

Mahajanapada States of Early Historic India

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I. Introduction

Chronology

The “sixteen Mahajanapadas” (maha = great; janapadas = settlements/ principalities) or the sixteen great principalities are explicitly mentioned in the Buddhist literature as being contemporary with the Buddha. They belong to a well-defined time-bracket and constitute a distinct phase of Indian political history. Their appearance coincides with the very beginning of the early historic period in northern India, as opposed to the long protohistoric period which preceded it. Although the chronology is not cast-iron, the beginning of the early historic period must fall somewhere between the eighth and sixth centuries B.C. This was the period that witnessed the emergence of (a) fortified urban settlements, (b) a diagnostic pottery type known as the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW), (c) the two indigenous coin-types known as punch-marked and cast copper coins, and (d) the system of writing in Brahmi – at least on perishable materials, if not on something as durable as potsherds and stone.

Right from the beginning of their recorded appearance, there was a struggle for power among these principalities, and eventually they were succeeded by the pan-Indian power of the Maurya dynasty (c.324 B.C. – c.187 B.C.). It is not clearly known whether they all succumbed at the same time to the Mauryas, or whether some of them continued to survive with a compromised sovereignty within the broader political framework of the Mauryan empire. An element of local freedom is not inconceivable for some of these principalities even under the Mauryas. Some of them, as we shall find later, continued even in the post-Mauryan context. However, any discussion of city-states in the history of ancient India belongs in the period before 300 B.C., and falls into two parts: the Indus civilization and the period of the sixteen Mahajanapadas.

The Possibility of the Existence of City-States in the Indus Civilization

The complexity of the political organization of the

Indus civilization is an issue which has not attracted the attention it deserves. In 1995¹ I argued that, although the idea of a Harappan unitary state covering the whole of the Harappan distribution area was generally accepted by scholars, the existence of multiple political units was a more attractive hypothesis. But for a comparatively short period under the Mauryas, the distribution area of the Indus civilization was never united under one government. Regional divisions of this distribution area are mirrored in names such as Sindhu, Sauvira, Anarta, Kekaya, Madra, Brahmavarta, etc., all attested in texts and inscriptions of the later, Early Historic period. Thus we must envisage the possibility that the multiple regions reflect the existence of as many regional polities. If so, the possibility of the existence of city-states in the Indus civilization is not remote.

In 1998 J.M. Kenoyer reached a similar conclusion: “Due to the long distances between the four major cities, it is highly unlikely that a single ruler ever dominated the entire Indus valley. Each of the largest cities may have been organized as an independent city-state, with different communities competing for control. At times a single charismatic ruler may have ruled the city, but most of the time it was probably controlled by a small group of elites, comprised of merchants, landowners and ritual specialists.”²

I suggest that we take a further step away from the view that the Indus valley constituted a political unit. We do not have to assume that only the four largest Harappan sites were centres of states, and that Harappa, Mohenjodaro, Ganweriwala and Rakhigarhi were the only political units of the Indus civilization. An alternative view is that many, if not all, of the fortified settlements of the period may have been the urban centre of a polity. What has misled scholars into accepting the idea of a Harappan empire is the over-arching cultural uniformity in its distribution area. However, cultural uniformity in India has seldom meant political unity. A millennium later early historic India showed a similar degree of cultural uniformity, but that did not mean that there was a single state. Geographically we consider it improbable that

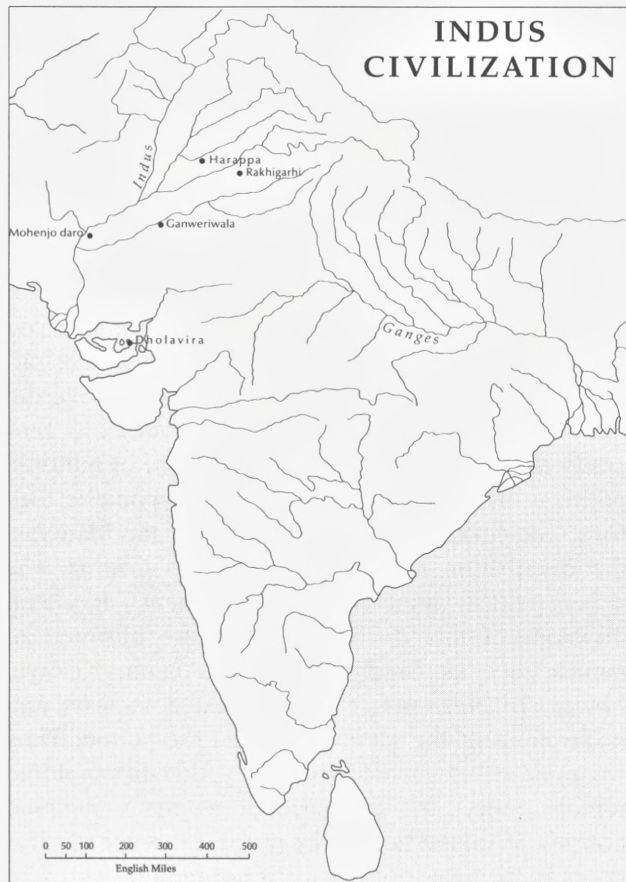


Fig. 1. Map of major cities of the Indus civilization.

the entire Harappan area formed a single political unit. A large number of polities of differently sizes and with different power bases may explain the situation equally well, if not better, and the question of city-states has to be investigated in quite a different context.

There is absolutely no reason to assume that only the large Harappan places that we know about (*viz.*, Mohenjodaro, Harappa, etc.) were the centres of such city-states. To begin with, every single excavated settlement of the mature Harappan period has had a fortification wall. Secondly, size is not a factor in evaluating the extent of urban planning at a Harappan site. For instance, the size of the site of Lothal in Gujarat was much less than that of Mohenjodaro in Sind, but the urban planning of Lothal with its rampart, properly organized road-system with associated house-blocks and drains, dock and warehouse, etc. compares very well with that of Mohenjodaro. Assuming that most, if not all, of the mature Harappan sites were fortified, one can argue that there must have been several hundred such settlements. In Cholistan alone 174

mature Harappan sites have been reported. Their individual hinterlands were certainly unevenly sized.

The element of uneven size should not cause a problem, and to justify our premise we may offer a modern analogy. The Kathiawar peninsulas of Gujarat have a large number of mature Harappan sites, and each of them, when excavated, has been found to be fortified. There were also 189 princely States in this region in the 20th century, "of which seventeen are 'Salute' States³ and the rest range in extent from considerable tracts of the country, with chiefs enjoying great executive freedom, to clusters of villages which are States only by name" (Murray [1929] 232). We can draw up a partial list of their names and sizes:

Rajpipla – 3930 km ²	Dhrangadhra – 3023 km ²
Chota Udaipur – area very small	Limdi – 889 km ²
Cambay – 906 km ²	Palltana – 746 km ²
Palanpur – 4575 km ²	Bhaunagar – 7409 km ²
Cutch – 19730 km ²	Junagarth – 8645 km ²
Wadhan – 630 km ²	Porbandar – 1663 km ²

If the ancient political units were as numerous and if each consisted of a fortified settlement with its immediate hinterland, then the majority of them may have been city-states and the whole region may have been a city-state culture. We leave it to future research to judge the issue.

II. A Textual Perspective of the Mahajanapada States Sources

The nature of the relevant literary sources is best understood by referring to the scholarly discussions of one of these principalities, Kamboja, for instance. Kamboja was one of the sixteen states under consideration, and the following synopsis highlights how B.C. Law ([1943] 1-8) discussed the available historical knowledge about it.

Earliest reference as a group of people in the Vedic literature (*Vamsa Brahmana* of the *Samaveda*) – the first post-Vedic mention in Yaska's *Nirukta* – reference also in Panini's *Astadhyayi* – the epics *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* – Kautilya's *Arthasastra* – the *Puranas* – later Sanskrit literature including the *Kavya* or poetic literature – both early and later Buddhist and Jaina literature – also, some early and late inscriptions.

