

# INDIAN ART

## FROM INDUS VALLEY TO INDIA TODAY

Talk 2  
Art of the Muaryas  
320-185 BCE

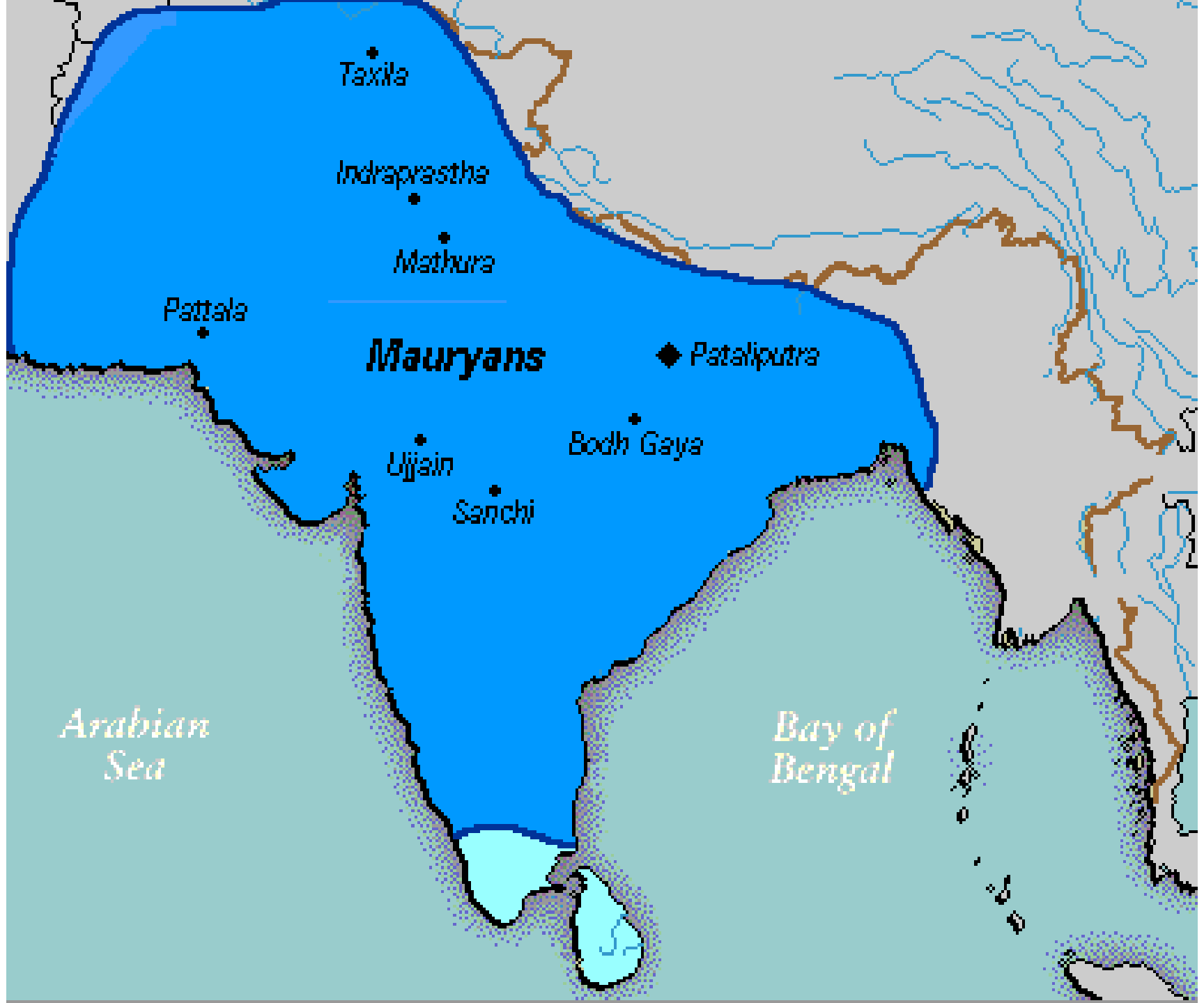


G Chandrasekaran  
S Swaminathan

# *Mauryan Dynasty*

*320-185 BCE*

<i>320–298</i>	<i>Chandragupta</i>
<i>298–272</i>	<i>Bundusara</i>
<i>268–232</i>	<i>Asoka</i>
<i>232–224</i>	<i>Dasaratha</i>
<i>224–215</i>	<i>Samparti</i>
<i>215–202</i>	<i>Saliska</i>
<i>202–195</i>	<i>Devavarman</i>
<i>195–187</i>	<i>Satadhanva</i>
<i>187–185</i>	<i>Brihadratha</i>



