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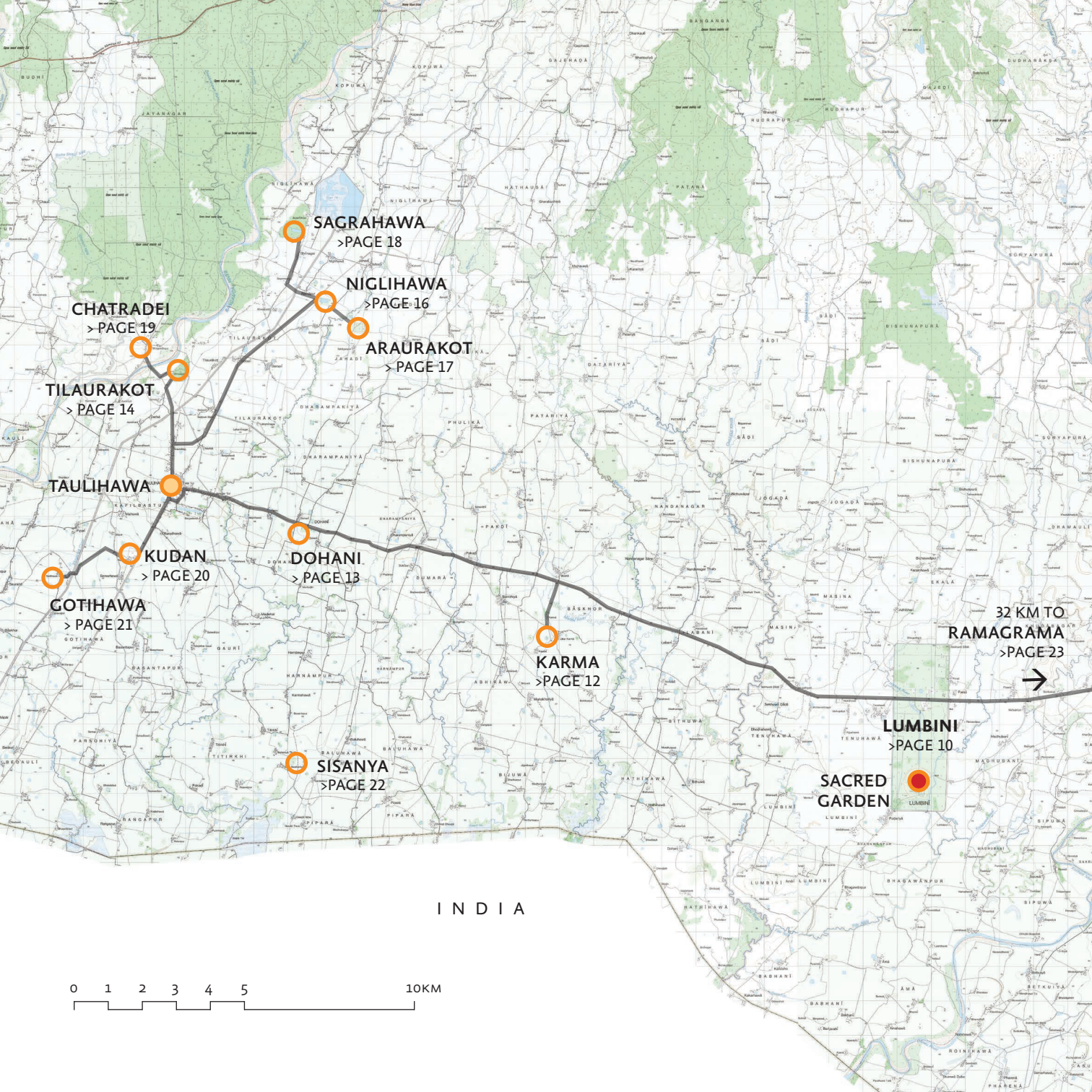
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## THE GREATER LUMBINI AREA RELIGIOUS AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES





# EXPLORE THE GREATER LUMBINI AREA

Lumbini can be reached by a 30 minute local flight from Nepal’s capital Kathmandu to Bhairahawa. The 280 kilometre journey by road takes approximately 8 hours. The nearest international border crossing to India is at Bhairahawa - Sunauli.

The climate of the region is dictated by the monsoon. The summers can be incredibly hot and humid, reaching temperatures of over 40°C.

During the winter months the Terai is often covered by fog, the climate is damp, and the temperature can drop to single figures.

The most pleasant times of the year are the months of February and November. On a clear day, it is possible to look northwards across the plain, past the foothills of the Siwaliks and see the Himalayas rising in the distance.

Most hotels and guesthouses for all tastes are located to the East of Lumbini Protected Area. Pilgrims can stay at one of the numerous monasteries.

Renting a vehicle is the best way to access the archaeological sites within a day but sportive travellers might use bicycles.

The following itineraries start and end at Lumbini:

**ITINERARY 1**  
Lumbini tour, including the Sacred Garden, the Maya Devi Temple, Monastic Zones, Lumbini Museum and the Peace Stupa.  
You can either walk from the north entrance to the Sacred Garden or use rickshaws or rented bicycles.  
*half to full day*

**ITINERARY 2**  
Tilaurakot including brief stops in Karma and Dohani.  
*63 km round trip, 4+ hours*

**ITINERARY 3**  
Tilaurakot including Kudan and Gotihawa  
*70 km round trip, 6+ hours*

**ITINERARY 4**  
Vist all sites west of Lumbini  
*110 km round trip, 8+ hours*

**ITINERARY 5**  
Ramagrama  
*64 km, 5+ hours*  
*Ramagrama is only an 8 km round trip from the main highway between Lumbini and Kathmandu.*



INTRODUCTION TO THE GREATER LUMBINI AREA



Most of the current population of the region are Hindu and Muslim.