The references to Kamboja thus lie scattered over a wide range of the ancient Indian textual material, and with some variations in emphasis, which are only to be expected, this is true of all the other principalities too. All these principalities constitute some stable geo-political units of ancient Indian history, and whatever uncertainties there may be about the date of composition of these texts, there is no uncertainty about the actual historical existence of these units.

Among the sources for the history of the principalities during the period in question, i.e. between the 8th/6th centuries and the 3rd century B.C., the pride of place goes to the early Buddhist sources which are complemented both by Late Vedic and Jaina literature. There is no reason to believe that the Late Vedic literature reflects the history of a single time-frame (c.800-c.600 B.C.), as has been supposed, but the general consensus is that it is earlier than the early Buddhist literature. Considering that the Buddha and Mahavira were contemporaries, the Late Vedic literature is also earlier than the early stratum of Jaina literature and there does not seem to be a major time-gap either between the early Buddhist and early Jaina literatures.

The generally accepted chronological bracket of the early Buddhist literature is c.600-c.200 B.C. This is a fair estimate, because several edicts of Asoka presuppose the existence of at least some of these texts. One may surmise that, when this literature refers to the political, social and economic background to the life of the Buddha, it refers to specific historical realities. The dates of the birth and death of the Buddha himself are not on a particularly secure footing, but one of the specific arguments is that the version of Asoka's Minor Rock Edict I (which is known from Ahraura near Varanasi) states that the edict was issued 256 years (not 256 nights, as previously supposed) after the Great Decease or *Parinirvana* of the Buddha. Assuming that the edict in question was issued during or after the 37th year of the coronation of Asoka and that his coronation took place in 264 B.C., three years after he ascended the throne, one gets the date 483 B.C. for the death of the Buddha⁴ who is unanimously supposed to have lived for 80 years. It follows that the lifetime of the Buddha falls mostly in the 6th century B.C. Mahavira, whose traditional date is 599-527 B.C., was thus an older contemporary of the Buddha.

At this point it must be stressed that the history of the Mahajanapada states of early historic India is known primarily from the texts. However, there are other categories of evidence too. (a) Certain coin-types have been associated with these states, and even after the pristine stage of these states was over, there

are many issues of what have been called "tribal" or republican coins, dating from the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C. and later. (b) Certain inscriptions, especially a few edicts of Asoka, refer to several groups of people and their territories located both inside and outside the borders of his empire. (c) Field archaeology also plays a role. The major urban sites associated with the Mahajanapada states have been identified, excavated or otherwise investigated throughout the length and breadth of the subcontinent. To construct a reliable picture of state formation in early historic India one must study the textual, numismatic and epigraphical data in the context of recent archaeological research.

A Geographical and Historical Outline⁵

There are two lists both of which record sixteen named principalities: the Buddhist *Anguttaranikaya* and the Jaina *Bhagavatisutta*. The existence of only nine states can be gleaned from the Late Vedic literature. If one goes beyond these three sources and looks for the total number of references to different groups of people and their states in early historic

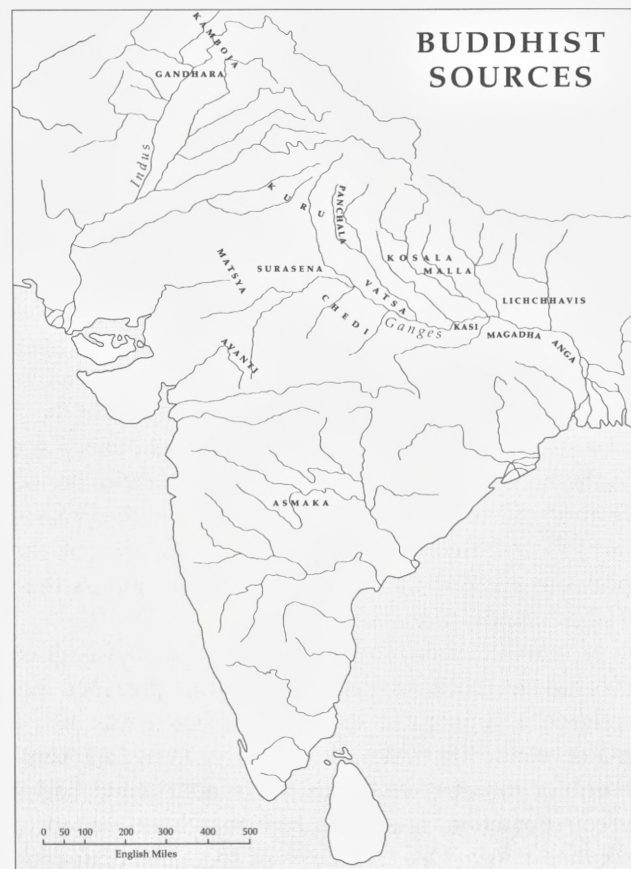


Fig. 2. Map of the political units mentioned in Buddhist sources (after Raychaudhuri [1996]).

India, as B.C. Law (1943) does in his *Tribes in Ancient India*, one arrives at a figure of altogether 75 “tribes”, each with a specific territory, although it has not been possible to identify all these territories with certainty. Some of the tribal principalities studied by Law may have emerged later than the sixteen major principalities, but even so, the process of their formation is likely to have begun before the advent of the Mauryas. For the sake of clarity I shall begin here with the Buddhist list of sixteen states. The next step is to show the extent to which the Jaina list is different from the Buddhist list, and how both the Buddhist and Jaina lists compare with the list deduced from the Late Vedic literature. Finally, on the basis of Law’s list of 75 tribal principalities, I shall investigate to what extent the small principalities in early historic India can be interpreted as city-states or city-state cultures.

Buddhist Literature

Most of the sixteen states that are mentioned in the Buddhist sources are related in various ways to the life of the Buddha. These states are:

Kasi	Vajji/Vriji	Kuru	Assaka/Asmaka
Kosala	Malla	Panchala	Avanti
Anga	Chedi/ Chetiya	Machchha/ Matsya	Gandhara
Magadha	Vamsa/ Vatsa	Surasena	Kamboja

The Buddhist sources unanimously ascribe a pre-eminent position to Kasi, which is identified with modern Kasi on the left bank of the Ganges and which lies between the two minor streams Varuna and Asi. Varanasi, the name of the capital (the British-Indian version is Benares) is derived from the names of these two streams. The pre-eminence of Varanasi as a place in the history of Indian culture spans the entire period from its mention in the Vedic literature to the present day. In the Buddhist *Jatakas* alone (stories of the previous lives of the Buddha) there are no less than 712 references to this city.

It was no doubt an important centre of Buddhist pilgrimage, because the Buddha first preached his religion at Sarnath in its outskirts; but it was also a major centre of trade and industry, including ship-building industry. Its cloth and sandal wood had a great reputation, and from here merchants sailed to southeast Asia. One also hears of specialist craftsmen within the city. For instance, there is a reference to “the ivory-workers’ street”. There are references to

villages outside its four gates, and the quarters of carpenters, hunters and potters are mentioned. The city itself had multi-storeyed palaces, rampart wall, gates, towers, moats and battlements. The king who is frequently mentioned is Brahmadata, who lived in a palace with at least two storeys and possessed many vehicles and large territories. It has been inferred that the principality of Kasi was at one time stronger than many of its neighbours, including Kosala which later annexed it.

Kosala had two capital cities, Saketa/Ayodhya and Sravasti, Ayodhya being the earlier of the two. The Brahmanical sources including the *Puranas* are full of references to the political importance of the rulers of Kosala, especially the ones at Ayodhya. Because of its association with the Buddha, Sravasti figures more in the Buddhist sources. Both these places have been satisfactorily identified, Ayodhya with a place of the same name on the right bank of the Sarayu and Sravasti with modern Sahet-Mahet on the bank of a dried-up course of the Rapti. The Buddha spent some time of his life at the Jetavana monastery of Sravasti. Kosala was regularly competing with Magadha for political supremacy.

Anga lay to the east of Magadha and its capital city was Champa, which has been identified with Nathnagar in the northern outskirts of modern Bhagalpur. It was considered one of the six great cities of India during the time of the Buddha, the other five being Rajagriha, Sravasti, Saketa, Kausambi and Varanasi. It used to trade with southeast Asia. Anga was opposed to Magadha, to which it eventually lost its sovereignty.

