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Gotama

A Biography Based on



Buddha

the Most Reliable Texts

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PART ONE

Birth, Enlightenment,
and Preaching

1. Birth

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

THE SAKYAS

It has been customary in India from ancient times to refer to the founder of Buddhism as the Buddha. This usage has been widely followed throughout southern Asia and the West. In China, *buddha* was transliterated first as *fó* and later as *fó-t'ó*; the same characters used in Chinese are also used in Japan.¹ *Buddha* means "enlightened one; one who has realized the truth." It was with this meaning that it was also translated into a Chinese compound, *chüeh-che* or *ta-chüeh*, taken from "The Adjustment of Controversies" chapter of the *Chuang-tzu*, a classic of the fourth-century B.C.E. Chinese sage Chuang-tzu.² The Tibetans translated *Buddha* as *sañs-rgyas*, meaning "purified, advanced being." In all cases, these are not proper nouns but rather common nouns denoting the ideal Buddhist existence.³ Any number of buddhas may exist; Buddhism considers their number to be infinite.⁴

The historical founder of Buddhism is referred to as Gotama Buddha. *Gotama Buddha* is the Pāli rendition of the name;⁵ in Sanskrit it is written as *Gautama Buddha*, as it is in Hindi and in Sinhalese, the Indic language of Sri Lanka that has become extremely close to Sanskrit since the twelfth or thirteenth century. For uniformity it would probably be better to employ the spelling *Gautama* because it is the Sanskrit form and is widely used in Sinhalese. Though *Gautama* is appropriate as a general designa-

tion, I use the Pāli *Gotama* for this book. First, *Gotama* is easy to pronounce, making it more accessible, and second, even if English and French speakers write *Gautama*, they tend to pronounce it "Gotama" anyway. *Buddha* was a designation for an enlightened person commonly used by other Indian religions at the time Buddhism arose; as such, it was directly adopted by Buddhists as well. I deal with the two expressions in more detail below.

The Japanese tend to call the Buddha *Oshaka-sama* or *Shaka*.⁶ Ancient Buddhist writings record that Gotama Buddha was born into the Sakya (Sākīya; Skt., Śākya) tribe,⁷ and this is confirmed by a reliquary inscription from Piprahwa.⁸ Strictly speaking, *Sakyas* refers to a tribe (*jāti*), to which Gotama belonged and which originally lived in the Terai basin in modern Nepal.⁹ The Buddha was sometimes called "son of the Sakyas," meaning "born of the Sakyas," in the same way that Mahāvīra, founder of Jainism, was called Nātaputta, "son of the Nātas."¹⁰ *Sakya* means "able and powerful person," perhaps indicating that the tribe held power in the region.

Gotama Buddha is also referred to as *Sakyamuni* (Skt., Śākyamuni), "sage of the Sakyas."¹¹ The Japanese epithet *Shakuson* may translate this meaning, or it might be an abbreviation of *Shakamuni seson* ("Sakyamuni, the World-honored One"). The title *Sakyamuni* appears only occasionally in the oldest strata of the early Buddhist canonical writings.

Probably, from the earliest period of Buddhism, Sakyamuni was regarded as being a descendant of Okkāka (Skt., Ikṣvāku; *Sn.*, 991), a hero and a king whose name appears in Vedic canonical literature from the time of the oldest anthology, the *Rg Veda* (X, 60, 4).¹² In India King Ikṣvāku is generally believed to be the son of Manu, the father of the human race and progenitor of the solar dynasty; Buddhist canonical literature names him the ancestor of the Sakya tribe. Chinese translators of Buddhist texts frequently translated his name as *Kān-che-wang*, literally, the "sugar cane king," based on the popular etymology of *ikṣu* (Skt.) meaning "sugar cane."¹³ Scholars conjecture that the Ikṣvāku family originally ruled the Pūru tribe. They were certainly rulers in the upper reaches of the Indus or Ganges, but in the *Rāmāyana* and *Purāṇas* Ikṣvāku is said specifically to have been the ancestor of the princes claiming to be the offspring of the sun, who ruled the country of Kosala (Skt., Kauśala), particularly the town of Ayodhyā.¹⁴ The *Purāṇa* canonical literature claims that Pasenadi (Skt., Prasenajit), the king of Kosala at the time of Sakyamuni, also is the offspring of Ikṣvāku, and lists his genealogy. The name Ikṣvāku

also appears frequently in the Jaina scriptures as a holy king of ancient times.

We do not know exactly to what race the Sakyas belonged. British historian Vincent A. Smith shocked Western scholars and brought ridicule on himself with his assertion that Gotama Buddha was "a Mongolian by birth, that is to say, a hill-man like a Gürkha with Mongolian features, and akin to Tibetans."¹⁵ All the same, if the Sakyas were Nepalese, they might very well have belonged to a non-Aryan people.¹⁶ When I meet Nepalese, I am struck by the degree to which they resemble the Japanese and how different they are in appearance from the majority of Indians. Though the origins of the Japanese people are unclear, scholars acknowledge that the Japanese language is related to the Ural-Altaic family of languages. Most Nepalese speak an Indo-Aryan language called Nepali; other languages spoken include Newārī and Pahārī, both of which exhibit a considerable Indo-Aryan influence and are written in the Indian Devanagari script. Despite this, however, the majority of Nepalese are not of Aryan descent. Though the Japanese, Koreans, Mongolians, Tibetans, Nepalese, and Burmese are by no means racially identical, they do share certain characteristics. It would be interesting, therefore, if some racial connection did exist between the Sakyas and the Japanese.

There remain, however, many unanswered questions concerning the race of the Sakyas. What is certain is that they were to a great extent Indian in culture, since their lineage belonged to the Aryan mythological tradition. If we accept that their mythical lineage was related to their origin as a tribe, then the Sakyas would seem to have been Aryan, in contrast to the majority of Nepalese. The inscription on the Piprahvā reliquary containing Sakya remains, discovered by William Claxton Peppé, is written in an Aryan vernacular, the earliest extant inscription in an Aryan language. This seems to add weight to the hypothesis that the Sakyas were Aryan. If so, the popular assumption that Sakyamuni was an Indian would be reasonable.

The American anthropologist G. T. Bowles carried out an ethnic survey of India, extending into Nepal.¹⁷ His results show that the majority of people living in the Terai basin are Aryans of Mediterranean stock and that Mongoloid traits are to be found only in pockets here and there. These people are culturally Indian to a large extent, and it is very possible that a similar pattern existed two and a half thousand years ago.

The region between Gorakhpur, a current industrial center in India, and

Lumbinī in Nepal is one of broad fields, carpeted in rape blossoms in January, with stands of mango and neem trees. The border between the two countries runs through the rape fields and is indicated only by a feeble crosspiece on the road.

Geography influences culture. Although most of Nepal speaks Nepali, people in Lumbinī province speak Abadhi. The word *Abadhi* derives from the Sanskrit *avadhi*, meaning “remote land.” That language has also been spoken in India. To the ancient Indians, culture extended as far as Lumbinī province; beyond was barbarism. Because of this we may suppose that the Sakyas and Sakyamuni himself were under considerable influence from Indian culture.

Myths and legends surround the origin of the Sakya tribe; early canonical literature (the *Ambaṭṭha-sutta*) records one version within a dialogue between the Buddha and a Brahmin youth called Ambaṭṭha.

“Ambaṭṭha! To what clan [*gotta*] do you belong?”¹⁸

“I am a Kaṇhāyana, Gotama.”

