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3 Early Historic South Asia

I Geography, Climate, and the Human Landscape

The geographical borders of pre-nation-states or polities are difficult to chart out clearly. Yet it is more often than not that geography shapes political and cultural entities. South Asia forms one such entity, having physiographical markers that define the space both geographically and culturally.¹ This space is bounded by the Balochistan highlands to the west, the Swat valley in the northwest, the Himalayas in the north, the meridional mountain chain of Indochina in the east, and the peninsular region in the south. The peninsular south is surrounded by the Arabian Sea in the west, the Bay of Bengal in the east, and the Indian Ocean in the south. An extensive coastline of 11,104 km in total surrounds the Indian subcontinent (map 1).²

Three physiographic divisions mark the mainland of the subcontinent: the Himalayas, the Indo-Gangetic Plains, and the peninsula.³ The Himalayas are young tectonic mountains with various glacial snow formations. Melting glacial deposits form three perennial river systems, the Indus, the Ganga, and the Brahmaputra, with various distributaries and tributaries. These river systems inundate the northern plains and form deposits of fertile alluvial soil. The Indus River system flows into the Arabian Sea, while the Ganga and the Brahmaputra flow into the Bay of Bengal. The alluvial plains are bordered by the Aravali and Vindhya Ranges in the south. The Aravali plateaus are the oldest physiographical formations, and it is here that the Deccan plateau and peninsular India begin.

Peninsular India is characterized by smaller zones, such as the lava trap topography with black soil in the western and upper Deccan,⁴ granite areas in the eastern region, and red soil in the southern peninsula.⁵ There are also pockets of alluvial soil zones in the Narmada, Tapti, Mahanadi, Godavari, Kaveri, and Krishna River valleys.⁶

1 South Asia comprises the modern states of India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. It is located between 5° and 37° N. The areal expanse of the subcontinent is more than 4.2 million sq km (Spate and Learmonth [1954] 2007; Xue and Yanai 2005, 115).

2 The total coastline area includes the coastline of the modern nations of India (7,500 km, including the islands), Pakistan (1,365 km), Sri Lanka (1,585 km), and Bangladesh (654 km), (Snead 2010b, 1059; 2010a, 1078; Nayak and Hanamgond 2010, 1065; Swan 2010, 1072).

3 Spate and Learmonth (1954) 2017, 6–7; Tandon et al. 2014, 3.

4 The black soil, also called the *regur* type, is rich in ferromanganesian and aluminum compounds because of the volcanic lava content (Randhawa 1980, 8).

5 This region consists of the oldest rock constitution containing prevalent crystalline schists and ferromanganesian minerals (Randhawa 1980, 8).

6 Spate and Learmonth (1954) 2017, 16.

Note: I would like to thank Professor H. P. Ray for her suggestions and comments on this chapter.



Map 1: Major cities and routes in early historic South Asia (after Chandra 1977; Neelis 2011).
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Offshore, the South Asian region includes the following main islands: Lakshadweep off the west coast, Andaman-Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal,⁷ and Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean. The Sri Lankan hinterland consists of alluvial tracts, lagoons, and coastal regions.⁸

The climate of the subcontinent varies considerably. The subcontinent has six major ecological zones: rainy tropical, humid subtropical, tropical savanna, mountain, arid desert, and steppe grassland.⁹ The extreme north has a temperate climate, while the northeastern regions, the central part, and the south are influenced by the tropical monsoon. The southernmost part of the mainland and Sri Lanka have an equatorial climate. Seasonal changes in temperature and rainfall throughout the subcontinent depend on the monsoon.¹⁰ In most regions, 80 percent of the rainfall is the result of the southwestern monsoon, lasting for four months from June to September. The northernmost regions, by contrast, experience precipitation during the winter, while parts of the southeastern coast, the islands in the Bay of Bengal, and northeastern Sri Lanka have rainfall during the retreating monsoon from September to January.¹¹

The diversity of the topography, soil type, climate, and rainfall are one explanation for the diversity of vegetation in South Asia.¹² The other is the human impact on the landscape. Apart from archaeobotanical finds, early historical literary texts mention a great variety of agricultural crops and methods of cultivation.¹³ Arguably, the particularly long tradition of local domestication combined with the dispersion and adoption of grains via land and sea routes since the third and second millennia BCE account for the greater variety of grain crops in early historic South Asia than in any other world region.¹⁴ Double-cropping in the form of winter and summer crops, and multicropping (growing more than one crop in a single season) were common practices in the subcontinent as early as 3000 BCE.¹⁵ Rice, millet, mustard, sesame, cotton, hemp, and some pulses formed the main crops of the summer cultivation cycle, irrigated by the monsoon rain from July to August.¹⁶ Winter cropping included wheat, barley, pulses (horse gram, mung bean, pea, chickpea, grass pea), flax, and safflower. Winter crops were watered by the winter rainfall in the northwest and by residual soil moisture or river irrigation in other regions.

7 Nayak and Hanamgond 2010, 1066.

8 Swan 2010, 1073.

9 McColl 2014, 453.

10 Singhvi and Krishnan 2014.

11 Dash 2005, 509; Xue and Yanai 2005, 115; Randhawa 1980, 21.

12 The types of vegetation include the temperate Himalayan type, the tropical thorn forest, the dry deciduous forest, the tropical evergreen rain forest, and the mangrove and beach forest. For a detailed account of the division of vegetation types, see Randhawa 1980, 25–43.

13 Randhawa 1980; Raychaudhuri and Roy 1993; Srinivasan 2016.

14 Murphy and Fuller 2017, 6; Fuller et al. 2011.

15 Murphy and Fuller 2017, 8; Petrie and Bates 2017, 83–84, 89.

16 Petrie and Bates 2017, 89; Murphy and Fuller 2017.

II Political Formations in Early South Asia

Henige suggests that the study of political chronology can be placed into a typological continuum. At one end are those incontrovertibly documented societies about which there is no dispute over timing and sequence. As we move back in time or to areas of restricted literacy and documentation, problems of chronology become more numerous and refractory. In these cases, the available evidence makes it virtually impossible to be certain about the timing and sequence of even the known events.¹⁷

The chronology of early India fits the latter end of this continuum. Since it was the British who first wrote histories of the subcontinent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, all early political chronologies of Indian history are based on the Christian calendar and relate to Hellenistic events. For the colonial rulers, the only authentic sources of history were Greek historiographies. The *Purāṇas*, in contrast, were condemned as being mythological.¹⁸ Thus, the date for the reign of Chandragupta (Chandragupta) Maurya (ca. 320 BCE) is derived from references to him in the accounts of the immediate successors of Alexander of Macedonia in the Indian *satrapies* (ca. 325 BCE onward). This was followed by dates of five Hellenistic rulers mentioned in Rock Edicts (RE) II and XIII of Aśoka (ca. 268–231 BCE).¹⁹ Also, the dates commonly found on Indic inscriptions of the Samvat and Śaka eras are attributed to 56 BCE and 78 CE based on the chronology of the Indo-Scythian rulers.²⁰ Given that the dating of Buddhist and Hindu texts is also highly controversial, historical chronologies and sequences are often only relative in nature and must be treated with utmost caution.

The period between 300 BCE and 300 CE is marked by a variety of political formations: (1) so-called empires; (2) *satrapies* and independent monarchies; and (3) *janapadas* (coin-issuing communities in the Indo-Gangetic divide).²¹ The period begins with the emergence of the Maurya dynasty (ca. 320–185 BCE), generally regarded as the first empire of South Asia, followed by a period of fragmentation and foreign domination. It ends with the rise of the Guptas (320–550 CE), another indigenous dynasty with its center in the northern alluvial plains. Scholars variously consider the post-Mauryan period as a phase of invasions, confrontations, interactions, innovations, and urban development prompted by external influences from

17 Henige 1986, 58.

18 Ray and Potts 2007.

19 Antiochos II Theos (261–246 BCE), Ptolemy II of Egypt (285–247 BCE), Antigonos II Gonatas of Macedonia (278–239 BCE), Magas of Cyrene (300–258 BCE), and Alexander II of Epiros (272–258 BCE).

20 Bhandare 2006, 69.

21 The *janapadas* here are used in the meaning Shrimali suggests. He finds *janapada* has connotations of both monarchical and non-monarchical forms of political organization, and implies both the communal and territorial aspect of a polity (Shrimali 1985, 3–4).

the northwest into the northern part of the subcontinent.²² Western influences resulted in the emergence of *satrapies* and monarchies usually referred to as Indo-Greek, Indo-Parthian, Indo-Scythian or Śaka, and Kuṣāṇa.²³ Among the local polities in the post-Mauryan phase, the most prominent were the local *gaṇa-samghas* in the Indo-Yamuna divide; the dynastic rule of Śungas in the north, Sātavāhanas and Kalinga in the Deccan and Odisha; and the kingdoms of Cola, Cera, and Pāṇḍyas in the peninsular south.

