



# Historical Archaeology in India

## 5.1 Do you know?

Description	Image	Source
<p>Nalanda was a famous centre for education in Asia, in the early Medieval period. Nalanda was the birthplace of Sariputra (Sariputta), a disciple of Buddha. Pupils from East Asia and Southeast Asia visited this university for learning.</p>	 <p>Nalanda Mahavihara</p>	<p>Excavated Remains of Nalanda Mahavihara: View of Site no. 03 and structure to north of Site no. 1B from East, Courtesy: © Rajneesh Raj</p> <p><a href="http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1502">http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1502</a></p>
<p>Hero stones are memorial stones erected for the heroes who lost their life for a social or political cause. Often the heroes who lost their life for the protection and retrieval of the societies were commemorated with hero stones. Some of the hero stones have inscriptions and some have sculptural panels.</p>	 <p>A Hero stone from Karnataka</p>	<p>Courtesy:</p> <p><a href="http://archive.archaeology.org/online/features/kadabakele/">http://archive.archaeology.org/online/features/kadabakele/</a></p>

The Indian merchant guilds were active in Southeast Asia in the medieval period. Their inscriptions have been found at a few sites such as Barus in Indonesia and Takua Pa in Thailand.



Indian Merchant guild Inscription from Barus, Indonesia, in Jakarta Museum



Source:  
Jakarta  
Museum,  
Photo:  
V.Selvakuma  
r

Pataliputra or modern Patna was known as Palibothra to the Greeks. The accounts of Strabo and Arrian, quote the description of Megasthenes on the famous city. Pataliputra was about 14.5 km in length and 2.4 km in breadth and it was shaped



Pillar Capital from Pataliputra Palace

Source: By  
For the front:  
L.A.  
WADDELL  
(1854-1938),  
author of the  
book and the  
photograph  
taken in  
1903. For the  
back: Patna

<p>like a parallelogram and was enclosed with a wooden wall that had 570 towers and 64 gates.</p>		<p>Museum Guide 1955 [1] - Composite off or the front and for the back., Public Domain, <a href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=60444854">https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=60444854</a></p>
<p>Place name study/Toponymical study involves the study of village/city/territorial names. Some of the village/city names of India can be traced back to a very early period. These names are also a source of history and they can help in the identification of ancient and medieval cities. Place names cannot be directly taken to present the ancient representations; more detailed scrutiny using other historical sources is important. For example, the place name of Dwaraka is very old.</p>	 <p>A prismatic stone anchor at buoys A-4-A-5, DWK.</p>  <p>Large bastion at buoy 8 in Zone 1, DWK.</p> <p>Underwater explorations from Dwaraka</p>	<p>Source: National Institute of Oceanography, Goa</p>



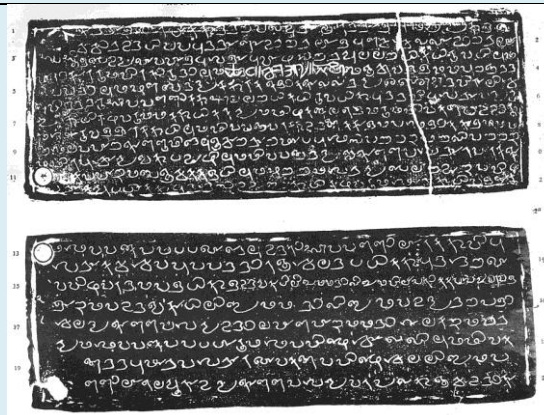
Oral traditions are a useful source for getting clues to the existence of ancient sites and historical traditions. Although oral traditions have to be cautiously used, they can be useful for understanding local history. Pottery making tradition exists in many parts of India. The knowledge is passed orally as well as through ‘traditional internship.’



Pottery making in Rural India

Source:  
Selvakumar

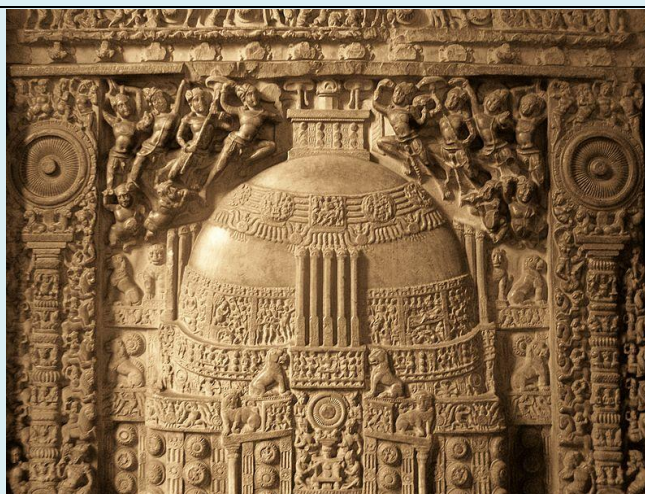
The Terisapalli copper plates in Kerala dated to 9<sup>th</sup> Century CE refers to the existence of a Christian establishment near Kollam. It refers to various traders of possibly West Asian origin.



