CHAPTER 4

The Gupta period; a golden age; literature, art, and science; Hindu renaissance; the Huns; King Harsha; the Chālukyas; disorder in northern India

Definite chronology from A.D. 320. The transition from the unsettled and hotly disputed history of the foreign dynasties to the comparatively serene atmosphere of the Gupta period is no less agreeable to the historian than the similar passage from the uncertainties of the Nand as to the ascertained verities of the Mauryas. In both cases the experience is like that of a man in an open boat suddenly gliding from the misery of a choppy sea outside into the calm water of a harbour.

The chronology of the Gupta period, taking that period in a wide sense as extending from A.D. 320, or in round numbers from A.D. 300, to A.D. 647, or the middle of the seventh century, is not only certain in all its main outlines, but also precise in detail to a large extent, except for the latter half of the sixth century.

It is possible, therefore, to construct a continuous narrative of the history of northern and western India for the greater part of three centuries and a half, without the embarrassment which clogs all attempts at narrative when the necessary chronological framework is insecure.

Rise of the Gupta dynasty. The exact course of events which brought about the collapse of the Indo-Scythian or Kushān empire in India at some time in the third century is not known. The disturbed state of the country seems to be the explanation of the lack of contemporary inscriptions or other memorials of the time, and of the hopeless confusion of tradition as recorded in books. Many independent states must have been formed when the control of a paramount authority was withdrawn. The Lichchhavis of Vaiśāli, last heard of in the days of Buddha, now emerge again after 800 years of silence. It would seem that the clan or nation obtained possession of Pātaliputra, the ancient imperial capital, and perhaps ruled there as tributaries or feudatories of the Kushāns, whose headquarters were at Peshawar. Early in the fourth century a Lichchhavi princess gave her hand to a Rājā in Magadha who bore the historic name of Chandragupta. The matrimonial alliance with the Lichchhavis so enhanced his power that he was able to extend his dominion over Oudh as well as Magadha, and along the Ganges as far as Prayāga or Allahabad. Chandragupta recognized his dependence on his wife’s people by striking his gold coins in the joint names of himself, his queen (Kumāra Dēvi), and the Lichchhavi
nated. He felt himself sufficiently important to establishing a new era, the Gupta, of which the year 1 ran from 26 February 320, presumably the date of his enthronement or coronation, to 13 March 321. The era continued in use in parts of India for several centuries.

That seems to me the natural interpretation of the coin legends. Mr. Allan, of the British Museum, regards the coins as having been struck by Samudragupta in honour of his parents, a view which I cannot accept.
The reign of Chandragupta I was probably short, and may have ended about A.D. 330. His son and successor was always careful to describe himself as being 'the son of the daughter of the Lichchhavi', a formula implying the acknowledgement that his royal authority was derived in part from his mother.

Samudragupta. Samudragupta, the second Gupta monarch, who reigned for forty or fifty years, was one of the most remarkable and accomplished kings recorded in Indian history. He undertook and succeeded in accomplishing the formidable task of making himself the paramount power in India. He spent some years first in thoroughly subduing such princes in the Gangetic plain as declined to acknowledge his authority. He then brought the wild forest tribes under control, and finally executed a military progress through the Deccan, advancing so far into the peninsula that he came into conflict with the Pallava ruler of Kanchi (Conjeeveram) near Madras. Samudragupta did not attempt to retain permanently his conquests in the south, being content to receive homage from the vanquished princes and to bring back to his capital a vast golden treasure. He celebrated the *asvamedha* or horse sacrifice, which had been long in abeyance, in order to mark successful assertion of his claim to imperial rank, and struck interesting gold medals in commemoration of the event.

Samudragupta’s empire. At the close of Samudragupta’s triumphal career his empire—the greatest in India since the days of Ashoka—extended on the north to the base of the mountains, but did not include Kashmir. The eastern limit probably was the Brahmaputra. The Narbadā may be regarded as the frontier on the south. The Jumna and Chambal rivers marked the western limit of the territories directly under the imperial government, but various tribal states in the Panjab and Malwa, occupied by the Yaudhēyas, Mālavas, and other nations, enjoyed autonomy under the protection of the paramount power.

Tribute was paid and homage rendered by the rulers of five frontier kingdoms, namely Samatata, or the delta of the Brahmaputra; Davāka, perhaps Eastern Bengal; Kāmarūpa, roughly equivalent to Assam; Kartripura, probably represented by Kumaon and Garhwal; and Nepal.

Relations with foreign powers. Samudragupta further claims that he received respectful service from the foreign Kushān princes of the north-west, whom he grouped together as ‘Saka chiefs’, and even from the Sinhalese. It is clear, therefore, that his name was

1 Kācha (Kacha), who struck a few gold coins, may have intervened for a few months either before or after Samudragupta, if he was distinct from him; but the general opinion is that they were identical.

2 The great inscription, which records in line 23 the rendering of ‘acts of respectful service’ by ‘Daivaputra-Shāhi-Shāhanushāhi-Saka-murundas, Sinhalese, and others’, must be interpreted in the light of modern research as meaning that the civilities were tendered by Meghavarna, King of Ceylon, and by sundry Kushān princes of the north-west, described collectively as ‘Saka-murundas’, or ‘Saka chiefs’, who used the styles of Daivaputra ( = Chinese ‘Son of Heaven’), Shāhi, or ‘king’; and
known and honoured over the whole of India proper. He did not attempt to carry his arms across the Sutlej or to dispute the authority of the Kushān kings who continued to rule in and beyond the Indus basin. The fact of the existence of friendly relations with Ceylon about A.D. 360 is confirmed by a Chinese historian who relates that King Meghavarna of Ceylon (c. 352–79) sent an embassy with gifts to Samudragupta and obtained his permission to erect a splendid monastery to the north of the holy tree at Bōdh Gayā for the use of pilgrims from the island.

**Personal gifts.** Samudragupta was a man of exceptional personal capacity and unusually varied gifts. His skill in music and song is commemorated by certain rare gold coins or medals which depict the king seated on a couch playing the Indian lute (vīnā). He was equally proficient in the allied art of poetry, and is said to have composed numerous works worthy of the reputation of a professional author. He took much delight in the society of the learned, whose services he engaged in the defence of the sacred scriptures. He was a Brahmanical Hindu with a special devotion to Vishnu, like the other members of his house.

The exact date of Samudragupta’s death is not known; but he certainly lived to an advanced age, and when he passed away had enjoyed a reign of apparently uninterrupted prosperity for nearly half a century.

**Chandragupta II.** About A.D. 380, or perhaps some five years earlier, he was succeeded by a son specially selected as the most worthy of the crown, who assumed his grandfather’s name and is therefore known to history as Chandragupta II. Later in life he took the additional title of Vikramāditya (‘Sun of prowess’), which is associated by tradition with the Raja of Ujjain who is believed to have defeated the Śakas and established the Vikrama era in 58–57 B.C. It is possible that such a Raja may really have existed, although the tradition has not yet been verified by the discovery of inscriptions, coins, or monuments. The popular legends concerning ‘Raja Bikram’ probably have been coloured by indistinct memories of Chandragupta II, whose principal military achievement was the conquest of Malwa, Gujarāt, and Saurashtra or Kathiawar, countries which had been ruled for several centuries by Śaka chiefs. Those chiefs, who had been tributary to the Kushāns, called themselves Satraps or Great Satraps. The conquest was effected between the years A.D. 388 and 401. 395 may be taken as the mean date of the operations, which must have lasted for several years. The advance of the imperial arms involved the subjugation of the Mālavas and certain other tribes which had remained outside the frontier of Samudragupta, although enjoying his protection. Rudrasimha, the last of the Satraps, was killed. A

Shāhānushāhi or ‘King of Kings’. *Shāhānu* is a genitive plural. The Purāṇas treat the Murundas as distinct from the Śakas, but originally the word meant simply ‘chief = Chinese *wang*. In practice the name Murunda was employed to denote a section of the Śakas.
scandalous tradition, recorded by an author of the seventh century, affirmed that the king of the Śakas, 'while courting another man’s wife, was butchered by Chandragupta, concealed in his mistress’s dress'. The fragmentary play Devicandraguptam treats of this event as occurring during the reign of a weak elder brother of Chandragupta, named Rāmagupta, and adds that Chandragupta killed Rāmagupta and married his queen. The story is disbelieved by most competent authorities, but may contain a germ of truth.