The first Magadhan capital was Rajagriha, a city which was surrounded by a range of hills, itself fortified by a dry-masonry stone wall. The Buddha was friendly with the Magadhan king Bimbisara and his son Ajatasatru who built the nucleus of the second Magadhan capital Pataliputra. In Rajagriha the Buddha used to stay at the monastery built for him in the mango-grove of Jivaka, a famous physician of his time. The Magadhan dynasties till the Nandas and their successor, the Mauryas, are well-known in the texts. The kings were successful in extending their political base at the expense of the Vajjis of north Bihar, Anga of east Bihar, and Kasi and Kosala of eastern Uttar Pradesh.

The Vajjis had their capital at Vaisali, which has now given its name to a district but is otherwise a prominent archaeological site. The Vajjis had a number of confederate clans and owe most of their fame to their republican form of government. It has been dis-

cussed by various scholars (Sharma [1968]) and its focal point was the annual elections which took place at the meeting of the General Assembly held during the Spring Festival. Another reason for Vaisali's fame was its chief courtesan Amrapali, who seems to have outshone the contemporary courtesans of the other principalities. The Lichchhavis competed with Magadha for political supremacy and the two states were often at war with one another.

The territory of the Mallas was centred around their capital Kusinara, where the Buddha died. There was also a subsidiary town called Pava which has not yet been satisfactorily identified but should be one of the major mounds lying between Kusinara and the Gandak. Kusinara is modern Kasia in the Padrauna-Deoria area of eastern Uttar Pradesh. The Malla territory was absorbed by Magadha.

The ancient Chedi territory was roughly the modern Banda-Rewa area in eastern Bundelkhand. According to the Buddhist literature its capital was Sotthivati Nagara which still remains unidentified.

The capital of the Vatsa territory was Kausambi where the Buddha spent his days at the monastery named *Ghositarāma*. Its ruins are spread over two modern villages which still have an echo of the old name Kausambi, Kosam. The most famous king of the Vatsa kingdom was Udayana, who ran away with Vasavadatta, the daughter of the king of Avanti, which lay centred in Malwa with Ujjayini as its capital.

The Kuru territory was centred on the modern Kurukshetra-Delhi-Meerat area of Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh. It had two capitals, Hastinapura (identified with a village of the same name in Meerat district) and Indraprastha (the "Purana Qila" area of modern Delhi, which used to be known under a name which was plainly derived from Indraprastha).

Ancient Panchala is roughly central Doab and Rohilkhand, with its principal city at Ahichchhatra near Bareilly. Another major city was Kampilya.

The Matsya territory included the Alwar area of eastern Rajasthan with its capital at Biratanagara or modern Bairat. The centre of the Surasena territory was Mathura.

The Assaka/Asmaka territory lay in the upper Godavari valley and its capital was Potana/Podana, which has been identified with Paithan near Aurangabad.

The Avanti territory, as already noted, lay in Malwa and had Ujjayini (modern Ujjain) as its capital.

Both Gandhara and Kamboja were in the northwest. The core of Gandhara was modern Peshawar plain and the area to its northeast, whereas in the later periods it apparently included the Potwar plateau with

Taxila as its capital. The first capital was modern Charsadda or ancient Pushkalavati, and the third capital was Purushapura or modern Peshawar.

The location of the 16th principality, Kamboja, is still uncertain and possibly comprised a part of Afghanistan to the northeast of Kabul. According to one source, its capital was Rajapura, which apparently has not yet been properly identified.

Jaina Literature

The number of states mentioned is still sixteen, but some of their names and geographical distributions are different (here italicized). Contrary to what has been supposed, however, this does not necessarily mean that the Jaina list is later than the Buddhist list cited above.

Anga	Malava	<i>Ladha</i>	Kasi
<i>Vanga</i>	Achchha	<i>Padha</i>	Kosala
Magadha	Vachchha/Vatsa	Vajji	<i>Avaha</i>
<i>Malaya</i>	<i>Kochchha</i>	Malla	<i>Sambhuttara</i>

Among the new names mentioned, there is no confusion about *Vanga*. Basically, it should be the Bengal coast or the Ganges delta to the east of the old course of the Bhagirathi south of Calcutta. *Malaya* may stand for a region in south India, probably Kerala. *Malava* is possibly Malwa in central India, and if so, identical with Avanti. *Achchha* is problematic but might be Assaka/Asmaka of the Buddhist list. *Kochchha* is probably Kachchha or Kutch peninsula, whereas *Ladha* can mean either Lata (Gujarat, possibly mainland Gujarat and north Konkan) or Radha (a section of western West Bengal). *Padha* is not clearly identified but is taken to be identical with Pundra (mostly northern Bangladesh). *Avaha* is not identified either, and *Sambhuttara* may stand for *Suhmmottara*, which may mean the Tamruk region of West Bengal.

Late Vedic Evidence

The evidence of nine major states can be gleaned from the Late Vedic literature, which by general consensus is pre-Buddhist.

Gandhara	Usinara	Panchala
Kekaya	Matsya	Kasi
Madra	Kuru	Kosala

This list includes three new names: Kekaya, Madra and Usinara. Kekaya is located between the Jhelam

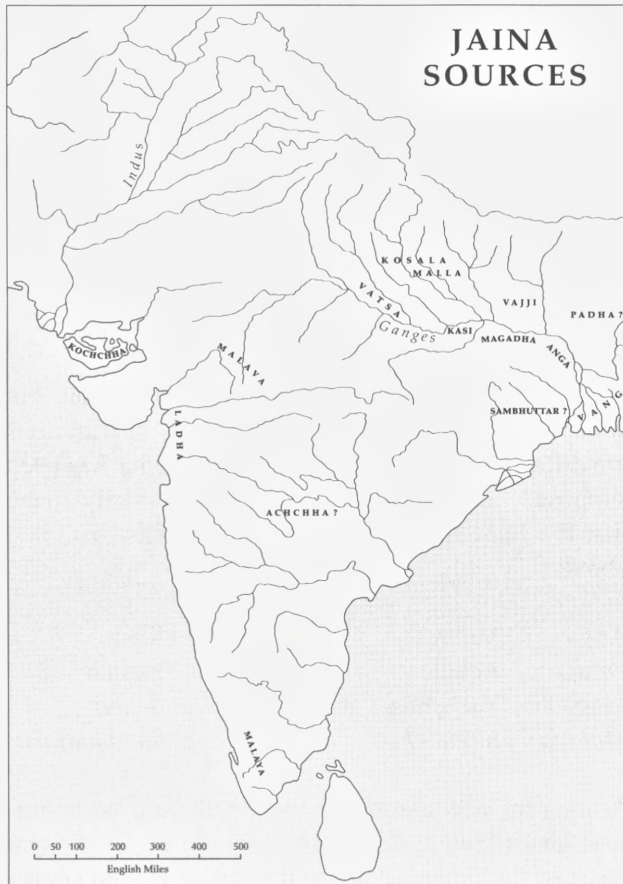


Fig. 3. Map of the political units mentioned in Jaina sources (after Raychaudhuri [1996]).

