

# HdO

## Ajanta: History and Development

- VOLUME FOUR -

PAINTING, SCULPTURE, ARCHITECTURE  
YEAR BY YEAR



*by*

Walter M. Spink

AJANTA  
PAINTING, SCULPTURE, ARCHITECTURE  
YEAR BY YEAR

# HANDBOOK OF ORIENTAL STUDIES

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### SECTION TWO

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VOLUME 18/4

AJANTA: HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

PAINTING, SCULPTURE, ARCHITECTURE

YEAR BY YEAR

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ARCHITECTURE  
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WALTER M. SPINK



BRILL

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*Cover illustration:* Ajanta Cave 19 façade, guardian at right, 470.  
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Remembering happy times



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## INTRODUCTION

The present volume includes a compilation of photographs (Plates 1–222) that provide an essential supplement to the text volumes describing developments primarily at Ajanta, but also at other Vakataka sites such as Aurangabad and Bagh. The arrangement of the photographs follows the numbered sequence of the caves, but it should be remembered that this numerical ordering is purely arbitrary. Cave 1 was so numbered (in the nineteenth century) because it was the first to be approached, while the Cave 26 complex (actually started well before Cave 1) was one of those farthest away. Only one major cave at Ajanta is “out of sequence”; this is Cave 29, the unfinished caitya hall of the local king. It was hidden by debris when the numbering was originally done, and was therefore numbered only when it was later exposed.

A significant point that I hope to establish in the course of the six volumes comprising **Ajanta: History and Development** is that every one of the myriad features of the Vakataka caves will ultimately be able to be securely located upon a developmental continuum between 462 and 480 CE, allowing no more than a year or two margin of error. Ajanta and the other Vakataka cave sites may be unique not just in India but throughout the world insofar as they allow, without the benefit of any dated internal records, a precision so insistent that it demands explication on a year to year basis. To discuss the evolution of Ajanta and its related sites in terms of decades or even five-year divisions would make no sense if we are going to read its biography with revealing care. Needless to say, this has significant implications for studies in Indian history, epigraphy, technology, iconography and style, not only for our understanding of Ajanta itself, but for the whole culture that the resplendent site mirrors deep in the distant mountains. Even the renowned Guptas must cede their pride of place to the great Vakataka emperor Harisena, who in the 460s and 470s brought India’s so-called Golden Age to its exuberant climax, even as his sudden death precipitated its startled doom. He is not yet in the history books but, if Ajanta’s story is read aright, he is destined to be finally recognized as the most successful emperor in the world in that brief period that so traumatically ended when his amazing empire—its glories mirrored



and so fragilely preserved at Ajanta—so sadly and so surprisingly fell apart.

Not very long ago (so it seems!) when I was asked to provide proper dating for the images in H. Zimmer's monumental **The Art of Indian Asia** (2 Volumes, 1955), I assigned the world-famous bodhisattvas in Cave 1 to the mid-seventh century, with a considerable even if unjustified confidence. This was an approved assumption at that time, although the truth is that no one had anything more than convention and tradition to support such an ascription. The concern now—at least for me—is whether those two great paintings, which help us to locate artistic and historical developments throughout the whole of Asia, should be assigned to “477”, as I have done, or could they possibly have been painted in “476” or “478”.

At this point it should be noted that both in the picture labels and in the text, I have omitted “circa” from the dates given, although (as noted above) one should assume a margin of error of a year or perhaps even two in all cases. For a further explanation of this dating procedure, see Volume V, Ch. 4, pp. 15–16: “A Few Relevant Comments Regarding Dating.”

Scholars will be able to better test, and hopefully extend, my own arguments regarding the great Vakataka developments by reference to a projected multi-volume publication of three to four thousand large-scale photographs of Ajanta and related contemporary sites. One of our goals is to “freeze-frame” the site as of 2008–2010, so that the inevitable losses that occur due either to conservation or to lack of conservation, or (one hates to imagine!) the possible assaults of some crazed terrorist, will be in some way preserved, through a total photographic record. Had we done this one hundred years ago—or even a few decades ago—how much knowledge and beauty could have been preserved for our future!

All photographs in the present Volume IV are from the Asian Art Archives of the University of Michigan, or from the collection of the author or Dr. Leela Wood.

## THE EARLIEST CAVES (C. 100 BCE TO C. 150 CE)

Ajanta's proud history began millions of years ago, when the monsoon waters, gathered yearly from hundreds of square miles of surrounding fields, started the gradual process of revealing, stage by stage, the deep ravine in which the caves are located. The water little by little cut through the layers of basalt that form the Deccan plateau, and the result, a seeming eternity in the process, was the precipitous scarp into which the caves were cut. The Waghora ("tiger") River, which has its source in the beautiful *sat kund* ("seven pools") carved over the eons by the persistent flood, runs out through the hills to the plains beyond and to the still-busy trade route that in ancient days nourished the site.

The first of Ajanta's caves were started in about the first century BCE, and included the impressive caitya hall, Cave 10, and the simple associated vihara, Cave 12. These were not unique excavations, however. They had their counterparts all over western India in this same period, a development made possible by the availability of Maharashtra's convenient mountains on the one hand and an energetic Buddhist faith on the other. This was a period when Buddhism, nourished by royal support, and by the active flow of ideas and material along the trade routes, appears to have been paramount in the region. The austere splendor of Ajanta Cave 10 itself stands in confirmation of this.

Like most Buddhist undertakings in this early period, Ajanta's monastic establishment at this time appears to have been a true community effort. The great caitya hall, Cave 10, has an inscription on its front that tells us that "the façade is the gift of Vasisthiputra Katahadi", while an inscription on the wall inside states: "The wall is the gift of Kanhaka of Bahada". In the vihara, Cave 12, an inscription on the rear wall, to the left of the rightmost cell, speaks of "a dwelling, the religious donation of the merchant Ghanamadada, a cell...along with a upa..."<sup>1</sup>

A second and adjacent caitya hall (Cave 9), with its more complex stupa and façade, may have been done a century later. Two other modest viharas, Caves 13 and 15A—the latter did not get in on the early count, having then been hidden by fallen debris—are also early

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<sup>1</sup> Translations, respectively, Volume II, Appendix Cohen #40, 42, 66.

undertakings of somewhat indeterminate date. It is perhaps remarkable that although we can now analyze the fifth century caves at the site on a fairly unshakeable year to year basis, we can date these five early caves on nothing much more secure than opinions about opinions. I have rendered mine, drawing largely on the view that the Satavahana dynasty started in the late first century BCE; but significant points of controversy still remain.<sup>2</sup>

As we might expect, all of these so-called Hinayana caves were originally plastered and painted, although few areas of old decoration still remain. Also, it should be noted that the plaster and painting on the wall of Cave 10 once totally obscured the carved inscription mentioned above, which speaks of the gift of the very wall into which the plastered-over inscription was cut. Thus it seems clear that the cave was plastered and painted somewhat later than it was excavated; for otherwise why would the record of its meritorious donation be obscured? If, as seems likely, the huge Cave 10 did not get decorated at the time of its excavation, its plastering and painting was perhaps done when the adjacent caitya hall (Cave 9) was being excavated a century or so later.

In any case, both the great Cave 10 and the associated Cave 9 did get fully painted: Cave 10, if not originally, then eventually. In Cave 10 bare traces of simple lotus decorations remain in the “coffers” formed by the interlocking ceiling beams in the vault. These beams are now totally missing, but in both caves, as we can tell by the pattern that they have left on the ceiling, they formed a complex structure. We know by analogy with other early caitya halls (Bhaja, Kondane, Karle) where the great beams mostly survive, that they must have been of solid and durable teak. We can only assume that, at some point in these early centuries, the caves at Ajanta had been abandoned, and that the inhabitants of the nearby villages—one close village is in fact named “Lenapur” or “Cave-town”—availed themselves of this valuable wood for use in building or for burning.

In Cave 10, sadly, most of the early decoration has either fallen away, or has been so begrimed from the early centuries of worship in the cave, that it is barely readable. Although certain sections on the left and right aisle walls have been recently cleaned with great care, there are inevitable losses, for it is well-nigh impossible to restore the original

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<sup>2</sup> For my original dating of Ajanta’s Hinayana phase, see Spink 1954; 1958.

strength and brilliance of the lines. The subjects of the wall narratives in Cave 10 are various jatakas, spread out almost like unrolled scrolls.<sup>3</sup> A few very fine early floral and geometric paintings can still be seen on the upper sections of some of the pillars in Cave 10's right colonnade, but at the lower levels these decorative panels have been covered with paintings of the fifth century. Equally strong and beautiful decorations—all lotus medallions painted in different colors—can be seen on the aisle ceilings of Cave 9, while a few traces of a vigorous hunting scene provide a narrow frieze just above the pillars in the same cave.

The repainting of these old Hinayana caves in the fifth century has been discussed in detail elsewhere, and so will be merely summarized here.<sup>4</sup> In Cave 10, a decision to refurbish the cave was made rather late and so the full plan was never realized. The vault and the aisles got painted first, and then a consistent program of redecoration was started on the left colonnade, beginning at the top of the pillars, and working gradually rearward from the front. However, the work never progressed past the upper levels of a number of the more forward left pillars—interrupted, it seems certain, by the emperor Harisena's sudden death. Now, with time at a premium, attention was turned to painting standing Buddha images on all of the main faces of the pillars down as far as the stupa. This now more hurried work was started at the more convenient lower levels, but broke off before the painters could set their scaffolds up and start work on the similarly desirable areas immediately above. By the time the now-hasty plan of getting the most visible faces of the pillars covered with a “litany” of Buddha images was aborted in 478 it was time for the “intruders” to take over. These “uninvited” devotees now started covering the pillars with their own images, which, unlike the programmed images were often inscribed. These new and eager donors understandably selected the most visible pillar faces first, but gradually were forced to utilize the less desirable locations on the rear faces of the pillars.

A similar process went on in Cave 9 in this renewal phase. A few pillars were decorated in a carefully programmed way in 478, but most of the images belong to the Period of Disruption.<sup>5</sup> The associated vihara, Cave 12, was also refurbished at this time, much of the wall area, along

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<sup>3</sup> Schlingloff 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Volume II, Ch 9.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

with various patches on the ceiling, being surfaced prior to painting with a characteristic red (ground brick) plaster, which is never used at the site until 477. It seems clear from this evidence—also found in Cave 9—that all of these early caves remained untouched until relatively late in the Vakataka period. The decision to refurbish them would seem to reflect the exuberant and positive attitude of the patrons at the site in the vigorous years of work from 475 through 477, when the site was flourishing as never before. In fact, the work probably was not begun until the latter year, at which point of course time soon ran out, so that most of the efforts were made first in the troubled context of 478, and then by the helter-skelter patrons of the Period of Disruption.

The heavy begriming of both Cave 9 and Cave 10 would confirm the assumption that these early caves remained in use over the course of the following centuries, although such usage may not have been continuous. Some breakage in their use is suggested by the fact, as noted above, that all of the great number of teak beams and rafters were at some point removed. This would surely not have occurred if the caves were in continual worship.

Although the first century BCE and the first and second centuries CE were busy times for Buddhism throughout western India, the next few centuries are notable for their lack of the same kind of ambitious—even staggering—monuments. Buddhism had surely gone into a decline from the late second century right up until the Vakataka “renaissance” in the early 460s. Little remains from the intervening years.

However, we know that these years were not completely barren. There were scattered monuments such as Devnimori in Gujarat (probably fourth century) that provide useful steps along this mostly deserted path, and of course Buddhism was flourishing in both the southeast and the northwest. Furthermore we have the useful travel record of the Chinese pilgrim Fa Hien.<sup>6</sup> With regard to Ajanta his record both shows that the site was still functioning in about 400 CE and at the same time shows that the good old days were obviously gone. Although Fa Hien traveled through this general area, he did not visit the site, probably reluctant to do so because, as he says, “the roads...are dangerous and hard to travel...(and) all the inhabitants (of the region) hold heretical

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<sup>6</sup> Li Yung-his (trans.) 1957, 74–75.

views and do not believe in Buddhism”.<sup>7</sup> However, despite this, the site was still being used, but was apparently hard to get to, except by air; for Fa Hien reports, “the people of this country often see men flying to the monastery here”.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

## 460 AJANTA'S VAKATAKA RENAISSANCE CONCEIVED

In about 460, the emperor Devasena, ruler of the western branch of the ancient Vakataka house, the authorizer of the Hisse Borala inscription of 458 CE, was succeeded by his son Harisena, the “ornament of the race of Bhoja, a partial incarnation, as it were, of the God of Justice, mighty, truthful, liberal, and well-behaved”<sup>1</sup> Such hyperbole may well have been justified, for Harisena was destined to become the greatest emperor in India, and perhaps in the whole world, during his brief reign from about 460 to about 477. Although he was certainly a Saivite, his liberal interests were surely ecumenical, for his prime minister and all of his known feudatories were devoted Buddhists.

It was they who must have prevailed upon Harisena, in the exuberance of succession, to support and probably to partially sponsor a remarkably ambitious undertaking: the creation, for the first time in over three centuries, of a vast and modern Buddhist monastery, cut into the deep and beautiful ravine in the mountains near the village of Ajanta.

This would be a private undertaking, sponsored exclusively by the elite of the empire. In the end hardly more than ten major patrons would control its development and of course gain merit from it. It seems likely that “outsiders” could not share in the donations of these startling and highly exclusive new monuments, for the four relevant donative inscriptions that we have make it clear that the gifts were “for” the people, not “by” them.<sup>2</sup> However, even if the general public may not have been able to make donations to the caves as such, one must presume that they could contribute to the monastic establishment itself, and (one would suppose) would be allowed to worship in the shrines once they were completed.

It may seem remarkable that, at the very beginning of Harisena's reign, such a vast and expensive project would have been begun. However, the times were not only culturally exuberant, but politically

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<sup>1</sup> See Vol. I, Appendix I: the *Visrutacarita* of Dandin's *Dasakumaracarita* (trans. Kale), 394.

<sup>2</sup> The major inscriptions in Caves 4, 16, 17, 26 all refer to “all sentient beings” as recipients of these meritorious gifts.

auspicious. That is to say, the various lands that composed his empire were at peace—even though it was a peace that only too soon would be shattered by political rivalries. Harisena, with his power-base in western Vidarbha (his capital at Vatsagulma, modern Basim) had inherited an impressive array of territories, the most important being: Risika (where Ajanta lies) to the west; Asmaka to the south; and Anupa to the north. And they were all at peace. We can assume this, because donors from these areas all sponsored major excavations starting at the very beginning of Harisena's reign; and this could never have been possible in a time of war or of significant political conflict.

Indeed, a public works project of this magnitude, even if costly, might be seen as a brilliant political initiative; for such a project would bring the disparate portions of the empire together at the very start of the emperor's reign. Furthermore, it would do this under the notably peaceful banner of Buddhism. Admittedly, except for the informational largesse provided by Ajanta itself, texts and epigraphs belonging to this particular time and this particular place are of little help for reconstructing the cultural milieu that would come to be controlled by, or reflected by, Harisena's court. Nonetheless it seems evident that, with the possible exception of western Vidarbha (the central Vakataka domain) itself, Buddhism was the prime faith of the whole of Harisena's domains at that time. The monuments that survive tell us this, and must have been developed in concert with the sangha.

Whereas one will look in vain throughout this region for a single Hindu temple, or even a single Hindu image, dating to the third quarter of the fifth century, Buddhist offerings are to be found in abundance: in ancient Risika at Ajanta itself, in Asmaka at Aurangabad, in Anupa at Bagh, in Aparanta at Kanheri's cemetery, and (although Jain) in Kuntala at Dharasiva. Thus, even though Harisena was almost certainly a Saivite, at least at the time of his accession—both his family tradition and the evidence of the *Visrutacarita* would confirm this—one can understand why he allowed and surely encouraged his courtiers to make these monuments dedicated to the very principle of non-violence. Nor is it surprising that, espousing the generous attitudes of those enlightened days, he eventually became the best of all patrons of the Buddhist faith.



## 461 PLANNING BEGUN AT THE VAKATAKA COURTS AND AT AJANTA ITSELF

I have suggested that the dramatic idea of creating rock-cut monasteries at both Ajanta and Bagh was developed by their respective patrons close to the very start of the emperor Harisena's reign. And although I have attempted to justify this assumption by ascribing the idea to an understandable initial enthusiasm, my assumption has also been influenced by the perceived need to begin Ajanta's development as early as possible in Harisena's reign, given the fact (or what I see as a fact) that the great emperor's sudden death occurred at about the end of 477. Since numbers do not lie, and since Ajanta's essential development ends within a year after Harisena's death—the work in 478 being done in a rush—this means that whatever was accomplished at the site during its carefully programmed phase had to have been done in no more than seventeen years inclusive (462–478).

Although I am a partisan of the idea that great monuments can and generally are accomplished very swiftly, I do not want to overstate this case, particularly since Ajanta's development (unlike that at Bagh) suffered a number of time-consuming traumas, most notably the destructive conflict between the Asmaka and Risika feudatories—responsible for what I call the “Hiatus” (472–474). The fact that valuable time was “wasted” right in the middle of the site's evolution is but one more reason to believe that Ajanta's development must have started close to the very beginning of Harisena's reign.

Undertaking a “renaissance” at Ajanta some three hundred years after its Hinayana phase—with nothing in between—must have involved considerable advance planning, particularly since the supporting patrons and the workers and even the monks must have come from a number of different parts of the empire. Indeed, it seems likely, considering the location of the different caves thus sponsored, that various priority decisions were, and had to have been made in advance; 461 must have been a year of much planning activity, even if no stone had yet been cut.

Thus the imperial Prime Minister, Varahadeva, was able to plan to put his Cave 16 at a prime location at the very center of the arcing ravine; significantly, the Chinese pilgrim Zuan Xang, reporting on the

site by hearsay in the early seventh century, still calls Cave 16's great Elephant Gate the "entrance to the site".

Adjacent to Cave 16, quite appropriately, the local king, Upendragupta, planned for his grand vihara, Cave 17; and still farther "to the west", as his inscription says, he reserved space for his ambitious Caitya Hall 19, upon which his planners and cost-appraisers must also have been already working in 461. They clearly drew upon the old Hinayana Cave 9 as their basic model, although would elaborate upon it greatly.

It seems clear that before such major caves were started, delegations of architects (now to be excavators) and members of the Buddhist sangha must have surveyed the site, deciding upon the best and/or most appropriate locations for the various anticipated caves. In the case of the vast Cave 26 complex, patronized by the Asmakas, they were careful to choose a location into which the projected monument would "fit", for its height demanded a particularly deep stretch of scarp. Furthermore, by being placed well to the west, it was ideally located to form the devotional center for the monks, who would reside in viharas both at its right (Cave 21–25) and (although never fully developed) to its left (27–28). This would have been a particularly important consideration when Cave 26 was first planned, for in the earliest years of activity at the site, the viharas were conceived as mere dormitories, not as the shrines that they later became, when the Buddha became their chief resident.

Just as the plan for Cave 19 drew upon the precedent of the Hinayana Caitya Cave 9, that of Cave 26 drew upon the old Cave 10—though again with every intention of transforming the model by adding appropriately "modern" features. Not only this, but when the four wings were planned for this ambitious cave complex, all were essentially based on the layout of the ancient Hinayana vihara, Cave 12. That is, as will be discussed in some detail below, they were conceived as astylar and shrineless, with cells on the left, right, and rear sides of the hall, but none at the porch ends.

These great undertakings, as planned, were all to be placed in the still undeveloped portion of the site to the left of the old Hinayana nucleus; and this would seem to have been the most desirable area in which to excavate, at least judging from the importance of the monuments involved. However, at the same time it seems clear that plans were being laid for a number of somewhat less grand excavations

close to the site's old Hinayana nucleus, itself comprising Caves 9, 10, 12, 13, and 15A. These new conceptions were all simple viharas, like the wings planned for Cave 26, and already, in their closeness to one another (*vide* Caves 5, Lower 6, 7 and 8), one can recognize the spatial constraints that were more and more operative as the site developed, and space became more and more precious.

Geological factors were yet another feature that imposed restraints, although at first the planners seemed less concerned, or less aware, than was the case later, when excavators more and more adjusted the positioning of their caves in accordance with problematic flaws in the rock. The positioning of the early Cave 8 is a case in point. It is just possible that the planners thought this location, lower than any of the adjacent caves, and easy of access from the old river path, was quite ideal; but it surely reflects inexperience with regard to geological factors—an inexperience that in various ways particularly affects the site's earliest Vakataka undertakings. There is a thick horizontal deposit of red bole—a notably corrupted mineral layer—running through the basalt at a disruptive height and presenting a problem that would have warned a more experienced contractor to abandon any excavation efforts in this particular area. As we shall see, however, work went on with dire results.

The same lack of awareness, or lack of thought, or the fusion of innocence and exuberance, resulted in an equally embarrassing situation in Cave 11; and here again the mistake was particularly costly in terms of time, money, and desired results. One of our initial patrons—we have no record of his name—opted to put his small vihara, planned with three cells on each side, in the unused space between the old Hinayana Caves 9 and 12. The space may have seemed quite auspicious, at least to the uncritical eye, and the patron's planners obviously thought that there was room enough; indeed, along most of the strongly curving face of the ravine, the space, quite understandably, is more ample toward the rear of the caves than toward the front. However, this is not the case here! The old Hinayana Caitya Hall, Cave 10, it turns out, does not follow the expected pattern. It is angled subtly but sharply to the left, probably to adjust for a troubling vertical flaw in its façade area; and this had dire consequences for the excavators, as we shall see. It seems likely too that when the cave was laid out—perhaps first “on plan”—no one realized how dramatically and deleteriously a flaw visible just above its porch was going to affect its interior arrangement.

It seems likely that the caves referred to above: Caves Lower 6, 7, 8, 11, 16, 17, 19, and the 26 complex, were probably all being planned in the city offices, as well as by surveyors at the site and monastic advisers, during 461, urged on by the very excitement of getting started on a project of such staggering dimensions. And the truth is, all of these well-laid and carefully budgeted plans, which would have seemed well worked out in this preparatory stage, would include features that later planners would wish were not there—features that would have to be cut away or revised or otherwise adjusted in the interests of change and progress.

I am proposing that after some months of preparatory planning both in the cities and at the site, the actual excavation of the earliest of the Vakataka undertakings began in approximately 462. Starting at this point, we shall try to reconstruct, even if imperfectly, the beginnings of what, in little more than another decade, would already have become one the world's most signal achievements.

## 462 EXCAVATIONS BEGIN AT THE SITE

The first Vakataka excavators at Ajanta, facing the idiosyncrasies of the rough scarp rising above the ravine, must have been staggered by the immensity—even the novelty—of the task before them. Remarkably, none of them had ever carved a cave before.<sup>1</sup> In fact, there are not even any remains of stone temples upon which they might have worked in the Vakataka realm, for the few fine temples in and around Ramtek were all made some decades before; indeed, the same is true of the few sculptures from Mandhal.<sup>2</sup> This being the case it is not surprising that the excavators depended almost exclusively on the old Hinayana caves at the site as precedents; but even so they still had to learn their craft anew.

Their tools were simple, but effective. It is clear from the manner in which the rock has been reamed out in the grosser excavation work—where masses of rock were cut away as major areas were opened up—that two men were involved in such cutting, just as is sometimes done today. One worker would hold a very large pointed chisel and the other would rhythmically bring a sledge down upon it; the downward point by point path of the chisel in great arcing swathes is easily seen in areas that happen to have been left unfinished. Far less hazardous for the hands was the work done with chisels held by a single person. The most common type of all had a flat cutting edge about half an inch wide, the cuts typically made in parallel sequences. The walls of the caves, and the surfaces of pillars, doorways, and windows, after being roughly exposed, were most often finished in this way; although when images and decorative carvings were later created a pointed chisel was often used.

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<sup>1</sup> There is a strong but simple cave at Patur, shown to me by Dr. A. Jamkhedkar. This can be seen as an important prototype; perhaps preceding Ajanta's main phase by a few decades; the find of a figure of Parvati from Patur (probably dating from the first half of the fifth century) might support such an assumption. (See Jamkhedkar 1991, 90, figure 8; in Khandalavala 1991). On the other hand, the simplicity of the design of the unfinished cave makes it difficult to date; it is at least conceivable that it is a simple local form, created by a patron aware of what was being undertaken at Ajanta.

<sup>2</sup> A. M. Jamkhedkar, "Vakataka Sculpture", in Parimoo 1991, 194–212.

As soon as such excavation work started, it created certain demands, which the site's enlarging workforce had to handle. The most basic task would have been the removal of the excavated material, consisting of both large chunks of stone and great quantities of debris. Happily, disposal was a simple task, because the deep ravine was at hand and could accept whatever was offered, large or small. Such support crews—possibly comprised wholly or in part of women, as is often the case today—would have been at the bottom of the employment ladder. By contrast, good blacksmiths must have been in great demand, for even though the forged iron chisels were very hard, it was surely necessary to temper them with fire many times during each day. Such blacksmiths are a necessary fixture today too, when stone temples are built or restored.

It may seem surprising that chisels and hammers, as if dropped or lost, have never been found in the area around the caves. Perhaps their very value protected them. However, there are a few instances where chisel points have been discovered broken off in the stone. One example, in Cave 1, found a few years ago, excited such interest among the attendants that it mysteriously disappeared. Another still is in place in one of King Upendragupta's caves, but it seems best not to disclose its location.

Evidence of what the chisels were like is quite well provided by a number of broken chisel blades which were used as wedges in some of the site's door latches, to better hold the teak pegs in place. A few others were pulled out by an enthusiastic visitor some years ago, but unfortunately without keeping any record of their location. The clearest example is still to be seen in the right rear cell of Cave 11. Two similarly broken chisels fragments apparently helped to secure the applied (now broken) wooden projection in the doorway of Cell R4 in Cave 1; they have both been removed but the channels made when they were driven in are preserved.

We can assume that the excavators were beginning to expose most of the caves listed above in 462, but because they were still so inexperienced and because there was often so much of the cliff-face to be cut away, it is unlikely that work progressed very fast in this initial year. Perhaps a few fronting pillars and portions of the porches were being roughed out by this time, but in general the work at the site must have still been in its very preliminary stages. Work would have speeded up in the following year; and as we shall see, some serious problems will start to be evidenced at that time too.

An important matter that had to be dealt with very early involved housing. The concern was surely less for the “mere workers” or low level monks than for the supervisors, as well as the high Buddhist officials and important visitors sent down from the courts. Such people could not just sleep on the ground, in the open air, or in the shelter of porches-in-progress. This, and the need for a place to keep and give out wages for the huge number of workers, probably explains the presence of an extensive and well-built brick structure, recently exposed at least in part, which was built across the river from the caves. Part of the area here is relatively flat, but it appears that it was necessary to continue the building even in the steeper area behind.<sup>3</sup>

As opposed to the work on the excavations, the work here could be accomplished very quickly—probably over the course of a few months—since the bricks could be made locally, and laid efficiently. Whereas not a single cave was ready to properly house a single monk until perhaps as late as 468, such a rapidly created brick structure might well have been ready for use during the initial year of activity at the site.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For the red sandstone Durga image found in the excavation, see Yuko Yokochi “The Mahisasuramardini Icon With special reference to the images made in the Vakataka realm” in Bakker 2004, 167–178, and Plate 13:3. The figure must date from the fifth century, probably earlier than Ajanta’s development. It must have been brought to the site, perhaps with a (Saivite) traveler from eastern Vidarbha, as a devotional object. A gold coin was also found in the excavation; but was not available for viewing when I visited the ASI office in Aurangabad some time ago.

<sup>4</sup> The fact that the old A mode doorways in Cave 11 were provided with attached (A+ Mode) fittings in 468 (or just possibly 469) suggests that it was being readied for occupation at that time. The first B mode fittings at the site were developed in 468 also, so monks could have occupied those cells too.

## 463/464/465 EARLY DEVELOPMENTS AND DECISIONS

Work now is going on apace in the more “privileged” caves already begun, and we can assume that a number of other caves (such as Caves 5 and 4 and 15 and 20) were now underway as well, although the competition for workmen must have been increasingly intense. At the same time, it is certain that Ajanta’s fame was spreading, along with rumors of lucrative and long-lasting employment opportunities; so workers, skilled and unskilled, must have been coming to the site now in great numbers. Even so, we can find many instances, particularly in the lesser caves, where the work-programs appear to be significantly slowed or interrupted, probably because some other patron with more clout or money managed to lure the workers away.<sup>1</sup> Of course a shift in focus could also be at the instance of the patron himself; a few years hence this will be very evident in both the great Cave 26 complex, where work on the upper wings comes to be drastically downgraded, as well as in Upendragupta’s beautiful monuments, where Cave 20 is essentially starved to nourish the development of Cave 19.

By 463, a visitor coming to the site would now have been able to see a clear pattern of patronage emerging, with productions of this fifth century phase ranging from the simplest small monastic residences, to more ambitious and even ostentatious living quarters with 12-pillared or 20-pillared interiors, and finally to the two impressive caitya halls (Cave 19 and Cave 26) conceived as the intended ceremonial centers for the site. The former is in what we shall refer to as the “Vakataka” area, including all of the excavations up to and including Cave 20, all of which appear to have had positive connections with the Vakataka court. The other will be described as the “Asmaka” area, starting with Cave 21 and continuing to the left, ultimately as far as the unfinished Cave 28. The Asmakas were in fact feudatories of the Vakataka emperor; but in the end were responsible for the dissensions that destroyed the empire.

The most modest of the excavations now emerging from the rock at Ajanta are a group of small halls that essentially copy their convenient

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<sup>1</sup> See Volume V, Cave 5, as a striking example.



Hinayana prototype, Cave 12. The interiors of these simple caves, as originally conceived, were astylar, with residence cells ranged on the left, right and rear sides. They were to be mere dormitories; and although they do not now have the stone beds of the earlier days, they surely were once supplied with sleeping pads of some type, or quite possibly simple cots, like that upon which the Dying Buddha in Cave 26 rests. The cell doorways, like all cut at the site prior to 468, are simple openings, still innocent of door-fittings; in the site's inaugural fervor, it appears that no one troubled to think of the manner in which these openings might be fitted out with doors, a problem which was solved in these and other caves only with some difficulty later.

The porches of these caves were fronted with pillars that at this early stage in their excavation would still have had simple octagonal shafts—surely those of Cave 12, now missing, were of the same typical “Hinayana” type. Also, following Cave 12, there were never cells planned for the porch ends at this early date, even though such porch cells, later on, were (very sensibly) added to these simple caves wherever possible. In the same way, it would appear to be the case that the elaborated doorframes that grace some of these entrances are also later features, added once such caves were provided with shrines. Only the porch doorway in Cave 11 preserves its original form; all others were re-cut after the Buddha took up residence in such caves. This must also explain the presence of fine paintings in such caves; certainly nothing so elaborate would have been planned when the viharas were nothing more than simple dormitories.

If we could pare away the later structural and decorative features from this early group of modest caves, to most of which shrines and/or supporting pillars and/or extra cells and/or various decorative features were added as the years went on, sometimes almost totally masking the original conceptions, we could list the following as having been planned in a notably severe and simple way as a standard early type, even though their original character has invariably been masked by the inexorable progress (or progression) of activity at the site: Caves 5, Lower 6, 8, 11, 15, 20, and the four wings of the Cave 26 complex, as originally conceived. We might note, however, that two caves—Cave 11 and Cave Lower 6—were supplied with interior pillars for purely expedient reasons: Cave 11 out of concern that the ceiling might collapse due to a serious flaw just above; and Cave Lower 6 out of concern that the ceiling might collapse because of the earlier-unanticipated presence of its added upper story.

The only “nicety” to be commonly found in the earliest (or at least early) level in these caves are the quasi-decorative *candrasilas*—the semicircular steps—in front of certain cell doorways; and these are features that themselves go out of fashion a few years hence. Indeed, even these special features might not have been revealed until the caves were turned into Buddha shrines, because often work at the floor level was quite delayed in such excavations, allowing significant features to be added later.<sup>2</sup> As for the fact that the porch pillars in some of these caves have elaborated capitals, as well as added decoration on their shafts, this too is surely due to later “improvements” that would not have been planned when the caves were first underway.

The revisions which transformed the caves at the site, by turning them from mere dormitories into shrines, had a more evident effect on the smaller caves just considered, than on most of the Ajanta’s grander viharas. This is because many of the smaller caves were already more fully defined when this desired but disruptive transformation took place; but quite apart from their being smaller and thus able to progress toward completion faster, there seems to be another (and perhaps surprising) reason too. This is the fact that this revolutionary new idea appears to have impacted upon the larger and more impressive caves first. This matter is appropriately considered when we reach 466, but for the present we can note that the development of these larger caves is not nearly as disrupted by the transformation as were their smaller neighbors; indeed, especially in the case of the large interiors, much of the excavation was not accomplished until plans for the shrine had already been established. This is not to say that such major caves, which were well underway by 463/464, did not have to undergo significant changes once a shrine was added to them, but the presence of the shrine could now be more comfortably anticipated, since it would of course be located in the still barely penetrated rear area. Furthermore, various decorative forms and features, which would surely not have graced a mere dormitory, could now be planned in normal course, as the cave was readied for its new resident Buddha.

We can reconstruct the general appearance of major viharas such as Caves 16, 17, 4, 2 and Upper 6 partly on the basis of their expected

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, the rows of devotees beneath the main images in both Caves 1 and 4, not originally planned, could only be added because the level of the unfinished floor was still quite high when the design of the images was changed.

and conventional development, but also in relation to later additions and changes, the most crucial being the addition of the shrine—an addition that invariably required significant adjustments to the original plan, and indeed to the decoration, of the cave.

In 464 or 465 all of these caves, like the smaller ones earlier discussed, would have been fronted by a colonnade of “Hinayana” type pillars with octagonal shafts; only the shafts of those of Cave 2 and Upper 6 were later significantly “updated”. One might also note that elaborate bases were added to those of Cave 17; they were probably cut from the extra matrix that had been intentionally left around the shafts when they were first blocked out. This is a point of some interest since it was the presence of such extra matrix that later allowed the creation of the cave’s axial focus, as we shall see. The ribbed brackets of the capitals of the porches of Caves 16, 17, and 4 would also have been defined later, probably in 466, at which point they all were provided with 4.5 ribs.<sup>3</sup> In 464/465 the capitals would still have been only roughly defined, making such added designs possible.<sup>4</sup>

In 464, the porch ends of all viharas would still have been totally plain, with no expectation that cells would later be added at this point. In 464, the porch doorways would have had merely plain openings; all would be decorated later on, after caves became residences for the Buddha. It is reasonable to suppose that a certain portion of the pilared interior halls in these caves were underway at this time, since a number of the cells in 16, 17, and 4 were already reached prior to 468, while in Cave 2’s interior the front center pillars must have been defined before 466, since they have no axial emphasis—as would have been the case had a shrine already been conceived.

By 465, the great interior halls of Caves 16, 17, and 4 must have been in good part exposed, even though the cells along their walls had by and large not yet been penetrated; in this early phase of work at the site the cells were generally not started “in sequence”, but only undertaken after the walls had been more or less defined.<sup>5</sup> This is why, in Cave 17, and even more evidently in Cave 4, we find B-mode

<sup>3</sup> In Volume V, Ch 5, 66 and 184 I mistakenly state that Cave 4 capitals have 5.5, rather than 4.5 ribs.

<sup>4</sup> The capitals of the interior pillars of Cave Upper 6 were not defined until work was resumed after 475. Like the equally late finishing going on in Cave 5’s porch, they show only 3.5 ribs, as do the relevant porch pillars of Cave 23.

<sup>5</sup> In the latest caves, such as Cave 24 (see plan), cells would be started as soon as the excavators had opened up the aisle space.

cells—which were not developed until 468—near the front of the caves. That is, they were added to the developing cave in that year, well after the forward portions of the caves had already been roughed out; indeed even the rear parts of the cave would have been underway at the time that these cells were added. By the same token, the last cell defined in the earlier phase of work in Cave 16 was Cell L4, showing an unfinished B mode projection; but it is clear that when work on the cave broke off in 468, excavation had already proceeded well past this point, since the shrine antechamber pillars had already been cut when work suddenly stopped.

One surprising feature of the walls warrants special attention: in all of these three caves they splay outward as they approach the rear of the cave. That is, the rear aisle is considerably longer from its left to its right end than is the case in the front aisle; and even the positioning of the rear, as opposed to the front, pillars has to be adjusted in consequence. What has happened is that, due to the understandable inexperience of the excavators—after all, no one had cut such caves for some three hundred years—they were not able to control their cutting, as it proceeded from front to back. Almost unconsciously, they kept cutting a tiny bit too much away, with the effect that the wall surfaces little by little angled outward. By the time the rear of the cave was reached, the misalignment could amount to as much as a few feet, making the interior plan no longer the desired square, but an unexpected trapezoid. Such imprecision—a veritable sign of an early excavation date—is typical of the caves cut during the first few years of activity at the site. Remarkably, the problem could have been avoided by nothing more complex than taking a piece of string as the measure of the length of the front aisle, and using it as a check at point after point as work progressed toward the rear. But, obviously this was not done, at least in these early contexts. In later contexts the situation is different; there, these mistakes are a thing of the past, due to better discipline.

A similar situation is to be seen in the ceilings of the early caves; and here too the problem is most evident in the same larger caves, where the spaces and therefore the evidences of error are greater. In Cave 4, remarkably, the excavators' accumulating errors resulted in the cave's ceiling rising nearly five feet (!) from the front of the hall to the rear of the shrine; and of course the floor level would originally have shown a similar rise, having been made parallel to the ceiling by consistent measurement with something like a bamboo pole of the desired length. Thus when work was renewed in the cave in and after 475, and the

excavators were correcting these early errors by leveling the ceiling and the floor, the angled floor of the shrine had to be lowered nearly five feet! This was time-consuming and costly, but it made it possible to add the impressive rows of devotees flanking the wheel on the throne base; and since such devotees were a “required” feature in such late image groups the ultimate result was a happy one. At the same time, due ultimately to these original errors of measurement, the shrine, once its levels were corrected, was able to house the tallest Buddha at the site—an image far more impressive than the small and simple Buddha that would have been put here, had work on the cave not been interrupted by the Recession, late in 468.

In Cave 4, this remarkable upward angling must have been noticed by the excavators, although it was obviously not troubling enough to disturb them. It would seem that they allowed it, realizing that one’s perception of the angle is far from acute, because the whole cave—pillars included—took part in the “plot”, and lent support to it. However, the situation was different in the case of the ceiling of Cave 17. It was also exposed quite early, and was subject to similar error, but in this case it would appear that the official in charge of the excavation work was all too aware of the imprecisions of his chisellers. It is clear that either he, or the workers themselves, kept “correcting” their errors as work proceeded. Thus, where the ceiling level angled upward, they soon brought it down; and then, when it angled upward once again, they brought it down again. The result of these continual corrections was a “waviness” of surface, which has been quite inappropriately admired as an attempt to create the effect of a “flying carpet”, or a “shamiana”. Indeed, these “skillfully executed undulations” (Behl 1999, 156) are nothing more than evidences of the clumsy approach of the still somewhat incompetent early excavators.

Throughout 465 work on the various excavations was going on in normal course, with a gradually developing efficiency and increasing skill. But one particularly surprising thing happened that would significantly disturb the well-laid plans of the site’s two new caitya halls.

As we know, work on these two new caitya halls, Cave 26 and Cave 19, was by now well underway, for they were the focus of considerable attention. This was hardly surprising, since they were planned as the ceremonial centers for the site—one sponsored by the Asmakas, the other by the local Risika king, Upendragupta. Although both were based upon their more ancient prototypes—Caves 10 and 9 respectively—they were destined to renounce the austerity of their forebears

for the elaborate trappings of this later day. Of course, in 465, caves 19 and 26 were still being roughed out; no ornamentation and no imagery had yet been added. Indeed, no such detailing would be added until a few years hence (say in late 468 or early 469) in the case of Cave 19, while Cave 26, forced into abandonment in 468, would be totally bereft of all ornaments and iconic forms until after the Hiatus (i.e. starting in 475).

However, suddenly, in 465, the planners of these two most important caves received an unexpected shock. Word must have come down from the capital that the controlling officials had suggested, in fact decided, that the two caitya halls should be oriented to the solstices: Cave 19 to the winter solstice and Cave 26 to the summer. That is, the sun's rays as they appeared on the horizon at the very moment of dawn should coincide with the axis of the caves. Such a significant astrological alignment must have had both meaning and importance to those who gave the order, although the particular justification has been lost to us today; all we know is that the main temple in the old Vakataka capital of Vatsagulma (modern Basim) itself has such an alignment.<sup>6</sup>

This was all very well—or would have been, had the excavation of the two caves not already been started at a quite different angle. In fact, the cutting of both caves had proceeded to the point that the now “required” adjustment could not possibly be effected, as “required”, even by wrenching the caves out of their present alignment. In fact, the realignment was more or less achieved, without too much difficulty and given some highly expedient adjustments, in Cave 26, for that great hall had, purely by chance, been cut from the start at an angle only a few degrees different from that described by the summer solstice's rays. But in the case of Cave 19, the angle already deeply established by the cutting of the cave into the mountain was impossibly different from the orientation which, according to the authorities in the capital, was now required. To give some idea of the problem, the variance between the angle established by the already largely reamed out cave interior and the direction of the winter solstice's rays must have been something like 20 degrees, since even with the adjustment to the façade (discussed below) one must still account for the recalcitrant rightward position of the stupa, which must have been already roughed out when the order came down to the site.

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<sup>6</sup> See Volume V, Ch 5 (Cave 29), 347.

This order coming down from on high, and impossible of realization, is only one example of the not-uncommon disjunction between the demands of authority and the reality of execution—between the expectations of those who gave the orders and the frustrations of those who had to carry them out. There was often a disjunction between what was thought in the city or the court or the “abbey”, and what was done or attempted at the site. It was a continuing problem, as we have often noted, in Vakataka times; and even today, with better and faster modes of correspondence, it has been responsible for situations that are sometimes costly in terms of time, money, and conservation.

The specifics of the adjustments that the on-site planners made and in a sense *had* to make to satisfy the orders imposed upon them are discussed elsewhere. Here I shall give only a brief resume.

In Cave 26, happily, the deepest portions of the great hall had not been reamed out by this time, even though the interior’s angle was already fixed. Thus when the order came down the excavators were able to locate the stupa (still only roughly defined) forward almost two feet from its “normal” position. In fact, this would seem to be the only caitya hall in India where the space around the stupa is not equidistant at left, rear, and right.<sup>7</sup> They then shifted it about seven inches to the right.<sup>8</sup> The manner in which the stupa is “warped” in shape suggests that this rightward shift was not accomplished when the stupa was brought forward, but was created by taking advantage of the extra matrix (present before its final definition) to shift it as much as possible to the right. Then, at the same time, by adjusting the frame of the great inner arch under the outer vault rightward in relation the outer façade arch, the planners were able to rather subtly achieve the desired solstice alignment through the “sun-window” to the stupa. Of course the stupa no longer has the expected alignment with the doorway. This is not fundamentally important (even if desirable) for establishing the true solstitial axis; however it is of interest to note that the left reveal of the doorway has been subtly angled inward, slightly enlarging the view

<sup>7</sup> See appended chart (Fig. 46) with plans of various caitya halls.

<sup>8</sup> Cave 26 is the only caitya hall known to me where the stupa is not “properly” centered (Fig. 46). The stupa in Cave 19 would have been similarly adjusted had it not been too late to do this when the “solstitial” order arrived at the site; as it was, it was somewhat twisted to achieve a better orientation.

into the cave on the left. Thus, as one comes straight into the cave, the stupa *appears* to be properly centered, even though in reality it is not.<sup>9</sup>

If the adjustments made in Cave 26 were not only relatively successful but also not excessively disruptive, Cave 19 presented much greater difficulties. Fortunately (from an esthetic point of view) the interior pillars and the stupa itself had already been roughed out by the time the order came down to the site, so there was no way that they could be significantly repositioned. However, the carvers did what they could to urge the stupa to the left, to gain a degree or two toward the required alignment: its upper elements are shifted leftward as much as possible and even the Buddha image stands slightly to the left, while the whole stupa base is wrenched into a leftward asymmetry. In the same way, the pillars toward the cave's left rear were "squeezed" a few inches leftward in the process of cutting their matrix away while decorating them, thus conforming with (see plan!) the reshaping of the stupa. At the same time, to keep the space around the stupa a consistent width, the pillar (L7) just to the left of the stupa is slightly reduced in size.

As for the exterior of Cave 19, the portico must still have been largely unrevealed when the troubling order arrived. This is hardly surprising, since excavation would have started at the top of the cave, with removal of debris via the great arch's opening—just as can still be seen in the unfinished Cave 29. Therefore, now, when it was finally cut, it was no longer on axis with the stupa, as would have been the case before any adjustments were demanded; instead, it has been angled in the "solstitial" direction to a slight but significant degree. Even so, it does not reach the proper solstitial alignment; and this may be due to its having been already roughed out to such a degree when the new orientation was demanded that it could not be twisted into alignment more than it is at present. At the same time, it is possible that the planners resisted angling it too much because of the strange appearance that this would create.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> By "straight into the cave" I mean walking directly between the central porch pillars when aligned with the porch doorway. The stupa, in such an approach, is off center, as is even more evident in Cave 19.

<sup>10</sup> The visual axis of the cave established by sighting directly through (i.e. bisecting) Cave 19's portico and doorway was measured by Dr. J. McKim Malville in 1990 (adjusting for precession) was -10.5 degrees away from line of the winter solstice. However, the portico itself has been adjusted in a (helpless) attempt to wrench the whole cave in the desired direction, leaving the stupa (itself somewhat "wrenched" out of its originally intended position) located somewhat to the right.



What the excavators did finally manage to do was to drastically warp the façade, curving it outward toward the left (and consequently thickening the cave's front wall) in a truly startling way. This is clear on Burgess's old plan, where the angling of the left façade in relation to the apparent axis of the cave is some 15 degrees.<sup>11</sup> This is evident on plan, and equally evident when one "sights" along the cave's front from the extreme right end of the façade toward the warped plane of the left. Significantly, it is at the point of greatest curvature, at the façade left, that the cave finally satisfies the "impossible" solstitial demands. The sun's rays, at dawn on the winter solstice, fall directly—that is, at a ninety degree angle—upon the point of greatest curvature on the façade. There can be no other explanation for this curious curvature, in a cave that was originally planned with everything intended to be perfectly symmetrical and in orderly alignment.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> I have depended upon Burgess's plan and my own rough observations at the site, to suggest that the angling of the left façade is about 15 degrees; but this must be considered as approximate. At the same time, the rightward position of the recalcitrant stupa, which had already been roughed by the time these difficult changes were demanded, would require us to add another 5 degrees or so to our estimate; this makes an angling of approximately 20 degrees total displacement from the originally intended axis of the cave.

<sup>12</sup> My article "Ajanta's Chronology: Solstitial Evidence" (Spink 1985) explains the adjustments to Cave 19 properly, in my opinion, but the measurements that I used are totally unreliable, the result of my own persistent confusion. This was pointed out to me, most gently, by Professor J. Mckim Malville, who took theodolite readings at the site. However, our readings were taken from across the ravine, with the central porch pillars of both Cave 19 and Cave 26 aligned with the porch doorways beyond. At that point we assumed that the stupas would be located upon the axes established in this way, even though we could not see deep into the caves from across the ravine. In fact, as we now know, in neither cave was this the case. Thus the measurements that we made did not define the actual solstitial axes of either cave, which turn out to be quite different from what one sees when the caves are viewed from directly in front.

## 466 A SIGNAL YEAR FOR INNOVATIONS AT THE SITE

466 is a signal year at the site, for this is when a number of remarkable new ideas impacted upon it.

One idea might seem rather unimportant at first, but we should note its effect throughout the caves. That is, a very sensible new innovation made its appearance during this year, by virtue of which, throughout the site, simple single cells were now—as if by rule—cut into the previously “blank” porch ends. Although such additions were not possible in all the caves, because they often abutted their neighbors, these additional cells, where they could be added, provided a number of extra places where the monks, in this rapidly developing site, would be able to live. Quite apart from this, it must have pleased the patrons and the planners to make such good use of previously “wasted” space, for it must have already been evident that housing was to be a matter of prime concern.

Although it appears that it was the unthinking following of Hinayana precedents that kept the planners from earlier putting cells in the porches, it was such a sensible idea that we can easily believe that such additions would soon have taken place in any case. However, the precipitating factor was probably due to problems that the planner encountered in Cave 11. As noted above, that cave, by error, was located too close to the ancient Cave 10, and as a consequence the three cells on its right side could not be cut. To make up for this loss, the planner, perhaps needing to assuage the anger of his patron, or the concerns of the monastic community waiting for residences, now “relocated” the missing cells, even though with considerable difficulty, in the porch. Indeed, he even added one more, as if to compensate for the loss of the hall’s rear center cell, which he must have known was soon going to be taken over and transformed in order to make a proper place for the cave’s new shrine.

Since it was at this very time that the placement of cells at the previously unused porch ends became an insistent convention throughout the site, it seems reasonable to assume that the innovation of the planner in Cave 11 sparked the new trend, rapidly affecting Cave 4, 15, 16, 17, 20, 26, 26LW, and 27. However, the convention of adding such single cells at the porch ends was short-lived. By 468, only complex pillared

cells would be placed in such areas, and this usage becomes standard after 475 not only for porch end cells but for other complex cells in the cave interiors. Indeed, in a few cases the planners, now dissatisfied with the already old-fashioned single cells, converted them to the more complex forms by cutting the new pillared fronts out of their front walls. This transformation is usually revealed by the fact that the new pillars are thinner than expected, since early front cell walls (as opposed to late ones) were relatively thin.

It was in this busy year, 466, that a revolution occurred at the site; for it was in this year that the startling concept of adding shrines to the viharas—of in fact converting the viharas *into* shrines—had its dramatic impact on the site. Now, every vihara that was actively underway, as well as any new viharas started, had to be planned, or re-planned, with a shrine as its central focus. Although at Ajanta today, every one of these shrines contains a Buddha image, the shrines as conceived in 466, and indeed right up to the end of 468, were all to have a stupa, not an image, as their focus of worship. That we see no such stupas in the shrines today is but one more witness to the rapidity and force of change at the site; for stupas almost immediately yielded to Buddha images as the focus of the caves.

This must have been a time of great ferment within the religious establishment both at the site and in the region in general. The idea of adding an image to the front of the stupa in both Cave 19 and Cave 26 was a dramatic departure from the traditions of the past, and was clearly dependent upon a crucial decision at the highest levels in the Buddhist establishment. By the same token, the idea of putting stupas in the viharas, and then, almost immediately, “replacing” them with Buddha images throughout the site, was an equally important departure from the past, and one which was to revolutionize the modes, and even the location, of worship throughout the site.

Another development of great importance at the site made, perhaps not by coincidence, in 466, was the beginning of work on Cave 1. This grand conception was to be the offering of the emperor Harisena to the site. For although Harisena, like his forebears, was almost certainly a Saivite, he was wise enough as a ruler, and ecumenical enough in his persuasions, to “get in on the act” at Ajanta, for political as well as for personal reasons; for Ajanta was clearly a cultural force, as well as a cultural projection. We must remember, too, that his own Prime Minister, and the major feudatories responsible for the development of the site, were followers of the Buddha. Similarly, the other major

area that he had inherited at the time of his accession, was Anupa, the location of the Buddhist caves at Bagh, a site of almost equivalent importance, although ruinous today.

In fact, it may well have been the situation at Bagh that was responsible for the convention-shattering conversion of caves—at first intended to be mere dormitories—into sacred shrines. At Bagh, as explained elsewhere, the friable nature of the sandstone—so much weaker than Ajanta's basalt—apparently made it impossible to excavate the expected caitya hall at the site. Probably for this reason the huge Cave 2 was converted into a "caitya hall" (a hall with a "caitya" or object of worship) by the addition of a chamber with a stupa—that is, a stupa shrine—at the center rear. Although Bagh Cave 2 had been conceived as a mere dormitory, to which a stupa was expediently added, the slightly later caves at Bagh were intended to be shrines from the start, since their interiors have the expected axial focus.

It may well have been the compelling influence of these developments at Bagh that revolutionized Ajanta as well; and the medium of transition may have been Harisena himself, via the counsel of his advisers. This is because his great Cave 1, with its decisively conceived plan, was probably the very first vihara at Ajanta to have been planned from the start with a shrine. And although Cave 1's shrine today contains a fine Buddha image, it was almost certainly originally intended to house a stupa. This is suggested by what now appears to be its retardatory shrine layout; its intended (centralized) plan was appropriate for a stupa, and for the ritual of *pradakshina*, but not at all for a Buddha figure, which can be properly seen and worshipped only from in front.

In fact, it was not the shrine of Cave 1 alone that, like its precedents at Bagh, was planned with a stupa as its focus. It is almost certainly the case that every shrine being planned over the course of the next two years was similarly conceived. We do not think of this now, because the Buddha images themselves have arrested our attention; but the fact is, that until after 475 every shrine was planned (even if the plan was never fully realized) with a "vestigial" central block. This clearly represents the retention of past usages, when the stupa was the object of choice. In fact, although (for reasons suggested below) stupas rapidly yield to Buddha images late in 468, an abandoned stupa backs the completed image in Cave 11, while the image in Cave Lower 6 may well have been cut from a block originally shaped to hold a stupa. Indeed, even when the priority of the image had long been established, the splendid Buddhas in Caves 1 and 4 and 17, were all still carved upon, and

constrained by, unwanted central blocks inherited from their past, as we shall see in due course.<sup>1</sup>

One other major development that must be mentioned took place in 466. This was when Cave 21, the first of the fine viharas associated with the Asmaka's caitya hall (Cave 26) was laid out and the initial stages of its excavation begun. At the same time, plans for the adjacent Cave 23 must have been laid. Characteristically, to conserve space, they were laid out as close to each other as possible, although the planners were careful to see that sufficient space was allowed between the two for their abutting cells, including the newly conventional single cells which were to be cut at the porch ends. Nonetheless, as we shall see, these plans had to be changed in the next year or two, with some drastic consequences.

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<sup>1</sup> The images in Caves 7, 15, and 20 were rushed to completion before their shrines could be properly carved, so that they do not have the expected centralized shrine. For discussion see Volume V Ch 5 (Caves 7, 20).

## 467 WORK CONTINUES IN NORMAL COURSE

The excitement created in 466 by the idea that viharas could now be supplied with shrines continues in 467, although it would appear that the privilege of adding them was at first reserved for the site's major undertakings alone, as if the creation of such shrines was to be the privilege of the elite. It is evident that the transformation could have been effected quite rapidly in many of the lesser viharas, where by 467 or even 466 the rear areas had already been reached, or nearly reached, in the course of excavation. However, in none of these caves had the shrines been started; nor would they be, until 468 or even early 469—the very point at which work on them was interrupted by the Recession. This group would include Caves Lower 6, 7, 8 (?), 11, 15, 26, 26LW, and 26RW.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, in the more monumental caves, such as Cave 1, 4, 16, 17, and the Ghatotkacha vihara work went on apace, as the interiors were opened up and the new shrine area was gradually approached. However, only in the relatively late Cave 1 (as I have suggested somewhat tentatively above) was the presence of the shrine anticipated from the start. That is, I am suggesting that in Cave 1 the axial focus achieved by the widening of the intercolumniation of the front and rear center pillars was part of the original plan. In all of the other major caves, as the still-rough pillars of the interior were trimmed down to their present state, the front and rear center pairs had to be “squeezed” slightly outward, to create the desired axial focus—the kind of emphasis that was already conventional in the porch colonnade to appropriately focus upon the doorway. This process, in the cave interiors, would have been started as early as 466—as soon as shrines were anticipated—and would have continued in 467, at which time the whole cave interiors would still have been very rough. As we know from the evidence of such still-incomplete interiors as those of Caves 5 and 24 a very considerable amount of matrix was left enclosing the projected pillars at an early stage in their definition. Thus such later

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<sup>1</sup> The excavation of Caves 2, Upper 6, and 21, all started somewhat later, had not reached the shrine area at this time.

adjustments were very possible, not only for the central pair but for the other front and rear pillars, which could be slightly repositioned at the same time to achieve a more balanced spacing.<sup>2</sup>

Only in Cave 2, Cave Lower 6, and Cave Upper 6 do we not find an axial focus achieved by such a widening of the front and rear intercolumniations in the interior. However, this is because the position of the pillars had already been fixed in those interiors before the idea of adding shrines had developed. The desired axial focus in these caves had to be otherwise achieved: for instance, multiple painted medallions mark the axis of Caves 2 and Lower 6, while in both Cave 2 and Cave Upper 6 the shrine antechamber pillars have elaborate brackets. Had Cave Upper 6's hall ever been painted, the shrine would probably have been further stressed.