Trade with west; Ujjain. The annexation of the Satraps’ territories added provinces of exceptional wealth and fertility to the northern empire, which had become an extremely rich and powerful state at the beginning of the fifth century. The income from the customs duties collected at the numerous ports on the western coast which were now brought under Gupta rule must have been a valuable financial resource. From time immemorial Bharōch (Broach), Sopāra, Cambay, and a multitude of other ports had carried on an active sea-borne trade with the countries of the west. Ujjain appears to have been the inland centre upon which most of the trade routes converged. The city, dating from immemorial antiquity, which still retains its ancient name unchanged and exists as a prosperous town in Madhya Bharat, has been always reckoned as one of the seven sacred Hindu cities, little inferior to Banaras in sanctity. Longitudes were reckoned from its meridian in ancient times. The favourable position of the city for trade evidently was the foundation both of its material prosperity and of the sanctity attaching to a site which enjoyed the favour of successive ruling powers by whom religious establishments of all kinds were founded from time to time.

The Great Satraps of Maharashtra. Two dynasties of Śaka princes, not certainly related, using the style of Great Satrap ruled in western India, and should not be confounded by being lumped together under a single designation as the ‘Western Satraps’.

The earlier dynasty ruled in Maharashtra or the region of the Western Ghats, its capital apparently being at or near Nasik. The date of its establishment is not known, and so far the names of only two princes, Bhūmaka and Nahapāṇa, have been recovered, but others may have existed. These we have met before, in connexion with the line of Śātavāhanas or Āndhras (p. 140, above).

The Great Satraps of Ujjain. At nearly the same time, or probably a few years earlier, a chieftain named Chashtana became Great Satrap of Malwa, with his capital at Ujjain. He may have been a subordinate of Kadphises II. His reign was not long, and his son did not come to the throne. Possibly he was killed in battle, for the times were troubled. Chashtana’s grandson, named Rudradāman, who was ruling conjointly with his grandfather in A.D. 130, won afresh for himself the position of Great Satrap, if our chronology is correct, under the suzerainty of Kanishka, and became the ruler of western India, including the provinces north of the Narbada which the Śātavāhana had wrested
from the Satrap of Maharashtra a few years previously. Chashtana's successors must have continued to be tributaries of Huvishka. When the Kushān empire broke up, the rulers of the west, who continued to style themselves Great Satraps, became independent, and preserved their authority until the twenty-first Great Satrap was killed by Chandragupta II at the close of the fourth century, when his country was incorporated in the Gupta empire, as already mentioned. The names and dates of the Great Satraps of Ujjain have been well ascertained, chiefly from coins, but little is known about the details of their history.¹

Character of Chandragupta II. The principal Gupta kings, except the founder of the dynasty, all enjoyed long reigns, like Akbar and his successors in a later age. Chandragupta Vikramāditya occupied the throne for nearly forty years until at least A.D. 413. The ascertained facts of his career prove that he was a strong and vigorous ruler, well qualified to govern and augment an extensive empire. He loved sounding titles which proclaimed his martial prowess, and was fond of depicting himself on his coins as engaged in the sport of kings, personal combat with a lion. Lions were numerous in the northern parts of the Uttar Pradesh as late as the time of Bishop Heber in 1824, but are now found only in Saurashtra. The last specimen recorded in northern India was killed in the Gwalior State in 1872.

Fa-hien, Chinese pilgrim. The indispensable chronological skeleton of Gupta history constructed from the testimony of numerous dated inscriptions and coins is clothed with flesh chiefly by the help of foreign travellers, the pilgrims from China who crowded into India as the Holy Land of Buddhism from the beginning of the fifth century. Fa-hien or Fa-hsien, the earliest of those pilgrims to have left an account of his journey, was on his travels from A.D. 399 to 414. His laborious journey was undertaken in order to procure authentic texts of the Vinaya-pitaka, or Buddhist books on monastic discipline. The daring traveller after leaving western China followed the route to the south of the Taklamakān (Gobi) Desert, through Sha-chow and Lop-nor to Khotan, where the population was wholly Buddhist, and chiefly devoted to the Mahāyāna doctrine.² He then crossed the Pamirs with infinite difficulty and made his way into Udyāna or Suwāt (Swat), and so on to Taxila and Purushapura or Peshawar. He spent three years at Pātaliputra and two at Tāmralipti, now represented by Tamulk in the Midnapore District of Bengal. In those days Tāmralipti was an important port. Its modern successor is a small town at least sixty miles distant from the sea. Fa-hien sailed from Tāmralipti on his return journey, going home by sea, and visiting Ceylon and Java on the way.

¹ Much difference of opinion has been expressed concerning the date of Nahapāna, and the question has not been settled.
² The details of the pilgrim's route from Lop-nor to Khotan have not been worked out properly by any of the translators and are obscure; but he certainly passed Lop-nor.
His stay in India proper, extending from A.D. 401 to 410, thus fell wholly within the limits of the reign of Chandragupta II. About six years were spent in the dominions of that monarch.

The enthusiastic pilgrim was so absorbed in the religious task to which his life was devoted that he never even mentions the name of any reigning sovereign. His references to the facts of ordinary life are made in a casual, accidental fashion, which guarantees the trustworthiness of his observations. Although we moderns should be better pleased if the pious traveller had paid more attention to worldly affairs, we may be thankful for his brief notes, which give a pleasing and fairly vivid picture of the condition of the Gangetic provinces in the reign of Chandragupta II. He calls the Gangetic plain Mid-India or the Middle Kingdom, which may be taken as equivalent roughly to the modern Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Malwa, and part of Rajasthan. The whole of Mid-India was under the rule of the Gupta emperor.

State of the country. The towns of Magadha or South Bihar were large; the people were rich and prosperous; charitable institutions were numerous; rest-houses for travellers were provided on the highways, and the capital possessed an excellent free hospital endowed by benevolent and educated citizens. Pātaliputra was still a flourishing city, specially interesting to Fa-hien because it possessed two monasteries—one of the Little, and one of the Great Vehicle, where 600 or 700 monks resided, who were so famous for their learning that students from all quarters attended their lectures. Fa-hien spent three happy years at the ancient imperial capital in the study of the Sanskrit language and Buddhist scriptures. He was deeply impressed by the palace and halls erected by Aśoka in the middle of the city, and still standing in the time of the pilgrim. The massive stone work, richly adorned with sculpture and decorative carving, seemed to him to be the work of spirits, beyond the capacity of merely human craftsmen. The site of that palace has been identified at Kumrāhār village, to the south of the modern city.

Pātaliputra probably continued to be the principal royal residence in the reign of Samudragupta, but there are indications that in the time of his successor Ayodhya was found to be more convenient as the headquarters of the government.

In the course of a journey of some 500 miles from the Indus to Mathura on the Jumna the traveller passed a succession of Buddhist monasteries tenanted by thousands of monks. Mathura alone had twenty such institutions with 3,000 residents. Fa-hien noted that Buddhism was particularly flourishing along the course of the Jumna.

Administration. He liked the climate and was pleased with the mildness of the administration. He notes that people were free to come or go as they thought fit without the necessity of being registered or obtaining passes; that offences were ordinarily punished by fine only; the capital penalty not being inflicted, and mutilation being confined to the case of obstinate rebellion, meaning probably professional
brigandage. Persons guilty of that crime were liable to suffer amputation of the right hand. The revenue was derived mainly from the rent of the crown lands, ‘land revenue’ in modern language. The royal guards and officers were paid regular salaries.