Taxila

Indraprastha

Mathura

Pataliputra

**Mauryans**

◆ Pataliputra


Ujjain

Bodhi Gaya

Sanchi

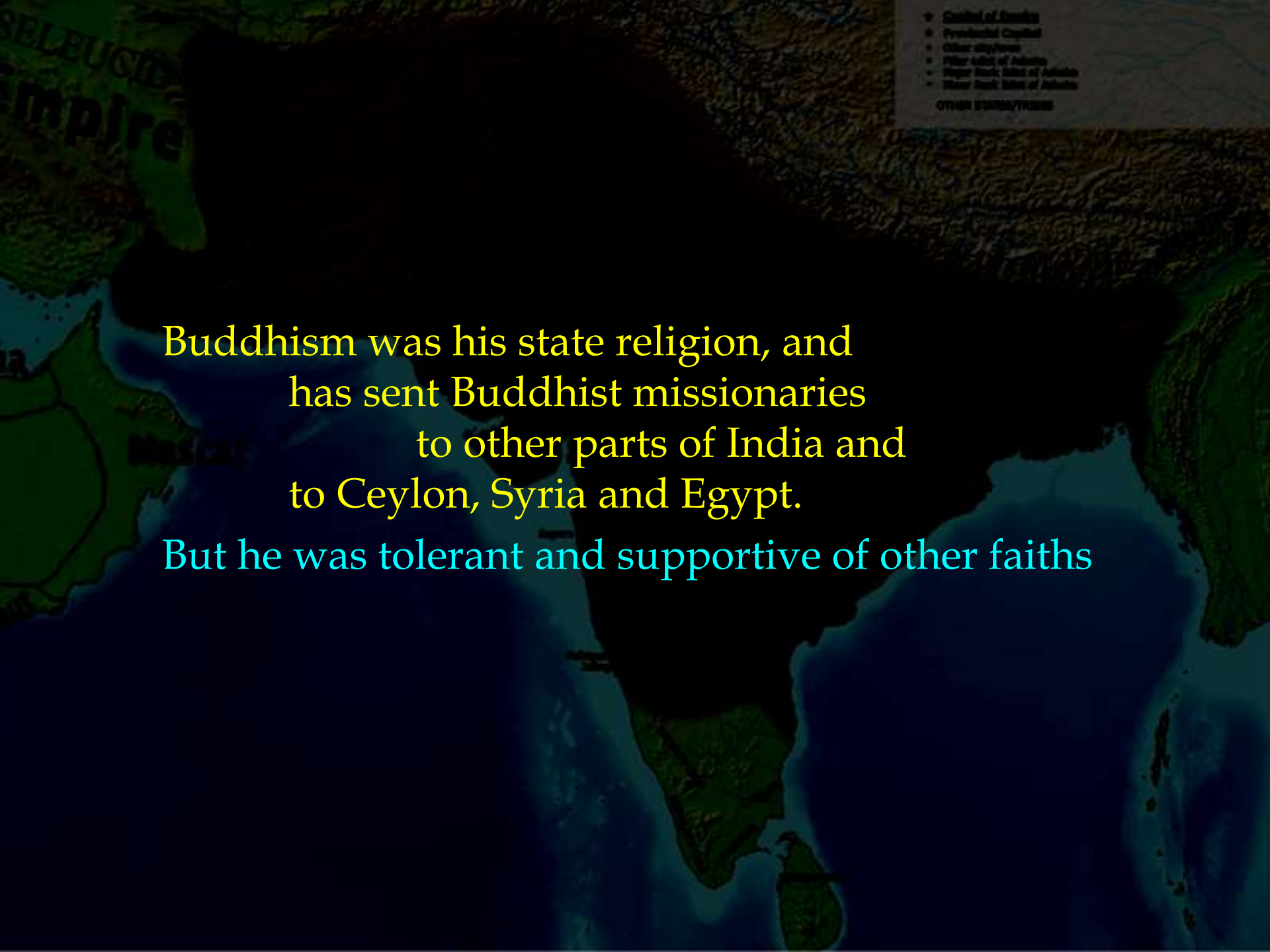
*Arabian Sea*

*Bay of Bengal*



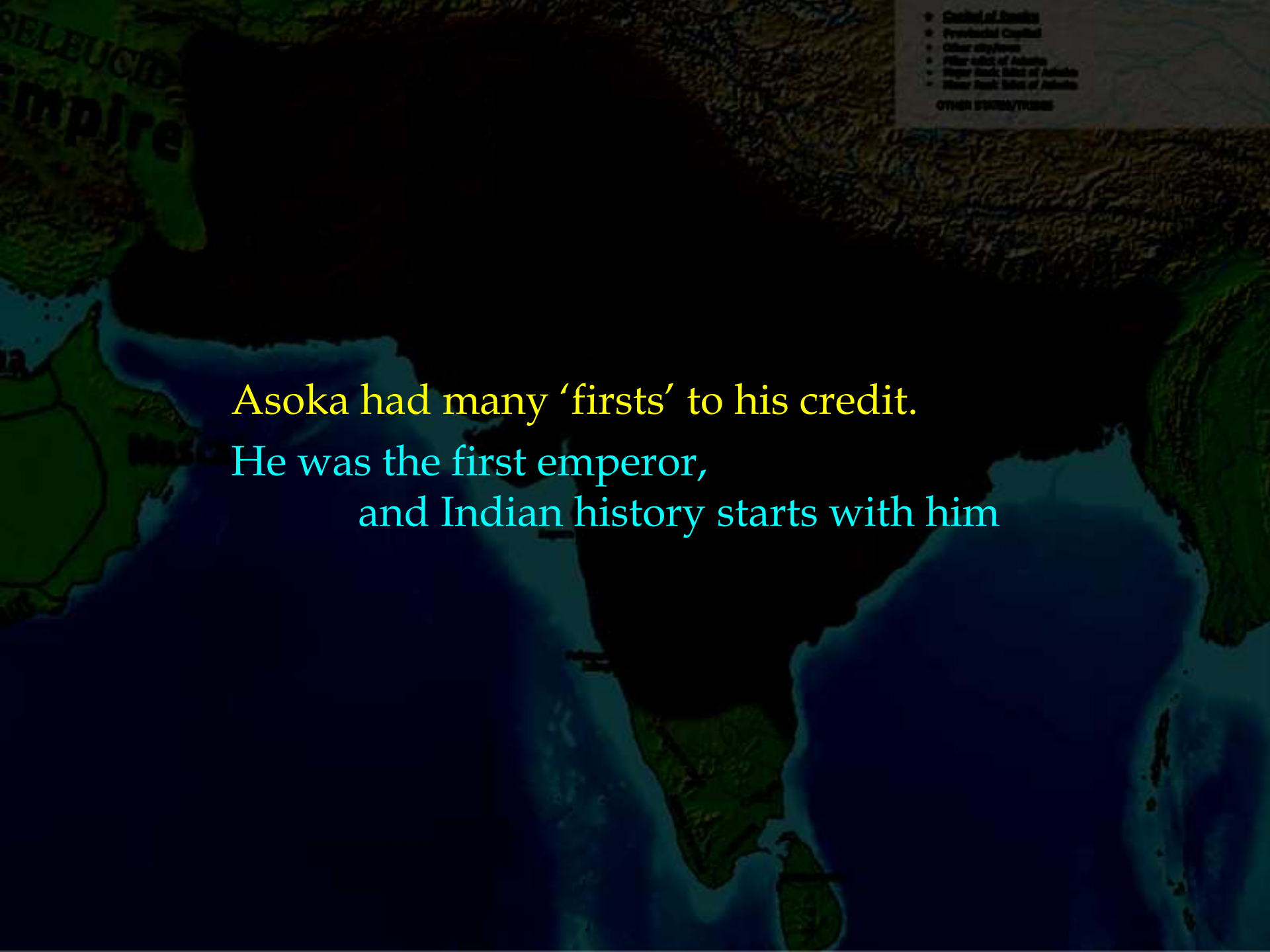
Asoka , first emperor, ruled over a vast empire,  
whole of pre-Independence India, plus Afghanistan  
excepting the Tamil country.

He went about with his new found zeal of  
spreading love and passion  
that the Buddha has preached.

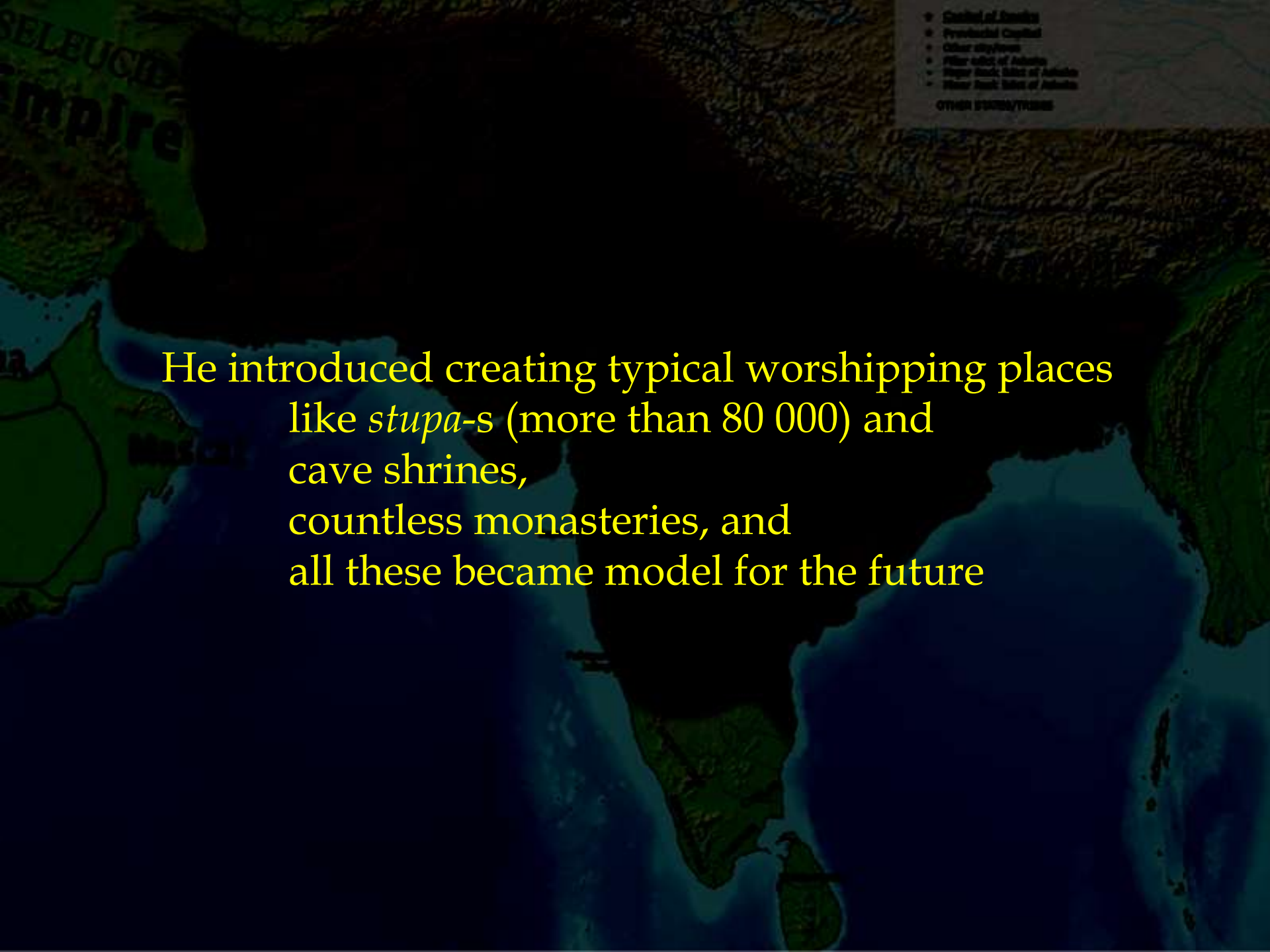
A map of the Seleucid Empire and surrounding regions. The Seleucid Empire is highlighted in a light blue color. Other regions shown include the Parthian Empire (light green), the Kingdom of Kush (light purple), and the Kingdom of Egypt (light orange). The map also shows the Indian subcontinent, Ceylon, and the Arabian Peninsula. A legend in the top right corner identifies symbols for Capital of Empire, Provincial Capital, Other city/town, Major cities of Seleucia, Major trade links of Seleucia, and Minor trade links of Seleucia. The text on the map is in a light blue color.

Buddhism was his state religion, and  
has sent Buddhist missionaries  
to other parts of India and  
to Ceylon, Syria and Egypt.

