

RAJGIR: WHERE ARCHAEOLOGY & HISTORY REMAINS SILENT BUT EXPLAINS EVERYTHING

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ABSTRACT

Rajgriha (modern-day Rajgir) is an ancient city in Bihar, India, that served as the first capital of the powerful kingdom of Magadha. **Historical Significance:** Ancient Capital: It was the early capital of the Magadha Empire during the reigns of rulers like King Bimbisara and King Ajatashatru of the Haryanka dynasty. **Alternative Names:** Also known as Girivraja (meaning "enclosure of hills"), the city is protected by five scenic hills: Ratnagiri, Vipulachal, Vaibhavgiri, Songiri, and Udaygiri. Rajgir is traditionally surrounded by five main hills, though ancient texts and scriptures also mention a valley ringed by seven hills. **The Five Main Hills:** According to general geography and tourism references, the town is nestled among these five prominent peaks: Ratnagiri, Vipulachal (or Vipula), Vaibhavgiri (or Vaibharagiri), Songiri (or Sona), Udaygiri (or Udaya). The old fortified city which lies in the valley surrounded by seven hills (Chhatha, Ratna, Sailsa, Sona, Udaya, Vaibhara and Vipula). Ratnagiri Hill is the highest among the main historic hills surrounding Rajgir, reaching an altitude of about 305 to 388 meters depending on the specific ridge measurement. **Elevation:** Rises to about 305 meters (with the broader Rajgir range peaking around 388 meters). **Major Landmark:** Home to the famous Vishwa Shanti Stupa (World Peace Pagoda) at its summit. Religious **Significance:** Sacred to Buddhists and Jains, located close to the historic Griddhakuta (Vulture's Peak). **Access:** Can be reached via a popular ropeway/cable car system.

KEYWORDS: Nalanda, Magadha, Vishwa Shanti Stupa, Son Bhandar, Bramhakund, Venuvana, Glass Bridge, Shankha Lipi, Ropeway.

OVERVIEW: Rajgir is an ancient, scenic city in the Nalanda district of Bihar, India, known as the first capital of the Magadha kingdom and a major spiritual centre for Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism. Rajgir (old name

Rajagriha, meaning "The City of Kings") is an ancient city and university town in the Nalanda district of Bihar, India.



Figure-1: Nalanda District & King Bimbisara.

It is also considered a cultural capital of Magadh. It was the capital of the Haryanka dynasty, the Pradyota dynasty, the Brihadratha dynasty, the Maurya Empire, and it was the retreat centre for the Buddha and his sangha. Other historical figures such as Mahavira and king **Bimbisara** lived there, and due to its religious significance, the city holds a place of prominence in Buddhist, Jain and Hindu scriptures.

1. Son Bhandar Caves in Rajgir, Bihar, survived British attempts to blast them open due to the structural integrity of the ancient rock-cut architecture. Local folklore widely recounts that during the British Raj, officials targeted a prominent stone wall inside the cave that resembles a sealed doorway, believing it hid the legendary treasure vault of King Bimbisara. According to historical lore and popular local accounts, British forces brought in a heavy military cannon to force entry:

The Cannon Fire: The soldiers pointed the massive cannon directly at the outlined stone doorway and fired a heavy iron cannonball at point-blank range. The solid rock face had not shattered. The vault remained entirely sealed.

The Visible Mark: Instead of breaking the mountain structure, the attack failed completely, leaving only a permanent scar on the cave. The British once tried to cannonball their way through the supposed doorway, but without success, leaving just a black mark that's still visible. The "special mark" on the Son Bhandar Caves in Rajgir, Bihar refers to two highly famous and mysterious markings: an undeciphered [unable to read] inscription code and a distinct black cannonball scar left by the British.

