

Article

Corporate Bodies in Early South Asian Buddhism: Some Relics and Their Sponsors According to Epigraphy

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Abstract: Some of the earliest South Asian Buddhist historical records pertain to the enshrinement of relics, some of which were linked to the Buddha and others associated with prominent monastic teachers and their pupils. Who were the people primarily responsible for these enshrinements? How did the social status of these people represent Buddhism as a burgeoning institution? This paper utilizes early Prakrit inscriptions from India and Sri Lanka to reconsider who was interested in enshrining these relics and what, if any, connection they made have had with each other. Traditional accounts of reliquary enshrinement suggest that king Aśoka began the enterprise of setting up the Buddha's corporeal body for worship but his own inscriptions cast doubt as to the importance he may have placed in the construction of *stūpa*-s and the widespread distribution of relics. Instead, as evidenced in epigraphy, inclusive corporations of individuals may have instigated, or, at the very least, became the torchbearers for, reliquary enshrinement as a salvific enterprise. Such corporations comprised of monastics as well as non-monastics and seemed to increasingly become more managerial over time. Eventually, culminating at places like Sanchi, the enshrinement of the corporeal remains of regionally famous monks partially supplanted the corporeal remains of the Buddha. Those interested in funding this new endeavor were corporations of relatives, monastic brethren, and others who were likely friends and immediate acquaintances. In the end, the social and corporate collectivity of early Buddhism may have outshined some textual monastic ideals of social isolation as it pertained to the planning, carrying out, and physical enshrinement of corporeal remains for worship, thus evoking an inclusive sentiment with the monastic institution rather than disassociation.

Keywords: Buddhism; epigraphy; relics; corporation; patronage

1. Introduction

Since the Buddha's *parinibbāna* (Skt. *parinirvāṇa*) and partitioning of relics according to legend, the body of the Buddha seems to have been an extremely accessible tool by which the everyday person, in addition to monastics and royalty, had an opportunity to engage in what might be characterized as "merit-making activity." For example, in the Pāli version of the *Sarīradhātuvibhajana* section of the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*¹ (DN 72), the king Ajātasattu of Māgadhā had heard that the Buddha was deceased and concluded that "[Since] the Lord was a *khattiya* (Skt. *kṣatriya*), and so am I, I deserve a portion of the Buddha's relics. I will build *stūpa*-s for them" (*bhagavāpi khattiyo ahampi khattiyo ahampi arahāmi bhagavato sarīrānaṃ bhāgaṃ ahampi bhagavato sarīrānaṃ thūpaṅca mahaṅca karissāmi*"²).

¹ This text is considered to be very early within the Pāli canon according to von Hinüber (2008) and Witzel (2009).

² Unless stated otherwise, all translations from text or epigraphy are my own.

Following suit, six groups—namely the Licchavis of Vesālī, the Mallians of Kusinārā, the Sakyas of Kapilavatthu, the Bulas of Allakappa, the Koliyans of Rāmagāma, and the Mallians of Pāvā—came from all over northern India and similarly decided that they also deserved a portion of the Buddha’s relics.³ However, the difference lies in that none of these groups defined themselves by their leader as the Māgadhans did through Ajātasattu. Instead, each of these other six collectives—or what we may come to identify as corporate bodies—communally highlighted their connection to the Buddha and claimed portions of the resulting corpus of bodily relics for themselves to take back to their home territories and worship. Although this story from the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* and its extraordinary number of parallels⁴ may not be an exact history of how the body of the Buddha came to be worshipped, we do know that the corporate sentiment of the non-Māgadhan peoples present within the story seems to have been an actual feeling of many people who did, in fact, sponsor the enshrinement of reliquaries attributed to the Buddha and also to the reliquary mounds (*stūpa*-s) that often surrounded these important objects of faith.

It is fitting that the Latin etymology of the English word “corporate” ultimately derives from the word “corpus,” meaning “body,” since, as will be discussed, the genesis of corporate-style patronage in Buddhism begins with the enshrinement of the Buddha’s bodily relics, likely at the *stūpa* site Piprahwa in the late 3rd century BCE. The word corporation comes from the Latin past participle *corporatus* meaning “fashioned or made into a body.” Herein, I juxtapose between the Buddha’s “corporeal body” and the later “corporate bodies” of Buddhist reliquary sponsors to elucidate a gradual diachronic shift away from the Buddha’s body and toward different kinds of bodies altogether. Therefore, it is something of a historical irony that the Śākya family—our first corporate body—at Piprahwa in northern India seemed to set the standard for non-royal patronage from non-royal persons wishing to express their piety at Lumbini by moving the corporeal remains of the Buddha to a more locally accessible spot of their choosing, thus using a sacred “body” as an instrument to legitimize their own corporate and familial “body.” The aim of this paper is to flesh out these types of individuals—mostly combinations of lay and monastic individuals—who came together collectively like the Śākyas to form a single entity that sponsored—presumably through the marshaling of their pooled funds—some of the earliest and most important Indian Buddhist sites. We will navigate many of the earliest known reliquary inscriptions from South Asia⁵ and use them to map an answer to the question: who was interested in establishing the Buddha’s relics? Further, what are the implications of evaluating patronage demographics?

We know that the birth of the Buddhist *saṃgha*, according to texts, is traditionally ascribed to the Buddha himself. However, historically, the growth, spread, and institutionalization of the *saṃgha* seems to have taken place in a space of interplay between the charismatic, iron-will of King Aśoka in the middle of the 3rd c. BCE and the widespread, inclusivistic decentralization of Buddhism to all corners of South Asia by means of the societal collective from approximately the 2nd c. BCE onwards, perhaps beginning at or near the time the Piprahwa reliquary vase was enshrined. Where Aśoka created something of an innovative theocratic state, whereby he was the standard-bearer for devotion embodied, the decentralized *saṃgha*(-s) appearing as far away as Gandhara in the Northwest and

³ It should be noted that eight parties claimed portions of the relics initially. Including Ajātasattu the king of Māgadha we may add to the list a lone *brāhmaṇa* named Veṭṭhadipa.

⁴ According to the SuttaCentral website, there are no less than 114 parallels from throughout the Buddhist literary world. For a detailed discussion of the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* and some parallels regarding *saṅgīti*, Anālayo’s recent paper is an excellent resource and starting point (Anālayo 2015).

⁵ There are many relevant inscriptions to examine from ancient Gandhara (Baums 2012). Unfortunately, the earliest ones do not add much to the overall argument of this paper beyond what is already discussed. Incorporating these inscriptions, of which there are dozens, into future work would be essential for any investigation of corporeal remains, especially ones involving longer diachronic time periods (Baums 2018). A companion paper to the current study might re-consider the nature of dispersing merit to the community at-large via the establishment of reliquaries. Such a topic would be undoubtedly well-rooted in the early Gandharan reliquary inscriptions.

Sri Lanka to the far South seemed to have stolen the metaphor of the “ideal” Buddhist patron and revolutionized it to fit the highly varied demographics existing beyond the royal palace walls.

Already nearly thirty years ago, historian Romila Thapar (1992) and art historian Vidya Dehejia (1992) convincingly argued that the everyday patrons—many of whom were monks and nuns—who helped Buddhism root itself materially were largely part of widespread communities which tended to sponsor Buddhist monuments through an “egalitarian” approach. While focusing on epigraphy, they suggested two major concepts: (1) that the generosity of the “commoner” helped spur South Asian Buddhism’s major artistic switch from working with impermanent materials such as wood and bamboo into more permanent and structurally reliant stones (Dehejia 1992, p. 35) and (2) that “patronage [was] a deliberate act of choice [that] can be seen when a community decides to donate wealth and labor towards the building of a monument which encapsulates its religious beliefs and social values [and] where the patron is not a single person but a recognizable group” (Thapar 1992, p. 19). It should be noted that most donative records from the Common Era describe the practice of patronage as some kind of permanent endowment, such as relating to interest-earning assets like land, but such information is scarce Before the Common Era. The only hint of the financial practices of these communities relates to their consistent use of the Sanskrit verb $\sqrt{dā}$, meaning “to give.” Historically in South Asia, the practice of *dāna*, meaning something like “a gift” and/or “the act of charity” itself dates to the Vedic period and implies some kind of financial or, at the very least, asset-transacting relationship between patrons and ritual actors (Findly 2003; Gonda 1965; Heesterman 1985). It seems, then, that within this context, the financial practices of early South Asian Buddhists were not altogether different in function than gifts given to priests as payments for rituals or sacrifices, although Thapar has discussed the subtleties of how this practice changed through urbanization (Thapar 2000, pp. 521–22).

Further, such acts were public declarations of belief (Thapar 1992, p. 25) involving groups or even mixed groups of monks, nuns, self-identifying laity, merchants, and others throughout society. Although Dehejia and Thapar’s ideas have framed the discussion on early Buddhist patronage since 1992, scarcely have scholars returned to or challenged what was originally presented. Even more surprising, neither Dehejia nor Thapar referred to or examined the most obvious evidence in support of their arguments. The work done in this paper is simultaneously both an assessment of their argument as it pertains to a specific, obvious collection of epigraphs that were ignored and is also a recalibration of the overarching sentiments.⁶ Put simply, I seek to begin telling the story of the corporate bodies of people whose joint donations are evidence of the collaborative nature of early Buddhism in some of the earliest material sources available for study. I primarily rely upon reliquary inscriptions from Piprahwa, Bhattiprolu, and Sanchi while reinforcing these with some of Aśoka’s inscriptions and related inscriptions known from early Sri Lanka. I conclude by emphasizing the nature of monastics *vis-à-vis* non-monastics with regard to the examined corporate bodies and identify several historical trends present within the accumulated data. Such observations about monastic Buddhists mark a stark contrast to the (in)famous—and perhaps blatantly misleading—literary tradition which paints the Buddhist path of enlightenment as solitary for many (Clarke 2014) or, at the very least, socially restrictive.