The rethinking of the porch plans at the site, started in 466 with the insistent addition of simple cells to the previously "useless" porch ends, now continued with yet another innovation. As mentioned earlier, starting in 467 no one wanted such simple porch end cells anymore. They wanted a new and complex variant, with a pillared vestibule fronting the residence cell behind. All newly undertaken porches would now have this new type of pillared residence cell, which was added to previously excavated porches wherever possible, sometimes even by incorporating the previous simple cell into the new complex, as noted above. The inclusion of such complexes in the porches, which probably find their source in the affronted pillared court cells of Cave 1, as well as in the pillared complexes inside Cave 7, starts in 467/468 and continues throughout the rest of the site's development.<sup>3</sup>

The pillared complexes in Caves 21, 26, 26LW, and 27 were probably all started as single cells in 467/468; but all were converted to pillared complexes between 475 and 477. The pillared complexes in Caves 2, 5 (unfinished), Upper 6, 14 (unfinished), 23 (unfinished), 24 (unfinished), and 28 (anticipated) were all excavated between 475 and 477. The pillared court cells of Cave 19 were cut in 470/471.

In fact, the "requirement" for the inclusion of such pillared complexes at the porch ends of all new caves, turns out to have a dramatic impact on the developments now going on in the western (Asmaka) section of

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<sup>2</sup> See Volume V, Ch 5 (Cave 16), 187; (Cave 4), 65/66.

<sup>3</sup> For the somewhat unfinished (undecorated) complexes in Cave 7, see Volume V, Cave 7.

the site. We have seen that when Caves 21 and 23 were laid out in 466, it was assumed that each would have a simple single cell at either end of the porch. But by 467, when Cave 21's porch was actually under excavation, taste and/or convention required the new type of pillared complex in these positions.

Of course the problem was one of space. When Caves 21 and 23 were "on the drawing board", the planners were careful as always to make the most efficient use of space possible. This was in part to allow sufficient room for the anticipated caves (23 and 24) which were to be placed between Caves 21 and the great Cave 26 complex. When the excavators began work on the pillared complex at the left of the porch in Cave 21, they knew that the space was in fact insufficient, so they carefully reduced its size a bit to save as much space as possible, at the same time shifting Cave 23 some ten feet to the left, a process then possible because at that point only the façade plane had been revealed.<sup>4</sup> But by the time this was done, the Hiatus had started, and Cave 23, for the time being had to be left untouched.

In the meantime, Cave 24 was being laid out, and this presented serious problems. In order to make room for the now required porch complexes at the abutting ends of Caves 23 and 24 a much wider span of rock had to be left than had been the case between Caves 21 and 23.<sup>5</sup> In fact, this enlargement, together with the fact that Cave 23 had been shifted to the left by ten feet, meant that the porch complex at the left of the huge Cave 24 had to penetrate some twenty feet into the right side of the Cave 26 complex—a decision which the patron Buddhahadra (apparently responsible for this whole sequence of caves) obviously allowed. In fact, he must have planned this surprising "invasion" of his old cave complex; for otherwise he could have reduced the size of Cave 24, to make it fit.

Of course Cave 24 (and Caves 21 and 23 as well) were mostly developed from 475 on; now, in 467, they were barely started, but these crucial decisions were made at this time; and this had a great effect on the old Cave 25—the upper right wing of the great Cave 26 complex.

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<sup>4</sup> One result of this shift is the "useless" stretch of ten feet at the right side of the repositioned façade. It has nothing to do with providing access to Cave 22; Cave 22 was not even conceived until almost ten years later.

<sup>5</sup> This is very clear when one views these Asmaka viharas from across the ravine.



Cave 25 was a small, clumsy and inconveniently located early undertaking, not really a well integrated part of the Cave 26 complex at all. It seems clear that Buddhabhadra was happy to sacrifice it (and essentially abandon the lower right wing too) in the interest of making the huge, up-to-date, and splendidly conceived Cave 24 instead. He was sacrificing a hovel for a palace, and at the same time making it possible to house nearly three times as many monks in the new cave as would have been possible in the old. Of course Cave 24 was never finished, but that is a story for a later date.

## 468 AJANTA'S FIRST BUDDHA IMAGES

In 468, the various caves gradually were reaching the point—even if none were yet completed—where the monks could move in. And happily, a workable, even if hardly ideal, mode of fitting the doors was now finally developed, after years of making just plain openings with no provisions for closure. This innovation was the B mode, in which a monolithic projection at the top, matched with a hole at the doorway base, held the pivoting door.<sup>1</sup> For anyone trying to puzzle out the development of the site, the B mode fitting gives essential clues, because it had just come into use when the Hiatus—caused by the Risika/Asmaka strife—caused the stoppage of work on the majority of caves at the site. Since many of the B mode fittings were never used, or were later replaced, one can often determine that work on the caves involved broke off at this very point, providing a useful benchmark in the site's development.<sup>2</sup>

Of far greater interest to those concerned with the site's religious development, as opposed to that of technological features, another startling change is taking place at this point. This is the transformation of the projected (but not realized) shrines from ones planned with a stupa in the center, to ones where (at least at first) a Buddha image would be carved on the front of the (now useless!) central block. In fact, as suggested earlier, it is reasonable to conclude that every shrine underway up until 468 was originally going to contain a stupa. However, in the end only one shrine actually does have a stupa in it. This is Cave 11, probably the first shrine to have been started (in 467/468). Cave 11's stupa was clearly its original focus.<sup>3</sup> But it is equally significant that this stupa was never finished. In fact, it was abandoned in favor of an image carved from the same matrix, which is composed in such a way that its untypically large halo in fact hides the unfinished stupa. This

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<sup>1</sup> Actually, the B mode, as well as the C mode, were used centuries before in the Hinayana caves, but were not replicated in the earliest Vakataka caves.

<sup>2</sup> For extended explanation and discussion of the various doorway modes, see Volume V, 228–230 and Fig. 36. Also Volume VI, forthcoming.

<sup>3</sup> For arguments that Cave 20's shrine was the first undertaken, see Volume V; Cave 20.

would seem to represent the moment of transition from stupa to image. The stupa was apparently started in normal course sometime in 468, but was abandoned when the Buddha image was started, probably in early 469.<sup>4</sup>

This same transformation had taken place in the development of Ajanta's caitya halls slightly earlier; and appears to have sparked a virtual revolution throughout the site. However, such a sudden conceptual shift from the stupa to the Buddha image could not have happened without the involvement and approval of the Buddhist sangha, for such a change must have required new rituals both on the part of the monks themselves, as well as for the public. There is no way to know whether the monastic authority at the site was powerful enough to facilitate this drastic change, or whether the authorization as well as the encouragement came from the Vakataka capital or other cities. However, we can well imagine that the powerful Buddhahadra himself was responsible for initiating such changes in the caves under his jurisdiction, perhaps with the advice of other monks, including "the monks Dharmadatta as well as—my good pupil Bhadrabandhu" (Cave 26 inscription, vs. 14) In any case, the development of the stupa alone in his cave, over the course of less than two decades, is revealing. When Cave 26 was first undertaken, its "caitya" was probably nothing more than a plain stupa, as in all previous caitya halls throughout India. It was probably not until about 467 or even 468 that an image was planned to front the stupa. But as explained elsewhere, this was probably a standing Buddha, never in fact carved. The present seated figure was not cut until a decade later, in 477/478.

When the impressive caitya halls at the site, Cave 19 and Cave 26, were started, it is reasonable to assume that they were to have nothing more than stupas—plain stupas, without their present images fronting them—as their focus. This was traditional for such halls, and even in the slightly earlier "transformed" vihara 2 at Bagh (and also in the related vihara 4) the stupa had no figure attached to it; that came only later, in Bagh 7, surely under the influence of what was happening at Ajanta. Indeed, as noted above, the plans conceived (but not yet realized) for the first shrines at Ajanta, starting in about 466, also suggest that they were traditional stupa shrines—the stupa located at shrine center—with no provision for fronting images.

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<sup>4</sup> See Volume V, Ch 5, Cave 11.

However, by the time that the stupas in both Cave 19 and Cave 26 at Ajanta had been roughed out—perhaps about 466 or 467—it is clear that they were being planned for “revealed” images, since they were provided with projecting fronts. And since there were no secrets at such a busy developing site, it would have soon been known that images, not the stupas that revealed them, would soon be the focus of worship in these great halls. One can therefore understand why suddenly, in the various viharas, the interest and the focus shifted to the figure of the Buddha himself, following the precedent established in the two caitya halls. In fact, it is fair to say that Ajanta’s patrons now rushed, wherever they could, to avail themselves of the privilege of being able to house a living Buddha in their shrines.

#### 469 (EARLY): THE PRIVILEGED LESSER CAVES' SHRINES MADE (LOWER 6, 7, 11, 15)

A general break in activity drastically affected the site in early 469. The troublesome Asmakas had just been expelled from the region, and now, concerned that these powerful antagonists would soon come back in force, the local king apparently issued a sumptuary edict, putting a stop to all patronage activity at the site, except for work on his own caves and on that of his overlord, Harisena. (Work on his Prime Minister's Cave 16 was also able to continue briefly, as noted below.) The only minor exceptions to Upendragupta's sumptuary pronouncement involved four relatively modest caves in which the images could be rushed to completion within a few weeks. These four patrons were obviously given a special dispensation, but with the proviso that they get their images done very quickly, and that their workers concentrate on the images alone, not on their architectural context.<sup>1</sup>

The situation was quite different in the Asmaka caves. There, both the main stupa with its projected image and the images in both of the lower wings could have been rapidly completed in a short time. However, this was not possible now, because the Asmakas were so peremptorily expelled. Indeed, the very fact these images were not brought to completion at this time is further convincing evidence of the Asmaka expulsion, for it would be hard to explain in any other way.

It would seem to be the case that a stupa—traditionally—had been planned for the shrine of Cave Lower 6, probably being underway in 468, before the compulsion for Buddha images had had its full impact on the site. However, if this is true, then the stone reserved for the stupa, in the center of the shrine, was recut into a Buddha image early in 469. The curiously untypical carved lotus medallion over the Buddha's head looks suspiciously like a somewhat transformed umbrella, of the type often found directly above carved stupas in earlier shrines.

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<sup>1</sup> Although, in Caves 7, 11, and 15 little more was done than get the image finished, in Cave Lower 6 the rear wall of the hall and the shrine/shrine antechamber were almost fully painted in early 469; however further (more time-consuming) work with the chisel was avoided. All of the walls at the rear of Cave Lower 6, left very rough, were "finished" with a thick layer of mud-plaster.

The Buddha image in Cave 7 is a study in expediency. When the permission was given which allowed it to be carved, if carved quickly, the excavators merely opened up the shrine area in a most cursory way, carving the Buddha, with essentially no context, at the focal point of a womb-like space. Only the image itself and the figures on the base were carved at this time; the halo and throne motifs must have been painted in.

The image in Cave 15 was treated with a similar expediency. The shrine chamber was still not fully cut when the image was carved within it. It was so hastily revealed (and presumably painted and dedicated) that its base motifs were never finished. Like the image in Cave 7, it was reworked (and presumably rededicated) nearly ten years later.

The last of these four privileged images—the one in Cave 11—has been discussed earlier. It too, having been created by a sculptor both careless and inexperienced, was also refurbished late in the site's history.

That the sculptors responsible for the four “allowed” images sometimes made mistakes is hardly surprising. The Cave 11 image's torso was apparently cut too thin, and was “corrected” with mud later on, while the feet of both this image and that in Cave 7 appear to have been trimmed too harshly in the course of cutting—thus requiring slight plaster reconstructions. The truth is that by 468/469, when these Buddha figures were being revealed, few figural or even decorative carving had been created at the site. Almost the only exceptions are the fine carved doorways in Caves Lower 6 (both porch and shrine), 7, 15 (porch), and 16 (porch), all apparently cut in 468 itself, in anticipation of the related shrines being completed too.

If work had been progressing vigorously and confidently throughout 468, by the beginning of 469 it had stopped precipitously not only on the Asmaka caves at the western extremity of the site, but almost as decisively on the majority of the Vakataka caves along the site's main scarp. The suddenly affected caves (including the four given a brief release) upon which work would not start up again until at least 475, were: Cave 2, 4, 5, Lower 6, Upper 6, 7, 8, 11, 15, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 26LW, 26RW, 27. That is, of the caves underway at this time, only the “royal” caves 1, 17, 19, 20 and (briefly) the Prime Minister's Cave 16, were able, or allowed, to continue in the development.

Perhaps surprisingly, in only two of these “interrupted” caves had the planned program of painting been started in 468. In Cave 11, the splendid bodhisattvas flanking the porch doorway were completed, as

were the porch pillars and the beautiful porch and eave ceilings. However, the hall itself was merely plastered, the painting being limited to that of the Buddha image when it was rushed to completion in early 469. Cave Lower 6, on the other hand, was almost fully painted at this time, the hall ceiling and the left and right walls already having been completed in 468. Because so much painting was already accomplished and perhaps in anticipation of better preparing the cave for worship (for which the cave was indeed used), most of the rear area of Cave Lower 6—not just the image alone—was painted in these anxious early days of 469. However, this relatively extensive painting—which abruptly broke off before the very back of the shrine was decorated—was evidently done when the patron was under great pressure, since the wall in the rear of the cave had not been properly smoothed before the thick surfacing of plaster was applied.

This is in striking contrast to the fine way that the left and right side walls were smoothed, reflecting the procedures found in the Hinayana caves, which influenced such early Vakataka undertakings in so many ways. However, in the Hinayana caves the surfacing was done either with expensive lime plaster or with a very fine mix of mudplaster, and for this reason was applied in a very thin layer on the appropriately smooth surface. In the Vakataka period, a coarser plaster was generally used, especially for walls and ceiling, and this plaster actually held much better against a somewhat coarser stone surface. Since it was obviously faster and cheaper to leave the surface slightly rough, it is hardly surprising that the trend at the site in this later phase was more and more toward surfaces having a greater “tooth”.

On the rear hall wall of Cave Lower 6, left purposely rough due to the pressures of time, a very thick layer of plaster was needed to hide the poorly finished wall surface; and because this caused a particular problem where the thick plaster came up to the openings of the cell doorways, the planner very ingeniously made the transition much neater by cutting an outer recess around each of the cell doorways, giving them all quite neatly trimmed borders. It is characteristic of the trends of taste at the site that such borders, never found in earlier cell doorways, now came to be invariably used in all later caves at the site,, even where they were in no sense required to “excuse” the treatment of the surrounding walls.

It seems evident that the Cave Lower 6 image was in worship for some time, because the shrine/shrine antechamber area is highly begrimed. On the other hand, although the alternating ceiling squares

and circles that define the cave's axial approach were each fitted with a garland hook, there is no breakage around them, so it is quite certain that they were not used. The same may be true of the carefully inset hooks at the top of the eight axial pillars, but this is hard to know for sure. The fact that the cells were not fitted with doors, or provided with the standard amenities until 475 or after, might suggest that no monks were living in it prior to that time, even although worship was surely going on in the shrine.



## PRIME MINISTER VARAHADEVA'S CAVE 16

In early 469, when the images in the four relatively minor caves discussed above were being rushed to completion, as if by a special agreement with the local king, work on the Prime Minister's impressive Cave 16 was also continuing. But this work was obviously done under great pressure, involving not only time-saving shortcuts but often a decline in quality. Just why the powerful minister, perhaps the chief architect of Ajanta's renaissance, who proudly claims in his inscription to have "governed the country righteously" (Cave 16 inscription, vs 20) could not bring his own cave to completion in this very period when work was continuing on the royal caves, is something of a mystery. That he felt seriously pressed is evidenced by the fact that he gave up the whole project (for the present) after what would appear to be less than a year of work. Furthermore, throughout the course of the work done in 469, he ordered continual shortcuts, as we shall see.

Until the start of the Recession and the breakdown of communication between the opposing rulers of Risika and Asmaka, Varahadeva's Cave 16 had progressed vigorously and authoritatively. Indeed, later in 468, just before the Recession struck at the beginning of 469, the fine painting of the porch pillars and lateral porch ceiling areas had begun, while the minister's sculptors had created the beautiful figures on the porch doorway. However, the high quality of these undertakings stands in almost shocking contrast with most of the allied work begun in early 469. As if suddenly no one had time, or no one cared, the beautifully carved porch doorway is slathered with a reddish two-tone design bereft of significant detail. The same painter hastily completed the sloppily executed medallion painted at the center of the porch ceiling. The square frame of the medallion is painted thinly over some of the earlier ceiling design, so we know that this central section is later than the much finer lateral portions. This was not the normal procedure, but can be explained by realizing that in 468, when the porch ceiling was started, the scaffolding put up for the porch doorway obscured the central area of the porch ceiling.

One might also note that a similarly unconventional and unhappy rush is evidenced by the treatment of the left aisle doorway, which still had not been recessed at the back when its reveal and the adjacent

wall to the left was plastered and then painted—obviously in 469. The painting on the wall—the Descent of the Buddha—is so beautiful that one might wish to ascribe it to 468 rather than to the troubled 469. However, this is not possible, given the fact that the aisle doorway in question was not finished before the plastering and painting was undertaken. However, even though the times were troubled and work had to be hurried, this painter retained his high standards; so one should not come to any single or hasty conclusion about the quality of work necessarily being affected by external pressures.

This area is revealing in another regard too. It seems clear that the abnormally high aisle doorways cut in both Cave 16 and Cave 17 were not included in the authorized plan made up in the capital, but that they might have been heightened at the site to allow more light into the cave. In any case, when the Descent scene was to be placed in this area in Cave 16, it did not fit. It must have been laid out (perhaps sketched on cloth) by some artist or planner who had no idea that the original aisle doorways had been extended in height. Then when it was time to put it on the wall, a significant portion of the composition extended over what was now empty space. Rather than have to redo the composition (which must have been officially authorized), workers filled in the “missing” space instead by inserting a stone slab (there were notches cut to hold it on either side) and filling the area above it with mudplaster. This filler has, understandably, long since fallen away, so that certain painted forms just above the once-filled spot now are partially missing: for instance, the halo of the Buddha seen just over the space in question lacks a body beneath.

Interestingly, the same problem, and the same solution, is very visible in the heightened left aisle doorway of Cave 17, as well as in the treatment of the Wheel of Life on the adjacent wall to the left.<sup>1</sup> These have been discussed in detail elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

While this first fine and then (generally) bad work was going on in the Cave 16 porch in 468 and 469 respectively, the same situation was to be seen in the cave's interior—that is, in the front aisle of Cave 16. In 468 (or possibly 467) work had begun on this most elaborate and impressive carved ceiling at the site. Although only a portion—that in

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<sup>1</sup> There is no right aisle doorway in Cave 17, an anomalous “window” taking its place.

<sup>2</sup> Volume V, Ch 5, Cave 17, 216/218.

the front aisle—was completed, it was originally part of Varahadeva's grand plan—appropriate for his eminent status—to make this now-transformed dormitory into the most impressive “palace” at the site for the resident Buddha. All that was ever accomplished, however, was the remarkably rich *faux* ceiling in the front aisle, with its elaborate architectonic structure, and its splendid population of assertively rendered figures—figure carvings that number among the earliest at the site, dating to the vigorous context of 468.

The porch doorway appears to have been planned as a variant of the B mode, as in Cave Lower 6 and Cave 20 shrine doorways, where a projecting monolithic beam holds the pivot holes; however as its roughness suggests, it had not been put into use when time ran out in 469, and was converted to its present D mode form in 475 or after.

Traces of cut-away beams on the left and right aisle walls, and the presence of important bracket figures on the inner faces of the pillar capitals would seem to suggest that the whole cave ceiling was to be treated in the same elaborate way as was done in the front aisle. This makes sense, because the front aisle, throughout the site, is always of particularly low priority, so it is very unlikely that it alone would have been so elaborated. In any case, it seems clear that just as this front aisle ceiling was being completed (a few details are still rough), the troubles of early 469 began, and therefore the beginnings of any such elaborate ceilings in the left and right aisles (apparently just the areas toward the front of these side aisles) was summarily cut away, and any plans for such a ceiling in the rest of the cave given up. The only details that remains to suggest the intended complexity of the central ceiling are the two supporting dwarfs carved on the rear of the capitals of pillars L1 and R1 of the front aisle. They would hardly have been cut at these points if the complex decoration of the central hall ceiling had not been once intended. In fact, their positioning suggests that it is possible that all of the remaining (now excised) capitals of the left, rear, and right aisles were going to be decorated with such carved supporting dwarfs, and that the matrix later cut away had been intended for this purpose.

In any case, remarkably, the still-rough bracket capitals on all of the pillars in the left and right aisle—no matter how their decoration was intended—were summarily cut off in the rush of 469. The pillars of the rear aisle were similarly simplified although, since like many of the elements in the rear of the cave, they would not have been fully exposed in 469. Therefore the transition to the beam above could be

made without the subtly angled adjustments seen at the tops of the left and right aisle pillars, made to more conventionally connect with the stone beam above.

Before 469 had progressed much farther, Varahadeva had urged the painters to begin, but to honor speed rather than care and quality. Just as the beautifully carved porch doorway finished in 468 was now, in 469, most cursorily painted, the now much simplified pillars of the hypostyle were decorated with a similar laxity. One need only compare the painting of these pillars or of the porch doorway to the pillars and porch doorway of Cave 17 to see the difference between Cave 16's rushed character, and Upendragupta's high-class efforts, aimed at revealing the taste and generosity and power of its patron.

In the untoward haste that was so affecting, or infecting, Cave 16, even the normal and sensible procedural patterns were sometimes violated: in the left aisle, the ceiling, although plastered, was never painted, while the left wall (and also the right) were plastered and, at least in their more forward sections, were painted, before the excavators had properly smoothed their upper reaches; the surprising roughness on the wall near the ceiling level can surely be explained as evidence of the earlier-intended complex structure, started (as expected) toward the front, having been hastily cut away. Farther down the plastered wall—and the same is true at the right—the program of painting suddenly breaks off, just as does the excavation of the barely penetrated shrine antechamber—upon which work would begin again almost a decade later.

However, the mystery remains as to why the powerful minister, who claims that he himself “governed the country righteously” (Cave 16 inscription, vs 20) was not able to get his own cave completed, and with a ministerial care and quality. Perhaps the very pressures upon him in these troubled times—for the Asmakas were a threat not only to the region but also to the empire—relegated his involvements at Ajanta to a low point on his scale of priorities and expenditures. This would seem to be equally suggested by the fact that when work throughout the site started up again in 475, the renaissance of enthusiasm which then occurred did not extend to Varahadeva himself or to his Cave 16. Surprisingly, he did not order work to begin again until 477; and then he concentrated his efforts almost exclusively on the creation of his new and remarkable *bhadrāsana* image and on the revolutionary new shrine that was to house it, rather than finishing most of the earlier-abandoned decoration of the walls and ceilings of the cave. However, as we shall

see, in due course—in 478, in fact—time ran out; and ran out all too quickly. Hardly a year after the awe-inspiring image in Cave 16 had been started, and long before its unique shrine was properly finished, Varahadeva and all of the other Vakataka patrons had to flee the site. But this is a matter for 478 and 479.

All of this curiously rushed and then aborted effort gives us a clear hint of the seriousness of the political situation starting in 469; and it suggests financial constraints too, which is not surprising. Although the local king, Upendragupta, prides himself on spending his resources lavishly in order to “adorn the earth with stupas and viharas and cause the joy of supplicants by conferring gifts (on them)” (Cave 17 inscription, vs 22), he obviously should have been building up his arsenals instead. For the Asmaka forces were about to come over the hill.

The minister Varahadeva's difficulties would suggest that the privileges accorded to the royal donors, with whom he was of course closely associated, might also have been balanced by a good portion of pain during the course of the few years from 469 through 471 when the royal caves alone were underway. This is particularly evident when we study the evolution of the efforts of the local king, Upendragupta. On the positive side, the old competition for workmen was now a thing of the past; it was a buyer's market, and the planners of Upendragupta's insistently splendid caves could pick and choose from among sculptors and painters now highly skilled and, in this pervasive Recession, eager to please. Ajanta, after its few years of preparation and sometimes difficult struggle, was now ready to "take off"; and the technical skills and esthetic discipline evident in his sumptuous caves, "which cannot even be imagined by little-souled men" (Cave 17 inscription, vs 25) stand as splendid witness to an art coming exuberantly into its own.

Although the monumental Cave 17 was started so early that its whole interior space shows a typically "early" misalignment, by 469, when developments were concentrated exclusively in the royal caves, its excavation and decoration was progressing with speed as well as with improving discipline. It does, however, show one particular (and appropriate) inconsistency: the modes used for cell doorway fittings keep evolving, starting with the still ill-considered A mode (probably cut in 467) in the more forward area of the cave, and then progressing to the far more practical B mode in 468/469. Then, in 479 and 471, the still more functional C mode had evolved, and was used in the latest cells at the rear of the cave. The only later additions in the cave during the period of Asmaka rule involved better securing cells L5 and L6 by converting their fittings to the more practical and secure D mode sometime after 475. This would appear to be a purely practical decision, to make the cave, which the Asmakas had taken over, more useful.

It is worth noting that just before Upendragupta had lost his control of the region in late 471, carved niches (never carved prior to 470) were

added at the rear of the latest cells in Cave 17, as if they were included in the contract for the fitting out of these latest cells.<sup>1</sup>

For all of the vigor and the care seen in its development, Cave 17 also reflects the mounting concerns of the local king who, having rid the region of the Asmakas at the end of 468, now was increasingly and rightly concerned about the likelihood that they would soon return with revenge on their minds. This almost certainly explains why, compared with the lavish efforts that the emperor Harisena put into Cave 1, with its rich burden of expensive and time-consuming sculptural decoration, Upendragupta by 470 and 471 was consciously limiting the work of the carvers to little more than the creation of the very elaborate shrine doorway and the fine Buddha image itself. Everything else is painted; and whereas the painting, done by a plethora of hands, perhaps in the interest of speed, is more often than not of high quality, it could certainly have been accomplished far more swiftly than the sculptural forms in Cave 1.

We know that the painting was going on at the rear of Cave 17 in 471, because time suddenly ran out at the end of that year before the shrine could be properly decorated. By then Upendragupta's concern that he might not get his cave done before the Asmakas' return is manifest, since the walls at the cave rear were never properly smoothed before being heavily plastered over and then painted. Indeed, it is conceivable that the whole cave, which took a long time to cut, was painted in a single year, as may well have been the case in Caves 1 and 2 also. However, it may well have been painted in stages, starting a year or so earlier—the porch, in particular, being completed while the cutting of the interior was still underway.

Upendragupta obviously lavished his major efforts upon the “Gandhakuti” or “perfumed hall” to which he refers in the inscription in Cave 17. Happily, in this beautiful hall we have an achievement comparable to that of the emperor Harisena's in Cave 1. Indeed, the connections between them clearly are immediately revealed in the elaborate carving

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<sup>1</sup> The four cells at the rear all have C mode door fittings and probably all date to 471 (rather than 470), because cells R6 and L6, both with unfinished door fittings, would have been underway very close in time to the rear cells. Cells L2 and L3 have B mode fittings, but may not have been fitted out until the last minute, in 471; this would explain why they have niches, which appear not to have come into use at the site until that late date.

and the carefully programmed and varied designing of their beautiful colonnades, so richly adorned with exuberantly varied capital motifs. Similarly, both caves boast a particularly sumptuous façade ornamentation, quite probably carefully planned out by the relevant officials and artists in the offices of the court or connected monastic centers. Cave 19's plan is of course centered upon the towering stupa, fronted by its authoritatively projecting standing Buddha image. If Upendragupta's splendid hall shows little of the erosive effects of the Recession, this is partly because the king obviously accorded its creation the highest priority, but also because (partly due to its priority) most of the work had already been done before the Asmaka's aggressive return was imminent.

However, just as the excavation of the rear areas of Cave 17 show that time was rapidly running out, the same was unfortunately true in Cave 19. The vestibuled court cells, dating to 470/471, as we can judge from their C mode doorways, are slightly unfinished, while the yaksha or yakshi that, conventionally, would have been paired with the famous nagaraja across the court, was never carved. However, it is significant to note that the yaksha's covering roof-motif had been started before time ran out; now, unnecessarily, it protects a fine large bhadrāsana Buddha, added as an intrusion dating to 479. But the most poignant evidence of all is to be seen in the large empty panel just inside the cave, over the doorway. This was surely intended for what would have been a very long and surely exuberantly composed prasasti. Sadly, time must have run out before it got composed by the Brahmins in the court. Therefore it never got sent down to be inscribed here, as was of course expected in the very ceremonial center of the site that Upendragupta had so generously sponsored.

When we analyze Upendragupta's caves with a clinical eye, it is evident that there is a dark side, to be seen beneath the surface, as it were, in these great offerings of this most obsessively pious and generous (and impractical) of kings. But if these pressures are already evident, as we have seen, in the high-priority Caves 17 and 19, it is even more immediately evident in Upendragupta's other donations.

Very shortly after Upendragupta expelled the Asmakas from the site at the end of 468, he added insult to injury by starting a new caitya hall in the still available area well up above his other caves. Just like the Asmaka caitya hall (Cave 26) whose further development he had now forbidden, Cave 29 was oriented to the summer solstice, thus



complementing his Cave 19's winter solstice orientation.<sup>2</sup> Such a pairing at the center of the site was surely a powerful statement; but it had no future. Within about a year the excavation of Cave 29 was abandoned, surely due to the reality of the political situation gradually imposing itself upon the unrealistic king.

A similar erosion of effort affected Upendragupta's fine Cave 20 starting at this same time—very much in contrast to the assurance with which the little cave had been developing earlier. As Upendragupta accorded priority to his impressive caitya hall, both men and money appear to have been taken from Cave 20, for the benefit of that higher priority undertaking. The beautifully decorated front of Cave 20's projecting shrine antechamber (it was brought forward to secure the cracked ceiling) typifies the work of Upendragupta's happy days in 467 and 468 (extending even into 469), while the rough and hasty carving, plastering, and painting done during the Recession tell of the king's mounting concerns in 470–471. Finally, just as time was running out in 471—with an Asmaka attack imminent—Upendragupta rushed to get the Cave 20 shrine Buddha done, obviously (and appropriately) giving the task to one of his best sculptors; but by the time that the beautiful upper levels of the image had been finished and work had started on the lower levels, time had impatiently run out. Part of the throne base, along with the flanking bodhisattvas, had to be expediently finished with a hasty coat of mud.

We might note that because of Ajanta's troubled history, the disjunction between the way in which the great majority of the Ajanta caves were started and the way that they ended is not only understandable but would seem to be unavoidable. However, the difficulties caused by their bipolarity is alleviated by the fact that not only the proud Cave 1 but the similarly splendid royal caves of Upendragupta kept developing under a highly demanding patronage for at least some of this interim period; and many of the forms and features evolved therein provided a basis for the sumptuous later style characteristic of the excavations upon which work continued after 475.

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<sup>2</sup> My views about the solstitial orientation of these caitya halls is still controversial; and the mistakes in measurements that I made in Spink 1985 can only add to the questions about the correctness of my views. However, my observations in that article about the many adjustments made to "correct" Cave 19's alignment can hardly be questioned.

## 469–471 (+475–477): THE EMPEROR HARISENA'S CAVE 1 FLOURISHES

Of the royal caves upon which work was able to continue during the Recession, only Cave 1—the donation of the emperor Harisena himself—was apparently unaffected by the troubles of the times; in fact those general problems at the site may have benefited Cave 1, for now the very best of Ajanta's sculptors and painters could be lured to the emperor's cave, thus assuring that its own development would continue well and efficiently.

Since Harisena was the overlord of both the Asmaka and Risika feudatories, it is not surprising that he, uniquely among the patrons of the site, was able to see work on his cave (except during the Hiatus) continue uninterrupted. Thus the cave flourished both when, during the Recession, the local king cut off Asmaka patronage, and then again, after the Asmaka restoration, when the victorious Asmakas now disallowed any patronage by the local king. Indeed, this evidence of Harisena's overlordship—to be seen in this essentially untroubled development of Cave 1—is one of the many convincing reasons that this splendid cave (truly, “fit for a king”) was Harisena's donation at the site.<sup>1</sup>

I have suggested that Cave 1 may originally have been planned to have a stupa shrine—in fact may have introduced the concept to the site in about 466, even though its own shrine would be only in the planning stages at that time. However, by the time that the rear of the cave was actually reached in the course of excavation, time had passed. The Cave 1 shrine was probably not being cut out until 471, and by that time stupa shrines were long since a thing of the past, for Buddha images had taken over. However, architectural conventions sometimes change very slowly; note how long it took to realize that residence cells could and should be added to Ajanta's porch ends.

The same resistance to change characterizes the development of the shrines. Even as late as 471, when the Cave 1 shrine was finally underway, a central block was still conventional, even though such a block, originally conceived for a stupa, was now inappropriate as a

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<sup>1</sup> See Spink 1981B, also Volume V, Ch 5 (Cave 1).

foundation for the fronting image. Indeed, by chance, in Cave 1, the central block never got completely cut out before work was interrupted late in 471 by the Hiatus. Then when the image was finally begun in 475, it was evident that there was no reason to continue revealing the central block; it had become vestigial. Indeed, the constrained block was now a distinct burden, because late Buddha images required, by convention, attendant bodhisattvas; consequently, if they were going to be included—and this was clearly a priority concern—they had to be very cramped in their positioning. This is why, in all images started after 475, the old fashioned block is finally renounced, and the image group is spread out more comfortably on the shrine's rear wall. Cave 2's shrine is the first to have been planned in this way from the start, although the aborted plan of the shrine in Cave 20 may have established a precedent.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Cave 20's shrine was rushed to completion in 471 without being able to have a "properly" centered block for the image—even if such outmoded blocks were far too constricted to conveniently hold the now "required" bodhisattvas.

## EVOLUTION OF CELL DOORWAY FITTINGS FROM 468 THROUGH 471

The technology involved in the fitting of the site's cell doorways changes to a small but significant degree during this period when only the royal caves were underway. During the first year (469) of the Recession the new B mode, with its monolithic pivot projection at the top of the door, was the invariable choice, but during the last two years of the Recession (470–471) a slight improvement was effected by the C mode, in which a projection appears at the bottom of the doorway as well, making the doors swing more freely. This latter mode is found only in Caves 1, 17, and 19—the royal caves; nor would we expect to find it elsewhere at the site during these years when work on other excavations had been halted.

In Cave 17, the progress of the excavation through time is clearly suggested by the presence of A mode doorways, (sometimes converted to the A+ mode, to emulate the more practical B mode), concentrated in the front areas of the cave, with the B mode doorways in the cells toward the cave's center, and finally the C mode doorways in the six cells at the extreme rear. It might be noted that one of those in the least desirable position of all—in the dark Cell R6—was shaped, but never fitted out, further confirming that the latest cells in the cave were just being finished and put into use when time ran out.

Interestingly, Cave 1 starts off with a somewhat similar pattern of development, but (happily) when the cave's cells were started in 468, the B mode was already in use. Then, just as in Cave 17, the C mode doorways have been cut at the cave rear, work continuing, as in Cave 17, until the end of 471. But Cave 1 was underway slightly later than Cave 17, and so the projections characteristic of the C mode, like other elements toward the rear of the cave, never got finished. Significantly, they were all—along with most of the other earlier (B mode) fittings—converted to the much more user-friendly D mode when work on this imperial cave started up again in 475.

In 471 excavators started cutting box-like recesses in the rear cell walls, at the center. These must have been shelves for various articles;

they were not used as private altars, since they show no stain from smoke or oil. These seemingly useful “cupboards” remain in fashion for only a few years, perhaps having been replaced by movable wooden cabinets or the like after that 476. However, a longer variant—what I call a shelf as opposed to a niche—is occasionally found in later contexts.

## THE HIATUS (472–474): THE PERIOD OF CONFLICT AND ASMAKA TAKEOVER

At the end of 471, the local king, attacked by the returning Asmakas, apparently was forced to flee from the region. It was at this point that the patronage of his own caves ended abruptly, while at the same time work stopped on every other cave as well. It seems clear that this was a period when the Asmakas, having been expelled from the site a few years earlier, were coming back in force.

I have suggested that the “war” between the local king and the invading Asmakas occupied some three years—the interruption of work at the site being referred to the years from 472 until the end of 474. This is necessarily an estimate. However, since Ajanta’s “Short Chronology” is indeed so short, and so much had to be accomplished, I would hesitate to say that this Hiatus in patronage activity occupied more than three years. In fact, it may well have occupied only two years, or possibly even one, for we really have no way to judge how long such a war, and the dramatic shifting of the control of the site, took. What we do know, however, is that some dire conflict did indeed take place at this point, and that when it was finished the world had changed. And happily, it had changed for the better! The next few years, under Asmaka control, were the most active and productive of all at the site. However, this newly radiant world, starting in 475, provided only a brief “millennium”. With the death of the emperor Harisena, late in 477, it rapidly and dramatically fell apart, as we shall see in due course.

It might be noted that this period—the Hiatus—or the Recession just before, must have been the time when Cave 4 suffered the dramatic collapse of the ceiling of its spacious central hall. In fact, this sobering event was directly related to the vastness of the cave itself; for the patron, the well-established *viharasvamin* Mathura, had grandiose conceptions. His cave, with eight pillars flanking every aisle, is by far the largest at the site; and as a consequence, as it turned out, the very spaciousness of the cave was what could be called, quite literally, its downfall. What happened was at a certain point in the course of its excavation, the ceiling collapsed, due to the fact that a major geological flaw—caused by an unhappy stratification of the lava (basalt) at the site—existed above the ceiling. In fact, the excavators knew about this flaw when

they started the cave, for it can be seen at a “safe” three or four feet about the porch. However, although such flaws general continue into the scarp on a roughly horizontal plane, in this particular case the flaw angled downward as it continued its course within the cave. Thus by the time the excavators had reached the center of the hall, the space between the excavated ceiling level and the treacherously angling flaw above had got so thin that part of the flawed ceiling no longer held. And so it fell; and then, as a consequence, the worried planners, or the patron himself, decided to raise the whole ceiling up to the plane of the flaw, to avoid any further rock fall.<sup>1</sup>

By analyzing this fascinating situation, we can tell that the rockfall did not occur until after the excavation was temporarily abandoned, due to the Recession, at the end of 468. We can tell this because the ceiling continues on its angled upward course (mentioned above as a result of the excavators’ early incompetence), right up to the rear of the shrine. Indeed, the central block—already an obsolete feature—intended for the Buddha image in the shrine was being exposed at the time, the excavators having actually started to open up the space on either side. We can in fact see how far they got before the Recession occurred, because of the preliminary cut at the upper right, the farthest point in the ceiling reached in 468. We should also note that when the excavators of this early ceiling were cutting the stone away around the tops of the shrine antechamber pillars, they blocked out these pillars with the relatively simple shafts characteristic in 468. Had they been working in this area in 475 they would certainly have reserved matrix on the pillars so that the bracket-goddesses (always intended as features in such caves after 475) could be cut. This is but one clear evidence that the original ceiling was cut right past these antechamber pillars at its established high level; in fact the pillars themselves were clearly heightened, as were the more rearward pillars in the cave, in response to the rising ceiling.

Therefore, we know that the crash of the ceiling did not take place prior to 468; at that point it was still intact, even if dangerously unstable. The original excavators did not know this, because they of course could not see the perniciously downward-directed flaw. It is clear too, that when work started on the cave again in 475, the first task was to clean

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<sup>1</sup> See also discussion in Volume Five, Ch 5, (Cave 4); also Spink 2004 (in Bakker 2004).

up the mess that must have been left by the ceiling's collapse, which must have occurred sometime in the interim between 469 and 474—a time when happily the cave was temporarily abandoned.

In 475, no proper planner or excavator could approve the shocking angle of the original ceiling—or of the floor that must have been cut parallel to it. Thus, when the order came—probably from Mathura's "office"—to raise the whole ceiling up to the precarious line of the flaw, the workers used a more up-to-date and improved technology, so that the resulting (later) ceiling was now made perfectly level. Remarkably, if we observe the "dual" character of the wall in the left aisle, we can see that the original aisle wall had already been smoothed in 468, and strikingly contrasts with the still-rough upward extension of the wall done in 475 or after. Thus we can clearly "read" the remarkable angling of the original ceiling.

It is clear that Mathura was deep in the process of drastically redoing his troubled cave during the last years of activity at the site, but of course time did not allow him to get it properly done. Although the Buddha image would be completed, and a few other major sculptures finished, the cave is woefully incomplete, and of course never painted, except for the highest priority elements in the shrine.

When we realize how staggering the process of "fixing" the cave turned out to be, the irony is that if the early excavators had only kept the original (angled) ceiling on a level plane, it would have passed a few feet below the "danger" level of the pernicious flaw, and would never have fallen! This is because, when the flaw in question reached the pillar L4 (and similarly R4) it turned sharply downward and to all intents and purposes disappeared as a serious threat. On the other hand, if we wish to find something positive in the faulty early cutting procedures, we can say that it was the very uncontrolled angling upward of the ceiling that was ultimately responsible for Cave 4's Buddha image turning out to be the largest at the site, while its worshipping devotees (which could now be cut from the mass of "excess" matrix under the old floor level) are among the most beautiful and indeed monumental at the site.



## 475–478 ASMAKA CONTROL OF THE SITE

In the years from 469 through 471, we have heard only of the royal caves (1, 17, 19, 20, and 29); and then, from 472 through 474, there was no excavating activity at all. But with 475 the site has a new beginning, and now Ajanta's patronage burgeons once again.

By 475 the Asmakas had defeated the local Risika king, Upendragupta, and had returned in force to the region and the site. Now, except in the case of Upendragupta's caves, a remarkable florescence began, which continued until the unexpected death of the emperor Harisena late in 477. I have dated his death, which so suddenly changed the world, to December 31, 477, only in order that we may make a clear distinction between "477", a year of incredible creative accomplishment, and "478", when everything fell apart.

The only loser in this productive period was of course the local king. Although his splendid caitya Cave 19, still not quite finished, had been hurriedly dedicated late in 471, the victorious Asmakas now made it out of bounds for worship; at least this seems evident from the fact that it shows absolutely no deposits of grime from the oil lamps that would have been used in the rituals of worship, while it is clear that the garland hooks over the pillars—some not even set in place—were never used. Even more revealing, the Asmakas now actually dishonored Upendragupta's fine hall by cutting a pathway to their own complex (which lay beyond) right through the cells at the front of Cave 19's courtyard.<sup>1</sup>

It would appear that Upendragupta's Cave 20, which would have been exquisite had it not been a victim of the Recession, was also now abandoned; the few cells that were fitted out appear to have been put into use only in the Period of Disruption. At that point, with the Asmakas no longer controlling the site, new donors eagerly added a plethora of votive intrusions to these previously abandoned sacred

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<sup>1</sup> The left front cell was a monks' residence; the right front cell had been converted to a cistern chamber. The "Asmaka pathway" was cut through both of them. Covered with debris in the 19th century, they are not shown on Burgess' Cave 19 plan.

halls, clearly attracted by their continuing sanctity. But this is a matter relevant to our discussion of 479.<sup>2</sup>

It is clear that the Asmakas (perhaps grudgingly) allowed monks to continue living in Upendragupta's spacious Cave 17. Such a decision was both practical and expedient, for housing was badly needed at the site; and at the same time, evicting the monks from their established quarters would hardly have been a good way for the conquerors to start their control of the site. Remarkably, when the Asmakas took over the site, although many cells were underway in the various caves, there were perhaps only two caves—Cave 11 and Cave 17 itself—that were properly fitted out for residence, and appear to have already been in use at that time.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, considering how thickly the shrine areas have been blackened by the smoke from the oil lamps used in worship, it seems evident that the Asmakas allowed worship as well as residence in Upendragupta's fine vihara to continue, even though they made no attempt to complete the shrine's abandoned program of decoration, either here or in Upendragupta's abandoned Cave 20. The only "improvement" that was made, now that the cave was under Asmaka control, was to fit out Cells L5 and L6, obviously utilized for storage, making more secure doors by converting the older fittings to the D mode.<sup>4</sup>

As we might expect, as soon as the Asmakas took over the site, their own caves started to develop with a particular energy; and since work on their excavations had summarily stopped in 468 when the site was in an early stage of its development, there is now a striking disparity between the early and the later phases of their excavations. However, this mostly involves changes in the shaping of architectural features—pillars, doors, windows, pillars, etc—rather than shifts in decorative features. This is because all of these "superficial" decorative features date from 475 or later; not a single one was to be seen in any of the Asmaka caves at the time that work ended so abruptly in 468. In the earlier years of work at the site, the planners of these Asmaka caves (as in many other excavations at the site) followed a convention

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<sup>2</sup> As explained elsewhere, the Period of Disruption may have started in the last half of 478 in the "Vakataka" caves, since those caves were being abandoned by their patrons at about the mid-point of that year, during which, in the "Asmaka" caves, the established patronage was still continuing. See Volume I, Ch 10, 200–203.

<sup>3</sup> The shrine of Cave Lower 6, extremely begrimed, may have been used for worship from 469; but it was not yet fitted out for residence.

<sup>4</sup> For more extensive discussion, see Volume VI.

whereby they carved their monuments out in general terms first, planning to add all decorative and/or iconic features subsequently. But as it happened, in the early Asmaka undertakings such decoration was never added in normal course, because the development of the caves was suddenly interrupted in 468.

Needless to say, it is the fact that the rich overlay of sculptural decoration on the caitya Cave 26 is all so clearly “late”, that was responsible for the common assumption that Cave 26 is one of Ajanta’s latest undertakings—indeed “post-Vakataka”.<sup>5</sup> In fact, Cave 26 is one of the *earliest* caves, if we think of its core structure. This is particularly evident in Cave 25, (the upper right wing), Cave 27 (the upper left wing), and the lower right wing (Cave 26RW), all of which were abandoned in mid-course, while still in a roughed-out stage.<sup>6</sup> It is more challenging to perceive the old core of the main hall and the lower left wing, beneath their clothing of exuberant sculptural decoration. Even the very uneven definition of the main façade plane speaks of its early date, as does the pre-Recession B mode fitting of the main doorway, and the transformed early A mode doorway—cut into a later pillared complex—in the porch of the left wing. Inside the main cave, the fact that the upper levels of the stupa were cut away when the vault was opened up, suggests early inexperience as compared to the treatment of the stupa in Cave 19, while Cave 26’s ornate interior pillars obviously started out as very early plain octagonal forms—eight of which remain in that old state at the back of the cave. In the “early” astylar hall of the left wing, the relatively thin-walled cells betray their early date, even though their early and impractical A mode doorways were converted to the convenient D mode after 475.<sup>7</sup>

In “clothing” the caitya complex with its rich overlay of sculptural forms, one should of course distinguish between the programmed work of 475–477 and the helter-skelter intrusive offerings that later invaded the still available areas of the façade. Similarly, in the ambulatory, where

<sup>5</sup> Bakker 1997, 41.

<sup>6</sup> Although totally abandoned from about 466 or 467 through 477, work was hastily renewed in 478, with the intent of finally fitting them out with shrines.

<sup>7</sup> It seems likely that, just as in the porches of Caves 11 and 17, Cave 26’s porch floor was lowered in order to reveal the candrasila. The positioning of the beam under the porch pillars would then have been defined, after their original (rough octagonal) forms had been transformed into the present square-based types.

Buddhabhadra located the Dying Buddha and other superb panels in 478, one must distinguish these “original” sculptures from the intrusions added to this area in 479–480. Happily, no such intrusions disturb the main central area of the hall, filled as it is with an exuberance of iconic and decorative forms. Indeed, the major areas of the main façade are similarly well organized, although what we see today was not always intended when the plans for the cave were originally laid. Thus the two large standing Buddhas on either side of the great arch surely “replace” intended yakshas like the burly attendants carved on Cave 19; by 475–477 the focus was more and more on Buddha imagery.

Although the Cave 26 complex was started with four viharas as its upper and lower wings, only the lower left wing could be conveniently expanded when the idea of turning simple viharas in shrines so significantly affected the whole site shortly before the Recession. Because Cave 25 and 27 were difficult of access, and because Cave 26RW was adversely affected by geological problems, Cave 26LW was accorded particular priority. Indeed, the original symmetry of the complex’s design was “violated” by the setting back of the Left Wing in 466, making it possible to have an up-to-date porch, as well as a more spacious interior with a proper shrine. Although time ran out for the whole complex all too soon, the highly elaborated left wing was able to be supplied with a Buddha image and dedicated, and the cells readied for residence. Also, at the last minute, the problematic lower right wing (Cave 26RW) was finally supplied with a fine Buddha image, carved upon an anomalous projection that had been early defined, in 468, for an earlier Buddha image, even though the Asmakas were expelled from the region before the originally intended sculpture could be even started.

The same energy manifest in the development of Cave 26 is evident in the excavation and decoration of the associated viharas, Cave 21, 23, and 24. This is not surprising, because it is evident that they were all either given or controlled by the great monk Buddhabhadra. We know that these were, in a sense, *his* caves (although he may have been acting for members of the Asmaka court and with the approval of the Buddhist sangha) because the adjustments made to these viharas impacted directly upon the development of his great Cave 26 complex; and he would certainly not have tolerated the “destruction” of a significant portion of his Cave 26 complex—notably his old Cave 25—if he were not overseeing and approving the whole development of the site’s western extremity.

Thus, when it was decided that Cave 21 and the adjacent Cave 23, both planned with simple cells at the porch ends, must have complex cells instead, this in fact required that the adjacent Cave 23 be displaced to the left. And when Cave 23 and Cave 24 were both now planned, in 467, with similarly up-to-date pillared complexes at their porch ends, such plans could only be realized if the Cave 26 complex, abutting them at the right, would be deeply penetrated by the repositioned Cave 24. This is in fact what destroyed any possibility of the old and very early Cave 25 being completed as planned.

Thus what we have is clear evidence of Buddhabhadra's authoritative decision to sacrifice the in fact obsolete Cave 25 in order to allow the uninhibited expansion of the far more impressive and "modern" Cave 24. In effect, as we have noted earlier, Buddhabhadra traded in an outworn concept for a new. Cave 24, even more that its closely contemporary counterparts Caves 21 and 23, brings the decorative forms of this late period—the doorway designs, the windows, the pillars and the medallioned pilasters—to their point of greatest and final development at the site.

At the same time, the fact that Cave 24 was, quite literally, only half-completed, allows us insights into the excavation methods of the day; and such methods were quite different from, and far more precise than, the procedures used in the earliest caves. Now, instead of roughing out the whole cave before beginning any detailing, the splendid ornamental and iconic motifs are undertaken as soon as the areas in question are sufficiently prepared. Even the caves' cells are started one by one as excavation progresses toward the rear (see Cave 24 plan), while the cave's pillars are seen in all possible stages of cutting, as evidenced by the work in progress in the front aisle.

The work on such caves, whether it involved the gross exposure of the cave, or the fine decorative motifs, was surely done by contract, with certain workers or family groups responsible for given portions of the work, with payment on completion. (A similar method is used in roadwork today, where piles of stone are broken into smaller pieces by contracting groups.) Such "contracting" surely extended to most of the work in the caves. This explains why, in 475, when nearly every cell in Cave 1 was "updated" with D mode door fittings, along with a modern niche cut into the rear wall, all of these changes are so uniform in appearance. Indeed, a few years later, during the Period of Disrup-

tion when, following a new convention, all these cells were plastered, we again see a general uniformity in much of the work done.

The very fact that the work in the caves was well organized—that it was not at all “every man for himself”—generally protected the excavations from more egregious errors. However, of course mistakes did occur, and there is one that is so revealing that it must be mentioned. In 468, as noted earlier, the excavators of Cave 21 “updated” the porch design by replacing the planned single cells for the porch ends with the just-developed pillared cell complexes. But just as these complexes were being finished, the Asmakas were expelled from the region, and nothing more was done on Cave 21 or any of the other Asmaka caves until the “Asmaka restoration” in 475.

Finally, in 475, the excavators were finally able to take up work on the porch of the adjacent Cave 23, which had (in 468) been shifted to the left (as we have noted) specifically so that there would be sufficient room for the placement of the now-conventional pillared cell complexes. However, in 475, the workers—and they must have been a new crew!—did not realize that the space for the right pillared complex would only be sufficient if (as was in fact done in Cave 21) the whole was carefully squeezed into the area provided. Instead, now that some six years had passed, one of the crew proceeded, oblivious to the realities of the situation, to cut out the inner cell of the complex in the “normal” way. However, as a result of his innocent inattention, he broke, suddenly and embarrassingly, into the earlier abutting inner cell of Cave 21, and as a result had to leave Cave 23’s insufficient inner cell uselessly unfinished.

As we might expect in caves that were sponsored by such prestigious donors, supervised by highly experience planners, and worked on by artisans with extensive prior experience, embarrassing mistakes like that which occurred in Cave 23 seldom occur, especially in the site’s later years. Furthermore, the techniques of measuring and leveling, so problematic in the site’s first few years of excavating activity, could now be considered appropriately professional. Walls are straight and are expected to be, ceilings are level, surfaces are smooth, and cells are no longer misaligned.

The excavators now also saved time, effort, and money by making the cave ceilings lower. The earliest interiors—such as what we see in Cave 16—probably followed the lead of structural palaces, where high

ceilings allowed better ventilation, just as in many pre-airconditioning structures in the west. However, the temperature in the caves is relatively constant, remaining between 27 and 30 degrees centigrade throughout the course of the year.<sup>8</sup> This remarkable uniformity is largely due to the stabilizing effect of the mountain mass into which the caves are cut. For this reason excessive ceiling height is in fact counterproductive, for it allows more of the warm outside air to enter the cave.

The unfinished state of Cave 24, and at the same time the superb quality of whatever work got completed, must impress us with the poignancy of Ajanta's situation here at the very moment of Harisena's death—for that is the point at which the sudden end of these great productions occurred. Had work been able to continue, it seems clear that the Asmaka excavations would have spread onto the extensive scarp at the left of the Cave 26 complex, where the large but very unfinished Cave 28 had been started just as the great emperor died and time ran out. We must remember too that Cave 21, although hastily put into worship in 478, was only partially decorated, and in an anxious manner that bears little relationship to what would have been done in less stressful times. In this same regard, Cave 23's excavation remained very incomplete, and its painting was never started at all. However, it is clear that, just as in Cave 21, work continued upon it in 478. This is because the plastering of its porch was started before its excavation was totally done—this is characteristic of work in 478, but not to be expected in 477.

A profound sense of what we are missing impacts upon us strongly when we consider the character of the superb Parinirvana, Temptation, Miracle, and Eight Buddhas carved for Buddhahadra in the ambulatory of Cave 26. In these sculptures, as in the architecture of Cave 24, Ajanta's artisans have achieved a creative fusion of authority and energy. It is an ironic twist of fate that just at this culminating moment, where the promise of the past has finally been fully readied for the future, Ajanta's life was cut off. If only Mozart, having reached a point of startling productive fervor in the last year of his life, had had ten more years! One must wait, as it were, for Elephanta, to see the realization of the promise so evident here. It is tragic that so much has been lost

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<sup>8</sup> This information was kindly provided by Mr. Manager Singh, Chief Conservator at the Ajanta caves.

that could have taken place in between; and this is true not only for the great sculptures in Cave 26, but for the site as a whole.

