AJANTA
THE END OF THE GOLDEN AGE

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

HANDBOOK OF ORIENTAL STUDIES

HANDBUCH DER ORIENTALISTIK

SECTION TWO

INDIA

INDIEN

EDITED BY

J. BRONKHORST

VOLUME 18/1

AJANTA: HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

THE END OF THE GOLDEN AGE

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

AJANTA: HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

VOLUME ONE

THE END OF THE GOLDEN AGE

BY

WALTER M. SPINK

BRILL
LEIDEN · BOSTON
2005

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Cover illustration: Ajanta Cave 1, façade view to left. Initiated 466, abandoned late 477. Published with courtesy of the Michigan Asian Art Archives.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A C.I.P. record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Appendix One (The Daśakumāracarita of Daṇḍin, 4th edition, 1966) is published with permission of Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi/Varanasi/Patna.

ISSN 0169-9377
ISBN 90 04 14832 9

© Copyright 2005 by Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands
Koninklijke Brill NV incorporates the imprints Brill Academic Publishers, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers and VSP.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission from the publisher.

Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use is granted by Brill provided that the appropriate fees are paid directly to The Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Suite 910 Danvers MA 01923, USA. Fees are subject to change.

PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

For H
Who made it all possible

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

CONTENTS

To the Reader xi

Introduction and a few Conventions 1

A THE END OF THE GOLDEN AGE

Chapter 1 Ajanta in a Historical and Political Context 7

This summary of my views was originally published in MTDC's magazine *Maharashtra Pathik (Sept. 1990)*, with the understanding that it would be used for the present purpose. It may be of particular interest because it was followed in later issues by the comments and/or criticisms of my colleagues. Concerned particularly with issues of history and epigraphy, these essays reveal clearly the bones of our contention. The various essays will be found in a later volume (*Arguments about Ajanta*).

Chapter 2 A Query and A Response 22

This chapter is introduced by a probing letter by Dr. Heinrich von Stietencron, questioning the validity of the "short chronology" for Ajanta. Entitled "Questions addressed to Walter Spink", it was published at the request of Dr. Hans Bakker, in his recent volume, *The Vakataka Heritage: Indian Culture at the Crossroads*, Groningen, 2004, consisting of scholarly papers presented at a recent conference with that same title. This short letter is followed by a rather long response by the present author discussing the character of the site, as well as patronage, chronology, and other matters.

Chapter 3 How the Monks Lived: Shrines and Cells at Ajanta 66

The Vakataka viharas at Ajanta were originally planned as mere dormitories for the monks, a usage that would hardly justify the splendors of their present decoration. This must be explained by their transformation, starting a half decade after the inauguration of the site's Vakataka phase, into shrines, in which not only the monks, but the Buddha himself was resident. The donation of the Buddha images in the shrines, and the creation of their richly meaningful decorative contexts, now became an obsession with Ajanta's courtly patrons, eager not only for religious merit but for worldly praise. However, the delights which such elite donors sponsored should not totally distract us from considering how the monks lived within the

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

caves—how they slept, where they hung their clothes, and how they kept their humble toiletries. What can a survey of the few hundred cells at Ajanta and related sites tell us about matters of privacy, security, and convenience?

Chapter 4 In Defense of Dandin: The Historicity of the Visrutacarita 119
Herein, I directly "bite the bullet" by presenting a detailed analysis of the historical evidence in Dandin's Dasakumaracarita, which I insist provides a remarkably trustworthy account of the specific events attendant upon the Vakataka fall. Admittedly, however, its convincing historicity goes against everything that we might otherwise expect. Perhaps because the "perfect world" which is mirrored at Ajanta fell apart so dramatically, the situation was unforgettably engraved in Dandin's familial memory.

Chapter 5 A Revised Vakataka Chronology 163
To support my views, I present a Vakataka chronology somewhat different from the conventional one. In fact, such a revision is necessary if my analysis of the historical situation is to be valid.

Chapter 6 Dandin's Visrutacarita and the Future of Harisena's Imperium 169
An analysis of Dandin's story of Prince Visruta, presented as a narrative, aimed at revealing the protagonist's motivations regarding his ultimate goal of taking over the power of the collapsing Vakataka house, and of establishing his own new dynasty on that ancient base. The reader will find justification for the arguments in Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 7 Family Relationships bearing upon Ajanta's Short Chronology 179
Very shortly after the great emperor Harisena's death, his minister Varahadeva (donor of Ajanta Cave 16) took Harisena's grandchildren for safety to the court of their uncle (Harisena's "second son") at Mahismati, which was still resisting the assaults of the insurrectionist feudatories. Since Dandin, in the Dasakumaracarita, tells us that the granddaughter was "about thirteen years" old at the time, we can estimate that Harisena was roughly fifty years old when he died, probably at the hands of the Asmakas, in about 477; by the same token, the emperor would have been in his early thirties when Ajanta was started shortly after his accession.

Chapter 8 "The Persian Embassy" 181
This innocent scene—in fact a Buddhist Jataka tale in praise of kingship—was the single even if unwilling source of the early but persistent misdating (by two centuries!) of Ajanta's great later phase. This chapter briefly considers how the confusion arose.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

B THE SHOCK WAVE AND THE SITE

Chapter 9 Ajanta Cave 1: Its Origins and its Aftermath ... 184
Cave 1 is not only the most splendid vihara at the site—indeed, in the whole of India—but the course of its development must be understood if we are going understand what happened to the site as a whole. Its tragic abandonment foretells both the precipitous decline of the site and the destruction of the Vakataka empire itself. The fact that it was never dedicated bears directly upon the circumstances of the Harisena's death and the site's consequent collapse.

Chapter 10 Ajanta's Latter Days: A Review 200
In 478, the troubled year after Harisena's death, first the "Vakataka" patrons, and then the Asmakas, gave up their longstanding patronage at the site, as a consequence of Harisena's death. But their reaction to this dire event and to the problems caused by Harisena's successor was quite different, as a study of their caves proves.

Chapter 11 Understanding the Site's Collapse: The "Vakataka" Caves 220
This chapter concentrates upon the earlier months of 478, after the emperor Harisena's death, during which the Asmakas rejected the Vakataka overlord, and put "Vakataka" patronage at the site in such sudden jeopardy, that these established patrons had to precipitously leave.

Chapter 12 Understanding the Site's Collapse: The Asmaka Caves 272
The difference between the situation of the "Vakataka" patrons and those patrons under Asmaka "protection" illuminates the history of the difficult year, 478, at the end of which the Asmaka patrons also were forced to leave the site.

Chapter 13 Caves Abandoned at the Time of Harisena's Death 315
These are the caves that were so incomplete when Harisena died that the patrons gave up on any attempt to get their shrine Buddhas finished. Because they were never dedicated, they contain no intrusions, even though there was much space available for such votive imagery.

Chapter 14 Related Caves of the Vakatakas or their Feudatories 325
This is a survey of important related monuments (Aurangabad, Bagh, Banoti, Dharasiva, Ghatotkacha, Kanheri, Lonad in most of which patronage is severely affected or suddenly curtailed in the troubled year (478) after Harisena's death. Only Bagh, already completed by that time, is not thus affected.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Chapter 15 The Need for Study in Situ (Esp. Caves 17–20; 29) 366
This chapter, with particular attention to the caves of the local king, Upendragupta, attempts to show how an on-the-spot analysis contributes to an understanding of the various aspects of work at the site. It also explores a few of the telling relationships involving this special group of royal caves (17–20; 29); since work upon them ended in about 471, due to the defeat of Upendragupta by the Asmakas, they have had only cursory mention in the previous chapters of this volume, which focus on the events surrounding Harisena's death.

Appendix I Visrutacarita of Dandin's Daśakumāracarita (Trans. Kale) 393
The reader should certainly have ready access to the relevant portion of this important text. The present author sees its eighth ucchvasa—the account of Prince Visruta—as having a startling and unexpected historicity. Even though it is richly fleshed out with compelling even if cautionary excursions into descriptions of the dangers of wine, women, and song, the bones of the story describe the events connected with the Vakataka collapse with such surprising precision that its author, Dandin, must have had first-hand knowledge of the unforgettable events described.

Appendix II Inscriptions (16, 17, 26, Ghatotkacha) 412
These are the four long inscriptions of the major Vakataka patrons. The two inscriptions of the Prime Minister Varahadeva in Ajanta Cave 16 and the Ghatotkacha vihara and the Ajanta Cave 17 inscription of the local king, Upendragupta, have been translated by V. V. Mirashi. (See Mirashi 1963) The Cave 26 inscription of the monk Buddhabhadra, translated by Chhabra, is to be found in the fourth volume (text) of G. Yazdani's *Ajanta* (Yazdani, 1955) For a critical edition of these four records, see Volume II, Appendix: Inscriptions of Ajanta, by Richard S. Cohen, who provides a new reading and critical edition of all other inscriptions at the site, both Hinayana and Vakataka.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

TO THE READER

Since this is an ongoing project, with more volumes of text, photographs, and maps, groundplans, charts, and conceptual reconstructions planned for publication in the near future, it has seemed wisest and appropriate to put much allied material in the final volume rather than first. This will include acknowledgements (of which there are many), a coordinated index to all volumes, a Sanskrit glossary (since diacritics are not used in the text) and a bibliography. A special volume of photographs with brief commentaries is now being published, in order to provide visual materials to go with all of the presently published volumes. Not only Ajanta but related Vakataka sites are included, and all items are assigned dates based on the evidence provided by the information in the text volumes.

I have increasingly come to see the development of Ajanta and related sites as a complex jigsaw puzzle—a kind of game which can be played with all of the pieces demanding to be put in place, essentially year by year, within the relatively short span of perhaps as little as fifteen years of consistent development.

For simplicity, I have used specific dates, although the reader should allow a margin of error of a year or two—probably not more—for each assignment. On the other hand, the sequential arrangement of the forms and features at the site, determined by the orderly and often surprisingly insistent evolution of Ajanta's myriad motifs, is relatively inflexible. Readers may have more difficulty with my assumption—in fact my assertion—that the famous Visrutacarita (the eighth chapter of Dandin's Dasakumaracarita) represents an almost point by point recollection—even a reportage—of the fall of the great Vakataka empire, which equally, and with a similar specificity, is reflected in the tragic and total collapse of all patronage at Ajanta by 480 C.E., a date already beyond the radiant horizon of the Golden Age. It is these two pieces of evidence, both controversial—which does not mean that they are not true—which define the field upon which this compelling game, with its significant historical implications, is being played.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

INTRODUCTION AND A FEW CONVENTIONS

The present volume deals with the period of India's greatest cultural florescence—the Golden Age—and the immediately subsequent years of its disintegration. The conventional view is that the Golden Age is specifically associated with the great Gupta dynasty and that it gradually lost its luster with the Gupta's decline in the late fifth and the sixth centuries. However, the arguments in this volume lead to a quite different conclusion: that it was the great (but still unheralded) Vakataka emperor Harisena who brought the Golden Age to its apogee during his brief but dynamic reign over central India from c. 460 to c. 477, and that when he suddenly died the burgeoning world, almost literally, fell apart. The great empire which he had created in central India, extending from the eastern to the western sea, broke back into its component parts when Harisena's many Vakataka feudatories rose up against his weak successor, Sarvasena III, and shattered the empire. The last decades of the fifth century are decades of darkness, but the culminating achievements of the period up to the time of Harisena's death are mirrored, not in the weakening Gupta world, but in the remarkable patronage at Ajanta during the 460s and 470s. Even though what we see there can only be a weaker reflection of the productions of the great cities of the time, now all turned to dust, it is still startling in its complexity, its energy, and its beauty.

Such a conclusion is not yet found in the history books, nor does the great Harisena ever receive the credit due. However, if this new view of fifth century developments is valid, it must change our conception of the cultural development of India in a fundamental way, with a climactic even if short-lived development under Harisena replacing the concept of a gradual erosion under the vaunted Gupta power. And what is remarkable is that the key to this new conception can only be found at Ajanta, for it is Ajanta's evolution, explicated here, that unlocks and reveals the connections to epigraphic and literary evidence. It is, in fact, the discipline of art history—the simple process of looking and thinking—that allows us to access the story that we are seeking. And when we do this, Ajanta's history turns out (surprisingly!) to be perhaps unique in the annals of the annals

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

of art history and archaeology, for its crowded development can be ordered with such precision that it has to be described on a year to year basis; the changes are so discrete that a less specific ordering would blur the steps of the evolution.

I do not believe that there is another site anywhere that, purely on the basis of its internal evolution, can be ordered with such precision; and the results of this are the more useful because of the great sparseness of dated monuments in India in this general period. What Ajanta, along with related sites such as Bagh and Aurangabad, gives us, is a tightly dated—essentially year by year—sequence of hundreds of architectural, sculptural, painted, technological, and epigraphic features which can be used as a spectrum of benchmarks against which features elsewhere in India can be compared, even though one must of course allow for variations related to region or rule. One must, however, recognize that the "specific" dates which we have applied to every feature at Ajanta can never claim to be absolutely precise, since the whole dated sequence depends on specifically dated termini which slightly pre-date and slightly post-date the period of Ajanta's patronage. So one must order Ajanta's development by reference to these outer limits. This is further explained in the following explanation of "Conventions".

Such a precise definition of Ajanta's development validates the relevant inscriptional evidence, even though one must contradict the established dating for Harisena's reign if the many synchronisms are to be compelling. My interpretation of events connected with Ajanta's rapid collapse in the late 470s also supports the remarkable (and remarkably denigrated) historicity of Dandin's Visrutacarita, which describes—just as Ajanta does—the events anticipating and then precipitating the fall of the great Vakataka house. I am also defending another conclusion that many scholars have had a hard time accepting: that Ajanta's total later development took place in less than twenty years. Indeed, a proper understanding of "The End of the Golden Age" depends upon the validity of this assumption, startling as it may at first appear to be.

A Few Conventions

When we see Ajanta's burgeoning Vakataka development as concentrated within a short time-span; when we consider how progressive and how consistent this development was; and when we analyze

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

the many distinct breaks in the course of its patronage (see Time Chart) which act as revealing "markers" in its evolution, then we can assign quite specific dates to the various events and the various forms and features which fall within this crowded span. Indeed, in the end we can put every form and feature at the site into a very precise, almost year by year sequence, because the overall span is so short and because the evidence with which we have to work is so abundant. But, unless specifically dated inscriptions from the period of Ajanta's development turn up—so far they have not—we will never be able to be absolute in our dating, but will have to allow a small margin of error—even if only a year or two—for every date that we give. The reader should understand that although the dates are a bit flexible, the sequence itself is "tight". Thus if the great bodhisattva in Cave 1, which I now date to 477, should better be placed at 476, then the dates of other related features should also probably have to be adjusted, as if everything at the site is inscribed on an elastic band, which could be expanded or contracted, either fully or in part, without changing the sequential arrangement.

The reader should also understand that, for convenience, I date both images and events to specific years. That is, when I date Harisena's reign to 460–477, I assume that the reader will understand that I mean c. 460–c. 477. Given the multitude of dates which can be assigned to Ajanta's various forms and features, I trust that the reader will approve, or forgive, such an arbitrary simplification.

I ask indulgence regarding another matter too: because what happened at specific times at the site divides it into periods of progress, or of delay, or of crisis, or of florescence, it makes our conversation simpler if we can better define these periods in an arbitrary but clarifying way. For instance, I have planned for the emperor Harisena to conveniently die on December 31, 477. Thus we can speak of "477" as a year when everything, under his guidance, was going right, while "478" was a year when, under his successor, everything was going wrong. Upendragupta rushed to complete his various beautiful caves throughout 471, but they still had not been fully completed when the Asmaka forces attacked on January 1, 472, finally consolidating their control of the region only on December 31, 474. Happily, work was able to vigorously start up again on January 1, 475.

One other "convention" should be clarified. All of the excavations at Ajanta are technically Vakataka; even when the Asmaka feudatories declared their independence in 478, the Vakataka emperor continued to think of them as his *de jure* subjects; it would take a

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

war to settle the matter. However, the caves along the main scarp at Ajanta, sponsored by the king of Risika, one or more members of the Vakataka court, and possibly others, have a very different development, and a different history, from the Asmaka caves at the western extremity of the site. Thus when I speak of one or more of the caves along the main scarp, may specify them as "Vakataka" (using quotes) to distinguish them from the Asmaka caves. For instance, in 478, when the Vakataka dynasty was already in trouble, the "Vakataka" patrons hurried—perhaps fled—away from the site, whereas the Asmaka patrons stayed on for some months longer, until they were forced to leave by for economic, not political, reasons.

I might also explain that when I speak of the period of Ajanta's "consistent patronage" I am of course referring to the work accomplished under the original patrons between 462 and 478. This consistent patronage ended, for the "Vakataka" patrons about midway in 478, by which time the Asmakas had rejected that Vakataka overlordship. It did not end for the Asmaka patrons until the end of 478, by which time it would appear that the Asmakas had cut off their support of the site, and perhaps had even conscripted some of the workers for the uses of their developing insurrection. Thus the Period of Disruption starts in mid-478 for the "Vakataka" caves and at the beginning of 479 for the Asmaka caves.

Diacritics and Glossary

By mutual agreement, both the publisher and the author have agreed to leave diacritical marks out of the text, both for convenience in publishing and for readability. However, we will publish a list of all Sanskrit terms, with the proper diacritical marks, in the final volume, which scholars will be able to use for reference. A glossary of relevant terms will also be included in the final volume, along with the expected index.

Further and Final Volumes

A number of volumes will appear in the Ajanta series. Volume 2 will deal with the Arguments about Ajanta, involving theories and counter-theories about the development of the site, as well as a treat-

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

ment of the Hinayana layer, and the patterns of patronage. The third volume, "The arrival of the Uninvited" covers the intrusions following the collapse of the site. Of course a full and systematic cave to cave description will be part, as well as a Pictorial Guide.

Since this study is planned to include a very complete photo-documentation of the site, there will be at least three thousand photographs of all relevant features, including conservation concerns. They will be published, mostly in black and white, but some in color, in the required number of volumes—presumably three or four. There will also be a further volume devoted to the reproduction of the remarkably precise ground-plans and cross-sections made in the nineteenth century, augmented by a number of new plans and conjectural restorations related to matters discussed in the text. We also hope to publish one volume, all in color, of the most important paintings at the site.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

CHAPTER ONE

AJANTA IN A HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

> "Why should not a monument be raised by those possessing wealth, desirous of mundane happiness as also of liberation?" *(Ajanta Cave 26 inscription of the monk Buddhabhadra)*

The twenty-nine Buddhist caves created by the Vakatakas in a remote ravine near the ancient town of Ajanta form a devotional complex which ranks as one of the world's most startling achievements, created at the very apogee of India's Golden Age. Far more elaborate than the small group of earlier caves (9, 10, 11, 13, and 15A) excavated in the curving scarp four or five centuries before, all of these later monuments were begun in a dramatic burst of pious activity early in the reign of the Vakataka emperor Harisena, who came to power in c. 460 A.D. Then, no more than a few years after his death in c. 477, patronage at the site stopped suddenly and forever. But what was created within this span of less than two decades was accomplished under the most powerful dynasty of the time; and it was achieved at the very apogee of India's Golden Age. Thus it has left us with a veritable illustrated history of those times, crowded with information and remarkably preserved.[1]

Harisena, with his power centered in ancient Vidarbha (eastern Maharashtra) was surely the greatest king in India, and possibly in the entire world, at this time.[2] By the end of his reign his sway extended over the whole of central India from the western to the eastern sea, as we know from the conquests recorded in an inscription of his chief minister in Cave 16.[3] However, like the ancient province of Asmaka just to the south, and Anupa to the north, ancient Risika, in which Ajanta was included, was already part of the extensive domains that Harisena inherited when he came to power; he did not have to conquer it. That is why, just a year or

[1] For evidence bearing upon Ajanta's "Short Chronology", see Spink 1991A, 1991B.
[2] See Map of Harisena's domains in c. 477.
[3] Ajanta Cave 16 inscription, verse 18 (See Appendix).

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

two after Harisena's accession, it was possible for the ambitious undertakings at Ajanta to begin.

The high-powered courtly patrons who initiated Ajanta's renaissance were surely energized by interests political as well as pious. They included the imperial chief minister, Varahadeva, donor of Cave 16 as well as the Ghatotkacha vihara a dozen miles away; the local Risika king, Upendragupta, responsible for the adjacent complex of Caves 17, 18, 19, 20 and the short-lived Cave 29; the well-connected monk Buddhabhadra who, drawing authority from his friendship with the great minister of Asmaka, "who was attached to him (*the monk*) in friendship through many successive births" (Ajanta 26 inscription, verse 9), sponsored the huge caitya Cave 26 and various related caves; and one Mathuradasa, both rich and influential, who donated the largest of all of the caves at the site—the doom-ridden Cave 4. A number of other donors also participated in this inaugural activity but their inscriptions have either been lost or (more probably) were never written, for many of Ajanta's caves were still very incomplete when the involvement of such patrons was traumatically disrupted hardly a decade and a half later.

The emperor Harisena, although obviously approving of the vast project in which so many of his courtiers were playing a part, apparently did not get directly involved himself until work at the site had already been underway for four or five years. As a consequence, his sumptuously "regal" Cave 1 had to be cut in a less than ideal location at the eastern extremity of the site, because all of the more central areas of the scarp had already been taken during the first few years of burgeoning patronage. But, as if in compensation, Harisena's splendid cave benefited mightily from the experience that the excavators had already gained by this time; in striking contrast to the relatively clumsy Cave 16, started by his chief minister when Ajanta's renaissance was just getting underway less than five years before, the highly elaborate and yet dignified Cave 1 is truly a monument "fit for a king".[4]

Not the least remarkable thing about Ajanta's Vakataka renaissance is that this was the very first such excavation project to have been initiated anywhere in India for over three hundred years. As

[4] For Cave 1, see Spink 1981.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

a consequence, the artists were totally unfamiliar with the procedures needed for both laying out and for cutting the caves, and had little awareness of the problems presented by the soberingly flawed basaltic scarp into which, as the inscriptions agree, they were expected to cut halls that would rival "the palaces of the lord of gods" (Ajanta Cave 16 inscription: verse 27). The history of Ajanta's evolution during this brief period is a history of discovery—not so much the discovery of new forms as the discovery of the ability to incorporate the complex forms already known from the structural architecture of the day into this totally unfamiliar rockcut medium.

Thus, during the first few years of work, in the early 460s, the excavators, approaching the mass of the mountain with evident diffidence, used many of the features of the simple earlier (Hinayana) caves at Ajanta itself for models, copying the typically early octagonal pillar shafts, the plain windows, the non-"trabeated" doorways, and the pillarless and shrineless vihara interiors.[5] However, year by year, they incorporated more complex and up-to-date forms. Already by 465 they were adding peristyles to their viharas, and by 466 every new vihara was planned with a shrine at the rear, those that had already been started without such shrines being revised to include them.

Meanwhile, under the pressure of an insistent patronage, which surely involved a rivalry among the artists as well as among the proud donors, the sculptural decoration of the caves more and more approached the lavish norms that we see in the splendid, and clearly contemporaneous, wooden palace structures so often represented in the Ajanta murals themselves. Needless to say, the pillars and walls in the caves, being monolithic, had to be much thicker than their wooden counterparts. However, as time went on they made a virtue of necessity by exuberantly decorating the strong multifaceted pillars and broad capitals with increasingly elaborate carved designs. Doorway forms and window frames and even the Buddha images follow a similarly urgent pathway toward complexity.[6] It sometimes seems that every later form and every later artist is trying to outdo and even reproach that which came just before, making of Ajanta the perfect vessel to hold, and to reveal, the fullest flowering of this still-crescent age.

[5] See Defining Features.
[6] See Development of Iconographic Features at Ajanta and related sites.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

The apparent "development" that takes place in hardly more than a decade as Ajanta's carvers move from an initial diffidence to an exuberant assurance must finally be seen more as a conquest of the medium than as a "stylistic" evolution". In the end what the artists achieve, after a few years of struggle, is a splendid and elaborate expression of the highly evolved style of the day, adjusted to the special requirements and potentialities of the rock-cut medium.

Looking at the mural paintings, on the other hand, we see no such struggle—no such "development" from a diffident simplicity to an insistent complexity. This is because the painters could decorate the walls of caves in essentially the same way that they had always decorated the walls of structural palaces, temples, and the like. The great variety of "styles" seen in the Vakataka period murals can hardly be explained on the basis of their dating, since they were all done within the span of little more than a decade, from 468 to 480.[7] The explanation, instead, lies in the fact that they were done by many different artists from many different regions, all drawn to the site by the promise of employment and by Ajanta's growing fame. In fact, many of them may have previously worked at the courts of Ajanta's present patrons, and may well have come to the site already supplied with familiar compositions, which they could then transfer to Ajanta's walls.

As members of traditional artists' families the workers who made Ajanta's paintings could, almost certainly, use the chisel as well as the brush, and must have been ready to do so. Otherwise there would never have been work enough to keep them employed, and to justify their coming from so far away. It is obvious that the excavation of the caves and the carving of the decoration was quite time-consuming, but all of the mud-plastering (in preparation for painting) and all of the painting itself would hardly have taken a few dozen artists more than a year or so to accomplish, if the actual time spent on such work over the course of the site's growth was all added up together.

If Michelangelo, working in the far more time-consuming medium of buon fresco could paint the whole of the Sistine ceiling in four years, it is reasonable to hypothesize that an equivalent Vakataka

[7] See Chronology of the Paintings at Ajanta.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

artist could have finished all of the Mahayana mural and ceiling painting at Ajanta in four decades for, (speaking very approximately) the area covered in the caves amounts to about ten times that covered by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel. Or to put it another way, the amount of painting done at Ajanta during the two decades or so of its development was barely enough to have occupied a few dozen painters for more than a year or two had they worked steadily at the task of painting alone.

Of course, judging from an analysis of "hands", it is clear that there were at least a few dozen different painters working at the site during the course of Vakataka patronage there. Therefore, if we do not want to indulge in evident rationalization, arguing that individual painters (almost certainly from diverse regions) merely dropped in at the site to work for a few weeks each while the carvers all stayed for years (or as some would have it, for decades) in order to get their part of the work done, then we have to explain how the painters, when they were not painting, were kept occupied; and the only reasonable assumption is that they were artisans with varied skills rather than specifically painters. In fact, they might best be considered sculptors and excavators first and foremost, for the plastering and painting of the caves represents only a brief final aspect of their work.

It is hardly surprising, considering the shortness of the time-span involved—during much of which, in fact, work was interrupted by one crisis or another—that most of the Vakataka caves at Ajanta, like the contemporary excavations at Aurangabad (Caves 1, 3, and 4A) and Varahadeva's Ghatotkacha vihara, were never completed. In the case of the local king's splendid complex (Caves 17–20, 29) its unfinished state was due to his defeat by the aggressive Asmakas shortly after 470, while the remaining caves were ultimately doomed to varying degrees of incompletion by the political turbulence attendant upon the great emperor Harisena's death less than a decade later. However, as we might expect, high priority was given to getting the shrines completed, especially in times of crisis, since merit could not be obtained until the shrine image was completed and dedicated. Furthermore, because of the insistent need for accommodations, the monks took up residence in the caves as soon as it was feasible to do so, whether they were finished or not. About half of them were finally occupied, a few as early as 468, but the majority not until after 475 or even later.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

In caves such as Lower 6 and 17, where worship went on for as much as a decade, the walls and especially the ceilings became heavily coated with soot from oil lamps and incense burners. By contrast, in excavations which were never put into worship, such as the emperor's own Cave 1, the paintings show no evidence of such grime at all. In fact, ironically, we owe the remarkable preservation of the paintings at the site to the sudden collapse of the exuberant Vakataka patronage that produced them. For when, following Harisena's death, the great empire, assaulted by a coalition of its own feudatories under the leadership of the ambitious king of Asmaka, shattered into its component parts, Ajanta's ravine was suddenly deserted once again. Not a single painting or sculpture or donative inscription at the site, to say nothing of excavation work of any kind, can be dated after c.480.[8] And by this time all of the artists and surely most of the monks had gone away, for the site's nourishing patronage was by then cut off completely, the funds once assigned to things of the spirit now being turned to the usages of war.

The fall of the great Vakataka house—a trauma so important in India's history that it was recalled detail by detail in Dandin's quasi-historical Visrutacarita—plunged the whole of central India into a time of troubles from which it did not recover until well into the next century. But if the precipitous collapse of the Vakataka house and the shock waves that it produced had an unforgettable impact upon India's future, the achievements of that house, during the reign of the all-too-little-honored emperor Harisena, will be equally unforgettable, once they are understood. For the Vakataka house, under Harisena, did nothing less than sponsor, and briefly preserve, the final flowering of India's Golden Age, at a moment in history when the previously transcendent Gupta power was already beginning its long decline. It is under the Vakatakas, not the Guptas, that India's Golden Age reaches its apogee, and (on a more somber note) it is the sudden Vakataka collapse, not the slow disintegration of the Gupta empire, that is the chief determinant of the direction of India's history in the late fifth and early sixth centuries.

The remarkable thing is this: that the Vakataka phase at Ajanta, occupying the brief span of time between 462 and 480, not only reflects the forms and the ideals of this culminating moment of the

[8] Spink 1991A.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Golden Age—does so as no other monument can, because of the remarkable state of preservation—but, with its developmental and its epigraphic evidence, it also uniquely reveals the political situation and the historical events which make a truer and more profound interpretation of the history of this period possible. Thus at Ajanta, on the one hand, we have a vast catalog of forms, sponsored by the most important leaders of the times, describing the material culture and the aesthetic and spiritual attitudes of the highpoint of this age, and on the other hand we have a developing site which acts as a document both revealing the course of events on its own, and confirming or clarifying the evidence of relevant literary or epigraphic records. What this finally means is that at Ajanta we have a richly fascinating pictorial history of the culminating moment of India's classic age—a history no less fascinating for the fact that it is ultimately a tragedy. And it is the evidence at Ajanta alone that finally makes this history understandable.

We will outline this originally hope-filled, yet finally tragic, history in the pages that follow.

When Ajanta's Vakataka phase was inaugurated by the impressive array of patrons that we have mentioned earlier, it is evident that ancient Risika (which included the Ajanta region) and ancient Asmaka (the region just to the south) were at peace, for each of those powers was sponsoring one of the new caitya halls at the site. However, by c. 468, this happy situation had changed, and the old antagonism between these two regions (referred to in the Cave 17 inscription) had resurfaced, with sobering effects upon the local economic and political situation. It seems clear that Asmaka was already threatening the region with its aggressive expansionism at this time. This would explain why work was abandoned in 468 on so many caves at the site, the shrines alone being rushed toward completion, at least wherever that appeared to be feasible, as in some of the excavations that were nearly complete at this time (Caves Lower 6, 7, 11, and 15). By the end of 468—and in the case of the inimical Asmakas' Cave 26, some months before—work had stopped on every excavation at the site except for Caves 17–20, and Cave 1.[9] Significantly, these more "privileged" undertakings were the donations of

[9] Upendragupta's Cave 29, started in 469, was soon abandoned.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

the local king, Upendragupta, on the one hand, and of the Vakataka emperor, Harisena, on the other. During the next three years or so work continued on these regal caves alone.[10]

Whereas the emperor Harisena's recently inaugurated Cave 1 may have been continued because as overlord he was above this local dispute, Upendragupta's urgent continuation of work on his own complex was surely an eleventh hour attempt to get merit while he could, or to have his piety rewarded by a return to peace. In any case, such wishes did not come true, for by 471, in Upendragupta's beautiful even though still unfinished caves, there is clear evidence of yet another rush (similar to that of 468) to finish the central images and to get the caves dedicated before time ran out. This was accomplished, albeit hastily, in Caves 17 and 20; while the gem-like caitya hall, Cave 19, was more carefully brought almost to completion. However, time surely ran out sooner than expected; not only is there clear evidence that Cave 19 was never put into use, but Upendragupta did not even have the chance to get its dedicatory inscription composed, sent down from the capital, and inscribed on the panel that had already been prepared to receive it. As for Harisena's Cave 1, still far from finished at this time, work now broke off on it too, further suggesting the kind of turmoil that the region must have been in by the end of 471, this second moment of drastic interruption in the site's development. The reason for this turmoil is revealed when work at the site finally starts up again in 475, for at that point we find that the Asmakas (still of course feudatory to Harisena) have taken over the region.

The evidence for this shift of rule in the region is clear; for the Asmakas' Cave 26 complex, after having been totally abandoned since 468, now is accorded particular attention, while the unfinished caves of Upendragupta's complex are left just as they were when work on them was so traumatically interrupted in 471. Despite its connection with the fallen king, Upendragupta's Cave 17 was indeed utilized, probably because, being essentially complete, it could provide much-needed housing for some forty monks, but any use of Caitya Cave 19 for worship was clearly disallowed. Indeed, the new Asmaka rulers went farther than that: they brutally violated Cave 19's carefully planned-out structure by cutting a passageway right

[10] See Time Chart.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

through its court cells, in order to reach their own excavations (the Cave 26 complex) more conveniently.

Although work was never taken up again on the defeated Upendragupta's caves, the rest of the site, now that the Asmakas had taken over the region, flourished mightily for the next few years. Judging from the rapidity with which work got started again in 475, it appears that great numbers of artists, along with allied workers, moved back to the site as quickly as they could. Many had surely spent the troubled years from 468 onward working on the new excavations at Bagh, in peaceful Anupa, which, as we know from the historical evidence in the Visrutacarita, was under the vicegerency of one of Harisena's sons during this period.[11] Indeed, the excavations at Bagh were probably inaugurated at just this time, due to the sudden availability of so many out-of-work and highly skilled craftsmen. Many of Bagh's features—stylistic, iconographic, and technological—suggest such an immediate influence from the already-started Vakataka caves at Ajanta while, in a significant turnabout, we can see a profound influence of forms developed at Bagh upon the post-475 Ajanta excavations.

However, Ajanta's seasons, whether fat or lean, were always brief. After only a few years' burgeoning growth under the Asmaka's control, the event which was to destroy both site and dynasty occurred: in 477, at the height of his power, the great emperor Harisena suddenly and unexpectedly died. We know that this doom-laden event came without warning, for Harisena's splendid Cave 1 was neither fully finished, nor inscribed, never having been put into worship before his death, even though all of this could have been easily accomplished in a matter of weeks or even days had this shattering blow been anticipated.

The news of Harisena's death and the accession of his weak son and successor (Sarvasena III) suddenly changed the political realities in the region, and initiated yet a third moment in the site's history when patrons felt compelled to rush their main Buddhas to completion while there might still be time to do so. With the great emperor gone, it appears that the local (now Asmaka) rulers asserted themselves afresh, establishing priorities in the region which militated—

[11] For this and other evidence from the Visrutacarita (the eighth ucchvasa of Dandin's Dasakumaracarita) see Chapter 4.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

the word is apt—against such luxuries as these ultimately self-aggrandizing religious benefactions. Thus once again, though surely hoping for an eventual change of fortune, the patrons of the caves at Ajanta, and also at Ghatotkacha, faced up to the situation; they abandoned their plans for the further excavation and decoration of their caves, and concentrated all their efforts upon the completion of the images alone, in order to get them dedicated, and to receive the merit from so doing before time ran out.

The images in these caves—caves 2, 4, Upper 6, 7, 11 (revised), 15 (revised), and 16, as well as in Varahadeva's Ghatotkacha vihara—were expediently finished during the first months of this troubled year (478), just after Harisena's death. However, it is highly significant that work continued quite confidently on the caves at the western extremity of the site, as well as the related excavations at Aurangabad. In all of these undertakings the excavation and the decoration of caves where there was some hope of completion (Caves 21, 23, and the Cave 26 complex only) continued in a more or less normal fashion throughout 478. However, despite the Asmaka's primacy, caves such as Cave 24 and Cave 28, which were still very incomplete when Harisena died, were summarily abandoned, while the main image in Cave 21 finally had to be finished in a rush probably due to the precedence of military concerns.

Ominously, about midway in this fateful year (478), the monk Buddhabhadra, surely reflecting the political stance of the Asmaka court with which he was so closely connected, had inscribed his long dedicatory inscription upon the nearly-completed Cave 26. "Ominously", we say, because although he lavishly praised the Asmaka king, the recently deceased Asmaka minister (in whose honor the cave was dedicated), and the latter's successor, he strikingly omitted any mention whatsoever of the Vakataka overlord himself!

If we give credence to the profoundly revealing evidence of the Visrutacarita—long suspect only because scholars, by dating Harisena's reign too late, invalidated many significant synchronisms—the Asmakas' Cave 26 inscription, with its implied declaration of independence, throws a sudden and harsh light on the course of empire. For if the Cave 26 inscription shows that the Asmakas no longer would give allegiance to the Vakataka overlord, the Visrutacarita shows that this rejection of Vakataka imperial authority was part of an insidious Asmaka plot to ultimately take over the empire for themselves, using their forces not only from the outside but also from within.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Thus Dandin explains that the son of the minister of Asmaka, "under the pretext of being expelled by his father for his profligate conduct", came to the unsuspecting court of Harisena's weak successor, Sarvasena III, "with a numerous train of musicians and dancing girls . . . and numerous retainers and spies in various disguises", (Kale 1966, 356) where he successfully corrupted the young king with wine, women, and song, along with pernicious political counsel.[12] This "mole" was none other than the son of the present minister of Asmaka who, as is clear from Buddhabhadra's inscription, had acceded to his position in 478 or shortly before; and the son apparently had absorbed his powers of devious diplomacy from his father, for the Cave 26 record (verse 10) tells us that he "accomplishes with tact and sweetness only, even such tasks as would normally call for rigours and active struggle". The rigors and struggle would all too soon be the responsibility of the military.

At such a critical moment, it is no wonder that all of the programs of work at the site broke off completely; for the Asmakas, having not only asserted their own independent control over the region but also having announced their intention of destroying the whole Vakataka house, would surely have needed every available rupee to achieve the latter goal. Now, even in the Cave 26 complex, the original work-program was finally abandoned. The great Dying Buddha in Cave 26's left aisle, carved in 478, poignantly witnesses the ultimate demise of the site's original patronage. It is among the very last images to have been undertaken as part of the planned programs of work at the site, cut off as they all were by the mounting threat of (and preparations for) war, the declaration of which was clearly anticipated by the insulting omission of any mention of the Vakataka overlord in the Cave 26 inscription. However, activity at the site was by no means over yet, even though at this point the original patrons, including the monk Buddhabhadra himself, could no longer continue work on the caves that they had so proudly started.

It is a surprising fact that during the site's heyday each cave was sponsored by a single patron, and by that patron alone. Not a single image was ever donated by anyone else right up through 478, when the site's bureaucracy, along with the strictures that it had

[12] See Chapter 4 for a detailed explication of the Visrutacarita.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

imposed, finally broke down. Incidentally, there is telling proof of the brevity of this main period of Vakataka patronage, when all of the "consistent" excavation and decoration of the caves was accomplished. This is because most of the known patrons who were involved in the later phase's dramatic inauguration in the early 460s were still alive at the end of the site's heyday, when they were rushing to get their shrine images dedicated. Assuming that most of these great patrons were already mature when they decided to make their donations, actuarial considerations alone would lead to the conclusion that the site's main phase of development could hardly have taken more than two decades, particularly at a time when life expectancies were much less than today.

The patrons known to have been active over this whole span of development have been mentioned before: the Vakataka minister Varahadeva; the rich Mathuradasa; the monk Buddhabhadra, as well as the monks Bhadrabandhu and Dharmadatta, whom he thanks for "having seen to the excavation and completion of (Cave 26) on my behalf" (Ajanta Cave 26 inscription, verse 14); and of course we must include the emperor Harisena himself who, having approved and allowed this vast undertaking, became more and more actively associated with it throughout the years of its flourishing—until its remarkable flowering was cut off by his sudden death.

By contrast, during the Period of Disruption from mid-478 through 480, when the overweening administrative control that had characterized the site's heyday so suddenly collapsed, dozens of anxious devotees, who had never been able to make such offerings before (even during its troubled years when work on the various caves had been abandoned!) took advantage of the anarchic state into which the site had fallen, to add their own votive images wherever they wished. Either carved and painted, or merely painted, and often individually inscribed, these new offerings were placed wherever it was convenient inside or outside the caves which had been so suddenly and so sadly abandoned by their original patrons.

The earliest of these intrusive images may have been placed in the suddenly abandoned "Vakataka" caves, as early as mid-478, and shortly thereafter, by the beginning of 479, in the Asmaka caves. Typically, they were placed in the "highest priority" locations available, such as those near the shrine, or where the light was good, or where the wall surfaces had already been smoothed and/or plastered. These new images were added in a helter-skelter fashion, without

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

taking any account whatsoever of the original patrons' well-laid plans or the master-artists' intentions. Only two restrictions seem to have applied. First: one should never cut away any Buddha or stupa image unless such an image had not been previously completed. Second: these intrusions should not be added to caves that had not been dedicated. The latter "rule" explains why seemingly fine locations in many of the large half-completed caves are totally lacking any such intrusions, and why the emperor Harisena's prestigious Cave 1, where a good deal of already-plastered wall space was still available, was also free of any such intrusions.

It is revealing to discover, from the evidence of their inscriptions, that nearly all of the intrusions at the site were the votive offerings of monks living on at the site after 478, waiting in vain for the political and economic situation to improve. Although there was probably no better place to go in these turbulent times, the artists who carved or painted the images for them may have been staying on in the same vain hope. By now the laden caravans and the rich travelers that had nourished the site during Harisena's "Pax Vakataka" no longer dared to travel the roads; and not only courtly but local offerings too must have dried up due to the trauma of the times.

However, the fact that such intrusive work stops very abruptly reveals that the times had not improved. Indeed, they had only worsened. By the end of 480, as this brief period of anxious hope turned into one of anxious despair, the still remaining craftsmen must have already been leaving in increasing numbers, for the simple reason that they had to feed their families. However, the final exodus of the workmen appears to have been precipitous, for we find a host of the latest intrusions, some very close to being finished, left in a state of abrupt incompletion, as if cut off by some sudden crisis, all on the same day. Indeed, this may reflect the moment when, according to the Visrutacarita, the Asmaka coalition, marching north toward an expected confrontation with the Vakataka forces on the Narmada river, passed through the Ajanta region.

Even after this moment of trauma late in 480, when all artistic patronage at the site totally ended, it is clear that a few monks, either using financial resources remaining from better days, or sustaining themselves by allowing nearby villagers to fill their begging bowls, lived and continued to worship in a few of the caves for a few years. Significant signs of usage, such as wear in the pivot-holes of the doorways of cells in some of the very latest caves, clearly suggest

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

this. But such continued activity could not have lasted for long, or else the smoke damage from oil lamps and incense burners in these few caves would have been much greater than it is.

By sometime in the 480s the site was abandoned completely. One would have heard there neither the sound of chanting nor that of chiseling, as the valley was returned, in the words of the Cave 26 inscription (verse 18) to the "chirping of the birds and the chattering of the monkeys."

Just as we can say that the start of the Period of Disruption reflects the decision of the Asmakas to go through with their long-festering plan to overthrow the great Vakataka house, the sudden end of this anxious spate of activity two or three years later reveals that their insurrection must have been going badly by that time, and that there was no hope, any more, that activity at the site was going to start up again in the foreseeable future. The Asmakas, after instigating the insurrection against the central house, in which numerous Vakataka feudatories took part, did indeed achieve part of their goal: they destroyed the great Vakataka empire. But because they were not able, as Dandin says, to greedily "take over the whole plunder for themselves" and thus keep the vast domains together, the whole great imperium disintegrated. It shattered into its many component parts; and with this disintegration of the Vakataka house India's Golden Age came to a startling end.[13]

It is indeed remarkable that deep in the ravine beneath "this best of mountains" (Ajanta Cave 16 inscription, verse 23), this unique record of India's material and spiritual culture, revealed at the very apogee of its Golden Age, still exists. As has been shown, Ajanta's record is a poignantly brief one; but the happy irony of its tragic history is the fact that the site—with all that it can tell us—was preserved by the very destruction of the great empire that created it. It was solely because of the Vakatakas' fall that Ajanta's development was cut off so decisively, at the very height of its fullest and freshest flowering; and it was because of the profound political and religious changes that the collapse of the great house wrought, that Ajanta was left undisturbed, in virtual solitude, over the subsequent centuries.

[13] Quoted from Ryder 1927, 215.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

> "A man continues to enjoy himself in paradise as long as his memory is green in the world", declares the patron of the vast Cave 26 complex. "One should (therefore) set up a memorial on the mountains that will endure for as long as the moon and the sun continue". (Ajanta Cave 26 inscription, verse 8)

If we allow the evidence to speak, this is precisely what Harisena and his courtiers have done. They have made available to a world that otherwise would never know its richness, the verdant landscape of this ancient dynasty.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

CHAPTER TWO

A QUERY AND A RESPONSE

I. A Query by Dr. von Stietencron

Questions Addressed to Walter Spink
Heinrich von Stietencron, Tübingen

A few days after the Vākāṭaka Conference in Groningen, I wrote a letter to Walter Spink. Earlier I had told him that I found it difficult to accept his short chronology. But when I saw him at the conference, so lively and charming, so enthusiastic about Ajanta and the results of his meticulous research, I refrained from discussing my problems in public. There was so much joy in him, so much pleasure to present the results of a lifetime's research to a qualified audience! And he did it so magnificently well; one could feel his attachment to the place and its beauty as well as his fascination with bringing history to life by joining bits of scattered information to form a coherent picture. Not even the technical problems with the projector could abate his radiance during this memorable performance.

During the conference we did not find time for serious discussion. The e-mail correspondence that followed was cut short by his departure to India. His reply was very friendly: he had been faced with disbelief before, but no reasons were adduced that could make him change his mind. He would think about my points and hoped to continue our exchange of views after returning from Ajanta. Meanwhile I should read his chapter on Daṇḍin.

My questions remained unanswered and the problem unsolved. We are all so busy with absorbing tasks—he in Ajanta, I in Orissa. So the matter came to a stand. But Hans Bakker wanted the Vākāṭaka group to be able to share in our argument. I therefore submit my questions to a wider audience. They are simple and have probably been asked by others also. Compared to my original letter, the present version is only slightly elaborated, but it contains a reference to Daṇḍin that was not there in the original.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Dear Walter,

You are right: I should visit Ajanta again. I know it would be delightful to be there and look afresh at that beauty in stone after many years!

And you are wise: to know that what we are trying to find out—and hope to complete—is much more rewarding than what we have already done and finished with. But this, I feel, should not prevent us from reconsidering earlier findings or choices.

I can see what pushed you into accepting your short chronology. You have presented your case clearly enough. But the truth is that our knowledge about the Vākāṭakas is poor and about the Aśmakas still much poorer. Also the real position of the local Lord is not very clear, in spite of his grandiose inscription. Was there a fort protecting the Ghāṭ? Was there a city? There was a road no doubt at some distance from the caves, but that is not sufficient as a regular provider for the basic needs of several major *vihāra*s.

What do we know about the monks dwelling there? How many would there have been during Hariṣeṇa's time? Did they stay in the caves only during the rainy season, or was there a Buddhist community of monks throughout the year, hosting travelling *bhikṣus*, providing education for the region's youths and offering both medical care and spiritual assistance for the area's population? Did the Vākāṭaka kings seek spiritual and political advice from the heads of monasteries in Ajanta? It appears to me, that extensive cave-building resulting from your research can not be explained without presupposing a major and influential monastic community. But this very supposition raises further questions.

Supposing the extraordinary boom in architecture and sculpture that you propose for Ajanta was really an historical fact—about 25 caves (some unfinished) during the short period of less than 20 years of Hariṣeṇa's reign—don't you agree that it would have made a monastic life in meditation and seclusion in the narrow valley totally impossible? It is clear that in order to complete that amount of work there must have been a large number of workers in the valley. The alternative scenario, known from other places, that the monks themselves did the work as a kind of service to the Lord, dividing their time between prayer, meditation, going out for alms, comforting—or giving counsel to—the devotees and trying their hand with the chisel in the remaining time does also produce results, but is far too slow to fit into your time table.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

A countercheck could be helpful:
Even for a master architect it takes time to plan in detail a new cave and to survey the excavations. Whatever is cut away by mistake can not be replaced. Excavation, therefore, is to be done carefully and consequently slow. How many months are required for how many people to only do the rough work of a single cave? Some of them, as you know better than anyone else, are highly complex and huge.

Even if the excavated material is thrown into the river gorge, it probably has to be carried out by a crew of people other than the masons. The more caves are worked on simultaneously, the more people are needed. Where do all these people live, how are they fed, where is the fertile soil for the rice and vegetables they need, how many bullock carts are required to bring sufficient nutrition from the low lands at some distance to the north up to the arid mountain range? After the harvest all this may be no problem. But the more people are working in the valley, the more difficulties will arise in providing food. In March, May and June when scorching heat slows down life in Maharashtra, the food situation will aggravate and work has probably to come almost to a halt. Then follow the rains blocking roads, stopping transports. Forget today's motorized supply system: think of fifth century roads, carts, and storage facility. For all we know, it is only in October that new crops start ending food scarcity. During the six month from April to September we may have to reckon with but little progress of work at Ajanta. If that is correct, it reduces your time-scale for work at the caves by almost 50%.

It is only after rough excavation of the cave that the creative work of the sculptors can begin. They start work at the porch pillars with all their rich detail including the capitals, and at the façade and entrance to the cave. Then follow the various attendant figures and lastly special care is to be given to the main images! One master sculptor requires months to finish one exquisite sculpture. How many such masterpieces are there at a single cave, how many on all the caves in total? How much time was needed to execute them, often in places difficult of access, by how many highly skilled people?

But here the questions do not end. After the sculptors have finished, when the dust and dirt is removed and the entire cave has been thoroughly cleaned, the painters can start their work. The scaffolding is to be made for painting the ceiling and the upper walls. For com-

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

parison, you could check the time Michelangelo needed to paint the Sixtina's ceiling with more advanced technology. Just calculate the size of the painted surfaces of Ajanta: what a huge task to do after the sculptors had finished their work!

The result of all this is one single cave. Logistics become considerably more complicated if several caves are under work at the same time. The path along the cliff is narrow; access will mostly be blocked by stones cut out from the caves or by people carrying the materials for scaffolding or food. The physical situation in the valley is such that it is certainly difficult to have many people at work simultaneously. This applies to the psychological situation as well: there will be constant quarrel since patrons are many, all wanting to have their own cave finished soon. The farther back in the valley their cave is situated, the more is the access blocked by others. Quarrel between the working groups will arise. Rivalry, even animosity among the donors cannot be ruled out in such a situation, and this will be the case among the artists also. All this does not favour a smooth and well organized progress of work in the valley.

When war diverted the flow of money to the front, the work had to slow down or stop altogether. I would be surprised if you could positively claim that none of the patrons and donors were involved in—or having to contribute to—wars during those years of Hariṣeṇa's reign except at their end. That would lead to temporary reduction or even stoppage of work. When a patron died or lost an influential position, the consequences are likely to have been similar.

I am sure you can think of more factors than these. Maybe you find at least some of them worth thinking about. But let me add one more note. Your crown witness for historical events at the time of Hariṣeṇa is Daṇḍin and his *Daśakumāracita*, Daṇḍin writes about 8 or 9 generations later, at the end of the 7th or early 8th century. It is a long time after the events—and he does not explicitly write about the history of Vidarbha. Nor does he himself seem to belong to Vidarbha. His sources are, as you yourself admitted, uncertain. But that he is not in the habit to cling faithfully to transmitted texts is clear in the same work from his handling of stories that have parallels in the *Kathāsaritsāgara* and probably go back to the *Bṛhatkathā*. Daṇḍin's book is a splendid piece of literature, but its reliability as a source of Vidarbha's history, as claimed by Mirashi, remains doubtful.

I wish I could do away with all these doubts about your chronology. You are the expert. You probably have all the answers and

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

will, in due course, convince me! I am looking forward to that event to happen! If it does not, there remains the fact that you have firmly established a relative chronology of the caves. That would remain valid even if the time span were considerably expanded.

Cordially yours, Henry

II. A Response to Dr. Stietencron

Ajanta: The character of the site

Just as in our previous correspondence Dr. Stietencron's challenging comments and questions—and it is fair to say that he is speaking for a number of colleagues—have forced me to think in various new and productive ways, focusing in particular on the site as a living and growing and struggling entity. Dr. Stietencron is adding his own admirable personal touch to my chronological concerns, and whereas I will continue to resist, with pleasure, all assaults on the notorious Short Chronology, or on my perhaps blind trust in Dandin's retelling of the Vakataka debacle, I certainly appreciate and have learned from his humanizing concerns about the rain and the sun and the roads and the harvest and working conditions—the effects of crowding and of competition—and about just how much a man could be expected to do in a day. I have, I think, tempered many of my arguments because of his kindly prodding, although I may not have moved as far from my established position on either Ajanta or Dandin's compelling account as many of my colleagues have advised. If I did that, the pleasure which I take in arguing, both for its own sake and for the sake of Harisena, would be significantly compromised.

What strikes me in Dr. Stietencron's present letter—and I had not thought of this before—is that we are really talking about two different sites. He is thinking of Ajanta as "a major and influential monastic community" which was involved in "hosting traveling bhikshus, providing education for the region's youths and offering both medical care and spiritual assistance for the area's population", including "the Vakataka kings, who (may have sought) spiritual advice from the heads of monasteries." If such a site was developed "during the short period of less than 20 years of Harisena's reign—don't you agree that it would have made a monastic life in meditation and seclusion in the narrow valley totally impossible?"

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Dr. Stietencron's observations would be better applied to Ajanta's sister site at Bagh, which was developed at approximately the same time as Ajanta, but was fortunate in not being embroiled in the local conflicts which at Ajanta caused first the cutback of work during the Recession (roughly 469–471) and then the Hiatus (roughly 472–474) when a local war embroiled the region. Even more important, Bagh did not undergo the sudden disruption which attended Harisena's death, but continued in its service both to the monks and to the community well into the 480s, if not later. As I have argued at length, the Dasakumaracarita makes it clear that the Anupa region, in which Bagh lay, was able to resist the Asmaka-led insurrection, primarily due to the force and wisdom of the wily Prince Visruta, whom I identify with the Maharaja Subandhu of Mashismati. In his Bagh plate, datable to the mid 480s, Subandhu, aware of the needs of this going monastic concern, makes a grant "to be used for (defraying the expense of) perfume, frankincense, flowers and offerings as well as for maintaining an alms-house, for repairing broken and rent portions (of the vihara) and for providing the community of Venerable Monks coming from (all) the four quarters, with clothing, food, nursing of the sick, beds, seats as well as medicine in the Monastery."[1]

This is the kind of monastery that Dr. Stietencron is talking about—but it is not Ajanta. Ajanta (in its Vakataka phase) is a monastery in process, started in great hope and fervor, but finally abandoned by its worried and disillusioned patrons before it was ever significantly used for worship. The value of a thoroughgoing step by step analysis (which I translate, for convenience, into a year to year development) is that we can better consider observations such as those offered by Dr. Stietencron. We need to know the general direction in which we are going, even if we still have to feel our way through the emerging excavations. Then we can better understand the seeming chaos of scraping and pounding which surely attended the site's development where, at least at first, there was little more than inexperience to be the laborers' guide.

"How was the monastery itself functioning in the midst of so much furor?" Dr. Stietencron asks. The point is: Ajanta was never a proper and workable monastic establishment. This is of course evident at its start, when the excavators for the first time in over three hundred years, faced the site's recalcitrant scarp, inaugurating over the course

[1] Mirashi 1955, 19–21.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

of the next three or four years no less than twenty major excavations which as yet no one could possibly live in. As Dr. Stietencron asserts, to do this work "there must have been a large number of workers in the valley". This is certainly true, and when the excavators first appeared at the site, holding the simple plans provided by their patrons' planners, they were totally inexperienced at this kind of work.

However, this does not mean that Dr. Stietencron's assumption—that the inaugural excavations had to be "done carefully and consequently slowly", aware that "whatever is cut away by mistake can not be replaced"—describes the situation or the concerns of these first workers. Innocent of both spirit levels and measuring tapes, they began cutting the earliest caves—the hall of the largest, Cave 4, being roughly 90' × 90'—with little more than their eyes as their guide. Consequently, nearly all of the earliest caves splay outward as excavation proceeds toward the rear, making the rear aisle significantly longer from left to right than the front aisle. In fact, you can almost always distinguish an early cave from one by and large excavated after 470, by the outward angling of its side-walls, due to the stone being "cut away by mistake". And at the same time, in most of these caves, because of this same imprecision, the ceilings gradually angle upward as cutting proceeded toward the rear. In the huge Cave 4, the rise was a startling 4.5 feet—the floor following suit—by the time the shrine was reached in the early phase of work on the cave, which ended in 468. If this is not evident today, it is because the patron, or his planner, took on the huge task of correcting this embarrassing miscalculation by raising and leveling the ceilings in the second phase of work on the cave, after 475.

We should also consider Dr. Stietencron's question of "how many months are required for how many people to only do the rough work of a single cave?" This is course depends upon the number of excavators employed. Since, at least in happy times, money does not seem to have been a problem at the site, we can assume that there were a great number of men (and probably women too) at work. Even so, what must have been the maddeningly slow development of some of the minor caves suggests that their workers may have been lured—or ordered—away by some of the more powerful patrons who, because of their position or their wealth, had a particular clout.

I have often had students try to estimate the number of workers involved in the revealingly half-finished 75' × 75' × 13' (ht) hall of

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Cave 24, which (if my assumptions are correct) must have reached its present (abandoned) stage of excavation during the course of not more than three years (475–477). The students' estimates typically range from at least one hundred excavators (not counting the necessary support crews) to twice that amount or more, which seems reasonable, since this is a very large cave, and there was plenty of space in which to work. Although the adjacent Cave 25, started more than ten years before, was roughed out in a most general way before any details were added, in the much later Cave 24 work proceeded with great technical and conceptual sophistication "on everything at once". The beautiful carved elements in the porch were now being brought to completion even as the interior space and the pillars were gradually being reamed out; at the same time the residence cells were being penetrated sequentially as the rock was gradually removed from the aisles. As in nearly all other work at the site, this must have been done by contract—a great accelerator!

We should not be overly awed by the demands of excavation. If we ask people who have been staggered by the rock-cut Kailasa temple at Ellora to compare the effort that went into it with that required to build an identical structural stone temple out on the plain in front, it usually takes considerable arguing to convince them that merely releasing such a temple from the stone could be done much more quickly and cheaply than building up and securing carefully cut stone from a quarry to create its structural cousin. Nor should we underestimate the amount of stone which a single workman (or often a pair, one holding a large chisel and the other hammering) could do in a day. Basalt, although hard, cuts easily, as we can judge from the great arcs typically reamed out in the course of chiseling; and often its flaws can be used to advantage to speed the course of cutting. My assumption is that any worker, working on contract, who did not fulfill a quota of at least a cubic yard a day would be fired at the end of the week. At this rate a single worker could expose a huge hall the size of that of Cave 24 in about 2700 days or 7.42 years if working continuously with no days off; or 100 workers could accomplish the task in slightly less than a month (27 days). The time would be somewhat reduced if we realize that the twenty large pillars would be reserved in the process; on the other hand this estimate does not include the cells, or the shrine and shrine antechamber, or the porch and court. Furthermore, this estimate does not factor in any of the problems, technical or personal, that might arise; nor

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

does it consider the final detailed carving; nor does it allow for any "days off" for over seven years! The point is: it must have taken much longer than my figures "ideally" allow; but the point also is: we do not need to allow decades for such work to be done.

I have heard that Karl Khandalavala, at a conference, insisted that it would have taken fifty years to cut out the great caitya hall at Karle. John Irwin, however, in a response, commented that his only experience with excavation was digging foxholes in the war, but that on that basis he felt that five years would be more than adequate. Obviously one can work relatively fast when under pressure, either from enemy artillery or from rich and demanding patrons.

As for the decoration of the pillars, pilasters, doorways, and windows which in Cave 24 were all done after 475, we must realize that the forms, no matter how delightful, were basically conventional, even formulaic, and done by craftsmen who by this time (and indeed from their long family traditions) were highly experienced. Furthermore, by the 470s, in contrast to the diffidence of the 460s, they did not have to wait for the whole cave to be revealed before starting work on the details. This was true of painting too; and whereas Dr. Stietencron's statement that "after the sculptors have finished and the dust and dirt is removed . . . the painters can start their work" might be the case in an "ideal" site, it is not true at Ajanta, where generally, because of the need to rush, the painting of the hall was started while excavation (generally in the more rearward areas) was still going on.[2] Furthermore, decorative carvings or even motifs on the Buddhas' thrones or on doorways were often completed, probably by the same artists who did the sculptures, with the brush, both to add color or detail and to save time.

It is hardly surprising that among hereditary craftsmen such as those that worked at Ajanta little or no distinction would have been made between sculptors and painters; and Ajanta provides us with evidence that they were one and the same, as the situation required.[3] By the same token, as in traditional settings today, the work of a given artist might be intimately mingled with that of his sons or cousin-brothers. This could have speeded up the work; but in any

[2] The hall painted was started while cutting was still going on in Caves 2, Lower 6, 16, 17, 20, 21, 26. In Caves 1 and 19 the evidence does not allow a determination.

[3] See discussion of Cave 17 porch doorway.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

case, since there may have been as many as forty or fifty separate "hands" at work, and the painting, no matter how effective, tends to be simple, with an emphasis on linear definition, the problem facing an artist who was interested in painting alone was not the "huge task to do after the sculptors had finished their work", but rather the competition for assignments in what was clearly a buyer's market. A painter who got most of a whole wall to cover, like the artist (and his sons?) who painted the Mahajanaka Jataka in Cave 1 was very lucky indeed; most of the other ten or so painters in Cave 1 had far smaller assignments, and some of them may not have been called to work on any other paintings at the site.

However, none of Ajanta's splendid artists (or even the various bad ones) would have got very wealthy from painting Ajanta's murals or its ceilings, for these were tasks which could certainly have been accomplished in a matter of days or weeks or months rather than years. The greater portion of their pay must have come from the much more time-consuming work done on sculptured forms and features, on the far less desirable but necessary task of carefully smoothing the walls and ceiling and floors and pillar shafts, or (when the caves were first started) on gross excavation work. If we add up the total area of ceilings and walls that got painted during the period of the site's carefully programmed work, from 468, when the first painting was started, up to the death of Harisena late in 477, it amounts to (roughly) 49,500 square feet.[4] This would be approximately 1000 square feet for each of the (let us assume) 49 painters.[5] The ceiling of Cave 1 alone—approximately 5000 square feet in area—would alone equal the allotment of five painters.[6] No artist would have come all the way, by foot or by bullock cart, from villages or towns often very far away, armed with nothing but a paint brush.

[4] The calculations include the painting on doorways and windows, but not on pillars or facades. Areas where there were losses from the action of debris at the lower wall levels, or from the fall of (painted) plaster are of course included. Wall areas which were plastered but never painted are not counted. For reference, see Chronology of the paintings at Ajanta.

[5] Francoeur, 1998 estimates 49 hands at work. Although estimates by other scholars, including myself, will vary, her number seems reasonable, and I will use it, as an estimate, here.

[6] A very rough estimate of the painted ceiling and painted wall areas, figured up to the time of Harisena's death, follows. The rush to get the shrine areas done in 478 is no longer typical; like work in the Period of Disruption, the work of 478 has been omitted from our count.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Dr. Stietencron is concerned about how all of the sculptures in the caves could possibly be done in the time which I have allotted, and this is certainly a matter that requires discussion when we consider the burst of demanding activity which occurred after the Asmakas took over control of the site in 475. But before this time (except in the royal caves of Upendragupta and Harisena to be discussed below) the amount of such demanding work was remarkably limited, and ended completely as soon as the Recession started at the end of 468. Between 462, the time of the site's inauguration, and 475, only three porch doorways (those of Lower 6, 15, and 16, all done just before the Recession) got carved, but their sculptural decoration limited to their flanking pilasters and supported goddesses. The shrine doorway of Cave 7 is equally simple.[7] Only the shrine doorway of Cave Lower 6, probably completed along with the Buddha image in the productive climate of 468 but painted in 469, is particularly elaborate. No windows were decorated at all prior to the Recession, while the pillars revealed by the excavators up to this time had characteristically simple octagonal shafts, and were bereft of the elaborate capital decorations characteristic of post-475 work.

Thus in the great majority of Ajanta's caves, between the inauguration of the site and the Asmaka takeover in 475, very little work was done other than the general roughing out (seldom completed) of the excavations themselves. The five doorways and four Buddha images (all but those in Cave Lower 6 very expediently finished) could not have occupied a few workmen more than a few months altogether. Furthermore, only three of these caves were painted prior to 475-Cave Lower 6 almost fully and Caves 11 and 16 only partially, all in 468 and early 469.[8] And as for the matter of the monks' moving in, only 9 cells in Cave 11, and 2 in Cave 15 were fitted out for residence (both in early 469) before the Recession put a stop to all work in these caves. We should probably assume that monks eagerly moved into these eleven cells in which the doors were finally hung. Of course it is possible that they may have taken up residence in whatever cells were fully exposed in other caves still under excavation, even though their doors were not yet fitted, or their shelves

[7] It might equally be called the porch doorway, which it would have been, had the cave plan not suffered revision.