2. Corporations

Before examining the epigraphic evidence in detail and exploring their basis as perhaps the first major inkling of corporations taking a foothold in early Buddhist social structures throughout South Asia, it is worthwhile to consider the primary word I am translating into English as “corporate body”:

⁶ It should be noted that some recent work on Indian Buddhist epigraphy at Sanchi has questioned the “egalitarian nature” of the inscriptional corpus (Milligan 2016). The argument observes that the epigraphic corpus, despite being an interesting representative sample from all levels of society, probably still reflects wealthy elite at some level, even from within the institutionalized *saṃgha*. For the sake of the current paper, it does not matter whether the corporate body was “elite” or not but rather that it was, in fact, a corporation of collected individuals.

goṭhi (Skt. *goṣṭhī*). A *goṣṭha* was originally an abode for cattle, perhaps something like a grazing ground or a stable/pen since the combination of *go* (=“cow”) plus *-stha* from $\sqrt{sthā}$ (=“to stand”) may equal something literal such as “a stand for a cow.”⁷ In terms of religious usage, a *goṣṭhīśrāddha* was one of twelve types of ancestral offerings and had prominence at least during the time of Manu in the first few centuries CE if not earlier (Olivelle 2005, p. 267). The Sātavāhana period saw the term *goṣṭhī* expand its meaning semantically to include urban administrative units in addition to its classical association with trade guilds (Ray 1989, p. 449). Looking even further through time, in medieval royal courts, and perhaps as early as the Gupta dynasty, a *goṣṭhī* was a key institution which linked social circles whereby it perhaps functioned as a type of cosmopolitan “salon”⁸ (Ali 2004, p. 65) but also retained the dual meaning of referring to male corporations whose individuals, called *dharmasthānagoṣṭhika*-s, were committee members who managed temple and monastery affairs (Sircar 1966, p. 94). More directly, a *goṣṭhī* was thus summarized by D. C. Sircar in his epigraphic glossary as “an assembly; a corporate body” (Sircar 1966, p. 118).

Given this brief lexicographic survey, we can arrive at the conclusion that a *goṣṭhī* was some kind of group or clan possessing some sort of power, probably social and economic at its heart (Chakrabarti 1995, p. 200). We see this in the early Buddhist inscriptions also, as at Sanchi during the 1st c. BCE we have four inscriptions utilizing the word *goṭhi* in the same manner as at Bhattiprolu, a major reliquary *stūpa* site from Andhra discussed below. The three Sanchi donative inscriptions clearly state *bodhagoṭhiyā dhamavaḍhananā dānaṃ* (=“a gift of the Bodha *goṭhi* from Dhamavaḍhana.”)⁹ We know that the *goṭhiyā* compound is in the genitive and therefore the maker of the gift but what can we make of *dhamavaḍhananā*? As is typical in the Sanchi inscriptions, this word is in the ablative singular (=“from [a place called] *dhamavaḍhana*”) to designate the locality of the donor(s). While *Dharmavaḍhana* may, in fact, be a real place (it is mentioned in Vālmīki’s *Rāmāyaṇa* 2.71.10), in a religious context the word may be translated as “that place which increases dharma.” It would therefore make sense that a corporate body made up of monastics and laity (*bauddha-goṣṭhī*) from somewhere pious in their Buddhist devotion came to the great *stūpa* at Sanchi and made gifts. However, gifts from what money? Perhaps, if we are to believe the Bhattiprolu inscriptions below, the corporate body was a type of management committee in charge of pooled financial resources. The same term occurs in the same context again at Sanchi in reference to what appears to be a family named the Barulamisa,¹⁰ at Amaravati¹¹ in perhaps the 1st c. CE, and in Sri Lanka (as *goṭa*) in perhaps the 2nd c. BCE.¹² Therefore, we may conclude that these special types of corporate bodies (*goṭhi*-s) were consequential for the funding and sociality of early Buddhist groups throughout South Asia.

To historicize the development of corporations in early Buddhism, we may also take note of the idea of the “corporation” in ancient Sri Lanka. The concept of the *goṭhi* (Skt. *goṣṭhī*) is attested to in a single inscription from Sri Lanka as the Old Sinhalese Prakrit word *goṭa* from about the early 1st c. BCE and refers to a cave gifted by an *upaśika* (=“female lay devotee”) named Cita, wife of a Gopala,

⁷ Apparently, in some modern vernaculars a *goṣṭha* is contrasted with a *māṭha*, or “meadow,” which may indicate the sense of direct presence or place (Sarkar [1928] 1985, p. 7). However, beyond Sarkar’s unsourced reference, I am unable to identify to which “vernaculars” he is referring.

⁸ *Goṣṭhī*-s appear also in the *Kāmasūtra* as such, see 14.34–36.

⁹ All non-Aśokan edict epigraphic editions are from Tsukamoto’s catalogue (Tsukamoto 1996). However, this catalogue does not adequately connect each inscription with the associated reliquary from the site. For this, I have presented Tsukamoto’s editions in the order they are presented in the *Uṭṭānkita Sanskrit Vidyā Aranya Epigraphs* volume 2 (Krishnan 1989), henceforth referred to as the USVA. It should be noted that the USVA’s edition does not directly correspond to what Tsukamoto lists. Tsukamoto appears to favor the older editions of Lüders (1912), which tend to make more sense than what is the USVA, which is largely not translated completely. The translations in the USVA are summaries only and are slightly misleading and incoherent when compared to the text. In Tsukamoto, these inscriptions are numbered as 82, 83, and 84 which are identical.

¹⁰ Tsukamoto no. 164.

¹¹ Tsukamoto no. 212.

¹² There the inscription (Paranavitana 1970) reads: L1 *goṭakaboḥijiyāna parumakaḡopalaha bariya upaśika citaya leṇe śagaśa* and may be translated as “A cave [to] the *saṃgha*, [a gift] of the female lay member Cita, wife of Gopala, and head of the Kabojiya corporate body.” It is numbered by Paranavitana as #990. Translation is mine.

named the chief (*parumaka*, Skt. *pramukha*) of something called a *goṭakabojhiya*. It is unclear what a Kabojhiya is exactly but it is likely a family name. Thus, the “corporation” at work in this inscription is not made up of a vast array of members from miscellaneous families and groups but rather a single, individual family.¹³ Although joint family donations do appear in Sri Lanka, the type of corporation associated with the word *goṣṭhī* appears to be rare there, if not entirely supplanted by another kind of corporation that might have either taken its place or been the result of corporate evolution.

The word *pūga*¹⁴ for corporation in Old Sinhalese Prakrit inscriptions is more common and likely more descriptive because of its broad associations. Where *goṣṭhī* refers to a group centered around something specific, perhaps a village’s cow-rearing or even gossiping (in medieval times) at salon-esque social venues, *pūga*, in its simplest form, can mean “assemblage,” relating to the Sanskritic *puñja*, a heap of something pressed together. However, the term is much more legally specific in the Sanskrit Dharmaśāstric tradition. The *Arthaśāstra* (1.13.2), *Kātyāyana Smṛti* (225; 678), and even the later *Vyavahāramayūkha* of *Nilakanṭha* (132) contextualize *pūga* as some kind of formal association of commercial agents. The *Yājñavalkya Dharmaśāstra* (2.30) even goes as far to allow *pūga*-s judicial functions and power below the royal court as allowed by the king (Olivelle 2015, p. 256). Although these legal texts are later than our inscriptions from Sri Lanka, we can see not only the high esteem for *pūga*-s but that they represent a kind of logical maturation of the corporate entity in South Asia centered around what we might find to be something akin to modern corporate bureaucracy. Take, for instance, an inscription from perhaps the 1st c. CE in Sri Lanka:

Anuradhapura: Avukana #1152¹⁵

(1st c. CE?)

L1 *pukana leṇe paḍagamadata jeṭha tipati dina*

L2 *pusamahatavare*

“On the day when Pusa was president [of the corporation], a cave [and] three shares [of revenue] were gifted [by] the corporation, which has as its alderman a man named Data Paḍagama.”

This oddly specific donative inscription seems to reveal that a Buddhist *pūga*, or generic corporate body, is intimately fastened with the vested finances of that corporate body and requires an increasing number of administrators to manage. Adding to the recognition (in texts) of *pūga*-s as types of legal corporations with genuine power, the epigraphic evidence mustered below outlines a historical trajectory from Aśoka onwards of groups of people functioning as a single, corporate entity to achieve common goals (namely, to sponsor the enshrinement of relics).

3. Aśoka’s Patronage

One of the most curious features of the Aśoka legend—which has not, to my knowledge, been previously discussed at any length—is the discrepancy between Aśoka’s (later) textual biography and the information, or, rather, lack of information, he generously contributes in his own royal inscriptions. Aśoka’s legendary patronage may turn out to be just that—a legend—as his own inscriptions are limited in their reference to the most important material objects in all of Buddhism. Aśoka’s role in establishing the Buddha’s relics for public worship would have been, like all his other imperial achievements, worthy of the same grandiose proclamations found elsewhere. What we find in the inscriptions is something altogether different and the idea of constructing *stūpa*-s to house relics is missing.

¹³ This is much more akin to the *goṭhi*-s from places like Sanchi in India referring either to the monastic kin group centered on a local luminary named Gotiputa or the *goṭhi* group called the Barulamisas, mentioned above.

¹⁴ *Pūga* is also used frequently in the Pāli canon, especially the *vinaya*. Some references are: Vin II.109, 212; IV.30, 78, 226, 252; M III.48; A III.300.

