

Early Buddhists and Urban Centers: Narrative Representations of Pāṭaliputra, Rājagṛha  
and Kusāvati in the Pali Canon

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## ABSTRACT

Early Buddhists and Urban Centers: Narrative Representations of Pāṭaliputra, Rājagṛha  
and Kusāvātī in the Pali Canon

Shaun L. Turriff

While it is often said that Buddhism is an “urban religion” or a “product of an urban revolution”, the actual relationship between Buddhists and the urban space of ancient India remains somewhat vague. This is in part due to a lack of evidence. In order to understand the connection of early Buddhism to the urban environment in which it seems to have arisen we need to carefully examine what sources are available, including archaeological evidence and textual sources like the Pali Canon.

By looking at the narratives concerning the cities of Pāṭaliputra, Rājagṛha and Kusāvātī in the Buddhist texts of the Pali Canon, I will provide a clearer view of how the Buddhist religious community imagined its relationship to urban space. Three elements will provide the focus of this endeavour: firstly, the narratives of the physical urban space in the texts; secondly, the comparison of that description with available archaeological evidence relating to that physical space; and thirdly, the analysis of what the textual evidence indicates about the authors' perceived relationship with that physical space.

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For Jen, whose love got me through the darkest hours of this thesis,

and

for my father.

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## Introduction

The middle of the first millennium BCE was an important period for India. The subcontinent experienced a second, and long lasting, period of urbanization, as well as the arrival on the scene of several new religious traditions, some of which were to become major players in the history of India. Buddhism in particular is one such new religious movement, among others (such as Jainism) which are often termed 'heterodox', that emerged around this time. As early as Max Weber, scholars have considered that these new religious movements were a product of the urban environment. Later scholars have often taken this course as well, including Richard Gombrich (1988) and Balkrishna Govind Gokhale (1982). However, with the relative scarcity of evidence from this period, one may question whether such assertions are justified. In order to get a more complete picture, one must draw from a variety of sources, including archaeological and textual evidence. While I am inclined to agree that the relationship between the heterodox movement of Buddhism and the burgeoning urban environment is a close one, I believe that more light can be shed on the exact nature of this relationship. To this end, my aim in the thesis is to undertake a detailed examination of some of the Buddhist sources to gain insight into Buddhists' own understanding of their relationship to the urban space in which their movement began.

By looking at the narratives concerning cities in the Buddhist texts of the Pali Canon, I will provide a clearer view of how the Buddhist religious community imagined its relationship to urban space. Three elements will provide the focus of this endeavour: firstly, the narratives of the physical urban space in the texts; secondly, the comparison of

that description with available archaeological evidence relating to that physical space; and thirdly, the analysis of what the textual evidence indicates about the authors perceived relationship with that physical space.

In order to keep the scope of this project within workable limits I will focus on three cities, Pāṭaliputra (modern Patna), Rājagṛha (modern Rajgir), and Kusāvātī. Among the early Buddhist texts, I will concentrate on the Dīgha Nikāya and the Vinaya Piṭaka as sources for the narratives concerning these three cities. I have relied on translations of these texts. The main translation of the Dīgha Nikāya that I have used is the *Dialogues of the Buddha*, translated by T. W. Rhys Davids and C. A. F. Rhys Davids, in the series *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*. For the Vinaya Piṭaka, I have used the *Vinaya Texts*, translated by T. W. Rhys Davids and Hermann Oldenberg, from the *Sacred Books of the East*.

In the body of this thesis, I use the Sanskrit names of cities, except in direct quotes from texts, where the Pali names occasionally appear.

### Methodology and Scholarly Context

Several undertakings similar to my thesis have been attempted over the years (Ramanujan, 1970; Chattopadhyaya, 2003; Goldman, 1986; Couture, 2005). In each case, early Indian texts are used to elicit an understanding of urban space. Ramanujan (1970) uses examples of Indian literature to this effect, although his paper does not focus on any one period. Chattopadhyaya (2003) undertakes a similar project. Some scholars focus on traditions other than Buddhism. Goldman (1986) looks at several mentions of Mathura, most significantly the differences between them. Couture (2004) uses the

*Harivamsa*, a late addition to the *Mahābhārata*, to argue for the role of the urban environment in the formation of early Vaisnavism. None have focused on the Buddhist self understanding of the urban environment.

My thesis will draw on the Digha Nikāya, “the long discourses”, a Pali Canon text that will provide descriptions of cities. The Vinaya Piṭaka, dealing with monastic discipline in the Saṃgha, will also furnish descriptions and records of cities. The Pali Canon as a source has its origins in or near the time of the Buddha, but was not written down until some time later, possibly around the beginning of the Mauryan Empire, in the third century BCE. While some scholars feel that these texts can offer historical facts concerning the time of the Buddha, in reality they seem too far removed to be accurate in a historical sense. Nevertheless, following Ramanujan, the narratives of the Pali Canon can furnish useful information, if read with an eye for literature. This problem is similar to that which one faces with the highly normative texts such as the *Dharmasutras* and *Dharmasastras*, which still prove to be useful sources (Olivelle, 1993).

In reading carefully through the Digha Nikāya and the Vinaya Piṭaka, three major narratives stand out as offering the most usable material concerning urban space. On the whole, the Pali canon is, in fact, rather sparing in its treatment of urban centers, and as such, these three narratives are all the more interesting. In addition, two of the narratives concern early historical cities, Pāṭaliputra and Rājagṛha, allowing a comparison with archaeological evidence from those sites. The third narrative concerns a fictional city, which allows for a glimpse of an ideal type, the city as a city ought to be.

For Pāṭaliputra, a major city in early India, there is a significant amount of archaeological evidence of the city, and several important textual references outside the

Pali Canon, primarily in Megasthenes' *Indika*. Further, the Dīgha Nikāya contains an interesting scene in which the Buddha visits the village of Pāṭaligrāma, and proclaims that it will someday be a major city, to be known as Pāṭaliputra. Rājagṛha, likewise, was a significant urban center in early India. There is a substantial body of archaeological evidence concerning the site. B. C. Law has collected major literary references to Rājagṛha in early Indian literature, but no in depth analysis has been undertaken. The Vinaya Piṭaka contains a narrative in which the Buddha and his cousin Devadatta wage an ideological struggle within the city of Rājagṛha, which is illuminating in several ways. Kusāvati, as it appears in the Dīgha Nikāya, is the small village where the Buddha dies, but is described by the Buddha as being a great city in the past, the seat of the king, Mahā-Sudassana. While there is no evidence that this city ever existed, it functions as an example of a literary construct, and sheds light on what the authors of the Pali Canon believed the ideal city should be like.

The first chapter of this thesis looks briefly at the history of Buddhism and at the period of urbanization in which Buddhism arose. It also examines the Pali Canon as a source and several of the theories about how we may use this literature as a source for examining urban centers in India. This chapter also summarizes the major narratives that are explored in this thesis.

The second chapter endeavours to examine the literary references to both Pāṭaliputra and Rājagṛha. This includes both Indian literature such as the Pali Canon and sources written by visitors to India, such as Megasthenes (fourth century BCE) and the Chinese travellers, Faxian (fifth century CE) and Xuanzang (seventh century CE). This chapter also looks at how, if at all, these later sources can be used in this thesis.

The third chapter explores the archaeological evidence for the cities of Pāṭaliputra and Rājagṛha. It raises questions about the desire of the British archaeologists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to “find” the sites mentioned by early Buddhist texts, as well as examining the issue of the usefulness of using two very different streams of evidence, literary and archaeological. The question of the usefulness of the comparison of literary and archaeological evidence becomes central to this project. The viability of this approach is part of understanding the relationship between the early Buddhist communities and the urban environment around them. Some scholars contend that there is value in such an enterprise. Nevertheless, there are some dangers associated with this approach, including the desire to “prove” the historical nature of the texts being used.

The fourth chapter looks at the three major narratives about cities in the Pali Canon that I have chosen for analysis, and addresses the value of references to cities in these texts. It also explores each narrative—concerning Pāṭaliputra, Rājagṛha, and Kusāvati—in terms of the various theories raised in the first chapter, and in light of the literary and archaeological evidence presented in the second and third.

In comparing the descriptions of cities, and in particular Pāṭaliputra, Rājagṛha, and Kusāvati, with available archaeological evidence, and illustrating the heterodox self-understanding in terms of the urban space, a clear picture will emerge of how the Buddhists writing and reading these narratives would have related to their urban environment, and how it may have shaped them, or vice-versa.

## Chapter 1

### Buddhism and the Urban Environment

#### Buddhism as an Urban Religion

While it is often said that Buddhism is an “urban religion” or a “product of an urban revolution”, the actual relationship between Buddhists and the urban space of ancient India remains somewhat vague. This is in part due to a lack of evidence. For the period of the urbanization of the Ganges river basin (600 BCE to 100 BCE) the available evidence includes archaeological sources and textual sources including the Pali Canon, which was apparently composed during this period. In order to understand the connection of early Buddhism to the urban environment in which it seems to have arisen we need to carefully examine these sources.

Many of the new religious movements that appear in India in the first millennium BCE seem primarily urban in nature. As early as Max Weber, scholars have drawn links between the rise of these new “heterodox” traditions such as Jainism and Buddhism and the new urban environments in which they appeared (Gombrich 1988, 50). Tradition holds that Buddhism began in the middle of the first millennium BCE with the Buddha, himself a city dweller, traveling to towns and cities, and teaching to those who would listen (Thapar, 1974; Gombrich, 1988; Olivelle, 1996). The religious landscape in the urban setting was an already active environment of competing ideologies, taught by wandering ascetics, renunciators, and other *gurus* and teachers (Thapar 2002, 164). The ascetic ideals attached to these varied systems and teachers were not monolithic,

however. They were understood and practiced differently by various groups. The heterodox understanding of the renouncer was vastly different from the understanding eventually codified in the orthodox brahmanical system (Chakravarti, 2006). Multiple and competing ideologies were a feature of urban life (Thapar, 2002).

The rise of Buddhism has been attributed to several causes, or some combination thereof. Among these are religious reasons, psychological reasons, sociological reasons, and historical reasons. Gombrich provides one theory of the advent of Buddhism in his book *Theravada Buddhism*. Gombrich contends that Buddhism appealed to a largely urban populace because it answered their needs better than the older, dominant Brahmanical tradition then in place. He writes, “There is some evidence that the Buddha’s message appealed especially to town-dwellers and the new social classes” (Gombrich, 1988, 55). In explanation, Gombrich turns to the notion that the urbanization taking place at the time of the Buddha upset the standard order enough to prompt religious change. Gombrich sums up this change as “a move away from a closed community towards a more open society, an increase in the individual’s power to choose and hence doubt about choosing rightly” (Gombrich, 1988, 58).

Gokhale expresses a similar understanding of the rise of Buddhism. Gokhale notes that the urban environment is central to the literature of the early Buddhists, and that urban figures are of critical importance for the emerging tradition. he writes, “It is now generally accepted that early Buddhism rode to popular acceptance on the crest of a significant urban revolution that swept across the Gangetic region in the sixth century B. C.” (Gokhale, 1982, 7). Gokhale draws a strong link between early Buddhism and newly powerful merchants and bankers, as well as the kings of the emerging states (Gokhale,

1982, 7). Gokhale ultimately concludes that, “The Buddhism of our texts is a Buddhism pre-dominantly of the cities, towns and market-places. Its social heroes are the great merchant bankers and the new kings, perhaps in that order of importance. This Buddhism drew its major social support from these classes and, in return, reflected their social and spiritual concerns” (1982, 18). Gombrich too highlights the idea that that Buddhism appealed to the new merchant classes, writing, “The tone and content of the Buddha’s moral teaching were equally of a kind to appeal to businessmen” (1982, 78). Together, Gombrich and Gokhale paint a picture of a Buddhism that flourishes because of the socio-economic effects of the “urban revolution” that was occurring in the Gangetic plain at this time. The rise of cities, in one way or another, sets the stage for the growth of new religious traditions, including Buddhism.

In the introduction to their *The Sociology of Early Buddhism*, Bailey and Mabbett effectively sum up one of the central problems in this discussion. They discuss the two approaches to early Buddhism’s relationship to urbanization as positive (the early Buddhists embraced emerging urban value-systems) or as negative (early Buddhists rejected emerging urban value systems) and note that, overwhelmingly, scholars have weighed in on the side of the positive (2003, 16). Of the positive assessment they write, “It is so often met with in this context that it virtually amounts to a tenet of received wisdom that *Buddhism flourished essentially on account of its appeal in the urbanized society of the rising urban state*” (2003, 16).<sup>1</sup> Despite the prevalence of this “positive” view, Bailey and Mabbett assert that “The other view, the negative, does not so often appear in research on early Buddhist history and is in that sense a minority opinion; but it is implicit in much of what has been written about ancient India and about Buddhism.

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<sup>1</sup> Italics in original.



It is often treated without examination, as self-evident, that Buddhism rejected the values of the urban state; it is implied wherever Buddhism's rise is attributed to its teaching about *dukkha* [suffering]" (2003, 16). The positive view that they discuss is clearly one espoused by Gokhale and Gombrich. However, Bailey and Mabbett conclude, ultimately, that, "Early Buddhism, as embodied by its monks and laity, is a social and religious movement *adapting itself to an expanding society where the economy is experiencing steady growth and a degree of prosperity*" (2003, 28)<sup>2</sup>. Their view is neither positive nor negative, but one that focuses on change and adaptation.