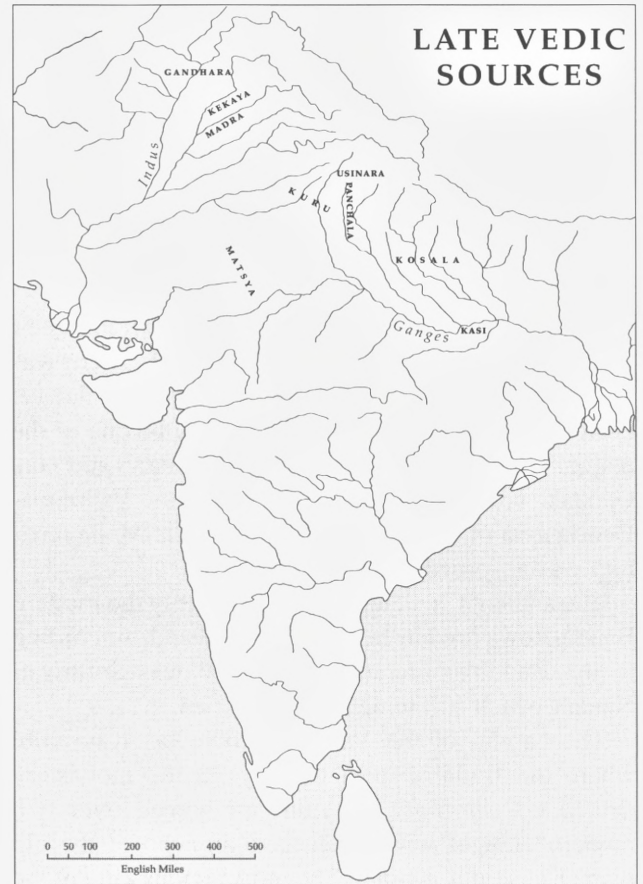


Fig. 4. Map of the political units mentioned in Late Vedic sources (after Raychaudhuri [1996]).

and the Chenab in western Panjab, whereas Madra is located between the Chenab and the Ravi. Usinara country is located around modern Hardwar, the place where the Ganges comes down to the plain.

Raychaudhuri points out that *Dakshinapada* or “principalities of the south” occurs in the Vedic literature. The trans-Vindhyan states which are mentioned in early literature are Vidarbha or modern Berar (centred in modern Nagpur), Kalinga (generally southwest Orissa), Bhoja (a part of Berar, and possibly a part of Koraput and Bastar), Savara (a part of the Deccan), Pulinda (a part of Bundelkhand?), Mutiba (modern Hyderabad?), etc.

Tribes in Ancient India⁶

In his list of 75 tribes in ancient India, Law (1943) demonstrates that the territorial units which were traditionally associated with particular groups of people (“tribes” in Law’s sense) need not be limited only to the Buddhist or Jaina versions of “sixteen principalities” mentioned earlier and may, in fact, cover the

length and breadth of the subcontinent with many more names. We do not know for certain that all of these 75 names emerged during our chosen time-period – i.e. between c. 800/600 B.C. and 200 B.C. Many of them may have emerged after ca. 200 B.C., and it must be kept in mind that the list of 75 names can be further expanded by a more detailed examination of the relevant texts. However, this greatly expanded list denotes that, traditionally at least, all these principalities were parts of the ancient Indian political configuration.

Kamboja	already mentioned
Gandhara	—
Kuru	—
Panchala	—
Surasena	—
Chedi	—
Madra	—
Malava	—
Salva	near Kurukshetra (epic tradition); western India (“Purana” tradition)
Usinara	already mentioned

Vahlika	Balkh area of Afghanistan	Buli, etc.	northern Bihar and U.P.
Trigarta	Kangra area of Himachal Pradesh	Lichchhavi	north Bihar
Yaudheya	along the Sutlej? around Multan?	Utkala/Udra	Orissa
Kekaya	already mentioned	Avanti	already mentioned
Abhira	western India, inclusive of Rajasthan?	Sindhu-Sauvira	Sindh
Sibi	western Panjab? Rajasthan?	Surashtra	Saurashtra peninsula, Gujarat
Darada	modern Dardistan, north of Kashmir	Sudra	northwestern India
Karusa	modern Rewa area	Lata	already mentioned
Kuluta	Kulu in Himachal Pradesh	Surparaka	modern Sopar area, north of Bombay
Kulinda	western Panjab	Audumbara	Kangra region, Himachal Pradesh
Barbara	Indus delta	Kaka, etc.	Central India? Rajasthan? Gujarat?
Murunda	no unanimity of opinion, but east India?	Matsya	already mentioned
Arjunayana and Prarjuna	Bharatpur area of Rajasthan?	Ramatha	Himachal Pradesh?
Ambastha	originally in Panjab	Parada	the northwest
Nisada	Central India and the Vindhya	Bhoja	already mentioned
Nisadha	Berar?	Mekala	eastern part of central India
Kasi	already mentioned	Dasarna	central India
Kosala	—	Pariyatra	central India
Vatsa	—		
Vatadhana, etc.	northwest subcontinent		
Yona	originally Afghanistan and northwestern subcontinent		
Kalinga	already mentioned		
Andhra	Godavari-Krishna valley		
Damila/Tamil	Tamil Nadu		
Savara	already mentioned		
Mutiba	—		
Pulinda	Deccan?		
Kuntala	central India? Deccan?		
Rashtrika	Deccan?		
Nasikya	—		
Asmaka	already mentioned		
Mulaka	Malwa? Deccan?		
Chola	Kaveri delta		
Pandya	Madurai area		
Chera	Kerala		
Magadha	already mentioned		
Videha	north Bihar		
Jnatrika	Vaisali area, north Bihar		
Sakya	Lumbini-Kapilavastu area		
Malla	already mentioned		
Vanga	—		
Gauda	northern part of western West Bengal		
Suhma	already mentioned		
Pundra	—		
Kirata	Nepal		
Pragjyotisha	Gauhati area, Assam		

Some of the regions mentioned above are attested in early sources as territories of individual states. The southern states of Chola, Chera and Pandya figure foremost in this category. In eastern India Pundra and Gauda, both with early literary allusions, should belong to this group. However, it must be borne in mind that the available literary sources on the earliest phase of state-formation and states in early historic India are not always consistent, and even when these sources refer to specific political events in their history, they are in many cases legendary or mythical. The very fact that such information runs through a very wide spectrum of ancient Indian textual genre, however, compels us to accept the notion that there was indeed a pristine phase of urbanized states in early historic India. The names and identifications listed above may also have made it clear that satisfactory identifications have not been obtained in all cases. In some cases scholars assume that the tribe in question lived first in one area and then moved to another one. There is, however, no confusion regarding the identification and location of the sixteen major states mentioned in the Buddhist literature.

The Evidence of the Historians Accompanying Alexander in Northwest India⁷

This evidence is important because it testifies to the political organization of the North West Frontier, Punjab and Sind before Alexander came to India in 327 B.C. According to the modern historians who

have analysed the evidence, there were about 28 political units in this region during this period. These units were well distributed in the hill valleys to the north-east of Peshawar, Peshawar plain and Potwar plateau, Panjab and Sind up to the Indus delta. The list is the following:

In the hill valleys to the northeast of Peshawar:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Aspasian territory | Alishang-Kunar-Bajaur valley |
| 2. the country of the Guraeans | Panjkhora river valley |
| 3. the kingdom of Assakenos | Part of Swat and Buner |
| 4. Nysa (republic) | Lower Swat |

Peshawar Plain

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------|
| 5. Peukelaotis (Pushkalavati) | modern Charsadda |
|-------------------------------|------------------|

Potwar Plateau

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------|
| 6. Taxila (Takshasila) | near Rawalpindi |
| 7. the kingdom of Arsakes | Hazara district |
| 8. the kingdom of Abhisara | hills above Taxila |

Punjab

- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 9. the kingdom of Elder Poros | the Jhelam-Chenab Doab |
| 10. the kingdom of Glauganikai | to the west of the Chenab |
| 11. the kingdom of Gandaris | the Chenab-Ravi or Rechna Doab |
| 12. the kingdom of Adraistai | the Bari Doab |
| 13. the kingdom of Kathaioi | also the Bari Doab |
| 14. the kingdom of Sophytes | along the Jhelam |
| 15. the kingdom of Phegelas | the Bari Doab |
| 16. the kingdom of Siboi | Lower Rechna Doab |
| 17. the kingdom of Agalassoii | in the Siboi area |
| 18. the kingdom of Oxydrakai | below the Jhelam-Chenab junction |
| 19. the kingdom of Malloi | right bank of the lower Ravi |
| 20. the kingdom of Abastanoi | below the Malloi country |
| 21. the kingdom of Xathroi | the Chenab-Ravi-Indus junction |
| 22. the kingdom of Ossadioi | same as above |

Sind

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| 23. the kingdom of Sodrai | Northern Sind |
| 24. the kingdom of Massanoi | same as above |
| 25. the kingdom of Mousikanos | Sukkur area of Sind |
| 26. the kingdom of Oxykanos | Larkana area of Sind |
| 27. the kingdom of Sambos | Sehwan area of Sind? |
| 28. the kingdom of Patalene | Indus delta |
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A Synopsis of the Textual Evidence for Economic and Politic Structures

In the Buddhist texts Varanasi is described as a city with walls and gates, ruled by a powerful king and inhabited by prosperous merchants and artisans. With

variations this description may apply to the other mahajanapada cities as well. The economy of the early historic period was characterized by prosperous agriculture, a system of peasant ownership, well-developed and well-organized crafts, and with local as well as long-distance trade conducted along an integrated network of routes.

