

Classification of the Stupas

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Out of the primary ten Buddhist stupas, eight were built over the Buddha's relics, and one over the ashes of the funeral pyre and another over the vessel, that was used for distributing the relics. Thus total ten stupas were built after His death. Cunningham categorized the stupas into three viz. "sharirika", "paribhogika" and "uddeshika". The first two refer to the contents kept inside the stupa and the third refers to the places associated with the Buddha. These stupas are mostly huge in structure. Later it was felt that the small stupas built in the vicinity and around the bigger ones were not represented in this classification. Hence, the fourth category "votive" was added to the earlier three. Though four different categories are generally accepted, the study of the archaeological findings from different stupas bring out certain anomalies in the classification. It is observed that only eight stupas that contain relics can be termed as "sharirika" and none of the other two stupas can be kept in either "paribhogika" or "uddeshika" categories. These stupas are equally important and therefore cannot be ignored. Moreover as the meaning of the word votive is "consecrated in fulfillment of a vow", fourth category, "votive" doesn't represent all varieties of the small stupas. Because small stupas were used for many other purposes also. Finally, an entirely different variety of the stupas, e.g. "chaitya stupas", has not been given a place in the stated classification. The classification of stupas proposed in the paper is based on the purpose and they are mahastupas, cave stupas and miniature stupas. The mahastupas are further sub-classified on the basis of architecture and they are round medhi, square medhi, medhi like a drum, projections in medhi, medhi with "ayaka platforms". The miniature stupas are further sub-classified on the basis of materials used and these are stone, brick, terracota, crystal and metal. The details of the classification and sub-classification are brought out in the paper.

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