Habits of the people. The Buddhist rule of life was generally observed. ‘Throughout the country’, we are told, ‘no one kills any living thing, or drinks wine, or eats onions or garlic . . . they do not keep pigs or fowls; there are no dealings in cattle, no butchers’ shops or distilleries in their market-places.’ The Chandālas or outcastes, who did not observe the rules of purity, were obliged to live apart, and were required when entering a town or bazaar to strike a piece of wood as a warning of their approach, in order that other folk might not be polluted by contact with them.

Those observations prove that a great change had occurred in the manners of the people and the attitude of the government since the time of the Mauryas. The people of Taxila had had no scruple in supplying Alexander with herds of fat beasts fit for the butcher; even Ašoka did not definitely forbid the slaughter of kine; while the Artha-śāstra not only treated the liquor trade as a legitimate source of revenue, but directed that public-houses should be made attractive to customers. Fa-hien’s statements may be, and probably are, expressed in terms too comprehensive, and without the necessary qualifications. Sacrifice, for instance, must have been practised by many Brahmanical Hindus. It is hardly credible that in A.D. 400, ‘throughout the whole country’, nobody except the lowest outcastes would kill any living thing, drink strong liquor, or eat onions or garlic. But Fa-hien’s testimony may be accepted as proving that the ahimsā sentiment was extraordinarily strong in ‘Mid-India’ when he resided there. Evidently it was far more generally accepted than it is at the present day, when Buddhism has been long extinct. The pilgrim’s statements, no doubt, apply primarily to the Buddhists. The traveller’s account of the precautions enforced on Chandāla outcastes in order to protect caste people from defilement may be illustrated by modern descriptions of the customs prevalent not long ago in the extreme south of the peninsula; and a somewhat similar attitude towards certain classes like the Mahārs, Doms, Chuhras, and Chamārs is still observable in Bombay and northern India, though the impact of Western civilization and modern reform movements have considerably mitigated the extreme rigour of caste rules.  

Good government. Fa-hien’s incidental observations taken as a whole indicate that the Gupta empire at the beginning of the fifth century was well governed. The government let the people live their

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1 The assertion in the same chap. xvi that ‘in buying and selling they use cowries’ must not be pressed to mean that coins were unknown. Chandragupta II coined freely in gold, and more sparingly in silver and copper.

own lives without needless interference; was temperate in the repression of crime, and tolerant in matters of religion. The foreign pilgrim was able to pursue his studies in peace wherever he chose to reside, and could travel all over India without molestation. He makes no mention of any adventures with robbers, and when he ultimately returned home he carried to his native land his collections of manuscripts, images, and paintings. Many other Chinese pilgrims followed his example, the most illustrious being Huien Tsang or Yuan Chwang in the seventh century.

Kumāragupta I. In A.D. 415 Chandragupta II was succeeded by a son named Kumāragupta who ruled the empire for about forty years. Details of the events of his reign are not on record, but it is probable that he added to his inherited dominions, because he is known to have celebrated the horse sacrifice, which he would not have ventured to do unless he had gained military successes.

Skandagupta, the last great Gupta. Kumāragupta died in A.D. 455 or a little earlier, when the sceptre passed into the hands of his son Skandagupta. In the latter part of Kumāragupta's reign the empire had been attacked by a tribe or nation called Pushyamitra, perhaps Iranians, who were repulsed. Soon after the accession of Skandagupta a horde of Hūnas, or Huns, fierce nomads from central Asia, made a more formidable inroad, which, too, was successfully repelled. But fresh waves of invaders arrived and shattered the fabric of the Gupta empire. The dynasty was not destroyed. It continued to rule diminished dominions with reduced power for several generations. Skandagupta, however, was the last of the great imperial Guptas, as Aurangzeb Alamgir was the last of the Great Mughuls.

The Gupta golden age. Before we deal more closely with the Hun invasions and their consequences we shall offer a summary review of the golden age of the Guptas, which may be reckoned as extending from A.D. 320 to 480, comprising the reigns of Chandragupta I; Samudragupta; Chandragupta II, Vikramāditya; Kumāragupta I; and Skandagupta, who followed his grandfather's example in taking the title Vikramāditya.

A learned European scholar declares that 'the Gupta period is in the annals of classical India almost what the Periclean age is in the history of Greece'. An Indian author regards the time as that of 'the Hindu Renaissance'. Both phrases are justified. The age of the great Gupta kings presents a more agreeable and satisfactory picture than any other period in the history of Hindu India. Fa-hien's testimony above quoted proves that the government was free from cruelty and was not debased by the system of espionage advocated by Kautilya and actually practised by the Mauryas. Literature, art, and science flourished in a degree beyond the ordinary, and gradual changes in religion were

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1 The reading of this word in Skandagupta's Bhitari Inscription is questioned. Some have suggested, for Pushyamitrāṇ, yudhy amitrāṇ 'his enemies in battle'. [Ed.]
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effected without persecution. Those propositions will now be developed in some detail.

Hindu renaissance. The energetic and long-continued zeal of Aśoka probably succeeded in making Buddhism the religion of the majority of the people in northern India, during the latter part of his reign. But neither Brahmanical Hinduism nor Jainism ever died out. The relative prevalence of each of the three religions varied immensely from time to time and from province to province. The Buddhist convictions of the Kushān kings, Kanishka and Huvishka, do not seem to have been deep. In fact, the personal faith of those monarchs apparently was a corrupt Zoroastrianism or Magism more than anything else. Their predecessor, Kadphises II, placed the image of Śiva and his bull on his coins, a practice renewed by Huvishka’s successor, Vāsudeva I. The Satraps of Ujjain, although tolerant of Buddhism, were themselves Brahmanical Hindus. The Gupta kings, while showing as a family preference for devotion to the Deity under the name of Vishnu or Bhagavat, allowed Buddhists and Jains perfect freedom of worship and full liberty to endow their sacred places. Although we moderns can discern from our distant point of view that the Hindu renaissance or reaction had begun the conquest of Buddhism in the fifth century, or even from an earlier date, Fa-hien was not conscious of the movement. India was simply the Buddhist Holy Land in his eyes, and the country in which the precepts of his religion were best observed.

Sanskrit. The growing power of the Brahmins, as compared with the gradually waning influence of the Jain and Buddhist churches, was closely associated with the increased use of Sanskrit, the sacred language of the Brahmins. Aśoka never used Sanskrit officially. All his proclamations were composed and published in easily intelligible varieties of the vernacular tongue, and so were accessible to anybody who knew how to read. The Śatavāhana kings too used Prākrit. The earliest known inscriptions written in grammatical standard Sanskrit date from the time of Kanishka, when we find a short record at Mathura dated in the year 24 of the Kanishka era, and a long literary composition at Gīrṇār in Surashtra, recorded about A.D. 150, which recites the conquests of the Great Satrap Rudradāman.

