

## Pratolī : A Part of Ancient Indian Architecture

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**P**ratolī was an important part of ancient Indian architecture. It has been mentioned in literature and epigraphs. But these literary and epigraphical references do not explain the exact nature and features of *pratolī* except that formerly it was attached to a fortification and subsequently it was built in front of the palaces and temples.

Modern scholars have taken the word '*pratolī*' to mean 'a road' or 'a wide path'<sup>1</sup> evidently, they derive this meaning from *Amarakośa*, wherein the word *pratolī* is mentioned as a synonym of '*rathiyā*',<sup>2</sup> which, according to these scholars, means a wide road for running a chariot. But this meaning does not sound plausible when taken in context with the references found elsewhere, for they suggest it to be a separate structure forming part of the temple or palace architecture.

In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *pratolī* has been mentioned not as road but as a kind of building. The city of Lanka has been described as 'surrounded by white-washed (*pāṇḍurābhīḥ*) and high *partolīs*'.<sup>3</sup> Here *partolīs*, which are white and high in nature, cannot be said to be the roads but structural buildings. Similarly, the city of Lanka when set on fire, all the *gopuras*, *aṭṭas*, *pratolīs*, *caryāsū* and *prāsādas* were reduced to ashes.<sup>4</sup> Being subject to fire *pratolī* certainly seems to be a building and not a road. It is further confirmed by the description of Ayodhya. The city was surrounded by the moats, beautified with the *pratolīs*, glorified with the *prāsādas*, fortified by the white-washed *prākāras* and decorated with the banners. Its highways were well constructed.<sup>5</sup> The separate mention to the highways itself distinguishes them from the *pratolī* and proves it to be a building.

In the *Mahābhārata*, it has been described as a part of the fortification and was very important for the sake of the security of the fort. Like other buildings *pratolī* was quite inaccessible and was kept heavily guarded. It has been well advised in the Rājadharmānuśāsana Parvan that 'the *bhāṇḍāgāra* (store), *āyudhāgāra* (artillery), *dhānyāgāra* (granary), *aśvāgāra* (cavalry), *gajāgāra* (elephantry), *balādhikaraṇa* (military headquarters), *parikhā* (moats), *pratolī* (?) and the *saṅkaṭa-dvāra* (exits to be used in emergency) should be kept secret and these should not be seen by a stranger or foreigner'.<sup>6</sup> If the meaning of *pratolī* is accepted to be the highway, its reference in the above context does not seem to be appropriate. Therefore *pratolī* must be a part of the defence wall. Its mention along with the moats and emergency exits confirms it.

The *Arthasāstra* mentions *pratolī* in a separate chapter on fortification (*durga-vidhāna*). It has been said that after the construction of the rampart, the rectangular bastions (*aṭṭālakas*) should be attached to it at the interval the thirty *daṇḍas* and there should be constructed a double-storeyed *partolī* in between the two. This should be two and half times larger than its width.<sup>7</sup> This *pratolī* mentioned in the *Arthasāstra* has differently been interpreted by different scholars. In one translation it has been said to be 'a house having harem in its upper storey'.<sup>8</sup> Here the translator has taken the word '*harmya*' for harem, which is not only improper in the context but quite wrong in its meaning. '*Harmya*' has everywhere been regarded as a style of palace architecture in ancient Indian literature.<sup>9</sup> The translator of the *Arthasāstra* has taken it to be 'a building having double storeyed *harmya*.' It was constructed in between the two bastions and had its length one and half times more than its width.<sup>10</sup> Another editor of the treatise has interpreted it as 'an *aṭṭālaka*, an attic, having a double storeyed building over it'.<sup>11</sup> According to R. Shamasastri, the first editor and translator of the *Arthasāstra*, *pratolī* means a wide road with a double storeyed building over it.<sup>12</sup> From these different interpretations it is certainly clear that *pratolī* was a double-storeyed building constructed over the city gateway and was attached to the rampart.