[8] These and other such matters are discussed more fully in the relevant chapters.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

or clothes-poles added. It seems reasonable to assume that monks also utilized the twenty-three cells in the three Hinayana viharas, although this is by no means certain, since there is no evidence showing that new doors were hung in them. Nor was there any attempt to redecorate the tattered old viharas (Caves 12, 13, 15A) and caitya halls (Caves 9 and 10) until 477 itself, the very year in which Harisena died. Then, at this "eleventh hour", the intended redecoration of these Hinayana caves, like the hurried work done in 478, in so many of the later caves at the site, had to be rushed to a most expedient completion.[9]

The point is that the site was never a really proper "monastic establishment" where one could worship and meditate (or even sleep) in peace. Indeed, few of its caves were viable places of worship until the crisis of Harisena's death forced the patrons to rush their shrine images to completion, and to thus bring their caves, even if woefully incomplete, to life—to make them fit for worship by dedicating them. But this "life" came much too late and was all too brief: within six months of Harisena's death, the original "Vakataka" patrons had all fled the region, leaving their caves open to intruders, while by the end of that same year (478) the Asmaka caves were similarly invaded by these previously uninvited—in fact totally excluded—eager donors.[10]

Thus again, we are not talking about the "ideal" situation of a site such as Bagh, where work proceeded with no interruptions, where the whole site appears to have completed prior to Harisena's death, and where worship (causing heavy begriming) was still continuing when, in 486, Maharaja Subandhu of Mahismati granted the income from a village for its upkeep and ongoing expenses. Ajanta presents a very different picture, and was taking much longer to complete, not only due to its greater size, but because Ajanta's basalt was far more challenging (and incidentally far more durable) than Bagh's sandstone. The chief activity at Ajanta, during the long stretch of Vakataka patronage, was not worship, or study, or social services presided over by the monastic establishment, but mostly excavation. How can we believe that the monastic community at the site could

[9] See Volume II on Hinayana.

[10] For the evidence that no potential donors other than the courtly patrons of the site could make any gifts whatsoever at the site, see Volume II.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

have been very developed, when the site itself was still so much in process?

The obsessive courtly sponsorship of Ajanta, even if it was hard on the resident monks and local devotees, was indeed a bonanza for workmen who must have come from far-flung areas seeking employment, or were sent there on deputation from the courts of their patrons. The latter probably did not make the onerous trip to their nascent donations very often, despite their obvious interest in monitoring and accelerating the work. When we realize that from 469 through 474-years which comprise more than a third of the life-span of the Vakataka undertakings at the site, the great majority of the caves lay dormant (see Time Chart), it is obvious that excavators must have been pressed by their respective patrons to make up for lost time. After all, they were working for the impatient emperor, the impatient local king, and other very high impatient officials. Furthermore, it is clear that in general they were working by contract, and that the faster they worked the sooner they would get their pay.

Karl Khandalavala expresses amazement at "how little western writers can comprehend the role of the Indian artisan, his unchanging methods of work, his unchanging habits, his unchanging lifestyle including the inevitable visits to his village which take precedence over all else, and the unhurried pace of his craftsmanship", expressing "the unpalatable truth which more than one Indian historian has remarked upon, namely, that most western writers on history of Indian art can never understand the Indian way of life and the Indian mind."[11] Be this as it may, I would nonetheless assume, that having come to this remote site to work for powerful patrons eager to see results, almost everyone would have been working at least ten hours a day, seven days a week, and happy to do so. Nor should we worry about any cessation of excavating activity during the hot season or the subsequent monsoons, which Dr. Stietencron suggests could "reduce (my) time scale for work at the caves by almost 50%." Shri Khandalavala, like Dr. Stietencron is particularly concerned about the "undoubted stoppage of all work during heavy rains"; but in fact, the interiors (and even the porches) of the caves are user friendly throughout the year, being solidly waterproof.

[11] Khandalavala (in Pathik) 1990, pp. 18–19. His whole essay will be reproduced in a later volume.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

As for the problems of heat in April, May, and June, the temperature of the caves is stabilized by the mass of the mountain into which they are cut; it ranges, temperately, between 27.5 and 30 degrees centigrade degrees from the coolest to the hottest season.[12] Work assignments in such areas from April to September, instead of being onerous, must have been considered a stroke of luck rather than a sentence of unemployment; and assuming that they worked from dawn until dusk, even their comings and goings during the heat of the hottest months would not have been troublesome. In fact, for all we know, they may have camped out in the developing caves or their porches, where they could sleep and cook, and where water was happily available, since the caves' cisterns were always among the first things completed.[13]

Nor should we worry that "difficulties will arise in providing food" for the (estimated) two or three thousand excavators and excavator/sculptors, debris-haulers, blacksmiths, water-carriers, cooks, and other assorted laborers who must have been involved in the site's inaugural (as well as later) efforts. Ajanta was set in a beautiful and deeply sequestered dead-end ravine, ideal for a monastic establishment, but it was by no means isolated; a major trade-route passed through the rich plains a few kilometers from the caves, just as it does, as a metalled highway, today. One of the major conduits for both goods and ideas linking northwest and southeast India and branching out in various directions on the way, this route was not a mere "road . . . not sufficient as a regular provider . . .", as Dr. Stietencron suggests. Because it was both so important and (at this time) also safe, we do not need to worry about the provision of staples for the developing site. The very need, in a rich mercantile economy such as must have been developing under Harisena, was sufficient to assure the supply.

The requirements of the site were surely as much a bonanza for the merchants of the surrounding area, plying the trade-route, as they were for the fortunate workers and the slowly growing consortium of monks. To realize that the supply could satisfy the demand,

---

[12] I wish to thank Mr. M. Singh, chief conservator at Ajanta, for this information. The humidity variation is from about 85% in the rainy season to 40% in the summer, inside the caves.

[13] For cisterns and other amenities, see Chapter 3 of this volume.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

we need only think of the much later history of this region, when thousands and thousands of Mughal or Maratha troops forced their way through such areas, covering many miles in a single day; and yet, at least when the battles were going well, they were always able to eat. And while we are discussing these later actors on our scene, a quick survey of their staggering fortifications—the towering encircling walls and huge gates made by the laborers of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb and others—shows how even miles of massive stone-work (involving a greater effort than merely removing the rock from caves) could be accomplished in a remarkably short time, given the right combination of money and urgency.

However, those fortifications belong to a later day. One hardly needs to be concerned about the "security" of the site, if indeed an attack on the monks would have been materially productive. The answer to Dr Stietencron's question: Was there a fort protecting the Ghat?" is surely almost certainly: "No! not in Harisena's day". The Ajanta area, like Asmaka and Anupa (where the Bagh caves lie) were all part of Harisena's inherited domains, and during his confident rule, it seems right to assume that the whole central area of the empire (including Ajanta) enjoyed the protection of the great emperor's "Pax Vakataka".[14] This situation of peace assured by strength was clearly a factor facilitating Ajanta's inauguration, when the neighboring Asmaka and Risika feudatories together sponsored the site. Although they later came into local conflict, Ajanta's vigorous early development could never have been possible if they were at each others' throats during those inaugural years.[15] And though problems—in fact, empire-shattering problems—later arose, we should honor the great Harisena sufficiently to recognize that they did not arise while he was the master of his "sea girt" world, which did indeed stretch from the western to the eastern sea.[16]

---

[14] Because they were his inherited domains Risika, Asmaka, Anupa and Vidarbha are notably absent from the list of territories which Harisena, according the Cave 16 inscription, had conquered or otherwise come to control by the end of his reign.

[15] Harisena apparently stayed aloof from this local conflict; his Cave 1 was the only cave at the site upon which work continued uninterrupted (except for the Hiatus) both when Risika ruled the region and then when Asmaka took it over.

[16] In the Visrutacarita, the old minister (= Varahadeva) counsels the new young king (= Sarvasena III); Kale 1966, 350.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

A Note on the Dating of Ajanta's Vakataka Phase

The Emperor Harisena's regnal dates (c. 460–c. 477), like the dates for Ajanta's main or later phase (c. 462–c. 480), cannot be determined absolutely, for there are no dated inscriptions within the two decade span in question. But fortunately there are external termini that frame these twenty years quite closely.[17]

Since even the very earliest Vakataka undertakings at Ajanta are intimately linked with the excavations known to have been started after Harisena came to power, we know that Vakataka patronage did not start at the site until after the great emperor was ruling.[18] We place Harisena's accession at c. 460, since as we know from the Hisse Borala inscription, his father was still reigning in 458 (our terminus post quem).[19] It is evident, if one is going to allow Ajanta's Vakataka development a span of nineteen years, and if this development had to have ended by about 480 (see below), that Harisena's father's reign could hardly have continued much if at all after 458.

The terminus ante quem is 486, by which time the great Vakataka empire had already fallen, since Anupa, the last stronghold of that great house, was already in the hands of Maharaja Subandhu of Mahismati by that date, according to his Barwani inscription.[20] The many events in Mahismati, where Harisena's grandchildren were taken for safety at the time of the Vakataka fall, are described at length in Chapter 4.

As the text explains, the end of Ajanta's patronage coincided with the beginning of the great insurrection instigated by the Asmakas.

---

[17] The termini are discussed at length in Spink 1991A and 1991B.

[18] Both Cave 16 and Cave 17 have donative inscriptions referring them to Harisena's reign. See Chart: Defining Features for features shared by all early caves. Even Cave 8, sometimes considered the earliest of the Vakataka caves (or even pre-Vakataka!) has a monolithic B mode door fitting which could not have been cut before 468.

[19] For the Hisse Borala inscription, see Kolte 1965, and Shastri 1969.

[20] For the Barwani and closely related Bagh inscriptions of Maharaja Subandhu of Mahismati, see Mirashi 1955, 17–19. However, by using the Early Kalacuri era Mirashi dates the Barwani inscription to 417 and the Bagh inscription (the date being lost) to approximately the same time; but since the latter speaks of the Bagh site as an ongoing establishment needing repairs, this suggests that those caves should be dated to the late 4th century—far too early. I argue that the Gupta era should be used—after all, Subandhu (= Visruta) was a Gupta prince; this provides the satisfying date of 486 for the Barwani plate.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

This led to the Vakataka's fall sometime prior to 486. Since this tragic course of events under Harisena's son and successor took a few years to run its course—as the evidence of the Visrutacarita confirms—it is unlikely that Ajanta's development could have continued past 480.[21] Yet it could hardly have ended much before that date, for although the nineteen year development suggested here (462–480 inclusive) as the total span of the site's development is certainly reasonable, and is supported by many historical synchronisms, it is hard either to compress it much more, or to expand it, given what goes on both just before and just after the site's development.[22]

Thus, even though the many inscriptions at Ajanta itself are not dated, we can determine the beginning and the end of the sequence of developments at Ajanta—both stylistic and historical—rather closely. When we see them as all taking place within a period of twenty years or less—following the so-called "Short Chronology"—it emphasizes the truly remarkable quality of the Vakataka achievement at Ajanta, which preserves so much of the glory of India's Golden Age. Ajanta's later phase developed in an incredibly concentrated burst of creative fervor, with the span of the site's consistent patronage all contained within the great emperor Harisena's brief reign from 460 to 477, continuing in 478, the "year of anxious consolidation". (This—460 through 478—is what I call the period of "consistent patronage", followed in 479–480 by the Period of Disruption.)[23] The old view, that Ajanta's later development went on for two hundred, or even three hundred years, under a succession of different dynasties, can no longer be sustained, for it totally confuses the history of the site.[24]

A number of scholars have suggested that they could, like Dr. Stietencron, look with more favor on the "Short Chronology" if it were not quite so short. This is of course impossible if my framing

[21] For a detailed discussion of the Dasakumaracarita, see Chapter 4.

[22] For the historical synchronisms, see Spink 1991B.

[23] Actually in the "Vakataka" as opposed to the Asmaka caves, the Period of Disruption may well have started by mid-478, due to the Asmaka rejection of the Vakataka overlordship.

[24] Goetz 1959, 106–107: "(In the 5th century, "the individual lines as well as the composition of whole scenes is rhythmic and decorative. . . . In the 6th century a Baroque mannerism appears and a stronger accent on outline. . . . In the . . . 7th century, already under Chalukya rule, the outlines resume their fluency, the figures show a lighter elegance. . . . Thereafter, in the late 7th and early 8th centuries the rapid disintegration can no longer be hidden. The lines are dead, the colours cold, the figures grotesquely misproportioned. . . . Gupta painting was dying".

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

termini are secure; for, given those bounds, anything more than a span for Ajanta of twenty years would be impossible, since there is just too much that happened, quite apart from Ajanta's development, in the twenty-eight years between our fixed poles of 458 and 486. In fact, even a twenty year span for activity at the site begins to stretch the bounds of credibility, as does the nineteen (462–480 inclusive) that I have somewhat grudgingly suggested. Frankly, a somewhat more contracted span—perhaps achieved by using our academic prerogative to "shorten the war" (i.e. the Hiatus) by a year or two!—would seem to me more reasonable than my present suggestion of nineteen years, for it would allow more time for the events before and after Ajanta's development.[25]

In fact, we do not even have to depend upon the above arguments to establish the validity of a "Short Chronology". We need only to turn to actuarial considerations; and in fact such considerations would recommend an even shorter span for Ajanta's consistent phase of patronage—say 462–475 instead of 462–478 (fourteen years inclusive rather than seventeen years inclusive). Even though such a conclusion could only exacerbate the concern of many of my colleagues about the Short Chronology being too short, the actuarial argument will probably be more compelling to those scholars who, like Dr. Stietencron, noting that "Dandin writes about 8 or 9 generations" after the events he describes, question "its reliability as a source of Vidarbha's history".[26]

The actuarial argument is this: we can surely identify at least ten different patrons—either by name or presence—who were involved in the inaugural activity at Ajanta, all getting their caves well underway in or very shortly after 462.[27] These same patrons, as far as we can tell, were all still alive and actively developing their caves when

[25] However, until there is clear proof for such a shorter span, I prefer not to change my present dating, since it would affect all past articles as well as the present study.

[26] Although I previously assumed that the common dating of Dandin to the late sixth or early seventh century was correct, I now am convinced that he lived close to the time of the event, as argued by J. Tripathi (Tripathi, 1996).

[27] The assumption that all of these caves were underway during the first few years is supported by the fact that the same group was present at the site's decline. Thus speed was necessary, given actuarial realities, just as it is necessitated by our suggested termini. Without such constraints it would not be possible to judge how fast any particular cave, or sculpture, or the site as a whole developed.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

the great emperor Harisena died. As a consequence of this dire event, they all, without exception, rushed their shrine Buddhas to completion, in order to dedicate them and get the merit while they could. At this point the consistent patronage of their caves suddenly ends. So we have a situation where the span of the site's consistent patronage (excluding the brief Period of Disruption) must fall within the span of time at the end of which all of the various inaugurators of the site were still alive.

Such an approach to Ajanta's dating has remarkably revealing implications. If we have as many as ten separate donors—and perhaps more—who not only started the site's consistent phase of patronage but were present at its demise, and if we assume that, being established enough to sponsor such major monuments, they were all relatively mature individuals, then it would boggle the imagination—ask any fifth century actuary!—if all of the members of this group, without exception, were alive as much as twenty years after they had inaugurated the site. In fact, to be reasonable, we would have to say that the site developed much more quickly than that. As mentioned above, a span of fourteen years for the site's consistent development might, in fact, be far more reasonable than the seventeen which I have long suggested.[28] This is because, when dealing with a number of individuals, the chance of one or more of them dying mounts rather sharply as the size of the group increases, particular if they are were already mature when their connection began.

Of course, this all depends upon being able to prove that all of the caves' patrons were involved in Ajanta's development both at its start and at its end, and this must be accomplished through an analysis of developments in all caves involved, with a view to confirming such an assumption. It is of course possible that one or more donors died during the period under consideration, even though the consistency with which work on the caves progressed would support the assumption that they remained under their original patron's control. But even if this were the case, we could perhaps "replace" them

[28] With regard to single caves, John Huntington (1981, 55, note 35) has written: "My iconographic studies of the western caves have completely convinced me of the validity of Walter Spink's chronology of them. In fact, if anything, I feel an even shorter period of excavation for any given cave is far more appropriate as the societal context would have demanded great expediency to meet certain astrologically determined deadlines."

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

with patrons excluded from our conservative count of ten; for instance I have credited all of the many caves at the western extremity of the site to a single patron (or overseer), the monk Buddhabhadra, when it is quite possible that he merely oversaw and approved the donations of certain Asmaka associates responsible for Caves 21, 23, 24, etc. And even if we exclude all anonymous patrons—which would hardly be necessary—we still have five named individuals who were present from beginning to end, together with one more—the great emperor Harisena himself—who died hardly a year before the other original patrons had to give up their connection with the site.

In reviewing our list of almost indisputably long-term patrons, let us start with the Vakataka Prime Minister Varahadeva, who praises his overlord, Harisena, in the dedicatory inscription of his Cave 16. Varahadeva also sponsored the similar Ghatotkacha vihara, where again Harisena is mentioned in the cave's dedicatory inscription.

Both of these caves have many early "defining features" (See Chart) characteristic of the inaugural phase of Vakataka patronage. In fact both Cave 16 and the Ghatotkacha vihara have traditionally (and rightly) been considered among the earliest excavations of this main (or later) phase of Ajanta's development; in this regard it is worth noting that Cave 16 and the adjacent Cave 17, made by the local king, occupy the "best" location along the scarp, which they undoubtedly preempted before other donors had a chance to take over this area. Since both Varahadeva and the local king, Upendragupta, were extremely important courtiers, and also "extremely devoted to the Buddha" (Ajanta 16 inscription, verse 21) it might well be that they initiated the very idea of creating this unique monastic establishment, in which so many other patrons soon got involved. In any case, as we can see from the evidence of their "defining features", their caves must have been among the very first inaugurated at the site.[29]

However, what is equally true—but not generally recognized—is that neither of these great viharas was ever finished, and that the

[29] There are of course a number of simpler and smaller caves which may indeed have been started a bit before Caves 16 and 17, being less subject to bureaucratic restraints and delays; but in terms of their "defining features", it seems clear that by the time their excavation was significantly underway, they were paralleling developments in other larger caves. In the "primitive" Cave 8, for instance, the presence of a monolithic B mode door fitting proves that the cave was still in course of excavation in 468.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

features which were underway when work was suddenly halted are, without question, among the very latest at the sites. Dozens of these late features are discussed in our main text, but we might make mention of one particularly striking example alone: their main Buddha images. The image in the unfinished shrine of the Ghatotkacha vihara is clearly a later variant of the (already late!) image in the Ajanta Cave 1. As for the main image in the unfinished shrine of Cave 16, it is of the still later bhadrasana type—a type introduced to the site so late that, during the period of the site's consistent development, it appears elsewhere only in the Cave 26 complex.[30]

It might be relevant to recall that it was my visit to the Ghatotkacha vihara in the early 1960s that first got me involved in the long course of Ajanta's short history.[31] I knew that the cave, located in a relatively remote valley a dozen or so miles from Ajanta, was dated to the reign of the emperor Harisena by virtue of Varahadeva's dedicatory inscription in its porch. When I entered the cave, the somewhat primitive character of the octagonal pillars in its hall, combined with my general confusion about how many motifs developed, together with my knowledge of what to think about the cave in advance, did little to disturb my belief that this was indeed a fifth century excavation. However, when I proceeded—accompanied, as today, by literally thousands of bats—toward the shrine area, I saw fine medallion motifs and decorated pillars that, at Ajanta, appear only in what, even then, were rightly recognized as the most developed forms at the site. And when I saw the elaborately decorated "T-shaped" shrine doorway and the shrine Buddha, which clearly post-dated the related image in Ajanta Cave 1, it was perfectly clear to me that many of the features in the cave could only be explained as versions of the very latest motifs at that greater site. Furthermore, although a number of scholars immediately assumed and/or declared that the obviously late motifs in the Ghatotkacha vihara must have been added much later, such views could not stand up to analysis.

[30] I stress the unfinished state of these caves and of the features under discussion, which confirms their abandonment; but more important, it is clear that the images were all finished in a rush. That is, work was not merely interrupted; there was an anxious effort to complete the most essential features alone (notably the shrine image and sometimes its immediate context), as if time was running out.

[31] See Spink 1966.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Even though I had not developed the concept of Ajanta's Recession and the Hiatus at that time, Ghatotkacha's development, in fact, follows the same pattern as that of all of the "non-royal" caves at Ajanta, being vigorously excavated up to the time of the Recession, and then lying dormant until 475, when work started up again, continuing until 478, when its image was rushed to completion and dedication. Thus the late image and the related motifs around it, which must have been done or at least underway when the cave was dedicated by Harisena's minister provide convincing evidence proving that Ajanta's most developed features must belong to Harisena's reign, or at least very close to it. Indeed, it would appear that Varahadeva had made a special point of honoring his emperor by essentially copying—and slightly updating—Harisena's Cave 1 image.[32]

The most important task bearing upon an analysis of the site's development is to decide what are early features and what are late features—a major concern throughout the following volumes. Only then can we say that caves such as Cave 16 and the Ghatotkacha vihara are "both early and late", and that their patron, Varahadeva, not only inaugurated them but also was present at their abandonment. That is, when Varahadeva "presented (Cave 16) with devotion to the Community of Monks" (Cave 16 inscription, verse 30), the course of his patronage essentially comprehended the inauguration and the abandonment of consistent patronage not only of Cave 16 itself and of the Ghatotkacha vihara, but of the beginning and end of consistent patronage on all of the caves at the site.[33]

These observations alone would be compelling, for they clearly limit the consistent development of both the cave and the site to the span of the Prime Minister's patronage. However, even if his patronage comprehends the site's consistent development, we do not know how long it was; we have no very precise way to determine when

[32] For instance, he replaces Cave 1's dwarfs, with "later" flying couples, and avoids retaining the vestigial cut-backs on either side, allowing the image to spread out on the back wall of the shrine in the more developed (and sensible) fashion. Varahadeva's other Buddha image, in Cave 16, is an even more advanced conception, probably started in 477, when the Ghatotkacha image was already begun.

[33] After the collapse of the site's generally courtly patronage, there is a brief Period of Disruption, when local devotees added a helter-skelter array of "uninvited" votive images to the caves. They are not included in what I call the "consistent patronage" or the "consistent course of excavation" at the site.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

he started it and when he ended it. What we do know is that he praises his father, the previous minister, in a way that suggests that his father had been a vigorous and committed aid to the king for some time, so we can probably believe that Varahadeva was already mature when he himself took over, and started to "govern the country righteously, (shining brightly) with the rays of his fame, religious merit and virtue." (Ajanta 16 inscription, verse 20.) We also know that, according to Dandin, he is consistently described as the "old minister" when he is (hopelessly) advising Harisena's successor in the court, and then finally taking Harisena's grandchildren to Mahismati, even though he died "of a raging fever" on the way. The designation "old", in the fifth century—as in my village in India today—might well mean a person of fifty; but even so we have no certain way of ascribing a certain number of years to Varahadeva's involvement at Ajanta.

Instead, to determine the likely limits of Varahadeva's patronage, we can point to the compelling fact, mentioned above, that there are four other known "inaugurators" of the site, who were also present at its collapse. Three, the great monk Buddhabhadra—a close friend of the minister of Asmaka—and his two associates, the monk Dharmadatta and his good pupil Bhadrabandhu, together saw to "the excavation and completion" of the great Cave 26 complex. The other, the rich "viharaswamin" (owner of the cave) Mathura, donated the huge Cave 4.[34] Both were among the very earliest caves to have been begun in the Vakataka phase, and both are notably (and typically) incomplete. Thus we have no less than five known individuals who were among the original sponsors of the site—whose caves reflect the earliest level of its evolution in their inaugural features—and whose personal involvement is validated by the inscriptions added to their now highly developed caves just before the site's precipitous collapse.

Indeed, not surprisingly, we can add the emperor Harisena himself to this list of known patrons, even though a study of his cave's "defining features" suggests both that work at the site had been underway for some time before his great Cave 1 was inaugurated, and that it was the first of all major caves to be abandoned. So his span of patronage would necessarily be slightly (but not much) shorter

[34] Inscr # 17.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

than that of his minister and indeed of all of our other known patrons.

Judging from the vigor with which their caves were developing right up until their traumatic abandonment, all of these patrons were flourishing at the very moment that Harisena died, effectively ending Ajanta's development. Thus we must ask, how much time elapsed between the site's vigorous inauguration, characterized by notably early forms and features, and the precipitous rush to complete the main Buddha images in caves, often still unfinished, but now characterized by notably late forms and features. At the same time we must remember that in ancient times life expectancy, even among the privileged, was soberingly short. Admittedly, Buddhabhadra's "good pupil Bhadrabandhu" may have still been a youth when Cave 26 was started, but his possible youthfulness could perhaps be statistically "balanced" by the seniority of Varahadeva. The point, however, is not whether any particular patron was young or old, but rather the statistical likelihood of the whole group, all having undertaken the site together, being still alive at its demise.

The actuarial argument, suggesting how quickly Ajanta developed, would be further strengthened if we consider the very significant number of non-inscribed caves which also begin with the same "early" features and end with the same typically "late" features.[35] These caves too, it is surely safe to assume, were sponsored in almost all cases by single patrons, whose activity spanned the site's consistent development.

If it is indeed true, as Dr. Stietencron generously states, that I "have firmly established a relative chronology of the caves", then we must realize the implications of the conclusion that we can count at least ten patrons whose caves start with the site's earliest stylistic, iconographic, and technological features, but who were still alive and active when their caves, now incorporating the very latest features, finally had to be abandoned, still unfinished.

In order not to be accused of weighting the argument to prove my point, I have kept my count of separate patrons minimal. Since I believe that the monk Buddhabhadra personally oversaw the development of all of the caves at the site's western extremity, I have

[35] Caves 1, 2, 5, L6/U6, 7, 8, 11, 15, 21, 23, 24, 28; Caves 4, 16, 26 and its wings are inscribed. It may be better to consider the monk Buddhabhadra as the single patron (or at least overseer) of all of the caves (from 21 on) in the site's western extremity.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

counted them as involving one patron only, although one might well assume that he had associates seeing to the development of other caves in the area. I have also not counted Harisena, who died the year before the original phase of patronage ended. Caves 17–20, all sponsored by the local king, Upendragupta, are of course exceptions, since work on them was cut off in mid-course when the ill-fated king was expelled from the site by the rival Asmaka, they do not share the latest features found in the caves upon which work continued to the end. Furthermore, the few caves started much later (Caves 3, 14, 22, 23A, 28, 29) would have no relevance for these considerations.

Thus, Ajanta's consistent development, from its vigorous inauguration up to the point when all of the site's continuing excavation programs had to be abandoned, clearly had come to an end before any of its patrons, who were probably already mature when they became involved in this ambitious undertaking, had died.[36] Or to put it more simply, all of these ten (or more) patrons who were involved from the beginning of the site's development, were still alive when that development ended.

From the point of view of any fifth century actuary, the idea that a dozen established and presumably mature patrons, even from the privileged class, would all still be alive twenty years after having started such a project, would boggle the imagination. This is because the life expectancy in ancient India was far shorter than it is today. The High Commission of India, in a speech in 1967, explains that because of the recent control of major diseases, "the life expectancy has increased from 32 to 50 years". Another source updates that figure to a present 63 years, rising from 40 years in the middle of the twentieth century.

Of course our wealthy and well-treated patrons would be likely to have lived well beyond the "average" age of 32 years; on the other hand we must assume that, on the "average", they were both mature and well-established when they inaugurated the site. And we must remember that we are not talking about the life expectancy of any single member, but of the group as a whole If my art historical analysis of Ajanta's development is correct—and it requires the

[36] If I am correct, Cave 1 does not belong in this group, having been abandoned in advance of the others, due to the death of its patron, whom I identify with Harisena.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

conclusion that the whole group of ten (and probably more) patrons was still alive when their consistent and joint patronage of the site very suddenly ended—then the actuarial implications not only insist upon a "short chronology", but would seem to insist that it be shorter than I have earlier suggested.

We don't even need to think of a span of consistent patronage going on for as much as thirty years, and even a span of twenty years would suggest that our group had somehow been granted a most surprising degree of shared longevity. I have earlier suggested about seventeen years, primarily because one has to allow a certain spread of time, in order to accomplish so much. But, from an actuarial point of view, fourteen years for Ajanta's consistent patronage (462–475 inclusive) might be a more credible option, still allowing two years (476–477) for the Period of Disruption. Unfortunately, this shortens Harisena's already brief reign, and his life also, by two years, terminating him on December 31, 475, rather than in 477. Even so, with a life-span of something like our estimated 49 years, he would have done quite well, actuarially speaking.[37] His reign of eighteen years (or possibly sixteen, if ended in 475 rather than 477), on the other hand, would be somewhat shorter than the likely statistical average of approximately twenty years, a conclusion which would be consistent with my suggestion that he was quite possibly assassinated at the instance of the Asmakas.[38]

Thus, as it turns out, we can have our cake and eat it too: the actuarial evidence in fact clearly supports our assumption that the consistent phase of Ajanta's patronage, along with the brief Period of Disruption, and a number of earlier and later historical "events" can and indeed must be fitted into the span of time which separates the 486 Barwani inscription of Maharaja Subandhu on the one hand and the 458 Hisse Borala inscription of the emperor Devasena on the other. In fact, actuarial considerations suggest the desirability of an even shorter Short Chronology; and happily this would (if true) leave more room for the various dramatic events which, not surprisingly, attend the dissolution of the great dynasty. Although our

[37] For the estimate of Harisena's age at his death, see Chapter 7 of this volume.
[38] For a careful consideration of regnal lengths in the Medieval period in India, see Trautmann 1969. His calculations are based on the records of kings reigning somewhat later than Harisena, but still have relevance.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

present estimate of nineteen years for the birth and death of the site (seventeen for the course of its consistent patronage and two for the Period of Disruption) is not unreasonable, given the actuarial evidence, it may be that a sixteen year total span (fourteen for Ajanta's consistent patronage and two for the Period of Disruption) would be closer to our elusive mark.[39]

If to some scholars this will surely seem "incredible", this does not mean that it is not true. And if it *is* true, the credit must go to Harisena, and should work toward his rehabilitation, after the long suppression of his reputation due in large part to the great fame of the Guptas. And yet we must finally realize that it was not the Guptas, whose long decline started in the 460s under Skandagupta, but the Vakatakas, under Harisena, who brought India's Golden Age to its climax, leaving the evidence of its greatness mirrored, if only so briefly, at Ajanta.

Patronage

Ultimately, it is the character of Ajanta's patronage which explains why the site could get off to such a startling start, and indeed could continue to develop, despite problems along the way, with such rapidity. And it could also be said that it was the character of Ajanta's patronage—that it was essentially courtly rather than either public or monastic—that was finally responsible for the site's dramatic demise.

When Ajanta was inaugurated in the early 460s the viharas were invariably planned as mere dormitories, innocent of shrines. However, in about 466, when the revolutionary idea of adding shrines to every cave was introduced, the very character of such donations was transformed. Now a "living" Buddha was going to be the main resident of the vihara. "The sage among sages, the teacher among teachers, the immortal among immortals, the best among the eminent (and) a store of marvels" (Ghatotkacha inscription, verse 1) could move into the place of honor provided for him. The cave itself would become

[39] Actually, the Period of Disruption for the "Vakataka" caves may have started by mid-478, rather than 479, because the Asmakas had declared their independence by that time.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

an offering, a radiant center of power. "Adorned with . . . beautiful picture-galleries, ledges, statues of the nymphs of Indra and the like . . . ornamented with beautiful pillars and stairs and (with) a temple of the Buddha inside" (Ajanta 16 inscription, verse 24) Ajanta was no longer destined to be a mere housing society for the sangha; the viharas, now to be "clothed in the brilliance of Indra's crown" (ibid., verse 29) were no longer just (or even primarily) made for the monks. In the fifth century, the site's decisive and discriminating underwriting was almost entirely courtly, or at least it involved donors whose lavish undertakings speak of a courtly connection. This meant money; and patrons like King Upendragupta, who ruled over the Ajanta region, were all too aware of "the power of the expenditure of wealth" (Ajanta 17 inscription, verse 17), just as he took pride in "having expended abundant wealth (ibid., verse 25) on his donations. The fact that he sponsored five elaborate caves at Ajanta itself gives us insight into his donative enthusiasms, and lends credibility to his further claim that he "covered the earth (i.e. his whole kingdom) with stupas and viharas" (ibid., verse 22).[40] Indeed, this supergenerosity—or, one might say, this self-seeking compulsion to make merit—surely contributed to his defeat, hardly a decade after his benefactions began, by the aggressive forces of the neighboring Asmakas.

Just as the Prime Minister, Varahadeva, the patron of Cave 16 "(realizing that) life, youth, wealth, and happiness, are transitory constructed (his) magnificent dwelling to be occupied by the best of ascetics" (Ajanta 16 inscription, verse 22), all of Ajanta's originally much simpler viharas were now redesigned for the praise of the Buddha. At the same time, the praise that would accrue to the donor—the amazement of the world at seeing such "almost measureless (halls) which cannot be even imagined by little-souled men" (Ajanta 17 inscription, verse 25)—was obviously also a motive force in the making of such donations.

Nor should one forget the expected benefits for the whole world of such donations. The monk Buddhabhadra, thanking the monks Dharmadatta and Bhadrabandhu, "who have seen to the excavation and completion of (Cave 26) on my behalf" (Ajanta 26 inscription,

[40] Caves 17–20; 29 Cave 18 is not so much a cave as an elaborate cistern chamber cum passage.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

verse 14) goes on to say: "Whatever merit is here, may that be for the attainment of fruit . . . of supreme knowledge as well as the multitude of all the pure qualities by them and by (all the beings in all the three) worlds" (ibid., verse 15). Similarly, Upendragupta, the local king, "whose heaped-up store of merit was indeed a marvel" proclaims: "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." (Ajanta 17 inscription, verse 22, 29)[41] But he, "whose abundant flood of giving created joy in the hearts of his suppliants" also is thinking of his own rewards, the rich fruit of his own generosity: "May such a man as this, who, in his every action, unflaggingly pursues the good of the world, be blessed with the complete success of all he desires on earth so that he can fulfill his vow to become a Buddha." Ibid., verse 28.

Once shrines began to be so compulsively added to what were previously planned as mere monastic residences, it was the patron's acquisition of merit, deriving from the completion of the main shrine images in the caves—not the support of the monks—that was the chief concern of all of Ajanta's patrons. Indeed, over the years of Ajanta's development, it may well have been that the overriding concern of the patrons, vying with each other for praise, and for the prestige which generosity can provide, was not so much to set up a working monastic establishment—although this was of course the ultimate justification—as to sponsor a creation that would be long remembered, in heaven as also on earth.

"Why should not a monument be raised by those possessing wealth, desirous of mundane happiness as also of liberation?" says the powerful and powerfully connected monk Buddhabhadra. "A man continues to enjoy himself in paradise as long as his memory is green in the world. One should (therefore) set up a memorial on the mountains that will endure for as long as the moon and the sun continue." (Ajanta 26 inscription, verses 7, 8.)

"Obeisance and praise (offered to him) will never turn fruitless", says the great monk Buddhabhadra. "(Even) a single flower offered (to the Buddha) yields the fruit known as paradise (and even) final emancipation (Ajanta 26 inscription, verse 3).

---

[41] For the first quote in this sentence and the first in the next, I am using the translations of Leela Wood, from Wood 2005.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

If a "single flower offered to the Buddha" could have such amazingly desirable consequences—a ticket to paradise as well as to emancipation—what eternal benefits would the gift of a cave produce?

The site, we have to feel, was the personal property of its powerful and elite donors. It was not at all, in its Vakataka phase, like the excavations of the Hinayana phase, made centuries earlier as characteristically Buddhist community efforts, with someone giving a façade, someone a wall, and someone a cell. The Vakataka caves were highly exclusive donations, under the direct sponsorship of no more than ten or a dozen different individuals, all of whom were either directly or indirectly connected with the court.[42]

The authority with which each individual's donations, and the development of the site as a whole, was controlled is suggested by the fact that during the long years when their caves were totally abandoned, no one ever put, or was allowed to put, an intrusive offering, small or large, painted or carved, in their temporarily abandoned excavations. And yet we know from what happened during the Period of Disruption, that the hosts of the uninvited (the majority being monks resident at the site!) were almost desperately waiting for an opportunity to make such donations.

Although it may seem remarkable, the monks at the site, and the local devotees were totally excluded from making any offerings whatsoever at Ajanta while its consistent development was going on from 462 until the very year after Harisena's death in 477, once the authority of the site was shattered—once all of the "Vakataka" and Asmaka patrons had hurried away by the end of 478, these waiting donors flooded onto and into the caves, making hundreds—even thousands—of their own donations over the course of the next two years or so.[43]

It was, after all, not the monks, but the courtly patrons, who in such a burst of enthusiasm, started this monastic "housing society",

[42] For my assumption that the monk Buddhabhadra oversaw and perhaps sponsored the creation of all of the caves (21–28) of the western extremity, see Chapter 12 of this volume. His money must have come largely from the Asmaka court, due to his connection "through many successive births" with the Asmaka minister.

[43] Buddhabhadra, "born of a noble family, (and) endowed with great learning" (Ajanta 26 inscription verse 16) and obviously privileged, powerful, and well-connected, along with "the monk Dharmadatta as well as (my) good pupil Bhadrabhandu" (ibid. verse 14) must be categorized differently from most of the other monks, so patiently waiting for the site to get done.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

surely thinking of the tempting combination of worldly praise and spiritual benefit which they would get from their involvements. And certainly the site, as its dormitories were transformed into shrines, came to be created even more for the donors themselves than for the monks. It was for the donors' own satisfaction that now, to praise the Buddha, they had reason to make excavations "like the palaces of the lord of gods" (Ajanta 16 inscription verse 27) to impress their friends, and to ultimately get the merit which would accrue from their impressive benefactions. Increasingly, as patron vied with patron, and artist with artist, the caves came to be filled with an increasingly marvelous catalog of exuberant carvings, vying for attention with cycles of sensuously conceived paintings that would take your breath away.

Of course this deep commitment to the project does not mean that the various patrons would have spent much time at the site. Unless you were interested in watching the workers cut the rock away, there was little to do there throughout most of Ajanta's development. Nor would there have been very appropriate places to stay.[44] The interest and the excitement, and the praise, would come later, when all of these efforts were finally coming to fruition—even though, at least in the sense expected, this was never to be the case.

If Ajanta was hardly "user-friendly" for monks during the first decade of Vakataka patronage, when so much rock-cutting was underway, the situation must have continued—indeed even intensified—once Asmaka had taken over the site in 475. For this was a new period of exuberant growth, and just as Dr. Stietencron suggests, there must have been scaffolding everywhere, both for the cutting and the plastering and painting, as the planners—pushed by the patrons—tried to bring their caves to completion. "The rivalry, even animosity among the donors", which Dr. Stietencron refers to, must have played its part in the site's development. After all, Ajanta was first and foremost a very human site, created out of a productive confusion of virtues and vices which were probably more characteristic of Ajanta's donors and of its artisans than of its weary waiting monks.

Although much scaffolding still filled the caves, and although the sounds of hammering and chiseling, along with the ribaldry of the

[44] A large brick structure on the other side of the ravine has recently been excavated. It probably functioned for special housing and for general administration, and was probably built when the caves were first begun for such uses.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

painters defining the feminine contours in Ajanta's narratives, never would have ceased, even as early as 475 the monks were able to take up residence in the newly fitted out cells in Caves 1 and Lower 6 and a few lesser caves as well. Indeed, by the time of Harisena's death late in 477, there were as many as 165 Vakataka period cells at the site which were already occupied, judging from the wear in the pivot holes in which the doors turned, or other signs of usage.[45] Since it seems likely that the Hinayana caves were also used, even if new doors were not hung in them, this would add 20 more cells available for residence, thus bringing the total of completed cells to 185, sufficient for 370 monks. At the same time, this was considerably less than half of the 354 cells, housing 708 monks, which would have been available, had work continued on the various unfinished excavations.[46]

However, even if the monks were now somewhat more able than before to "(divide) their time between prayer, meditation, going out for alms, comforting—or giving counsel to—the devotees", as Dr. Stietencron suggests, the "normal" monks (as opposed to the great monk Buddhabhadra) were still the guests, not the donors or owners, at the site. In the happy frenzy of work which took place in the years immediately before Harisena's death the monks' needs must have been secondary to those of the patrons, for there was not one cave at the site yet completed. And if this self-centered concern of the patrons—this eagerness to get their caves completed—was true before that ominous day late in 477 when Harisena died, it was even more true thereafter; for as soon as the ominous news reached the site, everyone immediately started rushing, with only one single purpose in mind, to complete their shrine Buddhas. At this point, with the single exception of the Buddha in the emperor's Cave 1, none of the shrine images started after 475 had been finished, or in some cases even started, as work went on in normal course; but now attention was focused in particular upon them, and upon getting them quickly done. And, as if by some cruel irony—for it was Harisena's power and approval which had made the Vakataka renaissance possible—

[45] See "Cell Count": Volume I, **Allied Materials**.

[46] Since the evidence of usage is sometimes obscure, this must be seen as a rough count. Furthermore, I have had to make a considered (but not necessarily) correct estimate of the cells planned (but not started) in some of the extremely unfinished excavations.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Harisena's beautiful image, although completed, had not yet been dedicated when the great emperor suddenly died; and now it never would be.[47]

Looking into the burden of frantic activity which characterizes the months immediately after Harisena's death, the shrine Buddhas were not now rushed to completion primarily for worship. Our rich and powerful patrons were not hurrying to finish them, during the turbulence of 478, so that they could be used by the eager monks or by the local devotees, and certainly not by the worried patrons themselves. They were rushed to completion simply to make merit; this was the crucial concern energizing the patrons in these latter days. This is what finally made the caves "alive", whether their overall programs of excavation and decoration were finished or not. Significantly, it was only in the fifteen caves containing completed and dedicated Buddha images, that the later "uninvited" donors, during the site's brief Period of Disruption, put their own helter-skelter votive intrusions.[48] Caves where the main image was never completed, even if they had seemingly ideal stretches of space available, were left totally untouched by these eager new donors; for caves without a living Buddha in them were dead.

In the darkening months of 478, in the midst of the rush to complete the caves' shrines, Ajanta's workmen still would have had plenty of work. However, by the beginning of 479 all of the old patrons had left, and no one had the slightest interest in continuing with the original programs of excavation and decoration. Although worship surely went on in the caves, and the monks continued living in whatever cells had already been readied for residence, the sole focus now was on making one's own private donations of Buddha (or bodhisattva) images, either painted or carved, sometimes inscribed and sometimes not. Placing their helter-skelter votive images in the most desirable locations both inside and outside the departed patrons' excavations, the monks and local devotees who for so many years had been totally excluded from the development of the intensely elit-

---

[47] For the abandonment of Harisena's main Buddha, see Chapter 9.

[48] Caves 2, 4, Lower 6, Upper 6, 7, 11, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 26, 26RW, 26LW. Cave 1 is excluded, because never dedicated. Cave Lower 6 and Cave 26LW have no intrusions, but probably because they was so fully decorated already. Cave 8 may have once had a loose (and dedicated) image, but its condition disallows judgment about intrusions. The tiny Cave 22 is an apparent exception, treated like a number of intrusive shrinelets; see Chapter 12.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

ist site, now, in their pious compulsion to finally make merit on their own, heedlessly violated the well-laid plans conceived by their courtly predecessors. And, happily, the hungry artisans, now highly skilled from years of working at the site, must have been desperate for work. Therefore the unemployed sculptors and painters, and the uninvited even if pious intruders, formed a symbiotic connection with which they quite literally took over the site with an eagerness both productive and destructive, as they imposed their own urgent enthusiasms upon the remains of the exclusive past. Indeed, the very urgency of their efforts, and their lack of rule, was a final reaction to the insistent exclusivity of the original patrons, who for so many years kept Ajanta to themselves.

But by the beginning of 481, Ajanta was to belong to nobody, except for those few monks willing to put up with a regimen of necessary austerities.[49] At the very height of the enthusiastic intrusive activity, work breaks off abruptly, with images in various stages of completion—some of which could be finished in a few hours' time—suddenly abandoned. Clearly, on some particular day, all of the workmen remaining at the site left together in haste, taking their chisels and their brushes with them, never to return.[50] This sobering departure, precipitated by the mounting revolt, fomented by the Asmakas against Harisena's successor, Sarvasena III, was already starting to erode the empire, and in the end would shatter it back into the diverse parts which the great Harisena had welded, or at least linked, together. We can well imagine that our workmen had heard, in the distance, the sound of the insurrectionist forces marching north toward the Narmada River. It was on the banks of that beautiful river that the new Vakataka ruler, who "unluckily held the science of politics in little esteem" all too soon "became mincemeat".[51] And that was the end of the great empire.[52]

---

[49] That monks remained at the site into the 480s seems clear, since the door pivots in a number of cells which were not completed until the very last year or so of consistent patronage at the site, show considerable evidence of wear.

[50] The only usage, over the centuries, was by an occasional sadhu or the like; one left a Siva trident symbol in Cave 11, while the plastering in the left porch cell of that cave, and some plastering (unlike the Vakataka type) in Cave 26's Left Wing also suggest such temporary residence.

[51] Kale 1966, 349; Ryder 1927: Kale 1966, 349 reads: "fell a prey to those princes . . . as he was totally averse to the science of politics".

[52] For Maharaja Subandhu's ultimate assumption of Vakataka power and authority, see Chapter 4 of this volume.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Chronology

Most of Ajanta's patrons started their caves, jostling for position and vying with each other for workmen, during the first three of four years of inaugural activity, starting in 462. Major donors from the Vakataka court itself, with the local king of Risika and highly placed patrons from neighboring Asmaka were all deeply involved in sponsoring donations. However, just as work at the site was beginning to gather speed, the Asmakas—who ultimately were going to destroy the Vakataka empire—started upon their preliminary trouble-making course. We do not know what they did, or what they threatened to do, but what is clear is that the local king, at the end of 468, expelled them peremptorily from the site.

The Asmaka expulsion by the local king at the end of 468 is an event which provides us with a clear benchmark in the development of the site. Because the Asmaka caves, occupying the whole western extremity of the site, were abandoned from the start of the Recession in early 469 until the Asmakas had taken over the control of the site and renewed its development in 475, they occupy two very distinct periods of development, one early, one late. This is particularly clear in the great Cave 26 complex, where the "primitive" early core is hidden beneath a highly developed decorative covering. The fact that the late decoration alone greets the eye has led to the common assumption that the lavish caitya hall must be one of Ajanta's latest excavations.[53]

However, when we analyze the growth of the Cave 26 complex and its four integral wings we can distinguish between its two distinct phases (462–468; 475–478). When these caves and a number of others, lying at the western extremity of the site, all had to be abandoned at the end of 468, they were still completely barren of detail; the excavators obviously wanted to get everything generally roughed out before concentrating on the elaborate overlay of forms which, as it turns out, could not be applied until much later. So all

[53] Bakker 1997, 41. Of course the assumption of a late date was supported by the fact that Harisena, said to be ruling in the Cave 16 and Cave 17 inscriptions, is not mentioned in the Cave 26 inscription. This is true; if my views are correct, Cave 26 was dedicated less than a year after Harisena died, during the reign of his son.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

of these caves at the western extremity of the site remained in a state of hibernation, as it were, until the Asmakas, having returned to wreak vengeance on the local king, took over the region for themselves by 475.

It was only after 475 that the Asmakas now could turn vigorously to the task of trying to complete their caves, finally getting a few of their shrines hurriedly completed in 478, just before the collapse of the site's consistent patronage. In fact, it was in anticipation of this collapse, caused by the emperor Harisena's sudden death at the end of 477, that Ajanta's patrons—both Asmaka and "Vakataka"—rushed their main images to completion, so that they could be dedicated and the merit thus acquired.

The situation in the "Vakataka" section of the site, along the main scarp, turned out to be very similar, although for a different reason. When the local king expelled the Asmakas at the end of 468, he was rightly worried that they would soon take revenge. Therefore, to garner available resource, he ordered work stopped on all ongoing excavations other than the royal caves—his own and Cave 1, the donation of his overlord, Harisena.[54] The only exception to this sumptuary edict was his allowing the Buddha images—and only the Buddha images—to be hurriedly added to Caves Lower 6, 7, 11, and 15.[55] The fact that these were the first Buddha images created at the site surely explains their privileged treatment.[56]

Although so many caves at the site, both "Vakataka" and Asmaka, had to be abandoned at the start of the Recession in 469, and were not touched again, as far as their architecture, sculpture, or painting goes, until at least 475, work proceeded upon the royal caves (1, 17, 19, 20, 29), at least at first, with a particular vigor, surely taking advantage of the huge supply of already experienced workmen so recently laid off by less prestigious patrons. Surely due to

[54] For the evidence that Cave 1 is indeed Harisena's cave, see Chapter 9 of this Volume. Significantly, it is the only cave at the site upon which work continued both when the local king was dominant, and when the Asmakas took over.

[55] In Cave 6, the painting of the shrine, shrine antechamber, and rear wall was also hastily completed, since the excavation of the area was already completed.

[56] Cave 16, the Prime Minister's cave, was also temporarily exempted from Upendragupta's proscription, but had to be abandoned after 469 before its image (finally completed in 478) had been started. It should be admitted that we have no record of an actual edict; however the evidence of the local king's action is clear from the work stoppage throughout the site.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

the position and the prestige of these two powerful patrons—the local king and the emperor—Ajanta's decorative style comes into its own during the brief span of their privileged undertakings. Increasingly now, forms from the worlds both of nature and of the imagination are interwoven with iconic imagery into an exuberant tapestry where meaning is amplified by delight. When work started up again after the local war (Hiatus), when everything had lain dormant, these developments, along with forms and features transmitted from the related (and untroubled) caves at Bagh, impacted with a renewed energy upon the site.

I have assumed that the Recession went on for roughly three years (469–471), judging from the amount of work accomplished in the exempted privileged royal caves before this moment of fragile peace broke into a time of war. And I have assumed that this local war, which ended with the takeover of the region and the expulsion of the local king, itself lasted another three years (472 through 474), causing what I have called the Hiatus, when no work whatsoever was done in any of the caves. The span given to the Hiatus is of course an estimate, based on the fact that it reflects a major regional disturbance; and it should also be noted that it reflects a time of particular growth at the Bagh caves, to which many of Ajanta's workmen migrated to find work. Bagh flourished greatly in this time of Ajanta's troubles; and when peace was restored at Ajanta following the victory of the Asmakas over the king of Risika, Ajanta's development is greatly influenced and enriched by ideas, forms, and techniques brought back by the returning workmen.[57]

The "history" of the benefactions of Upendragupta, the local king, poignantly reveals the drama of the contentions between his own feudatory state of Risika and the neighboring Asmakas. When he suddenly expelled the Asmakas at the end of 468, not even allowing them to hurry a single one of their main Buddha images to completion, Upendragupta, deriving energy from his own assertiveness, had the temerity to start a second (!) caitya hall (Cave 29), as of replacing their abandoned monument with one of his own.[58] Since Upendragupta hardly needed a second caitya hall, Cave 29 was

[57] For Bagh/Ajanta relationships, see Chapter 3 of this volume.

[58] The cave was hidden by debris in the nineteenth century when the numbers was assigned in sequence.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

surely started as a "slap in the face" to the Asmakas.[59] As witness to Ajanta's turbulent history, this new excavation, placed at a high level where space was still available, was the sole new undertaking started at the site during the dozen years between 466 and 477.

However, Cave 29 had hardly been started when reality dawned, and the work on it was halted. Obviously Upendragupta, who had so assertively stopped all expenditures at the site except for his own and those of his overlord, now was having second thoughts about such new undertakings. Not only was there still much work to do on his caves which were already underway, but it was also painfully clear that he should be rethinking his priorities in anticipation of a likely Asmaka reprisal.

This change in attitude—a change which in fact came both too little and too late—is clearly revealed in what happened to Upendragupta's sumptuously ornate little Cave 20. Its vigorous excavation was essentially abandoned shortly after the start of the Recession, even though its Buddha image and its decorated shrine doorway were eventually rushed to an expedient completion in 471, the cave being dedicated, like Caves 17 and 19, at the very last minute, just before the invasion by the Asmakas began.[60] After that, starting in 472, excavation work on all of Upendragupta's caves was summarily abandoned, and Upendragupta himself disappears from the history of the region from this time onward.

The Asmaka takeover of the region now initiated the incredible final florescence of excavation and decoration at the site, building upon what had been learned both in the earlier work on the royal caves and on the vigorous developments at Bagh, which had actually benefited from the Recession and the Hiatus at Ajanta. Intensive work now began again on all of the site's excavations, with the cruel exception of those of the defeated local king, whom the Asmakas now dishonored by forbidding worship in his beautiful caitya Cave 19 and then by brutally cutting a convenient passage to their own caves right through its courtyard.[61] This great burst of activity at

[59] Like the abandoned Cave 26, it was oriented to the summer solstice, thus giving Upendragupta halls oriented to both the summer and (Cave 19) the winter solstice.

[60] For the rush to complete the images of Caves 17 and 20, see Chapter 15 of this Volume.

[61] For the dishonoring of the Chaitya Cave 19, see Chapter 15 of this Volume.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Ajanta, starting in 475, reflects the eagerness of the old patrons to finally finish what they had started, and the desire of a number of new patrons to get in on the act. But it also probably stands as witness to the powerful linkage between the now-dominant Asmaka rulers and the great monk Buddhabhadra.

Buddhabhadra was the dominant force in the early development of the site's western extremity, and now, with his Asmaka connections, must have had a strong influence over the rest of the growing establishment too. In his Cave 26 inscription (verse 9), Buddhabhadra proudly reminds the world that he and the minister of Asmaka, whom he lavishly praises, had been "attached . . . in friendship through many previous births". This is of course the kind of connection which, whether at Ajanta in the fifth century, or in the halls of government today, gets things done, and Ajanta's brief burgeoning between 475 and 478 was certainly helped by this linkage to the dominant court.

However, this does not mean that the site was as yet properly ready for the Buddhist sangha to take over, hoping to replace the sounds of chiseling with the sound of chanting. The splendid "gandhakuti" (perfumed hall) which Upendragupta had so hurriedly decorated was now "off-limits" for worship, and the rival Cave 26 was still very much in course of excavation; so there was no proper ceremonial hall in which to worship. Possibly the two old Hinayana caitya halls (Caves 9 and 10) were still used but the fact that there was no attempt to refurbish them until probably as late as 477 shows a distinct lack of interest.[62] Not only had everyone's devotional focus now turned decisively to iconic as opposed to aniconic forms, but it is evident that Ajanta's patrons were far more interested in making their own new donations than in refurbishing the productions of the past.[63]

Remarkably, by the time of Harisena's death late in 477, not a single shrine Buddha had been completed and dedicated (and thus "brought to life") in any one of the many caves upon which work was either continuing (Caves 2, 4, 5, Upper 6, 7, 11, 15, 16, 21,

[62] For the redecoration of the Hinayana caves, see Volume II.

[63] This may also explain why there appears to have been no interest in refurbishing the Hinayana viharas until so late that time ran quickly out with Harisena's death.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

26, 26LW, 26RW) or had been newly started (Caves 3, 14, 22, 23A, 28) during this final phase of the site's consistent patronage.[64] Except for the central Buddha image in the Cave 26 caitya hall, all of the other eleven shrine Buddhas completed and dedicated in the final years of the site's consistent patronage (i.e. after 475) were done in an anxious rush in 478.[65] The "Vakataka" patrons, in that threatening year, were hurrying to dedicate their images before their power in the region was compromised, while the Asmaka patrons, only a few months later, were rushing to get as much done as they could before their ruler's military needs preempted those of the spirit.

Indeed, until 478—which was already a mere minute from midnight!—it may be that the monks had to conduct their worship in no more than a mere three (Caves 6, 11, and 17) of the few viharas where the Buddha image had been completed and dedicated much earlier. This is suggested by fact that in these three (and only in these three) caves (Lower 6, 11, and 17) the walls are heavily begrimed by the soot from the oil lamps which must have been used in worship.[66] Furthermore, Caves 11 and 17 appear to be the only Vakataka caves in which monks, who must have urgently needed housing, lived during the troubled years between 469 and 471 respectively; if they lived in other caves, their cells had not been fitted out with doors and other amenities.[67]

---

[64] The old images in Caves 7, 11, and 15 were all being refurbished, and presumably newly dedicated, in 478. Only the images in Upendragupta's Caves 17, 19, and 20, which had been rushed to dedication in 471, and the image in Cave Lower 6 (dedicated in 469) were not being worked on in this troubled year (478).

[65] The image in Cave 26LW had probably been fully carved by 477, but the late character of its context suggests that the cave as a whole was not finished until 478. The Cave 1 image was finished but still not dedicated in 477.

[66] The slight amount of painting done in Cave 15 all belongs to 478; it only appears in the shrine and on the antechamber ceiling, and shows no begriming. Cave 7's refurbished shrine was not painted until 478; so any evidence of previous soot deposits is gone, but the original image was so anomalous that is was probably treated like that in Cave 15. The images in Caves 19 and 20, probably because of their connection with Upendragupta, were apparently not worshipped until the Period of Disruption and then briefly; the small amount of soot in Cave 20 would seem to confirm this late usage.

[67] Cave Lower 6's cells had been cut, at least in part, by 467 since they originally had "useless" A mode doorways; these could have been (but were not) provided with quasi-B mode (= A+ mode) projections in 468, but were not. Instead, they were converted to the more practical D-mode after the Hiatus, probably in 475 worshipped until the Period of Disruption and then briefly; the small amount of soot in Cave 20 would seem to confirm this late usage.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Even in Caves 11 the main hall (although it had been already plastered in 468) was never painted, while in the shrine of Cave 17 only the image itself was properly finished; the surrounding walls did not get painted. Nor does there appear to have been any interest in hanging garlands in these few "active" caves during these early years; supporting this observation, Cave Lower 6 has many garland hooks but no breakage of the plaster around them, while Cave 17 was never fitted out to allow such decoration, even though this could easily have been accomplished. Cave 11 does have many holes which might have been used for garland hooks, although their placement is often anomalous, none being in expected positions such as at the center of porch or interior ceilings, or on the Buddha's halo.[68] By the same token, only a few of the twenty-three caves being worked on at the time of Harisena's death, not even a third had their carefully planned painting programs as much as half completed.

Such observations make it evident that when, during the year after Harisena's death, all of Ajanta's original patrons had to suddenly give up any further work on their great undertakings, Ajanta was hardly the kind of busy and crowded establishment of which they once had dreamed. And their dreams must have turned to nightmare when they realized their beautiful but still unfinished caves, now taken over by pious "philistines", could never be properly completed, even if Fate might eventually allow the original patrons to take up work on their donations once again.

Needless to say, Ajanta, as it turned out, was a far cry from the kind of ideal monastic retreat that Dr. Stietencron and many other scholars would wish to visualize, and which indeed might have been realized had the gods not established such demanding termini. As it is, we must recognize that Ajanta's excitement lies at least in part in its very incompleteness, in its constant revelation of process, and in the struggles and challenges which it so exuberantly faced.

[68] Three small square holes at the center of the right wall of the interior were almost certainly for garlands (or perhaps incense) to honor the standing Buddha painted just above them; however, the painting (and thus the holes) are clearly intrusive.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

A Final Comment

Actually, I welcome the insistence, by thoughtful scholars, that Ajanta's development, during its period of consistent patronage (i.e. excluding the brief Period of Disruption) must have taken more than the mere seventeen years (or even fourteen) years what I have proposed. This is because the shorter the time span, the more remarkable is the achievement, and the more surely the great emperor Harisena's reputation can be restored to the position it must have occupied in his own time. Both Dandin (in the Visrutacarita) and Varahadeva (in the Cave 16 inscription) attest to his great importance, even though he is not even mentioned in R. Tappar's (otherwise) fine and authoritative Early History of India, or in many other significant studies.[69]

I have said that Harisena was certainly the greatest king in India in his own day (460s and 470s). Having said this, I have then, with a courage sustained by affection, further claimed that he may have been the greatest king in the world in this same period, protecting my defenses, however, by asking anyone who disagreed with me to name a rival. Until now, no one has done so.

Although seventeen (or alternatively, as little as fourteen) years may boggle the imagination today, this was surely not the case with Ajanta's powerful and rich and assertive patrons, many of whom must have been of "a certain age", already slightly arthritic, when they inaugurated the site. They probably would not have wanted to get involved in such a project if they had known that work at the site was "going to go on forever and ever". After all, after almost two decades it was still be only half done, and surely well over the original cost-estimates. And how would they know, that to make matters worse, the great emperor was going to quite literally ruin everything by suddenly dying.

Much of my study, in fact, has nothing to do with trying to defend the Short Chronology. Instead of worrying about "how it could be done in such a short time", it is more relevant and productive to ask why such a carefully planned and powerfully controlled project, drawing upon the rich resources of the time, went on and on. The question that we should ask is: Why did Ajanta take so long?

---

[69] Tappar 2003.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

I was even guilty of saying once that Ajanta might be considered the "greatest creative achievement in the world". This is of course the kind of statement that is allowed to politicians, but that no academic should ever make. However, I should immediately point out that I used the qualification "might" as a much-needed shelter. Obviously such a competition could have no final winner—whether Angkor or Chartres or Machu Pichhu or the Taj Mahal or Hagia Sophia or the whole city of Paris could ever win. There are too many variables to take into account. However, we should ponder just what it is that could possibly put a site in contention for the role as mankind's "greatest creative achievement".

Certainly the quality of the work is a paramount consideration, and here (by general consensus) Ajanta stands high on the scale, with esthetic commitment amplified by an authority which came from long training. At the same time, it is only fair to say that the artists sometimes got away with making second-rate stuff—motifs hidden "around the corner" where the patrons would not be likely to see the short-comings, or to greatly care.

Then of course, in our world, quantity is very important too, and here again Ajanta passes with flying colors. Even though the various patrons may not have always been pleased about the progress of work, the amount accomplished in such a short time seems staggering to us today. And remarkably, even perhaps uniquely in the world, the sequence of its developments can be analyzed with such specificity that every form and feature at the site can be located in a sequence so tight that it demands discussion on a year-to-year basis. This is assumed throughout this study, even though each particular date (still keeping its place within the overall sequence) may vary by a year or two. The significance of such a precise and complete ordering of literally everything at the site over the course of its development in such a major period where, throughout India, such data are few and far between, cannot be gainsaid.

We must also consider the consistency of the work, the manner in which it makes a definable and constantly progressing statement, and reflects in a significant way the attitudes of the age in which it was created: how it summarizes both the esthetic and the social, to say nothing of the religious aspirations of its period. Here Ajanta triumphs; it leaves a compellingly readable record of the age in which it was created, and which in fact it preserves. It stands as the single most important record of India's Golden Age, which it, to a large degree, defines.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

And then there is the matter of growth in time. Ajanta is more than a "renaissance"; it is a "naissance". It may depend to a degree on the past, but its development represents a constant process of discovery, as its patrons and its planners and its workers tried to achieve—and did achieve—something that had never been done before; and, at its death, it offered, to its progeny, the treasures which it had found.

To sum up: where else can one find a monument where so much was done so quickly and so well, and which can be seen as a virtual laboratory of change, started in diffidence and confusion and ultimately moving toward a focused sophistication which "man's own resinous heart" alone kept from a final staggering realization.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

CHAPTER THREE

HOW THE MONKS LIVED: SHRINES AND CELLS AT AJANTA

> Among the Hindus round about the village of Ajanta the story goes that once the gods and goddesses, tired of the monotony of heaven, and desiring to refresh themselves with a little excitement, begged leave to go down to earth for one night to enjoy themselves. So earnestly did they entreat Indra, God of Heaven, that in compassion he granted their request, with the condition, however, that they should return before the cock's first crow, otherwise they would be shut out from heaven forever.
>
> Then the gods and goddesses came down swiftly to the earth, dancing and singing for joy, and no sooner did they see the splendid gorge near Ajanta than they chose it for the site of their one night's entertainment. Busily they hollowed out of the hillside halls and chambers, and so thoroughly enjoyed themselves that they forgot the time limit; but, alas, they were startled by the cock's crow, and the king of heaven's curse fell upon them, and so they transformed themselves into beautiful sculptures and paintings. Never again could they return to heaven, but were forced to remain on earth forever.[1]

During the exuberant first five years of Vakataka patronage at Ajanta from about 462 to about 466, no less than twenty of the site's viharas were started—the first such excavations to have been made in India for three centuries. Planned as a lavish housing project for the Buddhist monks, the site was directly supported by the Vakataka emperor Harisena and his courtiers. Chief among them, as we have seen, was the powerful Varahadeva who, as Prime Minister, "governed the country righteously" (Ajanta Cave 16 inscription, verse 20); Maharaja Upendragupta, the obsessively pious feudatory ruler of the Ajanta region; and the powerful monk, Buddhabhadra, with his long-standing ties to the aggressive Asmakas, the feudatory power to the south.[2]

---

[1] Legend quoted from Dey 1925, 162.

