

CANDRAKĪRTI AND THE MOONFLOWER OF NĀLANDĀ:

Objectivity and Self-Correction in the Buddhist Central Philosophy of Language

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CHAPTER TWO:

Śrī-Nālandā-Mahāvihāra: “Ivory Tower” of India's Golden Age

1. Nālandā: Epicenter of Enlightenment

Whatever route Buddhist pilgrims took to the holy-land of India, their destination invariably was Magadha, the hub or “central circle” (*madhyamaṇḍala*) of Buddhist Asia's galactic polity. Half of the four pilgrimage sites and eight great locations of the Buddha's life were to be found in ancient Magadha: Bodhgayā, locus of the Vajra seat (*vajrāsana*) at the foot of the tree of his enlightenment by the river Nairāñjana; Rājagṛha, the capital city of Bimbasāra and Ajataśastru; Vaiśālī, the mercantile center where Śākyamuni taught and performed miracles; and Kuśīnagara, the location of his final Nirvāṇa. As the political center of gravity in Magadha shifted from Śravastī to Rājagṛha late in the Buddha's life, he spent more of his time teaching in and around the new capital, where he ordained the great Śāriputra, Maudgalyayana and Mahākāśyapa and passed up to seventeen rain retreats (*varṣāvāsas*). After the Buddha's Parinirvāṇa in Kuśīnagara, Ajataśastru ordered a special road built linking the site to Rājagṛha, where he had the Buddha's remains enshrined. In addition to sacralizing his new capital in this way, Ajataśastru made it the center of Śākyamuni's teaching and community by convening the first Buddhist council in the Sāptaparṇī cave there, so that Ānanda, Upāli and Mahākāśyapa could codify the recitation of the

threefold canon (*tripiṭaka*) of discourses (*sūtra*), discipline (*vinaya*) and scientific teachings (*abhidharma*).¹

Outside Rājagṛha proper, one of the places where the Buddha most frequently taught was the mango-grove of Pavarika at Nālandā, a wealthy suburban city 5-6 miles² northeast of the capital that came to be called Vihāragrāma and is identified with modern Baragon. H. Shastri etymologizes Nālandā as “giver of lotus stalks” (*nālāṃ dadāti*), in keeping with the lotus ponds that naturally abound in the area. Perhaps because of its balancing of sophistication and tranquility, we learn from a Jaina text³ that the suburb (*bāhirikā*) of the capital was a “very prosperous and sacred” resort frequented for teaching and meditation not only by the Buddha but also by the Jain founder Mahāvīra and the Ājīvika founder Makkhali Gosāla, whom the Buddha reportedly met there. According to Yi jing, Nālandā was only 7 yojanas (49 miles) northwest of Bodhgayā; 25 yojanas (175 miles) southeast of Vaiśālī, home of Vimalakīrti (itself 50 miles from Kuśīnagara); and 20 yojanas (140 miles) east of the deer park at Varanasi (*mṛgavana*). A later pilgrim, Ki ye, reports that Vulture Peak (*Gṛdhakuṭa*) was only 20 li (5 miles) distant. In close proximity to Nālandā (4-5 li=1 mile), Xuan zang reports a stūpa commemorating the place where the Buddha's foremost disciple Śāriputra attained Parinirvāṇa; his birthplace was only 20 li (3-4 miles) from Nālandā in Kalapinaka. Also according to Xuan zang, Maudgalyayana, another of the first Buddhist

¹ These early scientific teachings were encoded in a series of formulas called “matrices” or “grammars” (*māṭṅkā*), and may not have been identified yet as a separate *abhidharma* canon.

² The estimates that follow are meant to give some measure of the perception by Chinese pilgrims, and probably their Indian contemporaries, that Nālandā was an epicenter of the Holy Land, closely interwoven in their minds with scriptural narratives of Buddha's life and teaching career. My source for the estimates is the contextual analysis of Chinese records of Nālandā in M. Stewart, *Historical Archeology at Nālandā* (London: BASI, 1989).

³ *Sātrākṣṅga*, cited in U. Thakur, *Buddhist Cities in Early India* (Dehli: Sundeep Prakashan, 1995), 80.

monks, was born and attained Parinirvāṇa 9 li (1-2 miles) away in Kulika (identified as Jagadishpur), in whose vicinity is a stūpa commemorating him. Further linking Nālandā to the narrative of Buddha's teaching career, the site where Bimbāsāra went to meet and escort him to Rājagṛha is approximately 20 li (3 miles) from Nālandā. Hui li⁴ reports an oral tradition that the original site of Nālandā Mahāvihāra was a mango-grove purchased from its owner, Śreṣṭhī Āmra, by 500 merchants for 10 lacs of gold coins for use as a communal retreat (*saṃghārāma*) by the Buddha and his disciples. Xuan zang reports that Śākyamuni's first teaching at Nālandā lasted three months, and that a later teaching lasted four months. Its ongoing place in his teaching life is clear from the fact that Nālandā is referred to in no less than nine different Pāli scriptures.⁵ An added reflection of its importance as a teaching site is that Ānanda, who accompanied the Buddha in all his lectures and debates, is said to have wished that Nālandā would be the site of his own Parinirvāṇa.

Tāranātha reports two traditions concerning the construction of Nālandā: that Aśoka erected the first college there near the stūpa commemorating Śāriputra's Parinirvāṇa, and left it under the direction of a faculty whose deans were Muragomin and his brother; and that new colleges were added by Rāhulabhadra and especially by Nāgārjuna, who directed his wealthy Brahman supporter Suviṣṇu to build additional colleges dedicated to teaching the Universalist scientific curriculum (*abhidharma*). The former tradition may refer to the stūpas Aśoka built just outside Nālandā at Kalapinaka and Kulika to commemorate the birthplaces of Śāriputra and Maudgalyayana. The latter tradition may refer to the likelihood that Nāgārjuna taught at Nālandā, as well as

⁴ Thakur, *op cit.*, 81, Stewart, *op. cit.*, 204.

⁵ H. N. Shastri, *Nālandā and its Epigraphic Material* (Dehli: orā Satguru, 1942); in Stewart, *op. cit.*, 67-68.

the story reported by Shastri⁶ that he met and converted Āryadeva there. It may also have some bearing on the fanciful etymology Xuan zang and Yi jing found had become attached to the university's name. As the story goes, a water spirit (*nāga*) was found inhabiting the water tank south of the first college, and its name was Landa (Xuan zang, Hui li)⁷ or Nanda (Yi jing), hence the contraction “Nālandā” was applied to the university in honor of its *genius loci*. A kernel of historical truth may underlie both traditions. The *Nikāyasamgraha*, a medieval Theravāda text written by one Devakṣita, reports that, after the third Buddhist council convened at Pāṭaliputa by Aśoka under Moggaliputta Tissa, “...some heretical monks went over to Nālandā where they formed themselves into a dissenting sect...interpolating new texts and inventing commentaries to suit their purposes.”⁸ This report is consistent with the rift in the community that had been growing over the century or so since the second Buddhist council held at Vaiśālī about a century after the Buddha's Parinirvāṇa. Those who disagreed with the conservative elders (*theravādi*) of the second council convened their own great recitation (*mahāsaigīti*). According to Xuan zang, the Mahāsaṃgikas compiled a canon that differed from the Theravāda collection of discourses, discipline and scientific teachings, and also added two collections not included in the Theravāda canon, formulas (*dhāraṇī*) and miscellany (*viśvaka*). The relevance of the rift is that the Mahāsaṃgika tradition, with its Sanskrit canon, is thought to have included the Universalist teachings which would eventually prevail at the fourth (Northern) Buddhist council sponsored by Kaniṣka (c.78-144) at around the time of Nāgārjuna. The

⁶ Shastri, *op. cit.*, 20.

⁷ HL, 167.

⁸ Thakur, *ibid.*, 81; Shastri, *ibid.*, 11, 33; Stewart, *ibid.*, 78.

Mahāsaṃgika faction referred to in Pāli chronicles, then, may have been the same initial Nālandā faculty of 500 referred to in Tibetan sources as “...having delivered the Mahāyāna teachings at the place of Śāriputra...[which] was also the place of Maudgalyayana.”⁹ Hence the association with the Nāga would appear to reflect a nod to the inspiration of Nāgārjuna, the founder of both the Universalist philosophical and academic traditions, whose name records his legendary association with the water spirits of his native south India.

Despite the plausibility of the Tibetan tradition that Nālandā remained an important center for the Buddhist teaching community through the Mauryan and post-Mauryan eras, most historians today accept the archeological consensus that the founding of a great university (*śrīmahāvihāra*) at Nālandā must date to the Gupta era and not before. Archeologists with the British Archeological Survey of India (ASI) based their reasoning partly on the absence of significant pre-Gupta finds among the Barāgon ruins identified with Nālandā by Cunningham (1861) and partly on the records of Chinese travelers. One often reads that Nālandā must be dated no earlier than the Gupta era, since Fa xien (in India 399-414) made no mention of any retreat-house, college or university while visiting the birthplace of Śāriputra (which he called Nalo) on his way from Bodhgayā back to his base of studies in Pāṭaliputra. Yet Mary Stewart points out in her exhaustive contextual study of the archeology of Nālandā¹⁰ that the records of Xuan zang, Hui li and Yi jing all agree in clearly distinguishing the commemorated birthplaces (and Nirvāṇa sites) of Śāriputra and Maudgalyayana from

⁹ TN, 556; cf. Shastri, *ibid.*, 66; Stewart, *ibid.*, 75-76.