In *Mṛcchakaṭīkam* (Act VI) there is the mention of '*pratolī dvāra*', which has been taken by some interpreters as 'the face of the lane'.<sup>13</sup> One thing is noticeable here. The description of *pratolī* is associated with the rampart. Therefore, *pratolī* appears to have been a building over a gateway attached to the rampart, under which passed a road. In Act VIII of the same drama, Śakāra asks the Ceṭa to go with the bullocks and wait at his '*prāsādabālāgra pratolīkā*', outer gate of the palace.<sup>14</sup> This appears to be more correct meaning of the term rather than the lane of the palace-attic.

Reference to *pratolī-dvāra* along with the rampart has also been found in the *Pṛthvīchandracarita*<sup>15</sup> and *Kathāsaritsāgara*.<sup>16</sup> Bāṇa, while describing the city of Sthāṇvisvara, mentions *pratolī* along with other architectural terms like *prāsāda* and *śikhara*.<sup>17</sup> *Pratolī* without the doors and guards is mentioned in a Jain text *Prabhāvākacarita*,<sup>18</sup> according to which it appears to have been a city gate-house attached to a surrounding defence wall.

The *Samarāṅgaṇa-Sūtradhāra* composed by Mahārājādhirāja Śrī Bhojadeva deals with the construction of *pratolī* in a great detail. The construction of the strong *pratolīs* over the great gateway of a rampart has been described there.<sup>19</sup> The highway passing through *pratolī* is also mentioned.<sup>20</sup> It has also been laid down as a principle that the great gateway having three storeyed (*tribhaumika*) *pratolīs* over them should be constructed on all sides of the city for its defence, beauty and prosperity.<sup>21</sup> In this way the writer of the *Samarāṅgaṇa-Sūtradhāra* has made clear the features of *pratolī*. According to it, *pratolī* was a three storeyed building constructed over the great gateways.<sup>22</sup>

D.N. Shukla, whose studies on ancient Indian architecture are based on the *Samarāṅgaṇa-Sūtradhāra*, takes the word *pratolī* as the original word for *paurī* i.e. 'dyoḍhī' the outer gate (*pratolī-paolī-paulī-paurī*).<sup>23</sup> He is of the opinion that '*pratolī mahādṵāra*' and '*gopura mahādṵāra*' were the two traditions of ancient Indian architecture, the former representing the northern and the latter the southern India.<sup>24</sup>

A poetic composition on prostitutes and their residence, the *Pādatāḍitakam* of Mahākavi Śyamilaka assigned by T. Burrow to the Gupta period between 410 and 415 CE,<sup>25</sup> while describing the architectural upper parts of the residence (*veśa*) mentions *pratolī* – "*vapra-nemisāla-harmya-sīkhara-kapotapālī-sinhakṛṇa-gopānasī-valabhīpuṭa-aṭṭālaka-avalokana-pratolī-viṭaṅka prāsāda-sambādhāni (33/9)*".<sup>26</sup>

The reference of *pratolī* construction in the inscriptions also marks it to be a sort of structure rather than highway. The Bilsaḍ Pillar Inscription of Kumāragupta I (GE 96 = 415-16 CE) mentions along with the installation of the image of Kārttikeya, the construction of a *patrolī* and an alms-house. The tenth line of the inscription runs thus – "*Kṛtvā netrābhīrāmāṅṅ muniवासतिनिहा स्वर्गसोपानरूपानि / Kauberacchanda-bimbāṅṅ sphatikamaṅṅi-dalābhāsa gaurāṅṅi pratolīm*".<sup>27</sup> Here according to Fleet, *pratolī* means a gateway.<sup>28</sup> In this inscription *pratolī* cannot be taken to mean a road. Actually the adjectives of *pratolī* themselves may be helpful in deciding the nature and structure of it. The epithet "*muniवासतिनिहा*" (where the sages reside) marks it to be a residential building. "*स्वर्गसोपानरूपानि*" (like the ladder leading to the heaven) establishes *pratolī* to be the structure of a high building. This fact is corroborated well with the *Arthaśāstra* and the *Samarāṅgaṇa-Sūtradhāra*, wherein *pratolī* has been described as 'double storeyed palace' and 'three storeyed building.' The adjective "*sphatikamaṅṅi-dalābhāsa-gaurāṅṅi*" (white like the effulgence of the slabs of crystalline gems) distinguishes it as a *saudha* (white-washed with *sudhā* or lime) structure. These adjectives do not suit the description of a road.