“But, Ambaṭṭha, if you think about your name and clan from ancient times on both your father’s and your mother’s sides, [you will find] that the Sakyas are descendants of the master [*ayya-puttā*] while you are the descendants of a woman slave [*dāsī*] of the Sakyas. The Sakyas hold King Okkāka as their ancestor. Long ago, King Okkāka, wanting to transfer the succession to the son of a beloved consort, banished his four elder sons, Okkāma, Karaṇḍu, Hatthiniya, and Sinipura, from his territory. Thus banished, they made their dwelling at the foot of the Himalayas by the banks of a lake, where there was a large forest of *sāka* trees. [That is, when they were banished through the contrivance of their stepmother, they settled down at Kapilavatthu, making it their new capital.] Because they were afraid of corrupting their bloodline [*jāti*], they took their sisters in marriage.

King Okkāka asked the ministers in his retinue, ‘Where then are the princes dwelling now?’

‘They are living, Sire, in a place where there is a large forest of *sāka* trees, by the banks of a lake on the slopes of the Himalayas. Because they were afraid of corrupting their bloodline, they took their sisters in marriage.’

Greatly pleased, King Okkāka exclaimed, ‘Able [*sakya*] are the princes! Supremely able are the princes!’ Henceforth they were known as the Sakyas, and they were the ancestors [*pubbapuriṣā*] of the Sakya tribe.”¹⁹

Here Sakyamuni explains, with pride in the pedigree of the Sakyas, that the Sakyas are the descendants of the master, whereas the Brahmins are the descendants of a woman slave. His claim constitutes a public challenge to Brahmins and their pride in the purity of their lineage. No doubt underlying his confidence was his interpretation of the Sakya name as meaning "able."²⁰

The mention of founding a settlement and dwelling in it also marks development of a culture and customs that differ markedly from those subscribed to by the same tribe in earlier times. It appears that at the time of the Buddha marriages between brothers and sisters were already thought to be contrary to good custom. Later documents record that when the Sakyas fought with the neighboring Koliyas over water rights to the Rohiṇī River, which divided their lands,²¹ the Koliyas derided the Sakyas as "descendants of people who married their own sisters, like dogs or foxes,"²² proof that the ancient legend continued to live in later times.

In the Chinese translation of the text, this sibling marriage was transformed to those within the third degree of kinship, that is, uncles and nieces, and aunts and nephews.

The mothers of the four princes and their associates all kept [the four princes] in their thoughts. And so they came together and discussed the matter, and went to King Okkāka and appealed to him: "Great king! A great amount of time has passed since we parted with the four princes. We wish to go and see them."

The king pronounced: "If you wish to go, please yourselves."

Then the mothers and their associates, having heard the king's pronouncement, went immediately to where the four princes were dwelling in a teak [Skt., *śāka*; Pali, *sāka*] forest south of the Himalayas. Then the mothers said: "We will give your sons our daughters. Give our sons your daughters." And so they married each other and became husbands and wives. Their sons, when born, were seemly in their features.

When King Okkāka heard that the mothers of his four sons had given their daughters as his sons' wives and that their sons were fine and upstanding, he pronounced, with great joy: "They are true Sakyas, the true sons of Sakyas, for skillfully have they survived." As a result they were called Sakyas. In China, *sakya* means "skillful."²³

This passage indicates that the mothers could not forget their children and so penetrated the Himalayas to meet them. It also mentions that the princes already had children and that the mothers had children other

than the four princes, thus making the whole story inconsistent. The Pali version is much simpler and the story line is far stronger. What probably happened is that the Chinese translator, according to Confucian principles, wanted to avoid the fact of marriage between brothers and sisters, and so deviated from the original text. Indeed, there are many other instances in the Chinese translation of Buddhist texts where this happened.

The *Wu-fen-lü* version gives the legend in the words of Sakyamuni:

Long ago there was a king. His name was Okkāka. He had four sons; the first was named Okkāmkha, the second was named Karaṇḍu, the third was named Hatthiniya, and the fourth was named Sinipura. They were surpassing in wisdom, virtuous, and full of dignity.

The chief wife had a son named Dighāyu [Skt., Dirghāyus]. He was foolish, weak, ugly, and base, and he was despised by all. The queen said to herself: "Though my son is the senior, he is inferior to others in ability. The other four princes are virtuous and full of dignity. Surely they will ascend the throne. I must devise a plan to strengthen [my] son's position. What will aid me is that the king holds me in great affection, surpassing the other wives. I shall first ask the king, showing my emotion, and then accomplish my plan with reason." And doing as she planned, she dressed herself in her finery, and when the king came to her, welcomed him in reverence. When the king tried to approach more closely, she began to cry. The king asked why she was crying, and in reply she said, "I cannot accomplish even my slightest desire. I am spent."

The king said, "I pledge to you that I will bring about your desire if it is a reasonable one."

Straightaway she said to him, "Your four sons are all virtuous and full of dignity. [Though] our son is the senior, he is inferior in ability. Without a doubt he will be overthrown when he succeeds to the throne. If you would only banish the four princes, my mind would be at rest."

The king replied, "The four princes are full of filial piety and brotherly harmony and are no threat to the country. How can I banish them?"

His wife answered, "I am anxious [for my child] as well as for our state. Because the four princes are all virtuous and full of dignity, each of them will find followers. Should [they] compete, they would destroy each other, and how could we be sure of the throne after your retirement?"

“Stop! Stop! No more,” the king said, and he immediately ordered the four princes to leave the country. Obeying his order, the princes dressed in dignified clothes. Then the mothers of the princes, and their sisters, all requested that they might depart also; and their strong men, their various workmen, and Brahmins, rich men, householders, and ordinary people begged that they might accompany them. The king acceded to all their requests.

The princes bowed and departed, and crossed the Bhāgirathi River until they came to a place north of the Himalayas where the land was flat and broad, with a refreshing landscape all around. Fruits grew in profusion, and there were all manner of animals and birds. Seeing this, the four princes called the Brahmins, rich men, and householders and discussed [the area] with them, saying, “So far there was no place better than this. Shall we remain here?” Because none disagreed, they halted immediately and built a city there. As the years passed, the city grew more and more prosperous, until it came to rule over a major kingdom.

Seven years after [the four princes] had left, their father the king recalled them to mind, and asked his ministers, “Where are my four sons dwelling now?”

[The ministers] replied, “They are dwelling in a place north of the Himalayas, near the forest of *sāka* trees [Sāka-saṇḍa]. They have built their palace and laid out their city. The people are prosperous, the land is fertile, and the fields are rich. Nor is anyone in need of food or clothing.”

Hearing this, the king was deeply impressed and said: “Able are my children!” In this way they came to be called the Sakya [*sākya* meaning “able”] tribe.²⁴

Because the Sakyas did not follow the Brahmanical traditions, Brahmins regarded them as coarse and strange. In the *Ambaṭṭha-sutta*, the Brahmin youth from Kosala, Ambaṭṭha, spoke to Sakyamuni in the following way: “Rough are they who are born as Sakyas, Gotama. Vulgar are they who are born as Sakyas. Imprudent are they who are born as Sakyas. Violent are the Sakyas. They do not venerate, value, respect, make offerings to, or honor the Brahmins even though they are menials. It is not seemly or fitting that these Sakyas, being menials, do not venerate, value, respect, make offerings to, or honor the Brahmins,” said the young Brahmin Ambaṭṭha, flinging degrading words at the Sakyas for the first time.”²⁵

The Sakyas ignored the authority of the Brahmins, and so the Brahmins despised them. “‘There are four classes [*vanna*],’ [said the Brahmin youth Ambaṭṭha], ‘kings, Brahmins, common people, and slaves.’²⁶ Of these four classes, the kings, common people, and slaves all serve the Brahmins. It is not seemly or fitting that the Sakyas, menials though they are, do not venerate, value, respect, make offerings to, or honor the Brahmins.’ In this way, Ambaṭṭha for the third time flung degrading words at the Sakyas.”²⁷