The Greater Lumbini Area (GLA) comprises the three Nepali districts of Rupandehi, Nawalparasi and Kapilavastu, and is centred on the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Lumbini. The GLA contains hundreds of archaeological sites, some of which are directly associated with the life of the Buddha. Key sites include Lumbini, where Lord Buddha was born, Tilaurakot-Kapilavastu, the city in which he spent the first 29 years of his life, and Ramagrama, one of the original eight nirvana stupas which house his ashes. Tilaurakot and Ramagrama are on the tentative list for UNESCO World Heritage Status.

The GLA lies within Nepal’s western Terai, a flat alluvial plain bisected



More than 20 monasteries from as many countries have been established in Lumbini.

by several major rivers. These rivers flow southwards from the Siwalik Hills before eventually merging with the Ganges River. The silts that are deposited by annual floodwaters from the rivers, are what make the region so agriculturally rich, and why people have been drawn to live here for millennia.

Whilst the Terai was the heartland and origin of Buddhism, most of the current population of the region are Hindu and Muslim. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Terai was sparsely inhabited. The dense forest and jungle acted as an informal buffer between the British Raj and the Hill States to the north. The main population living in the Terai were Tharu. Local communities



Transportation within the GLA

practised small scale agriculture, and had developed a natural resistance to malaria. From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the forests of the Terai were slowly cleared for agriculture and industry, and archaeological sites associated with Buddhism were rediscovered.

In 1967, the UN Secretary-General U Thant initiated a major international campaign to develop and protect Lumbini. This prompted the Nepali government to establish the Lumbini Development Trust (LDT) and today, the LDT and the Department of Archaeology share responsibilities for the management and protection of the historic sites.



Hindu pilgrims in the Banganga River on full moon days



Lotus in the circular pond around the Sacred Garden in Lumbini



A sarus crane in the sanctuary near the World Peace Pagoda



Local buses and ox carts still dominate the rural roads





Inside the Tara Foundation Monastery



Dharmodaya Sabha Monastery



Inside the Korean Temple

## PILGRIMAGE



Pilgrims and monks at the Sacred Garden in Lumbini



Nuns prostrating on the path leading to the Sacred Garden.



Ligthing of butter lamps

When the Buddha was approaching the end of his life, he advised his followers that there were four great places of pilgrimage associated with his journey: Lumbini, where he was born; Bodh Gaya, where he achieved enlightenment; Sarnath, where he preached his first sermon; and Kushinagara, where he would achieve his "Great Passing Away" or Mahaparinirvana.

Since then, Buddhists have been undertaking pilgrimages to the GLA in order to worship in the footsteps of Lord Buddha. We now know that the first shrine at Lumbini was constructed almost immediately after his death. The first recorded

pilgrimage to the region was that of Asoka, the Mauryan Emperor, in 249 BCE. He erected at least three pillars at Lumbini, Gotihawa and Niglihawa marking the birthplace of two Buddhas and the resting place of a third.

However, much of our knowledge of pilgrimage and the sites in the area is derived from the records of two Chinese pilgrims, Faxian and Xuanzang. They travelled throughout much of South Asia, including the Terai, in the fifth and seventh centuries CE respectively. They left detailed descriptions of sites they visited and their location in the landscape. Tracing the journeys of

these pilgrims was in many ways the genesis of the archaeology of Buddhism in the subcontinent.

After the rediscovery of many of these sites in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, pilgrims began to slowly flow back to Lumbini and other sites. U Thant's desire to see Lumbini developed now sees the GLA visited by over one million people per year, from Nepal and abroad. Many of these people are on personal spiritual journeys, while others are here to learn more about the history and values of Buddhism.



HISTORY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH



View of the 2016 archaeological excavations at Kudan

Lumbini was “rediscovered” in 1896 when Dr Führer, Archaeological Surveyor of the Indian Northwestern Provinces and Oudh Circle, was invited by General Khadga Shumsher J.B. Rana, the Governor of Palpa, to undertake archaeological investigations close to his camp. Together they identified four mounds, on the largest of which stood a temple dedicated to the river goddess Rupa Devi. Führer re-identified the statue of Rupa Devi as representing Maya Devi giving birth to Gautama Buddha. Adjacent to the temple was a broken pillar rising about ten feet from the ground. Führer and General Rana excavated the base of the pillar and uncovered



Excavations inside the Maya Devi Temple in the 1990s.

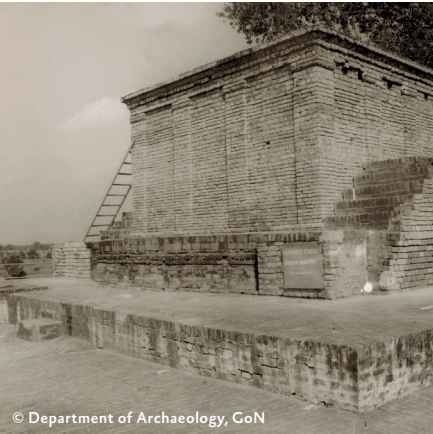
Asoka’s inscription. The translation of the inscription clearly identified the site as Lumbini. The historic descriptions of Chinese pilgrims were used to identify further sites in the area, linking Tilaurakot with ancient Kapilavastu.

In 1899, P.C. Mukherji of the Archaeological Survey of India surveyed and excavated the ruins at Tilaurakot. Mukherji recognized the wooded mound as the site of a rectangular fort protected by a wall and ditch. He cut sections through the fortification wall and cleared the eastern gateway. He also confirmed the identification of the eastern stupa, the presence of industrial activity to the

south of the site, and structures to the north and west of the city. Mukherji was convinced that the remains at the site of Tilaurakot represented Kapilavastu. He again used the descriptions of Faxian and Xuanzang to support his theory.