The construction of a *pratolī* in the context of the fortification has been mentioned in the Hānsī Stone Inscription of Pṛthvīrāja (VS 1224 = 1167 CE). Being afraid of invasion of Hammira, Pṛthvīrāja, a king of Guhīlauta dynasty, put the defence of the fort in the hands of his maternal uncle Kilhaṅa, who constructed a *pratolī* for the purpose. Decked with banners this *pratolī* seemed to be well equipped and ready to face the attack of Hammira.<sup>29</sup> Similarly the construction of *pratolīs* in front of the temples of Śiva has been referred to in the Kanker Inscription of Bhānudeva.<sup>30</sup> In the Varanasi Inscription of Pantha, *pratolī* has been compared to high shining peaks reflecting the rays of the moon and as building enlightened with the romantic sports of women of different *janapadas*.<sup>31</sup>

In the *Rāmāyaṅa*, *Mahābhārata* and *Arthaśāstra* the description of *partolī* has been made only in connection with the rampart of the fort.<sup>32</sup> But, later on, as the architecture of *gopura* was connected with the forts, temples and palaces,<sup>33</sup> similarly the architecture of *pratolī* was also connected with all of them. This fact is duly attested by the Gupta and later inscriptions wherein the construction of *pratolī* has been mentioned along

with temples and palaces besides the forts. The Hānsī Inscription of Prthvirāja mentions *pratolī* in reference to the fortification. The Bilsaḍ Stone Pillar Inscription of Kumāragupta I and the Kanker Inscription of Bhānudeva refer to its construction in association with temples whereas in the Varanasi Inscription of Pantha it appears to have been described as a part of palace-architecture. Its association with the palace is also alluded to in the *Mṛcchakaṭikam* (Act. VIII).

From the above account it is clear that *pratolī* in ancient times was associated with the ramparts and therefore its double and three storeyed constructions seem quite apt in relation to the gateways. In order to facilitate the transportation to and from the citadel, broad highways leading to all directions were constructed intersecting each other around the city and perhaps a double or three-storeyed building was made over each opening in the rampart. Probably, Kauṭilya has called these buildings as 'harmya'. Therefore it seems correct to call such storeyed buildings as *pratolīs*. Under these circumstances, *pratolī* might have been called *rathyā* in *Amarakośa*. Here by *rathyā*, the composer of the *Amarakośa* probably means a particular building under which there ran a road for chariot to be driven on. This fact is also corroborated by *Abhidhāna-Cintāmaṇi* wherein the synonyms of *pratolī* have been given *rathyā* and *gopura*.<sup>34</sup> *Gopura*, not only in ancient times but even at present, it known as a superstructure of a gateway built in front of the south Indian temples. This is also attested by *Abhidhāna-Cintāmaṇi* wherein *pratolī* are said to be quite identical. This also supports to D.N. Shukla's proposition that '*pratolī mahādvara*' and '*gopura mahādvara*' were the two architectural traditions of northern and southern India.

The phrase '*saharmya dvitalām*' in the Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* is interpreted by a scholar as a double-storeyed building consisting of a *harmya* in the upper storey. The *harmya* might be a closed room supported on pillars forming an open accommodation in the lower storey.<sup>35</sup> If the above interpretation is accepted we may easily recognize them represented in the bas-reliefs on all the four gateways (*torāṇas*) of the Great Stupa at Sanchi. These double-storeyed building constructed over the city gateways of Kuśīnagar,<sup>36</sup> Rājagṛha,<sup>37</sup> Śrāvastī<sup>38</sup> and Kapilavastu<sup>39</sup> have been well executed in Sanchi sculpture and thus preserve and maintain the *pratolī* tradition of ancient Indian architecture. These gatehouses constructed over the city-gates have also been mentioned in the Jātakas<sup>40</sup> and other Buddhist texts<sup>41</sup> as *dvāra-koṭṭhaka* which is probably the other name of *pratolī*.