¹⁰ Stewart, *ibid.*, 82.

the location of the university of Nālandā, their base of study in India.¹¹ Since Fa xien based himself in Pāṭaliputra, the Magadhan capital since Aśoka, to acquire Individualist learning and texts, it is possible that he was uninterested in Nālandā as the seat of Universalist learning in the region. Citing Fergusson's (1969) critique of the conventional ASI chronology based on Cunningham's early work, Stewart reminds us that the later Chinese records date the founding of Nālandā to seven hundred years before Xuan zang's time, “not long after the Buddha's Parinirvāṇa,” that is, about 100 BCE.¹² Xuan zang reports that “a former king of the country named Śākraditya selected by augury a lucky spot and built a monastery there,” and that thereafter, “a long succession of kings continued building, using all the skill of the sculptor, till the whole is truly marvelous to behold.”¹³ The fact that Śākraditya and his successors are usually identified with Kumāragupta I Mahendrāditya (r.413-455) and his heirs in no way disproves the claim that the first college at Nālandā dates to 100 BCE and was extended in the Gupta, post-Gupta and Pāla eras. Nor does the absence of significant pre-Gupta art, seals or inscriptions at the Barāgon site disprove the traditional claim, since it is questionable whether the Barāgon ruins have been properly identified with the great Nālandā university visited by the later Asian pilgrims, let alone with the earliest college at Nālandā. Given the history of monastic patronage in ancient India, it would not be surprising if the Gupta kings chose to found a university in the vicinity of an older, smaller college, especially in a region as historically central as Nālandā.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 200ff.

¹² XZ, 167-170, cited in Stewart, *op. cit.*, 200.

¹³ Quoted in Thakur, *Buddhist Cities*, *op. cit.*, 83.

Understanding the larger historical context of post-Aśokan North India lends further support to the idea that the Nālandā visited by the Chinese pilgrims was constructed by the Gupta kings as an extension of some prior Universalist teaching community and institution in the Nālandā area. Ever since Aśoka convened the second Buddhist council at Pāṭaliputra, the Gangetic paradigm of Indian statecraft had been aligned with the Theravāda tradition. So, assuming that the Tibetan and Pāli chroniclers are right in linking post-Aśokan Nālandā with the Mahāsaṃghika community and Universalist teachings, it would not be surprising if that community lacked the state support needed to found a major Mahāyāna university in Magadha. Instead, they probably had to make due with a more modest institutional base in their communal refuge (*sanghārama*) within the rich groves of Nālandā, by that time probably equipped with rain-proof lodging in caves (*guhān*) and cottages (*aḍḍhayogani*), possibly with a mansion (*harmyam*), a shrine (*prāsāda*), a residence hall (*vihāra*), or retreat-houses (*arama-grhakāni*), or even with communal buildings such as a temple (*devakula*), pavillion (*maṇḍapa*) or assembly hall (*sabhā*) that could serve as grounds for a small college.¹⁴ In the post-Mauryan centuries of Nāgārjuna's era, when the Gangetic model was adapted by the cosmopolitan mercantile empires of the Kuśanas and Sātavāhanas, it was realigned with the nondualistic teaching and community of the Universalist tradition, institutionally based in the public educational roles of the

¹⁴ The first five of these lodgings were approved by øākyaṃuni, Cullavaga VI, 1 (Nālandā edition, 239.19): *anujjānāmi bhikkave paṃca senāsānāni / vihāraṃ aóóha-yogam pāsādam hammiyam guham*, quoted in Gustav Roth, *Arāma, Vihāra and Mahāvihāra*, Searchlight Publishing, Patna, 1997, 26. The others are also referred to in Cullavaga, VI, and elsewhere in the Pāli Canon, as discussed in Roth, *op. cit.*, section 17 ff.

universities at Takṣaśilā (Gr. Taxila) and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa (Dhānyakaṭaka).¹⁵ Hence, one might expect that, when the Guptas eventually reasserted Magadha's place at the hub of the vastly extended galactic polity of Asian Buddhist civilization, they would decide to patronize what may well have been the original Universalist community in their own backyard and build India's (and Indicized Asia's) undisputed center of education for their use at Nālandā.

2. Contextual Reconstruction of the Nālandā Campus and Grounds

Before I attempt to describe what life was like at Nālandā in Candrakīrti's day, I must briefly address the limitations of the archeological data available for the purpose. Like other digs purchased under the British Rāj for study by the ASI, the site at Barāgon was excavated following a procedure that has since come to be known as historical archeology. In this procedure, ancient literary sources thought to describe the site were used to guide the excavation and help identify the major finds and features of the ruins. In the case of Barāgon, Major-General Cunningham's putative identification of the ruins with Nālandā was based on comparing inscriptions he found there with a French translation of the travelogues of Chinese pilgrims by Jean Pierre Abel-Remusat and Julius Klaproth (1836). Assuming the veracity of that identification, ASI archeologists working from 1916-1938 appear not to have scrutinized the English versions of the Chinese records, translated in the late 19th century, but simply accepted their predecessors' uncritical readings of Fa xien and Xuan zang as guiding their work.

¹⁵ L. Joshi, *Studies in the Buddhist Culture of India* (Motilal, 1967); G. Schopen. *Bones, Stones and Buddhist Monks: Collected papers on the Archeology, Epigraphy and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India*. (Honolulu: U Hawaii Press, 1997).

In the course of their excavation, the remains of fifteen monastic buildings and innumerable artifacts were unearthed, many of which are on display in the nearby Nālandā museum, some of which found their way to museums in Patna and New Delhi, and some into the hands of antique dealers. The limitations of their work were only gradually recognized as scientific methods of archeology were standardized and refined in the latter part of the twentieth century. Since then, only one minor study has been done at the site, without adding or challenging to the received consensus.¹⁶ Mary Stewart's (1989) review and contextual study points out the many methodological problems with the ASI's work, including Euro-ethnocentric biases towards Nālandā's Universalist tradition and art, problems of translation,¹⁷ failure to critically examine textual sources,¹⁸ and failure to observe scientific procedures for stratigraphically excavating ruins and contextualizing artifacts.¹⁹

Yet despite her systematic critique of historical archeology at Nālandā and of Indian and Western historians' uncritical adherence to the ASI's claims, Stewart is not intent on minimizing the history of Nālandā or deconstructing it as myth. Instead, she argues that modern scholarship has underestimated the antiquity, size, aesthetic and intellectual stature of the university, as a result of the Euro-ethnocentric

¹⁶ Described in B. Nath, *Nālandā Murals*, (New Dehli: Cosmo Publications, 1983). For discussion, see Stewart, *op. cit.*, 248-50.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 208-209.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 241: "While it cannot be said that the archeologists at Nālandā were unaware of the various strata in building sites, it is the lack of the techniques for recording and scientifically dating strata that creates the dichotomy between the literary history of Nālandā Mahāvihāra and the actual fieldwork.... There was no physical evidence of any building dating to Aśoka (3rd century B.C.), and no verified evidence that any of the pre-Pāla period buildings were indeed, in fact, seen by Hsuan Tsang or I-Tsing. The copper-plate grant of Bālaputradeva was not tied definitively to Monastery No. 1, and the evidences of fire throughout the Pāla ruins were not linked with an invasion by Muḥammad Bakhtiyār ḥalji. In short, none of the claims made for Nālandā in the guidebook were borne out by the field archeology."

misconception of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism as decadent traditions.²⁰ Rather than abandon Nālandā archeology, she recommends a contextual approach to the evidence, respecting the reports of the Chinese records.²¹ Since a broad contextual study along the lines Stewart is proposing would need several dissertations, what follows is a narrow look at portions of the literary and archeological record that may help fill in gaps or resolve questions raised by the traditional and modern biographies of Candrakīrti.²² The discussion will begin with a general sketch of the university campus, inhabitants, daily life and curriculum.

The most detailed description of the architecture of the main campus comes from the eye-witness account of Hui li, who reports that, “The colleges of India are counted by myriads but this [Nālandā] is the most remarkable for its grandeur and height:”

The whole establishment is surrounded by a brick wall, which encloses the entire convent from without. One gate opens into the Great College, from which are separated eight other halls, standing in the middle of the (*saṃghārama*). The richly adorned towers, and the fairy like turrets, like pointed hill-tops, are congregated together. The observatories seem to be lost in the vapour (of the morning), and the upper rooms tower above the clouds. From the windows one may see how the winds and the clouds (produce new forms), and above the soaring eaves the conjunctions of the sun and moon may be observed. And then we may add how the deep, translucent ponds, bear on their surface the blue lotus, intermingled with Kie-ni (*Kanaka, Butea Frondosa*) flower, of deep red

²⁰ She suggests that the Barāgon site may represent a complex of dormitories described by Xuan zang, Hui li and Yi jing as lying outside the walls of the main university campus where they and their hosts resided. Stewart, *op. cit.*, 60: “Thus by 1916, when excavations at Nālandā began, the archeologists were confronted with a site that had been identified by literary sources as belonging to the 6th or 7th century at the earliest—that is, to the period of late, or Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna, Buddhism which was considered to be degenerate. They were also confronted with Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhist artifacts which were also considered to be degenerate, or, to use Smith's term “Medieval.” In short they were not given much encouragement or information with which to proceed.”

²¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

²² My main sources here will be: the later Chinese and Tibetan records; Bāḍa's *Harīacarita*; the epigraphic and artistic finds at the Baragon site; and Buddhist literary output attributable to 7th century Nālandā.

colour, and at intervals the Āmra groves spread, over all, their shade. All the outside courts, in which are the priests' Chambers, are of four stages. The stages have dragon projections and colored eaves, the pearl-red pillars, carved and ornamented, the richly adorned balustrades, and roofs covered with tiles that reflect the light in a thousand shades, these things add to the beauty of the scene.²³

In his contextual study of Buddhist education in seventh century India, Lalmaṇi Joshi points out that Hui li's account is corroborated by an epigraph found at the Barāgon site, dating from the mid-eighth century, recording a donation made by Mālāda, son of Tikina, minister of Yaśovarman of Kanauj:

Bālāditya, the great king of irresistible valour, after having vanquished all the foes and enjoyed the entire earth, erected as if with a view to see the Kailāsa mountain surpassed, a great and extraordinary temple (*prāsāda*) of the illustrious son of Śuddhodana (i.e. the Buddha) here at Nālandā. Nālandā had scholars, well-known for their (knowledge of the) sacred texts and arts, and (was full of the) beams of the rays of the *chaityas* shining and bright like white clouds. She was (consequently) mocking, as it were, at all the cities of the kings who had acquired wealth by tearing asunder the temples of the great elephants surrounded by the shining black bees which were maddened by drinking the rut in hostile lands. She had a row of *vihāras*, the line of whose tops touched the clouds. That (row of *vihāras*) was, so to say, the beautiful festoon of the earth, made by the Creator, which looked resplendent in going upwards. Nālandā had temples which were brilliant on account of the network of the rays of various jewels set in them and was the pleasant abode of the learned and virtuous *Samgha* and resembled Sumeru, the charming residence of the noble *Vidyādhara*s. (The *prāsāda*) stands aloft, as if it were a column of the great fame it had won, scoffing at the lustre of the moon, disregarding the beauty of the summits of the Snow-mountains (Himālaya), soiling (i.e. throwing into the shade) the white Ganges of the sky, and then turning dumb the streams of disputants....As long as the moon shines and the sun, lamp of the world...so long let this glory (*kīrti*), which is pure like the moon (*candra*), whiten the circle of (all) the quarters.²⁴

As for the layout of buildings within the main campus, Xuan zang and Hui li describe the arrangement of eight colleges built around the college of Śākraditya by successive Gupta and post-Gupta kings. The layout has been reconstructed in very

²³ HL, 111-112.

²⁴ Quoted in Shastri, *Nālandā*, 81-82.

different ways by different scholars. Stewart's contextual reconstruction is the most coherent, since it collates the descriptions of Xuan zang, Hui li and Yi jing and compares the composite sketch with the modern maps of Cunningham, Father Heras and others. The description that follows, based on Stewart and Joshi,²⁵ must be regarded as provisional at best, and is provided for heuristic purposes only. To the south of the first college was one built by Buddhagupta (Skandhagupta); east of that (second college, southeast of the first) was a college built by Tathāgatagupta (Purugupta); to the northeast of the second (east of the first) was the college built by Bālāditya (Narasimhagupta, c. 500-530);²⁶ to the northwest (of the first) was a college built by Vajra (Kumāragupta II); and next to that (northeast of the first)²⁷ was a college built by Śīladitya, the king of Central India (Harṣavardhana of Kanauj, r.606-648), nearing completion at the close of Xuan zang's stay (645). Harṣa is also credited with building the university's brick perimeter wall and gate, although exactly what was inside versus outside the wall is contested. The main gate to the university was in the south, and within it was a large well. Also within the main campus, according to the Tibetan historian gSum-pa mKhan-po Ye-shes dPal, were three libraries called

²⁵ Joshi, *Studies*, 69-70.

²⁶ Presumably distinct from the the Baladitya temple (*prasada*) described in the Mālada inscription. Since the Chinese pilgrims were not always explicit about the Sanskrit terms currently used for the structures they were describing, and their translators were not always explicit about the corresponding characters they used to translate those Sanskrit terms, archeologists and scholars have had difficulty comparing the descriptions provided in the Chinese records. The Mālada inscription would appear to help, yet it refers to the main university colleges as *vihāras*, and the 300 foot high shrine Bālāditya built outside the campus walls as a shrine or temple (*prāsāda*), even though Xuan zang calls the former *saūghārama* and the latter *vihāra*. Stewart points out that Hsuang Tsang in other contexts uses the term *vihāra* to refer both to a residence for monks/nuns and to a residence for an image of the Buddha or a Bodhisattva. In all likelihood, the word *vihāra* had a wider range of uses than our "hall." In what follows, I have used "college" for buildings presumably used as residence halls and/or lecture halls, "chapel" for a dedicatory structure presumably used to house religious images or statue, and "shrine" for a dedicatory structure (other than a *stāpa* or *chaitya*) presumably used as a monument, rather than to house images.

²⁷ The Chinese differ about whether Harūa's college was to the north or the south

Ratnasāgara, Ratnodadhi and Ratnarañjaka, the largest of which was nine stories high. Each library was dedicated to a special collection, we are told; Ratnodadhi, for instance, held both the *Transcendent Wisdom Scriptures* and esoteric works such as the *Esoteric Communion*.²⁸ Within and beyond the walls, the Chinese reported hundreds of dedicatory stūpas, shrines and chapels containing various sculpted images beautifying the campus and its surroundings. The most impressive of these were described as follows: 200 paces to the east, a six-story chapel built by Pūrṇavarman housing an eighty-foot copper statue of Śākyamuni, probably the primary university chapel (*mūlaghandakuṭi*) Yi jing describes as containing a Buddha painted in life-like color; further east is a stūpa commemorating the place where Bimbasāra met Śākyamuni; to the southeast, between a tree that sprang from Buddha's toothpick and a water tank, a stūpa commemorating the site where he was questioned by a Vedic priest holding a bird; further to the southeast, a chapel (*vihāra*) 200 feet high, commemorating the Buddha's four month teaching at Nālandā; 100 paces south, a small stūpa commemorating Buddha's seven day teaching at Nālandā, and further south, a statue of Avalokiteśvara holding a vase; to the south of that statue, a stūpa with hair and nail relics from Śākyamuni; to the southwest, a 100 foot high brass chapel built by Śīladitya; west of the campus, just outside the wall, another chapel commemorating the Buddha's three month teaching at Nālandā; northwest is a site called “the seat of the four Buddhas;” 100 paces north, a chapel containing a statue of Avalokiteśvara; 50 paces north, a chapel 300 feet high with a Buddha statue, built by Bālāditya and compared by

²⁸ The *Pag-sam jon-zang* (Calcutta, 1908) is cited in S.B. Vidyabhusana, *History of Indian Logic* (Calcutta, 1921), 516, and Joshi, *Studies*, 170.

Xuan zang to the chapel at Bodhgayā; to the northeast, a brick chapel containing a statue of Tāra.

In addition to the dedicatory structures described by the 7th CE pilgrims, college buildings outside the main campus walls are referred to by the 10th CE visitor Ki-Ye.²⁹ Stewart assumes that some of these were extensions to the university constructed during the Pāla era.³⁰ Based on 7th century estimates of Nālandā's inhabitants and on the high density of water tanks and ruins surrounding the modern dig, she argues that the main campus could not have fit completely within the Barāgon site but must have been larger even in Xuan zang's day and would have been further expanded in the Pāla era. From Xuan zang we learn that there was also a large working farm with extensive fields where he was received outside the main campus. This could have been the farm managed by Candrakīrti.

As for the main campus buildings, Xuan zang gives a general description:

[They] are constructed with extraordinary skill. A three-storied tower is erected at each of the four angles. The beams and projecting heads are carved with great

²⁹ Huber, 259, cited in Stewart, *op. cit.*, 235: "Au sud et au nord de ce monastere il ya plusieurs dizaines d'autres monasteres," (Huber does not identify the character he is translating with "monastere.").

³⁰ Stewart goes so far as to suggest that the Barāgon site identified by Cunningham and his successors with the main university may in fact be one of them. Against this argument is the fact that the nearby "monasteries" Ki ye explicitly mentions either have other names (Wou-tchen-t'eou= Odantapuri?, probably in Biharsharif, 6 miles northeast) or are for the use of visiting scholars from Kashmir and China; most of the others were already mentioned by Xuan zang and Yi jing. Moreover, the presence at Baragon of hundreds of seals and inscriptions referring to Nālandā suggests that its buildings were part of the university proper. Moreover, Stewart's claim would presuppose a Pāla date for the whole site, whereas proponents of the ASI consensus argue from the levels of prior construction under the uniform level of excavation (dated to Dharmapāla, r. 770-810 and Devapāla, r. 810-850) and from the Gupta era seals and inscriptions found at the site, that the excavated remains predate the Pāla era. A. Gosh, *Nālandā* (Dehli: ASI, 1965, 1971), dates the oldest levels (level five of stāpa No. 3 and level 2 of monastery Nos. 1A and 1B) to the 6th century; and B. Nath, *Nālandā Murals*, *op cit*, dates the foundations of a small vihāra he excavated in the Sarai Mound east of the main site to the mid-fifth century (xxi). Although the prior levels have not been scientifically dated and the artifacts' presence could be explained in other ways, such as by earthquake, the number and consistency of finds at the site has not seemed accidental to archeologists. Assuming contra Stewart that the Barāgon site is the Chinese pilgrims' Nālandā, Ki ye's description may still be read as supporting her claim that the university was more extensive than usually thought (a claim shared by Page, Fergusson and many other ASI workers).

skill in different shapes. The doors, windows and low walls are painted profusely; the monks' cells are ornamental on the inside and plain on the outside. In the very middle of the building is the hall, high and wide.³¹

The most vivid description is Yi jing's, who starts with a single hall and then goes on give to a more general picture:

The shape of this monastery is square like the earth. On the four sides, the edge of the steep jutting roof forms long covered galleries which go all around the building. All of these buildings are of brick; they are three stories high, each storey being more than ten feet high. The transverse beams are tied together by planks; a walkway has been made not of rafters or tiles but of bricks. All the temples are perfectly aligned so that one can come and go without any difficulty. The back wall of the building constitutes the outside wall. On the top (of the back wall) human heads of natural proportion are represented. As for the living quarters of the monks, there are nine [cells] on each side. Each cell has a surface area of about 10 square feet [sic: 10 feet squared]. At the back is a window which goes up to the edge of the roof. Although the doors are high, they are made as a single swinging door so that the monks can all see each other...At the top of the angles (corners) [of the residence halls] is a suspended way which permits coming and going in the temple [hall]. At each of the four corners there is a room built of brick. These are the cells of the learned and venerable monks. The gate of [each of] the temple [s] faces west. Its top floor goes right into the sky, which quite takes one's breath away. Its marvelous sculptures go to the limits of art and ornamentation. Inside the monastery large areas of more than 30 feet are paved in brick. The smaller spaces of 5-10 feet and all the areas which cover the rooms which are on the roof in front of the verandah or in the cells are paved...All the rooms and the steps on the stairs are made in this way. When it [the cement] is finished it will withstand the trampling of feet for 10-20 years without suffering any damage. It is not like lime which flakes when it becomes wet. They (also) cover the precinct walls with whitewash. There are no less than eight temples [college halls] made like this. On top of all of them there is a flat terrace where one can walk. The dimensions of each all are similar. On one side of each temple, the monks have chosen a building, sometimes one-storeyed sometimes three-storeyed, for holy images....Outside the large enclosure, some large stupas have been constructed and lots of chaityas. There are 100 of them. The sacred relics, too many to enumerate, are crowded together. Gold and precious stones form a brilliant ornamentation; in truth, there are few places as perfect.³²

³¹ XZ, 74.

