

# Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland

<http://journals.cambridge.org/JRA>

Additional services for *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



---

## Art. XXVII.—An Account of the Discovery of the Ruins of the Buddhist City of Samkassa

Alex. Cunningham

Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland / Volume 7 / Issue 14 / July 1843, pp 241 - 249

DOI: 10.1017/S0035869X0015590X, Published online: 14 March 2011

**Link to this article:** [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S0035869X0015590X](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0035869X0015590X)

### How to cite this article:

Alex. Cunningham (1843). Art. XXVII.—An Account of the Discovery of the Ruins of the Buddhist City of Samkassa. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland*, 7, pp 241-249 doi:10.1017/S0035869X0015590X

**Request Permissions :** [Click here](#)

ART. XXVII.—*An Account of the Discovery of the Ruins of the Buddhist City of Samkassa.* By LIEUT. ALEX. CUNNINGHAM, of the Bengal Engineers, in a Letter to COLONEL SYKES, F.R.S.

(Read December 3rd, 1842.)

MY DEAR SIR,

THOUGH personally unknown to you, I am aware, from many of your articles in different publications, of the great interest which you take in the subject of Buddhistical antiquities. I believe, therefore, that what I am about to communicate will be my best apology for the liberty I now take in addressing you. I have read your last Essay on the Social, Moral, and Political State of Ancient India several times over with the greatest interest, and I have traced Fa Hian's route upon the map with unfortunately more zeal than success. Some points, however, I have been able to clear up, which have escaped the researches of all the critics, including Wilson and yourself. It is regarding these that I now venture to address you. I will begin with the kingdom of Seng-kia-chi, or in English spelling Seng-kia-shi.

On leaving Mathura Fa Hian proceeded S.E. eighteen yeu-yan to the kingdom of Seng-kia-shi, which has been recognized as the Samkassam and Samkassa of Pali books, and as the Sankasya of the Ramáyana. Remusat suggests that it is the same as the district of Farokhabad, and Wilson locates it in the neighbourhood of Mainpuri. The position of the kingdom was, of course, somewhere about Farokhabad and Mainpuri; but the actual locality of the capital where Fa Hian saw the ladder by which Buddha descended from heaven, has not been identified by any of the critics, French or English. This capital, however, still exists in the village of Samkassa, situated on the north or left bank of the Káli Nadi, three-quarters of a kos from Aghat Serai, twelve kos from Farokhabad, and twenty-five kos from Kanouj. The village consists of only fifty or sixty houses, on a high mound, which has once been a fort: but all around it for a circuit of six miles there is a succession of high ruined mounds of bricks and earth, which are said to be the walls of the old city. My Munshi's expression of wonder, after having visited these ruins, "*Kanouj sé bardá hy,*" "It is even larger than Kanouj," will convey some notion of their great extent. Amongst them is one mound about eighty feet in height, on which there is a

Brahmanical temple dedicated to Siva, erected some 200 years ago by a Gosain, whose descendant now resides there. It is built of the old bricks, which are of a large size,  $15\frac{7}{8}$  in.  $\times$   $11\frac{3}{8}$   $\times$   $2\frac{7}{8}$ , similar to those which are found wherever Buddhistical ruins exist. (The three stupas at Benares which I opened were built of the same gigantic bricks.) In this temple there is a four-armed figure of Siva in white marble, and a figure of his wife Párvati in yellowish stone. North of the temple there is a stone elephant, nearly four feet in height, on a pedestal, of which only one foot and a half now appears above the ground.