The *aṭṭālakas* (towers) at regular intervals were internally added to the rampart wall. This piece of structure actually arose out of architectural as well as military requirements. These pillar-like rectangular towers supported the rampart wall on the one hand and on the other served as the watch-towers providing a position for keeping a watch on the movements of the enemy force outside and for the purpose of defence from hidden and protected places. Such defence positions were provided inside the towers with window-like openings on all sides and on the roof protected with large battlements. These military operations can be clearly seen in the war of relics scene on the South Gateway (Pl.1).

## Endnotes

1. See *Śabdakalpadruma* (Varanasi, 1961); *Vācaspatyam*; Sanskrit-Hindi Kośa (ed. V.S. Apte, Varanasi, 1966).
2. 'रथ्या प्रतोली विशिखास्यात्' *Amarakośa*, II, 2.3 (N.S. Press, Bombay, 1944).
3. The *Valmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, V.2.17 (Gita Press Gorakhpur edition)  
पाण्डुराभिः प्रतोलीभिरुच्चाभिरभिसंवृताम् ।  
अट्टालकशताकीर्णा पताकाध्वजशोभिताम् ॥
4. The *Valmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, VI.75.6 (ed. P.L. Vaidya, Oriental Institute, Baroda)  
गोपुराट्टप्रतोलीषु चर्यासु विविधासु च / प्रासादेषु च संहृष्टाः संसृजते हुताशनम् ॥
5. *Ibid.*, II.74.17-18  
बहुपांसुचयाश्चापि परिखाः परिवारिताः / तत्तैन्द्र कीलप्रतिमाः प्रतोलीवर शोभिताः ॥  
प्रासादमाला संयुक्ताः सौधप्राकारसंवृताः / पताकाशोभिताः सर्वे सुनिर्मितमहायथाः ॥
6. *The Mahābhārata*, XII.69.52-53 (BORI, Poona Edition)  
भाण्डागारानामुद्यागारान् धान्यागारान् सर्वशः / अश्यागारान् गजागारान् बलाधिकरणानि च ॥  
परिखाश्चैव कौरव्य प्रतोली संकटानि च / न जातु कश्चित् पश्येत्तु गुह्यमेतद् युधिष्ठिर ॥
7. *Kauṭilya's Arthśāstram*, Part 1, II.3.14-15 (Udayavir Sastri (tr.), Pub. Meharchand Lachhmandas, New Delhi, 1970, p.104).  
त्रिशदण्डान्तरं च द्वयोरट्टालकयोर्मध्ये सहर्म्यद्वितलां प्रतोली कारयेत् ।
8. *Kauṭilya's Arthśāstra*, II.3.15 (ed. and tr. By Vachaspati Garola, Chowkhamba Vidya Bhavan, Varanasi, 1962).
9. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Indian Architectural Terms*, JAOS, Vol.48, No.3, p.258.
10. See *Kauṭilya's Arthśāstra*, II.3.14-15 tr. by Udayavir Śāstri (Lahore, 1952).
11. See *Kauṭilya's Arthśāstra*, Part II, p.72, English tr. by R.P. Kangle (Bombay University Press, 1969).
12. See *Kauṭilya's Arthśāstra*, II.3, English tr. by R. Shamasastri (8<sup>th</sup> edition, Mysore, 1967).
13. *Mṛcchakaṭīkam*, Act VI, after śloka 5 (ed. by Dr. Śrinivas Śāstri, Meerut, 1968).  
पुरस्तात् प्रतोलीद्वारे तिष्ठत्यम् त्वमपिदक्षिणे, त्वमपिउत्तरे ।  
योऽप्येषु प्राकारखण्डः एनमधिरुह्य चन्दनेन समं गत्वावलोकयामि ॥
14. *Mṛcchakaṭīkam*, Act VIII, after śloka 43  
ता गच्छ । एदाइ गोणाई गेण्डिअ ममकेलिकाए पाशादवालगपदोलिकाए चिष्ट! जाव हग्गे आअच्छामि  
(तद्गच्छ एतौवृषभौ गृहीत्वा मदीयायां प्रासादबालाग्रप्रतोलिकायां तिष्ठ यावदहमागच्छामि ।)
15. *Prācīna Gurjara Kāvyaśaṅgraha* ed. by C.D. Dalal, p.94, Baroda Central Library, 1920).  
'मरहट्टदेश.....जीणई नगरि कउसीसे करी सदाकार पार्शाल पोडउ प्राकार, उदार प्रतोलीद्वार'
16. *Kathāsaritasāgara*, 42.124 : 'तत्र रौद्र ददर्शदं प्रतोलीद्वारि रक्षासम्' ।
17. *Harṣacarita*, p.142 vide V.S. Agrawala, *Harṣacarita : Eka Sāṁskritika Adhyāyana*, p.215 (Patna, 1964).
18. *Prabhāvākārita*, IV.72.32 – 'न वा अट-कपाटानि पूः प्रतोलिष्वसंज्ञायत्'
19. *Samarāṅgana-Sūtradhāra*, Vol.1, ch.X.38, ed. by Mahāmahopādhyāya T. Ganpati Sastri (Baroda, 1944).  
कुर्यात् प्रतोलीः सर्वेषु महाद्वारेष्वयोदृढाः / दृढार्गलाश्चेन्द्रकीलाः कपाटपरिधान्विताः ॥ Cf. *Rāmāyaṇa*, I.5.10 - 'दृढद्वारप्रतोलीका'