Ajanta, in its development, had more than its shares of traumas, and these of course deeply affected its development. The Asmaka caves in the western extremity of the site had a distinctly two-phase development, for which the political situation can be blamed. Work on them first abruptly stopped when the local king expelled them from the region at the end of 468; then, remarkably, they lay absolutely dormant, totally untouched for more than half a decade, until the Asmaka “restoration” in 475.

However, it was not only the Asmaka caves that were thus affected. When, after the Hiatus caused by the Asmaka invasion, work in the main (or “Vakataka”) section of the site was taken up again, we find a similar pattern of development. Although any further work on the defeated local king’s Caves 17, 19, and 20 was now disallowed, all of the other excavations in this main area of the site were now put under excavation, or were about to be, once again. And of those now newly underway, starting in 475, not a single one—with the exception of the imperial Cave 1—had been touched by the excavators or the carvers or the painters for over half a decade—from 469 until the beginning of 475.<sup>9</sup> The group (excluding for the present the similarly affected Asmaka caves) comprises Caves 2, 4, 5, Lower 6, Upper 6, 7, 8, 11, 15, and 16, all of which can rightly be said to be both “early” and “late”—started before early 468 and finished after 475, all having a pre-468 (or early 469) phase followed by a six year gap (Recession and Hiatus) and then with work continuing from 475.

The only new caves that were started in this final “renaissance” from 475 through 477 are Caves 3 and 14, in the “Vakataka” area, and Caves 22, 23A, and 28 in the “Asmaka” area. In fact, judging from the work accomplished upon them in this busy period, it seems likely that none of them were even started until 477; quite possibly, before that time, it was not possible to get them planned and to find crews to start them. Thus it is not surprising that they are even more unfinished than the older caves, upon which work was now continuing. Of course, it should be noted that not a single cave at the site was ever actually completed,

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<sup>9</sup> As noted earlier the Buddha images in Caves Lower 6, 7, 11, and 15 had been rushed to completion in early 469, while Varahadeva made an abortive attempt to develop Cave 16 in that same year.



even though the majority got dedicated. The few that came close to being completed were Cave Lower 6, finished (hastily) except for some painting at the rear of the shrine; Cave 17, finished (hastily) except for the proper decoration of the shrine walls; and Cave 1, which is lacking a small amount of its mural decoration.

Although the period that began with the Asmaka takeover of the site was one of great creative fervor, its benefits were not shared by every patron. As we might expect—because the Asmakas were now in charge—the Asmaka caves now developed with great energy, being vigorously excavated and at the same time adorned with continually “updated” sculptural and painted forms. One can equally understand how and why the emperor’s grand Cave 1 appears to have given the highest priority at this time, with what appears to have been a full crew of highly skilled and indeed innovative workmen, quite possibly co-opted for such work. The energy apparent in the development of Cave 1 seems to have extended to the adjacent Cave 2 as well, although here there are many mural areas that never got completed, and the carvings, although admirable, still lack the variety and authority of those in the adjacent emperor’s cave.

Remarkably, Caves 1, 2, and lower 6 are the only “Vakataka” caves, other than Upendragupta’s Caves 17 and 19 that got more or less fully painted before time ran out; and it is equally remarkable that most of the other caves did not get even fully excavated. Although a number of the other caves (4, 5, Upper 6, 7, 8, 11, 15, 16) in this Vakataka area of the scarp had also been started very early, of this group only Caves 4 and Upper 6 progressed very significantly in terms of their excavation and a certain amount of carved decoration. At least this was true before the news of Harisena’s death reached the site, at which point all of the Vakataka patrons started frantically rushing their shrines to completion.

Although the world tends to think of Ajanta as a “painted paradise”, one should realize that most of the patrons did not get their intended painting programs even started, except for the hasty work in the shrine areas when time was running out in 478. Only Caves 1, 2, Lower 6, 17, 19 could really be called “painted caves”, although the programs in Caves 11, 16 and 26 did get partially completed. That is, during these most active years of the site’s patronage from 475 through 477, the painting programs were not even started in Caves 4, 5, Upper 6, 7, 8, 15, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26LW, 26RW, 27, to say nothing of the very late Caves 3, 14, 22, 23A, and 28.

What the slow and/or sporadic progress of work in the “Vakataka” area suggests is that the ruling Asmakas were now co-opting more than their “fair share” of workers, to satisfy the huge needs of their own undertakings. But it also suggests that the activity at the site in these happy days, although surely vigorous, was by no means as compulsive, or even frenzied, as it would soon become in the months after Harisena’s death. It is remarkable that, with perhaps one exception, not a single shrine Buddha had been completed and dedicated at the site since Upendragupta had hastily finished his own images in Caves 17 and 20 late in 471. The one possible exception is the image in the Left Wing of Cave 26, but here too, since its context was not completed until 478, its completion and dedication must be referred to that same year.

This leaves, for our consideration, the beautiful image in Cave 1, which had developed consistently and without incident, being finally completed in due course in 477, shortly before its patron, Harisena, died. However, it is equally certain that, although completed, the Cave 1 image was never dedicated and put into worship—a crucial matter that we shall consider in due course. It is something upon which the fate of Ajanta depends.

## THE IMPACT OF BAGH

At the same time that the late work at Ajanta was happily proceeding from 475 on, it was under the deep influence of developments at the far more stable Buddhist cave site at Bagh.<sup>1</sup> Bagh—also a Vakataka undertaking—was started at about the same time that the Vakataka phase at Ajanta began, and must have been supported, financially and/or politically by the elite of the Anupa region, where (the *Visrutacarita* tells us) one of Harisena's sons was the imperial viceroy.<sup>2</sup> But Anupa was not troubled by the kind of altercations that so harshly interrupted Ajanta's development. Indeed, it provided a safe haven for Ajanta's workers during the troubled Hiatus when Asmaka was battling to take over the Ajanta region.

Not surprisingly, when the “displaced” workers were able to return to Ajanta in about 475, they brought back many things that they had learned. Important iconic innovations—the concepts of Buddha as attendants upon Buddhas, and the significant grouping of the “six Buddhas of the past” attendant upon the central shrine Buddha—may well have been transmitted from Bagh.<sup>3</sup> The concept of elaborated doorway designs, including a trabeated format, was also probably first developed at Bagh, appearing somewhat later (c. 477) at Ajanta. The highly useful mode of fitting out cell doorways in the D mode (by simply putting the door pivots in a recess at the doorway's back) immediately replaced the clumsy previous forms at Ajanta as soon as the planners at Ajanta realized, in 475, how sensible it was. Some practical features such as the excavated niches at the rear of the monks' cells may have been brought back from Bagh somewhat earlier, since it seems likely that the two great sites were in communication even from the start.

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<sup>1</sup> Spink 1976/77; also Volume I, Ch 3, 67/68.

<sup>2</sup> Volume I, Appendix I, 405.

<sup>3</sup> For extended discussion of Bagh's influence, see Volume VI.

## ASPECTS OF PATRONAGE

It is remarkable that when the burden of excavating activity in the Vakataka domains had shifted to Bagh during Ajanta's Hiatus (from 472 through 474), leaving the Ajanta excavations in a virtual state of hibernation, there is no evidence whatsoever that any of them were added to, or even touched, in any way. This suggests that, even in times of no excavating activity, there were strong administrative controls at the site, perhaps reflecting the elitist nature of the undertakings. It seems clear that patronage at the site was the exclusive right, in this period (as opposed to the Hinayana phase), of a select few. Judging from the extant major inscriptions found in Caves 4, 16, 17, 20, and 26—these patrons were all rich and high-placed, often sponsoring (like Upendragupta and Buddhahadra, and also Varahadeva, if we consider the Ghatotkacha vihara) not merely one, but a number of excavations. Further evidence of strong administrative controls at the site would seem to be evidenced by the manner in which space was carefully apportioned; even the earliest undertakings abut each other closely and at the same time sometimes economically share their cisterns (Caves 2 and 4; 16 and 17; 23 and 24). Of course, most of the control evident at the site must reflect the stabilizing effect of the Buddhist establishment, which would offer support to tradition even as it would transmit the many new ideas that it would bring in via its other contacts. The rapid evolution of iconography at the site is remarkable, but equally remarkable is the consistency of the changes as they appear throughout the site. This suggests strong controls over developing conventions, which must have come from an authoritative sangha, as well as from a public quite willing to respect this authority. It must have been the force of the sangha too that was able to effect a startling degree of discipline throughout the site during the period of war when all patronage had stopped completely, but the caves remained completely sacrosanct. By contrast, when the controls of the sangha, following those of the court, were later shattered (in 479–480), the site became the seat of chaos.

It is evident from these patrons' inscriptions what pride they took in their donations, the splendors of which were surely intended to reflect their own lavish generosity, made available to the world through "the

power of the expenditure of wealth” (Cave 17 inscription, vs 17). The permanence of their offerings, made possible by the very process of cutting the caves in the enduring medium of the mountain, was clearly a feature of great importance to them. “As long as the sun (shines) with rays reddish like fresh red arsenic,—even so long may this spotless cave...be enjoyed” declares Varahadeva. (Cave 16 inscription, vs 32) “May this Hall, out of affection...cause the attainment of well-being by good people as long as the sun dispels darkness by its rays!”, says Upendragupta. (Cave 17 inscription, vs 29)

Similarly, the great monk Buddhahadra, the close friend of the Prime Minister of Asmaka “through many successive births” (Cave 26 inscription, vs 9), recognizing that the offering of “a single flower... yields the fruit known as paradise (and even) final emancipation” (Cave 26 inscription, vs 3) must have taken great satisfaction in giving, instead of a “single flower”, a great cave complex! “Why”, he declares, “should not a monument be raised by those possessing wealth, desirous of mundane happiness as also of liberation?” (Cave 26 inscription, vs 7) “A man continues to enjoy himself in paradise as long as his memory is green in the world.” he further declares, concluding with the assertion that “One should (therefore) set up a memorial on the mountains that will endure for as long as the moon and the sun continue.” (Cave 26 inscription, vs 8)

So, if one needs a justification for going to the effort to cut mountains away to make shrines “which cannot even be imagined by little-souled men” (Cave 17 inscription, vs 25), and to “expend abundant wealth” (Cave 17 inscription, vs 25) to “adorn them with windows, doors, beautiful picture-galleries, ledges, statues...and beautiful pillars and stairs and (with) a temple of the Buddha inside” (Cave 16 inscription, vs 24), the permanence and the beauty and the power of such monuments should be reason enough.

After 475, due to the new control that the Asmakas imposed upon the site, as well as their own Buddhist fervor, everything flourished as never before. Decorative and iconic motifs as well as technological features now underwent an intensive development, stimulated as much by the rivalries felt by both artists and patrons as by the demands of a faith constantly evolving due to the new ideas flooding into the site. At the same time, the source for many of these forms and ideas was the carefully wrought high-class motifs and features produced during the Recession in Upendragupta’s sumptuously conceived caitya hall—Cave

19—which received singular attention during this brief period. And added to what was given by that source, we must also count the many ideas that the traffic coming in from the trade routes brought to the site, as well as the ideas brought in by the artists returning from Bagh, after the Hiatus.

## THE DECORATION OF THE CAVES

Regarding the decoration of the caves, the mural paintings tended to be sophisticated creations from the start, even in the very earliest contexts such as in the porch and aisle of Cave 16. This is certainly because these forms were virtually transposed from the palaces and temples of the cities, where such things would have been painted for years by members of traditional craftsmen's families. Indeed, it is very likely that artists attached to the courts and temples were themselves sent down, when their services were required, to work at the site, bringing their sketch-books as well as their long experience with them.<sup>1</sup> We must believe too that the chief monks, associated with the courts of the various patrons, advised on the choice of subjects for the different caves. It is less likely that the monks at the site had much to do in such decisions, for it would appear to be the case that the programs were already established when the decoration of the caves was undertaken.<sup>2</sup>

Lest we wonder at the great variety of distinctive styles typically found in even a single cave, we must remember that painters from a great number of different regions must have been drawn to the site both because of its fame and because of the burgeoning work-opportunities that it offered. Nor should we expect any particular one of these styles to show a clear course of development at the site. There was no time for development, for all of the paintings of the Vakataka period at Ajanta were done in the span of hardly more than a decade: the earliest mural paintings, dating to 468, are in Caves Lower 6 and 11, while the latest paintings at the site are the intrusive murals done in 480. Furthermore, even though we may rightly wish to marvel at Ajanta's paintings, we should remember that the great majority of caves at the site were never painted at all, except for the rushed work involved in getting the images ready for dedication.

Ceiling paintings, in contrast to the murals, show a much clearer "development", as the painters worked out ways to appropriately deco-

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<sup>1</sup> Volume I, Ch 15, 67/77.

<sup>2</sup> The Descent of the Buddha in Cave 16's porch, and the Wheel of Life in Cave 17's porch are examples of paintings that must have been "imported" to the site. See Volume I, 377-379.

rate these surfaces, and at the same time to outdo the work of their rivals, for reasons of pride, as well as for success in the competition for employment. Whereas murals could be “transferred” from a wall in the capital to one at the site without significant changes, the artists were much more on their own when faced with decisions about decorating the ceilings.<sup>3</sup> Although the designs tend to be architectonic from the start, they are certainly not static, but give the artists considerable scope for their own design predilections. The urgent course of change, as one moves from the simplicity of the ceiling designs in Caves Lower 6 and 16 to the exuberant ceiling-worlds of Caves 1 and 2, parallels the same trends found in the treatment of the innumerable decorative motifs at the site. However, it is hard to say that the dramatic course of change from ceilings with simple lotuses and birds, to those incorporating proliferating lotuses, frolicking dwarfs and roiling sea monsters can be seen as a stylistic development; it is instead a development of complexity and variety.<sup>4</sup>

Ajanta’s patrons and planners would surely be shocked to learn that “conventional wisdom” today typically ranks Ajanta’s paintings far higher than its sculptures, even though the truth is that the work with the chisel at the site is, in general, of consistently higher quality than that done with the brush. For years only the so-called “painted caves” have been particularly honored by the archaeological authorities as well as by both guides and scholars; but a fifth century connoisseur would hardly understand such a prejudice. Indeed, perhaps for the very reason that carving was so much more expensive and time-consuming than painting, it was accorded a particularly high status; and as patrons vied to outdo each other in the effectiveness of their donations they turned more and more, and more and more consistently, to renditions in stone rather than merely on the surface, and appear to have demanded that the work be of fine quality. Thus, whereas the early windows and doorways and pillars at the site are typically painted, by 470 all such forms have carved decoration, and the carving becomes increasingly

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<sup>3</sup> For the suggestion that the mural compositions were probably brought *to* the walls, rather than designed *on* the walls, see Volume I, Ch 15, 377/379.

<sup>4</sup> For studying such decorative motifs throughout the caves, the thorough and informative sketches made by Dr. Monika Zin are most helpful. The sketches of the narrative wall paintings published by Dr. Dieter Schlingloff are an equally useful resource. See Zin 2003, Schlingloff 1999.



more complex as the years move quickly on. It is only when the site's troubles begin in 478 that the standards often decline.

Indeed, even admitting how superb many of the murals and decorated ceilings are, one could still find an abundance of material for an essay on "bad painting at Ajanta".<sup>5</sup> At the same time—significantly—such an essay would find little to draw on from Ajanta's Cave 1; not only is the painting in the cave of an appropriately "imperial" quality but, as we have seen, none of it was done in the troubled context of 478, which saw so much slack and hurried brush-work done at the site. And finally, since the great cave was never dedicated and used for worship, it is happily free of the grime that has so deeply obscured many of the paintings at the site.

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<sup>5</sup> As a single example, note the paintings of early 478 on the walls of the Nidhi shrinelet in Cave 2, as opposed to the superb painting of the shrinelet's ceiling, done in the previous year. Discussed Volume V, Ch 5 (Cave 2), 53/54.

## THE PRIMACY OF CAVE 1

By all counts, the emperor Harisena's Cave 1 is the most remarkable of the viharas that partake of the new energy that the Asmaka restoration brought to Ajanta in 475. Even though it was started very late—only after Harisena had decided to get in on the excitement of Ajanta's dramatic development—and even though the emperor by that time had no choice but to take the last and least ideal spot on the scarp, Cave 1 stands as the summation of what the whole site, had it been able to continue, might well have become.

Even though Cave 1's excavation did not begin until 466, it had the advantage of being an imperial benefaction, and this would seem to explain why its excavation and decoration proceeded with a particular efficiency. When work on it, as on all caves, broke off due to the Hiatus after 471, the whole interior had been roughly exposed. We know this, as noted earlier, from the type of door fitting (C mode) cut in the cells at the very rear of the cave—obviously the latest portion under excavation; and it is equally revealed by the fact that the shrine, with its obsolete centralized arrangement, had already been partially exposed, and that its antechamber pillars had been roughed out with no provision made for the brackets that would later become conventional. Thus, when work started up again in 475, the cave's interior had already been largely revealed, and its vigorous decorating activity could now begin.

Surely, because Cave 1 was the emperor's cave, it was provided, appropriately, with by far the most elaborate façade of any vihara at the site. Its beautiful sequences of sculptural friezes all speak of the perquisites of kingship: the hunt, battle, and erotic dalliance. With a similar import, the intricately revealed story on the left wall, showing Siddhartha's confrontation with the evidences of sickness, age, and death, and its continuation on the right wall, where he leaves the world of the palace for that of the forest, speak of the ideal vocation of every man, most paradigmatically the king. Inside the cave, with its dignified and beautifully decorated pillars, the walls are covered with an insistently programmed series of murals, every one a jataka tale in which the protagonist (the future Buddha) is—significantly—a king. Even

in the tales involving serpents, the naga-bodhisattva around which the story revolves is a serpent *king*.

No other cave, in the decoration of its hall, has such a consistently and revealingly constructed decorative program. Cave 2, with its representation of the birth of the Buddha, and with its shrine devoted to Hariti at the right rear, might be seen as having a feminine focus, but it lacks a convincing consistency. Cave 17 has a vast assortment of tales from the Jatakamala, and is full of subtle relationships explored by Leela Wood, but the connections would have been too subtle for the casual visitor, while the various scenes from the life (and lives) of the Buddha in Cave 16 were never completed.<sup>1</sup>

The pillars of Cave 1's hypostyle are generally paired, giving the interior arrangement, like that of the porch colonnade, an effective combination of order and variety, or of what could be seen as meter and melody. The old-fashioned octagonal shafts are now renounced for a modern square-based format, invariably used at the site for any newly defined pillars. This provided ideal surfaces for paintings of yakshas, nagas, and the like; such figures survive on many of the pillar bases in Cave 2, but have been lost in Cave 1 through contact with the deep debris that built up in the cave over the centuries. At the same time the square bases provide convenient "seats" for the carved dwarfs that now conventionally inhabit these points.<sup>2</sup> A year or so later, on Cave 4's rear axial pillars—completed about 477—they will be transformed into a marvelous group of eight miniature musicians, just as the goddess figures that inhabit Cave 1's antechamber will bring their instruments, only a year or so later, in these same areas in Caves Upper 6 at Ajanta and Cave 3 at Aurangabad.

The bracket-capitals of the pillars have also been transformed, initiating a new and sensible convention; their smooth—no longer ribbed—undersurfaces can now accommodate the vigorously painted yakshas who "support" the elaborately painted ceiling, with its counterpoint of richly colored and playful anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms inhabiting its crossing faux-beams and coffers.

The pillar shafts themselves have carefully organized designs that move from four to eight to sixteen to thirty-two sided sections—a prac-

<sup>1</sup> Wood 2004, in Bakker 2004, discusses the many complex connections.

<sup>2</sup> Similar dwarfs appear at the top corners of the square-based rear axial pillars of Cave 17, but had to be painted on, since the necessary matrix had already been cut away.

tical method of cutting that facilitates control. Only in one instance do we see a rare error: the sculptor has cut the fancy diagonal flutings on one of the corner pillars in the wrong direction. Such errors were rare at the site, and surely did not go unnoticed by the overseer here! At Ajanta, the development seen in the major pillar forms stops at the definition of thirty-two flutes, but a few innovative carvers developed sequences of  $8 \times 3 (= 24)$  and  $8 \times 5 (= 40)$  flutes as examples in some of the latest contexts.<sup>3</sup> During the very last year or two of Asmaka control over the Aurangabad region, in 477 and 478, these pillar sections progress to the point where sixty four flutes are shown, while by the time that the sons—or more likely the grandsons—of the Ajanta workers may have been employed at Elephanta, the development finally reaches one hundred twenty eight, still utilizing this logically organized cutting system for control.

The pillar capitals that are visible when one enters Cave 1 are decorated with motifs of particular beauty and complexity. This surely reflects the demands of the emperor and of his planners for work of the very highest quality. Needless to say, the designs of the pillar shafts and capitals, and other features in Cave 1, owe much to the fine and slightly earlier forms in Upendragupta's contemporaneous undertakings, where forms were able to continue developing during the Recession, when work in most other caves, except for Cave 1 itself, were in abeyance.

The capitals of Cave 1's front aisle colonnade, like most of those fronting the porch, show carefully wrought figures of the seated Buddha. Perhaps because they were the first capital panels carved, they are relatively simple conceptions; one often sees ideas rapidly changing at the site, as the planners become more and more caught up in their programs, sometimes changing their schemes of decoration even in mid-course. This may well explain why, when dealing with the pillars inside the cave, the planners and their sculptors became more and more playful and innovative. Nothing could be more "imperial" in splendor or in the implications of its energy than the elaborate carved decoration on the base of important rear center pillars; there the kirttimukha masks spouting forth crocodilian and exuberantly florescent forms, all rendered with the highest skill, appropriately complement the richly decorated shafts and the complex compositions in the capitals above.

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<sup>3</sup> E.g. pillars at left porch of Cave 2, show pillar sections with 40 flutes.

With their splendid representations of stupas worshipped by (indeed encircled by!) nagas, the capitals of the rear axial pillars recall the tradition that the Vakatakas traced their origins back to the semi-mythical Naga dynasty. On the pillars at the left (L3, L4), there are fine representations of Hariti and her mate, Panchika, as well as of two corpulent yakshas holding the lotus and the conch—the auspicious and wealth-bestowing sankhanidhi and padmanidhi. Other more playful representations, on the capitals of the right colonnade, show fighting elephants and complex deer composed of four bodies sharing a single head, while exuberantly dancing or frolicking dwarfs decorate other capitals. In a typical convention aimed at saving time and money, the aisle faces of the capitals or the rear faces of the capitals of the front colonnade are rendered far more quickly and cheaply in paint, rather than being carved. Even the emperor, or his bursar, was sensitive to the significance of cost/time considerations, and realized the importance of balancing pride with practicality.

Although as we shall note below, paintings and sculptures done during the Period of Disruption are typically supplied with iron hooks for the hanging of garlands, this was not conventional for the murals painted during the site's heyday. On the other hand the elaborately decorated ceilings done during the main or programmed phase of work often must have been hung with flower garlands, particularly along the axis to the shrine. The most striking example is Cave 2, with no less than six medallions decorating the cave's axis, while both of the famous shrinelets in the rear corners of the cave had (now missing) hooks at the centers of their ceilings.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, there were hooks (a few remain) over every pillar capital, except those not readily visible on the backs of the pillars of the front aisle.

The situation is rather different in Cave 1, where all of the hooks (many in fact remain) were concentrated in the rear of the cave. There was a hook at the top of the capitals of both of the rear axial pillars, and still another over each of these on the beam above. Another pair of hooks, one twisted and one broken off, is to be found on the two pilasters of the shrine doorway, along with an "extra" one at the right. The ceiling medallion of the antechamber also once had a hook, but

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<sup>4</sup> There was no hook placed in the shrine, probably because it was rushed to completion in 478. See Volume 5, Ch 5, Cave 2, 55–56.

there is no breakage around it—a significant piece of evidence suggesting that the cave was never used for worship. Finally, there are six surprisingly large hooks each extending some six inches out from carefully spaced points at the top of the rear wall.

The fact that, compared with the situation in Cave 2, Cave 1 has relatively few hooks, and those all at the rear, may well be because Cave 1 had been readied for plastering and painting a year or so earlier than Cave 2. It may well be that the idea of hanging garlands “everywhere” in the caves—at least in the viharas—took some time to develop, as was also the case with many other features. When the shrines of Caves Lower 6, 7, 11, and 15 were completed in early 469, no provision was made for such garlands in those areas, although it must be noted that the hall of Cave Lower 6 was well supplied with hooks at that time.<sup>5</sup> Cave 17 and Cave 20 have few holes for hooks, although Cave 19—probably because of its importance as a caitya hall—was well supplied with them inside and out, even though most were never used. However, their very presence may have stimulated later usage in caves decorated after 475, such as its rival caitya hall, Cave 26, which is well supplied with hooks on the capitals of the nave pillars. Many more hooks are of course associated with the plethora of intrusions both in the ambulatory and on and around Cave 26’s façade; but these belong to a later moment—the Period of Disruption.

By the time that the excavation of Cave 21, like that of Cave 2, was well underway, probably already in 476, the process of inserting the hooks began. As in Cave 2, hooks were put into the capitals of the hall prior to their plastering and painting, and (in Cave 21) a single hook was put at the center of the hall ceiling; however, it broke—the stump remains trapped in the rock—and so had to be replaced by one close by. Cave 21 also has a number of hooks set into its more fully completed wall surfaces, obviously in advance of their plastering, which in fact probably did not begin until 478. That is, they had been put in in better days, intended to adorn the wall paintings that in fact never got done.

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<sup>5</sup> However, it appears that these hooks in Cave Lower 6, both on the axial approach to the shrine, and on the flanking pillars, were never used. The same may have been true of a hook at the center of the antechamber ceiling, which in fact had to be replaced, since the first one apparently broke. See Volume V, Ch 5, Cave Lower 6, 93–95.

Returning to Cave 1, we can see something of a sequence of developments, taking place very rapidly. It may well be the case that when the plastering and painting of Cave 1 was started, progressing from front to back, garland hooks had still not really come into their own for the decoration of viharas, despite their usage in Cave Lower 6. However, in Cave 1, by the time the plasterers were ready to work on the rear of the cave, there was still time to insert a number of the newly popular hooks. In the meantime, probably in early 477, Cave 2's plastering was started, but only after its many hooks had been inserted. Cave 21 was following along in rapid course, but in this case there was time to put the wall hooks in too—a new innovation. Before this process was complete, however, and in fact before all of the receiving walls had been properly smoothed, the realities of 478 dawned, and ultimately the decoration of the cave had to be abandoned.

Almost exactly the same thing happened in Cave 15, where no less than 20 evenly spaced hooks (four still remain) were placed along the top of the walls of the hall. This was done in the vigorous context of 477, and the ceiling and walls had already been plastered before time ran out, and plans for painting had to be abandoned. Work had proceeded a bit later, not surprisingly, in the antechamber, and there hooks got placed in only three of the corners; the wall surface in the fourth corner was never sufficiently smoothed, and similar problems affect the shrine, where no hooks at all were inserted. Instead, the shrine was summarily painted, as was the ceiling of the antechamber, which was also missing its expected hook, because time ran out so quickly and so unexpectedly.

In the case of Cave 7, which was most expediently decorated in early 478, it is hardly surprising that hooks are totally absent, and the same is the case of Cave 4, where the patron got only his huge image and some related features in the shrine antechamber finished, but had no time to think of inserting hooks, or even of fitting out the great shrine doorway. By the same token, the shrines in Cave 26RW and Cave 26LW were finished so late and so hurriedly that they too were never supplied with the luxury of garland hooks.

When we “reconstruct” the intended (unhappily seldom realized) appearance of such interiors, we realize what connections they have with the highly garlanded palaces depicted in Ajanta's murals. Notable examples are to be seen in the beautiful painted structure in Cave 1's Mahajanaka Jataka, or Cave 16's Story of Nandi, and in many other areas, where the painted palaces are lavishly festooned. These painted

structures, we can assume, directly reflect the palaces of the day—richly decorated palaces very similar, surely, to those in which our courtly donors lived. The tales told on Ajanta's walls may be largely myth, but they are telling the truth about contemporary life—at least on the level of privilege.



## THE CAVE 1 BUDDHA AND THE DEATH OF HARISENA (LATE 477)

Although the Cave 1 Buddha image, being the (intended) donation of the emperor Harisena himself, could well be considered the most important image at the site, and although it was fully carved and painted by the end of 477, it was never dedicated. Presumably the dedication ceremonies were being planned, and the arrival of the emperor for this important moment anticipated; but, the whole event, and indeed the whole promising future, was cut off by the sudden death of the emperor at (approximately) the end of 477. Indeed, its suddenness was probably due to the fact that he was assassinated by or at the instance of his pernicious Asmaka feudatories. This is certainly suggested by the account in the *Visrutacarita*; and if we cannot prove that the emperor was murdered, at least we can say that it is clear that he did not die of a wasting disease.<sup>1</sup> His end obviously came quickly; if not from a poisoned meal or a bought barber, surely from something like a precipitous stroke or heart attack. It was clearly for this reason that he never got down to the site for the projected ceremonies; while the chaos immediately attendant upon his demise would also explain—if such an explanation is necessary—why no one else took over these same responsibilities.<sup>2</sup>

We know that Harisena's Buddha image, although obviously completed, was never dedicated. Particularly strong evidence for this is the fact that there are no intrusions in the cave, even though this impressive cave would have surely been considered an ideal spot, and even though there are a number of available wall spaces where intrusions could have been put. Later donors never put votive images in caves that had not been dedicated; whereas in caves that *had* been dedicated and where space was available, intrusions are invariably found.<sup>3</sup>

Added to this essentially incontrovertible evidence, it should be noted that Cave 1's shrine and shrine antechamber show absolutely no

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<sup>1</sup> For the *Visrutacarita*, see Spink Volume I, Chapters 4–6.

<sup>2</sup> See Volume I, Ch 9, 184–187 on the controversy surrounding this view of Harisena's death.

<sup>3</sup> Volume I, Ch 10, 213ff; see also Ch 13 for the special case of Cave 22.

trace of the grime caused by oil lamps used for worship; the paintings, though some (especially in the shrine) have fallen away, are in pristine condition in terms of color and surface condition. Equally suggestive, there is no damage whatsoever around the hook (now missing) at the center of the antechamber ceiling. There is invariably breakage of the mudplaster around such hooks, caused by hitting the surface with the pole when changing the garlands, if garlands were indeed hung. Thus it is clear that garlands were never hung here, for some damage would be evident if any such activity had taken place.

However, the most convincing evidence that the Cave 1 image was never dedicated, as a result of the tragic circumstances of Harisena's death, is the evidence of the trauma that affects the site at the very moment after the great Cave 1 image was left in abeyance. This, more than anything else, proves that the world, suddenly and tragically, had changed.

## THE TRAUMAS OF 478

If the year 477, like those just before it, was a happy time, when all things seemed possible, the year that followed—478—was a time of troubles, of concern and despair, when everything was falling apart. This dark year, so ominously introduced and indeed initiated by the sudden death of the emperor, divides into two tragic parts, separated, as it were, by the dedicatory inscription of Cave 26, ascribable to about the middle of the year. The inscription, lauding the Asmakas while insultingly omitting even the mention of the new Vakataka emperor, Harisena's son, is an assertion of Asmaka independence. Obviously reflecting the thinking of the Asmaka rulers and the (presumed) official pronouncements of independence up in the Asmaka capital, this seemingly “harmless” inscription ominously foreshadows the great insurrection against the Vakataka house that the perfidious Asmakas were already planning.<sup>1</sup>

The evidence of developments at Ajanta during 478 quite clearly reveals that during the first half of the year the new Vakataka emperor was still the overlord of the region; but it equally suggests that the patronage situation at the site was extremely unstable, even dangerous. Suddenly, at this point, the well-laid excavation plans underway in the various caves in the main, or “Vakataka”, section of the site were peremptorily abandoned, and total attention turned to the completion of the shrines alone—more particularly the Buddha images—in order to get them dedicated before time ran out.

It is evident that in this eleventh hour—in fact it was only a few minutes until midnight—the dedication of the shrine images was absolutely essential, if merit was going to be gained. It was clearly this—not the beauty or the completion of the carefully wrought surroundings—that would bring the image to “life” and in a sense justify the whole endeavor. We know that this is true because, as mentioned above, when “intrusive” donors usurped caves, throughout the site, for their own purposes during the Period of Disruption (479–480), they would put their votive offerings only in caves where the image had

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<sup>1</sup> Volume I, Ch 1, 16–18; also Ch 10.

been dedicated—was “alive”. Not a single one of the multitude of later donors ever put a single votive offering in a cave bereft of a living image, no matter how much excellent space might be available.<sup>2</sup>

To sum up: if the first half (approximately) of 478 was a period when the “Vakataka” patrons were rushing their shrine images to completion and dedication, this was because of the ominous political situation, soon to be clearly defined by Buddhabhadra’s insulting announcement. The rush was obviously connected with the compulsion of all of the different “Vakataka” patrons to finish and dedicate their shrine images, and then get out of harm’s way; for as we know from the evidence of Dandin’s *Visrutacarita*, and can readily infer from events at the site, the Asmakas were planning at this very moment to renounce the Vakataka overlordship. War was in the offing, and could come any day.

During this same period early in 478, work continued on the Asmaka caves, located at the site’s western extremity, in normal course. As both the local rulers and the potential aggressors—not the potential victims—they were in a position of power, reflected in the ambitious development of their undertakings at this time. The whole Cave 26 complex, with its staggeringly impressive ambulatory sculptures and its highly elaborated left wing, along with the splendidly conceived and related viharas, Caves 21, 23, 24, and 28, was still actively under excavation at the very time when such work had already ended on the “Vakataka” caves. However, by about the middle of 478, when the Asmaka insurrection, at least in intent, had already started, the situation at the site changed. The last of the anxious “Vakataka” patrons would by now have fled, and in the Asmaka caves the expected funding was about to be cut off, in order to be diverted (perhaps along with a host of conscripted workers) for the needs of the imminent war.

At this point, late in 478, the Asmaka caves began to be treated more like their unhappy “Vakataka” counterparts. Although it is possible that “normal” excavation had continued for some months early in 478 on vast endeavors such as Cave 24 and Cave 28, a realistic assessment of the situation now demanded that they, along with minor new caves such as Cave 22 and 23A, be totally abandoned. It was clear by now that—bowing to the realities of the situation—all efforts henceforth

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<sup>2</sup> Actually, every shrine Buddha that was started at Ajanta, with the exception of the Buddha in Cave 1, was ultimately dedicated; some were most expediently finished, but were still “brought to life”. Of course a good number of caves remained so incomplete that their intended shrine images were never started.

should be concentrated on the completion of the more nearly finished Caves 21 and 23, as well as the Cave 26 complex itself.

However, the Asmaka planners were still not as worried as their “Vakataka” counterparts had been. They obviously could not believe that their longstanding and indeed amazing efforts were going to be cut off as soon and as decisively as turned out to be the case. Although toward the end of this troubling year they suddenly got the point and finally rushed—a bit late—to complete their shrine Buddhas, they had already wasted precious time trying to finish—even if very expediently—their whole excavations. Thus, at about a minute to midnight, they realized that all they could do to complete the Buddha group in Cave 21 was to complete some of its details, not by carving, but with mudplaster and paint. At the same time the monk Buddhahadra now decided that he would finally make amends for having disregarded the Cave 26 complex’s lesser Caves 25, 27, and the right wing—all early and originally shrineless viharas—by putting images in them; but his success rate at this too-late moment was soberingly low, as we shall see below.

So the Asmaka goals, at least as originally envisioned, were finally aborted too, swept away by the oncoming demands of war. After all of their faith and all of their efforts, only the image in Cave 21, along with the main image in Cave 26, and the images in its two lower wings, had been dedicated, and even the great ceremonial hall—its ambulatory only half decorated—had not been properly completed. Buddhahadra’s dream of “(setting) up a memorial on the mountains that will endure for as long as the sun and the moon continue” (Cave 26 inscription, vs 8) had been to some degree realized; but he must have felt, as he looked back toward the great valley, “resonant with the chirping of birds and the chatterings of monkeys” (Cave 26 inscription, vs 18) that the sun and the moon were at least in partial eclipse.

As we have noted before, the first shrine Buddhas ever to be finished and dedicated at Ajanta were those rushed to completion early in 469: those in Cave Lower 6, 7, 11, and 15.<sup>3</sup> Then, slightly later, at the end

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<sup>3</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that the Cave 15 Buddha was hurriedly dedicated, even though it was partly unfinished when work on it stopped in 469. The Buddhas in both Cave 20 and Cave 21 were similarly unfinished (or, better, expediently finished), but they were certainly dedicated, since both caves contain intrusions. Cave 15 has intrusions too, but they of course belong to the Period of Disruption, which occurred after the shrine image was refurbished.

of 471, Upendragupta, equally rushed, managed to get those in Caves 17, 19, and 20 dedicated before the Asmakas attacked and ultimately took over the region.<sup>4</sup> Ironically, this need to complete and dedicate the images of the Buddha, with such “calmless” urgency, appears to have become from the start an established pattern in the caves, due to the fact that at moments of crisis there was a compulsion to rush them to dedication. And to add to the irony, the one figure that was completed in normal course, in the happy years between 475 and 477, was the shrine Buddha in the imperial Cave 1; and this great image alone was never dedicated and put into worship.

By contrast, nearly every shrine Buddhas found in the caves got completed and dedicated, almost invariably in a rush, during 478. Remarkably, no less than ten shrine images at the site were finished and dedicated in this single troubled year (2, 4, Upper 6, 7(revised), 15(revised), 16, 21, 26, 26LW, 26RW), while two others (8, and 11) may also have been refurbished and rededicated at this time.<sup>5</sup> One could also add the images in Caves 3 and 4A at Aurangabad and the image in the Ghatotkacha vihara to the list.<sup>6</sup> The only exceptions were the Buddhas in Caves 17, 19, and 20, which the defeated local king rushed to get dedicated in 471, and the image in Cave Lower 6, which had been in continuous worship since 469.

This curious division between what would appear to be absence and excess—between the paucity of completed Buddha images prior to 478 and the compulsive production in 478 itself—was in large part due to the fact that the flourishing world of the years between 475 and the end of 477 was a happy world. At that time, under Harisena’s powerful and productive rule, which seemed destined to go on forever, the various excavations, particularly those of the major courtly donors, were being developed with constancy and care; there was no need to rush. By 477, a great number of the caves were well underway, and even those waiting for more workmen could expect to be underway soon. So there was no problem; all of the shrines, with their patient Buddha

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<sup>4</sup> The main image in the Caitya Cave 19 may well have been completed by about 469, but it was probably not dedicated until things became critical in 471, since the cave was still being worked on into that year, when the arrival of the prasasti (never incised in the cave) was probably momentarily expected.

<sup>5</sup> Volume I, Ch 11 and 12; also Volume V, Ch 5.

<sup>6</sup> Volume I, Ch 14.

images, would be completed in due course, and in a manner in which both the patrons and the artists could take pride.

By contrast, the world of 478, which arrived all too quickly and harshly, was a world of tension and despair. The great emperor was dead, and with the accession of his imprudent and incapable son, the now-threatened Vakataka world was on the verge of imminent disintegration. In response, all of the “Vakataka” patrons, the sponsors of the caves along the main part of the scarp, were rushing to get their images completed and dedicated while they could—no matter if the excavations themselves were left in their half-finished states. And the Asmaka patrons, although they were now in control at the site, were not in control of the empire; they were powerless to stop the coming of the war, or the impact of its effects. Their funding was at first threatened and then quite abruptly cut off. They had no other choice but to finish whatever shrine images they could at the last minute, and then leave, turning the site over to the “Medes and the Persians”—to those intrusive donors, drawn from the local populace of monks and devotees, who would claim it for their own votive purposes during the next two years or so, and would innocently destroy so much that had gone on before.

We shall review, cave by cave, the now hyper-anxious image production of this painful year—478. Thus we can best describe the expedient character of the ultimately devotional, but at the same time self-interested, efforts of this troubled year.

## CAVE 2

By the end of 477, the whole excavation was essentially finished. The carving of the shrine Buddha was also probably completed, but like so much else in the cave it had not yet been painted. The painting of the shrine was completed in 478, and the Buddha was then dedicated. However, the walls of the antechamber and various other walls in the cave were not painted until the Period of Disruption, when they were covered with a host of intrusive Buddhas.

## CAVE 4

By 477, much of the excavation had been completed; in fact the shrine had already been penetrated before work broke off due to the Recession

late in 468. The six great standing Buddhas in the shrine antechamber were half completed in 477, and although some were never finished, in 478 the two flanking the shrine doorway were hurriedly painted, and the shrine doorway itself decorated with Buddha images. Work on the shrine walls was now abandoned, but the image itself, which is an enlarged copy of the image in Cave 1 and was already well underway, was finally completed and painted in 478. The Cave 4 Buddha image was also inscribed, hastily, at that time, by its patron, the “*viharasvamin Mathura*”—the term apparently describing a powerful lay figure or “owner of the monastery”.<sup>7</sup> The shrine doors were never hung, due to lack of time; and it is doubtful that the image was ever used for consistent worship.

#### CAVE UPPER 6

The splendid image, with its elaborate throne back, was already underway in 477. However, under the pressure of time, in 478, the matrix that had been reserved for the expected projecting devotees was summarily cut away, and a much-simplified group of relevant motifs, copying the forms on the base of the Buddha image in the cave’s lower story, was carved in low relief on the revised base. The image must have also been painted in 478. The newly popular grouping of the Six Buddhas of the Past had been started in the shrine antechamber in 477, but the patron did not attempt to finish them, since one of the figures had not yet been started. In fact, the painting of the five that had been carved was delayed until the Period of Disruption.

#### CAVE 7

The embarrassingly outmoded Cave 7 image, rushed to completion early in 469, was drastically (and impressively) refurbished in 477, at which time the now conventional Six Buddhas of the Past were cut from the remaining matrix along the sides of the shrine. After that, a host of small images were added in all available spots in the shrine and shrine antechamber. However, it was not until early in 478 that the whole area, with its myriad Buddhas, was finally plastered and painted.

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<sup>7</sup> For discussion see Cohen 1995, 176 ff; Schopen 21, 221, 238.



At the same time the porch area was plastered and painted (partially) in a great rush, as was characteristic in these troubled times.

#### CAVE 8

Although a shrine was added to Cave 8 in about 466, the excavators had to confront a malicious layer of “red bole”, making it impossible to carve a monolithic Buddha. It seems likely that a loose image was set up, prior to the Recession, but this is not certain. Later on, the whole cave, including the cells, was surfaced with the thick red plaster never found at the site prior to 477. Therefore it seems likely that this plastering was applied in 477 or early 478, and then (in the hall and shrine area) painted. This suggests that someone eager to honor the Buddha and to make merit took on this renewal of the old cave at this time, either refurbishing or renewing the loose image set up in the shrine.

#### CAVE 11

The Cave 11 image, replacing the abandoned stupa that had already been started in the shrine, was completed and dedicated in early 469. However, the sculptor, still unpracticed, made a number of mistakes in the definition of the Buddha’s torso. At some point these mistakes were corrected—the form being built up with mudplaster in the armpit area and then covered with a second layer of paint. The halo was also both replastered and repainted. Although it is difficult to date these revisions, the fact that, after 469, the painting of the cave was never continued suggests that this new work on the image was done only to make merit. This being the case, we might assume that the revisions were made, hurriedly, in early 478, when the focus of attention was on the Buddha image alone.

#### CAVE 15

The Cave 15 image had been hurriedly carved in early 469, before the (warped) shrine chamber had even been properly defined. Although the latter never got properly shaped, the image itself was refurbished in 478, in large part because in its rushed early phase the base portion had

never been revealed at all. Now it was provided with out-sized leonine throne legs (rather than figures of simple lions) and a conventional but now barely visible wheel. The image was then painted, along with the ceiling area above, while the ceiling of the shrine antechamber was also painted at this time, in a most cursory fashion.

#### CAVE 16

In 469, the excavators managed to penetrate what was to be this huge cave's shrine antechamber, but then work broke off. In 477 the Prime Minister Varahadeva and the great monk Buddhahadra introduced the revolutionary bhadrasana Buddha to the site, in their Caves 26 and 16 respectively. Remarkably, and not without difficulty, the huge Buddha image was cut from the matrix remaining in the area from the abandoned excavation work of 469. Varahadeva also planned a remarkable new type of (pillared) shrine for his image, but it had to be abandoned, due to the pressure of time, in 478. At this time, he did, however, manage to get his image painted, although the cave as a whole was never fully completed.

#### CAVE 21

Much of the excavation of Cave 21 had been completed by 477, but when the painted decoration of the cave was being planned in 478, the planners realized that it would have to be done very expediently. However, (being Asmakas!), it never occurred to them that time would run out before the Buddha image could be completed, and therefore they spent much more time than they should have working on the decoration of the hall itself. However, at some point late in 478 they suddenly realized that time was truly running out, and that they now would have to finish the fine Buddha image most expediently, if it was going to get done at all. As a result of this consequent last minute rush, the halo and the throne back did not get carved, the attendant bodhisattvas remain unfinished, and even the Buddha's characteristic snail-shell locks had to be painted in rather than carved. Although the image did get dedicated, its tribulations clearly reveal the pattern of the gradual but ultimately insistent breakdown of Asmaka patronage.

## CAVE 25

Cave 25, the upper right wing of the Cave 26 complex was started, at a very early date (c. 462) as a simple “dormitory” for the monks. Eclipsed by the attention given to the complex’s great central hall, it was still only half-excavated in about 466, when the huge Cave 24 was begun, crowding into the neighboring cliff-face. Cave 24’s left cells, to be revealed, had to penetrate so deeply into the space beneath the right side of the unfinished Cave 25, that there was no point in even starting the once-intended cells in that major area of the little cave, upon which, as a consequence, work on the whole was understandably aborted.<sup>8</sup>

Although Cave 25 was abandoned in (or by) c. 466, some rushed work began on it again in the troubled atmosphere of 478. That was when Buddhahadra (and/or his associates) decided to add shrines—before time ran out!—to the three long-neglected old wings of his caitya complex (i.e. Caves 25, 27, and 26RW).<sup>9</sup> At this point (478) he managed to complete the expediently placed shrine in the lower right wing (26RW), but was only able to start a very late shrine in the upper left wing (Cave 27) and (if I am correct) it was at this same “eleventh hour” that he decided to add a shrine to Cave 25 (the upper right wing) as well. This would explain why he suddenly ordered the “updating” of the unfinished old porch pillars and porch doorway with late and hastily rendered ornamentation, and why what may have been conceived (but never finished) as a storage area was cut into the cave’s left end-wall, an area which, as convention demanded, had remained inviolate in the early 460s.<sup>10</sup> One can well imagine that this huge Cave 26 complex needed such a storage area—all of the other cells both in the main cave and the wings appear to have been planned as residences for the monks.<sup>11</sup> However, like the re-designed porch doorway and the porch pillars of Cave 25, it never got finished; this was in part because time ran out, but perhaps also because, in the more forward inner chamber, the excavator(s) actually broke through into the too-closely neighboring

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<sup>8</sup> See Volume V, pp 304 ff for the development of Cave 25, the adjacent Cave 26 complex, and the role that Buddhahadra played in the matter.

<sup>9</sup> In contrast, the more convenient lower left wing (26LW) was enlarged and further developed.

<sup>10</sup> See Fig. 40: “Defining Features”

<sup>11</sup> Cell R1 of Cave 27, made into a shrinelet in 478, is in fact a converted unused residence cell.

vault of the great caitya Cave 26.<sup>12</sup> The very incompetence that this reveals strikingly confirms the haste and expediency that characterizes so much of the work in this very last and troubled year of the site's original patronage.

The same criticism could be made of the treatment of the roughing out, at the right end of Cave 25's court, of what appears to have been intended as a shrine even more anomalous in character than the expediently placed shrines conceived for the two other long-neglected wings. This rectangular "container" in Cave 25 is in fact very like one cut for an image in c. 480 in the front wall of Cave Upper 6.<sup>13</sup> This also was never put into use, but was (I suggest) also intended to hold an inserted image. By the same token, it would appear that the revealed stone "platform" in front of this area in Cave 25 would have been used for related ritual purposes. As I have explained elsewhere, this platform itself could not have been defined prior to 478, because its shape was clearly adjusted to the assertive presence of the adjacent Cave 24's court cell, which was located precisely below it; and the latter had not been started until 477, soon being abandoned as a consequence of Harisena's death later in the same year.

There is a flight of rock-cut steps, leading up from the courtyard of Cave 24, that now provide access to Cave 25. These are the most clumsily cut steps at the site, and in this regard their character would be consistent with much of the hasty work being done in a number of the Asmaka excavations in the troubled context of 478, when all consistent patronage at the site was so sadly doomed. Since the upper right wing (i.e. Cave 25) was part of the caitya hall's complex, this roundabout approach to the main hall would hardly have been a very practical or desirable one. But in any case, even if the early approach to the little cave was from somewhere to the right (which is unlikely), it could not have been via this particular stairway that we see today. This is because, in the early 460s, when Cave 25 was started, the courtyard of the adjacent Cave 24, from which this stairway to Cave 25 ascends, had not yet been cut down to its present necessary level. This suggests the likelihood that this rough stairway is nothing more than an expediently cut approach made in the nineteenth century or later to facilitate access to the cave.

<sup>12</sup> R. K. Singh kindly told me about this revealing hole in the wall.

<sup>13</sup> For the Cave Upper 6 "niche" see Volume III, 64.

By the time that it was decided to take up work again on Cave 25 in 478, the only practical, even if unexpected, approach to Cave 25 appears to have been from along the porch roof of the great caitya hall adjacent to it, through a doorway cut through the left end of Cave 25's courtyard; and because the roof of the porch is somewhat lower than the floor of Cave 25's courtyard, a short ladder or a couple of blocks of stone must have been needed for any workmen—no monks were ever able to take up residence in the unfinished cave—going back and forth. However, in the first phase of work on the cave, in the early 460s, it seems unlikely that the anomalous doorway had yet been cut, for its sill is (as we would expect) at the level of the Cave 25's court floor, and that floor was not cut down to its present depth until 478.

If we can trust the old groundplan of Cave 25 that R K Singh, in his enthusiastic researches, has located, it would appear that there were two doorways (somewhat suspicious in their asymmetry) that opened into the front of the court at this time.<sup>14</sup> Given such entrances, it is reasonable to assume that the early excavators would have approached the cave in this way, before the area below was usurped by the slightly later excavation-work in Cave 26LW, the complex's lower right wing.<sup>15</sup> Before Cave 24 was started (in c. 466) the excavators coming to Cave 25 would have been able to approach the Cave 25 court from that still virgin area. However, after Cave 24's deep courtyard had been cut

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<sup>14</sup> R. K. Singh located this old plan in the British Library archives, along with the revealing 19th century photograph proving the existence of the curious now broken doorway at the left of Cave 25's courtyard. I am most grateful to him for both his discoveries of these important materials, as well as for his generosity in sharing them with me.

<sup>15</sup> These doorways are shown clearly in the completed plan of Cave 25 found in the British Library, but this "too-neat" plan appears to be directly derived from a more precise preliminary sketch drawn (and containing a stamped (?) signature) by Burgess himself, or at least under his guidance. In this drawing, the front wall of Cave 25's court is barely sketched in, suggesting that it was based not on very precise archaeological evidence. Indeed, the asymmetrical position of the two doorways (when only one would have been "required" in any case), suggests that a certain amount of guesswork was involved in developing the completed drawing—which the very particular Burgess appears not to have signed. At the same time, it is reasonable to suppose that the original entrance to the court was indeed from in front; the question is: did this assumption influence the person who made the final drawing. Indeed, the groundplan of the whole Cave 26 complex (Fig. 30) lacks none of the remarkable precision expected from Burgess's final involvements, even though its general outlines may well have been developed under his supervision. By way of contrast, the detailed renderings of the elevation of Cave 26 (Figs. 31, 32) have Burgess's signature (printed), and are more trustworthy.

down to its present level, starting in c. 466, a new access to Cave 25 would have been needed; except for the fact that by this point in time the cave had been abandoned in any case.<sup>16</sup>

It may have been because of these changes—the development first of Cave 26LW and then of the great Cave 24 and the consequent destruction of the old approach to the cave, that another mode of access to Cave 25 was conceived when it was decided to take up work there again in 478. This would seem to explain the presence of the aforementioned doorway cut into the left end of Cave 25's court. The wall through which it opened has by now broken largely away, but the doorway was still visible in the nineteenth century, the evidence being preserved in an old photograph now preserved in the British Library.

What seems to be the case is that this doorway, from which one could walk from Cave 25 across to Cave 27 and then down into the main courtyard of the complex, was apparently not cut until Cave 25 was finally “born again” in 478. We can assume that this is true because the sill of the doorway, quite logically, considering its supposed purpose, is at the same level as Cave 25's court floor, and this area was not cut down to its present level until work on the cave was hurriedly taken up again in 478. It is not likely (although conceivable) that the doorway (with a previously higher sill) would have been cut when the cave was started in the early 460s, for at that time there was no reason for anyone other than the excavators to have been going in and out of the barely-revealed excavation. Instead, the excavators would have both approached the cave, and would have removed the tons of rock that they excavated, from directly in front. They would hardly have been expected to climb through such a doorway (even had it been cut at that time) and then to have trekked along the (probably still unfinished) roof of Cave 26's porch, then along the porch floor (probably also unfinished) of the opposite right wing (Cave 27), and finally down the steps (a trace alone remains) leading into the front of the main court of the complex.

Of course, a small amount of rock was also excavated in the porch and court of Cave 25 in 478—all work on the unfinished interior have been long abandoned—but this would not have amounted to more than five or ten percent of the amount taken out of the cave fifteen years or

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<sup>16</sup> A further explanation of the likely approaches to Cave 25, which apparently underwent changes, will be provided, with relevant drawings, in Volume VI, forthcoming.

so before. In any case, it could now be thrown down into the courtyard of Cave 24, for that enormous cave appears to have been peremptorily abandoned at the time of Harisena's death a year before.

### CAVE 26

Cave 26's revolutionary bhadrasana image, fronting the stupa, was begun by 477, when the richly decorated main areas of the cave were well underway and when the wonderful ambulatory sculptures were already probably in process. However, it is unlikely that the image was dedicated before 478, because the decoration of the cave was clearly still going on at that time. For instance, the ambulatory ceiling painting was completed after the Parinirvana panel (upon which it intrudes); therefore the great panel—not surprisingly—must have been part of Buddhabhadra's overall plan for the cave, aborted late in 478, while still in process. Assuming that the dedication of the bhadrasana image was delayed until the decoration of the cave was more or less complete, we must assign its dedication—as opposed to its completion—to 478.

### CAVE 26LW (LEFT WING)

Cave 26LW was given a much higher priority than Cave 26's three other wings, in part because its position was not only intimately connected with the main hall, but because, although started as a small shrineless vihara, it was able to be expanded, to include a shrine and other features. Its Buddha image was probably planned before the more "modern" bhadrasana image was started in Cave 26 itself, but the treatment of its strongly projecting celestials and the devotees at its base, suggests that it was in process for some time. Furthermore, its architectural context was still being worked on even in 478; the shrine antechamber pillars had not been fully cut at that time (and never would be) while the complex shrine doorway, developing from slightly earlier doorway forms, could hardly have been underway prior to 478—at the very time that the image was probably finally finished and dedicated.

## CAVE 26RW (RIGHT WING)

The Buddha image in Cave 26RW is probably the latest to be completed in the troubled but productive context of 478. It reflects the main Cave 26 image in its bhadrasana pose, although reveals a more appropriate grouping, in which the two now-required bodhisattvas are comfortably positioned at either side. The image, surprisingly, is placed on a projection of rock at the left of the cave that was reserved, in 468, for an earlier image that never got begun due to the expulsion of the Asmaka patrons at the end of that year. This curious lateral position was chosen because a shrine could not be cut at the cave's rear, due to aggressive flaws in that area as well as the proximity of the floor of the courtyard of Cave 24. In any case, the anomalous projection was still available for use in 478, when Buddhahadra was trying to get as many images done and dedicated as he could. The image's complex composition was conceived with care. Because of this, and probably because of its prestigious connection with the great caitya hall, it appears to have provided a model for a number of intrusive images done in the next year (e.g. Cave 22 rear, Cave 4, left of porch doorway).