[2] The latter had been the close friend of the minister of Asmaka "through many successive births", according to the Ajanta Cave 26 inscription, verse 9.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Ajanta's caves were not, in the early 460s, as dramatic in conception as they were soon to be; for of the twenty inaugural viharas at the site, not a single one was planned with a shrine. Not a single one was conceived as the kind of worship complex that we see today. The viharas were all intended, when first begun, to be mere dormitories with no devotional function, following the precedent of their ancient Hinayana prototypes, the viharas 12, 13, and 15A, excavated some four to five hundred years earlier.[3] So how and why did the remarkable shift from dormitory to worship hall, which first involved Ajanta's major donors by about 466, and then caught up the lesser donors a year or two later, come to so dramatically transform the site? What forces or factors turned these mere monastic residences into what in effect are palatial temples, "clothed in the brilliance of Indra's crown"? (Ajanta 16 inscription, verse 29)

The story seems to start in about 465 at the closely contemporary Vakataka site at Bagh.[4] Bagh's chief patron, one Dattataka, must have intended to have a caitya hall as the devotional focus of the extensive site which he was planning.[5] At Ajanta, two new caitya halls were already underway, while every other major rock-cut complex in western India also has at least one. But at Bagh geological realities intervened. Bagh's inexperienced excavators, like their counterparts at Ajanta, had not faced a cliff for over three hundred years; perhaps this is why it took a few years before they realized that although the Bagh scarp was high enough, the soft sandstone matrix

[3] Admittedly, even though much earlier viharas, generally dating centuries before Ajanta's Vakataka phase, are typically shrineless, there are a few (in fact very rare) Hinayana excavations where shrines and residence cells are combined. The Wai Vihara, and Cave 8 at Shelarwadi, and possibly Mahad Cave 8 may be the only relevant examples. (Dhavalikar 1984, Figs. 24, 34, 32). But in all of these cases it could be said that residence cells have been attached to the shrine, rather than vice versa; at Ajanta the shrine has been added to the vihara. It would appear that the old and perhaps expedient concept had long been forgotten by the time that Ajanta's Vakataka phase began.

[4] See Spink 1976, where I considered Cave 4 to be earlier than Cave 2, not then realizing that the antechamber sculptures were probably added after the shrine chamber was completed.

[5] For the Bagh plate of Maharaja Subandhu, who credits Dattataka with making the caves, see Mirashi 1966 Part 1, pp. 19–21. However, Mirashi dates (or really mis-dates) the Bagh and Barwani plates to the Early Kalacuri era. For my dating of the same inscriptions to the Gupta era, see Spink 1976–77.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

was far too flawed and fragile to allow any such spaciously vaulted structure. And so, it would appear, the ill-laid plans for a caitya hall at Bagh had to be abandoned.[6]

This being the case, Dattataka must have made a dramatic decision. He decided to convert the huge vihara, Cave 2, which had already been started, into a caitya hall. He would add a stupa chamber at its rear; for such stupas were of course the "caitya" or object of worship in all caitya halls up to this time. After all, it was the *caitya* and not the *hall* which made it a *caitya hall.* Thus Bagh's Cave 2 was the first monastic dormitory to incorporate-in fact, to become-a shrine. And this was probably at the instance of nothing more mysterious than geology.[7]

The vihara shrine concept introduced in Bagh Cave 2 rapidly impacted upon Ajanta. By 466, every one of the twenty simple dormitories already under excavation at Ajanta were being redesigned to incorporate a shrine at rear center; and following the lead of the great caitya halls at the site, the focus was now to be a Buddha image, conceived as a living presence in the cave—living right there in the midst of the monks.[8]

The sudden and obsessive addition of Buddha shrines to the Vakataka viharas, which took place in less than a single decade beginning in the late 460s, must have been warmly welcomed by the monks, eager for immediately available and indeed privileged places to worship. However, the new development was perhaps even more gratifying to the high-class Vakataka patrons, eager to sponsor such sacred and merit-making additions, under the approving eye of their caves' ultimate Owner. This surely helps to explain the urgency with which, despite many political problems, work on all of the caves at the site progressed. The making of merit, either for one's self, or for one's parents, or for mankind in general, was the patron's overriding concern, notably in the times of crisis which were a recurring phenomenon at Ajanta. And the evidence of the site proves that such merit could not be acquired until the shrine

[6] It is possible that the massive and unfinished Bagh Cave 3 was planned as a caitya hall; but if so, the need for huge supporting pillars perhaps it was better to abandon it in mid-course.

[7] For the plans of the Bagh caves, and various illustrations, see Marshall 1927.

[8] See Schopen 1990 ("The Buddha as an Owner of Property and Permanent Resident in Medieval Indian Monasteries"), republished in Schopen 1997, Chapter XII.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Buddhas—now to be resident deep in every cave—were finished and dedicated. They did not even have to be used; but they had to be dedicated, if the merit was to be gained. Nonetheless, before the image was dedicated, the cave had to be brought to—or, hopefully, near—completion. And hence Ajanta's urgency.

At each of these moments of crisis, the patrons halted or delayed the normal course of excavation and decoration in their caves, and ordered the shrine Buddhas alone to be completed, even if the walls and doorways of the shrines themselves had to be left unfinished. Thus four vihara images (in Caves Lower 6, 7, 11, 15) were rushed to completion early in 469, when the local king, having expelled the Asmakas, imposed sumptuary restrictions on work at the site. Two more vihara images (in Caves 17 and 20) were rushed to completion by the local king, when he feared a retaliatory Asmaka attack at the end of 471. Then when the emperor Harisena died (on "Dec. 31, 477") and the old Vakataka patrons feared an Asmaka insurrection, no less than seven of their shrine images (including three being refurbished) can be added to this compulsive list; thus Caves 2, 4, U6, 7, 11, 15, and 16 all were rushed to completion in early 478.[9]

By the middle of 478, the Asmakas, who from 475 had been the feudatory rulers of the site, finally renounced their Vakataka overlords; but now the monk Buddhabhadra and his Asmaka associates also were under great pressure, since war was imminent. Although the main image in the Asmaka caitya hall had got completed in good time, those in its important lower wings had to be rushed to completion, while those in the lower priority upper wings had barely been started in 478 before they had to be abandoned. Time ran out so swiftly on the fine image in Buddhabhadra's Cave 21, that it was painted and dedicated in such a rush that the details of the throne and halo, the Buddha's hair, and the legs of the attendant bodhisattvas never were carved. Indeed, at least half of Buddhabhadra's planned excavations had to be left even more incomplete than these, for it is clear that he had not expected that the mounting preparations for war would reap their harvest so soon.

The final crisis in the Vakataka caves came at the end of what we call the Period of Disruption. Then, in from mid-478 through

[9] The images in Caves 7, 11, and 15 had all been rushed to completion at the time of the Recession; but all were refurbished nearly a decade later.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

480, a host of uninvited devotees, who had been totally excluded from making a single image at the elite and exclusive site while Ajanta was flourishing, finally had a chance to make a spate of meritorious donations on their own.[10] These intrusive images, often done skillfully but totally careless of the original patrons' decorative programs, metastasized upon the monuments for this brief period, wherever space, either outside or inside, was available and acceptable. But then, all at once, on some unhappy day late in 480, the workers throughout the site suddenly put their chisels and brushes down, leaving dozens of these potentially merit-making works permanently unfinished. This must have been a moment when the Asmaka's developing insurrection against the empire flamed up in the region, completely destroying the last vestiges of Ajanta's rich but troubled patronage.

When we review Ajanta's patronage history, we come to the remarkable conclusion that almost every shrine Buddha at Ajanta was rushed to an expedient completion at one or another of the crises which afflicted the site. Almost invariably, this effort was given absolute priority, even if the other portions of the cave were still very incomplete. This is because it was only the Buddha image which was truly important. And the Buddha image was important only if (fully finished or not) it had been dedicated. Otherwise the image, and the cave, was dead. This is why intrusive donors, in the Period of Disruption, added their helter-skelter images *only* in caves where work had progressed enough so that the Buddha image had been dedicated. That the image had been dedicated was the crucial thing: only those caves were alive.

This is why the greatest vihara in all of India—the gift of the remarkable Vakataka emperor Harisena, who by 477 had brought India's Golden Age to the climax—is dead. It is clear that because of the emperor's sudden death, it was never used for worship. There is no ritual soot in its shrine and the garland hook in its shrine antechamber was never used.[11] But most revealing of all, it is bereft

[10] Intrusions may have been put in the "Vakataka" caves along the main scarp from mid-478, when the old patrons were forced to leave due to the Asmaka's rejection of Vakataka overlordship. The Asmaka involvement at the site lasted until the end of the year.

[11] As in most cases, only the hole for the hook (long since removed) remains; and like too many at the site, it has been cemented in. But, unlike its counterparts

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

of later intrusions. So it is evident that the emperor died with a suddenness which made it impossible for him to complete and—more important—to dedicate his beautiful monument.

I have suggested elsewhere that the emperor may have been assassinated by his perfidious Asmaka feudatories, who had infiltrated his court as part of their plan to destroy his empire.[12] And if we need further proof of his sudden death, we can find it in the Vakataka shrines themselves; for in the troubled year which followed, over ninety percent of the major shrine Buddhas at the site were rushed to completion, and hopeless attempts were made to finish a number of others.[13] All of this frenzied effort was due to the fact that no merit would accrue unless the image was dedicated.

This explains why, although there are hundreds of intrusive images at the site, all dating to the Period of Disruption, not a single one was carved or painted in Cave 1, or in any other caves where the Buddha image could not be brought to completion. All such evidence shows how important—how "alive"—the shrine Buddhas at Ajanta were; and it also suggests why the Ajanta viharas of the later Vakataka phase were so much more sumptuous than their early predecessors at the site—why they could now boldly aspire to rival "the palaces of the lord of gods".[14] For now no longer mere monastic dormitories, they were the residence of the Buddha—the living Buddha—himself.[15] And even though this honored resident never thought of taking up abode in the viharas until 466, his decision to finally do so drastically changed the old vihara concept. One can hardly believe that the increasingly beautiful carvings in the viharas, or the often lush murals which so directly reflect the privileged world of the courtly patrons who sponsored them, would ever have been made for the monks alone. In fact, if that was their sole audience, such mural decorations would have been marvelously inappropriate, even though we would probably be right in believing that the monks too were affected by the *fin de siècle* temper of the times.[16]

---

in Cave 2, the plaster around it remains unbroken: that is, garlands were never hung in the cave, because the image was not "alive".

[12] See below, Chapter 4.

[13] Three of these images, which had been hastily dedicated in 469 before being properly completed, were refurbished (and presumably rededicated) in 478.

[14] Ajanta Cave 16 inscription, verse 27.

[15] Schopen 1990.

[16] For the Western Vakataka's "world of leisure and affluence", see Bakker 1997, 44.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

I am not suggesting that if the Ajanta viharas had been mere dormitories they would have been particularly severe, for the elitist excavations at Ajanta reflect the very climax of India's Golden Age—the "world of sensuous pleasures and sophisticated refinement (that) we find in the Ajanta murals", as Bakker says.[17] However, the new, even celebratory, context allowed the Buddha—or perhaps more particularly the Buddha's visitors—to recollect the life-affirming character of this fragile age. Surely, there is nothing of that concern, expressed, in an earlier age, in the Cullavagga VI, 3.2, that "people touring the dwelling places, having seen . . . a bold design made with figures of women, figures of men . . . (would) spread it about (that the monks were) like householders who enjoy the pleasures of the senses . . ." and therefore should have only "wreath-work, creeper-work" and other patterned designs" in their dwellings.[18]

The period when the Vakataka caves were created was indeed an age of privilege, at least for the elite. And since the monks themselves were connected with and supported by that elite, it is relevant to review some of the monks' own privileges, as well as their needs—to consider their daily requirements, and to glance into the dark interiors of their cells to get a better understanding of how they may have lived.

We can start with the amenities found in the caves' precincts. Unless disallowed by geological problems, every cave had its own cistern filled by surface water channeled down from the heights above. The ill-starred local king proudly describes his "large cistern pleasing to the eyes and filled with sweet, light, clear, cold, and copious water". One can still see the channels cut into the scarp above, which directed the monsoonal water down into the elaborate pillared cistern chamber (Cave 18) which served as a connecting passage as well as a convenient water source between Upendragupta's grand vihara Cave 17 and his splendid Caitya Cave 19.

It seems unlikely that the monks, visitors, and workmen using such typically protected cisterns at Ajanta needed the water filters mentioned in one of the ancient texts.[19] Very deep, and extending more

[17] Bakker 1997, 44

[18] I. B. Horner (trans), The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-Pitaka) Vol. V, Cullavagga (Sacred Books of the Buddhists, Vol. XX); for this and other references to the Cullavagga. I must thank Dr. A. Jamkhedkar for pointing out the relevance of this text for studies of the caves.

[19] Cullavagga V, 13.2.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

than twenty feet rearward under the cave floor, Cave 17's second huge reservoir was positioned so that it could be shared with the adjacent Cave 16, the donation of the imperial Prime Minister Varahadeva. Like many of the other cisterns at the site, it still generally retains water throughout the whole year, the thermal stability of the mountain mass into which it was cut keeping it refreshingly cool. Until *e.coli* was discovered in the water, I drank of it happily—and recommended it with confidence to my students.

Since most of these cisterns, as their location suggests, were started when the viharas were conceived of as mere dormitories (that is, during the first few years of undertakings at the site), it suggests how well the various patrons were determined to treat the monks who would eventually be able to move into them. The patrons didn't have to spend their money on such conveniences—"affording enjoyment of well-known comforts in all seasons" (Ajanta Cave 16 inscription, verse 26) unless they had the interests of the intended residents in mind; for in lieu of such an amenity, the monks could have lugged their water up from the river at the bottom of the ravine, just as the nearby villagers had to do.

For certain less polite functions, of course, the river must have been used then, as it often is today. And then, as today, the amplitude of the welcoming river bed would have simplified the rituals. There was no need, as the Cullavagga VIII, 9.3 says, "to put on privy shoes, or to clean the privy if it had become soiled". Down by the river, it was hardly necessary to remember the polite warning, that "whoever goes to a privy, standing outside should cough, and the one sitting inside should cough too" (VIII, 3.2) Nor, in this ample outdoor setting, were there queues, based on seniority, which could cause "newly ordained monks . . . having arrived first, (through) restraining themselves . . . (to fall down) fainting" (Cullavagga VIII, 3.1) Indeed, the troubling impact of such rights of seniority, typical of more crowded settings, caused the Buddha, with his humane insight, to give the monks permission "to relieve yourselves according to the order of arrival" (VIII, 3.1).

Of course the river bed was not a particularly private place, for the paths which thousands of feet had worn along it, formed the ancient highway into the site. Indeed, much the same route, bordering the Waghora ("tiger") river, is used by the tourist busses today, as they come in from the plain beyond. It was here that the ancient trade-route wound its way up through the dramatic pass to the top

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

of the plateau and to the town of Ajanta (fortified in Mughal times) from which the caves received their present name. In the emperor Harisena's time the caravans—some making the long trek from the Northwest (Gandhara region) down across India to the cities and ports of the Southeast—would nourish the exuberantly growing site in their passing with a constant infusion not only of goods but of monks and workers and devotees and eager entrepreneurs, all bringing their skills and their ideas and their money and their faith to be absorbed and utilized at the site.

These were good times, and Ajanta, in this fifth century renaissance, responded to them; in fact, Ajanta was created by them. The great emperor Harisena was gradually expanding his control over Central India from the western to the eastern sea. And if he dreamt of empire, his ambitions went far beyond the idleness of dream. The strength of his political and military authority made the dreams of a richer and more radiant world come true, whether in the great structures of the cities, now turned to dust, or in the new "memorials (in) the mountain . . . that will endure for as long as the moon and the sun continue." (Ajanta 26 inscription, verse 8)

It was Harisena's firmly imposed rule—the *Pax Vakataka*—that was, all too briefly, to sponsor the final florescence of India's "Golden Age" in the 460s and the 470s. It was, ultimately, the great emperor's authority which approved that world of privilege and startling beauty—vouchsafed at least for the happy few—which was reflected, as if by a mirror deep in the mountains, upon Ajanta's walls. And it was upon the busy trade-routes passing by the site that one would now meet the groaning camels and the uncomplaining bullocks, both with their increasingly heavy burden of goods, some really needed, some merely desired.

Whether one's business was material or spiritual, the path into the site, via the twisting course of the Waghora river, finally ended, dramatically, at the caves. Or one might better say, it ended *below* the caves, because anyone coming into the ravine, monk or merchant, layman or prince, would still have to make a steep ascent—the princes perhaps being carried—up to one's sacred destination. The pathway used by most visitors would probably have been via the stairway, partially tunneled in the solid rock, that led up to the important cave of the Prime Minister Varahadeva. He, as one of the inaugurators of the site's renaissance, had (understandably) chosen the most central spot for his own donation, Cave 16. It lies

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

at the exact center of the great arc of the site. Even the Chinese pilgrim Zuan Xang, traveling through southern India in the early seventh century, had heard of the wonders of the long-abandoned site; and though he did not go to it, he speaks of the Prime Minister's great "elephant gate" as the "entrance to the site", and indeed reports that the massive stone elephants still sometimes "rumble and roar"—probably recording the thundering sound that the nearby waterfalls make during the flood of the monsoon season.[20]

Passing between the two elephants, the pilgrim or the monk or the artisan eager for work would come immediately upon the Lord of the Nagas, seated in the position of royal ease ("maharaja lila") and demand both attention or devotion; for these autochthonous divinities are known, even though with lesser force today, to rule the ravine. The Prime Minister is careful to honor him: his long and prideful nearby inscription informs us that he not only made "a temple of the Buddha inside", but also "a shrine of the lord of the Nagas". (Ajanta Cave 16 inscription, verses 24, 25) Whether it is significant (and if so, in what sense so) a "naga" (cobra) was found winding around the neck of the Buddha in the shrine of Cave 21 a few years ago, and another, innocent of all availablde footholds, once dropped down from the cliff above, to land directly in front of the famous nagaraja who guards the court of Cave 19.

Just as in the final part of the approach to the Prime Minister's cave, the adjacent excavation (Cave 17) of the local king, Upendragupta, also had to be partly tunneled, for the scarp was precipitous at this point. Farther to the west, Upendragupta's caitya hall, planned as the ceremonial center of the site, was once approached by a great staircase leading straight up from the river bed; high above, two powerful guardian snake divinities (one long since returned to its watery abode below) guarded the entrance to the court. An even longer approach led up to the rival Asmakas' expansive Caitya Cave 26; centuries ago this also fell away, along with some of the cells of the complex, cut with too much confidence close to the high scarp's fickle face. Only the figure of a fallen earth divinity (yaksha), half hidden in the safety of the garden below, now, along with the inaccessibility of the cliff itself, remains to offer protection at the

[20] Zuan Xang, (trans. S. Beal) Si-Yu-Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World, Vol. VI. 1881 (new ed. 1958).

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

site's western extremity, the spacious stretch of mountain which the aggressive Asmakas once jealously controlled.

Not far beyond the great Cave 26 complex, all development ended, brutally cut off by the Asmakas' own abortive dreams of empire. Only the *dhabdhaba*—the waterfall with its seven great leaps—continues its own timeless work of excavation, still patiently but insistently cutting into the deep layers of basalt laid down by volcanic eruptions some sixty million years ago. It was in this transformed lava (the so-called "Deccan Trap"), as much as twenty-five kilometers deep in some portions of the Deccan plateau, that Ajanta's caves were cut. It is here, of course, that the startling ravine abruptly begins, its walls of rock gradually diminishing as the river below meanders on its curving journey out to the fertile plains beyond, finally, at the end of its journey, reaching the Indian ocean, many miles away.

But for the first monks—if we can join them on that initial journey—wending their amazed way up into the still silent gorge, the route taken by the river was reversed. For them, their journey, rather than beginning, suddenly *ended* beneath the towering and unscaleable levels of the *dhabdhaba.* This deep and protected gorge, to which they were perhaps led as a consequence of the merit acquired over existence after existence, would now become the powerful and peaceful spot where they will make their home.

As if by divine design, Ajanta's beautiful valley, "resonant with the chirping of birds and the chattering of monkeys" (Ajanta Cave 26 inscription, verse 18) does not merely end the way some other valleys might, losing its energy among the surrounding hills; it decisively *dead-ends.* There is only a way *into* it; not through it. No rattling bullock carts (or trucks) can turn it into a refueling station or a crowded entrepot. If—knowing these things will end—we can endure the cries of the workmen, the sounds of the constant chiseling, and the crashing music made by the huge chunks of rocks being dumped into the ravine, we will see that this deep valley was created, for those who would honor it, as a perfect retreat.

And so the first monks, and their patrons, and their workmen, and a host of those who gave or searched support began, with their labors and their prayers, to carve a few huge but modest monuments in the waiting cliff-face over two thousand years ago. This became the so-called Hinayana nucleus of the site. At first the new establishment flourished, like a great number of other rock-cut complexes

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

in western India; but after the 2nd Century C.E. most of them endured a serious eclipse. Early in the 5th century Ajanta was still surviving, but only marginally. Although he did not try to go there, the Chinese pilgrim Fa hsien reported, "the roads . . . are dangerous and hard to travel . . . (and) all the inhabitants hold heretical views and do not believe in Buddhism". Obviously the safest way in was by air. Indeed, Fa hsien continues, "the people of this country often see men flying to the monastery here".[21] But apparently Fa hsien himself could not fly.

It is of course a very different world which we will see, when we visit the site, along with the rich patrons and the expectant monks, hardly a year or two after the great emperor Harisena, aided by his powerful prime minister Varahadeva, took over the control of the Vakataka house. Already, within the first five years, no less than twenty of the excavations at Ajanta had been started, urged on by power and pride and piety. Already the deep cisterns and the rising stairways, of which we have just spoken, had been begun. But this was no longer ancient times. This was the modern age; this was a new world, appreciative of its amenities, as we shall see when we enter the developing caves themselves. Just as the paintings inside the caves, as Bakker (1997, 44) has said, "reflect the very world of leisure and affluence that enabled their donors to be magnanimous", the life of Ajanta's monks themselves partook of the benefits which their own actions, and those of their patrons, over many rounds of existence, must have earned.

Even the layout of the site hints at the merit which its happy residents must have acquired. On the simplest level, it can be noted that the various caves were all connected by a path which ran along in front of them. No one, in the Golden Age, or at least at such a courtly site, expected the monks to go all the way down to the river and then come up again in order to visit other caves. Not that it was that hard to make such a linking path between the caves; but the point is that someone had to do it; and now, in this energetic age, such things did get done.

Just as various caves (Cave 2 and 4; 14 and 15; 16 and 17; 23 and 24) shared cisterns, they also were connected by walkways. Although much evidence is gone today, there are still remains of a

[21] Li Yung-hsi (trans.) 1957, 74–5.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

tunnel with a double-paneled doorway leading down from Cave Lower 6 to Cave 7, while originally one could climb up excavated steps (now totally obscured by modern cement) to get from Cave 5, suffering from the corrupted rock at its right end, to Cave 4, which had been placed much higher up, where the rock was good.[22] In most other caves paths were not needed, because the courtyards, to save on space, were contiguous. Finally, the notorious path cut straight through the monks' cells in the courtyard of Upendragupta's beautiful caitya hall by the victorious Asmakas, should be noted. This brutal cut not only made a more convenient access to their own cave complex, lying at the site's western extremity, but at the same time signaled their humiliating defeat of the local king in a very tangible and assertive way.

However, despite the convenience of the path, you and I could not just come in to the site as we wished and donate an image for our own present satisfaction, as well as for our own benefit in both our present and our future lives. It is clear that the ten (or perhaps fewer) courtly donors who controlled the site during its brief florescence insistently excluded everyone else from sharing such a merit-making privilege. Ajanta's Vakataka phase was in no sense a community effort, as its more characteristic Hinayana phase had been, where different individuals made a "gift of the facade", the "gift of a wall", or the "gift of a cell".[23] Even when everything totally stopped during the local war (the "Hiatus") in the early 470s, not a single image was added in or on these intensely private donations. It was only after the great emperor Harisena died and Ajanta was suddenly strangling from its premonitions of the empire's collapse that everything fell apart. Then, for two or three final anxious years, during what I call the Period of Disruption, anyone could put anything anywhere; for by the end of 478 the great and protective patrons were gone. Soon, Ajanta itself would soon disappear into its own darkening history.

The strong administrative control which kept the "uninvited"—even the resident monks and other eager devotees—from making a single donation in a single cave during the site's heyday, is further evident in the strong but sensible rules ordained by Ajanta's plan-

[22] The old steps are clearly visible, before their unnecessary covering-over, in ACSAA Ajanta fiche 12:29.

[23] Inscr # 40; 41; 66.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

ners, to discipline the site's insistent growth.[24] Except for the first few caves started early in the 460s, when as yet "no one was watching", each new cave abuts the other with no wastage whatsoever of usable cliff-face in between; just as in money-making housing cooperatives today space was both limited and valuable. However, these strictures caused great difficulties when expansion was desired; this was especially true after 467, when everyone suddenly wanted to upgrade their porches by cutting more impressive and up-to-date pillared complexes at the porchr ends, but often were prevented from doing so because of the close proximity of the flanking excavations, which left insufficient room.[25]

Although Ajanta, in its great phase, had the support of the greatest court in India, as it turned out, the monks who were attached to the site had relatively little opportunity to make use of this great monastery. When most of the caves were begun in an urgent burst of activity in the early 460s, the pressures and the problems were so great that well over half of the caves never got to the point where they could be used for residence at all. Only three viharas (Caves Lower 6 and 11, both from early 469, and Cave 17, from c. 470 or 471) appear to have had long and consistent usage, and neither of them (like the proverbial kitchen) was ever fully finished.[26] The cells in various major caves like 1 and 2 and 16, were not fitted out until c. 475, c. 476 and c. 477 (the very year of Harisena's death!); and even then much excavation and decoration work was continuing in them. In the midst of the general hubbub caused by workmen and the many others with (or without) business in the caves, meditation would have been a challenge, even in the few places where space was available. In fact, throughout its whole brief development under Vakataka patronage, Ajanta must have been a noisy and cluttered place.

It will surprise no one that the first (few) residence cells at Ajanta were not ready for occupancy until at least 468; that is six or seven

[24] The evidence that no intrusions were ever made at the site prior to the Period of Disruption is presented in Volume II, Part 1.

[25] See Cave 5 left, Lower 6, 25, 26RW.

[26] Cave Lower 6 originally had A mode doorways, to which no fittings had been added until they were converted to the D mode sometime after 475. If monks lived in them earlier, as seems likely considering the heavy begriming of the cave, the cell doorways apparently remained without fittings.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

years after work at the site began. So we must ask: with hundreds, more probably thousands, of workers, along with the monks and the inevitable entrepreneurs flooding into the site, where did everyone stay? Many of the workers must have put up ephemeral shelters in the vicinity, just as they sometimes do today, and it is reasonable to suppose that many monks did too. Perhaps some had accommodation in the villages nearby, such as Lenapur (= Cave-town) up beyond the beautiful series of linked waterfalls where Ajanta's ravine comes to its end.

It is of course reasonable to suppose that some monks, and perhaps even some workmen, took up abode in some of the caves while they were still very much in course of excavation. As discussed below, we know that most of the cell doorways in Cave 1 were recut and refitted for use in 475. But Cell R3 already had an earlier (and obsolete) projecting B mode fitting dating from 468 or 469, and the pivot hole of this earlier doorway was very worn by the time it was replaced in 475. Thus it is evident that the cell was used—even though the cave as a whole was barely roughed out—from the late 460s until its doorway was refitted (along with most others in the cave) in 475.[27] Perhaps some worker(s) took it over as a place to sleep, but it would be surprising if the B mode door was hung for a person of low status. It is surely more likely that it was provided with proper closure so that it could be secured for the storage of valuable tools, the cave's excavation being very incomplete in the late 460s.

This wear in Cell R3 had to take place between the extremes of 468 and 475, for the early door was hung as soon as the B mode fitting was in current use, either 468 or 469. Of course we do not know how much usage the door had, but even assuming that its usage was average, this would help in estimating how much wear could be expected in a given amount of time; and this is relevant to our understanding of the usage—in terms of time—revealed in certain very late cells at the site, which were still in service after its consistent patronage ended.

An example would be the many cells in the Cave 26 complex which were converted to the D mode sometime after 475, often

[27] A great number of the B and C doorways at the site had not been fitted out by the start of the Hiatus, since so many caves were far from ready for residence at that time.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

probably not until 477, close to the time when consistent patronage at the site was abandoned. That their pivot holes are significantly worn shows that they were surely used for at least a few years. This is hardly surprising since the Asmakas who patronized this complex were in control of the site until their consistent patronage had to come to a halt. Thus the monks connected with the Asmakas probably had a particularly privileged position, if "privilege" is the right term to use, when the world was falling apart. In any case, the kind of evidence provided by Cave 1's Cell R3, and by the usage of the cells in the great Cave 26 complex, shows that significant wear could be manifested rather quickly; and on this basis it would seem clear that regular residence did not continue for more than a decade after 478. Indeed, it might have continued for less.

Recently, opposite the caves, just across the river, the ASI partially excavated a very extensive structure built of very large—typically early—bricks, some being simple molded types like those at certain other roughly contemporary Vakataka sites in central India.[28] This may well have been where the more important members of the sangha lived while the excavation of the caves was underway. Surely in a site of this size and importance there was a need for administrative offices, if only to be able to safely keep and count the workers' pay, and to properly house important visitors. And of course, like Harisena himself (assuming, as most scholars do, that he was a Saivite) not all visitors attracted to the site were necessarily Buddhists. This is forcefully suggested by the find of a well-made terracotta image of Durga, which must have been brought there by a traveler, and left or lost. Interestingly, it would appear to date to the early fifth century and to have been made closer to Nagpur than to Ajanta.[29] Its "antiquity", as well as the projecting lug at its base, would suggest that it was a treasured object, which perhaps the traveler could set up wherever he stayed, for purposes of his own private worship. Why else would someone bring a Hindu goddess to Ajanta?

Few treasures have come to light in this extensive dig, but the find of a single late Roman (5th century) gold coin is very significant, for it would seem to confirm the important trade connections which

[28] See, for instance the brick temple at Nagra.

[29] The dating has been convincingly argued by Professor Yuko Yokochi; see Yokochi 2004, 171–172; figure 13.3.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

nourished and must have continually transformed the site.[30] Incidentally, the site is full of dozens of specific as well as suggestive references to funding. Dwarfs, on the doorjambs, in the painted ceiling panels, or in attendance upon the great guardians of the halls, are constantly pouring out coins from the heavy bags which they hold. A splendid (even if ruinous) fat Kubera painted as the dominating motif in Cave 16's front right corner, tantalizingly shows a handful of inscribed (but unfortunately illegible) coins pouring out of from his purse, while a devotee below is making a customary gift to this god of abundance. Throughout the site we find yakshas shown with a rich array of offered food, utensils, cloths, jewels and flowers placed in heaped up piles beneath their feet. Generosity, and the very act of giving, was one of the pervading themes at the site. This was surely not only for the acquisition of merit, but also to receive the more mundane rewards of gratitude from the monks, and praise from one's peers. We need only look at Ajanta to believe that the money came pouring in. Like the ten dollar bills suggestively stuffed into the Contribution Box at your local museum, the coins being so abundantly donated at the site appear to be large silver issues, rather than the modest coppers which the workers must have earned. And of course money begets money. Only a few years ago, the attendants at the site would confidently "prime the pump" when Buddhist devotees came not merely to see, but to worship in, the caves. A rupee or two placed in expectant reverence before the Dying Buddha by the attendants seldom failed to elicit contributions in kind. If the visitors were Japanese, ten or twenty rupee notes were wisely set out.

In this same regard, we can well imagine that funding was as uppermost in the minds of the patrons as payment was in the minds of those who worked for them, and as donations were in the minds of the many monks who depended upon them. Of course we do not know now how the contributions were shared, but the obvious complexity and force of Ajanta's authoritarian control would suggest that just, or at least well-considered, divisions were made, perhaps along the same lines as those described (but referring to a more established context) in the Civara-vastu:

[30] I have not been able to see the coin. Rumor has it that it was part of a larger hoard.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

> "The coined and uncoined gold and other worked and unworked metal is to be divided into three shares—one for the Buddha, a second for the *Dharma*, a third for the *Sangha*. With that which belongs to the Buddha, the dilapidation and damage in the Perfume Chamber and on the hair and nail *stupas* is to be repaired; with that which belongs to the *Dharma*, the word of the Buddha is to be copied, or it is to be used on the Lion Throne; that which belongs to the *Sangha* should be shared by the monks."[31]

Generosity, while not entirely selfless, was the rule of the day. The local king, Upendragupta, we read, with his "marvelous store of merit" not only "adorned the earth with stupas and viharas" but "caused the joy of supplicants by conferring gifts" (Ajanta 17 inscription, verse 22). He speaks unabashedly of "the power of the expenditure of wealth (ibid., verse 17), even though as it turns out he used it unwisely. And he is obviously proud of "having expended abundant (wealth)" to make Cave 17, "which is almost measureless and cannot be even imagined by little-souled men". (ibid., verse 25) Reflecting this marvelous mélange of materiality and spirituality, of worldly pride and productive piety, the great monk Buddhabhadra, "born of a noble family, endowed with great learning, with his mind purified by righteous conduct" is all too aware of the benefits of such donations. "Even", he says, "a single flower (made as an offering to the Buddha) yields the fruit known as paradise (and even) final emancipation" (26 inscription verse 3). And then, having shown what can be accomplished by even the most modest gift, he continues with the question, "Why should not a monument be raised by those possessing wealth, desirous of mundane happiness as also of liberation?" (ibid., verse 7) The answer given has a compelling force: "A man continues to enjoy himself in paradise as long as his memory is green in the world", we read (ibid., verse 8). "One should (therefore) set up a memorial on the mountains that will endure for as long as the moon and the sun continue."

Worship is of course coercive, a way of getting what you want, of force-feeding the higher powers with your devotion, for reasons as much practical as pious; and its benefits are reciprocal: the gods are as hungry for prayer, as the one who prays is hungry for food. So, in the best of worlds, both parties win. What you give you get;

[31] Quoted Schopen 1997, 272.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

and what you get you give. The concept of *dana*, of giving, of generosity, is pervasive at the site.[32] Of the dozens of donative inscriptions there is not a single one extant which requires that the merit gained be deposited to the account of the donor. The conventional formula is: "This is the religious donation of (*most often a monk*) . . . Whatever merit there is in it, may that belong to (his) mother and father and all sentient beings". But surely this very "transferring of merit" would be seen, wherever the accounts are kept, as a highly meritorious act on the part of the donor—an act of "selfless" generosity from which, surely, he himself would acquire great merit.

All of the great donors take the same position; and the monks of course lived (or were planning to live) in the midst of the benefits which would, inevitably, be achieved. "As long as the sun (shines) with rays reddish like fresh red arsenic,—even so long may this spotless cave . . . be enjoyed!" declares the Prime Minister Varahadeva in his Cave 16 inscription (verses 31, 32) ". . . and may the whole world also, getting rid of its manifold sins, enter that tranquil and noble state, free from sorrow and pain!" "Whatever merit is here", insists the great monk Buddhabhadra in his Cave 26 inscription (verse 15), "may that be for the attainment of fruit (in the shape) of supreme knowledge as well as the multitude of all the pure qualities . . . by (all the beings in all the three) worlds!" Finally, the local king, Upendragupta, who so innocently or at least so unthinkingly destroyed his happy world with his expenditures, offers his beautiful Cave 17 to the very subjects who would suffer from the turbulence which his policies engendered. "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, verse 29)

Thus Cave 17, like all of these residences-cum-shrine in which the fortunate monks resided, was radiant not only with the power of the Buddha in the shrine himself, but with the impact of the generosity of the rich patron who honored him, and indeed with the accumulated merit with which the resident monks and all who came to the cave, had been endowed in this happy and generous world. This was true of the whole world of Ajanta where, in its brief passage,

[32] Leela Wood (2004) has provided many insights into the concept of dana, notably in Cave 17.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

power in every form was honored and productive; and nowhere is this more true than in the strong but subtle organization of the forms of art, and of belief, in Upendragupta's splendid Cave 17. Everyone, we might say, is offering everything, whether it be karmic experience, or present property. One of the most moving compositions in the cave—a towering painting which the worshipping monks would have passed every day on their way into the shrine, is the representation of the enviable gift of the Buddha to his son Rahula, now grown; bypassing the tangle of materiality involved in the inheritance of his kingdom, the enlightened one hands over a simple begging bowl: the world of spiritual endeavor transcending that of material gain. Beyond, in the shrine, the two beautifully reverent figures—perhaps Upendragupta and his beloved brother, sadly deceased—hold bowls of offerings before their lord.[33]

In fact, the caves are full of such offerings, not merely to the Buddha himself, but to the powerful subsidiary figures whose powers, from time immemorial, would not only support him, but could render a perhaps even more immediate assistance to those who paid them honor. They too "live" with the monks in the caves, and were certainly offered a heartfelt and expectant homage. In Cave 2, impressive subsidiary shrines are dedicated to the great "mother goddess" Hariti at the right rear and to the great yakshas, seen as Padmanidhi and Sankhanidhi (protectors of wealth) at the left rear. Piled up offerings—food and flowers and fabrics—have been unstintingly carved at the feet of the latter, who also appear in prominent places flanking the arch on the Caitya Cave 26, and in other significant and productive locations.

When we realize the importance of Hinayana precedents at the site—the groundplans of the earliest Vakataka viharas, before later alterations, faithfully copy that of the Hinayana Cave 12—the fact that the cells in the Vakataka caves have no rock-cut beds must be explained. This is particularly true in light of the fact that the time and expense taken to cut the "bed-rock" was very considerable. From a cost-effective point of view it would have been much more sensible to leave the stone intact, thus saving approximately forty cubic feet of stone on each side of the cell, or about eighty cubic feet total per cell. Since Ajanta's basalt weighs approximately one hundred

[33] See Wood 2004, 127–129 for interpretation.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

eighty eight pounds per cubic foot, the stone for the beds, if cut away, would weigh about fifteen thousand pounds for each two-monk cell, or well over three hundred thousand pounds (150 tons) for a cave as large as Cave 24.[34] It seems reasonable to assume that stone beds would have remained in fashion, as in Hinayana times, if there had not been a clear preference for providing more floor space by cutting them away, either so that monks could put sleeping mats on the floor, or place beds along the left and right walls. In fact, it seems likely that beds were used, since if monks were going to sleep on the hard stone, it was pointless to go to the trouble to cut the "bed-rock" away, particularly since, as the Buddha himself realized (see below), an off-the-ground location might well be preferable.

It is evident from the cave plans that the accommodations in the cells of the Vakataka viharas were doubles; indeed, early texts often speak of roommates. However, the well-treated Ajanta monks probably slept on comfortable legged charpoys rather than on the austere stone beds of their Hinayana forebears. Of course normal beds may well have been conventionally used in structural monasteries. Even the Buddha's final hours were not spent on the ground, if we can trust the evidence of the great Parinirvana Scene in Cave 26, as well as many other representations. We read in the Cullavagga (VIII, 7.3) how a monk should take his bed out to clean and air in the sun, being careful not to cause damage by "knocking it against the door".[35] Although there are many references to sleeping on mats, cots with legs (like *charpoys* today, or that on which the Buddha so comfortably died) may have been preferred, if only for the practical reason of discouraging the company of wildlife, such as ants and rats. Some idea of the size of such charpoys—understandably smaller than the beds in tourists' rooms today—can be determined from the luxurious bed (and pillow) commodiously (even if monolithically) filling up some otherwise wasted space in the lower right wing of the Caitya cave 26.[36]

Indeed, by his nature, the Buddha was quite tolerant of amenities. In the Cullavagga, when one monk, "lying down to sleep on a

---

[34] Weight from Reade Advanced Materials, listed in www.Google.com.

[35] Descriptions in the Cullavagga refer to "cells", but these are generally to be interpreted as the monks' residences in structural monasteries.

[36] See Chapter 12 of this Volume. Although a cell was planned for this area originally, the space was later taken up by the right porch cell of the main Cave 26.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

low couch, was bitten by a snake . . . , (the Buddha) said: "I allow, monks, supports for the couches". (VI, 2.5) And "when monks were pestered by mosquitoes. . . . He said: 'I allow, monks, a mosquito-net'" (V, 13.3) And speaking of unexpected privileges, he also allowed spittoons, perhaps similar to those which appear later in Ajanta's courtly paintings. (VI, 20.2ff)

One of the niceties of the architectural arrangements at Ajanta involved carefully adjusting the position of the cells so that, with a few exceptions, no one had to look out directly at a pillar. However, when for some reason (as in the necessary constriction of the crowded cells at the rear of Cave Lower 6, or in the case of cells R5 and R6 of Cave 17, sufficient space could be provided for only one bed next to the doorway, the cell was extended sufficiently either in depth or width to accommodate the second bed at right angles.[37] Such concerns would hardly have been necessary if the monks were sleeping, in informal arrangements, on the floor.

A study of cell positioning is particularly useful in determining the pattern of development in any given cave. At the same time this further reveals how the planners, typically, had the best interests of the resident monks in mind when they developed their conceptions. Of course, the monks were probably quite unaware of the conscious efforts made on their behalf—just as we, opening our kitchen cabinets, may be quite unaware of the drafting work that was done to keep them from blocking the refrigerator. Thus, in Cave 17, the anomalous position of the cell at the left end of the porch—it is the only doorway at the site which breaks Ajanta's cherished insistence on symmetry—shows that it has been displaced by the presence of the nearby cistern chamber; or to put it another way, it tells us that the excavators had no idea that a cell was going to be put in the porch wall when—perhaps as early as 463—they cut the immediately useful cistern chamber. Thus they had to move the cell rightward if it was still going to have the conventional amount of sleeping space on either side of the doorway.

In the same cave, it is very clear that Cell R2 was positioned before Cell R1—somewhat adjusted in its placement—was started.

[37] See Hinayana Ajanta Cave 13, where the stone beds in three cells are placed at right angles, although the cells have the same dimensions as the four in which the beds are "normally" placed.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

This might at first seem surprising (R2 being more rearward) until we realize that work on R1 was probably delayed because of the busy activity (with scaffolds) in the front aisle of the cave; in fact, this relationship between R1 and R2 holds true throughout most of the site. Other examples of such revealing adjustments could be multiplied.

It was not of course the excavators, but the architects who laid out these caves, that were so obsessed with the idea (reflected in the case of the Cell R2 just mentioned) of providing each cell with a conventionally unobstructed "view". It probably mattered little to the monks, for it was hardly as effective in reality as it was on plan. In fact, the shifting of the position (and therefore sometimes the shape) of the cells had the disadvantage of sometimes reducing the space needed, on one side of the door or the other, for the placement of the beds. This is why (e.g. in Cave 17's cells R5 and r6) the cells were extended in such a way that there would be room for one bed along a side wall and the other along the back.[38] It is characteristic of the site that these adjustments, even if expedient, worked.

A single instance where this "obsessive" rule is broken is revealing, for it was due to a serious geological flaw. In Cave 1 Cell L5 is displaced forward because of leakage (or fear of leakage) at the cave's left rear ceiling; compare the "normal" placement of the matching cell at the right rear. This leakage from a serious flaw which apparently ran down the approximate center of the rear aisle, along its whole length from left to right also accounts for the surprising (and unique) omission of the expected cells at either end of the rear aisle. Happily, despite its proximity, the flaw which ran along the rear aisle ceiling did not leak upon the famous bodhisattvas painted there. They are of course very damaged at the lower levels; but this is because debris, coming down from the mountain above and collecting in the spacious (imperial!) courtyard, gradually spread into, and built up in, the cave to a depth of some four feet on the rear wall. This debris, which would become very moist in the monsoon season, literally dissolved the painted surface and its mudplaster support, not only in this cave but many others. Thus, typically, the

[38] Cave 17's Cell R2 was too squeezed in to be so adjusted, which may be why it was made a bit deeper than most; since the beds would not occupy the whole length of the walls, this probably made it possible to fit both in.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

beautiful paintings here and in a number of other caves, which once extended right down to the floor level, have suffered greatly in this regard, Cave 2 is one of the few that escaped too much of this type of damage. There, painted naga couples, seated yakshas, and playful dwarfs people the "late" pillar bases, whose modern square format shows them to best advantage.[39]

Although throughout the site, debris did great damage, on the positive side, we can note that (according to a tradition which has the ring of truth) the debris actually blocked the doors and windows of the beautiful Cave 1 so that vandals, either innocent or malicious, never got into it in the days before it was cleared and protected. The debris, of course, coming down from the mountain above, due to the effect of rain and marauding monkeys, built up very deeply, because the courtyard was so "imperial" in size. Therefore one could say that its grand size was ultimately a disadvantage, even though it would have been ideal for the ceremonies that (as fate would have it) never took place there.

Actually, the seemingly appropriate spaciousness of Cave 1's courtyard was not a function of ceremonial planning at all, even though its virtues may have been soon recognized by the planners eager to make Harisena's vihara something pleasing both to him and to all who came to the site. In fact, it resulted from the character of the location which the emperor Harisena, having put off starting his donation for some five years, was forced to use. By then, it was the last viable location still available along the main scarp; and since it had an inconveniently low slope, the excavators had to cut a long way back to achieve the elevation needed for the cave's elaborate façade. However, this turned out to be an advantage too, for the cave's façade is splendidly visible from the huge courtyard, which is not the case with "rival" excavations, such as Caves 16 and 17, where the steepness of the cliff-face disallows such direct viewing.

Thus Cave 1's wonderful array of friezes, which no other façade has, shows to ideal advantage. There we see all of the perquisites

[39] The ease of decorating such large plain surfaces with painting surely encouraged the increasing popularity not only of plain square pillar bases, but also of pillar capitals with plain undersurfaces. Starting in Cave 1, such plain undersurfaces become conventional, as do square-based pillars; where the paint remains, supporting yakshas (on the undersurfaces of the capitals) or seated couples (in Cave 2) are represented.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

of kingship: the pleasures of dalliance, the pleasures of the hunt, and the pleasures of war, all carved with a consummate delicacy. Also, over at the sides, above the pillared court cells, we see (on the left) Prince Siddartha's journey into reality, with its evidences of sickness, age, and death, while on the other side (on the right) he is cutting off his hair and giving away his royal robes, as a sign of renunciation. His horse, weeping, returns alone to the palace, where the women are weeping too. Thus even before entering the cave, which is filled with paintings showing the Buddha in previous births—but always in royal incarnations—we, and the monks who resided here, are witness to the ideal journey, the final goal being personal emancipation—and beyond that the emancipation of all of the beings of the world.

Even if the Vakataka caves, starting in about 466, came to be conceived of as shrines rather than as mere dormitories—a revolutionary change!—the matter of properly housing the monks remained of great importance. Realizing this, it is curious that, until about this same time, the prime locations at the left and right ends of the porches were never utilized for cells. Like so many other features in the Vakataka caves, this reflects Hinayana precedents, where perhaps these locations were conventionally avoided for residence purposes. Perhaps the Hinayana planners were concerned about privacy and noise, or perhaps this is yet another case of merely following illogical conventions. Whatever the reason, the perfectly usable space at the porch ends was in fact wasted. Therefore, it is of interest to try to ascertain just how and when and why the Ajanta planners came to realize that there was a great advantage in adding porch cells to their conceptions.

The idea may, in fact, have come from Ajanta's sister site at Bagh where, unaffected by Hinayana conventions (the site has no such ancient caves) the planners quite naturally put cells not only in the interior halls, but at the porch ends too—the latter location being, by virtue of its convenience and airiness, a particularly desirable one. On the other hand, the concept may have first developed at Ajanta because of a stupid mistake (probably his last at the site!) on the part of the planner in charge of laying out Cave 11. Possibly because the little cave was started so early (462) the inexperience which dominated many of the developments at the site played its part; but in any case neither the planner nor his workmen perceived that Cave 10, the adjacent Hinayana caitya hall, was strongly and anomalously

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

angled in the cliff.[40] Thus, as the excavation of Cave 11 proceeded, it turned out that there was not enough space to cut the expected three cells along the right wall of the interior, even though, following a common early procedure, the planner had revealed the whole wall area before penetrating it with the cells.[41] Indeed, the problem was only exacerbated by the fact that like most other early caves, Cave 11 "splayed out" widely toward the rear.

When this was discovered in 465, the patron must have been furious at the thought of "losing" three cells, and his irritation can only have mounted about a year later when he realized that he would have to sacrifice still another cell to make room for the new shrine. That meant that no less than four cells were going to be lost—space for eight monks, who were probably impatient to move in! Therefore, as a consequence of this really inexcusable and costly error (which surely elicited some wry comments on the part of his fellow patrons) either the patron or his embarrassed planner then decided to put the four "missing" cells in the porch. As happened so often at the site, it may actually have been this "correction" of a mistake—this "felix culpa"—that broke the previously established but by now retardatory convention of leaving the porch-ends blank. However, this drastic revision of the cave's cell arrangement was not achieved without pain, since the new cells had to be placed at an anomalously high level to avoid breaking into the old Hinayana vihara on the left and into the ambulatory of the old Hinayana caitya hall on the right. This in turn meant that the originally blank porch end-walls, originally in line with the walls of the interior, had to be cut back in order to make access steps to the new cells.[42]

Almost immediately, starting in 465—the sources of such developments at the site are often surprising—every patron at the site gave the order that cells should be placed at the porch-ends in their own caves, if at all possible. If you see a simple cell at the end of

[40] This angling was apparently a response to a serious flaw which can be seen under the cave's eave, and which may well have suggested "pushing" the façade back at the right, as it was being cut. Although it is very obvious once seen, it is not the kind of thing one "looks for". It has not been mentioned in recent literature; and the Vakataka planner of Cave 11 obviously did not notice it.

[41] The stone bench along the wall was obviously an afterthought, conceived as a way of doing something useful with the problematic wall area.

[42] For a somewhat similar situation, involving the cutting back of the porch walls, see Cave 20, discussed in Chapter 15 of this Volume.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

a porch at Ajanta, it was cut there in about 465 or 466, in a wall which was previously going to be left to be blank. This of course benefited the monastic community greatly, for it meant that other than Cave 11, the monks could look forward to two new cells being added in a total of sixteen caves then underway, with one cell being added to two others (Caves 5 and 25), where only one porch end could be thus utilized.[43] Such developments, if completed, would have provided living space for a grand total of 72 monks, giving satisfaction (and possibly merit too) to a good number of happy patrons.

At this point we might return to the "displaced" cell at the left porch-end of Cave 17, discussed above: its delayed cutting (in 465 or 466, by which time the first of the cells in the hall were already penetrated) can serve our understanding of developments at the site in another interesting way. When we look at the Wheel of Life, which fills this wall with the unending complexity of life (or rather, lives) it is clear that its lower circumference is broken by the opening of the doorway! But it is also clear, from the revealing notches near the top of the doorway, that the latter was filled in, before the Wheel was painted, to accommodate the missing arc. How can we explain this almost inexcusable confusion?

What clearly happened is that the artist who early designed this complex composition up in the capital (for the local king, Upendragupta, donated this cave) was provided with the plan of the wall of the porch as it was originally conceived and cut, not as it now looked. Someone had screwed up. No one had told him that he had to reduce the size of the circle before sending the complex design (probably on cloth, perhaps for transfer) down to the site. With its innumerable figures, the crowded circle would have been almost impossible to "shrink" *in situ*. It was obviously far easier to fill in the top of the door; when the filled area was plastered over, no one would know the difference, except the monks who on entering the lowered doorway may have bumped their heads. And the Wheel of Life would be able to fill up the whole space, just as the artists in the capital, and perhaps the esthetically minded king him-

[43] Two cells could now be added to Caves 1, 2, 4, Upper 6, 7, 8 (probably), 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 23, 24, 26, 26LW, 27. Because earlier cisterns and other abutting features made it impossible, no porch end cells could be added to Lower 6 and 26RW.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

self, who donated this "monolithic excellent hall . . . delightful to the eyes and mind", intended.[44]

The conclusion that the painters up in the capital were not kept abreast of every development at the site is validated by further evidence in both the local king's Cave 17 and in the Prime Minister's Cave 16. In both of these caves the porch doorways had been raised to a surprising height (for better light?) after having been originally cut with more standard dimensions. However, it is evident that the planners up in the capital(s), responsible for working out the composition of the intended murals, did not know that someone at the site, having taken the initiative to raise these doorways, had done this without reporting the change. Thus when the complex and "authorized" compositions to be painted in those areas were sent down to the site, they no longer fitted the space, because the doorways had been heightened.[45] The only sensible thing to do was to fill the upper part of the doorways in; it would be much easier than redesigning the compositions to fit around the changed doorway openings, particularly if the "perpetrators of the crime" at Ajanta wished to avoid a confrontation with higher authorities. And in any case, once the doorways were filled in and the offending portions plastered over, nobody would be the wiser.

We have discussed the compulsiveness with which new cells were added at the porch ends starting in 465 and 466. But their popularity was very short-lived. Developments followed vigorously one upon the other at Ajanta, especially in the first decade of Vakataka patronage. Even more than the next, this was a period of change, both of forms and expectations. The fact is that only nine caves underway in the site's inaugural phase, ever were provided with such simple porch end cells.[46] All of the others took advantage, or were able to take advantage, of a new and highly significant further development in the site's fashions; for in 467, immediately on the heels of the shift to single cells, everyone suddenly wanted something far more elaborate—namely complex cells at the porch ends. These were

[44] Ajanta Cave 17 inscription, verse 24, 27; the latter phrase is actually a description of the "perfumed hall" (gandhakuti) which Upendragupta also donated.

[45] See further discussion in Chapter 15.

[46] Caves 1, 4, 8 (probably breakage masks the evidence), 11, 15, 16, 17, 20, 27 all were supplied with such simple porch end cells.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

characterized not by a mere single cell, but by a nicely carved pillared vestibule fronting a simple residence cell behind, the very concept perhaps deriving from the pillared porch cell complexes of Cave 1, a cave which perhaps because of its imperial patronage, was a source for many developments at the site. Those at the porch-ends of Cave 2 were even painted with Buddhist narratives.[47] One might well imagine that such special features were conceived for the residence of certain chief monks or possibly for the use of visiting dignitaries—even though few of these more fancy facilities, as it turned out, would ever be completed until after the Hiatus, in 475 or later.

Just as single cells may have become conventional in 465 and 466 as a result in the restructuring of Cave 11, it is possible that pillared complex cells at the site had their origin in the concerns of the patron of Cave 7. Cave 7 had been planned, with its two entrances, as a particularly ambitious undertaking; if it had been completed as per our conjectural reconstruction, it would have had (like Caves Upper and Lower 6 before shrines were added) fifteen cells in its projected hall. However, something happened. The excavation of the cave was suddenly abandoned by 465, perhaps even by 464, and until about 467 it lay untouched.[48] Then either the patron, or some other person, was able to continue the work, but in a drastically reduced fashion, for plans for the great hall, indeed any hall whatsoever, had now been given up.

Of course, now that shrines were considered as essential features or additions in every cave, naturally the excavation of the shrine and its antechamber took first priority; by 467 the very center of the original porch wall was being penetrated for this purpose. At the same time, it is evident that the loss of the (hall's) cells was seen as a real problem; for after all, the cave was surely still intended as a viable monastic residence. It must have been to "recover" as many cells as possible, quite apart from the four that could be cut on either side of the shrine area, that the complex triads of cells at either end of the porch were conceived. Because no work was done

[47] Because of the late date of this innovation (477) no others were similarly painted until the Period of Disruption—the single example being the left porch cell of Cave Upper 6, where the "decoration" is of course intrusive (and iconic).

[48] The sequence of work is clear, because during this interim period, Cave 8 expanded, causing much difficult when Cave 7 was continued.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

in the cave in 465 or 466, the expected porch-end cells had not been cut, so no conversion was required. However, because of the "intrusion" of the expanding Cave 8 at that very time, the left triad had to be raised high up, when it was cut in 467 and 468, to avoid a breakthrough.[49] The very fact that this was done, and that added to that the whole left half of expansive porch ceiling was then onerously angled upward to "match" the height of the left complex, gives some suggestion of the seriousness with which the determined to add as many extra cells as possible to what was, after all, only an expanded porch, not a "proper vihara" at all.

At the same time it was eminently reasonable to dispose these triads around a vestibule fronted by pillars, for this would allow the maximum amount of illumination in these new residence areas. Not surprisingly, this simple but novel functional feature, surely the first of the site's many pillared vestibules, seems to have precipitated the rush to add similar pillared complexes now everywhere at the site; of course these subsequent pillared vestibules now fronted single cells, not triads, because the layout of the caves involved was quite different. The fact that the pillars of these first complexes in Cave 7 did not get decorated, and the access stairs at the left never cut from the available matrix, is surely explained by the fact that work in the cave was suddenly cut off by the Recession, while the troubled later development of the cave, with its many early features never completed, sufficiently explains why even after 475, these old pillars remained so plain.

But even if these very first pillared complexes at the site (i.e. those in Cave 7) remained unadorned, in other less troubled caves the planners and their sculptors made the most of the new feature, with its potential for a decorative character often missing from other portions of their caves. At the same time, as was never done in Cave 7, they typically utilized the "lintels" above for often superb representations of a naga at one end and a yaksha (or more often the yaksha

[49] The right complex was also elevated, but much less. This was surely for balance; similar examples of "balance" can be seen in the treatment of the cells in the porches of Cave 20 and Cave 17. But since the matrix in front of the wall had been all cut away when (prior to 465) no simple cells were intended for this area, it was convenient not to make the floor of the new unit too high up; one can without much difficult step up into it today.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Hariti) at the other, each flanked by corpulent seated yaksha attendants. For the monks resident in the caves such additions must have been particularly satisfying, for it is evident that such lesser divinities would confer significant benefits upon their devotees. Finally, adding to the interest accorded these wild powers, now under the Buddha's control, one might note that the pillars and pilasters beneath them are invariably different in design at one end of the porch as opposed to the other. This breaking of a "perfect symmetry", perhaps reflecting the difference in these contrasting but complementary honored forms, is something almost never found in the caves.[50]

The compulsion to carve these decorative pillared complexes in every porch where it was possible took the form of a virtual "rule" starting in 467. Eventually eight caves besides Cave 7 were thus supplied with this new feature.[51] Furthermore, starting in 475 (after the Hiatus) similar pillared complexes were made in the side aisles of Caves Upper 6, 21, and the Ghatotkacha vihara, and at the ends of the rear wall in nearly all late contexts, all adding to the potentially 5—star character of these residences, where both the Buddha and his devotees lived. In some cases, after 475, the pillared vestibule was created by means of the conversion of the "discredited" single cells into the new units—the pillared fronts being cut out of the typically thin old front walls—so great was the interest in upgrading the caves. The famous (notorious, if you consider the effect of tourists pounding them) two "musical pillars" which front the cell complex at the left end of the front aisle in Cave Upper 6, ring (I am told) when pounded; and though the guides traditionally have said that they were planned by the powers that be in order to offer these delights, the truth is that they ring because they are so attenuated, having been quite literally cut out of the wall, when the typically thin fronts of such early cells were converted into the fronting elements of the more elaborate pillared complexes.

In 477, when (since 475) the site was well stabilized and flourishing under the new Asmaka control, Ajanta's taste for a developing complexity made yet another demand. Pillared court complexes, hitherto

[50] Other examples are the aisle pillars of Caves 1 and 2, where the pairing can be lateral, instead of between the corresponding pillars of the two aisles.

[51] Cave 2, 5, U6, 21, 23, 24, 26, 26LW. Cave 1's court cell may well have been laid out (but not decorated) by 467 or 468, lending authority to the new pillared-vestibule type.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

excavated only in the imperial Cave 1 and in the royal Cave 19—surely the sources of the idea—now became *de rigeur* for every cave where space allowed. It was an admirable conception—aimed at providing extra living spaces, in spacious and airy accommodations perhaps quite literally "fit for a (visiting) king" or, perhaps more surely, for the more important members of the sangha.[52] But these new and confident undertakings were invariably aborted, because this was the very year in which the controlling emperor Harisena died. None were ever completed, and most are not even half done, even though they had surely been destined for distinction in a world increasingly demanding of its own technical and esthetic capabilities. But as it is, their silent presence in the courtyards is a poignant reminder of the brevity of the site's life, as well as of its blasted expectations.

The assertive beginnings of one such elaborate feature at the left of the courtyard of the Cave 4 is a case in point. If it had been finished, the "late" exuberance of its pillared front would have served to alleviate the embarrassing stolidity of its ponderous façade colonnade, which had been born all too soon, in those diffident early days when both planners and excavators were depending all too heavily, the later world would say, on the severer forms of ancient Hinayana times. Mathura, the patron of this vast excavation, who was still hastening to get it done in 477, oblivious of the plotting of time in the case of his emperor, was able to authorize only one of these special "residences"; this is because, years before, a cistern had been excavated at the courtyard's opposite end. Even at the left there was a problem, because the plane of the side wall of the court in that area had, understandably, been cut smooth when the cave was begun a decade and a half before. Thus, at considerable time and expense, the whole pillared front, other than the carefully defined eaves above, had to be set well back for protection from the sun and rain, as well as to allow for the monolithic steps, the cutting of which has been barely begun.

Beyond this what looks like the start of a doorway is actually the definition of the space to be left between the fronting pillars; this same efficient and conventional sequential staging of the work is found

[52] Besides Caves 1 and 19, one or more are found in Caves 4, 5, Upper 6, 7, 23 (? Broken), 24. In most caves there was no usable space, because of the presence of cisterns or pathways.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

in many similarly unfinished complexes at the site, as at the left of the courtyard of Cave 7, where both the vestibule and the inner cell have been cut but the pillars are as yet not even blocked out; perhaps the patron, in this tremendously busy year, was having difficulty getting an appropriately skilled sculptor undertake these details. Here, too, there was a problem in positioning. Because the cell complex at the left end of the Cave 7 porch had cannibalized so much space, half of this apparent "doorway" (really the opening between intended pillars) extends beyond the originally smoothed area beneath the cave's eave, into the rough outer wall area. And furthermore, here the patron must have decided to put up with applied wooden or cut-stone steps, rather than going to the expense of time and money to set the complex back, as had been done in Cave 4.

In areas underway such as the unfinished court cell of Cave 4, we can see with what efficiency and speed the workers were reaming away great arcs of stone, the debris then being tossed into the ravine. Even today—although the hours are shorter—pairs of men sometimes cut back the waiting basalt in the same efficient way, one holding with his hands (!) a huge iron chisel and the other slamming a sledge down upon it, gradually describing, as the chisel is repositioned point by point downward, a great arc out of the gradually yielding stone. In the course of a single day, massive amounts of stone could be roughly removed in this way, particularly if the workmen could take advantage of the flaws so often running through the rock. Then, after this, the more final surfaces could next be quite generally defined with lesser chisels which a single workman could handle on his own; and finally the proper smoothing or finishing would be accomplished, using either a small pointed chisel or a flat one, typically with blade measuring about a quarter of an inch across.

The choice for this finer work was apparently up to the excavator's personal preferences. On the rear wall of the porch of Cave 16 we can see that two men were working side by side, one with a pointed chisel, working in sweeping upward arcs to get the surface smoothed, while his partner (quite probably his son or his nephew) defined his area for which he was responsible with decisively parallel horizontal strokes. Then, when these first areas were done, they moved together down to the next, and then the next. The same manner of final cutting is to be seen on pillars as well as walls throughout the site, and even sometimes on the Buddha images,

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

although the latter were generally detailed with the pointed instrument. Needless to say, there must have been many blacksmiths at the site, just as they set up shop in the courtyards when stone temples are built today. The iron of the chisels was of high quality, but must have needed sharpening or tempering every few hours, if the excavations were to progress as efficiently as the patrons surely required.

As yet no workmen's tools have been found in the debris at the site—probably most of them were taken home with the men at night, or carried away permanently on that awful day late in 480 (December 31, 480) when the sculptors and painters working on a host of still unfinished intrusions put them in their bags for the last time and took them away forever, never to return. But this does not mean that we have nothing to show us the tools with which the carvers worked, for numerous lengths of broken chisels have been found—and a few still remain—used as wedges to better secure the wooden latches in various cell doorways at the site. There is even a single hair from a painter's brush, caught in the painted surface of the antechamber wall in Cave 17, waiting to be analyzed.