20. *Ibid.*, śloka 39 : 'राजमार्ग समासाला स्यात् प्रतोली विनिर्गमा'
21. *Ibid.*, śloka 47.
22. D.N. Shukla, *Bhāratiya Vāstusāstra*, p.192 (Lucknow, 1955).
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. T. Burrow, 'The Date of Śyāmilaka's Pādatāḍitaka,' *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*, 1946, pp.46-53.
26. *Śṛṅgāra-Hāṭa : Caturbhāṇi*, ed. and tr. by Motichandra and Vasudeva Sharan Agrawala, Bombay, 1959, p. 171.  
 वप्र-नेमिशाला-हर्म्य-शिखर-कपोतपाली-सिंहकर्ण-गोपानसी-वलभीपुट-अट्टालक-अवलोकन-प्रतोली-विटंक प्रासाद-सम्वाधानि ।
27. J.F. Fleet, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol.III, p.45.
28. *Ibid.*, p.45, fn.1.
29. *Indian Antiquary*, Vol.XLI, pp.17 and 19.  
 'हम्मीर वीर! क्व स तव महिमा निर्दिशन्तीध्वजाग्रैर्दिव्याकार-प्रतोली हृदयमि भुवो निर्मिता किल्हेण ।'
30. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.IX, pp.127-28, fn.3 :  
 'देवश्री शशिमूषणस्य कृतिना देवालय कारित युग्मं मण्डपं शोभितम् च पुस्तो भद्रम प्रतोल्य सह'  
 अह्यां-अत्तुंग-शृंग-स्फुट-शशिकिरणस्येतामास सनाथे ।  
 रम्यारामप्रतोलीविविधजनपदस्त्रीविलासाभिरामम् ॥
31. *Ibid.*, pp.60-61.
32. It might be due to a simple reason that the detailed description of all types was not the subject matter of these epics. Fortification has been dealt with therein with the relevancy of the subject and in the context the mention of *pratoli* was made therein.
33. See under the word 'Gopura' in 'a Dictionary of Hindu Architecture' ed. by P.K. Acharya (Oxford University Press, 1927).
34. *Abhidhāna-cintāmaṇi*, IV.981 vide Tarapada Bhattacharya, 'A Study on Vāstu Vidyā.
35. R.P. Kangle, *op.cit.*, p.72.
36. See Marshall, Foucher & Majumdar, *Monuments of Sānchi*, London, 1940, Vol.2, Pls.XV (Southern Gateway) and LXI (Western Gateway).
37. *Ibid.*, PLXXXV-B (Northern Gateway).
38. *Ibid.*, PLXXXIV-B (Northern Gateway).
39. *Ibid.*, PLL-A (Eastern Gateway).
40. *Jātaka*, I. 290; III.2; IV.63 125, 229.
41. *Dhammapada Aṭṭakathā*, I.50; II.27, 46; IV.204; *Milinda Pañho*, X.