Since the image finally added to Cave 26RW's projection dates a full decade later than its originally intended but never realized counterpart, it is of interest to note that the adjacent cell has a similar developmental history. Its early B mode doorway, defined in 468, was "updated", as was common throughout the site, to the more practical and secure D mode, which was used at the site only from 475 on. The fine stone bed (charpoy) cut at the left of the projection must also have been made at this time; the cell once planned for this position could not now be cut, because the right porch cells of the main hall had earlier exercised their priority.



## THE PERIOD OF DISRUPTION (479–480)

By the beginning of 479, with the Vakataka's imperial world about to fall apart due to the internal subversions and the external aggressions of the Asmakas and the other feudatories who were joining with them, Ajanta's history undergoes a turbulent sea-change. The patrons connected with the threatened Vakataka court had now all fled from the site, and although sometime in 478 the Asmakas had declared themselves lords of the region, they too now had to leave, because military priorities were taking precedence over spiritual needs.

At this point the previously established administrative controls at the site were no longer operational. Now, with the ruling Asmakas gone, even Upendragupta's beautiful caves were given a new lease on life. Although the Caitya Cave 19's interior had been completely filled with images belonging to Upendragupta's original program of work, the frame of the façade, the right and left walls of the court, and a few other areas were now covered with a hotchpotch of votive images, often of high quality, and often provided with hooks or holes for hooks, which must have been used for garlands. Three fine sculptured Buddha images were now also added to Cave 20, while other intrusive images, now missing, may have been painted on the porch walls. Although the shrine image itself, although dedicated, had never been properly finished in 471, the new donors made no improvements to it; indeed, one suspects that here, as in most of the other caves, their devotions were directed to their own private votive offerings alone. Upendragupta's Cave 17 also has a scattering of intrusions on the wall of the cistern at court right, as well as a fine intrusive Buddha triad cut beneath Upendragupta's dedicatory inscription.<sup>1</sup>

The two complex Buddha groups that have "appropriated" the central space in Cave 19's two pillared court cells give clear evidence of having been supplied with some kind of fitted-in wooden platforms,

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<sup>1</sup> The roof above the right cistern has long since collapsed, resulting in the displacement of some of the intrusive seated Buddha images.

surely for use in making offerings.<sup>2</sup> Intriguingly, it is clear that a similar fitted-in platform was once set up in front of the impressive intrusive Buddha triad at the left of the court in Cave 17, while still another was probably inserted in front of the large intrusive Buddha in the left rear of the hall of Cave 20. Since such “worship platforms” are found only in the caves originally sponsored by Upendragupta, it is tempting to think that now, with the sudden departure of the Asmakas, he or members of his family were able to “reclaim” their previous rights.<sup>3</sup>

Although the “intrusive” devotees, during the Period of Disruption, appear to have been most concerned to make and worship their own donations, it would hardly be surprising if they honored the many shrine Buddhas at the site as well, even though these were the offerings of previous patrons. There is a rather clear suggestion that they did indeed do this in Cave 19, for the plaster and paint around the (now-missing) garland hook at the center of the front aisle ceiling in this splendid cave shows distinct signs of damage. Since there is no evidence that Cave 19 was ever worshiped during the heyday of the site, it seems likely that this damage occurred during the Period of Disruption, when the beautiful cave was no longer “out of bounds”.

Although it seems reasonable to assume that other caves—or more specifically, their shrine Buddhas—were honored as well by the new host of devotees that flooded into the caves during the Period of Disruption, there is little clear evidence that this was the case. The only clear evidence for such continued usage appears to be in Cave 2. In that highly decorated cave, as noted above, there are no less than six painted ceiling medallions leading from the front of the cave to the shrine antechamber, and all of these show very considerable signs of breakage at their central points, even though the iron garland hooks have long since disappeared, presumably taken out for various uses by the residents of the area.

Since the Cave 2 Buddha was not finished and dedicated until time was already rapidly running out, it is not likely that the damage around the hook holes was done in 478; in fact, it is unlikely that the Buddha image was ever significantly worshiped until the Period of Disruption.

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<sup>2</sup> For the curious manner in which the standing Buddha’s flanking both of these groups have “balanced” gestures, as if their mudras have been adjusted for esthetic reasons, see Volume V, Ch 5, 243, and Volume III, 158.

<sup>3</sup> See Volume III, Cave 17, 126–7.

The fact that, as we know, monks continued to live in the cave in the year after Harisena's death, makes it reasonable to assume that worship of the image was still being carried on at that time.

There is reason to believe that this was the case in Cave Upper 6 as well, since again it is clear that monks were living in the cave during the Period of Disruption, and that the images in the antechamber were brought to completion at that time.<sup>4</sup> However, as in most other caves, there is no clear evidence that active worship of the main image was continuing, even though new donors were involved in adding their own images throughout the cave right up to the last minute. By the same token, there is no convincing evidence proving continued worship of the main images in any of the other caves—even though, admittedly, this may have been the case. The strongest evidence is negative, and this too is minor: the lack of any grime on the Cave 21 Buddha suggests that, although the image had been completed, and monks were continuing to live in a few of the cells, the image was paid no heed at this troubled period. The same could be said in the case of the relatively pristine images in Cave 4, Cave 15, and of course Cave 1. In other cases, where the earlier begriming of the images (i.e. Cave Lower 6, 11, 17) disallow such observations regarding activity in the Period of Disruption, no evidence can be forthcoming.<sup>5</sup>

Now that the Asmaka control over the site had ended, and the Period of Disruption was in full swing, it was becoming a situation of “each man for himself”. The concern now was fundamentally devotional and the goal was the creation of votive offerings made for the good of the world, with the benefits presumably accruing to the self as well. The new goals were in no sense pernicious, but they seem to have largely bypassed the authority of those who, allied with the political powers, must originally have exerted so much influence over the site's developments.

A typical formulation, one of a few dozen votive records painted (or in three cases carved) beneath the intrusions now found throughout the site, is like the following, written beneath two separate painted Buddha images on the left wall of Cave 16: “This is the religious donation of the Sakyabhiksu reverend Dharmadatta. Let the merit therein be for

<sup>4</sup> See Volume V, Ch 5, Cave Upper 6; also Volume I, Ch 11, 238–239.

<sup>5</sup> On certain images, it is hard to determine the amount of usage: Cave 7, Cave 16, Cave 20, Cave 26, Cave 26LW, Cave 26RW.

the attaining of supreme knowledge by [his] mother and father and all living beings.”<sup>6</sup> It is revealing to note that this is the same monk Dharmadatta who, along with another monk named Bhadrabandhu, was thanked, hardly a year before, by the monk Buddhahadra for “(having) seen to the excavation and completion of this temple (Cave 26) on my behalf” (Cave 26 inscription, vs 14).<sup>7</sup>

Particularly since all records pertaining to the period when the site was flourishing are inscribed in stone, it may seem surprising that only three, during the Period of Disruption, were produced by the chisel rather than the brush. These all happen to be on or in Cave 26, and are similar in import to the many painted intrusive inscriptions at the site. The haste typical of this whole period of course is one explanation for the preponderance of painted rather than carved inscriptions. The virtue of modesty might possibly be another reason, for the donative records are in no sense self-seeking, being brief and sometimes hardly legible. In fact, their placement is so expedient that they often give the appearance of being afterthoughts, hastily fitted in where space was available around the feet of the images.

The omission of any reference to the self as a (or the) recipient of the merit earned by a votive gift appears to be a convention in these brief inscriptions; and as such it finds its counterpart in the site’s long programmatic inscriptions—the donative records in Caves 16, 17, and 26—all of which end by assigning the merit to the world in general. “Whatever merit is here, may that be for the attainment of . . . supreme knowledge as well as the multitude of all the pure qualities by them and by (*all the beings of all the three*) worlds” (Cave 26 inscription, vs 15). “May this Hall, out of affection, . . . cause the attainment of well-being by good people as long as the sun dispels darkness by its rays” (Cave 17 inscription, vs 29) “May the whole world . . . getting rid of its manifold sins, enter that tranquil and noble state, free from sorrow and pain!” (Cave 16 inscription, vs 32). But as we have seen above, in the body of their long inscriptions these same donors refer clearly to the benefits of the amassing of “a large store of religious merit”, as a result of their benefactions. By the same token it would seem that similar benefits were assumed from these intrusive offerings, even though this is not stated.

<sup>6</sup> See Cohen Appendix Volume II, 316–317, #70, 71.

<sup>7</sup> Cohen 1995, 363–4 has suggested that this Dharmadatta of Buddhahadra’s inscription is not identical with the Dharmadatta who donated the intrusive image in Cave 16. For my contrary arguments see Volume Two; 122–4; 123, note 2.

If we can believe that the Dharmadatta who donated a number of intrusive Buddhas in Cave 16 is the same monk who hardly a year before was at work on the excavation of Cave 26, this can be revealing with regard to the situation of the site in the Period of Disruption. Dharmadatta was obviously only one of a host of monks who made large and small private donations in and on the caves during this frantically pious period starting in 479. And if we ask where these monks came from, the answer is surely directly at hand. They must have been the monks still resident at the site after that brief and traumatic year when all of the previously established patrons—both “Vakataka” and Asmaka—had had to leave the site.

If the monks did not leave when the patrons left, it was probably because they had no place to go. With war immanent and the roads no longer protected by the strength of Harisena’s authority—the *Pax Vakataka*—it was surely safer and more sensible to stay at the site than to move off into the unknown. Although the monks could surely have subsisted for some months on the beneficence of the villagers, who would gain merit from their offerings of food and other requirements, this was a bank that would inevitably fail. The same could be said regarding the monks’ own remaining resources.

In the end, however, the monks did have to go; and they did go, probably taking comfort in the fact that they had been able to leave some votive offerings behind them. Indeed, some monks or others leaving the site, were wise enough to take out a degree of insurance for their journey in the form of paintings or sculptures of the so-called Litany Scene. These are representations of the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara as the Protector of Travelers, his main image surrounded by the *astabhaya*s or eight fears detailing the dangers of the road. The depicted scenes vary in subject and (depending on the size of the image) in number, but generally include dangers from snakes, mad elephants, lions, demons, brigands and other attackers, forest fire, shipwreck or drowning.

The local villagers too, like so many of the monks, must have remained in the area, for want of a better option. However, they must have rapidly felt the effects of the site’s traumatic decline, since they were surely attuned to depending upon its resources and its growth, and the employment of various types that the site’s development must have provided. The one clear benefit that both villagers and monks now could enjoy is the new and unencumbered right to now make offerings of their own votive images. For, as mentioned earlier, Ajanta’s established patrons had always treated it as a totally exclusive site, disallowing any

offerings whatsoever by any “outsiders”. Remarkably, such “outsiders” included the site’s monks, who were from the start excluded from the circle of donors. The only apparent exception was the powerful monk Buddhahadra himself, who was functioning as an intimate of the Asmaka court, from which, undoubtedly, he gained the funds and the authority needed for his vast undertakings.

Among the many inscribed images from this period, according to Cohen’s count, thirty-six refer to donations by monks, six by laymen and one by a laywoman. Another thirteen have inscriptions, but they are indeterminate.<sup>8</sup> Of course, as we have seen in our listing of intrusions in Volume III, there are dozens of separate images or Buddha groups that were surely individual gifts, but which were never inscribed at all, or from which the inscriptions have been lost. In fact, if the rows of carved or (often lost) painted Buddhas in Cave Upper 6, 11, 16, 17 (court), could all be considered individual donations, the count would be in the hundreds. Indeed, if we were to make a count of the multiple Buddha figures which (as in Sravasti Miracle scenes) are part of intrusive painted or carved groups, the count would rise to a few thousand.

As for who carved and/or painted these images, the answer seems self-evident. When Ajanta collapsed, there must have been hundreds of workers of every type suddenly bereft of employment. Many must have gone back to their villagers, while the going was good—or at least not as bad as (they could assume) it soon would be. But many must have stayed, knowing that the employment available elsewhere, in this troubled time, would probably be even more limited than here. At least here at the site, it was evident that there would be a continuing demand for workmen who could make the intrusive images that both monks and laymen were now ordering for their own votive purposes. Of course by now the workmen knew exactly what they were doing when they had to make an image; and as a result, even in this confused period, the general quality stays very high indeed, as the result of the artists’ long experience and probably also as a result of the personal interest which these new donors would have in their benefactions.

As for payment, it was now a “seller’s market”, and the hungry artists could surely be hired for a pittance, perhaps (in the case of the many monk-donors) even accepting the offer of prayers and rituals in lieu

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<sup>8</sup> Cohen 1995, 412, with chart: “Ajanta’s Donative Inscriptions”.

of payment. At the same time, we can assume, following Schopen's revealing review of much previously unconsidered evidence, that monks often had, and often made, money of their own.<sup>9</sup> And if this is true in general in this period, it should be particularly true of a monastery as wealth-oriented as Ajanta. It is very clear that money had no negative associations here; one only need to walk through the site to see coins being dumped out or gathered in, particularly by yakshas, everywhere. One would have to have been either an insensitive or a very parsimonious visitor not to have gotten the point.

There is a vast array of images assignable to this brief period; and all are "uninvited". Although they all violate—or at least take no account of—the previous "well-laid plans" of the caves upon which they obtrude, there are certain rules or patterns that they tend to follow in their choice of location. The prime "rule" is that none of these votive images is ever put in a cave in which the shrine Buddha has not been dedicated. This may seem surprising, because these are often the very caves where there was ample unencumbered and often already smoothed wall space; but the point is that such caves were "dead". The most that was allowed with regard to the use of such "dead" caves is that their unfinished court cells (as if they were quite independent units) could be appropriated as a place for intrusions. This was done in both Cave 24 (left court cell) and Cave 23 (left court cell) probably at a very late (i.e. 480) point in this period when cells in a number of caves were being converted into such shrinelets. It may be the very popularity of such rather elaborate cell conversions that suggested a similar use for the very small and unfinished Cave 22, which had been started but then abandoned in 477.<sup>10</sup>

Even though these intrusions were all made within such a short span of time, they show—as does the whole site throughout its history—a rather remarkably consistent development. We can establish a rough sequence for the images based on their placement, and on the relative desirability of the locations chosen. Thus the fine Litany scene to the right of the porch doorway of Cave 4 may well be early because this was such a prime location—ample, highly visible, well lit, with a smoothly prepared wall surface. The Buddha group on the left side,

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<sup>9</sup> Schopen 2004, 1–18 "The Good Monk and His Money in a Buddhist Monasticism of 'the Mahayana Period'".

<sup>10</sup> This is the one exception where a "dead" cave contains intrusions. For discussion, see Volume III, 172–3.

once (like the Litany) brightly painted, directly reflects the fine image of 478 in Cave 26RW, with its flanking bodhisattvas rather than the “later” attendant Buddhas, and its numerous minor attendants. This complex carving was presumably created at about the same time as the Litany; however, it was necessary to put it high up, because in the meantime a painted image—sponsored by a donor who apparently wanted something quicker and cheaper—was put in the more prime location lower down. Although the painting is gone, we know it was there because one can see the holes for garland hooks; and of course the displacement of the Buddha group would seem to confirm this.<sup>11</sup>

The holes for the now-missing garland hooks above both the Litany and the Buddha group in the Cave 4 porch suggest how they were ornamented for worship. Indeed, we find evidence of such hooks associated with these late images everywhere when we study the innumerable intrusions at the site. The two small “shrinelets”, Caves 9A and 9B, excavated in 479 or 480 (probably the former) between the old Hinayana Caves 9 and 10, provide a telling example of how the many intrusive images were not only used but honored. Each of these two elaborate groupings of Buddhas had at least a dozen small iron hooks affixed at significant points inside the little caves. They were placed at the front and rear corners, at the ceiling center, and on either side of all of the Buddha images. If they cannot all be seen today, this is because so many have been taken out, presumably for use by the local people, or out of curiosity by visitors.<sup>12</sup> It is equally interesting to note that both of these deep “shrinelets” had a pair of swinging (pivoted) doors that could be closed when the images were not in use. Furthermore, both of them had what must have been thin wooden pillars set into holes in their fronts, and these pillars were clearly elaborated with decorative brackets; the latter, although long since missing, were obviously set into the holes cut near the tops of the pillars. Thus, these little excavations duplicated the pillared (and bracketed) arrangement of the site’s late shrine antechambers, which fronted the Buddha images beyond.

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<sup>11</sup> An “extra” hole for a hook was to hold a garland to decorate the doorway. Its counterpart on the right has been almost entirely cut away by the frame of the intrusive Litany scene.

<sup>12</sup> The task of locating them is made easier by the fact that insects (wasps?) lay their eggs in the holes and then secure them with a white substance which they produce for this purpose.



Of course the decoration was not only for such miniature shrines or shrinelets. The Buddha images were often significantly adorned too. This was accomplished, as in the Litany and Buddha panels mentioned above, by the hanging of garlands over the upper corners of the panels, but very often garlands directly adorned the Buddha images too, especially in the Period of Disruption. Thus in the beautiful intrusive shrinelet at the right front of Cave Upper 6, no less than five garland hooks were affixed in the Buddha's halo. Two others were "hidden" (quite literally) just behind the attendant flying couples, while many others appear at other significant points. Indeed, throughout the caves these hooks are, or were, found everywhere. This was particularly the case in the Period of Disruption when, as soon as images were done, the donor/devotees wanted to honor them with worship.

By analyzing the relative placement of the votive panels in or on the various caves—the placement of one often affects the other, and thus gives us clues as to their relative date—and of course by considering their state of completion and even their character of their plastering and painting, one can gradually work out the sequence of the undertakings. Iconographic factors are also revealing guides to change, as is clear from the appended chart, with its surprising specificity.

The character and development of such intrusions, cave by cave, have been analyzed and recorded in some detail in Volume III, so need not be repeated here. We can, however, list a few trenchant examples. For instance, the bhadrasana Buddha, following the innovative and indeed revolutionary first appearance of this type as the central image in both Cave 26 and Cave 16 in 477, becomes increasingly popular in 478 and then in the Period of Disruption.

During 478 and 479, a bit surprisingly, only large-scale panels of the bhadrasana images were produced. When one finds small representations, they are in a 480 context. Just why this is the case, it is hard to say. Possibly, because of the difficulty of making figures in this knee-jutting pose in a small format, sculptors avoided making small panels until they had gained greater confidence by 480. If such a suggestion may seem less than convincing, one can better understand—because it involves iconographic developments—why groups of seated images typically show alternating mudras—dharmacakramudra and dhyanamudra—in 478 and 479, whereas in 480 groups of seated figures invariably show the dharmacakra mudra alone.

Another decisive trend involves the common substitution, in 480, of standing Buddhas as attendants flanking a seated Buddha, whereas in

early 479 (as in 478) seated Buddhas, if attended at all, always have bodhisattva attendants. This resistance to adding standing Buddhas until 480 is the more curious because there are paintings, datable to 470 or 471 in Upendragupta's Cave 19, where standing Buddhas do indeed appear as attendants. By the same token, bhadrasana images appear frequently in earlier paintings, but never in carved panels until 478 at the earliest. I do not have an explanation for this curious separation between the appearance of such forms in painting and their appearance in carvings, sculptural forms being the more conservative.

There are a good number of other features which speak of 479 rather than 478, and perhaps also of 480 instead of 479: the manner in which attendant bodhisattvas and Buddhas, as well as single empanelled Buddhas, are raised up on lotus pedestals is one such innovation. Often eager kneeling devotees are crowded in beneath the pedestals.

Such subtle but distinctive changes in iconography are particularly noticeable where images were produced in sequences, as on the walls of Cave Upper 6, and even more strikingly in the ambulatory of Cave 26, which turns out to have been a ground for intrusions only after the façade areas were filled with these added images. The very latest image on the cave front, as we can judge quite precisely from its context, is the bhadrasana Buddha on the left façade return; this was a very bad (and therefore "late") location, because the view of the panel was cut off by the presence of the porch roof.

The cutting of this relatively advanced panel was probably contemporary with the start of the intrusive work in the ambulatory. There, along the right wall, following the fine Sravasti Miracles added in 478 by Buddhahadra, we find Buddha panels with bodhisattva attendants, which can be dated to 479, while in a few panels farther toward the rear, the compositions have standing Buddha attendants, clearly ascribable to 480.

Similarly on the left rear wall of Cave Upper 6, we find an unfinished "eight Buddha" group of padmasana images that was abandoned for some reason by its patron. It was then covered over with another "eight Buddha" group, but this time they are bhadrasana images. Such a change clearly responds to the transition from padmasana to bhadrasana types that characterizes the iconographic trend of this late time.

## LATE 480: THE END OF PATRONAGE

It is clear, and must be clear, that during the Period of Disruption many images, in the different caves, were being carved or painted at the same time. There was plenty of demand and plenty of artists to satisfy the demand. Thus it is not surprising that when the Period of Disruption suddenly ended—and this appears to have occurred very suddenly—we find a large number of very late images which were not only underway at the same time, but were also suddenly abandoned. A group of twelve images in the most undesirable—and clearly the latest—contexts, in the badly lit rear area of Cave 26's ambulatory, where the rock is often corrupted, all remain unfinished; and many have typically late iconographic features. Thus it is clear that these images were all underway at the very end of 480, and that work on them ended very suddenly.

We can say that these images were all underway at the same time because although work must have been all going on at once, they are caught in various stages of completion. A number of them, carved but not painted, could have been finished in a matter of hours, had time allowed. But time did not allow. It would seem that suddenly—as if on some Tuesday morning—the workmen came and discovered that the situation at the site was suddenly intolerable and that they had to leave, taking their tools and their brushes—but not their expected payment—with them. This situation is repeated in the shrine of Cave 4, and also in a number of other areas, such as in the notably unfinished work on the front wall of Cave Upper 6. Although some monks stayed on for a few years longer, as we can tell by evidence of wear in a number of very late cells, there was no point and no profit to tempt the workmen to stay; so this was the sudden and sad end of all patronage at the site.

I have suggested—somewhat tentatively—that this moment, around the end of 480, was when the insurrectionist forces of the Asmaka “coalition” were proceeding, as we read in the *Visrutacarita*, toward the Narmada River. There, we might believe, they reduced the new Vakataka emperor to “mincemeat”, as Ryder puts it, in his perhaps

overly dramatic translation.<sup>1</sup> But before that, the Asmaka forces appear to have marched through, or close to, the Ajanta region, immediately threatening Sarvasena III (Harisena's son and successor) who "mobilized for defense the moment his boundary was violated".<sup>2</sup> This may well have been the occasion—the crucial moment—when Ajanta's proud patronage came to an end.

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<sup>1</sup> Ryder 1927, 214. Kale 1966, 360 says: "fell a prey to those princes".

<sup>2</sup> Ryder 1927, 213 Kale 1966, 360 says: "Anantavarman (= Sarvasena III), having the border of his kingdom invaded, mobilized his army to march against (the aggressors)".

## A BRIEF APPRECIATION\*

Just as I am profoundly grateful to Professor V. V. Mirashi for providing the foundation for my own studies of the cultural context of Ajanta and other Vakataka sites, I am equally indebted to the work of James Burgess and his colleagues, both Indian and English, in surveying and recording the most important of India's excavations with such a consistently startling precision. It is the very precision of this work, preserving the faults of the planners and the workers as well as their triumphs, which make these ancient "works of art" such an invaluable resource. When a cell, for instance, appears to be misaligned, we must seek the reason (or reasons) for such a seeming error, and this often points us in the direction of discovery. If such plans are "cleaned up and straightened out" as is so often the case, even in purportedly scholarly publications, they can no longer tell the truth. Each of the plans here, testifying not only to Burgess's deep commitment but to his staff's evident sense of responsibility, embodies in graphic form the same story, with all of its twists and turns, that our investigations must elicit.

I must also express my warmest thanks to Dr. Suresh Vasant, who worked together with me for many years, constantly challenging me with his own views and constantly, by virtue of his love of the site and of his abilities as a facilitator, making our work productive. Without either elaborate help or elaborate equipment, he drew the "missing" plans, thus making the catalog complete; his contributions are identified by the initials SV. My friend Naomichi Yaguchi has studied Ajanta's cells (notably the cell doorways) with consummate care; I hope to work with him, in a future publication, on a very comprehensive study of these crucially revealing features. I include his schematic drawing of four types of doorway fittings. Ajit Rao and Nitin Veturkar of Samaskara have worked with me to make "virtual" renditions of certain caves as if still in the process of excavation; one, of Cave 2, is published herein (see Fig. 5); others will appear in Volume 6.

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\* For the reader's convenience Figures 1 to 45, previously included in Volume V, are repeated here, with one addition (Fig. 46).

Because the front court cells of Caitya Cave 19 were broken and filled with debris when the ground plan was made in the nineteenth century, they do not show on our plan (Figure 23). One should note that the elevation drawings of Cave 19 are incorrect as far as the positioning of the stupa, as seen through the caitya window, is concerned. They should not show the stupa as centered; it is considerably located to the right, as seen from the center of the court. One should also be aware of the fact that the plan of the Cave 26 complex (Fig. 30), while generally made with care, was not made by Burgess and has nothing of his insistence on precision.

BCT = Buddhist Cave Temples and Their Inscriptions (Archaeological Survey of India, IV), James Burgess, London 1883

CTI = Cave Temples of India, by James Fergusson and James Burgess, London 1880

HASA = A Historical Atlas of South Asia, Joseph E. Schwartzberg (ed), Chicago 1978

Unless otherwise indicated, the charts and graphs are by the author.



PLATES 1-122







(1) Ajanta: The dhabdhaba (waterfall) in the monsoon season. The deep ravine at Ajanta was cut, over millions of years, by the action of the monsoonal torrents, the water being gathered from hundreds of square kilometers of fields above the site. The eroding action of the waters takes place from late June through September or October, after which the area is essentially dry.



(2) Ajanta. The dhabdhaba's descent. The so-called "Sat Kund", or "Seven Pools" formed by the waterfalls or "dhabdhaba" make one of the most spectacular sights in India. Unfortunately, most visitors never see this area, since it is just around the corner from the last of the caves and is therefore hidden from easy viewing.



(3) Ajanta. The "sat kund" (seven pools): Distant view. The action of the waters has clearly revealed the striated formation of the scarp. One can see how successive layers of lava flow—then later turned to basalt—have been built up, and what a problem this faulted geological structure presented to Ajanta's long-suffering excavators.





(4) Ajanta. The source of the Waghora River. The lowest of the falls provides the source of the Waghora River, which flows past the caves on its way out to the nearby plain.



(5) Ajanta. The winding course of the Waghora River. This view, taken in the monsoon season, shows the curving course of the river. The manner in which the caves are ranged along the arc provides a sense of “community”, which would not be the case were the scarp straight. This view was taken from the Prime Minister’s Cave 16, which was placed—surely by intention—at the very center of the complex.





(6) Ajanta. The ravine from the "Viewpoint". The whole complex at Ajanta can be effectively seen from the "Viewpoint", which is located on a high plateau opposite the caves. Tradition declares that this is the area from which John Smith and other cavalry officers, while tiger hunting in the region during the heat of April, first saw the caves, bringing them to world attention.



(7) Ajanta. Approach to the caves via the Waghora River. The Waghora ("Tiger") River leads out to the area a few kilometers away where the ancient trade route—nourishing Ajanta—passed with its loaded caravans, as well as pilgrims and workmen, in the vigorous days when the site was flourishing. The same ancient route, now crowded with busses and trucks, is used today.





(8) Ajanta. Approach toward Hinayana nucleus. In ancient times, all who worked at the site, or came to visit, would have followed the course of the winding river, as they entered the monastic complex. This leads most directly to the old Hinayana nucleus of the site. The ancient caitya halls #9 and #10, and the vihara #12 were placed at this most convenient location, relatively close to the river bank. In fact, for purposes of excavation, the rock is better at a somewhat higher level.





(9) Ajanta. View from Cave 16 (right) to Cave 26. At the right is Cave 16, donated by the Vakataka Prime Minister, while the caves to the far left—at the site's western extremity—form the complex donated by the trouble-making Asmakas. The great caiya hall, Cave 26, was donated by the powerful monk, Buddhahadra. One can assume that the vast Asmaka funding came from the capital. Buddhahadra proudly claims to have been allied with the Asmaka minister in friendship, "through many previous existences"; in fact he dedicated the hall to this powerful and affluent friend.





(10) Ajanta. View from Cave 21 right to Cave 27. These caves were all Asmaka donations. Because of political problems, they all were suddenly and totally abandoned when the Asmaka patrons were expelled from the site in 468 by the threatened local king. They were then continued again, when the Asmakas conquered the region, just before 475. Work then continued vigorously until 478, all of the decorative detailing, both carved and painted, belonging to this late period.





(11) Ajanta Cave 1 façade. View to right. Initiated 466; abandoned late 477. This vihara (monastic residence), given by the Vakataka emperor Harisena, is the most sumptuous in India, and a fitting offering to the Buddha. Perhaps because Harisena's chief affiliation was Saivite, he did not start his cave at Ajanta until about five years after the inauguration of patronage at the site. Therefore his planners could take advantage of the most up-to-date developments, combining both variety and order in their treatment of the porch colonnade. Sadly, the damaged portico seen in this nineteenth century photograph collapsed some years later; its fragments were then thrown into the river in an ill-advised "clean-up" campaign.



(12) Ajanta Cave 1 façade. View to left. Initiated 466; abandoned late 477. The façade of the emperor Harisena's cave has a sumptuousness appropriate for its imperial connections. The dignified colonnade combines both order and variety in its balanced treatment of the pillar designs. As one might well imagine, such impressive design qualities had a great impact on all later caves at the site.





(13) Ajanta Cave 1 porch. Left pilaster with conch motif, 469. Now, for the first time, pilasters have carved rather than painted motifs. The medallions introduced here are still very simple in character; but within a few years sculptors at the site will be filling them not with simple conches and lotuses but with roiling animals and dallying couples.



(14) Ajanta Cave 1 façade. Frieze showing the hunt, 470. Cave 1's façade, perhaps because of the status of its patron, is the only highly ornamented example among all of the viharas at the site. The themes shown are those appropriate to kingship. Here a hunt is dramatically rendered in impressive detail, lending its energy to the whole richly elaborated façade





(15) Ajanta Cave 1 façade. Frieze showing scenes of dalliance, 471 and 475. Cave 1 is the only vihara at the site with elaborate sculptural decoration. This special treatment can surely be explained by virtue of its imperial patronage. In fact, the themes all have to do with the prerogatives of kingship, including the hunt, war, and erotic dalliance, while the whole structure is quite literally palatial.



(16) Ajanta Cave 1 façade. Left return: Prince Siddhartha's confrontation with reality, 475. Three stages of the prince's excursion are shown, in which, riding in his chariot, he encounters a sick man, an old man, and a dead man (only a portion survives) being carried off to the pyres. This recognition of mankind's suffering convinces him to begin his search for enlightenment. The narrative continues on the right façade return.



(17) Ajanta Cave 1 façade. Left return: Age and sickness appear on the road, 475.





(18) Ajanta Cave 1 façade. Right return: Prince Siddhartha leaves the palace, 475. In the center of the panel, the prince renounces his royal raiment, cuts off his hair, and sends his weeping horse back to the palace, where the women (seen at the right) are grieving about his decision to depart. At the left, a group of forest-dwelling mendicants is waiting for the prince to join them in the austerities of the forest.



(19) Ajanta Cave 1 interior. Painting done in 477; pillars finished in 476. The main hall of Cave 1 resonates with a rich but restrained dignity very appropriate to an imperial donation. One can see that its twenty pillars, despite their varied designs, were efficiently controlled in their cutting; the sculptors moved from an original square section, to eight, and then sixteen, and then thirty-two sections, with the rich decorative motifs being applied at the end in a carefully organized design.





(20) Ajanta Cave 1 shrine antechamber. View to right rear. Painting 477; doorway 476. Cave 1's spiritual impact increases as the focus moves toward the shrine. Here, the Buddha is shown in multiple forms on the right wall, while a figure of the bodhisattva Vajrapani guards the splendid (indeed revolutionary) doorway.



(21) Ajanta Cave 1 shrine. Doorway: Upper left, 476. The doorway's complex structure introduces the post and lintel format to the site, at the same time reveling in its exuberant catalog of expressive motifs: loving couples; rearing leonine forms; auspicious goddesses, and many other proofs of the world's abundance enhanced by the doorway's proximity to the shrine.





(22) Ajanta Cave 1 shrine Buddha. Started in 471; finished in 475-477. In many ways the most beautiful Buddha image at the site, Cave 1's image nonetheless presented a problem for the sculptor. This is because the shrine, following early design conventions when begun in 470, was supplied with a central block upon which the image was to be carved, as if it were to be treated as a stupa. However, due to the interruption of activity caused by the local war, the image was not actually created until 475, by which time attendant bodhisattvas-a new feature-were required by convention. As a consequence, the bodhisattvas had to be most uncomfortably squeezed into place. The kneeling devotees were also now "required" features; but fortunately, when the excavation of the shrine resumed in 475, there was still so much matrix remaining at the floor level that they could be cut from it.



(23) Ajanta Cave 1 shrine. Buddha and flying dwarf, 476-477. A pair of charming dwarfs, soaring within the clouds, converges upon the Buddha, bringing garlands of flowers. By 477 they will have to yield to flying couples, so strict was the force of convention at the site.





(24) Ajanta Cave 1 interior. Right front wall: “Persian Embassy”, 477. This famous (or infamous) painting was responsible for the long confusion—to some degree still having an effect today—regarding the dating of Ajanta’s paintings. It was suggested over a century ago, in 1899, that because the painting shows Sassanian types attending upon a royal figure, it might represent a Persian Embassy to the court of the Calukya king Pulakesin II, known to have taken place around 625 A.D. Eager to provide Ajanta with a “dependable” date, this valueless idea soon gained acceptance, even though there was really no reason that a Persian delegation to a Hindu court should be shown in such a Buddhist cave. Actually, like all other narrative scenes in the cave, it is a jataka scene, with a specifically kingly focus..



(25) Ajanta Cave 1 interior. Right front wall: “Persian Embassy”, detail, 477. This detail shows some of the Sassanian (or Persian) characters that were responsible for the misinterpretation of the scene. Actually, Ajanta’s paintings are filled with such foreign types. We can believe that, in reality, many Sassanian merchants or other visitors came to Ajanta along the flourishing trade routes of the day.



(26) Ajanta Cave 1 interior. Left front wall: Sudhana Jataka, detail, 477. Another detail from this dramatic and instructive tale again reveals the remarkable ease and assurance with which emotional attitudes have been described. One should also note the fluent manner, with a linear emphasis, in which the forms have obviously been very rapidly rendered.



(27) Ajanta Cave 1 interior. Left front wall: Sudhana Jataka, detail, 477. Although this scene—the story of Prince Sudhana—on Cave 1's front wall is very damaged, the dramatic representations of the various figures show the artist's ability at representing a variety of emotional states, all appropriate, in this story of the lovers' poignant search for each other.





(28) Ajanta Cave 1 interior: Left wall: Janaka Jataka, 477. The walls of Cave 1 concentrate upon representations of the Buddha in various previous lives as a king, thus forming an appropriate overall program extolling the virtues of ideal kingship. One of the most dramatic of these scenes deals with Prince Janaka's decision to leave the attractions and the attachments of the present life in order to seek for enlightenment. The splendors of his surroundings reflect the very world in which the emperor Harisena himself surely lived.





(29) Ajanta Cave 1 interior. Left wall: Janaka Jataka, detail, 477. The attractions of the material world are marvelously embodied in the maidens of the court who surrounded the princes of the period when Ajanta was created. Unfortunately, the life expectancy of this world was going to be all too brief, ending late in 477, when the emperor Harisena suddenly and mysteriously died.



(30) Ajanta Cave 1 interior. Left wall: Janaka Jataka, detail, 477. Such paintings tell us much about society at this moment—so close to the end of the Golden Age. We can see how people acted, what they wore, or did not wear, and how they participated in the wonderful world which the painter has revealed with such verve and veracity.





(31) Ajanta Cave 1 interior. Left wall: Mahasodha Jataka, detail, 477. Quite apart from the plot of the story of Prince Janaka, such representations take us directly into the world of the courtly and privileged, during the period of Harisena's rule; for although the stories are very ancient, they are described in contemporary terms. Thus we have what are in fact unique descriptions of "real" architectural forms, with pillars and roofs and rooms that surely reflect the very palaces where the elite were living in these times.



(32) Ajanta Cave 1 interior. Left rear wall: Mahosadha Jataka, 477. A curious story, in which a number of miscreants—all ministers—are literally “bagged” by a clever lady. Again, the story has to do with the virtues of kingship, as do all such scenes in the cave.



(33) Ajanta Cave 1 interior. Left rear wall: Mahosadha Jataka, 477. This scene, showing the lustration of a prince, must be a realistic representation of contemporary royal ceremonies, showing the type of attendants, the character of the throne, and other revealing details bearing upon the privileged life.





(34) Ajanta Cave 1 interior. Rear wall, left of shrine antechamber: "Avalokitesvara," 477. The identification of this renowned image is disputed, but it probably is a somewhat atypical representation of the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, who is so often shown at the site as an attendant of the Buddha. The image is paired with its more "royal" counterpart, Vajrapani, at the right of the antechamber entrance. In fact, the pair was originally shown flanking both the porch and shrine doorways, as well as being shown on the front wall of the shrine and (in sculptural form) flanking the image in the shrine.



(35) Ajanta Cave 1 interior. Rear wall, left of shrine antechamber: "Avalokitesvara," detail, 477. Although the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara is generally shown as an ascetic, with dreadlocks, a pilgrim's flask and a lotus, it is perhaps in line with Ajanta's elitist proclivities that here he is elaborately crowned, and adorned with a burden of jewelry, reflecting the courtly taste of the day.



(36) Ajanta Cave 1 interior. Rear wall, right of shrine antechamber: "Vajrapani", 477 This beautiful figure, probably Vajrapani, is typically paired with Avalokitesvara, and represents the kingly, as opposed to the priestly manifestation. Although the vajra (thunderbolt) is not shown, the burly figure upon which the lord leans may be a personified weapon—in this case a vajra purusa.





(37) Ajanta Cave 1 interior. Rear wall, right of shrine antechamber: "Vajrapani", details, 477. Vajrapani's bejeweled and crowned head appears on the right. On the left, a beautiful attendant, also richly crowned, is bringing an offering of fresh flowers to the bodhisattva. One can imagine that royal retainers in Harisena's court were clothed and adorned in this same lavish way. Even the natural background is treated with delicacy and sophistication.





(38) Ajanta Cave 2 interior. Main hall ceiling, section, 477. Each year ceiling designs at the site improved in terms of the discipline of design and the quality of the execution in both Caves 1 and 2. Whereas five years before ceilings were decorated with a much simpler catalog of lotuses and geese, now there is a great variety of forms, and greater care in representing the beams and crossbeams which recall the designs of structural ceilings upon which these are based.





(39) Ajanta Cave 1 interior. Main hall ceiling, section, 477. By 477, when Cave 1's ceiling was done, we frequently find animals as well as playful dwarfs and zoomorphs, along with inventive abstract designs. The painted "beams" are typically decorated with a surprising array of geometric designs.



(40) Ajanta Cave 1 interior. Main hall ceiling, section: "Inhabited scroll", 477. Among the most arresting of the designs on Cave 1's ceiling, one finds "inhabited" scrolls, in which playful dwarfs are enveloped by verdant growths of lotuses.



(41) Ajanta Cave 1 interior: Main hall ceiling, section. Bovine zoomorphs typify the imaginative creativity which guides the composition of the whole of Cave 1's ceiling. These splendid designs appear on the major "beams" which link the monolithic pillars, as if to support this quasi-structural ceiling.



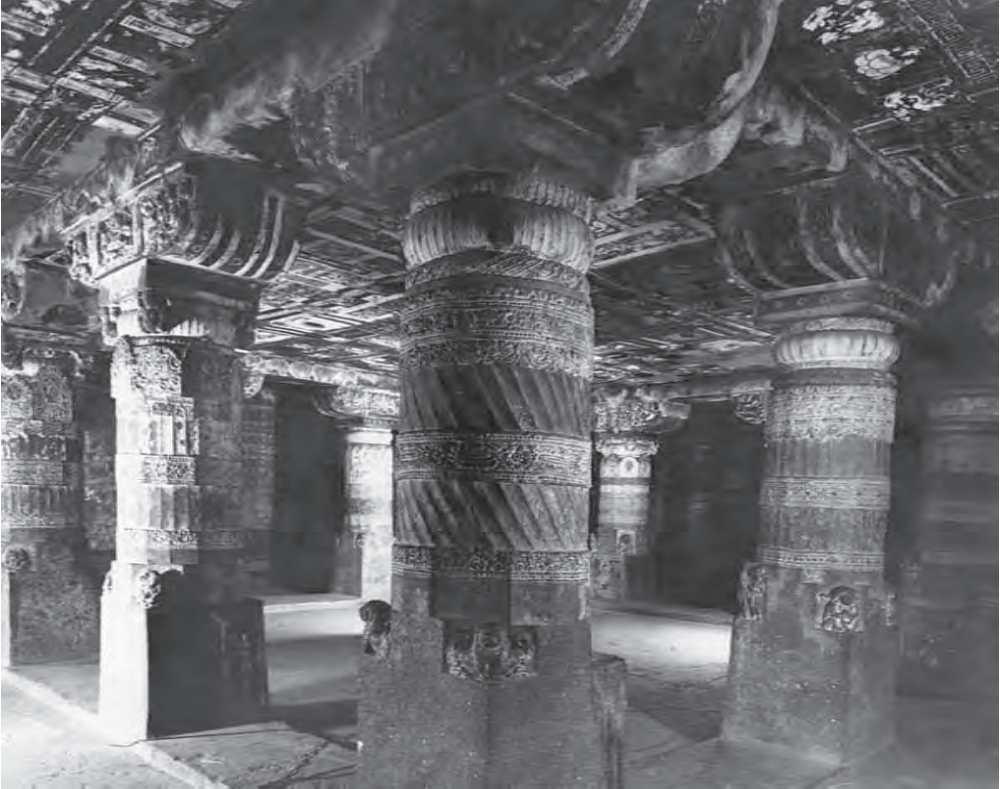


(42) Ajanta Cave 1 shrine antechamber. Ceiling medallion, 477. The beautiful medallion on the ceiling of the shrine antechamber of Cave 1 is notable not only for its carefully detailed design, but also for the fact that it shows not the slightest trace of soot from the oil lamps which, in many caves, were used for worship. But Cave 1's image was never dedicated, which explains the pristine condition of the ceiling. Furthermore, although it once had a (now missing) hook, set in at its center for holding a garland, this was never used. There is no damage to the plaster and paint in that central area, as would have been the case if garlands had been hung and daily changed as part of the ritual—which was clearly not the case.



(43) Ajanta Cave 1 shrine antechamber. Ceiling medallion, detail, 477. Flying figures—either single celestials or couples—typically appear at the corners of the ceiling medallions. As is the case here, they often bring lotuses or other flowers, in praise of the Buddha in the shrine.





(44) Ajanta Cave 2 interior. Painted 477; carved decoration 476. The carved decoration of Cave 2 expresses the richness which developed in the site's second "renaissance" (475-477) starting with the takeover of the site by the Asmakas, and continuing until it was cut off by the emperor's death. Had work at the site not been interrupted we can imagine that many other caves would have revealed a similarly lavish complexity. Happily, the debris which flooded into most caves, destroying any painted surfaces that it touched, did not affect Cave 2 seriously. Indeed, one can still see loving nagas painted on the base of the pillar in the far distance here; it is clear that debris never built up in this interior.



(45) Ajanta Cave 2 interior. Pillar, 476. An almost over-elaborated sumptuousness characterizes many of the forms in Cave 2, where occasionally the detail is so developed that it verges on illegibility. However, its richness cannot be denied. On the capital above, the loving couples seem to proliferate, apparently quite innocent of the use of the cave as a monastic residence; their auspicious overtones are evident.





(46) Cave 2 interior. Right wall: Vidhura Jataka, 476-477. Many of the murals intended for Cave 2 were never finished, work being interrupted by Harisena's death. By the same token, those that did get painted can be dated to the very last year of the emperor's reign. Although this work belongs to the same year as the murals in Cave 1, its volumetric style is quite distinctive. Like many of the Jataka tales, nagas play a significant role in it, as they do throughout the cave; the fact that the Vākatakas trace their origins back to the semi-mythical Naga dynasty may explain their presence so often at the site.



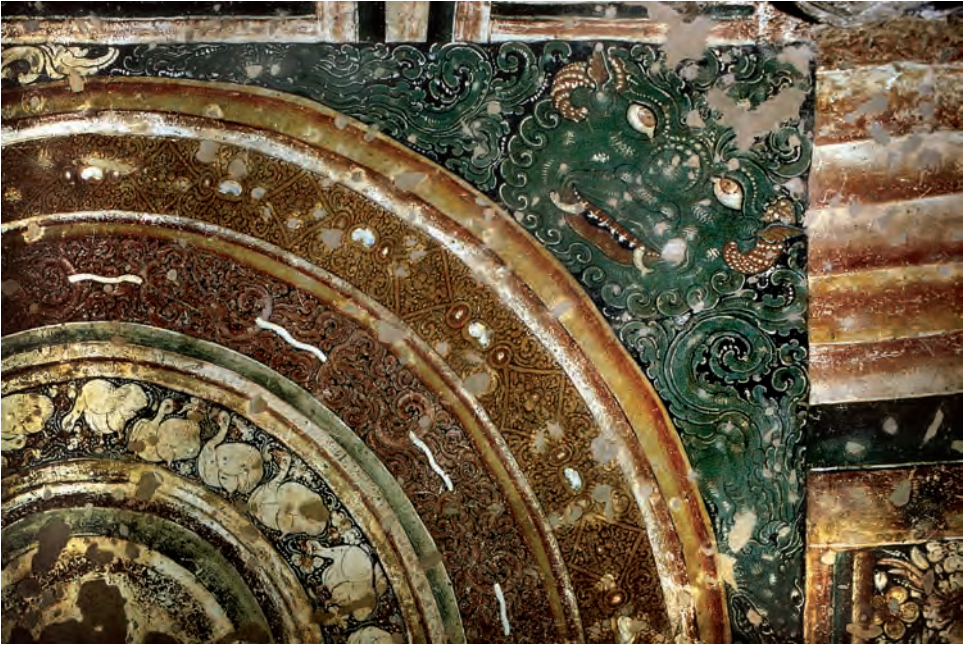


(47) Ajanta Cave 2 interior. Ceiling medallion with flying couple, 476-477. Cave 2 has no less than seven large medallions painted along the axial approach to the shrine, starting with one under the cave's projecting eave and ending with one in the shrine itself. This one in the rear aisle is typical of the bold but at the same time precise manner in which all were done. These medallions are in a sense garlands, which are being carried toward the shrine by the celestials which support them.



(48) Ajanta Cave 2 interior. Left rear: "Nidhi" shrinelet. Sculptures 477; ceiling painted 477; walls and images painted 478. Cave 2 is unique in having impressive shrinelets for sub-divinities at either end of the rear wall. That at the left houses two corpulent yakshas, the traditional guardians of wealth. They can be considered to be padmanidhi, holding the lotus (padma) and sankhanidhi, holding the conch. At their feet are carved piles of offerings. Like the figures of Hariti and her consort in the shrinelet at right rear, these two powerful figures equally would have expected homage from devotees. Indeed, piles of (sculptured) offerings are suggestively rendered at their feet. The beautiful ceiling had just been finished when Harisena died; the rest of the painting, hurriedly completed in early 478, has little to recommend it.





(49) Ajanta Cave 2 interior. Left rear: "Nidhi" shrinelet, ceiling medallion, 477. The ceiling medallion in the nidhi shrinelet is one of the most beautiful at the site. Its painting is of superb quality, while imaginative forms fill the four quadrants. The mask, both fearsome and auspicious, which decorates one corner, reveals the high technical skill of the painter chosen (surely by contract) to do this work.



(50) Ajanta Cave 2 interior. Left rear: "Nidhi" shrinelet, ceiling medallion, detail, 477. Of the twenty-three charming and auspicious geese proceeding in a circle around the ceiling medallion, every one is given a different playful pose.





(51) Ajanta Cave 2 interior. Right rear: "Hariti" shrinelet, 476-477. Hariti, a demoness who devoured children, was converted by the Buddha, who showed her the reality of parental pain by hiding one of her own five hundred children from her. Convinced of the error of her ways, henceforth she became the protectress of children, installed in many monasteries. The children shown here are busy at school, at least this is true of those under the master's eye and stick; by contrast the "backbenchers" at a safe distance from the teacher are acting obstreperously.



(52) Ajanta Cave 2 interior. View toward shrine. Painting 477 and later; carving finished 477. The antechamber area was planned with an emphasis on lavishness, all signaling the auspiciousness of the Buddha's presence within the shrine. However, only the ceiling got painted before Harisena died. The walls, although plastered, did not get painted until the Period of Disruption, when the many intrusions were added.





(53) Ajanta Cave 2 shrine antechamber. View toward shrine. Painting of ceiling 477; walls 479. Cave 2's richly painted ceiling was completed just before Harisena died, but the walls of the antechamber, with their myriad Buddhas, were done in the Period of Disruption. The fine shrine doorway, with its elaborate meander motif, is a particularly late example, finished at just about the time that the emperor expired. The damaged area at the center of the ceiling medallion proves that the cave was in worship, at least briefly, since the daily changing of the garlands hung from hooks at the major points typically caused such damage.





(54) Ajanta Cave 2 shrine antechamber. Ceiling, 477. This splendid medallion was completed in those happy days when the emperor was still alive, although the walls of the antechamber had merely gotten plastered but not painted when the situation suddenly changed for the worse. The shrine Buddha was not finished until the following harried year, and it was only then that worship could have begun. We know that the image was in worship because it is clear from the breakage of the plaster and paint at the medallion's center that garlands to honor the Buddha were changed from that time on.



(55) Ajanta Cave 2 shrine antechamber. Ceiling, detail, 477. Ajanta's medallion designs follow a general pattern, involving floral, geometric, and avian forms. The example here, from the shrine antechamber ceiling, has a characteristic rhythmic charm.





(56) Ajanta Cave 2 shrine antechamber. Ceiling and shrine doorway. Painting 478. The shrine antechamber was well underway when work on it was interrupted by Harisena's death. The complex shrine doorway had already been carved, and the ceiling painted. The walls had been prepared for painting by being plastered, but it was not until the Period of Disruption, starting by 479, that they were painted. Of course this painting—with its myriad Buddhas—has nothing to do with the original patron's intended design.



(57) Ajanta Cave 2 shrine Buddha, 476-478. Shrines excavated after 475, like this one, can now spread out at the rear, with adequate room for the attendant bodhisattvas—a far more commodious arrangement than that seen in Cave 1. The image group here was carved in the happy days when Harisena was still alive, but it did not get painted until early 478, immediately after his death.





(58) Ajanta Cave 2 shrine. Ceiling medallion, detail, 478. The shrine ceiling is of a conventional type, with a fine medallion attended by celestial bearing flowers. Actually, this painting was done in early 478, just after Harisena's death; the importance of the shrine must account for the design's splendid quality, even in this troubled year.



(59) Ajanta Cave 2 porch. View to right, 465; painting 477. Cave 2's porch was fully completed, unlike many others at the site. We can assume that as soon as it was finished (by 477) it attracted numerous visitors, just as it does today. At the far ends, sub-divinities (yakshas and nagas) hold court from their positions of honor in the friezes above the elaborately pillared cells.





(60) Ajanta Cave 2 porch. Ceiling and left rear wall, 476-477. The beautiful porch ceiling of Cave 2 partakes of some of the same energy found in the ruinous but still radiant scene below it. The latter once represented one of a pair of towering bodhisattvas in mountainous landscapes, surrounded by assorted celestials, which flanked the porch doorway.



(61) Ajanta Cave 2 porch. Left rear wall, detail, 476-477. Caught up in the surrounding clouds, this pair of celestials offers praise to the (now-ruinous) bodhisattva below. The artist responsible for these figures can be recognized by the lightness of his touch, evident in the surely contemporary jewelry and in the sensitive facial features.



(62) Ajanta Cave 2 porch. Right rear wall: Descent of Indra, 476-477. Here, at the far end of the porch's rear wall, the god Indra (recognized by his famous crown) and his godly companions come down from heaven to praise the Buddha—an example of the manner in which Buddhism gained power by willingly inviting the different gods into its context.





(63) Ajanta Cave 4 Porch. View to left. Begun in 464; intrusions in 479. The severe octagonal shafts of Cave 4's pillars reveal the early date at which it was started. But the workers encountered many problems; even in the porch one can see many unfinished details. In fact, the cave's patron, Mathura, had to rush the Buddha image to completion in early 478, before the painting of the hall could even be started. Immediately thereafter, new donors took over, appropriating the best available locations for their intrusive votive offerings.



(64) Cave 4 porch doorway. Tree goddess, 476. After a long delay, from early 469 through 474, work started up again on Cave 4, as on so many caves at the site, which had been left untouched due to the Recession and subsequent Hiatus (local war). Within a year or so, the Cave 4 porch doorway, drawing upon the shrine doorway of Cave 1 for inspiration, was underway. The tree goddess at the upper left is a splendid example of the skills which the sculptors had developed by this time. As if to display the artist's pride and confidence, a small chipmunk is climbing up the scarf at the goddess's side.





(65) Ajanta Cave 4 porch. Right of doorway: Avalokitesvara Litany, 479. During the Period of Disruption, intrusive donors took over the never-completed porch for their own votive purposes. Happily, the wall on either side of the porch doorway was already smoothed, so it provided an ideal and highly visible location. The so called Avalokitesvara Litany was particular popular in these troubled days, for it honors the lord as the protector of travelers. The various dangers of the road are figured on either side of the protective saint.



(66) Ajanta Cave 4 porch. Left of doorway: Intrusive relief, 479. Like the splendid "Lord of Travelers" relief at the right of the porch doorway, this is an equally well carved panel. In fact by this point, at the very end of Ajanta's development, the sculptors had become so sophisticated that they were able to render forms in very high relief. Sadly, however, this made such sculptures highly subject to vandalism; thus here, the heads of the main Buddha and both attendant bodhisattvas, are gone. The flawed proper left knee shows an old repair; in fact the hole cut for this purpose still contains part of the wooden tenon used to fix the missing prosthesis.





(67) Ajanta Cave 4 interior. Right front corner, 466-468; with later adjustments. "Pride goeth before a fall", says the old adage; and it was surely pride as much as piety which made Cave 4's patron sponsor the hugest vihara at the site. However, because of an unexpected pattern of flaws in the rock above the cave, a large portion of ceiling collapsed. Fortunately this startling collapse did not occur until after 468, when work on the cave had been temporarily abandoned due to the Recession; so no one would have been a victim of the accident. When work resumed in 475, workers gradually cut away areas of the ceiling which remained intact, lest these areas might also fall. The process was going on here, but there was never time to finish it.



(68) Ajanta Cave 4 interior. View to right rear, 466-468; 475-478. Partly because of the delays caused by the collapse of the hall ceiling, but also because of the very size of the undertaking, Cave 4's great hall was never finished; much of the carving is incomplete. Because of this, the painting of the cave was never started, except in the shrine area, where the Buddha image had to be hastily finished so it could be dedicated. The donative record is hastily incised on the front of the throne. With characteristic expansiveness, the donor (Mathura) declares: "Let the merit therein be for the attaining of supreme knowledge by [his] mother, father, and paternal grandmother—to whom belong the principle share—as well as by all living beings".



(69) Ajanta Cave 4 interior. Rear center pillar: Musician, 476-477. Not only are the two rear center pillars—being close to the shrine—particularly elaborate, but they show particularly fine images of dwarf musicians on each of the four corners of each pillar—making a total of eight delightful music-makers. Although Cave 4 was started very early (464) the many problems which the excavators encountered caused many delays. Thus these musicians are relatively late: this accounts for the exuberant quality of their carving, and also for the fact that they are invited into the sacred context of this area so close to the shrine.