The Sakyas had a sort of republican government. There was a congress hall in their capital, Kapilavatthu. A Buddhist scripture says that when a Brahmin had occasion to go there, he found in the hall numbers of Sakya kings and princes, seated all in high places, all joking and laughing and playing around. The Brahmin believed that he himself was the butt of their laughter.²⁸ The word for “congress hall” (*santhāgāra*) is never used in connection with royal conferences; it therefore appears that the Sakyas exercised a republican government. After the Buddha attained enlightenment and returned to his home, the Sakya nobles were discussing politics in the congress hall.²⁹ When the Sakyas later built a new congress hall in Kapilavatthu, the Buddha and his followers were invited to the newly constructed building to preach.³⁰ When the Mallās of Pāvā built a new congress hall called Ubbhaṭaka they immediately asked Sakya-muni to visit it.³¹ Another story relates how General Viṇḍabha reacted angrily when he went to the land of the Sakyas, where his mother had been born, and was treated with contempt because of his mother’s humble clan status, and of how the place where he sat in the congress hall was regarded as defiled.³² The episode reveals that only those of high rank gathered in the congress hall. It is said that in his later years the Buddha praised the republican system; perhaps this was due to the experience in his youth of meeting and debating in the congress hall.³³ Generally speaking, the atmosphere of the Sakya clan was liberal, and even, for the time, progressive and reformist. Such was the intellectual environment from which the Buddha emerged.

The Sakyas had long been subordinate to the rulers of Kosala.³⁴ According to the *Suttanipāta*, an old verse attributed to Sakya-muni at the time of his ascetic practice says: “(422) On the middle slopes of those Snow Mountains [Himalayas], O King, there live a people, the inhabitants of Kosala, who are upright in nature³⁵ and endowed with wealth and courage.”³⁶ They were perhaps in a tributary relationship with Kosala

(approximately the modern Oudh region), then a newly emergent power that also governed Ajodhya (Skt., Ayodhyā) and Kāśi (Skt., Kāśī; modern Varanasi), and there must have been a number of other small, weak tribal lands, like those of the Sakyas, that were also subordinate to Kosala. This connection with Kosala seems to have continued in the Buddha's later years as well. The *Agganna-suttanta* records him as saying:

The Sakyas are the vassals of King Pasenadi of Kosala. The Sakyas are submissive to him, bow before him, rise from their seats to greet him, join their palms in prayer for him, and take a humble position before him. In the same way King Pasenadi of Kosala is submissive to the Tathāgata, bows before him, and takes a humble position before him. The king says: "Is not the *samaṇa* Gotama of good birth [*suajāta*]; I am not well born [*dujjāta*]. The *samaṇa* Gotama is strong, but I am weak. He has beauty, I am ugly. He has great influence, I have only a little influence."³⁷

It is doubtful, of course, whether such a powerful king would have uttered these humble words. The above passage does tell us, though, that the king of Kosala recognized that the Buddha was of good birth, even though he was a Sakya, and that Kosala was more powerful than the Sakyas. It is certain that Pasenadi highly respected Sakyamuni as a religious figure, for he traveled in his vehicle through Sakya towns, such as Nagaraka, to see the Buddha. The Sakyas, being subordinate to Kosala, may actually have been of a different ethnic group from those who lived in Kosala. Later they would be destroyed by the might of that country.

The Sakyas were closely connected with the Koliyas who lived to their east. It is thought that both peoples were originally of the same tribe. The Koliyas, like the Sakyas, also built up a small territory. Their capital was Devadaha, in the vicinity of Dividamar in Nepal; in recent years archaeological excavations have confirmed its site. The two tribes had intermarried for many years; though there was the occasional dispute over water rights, relations between the two were cordial. Sometimes people even referred to both the Sakyas and the Koliyas together as holding the Sakya territory. It is a small area, more or less in the region of the present Terai basin, extending approximately sixty kilometers north to south and eighty kilometers east to west.

It is said that the Sakyas practiced the distinctive custom of cross-

cousin marriage.³⁸ This marriage of the children of siblings is widely practiced in undeveloped societies. I have set out in table 1 diagrams of such marriages as recorded in the legends of Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka). The only source for this information, however, is Pāli literature of a relatively late period—chronicles or commentaries—rather than the oldest scriptures. Some scholars therefore believe that the legend of cross-cousin marriage was developed by Ceylonese writers of later times.³⁹ Because such primitive customs would tend to disappear as the state grew larger, however, it would be natural to think that cross-cousin marriage occurred in a very ancient period. It is still followed today in Fiji, for example. It was also practiced, even encouraged, among the Dravidian-speaking people of southern India⁴⁰ and occurred among the Rājput people of northern India.⁴¹ It is probably safe to assume, therefore, that cross-cousin marriage was also a custom of the Sakyas. Marriage between such close relations may also have been a response to the perceived need to preserve the purity of the tribe's bloodline, as in the legend noted previously. In modern India, although the marriage of first cousins is forbidden by law, society tolerates unmarried cousins living together because they cannot marry formally. However, it is considered immoral for young unmarried couples who are not so related to live together. At the least, the custom remains firmly rooted in the more conservative southern part of the country.

Some scholars assert that Sakya society was matrilineal.⁴² This assertion is, however, doubtful. There are no examples of a man marrying into the wife's family and assuming her family name. Neither are there any examples of a child taking the mother's family name, as can be seen in later inscriptions from southern India. Furthermore, we have a quotation from Sakyamuni placed in the mouth of an ancient sage that "[my] authority is the clan of my father."⁴³ The existence of a patrilineal system would mean that the Sakyas were closer to the Aryans than to the native races.

According to one tradition, the Sakyas and Koliyas had "82,000 kings, who were all related and prayed for one another's prosperity."⁴⁴ Though the number is no doubt a rhetorical exaggeration, one can conjecture that a noble class practiced a kind of republican government in partnership. "King" in this case probably refers to the Ksatriya caste.

According to Sherpas (Tibetan people living on the southern slopes of the Himalayas in Nepal), there is even today a people called the Sakyas. They are tall, dark, with high-bridged noses, and of a proud and dignified

Table 1. Cross-cousin marriages of the Sakya clan according to the tradition of Ceylon (*Dīpavamsa*, III, 44–47; *Mahāvamsa*, II, 15–24)