¹⁵ Edition for all Sri Lanka epigraphs comes from Paranavitana (1970). Translations are my own.

The main item of contention here is the legendary establishment of 84,000 *stūpa*-s across the Indian subcontinent after opening the original *stūpa*-s to obtain and further distribute the Buddha's corporeal remains, presumably to not only spread Buddhism as a faith but also to further Aśoka's own imperial agenda of uniting a vast territory under a benevolent—at least in his eyes—ideology. We find a standard version of the tale in the Sanskrit *Aśokāvadāna*, dating from probably around the 2nd c. CE (Strong 1983). The text is obviously a legendary account of the famous king's life and therefore cannot be taken as a completely faithful reflection of events that occurred four hundred years previously. However, it is worth comparing its version of the story of the Buddha's relics with Aśoka's own words. The relevant section from the *Aśokāvadāna* reads:

*tato rājā bhagavaccharīradhātumī vistariṣyāmīti caturaṅgeṇa balakāyena gatvājātaśatrupratiṣṭhāpitam
dronastūpamutpātya śarīradhātum gṛhītavān/yatra uddhāraṇam ca vistareṇa kṛtoā dhātupratyamśam
dattvā stūpam pratyasthāpayat/evam dvitīyam stūpam vistareṇa/bhaktimato yāvāt saptadronād
grahāya stūpāṃśca pratiṣṭhāpya rāmagrāmaṃ gataḥ/*

Aśokāvadāna 52

“Then King Aśoka, intending to distribute far and wide the bodily relics of the Blessed One, went together with a fourfold army to the Droṇa *stūpa* that Ajātaśatru had built. He broke it open, took out all the relics, and putting back a portion of them, set up a new *stūpa*. He did the same with the second Droṇa *stūpa* and so on up to the seventh one, removing the relics from each of them and then setting up new *stūpas* as tokens of his devotion.”¹⁶

*yāvad rājā caturaśītikaraṇḍasahasraṃ kārayitvā sauvarṇarūpyasphaṭikavaidūryamayāṇām teṣu
dhātavaḥ prakṣiptāḥ/evam vistareṇa caturaśītikumbhasahasraṃ/*

Aśokāvadāna 53

*paṭṭasahasraṃ ca yakṣāṇām haste dattvā visarjitam/āsamudrāyām pṛthivyām hinotkrṣṭamadyameṣu
nagareṣu yatra koṭīḥ paripūryate tatra dharmarājikā pratiṣṭhāpayitavyā/*

Aśokāvadāna 53

“Then Aśoka had eighty-four thousand boxes made of gold, silver, cat's eye, and crystal, and in them were placed the relics. Also, eighty-four thousand urns and eighty-four thousand inscription plates were prepared. All of this was given to the yakṣas for distribution in the (eighty-four thousand) dharmarājikās [= *stūpa*-s] he ordered built throughout the earth as far as the surrounding ocean, in the small, great and middle-sized towns, wherever there was a (population of) one hundred thousand (persons).”

It would not be a stretch to say that this version of the story—or one like it—is not only the popular image of Aśokan patronage but also of Buddhist patronage more broadly. The trope, established within the text, runs that the devout king wishes to repair or ensure his karmic future and therefore unilaterally takes matters into his own hands by committing to a virtuous patronage task, like building 84,000 *stūpa*-s to allow the mass worship of the Buddha's relics. Indeed, for the character of Aśoka in the *Aśokāvadāna*, the enormous task of establishing 84,000 *stūpa*-s is meant to make up for his past indiscretions. However, even though the Aśoka known from the edicts attributed to the real king Aśoka Maurya is also remorseful for killing thousands of Kaliṅgas as he discussed in the 13th Major Rock Edict, his follow-up action is different from the textual account.

The Nigāli Sāgar Minor Pillar Edict in the Kapilavastu district in modern day Nepal records Aśoka's first known engagement with a *stūpa*—but the *stūpa* is, unfortunately, not one attributed to Śākyamuni Buddha:

¹⁶ Translation comes from Strong's book (Strong 1983, p. 219).

Nigāli Sāgar Minor Pillar Edict of Aśoka
(Mid 3rd c. BCE)¹⁷

L1 *devānaṃpiyena piyadasina lājina codasavasā[bhisi]tena*

L2 *budhasa konākamanasa thube dutiyaṃ vaḍhite*

L3 *[vīsativa]sabhisitena ca atana āgāca mahīyite*

L4 *[silāthabhe ca usa]pāpīte [//]*

“When King Piyadasin, beloved of the gods, was consecrated for this 14th regnal year he enlarged the *stūpa* of the Buddha Konākamana to be double [in size] and during his 20th regnal year [he] came here to pay reverence and construct a stone pillar.”

Beyond the fact that Aśoka is paying reverence (*mahīyite*), the key part of the inscription for our argument rests in an analysis of the past participle *vaḍhite* in the grammatical nominative singular. Aśoka—or at least whoever was his official state composer—was quite fond of this word as it appears in several of his edicts (nine or more times), usually meaning roughly the same thing: “increased.” Therefore, we can say that, at the very least, Aśoka knew precisely what he was saying when he deployed this word. Since it is formed in the causative, we also get a sense of the “heavy hand” of Aśoka himself as the one behind the scenes initiating the task via his power. Some of the shades of meaning for this formation of $\sqrt{vṛdh}$ beyond “increased” might be “carved,” “fashioned,” “built,” “augmented,” or even “strengthened.” Each of these seems to fit the context rather well. Moreover, the inscription is also salient in that *vaḍhite* is only referring to the structure of the *thuba* (= *stūpa*) and not anything that is inside of it. The adjective *dutiyaṃ* (“double [in size]”) also implies a structural augmentation and does not coincide with any type of relic “splitting” that may be derived from taking $\sqrt{vṛdh}$ in the sense of *vardhayati* (“to divide”), especially since the relics, if we are to believe the legendary textual accounts, were divided not twice (*dutiyaṃ*) but many more times. In both of Aśoka’s confessed visits to the site Aśoka does not mention relics or any objects contained therein, thus establishing the conundrum outlined above. If Aśoka had any reason at all to “split” open a holy Buddha-*stūpa* (for the second time, = *dutiyaṃ*?), it must have been an easily justifiable reason—a reason, perhaps, that would have been worth mentioning in his very public document that was, by his own words, supposed to be read aloud to his subjects.

The only other tangentially related Aśokan writing, from Lumbini, has been interpreted and translated as completely and deliberately ignoring the idea of a relic. That inscription may be read as:

Rummindei Minor Pillar Edict of Aśoka
(Mid 3rd c. BCE)

L1 *devānaṃpiyena piyadasina lājina vīsativasābhisitena*

L2 *atana āgāca mahīyite [//] hida budhe jāte sakyamunī ti*

L3 *silāvigaḍabhīcā kālāpita silāthabhe ca usapāpīte [//]*

L4 *hita bhagavaṃ jāte ti lumṇinīgāme ubalike kaṭe*

L5 *aṭṭhabhāgiye ca [//]*

“When King Piyadasin, beloved of the gods, was consecrated for his 20th regnal year he himself [came] to pay reverence [here]. [The King] had [both] a stone railing and stone pillar set up [because] it is said that ‘the Buddha was born here.’ Since it is known that ‘the Lord was born here,’ [the King] has made the village of Lummini tax-exempt and made it [have] a share of the eight.”

¹⁷ Editions to the Aśokan edicts come from Falk (2006).

From this pair of Aśokan edicts we get a strong sense that by his 20th regnal year, Aśoka's faith was not only cemented into his persona, but, furthermore, he felt obligated as a powerful king of a vast territory to carry out special tasks. At Kapilavastu, during his 20th year he returned to the site to construct a stone pillar (seemingly ignoring the previously enhanced *stūpa*'s base) as per the aforementioned inscription and then traveled to Lumbini to construct more monuments in permanent stone as presented in the edict there. Although the word *silāvigaḍabhī(cā?)* is anything but certain, at the very least scholars may all agree that it was a stone (=silā) something, whether it was a railing (*vedikā*) (Falk 2006, 2012, 2017), a wall (Fleet 1908; Norman 1994), an artificial bathing pond¹⁸ (Deeg 2003), or perhaps something like a sacred marker stone being in its natural condition (Tsukamoto 2006). While the arguments for *silāvigaḍabhī(cā?)* being either a railing enclosing something sacred or a "stone being in its natural condition" are intriguing, for the sake of simplicity and consistency with what is found at most other post-Mauryan *stūpa* sites we may envision the concept of a *vedikā*—a stone, fenced enclosure which encircles something which could be a (bodhi?) tree, a *stūpa*, or even a smaller portion of the *stūpa* like a sunshade (*chattra*). Aśoka simply does not mention erecting a *stūpa* or even enlarging an existing *stūpa* as he did at Nigāli Sāgar. It is very clear, then, that within this context that this Lumbini, the place where Aśoka believed to be the actual birthplace of the Buddha, was completely devoid of bodily relics to be worshipped. Provocatively, Aśoka may have tried to remedy that problem.