Politically, monarchy was the dominant form of government by this time. The *Gana* or republican tradition was found in the states of the Vajjis, Mallas, Sakyas, Koliyas, and a few other lesser-known communities in the eastern U.P. – north Bihar belt.⁸ The Vajjis are the best documented case. Above a large general assembly was a small council headed by a chief. Both the chief and the eight members of the small council were elected by the 7707 members of the larger assembly, which was possibly attended by the eldest sons of the families of the Vajji clan, each son representing his family. The voting procedures were laid down step by step, and there was also a formality of consecrating the elected councillors by a ritual bath. In north Bihar and its adjoining area there were other republican clans like the Videhas, Nayas, Mallas, Sakyas, Koliyas, etc. It also appears that during this time the Videhas and the Sakyas had already developed monarchical institutions. Among the lesser-known republics one finds the names of the Moriyas of Pippalivana (near Kusinara), the Bulis of Allakappa (also in the Kasia/Gorakhpur area), the Bhaggas of Sumsumaragiri (in the Allahabasd-Kausambi belt) and the Kalamas of Kesaputta (somewhere in the Kosalan territory).

Among the sixteen major states of this period, only one – the Vajji state – was republican. Monarchy had already become a strongly entrenched political institution by this time. Of the 28 states mentioned by historians accompanying Alexander, most had a monarchy. The Sibois reputedly dressed in animal skins and wielded clubs. The Oxydrakai (Sanskrit Kshudraka) were the most warlike of them all. The Oxydrakai and the Malloi had a large army. The Abastanoi had a democratic government and a large army. The small state of Nysa had a similar form of government. In the kingdom of Patalene, leadership in war was vested in two hereditary kings of different families, but the state as a whole was ruled with paramount authority by a council of elders.

III. The Numismatic Evidence

Punch-marked silver coins have been found in their thousands all over the subcontinent, more in hoards

and less in stratified contexts. They occur right from the very beginning of the Indian early historic sequence. These coins belong to three chronological groups: pre-Mauryan, Mauryan or Imperial Magadhan, and post-Mauryan. It is the first group which is mainly considered here, with a brief reference to the post-Mauryan “tribal” coins.

In a detailed recent study D.Rajgor (1998) has argued that no less than seventeen Janapadas “issued their coins from about the 6th century B.C. to the rise of the Mauryas”. These Janapadas are *Andhra*, *Vanga*, *Magadha*, *Surashtra*, *Asmaka*, *Kuntala*, *Sakya*, *Gandhara*, *Kalinga*, *Kosala*, *Kuru*, *Malla*, *Panchala*, *Surasena* and *Vatsa*. Those italicized belong to the Buddhist literary list of sixteen Mahajanapadas. Rajgor (1998) has illustrated what he calls the “state symbols” of the Janapada coins studied by him (Fig. 5), and following him, we may offer a brief survey of these coins and their postulated dates. These are all punch-marked coins, and are, unless otherwise stated, of silver.

Andhra Janapada (c. 500-350 B.C.) silver punch-marked coins weighing between 1.5 g and 1.8 g, conforming to the weight standard of the indigenous coin-type known as “half Karshapana”. Their sizes are 14 to 17 mm by 28 mm. Punched symbols occur on only one surface, and the only recurring symbol in the series is an elephant with minor variations. Smaller denomination coins are also known.

Vanga Janapada (c. 550-500 B.C.) coins are known in three denominations: Karshapana, half-Karshapana and quarter-Karshapana. The Karshapana coins of *Vanga* weigh between 2.8 g and 3.5 g. The identifying symbol of *Vanga* seems to be a boat.

Magadha Janapada (c. 600 - c. 410 B.C.) coins included denominations higher than the Karshapana type, some of them weighing between 5.2 g and 6 g. The distinguishing symbols are “sun” and a six-armed symbol.

Surashtra Janapada (c. 450 - c. 300 B.C.) coins are found in the Junagadh area of the Saurashtra peninsula and weigh about a gramme each. The symbols include variations of an elephant shown in association with other symbols.

Avanti Janapada (c. 500 - c. 400 B.C.) Karshapana coins weigh about 3.6 g each and bear elephant symbol in combination with two other symbols.

Asmaka Janapada (c. 500 - c. 350 B.C.) coins weigh between 1.3g and 1.7 g and their symbols include an elephant and a tree.

Kuntala Janapada of the Konkan coast of western

India has coins both in silver and copper, with their highest denomination weighing between 6.3 g and 7.5 g. Their symbols include a scorpion.

Sakya Janapada coins come from the Lumbini region of Nepal, weigh between 7 g and 7.2 g and bear a “hut” sign placed with other motifs.

Gandhara Janapada (c. 600 - c. 300 B.C.) has three categories of coins: bent-bar and single-symbol coins and coins with animal motifs. A six-armed symbol seems to be the commonest Gandhara coin motif.

Kalinga Janapada (c. 500 and c. 260 B.C.) coins are “half-Karshapana” type and show a symbol made of a combination of different motifs.

Kasi Janapada (c. 600 - c. 465 B.C.) has several coin-types, including a large and thick issue showing a disc-shaped symbol.

Kosala Janapada (c. 525 - c. 465 B.C.) coins are also multidenominational and their main symbol is a combination of different motifs.

Kuru Janapada (c. 400 - c. 350 B.C.) coin symbols include a fish with dots, a bull, and an elephant with a rider.

Malla Janapada coins show a weight range between 6.8 g to 2.5 g and carry a distinct symbol composed of several motifs.

Panchala Janapada coins are found in three denominations – half-Karshapana, quarter-Karshapana and Mashaka – with a large central symbol composed of different motifs.

Surasena Janapada coins are in two denominations – half-Karshapana and Mashaka – with a large composite symbol showing a lion and a fish.

Vatsa Janapada coins conform to the Karshapana type and show a four-symbol pattern.

As more detailed studies are undertaken of the provenances and symbols of hundreds of thousands of punch-marked coins in different parts of the subcontinent, one hopes that more “Janapada coin types” will be isolated. In fact, such coin types are about the surest indications of the fact that there were Janapada states long before the formation of the Mauryan empire. Even the second major type of early coins (c. 600 - c. 200 B.C.), i.e. uninscribed cast copper coins, could have had various local issues, denoting the existence of local powers before their incorporation in the Mauryan empire.

Between the fall of the Mauryan empire in the beginning of the 2nd century B.C. and the rise of the Gupta dynasty of Magadha in about the middle of the 4th century A.D. there were a large number of locally



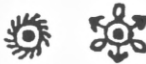








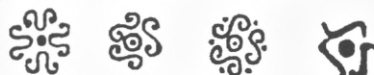





State Symbols	Janapada
	Andhra
	Vaṅga
	Magadha
	Surāshtra
	Avanti
	Asmaka
	Kuntala
	Shākya
	Gandhāra
	Kalinga
	Kāshi
	Kosala
	Kuru
	Malla
	Pañchāla
	Shurasena
	Vatsa

Fig. 5. State symbols on some Janapada coins (after Rajgor [1998])

issued coins in north India, generally in Panjab, north-eastern and eastern Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. They were issued by both monarchical states and tribal republics. More interestingly, there were some “city issues” and “guild issues”. The local coins were mostly of copper, round in shape, both inscribed and uninscribed, and carried symbols which were executed at the same time by either dies or moulds.

