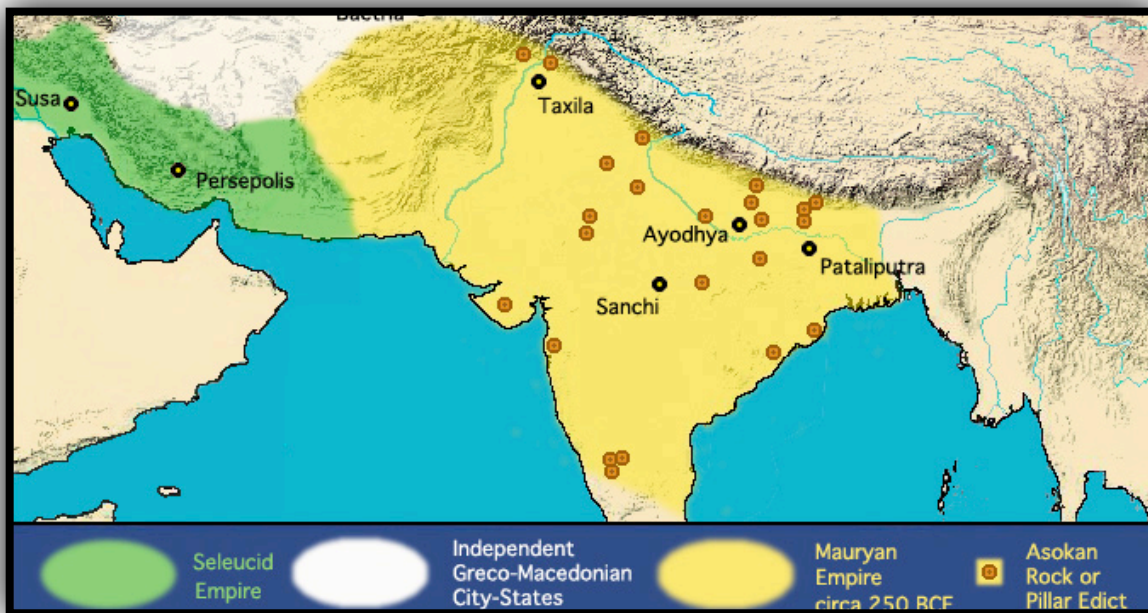


MAURYAN EMPIRE



Mauryan Empire 322-188 BCE

Background

By 500 BCE, the Persian Empire controlled the area between the Hindu Kush mountains and the Indus River. When Alexander the Great invaded Persia, he pushed beyond the Indus, setting up governors and provinces as he went. After his death, however, his generals fought to control the pieces of the great empire. Seleucus, one of his generals, gained control of the eastern part of what had been the Persian empire and considered the Indus region to be part of that empire.

Founding However, farther southeast, along the Ganges River, the Mauryan empire began to take shape under Chandragupta Maurya, the ruler of the kingdom of Magadha. While Alexander's generals were squabbling among themselves over the remnants of his empire, Chandragupta moved north and gained more control over the territories between the Indus and Hindu Kush. In 305, Seleucus moved his army into the region, however, he faced the huge Mauryan army with its 700,000 soldiers, 10,000 chariots, and 9,000 war elephants. Seleucus wisely called it quits, signed a treaty with Chandragupta, gave him a daughter in marriage, and went home with a consolation prize of 500 war elephants. Chandragupta's son then pushed the Maurya state southward into India, and his grandson, Ashoka (Asoka, 272-232 BCE) completed the conquests by taking

control of much of this area.

Administration

The Mauryans appear to have used and improved upon bureaucratic methods developed earlier by the Persians. They divided the state into provinces, districts, and villages. Royal officials, including superintendents, judges, clerks, and inspectors, fanned out across the cities and countryside, keeping order and collecting taxes from villages. Well-maintained roads and swift postal riders helped the emperor to rule over this vast area. An elaborate system of spies kept him informed. The government regulated everything from copper, lead, tin, bronze, and iron works to gum, dye, perfume, drug, and pottery industries.

Pataliputra, the capital, was at the center of bustling commerce and trade. Inside the walls were palaces, temples, a library, parks, and gardens. Under Ashoka, Pataliputra became perhaps the world's largest city, with between 200,000 and 300,000 people.

Religion

The Mauryan Empire reached its peak under Ashoka (271-232 BCE), Chandragupta's grandson. Apparently, Ashoka began his rule as a cruel leader with total control. Legend says that he killed 99 of his brothers in order to secure the throne for himself. Eventually, he seems to have had a change of heart. According to a stone pillar erected and inscribed by Ashoka himself, he spoke out against war and bloodshed after seeing an especially bloody battle. He then turned to Buddhism, a religion that had been developing in northern India since the time of its founder, Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha, the Enlightened One, c. 563 - c.483).

Buddha agreed with Hinduism that people's destiny depended on how they lived their lives. He did not, however, see a need for Hindu gods, priests, temples, or the sacrificing of animals. Buddha stressed a code of ethics based on unselfishness and on rules of behavior that he called the Eightfold Path. A person simply had to live a moral, unselfish life in order to attain *nirvana*, the perfect peace which frees the soul from reincarnation (repeated rebirth of the soul until it attains perfection).

Ashoka considered himself responsible for the well-being of his subjects, and he tried to create a system of government based on *dharma*, Buddhist moral and ethical principles. He defined these principles as non-violence, obedience to parents, tolerance of and respect for all opinions and sects, humane treatment of servants, kindness to all living beings, and generosity to all. He considered these principles so broad that no one, no matter his or her religious beliefs, could reasonably object to them. He broadcast these principles by carving them on rocks and stone pillars throughout his empire.

Trade

The Mauryan Empire was an important link in the chain of interconnected kingdoms that stretched more than 4,000 miles across Indo-Mediterranea. Trade flourished along trade routes that ran from Pataliputra, across the Hindu Kush, Persia, and Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean Aegean. Ashoka improved the stretch between the city of Taxila in the upper Indus valley and Pataliputra on the Ganges. He added shade trees, wells, and rest houses to accommodate travelers. It was along this route, among others, that Buddhism spread from India after about 300 BCE.

Decline/Fall

After Ashoka's death in 232 BCE, the Mauryan Empire slowly disintegrated under a series of weak monarchs. It came to an end around 184 BCE with the assassination of the last emperor.



Ringstone with four goddesses and four date palms. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



One of the Ashoka pillars. Vaishali, India

EXPERT GROUP NOTE TRACKER: MAURYAN EMPIRE

Characteristic	Significant information about this empire related to this characteristic:
Background/ location	
Founding	
Organization	
Religion	
Trade	
Decline/Fall	
Summary description / categorization of this empire	

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