

## HISTORY

to Ujjayani as a viceroy, is said to have visited his mother at Vidiśā, and the latter took him up to the beautiful monastery of Vedisagiri<sup>1</sup> built by herself. Mahendra had stayed there for a month before he set out for Sri Lanka.

The foundation of the great religious establishment at Sanchi, destined to have a glorious career as an important centre of Buddhism for many centuries to come, was probably laid by the great Maurya emperor Aśoka (*circa* 273-236 B C), when he built a *stūpa* and erected a monolithic pillar here. In addition to his marriage with a lady of Vidiśā, the reason for his selection of this particular spot may be due to the fact that the hill-top served as an ideal place for giving a concrete shape to the newly-aroused zeal for Buddhism in the emperor, who is said to have opened up seven out of the eight original *stūpas* erected over the body-relics of Buddha and to have distributed the relics among innumerable *stūpas* built by himself all over his empire. By its quietude and seclusion ensuring a proper atmosphere for meditation, combined with its proximity to the rich and populous city of Vidiśā, Sanchi fulfilled all the conditions required for an ideal Buddhist monastic life. The dedicatory inscriptions at Sanchi unmistakably show that the prosperity of the Buddhist establishment here was, to a great extent, due to the piety of the rich mercantile community of Vidiśā. The nearness of the city, the strategic situation of which at the confluence of two rivers, the Betwa and the Bes, as

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<sup>1</sup>In some recensions it is called Chetiyagiri.