

THE
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HISTORY OF INDIA

VOLUME I

ANCIENT INDIA

EDITED BY

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PREFACE

THE present volume deals with the history of ancient India from the earliest times to about the middle of the first century A.D.; and it attempts to represent the stage of progress which research has now reached in its task of recovering from the past the outlines of a history which, only a few years ago, was commonly supposed to be irretrievably lost. Well within the memory of contributors to this volume it was the fashion to say that there was no history of India before the Muhammadan conquests in the eleventh century A.D., and the general opinion seemed to be summed up in the dictum of the cynic who roundly asserted that all supposed dates for earlier events were like skittles—set up simply to be bowled down again. But this gibe, not quite justifiable even when it was uttered, could not be repeated at the present day. It has lost its point: it is no longer even approximately true.

Regarded as a record of the character and achievements of great leaders of men, this history indeed is, and must always remain, sadly deficient. Of all the conquerors and administrators who appear in this volume there are two only—Alexander the Great and, in a less degree, Açoka—whose personality is at all intimately known to us; in the case of others the bare memory of some of their deeds has been preserved; the rest have become mere names to which research has given a time and a place. But the fragments of fact which have been rescued from the past are now sufficiently numerous and well established to enable us to construct a chronological and geographical framework for the political history of many of the kingdoms and empires of ancient India; and into this framework may be fitted the history of social institutions, which is reflected with unusual clearness in the ancient literatures.

The manner in which modern scholarship has succeeded in throwing light on the dark ages of India, and in revealing order where all seemed to be chaos, is briefly indicated in the latter section of Chapter II which deals with the sources of history. The story of rediscovery is a long record of struggles with problems which were once thought to be insoluble, and of the ultimate triumphs of patience and ingenuity. It begins in 1793, when Sir William Jones supplied 'the sheet-anchor of Indian chronology'

by his identification of the Sandrocottus of Alexander's historians with the Chandragupta of Sanskrit literature; and its great epoch is ushered in by the decipherment of the long-forgotten alphabets of the ancient Indian inscriptions by James Prinsep in 1834. The first comprehensive summary of historical gains appeared in 1858, when Christian Lassen published the first volume of his *Indische Alterthumskunde*; and in recent years other summaries have been made by Dr Vincent Smith (*Early History of India*, 1st edn. 1904, 2nd edn. 1908, 3rd edn. 1914), by Dr L. D. Barnett (*Indian Antiquities*, 1913), and, on a smaller scale, by the editor of this volume (*Ancient India*, 1914).

The *Cambridge History of India* marks a new departure. The literature of the subject has become so vast, and is still growing with such rapidity, that the best hope of securing a real advance in the study now lies in a division of labour among scholars who have explored at first hand the main sources of information. This volume therefore follows the plan adopted in the modern and medieval histories published by the Cambridge University Press. It is the outcome of the combination of a number of investigators with an editor whose function it has been to coordinate, so far as seemed possible or advisable, results obtained independently. That this plan is not without its disadvantages is obvious. All cooperative enterprises of the kind involve necessarily some reiteration and also some discrepancy; and the questions which an editor must decide are how far repeated discussions of the same topic contribute to a fuller knowledge or are merely redundant, and how far different opinions admit of reconciliation or should be allowed to remain as representing the actual state of a study which abounds with difficulties and obscurities. In all important cases of the occurrence of such supplementary or contradictory views in this volume cross-references are given to the passages in which they are expressed.

The general scheme of the work may be explained in a few words. The first two chapters are introductory. In Chapter I Sir Halford Mackinder describes the India of the present day when railways and telegraph lines have taken the place of the ancient routes, and gives an account of those geographical features which have determined the course of history in past times. The chapter is founded on *Eight Lectures on India* prepared for the Visual Instruction Committee of the Colonial Office and published in 1910. A similar acknowledgment of indebtedness is due to the Government of India for the use which the editor has made of its official