Literature; Kālidāsa. The increasing use of Sanskrit is further marked by the legends of the Gupta coins, which are in that language, and by the development of Sanskrit literature of the highest quality. Critics are agreed that Kālidāsa surpasses all rivals writing in Sanskrit whether as dramatist or as poet. Something like general assent has been won to the proposition that the literary work of the most renowned of Indian poets was accomplished in the fifth century under the patronage of the Gupta kings. Good reason has been shown for believing that Kālidāsa was a native of Mandasor in Malwa (now in Madhya Bharat), or of some place in the immediate neighbourhood of that once famous town. He was thus brought up in close touch with the court of Ujjain, and the active commercial and intellectual life which centred
in that capital of western India. His early descriptive poems, the Ritusamhāra and the Meghadūta, may be assigned to the reign of Chandragupta II, Vikramādiyta, the conqueror of Ujjain, and his dramas to that of Kumāragupta I (A.D. 413–55); but it is probable that his true dates may be slightly later. Sakuntalā, the most famous of his plays, secured enthusiastic admiration from European critics the moment it was brought to their notice, and the poet’s pre-eminence has never been questioned in either East or West.1

Other literature. Good authorities are now disposed to assign the political drama entitled the ‘Signet of the Minister’ (Mudrā Rākshasa) to the Gupta period, probably in its later centuries; and the interesting play called ‘The Little Clay Cart’ (Mrichchhakatikā) may be a little earlier. The Vāyu Purāṇa, one of the most ancient of the existing Purāṇas, may be assigned to the first half of the fourth century in its present form. All the Purāṇas contain matter of various ages, some parts being extremely ancient; any date assigned to such a composition refers only to the final literary form of the work.

Science. The sciences of mathematics and astronomy, including astrology, were cultivated with much success during the Gupta period. The most famous writers on those subjects are Āryabhata, born in A.D. 476, who taught the system studied at Pātaliputra, and included Greek elements; Varāhamihira (A.D. 505–87), who was deeply learned in Greek science and used many Greek technical terms; and, at the close of the period, Brahmagupta, who was born in A.D. 598. By this time there is evidence that Indians had devised the decimal system for the notation of numerals, expressing tens, hundreds, &c., by position, and employing a special sign for zero. This system, India’s greatest legacy to the world in the sphere of practical knowledge, was not used in inscriptions until about a century after Āryabhata.

Fine arts. The skill of Samudragupta in music has been recorded. We may be assured that the professors of that art, as the recipients of liberal royal patronage, were numerous and prosperous. The three closely allied arts of architecture, sculpture, and painting attained an extraordinarily high point of achievement. The accident that the Gupta empire consisted for the most part of the provinces permanently occupied at an early date by the Muslims, who systematically destroyed Hindu buildings for several centuries, obscures the history of Gupta architecture. No large building of the period has survived, and the smaller edifices which escaped destruction are hidden in remote localities away from the track of the Muslim armies, chiefly in central India and Madhya Pradesh (the former Central Provinces). They closely resemble rock-cut temples.

The most important and interesting extant stone temple of the Gupta age is one of moderate dimensions at Deogarh in the Lalitpur subdivision.

1 For Kālidāsa’s birthplace see M. M. Haraprasad Shastri in J. B. & O. R. Soc., vol. i, pp. 197–212. I accept the continuous tradition that the Ritusamhāra is an early work of Kālidāsa.
of the Jhansi District, U.P., which may be assigned to the first half of the sixth, or perhaps to the fifth, century. The panels of the walls contain some of the finest specimens of Indian sculpture. The larger brick temple at Bhitargoon in the Cawnpoor District, U.P., may be ascribed to the reign of Chandragupta II. It is remarkable for vigorous and well-designed sculpture in terra-cotta. Fragments, including some beautiful sculptures, indicate that magnificent stone temples of Gupta age stood at Sarnath near Benares and elsewhere. Sarnath has proved to be a treasure-house of Gupta figures and reliefs, among which are many of high quality dating from the time of Samudragupta and his successors. The Gupta artists and craftsmen were no less capable in working metals. The pillar at Delhi, made of wrought iron in the time of Kumāragupta I, is a marvel of metallurgical skill. The art of casting copper statues on a large scale by the cire perdue process was practised with conspicuous success. A copper image of Buddha about 80 feet high is said to have been erected at Nalanda in Bihar at the close of the sixth century; and the fine Sultanganj Buddha, 7½ feet high, is still to be seen in the museum at Birmingham. It dates from the reign of Chandragupta II. The highest development of the arts may be assigned to the fifth century, the age of Kālidāsa, in the reigns of Chandragupta II and his son. Two of the finest caves at Ajantā, Nos. XVI and XVII, were excavated in the same century of brilliant achievement. It is needless to dwell upon the high merits of the paintings in the Ajantā caves, which are now freely recognized. A Danish artist, who has published a valuable professional criticism, declares that ‘they represent the climax to which genuine Indian art has attained’; and that ‘everything in these pictures from the composition as a whole to the smallest pearl or flower testifies to depth of insight coupled with the greatest technical skill’.

The closely related frescoes at Sigiriya in Ceylon were executed between A.D. 479 and 497, soon after the close of the reign of Skandagupta.

Hindu art at its best. The facts thus indicated in outline permit no doubt that the fine arts of music, architecture, sculpture, and painting attained a high level of excellence during the Gupta period, and more especially in the fifth century, which in my judgement was the time when Hindu art was at its best. The Gupta sculpture exhibits pleasing characteristics which usually enable a student familiar with standard examples to decide with confidence whether or not a given work is of Gupta age. The physical beauty of the figures, the gracious dignity of their attitude, and the refined restraint of the treatment are qualities not to be found elsewhere in Indian sculpture in the same degree. Certain more obvious technical marks are equally distinctive. Such are the plain robes showing the body as if they were transparent, the elaborate haloes, and the curious wigs. Others might be enumerated. Many of the sculptures are dated.

Exchange of ideas. The extraordinary intellectual vitality of the Gupta period undoubtedly was largely due to the constant and lively exchange of ideas with foreign lands in both East and West.

The desert sands of central Asia have revealed the existence of kingdoms dating from about the beginning of the Christian era, where elements of Indian culture, introduced through Buddhism, combined with those of Iran and China. The most important of these kingdoms was that of Khotan, the Tarim basin of Chinese Turkestan, which was probably founded in the first century A.D. under the influence of the Kushāns. Its early kings bore Indian names and their state documents were in Prākrit, written in Kharoshthi characters. These were later replaced by a form of Gupta character, from which the modern Tibetan script is derived. Both archaeology and the accounts of Chinese travellers show that these lands had strong Buddhist communities, and contained many monasteries and temples, the remains of which have produced numerous precious manuscripts in Sanskrit and the local vernaculars, and beautiful paintings showing a blending of Indian, Iranian, and Chinese influence. Buddhism survived here until after the coming of Islam, while Tibet has remained a centre of Tantric Buddhism, imported from the medieval Pāla empire of Bihar and Bengal, down to the present day.

It was from central Asia that Buddhism was introduced into China. Though a few Buddhist missionaries may have visited China earlier, the religion first found a foothold there when, in A.D. 65, under the patronage of the Han Emperor Ming-ti, two central Asian monks, Dharmaratna and Kāśyapa Mātanga, established the White Horse monastery at Lo-yang. They were followed by other missionary monks, and soon Buddhism began to make headway, and the scriptures were translated into Chinese. Numerous Chinese Buddhist monks visited India, to do reverence to the sacred spots of the faith, and to improve their knowledge of Sanskrit, and, from Gupta times onwards, many embassies were sent to China from one part of India or another. India has little affected Chinese culture except through Buddhism, but by this means it has exerted a subtle influence which has permeated the whole of Chinese life and thought.

Active communication between the Indian coasts and the islands of the Archipelago was maintained. The Chinese say that the conversion of the Javanese to Buddhism was effected by Gunavarman, Crown Prince of Kashmir, who died at Nanking in China in A.D. 431. From the end of the fourth century onwards numerous inscriptions in south-east Asia and Indonesia show conclusively that the local kings had already adopted Hindu customs; they performed Brahmanical sacrifices, and employed Sanskrit as their official language. This topic is discussed at greater length in an appendix at the end of this chapter. The Ajantā frescoes record intercourse between western India and Persia early in the seventh century. Three missions to Roman emperors in A.D. 336, 361, and 530 are mentioned. The coinage bears unmistak-
a. Monkeys, Ajantā

b. Woman and child, Ajantā
c. Hippogryph, Gupta period
a. Kandariya Māhadeo Temple, Khajurāho

b. Pāla sculpture

c. Kailāsanātha Temple, Ellora
able testimony to the reality of Roman influence, and the word dināra, the Latin denarius, was commonly used to mean a gold coin.