#### Urbanization in early historic India

In order to properly understand the links being drawn between Buddhism and the socio-economic milieu in which it sprang up, the nature of the urbanization of the Gangetic plain needs to be considered, at least briefly. The Gangetic urbanization is marked primarily by the development of a settlement hierarchy, whereby one large central settlement is surrounded by smaller satellite settlements (Erdosy, 1995b, 81). The locations of these major settlements are often tied to the availability of strategic resources, such as iron ore (Erdosy, 1995a, 82). This system of settlement hierarchy is divided by Erdosy into two phases, early (550 BCE-400 BCE) and late (400 BCE-100 BCE), as distinguished by Northern Black Painted Ware (NBPW) found at the sites (Erdosy, 1995a, 105). Based on the settlement patterns, which "provide the most reliable index to the evolution of complex societies in prehistoric context" (Erdosy, 1995a, 105), Erdosy lays out the urban hierarchy of village, minor centers, major centers and royal capitals (1995a, 107). The central capitals were the base of a growing political power.

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<sup>2</sup> Italics in original.

This settlement pattern is common to all of north India, and it is safe to assume that fortified cities in general were part of a similar hierarchy (Erdosy, 1995a, 109-10).

Sarao puts forth a description of the urbanization of the Gangetic plain that shares some elements with that of Erdosy. He posits a hierarchy in which there are first and second orders, or stages, of urban sites, the secondary stage appearing in response to the needs of the primary stage of cities. Sarao's first stage cities are urban centers that grew out of the villages, with large populations (Sarao, 1990, 17). Second stage urban centers had smaller populations, as "they did not become urban centers as a result of the *swelling up* of big villages like the first stage urban settlements" (Sarao, 1990, 20). Second stage cities arose in order to support the first stage of urban growth. These cities were "port-towns, trade settlements, army cantonments, educational settlements, religious settlements" (Sarao, 1990, 17). Over time, however, this first/second stage distinction fades, as second stage settlements prosper and surpass the importance of the first stage cities (Sarao, 1990, 17).

In his discussion of urbanization, Sarao also deals with the idea of a hierarchy of cities. He notes that it is difficult to order cities in a relative manner. In general, a lack of clear information is the problem in creating some form of ranking system. Sarao notes that concrete criteria for a ranking system, like population or dimension are rarely mentioned (Sarao, 1990, 9). He notes that the urban centers in question are not always contemporaneous, which also makes ranking them difficult. He further notes that antiquity is also not a very useful tool, as in many cases, the foundation date of the urban centers in question are not always known (Sarao, 1990, 9). Sarao is clear that in the

literature, however, there is a strongly hierarchical language used to name the cities, with clear separations between the different types of urban centers (Sarao, 1990, 36-47).

Sarao does note, however, the importance of fortification in early India. He dismisses it as a necessary feature of an urban site, writing that a variety of factors could influence whether or not a site was fortified, including location and whether or not a city was a first or second stage city (1990, 16). The most important of the factors influencing fortification, according to Sarao, was the political importance of the city. He writes, "The position of an urban settlement within a political system affected the usefulness of fortifications and other tight defensive mechanisms" (Sarao, 1990, 17). He further notes that "fortification no doubt gave an urban center a metropolitan status". Indeed, according to Sarao, "fortification of an urban center could be extremely important in graphing its political value in the stock market of ancient politics. For all those urban settlements that became the capitals of territorial kingdoms, proper defence was unavoidable" (Sarao, 1970, 17). Fortifications were not only important in defence, but had symbolic significance. Carla M. Sinopoli and Kathleen D. Morrison discuss the articulation of political control in "the realm of ideological discourse and symbolic representation" and note that assertions of control over the ideological realm can include royal sponsorship of a distinctive and monumental imperial style of architecture" (1995, 85). Erdosy is also quick to point out the symbolic value of city ramparts (1995a, 111).

Bailey and Mabbett suggest two stages to the Gangetic urbanization as well. They propose that "advanced urbanization needs to be recognized in a variety of sophisticated cultural developments that did not in fact become important features of Ganges settlements until the rise of the Mauryan dynasty towards the end of the fourth

century, or a little earlier” (Bailey and Mabbett, 2003, 84). Bailey and Mabbett characterize the first stage of urbanization as involving larger communities and higher population density in central settlements, and a centralized political power (Bailey and Mabbett, 2003, 84). The second stage is characterised by the appearance of money, writing, advanced architecture, and agriculture with iron tools (Bailey and Mabbett, 2003, 84)<sup>3</sup>. Bailey and Mabbett are careful to point out that,

The succession of stages is masked by the fact that not all the technical advances of the second stage had to wait until then to be invented. Some (notably, iron manufacture) had been invented long before, some (such as written language) perhaps somewhat before, but they found their widespread application only then. Mature urbanization, with a growing economy and technical advance, involved not so much new inventions as the burgeoning of technologies whose time had come” (Bailey and Mabbett, 2003, 84).

This understanding of a later, more mature urbanization is close to the ideas put forth by Erdosy and Sarao. Sarao also notes that the requirements for urbanization, writing, monumental architecture, etc., can often be seen split between the older first stage cities and the later second stage centers (Sarao, 1990, 19).

Bailey and Mabbett, following Niharranjan Ray, note that fortification probably preceded actual cities, with fortified settlements (2003, 83). Ray himself discusses urban centers that were associated with the Buddha’s life, noting that “Many of these places must have been, at the time of the Buddha and much later too, just *gāmas* [villages] or *mahāgāmas* [large villages], or at the most, agglomerated and fortified *jana*-settlements or *nigamas* [small towns, market towns]” (1975-6, 137). These would represent first stage urban centers, following Sarao’s argument.

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<sup>3</sup> These are usually related to Childe’s list of 10 prerequisites of an urban settlement (1950).

Erdosy, Bailey and Mabbett and Sarao all generally agree on the time frame of these stages. Erdosy places the first stage from 600 BCE to 400 BCE, with the second stage from 400 BCE to 100 BCE. Bailey and Mabbett largely agree, dating the beginning of the first stage in the sixth century BCE, and the second in the fourth. Sarao does not explicitly mention any dates for the second stage of urbanization, but notes that circa 550 BCE is the beginning of the Gangetic urbanization with the rise of capital urban centers (Sarao, 1990, 35).

### Looking for the City in Indian Literature

The Buddhist Pali Canon is a substantial corpus of literature. According to Sarao, the Canon is traditionally associated with the first council at Rājagṛha, an assembly that took place immediately after the death of the Buddha, and the second council at Vesālī, although he thinks that it would have been “impossible that the huge mass of the Pali *Vinayas* and the *Sutta Piṭakas* in any case could have been *recited* in its entirety in the First Council” (1990, 10).<sup>4</sup> He does, however, note that there is a definite possibility that the Canon began to take shape at this time, immediately after the Buddha’s death, which Sarao places around 400 BCE. Sarao believes that by the Mauryan period (beginning 321 BCE) the Canon was relatively fixed and would have closely resembled the Pali Canon as we know it today (Sarao, 1990, 11). In a discussion on the chronology of the Dīgha Nikāya and the Vinaya Piṭaka, and the Pali Canon in general, Sarao notes that the use of textual methods for dating are of little use for his historical project (1990, 12). In his attempt to “eliminate from the tradition all the miraculous stories and then examine the residue critically to extract authentic history” (1990, 10) Sarao notes that using

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<sup>4</sup> Italics in original.

textual clues like the metrical base of a passage may not help, as historical facts present in the text need not reflect the period they were written in. For example, he says:

“As we will be dealing with historical facts, metrical criteria for discovering various chronological strata may not be of much help. E.g. metrically a portion of a text may belong to, say, the Mauryan period, but if it talks about the days of the Buddha and there is no reason to believe that the historical facts mentioned in that textual portion are made up, then we have to accept that portion as reflecting historical data of the days of the Buddha and not that of the Mauryan period” (1990, 12).

Sarao, then, operates under the assumption that historical data can be gleaned from these texts, even if the texts themselves were written down quite some time after the period they purport to discuss. Sarao’s treatment of the Pali Canon as historically accurate (even if only in small parts) is problematic; it seems historiographically unsophisticated. It assumes that the aim of the Pali Canon is to provide us with “historical data”.

Bailey and Mabbett, as previously seen, discuss the urbanization of the Gangetic plain in two stages, the latter of which is distinguished by substantial cultural change and dates to the Mauryan period at the end of the 4th century BCE. In this context, they state that “So far as any sort of chronological associations can be made, it is our view that the rise of Buddhism accompanied the beginnings of the second stage. What is clear, though, is that the canonical texts took shape as a whole somewhat later, when the full fledged urban environment of the second stage was thoroughly familiar and taken for granted” (Bailey and Mabbett, 2003, 85). The Pali Canon is thus a product of a fully formed urban environment. Indeed, Bailey and Mabbett note of the canonical texts and the urban situation of the time, “The Pali Canon does not so much chronicle the development of this situation as reflect its fully developed condition” (Bailey and Mabbett, 2003, 79).

A. K. Ramanujan, in his “Towards an Anthology of City Images”, proposes that “literature may provide facts for social scientists, especially in the absence of other documents” (1969, 224). Ramanujan is, however, careful to qualify his statement, noting that to use literary sources in a straight forward manner is to do them injustice. He writes, “The special contributions of literature is its vision, its intuitive grasp of structure, its perspective; not the facts so viewed, but the facts as seen by the imaginative accuracy of a mind that is not merely factual” (1969, 224). Ramanujan maintains that “literature is an excellent place to go for ‘the image of a city’ [...] how it feels to live in it, the atmosphere and ambiance”. He writes, “Sometimes, the best focused image of a city is the literary one, sensitive to both structural design and the significance of detail. Such, in brief, are the assumptions that underlie the discussion of the examples that follow” (1969, 224).

In looking at three cities in Indian literature, Ramanujan highlights the difference between an orthogenetic city and a heterogenetic city. Ayodhyā represents a perfect orthogenetic city, a city expressing a “the consciousness of a single cultural universe” (Ramanujan, 1969, 234). Ramanujan declares that the description of Ayodhyā in the *Ramayana* offers “no ‘facts’ as such for the social scientists, unlike a description in a modern realistic novel. Yet it presents what an ideal city should look like” (1969, 232). Other cities, like Pukār, as described in the *Cilappatikāram*, represent a heterogenetic city, a city of “technical order, an environment for both good and evil; the whole and the maimed, the lame, the deaf, and the blind have their place” (Ramanujan, 1969, 138-9). Pukār is an “open city, a market city, both physically and socially [...] Foreigners are at home; They have accumulated wealth and built houses [...] A great variety of religions

and gods are mentioned, paralleling the variety of the social scene” (Ramanujan, 1969, 239). Finally, Madurai, again from the *Cilappatikāram*, represents a corrupt version of the orthogenetic walled city, in contrast to the open Pukār. It is dominated by a single deity, Siva, and is unwelcoming of foreigners (Ramanujan, 1969, 239). It is orthogenetic, in that it represents a single order, but that order is significantly different that that of Ayodhyā.

Introducing his essay, “The City in Early India: Perspectives from Texts”, Chattopadhyaya writes that he, “attempts to explore a select range of early texts in order to understand how the city was viewed and situated within the parameters of early Indian culture” (2003, 106). He offers a caveat, however, and one that resonates with the overall intent of my project. Of his endeavour, he notes that it “is not intended to complement work on ‘historical’ cities which are known from archaeology, inscriptions and literature” (2003, 106). He intends, rather to get at the “city-ness” of the city as “literature only tells us more eloquently than even other written sources...about the ‘city-ness’ of the city” (2003, 106). Nevertheless, he does conclude that “the chronology of the texts [...] would suggest that the literary images of the city and normative prescriptions about it are drawn from the empirical reality of the early historical city” (2003, 128). He notes quite clearly that a typology of cities is not the goal, merely the quest for this “city-ness”.

Chattopadhyaya notes that cities in early India were recognized as part of a hierarchy of space, often formulaically expressed as *gāma*, *nigama*, and *nagara*—village, market town, and city (2003, 106). He writes, “The continuum is, of course, evidence of a notion of hierarchy and the recognition of the existence of hierarchy in space, in situations where cities exist” (2003, 106). He also discusses cities as “delimited space



corresponding to a moral order” (2003, 119), noting that “the image of the city, as it is generally available, is that of a carefully planned space” (2003, 108). Nevertheless, Chattopadhyaya notes that the city is also often heterogeneous. It becomes a representation of heterogeneity. He writes that the city stands as “a clearly recognizable locus” of “convergence on a very significant scale” (Chattopadhyaya, 2003, 119). Everyone and everything converges in a city, and it become “a microcosm of the human universe” (Chattopadhyaya, 2003, 121). However, Chattopadhyaya highlights the tension between views of the city that focus on the notion of keeping outsiders out or allowing a coming together of diverse elements, pointing to the variety of understandings concerning the Indian city (Chattopadhyaya, 2003, 122). The city can equally be seen as the preferable place to live, as it offers more variety and a different quality of life than village dwelling (Chattopadhyaya, 2003, 124). Chattopadhyaya notes that there is still some “evidence of undisguised apprehension about the city in certain quarters, notwithstanding the way in which the majority of texts represent the city” (Chattopadhyaya, 2003, 125). Chattopadhyaya importantly concludes that “the various meanings of the city derived from but also transcended its physical attributes; to those who wrote about it, the city was ultimately what it was viewed as” (2003, 128).

In my analysis of the texts of the Pali Canon, I take a position somewhere between those of Sarao on the one hand, and of Ramanujan and Chattopadhyaya on the other. There is some limited value to Sarao’s approach in discarding the miraculous stories of the Buddha in search of a historical fact embedded in the text. But the greatest value of such literary passages is in providing some notion of how their authors or their audiences would have understood what a city was, in a sense that exceeds the mere

physicality of the space. The different lenses through which an urban space can be perceived, according to Chattopadhyaya, and the potential to see the “image” of the city, as Ramanujan puts it, are provided by the literary passages of the texts in question, and by the narratives of cities that dot the Pali Canon.