publications, especially the *Census Reports* of 1901 and 1911 and the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, in Chapter II on peoples and languages, and the sources of history. In Chapter III Dr P. Giles reviews the evidence which Comparative Philology, aided by the ancient inscriptions of Western Asia, supplies for a knowledge of the early culture of the Āryans or 'Wiros,' their original habitat, and the date of the migrations which eventually led some of their tribes into India. The next five chapters are devoted to accounts of political, social, and economic conditions as represented in the earliest scriptures of the Brāhmanas, Jains, and Buddhists—Chapters IV and V by Prof. A. B. Keith on the Vedas and Brāhmanas, Chapters VI and VII by Dr J. Charpentier and Dr T. W. Rhys Davids respectively on the earliest history of the Jains and Buddhists, and Chapter VIII by Mrs Rhys Davids on economic conditions in early Buddhist literature. The five chapters which follow extend this investigation to the Brāhman sources for the history of the post-Vedic period—Chapters IX–XII by Prof. E. Washburn Hopkins on the Sūtras, epics, and law-books, and Chapter XIII by the editor on the Purāṇas. Up to this point the evidence has been gleaned almost entirely from Indian sources and confined almost entirely to India. In the next four chapters India is viewed in relation to other countries—Chapter XIV by Prof. A. V. Williams Jackson on the ancient Persian dominions in India, Chapters XV and XVI by Mr E. R. Bevan on the invasion of Alexander the Great and the early Greek and Latin accounts of India, and Chapter XVII by Dr G. Macdonald on the Hellenic kingdoms of Syria, Bactria, and Parthia. In Chapters XVIII–XX the first great historical empire, that of the Mauryas, is described by Dr F. W. Thomas; and in Chapters XXI–XXIII the editor deals with the powers which arose on the ruins of the Maurya empire—the Indian native states, the Greek successors of Alexander the Great, and the Scythian and Parthian invaders. In Chapter XXIV Dr L. D. Barnett sums up what is known of the early history of Southern India; and in Chapter XXV he gives an analysis of the history of Ceylon which possesses a continuity in striking contrast to the fragmentary records of the kingdoms of the sub-continent. In the final Chapter XXVI Sir John Marshall describes the ancient monuments, and traces the various phases of Indian art from its beginnings to the first century A.D.

The editor desires to thank all the contributors for the courtesy with which they have received and carried out his suggestions. He is doubly indebted to Sir John Marshall, Dr L. D. Barnett,

Dr George Macdonald, Dr F. W. Thomas, and Mr E. R. Bevan for much valuable advice and for their kind help in reading the proofs of chapters other than their own. He gratefully acknowledges also the assistance which he has received from Colonel Haig and from Sir Theodore Morison, the editors in charge of the Muhammadan and British sections of the *Cambridge History of India* (vols. III-IV and V-VI respectively).

The preparation of vol. II, which will deal with the period from the downfall of the Çaka and Pahlava empire in the middle of the first century A.D. to the Muhammadan conquests, is attended with unusual difficulties, caused partly by the vast extent and partly by the fragmentary character of the historical records; but it is at least to be hoped that its appearance may not be delayed by disasters such as that which has impeded the publication of vol. I.

The printing of this volume began in 1913, and more than half the chapters were in type in 1914, when war made further progress impossible until the end of 1918. Since then the work has been completed, all the earlier chapters have been revised, and no effort has been spared to make the book representative of the state of early Indian historical studies at the end of 1920.

The system of chronology, which has been adopted for the periods of Çaka and Kushāṇa rule, needs some explanation. The chronological difficulties connected with the Vikrama era of 58 B.C. and the Çaka era of 78 A.D. are well known; and it is universally admitted that the names which these eras bear were given to them at a later date, and afford no clue to their origin. The view maintained in this work is that the eras in question mark the establishment of the Çaka and Kushāṇa suzerainties. The idea of suzerainty, that is to say, supreme lordship over all the kings of a large region—'the whole earth,' as the poets call it—is deeply rooted in Indian conceptions of government; and the foundation of an era is recognised as one of the attributes of this exalted position. Now there is abundant evidence that the Çaka empire attained its height in the reign of Azes I and the Kushāṇa empire in the reign of Kanishka. It is natural to suppose therefore that such imperial eras must have been established in these reigns, and that their starting point in both cases was the accession of the suzerain.

The story of the foundation and extension of later eras in Indian history—the Gupta era and the era of Harsha, for example—can be clearly traced. All such undoubted illustrations of the process are seen to imply the existence of certain political conditions—the

relations of suzerain to feudatories, in fact. It is not necessarily, or indeed usually, the founder of a dynasty who is also the founder of an era; but it is that member of the royal house who succeeded in asserting 'universal' sway and in reducing his neighbours to the status of feudatories. The use of the era can be shown, in well-ascertained cases, to have spread from the suzerain to the feudatories. Is there any reason to suppose that extension in the contrary direction—from feudatory to suzerain—has ever taken place or could possibly take place?