Fig.1 : War of relic, South gate (back), Lower architrave, Great Stupa, Sanchi



Fig.2 : War of relic, West gate (back), Middle architrave, Great Stupa, Sanchi



Fig.3 : Enlarged view of Fig.1





Fig.4 : Bimbisāra or Ajātaśatru coming out to meet the Buddha, West pillar, North gate, Sanchi

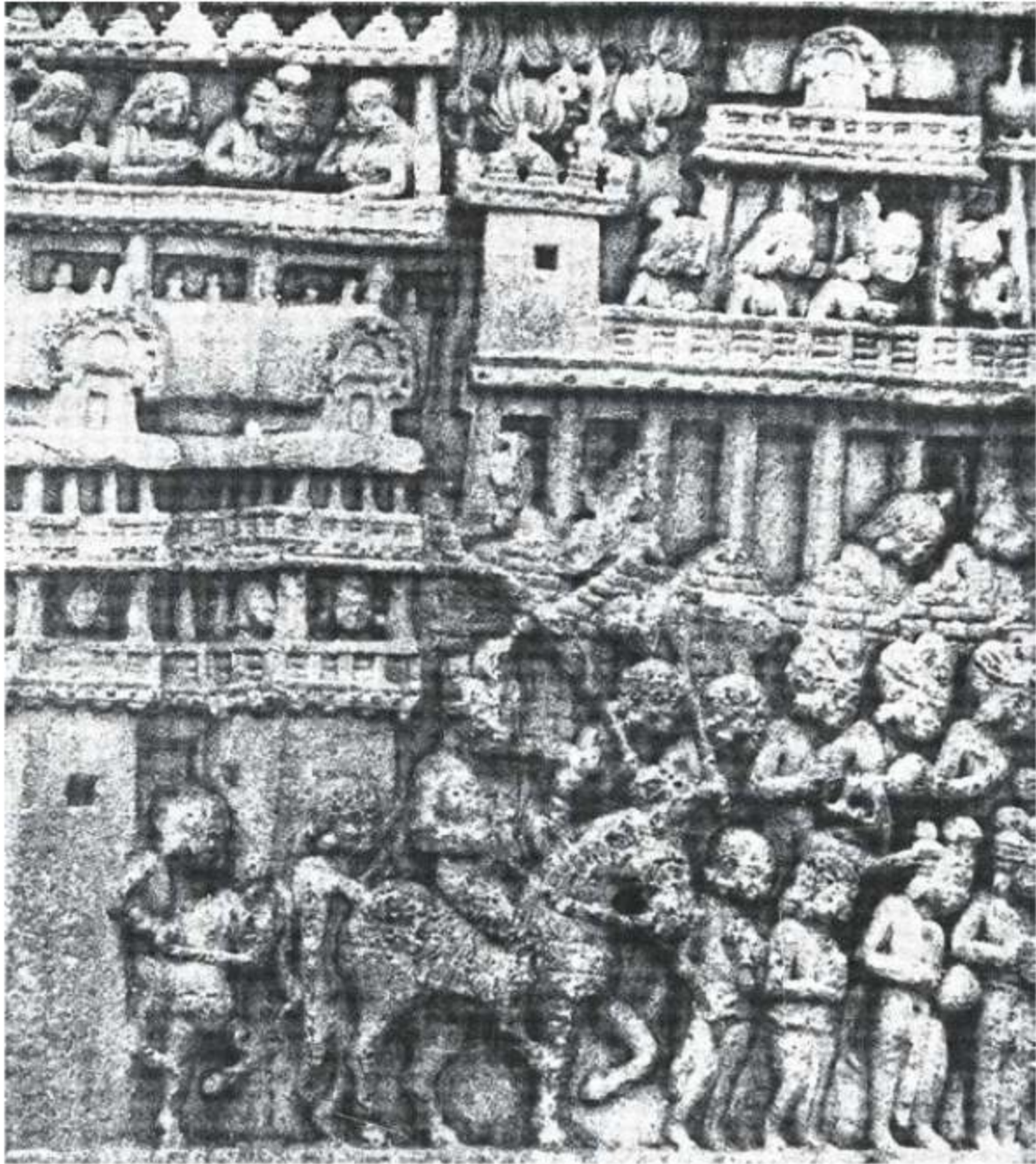


Fig.5 : Prasenajita coming out of the city to meet the Buddha, East pillar, North gate, Sanchi

