

**Asoka: The Buddhist
Emperor of India**

Rulers of India .

ASOKA

HENRY FROWDE, M.A.
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THE INDIAN EMPIRE

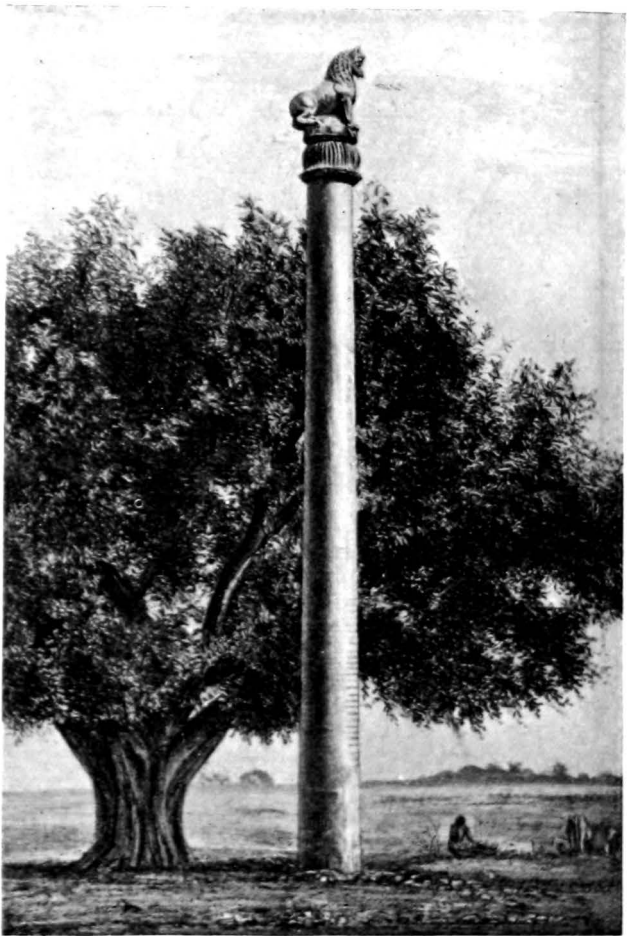
Prepared for Sir William Wilson Hunter's
IMPERIAL GAZETTEER OF INDIA

Scale 200 miles to 1 inch
100 70 0 100 200 300 400



to the height above sea level in feet.
and only to exhibit the principal
of the sea in India.

PLATE I



ASOKA'S PILLAR AT LAURIYĀ-NANDANGARH

RULERS OF INDIA

Asoka

THE BUDDHIST EMPEROR OF INDIA

BY

VINCENT A. SMITH, M.R.A.S.

LATE OF THE INDIAN CIVIL SERVICE .

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PREFACE

A VOLUME on Asoka Maurya by Professor Rhys Davids was intended to be the first of the 'Rulers of India' series, but unfortunately circumstances prevented the fulfilment of that intention, and the series was closed leaving vacant the niche destined for the great Buddhist emperor. With the approval of Professor Rhys Davids I have undertaken the preparation of a supplementary volume giving in a popular form the substance of what is known concerning the Maurya empire. The sources of our knowledge of ancient Indian history are so meagre that it is impossible to treat the subject of this volume in a manner similar to that in which the biographies of Akbar, Albuquerque, and other Indian worthies have been treated. All minute biographical details are lacking, and a distinct picture of the man Asoka cannot be painted. Nevertheless, enough is known to render the subject interesting, and if my book should fail to interest readers, the fault will lie rather with the author than with the subject.

The chapter entitled 'The History of Asoka' will be found to differ widely from all other publications, such as Cunningham's *Bhilsa Topes*, which treat of that topic. I have tried to follow the example of the best modern historians, and to keep the legends

separate from what seems to me to be authentic history. Among the legends I have placed the stories of the conversion of Ceylon and of the deliberations of the so-called Third Council. All the forms of those stories which have reached us are crowded with absurdities and contradictions from which legitimate criticism cannot extract trustworthy history.

I reject absolutely the Ceylonese chronology prior to the reign of Dutthagâmini in about B. C. 160. The undeserved credit given to the statements of the monks of Ceylon has been a great hindrance to the right understanding of ancient Indian history.

The translations of the inscriptions in this volume are based on those of Bühler, checked by comparison with the versions of other scholars, especially those of MM. Kern and Senart, and with the texts. Although I do not pretend to possess a critical knowledge of the Pâli and Prâkrit languages, and have, therefore, rarely ventured on an independent interpretation, I hope that the revised versions in this volume may be found to be both accurate and readable.

A difficulty experienced by all translators of the Asoka inscriptions is that of finding an adequate compendious translation of *dharma* and its compounds. 'Religion,' 'righteousness,' 'truth,' 'the law,' 'the sacred law,' and, I dare say, other phrases, have been tried: all these are unsatisfactory. To my mind the rendering 'piety' or 'law of piety' seems the best. The fundamental principle of Asoka's ethics is filial piety, the Latin *pietas*, the Chinese *Hsiao*, which

is presented as the model and basis of all other virtues. The first maxim of the Chinese 'Sacred Edict,' the document most nearly resembling Asoka's Edicts, is this: 'Pay just regard to filial and fraternal duties, in order to give due importance to the relations of life.' Asoka's system may be said to be based on the same maxim. Such a system may well be described as 'the law of piety.'

In dealing with the vexed question of transliteration I have shunned the pedantic atrocities of international systems, which do not shrink from presenting Krishna in the guise of Kṛṣṇa, Champâ as Kampâ, and so on. The consonants in the Indian words and names in this book are to be pronounced as in English, and the vowels usually as in Italian. The short *a* has an indistinct sound as in the word 'woman.' Long vowels are marked when necessary; other diacritical marks have not been used in the text.

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