It has been suggested that the Vikrama era originated with the Mālavas, whose name it sometimes bears in inscriptions. They were a people, apparently of no great political importance, who can be traced in the Punjab and Rājputāna centuries before they settled in Mālwa, the tract of Central India which now bears their name; and they were almost certainly, like the other peoples of these regions, included in the Çaka empire at one period of their history. Is it conceivable that they could have initiated the Vikrama era, and that a great suzerain like Gondopharnes, who almost beyond doubt dates his Takht-i-Bahi inscription in this era, stood indebted to them for its use? The Vikrama era had undoubtedly become the traditional reckoning of the Mālavas in the fifth century A.D.; but the most obvious explanation of the fact is that they had inherited it from their former overlords.

In the same way, the later name of the era of 78 A.D. may be due to its use for centuries by the Çaka satraps of Western India; but they can scarcely have founded this era. Their very title 'satrap' shows that they were originally feudatories; and they were most probably feudatories of the Kushānas. If so, they would use the era of their suzerains as a matter of course.

Thus all *a priori* considerations favour the views which are adopted in this work in regard to the origin of these eras; and, as is pointed out on pages 581-2, the Taxila inscription of the year 136, which first suggested to Sir John Marshall the possibility of an 'era of Azes,' may also furnish positive evidence of their correctness. It has been necessary to deal with these chronological problems somewhat at length because of their importance. If the theories here maintained are accepted, there will be an end to the worst of the perplexities which have for so long obscured the history of N.W. India during the centuries immediately before and after the Christian era, and the dates in all the known inscriptions of the period will be determined, with the single exception of that which occurs in the Taxila copper-plate of Maues, and which, as is

suggested, may be in some era which the Çakas brought with them from eastern Irān into India.

The munificence of Sir Dorabji Tata has enabled the Syndics of the University Press to illustrate this volume more lavishly than would have been possible without such generous help. Mr G. F. Hill and Mr J. Allan of the British Museum have most kindly provided casts of the coins figured in Plates I-VIII; and Sir John Marshall has enhanced the value of his chapter on the monuments by supplying photographs, which were in many cases specially taken for the illustrations in Plates IX-XXXIV.

The index has been made by Mr E. J. Thomas of Emmanuel College and the University Library. Modern place-names are, with very few exceptions, given as they appear in the index-volume of the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*. For the spelling of ancient names the system adopted by Prof. Macdonell in his *History of Sanskrit Literature* has been followed. This system has the double advantage of being strictly accurate and, at the same time, of offering as few difficulties as possible for readers who are not orientalists. The vowels should be pronounced as in Italian, with the exception of *a* which has the indefinite sound so common in English, e.g. in the word *organ*. The vowels *e* and *o* are always long in Sanskrit, and are therefore only marked as such in the non-Sanskritic names of Southern India, in which it is necessary to distinguish them from the corresponding short vowels.

E. J. R.

ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE,
18 August 1921.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

THE SUB-CONTINENT OF INDIA

By Sir HALFORD J. MACKINDER, M.A., M.P., Reader in
Geography in the University of London, formerly
Student of Christ Church, Oxford

	PAGE
The four sub-continents of Asia	1
Ceylon; Colombo, the strategic centre of British sea-power in the Indian Ocean	1
The Malabar and Coromandel coasts; the Western and Eastern Ghâts	2
The Carnatic; Travancore; Cochin	3
The Gap of Coimbatore or Pälghât	3
The plateau between the Ghâts; Mysore	4
Climate of the southern extremity of India	4
Madras; some causes of the comparative isolation of southern India .	5
Burma, the connecting link between the Far East and the Middle East	5
The geography of Burma	6
The geography of Bengal	8
Calcutta	9
Countries of the Himälāyan fringe	10, 25
Valley of the Brahmaputra	11
The plain of the Ganges and Jumna	12
Central India	15
The situation of Bombay	16
The Marāthā country; Hyderābād; the Deccan plateau	18
The Central Provinces; Baroda	19
Kāthiāwār and Cutch	20
The Himälāyan barrier	20
Rājputāna; historical importance of the great Indian desert and the Delhi gateway	20
The north-west frontier	26
The plain of the Indus	27, 31
Routes leading into N.W. India	28
Kashmīr	32
Gilgit; Chitrāl; the Karakoram; the Hindu Kush	33
Lateral communication between the Khyber and Bolān routes . . .	33
The Hindu Kush and the Indus as boundaries between India and Irān	34
Summary of the principal physical features of the sub-continent . .	34

CHAPTER II

By E. J. RAPSON, M.A., Professor of Sanskrit in the University
of Cambridge, and Fellow of St John's College

A. PEOPLES AND LANGUAGES

	PAGE
Varieties of race, speech, and culture	37
Western and eastern invaders	38
Natural and ethnographical divisions	40
The seven chief physical types	40
The four families of speech	48
The caste-system	53