³² YJ, 88.

From such descriptions, Stewart concludes that the main campus complex must have included a variety of residence halls and specialized halls as well as shrines and chapels. N. Nazim cites the find in the Barāgon ruins (Monastery No. 13) of what is thought to be a smelting furnace along with fragments of crucibles, molds and Gupta and Pāla era seals as evidence that the university had its own metal shop for casting bronzes. H. Shastri suggests that the series of hearths found in Monastery Sites 1A and 1B could have been used for preparing herbal remedies and concludes that these structures may have been used as the university health services. C. Upasak identifies a large oven (*janta ghara*) at the Barāgon site as part of a university sauna. And most archeologists tend to credit the Chinese reports that Nālandā had several observatories.

3. Everyday Life at Nālandā

We turn now to survey the inhabitants and their material standard and mode of living. Xuan zang reports that 3000 people lived and worked at the university; by Yi jing's time that number apparently had risen to approximately 3,500. In addition to students and faculty, there was a large monastic and lay support staff who maintained the buildings and grounds and provided various types of services to the faculty and students. Since neither Xuan zang nor Yi jing analyze their estimates except to say that they included the whole complement of students and faculty, as well as a number of technical students (Buddhist and non-Buddhist) and workers,³³ it is difficult to say whether or not their figures included support staff. If not, it would explain why Hui li numbered the inhabitants of Nālandā at 10,000. In fact, Xuan zang reports that the

³³ Joshi, *Studies*, 95.

support staff at the monastery complex Harṣa maintained in Kanauj was in the thousands, and that during his entire stay at Nālandā he was provided with two personal attendants.³⁴ According to Yi jing, the services of the support staff at Nālandā included receiving guests, serving and cleaning up at meals, maintaining the grounds, beating the time-drum, and generally managing non-academic affairs.³⁵ A portion of the support staff consisted of lay students—either special students (*brahmacārin*) admitted for secular studies only or novice students (*mānavas*) preparing for ordination—who could not pay their own way as expected but were fed and housed as part of the university's work-study program instead. While at least some of the other support staff lived on campus, it is probable that some lived in nearby villages and off campus residences, especially in view of the interdependence of the university and local communities.

In Xuan zang's day, Hui li reports, a portion of the agricultural produce of 100 villages was earmarked by Nālandā's royal patrons to the university as an endowment. The revenue included several hundred piculs of rice and several hundred catties of dairy goods (on the order of 20-40 tons each) annually. In lieu of taxes, the villages were also responsible for the textiles, bedding, medicines and other necessities of the university. During Yi jing's stay, the number of villages assigned to support the university had doubled. In addition, the university also benefited from the donation of lands, including grain-fields and fruit-groves; the workers hired to cultivate the lands were paid in kind by retaining five-sixths of the produce they grew. Finally, Yi jing reports that it was a universal custom in India for kings and lay Buddhists to routinely

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ YJ, 36-37, 47, 56-57, 61, 64, 144-145; cited in Joshi, *Studies*, 95-96.

donate gifts to monks and nuns including money, gems, sacred images, textiles, incense, water-clocks, utensils and delicacies of all kinds, along with staff to maintain them.³⁶ According to Buddhist monastic discipline, money and gems were divided evenly between a religious (*baudhika*) fund for shrines and images; an academic (*dharmika*) fund for the upkeep and development of the physical plant, library collections, etc.; and a community (*saṃghika*) fund for distribution.³⁷ Texts and commentaries were added to the university's library collections for reference and general circulation. Other non-monetary gifts to the university were distributed by seniority among the faculty and students, and, at death, automatically became property of the university to be redistributed. In this category of goods were necessities such as robes, water-filters, metal bowls, locks and keys, needles, razors, knives, axes, chisels, earthenware pots and water basins. In addition, individual monks could receive a variety of donated valuables including lands, houses, shops, beds, chairs, iron and copper bowls or tools, which would also become community property at death. Bulls and sheep would be retained by the university, while gifts of other animals would be sent to the royal stables. Wines were discarded. Paints were used for decoration or maintenance. Medicines went to the university health service as part of the residents' health plan. A common practice documented in the Mālāda inscription was for patrons to purchase all the possessions of the entire university community and then donate them back again. Thus over time, the university could amass an enormous endowment, Yi jing observes, including "...great wealth, granaries full of rotten corn (sic: grain),

³⁶ Joshi, *Studies*,, 85.

³⁷ *YJ*, 192-194, cited in Joshi, *Studies*,, 86-87.

many servants, male and female, money and treasures hoarded in the treasury.”³⁸ Moreover, individuals who earned distinction through eloquence, learning or character, could amass great fortunes. Harṣa, for instance, donated the tax revenue of 80 large towns in Orissa to support the teaching activities and personal comfort of the scholar Jayasena. At the other end of the spectrum one can infer from the records that even the novice or freshman student possessed far more than the minimum 13 items required by monastic regulations, including: outer garments (*antarvāsa*, *uttarāsaiga*) and undergarments (*nivāsana*); a cloak (*saṃghāti*); a shawl (*saikṣita*); a bowl (*pātra*); a mat for sleeping and meditation (*niśīdana*); a water-filter (*pariśravaṇa*); four towels (*prancchana*); a bandage (*praticchadana*); and some luxury fabric (*pari-śkārācīvara*) to be sold for medicine in the event of illness (mendicants could not carry money). Yi jing reports that monastic robes were a reddish color, except for the white of novices and the saffron of the newly ordained, and that the fabrics used included cotton, wool and silk.

As for the daily customs at Nālandā, Yi jing's interest in the regulation of monastic life lead him to give a precise description of the activities of its inhabitants, from the most common routines to the ultimate eventuality. The fastidious pilgrim was clearly impressed with the regulations concerning health, personal hygiene and sanitation at the university, and described them as setting a standard significantly above the highest standards prevailing in China. I quote from his textured account of life there:

There are more than 10 great pools near the Nālandā monastery, and there every morning a *ghantī* is sounded to remind the priests of the bathing hour. Every one brings a bathing-sheet with him. Sometimes a hundred, sometimes a thousand (priests) leave the monastery together, and proceed in all directions

³⁸ XZ, 194; Joshi, *Studies*, 86-87.

toward these pools, where all of them take a bath.³⁹ When a meal is finished, do not fail to cleanse the hands....Chew tooth-wood in the mouth; let the tongue as well as the teeth be carefully cleansed and purified.... Afterwards the water must be poured (for rinsing) out of the clean jar into a conch-shell cup, which is to be held over fresh leaves or in the hands....The clean jar must be carried in a clean hand, and placed in a clean place, while the jar for the 'touched' water should be grasped by the 'touched' (or 'unclean') hand and be put in an unclean place.⁴⁰ [Now] concerning evacuation. One should put on a bathing skirt...[and] then fill up a jar with water for cleansing purposes, go to the lavatory with the jar, and shut the door in order to hide oneself. Fourteen balls of earth are provided and placed on a brick plate outside the lavatory....The manner of washing is as follows: one should wash the body with the left hand, and again purify with water and with the earth....After purification has been done, one should put down the clothes, open the door with the right hand...shut the door behind him with the right hand, and leave the urinal....If one does not wash and purify oneself, the people of all the five divisions India will laugh at once.⁴¹ In India the priests wash their hands before and after meals, and sit on separate small chairs. The chair is about seven inches high by a foot square, and the seat of it is wicker-work....They place their feet on the ground and trays (on which food is served) are placed before them.... As soon as the meal is finished, the utensils are removed and piled up in one corner. All the remaining food is [thrown away for birds, *pretas*, etc.] for it is very improper to keep the food for further use.⁴² In India both priests and laymen are generally in the habit of taking walks, going backwards and forwards along a path, at suitable hours and at their pleasure: they avoid noisy places. Firstly, it cures disease, and secondly it helps digest food....If one neglects this exercise he will suffer from ill health.⁴³ If one be indisposed, one should investigate the cause; and when the cause of ill-health has been discovered, one should take rest.... a physician, having inspected the voice and countenance of the diseased, prescribes for the latter according to the eight sections of medical science.⁴⁴ [W]hen a priest is dead...on the same day his corpse is sent on a bier to a cremation place, and is there burnt. While the corpse is burning all his friends assemble and sit on one side....On returning to their residence they bathe together, in their clothes, in the pond outside the monastery.⁴⁵

³⁹ *YJ*, 107-110.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 26-28.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 91-93.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 22-24.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 127-130.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

The daily routine was regulated on a strict schedule maintained by the main university bell, by drums that counted the hours according to water-clocks and by numerous sundials placed throughout the campus. After the bathing period, the monks would remove the beds from their rooms, clean the public and private altars and then perform morning offerings and recitations. Because of the university's size, a public offering would be performed in the main courtyard by the dean of the faculty (*karmadāna*), his assistants and a band of female musicians, while the monks were engaged in parallel activities in their own halls and private rooms. After a walk, morning classes would be held. Joshi makes the following observations, based on the Chinese records: “Not less than one hundred chairs or pulpits were arranged every day in the University for lecture purposes. This would indicate that as many as one hundred topics were discussed every day, and the students were said to have attended to them regularly without any fail even for a minute.”⁴⁶ Students would also sit on chairs. Within and between classes, Yi jing observes, “eminent and accomplished men assemble in crowds, discuss possible and impossible doctrines, and after having been assured of the excellence of their opinions by wise men, become far famed for their wisdom.”⁴⁷ At noon, students and faculty would adjourn to the dining hall of their respective colleges for the main meal of the day, which typically included rice, ghee, milk, butter, fruit, soup, bread, sugar, tea, and desert of syrup and betel-nuts or leaf. At lunch, after a portion of the food had been offered to images of Mahākāla and Hārīti and the senior faculty member of the hall had eaten, he would read to the other faculty

⁴⁶ Joshi, *Studies*, 170.