The conquest of western India by Chandragupta II at the close of the fourth century brought the Gangetic provinces into direct communication with the western ports, and so with Alexandria and Europe. Trade also followed the land routes through Persia. The effect of easy communication with Europe is plainly visible in the astronomy of Āryabhata and Varāhamihira, who must have known Greek. The belief of Windisch that the many striking resemblances in form between the classical Indian dramas and the plays of the school of Menander are not accidental rests on substantial arguments. The influence of Greek taste on the sculpture of the Gupta age, although necessarily less obvious, is not less certain. The works are truly Indian. They are not copies or even imitations of Greek originals, and yet manifest the Greek spirit, forming a charming combination of East and West, such as we see on a vast scale in the inimitable Tāj many centuries later. When the intercourse with Europe died away in the seventh century India developed new schools of sculpture in which no trace of foreign example can be detected. Some expert critics maintain that the works of the eighth century mark the highest achievement of Indian art; but those of the fifth century commend themselves, as already observed, to my taste, and appear to me to be on the whole superior to those of any other age.

The Huns. The meagre annals of the Gupta monarchs subsequent to Skandagupta present little matter of interest, and may be passed by with a mere allusion. But the nature of the foreign inroads which broke down the stately fabric of the Gupta empire demands explanation. The work of destruction was effected by hordes of nomads from central Asia who swarmed across the north-western passes, as the Sakas and Yueh-chi had done in previous ages. The Indians generally spoke of all the later barbarians as Hūnas or Huns, but the Huns proper were accompanied by Gurjaras and other tribes. The section which encamped in the Oxus valley in the fifth century was distinguished as the White Huns or Ephthalites. They gradually occupied both Persia and Kabul, killing the Sassanian King Firōz in A.D. 484. Their first attack on the Gupta empire about A.D. 455 was repulsed, but the collapse of Persian resistance opened the flood-gates and allowed irresistible numbers to pour into India. Their leader, Toramāna, who was established in Malwa about A.D. 500, was succeeded soon after by his son Mihiragula ('Sun-flower'), whose Indian capital appears to have been Sākala or Sialkot in the Panjab.

India at that time was only one province of the Hun empire which extended from Persia on the west to Khotan on the east, comprising forty provinces. The headquarters of the horde were at Bāmyan near Herat, and the ancient city of Balkh served as a secondary capital. The power of Mihiragula in India was broken about A.D. 528 by Yaśodharman, King of Malwa, and by Bālāditya, usually identified with
Narasimha, the Gupta King of Magadha. Mihiragula retired to Kashmir, where he seized the throne, and died. His history is obscured by fanciful legends.

Soon after the middle of the sixth century the Hun kingdom on the Oxus was overthrown by the Turks, who became masters of the greater part of the short-lived Hun empire.

A turning-point in history. The barbarian invasions of the fifth and sixth centuries, although slurred over by the Indian authorities, constitute a turning-point in the history of northern and western India, both political and social. The political system of the Gupta period was completely broken up, and new kingdoms were formed. No authentic family or clan traditions go back beyond the Hun invasions. All genuine tradition of the earlier dynasties has been absolutely lost. The history of the Mauryas, Kushāns, and Guptas, so far as it is known, has been recovered laboriously by the researches of scholars, without material help from living tradition.1 The process by which the foreigners became Hinduized and the Rajput clans were formed will be discussed in the next chapter.

Maukharis and ‘Guptas of Magadha’. After the decline of the imperial Guptas another line of kings with names ending in -gupta rose in Magadha. Their genealogies give no clear evidence of relationship to the earlier Gupta line. Simultaneously a line of Maukharı kings grew in importance to the north of the Ganges. Traces of the existence of a martial Maukharı clan are to be found from Maurya times onwards. In the latter half of the fifth century Maukharı chieftains held the Gaya District under Gupta suzerainty. In the sixth century they appear to have established their independence, and to have made Kānauj their capital, the first important house to have ruled from this city, which had been comparatively small and insignificant in earlier centuries. The latter half of the sixth century saw almost continuous warfare between the kings of the two houses which shared the control of much of the Gangetic basin. Towards the end of the century the Maukharis seem to have driven the Guptas from their ancestral domains and to have occupied part or the whole of Magadha. The Guptas are referred to in Bāna’s account of the rise of the Emperor Harsha as kings of Malwa, so it may be assumed that they were forced to take refuge in the eastern part of their possessions, where they came under the influence of Harsha’s father, Prabhākara- vardhana of Thanesar. Princes of this line are mentioned both by Bāna and the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang as Harsha’s vassals.

The Maukharı empire ended very early in the seventh century with the defeat and death of the last of the line, Grahavarman, at the hands of the ‘wicked king of Malwa’, who appears to be the same as Deva- gupta, referred to in one of Harsha’s inscriptions. On the death of Grahavarman without heirs Kānauj passed to his brother-in-law,

1 The Jain traditions of Sāmprati constitute a small exception to the statement in the text.
Harsha, whose reign is discussed below. On the fall of Harsha's empire at his death the Guptas again rose to prominence under Ādityasena (c. 675). They disappeared in the eighth century, perhaps at the hands of Yaśovarman of Kanauj (p. 199, below), who may have been of Maukhari descent.

Valabhi and other kingdoms. When the Gupta power became restricted at the close of the fifth century western India gradually passed under the control of rulers belonging to a foreign tribe called Maitraka, possibly Iranian in origin. The Maitrakas established a dynasty with its capital at Valabhi (Walā, or Vala of I.G., Wullubhea-poor of the Rāṣ Māḷā), in the Saurashtra peninsula, which lasted until about 770, when it seems to have been overthrown by the Arabs. The names and dates of the long line of the kings of Valabhi, who used the Gupta era, are known with sufficient accuracy. The kingdom attained considerable wealth and importance. In the sixth century the capital was the residence of renowned Buddhist teachers, and in the seventh it rivalled Nālandā in Bihar as a centre of Buddhist learning. The modern town is insignificant and shows few signs of its ancient greatness.

After the overthrow of Valabhi its place as the chief city of western India was taken by Anhilwāra (Nahrwālah, &c., or Patan), which in its turn was superseded in the fifteenth century by Ahmadabad.

The Gurjaras, who have been mentioned as associated with the Huns, founded kingdoms at Bharōch (Broach) and at Bhinmāl in southern Rajasthan.

The history of India during the sixth century is exceedingly obscure. The times evidently were much disturbed.

Nothing definite of moment can be stated about the Tamil kingdoms of the Far South during the period dealt with in this chapter.

Ample material for seventh century. The embarrassing lack of material for the history of the latter half of the sixth century is no longer felt when the story of the seventh has to be told. The invaluable description of India recorded by Hiuen Tsang or Yuan Chwang, the eminent Chinese pilgrim; his biography written by his friends; the official Chinese historical works; and an historical romance composed by Bāna, a learned Brahman who enjoyed the friendship of King Harsha, when combined with a considerable amount of information derived from inscriptions, coins, and other sources, supply us with knowledge surpassing in fullness and precision that available for any other period of early Hindu history, except that of the Mauryas. Harsha of Kanauj, the able monarch who reduced anarchy to order in northern India, and reigned for forty-one years; as Aśoka had done, is not merely a name in a genealogy. His personal characteristics and the details of his administration, as recorded by men who knew him intimately, enable us to realize him as a living person who achieved greatness by his capacity and energy.