But he was tolerant and supportive of other faiths



Asoka had many 'firsts' to his credit.  
He was the first emperor,  
and Indian history starts with him



He introduced creating typical worshipping places like *stupa*-s (more than 80 000) and cave shrines, countless monasteries, and all these became model for the future



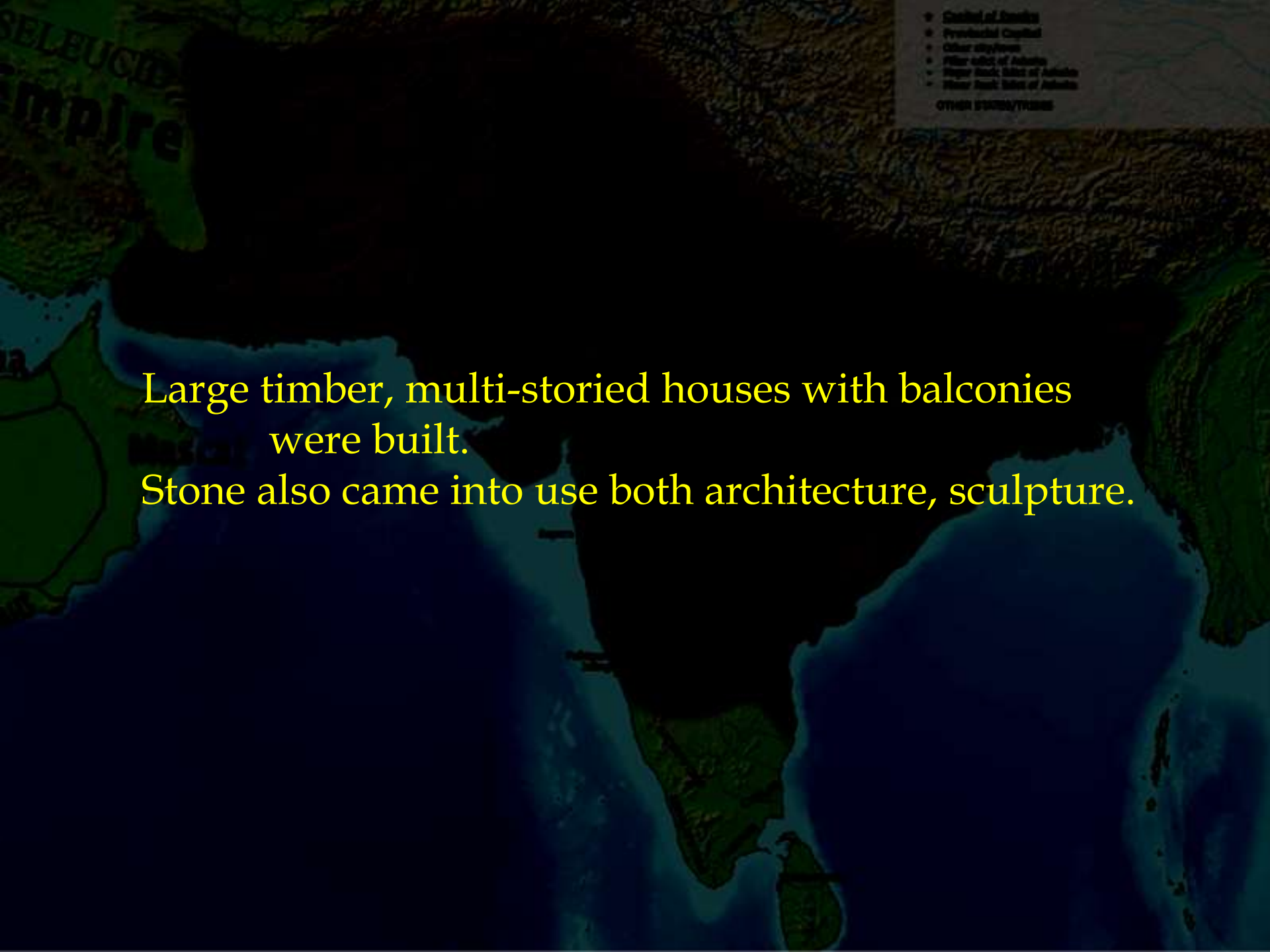
His was the overture  
to the marvellous world of Indian sculptures,  
the animal motifs on top of his pillars,  
sculptures in the round in stone and terracotta  
reaching maturity in his time itself  
stand testimony to his creativity





- Capital of Empire
  - Provincial Capital
  - Other city/town
  - Major roads
  - Major rivers
  - Major lakes
- OTHER STATES/TERRITORIES

Many the crafts were practised:  
painting, carpentry, iron-smithy, glass-making  
textiles (cotton, wool, linen and silk)  
weaving and printing,  
and many more.



- Capital of Empire
- Provincial Capital
- Other city/town
- Major Road
- Other States/Tribes

Large timber, multi-storied houses with balconies were built.  
Stone also came into use both architecture, sculpture.



We have substantial knowledge about this period:  
abundant literary sources ;  
*Jatakas* and *Sutras*, the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya,  
western sources, like of Megasthenes etc



SELEUCID  
Empire

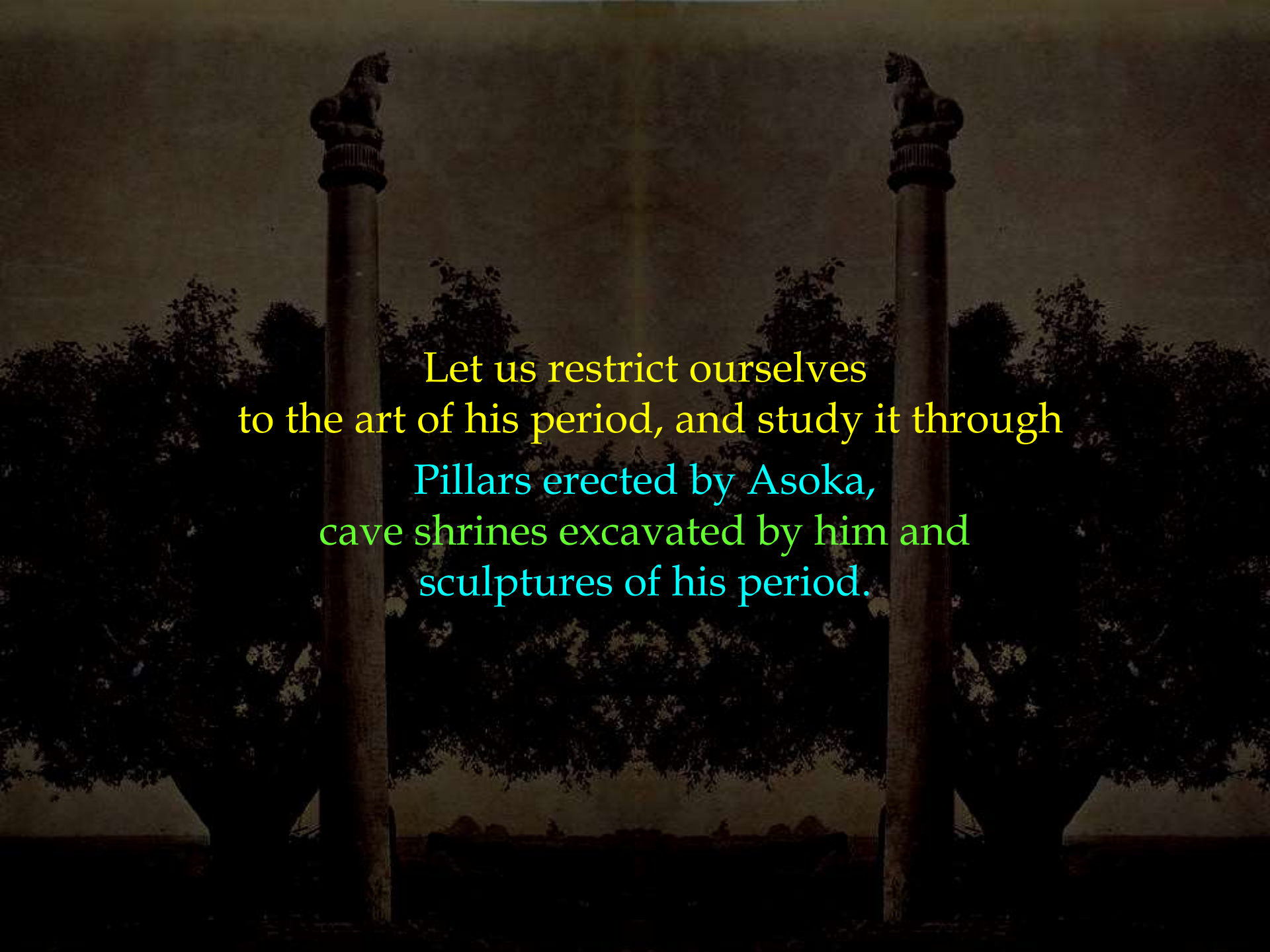
- Capital of Empire
  - Provincial Capital
  - Other city/town
  - Major cities of Ashoka
  - Major trade links of Ashoka
  - Minor trade links of Ashoka
- OTHER STATES/TRIBES

We can say history of Indian art starts with him



- Capital of Empire
- Provincial Capital
- Other city/town
- Major cities of Ashoka
- Major trade cities of Ashoka
- Other cities/towns

