



VII.10. Pataliputra

The ancient city was situated on the confluence of river Son with Ganga and in ancient times, Son flowed parallel to Ganga for a certain length before merging in it. This long stretch of land provided the site for a great city which came to prominence with the shifting of the Magadhan capital from Rajagriha to Pataliputra, possibly by Udayin Bhadra, the son of Ajatasatru, a contemporary of the Buddha. Prior to that, this place was known as Pataligrama which possibly was a significant village of that time. During the time of Saisunaga, King Kalasoka and Nanda kings Pataliputra was still the Magadhan capital. With the onset of the Mauryan empire under Chandragupta about 323 BC, the city became the capital of one of the largest empires in Indian history and the status of this city continued to be so during Sunga and also possibly Gupta periods but in between and after it, its importance as a great city dwindled. During the Pala period, the area around Patna was possibly known as Srinagara *bbukti* but Pataliputra was not so important city of the times. The city again entered a somewhat glorious phase with the construction of a fort there by Shershah Suri in the sixteenth century.

A number of literary references are available about this ancient city. According to *Mahaparinibbana-Sutta*, during his final journey from Nalanda to Kushinara, the Buddha reached Pataligama which was situated on the southern bank of river Ganga. In the *avasathagara* of Pataligama, he met two Brahmana ministers of King Ajatasatru named Sunidha and Vassakara who were in the process of constructing a fort there to win over the Vajjis (Upadhyay 1961:

120-21). According to Megasthenes, the Greek Ambassador to the court of Chandragupta Maurya, the city of Pataliputra measured 9 miles in length and 1.5 miles in width. Megasthenese gives an elaborate description of various parts of the city, its fortifications, and its complicated municipal organization. According to him it was well protected by massive timber palisades, pierced by 64 gates and crowned by 570 towers and further defended by a broad and deep moat. He further informs that the royal palace of Chandragupta excelled in splendour and magnificence the palaces of Susa and Ecbatana. *Therigatha* mentions this city as Kusumapura (cited by Upadhyay 1961). Hiuen-Tsang has also mentioned this name of the city.

Buddhaghosha (*Papanchasudani*, Vol. II: 571) mentions the presence of a monastery during the time of the Buddha here known as “Kukkutarama” as it was constructed by Kukkuta Setthi. The same monastery finds mention in other Pali texts like *Anguttaranikaya* (Book V, p. 342) and *Samyuktanikaya* (Upadhyay 1961: 229). During the time of Asoka, a monastery was constructed in the city which was known as Asokarama Vihara where the Third Buddhist Council was organized (*Samantapasadika*, Book I, pp. 48-49 and *Mahavamsa*, Book I, p. 48 as cited by Upadhyay 1961). According to the Buddhist literature even before its importance as an important city, i.e. during the time of the Buddha, it was an important point for crossing the river Ganga while moving from Rajagriha to Sravasti or Kasi. Even from Mathura and Takshasila, the route to Tamralipti would have gone via Pataligama and Rajagriha (Upadhyay 1961: 232). Jaina literature has also provided a number of references about this city. According to it, the first Jaina *sangiti* (council) was held in this city during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya and their famous teacher Sthulabhadra

was born and brought up in Pataliputra. The Chinese pilgrim, Fa-Hian had visited Pataliputra and had stayed there for three years. He speaks highly of the city, its walls, gates, palaces and buildings, constructed in “a way which no human hand could accomplish”. He also mentions of one Asoka-Stupa and a Hinayana-vihara nearby. Hiuen-Tsang visited Pataliputra in about AD 635, but found it long deserted with the ruins still standing and occupying an area nearly 70 *li* or 12 miles in extent.

HISTORY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPEDITIONS

Major Rennell had for the first time in 1783 proposed the possibility of ancient Pataliputra being identified with modern Patna in his *Memoir of a Map of Hindustan*. Buchanan was the first to carry out a regular survey of Patna for its ancient ruins. During the second half of the nineteenth century Alexander Cunningham and J.D. Beglar made several attempts to locate the sites mentioned by the two Chinese pilgrims but without any significant finding (*ASI-AR*, 8, 11 and 15). During 1892-99, L.A. Waddell carried out exploration and excavations at various places in Patna including Bulandibagh, Chhoti Pahari, Tulsimandi, Maharajganj to the north-east of Kumrahar and at Rampur, Bahadurpur and Prithipur in the south of Patna



Fig. 1. Mauryan fortification.