King Harsha, A.D. 606–47. Harsha, or Harsha-vardhana, was the
younger son of Prabhākara-vardhana, Raja of Thanesar, the famous holy town to the north of Delhi, who had won considerable military successes over his neighbours—the Gurjaras, Mālavas, and others, in the latter part of the sixth century. His unexpected death in A.D. 604 was quickly followed by that of his elder son, who was treacherously assassinated by Śaśāŋka, King of Gauda, or central Bengal. His younger son, Harsha, then only sixteen or seventeen years of age, was constrained by his nobles to accept the vacant throne, and to undertake the difficult task of bringing northern India into subjection and tolerable order. The young sovereign, who reluctantly accepted the trust imposed upon him in October 606, was obliged to spend five years and a half in constant fighting. Soon after his accession he gained control of Kanauj, the kingdom of his brother-in-law Graharvarman Maukharī, who had been killed in battle by the King of Malwa, probably DeVagupta, and had apparently left no heirs. According to Hiuen Tsang Harsha was invited to accept the throne of Kanauj by a great meeting of the nobles and dignitaries of the kingdom. His sister Rājyaśri appears to have played an important part in affairs, no doubt by virtue of her position as widow of the last of the Maukharis. Soon after these events Harsha moved his capital from Thanesar to Kanauj.

The Chinese pilgrim who came to India a few years later tells us that Harsha ‘went from east to west subduing all who were not obedient; the elephants were not unharnessed, nor the soldiers unhelmeted’. His conquests were achieved with a force of 5,000 elephants, 20,000 cavalry, and 50,000 infantry. He seems to have discarded chariots. When he had finished his task the cavalry had increased to 100,000, and the elephants are said to have numbered 60,000, a figure hardly credible, and probably erroneous. Harsha’s subjugation of upper India, excluding the Panjab, but including Bihar and at least the greater part of Bengal, was completed in 612, when he appears to have been solemnly enthroned. But the new era established by him, which attained wide currency, was reckoned from the beginning of his reign in October 606. His last recorded campaign in 643 was directed against Ganjam on the coast of the Bay of Bengal. A few years earlier he had waged a successful war with Valabhi, which resulted in the recognition of Harsha’s suzerainty by the western powers. In the east his name was so feared that even the king of distant Assam was obliged to obey his imperious commands and to attend his court.

War with the Chāluksyas. The Chāluksya kingdom in the Deccan, founded in the middle of the sixth century, was raised to a paramount position by its king, Pulakesin II, the contemporary of Harsha. The northern monarch, impatient of a rival, attacked Pulakesin about A.D. 620, but was defeated, and obliged to accept the Narbāda as his southern frontier. So far as is known that defeat was Harsha’s only failure. During the greater part of his reign, although his armies may have been given occupation from time to time, he was free to devote his exceptional powers to the work of administration and to consecrate an
extraordinarily large share of his time to religious exercises and discussi
tions.

Kanauj the capital. The ancient town of Kanauj (Kanyākubja) on the Ganges, which was selected by Harsha as his capital, was converted into a magnificent, wealthy, and well-fortified city, nearly four miles long and a mile broad, furnished with numerous lofty buildings, and adorned with many tanks and gardens. The Buddhist monasteries, of which only two had existed in the fifth century, numbered more than a hundred in Harsha's time, when Brahmanical temples existed in even larger numbers. The inhabitants were more or less equally divided in their allegiance to Hinduism and Buddhism. The city, after enduring many vicissitudes, was finally destroyed by Sher Shah in the sixteenth century. It is now represented by a petty Muslim country town and miles of shapeless mounds which serve as a quarry for railway ballast. No building erected in Harsha's reign can be identified either at Kanauj or elsewhere.

Administration; literature. Harsha, who was only fifty-seven or fifty-eight years of age when he died late in A.D. 646 or early in 647, was in the prime of life throughout most of his long reign. We hear nothing of the elaborate bureaucratic system of the Mauryas, although an organized civil service must have existed. The king seems to have trusted chiefly to incessant personal supervision of his extensive empire, which he effected by constantly moving about, except in the rainy season when the roads were impassable. He marched in state to the music of golden drums, and was accommodated, like the Burmese kings of modern times, in temporary structures built of wood and bamboo, which were burnt on his departure. Many provinces were governed in detail by tributary Rajas. The Chinese pilgrim thought well of the royal administration, although it was less mild than that of the Guptas in the fifth century. The penalty of imprisonment, inflicted after the cruel Tibetan fashion, which left the prisoner to live or die, was freely awarded, and mutilation was often adjudged. The roads, apparently, were not as safe as they had been in the days of Vikramāditya. Official records of all events were kept up in each province by special officers. Education was widely diffused, and the great Buddhist monasteries at Nalanda in Magadha and other places were centres of learning and the arts. The king himself was an accomplished scholar. He is credited with the composition of a grammatical work, sundry poems, and three extant Sanskrit plays, one of which, the Nāgānanda, with an edifying Buddhist legend for its subject, is highly esteemed and has been translated into English. A Brahman named Bāna, who was an intimate friend of the king, wrote an account of part of his master's reign in the form of an historical romance, which gives much accurate and valuable information wrapped up in tedious, affected rhetoric, as tiresome as that of Abu-l Fazl in the Akbarnāma.

Religion. Harsha, who was extremely devout, assigned many hours of each day to devotional exercises. Primarily a worshipper of Śiva,
he permitted himself also to honour the Sun and Buddha. In the latter part of his reign he became more and more Buddhist in sentiment, and apparently set himself the task of emulating Aśoka. He 'sought to plant the tree of religious merit to such an extent that he forgot to sleep or eat'; and is said to have forbidden the slaughter of any living thing or the use of flesh as food throughout the 'Five Indies', under pain of death without hope of pardon.

The details of his proceedings make interesting reading; indeed, the historical material is so abundant that it would be easy to write a large volume devoted solely to his reign. Hiuen Tsang or Yuan Chwang, the most renowned of the Chinese pilgrims, being our leading authority, it is desirable to give a brief account of his memorable career.

**Hiuen Tsang or Yuan Chwang.** He was the fourth son of a learned Chinese gentleman of honourable lineage, and from childhood was a grave and ardent student of things sacred. When he started on his travels at the age of twenty-nine (A.D. 629) he was already famous as a Buddhist sage. His intense desire to obtain access to the authentic scriptures in the Holy Land of India nerved him to defy the imperial prohibition of travelling westward, and sustained him through all the perils of his dangerous journey, which exceeded 3,000 miles in length, as reckoned from his starting-place in western China to Kabul, at the gates of India. The narrative of his adventures, which we possess in detail, is as interesting as a romance. The dauntless pilgrim travelled by the northern route, and after passing Lake Issik Kul, Tashkend, Samarqand, and Kunduz arrived in the kingdom of Gandhāra about the beginning of October 630. Between that date and the close of 643 he visited almost every province in India, recording numberless exact observations on the country, monuments, people, and religion, which entitle him to be called 'the Indian Pausanias'.

He returned by the southern route, crossing the Pamirs, and passing Kashgar, Yarkand, Khotan, and Lop-nor—a truly wonderful journey. Eight years, 635 to 643, had been mostly spent in Harsha's dominions. Early in 645 he reached his native land, bringing with him a large and valuable collection of manuscripts, images, and relics. He occupied the remainder of his life in working up the results of his expedition with the aid of a staff of scholars, and died in 664 at the age of sixty-four or sixty-five. His high character, undaunted courage, and profound learning deservedly won the respect and affection of the Chinese emperor and all his people. The memory of the Master of the Law, the title bestowed upon him by universal consent, is still as fresh in Buddhist lands as it was 1,200 years ago.