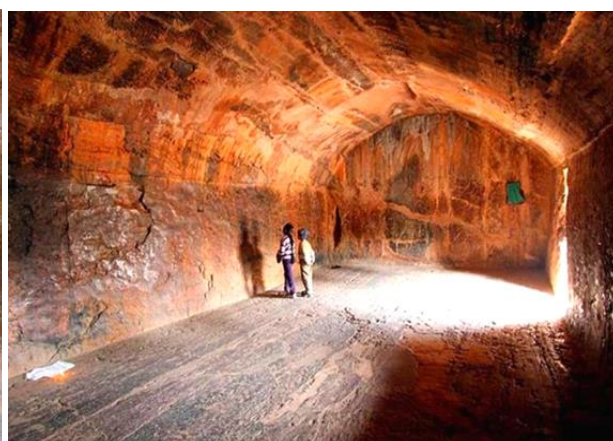
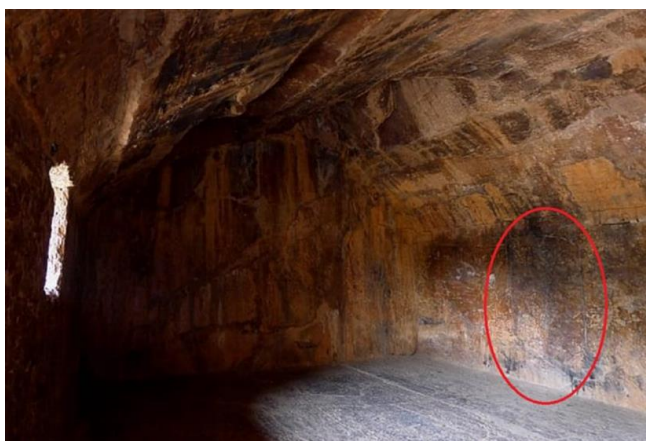


Figure-2: Son Bhandar Cannon Fire.

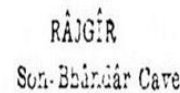
The Mysterious Inscription ("The Treasure Code"): On the western wall of the cave, adjacent to a large, blocked stone door, there are mysterious inscriptions written in Sankhlipi (shell script) and Brahmi/Gupta script.

The Legend: Local folklore states that these caves serve as the "store of gold" (Son Bhandar) where the Magadhan King Bimbisara's wife hid his vast treasure when his son Ajatashatru imprisoned him.

The "Secret Code": According to legend, these markings are an ancient password or cryptographic code. It is widely believed that whoever correctly deciphers and chants the script will trigger a magical mantra that opens the massive 10-foot-thick stone door to reveal. The "special mark" on the Son Bhandar Caves in Rajgir,

Bihar refers to two highly famous and mysterious markings: an undeciphered inscription code and a distinct black cannonball scar left by the British.

The British Cannonball Mark: The second prominent "special mark" is a physical black scar on the upper section of the cave's stone entry door. During the British Raj, British officials heard legends of the immense gold hoard stashed behind the stone wall. Rather than decoding the script, they attempted to brute-force their way inside by firing a cannonball directly at the stone door. The ancient Maurya/Gupta-era rock-cut engineering proved indestructible—the wall remained perfectly intact, and the only result of the explosion was a permanent black impact mark that tourists can still see today.



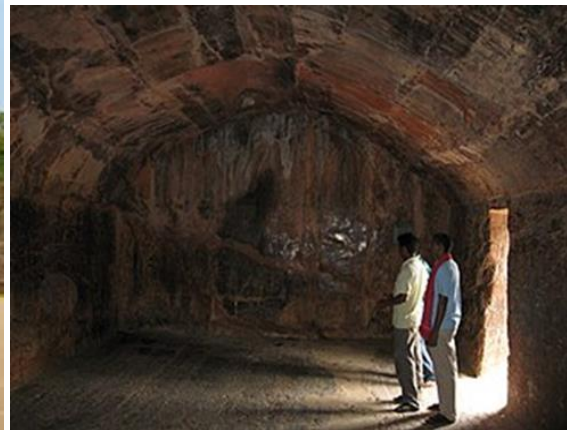
நித்யானந்தர் அவர் பத்திரிகை - மூலநிலை இயல்பு
முதலாம் பத்திரிகை: சிவகாமியம்

The Son Bhandar Caves in Rajgir, Bihar, are two artificial rock-cut chambers shrouded in a legend that a vast, hidden royal treasure of gold belonging to ancient King Bimbisara is sealed inside their walls.