The historiography of the period under consideration is influenced by two traditions, one emphasizing imperial unity, the other local autonomy.²⁴ The first focuses on imperial state formation explained by surplus production and the concomitant emergence of social hierarchy and political organization. This approach explains history in terms of the rise and fall of empires, the emergence and fall of cities and cultures, and the dynamics of political vacuums created and filled. It originated in early nineteenth-century scholarship, which searched for empires as markers of early civilization.²⁵ By the middle of the twentieth century, the tradition transformed into concepts of state formation and urbanization and was strongly influenced by Marxist historiographic models introduced into Indian historiography by D. D. Kosambi.²⁶ Thus in the Indian context, the study of empire is strongly associated with concepts of state formation and unifying processes. An empire is understood as a well-developed, centralized state that is territorially expansive.

Within the imperial approach, the subcontinent is constructed as one historical unit in which different areas played their parts. The northwest is described as a region ever riddled by incessant invasions and imperial endeavors.²⁷ The northern alluvial plains are regarded as the nucleus of civilization and state formation, while the Deccan and the southern peninsula played catch-up.²⁸ The state of the Mauryan dynasty, with its center at Magadha (modern Bihar), came to be considered the first and archetypical Indian empire. This characterization of the Mauryan dynasty owes much to the idea of the Mauryan state as a unifier of South Asia under one ruler,

22 Basham (1954) 1986; Thapar 2003; Chakravarti 2016; U. Singh 2008.

23 See Morris, ch. 2, this volume.

24 Chakravarti 2012, 14.

25 The late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Indologists like William Jones and James Mill were familiar with the king named Candragupta of Mauryas from references in ancient Greek sources as a contemporary of the successors of Alexander of Macedonia. Also, Aśoka was known from the Sri Lankan Pali chronicles of the fourth and sixth centuries CE. With the successful decipherment of Kharoṣṭhī and Brāhmī scripts by James Prinsep in the 1830s, the discovery of Aśoka as an Indian emperor was made. The deciphering of the scripts also enabled the identification of the Kuṣāṇas as a ruling dynasty of early India (Prinsep 1838; 1858; Dwivedi 2015, 208–210).

26 Kosambi 1956. Gurukul (2008) describes the tradition as influenced by the “Kosambi effect.”

27 Prakash 1964; 1971.

28 Seneviratne 1981; Champakalakshmi 1996; Thapar 2003; Basu Majumdar 2017.

no doubt inspired by the colonial idea of ruling and governing India as a single imperial unit.²⁹

Since the nineteenth century, the identification of the Mauryas as an empire, particularly under Aśoka, has been based on identifying the criteria for imperial status and arguing that the Mauryas fulfilled them. An empire is defined as a uniform territory divided into centers and peripheries; it is marked by the introduction of a uniform script and state-issued coinage; there is evidence for royal patronage of art leading to representative monuments; and it has a state ideology.³⁰ To demonstrate Mauryan imperial homogeneity, scholars have pointed to the ubiquity of northern black polished ware (NBPW) throughout the subcontinent, which in turn was labeled Mauryan pottery. They saw the rock edicts as marking the territorial expanse of Aśoka's sphere of influence (see ch. 10.A, map 1), and his policy of *dhamma* (Buddhist ethical teachings) as the unifying ideology.³¹ In this approach, Aśoka stands at the core of the Mauryan dynasty as the ideal emperor. The deciphering of Brāhmī and Kharoṣṭhī scripts by James Prinsep in the early 1830s enabled the attribution of the titles *devānāmpīya* and *piyadasi* to Aśoka.³² Since then, Aśoka has remained an important historical figure, both to be studied and admired.³³

Any other political formation was understood in terms of being part of the process of incipient state formation. Where the influence of the Mauryan imperial state formation process could not be identified, it was suggested that these polities remained uninfluenced by Magadha.³⁴ The imperial model also fostered ideas of urbanization and so-called secondary state formation in imperial vicinities, and the establishment of long-distance trade routes and religious contacts as part of the imperializing process. Secondary state formation and secondary urbanization were the explanatory models for the rise of complex state-like polities and cities in areas adjacent to the imperial centers in the middle Ganga valley as well as in Sri Lanka.³⁵ Finally, the spread of the imperial state was associated with the processes of what may be called Sanskritization and Brahmanization. Complex imperial state formation in this model was influenced by orthodox Brahmanical ideas vis-à-vis heterodox republican ideas that were prevalent in areas farther away from the Ganga valley.³⁶

²⁹ Chattopadhyaya 2015, 3–4.

³⁰ Thapar 2003; 2006; (1961) 2013. For criticism, see Morrison 1995; 1997; M. Smith 2005; Ray 1986; 2008.

³¹ Thapar 2003; (1961) 2013; Allchin 1995; U. Singh 2008; Chakravarti 2016.

³² Prinsep 1838. In Sanskrit *devānāmpīya* means 'beloved of the gods' and *priyadarśin*, 'he who regards everyone with affection.'

³³ For an account of scholarly interest in Aśoka and the Mauryan dynasty, see Lahiri 2015.

³⁴ Thapar 2003, 158.

³⁵ The suggested regions of impact are Bengal, Odisha, the Deccan, and the southern peninsula, as well as Sri Lanka, Thapar 2003, 211; Basu Majumdar 2017; Chakravarti 2017, 333–338.

³⁶ The influence of Brahmanical ideals on the emergence of complex state structures is ascribed to the complex and hierarchical 'Brahmanical' social institutions, which contrast with simpler egalitarian

The second method for studying this region calls for examining socio-cultural aspects of South Asia beyond the question of state formation and political expansion. These approaches explain early historical India in terms of autonomous spaces and consider regional social variations instead of uniform processes of state formation.³⁷ They use fluid concepts of historical orbits,³⁸ and describe the political space “as networks of resource acquisition in which territories and boundaries are porous, permeable, flexible, and selectively defended.”³⁹ The identification of certain geographical areas as cradles of civilization and starting points of political development is rejected in favor of approaching regions as more than either perennial nuclear regions or backward and tribal parts of the subcontinent. The search for imperial structures and centralization is largely abandoned in favor of studying areas and political formations in relation to their specific social, economic, and political contexts.⁴⁰ The new perspective also focuses on power nodes and social functionaries that used to be overlooked, such as merchants, small landowners, and religious agents.⁴¹ This method denounces the compartmentalized view of political geographies and advocates for the possibility of a more continuous ecological and cultural divide between the northern and southern polities of the subcontinent.

II.1 Political Scenarios in South Asia

II.1.1 The Mauryas and the North

At the time of Alexander’s invasion of the subcontinent, the Nandas ruling at Magadha were a formidable political power with a grand standing army. It was in 321/20 BCE that the Nandas were usurped by Candragupta Maurya (known as Sandrokottos to the Greek historians) who founded the Maurya dynasty.⁴² Control over the northwestern region of the subcontinent under the Mauryas is credited to Candragupta and is based on the record of the gift of Arachosia, Gedrosia, and Paropami-

tarian political models found in regions west of the Yamuna and identified as more ‘heterodox’ (Thapar 1978). In the Deccan and southern regions, the polities are considered tribal until Brahmanical ideas were spread through the process of secondary state formation and the propagation of Vedic-Śāstric-Purāṇic ideas (Sahu 2001). This idea does not find any support in the archaeological evidence. The archaeological sites of Mathura, Kaushambi, Varanasi, and others exhibit a mixed archaeological assemblage with common and shared iconographies.

³⁷ Chattopadhyaya 2003a.

³⁸ Chakrabarti 2010a.

³⁹ M. Smith 2005, 835.

⁴⁰ Lahiri 2015, 172.

⁴¹ M. Smith 2005, 836; Ray 2008, 11.

⁴² The date for Mauryan accession depends on the two debated dates of the Buddha’s *parinirvāṇa* (death), 486 and 483 BCE.

sadai (Kandahar, south Balochistan, and Kabul) that Seleukos Nikator made in exchange for 500 elephants.⁴³ It is also possible that Candragupta Maurya had the chance of retaining some regions controlled by the Nanda rulers, possibly with the exception of Kalinga.⁴⁴ Candragupta Maurya's grandson, Aśoka (r. 268–232 BCE) is regarded as the first ruler to have united the subcontinent under one rule, after which he adopted a pacifist policy changing *bherighoṣa* to *dhammaghoṣa* – from announcements of war to propagation of *dhamma* (Buddhist teaching) – as declared in RE IV. Aśoka is also known to have added the Kalinga region to the Mauryan sphere of influence after a battle recorded in RE XIII, which expresses remorse for the losses suffered in war.⁴⁵

The Maurya dynasty ended with the assassination of the last king Bṛhadratha by his minister Puṣyamitra Śunga, who established a new dynasty centered in Magadha. The legend of his accession, however, is debatable as it is drawn from a romantic play of the fourth century CE.⁴⁶ The post-Mauryan period is identified in the imperial approach as a phase of political upheaval when kingdoms that sprang up were in constant conflict. The Śungas are said to have campaigned against their southern neighbors in the Deccan, against the Hellenistic Greeks in the northwest, and against the Kalinga in the southeast.⁴⁷ The political activities in the post-Mauryan period, moreover, are considered to be the result of polities emerging to fill in the vacuum created by the decline of the empire. The northwest and west experienced the presence of Indo-Greek kingdoms and Seleukid *satrapies*.⁴⁸ After the Mauryas, only the Kuṣāṇas in the first century CE were able to claim a large part of the north under their rule, as mentioned in the Rabatak inscription.⁴⁹

The northwestern region was occupied by the *janapadas* and *gaṇa-samghas* (political conglomerates) who are known by their coin issues as Yaudheyas, Ārjun-

⁴³ Chakravarti 1986, 49.