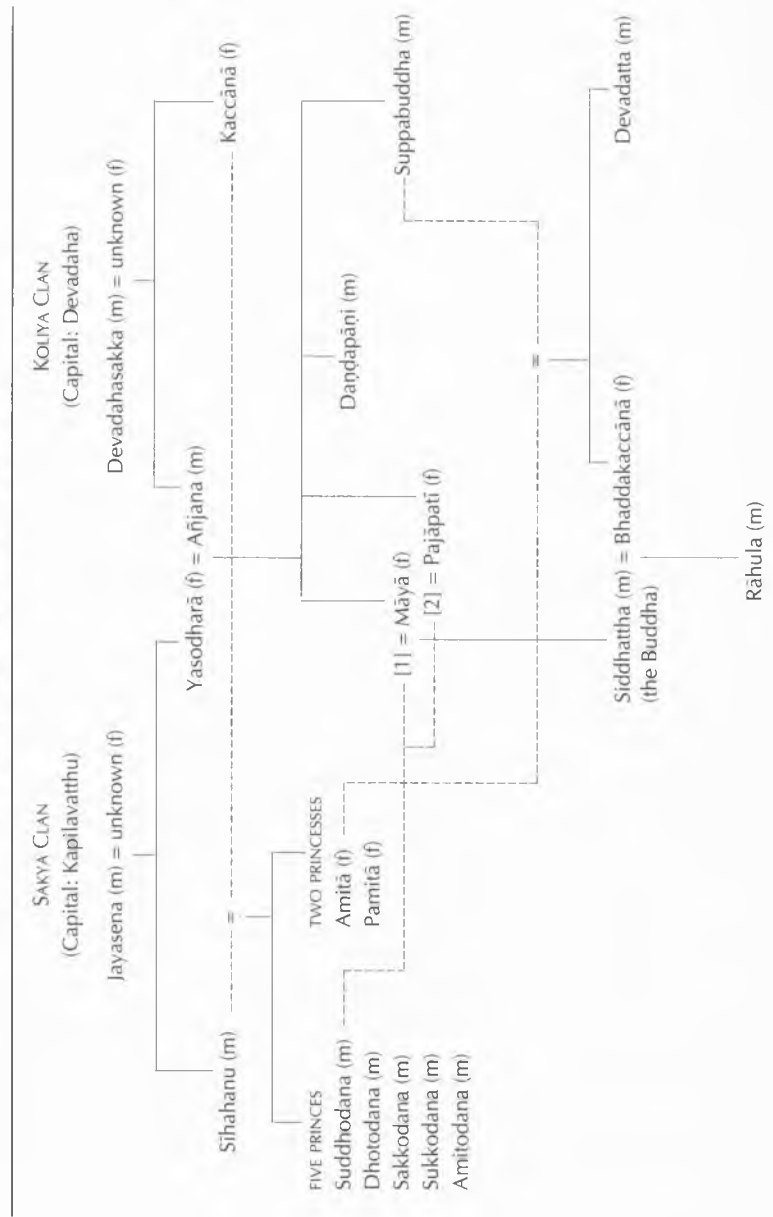


Table 2. Sanskrit forms of the names in table 1 according to Bernhard Breloer, "Die Śākyas," *ZDMG*, new series, no. 19, 1940.

I		II	
MALES	FEMALES	MALES	FEMALES
[Kapilavastu]	[Devahrada]	[Devahrada]	[Kapilavastu]
Jayasena	unknown	unknown (usually called Devahrada-Śākya)	unknown
Simhahanu	Kātyāyana	Añjana	Yaśodharā
Śuddhodana*	Māyā; Prajāpati	Suprabuddha	Amṛtā
Siddhārtha	Bhadra-Kātyāyana	Devadatta	unknown
(the Buddha)			
Rāhula			

* His three brothers were Dronodana, Śuklodana, and Amṛtodana.

disposition. It is not known whether there is any relationship between these Śākyas and those of old.

LINEAGE OF THE BUDDHA

In early verses, Gotama Buddha is frequently called Ādiccabandhu, "the sun's kinsman," which was translated into Chinese using the compound *jih-chung*, "race of the sun."⁴⁵ A *Suttanipāta* verse (423) says that this is his clan (*gotta*) name. Gotama was, therefore, a member of a clan within the Śākya tribe whose members traced their ancestry from the sun, a clan proud to be called "kinsmen of the sun."

Myths in which certain royal families claim solar descent are not limited to India. Japanese mythology connected with the sun a deity described as the ancestor of the imperial house, Amaterasu Ōmikami [Great Divinity Illuminating Heaven], and American Indians have similar myths. Just as the Japanese were proud of the solar myth about the origins of their imperial house, the Indian Buddhists must have been proud that the clan of Śakyamuni claimed solar descent. Indian epic poetry also contains legends that the entire human race is descended from the sun.⁴⁶

The fact that the Śākyas were called kinsmen of the sun may indicate that they practiced sun worship, which would suggest they led an agricultural life. Desert existence does not give rise to sun worship: there the sun is the source of blazing heat and many afflictions. Places with hot, wet cli-

mates, such as the Pacific and Caribbean islands, take heat and sunlight for granted and rarely develop sun cults. To those engaged in agriculture, however, the sun is a benefactor, providing the warmth and light necessary to grow crops, and so it is worshiped as the bestower of blessings. Sun worship was not widespread when the Aryans were still hunters and nomads; it became popular after they settled around the Ganges River, and especially after they began growing rice, which depends on sunlight. The sun cult emerged in the rice and sugar cane lands stretching from Gorakhpur to Lumbini, and it is not hard to understand why large temples to the sun were built in Orissa starting in the tenth century.

The conventional explanation of later ages concerning the Indian legend is that those who were members of royal families by birth were of solar descent (Skt., *sūryavaṃśa*; Pāli, *suriyavaṃsa*), whereas those who were not of royal birth but later became kings were considered to be of lunar descent (Skt., *candravaṃśa*; Pāli, *candavaṃsa*).⁴⁷

Accounts in Buddhist literature that the Sakya kings were of solar descent and descended from Ikṣvāku derive from similar Indian traditions. Though the Sakyas were vassals of the Kosalas, Sakya kings claimed to be of the same ancestry as Kosala kings and by this token considered themselves of equal rank in lineage.

The Buddha's family name was Gotama. In some instances this is considered to be his clan (*gotta*) name.⁴⁸ A poet named Gautama [the Sanskrit form of *Gotama*] appears in the *Rg Veda*.⁴⁹ Its plural form indicates his descendants. That Gautama is not, however, given credit as the author of any poem in the *Rg Veda*. The name *Gautama* also appears in the *Brāhmaṇas*, where it means "descendants of Gotama."⁵⁰ In ordinary Sanskrit, *Gautama* is a patronymic meaning "kinsmen of the sage Gotama." It is one *pravara* ("lineage"; Pāli, *pavara*) within a Brahmin *gotra* ("clan"; Pāli, *gotta*).⁵¹ This can be verified through inscriptions.⁵² Statements in Buddhist sources, however, do not concur with this:

1. *Gotama* is described as the Buddha's *gotta*.⁵³ Perhaps because the Buddhists were not concerned with the Brahmanical *pravara*, they called the *pravara* the *gotra*. Alternatively, those living in the Nepal area may not have been concerned with the distinction between *gotra* and *pravara*.

2. As far as Brahmanical religious works are concerned, *Gotama* is clearly a name used among Brahmins. According to the Buddhist texts, however, the Sakyas had a Gotama clan even though they were Ksatriyas.

In the *Vedas*, *Gotama* is the name of a sage (*ṛṣi*) belonging to the Āṅgīrasa tribe. The name appears in the hymns of the *Rg Veda*.⁵⁴ In cer-

tain ancient verse sections of the Buddhist writings, Gotama Buddha is addressed as Āṅgīrasa, which suggests that people of the time knew of the connection between Gotama and Āṅgīrasa in the *Vedas*. Here again we find links between the Buddhist sutras and the Vedic tradition, despite a slight distortion.

