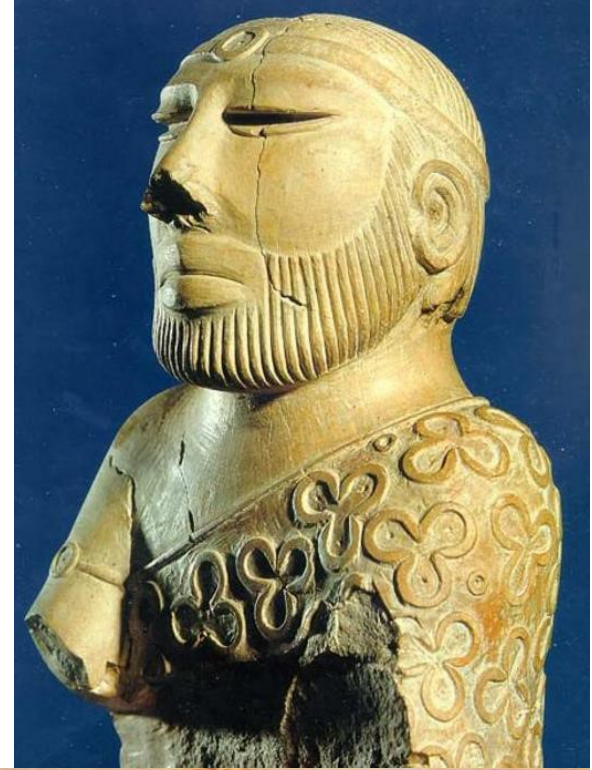


History of the Art of India, Part I: Origins to Mughhals



OLLI
Spring 2024

Week 1



**Origins in the Indus Valley
Civilization, and Early
Buddhist Art through the
Mauryan Empire**

Origins... Early Buddhist Art

- A. Introduction to the course
- B. Indus Valley Civilization (Mohenjo Daro and Harappa)
- C. Arrival of the Aryans
- D. Early Buddhist Art of the Mauryan Empire

A. Introduction to the Course

Three questions; first:

A1. What is India?

- Not the post-1947 country
- South of Himalayas; inverted triangle; W by Afghanistan & Arabian Sea; E by Bay of Bengal
- Indian subcontinent or South Asia
- 7 countries: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Sri Lanka (sometimes Afghanistan)

A1. What is India?

- 7 countries: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Sri Lanka (sometimes Afghanistan)



A1. What is India?

- **3 rivers: Indus (Pakistan), Ganges & Jamuna (India)**
- **In the West: India from Greek from Skt Sindhu River**
- **In India itself: Bhārata (ancient sage)**
- **~ size to Europe, with similar diversity**
- **Original inhabitants: Dravidians (drāviḍa), later assimilated Aryans, Greeks, Persians, etc.**

A. Introduction to the Course

Three questions; second:

A2. What is Indian religion, culture, art?

- Impossible to answer!... but some observations:
- 3 world religions: Hinduism (**Brahmanism**), Buddhism, Jainism; and later imports: Islam, Christianity
- Hinduism: problematic post-Enlightenment Euro term
- No distinction between religious/secular (~ Euro MAs)
- Art and artist: not in the modern aesthetic sense... mostly unknown creators... patrons more important than creators

A. Introduction to the Course

Three questions; third:

A3. What is this course?

- Survey of a history rich and complex in diversity and continuity
- Chronologically through evolution of styles and forms:
 - origins > early Buddhist > early Brahmanical > Hindu temple architecture > Islamic/Mughal
- Art = architecture (mostly), sculpture, painting

A3. What is this course?

- **Note on names: transliteration from Sanskrit and vernaculars... not entirely consistent**
- **Note on sources: Craven, Dehejia, Stierlin**
- **Rasa / rasika = flavor or taste / one who tastes**
 - **Aesthetic theory since 4C**
 - **Rasa = aesthetic flavor of a work**
 - **Rasika = connoisseur**
 - **Viewer's (rasika's) sensitivity as important as artist's skill in the success of a work of art**
 - **You are rasikas! Not r/t details of the works we'll study**
 - **r/t observant eye & r/t emotional, intellectual, intuitive response to the beauty of form and idea**

B. Indus Valley Civilization (Mohenjo Daro and Harappa)

B1. Neolithic paintings

B2. Indus valley civilization: Location and timeline

B3. Cities and structures

B4. Sculpture

B1. Neolithic paintings

- Sandstone wall- and rock-paintings, Bhimbetka (Central India), ca. 5500 BCE
- Often animals
- Sometimes humans, with bows and arrows
- Mineral pigments: red and purples... blues and greens... white
- Applied with fingers or brush-like instruments
- Cf. Paleolithic Euro: Lascaux, ca. 17K yrs ago; El Castillo, ca.40K yrs ago