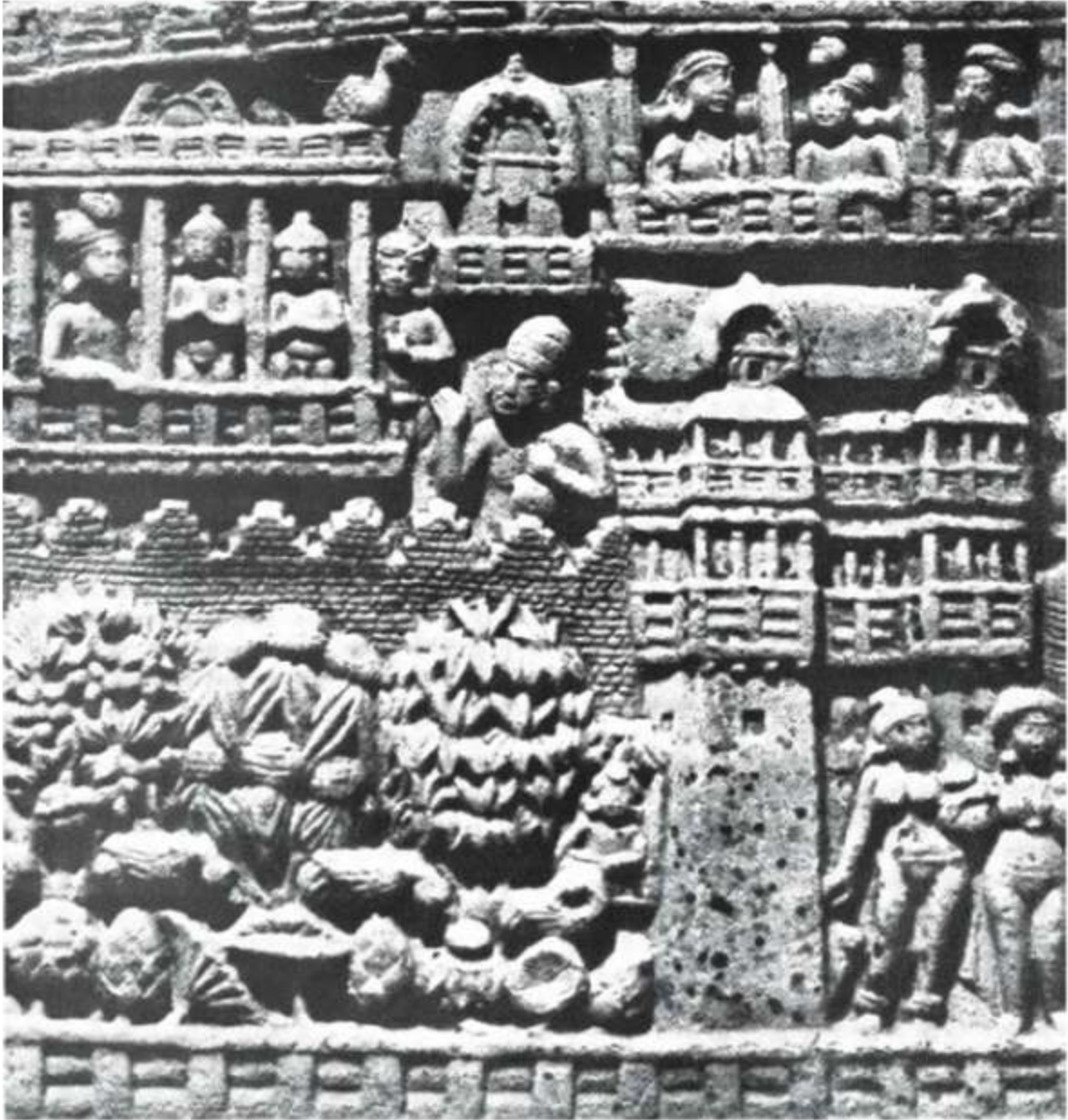


Fig.6 : Multi-storeyed buildings, Lintel, North gate, Sanchi