1 See map prepared by the author at the end of vol. ii of Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India* (1905). For the benefit of readers unfamiliar with Greek history it may be mentioned that Pausanias travelled through Greece in the second century A.D. and recorded his detailed observations in the form of an Itinerary divided into ten books. The Chinese pilgrim's Travels or Records of Western Lands comprise twelve books (chuan); but the last three books, equivalent to chaps. xvi–xviii of Watters, seem to be interpolated and are of inferior authority (Watters, vol. ii, p. 233).
a. Medal of Alexander the Great

b. Coins of Taxila

c. Diodotos II

d. Euthydemos

e. Eukratides

f. Menander

g. Gondophernes

h. Kanishka

COINS OF ANCIENT INDIA
PLATE 12

a. Candragupta I

b. Samudragupta

c. Candragupta II
d. Toramāna

e. Govindacandra Gāhadavāla

f. Pallava

g. Rājarāja I Cola

COINS OF ANCIENT INDIA
HARSHA

It is impossible to overestimate the debt which the history of India owes to Hiuen Tsang.

Assemblies at Kanauj and Prayāga. King Harsha, who was in camp in Bengal when he first met the Master, organized in his honour a splendid assembly at Kanauj the capital, which was attended by twenty tributary Rajas, including the King of Assam from the extreme east, and the King of Valabhi from the extreme west. After the close of the proceedings at Kanauj, Harsha carried his honoured guest with him to Prayāga (Allahabad), where another crowded assembly was held, and the royal treasures were distributed to thousands of the holy men of all the Indian religions, Brahmanical, Jain, and Buddhist. On the first day the image of Buddha received honours of the highest class, the effigies of the Sun and Siva being worshipped respectively on the second and third days with reduced ceremonial. The assembly at Prayāga in 643 was the sixth of its kind, it being Harsha's custom to distribute his accumulated riches at intervals of five years. He did not live to see another celebration. The pilgrim was dismissed with all honour and presented with lavish gifts.

Death of Harsha; results. Either late in 646 or early in 647 the king died, leaving no heir. The withdrawal of his strong arm threw the whole country into disorder, which was aggravated by famine.

Then a strange incident happened. A Chinese envoy named Wang-hiu-en-tse was at Harsha's court, attended by an escort of thirty men. A minister who had usurped the vacant throne attacked the envoy, plundered his goods, and killed or captured the men of his escort. Wang-hiu-en-tse succeeded in escaping to Nepal, which was then tributary to Tibet. The Tibetan king, the famous Srong-tsan Gampo, who was married to a Chinese princess, assembled a force of Tibetans and Nepalese, who descended into the plains, stormed the chief city of Tirhut, defeated the Indian army with great slaughter, and captured the usurper with his whole family. The captive was sent to China, where he died. Tirhut remained subject to Tibet until a.d. 703.

The death of Harsha having loosened the bonds which had held his empire together, the experiences of the third and sixth centuries were repeated, and a rearrangement of kingdoms was begun, of which the record is obscure. It is impossible to say exactly what happened in most of the provinces for a considerable time after his disappearance from the scene.

His rival, Pulakeśin II, Chālukya, who had successfully defended the Deccan against aggression from the north, had met his fate five years before Harsha's death. He was utterly defeated and presumably killed in 642 by Narasimha-varman, the Pallava King of Kanchi or Conjeeveram in the far south, who thus became the paramount sovereign of the peninsula. The story will be told from the southern point of view in a later chapter.

Unity of history lost. The partial unity of Indian history vanishes with Harsha and is not restored in any considerable measure until the
closing years of the twelfth century, when the extensive conquests effected by and for Muhammad of Ghōr brought the most important provinces under the sway of the Sultans of Delhi. The story of Hindu India from the middle of the seventh century until the Muslim conquest, which may be dated approximately in A.D. 1200 for the north and A.D. 1300 for the south, cannot be presented in the form of a single continuous narrative. The subject will be treated in Book III.
CHAPTER 5

Indian Influence in South-east Asia

It was in the early centuries of the Christian era that the already ancient culture of India began to make a significant impression on the civilizations of south-east Asia. By the end of the Gupta period the whole region had been deeply affected by Indian thought and custom, especially in religion. Thus it is appropriate that we should briefly consider the early kingdoms of south-east Asia here.

Early contacts. There is little doubt that some contact between the islands of Indonesia and India existed before the commencement of the Christian era. The Buddhist Jātaka stories, and other sources of the period, frequently mention "The Land of Gold" and "The Island of Gold" (Suvarna-bhūmi and Suvarna-dvīpa), by which terms the lands and islands to the east of India are certainly referred to. Ptolemy's geography, of the second century A.D., proves that by this time there was active commerce between the ports of India and south-east Asia, and several places in the latter region are referred to by Indian names. It is to the intensification of sea-trade, much stimulated by the demands of the Roman empire, that we must chiefly attribute the growth of Indian influence, rather than to any conscious process of colonization. A further factor was Buddhism, which, chiefly in its Mahāyāna form, was carried by courageous monks to the lands beyond the seas, and brought with it many elements of Indian culture. It is significant that the earliest material evidence of Indian contact with south-east Asia takes the form of Buddha images of the school of Amaravati, which have been found in Thailand, Cambodia, Annam, Sumatra, Java, and the Celebes. At Oc Eo, in Cambodia, such an image was found in proximity to a gold coin of the Roman emperor Antoninus Pius (A.D. 138–61).

The earliest south-east Asian inscriptions, which are in fairly correct Sanskrit and date from the early fifth century A.D., have been found in Java, Borneo, Malaya, and Cambodia. These show that the region was already ruled by kings with Indian names, many of whom performed Vedic sacrifices. Chinese chronicles tell of the foundation of the kingdom of Fu-nan, the modern Cambodia, in the first century A.D. by a Brahman from India named Kaundinya; we cannot be sure of the accuracy of this account, which is evidently based on a local tradition, since the Chinese source is some centuries later. Late Javanese tradition, however, also tells of the coming of a prince from India, with many followers, to set up the first Javanese kingdom at the end of the first century A.D. The evidence for any such deliberate large-scale settlement is, however, poor, and it is doubtful whether any of the
greater south-east Asian kings had more than a little Indian blood in their veins. The traditions of the south-east Asian royal families, connecting them with Indian ancestors, are just such as would be devised by their Brahman advisers to give them prestige and a place in the Hindu order. In the absence of any very clear evidence we may account for the process of Indianization somewhat as follows. By the beginning of the Christian era colonies of Indian merchants had appeared in the busier and more developed coastal settlements of south-east Asia, the inhabitants of which were by no means at the lowest level of barbarism. These colonies increased in numbers and size, and often included Brahmins and Buddhist monks among the settlers. With the growth of Indian settlements, owing to the development of trade in the early Christian centuries, the influence of Indian ideas on the native inhabitants quickly grew, and soon local chiefs became Rajas and Maharajas on the Indian model, performing the royal ceremonies of the Vedas and looking back with pride to usually fictitious Indian ancestors. In many cases intermarriage must have taken place, and here and there an Indian adventurer may have set up a small kingdom. A further probable source of Indian influence was the journeys of south-east Asians themselves to and from India.

Indian influence appears chiefly to have come from the peninsula at this period. The script of the oldest inscriptions resembles that of the early Pallavas, while Amarāvatī provided the earliest Buddha images; but probably every coastal region of India had some cultural influence on south-east Asia, and from the ninth century onwards the religious and cultural influence of the Buddhism of the Pāla kingdom of Bihar and Bengal was very prominent.

In all cases Indian influence in south-east Asia was never sufficient to destroy local customs and religion, and it is evident that the influence was more strongly felt in Indonesia and Malaya than on the mainland; the Buddhism and Hinduism practised in Indonesia had local features distinguishing them from those of India, and the cults of Cambodia and Champā (the southern part of modern Viet-nam) were even more different. A special feature of the state religion of the south-east Asian kingdoms was the deification of the king, who was identified with a god, usually with Śiva, and often worshipped in special temples; in its Śaivite form this worship was directed to the royal linga, or phallic emblem, in which the spiritual potency of the divine king was believed to be concentrated. The popular religion was probably little affected by Indian ideas until the coming of Hinayāna Buddhism from Ceylon, which, in the late Middle Ages, gradually ousted Mahāyāna Buddhism and Hinduism from Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. Simultaneously the Indian religions were eclipsed in Indonesia and Malaya by Islam; but a form of Hinduism is practised to this day on the island of Bali, and the Hindu system of the four classes of society is still maintained there.

