

## Elephant Warriors

male narrator: IN THE THIRD CENTURY B.C., THE EMPEROR ASHOKA USED MILITARY POWER TO BECOME ONE OF THE GREATEST RULERS OF ANCIENT INDIA. FOR NEARLY 40 YEARS, HE RULED THE VAST MAURYAN EMPIRE. THROUGH WAR AND CONQUEST, HE BROUGHT NEARLY ALL OF INDIA UNDER A SINGLE RULER FOR THE FIRST TIME. ASHOKA MADE THE CAPITAL CITY OF PATALIPUTRA, NOW KNOWN AS PATNA, THE NUCLEUS OF HIS EMPIRE. UNDER ASHOKA, INDIA PROSPERED, ART FLOURISHED, AND THE CULTURE OF THE MAURYAN EMPIRE USHERED IN THE FIRST GREAT FLOWERING OF INDIAN CIVILIZATION.

ASHOKA WAS KNOWN AS A GREAT MILITARY STRATEGIST, AND HIS ARMY WAS EXTREMELY WELL ORGANIZED. IT HAD A STRONG CHAIN OF COMMAND AND EVEN DETAILED WRITTEN MANUALS TO GUIDE THE SOLDIERS. HIS SOLDIERS WERE WELL PAID AND WELL TRAINED. THEY SPENT MUCH OF THEIR TIME TRAINING AND PREPARING FOR BATTLE. BUT ASHOKA HAD AN EVEN MORE FORMIDABLE WEAPON. HIS ARMY USED ELEPHANTS TO WIN MANY VICTORIES IN BATTLE. WITH THEIR VERY LARGE BODIES, ELEPHANTS ARE ABLE TO DO THINGS DURING COMBAT THAT ARE TOO DIFFICULT OR DANGEROUS FOR OTHER FORCES SUCH AS MARCHING IN FRONT, DESTROYING RAMPARTS, GATES, AND TOWERS, TRAMPLING THE ENEMY'S ARMY, AND CAUSING TERROR.

OTHER INDIAN ARMIES DURING THIS TIME ALSO USED SOME ELEPHANTS IN COMBAT, BUT ASHOKA HAD 9,000 OF THEM, AND THEY TRAINED RIGHT ALONGSIDE HIS SOLDIERS. THE INFANTRY, CAVALRY, CHARIOTS, AND ELEPHANTS TRAINED OUTSIDE THE CITY EVERY DAY AT SUNRISE EXCEPT ON DAYS OF SPECIAL ASTROLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE. ASHOKA LED HIS LAST MILITARY CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE RICH KINGDOM OF KALINGA, LOCATED ON THE BAY OF BENGAL. KALINGA CONTROLLED THE COUNTRY'S SOUTHERN TRADE ROUTES. THIS WAS ASHOKA'S LAST REMAINING COMPETITION IN INDIA.

IN 261 B.C., ASHOKA SET OUT WITH HIS ARMY FOR THE ASSAULT ON KALINGA. A WELL PLANNED SYSTEM OF ROADS CROSSED THE EMPIRE AND HELPED SOLDIERS AND CIVILIANS ALIKE GET AROUND. OVER THE YEARS, ASHOKA HAD LINED THIS PRIMITIVE HIGHWAY WITH PONDS AND WELLS. WITHOUT THEM, HIS TRAVELING ARMIES WOULD HAVE PERISHED WITHIN DAYS. A GENERAL TOOK THE LEAD, THEN THE EMPEROR HIMSELF, FLANKED BY HIS BODYGUARDS. BEHIND HIM MARCHED THOUSANDS OF ELEPHANTS, HORSES, OXEN, AND SOLDIERS. AFTER THEM CAME THE PART-TIME MILITIA AND CRAFTSMEN. THEN THE COMPANIES OF ALLIES AND MERCENARIES. BEHIND THEM, FINALLY, ROLLED THOUSANDS OF WAGONS AND BEASTS OF BURDEN LOADED WITH EQUIPMENT AND FOOD FOR THE ENORMOUS ARMY. ENGINEERS AND LABORERS FORGED AHEAD, REPAIRING BOATS AND BRIDGES AND PREPARING FORDS BEFORE THE ARMY ARRIVED.