“The legends on the local coins show that these were issued by authorities of different types. Majority of their issuers were persons having no royal titles whatever. A few names are accompanied by royal title, and rarely by one or two epithets... Most of the issuers, however, were petty local chieftains. Some issuers of coins display their pride in their tribal affiliation. The Audumbaras and allied tribal chiefs ... adopt royal titles, but their legends also mention their respective tribes. The legends on a few coins also show that they were issued in the name of the *ganas* and *janapadas*. The legends on the coins of the Arjunayanas, the Uddehikas, the Malavas, the Yaudheyas and others prove that they were issued in the names of the different *ganas* or republican clans. Similarly the coins of the Sibis, the Trigartas, the Vrishnis and the Rajanyas bear inscriptions showing that they were issued in the respective names of the whole *janapadas*” (Goyal [1995] 131).

The cities which issued coins on their own are Varanasi, Kausambi, Vidisa, Erakina, Bhagila, Kurara, Ujjayini, Tripuri, Mahishmati, Jyesthapura, Tagara, Ayodhya, Pushkalavati, Taxila and Kapisa. The city names occur as legends on such coins. There are also a few other legends of this type but it is not known if they refer to cities or tribes. The city divinities figure on the coins of Pushkalavati, Taxila and Kapisa and are identified clearly by legends. In Taxila there is a specific coin type which is identified by legends as being issued by guilds. These are known as *Naigama* (“of trade guilds”) coins.

The explanation offered for such an immense multiplicity of local coin types is that it was economically important for the local authorities and cities to mint coins of their own in the wake of the collapse of the Mauryan empire.

The tribal/republican and the city and guild coins of this period do not necessarily reflect the existence of city-states in the post-Mauryan period up to the establishment of the Gupta dynasty, but they surely indicate that the pre-Mauryan *Janapada* tradition did not entirely wither away. This apparently merely lay dormant during Mauryan rule over a large part of northern India. Besides, the city and guild issues identify their issuers as still the foci of political and economic activities.

IV. The Evidence of Inscriptions

Compared with the evidence furnished by coins, the epigraphic evidence is much less abundant. However, one has to take cognizance of the mention of a few northern and southern groups of people and principalities in Asoka’s inscriptions. Among the northern people are those of Kamboja and Gandhara. In the deep south there are references to four groups, each having their kingdoms outside his own empire: Chola, Pandya, Satiyaputra and Keralaputra. In the Andhra region the “Andhras” are mentioned as a group. Perhaps in the same general region or elsewhere figure the Palidas (basically unidentified), Bhojas (Berar), Rathikas (Deccan?) and perhaps Petenikas (disputed and unidentified). Similarly, the territory of the Kalingas is mentioned. The importance of this epigraphic testimony is that it provides an independent verification of the terms that we have come across in literature. If we leave aside the Asokan edicts, perhaps the only other major inscription which is of primary importance from the present point of view is the Allahabad edict of Samudragupta of the Gupta dynasty of Magadha in about the middle of the 4th century AD. The tribal states which have been mentioned here and which are said to have paid homage to him are the Malavas, Arjunayanas, Yaudheyas, Madrakas, Abhiras, Prarjunas, Sanakanikas, Kakas and Khara-parikas. Many of these names occur in the texts and on the coins.⁹

V. An Over-View of the Textual, Numismatic and Epigraphic Evidence

The evidence as a whole is both diverse and disjointed. As we have noticed, references are scattered in a wide variety of texts covering a very wide range of Indian history. What is important about these sources is that they are consistent in their mention of different tribal states. There is no contradiction between them regarding this issue. A very extensive range of Sanskrit literature, the early Buddhist and Jaina literature, and even the fragmentary texts of the accounts left by historians accompanying Alexander testify unanimously to a rich tradition of political units associated with specific communities or groups of people in ancient India. Details of their administration can be found only in the Buddhist literature and mostly in the geographical context of north Bihar, where the Vajji confederacy had a republican structure. In other cases the evidence is marginal. It is again the Buddhist literature which throws light on the economic condition of the Mahajanapada states by

talking about their peasants, craftsmen, traders and royal families. If one looks at the evidence as a whole, one is struck not merely by its diversity but also by its internal consistency. Widely separate texts go on mentioning the same names, which are also recorded in whatever epigraphical evidence is available. The impressive array of coin types of different periods ensures that the tradition is not just a chimera, despite its general lack of details about economy and administration. The history of these coin types in terms of pre-Mauryan, Mauryan and post-Mauryan phases is perhaps the surest indication of the fact that the Janapada states had a time-bound history of their own. Samudragupta's Allahabad inscription proves that this history continued at least up to the 4th century A.D.

Our primary concern in this paper is with Mahajanapada states. The literary sources, the Asokan edicts, and the coins all suggest that there was a specific phase of Indian civilization during which the political units were the Mahajanapada states. The problem which will be examined in the rest of the paper is the extent to which field archaeology supports this framework and can shed light on the question whether some of the Mahajanapada states were city-states or a network of city-states, i.e. a city-state culture.

VI. The Evidence of Archaeology

There are three preliminary points. City-sites have generally been identified in the ancient Indian historic context mainly on the presence or absence of fortifications, which is not always a safe guide. Secondly, if there are a number of city-sites in a particular region, it is important to establish their chronological sequence. The early historic urban growth in India has three major chronological phases: around the 6th century B.C., in and around the Maurya period in the 3rd century B.C., and finally, the early centuries A.D. or roughly, the Kushan period. Thirdly, only a handful of sites have been properly excavated, and even in those cases, the data on the early levels are inadequate. The limitations of the currently available data force us to offer only a very sketchy outline¹⁰ in the present context, where the focus is on the evaluation of the premise that some of them might have functioned as the urban centres of city-states.

Kasi figures at the top of the Buddhist list of Janapada states. As early as the 6th century B.C. if not earlier its capital, Varanasi, was a settlement with a massive clay rampart. However, the crucial problem in this and all other similar cases is not the identification

of capital cities but rather how we define the territory of the Janapada in question? How many city-sites can be identified within its territorial limits, and what do we know of their chronology and relationship to the capital?

In the case of Kasi certain inferences can be made. The geographical focus of the modern Kasi region includes the areas of Azamgarh, Ballia, Ghazipur and Jaunpur. Its base-line is the right bank of the Ganges. It had a large hinterland beyond this base, but on the east its natural boundary is the Ghaghra. On the north it probably did not extend beyond Jaunpur and a part of Sultanpur. On the right bank of the Ganga it perhaps included the area between modern Chakia and Mirzapur. Thus, it covered an area of c. 15,000 km², roughly corresponding to the Benares Division of British India,¹¹ a conclusion supported by my own ground survey of the region. In this area there are 6 fortified settlements besides Kasi: one near Jaunpur; Masaon-dih between Banaras and Ghazipur, Bairant in Chaundauli on the right bank of the Ganges, Ahraura on the same bank of the Ganges, Pakka Kot in Balliah and Raja-Nahush-Ka-Tila in Azamgarh. Among the unfortified sites, Khairadih in Azamgarh deserves a special mention. Its ancestry is earlier than the NBPW, and in the early centuries AD it was a well-built township. None of these latter sites, except Khairadih, is excavated, but all of them have yielded NBPW, the diagnostic pottery feature of the beginning of the early historic period in the Ganges plain, but the NBPW also continues up to c. 200 B.C. or the end of the Maurya period. Some, if not all, of these six sites could also have come up only during the Maurya period and served the function of administrative centres of the Mauryan empire. On the other hand, they may date from the 6th century B.C., and if so, they were either the major administrative centres of the Kasi Janapada itself or, perhaps, contemporary city-states which were eventually merged in the kingdom of Kasi. It was a monarchical state, and we cannot rule out the possibility that the strength of the Kasi Janapada reported in the Buddhist literature was based on the incorporation of a number of small neighbouring city-states. We prefer to leave the issue open, but emphasize that it is the archaeological evidence of urban centres which lies behind such a conclusion, and that goes for all the other Mahajanapadas too.