Examining the compound *aṭhabhāgiye* offers some clues. Literally, we have "that which is of/from/connected to shares (*bhāgiya* = Skt. *bhāgika*) of eight (*aṭha* = Skt. *āṣṭa*)."¹⁹ *Bhāgiya* may easily be rendered, as it has by most scholars previously, as "[a village] paying one eighth of the produce [instead of the usual rate of one sixth or so]" (Sircar 1966, p. 30) since the word *bhāga* refers to the king's grain share. Such an interpretation proves reasonable especially given that the previous word *ubalika* (Skt. *udbalika*) refers to a type of tax owed to the sovereign. *Bali* also seems to have its origin as the name of an offering to a deity, which also makes sense given that the pious Aśoka would have wanted the people to offer *bali* to the Buddha rather than to him. However, since the Rummindei pillar inscription comes within a Buddhist context, we are forced to consider a Buddhistic meaning for *bhāgiya* since it could be redundant for Aśoka to render Lumbini as a village tax-free as well as having a discounted land revenue (*bhāgiya*) share he would normally be rightfully owed as well. Harry Falk recently suggested that we should "rid our mind from preconceived notions [since] we don't know if there was a *stūpa* at Lumbinī in the time of Aśoka" and if *aṭhabhāgiya* actually did refer to a second type of tax on the "tiny village in the Terai" then that would make Aśoka a rather strange ruler since he would be essentially waiving most of his kingly rights to the village (Falk 2012, pp. 205–6). Falk found a solution stemming from a new inscription found at Kanaganahalli in Karnataka. A labeling inscription refers to a now vanished relief scene on a *stūpa vedikā*: L1 *rāmagānilo aṭhabhāgathubho upari* = "Above (you see) the *stūpa* of Rāmagrāma (containing) one-eighth part."¹⁹ It is very likely that the reference here is to some scene that is an artistic rendering of the *Dīgha Nikāya*'s version of the relic division after the Buddha's demise. As Falk has noted, Lumbini is curiously absent from the textual list, implying that Lumbini had not (yet) received a portion of the relics (Falk 2012, pp. 206–7). Aśoka, then, was simply remedying the situation. From Lumbini, a now-lost reliquary and its contents were once excavated from a Mauryan-era square pedestal that may have once been encircled by a *silāvigaḍabhī*, or a stone enclosure (*vedikā*) that demarcated something sacred (Falk 2012, pp. 208–11). Aśoka's redundancy of manipulating two different types of "taxes" on a small village is now explained away, and we get a glimpse of his role as instigator of the 84,000 *stūpa*-s erected across South Asia.

¹⁸ This interesting suggestion takes the very difficult *vigaḍa* as deriving from the root *vi+√gāh* into *vigaḍha* meaning "to take a bath, dive into, enter" (Deeg 2003, p. 20). However, Falk has refuted such an interpretation, explaining that this interpretation violates "several sound laws" and confuses the archaeological evidence (Falk 2012, p. 216).

¹⁹ Edition and translation come from Falk (2012, p. 206).

To the contrary, in Sri Lanka, all the early inscriptions that refer to *bhāgiya* (and its various forms) do not refer to ashes or other types of bodily relics as we might expect given the prevalence and adherence to the Pāli canon which contains stories resembling the ones presented briefly at the beginning of this paper from the *Dīgha Nikāya*. Instead, they simply mean land-revenue shares as known from their material and patronage contexts (Paranavitana 1970). We may then come back to the underlying problem: is Aśoka the exception rather than the rule? If we take his donative inscriptions at Nigāli Sāgar and Lumbini at face value, Aśoka himself would have answered the question affirmatively in that he thought he was starting something new and setting up a standard to be emulated. In this way, he was exceptional—but his patronage model may not have been as prevalent across South Asia as he might have liked as the evidence from the reliquaries themselves depicts an altogether different kind of demographic interested in setting up these important objects for worship. Even if Falk is correct in associating *aṭṭhabhāgiya* as referring to the eight shares of relics deposited throughout the countryside—and we have no reason to doubt this interpretation—Aśoka does not concede to even constructing a special structure to house them beyond perhaps a strange *silāvigaḍabhī*, nor does he ever discuss spreading them around the countryside in any number, let alone 84,000 deposits. This critique of Aśoka should not undermine his undoubted influence for the rooting of the Buddhist institution throughout South Asia. Rather, the goal here is to make the actual evidence for Aśoka’s royal patronage translucent; that is, to diffuse Aśoka’s influence in the category he is perhaps most famous for (as in stories like that found in the *Aśokāvadāna*) and permit other patrons’ generosity and efforts to visibly shine forth.

4. Piprahwa: The First Corporate Gift

We may begin our examination of corporate-style patronage in early South Asian Buddhism with perhaps the single most famous and controversial Buddhist epigraph. Discovered in January of 1898 by local English Landlord of the Birdpur Estate named William Peppé, Piprahwa is a *stūpa* site on the Indian side of the border (Uttar Pradesh) between India and Nepal and dates to perhaps the early 2nd century BCE. During his excavation, Peppé discovered many important Buddhist antiquities. The one most pertinent to our historical survey is a nearly 700 kg sandstone box containing a soapstone reliquary, crystal bowl, and four soapstone vases, among of which is the inscribed vase that may be our earliest historical reference to the Buddha (Falk 2017; Allen 2008, 2012; Härtel 2000; Peppé 1898). Although the exact history of these artifacts is obscure, Falk (2017, p. 67) provocatively argued recently that the crystal reliquary—and not the inscribed soapstone vase—are perhaps Aśokan (3rd c. BCE) and therefore earlier than the Piprahwa *stūpa* which enshrined it.

At Lumbini, the Aśokan edict claims the King brought relic bones of the Buddha to the site and installed something called a *silāvigaḍabhī(cā?)*, which was made of stone. Further, the coffer at Piprahwa was also made of the same type of sandstone, quarried near Kaushambi, used by Aśoka for his pillars. Falk notes that the coffer itself has no Indic predecessor and only smaller successors. Given that the star-shaped flowers of some of the jewels is extremely like those associated with the Indo-Greek Kings in the Ai-Khanum treasury, and that the cost of constructing these items must have been extraordinarily expensive, it does seem likely that there was a wealthy royal benefactor, which agrees with the Aśokan legend (Falk 2017). Although this line of thought is only speculation, the timeline appears consistent logical historically given that the Piprahwa *stūpa* itself is younger than the Mauryas and has a first phase of construction dated to approximately the end of the 3rd c. BCE or perhaps the early 2nd c. BCE. For whatever reason—perhaps legitimation or pure piety—Falk’s timeline suggests that a Śākya family seemed to have removed Aśoka’s crystal reliquary at Lumbini and transported it 15 km to Piprahwa and enshrined it within the *stūpa* there. During this enshrinement, they probably constructed the box and the vase and placed the crystal reliquary within it. Before enclosing the vase—and thus the Buddha’s remains—within the sandstone box and finally inside the large brick *stūpa*, the family inscribed it with their words.

Falk (2006) has intimately reconsidered the epigraph and deemed it genuine after some years of controversy as to whether it may have been a forgery. His corrected edition, with my own translation, reads:

Piprahwa Vase Inscription
(3rd/2nd c. BCE?)

L1²⁰ *sukitibhatinaṃ sabhagiṇikanaṃ saputadalanāṃ*

L2 *iyaṃ salilanidhane budhase bhagavate sakiyaṇaṃ*

“This enshrinement of the corporal remains of the Lord Buddha of the Śākya clan [is the gift] of the very famous Śākya brethren concurrently with their sisters, and sons’ wives.”

The word *nidhāne* functions as the subject albeit without a verb and has nearly always been understood to mean the vessel itself. Falk convincingly suggested its translation as “enshrinement” to better suit the original circumstances of the vessel as an object that itself was worshipped, perhaps in the open-air, and not as contained within a burial mound (*stūpa*) or larger shrine (Falk 2006, p. 59). The Prakrit inscription is somewhat odd because it does not contain a noun or verb which corresponds to typical donative terminologies which frequently describe such objects as either a “gift” (*dānaṃ*), a “construction” (*kārita*), “that which was [caused to be] established” (*pratiṣṭhāpita*), or perhaps even the infrequently occurring “presented” (*niryāta*). Rather, the inscription only *implies* one of these verbs. It is possible that the vessel and its inscription is old enough to date to a time prior to a common reliquary formula being in use; however, Aśoka himself is not foreign to these verbs to connote the “establishment” of a physical object so the absence here is fascinating since he so frequently used all of these words or word derived from the same roots (for example, *dānaṃ* / $\sqrt{dā}$ appears in RE 5, 8, 9, 11, 12; PE 4, 7, Queen’s, Barābar, *kārita* / \sqrt{kr} (Nigālī Sāgar, Delhi-Toprā), etc.

Looking closer, we have perhaps the first usage of the important *sa-* designation to indicate a joint donation. The inscription itself yields *sabhagiṇikanaṃ* (=“with [their] sisters”) and *saputadalanāṃ* (=“with [their] sons’ wives”), which are in support of the chief benefactors who are described as the *sakiyaṇaṃ sukutibhatinaṃ* (=“the famous brothers who are Śākya”). There is an admittedly difficult translation problem in that *sakiyaṇaṃ* undoubtedly qualifies *sukitibhatinaṃ*. However, according to legend, we also know that the Buddha himself was of the Śākya clan, so we may tentatively take extend the association to the grammatically singular *budhase bhagavate* which does not agree in number with the genitive plurals that we find in the rest of the inscription.

The other curiosity pertaining to my argument is the reliquary’s reference to those who are doing the establishing, namely the famous Śākya brethren along with their sisters, sons, and wives (*sukitibhatinaṃ sabhagiṇikanaṃ saputadalanāṃ*). The first observation we must make is something surface-level: these words all grammatically qualify *sakiyaṇaṃ*, meaning they are members of the Śākya clan specifically. In the genitive plural, the interpretation of *sabhagiṇikanaṃ saputadalanāṃ* hinges on *sukitibhatinaṃ*, which may be taken in several ways. First, it could be, as Lüders has attempted to read, a compound whereby *-bhatina** qualifies *sukiti-*, thus making it a genitive *tatpuruṣa* translated something like “the brothers of Sukiti.” Falk’s recent translation understands the compound in the same way. Both translations imply that *sukiti-*, which is very likely *sukīrti*²¹ in Sanskrit, is a proper noun, either a name unto itself which happens to mean “highly famous” or a referent to the obvious family relative, meaning the Buddha, who is, of course, very famous. However, a *karmadhāraya* compound is also possible and potentially improves the situation, thus taking *sukiti-* as an adjective qualifying the substantive *-bhatina** disassociates *sukiti-* with any kind of emphasis (such as a proper name or as

²⁰ Note that the inscription itself does not actually appear on two lines. Rather, the separation into two lines here is for the sake of presentation only. The original inscription encircles the vase, hence leading to some discussion after excavation as to how to exactly render the Prakrit original edition. Nearly all experts now agree with the edition presented here.