(70) Ajanta Cave 4 shrine antechamber. Left wall: Colossal Buddhas, 477-early 478. In 477, an effective grouping of the Six Buddhas of the Past suddenly became popular. Here they are gathered—two on each wall—and stand in attendance upon the “seventh” historical Buddha, the figure of Sakyamuni in the shrine. Because of the sudden work stoppage caused by Harisena’s death, only the two Buddhas directly flanking the entrance to the shrine were fully completed.



(71) Ajanta Cave 4 shrine Buddha. The Cave 4 Buddha, the largest at the site, is a huge copy of the emperor's image in Cave 1. Its scale was made possible by the fact that the early excavators did not keep the ceiling and floor properly horizontal. When their error was corrected by later and more disciplined supervisors, some four feet of the shrine floor had to be cut down to make the floor flat; and this allowed the image, when planned, to expand immensely in height.



(72) Ajanta Cave 4 shrine. Devotees beneath Buddha image, 476. The complex grouping of kneeling devotees, who like the deer, attend the central wheel, show the increasing confidence and technical ability characteristic of much late work at the site. Until 475, such groups never appear, although after that they are expected features. In fact, these devotees were not part of the original plan for the image; but there was so much uncut matrix in the shrine when work was renewed in 476 that devotees and the wheel and deer could now be included. The most developed version of such a group is to be found in the shrine of Aurangabad Cave 3, dating to 477-478. It seems possible that it was created by the sculptor responsible for this admirable group.





(73) Ajanta Cave 5 porch. Doorway, 477. Cave 5 was one of the inaugural undertakings at the site, but work did not progress very far in its early phase, perhaps because the patron of this small cave could not compete for workmen, as excavation activity rapidly developed at the site. Much later on, apparently not until 477, work on the cave was renewed. The porch doorway, elaborately carved even though the hall beyond had been barely penetrated, is one of the most developed at the site; the trabeated (post and lintel) structure does not make its appearance in this simple but effective form until 477. The fact that this doorway was so elaborately carved in 477, even when so much else was not done, makes it evident that the site's patrons had every expectation that years of productive work lay ahead. In fact, for many, such as Cave 5's donor, all of their careful planning would come to naught at the very end of this year, with the emperor's sudden death.



(74) Ajanta Cave 5 porch. Left window, 468; 477. The rough cutting at the lower edge of this window retains, at the left, traces of original narrow opening which was in the process of being cut when work was interrupted by the Recession at the end of 468. Then, later on, the unfinished windows, both here and at the right, were being converted to conventional later forms, when work once again was interrupted, this time by Harisena's death. The decorative borders are by now conventional: very similar types are found in most windows completed after 475. In fact, the ornamentation is allowed by a sensible technical change; all late windows have very convenient interior closures. The shutters no longer are placed outside (as in Cave 1 and earlier) where they would slam against the painted wall.





(75) Ajanta Cave Lower 6 shrine. Doorway, 467-468. This exuberantly composed entrance to the shrine indulges in an elaborateness which has no immediate progeny, for the strictures of the Recession stopped most of the ongoing work at the site. The Buddha image visible in the shrine was carved, in the early manner, on a central block, an arrangement probably developed for stupas, and more appropriate for stupas than for the frontally oriented images which now replaced them.



(76) Ajanta Cave Upper 6 porch. Pilaster at right, 475. Like so many of the caves, Upper 6 was abandoned in 468 due to the developing troubles between the aggressive Asmakas and the local king. Later, work on most caves began again in 475, as was the case here. Now the influence of the royal caves, upon which work had continued, can be felt in forms such as this fine pilaster design, strongly influenced by related forms in Cave 19.



(77) Ajanta Cave Upper 6 interior. Right aisle, 465-477: Intrusive Buddha, 480. Time ran out in Cave Upper 6. The progress of excavation is clearly revealed on the aisle floor, and in the pillared front of the complex cell at the right. The cell in the distance would also have had two pillars fronting a vestibule had it been finished, but the excavators got no farther than opening up the space between the intended pillars. The opening served as a doorway for the intrusive shrinelet cut there during the Period of Disruption.





(78) Ajanta Cave Upper 6 interior. Front aisle and cell at its left end, 467; cell converted in 476-477. This is the famous "musical pillar"; when pounded it produces notes. The reason for this is that it is so unconventionally thin; and the reason for this attenuation is that the pillared front of this complex cell was cut from the typically thin wall of the cell front that has been cut away in the process of conversion. At the same time, the sculptor has carved a splendid row of frolicking elephants above, and has laid out a geometric design as a guide for his carving at the side. However, the carved design was never completed, interrupted like so much else in the cave by Harisena's death late in 477.





(79) Ajanta Cave Upper 6 shrine and shrine antechamber, 475-478, with intrusions until 480. Various details around the front of the antechamber are unfinished, since the patron's chief interest was in carving the large Six Buddhas of the Past in the area, given his limited time and funds. Actually, only five of the great images were carved, and even these were not plastered and painted until the Period of Disruption, presumably by the new donors which took over the very unfinished cave, filling it with literally hundreds of their own intrusive images



(80) Ajanta Cave Upper 6 shrine Buddha, 477-early 478. Remarkably, this fine Buddha image is the only one, of the hundreds in the cave, which was finished by the original patron during the course of consistent work on the cave. This was surely because the hard-pressed patron put a major effort into getting the image itself done and dedicated, even though to save time he had to greatly reduce the motifs on the Buddha's base, which have nothing of the complex splendor of the carvings at the upper level. In fact, to save time, he cut away the ample matrix reserved for larger throne base figures, adding the present shallow motifs instead.





(81) Ajanta Cave Upper 6 interior. Right front shrinelet with Buddha image, 479-480. This shrinelet was created from an abandoned residence cell by a new (intrusive) donor sometime after mid-478. His fine Buddha image is a free copy of the cave's main Buddha image. However, the latter's bodhisattvas have now been superceded by standing attendant Buddhas, a feature which never appears in sculptured groups until the Period of Disruption. The whole shrinelet was supplied with over a dozen hooks for garlands, and then (after plastering) lavishly painted. It may have been sponsored by the Sakyabhiksu Govinda, whose donative inscription appears near the shrinelet's façade.



(82) Ajanta Cave 7 shrine and shrine antechamber, 468, but much recut in 476-early 478. When the first stage of work on the cave had to be abandoned due to the Recession the only carvings here were the lions guarding the entrance, and the pilasters (then intact) with the females above and the supporting dwarfs below. Such simplicity was then characteristic, and of course stands in distinct contrast to the array of images added in 477 and early 478 by a patron obsessed with filling the area with such embodiments of power. At the same time he enhanced the simple original image by adding elaborate throne motifs, as well as attendant bodhisattvas.





(83) Ajanta Cave 7 shrine antechamber. Left wall: Sravasti Miracle, 477 or early 478. On both the left and the right sides of the Cave 7 antechamber, there are fine representations of the Buddha appearing in multiple manifestations. The figures are very carefully organized, with alternating gestures, unless geological factors such as flaws disrupt the pattern. The “pedestal” at the base was almost certainly reserved for the patron’s donative inscription; assuming that it was painted, the painting has long since disappeared.



(84) Ajanta Cave 7 shrine. Right wall: Original wall early 469; figures added 477-early 478. The patron, eager to keep abreast of new developments, has added the Six Buddhas of the Past to the shrine, cutting them from matrix earlier never cut away when the Buddha image was hurriedly carved in early 469. Then, as if not satisfied with these figures alone, he has filled the whole shrine area with a carefully organized array of Buddhas large and small, seated and standing. When all were finished, the whole area was plastered and painted.





(85) Ajanta Cave 9 façade. 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. This caitya hall of the Hinayana period replicates structural (wooden) forms; it once had many wooden fittings in the great arched opening, and the vault inside the cave was filled with attached wooden rafters and beams. Starting in mid-478, when the original Vakataka patrons had to leave the site, new and “uninvited” donors appropriated such caves for their own pious purposes. The intrusive Buddha image at the right is particularly beautiful; perhaps even more so because its original paint, as well as the painted inscription below, have long since been washed away. By the late 470s the artists at the site were highly experienced, and often produced work of the highest quality, even though working for “uninvited” donors. These new donors were mostly the monks who lived on briefly at the site after the major donors had had to leave. Never allowed to donate images during the period of the site’s consistent development, they now put their votive images anywhere they wanted, with no thought of the original programs of work.



(85) Ajanta Cave 9. Showing intrusive Buddha, 479. The old Hinayana caitya hall provided an ideal location for intrusions, which were added to it during the Period of Disruption. Not only had it been carefully smoothed long ago, but it had been long ago dedicated and put into ritual use. The splendid standing Buddha here is matched by a similar form at the right; both were once inscribed below, but only with a painted dedication, which has long since washed away.





(87) Ajanta Cave 9. View to stupa. 1<sup>st</sup> century CE; paintings 478-480. The severity of both the simple octagonal pillars and the compact stupa stand in great contrast to the richly ornate forms in the Mahayana caitya halls. The vault of this cave once had applied wooden rafters, but even by the fifth century, they had apparently been lost—probably taken away by the villagers for use in building or for cooking fires. Small traces of original (Hinayana) decoration remain, but most of the painting seen today comes either from early 478, when a consistent program of redecoration was started, or during the Period of Disruption, when most of the images were added in a helter-skelter fashion.



(88) Ajanta Hinayana Caves 9 (at right) and 10. 1<sup>st</sup> BCE – 1<sup>st</sup> CE. Originally, both of the old Hinayana caitya halls would have been approached from the river below, and of course they would have had inset wooden fittings instead of the present day screens—necessary to keep out bats, birds, monkeys and the like. The cave just to the left is a Vakataka excavation (Cave 11), while the space between the two halls was filled up with intrusions during the Period of Disruption.





(89) Ajanta Cave 10. John Smith inscription on pillar R13. April 28, 1819. The famous inscription left by the site's "discoverer" is actually the first of many graffiti at the site; like this one, they are often carelessly scratched over the ancient paintings. Here, scratched across the chest of one of the Buddha images on pillar R13, we can still read the name of John Smith, a British cavalry officer. The record is more than seven feet up on the pillar, because he was standing on four or five feet of debris which had built up in the cave during the many centuries of its abandonment.





(90) Ajanta Cave 11 shrine Buddha. 468-early 469; refurbished in 477-478. This is one of the earliest Buddha images at the site, with the characteristic early placement of the image on a central block—an arrangement held over from earlier contexts, where stupas alone were placed in the shrines. Indeed, there is a stupa here, hidden behind the image, and very unfinished. It was abandoned in favor of the image which fronts it, reflecting contemporary developments in the site's caitya halls, with their new emphasis on the image as opposed to the stupa.



(91) Ajanta Cave 12, Hinayana phase. This is one of the three early (Hinayana) viharas or monastic residences which are connected with the early caitya halls. The asyilar interior presumably housed twenty four monks, two to a cell. Inside, each cell was originally provided with carefully fitted doors and supplied with two stone beds, along with poles to hang clothes.





(92) Ajanta Cave 14 porch. Doorway, 477. This ambitiously conceived doorway was abandoned in mid-course, like the whole cave, due to the sudden death of the emperor Harisena. With its strongly trabeated structure, its highly energized auspicious goddesses, and its very “late” meander motif, it could not have been started until 477, the very year in which it was precipitously abandoned. Of particular interest is the fact that, like the porch doorway of Cave 17, it was the work of two different artists, who carried out their assignments somewhat differently.



(93) Ajanta Cave 15 porch. Doorway, 468; refurbished 477. The Cave 15 porch doorway was completed in the conventional manner in 468, at which point the cave was abandoned due to the Recession. Then later, when work was taken up in the cave again in 477, the doorway was "modernized" by the addition of a characteristically late lintel, imposed upon the earlier form. In the process the trees under which the early goddesses stand were somewhat sliced away. The shrine Buddha was similarly refurbished at the same time.



(94) Ajanta Cave 16. Elephant Gate, 463 or later. The famous elephant gate was known as the entrance to the site, which is hardly surprising since it is the approach to the cave of the Vakataka Prime Minister, and is located at the exact center of the curving scarp. The Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang, though he did not trouble to visit the deserted site, reports that the great elephants sometimes still “rumble and roar”.



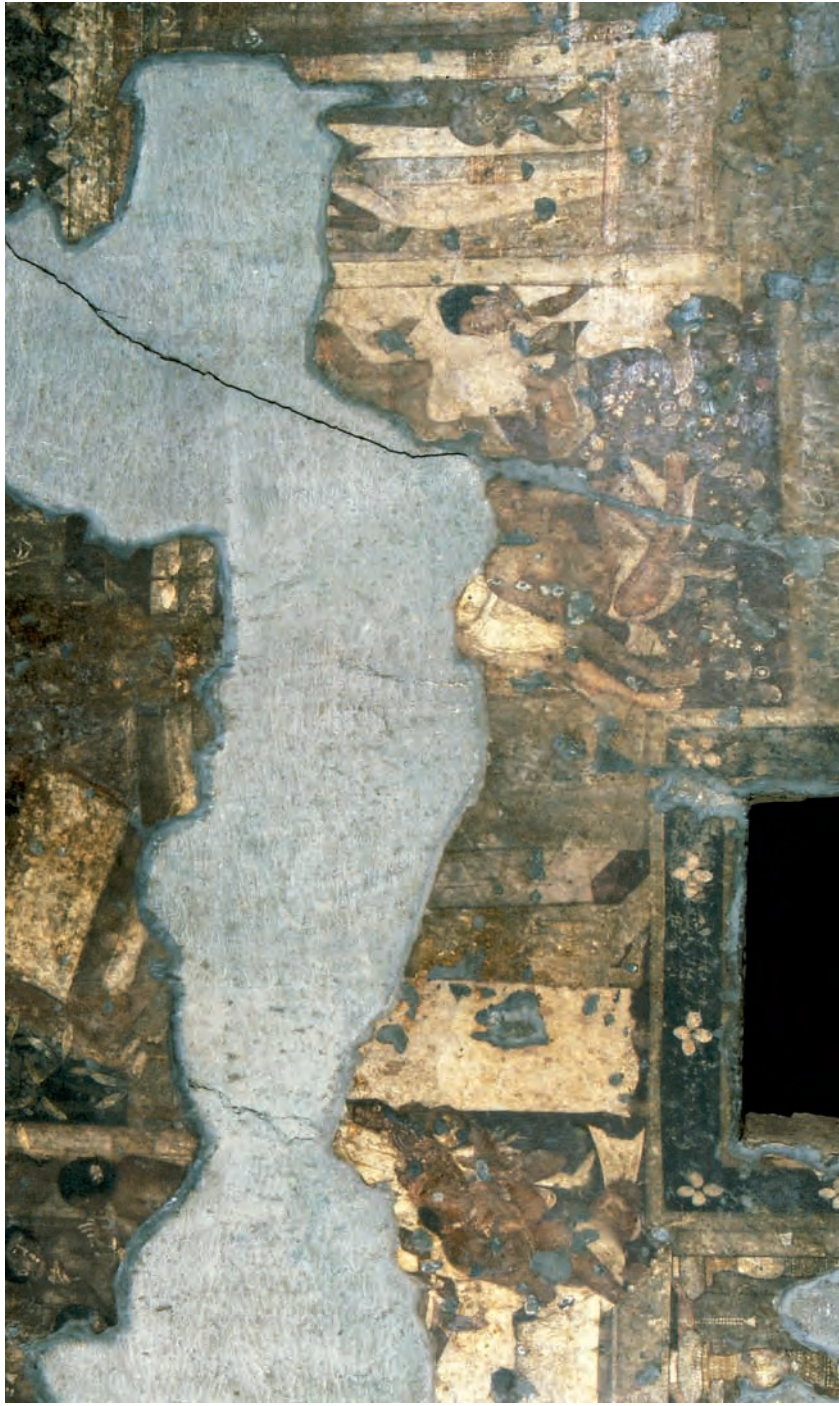


(95) Ajanta Cave 16. Shrine of the Lord of the Nagas, 464 or later. Passing between the massive elephants, one immediately confronts a snake divinity, seated authoritatively in the pose of royal ease. The Prime Minister reports that, together with a shrine for the Buddha, he also made a “shrine for the lord of the nagas”, proving the great importance which was accorded such autochthonous divinities.



(96) Ajanta Cave 16 interior. View to right rear, 465-469: Shrine revised 477-early 478. Cave 16 was one of the earliest excavations, the Prime Minister being one of the inaugurators of the site's Vakataka renaissance. Its severe octagonal pillars proclaim this. However, the fact that they are lacking the expected capitals was due the pressures which the patron felt when the Recession started; he had them all cut off to save time, and made many similar adjustments in order to hasten his work. Even so, he had to abandon further progress on the cave before the shrine had been completed. The present Buddha image was cut ten years later out of the matrix which still remained in the unfinished vestibule of the originally-planned shrine.





(97) Ajanta Cave 16. Left wall: Story of Nanda, 469. The mural on Cave 16's left wall depicts the concerns of the Buddha's relative, Nanda, and also his wife, as he determines to leave his comfortable present life and follow the Buddha. Actually, the scene was never finished, work on it being suddenly interrupted by the Recession, starting in 469. But sadder still is the manner in which vandals early removed portions of the composition—particularly the parts showing faces. Only one of those taken from this sad swath of destruction survives. It is a small portion now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.



(98) Ajanta Cave 16 shrine Buddha, 477-early 478. This huge and impressive image is in the new bhadrasana pose—with the feet authoritatively planted on the ground. This new type first appears in sculptured form here and in the Caitya Cave 26 at the same time, and has an immediate impact. Within a few years, during the Period of Disruption, the bhadrasana Buddha has become the image of choice, and continues dominant in subsequent caves at sixth and seventh century sites. The image is slightly asymmetrical, due to the fact that the mass of matrix from which it was cut bore no relation to the requirements of the later sculpture. For the same reason the now necessary bodhisattvas have had to be shifted to positions behind the throne; the excavators a decade before had cut too much of the original mass of matrix away.





(99) Ajanta Cave 16 shrine Buddha. Detail: head, 477-478. The massive image in the Prime Minister's Cave 16 must have had an immediate impact upon worshippers of the day; and its significance was enhanced by the fact that it was in the newly introduced bhadrasana pose. But it was no sooner finished, in 478, than its patron had to flee, along with Harisena's grandchildren, from the region. The only worshippers, after that, were the "uninvited" devotees who took over the site during the Period of Disruption





(100) Ajanta Cave 17 porch. View to right: Painting, 468-469. The beautifully decorated vihara, Cave 17, a donation of the local king, Upendragupta, reflects his high esthetic interest, as well as his liberal use of state funds for his pious donations. Because of the rising threat from the neighboring Asmakas, it had to be finished very quickly, in 471. After that Upendragupta's connection with it was unhappily broken.



(101) Ajanta Cave 17 porch. Ceiling, 468-469. The ceiling of Cave 17's porch is highly effective, even though it was painted—probably by a number of artists from the same family—in a rather consistently carefree manner. As one of the earliest ceilings at the site, its forms are limited, by and large, to lotus patterns along with occasional birds and aquatic forms. Its palette, too, is quite limited, at least as compared with later ceilings at the site.





(102) Ajanta Cave 17 porch. Top of doorway, 468-469. The Cave 17 porch doorway is richly designed, with the Seven Historical Buddhas plus Maitreya on the lintel, coexisting very comfortably with the scenes of dalliance below. The doorway design is particularly instructive because it is clearly the work of two painters; a distinct change is evident at the midpoint of the doorway, not merely in the forms of the figures but in the many decorative motifs as well. In fact, the carvings at either side are also the work of two different sculptors. It was probably they who painted the doorway once the carving had been completed.



(103) Ajanta Cave 17 porch. Top of doorway: Buddhas at left, 468-469. Many features of the Buddhas on the left side of the doorway are distinctly different from those at the right—the throne, the halos, even the separating panels. But the most surprising difference is in the skin tones. This is to be explained by the fact that the left and right painters were from different family groups, and that the pigment used for the skin of the Buddhas at the left has oxidized, whereas that at the right has not.



(104) Ajanta Cave 17 porch. Top of doorway: Couple, 468-469. The couples represented on the Cave 17 doorway add a touch of auspiciousness, verging on the erotic, to the total composition. Ideal male and female types are shown, as if reflecting the youthful promise of the site itself—even though this was a promise all too briefly realized.





(105) Ajanta Cave 17 porch. Left rear wall: Story of Udayin and Gupta, 468-469. Udayin and Gupta, the ideal pair described in the story, are seated as close as possible in a palatial setting. After all, Udayin was about to have to renounce this happy world. A Sassanian servant attends them, holding a Sassanian vessel. It is intriguing to note that before the artist got down from his scaffold, he reached up and playfully “wiped” the brilliant vermillion paint out of his brush on the ceiling panel directly overhead.





(106) Ajanta Cave 17 porch. Rear wall: Story of Udayin and Gupta, 468-469. The Udayin tale, which some scholars prefer to see as the Visvantara Jataka is represented with much concern for gesture and attitude, as well as for the representation of the aspects of the material world. The umbrella alone—or the “spying” women in the window—are aspects of distinctive reportage.



(107) Ajanta Cave 17 porch. Left rear wall: Story of Udayin and Gupta, 468-469. Everything about the costumes and ornaments and hairstyles of the participants in this story reminds us that we are in a world of the privileged and the elite.



(108) Ajanta Cave 17 porch. Right rear wall: Story of Nalagiri, 468-469. This arresting scene, which occupies much of the right end of Cave 17's porch wall, depicts the rampage of the elephant Nalagiri, as he disturbs the peace of the city in order to attack the Buddha. Shown twice—in continuous narration—he of course bows down to the master as soon as he enters the latter's spiritual force field.



(109) Ajanta Cave 17 porch. Right rear wall at right: Story of Nalagiri, 468-469. The speed of Nalagiri's dash through the streets is clearly suggested by the violent movement of his trappings, while the consternation he creates has caused the shopkeepers to hurriedly lower their screens to protect their wares. Above, from a safe vantage point, the ladies of the town look down in amazement at the violence which the mad elephant is causing.





(110) Ajanta Cave 17 interior. Pillars: Cut 468; painted 470. Cave 17 was the dedication of the lavishly pious local king, Upendragupta. Although he put his greatest creative energies into the making of his adjacent caitya cave, Cave 17 is also beautifully decorated, although with paintings rather than with the more expensive and time-consuming sculptures. The pillars here express the variety and high quality of the ornamentation which he may have personally approved, in making this “monolithic excellent hall...which cannot be even imagined by little-souled men”, as he says in his inscription.



(111) Ajanta Cave 17 interior. Left wall: Visvantara Jataka, 470-471. Prince Visvantara embodies the virtue of generosity, which Upendragupta clearly aimed at emulating. Through a ruse of the gods, Visvantara was constrained to give away not only his children but his beautiful wife. Having passed the test, they were finally restored to him, as was his kingdom. Then he was reborn in the heaven of the gods, from which he ultimately came to earth as Prince Siddhartha.





(112) Ajanta Cave 17 interior. Left wall: Hamsa Jataka, 470-471. The King of Benaras's chief minister listens to the preaching of the King of the Geese, who is the Bodhisattva. For many years, this mural was considered typical of the earliest Vakataka painting at Ajanta, while the "baroque" paintings in Cave 1 were considered a century or even two centuries later. Now we know, however, that all of Ajanta's later paintings are essentially contemporary, created between 468 and 480. The differences must be ascribed to varied artistic hands and family traditions.



(113) Ajanta Cave 17 interior. Left wall: Visvantara Jataka, 470-471. This is a splendid linear rendering of the cruel Brahmin, who mistreats Visvantara's children. It shows how quickly and yet incisively Ajanta's paintings could be done.





(114) Ajanta Cave 17 interior. Carving 469-470; painting 470-471. The rear center pillars in most caves are particularly elaborate, being near the shrine. The fact that the seated dwarfs just above the pillar bases are painted argues for the relatively early date of these forms. A few years later such little figures would be carved rather than painted.



(115) Ajanta Cave 17 interior. Carving 469-470; painting 470-471. The more elaborate carvings on such pillars are placed, understandably, on the most visible faces. On the less important side one generally finds similar motifs, but rendered in paint.



(116) Ajanta Cave 17 shrine antechamber. Left pillar: Musicians on base, 471. In later contexts, figures of musicians were often rendered in sculpture, but here in Cave 17 we find their earlier painted counterparts. It is very characteristic of Ajanta that one finds such exuberant worshippers actually making music in the shrine antechamber. The figure at the left, holding a bow, plays a multi-stringed sarangi, while his companion beats the rhythm with percussive instruments. The verve and assurance of the drawing of these figures is characteristic of much of the swiftly accomplished work at Ajanta; certainly they could have been drawn in a few hours.





(117) Ajanta Cave 17 shrine antechamber. Completed 471. The shrine antechamber of Cave 17 still has impressive painting; but since the Buddha in this shrine was worshiped for over a decade, the whole area is much more begrimed than in most caves. This is particularly true of the ceiling; its fine medallion can hardly be seen now, because of the obscuring soot.



(118-119) Ajanta Cave 17 shrine Buddha, 470-471. The Cave 17 image establishes an important new convention in the addition of attendant bodhisattvas; here they are already struggling to break the confines of the outmoded central block, here somewhat extended to contain them. The image is unusual in having two other attendants; standing toward the front, they may represent King Upendragupta and his beloved brother, as devotees. Although the image got fully finished, the shrine walls and most of the ceiling were never painted, due to the impending attack of the aggressive Asmakas.







(120) Ajanta Cave 17 interior. Cell doorway, 468-469. This doorway is in the B mode representing a great advance over the plain A mode. The B mode was used in Cave 17 (and at the site in general) in 468 and 469, after which it was replaced by a slightly more efficient C mode. All of these types, as well as the later D mode, can be found in the cave, generally appearing according to the manner in which excavation progressed from front to back. Here we can see how the door pivot would be fitted into the monolithic projection at the upper level, while a receiving hole in the floor has been fitted with a wooden sleeve to ease the door's turning. A deep hole, once holding a wooden latch, can be seen on the opposite side.





(121) Ajanta Cave 19. Upendragupta's caitya hall: Façade, 464-471. Upendragupta's splendid "perfumed hall" was planned by the local king, who "expended abundant wealth" in order to develop the cave as the ceremonial center for the site. However, because he was expelled from the region by the Asmakas in about 472, it was hardly used at all as intended. By 479, it had been taken over by intrusive donors who filled up all the available spaces, even adding a few standing images on the pilasters which form part of the original central design, which had been developed with consummate care.



(122) Ajanta Cave 19 façade. Right of doorway: Buddha's offering to Rahula, 470. The doorway of Cave 19 is flanked by two popular representations of the Buddha's story. Here, at the right of the doorway we see the Buddha offering his inheritance to his son. It was, however, not the kingdom—not the things of this world—that were given, but an ascetic's begging bowl. The Buddha image cut into the pilaster at the right is, understandably, an intrusion.





(123) Ajanta Cave 19 façade. Left of doorway: Dipankara Jataka, 470. The area to the left of the doorway represents another popular scene. A devotee, through his devotions, has obtained a promise from an earlier Buddha that he will eventually be reborn as the Buddha Sakyamuni. Like the composition at the right, the two form a balanced and welcoming pair.

(124) Ajanta Cave 19 façade. Frieze: scroll form, 470. The façade of Cave 19 is richly relieved with scrolling floral and animal forms, in addition to the multiple lion heads symbolic of kingship. Human or superhuman heads also peer out from the upper levels of the façade.





(125) Ajanta Cave 19 façade. Left of arch: Guardian figure, 470. The guardian figures which flank Cave 19's great caitya are both protective and welcoming, a dichotomy reflected in their "tough but oh so gentle" demeanor. The figure at the left holds a bag of treasures, while the little attending dwarf dumps out coins from a bag slung over his shoulder. Devotees presumably would take the hint, and leave their own offerings at the cave.



(126) Ajanta Cave 19 façade. Left of arch: Guardian figure, head, 470. As an embodiment of wealth, it is hardly surprising that this figure is so copiously adorned. His incredible hair-do equally proves his privileged status. One could not be coiffured with such complexity in a culture which had not reached a supreme level both of taste and of wealth.





(127) Ajanta Cave 19 façade. Right of arch: Guardian figure, 470. The guardian to the right of Cave 19's great arch is equally beautiful, and completes the façade's carefully balanced design.



(128) Ajanta Cave 19 façade. Right of arch: Guardian figure, head, 470. The head of this figure rivals that of its counterpart on the right. Together they prove the concern for personal beauty which characterizes any highly sophisticated culture.





(129) Ajanta Cave 19 façade: View from front left, 463-471. Cave 19 was planned by the local king, Upendragupta, as the ceremonial focus of the site, and surely in part for this reason it was designed with a particular sumptuousness. However, it had to be left slightly incomplete in early 472 when the aggressive Asmakas took over the region. They apparently forbade its use for worship, and in fact cut through the monks' cells at the front of court to make a more convenient passage to their own complex at the site's western area. Finally, in 479, when all of the site's original patrons had to leave the region, Cave 19, like many other caves, became a focus of a new and fervent devotional activity by "uninvited" donors.. All of the carvings—many of superb quality—on the façade frames and returns were done in this urgent burst of activity, which had ended by the end of 480.



(130) Ajanta Caitya Cave 19 façade. Intrusive Buddha, 479. This fine standing Buddha is a typical intrusion; the donor responsible for it has chosen a very visible location, where the stone was already smoothed, and where the light is good. The proper right hand—perhaps unconsciously enlarged by the sculptor to emphasize its gesture of blessing—is the standard gesture for such standing Buddhas. The tiny devotees below, so dwarfed by the towering form above them, emphasize the Buddha's other-worldly nature. Above, celestial dwarfs offer flowers and praise.





(131) Ajanta Cave 19 court. Pillared complex at right: Decorated capital, 470. The pillars which front Cave 19's court cells are wrought with great imagination. A wealth of fruits and flowers tumble out of the carved vessels of abundance. Such an overflow of energy is typical of the exuberant conception of Upendragupta's lavish sacred hall.



(132) Ajanta Cave 19 façade. Right return: Intrusive bhadrasana Buddhas, 479. When the Period of Disruption began, new donors appropriated Upendragupta's great hall for their own uses, adding intrusive images wherever space was available. The new type of Buddha—the bhadrasana image—was now suddenly the rage. The large image seen here was rapidly surrounded by its smaller counterparts, all given by separate new donors eager to make merit.





(133) Ajanta Cave 19 court. Left side: Naga panel, 471; Buddha panel, 479. The fine nagaraja (snake king) was placed in such a way as to guard the approach to the caitya hall. However, his protection was of no avail, for when the rival Asmakas took over the site, they cut a pathway straight through the monks' cells at the front of the court, in order to provide an easier access to their own cave complex which lies beyond.



(134) Ajanta Caves Cave 19 court. Left side: Naga Panel, detail of Nagini (snake goddess), 471. This beautiful and highly sensuous figure is one of the two female companions of the famous nagaraja (snake king) who overlooks—and protects—Cave 19's courtyard. Nagas, along with their female consorts (naginis) are found in purposeful positions in nearly every cave, often balanced against representations of yakshas (earth divinities). In this close-up view one can see the characteristic manner in which the site's basalt is full of troubling pits or "bubbles" (technically amygdaloids) caused by the gasses trapped in the layered lava deposits of which Ajanta's cliffs are composed.





(135) Ajanta Cāitya Cave 19 interior. View to rear, 466-471. The interior of King Uparigupta's beautiful cāitya hall is decorated with sculptures of the highest quality, which other patrons and their artisans often tried to emulate. The chief focus is of course on Buddha imagery, but the Buddhas are typically accompanied by exuberant figural groups, as on the ends of the capitals. The splendid floral and geometric motifs at the upper level become gradually less complex, but still finely rendered, as one proceeds toward the darker reaches of the cave at the rear.



(136) Ajanta Cave 19 interior. Left side: Frieze over pillars, 471. The interior of Upendragupta's focal hall of worship is laid out with consummate care. Not only the pillar forms, but the carved images on them are organized with a concern both for variety and for order. But because of the vagaries of history, the splendid hall received almost no use at all, as the condition of its unsullied paintings proves; there is no evidence whatsoever of soot deposits from oil lamps and incense used in worship.





(137) Ajanta Cave 19 interior. Left wall: Detail of Buddha groups, 471. The frieze above the pillars of Cave 19 fuses panels showing the Buddha with superbly carved "dividers" of great exuberance. Beneath, the pillar capitals show a similar contrast, with central Buddha images flanked by richly varied motifs on the ends of the capitals.



(138) Ajanta Cave 19 interior. Left side: ambulatory ceiling. The ceiling of Cave 19's ambulatory offers an exuberant display of floral and animal forms, painted with speed and assurance. An analysis of style proves that at least a half dozen painters—probably more—worked on this assignment. By 471, when this ceiling was done, things were increasingly rushed, for Upendragupta by now knew that time was short.





(139) Ajanta Cave 19 interior. Left wall: Detail of Buddha groups, 471. The walls of Cave 19 are covered with a veritable litany of Buddha images, clearly the work of a number of painters, some of which appear to have worked in the same royal patron's adjacent vihara, Cave 17.





(140) Ajanta Cave 19 interior. Front wall: Panel for inscription, 471. This empty panel poignantly speaks of the local king's sad defeat by the forces of the rival Asmakas. The space had been carefully prepared for an extensive encomium, but time ran out before it had been sent down from the capital and inscribed in this highly appropriate location over the doorway of the cave. If completed, it would have been the most extensive dedicatory inscription at the site.





(141) Ajanta Cave 20 porch. View to right end, 463-471. The small Cave 20 started with great expectations and the highest quality effort, indulging in an almost unnecessary elaborateness—the carved ceiling being a case in point. The fact that it was Upendragupta's own donation—his ruinous inscription appears on the left pilaster—surely explains the particular lavishness of the porch pillars. The handsome female brackets were probably carved about 467 or 468, even though such elaborate motifs are not found often in early viharas. However, shortly thereafter, Upendragupta became necessarily concerned about the likelihood of an Asmaka invasion, and started limiting expenditures on the cave, paying far more attention to his crucial caitya hall, Cave 19.



(142) Ajanta Cave 20 porch. Right pilaster: Bracket with goddess, 469. The jewel-like Cave 20 was another donation of the local king, but before it was well underway hard times appeared and its splendid conception had to be much reduced. However, before this happened, the impressive tree goddess brackets were already carved, and exist today as a witness of the donor's rich intentions.



(143) Ajanta Cave 20 interior. View to shrine through shrine antechamber, 466-471. Cave 20 was planned as a typically early vihara, without interior pillars. However, in the course of excavation, a major crack was found in the ceiling, and therefore, to supply support, the shrine antechamber was brought forward—a surprising innovation. This repositioning of the antechamber and the splendid carving on its face was done in about 467, when work was going on actively in the cave. Soon thereafter work languished, with careful attention being paid to the Buddha image, but to little else.





(144) Ajanta Cave 20 interior. Face of antechamber: Naga image, 467. Nagas, or snake divinities, characteristically stand in attendance in shrines at Ajanta. This one, like its counterpart at the right, has a ponderous grace typical of such figures at the site. The rich catalog of forms on the antechamber face includes, along with these nagas, beautiful auspicious goddesses at the upper corners, and a series of the seven historical Buddhas across the top.





(145) Ajanta Cave 21 interior. View to right aisle, 468-early 478. Cave 21 represents the most developed and orderly version of the most common viharā plan, with its supporting hypostyle and four equal aisles. Here, probably for the first time, the plan included pillared cell complexes opening off of the left and right aisles, as well as at the left and right ends of the rear wall. The decoration of the pillars is now highly competent, even if less vigorously experimental than in Cave 1 or 19. Time was running out when the interior was underway; the plastering and painting was started in a very hurried fashion, even though many elements in the cave were still not fully smoothed. Such expedient work could only have been done in the troubled context of 478.



(146) Ajanta Cave 21 interior. Right end of rear wall: Naga on pillared cell, 477. Nagas and yakshas share the stage in the decoration of the front of the fine pillared cells found throughout Cave 21. This image was done in the untroubled and vigorous period when Harisena was still alive, and reflects the assurance of the last years of the emperor's reign, when esthetic expectations were high. The vigor of the forms here contributes to the overall richness of the decoration in the cave. Here celestial couples converge in praise upon the naga from above, while crocodilian makaras, embodying the energy of the waters, spout forth the lotus garland which envelops the naga and his two attendants bearing honorific cauris or flywhisks.





(147) Ajanta Cave 21 shrine Buddha, 476-478. This Buddha image was started in about 476, just before the bhadrasana type, and the use of flying couples, became standard. It must have been worked on slowly, or sporadically, which is not surprising, since there was no anxiety about getting things done in the vigorous period when Harisena was still alive. However, after his death, the situation changed, and although those in charge of this cave seemed confident about getting it completed, at least expediently, time soon ran out. Here, although the image was plastered and painted, the lower parts of the attendant bodhisattvas could not be completed. Even the curls of the Buddha's hair were not properly carved, but had to be painted on.



(148) Ajanta Cave 21 porch. Left cell complex: Intrusive Buddha, 480. Since the image in Cave 21, no matter how hastily finished, was dedicated, the cave was “alive”, and intrusions could be added. This half finished image must belong to 480, since obviously time ran out when it was underway. Its placement here has nothing to do with the original decoration of the cave, for it is cut into the wall of the vestibule of a complex cell. The splendid fronting pillars, with their very developed designs, are typical of the confident work being done after 475, when the aggressive Asmakas—the patrons of this and other caves at the western end of the site—had taken over the region.





(149) Ajanta Cave 23 porch. Left end: Naga panel, 476-477. After 475, it was standard procedure to decorate the pillared cells at the porch ends with fine friezes showing nagas at one end, balanced against yakshas (or yakshis) at the other end, representing the powers of the water on the one hand and of the earth on the other. Here in Cave 23 we have a richly complex panel made in praise of the naga divinity, who in turn offers his homage—even though distracted by his female companions—to the Buddha. The richness of the sculptural work, reflected in the capitals of the supporting pillars, is characteristic of this vigorous period of activity, unfortunately soon to be cut off by Harisena's death.



(150) Ajanta Cave 23 interior. Right front pilaster: Medallion, 476-477. One can trace the development of medallion designs from their first appearance in Cave 1 to later recensions such as these. The motif at the center, as well as the complexity of the borders, develops year by year. The medallions in Cave 23 are very advanced, one containing an exuberantly rendered conflict between the makara, embodying the waters, and a dwarf or genie who is struggling to release them,





(151) Ajanta Cave 23 interior. Left front pilaster: Medallion, 476-477. Here the artist is experimenting with a "half-medallion" motif, which is not going to find favor. However, he effectively fills his forms with a floriated horse, and a goose that appears to be feeding upon, or among, the lotuses.



(152) Ajanta Cave 24 porch. Broken colonnade, 475-477. This photograph, taken over a century ago, shows the state of the beautiful Cave 24 as it appeared in early days. The damage was caused by the pervasive flaws, which caused so many problems for the excavators. Here, we can see a particularly bad one running between the lava layers more or less horizontally, just below the splendidly carved capitals. Over the centuries deep debris—here some five feet—built up in porches such as this, and as it dried (and contracted) and then became wet (and expanded) from season to season, it gradually displaced (millimeter by millimeter) the flawed shafts, until they literally toppled over, generally leaving the capitals above intact. Unhappily, many years ago, in some misunderstood effort at a “clean-up” of the site, all of these splendid fallen pieces were thrown into the nearby river.





(153) Ajanta Cave 24 porch. Right center pillar: Capital, 476-477. This is not only one of the very latest but also one of the most complex capital compositions at the site. Probably vying with other sculptors for praise, and for the next commission, the carver has included fourteen figures of different sizes and types in the central panel alone, while there are three more figures on each of the side panels. The “overflowing pot” capital below is a cement restoration, since the original shaft, weakened by its flaws, had fallen, leaving the beautiful capital hanging from the stone above.



(154) Ajanta Cave 24 porch. Right pilaster: Capital, 476-477. The right pilaster capital in Cave 24’s porch shows the familiar flying couple, along with a motif honoring the yaksha. Such sub-divinities along with their aquatic counterparts, the nagas, appear everywhere throughout Ajanta, bringing their ancient powers into the service of the Buddha.



(155) Ajanta Cave 24 porch. Right pilaster: Medallion, 477. One can trace the evolution of medallion designs from the forms found in Cave 1, with their simple inclusion of lotuses or conch shells, to the more vigorous example like those in Cave 23, with roiling animal forms, and finally to this, the most complex and surely the latest of all. Here an auspicious princely figure, probably a yaksha, and accompanied by languishing wives or companions, is intended to offer praise and protection, from his vantage point in the porch, to the (never finished) Buddha. Although the Cave 24 porch is filled with wonderfully rendered motifs, all further work on the cave was suddenly cut off by Harisena's death at the end of 477; as in the case of most very unfinished caves, it was apparently assumed that there was no hope that they could be finished.

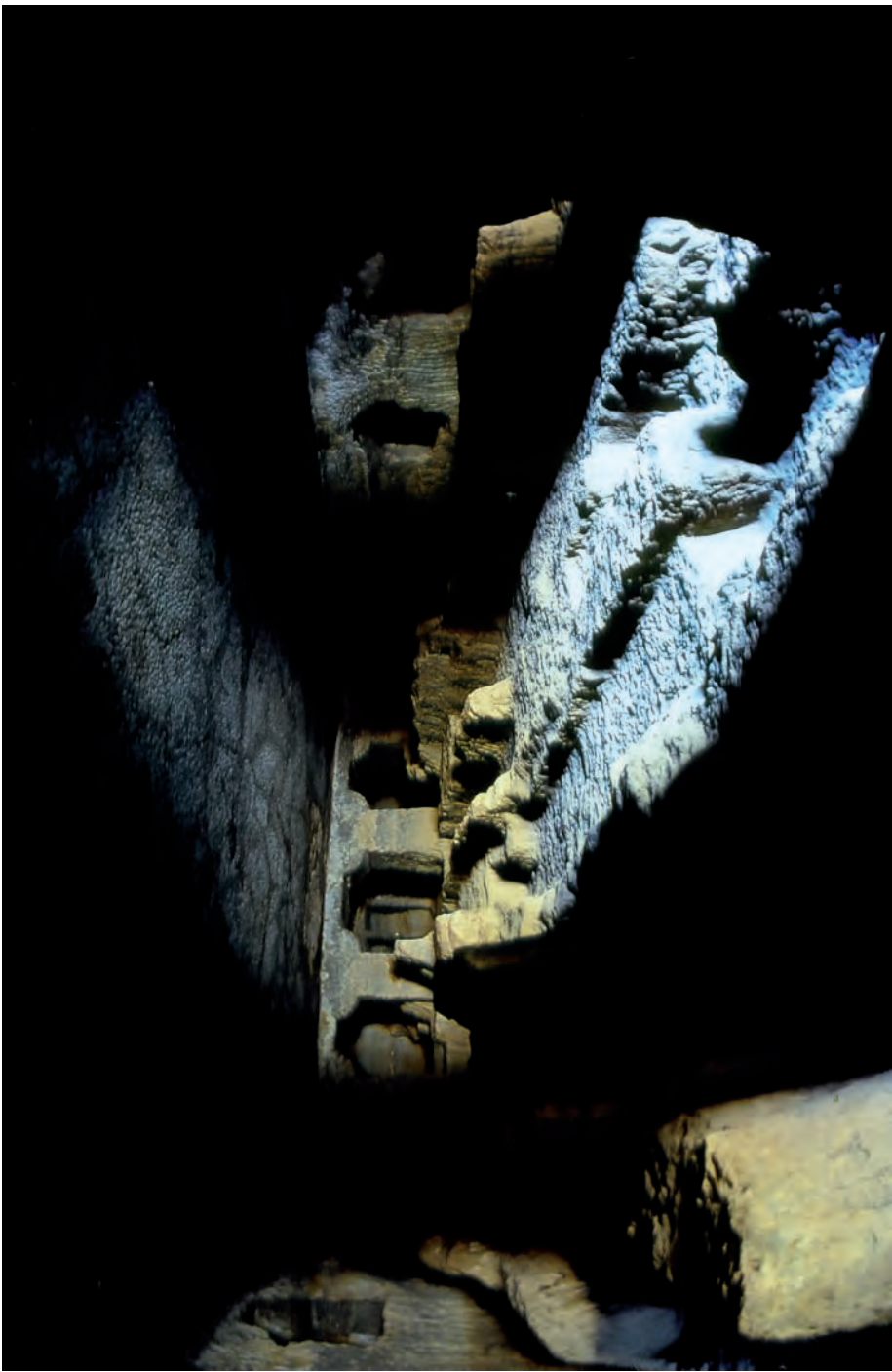




(156) Ajanta Cave 24 porch. Doorway, 477. With its insistent trabeation—post and lintel format—this doorway represents the type developed during the year (477) before Harisena's death. The female figures, which once used the pilasters as their pedestals, have been moved to the upper corners, creating the doorway's characteristic T-shaped format. The vigorously enamored couples seem quite caught up in their own concerns, but the inner edges of their enframements have now been cut away, creating a strong, and new, axial focus for the entrance. This sense of focus is amplified by the converging groups of ecstatic celestials who, along the top of the doorway, bring a crown as their offering—an offering which the Buddha resists until a later century.



(157) Ajanta Cave 24 porch. Doorway: Upper right, detail, 477.



(158) Ajanta Cave 24 unfinished interior. View to rear, 475-477. This fascinating revelation of the progress of excavating activity in this unfinished cave shows how work logically proceeded from the ceiling downward and from front to back. The whole process was surely done by contract, just as today in work on the roads, where whole families may be involved in the stage by stage progress of contracted work.





(159) Ajanta Cave 24 interior. View from front left corner, 475-477. The unfinished interior of the huge Cave 24—abandoned at the end of 477 when the great emperor died—is a virtual laboratory for the study of excavation techniques. The cutting of course progressed, in general, from the top down and from the front to the back; all work must have been done by contract, with payment being made when certain given areas or forms were done.



(160) Ajanta Cave 24 interior. Viewed from the right: Front row pillars, 475-477. In the front aisle, one can see how one pillar is still merely a roughed-out square, how others are being shaped into octagonal, or sixteen-sided forms, and how (in the fifth pillar from the left) the final design of most of the pillars would have included elaborate medallion and other decorative motifs. As is evident from the decoration of the porch, the patron of this cave had hoped to make it unrivaled from an esthetic point of view.



(161) Ajanta Caves Cave 26 court and façade. View from front right, 462-468 and 475-478: Intrusions, 479-480. This photograph, taken in the late nineteenth century, reveals the condition of this important cave at a time when major portions of the cave's wings were obscured by debris. When the cave had to be abandoned due to the expulsion of its patrons (the Asmakas) in 468, it had been no more than blocked out, with no detailed carving yet accomplished. The carefully organized series of Buddha images on the main surface of the façade, like most of the images decorating the interior, were all done after the aggressive Asmakas had taken over the Ajanta region in 475. This work continued through 478, at which point the Asmaka funds had dried up due to the needs of the war that they were planning against their Vakataka overlords. Then, in 479 and 480, "uninvited" donors, mostly monks still resident at the site, took advantage of the breakdown of authority and put their own votive images wherever they pleased; the huge standing Buddha seen here, and all of the figures below him and to the left, are such intrusive images.





(162) Ajanta Cave 26 court and façade. View from front right, 462-468; 475-480. The vast courtyard of Buddhahadra's Cave 26 suggests something of the great monk's concern for effective ceremony. The central hall is complemented by two wings—the left shown here—which functioned in particular as housing areas for the monks associated with the main hall. Unhappily, both the original porch of the main hall and much of the forward areas of the wings have been much damaged.



(163) Ajanta Cave 26 façade. Right of arch: Yaksha, 476. On either side of Cave 26's great arch yaksha guardians sit at ease. Beneath them are suggestive piles of offerings, showing fruits and flowers and clothes and metal utensils—the very things which a pious devotee might well bring as a pious contribution.





(164) Ajanta Caitya Cave 26 façade. Left return: Figures, 479. As can be seen in the general view of the façade, this composition, although high in quality, was in the worst location possible. This is because, when the porch roof was intact, it could not be seen from the courtyard. It is clear that it is later than either the seated Buddha just above, or the standing Buddha at a still higher (and very visible) level. In fact its late date is confirmed by the fact that it is of the bhadrasana type, the only such image in this area, and anticipates the many related intrusive images in the cave's ambulatory, which was taken over by such eager donors only after they had used up all the available spaces on the façade. The composition is surprising, because the figure of Vajrapani at the right had to be squeezed in at ninety degrees; this cramping of the composition was caused by the prior presence of the two intrusive standing Buddhas to the left. Obviously a previous donor took over this area to the left, because that more forward location was still visible from the courtyard.



(165) Ajanta Cave 26 porch. Doorway: Upper right, 477. The doorway of the caitya hall, Cave 26, is one of the most developed at the site, and clearly must be dated to 477, the very year in which the emperor Harisena died. It has the just-developed trabeated format, as well as the strong axial focus which also developed at this time. The goddesses on the makaras are still honored, but have been moved to the side because of the requirements of the entrance's quasi-structural format.





(166) Ajanta Cave 26 interior. View toward stupa, 465-468; 475-478. This view, slightly wide angle, reveals the complexity and splendor of the interior arrangement of Cave 26. The focus is of course on the central stupa, with its Buddha in the just introduced bhadrāsana pose. However, the richness of every form emphasizes the central image, shown with the gesture of preaching to the world.



(167) Ajanta Cave 26 interior. Frieze over right pillars, 476-478. The frieze above Cave 26's interior pillars focuses on representations of the Buddha, as expected. However, the complexity of the setting—the involvement in significant detail—is very characteristic of the latest phase of work at the site. The complexity extends, too, to the treatment of the capitals below. The frieze was once richly painted, but mere traces—perhaps of lapis lazuli blue—survive today.

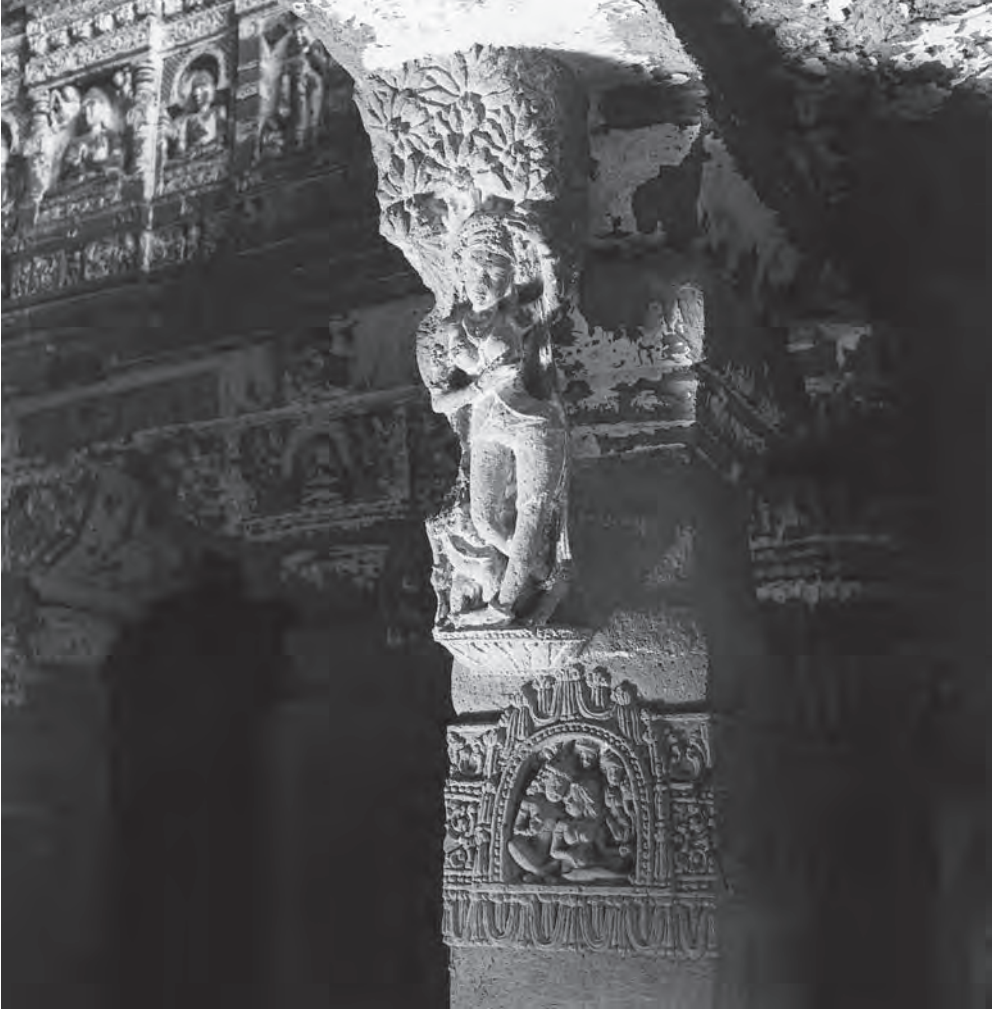




(168) Ajanta Caviya Cave 26 interior. Frieze above pillars: Buddha images, 477-478. This is one of the many sections of the lavishly pious decoration of the continuing frieze above Cave 26's pillars. The main images are framed by an abundance of auspicious motifs: lotus scrolls, lion heads, dancing dwarfs. The bhadrāsana Buddha seated here on a lion throne, with his bodhisattva and flying dwarf attendants, probably is one of the first instances where the newly important bhadrāsana image—the central motif in both this cave and Cave 16—appears in such lesser contexts; in fact its appearance here suggests that the frieze was not completed until the very last year, namely 478. One should also note the necessarily reduced representation of Avalokitesvara as Lord of Travelers at the right—the motif became very popular in these latter days, when departure—quite possibly dangerous—was imminent.



(169) Ajanta Cave 26 interior. Pillar R3: Yaksha under capital, 477. Minor areas at Ajanta, such as the lower faces of the capitals, were often painted with great speed and facility, supporting the assumption that such work often was accomplished with great efficiency. In the case of this charmingly playful dwarf, the work could hardly have consumed more than an hour or so of the painter's time. The dwarfs in the most visible spots are, like this one, four armed; in less visible areas toward the rear they become two-armed—presumably a cost-saving procedure which has parallels in Cave 19 and Cave 10.



(170) Ajanta Caitya Cave 26 interior. Left of entrance: Pillar, 476. The incorporation of auspicious, even erotic, motifs into the iconographic program is very characteristic of Ajanta, with its life-accepting rather than life-denying attitude. Thus, on entering the cave, one first encounters this abundant maiden, utilized as a bracket figure, while a loving couple occupies the decorative motif below. The bracket figures which adorn the late shrine antechambers in excavations such as Caves 1 and 2, and Aurangabad 3, are the almost immediate descendants of these figures in Cave 26.





(171) Ajanta Caitya Cave 26 interior. View toward stupa, 465-468; 475-478. This splendid stupa, with its very late bhadrāsana image, was originally planned to be fronted by a standing Buddha, like that in Cave 19. However, by the time that the Asmakas were able to return to their excavations, in 475, conceptions had radically changed and this very different image was what the patron now desired. However, it had to be squeezed into a space so inadequate that the now necessary attendant bodhisattvas, much reduced in size, had to be relegated to the stupa drum; one of these attendants is visible just to the right of the central group. At the same time, kneeling devotees were now also necessary. Those at the left could be cut from the deep matrix still left at the floor level when the work on the cave first ended in 468; but the other group had to be cut separately and then “plugged in”; the hole to receive the plug can be seen in the floor, but of course the loose images are long since gone.





(172) Ajanta Cave 26 interior. Left ambulatory: Parinirvana, 477-478. The Dying Buddha extends twenty-three feet along the wall of the left ambulatory. He lies comfortably upon a conventional early bed, his head supported by a well-filled bolster. Beneath, his earthly devotees are inconsolably grieving, while above, the celestials are joyfully praising his victory over mundane time.



(173) Ajanta Cave 26 interior. Left ambulatory: Temptation by Mara, 477-478. This splendid panel depicts the Buddha's temptation by the god Mara, and his victory over the forces of desire. The scene is shown in continuous narrative, with Mara's attack at the upper left, and his defeat—the Buddha's victory—at the upper right. Below, Mara's tempting daughters are suggestively dancing, but the Buddha is not thrown off his course by their ministrations.