Near this, beneath a ním tree<sup>1</sup>, is an erect figure,  $5\frac{1}{4}$  feet in height, with the arms and half of the head broken. It is said to be of Chatrbhoj, which may possibly be true; but from the elongated ears, it must represent a Buddhistical and not a Brahmanical Chatrbhoj. Eastward of the Gosain's mound are the ruins of a temple to Mahadéva; and close by to the southward is the most interesting point in these ruins. It is a small mound of ruined bricks, dedicated to the worship of the Nága<sup>2</sup>. Nothing whatever is erected there; but whenever rain is desired the people proceed to the spot and pray for it. The period of annual worship, however, is the month of Bysákh, just before the usual commencement of the seasonal rains, when the village women go there in procession and make offerings of milk, which they pour upon the spot. This is, no doubt, the identical dragon (*Nága*), which Fa Hian mentions as appearing *once a year*, from whose favour the people of Seng-kia-shi obtained propitious rains and an abundant harvest. It is most interesting thus to trace back with certainty this local worship for nearly fourteen centuries and a half, to A.D. 400, which, though most probably not the period of its origin, yet must undoubtedly be close to the time of its engrafture upon Buddhism.

It is said that Raja Jayachandra of Kanouj, in Samvat 1240 (A.D. 1183), marched an army against Samkassa, and razed it to the ground; and afterwards, at the instigation of the envious Brahmans of Kanouj, he ploughed it up into fields. The ruins are now completely ploughed up, and the large old bricks are piled along the borders of the fields. In these fields also many old coins are found every year, most of which are carried to Kanouj; and lastly, there are no vestiges whatever of Mahomedan buildings; no ruined musjids, idgahs, or tombs. We may, therefore, conclude with certainty that this great city, which was one of the most flourishing in India about A.D. 409, when Fa Hian saw it, and also about A.D. 640,

<sup>1</sup> Melia Azadirachta.

<sup>2</sup> The hooded snake, Coluber Naga.

when Hwan Thsang visited it, had much declined, if indeed it had not been completely ruined before the period of the Mahomedan conquest by Moaz ad din Sâm in A.D. 1188. I incline, therefore, to give some credit to the tradition of its destruction in A.D. 1183 by Jayachandra of Kanouj, at the instigation of the Brahmans, who at that period were violently hostile to the Buddhists.

I was unable to procure any coins, as no rain had fallen up to the period of my Munshi's visit on the 3rd of September, 1842; but I will endeavour to obtain some of them hereafter; and, if possible, I will contrive to visit the place, as I feel convinced that many of the mounds are ruined stupas which would probably yield relics of historical value. It will be a point of much interest to obtain some of these coins, which must undoubtedly be those of the Buddhist sovereigns of Samkassam. I suspect that the old square copper coins with an elephant and swastika on one side, and with the chaitya and sacred bo-tree on the other, belong to this kingdom.

This identification of Seng-kia-shi with the modern Samkassa or Samkissa will enable us to determine with certainty the length of the ancient yeu-yan or yojan. Fa Hian says that Seng-kia-shi was 7 yeu-yans from Kanouj, which are equivalent to 28 kros or kos. Now the distance of the village of Samkassa from Kanouj is always called 25 kos *kurri* (or long), and 28 kos *narm* (or short), equal to 50 miles English; which must be very nearly correct, as the direct distance on the map is 43 miles. The result of this computation is, that the yeu-yan or yojan, was equal to a fraction more than 7 miles English. To test the correctness of this value, it is only necessary to compare another of Fa Hian's distances with the modern measurement. Fa Hian says that from Na-kia-lo-ho, or Nagara, to Pukkalávata, or Peukelaotis, was 16 yeu-yans, equal to 112 miles English. Now by the measurement of the Quarter-Master-General's Department of the British Army, the distance from Jelalabad to Peshawur is 90 miles; and as Nagara was undoubtedly from 10 to 20 miles to the westward of Jelalabad, we may consider the two distances as corresponding exactly. The modern Peshawur also is about 2 miles distant from the old city.

On leaving *Na-kia-lo-ho*, Fa Hian crossed the snowy mountains, the Saféd Koh, and reached *Lo-i*, the modern Rohi or Roh, another name for Affghanistan. From thence he went to Po-na, the modern Banu, or, as it is written by Sheríf-ad-dín, بانو Báu: which is *exactly* three marches from the Indus, as mentioned by Fa Hian.