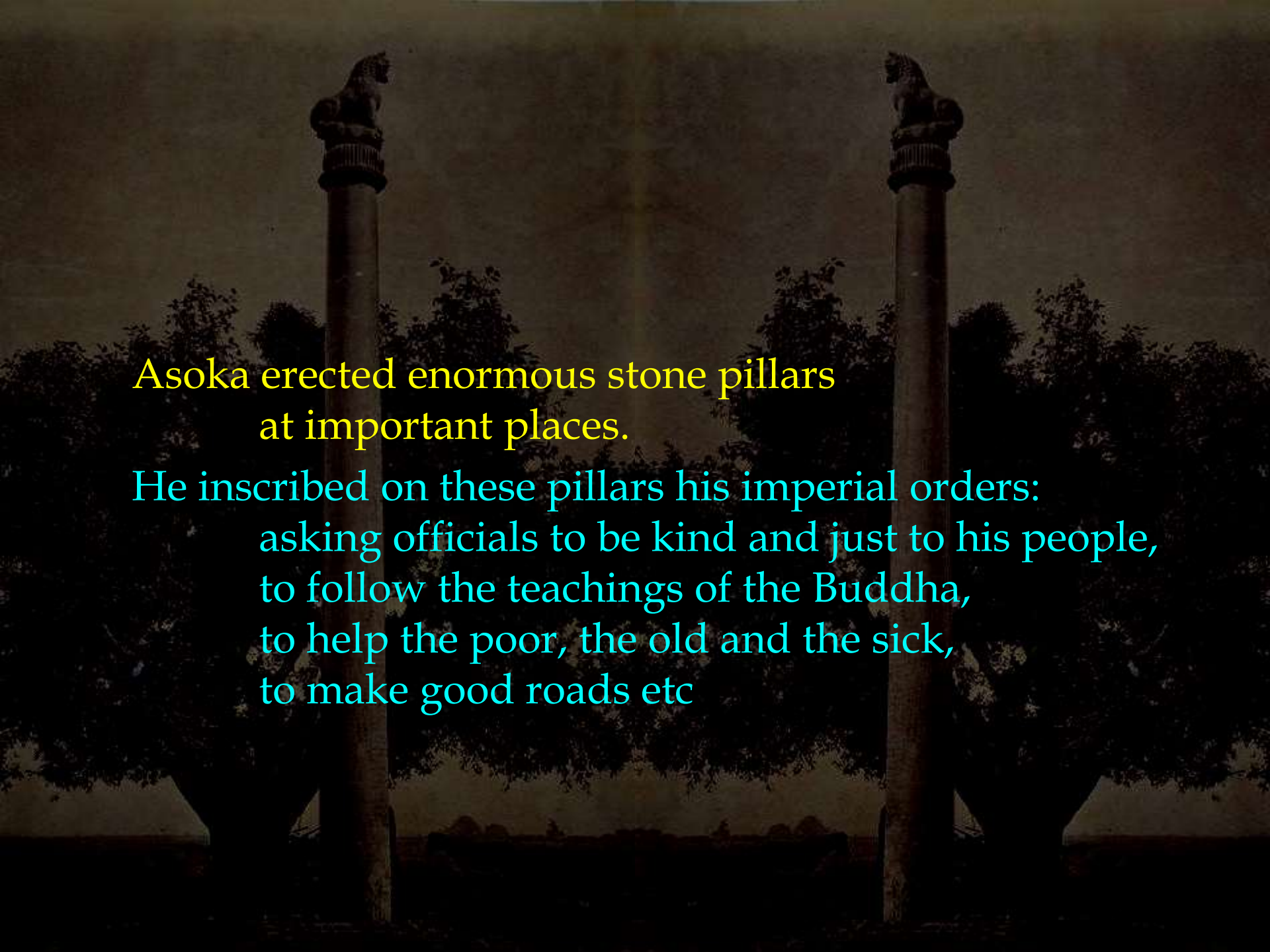
Some identify the worshipping figure at the centre in this Amaravathi relief with Ashoka

The image shows two tall, cylindrical stone pillars standing side-by-side. Each pillar is topped with a capital featuring a lion sculpture. The background is dark, with silhouettes of trees and a faint horizon line. The text is overlaid in the center in three lines of different colors: yellow, cyan, and green.

Let us restrict ourselves  
to the art of his period, and study it through  
Pillars erected by Asoka,  
cave shrines excavated by him and  
sculptures of his period.

The image shows two tall, cylindrical stone pillars standing side-by-side. Each pillar is topped with a capital featuring a lion sculpture. The background is dark, with the silhouettes of trees visible behind the pillars. The overall lighting is low, creating a dramatic and somewhat somber atmosphere.

Asokan pillars



Asoka erected enormous stone pillars  
at important places.

He inscribed on these pillars his imperial orders:  
asking officials to be kind and just to his people,  
to follow the teachings of the Buddha,  
to help the poor, the old and the sick,  
to make good roads etc



# Ashoka's First Pillar Edict in the Brahmi script, Lauriya Nandangarh, Bihar; circa 242 BCE



𑀅𑀲𑁄𑀓𑀲𑀢𑀺𑀢𑀺𑀓 𑀅𑀲𑀭𑀺𑀢𑀺𑀢𑀺 𑀉𑀲𑀭𑀺𑀢𑀺𑀢𑀺𑀓 𑀭𑀺𑀢𑀺𑀢𑀺𑀓 : 𑀭𑀺𑀢𑀺𑀢𑀺  
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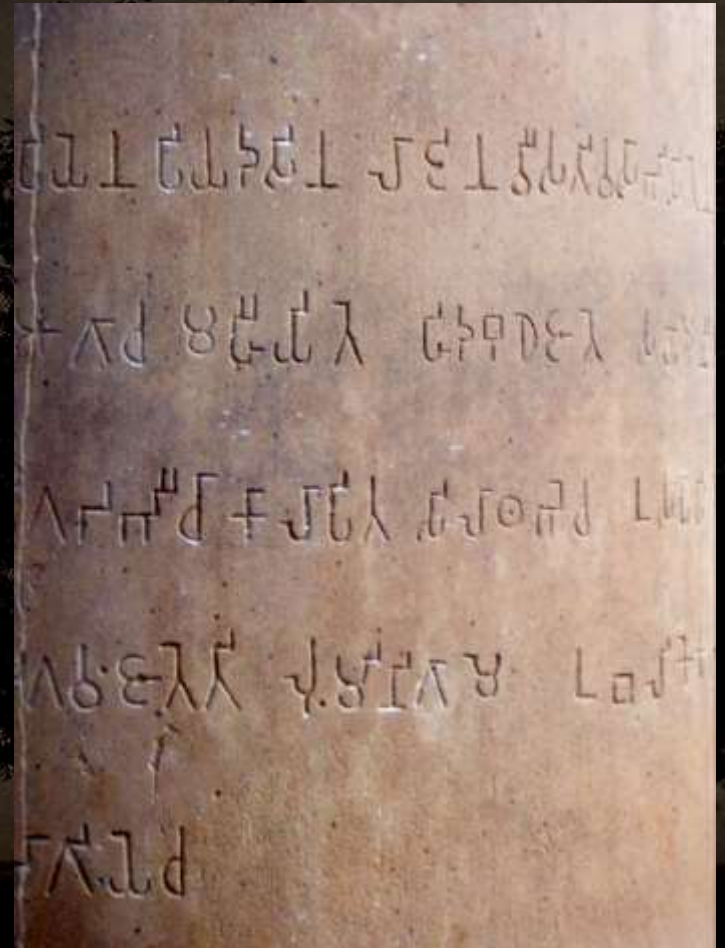
Thus speaks the King,  
dear to the Gods, Priyadarshī.

.. I ordered this inscription of Dharma  
to be engraved. . . .