Go means “cow,” and *tama* is a superlative suffix, meaning “most excellent, the greatest.”⁵⁵ There are no known instances of *gotama* being used as a common noun meaning “most excellent cow,” but no doubt ancient Indians were reminded of that meaning when they spoke the word, and *Gotama* must have been considered an auspicious clan name. The idea of venerating cows appears in Vedic literature, and a similar concept was present even earlier in the Indus Valley civilization. Gotama or Gautama appears in the *Vedas* as the name of a sage, and Mahāvīra, the founder of Jainism, often taught a man of the same name, so it is apparent that *Gotama* was used as a family or clan name not only among Buddhists but among all Indians.⁵⁶

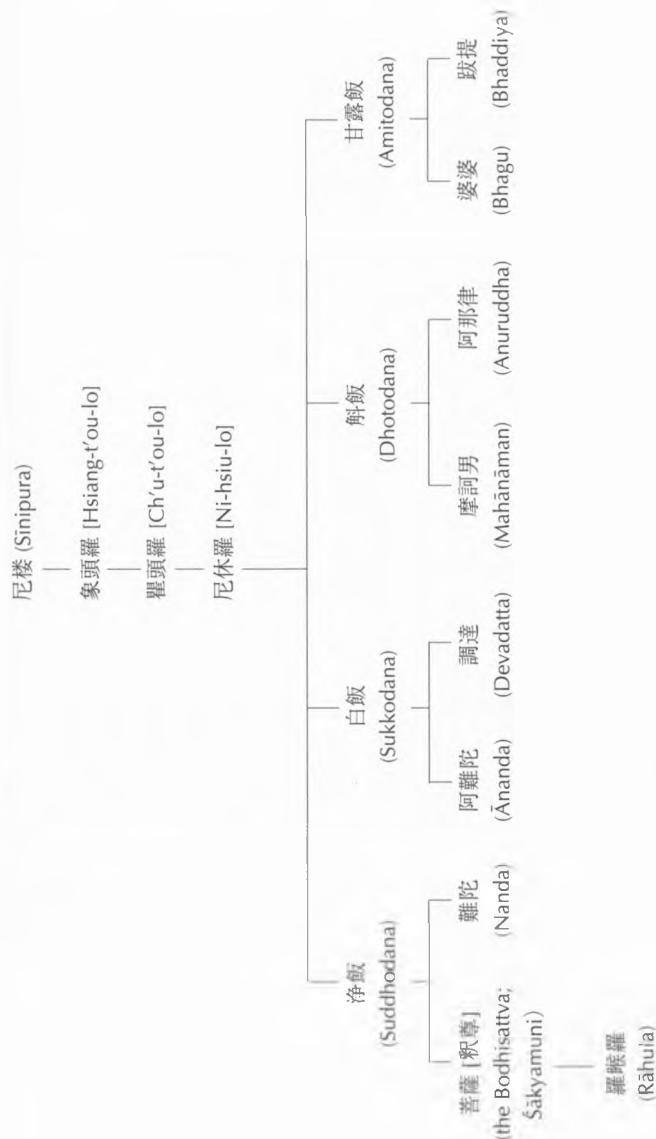
Even before cows became widely used for agriculture, they had been familiar to Indic people since the Vedic period for their milk, and their flesh was eaten after a sacrifice. The clan name of Gotama may have arisen because cattle were considered the main form of wealth. At the time when the Sakyas began using the name *Gotama*, they already had a settled, agricultural life and prized cattle as valuable draft animals. They thus had no difficulty in accepting the clan name *Gotama* as a type of honorific title.

Buddhist literature has transmitted Sakyamuni’s genealogy in a variety of ways. The bulk of such genealogies are no more than legend. A simplified version of the genealogy given in the *Wu-fen-lü* is Ni-lou (Śinipura)—Hsiang-t’ou-lo—Ch’u-t’ou-lo—Ni-hsiu-lo—Ching-fan (Suddhodana)—P’u-sa (the Bodhisattva, i.e., Sakyamuni)—Lo-hou-lo (Rāhula; see table 3).⁵⁷ The version in the *Mahāvastu* traces the Sakya ancestry still further back: Saṃmata—Kalyāṇa—Rava—Upośadha—Mandhātṛ—Sujāta—Ikṣvāku.⁵⁸

Other versions appear in the Pāli *Dīpavaṃsa* (chapter 3) and *Mahāvāṃsa* (chapter 2), and in Chinese translations,⁵⁹ in translations of semibiographical material,⁶⁰ in *Vinaya* translations,⁶¹ and in the Tibetan commentary *Chang-so-chih-lun* of Ḥphags-pa.⁶² In all of these, the genealogies are extremely long.⁶³ As an example, I have given in tables 4 and 5 the versions according to the Ceylonese legend *Mahāvāṃsa* and the *Ssu-fen-lü*.

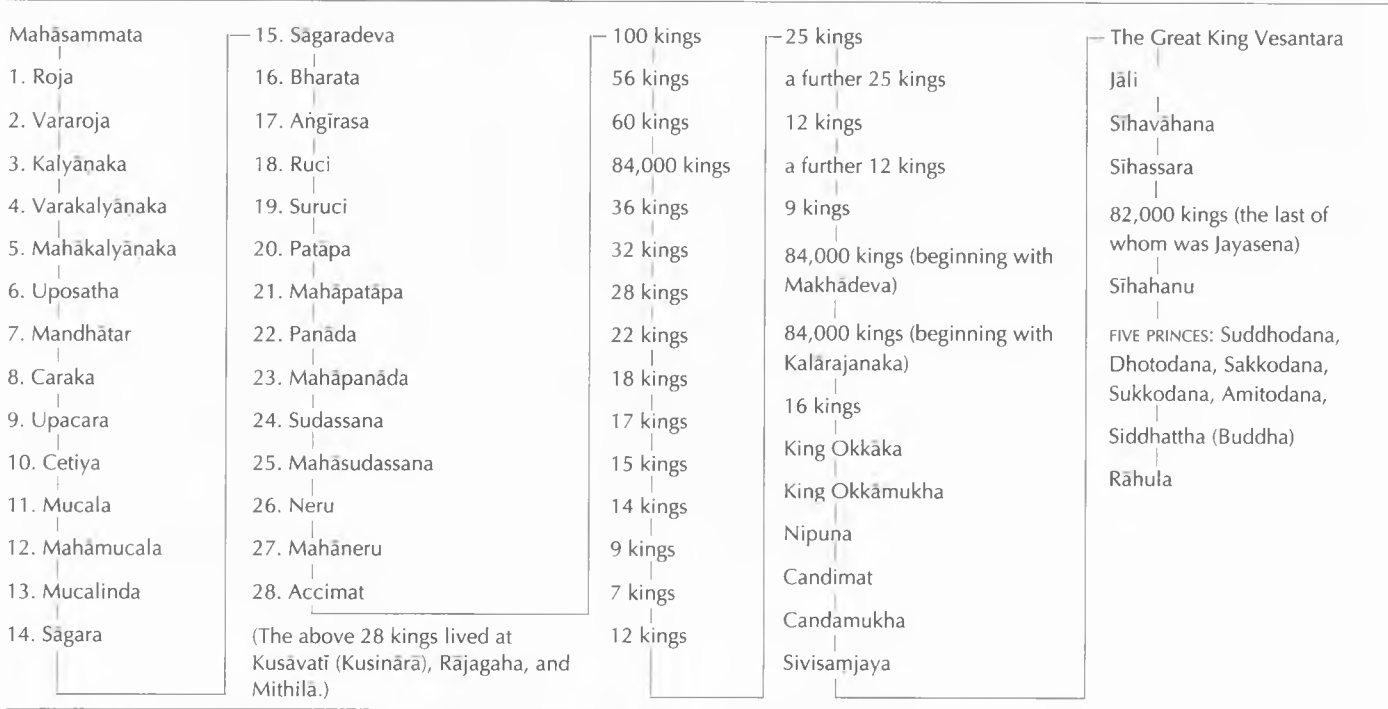
Certain characteristics are common to the various legends about the Buddha’s lineage:

Table 3. Genealogy of the Sakya clan according to the *Wu-fen-lü* (fasc. 15 [T. 22:101a–b])



