

Sabba Danam Dhammadanam Jinati
The Gift of Dhamma excels all gifts!

Shrines and Relics in Buddhism

By Chan Khoon San

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Cover Photo (Full story on pp 86-89)

Cover photo shows the 27m tall Shingadar Stupa in Swat Valley, Pakistan. According to Chinese pilgrim Xuan Zang, he saw the Buddha's Nirvana Stupa when he visited Udyana. He heard the local legend that it was erected by King Uttarasena, himself a Sakya who went to Kusinara to claim a share of the Buddha's relics after the Parinibbana. Uttarasena had the relics brought back by elephant. When the elephant reached this spot, it collapsed and died. So the king erected the stupa to enshrine the relics here. This famous stupa is located near Ghaligai village in Swat Valley, Pakistan.

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Preface

The objective of this book is to acquaint the Buddhist laity on the origin and significance of the various types of Buddhist shrines in existence. In this way they will be able to appreciate the historical basis and role of shrines in Buddhism. This is because the shrine plays an integral role in their spiritual life. Most Buddhist households would have a shrine-room for the devotee to seek solace whenever the need arises. For the majority of lay followers, a shrine is a place or an object to remind them of the Buddha and by which they remember to observe their religious obligations through the taking of the Three Refuges and Five Precepts on a regular basis. In Buddhism, unlike other religions, the shrine is not the place to ask for favors or appease the Buddha but to renew our pledge to follow his instructions to train ourselves – “not to do any evil, to cultivate good, and to purify one’s mind.” It is a sanctuary, far from the maddening crowd, where the ordinary lay follower can still connect in a symbolic sense, with the Omniscient Buddha in order to gain the inspiration to practise the Dhamma.

After the Buddha's Parinibbana, his corporeal relics were divided into eight equal portions among the eight nations who came to Kusinara to claim a share of his relics. These men returned home and erected stupas to enshrine the relics in accordance with the Buddha's instructions. After the Muslims conquered India during the 13th century AD, Buddhism disappeared from its land of origin. The Muslims either destroyed or vandalized the Buddha images but left the stupas alone knowing that they were burial ground. The Hindus occupied the temples abandoned by the monks or built Hindu shrines on top of the stupas. All the Buddhist monuments were neglected and fell into ruins. With the arrival of the British Raj, came dedicated archaeologists like Sir Alexander Cunningham and many others, who were deeply disturbed by the way the Buddhist monuments were suffering from the ravages of nature and the plunder of man. So they undertook the noble task of restoring the ancient monuments back to their past glory. In fact, the British era in India was the time when most of the buried Buddhist stupas were restored and excavated to reveal Buddha relics, which the British returned to the Buddhist community in India, Sri Lanka and Burma later.

The practice of excavating stupas is not viewed favourably in Buddhist countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, etc., where the Buddha's injunction to keep his remains buried in the stupa is respected. Digging up ancient stupas to search for valuables and relics amounts to desecrating the holy person's tomb unless one's intention is to restore or repair the stupa, or to re-enshrine the relics in some stupa elsewhere for valid reasons. So whenever Buddha relics (whether genuine or not) are discovered and donated to the Sangha, they are enshrined in a stupa in accordance with the Buddha's wishes, so that the devotee may pay homage to the Lord at the sight of the stupa.

Recently there was furore over a video shown on television about the excavation of a stupa in 1898 at Piprahwa in India. Based on the discovery of a stone coffer containing some soapstone caskets, jewellery and bones, claims were made that the area around the stupa was the site of the Sakya capital Kapilavastu and that the bones discovered were the bones of the Buddha. Today there is irrefutable evidence that challenges the validity of these claims. For the benefit of readers, a full expose of the Piprahwa controversy is written in

Chapter 8 for them to evaluate the evidence and draw their conclusions without fear or favour.

There is a valuable lesson to be learnt from this expose; and that is, as rational Buddhists we should not be too attached to Buddha relics to the point that we become gullible and easily taken in by claims of new discovery of more Buddha relics, which may actually turn out to be fakes. The Buddha taught in the Kesaputta Sutta that one should not simply accept anything without proper investigation. The corporeal relics of the Buddha are just the ashes of his cremated body. They should be treated with reverence because they serve to remind us of our Master. However, the adoration of purported Buddha relics will not assist in understanding of the Dhamma. On the contrary, it may lead to more attachment that will hinder the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Buddha discouraged any excessive blind veneration paid to his physical form. To the monk Vakkali who was full of devotion and love for him, the Buddha admonished him thus:

“What good will it be to see this foul body? He who sees the Dhamma (Teaching) sees me. Seeing the Dhamma is seeing me, seeing me is seeing the Dhamma.”

However, for the lay follower whose mind is generally inclined to faith and devotion, and who desires to venerate the Buddha’s corporeal relics, it is worthwhile paying a visit to the Holy City of Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka, where he/she can venerate the Bodhi Tree as well as many stupas containing Buddha relics donated by King Asoka in the 3rd century BC. Unlike India, the majority of people in Sri Lanka are Buddhists. They hold the stupas in great esteem, going barefoot within the stupa grounds, venerating the Buddha with offerings of flowers and reverential salutations, whereby their hearts become calm and happy, and setting a fine example for visitors to follow.

I thank Sis Wooi Kheng Choo for checking the texts and providing useful suggestions.

Bro. Chan Khoon San,
Klang, 1 August 2013

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1. Types of Shrines

Beginning from the 21st *vassa* until the 44th *vassa*, the Buddha decided to spend each *vassa* or rainy season regularly at Savatthi. Thus the Jetavana monastery became a popular place for devotees and monks to come to pay their respects and/or listen to his sermons. According to Commentary to the Kalinga Bodhi Jataka [1], even when the Buddha was away propagating the Dhamma, devotees would still bring garlands and fragrant wreaths and place them before his Fragrant Chamber (*gandhakuti*) [Photo 1] as a mark of veneration and depart happily.

When Anathapindika heard about it, he requested Ven. Ananda to inform the Buddha about this matter, and ask whether it was possible to find a place for this purpose. The Commentary records that when Ven. Ananda asked the Buddha what would constitute a “basis worthy of veneration (*pujanīyatthana*)” during his absence, the Buddha spoke of three kinds of shrines (*cetiya*), as follows:

1. Shrine for a relic of the body (*saririka cetiya*)
2. Shrine for a relic of use or wear (*paribhogika cetiya*)
3. Shrine for a relic of memorial (*uddesika cetiya*)

The Commentary to the Treasure-store Discourse or Nidhikhanda Sutta [2] of the Khuddakapatha (KhpA 222) mentions the same three kinds of shrines as follows:

1. Shrine by use (*paribhogika cetiya*) namely, the Bodhi tree;
2. Relic shrine (*dhatu cetiya*), i.e., stupa with a relic chamber. (*dhatu gabbha thupa*).
3. Shrine of memorial or dedication (*uddesika cetiya*), namely, the Buddha image (*patima*).

The Vinaya Sub-commentary (Saratthadipani) also lists three kinds of shrines but replaces the Memorial shrine by the Dhamma shrine, namely:

1. Relic shrine (*dhatu cetiya*)
2. Shrine by use (*paribhogika cetiya*)
3. Dhamma shrine (*dhammacetiya*).

By Dhamma shrine (*dhammacetiya*) is meant a shrine containing writings of Buddhist doctrines such as “*Ye dhamma hetuppabhava*” or the Law of Causation, etc. The Dhamma shrine therefore constitutes a fourth type of shrine. It was added later to remind monks that the true memory of the Buddha can best be found in his Teachings.

The idea of the Dhamma shrine might have come from the Dhammacetiya Sutta or the Discourse on Monuments to the Dhamma (M 89). However the Majjhima Commentary (MA) explains that the term ‘*dhammacetiya*’ in the sutta does not mean a physical shrine but “words expressing reverence for the Dhamma” where in showing respect to any of Three Jewels, one does so to all three. Therefore the term ‘*dhammacetiya*’ used in the Dhammacetiya Sutta of Majjhima Nikaya should not be confused with the Dhamma shrine of the Vinaya Sub-Commentary.

It is pertinent to point out that of the four types of shrines described in the Commentaries, only one, i.e., the Relic stupa shrine can be found in the Discourses or Sutta Pitaka, namely, the Mahaparinibbana Sutta of the Digha Nikaya.

2. The Ananda Bodhi Tree

The Commentary to the Kalinga Bodhi Jataka records that in choosing a suitable shrine, the Buddha said that a relic shrine was not possible while he was still alive. A memorial shrine was improper because the connection depended on the imagination only. But the Bodhi tree used by the Buddhas was fit for a shrine, be they alive or dead. So the Buddha suggested the Bodhi tree as the best object to venerate in his absence.

After getting permission from the Buddha to plant a Bodhi tree in Jetavana, Ven. Ananda then asked Ven. Maha Moggallana to assist by making use of his psychic ability to obtain a sapling of the Bodhi tree under which their Master attained Supreme Enlightenment in Buddhagaya. When it arrived, the young shoot was ceremoniously planted at the gate of Jetavana by the rich man Anathapindika.

The Jataka Commentary says that the sapling sprang to a height of fifty cubits (75 feet) the instant it was planted in the ground. At the

request of Ven. Ananda, the Buddha spent one night meditating under it adding sanctity to the Bodhi tree shrine. As this tree was planted at the initiative of Venerable Ananda, it became known by the name of Ananda Bodhi Tree [**Photo 2**].