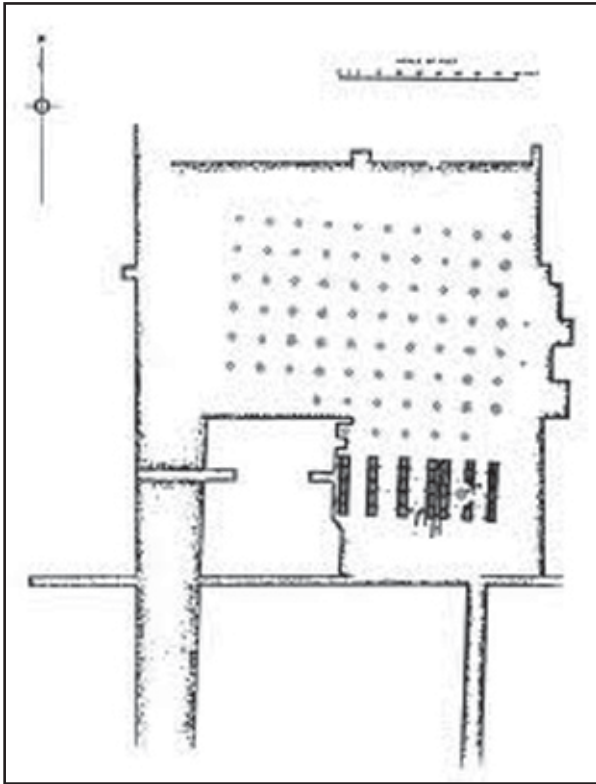


Fig. 2. Pillared hall.

(Waddell 1892, 1903). At Bulandibagh, Tulsimandi and Maharajganj Waddell brought to light remains of wooden beams of about 18" to 20" in diameter arranged in a double row and also wooden drains. He also discovered a colossal capital in Corinthian style. At Kumrahar, he succeeded in finding a broken Asokan pillar at its northeastern corner. In 1897-98, P.C. Mukherji also took up excavations at Lohanipur in Patna and came across a ditch extending to 76 m from east to west and also found punch-marked coins, coins of Chandragupta II and fragments of polished pillars (Mukherji, 1898).

In 1912 and onward years, D.B. Spooner of ASI re-excavated Bulandibagh and Kumrahar (*ASI-AR*, 1912-12: 53; 1913-14: 45; 1914-15: 45; 1915-16: 27) and at the latter site found all over the site remains of brick walls of the period

ranging between the Gupta and post-Gupta period. Below these walls was encountered a layer of charcoal and ashes (about 30 cm thick) strewn with innumerable fragments of polished sandstone pillars occurring at a regular interval of 4.57 m (15 feet) from each other. Spooner found a total of 80 such pillar remains in eight rows with roughly ten heaps in each row. He surmised that there had existed a Mauryan pillared hall at the site resting on 80 or more pillars (72 pillar spots actually found by then) which in turn had been placed on a wooden support. According to him, the belt of ashes and charcoal indicated that before the date of the later brick structures the wooden superstructure of the building had been destroyed by fire which was also responsible for the rending asunder of the exposed parts of the pillars. He also postulated that with the decay of the wooden platform on which the pillars were resting, the pillars sank deep in the soft soil. In the absence of similar parallels in India, he favoured a similarity between Achaeminid hall of Persepolis and the Mauryan hall (Spooner, 1915). At another site in the city area known as Sardargaly Spooner discovered several fragments of polished stone pieces.

Again in 1926-27 the site of Bulandibagh was selected for archaeological excavation in order to determine the nature of wooden palisades (*ASI-AR* 1926-27: 135). Here, the palisade of about 250 feet in length running in east-west direction was exposed. Two rows of upright pillars about 12 feet in height above the floor were seen placed at a distance of 14 feet 6 inches from one another. The space between the pillars was paved with wooden sleepers and their ends were socketed with upright pillars. In 1935 a similar structure was found at Gosainkhand, 800 m to the east of Bulandibagh (*ASI-AR* 1935-36: 54)

After an interval of 38 years Kumrahar was again selected for excavations, this time by the K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute, Patna (Altekar and Mishra 1959). The five season's work at the site revealed that the habitation at Kumrahar was continuous from the Mauryan age down to AD



Fig. 3. Didarganj Yakshi.