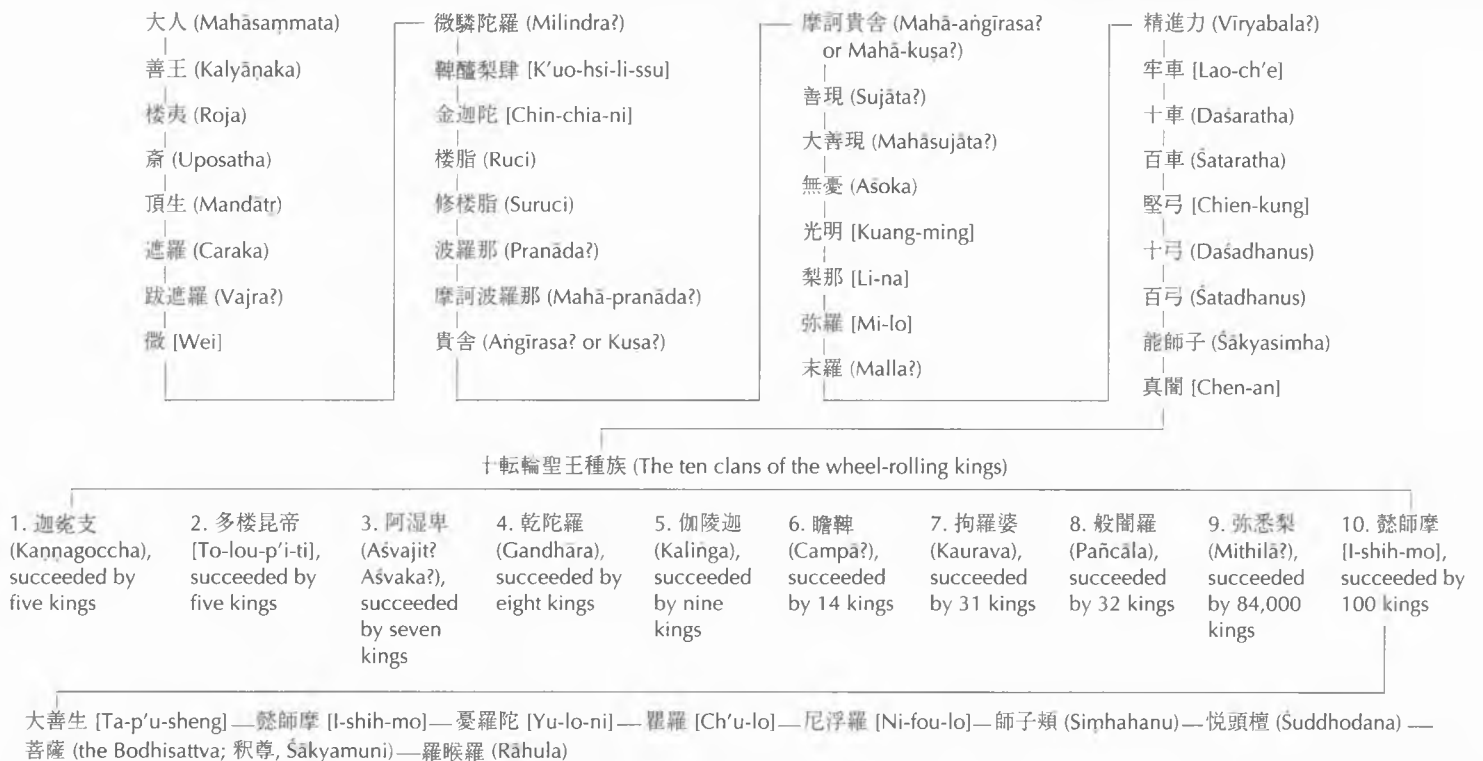
Note: Equivalent Indic names are in parentheses, and the Chinese rendering in brackets when the Indic is not known.

Table 4. Genealogy of the Sakya clan according to the Ceylonese tradition
(*Mahāvamsa*, chapter 2, with reference to *Dīpavamsa*, chapter 3)



Note: The record in the *Dīpavamsa* is arranged in W. Geiger, trans. *The Mahāvamsa, or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon* (Colombo: The Ceylon Government Information Department, 1950; London: Luzac, 1964), pp. 10–13.

Table 5. Genealogy of the Sakya clan according to the *Ssu-fen-lü* (fasc. 31 [T. 22: 779a])



Note: Equivalent Indic names are in parentheses and the Chinese rendering in brackets when the Indic is not known.

1. All legends make Mahāsammata the progenitor of the Sakyas. *Mahāsammata* means “one recommended by the people’s assembly,” or “one chosen by election of the people.” This is an outlook based on a sort of social contract; here we see the traditional Buddhist view that the first kings were elected by the people but the dynasties were continued by their descendants. It may also reflect historical fact; the Sakyas valued the assembly and maintained a type of republican polity.

2. Famous kings from Indian epic poems and legends are added into these genealogies as ancestors of the Sakyas. Historical kings and emperors are also inserted in the lists. Aśoka appears as an ancestor of the Buddha, and in Chinese translations, so does Wei-lin-t’o-lo,⁶⁴ who may be identified as Milinda (Skt., Milindra; Gk., Menandros), the Greek king who invaded India from Bactria in the mid-second century B.C.E. Although these genealogies may have some basis, the names of the kings in the lists have been made up arbitrarily, which accounts for the fact that there is little uniformity among the lists, and which means they lack historicity.

3. The names of the ten wheel-rolling (Skt., *cakravartin*; Pāli, *chakkavartin*) kings reflect the names of the major kingdoms in India at the period when the original *Mahāsāsaka Vinaya* (translated into Chinese as *Wu-fen-lü*) was compiled.

4. It is natural that there should be discrepancies in some details of the various accounts, but they disagree on major points as well. For example, the Ceylonese legends give Suddhodana’s predecessor as Sihahanu, and the *Ssu-fen-lü* gives him as Shih-tzu-chia (Simhahanu), but this name does not appear in the *Wu-fen-lü*, where the king preceding Suddhodana is called Ni-hsiu-lo.

As is clear from the preceding discussion and from the lists in tables 1–5, Sakyamuni’s father was called Suddhodana.⁶⁵ The name means “pure rice” or “white rice.” In Chinese it is translated as Ching-fan-wang [king of pure rice].⁶⁶ Legend says that the names of his four younger brothers all contained the element meaning “rice” (*odana*). These names suggest that the Sakyas were already cultivating rice and that they particularly valued white rice.

Later Buddhist writings called Suddhodana a *rājan* (“king”), not a *mahārājan* (“great king”).⁶⁷ He was certainly a local ruler, but he was not the monarch of a great kingdom and was accorded the title “great king” only as a result of the idealization of later times. He was nominally a ruler, although the Sakyas actually had a republic; at the very least, he was a wealthy head of a small state.

The Buddha's mother was Māyā. The names of both parents appear in relatively old sutras, so they are probably factual names.⁶⁸ Legends say that Māyā protected Sakyamuni inside her womb and that after death she dwelled in the bliss of the heavenly realm.⁶⁹ Later sutras give Māyā the title of *devī* ("queen").⁷⁰ In ancient India, *māyā* meant "mysterious spiritual power of a deity." In later Indian philosophy, *māyā* came to mean "illusion," which is considered to be the source of the visible universe, but it would be misleading to apply any such connotation to the name of the Buddha's mother.

The Buddha's personal name is generally said to have been Siddhattha (Skt., Siddhārtha), meaning "one who has achieved his purpose," or "one who has accomplished righteousness (or profit)." This name, however, does not appear in the earliest writings, so a question arises as to whether it was a later addition.⁷¹ At the same time, because no other name is suggested anywhere, there is no positive evidence to cause us to reject the tradition.

It may seem strange that personal names are not certain. In many cases Sakyamuni is referred to as the Bodhisattva or the Buddha. These expressions are based on a traditional Indian way of thinking. Even in modern times, for example, the scholar Satis Chandra Vidyabhushana is referred to as Vidyabhushana, which is an academic title similar to "doctor," rather than by his personal name. Japanese people of the past also avoided calling the nobles by their personal names and used other expressions.