Whilst most people accepted Tilaurakot as Kapilavastu, there remained some doubt, stemming from differences in the descriptions given by the two Chinese pilgrims.

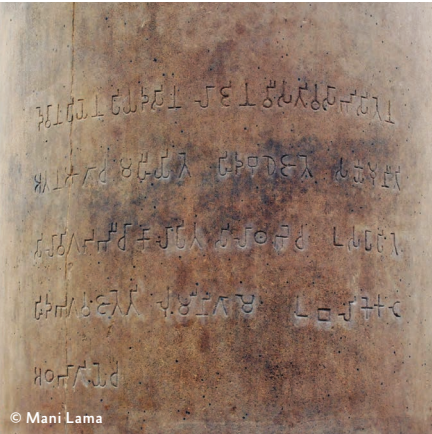
Little archaeological work was carried out in the Terai during the mid-twentieth century. In 1962, joint excavations were conducted at Tilaurakot and Kudan by the Nepali Department of Archaeology



The Maya Devi Temple before excavations in the 1990s

and the Archaeological Survey of India, under the direction of Debala Mitra. She courted controversy by concluding that Tilaurakot was no older than the second century BCE, and thus could not be ancient Kapilavastu.

In 1972 the Nepali archaeologist B.K. Rijal began to expose and restore monuments at Lumbini, identifying the first pre-Mauryan structure north of the Asokan Pillar. He was followed by Tara Nanda Mishra, who conducted more systematic excavations at Lumbini and Tilaurakot during the 1980s. Mishra developed chronological sequences for the main sites, and focused on trying



Asokan inscription on the Lumbini pillar

to understand their development over time.

Whilst a Japanese team from Rissho University exposed a series of structures at Tilaurakot between 1967 and 1977, major international interventions began in the 1990s. The Japanese Buddhist Federation conducted a large scale excavation of the Maya Devi Temple, exposing the brickwork that is visible today. The Italian archaeologist Giovanni Verardi reexcavated the stupa and pillar at Gotihawa, as well as the small settlement mound at Pipri.

In 2010 new work at the Maya Devi Temple was initiated by UNESCO and funded by the Japanese



From left: Vincent Smith ICS, General Khandga Shumsher Rana, Dr Hooley ICS, and Duncan Ricketts (estate manager) next to the Asokan pillar in 1896.

Government, including archaeological excavations, conservation of monuments and development of management plans. This work undertaken by the Department of Archaeology (Government of Nepal), Lumbini Development Trust and Durham University now encompasses Tilaurakot, Kudan, Araurakot, Ramagrama and numerous other sites in the GLA. Through this, remains of the earliest Buddhist shrine at Lumbini were discovered, and the establishment of Tilaurakot pushed back to at least 800BCE.



LUMBINI



Aerial view of the Maya Devi Temple and Sacred Garden

Lumbini is internationally recognised as the birthplace of Lord Buddha. It was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1997 in recognition of its Outstanding Universal Value. In particular, UNESCO identified that Lumbini is one of the most holy and significant places for one of the world’s great religions.

The recent UNESCO project funded by Japan, revealed the presence of the earliest Buddhist shrine – a simple timber fence enclosing a tree. This tree would have been identified by the first pilgrims as the tree under which Lord Buddha was born. Radiocarbon dates indicate that this occurred at around 550 BCE, broadly about the same



Excavations inside the Maya Devi Temple

time as his *mahaparanirvana*, or great passing away. Over time, the timber fence was replaced by large brick kerb stones, and the surrounding area was paved with brick to create a prayer platform.

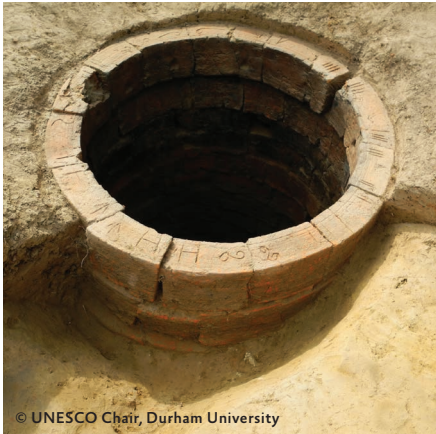
In 249 BCE, when the Mauryan Emperor Asoka made his pilgrimage to the site he built a small structure of timber and mud, with an open courtyard for the tree. The walls were covered in plaster and painted white, black, red and yellow. Shielded from the outside, the centre of the structure remained unroofed and open. The Marker Stone later became a focal point of worship. Asoka also erected a ten metre high pillar to the west of the temple. The inscription on



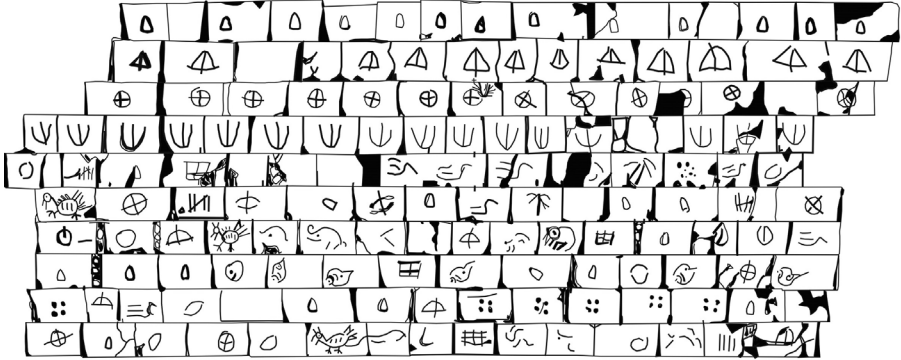
The Asokan Pillar at Lumbini

the pillars identifies the location as Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha, which Asoka visited in the twentieth year of his reign and that he exempted the local village from taxes.