²¹ Sircar has speculated that it is perhaps “of the [brothers] Sukīrti and Bhakti.” However, Falk outright dismisses this rendering into Sanskrit.

referring to the Buddha) and thus actually redirects the grammatical emphasis on *-bhatina**, making the “brethren” the focus of the compound instead of the awkward “highly famous.” The brethren as the focus better concert with the second half of the descriptive genitive plurals which inclusively marshals together the entire Śākya clan. In the end, by shifting this singular, small piece of grammar we can highlight and account for the inclusivistic corporate body responsible for the enshrinement. As we shall see, further early *brāhmī* epigraphs from the reliquaries at Bhattiprolu display a remarkably similar sentiment albeit further in time, thus indicating a continuation of the corporate-style sponsorship.

5. Bhattiprolu: Corporate Bodies Aligned

Beyond Piprahwa, we see evidence of direct continuity in the enshrinement of reliquaries by corporate bodies that was previously only implied. At Bhattiprolu in the Guntur district of modern day Andhra Pradesh a large *stūpa* mound yielded several important artifacts relevant to the history of Buddhism. These were three inscribed receptacles containing relics as well as jewels, gold leaves, other precious objects such as coins, beads, pearls, etc., and one inscribed piece of crystal. Although we might once again be wary of the potential difference in dating between the excavated mound and the objects, based on some palaeographic assumptions and observations which are complex and need not be improved upon here we may assign a late 2nd c. or even early 1st c. BCE date to the inscribed objects. The editions of the inscriptions have remained largely the same since Bühler (1892) and Lüders (1912) examined them. In the modern era, Tsukamoto (1996, p. 290) has made some subtle improvements to our understandings of the sometimes-confusing grammatical characteristics. The *brāhmī akṣara*-s were likely the result of one major attempt at making innovations to the known Aśokan script to account for local Dravidian vernaculars (Falk 2014, p. 51).²²

Bhattiprolu’s inscriptions strongly highlight this importance as the inscriptions are not only early but of a slightly different nature than the donative inscriptions at Sanchi, Amaravati, or in Sri Lanka. Where the donative inscriptions at the *stūpa* sites were clearly meant to be read, or at least publicly observed, given their status as visible to the naked eye of visitors to these sites, the Bhattiprolu inscriptions were enshrined alongside the relics and therefore likely never intended to be read, much less understood. The fact that they articulate, with rather fine precision, the social details of the corporate bodies involved in their patronage is rather remarkable and of extreme importance to the historian of early Buddhism. We may begin with the first casket inscription:

Bhattiprolu Casket 1
(2nd/1st c. BCE?)

*L1 kurapituno kuramā[t]u ca kuraṣa capiva²³ kācamajusaṁ paṇati phāḷigaṣamugaṁ ca
budhasarirānaṁ nikhetu [/] banavaputaṣa kuraṣa ṣapitukaṣa majusa [/] utaro piḡahaputo kāṇṭṭho [//]*

“A quartz casket and a crystal box was arranged [for the] installation the corporeal relics of the Buddha by the father of Kura [named Banava], the mother of Kura, and Kura. The receptacle, [was the gift] of Kura concurrently with his father, Banava. Utara, the youngest son of Piḡahā [was also involved].”

The first casket bears a relatively short inscription and designates the primary importance of the site: to enshrine the corporeal remains of the Buddha himself. The words of the inscription are somewhat straightforward except for the final sentence which may only be estimated by context

²² Only a recently published gold ring (Raman and Mahadevan 2010) has suggested that there was any continuation at all this peculiar form of what is now called Tamil-brāhmī as even when compared against the other Tamil-brāhmī inscriptions from the Early Historic Period in India or Sri Lanka the script maintains some unusual variants. According to Salomon (1998), there are two primary deviations. These were the *-gha-*, *-ja-*, *-ma-*, *-la-*, and *-sa-* akṣara-s (Salomon 1998, p. 34) as well as the system of notation for the postconsonantal vowels *-a-* and *-ā-* (Salomon 1998, p. 35).

²³ It is important to note a minor detail but Bühler read *śiva[ṣa]* in place of *capiva kāca-*, a reading that many subsequent scholars have chosen to follow. However, Tsukamoto has corrected this reading.

alone. From the inscription, which is donative in nature, we are to understand just how precious the relics of the Buddha are from the donors' enshrinement in a series of receptacles made of precious stones like quartz and crystal. Grammatically noteworthy here is the usage of the infinitive *nikhetu* (Pa. *nikkhattum*) to imply not just a donation but an actual enshrinement as the Sanskrit verb *ni+√kṣip* literally means to "lay down," to "pour in," or even "to deposit" more directly. So, then, just who is doing the enshrinement? Unlike at Piprahwa, which is vague about the Śākya clan involved (referring to them as a relatively unidentifiable group of unknown number), here we get some details if not a lineage. The project was spearheaded by immediate family of someone named Kura. The donative inscription is also interestingly repetitive as the second sentence employs repetition to drive home the point that it was Kura and his family—and not anyone else—responsible for the endeavor. We may note the usage of the joint donation marker *sa-** in the second sentence which refers to Kura's father. The final section of this inscription, referring to a completely unknown individual named Utara, presumably connects a second sponsor—or even whole family again—to the installation of the relics by giving Utara a short but important genealogy to his mother, named Pigahā, and also by utilizing the rarely occurring superlative *kāñīṭha* (Skt. *kaniṣṭha*) to outright state that Utara was not a single child since he undoubtedly has other, older brothers who may or may not have also been involved in the sponsorship. Pigaha is not written with the long *-ā-* vowel to indicate probable gender; however, if we consider the phrase *piḡahaputa* to be a metonymic in the same style as those found at Sanchi (*gotiputa*, *koḍinaputa*, *kosikiputa*, *mogaliputa*, etc.) and those found in donations at most Sātavāhana cave sites like *vāsīṭhiputa* (at Ajanta), *kaṃcikaputa* (at Karle), and *vachīputa* (at Pitalkhora), etc., then Pigaha may, in fact, be the name of Utara's mother rather than his father. Furthermore, the name of one Utara's father is given below in the inscription for Casket 2 (Upoṣatha). I have translated the third sentence involving Utara with some flourish to hypothesize a tentative connection to Kura and his family by assuming that Utara (and his family?) were also involved in the enshrinement in some way. Between these three sentences, Bhattiprolu represents a distinct new turn in the enterprise of corporeal reliquary enshrinement in South Asia as we now are getting individual names of donors of the reliquaries for the first time—and these individual names are not alone. Rather, they are embedded within their larger corporate structure of the nuclear family who must work together to install the corporeal remains of the Buddha for worship.

The second Bhattiprolu casket contains many words and yields yet further evidence as to the importance of individual donor details since it is primarily a lengthy list of the members of the corporate body (*goṭhi*). It reads as follows:

Bhattiprolu Casket 2
(2nd/1st c. BCE?)

- L1 *goṭhi*
- L2 *hirañāvaghavā*
- L3 *v[u]gāḷako k[ā]laho*
- L4 *visako thorasisi*
- L5 *samaṇo odalo*
- L6 *apaka . . . + ṣamudo*
- L7 *anuga[h]o kuro*
- L8 *satugho potako [p]oto āḷinakā+*
- L9 *v[a]ruṇo piḡa[la]ko koṣako*
- L10 *suto pāpo kabherakh[o] [ghāḷe]ko*
- L11 *samaṇa[d]āṣo bharado*
- L12 *odālo thoratiso tiso*
- L13 *gilāṇo jambho*

L14 *putara ābo*

L15 *gālavata . . . (?) janako*

L16 *gosālakānaṃ kūro*

L17 *upoṣathaputo utaro*

L18 *kārahaputo [/]*

L19 *sama[nadā]ṣa[to hita] . . . a . . . budhaṣa sarirāni mahiyānukamṃā . . . [/]*

L20 *goṭhisamaṇo kubo [/]*

L21 *hiraṇakāraḡamaṇīputo būbo [/]*

L22 *ṣā goṭhi nigamaputānaṃ rāḡapāmukhā ṣā . . . ṣa puto khubirako rāḡā sthagoṭhiyā pāmukho [/] teṣaṃ aṃnaṃ majus[aṃ] phāliḡaṣamuḡo ca pāsāṇaṣamuḡo ca [/]*

L23 *samaṇo caḡha[nā]puto utaro ārāmu taravet[i] [//]*

“A corporate body consisting of members hereby named:

Hiraṇavaghavā, Vugāḡaka, Kāḡaha, Visaka, Thorasisi, Samaṇa, Odala, Apaka[ra?], Ṣamuda, Anugaha, Kura, Satugha, Potaka, Pota, Āḡinaka, Varuṇa Piḡalaka, Koṣaka, Suta, Pāpa, Kabherakha, Ghāḡeka, Samaṇadāṣa, Bharada, Odāla, Thoratisa, Tisa, Gilāṇa, Jaṃbha, Putara, Āba, Gālavata, Janaka, Kūra of the Gosālakānas, Utara who is the son of Upoṣatha, [and] one who is the son of Kāraha.