(174) Ajanta Cave 26 interior. Left ambulatory: Temptation by Mara, detail, 477-478. With his furious and hideous hosts, Mara, on his elephant, starts his attack.



(175) Ajanta Cave 26 interior. Left ambulatory: Temptation by Mara, detail, 477-478. As Mara's daughters dance, they are accompanied by a female drummer.



(176) Ajanta Cave 26 interior. Left ambulatory: Temptation by Mara, detail, 477-478. Mara, discomfited, grieves about his defeat.



(177) Ajanta Cave 26 interior. Left ambulatory: Temptation by Mara, detail, 477-478. A detail of Mara's face shows the sensitivity inherent in the sculptor's powers.





(178) Ajanta Caitya Cave 26 interior. Right ambulatory: Sravasti Miracle (Panel R2), 478; unfinished intrusion, 480. After the patron Buddhahadra had essentially finished the more central areas of the cave, he started a vigorous campaign of decorating the ambulatory. This sumptuously rendered "Sravasti Miracle" image, with the enthroned Buddha supported by nagas (snake divinities) and attended by devotees as well as the deer symbolic of his preaching, is one of the first images accomplished in 478. Typically, work started toward the front of the aisle, where the light was good; however, a large area of rock was left at the right for the simple reason that the aisle door, when opened, would slam against this area. In the Period of Disruption, when new donors were taking over the cave for their intrusions, they could not afford to be so choosy, for good space was at a premium. Therefore, some later donor took over this area for a standing Buddha, which barely got started before time ran out; it is clearly one of the very last intrusions in the cave, and must date from late 480.

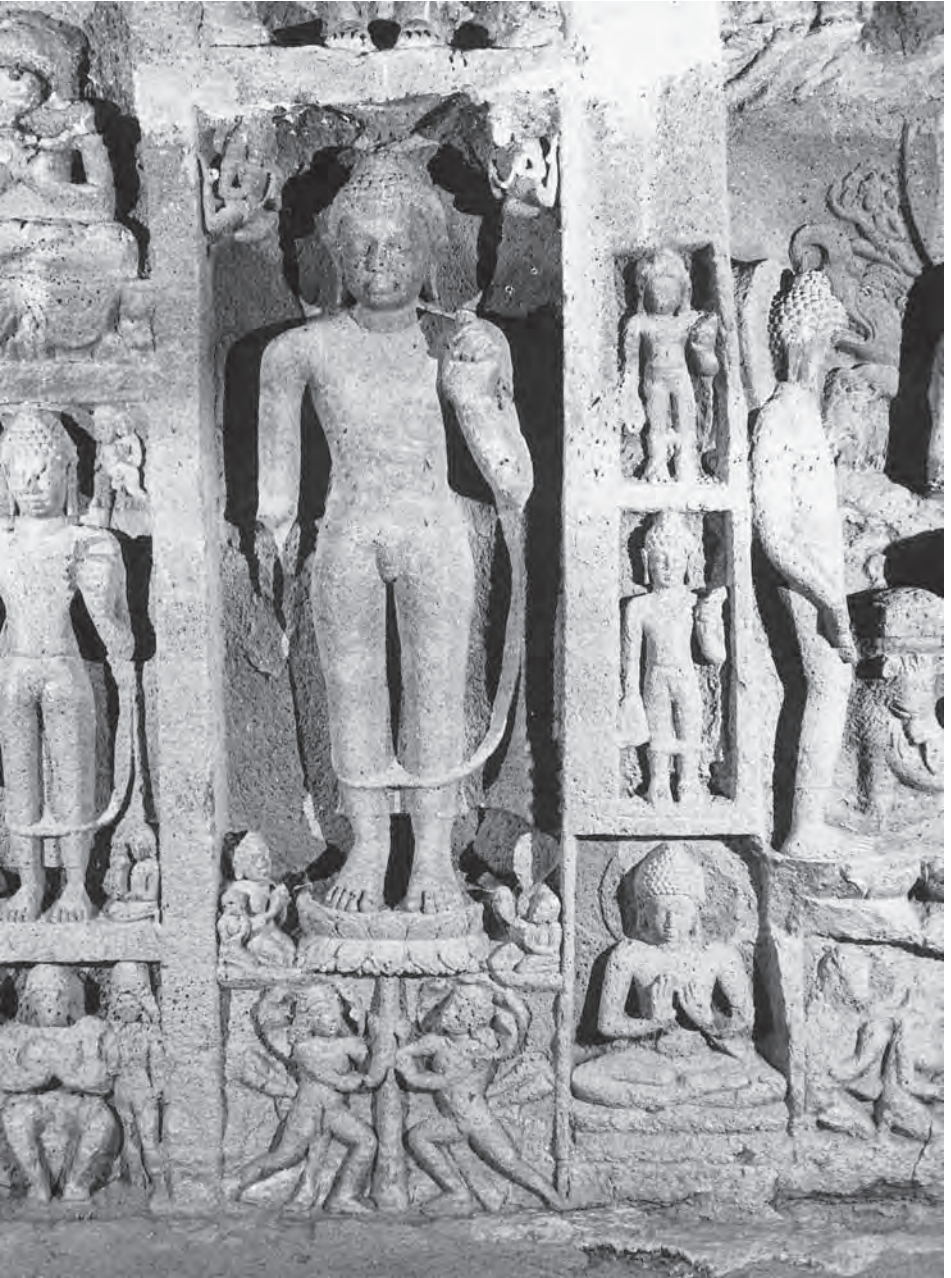


(179) Ajanta Caitya Cave 26 interior. Right ambulatory: Sravasti Miracle (Panel R2), detail, 478, The auspicious energies which accumulate around such images are perfectly embodied in the hosts of exuberant celestials which converge upon the Buddha here. The elaborate floriated arch further protects and honors him, while hopeful devotees soaring above offer him the very crown which he had long ago rejected, and in fact will not agree to wear for another two centuries.





(180) Ajanta Cāitya Cave 26 interior. Right ambulatory: view to rear, 479-480. Buddhābhadrā's efforts to complete his program for the decoration of the ambulatory was cut off at the end of 478, when the Āsmaka connection with the site had to end due to the exigencies of their insurrection against the Vakataka overlord. Late in 479, after having taken over the cave's façade for their own votive purposes, the eager new donors took over whatever space remained in the ambulatory, and filled it with Buddha images of various sizes and shapes, often with iron hooks (often now missing) for garlands or covering cloths. Here, just beyond Panels R3 and R4, sponsored by Buddhābhadrā in 478, we can see a sequence of intrusive images which copy, in a very expedient way, the far more impressive panels sponsored by Buddhābhadrā.

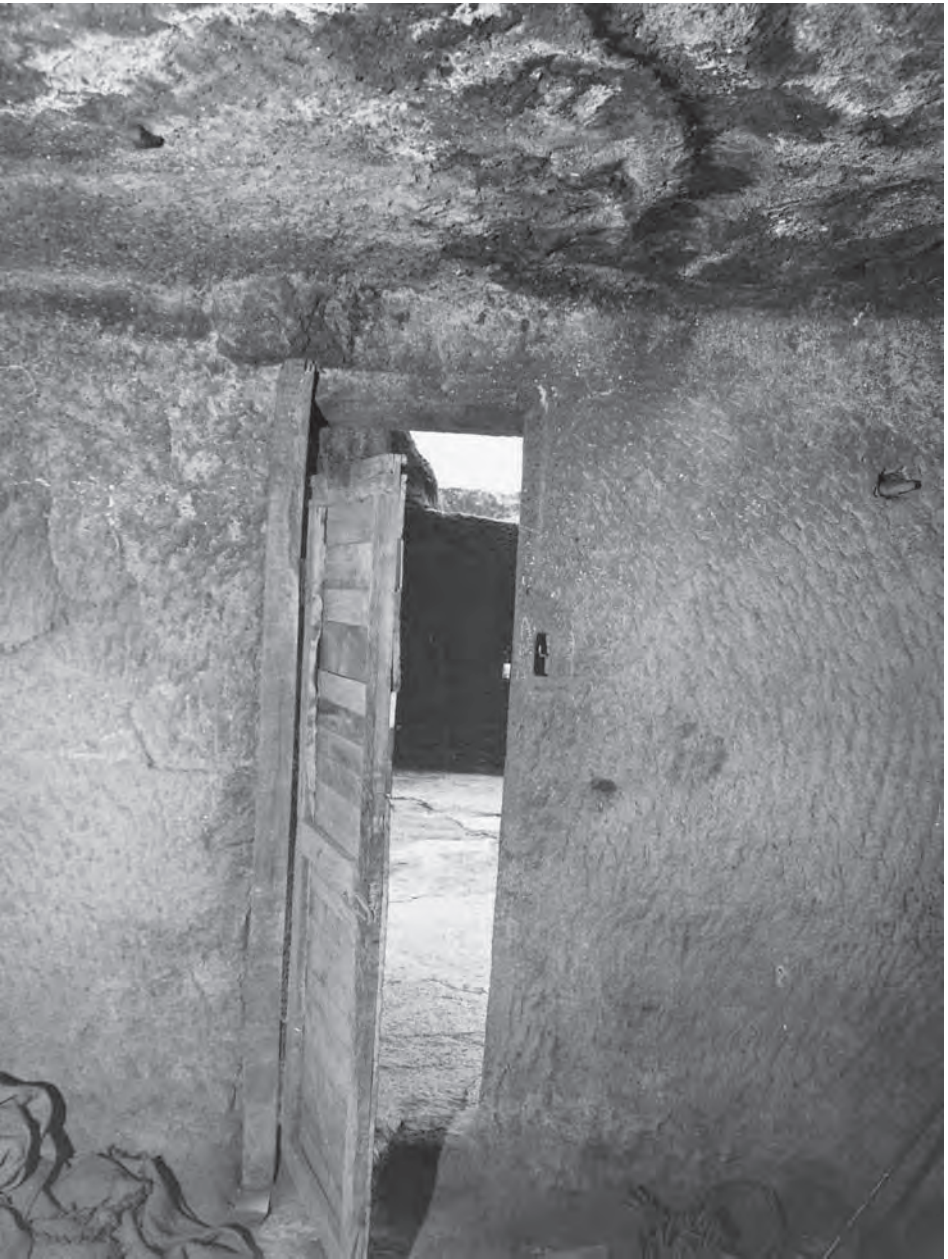


(181) Ajanta Caitya Cave 26 interior. Right ambulatory: Various intrusive images, 479-480. At first, the new donors, sponsoring intrusive images, made large panels which reflected, in a simplified way, those sponsored by Buddhahadra himself. However, as the months went on, and pressures increased, the ambulatory walls were broken up into a confusing array of multiple separate donations, all of course Buddha images, either seated or standing. The figures here were almost certainly all private donations, and many probably had painted inscriptions, now long since lost. They were all probably carved in 480, as is suggested by the fact that a small bhadrāsana image appears here. Similarly the central motif of a Buddha (attended by multiple devotees) standing on a double lotus supported by nagas is a very late conception.





(182) Ajanta Caitya Cave 26 interior. Right ambulatory: Unfinished bhadrasana Buddha, 480. This panel, put in a relatively undesirable location where the rock is flawed and the light is bad, poignantly expresses the ending of all patronage activity at the site. Not only are the main figures unfinished, but the flying celestials overhead, and perhaps devotees at the base, have not even been started. What is significant to note is that there are at least a dozen images in the least desirable—i.e. the last remaining—areas of the ambulatory which are all variously unfinished. When we realize that there are other groups of similarly unfinished images in other caves—and all in the latest contexts—it seems evident that work on them all ended simultaneously; in fact this may have been due to the threat to the region created by the Asmakas' insurrectionist forces marching northward, along with other disenchanted feudatories, for a final confrontation with Harisena's weak successor, Sarvasena III.



(183) Ajanta Caitya Cave 26. Right wing: Cell doorway, cut 468; refitted 475. This cell doorway presents one of the many proofs that Cave 26, instead of being a very “late” cave, as has been so often supposed, was one of the first caves started at the site. This doorway, with its early monolithic pivot projection, clearly dates to 468, the very year that work first broke off on the cave. Since this cell is deep in a very minor area, we can believe that much of the cave had already been excavated by the time this doorway was cut. However, it was not used in 468, for at that time the whole cave complex was merely reamed out—living in it was unthinkable. It was not until 475, when the Asmakas came back as the conquerors of the region, that it was converted to a more up-to-date D mode. Happily, the old monolithic project was not cut away, but was retained as a strengthener—and thus provides useful evidence.





(184) Ajanta Cave 29 facade. Unfinished caitya hall. The local king, Upendragupta, having expelled the Asmakas from the region in 468, decided to make a new caitya hall, oriented like that of the Asmakas to the summer solstice. However, it was barely started, in 469, when he realized the danger of Asmaka retaliation, and consequently reduced his new undertakings. The unfinished character of Cave 29 speaks to the problems which he had begun to realize.



(185) Aurangabad Cave 1 façade. 476-478. When, in about 475, the Asmakas decided to make their own complex of caves in the hills near present-day Aurangabad, they intended their new offerings to be totally up-to-date; in fact they were to offer proof of the patrons' piety and energy. Cave 1, the most elaborate of all Vākataka viharas, witnesses the Asmaka interest and intentions. Although unfinished, it was to be the most elaborate manifestation of Asmaka political and spiritual power.





(186) Aurangabad Cave 1. View toward left front from porch, 477. The caves at Aurangabad were not started until the Asmakas had already taken over the Ajanta area, and appear to reflect an interest on their part to create a site quite specifically their own. At the same time, they took advantage of all of the stylistic and iconographic developments at Ajanta, which by 475 included increasingly rich forms and motifs. Cave 1 at Aurangabad was clearly intended to outdo anything at Ajanta, but it was started all too late: unlike Cave 3, which was started a couple of years earlier, the excavation of Aurangabad Cave 1 barely progressed past its highly elaborated porch. It may have been necessary to set the cave far back in order to have enough height for the façade. In any case, this resulted in a huge courtyard, quite in keeping with the planner's desire to awe the visitor..



(187) Aurangabad Cave 1 porch. Colonnade: Bracket with goddess, 477-478. Although the quality of the stone at Aurangabad often made the task of sculptors difficult, nonetheless they often managed to create images of great beauty. Here we see only one of the host of goddesses that decorated the porch colonnade; and her richness is further elaborated by the burden of beautiful floral, geometric, and figural motifs which surround her. In the distance one can see a portion of a group of bhadrāsana Buddhas; these are in fact intrusions carved when work was renewed at the site in the sixth century, possibly with Early Kalacuri approval. Although in the Vakataka phase intrusions would never be placed in a cave which did not have a dedicated Buddha image, this was not a problem a century later.



(188) Aurangabad Cave 1 porch. Colonnade: Bracket with goddess, 477-478. The use of brackets with tree goddesses on the porch colonnade is one of the surprising features of the early Cave 20 at Ajanta. The concept becomes increasingly popular after 475, in shrine antechambers; but nothing can match the ambitiousness of the plan of the colonnade here, where every pillar has goddesses both on the left and on the right pillar faces. The complexity of the brackets rivals anything done at Ajanta, even though it seems evident that the sculptors from the latter site were brought to work here.





(189) Aurangabad Cave 1 porch. Doorway, 477-479. The excavators of Aurangabad did not get much farther than the porch, and a part of the front aisle, before time ran out. However, their ambitions were great, and this doorway, although clearly made with a degree of haste and carelessness, was one of the most richly complex ever done, rivaled only by the shrine doorway of the nearby Cave 3. It is of the late "trabeated" type, with pillars supporting a lintel which is divided into a series of five shrines, an arrangement which will find counterparts in (and probably influenced) slightly later doorways at sites such as Nachna and Deogarh. The goddesses at the top have been provided with their own pilasters, while at the base naga guardians project with an assertive vigor typical of the sadly aborted work in this whole cave.



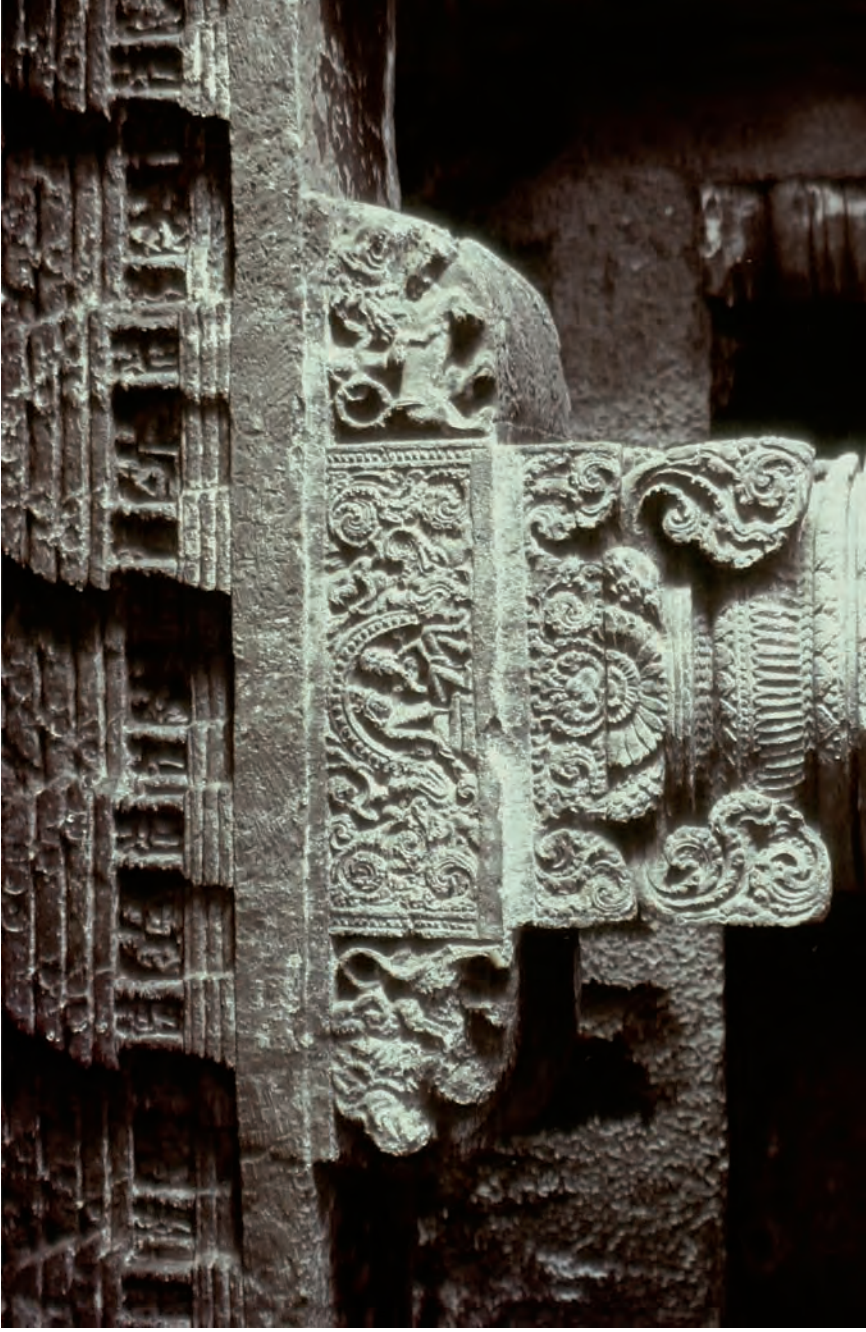


(190) Aurangabad Cave 3 interior. View from left front, 475-478. Although the rock is of inferior quality throughout the whole site at Aurangabad, the sculptors outdid the complexity of anything at Ajanta in the creation of Caves 1 and 3; the closest counterpart can be found in Ajanta's Cave 26, also an Asmaka monument. Just as in Cave 26, all of the decorative overlay was done at this same time—in the period after 475 when the Asmakas had conquered the Ajanta region, and were perhaps expressing their sense of victory in the complexity of their productions. Aurangabad, in fact, was probably in their own home territory, which could account for their particular efforts to make it impressive.



(191) Aurangabad Cave 3 interior. Pillar L2, 477-478. The remarkable complexity of the work in Cave 3 is well exhibited in this elaborate pillar, which has such multiform motifs the mind is boggled by them. In fact, something of the dignity of the sedate pillars in Ajanta Cave 1 is lost in this rich display. Fortunately, Aurangabad Cave 3, unlike Cave 1, was underway early enough (by 475) so that it was able to be completed before late 478, when time ran out for the Asmaka patrons. Even though the cave was dedicated, it has no intrusions; this is probably to be explained by the fact that, being totally decorated, there was no room for such uninvited images.





(192) Aurangabad Cave 3 interior. Left side: Frieze and pillar capital, 476-477. As is sometimes the case with Cave 26 at Ajanta—the clear source of the style at Aurangabad—the carvers get lost in often minuscule detail and what could be called a horror vacui. Nonetheless the richness of the forms is manifest. Interestingly, the series of loving couples in the frieze above the pillars here shifts to Buddha images in the slightly later frieze on the opposite side of the cave. It is characteristic of the concerns that took over after Harisena died that this revealing switch was made.



(193) Aurangabad Cave 3 interior. View from rear aisle to right, 477-478 Not surprisingly, the pair of pillars at rear center, since they are the closest to the shrine, are the most complex of all. Here the sculptors indulge their skills in creating groups of active figures on the tops of the now-conventional high square bases. The definition of the pillars was effectively controlled by moving from the square bases, to octagonal sections, and then to sixteen sided sections—a carving method by now quite conventional; but then, in a tour de force, the sculptor has created dramatic sixty-four sided sections, with diagonal flutings carefully disposed in opposite directions. Above, as in Cave 26 at Ajanta, female brackets are added to the corners of the elaborately designed capitals. In the distance one can see a very late and complex medallioned pilaster.





(194) Aurangabad Cave 3 interior. Right front pilaster, 476-477. Like everything else at Aurangabad, the medallion forms here attempt to outdo those at Ajanta, upon which they are drawn. By now it is conventional to fill the medallions not only with roiling animal forms, but with erotically suggestive couples.



(195) Aurangabad Cave 3 interior. View from shrine antechamber, 476-478. The overall richness of this cave continues unabated into the shrine area. In accordance with late convention, the two antechamber pillars are adorned with female brackets, as well as with various other auspicious motifs. Although traces suggest that the whole cave was once painted, no significant remains can be seen today. However, the complexity of the carved motifs makes up for such losses.



(196) Aurangabad Cave 3 shrine antechamber. View toward shrine, 476-478. The unending decorative complexity of Cave 3 continues unabated in the antechamber where even the outer border is filled with auspicious couples and a host of other late motifs. Happily two of the female brackets remain, from an original four, carved on both sides of each pillar. The others, along with various other “detachable” motifs must have been knocked off by vandals or iconoclasts years ago.





(197) Aurangabad Cave 3 shrine. Doorway, 477-478. Since the Asmaka insurrectionists were technically feudatories of the Vakataka emperor when Cave 3 was excavated, we can say that this was the most complex and at the same time accomplished doorway ever done in the Vakataka phase of activity, at any site whatsoever. For "support" it now has two pilasters for its "post and lintel" (trabeated) format. All of the standard features that we would expect are included, but with great assurance and careful disposition. Large projecting nagas guard the lower part of the entrance, while at the upper corners the goddesses are making music.





(198) Aurangabad Cave 3 shrine. Buddha, attendant, and kneeling devotees, 477-478. As we would expect at this late date, the grandly conceived Buddha sits in the bhadrasana pose against a richly realized throne back. Because the shrine is so small in comparison to the size of the figures, a wide-angle shot has been used here, with the resulting diminishment of the size of the attendant bodhisattva—the figure is actually over twelve feet high. The remarkably innovative group of devotees found on both sides of the shrine is also over life size, and makes an overwhelming impression upon anyone going into the shrine.



(199) Aurangabad Cave 3 shrine. Devotees along left wall, 477-478. These kneeling devotees are among the most impressive creations in India's art, and represent the ultimate development of the fine but smaller groups of devotees found at Ajanta. There, however, the figures are typically placed in front of the throne upon which a padmasana image sits. It was partly the difficulty of disposing such devotees in front of the bhadrāsana type which must have suggested this new arrangement, which led to such startlingly successful results.





(200) Aurangabad Cave 3 shrine. A devotee at the right, 477-478. As if consciously, the sculptor has varied all of the headdresses, giving us a fine insight into the sophistication of personal dress and decoration in this "golden age". This was, if anything, an age of indulgence and excess, at least for the privileged classes. Such ominously beautiful coiffures, such multiple strands of jewel-laden necklaces, may well hint at the troubles that are so soon to come.



(201) Aurangabad Cave 4A. Broken shrinelet, 478. Only a couple of decades ago, a highly important shrinelet containing a bhaddrasana Buddha image was uncovered from the debris close to Aurangabad's ancient caitya hall. It turned out to be the last great Buddha image of the Vakataka period, clearly dating from the year 478, when the last images were being dedicated by the original patrons—in this case the Asmakas.





(202) Aurangabad Cave 4A. Bhadrasana Buddha, 478. The Buddha image had been installed in its separate shrinelet, originally fronted by two pillars, only portions of which remain. When the shrinelet collapsed and was covered over by the fallen rock, it slipped downward at an angle, and at the same time the roof—never recovered—fell in.

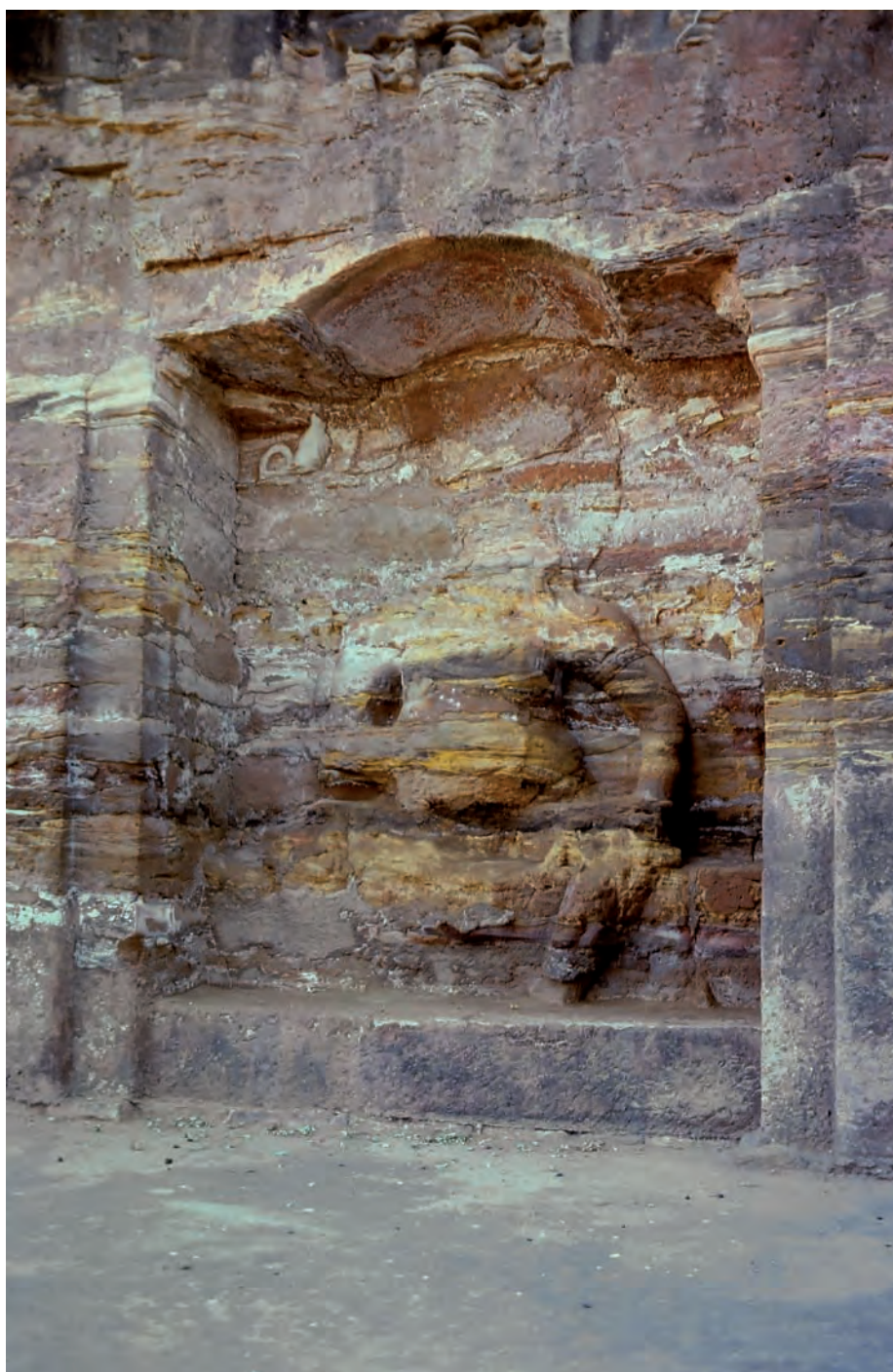


(203) Aurangabad Cave 4A. Bhadrasana Buddha, 478. The Buddha image is typical of the latest Vākataka types, with the characteristic throne back and throne side motifs. Interestingly, by 479 or 480, intrusive donors added a number of small standing Buddhas at the top and sides of the image.



(204) Bagh River with caves at left. The Bagh caves open upon the attractive Bagh River. However, the well-located site had the disadvantage of being composed of friable sandstone. This facilitated the work of excavation, but not its permanence.





(205) Bagh. Gigantic Yaksha near caves, c. 470. The site is, in a sense, introduced by the presence of a huge Yaksha, which was surely conceived as the protector of the area. Although it has suffered significantly from the character of the site's fragile sandstone, it still has a startling impact upon the visitor.



(206) Bagh Cave 2 interior. View to right, 464-477. Work at Bagh progressed very efficiently, partly because the sandstone was so easy to cut. Furthermore, because Bagh did not suffer from Ajanta's political problems, the site was able to develop continuously. Bagh's pillars are invariably very massive, because of problems with the stone; but their thickness has not saved the colonnade here from destruction. The trabeated porch doorway design may well be the source for the similar forms which appear very late at Ajanta.





(207) Bagh Cave 2 interior. View from right, 464-477. The huge interiors at Bagh were possible, in part, because the excavation of the sandstone could go so quickly. At the same time, it was necessary to provide extra support, as here, because of the possibility of the ceiling's collapse. The carved decoration on the pillars was relatively simple, again because of the friability of the stone; most of the detail was rendered by painting the pillars, even though few traces are now left. More traces remain on the ceiling—particularly in Caves 2 and 3. These are generally very begrimed, for caves such as this appear to have remained in worship even after the Vakataka collapse; in 486 Maharaja Subandhu of nearby Mahismati provided funds for the repair of the monastery, confirming the view that it had been in continual worship from the time when its caves were completed in or about 477.



(208) Bagh Cave 2 shrine antechamber. Buddha and attendants, 475. The shrine antechamber contains both this beautiful group of the Buddha and two bodhisattvas on the right wall and another similar group at the left. They were undoubtedly added some years after the shrine itself was completed; the latter contains a simple stupa, and as ideas here and at Ajanta developed, it became desirable—perhaps even necessary—to add images to the shrine context. Considering the friable nature of the Bagh sandstone it is remarkable that such beautiful figures could be cut; the sculptors must have been fortunate in working in an area where the stone was more compact than usual; in Bagh Cave 7, the same groups had to be carved as separate (wooden?) images and then “plugged in” to their appropriate positions. Needless to say, they have long been lost.



(209) Bagh Cave 2. Cell doorway, 472. This is a characteristic Bagh doorway. Because of the friability of the sandstone, it was impossible to make monolithic pivot projections, as had been developed at Ajanta. Actually, this system, which involved merely recessing the back of the doorway and putting pivot holes in the recess, was a far better one. When the workmen who had migrated to Bagh during Ajanta's times of troubles came back to Ajanta, they brought this very practical concept with them and it immediately became the standard door fitting type. The modern door seen here may be similar to those used in ancient times; the turning of the pivoted door, and the consequent smoothing of the pivot holes, gives us useful information about the usage of any particular cell.





(210) Bagh Cave 2 interior. Painting: Lotus scroll and bodhisattva below, c. 475. Cave 2 at Bagh still preserves a number of attractive paintings, all quite related to their counterparts at Ajanta. Here, the scrolling floral forms related closely to those (now badly damaged) in the interior of Ajanta Cave 20. Below one can see traces of the figure of a painted bodhisattva on either side of the doorway.



(211) Bagh Cave 3 interior. Shrinelet ceiling: medallion with flying couple, c. 475. In Bagh Cave 3, one finds a medallion similar to those at Ajanta, with equally related flying couples, of great beauty, at the corners. Because Bagh was in use for many years, the ceilings are much begrimed.



(212) Bagh Cave 3 interior. Shrinelet wall: Halos for attached Buddhas, c. 475. Cave 3 has a pair of minor shrinelets, each having “empty” halos on the walls, to which loose Buddha images would have once been attached.





(213) Bagh Cave 4 interior. Left rear: Painted pillars, c. 475. Bagh Cave 4 preserves a number of finely painted pillars. Since the nature of the friable rock disallowed elaborate cutting, much of the detailing was necessarily done in painting.





(214) Ghatotkacha Vihara porch. View to left rear, 464-468; 475-478. The Ghatotkacha vihara was the second donation of the Yakataka Prime Minister Varahadeva, perhaps given for the benefit of the local people of that remote area. The porch, now ruinous, follows Ajanta precedents. Significantly, Varahadeva's inscription, proving that the cave was made in Harisena's time, appears on the left rear wall.



(215) Ghatotkacha Vihara porch. Inscription on the left end of the rear wall, 477. Varahadeva's inscription, which mentions his emperor Harisena, along with giving his own proud genealogy, is of great importance in establishing the date of the caves at Ajanta. The inscription is clearly fifth century—it would have been applied during Harisena's reign—but it is intimately associated with motifs (like the adjacent pilaster decoration) which, traditionally, were considered to date from the sixth or even later centuries. However, the association seen here and throughout the cave proves that it must indeed all be a fifth century creation; and therefore the related latest caves at Ajanta must be similarly dated.





(216) Ghatotkacha Vihara porch. Right pillared cell, detail, 477. The treatment of the pillars in the complexes at either end of the porch is highly significant. They clearly relate to the very latest types found at Ajanta—the present one has counterparts in Cave 26. This makes it clear that many motifs in the Ghatotkacha vihara, clearly a cave of the fifth century, relate to what has always been considered the latest forms at Ajanta.



(217) Ghatotkacha Vihara interior. View toward left aisle, 466-468; 475-478. The interior of the Ghatotkacha vihara is patterned on the earlier Vakataka caves at Ajanta. The relatively severe octagonal pillars suggest the early date of its exposure; the more elaborately decorated forms, such as the pillared cell complex in the aisle, visible here, were created much later, however, after the long interruption of work in the cave caused by the Recession and the Hiatus. The low square bases of the pillars, reflecting late conventions, may also have been cut at this time from the uncut matrix at the floor level, since the cave was only partially excavated by the time that ongoing work had to stop because of political concerns at the end of 468.



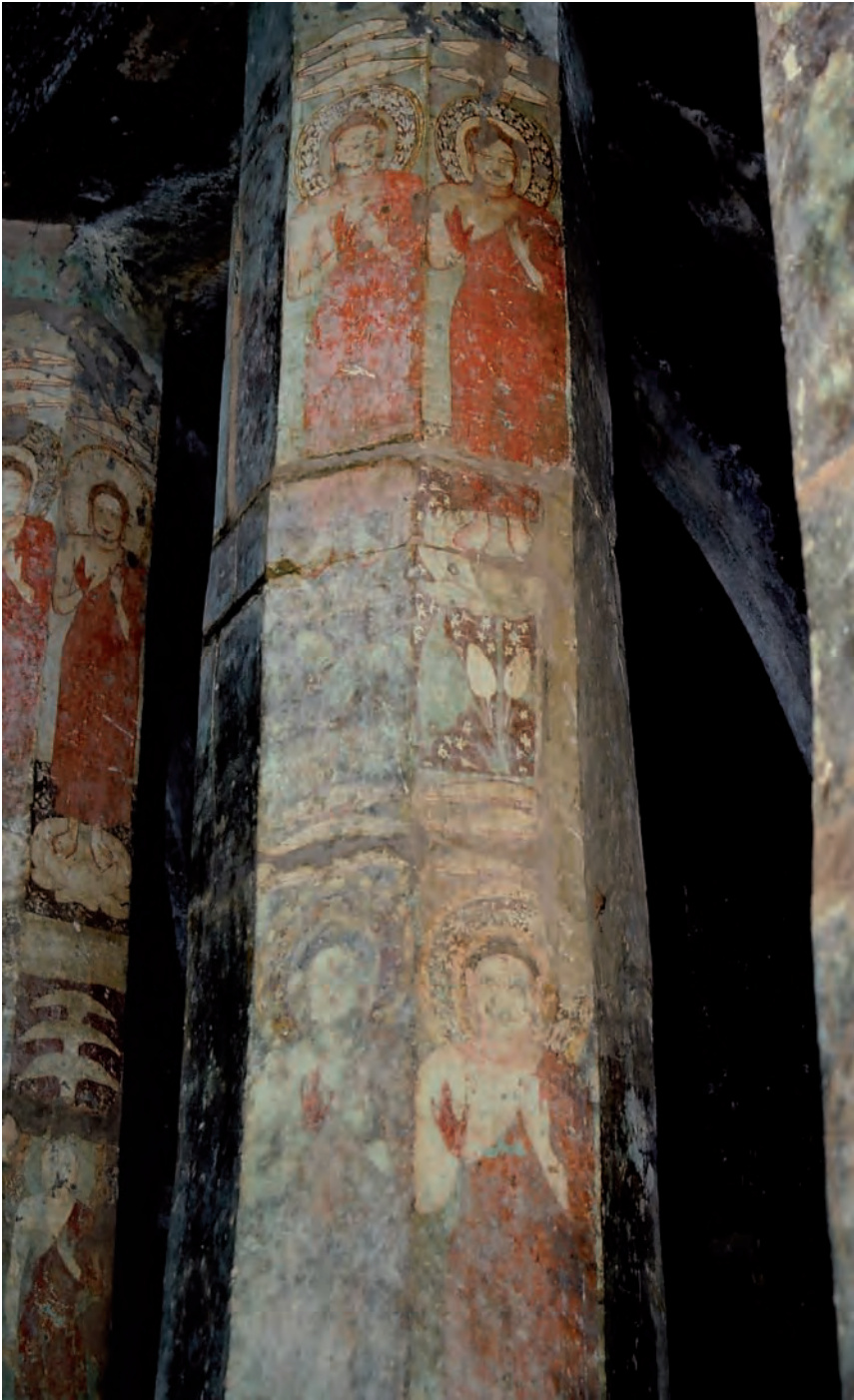


(218) Ghatotkacha Vihara shrine. Buddha image and attendant figures, 477-478. The Buddha image in the vihara is a complex and beautiful creation, which was rushed to completion early in 478, when the Vakataka patrons were hurriedly leaving the region due to the aggressive intentions of the Asmakas. The minister has probably intentionally used Harisena's great image in Cave 1 at Ajanta as his model. However, the shrine arrangement here is more ample, so the figures can spread out more comfortably. The sculptor has also added a few more advanced touches, such as extra celestials and a more complex throne back. Fine as it is, it is doubtful that the image ever was used, except perhaps for a few weeks or months. Even the shrine doors were never put in place—no pivot holes having been carved.



(219) Ghatotkacha Vihara interior. Right front: Votive stupa, early 469; intrusions 479-480. At the end of 468, the local king disallowed most developments at Ajanta; only his own caves and that of his emperor could continue as planned. Curiously, the Prime Minister was also affected by this sumptuary edict. Not being able to continue the excavation of the Ghatotkacha vihara, he had this relief stupa made, presumably to give local people a place to do their devotions. Then later on, when the Asmakas took over control of the region in about 475, he, along with all other patrons, was able to continue on his temporarily abandoned cave. The stupa probably did not then attract much attention until the Period of Disruption, when eager new donors added their intrusive images in this powerful area. Even the seated Buddha on the stupa drum is an intrusion, although the supporting yaksha is part of the original (early 469) conception.





(220) Pitalkhora Cave 3. Hinayana cave: 5<sup>th</sup> century paintings, 475-478. The extant paintings at Pitalkhora were applied to the ancient pillars, and would seem to represent the same urgency responsible for the spate of intrusive donation at Ajanta in 479 and 480. However, the situation at Pitalkhora was different, so it is possible that these images were added somewhat earlier.



(221) Pitalkhora Cave 3, Hinayana cave: 5<sup>th</sup> century paintings, 475-478. This is the figure of a flying devotee, or celestial, offering homage to the Buddha nearby. It is done in a style of particular speed and facility.



(222) Pitalkhora Cave 3 Hinayana cave: 5<sup>th</sup> century paintings, 475-478. The ambulatory of Pitalkhora's caitya hall is filled with a number of fine images, sometimes inscribed, which were apparently offered by local devotees. Here the seated Buddha is attended by fine representations of bodhisattvas, probably Avalokitesvara on the left and Vajrapani on the right

## PLANS AND CHARTS





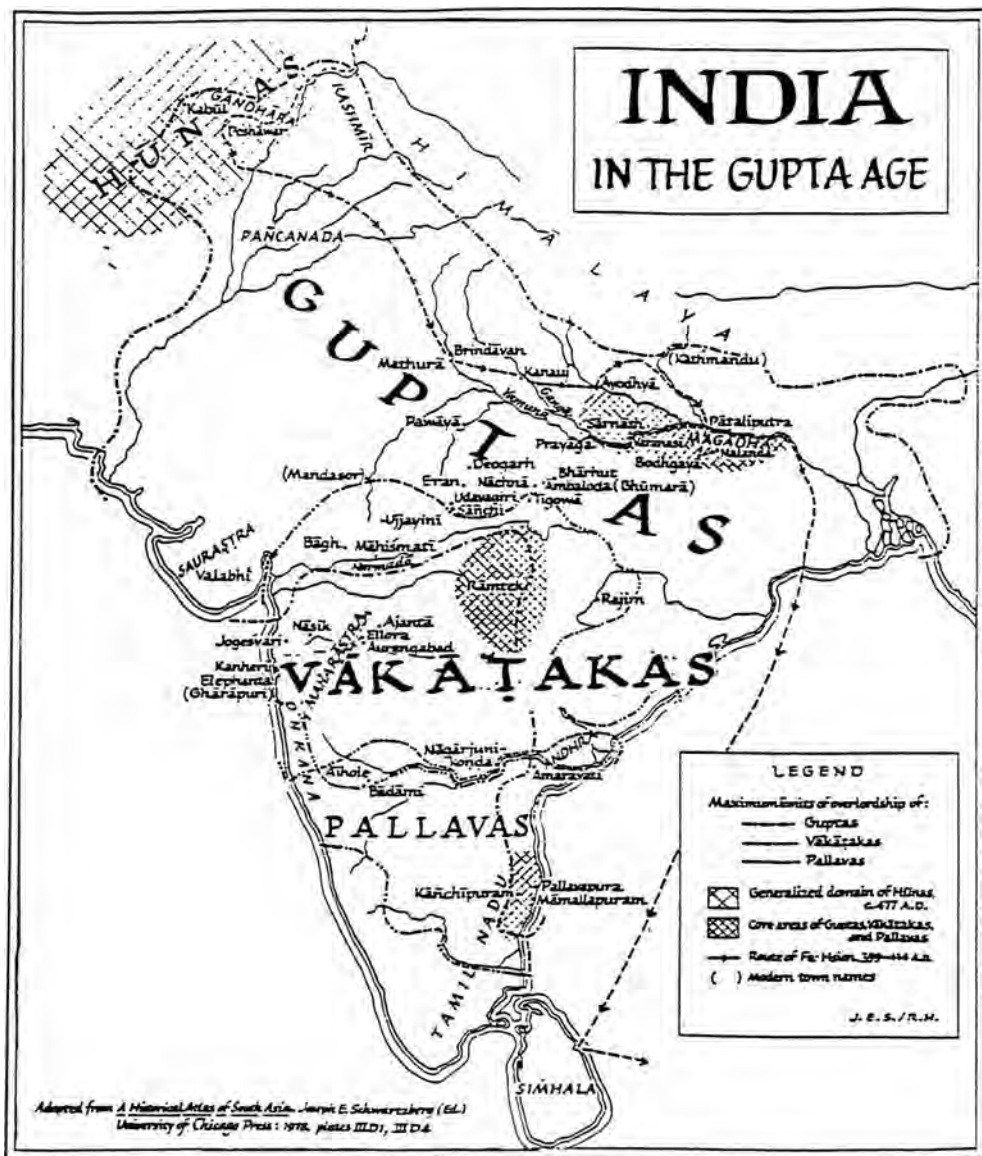
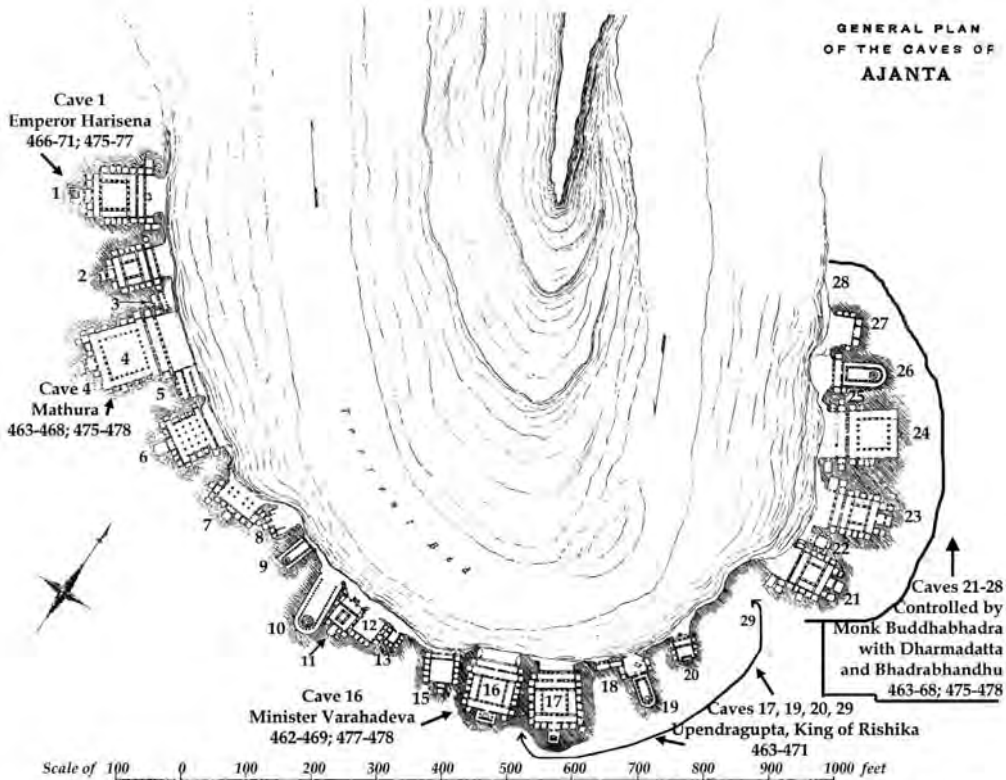


Fig. 1. India in the Age of the Guptas and Vakatakas (Adapted from HASA IIID1, IIID4; I have taken the liberty of “magnifying” the Vakatakas)



J. Burgess.

The dates show the outer limits of each individual's patronage.  
Some vary slightly from those previously published.

H<sup>o</sup> Orissa, Photo-lith.

Fig. 2. Ajanta: plan of Site (BCT 14)



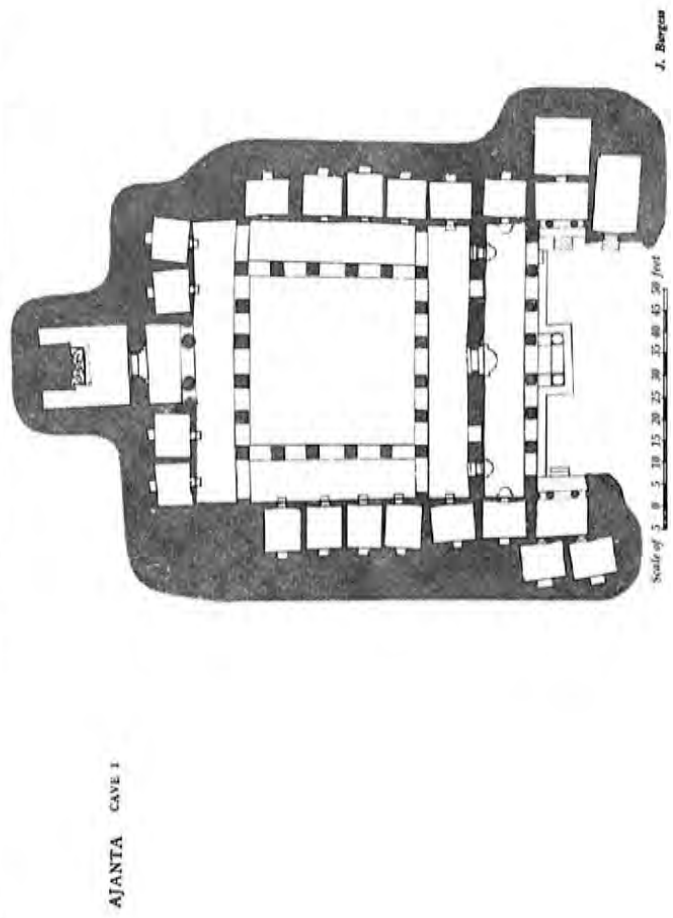
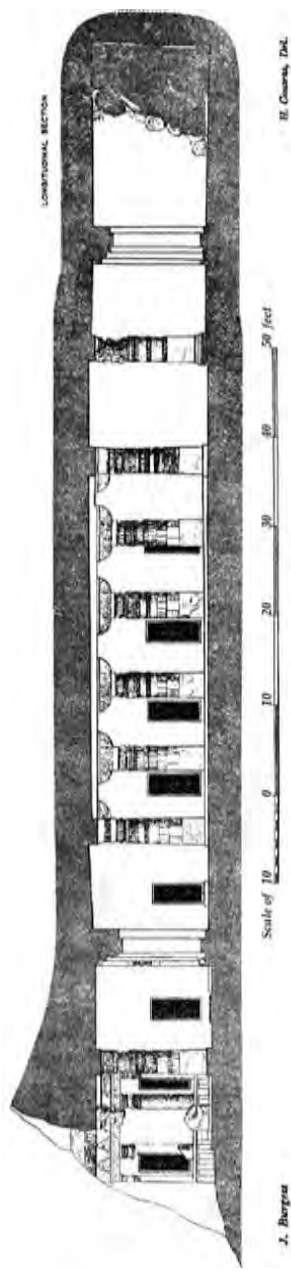


Fig. 4. Ajanta Cave 1: plan (CTI 40); long. section (BCT 21)



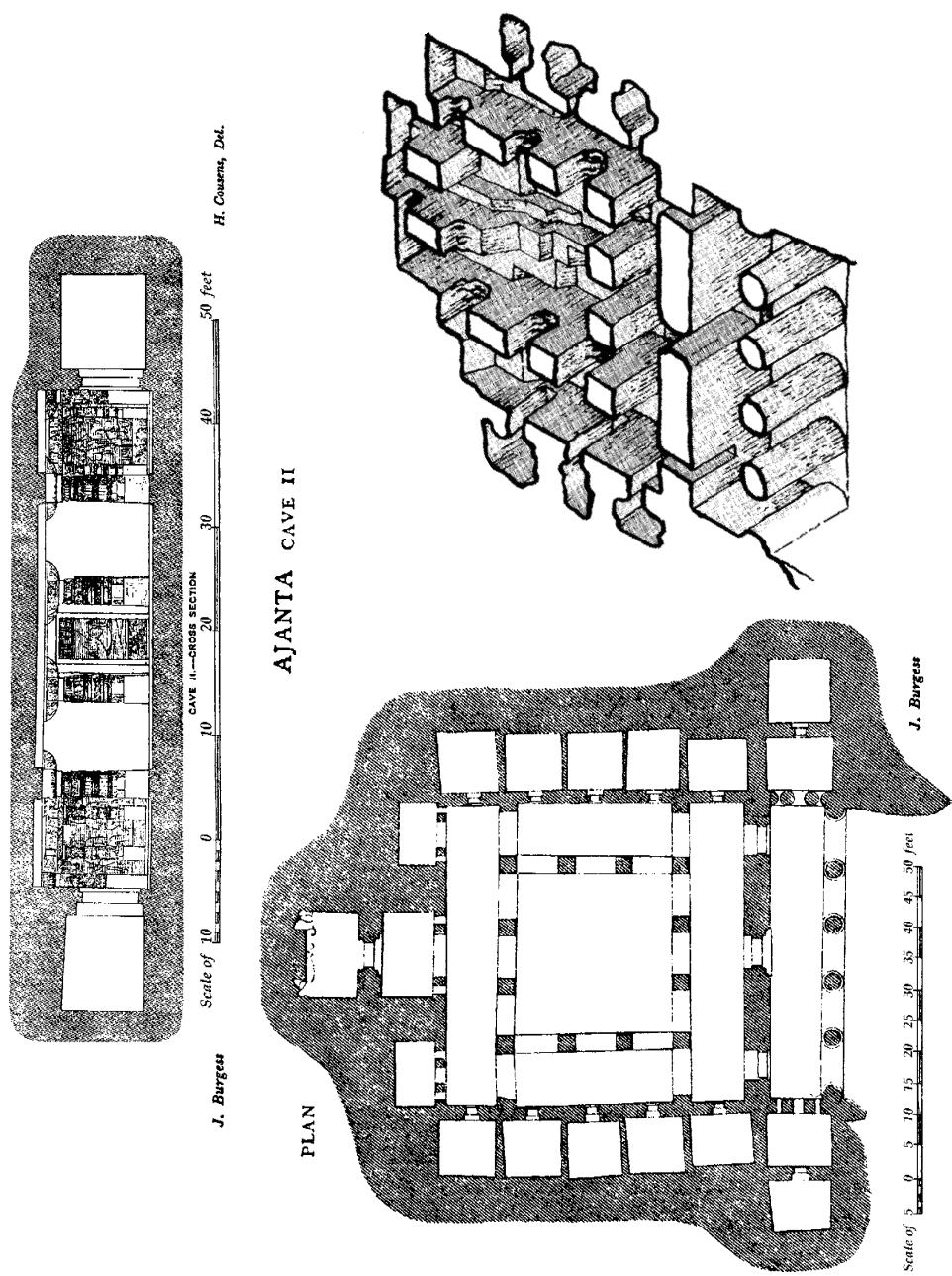
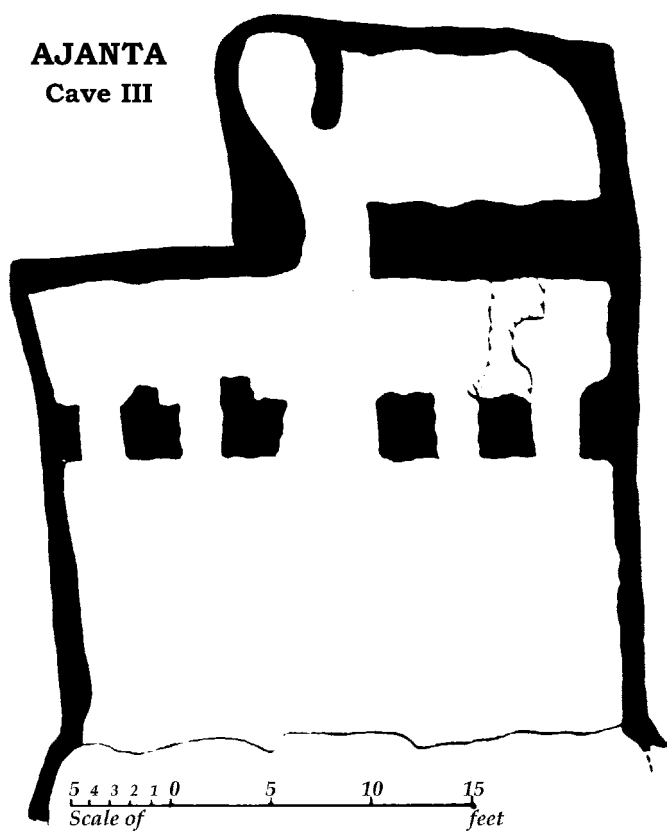