Terisapalli copper plate

Source:  
Wikimedia  
commons.

Many of the temples/*stupa*/monument sites of India are also sites of early settlements. Evidence of habitations is found around the temples. The areas around the medieval temples/other monuments are worth excavating as part of historical archaeology.




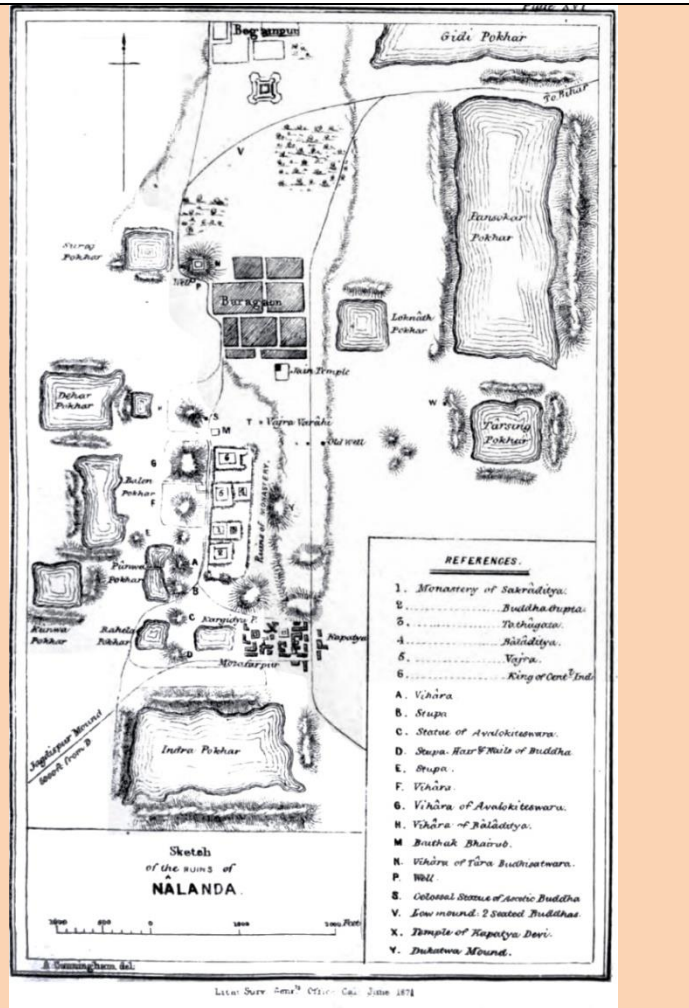
Sculpture from Amaravati Stupa now at Chennai Museum

Source: By  
Soham  
Banerjee -  
[http://www.flickr.com/photos/soham\\_pablo/395199242/sizes/l/inphotostream/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/soham_pablo/395199242/sizes/l/inphotostream/,), CC BY 2.0,  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=>

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## 5.2 Timeline

Timelines	Image	Description
James Prinsep deciphered the Brahmi script around 1837. James Prinsep was an assay master at the Kolkata Mint	 <p>Image of James Prinsep painted by his sister Emily</p>	<p>www4.gu.edu.au:8080/adt - root/uploads/approved/adt -QGU20100621.083616 Private collection reprinted in Malcolm Allbrook (2008) 'Imperial Family': The Prinseps, Empire and Colonial Government in India and Australia. Doctoral thesis. Griffiths University. Australia. page 101]</p>





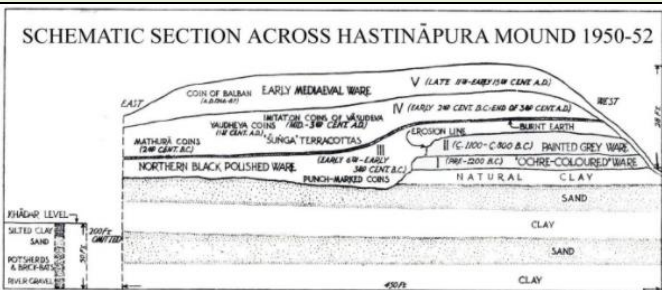
Plan of Nalanda Ruins  
Prepared by Alexander  
Cunningham