The relics of the Budha . . . [were installed by?] Samaṇadāṣa . . . [?]

The ascetic (monastic?) corporate body consisted of Kuba (and others) while the treasurer [of the whole operation] was Būba, the son of a village-chief.

[Each] corporate body, namely the one whose members consisted of residents of a small market village, as well as the Lion (=monastic?) guild, had the king Khubiraka as its chief. The casket, crystal box, and stone box were their [patronage].

The ascetic Utara, son of Caghaṇā, presented a grove [for the objects].”

Analyzing the list of committee members is simple given that all the personal names are in the grammatical nominative singular. However, three of those are also listed alongside their familial identifiers, namely Kūra of the Gosālakānas, Utara, the son of Upoṣatha, and one man listed only as being the son of someone named Kāraha. Kūra of the Gosālakānas is a different member than Kura who is the son of Banava listed in Casket 1 and presumably marked here as well. The Gosālakānas were probably a particularly famous clan or, perhaps, a group of persons associated with cows since the *goṣāla* means, literally, a “cow stall.” It may be that cow-tending is this family’s occupation or that this refers to a group, potentially a group of ascetics, who occupy places like cow pens. Either way, Kūra might be a representative official of the group or is someone of prominence and thus deserves further description compared to the others. Utara may be the Utara, son of Piḡahā (?), known from Casket 1 who also seems to have involved his family in the sponsorship of Buddha-relics.

Unfortunately, L19 after the corporate body member list is mangled, although we can decode that the purpose of this casket was also to enshrine or probably worship the corporeal relics of the Buddha. It is possible that *mahiyānukamṃā** is some form derived from the common *mahīyite* (=“to pay homage”) found in the Aśokan inscriptions and elsewhere since *mahīkr** is a known formation probably meaning something “to make reverential,” especially since *mahīyā* is an attested feminine noun meaning “happiness.” Alternatively, an extended meaning might have something to do with the earth, i.e., the ground itself since *mahī* as a feminine noun refers to the earth as a substance. Either context makes sense and the \sqrt{kr} derived substantive as the second member of the compound may loosely fit into a multitude of meanings.

L20 contains the beginnings of what appears to be a second corporate body, explained as a *goṭhi* of *samaṇa*-s, or “ascetics” (Skt. *śramaṇa*). From the thousands of other inscriptions found throughout

South Asia during the pre-BCE period of Buddhism we also know that *samaṇa* may also be used as a personal name. However, here it likely refers to a type of collective body consisting of a man named Kuba. L21 contains the key phrase *hiraṇakāragāmaṇīputa* as an adjective for Būba. Būba likely is the cog in the machine for the enterprise of enshrinement as he is not only a type of social elite, being that he is the son of a village chief (= *gāmaṇī-puta*) but also in that he is a *hiraṇakāra*. *Hiraṇya* is, of course, gold and a *hiraṇyakāra* is a “maker of gold,” or a “goldsmith” more generally. Lüders (1912) has translated this as “treasurer,” which is somewhat speculative. In Sri Lanka, from probably the late 2nd c. BCE onwards there is a known member of Buddhist society described as a “treasurer” (= *baḍagarika/baḍakari* etc. in Old Sinhalese Prakrit, derived from the Sanskrit *bhāṇḍa*, meaning “wares”), while in India a *hiraṇyasāmudāyika* is a collector of tax in cash (Sircar 1966, p. 37) and a *hairaṇyaka* (Sircar 1966, p. 125) is certainly someone who works directly with gold, probably as a minter. Between these meanings and contexts, we may infer that Būba is at the crux of the whole enterprise since he either is the actual craftsman/minter or the collector/manager of funds. Given that we have a multiplicity of corporate bodies involved in the actuation of the reliquary enterprise, I opt for Būba’s occupation to be something closer to a “treasurer” since someone trust must have been in charge of keeping the accounts since the complexity of the whole endeavor involved dozens of persons of varying statuses (and knowledge of record-keeping) as well as dozens of persons who likely did not live in the same locality and may or may not have had any direct engagement with one another. I therefore view Būba as a type of manager for the enterprise pertaining to the sponsoring of the Bhattiprolu caskets.

We see in L22 that the primary agent for the whole process was a king (perhaps a local chieftain?) named Khubiraka. It is unclear if the Kabherakha from L10 in the committee member listing is the same individual but whether it was does not matter insofar as we have *rāja* Khubiraka’s importance deliberately laid out for us in the inscription. The corporate body from the village (= *ṣā goṭhi nigamaṇputa*) had Khubiraka as its *pāmukha*—that is, their “chief.” The term *parumaka* in its various forms is extremely well attested to by the hundreds in early pre-BCE Sri Lanka and even within the Pāli canon a *pāmokkha* is defined as a leader (A II 168). In Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, a *prāmukhya* is similarly implied to be a chief while the Sanskrit *pramukha* is “one who is at the head,” or “foremost,” suggesting that a *pramukha* therefore is the leader of a committee, which is, of course, in this case, the corporate body dealing with the enshrinement of the Buddha’s relics. A second *goṭhi* qualified as *sīha** (= “lion”) also had the king as its *pramukha*. Both are linked to the caskets through the genitive plural pronoun *teṣaṃ*, which literally makes the caskets (*majusa*, *phāliḡaṣamuga*, and *pāsāṇasamuga*) “of them,” meaning the “of the corporate bodies.” The meaning of the *sīhagoṭhi* is unclear but we may speculate that it is an endearing term for the *samaṇagoṭhi* mentioned in L20. Finally, L23 clearly illustrates that one of the *samaṇa(sīha?)goṭhi* members named Utara presented (*taraveti* in the causative from $\sqrt{tṛ}$) an *ārāma*, meaning a “grove” or “park.” *Ārāma* in many Buddhist texts may refer to a monastery but here could refer directly to the earth/land/area where the reliquaries themselves were to be enshrined. That a *samaṇa*, who may or may not be the Utara mentioned above as a member of the *goṭhi*-s, was responsible for this part of the project may not be a surprise given that the monastics, as a corporate body themselves, had control of the relics in the first place.

The last of the caskets contains more of the same types of information already provided as the names of some of the village corporate body are now presented. It is unclear if this is yet another group involved in the project or if this is a subgroup or even list of generous contributors who are not “official” members of any of the previously mentioned *goṭhi*-s. The inscription from Casket 3 is:

Bhattiprolu Casket 3
(2nd/1st c. BCE?)

L1 *negamā*

L2 *vacho cagho*

L3 *jeto jaribho tiso*

L4 *reto acino ṣabhiko*

L5 *akhaḡho kelo keso māho*

L6 *seṭo chadiko okhabūlo*

L7 *soṇutaro samaṇo*

L8 *samaṇadāṣo sāmako*

L9 *kāmuko cītako [/]*

L10 *arahadinānam goṭhiyā majūsa ca ṣa[m]ugo ca [/] tena samayena kubirako rājā aṃsi [//]*

“Some inhabitants of the small market village are:

Vacha, Cagha, Jeta, Jaṃbha, Tisa, Reta, Acina, Ṣabhika, Akhaḡha, Kela, Kesa, Māha, Seṭa, Chadika, Okhabūla, Soṇutara, Samaṇa, Samaṇadāṣa, Sāmaka, Kāmuka, and Cītaka.

The casket and the box are [gifts] of the Arahadina corporate body. During that time, the king was Kubira.”

Like L1 from Casket 2’s inscription, L1 from Casket 3 is simply a single word to indicate the beginning of a list of names, presumably once again members of the group or committee. We do not know anything about these persons although it is possible that Samaṇadāṣa is the same person known from L19 in Casket 2 and that Cagha may or may not be connected to one of our Uтары. L10 contains a direct statement that the *majūsa* and the *ṣamuga* belong to or were the fruit of the generosity of a *goṭhi* called *arahadina*. We know that *arahadina* is equivalent to the Sanskrit *arhad-datta* (=“he who has gifted and who is an *arhant*”). However, the situation is complicated considering that there are nine donative inscriptions from Sanchi in which *arahadina* or some Prakritic variation (*arahadāsī*) appears to be personal names of individual donors (and not groups).²⁴ Evidence for these words being personal names come from the fact that they frequently appear with obvious descriptors, such as monk, nun, etc., and are in the singular. At Bhattiprolu, the word in L10 is grammatically plural and is itself relating to the word *goṭhi*, thus forming, in English, something akin to “the casket and box of the *goṭhi*, which itself is of the *arahadina*-s.” There are two likely possibilities for *arahadina*: (1) it refers to a family name and therefore *goṭhi* is referring to them as a singular unit; or (2) we may take *arahadina* more literally and separate the compound into “they who are donors as well as *arhants*.” Considering the history of the adjective *araha* describing one as “worthy” or “deserving,” in Pāli (Dh 195), in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (Mv I 347.18), and classical Sanskrit more broadly, it may be worthwhile to consider the notion that the *goṭhi* was not full of enlightened beings, as the formal religious title might imply in Theravāda Buddhism. Instead, they may have been described as “worthy” or “noble” due to their actions of enshrining the Buddha for the public. As such, we may tentatively take the sentence *arahadinānam goṭhiyā majūsa ca ṣa[m]ugo ca* as something closer to “the casket and the box are [gifts] of the corporate body (*goṭhi*) which was both generous (*dina*) and worthy (*arahat*).” The concluding sentence reminds the reader that the king, here spelled Kubira and not Khubiraka as in L22 of Casket 2, was also involved in the project albeit perhaps as more of a symbolic guiding hand than at the micro-management level of Būba, the treasurer/manager.