Kosala was a larger Janapada than Kasi. It was based on both banks of the Ghaghra or Sarayu. On the right bank of the Ghaghra, it came up to Pratapgarh and Sultanpur and covered the Lucknow area as well.

On its left bank it had a larger territory, including the whole of the old Bahraich, Gonda and Basti districts and perhaps a part of Gorakhpur. Ayodhya/Saketa and Sravasti were its two successive capital cities. Both of them had huge ramparts, but there seems to be a general lack of other fortified sites in Kosala. In my surveys I have encountered only two – Chardah near Nanpara on the modern Nepal border, and Kopia on the bank of the Ami river in Basti. There seems to be no lack of large unfortified settlements on both sides of the Sarayu. Pratapgarh has at least one such site and Sultanpur several. Basti has sites like Bhuli, Soh-gaura and Setavya. All of them have NBPW, but are all of them as early as the first phase of Ayodhya and Sravasti? Kosala Janapada was a monarchical state which subsequently annexed Kasi. Ayodhya/Saketa is supposed to be its first capital. During this phase its territory was perhaps limited to the region on either bank of the Sarayu. In the second phase, when Sravasti became the capital, its interests must have extended very wide on the left bank of the Sarayu, and the territorial limits that we have outlined for Kosala here possibly belong to this phase when it was certainly too large to be called a city-state. In the third phase of its history, when Sravasti was one of the provincial capitals of the Mauryan empire, its writ certainly ran as far east as the old Sakya territory of Tilaurakot and Kapilavastu.

The capital of Anga Janapada was Champa, modern Nathnagar in the northern outskirts of Bhagalpur on the right bank of the Ganges. It lay spread along this bank of the Ganges between Rajmahal in the south and Kiul/Lakhisarai in the north and included some areas on the left bank as well. As a site Champa towers high above any other site in the entire region, and although the total area involved is not insignificant, it may once have been a city-state, but we have no supporting evidence.

During the time of the Buddha, the capital of Magadha Janapada was Rajagriha. If we leave aside the later capital of Pataliputra, which subsequently became the capital of the Mauryan empire, Rajagriha is the earliest major site in the whole of Gaya and Patna districts, which correspond to the core of Magadha. There is a fortified site – Devanagarh – to the south of Rajagriha, but that is a much smaller place, although fortified. The political landscape of early Magadha was overshadowed by Rajagriha, and its hinterland was too large for a city-state.

Vajji Janapada, or perhaps a conglomeration of republican Janapadas known as the Vajji or Lichchhavi confederacy, had its capital at Vaisali. However,

Vaisali was not the only fortified urban site of north Bihar; there are three more fortified sites and at least two more large, unfortified but presumably urban, sites of this period in north Bihar. The three fortified sites are Naulagarh in Begusarai, Katragarh near Muzaffarpur, and Balirajgarh near Madhubani. The two major unfortified sites are Mangalagarh in Samastipur and Jai Mangalagarh in Begusarai. The 6th century B.C. date is established only for Vaisali; the others yield NBPW and may thus be both contemporary and later. The fortifications of Katragarh and Balirajgarh are supposedly not earlier than the second century B.C. The references in literary sources to the existence of a confederacy of republican states in this part of north Bihar seem to be supported by the archaeological data. There is no evidence, however, that the Vajji Janapada was a system of city-states organized into a confederacy. The confederacy seems to have been composed of clans, not cities; the only other known member was Videha, which was not a city; and the confederacy must have covered an enormous territory.

Malla Janapada's capital was Kusinara in the Gorakhpur region. The territory lay to the west of the Gandak and included, apart from Kusinara, the modern Padrauna and Deoria areas. None of the early sites of this territory, including Kusinara, is fortified. Kusinara appears to be the most important settlement of this zone but its hinterland is much too big for a city-state.

Chedi Janapada lay centred in Bundelkhand, much of it covered by the Vindhyan hills. The capital Sotthivati Nagara was possibly near Rewa and thus identifiable with the unfortified but large early historic site of Itaha on the bank of the Beehar, a tributary of the Tons, itself a tributary of the Yamuna. The major monumental site of this zone – Kalinjar fort – is mentioned in early literary sources, but no early remains have yet been reported from the fort area. It is impossible to decide whether Sotthivati Nagara was ever be the urban centre of a city-state.

The capital of Vatsa Janapada was Kausambi on the right bank of the Yamuna. The other major urban settlements of this region are Jhusi or ancient Prayag on the left bank of the Ganges opposite Allahabad, Bhita on the right bank of the Yamuna, Kara on the left bank of the Ganges, and Kairagarh on the bank of the Tons. It would make sense if these settlements also belonged to the Vatsa Janapada, which may have extended to include a part of the right bank of the Yamuna. Ancient Prayag, apparently unfortified, is a massive site, but Kausambi towers above them all.

The core of Kuru Janapada was the area of modern Kurukshetra, Delhi and Meerat. The major contemporary sites are Thaneswar (Kurukshetra), Indraprastha (Delhi) and Hastinapur, the last one being the largest of the three.

Panchala Janapada had its capital at Ahichchhatra near Bareilly, which roughly covers the Rohilkhand area and central Doab of Uttar Pradesh. Apart from Ahichchhatra, the major city sites are Musanagar on the right bank of the Yamuna to the west of Kanpur, Jajmau on the right bank of the Ganges in the outskirts of Kanpur, Kampil and Sankisa (both near Farukhabad), Ekachakra (near Etahwa) and Kanauj (near Kanpur). All these are major sites. The ancient Panchala Janapada is unlikely to have been a city-state, and there is no evidence that it comprised a number of city-states united under the name of the Panchalas.

Matsya Janapada is roughly modern Alwar between Delhi and Jaipur. The site of its capital Biratanagara is modern Bairat. This is the only major early historic site of the area, unless the sites of Rairh and Sambar near Jaipur are included.

The capital of Surasena Janapada was Mathura, which is also the dominant city-site of the entire region and which is too large to be the hinterland of a city-state.

If the Asmaka territory was situated in the upper Godavari valley in Maharashtra, its capital must have been Paithan or ancient Pratisthana. The only other major city-site of the region is Bhokardan or ancient Bhogavardhana. On the other hand, if the Asmaka territory was in Vidarbha, its major city-sites would be Adam and Pauni.

The capital of Avanti Janapada in Malwa was Ujjayini, the only major city-site of the Malwa region except for Vidisa, which may once have constituted a separate political territory under the name of Dasarna.

Both the major cities of Gandhara Janapada – Pushkalavati and Takshasila – are attested as early and contemporary settlements. Apparently, this Janapada had two major urban centres right from the beginning.

Kamboja Janapada lay beyond Gandhara and thus was probably in Afghanistan. The ancient city of Kapisa or modern Begram could be its capital. There is no other large city in the area.

The above summary covers the archaeological evidence for urban centres in the sixteen Janapada states mentioned in the Buddhist list. In this context it is superfluous to do the same for the Jaina list and the expanded list given by B.C. Law. Instead, we may look at the distribution of city-sites in a particular geo-

graphical area where the chance of fresh discoveries of such sites is remote. The following ancient geographical units, for instance, are commonly cited for the area of the modern Indian state of West Bengal: Gauda, Uttara Radha, Dakshina Radha, Suhma, Dantabhukti, and Pundravardhana. Gauda covered the Murshidabad-Birbhum sector, and here the principal city-site is Kotasur. In Uttara Radha or Barddhaman, the city-site is Mangalkot. In Dakshina Radha or Bankura the city-site is Pokharna. In Suhma which should cover coastal Medinipur, the city-site is Tamluk. In Vanga, across the Bhagirathi-flow of the Ganges to the east, the major site is Chandraketugarh. In the northern part of West Bengal, the Pundra territory includes the fortified site of Bangarh, but its capital was Mahasthangarh in the modern Bangladesh territory of Bagura, which is immensely larger than Bangarh. Dantabhukti covers the southwestern portion of West Bengal and the southeastern section of Orissa. Here the dominant site is Radhanagar near Jajpur. What is interesting is that each of these ancient geographical units is dominated by one major city-site, just as each of the sixteen Mahajanapadas seems to have been dominated by a capital.