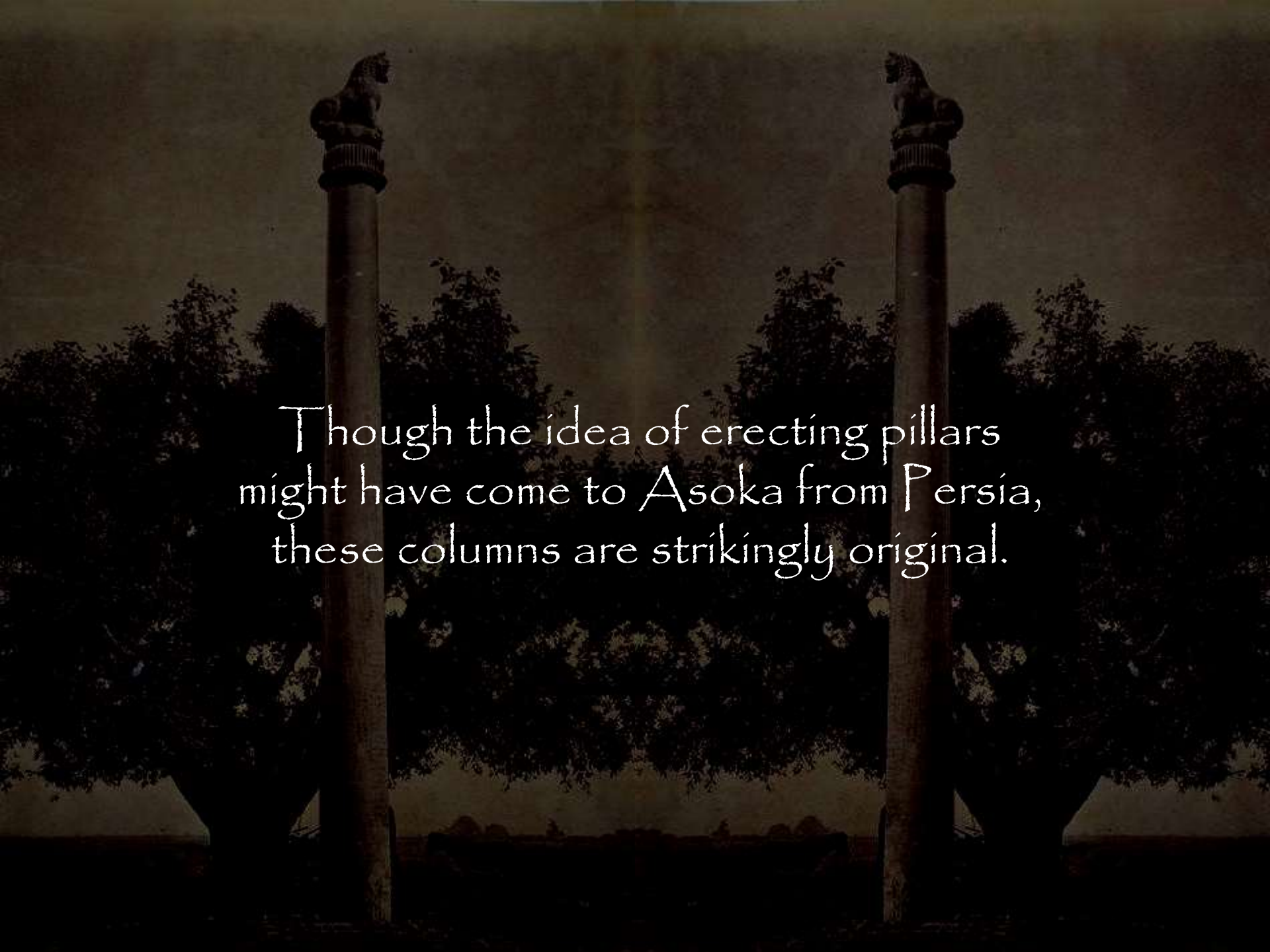
For this is (my) rule:  
government by Righteousness,  
administration according to  
Righteousness,  
gratification .. by Righteousness,  
protection by Righteousness.

All the inscriptions  
are finely cut and mostly in the  
Brahmi script,  
the mother script of  
all Indian languages  
and of most  
South-East Asian languages

Lauria Nadangarh, Bihar





The image shows two tall, slender stone pillars standing side-by-side. Each pillar is topped with a capital featuring a lion sculpture. The background is dark, with silhouettes of trees and a faint horizon line. The overall lighting is low, creating a somber and historical atmosphere.

Though the idea of erecting pillars  
might have come to Asoka from Persia,  
these columns are strikingly original.



These pillars are of highly polished sandstone, red or white, 50-60 feet tall and weighing about 50 tons.

The shafts are plain, circular and slightly tapered.

Lauria Nadangarh, Bihar

The capital, normally made of a different stone, contains lions, bull, horse, elephant or wheel.

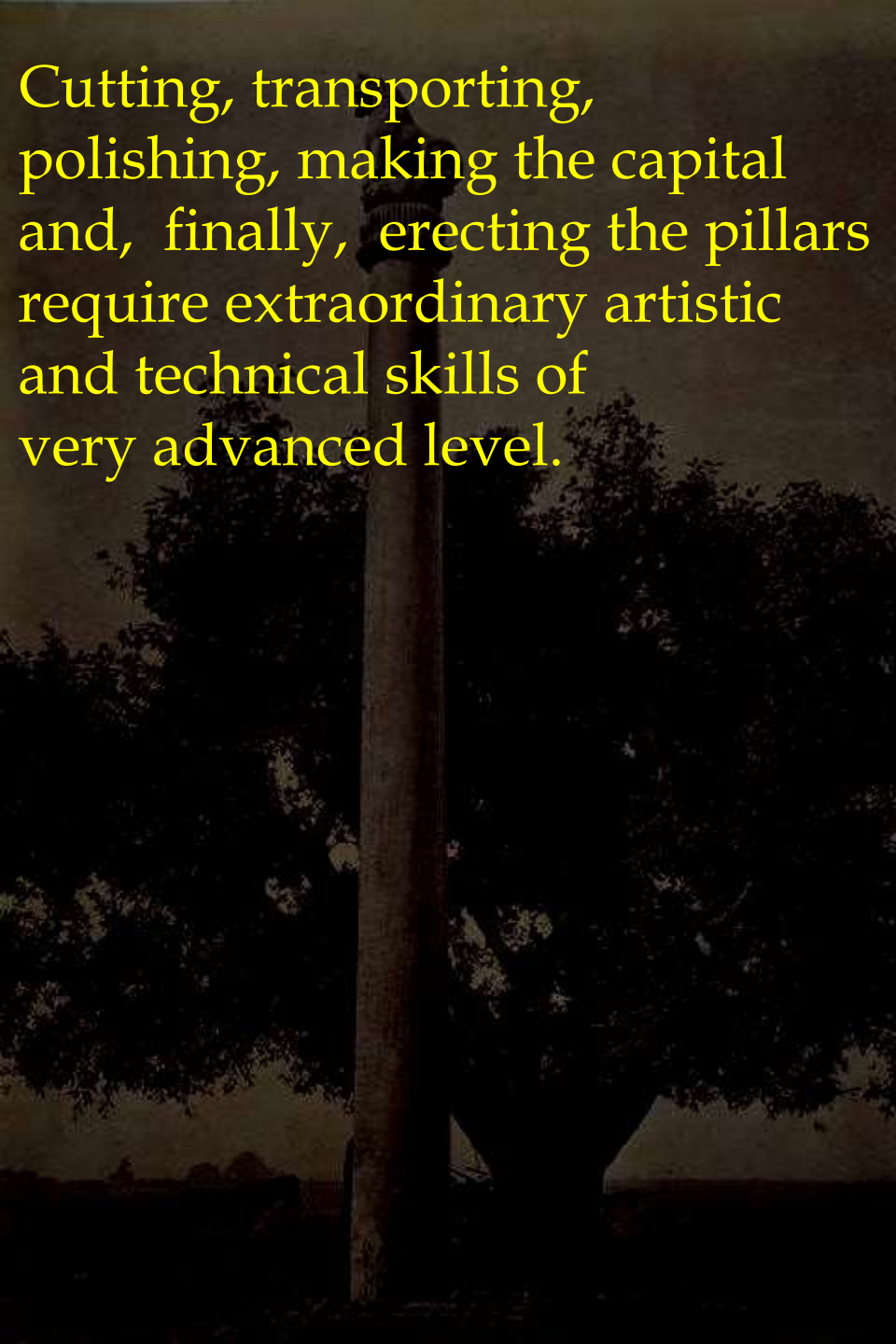
The abacus, square or round, carries very lively motifs.

The base is generally an inverted lotus.



Abacus

Base



Cutting, transporting, polishing, making the capital and, finally, erecting the pillars require extraordinary artistic and technical skills of very advanced level.





Only nineteen pillars survive,  
six with the capitals intact.

Many are available in  
fragmented state.



The bull of the Rampurva pillar,  
sitting lion of Vaishali,  
the four lions of Sarnath  
are the most famous,  
the last being taken as the national emblem of  
the Republic of India.