⁴⁴ In the west, at Junagarh (Gujarat), Candragupta Maurya is also noted to have commissioned the construction of Sudarśana Lake, which was then repaired at the time of Aśoka and then again in 150 CE by Rudradāman, a Śaka ruler. In the east, in modern Odisha, a post-Mauryan eulogistic rock inscription ascribed to Khāravela refers to a water tank constructed by one of the Nanda rulers. It is possible that Kalinga was controlled by the Nandas but was perhaps lost by early Mauryas and was conquered by Aśoka (Jayaswal and Banerji 1929). The extent of the Kalinga region in the early historic period is not clear. The region might have included areas of the present states of Odisha, Chhatisgarh, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh.

⁴⁵ However, the war with Kalinga referred to in RE XIII is not mentioned in the major rock edicts found in Odisha (at the Dhauli and Jaḡauda sites), a part of the traditional Kalinga region itself. Guruge (1994, 54–55) questions the historical reliability of the content of RE XIII as it has as many as eight versions found in different regions, however none near Odisha.

⁴⁶ The *Mālavikā-Agnimitram* is a Sanskrit play in the *kāvya* tradition authored by Kālidāsa stationed at the court of the Guptas.

⁴⁷ Thapar 2003, 210.

⁴⁸ For discussion of Indo-Greek, Indo-Parthian, and Kuṣāṇa rule, see Morris, ch. 2, this volume.

⁴⁹ For the Rabatak inscription see, Sims-Williams and Cribb 1995. See also, Morris, ch. 2, this volume.

āyanas, Trigartas, Kuṇindas, Śibis, and some other names.⁵⁰ They are often regarded as tribal kingdoms filling the vacuum created by the end of the Mauryan rule. Yet one finds references to these *gaṇa-samghas* in the pre-Mauryan grammatical work by Pāṇini, and they are also mentioned in the Alexander historiography.⁵¹ In the Indian grammatical tradition, these groups are identified as *śastropajīvi-samgha* and *āyudhajīvi* (a group living by the profession of arms or warfare).⁵² They are also mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* and the fourth-century CE inscriptions of Samudragupta. Coin issues suggest that the three communities of Yaudheyas, Ārjunāyanas, and Kuṇindas formed an alliance to eventually defeat the Kuṣāṇas in the northern region. They issued coins or seals commemorating their victory with the legend *yaudheya-gaṇasya-jaya* (victory of the Yaudheya alliance).⁵³ Similarly, an inscription ascribed to the dynasty of the Vākāṭaka (third to fourth centuries CE), suggests that the imperial Nāgas of Kāntipuri (identified as modern Mirzapur district of Uttar Pradesh) ousted Kuṣāṇas from the Āryāvarta region.⁵⁴

II.1.2 Politics in the Deccan

Scholars who write the early history of South Asia give relatively less space to the history of the peninsula because there is less evidence for a well-developed territorial state system. Many scholars suggest that the political formations in the Deccan and the south were secondary state formations, adopting administrative institutions under the influence of the Mauryan metropolitan state's administrative structures.⁵⁵ An example of a region supposedly experiencing secondary state formation is the central India region (present Chhattisgarh), a land corridor of primarily forested areas communicating between the southern and northern regions. While travelers frequented it over centuries, its particular landscape formed a territorial zone favoring a particular kind of settlement. Inscriptions from the Sitabenga and Jogimara caves in this region, dating to the late third or early second centuries BCE, refer to military and administrative offices that might have shared features with offices attested in the territorial polities (*mahājanapadas*) of the Ganga valley during the pre-Mauryan period.⁵⁶ Yet the idea of a southward influence over land is problematic when one looks at the archaeological evidence, sculptural and architectural remains, and the history of maritime activities.⁵⁷

50 Handa 2007; Shrimali 1985; Gupta 1996; Agrawal 1953, 457; Allan 1936.

51 E.g., Arrian *Indica* 5.

52 Handa 2007, 149.

53 Altekar and Majumdar (1946) 1986, 23–33; S. Ghosh 2012, 49–51.

54 Jayaswal 1933, 5. However, this has been contested by Altekar and Majumdar (1946) 1986, 25–28.

55 Seneviratne 1981; Thapar 2003, 60, 211; Chattopadhyaya 2003b; Basu Majumdar 2017.

56 Basu Majumdar 2017, 123. For the inscription and translation see H. Sastri 1925–1926, 152–156.

57 Maloney 1970; Ray 1986; 2003; 2008; Morrison 1995; 1997; Abraham 2003.

The upland areas of peninsular India were home to iron-using megalithic communities in the first millennium BCE. Iron Age megalithic sites span the centuries from 1200 BCE to 300 CE and extend across all regions of peninsular India with the exception of the western Deccan (modern Maharashtra). Of the thousands of sites discovered so far, more than 65 percent are in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.⁵⁸

The larger megalithic sites were not only found at the locations of Aśokan inscriptions, but also distributed along major routes of communication. These routes are known to have continued in the subsequent post-Mauryan periods. Perhaps the most interesting is the stretch extending from the Palghat (Palakkad) Gap and Coimbatore to the Kaveri delta.⁵⁹ An analysis of site dimensions indicates that there were at least 26 large settlements, each capable of supporting a population of approximately 1,000 residents. 14 of these were concentrated in the Coimbatore-Madurai uplands.⁶⁰ One especially significant site is Kodumanal on the northern bank of the river Noyyal, a tributary of the Kaveri. The site straddles the ancient route running eastward along the Kaveri from the Palghat Gap to Karur and Uraiyur. The site dates from the late Iron Age to the early historical periods (ca. third century BCE to third century CE) and has provided evidence of early writing dated to the pre-Mauryan period.⁶¹

The Āndhras in the west and the Kalingas in the east rose to power after the decline of the Mauryas in the late third century BCE. Khāravēla was the most recognized ruler of Kalinga. He assumed the title of *Kalingādhipati* ('king of Kalinga') and *Kalinga-cakravartin* ('unchallenged ruler of the Kalinga').⁶² There are no clear references to clashes between Khāravēla and the Āndhras, although a eulogistic inscription praising Khāravēla refers to expeditions against the Bhojakas and the Raṭṭhikas (Rāṣṭrikas).⁶³ He apparently aimed at expanding his rule over *Bhārata-varṣa*, successfully pushed a *yavana* king out of Rājagriha, made the ruler of Magadha bow to him and broke the formidable conglomeration of the southern states.⁶⁴

The Āndhras are mentioned in Aśoka's RE XIII as one of the followers of *dhamma* (Buddhist teachings). In the early historical context, Āndhra refers to the Sātavā-

⁵⁸ Moorti had studied more than 1,900 megalithic sites (1994, 4–5). Recently the number of known sites has increased to 3,000 (Menon 2018).

⁵⁹ Moorti 1994; also Ray 1994a, ch. 2.

⁶⁰ Ray 1994a, tab. 2.6.

⁶¹ Apart from Kodumanal, the discovery of sherds with Tamil-Brāhmi inscriptions (dated to the fifth century BCE) has also been reported at Adichanallur (Tamil Nadu) and Anuradhapura (Sri Lanka) (Rajan 2015; Allchin 2006).

⁶² Sastri and Srinivasachari 1970, 148.

⁶³ Jayaswal and Banerji 1929. The Bhojakas and Raṭṭhikas are considered to be the ancestors of the Mahābhojas and the Mahārathis, who had marital alliances with the Sātavāhanas (Raychaudhuri [1923] 1972, 259; Ray 1986, 165).

⁶⁴ Rājagriha and Magadha are mentioned separately in the inscription and it is possible that the latter is to be identified with Pāṭaliputra, which had become the capital of Magadha under Ajātaśatru of the Haryanka dynasty in the fifth century BCE.

hanas in the Deccan, an identification that is based on the Purāṇic texts mentioning the Sātavāhanas as Āndhras and Āndhrabhṛtyas. However, the Sātavāhanas do not mention the Āndhra connection in their inscriptions.⁶⁵ The dynasty was probably founded by Simuka, though the date is not clear. Scholars variously ascribe his accession as occurring between 230 and 100 BCE.⁶⁶ By the third ruler, identified as Śrī Sātkaṛṇi in the first century BCE, the dynasty had emerged as a political power. It is probably under his rule that the Sātavāhanas defeated the Śungas in 75 BCE and the Kāṇvas in 30 BCE.⁶⁷ The Nanaghat cave inscription issued by Sātkaṛṇi's queen Nāganikā (?) praises him as the lord of the *Dakṣiṇāpatha* ('route to the south' or the Deccan) whose *cakra* (chariot wheels or army) were unstoppable.⁶⁸

The epigraphic and numismatic evidence reveal political clashes of the Sātavāhanas with both Indo-Scythians and Western Kṣatrapas.⁶⁹ Toward the end of the second century CE, the Sātavāhanas had extended their domination of western India to the Krishna delta in the south. From the mid-third century, there were various political units that appear in the sources. The upper Deccan was taken by the Vāk-āṭakas, whose dynasty appears in many later sources as contemporary to the early Guptas, and the lower Deccan saw the emergence of the Kālacuri-Cedi dynasty. Further south to the Krishna valley, another dynasty, the Ikṣvākus, appears prominently in the third and fourth century.⁷⁰

II.1.3 The 'Tamilakam' of the *Sangam* Period

Sources that refer to the southern polities are RE II and XIII, found in Siddhapura and Brahmagiri (Maski and Teragudi). These mention the Cola, the Pāṇḍya, the Satiyaputra (Kośars of Tuḷanāḍu), the Keralaputra (Ceras), and the Tambapanni (Skt. Tamraparṇī, i.e., Sri Lanka) as southern neighbors. Of these, the polities of the Cola, Ceras, and Pāṇḍyas were most influential, and their dynastic monarchies are regarded as kingdoms or secondary states.⁷¹ For understanding the political situation in the far south, the *Sangam* literature has also been identified as an important source. This is a corpus of literature written in the Tamil language and dated to the

⁶⁵ Ray 1986, 173.