These are identifications of Buddhistical places actually men-

tioned by Fa Hian. I will add the description of a place most probably seen, although not mentioned by him. At the old town of Maláwan, which lies on the direct road from Mathura to Samkassa, there are some ruins which appear to me to be of Buddhistical origin. These ruins are at the east end of Maláwan, touching the high road from Calcutta to Delhi; in making which portions of these ruins were dug up and removed. They consist of squared kunkur stones, piled up over extensive solid brick foundations. The bricks are of large size,  $13\frac{1}{2} \times 8\frac{1}{2} \times 2\frac{3}{8}$ . The solid structure is still 57 feet from north to south, and 54 feet from west to east. The highest part is not more than 12 feet: but as three wells close to the ruins, besides many houses in the town are built of the very same large bricks, we may safely conclude that these solid brick structures were once much more lofty; and, in fact, that they were the lofty solid buildings of the Buddhists called stupas. The kunkur stones I believe to have formed the facing of these buildings, which cannot, therefore, have had a base diameter of less than 70 feet.

These wrought kunkur blocks are from  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 3 feet long, and about 10 inches square. Many of them have mouldings deeply cut, and I recognized the ornaments of several stones as being exactly of the same pattern as those upon some architrave stones which I dug up close to the Sárnáth stupa near Benares. These kunkur blocks are loosely piled in some places; but in others they appear to have been regularly laid down upon the brickwork. On a more minute examination, however, I found that many of these stones had carved surfaces underneath, and that many of them besides were resting upon earth and rubbish. Now it seems to me that if the solid brickwork had been merely a foundation for the stonework, it would have been placed under all parts of the stonework alike. The stonework, therefore, *as it at present exists*, must be of a later construction than the brickwork. The stone figures lying about are chiefly Buddhistical. There is one large red stone 5 feet in length, which has upon it two recumbent lions facing outwards, the commonest ornaments on the pedestal of a Buddhistical figure. A kunkur stone has the same. There is also a small red stone about 1 foot in height, which bears a seated figure with the hands laid flat in the lap, and with a small erect figure on each side, (a Buddha and two attendant Bodhisatwas). Over the left shoulder is a small elephant, and over the elephant is a small flying figure, holding out a garland towards Buddha's head, which is rayed by a seven-headed snake. On the pedestal are the usual two recumbent lions facing

from each other. These figures clearly prove the Buddhistical origin of the ruins. In further confirmation of this point, I may add, that there are several deeply-carved semi-circular stones, which have formed part of a column at least  $3\frac{1}{2}$  feet in diameter; and on the ruins there is a headless lion, which no doubt was once placed upon the pillar; thus forming a lion-pillar, which we know was so commonly erected close to a stupa.

By comparing together these different facts, I conclude that the wrought kunkur stones once cased the solid brickwork which still exists, and that the building was a stupa of the Buddhists, accompanied by a lion-pillar. From the brick foundations which exist close by to the eastward, it is probable that there was formerly a second stupa of inferior dimensions.

At Etah and at Pilwa there are also many wrought kunkur stones, the remains of former magnificence.

When I was at Kanouj I searched carefully for Buddhistical remains. The great stupa which was to the north of the Ganges must long since have been swept away by the river. At present the Ganges is fully 2 miles from the most northerly part of Kanouj; while the Kali Nadi runs immediately below the mounds of ruins. But the whole of the intervening ground is low, and there can, therefore, be no doubt that the Ganges once ran close under the walls of Kanouj. Indeed, the high bank on which Kanouj stands is the extreme limit of the right bank of the Ganges, which even now, in an extraordinary flood, joins the Kali Nadi beneath the walls of Kanouj.