The present Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya is not the original Bodhi tree. It was first cut down by King Asoka before his conversion. Later, out of remorse, he revived the tree by bathing the roots with scented water and milk. Asoka revered the tree so earnestly that his queen, Tissarakkha, was filled with jealousy and had it destroyed secretly. Again Asoka had it revived. During 6th century AD, Sasanka, a Hindu king cut down the Bodhi tree. Later it was replanted with a sapling from the Bodhi tree in Sri Lanka by King Purvavarma of Magadha around 600-620 AD.

In 1876, the old decaying Bodhi tree fell down during a storm. General Cunningham, who was renovating the Mahabodhi Temple at that time, replanted a sapling from the old tree on the same spot. It has survived to this day and is the object of veneration of pilgrims who come from all over the world to worship the Buddha and earn merit.

In 3rd century BC, at the request of the Sinhalese king Devanampiya Tissa, a southern branch of the Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya was taken by the Bhikkuni Ven. Sanghamitta to Sri Lanka where it was planted at Anuradhapura as a shrine by which the people may worship the Buddha. The veneration that the Sinhalese Buddhists gave to the Bodhi tree evolved into the Bodhi Puja still performed today. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, the Bodhi tree at Anuradhapura is the oldest historical tree on record.

The Bodhi tree is a type of fig or peepal tree with the botanical name *Ficus religiosa*. The original Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya is said to have sprouted at the same time the Bodhisatta was born. Not every *Ficus religiosa* can be called a 'Bodhi tree'. To qualify for the title, a 'Bodhi tree' must be able to trace its ancestry to the first Bodhi tree under which the Buddha attained Enlightenment.

Even today the Bodhi tree remains one of the most popular shrines within the grounds of Buddhist monasteries wherever the climate is suitable for its planting.

3. The Stupa Shrine

The word stupa (Pali ‘thupa’; Anglo-India ‘tope’) derived from the root ‘stup’ (to heap) is a mound or tumulus. Originally they were associated with funerals, being mounds containing the ashes and charred remains of the dead collected from the funeral pyre. The practice of erecting stupas over corporeal relics was pre-Buddhistic.

The Buddha realized the significance of devotion among the laity by sanctioning the worship of his corporeal relics. In the Mahaparinibbana Sutta [3], in answer to Ven. Ananda’s question about what should be done with the Tathagata’s body after His Parinibbana, the Buddha said that it should be cremated like the body of a Universal monarch and the corporeal remains from the cremation should be honoured by stupas erected over them at the crossroads.

For the monks, he realized that too much time spent on such devotional rites could hinder their practice of the Noble Eightfold Path. So he advised them “not to hinder themselves by

honoring his body but leave it to the laymen who are devoted to the Tathagata and will render due honor to his body.”

The Buddha further mentioned that there are four persons worthy of a stupa, namely: a Supremely Enlightened Buddha, a *Pacceka* Buddha, an *Ariyan* disciple and a Universal monarch. Why is a Samma-sambuddha worthy of a stupa? Because at the thought: “This is the stupa of the Bhagava, Arahant, Samma-sambuddha!” the hearts of many people will be calmed and made happy; so calmed and with their minds established in faith, they at the breaking up of the body, after death will be reborn in a realm of heavenly happiness. And so also at the thought: “This is the stupa of that *Pacceka* Buddha!” or “This is the stupa of an *Ariyan* disciple of the Buddha!” or “This is the stupa of that Universal monarch who ruled righteously according to Dhamma!”

This is how the Buddha sanctified the stupa from an ordinary grave-mound to its present position as a supreme object of veneration and sanctity to Buddhists. Stupa worship took a new dimension after Emperor Asoka converted to Buddhism and

built 84,000 stupas all over his empire. In the course of time, stupas evolved from simple mounds of earth into ostentatious structures of architectural beauty and magnificence and became the chief emblem of the Buddhist faith.

As the corporeal relics enshrined within a stupa stood as a symbol of the presence of the Buddha, prayers were normally offered and rites of worship performed, such as offering of lights, flowers, garlands, incense, buntings and cloth wrapped round the mound. An ancient custom in India is to pass round a person of reverence or a holy object, keeping him or the object on the right side. This is called '*padakkhina*' (Sanskrit: '*pradaksina*'). In the Scriptures, a visitor always behaves thus when about to take leave of the Buddha. This custom became a ceremonial rite in stupa-worship and a path for circumambulation was usually provided in a stupa.

For the skilful pilgrim, circumambulation around the stupa may be turned into walking meditation to develop mindfulness or the practice of metta. Those who are more inclined towards devotional practices should practice the Recollections of the

Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha at the stupas to develop faith and attain purity of mind.

3.1 The Four Types of Stupas

Buddhist stupas may be divided into four types:

(a) *Saririka* or Relic Stupa

These stupas contain the corporeal relics of the Buddha, the Chief Disciples, Buddhist teachers and saints. Stupas containing the relics of the Buddha, which are considered the most sacred objects of worship, are usually very large and grand, as they have been enlarged and renovated several times by successive Buddhist kings of India. According to legend, Emperor Asoka broke into seven of the original eight relic stupas, except Ramagama stupa [**Photo 3**], took a major portion of the Buddha's relics and distributed them in 84,000 stupas all over his empire. As a result, even today, we can still see some of these stupas outside India, e.g., Dhammarajika Stupa [**Photo 4**] in Taxila near Islamabad, Pakistan.

(b) *Paribhogika* or ‘Object of Use’ Stupa

These stupas were built over the objects used by the Buddha. Buddhavamsa XXVIII [4] records that after his Parinibbana, stupas were built to enshrine various objects used by the Buddha, e.g., the water-pot and girdle in Pataliputta, the razor and needle-case in Indapattha (Delhi) and so on.

(c) *Uddesika* or Memorial Stupa

These stupas commemorate important events in the Buddha’s life, including those of his previous births or spots hallowed by his presence. A famous memorial stupa is the Sujata Stupa at Bakruar village built by Asoka to commemorate the offering of milk rice by the Lady Sujata to the Bodhisatta before he attained Enlightenment. Another memorial stupa is the Dhamekh stupa [Photo 5] in Sarnath erected over the site where the Buddha preached the Anatta Lakkhana Sutta to the Five Ascetics, who all became Arahants. It contains no relics but clay tablets containing the Buddhist creed “*Ye dhamma hetuppadabhava*”.

(d) Votive Stupa [Photo 6]

These are usually small stupas erected at the sacred sites by devotees mainly as an offering for making merit. The most number of votive stupas can be seen at the four places of Pilgrimage, viz: (i) Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha; (ii) Bodhgaya, the place of Enlightenment; (iii) Deer Park in Sarnath, venue of the First Sermon; (iv) Kusinara, the place of the Buddha's Parinibbana. Besides these four holy sites, many votive stupas can also be seen at the four places of miracles, namely: Sankasia, Sravasti, Vaishali and Rajgir.

According to Mitra [5] votive stupas are either monolithic or structures built of bricks. Some contain Buddha images within the core. Others contain manuscripts of Buddhist texts, tablets or plates inscribed with verses from the *Paticca Samuppada* or the Buddhist creed “*ye dhamma hetuppadabhava*”. These texts are considered to be of paramount importance to Buddhists as they record the essence of the Buddha's Teachings. In fact, such votive stupas may be considered as Dhamma shrines mentioned earlier on page 11.

3.2 The Distribution of the Relics

According to Mahaparinibbana Sutta when the Buddha's Parinibbana became known, leaders of eight nations came to Kusinara to claim their share of relics after his body was cremated, namely: (1) King Ajatasattu of Magadha, (2) Licchavis of Vesali, (3) Sakyas of Kapilavatthu, (4) Koliyas of Ramagama, (5) Buliyas of Allakappa, (6) Brahmin of Vetthadipa, (7) Mallas of Pava and (8) Mallas of Kusinara.

To satisfy the claimants, the Brahmin Dona divided the relics into eight equal measures using a measuring jar. Each tribe received one measure of the Buddha's relics while the Brahmin Dona took the jar. When the Moriyas of Pippalivana arrived, there were no more relics, so they took the ashes from the pyre. These men returned home and built ten stupas: eight for the relics, a ninth for the jar and a tenth for the pyre ashes. The eight original relic stupas erected over the eight portions of the Buddha's bodily relics are also called Dona stupas because they enshrined one dona (or one measure of capacity) of relics.

3.3 The Adoration of Relics

In the Milindapanha Book IV, 25th Dilemma on the ‘Adoration of Relics’ [6], King Milinda asked: “The Tathagata has said: ‘Do not hinder yourselves, Ananda, by honoring the remains of the Tathagata!’ And, on the other hand, he said: Honour that relic of him who is worthy of honour! Acting in that way, you go from this world to heaven.”

Now if the first injunction was right, the second must be wrong, and if the second be right the first must be wrong. This is another dilemma, which I now put to you, and which you must solve.”

Nagasena replied: “Both the passages you quote were spoken by the Blessed One. But it was not to all men, it was to members of the Sangha that it was said: ‘Do not hinder yourselves, Ananda, by honoring the remains of the Tathagata!’ Paying reverence is not the work of the sons of the Conqueror (*jinaputtanam*) but thorough understanding of the true nature of all compounded things, wise attention, the practice

of Satipatthana meditation, the seizing-of the real essence of all objects of thought, the battle with the passions and the pursuit of the highest good; that is what the sons of the Conqueror have to do.