Malaya and Indonesia. The existence of small Indianized king-
a. The Stūpa of Barabudur, Java

b. The Temple of Angkor Wat, Cambodia
doms in Malaya, Java, and Borneo is attested by inscriptions from the fifth century A.D. onwards. In the late seventh century arose a more important kingdom, that of Śrīvijaya, identified with Palembang in Sumatra, which was conquered in the eighth century by the Śailendra kings of Java, who gained the hegemony of most of Indonesia and Malaya, and for a while of Cambodia. The Śailendra dynasty survived until the eleventh century, but its power was waning, and it received a blow from the invasion of the Cōla emperor Rājendra I from which it never wholly recovered. In the fourteenth century the place of the Śailendras was taken by the kings of Majapahit in Java, which became the centre of a second great island empire, for a while controlling most of Indonesia and Malaya. The empire of Majapahit broke up in the fifteenth century, by which time Islām was making rapid headway in the region, propagated peacefully by merchants from western India. Though Hinduism survived only in Bali, the influence of Hindu India is much in evidence in the culture and language of Indonesia and Malaya even at the present day.

The splendid sculptural and architectural remains of the old kingdoms of Indonesia show the harmonious assimilation of Indian styles and motifs to those native to the region. The most important monument is the famous Barabudur, the great Buddhist shrine in central Java, erected between about 750 and 850 A.D. Built around a natural hillock, the stūpa is surrounded by eleven square concentric terraces, the lowest with a length of 131 yards, all adorned with beautifully sculptured panels, depicting in relief scenes of Buddhist legend.

The mainland of south-east Asia. According to Chinese records an Indianized kingdom existed in the south-eastern part of what is now known as Viet-nam as early as the second century A.D., but inscriptive records of it date from the fifth. This kingdom is generally known as Champā, from the name of its capital city. It survived, suffering much at the hands of Chinese, Annamites, and Khmers (Cambodians), until in the fifteenth century it was conquered by the Annamites.

Farther west a kingdom, known to the Chinese as Fu-nan, is said in Chinese chronicles of the third century A.D. to have had already an existence of two centuries, and to have been founded by an Indian Brahman, Kaundinya, who married a local princess and taught Hindu culture to her subjects. In the seventh century Fu-nan was conquered by one of its vassals, Kambuja (Cambodia), which gave its name to the whole region. For a while, in the eighth century, Kambuja was subject to the Śailendras of Śrīvijaya, but under the great King Jayavarman II (802–850) it regained its independence, and entered on its most prosperous period, which lasted until the end of the twelfth century. During this time Kambuja controlled much of the Indo-Chinese peninsula, including Thailand and Laos. The most impressive monuments of the kingdom of Kambuja are those known today as Angkor Thom and Angkor Wat. The former is a walled city, the capital of Kambuja, as rebuilt by King Jayavarman VII (1181–c. 1218); it is in the form of a
perfect square, with walls two miles long on each side, and holds in its
centre the fantastic temple known as the Bayon, adorned with relief
sculpture of remarkable vigour. The earlier temple of Angkor Vat, to
the south of Angkor Thom, is perhaps even more imposing in size and
splendour, and is said to be the largest religious building in the world.
After the reign of Jayavarman VII the kingdom of Kambuja declined,
perhaps exhausted by the immense labour and wealth devoted to the
building of the new capital. At the end of the fourteenth century the
Annamites, and a new people, the Thais, who had been slowly moving
southwards from the Chinese province of Yunnan, divided most of
Kambuja between them, though the kingdom has retained its indivi-
duality down to the present day. The Thais set up the kingdom of
Ayuthia, the ancestor of the present-day Thailand.

Though geographically the closest part of south-east Asia to India,
traces of Indian culture in Burma are almost non-existent until the
sixth century. In this century there is evidence of the existence of the
Buddhist kingdom of Śrīkṣhetra (modern Prome), which controlled
the lower Irrawaddy, and was ruled by a Tibeto-Burman people called
Pyu; to the south, in the valley of the Menam in modern Thailand, was
another Buddhist kingdom, that of the Mons, called after its capital
city Dvāravatī. In the ninth century the Pyus gave way before the
kingdom of Pagan, which was ruled by true Burmese, while the centre
of the Mon kingdom moved westwards to Pegu. Burma was unified in
the eleventh century by Anoratha, King of Pagan (1044–77), whose
successors controlled the land until Pagan fell to the Mongols in 1287.

**CHRONOLOGY**

A.D.
c. 330. Samudragupta, acc.
c. 360. Enibassy from Meghavarna, King of Ceylon.
c. 380. Chandragupta II, acc.
c. 395. Conquest of western India.
405–11. Travels of Fa-hien in Gupta empire.
455. Skandagupta, acc.; first Hun war.
476. Āryabhata, astronomer, born.
c. 480–90. Partial break-up of Gupta empire.
484. Fīrōz, King of Persia, killed by the Huns.
499. Latest date of Budhagupta.
c. 500. Accession of Toramāna in Mālwā.
505. Varāhamihira, astronomer, born.
c. 528. Defeat of Mihiragula the Hun by Indian powers.
c. 540–600. Maukhari and ‘Guptas of Magadha’ control most of Ganges
valley.
578. Brahmagupta, astronomer, born.
c. 605. Defeat and death of Grahavarman, Maukhari King of Kanauj.
606. Harsha-vardhana, acc.; epoch of Harsha era.
AUTHORITIES

A.D.
606–12. Conquest of northern India by Harsha.
c. 620. Defeat of Harsha by Pulakesin II, Chalukya.
622. Flight of Muhammad to Medina; epoch of Hijri era.
629–45. Travels of Hiuen Tsang (Yuan Chwang).
641. Arab conquest of Persia.
642. Defeat of Pulakesin II, Chalukya, by the Pallavas.
643. Harsha’s assemblies at Kanauj and Prayaga.
645. Hiuen Tsang arrived in China.
647. Death of Harsha; usurpation by minister
664. Death of Hiuen Tsang.

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Many still important references will be found in E.H.I. (1923). A few others are
given in notes in the text.

Gupta inscriptions are contained in Fleet’s edition (Corpus Inscriptionum Indica-
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the publication of this volume, and are to be found in various parts of Epigraphy
India. A second edition of the Corpus, vol. iii, has been delayed by the death of
Professor D. R. Bhandarkar.

On numismatics the B.M. Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasties, &c., by
J. Allan (London, 1914) supersedes earlier publications and contains a valuable
outline of the history of the period. Later numismatic discoveries are recorded in the
Journal of the Numismatic Society of India and other learned periodicals.

Among recent monographs on the period the New History of the Indian People,
vol. vi, edited by R. C. Majumdar and A. S. Altekar (Lahore, 1946), is the most
valuable. See also the Bombay History and Culture of the Indian People of which the
third volume (The Classical Age, 1954), also edited by R. C. Majumdar, covers this
period. R. K. Mookerji’s The Gupta Empire (Allahabad, 1949) is also a useful work,
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On the Maukharis see Pires, The Maukharis (Madras, 1934). De la VALLÉ
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et d’Indonésie (Paris, 1948). In English the best authorities are R. Le May, R. C.
Majumdar, H. G. Quarteni Wales, and N. K. Shastri, who have produced several
important volumes and articles on the subject. D. G. E. Hall’s A History of South-
East Asia (London, 1955) covers the whole period from the earliest times to the
present day; its earlier chapters give a very valuable summary of all knowledge to
date on the Indianized kingdoms of the region.