Meaning of Name: Son Bhandar translates literally to a "store of gold".

The Sealed Doorway: One of the cave walls features a blocked, doorway-like stone structure that people believe leads to the secret underground treasury vault.

Undeciphered Inscriptions: Etched right next to the blocked stone doorway are ancient carvings in the *Shankha Lipi* (shell script) that remain completely undeciphered [*unable to read*]. Legend says this inscription contains the secret code or "word" required to slide open the stone door.



The British Attack: During the British Raj, a British army officer tried to blast open the sealed rock wall using a cannon, but the massive stone didn't budge. Only a black scorch mark remains on the rock face today as proof of the failed attempt.

Jain Origins: Despite the popular treasure lore, historical inscriptions written in Gupta script inside the main cave show it was actually built around the 3rd or 4th century CE by a Jain monk named Muni Vairadeva to house ascetics. The mystery behind the Son Bhandar Caves in Rajgir, Bihar, centers on a legendary hidden treasury of gold belonging to the ancient Magadhan King Bimbisara.

The Treasury: Son Bhandar translates literally to "store of gold".

The Hiding Place: Legend says that when King Bimbisara was imprisoned by his ambitious son Ajatashatru, the king's wife hid the royal family's massive fortune inside these caves.

The Sealed Doorway: One of the chambers features a blocked, doorway-like stone structure. Locals and folklore believe a vast fortune sits sealed behind this solid rock wall.

The Undeciphered Inscription

Shankha Lipi: Etched onto the wall near the blocked entrance are mysterious symbols and letters written in Shankha Lipi (conch shell script). The Shankh Lipi (shell

script) at the Son Bhandar Caves in Rajgir, Bihar, is an undeciphered ancient inscription that many people believe holds the secret code to a hidden royal treasury.

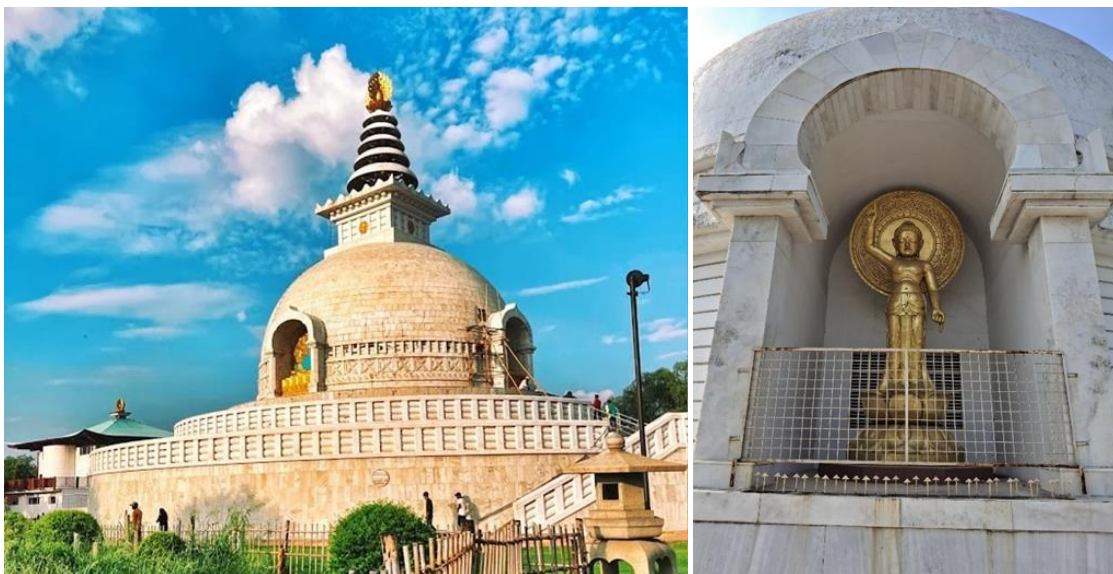


Figure-5: Vishwa Shanti Stupa.