Eventually the temple was expanded further, and by the Gupta period (4<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> cent. CE) it was reconfigured as a seven-bayed structure with carved and moulded brick opening to the east. The temple became fully enclosed, the Marker Stone was buried and the tree was no longer present. We do not know if it was a natural or deliberate end to the tree’s life.



The nursery well in Lumbini



Elevation of the interior of the Nursery Well, showing the decorative bricks



Aerial view of the Sacred Garden taken in 1969



Ceramic vessel discovered at the Village Mound in Lumbini

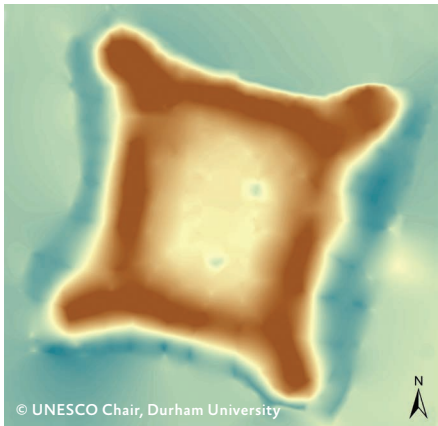


KARMA



- 1 The moat encircles the fort, and would have been about two metres deep and four metres wide.
- 2 The semi-circular bastions at each corner provide additional strength and support. The ramparts are constructed from clay – no brick was found anywhere on the site.
- 3 The interior of the fort was devoid of any cultural material.
- 4 The small modern Samai Mai Shrine is present on the northeast bastion.

Karma has been excavated in 2016/17 by a team from Durham University together with DoA. In order to protect the archaeological remains, the trenches were later covered by earth. The small fort’s layout is almost identical to that of Dohani. The two forts form a direct line between Lumbini and Tilaurakot-Kapilavastu, and were



View of the northwest corner bastion, looking southeast

Topographical map showing the distinctive bastions on each corner.

designed as stopping points for pilgrims, officials and traders moving between Lumbini and settlements to the west. The fort of Karma measures 49.5 x 43.5 metres and has rounded bastions on each corner. The ramparts are nearly two metres high, and the fort was surrounded by a two-metre-deep moat. When a team from Durham University and

the Department of Archaeology extracted auger core samples, no cultural material was recovered. This suggests that the fort may not have been fully functional after it was constructed and that, unlike Dohani which was built over a pre-existing settlement, it was founded on virgin land.

DOHANI



- 1 The corner bastions provided strength and support to the fort.
- 2 The archaeological trench identified that the southern rampart was constructed from clay with a brick facing. It was about four metres wide, with a shallow ditch on the outside.
- 3 The interior of the fort had over two metres of occupation.
- 4 Auger cores picked up early cultural material, such as proto-Northern Black Polished Ware and Cord Impressed Ware at depths of nearly four metres here. It is possible that this was the site of the early village.

A low rectangular mound, the first formal investigation of the site began with a subsurface geophysical survey in 2016. This revealed the presence of a square cardinally-oriented fort, complete with rounded bastions on each corner. Measuring 50 x 50 m, its fortifications share similarities with other Kushan period (100 BCE – 300 CE) forts in



View of the excavation trench showing occupation pits and ceramic vessels.



The results of the geophysical survey showing the distinct outline of a square fort below the surface.

the region, such as Araurakot and Karma. Dohani would have served as a stopping point between Lumbini and settlements to the west.

Excavations and auger-coring in 2017 identified that the fort was constructed from brick faced ramparts of clay on top of an earlier settlement. Possibly dating back to

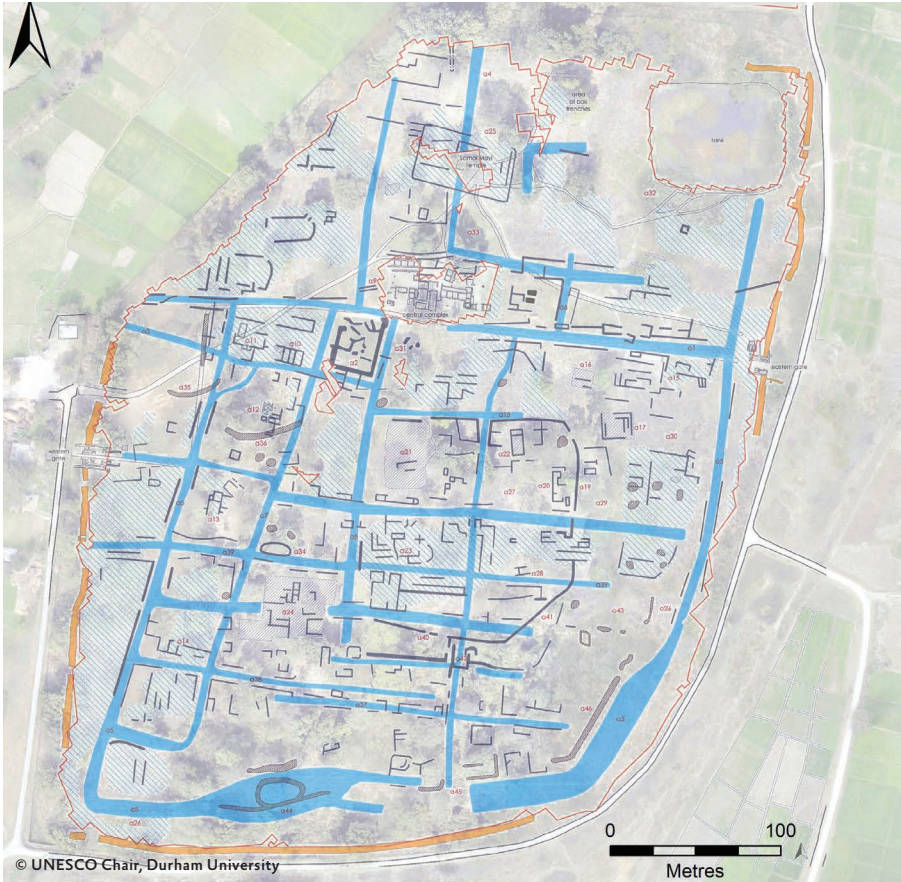


Subsurface geophysical survey

1000 BCE, the pottery and material found in the lowest layers of Dohani are very similar to that from Lumbini’s Village Mound. Indeed, Dohani may be one of the longest occupied sites in the Greater Lumbini Area. To protect the archaeological remains, the trenches were backfilled again.