Now that we have shown how the residence halls at Ajanta became more and more commodious and more and more complex as ideas, and energies, at the site accumulated, we must ask the simple question: where and how did the monks hang their robes? They could of course hang them over a peg inserted into a hole drilled in the rock, and there are many instances of this, occasionally with the stump of the teak peg remaining in the hole. Indeed, when the monks complained that bags hung from beds or the like were eaten by rats and white ants, the Buddha said: "I allow, monks, a peg in the wall, an 'elephant-tusk' (peg)" (Cullavagga VI,3.5). But a wiser course—if one had wet-wash from the river below-was to hang them over a strong bamboo pole fixed into single holes on two opposite walls of the cells. "I allow you, monks", the Buddha said, a bamboo for hanging up robe-material, a cord for hanging up robe-material" (Cullavagga V,11.5) Such corresponding pole holes are abundant at the site. Sometimes the "matching" holes were too small to hold a pole, which would have had to be eight to ten feet long. In these cases, the pegs probably secured a string or rope stretched across the cell. One can also find a few old and worn holes in the edges of doorways which are polished smooth by constant wear, suggesting that they may have held a cord connected some way with the opening and closing of the door.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Often two holes on one wall are cut in the same position on the corresponding opposite wall to allow for the insertion of poles which would support a wooden shelf. There is even one instance where there are small extra holes to hold a "guardrail" as on a children's crib, but presumably for a more monkish purpose, possibly to keep certain items from rolling off or being knocked off. At Bagh we find a slotted arrangement, in use even today, but of course with new wood. The old wood must have been removed centuries ago by local people for building purposes or for fires.

There are also a number of bowl-like concavities in the floors of a number of the caves; these are clearly late additions, which no planners would have allowed in their precincts. Discounting the typical revelation of the guides that these were used by the painters to prepare their pigments (which in fact their families probably prepared in the village), it seems clear that these reflect the occasional later usage of the caves by sadhus and the like, who may have used them as "mortars" for pounding grains and grinding spices. It is also possible that some of them were used for holding round-bottomed clay or metal pots. This is certainly true of the large concavity, on what was probably a cistern-shelf, in the low platform on the left side of Cave 20's porch plinth; however that particular example surely dates from the period when the site was flourishing.[53]

In passing we might note how different Ajanta's fixtures are from those found so commonly at Ellora, where a myriad of holes are typically cut through the corners of square pillars or walls or doors, or even through easily penetrated portions of sculptures. These expedient holders were surely made to secure ropes which divided the spacious caves into small "apartments" for barracking the troops of the Mughals or their opponents. The suggestion that they were used to tether horses, turning the old caves into stables, would make more sense if one could get the horses to negotiate the three flights of stairs in caves such as the "Do Thal" and the "Tin Thal" (Caves 11 and 12), where many such fasteners are found.

For storage, perhaps of valuables, tiny "vaults" were sometimes cut into the cell floor; even today a few of the beveled covers remain. In Cell R1 in Cave 17, which perhaps from its position was the res-

[53] Another smaller concavity is obscured by cement, as is the (assumed) cistern at court left.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

idence of some important person, or some monk entrusted with valuables, there are four small depositories of different shapes and sizes. The smallest even has a remaining stone cover which fits so well into the floor surface that it can easily escape notice; this may explain its rather remarkable survival. The receptacle beneath, carved down into the floor, has a jug-like form. In Cave Lower 6, we find a similar vault—the cover gone—in an unusually long shelf cut at the rear of Cell L2; the fact that the cell's door appears to have been enlarged suggests, as does the long shelf, that it was not used as a residence, but for some more communal purpose.

Not all the vaults were small. At both Bagh and Ajanta large repositories are occasionally cut into the floor. For even greater storage space, probably for community use, we find very commodious recesses in the shrines of both Ajanta Cave Lower 6 and Cave 11. These apparently important storage spaces may well have been located in the shrines for greater security, a concern which is also suggested by the relative inaccessibility created by their high placement; one would need a ladder or the like to get into them. An added advantage is that they did not take up space better allocated to the residence cells.

This is also true of two other intriguing storage areas, placed over the cells in the deep lateral extensions of the rear aisle in Cave Lower 6. These were created by setting five strong wooden beams (long since missing) into deep chiseled sockets cut into the front and rear walls in these extensions. Since the painted decoration of the walls and ceilings at the rear of the cave was not extended into these areas (whose ceilings were not even plastered) it is clear that these storage areas had already been planned for by early 469, when the paintings toward the rear of the cave were done. Indeed, it is clear that the wooden supports were inserted into the five pairs of holes in each area before the walls were plastered, as per normal procedures; and this is confirmed by the fact that when some of the supports at the left (rearward) side were pulled (lifted) out, the process tore some of the plaster away. We can conclude that since the beams were set in before the plastering and painting program for the rear of the cave had been accomplished, they were probably already in place before the Recession started, probably having been put in place as part of the normal course of work, in 468 or even earlier. Such a conclusion is reasonable, since the rushed and anxious psychology of early 469, when the patron was chiefly concerned with getting

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

his cave dedicated, can explain the painting of the multiple Buddhas on the rear wall and in the shrine more easily than the creation of the lower-priority storage areas.

It is a curious fact that although a great many of the monks' residence cells were finally plastered, it is surprising that this was apparently never done prior to the very stressful Period of Disruption, by which time all consistent patronage at the site had ended.[54] We know this because the plastering, probably hurried like everything else in these final years, and probably done by contract but without any strong supervision, is sometimes smeared over the painted door reveals. Since these reveals were painted as part of the original programs, this proves that the plastering must be "intrusive" in origin, dating at least in such cases to 479 or 480. Such a surprising late dating is supported by the fact that a bright red (powdered brick?) plaster, which never appears at the site prior to 477 but is found commonly thereafter, is also used for plastering the cells, and sometimes is also smeared over the earlier painting.

It is of interest to note that this eleventh hour plastering of the cells includes the surfacing of the little niches made presumably for the monks' personal items which, between 471 and 476 (only) had been cut in the rear walls of many of the caves.[55] It seems likely that these niches are another "importation" from the caves at Bagh, where they were used consistently prior to their appearance at Ajanta, and at a time when workmen from Ajanta were already going there for employment to "escape" Ajanta's Recession, perhaps coming back occasionally to see their wives and families. It is unlikely that these niches, whether at Bagh or Ajanta, were used for ritual purposes, even though they bring to mind the typical Indian household shrine; for there is never any evidence of soot from oil lamps or incense on their sides or top, or even of oil on their "floors".[56] Perhaps they

---

[54] The vestibules of the porch-end cells of Cave 2 were plastered along with the porch walls and ceiling in 477; but the cells connected with them have a different mix, and were undoubtedly plastered later, in the Period of Disruption. In Cave 8, where both the main hall and the cells appear to have been surfaced at the same time with characteristically late ground brick plaster, possibly in 478. For Cave 21, see Chapter 12 of this Volume.

[55] Similar storage niches—like the recessed one in the wall of my room in Fardapur—are commonly reserved in buildings made of cement or mud today, while the pivoted door fittings which we shall discuss are also common in older houses, temples, and the like.

[56] Like the door-fittings, the niches, apparently done as part of the same contract,

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

were used for texts or neem twigs (i.e. toothbrushes) or the like. Since they suddenly go out of fashion in 477, it seems likely that some entrepreneur from a nearby city convinced the sangha to switch to some type of wooden replacements, which would be both moveable and cheaper. Just possibly a small commission would have urged the purchase. As for the cells fitted out before this niche concept developed in 471, we must assume that personal items were kept in whatever way was expedient—probably on the floor, or in sacks hung from the wall pegs, out of the way of rats, mice, and the like, just as is seen as a concern in the Cullavagga.

At both Ajanta Cave 17 and Bagh Caves 2 and 4, we also find large storage cells, with deep extensions difficult of access, in which (at least in Ajanta 17's Cell L6A even the floor is carefully plastered. These functional areas (see plans) are located deep in the rear corners of their respective caves, surely for security, but also because these dark areas were the least desirable for residential purposes. A somewhat similar "storage extension", extremely lightless, is cut behind the right rear cell in Cave 7.

Furthermore, Cave 17's adjacent Cell L5 was also extended by the cutting of a long and deep shelf occupying the whole of the back wall. Its functional purpose was originally augmented not only by a once-covered receptacle built into the unit's top, but by a wooden shelf supported on two beams or poles placed in sockets cut into the shelf and then inserted into two corresponding holes in the cell's front wall. Needless to say, only the sockets remain today.

In Cave 16, in the cell (L6) at the extreme end of the left wall, six small holes have been cut across the floor toward a few feet from the rear, with two similar holes behind them, on the cell's axis. They almost certainly supported some kind of wooden storage shelf or bench, although at the left and right ends it must have legs or some other kind of support, since there are no relevant holes at these points.

To understand not only Ajanta's physical development but also the interests of the monks and donors, we need to try to determine why and when and by whom such features as secure storage areas were made in the caves. As we know, when the Asmakas defeated

---

were never plastered until the Period of Disruption, and then as part of the general surfacing of the cells in question.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Upendragupta and took over his beautiful Cave 17 (by 475), they totally disallowed the completion of any work in the cave which had been interrupted by the war, even though for practical reasons they allowed the monks to continue living there. Thus, although the shrine continued in worship, as is evident from the excessive amount of soot deposits in the cave, the shrine walls remained unpainted; by the same token the unfinished Cell R6 was never fitted out, even though this could have been accomplished in a day or two.

Interestingly, it is clear that although the Asmaka conquerors allowed no improvements upon Upendragupta's original program, they did in fact add the storage facilities mentioned above. Both Cell L5 and Cell L6 were originally designed like all of the other cells in the cave and probably were intended for residences. However, sometime between 475 and 478, when the site was under Asmaka control, the doorways of both Cells L5 and L6, having weak and clumsy early fittings were refitted in the more secure D mode.[57] In L5 a particularly large slot was added (recut) to hold the teak insert into which the door latch would fall, and it was further supplied with two rather large doorstops, along with a large square hole to hold a wooden block for the lower pivot hole.

The earlier A+ (A converted to B) door fitting in Cell L5, which involved a rather clumsy addition of a projecting pivot holder (described later), is of course gone, though evidence of wear in the corresponding hole in the floor shows that (as we would expect) it was earlier in use (prior to 475). This particular A+ mode fitting is unusual, however, since it has iron pins in the two holes typically drilled to hold the teak pegs which secured an added wooden projection. This special "security" treatment suggests that the cell was used for storage even before 475, and had a strengthened fixture for this purpose. This would not be surprising; but the major conversions of Cells L5 and L6 took place after 475, when the D mode doorways were added and their clear storage function was established, at the behest of (or with the approval of) the Asmakas.

The creation and/or expansion of the storage areas in Cave 17 of course involved major excavation work, involving the removal of more than eight hundred cubic feet of stone in Cell L6A, plus another one hundred cubic feet at the back of L5, all of which would have

[57] For the various doorway modes, see brief explication at end of this chapter.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

been carried out in the already decorated cave, sometime after the Asmaka takeover of the region in c. 475. But the new storage and security requirements obviously warranted this, or it would not have been done.[58] That it was done during the Period of Disruption (479–480), when indeed the political situation might have recommended concern, is most unlikely, for by then the Asmaka overlords were taking no responsibility for the site. Furthermore, such coordinated efforts, involving the excavation of functional features, hardly characterize that period, even though that is when the cells in the cave, and perhaps these special areas too, were finally plastered. The careful revisions made in the door fittings alone seem to deny an ascription to this troubled period, when we have no sure evidence that any cells whatsoever were fitted out.[59]

As if to confirm the assumption that these were indeed high-priority residences, the left central complex in Cave Upper 6 has a very deep extension (L3A), making it by far the largest at the site .45 At the extreme right rear there is a built-up mud-plaster platform some 2.5' wide × 6' long, which apparently served as a bed. It seems logically placed, which might suggest that it belongs to the period when the caves were in use, but unless the materials which make up the "bed" could be analyzed (which seems doubtful) it is hard to know how old it is.

The very fact that the Asmakas, having stopped any worship in Upendragupta's Cave 19, nevertheless allowed worship to go on in Cave 17 and also allowed the monks to continue living there suggests that the Asmakas were more interested in insulting their defeated enemy Upendragupta—they also broke through two of the Cave 19 court cells—than in denying the conveniences of residence and worship to the monks. Cave 17 was able to house at least two dozen monks, and this must have been a serious consideration at a time when few cells at the site were as yet fitted out for use, or even finished. In fact, by the time that the Asmakas took over the site in 475, except for Cave 17, and two cells in Cave 15, only the little Cave 11 had been almost fully provided with properly fitted out cells.[60]

---

[58] Perhaps the new Asmaka rulers had particular security concerns, as a result of their aggressive takeover of the region a few years before.

[59] A possible exception might involve Cave 20, where three cells may have been hastily fitted out in the Period of Disruption.

[60] Cave 11's "extra" left rear cell, with its D mode doorway, was obviously a

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Perhaps most important of all, there was really no other available and at the same time impressive place to worship when the Asmakas took over the site in about 475. Not a single one of their own caves, at the site's western extremity, was anywhere nearly completed; not a single Asmaka Buddha had yet been started. Among the four "Vakataka" caves in which the Buddha images had been rushed to an expedient completion early in the Recession (i.e. in 469), those in Caves 7 and 15 (although probably hastily dedicated) resided in shrine areas that were woefully unfinished, as were the caves themselves; there had not even been time to provide them with shrine doors, which did not get added until about a decade later.

Cave 11's shrine had also been left in a very rough state, but the shrine doorway (originally A mode) was provided with a fitted-on projection in 469, rather in the same way that the nine residence cells had been fitted out in the A+ mode just the year before. Thus it is likely that Cave 11's image was actively honored, at least by the monks living in the cave, but the cave—small and never fully carved or painted—could hardly compete with Cave 17 as a locus for very intensive or convenient worship.

In this regard, it would seem that, of these four dedicated caves, Cave Lower 6 must have had precedence, for the shrine was not only well finished but is nearly as deeply begrimed with soot from ritual oil lamps as Cave 17. On the other hand, it is clear that none of its many cells had been properly fitted out by the time of the Recession, indeed not until 475 or after. Of course monks might nonetheless have stayed in them, but it does suggest that the cave was not accorded a very high priority by its patron; and, significantly, this assumption is supported by the surprising fact that although there were garland hooks in the alternating circular and square painted designs which fill the axial approach to the shrine, not a single one shows evidence of having been used. This is very surprising—perhaps it is a unique situation—for it suggests that monks

late addition, and would seem to confirm that the cave remained in active use—like Cave 17—until the very end. Two of the eight cells in Cave 15 had been similarly converted and might also have been in use. There is one B mode doorway in Cave 20, but it was probably not used until the Period of Disruption, when the doorways of three of the other cells (PR, R1, R2) were clumsily fitted out, the others (L1 and L2) being left unfinished. For the few clumsy fittings, abandoned before they could be converted, see discussion of Cave 8.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

in Cave Lower 6 worshipped the image throughout the long period from 469 through 475 when no carving or painting was going on, but that there was no overriding authority, such as the patron, which was concerned to make sure the cave was decorated.

In fact, although the situation in Cave Lower 6 is confusing, the characteristic wear which one sees around garland hooks, or the holes which once held garland hooks, is a particularly revealing evidence of usage in other caves. In Cave 2, for instance, where worship would have started in 478 and presumably continued into, or past, the Period of Disruption, every one of the six ceiling medallions leading directly to the shrine show that some careless devotee (probably a monk?) occasionally hit the fragile paint and plaster around the hook with his "garland-changing pole" on his daily rounds, gradually breaking it away, just as the plate around the light switches in a modern house gets sullied after weeks or months of use. Thus we can tell that a cave like Cave 2 was in active worship for some time. By the same token, it is clear that Cave 1 was never used for worship—it was never dedicated, because the emperor Harisena died too soon. The garland hook hole in the shrine antechamber shows not the slightest evidence of having been put into the use intended.

Unfortunately, although many of Ajanta's caves have garland hooks, time at the site ran out so fast that the walls containing them never got plastered and/or painted. Even though often, in a kind of pious desperation, the Buddha images in such caves would be finished, they were never put into the worship intended. So often the hooks have been set into the walls or ceilings, but the plaster around them shows no evidence of wear; and even if the areas under consideration were plastered, they sometimes did not got painted, and therefore were never garlanded. Cave 15 has no less than twenty-three hooks, or holes minus their hooks, since many were removed for various uses (or just to see if they would come out) in later times; occasionally only the iron stumps remain, having resisted removal, and having been broken in the process. Cave 15's hooks were all put in, carefully disposed along the top of the walls both in the hall and in the antechamber, in 477, when hopes were high; but although the ceiling and the walls were then plastered, they never got painted, except for a hasty bit of expediently reverent decoration in the shrine and on the antechamber ceiling.

Hope, at least for the Asmakas, was still alive (although weakening) in 478, when most of the walls of the fine Cave 21 were hastily

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

plastered, but the conventionally large eye-hooks, often set into walls, must have been applied a year before, in better days. Much earlier, probably in 471, smaller hooks had been fixed above most of the capitals in Cave 19; apparently time was running out before all had been applied (probably in 471), so the areas were plastered anyway; thus a few were never applied, even though they were in locations where they are expected. Since the cave became a pariah in the following period of Asmaka ascendancy these hooks were, essentially, never used; later visitors (or villagers) must have pulled them out, because the breakage of the plaster suggests a forcible removal rather than the gradual deterioration caused by garland changing.

When we move to the Period of Disruption, during which time Ajanta's monks were intensely involved, for the first time, in donating their own (intrusive) images, we find a plethora of garland hooks and hook-holes—a few hundred, by an informal count. The little intrusive shrinelets, Caves 9A and 9B, so similar in every way, have more than a dozen apiece—in the corners, at the ceiling center, and over the various images. Considerable numbers are found in other shrinelets, notably that at the right front of Cave Upper 6, where five were set into the Buddha's halo (all pulled out by now), two into the halos of each of the attendant Buddhas, one carefully (?) hidden behind each of the flying couples (and still there!), and others on the ceiling and elsewhere. If the monks had been excluded from adding any images to the various exclusive "palaces of the lord of gods" (Ajanta 16 inscription, verse 27) in better times, now, at the start of the great site's dissolution, they were free to honor the Buddha as they would.

Since, just as in the case of Upendragupta's splendid Caitya Hall Cave 19, the Asmaka conquerors apparently disallowed worship in Upendragupta's little Cave 20—also very incomplete and offering little or no evidence of any extensive usage—the single significant (and essentially finished) focus of worship at the site at the time of the Asmaka takeover was the grand and already occupied Cave 17. Obviously, for reasons of expediency if nothing else, the Asmakas must have overlooked its origins as the donation of their defeated rival, perhaps justifying their appropriation of it as in a sense a "put-down" of their rival, just as Balshazzar took pleasure in using the sacred vessels of the Israelites for his insulting parties. Of course, all too soon, just as Balshazzar and his ilk were "weighed in the balances and found wanting", the Asmakas themselves were soon to fall from their place on high.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

At the same time, despite the evident continuation of the use of Cave 17 for residence and worship during the period, from 475 on, when the Asmakas controlled the site, these new local rulers made no effort whatsoever to properly finish Cave 17's shrine; although it clearly continued in use, its walls were never painted, despite the fact that this could surely have been accomplished in a week or so. Even the unfinished Cell R6 remained untouched and possibly unoccupied. The only "improvements" which were made after 475 were practical changes made to the door-fittings of Cells L5 and L6, and PL, clearly to better fit them for storage and security purposes.[61]

Since the progress of work on most of the caves at the site had been seriously interrupted by the "Recession", for which the Asmakas themselves were in part to blame, living space, which must have been a priority concern in Ajanta's rapidly growing community from the start, was even more of a problem now that the Asmakas had taken over the site. Having been deeply involved in donations (involving the whole of the site's western extremity) before their expulsion by the local king in 468 AD, they were now, as enthusiastic conquerors, sponsoring what could be called its second renaissance, urging the continuation of work on all of the previously unfinished caves, except for those of the defeated local king.

The site's housing problems, in 475, must have been serious, since most of the caves at the site had not been under excavation since 468. The "royal" caves' excavation did continue during the Recession, but when the Asmakas took over the site by 475, it appears that they disallowed the use of Caves 19 and 20. Thus of the royal caves, only Cave 17 was clearly in use in 475.[62] During the next few years the residence situation improved, as work continued vigorously throughout the site. However of the (estimated) 334 residence cells (each presumably housing two monks) which would have been available had work at the site not been truncated by Harisena's death, only an (estimated) 144 were ever readied for use, and these were often in caves which were very unfinished.[63] Of course, monks may have

[61] See Chapter 15 of this Volume.

[62] It seems clear that Cave 1's diffidently cut D-mode cell doorways were hung in 475, and it is possible that the cells were occupied; but the sculptors were still at work at the time, and the plastering and painting had not even started.

[63] In Cave 1, it is possible that only Cell R3 was fitted out prior to 475, and that it too was used not for residence but for storage at that point. In Cave 17, R6 remained unfinished, as it was in 471; L6, with its special fittings and deep attached chamber was intended for storage from the start. The doorway of the

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

lived in cells without doors, and in caves that were still in the course of excavation and decoration. However, the great care with which doorways were fitted out with pivot holes, interior closures (sometimes as many as two, quite apart from the doorstop), exterior closures, and the way that cells were provided with fixtures for hanging clothes by means of poles or pegs, or storing items in shelves or in niches, suggests that at this high-class site the monks were not expected to live and sleep just anywhere.

Door Fittings: A Resume

If one wishes to analyze the course of Ajanta's development in the most specific way possible -almost year by year-and at the same time understand the various crises in the site's development, one should turn not to Buddha imagery, so influenced by tradition and convention, but to such things as the purely expedient manner in which the doors of the monks' cells were hung, for here we are dealing with technology alone, which innocently welcomes change, and is all too eager to forget the past.[64]

The first cell doorways at Ajanta, in the all too simple A mode, were the only types cut until 467. They included no provision at all for door fittings. The excavators, who after all had never carved such caves before, apparently felt that they could figure out how they were going to hang the doors when the time came to do so. With so many things to think about that they had never thought about before, this attitude was very human, even if not very farsighted, as would all too soon be clear.

It wasn't until 468 that a sensible door fitting system was discovered. This—the B mode—involved the use of monolithic projections for holding the door pivots. Now every planner switched to this new and practical fitting system. These fittings, with a monolithic projection for the door's pivot at the top and a corresponding hole at

---

adjacent Cell L5, originally cut in the A mode (converted to B) was also converted to a storage function after 475, with a more secure D mode). In Cave 11 the left rear cell is post-475.

[64] For a more detailed discussion of doorways and door fittings, see Discursus on Door-fittings: in forthcoming volume; also Spink 2004 ("The Innocent Evolution of Ajanta's Technology").

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

the floor level relate to the very type of doorway which the Buddha "allowed" in Cullavagga V,14.3. "I allow, monks, a door, a door-post and lintel, a hollow like a mortar (for the door to revolve in), a small upper projection, a post for the bolt, a 'monkey's head', a pin (to secure the bolt), a (stick) used as a bolt, a keyhole, a hole for pulling through (the cord), a cord for pulling through."

Indeed, at this point (in 468 and 469) nearly all of the site's "useless" A mode doorways were converted to the A+ mode—an approximation of the B mode achieved by means of pegged on-wooden projections. Today, of course, only the stumps of the teak pegs which held the applied projections sometimes remain, their shakiness a prediction of inevitable obsolescence.

The B mode was used for only about two years, then being replaced in 470 by an improved variant, the C mode, which is found only in the imperial Cave 1 and the royal caves 17 and 19; these excavations were among the few (all royal) caves in which the local king allowed work to continue during the troubled years of the Recession (469 through 471), when he was trying to discipline himself to save the region's resources for an expected conflict with the aggressive Asmakas.[65]

In this more modern C mode projecting holders were cut at the bottom of the doorway as well as at the top. This lower addition was a distinct improvement, for it kept the door from scraping on the floor when it was opened and closed. However, just as in the B mode, the door's closure was still very clumsy, for since the pivot holders both projected from the wall, the door necessarily slammed up against the wall's uneven surface when it was closed.

Through all of Ajanta's traumas in this period when it was all too obvious that the Asmakas, with their troops, were planning a sobering return visit to the Ajanta area, the closely related Buddhist site at Bagh was at peace. Controlled by an imperial viceroy, and far enough away to be out of the range of the Asmaka actions, it offered a safe haven for Ajanta's prescient workmen, who must have thought it a stroke of fortune to be able to work in soft sandstone rather than hard basalt for a change. But Bagh's sandstone was so

[65] Upendragupta's new chaitya hall, Cave 29, barely started in 469, had to be abandoned to save money, while his Cave 20 was so affected by his sumptuary measures that work on the cells had been abruptly abandoned in that same year.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

friable that projecting door-fittings of the B or C mode were impossible to utilize; so the artisans at Bagh developed a new and in fact far more practical system; they merely recessed the back of the doorway and cut the pivot holes in the recess, creating what I call the D mode, characterized by a simplicity and practicality which put the planners at Ajanta to shame. This new and sensible mode was brought back to Ajanta by returning workmen, after the victorious Asmakas had imposed peace upon the region once again in about 475.

The introduction of the D mode must have been a revelation, as well as a lesson in delayed good sense. Now the cell doors no longer had to slam against the wall; they closed neatly and tightly into the recess cut into the back of the doorway. Now the workers could also cut what I call a drop-slot in the side of the doorway's inner recess into which a pivoted arm attached to the door could drop, to effect a secure closure. Some doorways have such a slot, together with a more conventional teak latch, and finally with doorstops in the threshold. Thus in some late doorways, there appear to be three ways that monks could shut themselves in, from the inside! Why this was desirable or necessary is hard to explain.

With the doors so tightly closed, the cells would have been pitch black, and only a monk protected from asphyxiation by remarkable inner resources would have dared to light a lamp. Indeed there is no evidence, from deposits of soot, that oil lamps were ever used in the cells at Ajanta in this period, although there is one such primitive lamp, located quite high up, molded from the mud plaster which surfaced the front wall of one of the shrines at Bagh. But this, it should be noted, is not a cell, but rather a location where devotional lamps would be appropriate (even if generally put on the floor) and where the air could circulate freely.

Interestingly, the same type of "lamp" molded as an integral part of the plaster on the wall, can still be found in Cell PL, at the left end of the porch of Cave 11.[66] But this was obviously made by (or made for) a sadhu who made this his abode in some later century.[67] Furthermore the cell which he took over was now fully air condi-

[66] The plaster, perhaps mostly cow-dung, is very different in texture from that of the Vakataka phase.

[67] This sadhu and his residence are discussed in this same chapter, below.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

tioned, since its early A+ mode doorway had long since fallen, or been taken, away.

The Vakataka caves at Bagh were able to continue in worship long after Ajanta's collapse, and were tremendously begrimed by the usages of worship as a consequence of their good fortune. By contrast, a great many of the paintings at Ajanta survived without much heavy grime because the site collapsed so early and so precipitously. This ironic state of preservation by default is particularly true of the splendid paintings in Cave 1, although there is a special reason; namely, that due to the sudden death of its patron Harisena, the cave was never dedicated and thus put in worship. By a similar token, the splendid caitya hall of the local king is also totally unsullied, for the simple reason that, even though it had been hurriedly dedicated, the ill-starred patron was defeated by the Asmakas, who disallowed worship in his cave for reasons both political and psychological. Cave 21 and the great caitya hall Cave 26 also show little or no grime, because within months after they were put into worship, their patrons, the Asmakas, had to give up their connection with the site. Even Cave 2 has no smoke damage in its shrine, because it was barely finished, when it had to be turned over to the "intruders", who apparently were more interested in their own many small offerings than in conducting their worship in the abandoned shrine. These caves all stand in sad contrast to the caves which were vigorously worshipped for as much as a decade or more: Cave 17, Cave Lower 6, and Cave 11.

The new D mode was so practical that it was used exclusively from now on in every new doorway, while earlier doorways were very often recut in this new and more efficient manner. And happily for our investigations the workers usually left the abandoned projections in place as strengtheners—often not only desirable but necessary—trimming them back at their convenience to effect the doors' better fit.

Just as in an archaeological dig, all of the caves are stratified by circumstance, whether political and/or economic and/or personal—such as the death or sudden insolvency of the patron. Happily, the site's doorways, both main doorways and cell doorways, are the most revealing examples of this stratification, although the treatment of window shaping and fittings, to say nothing of the evolution of pillar and pilaster forms, and the layout, often changing, of the caves all must play a part in our understanding, quite apart from the evidentiary

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

impact of the style and iconography of the paintings and sculptures. But features such as cell doorway fittings are particularly revealing, for the simple reason that "if it works, keep it", and if it doesn't, or can be even modestly improved upon, then let it recede into the site's history. Never use it again. Such technological features, in particular, are "innocent" of convention and tradition, and at the same time are open to the impacts of change, responsive to the burden of ideas daily or weekly or monthly or yearly brought into the site by those eager for work or wanting to have work done. The essential criterion—as the planners and workers and even the patrons at the site knew very well—is use, or usefulness. Ajanta, from the start—unlike so many long established sites—is open to suggestion; from the start it is growing; and even in its many times of troubles it is never dying, until that final, sudden, day.

In the cell doorways of Cave 17 we can see the progression from A mode to B mode (or often A+ mode), and finally to C mode doorways, the latter sometimes unfinished, because at this point the local king lost control of the region. And then, as we have mentioned, a few later fittings (D mode) were added, perhaps grudgingly, by the conquering Asmakas, after 475, for security. The course of this development, immediately evident on plan, when the cell types are listed, proves the rapidity of change and of changes, so characteristic of youth. Actual maturity was something which Ajanta, during its brief lifetime, was moving toward, but was never to know.

A somewhat similar stratification reveals and explains the development of the emperor Harisena's Cave 1 which, to its esthetic benefit, was started a few years late, and could take advantage of the progress made at the site in nearly every area. In the case of the doorways, by the time Cave 1's first cells (those in the porch) were underway, the B mode had already become standard, although, as the excavation progressed, the updated C mode soon (by 470) replaced it. And then, after the war, in about 475, all but one of Cave 1's earlier doorways were converted to the D mode just brought to the site from Bagh.[68]

[68] The exception is Cell R1, at the end of the front aisle, which was fitted out in the pure D mode, in 475, without any conversion from earlier fittings. The particularly long delay was possibly caused by geologically flawed ceiling, which has troubling veins of very hard quartz. So work on the cell may have been "put off until last" as was very often the case with difficult areas at the site. However, it is

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

The conversions of the doorways in Cave 1, like the later plastering of the cells, were surely done by contract, as was so much work at the site. In Cave 1 this is suggested by the surprising consistency with which the niches were cut (by the same contractor) when the cave's doors were being either finally fitted, or refitted. Later on, when this and other caves were plastered, we find a similar consistency, with related cells all being worked with the same mix, and so presumably at the same time. Furthermore, when the contractors redesigned Cave 1's doorways, they added (at the rear of the cells) the useful niches which, as I mentioned earlier, were still *a la mode* in 475, but not thereafter. Such developments are characteristic of the shifts in taste and/or technology so characteristic of the rapidly evolving site, while the efficient allocation of labor helps to explain how so much got done so fast.

Every cave at the site used the new D mode right up until the time when Harisena died in 477; according to my chronology he expired conveniently on Dec. 31, 477. Then, because the Asmakas, in the very next year, rejected Harisena's weak successor and initiated their plan to conquer the empire, all of Ajanta's courtly patronage came to a rapid—even frantic—end. It was early in this difficult year (478) that a new mode (E mode) apparently was used to fit out the doorways of four of the latest cells of Cave 16, all located in the left rear. However, this was done in a most expedient manner; rather than recessing the doorways properly, a deep slot, in one case breaking right through the front wall of the cell, was cut at the top. A wooden block with a pivot hole in it was then apparently pushed into the slot to receive the upper door pivot. The block could then be shifted back and forth and finally fixed with a wedge when the door, pivoted at the base just like a D mode doorway, hung straight. This must have worked quite well and was quicker than precisely lining up the D mode holes; but it was a jerry built system, shocking from the point of view of better times. Perhaps Varahadeva, for

more likely to be explained by the fact that work on the cells at the ends of the front aisle was often somewhat delayed, probably because of scaffolding put up to carve the front aisle pillars and the doors and windows opening into that busy area. The slight displacement of the cells at the ends of the front aisle in a number of caves suggests this. Thus Cells R2 and L2 (see cave plan) in both Cave 16 and Cave 1, which have been set slightly forward to effect an unobstructed view, appear to have affected R1 and L1. See also R1 and R2 in Cave 17.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

whom expediency became the rule in these few months after Harisena's death, allowed these last cells to be thus fitted out to hurry his patronage to a quick conclusion before he "presented (the cave) with devotion to the Community of Monks" sometime in 478.[69] Or perhaps the monks themselves got the work done, after Varahadeva had had to leave by mid-478. It is also possible that these doorways were fitted out in this expedient E mode manner in the Period of Disruption (479–480) when there would still have been plenty of workmen at the site.[70]

The fact that the amount of wear in the lower pivot holes of these E mode doorways is roughly the same as those in the same cave's D mode doorways would at least suggest (although would hardly prove!) their closeness in date, and there is of course good reason to think that the cave would have (finally!) been busily occupied immediately after Varahadeva turned it over to the sangha.[71] But perhaps more to the point is the evidence that this gives us that the cave (like a number of others) remained in use for some years after the site's heyday had ended so abruptly. Indeed, the wear in these doorways suggests that the caves were used for residence for a num-

[69] Ajanta Cave 16 inscription, verse 30. Actually, the record must have been written and inscribed in 477, rather than after Harisena's death in 478, since it mentions the emperor as living. It could hardly have been written much before 477, since it lists the areas, from sea to sea, which he had finally come to control by that time. Also, it would appear that Varahadeva did not renew work on his cave at about 477, so it is not surprising that the inscription dates from that same year, reflecting his new commitment. Just as with his inscription in the never-fully-finished Ghatotkacha vihara, he may have wanted to get his prasasti written and "put on display" in its very noticeable position as soon as possible. In fact, the inscriptions of Cave 17 and 20, and of Cave 4 were also both written before those caves were finished—although in far more traumatic circumstances. The Cave 26 inscription, inscribed when the patron was secure in his position, provides a better parallel with that of Cave 16 and the Ghatotkacha vihara.

[70] Indeed, there is one other E mode fitting at the site, in the long abandoned and unfinished Cave 20's Cell R2, which was certainly done in the Period of Disruption, since until the end of 478, when the Asmaka rulers left the site, this cave of the defeated king must have remained "closed". However, the expediency of this fitting in Cave 20 makes those in Cave 16 look well-wrought by comparison; I assume it is merely a crude copy of those made in Cave 16—probably in 478—certainly not earlier.

[71] The D mode fittings in Cave 16 are curious, for they show wear only in the lower pivot holes. It would seem that wooden "fillers" to receive the upper pivots, make them turn smoothly, and perhaps allow certain adjustments, were fitted into the receiving holes, the "too-ample" size of which supports the assumption that wooden(?) fillers were placed in them.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

ber of years; perhaps until the war against the empire was over and the region had come (very likely) under the domination of Saivite rulers.

There is still one further type of fitting in Cave 16, which would have grieved Varahadeva and his courtly friends. This type, the F Mode, appears to have been merely a way of hanging a cloth from a wooden "beam" affixed to the top of doorways in a number of cells whose original doors had been lost. It involved a heavy buildup of mudplaster (mostly by now missing) along the sides and top inside the doorways. In one case it is clear that the mudplaster was built up to hold a piece of wood which stretched from one side of the doorway's top to the other; it appears that the wood was pressed in while the mudplaster was still moist. In another case the mudplaster went well up into the upper pivot hole, proving that the door by then had been broken or taken away, which we can assume was the reason for these new fittings in every case. It is also clear that such curtains or the like were not applied until sometime in the 480s or even later, since the doorways in which they appear have wear in the lower pivot holes, obviously caused by the turning of the previous more conventional doors; and it would have taken a few years for these pivot holes to get smoothed down so noticeably. In any case, these F mode fittings are of a very expedient type, and obviously reflect a very different kind of attitude, and a different degree of resources, from that of the original donors.

There are two other doorways at the site where we have clear evidence of still later occupation. But these residents were probably Saivite mendicants, who took up their abode there when the region came under the control of the Early Kalacuris or some later dynasty, after the Vakataka empire had been shattered by its adversaries.[72]

[72] I am awaiting results of carbon tests on this plaster, hoping it would confirm a Saivite presence in the area in the sixth or seventh century, although of course the sadhu could have taken up residence at any later time. The long and almost illegible inscription on the wall between Cave 26 and its left wing appears to have been put there—probably as a public record of his control over the region—by some later king, probably as witness of his control of the region. Malandra (1982, 43–46), in a careful analysis, has suggested that the inscription belongs to a branch of the Rastrakuta family from Vidarbha, connected with two kings (Nannaraja and Vajratadeva) who are mentioned in it, and who probably were ruling in the late seventh century. Although we do not know when their rule may have started over the Ajanta region, the presence of this inscription would be consistent with my suggestion that the insistent abandonment of the site after the early 480s was due to a political/religious shift in the control of the region after the Vakataka debacle.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

In one (PL in Cave 11) the sectarian reference is clear, since a sadhu or his devotees painted Saivite symbols on the wall next to the doorway. Here the door is long since gone, but it was obviously an A mode doorway converted to A+ (in 468 or early 469), since the more recent plaster partially covers the holes (now containing on the stumps of the original teak pegs) which held the applied wooden projection by which it was made into an approximation of the monolithic B mode. The plastering here is quite different from that found in properly Vakataka contexts, and even has a built up mud projection formed into a rude oil lamp on the inner front wall. It might be noted too, that during the period when the site was active, none of Cave 11's cells were ever plastered; this only confirms the later date of this plastering.

Like another later resident, who must have lived in the porch of Cave 7, this sadhu sadly sullied the beautiful porch ceiling with the fires which he used either for cooking or for comfort. Since it is unlikely that the sadhu resided here for very long, this reminds us how quickly the grime from fires and lamps can obscure paintings.

Cell R2 and R2A in Cave 26's left wing also shows a mode of plastering quite different from that used during the site's heyday. It appears to be (or to be like) cowdung, and in many areas is smeared on thinly, so that the rough surface of the rock is by no means hidden. This doorway once had a D mode fitting (converted from an earlier A mode) but the door was no longer in place when this cell was hastily refurbished for its new resident; and when the plaster was applied, it was carelessly smeared right up into the upper pivot hole. Thus the doorway finally has reverted to a quasi A mode opening with no door at all—which is how it was originally cut, in about 466, by the diffident early excavators. Things have seemingly come full circle.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

CHAPTER FOUR

IN DEFENSE OF DANDIN: THE HISTORICITY OF THE VISRUTACARITA

Scholars understandably question the historicity of the Visrutacarita—the eighth ucchvasa of Dandin's Dasakumaracarita—with what purports to be a remarkably surprisingly detailed recollection of the circumstances of the Vakataka fall.[1] Bakker's recent criticism of my own interpretation, as well as that of Mirashi is conventional: "both authors treat (the Visrutacarita) as a reliable description of the historic events that led to the downfall of the House of Harisena—as if it were a roman a clef, in which Punyavarman represents Harisena, Vasantabhanu the king of Asmaka, Ekavira the king of Rsika, etc. . . . At best it could be seen as a kind of Alexander Romance . . . (which) no historian would use . . . as his primary source for Alexander's life and deeds." (Bakker 1997, 37)

In the following chapter I will try to counter this assumption; and for simplicity I will use the actual historical names of the actors in this "romance" (e.g. Harisena for Punyavarman), except in the few cases where there might be disagreement with my identification (e.g. Maharaja Subandhu for Visruta).[2] All histories, corrupted by both the author's predilections and his selectivity, are of course to some degree fictions, But I will try to show that the core of this "romance" (or as DeCaroli calls it: this "mytho-history") is grounded in a painfully unromantic and specific reality; for it is describing nothing less than the destruction of India's Golden Age.[3]

The specificity of this "romance", where (as I shall try to show) all of the characters, although provided with "stage names", check out, and where all of the locales and territories mentioned are really on the map, would be cause for wonder even if it purported to be

[1] I use the translation and commentaries in Kale (1966, 348–367). The less reliable translation by Ryder (1927) has been occasionally consulted.

[2] I shall sometimes say Subandhu = Visruta, or Visruta = Subandhu, depending on the context.

[3] DeCaroli 1995.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

a serious historical account. However, although the abundant references, tied to reality, could indeed define Dandin's story as "history", it reads unapologetically as a novel. It is for us—as it surely was for the audience of his own day—to make the connection with historical reality. And obviously his audience could do this, since we ourselves can do it today.

Of course, if the story truly describes the events at the time of the Vakataka fall, around 480 A.D., it would be almost impossible to believe that Dandin was living more than a century later, particularly when we consider the imprecision with which such stories were typically transmitted in ancient India, most notably in the oral tradition, upon which, presumably, Dandin based his account. When I myself originally accepted a late (early seventh century) date for Dandin, I justified what seemed to be his "total recall" of events and personalities in the Visrutacarita by suggesting that the situation that he was describing was so world-shattering that they were "literally unforgettable", particularly for the author, if it was true that his ancestors had been connected with the collapsing Vakataka court. However, having worked out, almost point by point, the relationships between Dandin's story and the historical situation attendant upon Ajanta's fall, it has become well nigh impossible for me to believe that Dandin lived a century of more after the event.

The most thoughtful explication of the view which places Dandin at such a late date, is that of R. DeCaroli, who suggests that, in the Visrutacarita, "Dandin intentionally drew on recognized historic events in order to construct an elaborate analogy that could serve to caution the young Pallava king Narasimhavarman II against complacency."[4] This gives a cogent reason for Dandin having written his idiosyncratic story, but at the same time it locates him nearly a century and a half after the events that he so precisely describes, while the biographical information upon which the connection depends essentially derives solely from the Avantisundarikatha, written by one "Acarya Dandin", who may have been writing at a very much later date than the Dandin of the Dasakumaracarita, whose partisans locate him very much earlier—in the early sixth or even the fifth century.[5]

[4] DeCaroli 1995.

[5] The best explication of historical information in the Avantisundarikatha is in DeCaroli 1995. However, he admits that "Ultimately, the common authorship of

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

This is of course the problem. Scholars are so divided about the identity of these two Dandins (one author even finding three Dandins[6]) that their confusion suggests that the matter can hardly be settled by reference to any reconstruction of Dandin's biography. We must turn instead to the account itself, to see how its events relate to evidence available from epigraphic, art historical, and literary evidence. And when we do this we will not be able to believe that "our" Dandin—the Dandin of the Dasakumaracarita—is the same as "Acarya Dandin" of Pallava times.

"Our" Dandin reports on the events surrounding the Vakataka fall—and the fall of Ajanta—with such specificity that he must have been living at approximately that same time, and have been very familiar with both the actions and the personalities of the "masked men" in his tale. Because (as we shall see) he includes events—such as the establishment of Subandhu = Visruta in Mahismati, documented by the Barwani inscription to approximately 486 C.E.—he must have been writing after—rather than in the midst of—the Vakataka fall. One possible hint regarding his location might be the noteworthy fact that he provides some of the central characters with the varman suffix. Of course this could be associated with the Pallavas, but more important from our point of view, it could equally suggest a connection with the Visnukundins, who were almost certainly one of the major inheritors of Vakataka power, when the great empire broke into its constituent parts. Indeed, the connection was enhanced, significantly, by the fact that one of Harisena's daughters married the Vishnukundin monarch Madhavavarman II.[7] So it is quite possible that "our" Dandin (as opposed to "Acarya Dandin"), filled with a knowledge of the recent shattering events, was writing his cautionary account in that very region, just possibly at the Visnukundin court.

Or is it possible that he was connected with the court of Maharaja Subandhu at Mahismati, which might well explain the consistently laudatory manner in which he represents Visruta (= Subandhu) who, even when doing wicked and devious things, can do no wrong. Subandhu's upwardly mobile career appears to have found, in Dandin,

---

these texts is essential to my argument because the biographic information about Dandin employed here is primarily evidenced by the Avantisundarikatha, while the political analysis centers on the Dasakumaracarita.

[6] G. J. Agashe (1919).

[7] See below in this chapter.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

the ideal biographer, while the masking of the characters—still totally recognizable—behind new names equally serves both pride and modesty. By thus "fictionalizing" the story, Dandin allows its useful distortions and exaggerations, while preserving its purpose as political and personal propaganda. Thus when Punyavarman = Harisena suddenly dies, probably done in by the Asmakas, we read that his demise was "owing to the want of religious merit on the part of his subjects", not to the laxness of his controls. And if, as I shall argue, the noble Visruta in fact dispatched his young ward (the Vakataka heir) on his own way to the throne, Dandin discreetly ends his story just before the awful truth might have emerged. For just as Harisena's perfection was preserved, Visruta's nobility is consistently stressed. For not only does he, as the heroic protagonist, save the shreds of the great Vakataka empire, but almost certainly founds another—eventually known as the Early Kalacuri Dynasty.

The very format of Dandin's account may well contribute to its significance. DeCaroli points out that ". . . in Dandin's day the prose romance was a rare thing, as tales were usually told in verse and prose forms were used primarily for educational and scientific purposes. Therefore, the use of a prose format may suggest his intentions were better suited to a didactic medium. While the use of this format is not proof of Dandin's intentions, it does help support the notion that he was trying to do more than simply entertain." (DiCaroli 1995, 671–8) The fact is that Dandin's story—if we take away the intentionally diverting discussions of wine women and song and stick only to the skeleton of this voluptuous account—checks out point by point as a resume of an actual historical situation, and one of great interest and significance.

As we shall see in the course of this chapter, Dandin's account—the Visrutacarita—has a startling historicity. But this is evident only if we reject the traditional chronology for the great emperor Harisena and his ill-fated son Sarvasena III, who appear on the Dandin's dramatic stage as the virtuous Punyavarman and the not so virtuous Anantavarman. The Visrutacarita's historicity is properly revealed only if the reigns of Harisena and Sarvasena III reigns are assigned to (approximately) 460–477, and 478–483 respectively, rather than to the long-accepted 475–500 and 500–510.[8] When this important

[8] The traditional dating was merely suggested by Mirashi but, perhaps because of the weight of his authority, it came to be accepted as something close to the truth.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

revision is made, suddenly a host of synchronisms referring to epigraphic, historical, literary and archaeological data lock into place, confirming the validity of the new "Short Chronology".[9] The fact that such synchronisms did not lock into place before was largely responsible for seeing Dandin's account as suspect.

At the same time, if these synchronisms are going to "work" it is essential that we also recognize that the hero of the eighth ucchvasa of Dandin's story, Prince Visruta, like all of the other major characters, is an actual historical figure, lightly "disguised" under a different name. After all, the whole plot of the Visrutacarita centers around his personality and his dramatic actions. As DeCaroli has pointed out, having noted how consistently Dandin weaves his story around major figures and events connected with the time of the Vakataka fall, "it would be odd for Dandin to tell a historic tale of a king's downfall and then not back it up with an equally historic role model" That is, it makes little or really no sense to have everyone except the story's heroic protagonist identifiable to the audience as real figures; and in this regard, I have tried to show that not only is Visruta "real", but that the story being told is probably that of the founding of a new historical dynasty, even as the old was in the throes of disintegration.

The possible connection between Dandin's heroic protagonist and Maharaja Subandhu of Mahismati has been paid little heed in the past, for the simple reason that Mirashi assigned Subandhu's Barwani inscription, dated in the "year 167" to the Kalacuri Era of 249–250 A.D.; thus Subandhu would have been ruling in 416 A.D., and could hardly have played a part in Dandin's drama, or in the actual historical events which it describes.

However, a dating to 416 C.E. for the Barwani record is impossible. The most crucial evidence is provided by the closely related Bagh inscription (the date has been lost), in which Subandhu claims to have repaired the caves at Bagh. Actually, there were not any caves there in 416, to say nothing of some years earlier, when the caves would have had to have been made if they were to be later "repaired" by Maharaja Subandhu.[10] The Bagh caves, which Mirashi

[9] See "Summary of Evidence: The Vakatakas Flowering and Fall".

[10] Mirashi 1945, 79ff: "From the evidence supplied by the grants of Subandhu it appears clear that they must be referred to about the end of the fourth century A.D. at the latest". This dating, almost a century too early, has too often confused

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

sees as belonging "to the end of the fourth century at the latest" are in fact contemporary with the Vakataka caves at Ajanta, and surely enjoyed the same Vakataka patronage, since they were excavated when (according to the Visrutacarita) a "second son" of Harisena was viceroy there in Mahismati prior to the control of the city by Subandhu (= Visruta).

The situation becomes clear when we date Subandhu's inscriptions not to the Early Kalacuri era but to the Gupta era, giving a date of 486 A.D. After all, Subandhu, who can convincingly be identified with Visruta of the tale, was a Gupta prince! And his activities, as we shall see, synchronize perfectly with the activities of the members of the Vakataka house who (according to Dandin) fled to the city of Mahismati for a tenuous safety, during the turbulent years when the Vakataka dynasty was collapsing. This was the very moment, if our analysis is correct, that Ajanta was in collapse and its great patrons, such as the Prime Minister Varahadeva, had to flee the site. It was, in fact, Varahadeva—the "aged minister Vasurakshita" of the Visrutacarita—who, having renounced his patronage at Ajanta, tooks Harisena's young granddaughter (thireen years old at the time) along with her younger brother, for safety to the uncle's court at Mahismati. It makes sense that, around 486, Subandhu, after much intrigue, and on the make politically perhaps even more than erotically, married Harisena's granddaughter, who would have still been in her highly marriageable teens at the time that he was consolidating his control in Mahismati.[11] And it makes sense that now, with his new Vakataka connections, he repaired the highly friable Vakataka Bagh caves, which had been excavated a decade or two before.

The identification of Maharaja Subandhu, ruling by or before 486 A.D., with the heroic protagonist Visruta in effect "proves" the validity of the Short Chronology for Ajanta. This is because Anupa, where Subandhu was ruling in the 480s, had been part of Harisena's inherited domains. According to the "Short Chronology" the Vakataka dynasty had fallen some years before the time when Subandhu was ruling there. By contrast, Mirashi's dating presents a conflict which cannot be resolved: if Harisena was ruling from 475–500, how could

---

the issue, including the probably connection of Subandhu to the founding of the Early Kalacuri dynasty, referred to below.

[11] See Volume I Chapter 7 for the age of Harisena's granddaughter.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

we justify Subandhu's control over one of Harisena's major territories in the 480s?

Such reasoning seems compelling. However, as DeCaroli has pointed out: "many eminent scholars . . . are willing to accept all the parallels between the Vakataka royalty and the characters in Dandin's play, with the exception of Visruta himself, (objecting to) the linking of Visruta and Subandhu . . . because such a connection drastically reduces the time in which the caves at Ajanta must have been created." Of course, this is precisely the point that I am making: the caves were created quickly, the Vakataka dynasty did collapse early, and there was plenty of time for Subandhu to rise to power, out of the ruins of the imperium. Although the "Short Chronology", as I have explained earlier, can stand alone, on actuarial grounds, the evidence of the Barwani inscription provides an important confirmation for the "Short Chronology", supplying a most telling point of synchrony between the art historical evidence and evidence from epigraphy.

As we shall see later in this chapter, there are a good number of inscriptions, notably in the 490s, that also provide *termini ante quem* bearing upon the upper limit of Ajanta's development. But, because Subandhu was ruling in the 480s, his rule most strikingly "defines" the time in which the caves at Ajanta must have been created. For as will be shown in the discussion below, the rule of Maharaja Subandhu—particularly if he is seen as playing a part in Dandin's tale—could not have begun until patronage at Ajanta, and the Vakataka dynasty itself, had both collapsed. Subandhu is one of the many beneficiaries of the Vakataka collapse; and (in his guise as Visruta) he makes the most of it.

At the same time, the development of the Vakataka caves at Ajanta, which as I shall show both in the present chapter, and in the previous Chapter 2 (where "actuarial" considerations are discussed) totally support—in fact "define"—the historical context in which they were made, as revealed in the Visrutacarita's account. As a consequence, all of our sources of information—the art historical, the literary, and the epigraphic—conspire to drastically limit the time-span into which Ajanta must be fitted, so that their crowded and consistent development can be outlined on an almost year to year basis, something unheard of for other Buddhist and Hindu monuments.

By confirming inscriptional and archaeological evidence at the Vakataka cave sites, the Visrutacarita establishes the Vakataka emperor

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Harisena—long neglected by the history books—as the great ruler who brought India's so-called Golden Age to its climax. If this cultural apogee is stunningly reflected in the caves made by Harisena and his courtiers at Ajanta in the 460s and the 470s, the collapse of patronage at Ajanta after the powerful emperor's death (c. 477) signaled, just as stunningly, the tragic end of the Vakataka dynasty and the beginning of a generation of darkness. It was not until the early sixth century that many of the former feudatories of Harisena came into their own, building upon their still-potent Vakataka heritage.

Even though Dandin's Visrutacarita turns out to be startlingly close to the history which it describes, it is still intended as a story, more to delight than to inform. Even though the stage—covering much of central India—is described with great precision, the actors are masked (even if transparently). Thus they become (to use DeCaroli's term) mytho-historical figures, transcending individuality, to become models for actions, either degrading or uplifting. And since Dandin is not writing a history, but a story, he can use indirection occasionally, to protect his main characters from too much exposure in the light of truth.

Scholars have been rightly put off by the major inconsistencies that emerge if, as has been traditional, one uses Mirashi's chronology as the base from which to start; for given Mirashi's dating of Harisena's reign the text often does not correspond with what we know from inscriptional and other historical evidence.[12] If I follow Mirashi "with considerably less reservations" (Bakker 1997, 37) than the understandable reservations of the great scholar himself it is only because I am working with a new chronology which places the fall of the Vakataka empire some twenty years earlier than his datings allow; and when the old datings are changed, a host of convincing synchronisms emerge, as we shall see.

Linked to such a revised chronology, the Visrutacarita account locks tightly into place with evidence from relevant inscriptional and historical sources, as well as with Ajanta's development—the latter

[12] For Mirashi's suggested dating of Harisena to 475–500 C.E., see Mirashi 1963, 104. His dating of Devasena to 450–475 is equally arbitrary, using a "standard" twenty-five year regnal length. Although I disagree with Mirashi's dating, I must record my deep gratitude to him for his remarkable researches; my own work is totally founded upon his, and I would like to think of it as an homage to that great scholar.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

a crucial consideration, but generally one never treated seriously. It also explains one of Bakker's main concerns: that "the eastern Vakatakas are conspicuous by their absence." (Bakker 1997, 37) Indeed, it is a measure of the Visrutacarita's consistency that the eastern Vakatakas are indeed "absent" from the account and that only a single unified empire is mentioned; for according to our revised chronology the eastern Vakatakas had been taken over, or absorbed into, the Vatsagulma (western) branch a few years before, during Harisena's reign.[13]

Not only does the Visrutacarita tell us that the great ruler Harisena, and subsequently his son, were in sole control of the empire, but this information finds striking confirmation in Harisena's Prime Minster's Cave 16 inscription, where Harisena's domains are claimed to stretch from the eastern to the western sea.[14]

It was this great empire—greater than the troubled world of the Guptas—that Harisena's son, Sarvasena III, inherited, and that the revolting Asmakas would all too soon destroy. For the son, unlike his remarkable father, "unluckily held the science of politics in little esteem", (Kale 1966, 349) opting instead, according to the Visrutacarita, for every manner of indulgence and corruption. It is no wonder that Harisena's old minister (Vasurakshita=the prime minister Varahadeva), was frustrated by the irresponsibility of the new ruler, who "never listens to my counsel. (Kale 1966, 355) Surely now this kingdom will fall into the hands of . . . the ruler of Asmaka." (Kale 1966, 355)

Of course, this was just what the Asmakas intended, for the new king had been deeply enmeshed by the blandishments of the devious son of the minister of Asmaka, the very minister who, in 478, was extolled in Buddhabhadra's Cave 26 inscription, as "accomplish(ing) with tact and sweetness only, even such tasks as would normally call for rigours and active struggle" (Ajanta 26 inscr., vs 11). But the father's vaunted diplomacy obviously had its insidious side, as we learn from the assignment which he gave to his son, the Candrapalita of the Visrutacarita account. The latter, "under the pretext of having been expelled by his father for his profligate conduct came to Vidarbha with . . . musicians and dancing girls . . . and

[13] For my so-called "Short Chronology", see Spink, 1994; 1991A; 1991B.

[14] See below, in this chapter, for discussion of the relevant verse (verse 18) in the Ajanta Cave 16 inscription.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

numerous retainers and spies in various disguises . . . and soon acquired a hold upon the king". (Kale 1966, 356)[15]

If we can believe the account, the minister's son arrived only after Sarvasena III—Anantavarman of the Visrutacarita—acceded to power in 478.[16] Thus since the Cave 26 inscription of that same year states that the minister in whose honor the cave was made had already died, the son must be identified as the son of the succeeding "excellent minister", who was in office when the inscription was written.[17] Just when this "mole" arrived in Vidarbha is not stated, but since the evidence of Ajanta's dramatic disruption suggests that their insurrectionist plans began almost immediately after Harisena's death, he may well have gotten to the Vakataka capital shortly before 480, perhaps even in the dark year, 478, when the Asmakas publicly announced their rejection of the Vakataka overlordship.[18] This would allow time for his pernicious ministrations to have their intended effect.

Thus, even as his father and the king were plotting to destroy the great empire from without, the Asmaka minister's son—the Candrapalita of the account—was occupying himself with the goal of weakening it from within. In this he rapidly gained the support of "an associate of the king (= Sarvasena) from his very childhood, Viharabhadra by name." But although Viharabhadra "was known to be the royal favorite", he was "libidinous, clever, of licentious tongue, . . . devoted to finding the weak points of others, . . . an expert in . . . the art of receiving bribes even from ministers; and a professor of all the wicked acts." (Kale 1966, 350) One hardly need point out the danger to the malleable young Sarvasena, of having such a counselor, now so readily allied with the destructive Asmaka presence at the court.

---

[15] Ryder's translation (1927, 208): "he had been exiled by his father for loose living. . . ." is incorrect, and misses the essential point—that this was a ruse.

[16] For the (hypothetical) dates of Harisena, Sarvasena, etc., see Spink 1991A, 71–99. The Cave 26 inscription can reasonably be assigned to 478 because the established Vakataka patrons all apparently fled the site within a matter of a few weeks or months after Harisena died, surely in fear of the Asmaka takeover, which the record confirms.

[17] Thus he would be the grandson of Bhavviraja who, according to the Cave 26 record, was the minister of Asmaka when his close friend the monk Buddhabhadra began the cave early in the 460s.

[18] I am in agreement with the generally accepted interpretation of the Cave 26 inscription, which assumes that the Vakatakas were no longer in control of the Ajanta region. Buddhabhadra specifically praises the ministers and the "mighty king" of Asmaka, but omits the expected reference to the Vakataka overlord.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Indeed, the presence of such dangerous characters at the court may help to explain the mysterious circumstances of the great Harisena's death when he was probably only about fifty years of age.[19] As I have pointed out elsewhere, his demise was clearly sudden and unexpected. He did not die of tuberculosis, or diabetes, or cancer, or any other wasting disease, for in such a situation he would surely have ordered that his already essentially completed great Cave 1 be dedicated, if only to achieve the meritorious advantage therefrom. (Spink 1981, 154–5) Although it is conceivable that he was carried off by a heart attack, the Visrutacarita would have us believe otherwise. It was "for the unworthiness of his subjects (that he was) translated into divinity". (Ryder 1927, 200)[20] Although the proposition is hardly provable, is it not likely, given what we know about the insidiously aggressive Asmakas, that Harisena fell prey to poison or the knife, just as his unfortunate son Sarvasena, lured into battle by the Asmakas' trickery, "fell a prey to the (attacking) princes . . . (being) totally averse to the science of politics" (Kale 1966, 360)? There would have been no better way for the Asmakas to forward their long-term goal of taking over the great Vakataka empire for themselves than to have assassinated Harisena at the start, and then to have lured his son and successor into a fatal battle.

Considering the importance which Dandin gives to the recently arrived Candrapalita, one might believe that such a crucial participant in the Asmaka plot might also be mentioned by name or referred to in some fashion in Buddhabhadra's inscription. But this can be easily explained; he was probably already on his way to his apparent "exile" in Vidarbha. Being—as far as the newspapers knew—in deep disfavor with the Asmaka court, he would hardly have been honored in Buddhabhadra's 478 inscription; such a mention would have clearly "blown his cover" and ruined an essential part of the Asmaka plot.

The Visrutacarita expatiates on both the proper duties of kingship, and also on the various faults and foibles that may characterize

[19] See below, Chapter 7: Family Relationships bearing upon Ajanta's Short Chronology.

[20] Kale (1966, 349) phrases it somewhat differently: ". . . he came to be numbered among the immortals owing to the lack of religious merit on the part of his subjects." It is surprising that the particular circumstances of Harisena's death are not described. However, if he was murdered at the instigation of the Asmakas, this could be seen as a reflection of faulty imperial control and therefore not mentioned.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

a weak ruler. These long digressions, fascinatingly fanciful, have little connection with the "historical" portions of the text, a fact which surely has distracted scholars from more seriously attending to the latter. These rather extensive "lectures", aimed variously at either improving or ruining the new king's character, depending upon the political persuasion of the locutor, are clearly cautionary instructions, intentionally dramatized; they may well have been written for the amusement—and instruction—of some young prince on the path to power.[21]

Among a number of diversions which the minister's son prescribed for the young king, gambling and sexual dalliance and drinking were all highly recommended as appropriate prerogatives of kingship; ". . . for a king devoted to a life of peace like a saint," Candrapalita told the young Sarvasena, ". . . can neither keep in check his foes nor carry on the administration of his kingdom properly". (Kale 1966, 367) And, unhappily, finding justification in his own desires and in this developing "world of leisure and affluence" (Bakker 1997, 44) "the king followed his advice like the instructions of a Guru, and the people imitating the king threw off all restraint; . . . the administrators . . . devoured the fruits of their offices; then gradually all the channels of revenue were closed, and those of expenditure multiplied, day by day, owing to the subserviency of the king to rogues. . . ." (Kale 1966, 357–8)

This adds poignancy to the concerns of the old minister, who, according to the Cave 16 inscription, had "governed the country righteously" for the great Harisena; and as the minister astutely suggests, the emperor was "very famous for valour . . . brave and spirited like a lion". (Ajanta Cave 16 inscr., verses 20, 17, 18) But, the wise Varahadeva worries deeply about the new king, the young Sarvasena III, who from the start, rejecting his good advice, "does not disclose

[21] DeCaroli (1995) has suggested that Dandin's story may have been written for the moral benefit and practical instruction of the young Pallava king Narasimhavarman II. Although I now am convinced that this puts Dandin too late, it still is of interest that Dandin adds the royal Pallava suffix "varman" to his "renamed" members of the (Vakataka) imperial house. Thus he speaks of Harisena and Sarvasena III as Punyavarman and Anantavarman respectively, while Harisena's second son (the Anupa viceroy) and his grandson, whose historical names are not known, become Mitravarman and Bhaskaravarman. This would surely have made the account all the more compelling for a noble Pallava auditor. But I would prefer to see a similar connection with the Visnukundins (often "varmans") who almost certainly moved into one of the political and geographical gaps left by the Vakataka debacle.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

his secrets to me, does not touch my hand, . . . never asks after my family . . . or gives me an access to the harem". . . . "What good can I do to him?" the old minister complains. . . . Would that the calamities that are in store for him (Sarvasena) would . . . (bring him to his senses)" (Kale 1966, 355)

However, the young king, focused only upon pleasure, took the pernicious advice of his childhood friend, Viharabhadra—"a professor of all the wicked acts and a pilot of libertinism"—as well as the son of the Asmaka minister, who had come to the Vakataka court as a false friend and specialist in bad advice. Under his intentionally corrupting influence, Sarvasena paid little heed to his royal duties, indulging instead in the delights of wine, women and song. "And the people imitating the king through off all restraint, and became universally licentious. All being equally guilty, nobody tried to poke at the vices of others; the administrators of different departments . . . devoured the fruits of their offices; then gradually all the channels of revenue were closed, and those of expenditure multiplied . . . The weak were assaulted by the strong; the rich were robbed of their money by thieves; all fear of reproof being removed, the paths of sin were freely trodden." (Kale 1966; 350, 367–8)

Bakker's analysis of the trend of these times, amplified in both the actions and the inactions of Sarvasena, takes on a sobering significance when (even allowing for Dandin's exaggerations) we see how rapidly and how easily chaos took control as soon as the strictures of Harisena's rule were relaxed. Even the powerful Harisena himself may, in dying, have left a world essentially unprepared for the harshness of an internal conflict, where feudatories could all too easily now rise up against their overlord. It would seem that even in Harisena's time, society had been conditioned by power and privilege to the fin de siecle attractions of the "sensuous pleasures and sophisticated refinement that we find in the Ajanta murals". (Bakker 1997, 44)

As Bakker perceives: "The (Vakataka) inscriptions speak no longer of kings who are praised for their upright, reliable and solid rule, paragons of the dharma as it were, but instead of a world of courtiers, in which ministers took over the day-to-day worries of government in order to allow the king to become 'free from care' so that he could engage 'himself in the enjoyment of pleasures, acting as he liked'". (Bakker 1997, 44 with quotes from Ajanta Cave 16 inscr., vs. 16) Indeed, Professor Wilson, commenting on the "tone" of the Visrutacarita, goes even farther: "(Viharabhadra's) arguments . . .