What is Shankh Lipi? Shell-like shape: Experts call it "conch script" because the carved symbols look like conch shells.

Origin: It is an old variation of the ancient Brahmi script.

The Secret Code: Popular belief holds that these engravings contain the secret instructions or a mantra required to slide open the stone door. To this day, experts have failed to fully decipher the script.

The British Cannon Attack

The Attempt: Intrigued by the legend during the British Raj, a British army officer tried to blast open the sealed rock wall using a cannon.

The Result: The cannonball failed to break or shatter the stone, leaving only a dark, indented scar that remains visible on the rock surface today.

Top Attractions

2. Vishwa Shanti Stupa: A massive white peace pagoda sitting atop Ratnagiri Hill, offering panoramic views and reachable via a ropeway. The Vishwa Shanti Stupa in Rajgir, Bihar, is the world's highest peace pagoda, standing atop the 400-meter-high Ratnagiri Hill.



Figure-6: Ropeway.

Key Details

Location: Ratnagiri Hill, Rajgir, Nalanda District, Bihar, India.

Built: Completed in 1969 and expanded in 1993 by the Japanese Nichiren Buddhist sect Nipponzan-Myohoji.

[**Nam-myoho-rengo-kyo** translates to "*Devotion to the Mystic Law of the Lotus Sutra*".

Nam (or Namu): Comes from Sanskrit (namas), meaning to dedicate or devote one's life.

Myo: Means mystic, wonderful, or the hidden/enlightened nature of life.

Ho: Means law, dharma, or the visible and concrete phenomena of the universe. Together, Myoho is the Mystic Law.

Renge: Means lotus flower. It stands for the simultaneous working of cause and effect, as the lotus produces both flower and seed at the same time. It also represents blooming with purity out of the muddy struggles of daily life.

Kyo: Means sutra or the voice and teachings of the Buddha.]

Design: Built entirely of white marble, featuring four golden statues of Lord Buddha facing four directions to represent his birth, enlightenment, preaching, and death.

Timings: Open daily from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM.

How to Reach: Accessible via a modern ropeway or by climbing around 600 steps.

Rajgir Nature Safari & Glass Bridge: India's modern glass sky-walk set among scenic hills, alongside wild animal safaris.

3. Venu Vana: A peaceful bamboo grove and park that was once a royal residence gifted to Lord Buddha. Venuvan in Rajgir, Bihar, is considered the first Buddhist monastery, gifted to Gautama Buddha by King Bimbisara of Magadha around 2,500 years ago. Venu Van is an ancient, historically significant bamboo grove and monastery located in Rajgir, Bihar that was gifted to Gautama Buddha by King Bimbisara of Magadha.



Figure-7: Venu Vana.

Key Historical & Religious Significance

First Buddhist Monastery: It is considered the very first bamboo grove monastery where the Buddha and his disciples lived, meditated, and preached.

The Karandak Tank: The park houses a small historic pond called the Karandak tank, where the Buddha used to bathe before heading up to Gridhakuta (Vulture's Peak) to teach.

Royal Association: King Bimbisara was a devoted follower and once spent the night here with the Buddha when the city gates closed after a late visit to the nearby hot springs.

Significance: Buddha and his disciples lived and preached here. Buddha frequently bathed in the internal Karandak tank (pond) before heading to Giddha Kuta hill.

Location: Situated near the Rajgir Hot Springs on Virayatan Road, about 3 km from the Rajgir.

Hot Springs: Natural thermal springs (like Braham Kund) revered for their healing properties.

Ghora Katora Lake: A serene, crescent-shaped natural lake surrounded by hills, featuring a large central Buddha statue.

Swarna Bhandar: Mysterious rock-cut caves featuring ancient inscriptions linked to King Bimbisara's legendary treasury [BCE. 558 – 491].