B. SOURCES OF HISTORY

Prehistoric archaeology	56
Ancient literatures	56
Foreign writers	58
Inscribed monuments and coins	60
The ancient alphabets	62
Progress of research	62

CHAPTER III

THE ARYANS

By P. GILES, Litt.D., Master of Emmanuel College, and Reader in
Comparative Philology in the University of Cambridge

The Indo-European languages	65, 71
The Wiroos and their original habitat	66
Their migrations	70
Evidence of the inscriptions of Boghaz-köi	72
Irānians and Indo-Āryans	73
Āryan names in the inscriptions of Mesopotamia	76

CHAPTER IV

THE AGE OF THE RIGVEDA

By A. BERRIEDALE KEITH, D.C.L., D.Litt., Regius Professor
of Sanskrit and Comparative Philology in the University of
Edinburgh, formerly Scholar of Balliol College, Oxford

The hymns of the Rigveda	77, 108
Geography	79
Fauna; peoples	81
Social organisation	88
Origins of the caste system	92
Political organisation	94
Warlike and peaceful avocations	98
Dress, food, and amusements	101
Religion	103
The beginnings of philosophy	107
Chronology of Vedic literature	110

CHAPTER V

THE PERIOD OF THE LATER SAMHITĀS, THE BRAHMAṆAS,
THE ĀRAṆYAKAS, AND THE UPANISHADS

By Professor A. BERRIEDALE KEITH

	PAGE
Vedic literature after the period of the Rigveda	114
Extension of Āryan civilisation to the Middle Country	116
Peoples of the Middle Country	118
The more eastern peoples	122
Changes in social conditions	125, 135
Government and the administration of justice	130
Industry; social life; the arts and sciences	135
Religion and philosophy	141
Language	146
Criteria of date	147

CHAPTER VI

THE HISTORY OF THE JAINS

By JARL CHARPENTIER, Ph.D., University of Upsala

Jainism in its relation to Brāhmanism and Buddhism	150
The <i>tīrthakaras</i> or 'prophets'; Pārçva	153
Mahāvīra	155
Jains and Buddhists	160
Mahāvīra's rivals, Gosāla and Jamālī	162-3
The Jain church after the death of Mahāvīra	164
The great schism: Çvetāmbaras and Digambaras	165
Settlements in Western India	166
Organisation of the religious and lay communities	168
Blanks in Jain ecclesiastical history	169

CHAPTER VII

THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE BUDDHISTS

By T. W. RHYS DAVIDS, LL.D., Ph.D., D.Sc., formerly Professor of Pāli and Buddhist Literature at University College, London, and Professor of Comparative Religion in the University of Manchester

Pre-Buddhistic	171
India in the Buddha's time; the clans	174
The kingdoms:	
Kosala	178
Magadha	182
Avanti	185
The Vauṣas	187
The first great gap	188
Chandagutta	190
Age of the authorities used	192
Growth of Buddhist literature from the time of Buddha down to Asoka	197

CHAPTER VIII

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS ACCORDING TO EARLY
BUDDHIST LITERATUREBy Mrs C. A. F. RHYS DAVIDS, M.A., D.Litt., Fellow of
University College, London

	PAGE
Rural economy	198
Cities; villages; the land	200
Agriculture	203
Labour and industry	205
Social conditions	208
Trade and commerce	210
Trade centres and routes	212
Methods of exchange and prices	216
Securities and interest	218
General conclusions	219

CHAPTER IX

THE PERIOD OF THE SŪTRAS, EPICS, AND LAW-BOOKS

By E. WASHBURN HOPKINS, Ph.D., LL.D., Professor of Sanskrit
and Comparative Philology in Yale University

Language of the later Brāhman literature	220
Social conditions as reflected in the Brāhman and Buddhist books	221
Outlines of chronology	222
Causes of the wider political outlook	225

CHAPTER X

FAMILY LIFE AND SOCIAL CUSTOMS AS THEY APPEAR
IN THE SŪTRAS

By Professor E. WASHBURN HOPKINS

The Sūtra literature	227
Gṛihya Sūtras	228
Oblations to spirits and gods	229
Rites to avert disaster and disease	231
Substitution of images of meal for sacrificial animals	232
Marriage ceremonies	233
Caste and family	234
Contents and arrangement of the Gṛihya Sūtras	236
The life represented is rural, not urban	237
Minor superstitions	238
Ārya and Çūdra; Dharma Sūtras	240
The beginnings of civil and criminal law; inheritance	243
Duties of the king	244
Taxes; status of women; ordeals	247
Legal rates of interest	248
Religion and philosophy	248
Relative ages of the Sūtras	249