### The City in the Pali Canon: Three Narratives

The Pali Canon, and particularly the Dīgha Nikāya and the Vinaya Piṭaka, contains several narratives that can help shed light on the Buddhist understanding of urban space. While the Pali Canon appears to have been written at a time when urbanization was a mature *fait accompli*, it nevertheless purports to describe cities as they stood in the time of the Buddha. The three best examples of major narratives involving urban space revolve around two major urban centers, namely Pāṭaliputra (also called Pāṭaligrāma, and Pāṭaliputta in Pali), and Rājagṛha (Rājagaha in Pali). Another narrative deals with the non-historical city of Kusāvati, a fictional city in the Pali Canon, which is described as what Kusinārā, a rather provincial town contemporary to the Buddha, had been in the past. While various other cities are mentioned in passing, narratives concerning these three cities provide the fullest accounts of urban spaces.

A careful investigation of these three narratives, especially in light of existing archaeological evidence, lends depth to an understanding of the relationship of early Buddhism to its urban environment.

The first narrative to be considered is one that appears both in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta and in a section of the Mahāvagga part of the Vinaya Piṭaka. This narrative deals with one of the Buddha’s visits to Pāṭaligrāma, a village that is to

become the city of Pāṭaliputra. According to the Dīgha Nikāya, the Buddha, traveling with his retinue, spends the night in Pāṭaligrāma. After preaching to the lay-followers there, he notes that two ministers of the king are building fortifications. The Buddha asks “Who is building a fortress at Pāṭaligrāma?” Ānanda, his lieutenant, replies that the ministers are building a fortress against the neighbouring Vajjians. The Buddha also observes that thousands of *devatās* were taking up lodging at Pāṭaligrāma, deities visible only to his divine eye. According to the tale, wherever powerful *devatās* chose to settle, they cause the minds of powerful officials to want to settle there as well, and where mid-level and low-ranking *devatās* dwell, so too with lower officials. The Buddha, noting this, utters a prophecy concerning Pāṭaligrāma and its unfinished fortress. He says “as far as Aryan people resort, as far as merchants travel, this will become the chief city, Pāṭaliputta, a center for the interchange of all kinds of wares. But three dangers will hang over Pāṭaliputta, that of fire, that of water, and that of dissention among friends” (Dīgha Nikāya, ii.86-88). After a meal with the two royal ministers, the Buddha prepares to leave Pāṭaligrāma. Following him, the ministers declare that whichever gate the Buddha exits by will be renamed the Gotama gate, and whichever ford he crosses the Ganges at will be renamed the Gotama ford. Finding the river too high to ford, the Buddha simply disappears with his retinue and reappears on the other side (Dīgha Nikāya, ii.86-88).

The second major narrative concerning an urban space, also from the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, is that of Kusinārā, the city in which the Buddha dies. After the Buddha preaches, Ānanda says to him “May the blessed lord not pass away in this miserable little town of wattle and daub, right in the jungle in the back of beyond!” (Dīgha Nikāya, ii.146). Ānanda continues by reminding the Buddha that there are “great

cities, such as Campā, Rājagaha, Sāvatti, Sāketa, Kosambī or Vārāṇasī. In those places there are wealthy Khattiyas, Brahmins and householders who are devoted to the tathāgata, and they will provide for the tathāgata’s funeral in proper style”. The Buddha chastises Ānanda, and explains to him that the city has not always been a provincial backwater. The Buddha describes Kusinārā as having been a great capital city of King Mahā-Sudassana, which was then called Kusāvati. The Buddha describes Kusāvati as being “twelve yojanas long from east to west, and seven yojanas wide from north to south” (Dīgha Nikāya, ii.146). The Buddha further describes Kusāvati as being “rich and prosperous and well-populated, crowded with people and well-stocked with food” (Dīgha Nikāya, ii.147). The Buddha states that “Kusāvati was never free of ten sounds by day or night: The sound of elephants, horses, carriages, kettle-drums, side-drums, lutes, singing, cymbals and gongs, with cries of ‘Eat, drink and be merry!’ as tenth”. In addition, the Buddha offers a direct comparison of Kusāvati with the divine city of Āḷakamandā: “Just as the deva-city of Āḷakamandā is rich, prosperous and well-populated, crowded with yakkhas and well-stocked with food, so was the royal city of Kusāvati” (Dīgha Nikāya, ii.147).

This description of Kusāvati is repeated in the next sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya, the Mahā-Sudassana Sutta. In addition, in this sutta the Buddha adds substantially to the description of Kusāvati. He continues, “The royal city of Kusāvati was surrounded by seven encircling walls. One was of gold, one silver, one beryl, one crystal one ruby, one emerald, and one of all sorts of gems” (Dīgha Nikāya, ii.171). The description continues, with the city’s gates being described as being “of four colours: one gold, one silver, one beryl, one crystal”. Seven pillars are described as standing in front of each gate, in the

same set of materials as the seven walls. Seven rows of palm trees are also described, in the same materials, but with trunks and leaves of alternating materials, as such: gold trunk, silver leaves; silver trunk, gold leaves; beryl trunk, crystal leaves, crystal trunk, beryl leaves. This pattern is repeated until the trees made of many gems, where the whole tree is made up of many gems, trunk and leaves. The Buddha states that “the sound of the leaves stirred by the wind was sweet and intoxicating, just like that of the five kinds of musical instruments played in concert by well trained and skilful players. And, Ānanda, those who were libertines and drunkards in Kusāvātī had their desires assuaged by the sounds of the leaves in the wind” (Digha Nikāya, ii.171-2). The king further enhances his royal city by building lotus ponds between the palm trees. The lotus ponds are surrounded by staircases, banisters, and parapets, built of the same rich materials as the rest of the royal city (Digha Nikāya, ii.178-80). The king’s greatness eventually inspires the god Sakka (Indra), who orders his attendant, the divine architect Visakamma, to build king Mahā-Sudassana a palace to be named Dhamma. It is the greatest of all palaces, built in the same costly materials as the rest of the city, and is filled with columns, staircases, railings, couches, etc. The palace is adorned by a palm grove, a lotus lake, nets of bells and a ring of palm trees, again made from the same precious materials (Digha Nikāya, ii.180-5). The narrative of Kusāvātī ends with the death of the king, and the Buddha’s statement, to Ānanda, that he himself in a previous life was that king, and that the city of Kusāvātī was his city, chief among his 84,000 cities (Digha Nikāya, ii.190-9).

The third narrative central to this project concerns the city of Rājagṛha. This narrative is found in the Cullavagga, and concerns the dissent within the community of

monks incited by Devadatta. This rather long narrative begins with Devadatta's decision to abuse his powers of *iddhi* (magical powers conferred by enlightenment) to win over the young and gullible prince Ajātasatru. Devadatta seeks by so doing to displace the Buddha as the leader of the Saṃgha. As he thinks this thought, he loses his magical powers (Cullavagga VII.2.1). Nevertheless, the prince dotes on Devadatta, to the dismay of the rest of the Saṃgha. The Buddha instructs them not to desire to be like Devadatta (Cullavagga VII.2.5). Next, Devadatta asks the dying Buddha if perhaps he should not step down, and hand over the reins of the Saṃgha for Devadatta himself to hold. The Buddha quickly chastises Devadatta for his desires for power (Cullavagga VII.3.1). In addition, the Buddha issues an 'Act of Proclamation' against Devadatta, and charges one of the monks, Sariputta, with publicizing this proclamation throughout the city of Rājagṛha, where these events are unfolding. It is clear from the context that the "Act of Proclamation" will reflect poorly on the reputation of Devadatta. Sariputta suggests that insomuch as he has already spread word of Devadatta's greatness throughout the city of Rājagṛha that he should be excused from the duty. The Buddha decides that he is fit for the duty, and Sariputta sets off to decry the acts of Devadatta to the residents of Rājagṛha (Cullavagga VII.3.2-3). There is a mixed reaction to the proclamation, from various groups of residents. Some believe that the Buddhists are jealous of the powers of Devadatta. Others appreciate the seriousness of the charges against Devadatta (Cullavagga VII.3.3).

Devadatta continues to stir up problems, by inciting the prince to kill his father the king (a staunch supporter of the Buddha) and to order the death of the Buddha (Cullavagga VII.3.4-9), and furthermore attempts to kill the Buddha himself several times

(Cullavagga VII.3.9-12). These attempts are all foiled through the power of the Buddha. In one of them, Devadatta deliberately releases a man-killing elephant on the road leading in to Rājagṛha, where he knows the Buddha will enter the city. The citizens of Rājagṛha are of several minds about these events. Unbelievers believed that the Buddha would be hurt, but believers thought the Buddha would escape unharmed. In plain view of the citizens of Rājagṛha, who watch from the rooftops of the “multi-storied buildings”, the rampaging elephant is calmed by the Buddha, and Devadatta’s plan is foiled (Cullavagga VII.3.11-12). Devadatta’s honour is lessened as a result (Cullavagga VII.3.13), and he begins to deliberately stir up division in the Saṃgha, and makes five demands of the Buddha to institute limitations on the activities of the Saṃgha (one of which involves avoiding villages and, presumably, larger urban spaces), which are refused (Cullavagga VII.3.14-15). Devadatta returns to Rājagṛha to spread the word of the Buddha’s refusal, sparking another mixed reaction between the believers and the unbelievers in the city. The believers understand Devadatta’s ploy to stir up dissent, but the unbelievers see the Buddha as being overly concerned with sense pleasures, saying “his mind dwells on abundance” and regard Devadatta and his followers as fighting against evil (Cullavagga VII.3.16). Devadatta then splits the order, leaving with 500 monks (Cullavagga VII.3.17).

Buddhism is generally accepted as an “urban religion”. Gokhale and Gombrich both hold this position, and it is not discounted by Bailey and Mabbett, although they offer a slightly more nuanced approach to the positive or negative reasons behind such a connection. The urbanization of the Gangetic plain that coincided with the rise of Buddhism was in two phases, a primary less technologically involved phase, and a

second, more mature phase. In looking for evidence of this urbanization in literature, Sarao takes a straightforward approach that assumes the historicity of the Pali Canon, while Ramanujan and Chattopadhyaya see the image of the city in literary sources as important, unattached to historical fact. In this vein several substantial narratives from the Pali Canon need to be analysed. In an attempt to achieve a fuller context for understanding the three narratives, looking at other references to Pāṭaliputra and Rājagṛha in various literary sources will prove useful. The next chapter aims to do just that.



## Chapter 2

### Literary References to Pāṭaliputra and Rājagṛha

#### Introduction

Both Rājagṛha and Pāṭaliputra appear extensively in literature, in both Indian and non-Indian sources. Rājagṛha figures prominently in the Pali Canon of the Buddhists, as well as several other texts from various Indian traditions. It is also mentioned by the two Chinese pilgrims, Faxian (fifth century) and Xuanzang (seventh century), who travelled to India in search of knowledge of Buddhism. References in these sources are largely collected by B. C. Law (1938), and later by K. T. S. Sarao (1990). The work on Rājagṛha has led to questions about that city's character and location, focusing on the debate concerning "New" and "Old" Rājagṛha. This debate has not been resolved in any satisfactory manner by scholars dealing with textual sources any more than it is among those dealing with archaeology. Rājagṛha in literature stands out with respect to several key attributes: it is the capital of the Magadhan state, it is a fortified city and it is an important location for a number of religious traditions, including Buddhism.

Pāṭaliputra appears in the *Indika* of Megasthenes, who visited it as an envoy of the Greek Seleucus Nicator in the fourth century BCE during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya. Pāṭaliputra is also visited by Faxian and Xuanzang during their travels in India. Like Rājagṛha, Pāṭaliputra is known primarily as the capital of the Magadhan rulers (after the capital was moved from Rājagṛha), and later as the capital of the Mauryan state, for being a fortified city.

### Rājagṛha in Literature

B. C. Law has done an excellent job of collecting the references to Rājagṛha in ancient literature. He notes that the *Mahābhārata* describes Rājagṛha as the capital of king Jarāsandha, and refers to it by the name of Girivraja. The *Mahābhārata* contains references to the hills that surround the city on all sides, which it describes as “abodes of all *siddhas*, the hermitages of anchorites and high-souled *munis*, and the haunts of powerful bulls, *Gandharvas*, *Rākshasas*, and *Nāgas*” (Law, 1938, 2). In the description furnished by Law, drawing from the *Mahābhārata*, Rājagṛha is said to be “flourishing, populous and prosperous” and is said to possess a city gate (Law, 1938, 2-3). Law notes that while the *Mahābhārata* claims to depict the ancient past of Rājagṛha, it is unlikely that the references in the *Mahābhārata* describe a city that is actually older than that portrayed in the Pali Canon (Law, 1938, 2 n. 4).

The Pali texts concerning Rājagṛha, according to Law, are unequivocal about the presence therein of the royal palace of Magadha during the time of the Buddha. Sarao also notes that the palace, “at least two-storeys high” was located in Rājagṛha, citing the Dīgha Nikāya and the Vinaya Piṭaka (1990, 82). The Dīgha Nikāya notes that Ajātasatru sat on the upper terrace of his palace at Rājagṛha (i.47). Buddhaghosa in his *Sāratthappakāsinī* (fifth century) states that the city is divided into the “inner” and the “outer” cities. He also makes reference to the city having a wall, which in turn is noted to have been pierced by 32 large gates and 64 small gates (Law, 1938, 7). However, Law maintains that the wall actually had 4 principle gates, citing the *Rājovāda-Jātaka*, and counting references to gates in various other sources (Law, 1938, 24). Sarao is quick to

point out the importance that the Pali Canon attributed to the fortification of the city. He notes that Ajātasatru repaired the defences at Rājagṛha, while it was still the capital of Magadha, against the threat of an invasion from Ujjain, under king Caṇḍapajjota (Sarao, 1990, 82). The fortifications of Rājagṛha appear in a few different writings within the Canon, namely the Majjhima Nikāya (iii, 7) and the Vinaya Piṭaka (iii, 43). In several instances, important ministers of Magadha are involved in overseeing the construction or repair of the defence works (Sarao, 1990, 82).