TILAURAKOT-KAPILAVASTU



Aerial view of Tilaurakot with the results of the geophysical survey overlain. The blue areas indicate streets, lanes and open spaces, whilst the black and grey areas represent buildings, walls and structures. The orange areas are the fortification walls. This layout most likely dates to the Kushan period (1st century BCE – 3rd century CE), and is one of the most complete plans of an early historic city in South Asia. This plan, replicated in brick during the Kushan Period, was first established in timber in the sixth century BCE.



Hoard of 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE silver punch-marked coins discovered at the monastic complex east of Tilaurakot.



Close up of four of the silver punch-marked coins



View of the Eastern Stupa, looking south



View of entrance to the central walled complex

Tilaurakot is recognised by most scholars as Kapilavastu, the city in which Lord Buddha spent the first 29 years of his life. It was from here that he left on his journey of spiritual enlightenment, departing through the Eastern Gateway.

The site was first discovered by P.C. Mukherji in 1899, who traced the journey of the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang from Sravasti. Questions over the identification arose again in the 1960s when Debala Mitra excavated across the northern rampart. She concluded that the site could be no earlier than the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, and thus could not be Kapilavastu. This instigated a long

debate over the true location of the city – Tilaurakot, or across the border at Piprahawa. Excavations by the Nepali archaeologists Rijal and Mishra began to expose more of the city, including the Western and Eastern Gateways, the fortification walls and the Northern Stupas. However, recent UNESCO-led archaeological investigations re-examined Mitra’s trench. Clay and timber fortifications were exposed, with the earliest palisade dating to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, and thus concurrent with the life of Lord Buddha.

Geophysical surveys revealed the buried street plan of the city with roads running north-south and

east-west and punctuated by small squares or plazas. At the very centre of the city is a walled complex, with gates at each cardinal point. Between 2012 and 2017 some of these structures were excavated, including a small shrine, a deep brick-lined water tank, parts of the northern and eastern ramparts, large sections of the central walled complex, and some smaller buildings and houses. Outside the city, a Mauryan Period monastery has been discovered near the Eastern Stupa, and an industrial zone to the south.



NIGLIHAWA



- 1 Niglihawa Pillar with inscriptions from Asoka and King Ripu Malla. It was moved to this location in 1996.
- 2 Niglisagar Pond where the pillar was found in 1895 by Dr Führer. The inscription was translated in 1896 by Georg Bühler.

The Asokan inscription at Niglihawa

*“King Piyadasi, beloved of gods, having been anointed 14 years, increased for the second time the stupa of Buddha Konakamana and having been anointed (20 years) he came himself and worshipped (and) caused (this stone pillar to be erected).”*

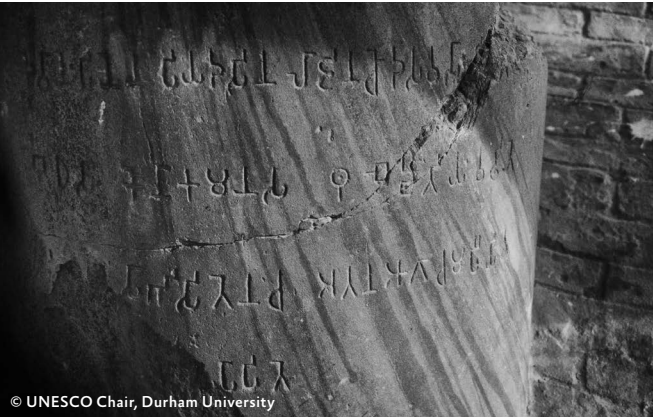
The Mauryan Emperor Asoka erected an inscribed pillar in 249 BCE, recording his veneration and enlargement of the nirvana stupa of the earlier Kanakamuni Buddha, one of the 27 Buddhas preceding Lord Buddha. The Chinese pilgrims Faxian (5<sup>th</sup> cent. CE) and Xuanzang (7<sup>th</sup> cent. CE) also described their visits to the pillar and stupa. Two

fragments of the pillar were rediscovered in 1895, the upper portion was half submerged in the bank of the Niglisagar pond, while the lower part of the pillar was partially buried. As the base of the pillar and plinth on which it once stood are missing, its original location remains unknown. Some scholars believe that it was erected at the natal

town of Kanakamuni Buddha, which Faxian indicates is about one *yojana* (c. 11–14 km) west from the city of Kapilavastu. However, Xuanzang provides different directions and, as such, the town’s location remains unknown. Asoka’s pillar also bears a later inscription marking King Ripu Malla’s visit in 1312 CE.



Photographs of the pillar when it was discovered in 1895 at the side of the Niglisagar Pond (from Mitra 1972).



ARAURAKOT



- 1 The western rampart was probably constructed from clay dug out of the moat.
- 2 The southern rampart is faced with brick and has two distinctive stirrup bastions along it.
- 3 The southwest platform is slightly raised and geophysical survey identified the presence of two structures below the surface.
- 4 The eastern rampart and gate was constructed from brick with three stirrup bastions. The gateway is visible but badly eroded.
- 5 The double moat only survives on this side and represents a significant defensive structure.
- 6 The northern rampart was constructed from clay. There was an area of occupation outside the fort to the north.