1913-20  
Taxila  
Excavations

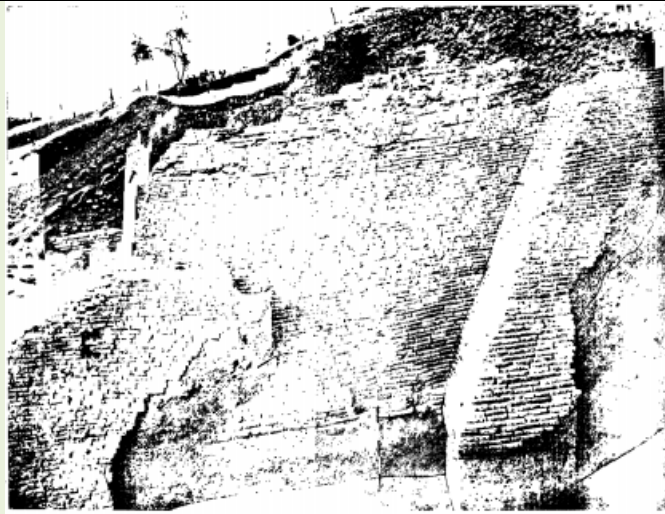


Archaeological artifacts  
from the Indo-Greek strata  
at Taxila from John  
Marshall *Taxila*  
*Archeological*  
*Excavations*



1920s		<p>Excavation at Bulandibagh, Pataliputra, Bihar by J.A. Page and M.Ghosh in 1926-27. It is considered to be part of Mauryan Palace.</p> <p>Source:  <a href="http://www.asi.nic.in/asi_excav_imp_bihar.asp">http://www.asi.nic.in/asi_excav_imp_bihar.asp</a> </p>
1940s		<p>Excavations at Arikamedu by R.E.M. Wheeler at Southern Sector</p> <p>Courtesy: ASI</p>
1950s		<p>Excavations at Hastinapura, Section Drawing</p> <p>Courtesy: BB. Lal and ASI</p>

1957-59



Excavations at Kaushambi

Courtesy: G.R. Sharma

1989-92



Excavations at Arikamedu

Courtesy: Vimala Begley  
and Steven Sidebotham



2006		<p>Excavations at Talakkad. It was the capital of the Western Gangas. It has temples buried in sand dunes.</p> <p>Courtesy: ASI</p>
2008-09		<p>Excavations at Kadabakele</p> <p><a href="http://archive.archaeology.org/online/features/kadabakele/">http://archive.archaeology.org/online/features/kadabakele/</a></p> <p>Courtesy: Kathleen Morrison</p>
2007-15		<p>Excavations at Pattanam in Kerala. The site is identified as the ancient port of Muciri or Muziris. This photo has an ancient canoe and wharf.</p> <p>Courtesy: KCHR and P.J. Cherian</p>

### 5.3 Glossary

Starting Character	Term	Definition	Related Term
A	Amphorae	Generally, amphora refers to a Roman Wine Jar; but they were used in West Asia as well as Egypt. Amphorae in most cases have double handles, a narrow neck and a conical body, and pointed base. They were used for transporting wine, <i>garum</i> (fermented fish sauce) sauce, and olive oil. Amphora jars are found in many Early Historic sites of India. Amphora = Singular, Amphorae=plural.	Roman Trade; Indian Ocean Trade
A	Andhra Ware	The ceramic variety of Russet Coated and Painted Ware is also known as Andhra Ware. It is found in Deccan and southern part of India.	Russet Coated and Painted Ware
A	Arretine	It is a fine table ware, with reddish surfaces. It was produced in the Roman Empire In India, it was first recognized at Arikamedu, and it was used for dating the site of Arikamedu.	Terra Sigillata
B	Brahmi	The script used during the Early Historic period in India. It was used in Asokan inscriptions. Many of the Indian and Southeast Asian scripts evolved from this script.	Asokan Brahmi
B	Black-and-Red Ware	Black-and-red ware is a ceramics of the Iron Age and Early Historic period in South India. It also occurs in Early Historic context in Bengal. In Chalcolithic context too it occurs in Western India.	
C	Chaitya	Chaitya is an apsidal Buddhist prayer hall with a <i>stupa</i> in the apsidal end.	Stupa
G	Graffito	Graffiti are generally post-firing marks or figures or writing found on pottery.	
J	Jataka stories	<i>Jataka</i> stories are part of the Buddhist literature. They speak about the previous birth of Buddha in human and animal forms, who would become Buddha in future. These stories are portrayed as sculptures in the <i>stupas</i> . These stories offer clues to the historical conditions.	Sculptural panels. Stupas.