Fig. 5. Ajanta Cave 2: plan (CTI 44); cross section (BCT 21) Excavation progress as of 468 (source: Samaskara)

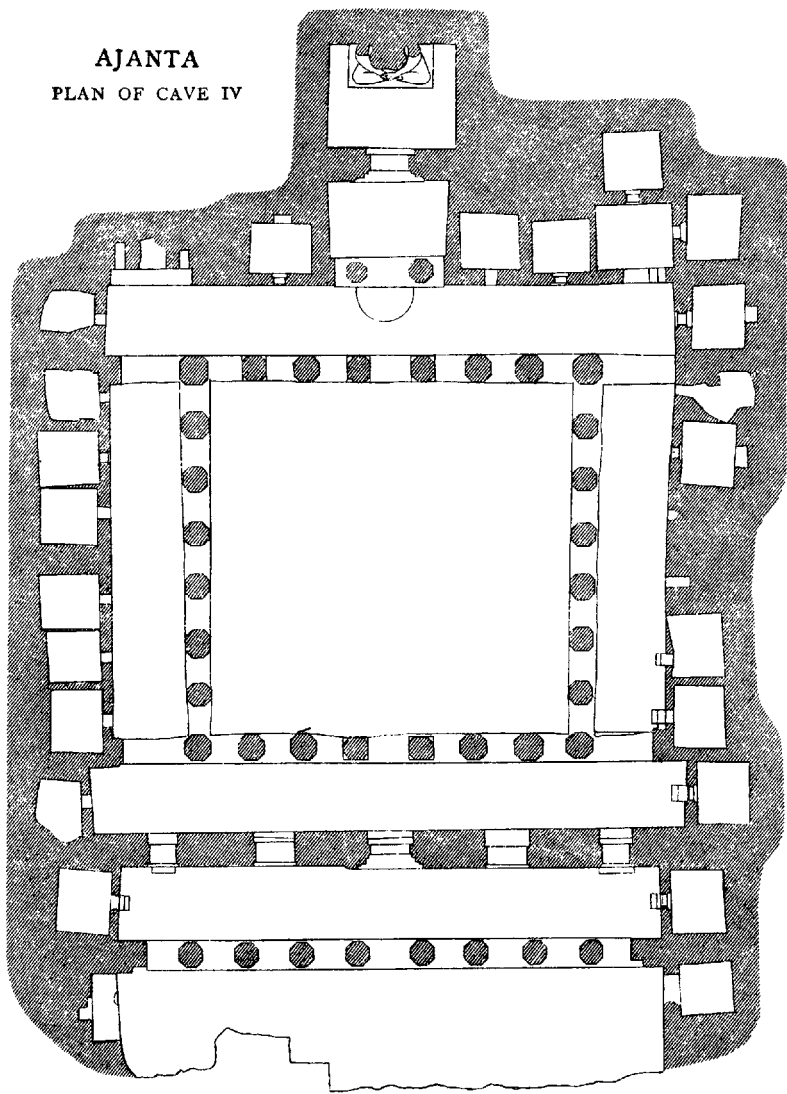
**AJANTA**  
**Cave III**



*Suresh Vasant DEL.*

Fig. 6. Ajanta Cave 3: plan (SV)

AJANTA  
PLAN OF CAVE IV



*J. Burgess*

Scale of 5 0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50 feet

Fig. 7. Ajanta Cave 4: plan (CTI 46)

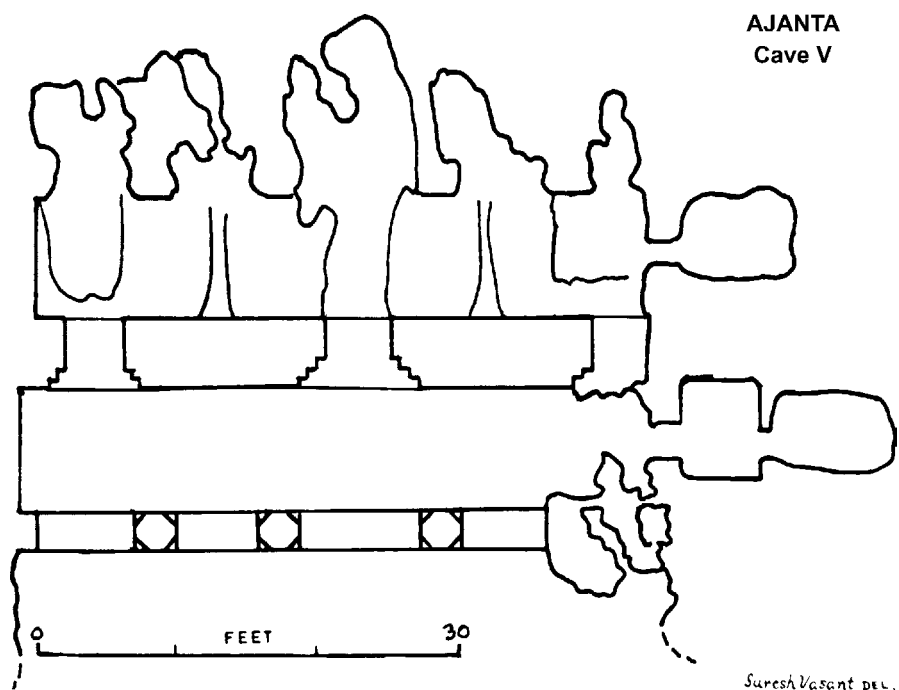


Fig. 8. Ajanta Cave 5: plan (SV)



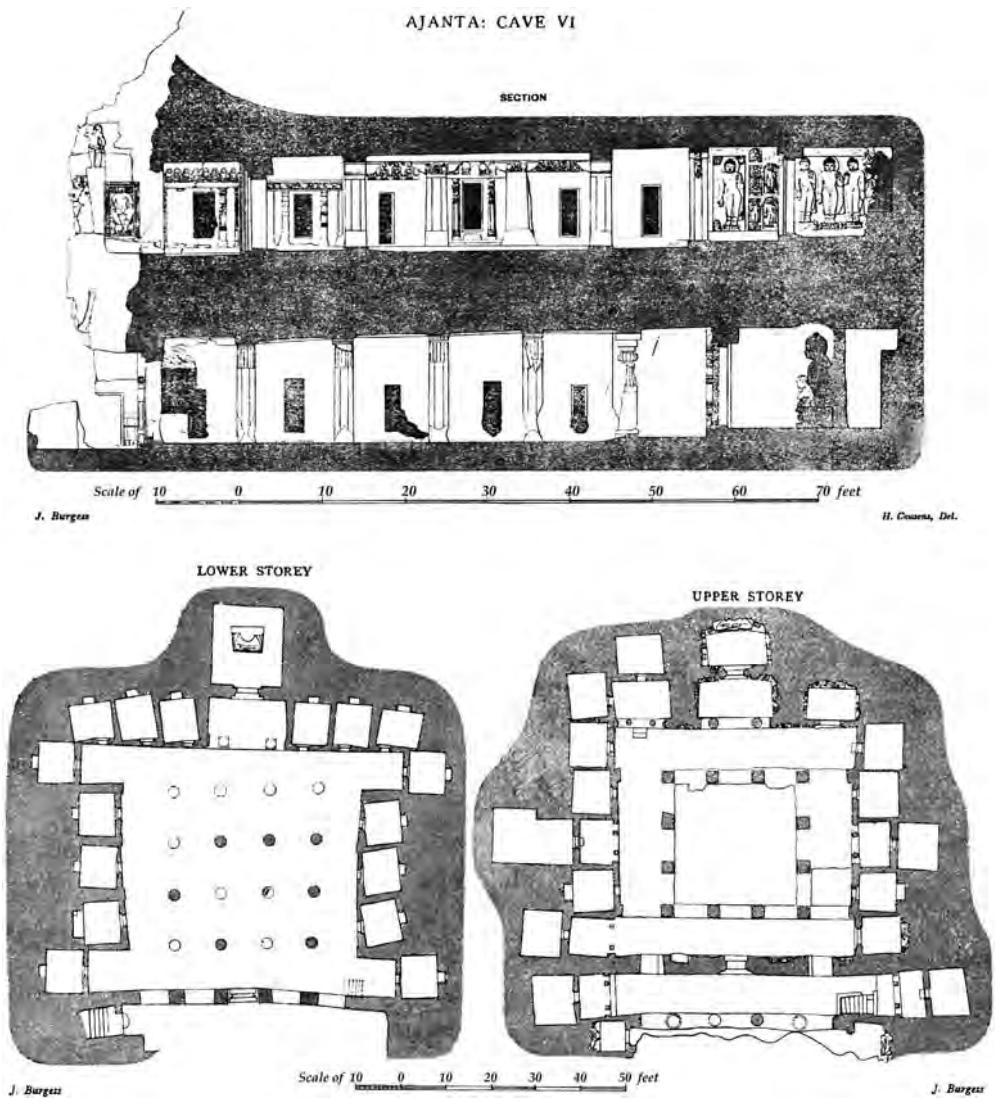


Fig. 9. Ajanta Cave 6: Upper and Lower Plans: (CTI 32) long. sections (BCT 26)

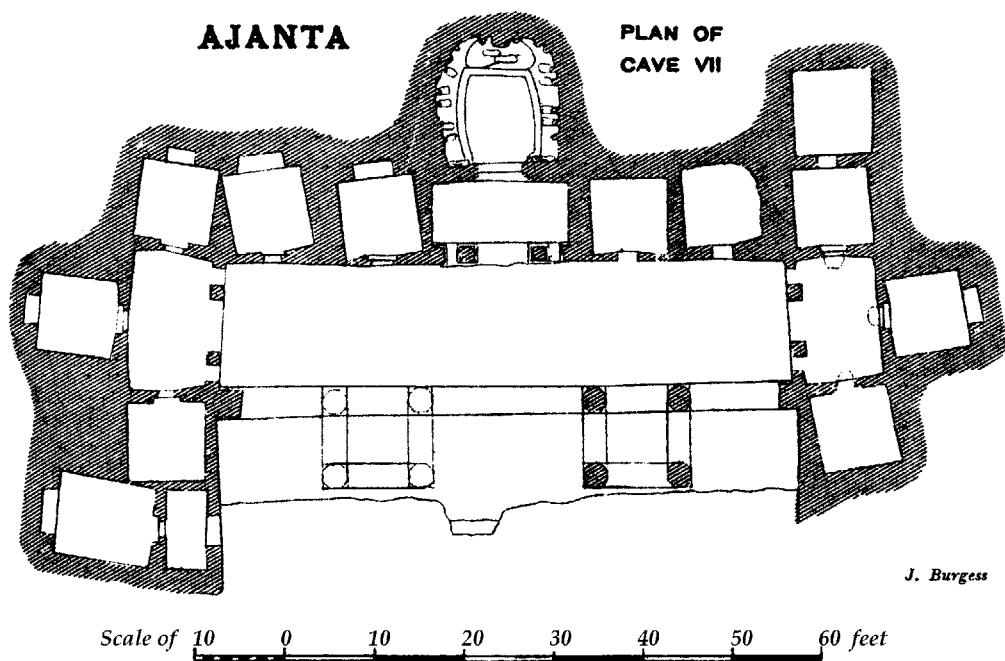


Fig. 10. Ajanta Cave 7: plan (BCT 28)

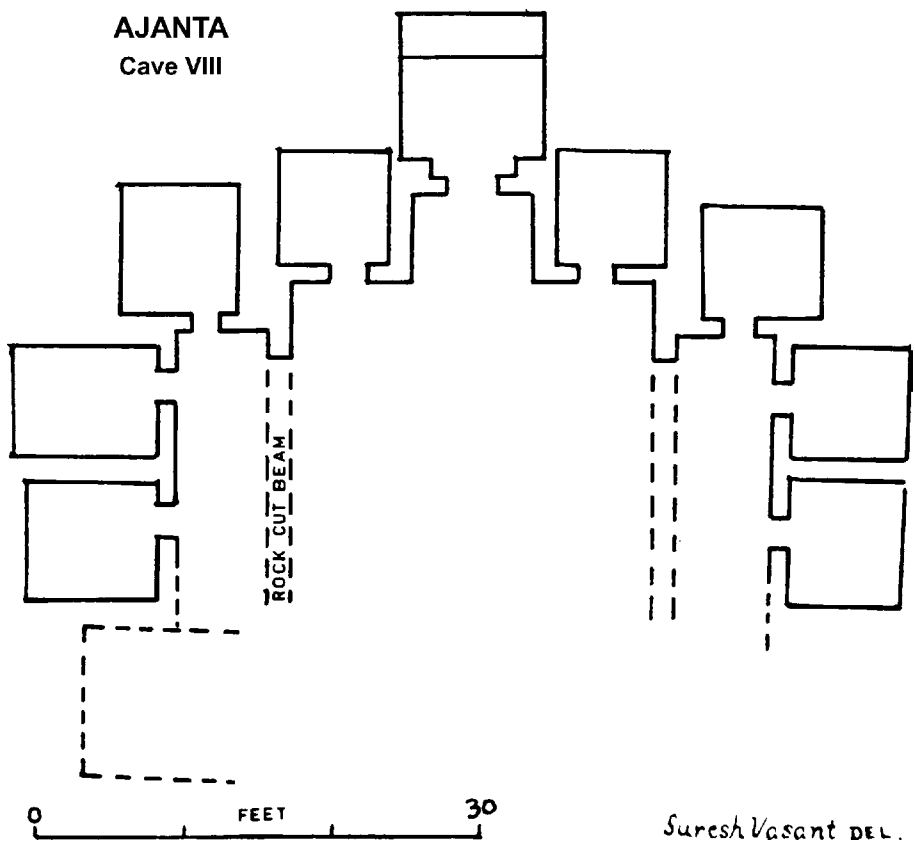


Fig. 11. Ajanta Cave 8: plan (SV)

# AJANTA CHAITYA NO. IX

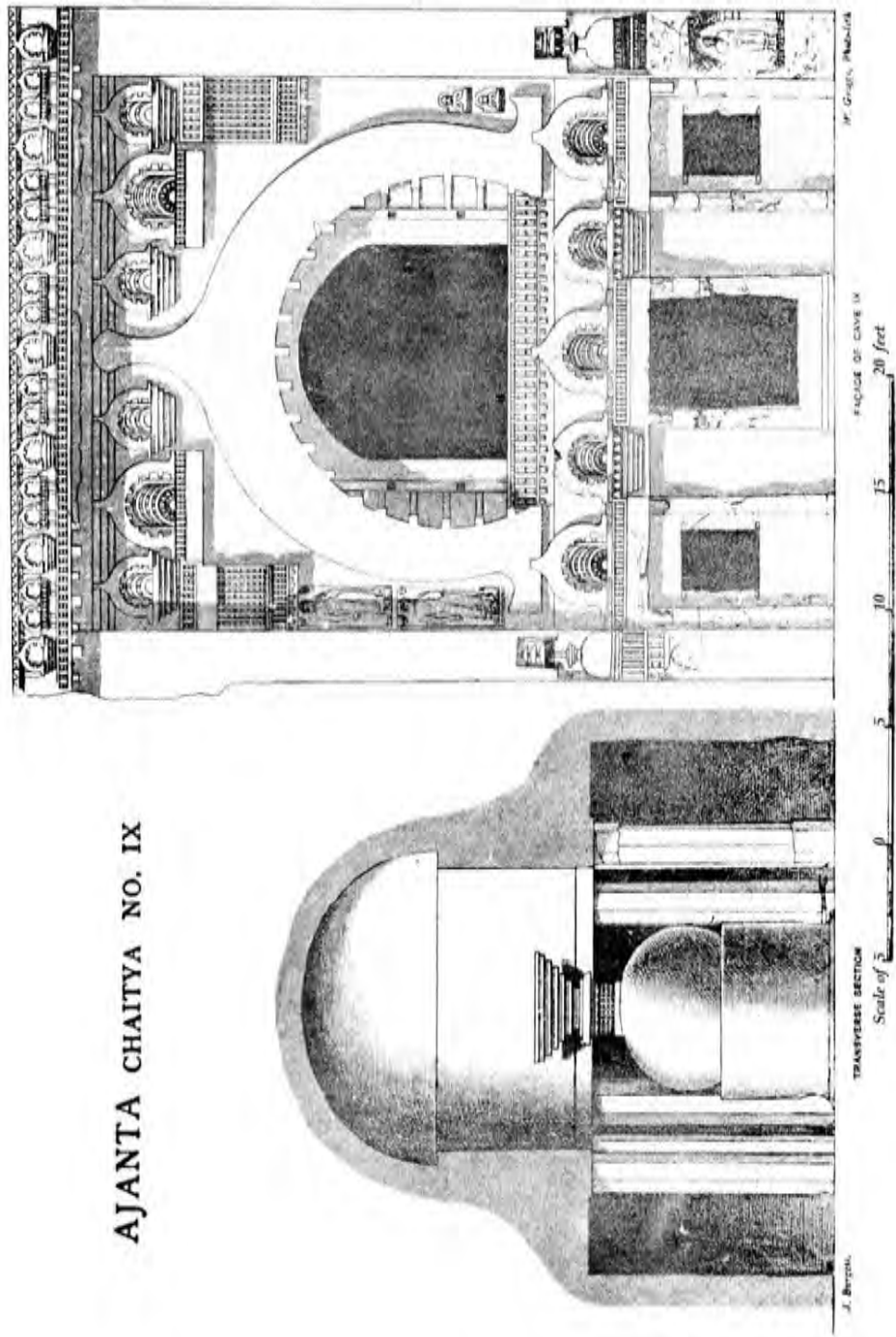
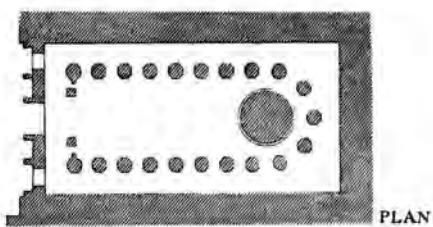
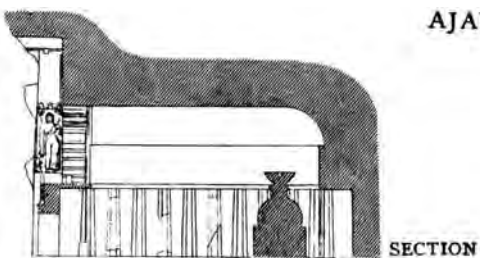


Fig. 12. Ajanta Cave 9 façade and transverse section (BCT 17)

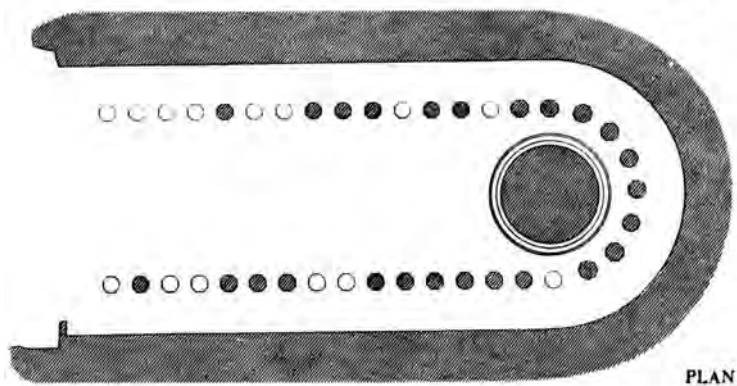
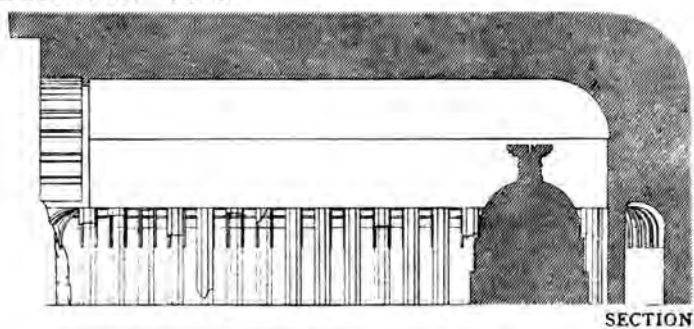


CHAITYA NO. IX

AJANTA



CHAITYA-CAVE NO. X



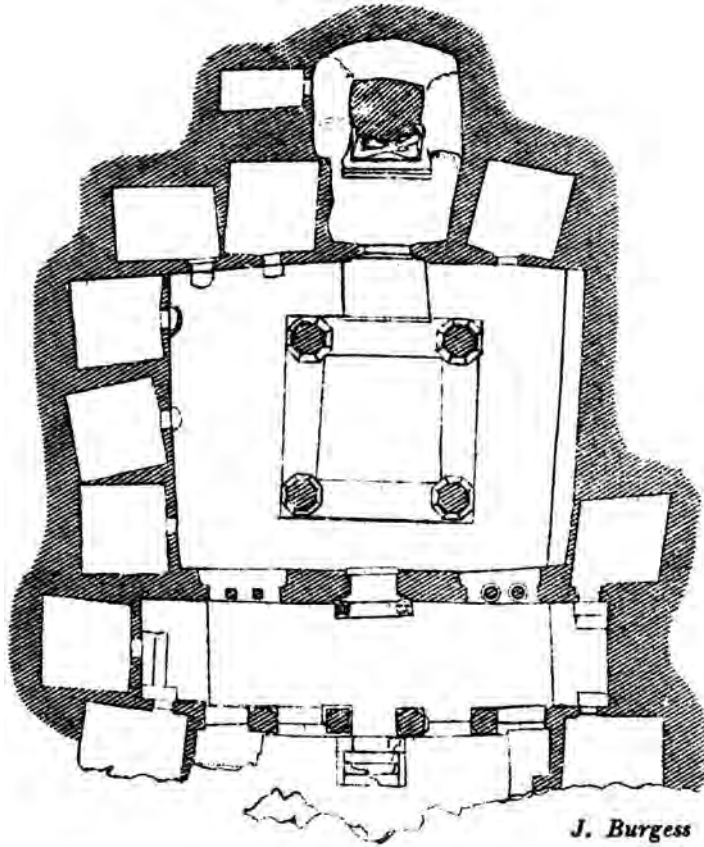
J. Bergen

Scale of 1" = 10' 0" 10' 0" 10' 0" 10' 0"

Ganpat Purshotam del.

Fig. 13. Ajanta Cave 9 plan and section (CTI 28)  
Ajanta Cave 10 plan and section (CTI 28)

# AJANTA



PLAN OF CAVE XI

Scale of 10 0 10 20 30 feet

Fig. 14. Ajanta Cave 11 plan (BCT 28)

# AJANTA VIHÂRA NO. XII

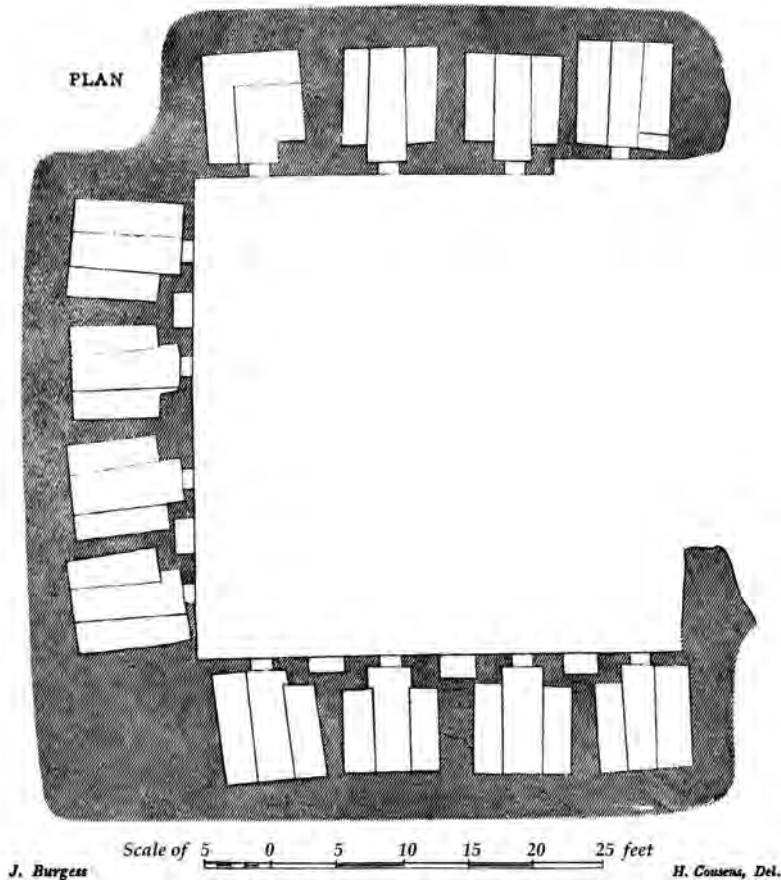
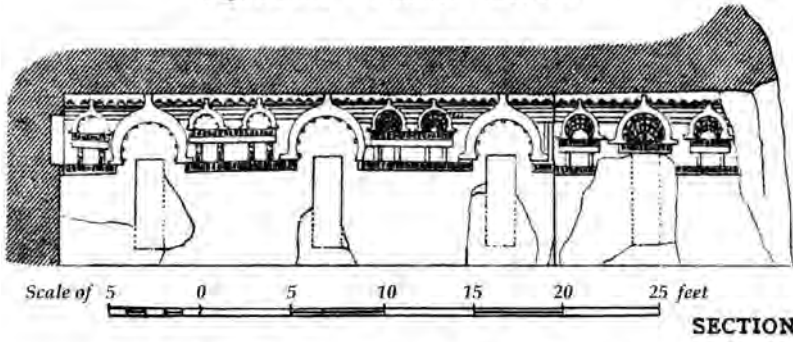
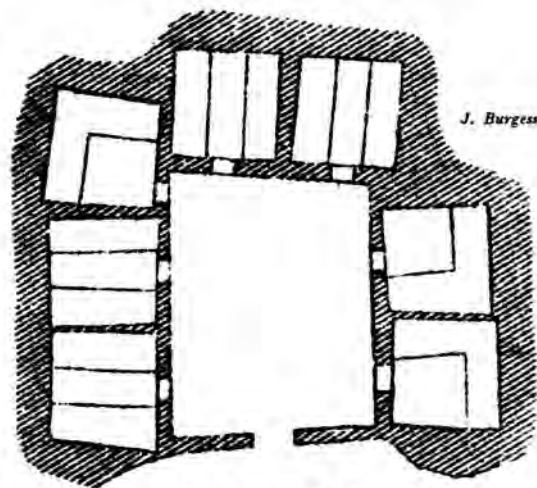


Fig. 15. Ajanta Cave 12 plan and section (BCT 27)

# AJANTA



*J. Burgess*

## PLAN OF CAVE XIII

Scale of 10 0 10 20 feet

Fig. 16. Ajanta Cave 13 plan (BCT 28)



# AJANTA PLAN OF CAVE XIV

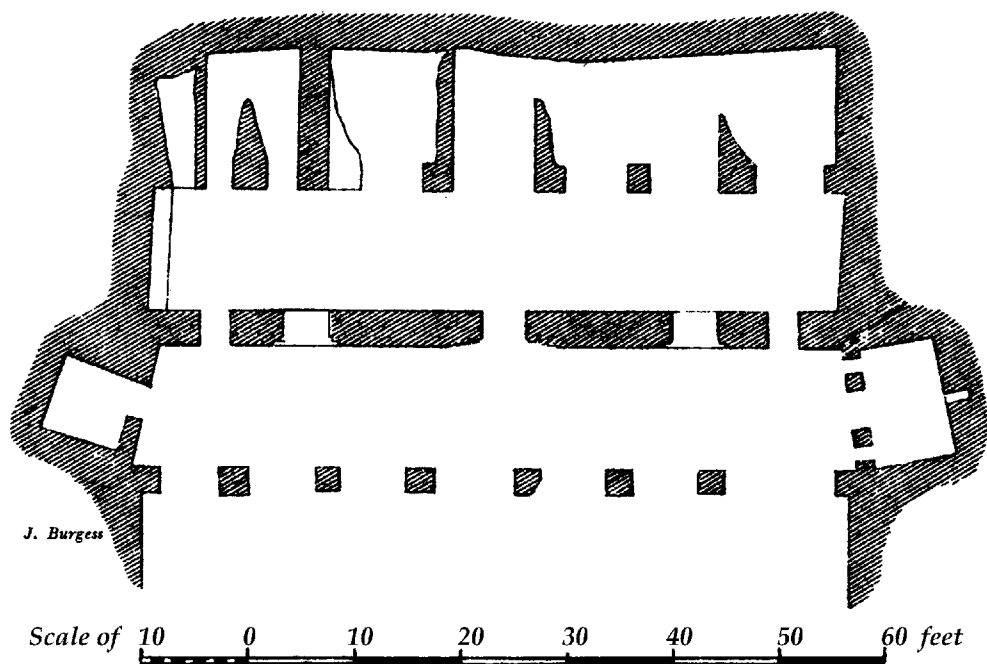


Fig. 17. Ajanta Cave 14 plan (BCT 28)

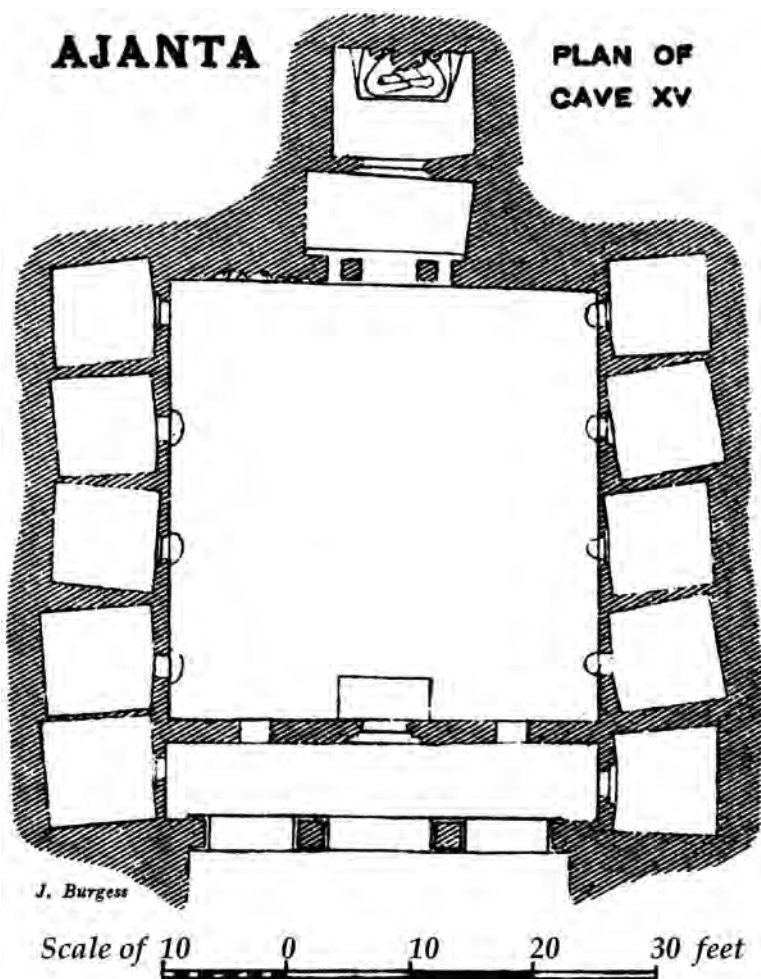
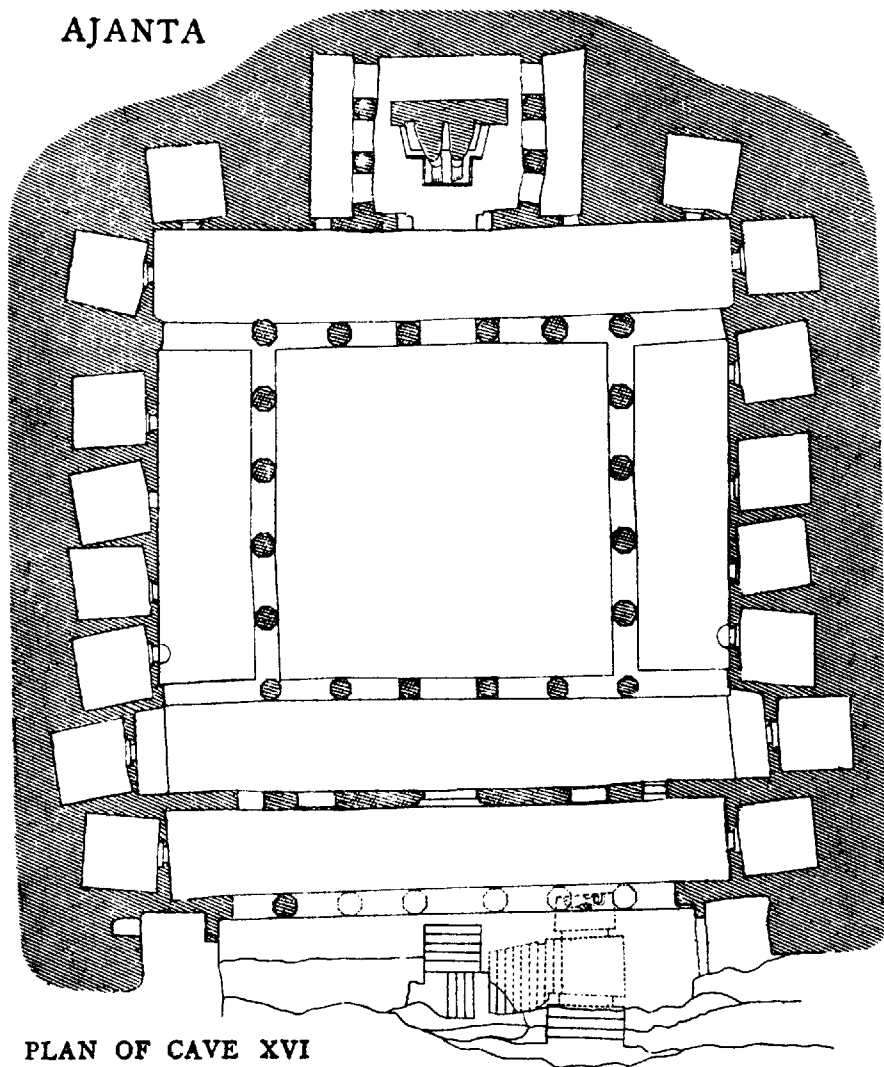


Fig. 18. Ajanta Cave 15 plan (BCT 28)

# AJANTA

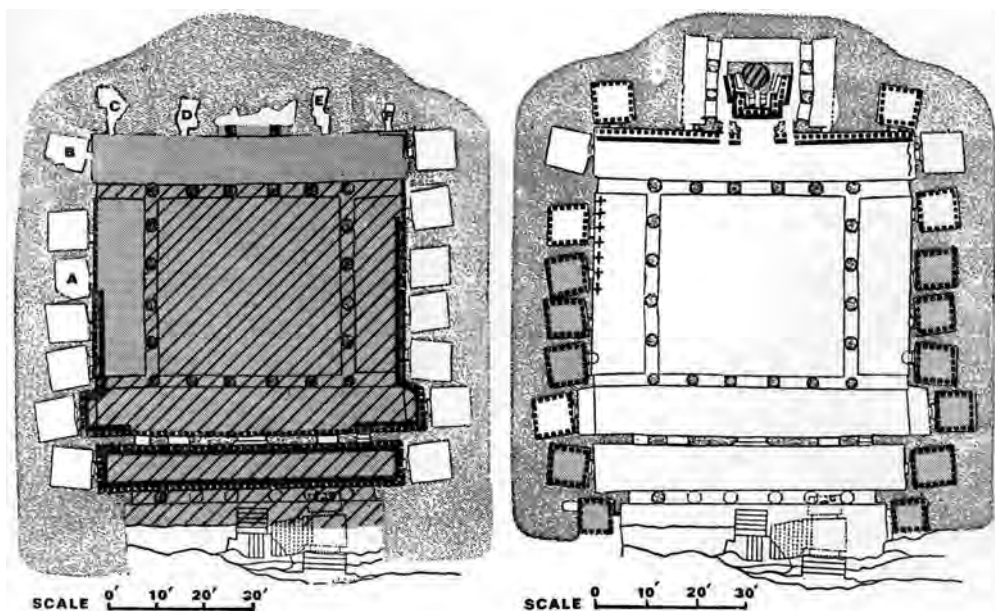


PLAN OF CAVE XVI

*J. Burgess*

Scale of 10 0 10 20 30 40 50 feet

Fig. 19. Ajanta Cave 16 plan (CTI 33)



#### LEGEND

- Heavy solid lines define painted wall areas
- Heavy broken lines define plastered wall areas
- Inside shaded areas define plastered ceiling areas
- Cross-hatched lines define painted ceiling areas
- Plus symbols define intrusive paintings

Cave 16. Hypothetical Plan showing appearance of cave when patronage was temporarily interrupted in circa A.D. 469. Excavators were following programs as seen in *text figure 1* at this time. The hypothetical shapes, assigned to the unfinished cells A, B, C, D, E, F, can be compared to unfinished cells in Caves 4 (A), 24 (B), 4 (C), Ghatotkacha viihāra (D), 24 (E), 24 (F), respectively as drawn in *The Cave Temples of India*, pls. XLVI and LII, and Burgess, "Report on the Buddhist Cave Temples," pl. XXXIV. Note the plastered and/or painted wall and/or ceiling areas. All porch and interior pillars (excepting the two shrine antechamber pillars) had also been painted by the time this initial phase of work was interrupted in circa A.D. 469.

Cave 16. Plan as finally completed in circa A.D. 478. (Basic Plan reproduced from *The Cave Temples of India*, pl. XXXIII, left, with minor corrections made for design of shrine entrance and for lateral walls of shrine.)

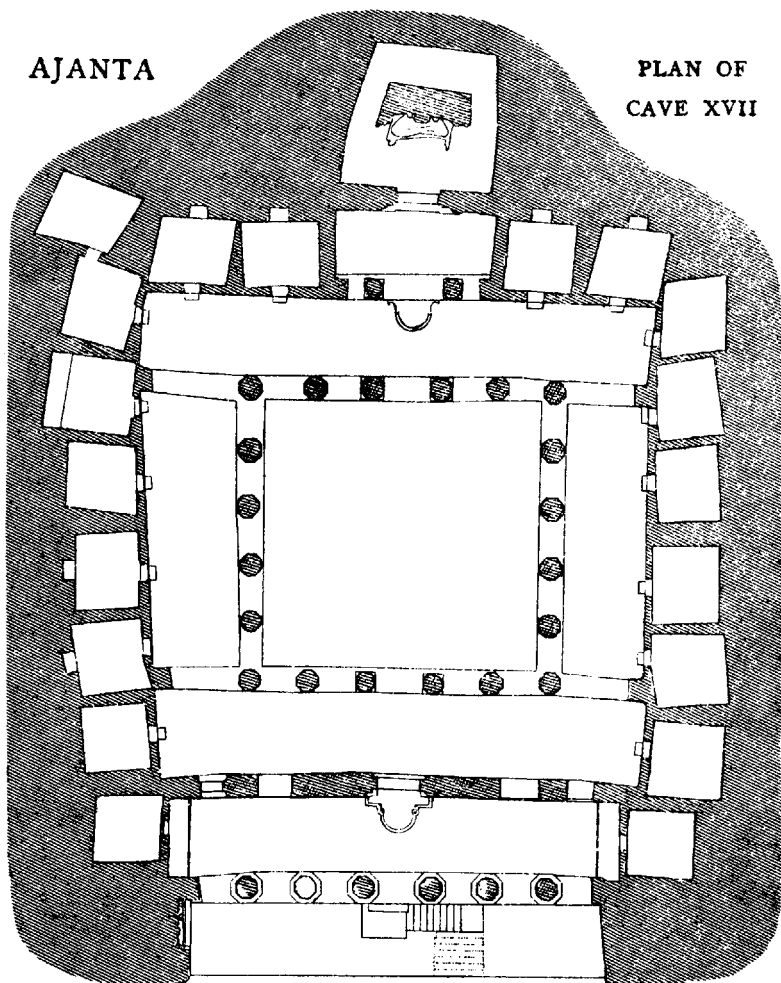
The new areas excavated, plastered and/or painted in this final phase are shown. *Text fig. 4* combined with *text fig. 3* reveals the total area plastered and painted by the time work on the cave finally ended in circa A.D. 478. The forward parts of the lateral walls of the shrine are not precisely perpendicular, a fact which can be explained by the assumption that the excavators had originally intended that cells be placed at these points (cf. *text figs. 1* and *3*). The plastering and painting of the rear wall of the interior hall and of the Buddha image (including a small area on the ceiling over the head of the image) was probably begun circa A.D. 478. Shortly thereafter the majority of the residence cells were plastered and the two new court cells started. The intrusive paintings on the already plastered left side wall (see symbols + + + +) were probably done a few years later, circa A.D. 479; by that time Varāhadeva's involvement in the patronage of the cave appears to have ended.

Fig. 20. Ajanta Cave 16 stages of development (WS)



AJANTA

PLAN OF  
CAVE XVII



*J. Burgess*

*Ganpat Purshotam del.*

Scale of 10 0 10 20 30 40 50 feet

Fig. 21. Ajanta Cave 17 plan (CTI 33)

# **AJANTA** **Caves XVIII-XIX**

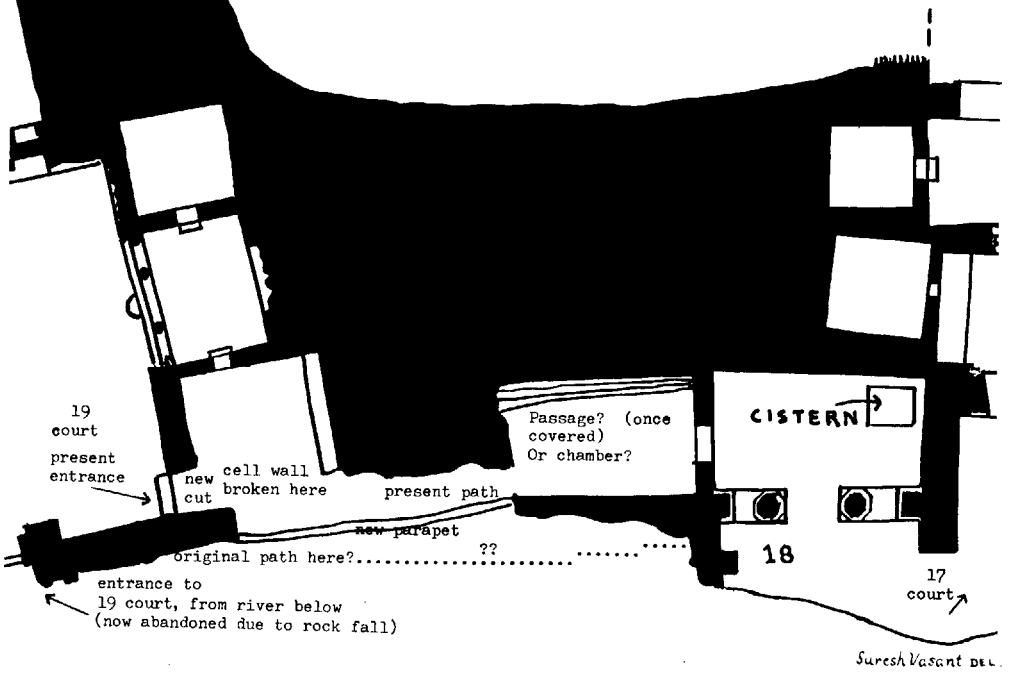
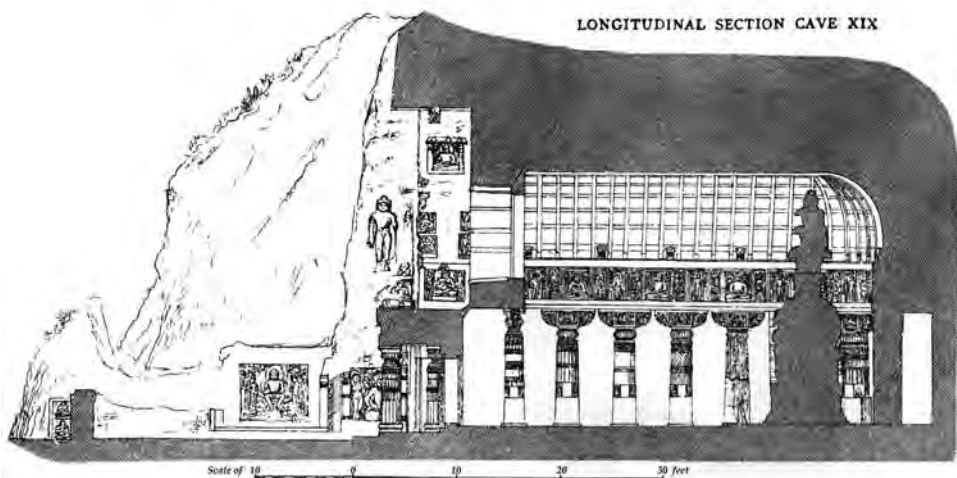


Fig. 22. Ajanta: passage between Caves 17 and 19 (SV). The front right court cell (converted to a cistern chamber) is shown here but not on Burgess' plan of Cave 19; this cell and the corresponding one at court left were obscured by debris in the nineteenth century. The cut in this right court cell, and a matching one in the left court cell, was made by the Asmakas, for their convenience in walking to their own complex at the site's western extremity.

# AJANTA CHAITYA CAVE NO. XIX

LONGITUDINAL SECTION CAVE XIX



J. Burgess

Ganpat Purshotam del.

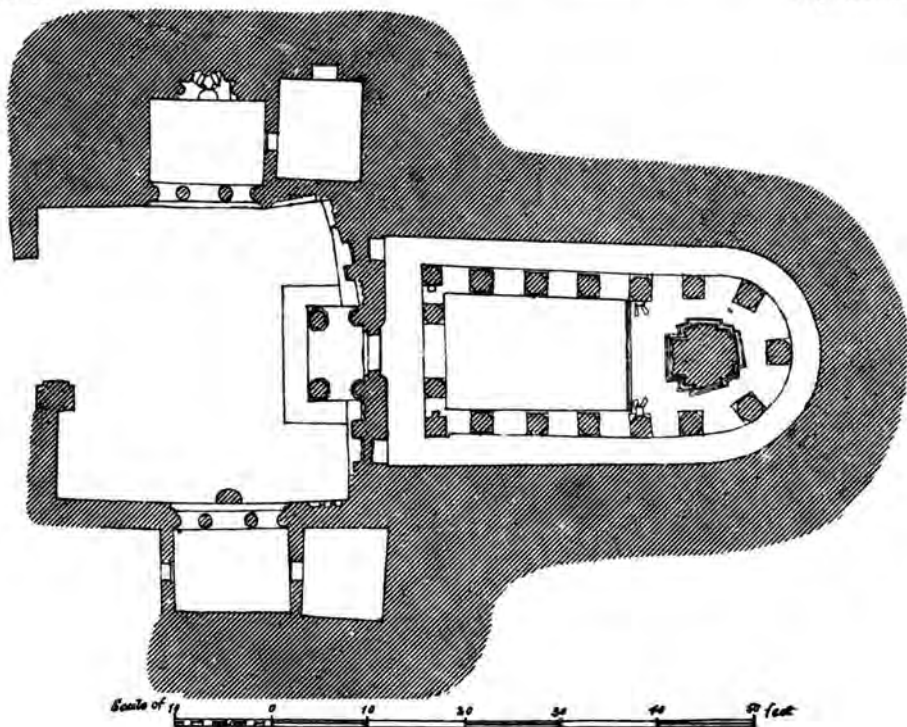
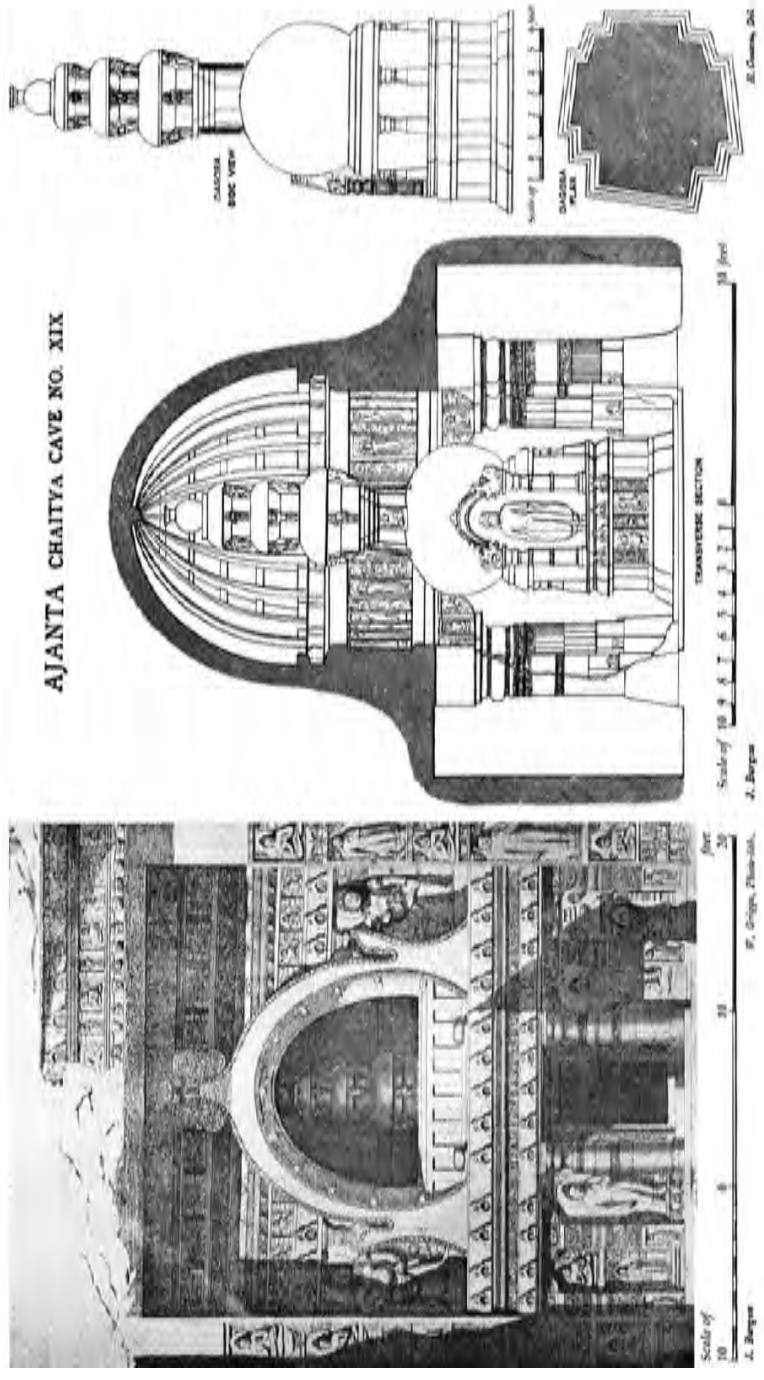


Fig. 23. Ajanta Cave 19 plan and longitudinal section (CTI 36, 37)

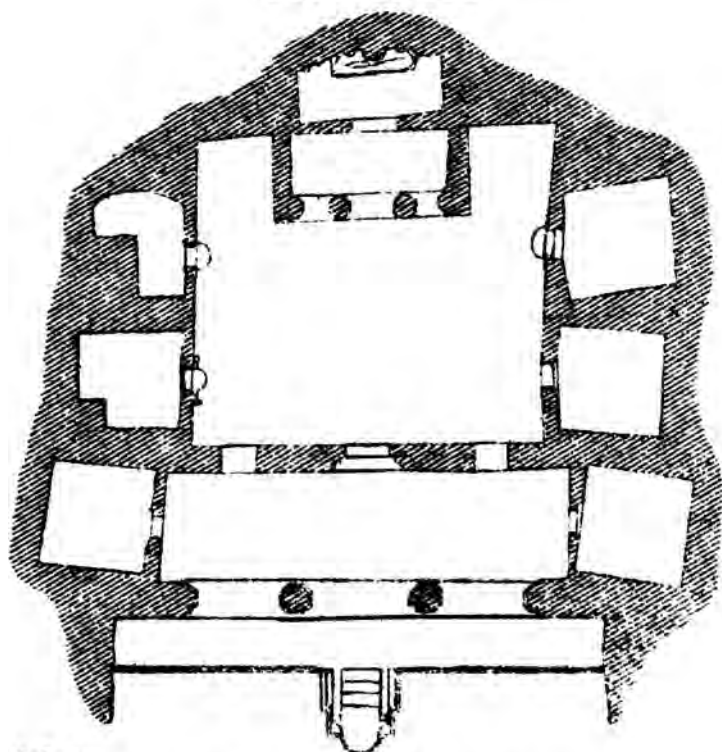


AJANTA CHAITYA CAVE NO. XIX

Fig. 24. Ajanta Cave 19 façade, transverse section, stupa (BCT 30,31)



# AJANTA



*J. Burgess*

## PLAN OF CAVE XX

Scale of 10 0 10 20 30 feet

Fig. 25. Ajanta Cave 20 plan (BCT 28)

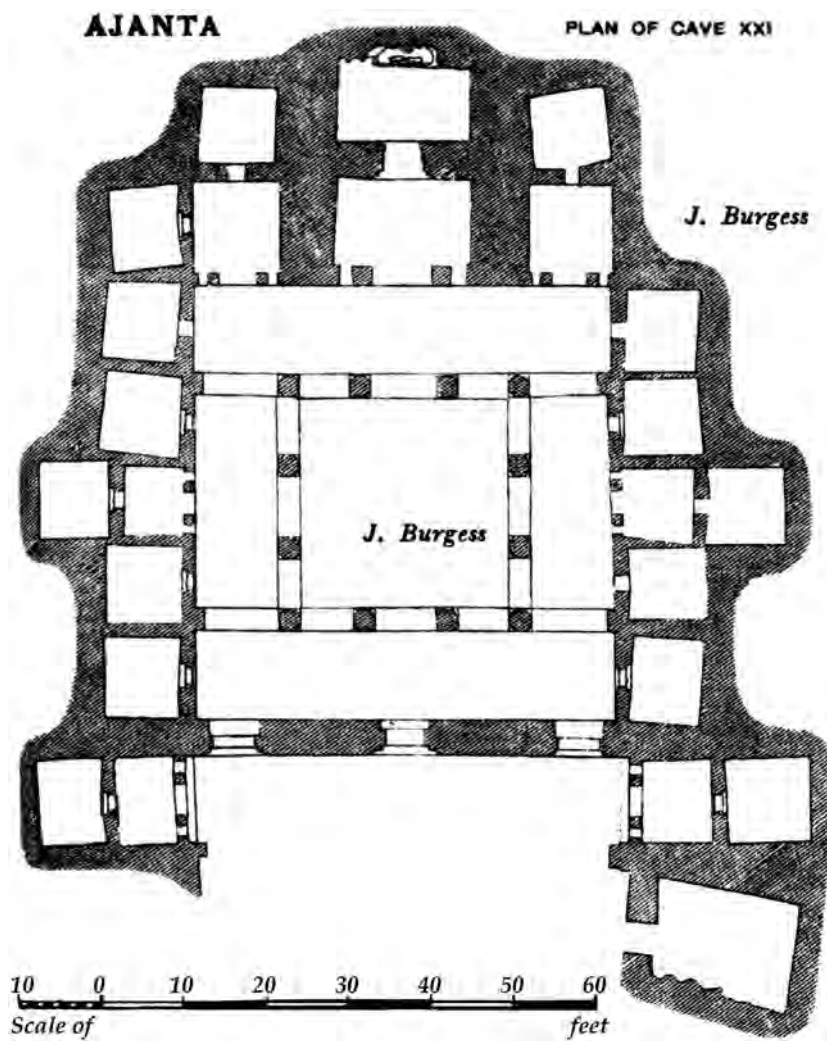
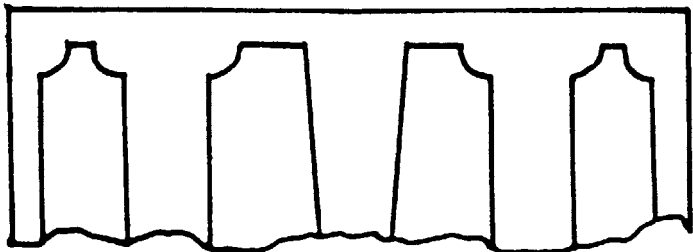
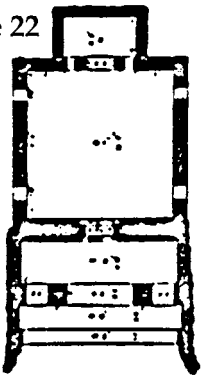
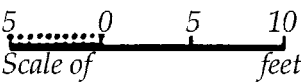


Fig. 26. Ajanta Cave 21 plan (BCT 34)

AJANTA

Cave 22



CAVE 23A FRONT ELEVATION

PLAN



Suresh Vasant DEL.