Sarao notes that in addition to being well fortified, Rājagṛha was a wealthy city. He suggests that “Many people of Rājagaha were engaged in trade or commerce” and that it was a city that must have attracted merchants and bankers (Sarao, 1990, 82-83). According to Sarao, the Digha Nikāya describes Rājagṛha as being “inhabited by many rich and influential khattiyas, brāhmaṇas and *gajapatis*” (Digha Nikāya, ii.146). In reality, this statement is made of all six *mahānagaras* [great cities], not just Rājagṛha. Rājagṛha is considered to be one of the six *mahānagaras* of the 6<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, along with Vārāṇasī, Campā, Kosambī, Sāketa and Vesālī (Sarao, 1990, 46)<sup>5</sup>. This list is found in the Pali Canon, when Ānanda attempted to convince the Buddha to die in one of the great cities, and not in Kusinārā.

Rājagṛha’s primary claim to fame in literature tends to be its position as capital of the Magadhan monarchy. Thakur writes, “There is no doubt that by the time of the Buddha, Rājagṛha was an established capital of the powerful kingdom of Magadha” (1995, 53). In addition to the palace, the city is said in the Majjhima Nikāya to have an

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<sup>5</sup> Schopen gives the six *mahānagaras* as Śrāvastī, Rājagṛha, Vārāṇasī, Campā, Sāketa and Vaisālī in the Mūlasarvāstivādin tradition, with the Pali tradition substituting Kosambī for Vaisālī (Schopen, 2004, 399). Sarao gives them as Rājagaha, Bārāṇasī, Campā, Kosambī, Sāketa and Vesālī, leaving out Sāvattthi (Sarao, 1990, 46). Ānanda, in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, lists Campā, Rājagaha, Sāvattthi, Sāketa, Kosambī and Vārāṇasī (Digha Nikāya ii.146).

array of “delightful” parks, fields and forests (Sarao, 1990, 84). The Buddha himself is reported to have commented on the delightfulness of Rājagṛha. He says “how pleasant a spot, Ānanda, is Rājagaha” and describes various attractive spots around Rājagṛha (Digha Nikāya ii.116). This formula is repeated for Vesālī, but for no other city (Digha Nikāya ii.117). Sarao claims that the pre-eminence of the city is strengthened by the fact that it is mentioned roughly 600 times in the Pali Canon, second only to the city of Śrāvastī.<sup>6</sup>

Law’s collection of literary references also points out the connection between the urban center and supernatural beings. He notes that the early records of Buddhism have many divine beings visiting the hills around the city, including Sakka and Sahampati Brahmā (Law, 1938, 33). Law, referring to a passage in the Digha Nikāya (iii.194-202) points out that Rājagṛha was “popularly known to have been so under the influence of such malevolent spirits such as Nāgas and Yakshas that even the Buddhist Bhikshus had to be furnished with a Paritta or ‘Saving Chant’ in the shape of the *Mahā-āṭṭāṇṭiya-Suttana* for their protection against them” (Law, 1938, 35).

### “Old” and “New” Rājagṛha

Law has a substantial contribution to make to the discussion of the “New” and “Old” Rājagṛha that appears in the archaeological writings pertaining to this city.

Although this debate will be covered in detail in the next chapter from the view of the archaeologists, I will touch briefly upon it here to contextualize Law’s contribution. In

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<sup>6</sup> Schopen claims that the high incidence of these cities could be attributed to a formula for redaction designed to replace forgotten locations in the *sutta* and *vinaya* literature. His theory works best for Śrāvastī but could also account in part for a high occurrence of Rājagaha as a location in these texts. See discussion in Chapter 4 and Gregory Schopen, “If You Can’t Remember How to Make It Up: Some Monastic Rules for Redacting Canonical Texts”, *Buddhist Monks And Business Matters: Still More Papers on Monastic Buddhism in India* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004. 395-407).

essence, the sources left by the Chinese pilgrims point to the existence of both a “New” and an “Old” Rājagṛha, the “New” located just to the north of the old. Law is convinced that the “New” Rājagṛha of the Chinese pilgrim is in fact the new capital of Magadha, Pāṭaliputra, and not Rājagṛha at all (Law, 1938, 23). This seems to be a possible reading of Xuanzang who writes of Pāṭaliputra, “When the old capital Kusumapura was changed, this town was chosen” (Beal, 85). This suggests that Kusumapura does not refer to Pāṭaliputra, but rather to some other city, possibly Rājagṛha. Law notes that the area to the north of the valley that is considered to be the “New” Rājagṛha by some, including Faxian, is in fact a palace area, fortified, but not a city unto its own right (Law, 1938, 24).

Sarao also weighs in on this debate. He notes that Xuanzang calls *Giribbaja* (hill fortress) the old capital of Magadha, with natural fortifications based on the surrounding hills. Sarao further notes that Xuanzang writes that the name of Rājagṛha is reserved for the new city built either by Bimbisāra or Ajātasatru to the north east of the old city (Sarao, 1990, 86-7). Faxian writes that the new site was built by Ajātasatru and had two monasteries in it as well as a wall, and that it was roughly 4 li (a mile) north of Bimbisāra’s old city of Rājagṛha (Legge, 1965, 81). However, Sarao notes that in the Pali Canon, the two names, *Giribbaja* and Rājagṛha are used seemingly indiscriminately, with *Giribbaja* restricted largely to verse. Sarao also places the “palace city” of Xuanzang, not to the north of the hills, as does Law (New Rājagṛha), but rather in the south, in what has also been called the citadel, where the outer walls form a sort of enclosure (Sarao, 1990, 87-8). This is a significant departure from what Chakrabarti concludes based on the archaeological evidence (see chapter 3). That these arguments depend almost entirely on the writings of the Chinese pilgrims is problematic since they

visited Rājagṛha long after the period of the Buddha, at a time when it was largely abandoned as an urban center.

One of the important elements brought to light by the accounts of the two Chinese pilgrims is the fact that by the time of their travels (Faxian visits India in early 5<sup>th</sup> century CE; Xuanzang in the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE) Rājagṛha was no longer the grand city it had been at the time of the Buddha. This is generally attributed to the shifting of the capital to the then newly fortified city of Pāṭaliputra by Ajātasatru's son, some time after the death of the Buddha. Faxian writes of "Old" Rājagṛha, "inside the city is all emptiness and desolation; no man dwells in it" (Legge, 1965, 82). However, elsewhere in the city ('New' Rājagṛha) Faxian says that there are two monasteries although there is no mention of whether the city itself is prosperous or not (Legge, 1965, 81). Xuanzang notes that Aśoka gave the city to the Brahmans, and that no common folk were to be seen during his visit (Beal, 167).

The debate about "New" and "Old" Rājagṛha highlights one of the central problems involved in the effort to coordinate literary and material evidence. There is little archaeological evidence that can conclusively prove the existence of a major city in either location, or even the presence of a palace or a Buddhist structure, let alone a date for any of these. Meanwhile the written records are all composed substantially later and their historical value is not altogether certain.

### Pāṭaliputra in the Pali Canon

Unlike Rājagṛha, Pāṭaliputra is mentioned in the Pali Canon literature only a few times, but those few references are important. In addition, Megasthenes leaves an eye-

witness account from his fourth century BCE visit to the court of Chandragupta Maurya, first of the Mauryan emperors.

Sarao has collected the major references to Pāṭaliputra in the Pali Canon. As we have already seen in the narrative about Pāṭaliputra analysed in this thesis, the Buddha, near the time of his death, witnessed the construction of some form of fortification at Pāṭaliputra, the building of which was overseen by two ministers of Ajātasatru. Sarao says that at the time of the Buddha there were two centers in the area, one called Pāṭaligrāma, the other called Pāṭaliputra, the latter, as it grew in size, assimilating the former (Sarao, 1990, 78-9). Sarao bases this idea on the existence of both names—Pāṭaligrāma and Pāṭaliputra—in the same *suttana* in the Dīgha Nikāya (ii.86-7). Sarao feels that Pāṭaligrāma/Pāṭaliputra’s absence from the list of the six *mahānagaras* is important, pointing to a lack of prominence of the city in the time of the Buddha (1990, 78). This suggests a rapid rise in status for the city which “must have considerably developed in size and stature before the Mauryas chose it as their capital” somewhat less than a hundred years after the death of the Buddha (Sarao, 1990, 79).

Trade seems to have been an important feature of Pāṭaliputra in its depiction in the Pali Canon. Sarao notes that it is the only city which is referred to by the term *puṭabhedana*, A term which may be translated as “a center for interchange of all kinds of wares” (Dialogues of the Buddha, ii.92) or as “a place where men shall open up their bales of merchandise” (Minor Anthologies, ii.108) or as “a town at the confluence or bend of a river” (according to Rhys Davids) (Sarao 1990, 79). Sarao interprets the term to refer to a sort of interior port, a city where trade would have been a primary function at some point in its existence. He concludes that it is possible that this commercial

importance was instrumental in moving the center of Magadhan power from Rājagṛha to Pāṭaliputra.



### Traveller's Accounts of Pāṭaliputra

Patil notes that Megasthenes wrote about many facets of Pāṭaliputra, known to the Greeks as Palibothra, including the various parts of the city, its fortifications, and the royal palace (1963, 373). Megasthenes was a Greek envoy of Seleucus Nicator to the court of Chandragupta Maurya and stayed at Pāṭaliputra (McCrindle, 1877, 14), probably around 300 BCE (Kalota, 1978, 29). Bosworth suggests that the date is somewhat earlier. He writes, "The evidence that we have suggests a relatively early date for Megasthenes, a decade and a half before the canonical date. His embassy to Porus and Chandragupta is best placed around 319/18 B.C. and the publication of his *Indica* seems to belong around 310, before the loss of the Indus lands to Chandragupta" (Bosworth, 1996, 121).

Majumdar claims that only a few of the fragments collected under the title Megasthenes' *Indika* can be considered authentic. He notes specifically that the following references are reliable:

5. The mean breadth of the Ganges is 100 stadia and its least depth 20 fathoms (Fragment XXV). The rest of the Fragment XXV, containing the description of Pataliputra, may be ascribed to Megasthenes, for it is repeated with fuller details by Arrian (Para X) who definitely mentions Megasthenes as his authority.
6. The passages quoted by Arrian about Palimbothra and absence of slavery in India (Fragment XXVI, p. 68, last 9 lines, and line 1 of p. 69). The rest of Fragment XXVI cannot, however, be definitely attributed to Megasthenes, though it seems to be very likely.

Megasthenes describes Pāṭaliputra as being in the shape of a parallelogram. It is located at the confluence of an unnamed river (identified as the Eranoboas in Frag. XXVI) and the Ganges. He notes that the city is girded with a wooden wall, which has loopholes for archers, and a ditch, which served both the purpose of defence and sewer (Frag. XXV). Elsewhere, it is written that the wall of the city was pierced by 64 gates and had 570

towers. The city is said to have measured 80 stadia by 15 stadia (9 miles by 1 1/3 miles or 14.5 kilometers by 2 kilometers).

In considering the reliability of Megasthenes, Brown writes, “On the credit side we must admit that he frequently corrects his literary sources [Ctesias, who wrote about India from knowledge learned at the Persian court, c. 400 BCE] by the evidence of his own experience; and this justifies some confidence in his description of Indian society at the court of Chandragupta, where he can have had no Greek source at all. The difficulties of language necessarily make his understanding a superficial one, but it is a great deal to be able to rely on his integrity” (Brown, 1955, 32). In defending Megasthenes, Brown has raised several important points. Even if he was not inventing things, how much did Megasthenes actually understand of what he saw and heard? As we shall see in the next chapter, however, archaeological evidence at Pāṭaliputra seems to support Megasthenes’ descriptions, lending him some credibility.

Faxian visited Pāṭaliputra in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. He describes a great palace that had been built for the Mauryan king, Aśoka, made of stone and supposedly constructed by spirits, as it was built and decorated “in a way no human hands of this world could accomplish” (Legge, 1965, 77). This stone structure is unlikely in fact to have any connection with the palace of Chandragupta Maurya or his successor Asoka, as Pāṭaliputra was probably constructed mostly of wood in the Mauryan period (Megasthenes, Frag. 68; see also Chapter 3). In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Xuanzang writes of Pāṭaliputra, “to the south of the river Ganges there is an old city about 71 li round. Although it has been long deserted its foundation walls still survive” (Beal, 82). Xuanzang also writes that Aśoka moved the capital to Pāṭaliputra from Rājagṛha and

“built an outside rampart to surround the old city” (Beal, 85). Even farther removed in time than Faxian, Xuanzang’s writing serve only really to tell us that by the time of his visit, Pāṭaliputra was deserted.

### The Arthaśāstra

Some authors turn to the Arthaśāstra for information concerning Pāṭaliputra. The Arthaśāstra, a treatise on politics, describes an ideal capital city, “some Central seat of government, but whether this seat was at Pataliputra or somewhere else we know not” (Kalota, 1976, 63). The connection of this city with Pāṭaliputra is derived from the assumption that Kautilya, the supposed author of the Arthaśāstra, was the political advisor to Chandragupta Maurya (321 BCE-297 BCE), whose capital was, of course, Pāṭaliputra (Rangarajan, 1992, 16-18). However, most scholars today date the Arthaśāstra around 150 CE (Rangarajan, 1992, 19). As the Arthaśāstra is a compilation of previous texts dealing with the conducts of politics, there may be some chance that these descriptions are drawn from the earlier capital of the Mauryans, but it is unlikely. The Arthaśāstra describes the ideal capital city as fortified with 3 moats and a rampart (wide enough to drive a chariot on top of), with gates and towers, and a palace in the center (2.3.4-32). It should be located at the center of the state, should be at the confluence of two rivers, or a lake or a tank, be accessible by both land and water and “should be capable of being a market town” (2.3.3). These descriptions seem to match the general picture painted of Pāṭaliputra in both literary sources and archaeology (See chapter 3). But, as Chattopadhyaya notes, the Arthaśāstra is a normative text, not a descriptive one, which is bound to reflect the political and social ideals of its creators

(2003, 109). He does contend, however that this can still be useful in understanding not what the city actually looked like, but how the authors of these texts believed it should look (Chattopadhyaya, 2003, 108).