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

in behalf of idle pleasures and in detraction of grave advisers and ministers . . . afford some curious insight into the abuses of official authority which prevailed in Indian Government at the time of the (Dasakumaracarita's) composition" (Kale 1966, 491, quoting Wilson); or one might just as properly say, "at the time of the Vakataka dynasty's collapse", for that is what Dandin is describing.

Actually the reference which Bakker makes is to Harisena' father, Devasena, and to Devasena's minister, who was the father of Varahadeva. However, by implication it suggests a similar relationship between Harisena and his minister Varahadeva who "governed the country righteously, (shining brightly) with the rays of his fame, religious merit and virtue." (Ajanta Cave 16 inscription, verse 20)

We should note, however, that, *pace* Bakker, Harisena is not only praised for his military prowess in the same inscription, but is fulsomely praised in the Visrutacarita for his ethics, and his administrative ability. Harisena is lauded as a "partial incarnation . . . of the God of Justice, mighty, truthful, liberal, and well-behaved; . . . he himself looked after his treasury and conveyances, took great pains to supervise (and appreciate) the work of the heads of the various departments, and encouraged with honour and fitting rewards those who well acquitted themselves of the duties entrusted to them, (as well as being) an expert in the employment of the six expedients in foreign politics." (Kale 1966, 349)

Of course, Harisena may well have stood in contrast to the very tenor of the times which his successes—and the efforts of his minister—promoted. But no matter how we might wish to question the hyberbolic characterization of the emperor in Dandin's account, Ajanta itself, with its startlingly vigorous development, provides solid evidence of his power and vision and of his administrative acumen as clearly as Ajanta's precipitous collapse mirrors the destructive heedlessness of his successor.

Indeed, the evidence of Ajanta reveals, when the shock of Harisena's death at the end of 477 staggered the site, that an even more intensified self-interest reigned in the place of the deceased king. Now, as the site dramatically proves, the great patrons were consumed by a single obsession—a concern not for the salvation of the threatened empire, but for the benefit of their own souls. Throughout the site, one thing was now strikingly apparent: that they must complete their shrine images, and their shrine images alone, if they were to obtain the merit that would thus accrue. (Spink 1992, 75)

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Even in the caves under Asmaka patronage, the same goal was clear, at least until it was frustrated by the realities of the preparation for war. But it is interesting to note that in the harsh year of 478 the Asmakas were less successful in completing their shrine Buddhas than were the Vakataka (non-Asmaka) patrons at the site. This is because the Asmakas apparently assumed that they could finish certain whole caves, even if very expediently. Now in control of the region, they did not realize that time would run out for them almost, if not quite, as quickly as for the disenfranchised Vakataka donors. (Spink 1991A, 86–91)

In the dire contexts of 478, the monk Buddhabhadra seems to have turned to a focus on his own future (or, as a Buddhist might say, "futures") and not of that of the empire, be it the empire of Vidarbha or that of Asmaka. In his Cave 26 dedicatory record he reveals his latter-day compulsions: "A man continues to enjoy himself in paradise as long as his memory is green in the world. . . . Why should not a monument be raised by those possessing wealth, desirous of mundane happiness as also of liberation?" (Ajanta Cave 26 inscr., vs. 8, 7) After all, when even "a single flower offered to (the Buddha) yields the fruit known as paradise (and even) final emancipation" what incredibly lasting benefit could be gained (as Upendragupta, in his Cave 17 inscription, expressed it) by a "hall (which could) cause the attainment of well-being by good people as long as the sun dispels darkness by its rays!" (Ajanta Cave 17 inscr., verse 29) The more was the reason, in the eyes of Ajanta's proud patrons, that having "set up a memorial on the mountains that will endure for as long as the moon and the sun continue" its living core—its Buddha image—should without fail be completed and dedicated.[22]

The Asmaka's program for military action must already have been conceived by 478, for it was in that year that the long-established elitist (essentially "Vakataka") patrons at Ajanta lost their economic base, and had to totally abandon any further work on their still unfinished but hastily dedicated caves. This can surely be ascribed to the Asmakas' rejection of their long Vakataka overlordship, effected by about the middle of 478, when the Asmaka's Cave 26 inscription

[22] We know, from the cutting-away of incomplete images at the site, that Buddha images had no "life" if they had not been dedicated. The rushing of shrine images to an expedient completion and dedication dramatically illustrates the same point.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

was written. The patronage of the Asmakas themselves, involving the whole western extremity of the site, survived some months longer than that of the now-rejected Vakataka donors. (Spink 1991B, 86–91) However, it too came to an end—far more quickly than was expected, judging from the evidence of the caves—when the Asmaka preparations for war suddenly assumed an absolute priority. After another two years or so, this cruel change of priorities would be reflected in the sudden abandonment of even the helter-skelter and anxious imagery which so briefly flooded the site in 479–480, under the sponsorship of a host of eleventh-hour donors who now finally had the opportunity to make some merit of their own.

As Schopen has pointed out, the great majority of these minor donors were monks resident at the site.[23] But in counting up the inscriptions, he does not distinguish between the five "elitist" records proclaiming the donation of whole caves, all written when the site was flourishing between 462 and mid-478, and the myriad "lesser" donations, generally of images alone, which all date to the brief but urgent Period of Disruption (mid-478 to 480) when the site was no longer under the control of its original courtly donors. The very fact that only five inscriptions were written prior to mid-478, while dozens appear in the brief period of activity thereafter, dramatically elucidates the history and character of Ajanta's suddenly transformed patronage; indeed it both predicts and explains the site's sudden denouement.

Interestingly, there is one patron who bridges both the main period of patronage, and the intrusive phase. This is the monk Dharmadatta, who assisted Buddhabhadra in the creation of Cave 26. According to his three closely related inscriptions (Inscr # 70–72) in Cave 16, this "reverent (monk) Dharmadatta", donated and inscribed a group of four intrusive painted Buddha images on the left wall of Cave 16 sometime between mid-478 and 480. It is reasonable to assume that he is the same "Dharmadatta" who (along with his associated Bhadrabandhu) was thanked by Buddhabhadra, just a few months before, for having helped with "the excavation and completion of the cave (Cave 26) on my (Buddhabhadra's) behalf".[24] As a functionary, it is not likely that Dharmadatta would have acquired any personal (religious) merit from his "employment" on Buddhabhadra's

[23] G. Schopen 1988 (lecture).
[24] Cave 26 inscription, verse 14.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

cave; so perhaps for this reason he, like so many other monks, was eager to now obtain it by putting his own votive donations wherever he could. He was in fact fortunate in being able to appropriate a highly desirable location, in a cave which must have been considered highly prestigious, containing the most up-to-date and impressive Buddha image at the site. Indeed, his "uninvited" donations may be among the first intrusions at the site, for by mid-478 the great "Vakataka" donors had already precipitously fled the site, while the Asmaka donors were able to continue their work there until about 479. Thus the most likely time for Dharmadatta's donation may well have been late 478, which could explain why he was able to appropriate such a fine location on the wall of Cave 16.[25]

One cannot say exactly when, in the early 480s, the Vakataka power was finally destroyed. However, the Visrutacarita yields information which illuminates the situation, telling us that Harisena's inept successor (Sarvasena III), encountering his rebellious feudatories somewhere along the Narmada, "fell a prey to those princes (Ryder 1927, 214 reads: "became mincemeat") . . . as he was totally averse to the science of politics" (Kale 1966, 360) The ruler of Asmaka then "stirred up a quarrel among the (other) princes, brought about the destruction of all, and seized for himself all their wealth".[26] "He gave a small portion of it to Vanavasya, and marching back, established himself in the kingdom of Anantavarman (= Sarvasena III)" (Kale 1966, 360).[27]

But if the king of the Asmakas, by virtue of force and scheming, did indeed emerge victorious, the rise to independent power of the

---

[25] Considering both their proximity in space and time, it would seem that the monk Dharmadatta mentioned in the Cave 26 inscription of 478 A.D. and the monk Dharmadatta who made offerings in Cave 16 later in that same year are identical. However, Cohen believes "there is little basis for this identification, Dharmadatta being a 'John Doe' kind of name." (Cohen 1995, 364) In response, however, it should be said that his reservations would be more convincing were the name ever found among the dozens of other inscriptions at the site. Opting for what I feel is the obvious, I conclude that Dharmadatta, like Varahadeva, was alive and active both during and after the site's main phase of patronage; we can assume that, except for the just-deceased Harisena and the earlier-defeated Upendragupta, the other major patrons (Varahadeva, Mathura, Buddhabhadra (and the latter's associates Dharmadatta and Bhadrabandhu) were still active too, for all were involved in their excavations until the collapse of patronage in 478.

[26] (Ryder 1927, 215) reads: "thus he baited all the vassals into a ruinous squabble and himself swallowed the whole plunder."

[27] Ryder 1927, 215 reads: ". . . After bestowing a petty fraction on the lord of

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

former Vakataka feudatories in the 480s and 490s proves (as various inscriptions show) that he did not hold his disruptive new empire together for long. Nor (understandably) did he ever manage to take over the whole vast realm. Most significantly, the old viceregency of Anupa was never conquered. The Visrutacarita tells us that when the great Punyavarman's (= Harisena's) successor Anantavarman (= Sarvasena III) was killed, the aged minister Vasurakshita (= Varahadeva, who dedicated Cave 16 in c. 477) fled with Sarvasena's widowed queen, her young son and his older sister, who was "about thirteen years old". (Kale 1966, 361) With its characteristically convincing emphasis on detail, the story states that the old minister himself died of a "burning fever", but friends took the "exiles" to Mahismati where their step-uncle ("the son of Harisena by another wife") was still clinging to the remnants of the Vakataka power. (Kale 1966, 360, passim)

To make a long story short, there they encountered one "Visruta", a Gupta prince of Magadha (one of the the "ten princes" or Dasakumara of the tale). This emphatically heroic figure—as forceful and as downright wily as Odysseus—arranged the demise of the uncle and then married the Vakataka princess. Next, he declared himself the regent of the prince, even though his qualifications as such a protector might be questioned in the light (or darkness) of the various deaths of significant rivals that he apparently arranged. In any case, we are told that he stood up successfully against the Asmakas (who surely would have been threatening Anupa at this point) and that he was firmly securing his young ward's position as the Vakataka heir. (Kale 1966, 367) He then employed a priest to instruct the prince in politics, while (he himself) "carried on the work of administration." (Kale 1966, 366).

At this point, Visruta's self-seeking play for power was well-nigh won. With Harisena's grandson, now the legitimate successor to the remnants of Vakataka power, still not even in his teens, Visruta was the effective (and surely impatient) regent. Furthermore, his central significance was amplified by his marriage to the young Vakataka princess, granddaughter of the great Harisena. Indeed, Visruta even had a familial connection with the Vakataka house, for the new

---

Vanavasi, he faced about and reduced the entire realm of Anantavarman." However, it is clear from the Visrutacarita that Harisena's "second son" continued to control the region of Anupa, with its capital in Mahismati.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

child-king's mother, daughter of the king of Kosala, "had the same maternal grandfather" as Visruta's father. (Kale 1966, 361) But nonetheless he was an "outsider"—a (Gupta) prince of Magadha—and with his wily wisdom he laid plans to better connect himself with the workings and the officials of the (Anupa) court of which he was already the effective head.

But who could one trust? It is clear from the story that in these troubled days it was difficult to trust anyone. So, to test the most important of the court officials, the minister of the (conveniently) just-deceased king, Visruta had a confidante approach him with this leading question: "Say to the revered (minister) in private: 'Who is this imposter (or man of marvelous powers) who has appropriated the sovereignty of this state? Moreover, this our prince has been entirely caught in his grip by this serpent. Will he disgorge the prince or swallow him?'" (Kale 1966, 360)

The Anupa minister's answer, whether truly truthful or truly expedient, comes back in an encouraging way, totally accepting of Visruta's powers and policies; indeed, they are subtly paralleled with those of the great Punyavarman (= Harisena) himself. Visruta is described as "descended from a noble family; he has extraordinary acuteness of intellect; . . . a boundless nobility of mind . . . not a little knowledge of the arts . . . he thus combines in himself qualities which it is difficult to find in others even singly; . . . He is a poisonous tree to the enemies (of the state); . . . so regard (the king of) Asmaka, who vainly prides himself upon his being an adept in state-craft, as uprooted, and (the young Vakataka prince) as firmly and securely placed on the throne of his forefathers." (Kale 1966, 366–7)

One might question the necessity of such a point being made about Visruta's loyalty to the young prince—the Vakataka heir—who was also his wife's brother. Reading between the lines can we not sense danger for the prince, as Visruta, excelling at all levels of diplomatic intrigue, "cleared out all who stood in the way of the prosperity of the state". (Kale 1966, 367) This may suggest why the Visrutacarita breaks off so suddenly at this point, before a darker chapter of Visruta's biography had to be written. Admittedly, the final (added) chapter of the text, the Uttarapithika, considered a later composition, finishes the story in the "proper" way, with Visruta restoring the young prince to the throne. However, this bears no relevance to the historical situation, as we can construct it from the original body of the text.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

In fact, it seems very likely that the "imposter" did indeed "swallow" the young prince, although this is not specified, perhaps because the sin of doing away with his wife's brother would be an inappropriate addition to the extensive catalog of his many virtues, and the praise of his high principles of government. Furthermore, Visruta himself, now the inheritor, through his marriage, of the remnants of Vakataka power, is both the protagonist and the primary narrator of Dandin's story. And if, as has been suggested, Dandin composed it as a moralizing guide to effective kingship, this could explain why he might break his story off in this surprisingly ambiguous way, leaving one with an impression of Visruta's (= Subandhu's) character perhaps more positive than the facts would have warranted had the story, with its saturnine undertones, continued. Indeed, if (as seems possible) Dandin was composing his quasi-historical tale close to the period of Visruta = Subandhu's "unforgettable" reign, there may have been good political reasons to edit the story as he did.

However, despite what may well have been thought of in the context of the day as virtues, Visruta was no Harisena. In fact he better fits Bakker's characterization of the self-indulgent type that an over-ripening world had sponsored, depending on suppleness and subtleties rather than upon true strength to gain the day. He carefully, with the help of "upright ministers and spies under various disguises . . . (found out) which of the subjects were covetous and rich misers, which very proud, and which mostly refractory; and thinking that (he) might amass great wealth if (he) gave proofs of (his) own want of greed . . ." he structured his policies with a chill calculation. (Kale 1966, 367)

Thus the city of Mahismati in Anupa—Harisena's ancient inherited domain—was the central stage upon which our tragic drama was being played; for it was the final focus of the Vakataka fall.

We can be sure that Mahismati was still under the shaky control of Harisena's viceroy early in the 480s, while the Asmaka-engendered insurrection was developing. And it is equally certain from the Barwani inscription that Mahismati had fallen into the firm grasp of Maharaja Subandhu by 486.[28] Indeed, his reign almost certainly had begun a year or two before 486, since the Barwani inscription (together with the closely related Bagh cave inscription) appears to

[28] Barwani inscription of the unspecified year 167 (Mirashi 1955, 17–19). Mirashi

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

have been written when his rule was already established, rather than as a proclamation of victory—a victory based on skillful diplomacy, it would seem, rather than war.

Thus it is hard to avoid the conclusion that has been so long avoided, namely that Visruta of the Visrutacarita is none other than Maharaja Subandhu himself. Significantly, he dates his Barwani inscription in the Gupta era—not, as Mirashi and others have supposed, to the Early Kalacuri era, which would demand that the Bagh caves (impossibly!) would have been excavated in approximately 400 C.E. or even earlier, since Subandhu claims in his Bagh inscription to have given funds for the caves' repair and other purposes.

A Gupta era dating for Subandhu's inscriptions accords with the Visrutacarita's various references to Visruta's (= Subandhu's) Gupta connections. He was, after all, like all of the other "dasakumaras", a Gupta prince! We do not need to assume that he "accepted" the era merely because he "considered himself within the margins of Gupta influence." (Bakker 1997, 50) He was, instead, extending those margins by his very presence in Anupa, and increasing the authority of his inscription by stressing that connection rather than linking his record with that of the fallen Vakataka house. Indeed, he was deepening those connections by his altercations with Malwa, which may have been struggling against the declining Gupta power at this time. According to the Visrutacarita, he plotted, successfully, for the death of both the Malwa monarch and for that of his brother, who was intending to marry the young Vakataka princess. In this way he saved the same prize for himself.

Indeed, now that the Vakataka empire had collapsed, it is hardly surprising that many of the territories once under Vakataka control or influence now tilted toward the Guptas, despite the erosion of Gupta power which Harisena had earlier, and the Hunas had later, effected. The collapse of the Vakatakas, as well as the impact of the rise of Subhandu/Visruta explains the new use of the Gupta era, or references to the Guptas, in various inscriptions during the troubled last two decades of the fifth century and the first decade of the sixth. Maharaja Subandhu of Mahismati's Barwani inscription (486) and

---

dates the inscription to the Early Kalacuri era (= 417) rather than the Gupta era (= 486), an error which has confused epigraphic and historical studies, as well as impacting upon art history.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

his related but undated Bagh plate, only begin the "Gupta era" listing, which continues with the inscriptions of King Gauri of Avanti (491), the Parivrajaka king Hastin (475–510), the Uccakalpa Jayanatha (493, 496), Bhimasena II of Kosala (501), and Harivarman of Baghelkhand (487–8). At the same time, it is significant that none of these rulers, although they use the Gupta era, suggest their subservience to that notably declining power. (Spink 1991A, 80–95)

It would be very hard to explain how this significant portion of the Vakataka empire could be taken over by a Gupta prince in 486 or somewhat before, if Harisena's empire was still flourishing, as Mirashi's chronology asserts. Actually, Mirashi's dating of Harisena's reign to 475–500 was only a suggestion originally, even though it was rapidly translated into "truth" by his followers. Among the various problems which it causes is the fact that it places the great period of Vakataka power precisely where it should not be, for it is exactly at this time that inscriptional evidence shows that not only Anupa but Lata, Avanti, Kalinga, Kosala, (and probably Aparanta)—the latter regions all earlier mentioned (along with Trikuta, Andhra and Kuntala) in the Cave 16 inscription—were no longer under Harisena's control. (Ajanta Cave 16 inscr., vs. 18)

The situation of the Konkan (ancient Aparanta) is of particular interest since, according to the Visrutacarita, "Kumaragupta, lord of Konkana", along with the rulers of Asmaka, Vanavasi, Kuntala, Murala, Risika, and Sasikya, was one of the seven vassals of Anantavarman = Sarvasena III who joined forces to overthrow him. (Kale 1966, 360) This alone would clearly suggest that Harisena had conquered, or at least come to control, the Konkan by the end of his reign, and this view has recently received significant support from the research of S. Gokhale. She has suggested that the troubling lacuna in Varahadeva's Ajanta Cave 16 inscription (verse 18) should be reconstructed with "Paranta" in place of "Aparanta" (the Konkan), since "according to the essentials of the Vamsastha metre no other name of a country suits in between Andhra and Janiman." (Gokhale 1992, 269–278)[29] This tallies with the likelihood that Harisena did at least briefly take over the control of the Konkan at the expense of the Traikutakas, whom we know were ruling it both before and

[29] Drs. Arvind Jamkhedkar and Madhav Deshpande have kindly examined the matter and agree that Dr. Gokhale's reading is reasonable.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

after his reign. The Traikutaka's 494/5 inscription found in front of the Caitya hall, Cave 3, at Kanheri, records a donation "in the augmenting reign of the Traikutakas", while the great burst of donative activity there from about 490 on, suggests too that the Traikutakas were one of the many separate beneficiaries of the Vakataka fall—for which they must have been in part responsible, according to the Visrutacarita.

Gokhale also points out that the over twenty inscriptions (epitaphs) on stone slabs found associated with the stupas in the so-called burial gallery at Kanheri "are strikingly similar to those of Ajanta and Ghatotkacha cave inscriptions. (Gokhale 1992, 270) This is of great interest, since my own investigations suggest that the sculptures on the stupas in this same area are quite different in character from (and earlier than) the others at the site. They never represent the bhadrasana images so popular in what appear to be Traikutaka contexts, while some of the associated decorative motifs are very close in type to those found at Ajanta from about 470 on. One might even suggest that the (clearly later) huge Buddhas at either end of the porch in Cave 3 were inspired by the almost equally large Dying Buddha in Cave 26 at Ajanta, while the various Buddha images there and elsewhere at the site build upon Ajanta models. Thus while it is reasonable to suppose that artisans migrated to Kanheri (as to other sites) after Ajanta's collapse in 480, some may already have been there from the time of the Vakataka "occupation", after Harisena took over the Konkan in his remarkable policy of expansion.

Thus we must dramatically revise the overall course of late Vakataka chronology—both of the Nandivardana and Vatsugulma branches—to come to a proper understanding of the history of this period of profound transition. We must recognize that Harisena had taken over the so-called "main" (Nandivardana) branch from Prithivisena II sometime shortly before his reign ended in 477, probably around 475 or a bit earlier, and that his successor (Sarvasena III) had—if we exclude Malwa—lost almost all of the whole finally unified empire in the early 480s. Consequently, the 480s, 490s, and the early 6th century comprise a period when the territories under Harisena's previous control—those numerous "conquests" mentioned in the Cave 16 inscription, as well as those inherited domains which did not need to be mentioned, (Anupa, Asmaka, Risika and finally the whole of Vidarbha itself)—were struggling to rebuild their polities after the purnaghata of the Vakataka imperium had been so totally shattered.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

This shattering—and the listing of the various pieces of the broken pot—is described with a remarkable specificity in the Visrutacarita. Indeed, even its omissions are significant. For instance, although Andhra, Kalinga, and Kosala are mentioned in the Cave 16 inscription as among the territories somehow controlled by Harisena, they are not among the insurrectionists listed in the Visrutacarita. At least in the case of Andhra and Kosala, the explanation would seem to be that their connection with Harisena's ruling house was not by conquest but through marriage, or close familial connections. For instance, we know that the Visnukundin Madhavavarman II (with a lengthy reign from 470–518) married a Vakataka princess; and considering his presumed young age at his accession in 470, this was almost certainly Harisena's daughter.[30] Similarly, the Visrutacarita informs us, indirectly but clearly, that Harisena's son (Sarvasena III) married the daughter of the king of Kosala. (Kale 1966, 361) We have less information about Kalinga, which is also omitted from Dandin's list—but its great distance from the center of the conflict, which took place somewhere along the Narmada River, could well explain its non-participation; and this could have been a factor with regard to Andhra and Kosala too.

Such considerations support Bakker's criticism of the conventional reconstruction of the missing verb in the Cave 16 inscription; instead of the commonly supplied "conquered", he supplies "stands above", which better fits the pattern of Harisena's influence. But perhaps "controls" or "dominates" would be less ambiguous. In any case, as "an expert in the employment of the six expedients in foreign politics" (Kale 1966, 349) Harisena, already the heir to a strong power base, must have achieved his expansionist goals in various ways: by war, by marriage alliances, by negotiation, and by intrigue.

However his dominance was achieved, it appears that, by the end of his reign, late in 477, by which time his minister Varahadeva's Cave 16 inscription was written, Harisena was in control of the whole of central India from the western to the eastern sea.[31] And this conclusion is supported by the evidence of the Visrutacarita,

[30] The princess's father's name is unknown. Bakker (1997, 46, 55–57) suggests Narendrasena. However, according to my revised chronology, Narendrasena reigned too early to allow his consideration.

[31] Varahadeva's inscription was inscribed in c. 477, when Harisena was still alive; the image was hurriedly dedicated in 478 (Spink 1991B, 85–88), although the cave was never finished; see Chapter 1 for further discussion.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

which records the fulsome advice which Vasurakshita, (Harisena's) old minister, gave to the Sarvasena III shortly after he succeeded to the Vakataka throne. "Abandon", Vasurakshita says, "the attachment to mere external accomplishments, and study the science of government. . . . Putting into practice its precepts . . . rule long over the sea-girt earth, your authority being unobstructed!" (Kale 1966, 350) The reference to the sea-girt(!) earth, and of Sarvasena's authority (or potential authority) over it, can only recall the vast extensiveness of the empire which Harisena had so rapidly and so wisely constructed before his untimely death. Again, we encounter Dandin's convincing specificity which, if not based on some actual knowledge of the past (and probably the recent past), would be gratuitous.

The Visrutacarita's account only makes sense—only synchronizes with the relevant historical and inscriptional sources—if the Vakataka fall can be dated to the first half of the 480s, and if we can accept the conclusion that the whole dynasty had been unified under Harisena well before that time. It is highly significant to note that the Visrutacarita, which is nothing if not detailed in its account, speaks of Punyavarman (= Harisena) and then of his son/successor Anantavarman (= Sarvasena III) as the sole emperors of Vidarbha, and mentions no other contending branch. Once one credits this assertion, it clarifies the whole situation.

The very fact that the Cave 16 inscription, datable to the last year of Harisena's reign, mentions territories surrounding Vidarbha on all sides, surely proves that by that time (477) Harisena ruled over Vidarbha itself, just as the Visrutacarita says; and this equally confirms the conclusion that the dynasty had been unified by this time. And if, like Anupa, Asmaka, and Risika, Vidarbha is not listed as a "conquest" this would be because Harisena gained control of it—or of whatever part of it he did not originally control—by virtue of hereditary right; at least any type of takeover could be justified by his familial connection.

This takeover would have occurred at the death or (less likely) due to the defeat of Prithivisena II. This crucial transition, according to our revised chronology, would have occurred just a few years before Harisena's death, which I place at the end of 477. Of these two options—Prithivisena's death or defeat—the former is far more likely, as noted below. Although there seems to be no necessary reason for dating the end of Prithivisena's reign as late as 490 (Mirashi 1963, xxviii) or 495 (Bakker 1997, 47–57)—judgments based primarily

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

on the fact that his feudatory Vyaghradeva's son made grants dating 493/4 and 496/7—it is probably safe to say that his reign had ended by the early 470s.

The Vakataka caves at Bagh in Anupa, a region ruled by one of Harisena's sons, were flourishing mightily in the early 470s, while Ajanta itself had entered its most vigorous phase of patronage by 475. Given this apparently untroubled activity, one can hardly believe that Harisena absorbed the eastern branch by means of war; inheritance would seem to be the only reasonable option in this period of apparent peace and great productivity.

For those who will credit the historicity of the Visrutacarita, Dandin offers confirmation for this peaceful transition; his encomium to Harisena speaks of no record of family battles: although "he buried his foes in misery . . . he raised his kinsmen to dignity." (Kale 1966, 348) Such laudatory statements must always be accepted with caution, but this one finds support in the fact that there are no records of interfamilial conflicts during Harisena's reign. Just as the peaceful connections between Asmaka and Risika sponsored the vigorous inauguration of the Vakataka phase at Ajanta, the apparent environment of peace in Harisena's central domains during the late years of his reign helps to explain the burgeoning of Ajanta and Bagh and other sites during this period.

This can equally help us account for the staggeringly impressive Saiva construction on the hill at Mansar. (Bakker 1997, 78–88) This too is not the kind of thing that would have been done in times of war, nor is it likely that it was produced by the "rural small scale economy" (Bakker 1966, 44–5) that characterized Eastern Vidarbha under Prithivisena II's rule. However, I would suggest that the huge and sophisticated structure, with its molded bricks and subtle contours, was probably sponsored by the emperor Harisena himself shortly after he came into control of Eastern Vidarbha, perhaps as a result of the demise of Prithivisena II.[32] Outdoing anything previously created in the eastern part of the empire, it may well signal Harisena's new authority over the region, made in homage to his family deity, Lord Siva. Furthermore, as an offering even more expensive than his great offering of the Buddhist Cave 1 at Ajanta, with

[32] Bakker (1966, 87–8; 149) suggests that the Mansar edifice was created by Pravarasena II before 460.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

the latter stages of which it is probably contemporary, it expressed his ecumenical interests and his piety in a way that could only have been politically advantageous in this new region under his control. The superb sculptures now in the Mansar site museum, and the justly famous Saiva "nidhi" now in the National Museum, probably belong to this same appropriation of the area by Harisena. This would explain their telling connections with Ajanta figures of the mid and late 470s.

The close connection between these old western and the new eastern domains at the very center of Harisena's empire are evidenced by the telling relationships between the justly famous seated Siva (or possibly "Saiva nidhi") from the same site at Mansar and the standing nidhis carved about 470 on the façade of Cave 19 at Ajanta.[33] This connection, first noted by Joanna Williams, is corroborated and further emphasized by various other Ajanta figures, notably the large nidhis in the shrinelet at the left rear of Ajanta Cave 2, rushed to completion early in 478, or the similar seated figures in the panels at the Cave 2 porch ends, dateable to about 476. But the closest connection in terms of pose is with the seated Yaksha at the left end of the carved panel at the right of the porch of Cave 21. Because the Cave 21 was left still unfinished when the normal (consistent) progress of work on the porch ended with Harisena's death, this fine panel had probably just been completed in 477, at which point work at the site was going on vigorously, unaware of the crisis about to come. In this still happy time it is reasonable to suppose that the work at Mansar was also underway, itself a valid reflection of the energy of its new ruler, Harisena.[34] Of course just as all consistent patronage came to an end at Ajanta in 478 due to the Asmaka rebellion, the eastern region must also have suffered from this blow. However, since this region was farther from Asmaka, work may have gone on slightly longer—though hardly more than a couple of years, since by 483 (I suggest) Sarvasena's empire had been destroyed.[35]

[33] At the recent Vakataka Conference in Groningen (June 6–8) a number of people suggested that the Mansar figure might be one of a pair of Saiva attendants (one now lost) and probably represents padmanidhi.

[34] Work on the adjacent porch pilaster, still unfinished, would help to confirm this late dating for the panel, carved close to the final moment of the site's florescence.

[35] There is no proof; I am merely suggesting that in such a time of troubles there may have been a desire to honor the gods, to say nothing of getting such monuments done and dedicated for the benefit of the (royal) patron. Similarly, during Ajanta's Recession, work on the royal monuments alone was continued.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Of course it would be hazardous to date the Mansar figure too precisely on the basis of its stylistic similarities with the sculptures at Ajanta, even though we would probably be right in assuming that artistic interaction between the two areas would have followed upon Harisena's takeover of the eastern Vidarbha area. And even though the comparable images from the two sites both reflect what could rightly be called a courtly, even imperial, esthetic, it is more likely that shared sketches or copybooks—rather than the same hands—explain the distinct "family connection". The Mansar figure is far more exuberant in its rotundities and its volumetric ornamentation, despite what can perhaps properly be called a "family connection". The dating of the Mansar figure can, I believe, be quite precisely established, but only on the basis of its historical context. That is, the most logical time for this dramatic and positive burst of activity, would be the very moment, in about 475, when Harisena took over the region. Although work on the great monument, urged on by its apotropaic as well as political sacred purpose, might have continued sporadically even for a year or so after the traumatic Asmaka actions in 478, the exuberant spirit evident both in the Mansar sculptures and their architectural context, would seem to be a reflection of the happy last years of Harisena's reign, ending in 477, when the Vakataka style was at its apogee.

Among the many points of contention involving Vakataka history, Risika also takes its place. Bakker, together with a number of other scholars, is wary of "introducing Risika in Vakataka history", since the territory "does not feature in any inscription pertaining to this period. . . . the confusion (thus) created is illustrated by the fact that Spink, contrary to Mirashi, identified this country with the region of Ajanta itself." (Bakker 1997, 37)

It is true that Mirashi does not specifically mention Ajanta as located in the region of Risika, known from the Visrutacarita. However, he asserts, on the basis of various references cited, that "Risika was contiguous to Asmaka, Vidarbha and Mulaka (and that) the only country which answers to this geographical position is Khandesh." (Mirashi 1963, 123) Since Mirashi refers to "the ruler of Risika (modern Khandesh where this royal family was reigning) as a feudatory of the Emperor of Vidarbha" it is curious that he did not follow his own argument to its logical conclusion: that the feudatory king who honors "Harisena, that moon among princes" in the Ajanta Cave 17 inscription is identical with "the ruler of Risika" and therefore

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

must have controlled at least part of modern Khandesh. This would have put one of the last pieces of this complex puzzle in the very place that history appears to have prepared for it. If king Upendragupta, in his Cave 17 record, does not refer to Risika by name, this is not surprising, for it was hardly to be expected with regard to his own home region. By the same token Varahadeva, the prime minister, does not mention (or need to mention) his own domains by name in his Cave 16 inscription.

Mirashi states that, according to the Cave 16 inscription, "the Vakataka emperor Harisena either raided or exacted tribute from Trikuta, which comprised the territory around Nasik. He then, without justification, either geographical or historical, states that "Khandesh, which lay between Vidarbha and Trikuta must have likewise submitted to the Vakatakas." (Mirashi 1963, 124) Such an assertion could very much confuse Ajanta's history, for if I am correct, Ajanta's development was able to start so early in Harisena's reign for the simple reason that, like Asmaka, Anupa, and western Vidarbha, it came (peacefully) to Harisena through inheritance when he succeeded to the throne. The very fact that none of these more central areas are mentioned in the long list of "conquered" territories in the Cave 16 inscription supports such a reconstruction. This of course refers to the dynastic situation in happier days, before Harisena's unfortunate successor, Sarvasena III, lost the empire to his disaffected feudatories in the early 480s. At that point, "the ruler of Risika", who had in fact lost control of the site a decade earlier, was numbered among the insurrectionists.

Thus the "Risika" problem is hardly insoluble. We have a region (Khandesh) looking for a name, and a name (Risika, of the Visrutacarita) looking for a region. And the evidence from the two complementary sources—Ajanta and the Visrutacarita—would seem to offer the answer: that Ajanta lies in ancient Risika = Khandesh.

Harisena's takeover of the Nandivardana branch must have brought with it a number of the outlying territories listed in the Cave 16 inscription,—notably Kalinga and Kosala—both of which probably belonged to the absorbed (or defeated) Nandivardana line. This conclusion clarifies the much-disputed situation involving the Ucchakalpas (ruling in Mekala, lying generally north of Vidarbha), whose king, Vyaghradeva declared his allegiance to the Nandivardana branch of the Vakatakas, by "meditating upon the feet of (the Vakataka) Maharaja Prithivisena". (Mirashi 1955, xlv) Whether or not this

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Prithivisena was the first, or (probably) the second, king of that name is immaterial for our present purposes; but it would explain how Mekala, now under the control of the Nandivardana branch, would have been absorbed into Harisena's growing empire when the two branches became unified under him by about 475.

That this "takeover" of the Nandivardana branch was by inheritance (or some other mode of peaceful absorption), presumably upon the death of Prithivisena II, is suggested by the fact that eastern Vidarbha—the essential central area which Harisena incorporated into his empire—is not mentioned in the presumed "conquests" of Harisena listed in the Cave 16 inscription. Here again the account of the Visrutacarita supports, and is supported by, this review of the dynastic situation, and by the revised Vakataka chronology upon which the adjusted succession sequence founded.[36] The Visrutacarita makes it clear that the Vakataka house, at the time of Harisena's death, belonged to Harisena alone, that at the end of his reign he ruled from Vidarbha, and that all of the many territories mentioned in the Cave 16 inscription and in the Visrutacarita itself were under his sway. No war for succession is in any way implied in Dandin's encomium where: although "he buried his foes in misery . . . he raised his kinsman to dignity"; (Kale 1966, 349) and of course Harisena's contemporaries of the empire's eastern branch were now part of his extended family.

More relevant than Dandin's praise, however, is the fact that the period from 475 through 477, just before Harisena's sudden death, is the apogee of Ajanta's florescence. It was only after the great emperor's death, and the defeat (and death) of his son/successor, Sarvasena III, that the far-flung empire fell apart. And here again, there is no suggestion in the Visrutacarita account that there was any collateral line at this time, which might have been preserved from this blow. The only surviving participant was the afflicted territory of Anupa, which had been a Vakataka viceregency from Harisena's time; it was still under the control of a second son of Harisena when, taking advantage of the developing chaos, Visruta (= Subandhu) appeared on the scene.[37]

---

[36] See Chapter 5: A Revised Vakataka Chronology). For discussion and justification, see Spink 1992, 16–25.

[37] The old minister (= Varahadeva) declares: "Friends like me took the queen to Mahishmati and consigned her with her children to Mitravarman, her husband's brother by another mother, for protection. He, however, wicked that he was, enter-

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

It is then, from the mid-480s onward, and not during the era of Harisena's strong control in the 460s and 470s, that inscriptional evidence speaks of the rise of independent states. Starting with Maharaja's Subandhu's inscription of 486 A.D. and Maharaja Harivarman's Shankarpur inscription of 487–8 A.D., the list continues into the 490's and beyond with inscriptions of the Traikutakas (490; 491, etc.) and (as mentioned above), King Gauri of Avanti (491), the establishment of the Ganga Dynasty in 498, Bhimasena II's Arang plates of 501, and the 503 (or somewhat later) Velpuru Pillar Inscription of the Visnukundin Madhavavarman II, dated in his 33rd year. (Spink 1991A, 71–95)

However, Maharaja Subandhu's importance may well extend well beyond his takeover of Anupa—that one fragment of the greater Vakataka "purnaghata" which the Asmakas and their co-insurrectionists apparently had not smashed. It is reasonable to believe that he was the founder of what came to be known as the Early Kalacuri dynasty, which according to tradition had its origins at Mahismati. He may well have been the grandfather (or possibly the great-grandfather) of the renowned Early Kalacuri emperor Krishnaraja, who came to power not around 550 C.E., as Mirashi suggested, but around 530, judging from the evidence of the Great Cave at Elephanta and its preceding monuments, e.g., Jogesvari, Mandapeswar, and the caves along the eastern end of the scarp at Elephanta. (Spink 1983, 276–282) Krishnaraja's father possibly filled the gap (if such a gap exists) between Subandhu of Mahismati and Krishnaraja himself. The fact that Krishnaraja's son and grandson both mention that "the illustrious Krishnaraja . . . revived the prosperity of his family" suggests not only that the family had a history of rule, but that it had encountered some difficulties prior to Krishnaraja's reign; quite possibly this problem period took place during the reign of Krishnaraja's father.

Our suggested dynastic chronology for the first Early Kalacuri kings would thus be: Maharaja Subandhu: c. 485–c. 515; Krishnaraja's father (= Subandhu's son?): c. 515–c. 530; Krishnaraja: c. 530–c. 560. (Spink 1983, 237–243)[38]

---

tained sinister motives regarding the noble queen . . ." (Kale 1966, 361) Thus was the stage set for the Visruta's (= Subandhu's) "rescue" of the young Vakataka heir, and his marriage to his sister.

[38] Mirashi (1955, xlvi) suggests 550–575 for Krishnaraja; but there is nothing to militate against my slightly earlier dating.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

The significant traditions connecting the foundation of the Early Kalacuri dynasty with Mahismati have been explained to me by Dr. A. Jamkhedkar. He suggests that this new historical dynasty required and found a mythological basis through its identification with the Haihaiya clan famous in the Puranas.[39] The legendary Haihaiya king Kartavirya Arjuna, possessed of a thousand arms, ruled on the banks of the Narmada at Mahismati; indeed, in one famed episode, to show his prowess, he stopped the flow of the Narmada at this important city, requiring the intervention of the avatar Parasurama, who cut off his thousand arms. This powerful Kartavirya Arjuna is seen as the legendary founder of the Early Kalacuri dynasty at Mahismati, as the new dynasty sought to establish the antiquity and thus the mythic legitimacy of its history. So it is hardly surprising that R. D. Banerjee, in his Bas Reliefs of Badami, calls the Early Kalacuris the Haihaiyas, as does Mirashi (1955, xlv).

The same Vakataka/Early Kalacuri linkage, both through Subandhu's marriage on the one hand, and the Early Kalacuri "reclamation" of lost Vakataka territories on the other, is strongly hinted at in the similarly mythologized "history" of the Visnu Purana. Therein, the Bhojas, who from various sources can be identified as ancestors of the Vakatakas, are spoken of as being descended from one "Vidarbha"—clearly a personification of the Vidarbha region. And this "Vidarbha", according to the Visnu Purana, was also the ancestor of the Cedis, another name for the Kalacuri kings!" (Indeed, Mirashi entitles his great study Inscriptions of the Kalachuri-Chedi Era). Such references further suggest a significant dynastic connection between the Vakatakas and the Kalacuris, which as we have seen can (and even must) necessitate Subandhu as their link.

Mirashi too is inclined to believe that Maharaja Subandhu was the founder of this great dynasty which rose in western India out of some of the fragments of the shattered Vakataka imperium. In fact, it was he who first suggested it, noting "the general resemblance that (Subandhu's Barwani grant) bears . . . in respect of characters, phraseology, royal sign manual, etc." to other grants from Khandesh. However, Mirashi continues (1955, xliv–xlvii) "unlike Svamidasa and other princes of Khandesh, (Subandhu) gives no indication that he acknowledges the suzerainty of any other ruler, suggesting that he

[39] Personal communication August 2001.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

may well have been the founder of the new dynasty which ultimately came to be known as the 'Early Kalacuri' dynasty because of the eventual use of that name."

The fact that these earlier records are all dated in the so-called Abhira era which by the early sixth century was associated with the famous Early Kalacuri (Katacuri) king Krishnaraja further suggested that Maharaja Subandhu may have been the founder of that important later dynasty. However, Mirashi still had misgivings. "It is not known", he wrote, "whether the Early Kalacuris were descended from Maharaja Subandhu who ruled from Mahismati in an earlier age; for there is a long period of nearly 150 years which separates them and for which no records have yet been discovered." (Mirashi 1955, xlv) Furthermore, if one follows Mirashi's dating of Maharaja Subandhu's Barwani inscription according to the Early Kalacuri era (= 417 A.D.), Maharaja Subandhu would have lived more than one hundred years before the first confirmed inscriptional references to the Early Kalacuris, which occur only in the first half of the sixth century.

However, this difficulty essentially disappears when, as explained earlier, we date Maharaja Subandhu's inscription according to the Gupta era (= 486 C.E.) rather than to the Early Kalacuri era (= 417 C.E.). (Spink 1976–7, 57–9) For then only a few decades separate Subandhu from the first records specifically tied to the great Early Kalacuri dynasty, which had become established in the Konkan region sometime between 505 and 533 A.D. Their predecessors, the Traikutakas, who had become independent once again after the Vakataka fall, issued the Matvan plate of 505 from their capital "Aniruddhapura of the Traikutakas". (Gokhale 1972) But when the Matvan plate of 533 A.D. was issued the capital had become "Aniruddhapura of the Katacuris". Thus it is clear that by this time the Early Kalacuris had become dominant; the Traikutakas had perhaps been reduced to the status of feudatories, if indeed they still had any power at all.

Although Subandhu's Barwani inscription has more often than not been referred to the era which started in 249 A.D.—ultimately called the Early Kalacuri era—this ascription must be explained only by Mirashi's great authority—often accepted uncritically—in such matters rather than for some other compelling reason. Subandhu may have appropriated certain formulae from the earlier Khandesh records, as Mirashi suggests, but this hardly required that he used the same era. And although the era was indeed ultimately used for the dynasty

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

which—we assume—he founded, it is most unlikely that he was conceiving of himself in such grand terms in 486, when his Barwani inscription was written, for he could hardly have acceded to the throne much more than a year or two earlier. As pointed out earlier, Harisena's grandchildren would not have arrived in Mahismati until at or during the time of the Vakataka fall in around 483, and he then had to manage his marriage to Harisena's granddaughter, the murder of Harisena's second son (the viceroy) and then move (insidiously) from his self-assumed position as regent for Harisena's young grandson to his ultimate goal as ruler of this old Vakataka domain—all in the space of a few years. Needless to say, in a period of such extreme political turbulence as the mid-480s the wily Visruta may well have accomplished such dark deeds; and the possibility of such self-aggrandizing actions may explain why the Visrutacarita ends abruptly without relating the fate of the young Vakataka heir beyond Visruta's assurance that we should conceive of "the prince as firmly and securely placed on the throne of his forefathers". (Kale 1966, 367) However, the vagueness may be as significant as it is shadowy, since it was not Visruta's young ward, but Visruta himself, the pretender, who became the ruler (= Maharaja Subandhu) of Mahismati. Dandin may have suppressed this negative information, which would cast a shadow on Visruta as the founder of a great dynasty. Indeed if, as seems likely, Dandin was a close contemporary of the participants in his story, such "editing" of the events he describes is particularly understandable.

However, it is still unlikely that Visruta (= Subhandu) was already dreaming of founding a dynasty—later to be known as the Early Kalacuri dynasty—when he was hardly settled on the throne. It was enough for the moment for him to publish his ceremonious records (such as the Barwani plate), proclaiming his new authority. Eventually the dynasty which Subandhu founded would become assertively independent, at which point it took over the old Abhira reckoning for its own (Early Kalacuri) era. But it is reasonable to assume that at its very inauguration, Subandhu found it to his political advantage to stress a connection with the Gupta court, for according to the Visrutacarita he was the son of Susruta, a counselor to the king of Magadha. (Kale 1966, 224) Indeed, he was an intimate of the heir to the Magadha throne, Rajavahana, who "grew up, together with his friends, the sons of the ministers, enjoying the sports of childhood." (Kale 1966, 224)

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

The evidence of Subandhu's connection with the Bagh caves alone, which he claims to have "repaired", would make the Early Kalacuri era dating of his inscriptions (one of which was found in Bagh Cave 2) impossible. That is because the caves were not even started, to say nothing of being "repaired", until a half-century after Mirashi's dating of the Barwani inscription to 417 A.D. But quite apart from that, if my own suggestions are correct, Subandhu was in fact "Visruta", a prince from Magadha, and used the Gupta era that his own tradition approved, and that was so commonly used in this period. And finally, the Gupta era dating (319/320 + 167 = 486 A.D.) fits perfectly not only in relation to developments at Bagh, but in relation to the Vakataka debacle in the early 480s, which Subandhu (= Visruta of the Visrutacarita) used to his advantage, as I have been at pains to suggest.

Another connection between Subandhu of Mahismati and the Early Kalacuri rulers who made the great Saiva monuments in the Bombay region in the first half of the sixth century might be seen in the strong Saiva (especially Pasupata) focus of the city of Mahismati which, as described in the Visrutacarita, was still under the rule of Harisena's "second" son, who was probably a Saiva, if most scholarly assumptions about the Vakatakas' religious focus are correct. As for Visruta (= Subandhu) his own religious orientation is suggested by the Saiva connections in the references to his activities in the Visrutacarita. For instance, the fact that Visruta and the young prince made their entrance into the city in "the disguise of Kapalika mendicants" not only suggests a familiarity with that tradition, but implies that such characters were so common in the city that such a ruse would attract little attention. (Kale 1966, 362) Furthermore, Visruta's (= Subandhu's) marriage to the daughter of Harisena's "second" son, Sarvasena III, would also have augmented the Saiva connection. And in fact, according to the Visrutacarita, he had a genealogical connection, for he and the young prince turn out to be cousins, as noted earlier.

We do not know how long Subandhu ruled after he came to power in Mahismati by the mid-480s; but a reign of twenty five or thirty years would be reasonable. It is clear from Dandin's description that he was young, vigorous, and marriageable. Such conclusions would also tally with the suggested identification of him with the Subandhu of the Mrcchakatika, who "was still recognized as an important ruler in this general region (Anupa, etc.) in the early sixth century". (Buddha Prakash 1962, 400–404) On the other hand, the

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

dynasty which Subandhu (hypothetically) founded—though not known then under the "Katacuri/Kalacuri" name—may have had its difficulties toward the end of his reign or during that of his (unknown) successor, for this was a turbulent period when (among other aggressors) there must have been continuing problems with the Hunas to the north, while in the Konkan there were surely conflicts with the "augmenting kingdom of the Traikutakas" (Mirashi 1955, 29–32: Kanheri Plate of 494 C.E. equivalent). This was one of the many rising powers that had recently become independent of the Vakataka yoke. (Spink 1983, 262)

We do not even know if Subandhu ever extended his control significantly southwestward into the later heart of the Early Kalacuri domains. However, it is clear that King Krishnaraja and his successors did indeed move into the Deccan in the mid-sixth century, probably justifying the expansion of empire by asserting their familial rights to the long-lost Vakataka territories which Subandhu (= Visruta) had established through his marriage, as well as through his definite, even if distant, connection with the Vakataka house. Nor do we know whether Subandhu, or his unnamed successor (hypothetically, Krishnaraja's father, reigning from perhaps 515 to 530) ruled primarily over Anupa alone before the Katacuri's expansion under Krishnaraja in the Bombay region. However, this is likely, since (as pointed out above) the Traikutakas appear to have been in control of the Konkan until sometime between 505 and 533 A.D. It is quite possible (if hypothetical) that Subandhu's successor or the great Krishnaraja himself first ruled over Anupa and then, ultimately overcoming the Traikutakas, shifted their power to the Konkan in response to the political and military turbulence affecting them from nearby Western Malwa, where both the Guptas and the Hunas were probably in contention.

Mirashi surmises that Krishnaraja's predecessor (in our view Subandhu's successor) "seems to have extended his power in the east, west, and south from his dynastic base at Mahismati . . . modern Onkar Mandhata on the Narmada, where his family may have been ruling for some time". (Mirashi 1955, xliv–xlvii) But Mirashi might better have surmised that this predecessor was in fact forced out of the Anupa region. Such a period of decline could explain why Krishnaraja, in the inscriptions of his sons, is said to have "revive(d) the prosperity of his family". Indeed, the great cave at Elephanta, probably an imperial undertaking of the 530s, begun shortly after Krishnaraja's

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

accession, may be the clearest evidence of this revival. (Spink 1983, 235–282). The low ebb in the tide of the family fortunes in the early sixth century might also explain why we hear nothing more of Krishnaraja's predecessor than a reference on Krishnaraja's coins that he "meditates on the feet of his mother and father". (Mirashi 1955, xlvi; clxxix–clxxxii) On the other hand Sankaragana's Abhona plates speak of his father Krishnaraja's "illustrious" lineage. (Mirashi 1955, 42) This, even if a conventionalized reference, cannot help but make us think back to the achievements of Subandhu, who not only founded the dynasty (or so I suggest) but provided a justification for its later aggrandizements in the Deccan. There, the earliest Hindu caves at Ellora, dating from the mid to late sixth century (Spink 1967, 11–2), can only be explained as close variants, both in form and in their clear Pasupata sect focus, of the Early Kalacuri Saiva excavations in the Konkan, most particularly at Elephanta.[40]

The Visrutacarita makes it clear that, quite apart from the Asmakas—whom Subandhu (= Visruta) was apparently able to keep from taking over the Anupa region late in their campaign of destruction—his main antagonist was (Western) Malwa, lying just to the north of his newly acquired domains. We can probably assume that the Malwa regent—Chandavarman of the Visrutacarita—who tried to arrange the marriage of his younger brother to Harisena's granddaughter but was foiled by the rival Visruta (= Subandhu) in this attempt, was an actual historical character, given the overall veracity of the Visrutacarita, the eighth Ucchvasa in Dandin's tale.

In fact, the whole of the Visrutacarita account, relating the generally "far out" adventures of the ten Magadhan (i.e. "Gupta") princes, refers to the highly troubled years of the late fifth and the early sixth century, and in particular to the contentions between the declining Gupta imperium and the region of Malwa. It may well be that the death of the Malwa monarch's younger brother, killed through Visruta's machinations, reflects an enmity toward the Malwa rulers, which could only have facilitated the forays of the Hunas into the Malwa area in the late fifth century, to the probable benefit of Subandhu's growing house. At the same time the devious Visruta, through the queen, reported to Chandavarman, the Malwa monarch,

[40] A silver coin was found when excavating in front of Ellora Cave 21, which is suggestive, even though such krishnarajarupakas were widely used.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

that this death was due to the treachery of the lord of Asmaka, further directing the blame in a politically auspicious way. (Kale 1966, 365)

It may seem surprising, if our analysis of Subandhu's Saiva focus is valid, that he "repaired the (Buddhist) caves at Bagh", as well as providing for the maintenance and upkeep of the monastery. The caves at Bagh had been excavated in the 460s and 470s under Vakataka patronage, either direct or indirect. Of course, cut from notably friable sandstone, and subject to constant water seepage, the need was probably clear after some two decades. Nonetheless, his motivation in making grants to a monastic community which must have suffered from the Vakataka debacle, was probably political, to sway the Buddhist population toward his own support. It would also emphasize his links with the Vakataka house, which through his marriage and his machinations, he had taken over as his own. (Spink 1976–7, 53–84)

Harisena's involvement in the Buddhist developments at Ajanta is sometimes explained as reflecting a similar political expediency. On the other hand since Cave 1 at Ajanta—the most splendid Buddhist vihara in India—was (according to my view) Harisena's own donation, and his Prime Minister "was solely devoted to the Buddha", vying in piety with the local king and the powerful Asmaka patron, Buddhabhadra, we have to consider the possibility that the emperor himself was a Buddhist. (Spink 1981, 144–157)

This could explain why a site as extensive and impressive as Bagh, with its nine large caves, was created during the viceregency of one of his sons.[41] Such an undertaking would serve not only the purposes of piety, but as a significant "public works project" for Ajanta's numerous displaced workmen during that site's Recession and Hiatus. It seems evident that imperial approval and probably support would have been required for such a major project which, with its "provisions for the sick" as well as the expected monastic residences had, like the carefully organized and tightly controlled developments at Ajanta, something of a corporate character. By the same token, the apparent ease with which workmen moved from Ajanta to Bagh (and later back again) when Ajanta's development was cut off by the Asmaka/Risika war also could suggest that such a "migration" was

[41] For a useful and well-illustrated discussion of the many remains at Bagh, and a review of the controversial evidence regarding its dating, see Pande 2002, 6–25.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

done with imperial encouragement and approval. Finally, the earlier imperial involvement at Bagh—whether direct or indirect—would also explain why Harisena's grandson-in-law (the Visrutacarita's Visruta = Subandhu) made significant donations to the same site when he took over the region a decade later.

Surely to further establish his credibility as the inheritor of what was left—or restorable—of Vakataka power, Subandhu/Visruta made a perpetual grant of the income from a village to cover expenses of ". . . perfume, frankincense, flowers and offerings as well as for maintaining an alms-house, for repairing broken and rent portions (of the vihara) and for providing the Community of Venerable Monks . . . with clothing, food, nursing of the sick, beds, seats as well as medicine . . . (for) as long as the moon, the sun, the oceans, planets, constellations and the earth would endure." (Mirashi 1955, 19–21)

Schopen (1990, 207 note 15) in his reference to the Bagh inscription, which he has reexamined, omits ". . . (this) portion explicitly providing for the maintenance and upkeep of the monastery", explaining that "Such a provision is a common, even a standard, element in land grants to Buddhist monasteries." He continues: "The failure to take this into account has, unfortunately, affected Spink's attempt to date the caves. Spink argues in part that the presence of such a provision in the Bagh grant indicates that Subandhu actually made 'repairs' to the caves and that they were, therefore, excavated earlier than had been previously thought. But the provision, of course, need not imply any of this . . ."[42]

However, it is clear from Subandhu's record that this major gift was not made by the original donor—the Dattataka mentioned in

[42] According to my interpretation, the Bagh inscription would have been written by Subandhu about a decade after the caves, made in the 460s and 470s, were completed. Schopen (1997, 280, note 15) seems to believe that Subandhu actually made the caves as well as making the grant, since "such a provision is a common, even a standard, element in land grants to Buddhist monasteries" and that by separating the making of the caves and the land grant, I (WMS) come to the conclusion that the caves were "excavated earlier than had been previously thought". I trust that my discussion will confirm that the caves and the grant must indeed be separated in time, and that putting them together would create (or sustain) historical chaos. Schopen also believes that the "monastery" to which Subandhu's gift was made "is almost certainly Cave II, the cave in which the plate was found" but I would assume that, being published from Mahismati some years after the site was finished, and with its wide range of benefits, the inscription refers to the site—the "kalayana" ("Abode of Art")—as a whole.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Subandhu's inscription—even if he might have been aware of the potential need for such attention, given the nature of Bagh's fragile matrix and of the monastery's ritual and humanitarian needs. Instead, it was made roughly a decade later by Maharaja Subandhu (= Visruta) himself, whose closely related Barwani record must be dated to 486. By contrast, the excavation of the Bagh caves, tied so closely to Ajanta's development as well as to the vagaries of Vakataka fortunes, cannot postdate Harisena's death in 477. Although the date of the Bagh record is lost, it could hardly have been written before 485, since Subandhu's takeover of Anupa can only have been accomplished sometime (shortly) after the Vakataka fall.

By that time, given the notably friable nature of the Bagh rock, it is surely reasonable to think that repairs would have been desirable.[43] When one sees the almost totally collapsed character of all of Bagh's cave fronts today, or the gradual disintegration of the interiors, one can well imagine that the process started as soon as they were exposed, despite the Bagh architects' necessary predilection for massive walls and pillars.[44] However, it is not easy today to find evidence of any repairs, either during Bagh's original phase of patronage in the 460s and 470s, or dating from Subandhu's time, as would seem more likely. Indeed, it may well have been a promise, well-intentioned, that in the fervor of the times, was never kept.

Clearly Subandhu's support was for the whole Bagh complex, not just Cave 2, in which the plate was found; and although it is difficult today to determine which caves (or now-lost structures) were used for the "alms-house" and/or for the "nursing of the sick", the obvious candidates would be the large and anomalous Caves 5 and 6, which lack any residence cells, and could have served such functions.

---

[43] This is not to say that such repairs were actually made, given the nature of bureaucracies and the complexity of the times. The almost total collapse of Bagh's exposed porches makes it impossible to say. I cannot remember seeing any ancient repairs to the interiors, despite the ravages of water seepage.

[44] The consequent thickening of the walls and pillars and the incorporation of square bases at Ajanta appears to have been largely esthetic, although it appears to have been recommended by the fall of Ajanta Cave 4's ceiling sometime between 468 and 475. (See Cave 4 in later volume) The shift to inner framing for post-475 Ajanta windows, requiring thicker walls, was a very practical change also deriving from Bagh, allowing their outer decoration, and keeping the shutters from slamming against the porch paintings. The relatively late thickening of Ajanta's cell walls better allowed the highly practical and new recessed D mode for door fittings, another post-Hiatus feature derived from Bagh, where monolithic projections (B mode and C mode) could not be used because of the sandstone's friability.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

It is relevant to note that, unlike the complex at Ajanta, the Bagh caves were essentially finished, both in terms of their excavation and their paintings. This must reflect the easiness of their cutting on the one hand, while just as at Ajanta the plastering and painting would have been accomplished very rapidly once the excavation was done. One must also realize that Bagh's main development took place in the early 470's, well before the Vakataka empire's (and Ajanta's) fall. In the period from 469 to 475, when its work-force was swelled by "refugees" from Ajanta during the Recession and Hiatus, it is quite likely that the whole available scarp was fully filled up with the caves which we see today, so that the site's patronage could not be extended. In this it contrasts with Ajanta, where even in the late 470s there was still plenty of room for expansion, notably in the extensive scarp to the west of the Cave 26 complex, as well as in many of the still available locations at a level higher than the caves already underway.

The assumption that the Bagh caves had all been efficiently excavated, plastered, painted, and dedicated some time before the Asmakas started making so much trouble for the empire from 478 on is supported by the fact that they show such significant signs of occupation. Not only are the pivots in the doorways well worn, but the interiors of the caves, most notably the ceilings and the upper levels of the walls, are covered with a thick layer of sooty grime, gradually deposited by the smoldering oil lamps and incense used within the shrine. There are somewhat comparable thick deposits at Ajanta only in Cave Lower 6 (dedicated 469) and 17 (dedicated 471) where active worship of the Buddha images presumably continued for a decade or slightly more, ending with the site's gradual abandonment as a residence for the monks sometime in the 480s.[45] But the Bagh begriming is even greater than this, so that we can perhaps assume that Bagh continued active as a place of worship right up to the

[45] Although Upendragupta hastily dedicated both Cave 19 and 20 in 471, only his Cave 17, where monks were already in residence, was used after 471. Like the heavily used Cave Lower 6, Caves 7, 11, and 15 were all dedicated in 469, but Cave 7 was refurbished later so signs of early use are obscured. Most of Cave 15's cells were fitted out only after 475, perhaps explaining its lack of early soot from worship. All but one later cell in Cave 11 were fitted out in 468, but the soot in the interior covers intrusive paintings, suggesting that the cave was little used for worship until 479. The heavy soot on the porch walls and ceilings was caused by a sadhu later taking over the cell at the left porch-end for residence.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

time of (and presumably after) Subandhu's generous gift, made "for the increase of the religious merit of my parents and myself".[46] Thus if Subandhu's inscription (its date being lost) was composed at roughly the same time as his Barwani inscription of the year 146 (= 486 A.D.), the Bagh caves would have already have been in use for at least a decade at the time of his benefaction, which could alone explain the begrimed condition of their paintings, notably the ceilings, even if their use did not continue very long thereafter.[47]

The political implications of this are of interest, for as we have seen, the Visrutacarita asserts that Mahismati and presumably the region of Anupa in general, was a "hold-out" at the time of the rest of the Vakataka empire's fall. Sarvasena's "brother by another mother" (Kale 1966, 361) had been placed as viceroy in the Anupa region and was still in control there. This is the reason, of course, that Harisena's grandchildren were taken there for protection. If we are to believe what Visruta proclaims: "so regard Asmaka as uprooted . . ." then it follows that Visruta (= Subandhu) continued to resist the Asmakas, and presumably kept the Anupa region in "Vakataka" hands even after the suspiciously "convenient" death of the Vakataka viceroy, Mitravarman (Kale 1966, 362). Mitravarman's "final disposition" was justified (according to Visruta) because Mitravarman intended "to gain the confidence of the mother . . . so that he may put (the prince) to death". This, in fact, was a project which later circumstances suggest was one which Visruta had reserved for himself.

Thus the evidence from Bagh appears to confirm that the Visrutacarita reports correctly on the situation in Anupa at the time of the Vakataka fall. Apparently from the time of their inauguration in the 470s, and up until the time of Subandhu's (= Visruta's) acquisition of the region in the mid-480s, and probably somewhat beyond, the caves had a relatively undisturbed history, first of development, and then of use. It was out of this relatively stable context, even as the Asmaka insurrection was reaching its much-deserved denoue-

[46] Mirashi 1955, 21.

[47] This is particularly evident in Bagh Caves 2 and 3 where the roofs are still essentially intact. In Cave 4, the ceiling has collapsed so massively, especially in the unsupported central area, that it has sometimes been referred to as "domed", reflecting its present appearance. Other caves are in such bad condition, due to rock falls and surface losses (caused especially by water seepage) that few traces of paintings remain, even though their generally finished state suggests they once had them. See Pande 2002, 16–19.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

ment, that Maharaja Subandhu (= Visruta) may have laid the foundations of the Early Kalacuri dynasty.

The compelling specificity of the Visrutacarita of course extends much farther than an account of events involving Mahismati. As we have seen, it provides us with what is, in the light of the Cave 16 inscription and other epigraphs, a totally credible listing of the seven feudatories who rose up against Harisena's son. Equally significant, it does not list Anupa, where one of Harisena's sons was then ruling, in this group, while Andhra and Kalinga, with their Vakataka marriage connections, are also omitted from the list of insurrectionists.

The Visrutacarita further reveals that the empire of Harisena, which Sarvasena III inherited, was a completely unified one. The power, according to Dandin, lay in Harisena's Vatsagulma line, not in the collateral Nandivardana branch.[48] If we assume, with Mirashi, that the two branches coexisted into the early sixth century or, with Bakker, that the so-called "main branch" had absorbed the Vatsugulma branch, and ruled into the late fifth century, it completely invalidates the evidence of the Visrutacarita, and disconnects the telling and troubled evolution of Ajanta from the contemporary historical situation.

It is only when we drastically revise Vakataka chronology and recognize that at some point during the 470s Harisena took over the so called main (or Nandivardana) branch of the dynasty—either by war or by inheritance with the death of Prithivisena II—that everything locks into place: the epigraphic evidence mentioned above, the reflex of late Vakataka history in the Visrutacarita, and the pattern of events which emerges from an analysis of Ajanta's development.