CHAPTER XI

THE PRINCES AND PEOPLES OF THE EPIC POEMS

By Professor E. WASHBURN HOPKINS

	PAGE
The two chief varieties of epic poetry	251
Sources of the Mahābhārata	252
Narrative and didactic interpolations	255
The characters partly historical and partly mythical	257
Date of the poem in its present form	258
Features common to the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa	259
Social conditions in the Sanskrit epics and in Buddhist works of the same period	259
The story of the Mahābhārata	262
The Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa contrasted	264
Earlier and later moral ideals in the Mahābhārata	265
Knights, priests, commoners, and slaves	266
The king and his ministers	271
Religious and philosophical views of the epics	272
Peoples traditionally engaged in the great war	274
The genealogies	275

CHAPTER XII

THE GROWTH OF LAW AND LEGAL INSTITUTIONS

By Professor E. WASHBURN HOPKINS

The chief codes—Manu, Vishṇu, Yājñavalkya, and Nārada	277-9
Growth of the distinction between religious precepts and law	280
Growth of the distinction between civil and criminal law, and the first enumeration of legal titles	281
Ordeals	282
<i>Dharma</i>	284
Punishments	284
Development of civil law	286
Interest; wages; property	287
The king as ruler in peace and war	288
The king as judge	290
Hereditary traditional law and custom	291
Infant marriage; the levirate; the status of women	292
The law-books and the Arthaśāstra	293-4

CHAPTER XIII

THE PUĀRṆAS

By Professor E. J. RAPSON

The classical definition of a Purāṇa	296
Kshatriya literature	297, 302
Scriptures of the later Hinduism	298
Critical study of the Purāṇas	299
The Purāṇas and Upapurāṇas	300
Their chronological and geographical conceptions	303
Genealogies partly legendary and partly historical	304

	PAGE
Common traditional elements in Vedic literature and the Purāṇas	305
Traditional period of the great war between Kurus and Pāṇḍus	306
The Pūrus	307
The Ikshvākus	308
Kings or suzerains of Magadha:	
Bṛihadrathas	309
Pradyotas, originally kings of Avanti	310
Çiçunāgas	311
Nandas	313
Contemporary dynasties in Northern and Central India	315
Later kings of Magadha and suzerains of N. India:	
The later Nandas, Mauryas, Çuṅgas, Kaṅvas, and Andhras	317

16

CHAPTER XIV

THE PERSIAN DOMINIONS IN NORTHERN INDIA DOWN
TO THE TIME OF ALEXANDER'S INVASIONBy A. V. WILLIAMS JACKSON, Ph.D., LL.D., Professor of
Indo-Irānian Languages in Columbia University

Prehistoric connexions between Persia and India	319
Common Indo-Irānian domains	321
Evidence of the Veda and the Avesta	322
Avestan, Old Persian, Greek, and modern designations of Persian provinces south of the Hindu Kush	326
Early commerce between India and Babylon	329
The eastern campaigns of Cyrus	329
Cambyses	333
Darius	334
Xerxes	340
Decadence of the Achaemenian empire	340
The conquest of Persia by Alexander	341
Extent of Persian influence in India	341

NOTE TO CHAPTER XIV

ANCIENT PERSIAN COINS IN INDIA

By Dr GEORGE MACDONALD

The rarity of Persian gold coins in India explained by the low ratio of gold to silver	342
The attribution of punch-marked Persian silver coins to India doubtful	343

CHAPTER XV

ALEXANDER THE GREAT

By E. R. BEVAN, M.A., Hon. Fellow of New College, Oxford

The Kābul valley and the Punjab in the fourth century B.C.	345
Alexander's conquest of the Persian empire; settlements in Seistān, Kandahār, and the upper Kābul valley; invasion of Bactria	347-8
The rāja of Takshaçilā and the Paurava king (Porus)	349

	PAGE
Invasion of India from the upper Kābul valley	350
Hill tribes beyond the N.W. frontier	352
Occupation of the lower Kābul valley	354
Siege and capture of Aornus	356
The crossing of the Indus	357
Reception at Takshaçilā	358
The Paurava king	359, 368, 383
The battle of the Hydaspes	360
Foundation of Nicaea and Bucephala	368
Flight of the second Paurava king, and occupation of his kingdom	370
Capture of Sangala	371
Saubhūti (Sophytes)	371
The Hyphasis, the eastern limit of Alexander's conquests	372
Return to the Hydaspes; expedition to the Indus delta	373
Defeat of the Mālavas	375
Musicanus	377
Return of Craterus through Kandahār and Seistān	379
Pattala	379
Return of Alexander through Gedrosia	380
Return of Nearchus by sea	381
Alexander's Indian satrapies	383
Consequences of the invasion	384