### Conclusion

Several important considerations come out of a survey of the literary references to Rājagṛha and Pāṭaliputra. Firstly, the debate concerning ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Rājagṛha stands out as an important issue. It points to a desire on behalf of certain scholars to firmly locate these spaces “on the ground”, so to speak, given the literary sources as a guide. This issue is also important to consider in the context of archaeology, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

The importance of the cities as capitals of states also comes to the fore as an issue for consideration, as this is a recurrent theme in the literary references. Tied into this notion of the city as capital, the notion of the city as fortified also becomes an important consideration. Many of the literary references to these two cities concern their respective fortifications. Again, this issue arises in the context of the archaeology of these cities as well, as both have surviving examples of fortification.

Additionally, for this project the question of how to use the available sources is an important one as well. While the Chinese pilgrims offer a few valuable insights in to the two cities, especially in the case of fuelling the ‘New’ vs. ‘Old’ Rājagṛha debate, they date very much later than the period under consideration. While most other scholars turn to them for information, what they can offer here seems limited. Megasthenes, on the

other hand, seems more informative, as his work dates from roughly the same period (600 BCE to 100 BCE) as the rise of Buddhism and the composition of the Pali Canon.

Overall, while the pictures of both Rājagṛha and Pāṭaliputra that emerge from the literary references are limited, they are nonetheless useful, especially if one compares them to the available archaeological evidence. This evidence is the focus of the next chapter.

## Chapter 3

### Archaeology of Pāṭaliputra and Rājagṛha

#### Introduction

Both Pāṭaliputra and Rājagṛha have been the object of considerable archaeological activity. This is due in part to the fact that they are both intimately related to colonial endeavours of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to “authenticate” certain textual records by finding the sites mentioned in these texts. In the case of Pāṭaliputra, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century British explorers and archaeologists sought to find the fabled Palibothra, mentioned by Megasthenes in the fourth century BCE as the mighty capital city of the Magadhans and the Mauryans. In the case of Rājagṛha, they sought to find the various sites discussed in the Pali Canon, as well as the travel reports of the two Chinese pilgrims, Faxian and Xuanzang (5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, respectively), who had been engaged on quest similar to that of the British, several hundreds of years earlier.

Despite a considerable amount of archaeological literature on both sides, there are relatively few hard and fast conclusions to be drawn. This is partially due to the nature of the excavations carried out. In discussing the study of the Ganges Valley urbanization, Erdosy notes, “In particular, horizontal exposure is required at Early Historic sites, since the vertical sequence of artefact distributions has by now been securely established” (1985, 104-5). Chakrabarti concurs, noting that the “general limitation of the work done on the urban settlements themselves” is a problem. He too highlights the lack of

horizontal exposure, and the fact that archaeological knowledge of “early historic cities has not substantially increased since the time of Marshall” in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (1997, 266-7).

Nevertheless, what we do know, especially in the case of the two central cities in this project, bears reviewing.

### History of Archaeology at Pātaliputra

Archaeologists’ early interest in Pātaliputra was linked to a quest to find the great city of Palibothra described by Megasthenes in his *Indika*. Major Rennell in his *Memoirs of a Map of Hindoostan* (1793) placed Palibothra at Patna (Patil, 1963, 378). Buchanan first surveyed the ruins at Patna, in 1811, and on the basis of these investigations, he concluded that it in fact was *not* the ancient city known to the Greeks as Palibothra (Patil, 1963, 379). But as a result of the studies of Waddell, Cunningham and Beglar, later in the later nineteenth century, Palibothra was after all equated with Pātaliputra, at modern day Patna (Patil, 1963, 379). In 1892, Waddell was the first to excavate the ruins at Patna, based on the idea of matching the material evidence with the reports of the Chinese pilgrims who had visited the site (Patil, 1963, 379-80). Starting in 1894, these excavations continued sporadically until 1899 (Patil, 1963, 380). Mukerji excavated in 1896-7 and 1897-8, but Patil notes that it is unclear whether or not this work was done under the direction of Waddell (1963, 380). Sir Ratan Tata financed a dig in 1911-12 and excavation continued under Spooner and the Archaeological Survey of India in 1914-15 (Patil, 1963, 380). Various trial excavations followed reports of findings by construction

crews in the city in the following years (Patil, 1963, 380). The Jayaswal Research Institute launched a series of excavation at various sites from 1951-52 until 1955-56.

Archaeological evidence suggests that occupation of Pāṭaliputra as a settlement began around the middle of the first millennium BCE. This date is based on the presence of NBPW (Northern Black Painted Ware)<sup>7</sup> found at the ruins of Bulandibagh and Kumrahar within Patna city (Sarao, 1990, 144). Sarao claims that the settlement enjoyed nearly continuous occupation until c. 600 CE, when it was deserted (1990, 144). Patil notes the finding of NBPW but does not comment on the date this may suggest (1963, 395).

Based on evidence of its defences, Pāṭaliputra may have covered up to 3000 acres (roughly 12 square kilometres, or 4 and a half square miles) in the second century BCE (Sarao, 1990, 144). This is roughly the size of modern day Patna, although it is unlikely that the boundaries of the 2 cities correspond (Chakrabarti, 1997, 210). Patil takes the measurements of Megasthenes, also accepted by Chakrabarti (1997, 210) to be correct.<sup>8</sup>

Much of the evidence excavated in Pāṭaliputra is dated from the Mauryan period or later (Patil, 1963). This includes the fortification, and the two significant ruins at Bulandibagh and Kumrahar. None of the substantial archaeological evidence dates from the Buddha's lifetime.

### Fortifications and Other Structures at Pāṭaliputra

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<sup>7</sup> Northern Black Painted Ware is usually is dated between 600 BCE and 100 BCE. See Fig. 1 in Erdosy, 1988, 21.

<sup>8</sup> Megasthenes has the city at 80 stadia in length and 15 in breadth (Book II, frag. XXV), or 9 miles by 1 1/3 miles (Patil, 1963, 373) which Chakrabarti claims makes it roughly the same size as modern Patna (1997, 210). See Chapter 2.



One of the most significant aspects of the archaeology of Pāṭaliputra is the general conclusion that it was a walled city in the Mauryan period. Given the revised dates for the death of the Buddha (Sarao suggests the new date for the Buddha's death be understood as 397 BCE), it is possible that these walls were in fact the continuation of those supposedly seen being constructed by the Buddha in the narrative concerning Pāṭaliputra. Patil highlights the discovery of these “walls”, palisades, and ‘drains’”, as particularly important, given their relative rarity (1963, 408), and latter writers tend to focus much attention on them as well. Chakrabarti notes that although precise dating is difficult, and that the extent or the alignment have never been clearly proven, circumstantial evidence points to these being the fortifications that are mentioned by Megasthenes (fourth century BCE) (1997, 212). Sarao claims that the palisade dates to the fourth century BCE and perhaps “represents the conclusion of a more or less continuing period of expansion beginning from the time of Ajātasattu”, who was a contemporary of the Buddha (1990, 144). These fortifications were built, according to Chakrabarti, by Ajātasatru “perhaps to cope with the Lichchavis, whose territory lay across the river” (1997, 209). Kumar notes that the palisades at Pāṭaliputra consisted of two rows of upright wooden pillars, roughly 15 feet (4.5 meters) from each other (1987, 169). The space in between would have been meant as a passage way, according to Sarao (1990, 144). The surviving palisade at Pāṭaliputra is 12 feet high (over 3.5 meter), and the pillars would have been faced with “thick wooden planks laid horizontally along the outside and fixed to them by wooden pegs”. The wall also appears to have been piled with earth, forming a rampart, although the height of this rampart cannot be ascertained (Kumar, 1987, 169). Patil notes that an octagonal post unearthed by Ghosh seems to be a

post of a gate (1963, 395). Sarao places a very high level of importance on the existence of these fortifications, noting that “fortification no doubt gave an urban center a metropolitan status”.

Chakrabarti makes mention of Bulandibagh and Kumrahar as two of the most important sites in Pāṭaliputra (Chakrabarti, 1997, 210). At Bulandibagh, Waddell seems to have discovered a wooden palisade, although it is not clear that this structure would have counted in the defences of the city, nor what its date is. He mentions these separately from the wooden walls that are later accepted by archaeologists to be the defensive wall, discussed above, which were also unearthed here.

Kumrahar, Waddell suggests, could be the site of the palace of the Mauryan kings Nanda and Chandragupta. This conjecture is based on local legend and the presence of carved stonework, said to be of “Aśoka’s age” (Patil, 1963, 386). Patil notes that major finds at this site include a possible Buddhist *vihāra* and several examples of Aśokan pillars. Patil claims that Waddell was interested in finding an inscribed pillar described by Xuanzang. While many fragments of Mauryan pillars have been found at Kumrahar, none bear any trace of inscription (Patil, 1963, 388). In the course of his excavations, Spooner uncovered traces of a large building, supported by parallel rows of pillars. Near this ruin were discovered seven wooden platforms (Patil 1963, 389-90), which may have been used as the foundation for a series of staircases leading to a “Great Hall”, or pillared structure (Patil, 1963, 392). Despite the evidence for some sort of large structure at Kumrahar, nothing conclusively points to its identity as a major monastery, a Mauryan palace or some other type of building.

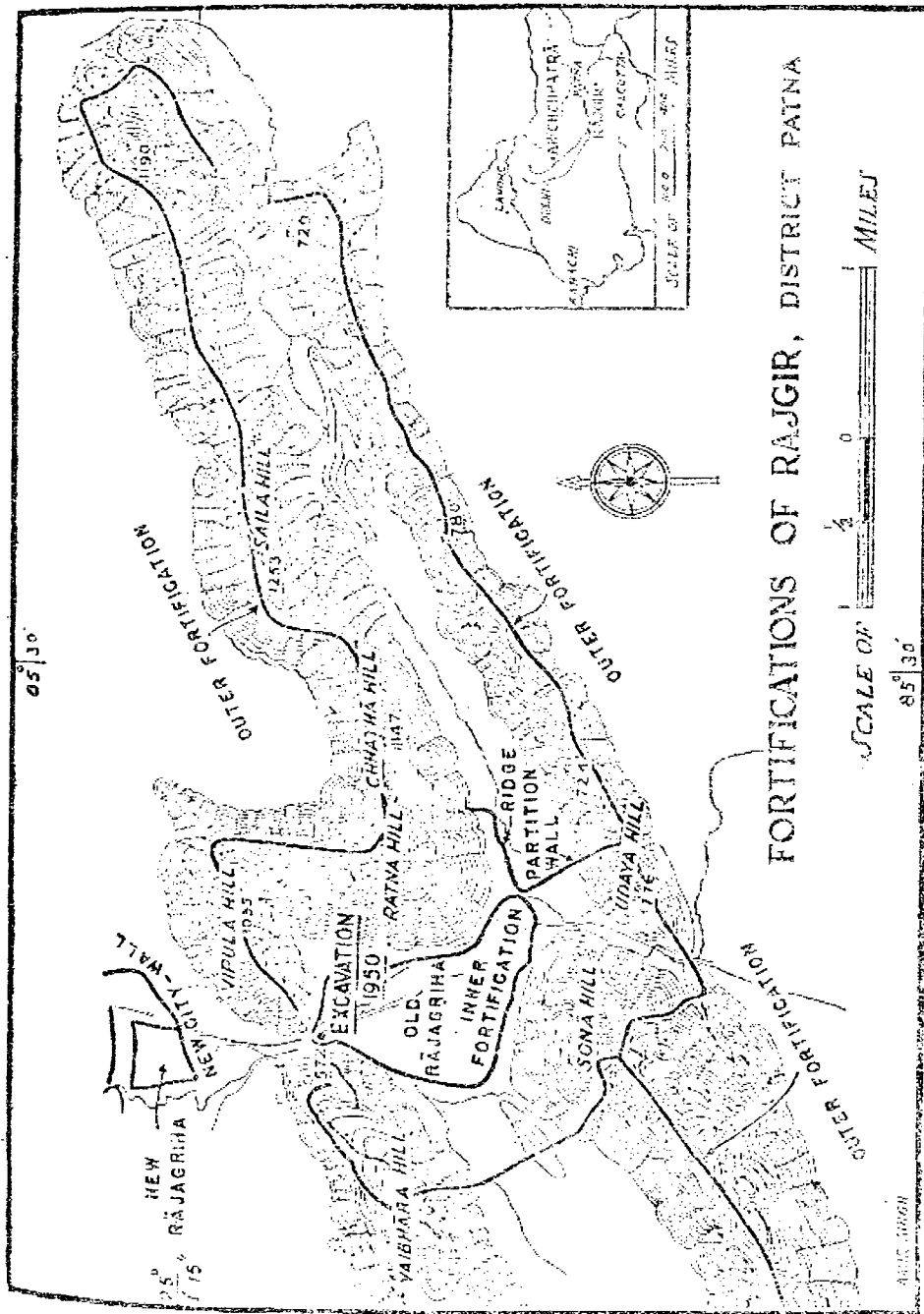
## The Archaeology of Rājagrha

Rājagrha was first explored by Buchanan, whose account was not published until 1847, almost twenty years after his death. His explorations focused on ruins near the village of Rajgir and those in the vicinity of the hills nearby. He does not seem to have examined the ruins inside the valley between the hills (Patil, 1963, 435). Kittoe also explored the area. In 1861-62 and 1872-73, Cunningham made progress in the identification of Buddhist sites around Rājagrha and published two reports. 1872 also saw Beglar and Broadley exploring various locations around the valley. In 1905-06, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) undertook a regular and systematic survey of the locations of the ruins and of the fortifications at Rājagrha. In the same year, Daya Ram Sahni and Bloch also undertook some excavations. Jackson supplemented the ASI's work in 1913-14. A. Ghosh, in 1950, performed some trial digging, and Patil carried out some excavation in 1954 (Patil, 1963, 435). Of the archaeology at Rājagrha, Chakrabarti highlights the fact that "the explorers have been preoccupied mostly with the problem of the identification of the ruins with monuments described either by Hiuen-Tsang or in early Buddhist literature" (1997, 212). This orientation leads towards a quest for affirmation of a site's antiquity, based on the site's traditional date and importance which cannot actually be satisfied through archaeological investigation.