This fortified enclosure measures 270 x 270 m. The clay ramparts on its south and west are encased in brick, while those on the north and east are lower and unfaced. The brick ramparts are strengthened by stirrup bastions at regular intervals. Circular corner towers and a double moat are to be found on the western side. In 1899 P.C. Mukherji started excavations for the Archaeological Survey of India. He suggested that the difference

in construction materials reflected the fact that ARAURAKOT’s enemies were located to the south and west. However, it is equally possible that the site was only partially completed. The site’s morphology bears a striking resemblance to the early first millennium CE military outposts found throughout the Kushan Empire. Although there have been no excavations within the site, a subsurface geophysical survey in 2015 confirmed the different

constructions of the ramparts as well as the presence of five stirrup bastions. The survey also revealed that the interior was largely empty, except for a raised platform in the southwest corner with foundations of two buildings. Carved bricks similar to those from Lumbini, Kudan and Tilaurakot have been recovered from the site, suggesting that it was occupied into the middle of the first millennium CE.



View of the interior of the site, looking southeast



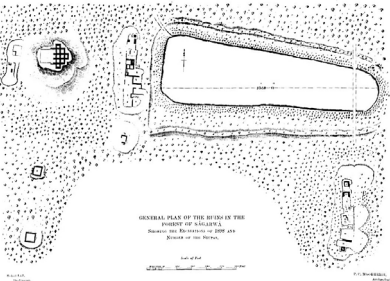
View of a stirrup bastion on the southern rampart



SAGRAHAWA



- 1 The tank from which the site gets its name.
- 2 Row of seven stupas. It is from here that the carved bricks were recovered by Mukherji.
- 3 Row of small stupas.
- 4 Führer and Mukherji described this as an ancient stupa, with a connected structure of twelve rooms measuring 2.7 x 3.0 metre in size. It was almost completely destroyed by excavations but looks similar in size, shape and form to the cruciform temples at Kudan. From the centre a copper casket containing bones, two gold naga statues, and semi-precious stones were recovered.
- 5 Mukherji reported the presence of some small ruins here. Unfortunately, very little survives today.
- 6 Mukherji reported that there were two small stupas and a small building here.



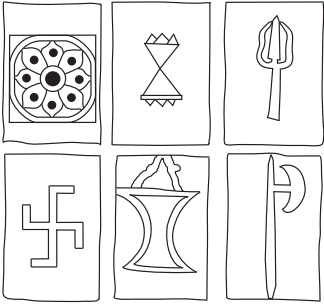
© Department of Archaeology, GoN  
Mukherji’s site plan dated 1898

Sagrahawa comprises of an expanse of large and small mounds, clustered around a water tank. Excavations in 1896 by Dr Führer from the Archaeological Survey of India exposed the remains of a large brick monument and smaller buildings at the western edge of the tank, as well as 17 small brick stupas to its southeast. The stupas were interpreted as commemorative of the

deaths of the Sakyas – the people to which Lord Buddha’s family belonged – during the destruction of Kapilavastu by Virudhaka, the King of Kosala during the lifetime of the Buddha. Führer identified Sagrahawa as “the place of the massacre”, visited by the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang in the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE. Until recently, the site remained unexplored and the previously exposed



© UNESCO Chair, Durham University  
View over the Sagrahawa tank towards the east



Designs on the carved bricks found within the foundations (redrawn from Mitra 1972)

monuments are now eroded and overgrown. A subsurface geophysical survey in 2016 identified a series of additional buried brick structures around the larger mound, indicating the presence of additional buildings, platforms or stupas, suggesting that this was a site of religious importance in the past.

CHATRADEI

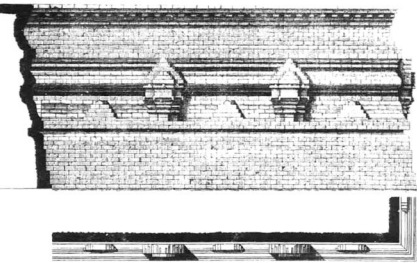


- 1 Large mound. This is the location of the cruciform temple exposed by Mukherji.
- 2 Geophysics identified the presence of brick structures buried below the surface.
- 3 Not much is known about the smaller mound.

Today the site is densely covered by vegetation and it is difficult to view the large mound. Excavations were first undertaken by the Indian archaeologist P.C. Mukherji in 1899, who suggested that the extensive ruins were most likely contemporary with Tilaurakot. He documented ditches on the north and west sides of the



© Department of Archaeology, GoN  
View of the excavations by Mukherji



© Department of Archaeology, GoN  
Elevation of one of the faces of the cruciform temple exposed by Mukherji in 1899.

largest mound and a boundary wall to its south. His excavations on the largest of the mounds exposed rectangular buildings decorated with carved brick. Later research by Debala Mitra of the Archaeological Survey of India in the 1960s suggested that the structures exposed by Mukherji dated to no earlier than the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE. This was partly due to the complex of cells



© UNESCO Chair, Durham University  
Auger-coring to the south of the main mound

to the front of the temple platform, an arrangement similar to that of the temples at Kudan, although the presence of carved brick suggests an earlier date. A subsurface geophysical survey in 2016 identified additional structures under cultivated fields to the southeast of the larger mound.



KUDAN



- 1 The octagonal Hindu temple on the summit of this mound is about 200 years old and encases a much older shiva linga.
- 2 This small mound contains the remains of an unknown structure in the “last stage of decay” when Mitra excavated.
- 3 Temple #1 measures 42.3 x 31.8m and just over 4.5m in height.
- 4 The well, constructed from brick, was excavated by Mitra to a depth of 3.7 without encountering water.
- 5 Temple #2
- 6 The tank was probably created as clay was extracted for making bricks. Major Vost had suggested in 1906 that the tank was Hastigrata, where it is believed the elephant thrown by the Buddha landed.