NOTE TO CHAPTER XV

ANCIENT GREEK COINS IN INDIA

By Dr GEORGE MACDONALD

Athenian and Macedonian types	386
Sophytes	388
Coins attributed to Alexander	388
Double darics	390

CHAPTER XVI

INDIA IN EARLY GREEK AND LATIN LITERATURE

By E. R. BEVAN, M.A.

The early sources of information	391
Scyllax of Caryanda; Hecataeus of Miletus; Herodotus; Ctesias of Cnidus	393
Nearchus; Onesicritus; Clitarchus	398-9
Megasthenes; Daimachus; Patrocles	399-400
Geography and physical phenomena	400
The mineral, vegetable, and animal world	403
Ethnology and mythology	407
Social divisions according to Megasthenes	409
His description of Pātaliputra	411
Manners and customs; laws	412
Marriage; suttee; disposal of the dead; slavery	414
The king; royal festivals; government officials	416
Industries	418
Brāhmanas; ascetics; philosophers	419

	PAGE
Deities	422
Fabulous creatures	422
Pearls; Southern India and Ceylon	423
Later sources of information—Apollodorus of Artemita; Eratosthenes; Alexander Polyhistor; Strabo; Pliny; Arrian; Aelian	425
Greek merchantmen	425

CHAPTER XVII

THE HELLENIC KINGDOMS OF SYRIA, BACTRIA, AND PARTHIA

By GEORGE MACDONALD, C.B., LL.D., F.B.A., First Assistant
Secretary Scottish Education Department, formerly Scholar
of Balliol College, Oxford

Greek and native rulers of the Kābul valley and N.W. India after Alexander	427
Chandragupta	429
The Indian expedition of Seleucus	430
Relations of Syria with the Maurya empire	432
Foundation of the kingdoms of Bactria and Parthia	434
Diodotus	436
Arsaces	438
Euthydemus	440, 442
Invasion of India by Antiochus III	441
Sophagasenus	442
Demetrius	444
Eucratides	446, 454
Euthydemus II; Demetrius II; Agathocles; Pantaleon; Antimachus	447
Heliocles and Laodice	453
Plato	456
Parthian invasion of Bactria	457
Seythian invasion of Bactria	458
Heliocles	459
Key to Plates I—IV	462

CHAPTER XVIII

CHANDRAGUPTA, THE FOUNDER OF THE MAURYA EMPIRE

By F. W. THOMAS, M.A., Ph.D., Librarian of the India Office,
formerly Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge

Characteristics of the Maurya period and authorities for its history	467
N.W. India before and after Alexander	468
Agraumes, Xandrames, or Dhana-Nanda	469
Nanda and Chandragupta	470
Date of the overthrow of Nanda	471
Plot of the <i>Mudrārākhṣa</i>	471
Chandragupta and Seleucus	472
Megasthenes	472
Rule of Chandragupta and extent of his dominions	473

CHAPTER XIX
POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ORGANISATION
OF THE MAURYA EMPIRE

By Dr F. W. THOMAS

	PAGE
Internal conditions:	
The land	474
Towns and fortifications	475
The imperial capital	477
The people	477
Trade	478
State of society	479
Literature	482
Language	483
Religion	483
Law	485
Government and administration:	
Civil administration founded on village autonomy	486
The army	489
Foreign policy	490
Tribal oligarchies	491
Monarchies	491

CHAPTER XX
AÇOKA, THE IMPERIAL PATRON OF BUDDHISM

By Dr F. W. THOMAS

Bindusāra	495
Events and principal enactments in Açoka's reign	495
Religious and other foundations	497, 501
Buddhist Council of Pāṭaliputra and religious missions	498
Duration of Açoka's reign and his family history	499
Chronology	502
Açoka's principles and personal action	504
His admonitions	507
His ordinances and institutions	508
The personality of Açoka as revealed in his edicts	509
His successors	511
Probable division of the empire after the reign of Samprati	512

CHAPTER XXI
INDIAN NATIVE STATES AFTER THE PERIOD
OF THE MAURYA EMPIRE

By Professor E. J. RAPSON

The peoples of India in the inscriptions of Açoka	514
Internal strife and foreign invasions the result of the downfall of imperial rule	516
Routes connecting Pāṭaliputra with the north-western and western frontiers	516