Fig. 27. Ajanta Cave 22 plan (Yazdani Vol 4)  
Ajanta Cave 23A plan (SV)

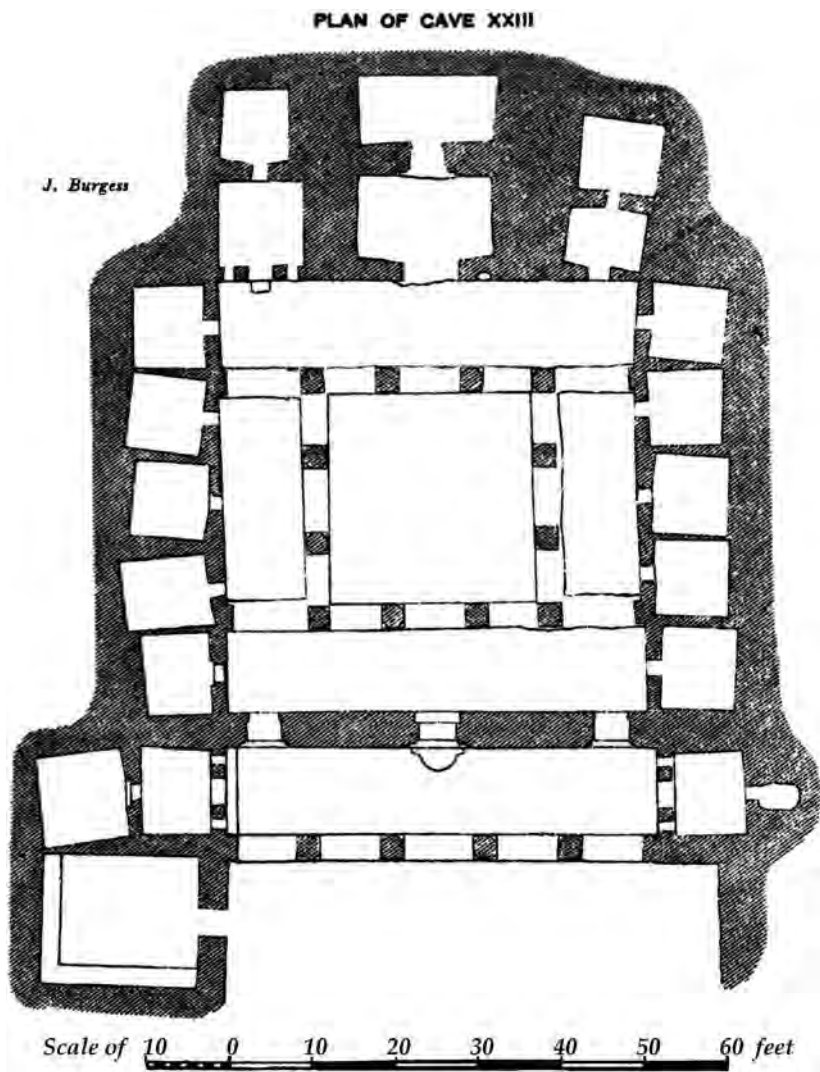


Fig. 28. Ajanta Cave 23 plan (BCT 34)



**AJANTA PLAN OF CAVE XXIV**

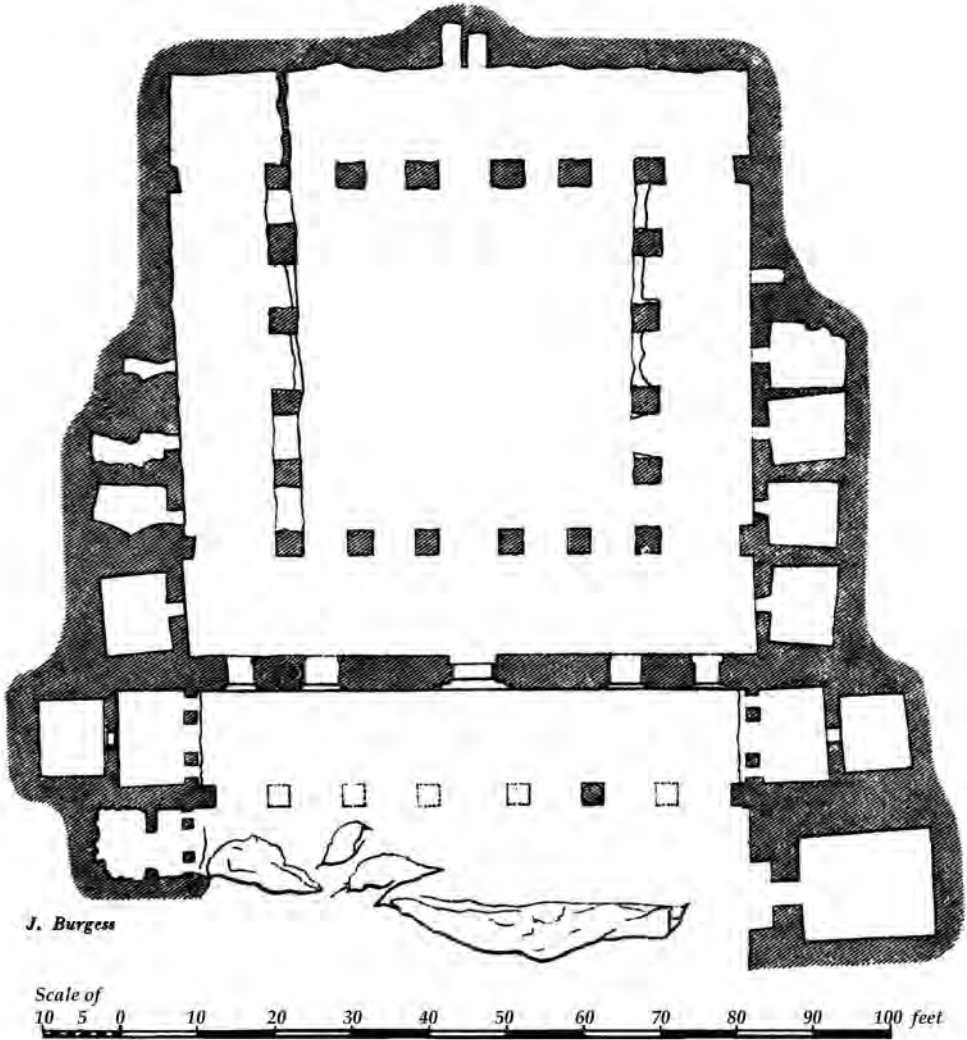


Fig. 29. Ajanta Cave 24 plan (BCT 34)

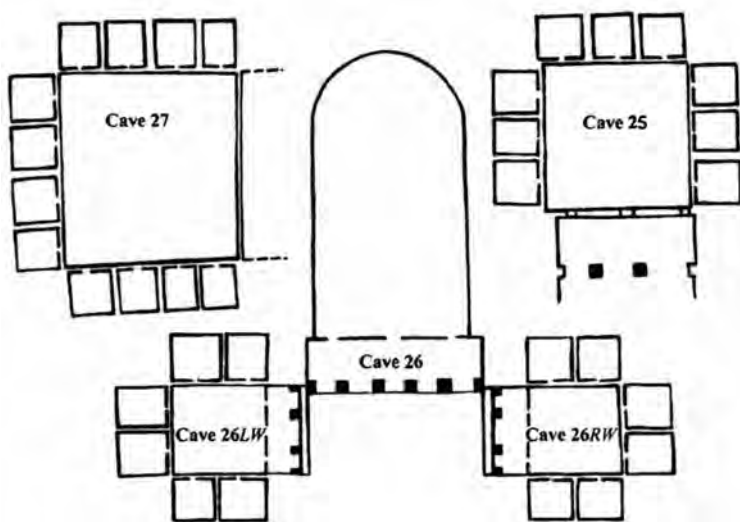
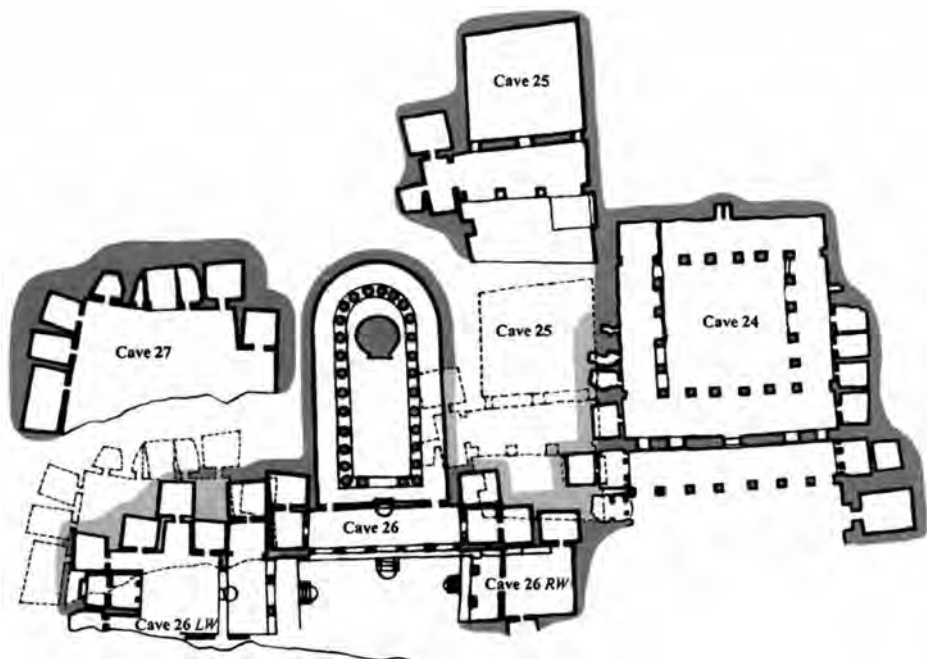


Fig. 30. Ajanta Cave 26 complex:(Yazdani IV) with conjectural reconstruction: original plan (WS)

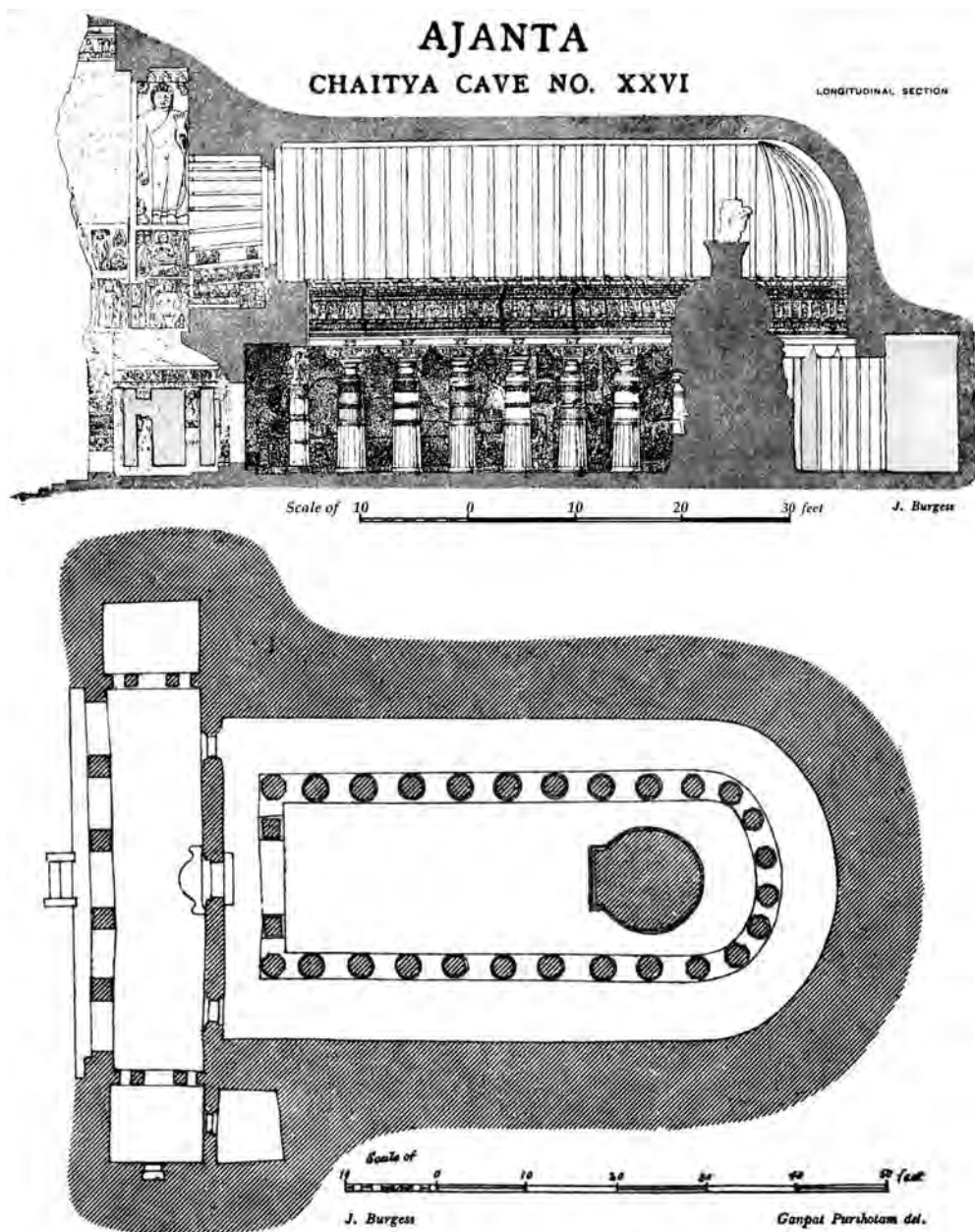


Fig. 31. Ajanta 26 plan and longitudinal section (CTI 37; BCT 36)

# AJANTA

## CHAITYA CAVE NO. XXVI

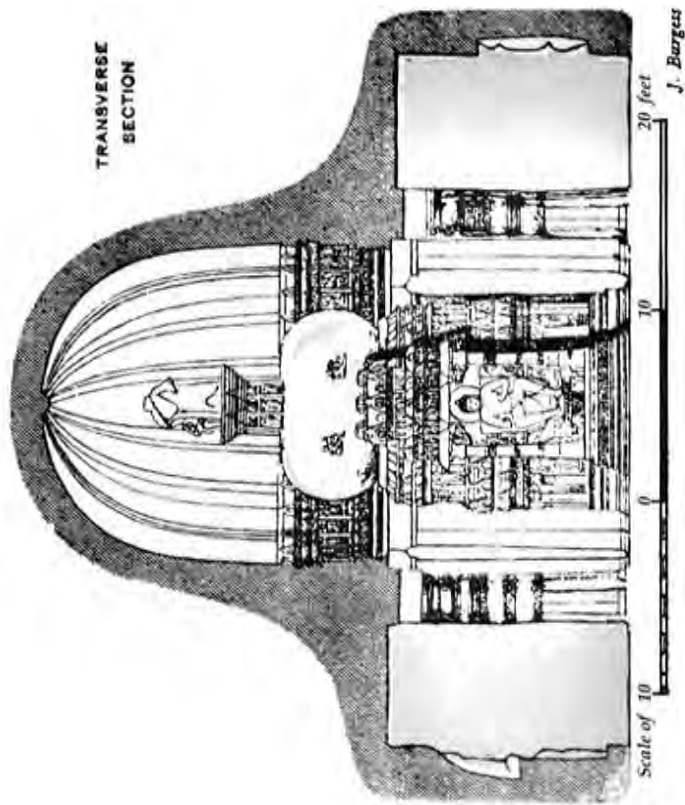
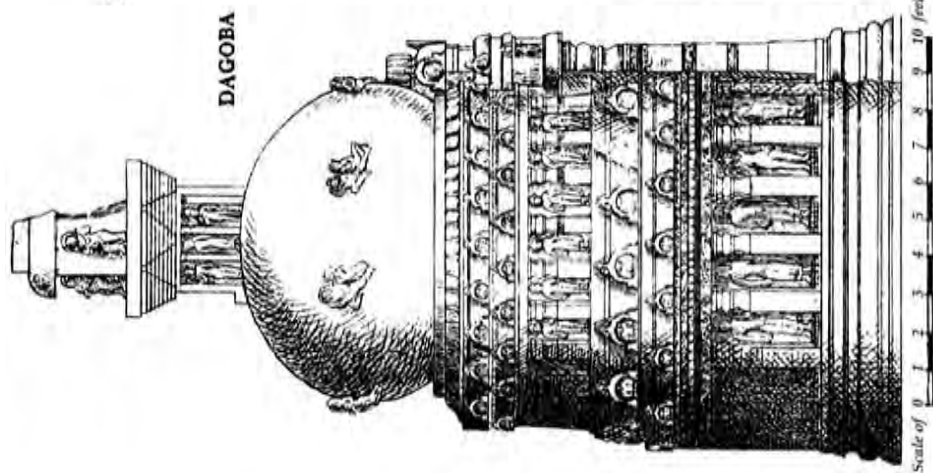
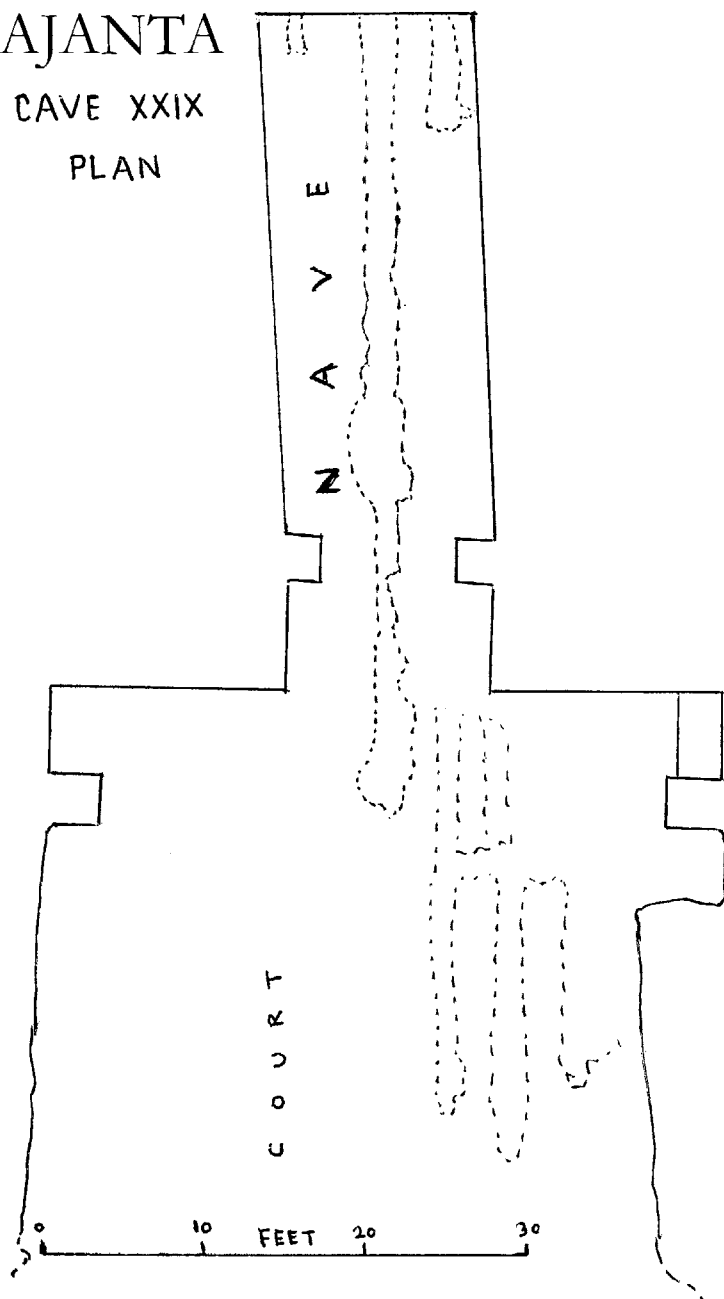


Fig. 32. Ajanta Cave 26 transverse section (BCT 36); stupa (CTI 38)



AJANTA  
CAVE XXIX  
PLAN



Suresh Vasant DEL.

Fig. 33. Ajanta 29 plan (SV)

# AJANTA.

## CAVE I.

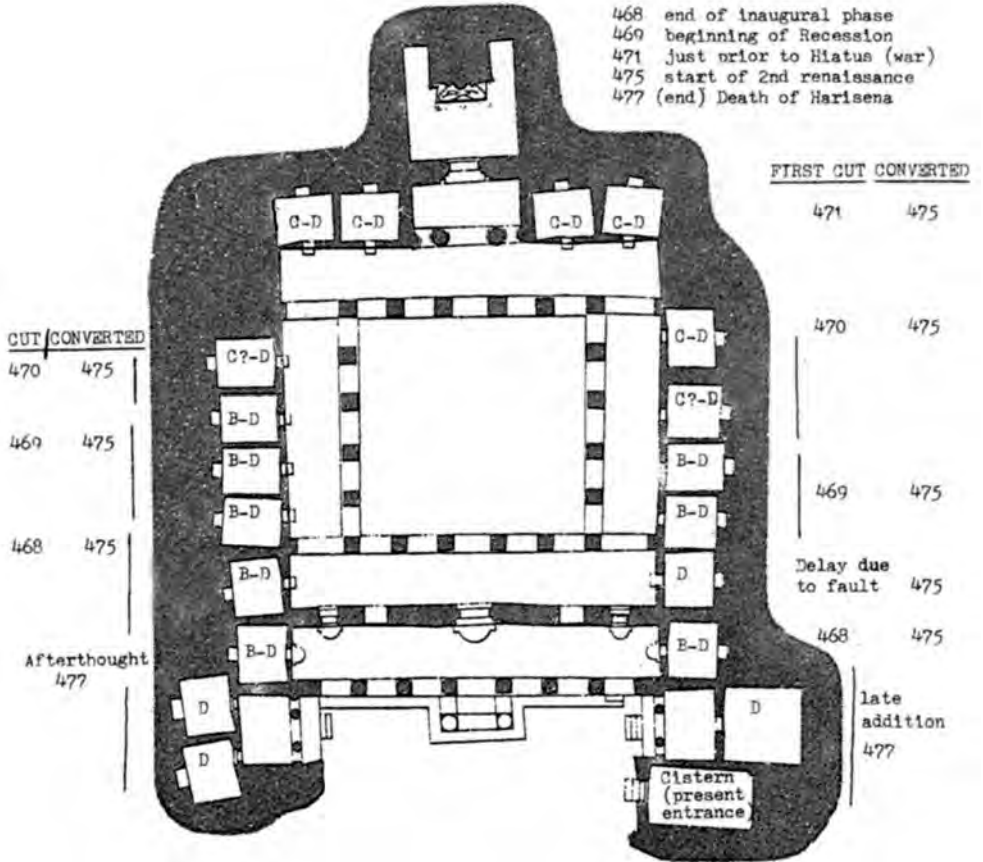
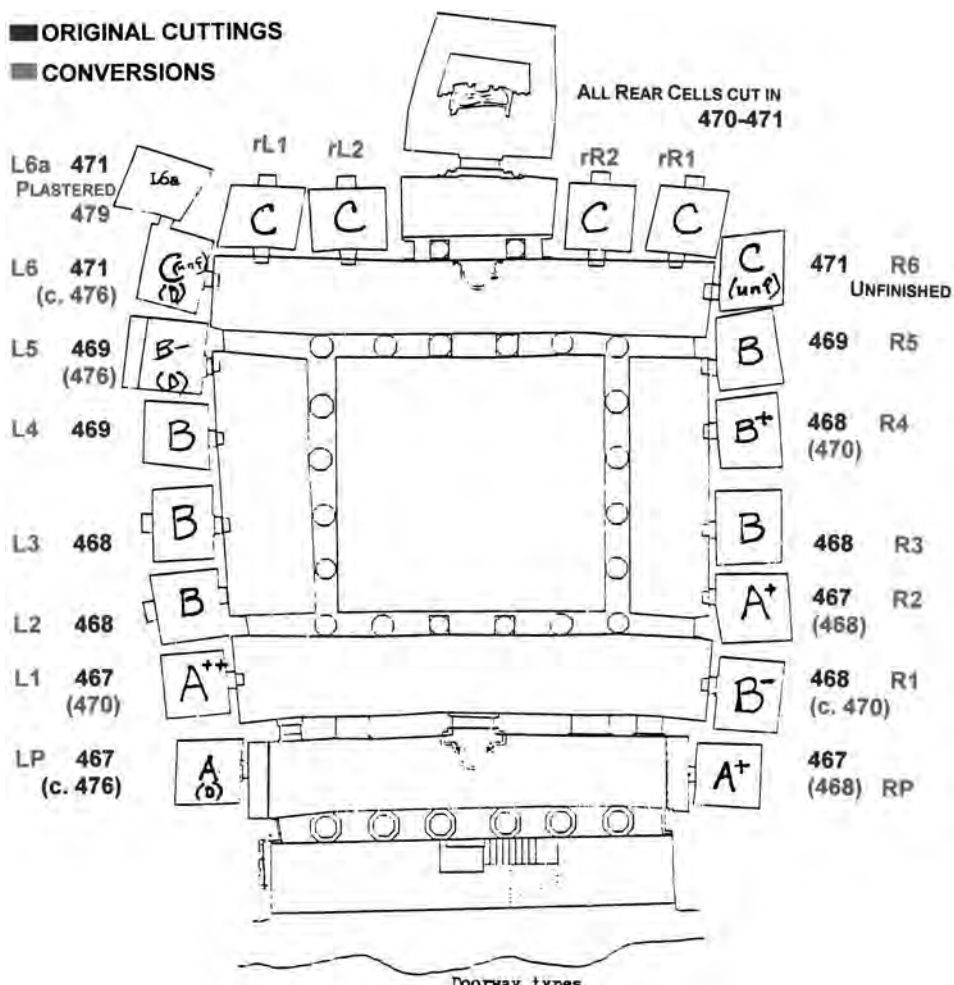


Fig. 34. Ajanta Cave I showing conversion of door fittings, and dates. Based on CTI 40.

■ ORIGINAL CUTTINGS

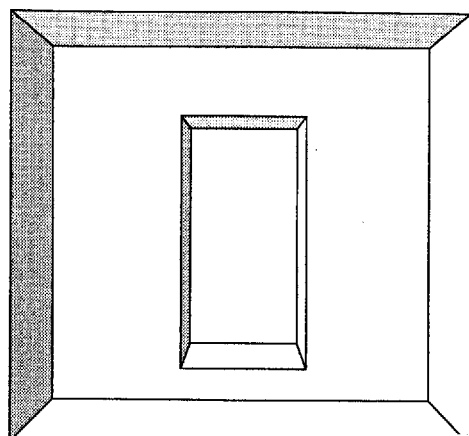
■ CONVERSIONS



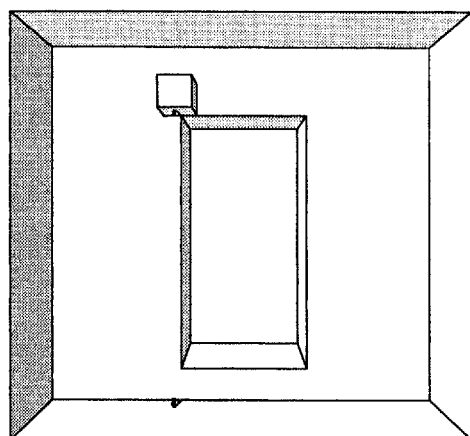
- A. Plain, thin; doorway set into frame. Used through 467 A.D.  
 B. Monolithic top projection. Door hung from back. Cut 468, 469.  
 C. Monolithic top and bottom projections. " " Cut 470, 471.  
 D. Recessed deeply to hold door, which fits into back. 475 through 478.  
 (no cell doorways cut in period of disruption: 479-480.)

A+ :Converted to approximate type B by pegged-on projection at top. A++ Converted to approximate type C by pegged-on projection at bottom. B+ Converted to approximate type C by pegged-on projection at bottom. (D) Later converted to type D. B- monolithic projection broke; replacement pegged on.

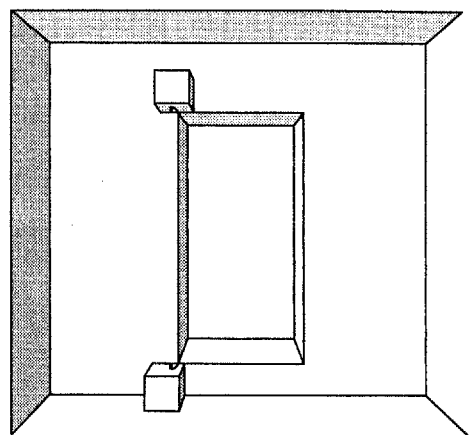
Fig. 35. Ajanta Cave 17 showing door fitting modes and dates. Based on CTI 33



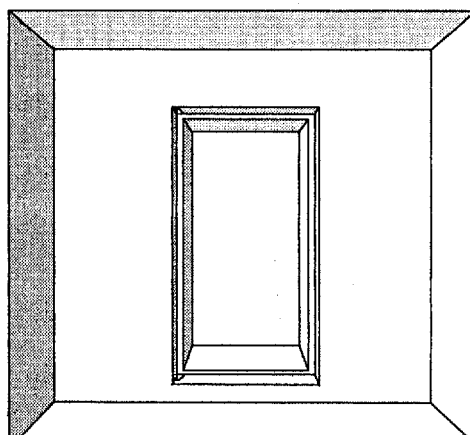
INNER VIEW OF TYPE A DOORWAY



INNER VIEW OF TYPE B DOORWAY



INNER VIEW OF TYPE C DOORWAY



INNER VIEW OF TYPE D DOORWAY

Fig. 36. Door fitting modes A, B, C, and D. (drawing: N. Yaguchi)



**Count of Ajanta caves' cells, either intended or finished**

<b>Cave</b>	<b>Cells planned or Started</b>	<b>Used or Ready for Use</b>
1	18	18
2	12	12
3	12	
4	26	5
5	12	
6L	16	16
6U	16	16
7	12	8
8	10	5
11	10	10
12	12	12
13	7	7
14	18	
15	10	10
15A	3	3
16	18	18
17	18	18
19	3	3
20	6	3
21	14	5
22	4	
23	14	1
24	22	
25	10	
26	3	3
26LW	10	10
26RW	4	2
27	14	2
28	22	
<b>Total</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>185 cells</b>

**Assuming two monks for each cell:**

**Total            708            370 potential residents**

Fig. 37. Count of Ajanta caves' cells, either intended or finished.  
Assuming two monk for each cell.

## Reconstruction of events related to the development of the Vakataka caves

Absolute dates are underlined. Other dates are hypothetical.

<u>458</u>	Devasena reigning	Terminus post quem for Harisena's accession
460	Harisena's accession	Assuming he died in 477 and reigned over 15 years
462	Ajanta's inauguration	Follows Varahadeva's appointment as hereditary Prime Minister. Great patrons cooperate at start.
466	Harisena begins Cave 1	First vihara with shrine as part of original plan. By 467, shrines being added to all earlier Vakataka caves too.
469	Recession begins	Asmaka threat. Work programs halted on all caves except royal ones and (briefly) Cave 16. Shrines of Caves L6, 7, 11, and 15 expediently completed.
471	Asmaka attack imminent	Upendragupta rushes his royal caves toward completion.
472	Hiatus begins	Work stops completely, due to Asmaka aggression. Many workmen shift to Bagh caves temporarily.
475	Asmaka takeover of site	Vigorous renewal on all but Upendragupta's caves. Asmakas focus on Cave 26 and Aurangabad caves.
477	Harisena's death	Dies without warning. Cave 1 summarily abandoned. Shock wave runs through site.
478	Sarvasena III succeeds	"Year of Anxious Consolidation". Patrons rush shrine Buddhas to completion and dedication.
479	Period of Disruption	Asmakas, planning Vakataka overthrow, withdraw support. Old programs abandoned. New donors sponsor helter-skelter intrusive images.
480	End of all patronage	Situation worsens. Craftsmen leave. Some monks remains for a few years. No donations at site ever again.
483	Fall of Vakataka Empire	Weak Sarvasena III overthrown. Harisena's grandchildren flee to Mahismati, where uncle clings to local power.
485	Final power shifts	According to the <u>Dasakumaracarita</u> a Gupta prince (probably the historical Maharaja Subandhu of Mahismati) kills the uncle, marries the princess, and declares himself the avenger of the fallen Vakataka house.
<u>486</u>	Subandhu ruling	Barwani copper plate, issued by Maharaja Subandhu of Mahismati in 486, is secure terminus ante quem for Vakataka fall, since Mahismati had been one of Harisena's prime domains.
<u>490</u>	Traikutakas in Konkan	Traikutakas, also Vakataka feudatories, now independent rulers (Surat, Kanheri, Matvan plates of <u>490</u> , <u>494</u> , <u>505</u> C.E.) Similarly, King Gauri ruling over Western Malwa by <u>491</u> , providing another terminus ante quem for Vakataka fall.

Fig. 38. Reconstruction of events related to Ajanta's development

TABLE 1. Vākātaka Patronage at Ajañṭā and Related Sites (462–80)\*

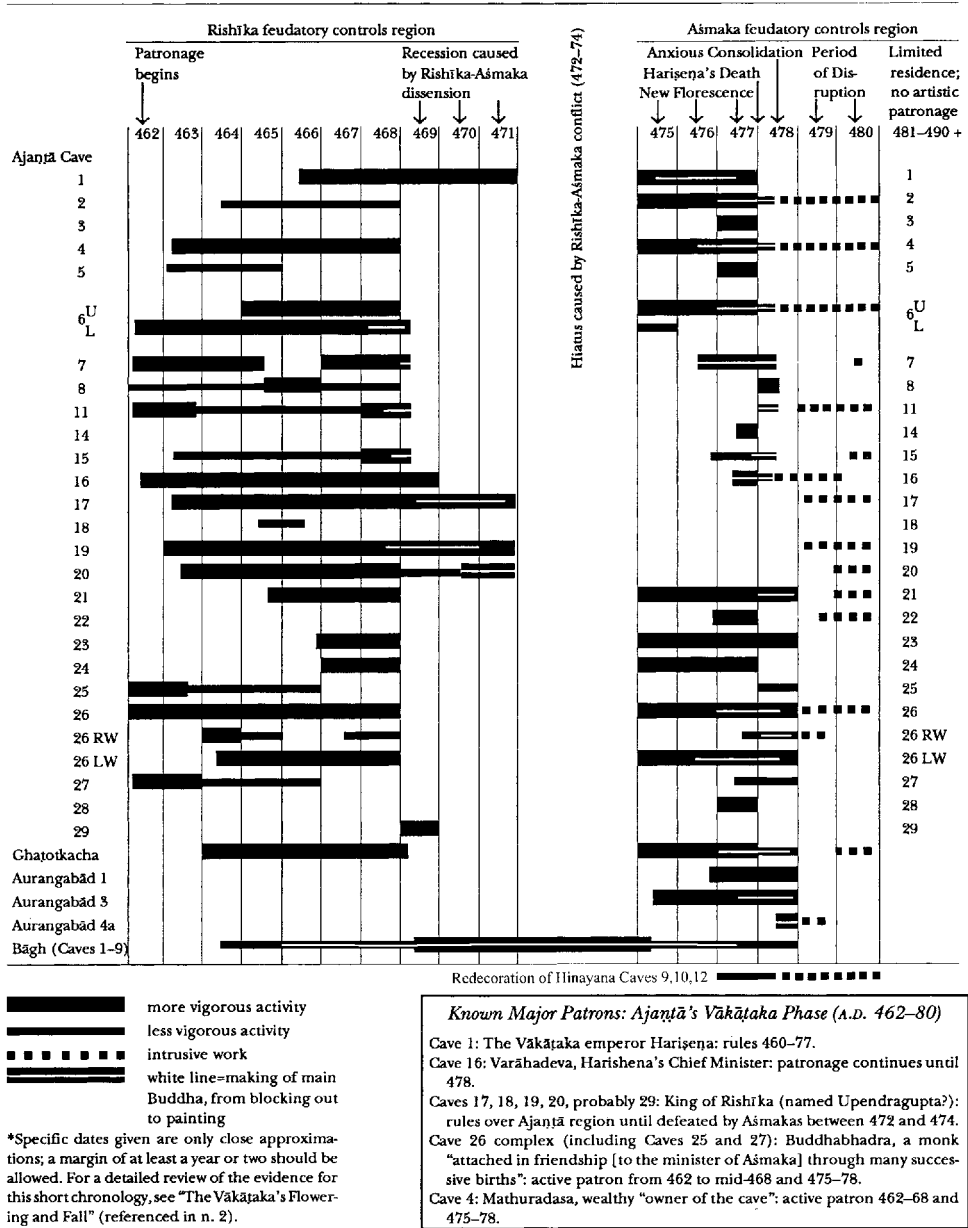


Fig. 39. Time Chart: Vakataka Patronage at Ajanta and related sites

DEFINING FEATURES  
for the  
Vakataka Phase at Ajanta  
462-470 A. D.

<u>Location</u>	462-466	Along main scarp development was (generally) from center to either side. At western (Asmaka) end, Cave 26 complex first; then from 21, 23, 24, 28.
	477	All unfinished caves at upper level started late, probably in 477
<u>Excavation technique</u>	462-468	Sidewalls angle out, ceilings up, as cutting moves rearward
	469-477	Walls and ceilings increasingly level as technical control improves
	462-477	Early caves have greater interior height, following structural precedents.
	475-477	(Lower ceilings cheaper; interiors better cooled by mountain mass.)
<u>Astyalar interiors</u>	462-464	Earliest viharas follow Hinayana precedents; no hall pillars.
		Plans for larger courtly caves (4, 16, 17, etc) already included peristyle.
	466&later	Axial intercolumniation wider (or widened)
<u>Porch ends</u>	462-465	End walls blank, following Hinayana precedents
	466-467	Simple cells cut at either end; especially in 466
	467-477	Cells fronted by pillared vestibules; standard from 468 on.
	475-477	Nagas and yaksa groups carved over fronting pillars
	477 only	Pillared complexes in court if possible; all unfinished
<u>Pillars</u>	462-466	Shafts roughed out square, then defined octagonally
		From 466 interior axial pillars retain square bases
	467-477	High square bases, generally to be painted, with complex designs above
		From 469 carved dwarfs on corners of bases; until 471 some only painted
	464-471	Capitals' brackets show consistent reduction of number of volutes
	464-471	in 465: 6 volutes; 466: 5 volutes; 467: 4 volutes;
	475-478	after Hiatus: 3 volutes; but plain undersurfaces conventional
	467-477	Plain capital undersurfaces preferred, to facilitate painting
<u>Pilasters</u>	464-469	Generally plain flat shafts, sometimes simple linear decoration
	469-477	Medallions conventional now; complexity develops consistently
<u>Main Doorways</u>	463-466	Plain jambs, painted; Cave L6 has set-in goddesses on monolithic makaras
	467-469	Goddesses on yaksa-supported pilasters, with hand on upraised makara tail
	469-478	Decoration more complex, later influenced by Cave 1 shrine doorway.
		Panels w/loving couples on top and sides increasingly complex
	477-478	Goddesses displaced to allow trabeated composition; increasing focus.
<u>Windows</u>	463	Square with notches for frame (anomalous; Cave L6) Shuttered outside
	464-471	Higher than wide. Shuttered from outside; No carved decoration.
	475-477	Square. Carved decoration outside. Shutters efficie ntly inside.
	475-477	Unfinished rectangular windows converted to decorated square types.

Fig. 40. Defining Features (1)



<u>Cell doorway front</u>	463-468 469-478 475-477	Cell doorways simple; no outer or inner recesses. From 469 cell doorways always have front recess; never before. Deep inner recess cut for newly developed D mode doorways
<u>Candasilas (for cells)</u>	464-467 467-469 471-478	Commonly placed in front of cell doorways Plain steps or rises often used; candasilas rarely Steps generally omitted; cell door-sills typically low.
<u>Cell door fittings</u>	462-467 468-471 468-469 470-471 475-477 478-479 479-480	A mode: plain door openings; no fittings included A+ mode mimics B (and sometimes C) mode with attached projection B mode: monolithic projection for upper pivot; lower cut in floor below (First found in Caitya Cave 26 main doorway in c. 465; impact delayed) C mode: monolithic projection above and below to contain pivots D mode: simple inner recess at rear into which door pivots fit (First found in Caitya Cave 19 in 471; impact delayed) E mode: expedient variation of D-mode with adjustable upper pivot F mode a few clumsy door-fittings built up of mud-plaster
<u>Niches in Cells</u>	471-476 477-478	Generally cut in cell's rear wall; but in Cave 19 put where light best Larger niches (called "shelves") occasionally used
<u>Shrine Development</u>	462-465 466-468 469-478 469 (early) 469-470 471 476-477 477-478 478 (early) 478 (late)	Shrines not yet conceived; no axial focus in caves Stupas intended for shrines; started only in Cave 11 and L6(?) Buddhas in shrines, influenced by Cave 19, 26 conceptions. Axial focus invariable now; central intercolumniations widened Buddhas created and dedicated in viharas Lower 6, 7, 11, 15 Buddha image finished in Caitya Cave 19 (dedicated 471) Buddhas dedicated in Caves 17 and 20 Buddha carved in Cave 1 (never dedicated) Buddha (intended in 468) carved in Caitya Cave 26. Dedicated 478 Buddhas dedicated in 2, 4, Upper 6, 7 (redone), 11 (redone), 15, 16. Buddha images dedicated in 21, 26 Left Wing, 26 Right Wing
<u>Buddha images</u>	469-476 477-478 Mid 478-480 469-479	Shrine Buddhas invariably planned for padmasana Shrine Buddhas invariably bhadrasana (unless begun earlier) Buddhas in intrusive shrines now favor bhadrasana pose. For varying throneside, thronebase, attendants, etc., see Chart: "Development of Iconographic Features at Ajanta..."

Fig. 41. Defining Features (2)

## Chronology of the paintings at Ajanta

The earliest (Hinayana) caves were probably fully painted, but little now remains. Most of the painting at the site belongs to the later (Vakataka) phase. The Vakataka patrons' intended painting programs all fall between 468 and 478, and exist in various stages of completion. Few were ever finished, the only apparent exceptions are Caves Lower 6, 8(?), and 26's Left Wing; the latter two, now ruinous, may have originally been fully painted. In 469 and 478, both years of great stress, efforts were concentrated almost exclusively on hastily finishing the main images and their immediate contexts. In the Period of Disruption (479-480; mid-478-480 in the "Vakataka" caves) painted intrusions were added to most of the caves in which the shrine Buddha had already been dedicated, their unfinished condition making this both feasible and tempting.

Cave 1	475-476	Façade and Porch
	476-477	Hall and shrine
Cave 2	477	Whole porch and porch cell vestibules; all ceiling except shrine Right and left walls toward front; "Hariti Shrine" walls.
	Early 478	Vajrapani at right rear; "Nidhi Shrine" walls; whole Buddha shrine
	Mid-478-480	Remaining areas, with multiple (intrusive) Buddhas
Cave 4	Early 478	Buddha mage; shrine doorway and two flanking Buddhas
	Mid-478-480	Painted intrusions in porch and in shrine
Cave 6L	468	Main hall ceiling and side walls
	Early 469	Rear wall of hall, antechamber, shrine
Cave 6U	Early 478	Painting of Buddha image
	Mid-478-480	Intrusive images in porch, hall, and shrine area, except main image
Cave 7	Early 478	All areas except left rear wall of porch
	Mid-478 or later	Intrusive painting on left rear wall of porch
Cave 8	477 or early 478	Whole, along with plastering of cells
Cave 9	1 <sup>st</sup> CE	Whole hall (much covered by Vakataka paintings)
	478	Rear Wall
	Early 478	Main faces of a few more forward pillars
	Mid-478-480	Various pillars, wall above pillars, front walls
Cave 9A,B	Mid-478-480	Traces of paint remain
Cave 10	1 <sup>st</sup> BCE	Whole hall (much covered by Vakataka paintings)
	477	Façade, hall ceiling, stupa, upper parts of left pillars
	Early 478	Main faces of most visible pillars; aisle ceilings toward rear
	Mid-478-480	Less desirable pillar faces; a few ruinous traces on aisle walls
Cave 10A	Mid-478-480	Whole shrinelet painted

Fig. 42. Chronology of the paintings at Ajanta (1)

Cave 11	468	Porch pillars; ceilings and dwarfs; doorway and bodhisattva
	Early 469	Image completed and painted
	Early 478(?)	Image refurbished and shrine doorway painted
	Mid-478-480	All other images (intrusive) in porch and hall
Cave 12	1 <sup>st</sup> BCE	Original painting (much covered by Vakataka paintings)
	477-early 478	Previously plastered ceiling and walls repaired and repainted
Cave 15	Early 478	Antechamber and shrine ceilings and image painted
	Mid-479-480	Traces on intrusive Buddha panels on left rear wall
Cave 16	468	Porch pillars and ceiling, except central medallion
	Early 469	Porch walls, ceiling medallion, doorway; hall ceilings except left and rear; pillars; left, right, front narrative paintings
	Early 478	Rear wall, shrine image and fronting pillars
	Mid-478-480	Intrusive Buddhas on right and left walls
Cave 17	469-470	Entire Porch
	470-471	Hall and antechamber ceiling, walls, pillars
	471	Shrine (Buddha image only) and fronting medallion
	Mid-478-480	Left front pilaster base (intrusive bhadrāsana Buddha)
Cave 19	470-471	Whole façade and hall
	Mid-478-480	Pillared complex at left of court (right complex ruinous)
Cave 20	468	Porch ceiling plastered
	470	Hall ceiling
	471	Hall walls, antechamber, shrine (Buddha image only)
	Mid-478-480	Painted intrusions in porch, hall
Cave 21	478	Hall ceilings, pillars; shrine (Buddha image only)
	479-480	Intrusive Buddha on left aisle wall
Cave 22	479-480	Painted images in interior (all intrusive)
Cave 26	477	Façade; Buddhas and lotuses under main arch
	478	Whole main hall and image; aisle ceilings and major panels
	479-480	Front wall multiple Buddhas; intrusions in aisles
Cave 27	478	Ceiling medallion in first cell at right

Fig. 43. Chronology of the paintings at Ajanta (2)

CHECKLIST OF SCULPTURED INTRUSIONS AT AJANTA

All of the votive intrusions at Ajanta were added to the caves during the brief and troubled Period of Disruption from mid-478-480. Generally Buddha images, but sometimes stupas or bodhisattvas, these votive offerings were given by eager and anxious new donors, most of whom appear to have been the monks who had never been able to share in this merit-making activity during Ajanta’s elitist heyday. These intrusive images, both painted and sculpted, were generally positioned with little or no respect for the original patron’s well-laid plans. Understandably, locations near the shrine, or in good light, or on already smoothed wall surfaces, were preferred, as long as they did not cover or cut into previously finished iconic images.

Intrusions were placed only in caves where the Buddha image was already dedicated. A few separate shrinelets (e.g.9A-D; 10A; 12A; 24 court) were also made at this time by more affluent donors. We can judge how intensive, and how brief, this intrusive phase was by noting how many of the carved images in the ambulatory of Cave 26 or in the lower priority areas of Cave Upper 6 were simultaneously underway when work on them was abruptly abandoned.

Because these intrusions violate the original patrons’ plans for the caves, it is important to be able to identify them. By visualizing the caves as if such added images were not there, we can better imagine what the completed programs might have been like. The following list comprises the site’s sculptured intrusions. For the painted intrusions, see Chronology of the Paintings at Ajanta.

CAVE LOCATION

2	Courtyard	Buddha at right
4	Porch	Buddha and “Litany” panels
	Shrine	Buddha images on walls (many unfinished)
U6	Court	Shrinelets and front wall images
	Porch	All images (many unfinished)
	Hall	All Buddhas; relief stupas; shrinelets at right
	Antechamber	All small Buddhas; completion of large Buddhas
	Shrine	Buddhas on front and side walls (some unfinished)
7	Porch	Left rear wall painting

Fig. 44. Checklist of sculptured intrusions at Ajanta (1)



9	Façade	All Buddhas and stupas (some unfinished)
9A-D	Shrinelets	All intrusive
10	Façade	Two panels on right return
10A	Shrinelet	All intrusive
11	Porch	Buddha panels at right end
12A	Shrinelet	Unfinished Buddha
15	Hall	Two Buddha panels at left rear
17	Court	Buddhas at left and right
19	Court	All images except nagaraja panel
	Façade	Images on façade frames and pilaster bases
	Approach	Buddhas and miniature stupas at left
20	Porch	Buddha panels at left and left rear
	Hall	Buddha panel at left rear
21	Porch	Buddhas at left end
22	(Shrinelet)	All Buddha panels
24	(Shrinelet)	Buddhas added in left court cell
26	Court	All images on facade returns
	Facade	Images under and in front of caitya arch
	Hall (aisle)	All panels, except Parinirvana, Temptation, Sravasti panels (R2-4: L8) and “8 Buddhas”
26LW	Shrine	Buddhas on shrine doorway
26RW	Porch	Left end Buddha panel(s): right end ruinous

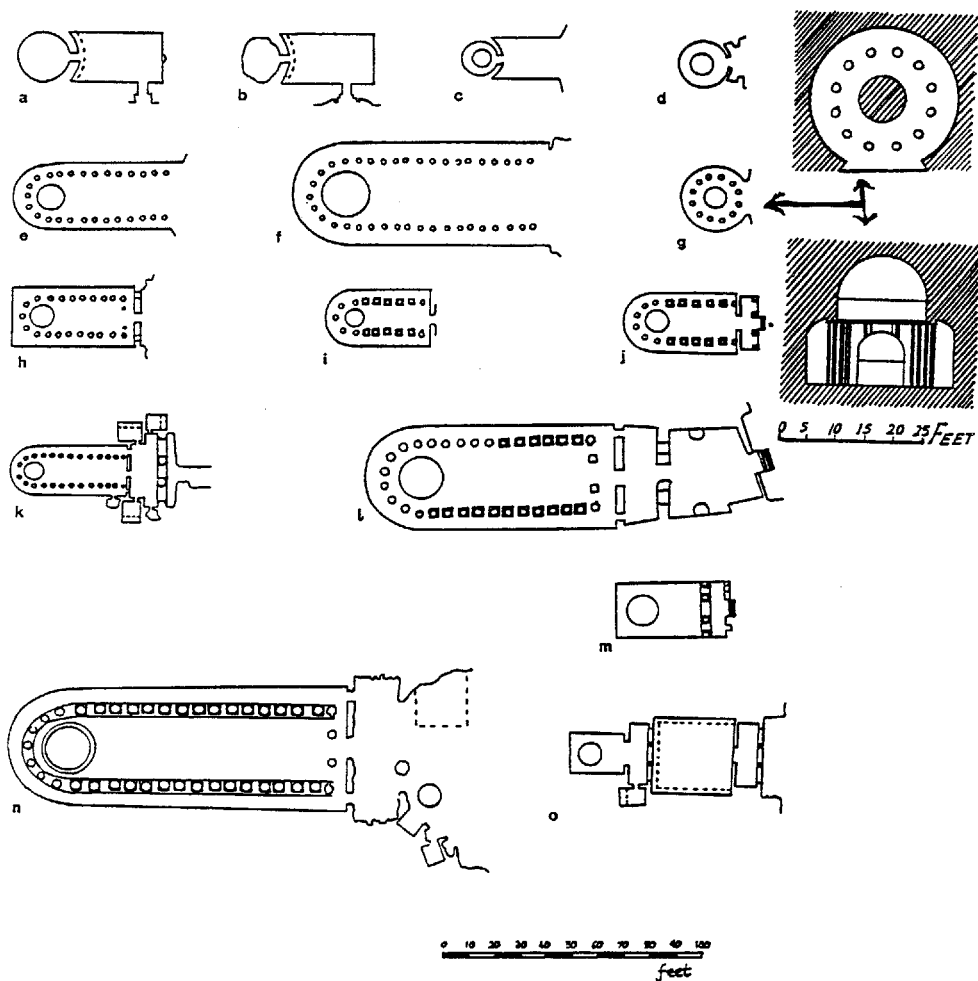
Fig. 44. Checklist of sculptured intrusions at Ajanta (2)

**Introduction of Various Buddha Features at Ajanta and Related Sites**

First appearance of each feature shown by asterisk. For date of images see also Time Chart.

		7							7(recut)		
		11							U6	15(recut)	
		L6 15		17 20	Bagh active		1	4 2 26	26LW	26RW	
										21	
										Aur4A	
										Aur3 Intrusive Images	
	468	469	470	471	Hiatus	475	476	477	478	479	480
Buddha: padmasana	*										
Buddha: bhadrasana								*			
Buddha placed in shrine center	*										
Buddha planned for rear wall							*				
Buddha: unusually large halo		*									
Buddha: smaller (usual size) halo				*							
Buddha: with abhaya mudra	*										
Buddha: dharmacakramudra	*										
Base with lions: no throne legs	*										
Base with throne legs: no lions				*							
Base: devotees: no legs or lions							*				
Base with leonine throne legs;								*			
Base with dwarf throne legs										*	
Wheel plain (undecorated hubs)	*										
Wheel festooned (e.g. Cave 1)							*				
Wheel garlanded (e.g. Cave U6)								*			
Wheel absent (bhadrasana)								*			
Nagas at base (bhadrasana)								*			
Wheel present (bhadrasana)								*	*		
Wheel fused with lotus shaft								*	*		
Wheel raised on lotus shaft									*	*	
Base: corner nubs (bhadrasana)									*		
Base: corner nubs (padmasana)									*	*	
Base: small robe-end on seat	*										
Base: arcing cloth over front							*				
Base: scalloped cloth over front								*			
Makara: empty mouth		*									
Makara: dwarf from mouth				*							
Makara rests paws on throne arm								*			
Frond or bird-head from mouth								*			
Dwarfs as well as the latter								*			
Seated figure over makara	*							*			
No figure over makara		*									
Vigorous figures over makara								*			
Dancing figures etc. over makara										*	
Vyala omitted				*							
Vyala with no dwarf attendants	*										
Vyala: one dwarf on or under							*				
Vyala: multiple dwarfs								*			
Vyala: beads from paws, snout								*	*		
Pillared throne back								*			
Pilasters frame Buddha panel										*	
Flying dwarfs above image	*										
Flying couples above image									*		
Both flying couples and dwarfs									*		
Bodhisattva attendants			*								
Standing Buddhas as attendants									*		
Attendants on lotus pedestals								*			
Attendants with halo								*			
Avalokitesvara: long-stem								*			
Attendants on long stemmed									*		

Fig. 45. Development of Iconographic Features at Ajanta



2 Caitya floor plans: a *Sudama*; b *Lomasa Rishi*; c *Kondivte*; d *Guntupalli*; e *Bhaja*; f *Ajanta X*; g *Tulja*; h *Ajanta IX*; i *Nasik*; j *Lenyadri*; k *Bedsa*; l *Kaniheri*; m *Shivheri*; n *Karle*; o *Kuda VI*

Fig. 46. Caitya Hall floor plans