Worship, however, is the task of the other gods and men. So, your majesty, it is the business of the princes to know all about elephants, horses, chariots, bows, swords, edicts, and seals, to be well versed in the textbooks of statecraft, in its tradition and customs, and to lead people into battle, whereas agriculture, trade, and the care of cattle are the tasks of other people, of ordinary traders, cultivators, and servants.”

The Tathagata therefore urged the monks to devote themselves to their own work, and not to that of others, when he said, ‘Do not occupy yourselves, Ananda, with honoring the bodily remains of the Tathagata!’ If the Tathagata had not said this, the monks might have taken the Buddha’s bowl and robe, and made it their business to worship the Buddha through them.”

3.4 Stupa Worship and the Sangha

In Mahaparinibbana Sutta when Ven. Ananda asked how he should act with respect to the body of the Tathagata, the Buddha replied: “Do not hinder yourselves, Ananda, to honour the body (*sarira-puja*) of the Tathagatha. Rather should you strive and be zealous for your own behalf, for your own good.”

In the above passage, the Pali term ‘*sarira-puja*’ has been translated as ‘honouring the remains’ by Sister Vajira [3], Rhys Davids [7] and U Ko Lay [8]. Walshe [9] however narrows down its meaning to ‘funeral arrangements’. According to Strong [10], because of this different translation, some scholars have interpreted it to mean that ‘*sarira-puja*’ has nothing to do with the post-mortem cult of relic worship as much as it does on the preparation of the body for cremation and commemoration.

However if one reads the Mahaparinibbana Sutta from this point right up to the distribution of the Buddha’s relics and the erection of the eight relic stupas, we will get the idea of what ‘*sarira-puja*’

really means because the Buddha himself told Ven. Ananda what the laity should do after the cremation too. So we can see that ‘*sarira-puja*’ involves more than just the funeral arrangements. It encompasses stupa worship as well. In fact, the incomplete translation by Maurice Walshe has led to some misunderstanding among scholars.

Schopen [11] has even argued that the injunction against the adoration of relics in Milindapanha applies only to the sons of the Conqueror (*jinaputtanam*) and claimed that the term ‘*jinaputta*’ does not mean an ordinary monk but a different class of monks. He failed to understand that the term ‘*jinaputta*’ is an epithet used by Ven. Nagasena for the bhikkhu, while the term ‘*Sakyaputtiya*’ or follower of the sons of the Sakyas is also an epithet of the Buddhist bhikkhu (See D. iii. 84 Pali Text Society)

If the reader is still unconvinced that the Buddha discouraged bhikkhus from taking part in relic worship, this advice of the Buddha may help to clarify the matter: “*Why is a Samma-sambuddha worthy of a stupa? Because at the thought: ‘This is the stupa of the Bhagava, Arahant, Samma-*

sambuddha!’ the hearts of many people (bahujjana) will be calmed and made happy; so calmed and with their minds established in faith, they at the breaking up of the body will be reborn in a realm of heavenly happiness.”

According to the Pali English Dictionary, the word ‘**bahujjana**’ means ‘a mass of people, a great multitude, a crowd, a great many people. At some passages interpreted by Buddhaghosa as ‘unconverted, the masses’. Obviously members of the Sangha do not fall under this category.

We are now pretty sure that the Buddha did not encourage relic worship among the bhikkhus. However, as he did not institute any Vinaya Rule forbidding bhikkhus from worshipping stupas, it is left to their own discretion whether or not to participate in stupa worship. At the various holy places in India, it is common to see bhikkhus leading their followers in the act of paying homage at the stupas probably out of compassion, which is something praiseworthy. So we should not judge others, especially when we do not know their true intentions.

3.5 Devotion in Buddhism

The Buddha discouraged any excessive blind veneration paid to his physical form because he knew that too much devotion would hinder the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path. Khanda Samyutta, Vakkali Sutta [12] tells the story of the monk Vakkali who was full of devotion and love for the Buddha. Even when he was gravely ill, all he wanted was to see the Buddha, as he was ever so desirous to behold the Master bodily.

The Buddha admonished him thus: “What good will it be to see this foul body? He who sees the Dhamma (Teaching) sees me. Seeing the Dhamma is seeing me, seeing me is seeing the Dhamma.”

However, we should realize that the Buddha’s injunction against overly devotion to his physical form mentioned in Vakkali Sutta was directed mainly at the Sangha. For the laity, the sight of the Buddha can arouse confidence through belief (*pasada-saddha*) by revering the physical appearance and believing.

In the Dhammapada there is a story of the youth Matthakundali [13] who was gravely ill. Knowing his condition, the Buddha paid him a visit out of compassion. Seeing the Buddha, he was pleased, developed faith and dying with a pure heart, was reborn in Heaven. This story sharply contrasts that of Vakkali.

In the case of Vakkali, he had acted out of a deep desire to behold and adore the Master, which the ancient Indians defined as ‘bhakti’, a type of devotion to a deity constituting a way to salvation in Hinduism. Devotion is a natural expression of faith and is common in all religions.

However, in theistic religions or cult practices devotion is always demanded and accompanied by practices like prayers, rituals, vows and an unquestioned obedience to a Creator God, his earthly incarnation or even the cult leader. There is always fear of being punished if the command of God or cult leader is either questioned or not obeyed. And wherever there is fear, there will be blind faith, dogmatism, superstition, ritualism, intolerance and other unwholesome practices because fear restricts the mind like a prison.

The devotion practiced in Buddhism is different from the cult of bhakti, in that it is accompanied by wisdom, not blind faith. The positive aspects of devotion are wholesome, such as gratitude, reverence, metta, faith or confidence, and joy. In fact, these factors can assist spiritual progress especially when one is devoted to wholesome practices, such as reflecting or meditating (*anussati*) on the qualities or attributes of that Triple Gem. These qualities are embodied in the most simple, yet profound formula known as the Recollection of the Buddha (Buddhanussati), Recollection of the Dhamma (Dhammanussati) and Recollection of the Sangha (Sanghanussati) — familiar to all Buddhists, which they recite and reflect on all occasions of worship.

In fact, it is through devotion and understanding of the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha that will strengthen our faith in the Triple Gem and spur us on in our practice of the Dhamma.

4. The Legend of King Asoka

The corporeal relics of the Buddha are called '*sarira-dhatu*' in Pali. There are two accounts regarding the collection of the relics from the Dona stupas by King Asoka, after their initial enshrinement by the eight tribes.

According to the account in Asokavandana [14], King Asoka first went to the Dona stupa built by Ajatasattu and then to the next six, removing the relics from each. When he went to Ramagama, **[Photo 3]** the nagas took him to their palace to show him their relics, which they would not part with because they wanted to continue honouring the relics themselves. Asoka, realizing that he could not match the nagas in their offerings, agreed to let them keep the relics and left empty-handed. With the relics obtained from the seven Dona stupas, Asoka proceeded to build stupas all over his empire in honour of the Dhamma.

According to the account in the Sumangala Vilasini, a Commentary to the Digha Nikaya and also in Thupavamsa [15], some time after the

Dona stupas had been built, Ven. Mahakassapa foresaw danger to the Buddha's relics and advised King Ajatasattu to keep them in safety at one place in Rajagaha. Then employing his supernatural powers, Venerable Mahakassapa collected all the relics except those enshrined at Ramagama, which were protected by the Nagas. Returning to Rajagaha, he arranged for them to be buried in a secret underground chamber.

When the Third Buddhist Council was held 235 years after Parinibbana, King Asoka asked Ven. Moggaliputta Tissa, head of the Sangha about the numerical extent of the Buddha's Teachings to which the Mahathera answered that it consists of 84000 *dhammakkhandhas* (dhamma groups). In veneration to the Buddha's Teachings, King Asoka ordered his ministers to build 84,000 monasteries and stupas all over his empire. The Mahathera obtained the Buddha's relics from Rajagaha and let the emperor enshrine them in the stupas that he had built.

According to the Mahavamsa [16] after the Third Council, Venerable Moggaliputta Tissa decided to send senior monks to propagate the Buddha's

Teaching all over India, the North-West frontier, the Himalayan region, Sri Lanka and Mon state in Lower Myanmar. It is due to the wisdom and foresight of Venerable Moggaliputta Tissa, the royal patronage of Emperor Asoka and the teams of highly dedicated missionaries that the Buddha *Sasana* has spread beyond the borders of its home base. Thus when Buddhism disappeared from India for six hundred years after Muslim conquest during the 13th century AD, the light of the *Dhamma* still shone in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and other Theravada countries where the *Sasana* had been established.

The legend of Asoka building 84,000 stupas is obviously an exaggeration but no one can deny that he was a great builder of Buddhist stupas. In each stupa, he would deposit a few pieces of the Buddha's relics to symbolically represent the Buddha's presence, especially at the holy places associated with the Buddha in India. It is likely that he ordered the erection of many such stupas, called *Dhammarajikas*, at the places where the missionaries of the Third Council had established the Buddha Sasana. In fact the Chinese pilgrim Xuan Zang reported seeing Asokan stupas at

many of the Buddhist sites he visited during his travels from China to India in the 7th century AD.

Even today Buddhists can still visit and pay homage at many stupas erected by the Mauryan emperor Asoka 2300 years ago in honour of the Lord Buddha all over his empire. Some of the well-known Asokan stupas can still be seen at Sanchi [**Photo 7**], Bodhgaya, Sarnath [**Photo 5**], Kusinara, Sravasti, Vaishali, Nagarjunakonda, Amaravati, Gotihawa in Nepal, Taxila [**Photo 4**] and the Swat Valley in Pakistan.