The site of Rājagrha consists mainly of two distinct areas. The first, generally considered "Old" Rājagrha, lies in a long valley surrounded by five hills. This valley runs almost east/west, and is wider at the western end, where the site of "Old" Rājagrha is located. The site of "New" Rājagrha is located to the north of this site, outside the valley

formed by the five hills. These two sites are separated by a distance of roughly a mile. Two maps are included here, from Chakrabarti (1976), and from Cunningham (1871).

Figure 1: Map of Rājagṛha from Chakrabarti 1976).





### New and Old Rājagṛha: A Debate

There exists in the archaeological literature some debate about the respective antiquity of the two seemingly separate sites located at Rājagṛha. Commonly divided into “Old Rājagṛha” and “New Rājagṛha” by the scholars writing about them, these sites are both ambiguous as to exact dates. Much of the debate, as we have seen, hinges on literary sources, which were discussed in chapter 2, but some is firmly understood in archaeological terms. In general, “Old” Rājagṛha is understood to be the site located within the valley formed by the 5 hills, and “New” Rājagṛha is located outside this valley, to the north.

Both Patil and Thakur blame Cunningham as perpetuating the notion that there was an old and new city. Chakrabarti puts forth the notion that the old Rājagṛha, the site inside the valley, is in fact very old (pre Buddha) and that the new Rājagṛha, north of the valley, is the city that appears in the Buddhist tradition as Rājagṛha. He argues that the presence of pre-NPBW pottery and a predominance of local images of snakes and fertility figures like the Yakṣas point to a possible pre-historic core, which he claims the “higher” religions (Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism) failed to completely eradicate (Chakrabarti, 1976, 265-6). He presumes that the so called “old Rājagṛha” was a pre historic tribal center, and that the “new Rājagṛha” was the urban center of the time of the Buddha, with the valley used only for religious purposes (Chakrabarti, 1976, 267). While there is little evidence to support these claims, Chakrabarti feels that they are reasonable. He argues that it is unlikely that Ajātasatru or any subsequent Magadhan king would build a new city at this site after Ajātasatru had moved the capital to Pāṭaliputra, as had been suggested based on a reading of Faxian (Chakrabarti, 1976, 267). He feels that the

religious role of the valley, suggested by the finds of early religious sculpture, is continued in the time of the Buddha.

Ultimately, the only solid conclusion to be made are that there exist two separate sites, one inside the valley formed by the 5 hills, and one north of that, on the plains.

While no final conclusion is possible, it seems to make the most sense that there was only one major center, located to the north of the valley. This debate, in terms of this thesis, highlights some of the pitfalls of the two streams of evidence, where literary evidence supplies one set of ideas, often separated from physical localities by centuries, and archaeological evidence provides another set, and it is difficult to sort through the two.

### Outer Fortifications

Kumar notes that the only pre-Mauryan structures remain that in Rājagṛha are the fortifications, which are described as formidable (1987, 164). According to Kumar, the walls extend roughly 30 miles (50 kilometres). Chakrabarti notes that the extent of the total length of the wall in traces comes to about 13 miles (21 kilometres), citing Marshall (1905-06). Evidence suggests that the walls stood 12 feet (over 3.5 meters) tall. Traces of the north gate into the city are visible in these walls, although no other gates remain (Kumar, 1987, 164-7). Sarao mentions the existence of a gate, although it is unclear if this is the northern gate mentioned by Kumar (1990, 147). Patil discusses gates in the context of the “New Fort” (see below), but not in the context of the “outer wall” (1963, 467). Sarao also notes that gaps in the wall could be gates, but that substantial proof of this is lacking (1990, 147). However, Chakrabarti, citing Marshall (1905-06) claims that the gaps could be unfinished sections of the wall (Chakrabarti, 1997, 213). The

continuity of the wall along the hilltops in antiquity is questioned by Chakrabarti (1976, 261). Patil's discussion of the "outer fortifications" maintains the position that the walls may very well be dated much later than the other sources tend to assume. Patil's argument is based largely on the absence of evidence: there is no archaeological evidence to date the walls in Mauryan or pre-Mauryan times, and there are no literary records that mention the walls of Rājagrha (1963, 440-1). There seems to be no consensus in earlier sources (Marshall, 1905-06; Ghosh, 1951) as to the exact extent of the wall, and Chakrabarti (following Patil, 1963) claims that any conclusion would be premature without further archaeological study of the sites (1976, 261).

While there are also earthen ramparts inside the valley, there is no consensus as to what their purpose is. Chakrabarti claims that these inner walls would almost certainly been a defence against runoff water and flooding (1976, 263), citing Patil's argument (1963). Patil's argument focuses once more on the lack of substantial archaeological evidence for the ridge as a fortification. No masonry is to be found on the ridge, even though stonework is common in the valley (1963, 438). Patil notes that the issue could be settled by proper excavation of the ridge, something not yet undertaken at the time of his writing (1963, 438).

#### Bimbisāra's Prison and Jīvaka's Grove

Located inside the earthen rampart found in the valley, what is called Bimbisāra's prison is a "square fort with stone wall 8 ½ feet [2.6 meters] thick and circular bastions at the corners" (Patil, 1963, 445). Patil notes that V. H. Jackson in 1913-14, was the first to hint that these might be the ruins of the site where Buddhist tradition has it that



Bimbisāra, a king of Magadha and friend of the Buddha, was imprisoned by his son, Ajātasatru (1963, 445). After the ruins were cleared of all debris in the 1930's, an iron ring was discovered that, it was speculated, could have been used to shackle prisoners (Patil, 1963, 445). Patil's understanding of the situation is such that no hard conclusions are possible: "the construction itself gives no definite suggestion with regards to its probable date; nor would the cells give any positive indications that they belong to a prison" (1963, 445). Patil further notes that, "The details of the iron ring, especially its dimensions, are not known so as to judge whether it could be used to 'manacle' prisoners, but, even if this is accepted, the conclusion is open to question" (1963, 445). Patil concludes that there needs to be "further investigation and proof so as to be more sure of the identification of the site" (1963, 446).

Thakur claims that except for the Buddhist ruins in an area known as Jivakāśrama, there is little archaeological evidence to suggest occupation at Rājagṛha as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE (1995, 53). Thakur notes, however, that many of the ruins have yet to be investigated (1995, 53). The Jivakāśrama site is just east of the eastern ridge that forms part of the valley's earthen ramparts, across a deep ditch, on a relatively flat area (Patil, 1963, 447-8). Patil himself excavated these ruins, finding "curious elliptical shaped structures with attached subsidiary rooms, oblong in plan" (Patil, 1963, 448). Patil notes that the outline of the building does not suggest regular residential use, writing of the elliptical halls, "They were obviously not meant to serve the normal requirements of a family life" (1963, 448). These claims are supported by a lack of other material evidence at the site, limited to a few potshards, a few nails and some animal figurines (1963, 448). Patil asserts that the lack of dateable antiquities at this site prevents us from

concluding that it is of sufficient antiquity to be the monastery which was, according to the Pali Canon, built by the layman Jīvaka for the Buddha. Nevertheless, he argues that the unusual elliptical form of the building, not seen in other, later (c. first century) monasteries suggests that it might predate them, and that the lack of any literary references to major monasteries other than Jīvaka's supports the notion that this ruin is in fact Jīvakaśrama.

Chakrabarti largely follows the example set by Patil, noting of the ruins at Jīvakaśrama, "Nothing significant or early was found associated with these [ruins]" but allowing that "though the plan differs from the plans of other monasteries elsewhere, this could be the monastery which Jīvaka [...] built in his mango-grove and dedicated to the Buddha" (1976, 264). Sarao also questions the date of this site, and others at Rājagṛha, noting, "It is surprising that a sufficiently old date for Rājagṛha could not be proved anywhere" (1990, 148).

### New Rājagṛha

The ruins of "New Rājagṛha", located outside the valley of "Old Rājagṛha" to the north, consist largely of fortifications, namely, an earthen rampart behind a ditch, that Cunningham claimed, according to Patil, is very ancient (Patil, 1963, 466). The ruins here also consist of a stone fort, called the 'New Fort', trapezoidal in shape. The wall of this fort is 15 to 18 feet thick (4.5 to 5.5 meters) and made of unhewn stone filled with rubble (Patil, 1963, 466). Here, Patil offers some discussion of gaps in the walls, noting that they could be, but cannot be proven to be, gates. One definite gate remains, however. It retains its jambs, and is flanked by two stone bastions (Patil, 1963, 467).

The earliest date that Patil ascribes to 'New Rājagṛha' is first to second century BCE. This is based on several small excavations of the walls and of a few ruins. These excavations unearthed a few antiquities, notably clay tablets with inscriptions in first to second century BCE Brahmi script. The walls themselves cannot be dated earlier than second century BCE (Patil, 1963, 468). However, Patil does offer the caveat that much of this area remains unexplored (Patil, 1963, 468).

Chakrabarti's discussion of "New Rājagṛha" follows Patil's conclusions quite closely, except in date. He notes that the earthen ramparts originally surrounding the "new" city are rapidly disappearing (1976, 266). As for the stone fortifications, he notes that the 2<sup>nd</sup> century date may not be the last word, stating that even the excavations carried out might not have been extensive or exhaustive enough (1976, 266). Based on an excavation by Singh in 1961-3 (1961-62: 1962-63), unpublished at the time of Patil's writing, Chakrabarti offers some extra information on dating. A calibrated carbon-14 date offers at its earliest 410 BCE (1976, 266). He resorts to the argument that it would be unlikely that a king any later than Ajātasatru would have bothered to build a new city at Rājagṛha, given that the power had already begun to shift to Pāṭaliputra, which very shortly thereafter became the new capital (1976, 266). Chakrabarti, following Singh's evidence, suggests that the 'New Rājagṛha' does in fact date back to the time of the Buddha, and is the Magadhan capital that we know from tradition as Rājagṛha (1976, 266-7), leaving "old" Rājagṛha as a site of religious, but not urban, activity.

#### The Usefulness of Archaeology in Understanding Textual Sources

Ratnagar expresses two important points concerning the use of textual material and archaeological material together. She writes, “The problem arises of how to read the archaeological material in light of information contained in contemporary texts” (1995, 27). She continues, “Both textual and archaeological materials can be dated on independent ground, and cross checks can be made between texts and excavated finds on geographic milieu, or the use of metals, tools, plants animals or food crops” (Ratnagar, 1995, 27-8). She notes that, “excavated finds can put flesh on the bones of written sources by revealing aspects of material culture ignored by the text” (1995, 28).

However, Ratnagar draws a line in the sand. She notes that if pushed to far, “an exercise in correlation can run into trouble”. She evokes the example of trying to prove the historical reality of the events described in the Hindu epics (1995, 28). One of the central problems with using archaeology alongside texts is the desire to ‘prove’ the textual tradition right. This is amply evident in the case of both Pāṭaliputra and Rājagṛha. British archaeologists, enamoured by the possibility of finding the ‘authentic’ Buddhist sites mentioned in the Pali Canon, imposed a textual understanding on ruins that they excavated. This led them to ‘discover’ the fortifications built by king Ajātasatru in the time of the Buddha, the prison where king Bimbisāra was imprisoned, and the monastery devoted to the Buddha by Jīvaka. The further result of such an approach is the unexamined assumption that the ruins of Patna and Rājagṛha date to the sixth century BCE, although there is no material evidence to back up this notion.

Nevertheless, there remains some value in comparing archaeological and literary sources. As Erdosy notes when speaking of the early historic urbanization of India (sixth to first centuries BCE), “this subject deserves more [attention] since it is the only case of

primary urbanisation where an abundant literature augments the archaeological record, which, for all its shortcomings, should contain invaluable evidence of social evolution, hardly recoverable by excavation [...] Only when this promise is fulfilled will full justice be done to the subject” (1985, 105). Chakrabarti notes that some exercises that “have explored in some detail the historical background, society and economy, religious sects, numismatics, archaeology, language and literature, epigraphy, art and iconography” have been undertaken. He finds that such “detailed, multi-dimensional exercises to explore the cultural history of an ancient Indian city are laudable academic endeavours” (1997, 268).

In that vein, it is important to consider the narratives of Rājagṛha and Pāṭaliputra, as well as that of Kusāvati, as a valuable source of information concerning the Buddhists and their relationship to urban space. The next chapter analyses what the narratives in the Pali Canon reveal about the Buddhist idea of the city.

## Chapter 4

### Three Narratives about Cities in the Pali Canon

#### The Pali Canon Talks about Cities

Many of the references to urban spaces in the Dīgha Nikāya and the Vinaya Piṭaka are of a cursory nature, coming at the beginning of a sutta, in the frame narrative. These references recount, for example, how the Buddha traveled from such a city to such a city, where he stayed at such a place, and met such a person, who asked him a question which he answered, or how he delivered a lesson to a gathering of people at a particular place. Few if any details are forthcoming about the city, or the place at which the Buddha stayed. As Bailey and Mabbett note, “Buddhist canonical literature sets many or most of its stories in or near cities and villages, and in sum we are not given much more information about them than the names themselves” (2003, 80). While such references in the frame narratives of the Dīgha Nikāya and the Vinaya Piṭaka often seem perfunctory they nevertheless have been the basis for much of the scholarly tradition that links early Buddhism to the urban revolution of northern India.