⁴⁷ YJ, 177.

and students during their meal. After the hall had been cleaned and all had washed, another walk was routine. Afternoon classes then began and continued until the late afternoon recitation, which went on into the evening and is described by Yi jing as follows.

In the Nālandā monastery, the number of priests is so immense...it is difficult to assemble so many together in any one place. There are eight halls [*saṃgha-āramas*=colleges?] and three hundred apartments [*vihāras*=residence halls?] in this monastery. The worship can only take place separately, as is most convenient to each member. Thus, it is customary to send out, every day, one preceptor to go round from place to place chanting hymns, being preceded by monastic lay servants [*brahmacārini*=work-study students] and children [*mānavāḥ*=novice students] carrying with them incense and flowers. He goes from one hall to another, and in each he chants the service, every time three or five *ślokas* in a high tone, and the sound is heard all around. At twilight he finishes his duty....In addition there are some who sitting alone facing the shrine (*mahāgandakuṭi*= main chapel) praise the Buddha in their heart. There are others who, going in the temple, kneel side by side with their bodies upright, and putting their hands on the ground touch it with their heads, and thus perform the threefold salutation.⁴⁸

As for other modes of individual worship, Yi jing tells us elsewhere that at sunset it was common for the monks to perform the triple circumambulation (*pradakṣiṇā*) of one of the off-campus stupas, performing recitations while offering incense or flowers. Afterwards, they would adjourn to the main hall of their college where one scripture reader would mount the lion's throne (*siṃhāsana*) and lead a threefold service based on a text such as Aśvagoṣa's *Threefold Service* or Mātṛceṭa's *One Hundred Fifty Verse Hymn*. Praise to the three jewels would be followed by a scriptural passage, and finally, some dedicatory prayers. Afterwards the congregation would exclaim "Well said!" (*Subhāṣita*) or "Excellent!" (*Sādhu*). "A delightful thing it is," Yi jing relates, "to hear a skillful person recite...[for] in India numerous hymns of praise to be

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 153-154.

sung at worship have been most carefully handed down, for every talented man of letters has praised in verse whatever person he deemed most worthy of worship.”⁴⁹

For the rest of the evening, students and faculty would do homework or preparation. After studying any text in class, Yi jing reports, a student “reads a portion of the scripture and reflects on what he has learnt. He acquires new knowledge day by day, and searches into old subjects month after month, without losing a minute.”⁵⁰ The night was divided into three watches, the second of which alone was set aside for sleeping, while the first and third watches were devoted to meditation or recitation of poetic works such as Nāgārjuna's *Letter of Advice*, Aśvagoṣa's *Deeds of the Buddha*, Mātṛceṭa's *Hymn to the Buddha (Sārdhaśataka-Buddhaśaisaṃgāthā)* or Āryasūra's *Rosary of Lives (Jatakāmāla)*.

3. Academic Life at Nālandā

As for the academic body, students and faculty were organized as follows. Special students (*brahmacārin*) whose studies were limited to the five secular sciences (*pañcalaukikavidyā*), whether Buddhist or non-Buddhist, would contract with a professor (*upādhyāya*) of their choice and be expected to pay or work for their own tuition, room and board at the university. (The residences at Barāgon in which multiple non-Buddhist frescoes and images were found, especially Temple No. 2,⁵¹ may have belonged to a school of liberal arts and sciences designated for these students, who would enroll for individualized programs of varying duration.) Novice students

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁵¹ Shastri, *Nālandā, op. cit.*, 24-25.

(*mānavas*) would choose a preceptor (*karmācārya*) as well as a professor, with whom they would first master the monastic regulations (*pratimokṣa*) and canon of discipline (*vinayapīṭaka*), and then begin studying scriptures (*sūtras*) and scientific texts (*śāstras*). Typically a novice would enter as a lay person (*upāsaka*) who observed the fivefold ethics (*pañcaśīla*) and, after a period of instruction and probation, eventually be admitted as a homeless one (*pravrajita*) through a basic ordination ritual. On mastering the ten moral precepts (*śikṣāpadas*), one would be recognized as a wanderer (*śramaṇera*) ready for full ordination (*upasampadā*). Once one had mastered the regulations and canon of discipline, he would become a junior member (*dahara*) of the faculty, equivalent to an instructor or assistant professor. After a tenure of ten years, including ten complete rain retreats, he would become a senior member (*sthavira*) of the faculty or associate professor. He was then eligible to serve as a full professor (*upādhyāya*) or preceptor (*karmācārya*). The administration was collegiate, and conducted by the assembled junior and senior faculties (*pariṣad*), who debated and voted on all academic, practical and disciplinary matters including the admission of new students and faculty and the election of a dean of affairs (*karmadāna*), a dean of the college (*vihārapāla*), a dean of admissions (*dvaraṇḍita*) and a chancellor of the university (*kulapāti*). Yi jing describes some of the privileges accorded students and faculty for seniority and service: “The assembly assigned to venerable priests, if very learned, and also to those who thoroughly studied one of the three collections, some of the best rooms (of the monastery) and servants. When such men gave daily lectures, they were freed from the business imposed on monastics. When they went out they could ride in sedan-chairs, but not on horseback.”⁵²

In regard to admissions, academic standards and curriculum, the Chinese records all portray Nālandā as a highly competitive, rigorous and complex institution, and have led scholars to compare it to a modern university. Firstly, Nālandā specialized in graduate and post-graduate education. Yi jing makes it clear that it did not offer the basic education commonly provided in Buddhist monasteries, royal academies and Vedist tutorials (*gurukula*), such as primary instruction in literacy and grammar, secondary instruction in the arts and sciences, or undergraduate education in the threefold canon. Instead, Nālandā presupposed these as admission requirements and offered advanced courses in a wide range of fields, scientific and technical as well as meditative and philosophical. According to Yi jing, then, a student entering Nālandā would already have spent approximately eight years (ages 6-14) developing literacy and studying basic grammar using texts such as the *Siddhirastu*, Pāṇini's *Sūtras*, the *Dhātupāṭha*, *Aṣṭadhātu*, *Maṇḍūkīśikṣā* and *Uṇādisūtra*; in addition, another five years (ages 15-20) would have been spent studying a commentary on Pāṇini's grammar by Jayāditya (d.661-662) and Vāmana entitled the *Kāṣikāvṛtti* (175-176, ns. 3-4). As for foreign students, Yi jing reports meeting two other Chinese monks, Tang and Tao lin, who studied Sanskrit at Tāmralipti before seeking admission at Nālandā. At this point, students are eligible to take the entrance examination at Nālandā, which Xuan zang describes as quite rigorous: “Those students, therefore, who come here as strangers, have to show their ability by hard discussion; those who fail compared with those who succeed are seven or eight of ten. The other two or three of moderate talent, when they

⁵² YJ, 64.

come to discuss in turn in the assembly, are sure to be humbled, and to forfeit their renown.”⁵³

For those admitted, Nālandā appears to have required first the equivalent of a master's program described by Yi jing as a two to three year course in logic, epistemology and debate (*hetuvidyā*), basic science (*abhidharma*) and bioethics, based on Nāgārjuna's *Door to Logic* (*Nyāyadvāratarkaśāstra*), Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Science* (*Abhidharmakośa*) and Āryaśūra's *Rosary of Lives* (*Jātakamāla*). Yi jing's comment on those who enter and complete this program suggests that it served as a form of graduate education for government posts.

[H]aving been assured of the excellence of their opinions by wise men, [they] become far famed for their wisdom. To try the sharpness of their wit, they proceed to the king's court to lay down before it the sharp weapon (of their abilities); there they present their schemes and show their (political) talent, seeking to be appointed in the practical government. When they are present in the house of debate they raise their seat and seek to prove their wonderful cleverness. When they are refuting heretic doctrines all their opponents become tongue-tied and acknowledge themselves undone. Then the sound of their fame makes the five mountains (of India) vibrate, and their renown flows, as it were, over the four borders. They receive grants of land, and are advanced to a high rank; their famous names are as a reward written on the lofty gates. After that they can follow whatever occupation they like.⁵⁴

Judging from several grant inscriptions found at Nālandā, this appears to have been the program completed by Mālāda and other sons of government officials of the day. Since we are told that there was no system of knowledge, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, that went unstudied at Nālandā,⁵⁵ Kautilya's *Politics* would likely have been part of this program, which thus may have been comparable to our masters in political

⁵³ YJ, 171.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 177-178.

⁵⁵ HL, 112; YJ, 176-17.

science. Yet Yi jing's comment that a career in conventional politics was inappropriate for a monk (presumably because of the opportunism involved) suggests that the thrust of this program was to maintain the Buddhist-based Aśokan tradition of political economy guiding the Indo-Asian experiment in enlightened civilization. In addition to the program Yi jing describes, it is probable that Nālandā students could also enter master's level programs specializing in other sciences such as medicine (*cikitsāvidyā*) and physical science and technology (*śilpasthānavidyā*). Yi jing himself reports that he studied medicine early in his stay and considered it as a field; and that he encountered another Chinese monk there named Ling yun (Prajñādeva) enrolled in a fine arts program who had painted a statue of Maitreya at Nālandā. In addition, contemporary inscriptions identify the work of architects, sculptors and painters trained at Nālandā.⁵⁶ For monks, the program Yi jing describes served not only as a basic graduate study of the five sciences, especially logic, linguistics (*śabdavidyā*) and the multidisciplinary science of mind (*adhyātmanavidyā*), but also focused on advanced study of comparative religion and philosophy, including not only the Buddhist four therapeutic philosophies (*catur-siddhānta*) and the disciplines of all eighteen Hinayana schools, but also the six Vedist philosophies (*ṣaḍdarśana*) such as Vedist Analysis (*Sāṃkhya*) and the entire Vedic corpus. Yi jing confirms Hui li's report that even the collected formulas (*dhāraṇī*) and miscellaneous works of the Universalist canon were studied, along with the *Atharvavedas*; Xuan zang is known to have read the *Yogaśataka* with the sitting president, Śīlabadhra, who was the university's resident expert on Vedic traditions.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Joshi, *Studies*, 160.