Note on the Buddhist Era B.E.

The chronology according to Theravada tradition commences from the Parinibbana of the Buddha in 543 B.C., which is reckoned as Year 1 of the Buddhist Era or 1 B.E. So the Third Council, which was held 235 years after Parinibbana or 235 BE would be in 309 BC according to the common era. Similarly, the Sixth Buddhist Council held in Yangon in 1956 corresponds to 2500 BE or 2500 years of Buddhism.

4.1 Arrival of Relics in Sri Lanka

According to the Mahavamsa [16], after he had established the Buddha Sasana in Sri Lanka, Ven. Mahinda indicated to King Devanampiya Tissa, the need to build a relic stupa to represent the Buddha's presence in Sri Lanka. The king agreed to build the stupa and asked him to procure the Buddha's relics. Ven. Mahinda dispatched the samanera Sumana to Pataliputta in India to ask King Asoka to donate the Buddha's relics in his possession to Sri Lanka. Sumana was the son of the Theri Sanghamitta before she renounced the world. So he was the grandson of King Asoka.

The old king was filled with great joy at seeing his beloved grandchild and immediately filled up the alms-bowl used by the Buddha, with relics. Taking the capacity of the alms-bowl to be about 4.5 litres, this means that a large quantity of the Buddha's relics, together with the Buddha's alms-bowl went to Sri Lanka. There is no doubt that this munificence of Asoka was due mainly to the wisdom of the Venerable Mahinda in sending Asoka's grandson Sumana to ask for the relics on behalf of the people of Sri Lanka.

4.2 The Dagabas of Sri Lanka

The stupa or thupa in which relics of the Buddha or Arahant are enshrined was called dhatugabbha (dhatu – relic; gabbha – cavern, cavity, or womb). Later this became corrupted to dhagabbha or dagoba. When the Portuguese came to Sri Lanka in the 16th century AD, they saw stupas at many places in Sri Lanka and were told by the locals that these were dagobas. Finding it difficult to pronounce this new word, they started to call the dagoba as pagoda. Over time, the stupa that was earlier called cetiya was now called pagoda. Later the Portuguese term ‘pagoda’ was adopted by the English and has been used since then.

4.2.1 The Thuparama Dagaba [Photo 8]

Besides obtaining the Buddha’s relics from King Asoka, the samanera Sumana also asked for and obtained the right collar bone relic from Sakka Devaraja, the chief of gods. He then returned to Mihintale in Sri Lanka, where Ven. Mahinda was

residing and delivered all the relics to the latter. Leaving the relics and alms-bowl in his mountain residence and taking only the collar bone relic, Ven. Mahinda proceeded to the Sacred Garden of Anuradhapura and presented the same to the king. The king received the relic in a casket and placed it on the back of the state elephant, which then led a procession around the city before returning to the Sacred Garden where it halted at the spot where the Thuparama Dagaba was subsequently built. Within a few weeks, the Dagaba was constructed, and the right collar bone of the Tathagata was enshrined in the presence of the Sangha, the king and his subjects.

The Thuparama Dagaba was built in in 236 BE or 308 BC and was the first of its kind erected by the Singhalese nation. In 119 BC, King Lajjitissa constructed a roof over it, supported by ornamental stone pillars, about 41 of which can still be seen standing on a circular platform around the edifice.. Thereafter, it has been repaired and restored 3 times, the last in 1828. The circumference of this Dagaba is 59m and height 19.2m.

4.2.2 The Story of Dutthagamini and the Mirisaweti (Maricavatti) Dagaba

After the death of King Devanampiya Tissa, five kings ruled in succession for about 62 years before the state of Anuradhapura was conquered by the Tamil warrior Elara, who killed the last Singhalese King Asela. Asela's elder brother Mahanaga fled to the nearby state of Rohana and established his rule there. On his demise, his son Yatthalaka Tissa ruled over the same state of Ceylon. In the like manner his son Gothabhaya succeeded him. When he died, his son Kavanna Tissa ruled Rohana province. He was extremely pious and so was his queen Viharadevi.

Kavanna Tissa had two sons, Gamini Abhaya and Tissa. When they reached the age of twelve and ten years respectively, he asked his sons to make a vow never to make war with the Tamils, as he was a man of peace. The two young princes spurned his wishes. When Prince Gamini grew up, he developed his fighting skills and the art of warfare. One day, the prince having held a drill of his army of thousands of Singhalese youths, proposed to his father to attack the Tamils under

Elara. The king, thinking of his son's safety refused permission. After asking three times and getting opposition from his father, Prince Gamini sent a female trinket to his father asking him to wear the trinket. The old king was furious and ordered his son to be chained to prevent him from going to war. Hearing this, Prince Gamini fled to another district and stayed there until his father's demise. On account of his disobedience towards his father, he was named "Duttha" (undutiful) Gamini or Dutthagemunu

After the death of Kavanna Tissa, Dutthagamini returned to Rohana and assumed sovereignty. He then raised an army and destroyed all the Tamil forces at Anuradhapura including Elara. He became the sole Monarch of the Island of Ceylon in 383 Buddhist era or 161 BC and established the capital at Anuradhapura.

A week later, while attending a water festival at Tissa Wewa Lake, King Dutthagamini took a bath in the lake and placed his imperial scepter containing a Relic in an erect position on the site where the Mirasaweti Dagaba was subsequently erected. After enjoying his bath, he put on his

royal attire and ordered his servants to bring him the scepter but they were unable to move it from where it stood. He pondered over the miraculous event and finally decided to raise a stupa to enshrine the scepter containing the Buddha's relic at that very spot. After three years, the construction of the Mirasaweti Dagaba and ancillary building were completed and the inaugural ceremony was attended by thousands of monks from India and Lanka.

4.2.3 The Lohapasada Monastery

After building the Mirasaweti Dagaba, King Dutthagamini obtained a record of the prophecy by Ven. Mahinda that in future a descendant of King Devanampiya Tissa would build the great stupa and monastery in Anuradhapura. Even the site of the great stupa had been earmarked by King Devanampiya Tissa with a colossal stone column 140 years ago.

Being highly pleased, Dutthagamini assembled the Sangha and announced that he would build

an excellent storied monastery and requested them to procure the plan, which was supplied immediately. It was to be a quadrilateral building, 200 feet long on each side and the same in height. The building had nine stories and each of them had 100 rooms, all well furnished. A special hall was built in the centre of the quadrangle. The roof of the building was covered with copper tiles; hence it was called the 'Loha Maha Pasada' or the 'great brazen palace.' When the great monastery was completed King Dutthagamani held a grand ceremony in which he dedicated the entire building and belongings to the Sangha.

4.2.4 The Ruwanweli Dagaba [Photo 9]

After building and furnishing the Lohapasada Monastery, King Dutthagamanini wanted to proceed to build the Great Stupa to fulfill the prophecy of Venerable Mahinda, but he had spent a great deal of money. He did not want to impose tax and cause hardship to his subjects in order to raise funds. Due to their good fortune, the people discovered various materials in their

villages and donated them for the building of the Great Stupa. According to Mahavamsa XXVIII, the materials found by the people were bricks, nuggets of gold, copper, gemstones, silver, pearls and corals, and four large gems.

Having obtained the necessary materials, King Dutthagamini commenced work by removing the stone column put up by King Devanampiyatissa and placing it at the northern side of the Dagaba. On Wesak day, workmen started digging the foundation and filling it with stones. Then he employed elephants wearing leathern boots to trample on the stones to make the foundation strong and firm. Finally a 8” copper plate and a 7” silver plate were laid over the foundation for durability. After the foundation had been completed, he arranged for the Relic Chamber to be built on the full-moon day of the month of *Asalha* (June–July). He invited thousands of bhikkhus from all over India to attend the Ceremony; even from as far as Alasanda (near today’s Kabul) the city of the Yonas (Ionian or Greeks), came the Thera Mahadhamma Rakkhita with 30,000 monks.

Six beautiful stone slabs, each 80 cubits square and 8 inches thick were secured to form the Relic Chamber. When the foundation was ready, the monks placed one of the slabs in the centre to form the base while the other four pieces were placed vertically like the four sides of a box. The final piece would be used as the cover. Along with a large collection of the Buddha's corporeal relics that were enshrined, numerous valuable offerings were also deposited, such as a beautiful Bo-tree, whose stem was made of silver, leaves of gold and gems and fruits of coral. There was also a golden Buddha image and art scenes from the Buddha's life fashioned with gemstones.

Having arranged the Relic Chamber in the manner related above, the King fixed the day for enshrinement of the relics to all the inhabitants of the Island. In front of the fourfold assembly of bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, upasakas and upasikas, the Monarch bearing on his head, the golden casket containing the Relics, making presentation of offerings, marched in procession around the Dagaba. After that, he entered the Relic Chamber, placed the casket on the golden altar and offered to the Relics all his regal ornaments. Two

Samaneras closed the Relic Chamber with the stone slab as cover. The large assembly also made valuable offerings to the Relics.

After enshrinement of the Relics, construction of the Dagaba began but while the building of the spire and plastering were going on, the King fell ill and as the illness became severe, he handed the responsibility of work to his younger brother Saddha Tissa. Prince Saddha Tissa knew that his brother would not live long and wanted him to see the completed Dagaba before his death. He caused a covering to be weaved and covered the edifice with it. He then had the covering painted to make it appear that the whole Dagaba had been completed. King Dutthagamini was brought in a royal palanquin and carried round the Great Dagaba. He was extremely pleased at the sight.