On a high mound there is a square cloistered building, called *Sita-ka-Rasoin*, Sita's kitchen. It is said to have been built by one of the Jaunpoor kings; but it can only have been altered by the Jaunpoor king, for the building is certainly not Mahomedan. The domes are formed by circles of ornamented stones placed over one another, and gradually lessening in size until they nearly meet, with one flat stone covering in the top. On the lowest circle the ornament has been removed, and sentences from the Koran substituted. I observed several figures in the walls placed sideways and upside down, in positions which show that the Mahomedans must have placed them there. The building may possibly be Brahmanical, but I should think that it was more likely to have been originally a Buddhist monastery.

To the westward of Sita's kitchen, on the same high mound, is a small square building, in which is a statue (in several pieces) about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  feet in height, which is said to be the effigy of Ajaya Pála, Raja

Chakravarti. It was broken and thrown into a well by Aurangzeb's orders, and was only recovered some years back, when the oldest people of the town recognized it as the figure which was in their younger days called Ajaya Pála, Raja Chakravarti. The ears, however, are elongated, and have long ear-rings, and the hair is peculiarly dressed in two lofty tiers above the head. In the same building there are two other heads not Brahmanical; and a small figure seated with crossed palms, and with a standing figure on each side of him, without doubt, a Buddha seated, and attended by two standing Bodhisatwas, and therefore not Brahmanical.

The most celebrated figures at Kanouj are called Ráma and Lakshmana; but as they have each six arms, they cannot, of course, represent the conquerors of the ten-headed Ráwan.

These observations are not, perhaps, of much importance; but if you think them of any value, you are perfectly welcome to do with them as you please; either to publish them as they are, or to make use of them yourself in some future essay on Buddhistical antiquities.

These few points, which have been ascertained by me on a march upon duty in the rainy season, and without a single halt, will show you what might be done if one had the opportunity of marching leisurely, with time to halt at all places which seemed to offer any objects of interest. The cave-temples of Ajanta and Ellora possess invaluable treasures hidden in the small stupas which most of them have in the interior. To open these, and to search out all the Buddhistical ruins in India, would be works of the greatest interest and importance. With what joy and zeal would not one trace Fa Hian's route from Mathura, his first Indian station, to his embarkation for Ceylon.

To begin at Mathura, and to follow in his footsteps through Samkassam and Kanouj, through Sha-chi, and through Benares and the numerous sacred spots north of Patna (opening the Mozufferpore stupa by the way), through Gaya and its numerous caves, through Rajgriha, and through Orissa, would be an undertaking of vast importance to the Indian government politically, and to the British public religiously. To the first body it would show that India had generally been divided into numerous petty chiefships, which had invariably been the case upon every successful invasion; while, whenever she had been under one ruler, she had always repelled foreign conquest with determined resolution. To the other body it would show that Brahmanism, instead of being an unchanged and unchangeable religion which had subsisted for ages,

was of comparatively modern origin, and had been *constantly* receiving additions and alterations; facts which prove that the establishment of the Christian religion in India must ultimately succeed.

This is a long letter, but I trust the subject is of sufficient interest to gain pardon for my troubling you.

Believe me, with much respect,

Most sincerely yours,

ALEX. CUNNINGHAM,

*Lt. Bengal Engineers.*

*Aligurh, 15th Sept. 1842.*

---

NOTE BY COLONEL SYKES.

In the discovery of the ruins of this city, lost most probably for at least six or seven hundred years since its destruction before the Mahomedan Conquest, we have not only a new proof of the honesty and good faith of the Chinese traveller, Fa Hian; but we have one proof more, added to the multitudinous existing evidences of celebrated and even holy cities claimed by the Brahmans as Brahmanical, from being mentioned in their heroic poems, or the Puranas;—Mathura, Benares, Delhi (Hastinapura), Kanouj, and Sankasya; in their antiquities yielding only fragments appertaining to Buddhism, and nothing *antique* of unquestionable Brahmanical origin. I venture to express a hope that the example of Lieut. Cunningham may be followed throughout India, wherever mounds or ruins are to be met with (and they are sufficiently numerous), and I have little doubt the investigators would be amply rewarded by discoveries, auxiliary to the fixing of historic truths.