Rampurva



Vaishali



Sarnath



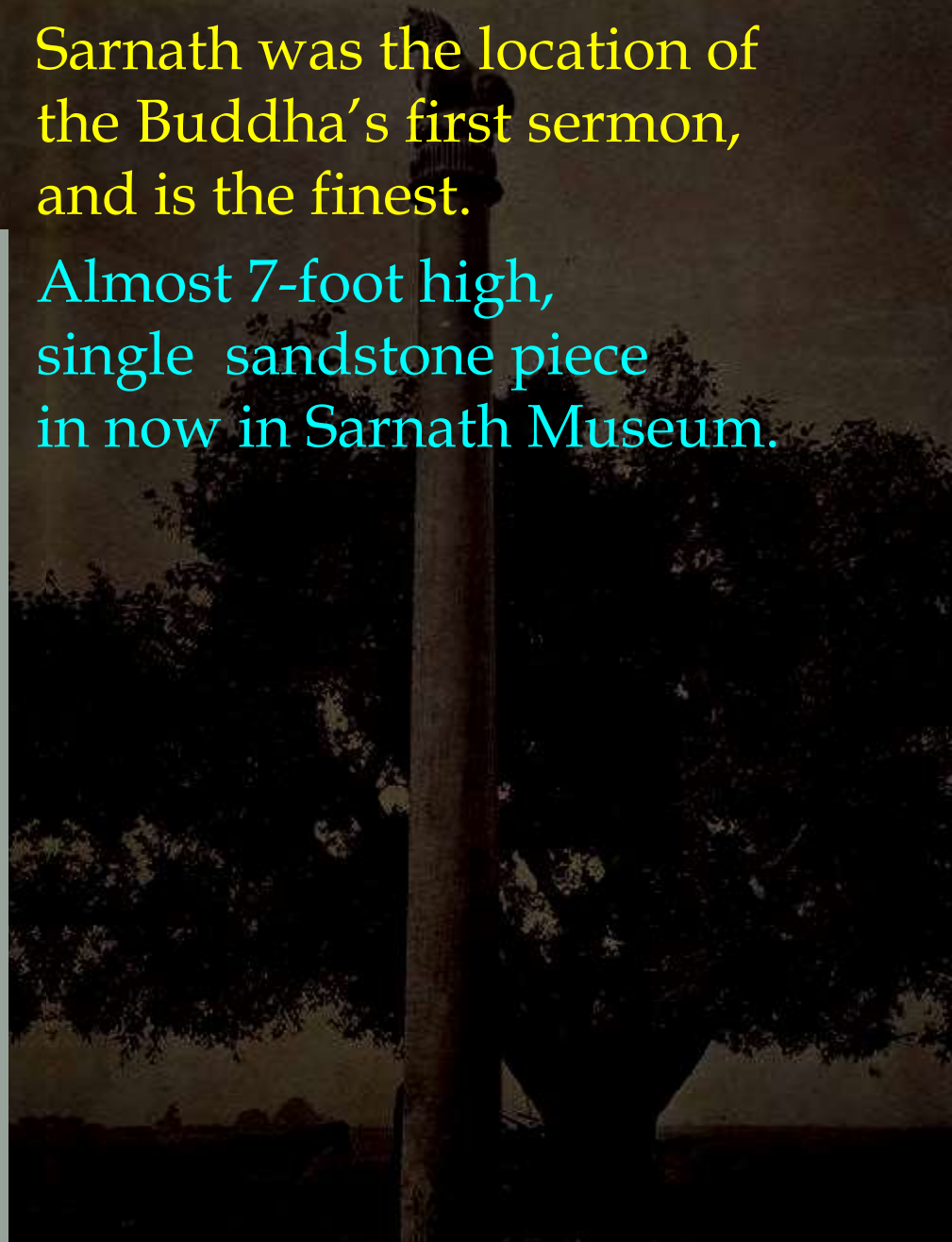
Sarnath was the location of the Buddha's first sermon, and is the finest.

Almost 7-foot high, single sandstone piece in now in Sarnath Museum.

The four lions symbolise the Four Noble Truths.

Sarnath was the location of the Buddha's first sermon, and is the finest.

Almost 7-foot high, single sandstone piece in now in Sarnath Museum.



This originally supported a metallic *Dhamma-chakka*  
(Wheel of the Law).





The four lions standing back-to-back symbolise the Four Noble Truths.

The abacus bears in relief elephant, horse, bull and lion separated by four *dhamma-chakras*.

Below is an inverted lotus.



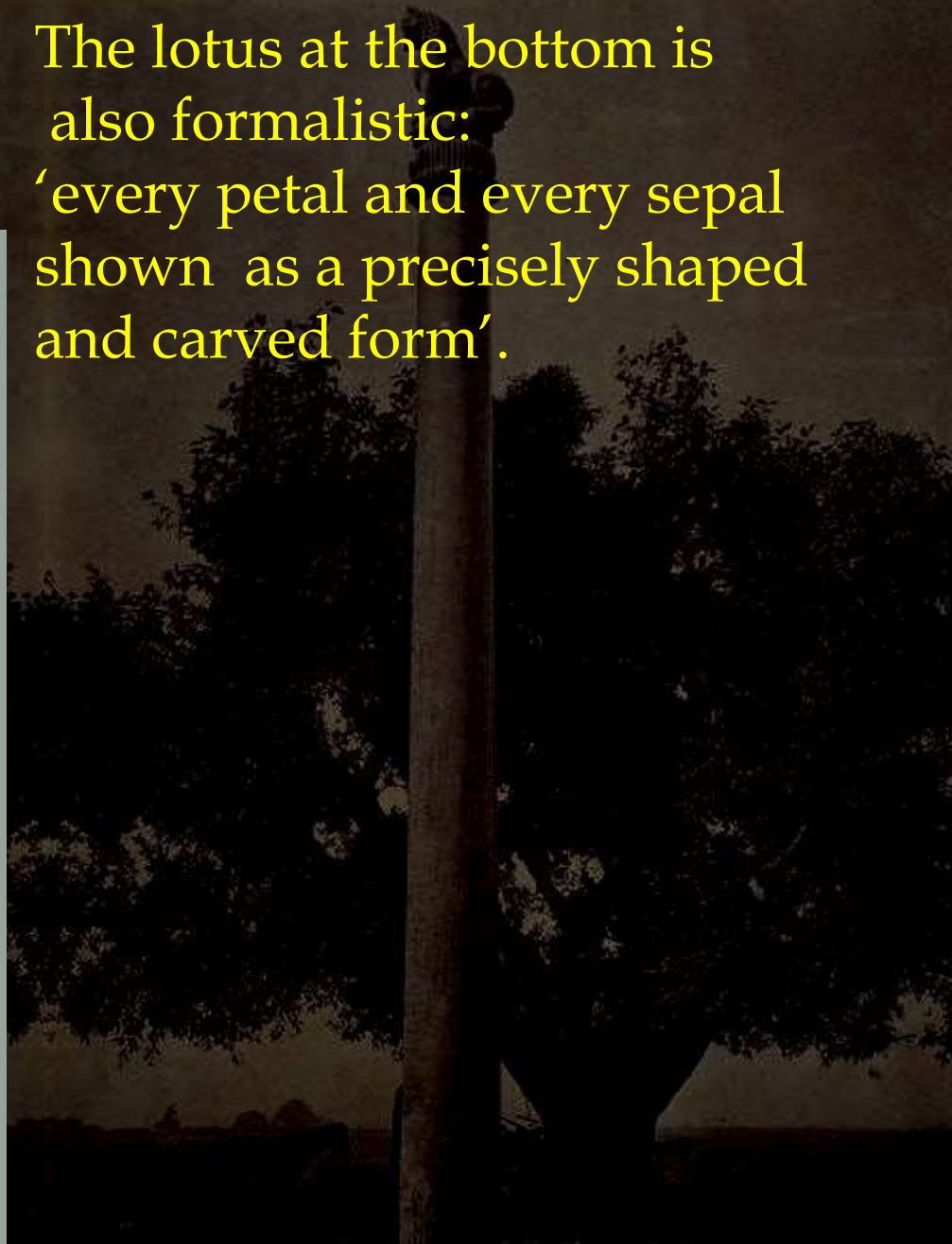
The lions are not realistic,  
but formalistic.

The mane 'as flame-shaped  
bunches of hair'.

Though stylised, these lions  
display strength and vigour



The lotus at the bottom is also formalistic: 'every petal and every sepal shown as a precisely shaped and carved form'.





But the figures on the base are different.

Bull, horse, elephant and lion are excellently realistic, result of sharp observation and full of life.



The Rampurva bull  
is a masterpiece:  
soft flesh,  
wiry sinews,  
life-like rump,  
strong legs,  
soft nostrils,  
alert and  
ears cocked as though  
it were listening.  
The bull is a gift of  
the native genius.



Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi



The period also produced some interesting sculptures. Here is a sample.

Perhaps portrait figures;  
individuality marked by the head-dress, extraordinary actuality  
and stylised; the mouth, empty eyes, short, stout neck,  
symmetry in the face; but have vigour.



An aristocrat  
Indian Museum, Kolkata,



A peasant,  
National Museum, Delhi



Some very graceful figures of *yaksha* and *yakshi* were also made.

These figures have the stamp of the artistic style of the period.



Yakshi, Kolkata Museum



Yakshi, Mathura Museum



Both these colossal figures are powerfully built with well proportioned bodies.

The male figure has strong chest, robust masculinity while the female has all the features of a beautiful damsel.

The dresses are rendered with great expertise.

It can be seen that these are magnificently conceived and exhibit astounding physical energy.



Patna Museum



Chawri bearer, Didarganj





The smiling chawri-bearer is a unique example of feminine grace displaying the Indian ideal of female beauty: heavy hips and full breasts strongly emphasising the motherly aspect. Its exceptional polish adds to its importance.

This is a masterpiece



But she looks stiff, lifeless, formal, symmetrical, frontal and static, hall-mark of the beginning phase of art.

A photograph of a large, weathered stone elephant sculpture, likely a guardian lion or elephant, positioned in an outdoor setting. The sculpture is the central focus, showing the head and trunk. The background is dark and out of focus, suggesting a wooded area or a shaded courtyard. The text "Dhauli elephant, Bhubaneswar" is overlaid in white, serif font across the middle of the image.