In accordance with his wishes, a royal carpet was spread at the southern entrance of the Dagaba for the King to lie down and admire the magnificent Loha Pasada he had built on his left side, and the Great Dagaba on the right side. Present also were members of the Sangha, reciting the holy verses.

Shortly after, King Dutthagamini passed away in 137 BC and was succeeded by his brother, Saddha Tissa. The Ruwanweli Dagaba is one of the world's tallest monuments, standing at 338 feet and with a circumference of 950 ft.

4.2.5 The Story of Vattagamini Abhaya and the Abhayagiri Dagaba

Vattagamini Abhaya who became King of Sri Lanka in 455 B.E. (89 B.C.) had to repel the Tamil invaders. Once he was defeated and had to flee from the capital Anuradhapura passing by the Jain temple owned by a priest named Giri. The priest, seeing the King defeated and in flight shouted out: “the great black Singhalese is fleeing.” Vattagamini Abhaya heard the impertinent remark of Giri and vowed that when he regained his kingdom, he would pull down the Jain temple and build a stupa on the very spot.

Vattagamani Abhaya took refuge in the mountain region amassing troops until after more than 14 years of exile he marched on Anuradhapura in 89

BC and defeated the last Tamil king. To fulfill his vow made on the day of his defeat, one of his first acts was to demolish the Jain temple and erect the Abhayagiri Dagaba on the very same site. The name Abhaya-giri Dagaba is derived from the name of the King (Vattgamini) Abhaya and that of the Jain priest Giri.

King Vattagamini Abhaya also built a monastery called the Abhayagiri vihara, which he presented to a monk named Kupikkala Mahatissa who had helped him during his exile. Later, the monks of Abhayagiri under Mahatissa broke away from the orthodox monks of the Mahavihara, thereby creating a schism.

Readers who wish to know more about the conflict between the monks of the Mahavihara and those of the Abhayagiri vihara should refer to the article on “Buddhism in Sri Lanka” by H.R. Perera [17]. For an excellent account of the Dagabas of Anuradhapura, please refer to “The Sacred City of Anuradhapura” a book written in 1908 by Harischandra. [18]

5. The Evolution of the Buddha Image

Although the Buddha did not institute any prohibition against representations of his physical form, no images of the Buddha were made for about five centuries after Parinibbana. Symbolic representations of the Buddha in the form of stupas containing Buddha relics served as the main object of veneration. In this respect, there was no shortage of stupas in India.

According to the Asokavadana, King Asoka had raised 84,000 stupas to represent the Dhamma groups of the Buddha's teachings. Thus the cult of stupa worship became firmly established in the minds of the Buddhist laity and it became unthinkable to replace it with another object of worship, especially a Buddha image, something not favored by the monks. Therefore something drastic must have happened to cause a change in the mindset of the Buddhists. For this we need not look further than the invasion of Northern India after the fall of the Mauryan Empire, first by the Indo-Greeks and then by the Kushans,

both of whom adopted Buddhism and came up with their own ideas of an object in veneration of the Buddha – the Buddha image!

5.1 The Origin of the Buddha Image – Gandhara versus Mathura

The question of where the Buddha image originated from has been the subject matter of intense debate among scholars. One group attributed the origin of the Buddha image to Gandhara in Pakistan while a rival group attributed its origin to Mathura in India.

To support his view that the Buddha image originated from Mathura, the foreword of the book on ‘The Origin of the Buddha Image’ by A K Coomaraswamy [19] even claimed that the Buddha image was a product of the Indian mind! This certainly sounds illogical because the idea of a Buddha image can only come from the mind of a faithful Buddhist devotee, regardless of race!

In his book ‘The Buddha Image: Its Origin and Development pp 39’, Y Krishnan [20] notes: “Luders has observed that the custom of erecting portrait statues was in vogue among the foreign chiefs in Mathura during the Kushan period. It is not by accident or co-incidence that the earliest Buddha and Bodhisatta images of Mathura should belong to the same period when the Kushans had their own statues executed. This strongly suggests that the impulse to portray the Buddha in human form was an innovation of foreign origin.”

This observation refutes the claim of the Buddha image being a product of the Indian mind! Today the general consensus is that the Gandhara-style Buddha images were the earliest representations of the Buddha.

More evidence comes from the discovery of the Bimaran Casket inside a stupa at Bimaran near Jalalabad, Afghanistan around 1833-38. This discovery provides incontrovertible scientific evidence that Buddha images had existed before the Christian era because the reliquary was made around the 1st century BC. This is confirmed by

the style and manufacture (gold inlaid with precious stones) of the casket, which is highly consistent with the art of the Scythians of that era.

According to Alfred Foucher [21], the Bimaran casket showing a Buddha image is dated to 30-10 BC. The dating and the general Hellenistic style and attitude of the Buddha on the casket would indicate Indo-Greek work, used in dedications by Indo-Scythians soon after the end of Indo-Greek rule in Gandhara. Since it already displays a sophisticated iconography in an advanced style, it would suggest much earlier representations of the Buddha were already current by that time, going back to the rule of Indo-Greeks, preceding the Mathura-style images by about two centuries.

5.2 A Greek King as the Prototype of the Buddha Image!

In 185 BC, about fifty years after Asoka's death, his grandson Brihadratha, was assassinated by the Brahmin general Pusyamitra, who ascended

the throne and started the Sunga Empire. Brahmins are well-known for their antagonism towards Buddhism because the Buddha had always preached against the caste system which favored the Brahmins and reduced the lowest class Sudras to the level of menials. Pusyamitra Sunga was no exception. According to the Asokavadana [14], he persecuted the Buddhists, destroyed many monasteries and killed the monks. So when the Greco-Bactrian King Demetrius I defeated the Sungas and started the Indo-Greek Kingdom in North-West India, the local Buddhists hailed the new conqueror as a Savior!

Demetrius I was probably the prototype for the image of the Buddha. He was king and savior of India as confirmed by his successors Apollodotus I and Menander I. Buddhism flourished under the Indo-Greeks especially during the reign of King Menander of the Milindapanha fame. It is very likely that the first Buddha images were made during this period as the Greeks were well-known for making sculptures of their deities.

Evidence in support of this idea is shown by the resemblance in the face of the Buddha in the Gandhara sculpture from the British Museum with the face of Demetrius I in his coin as shown in Figures 1 and 2. Presence of the naked figure of Heracles in the sculpture standing behind the Buddha, in the same posture as the reverse side of Demetrius' coins seems to support this idea!

Figure 1: Silver coin depicting Indo-Greek king Demetrius I (205–171 BC).



Obverse (Left): Wearing an elephant scalp, symbol of his conquests in India.

Reverse (Right): Youthful, naked Heracles, crowning himself with right hand, with lion skin and upright club resting on his left arm.



Figure 2: In this 1st-2nd century AD Gandhara sculpture from the British Museum, the Buddha is shown under the protection of the Greek god Heracles, standing with his club resting over his arm. This unusual representation of Heracles is the same as the one on reverse of Demetrius' coins. Note the resemblance of the face in the statue with that of the coin shown in Figure 1



Figure 3: Using a monarch's face as a model of the Buddha image is not unique to Indo-Greeks alone. At the Longmen Grottoes in Luoyang in Henan Province of China, stands a 17-metre tall Vairocana Buddha statue (above) with a rather feminine face. Historical records reveal that it was modeled after the face of Empress Wu Zetian, the only empress in Chinese history, who gained popular support by advocating Buddhism. She reigned during the Tang Dynasty from 690 to 705 AD. The local people also call it Empress Wu Zetian's Statue.

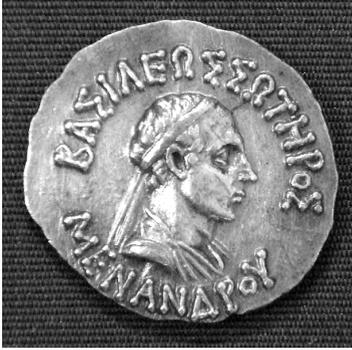


Figure 4: Silver coin of King Menander (Milinda)
Reign: 165/155–130 BC

Of all Indo-Greek kings of North-western India, King Milinda is the most famous among Buddhists.

According to Milindapanha, King Milinda was learned in arts and sciences and had an inquiring mind. Only Ven. Nagasena was able to resolve his doubts and convert him to Buddhism. After Milinda, the most famous Buddhist king was the Kushan Emperor Kanishka I (78-102 AD) whose capital was Purushapura near Peshawar in Pakistan. He conquered India as far as Bihar, Sindh and Baluchistan. He later converted to Buddhism and supported the Sarvastivada, which dominated in Mathura and North-West India. It was during this period that Buddha images appeared in Mathura although they had been present in North-West India before the Christian era. It was mainly because of conquest by the Kushans that the Buddhists of Mathura started to accept the idea of the Buddha image as an object of veneration.

6. Did the Buddha Look Like His Image?

Just as the Buddha makes the Vinaya rules, so he keeps them: “As I say, so I do; as I do, so I say” This means the Buddha kept his head clean shaven and wore rag-ropes just like any other good monk. That the Buddha was always clean shaven is confirmed by certain suttas in which the Brahmins expressed their displeasure at his tonsure.

- In the Ambattha Sutta (D 3), when the Buddha pointed out Ambattha’s rudeness when talking to an older teacher, the latter angrily replied: “With shavelings (mundaka), sham recluses, menial black fellows, the off-scouring of Brahma’s foot – with them I would talk as I now do to you!”
- In Sundarika Sutta (S 7.9), the Buddha was sitting with part of his robe covering his head. As the Brahmin Sundarika approached, he removed the covering exposing his head. The Brahmin, seeing his tonsure thought: “The

good man is shaven-headed! This good man is a shaveling!” and so wanted to turn back.