Rajgir is famous as an ancient spiritual centre and the first capital of the powerful Magadha kingdom, holding deep religious significance for Buddhists, Jains, and Hindus.

Spiritual and Religious Importance

Buddhism: Lord Buddha spent many years here meditating and preaching.

Key spots include Gridhakuta (Vulture's Peak) where he delivered major teachings, and Venu Vana—an early bamboo grove monastery.

Jainism: The city is revered because Lord Mahavira spent several rainy seasons and delivered teachings here.

Hinduism: The epic Mahabharata mentions Rajgir (then Rajagriha) as the capital of King Jarasandha, where the

famous wrestling match between Bhima and Jarasandha took place.

4. Jarasandha Ka Akhara in Rajgir is an ancient, legendary wrestling arena and archaeological site in Bihar, India, linked to the Mahabharata.

Historical and Mythological Significance

The Epic Duel: “Bhima, the second Pandava brother, killed Jarasandha at this place. Krishna advised Bhima to trick Jarasandha in a duel to kill him.” Jarasandha Ka Akhara is an ancient, open-air historical and mythological site in Rajgir, Bihar that served as the legendary wrestling arena and martial arts training ground for King Jarasandha of Magadha.

History and Mythology

The Mahabharata Duel: According to the Hindu epic Mahabharata, this site is where the fierce, month-long

wrestling duel took place between the Pandava brother Bhima and King Jarasandha.

The Defeat: “Krishna advised Bhima to trick Jarasandha in a duel to kill him.” Following this advice, Bhima tore Jarasandha's body in half and threw the pieces in opposite directions so they could not rejoin.

Military Training: The arena was used by Jarasandha and his army to train soldiers and host combat challenges against opposing rulers.



Figure-8: Jarasanda Akhra.

Training Ground: The site served as a martial arts arena where King Jarasandha of Magadha trained his armies and gathered rival kings.

Current State: Today, the location features elevated stone platforms and old ruins near the Vaibhava Hill, surrounded by local flora.

Location: Situated near Vaibhava Hill, roughly 1.5 kilometers from the Sonbhadra Caves in Rajgir, Nalanda district.

Access: Easily reachable via a short walk, cab, or rickshaw from the main town or local railway station (about 5 km away).

5. Brahmakund in Rajgir, Bihar is the hottest and most sacred natural geothermal hot water spring, with temperatures reaching around 45°C (113°F).

Key Details: Location: At the base of the Vaibhava (Vaibhargiri) Hill in Rajgir, Nalanda district, Bihar, about 3 km from the Rajgir Railway Station.

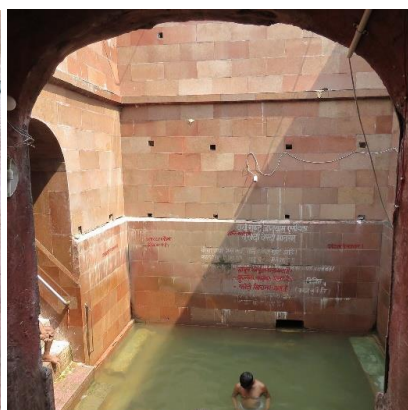


Figure-9: Bramhakund.

Temperature: Approximately 45°C due to natural sulfur and mineral content.

Origin: Collects water from the Saptadhara (seven streams) originating from the Saptaparni Caves.

Best Time to Visit: September to April. Entry Fee: Free. The water of Brahma Kund is believed to have medicinal and healing properties due to its sulphur content.”

Pilgrims believe bathing here helps cure skin ailments and purifies the soul. The water in the Rajgir kunds (hot springs) is hot because of natural geothermal activity deep underground that heats the water before it flows out through the hills.