Gregory Schopen discusses the value of these references in his essay “If You Can’t Remember, How to Make It Up: Some Monastic Rules for Redacting Canonical Texts”. He argues that the large number of references to cities, and particularly to Śrāvastī, found in the Buddhist *sutta* literature is the result of a set of rules that were used to redact these texts. Schopen notes, “we know next to nothing for certain about [...] the association of texts and their settings — because we know next to nothing for certain

about how early Buddhist texts were redacted and transmitted” (Schopen, 2004, 397).

Schopen’s conclusions are based on a short text in the *Kṣudrakavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*. This text is important, Schopen argues, because it offers a set of rules to be followed for the completion of a *sutta* that a monk has forgotten some element of (2004, 397-8). The rules, briefly, are this: A monk who has forgotten where the teaching recorded in a certain *sutta* took place is to fill in the place as one or the other of the six great cities (*mahānagaras*) or somewhere that the Buddha had stayed ‘many times’. If the name of the king is forgotten, it is to be replaced by Prasenajit; if the name of the householder or a lay-sister is forgotten, then it is to be replaced with Anāthanpiṇḍada or Mrgāramātā respectively (Schopen, 2004, 398). Schopen draws two important conclusions here. The first is that in replacing any forgotten place name, including that of a village or town, with the name of one of the six *mahānagaras*, an “urban bias” is created. The more forgetting of place names—Schopen argues this would have been a common occurrence—the more the overall setting would shift towards the major urban centers (2004, 397-399). Schopen’s second important point is that the decision about which location should be used when the site has been—presumably any of the six *mahānagaras* or somewhere the Buddha had stayed ‘many times’—is not as open a choice as one might expect, given that if a name is forgotten, it must very often be replaced with the city of Śrāvastī (Schopen, 2004, 399). Schopen notes, “To replace the lost name of a king, for example, with that of Prasenajit would therefore, it seems, almost by necessity require the setting—if preserved—also be changed to Śrāvastī” (Schopen, 2004, 399). This, Schopen claims, accounts for the numerous references to Śrāvastī as a location in Buddhist literature.<sup>9</sup> Such a claim would imply that much of the scholarly

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<sup>9</sup> Gokhale notes that of 1009 references, 593 concern Śrāvastī (1982, 10).

literature based on this high rate of occurrence of this place name might need to be rethought.

In light of Schopen's argument, how do the three central narratives concerning the cities of Kusāvati, Pāṭaliputra and Rājagṛha remain meaningful as potential sources of knowledge concerning Buddhist understandings of urban space? I would argue that there is a substantial difference between the brief and detail-poor references in the frame stories of the *sutta* and *vinaya* literature and the narratives investigated here. As opposed to simple references to various cities which function only to establish a setting for a discourse or the promulgation of a *vinaya* rule governing the monks and nuns, the accounts of cities in the three narratives examined in this thesis take a central place in the *suttas* they are part of. In the case of the narratives concerning Pāṭaliputra and Kusāvati, the narratives are important enough to appear in both the *sutta* and *vinaya* literature virtually unchanged. Further, the rules of redaction discussed by Schopen would not suggest that a *sutta* be reconstructed with either Pāṭaliputra or Kusāvati (Kusinārā) as its setting, as neither of them are *mahānagaras* or are places visited by the Buddha "many times". In the case of the narrative concerning Rājagṛha, the situation is different. Rājagṛha is in fact one of the six *mahānagaras* and one of the places that the Buddha has visited "many times". The narrative could, then, have been placed in Rājagṛha according to Schopen's redaction rules. Nevertheless, there are several narrative elements that suggest that this story is not affected by the rules of redaction as laid out by Schopen.

Schopen himself argues that the rules he has extracted from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* are "not as flexible as they may at first sight seem" (Schopen, 2004, 399). His argument that the system favours Śrāvastī by requiring that the names of



forgotten kings, householders or lay-women be replaced with names linked to Śrāvastī is obviously not applicable in the case of the Rājagṛha narrative. If the narrative were simply set in Rājagṛha, and made no mention of personages, then it would be possible for the rules to have been used, since, as mentioned, Rājagṛha is a *mahānagara* as well as one of the places that the Buddha has visited “many times”. Nevertheless, the mention of several personages in the context of this narrative suggests that the rules of redaction were not engaged in this instance. Had all of these names been forgotten, then the replacements for them would have had the narrative set in Śrāvastī, not Rājagṛha. If the names were remembered, and the setting forgotten, the names themselves—such as Bimbisāra, the king of Magadha, and his son Ajātasatru—would have been proof enough for a redactor to know that the story took place in Rājagṛha. Given the fit between place and persons as well as the substantial nature of the narrative, it is safe to assume that the authors of the narrative intentionally wrote about Rājagṛha.

### Pāṭaliputra

The narrative concerning the village of Pāṭaligrāma is one of the most intriguing references to urban spaces in the Pali Canon. This narrative exists in two different places in the Canon, appearing both in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya and in the Mahāvagga of the Vinaya Piṭaka. It can be broken into several component parts. The first part of the narrative is a lecture delivered by the Buddha to his disciples, framed in a manner similar to all the other discourses of the Buddha that populate the *sutta* literature. The second part of the narrative is of much greater importance for the present analysis: this is the prophecy concerning the future of Pāṭaligrāma that the Buddha gives after

seeing the Magadhan ministers arranging to the village. The third part of the narrative is the interaction between the Buddha and the ministers in charge of the fortification, and the final part is the Buddha's departure from the village. The prophecy that the Buddha makes about the village is particularly interesting. The Buddha, on seeing the construction of fortifications and the gathering of divine beings in the area, utters the prophecy, "And as far, Ānanda, as the Aryan people resort, as far as merchants travel, this will become the chief city, Pāṭaliputra, a center for the interchange of all kinds of wares" (Digha Nikāya, ii.87). Two things are important about this prophecy. The first is the question of its priority of the prophecy to the situation it prophesies. Our understanding of this narrative overall, especially in light of this prophecy portion, depends on when we consider the Pali Canon to have been composed. In other words, does this prophecy predate the growth of Pāṭaliputra? Or does it benefit from the clear gaze of hindsight?

Sarao, in discussing the various literary references to Pāṭaliputra in the Pali Canon, raises this issue. He writes,

"Some scholars incorrectly assume that the portion of our textual material dealing with the Buddha's prophecy of this settlement becoming the leading city shows 'the benefit of hindsight' and hence the 'the possibility of the notice of the event's late insertion into the text'. But this does not appear to be true. Accepting the new date of the Buddha which reduces the gap between the age of the Buddha and Chandragutta Moriya to only about 70 years, we must accept the fact that the incidence of its [Pāṭaliputra's] fortification work does not appear far removed away the age of the Buddha" (Sarao, 1990, 79).

Sarao's claim that the fortification of the village of Pāṭaligrāma began within the lifetime of the Buddha is possible, if the revised dates of the Buddha are considered.

Nevertheless, others tend to understand the texts as clearly benefiting from "hindsight".

Bailey and Mabbett's understanding of the Pali canonical texts as having come from a fully mature urban environment almost certainly put them later than Pāṭaliputra's rise to greatness as the Magadhan capital. While Bailey and Mabbett are vague about exact dates, they tentatively place the mature, second phase of the Gangetic urbanization in about the third century BCE, close to or within the Mauryan period (2003, 84-5). In addressing the historicity of the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, within which the Pāṭaliputra narrative appears, Raymond B. Williams notes that while it certainly contains some early material, the Canon as we know it is "a conglomeration of legends, a great mosaic of varied materials—episodes, discourses, myths, inset abstracts of the cult and its doctrinal categories—all however within a single and consistent narrative framework" (quoting Dutt, 47, in Williams, 1970, 161). Williams writes, "Certainly the travelogue and narrative of the last seven months of the Buddha's life, the framework of the MP [Mahāparinibbāna Sutta], is a construct of the tradition" (1970, 166). Williams notes that the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta contains a lot of oral material. He writes, "All of this gives evidence of the shaping of the material for ease in oral transmission. The verse form, the numerical sequences, repetitions, stock phrases and paragraphs and formalized encounters were probably shaped by the monks in the transmission, though it is possible that the Buddha's teaching methods included repetition and stylized formulae to aid memorization" (1970, 166). It seems likely, as Williams suggests, that the narrative embedded in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta concerning the Buddha's visit to and prophecy about Pāṭaligrāma is a late addition (Williams, 1970, 166).

The Pāṭaligrāma narrative occurs not only in the context of the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, but also in the Mahāvagga of the Vinaya, in a section discussing the types of

medicines that are and are not approved for use by the monks. These contexts are significantly different. Williams suggests that “There was evidently a great store of episodes and dialogues in the oral tradition, some of which were included in two or more parts of the Canon in different contexts” (Williams, 1970, 162). He notes that in the specific case of the narrative concerning Pāṭaligrāma, the multiplication of tellings raises questions about its status as a historical record. He writes, “For example, it excites distrust to find that the occurrences at Pāṭaliputra [...] are narrated at another place in quite different connections” (Williams, 1970, 162). Further, he notes that, “Rhys Davids has shown that two-thirds of the [Mahāparinibbāna Sutta] can be traced in other parts of the Canon in which a paragraph or more is couched in identical or almost identical words. Of ninety-six pages of the Pali text only about thirty-two pages contain material unique to this sutta. This casts doubt on the reliability of the narrative framework of the sutta” (Williams, 1970, 162). Whether or not the surrounding framework of the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta is reliable, the fact that the narrative about Pāṭaligrāma appears in two separate texts, virtually word for word, is significant. The narrative of the prophecy at Pāṭaligrāma is important enough to have been placed in the Canon at two different locations, and as such is worth studying.

In Williams’ view, narratives like the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta were transmitted less faithfully than the actual discourses of the Buddha. He writes, “In general the details of the narratives are suspect. They reflect the shaping of the tradition to such a degree that they consist largely of stereotyped formulae. They suggest that this is the kind of thing the Buddha did rather than that he did this or that specific thing” (Williams, 1970, 166). This does not mean that the narrative is of no use in the present project, however.

The fact that it presents some ideas of *the kind of thing the Buddha did* make it very useful indeed. While this understanding of the character of the text does not support Sarao's quest for historical fact buried in the Pali texts, it does not entirely invalidate it either.

The narrative of Pāṭaligrāma tells us a few things about the early Buddhist understanding of urban space. First, there is an implicit connection in the story between the prophecy uttered by the Buddha and the building of the fortifications against the Vajjians. The Buddha utters his prophecy to Ānanda immediately after asking about the ministers and the fortification (Dīgha Nikāya, ii.87). The central point of the prophecy is, of course, to highlight the importance of the city of Pāṭaliputra. It would seem that somehow, the fortification of Pāṭaligrāma is central to the idea of the eventual greatness of Pāṭaliputra. The presence of fortification is fundamental to Sarao's understanding of the urban environment in the half-millennium before the Common Era. In the narrative of Pāṭaliputra, the fortification is clearly a kingly construct with the ministers of the Magadhan king who oversee the work on the walls (Dīgha Nikāya, ii.86). I think that it is evident, especially considering the notion of the "closed" and "open" city discussed by Ramanujan, that ideologically, the fortification of a city is important. The narrative, and the community that produced and used it, clearly saw the importance of the fortification of a village that was to become "the chief city, Pāṭaliputra".

The fortification of Pāṭaliputra, historically, is only slightly less difficult to date than the narratives in the Pali Canon that refer to it. As seen previously, there is some consensus in the archaeological world that certain ruins at the site of Pāṭaliputra can be considered a substantial defensive network or palisade and moat. The existence of ruins

that look like fortifications is supported by the accounts of Megasthenes, who describes the city of Pāṭaliputra as fortified with a moat and a wall, which was topped with towers. As Megasthenes, in his descriptions of cities at least, if not fauna, is taken to be a reliable witness, historians generally conclude that Pāṭaliputra was, at the time of the Mauryan empire and Chandragupta at least, a fortified city, although there has been only a small amount of ruined wall unearthed at Pāṭaliputra. Given the dates that Bailey and Mabbett suggest for the mature second stage urbanization from which the Pali Canon seems to have been developed, it is probable that the original narrative of the prophecy of Pāṭaligrāma post-dates the construction of the fortifications and the shift of the Magadhan capital to Pāṭaliputra. If this were true, the presence of fortification in the narrative of Pāṭaliputra could be seen as an attempt to mark it off clearly as a capital city, to grant it the distinguished place it deserved as a royal city.