- In Vasala Sutta (Sn 1.7), Brahmin Aggika Bharadvaja vents his anger by calling the Buddha a “shaveling, a wretched monk and an outcaste” because he viewed the sight of the shaven head as inauspicious while he was making an offering.

There is also clear evidence in the Scriptures that not everyone was able at to recognize the Buddha immediately upon seeing him:

- In the Samaññaphala Sutta (D 2) when King Ajatasattu went into the pavilion where the Buddha was sitting with the monks, he had to ask Dr. Jivaka, which of the monks was the Buddha.
- Dhātuvibhanga Sutta (M140) records that the monk Pukkusati recognized the Buddha only after attaining the 3rd stage of sainthood while he was listening to the Dhamma preached by the Buddha.

6.1 Why the Buddha Image has hair on the head

Although the Pali Scriptures clearly state that the Buddha was clean shaven, yet all Buddha images we see today show a topknot of hair on the head. While certain purists may find this contradiction hard to accept and some may even call it a culture that exalts a heresy, the majority of lay Buddhists may not be aware of this fact at all! Even among those who are aware of it, such as Dhamma teachers and members of the Sangha, many may consider it to be a trivial matter!

To view the matter objectively, the first thing one should realize is that the Buddha image was created as a result of demand by the laity and not by the Sangha. While the monks perceive the Buddha as a normal human being with Super Mind, most lay Buddhists, especially Mahayana Buddhists perceive the Buddha as a Superman or even a Deity, endowed with the thirty-two marks of the Superman (Mahapurisa).

6.2 Unhisa-sisa or Turban-like Head

Several suttas (e.g. M 91, Brahmayu Sutta; D 3, Ambattha Sutta; D 14, Mahapadana Sutta; D 30, Lakkhana Sutta) mention a list of thirty-two physical marks possessed by the Great Man or Mahapurisa, who is destined to become a Universal King or a Buddha; the last mark being the ‘Unhisa’. Pali-English Dictionary translates it as a ‘turban’ while Childers Dictionary translates it as ‘a crest, diadem, crown, or turban’.

The Lakkhana Sutta describes how the Buddha acquired this special mark due to his past kamma:

“Being leader among men in goodness, foremost in virtuous deed, word and thought, in dispensing gifts, in morality, in attending religious festivals, in filial duties, in honouring recluses and brahmins, in deferring to the head of the family, and in other and sundry righteous observances. Deceasing thence and attaining life as you know it, he acquired this Mark of the Superman, to wit, a head like a turban.”

Some scholars have interpreted the term ‘Unhisa’ as a cranial protuberance from the appearance of the head in Buddha images. However, the great Pali commentator Venerable Buddhaghosa in his *Sumangala-vilasini* describes the term ‘Unhisa’ by two different meanings, either denoting the fullness of the forehead or the fullness of the head.

The fullness of the forehead may be caused by a strip of muscle (*mamsapatala*) rising from the root of the right ear, covering the entire forehead, and terminating in the root of the left ear. As a head with such a strip of muscle on the forehead looks like a head wearing a turban, it is therefore called a turban-like head or a turban-head.

The other explanation defines the turban-head as a fully round head symmetrical in shape like a water bubble. The most important point here is that the so-called ‘cranial protuberance – the bony protuberance on the top of the Buddha’s skull’ – an adventitious idea derived from legend and art, is not mentioned at all.

According to Banerjea [22], the question may arise as to when the term 'Unhisa' came to mean a 'bony protuberance'. He suggested that this idea had already come into existence when Xuan Zang visited India in 7th century AD as proven by the fact that the pilgrim visited the shrine of the Buddha's Unhisa-bone in Hilo near Gandhara. Two centuries earlier, this relic was seen and described by Faxian as follows: "The bone is of yellowish-white colour, four inches across and raised in the middle" shown to believing pilgrims but found to be an imposter, a fake.

It appears this peculiarity of Buddha's head was understood in different manners by two famous Buddhists of 5th century A.D., viz. the Chinese pilgrim Faxian and the great Pali commentator Buddhaghosa. Banerjea explains it by saying that Buddhaghosa who wrote his commentaries in Ceylon has offered the original meaning of the term which has been shown to be borne out by Brahmanical texts, whereas the Chinese pilgrims referred to the popular superstition about the 'skull bone relic' in Hilo, which was a fake and has led to confusion among modern scholars.

6.3 The Cranial Protuberance – A Figment of Imagination

According to Chanda Ramaprasad [23], a head, turban-like in outline, but without the crest, cannot be recognized as a turban-head in the strict sense. The addition of a protuberance on the top was evidently thought necessary in to make the head of the Mahapurisa look perfectly turban-like. The so-called Unhisa on Buddha's head is the crest of the turban head. Thus it appears that the sculptors may have deliberately added a topknot to make the Buddha's head look exactly like a turban with a crest. Because of this, certain writers may have been misled by the idea that Buddha possessed a cranial protuberance that made the head look like a turban.

The theory that the Buddha possessed a cranial protuberance is a figment of imagination. There is no evidence in the Pali Canon to support it.

(1) There is no mention of anything unusual about the Buddha's appearance in the Pali Canon where he was always portrayed with a clean

shaven head. This implies that there is no visible abnormality on his skull such as a protuberance.

(2) There is clear evidence in the Scriptures that not everyone was able to recognize the Buddha immediately upon seeing him. This would not be so if he had a cranial protuberance or “a bump on his head.”

(3) Even the Brahmins who took offense at the sight of his tonsure went no further in their insults other than calling him a shaveling (*mundaka*), a sham recluse and an outcaste! One can only imagine what they would have called him if he had a cranial protuberance!

Lastly, the *Lalitavistara* and *Mahavastu* lists of the lesser marks referring to the Buddha's hair, such as *citakesa* (hair piled up), *asamlulitakesa* (hair not disheveled), *aparusakesa* (smooth hair) etc., should be taken into account in this connection. Hence it is quite reasonable to assume that the tradition about the topknot of hair was a fairly authoritative one. We should also bear in mind that the wearing of long hair in different modes was a common custom among

the Indo-Aryan males in ancient times. They not only carried these luxurious locks on their own heads in different shapes, but endowed their gods with this same characteristic [Banerjea, 22].

It would appear that by adding a topknot on the head of the Buddha image to make it appealing to the Buddhist laity, the early sculptors of Buddha images had unwittingly laid a red herring for some of our modern scholars to chase after nothing. We can confidently conclude that there was no abnormality in the Buddha's head. The so-called cranial protuberance on the Buddha's skull is a figment of imagination!

By the time when the sculptors of Gandhara and Mathura began to carve their Buddha images for sale, there were two rival traditions relating to the hair on the Buddha's head: an older one preserved in the Pali Nikayas represented the Buddha as a shaven-headed monk; and another tradition preserved in Mahavastu, Lalitavistara and Nidanakatha represented him as having cut his hair with his sword leaving part of it intact on the head, reduced to two inches in length and curling from the right for the rest of his life. We

can guess that among the earliest Buddha images made for sale, those that showed the clean-shaven head were probably not popular with the laity. Like any commodity, the sale of Buddha images depends on the buyer's preference and the current style showing the Buddha with a topknot was probably the more popular model with the Buddhist laity then, and even nowadays.



Figure 5: Early Mathura Buddha statue showing the topknot on the head. Due to ignorance of the meaning of ‘Unhisa’ or turban, certain writers

have misinterpreted the topknot on the statue's head as a cranial protuberance making the head look like a turban. The truth is that the Buddha was always clean-shaven and any protuberance on his head would have been noticed by many people during his time. The fact that there has been no report of anything unusual about the Buddha's appearance proves that the so-called cranial protuberance is a figment of imagination.

6.4 Stupa or Buddha Image?

With the introduction of the Buddha image as a memorial shrine, the issue now was how to treat this new symbol, which had no status as a memorial shrine because it was not sanctioned by the Buddha. Among the symbols, the most powerful was the stupa because the Buddha himself gave his approval before he passed away. In olden times, the landscape of Majjhimadesa in India was literally dotted with stupas. Eventually the Buddha image became more popular with the laity but for the monkhood, an opinion prevailed that sanctity had to be imparted to an image by

placing Holy Relics inside it. In a situation where no sacred relics are available, even verses of the Dhamma inscribed in gold, silver or copper foil or even clay, can serve the purpose. In the Ajanta and Ellora caves, we see a compromise effected by the engraving of an image on the stupa itself or recessing the image inside it as shown in the figure below.



Figure 6: Buddha image recessed at base of stupa at the Cetiya Hall of a cave in Ellora, India.

7. Conclusion

From all the evidence in the Scriptures, we can confidently conclude that none of the images of the Buddha we see today looks like him.

The Buddha image is basically a memorial shrine, an object to remind us of our Master. Therefore, one should not treat it like a piece of art and forget the real purpose of setting up an image shrine. When one pays homage to the Buddha with the image as object, one should always remember to focus on the Buddha's virtues, not the physical appearance of the statue. To achieve this, it is imperative that one should spend some time reflecting on the Buddha's virtues with proper understanding and concentration using the formula for the Recollection of the Buddha.