B1. Neolithic paintings



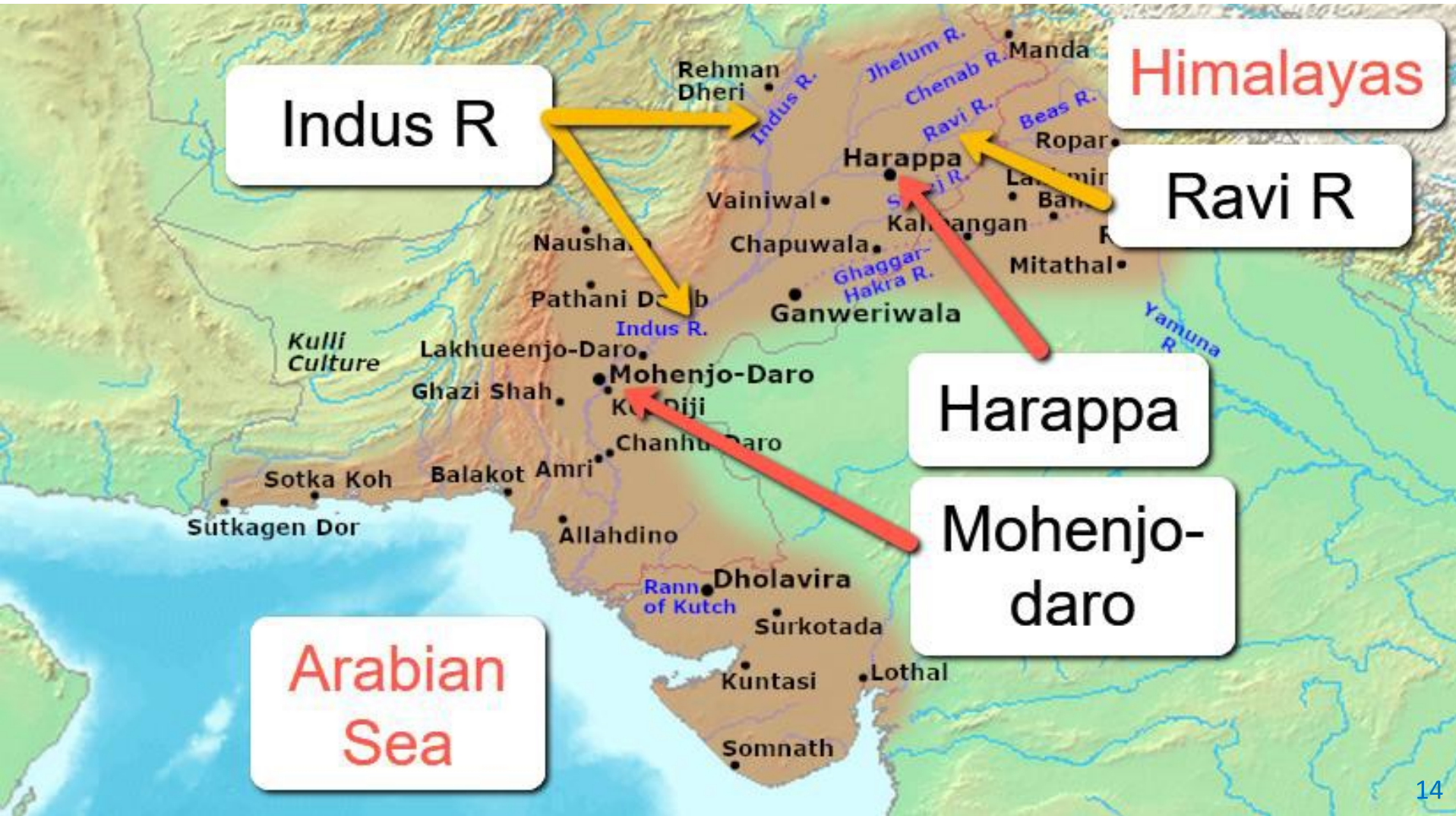
Neolithic rock ptg, Bhimbetka (near Bhopal), Madhya Pradesh, ca.5500 BCE

B2. Indus valley civilization: Location and timeline

- **Ruins of Harappa discovered 1856, on Ravi R. (tributary of Indus, modern Pakistan)**
- **Ruins of Mohenjo-daro discovered 1922, on Indus R., 210 mi from sea, 400 mi S of Harappa**
- **Extent of civilization: Along Indus R and Arabian Sea**
- **Arose 3rd millenium BCE / mature phase: 2600-1900 BCE**
- **Cf. Sumer and Egypt, arose late 4th millenium BCE**
- **Trade with Mesopotamia**
- **Undeciphered writing**

B2. Indus valley civilization: Location and timeline

- Extent: Along Indus R. and Arabian Sea
- End: ca. 1500 BCE... environmental causes VS Aryans



B3. Cities and structures

- 2 major cities, ca.35K people, grid streets, brick buildings, grain storage, wells, water drainage



View of Harappa granary

B3. Cities and structures

- ...writing, town planning, aesthetic sensibility
- View of Mohenjo-daro and citadel (stupa?)



B3. Cities and structures

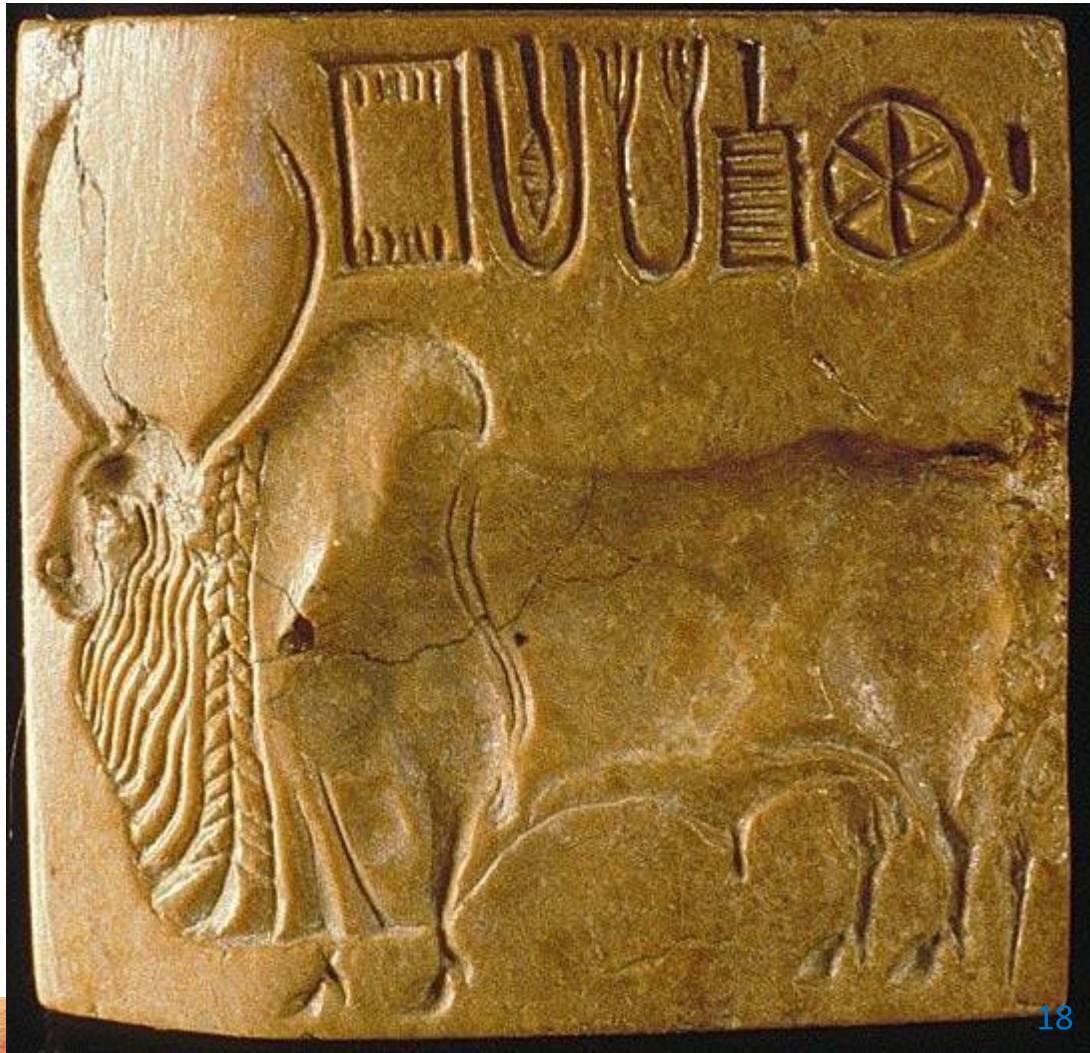
- Pool for (ritual) bathing (precedent for later India)