If one moves to the deep south, one encounters a similar situation in the earliest phase of urban growth there. Four geographical units are established in the Asokan epigraphical records: Satiyaputra, Chola, Pandya and Chera/Kerala territories. The Satiyaputra territory is identified with the Dharampuri district to the north of the Kaveri delta. Urayur in modern Tiruchirapalli on the Kaveri was the first capital of the Cholas. The Pandyan capital was Madurai and the Chera capital was Karur. The point is, once again, that each geographical unit was centred on one major city. In the context of this region, it is also important to remember that the early historic urban growth in the Kaveri delta and its hinterland including a part of Kerala is almost as early as the beginning of the early historic period in northern India. The 5th-4th century B.C. is now taken as its base-line.

VII. Summary

After pointing out that the Mahajanapada states denote the first phase of the political history of India and are closely related to the growth of the early historic period in the Ganges plain and elsewhere, we have put this growth in its proper archaeological context by underlining the long protohistoric phase behind it and the possible element of the continuity of a city-state tradition from the Indus civilization phase

itself. The next focus of our enquiry was an understanding of the framework of local states all over the subcontinent through the references in the Later Vedic, Buddhist, Jaina and other categories of literature, including the testimony left behind by the historians who accompanied Alexander. This was followed up by an examination of the nature of numismatic and epigraphic sources, which left no doubt that there was a strong core of tribal/local states in India right up to the Gupta period in the 4th century A.D. Finally, the currently available data on major city-sites in various parts of the country were briefly considered and found to conform broadly to the literary, numismatic and epigraphic data mentioned earlier. The major city-sites were usually the foci of political units which in some cases – as in the case of Panchala, among others – would be in the region of tens of thousands of square kilometres and thus be considered unsuitable for a city-state-type organization. But in certain relatively small areas – as in the case of the ancient geographical units of West Bengal – there is no difficulty in postulating such an organizational framework. The point we would stress is that city-states – monarchical, oligarchical or republican – were a clear and important component of the ancient Indian political scene.

Further, the following summation of the textual image of an ancient Indian city will tell us that it had a lot in common with preindustrial cities elsewhere. The normative literary image has been called the state's view of a city: "a special place, to be separated from other spaces and protected – a place no doubt accommodating workers, artisans, merchants, farmers and others, but only as ancillaries to the king", because the city belongs to the king and his state. In the more dominant, secular view, "the city is not constituted by the mighty presence of the king or a central ritual structure; in this view the city is a beehive of secular activity ... it is a view of the city in which the main actors could be an impoverished Brahmin (caravan leader), his family, friend and his lady-love; a merchant's son; a courtesan girl; a gambler who turns to renunciation, and a host of other characters" (Chatopadhyay [1997]).

VIII. Conclusion

In spite of the fact that the conclusion of this study is largely negative or, at best, leaves open the possibility that the concepts of city-state and city-state culture can be applied, there can be no doubt that early Indian history deserves to be discussed in this context.

First, comparisons with the Greek *polis*, especially Athens, are frequently found in older studies of early Indian history (e.g. Rhys Davids [1922] 175; Sharma [1968] 99), and the concept of city-state has been brought into play in several recent studies (e.g. Kenoyer [1997]; [1998] 100, 179). It is our hope that the more cautious and sceptical views argued here will counterbalance the wider and somewhat inexact use of the concept of city-state in earlier studies.

Second, the importance of urbanization in early Indian history, the remarkable fragmentation of early India in a large number of political units each centred on a capital, and the attestation of republican forms of government in the first millennium B.C. are three factors which indicate that it is relevant to investigate whether some of these urbanized republican political units were, in fact, city-states. In answering this question one must treat the Indus civilisation and the Mahajanapada states separately.

1. The prevailing view today seems to be that the Harappan civilization comprised four or five states, each centred on a major city, and that all the other towns were just administrative centres. In that case each of the four or five major cities possessed a hinterland of 100,000 km² or more (Kenoyer [1997] 54), and was certainly not a city-state as defined here.

On the other hand, it may just as well be argued that many of the urban settlements were centres of much smaller political units, some of them confined to a city with its immediate hinterland. In that case the concepts of city-state and city-state culture become highly relevant. The present state of knowledge does not allow us to make a choice between these two different interpretations.

2. As the evidence stands, none of the Mahajanapadas seems to have been a city-state or a city-state culture according to the definitions of these two concepts suggested in this volume. There are two major obstacles to applying the city-state concept to India in the early historic period.

One is the size of the Mahajanapadas. Even the smallest of the sixteen states in the Buddhist list possessed a territory of over 10,000 km² and can only count as a city-state if one is prepared to extend the possible size of the hinterland of a city-state from a maximum of c. 3,000 km² to something like 10,000-20,000 km². There remains, of course, the possibility that each Mahajanapada was a city-state culture, i.e. a system of city-states. In several cases we know that a Mahajanapada had other important urban centres than the capital, and in the case of the Vajjis the texts speak of a federation of republican janapadas. But it cannot

be proved that it was a federation of polities each composed of an urban centre and its immediate hinterland. Thus, even here the answer is, at best, a *non liquet*.

The other obstacle to applying the concept of city-state is the names of the Mahajanapadas and their capitals. An often very good indication of the existence of city-states is that the name of the city is the same as the name of the state, e.g. Uruk in Sumer, Athens in Greece, Tarquinia in Etruria, Siena in Italy, Tikal in the Mayan part of Mesoamerica, Melaka among the Malay city-states, Zheng in Zhou China, Kalimbari in the Niger Delta, Ilesha among the Yoruba, etc. The so-called territorial states, on the other hand, are characterized by having names derived from the whole territory or the people with quite different names for the capital; thus, Paris is the capital of France, etc. (Hansen, *supra* 18). Now, in all sixteen Mahajanapadas the name of the state was different from the name of its capital, which indicates that it was a territorial state with a capital, not a city-state, and that the other urban sites of the Mahajanapada were administrative rather than political centres. On the other hand, we cannot be certain, and future discoveries may change the picture.

Notes

1. Chakrabarti (1995) 140. In Chakrabarti (1999) 199 I wrote: "We postulate multiple kingdoms centred around the major settlements of a region. This means that in each distribution zone there could have been more than one kingdom. We must consider the possibility that some of them were actually city-states."
2. Kenoyer (1998) 100. On page 183 he states: "Many continuities between the Indus and the Early Historic cities may result from living in similar environments and the availability of similar raw materials, but other continuities clearly reflect strong social and ideological linkages."
3. To be a "Salute" State means that the ruler of the State in question was greeted by a formal gun salute by the British.
4. Narain (1993). For a discussion of the much-debated socio-political aspects connected with the birth of the Buddha, see Chakrabarti (1997) 183-189.
5. The sections II.2.1 to II.2.3 are based on Raychaudhuri (1996) 11-185.
6. In addition to B.C. Law (1943), Chaudhuri (1954), Pathak (1963), and Sharma (1968) are useful in this regard.
7. Alexander's invasion of India has been discussed by various scholars (Smith [1924]; Tarn [1951]). This account is based on Raychaudhuri (1996) 211-233.
8. This section is based on Sharma (1968) 85-236.
9. For the Asokan inscriptions, see Hultzsch (1925); for Samudragupta's inscription, see Chhabra & Ghai (1981).
10. This section is based on my review of the material in Chakrabarti (1999) 279-290. For a detailed review of the Buddhist literature on some of the sites mentioned in this section, see Sarao (1990). On Kasi, see Chandra (1981) (in Hindi); Narain & Roy (1976, 1977); Narain and Singh (1977); Singh (1985). On the Kosala capitals Ayodhya and Sravasti, see Bakker (1986); Chakrabarti (1995); Marshall (1914), Sinha (1967). On Rajagriha in Magadha, see Marshall (1909). On Vaisali, see Mishra (1962). On Champa, see Ghosh (1989). On the lesser sites of the Gangetic Plain, see Patil (1963); Fuhrer (1891). For recent developments in south India, see Rajan (1997).
11. Division = an administrative unit comprising several districts.

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