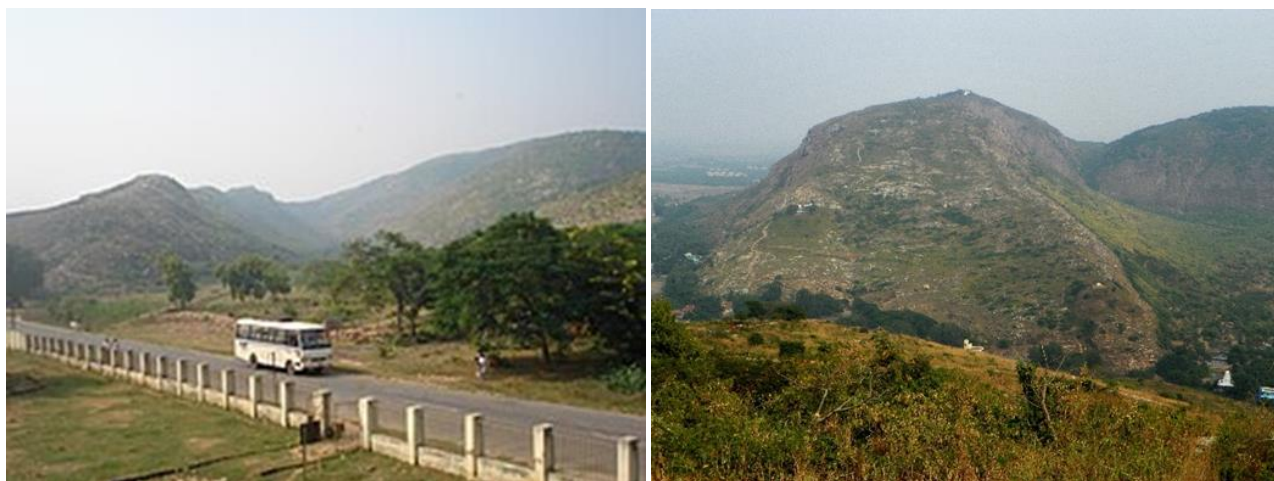


Figure-10: Rajgir is covered by hills.

How It Works

Geothermal Heat: Groundwater seeps deep into the earth, where hot rocks and geothermal energy warm it up.

Mineral Interaction: As the heated water travels through subterranean channels near the Vaibhargiri Hills, it picks up minerals like sulfur.

Surface Streams: The hot water emerges at the surface in streams (such as the Saptarshi streams) at a steady temperature of around 45°C (113°F) year-round.

Brahmakund: This is the hottest and most famous spring in Rajgir, reaching temperatures near 45°C.

Healing Beliefs: The water contains sulfur and other minerals, which local traditions and visitors believe help cure skin diseases and joint pain.

Religious Importance: Pilgrims consider the water sacred and visit to take a holy dip.

Yes, the water in Brahmakund in Rajgir, Bihar, contains natural sulfur and other minerals that give it a high temperature and healing properties.

Key Facts About Brahmakund

Sulfur and Minerals: The subterranean pathways are packed with high amounts of natural sulfur and helium minerals.

Water Temperature: The water temperature in Brahmakund ranges between 45°C to 50°C (and can reach higher in specific streams).

Medicinal Beliefs: The water of Brahma Kund is rich in minerals like sulfur, which is said to have therapeutic properties.

Location: It sits at the base of the Vaibhara (Vaibhargiri) Hill in Rajgir and collects water from the Saptadhara (seven streams).

6. Maniyar Math is a mysterious, cylindrical brick shrine located in the center of ancient Rajgir in Bihar, historically dedicated to the serpent deity Mani Naga. Discovered in 1861 by British archaeologist **Sir Alexander Cunningham**, “the site was originally a worshipping area for the Naga cult.” [District Nalanda, Government of Bihar]. Maniyar Math in Rajgir is primarily dedicated to Mani Naga, the serpent deity and guardian god of ancient Rajagriha. Deity and History Main Deity: The shrine is dedicated to Maniyar Matth, sacred to the snake god (Naga) Mani-Naga, who is also mentioned in the Mahabharata.

Architecture: Features a unique central well-like cylindrical structure built with Gupta-period bricks, surrounded by a raised circular platform.

Stucco Sculptures: The outer walls contain niches featuring damaged stucco images of Hindu and regional deities, including a four-armed Vishnu, Ganesha intertwined with snakes, and a dancing Shiva.