⁶⁶ The date is based on the date of death of Aśoka, as other polities only rise after the collapse of the Mauryas. However, the discontinued settlement pattern in the archaeological assemblage shows Sātavāhanas could not be contemporaneous with the Mauryas. See further, N. K. A. Sastri (1955) 1995, 93–94; Ray 1986.

⁶⁷ Dhavalikar 1996, 135–136.

⁶⁸ "... *apratihatacakrasya dakṣiṇāpathapate.*" Inscription no. 82 in Sircar 1965, 186–190. See also below for the *Dakṣiṇāpatha*.

⁶⁹ Cribb 2000.

⁷⁰ Subbarayalu 2014.

⁷¹ Chakravarti 2017.

second and third centuries CE.⁷² Its geographical scope is the ancient Tamilakam (the modern states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and parts of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka).

The Colas were situated in the lower Kaveri valley, and their residential city was at Uraiyur. Their origin is traced back to a mythical ruler whose name is not recorded. Karikāla (190 CE) might have been one of their most powerful and expansionist kings. He gained many victories in different regions, but the idea that his conquests extended up to the Himalayas in the north is probably exaggerated.⁷³

The Ceras had their seat at Karuvur or Vanji and controlled the western part of the Kaveri valley as well as the southern part of the western coast. There is also a reference to the Elimalai kingdom, headed by a ruler named Nannan, situated in the Konkanam region on the west coast near Tulunād.⁷⁴ After his death, this region is said to have merged with the Cera kingdom.⁷⁵ His son, Nedun, assuming the title of *imayavaramban*, is connected with victories over several rulers as well as a naval victory along the Malabar Coast in which he captured *yavanas* (western or Greek-speaking people).⁷⁶ Another king, Senguṭṭuvan, is credited with some exploits in the sea, but no further details are known.⁷⁷

The Pāṇḍyas, with their capital at Maturai (Madurai), controlled the Thamirabaran-Vaigai valley. They were well known to Greek geographers and historians mainly for their connection with sea pearls.⁷⁸ Not surprisingly, the Vaigai River delta was called the greatest emporium of trade in India.⁷⁹ The Pāṇḍyas are also often ascribed a northern origin and are associated with the Pāṇḍavas of the *itihāsa-kāvya* tradition, which is part of the *Mahābhārata* epos. Based on the *Mahābhārata* tradition, the Pāṇḍyas are ascribed a pre-Mauryan origin, having traveled from the northwest of the subcontinent to the south via the sea.⁸⁰

The nature of these various polities is debated. The *Sangam* texts refer to battles in their praise of victory and death, and refer to the Colas, Ceras, and Pāṇḍyas as the three most prominent kingdoms. Their rulers are called the three crowned kings (*ventar/vendar*) among many more chieftains.⁸¹ Yet lacking tributary structures, the

72 Dwivedi ch. 10.A, this volume.

73 N. K. A Sastri (1955) 1995, 124.

74 Girija 1976.

75 Girija 1976, 57.

76 N. K. A Sastri (1955) 1995, 118; see also below for the term *yavana*.

77 N. K. A Sastri (1955) 1995, 118.

78 *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (PME) 59; Ptolemy *Geographia* (Ptol. *Geog.*) 7. 1. 10–11; 1. 13. 1; Pliny *Naturalis historia* (Plin. *HN*) 6. 17. 23; Aelian *De natura animalium*, 15. 9. See also Maloney 1970, 604.

79 Maloney 1970, 604.

80 Maloney 1970, 603–604.

81 Champakalakshmi (1996, 26–28) translates the terms *ventar/vendar* as ‘chiefs’ rather than ‘kings’ because to her the *Sangam* period is characterized by pre-state polities and the *vendars* are

Sangam polities are often considered to be tribal. On the other hand, based on the fact that the texts do refer to capital cities with fortified settlements, guarded posts, and standing armies with a commander (*enādi*), they can also be called kingdoms. There are references to victories over seven such crowned kings with the result of the conqueror taking the title of overlord (*adhirāja*). Yet kingship and kingdoms as developed political concepts should be taken more as rhetoric in the epic tradition than as developed political concepts. The *Sangam* polities appear as a conglomeration of the Cola, Cera, and Pāṇḍyas rather than individual monarchies. The Hathigumpha inscription of the Kalinga king Khāravela refers to a league of Tamil states lasting for more than a century and posing a threat to Kalinga.⁸² This was possible, as the *Sangam* kings were constantly at war with each other.⁸³ Yet alliances, periodic exactions, patronage of agriculturists, and intensification of production do not require state structures. They can equally be regarded as features of a pre-state society.⁸⁴ The peninsula thus exhibits a varied socio-political character that requires us to understand its complexity and diversity without dividing it into fixed evolutionary structures. It should rather be seen in contextualized situations of continuous interactions.⁸⁵

II.1.4 Sri Lanka

In the early historiographical tradition, Sri Lanka is identified as Tamraparṇī or Tambapanni and Sinhala.⁸⁶ The history of settlement and the establishment of kingdoms was derived mainly from the fourth- to fifth-century CE Buddhist chronicles of the Pali *Theravāda* tradition, also referred to as the Sinhalese tradition. These texts provide a chronology of rulers up to the third century CE.⁸⁷ They ascribe the establishment of monarchy in Sri Lanka to King Vijāya, who came with an influx of migrants from the north and established a base at Anuradhapura in the sixth or fifth centuries BCE. Other detailed accounts identify the historical rulers Devānampiyā Tissa (250–210 BCE) and Duṭṭhagāmani (161–137 BCE).⁸⁸ An inscription from Mihintale records another ruler, identified as King Uttiya (207–197 BCE), the successor

found in the fertile agricultural tracts of the *Marudam tinai*. N. K. A. Sastri, however, takes the term *ventar/vendar* to refer to monarchies ([1955] 1995, 117).

82 Jayaswal and Banerji 1929.

83 For *Sangam* warfare, see Chakravarti 1986, 106.

84 Gurukkal 1993, 11.

85 Gurukkal 1995, 239–240; Abraham 2008, 67–73. See also Bauer 2015 for a study of political complexity in megalithic societies.

86 The fifth-century Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Faxian refers to the region as Sinhala in his accounts (Peeble 2006, 19).

87 Peebles 2006, 13.

88 Peebles 2006, 14.

of Devānampiya Tissa, a contemporary of Aśoka.⁸⁹ The adoption of the title *devānampiya* ('beloved of gods') has been interpreted as an attempt to imitate Aśoka, who also adopted this title. However, as Ray has pointed out, in Sri Lanka it appears in conjunction with the title *mahārāja*, which is not typical for the subcontinent. The Minvila inscription of king Kuṭakaṇṇa Tissa, moreover, refers to this king as belonging to the Devānampiya *kula*, or family of Devānampiya, indicating the dynastic aspect of the title.⁹⁰

Again, there is much debate over whether the Sri Lankan rulers mentioned in the Buddhist chronicles represented monarchical state formation processes, and accordingly, whether they were ethnically and politically linked to peninsular and northern India. Brāhmī inscriptions, such as the one discovered at Mihintale near Anuradhapura, provide significant evidence running contrary to the idea of monarchical state structures, as well as peninsular influences.⁹¹ They mention kinship titles, royal titles, and titles of functionaries that diverge significantly from those in north and peninsular India. They attest a variety of local chieftains and administrative officers (superintendent of horses, superintendent of roads, superintendent of storehouses at sea ports, accountants, cavalry officers, and so on) that suggest a rather differentiated and articulate structure of authority. Scholars have also argued that the emergence of a more centralized polity in the late third and early second centuries BCE should not be viewed as a response to Mauryan influence, but as an indigenous development. Buddhism was introduced in Sri Lanka in a climate of political fragmentation, but it helped to unify the different chiefdoms and eventually led to the emergence of the kingdom of Anuradhapura in the second century BCE under king Duṭṭhagāmaṇi. The disappearance of inscriptions of smaller chiefdoms after the first century BCE is indicative of the expanding power and authority of Anuradhapura over the island, but also reveals them as signs of local diversity before this period.⁹²

II.2 Ideas of Kingship, Administration, and Warfare

Ideas of kingship are represented variably in the literary sources. The *Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra* (*KA*) is one of the most elaborate treatises of economic and political administration.⁹³ It is difficult to ascribe it to one single period or kingdom, but it certainly can be used as evidence for a highly developed idea of administration and political organization. The *KA* represents the state or political organization as an organic entity with seven parts (*saptāṅga*): *svāmī* ('king'), *amātya* ('ministers'), *ja-*

⁸⁹ Ray 2003, 147.