Dhauli elephant, Bhubaneswar

On the face of a low rock there is an Asokan edict.

On one side of the rock is sculpted an elephant as if emerging from the rock and this is very impressive .



Though no more than four-foot high, it is life-like,  
'with its right front leg is slightly tilted and  
the left back straight in short angle  
exhibits a slight forward motion and  
with its heavy trunk flowing rhythmically in a curve'.



...and the plump, fleshy qualities of the young animal's body,  
seen as emerging from the rock,  
are suffused with warmth and natural vitality.

The modelling here is soft and gentle and  
the plump, fleshy qualities of the young animal's body,  
seen as emerging from the rock,  
are suffused with warmth and natural vitality.



A photograph of a long, narrow cave with a dirt floor and a blue sky visible at the end. The text "Cave shrines" is overlaid in the center.

Cave shrines



Ashoka had respect for all faiths.

His two early cave shrines  
in the Barabar Hills in Bihar  
were dedicated to  
the Ajivaka and the Hindu religions.



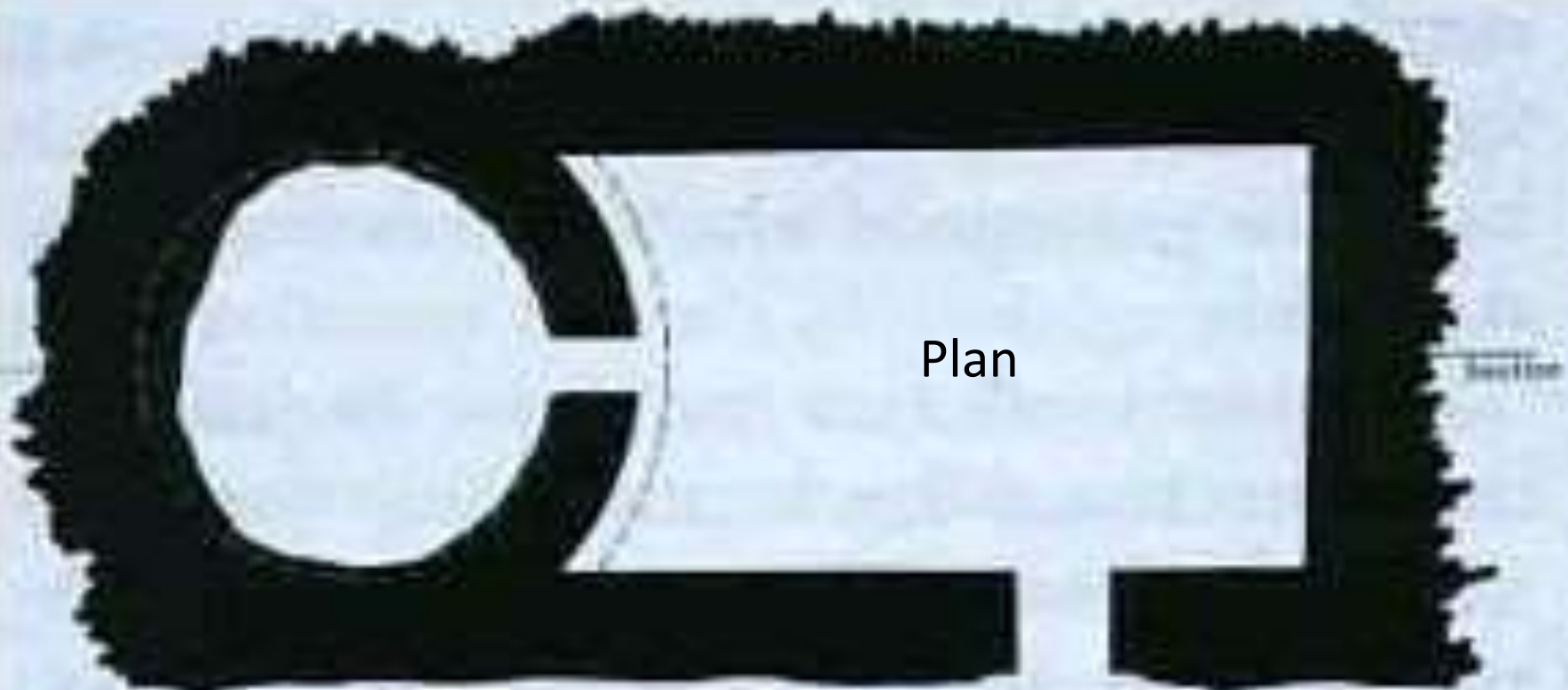


Sudama Cave  
for Vishnu

Lomas Rishi Cave  
for Ajivakas



The Lomas Rishi cave has an interesting façade.



Plan



Elevation

The Lomas Rishi Cave for Ajivakas



A false arch in the shape of horseshoe, supported by mock corbelling.