Because Sakyamuni was born into a ruling family, he was considered to be "born in the Ksatriya caste, born in a Ksatriya family."⁷² Mahāvira, the founder of Jainism, was also born in a Ksatriya family. Later writings, however, emphasized the excellence of Gotama's lineage. The *Sonadanda-sutta* says: "Truly the *samaṇa* Gotama was well born, both in terms of his mother's lineage and in terms of his father's lineage, of pure descent through his forefathers for seven generations, with no deviation, and irreproachable with regard to his lineage."⁷³

The people of that time were probably diligent and led affluent lives. Hsüan-tsang (ca. 596–664) wrote about Kapilavatthu in his travel record, *Ta-T'ang hsi-yü-chi* (Buddhist records of the western regions), that "the ground is rich and fertile, and is cultivated according to the [right] season. The climate is uniform, and the manners [of the people] are peaceful and relaxed."⁷⁴ The text says that the city was about 4,000 *li* in circumference.⁷⁵ The area deteriorated during the medieval period but has started to produce more since the last century.

The preceding quotation describes the land as rich, and this seems to have been a fact. Rice is grown in the region even today, and during the Buddha's time paddy cultivation was practiced. The king's name, Suddhodana, "pure rice," bears this out. Furthermore, the land was located in a strategic position connecting the various countries of the Ganges plain and the mountains, an advantageous situation for trade and commerce.

KAPILAVATTHU

The capital of the Sakyas was the town (*pura*) of Kapilavatthu⁷⁶ (Skt., Kapilavastu):⁷⁷ "And there the Sakyas are at their own home, in Kapilavatthu."⁷⁸

The town's name was thought to have been connected with an ancient sage called Kapila. Later legends say that the sage Kapila possessed a special wisdom called "the net of the earth" (*bhummajāla*). When he looked at the site with this wisdom, he saw deer and boars pursuing lions and tigers, and rats pursuing snakes. So he predicted that a great city would be built there.⁷⁹ There seems to be no direct connection, however, between the Kapila who founded the Sāṃkhya school of philosophy and the town of Kapilavatthu. *Kapila*, originally meaning the reddish-brown color of fire, also became the personal name of a sage.

Kapilavatthu was described as being located in the foothills of the Himalayas on the banks of a river called the Bhāgīrathī, meaning "a river brought to the surface through Śiva's blessing by a sage called Bhagīratha."⁸⁰ The name of the river, Bhāgīrathī, refers to the Ganges, but is probably given to the river under discussion because it is a branch of the Ganges.⁸¹

Though cities (*nagara*) had already appeared in India at the time of the Buddha, Kapilavatthu was not referred to in this way, which suggests that it could not have been particularly large.⁸² As Buddhism spread, though, the hometown of Sakyamuni drew interest,⁸³ so that in later writings it came to be called a city (*nagara*) and a royal city (*rājadhānī*).⁸⁴

The site of Kapilavatthu has not yet been definitely located. Some scholars identify it with Tilaurā Kōt⁸⁵ in the Nepalese Terai,⁸⁶ and Nepalese scholars continue to maintain this claim. Tilaurā Kōt lies twenty-four kilometers from Sakyamuni's birthplace of Lumbinī. When Hsüan-tsang visited the area in the seventh century, the city had so fallen into ruin that it was impossible to determine how broad it had been. The palace inside the city, with a circumference of fourteen or fifteen *li*, was built of brick. Fa-hsien had visited the site in the fifth century and reported that "the

country of Kapilavatthu is all desolation, with very few inhabitants. On the roads people are terrified by white elephants and lions, and no one should travel without good reason."⁸⁷ All the same, there is considerable doubt as to whether Tilaurā Kōt is the Kapilavatthu of Gotama Buddha's time.

The Nepalese government excavations at Tilaurā Kōt have unearthed Neolithic stoneware, pottery, and coins dating to before the common era, as well as the ruins of a monastery. Sculptures discovered there show that a cult worshipping *linga* (the phallic symbol used in the worship of the Hindu god Śiva) existed in the region from quite ancient times. In 1966 punch-marked coins were found, on one of which was engraved a horse, connected with the Brahmanic horse sacrifice (*aśvamedha*). A sculpture of the Buddha dating from the Gupta period (ca. 320–ca. 550) was also discovered. Other finds included coins of King Kaniṣka discovered near Tilaurā Kōt, and pottery dating from the days of Gotama at Bedamau in the west Terai basin.⁸⁸ Subsequently an archaeological research team from Risho University undertook a large-scale excavation and published a volume containing photographs of these artifacts.⁸⁹ The essentials are summarized in the following article from the *Bukkyō Times*:

From 1966 to 1967 we embarked on an exploratory tour to uncover the lost ruins of Kapilavatthu. The project was proposed by Professor Zuiryū Nakamura of the faculty of Buddhist studies and was promoted by the combined efforts of Dr. Hajime Ōmura (professor of geography) and Dr. Tsuneharu Kubo (professor emeritus of archaeology). . . . Tilaurā Kōt had not been examined since P. C. Mukherji's excavation, except for a small-scale investigation by the Archaeological Survey of India under Dr. Mitra in 1961. After consultation with Dr. Tappa, head of the Department of Archaeology, His Majesty's Government of Nepal, it was agreed that we would mount a joint excavation.

The excavation began in 1967 and ended with the eighth season in 1977–78. Since 1978 we have been consolidating the ruin, setting up museum and research facilities, preparing our report, and investigating other sites in the same area. . . .

The Tilaurā Kōt ruins are 3.2 kilometers northwest of the village of Taulihawā in Lumbinī Province, Royal Kingdom of Nepal. The ruins are rectangular along a north-south axis, measuring about 500 meters north to south and about 450 meters east to west. A brick wall surrounds the ruins. The northwest corner, however, has been lost as a

result of erosion caused by the Banganga River, which flows northwest of the site. To the south and east of the northern part of the wall, there is a conspicuous moat. What appear to be gates are found in two places on the east side and two places on the west side of the wall, but the existence of one each on the west and the south cannot be confirmed. Within the walls there is one tank each in the northeast section and the northern part of the central area, and there are eight mounds that indicate constructions of some kind.

We began by excavating Mound 7, in the northern part of the central area. We found the remains of structures dating from the Śuṅga and Kuṣāṇa periods, with the earliest artifacts belonging to the period from the Neolithic era down to the era of Northern Black Polished (N.B.P.) Ware Culture [600–200 B.C.E.]. Finding pottery resembling N.B.P. ware is highly suggestive in terms of the nature of the Tilaurā Kōt site, but my personal opinion is that the pottery, though of the N.B.P. ware type, is relatively late. . . .

The earliest of the structures dates from the Mauryan period [317–ca. 180 B.C.E.], and others span the Śuṅga period [ca. 180–ca. 68 B.C.E.] into the Kuṣāṇa period [ca. 50 C.E.–ca. 250]. Excavated items include, besides a large amount of pottery, numerous terra-cotta objects, coins, and utensils made of stone, copper, and iron. An excavation of Mound 11 showed that it belonged to the same period as Mound 7, with many finds dating from the Kuṣāṇa period.