⁹⁰ Ray 2003, 147.

⁹¹ Ray 2003, 147.

⁹² Ray 2003, 148–149.

⁹³ Dwivedi, ch. 10.A, this volume.

napada ('countryside/subjects'), *durga* ('fort/city'), *kośa* ('treasury'), *daṇḍa* ('army/police'), and *mitra* ('ally').⁹⁴ The state is not only supposed to regulate and gather wealth and resources from within its territory, but also to expand its arable land into new areas and into neighboring kingdoms. Expansion may be achieved through alliances with neighboring states or through warfare and other strategies. The rule or administration of the king is to be based on *daṇḍa*, which can be variously interpreted as literally the imperial rod, but also army, punishment, or state apparatus of enforcement.

The KA's idea of a ruler is that of a *vijigīṣu* (the 'would-be controller'),⁹⁵ who must instill within himself an expansionist nature, as the acquisition of land (*prithvyā lābhe*) is one of the most important parts of administration.⁹⁶ Expansionist kings are of three types, the righteous, greedy, or "demonical" conqueror.⁹⁷ The righteous conqueror (*dharmavijayin*) is satisfied with submission by his subjects, the greedy king (*lobhavijayin*) with seizures of land and goods, while the demonical conqueror (*asuravijayin*) also takes sons, wives, and lives.⁹⁸

Buddhist texts, too, talk about important qualities of a king. The *Tesakuṇa Jātaka* refers to five strengths (*balāni*) that make a successful king: physical strength, wealth, ministers, high birth, and intellect.⁹⁹ The territory of a state should comprise a capital, towns, villages, countryside, and border areas.¹⁰⁰ The definition of power is also similar to Kauṭīliya's, referring to an army and treasure as powers of might, as well as the power of knowledge and the power of valor.¹⁰¹

According to the KA, the appointment of the king was to end the confusion arising out of anarchy (*arājaka*) in which the stronger exploits the weaker.¹⁰² The title of *devānampīya* ('beloved of god') is found not only in relation to Aśoka and the Sri Lankan king Tissa, but also in the Nagarjuni hill cave inscription in relation to his grandson Daśaratha.¹⁰³ Similar titles are seen in the inscriptions of the Kuṣāṇa kings, such as *mahārāja* ('great king'), *rājatirāja* ('King of Kings'), and *devaputra* ('son of god'). These rulers followed the practice of assuming grand titles from previous Indo-Greeks, who themselves borrowed it from the Achaemenid rulers.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁴ Kauṭīliya *Arthaśāstra* (KA) 6. 1. A similar definition is found in the *Tirukural* (381), where six limbs of the king are mentioned and refer to army, subjects, wealth, ministers, ally, and fort. The dating of the *Tirukural* has been difficult and the suggested dates vary from the early Common Era to as late as the ninth century (Kennedy 1976, 2).

⁹⁵ KA 6. 2. 13.

⁹⁶ KA 1. 1. 1.

⁹⁷ KA 11. 1. 10.

⁹⁸ KA 11. 1. 11–16.

⁹⁹ Gokhale 1966, 17.

¹⁰⁰ Gokhale 1966, 17.

¹⁰¹ KA 6. 2. 33.

¹⁰² KA 1. 13. 5; MS 7. 20.

¹⁰³ Thapar (1961) 2013, 348–349.

¹⁰⁴ See Falk 2010; Morris, ch. 2, this volume.

However, emphasis on divinity of the king is also found in the Indic literary tradition. One of the earliest references comes from the *Manusmṛti* (*MS*),¹⁰⁵ one of the earliest *dharmaśāstras* dated between the second and third centuries CE.¹⁰⁶ In the *Sangam* literature, we find a reference to the king as the center and embodiment of administration, encapsulated in the titles *ko*, *mannan*, *vendan*, and *iraivan*. *Ko* is also suggested to have meant god or ‘god incarnate.’¹⁰⁷

The idea of royal paternalism is also attested in various sources.¹⁰⁸ *Rājadharmā* (‘duties of the king’) are found in early Hindu political and economic treatises, the *KA* and the *MS*. The *KA* refers to the king’s happiness (*sukham*), but his welfare (*hita*) lies in the happiness and welfare of the people.¹⁰⁹ Like a father, the king helps initial settlers with various exemptions and grants favors.¹¹⁰ A reckless king, by contrast, can lose his position as a result of his people’s anger and revolt (*janapada-kopa*).¹¹¹ Buddhism also has the concept of political society as a family presided over by a morally elevated father figure.¹¹² The Buddhist universal monarch, the *cakkavatti* (*cakravarti*), is considered the beloved of the subjects.¹¹³ The statement of the Aśokan edict at Dhauli that “all men are my children” goes in the same direction, though in the imperial historiographical tradition this statement has been mistaken as some kind of paternal despotism.¹¹⁴

Standing armies are frequently mentioned in the sources, and the military campaigns in northern India are well known. The *KA* gives a detailed account of methods and tactics of warfare and siege, various ranks and their duties, training, army organization, salaries, camping, transport of armies, and the duties of the army commander.¹¹⁵ The army traditionally was fourfold, comprised of foot soldiers, horsemen, chariots, and elephant forces. Apart from the standing army, the king could deploy additional “hereditary troops, hired troops, corporate troops, troops supplied by the ally, troops supplied by the enemy, and tribal troops.”¹¹⁶ The pur-

105 *Manusmṛti* (*MS*) 7. 4. The king is further equated with the gods Fire, Wind, Sun, Moon, Yama, Kubera, and Indra (*MS* 7. 7). Apart from association with Kubera, the deity of wealth, the king is also elevated to a higher socio-ritual position, and in his “benevolence lies Padmā, the goddess of prosperity” (*MS* 7. 11). A verse very similar to that in *MS* 7. 4 is also cited in *MS* 5. 96, where the king is mentioned as the embodiment of the ‘eight guardians’ (*aṣṭānām lokapāla*) and thus is considered pure at all times (Jayaswal 1924, 55).

106 Olivelle 2005, 25.

107 Subramanian 1966, 40.

108 Bandopadhyaya 1927, 64. See also Thapar (1961) 2013, 121.

109 *KA* 1. 19. 34.

110 *KA* 2. 1. 17–18.

111 *KA* 1. 13. 20.

112 Gokhale (1966, 21) in reference to *Majjhima Nikāya* 3. 176.

113 Gokhale 1966, 21.

114 Thapar (1961) 2013, 121.

115 *KA* 2. 33. 6–10.

116 *KA* 9. 2. 1, trans. Olivelle 2013, 352.

pose and conditions for the recruitment of these groups are also explained.¹¹⁷ The arms were to be returned to the royal armory, the horses and elephants to the royal stables.¹¹⁸ The elephants had three mounted archers and a mahout. Greeks showed a great interest in the use of elephants in the army, and there are references to the importance of elephants in the indigenous military.¹¹⁹ The *KA* refers to officers of horses, elephants, chariots, and infantry (*aśvādhyakṣa*, *hastyadhyakṣa*, *rathādhyakṣa*, and *pattiyadhyakṣa*).¹²⁰ The Buddhist text *Dīgha Nikāya* refers to the wheel-treasure, the elephant-treasure, and the horse-treasure as parts of the seven jewels of an empire.¹²¹ It is believed that it was because of this form of military machine that it was possible for the Mauryas to subdue most of the northern region.¹²²

Even in various works of Greek Indography, the military strength of Indian rulers is praised. Plutarch mentions that Candragupta Maurya subdued India with an army of 80,000 horses, 200,000 foot soldiers, 8,000 chariots, and 6,000 elephants.¹²³ Pliny mentions walled towns of the eastern Deccan, and that the rulers of the powerful tribe Andarae (probably referring to the Āndhras/Sātavāhanas)¹²⁴ maintained an army of 100,000 infantry, 2,000 cavalry, and 1,000 elephants.¹²⁵ In the southern context, a similar picture has been suggested, with a fourfold army – ox-drawn chariots, elephants, cavalry, and infantry.¹²⁶

War drums were symbols of sovereignty and an important part of warfare. Each ruler and chieftain had a war drum among his insignia.¹²⁷ The symbolism of war drums is clearly attested in a reference to the change in Aśoka's policy toward conquest and expansion. His expansionist policy is referred to as *bherighoṣa*, literally meaning the 'sound of the war drums,' i.e., declaration of war.¹²⁸ In the *Sangam* texts, there are also references to capturing the war drums of different groups as a sign of control over them.

117 *KA* 9. 2. 13–20.

118 Trautmann 2009, 233.

119 Trautmann 2009.

120 *KA* 2. 30. 1–2. 33. 11.