600. After that the site was abandoned until 17th century. It further exposed eight more pillars belonging to the Mauryan hall proper and four probably belonging to the entrance. It was proposed by the excavators that the hall was destroyed sometime around the early Sunga period and not during late Gupta period as proposed by Spooner. A good number of structural remains belonging to Buddhist monasteries dating from 2nd century BC to 6th century AD were exposed. A seal confirmed the name of a monastery-cum-sanatorium by its inscription reading *sri-arogyavihare bhikshusamghasya*. Other important findings included punch-marked coins, Kushan and Gupta coins, seals and sealings in Gupta character, beads of semi-precious stones and several terracotta objects.

Excavations were again undertaken at different sites in Patna city, namely Mahabirghat, Shah-Kamal Road, Begum-ki-Haveli and

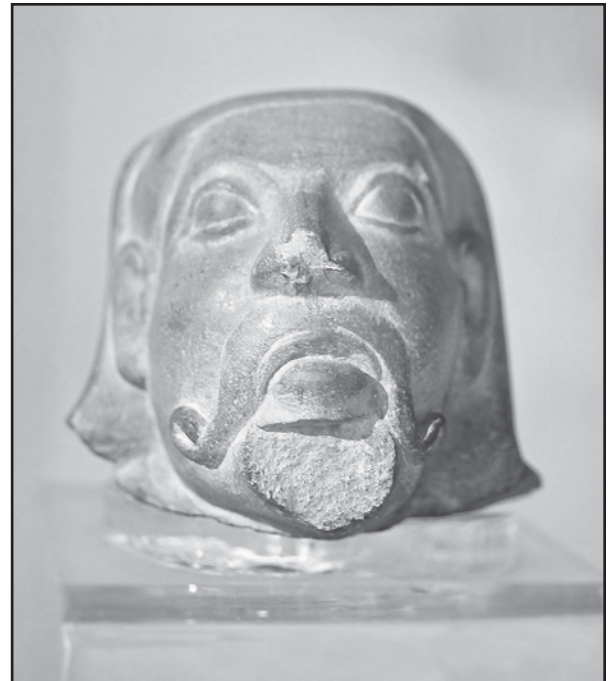


Fig. 4. A Mauryan head.

Government Press Play Ground during 1955-56 (Sinha and Narain, 1970). Out of the three important culture periods (I, II and III), the Period I was represented by Northern Black Polished Ware, black-and-red ware, grey ware, black ware and red ware. Terracottas belonging to the early phase of this period showed some archaic features like the ear, nose, hair shown by pinching out of clay, the mouth by a deep horizontal cut just above the chin, the legs and hands by stump of clay and the fingers by notches. In some cases, the nostrils were shown by two holes. The impressed circles over the body indicated the navel and the breast portions. The female figurines from mid-to-top portion of Period I showed some advanced features where the face was prepared by mould while the other features like the ornaments, ears and hair were shown by the applique method. Some terracotta plaques entirely made of mould also made their appearance in the period. Among the animal figurines which were generally hand-modelled, horse figurines predominated. Punch-marked coins both in silver and copper and uninscribed cast coins were in circulation and they made their appearance from the mid level of period I. According to the excavators, the most noteworthy discoveries were of mutilated couchant bull and a number of carved stone pieces bearing the lustrous Mauryan polish. The

Period II (150 BC to AD 300) was marked by the presence of red ware. In excavations, the deposit of this period was found to have numerous flimsy walls of brick (43 x 29 x 5 cm), terracotta ring-wells and numerous Sunga and Kushan terracottas, a gold amulet and Naigamesha figures. Period III at the site belonged to the Gupta and late Gupta periods after which, according to the excavators the site was abandoned till 17th century.

Of the isolated Mauryan finds from Patna the most noteworthy are the two nude polished sandstone tortois of Jaina tirthankaras found at Lohanipur and the famous Didarganj Yakshi now housed at Patna Museum. Besides the findings from regular excavations, a large number of terracottas, pottery and other antiquities were obtained from various schemes of sewerage in Patna, especially in 1920s (Ghosh 1989: 335). The terracottas belonged to Maurya, Sunga, Kushan and Gupta periods and are now housed at Patna Museum. These have been described in some detail by P.L. Gupta (Gupta 1965, 1972). According to majority of scholars, the pillared hall of Kumrahar lying isolated at the southern outskirts of Patna can hardly be identified as a durbar hall of Chandragupta Maurya and a guess may be hazarded that it was the assembly hall of the third Buddhist Council convened by Asoka (Ghosh 1989: 335).

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