Without a proper understanding of the Buddha's spiritual qualities, one may end up in adoration of his bodily form just like the monk Vakkali, whom the Buddha admonished as follows: "What good will it be to see this foul body? He who sees the Dhamma sees me. Seeing the

Dhamma is seeing me, seeing me is seeing the Dhamma.” At least, Ven. Vakkali adored the real life Buddha, who taught him the correct path.

Yet there is a unique quality in certain Buddha images that is hard to ignore; and that is its ability to calm the mind of the beholder by its serene-looking face. A good example is the 10th century AD gilded image of the Buddha inside the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodhgaya. **[Photo 10]** Just gazing at this magnificent image of our Lord will arouse feelings of joy and reverence in the hearts of the pilgrims who come from all over the world to pay homage to the Master. Another equally imposing Buddha statue is the 5th century AD Nirvana Buddha statue in Kusinara. This unique statue is able to arouse different feelings in the mind, depending on where one stands to gaze at it. Seen from the feet, one can discern the suffering of the body, while the view at the head shows calm and serenity in the face. **[Photo 11]**

However when we examine the cause, it is not just by looking at the Buddha image alone that calms the mind. Rather it is the faith and mental purity developed in the Pilgrimage, which is the

proximate cause. So the presence of the Buddha image can be useful at the right time and place.

Among the laity, the Buddha image is the most popular shrine because it is easily available, affordable and portable, unlike the Bodhi tree or stupa. On the negative side, it can arouse the ire of iconoclasts, to whom making and worshipping of graven images or any likeness of anything is forbidden. However such bigotry does not occur in Malaysia where the Constitution guarantees the freedom of worship for all its citizens.

There is no controversy over the adoption of the Bodhi tree as a shrine. Buddhists do not worship trees but the Bodhi tree is treated with veneration because it sheltered the Bodhisatta in his quest for Enlightenment in Bodhgaya, India more than two thousand six hundred years ago.

In the case of the stupa shrine, the Buddha had clearly instructed that a stupa should be erected over his bodily relics after his Parinibbana. This is because the sight of the stupa of the Sammasambuddha will calm the hearts of the people and arouse confidence that will lead to their welfare.

Unfortunately, after Buddhism disappeared from India, the stupas were broken up for their bricks or plundered for their relics by the grave robbers. Although the Muslims destroyed or vandalized all the Buddha images, they left the stupas alone knowing these were burial sites. Even today, visitors to Muslim countries such as Xinjiang in China, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan where Buddhism once flourished, can still see many ancient stupas in the countryside standing like forlorn sentinels of a bygone era. **[Photos 12, 13, 14]**

For those Buddhists who have the good fortune to encounter these ancient shrines, their hearts will surely leap with joy at the sight of the stupa that reminds them of the Blessed One. Instilled with faith and devotion, they will seek Refuge in the Triple Gem, observe the Five Precepts and recollect the Virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. After such an experience, one will begin to understand why the Omniscient Buddha made the stupa a worthy shrine of veneration.

8. Expose – Are these the Bones of the Buddha?

In 2002, we visited the Indian Museum in Delhi and saw the bone fragments found by the English planter W.C. Peppe in 1898 when he excavated the Piprahwa stupa in the Basti District of Uttar Pradesh, India. Some of the bone pieces, claimed to be the Buddha's bones, were displayed inside a miniature golden pavilion donated by the Govt. of Thailand. We were filled with immense joy at seeing such 'sacred objects', worshipping them with great enthusiasm. I took several photos of the bone fragments for remembrance. **[Photo 15]** Back home, I took a closer look at the photos of the bone fragments. That was when I began to have doubts about their authenticity.

According to the Thupavamsa, **[15]** the Buddha Gotama's relics were scattered except four teeth, two collar bones and the cranium. The scattered relics may be divided into three sizes. The small relic has the size of a mustard seed, the great relic the size of a rice grain and the very great relic the size of a sprouted seed.

The bone relics of Piprahwa stupa are mega-size. They don't resemble any of the authenticated bone relics of the Buddha discovered in 1913 by British archaeologist Sir John Marshall at the Dhammarajika Stupa in Taxila, Pakistan or the Buddha's ashes recovered by Altekar [24] from the Relic Stupa of the Licchavis at Vaishali. Secondly the bones of Piprahwa stupa didn't even look like they had been cremated at all. These obvious signs reinforced my doubts about the authenticity of the bones of Piprahwa stupa.

In May 2013, the National Geographic presented a documentary about the Piprahwa stupa entitled "The Bones of the Buddha", claiming that the area at Piprahwa stupa is the site of the Sakya capital of Kapilavastu, and that the bones found were the bones of the Buddha. Other than a few mock-up scenes imitating an excavation, it did not provide any credible evidence to back up its claims. Today there is irrefutable evidence to show that these claims are untenable. This article presents the evidence for the reader to evaluate and decide the case without fear or favour.

Interpreting the Piprahwa Casket Inscription

In January 1898, W. C. Peppe, [25] manager of the Birdpur Estate in Basti District, Uttar Pradesh, India announced the discovery of a stone coffer containing some soapstone caskets, jewellery and a quantity of bones, inside a stupa near Piprahwa.

An inscription on one of caskets reads as follows:
*Sukiti-bhatinam sa-bhaginikanam sa-puta-
 dalanam iyam salila-nidhane Budhasa
 bhagavate sakiyanam.*

According to Debala Mitra [5], there are two different interpretations of the inscription:

(1) “This shrine for the **relics of the Buddha**, the August One, is that of the Sakyas, the brethren of the Distinguished One, in association with their sisters and with their sons and wives.”

According to this first interpretation, the relics are those of the Buddha himself.

(2) “Of the brethren of the Well-famed One, together with little sisters, together with children and wives, this (is) a deposit of **relics of kinsmen of Buddha**, the Blessed One.”

This interpretation means that the relics are those of Buddha’s kinsmen and their sisters, wives and children (who were killed by Vidudabha). The words in brackets are added in by Debala Mitra.

Probably because of the furore over the historic find, the British Government accepted the first interpretation that was available at that time, i.e., that the bone relics were the Buddha’s, accorded to the Sakyas of Kapilavastu.

In 1899 the bones were ceremonially presented by the (British) Government of India to the King of Siam, who in turn donated portions of them to the Sangha of Burma and Sri Lanka.

In 1906, British epigraphist Fleet [26] provided a second interpretation of the inscription, which said that the bones were those of the Buddha’s kinsmen. As the bone fragments had been given to the King of Siam and enshrined as ‘sacred’

relics, it would be rather embarrassing for the British Govt. to admit the bones might not be the Buddha's after all. So the matter was hushed up.

The whole episode would have been forgotten if the Indian Government had not been so keen in promoting Piprahwa as the ancient capital of Kapilavastu in order to attract more tourists. So when Indian archaeologist S.M. Srivastava [27] re-excavated the Piprahwa stupa in 1971-73 and claimed to have discovered the original relic stupa of the Sakyas containing more bones of the Buddha, it opened up a Pandora box.

Dating of the Piprahwa Casket

In evaluating any data, one must not be influenced by any bias. In the case of the Piprahwa discovery, there are several allegations that Peppe, who excavated the stupa might have colluded with Dr. Fuhrer, a known forger of Buddhist relics, and faked the casket inscriptions. **[Phelps, 28]** These allegations will not be taken into account in our evaluation of the data.

Initially the Piprahwa casket was thought to be from Sakyan and pre-Asokan times when found in 1898 but its characters are now said to be from Asoka or Sunga era [Allen, 29]. Today it is dated around the 2nd century BC. As King Asoka had earlier collected most of the Buddha's relics from all the Dona stupas except the Ramagama Stupa, it is not possible for the Sakyas who dedicated the offerings in Piprahwa to come up with such a large quantity of the Buddha's bones unless they were not the Buddha's bones at all!

On the Bone Fragments found by W. C. Peppe

Writing of the Piprahwa finds in 1904, Dr Theodor Bloch [30], Head of the Eastern Circle of Archaeological Survey of India, declared thus: *“One may be permitted to maintain some doubts in regard to the theory that the stupa contained the relic share of the Buddha received by the Sakyas. The bones found at that place, which have been presented to the King of Siam, and*

which I saw in Calcutta, according to my opinion were not human bones at all!”

Bloch was then Head of the Archaeological Dept. of the Indian Museum, Calcutta, and would have relied not only on his archaeological expertise before making this extraordinary allegation, but also that of his zoological colleagues at the Museum. It appeared that Peppe himself had retained a tooth from the alleged Piprahwa finds. This tooth was taken by the author, Charles Allen in 2004 to the Natural History Museum in London, where palaeontologists declared it to be molar tooth of a pig! [**Mackenzie, 31**]

Where exactly were the bone fragments located when found? Peppe himself said that all the caskets contained jewellery and quantities of bones in good preservation (Peppe later declared that they ‘might have been picked up a few days ago’, something strange for bones cremated 2500 years ago). Smith [**32**] and Fuhrer who had visited Peppe to examine the finds stated that these ‘sacred fragments’ had been enshrined in a decayed wooden vessel which was also found within the stone coffer.

Since the bones were finally handed to the Thais together with the decayed wooden vessel, this probably confirms the wooden vessel as their original location. This raises further awkward questions about their real identity. According to Phelps [28], since portions of these items are now enshrined in Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka and Japan, this raises the appalling spectre that for over a century, the Buddhist world may have been venerating the remains of some ancient pig!