Kudan means “to jump”, referring to the local legend of a giant, who could jump from one mound to the next. The site was first identified by P.C. Mukherji in 1899, who recorded a row of four ancient mounds. In 1962 the site was excavated by Debala Mitra from the Archaeological Survey of India.



Carved bricks along the side of Temple #1



Monks visiting temple #1 (top) and view of temple #2 (above)

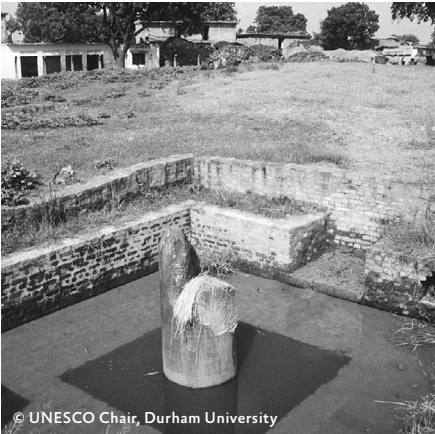
have suggested that Kudan may be the site of ancient Nigrodharama, the banyan grove where Gautama Buddha met his father several years after his departure from Kapilavastu, and where his son Rahul was ordained as a monk.

GOTIHAWA



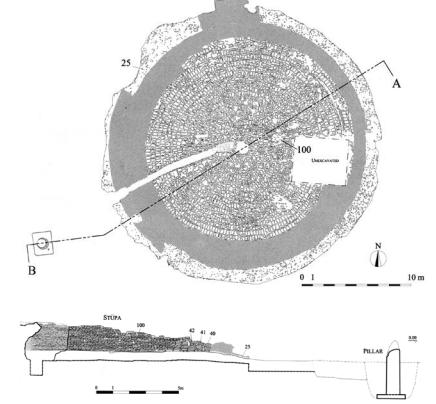
- 1 The stupa originally measured 19.5 metres in diameter, and was later expanded to 21.5 metres. The early phase of the stupa was constructed using concentric rings of wedge-shaped bricks which had symbols inscribed on them. Later phases only used rectangular bricks.
- 2 A 3.2 metre long section of the pillar with a diameter of 79-83 cm remains. The part with the inscription is broken and its whereabouts unknown.

Ancient Gotihawa consists of a large brick stupa, the stump of an Asokan pillar and a water tank, nestled within a modern village. The site was first explored in the 1890s and in 1898, the stupa was partially excavated by Major Waddell. Some early archaeologists believed that the monuments marked the birth-place of Krakkuchanda Buddha, one of the earlier Buddhas. The stupa was re-excavated by the Italian



The remaining pillar photographed in 1990 (top) and in 2014 (above)

archaeologist Giovanni Verardi in the 1990s, who identified two construction phases. The initial stupa measured 19.5 metres in diameter and was built with concentric rings of rectangular and wedge-shaped bricks, many of which were incised. The stupa was later expanded to 21.5 metres in diameter, however, the new brickwork comprised solely of rectangular bricks. Verardi attributed the initial construction



Plan, section and photograph of the excavated stupa by Giovanni Verardi, 2007



Plan, section and photograph of the excavated stupa by Giovanni Verardi, 2007

to Asoka (3<sup>rd</sup> cent. BCE) with an expansion during the Kushan period (100 BCE – 300 CE). The excavations also provided evidence that the site had already been occupied before the stupa was built. Radiocarbon tests date to 800 BCE, and finds of proto-northern Black Polished Ware indicate that it is contemporary with Lumbini’s Village mound of 1300 BCE.





The site comprises of a 260 metre long mound and a small circular mound 200 metres to its north. Excavations were first undertaken in 1899 by the Indian archaeologist P.C. Mukherji, who identified the foundations of a town with brick structures, mounds and a well. Further research undertaken by Debala Mitra of the Archaeological Survey of India in 1962 noted brick ruins on two sides

- 1 Main Square. The geophysical survey showed an area of open space through which the main north-south road ran.
- 2 Below the surface are a series of buildings and small lanes.
- 3 Auger-coring showed the presence of a moat here. The moats can be seen as both defensive structures and symbolic representations of the cosmos.
- 4 Very little is known about the stupa, as no archaeological investigation has been undertaken. It measures about ten metres in diameter and about two metres in height.
- 5 Buried below the fields is a brick-lined water tank. This is very similar to the water tank found to the east of Tilaurakot. It is possible that there was a monastery connected to the stupa near here.
- 6 Area of early occupation. Auger-coring picked up traces of occupation predating the town in this area. However, until further work is carried out we don't know how much older, or what form it took.
- 7 Small mound 200m to the east.

of the mound, and concluded that the site dated back to at least the 1<sup>st</sup> cent. CE. In 1995, the Italian archaeologist Giovanni Verardi conducted a systematic collection of material on the surface of the mound, and dated Sisaniya's occupation up to the 9<sup>th</sup> cent. CE.

In 2016, a subsurface geophysical survey confirmed the presence of



Results of the geophysical survey. The thick blue areas represent the main streets; striped areas are areas of occupation; and the grey lines represent buried walls and structures.

a large settlement of brick structures and open spaces, bisected by a north-south thoroughfare. It also showed the presence of a walled pond below the fields between the town and the northern mound, similar to ones identified around Tilaurakot's Eastern Monastery. This suggests that there may have been monastic complexes around the town in the past.