SOMETIMES THE ELEPHANTS FORMED A LIVING BRIDGE. AFTER MARCHING HUNDREDS OF MILES, THE MAURYAN ARMY ENTERED THE KINGDOM OF KALINGA. AT THE FRONT LINE STOOD ASHOKA'S ELITE, THE MOUNTED ARCHERS. EACH WAR ELEPHANT CARRIED THREE FIGHTING MEN. TWO SHOT FROM THE SIDE AND ONE FROM BEHIND. A FOURTH MAN GUIDED THE ANIMAL. AGAINST SO MANY WAR ELEPHANTS, THE KALINGANS WERE OUTMATCHED. SOME GOT TOSSED IN THE AIR, OTHERS CRUSHED UNDERFOOT. THE REST PANICKED AND RAN. WITH ITS ARMY BEATEN, KALINGA SOON SURRENDERED.

---

## Elephant Warriors

AFTER THE BATTLE, EMPEROR ASHOKA WAS SHOCKED TO SEE THE SUFFERING AND CARNAGE HE HAD CAUSED. ASHOKA WAS SO FULL OF REMORSE THAT HE RENOUNCED THE USE OF VIOLENCE AND EMBRACED BUDDHISM. THE RELIGION OF BUDDHISM HAD STARTED IN ASHOKA'S HOMETOWN OF MAGADHA, A REGION IN THE MODERN-DAY STATES OF BIHAR AND JHARKHAND. THE BUDDHA HIMSELF USED THE MAGADHI DIALECT OF SANSKRIT.

ASHOKA HAD BOULDERS AND PILLARS ACROSS INDIA INSCRIBED WITH HIS PIOUS DECLARATIONS. HE ASSERTED HIS BELIEF IN AHIMSA, OR NONVIOLENCE. ONE OF THESE INSCRIPTIONS READ, "THE BELOVED OF THE GODS, ASHOKA, CONQUERED KALINGA. "150,000 PEOPLE WERE DEPORTED, "100,000 KILLED, "AND MANY TIMES THAT PERISHED. "THE SLAUGHTER, DEATH, AND DEPORTATION OF THE PEOPLE "IS EXTREMELY GRIEVOUS. "THE BELOVED OF THE GODS WISHES THAT ALL BEINGS "SHOULD BE UNHARMED, SELF-CONTROLLED, CALM IN MIND, AND GENTLE."

ASHOKA HAD NUMEROUS BUDDHIST MONASTERIES BUILT AND MADE BUDDHISM THE STATE RELIGION. AND HE SENT BUDDHIST MISSIONARIES THROUGHOUT INDIA AND AS FAR AWAY AS SYRIA, EGYPT, AND GREECE. ASHOKA ALSO URGED TOLERANCE OF ALL FAITHS, REGULATED THE SLAUGHTER OF ANIMALS, AND SOFTENED THE HARSH LAWS OF HIS PREDECESSORS. WHEN HE DIED AROUND 232 B.C., HIS EMPIRE COLLAPSED INTO CHAOTIC FIGHTING BETWEEN RIVALS, BUT ASHOKA HAD LED ONE OF INDIA'S GREATEST CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS REVOLUTIONS, AND ALTHOUGH IN INDIA, BUDDHISM WOULD EVENTUALLY BECOME ONLY A MINOR RELIGION, ASHOKA'S SUPPORT HELPED THE RELIGION SPREAD AND SURVIVE IN OTHER REGIONS OF THE WORLD, WHERE IT LIVES ON TODAY. IF YOU'D LIKE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WHAT YOU'VE JUST SEEN, GO ONLINE OR CHECK OUT THESE BOOKS AT YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY.

---