	PAGE
Kingdoms on the central route	517
The Çuñgas	517
Feudatories of the Çuñgas	523
Kosala and Magadha	527
Independent states	528
Rise of the Andhras	529
Conquest of Ujjain	531
Conquest of Vidiçā	533
The Kaliñgas	534
Key to Plate V	538

CHAPTER XXII

THE SUCCESSORS OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT

By Professor E. J. RAPSON

The Yavana invasions	540
Extension of Yavana power along the routes from Kābul	542
Stages on the route leading to Pāṭaliputra	543
Yavana invasion of the Midland Country	544
Bactrian and Indian coins	545
The house of Euthydemus:	
Demetrius; Pantaleon and Agathocles; Antimachus	546
Apollodotus; Menander	547
The kingdom of Çākala	549
Dominions of this house after the conquests of Eucratides and Helioeles	551
The families of Menander and Apollodotus	552
The Çaka conquests completed in the reign of Azes I	553
The house of Eucratides:	
Eucratides	554
The kingdom of Kāpiça	555
Helioeles	556
His successors at Pushkalāvati	557
Antialeidas	558
Archebius his successor at Takshaçilā	559
Çaka conquest of Pushkalāvati and Takshaçilā in the reign of Maues	559
Successors of Eucratides in the upper Kābul valley	560
Hermacns the last Yavana king	560
Pahlava conquest of the upper Kābul valley	561

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SCYTHIAN AND PARTHIAN INVADERS

By Professor E. J. RAPSON

The Çaka invaders came from Seistān and Kandahār into the country of the lower Indus	563
Çakas in the inscriptions of Darius	564
Migration of the Yueh-chi	565
Bactria overwhelmed and Parthia invaded by Çakas	566
Being checked by Parthia the Çakas invaded India	567
The title 'Great King of Kings'	567

PAGE

Pahlava and Çaka suzerains in eastern Irân and India	569
The date of Maues, the conqueror of Pushkalāvati and Takshaçilâ	570
Extension of his conquests by Azes I, who may be the founder of the Vikrama era	571
Azilises; Azes II; Vonones	572
The family of Vonones	573
Çaka satraps	574
The <i>strategoi</i>	577
Gondopharnes	577
Pacores	580
The transition from Pahlava to Kushâna rule in Takshaçilâ	580
Vîma Kadphises	581
The date of Kanishka	583
Summary of numismatic evidence for the history of the Yavana, Çaka, and Pahlava invaders of India	586

CHAPTER XXIV

THE EARLY HISTORY OF SOUTHERN INDIA

By L. D. BARNETT, M.A., Litt.D., Keeper of the Department of Oriental Printed Books and MSS. in the British Museum, formerly Scholar of Trinity College, Cambridge

The Dravidian peoples	593
The Tamil kingdoms	594
The Andhras or Telugus	598
The Kalingas	601
Mahârâshtra, etc.	602

CHAPTER XXV

THE EARLY HISTORY OF CEYLON

By Dr L. D. BARNETT

Sources of history	604
The Vâddas	604
Other races in Ceylon	605
Earliest colonisation	605
History from Vijaya to the advent of Buddhism	607
From Devânampiya Tissa to Kuṭakaṇṇa Tissa	608

CHAPTER XXVI

THE MONUMENTS OF ANCIENT INDIA

By Sir J. H. MARSHALL, K.C.I.E., Litt.D., Director General of Archaeology in India, formerly Scholar of King's College, Cambridge

Prehistoric antiquities	612
The age of iron	615
The mounds at Lauriyâ Nandangarh; the walls of the old city of Râjagriha	616
The earliest buildings	617
Monuments of the Maurya epoch	618

	PAGE
Persian influence	621
Contrast between Indian and foreign workmanship also seen in the minor arts	622
Development of art in the Çuṅga period	623
Bhārhut	624
Besnagar	625
More advanced style in the railing at Buddh Gayā	625
Sāncī	627
Interpretation of the reliefs	629
Varieties of style	630
The pre-Kushāna sculptures at Mathurā	632
Decadence of art	633
<i>Chaityas</i>	633
Bhājā; Kondāne; Pitalkhorā; Ajanta; Bedsā; Nasik; Kārli <i>Vihāras</i>	635
The caves of Orissa	637
Sculptures in the caves	638
Paintings of the Early Indian school	640
Terracottas	642
Foreign influence in Indian art	643
Coins	644
Architecture	645
Minor arts	646
The Gandhāra School	648
Greek and Indian ideals	648
 LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	 651
BIBLIOGRAPHIES	653
CHRONOLOGY	697
INDEX	705
PLATES I—XXXIV	<i>at end</i>