Under this is a carved lattice-work panel.  
On both ends are bunched leaves



Below this ten beautifully carved, lively elephants and mythical animals



Regular elephants

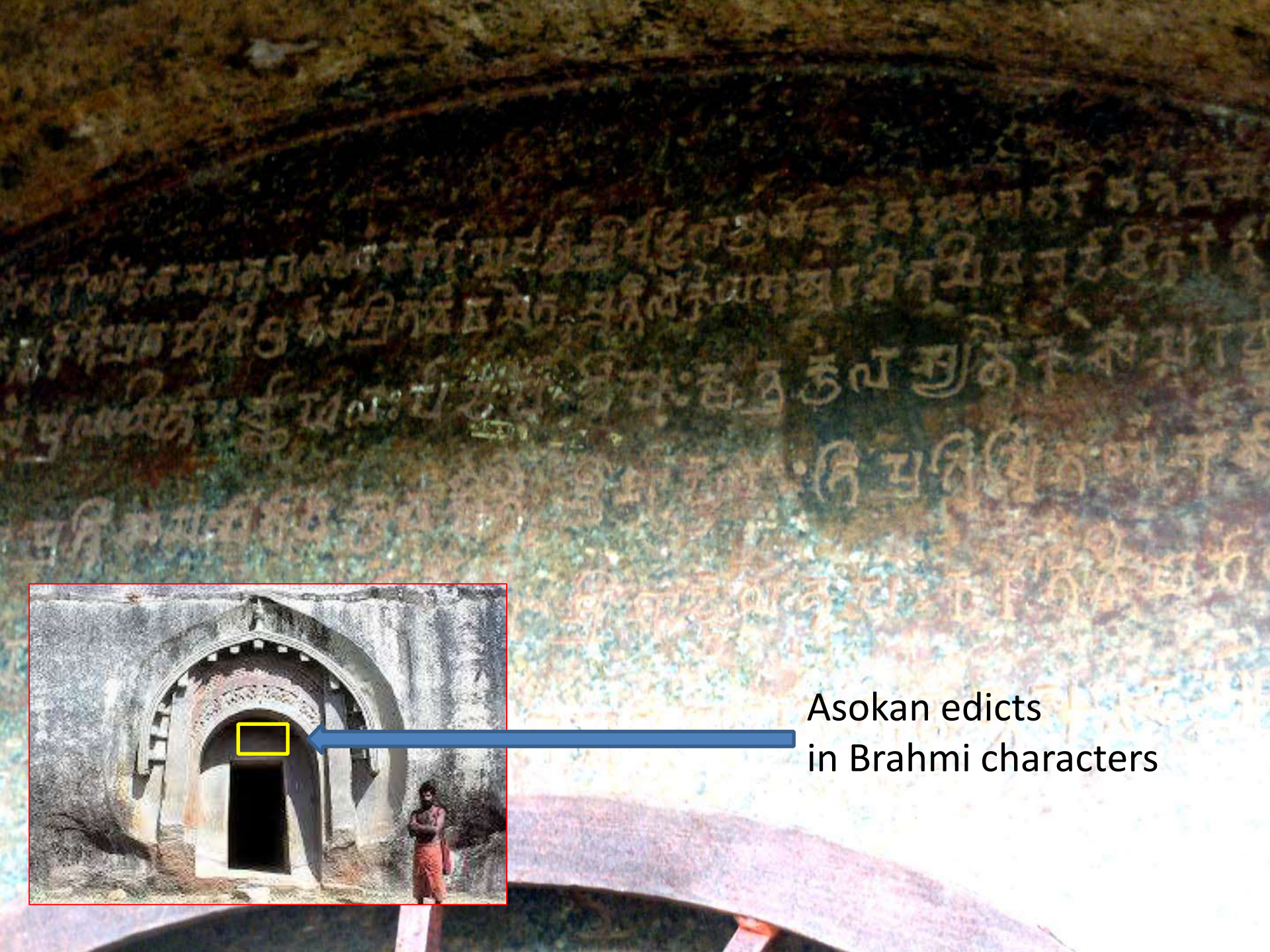
Makra snout

Head resembling Elephant

Cat-like fore legs

Tail filling up available space

Detail of row of elephants and elephant-like makara

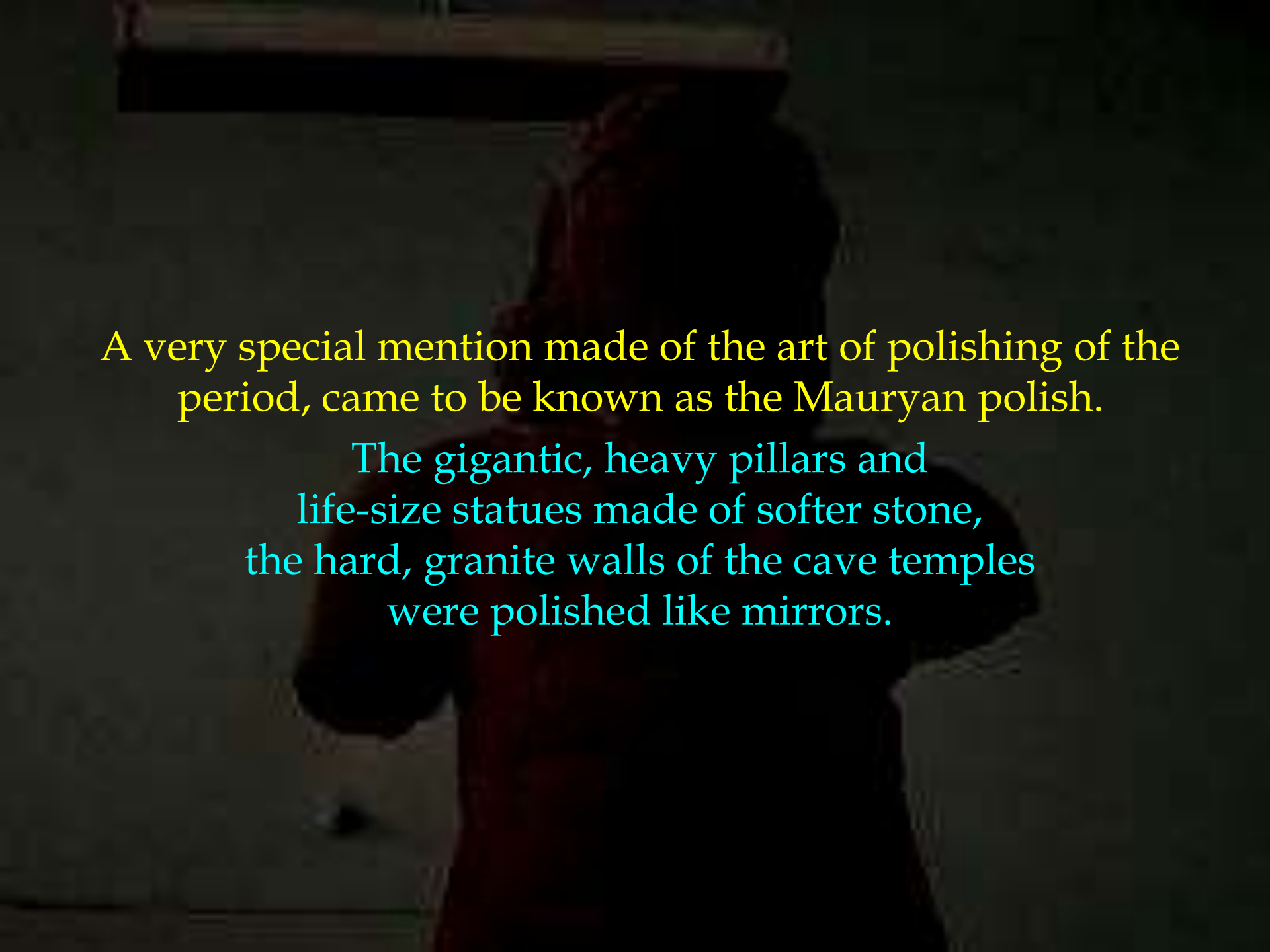


Asokan edicts  
in Brahmi characters





Interior of the cave, walls polished like glass.  
The doorway opens into a shrine, a domed chamber



A very special mention made of the art of polishing of the period, came to be known as the Mauryan polish.

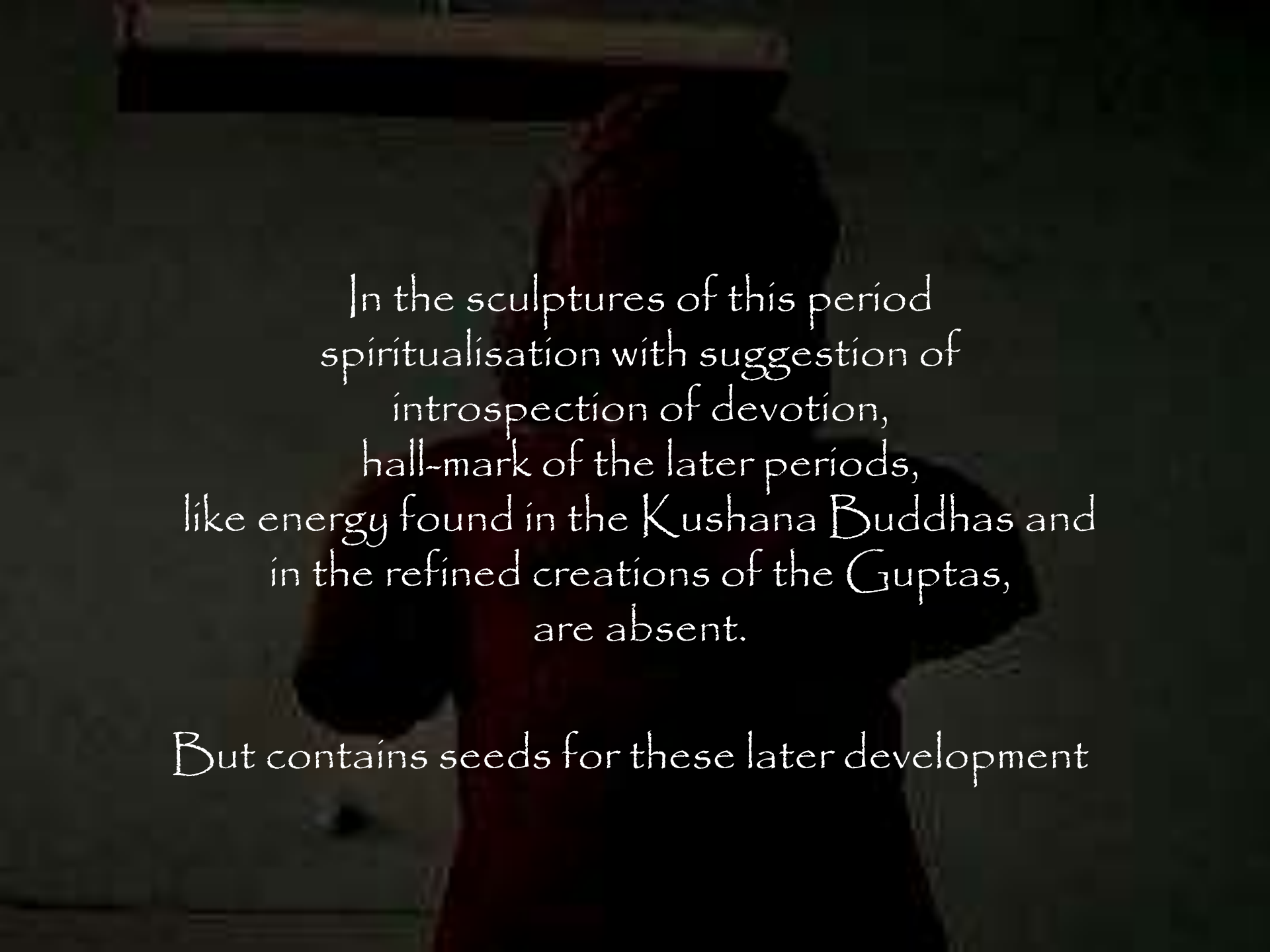
The gigantic, heavy pillars and life-size statues made of softer stone, the hard, granite walls of the cave temples were polished like mirrors.



This made Vincent Smith to exclaim:

*'The skill of the stone cutter may be said to have attained perfection to have accomplished tasks which would, perhaps be found beyond the power of the twentieth century.'*

**It is pity that we have lost this art!**



In the sculptures of this period  
spiritualisation with suggestion of  
introspection of devotion,  
hall-mark of the later periods,  
like energy found in the Kushana Buddhas and  
in the refined creations of the Guptas,  
are absent.

But contains seeds for these later development

## One final question

For this beginning of the phase of art :

Did it jump start this way?

Whether it was 'importing' technology,  
both techniques and technicians?

Or whether there was an advanced base for craft and  
assimilated foreign ideas?



*Isn't this a glorious beginning of an artistic expression  
that engulfed a third of globe?*