The travels of Fa Hian are so little known to the English reader, the book being only procurable in Paris, that extracts from Fa Hian's account of Samkassa may be acceptable, and I therefore annex them to this note.

“De la (Mathura) en allant au Sud-est, à dix-huit yeou yan, il y a un royaume nommé *Seng-kia-chi*, c'est le lieu où Foe après être monté au ciel de Tao-li et avoir, durant trois mois, prêché en faveur de sa mere redescendit sur la terre.” Fa Hian then mentions the tradition of Buddha's descent from heaven by a triple ladder, and his return being expected. “Les grands rois de *huit royaumes*, leurs vassaux et les peuples, qui depuis longtemps brûlaient du désir de



revoir Foe s'assemblèrent comme des nuages dans ce royaume (de Seng kia chi) pour y attendre *l'honorable du siècle.*" When Fa Hian was at Samkassa (about A.D. 400 to 409), only seven steps of this legionary ladder remained visible, a chapel had been built over them by the king Asoko, and upon the middle step a statue of Buddha has been erected, and outside the chapel a square stone column had been erected, about forty-five feet high, with figures of Buddha on the four sides, and a lion on the summit. Already some of these Buddhist columns mentioned by Fa Hian have been found in Buddhist localities, and it is very probable that this identical column might be brought to light by a careful examination of the ruins of Samkassa. A type of one of them exists to this day in front of the Buddhist cave at Karleh, *cut out of the rock*, on the road between Bombay and Poona.

Another circumstance connected with Samkassa was the veneration of the hooded snake, called a dragon by Fa Hian, but appearing once a year to the people in the form of the coluber naga. I will give the passage entire, as it relates to a worship which Buddhist works say was the religion of the inhabitants of Ceylon, Thibet, and other places in Asia, previously to the introduction of either Buddhism or Brahmanism.

"Dans l'endroit du séjour des religieux, un dragon à oreilles blanches fut leur bienfaiteur. C'est lui qui rend le pays fertile et abondant, en faisant tomber à propos une pluie douce sur les champs, et en les garantissant de toutes calamités. Il procure le repos aux religieux, et ceux-ci pour reconnaître ses bienfaits, lui ont construit une chapelle, avec une estrade pour l'y placer. Ils préparent aussi des aliments heureux pour le dragon et lui rendent hommage. Les religieux choisissent chaque jour, dans leur assemblée, trois personnes qu'ils envoient prendre leur repos dans la chapelle du dragon. Leur séjour étant terminé, le dragon prend la forme d'un *petit serpent dont les deux oreilles sont bordées de blanc*. Quand les religieux l'ont reconnu, ils lui présentent de la crème dans un bassin de cuivre. Le dragon descend du haut du trône et vient au bas de l'estrade où il se promène ayant l'air de prendre des informations. Après avoir fait le tour, il disparaît. Il sort une fois chaque année. Ce royaume (Samkassa) est fertile et abondant en toutes sortes de productions. Le peuple y est nombreux, riche et sans comparaison plus joyeux que partout ailleurs. Des gens de tous pays ne manquent pas d'y accourir, et on leur donne tout ce qui leur est nécessaire."— p. 126.

Fa Hian also mentions that at Samkassa, IN THE TIME OF

SAKYA BUDDHA HIMSELF, a tower (stupa?) was raised in honour of Sakya's PREDECESSORS, Karkoutchanda, Kanaka Mouni, and Kas'yapa, which *was in existence* in Fa Hian's time. He saw similar monuments elsewhere; and the fact is of great importance to correct a mistaken opinion which generally prevails, that Sakya Buddha, who flourished in the seventh century before Christ, was the FOUNDER of the Buddhist religion.

---