Mythological Links: Local folklore connects the site to King Jarasandha from the Mahabharata, who is believed to have worshipped the Naga gods here.



Figure-11: Maniyar Math.



Figure-12: Veerayatan.

Veerayatan in Rajgir is a major spiritual and humanitarian centre located at the foothills of the Vaibhagiri hills.

The **Rajgir Glass Bridge** is Bihar's first transparent glass skywalk, located inside the Nature Safari park at the foothills of the Vaibhar Giri and Swarna Giri hills in Rajgir.

Key Details

Dimensions: Around 85 to 130 feet long and 6 feet wide, sitting about 200 to 250 feet above the valley floor.

Capacity: Allows around 10 to 40 visitors at a time depending on safety regulations.

Timings: Generally open from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM; closed on Mondays.



Figure-13: Glass Bridge.

7. Cyclopean Wall: It is wall of Rajgir is a 40-kilometre-long (25 mi) wall of stone which encircled the ancient city of Rajgriha (present-day Rajgir), in the Indian state of Bihar, to protect it from external enemies

and invaders. It is described as being one of the few extant structures from ancient India to have pre-Mauryan origins.



Figure-14: Cyclopean wall Cyclopes.

A cyclopean wall is an ancient stone fortification built using massive, unworked limestone or rock boulders stacked tightly together without the use of mortar.

Cyclopean stone walls get their name from ancient Greek myths about giant, one-eyed monsters called the Cyclopes, who were believed to have the supernatural strength required to move massive boulders.

Mythological Origins

In Greek mythology, the Cyclopes were **legendary giant beings with a single round eye in the middle of their forehead**. Ancient traditions split them into different groups:

The Elder Cyclopes: Master Blacksmiths like Arges, Steropes, and Brontes who forged Zeus's thunderbolts.

The Homeric Shepherds: Savage, man-eating giants, most famously Polyphemus, who was blinded by Odysseus in Homer's Odyssey.

Key Features

Dry-Stone Construction: Rocks fit together using their natural shapes, with smaller stone chunks filling the gaps.

Key Historical & Religious Overview



Figure-15: Pippali Cave & Saptaparni Cave.

Name Origin: Ancient Greeks believed these enormous structures were built by the mythical one-eyed giants known as the Cyclopes.

Global Examples: Famous instances include the Bronze Age fortifications of Mycenae and Tiryns in Greece, as well as sites in Italy.

Age: Built around 2,500 years ago during the pre-Mauryan era by early Magadha rulers like King Bimbisara and King Ajatashatru.

Size: Originally spanned roughly 40 kilometers (25 miles) around the ancient capital of Rajgriha, featuring a width of about 12 to 14 feet.

Purpose: Guarded the ancient valley capital across surrounding hills using strategic bastions and numerous entry gates.

8. Pippali Guha: In English, "Pippali Guha" translates directly to Pippala Cave or Pippali Cave. Located on the Vaibhava Hill in Rajgir, Bihar, it is a highly revered ancient site with significant historical and religious context.

Buddhism Connection: The cave is primarily famous in Buddhist tradition. It is named after a Pipal (sacred fig) tree that once stood at its entrance. It served as a favoured residence for the Buddha, who would often walk up to the cave to meditate after his midday meals. "...there is a stone cell, called the Pin-po-lo (Pippal) cave, where Buddha was accustomed to sit in deep meditation after his midday meal." — [Ancient Caves of Rajagriha]. It is also famously known as the intense meditation abode of Mahakasyapa (Maha Kassapa), the Buddha's chief disciple.

The "Jarasandh ki Baithak" Moniker: Locally and historically, the massive stone structure built right above the cave is widely referred to as Jarasandh ki Baithak (King Jarasandha's Meeting Chamber), referencing the legendary king of Magadha from the Hindu epic Mahabharata.