What this proves is that India's "Golden Age" came to its point of greatest and final development not under the Guptas but during the reign of the Vakataka emperor Harisena, and that Ajanta, almost miraculously, mirrors this moment upon its walls. But Ajanta mirrors too the disaster which so soon struck the great empire. It was a disaster of such proportions that, if the tradition is true, that Dandin had courtly ties to Vidarbha, the political events would have had great immediacy and meaning for him.[49]

---

[48] Cohen (1995, 77) offers an alternative view, in which Harisena becomes the emperor of Asmaka. Cohen himself says that this "may not be correct or convincing" (p. 77), a conclusion with which I would agree. See also Nath 1990, 87–96.

[49] As Dandekar (1982, 286, note 28) points out most great poets are "tradition-

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

The historicity of the Visrutacarita, written so long after the fact, may boggle the mind, especially when one considers the imprecision of Indian "histories" in general. And the so-called "Short Chronology" for Ajanta is still seen by some to be mind-boggling too. But the challenge is to read these texts—for Ajanta is a remarkably specific text too—without any preconceptions, and to honor the telling evidence that they provide.[50] Otherwise we will be constructing a history which never happened. In fact the apogee of the "Golden Age" under Harisena, and its collapse under his weak successor—both moments reflected so directly at Ajanta—can be explained and described with a precision—a year by year precision!—not available at any other site in India.

Indeed, when we revise Vakataka chronology, and contain Ajanta's turbulent development within the limits imposed by epigraphic and literary evidence, we can read off the progress of its patronage and the fortunes of its courtly patrons on an almost year-to-year basis, as I have tried to show. (Spink 1991B, 68, 80; 1994, 35–41) There is probably no other site or group of sites—for Bagh, Ghatotkacha, and Aurangabad Caves 1, 3, 4A, and Banoti, as well as a number of the Jain caves at Dharasiva must also be included—where such precision is possible; and it is this precision which can lead to a new understanding. It is such an understanding which must change the history of India in what we know as the Golden Age. Its apogee, we can now say, came not under the Guptas, but during the brief reign of the great Vakataka emperor Harisena.

---

ally believed to have lived at court"; and of course we can assume that they did live with or near their major patrons. But the specific connection sometimes stated for Dandin's family connection with the Vidarbha court is from the information provided by the Avantisundarikatha—which was probably written by "another Dandin"!

[50] Considering the Ajanta caves as a "text", we have clear evidence of who made them, when they were made, and (obviously) where. Even the significant changes in form and iconography—the constant recensions or interpolations which transform them—can be located precisely in time and (generally) in terms of authorship or patronage. There are no other Buddhist texts about which the same can be said.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

CHAPTER FIVE

A REVISED VAKATAKA CHRONOLOGY

I have elsewhere given the reasons that Ajanta's total later (Vakataka and then Asmaka) development must be contained between the dates of c. 462 and c. 480.[1] But to justify this conclusion, the conventional view of late Vakataka history must be carefully reconsidered, for scholars generally suppose that both branches of the dynasty continued well beyond this point, whereas I contend that the unified empire was totally destroyed in the early 480s—a destruction which Ajanta's tragic demise only briefly anticipated.

Critics of my view of late Vakataka history generally come at me from the wrong corner, rendering our arguments unproductive. They focus on my "Short Chronology", it is true, but think of it primarily as involving the chronology of the caves themselves. And even if they agree with me that Ajanta's chronology should be "short", they typically prefer to think that thirty, or sixty, or seventy years for the course of its patronage is a more reasonable short span.

However, my point is that Ajanta's development is literally trapped within the span of a mere two decades (or less) by epigraphic, actuarial, and literary evidence. Indeed, if one releases the site from my suggested boundaries (c. 462 and c. 480), a host of unsatisfied synchronisms escape into the jungle, to lie in wait for the lost traveler. If we do not honor the synchronisms that fix the site's development between c. 462 and c. 480 we really have no way at all of knowing how long its patronage continued. Such uncertainty might sometimes represent reality, but in this case it does not: Ajanta does indeed "fit" into a clearly defined time-slot of two decades or less—a time-slot framed by the evidence of inscriptions.[2]

---

[1] Spink, 1991B.

[2] Harisena's father was still ruling in 458, so I arbitrarily place Harisena's accession at 460, to allow a reasonable expansiveness for Ajanta's development, since this development must have ended about 480. This is because we know from Maharaja Subandhu's inscription of 486 that the Vakataka dynasty must have been destroyed well before that date, and that Ajanta's patronage would have been disrupted even earlier. For justification, see discussion in Chapter 4.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

A major flaw in my argument, in the view of many scholars is my assertion that the so-called (arguably mis-called) "Main" or Nandivardana branch of the Vakataka house was absorbed into the collateral Vatsagulma branch sometime relatively late in the reign of the scion of the latter branch, the great emperor Harisena. Harisena was ruling, according to me, from c. 460 to c. 477, and sometime in the mid-470s took over the Nandivardana branch, which henceforth disappears from history. Although the assumption that Harisena was the sole emperor of the Vakatakas by the mid 470s allies with the evidence of both the Visrutacarita and the important Ajanta Cave 16 inscription, many scholars are still loathe to accept this conclusion. For this reason Dr. Jamkhedkar asks for clarification on this matter, in light of the fact that Dr. Mirashi assigned Prithivisena II, the last king of the Nandivardana branch to the period c. 470–c. 490.[3] Prithivisena's regnal period can hardly be placed earlier, as Dr. Jamkhedkar has pointed out, if "as per the accepted understanding of the scholars which is based on Mirashi's observations Rudrasena II ruled from c. 400–405 A.D." (Jamkhedkar 1991, 14–15)

But this phrase—"as per the accepted understanding"—suggests that historians have been coerced by mere assumptions, validated by an understandable respect for the great scholar Mirashi, which might have seemed to make it unnecessary to review the evidence.

First of all, since the Uccakalpa king Jayaraja is known from dated inscriptions to have ruled in the mid-490s, Mirashi very arbitrarily assigned the reign of his father Vyaghradeva to c. 470–c. 490, rather than a decade or more earlier, as he could just as well have done. Similarly, since Jayaraja says that his father, as a Vakataka feudatory, had meditated upon the feet of Prithivisena, Mirashi suggested equivalent regnal dates (c. 470–c. 490) for Prithivisena. (Mirashi 1963, 120–129) This quickly and baselessly gave the Nandivardana line a longer lease on life than other evidence warrants.[4]

It is not that Mirashi's dating for Prithivisena II (who reigned at least eighteen years) was totally unreasonable, given what little is

[3] Unless otherwise stated, the references to Vakataka chronology, and relevant epigraphic sources, are from V. V. Mirashi's monumental Inscriptions of the Vakatakas (Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum), Ootacamund, 1963, Vol. 5, pp. 120–129.

[4] Although it does not change my point, the argument is complicated by Shastri's assertion that ". . . the Nachna-ki-talai and Ganj inscriptions (of 'Vyaghradeva') in question belong to the time of Prithivishena I, and not Prithivishena II, as is now commonly believed by historians." A. M. Shastri, 1992, p. 11.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

known of the succession of the kings of the Vakataka's Nandivardana line; but it was far from binding. Prithivisena II could just as logically be assigned a reign starting around 450 and ending around 470 or a little later, at which latter date (if I am correct) Harisena, either through inheritance or conquest, assumed full and sole control of Prithivisena II's domains.[5] This would explain why Harisena's minister's famous Cave 16 inscription of c. 477—written at the very end of the emperor's reign—lists lands to the east, now under Harisena's control, which must once have been controlled by the now defunct Nandivardana branch, and why it implies so strongly that Harisena alone, by the end of his reign, controlled the whole of central India from the western to the eastern sea.[6] Equally important, the Visrutacarita makes it clear that Harisena, and his successor Sarvasena III ruled over a unified empire. With its great emphasis on historical—or even, as its critics would say, on "quasi-historical"—detail, why would Dandin thus define the situation, if it did not have some basis in historical fact?

At the same time, as Dr. Jamkhedkar carefully points out, we must make a provision of at least sixty years from the accession of Rudrasena II to that of Narendrasena, Prithvisena II's predecessor. And how can this possibly be done unless what he cites as the "accepted understanding" about Rudrasena II's regnal period being assignable to c. 400–c. 405 is wrong?

Again, when we check the evidence, we can find no foundation for Mirashi's very late dating of this short-lived king, who married Prabhavatigupta, the daughter of the Gupta monarch, Candragupta II (ruled c. 375–c. 414). Indeed, authorities such as P. L. Gupta, R. C. Majumdar, A. S. Altekar, A. Agrawal, and others, assign the reign of Rudrasena II to c. 385–390, some fifteen years earlier than Mirashi. This is also hypothetical, but has the advantage of locating Prabhavatigupta's regency fully within the period when her father, the Gupta emperor, was reigning. His interest in protecting her, and his own self-interest in controlling Vakataka affairs through his daughter's regency may explain why that regency (apparently conducted from the Gupta court itself) went on so long.

---

[5] Bakker 1999, 53 takes a different view, proposing that Prithivisena's military prowess proved itself and that the eastern Vakatakas were again their own masters in Nandivardhana during a period that lasted from about 478–490.

[6] See earlier discussion of Ajanta Cave 16 inscription; see also Spink 1991A.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

The fact is, Mirashi's surprisingly late dating of Rudrasena II is apparently to be explained by nothing other than his too-late dating of Prithivisena II, which in turn depends upon his too-late dating of Harisena. By assigning roughly known or at least reasonable regnal spans to the rulers in between Prithivisena and Rudrasena (see Dr. Jamkhedkar's listing), the accession date of c. 400 for the latter was "established". (Jamkhedkar 1991, 14–15) This is precisely the same process that I am using, also out of necessity; but of course I am starting the count some twenty years earlier, reflecting my different datings for Prithvisena II and Harisena.

We can reconstruct this new Vakataka chronology, which should obviate Dr. Jamkhedkar's objections, as follows:

NANDIVARDANA BRANCH approx. reigns		
Rudrasena II	385–390	(allows for yr 5 inscr)
Prabhavatigupta	390–405	(estimated 15 yr regency)
Damodarasena	405–410	(as brother's reign was long)
Pravarasena II	410–445	(allows for yr 32 inscr)
Narendrasena	445–455	(no evidence re length)
Prithvisena II	455–475	(allows for yr 17 inscr)
VATSAGULMA BRANCH takes full control c. 475 or earlier		
Harisena	460–477	Devasena ruling 458
Sarvasena III	478–483	Died before 486

Although I have not done so, Rudrasena II's brief reign (for which I have retained the conventional span of five years) could probably be assigned an even earlier date than that given here. This would allow a longer regency for Prabhavatigupta and/or a longer reign for Narendrasena; in the table above I have shortened the twenty year regnal spans generally given to these rulers, since there seems to be no basis other than convention for making them so long. Damodarasena's reign was probably very short; not only is practically nothing known about him, but his younger brother, Pravarasena II, reigned well over thirty years. As for Narendrasena, it seems likely that when his "sovereignty was snatched away by a close kin" the antagonist was his contemporary of the Vatsagulma branch, Devasena (Harisena's father). It seems reasonable to assume that at least one of the (two) "restorations of the sovereignty of his line" mentioned by Prithvisena II involved getting back what Devasena had taken

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

away—even though Prithivisena himself was not destined to keep it long.[7]

As for the further difficulty that Dr. Jamkhedkar sees over the conflicting claims of Harisena and Narendrasena regarding the overlordship of Kosala, Mekala, and Malava, it vanishes with this revised chronology: these rulers of the two branches of the Vakataka house are not even contemporaries. We do not know how Harisena acquired all (or more likely, part) of these territories, but the safest assumption is that he acquired them from Narendrasena's successor, Prithvisena II, when he (Harisena) incorporated the Nandivardana (or so-called "Main") branch into his now more powerful Vatsagulma branch. As I have explained earlier, this acquisition was probably through inheritance or some other form of peaceful acquisition, rather than by means of war; for the amazing productivity of the final years of Harisena's reign must have been dependent upon an environment of peace. I have suggested a date of c. 475 for the unification of the empire under Harisena, but it could easily have occurred a few years earlier, since a number of the Nandivardana branch regnal spans might be shorter than given here.

The fact that Prithvisena's power base in eastern Vidarbha is not mentioned in Varahadeva's listing of territories which Harisena "conquered" (Bakker: "stood above") according to the Ajanta Cave 16 inscription also argues that this significant territorial acquisition was a peaceful one. The obvious stability and authority of Harisena's relatively brief rule (c. 460–c. 477), to which both Ajanta and Bagh attest, would seem to further confirm this. In any case, by the time of Harisena's death, the now-unified Vakataka empire was second to none on the sub-continent and (I hesitate to say) may not even have had an immediate rival on the globe, in terms of its cultural authority.

However, this era of light did not last long. Under Harisena's inept and ill-fated successor, Sarvasena III (c. 478–c. 483), the darkness gathered, and all too soon the Vakataka empire was shattered into many broken parts.

Many readers may not wish to accept my revision of Vakataka chronology. However, I think it is fair to say that although my alterations break the conventions with which the study of Vakataka

[7] For the view that it was Harisena and not Devasena who usurped Narendrasena's sovereignty, see Bakker pp. 39–40.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

epigraphs have long been approached, they do not go against reason. In fact, they throw a clearer light on the development of history and culture in this most important period.

What may be of particular interest is the fact that it is art historical evidence that has provided the key to this new Vakataka chronology. It is the validation of both the telling evidence in the Visrutacarita and of the relevant inscriptional records, by the sequence of art historical and epigraphic "events" at Ajanta, that finally brings the whole history of Central India in the fifth century into focus.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

CHAPTER SIX

DANDIN'S VISRUTACARITA AND THE FUTURE OF HARISENA'S IMPERIUM

Part 1. The Emperor Harisena and the End of the Golden Age

When Harisena came to the throne in about 460 C.E., he was fortunate in inheriting not only his central seat of power in western Vidarbha, but the adjacent feudatory territories of Asmaka and Risika, as well as Anupa, where his "second son" was made the viceregent. All these three areas were obviously at peace at the time of his accession in about 460; and it is this that made the beginning of work (and the very conception!) of Ajanta and the related caves at Bagh possible. These new excavations were elitist and courtly undertakings, and reflect the wealth, the power, and the esthetic interest of the Vakataka court. They were quite unlike earlier Buddhist sites (including five caves at Ajanta itself) which were typically community efforts. Although the powerful Asmaka feudatories were already testing their strength—as suggested even by their grandiose plans for their own developments at Ajanta—Harisena had no trouble exerting a strong control over these aggressive subjects, as he gradually expanded the boundaries of his empire, through war, marriage, inheritance, and diplomacy, from the western to the eastern sea.

By the end of his reign ("Dec. 31, 477") he had also taken over, possibly by inheritance, the domains of the Eastern Vakatakas, so that, just as the Visrutacarita says (and the Cave 16 inscription confirms), he was the single lord of the whole of central India. Perhaps as a signal of his final control of the whole of Vidarbha (the traditional center of Vakataka power) he may have sponsored the enlargement of the incredible "hill-temple" at Mansar, giving honor to Siva, just as his Cave 1 at Ajanta, honors the Buddha; both of such developments of course gave satisfaction to his subjects, with their varied religious attachments. But although Harisena's power was strongly established, it is likely that the Asmakas, with their own dream of empire, had already infiltrated his court with the spies and

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

false counselors which caused such havoc during the reign of his successor, according to the Visrutacarita. And since the evidence at Ajanta proves that Harisena died so suddenly that he was not even able to order his cave to be dedicated, it seems likely that, like many other kings in India's history, he was poisoned or killed in some other way. If so, this would surely have been the work of the pernicious Asmaka interests at court. However, it is also possible that he had a heart attack or a fatal accident. The crucial point is that his death was sudden and unexpected, as the evidence of his great Ajanta Cave 1, which he never finished, proves. He was about 49 (give or take a few years) when he died at the end of 477.[1]

Part 2. Sarvasena III and the Destruction of Empire

Sarvasena would have been about thirty years old when he acceded to power; and, unfortunately, he had probably been indoctrinated with "false counsel" for some years even before his ascent. Indeed, it is clear from the Visrutacarita that even when he became emperor he was still under the influence of bad advisors, as well as a slave to his youthful desires. This caused much despair to his loyal old minister, Varahadeva, who had also served the young prince's father before him. Varahadeva was, incidentally, the patron of Ajanta's Cave 16, which served as an early model for many other viharas made during the site's Vakataka phase.

Almost immediately upon Sarvasena's accession, the Asmakas, having asserted their control over the Ajanta region, developed even greater aspirations. Even in the first year of Sarvasena's reign, they declared their independence from their Vakataka overlord, who unfortunately was "inattentive to administrative matters". They, in effect, proclaimed their independence in Buddhabhadra's inscription on their great caitya hall (Cave 26) at Ajanta, where all mention of the Vakataka overlord is insultingly omitted, even as the Asmaka king and ministers are praised. By the middle of this first year of Sarvasena's rule, the great Vakataka patrons, fearing that this ominous political shift was imminent, all fled from the site. For a rather different reason, all of the Asmaka patrons also had to leave the site by the end

[1] See Chapter 7.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

of this same year (478), because their funds (and probably their workmen) had been diverted to the needs of the Asmakas' military buildup.

Thus by the end of this initial year of Sarvasena's inept rule, Ajanta was totally bereft of its great patrons, and with their departure the established administrative controls rapidly broken down. During the next couple of years (mid-478–480) there were hundreds of minor donations made at Ajanta, but they were mostly the offerings of the monks remaining at the site, who probably got the stranded workmen to work for next to nothing, or even in exchange for prayers and rituals. And then, by the end of 480, as the first flames of the developing conflagration must have already started to threaten the Ajanta region, even this anxious activity came to a total halt, with dozens of the images then underway peremptorily abandoned. In later years not a single such offering was ever made again; and within a decade or so, all of the monks too had moved away from the dying site.

As far as we know, only Kosala, Andhra, and Anupa, with all of which Sarvasena had familial connections, did not join in the coming insurrection, which was supported by a growing consortium of feudatories eager to overthrow Harisena's unfortunate successor. With Asmaka as the "ringleader", the coalition consisted of Vananasi, Kuntala, Murala, Risika, Konkana, and Nasikya. In the battle which took place on the banks of the Narmada, Sarvasena "fell prey to those princes . . . as he was totally averse to the science of politics" (Ryder says: "became mincemeat, because he despised political science"). The king of Asmaka then "marching back, established himself in the kingdom of (Sarvasena III)". Meanwhile, the devoted minister Varahadeva, now quite old, (as the Visrutacarita confirms, as does the fact that he had been one of the major inaugurators of Ajanta's renaissance), was fleeing with Sarvasena's wife and her two children to the city of Mahismati, the last stronghold of the shattered Vakataka power.

Although Varahadeva himself died of a "burning fever" before getting to Mahismati, the royal family finally reached the city, where her brother-in-law (the second son of Harisena, the Vakataka viceroy) was still ruling. This must have been about 481, by which time even the helter-skelter intrusive activity at Ajanta and all other related Vakataka sites had fallen victim to the developing conflict. The whole of central India was by now embroiled in actual war, and the unhappy Sarvasena was already dead.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Part 3. Events in Mahismati and the Emergence of Prince Visruta

Although the little imperial family had expected to be protected at Mahismati, it immediately became clear that Mitravarman (Harisena's second son) was hoping to save the remnants of Vakataka power for himself, by arranging the death of his little nephew, as the Visrutacarita relates. Thus, no sooner had they arrived in the city, but the child was sent away for safety. When his guardian, an old man, fell into a well, he was serendipidously rescued by a wandering Gupta prince Visruta. This heroic figure was, in fact, the future Maharaja Subandhu of Mahismati, who may indeed have had such tales, true or false, added to the edition of his life. Having rescued the young prince, Visruta also, following heroic convention, shows his prowess at the hunt by brilliant bow and arrow work, to provide venison for the group. Having proved his mettle again, he took the young prince in hand and started back to Mahismati.

Visruta returned to Mahismati just when the prince of Malwa was about to come to the city to make a marriage proposal for the hand of Harisena's granddaughter. However, this hardly suited Visruta's own personal goals! Thus, developing a complex plot, he first arranged to cleverly kill the viceroy Mitravarman (who also stood in his way) with a dramatic trick involving a poisoned garland, making sure that no blame from the deed would accrue to his own person. Having done this, he then had the queen send a message to the prince of Malwa, saying that the realm was now lacking a leader, and urging him to come and take the hand of the princess immediately.

Then, with the complicity of the queen and of the young princess, who was already feeling "the rise of love at (Visruta's) sight", Visruta took the young prince and prepared a ruse by which the prince of Malwa, full of the expectations of marriage, would be killed. At the same time, he managed to put the blame, convincingly, on the perfidious Asmakas. Thus at a crowded celebration, where Visruta appeared in disguise as a spectacular dancer, acrobat, and knife-thrower, he suddenly hurled a lethal dagger at the Malwa prince, shouting "May Vasantabhanu (the king of Asmaka) live a thousand years!", and then (having deviously shifted the blame to the Asmakas) made a brilliant escape. He then disguised both himself and the young prince as kapalika ascetics, avoiding detection completely; the success of his deception was not surprising, given the Saivite character of the city.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Visruta's final ruse involved hiding himself and the prince in a secret niche cut beneath a statue of Durga, where they waited until the court had gathered for worship in the temple. Then, the two of them, pushing open the seal to the niche, appeared before the multitude as if by magic, clearly with the help and protection of the goddess. While the group was still stunned, Visruta declaimed: "The goddess Vindhayavasini thus orders you through me: 'as he is considered by me as my son, you should acknowledge him as such' . . . Besides you have to consider me as his protector; . . . and as compensation for the protection extended to him by me, the goddess has allowed me to accept the hand of his sister, this beautiful-browed princess".

Then, with the declared—surely only declared!—intention of getting the prince "firmly and securely placed on the throne of his forefathers" he won over the minister of the deceased (in fact, assassinated) Mitravarman to his cause, and "with his assistance . . . secured the services of devoted and upright ministers and of spies under various disguises." By such actions, Visruta declares, "(he) inspired a sense of duty (among the people), tormented the heretics, cleared out all who stood like thorns in the way of prosperity of the state, thwarted the secret plans of the foes, and firmly established the four castes in their respective religious spheres and duties." Thus ends the Visrutacarita, the true story of Visruta, at least according to Dandin. But it is hardly the complete story. It only tells us how he came into a position of power. it does not tell us how he extended this power to found the dynasty which, in the early 480s, may already have taken pride in an identity of its own, despite its telling Vakataka marriage connections. So we should go back a bit in the story, and analyze his actions further.

Part 4. Visruta/Subandhu's Consolidation of Power in Mahismati

Visruta, this well-favored, well born, and well connected adventurer from Magadha (one of the Dasakumara or "ten princes" of the "carita" or tale) is an emphatically heroic figure—as forceful and as downright wily as Odysseus. Taking charge of a deteriorating situation, in the midst of the fallout from the great war of insurrection, he cleverly arranged the demise of the uncle. After that, with a lethal

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

dagger, he put an end to the suit of the prince of Malwa, and married the Vakataka princess himself. Next, he declared himself the regent of the prince, even though his qualifications as such a protector might be questioned in the light (or darkness) of the various deaths of significant rivals that he apparently arranged. In any case, we are told that he stood up successfully against the Asmakas, who were a continuing threat to Anupa at this point. At the same time he was firmly (if perhaps temporarily!) securing his young ward's position as the Vakataka heir. He then employed a priest to instruct the prince in politics, while (he himself) "carried on the work of administration."

Now Visruta's self-seeking play for power was well-nigh won. With Harisena's grandson, the legitimate successor to the remnants of Vakataka power, still not even in his teens, Visruta was a regent as effective as he was impatient. Furthermore, his central significance was amplified by his marriage to the young Vakataka princess, granddaughter of the great Harisena. Indeed, Visruta even had a familial connection with the Vakataka house, for the new child-king's mother, daughter of the king of Kosala, "had the same maternal grandfather" as Visruta's father, according to the Visrutacarita. Nonetheless, he was an "outsider"—a prince of Magadha—and so with his wily wisdom he laid plans to better connect himself with the workings and the officials of the (Anupa) court of which he was already the effective head. But if he thus gained much power, he still did not have the ultimate position which he desired—to be king, not merely counselor. And how could he reach this goal, if his royal ward, the young king, Bhaskaravarman, stood in the way?

One might question the necessity, expressed in the Visrutacarita, of Visruta's constant concern to confirm his own loyalty to the young prince—the Vakataka heir—who was also his wife's brother. However, reading between the lines, can we not sense danger for the prince, as Visruta, excelling at all levels of diplomatic intrigue, "cleared out all who stood in the way of the prosperity of the state", a listing which might well have included his own ward. This is almost certainly the reason that the Visrutacarita breaks off so suddenly at this point, before a darker chapter of Visruta's biography—a chapter in which he makes his final grasp for power—had to be written.

Admittedly, the final (added) chapter of the Visrutacarita, the Uttarapithika, considered by all to be a later appended composition, finishes the story in the "proper" way, with Visruta restoring the

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

young prince to the throne, and the fallen dynasty restored. However, this bears no relevance to the actual historical situation, as we can construct it from the Visrutacarita proper. It is significant that in Indian history we never hear of Harisena's grandson (the Bhaskaravarman of the Visrutacarita) again; this confirms the suspicion that he never acceded to power, whereas Visruta (= Maharaja Subandhu), we must believe, founded his new ("Early Kalacuri") dynasty here in Mahismati at this very time. This striking conjunction in both time and place of Bhaskaravarman's loss and Visruta's gain suggests that in one way or another our Gupta prince became (after astutely marrying Harisena's granddaughter!) the inheritor of what was left of the shattered Vakataka imperium. Having disposed, by his own devices, of the other pretenders to the throne (Mitravarman, Harisena's second son, as well as the prince of Malwa), the life of the young Vakataka heir alone was frustrating Visruta/Subandhu's high ambitions.

It would be comforting to think that the young prince Bhaskaravarman conveniently died of one of the many diseases of the day; for since Visruta was not only his "protector" but his brother-in-law, this would have surely have assured Visruta's "succession" to the remnants of the once glorious Vakataka power. But if this is what happened, Dandin's story could have had a conventional, decisive, and satisfying resolution. That it does not—that it leaves Visruta's history "hanging in the air", casts a dark shadow into the picture at the very climax of Visruta/Subandhu's heroic career. We can only believe that the death was not "natural"; and, given this suspicion, we can only feel that what may have happened—what almost surely did happen—was better left unsaid. This is precisely what Dandin did; for it would seem that Subandhu's new dynasty came to life as the result of an untimely and "unmentionable" death. In an impartial court, the verdict would almost certainly be not only regicide, but fratricide as well. To put it bluntly, Visruta almost certainly arranged for Bhaskaravarman's demise.

Having disposed of the Vakataka viceroy, Visruta realized that it was essential that the latter's powerful Anupa minister would be loyal to him, if Visruta were to properly establish his authority in the city. But could he trust him? Therefore, to find out, he arranged a confidential test, to see what the minister's attitude toward him really was. The question itself is highly suggestive—a psychiatrist would see in it evidence of guilty desires or intentions; for if Visruta was sincere

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

in his claim to be the determined protector of the little prince, why would a question about his (Visruta's) sincerity need to be asked?

"Who is this impostor" the Anupa minister is "secretly" asked, ". . . that has appropriated the sovereignty of this state? Moreover, this our prince has been entirely caught in his grip by this serpent. Will he disgorge the prince or swallow him?"

The minister's "confidential answer", conveyed back to the devious Visruta, is expectedly reassuring, whether it was truly truthful, or politically expedient. But at the same time it confirms the high reputation—modeled upon Harisena's—which Dandin is at pains to establish for his heroic protagonist.

"Good man, speak not in this manner", the minister is reported to have declared. "He (Visruta) is evidently descended from a noble family; he has extraordinary acuteness of intellect; he possesses superhuman strength, a boundless nobility of mind, wonderful skill in missiles, not a little knowledge of the arts, and a mind always disposed to favour; while his prowess . . . is unbearable and valiant enough to cope with . . . all his enemies. He thus combines in himself qualities, which it is very difficult to find in others even singly. He is a poisonous tree to the enemies (of the state), but a sandal tree (that would give its grateful shade) to those who approach him submissively; so regard Asmaka, who vainly prides himself upon his being an adept in state-craft, as uprooted, and this prince as firmly and securely placed on the throne of his forefathers. You need not entertain doubt (as to his sincerity toward the prince and the state)."

So whether or not Visruta's "sincerity" is as inviolable as Dandin (and Visruta) would have you believe, at this demanding moment so close to the foundation of Visruta's dynasty, this is the final and "authoritative" characterization of the hero with which this abruptly "unfinished" story ends. And as if Dandin "doth protest too much", the suspicion (or conviction!) that the "imposter" would indeed "swallow" the young prince, refuses to depart. It could hardly be specified, perhaps because the sin of doing away with his wife's brother would be an inappropriate addition to the extensive catalog of the many virtues otherwise descriptive of our hero.

We must remember that it is Visruta himself, who would ultimately become, through his marriage, the inheritor of the remnants of Vakataka power, who is both the protagonist and the primary narrator of his self-aggrandizing story. And if, as has been suggested, Dandin composed it as a moralizing guide to effective kingship, this

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

could explain why he might break his story off in this surprisingly ambiguous way.

Part 5. Visruta/Subandhu's Future and the founding of a new Dynasty

One could dramatize the attempt, perhaps already initiated by Subandhu, to establish the antiquity and thus the mythic legitimacy of the new house that he founded, by referring to the dramatic (and visually compelling) story of the legendary founding of the Early Kalacuri dynasty by the mythic Haihaiya king, the thousand-armed Kartavirya Arjuna, who stopped the flow of the Narmada river at Mahismati; it could only be restored when the avatar Parasurama cut off his thousand arms. There are a number of other compelling connections which argue that the Early Kalacuri dynasty was started (as Mirashi hypothesized, despite the troubling implications of his mistaken dating of the Barwani inscription) at Mahismati by Maharaja Subandhu.

We know little about Subandhu's (= Visruta's) activities from Dandin, since the latter's account ends so abruptly, but we do know from his Bagh inscription that he made donations to repair and support the activities at that old Vakataka site almost as soon as he came to power, for the closely related Barwani inscription is dated to 486 A.D. This suggests not only that he was astute enough to continue work on the great caves that his wife's grandfather (Harisena!) had supported, and thus to assert his family connections as well as to please the public, but it also suggests that he had firm control over his new domains at this time. It seems clear that, although the Asmakas may have been a continuing threat, their power, weakened by their own war, was no longer particularly troubling. Thus his plans for expanding his own power were suffering no particular encumbrance; and of course his Gupta connections (he was a prince from Magadha) could only have aided him, now that the Guptas were no longer being assaulted by the eroding Vakataka imperium.

In the Konkan, the Traikutakas, who had earlier been absorbed into Harisena's growing empire, were flourishing again. The striking connections between the late fifth century sculptures at Kanheri and their earlier counterparts at Ajanta suggest that the sons of some of displaced Ajanta's artisans, and quite possibly some of the artisans

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

themselves, were working at this and other newly flourishing coastal sites under Traikutaka patronage. However, sometime after 505 C.E. the capital city of the Traikutakas became (as it was called in a later inscription of 533 A.D.) the "Aniruddhapura of the Katacuris". It would appear that Subandhu's dynasty, by now known as the Kalacuris (= Katacuris), had reduced the Traikutakas to a feudatory status, just as the great Harisena had done some decades before. Thus it seems clear that Subandhu (or more likely his unknown successor) was in a sense now recreating the old expansive program of his Vakataka forebear.

Surely, by the 520s, the Early Kalacuris were dominant in the Mumbai region, and as a symbol of their increasing power, the great king Krishnaraja—Subandhu's son or more probably his grandson—began the great imperial cave at Elephanta. Its huge demands must have been responsible for the expedient aborting of work on the earlier and lesser caves at the same site, as well as at the Saivite (Pasupata) monuments at Jogesvari, Mandapeswara, and elsewhere in the region, all of which remain unfinished. Then, with Kalacuri power established in the Mumbai region, the son and successor of Krishnaraja, Sankaragana (or possibly his successor Buddharaja), extended the power of the vigorous dynasty into Harisena's original domains in the Deccan. The first caves made at Ellora are the proud sign of this expansion—in effect a reclamation of the territories held long ago by the great Vakataka dynasty to which Subandhu's wife belonged; indeed his marriage to Harisena's granddaughter may well have been seen as the justification for incorporating these territories into this latter-day "Vakataka" empire once again.

So things have come full circle; and the circle is only to be broken by the takeover of these lands by the increasingly powerful Calukya king Mangalesa, who in 601 A.D., "long desirous of conquering the northern regions" finally was successful in depositing "the wealth of the Kalacuris in the treasury of the temple of (his) own god." If, as I am suggesting, Maharaja Subandhu of Mahismati (= Visruta) was the grandson-in-law of the great Harisena, and if he in turn was the founder of the Early Kalacuri dynasty, his descendants—King Krishnaraja, Sankaragana, and Buddharaja were the final heirs of the great Vakataka house, just as their monuments of the last half of the sixth century at Ellora, Aurangabad, Dhoke, and Mahur are the final visible signs of their spreading but now declining power.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

CHAPTER SEVEN

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS BEARING UPON AJANTA'S SHORT CHRONOLOGY

The Dasakumaracarita's reference to the age (thirteen) of Harisena's granddaughter when she was going to Mahismati in about 481, just after Ajanta's total collapse, makes it possible to work out the approximate length of Harisena's life and of his rule. As we must expect, if the Short Chronology is essentially correct, the time when Harisena would have been involved with Ajanta's consistent development—which took place entirely during Harisena's reign—tallies very closely with Ajanta's span, as figured from other outer sources as well as internal evidence.

The Dasakumaracarita's statement that Harisena's granddaughter was "about thirteen years old" when she was fleeing to Mahismati to escape the consequences of the insurrection is characteristic of Dandin's specificity, its probable validity suggested by the account's internal consistency in this and other regards. As suggested elsewhere, this family flight must have taken place early in the 480s, probably in 481, just after the donation of intrusions at Ajanta precipitously ended, probably as the developing conflagration flared in the area. I have also made the assumption, supported by a number of scholars in the field, that the age of 20 is a reasonable estimate of the age at which a man in ancient times would have had his first child. Thus if Manjuvadini was thirteen in 481, she (his first child) would have been born in 468, when Sarvasena was 20. Sarvasena himself would have been born in 448, when Harisena was 20. By the same token Harisena would have been born in 428; and if he acceded to the throne in 460, he would have been 32 at the time. When, shortly thereafter, in 462, work at Ajanta was initiated, Harisena would have been 34. He would have been a relatively young 49 at the time of his (probably unnatural) death some sixteen years later, when the consistent development of Ajanta totally ended. Since I have suggested, on epigraphic and literary grounds, that Ajanta's consistent patronage must have comprised a span of about seventeen years (462–478 inclusive) this fits very satisfactorily into the span of Harisena's

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

personal chronology; to see him as supporting Ajanta from the age of 34 to 49 (462 to 477) seems very reasonable.[1]

Of course the dates on my Time Chart are slightly adjustable; but not by very much. The earliest we could date Harisena's succession is 459 (instead of 460), since his father Devasena was still reigning in 458. And we might even date Ajanta's inauguration (which we can prove did not begin until Harisena had come to power) to 460, rather than 462. This estimate (while excessively "tight") would allow a nineteen year (inclusive), rather than a seventeen year connection of the site with the emperor, whose death coincided with (and indeed caused) the replacement of consistent patronage with chaos during its brief remaining years (479–480). This is as much as we could extend the span at its early end; and because of the crush of events which took place between the time of Harisena's death and Maharaja Subandhu's appropriation of the remnants of the Vakataka empire sometime shortly before 486, it would be impossible to extend the date of his death by more than a year or two—say to 478 or 479 at the very latest. This would still make his involvement at the site, and thus the site's consistent development, fit into a span of less than twenty years.

Even if our kings' ages when their first child was born might vary from this "norm" and even though Harisena's daughter might have been 13 a year or so earlier or later than 481, the results of these calculations would still very much parallel the graphic depiction of such relevant historical events as outlined in our Time Chart, and would confirm the validity of the so-called Short Chronology. Were 22 years instead of 20 estimated for the father's "typical" age at the birth of the first child, then Harisena, using the same line of reasoning, would have been 53 instead of 49 at his death, and 38 instead of 34 when Ajanta's renaissance began. But his span of involvement, relatively fixed by the constricting character of events related to the site's history, would not be very different.

[1] In Chapter 2 above, I suggest that a span as brief as fourteen years for Ajanta's consistent patronage might be closer to the truth, based on actuarial considerations.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

CHAPTER EIGHT

"THE PERSIAN EMBASSY"

Why, for so many years, were the famous paintings in Cave 1 at Ajanta, which defined the esthetic climax of the site, dated to the mid-7th century? We know now that this locates them some two hundred years too late, but in the meantime it long disrupted our understanding of monuments throughout India in this most crucial period. Indeed, even today the progeny of this misunderstanding still inhabit many of the productions of the popular press, while even the most scholarly works find it difficult to view the site without retaining some of the preconceptions which the old assumptions engendered. However, when we go back to the beginning, we find that the whole misunderstanding had a very simple, even if not very sensible, origin.

In or shortly before 1879, James Fergusson read a paper before the Royal Asiatic Society, "On the Identification of the Portrait of Chosroes II among the Paintings in the Caves at Ajanta". It was "so interesting historically" to James Burgess that he published a long extract from it in his *Notes on the Bauddha Rock-Temples of Ajanta.*[1] Fergusson's well argued (but incorrect!) theory was that the scene, which does indeed look like an "embassy" and which includes many figures in distinctly foreign (Persian or Sassanian) dress, represents the reception by the Calukyan king Pulakesin II (reigned 610 to 647) of a delegation from the Persian monarch Chosroes II (reigned 591 to 628 A.D.) in (hypothetical) response to an Embassy from Pulakesin to Chosroes known to have taken place in 625–6 A.D.[2] Because the

[1] Burgess 1879, 90–93.

[2] "I do not know how all this may strike others", said Fergusson, as quoted by Burgess (p. 93) but to me it seems to make out a very strong case for believing that the portraits on the roof of Cave No. 1 at Ajanta are really those of Khosru II, surnamed Parwis, the Chosroes of the Greeks, and of his wife, the fair and celebrated Shirin; and further that the great fresco on the wall represents Pulakesi, King of Maharashtra, receiving and embassy from the Persian King, and dismissing it with the customary complimentary presents.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

costumes of many of the persons depicted, as well as a few implements and ornaments, were definitely Persian in type, Fergusson's identification, bolstered by Burgess's concurrence, was widely and rapidly accepted. At that time no one had any idea of how Ajanta developed after its Vakataka beginnings in the fifth century, so this seeming benchmark was gratefully welcomed.[3]

So now, with Cave 1 and related material at the site "safely" dated to the mid-seventh century by two such eminent authorities, other problems could be solved as well. Since the similarly untethered Great Cave at Elephanta was recognized by all as clearly later than Ajanta, it could now be given a Rashtrakuta date in the eighth century—following the "Calukya" phase at Ajanta. Although such a Rashtrakuta (8th century) dating for Elephanta made it "contemporaneous" with the Kailasa Temple at Ellora—an unhappy conjunction—soon many scholars had committed themselves to these new "truths" and started the process of publication, that great sustainer of belief.[4]

Eventually, of course, scholars began to ask themselves why an uncharacteristic "historical" event, and in fact one involving a *Persian* ruler and a *Hindu* king, should be represented in a Buddhist cave and in a region far from the Calukyan homeland. Although references to Ajanta's "Persian Embassy" can still be found today, serious scholars have long discounted that once-hopeful identification. However, by the same time, many scholars were already established in their belief that Elephanta was an eighth century monument (it in fact belongs to the mid-sixth century!) and this made the seventh century dating of Cave 1 and associated excavations at Ajanta seem both reasonable and compelling. Somewhere in the process the obviously circular argument became self-sustaining and, having served its purpose, the "Persian Embassy" was no longer required as the foundation of this all-too-shaky structure, built so confidently upon sand.

---

[3] Some scholars did consider the cave itself earlier than its paintings, but such opinions could not be sustained by even a brief analysis of the "architectonic" ceiling paintings and of the painted details which "complete" the pillars and doorways. They clearly show that the cave's program is all of a piece.

[4] Mirashi was almost alone in correctly considering Elephanta a sixth century monument, but since he argued solely on epigraphic grounds, art historians paid little or no heed to his ascription of it to the Early Kalacuri dynasty, in the "second half of the sixth century". See Mirashi 1955, pp. cxlvii–iii. My own researches have supported this conclusion, although suggesting a date in the second quarter of the sixth century. See Spink, 1983.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

As it turns out, the only observation that remains relevant in Fergusson's identification of the "Persian Embassy" is that it does indeed depict a king. In fact, this links it directly with the insistently royal focus of Cave 1's programmatic mural decoration, an assumption that has recently been confirmed by D. Schlingloff in his intensive and revealing study of Ajanta's iconography. He convincingly identifies the scene as a representation of the Mahasudarsana Jataka.[5]

Except for the depictions of bodhisattvas and scenes from the Buddha's life in and near the shrine area, all of the stories depicted on the cave walls focus on the theme of Buddha's previous births as a king, and Schlingloff's new identification adds this scene too to the list. Even in the two incarnations where the future Buddha is shown as a naga (snake), he is not just an ordinary snake, but a naga*raja*—a snake king. Furthermore, the impressive figures depicted at the crossing of the major (painted) beams of the ceiling are also kings, but probably yaksha kings, not representations of Chosroes II, as Fergusson proposed. He was of course misled by their obviously Persian costumes, just as he was misled by similarly costumed figures in the so-called "Persian Embassy". Actually, as we look through the caves, we find numerous figures of this type, such as the Sassanian servant holding a Sassanian vessel in the palace scene on the left rear wall of Cave 17. It is clear that not only were many Sassanian traders or workers present in Central India at this time, having come along the busy trade routes of the day, but that they were objects of considerable interest and therefore worthy of inclusion in the highly sophisticated paintings of the day.

[5] Schlingloff 1996, Pl. 1–2 (Mahasudasana Jataka, # 44).

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

CHAPTER NINE

AJANTA CAVE 1: ITS ORIGINS AND ITS AFTERMATH

The precipitous collapse of Ajanta's patronage by 480, and the precipitous collapse of the great Vakataka empire by 483, was the direct consequence of Harisena's sudden death on (for convenience!) Dec. 31, 477. And it is the testimony of the great emperor's Cave 1—undeniably his, even though he was never able to inscribe it—that most tellingly clarifies the historical situation, for as we shall see, it confirms not only his central involvement in the site's patronage, but also is crucial for our understanding of both the time and the traumatic character of his demise.

The emperor's death after less than two decades of remarkable rule was probably due to the same cause that ultimately destroyed the empire itself—namely the treachery of the Asmakas; it is hard to avoid the suspicion that he was done in by these scheming feudatories. They may have already infiltrated his court, under false pretences, even while he lived, as part of their long-term program to take over the empire for themselves.[1]

Bakker (1999, 41) pokes gentle fun at my vivid recollection of the circumstances of Harisena's death and of its impact upon the patronage of the site. Admittedly, I was not Harisena's doctor in some earlier birth. Thus I have been able to examine only the evidence, not the emperor himself. But the contagion which caused his death appears to have started at the Asmaka court, and was virulent enough to kill off the whole site—still so young and beautiful—before it was even twenty years old. Considering the last of Harisena's superb sculptures and paintings in Cave 1 in 477, or the last of the monk Buddhabhadra's remarkable creations—such as the Dying Buddha of 478 in Cave 26—it is sad to be able only to ponder, but not to see, what Ajanta might ultimately have become, had Time allowed.

[1] The length to which Harisena's enemies might have gone is suggested by the baroque descriptions of how they corrupted his son and his kingdom after his death. Of course, these are literary exaggerations; but they are nonetheless suggestive.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

But even what we have been given—those fragments of what might have been—should be sufficient to help us solve the riddles of Vakataka history, as well as to explain the difficult years which followed the empire's fall.

His tongue still in his cheek, Bakker (1999, 41) marvels that "no one among (Harisena's) mourners. . . . had the presence of mind to inscribe (Harisena's) prasasti on the wall . . . before the great occasion of the official conveyance of the vihara to the sangha." And Karl Khandalavala (1991, 103) moves from irony to outrage: "If Harisena was the donor of Cave 1, then his name, without a shadow of a doubt, would have been most prominently inscribed in the vihara as the donor or patron thereof, even if it had been completed after his death. It could never have been otherwise and yet there is no inscription at all in Cave 1, a circumstance which alone makes the theory of Harisena's donation of Cave 1 totally chimerical. The less said of Dr. W. Spink's theory that it was 'The King's Cave', the better . . .".[2]

But of course my point is that Bakker's "great occasion" was never to be, even in the unlikely event that such a posthumous ceremony would have been planned. The year of which we speak—478 (*pace* Khandalavala)—was not a happy one; and anxious donors throughout the site were struggling to salvage what they could of their own pious investments, rather than worrying about the cave of the dead emperor. Indeed, all of this work must have been done in the shadow of the Asmaka's anticipated rejection of the Vakataka overlordship. As Bakker (1999, 41) agrees, this was clearly announced, even if between the lines, in Buddhabhadra's Cave 26 record, inscribed late in 478, reflecting the crucial political decisions made at the Asmaka court, almost immediately after the inept Sarvasena III had come to power.

Had Harisena died from a lingering illness, it is clear (at least to me!) that he would undoubtedly have seen to the dedication of the already completed image, even if he himself were unable to attend the ceremonies. As I have mentioned, the courtly patrons of the site were obsessed with getting their main Buddha images dedicated,

[2] Although I do certainly believe that an inscription was intended for Cave 1, it might be noted that of the sixteen dedicated caves at Ajanta, only five (4, 16, 17, 20, 26) ever were inscribed, as far as we know.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

almost as if it was this alone, and not the making of the excavations themselves that would gain them merit. Remarkably, except for the two images in the lower wings of the Asmaka's Cave 26 complex, both completed by Buddhabhadra in 478, every main shrine image in the site's viharas was precipitously finished—at least enough to be dedicated—at one time of crisis or another. That the emperor's image in Cave 1 was the only exception—the only image not hurriedly dedicated—is as revealing as it is ironic. We do not need an inscription—it would make things too easy—to tell us that Harisena's death was sudden and unanticipated: that he must have died, as I have said (and have been accused of saying), "from a heart attack or a stroke, or (considering the perverse machinations of the Asmakas) perhaps by poison or the knife."[3]

Indeed, the *Dasakumaracarita* would seem to support the view that Harisena's death was not a natural one, for after a long passage of praise, it describes this crucial event in a way which hardly suggests a normal demise. "For the unworthiness of his subjects he was translated into divinity" Dandin says (trans.: Ryder, 1927, 200)—a surprising notice, after an otherwise glowing description of his happy rule.[4] Again, it is hard to avoid thinking of the Asmakas here, since they were so successful in infiltrating the imperial court during the reign of Harisena's ill-fated son and successor. Admitttedly, one could hardly prove that they were the facilitators of Harisena's death, but the sudden breaking off of work on the magnificent Cave 1, followed by the insulting omission of any reference to the Vakataka overlord in the Asmaka's Cave 26 inscription, together with the sudden concern of the old "Vakataka" patrons for their own safety, does nothing to deny the possibility.

The collapse of Ajanta's long-established courtly patronage so early in 478—even the sad and sudden abandonment of Harisena's great intended donation—surely suggests that the machine that was so soon to overrun the empire was waiting in the wings, its route already prepared. It seems all too possible that the death of Harisena, like the plotted death of Sarvasena III only a few years later, had already

[3] See Chapter 4 of this Volume.

[4] Kale 1966, 349 translates the passage as: "he came to be numbered among the immortals owing to the lack of religious merit on the part of his subjects." See Volume I, Chapter 4, about why such an important event was not described directly.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

been written as a prologue to the tragic drama which the insidious Asmakas were composing.

Admittedly, the *Dasakumaracarita* by no means says, or even implies, that Harisena was assassinated, giving only this mysterious reference to the "unworthiness of his subjects". But it is possible that such obfuscation was Dandin's way to preserve the emperor's aura of nobility, since it would be demeaning to say that he had fallen victim to the very people who were presumably under his control. In a similar way, at the end of the *Visrutacarita*, there is no reference to what was probably the case—that Visruta/Subandhu, in whom the qualities of both villain and hero were nicely fused, probably got rid of his princely ward—Harisena's grandson—who stood in the way of his own imperial expectations.[5]

What has kept Ajanta's remarkably central history from so long being properly understood, is the fact that epigraphic, numismatic, and other historical documents alone are not sufficient to prove that the development of the site's elitist patronage is tied specifically to the time and the course of Harisena's reign in the 460s and the 470s. We can ultimately discover this fusion between the history of the site and the biography of the great emperor only through an analysis of developments at Ajanta itself, and at closely related monuments such as Ghatotkacha, Bagh, Aurangabad (Caves 1, 3, 4A), and Banoti. It is an unrivalled example of the possibility of being able to derive "History from Art History".[6] In this particular case, without the evidence from art history, we cannot understand Ajanta's history, or the history of the times which it reflects.

The linking of the fate of Cave 1, and of the site itself, with the fate of the emperor is compelling, and the hypothesis is given further force when we find that it is linked to the fate of the great empire too. Ajanta's startling collapse around 480 can only be explained by an analysis of the events which led to the destruction of the Vakataka dynasty in the early 480s—a dynasty which after that date was never heard from again. The year after Harisena's death—the traumatic year 478—begins with the anxious disruption

[5] See Volume I, Chapter 4.

[6] This was the title of my paper at the 26th International Congress of Orientalists, New Delhi 1963, where I first presented the arguments for the "Short Chronology". See Spink 1964. Since then the "Short Chronology" has been further shortened.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

of the old Vakataka patronage in the caves along the main sweep of Ajanta's scarp. Then, a few months later, it ended with the abandonment of the Asmaka caves at the western extremity of the site, shortly after those rebellious feudatories renounced the Vakataka overlordship at about the middle of that same year. After that, during the "Period of Disruption", when the administrative controls over the site had collapsed, the donation of images became a "free for all".

At this point, those who had been totally denied the right to donate images while the elitist site prospered, now usurped any "live" (i.e. dedicated) caves for their own pious purposes. The many brief donative inscriptions prove that the new donors now were in large part the site's remaining monks, but a number of lay devotees are represented as well; they were probably residents from the surrounding region, for it was hardly a moment for straqngers to be on the roads. The abrupt ending of this "eleventh-hour" spate of activity late in 480 finally signs the death warrant for the site. Shortly after that the destruction of the empire itself begins, already presaged by economic pressures and the requirements of an imminent war, both of which had so rapidly eroded the site's patronage.

In studying the strata in our dig, we find that a "shock wave" runs through the site at a startling speed, immediately after the abandonment of work on Cave 1, peremptorily interrupting the normal course of work in the "Vakataka" caves—those caves along Ajanta's main scarp. Significantly, all these caves had been flourishing up to this time; and (although in different stages of completion) the work in all was contemporaneous when interrupted by the emperor's sudden death, as is clear from an analysis of their various technological and iconographic features. At this point, the anxious patrons ordered their workers to turn immediately to the crucial matter of getting their shrine Buddha images expediently done before time ran out, for this was a time when time was of the essence.[7] The specifics of how they did this will be detailed in the following chapter. Only in those few "Vakataka" caves (3, 5, 14) which were so incomplete that finishing them was unthinkable, was work summarily abandoned.

This anxious turning of attention, during the first months of 478, to the completion of the shrine and most particularly the shrine

[7] When possible, they finished or more often attempted to finish related shrine or shrine antechamber attendants too: see Cave 2, Cave 4, Cave Upper 6?, Cave 7.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

image), is evident in Caves 2, 4, U6, 7, 8(?) 11, 15, 16, all in the main "Vakataka" section of the scarp, as well as Varahadeva's Ghatotkacha vihara, all discussed further on in this Volume. And as if to establish the fact that this was done to get the crucial merit to be gained by finishing the image itself, to the exclusion of other parts of the previously well-laid plans, we see precisely the same thing happening in the crisis of 469 with Caves L6, 7, 11, 15, the only excavations sufficiently developed at that early date, to justify such an effort. The same anxious rush to complete the images is seen again in the crisis of 471 in the beautiful viharas Cave 17 and Cave 20 sponsored by Upendragupta, the local king.[8] There is a fourth major crisis too, late in 478, when the Asmaka patrons, now forced to leave the site, also had to rush (or tried to rush) their main images to completion.[9] A fifth moment of crisis came at the end of 480, when the donation of intrusions at the site came to such an abrupt end that there was not even time to complete the many images then underway. In some cases it would have taken hardly an hour or so to get them finished, but in the frenzy of the moment it is likely that no one was going to be able to dedicate them in any case, so there was little point in bringing them to completion.

As in all distinct moments of crisis at the site—at the beginning of 469, at the end of 471, at the beginning of 478 for the "Vakataka" patrons, and at the *end* of 478 for the Asmakas, the patrons' concern suddenly shifted to the importance of obtaining *merit*. This concern for acquiring merit had little to do with finishing the caves, even in a rushed way, and everything to do with completing and (most important!) dedicating the shrine image itself. If time allowed, the image's context—notably the attendant images—were expediently completed too, but this was seldom possible or even a metter of great concern. It is clear that the important thing was to get the image dedicated.

What is most significant historically—and which I stress again—is that the major "shock wave" at Ajanta, which turned the happy

[8] As will be discussed, Upendragupta's eleventh hour rush even reveals in the way he inscribed (or did not inscribe) his three adjacent caves. The large prepared panel in Cave 19 never received the anticipated laudatory record. The donatory record on Cave 20's porch pilaster is clearly rushed both in content and presentation. The Cave 17 record did not fit until the adjacent pilaster was cut back, and this appears to have been done in such a rush and so expediently that it was left uncharacteristically unfinished.

[9] See Chapter 12 of this Volume.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

site into a state of frenzy, follows immediately upon the sudden abandonment of the great emperor's Cave 1, due (so it appears) to his sudden and unexpected death. Thus Cave 1 shows nothing of the telling disruption of the normal program of work, which is so evident in all of the other Vakataka caves. It is true that the painting program was never fully completed, but the areas still unfinished are all on either the low priority (dark) front wall, or on the right wall, where the painting is still incomplete. It is clear that work on these areas merely stopped when the cave was summarily abandoned; this is very different from the situation in Cave 2 where, when the shock occurred, painters were suddenly shifted from the lower-priority work of painting narratives on the walls to the more crucial work on iconic compositions at the rear of the cave.

From the start Cave 1's situation is unique, for in none of Ajanta's various moments of crisis does it show a troubled response; and this was surely due to its privileged situation, reflecting its imperial authorship. Nor is Cave 1's inauguration typical. Not underway until about 466, it did not take part in the burst of early excitement which characterizes Ajanta's opening years, even though the emperor must have taken an interest in, and approved (and allowed) the significant expenditures being made by his courtiers.

As if in compensation for its getting underway so late, the great emperor's cave was conceived as the most lavishly creative (and yet also the most dignified) vihara in India. Its inaugural "delay" paid off auspiciously in its notably advanced features, reflecting the rapid evolution of forms and motifs which had taken place in the previous few years.[10] This is because planners, patrons, and workers were all continuously striving to move away from their dependence on Hinayana prototypes and to emulate the character of the palaces and temples of the cities of the day. The elaborate square based pillars and the richly carved porch doorway, the new B mode doorways in the earlier (more forward) cells and the widened intercolumniation between the hall's axial pillars (the latter showing that an image had been planned from the start) all prove the cave's "delayed" inauguration. (See Defining Features)

[10] By contrast, the prime minister's Cave 16, started much earlier, is (undesirably) old fashioned.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Of course, this "delay" is most immediately revealed by its surprising location, for the main area of the site had already been essentially filled up by the time that the emperor, either urged on by piety or by the political and psychological benefits of being connected with the increasingly famous site, joined his own efforts to those of the other patrons.

In fact, the evidence that the emperor Harisena did not get directly involved in the burgeoning site until perhaps four years had passed might be used to argue—as indeed seems to be the case—that his own religious focus was Saivite, and that he only got involved in Buddhist patronage when it became politically advantageous to do so. This could explain why Harisena was not one of the actual inaugurators of the site, unlike his Prime Minister, who leaves no question about the fact that he was "extremely devoted to (the Buddha), the teacher of the world." (Cave 16 inscription, verse 21)

Whatever the answer to the riddle (if it indeed is a riddle) of Harisena's religious affiliation may be, we must remember that this was a time, throughout what is (too) loosely called the "Gupta" period, when kings not only generally tolerated, but often directly supported, faiths not their own.[11] This could well explain why he not only lent his powerful support to Ajanta, where he created the most splendid vihara in India, but also must have lent his approval to the impressive developments at Bagh, Aurangabad, and lesser sites.

Michael Willis aptly refers to a trenchant observation by Bakker, relating to the concerns of Vakataka kingship in general: "By the assimilation of popular cults like that of the boar and the man-lion, a dual aim was served, viz., to unite the subjects of the realm into a community of worship, and, secondly, to confirm the royal family's sacrosanct, leading role in this community. In this way the symbolic texture of Vakataka kingship was given shape in the heyday of its rule."[12] Although Bakker is describing an ecumenical attitude specifically related to the socio-religious background of Ramagiri, one can easily extend Bakker's perceptive comments to include royal attitudes toward the Buddhist community as well.

---

[11] For a comprehensive summary, see A. K. Narain, "Religious Policy and Toleration in Ancient India", in B. Smith, Essays on Gupta Culture, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 17–51.

[12] Willis 1994, quoting Bakker 1992A.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

From the start work progressed on Cave 1 with particular speed, complexity, and care, even though when work began in the mid-460s, the excavators had not overcome all technical problems. By the end of the Recession late in 471 we know that the shrine antechamber had been penetrated, for it is clear that the shrine antechamber pillars had been roughed out in a plain square format, with the expectation that they would be shaped in the simple early fashion at this time—i.e. without any provision for the elaborate brackets that became conventional from 475 on. This is evident since, after 475, when female brackets for such pillars had come into fashion, it was necessary to "squeeze" them out of the still unfinished square pillar formats, which must still have been in a roughed-out state when work was interrupted in 471.[13]

At the same time (i.e. 475) the cells at the rear of the cave reveal how far the earlier stages of work had progressed by the end of 471, when the Hiatus temporarily stopped all work at the site. Although not yet put into use, all of these doorways, with their upper and lower monolithic projections, had been roughed out in the C mode, proving that they had already been cut prior to the Hiatus, when that somewhat impractical type of fitting went totally out of fashion. All were rapidly converted to the simpler and better D mode after 475. (see Plan with door modes)

Understandably, except in the porch, most of the sculptural decoration of the cave had not be undertaken until after the Hiatus, when the emperor's sculptors were able to further elaborate upon the richly ambitious decorative forms found in Cave 19 and the other caves of the ill-fated local king, Upendragupta, whose connection with the site had so abruptly ended by 472. Many of the elaborate pillars and other architectural features of Cave 1 parallel those of Cave 19, proving that Cave 1's architecture was well underway by the time of the Hiatus—at which point Cave 19's development stopped, with the Asmaka's expulsion of Upendragupta from the site.

Work on the Cave 1 Buddha image proper began in 475, shortly after the Hiatus, as the sculptor struggled to overcome the difficulties created by the obsolete (pre-Hiatus) shrine plan, whereby the image had to be located on the constricting front of a block of matrix cen-

[13] Compare them to the "normal" late brackets in Cave 2 or Aurangabad Cave 3, for which matrix had clearly been reserved from the start.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

tered in the shrine, with space on all sides. This old-fashioned schema went completely out of fashion after 471, but by then the central block, defined by (never completed) "corridors" already cut on either side, had already been reamed out in Cave 1's shrine. Therefore, when, with the renewal of activity in 475, work was finally started on the image itself, the Cave 1 the sculptor had no choice but to adjust his image group to the already defined space. Since bodhisattva attendants (first introduced in Caves 17 and 20 in 471) were now a necessary adjunct of late images, they had to be squeezed in.[14] The sculptor achieved this brilliantly, but still it was necessary to sacrifice the left attendant's proper left arm which, except for a carved armlet, must have been suggested by painting.

Another "requirement", after the Hiatus, was the placement of groups of devotees in front of the throne base; such groups are an expected late feature. However, such groups of devotees were never carved in front of images cut before the Hiatus—i.e. prior to 472. Thus, had the central block already been very fully revealed prior to the time that work on the shrine was renewed in 475, it would not have been possible at this later date to carve the devotees in front of it. The fact that the devotees could in fact be included in Cave 1 shows that there must have been a considerable depth of matrix remaining at the floor level of the shrine when the first phase of work on the image had to be abandoned in 471. But it should also be noted that the angling upward of the floor (although considerably less than in Cave 4's shrine, where the original floor level inclined by nearly five feet by the time the shrine was exposed) meant that the extra matrix could be utilized for such figures when, after 475, the inclination of the floor was corrected.[15] The smaller size of Cave 1's devotees, as compared with Cave 4's, probably reflects the significant difference in the old floor's angling.[16] This was surely because Cave 1, having been started somewhat later and under the supervision of the imperial authority, enjoyed improved technical controls.[17]

---

[14] Their inclusion in Cave 1 was probably suggested by the manner in which the stupa and its image were attended in Cave 19.

[15] For the surprising angling of the Cave 4 floor, paralleling that of the ceiling, see Cave 4 in Chapter 11 of this Volume.

[16] Since the C mode cells, with lower projections, were completed by 471, the floor in the rear of the cave must have been largely revealed by that time.

[17] Compared with Cave 4, work in Cave 1 was done under a far more watch-

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

That the shrine floor had not been fully cut down (even before the angling was corrected) is hardly surprising, since the excavation of the shrine would have started at the ceiling level and progressed downward, as well as toward the rear as the course of work typically progressed gradually from the ceiling down to the floor level. But the assumption that the floor was still in a very rough state helps to explain why the "corridors" never were cut more deeply, or continued around the rear of the half-revealed image block. That is, when work on the shrine was abandoned late in 471, its exposure was far from complete.

The whole of Cave 1's shrine, in 471, was very much in process, being half revealed, when work on it suddenly had to end.[18] However, despite the constraints that its now outdated and unwelcome beginnings imposed, the very fact that the shrine chamber was already partially excavated, gave the Cave 1 image a "head-start" over the other "Vakataka" images, and is probably one reason that it alone had been completed prior to 478. Of course, the emperor's Buddha image would have been accorded priority in any case—even though such priority would and did end with his death.

By 476, with the excavation work on Cave 1 essentially completed, the cave's splendid painting program (probably already underway in the porch) could at last begin. As was customary, the ceiling paintings, now very developed, were completed first, as soon as the whole cave (excluding the cells) had been plastered. Perhaps by late 476 and certainly throughout 477, the cycle of jatakas, all significantly focused on the theme of kingship, could be begun, along with the representations of bodhisattvas and other sacred scenes on the central sections of the rear wall and in the shrine and shrine antechamber. However, work on the last of the murals—those on the "low priority" dark front wall and toward the rear of the right wall—

---

ful and critical eye. Even so, there is much warping in the treatment of the walls, which the supervisors kept from too much splaying outward, by a constant process of realignment, very much as in the treatment of the "wavy" ceiling in Cave 17. Some years ago, when fluorescent lights were installed in Cave 1, as soon as they were turned on, the imprecision of the wall carving was immediately evident, to the degree that the lights were never used.

[18] The similar developments in the shrines of Cave 1 and Cave 4 are summarized in Chapter 11 of this Volume, in the section on Cave 4. Note too, that the devotees at the left of the stupa in Cave 26 were also carved from earlier-remaining matrix. (See Chapter 12)

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

broke off very suddenly only shortly before; had work continued in a normal fashon they would have been completed.

Although all of these areas had already been plastered in preparation for their final decoration, some of the major compositions, like the so-called "Persian Embassy" on the front wall or the narratives on the right wall, show portions that are merely sketched in, while others have not been painted at all. The most incomplete painting is the red sketch of no more than a head with a crown on the front wall of the hall in the right corner—the space which the painters would have got to last. Its presence suggests how quickly work must have stopped. These unfinished murals, being the last underway, as their location also confirms, can be dated to the very end of 477, in terms of our suggested chronology.

Given the evident fact that a good number of painters were at work in the cave at this point—a dozen or more would be a fair guess, judging from style and palette—a single week or two would surely have sufficed to have completed the unfinished works, had the workers continued their tasks. It is evident in most of the various times of crisis at the site that the workers were told to hurry, and that time, not care, was of the essence. But there is no evidence at all of a last-minute rush in Cave 1. Work merely—suddenly—broke off; the last things to be done are as fine as the first. And in this regard Cave 1 is without parallel.