New Data from 1971-73 Excavations at Piprahwa

In 1971-73 Indian archaeologist, K.M. Srivastava [27] commenced further excavations at Piprahwa and claimed to have discovered a 'primary mud stupa' below the one excavated by Peppe. This supposedly yielded yet more soapstone vessels (none of which bore inscriptions) containing bones. According to him, the 'indiscriminate destruction' caused by Peppe's excavation meant that the bone relics found in 1898 could not

reliably be shown to be those of the Buddha, and the inscription on the 1898 casket somehow ‘pointed’ to the bones, that were found lower down, were thus the real relics of the Buddha.

While excavating in the monastic ruins nearby, he also claimed to have discovered clay seals bearing the words in Brahmi script as follows:

“Om devaputra vihare kapilvastu bhikshu mahasanghasa” and *“Om devaputra vihare kapilvastu bhikshu sanghasa”*

According to Basanta Bidari [33] the title ‘*Devaputra*’ refers to the Kushan king Kanishka who built the biggest vihara at Piprahwa and renovated the main stupa. These inscriptions dating from the 2nd century AD clearly indicate that Piprahwa was a monastic site dedicated to the Sangha of Kapilavastu by King Kanishka and not the Kapilavastu, where the Sakya royal family lived.

K.M. Srivastava’s findings were reviewed by eminent archaeologist and historian, Dr. Herbert Härtel [34] who dismissed his claims and

commented: “To declare that the bones in one of the reliquaries in the lower chambers are those of Buddha is not provable, and therefore not tenable.”



Based on the size of the burnt bricks in the relic chambers excavated by K.M. Srivastava (**Figure 7 above**), Hartel confirmed that they belonged to 2nd century BC, not the Buddha’s time. So the claims made by K.M. Srivastava that Piprahwa is Kapilavastu is unsubstantiated!

Summary of Findings

1. Dating of Piprahwa vase inscription to post-Asokan era proves that the bones found in Piprahwa stupa were not from Buddha's time and unlikely to be Buddha's bones because in 3rd century BC, King Asoka had collected most of the relics from all the Dona stupas except the Ramagama stupa.
2. Archaeologist, Theodor Bloch, who saw the purported bone relics in Calcutta back in 1898, declared that they were not human bones at all. Peppe took a tooth relic from the find, which turned out to be that of a pig!
3. Indian archaeologist Srivastava re-excavated Piprahwa stupa because he suspected "that the bones found by Peppe in 1898 could not reliably be shown to be the Buddha's bones." During his excavation, he claimed to have found the original mud stupa and more bones alleged to be those of the Buddha. According to archaeologist Herbert Hartel, Srivastava's claims are not provable or tenable.

4. Based on the size of burnt bricks in the relic chambers excavated by Peppe and Srivastava, Hartel confirmed that they belonged to 2nd century BC, not the Buddha's time.
5. Relic stupas from the Buddha's time were made of mud as shown in original relic stupa of the Licchavis at Vaishali excavated by Dr. A.S. Altekar [24] in 1958 (**Figure 8 below**). They did not have brick relic chambers like those found in the Piprahwa stupa.



6. So the claims made by Srivastava that the Piprahwa stupa is the stupa erected over the Sakya's share of the Buddha's ashes is untenable.
7. After examining all the available evidence, we can conclude that the bones found in Piprahwa stupa were not the Buddha's bones and that Piprahwa is not the site of Kapilavastu, the ancient capital of the Sakyas.

Remarks

There is a valuable lesson to be learnt from this expose; and that is, as rational Buddhists we should not be too attached to Buddha relics to the point that we become gullible and easily taken in by claims of new discovery of more Buddha relics, which may actually turn out to be fakes. The Buddha taught in Kesaputta Sutta [35] that one should not simply accept anything without proper investigation.

Corporeal relics (*sarira-dhatu*) of the Buddha are just his ashes and devoid of any special power. They should be treated with reverence because they serve mainly to remind us of the Buddha. The adoration of purported Buddha relics will not help us in understanding the Dhamma. On the contrary, it may lead to more attachment that may cause disappointment and sorrow when the relic is lost, destroyed or exposed as a fake.

The exhibition of fake Buddha relics to believers is not uncommon. When the Chinese pilgrims Faxian and Xuan Zang (of 5th & 7th centuries AD respectively), visited Nagarahara near Jalalabad in Afghanistan, they made a beeline to the Vihara of the Buddha's skull bone relic in Hilo to pay homage to the sacred relic. According to Xuan Zang, "the local king had commanded five Brahmins to offer scents and flowers daily to the relics. These wily Brahmins, observing the crowds who came to worship incessantly, started to charge entrance fees: one gold piece just to see the skull relic; five pieces to make a mark on the skull with a paste of scented earth for good luck. Though the charges are steep, the worshippers are many."

According to Banerjea [22], the skull bone relic shown to believing pilgrims in Hilo was actually an imposter. The description by Faxian on page 60 confirms that it is a fake because the shape is abnormal for a human skull.

It is imperative for Buddhists to realize that exhibiting the Buddha's corporeal relics in public is treating the Master's bones as showpieces and acting against his instructions. Right thinking people will not act so disrespectful to their Master's bones. Buddhists should not condone the exhibition of Buddha relics by organizations that are more interested in seeking publicity than in upholding the dignity of the Buddha Sasana.

This is why the Omniscient Buddha advised that his relics should be enshrined inside a relic stupa. At the sight of the stupa, one will think of the Buddha, not the relics. "At the thought: 'This is the stupa of the Bhagava, Arahant, Samma-sambuddha!' the hearts of many people will be calmed and made happy; so calmed with their minds established in faith, they at the breaking up of the body will be reborn in heaven"

9. In Search of the Dona Stupa of the Sakyas

Although India claims Piprahwa to be the site of Kapilavastu, Basanta Bidari [36] has provided irrefutable evidence to show that the actual site is located at Tilaurakot in Nepal. According to him, this site is surrounded by towns and villages with ancient monuments within a radius of 8-10 miles as befits the capital of the Sakya kingdom. Based on records of the Chinese pilgrims, the presence of Gotihawa and Niglihawa Asokan pillars, the thick-walled fortress with moat in Tilaurakot and discovery of seals, numerous sites and antiquities around the area, it is most likely that the ancient Sakya capital is located in vicinity of Tilaurakot. Despite locating the actual site of Kapilavastu in the vicinity of Tilaurakot, still no one has been able to find the Dona Stupa of the Sakyas there.

One crucial point in the accounts of the Chinese pilgrims is that they mentioned the Nirvana stupas of Kakusandha and Konagama Buddhas and the Ramagama stupa of Gotama Buddha but made no mention of the Nirvana stupa of Gotama

Buddha at or near Kapilavastu. This observation raises the possibility that no Nirvana stupa of Gotama Buddha was ever built at Kapilavastu in the first place! To find out the cause of this, we need to know what happened to the Sakyas of Kapilavastu just before the Buddha died.

According to the Dhammapada Commentary, a few months before the Buddha's Parinibbana, Vidudabha of Kosala attacked Kapilavastu and massacred the Sakyas. Returning to Savatthi in victory, he took his grandfather Mahanama the Sakya as hostage but the latter died on the way. It was nightfall when Vidudabha and his army reached the Aciravati River. So they camped on the bank of the river to sleep. That very night a huge flood came suddenly and drowned them. In the Mahaparinibbana Sutta, it is stated that the Sakyas of Kapilavastu came to Kusinara to claim their share of the Buddha's relics and returned home. The general assumption is that they were the survivors of the massacre who took the relics back to Kapilavastu and raised the stupa there. Yet despite intensive search in India and Nepal over the last century, the whereabouts of the Dona Stupa of the Sakyas still remains a mystery.

The relevant question to ask is: Who were the Sakyas who went to Kusinara to claim their share of the Buddha's relics? Were they the Sakyas of Kapilavastu who had survived the massacre of Vidudabha or were they other Sakya clansmen from another country?

According to Chinese pilgrim Xuan Zang [37], when he visited Udyana he saw the Buddha's Nirvana or Dona stupa and heard the legend that it was erected by the local King Uttarasena, himself a Sakya who went to Kusinara to claim a share of Buddha's relics. Uttarasena and his men might have gone to Kapilavastu earlier to render assistance to his relatives upon hearing of their tragedy. The Buddha was probably aware of this because the legend says that when Tathagata was about to die, he had said to the congregation: *"After my Nirvana, Uttarasena-rajā of Udyana will obtain a share of the relics of my body."*

Soon after the Buddha's Parinibbana, Uttarasena travelled from Kapilavastu to Kusinara on behalf of the Sakya clan to demand a share of the relics. As he was a Sakya and king, he had a legitimate right but the other kings treated him with disdain

because he came from a frontier country. At this moment the Devas announced afresh the words of Tathagata as he was about to die. As a result, Uttarasena was given the Sakyas' share of relics. After getting the relics, he took them back to Udyana by elephant. When the elephant reached Swat Valley, it collapsed and died. So Uttarasena erected the stupa at that spot to enshrine the Buddha's relics. As this legend appears to be supported by the turn of events at that time, there exists a strong possibility that the Dona Stupa of the Sakyas may be the very stupa located near Ghaligai village at Swat Valley in Pakistan instead of in India or Nepal [**Cover photo**].

10. References

(i) Acknowledgements

Photos in Figure 1-6 were obtained from Wikipedia

(ii) Abbreviations

A = Anguttara Nikaya; D = Digha Nikaya; M = Majjhima Nikaya; MA = Majjhima Commentary; S = Samyutta Nikaya; Sn = Sutta Nipata; Dh = Dhammapada; DhA = Dhammapada Commentary.

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