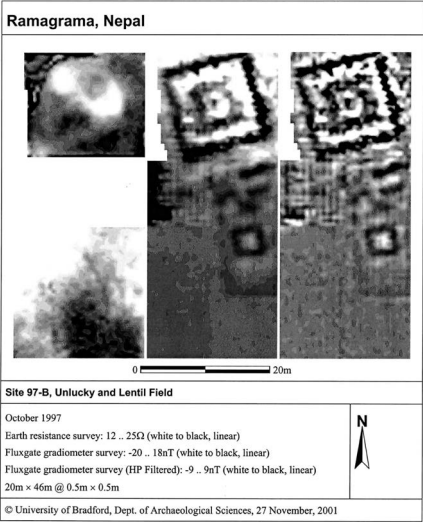
View of the stupa from the west

Ramagrama is on the tentative list for UNESCO World Heritage Status, and has attracted archaeological interest since 1896. The most striking feature of the site is its massive stupa, which is ten metres high and 23.5 metres in diameter. Referencing the itineraries of the Chinese pilgrims, Faxian (5<sup>th</sup> cent. CE) and Xuanzang (7<sup>th</sup> cent. CE), B.K. Rijial of Nepal's Department of Archaeology identified the stupa as Ramagrama, one of the original eight stupas that housed the cremated

- 1 The stupa measures 10m high and 23.5m in diameter. It is reputed to be one of the original eight nirvana stupas that was not reopened.
- 2 Farmers had called this the "unlucky field" as no crops would grow in it. When a geophysical survey was conducted, it identified a perfect quadrangular Kushan monastery buried below the surface. The dense concentration of brick would have made it difficult for crops to establish themselves.
- 3 Kushan Monastery. Further quadrangular cells were found in this area forming part of the wider Kushan monastery at the site.
- 4 A series of brick walls are visible on the surface in this area. Their function and form is unknown.

remains of Lord Buddha. Tradition records that the other 7 stupas were reopened during the Mauryan period and their relics redistributed. It is believed that when Asoka went to open the stupa at Ramagrama, he was prevented from doing so by its guardian snake or *naga*.

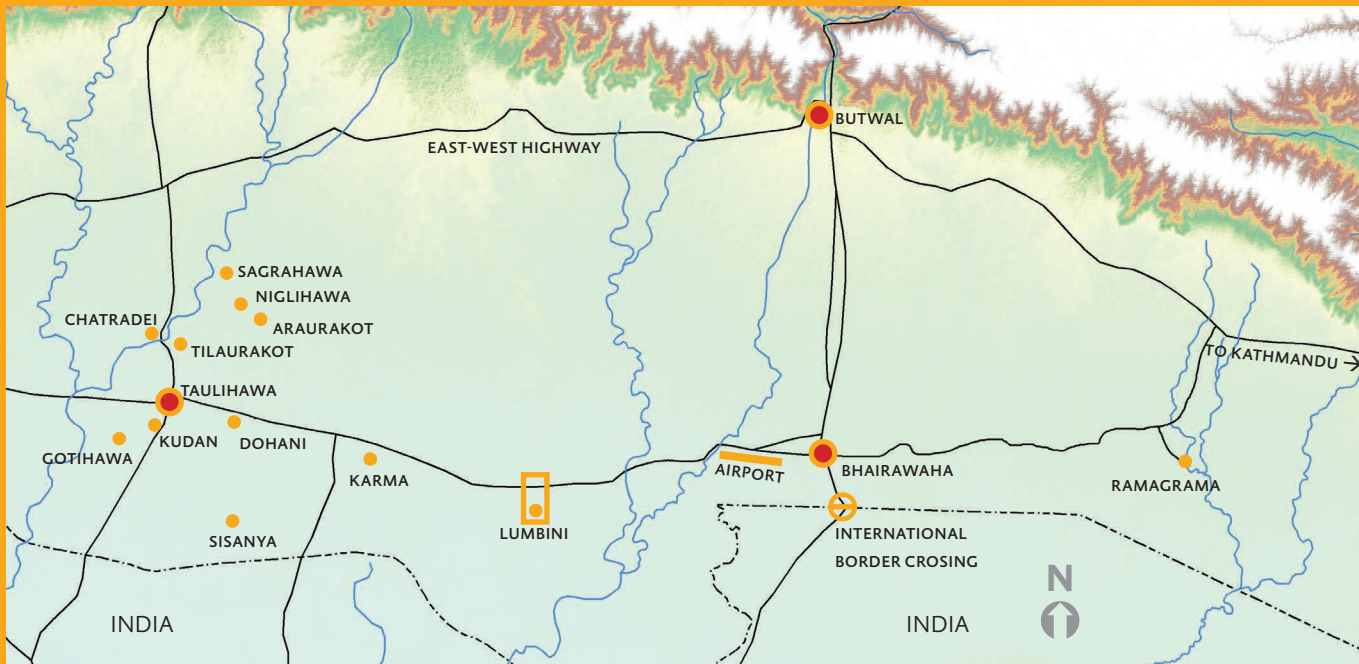
Xuanzang carefully recorded this tradition as well as the presence of the stupa, a pillar and a temple, now at the centre of an island formed by an old oxbow of the Jharahi River



Geophysical survey of the "unlucky field"

and a modern canal. Subsurface geophysical surveys were conducted in 1997 and 1999. These identified the presence of several quadrangular brick monasteries to the east and north of the stupa. Some of these structures were excavated by Sukra Sagar Shrestha of the DoA between 1999 and 2004. His research confirmed the site's establishment between the Maurayan and Gupta periods.





Based on the map prepared by UNESCO Chair, Durham University

Learn more about the Greater Lumbini Area:

Charles Allen, The Buddha and Dr Führer: An archaeological scandal, 2008

Basanta Bidari, Kapilavastu: The world of Siddhartha, 2007

Basanta Bidari, Lumbini Beckons, 2009

UNESCO, The Sacred Garden of Lumbini: Perceptions of Buddha's birthplace, 2013 & 2018

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