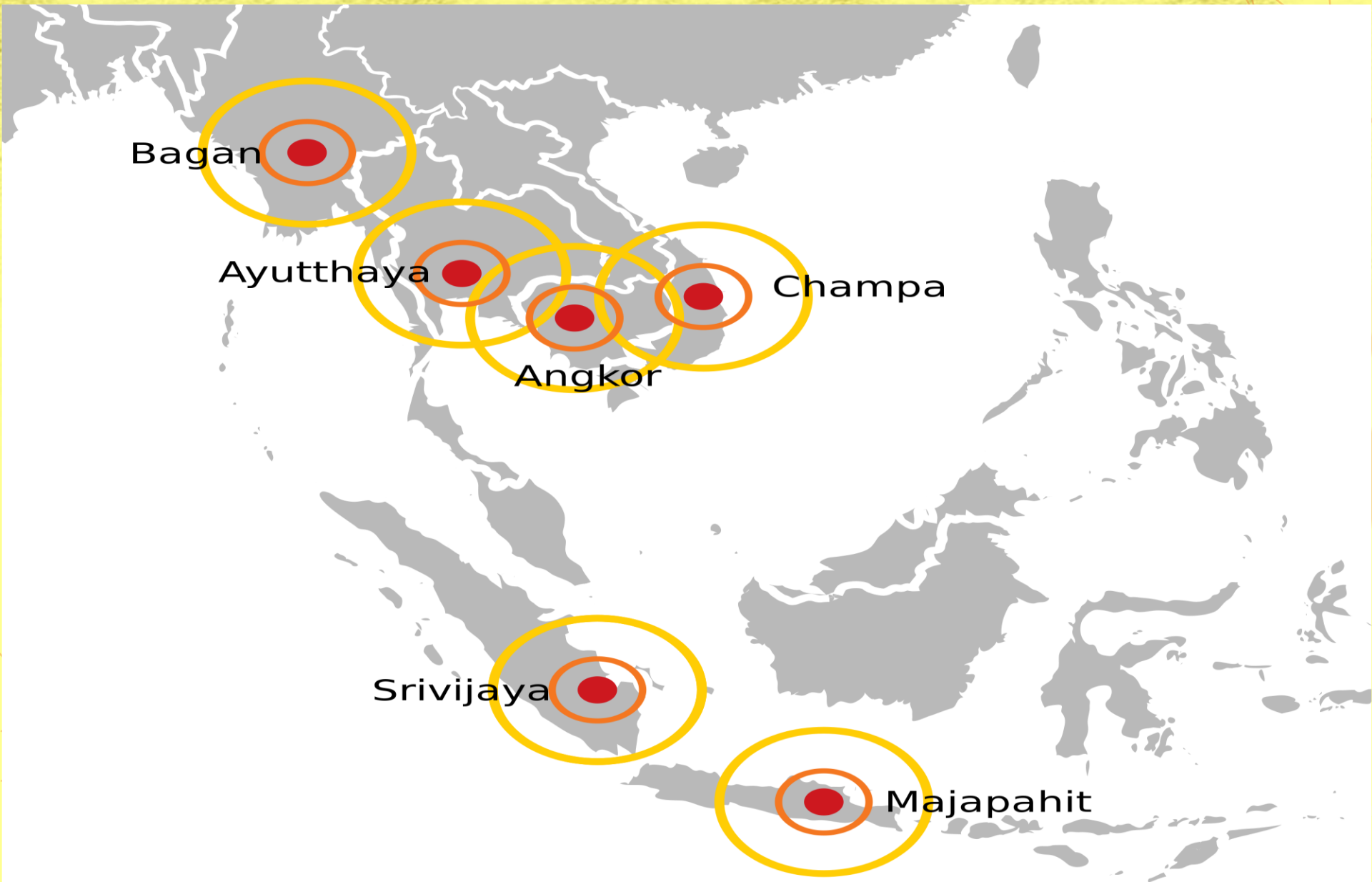
Ruins of the Dhamek Stupa in Sarnath







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