

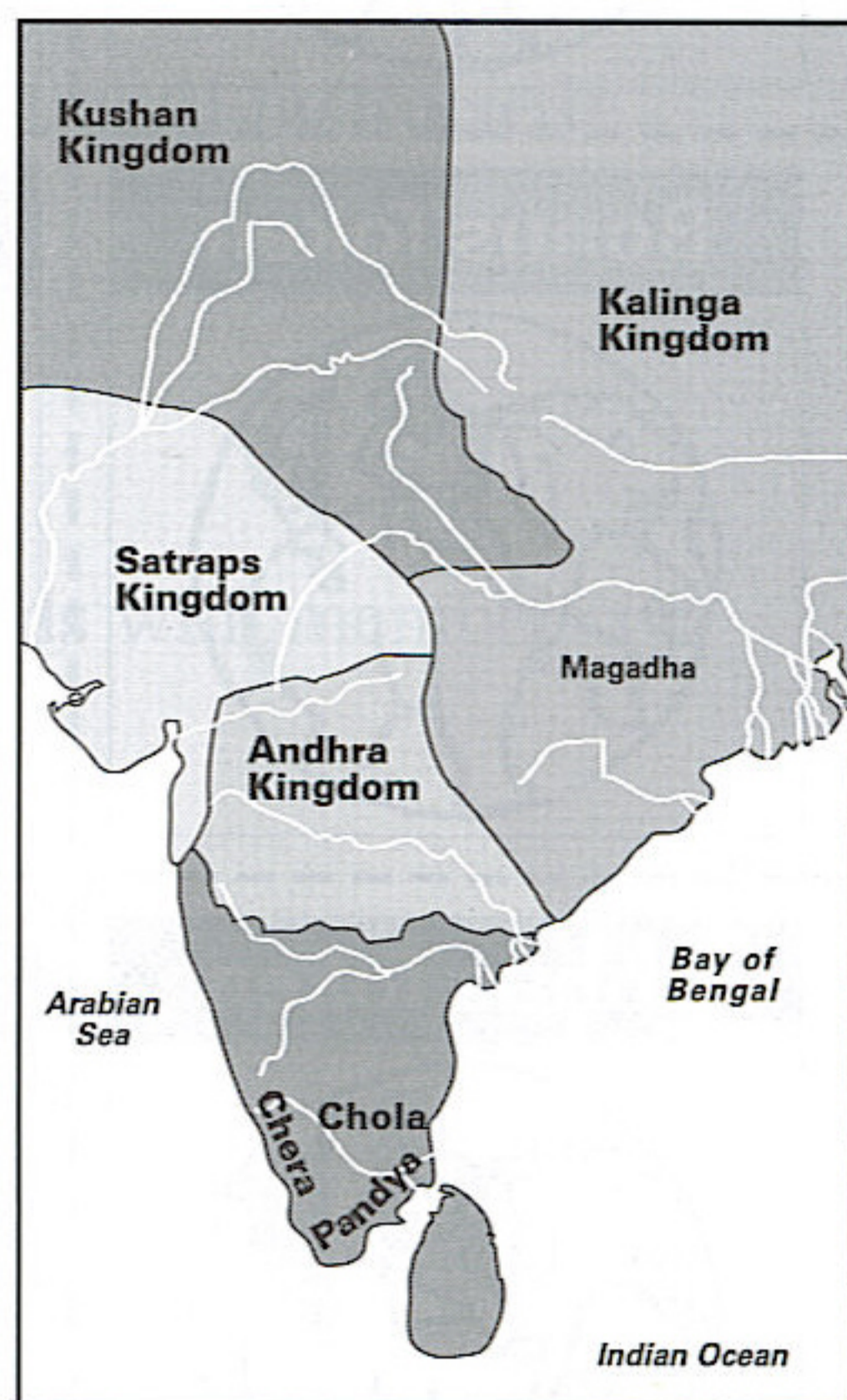
The Decline of the Mauryan Empire

The Mauryan Empire began around 322 B.C.E. and unified most of India until the first century B.C.E. The empire reached its height under King Ashoka, who ruled from about 269 to 232 B.C.E. After Ashoka died, the seven kings that followed could not hold the empire together. Regional kingdoms began defying Mauryan leaders and trading independently with foreign kingdoms. This desire for greater wealth created political rivalries and wars among the regional kingdoms, which Mauryan leaders were unable to manage. These internal conflicts weakened the empire and made it vulnerable to foreign invasions. The empire lost most of its land and by 184 B.C.E., only the Mauryan Empire's original section, Magadha in the east, was left.

For about the next 500 years, India was made up of disunified (separate) regional kingdoms. The Sunga kingdom, which was established by a general who murdered the last Mauryan king, lasted about 100 years. The more powerful Andhra kingdom, also known as the Satavahana kingdom after the family who ruled it, lasted about 400 years. The Kushan kingdom was founded by conquerors from China and ruled for more than 100 years. Other important kingdoms included the Kalinga kingdom in eastern India, the Satraps kingdom in western India, and three southern kingdoms, Chera, Chola, and Pandya.

Despite the absence of a strong central government, trade flourished during the 500 years following the collapse of the Mauryan Empire. Traders took treasures—such as pearls, jewels, pepper and other spices, silks, ivory, and a dark wood called ebony—out of India to sell in foreign lands. Traders also brought treasures into India, such as metals, coral, and a large number of Roman coins. More Roman coins ended up in India than Indian coins in Rome, which shows India's strength in trade. The three kingdoms of southern India were so successful in trading that they started new cities, coastal ports, and banks.

In addition to economic growth, India experienced many cultural changes during this period. Many followers of the Buddhist religion grew from simply respecting the Buddha as a past spiritual teacher to worshipping him as a God. In the Hindu religion, God worship became more personal, and ancient tales called the *Puranas* described the great deeds of Hindu Gods such as Vishnu. India's art and architecture also blossomed. Artists carved forms of the Buddha; Maya, the goddess mother of Buddha; and elephants into coins, rocks, and caves where Buddhist monks lived. Architects built towers, gateways, temples, and statues to honor the Buddha and political leaders. With many new cities and travelers in India, Hindu legal codes such as the Law of Manu helped keep order in India.



India in the second century C.E.