⁵⁷ HL, 112; XZ, 187.

The genre of comparative philosophy in India, as old as Āryadeva and Śākyamuni himself, was brought to maturity by encyclopedic Nālandā scholars like Bhāvaviveka and Śāntaraksita in large part thanks to the practical need for current and comprehensive textbooks for this curriculum. It is likely that the masters' programs for monks would also have involved some degree of specialization to help prepare them to master the vast specialized literature required for higher studies at Nālandā. The university was especially renowned as an international center of Universalist studies, most students would focus on its Universalist scriptures and philosophies. According to the Chinese records, the majority of Nālandā students were highly motivated and fully supported to continue their studies in programs comparable to our doctorates in philosophy, designed to make them learned (*bahuśruta*) or expert (*vidvān*) in various specialized disciplines including logic (Dharmakīrti's field), linguistic philosophy (*vyākaraṇa*) (Bhartrhari's field), philosophy of mind (*vijñānavāda*) (Xuan zang's field), ethics (*vināya*) (Yi jing's field),⁵⁸ critical philosophy (*madhyamaka*) (Candrakīrti's field as well as Xuan jao's⁵⁹), and science of mind (*abhidharma*) (Tao lin's field⁶⁰). In addition, as one would expect given the multidisciplinary framework of the Buddhist threefold education, Yi jing reports several Chinese monks at Nālandā enrolled in specialized doctoral programs focused on yoga and meditation (*vipāśyana*), including Qu jing and Xuan jao.⁶¹ As Yi jing describes the higher programs of study, they all required advanced mastery of linguistics and linguistic philosophy, based on Patañjali's

⁵⁸ YJ, 180-181.

⁵⁹ Thakur, *Buddhist Cities*, *op. cit.*, 101.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

Mahābhāṣya and the writings of current philosophers such as Bhartṛhari (whose *Bhartṛhari-śāstra*, *Vākyapadīya* and *Vedavṛtti* are mentioned as current by the pilgrim). Judging from Yi jing's description of the studies of other Chinese pilgrim's and from Xuan zang's own curriculum, most doctoral level students would be expected to master other classics of Buddhist and Vedist thought, including the *Madhyamakakārikās* or current commentary, *Catuṣṣataka*, *Abhidharmakośa* and/or a Universalist version such as *Śatapadābhidharmaśāstra*, as well as the *Yogaśāstra*.

Joshi reports that progressive privileges and stipends were accorded to doctoral level students whose mastery of key texts qualified them to serve as faculty, including exemption from work, promotion to senior faculty, assignment of assistants, assignment of an elephant, and of a circle of aides.⁶² Yi jing says of the graduates of the doctoral level program:

They oppose the heretics as they drive beasts (deer) in the middle of a plain, and explain away disputations as boiling water melts frost. In this manner they become famous throughout Jambudvīpa, receive respects above gods and men, and serving under the Buddha and promoting his doctrine, they lead all people (to Nirvāṇa)....These men could compose a work on the spot whatever subject was required.⁶³

He ranks current exemplary graduates of this curriculum along with Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Asaigaand Vasubandhu, and includes among their ranks scholars such as Bhāvaviveka, Dharmapāla, Guṇamati, Sthiramati, Dharmakīrti, Candradāsa (Candragomin?), Siṃhacandra (Candrakīrti?) and Śāntideva. Apparently, the number of doctoral level graduates who remained at Nālandā and continued studying and teaching was quite high. Hui li cites the number of Nālandā faculty present at the great

⁶² Joshi, *Studies*, 166.

⁶³ YJ, 181-182.

philosophical conference organized by Harṣa under Xuan zang's direction at 1000, and also recounts that among the Nālandā faculty were one thousand scholars who could explain twenty categories of philosophical and scientific texts, five hundred who could explain thirty, ten who could explain fifty, and one (the chancellor, Śīlabhadra) whose knowledge was encyclopedic.⁶⁴ The Chinese monk's high estimate of the standards of the Nālandā faculty is generally supported by the Mālāda inscription, which describes its scholars as “expert figures in the fields of literature and the arts” (*āgamakalāvikhyaṭa-vidvadjanaḥ*). Hui li tells us that great Indian Emperor renowned as Śrī Harṣavardana of Kanauj did not hesitate to refer to himself as “the servant of the Sages of Nālandā.”⁶⁵

In fact, according Husan Tsang, the students of Nālandā were reportedly held in equally high esteem throughout India:

They were looked up to as models by all India; learning and discussing they found the day too short; day and night they admonished each other, juniors and seniors mutually helping to perfection. If among them there were any who did not talk of the mysteries of the *Tripitaka*, such persons, being ashamed, lived aloof. Hence foreign students came to the establishment to put an end to their doubts and became celebrated, and those who stole the name of Nālandā monk were all treated with respect wherever they went.⁶⁶

This high estimate is also echoed by the Mālāda inscription, which describes the university as “the pleasant abode of the community of the learned and virtuous.”⁶⁷

Nālandā's high standards were strictly enforced. Students not up to them were expelled, we are told; while faculty discredited in debate would face serious

⁶⁴ HL, 112, 177.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁶⁶ XZ, trans., T. Watters, *On Yuan Chang's Travels in India* (Dehli, 1965), II 169.

⁶⁷ Shastri, *Nālandā*, *op. cit.*, 81; cited in Joshi, *Studies*, 169.

consequences, being obliged either to study under their opponent or quit the university.⁶⁸ Nālandā's high repute spread, attracting scholars not just from all parts of India and China but also from Java, Sumatra, Korea, Khotan, Nepal and Tibet.

As for the process of study at Nālandā, it was based on the close analysis and memorization of texts, described by Yi jing as follows: "A particular method has been adopted by teachers and pupils. They discourse on paragraphs, separating them into smaller and smaller sections; they treat of the articles concerning the offenses [in ethics, for instance] by dividing them sentence by sentence."⁶⁹ According to the traditional method, "all these books should be learned by heart...[One] should study hard day and night, without letting a moment pass for idle repose."⁷⁰ The pilgrim was especially impressed with the way linguistic analysis was used as a pure science to develop mnemonic and analytic intellectual powers:

In India there are two traditional ways by which one can attain to great intellectual power. Firstly, by repeatedly committing (texts) to memory the intellect developed; secondly, the alphabet fixes one's ideas. By this way...one can commit to memory whatever he has once heard. This is far from being a myth, for I myself have met such men.⁷¹

At the same time, the emphasis on grammar and linguistics at Nālandā also made it a national and international center for textual studies. The libraries at Nālandā were reportedly vast and complete, automatically acquiring all deceased monks' private collections; their book-lending and copying services seem to have been sufficient for most students to keep personal copies of required texts. Chinese and other Asian

⁶⁸ Joshi, *Studies*, 166.

⁶⁹ YJ, 16.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 182-183.

pilgrims traveled there not just to master Sanskrit grammar and linguistics but also to acquire, study and translate definitive editions of all genres of Sanskrit works. Joshi

comments:

Nālandā University Library was the only standard place where foreign scholars and translators could get authoritative texts. Husan Tsang had taken to China with him copies of 124 Mahāyāna texts and other works amounting to 520 fasciculi. Yi jing got copies of 400 Sanskrit works at Nālandā which amounted to 500,000 verses. Inscriptions also refer to Sumatran monks copying MS. at Nālandā. It is also reported that the monks kept private libraries which after their death were to be deposited in the Central Library.⁷² [I]f today we are able to recover our valuable Buddhist scriptures from Sinhalese, Tibetan, Chinese, Khotanese, and Mongolian languages; and if we look to-day to the Ceylonese Chroniclers, Tibetan lot-sa-bas and Chinese annalists with an earnest hope of getting useful information concerning our past, and if the Indian historian of today can boast of his country's righteous conquest and cultural empire in bygone days, the credit goes to these Buddhist Universities and their scholars.⁷³

As for disciplinary standards at Nālandā, Xuan zang portrays them as every bit as high as its intellectual standards, depicting the students and faculty as

“spontaneously disciplined and grave, so that during 700 years since the foundation of the establishment, there had been no single case of rebellion against the rules.”⁷⁴

Elsewhere he explains, “On account of the priests' mutual confession, their faults were prevented before their growth.”⁷⁵ As in any Buddhist community, a faculty member who violated the canons of discipline would be censured, penalized or dismissed. Yet the atmosphere at the great university was not only dignified but also collegial, even familial. Xuan zang enumerates nine ways in which Nālandā students and faculty showed respect to one another or sacred images, from the simple salutations “Vande”

⁷² Joshi, *Studies*,, 170.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁷⁴ HL, 112; cited in Joshi, *Studies*,, 107.

⁷⁵ XZ, trans. Watters, *op cit.*, II, 65.

and “Ārogya,” to full prostration. Yi jing describes the bond between students and teachers as not only respectful but also caring.