Excavation of both mounds was, at the wish of the Department of Archaeology, His Majesty's Government of Nepal, terminated before the lowest strata were reached, in order that structures might be preserved and work on them consolidated. We were able to verify, however, through excavations in areas of Mound 7 where there were no signs of structures, that the N.B.P. ware came from quite a deep level. These results indicate that it is possible to date the earliest settlement at the site to the N.B.P. period, that is, 600–200 B.C.E.⁹⁰

This excavation has great archaeological and historical importance, though no positive identification can be made because, as the report states, "the remains in Tilaurā Kōt are those of a palace, but no inscriptional evidence was found [to verify that the site was Kapilavatthu]."⁹¹

In recent years the Archaeological Survey of India has been conducting excavations at another site identified with Kapilavatthu, Piprahwā in

Uttar Pradesh, and has announced that it was the actual site of the town. It was here that relics of Sakyamuni (or the Sakyas) were found. The excavation in northern Uttar Pradesh began in 1970, and the announcement that Piprahwā was the site of Kapilavatthu came in 1976. The hamlet of Piprahwā is about five hundred kilometers east of New Delhi, just south of the border with Nepal, and is surrounded by marshy jungle and mango groves. There are about fifteen kilometers between Piprahwā and Lumbini. Brick structures excavated to date include a Kuṣāṇa-period monastery, a stupa, and part of a palace. The objects discovered include two talc reliquaries, three pots, and forty terra-cotta seals. The reliquaries contained carbonized bones and the deep pots, ashes.

The decisive factor identifying Piprahwā with Kapilavatthu was an inscription, on a pot lid excavated from the ruins of what is thought to be a monastery, which reads: "This monastery was built by Devaputra Kaṇiṣka, for the *saṅgha* of Kapilavatthu." I have not seen the object, or a photograph of it, and so cannot report it as conclusive evidence.

The more than forty terra-cotta seals found in the ruins of the monastery on the east side of the stupa, however, do reveal some historical facts. The seals were not discovered in one spot but in various places, at depths between 1.05 and 1.55 meters beneath the surface at the monastery ruins. All are unsymmetrically round, about three centimeters in diameter. Some were found, just as they had been placed, in a feretory in a *bhikkhu's* (monk's) quarters. The seals read, in three- to four-line inscriptions in Brāhmī characters dating from the first or second century, "Om! [Possession of] the Bhikṣu Saṅgha of the Devaputra Monastery at Kapilavastu" and "[Possession of] the Bhikṣu Saṅgha of Mahā-Kapilavastu." *Om* is a sacred syllable used by the Indians; its use here reveals the influence of the Sanskrit revival, particularly remarkable after the second century. *Devaputra* means "son of the deity" or "son of heaven"; it is a title used in inscriptions by the Kuṣāṇa kings (such as King Kaṇiṣka).⁹²

These finds testify to the existence of a monastery founded by a Kuṣāṇa king (Kaṇiṣka?) at the site and that the name of the site was Kapilavastu or Mahā-Kapilavastu. The seals, being portable, could of course have been taken to the site from elsewhere, and *Kapilavastu* might indicate a relatively wide area. Nevertheless they do provide a basis for identifying Piprahwā with Kapilavatthu, although absolute proof is still lacking. Although Mauryan coins were reportedly found at the site, it is not known how many objects dating before that era were found. The

stupa seems to have undergone a reconstruction. Altogether seven reliquaries have been found, five by Peppé and two more recently. The number is not unusual: at Amarāvati five were discovered.

The report by the Archaeological Survey of India infuriated Nepalese archaeologists. They compiled a report, which they distributed internationally, saying that the Indian claim was unsubstantiated and that Tilaurā Kōt was Kapilavatthu.⁹³

As yet no definite conclusion has been reached, and a final decision must await future excavations. The passions aroused by the question of the site are fanned by the contention that if Tilaurā Kōt is the site of Kapilavatthu, then Sakyamuni was Nepalese, and if Piprahwā, then he was Indian. If the latter is the case, Sakyamuni was an Indian who happened to be born at Lumbinī (in Nepal) during his mother's trip to that site. Neither India nor Nepal existed at the time as a national entity, so the question has very little relevance for those not directly involved.

Kapilavatthu appears to have fallen into ruin after the death of Kaṇiṣka. Fa-hsien (340?–420?) described it as follows:

Less than a *yojana* [around seven kilometers] east from here [the birth-place of Koṇāgamana Buddha] we arrived in Kapilavastu. In the town there was neither king nor people, and everything was extremely desolate. There were only some *bhiksus* [monks] and a few dozen families of the common people. Where the old palace of King Śuddhodana had been, there had been made an image of the prince's mother. It was an image showing the prince, riding a white elephant, entering his mother's womb. Stupas had been built where the prince turned around again after leaving the east gate of the palace and seeing the sick man; where Asita [the sage] had inspected the marks of the prince; where, with Nanda and others, [the Buddha] had struck the elephant; and where he shot the arrow. [At that time] the arrow entered the ground 30 *li* to the southeast making a spring gush out. People of later times made this into a well for travelers to drink from. Stupas were also built where the Buddha returned to meet his father, the king, after attaining enlightenment; where the five hundred Śākyas left home and bowed to Upālī and the earth moved in six different ways; where the Buddha preached the Dharma to the *devas* and the four heavenly kings guarded the four gates so that even the king, his father, could not enter; and where the Buddha sat facing east under a *nigrodha* tree and Mahā-pajāpati presented him with a *saṃghātī* robe. This tree is still standing.

A stupa was also built where King Viḍḍabha murdered the Śākyas, who, dying, all attained *śotāpanna* [entrance to the river leading to nirvana], and this still stands. Several *li* northeast of the city was the king's field, where the prince sat under a tree and watched the ploughing.⁹⁴

Alexander Cunningham believed that Fa-hsien's description was invaluable to his efforts to locate the position of Kapilavasthu.⁹⁵ The area was still in ruins when Hsüan-tsang visited it over two centuries later:

The country of Kapilavastu is about 4,000 *li* in circumference. There are ten empty [unpopulated] towns [here] and the desolation is extreme. The capital is ruined and fallen down, and its circumference is difficult to measure. Within, the king's palace is 14 or 15 *li* in circumference. It was built of piled brick, and its foundations are still high and strong. It has long been deserted. There are few places where people live. There is no great lord [who governs the country as a whole]. Each town sets up its own head. The ground is rich and fertile and is cultivated according to the [right] season. The climate is uniform, and the manners [of the people] are peaceful and relaxed. There are ruins of *saṃghārāmas* in more than a thousand places. There is still one *saṃghārāma* adjacent to the palace, and it houses more than 3,000 *bhikṣus*. They study the teachings of the Hinayāna school Sammitiya. There are two temples of the *devas* where the followers of a non-Buddhist sect live.⁹⁶

Though only remnants of buildings remained, Hsüan-tsang linked them to legend.

Within the palace of the king is a ruined building. This is the main hall of King Suddhodana. Above [the ruins] is a monastery, in which is a statue of the king. Nearby are the ruins of a building, the sleeping quarters of Mahāmāyā. Above, a monastery was erected, inside which is a statue of the queen. Nearby is a monastery; this is the place where the Bodhisattva descended into the womb of his mother. Inside [the monastery] is a depiction of the Bodhisattva descending from heaven. [According to] the Theravādins, the Bodhisattva entered his mother's womb on the night of the thirtieth day of the month *uttara-āśāḥā* (the latter half of the month *Āśāḥā*). This is equivalent to the fifteenth day of the fifth month [in China]. Sects [other than the Theravādins say]

that he entered his mother's womb during the night of the twenty-third day of that month. This is equivalent to the eighth day of the fifth month [in China].⁹⁷

Villages and towns belonging to the Sakyas that are described in the canonical writings of early Buddhism, apart from Kapilavatthu, include Cātumā, Khomadussā, Metarūpa (Uḷumpa), Nagaraka, Sakkara, Sāmagāma, Silāvati, and Vedhañña. Towns and villages of the Koliyas mentioned in the canons of early Buddhism are Devadaha, Haliddavasana, Kakkarapatta, Kuṇḍi, Rāmagāma, Sajjanela, Sāpūga, and Uttara.⁹⁸

It was in such a historical and cultural matrix that Sakyamuni appeared.⁹⁹