121 Ghoshal (1959) 1995, 77.

122 Trautmann 2009, 233.

123 Plutarch *Life of Alexander* 62. 3; Majumdar 1960, 192–193, 198; see also Chakravarti 1986, 48.

124 Aiyangar 1941, 46.

125 Plin. *HN* 6. 22. 67; see von Reden, ch. 10.B, this volume.

126 N. K. A. Sastri (1955) 1995, 133.

127 U. Singh 2008, 385.

128 In RE IV, Aśoka claims the replacement of *bherighoṣa* with *dhammaghoṣa* ('call of *dhamma*'). It is understood as a change in policy that is from aggressive conquest to *dhamma*. The term *dhamma* in this context is understood by some scholars as the spread of Buddhism, while others understand it as moral governance, righteousness, and social ethics. See V. A. Smith (1901) 1920, 29–31; Raychaudhuri (1923) 1972, 170–178; Basham 1986, 56–58; Thapar 2003, 200–204.

II.3 Regions, Networks, and Connectivity

The Sanskrit textual sources refer to the northern region as the *Āryāvarta*, the abode of the noble, expanding from the Himalayas in the north to Vindhya in the south.¹²⁹ Within this the Ganga-Yamuna region is considered the *Madhyadeśa* ('Middle Country'), expanding toward the river Sarasvatī in the west.¹³⁰ Within the period of our concern, epigraphic sources also refer to the subcontinent as *Jambudvīpa* (literally 'the island of rose apple')¹³¹ and *Bhāratavarṣa* ('land of the descendants of King Bharat').¹³² The region south from the Vindhya Ranges to the river Krishna was known as the *Drāviḍadeśa*, which in the Graeco-Roman *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (*PME*) and Ptolemy's *Geographia* is frequently referred to as *Dachinabades* and *Limyrike* (*Dimirike*), the hinterland of Barygaza (Bharuch).¹³³ The southernmost region of present Tamil Nadu and Kerala are identified as the Tamilakam, which is a linguistic rather than a geopolitical entity.¹³⁴

Literary sources do not only identify geographical regions, but also networks and corridors. Such corridors of travel and communication appear in texts from the sixth to fifth centuries BCE onward.¹³⁵ Of interest here are the *Uttarāpatha* ('northward route') and the *Dakṣiṇāpatha* ('southward route'). The term *Uttarāpatha* is found in one of the earliest surviving Sanskrit grammatical texts, Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, dated between the fifth and fourth centuries BCE.¹³⁶ The route certainly facilitated long-distance journeys through networks of roads toward northerly regions with multiple functions and associations depending on geographical contexts.¹³⁷ The networking routes are said to have filled important roles for administrative purposes. They were hubs, semiautonomous regional centers, and clusters of cultic activi-

129 Here the Sanskrit/traditional textual sources include a wide array of normative texts (the *śāstras*, pertaining to general livelihood, morality, legality, and administrative matters), grammatical texts, and the *itihāsa-kāvya* tradition commonly considered related to the epic tradition.

130 *MS* 2. 21–22. The river Sarasvatī has not been located, and it is mostly understood as part of a mythical geography. See also, Chattopadhyaya 2015, 23.

131 RE I from Maski refers to the subcontinent as *Jambudvīpa*. Sircar points out that this could have been a reference to the Aśokan Empire, which in Dhauli RE V is called *prithvi* ('the entire earth'). This may be an exaggeration, however. The concept of *Jambudvīpa* is also seen in Buddhist *Visuddhimagga*, *Vinaya* texts, and the *Purāṇas*, which identify *Jambudvīpa* as the region between the Himalayas and the southern sea (Law 1955, 8–9; Sircar [1979] 2000, 62, 66–68, 84; Thapar [1961] 2013, 26).

132 Jayaswal and Banerji 1929; Bhattacharyya 2009, 21–22.

133 *PME* 51; Ptol. *Geog.* 7. 1. 8; 1. 7. 6; 7. 1. 85; Casson 1989, 213; Chakravarti 2016, 187.

134 Abraham 2003, 207–208, 212; 2008, 53.

135 Chandra 1953, 45–68.

136 For the commodities procured along the northern route, *Auttarapathika*, see Agrawal 1953, 244.

137 Neelis 2013, 14.

ties.¹³⁸ It is also suggested that the network was used by both regional and foreign political units for expansion into northern India.¹³⁹ This interpretation is based on an understanding of the routes as part of an imperial communication network, described by Megasthenes as royal roads with pillars to mark distances, extending from Susa in Iran to Palibothra (Pataliputra, modern Patna in Bihar) under the Mauryas.¹⁴⁰ The two Aramaic edicts of Aśoka from Laghman mention the term KRPTY (*karapathi*), which is considered to mean ‘royal roads.’¹⁴¹

The *KA* explains “the east and the west trade routes” further by talking about “the route to the Himavat” (possibly a reference to the *Uttarāpatha*) and the route to the south (the *Dakṣiṇāpatha*).¹⁴² The reference is made within a debate about which trade route is better. The *KA* emphasizes the benefits of trade to the south. The author expresses a clear preference for land routes, and here in particular wheel tracks rather than footpaths.¹⁴³ Among different kinds of water paths, he prefers coastal and riverine routes over the open sea. The influence of topography on the routes is most prominent in peninsular India. Because of the varied terrain and smaller stretches of alluvial soil, the agricultural tracts were relatively smaller in comparison to those of the northern plains. Yet the uneven distribution of the rich mineral resources in the peninsular region necessitated an internal exchange system. The *KA* explicitly refers to the profitable trade in minerals in the Deccan.¹⁴⁴ Sanskrit Buddhist texts divide India into three parts, *Madhyadeśa*, *Uttarāpatha*, and *Dakṣiṇāpatha*, where the two latter terms are not seen as routes but as regions.¹⁴⁵

The interaction of different ecological zones stands out clearly in the *Sangam* literature. The texts are strongly aware of the geographical and ecological divisions of the southern Indian region. Central to this perception is the notion of *tinai*.¹⁴⁶ The five *tinai*s are first mentioned in *Tolkappiyam*, the earliest extant Tamil text, where they form zones characterized by particular landscapes and occupations: the *Kurinji* (areas with hilly terrain), *Mullai* (pastures and woodlands), *Palai* (arid stretches), *Neidal* (littorals), and *Marudam* (agrarian tracts). *Tinai*s also had their

138 Thapar 2003, 196; Fussman 1987–1988, 66–68; Neelis 2013, 14.

139 Neelis 2013, 14.

140 Megasthenes *ad Strabo* 15. 1. 11; 15. 1. 50; see also Neelis 2013; von Reden, ch. 10.B, this volume.

141 Chakravarti 2017, 309. For the inscriptions, see Mukherjee 1984.

142 *KA* 7. 12. 22–26. The route to the Himavat, or the *Haimavatapatha*, in Kautiliya’s *Arthaśāstra* (*KA*) has been identified as the route from Balk to Taxila based on the items that are said to have been traded in the region, such as horses, woolen cloths, hides, and furs (Chandra 1977, 5, 78, 79). For the Skt. text and translation of the *KA*, see Kangle (1960–65) 2014, vols. 1 and 2 respectively

143 *KA* 7. 12. 13–26.

144 *KA* 7. 12. 13–26.

145 Law 1955, 14. Based on the *PME*, De Romanis (2012) also discusses the possible evolution of the term *Dakṣiṇāpatha* from a hodonym (name of a road) to a choronym (name of a region).

146 For discussion on *Sangam* literature, see Dwivedi, ch. 10.A, this volume.

own heroes and deities, and thus formed some kind of identity group.¹⁴⁷ Yet the precise meaning of the term *tinai* can only be conjectured, as the semantic field of the term ranges from ‘space,’ ‘land,’ and ‘abode,’ to ‘genre,’ ‘genealogy,’ and ‘situation.’¹⁴⁸ Thus, some scholars take them as ecological zones that harbored differentiated economic activities. The littoral zone was associated with fishery and pearl diving, while agricultural groups that were always under the threat of attack by raiders from the *Palai* areas occupied the fertile *Marudam*. In this approach, the fertile agricultural tracts of *Marudam* created a prerequisite for state-like political formations, as particular ecological pockets had access to urban centers and the inland capitals of chieftains.¹⁴⁹ Other scholars regard them as just mythopoeic categories, or semiotic tools for organizing a lyrical landscape with no background in a real world.¹⁵⁰ However, regardless of whether the *tinais* are considered as real ecological zones in southern India or as mere mythopoetic concepts, *Sangam* poetry provides us with an insight into how early writers conceptualized and represented regions, occupations, and polities in ecological terms.

The knowledge of geography or place names of the southern region in northern Sanskrit texts does not indicate a gradually increasing awareness of southern geography in the post-Mauryan period. Rather, the Indo-Sri Lankan coast was already well known in pre-Mauryan times.¹⁵¹ If we believe the Roman geographer Strabo, Sri Lanka (Taprobane in Greek) was known to Alexander’s pilot Onesikritos when the Macedonian army was stationed near the river Indus.¹⁵² It is also remarkable that early sources refer to Sri Lanka as Tamraparṇī.¹⁵³ The Tamraparṇī River (now Thamirabarani) near the coast of the southern peninsula may represent a close connection between the riverine and maritime routes to Sri Lanka, connecting coastal ports with inland riverine ports.¹⁵⁴

The early historical donative records, found throughout the subcontinent, are also an interesting source for understanding social, economic, and ecological connectivity. Donative texts on stone were not the result of any “royal decree but constructed through the generosity of the common man, by a process of collective do-

147 Gurukkal 1993, 7.

148 Champakalakshmi 1996; Chakravarti 2016; Devadevan 2006, 200.

149 Champakalakshmi 1996, 28–32; Gurukkal 1995.

150 Devadevan 2006; Selby 2008.

151 Maloney 1970, 606; Ray 2003; 2008; Abraham 2003; 2008.

152 Strabo 15. 1. 14–15; Maloney 1970, 606. Sri Lanka was also known to Arrian (second century CE). On the knowledge of Sri Lankan natural phenomena by Arrian, see Ray 2003, 168–172.