B4. Sculpture

B4a. Steatite (soapstone) seals, ca. 2600-1900 BCE

- Thousands with inscriptions only (r/t trade?)
- Thousands, ca. 1.5" square, personal adornment (?)
- Mostly animals, some humans, + geometric symbols (writing?)
- E.g. Brahmani bull



B4a. Steatite (soapstone) seals, ca. 2600-1900 BCE

- First art objects in India
- Hallmarks of Indian art: love of animals, keen sense of observation, vital reality
- E.g. rhinoceros (seal impression into clay)



B4a. Steatite (soapstone) seals, ca. 2600-1900 BCE

- Shiva or Yogi seal



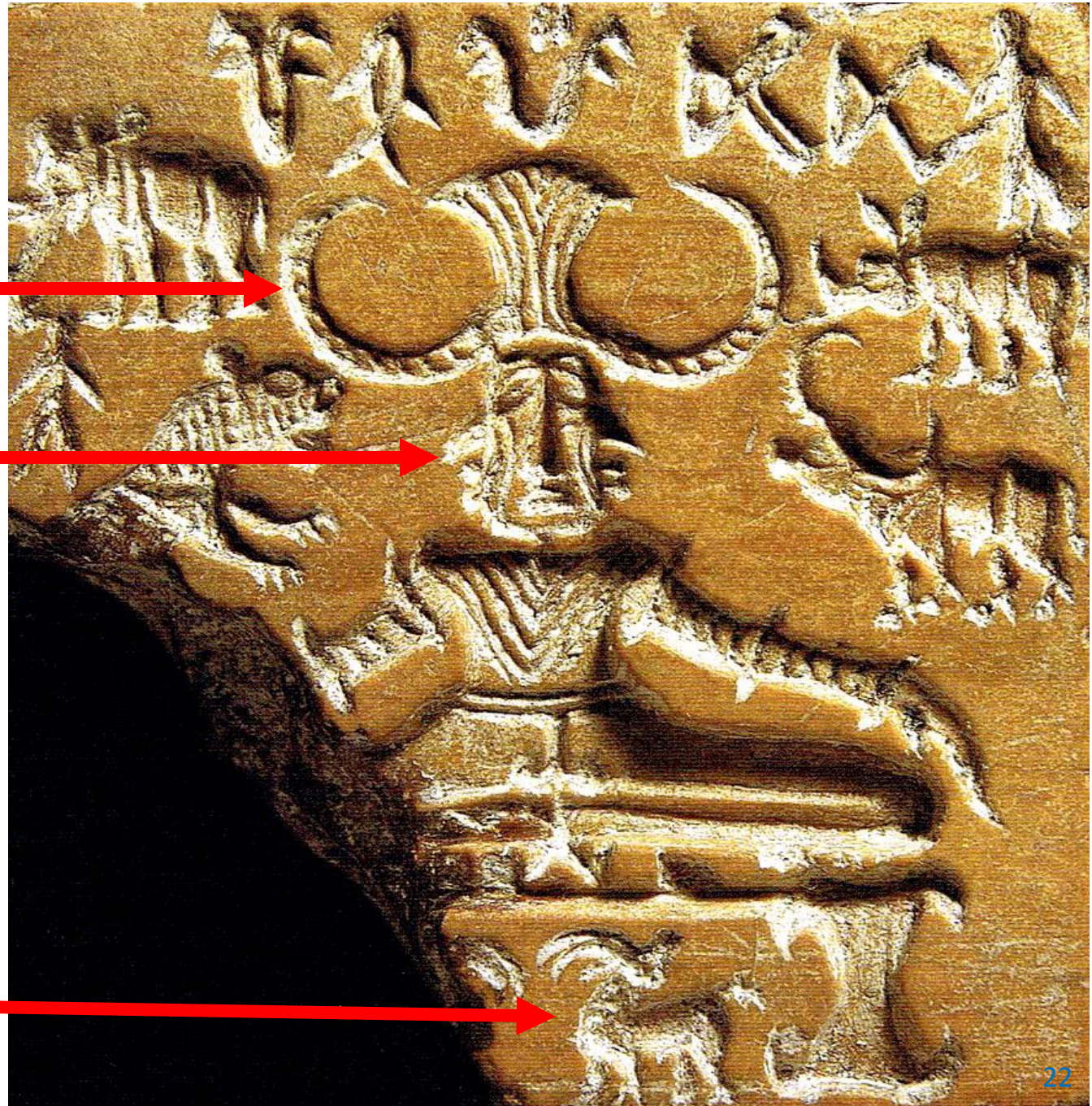
B4a. Steatite (soapstone) seals, ca. 2600-1900 BCE

- Famous and historically important seal: prototype of “Shiva Pashupati” (Lord of beasts)
- First representation of a deity in Indian art
- Figure on low throne in yoga pose (**padmāsana / full lotus**)
- Iconography...

(sacred) horned
headdress (~
Shiva's trident)

Triple visage (~
Shiva)

Deer under
throne (~
Buddha's
throne)