I have suggested that because the world changed so dramatically at the end of 477—the *pax Vakataka* ending at the time of Harisena's death—that no one cared or dared to come down to the site to conduct the ceremonies necessary to finally dedicate Harisena's splendid cave. At such a difficult moment for both the inner and the outer concerns, Sarvasena III, Harisena's faulted successor, may have had other more pressing matters on his mind than either his father's fame or the merit due him.[19]

However, there may be another (and related) explanation as to why Sarvasena or someone else from the court did not dedicate Cave 1 after the emperor's death. There seems to have been a resistance at Ajanta to completing someone else's intended offering, either

[19] The question remains: would Harisena have gained the merit if his son had completed his donation? Would he have gotten, or did he get, any credit from his unfinished cave, work on which was so unexpectedly aborted?).

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

for their benefit or one's own, if indeed this was possible at all.[20] This could also explain why, during the Period of Disruption, later donors never took over abandoned caves, either to finish them, or to add a missing main image, or as a location for their intrusive offerings.[21] Again, during the Period of Disruption, we find that unfinished votive offerings (Buddha images and/or stupas) were sometimes re-cut with a new complete image; but there is no evidence showing that anyone ever actually finished such abandoned images.[22] Such unfinished images were as "dead" as the unfinished caves.

Quite apart from the absence of any inscription, the Cave 1 Buddha image has not a trace of ritual grime; nor was the garland hook (now missing) at the center of the antechamber ceiling ever used, since the paint and plaster around the hole (now cemented in) shows none of the breakage typically caused by the changing of garlands.[23] A number of large hooks—surely also for garlands—were also set into the ceiling just over the cave's rear wall but again, because the image was not dedicated, they probably were never used.[24]

Finally, and very important, the unpainted wall areas in the cave were never used for intrusive imagery during the period of the site's breakdown (mid 478–480). Such intrusions were cut or painted in every cave at the site in which the images had been dedicated if there was still available wall space.[25] But such intrusions are strik-

[20] For Cohen's alternative view, see Cohen 1995, 184–193; for my reservations, see below, (discussion of Dying Buddha; U6, 7).

[21] The tiny Cave 22, Chapter 13 of this Volume, is something of an exception, being treated like a number of pillared cell complexes which were taken over by devotees in the Period of Disruption.

[22] A single exception might be the painting of at least four (possibly five) of the abandoned colossal Buddhas in the antechamber of Cave Upper 6, when the adjacent intrusions were completed. For discussion, see Chapter 11; also Volume III, Cave Upper 6.

[23] Curiously, the main hall ceiling has no garland hooks or holes.

[24] There were probably four of these, most of which remain above the rear wall murals. Another was on the left rear wall, close to the rear wall, probably matched by one (now missing) at the right. Typically, they would have been inserted before the plastering in this area. However, the plaster is now completely gone, because of problems caused by a seriously leaking flaw running the length of the rear aisle. The leakage must have been there when the cave was excavated, since this is the only cave where cells were not put at the ends of the rear aisle. Indeed, Cell L5 has been squeezed toward L4 probably for the same reason. Thus it faces directly out on a pillar, a positioning which is almost always carefully avoided in this and other caves.

[25] Caves 2, 3, U6, 7, Hinayana 9 and 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 26, 26RW.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

ingly absent in caves where the image never got dedicated or may never have been even started; and they are absent in Cave 1.[26] Here again the conclusion must be that Cave 1, despite its being the Vakataka emperor's cave, was never dedicated. Thus the great cave was "dead", and was never to be worshipped—a silent witness to its royal patron's death.

But even if Cave 1 was never dedicated, and its beautiful image was never worshipped, it was clearly used for residence purposes, probably from as early as 476.[27] By that time any of the cells, which had been fitted out before 471 in the "primitive" B and C modes had been quite uniformly refitted (almost certainly by contract) in the current D mode. (See Cave 1 plan with cell types). Significantly, many C mode cells, particularly those at the cave rear, as opposed to many of the more forward cells (which were presumably put into use as soon as habitable), show no signs of wear in their pivot holes. But in any case all fittings—whether B mode or C mode and whether used or unused—were converted to the D mode in 475.[28]

The uniformity of the work suggests that the same contractor cut the excavated niches in the back wall of all of Cave 1's cells and also cut the holes for shelves and clothespoles at the same time that he was updating the door fittings; such contractual efforts are characteristic of much work at the site. It is significant to note that such excavated niches go out of fashion after 476; quite possibly they were replaced (in Cave 2, etc.) by cheaper and more convenient wooden cabinets supplied by some enterprising businessman from a nearby city.

That the cave continued to be used for residence, even after Harisena's death, is evident from the fact that its cells were all plastered, presumably for the monks already living in them. Such plastering

---

26LW possibly had now-missing intrusive paintings. Cave L6 was fully painted already. For caves 8 and 22, see those discussions.

[26] Cave 3, 5, 12, 13, 14, 15A, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29.

[27] We should note the curious fact that, although Cave 1 was never used for worship, shrine doorway pivot holes show significant signs of wear, and the shrine ceiling and walls have lost nearly all of their surfacing. I have suggested elsewhere that the space may have been used as a storeroom.

[28] Cell R1 is the single exception. Work on it was probably delayed. This was perhaps because it was at the end of the front aisle where much other work was often taken up first, but work may have also been put off because of the bad flaw in its ceiling.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

of the cells at the site is—surprisingly—a very late phenomenon, belonging to the years when the consistent patronage of the site had already broken down.[29] In Cave 1, the evidence that they were plastered after 477, and therefore were not part of the original patron's program, is to be seen in the fact that the plaster sometimes is quite carelessly smeared over the programmed painting on the reveals of the cell doorways. Although very simple, this painting of the reveals is part of the original decoration of the cave, as is confirmed by its plaster ground and the pigments used. Furthermore, such "inessentials" are not characteristic of the expedient work done in the Period of Disruption.

The sudden—indeed precipitous—departure of the old Vakataka (non-Asmaka) patrons from the site sealed the fate of the already dedicated Caves 2, 4, Lower 6, Upper 6, 7, 8(?), 11, 15, 16 in the main, or "Vakataka", section of the site; and it left no hope at all for the few unfinished "Vakataka" caves (3, 5, 14) which had been summarily abandoned when the news of Harisena's death impacted upon the site. Even the redecoration of the ancient Hinayana complex, which had been undertaken in about 477, had to be forgotten now. Nor was there now any expectation that Harisena's defeated feudatory, Upendragupta, could ever return to continue further work on, or any involvement in, his own dedications: Caves 17, 19, 20, and 29.[30]

As the evidence of the "Vakataka" caves proves, these were troubled times, in which all were awaiting the Asmaka's clear break with Sarvasena III—a break which would be, in effect, a declaration of war. And since that war, in the darkening future, was indeed to come, the site was no place for its old established patrons to stay. The first few months of 478 reveal their anxiety and their rush to get their shrines done and dedicated. And then, after mid-478, while Ajanta was still so tenuously surviving, great numbers of assertive

[29] Cave 8's cells may have been plastered early in 478; see Cave 8 in present volume. In Cave 2, the vestibules of the porch cell complexes were plastered as part of the porch program (with the same mix) in 477; but this was apparently because their painting (with Jataka scenes) was part of the overall plan.

[30] Actually, when Asmaka controls over the site collapsed at the end of 478, there is some (slight?) reason to think that Upendragupta and/or his family were able to return and to take some further interest in their earlier dedications. See Intrusions Volume, Part II, discussion of Cave 17, 19, 20.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

but uninvited donors took over the site for a brief period, and finally had their chance, too, to reap the benefits of merit from it.

I will summarize hereafter the anxious and expedient work which was done in so many caves at the site in the early part of 478, for it describes the history of this brief moment more clearly than any book. It tells us that the world—or at least the world of the old Vakataka patrons—was falling apart and that this very process mirrors the turbulent ending of the Golden Age. For the rush, first on the part of the "Vakataka" patrons, next on the part of the local Asmaka rulers, and then on the part of the pious "intruders", was one fueled by desperation, by the awareness of a great loss which was bound to come.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

CHAPTER TEN

AJANTA'S LATTER DAYS: A REVIEW

We have hitherto analyzed some of the wealth of evidence revealing the pattern of developments characterizing Ajanta's overall course of evolution during its Vakataka phase.[1] In the following chapters we will concentrate on the events related to the final years—more generally the breakdown—of the established patronage of the site which took place immediately after, and because of, Harisena's death.

The pattern is distinctly twofold. All of the caves along the main stretch of scarp—at least those in which the shrine Buddhas were finally dedicated—can be associated with the "Vakataka" patrons. They stand in contrast to the dozen excavations at the site's western extremity which, as their connections reveal, were specifically connected with Asmaka patronage. In the case of the Prime Minister Varahadeva and the local king Upendragupta, who honors Harisena in his inscription, the Vakataka connection is confirmed by inscription.[2] In the case of patrons like Mathura (Cave 4) or colleagues whose records are not extant, we can recognize their Vakataka connections by analyzing the strikingly parallel circumstances which characterize both the situation in their caves and the situation in their lives occasioned by Harisena's sudden death, which itself must be understood by virtue of its impact on the fragile life of the site. All show a similarly expedient rush to get their Buddha images dedicated in the first few months after Harisena's death. By the middle of 478 these "Vakataka" patrons had all precipitously left (or at least had abandoned their caves) because, if our analysis is valid, in the middle of 478 the Asmakas had broken their connection with the new Vakataka overlord, and were now his declared adversaries.

---

[1] For earlier summaries see Spink 1991A, 1991B.

[2] See Spink 1991B. Upendragupta's Caves 17, 19, 20 and 29 were no longer underway in 478, because his patronage was cut off by his earlier defeat. Cave Lower 6's image had already been completed a decade earlier, so reveals no sign of rush after Harisena's death.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

By contrast the monk Buddhabhadra and the associated Asmaka patrons who developed the whole western extremity of the site reacted very differently to the shock of Harisena's sudden death at the end of 477, which was so significantly followed by the Asmaka's assertion of independence. Anticipating a turbulent and uncertain future, and with their funding already jeopardized by the prospects of war, they sensibly hurried their work, expediently "cutting corners" as in Cave 21 and 23, or allowing a qualitative decline as in Cave 25 and 27, or regretfully abandoning them completely if, as was the case with Cave 24 or Cave 28 there was no realistic hope of ever finishing them. Only in Buddhabhadra's great caitya hall and its main (lower) wings do the productions reveal the same high esthetic and technical standards that characterized the work throughout the site during its heyday.[3] This was surely because of the central importance of this sacred hall, and reminds us of the similar care which Upendragupta had earlier, until 471, concentrated upon *his* fine Caitya Cave 19 when his own world was in jeopardy.

However, since Buddhabhadra and his associates concentrated so much of their efforts in the porches and halls rather than just in the shrines, it seems that they were not particularly worried that time might run out before they completed and dedicated their images. But of course they misjudged the ominous destructiveness of the future. In the end, ironically, they had even less time than their "Vakataka" counterparts to finish their shrines—the goal toward which they had been all too innocently, all too blindly, working. Therefore, in the end, Cave 21's Buddha image had to be completed with an unexpected and surely embarrassing speed, while the shrine images in Caves 22, 23, 25, and 27 (to say nothing of Caves 24 and 28) were not reached at all. Only the main Buddha images in Buddhabhadra's caitya hall and its lower wings were properly finished, and this was because priority was so obviously given to this focal devotional area throughout 478.

[3] Because of its abortive development, the never fully realized right wing shows such final efforts only in its projecting shrine and adjacent bed. Buddhabhadra's interest in it may now have extended no further than providing it, finally, with a dedicated image. It is possible, however, that the halls of both of these very exposed lower wings were once painted. This could explain the fact that intrusions were not later added to them.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

So if the situation in the "Vakataka" caves (occupying the main section of the scarp) in early 478 involved an anxious but in fact successful rush to get the Buddha images completed and dedicated in a reaction to the Asmaka threat, in the Asmaka complex at the far end of the site, there was not rush enough, due to an unjustified overconfidence probably deriving from the fact that the Asmakas were now, at least in their own view, the rulers of the region and the site. The Vakataka emperor surely considered Rishika, as well as Asmaka, as established parts of his domains, but to all intents and purposes he no longer wielded any power over them, for control was now claimed by the rebellious Asmakas. It would take a war to settle the matter.

As we shall see, the difference between the two realms of patronage, as expressed in the development of the site in the troubled context of 478 is decisive and revealing; and it confirms the Visrutacarita's description of the relationship between the threatened Vakataka emperor and his threatening Asmaka feudatories. Although Cohen (1995, 62) has suggested the possibility that by manipulating the evidence we might be able to conclude that "the Asmakas . . . may be the Vatsagulma Vakatakas themselves", and that "it is, in fact, possible that the great and powerful Asmaka king to whom Cave 26's inscription refers is Harisena himself", this is an intellectual, not an archaeological, construction, and no matter how much fun it is, it must yield to a more serious appraisal when one turns to the caves themselves.[4] The *in situ* evidence decisively puts the matter to rest. The Asmakas were, just as Dandin declares, and the course of Ajanta's final years confirms, the Vakataka's empire-shattering enemies. Once again, when we confirm what happened by "excavating" the evidence that the site itself offers, Dandin is exonerated from the charge of being a mere story-teller. Indeed, with such a plot, there was no need to fake it!

When we coordinate the data that we can discover regarding the completion of the images at Ajanta, Aurangabad, and Ghatotkacha, surprising conclusions emerge that will surely be unexpected by those who still see the site's development as continuing for many decades or even for a few centuries.[5] Except for the image in Cave Lower 6

[4] For a critique of Cohen's view, see later volume.
[5] For Aurangabad and Ghatotkacha see Chapter # 14 of this Volume.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

(468–469) and the two images in Upendragupta's beautiful caves 17 and 20, which were hurriedly completed in 471 before the Asmakas took over the site, all of the rest of the shrine Buddhas in the viharas at these sites, although generally started somewhat earlier, were brought to completion only in 478—a year of continuing crisis![6]

The exception at Ajanta, of course, is Harisena's Cave 1 image, which had already been finished (but not dedicated) in 477, shortly before the emperor died. Bagh is also not included, since that whole site appears to have "filled up" before this time of crisis. In any case, the conflict in Rishika did not affect it very seriously, since the Bagh area (Anupa) was not directly threatened by the Asmaka insurrection.[7] And although not included in our "vihara count", the Buddha in Buddhabhadra's Caitya Cave 26 was also probably completed in the untroubled and exuberant environment of 477, after which it had an immediate impact throughout the site.[8]

Since we should include the refurbished and rededicated Cave 7, 11, and 15 images in our listing, this means that a total of thirteen vihara shrine images were finally completed and dedicated in this one single (troubled!) year after Harisena's death. We might even consider the missing image in Cave 8 as a fourteenth, since that cave's thorough refurbishment in 477, probably continuing in 478, would surely have included the now-missing (loose) image.[9] It is of course remarkable that not a single image was dedicated at any of our three sites during the long span between 471 and the final sobering year, 478. Naturally, most were being worked on, at least in the more untroubled years; but excellence, not some desperate urgency was the guide during the mid 470s, and time, in those happy days of Harisena's expanding rule, must have been seen as the friend rather than the enemy of the site's patrons.

At the same time it is of interest to note that even the images which were earlier completed were the immediate products of crises: the Cave Lower 6 image was carefully completed, but its context speaks of the crisis which inaugurated the Recession, because the

---

[6] The caves are: 2, 3, Upper 6, 7, 8(?), 11, 15, 16, 21, 26LW, 26RW, Ghatotkacha, Aurangabad 3, 4A. For the possibility that the Jain images in Caves 2 and 3 at Dharasiva also were completed in 478 see Chapter # 14.

[7] For Bagh, see Chapter # 14.

[8] For the Cave 26 image, see Chapter # 12.

[9] See discussion of Cave 8 in Chapter # 11.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

finishing of the walls at cave rear was extremely hurried, while neither the painting of the shrine ceiling nor the painting of the shrine wall was fully or properly done.[10] Similarly, both Upendragupta's Cave 17 image and his Cave 20 image also were rushed to completion in the crisis which is reflected in the Hiatus. Thus we cannot speak of Ajanta's development without speaking of these defining crises; they are fundamental to an understanding of the site, and in large part explain its urgencies. To think that the site just drifted along without a history is to do it a serious injustice.

My burdening of 478 with so much intense activity may boggle one's expectations, as might the related fact that Ajanta's consistent patronage surely lasted no longer than about only (roughly) seventeen years (c. 462 through c. 478) and quite possibly for as little as fourteen.[11] But because these conclusions trouble convention does not mean that they are not true. Those who doubt them should put them to the test by *in situ* investigations; for it is only at Ajanta itself, and at the related Vakataka sites, that one can find the keys to unlock the evidence provided by the epigraphic, literary, and historical sources.

Having assigned the completion of no less than thirteen Buddha images to the single year 478, it is instructive to note how, as we might expect, they compare in terms of "style". Of course most had already been underway before 478, but the majority had not been begun until 476, so they generally fall into a span of no more than two or three years. Yet it is fair to say that if they were presented, without reference to their context, to a group of experienced critics, even connoisseur/scholars of Indian art, the considered opinions about their dates would range widely and soberingly—surely by as much as a century or even two. In fact, innumerable studies have proved this already, not only with regard to the sculptures but also with regard to the paintings directly associated with them? One can find presumably authoritative dating for the paintings at Ajanta, all in fact done during the brief reign of Harisena and the much briefer reign of his successor, from as early as the late fourth century to as late as the ninth. Yazdani, for instance, in his pioneering work

[10] For the Cave 6 image, see Chapter # 11.

[11] I suggest that the "Short Chronology" might well be shortened even more in Chapter 2 of this Volume.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

of 1955, asserts that "in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. Ajanta . . . became an important center of Buddhist religion and art", while Goetz suggests that painting at the site continued even into the eighth century.[12] Such divergences may seem surprising. However, how many of us would, purely on the basis on our opinion about the style of the Buddha images under consideration, see these images as essentially contemporaneous, and how many of us would guess that work on all of them came to a halt in the very same year?

Why is the "478 style", or for that matter the "early style" or the "middle style" of Ajanta's Vakataka development so hard to define? Obviously the fact that painters and sculptures arrived at the site from far-flung regions, with different traditions and different abilities, confuses as much as it enriches the situation. But for another thing we are dealing with very varied contexts. In many cases shrines could not be completed as originally planned, and so the images were adjusted accordingly, creating unanticipated arrangements. Remarkably, at Ajanta, only the vihara shrine images of Caves 2, Lower 6, Upper 6, and 26's Left Wing are in settings which were in fact planned for them (at least once shrines became a necessary feature of the caves) in the way finally seen. In all others either the image or the shrine, or both, have undergone changes not anticipated at the start. The fact that some images were done in great haste, or even simplified in order to get them dedicated in time, also had an effect upon their "style".[13]

Furthermore, the very fact that iconographic features change so rapidly and so consistently (see Chart) obviously affects the "look" of the image, which is an essential clue to style. Because all shrine Buddhas in 475 and 476 have to have flying dwarfs above, and all shrine Buddhas in 477 and 478 have to have flying couples, or because the earliest images have simple throne sides while many late images have throne sides of great complexity, is their "style" different? If so, then "style" in these situations is largely a function of iconography,

[12] Yazdani 1955, 1; Goetz 1959, 107 I myself referred the paintings of Cave 1 to the mid-7th century in developing a chronology for H. Zimmer's The Arts of Indian Asia (1955) many years ago. My concern now is whether they should be dated to 477, or to 476, or possibly 478.

[13] In both Cave Upper 6 and in Cave 20, the upper portions of the image, done in better times, is far more elaborate than the base motifs, done shortly thereafter, but in a developing atmosphere of crisis.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

ordained by the sangha rather than the artist, its changes fueled as much by internal decisions as by external influences. Even in situations where the decisions were up to the artists or the planners, and where typically the trend is from an initial simplicity to an increasing complexity (obvious in such features as medallions and doorways) we have to ask if the almost yearly transformations should be ascribed to a change in "style" or merely to a tendency toward a more and more insistent elaboration. Is there such a thing as an "Ajanta style" pillar, when the acceptable style changes almost year by year and where the embarrassing simplicities of the past are often modernized and thus "improved" by a simple process of recutting?

If we are going to attempt to define the changing "Ajanta style", let us say in Buddha images, we had better turn to relatively unchanging representations of single standing Buddhas, where established convention plays a heavy role. This hardly unlocks the elusive pattern of the "stylistic development" of the site, but it at least allows a comparison with similarly "simple" Buddha images, generally earlier, from the Mathura area on the one hand, and those, generally later, from the Sarnath area on the other. The Ajanta images might well be seen as absorbing, through the influx of artists, the style of the earlier forms, and then transforming the style in its own way during the course of the site's development. Then, with the site's collapse, as artists were scattered to other such areas, Ajanta's authoritatively developed conventions impacted upon the same wider world from which it had so vigorously gathered its resources. In this sense it can be seen as transitional between the "clumsier" forms of the past (among which the earlier productions of the Nandivardhana branch of the Vakatakas must be included) and the fully ripened (sometimes over-ripened) forms of the late fifth to early sixth century—at Sarnath, Deogarh, Nachna Kuthara, Pavnar, and the like.

At the same time, when we speak of Ajanta's style, most notably in painting, we are presented with a marvelous melange. At least in the mural paintings, it does not seem to "develop"; nor is this particularly surprising, when (if we exclude intrusions) all of the later paintings at the site were done in hardly more than a single decade—from 468 through 478. And in this single decade painters, generally deputed by their patrons, must have come from many of the cities of the empire (and perhaps beyond). Quite apart from significant variations in the established, and now imported, regional styles, we must recognize the varying quality of the many different "hands" at

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

work.[14] Furthermore, even the age of the various artists, to say nothing of the circumstances of their training, would be reflected in their productions.

It is a truism among epigraphists that any particular scholar can date the letter forms of a given inscription within a margin of twenty-five years. Yet it is also true that different epigraphers date the same inscription well beyond those margins. So caution is necessary, particularly since the context and the purpose of the inscription—be it formal or informal, official or personal—can make a great difference. I have pointed out elsewhere that if I write a certain phrase today, the character of "my" calligraphy will be quite different from that used by my son, or my mother, or my grandmother in writing the same phrase; for we are all using the writing style current when we learned to write.[15] To some degree the same applies to painting, which similarly reflects variations in training, to say nothing of the age, the place of residence, and the skill of the artist, to say nothing of certain constraints or demands put upon him, such as the significance and the context of what is being painted (or written) and the need to get something painted (or written) quickly. This should make us wary of the distinctions which even great scholars make, particularly in those sobering cases where the "later" painting is in fact overlapped by those assigned as "earlier". This is why I myself date Ajanta's paintings almost totally by their context, for the sequence of developments at the site can (in general) be clearly specified, and the paintings must follow suit; they can thus be placed in an essentially year by year order, even though the whole sequence might be expanded or contracted very slightly.

The fact that from the end of 471 to sometime in 478 no images were completed either at Ajanta or at Aurangabad or at Ghatotkacha, although surprising, can be explained partly by the antagonism between Risika and Asmaka, an antagonism which after causing a Recession at the site, flared into a damaging war from about 472 through 474. This "Hiatus" put a stop to all excavating activity for those three years—consuming a significant portion of Ajanta's lifespan—

[14] S. Francoeur, 1998, has suggested that forty-nine different painters were at work in the caves. Although it is surely difficult to be precise, this gives a reasoned estimate.

[15] See Spink, 1968.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

while the "Recession" from about 469 through 471 had earlier denied all patrons at Ajanta and Ghatotkacha, except for the local king and the emperor, the right to do anything whatsoever during all but the first few months of that long period also.[16] So when we say that Ajanta was completed in about seventeen years of established patronage, we should also remember that from about 472 through 474 no work at all was being done, while during most of the span from 469 through 471 the royal caves alone (1, 17, 19, 20, 29) continued under development.[17]

The "Asmaka/Risika war", which forms such an important factor in our understanding of Ajanta's history, is in a sense a "fiction"; that is, there are no epigraphic or historical records which prove that it took place. Like so much else that happened in Ajanta's turbulent history, the evidence for the war, to which the Recession led and which the Hiatus expressed, is entirely derived from an analysis of the site. It is a compelling fact that, after a brief period of obvious anxiety on the part of the local ruler—an anxiety directly mirrored in the development of his caves—control of the site shifted dramatically to the Asmakas, who validated their domination by dishonoring the defeated local king. They not only "closed down" but actually violated the central symbol of his power and piety, the beautiful Caitya Cave 19; and at the same time they disallowed any further work on his associated viharas.[18]

How long this local conflict, from which the Vakataka overlord remained aloof, may have lasted can only be guessed at. However, since the consistent development of the great site is so compressed between 462 and 478, the war which took place therein could not have gone on too long. On the other hand, the evidence that workmen went to work at Bagh (and other peaceful areas) during the conflict, picked up many ideas, and finally came back again, suggests that the war occupied a significant span in the site's history: I propose three years; but since it must be an estimate in any case it

[16] Upper 6, 7, 11, 15, and 16 of course continued for a few weeks or months at the beginning of 469, as noted earlier.

[17] I continue to use seventeen years as the span of established patronage, although I make a case, largely by virtue of actuarial considerations, that it might be as little as fourteen. (See Chapter 2 of this Volume.)

[18] For the Asmaka violation of Upendragupta's chaitya hall (Cave 19), see Chapter # 15.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

could well be two, or even four, with other periods of the site's development amplified, or diminished, accordingly.

In any case, the question should not be the all too standard "How could the site be done in less than twenty years?" It should be: "How could it have taken so long?" How could a site developed by an elite group of rich and powerful and mature patrons, eager to see results and to get the merit, and to accomplish these things quickly, linger on in its development for nearly two decades? The answer is, of course, that its development was by no means consistent; in between all too brief periods of happy and consistent and impulsive progress, periods of pain arose. (See Time Chart) With a history so turbulent it is no wonder that the expectations of its eager and powerful patrons were so constantly aborted, finally ending in disaster.

When, after the Recession and the Hiatus, work suddenly started up again in 475, in the site's second Asmaka renaissance, any patron not closely connected with the local Asmaka power surely had to be either very clever or very rich or very prestigious to enlist a proper crew from the hosts of returning workmen. Judging from the stylistic/iconographic gap in their development, we can assume that there was a distinct blockage of activity until perhaps as late as 477 in small caves such as 5, 11, and 15, in all of which the patrons may have had difficulty in either recruiting or in keeping good workers.[19] The upper and right wings of the Caitya Cave 26, or the minor Cave 22 may have been temporarily "blocked" in their development for a somewhat different reason; Buddhabhadra, who controlled the whole western complex, probably had no trouble recruiting workers, but at least in 475 and 476 put them all to work on his more impressive undertakings. By the same token the Prime Minister, perhaps "embarrassed" by the chaos he had created in Cave 16 in 469, may have sent his crew off to Ghatotkacha, continuing work on Cave 16 only when, in 477, the brilliant idea of installing the new bhadrasana Buddha in Cave 16 made him change his mind and get to work on that major cave again.[20]

---

[19] Earlier, the anxious Upendragupta almost certainly transferred good workers from the less important (even if beautiful) Cave 20 to his never-quite-finished Chaitya Cave 19.

[20] I have suggested (very tentatively) that Varahadeva's problems with Cave 16 in 469 might have been due to restrictions put upon him by the emperor, and it is conceivable that this, or the pressure of his ministerial involvements, delayed the

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

That Ajanta now, just as when it was so exuberantly started, was a thriving "sellers' market" cannot be doubted. The count of caves at Ajanta alone confirms it. In 477, no less than twenty-four caves, mostly major, were still underway; six of them having been recently started since 475.[21] And there was still extensive work to do on the Ghatotkacha vihara and on the elaborate Asmaka caves at Aurangabad, to say nothing of Banoti. Furthermore, since the Asmakas now were in control of the site, they were undoubtedly planning to extend their excavations along the empty scarp to the west—the incomplete but impressive Cave 28 being the first to be cut into this "inaccessible" area.[22] Indeed, they may have originally positioned Cave 26 at the very far end of the present series of excavations with the intent of putting viharas to the left of it, to balance those on the right and to make the great caitya hall the intended true center of a complex planned to be even more magnificent and more extensive than what we see today.

With so much work to do, and so much work going on, after a period when all workmen had left the site for employment elsewhere, it is evident that constantly increasing numbers of artisans would have started flooding into the site starting in 475. Perhaps the largest numbers—many in fact returning—came from Bagh, where the greater portion of excavation was probably already done by 475; the limited usable section of the site's scarp would have filled up rather quickly, the soft nature of the sandstone allowing very rapid and efficient excavation. But many other workmen would have come too, and this explains the abundance of new stylistic and iconographic

---

resumption of work on Cave 16 in 477 also. However since, as Prime Minister, he claims to have "governed the country righteously" (Cave 16 inscription verse 20)—like his father before him, who was similarly "entrusted. . . . while the king engaged himself in the enjoyment of pleasures, acting as he liked" (verse 16)—it is more likely (even allowing for hyperbole) that he made his own decisions in this regard. However, both in 469 and 477 it is conceivable that his Ghatotkacha vihara was a serious distraction, both financially and in terms of his workforce and his time.

[21] The eighteen pre-Hiatus excavations still underway in 477: 1, 2, 4, 5, U6, 7, 8, 11, 15, 16, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 26LW, 26RW, 27. The six later undertakings: 3, 14, 22, 23A, 24A, 28.

[22] It was not then as inaccessible as it looks today, for there surely was an approach to Cave 28. The fact that all of the cells on the cliff-face side of both of the left wings of Cave 26 have totally fallen away gives some idea of how extensive the losses have been and how much more frontage the scarp, at least in this area, once had. This is true of much of the site.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

forms which are introduced and developed in this "second renaissance" of the site, enriching Ajanta so powerfully and so increasingly.

This enrichment also reflects the fact that the workers at the site had by now gained remarkable confidence in developing both the sculptural and painted forms in the decoration of the caves. Furthermore, both the insistent patrons and their planners were now expecting to achieve works of the highest technical and esthetic quality, something that had not always been possible in the understandable confusion and diffidence that characterized the inaugural work on Ajanta's excavations in the early 460s. The same diffidence, and lack of variety, can be seen when the very first ceilings and pillars were painted, starting in 468 and 469, in Cave Lower 6 and the porch ceilings of Caves 11, 16, and 17, for these were areas where the painters had to work in unfamiliar contexts. By contrast, the actual murals in these early caves presented less difficulty, for they could essentially replicate figures and compositions which the artists may well have done on the walls of structures in the cities.[23]

Of course, it was only from 475 through 477—a mere three years—that work was able to continue at the site with an ideal vigor. Then, with Harisena's death, the dreams of the past began to be lost in the restless nightmare of a threatening future. It was, of course, in this environment of nightmare, that the fourteen dedications of 478 were anxiously achieved, first by the site's "Vakataka" establishment, where all involvement by the original patrons ended by mid-478 and then a few months later by the unready Asmaka patrons, who finally had to leave the site at the end of that same year. By then, the emperor's great Cave 1—never brought to life—would have been virtually forgotten.

The only image actually being revealed in 475 was, in fact, the image in Cave 1, for the emperor alone of all the patrons now active had been able to continue his excavating program right up to the Hiatus.[24] At that point, in 471, just before the Hiatus started—just before a serious conflagration affected the region—his shrine chamber was roughly half exposed, even though the Hiatus had started before the Buddha image itself was begun. Probably because he got

[23] For a list of suggested painting dates, see Chronology of the Paintings at Ajanta.

[24] The local king's caves 17, 19, and 20 continued right up to the Hiatus, but then, due to the Asmaka victory, had to be abandoned.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

this "headstart" and surely also because of his prerogatives as emperor, his was the only image completed in the site's second "renaissance"—that incredibly productive period which lasted from 475 through 477.[25] But, because of his sudden death, he did not get it dedicated; so it is omitted from our list of excavations still underway in 478. It is sad to think—for Ajanta was essentially dependent upon his approval and his support—that he would never receive the that he so richly deserved.

Although after Harisena's death the work on all of the images in the caves along the main ("Vakataka") stretch of the scarp is highly expedient, anxiously reflecting the new political situation, this expediency is far less evident in the main hall and in its highly developed lower left wing (26LW) at Ajanta and in the impressive Asmaka donations at Aurangabad. Since the main image and the elaborate stupa in Cave 26—to say nothing of the superb carvings over the colonnade—were largely completed in the stable context of 477, their high quality is understandable.[26] But the same high quality characterizes the remarkably fine images which Buddhabhadra's workers were completing in Cave 26's ambulatory in the following troubled year; and the similarly fine carvings in the Aurangabad Caves 1, 3 and 4A were also completed in this same year—478—without any apparent undue haste and anxiety—even though the very speed with which the work was accomplished suggests an underlying urgency.

Indeed, it is evident that, from the point of view of Buddhabhadra and his associates that the situation was critical, even though this is only evident from the hastiness of the ongoing work in their less important caves. When we see the lavish care that Buddhabhadra expended on the Dying Buddha, the Temptation scene and the superb panels at the front of the opposite ambulatory, it is clear that they did not expect the actual crisis to come so soon or so suddenly, nor imagine that when the "notice of eviction" was pronounced upon them late in 478, it would be carried out within the next few weeks—possibly even within the next few days.[27]

---

[25] 478 was also "incredibly productive" but under the rule of expediency and—at least in the "Vakataka" caves—of desperation.

[26] See discussion Chapter # 12.

[27] For a clear example of a final rush, see the analysis of Cave 21 in Chapter # 12.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Thus, the needs of war suddenly compromised the Asmakas' self-aggrandizing pious energy. By the end of 478, Asmaka support for the caves at the site's western extremity had dried up. It had dried up totally, probably as the result of a decisive cutback of funding from the capital, which now had more immediate concerns in mind than getting the caves done. Thus, having given the order, the Asmaka authorities apparently left Buddhabhadra and his associated patrons a very brief time only, to finish what they could.[28] If the long-established Vakataka patrons had left, without looking back, by the middle of 478, the now dominant Asmaka patrons left, with more honor but with hardly more privilege, at the end of that same terrible year.

By 479, a host of the "uninvited" started to take over the orphaned excavations, putting their myriad votive images of Buddhas helter-skelter on any caves (and on only those caves) in which the shrine Buddha had been dedicated.[29] All concern for the original programs of decoration was now truly a thing of the past. Instead, these new donors, mostly the resident monks left at the site with nowhere else to go, hurried to choose locations for their intrusions close to the main Buddhas, or where the light was good, or where their donations would be highly visible, or where the walls had been previously smoothed, or where the plastering of the wall surface had already been done.

This pious invasion was totally careless of the restrictive covenants of the past. Up until the middle of 478—or until the end of that year in the case of the ruling Asmakas—the site had been a totally exclusive domain, tightly controlled by its essentially courtly patronage. The former elite patrons not only kept a strong discipline over the developing placement of the different caves, but just as in a rich mafia housing development, they kept everyone else out. Not a single "intrusive" image, no matter how unobtrusive, was ever put on or in or between or near any of the exclusive caves underway in Ajanta's heyday; and this was true even when so many of these same patrons' caves lay abandoned during the Recession, and when the

[28] I say "and associated patrons" because it seems likely that the responsibility (and the expense) was shared, even though Buddhabhadra appears to have been himself in charge of the development of the whole western complex.

[29] For the special case of Cave 22, see Chapter # 13.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

area must have been in turmoil during the conflagration of the Hiatus. This is remarkable, and is perhaps not what the Buddha would have ordained; he may have preferred the more generous sense of community which informed Ajanta's earlier phase.[30] However, Ajanta's ultimate "elitism" is a fact, and reflects the ultimately erosive self-indulgence of which Bakker speaks.[31]

Schopen first pointed out that the vast majority of the donations made at the site were made by monks, "tentatively (placing) them in the 6th century, meaning that they are not likely to be later than that."[32] However, quite apart from problems created by such a generous dating, he did not take account of the fact that the site's inscriptions divide into two distinct groups, differentiated by both their purpose and their date. The first are five "programmatic" inscriptions (to use Cohen's term), which range in date from 471 to 478, and refer to the creation and finally the dedication of whole caves: 17, 20, 16, 4, and 26 as actually inscribed.[33] All of the others are "intrusive" inscriptions, belonging to Period of Disruption, which I have previously dated to 479–480, although to be more specific it probably began in the Vakataka caves a bit earlier—at the moment of the "Vakataka" patrons' exodus in mid-478.

Although the great majority of intrusive donations were either not inscribed or else had painted records which have been washed or eroded away, many do remain. Cohen, in studying the intrusive records has found that "36 were made by monks, 7 by lay disciples, and the remaining 14 are of indeterminate origin."[34] Such an intense concentration of new activity, its urgent character, and the fact that it ended with surprising abruptness, illuminate the changed, and fragile, situation of the site in the Period of Disruption. It also allows us to conclude that most of the monks who made these donations must have been resident at the site, for these difficult years were ones in which people were not coming *to* the site, but instead were

[30] Ajanta Cave 10, for instance, records "the gift of a wall" and "the gift of the façade" by separate patrons. Of course there may have been other such inscriptions no longer extant, especially if painted.

[31] Bakker 1997, 44.

[32] Schopen, G., "Mahayana in Indian Inscriptions".

[33] Cohen and I hold different views on the Cave 20 inscription, but this does not affect its "programmatic" character.

[34] Cohen 1995, 171.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

anxiously leaving it, and invoking the Lord of Travellers to guide them on their way.[35]

The abruptness with which intrusive donative activity ends at the site is a circumstance confirmed in the shrines and halls of cave after cave at Ajanta. The situation in Cave 26 is typical. There are no unfinished intrusions on the façade, which was filled up first by these eleventh-hour merit seekers, just as they filled up all of the most desirable locations in the ambulatory, while their work was able to go on without serious interruption. But in the lowest priority areas—that is, in the remaining locations which they were filling up last—no less than twelve images remain in various states of incompletion. Obviously, no one received merit from these unfinished works—ritually they were as dead as a shrine where the Buddha image did not get dedicated. Yet some of them could have been painted in a matter of hours and others finished by the carvers in a day or two.[36] Instead, all this work and hope was for nothing. And this same situation is duplicated on the shrine walls of Cave 4, the low priority front walls of the hall and porch of Cave Upper 6, and at many points inside Cave 22.

This is obviously a response to an immediate crisis; donors do not leave their work unfinished if they can, no matter how expediently, rush them to a conclusion and thus to dedication. We can only believe that, throughout the site, workmen just did not show up on that crucial morning of January 1, 481. It appears that they had taken their valuable tools home with them; perhaps they always did this, for no intact implements have ever been found at the site.[37] They may very well have heard the night before that the Asmaka armies were coming over the hill, perhaps down from the very "viewpoint" from which John Smith, according to tradition, was searching for tigers roughly thirteen-hundred and forty years later.

As I have suggested earlier, this final moment of crisis at the site may have been the very point at which the Asmakas finally estab-

[35] For the Litany scenes showing Avalokitesvara as Lord of Travelers, see Volume III.

[36] It is hard to judge about paintings, since so many are lost, but we can assume that certain caves or relevant portions of caves were earlier all filled up with intrusions, before the crisis occurred that they had no room for others. For instance, Cave 2, 19, and the façade of Cave 26.

[37] On the other hand pieces of broken chisels were commonly used as effective wedges to secure the wooden inserts in door latches and in similar contexts (see Chapter 3 of this Volume).

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

lished their claim to the region through force of arms. For even though the Asmaka's virtual "Declaration of Independence" in mid-478 may have satisfied their own egos and aspirations, we can hardly believe that the newly enthroned Sarvasena III took it sitting down, even though, as his aged counselor complained (Ryder 1927, 200), he was "somewhat inattentive to administrative duty"—hardly a virtue when the whole empire was in jeopardy. So we must assume that a conflict occurred. In fact, just as Dandin says, Anantavarman (= Sarvasena III) "mobilized for offense the moment his boundary was violated"—the likely boundary referred to obviously being that of his rebellious "feudatory" Risika. This may very reasonably be the cause of the sudden surcease of all intrusive patronage on that fateful December 31st 380, immediately after which the Asmakas indulged themselves in the first course of the larger feast of conquest which they were planning.

Alternatively, instead of separating the Asmaka conquest of the Ajanta region into a separate "mini-campaign", we might see it as the first territorial takeover in the course of the larger campaign which was being developed under the instigation of the Asmakas; for the Asmaka sovereign's greed did not stop with his consolidation of his hold over the southern portion of Risika, in which Ajanta lies.[38]

Although it may have been a year or two before the invitations to the tempting banquet had been received and accepted, the Asmaka sovereign had called many other hungry feudatories to partake of the rich Vakataka offerings laid out before them. Meanwhile, back at the Vakataka court, and in the Vakataka lands, things were in bad shape. Continuing the pernicious ministrations of the Asmaka "mole"—the (soi-disant)"exiled" son of the Asmaka minister himself) "poisoners and other plotters, in the pay of the lord of Asmaka, destroyed Anantavarman's (= Sarvasena III's) picked solders and debilitated his army by many devices. . . . The strong killed the weak. Thieves stole the wealth of the wealthy. The paths of crime were free and frequented. . . . Greed stalked through the impoverished households."[39]

---

[38] I suggest that the campaign was only to conquer southern Risika, because the north may have been under the control of Maharaja Gomika at that time; see Thalner inscription (Mirashi 1982, # 7) Gomika may have been the same "king of Risika" mentioned in the Dasakumaracarita, who joined in the great insurrection. For discussion see Chapter 15 of this Volume.

[39] Needless to say, such descriptions, which go on and on, are "literary" exaggerations, but do give some idea of the breakdown of imperial control.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

The Ajanta region may have been directly in the path of the Asmaka forces as they and their allies moved northward to confront Sarvasena III in the field; at least this is what the Dasakumaracarita suggests. By this time—the Ajanta region having perhaps already been taken over—the opposing forces gathered, and as the tension mounted, met "on the bank of the Nerbudda" to the north.[40] Significantly, the most direct route from Asmaka to the Narmada would be through Risika. Whether or not we wish to link Ajanta's sudden breakdown of the intrusive patronage so specifically to the passage of the Asmaka forces, the dark clouds were now clearly gathering in all their fullness over this part of the empire. Shortly after the meeting on the Narmada, according to the Dasakumaracarita, the ineffectual new Vakataka emperor "became mincemeat, because he despised political science".[41] By this time, it seems clear, Ajanta was virtually dead, a victim of the mounting turmoil.

As we might expect, the Asmaka king's ultimate plan (Ryder 1927, 215), after gathering his friends together, was to "swallow the whole plunder" for himself. "Thus he baited all the vassals into a ruinous squabble". Then, having established his own dominance through such divisive treachery ". . . he faced about and reduced the entire realm of Anantavarman (= Sarvasena III)". However, although he may have swallowed the whole empire, or most of it, he could not keep it down. It soon broke into its constituent pieces, as if the once-overflowing pot—the purnaghata—which the great Harisena, with his own hands, had so skillfully molded, had suddenly fallen apart. With this shattering of the remarkable whole, the rich world of central India suddenly fell into a chaos of newly independent powers, released (either painfully or productively) from the authority of a single overlord.

This explains the sad end of patronage at the great site. However, even if intrusive donative activity, at the mercy of the threatening world, ended so abruptly at the end of 480, this does not mean that the resident monks suddenly left. Indeed, where were they to go, when things were boiling up, rather than cooling down? It is clear that many of the cells remained occupied for at least a few years

[40] Ryder (1927) page 213.
[41] Ryder (1927) page 214. For a more detailed discussion of the Visrutacarita, see Chapter 4 of this Volume.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

after 480, suggesting some local support for the monks; but it was surely minimal.[42] Then, if my suggestions are correct, rulers with a Saivite focus took over the region, with essentially (and happily!) no interest in the caves.[43] Understandably, the increasingly hungry monks soon migrated elsewhere, to more welcoming communities such as that under Traikutaka control at Kanheri. We can assume that many of Ajanta's displaced workers must have gone there as well, a migration that can explain the authority with which Kanheri's sculptors and excavators were able to work from the start.

By contrast, it is unlikely that Ajanta's workers went back to Bagh, for the site, limited in its expanse, was apparently already "filled up" by the time that consistent patronage at Ajanta collapsed.[44] Furthermore, Bagh appears to have suffered no "Period of Disruption", during which intrusions would have been added. This was probably because Anupa, unlike most of Harisena's former territories, may have remained more stable politically, remaining under the control of the Vakataka viceroy (Harisena's second son) until its control shifted to Maharaja Subandhu, who married Harisena's granddaughter.[45] The very fact that Maharaja Subandhu, in about 486, took an interest in the support of the still-ongoing establishment, shows that the site, unlike Ajanta, was still active; and of course this was appropriate, since Bagh, like Ajanta, was one of the great achievements of Harisena's reign. After all, through his marriage, Subandhu was the inheritor of the Vakataka power (such as it was!) and would become, in a sense, its ultimate restorer.[46] If Maharaja Subandhu

---

[42] See Chapter 11.

[43] See Malandra 1982 for the presence of an early Rashtrakuta control of the region, at least in seventh century.

[44] Some monks may have migrated there from Ajanta, for it is evident from the thick coating of ritual grime in the Bagh caves that the site was still active into the mid-480s (and probably longer) as the evidence of Subandhu's Bagh plate proves.

[45] See Spink 1990 and 1992. If I am correct, the Gupta prince Visruta of the Dasakumaracarita, was Maharaja Subandhu, the issuer of the Barwani Inscription (Gupta era: 486) and the related Bagh inscription.

[46] This is speculative, but is supported by far more telling evidence than the conventional assumptions that oppose it. Again, I am indebted to Professor Mirashi for the very foundation of my views. However, just as it is necessary to "redate" Harisena's accession to c. 460, rather than Mirashi's 475, if the late Vakataka world is going to fall into place, it is necessary to locate Subandhu's Barwani inscription to the Gupta and not, with Mirashi, to the Early Kalacuri era, if the foundations of the Early Kalacuri dynasty are to be connected with Maharaja Subandhu, as Mirashi himself has suggested. His dating of the Barwani inscription to 417, instead

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

was the grandson (in-law) of Harisena, his own grandson was almost certainly the great patron, Krishnaraja, of Elephanta. As the great emperor of the Early Kalacuri dynasty—the dynasty perhaps so named to minimize the onus of his Vakataka predecessors' defeat—he (or perhaps his son) moving eastward in his campaigns, took back many of the Vakataka domains which had been lost by Harisena's useless successor, Sarvasena III.

---

of 486 not only is denied by Bagh's contemporaneousness with Ajanta, but also destroys the credibility, which he seeks, of Subandhu's role as founder of the Early Kalacuri dynasty. See discussion in Chapter # 4 of this Volume.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

CHAPTER ELEVEN

UNDERSTANDING THE SITE'S COLLAPSE: THE "VAKATAKA" CAVES

Cave 2[1]

The reaming out of the forward portions of the hall of Cave 2 was already well underway when interrupted by the Recession at the end of 468. (See Conjectural Plan of Cave 2 in 468) The revealingly early disposition of the then-half-revealed interior pillars is clear evidence of this, for had a shrine been intended when the hall was started, the intercolumniation of the axial pillars would have been widened, to enhance the focus on the shrine. Perhaps even more telling, in cell R2 one finds a blocked-out projecting fitting in the B mode—an early and impractical type of fitting which was never used at the site after 469.[2] Not surprisingly, this old monolithic projection was replaced by a far more practical late D mode fitting, when work was taken up on the cave again, after 475.[3]

Probably because the cave had already been so deeply penetrated when work was first interrupted in 468, its excavation, continued after the end of the Hiatus, was almost finished by the time of Harisena's death in 477. Even the cells had been finished and consistently supplied with late D mode fittings. Only the shrine Buddha, begun in 476, still had to be completed; it is possible that it had been fully carved by the time of Harisena's death, but its painting, typically hurried, must be assigned to 478, along with the abortive

[1] For a dialectical approach to the development of the painting program in Cave 2, covering the years from 477 to 480, see "Do your own analysis" in Volume III: Cave 2.

[2] There is no stressing of the axial intercolumniation, meaning that the cave was started before its shrine was added to the original conception.

[3] Throughout most caves (such as here, and in the thin-walled Caves 1 and 26RW)) with B-mode or related C-mode fittings, these projections were intentionally left as strengtheners; whatever portions are in the way of the later D-mode fittings are roughly cut away.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

attempt to decorate the rear wall with both of the expected bodhisattvas. As it was, only the "Vajrapani" at the right got completed, while the corresponding wall at the left, like the walls of the shrine antechamber, got only plastered, as they indeed remained until filled with intrusions a year or more later.

Had the Buddha image not been started until 477, it would certainly have been a bhadrasana type, following the authoritative lead of the shrine image type introduced to the site by Varahadeva and Buddhabhadra in 477 and "copied" in all shrines (Cave 26RW, Aurangabad 3, Aurangabad 4A) done after this date by the site's established patrons. Furthermore the old-fashioned flying dwarfs above would have been replaced by up-to-date flying couples.

As it is, the Cave 2 Buddha image is surely the first at the site to have been planned in such a way that it could spread out comfortably against the rear wall of the shrine; for the concept of a shrine with a central image block (originally stupa block) had by now been given up, after the difficulties it had already caused with the too-constricted image groups of Caves 1 and 4.[4] Whether or not the anomalous shrine plan of Cave 20 (471), which allowed more amplitude for the group, was the source of Cave 2's composition, the new arrangement now became standard, while the general composition of the image in Cave 1, already underway in 475, was used as its model. However, its large bodhisattvas and flying dwarfs are now far more comfortably disposed, and now-expected devotees have been fitted neatly within the confines of the thronebase.

It is worth noting that both of the splendid subsidiary shrines at the rear corners of the cave, housing their impressive tutelary couples, were fully carved out in 477, shortly before the main image had reached the stage where it could be painted.[5] We know this because the "Hariti shrine" at the right rear was fully and carefully painted before the end of 477, while the "Nidhi shrine" at the left rear—the left side of Cave 2 always lagged a bit behind the right—

[4] Cave 20's image is also amply spread out, but this was surely not intended from the start, when it seems clear that the standard formulation with a central block was intended.

[5] It is conceivable that the main Buddha image was fully carved in 477, even though not yet plastered and painted. However, this would be surprising since, as the yaksha shrines (and other features) reveal, the plastering and painting was done immediately after the carving. If indeed the main image had been fully carved in 477, this work must have continued right up until the end of the year.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

had received its superb and dramatic ceiling design in the same year, even though the walls (to be rushed to completion in 478) were not yet decorated. We might wish to speculate that these powerful tutelary received attention first because of their great popularity; but this is not the way such caves were done.

It is far more likely that the shrine image did not get completed quite so quickly because, in normal course, the work on the complex shrine doorway, probably filled up with scaffolding, was in the way. Such work was clearly going on vigorously in 477; the doorway has close connections with both those of Ajanta Cave 26LW and Aurangabad 1, neither of which would have been started until 478.

Admittedly, workmen could have squeezed under or around the scaffolding, in order to continue the work on the main image; but it surely would not have been practical to start plastering and painting either the shrine or its complex image until access was unencumbered; and of course the work in the shrine would have required scaffolding too. So it appears that all of this finishing of the shrine had to have been done in the changed world of early 478.

It is clear that, in 477, the painting of the Cave 2 ceiling had only progressed as far as the shrine antechamber, where the medallioned ceiling's character is consistent with that seen throughout the main hall. It seems clear, too, that the painting of the shrine ceiling was done quite separately, and not until 478, as will be discussed later. Needless to say, if the ceiling of the shrine had not been started until 478, the image itself, and the side walls of the shrine, with their multiple painted Buddha images (and two standing bodhisattvas flanking the inside of the shrine doorway) must also have been painted in 478. This would suggest that the Buddha image itself was still being carved at the time when Harisena died; but considering the fact that the carving of the yaksha and Hariti shrines was already finished at that time, and that the shrine antechamber was also being worked on in 477, we can assume that the main Buddha too needed only a few finishing touches with the chisel before being rather hastily painted in the following year.

It might be noted that, since the shrine obviously had the higher priority, the shrine antechamber, although its doorway had been carved, its ceiling already painted, and although its walls were already plastered, was not touched again until the Period of Disruption, when new and uninvited donors happily took it over for their own purposes, and turned it into a virtual "radiation chamber". Had there

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

been time for the original patron to complete it, he would have flanked the doorway with painted bodhisattvas, and put iconic scenes on the walls like those in Cave 1 or Cave Lower 6.

The painting of the ceilings throughout Cave 2, with the exception of that of the shrine, were all finished between the renewal of work on the site in 475 and the time of Harisena's death. With so much excavation work to finish first, it is unlikely that the whole interior of the cave (again except for the shrine) was ready for plastering before early 477; and judging from the consistently high quality of the ceiling painting, it was certainly not done after Harisena's death. Therefore it must have been started sometime in 477, surely continuing right up to the end of that year, when it stopped abruptly just as the shrine antechamber ceiling, along with the carving of the elaborate shrine doorway, was completed.

This is confirmed by the evidence of the immediately subsequent wall painting, which would normally have been started as soon as the area of ceiling above was completed, the plastering of both ceilings and walls having been done in a single campaign somewhat earlier. Although the ceiling painting throughout the hall and antechamber got completed in time, along with the decoration of the pillars of the hypostyle, this was not true of the wall paintings, which were also done in 477, but very slightly subsequent to the ceilings.[6] The paintings on Cave 2's typically low priority front wall were not started at all, even though the mudplaster would have long since dried. As for the already plastered side and rear walls, only that on the right was fully decorated. The Birth of the Buddha scene on the left wall was progressing well until Harisena died. However, starting only a few feet from the left front pilaster, the composition at the lower level is merely sketched on the plastered surface, work having typically proceeded from top to bottom and from front to back. Then, beyond that, the bare plaster was left totally untouched—at least until filled up by eager "intrusive" donors in the Period of Disruption, probably starting in mid-478.

[6] The splendid ceiling and wall decoration in the porch and in the vestibules of the porch end cells would (understandably) have been completed slightly earlier, but also in 477, as the developed character of the ceiling alone would confirm. The same mix is found under the painted surface of the porch pillars, the porch walls and ceilings, and the porch cells.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

The painting of Cave 2's ceiling, all accomplished in the vigorous period of activity when work started again after the war (= Hiatus) is typical of the (intended) program of the cave as a whole in both its lavishness and its discipline. Much of the design is architectonic or quasi-structural, with a now very complex gathering of living forms, including many human or quasi-human figures in the squares between the beams and crossbeams. However, on the main axis of the cave we find no less than six fine medallions leading insistently from the eave to the porch to the interior, to the shrine antechamber.[7] All of them have hook-holes (although the hooks are gone) for the hanging of garlands; the holes, sensibly, were always cut and the hooks inserted before any plastering was done. These six medallions all have suffered significant damage around the (missing) hooks, caused by hitting the fragile plaster with the poles used for changing the garlands.[8] This is important proof that the cave was actually used for worship, even though this worship must be mostly referred to the Period of Disruption, when the fully plastered but only partially painted cave was literally filled up by the intrusive offerings of later devotees.

The same must be true of the relatively modest but pervasive deposit of grime on the cave ceilings. This again can hardly have been the result of worship by the original patron, or by other devotees while he (or someone in his orbit) was still an active presence at the site. This is because we know that the cave could not have been finished and dedicated until sometime well into early 478; and by the mid-point of that same year the patron, either by fear or force, had been ousted from the site. Thus it seems likely that the changing of the garlands and the burning of the oil lamps must be largely referred to the Period of Disruption, when (in the "abandoned" Vakataka caves) intrusions may have been added, and worship started, as early as mid-478, rather than (as in the Asmaka caves) early 479.[9] And as we would expect, not much smoke damage would have occurred in this brief period, if indeed (as we might

[7] There is a seventh, slightly different, in the shrine, which has been discussed earlier.

[8] Such poles would obviously have had some kind of simple device at the top for adding or replacing the garlands.

[9] As noted before, the Period of Disruption (roughly 479–480) probably started in mid-478 for the Vakataka caves, by which time the now unwelcome original patrons had left.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

suppose) oil lamps were burnt for ritual purposes in front of the intrusive images as well as in front of the main Buddha itself.[10] There is nothing of the oppressing blackening of the shrines, and shrine antechambers, and hall ceilings in general, which results from the usage of Cave Lower 6 and Cave 17 for well over a decade.

It is clear that the shrine antechamber, like all of the rest of the cave except the shrine, was plastered in 477. This is because its beautifully complex medallion (which would not have been painted before the ceiling and adjacent walls were plastered) could only have been painted in that same year. This is not merely because it is identical in style (as are its quasi-structural borders) with the other medallions in the hall, but even more because (except for the painting of the shrine doorway) it was the last of the paintings ordered by the original patron for the shrine antechamber which ever got done. That is, although the walls and pillars were plastered in normal course, time ran out (at the end of 477) before these relatively last areas to be plastered could be painted. Instead, in 478, attention was rapidly turned to putting the finishing sculptural touches on the main image, and then plastering and painting the whole shrine area, as noted above. This could hardly have taken very long (at least if the carving of the image itself had been essentially completed in 477) but still one can see signs of haste. The expected hole for a garland hook was never drilled in this last, surely most important, medallion, while the medallion itself was designed and painted with a revealing hastiness. Although its central motifs, showing flying celestials, is very fine (and was surely intended to be so), the concentric patterns in the center of the medallion are put to shame by those in similar areas elsewhere in the cave—most notably of all in the "nidhi" shrine. Similarly, the framing borders of the shrine ceiling have a particularly hasty simplicity which would never have been allowed in better times; here the comparison would be not with the superb "477" ceiling of the "nidhi" shrine but with some of the dreadful "478" passages on the walls in that same shrinelet—even though those on the main shrine ceiling are at least more neatly done.

[10] M. Singh, Chief Conservator at Ajanta, has found the heaviest soot deposits on the ceilings of the aisles toward the right front (where there are no intrusions) and the least of all in the shrine! He has suggested that this is the result of air movement in the cave, or possibly its use by a later resident (e.g. sadhu) who burned a fire inside; but neither of us finds such explanations very convincing.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Even so, it is of interest (although perhaps not surprising) that the painting of the walls of nidhi shrine, showing devotees in attendance upon these powerful divinities, who it was surely safer to praise than to disregard, was completed in 478. Of course the Hariti shrine, with similarly attendant devotees, both carved and painted, was completed even while Harisena was alive. But it is perhaps surprising that the walls of the main shrine, in which the far gentler Buddha sits, never got painted by the original patron at all, being ultimately taken over for intrusions.

Perhaps because the painters of the nidhi shrine knew that the patron was packing up, they "got away with murder". If one had to choose the worst painting at Ajanta (out of a generous selection) the painted medallions of the fortunately hard to see rear faces of the nidhi shrine's pilasters would surely win this prize. They could have been brushed on within a very few seconds—a valuable saving of time, given the fact that the Vakatakas' world was getting very unstable. However, the more immediate reason was probably that the whole program was being done on contract, and at this point checks and balances were vanishing; that is, no one was watching, and the patron had either gone or, it was now certain, would not be coming in the foreseeable future.

Another really good example of a bad painting, equally referable to 478 is the large figure of (presumably) Vajrapani on Cave 2's right rear wall. Interestingly, like its expected counterpart on the right rear wall, work on it had been delayed in favor of the adjacent subdivinities' personal shrines. Again, this shows the importance throughout Ajanta of such yakshas, or nagas, or celestials, bringing the very powers of the earth, and the waters, and the sky to the site. Of course, there was originally no intention to downgrade the bodhisattvas, for the space had already been planned for them, and indeed, by the end of 477 had already been plastered. But when 478 came, neither had yet been done.

The bodhisattva Vajrapani—although perhaps slightly lower in the Buddhist hierarchy than Avalokitesvara—was given priority only because work on the right side of the cave had progressed faster than on the left.[11] It is quite possible that the scaffolding for the

[11] Although no vajra is visible (as also in Cave 1), the identification is fairly certain, since throughout the site Vajrapani and Avalokitesvara are typically shown as paired flanking images.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

complex pillars and the decoration of the front of the nidhi shrine was still up and would have made painting the expected (never realized) Avalokitesvara image on the left panel difficult or impossible. In any case, the bodhisattva Vajrapani, having been given priority and planned for the already convenient plastered surface on the right rear wall, was done in an inexcusable rush; any comparison with its beautiful counterpart and model in Cave 1 must have embarrassed the cave's patron, or the planner, even though they probably had many other more serious concerns at this difficult moment; after all, the painting of the main shrine itself still had to be completed. In fact, the moment was so difficult that the workers were never able to get the companion figure—the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara—painted in the similar already prepared space at the left. Nothing could better reveal the impact of this moment, toward the middle of 478, when time was rapidly running out. Understandably, the patron was now allocating his limited time—and perhaps his now-threatened resources too—to the hasty but adequate decoration of the shrine chamber. (It seems reasonable to assume, despite the mounting anxieties of 478, that the patron either remained at, or came to, the site for the dedication of his shrine Buddha; and it seems reasonable to believe that, after their almost frantic struggle to get their main Buddhas finished, that other patrons too were generally present at the ceremonies. In fact the common rush to complete the shrines alone in all of the "Vakataka" caves itself suggests that the patrons were—wisely or unwisely—remaining long enough to see the dedications ceremonies through.[12]

When we look at the left rear wall, where the Avalokitesvara image, following convention, "should" have been painted, we can see another moment of transition in the cave. The fine painting there, depicting the multi-imaged Sravasti Miracle, is clearly an intrusion, even if it now has no inscription, and of course may never have had one, even in its ruinous lower precincts. It surely dates early in the Period of Disruption, probably to late 478—for this was really the best still-unused location in the cave, and the new donors were very partial to such high priority areas. By the same token some new donor with more initiative than money or time grabbed

[12] Whether or not one could be an "absentee donor", and at what cost, is a question for Buddhologists to ponder.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

the eyelevel location at the right of the shrine doorway, placing the familiar series of "Eight Buddhas" there.

This Eight Buddha group was of course right in the way of the far grander (and also intrusive) "Thousand Buddhas" composition that fills the whole antechamber (except for the already occupied Eight Buddha area!), making a veritable "radiation chamber" of this powerful area. Needless to say, the slightly later donor could not cut away the previous Eight Buddhas—this would never be done. But it is interesting to note that he encroached so closely upon the Eight Buddhas' territory that the latter's inscriptions had to be worked in around the haloes of the adjacent figures in the later and larger group. This clearly allows us to conclude that the Eight Buddhas and the "Thousand Buddhas" are closely contemporary, both being among the first of the intrusions; and this of course makes sense, when we consider the importance and the availability of the shrine antechamber area, the walls of which, so conveniently, had already been plastered but still not painted when Harisena died.

Although the major unpainted areas in the shrine antechamber, so close to the shrine, were of course particularly desirable, the less fortunate or less prescient or less prepared intrusive donors, had to be satisfied by putting small images (generally inscribed) on some of the antechamber's conveniently flat pillar and pilaster bases (happily already plastered) or in other relatively undesirable spots, such as in the lower corner (close to the shrine!) of the equally intrusive but slightly earlier Sravasti Miracle panel; although no intrusions ever cover or cut away an earlier Buddha image, they could be put, as in the Miracle scene, over "unimportant" motifs, such as the lotus stems which support the miraculous images. A few limited and relatively undesirable or hard-to-see faces on the square-based antechamber pillars (already plastered)—were never utilized, donors opting instead for the long surface of the left wall of the hall; here again the surface had already been plastered—since work had broken off only a little more than a year earlier on the Birth of the Buddha scene. Here again any thought of continuing such a narrative was not a conceivable option for these late and uninvited donors; instead one or more of them painted and inscribed the "Hundred Buddhas" on the best stretch of surface, with another donor or donors adding ten more seated Buddha images beneath, while someone else continued with still more seated Buddhas all the way down to the still unpainted left rear pilaster.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Except for the dark and undesirable front wall of the hall, there was little usable wall space left inside the cave. However, another intrusive donor selected the very limited stretch of unused space at the right of the narrow courtyard to have an intrusive Buddha carved there; it was originally fitted out with small double doors so that it could be properly closed.

Although we know the names of a number of the uninvited donors who took over the cave in 479, and sometimes inscribed their votive paintings, we have no record of the cave's original donor, possibly because it was so hastily rushed to dedication in 478. I believe that it was Richard Cohen who first noted a strong feminine focus in the cave, notably with the Hariti shrine, and the Birth of the Buddha mural. It might be at least tempting to think that the sponsor of this courtly cave, so close to the great Cave 1, was one of the imperial wives. However, this is very doubtful. Not only was Cave 2 undertaken before the emperor's cave, but work on it stopped abruptly in 468, when work on the emperor's cave (by way of contrast) was able to continue vigorously. Furthermore, when work abruptly stopped on the emperor's cave with his death at the end of 477, the patron of Cave 2 was able to continue his efforts during the first months of 478, in order to get his cave dedicated, even though that of the emperor was never brought to life.