The notion that the city was ideologically important for the early Buddhist community is also highlighted by the aspects of the supernatural associated with the Pāṭaligrāma narrative. The narrative claims that at Pāṭaligrāma, thousands of *devatās*<sup>10</sup> that only the Buddha can see have taken up residence. The *devatās* that appear in the Pāṭaligrāma narrative are closely linked with the fortification of the village. The Digha Nikāya describes the location of the fortifications: “And there were a number of fairies who haunted in thousands the plots of ground there. Now, wherever ground is so occupied by powerful fairies, they bend the hearts of the most powerful kings and ministers to build dwelling-places there, [and fairies of middling and inferior power bend

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<sup>10</sup> In a discussion of the translation of the word *devatā* in *Dialogues of the Buddha, vol. 2*, the translators note that “*devatā* is a fairy, god, genius or angel”. They further discuss the notion of how even these terms are too loaded with western connotation to truly do any justice. To simplify matters, I have chosen to stick with supernatural beings when using English. While very general, for understanding the narrative, this term suffices.

in a similar way the hearts of middling or inferior kings and ministers]”<sup>11</sup> (Digha Nikāya, ii.87). The understanding here, is of course, that the location of the city is not merely an accident or simply the result of a combination of socio-economic factors. It exists, and is important enough to fortify, because it is a supernaturally powerful place, attracting the divine beings as well as humans of all kinds. This divine presence inclines rulers and ministers to dwell there also and to make Pāṭaligrāma a fortress, and it is because of this that the Buddha can foresee a great future for the soon to be city of Pāṭaliputra. Effectively, this stamps the city as not only a place of human interaction, and human diversity, as both Ramanujan and Chattopadhyaya highlight in their description of the heterogeneous city, but also of supernatural diversity. Also, this description of the *devatās* coming to reside at Pāṭaliputra suggests that it is a reflection of a divine city, like Āḷakamandā, city of the gods, discussed later. In the last part of the Pāṭaliputra narrative, the Buddha leaves the city, and the two ministers of king Ajātasatru, state that the gate that the Buddha leaves the city by will be named after him, and likewise the ford where he crosses the river. Re-naming the gate and ford serves to highlight the Buddha’s pre-eminence. Like the supernatural beings, the Buddha has permanently left his mark on the city. Pāṭaliputra is both a divine city and—perhaps even more—a Buddhist city. In the Pali Canon, Pāṭaliputra functions symbolically. In the terms established by Ramanujan, Pāṭaliputra is neither truly orthogenetic nor heterogenetic. In the narrative, it is not yet a closed city, but the importance given it in the prophecy, and the knowledge that that prophecy was probably composed after the city was in fact the imperial capital, suggests that it will be. In the narrative, it is being fortified; it is in the process of becoming

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<sup>11</sup> Square brackets appear in the translated text.

closed. Nevertheless, it does not strictly fit the model of the orthogenetic city as laid out by Ramanujan. Ramanujan's Ayodhyā has no place for any deviants; there is a negation of atheists, thieves and those born of mixed-caste in Ayodhyā (1969, 234-5). The Buddha's prophecy notes that the city will be in danger from "dissent among friends". This is not something that would happen in an orthogenetic city. Nevertheless, the presence of the supernatural beings, the Buddha's strong association with the city in the form of the re-naming of the gate and ferry, and the ideological weight of the encircling walls points to a orthogenetic ideal.

### Rājagṛha

The question of who does and does not have confidence in the Buddha is a reoccurring theme in the *sutta* and *vinaya* literature, and it is especially prominent in the narrative about Rājagṛha, which recounts how a split in the Saṃgha was caused by Devadatta. This narrative does not only concern the community of monks, however, since it also concerns itself with the effects of the struggle between Devadatta and the Buddha on the lay population of Rājagṛha. The story is in part about winning the hearts and minds, so to speak, of the people. This narrative is embedded in the Cullavagga, and constitutes a complete narrative, like the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta. When the Buddha's proclamation against Devadatta is first circulated throughout the city by Sāriputta, the reaction of the people is mixed, with some saying that the Buddha is simply jealous of Devadatta's power, while others who believe in the Buddha believe also that Devadatta is guilty of many misdeeds. The narrative makes an explicit link between the actions of the Buddha and the Saṃgha on the one hand and the reaction of lay Buddhists and non-



Buddhists on the other. This theme is repeated in the narrative latter, when Devadatta attempts to take the Buddha's life by releasing the mad elephant. Here again, the people of Rājagṛha pass judgement on the action, this time turning against Devadatta, as his behaviour is seen as reprehensible. He loses his reputation, and his behaviour begins to anger the populace. The people of Rājagṛha have difficulty distinguishing between the Buddha's Saṃgha and Devadatta's followers, so the Buddha is forced to take action to distinguish his followers from Devadatta's. Ultimately, Devadatta splits the order, causing a schism. In this narrative, in a very real way, the city of Rājagṛha is an ideological battleground for the Buddha and Devadatta. The unity of the Saṃgha, and in part, the city, is at stake. This is exactly the kind of internal dissention that should not be found in an orthogenetic city. The tension between Devadatta and the Buddha is echoed in the tension between the king and prince of Magadha. In the narrative of Devadatta set in Rājagṛha, Devadatta allies himself with Ajātasatru, son of Bimbisāra, while the Buddha is often linked to Bimbisāra himself. The narrative has Ajātasatru attempt to take his father's life, just as Devadatta attempts to take that of the Buddha.

Interestingly, the walls of Rājagṛha are absent in the narrative of Devadatta. While it has much to say about other aspects of the Buddhist views of urban center, it is largely silent about the fortifications of the Magadhan capital. While the walls of Rājagṛha do appear in the canonical literature in other places, they do not figure in the discussion of Devadatta's dissent. Only the north gate of the city is mentioned, as this is the location of the attack on the Buddha by the mad elephant, orchestrated by Devadatta. The existence of the gate strongly implies fortification, but it is never explicitly

mentioned. This absence is curious, but the narratives of Kusāvātī and Pāṭaliputra make the importance of fortifications abundantly clear.

Rājagṛha, like Pāṭaliputra, does not easily fit into Ramanujan's orthogenetic/heterogenetic system. It has elements of the heterogenetic city, in that it is not explicitly closed, although there is the suggestion of a wall, and the narrative mentions a city gate, which marks it as delineated in some way from the surrounding countryside. It also has much stronger elements of the heterogenetic make up, with believers and non-believers alike, with the Buddha and Devadatta trying to win the whole lot over. Even the rulers' sovereignty is threatened, as king Bimbisāra's son attempts to murder him.

### Kusāvātī

The narrative about Kusāvātī appears both in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, in a shortened version, and then in a much longer version in the Mahā-Sudassana Sutta. Both versions of the narrative stress that the "wattle and daub" town of Kusinārā was in the past a great city, Kusāvātī, ruled over by a great king, "Mahā-Sudassana, a king of kings" (Digha Nikāya, ii.169). King Mahā-Sudassana is said in the narrative to have "four and eighty thousand cities, the chief of which was the royal city of Kusāvātī (Digha Nikāya, ii.187). Of Kusāvātī, the Buddha states that "This Kusinārā, Ānanda, was the royal city of king Mahā-Sudassana, under the name of Kusāvātī, and on the east and the west it was twelve leagues in length and on the north and the south it was seven leagues in breadth. The royal city Kusāvātī, Ānanda, was mighty, and prosperous, and full of people, crowded with men, and provided with all things for food" (Digha Nikāya, ii.170). This

last sentence is repeated formulaically, as Kusāvati is compared to Vessavana's city of Āḷakamandā, the royal city of the gods, to which it is said to be identical (Digha Nikāya, ii.170). Kusāvati is said to have seven walls, and four gates (Digha Nikāya, ii.170).

These, as we have seen, are understood to be important features of the urban environment, and it is telling to see them here in what is clearly an idealized portrait of a city. Furthermore, Mahā-Sudassana's palace is prominently featured in the story, having been built for him by Sakka, king of the gods (Digha Nikāya, ii.180). The palace is described as vast, and sumptuously appointed, clearly in an effort to describe a hyperbolic model city. What is important is that the royal city needs a palace. This monumental architecture, in addition to the fortifications, plays into the idea of ideological control raised by Sinopoli and Morrison. To the community that compiled and redacted the Pali Canon, the notion of the kingly city was very important, with a palace at the center of a well defined, well defended city. This is an image that we have encountered in the Arthaśāstra, and it is reflected in the description of all the other major cities in the narratives in the canonical literature.

Nonetheless, when the Kusāvati narrative provides us with a glimpse of the inhabitants of the city, in addition to the ideal physical description of the urban space, we find several descriptions of gamblers and drunkards said to be dancing to the various types of music produced by the wind in the palm trees surrounding the city (Digha Nikāya, ii.172; 185). Unlike the strictly controlled Ayodhyā, which, according to Ramanujan, had no place for undesirable elements, the idealized Buddhist city did make room, at least to some extent, for a variety of different types of people. Still, the city of Kusāvati is strongly orthogenetic. It has substantial fortifications, and offers all the

benefits befitting a king in the form of a palace and the palm groves and lotus pools. It is prosperous, and crowded, just as Chattopadhyaya suggests a city should be, and it serves as a symbol of centralized kingly power, well defended, and well appointed.

### Buddhist understanding of cities in the Pali Canon

While these narratives might not represent a crystal clear glimpse into the past, they do represent a seemingly cohesive understanding concerning the Pali Canon's view of the urban space.

Clearly, in the case of Buddhist cities, the narratives in the Pali Canon offer urban space that falls somewhere in between Ramanujan's understanding of the open heterogenetic and the closed orthogenetic city. These cities are often closed, in the sense of being clearly delineated from the outside by a wall, with gates to control access. This is most clearly seen in the narrative of Kusāvati, but is also present in the Pāṭaliputra prophecy. They are orthogenetic in the sense that they represent a singular, unified order, however, that order is less rigid than that of Ramanujan's Ayodhyā. Rājagṛha is more heterogenetic than either Kusāvati or Pāṭaliputra. It is riddled with dissent. The urban centers were, to the Buddhists of the Pali Canon, central places of power, both material and supernatural.

The orthogenetic nature of Kusāvati and Pāṭaliputra is, in both cases, tempered in some way or another. In the case of Kusāvati, at the end of his life, king Mahā-Sudassana is urged to relinquish his 84,000 cities, and not to cling to life suggesting a dissolution of the kingdom and the bounded city at its ideological center. In the case of Pāṭaliputra, its orthogenetic character is compromised by the shadow of dissent that lurks

in the prophecy of the Buddha. These characteristics of the city described in the Pali Canon suggest that Buddhist understandings of the city and its significance were somewhat different from those that informed the authors of the Rāmāyana and the *Cilappatikāram*—the narratives that Ramanujan analyzed. There is some fluidity in the Pali Canon’s imaging of cities that points towards a certain amount of negotiation with plurality and reality. Bailey and Mabbett suggest that Buddhism “throve on the ideological integration of a culturally diverse fragmented society subject to political and economic expansion” (2003, 262). This is perhaps reflected in the image of the city in the Pali Canon, which while highlighting some aspects of the orthogenetic city, seems to depict an urban setting that is not a closed one.

## Conclusion

Ideologically, the city was clearly important to the early Buddhist community that authored the Pali Canon. While Gregory Schopen argues effectively for rethinking the meaning of the prevalence of references to urban centers as the setting of the canonical literature, the centrality of urban centers in major narratives suggests an importance that transcends simple editorial practice.

Historically, there is little hope in really uncovering exactly what these early cities were like. Literary references, while dates of composition may be early, are not written down or codified until much later. The Pali Canon, at the earliest, dates to the Mauryan period (third century BCE). Sarao argues an early date for the Canon, and suggest that even later additions contain reliable historical facts. This seems unlikely, and Bailey and Mabbett's suggestion that the Canon dates to the Mauryan period is a more acceptable notion.

Despite the problems of using literary sources to reconstruct history, scholars like Ramanujan and Chattopadhyaya offer some hope of recovering some useful information from them. Their use of these sources to find the "image" of the city, as it appeared to the authors, proves useful in this thesis in uncovering early Buddhist understandings of urban space.

Archaeology helps in determining the hierarchy of cities which appear in the Pali Canon. Archaeology is also central in making the important links between historically fortified sites and the ideological importance attached to these sites in literature. It is useful also to unravel the previously tangled relationship between archaeology and

literature, for example the British drive to find “authentic” Buddhist sites, and to avoid any similar methodological mis-steps.

Early Buddhist descriptions of urban centers seem to point towards an orthogenetic model, where the city seems to perpetuate an established order, as both Pāṭaliputra and the ideal Kusāvātī represent an ordered system. Still, the city of Rājagṛha seems to fit the heterogenetic model more closely, where a city represents a conflict with or movement beyond an[d] established order, and it too is an important site for the early Buddhists. Indeed, the orthogenetic nature of both Pāṭaliputra and the Kusāvātī are undermined in important ways. Nevertheless, both cities are clearly marked as “Buddhist”, either by the Buddha’s permanent mark on the geography of the city, as in Pāṭaliputra, or by the Buddha’s presence as king in the ideal city of Kusāvātī. That the orthogenetic/heterogenetic model does not fit as closely as it does for Ayodhyā and Pukār points to the fact that the early Buddhist city was differently imagined than those of the Rāmāyana and the *Cilappatikāram*. This suggests that the assertion made by Bailey and Mabbett that early Buddhism was a flexible, adaptive religion, in a fragmented but growing socio-economic milieu are reflected in the Buddhist imaging of the city in the Pali Canon.

Ultimately, the image of the city in the Pali Canon suggests that urban space was important to the early Buddhist communities. The prominence of the orthogenetic city, centered on a royal figure, undermines Gokhale’s idea that the merchant class is given priority as patrons of Early Buddhism. While merchants do appear in the Pali Canon, the major narratives concerning cities focus on royal elements, such as the monumental fortifications of Pāṭaliputra, and the rich palace and ramparts of Kusāvātī. Even in the

case of Rājagṛha, the least orthogenetic of the three cities, the conflict between the king and the prince mirrors that between the Buddha and Devadatta. Royalty is central to these narratives. In the sense that urban space is the center of royal power, Gokhale's assertion that Buddhism is an "urban religion" is not wrong. His statistical analysis, favouring urban space over rural areas is somewhat weakened by Schopen's discussion of redaction. Gombrich's view of Buddhism as an "urban religion" is also largely unsubstantiated by the narratives concerning urban space, as they do not furnish any evidence of Buddhism suiting the spiritual needs of the city any better than other systems. Nor do these narratives point in any substantial way to an increase in individualism. On the whole, they point instead to a model of a state with central power and a powerful king at the head. In some ways, the individual needs are addressed, as in Rājagṛha, where people are represented as free to choose between the Buddha and Devadatta, or in Kusāvātī, where drunkards and gamblers have a place in the city, but overall, it is the king and his monuments that dominate the urban landscape of the Pali Canon. Gokhale and Gombrich's points are not without value, and other parts of the Pali Canon support their claims. But in the case of the three substantial narratives dealing with cities, kings, not bankers, or merchants, or other individuals, take a clear precedence.

Whether or not Buddhism is in fact an "urban religion" is not entirely proven or disproven in this analysis of narratives involving urban space. The narratives of Pāṭaliputra, Rājagṛha and Kusāvātī suggest that early Buddhism certainly had strong ties to the urban environment, and symbolically, the city remains a very important image to the early Buddhist community.



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