Human figures

Animals suggest
fertility figure

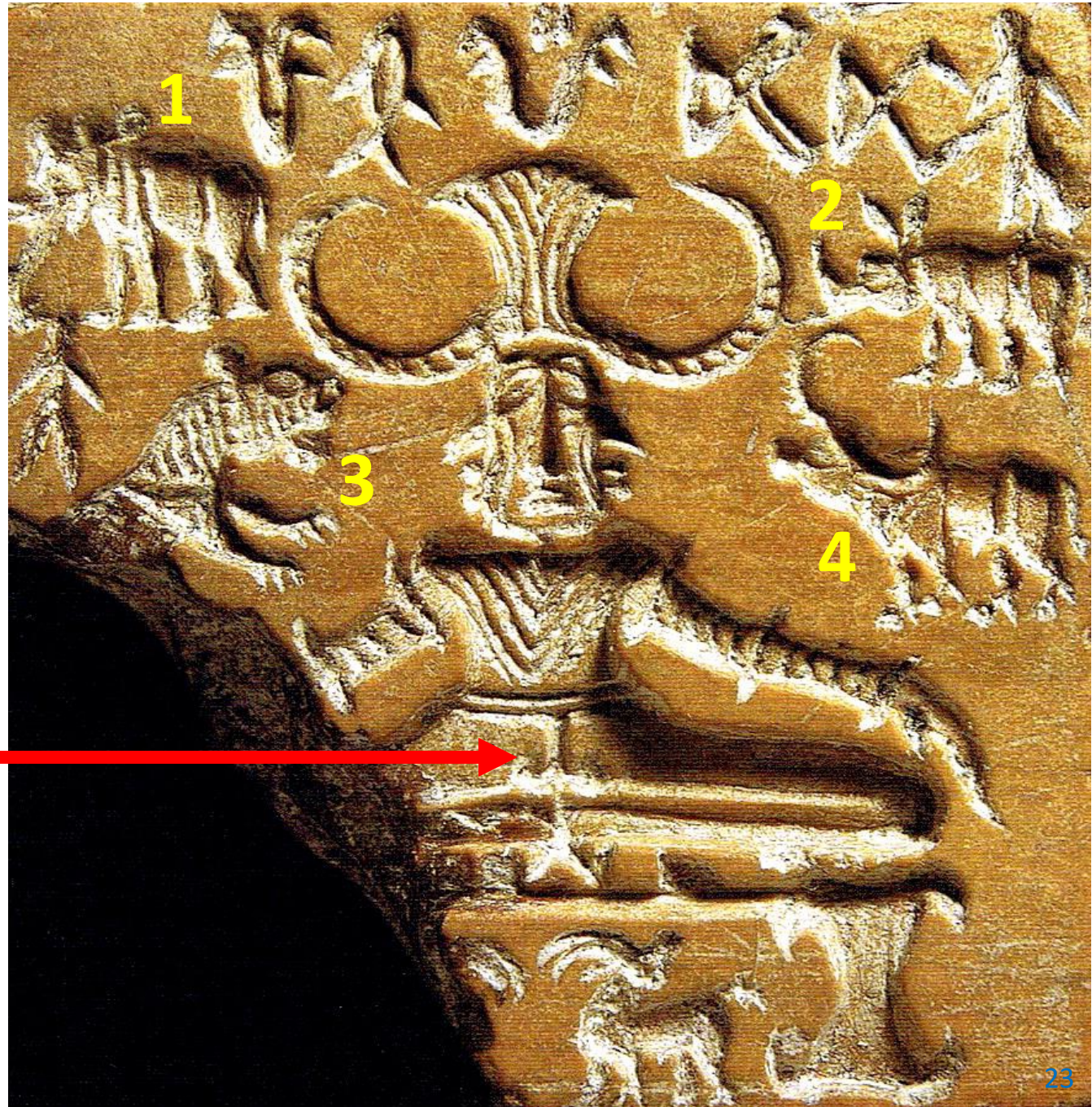
* elephant (1)

* rhinoceros (2)

* tiger (3)

* buffalo (4)

Erect phallus
suggests fertility
(ithyphallic)



B4. Sculpture

B4b. Terracotta figures: Toys or votive objects, ca.2600-1900 BCE

- Spontaneous
- Humorous
- Keen observation
- Skill in modeling
- Possibly votive



B4. Sculpture

B4c. Terracotta figures: “Mother goddesses”

- Crude workmanship
- Pellets of clay for eyes, breasts, ornaments
- Wide hips, ample breasts
- Jewelry, headdress
- Type of feminine beauty continued in Indian art
- Possibly votive object deposited in water

Mohenjo-daro, terracotta “mother goddess,” ca.2600-1900 BCE, ca.7”, National Museum, Karachi



B4. Sculpture

B4d. Bronze statues

- “Dancing girl” or “naked negress,” ca.2600-1900 BCE
- Original inhabitants (Dravidian) were negros—*dasas*
- Weight on right leg, left arm bangled & holds bowl against left leg, right arm confidently akimbo, head tossed back, negroid facial features, braided hair
- Craven: “urban in pose/hauteur”

Mohenjo-daro statue of “dancing girl,” copper / bronze, 5.5” high, National Museum, New Delhi



B4. Sculpture

B4e. Stone statues

- Steatite torso of “priest-king,” ca.2600-1900 BCE
- Beard, upper lip, headband, eyes half-closed once inlaid w/ shell
- Negroid facial features (dasa)
- Trefoil robe (~ Egypt, Mesopotamia) once filled w/ red paste

Mohenjo-daro bust of “priest-king,” carved steatite, 8” high, ca.2600-1900 BCE, National Museum, Karachi



C. Arrival of the Aryans

- The **ārya** arrival: around time Indus Valley cities are abandoned (ca. 1500 BCE)
- Gradual influx of nomadic groups
- Speak Indo-Euro proto-Sanskrit
- Literature: Vedas
 - Rig (ca.1500-1300 BCE): living in Indus valley, stock breeding, horse riding, chariots, better weapons, practice of sacrifice
 - Sāma, Yajur, Atharva (ca.900-600 BCE): living in Ganges valley, war and trade
- Slow amalgamation with dark-skinned *dāsas*... attitudes
- No surviving sophisticated art from arrival till time of Buddha (but arts were practiced)

- Vedic culture evolved into Brahmanism
- New religious views: Upanishads, Buddhism, Jainism...
- Religion of sacrifice, brahmins...
- 6C BCE: mahājanapadas (great states/chieftaincies), e.g., Śākya



D. Early Buddhist Art of the Mauryan Empire

D1. Buddhism

**D2. Alexander the Great and Chandragupta
Maurya**

D3. Ashoka and the Mauryan empire

D. Early Buddhist Art

D1. Buddhism

- Siddhartha Gautama (563-483 BCE or later) born in Śākya kingdom (republic?)
- Attained spiritual enlightenment and taught spiritual truths to his followers
- His ashes to be buried in a memorial mound
- A missionary religion spread by monks and laypersons throughout the great states and beyond

D. Early Buddhist Art

D2. Alexander the Great and Chandragupta Maurya

- In 326 BCE, Alexander crossed the Indus into “India”; defeated army of 50K troops and 200 elephants... but his army turns back
- Greek colonies in Asia ruled by Seleucus (A’s general) after A’s death
- Chandragupta Maurya established a kingdom, capital at Pataliputra (Patna)... moved westward... defeated Seleucids ca. 300 BCE
- Greek ambassador Megasthenes described Pataliputra