The last inscription from the Bhattiprolu reliquaries comes from an extremely rare artifact. Not only is such an object unique in its composition as a hexagonal crystal piece of jewelry but it is also distinguished because it is inscribed. The inscription may be read and translated:

Bhattiprolu Crystal Pendant Inscription²⁵

(2nd/1st c. BCE?)

L1 *mātugāmasa [nam]dapurāhi*

²⁴ The inscriptions are listed in Tsukamoto as #87, #143, #144, #210, #466, #530, #639, #837, and #886.

²⁵ This piece was found within one of the boxes. It was likely a pendant or an amulet.

L2 *suvaṇṇamāhā*

L3 *śamaṇudeśānaṃ ca*

L4 *gilāṇakarasa ayasaka-*

L5 *[ya]ṭhiyo*

L6 *gopiyā] agadānaṃ [//]*

“An iron-colored pearl-like pendant, which consists of a particular weight in gold, [was] the foremost gift of a village mother from Naṃdapura, of [a group of] novices, and of [a woman] named Gopī who cares for the meek.”

Finally, our last inscription from Bhattiprolu, the crystal pendant inscription found inside one of the reliquary boxes, adds one last layer to the exceedingly complex enterprise of enshrining the Buddha’s relics. We may start by discussing the focus of the inscription, *agadānaṃ*, which qualifies the donated object, *ayasaka[y]ṭhiyo*. *Agadānaṃ* may be analyzed as *agra-dānaṃ* (=“chief gift”) in Sanskrit, thus amplifying the *dānaṃ* indicating that it is something unique and special. To my knowledge, no other inscription in early South Asia describes any gift as such, although *agra* does appear in Gandhara but never with *dānaṃ*. The object itself, which we can easily assume is a piece of jewelry based on visual appearance only, is called *ayasakayṭhiyo* and has, until Tsukamoto (1996, p. 290) reconsidered the phrase, eluded scholars. *Āyasa* is, of course, iron and given the **ka* diminutive suffix might mean something like “iron esque” rather than made of iron. According to Tsukamoto, *yaṭhiya* is not *goṭhiya*, as many scholars have suggested before, but rather the Prakritic version of *yaṣṭi*, meaning a thread or string of precious jewels, especially pearls in classical Sanskrit literature.²⁶ Given that the object itself is seemingly a pendant made of a precious object (crystal), we may conclude that the text is describing itself literally as “an iron-colored pearl-like pendant.” We may further support this derivation by taking the two words as a compound rather than as separate substantives. Although our word for corporation here, *goṭhi*, is missing, we can easily remedy the absence since three separate donors, of varying degrees of social status, were in concert with each other to sponsor the creation of this unique *agadānaṃ*.

The *mātugāma* from Naṃdapura is likely an older woman with some disposable funds and full of piety, whereas the *śamaṇudeśa-s* (Skt. *śramaṇoddeśa*, Pa. *samaṇoddesa*)²⁷ were likely novices who were poorer than the *mātugāma* who had to pool together funds to sponsor the gift. Lastly, I take the word *gopiyā* as the genitive singular for a female personal name Gopī as there is no other logical conclusion. The unusual but very descriptive adjective for Gopī, then, is *gilāṇakara*, which could be translated as something like *glāṇa-kara* in Sanskrit, or “one who is a worker for the ill.” Therefore, our last sponsoring agent for the crystal pendant is an extremely virtuous as well as devout woman. Startlingly absent from this *agadānaṃ* is any member of the wealthy elite or the royalty. In place of the elite, we have a trio of donors who, although coming from vastly different social backgrounds, form a special type of corporation whose remarkable gift matches any other known reliquary gift from the entirety of early South Asia.

To conclude our examination of the scarcely utilized Bhattiprolu inscriptions, we might summarize our findings. Unlike the enshrinement at Piprahwa, which was not forthright about the details of why the deposit existed in the first place and who was responsible for it, Bhattiprolu’s lengthy corpus of inscriptions are much more explicative. They begin to tell the story of the cooperation of several vastly different corporate bodies working together toward a common goal. Whether or not these corporate bodies had further involvement with each other beyond this reliquary enterprise remains to be seen. Fortunately, it is clear that some kind of inclusive attitude was at work socially within this community.

²⁶ *Yaṣṭi* does carry the meaning in many earlier texts of staff, pillar, or vertical support object but clearly this does not coalesce with the context at Bhattiprolu.

²⁷ Some Pāli canonical references for this term’s usage may be found in D I.151; M III.128; S V.161; Vin IV.139; A II.78.

We may speculate that such a sentiment was in the spirit of the early Buddhist religion; however, it is equally possible if not altogether parallel phenomenon that the business venture of enshrining relics at Bhattiprolu was too large of an undertaking to be done without vast amounts of financial (as well as intangible) resources and aligned managerial cooperation from several corporations similarly inspired. One can also not help but to notice the lack of detail concerning the corporeal remains since they are not given any adjectives or description whatsoever. The receptacles containing those corporeal remains, on the other hand, are given exact details (of their stone). Perhaps we could be catching a glimpse of the shifting importance of reliquary enshrinement away from *what* was enshrined and toward the appearance and significance of the enshrinement itself. For that, we may turn to our largest single-site repository of art and inscriptions from early historic Buddhist South Asia: Sanchi in central India.

6. Sanchi: Corporeal Monastic Corporations

Sanchi as an important early Buddhist pilgrimage site needs little introduction, but it should suffice to say that it was a bastion of early Buddhist activity since the hundreds of donative epigraphs found at the site (and its other local *stūpa* sites) forms one of the largest epigraphic corpuses throughout all South Asia. Located in central India outside Bhopal, Sanchi's relief artwork is largely one of the symbols for Indian Buddhism generally; however, little attention is paid to the importance of the Sanchi *saṃgha*'s founding members. These founding members appear to be the instigators of a new type of corporate body and, ironically, the only reason we know anything at all about them is because their corporeal bodies were enshrined for worshipped throughout the region. We know that Aśoka, via his schism pillar edict, likely began Buddhist activity in the vicinity but little is known about just what he constructed and whom he assigned to oversee the monuments (and monasteries?), if anyone at all. In the period immediately after Aśoka, we know of a tight-knit group of interrelated elite monastic Buddhists who appear to have been the local chiefs in charge and ultimately themselves were enshrined for worship. We may begin by analyzing a few of the reliquary inscriptions from Sanchi and its vicinity:

Sanchi Stūpa 2 Stone Relic Box (Dhātukaraṇḍaka)²⁸

Side
(2nd c. BCE?)

L1 *savina vināyākāna araṇi kāsapa=*

L2 *gotāṇi upādaya araṇi ca vāchi=*

L3 *suviṇyayitaṇi vināyakaṇi*

“[The corporeal remains] of all the *vināyaka*-s, including the Noble Kāsapagota as well as the Noble Vāchi Suvijayita who are both *vināyaka*-s [also].”

The term *vināyaka* is a common epithet of a Buddha in both Buddhist Sanskrit and Pāli. Stemming from the root *vi+√nī*, the term generally refers to one who is a leader or guide (hence *√nī*'s meaning of “to lead” or even “to instruct”), which conforms to the given context. We may logically conclude that the term refers to locally renowned monastic teachers, as suggested since their discovery and discussion by [Cunningham \(1854\)](#), [Lüders \(1912\)](#), Majumdar ([Marshall et al. 1982](#)), and [Willis \(2001\)](#), since these enshrined teachers were named specifically and do not correspond to any mythological Buddhas. Of course, it is worth noting that the term does not specifically connote a relationship between the *vināyaka* and the Buddhist monastic discipline called the *vinaya*, although it may be true under some circumstances that some *vināyaka*-s themselves were likely monastics and/or masters of the monastic code (*vinaya*). In short, the stone relic box from Sanchi's *stūpa* 2 is our reference point for

²⁸ This edition was recently re-edited by Michael D. [Willis \(2000, p. 70\)](#), as are all the reliquary inscriptions cited in this section. Translations are mine.

Sanchi's patronage activity since it demonstrates the power associated with those who are enshrined at Sanchi beyond the Buddha, who has never been confirmed to be enshrined anywhere in the vicinity.

Amongst the five reliquary inscriptions found at Sanchi proper—as opposed to the fourteen found within the Vidisha region (Willis 2000)—is the following donative inscription attributing the enshrinement of all the presumed teachers (*vināyaka*-s) in the area to a specific kind of corporate donor body:

Sanchi Stūpa 2 Side of the Stone Relic Box (Dhātukaraṇḍaka)
 Steatite Reliquary No. 2
 (2nd c. BCE?)

(Outer circle)

L1 *sapurisasa vāchiya suvijayitasa goti[puta] atevāsino*

(Inner circle)

L1 *kākanavapabhāsa sihanā dāna*

“[Corporeal remains] of Vāchiya Suvijayita, a ‘good person’, and [monastic?] pupil to Gotiputa. The gift [from] the students of the Light of Kākanava.”

