

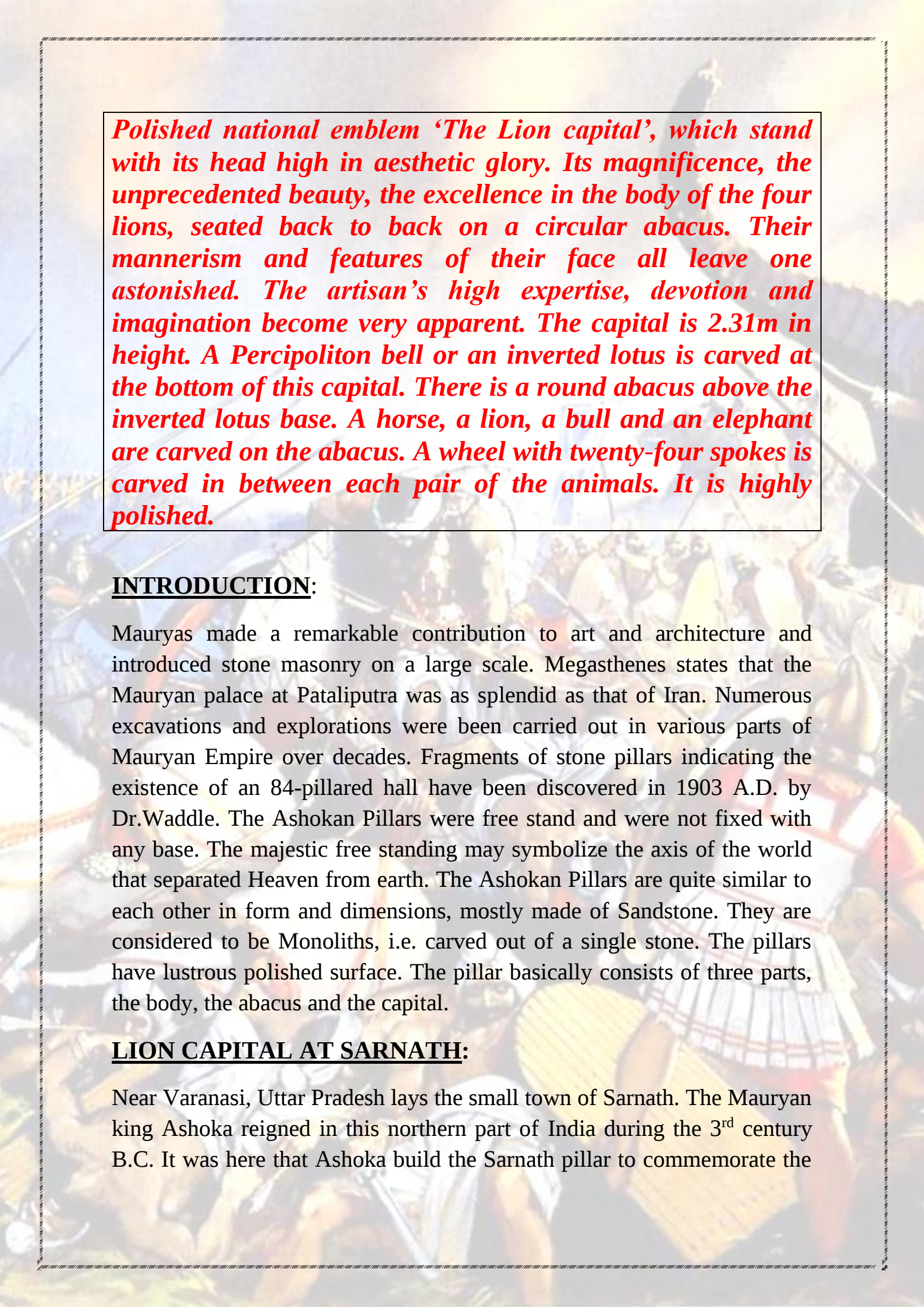


MAURYAN AGE: CAPITAL OF ASHOKAN PILLAR AT SARNATH



MATERIAL: STONE

MEASUREMENTS: 210 x 283cm



Polished national emblem 'The Lion capital', which stand with its head high in aesthetic glory. Its magnificence, the unprecedented beauty, the excellence in the body of the four lions, seated back to back on a circular abacus. Their mannerism and features of their face all leave one astonished. The artisan's high expertise, devotion and imagination become very apparent. The capital is 2.31m in height. A Percipoliton bell or an inverted lotus is carved at the bottom of this capital. There is a round abacus above the inverted lotus base. A horse, a lion, a bull and an elephant are carved on the abacus. A wheel with twenty-four spokes is carved in between each pair of the animals. It is highly polished.