153 Aśokan RE II and XIII, as discussed above, and the KA 2. 11. 1–2.

154 The similarity of archaeological assemblage even in the megalithic phase between South Indian and Sri Lankan sites, such as Adichanallur and Pomparippu, has often been suggested (Kennedy 1974, 24). Further, there have been studies about the cosmopolitan nature of Anuradhapura from the fourth century onward. It is situated in the North-Central province of the island and transformed from an Iron Age village into a metropolis due to extensive development of irrigation facilities (Coningham, Manuel, and Shoebridge 2017).

nation that is attested by the masses.”¹⁵⁵ The donations or gifts, referred to as *dāna*, include anything from single railing pillars, cross bars, sculptures, and stone to images of the Buddha, Bodhisattvas, Jain Tirthankaras, and Hindu deities. The donors often identified themselves with their and their ancestors’ names, references to their home city or region, and their occupations. It is interesting that most of the donors were monks, nuns, and laypersons.¹⁵⁶ Donative records from Mathura mostly refer to the occupations of the donors, such as perfume merchants, courtesans, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, ivory workers, performers, rich merchants, travelling merchants, and others.¹⁵⁷ Studies of the donative inscriptions from the Sanchi *stūpa* have been used to identify kinship relations. The references to kinship ties of the donors along with references to their occupation and places of origin have been used to understand the complexity of identities as a characteristic of urban societies. Individuals occupied many roles, vis-à-vis their religious, economic, political, and regional affiliations.¹⁵⁸ Similarly, donative inscriptions from areas near Anuradhapura have been used to understand the limited role of kings in patronage of religious structures, water body management, and administration. Like in other parts of the subcontinent, Anuradhapura also demonstrates the importance of social dynamics as opposed to state-driven developments.¹⁵⁹

II.3.1 Foreigners in Local Texts

References to outsiders are commonly found in Indic texts and are often identified with the term *yavana*. References to rulers like Antiochos of Syria, Ptolemy of Egypt, Antigonos of Macedonia, Megas of Cyrene, and Alexander of Epiros as *yona-lāja* in RE II and XIII have been mentioned above. In RE V, Aśoka includes *yavanas* among his subjects at the northwestern border.¹⁶⁰ RE XIII refers to kingdoms situated along his borders and includes the country of the *yavanas*.¹⁶¹ The presence of *yavanas* in the northwest is also associated with the presence of the bilingual Aśokan edict at Kandahar in Greek and Aramaic.¹⁶² Another piece of epigraphic evidence comes from Khāravēla’s Hathigumpha inscription dated to the second century BCE. Here, the king is eulogized for having defeated and pushed back a certain *yavana-rāja*

¹⁵⁵ Dehejia 1992, 35.

¹⁵⁶ U. Singh 1996.

¹⁵⁷ V. L. Singh 2005; Bhattacharya 2008, 495–500. For the inscriptions from Mathura, see, Lüders 1912.

¹⁵⁸ Basant 2009; U. Singh 1996.

¹⁵⁹ Coningham 1995.

¹⁶⁰ Sircar (1979) 2000, 15; 22–23; 31–33.

¹⁶¹ Ray 1988, 312.

¹⁶² Sircar (1979) 2000, 113.

out of Rājagṛha to Mathura.¹⁶³ There are, furthermore, records of donations made by *yavanas* in central and western India, for example, the records of a gift at Sanchi by a *yona* living in Setapatha, of gifts at Karle by *yavanas* living in Dhenukākata, by the Vitasamgata from the unidentified place Umehanakata, and at Junnar by a *yavana* from Gata.¹⁶⁴

While most of the epigraphic records are post-Aśokan, references to *yavanas* are also found in pre-Aśokan Sanskrit grammatical works.¹⁶⁵ From around 500 BCE onward, *yavanas* appear to have been included in the category of people who spoke a *mlecchas bhāṣā*.¹⁶⁶ The areas where these people lived were designated as *mleccha deśa* and included frontier zones such as the countries where the *yavanas* and *kāmbojas* lived. Subsequently, rich mythologies emerged, giving the *yavanas* a local northern Indian origin.¹⁶⁷

In Tamil texts, references to Graeco-Roman outsiders or strangers are attested rather late. The term *yavanar* seems to have been triply imported. It is the Tamilized form of *yavana* deriving from the Sanskritized version of ‘Ionian,’ in turn entering Sanskrit/Prakrit through the Old Persian term *Yauna* denoting Ionian Greeks, who were conquered by Cyrus in the sixth century BCE.¹⁶⁸ Originally denoting Greeks or Romans, the word came to refer to any unfamiliar being, foreigner, or stranger. In the context of Tamil literature it occurs for the first time in the *Puranānūru* (ca. 350 CE) where the *yavanars* are described as wine merchants coming in boats. It is interesting that while Greek and Roman trade is attested in earlier texts, the term *yavanar* enters Tamil literature much later, though with no conspicuous description. It comes “very much in passing and almost offhand, as if the ‘Greeks’ were a part of the ordinary daily existence.”¹⁶⁹

II.3.2 Inland Networks

Indic connections to the north and beyond the Himalayas are clear in the material and architectural remains. This is often studied in connection to the Gandhāran material culture and spread of Buddhism. The expansion of Indic traditions beyond the Indus is associated with the legendary account of colonization of Khotan by Kunāla, a son of Aśoka. By the fourth century CE Khotan had become a center for

¹⁶³ Jayaswal and Banerji 1929.

¹⁶⁴ Ray 1988, 314–315.

¹⁶⁵ Karttunen 2015, 42.

¹⁶⁶ The term *mleccha* refers to ‘non-Vedic,’ ‘barbaric,’ ‘non-ārya,’ an outcast, or a foreigner. *Mleccha bhāṣā* means the language of the *mlecchas*.

¹⁶⁷ Ray 1988, 321–322.

¹⁶⁸ Ray 1988, 312; Selby 2008, 82.

¹⁶⁹ Selby 2008, 83.

the diffusion of northwestern Prakrit.¹⁷⁰ The accounts of a Chinese Buddhist monk, Faxian (fourth to fifth century CE) refers to the Gomativihāra of Khotan, famous for housing 3,000 monks, where Sanskrit manuscripts of medical knowledge and other types of texts were reproduced and translated.¹⁷¹ The Kharoṣṭhī documents from Niya also refer to a monetary denomination of *masa* (Skt. *māṣaka*) and other Sanskritized names in the context of Buddhist *vihāras* that point to a prolonged connection with Indic traditions.¹⁷²

Routes through the Swat valley are considered the most common and conventional connections between the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia. This region is considered as a corridor toward the Indus and then into the mainland for contact and invasions. Other than this corridor, scholars point to another overland route along the Karakorum highway connecting Kashmir with Kashgar, including the sites of Gilgit, Chilas, Skardu, etc., based on the rock engravings and epigraphic material.¹⁷³ This route is identified as the Jibin (Kashmir) route in the Chinese sources of the Han period. It was suggested this route would be a shorter way to directly connect Kashgar to the subcontinent in comparison to the route from Kashgar to Kabul and then to the Peshawar-Taxila region.¹⁷⁴

Material remains in archaeological contexts have also been used as evidence for interregional connections within mainland India. Raw materials as well as finished products of agate, steatite, carnelian, ivory, gold, copper, and iron have been used to chart inland communication between northern and southern regions.¹⁷⁵ Archaeological assemblages of various megalithic sites contain material remains that have been used to identify connectivity between inland and coastal areas, so much so that recent studies have questioned the concept of ‘hinterland’ and ‘foreland.’¹⁷⁶ The distribution of Buddhist sites and their contextualization in their respective geographic settings has also allowed the identification of different passes and arterial routes (map 1).¹⁷⁷

170 Sastri and Srinivasachari 1970, 229.

171 Sastri and Srinivasachari 1970, 229.

172 Hansen 2017, 83–93.

173 Inscriptions in Kharoṣṭhī, Brāhmī, Chinese and Sogdian have been reported along with rock engravings of *stupa* worship and horses brought for trade (Jettmar 1989; Neelis 2000; Chakravarti 2017, 311–314).

174 Chakravarti 2017, 313. For a discussion on problems of identification of such toponyms as modern regions, see Morris, ch. 9, sec. II.3, this volume.

175 Lahiri (1992) has illustrated the distribution of various raw materials in different parts of the subcontinent. She explains the possible distributive networks from the Bronze age up to 200 BCE. Chakrabarti and Lahiri (1996) charted out the distribution of copper sources as well as their find spots in the subcontinent, which allows one to identify channels of communication.