For perhaps the first time, we find a South Asian Buddhist reliquary inscription describing the enshrinement of someone other than the Buddha. The first observation that must be noted is that the object of the gift, namely the corporeal remains themselves, are those of Vāchiya Suvijayita, one of our primary *vināyaka*-s named in the above inscription. Here Vāchiya Suvijayita is given two more honorifics: *sapurisa* (Skt. *satpuruṣa*), meaning literally “a good person” or “saint” if we are to believe Majumdar’s extrapolation (Marshall et al. 1982). In Pāli, the term *sappurisa*, which is undoubtedly related to this Prakritic expression, has a specific meaning of a person who “gives a gift respectfully, with his own hand, with consideration, in purity, and with a view to the future” (Findly 2003, p. 192). The new title concords well with the old *vināyaka* title considering it implies a leader within the community if not even a monastic teacher. Willis’ translation of “[one who is] worthy” is decidedly less descriptive of the type of person the Pāli canon seems to qualify and is somewhat redundant consider in the first Sanchi reliquary inscription cited here Vāchiya Suvijayita is also given the title of *araṇi*, probably derived from *ārya* (“noble”). Although a number of *sutta*-s are titled *Sappurisa-sutta* we may cite, specifically, the text in the *Aṅguttara-Nikāya*’s which portrays a *sappurisa* as one who speaks truthfully, does not discredit himself, and speaks about his qualities (as a good person) confidently (A II 77). Elsewhere in the *Aṅguttara* (A IV 244) a *sappurisa* nurtures those around him by bringing welfare and happiness to them. Those who benefit from a *sappurisa*’s birth are listed as parents, wives and children, workers and servants, friends, and companions, departed ancestors, kings, deities, and, last but certainly not least, ascetics and *brāhmaṇa*-s. The *sappurisa* is here compared metaphorically to a marvelous rain cloud that nurtures crops by sprinkling down rain during a drought. The metaphor speaks directly to the generosity of a *sappurisa*. Numerous other references throughout the Pāli canon (M III 37; A IV 243; A III 172; S V 19) present many similar qualities of such an esteemed person, but the point remains clear: the type of person that Vāchiya Suvijayita was thought to be was one who was terrifically regarded by those who were inspired by him if not directly elevated through his good works and/or teachings.

Finally, we may turn our attention to the corporate donor body itself. The word *sihanā* is grammatically genitive plural and corresponds to all of the students of the “Light of Kākanava (Sanchi)” (*kākanavapabhāsa*), who is known only by his metonymic *gotiputa* (“son of Goti”). The substantive *sihanā* is extremely rare and probably derives from the Ardha-Māgadhī *seha*, itself made from the Sanskrit *śaikṣa* (“pupil”). Although not labeled a *goṭhi* like at Bhattiprolu, it is clear that the students and grand-students of this revered person (Gotiputa, who himself was also enshrined in *stūpa* 2 at Sanchi and also in a crystal *stūpa* at nearby Andher and Sonari according to other reliquary inscriptions) were themselves a powerful corporate group sponsor, setting up not just the relics for enshrinement

(as evidenced here) but also contributing (probably more so than nearly any other identifiable single group) to the entire *stūpa* complex at Sanchi. We catch a glimpse of the importance of lineage within the Sanchi teacher corporation by looking at one of Gotiputa's own reliquary inscriptions from Sonari:

Sonari Stūpa 2 Crystal Reliquary (sphatikapātra)
(2nd c. BCE?)

(side one)

L1 *sapurisasa goti=*

L2 *pugasa hemavata*

(side two)

L3 *sa dudubhisa=*

L4 *radāyādasa*

“[Corporeal remains] of the ‘good person’ Gotiputa, himself the heir [to the teaching] of Dudubhisara, the Hemavata [teacher].”

It is virtually certain that this personal name Dudubhisara corresponding with the specific Hemavata school was the same Dudubhissara mentioned in both the Pāli *Mahāvamsa* and *Dīpavamsa* as missionaries. Some of the other monastic missionaries were also seemingly enshrined in the Sanchi area, namely those named Majhima and Kāsapagota. The legacy of Gotiputa lived on through his monastic pupils (like Vāchiputa and Mogaliputa) and the pupils of his pupils. All these Sanchi area reliquary inscriptions suggest that not only was Gotiputa worthy of enshrinement—and corporate sponsorship—but so too were his pupils. Given that no reliquaries identify the Buddha as having been enshrined at Sanchi, it would not be unreasonable to argue that Sanchi and its sister sites in and around Vedisa were primarily dedicated to monastic teacher veneration, thus implying yet another shift in patronage away from the Buddha's physical importance and toward the importance (and symbolism) of corporate lineage.

The century after the enshrine of Gotiputa and his pupils in the *stūpa*-s saw the continuation of the lineage as revealed through further patronage (Milligan 2016, pp. 265–89). The direct kinsman of Gotiputa—and their own pupils—were responsible for a few prominent *vedikā* donations, thus confirming the spread of the relic corporation beyond the reliquaries themselves. One member of this corporation, named Subāhita, was labeled a *rājālipikara* (=“royal scribe”) and, along with his wife named Majhimā, gifted at least four separate times to Sanchi in the 1st c. BCE. A monastic member of the Gotiputa family was named Bhaṃḍuka and donated himself multiple times at Sanchi. Furthermore, so did Bhaṃḍuka's own monastic pupils. One, named Kāna, was given the title *aya* (Skt. *arya*), meaning “noble,” the same title afforded Bhaṃḍuka himself in several of his inscriptions. Other pupils of his were Budharakhita, Dhamadata, Arahatapālita, and Saṃghila.²⁹ Indeed, Bhaṃḍuka, like his relative Gotiputa who was enshrined, was an esteemed member of the Sanchi *saṃgha* and a prime mover in the corporate sponsorship of Sanchi as a whole as his special monastic corporation was responsible for the construction of relics to be worshipped but specifically for the construction of relics of their own corporate body to be worshipped, thus critically expanding the influence and basic idea of just what the duty corporate body was in the last century BCE.

The cooperative spirit at Sanchi persisted beyond the enshrinement of the famous luminaries enshrined in Sanchi *stūpa* 2 and many of the other *stūpa*-s from the surrounding vicinity. Sanchi's main hilltop contains one of the largest repositories of Buddhist donative epigraphy in South Asia and provides scholars with an abundance of social historical data from which to understand the development of early Buddhism. The 606 readable inscriptions from *stūpa*-s 1 and 2 appear on the

²⁹ For these names, one may consult Marshall and Majumdar's catalogue of Sanchi inscriptions (Marshall et al. 1982).

sandstone *vedikā* pillars, crossbars, and coping stones encircling the various circumambulatory paths. The names of the donors—many of whom are from named families, monastic lineages, mercantile guilds, and other types of “corporate bodies”—appear throughout and are a noteworthy feature to the vast material culture. Using the chronology for Sanchi’s vast corpus of donative epigraphy I previously developed (Milligan 2015, 2016) to briefly study the phenomenon of joint patronage, we may tentatively divide the majority of the inscriptions into two periods beginning with 244 donations belonging to the middle of the 1st c. BCE (what I call Generation 1) and ending with 362 donations dateable to the last few decades of the same century (Generation 2). Within Generation 1, there were nineteen identifiable donations that come from joint patronage, which is slightly under 8% of the total number of epigraphs. Generation 2 had twenty-five such donations equaling nearly 7%, thus implying that the sheer number of corporate bodies involved in the patronage of the Sanchi *stūpa*-s across two generations of donors remained remarkably consistent. We may suggest without too much of a leap in logic that another, more powerful corporate body, such as the monastic institution at large, headed perhaps by members of Gotiputa and Bhaṃḍuka’s ilk, actively worked to keep this number at roughly the same percentage due to some overarching patronage strategy to keep (their own?) corporations socially and financially strong.

7. Conclusions

From Aśoka in the 3rd c. BCE, to Piprahwa after that, Bhattiprolu in the 2nd or early 1st c. BCE, Sanchi in the mid to late 1st c. BCE, and then, finally, to Sri Lanka during the 1st centuries BCE and CE we may be observing some type of progression of corporate bodies into mature, managerial Buddhist corporations. For Aśoka, there was no corporate body, nor was there much of an overt interest in corporeal bodies since Aśoka appears to not be the grand builder later reverential literature makes him out to be. However, at Piprahwa, a corporate body of Śākyas, who may or may not have included monastics, came together for perhaps the very first time to design a shelter or corporeal remains for worship. Bhattiprolu advanced the idea quite a bit further by outright stating that there were both monastic and non-monastic corporate bodies combining their efforts to enshrine relics of the Buddha. The sheer number of people involved in the process, along with a potentially high volume of financial resources required for such an ornate enshrinement, required the expansion of the idea of a corporate body to include several hierarchical members, including perhaps a treasurer and a local ruler. Sanchi’s corporate bodies were sustained by a seemingly even larger number of members, many of whom were related to those who had their own corporeal remains established for worship in the *stūpa*-s since the Buddha’s remains were not enshrined. Lastly, in Sri Lanka, as stated earlier in the paper, we see the institution of corporations proceed along roughly the same kind of trajectory but culminate in what appears to be an administrative heavy organization that established cave monasteries (and probably open-air monasteries) throughout the island.

Two trends have become apparent throughout this paper. The first involves the members of the corporate bodies. From Piprahwa onwards, we see that the early corporations were heavily reliant upon family members and nearby friends/acquaintances, which eventually involved royalty, probably as a primary financial backer. As the corporations became larger, so too did the number of official administrative positions required to operate the corporations—as one might expect. The second trend is the gradual disassociation of corporeal bodies from corporate bodies. By the time of Sanchi’s expansion, the Buddha was no longer the singular important entity to enshrine and worship as regionally famous monastic teachers were thusly afforded the luxury of being worshipped post-mortem as well. In Sri Lanka, the lack of relics described in the early inscriptions also concurs with such a disassociation since the corporate bodies now had to ensure the sustained patronage (and financial success) of monasteries. In returning to the observations regarding patronage that Dehejia (1992) and Thapar (1992) once made, we may now reinforce their idea of “collectivity” using these reliquary inscriptions while also rejecting monastic social isolation. Monastics in early Buddhism were just as much a part of the corporate enterprise as non-monastics and—if we are to take their very serious interest in enshrining

themselves at places like Sanchi using corporate funds—it is likely that their inclusion into society was well planned, highly regular, and in concordance with their ideas about the collaborative nature of early Buddhism.

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