D. Early Buddhist Art

D3. Ashoka and the Mauryan empire

Introduction

D3a. Stupas

D3b. Edict pillars

D3c. Pillar capitals

D3d. Stone sculpture

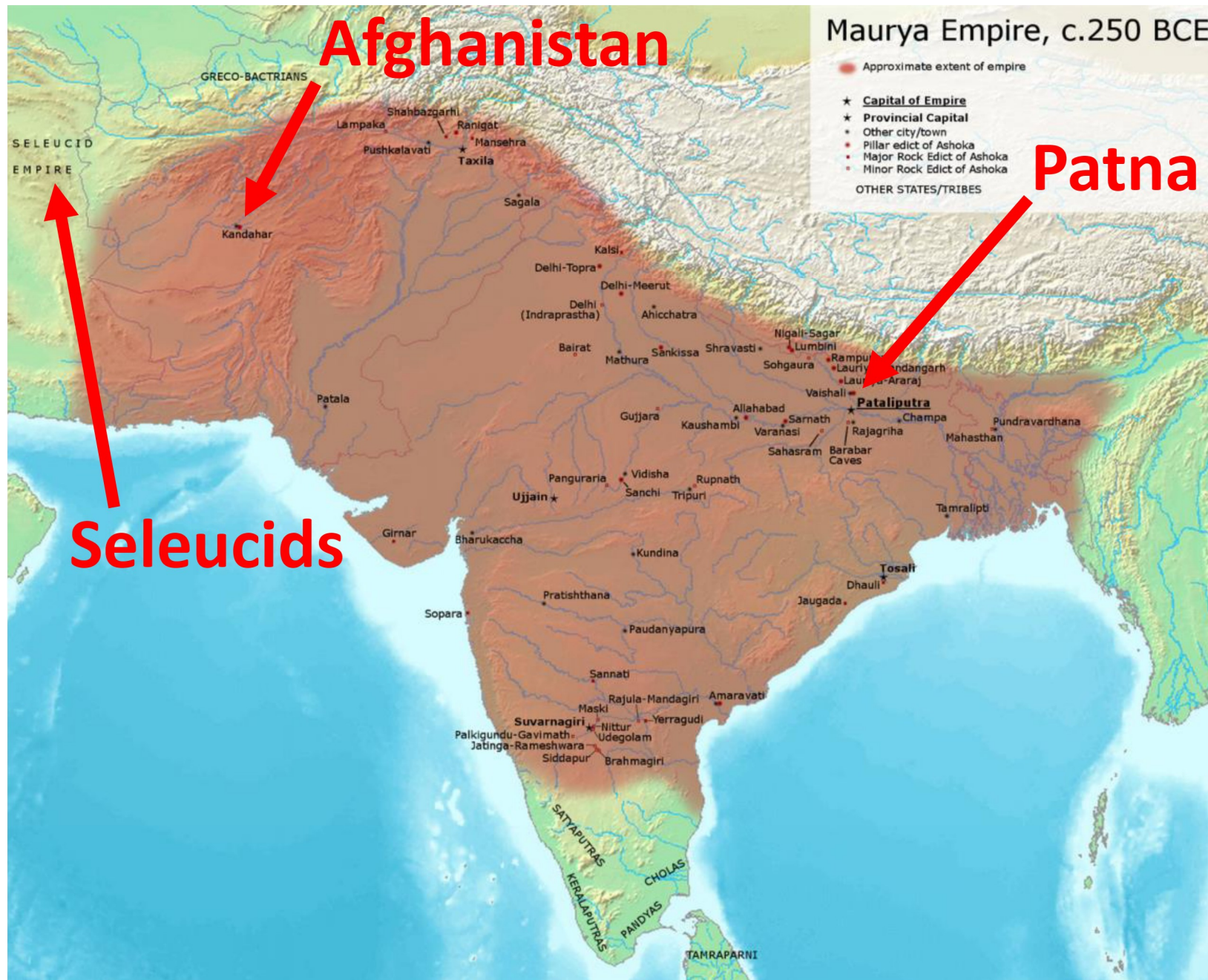
D3e. Rock-cut caves

D3. Ashoka and the Mauryan empire

Introduction

- Chandragupta's conquests lead to empire
- Greatest Mauryan ruler: Ashoka the Great (r. 273-232 BCE)
- After his defeat of Kalinga, converted to Buddhism and non-violence
- Renounces war as political policy
- Supports Buddhist art
- Buddhism as a state religion; others tolerated
- Empire at greatest extent (Afghanistan > Bangladesh > south India)

D3. Ashoka and the Mauryan empire / Introduction



D3. Ashoka and the Mauryan empire

D3a. Stupas

- **Large-scale stone monuments begin to appear**
- **E.g., stupas (to house Buddhist relics) (Week 2)**

D3b. Edict pillars

- **Ashoka promulgates edicts on Buddhism and moral principles carved into rocks, caves, and stone pillars erected across the empire**
- **E.g., pillar at Vaishali (Bihar)**