INTRODUCTION:

Mauryas made a remarkable contribution to art and architecture and introduced stone masonry on a large scale. Megasthenes states that the Mauryan palace at Pataliputra was as splendid as that of Iran. Numerous excavations and explorations were been carried out in various parts of Mauryan Empire over decades. Fragments of stone pillars indicating the existence of an 84-pillared hall have been discovered in 1903 A.D. by Dr.Waddle. The Ashokan Pillars were free stand and were not fixed with any base. The majestic free standing may symbolize the axis of the world that separated Heaven from earth. The Ashokan Pillars are quite similar to each other in form and dimensions, mostly made of Sandstone. They are considered to be Monoliths, i.e. carved out of a single stone. The pillars have lustrous polished surface. The pillar basically consists of three parts, the body, the abacus and the capital.

LION CAPITAL AT SARNATH:

Near Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh lays the small town of Sarnath. The Mauryan king Ashoka reigned in this northern part of India during the 3rd century B.C. It was here that Ashoka build the Sarnath pillar to commemorate the

site of the first preaching of Lord Buddha where at he taught the concept of Dharma to five monks.

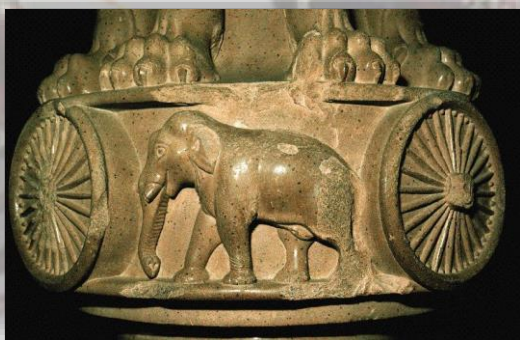


This pillar is one of many erected by Ashoka to convey the tenants of Buddhism. But Sarnath pillar was crowned with a unique sculpture know as the Lion capital.

DID YOU KNOW?

*The Ashokan Pillar at Sarnath
weights 50000kg!*

The Ashoka Lion Capital at Sarnath comprises four lions, standing back to back, mounted on a cylindrical abacus. The abacus features the sculptures of an elephant, a galloping horse, a bull and a lion separated by intervening 24-spoked dharma chakras over an inverted bell-shaped lotus flower (The National Flower of India). The lotus is a symbol of purity and fecundity in the Indian tradition, later, Buddhist texts tell us that lotus flower sprang up where Gautama Buddha took seven steps after he was born. The four animals in the Lion Capital are believed to symbolize different phases in Lord Buddha's Life. The Elephant is a representation of Queen Maya's conception of Buddha when she saw a white elephant entering her womb in a dream. The Bull is a fertility symbol in many ancient traditions, whereas here it represents the asterism of Rishaba under which Gautama Buddha was born. The Horse symbolizes Buddha's departure from palatial life. The Lion represents the attainment of Nirvana by Lord Buddha and some texts refer to it as being referred to Sakyasimha. There are also non-religious symbolic interpretations of the Lion Capital believing the four lions symbolize Ashoka's rule over the four directions, the wheels as symbols of his enlightened rule and the four animals as symbols of four adjoining territories of India. The Sarnath pillar still stands in its original place; however the Ashoka Lion Capital has been moved to the Sarnath Museum for preservation.



ACTIVITY NO: 1

Try drawing the lion on the abacus here!

CONTEMPORARY IMPORTANCE OF THE LION CAPITAL:

In the State emblem, adopted by the Government of India on January 26, 1950, only three lions are visible, the fourth being hidden from view. Symbolizing power, courage and confidence, the abacus is girded by four smaller animals regarded as guardians of the four directions; the lion of the North, the elephant of the East, the horse of the South and the bull of the West. Each of these animals is separated by intervening wheels of Dharma Chakras. The inverted bell-shaped lotus which the original sculpture shows the abacus resting on has been omitted. Usually inscribed below the abacus in Devanagiri script is the motto Satyameva Jayate meaning “Truth only Triumphs”. This is a quote from Mundaka Upanishad, the concluding part of the sacred Hindu Vedas. On the original Sarnath pillar, an inscription of one of the Edicts of Ashoka reads, “No one shall cause division in the order of monks”. The National Emblem was chosen as a symbol of contemporary India’s reaffirmation of its ancient commitment to world peace and goodwill.

ACTIVITY NO:2

We have two Ashokan Pillars in Delhi! Visit the place and take a selfie with it and paste the photos below:

PHOTO NO: 1

PHOTO NO: 2

ACTIVITY NO: 3



Find out where this pillar stands, you might think the pillar is at Sarnath, but it's not!

REFERENCES:

- A history of the world in 100 objects by Neil Macgregor.
- www.columbia.edu
- <http://www.sarnathmuseumasi.org>