176 Bauer 2016.

177 Ray 1994a; 1994b; Chakrabarti 2005; 2010b; Neelis 2011.

II.3.3 Maritime Networks

South Asia has a long history of maritime connections to both western and eastern regions of the Indian Ocean.¹⁷⁸ The transmission of flora and fauna from the African continent and Southeast Asia dates back to the second and first millennia BCE.¹⁷⁹ Maritime networks involving coastal centers in Gujarat (western India) date back to the third millennium BCE, while Tamil maritime connections can be traced to the first millennium BCE. A third region of maritime activity was that of the Bay of Bengal, although it contrasts with the other two as having more extensive inland and riverine connections.¹⁸⁰ Here, the location of coastal ports may not have responded to maritime trade, but rather to the location of resources in the hinterland.¹⁸¹ The connection of regional coastal routes with the hinterland via river is confirmed by the distribution of rouletted ware (RW) in Bangladesh and West Bengal.¹⁸²

In the Indian context, trade and exchange are often part of the ritual and social roles of communities and not the consequence of settled agricultural life associated with surplus production and state formation.¹⁸³ Trading activity, including seafaring in the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea, must be dissociated from the question of state formation and the great empires as prime movers of trade.¹⁸⁴ If one considers that the vast majority of produce shipped between and through Indian ports consisted of local subsistence products rather than luxuries, the role of small-scale entrepreneurs in multitude comes into view.¹⁸⁵ The vast majority of pottery found in coastal sites along the Indian littoral is now identified as being of local origin, although many varieties of coarse ware are still difficult to place precisely.¹⁸⁶

South Asia's role in the maritime networks of the western Indian Ocean is usually studied in connection with trade in the Arabian Sea, Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea.¹⁸⁷ The *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (mid-first century CE), with its extensive record of travel and navigation through ancient ports, is one of the most commonly used

178 Among the large amount of literature devoted to Indian Ocean trade, see the most recent volumes by De Romanis and Maiuro (2015); Mathew (2017); Cobb 2018.

179 Fuller et al. 2011.

180 Ray 2003, 20.

181 Most of the early western sources refer to the already existing ports. There is hardly any indication that the activities of the traders either established or enhanced the trading stations (Ray 2003, 23–24).

182 Schenk 2006; Tomber 2008, 45–46.

183 For discussion see, A. Ghosh 1973; Ray 1994a.

184 For a discussion on internal and external impetuses for the development of trade in India and urbanization and secondary state formation, see Chakravarti 2017, 333–338.

185 Ray 2003 82–125; Fuller et al. 2011. The non-luxury items may include food stuffs, inexpensive textiles, spices, medicines, and ritual commodities (Seland 2014, 386).

186 On the misattribution of conical amphorae and rouletted ware in particular, see Tomber 2008, 44–45. See Dwivedi, ch. 10.A, this volume for the history of rouletted ware.

187 Mathew 2017; De Romanis and Maiuro 2015; Seland 2014, 368.

sources for the study of maritime activity in this region.¹⁸⁸ As a result, port sites on the western coast of the mainland and in Sri Lanka have been studied through the lens of Roman trade with India, most prominently at the sites of Arikamedu and Pattanam (alleged Muziris). More recently, Roman and Indian traders have been considered as just two players active along the long-established routes of trade and exchange from East Africa to Sri Lanka via Arabia, southern Iran, and the Indian subcontinent.¹⁸⁹ Recent archaeology focuses more carefully on the identification and analysis of South Asian artifacts at sites across the Arabian Sea. One example is the discovery of Indian pottery dating back to centuries long before the Common Era from sites in southern Arabia (Khor Rori), the Arabian Gulf (Mleiha), and the Red Sea (Berenike and Myos Hormos).¹⁹⁰ Finds of grain from Mleiha and ed-Durr in Umm al Qaiwain, early Indian coins of Ujjain and the Sātavāhanas, and inscriptions in Tamil-Brāhmī script are also important markers of connectivity.¹⁹¹ Indian pottery found in the port towns on the Red Sea coast are now considered as relating to Indian communities settling there, rather than as representing Roman imports of ceramics or their contents.¹⁹² This is particularly true for rouletted and other fine wares that are represented in small numbers (ca. 20 vessels) in Myos Hormos and Berenike.¹⁹³

Southeast Asian connections with South Asia based on the similarity of religious-political concepts has been a topic of discussion since the colonial period. The ‘Indinization’ or ‘Indicization’ of Southeast Asia, including the spread of Buddhism, was considered a form of colonization undertaken by the South Asian empires and states, especially during the first millennium CE.¹⁹⁴ However, archaeological, epigraphical, and socio-anthropological research has pointed to maritime connections with Southeast Asia as early as the second millennium BCE. Furthermore, shared seafaring technology, suggesting that the development of boat-building techniques in India were influenced by Southeast Asian practices, indicates transfers of knowledge.¹⁹⁵ Another type of shared knowledge was that of metallurgy. Bimetallic artifacts of bronze and iron from sites in South Asia, east Java, and Vietnam date back to the first millennium BCE, and are still evident in the beginning of the Common Era. Glass, pottery, and carnelian beads also appear as common remains linking South and Southeast Asia over long periods of time.¹⁹⁶

188 Ray 2011; Seland 2014.

189 Fitzpatrick 2011, 30.

190 Reddy 2016, 55–68.

191 Reddy 2016, 71–72; Haerinck 1998, 293–296.

192 Tomber 2008, 74; Thomas 2012, 180.

193 Tomber 2008, 74.

194 For an overview of the argument and criticisms, see Mabbet 1977; M. Smith 1999; Winzeler 1981, 459–466; Ray 1996, 422–431.

195 Fuller et al. 2011, 551–553.

196 Ray 2003, 120–123.

Knowledge of a place called Suvarṇabhūmi (literally ‘the land of gold’) in Southeast Asia, including its location, is another issue in the debate on Indian maritime contacts and networks.¹⁹⁷ Buddhist *Jātakas*, some of which date to the third century BCE, refer to overseas voyages toward the seaports of Suvarṇabhūmi.¹⁹⁸ The *KA* also refers to an incense from a region named Svarṇabhūmi.¹⁹⁹ Further, the prevalence of Brāhmī inscriptions of the South Indian variety in Borneo, Myanmar, Java, and Malaysia makes the connectivity obvious. Also, Sanskrit inscriptions and political structures based (it has been suggested) on the principles of the *dharmasāstras* and the *KA* are considered to be the result of cultural and economic influences.²⁰⁰

The attribution of Suvarṇabhūmi to a geo-political entity was an important factor in debates surrounding the spread of Buddhism in nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship. However, extensive gold mines in the Philippines, Borneo, western Burma, western Sumatra, the Malaysian and Thai peninsulas, central Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos confirm the reputation of Suvarṇabhūmi as a ‘land of gold.’²⁰¹ High-value artifacts of South Asian provenance used in a ritual context, moreover, have been discovered in sites of peninsular and central Thailand and coastal Vietnam. Rouletted ware and beads found in coastal sites in Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia show that maritime trade between these regions and South Asia was established by the third century BCE.²⁰² The presence of merchants is evident from merchant seals found at U Thong and Chansen. Small stone seals from Palembang are inscribed in Sanskrit with the verse: “This successful journey is for the welfare and happiness for all human beings.”²⁰³

III Conclusion

Understanding the political development and chronology of early India is a complex matter due to a scarcity of dated texts and a complicated archaeological situation. Discrepancies and contradictions between literary and archaeological evidence exacerbate the problems.²⁰⁴ While the northwestern region is understood by many scholars as primarily Buddhist and its polities inspired by the *gaṇa-samgha* (repub-

197 For this and the following, see Ray and Mishra 2018.

198 Ray and Mishra 2018, 1–4.

199 *KA* 2. 11. 96.

200 Sastri and Srinivasachari 1970, 230–231.

201 Bennet 2009; Ray and Mishra 2018, 4–6.

202 Jahan 2010, 5.

203 Guy 2014, 8, quoted in Ray and Mishra 2018, 9.

204 The inherent contradiction lies in the different ways in which each field is used: archaeological data are commonly used to corroborate theories derived from literary sources. The role of archaeology in history writing and the problems associated with it have been discussed in several essays in Ray and Sinopoli 2004.

lican-style polities), archaeological and architectural remains run contrary to this perspective.

Early historic South Asia exhibits a variety of political formations. There were polities with tendencies toward monarchical rule, elaborate administrative structures, and expansionist military apparatuses. There were also political conglomerations and lineage-based polities coexisting with the kingdoms and often outliving the monarchical structures. The dynamics of subjugation, coexistence, and alliance do not allow one to chart fixed political developments in a cohesive unity spanning the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, the idea of dynamic unity has resulted in scholars understanding the political scenario of South Asia differently. While one group of scholars regards the degree of ecological diversity as an adequate condition for one region (the Ganga-Yamuna valley) to emerge as a nucleus region with a level of surplus production and resource concentration that enabled the control of other regions, the alternate view sees the diversity and complexity of ecologies and social structures as hindering the formation of empire-like structures. However, if empire is to be understood as more than a central state, military apparatus, and dominant political and religious influence, other, perhaps more helpful, aspects come into perspective. If we define empires more flexibly as a political context of connectivity and interaction (of ideological, religious, cultural, and economic forms), the history of the South Asian region appears as a dynamic entity with connections and interactions both within the region and with the wider world. South Asia provides an example of an interesting relationship between ritual, economic, and social aspects of society in which polities, monuments, and institutions developed through factors other than either the purely political or the purely economic.

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