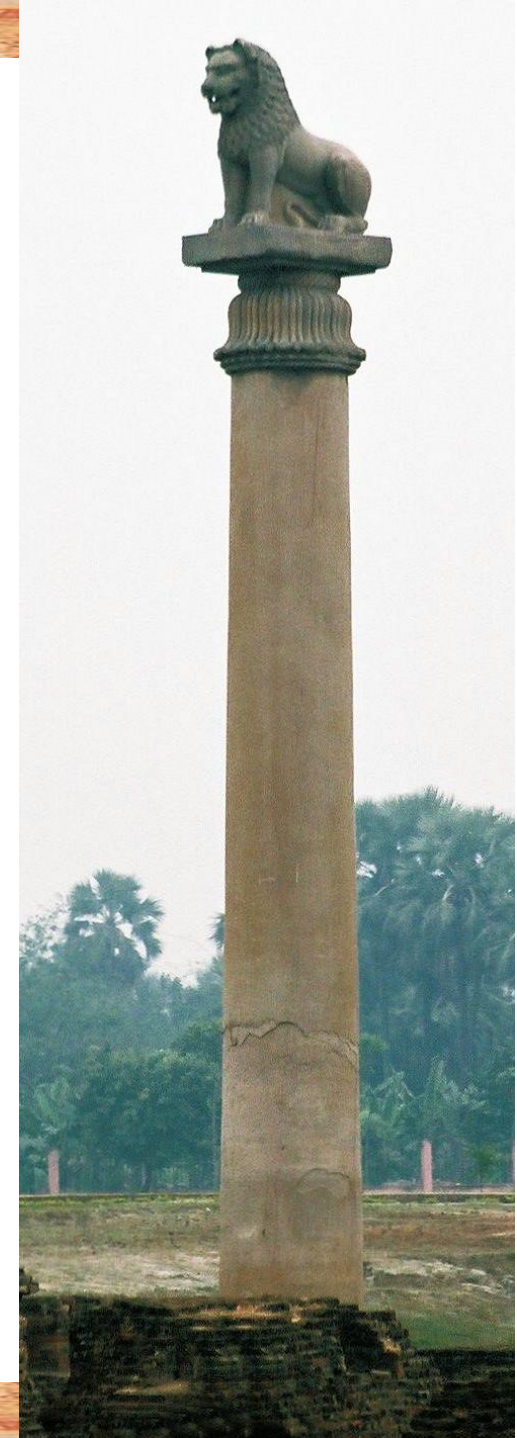
D3b. Edict pillars



Ashokan edict
pillar, Vaishali
(Bihar), ca. 240
BCE

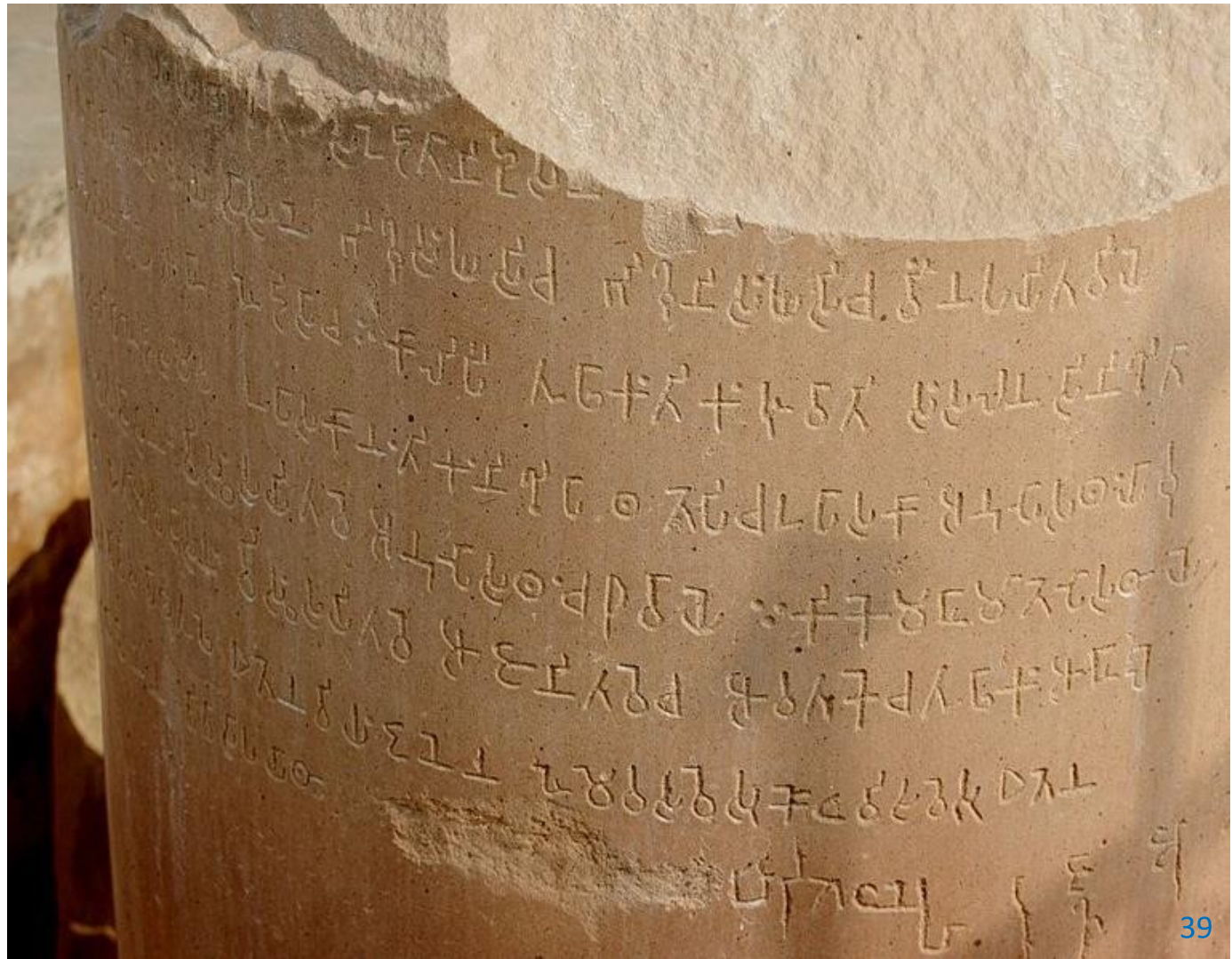
D3b. Edict pillars

- Solid shaft of polished limestone frequently topped by a capital and seated lion
- Made in royal workshop in Pataliputra
- Engineering skill to raise a 50-ton column 30 ft high
- **Craven:** culmination of pre-Buddhist tradition of wood pillars
- **Dehejia:** Persian influence: similarities:
 - Stone instead of wood
 - Similar intros to inscriptions: Thus spake Darius... Thus spake [Ashoka]...
 - Lions ~ Persian lions
- **Dehejia:** differences:
 - Other animals, e.g., bulls



D3b. Edict pillars

- The edicts written in Greek and Aramaic in the west and in Prakrit (using brahmi script) in the rest of the empire



Ashokan edict pillar,
Sarnath (Uttar
Pradesh), (brahmi
script) ca. 240 BCE

D3b. Edict pillars

Examples of the texts:

- Thus the glory of Dhamma will... be endorsed in the form of mercy, charity, truthfulness, purity, gentleness, and virtue.
- It is hard to obtain happiness in this world and the next without... much vigilance, obedience, fear of sin, and extreme energy.
- Whosoever praises his own sect or blames other sects... with the view of glorifying his own sect... injures his own sect very severely. But concord is meritorious....