N	NBP – Northern Black Polished Ware	A ceramic variety occurring in northern part of India. It is generally dated to the Mauryan period. It has been reported in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia.	Mauryan period
O	OCP - Ochre Coloured Pottery	A ceramic variety of the Chalcolithic affiliation found in the Northern part of India mainly in the Ganga Valley.	PGW
P	Painted Grey Ware	A ceramic variety of the Iron Age affiliation that occurs in Northern India and mainly in the Ganga Valley.	OCP, NBP
P	Place Name Study	Study of contemporary village names and territorial names and correlating them with the references in literature and inscriptions.	Oral Tradition
R	Russet Coated Painted Pottery	A pottery of early historic period in South India also known as Andhra Ware.	Andhra Ware
S	Stupa	<i>Stupa</i> is a Buddhist monument. It has a hemispherical mound over a square basement. It has the mortal remains of Buddha or Buddhist saints or their belongings.	<i>Chaitya</i>
T	Terra Sigillata	It is a fine table ware, with reddish surfaces. It was produced in the Roman Empire In India it was first recognized at Arikamedu, and it was used for dating the site of Arikamedu.	Arretine
X	XRD	X Ray Diffraction Analysis. Used in archaeology to understand the mineral properties of ceramics and other materials for provenance studies.	
Y	Yavadvipa	<i>Yavadvipa</i> is the name of Java found in ancient texts of India.	Java



## 5.4. Weblinks

Web links
<a href="http://asi.nic.in/asi_monu_tktd_ap_nagarjunakonda.asp">http://asi.nic.in/asi_monu_tktd_ap_nagarjunakonda.asp</a>
<a href="http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1502">http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1502</a>
<a href="http://asi.nic.in/asi_exca_imp_bihar.asp">http://asi.nic.in/asi_exca_imp_bihar.asp</a>
<a href="https://www.academia.edu/30529100/India_Historical_Archaeology">https://www.academia.edu/30529100/India_Historical_Archaeology</a>
<a href="http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0376983615569836">http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0376983615569836</a>
<a href="http://asi.nic.in/asi_monu_whs_hampi.asp">http://asi.nic.in/asi_monu_whs_hampi.asp</a>
<a href="http://asi.nic.in/asi_aboutus_history.asp">http://asi.nic.in/asi_aboutus_history.asp</a>
<a href="http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/75705/10/chapter%207.pdf">http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/75705/10/chapter%207.pdf</a>
<a href="http://www.muzirisheritage.org/pattanam.php">http://www.muzirisheritage.org/pattanam.php</a>
<a href="http://asi.nic.in/asi_exca_indi_maharashtra.asp">http://asi.nic.in/asi_exca_indi_maharashtra.asp</a>
<a href="http://asi.nic.in/asi_exca_2005_westbengal.asp">http://asi.nic.in/asi_exca_2005_westbengal.asp</a>
<a href="http://asi.nic.in/asi_exca_imp_bihar.asp">http://asi.nic.in/asi_exca_imp_bihar.asp</a>
<a href="http://asi.nic.in/asi_exca_imp_maharashtra.asp">http://asi.nic.in/asi_exca_imp_maharashtra.asp</a>
<a href="http://asiguwahaticircle.gov.in/excavation8.html">http://asiguwahaticircle.gov.in/excavation8.html</a>
<a href="http://asi.nic.in/asi_exca_imp_uttarpradesh.asp">http://asi.nic.in/asi_exca_imp_uttarpradesh.asp</a>
<a href="https://www.studyblue.com/notes/note/n/lecture-6-archaeological-excavation-part-1/deck/10393570">https://www.studyblue.com/notes/note/n/lecture-6-archaeological-excavation-part-1/deck/10393570</a>
<a href="http://www.asi.nic.in/asi_exca_imp_bihar.asp">http://www.asi.nic.in/asi_exca_imp_bihar.asp</a>
<a href="http://www.asi.nic.in/asi_excavations.asp">http://www.asi.nic.in/asi_excavations.asp</a>

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7, <i>The Trading World of the Indian Ocean, 1500-1800</i> , Om Prakash ed. p. 53-116. Pearson, Delhi.
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