First the teacher bids [the student] sit down comfortably. From the *Tripitaka*, he gives a lesson in a way that suits the circumstances, and does not pass any fact or theory unexplained. He inspects his pupil's moral conduct and warns him of defects and transgressions....[I]f there be anything to be done, [the student] does all on behalf of the teacher. This is the manner in which one pays respect to one's superior. On the other hand, in case of a pupil's illness, his teacher nurses him, supplies all the medicine needed and pays attention to him as if he were his child....[J]ust as a king *Cakravartin* very carefully protects and brings up his eldest son, so carefully is a pupil instructed in the law.⁷⁶

The political metaphor here appears to reflect the socially engaged role for which Nālandā students, monastic and lay, were groomed . Hui li offers a similar insight into the tone set by the administration. He reports that the president of the university is expected not only to be exemplary in intellect and character, but also to have “exalted spiritual powers and an affectionate disposition.”⁷⁷ Finally, Xuan zang and Yi jing both attest to the openness of the Nālandā community; guests, visitors and travelers were warmly welcomed and generously received by all, regardless of their origin, status or purpose.

4. The Art of Nālandā

The sheer volume of art works found at the Barāgon site has led Western and Indian historians to conclude that Nālandā must have had its own schools of architecture, sculpture and painting. The Nālandā school of fine arts is thought to have been one of the two most influential in India (with the Takṣaśīla school in the West)

⁷⁶ YJ, 120-121.

⁷⁷ HL, 70.

and to have become increasingly important through the Gupta, post-Gupta, pre-Pāla and Pāla eras,⁷⁸ finally exerting the primary influence on the Buddhist art of Central Asia. Although its stuccos and sculptures initially followed the Gandhara style developed at Takṣaśīla (3rd-4th CE) and the early Gupta style found at Sarnath (5th CE), Nālandā increasingly developed its own style, especially distinctive in the bronzes of the post-Gupta and pre-Pāla eras.⁷⁹ Typical of these bronzes is the syncretistic iconography of the Buddhist Tantras, in which Vajrayāna archetypes such as Heruka and Vajravarahi subsumed or subordinated their Hindu equivalents, Śiva or Bhairava and Parvati or Durga. But this distinctive syncretic style was apparently not without precedent even in the earliest art at Nālandā. The findings at Barāgon are indicative of an iconographic pluralism Shastri refers to as “catholicity.”⁸⁰ Theravāda icons such as the emaciated Buddha or Buddha flanked by ariputra and Maudgalyana (Mound S) are found alongside early Universalist (Gandhara-Ajantā style) icons such as the Jātaka stuccoes and the Buddha of Temple No. 3, flanked by Avalokiteśvara and Maitreya. Frequent images of Prajñāparamitā, Tāra, Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, Vajrapaṇi and the five Dhyani Buddhas were uncovered not far from sculptures of Trailokavijaya and Vajravarahi. Vedist and Buddhist motifs are found side by side in the sculpted panels of Temple No. 2, and statues of Viṣṇu and Gaṇeśa were unearthed elsewhere at the site. In her review of the Western art historical contribution to Nālandā studies, Stewart shows how the Euro-ethnocentric misconception of Universalist Buddhism as degenerate led to the consensus that the Nālandā style reflected the corruption of the “pure”

⁷⁸ Upasak, *Nālandā*, *op. cit.* 86.

⁷⁹ R.D. Banerjee, *Eastern Indian School of Medieval Sculpture*, cited in Upasak, *ibid.*

⁸⁰ Quoted in Stewart, *Historical Archeology*, *op cit.*, 142.

(Hellenized) Gandhara style by Hindu influence.⁸¹ To the contrary, our survey of the multi-cultural spirit of the Buddhist experiment and the comprehensive scope of the Nālandā curriculum suggest that the “catholic” style of the Nālandā school was representative of the highest traditions of Buddhist culture and education. A final point made by Indian historians about the Nālandā style of Buddhist esoteric art is that its subordination of Hindu to Buddhist iconography is not simply reactive but represents a proactive move, centered at Nālandā, to appropriate, transvalue and universalize Vedist and indigenous Indian traditions.⁸² This move is reflected in the triumphalist claims made by Xuan zang and Yi jing for Nālandā's comparative curriculum and its graduates, who, we are told, “oppose heretics as they would drive beasts in the middle of a plain.”

One key issue that may be clarified by a contextual study of the art at Nālandā is the thorny issue of dating the origins of esoteric traditions. Unfortunately, this task is complicated by the limitations of historical archeology at Nālandā, discussed above. The dates of the oldest art found at the Barāgon site are controversial, but a fair case has been made on stylistic grounds that it is contemporaneous with the early Gupta art found at Sarnath (5th-6th CE). Examples include the stucco sculptures found in Temple No. 3 of early Universalist Buddhas, bodhisattvas such as Tāra and Jātaka scenes. The Buddha here is part of a triad with Avalokiteśvara and Maitreya, seated on a lotus throne, continues a 3rd-4th century Gandharan genre but in a style that includes

⁸¹ Stewart, *ibid.*, 43ff.

⁸² Upasak, *Nālandā*, 86ff; Shastri suggests that the Brahmanical images "...might have been put by the Buddhists themselves to show that the Brahmanical gods were only subservient to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas." ASIAR, Eastern Circle Report, II, 39; quoted in Stewart, *Historical Archeology*, 142.

distinctive Gupta facial features.⁸³ This genre is connected with the worship of Maitreya, which Fa xien attests was popular in 5th century Magadha. In fact, the great majority of the bodhisattva images found at Barāgon and housed in the Nālandā collection are of Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara, although numerous stucco images of the eight bodhisattvas decorating the 5th level of stūpa No. 3 are among the earliest images found at Nālandā, dating to the 6th CE.⁸⁴ Also found at Stūpa No. 3 were: a stone sculpture in the Gandhara style of a crowned male figure seated in the posture of royal ease, holding a rosary and vase, and enhaloed by a shroud of Nāgas, thought to be Nāgārjuna; a figure with vajra and lotus, crowned by Akṣyobhya, thought to be Vajrasattva; and a mother goddess identified as Hāratī, to whom Yi jing reports mealtime offerings at Nālandā were made.⁸⁵ Among several other artifacts usually dated to the 5th-7th centuries, the sculpted panels Shastri found on the dado of the base of Temple No. 2 are noteworthy both because of their beauty and because they depict Hindu deities including Sūrya, Śiva, Agni, Lakṣmī and possibly Hāratī, as well as scenes from the *Rāmāyana* and several amorous couples.⁸⁶ These findings dated to the Gupta era suggest that the syncretic style of art at Nālandā may date to the foundation of the university, and from that time on can be readily distinguished from the styles of Gandhara, Sarnath and Bodhgayā by its distinctive incorporation of Vedist mythology

⁸³ Upasak, *Nālandā*, 89.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 102-103.

⁸⁵ Shastri, *Nālandā*, in Stewart, *Historical Archeology*, 141-142.

⁸⁶ Upasak, *Nālandā*, 90; C. Bautze-Picron, *La Culte de la Grande Deesse au Bihar* (Napoli: Instituto Universario Orientale, 1992), 32.

and of iconography drawn from the indigenous worship of feminine archetypes and sensuous couples (*maithuna*).⁸⁷

The distinctive elements of the Nālandā style become more accentuated in the transitional art of the post-Gupta, pre-Pāla period found at Barāgon. The Avalokiteśvara on slate stone (Nālandā reserve #00044), dated to the seventh century, is novel for its synthesis of the classical simplicity of Gupta style Buddhas in the Sarnath school with a sensuality reminiscent of contemporary Bengali images of Sūrya,⁸⁸ a synthesis not surprising in view of the mixed religious affiliation of Nālandā's post-Gupta patron, Harṣa. Also remarkable is the appearance of large scale images suggestive of the synthesis of exoteric and esoteric Universalist traditions at Nālandā, such as the black basalt Vajrapaṇi (#00010) and the Akṣyobhya Buddha in black slate stone (#00057). One of the most suggestive of these is the colossal blue basalt Samantabhadra in the museum's main hall, dated to the turn of the seventh century. It is remarkable for its esoteric iconography, including its topknot and diadem with Adibuddha crown ornament, the Dhyani Buddha trinity in its halo, and its flanking female consorts Tāra and Bhṛkuṭi. Also noteworthy in this connection is the Buddha image in the courtyard of the Sun Temple at Barāgon. Although undated, it has unusual stylistic features consistent with the post-Gupta synthesis at Nālandā. Unlike any of the other four colossal Buddhas in the vicinity, this one in the earth-touching gesture wears a crown and other ornaments symbolic of the sociopolitical power of his enlightenment

⁸⁷ Bautze-Picon, *ibid.*, confirms the antiquity and novelty of the Nālandā style: "Les représentations les plus anciennes de la Deesse shivaite apparaissent parmi les panneaux du temple du site 2, date du VIIe siècle (32)...L'iconographie de la Devī a suivi une voie particulière a Nālandā et dans la région localisée a l'Est de ce site...Les formes se diversifient, certaines s'inscrivent dans la prolongement des formes étudiées auparavant, tout en pouvant se révéler plus élaborées, d'autres sont nouvelles" (34).

⁸⁸ Upasak, *Nālandā*, 92.

experience. Interestingly, he is flanked by four smaller Buddhas in various gestures, in an arrangement that resembles the Dhyani Buddha system refined in the *Esoteric Communion*. Within the Sun Temple is a medium sized Mañjuśrī, holding a textbook without the usual sword; while another Nālandā Mañjuśrī found by Page (1930-1934, location unspecified), is also unique in holding a vajra and sword, without a book. This (undated) icon is evidently a precursor of the Mañjuvajra also associated with the *Esoteric Communion*, and further illustrates the transition from exoteric to esoteric iconography.