D3. Ashoka and the Mauryan empire

D3c. Pillar capitals

Ex. 1. Lion capital from Sarnath pillar

- Capitals topped edict pillars
- 7 ft. tall polished sandstone
- Composed of 3 (4) elements:
 - (4) (Originally topped by a stone wheel)
 - (3) Quartet of lions standing on abacus
 - (2) Circular abacus with four animals and wheels
 - (1) Fluted bell



Lion capital from Ashokan edict pillar at Sarnath (Uttar Pradesh), 7 ft., 3rd C BCE, Archeological Museum, Sarnath

Ex. 1. Lion capital from Sarnath pillar

- **Symbolism:**

(4) Upper wheel (missing)

= wheel of the law

= ref to **chakravartin** (holder of the wheel), i.e., universal ruler, i.e., Ashoka

(3) Four lions = Buddha, lion among teachers who preaches to the four quarters of the world

(2) Animals on abacus (elephant, horse, bull, lion) = extent of Buddha's sermon & quarters of the world



Lion capital from Ashokan edict pillar at Sarnath (Uttar Pradesh), 7 ft., 3rd C BCE, Archeological Museum, Sarnath

- **Symbolism, continued:**
2 & 3. Emblem of the state of India
(modern symbolism)

- **Craven: Persian influence**

- Bell itself
- Fluted petals on bell
- Realism of animals on abacus
- Stylized claws of lions



- **SO: imported styles**
- **Cf. Dehejia: mostly indigenous**
- **SO: different scholarly views**



D3. Ashoka and the Mauryan empire

D3c. Pillar capitals

Ex. 2. Capital from Pataliputra

- **Abacus:**
row of rosettes
- **Sides:**
cylindrical volutes
- **Capital face: palmette**
- **Whole ~ ionic capitals**
- **SO: Hellenic and Iranian motifs**

Capital of Ashokan pillar at Pataliputra, sandstone, 3C BCE, Patna Museum



D3. Ashoka and the Mauryan empire

D3d. Stone sculpture

- Sandstone sculpture of a **yakshi** (female earth spirit) with yak tail fan
- Fertility figure
- 5 ft. tall, sense of monumentality
- Voluptuous realistic carving, smooth flesh contrasted with detailed jewels and fabrics
- Fan suggests the figure was located at a shrine or accompanied a buddha statue
- Way to placate ordinary believers in the face of the state-endorsed Buddhist religion
- Allows a reference to popular religion (which Ashoka curtailed) (cf. other major religions)

Yakshi/fan-bearer, sandstone, 5 ft.,
ca. 200 BCE, Patna Museum



D3d. Stone sculpture

- Male yakshas were depicted as well as female yakshis.
- Once held fly whisk and yak tail (and had a head!)
- Monumental

Yaksha, red sandstone, 5 ft. 5 in., ca. 200 BCE,
from Patna, National Museum, New Delhi

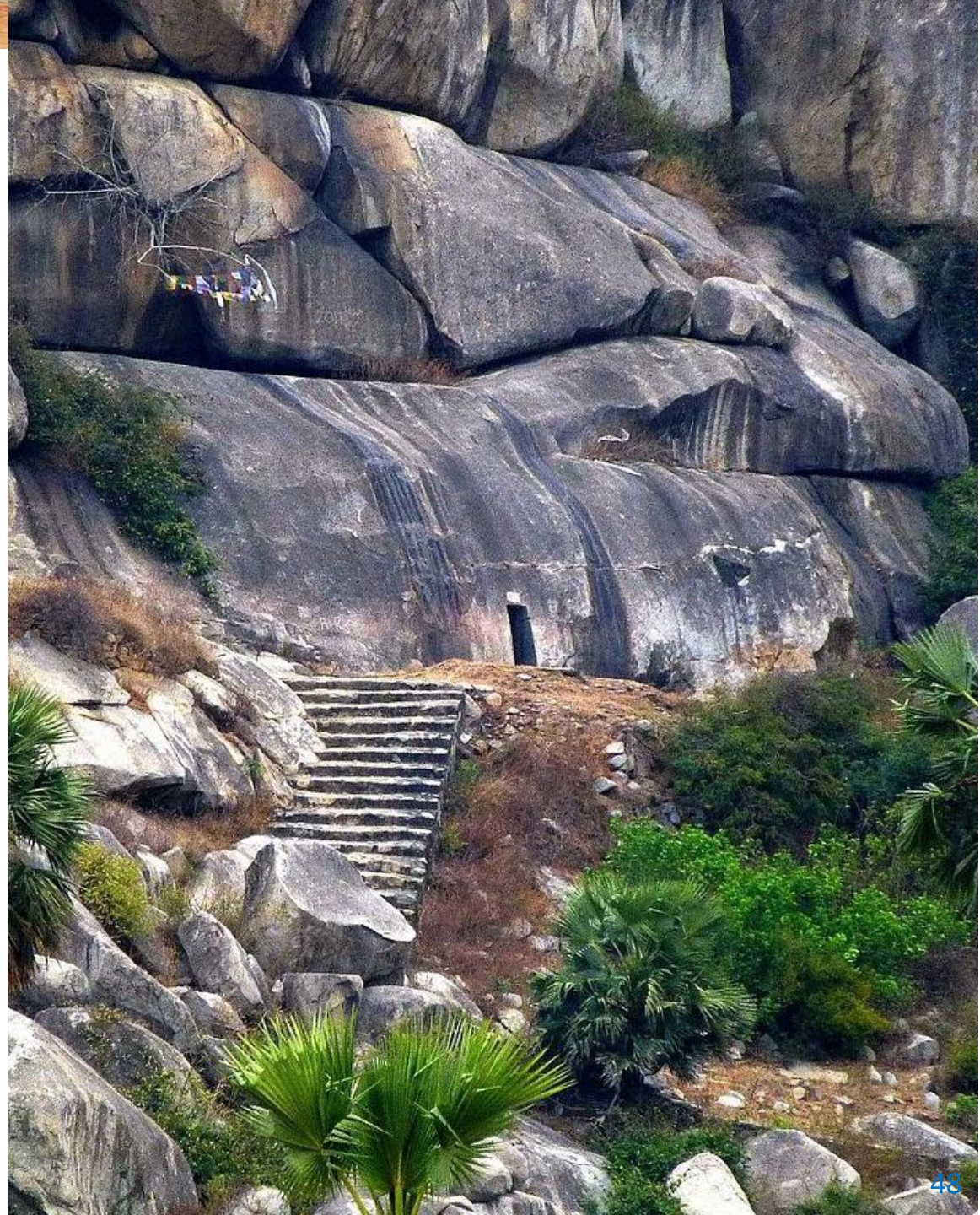
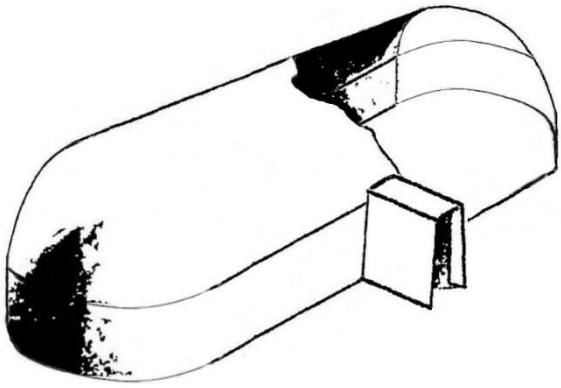