Archaeological Nature: Archaeological evidence suggests that the large 22-foot-high rectangular stone

structure initially served as a watchtower or a defensive outpost built into Rajgir's famous Cyclopean Wall fortifications. After its military utility faded, its small cells and grottos were repurposed into a serene retreat for monks and hermits.

9. Saptaparni Cave, also known as Saptaparni Guha, is a historic Buddhist site located on the Vaibhava Hill in Rajgir, Bihar, India.

Significance

First Buddhist Council: The cave is deeply revered as the venue where the First Buddhist Council was held around 400 BCE, shortly after the Mahaparinirvana (death) of Gautama Buddha.

Preservation of Teachings: Under the leadership of monk Mahakasyapa and the patronage of King Ajatshatru, around 500 monks gathered here to recite, compile, and preserve the Buddha's teachings and sermons for future generations through Ananda and Upali.



Figure-16: King Ajatshatru & King Jarashandha.

The Name: Literally translating to "Seven-leaves-cave" in Sanskrit and Pali (*sattapaṇṇi guhā*), traditions connect its name to seven natural caves or local flora and water streams associated with the site.

10. Jivak Amravan (also known as Jivakarama Vihara or Jivaka's Mango Garden) is an ancient Buddhist archaeological site located in Rajgir, Nalanda district, Bihar, India. Historically, it is recognized as one of the oldest institutional Buddhist monasteries (viharas) in the world, dating back to c. 530–400 BCE. Jivaka (also spelled Jivak or Jeevak) was a renowned 5th-century

BCE ancient Indian surgeon and physician to King Bimbisāra and Gautama Buddha.

Historical Figure & Legacy

The Model Healer: Also known as *Jivaka Komārabhacca*, he trained in Taxila and became a legendary master of internal medicine, pediatrics, and surgery.

Royal Physician: He served the royal court of Magadha and offered medical care to the early Buddhist monastic community.



Figure-17: Jivak Amravan & Jivak [The Royal Physician].

The Royal Physician: The site originally belonged to Jivaka (Jivaka Komarabhacca), the highly celebrated royal physician of the Magadha rulers, King Bimbisara and King Ajatashatru. Bimbisara gifted this land to Jivaka as a reward for his monumental contributions to the medical field.

CONCLUSION

The phrase "Rajgir, where archaeology remains silent" highlights a profound truth about one of India's oldest historical landscapes. While the ancient capital of the Magadha Empire is steeped in epic mythology from the Mahabharata and rich textual histories of Buddhism and Jainism, its physical soil presents a deeper puzzle. Despite decades of exploration, large chapters of Rajgir's earliest history lack definitive scientific artifacts, leaving archaeology "silent" where literature speaks volumes. This contrast between silence and history is evident in several key areas: The a) Enigma of Son Bhandar Caves: Hollowed out of a single massive rock, these ancient caves are widely rumored to guard the legendary treasury of the Magadhan King Bimbisara. Etched onto the walls are undeciphered inscriptions written in the mysterious Sankhlipi (shell) script. Until today, "the mystery of Son Bhandar cave has not been solved," as the inscriptions supposedly detailing how to open the secret doorway remain uncracked by modern linguists.

b) The Disconnected Cyclopean Wall: This massive 40-kilometer defensive fortification constructed of interlocking stone boulders without mortar is one of the oldest structural remains in India. However, the physical structure still leaves gaps in our historical narrative. Modern archaeological research reveals that our initial understandings of this wall are incomplete, as its actual construction phases and urban functions often challenge the unified system assumed in ancient texts.

c) Overshadowed Secular Urbanism: For centuries, formal archaeology in Rajgir heavily favored the discovery of religious landmarks mentioned by ancient Chinese travelers like Faxian and Xuanzang. Because of this focus, the city's "urban functions... have been overshadowed by its identification as a Buddhist site since the 19th century," leaving the secular, everyday lives of its ancient citizens historically quiet. While recent excavations by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) have slowly unearthed everyday infrastructure like pre-Mauryan brick walls, terracotta ring wells, and primitive iron-smelting workshops, Rajgir remains a site where the earth keeps secrets that books claimed to have solved long ago.

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