The rising presence of female deities in the pre-Pāla and early Pāla eras is yet another indication of the synthesis and transition underway. Beside images of Durgā (Vajravahī?) and Mahiṣamardini, Nālandā's pre-Pāla collection (#00003) features a highly sensuous Vajra-Sāradā, described by Upasak.⁸⁹ The Nālandā collection also includes images of many other female deities including stone images of Prajñāpāramitā, Tāra (#00100) and Syāma-Tāra, early Pāla bronzes of Tāra and Vajra-Tāra. Upasak says of Tāra:

In the medieval period between the 6th and 8th centuries she became one of the principal deities worshipped at Nālandā. From the account of Xuan zang we know that the people of Magadha and the neighboring countries used to adore her by offering perfumes and flowers, holding gem covered flags and canopies, while [playing] music.⁹⁰

Bautze-Picron describes the creative synthesis of Hindu mythology and indigenous goddess worship by the Nālandā school in the pre-Pāla and Pāla eras:

Les moines de Nālandā élaborerent à l'époque une iconographie complexe qui poursuivait tout en l'achevant un mouvement amorcé à Aurangabad et Ellora.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

Maintes nouvelles deesses sont alors introduites, souvent integree a des *maṇḍala*.⁹¹ [N]ous aimerons citer une stele d'origine inconnue mais fort probablement produite dans un des ateliers de Nālandā.... Sous sa forme ascetique, la Grande Deesse sivaite inclut dans son iconographie la rosaire...ainsi que la branche.⁹² A la meme epoque et jusque a l'epoque Pāla, Nālandā en revanche privilegia la forme ascetique de la Deesse....Cette Deesse devenue bouddhiste est concu a partie de l'imagerie śivaite....Les images proprement bouddhiques...d'une part...ont pu servir de support aux notions de fertilite et richesses, mais d'un autre part...ont pu etre intellectualises at de la sorte, echapper a la devotion poulaire.⁹³

The final realization of the Nālandā style in the Pāla era was characterized by the standardization of iconography by performance texts (*sādhana*) and the refinement of the metallurgic technology for the mass production of elegant statuary of black basalt and an eight metal alloy (*aṣṭadhātu*) known in the West as bronze. Upasak describes the art:

The artist of Eastern India had attained a high degree of excellence in the post-Gupta Era and specimens produced by them are truly marvels of human industry and skill....As this school of art was developed under the patronage of the Pāla kings who were zealous Buddhists and the art was mainly nurtured in the Buddhist monasteries of Bihar, headed by the University of Nālandā....The iconographic forms of these gods and goddesses were standardized by means of *Sādhana* or canonical formulae describing their distinctive appearance...down to the minutest details. [As L.P. Promod says in *Early History of Bengal*, the *sādhana*] “is a plastic commentary on the *Śilpaśāstra*.”⁹⁴

Although it is impossible given the limitations of historical archeology to draw any final conclusions about Candrakīrti's Nālandā from the artwork at Barāgon, a brief survey of the Nālandā school and its products does help flesh out the contextual picture of it developed above. Generally, it helps animate the glimpse we have from Chinese records of Nālandā's physical beauty, cosmopolitan culture, comprehensive curriculum

⁹¹ Bauze-Picron, *Culte*, 36.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 41 (my italics).

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 47-48 (my italics).

⁹⁴ Upasak, *Nālandā*, 93-95.

and high intellectual and moral standards. Specifically, it helps confirm Chinese and Tibetan claims for Nālandā in the 7th century: 1) that it hosted a creative dialogue between Buddhist and Vedist culture; 2) that it was home to a golden age synthesis of cosmopolitan elite traditions that helped to spread the Gangetic Buddhist experiment across Asia; 3) that it was engaged in a synthesis that embraced not only religion and philosophy, but all the scientific, technological and aesthetic disciplines vital to a cosmopolitan society; and 4) that its scholars were engaged in refining intellectually critical and morally cohesive forms of the popular worship of gods and goddesses.

6. Eurasia's First University

After Candrakīrti's century, the historical record clearly shows that Nālandā maintained its national and international role and continued its expansion under Pāla patronage. Although its second Pāla patron, Dharmapāla (770-810), founded two new universities, Odantapurī (730-1199) and Vikramaśīla (c.750-1300), these institutions were not only built on the Nālandā model but were in fact co-administered with their parent institution. While some historians speculate that Dharmapāla founded the new universities because he wanted to draw the center of Buddhist culture closer to the Pāla seat of power in Bengal, it is also probable that they were built as colleges specializing in the synthetic exoteric-esoteric Universalist curriculum that had gradually developed at Nālandā. Odantapurī was the earlier and smaller of the two, founded just miles from Nālandā with an estimated enrollment of one thousand and a faculty of one-hundred eighty professors. The more distant Vikramaśīla reportedly had a much larger enrollment of twelve thousand, and served as the model for the first Tibetan monastic

college at bSam-yas built by Khri-srong-lde-mthsan (755-797), also a patron of Nālandā.⁹⁵ Reports of Ki ye (in India 964-976) and Chag-lo-tsa-ba (1234-1236) show that Nālandā continued to serve as an international academic center until its devastation by a Turkic Muslim invader toward the close of the thirteenth century. This figure is often identified with Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khilji described in Minhaj-I-Siraj's Tābakat-I-Nāsiri as having overwhelmed two “forts” near Uddaṇḍapura sometime in the thirteenth century, only to find their inhabitants unarmed “with shaven heads” and to plunder their wealth, raze their buildings, burn countless books to ashes, and kill “the high and low.”⁹⁶

In his study of Buddhist education during the 7th–8th centuries, Lalmaṇi Joshi sums up the role of the great Buddhist universities in Indian and Asian civilization aptly:

It has been repeatedly pointed out that the Buddhist monasteries were not only the true centers of Buddhistic culture in particular, but also the nurseries and repositories of Buddhist education and learning in general. In course of the centuries some of these monasteries of India grew into large educational centers and had some characteristic features which justify their being called Universities. They had a truly universal character; they were free from religious, political or national barriers; they threw open their doors to all persons irrespective of caste, colour, creed or country. This universal and catholic spirit of Buddhistic culture and its centers earned a great international reputation for India and attracted scholars from far off countries. The same cannot be said of the Brahmanical system of education and its institutions.... It is therefore proper to attribute to the influence of Buddhism the rise of organized public education in India. The importance of these Buddhist Universities and their singular contributions towards the growth of Indian culture—India's literatures, arts, religious faiths and institutions, philosophical systems, logical theories, and technical sciences—and its expansion beyond the frontiers of India, can scarcely be over estimated.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Joshi, *Studies*, 173-174.

⁹⁶ Shastri, *Nālandā*, 2.

⁹⁷ Joshi, *Studies*, 167-168.

If H.D. Shankalia is right to call Nālandā “the premier and pioneer National University of India,”⁹⁸ it would be equally appropriate to speak of ancient Magadha's great center of Buddhist learning as the pioneer university of Eurasia. More insulated from attack than the University at Takṣaśīla yet more linked with Eurasia at large than Dhānyakaṭaka, Nālandā survived the destruction of Buddhist monasteries as far east as Kauśambi, Kuśīnagara, Pāṭaliputra and Bodhgayā by the Śaivite Huṇa rulers Toramāṇa (d. ca. 510), Mihirakula (r. ca.530-542), and Śaśāika (d.ca.627). Given that Candrakīrti's tenure fell during the latter persecution, the legend that he repulsed an invading army by riding a lion statue may suggest that he encouraging Harṣa to contain Śaśāika.⁹⁹ Nālandā's location in a region of relative political stability, economic abundance and social tolerance explains its place both at the hub of Asia's cosmopolitan mercantile-informational network and at the vanguard of liberal education in Eurasia. Not only was it founded eight centuries prior to the first European universities, but its pluralism and comprehensive curriculum were easily a millenium ahead of anything comparable in the West.¹⁰⁰ Although the limits of historical archeology have lead some to

⁹⁸ D.K.Barua, *Vihāras in Ancient India* (Calcutta: Indian Publications, 1969), 147.

⁹⁹ This series of events enters the historical record from several sources: 1) the reports of Xuan zang; 2) a seal of Toramaṇa found at the Gouitārama in Kauśambi; 3) reference to Bāladitya's conquest of the Huns in the Mālāda inscription at Nālandā; 4) *Harīcarita* 101, 132. See Joshi, *Studies*, 403-405.

¹⁰⁰ Although Western monasteries founded on the model of Benedict's Monte Cassino (525) offered Western European renunciates enough education to support the prayer of the *divine office* and exerted a cultivating influence on emerging far Western civilization through serving as hostels, the Benedictine Rule's requirement of manual labor precluded these monasteries from developing into universities. The Irish monastery founded at Clonmacnois (548) offered a more promising model, but by the time the Irish second university of St. James was established (1090) it was clear that it would be abortive for lack of local royal support. The universities of Italy, such as Bologna, would suffer censorship from the proximity of the Church, much as the university of Constantinople did from its foundation in the 9th CE. Italy would not produce a university with any real degree of academic freedom until Frederick II of Sicily founded the first state university in the West at Naples (1221-1231). Like Ficino's Neoplatonic academy in Florence, which would develop two and a half centuries later under the cosmopolitan patronage of the Medici court, the university of Sicily developed in interaction with the cosmopolitan court at Palermo and probably served as a model for the courts of the Italian renaissance and Northern Europe. Yet again, despite its head start and direct contact with the cosmopolitan classical culture of Abbasid Islam, the University of Sicily proved too

underestimate Nālandā's antiquity, complexity and scale, contextual study of the archeological and epigraphic data in light of the Indian, Chinese and Tibetan records strongly suggests that Nālandā offered 7th century Indian Buddhist scholar-practitioners like Candrakīrti an environment of academic freedom and practical sophistication that was unparalleled in Eurasia and would remain so for centuries to come. Since this fact directly challenges Euro-ethnocentric conceptions of the history of civilization, it is critical that we bear it in mind in examining the precocious intellectual milieu in which Candrakīrti wrote.

close to the papal states to sustain the ongoing process of scientific-humanistic crystallization in the West. Instead, it would be the monastic universities at the more peripheral centers like Paris (founded 1200) and Oxford (founded 1214), linked with the patronage of the French, British and German courts, that would provide the institutional matrix to sustain the Western world's cosmopolitan classical synthesis, as home to the likes of Newton, Gibbon, Kant and Darwin.