D3. Ashoka and the Mauryan empire

D3e. Rock-cut caves

- Earliest surviving Indian architecture
- A practice seen in Persia for tombs
(**SO: Persian influence?**)
- Ashoka sponsored caves for meditating ascetics
- Form based on earlier wooden structures
- Simple spaces with sometimes more elaborate entranceways

D3e. Rock-cut caves
Ex. of cave and
rock face
& Volume drawing

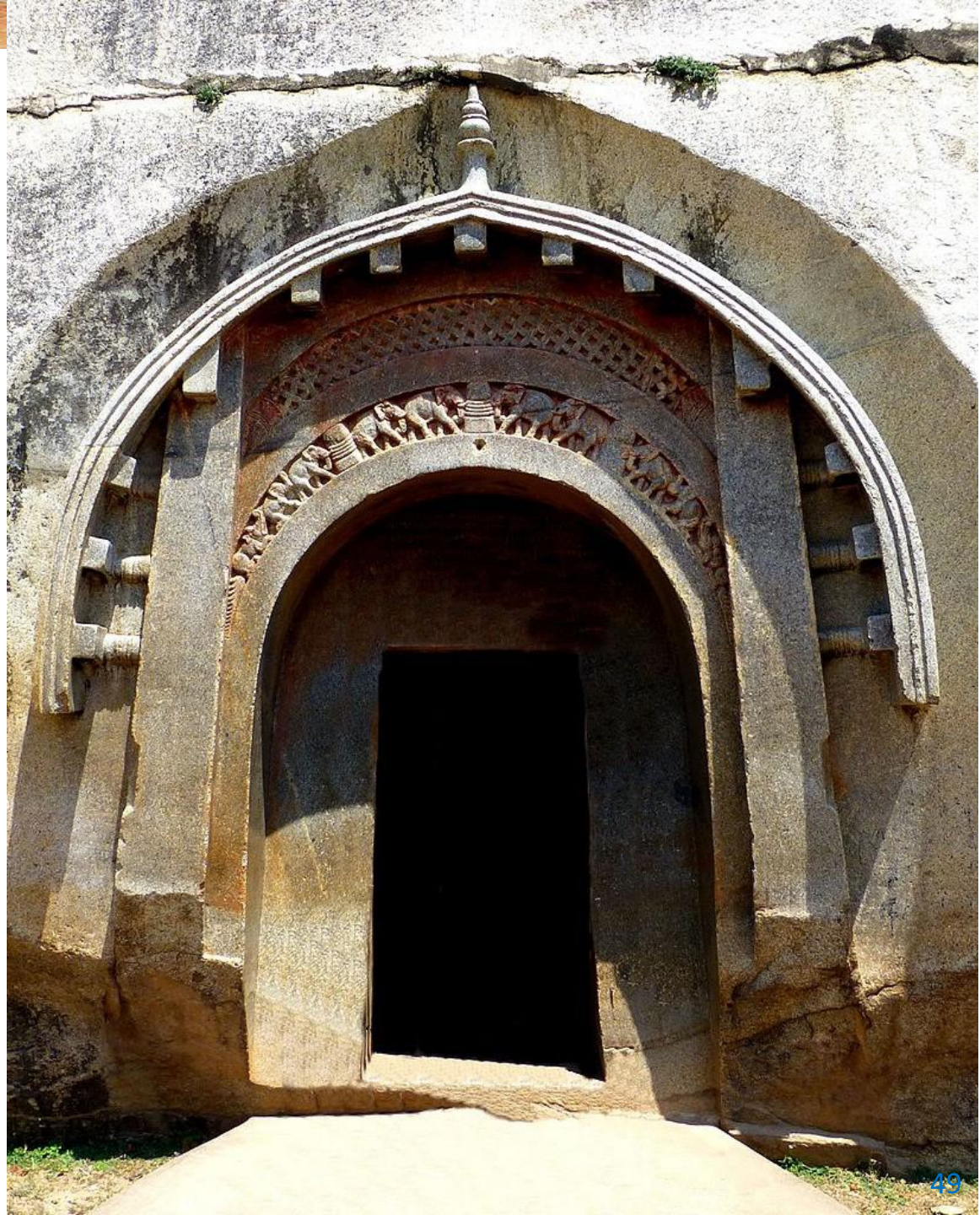


Gopika Cave, Nagarjuni hill (Bihar),
ca. 230 BCE

Ex. of cave entrance: Lomas Rishi cave

- 7.5 ft high door
- Imitation in stone of a wood and thatched hut
- Doorjambs w/ inward slope that's meaningless in stone
- Wood screws w/ threads in stone

Lomas Rishi Cave, Barābar hill
(Bihar), ca. 250 BCE



Lomas Rishi cave

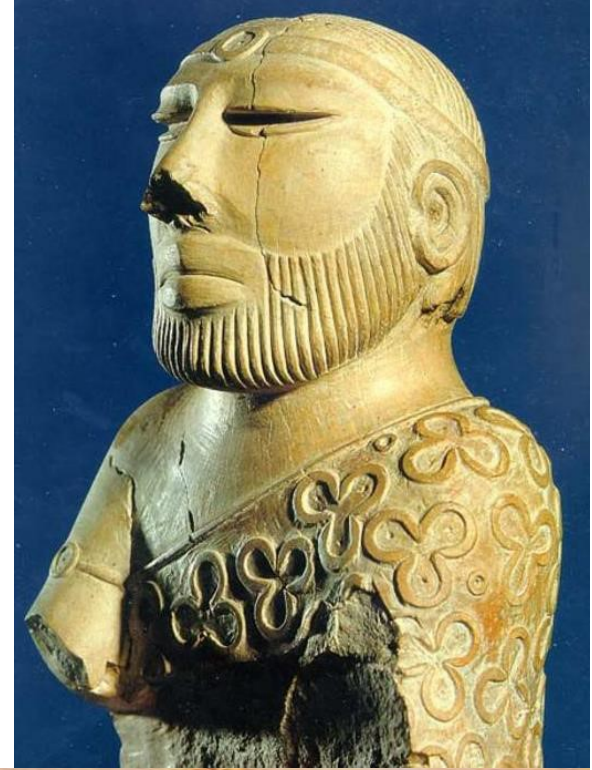
- triple band arch (with finial) mimics bent bamboo
- barrel roof on posts and beams
- imitation bamboo lattice screen
- frieze of elephants



History of the Art of India, Part I: Origins to Mughals

OLLI Spring 2024

Week 1



Origins in the Indus Valley
Civilization, and Early
Buddhist Art through the
Mauryan Empire