LIST OF MAPS

1. Physical Map of the Indian Empire *before p. 1*
2. Physical Map of N.W. India and the Adjacent Countries
between pp. 28 and 27
3. The Kābul Valley and the Punjab *between pp. 344 and 345*
4. Baluchistān and the country of the Lower Indus *between pp. 374 and 375*
5. Bharatavarsha *between pp. 514 and 515*
6. The Indian Empire and Ceylon *in pocket at end of volume*

LIST OF PLATES

- I. Persian, Athenian, and Macedonian Coins in India.
- II. Coins of the Seleucid Kings and their Successors.
- III, IV. Coins of Bactria.
- V. Coins of Native Indian States.
- VI–VIII. Coins of the Greek, Scythian, and Parthian Invaders.
- IX. Palaeolithic and Neolithic Implements.
- X. Prehistoric Copper Objects.
- XI. Gold leaf from Lauriyā Nandangarh; Seals from Harappa; Aṣoka Pillar at Lauriyā Nandangarh; Façade of the Lomas Rishi Cave.
- XII. Yaksha (?) Statue from Pārkhām; Capital of Aṣoka Column at Sārnāth.
- XIII. Yaksha Figures from Patna; Indigenous punch-marked Coins; Coin of Sophytes (Saubhūti).
- XIV. Terracotta Figures from Sārnāth and Basārḥ (Vaiçālī); Jewellery from Taxila; Crystal Reliquary from Piprahwa Stūpa.
- XV. Gateway and Railings of the Bhārhut Stūpa.
- XVI, XVII. Reliefs on the Railing of the Bhārhut Stūpa.
- XVIII. Garuḍa Pillar at Besnagar.
- XIX. Railing and Reliefs at Buddh Gayā.
- XX. The Main Stūpa at Sānchī (General view from N.E.).
- XXI. Stūpa II at Sānchī (General view and Pillars).
- XXII. Front Face of East Gateway of the Main Stūpa at Sānchī.
- XXIII. Architraves of Gateways of the Main Stūpa at Sānchī.
- XXIV. Jain Votive Tablet and portion of Torāṇa Arch from Mathurā.
- XXV. The Chaitya Cave at Kārli.
- XXVI. Caves at Kondāne, Bhājā, Nadsūr, and Nāsik.
- XXVII. Manchapuri Cave and Ananta Gumphā.
- XXVIII. Rānī Gumphā and Alakāpuri Cave.
- XXIX. Terracotta Plaque from Bhītā; Copper Loṭā from Kulū.
- XXX. Coins of Bactria and North-western India.
- XXXI. Head of Dionysus from Taxila; Stūpa Base of Scytho-Parthian epoch at Taxila.
- XXXII. Bronze Statuette from Taxila; Gold Casket from Stūpa at Bīmarān.
- XXXIII. Intaglio Gems from the North-west of India.
- XXXIV. Life-size Statue of Buddha from Gandhāra.

LIST OF BIBLIOGRAPHIES

	PAGE
General Bibliography	653
Chapter I	654
Chapter II	655
Chapter III	658
Chapter IV	659
Chapter V	660
Chapter VI	662
Chapter VII	663
Chapter VIII	665
Chapters IX—XII	666
Chapter XIII	669
Chapter XIV	670
Note to Chapter XIV	673
Chapters XV and XVI	674
Note to Chapter XV	676
Chapter XVII	677
Chapters XVIII and XIX	679
Chapter XX	681
Chapter XXI	683
Chapter XXII	685
Chapter XXIII	686
Chapter XXIV	688
Chapter XXV	690
Chapter XXVI	692

CORRIGENDA

- p. 129, l. 2 from foot. *For* Himalāyas *read* Himālayas.
- p. 184, l. 11. *For* Samañña- *read* Sāmañña-.
- p. 194, l. 3. *For* Moggliputta *read* Moggaliputta.
- p. 265, note ², l. 3. *For* Kṛishṇa *read* Kṛishṇa.
- pp. 320, 321, note ², ll. 7 and 10. *For* Oldenburg *read* Oldenberg.
- p. 501, l. 15. *For* Koṇagamana *read* Koṇāgamana.
- p. 581, l. 11. *For* protrait *read* portrait.
- p. 598, l. 10. *For* Aravālar *read* Aruvālar.
- p. 636, l. 5 from foot. *For* Andra *read* Andhra.
- p. 684, l. 1. *For* Fourcher *read* Foucher.