The honor accorded Hariti in Cave 2 lends some (even if slight) support to the possibility that the emperor Harisena himself was a Buddhist, or at least had Buddhist leanings, possibly recommended to him by his desire to please the considerable Buddhist community. It is just possible that he (or one of his wives?) may have had a particular predilection for the worship of the Buddhist goddess Hariti; for he is called Haritiputra (son of Hariti) in the Thalner inscription (Mirashi 1982).[13] He also figured Hariti and her husband, along with the "two nidhis" on the capital faces of the important pillars L3 and L4 in Cave 1; indeed these capitals were probably the immediate source for the carved groups in the Cave 2 shrinelets. However, it should also be noted that Dandin, in his Visrutacarita, emphasizes the Saivite connections of the family, and Buddhist connections not at all, while the evidence of finds in the Nagpur region makes the

[13] It should be noted that "Haritiputra" is an epithet that could also be used for Hindu kings; this in fact confirms the ecumenical attitude of the times.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Saivite focus of the family very clear. In fact, the staggering brick monument at Mansar (or, perhaps better, its later enlargement) has so many connections with Ajanta that I have suggested that it may be Harisena's own dedication—balancing his offerings to the Buddha by this stunning construction in honor of Siva, possibly ascribable to the years after he had taken over the domains of the so-called "Main Branch" of the Vakataka house.

Although a few of Cave 2's cells were already underway in 468, most of them were finally fully excavated in what must have been an intense burst of activity starting in 476. The uniformity of their shaping and cutting is due in part to the greater technical discipline of these later days, but also to the likelihood that they were all done by the same contractor or contractors, who had completed their exposure by 476, and then supplied them with relatively deep and neatly recessed (D mode) fittings. Apparently, by this time, the rear niches found throughout Cave 1 had gone out of style.[14] The significant wear in the pivot holes of the doorways suggests that use continued at least into the 480s, when all patronage had ended, but monks must have still been living there. The cells were consistently plastered, almost certainly in the Period of Disruption, when this amenity appears to have been offered to the monks, perhaps by local devotees.

Cave 4

In 477, Cave 4 was still very incomplete. This was partly due to its huge size and partly due to the time-consuming efforts that went into compensating for the damage caused by the collapse of the faulted hall ceiling sometime between 469 and 474. In 475, when a relative peace was restored to the site, "Mathura, the owner of the cave", apparently undeterred, took up work again.[15] Obviously rich and powerful, Mathura ordered the raising of the ceiling above the still threatening geological flaw, as well as the consequent adjustment of many features in the cave which the change in the ceiling level

[14] I have suggested earlier that some entrepreneur may have convinced the sangha that movable wooden fixtures—which he could supply!—were cheaper and more efficient than rock-cut recesses.

[15] See Inscr # 17; see also Sircar, 1959–1960, 259–262, where the inscription is dated (incorrectly) to about 525 A.D.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

necessitated.[16] It was surely in part for this reason, and perhaps also because work on nearly every cave at the site was being renewed at this time, with the supply of returning workmen not equal to the demand, that at the time of Harisena's death in 477 many of Cave 4's walls, cells, sculptures and other features were still being carved out, so that it had neither been plastered nor painted at this point.

Now, however, in early 478, the situation was critical. Suspecting—because of the anticipated Asmaka threat to Harisena's weak successor—that his involvement with the site would soon be peremptorily cut off, Mathura gave up all "inessential" work in the cave, and ordered his workers to concentrate exclusively upon completing the great Buddha image and its immediate context. In this he was only partially successful, for much in the area is unfinished; he peremptorily abandoned the final smoothing (which was underway) of the shrine walls, and time also ran out before the fittings in the shrine doorway could be cut, and the great (17') double shrine doors made and hung.

But the essential thing was accomplished: the shrine Buddha, which is a huge enlargement of its very slightly earlier model in the imperial Cave 1, was—even if expediently—completed. In fact, it was probably already carved in 477. However, since 477 was the very height of Ajanta's flourishing, the image would not have been painted until the shrine itself had been properly carved out; that was the rule, at least in the "normal" times prior to Harisena's death. The fact that it—and it alone of all the features in the shrine proper—was painted confirms the assumption that it was rushed to completion in early 478 so that the patron could dedicate it and get the merit due, before time ran out. The rush that he was in also explains the hasty and expedient dedication carved at the top of the image base, referring to the image, in Cohen's translations as the "religious donation of the viharasvamin Mathura" and assigning "whatever merit there is in it (to his) mother, father, and paternal grandmother—to whom belongs the principle share—as well as all sentient beings' attainment of unexcelled knowledge".[17] The expedient manner in

[16] Actually, the raising of the ceilings of the aisles was surely unnecessary, considering the narrowness of the span in question. One suspects that this was one of the many ill-considered decisions, good or bad, and often made by officials working far from the site, which have impacted upon Ajanta not only in ancient but in more recent times.

[17] (Inscr # 17); Schopen 1997, 61 and note 29 provides interesting data regarding

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

which the inscription was applied reminds us of the hasty record which Upendragupta, the local king, had carved on the left pilaster in the Cave 20 porch when, nearly ten years before, he too had had to hurry away. There was obviously no time to have a "proper" laudatory record, composed in verse, and extolling the donor's virtues, sent down by his functionaries in the city; indeed, even if it had started on its way, it could well have been held up on the now increasingly hazardous routes down to the site.

Confirming the evidence of haste which characterized both the work continuing and the work abandoned in early 478, it appears that the carving of the six colossal Buddhas which fill the antechamber, and attend upon the Buddha in the shrine, suddenly stopped as soon as Harisena died. At that point, in a kind of devotional triage, the decision was made to complete only those which flank the shrine doorway. These two were once painted; although much of the paint is now gone, the wheel symbol in the lowered hand of the left Buddha survives, suggesting the care that was taken in the finishing of these two "flanking" images. The beauty of the two devotees kneeling at the foot of this great standing Buddha sets the tone of reverence in the antechamber, while the "intended" devotee trapped forever in the rough block of stone beneath the Buddhas on the right wall amplifies the poignancy of our loss.

Although the patron managed to finish these Buddhas which immediately attend the entrance to the shrine, the two great standing Buddhas on the left wall, by way of contrast, had nothing but traces of what appears to be a thin wash covering them. As for the very unfinished standing Buddhas on the right wall, they were merely abandoned in mid-course. This is in fact a benefit for scholars, since these huge half-cut images clearly reveal the manner in which they were being released from the rock. Even so, we can see the subtlety in the disposition of the six huge figures. Their comforting hands, lowered in the varada mudra, at the very eye level of devotees coming into the antechamber, literally push their promise of compassion upon all who attend them. At the same time, the Buddhas on either side, with the slightest turning of both body and face, delicately direct their energies toward the huge image in the shrine, just as the beau-

---

inscriptions referring to donations for parents, but the Cave 4 patron's inscription is unusual in terms of the reference to the grandmother.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

tiful bodhisattvas painted at either side of other doorways at the site seemingly collect and then, turning toward the cave's axis, direct the worshippers' focus inward toward the shrine. Thus all such great attendant figures both retain their integrity, collect the devotees' devotion, and intimately pass it on to the final focus of attention deep in the heart of the cave. That the powerful arrangement was carefully planned is evident when we realize that the poses of the towering images on either wall are intentionally mirrored with this in mind. The four Buddhas are not cast in the same mold, as would have been the case, if they had been carved according to a single formula: instead, the poses of the two at the left are subtly turned, by a curve of the hips leftward, toward the shrine, while those at the right, by a curve of the hips rightward, are similarly disposed. Even the lowered hands are slightly adjusted in the same way, at the left and at the right, effecting the same silent impact.[18]

It is unlikely that these six standing "Buddhas of the past" attending upon the "historical Buddha" in the shrine, were started before 477, because both the antechamber and the shrine were still very much underway during the unhappy first half of 478. For very different reasons work would have proceeded vigorously both in the happy context of 477 and then, with time rapidly running out, in the harried world of the months immediately following. Significantly, this powerful new concept of six "attendant" Buddhas appears at almost exactly the same time among the late developments both Cave 7 and Cave Upper 6 and, not surprisingly, in one case (Cave 24 Court Shrine) in the Period of Disruption.[19]

It seems apparent that the huge shrine doorway had not been decorated at all before the time of Harisena's death, for in the exuberant context of those happy years, even shrine doorways were conventionally faced with loving couples, frolicking dwarfs, and beautiful guardian or attendant figures. The obvious shift to what is found here is very revealing of a world suddenly and drastically changed. The "T-shape" format which became conventional for most late doorways had already been renounced here in order to accommodate the large standing Buddhas flanking the doorway; so the introduction

[18] I thank Albert Hoffstaedt and Andre Kalden for these observations.

[19] The Cave Upper 6 group (with one Buddha missing) was plastered and painted only the Period of Disruption.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

of these huge flanking Buddhas, who literally force the traditional goddesses out of their accustomed positions at the top corners of the entrances, can be assigned only to a normal process of change, as significant new concepts emerged very naturally during the flourishing period while Harisena was still alive.

However, the surprising "new" treatment of the doorway proper, with its insistent and total focus on Buddha imagery for its "decoration" is clearly a response to the anxious context of 478. It seems clear that these multiple images were conceived to satisfy the increasing concern for making merit—or at least the new turning away from the things of the world. It is clear that these repeated Buddha images were rushed to completion and then plastered and painted along with the two high-priority huge Buddhas on either side of the doorway, at the same time that the great Buddha image itself was finished and dedicated.

As if to confirm the doorway's dating to early 478, if such confirmation is needed, it should be noted that the long lintel, with its sequence of "Eight Buddhas" appears to replicate its unusual counterpart in the right aisle of Cave 26, a composition sponsored by the monk Buddhabhadra himself, in 478. In fact, it seems possibly that the same artist, finishing Buddhabhadra's panel, was somehow lured (or ordered) to work in Cave 4 as well.[20] By the same token, the sculptor responsible for the brilliant series of devotees kneeling beneath Cave 4's Buddha image, may well have been lured to Aurangabad—as Mathura's powers of patronage collapsed—to carve the similar but even more startling series of life-sized devotees in that site's Cave 3. Being under direct Asmaka control, Cave 3 was still flourishing late in that same difficult year.

Shortly after Mathura and the "Vakataka" patrons had lost their control over their own caves—as early as mid-478—pious intruders took over, surrounding the porch doorway with carved and painted images. By 480, intrusive images were starting to crowd the more

[20] For the "Eight Buddhas" (actually seven Buddhas plus Maitreya) in Cave 26, see Chapter 12. Both the sculptural character of the Cave 4 group, and the fact that Maitreya is placed at the "wrong" end of the sequence, suggests that the Cave 4 group is a "copy" that in Cave 26, probably done by the same artist. This suggests that the Cave 26 group was at least sketched out at least a month or two before mid-478, to allow time for the Cave 4 copy, where the positioning of Maitreya is gratuitous, instead of responding to geological realities.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

forward walls of the shrine; not surprisingly, many of them were never finished, having been abandoned as the result of a sudden exodus at the very end of 480.[21] But this phase in Cave 4's troubled history is discussed at length in the volume on intrusions.

Cave Upper 6

When work began again at the site in 475, Cave Upper 6 must have been quite unfinished, especially at the rear and at the floor level.[22] It is clear that the shrine area had not been penetrated in the cave's pre-Recession phase, for bracketed pillars like those in the antechamber did not appear at the site so early; had simple "early" pillars been earlier defined at this time (468), the matrix necessary for the later brackets would have been largely cut away. It seems reasonable to assume that the antechamber pillars, whose "rearing vyala" brackets were probably suggested by contemporary structural forms, would have been roughed out soon after work started in up 475. This would explain why they are very different from the more complex and voluptuous later female brackets found in Caves 1, 2, Aurangabad 3, and at the entrance of Cave 26, all of which better reflect the exuberance of the last years of the site's consistent patronage.[23] The "primitive" character of the shafts is probably due to the fact that, under the great pressure of work in this area after 475, they were accorded low priority and never were decorated as planned; the unfinished character of these pillars and the associated pilasters, at the base level, supports such an assumption.

Although the porch and the hall developed sporadically from 475 on, the shrine antechamber was well underway by that time, and the shrine (being of the highest priority) had surely been penetrated by 476. Just as we would expect, the shrine Buddha with his now-

[21] For discussion of this precipitous departure, see Volume II, Part A; Volume I, Chapter 4.

[22] The main pillars must have been roughed out, but the capitals, with 3.5 ribs, like those of Cave 5, were almost certainly defined in 475 or after.

[23] Such brackets appear as supports in the palaces depicted in Cave 1 (Mahajanaka Jataka) and elsewhere. More complex variants appear on the rear of the first pillars of Cave 26; just as the Cave Upper 6 vyala brackets were superseded by female brackets in later caves, the Cave 26 vyala is put on the rear of the pillar, while the female bracket is placed on the front.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

necessary bodhisattva attendants was now cut from the rear shrine wall in the standard post-475 mode. The main image's rather conservative padmasana format suggests that it was surely being blocked out by the end of 476, with matrix being reserved (as the floor was cut down) for the now expected groups of devotees at its base. (The surprising circumstance that these devotees were never cut will be discussed below.)

Typically, the final detailing of such images proceeded from the top down. Thus it seems certain that the remarkably elaborate treatment of the throne back and of the complex groups of flying attendants, together with the attendant bodhisattvas, was defined during the site's heyday. The flying couples over the throne appear here for the first time in a vihara shrine—their presence probably suggested by the nearly contemporary celestials flying above the main Buddha in Caitya Cave 26. Still diffidently disposed, they sufficiently date the whole of this complex grouping to the exuberant contexts of 477, just prior to Harisena's death. They establish a convention followed with increasing confidence in late 477 and 478 in Cave 2 (painted but not originally planned), Cave 26LW, Ghatotkacha, and Aurangabad 3, as well as with even more intensity in images made in the Period of Disruption. At the same time flying sages are added over the bodhisattvas, replacing the once-familiar dwarfs; the dwarfs' projecting positions are typically taken over by the flying couples in later compositions.

But with Harisena's death, the patron of Upper 6 was assailed by the same pressures as the other Vakataka donors. Therefore, early in 478, his workers peremptorily cut away the projecting matrix which (we can assume) had been reserved in front of the throne base, out of which he had surely intended to cut complex groups of nearly three-dimensional kneeling devotees with the conventional late type of wheel and deer between.[24] That is, he had planned, when he began the Buddha image in late 476 or early 477, to have the same base arrangement that characterizes the essentially contemporaneous shrine groups of Cave 1, Cave 4, and the Ghatotkacha vihara. But he gave this up to save precious time and, having sliced

[24] The slight projection of the feet of the right bodhisattva suggests that the figure's position was planned before the throne base was trimmed back to an expediently defined (rather than straight) margin.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

off the projecting matrix, substituted an anomalous flat design. As a model for this he used, not surprisingly, the treatment of the base of the main image in the same cave's lower storey—an image which (although now out of fashion) he himself had probably sponsored ten years earlier.[25]

Having been put together so expediently, the resulting base design of the Buddha image is neither fish nor fowl. It surprisingly omits the now-conventional "nubs" (to cap the throne legs), even though they are an almost invariable new feature of all significant images beginning in 477, because the lower storey image did not have them. However, at the same time it inconsistently adds a "late" thrust element above the heads of the supporting lions, and treats the lions in a properly "late" way as leonine throne legs, whereas in the lower storey and in other equally early images they appear to represent "actual" lions. It also adds a misunderstood throne-cloth as a space filler, because that was the later fashion. Finally, it incorporates a sadly out-of-date form of the wheel, again based on that of the lower storey. Perhaps the sculptor who earlier carved the image in the lower storey was called upon to do this curiously related base, with its mixture of early and late features. Interestingly, just as the image in the upper storey hastily and inconsistently draws elements from the "model" in lower storey, the major intrusive images in the right front and rear shrinelets of Cave Upper 6 carry on the confusion by directly copying some of the main image's idiosyncratic motifs, as if they were lesser officials required to agree with and repeat what their boss has said.[26]

The point is that in early 478, the patron here in Cave Upper 6, like his other Vakataka colleagues, resorted to extreme measures to get his image done before time ran out. And having accomplished that he hastily plastered and painted it, "honoring" it with a limited area of paint on the ceiling just above. He also managed to get the shrine's swinging double doors hung, but in a most expedient manner, cutting their pivot holes in the still very rough front wall,

[25] I am assuming that the same patron was responsible for both the lower and upper storeys, which are integrally connected. The stairway into the Upper Storey rise from the front aisle of the Lower; and the Lower Storey pillars (and most notably the "extra" ones, were certainly added to better "support" the Upper Storey.

[26] The connections between the main image and the later intrusive groups is discussed in Volume III, Cave Upper 6.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

and added a conventional hole for a doorstop at the base. The rest of the shrine, although it was to be filled up with intrusions very shortly, remained undecorated at this point, while work on the cave's expansive hall, already deeply penetrated when work was interrupted by the Recession, was now cut off again while still very much in the course of excavation, particularly at the lower levels. Perhaps pressured by the sangha, the harried patron had put a particular effort into carefully finishing most of the cave's cells, supplying them with efficient D mode doorways. However, even some of the cells were by no means fully finished; the pillared vestibule to the complex Cell R3 is of particular interest because it clearly reveals the various stages in the definition of the fronting pillars and pilasters.

At the same time, the patron of the cave had put a special, and understandable, effort into filling his shrine antechamber with the most up-to-date iconographic innovation at the site: namely six large standing Buddhas, probably representing the Six Buddhas of the Past, associated with the shrine's Sakyamuni, the present or historical Buddha. Similar configurations, started at approximately the same time—apparently in 477—are found both in Cave 4's antechamber and cut from the previously unfinished shrine walls of Cave 7. However, just as in the case of the group in Cave 4, time ran out before the whole group could be completed.

Since this impressive group in Cave Upper 6 is intimately connected with the intrusions added to the antechamber very slightly later, they have been discussed at length elsewhere.[27] The situation will be only briefly reviewed here. It is clear that the sculptors working on each triad began the two outer images first, putting off the carving of the two central images until the others were done. As explained in the discussion of intrusions, this was surely a reflection of the requirements of scaffolding. By leaving the central figures untouched, the workers would not be in each others' way. Thus the carving of the two figures on either side of the shrine doorway (also defined in 477, but painted only later) were fully finished, as were the two figures located toward the front of the antechamber. But even though we can well suppose that the patron, despite the expediency with which he finished the main Buddha in early 478, kept at work on these great images too at that time, time obviously ran out.

[27] See Volume III, Cave Upper 6.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Even at the right, we can see that the intermediate figure was so rushed at the end that the expected little kneeling devotee beneath remained as nothing but a block of stone when the patron's time ran out. The barely revealed block, characteristically, was soon appropriated by an early "intruder" and converted into a little seated Buddha. The same type of "conversion" took place on the left, but here it appears that the sculptors of the two large flanking Buddhas were so delayed in getting the scaffolding down, or else so despaired of getting the whole group done, that when the Period of Disruption arrived that area was still blank. Then, understandably, it was soon appropriated by a group of new uninvited devotees, who filled it with their own intrusions.

By the time that the Period of Disruption started, it seems evident that the five great images had not been finally completed—that is had not been painted—by the original patron, for the same mix of thinly applied gray mudplaster appears to have been applied to both the great Buddhas and the new intrusions at the same time.[28] Even the famous kneeling monk with a censer painted beneath the front left standing Buddha was apparently not the work of the original patron, even though (because the adjacent carved devotee was made so small) he may himself have planned to put such a painted figure in the quite adequate space provided. The hasty painting of the shrine doorway, as well as the little painted flying figures connected with the intrusions panel on the left antechamber wall, must have also been done at this same time, along with the painting of the great figures themselves.

Cave 7

The image in Cave 7 had been expediently rushed to dedication in early 469, but at that point it consisted of nothing except the Buddha's body, a conventional early base with deer flanking the wheel, and

[28] Another browner mix was apparently used to surface the upper level of the large figure at the left of the doorway; the fact that this plaster also continues over part of the "intrusions" panel confirms the fact that the whole antechamber was plastered (and then painted) at the same time. The ceiling however (which might be of this same browner mix) was never painted, which is not particularly surprising in the Period of Disruption—see the porch ceiling of Cave Upper 6 itself.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

lions at either side. There had not been time to carve the throne-back, while bodhisattvas were also omitted, because at that time they had not yet come into fashion. In fact the whole shrine must have given a womb-like effect, appearing to be little more than a hole or a cave in the wall with the image at the farther end. (See Conjectural View of Cave 7 shrine at different stages.)[29]

After about six years, during which no work at all was being done in such non-royal caves, the site was flourishing once again, starting in 475. At this point, the patron (or perhaps his successor) understandably wished to upgrade this anomalous image, which may have been functional but was extremely unfinished. However, by this time ideas had of course changed; and, along with other developments, it was now essential to have bodhisattvas attending the image. Therefore, in 476 or even early 477, perhaps after some delay in getting a good master sculptor with everyone now vying for workers, the patron got the carving of the bodhisattvas, along with the expected flying dwarfs, underway.

The sculptor started at the top, roughing out either one or perhaps both of the dwarfs, and perhaps very tentatively shaping one or both of the bodhisattvas also. But then the patron or the master planner stopped him. A dramatic new concept was just making its appearance at the site in 477, and the patron was obviously eager to incorporate it into his shrine arrangement if he could. This iconographic innovation involved the introduction of the six-Buddha concept, being developed at the same time in Caves 4 and U6, as we have seen. Happily, because the deep matrix at the sides of the Cave 7 shrine had never been cut away, there was room for an impressive grouping of these new and highly significant attendants on either side of the old image. The only problem was that, even though the bodhisattvas could hardly have been more than roughly started at this time, and the flying dwarfs were probably also still only very generally roughed out, the matrix between them, on at least one side of the shrine, must have been revealed to such a degree that the two Buddhas nearest the central image could not possibly be made as large as the other four.[30] This must have been

[29] See Spink, 1985 "Ajanta's Chronology: Cave 7's Twice-born Buddha" for general discussion; see Spink 2004, 95 (7:14) for diagrams of the stages in the shrine's development.

[30] This must be an assumption, since the figures are necessarily re-cut. However,

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

a great disappointment to the patron but, as was so often the case at the site, he used expediency as his guide, and made the popular new grouping of six Buddhas anyway.

Although in 477, when this group must have been underway, flying couples were the newest thing, it is likely that at least one or both of the now somewhat outmoded flying dwarfs had been too much defined to be changed; so dwarfs rather than the more up-to-date flying couples it had to be. As for the intended bodhisattvas, work on which could hardly have progressed more than minimally, they were by no means abandoned, but were shifted to locations behind the throneback, a creative move sanctioned by a similarly expedient repositioning in the great Cave 16 image, underway in this same year.[31] The throneback itself, which had remained totally uncarved (though perhaps hurriedly painted) in 469, was now elaborated in the latest style. As for the throne base, its format was earlier fixed, but to bring it up to date "nubs", which never appear prior to 477, were rather clumsily cut from the still rough corners of the old base; they do not, of course, connect with the lions below as they should, but those lions were apparently originally conceived as "real" lions (as in Caves Lower 6 and 11), not the leonine throne-supports of the late period.

It seems evident that this remarkable new program involving the Six Buddhas of the Past attending upon the central figure of Sakyamuni had not been quite finished by the time that Harisena died, because that dire event obviously occasioned still another remarkable transformation of the shrine and shrine antechamber; and it was only after this new transformation that the shrine Buddha was dedicated. As was the case in all of the "Vakataka" caves which could be rushed to dedication by mid-478, the new program developed in these troubled months had to be expediently completed, but nonetheless the patron of Cave 7 busied himself with a remarkably innovative and impressive program which gives every evidence of an obsession to maximize his merit while time still allowed.

---

it makes sense considering the conventional way in which attendant figures were blocked out. See Cave 4 shrine right wall: unfinished Buddha group; Cave 26 ambulatory: a few unfinished groups at extreme right rear; Cave Upper 6, unfinished group in right rear shrinelet, right wall.

[31] Probably because of the authority of the Cave 16 image, such a placement for bodhisattvas becomes very common in main and lesser Buddha groups from 477 on; but is never found before, at least in carved images.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Anyone walking into the shrine of Cave 7 today and seeing the myriad little Buddhas crowding in between the colossal standing images, or seeing how the beautiful old (468) shrine doorway has been cut away and usurped by another host of little Buddhas, would assume that these areas, like so many other areas throughout the site, had been taken over by "intruders" during the Period of Disruption. At the same time it might be noticed that the image itself could not have been dedicated until all these little figures had been carved, since the same consistent layer of plaster and paint covers both the main image and the presumed "intrusions"; during the Period of Disruption "intruders" carefully avoided caves where the main image had not been completed and dedicated.[32] Of course one might justify this curious phenomenon by noting that the main Buddha, now being dramatically revised, had actually been dedicated ten years before, early in 469, and so was still "alive". But then one would have to ask why the patron did not rush it to completion (by expediently painting it) early in 478, just as all of the other "Vakataka" patrons did.

Thus, it just does not make sense to believe that the plastering and painting and dedication of the image was delayed past the middle of 478, in order to be coordinated with the finishing of the supposed "intrusions", if the patron had nothing to do with the multitude of latter images. The only thing that makes sense is to realize that these many *seemingly* intrusive images are not intrusive at all. All of them were ordered by the original patron of Cave 7 who, reacting to the tensions of early 468, apparently became obsessed with the idea of totally filling his shrine and shrine antechamber with a veritable litany of merit-making Buddha images. In fact, counting the already created main Buddha and his six Buddha "attendants", he sponsored no less than 219 Buddha images, mostly sculptures, five being paintings. There are 88 in the shrine and 131 in the antechamber.

When we study the careful organization of all of these figures, we realize that they have nothing of the randomly organized character of intrusions, but must have been added at the behest of the patron himself who, apparently compelled by a self-seeking piety, filled every nook and cranny of the devotional heart of the cave with these auspicious forms. They are clearly, even tightly, programmed, the iconic

[32] For Cave 22 as an apparent exception, see Volume III, Cave 22.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

patterning involving an insistent alternation between dhyana and dharmacakra mudras, with paired standing Buddhas showing either varada or abhaya mudra often participating.[33] Even the very obscure area over the inner face of the shrine doorway shows an insistently alternating sequence of padmasana Buddhas in dhyana and dharmacakra mudra: A B A B A B. The same is true of the equally "invisible" back of the beam over the shrine antechamber pillars: A B A B A B A B A B A B A. Since there was just enough room at the left of the latter sequence, a standing Buddha has been squeezed in, even though it has no counterpart at the opposite side.

Remarkably, the alternating patterning in these carefully programmed areas, is broken only in three (out of 88) instances in the shrine. In one, abhaya mudra was substituted when (we assume) the expected and relatively complex dharmacakra mudra broke in the course of carving. Thus at the junction of the right and front walls, with two images on the former connecting with three on the latter, we find the follow pattern, "A" representing dhyana, "B" dharmacakra, "C" the anomalous abhaya, and "S" standing Buddhas:

A B A B A
A B A B A
A C A B A
A B A B A
S S A B A

Because the shrine was so hurriedly and expediently reamed out in early 469, its plan is warped. There is much less space on the left side than on the right. Therefore the added images at the front left are fewer in number, but they still (with some standing Buddhas in the way) adhere to the alternating dhyana/dharmacakra mudra pattern.

In the alternating sequences of seated Buddhas near the floor, there are another two exceptions, surely ascribable to the same geological causes. They show, on the left: A A B A B A B A and on

[33] I have said elsewhere that standing Buddhas with abhaya mudra, because of their relationship with Upendragupta's central image in Cave 19, were disallowed by the Asmaka during the period when they controlled the region, but came into prominence after the Asmaka departure at the end of 478. However, if these figures in Cave 7 are not intrusive (as I once thought) but date from early 478, my argument would be hard to sustain. It is just possible that within the turbulence of early 478, the Asmaka's strictures on Ajanta's patrons were relaxed as they focused on their goal of overthrowing their new Vakataka overlord.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

the right: A B A B A A B A B. I do not count the fact that the two tiny Buddhas squeezed in on either side of the already defined main Buddha's halo, are both in the dharmacakra ("B") mudra, for this is surely for balance. In fact, various figures closest to the axis of the cave (as on the shrine doorway) appear to have been laterally rather than intentionally alternated.

The only places where the pattern (understandably) breaks is where single figures are crowded into the limited number of remaining available spaces, particularly in the environs of the colossal standing Buddhas. Indeed, it is interesting to note that in the desire to maximize the numbers of Buddha images, two little carved Buddha images somewhat cut away the bottom of the garments of the colossal standing images at the right, as if such hems were happily sacrificed to allow the insertion of yet further figures. On the left, two other little seated Buddhas occupy the still usable space beneath the lowered hands of two of the great images. It is such "violations", which include the "destruction" of the pilasters and lintel of the fine shrine doorway (carved a decade earlier, in 468) which seemed to confirm (at least for me) the "intrusive" character of this whole spate of added images when I was first analyzing the program of the cave. But we must now ascribe such depredations to the patron's own compulsive piety. Indeed, although most of the surfacing on the figures added to the shrine doorway is gone, the very same layer of plaster and paint clearly extended over both the great images in the shrine and the little figures so expediently carved beneath them; so it is clear that these "extra" images were brought to completion at the same time as the great images around with they cluster.

In the case of the huge middle Buddha on the left, carved some months earlier, his significance has only been enhanced (rather than compromised) by three tiny seated painted Buddhas added to his halo, along with one small standing Buddha in the more constricted space at the right, along with a "matching" small carved standing Buddha flanking the great image on the left. It is true that small intrusions, during the Period of Disruption, often cluster around a larger and more important image, but the situation is quite different here, where they are clearly intended to complement the great image and to add to its significance. It is the kind of thing that the patron responsible for the great image probably both planned and approved; by contrast, actual intrusions typically have no such balanced and supportive arrangement but are "self-centered". Furthermore, since

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

in the case of the small standing image at the upper left, it is clear that it was cut before the great image which it attends was plastered, and therefore it (and the added group of figures of which it is part) could in no way be intrusive.

It is witness to the patron's constantly enlarging vision (starting with the remarkable transformation of the outmoded shrine in 476/477) that Cave 7's main image was not completed and dedicated until all of the myriad "extra" images added in 478 in the shrine and shrine antechamber had been carved. This is because the same plaster and paint covers everything; the main Buddha's surfacing extends over the two little seated Buddhas squeezed in near the top of the halo, while even though the plaster and paint is much damaged, we can see that the six great standing Buddhas were plastered and painted in the same campaign as the little Buddhas clustered around them. Then, a few more images (those around the great middle standing Buddha) were painted on the newly plastered surface, a *horror vacui* combining with this compulsion for making the whole program as impressive (and as effective) as possible.

Thus we are forced to the conclusion that, in the shrine, the 81 Buddha images associated with the main image and its six colossal attendants cannot be considered as intrusions at all, for they were completed all together, before the main image could be dedicated (or rededicated) as the case may be. I assume that the old image, surely dedicated after being rushed so expediently to completion in early 469, was still "alive", even though it was so completely refurbished in 477.[34] However, this is a matter for Buddhologists to consider. Was it given a new and more effective "life" when it was refurbished—newly plastered and painted in 478? Did the addition of its new and elaborately carved throne-back, to say nothing of the many images around it, increase its power and sanctity? Or was the patron merely bringing it up-to-date?

Obviously, if these many "added" images are not intrusions, they cannot belong to the Period of Disruption; that is, they all must have been carved, plastered and painted before the middle of 478, by which time the main Buddha had been dedicated, responding to the same pressures as the other "Vakataka" Buddhas installed in the

[34] The situation seems to have been quite similar in Caves 11 and 15, where the main images were also refurbished.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

caves along the site's main scarp. This would mean that a single patron was responsible for all of the 219 images in the shrine and shrine antechamber.[35] Although the shrine's six large standing Buddhas (included, along with the main Buddha, in this count) were started earlier, and were probably fully carved by early in 478, all of the 212 smaller images—assuming now that they are not intrusions—would have to be assigned to the first few months of that troubled year. Given the pool of now-hungry and highly experienced workmen at the site in this troubled year, getting these little images carved and then getting them (along with the big Buddhas) plastered and painted, as well as dedicated before time ran out need not have been difficult.

It boggles the mind at first, to think that this spate of images, struggling to fill up every available nook and cranny in the shrine and shrine antechamber, are not intrusions, but instead represent what might be seen as the patron's obsession to multiply his merit along with his imagery. He was obviously turning his shrine, which was really already completed, into a virtual "radiation chamber"; and in his compulsiveness he did the same to the antechamber.

The patron did, of course, have to have had a degree of hubris, as well as power and money, to get all this done so well and so quickly. Indeed, his ambition led him to order the plastering of the ceiling and walls of the huge porch, even though there was now no time to smooth the rear wall properly or to properly trim the old and unfinished cell doorways in that area. (Progress with the chisel was notably slower than that with the brush.) The patron first ordered the beautiful decoration of the (now ruined) porch ceiling, which not only was influenced by but must also have rivaled that done in the emperor's own cave a year before. However, this program, at least in part, was ultimately abortive, for by the time the plasterers reached the roof of the porch entrance and the cave's eave, they were merely slathering the plaster on, covering over the still uncut medallion

[35] I see no reason to assume the presence of a consortium of monks—what Cohen 1995, 184–191 calls "collective patronage"—at work here (or elsewhere at the site). The fact that the "irrelevant decoration" of the porch was going on contemporaneously would seem to confirm that everything was in the purview of our single donor, for this would hardly have been the concern of a consortium. In any case patrons at Ajanta are more interested in acquiring (and then forwarding) merit than in sharing it.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

motifs which had been abandoned at the time of the Recession or even before.[36]

Although most of the cave's forward surfaces now got roughly plastered, the painters did nothing more here than expediently paint the faces of the porch pillar capitals. At the same time, the right rear wall was painted with a ruinous narrative scene, far more visible when described convincingly long ago as scenes from The Birth of the Buddha (Yazdani 1946, 14–15).[37] This was clearly part of the original patron's desperate attempt to get his cave fully, even if expediently, decorated; we are reminded of similar eleventh hour efforts on the part of the patron of Cave 2.[38] However, most of the "Vakataka" patrons spent the troubled early months of 478 on more "serious" iconic concerns; but then most of those other "Vakataka" patrons limited their efforts to completing the main image and its context alone, whereas the Cave 7 patron either had more time or more money or more clout and used his powers to somehow get his whole still unfinished cave at least expediently completed. Nonetheless, except for the creation of the beautiful ceilings (not only of the porch but of the shrine and shrine vestibule) he too had to give up in the end.

By contrast with the Birth of the Buddha on the right wall of Cave 7, the left rear wall of the porch appears to have been largely taken up with hieratic representations of at least two bhadrasana Buddhas, much ruined (as was the Birth of the Buddha) by the effects of sadhus later using the porch for residence and cooking.[39] By contrast with the narrative on the right, this would appear to be intrusive; a now illegible inscription must have been a donative record

[36] The carver's medallion design, sketched (typically) in red remains uncut in the extreme right "bay"; a more ambitious projecting medallion was to be carved in the next bay, but was hastily covered over with plaster (as was the other) in 478. The second bay was more important, being one of the impressive paired entrances of the cave as it was originally conceived.

[37] An illegible painted inscription (Inscr # 20) could once be seen on the right wall. Cohen states: ". . . this record conceivably either labeled the figures or was a verse pertaining to the adjacent action".

[38] In Cave 2's nidhi shrine the wall paintings are hardly iconic; but they must have been intended as providing an appropriate context for the two great carved figures therein. Such "inessential" work was common in the Asmaka caves in 478, but there the pressure was much less, notably in the Cave 26 complex, and even in Cave 21.

[39] Cave 11's porch was smoked up for the same reason; there we find a few Saivite symbols painted on the wall.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

(Inscr # 21). This is in fact the only extant intrusion in the cave, and the only intrusive inscription. The only other place where there might have been an intrusion would be on the projecting left wall of the porch; but this is a highly exposed position, and if there were any painting there is has long since weathered away.

It is of particular significance that in this whole complex of carved Buddha images, one never finds a single example of the bhadrasana type, which rapidly became the image of choice during the Period of Disruption, following the creation of the main images in the prestigious Caves 16 and 26 in 477–478. Although, early in the Period of Disruption one finds only larger images of this authoritative type, by 480 dozens of smaller bhadrasana figures were being carved, scattered throughout the intrusions of Cave 4, Cave Upper 6, Cave 19, and Cave 26. But, notably, there are no bhadrasana figures among the 212 small images in Cave 7. This almost certainly means that work in the shrine/shrine antechamber had already stopped by 480, and lends support (even if not certain proof) to the conclusion that all of the carved Buddha imagery had in fact been completed before the patron was forced to leave the site.

Add to all such evidence, it is significant to note that there is not a single donative inscription found in connection with any of the 212 "added" figures; even noting the extensive surface losses, one could reasonably expect some evidence of damaged painted records or possibly even an incised record, if these images were the donations of a number of different "intrusive" devotees. Indeed, the evidence in this regard argues for a single donor in any case, for it is hard to explain the presence of the smooth panel under the fine Sravasti Miracle in the antechamber except for such a purpose, particularly since it is specifically differentiated from the fully-filled scene on the right.[40] We can well believe that, like the similar panels under the great Buddhas added to the façade of Cave 9, this once had a painted inscription, long since worn away or (in this case) dissolved by the action of the debris which settled in the cave.

We might also note that since all of these 212 added images were fully finished, and all available room for any additions had already been taken, there is nothing here which parallels the situations in

[40] It may be significant that the (presumed) inscription, though placed on our left, would have been on the main Buddha's proper right.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Caves 4, Upper 6, 21, 22, 26, or the Ghatotkacha vihara, where we can clearly see the evidence of time running out, and can ascribe the unfinished images to late 480. Indeed, the myriad Buddhas in Cave 7 do not even show evidence of any trauma caused by the need of the "Vakataka" patrons to stop all further work and flee in the middle of 478; even though this was certainly the case in the redecoration of the porch, described above. It seems clear that the Cave 7 patron—quite understandably—gave the highly significant iconic additions in the shrine and shrine antechamber first priority, and that these were already done in the first half of 478, even though the splendid decoration of the porch ceiling was still going on, and had to be aborted.

It is obvious that the finely painted shrine and shrine antechamber ceilings had not been done before all of the myriad figures were added to those areas, for in both cases, along the margins, we can see that the ceilings' plaster extends into areas which had already been cut away by some of the many little figures. This again argues against—if such arguments now be needed—the added figures being "intrusive". As we might expect, there was probably a garland hook at the center of the ceiling medallion in the shrine, for the breakage in the now-unfortunately-cemented central point clearly suggests such usage. However, it is remarkable that there no other hooks or holes for hooks appear anywhere in the shrine, antechamber, or porch—not even on the main Buddha's halo. Since, conventionally, such hooks were inserted prior to plastering, this might suggest that the patron did feel that he had to hurry; perhaps he told the workers hurrying to complete the painting of the façade areas to expeditiously decorate these more important areas instead—and not to take the time to insert any hooks.

It will be of interest to describe, diagrammatically, some of the major patterns which the compulsively added little Buddha images take in the shrine antechamber, just as in the shrine. Not only will this show how intensively programmed these groups of images are, but it will also show—necessarily—how adjustments occasionally had to be made because of the problems caused by flaws in the rock. This, in turn, will show how "flexible" iconographic formulations could be at a site such as this, where this rock-cut "text" could be amended for reasons of necessity or expediency. Buddhologists may all too often believe what they read, even when those texts are full of elusive interpolations, and even though one may not know when

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

they were written, or where, or by whom, or even why. At least the "text" of (or at) Ajanta's stone gives us far more "solid" evidence than any of these.

The paired Sravasti Miracle panels on the left and right side walls of the antechamber retain, as in the shrine, the emphasis on seated images in both the dhyana and dharmacakra mudras, along with standing Buddhas showing varada and abhaya mudra. However here, instead of an insistent pairing, the images are generally arranged in balanced patterns, which work effectively both with the rows of five on the left wall (i.e.: a a b a a; or a b a b a) and with rows of seven on the right wall (e.g.: a a b a b a a; or a b a b a b a). This insistent order, in the left panel, is violated only once. In the row of standing Buddhas, although an alternation between the conventional varada mudra and the rarer abhaya mudra was clearly intended, it would seem that the upraised proper right hand of the figure at the far left was broken during carving, and that therefore an expedient change to the varada gesture was made.

As in the case of the latter, which is the single exception among the 25 images (five rows of five each) in the patterned area on the left wall, not all of these sequences are "perfect". Among the 54 smaller images (seven rows of seven each, plus a row of five larger padmasana images at the bottom) on the right wall, there are two more "problem" carvings. In the seventh row from the top the third image from the left has an ambiguous gesture; it looks like the sculptor has tried to transform the proper right hand, which seems to be positioned for dharmacakra, into an anomalous abhaya mudra. It is only when we see the serious flaw at the level of the proper left shoulder, and note its angle, that we realize this must have caused the problem. The other "mistake", in the row above, must have been caused by a hammer and/or chisel blow, because no flaw is evident. Presumably, when the wheel-turning hands broke in the course of carving, the sculptor (presumably with the approval of the patron or planner) merely transformed it into a dhyana type, putting the dharmacakra image to the right, where the image was still to be carved. Thus the pattern is *a b a b a a b* instead of *a b a b a b a.*

We can also find two "mistakes" on the piously "vandalized" old shrine doorway, where in an ideal world one would have a Buddha with dharmacakra placed just below the beautiful (and fortunately preserved) salabhanjika figure at the right. But there is a serious flaw running down the right (proper left) center of the Buddha's chest,

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

which almost certainly explains why dhyana mudra was substituted. Then, where the old plain lintel was cut away, we find eight seated Buddhas in the following order: A B A B A A B A. Apparently a flaw, found when the fourth figure from the right was carved, caused the adjustment. The carving of the series must have started from the right; had it started from the left, this figure would have been in dhyana mudra anyway, and the mudras of the final three could have been shifted without any problem: A B A B A B A B.

These are all clear examples of the impact of geology upon iconography. The site is full of similarly broken but adjusted images, as well as other features. The common belief, derived from various assertive texts, that a broken image was non-functional and should be abandoned, has little relevance for Ajanta or its basaltic neighbors. Thus, as we might expect, the carvers (or the donors) were not overly doctrinaire when it came to such unavoidable problems. And if repairs were necessary, a good layer of plaster and then paint would mask many faults, either of the sculptor or of the rock itself.

Surprisingly, the carvers of the six large seated Buddha filling the left and right portions of the rear wall of the antechamber encountered the most problems of all. But the ease with which the sculptors faced such difficulties explains why the carver of the large padmasana image at the upper level of the left rear wall decided, or was allowed, to position the dharmacakra mudra so low that it touches the legs of the figure; he was avoiding a crack running horizontally at the navel level. It is true that the crack does not *look* very serious, but it was surely sufficient to make the carving of the mudra, with its complex finger arrangement, impossible, were the hands located at the normal level.

The middle padmasana image on the equivalent right side is particularly unusual, since it shows abhaya mudra where one would expect dharmacakra. Again, this may well be due to the latter's breakage in process, which might have made it possible to carve dhyana mudra as an alternative. The surprisingly low placement of the gesture of reassurance might suggest that the upper level of the image had been so fully roughed out by this time that the abhaya, which of course had not been planned for, had to be lowered.

Although only one other minor padmasana image in the cave shows this gesture, its use here might well have been validated by the fact that the main shrine image also—quite anomalously—originally showed the same mudra, the only instance at the site. Here

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

again, in the main Buddha image, a flaw appears to have been responsible, for the plane implicated in the breakage surely continued across in front of the stomach, presumably disallowing the expected dharma cakra mudra.[41] That the problem was already realized before the dharmacakra mudra for the main image had been roughed out is proven by the fact that a "hidden" block of stone (as in many old Kushan images) has been left behind the upraised (now lost) hand to better secure the abhaya gesture.[42]

Since all of the large Buddha images on on the left and right rear walls of the antechamber were (despite the necessary adjustments) apparently planned with alternating dharmacakra and dhyana mudras, one would expect that the pattern would be completed by carving an image with the dharma cakra mudra at the lower left, to alternate with the dhyana mudra at the lower right. And this was indeed probably intended, for when the image was planned, it is evident that the geological realities—involving a strong even if subtle flaw running down the right center of the torso—had not been taken into account. Although barely visible, at least to the unobsessed observer, the flaw would have made carving the hands in the teaching gesture difficult, if not impossible.

It is of interest to find that the upper right image on this rear wall sits under a naga hood, an iconographic feature unique at the site.[43] Presumably this represents the Buddha protected during meditation by the naga Muchalinda, so the dhyana gesture is appropriate, and was chosen instead of the more expected bhumisparsa mudra to keep the original alternating pattern. It is indeed remarkable (but I believe true) that no less than three of the mudras for these six Buddhas had to be adjusted when the presence of flaws was realized.

It is difficult to know if the Sravasti Miracle scenes on the side walls, or the group of six large Buddhas on the rear wall were started

[41] Although there is a small hole near the top of the break, it would have not been sufficient for a repair. It seems likely that the hand remained intact while the cave was in worship, but fell off in later centuries, possibly being broken off when iconoclasts damaged the face of the image.

[42] Although this gesture is unique for main images at the site, we must remember that this was one of the very first images underway, and conventions may not yet have been fully fixed.

[43] There is a naga holding a "casket" (?) over the shrine doorway of Cave Lower 6, and a naga protecting a small stupa on the façade of Cave 7, but other nagas are more specifically attendants, or objects of worship in themselves.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

first; in fact, since both of these areas were not only very desirable but were in locations prepared a decade earlier, they were probably underway at essentially the same time. If the margin motifs—notably the pilasters framing the six large Buddhas—extended into the recesses cut by the Sravasti Miracle panels, this would show the latters' priority; but since they do not, it seems more likely that the six Buddha panels were underway first. The images on the dark front wall (over the pillars), and on the rear face of the pilasters, were of such low priority that we can assume they were started last, as the process of filling up the antechamber was nearing completion.

The compulsion to carve images in every nook and cranny of the antechamber and of the shrine sometimes in a few instances broke the overall consistency of pattern. There is a single instance in the antechamber, where a standing Buddha is expediently squeezed in between the upper corner of the left Miracle scene and the imagery on the rear face of the left antechamber pilaster. Understandably, there are more examples in the shrine, particularly around the colossal images, where (as described above) there was a certain amount of "unused" space which the temptations of piety demanded be utilized as fully as possible.

We might finally note that the dark front wall around the rear of the shrine doorway was originally left very unfinished—with still-thick matrix—when the shrine was hurriedly excavated early in 469. At that point, had it been fitted out, it would surely have been in the B mode. However, if B mode projections once had been reserved they were surely never used and would later have been cut away when work on the cave was renewed in 475 and when, the shrine now being filled up with carvings, the doorway was converted to its presently deeply recessed D mode.

Cave 8

Cave 8 presently has no Buddha image. Being one of the first caves started—probably in 462—its planners may not have been sufficiently aware of the site's geological peculiarities, and as a consequence cut Cave 8 into an area with a very bad and very visible stratum of weak "red bole". When the cave was first begun as a simple dormitory, this was obviously a problem, but the excavation was managed in any case. However when, by 468, the new demand for

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

shrines, which at first may have been planned only for major excavations, began to effect minor caves such as this one, problems arose, since the offending strata continued right through the lower levels of the rear of the cave.[44] Thus it was apparently impossible to cut the expected monolithic Buddha image. A loose image must have been put up instead. Of this there is no trace today, although the fact that the shrine and shrine antechamber exist, and that the shrine doorway has fittings would seem to be sufficient confirmation that it was once present. Indeed, it would be totally out of character for Cave 8 *not* to have an image, given the fact that in all other viharas shrine Buddhas are either present or anticipated.

Perhaps because Cave 8, with its clumsy cell doorways, anomalous interior arrangement, and expediently arranged shrine, was accorded a very low priority in the competition for workmen and/or donor support, it does not appear to have been decorated during the phase of the site's flourishing, and was probably not used throughout most of the site's Vakataka phase. Even its most up-to-date door fitting, a B mode projection cut in the cell at the left rear in 468, just before work on the cave was interrupted by the Recession, shows no sign of use; nor were the more primitive A mode doorways ever converted, after 475 to the more practical D mode, as was done in so many old caves throughout the site.

However, although Cave 8 had seemingly been empty and abandoned for years, at a very late stage in its development (or really non-development) the whole central hall was thickly plastered with the characteristic red ground-brick plaster which is never found at the site before 477, and is used rarely even then. It is much more commonly seen associated with intrusions in the Period of Disruption, and at that same time is often used in plastering the monks cells—a curious feature of the late and troubled period.

The fact that the cells in Cave 8 were plastered in the same apparently single campaign along with the main hall might lead one to think that all this work in the cave was done in the Period of Disruption. But this is rather hard to believe, since the hall (although now in terrible condition) was also painted with apparent consistency at this same late date, while the presence of carefully organized holes

[44] Cave 8 has a complex development. Started as a simple astylar "dormitory", it was significantly expanded (and the shrine added) in about 466, just when work on the adjacent Cave 7 has been temporarily abandoned. Its development, and its connections with Cave 7's developments, will be discussed in a subsequent volume.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

cut along the top of the hall's walls (possibly for garlands?), suggest a care in planning hardly typical of that latter day.

Is it possible that some aspiring devotee—possibly the original patron coming back to renew work on his old excavation—decided to bring the cave up to code at the last minute, probably in early 478, when the urge toward making merit was so affecting the site? Although the work done was extensive, work involving only plastering and painting does not consume much time, not even much money. Whoever did this did not have to hire any excavators or sculptors, but merely had to refurbish what was already there. Had the old cave, which has a complex history in its early development, not been used as the site's engine room for many decades, one could judge better about what kind of paintings are now covered by oily grime or mixed in with the dust on the floor.

Cave 11

Unlike most of the "Vakataka" caves, Cave 11 reveals no particular trauma specifically attendant upon the concerns caused by Harisena's death. This is its Buddha image, although somewhat refurbished at a late date, had already been fully completed and dedicated at the very beginning of the Recession, in early 469, having been started, along with the attached stupa behind it, in 468. The cave was apparently in use as a residence by monks from 468 or early 469, at which point the "useless" old doorways were fitted out with applied pivot projections (A+ mode) emulating the newly developed B mode types. Furthermore, it must have been in worship since early in 469, when the image was hurriedly put into worship, along with those in Caves L6, 7 and 15. However, at this point, except for a certain amount of fine work in the porch, the decoration of most of the walls and ceilings of the cave had to be abandoned after having been merely plastered.

Being one of the first such images at the site—perhaps even the first undertaken, in 468—it is not surprising that the sculptors made a number of mistakes in the cutting. In various places too much stone was cut away, the most obvious instance (of a number) being in the shaping of the proper right arm; and thus was reshaped with mud-plaster (now mostly fallen) perhaps by the guilty sculptor himself. On the other hand, it is clear that the area under the proper left arm, which shows no such obvious faults, was conscientiously

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

reconstructed in mudplaster too. In fact, there appears to be a layer of paint under the new plaster "reconstruction", suggesting that at some point someone decided to re-shape the too constricted torso. The conclusion that at least here on the proper left, this was done well after the image was originally cut, is supported by the rather surprising fact that the halo also has two distinct layers of paint—the second, perhaps surprisingly, even less impressive than the first; perhaps the criterion was not esthetic quality but functionality or "modernization".

All of this suggests that the old image was redone and perhaps also rededicated at some date subsequent to its original completion; and since there was obviously no effort either to finish the rough carving of the shrine or to paint the waiting walls, one might assume that this refurbishment was done in a period where the focus was not only improving the cave, but in perfecting or honoring the image, with the specific goal of making merit from such an action. In other words, it would be reasonable to suggest—without too much insistence—that this refurbishment took place in those anxious months immediately after Harisena's death, and that it may indeed have been the last meritorious effort made by the cave's original donor, before he fled from the site. Such a situation would in fact parallel that in Cave 7 at this same time. It is less likely to have been done in the Period of Disruption, when donors were so focused on making their own images.

Then later, when the Period of Disruption started in mid-478, a host of uninvited donors took over the cave for their own pious purposes. They filled many of the available spaces in the porch with Buddha images, both painted and carved, as well as a large (inscribed) Avalokitesvara Litany scene, as well as a host of other (often inscribed) Buddha images on the already plastered (as of 468) but still unpainted wall surfaces of the hall.[45]

Cave 15

Cave 15's image is one of the four upon which work was allowed to continue briefly in 469, at the start of the Recession. Thus we

[45] These intrusions are discussed in Volume III, Cave 11.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

can assume that, like those in Caves Lower 6, 7, and 11, it was dedicated as intended. However, it was certainly not properly finished at that time even though, as with Cave 7's image, the then-conventional plan to locate it at shrine center had to be renounced to save time. In this regard, the cutting of the rear areas was summarily abandoned as soon as the image could be exposed, while the front left corner of the shrine (planned to be conventionally and expectedly square in format) never got properly shaped at all. (See Plan) However, even with these time-saving decisions, the image's thronebase had still not been defined when time ran out. This does not mean that the image was not dedicated in 469—after all, the patron had been given a special dispensation by the local king—but as with its sister images in Caves 7 and 11, the fact that it had not been properly finished in 469 may have provided its patron (or perhaps his successor) with the impetus to supply it with a meritorious refurbishment in 478.

It seems clear that this upgrading of the image took place in the hurried context of 478, not in the vigorous environment of 477, when work had in fact been renewed on the still unfinished cave, starting with the porch and the hall. Had the work on the shrine already been underway in 477, the workers surely would have straightened out its warped format, which haste had earlier ordained. (See plan) They would not have continued developing the original (early) centralizing conception, for that was now obsolete, and they surely would have carved the now-essential bodhisattva attendants if time had allowed—which it obviously did not. Or perhaps because both areas to the left and right had been quite deeply cut in 469 (or possibly late 468), when the plan was to define a conventional image block at the center of the shrine, they felt that this would place any carved bodhisattvas too far rearward. So the image, as it had to be left at the beginning of the Recession, consisted of nothing more than the Buddha itself, backed by a very large "early" halo with an anomalous "rayed" border, and tiny dwarfs converging from above, at either side, their farther legs lifted straight up in conformance with the originally defined margins of the central block, which as it turned out got only partly defined.[46]

[46] For a similar adjustment of the flying dwarfs to the confining margins of the originally defined central block, see Cave 11 and Cave 1.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Of course, as the renewal of work on the cave progressed in 477, no one realized that that was to be the very last year of Ajanta's florescence. They had every expectation of modernizing both the warped shrine and aborted image in due course. But now, in the hurried weeks or months of early 478, they had to do what they could as quickly as they could. Thus they managed to modernize the previously plain throneback by adding elephant heads and vyalas of the late (attended by a figure) type.

The thronebase must have been largely unrevealed when the first version of the image was "completed" in early 469. Now, in 478, it incorporates a somewhat clumsy pair of leonine thronelegs, between which a throne-cloth, of a type never found in such images until at least 476, hangs in broad loops on either side of a complex wheel.[47] The complex wheel, although badly eroded, was of the late type found in Caves 1 and 4, while the base's relatively narrow format, reflecting the constrictions of the intended centralized image block, may explain the unusual omission of the expected deer or of the now-desirable, but expendable, kneeling devotees. Tiny deer might possibly have been painted on the base, even though the surprisingly large lions consume most of the available space, reflecting the vigorous return of these once-essential adjuncts throughout the site in 477 and 478, where they now are honorific throne-supports, quite different from their counterparts crouching of their own accord in front of or beneath the earliest thrones at the site.

The quasi-structural "thrust-blocks" which usually appear over the lions' heads in 479 and 480 have been omitted here, as they are in the great (prototypical) image in Cave 16, but as if to make up for this, the sculptors have been careful to include capping "nubs" (to hold the throne legs) at the front corners of the seat.[48] It is interesting to note that these features (never found until 477 but quite standard thereafter) have been "squeezed" out of the matrix on the surface of the throne-seat, which (like the unfinished base) must have been still rough enough to make it possible to bring the revised

[47] For these various elements, see the chart: Development of Iconographic Features.

[48] Note that this image (like Cave 7's) includes the nubs but not the thrust-blocks, whereas Cave Upper 6's includes the thrust-blocks but not the nubs; both sculptors were somewhat blindly (and yet inconsistently) following changing conventions.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

image as "up-to-date" in this way; it is interesting to note that precisely the same thing has been done in the refurbishment of the old image in Cave 7.

Thus with its very late motifs, and its very expedient reworking, the revised image clearly fits into the troubled context of 478. This judgment is confirmed by the slack organization and execution of the limited amount of immediately subsequent painting on the ceilings of the shrine and shrine antechamber, while the painters apparently never got to decorate the shrine and shrine antechamber walls at all. Indeed, the very fact that they concentrated on these "significant" areas, rather than painting the main hall, is further strong witness to the fact that, immediately after Harisena's death, the patron took stock of the changed situation, and established new priorities. Since now, in 478, the plasterers were obviously in a rush, doing areas that had not been properly smoothed and not doing other areas at all, it is hardly surprising that they did not insert the expected garland hook at the center of the shrine antechamber ceiling. However, it is likely that this was now seen as inessential, because the harsher view of reality now current at the site may have suggested to the planner that even if the shrine got dedicated, it might never get used.

The shrine doorway, if underway in 477, would probably have been carved with a rich variety of motifs, just as the shrine itself would have been more carefully finished. But the doorway was not even painted, while, because the urgencies of 478 had now beset the patron, pivot holes were not even made to hold the double doors, which was therefore never be set in place. Although it had original been cut in the featureless (and early) A mode (probably in 467 or 468), and was therefore quite thin-walled, the doorway still could have been converted to the D mode—conventional in 478—if time or available funds had allowed in 478.

The traces of painting on the image are so slight that one cannot tell if there was one layer dating to 478, or if there is a 469 layer beneath; but of course the previous layer, if in bad condition, might have been cleaned off before the latter was applied. Careful analysis of the traces would be revealing; if there was no early (469) painting, it would probably mean that the image—not "properly" finished in any case—was abandoned before being dedicated at that time. This would be surprising considering the fact that this donor was one of the few allowed to work on his image in those first few weeks of the

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Recession; but the fact that all of these "permitted" images were done in a great rush would suggest that some kind of deadline had been imposed.

It is clear from the limited amount of painting in the shrine and shrine antechamber of Cave 15, and the roughness of some of the late cutting, that the old image, after being still under revision early in 478, was brought to dedication in a great hurry. As is characteristic of the work of this year throughout the Vakataka caves, the overall work program of the cave had been abandoned at this time. Had this not been the case, we could well imagine that, even if the old cuts at the sides were too deep to allow the now-expected bodhisattvas to properly flank the image, they might have been set in place as loose (wooden?) figures at either side, reflecting such "loose" additions as are found in a number of instances at Bagh.[49] But there is no evidence that such separate attendants were attached or set in here, even though attendant bodhisattvas were standard features by this late date.

As mentioned above, work had been taken up on the cave in this second vigorous phase of activity at the site, but apparently not until about 477. Such a delay may seem surprising, but when we realize that all workmen had left the site in the Hiatus, and did not return, often from places quite distant, until at least 475, it can be assumed that competition for skilled workmen was intense, and in this competition the patrons of minor caves such as Cave 15 may well have had to bide their time. For it was surely a tough "seller's" market at this time, and some of the "buyers" like Harisena himself or the great Asmaka monk Buddhabhadra, controlling the whole western extremity of the site, had impressive "capital" both in terms of funds and prestige.

The late renewal of work on the cave, starting in 477, when times were still good, appears to have been proceeding in normal course in the vigorous and untroubled months of activity prior to Harisena's death. Conventionally, work had started at the front and was moving without worry (innocent of the coming disaster!) toward the back. The surprising conversion of the porch doorway from its early

[49] A large bodhisattva with one smaller attendant was almost certainly plugged in on the right rear wall of Aurangabad 3; this seems evident from the position of the holes in the wall.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

outmoded form, dateable to 468, to something anomalously "half-modern" was effected by imposing a new "structural" lintel of a characteristically late (477) type on the old doorway format, where the lintel had originally been left plain for painting. The characteristically early tree-goddesses, posed like other such images made in 468, now are forced to bear what can be read as a palace or shrine roof-structure on their heads, which of course was never originally intended; indeed, the tops of their accustomed trees have been pruned (i.e. chiseled!) away in order to better define the new lintel. Probably at this same time (477)—since there is no evidence of work being done in the hall prior to the time when the porch doorway was converted—eight of the cave's ten obsolete A-mode cell doorways, originally defined in 467, were converted to the D-mode. Two of the old doorways, along with the porch doorway, had already been converted to an approximation of the B-mode, in 468, just before the Recession put a stop to all such "unnecessary" work. They must have been still functioning in 477, so their applied fittings (A+ mode) were apparently left intact at this time. By now, they are of course gone.

Over the centuries Cave 15 filled up with mud and debris coming down from the scarp above. I have been told by old ASI hands that it reached nearly up to the ceiling. Whether this is true or not it certainly reached up as far as the latches of the cell doorways, for some of them are still packed with it. Therefore, despite the great losses, it would seem from the slight fragments of remaining plaster, always high up on the walls, and generous remains on the ceiling that the whole main hall was once plastered. Although it would have been possible to have started the plastering of the main hall in 468, the whole cave must have remained devoid of plaster until work on the cave was renewed in 477, judging from the similarity of the mix and the mode of application in the hall, the antechamber ceiling, and the shrine ceiling.

Although time had run out before the decoration (plastering and painting) of the hall could be started in 468, in 477 the patron was ready again to sponsor what we can assume was intended to be an elaborately decorated interior. The care and the planning with which this work was initiated is revealed by the fact that prior to the plastering iron garland hooks were set in place all around the interior, close to the junction with the ceiling. There were originally a total of twenty such holders, all carefully and symmetrically disposed; most of them are now missing from the holes, only four remaining in place.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

It is clear that only the hall itself would have been surfaced just before Harisena's death, because work was going on in normal course, and neither the antechamber nor the shrine was ready at that time. Had things not gone awry, it seems clear that the shrine doorway would have been properly decorated and that the Buddha image would have been completed with the kind of care that time and circumstance ultimately disallowed.

The preparation for garlands had continued into the shrine antechamber, even though the walls there never got plastered. This was probably because the left side of the antechamber has very rough areas left, which (if hope had had its way) would of course have been smoothed and then surfaced. In fact, hooks were already put into three of the antechamber corners, near the ceiling, but (understandably) not in the front left corner, which was still extremely rough. Perhaps by this time—even before this final hook was inserted—the ominous year 478 had already begun. Thus, even though the main hall was now fully plastered, it was never painted, while even the Buddha image, rushed to completion in 478, had to be satisfied with nothing more than the hasty decoration of the ceilings of the shrine and the shrine antechamber, at the center of which even the expected garland hooks were never applied.

The two carved Buddhas on the cave's left rear wall, being intrusive, confirm the fact that the main Buddha image, no matter how rushed, had been dedicated, and that the cave was therefore "alive". It is very possible that there were intrusions—but of course painted—on the porch wall as well, since it is evident that this area, and the ceiling above, were once plastered with the ground red brick mix which came into wide usage starting in 477 (but not before). Although it is unlikely that the patron's painted program had been already started in the porch (since there is no such painting in the hall), this already prepared and highly visible location would surely have been attractive to the new donors in the Period of Disruption. However, there is no proof that intrusions were ever put in this area; and in fact, the absence of significantly disposed hooks or hook-holes in the wall would better argue that the plastered wall was left plain.

Cave 16

Although Cave 16 was the Prime Minister's own dedication, it had a very troubled history. This will be discussed at length in a later

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

volume. For the present, our concern is to show how Cave 16, like most of the other "Vakataka" caves, shows an immediate and traumatic response to the sudden death of the great emperor, and how Varahadeva, like the other "Vakataka" patrons, was forced to expediently finish his main Buddha image, and then depart from the site, leaving his cave to the pious depredations of new and uninvited intrusive donors, starting as early as mid-478, when the Asmakas insultingly rejected the Vakataka overlordship.

Varahadeva appears to have continued work on his Ghatotkacha vihara, starting in 475, as soon as the Asmaka/Risika conflict—the Hiatus—was over. However, perhaps because he wished to focus his interest on the more isolated Ghatotkacha vihara, or perhaps because of the pressures of the affairs of state, or perhaps because he was troubled by the aborted early development of his already "old-fashioned" Cave 16, he does not appear to have taken up work again at Ajanta until perhaps as late as 477. What may have finally stimulated him to take a renewed interest in Cave 16 was his decision to give up his past plans for a conventional shrine/shrine antechamber arrangement like that of the adjacent Cave 17, and to introduce a dramatically new type of Buddha to the site, the same new bhadrasana conception that the powerful monk Buddhabhadra was deciding, at this very same time, to introduce as the central image in his great Caitya Cave 26.

How this new and assertive type of image, with its dramatic impact, had traveled to the site we do not know. It has precedents in both southeastern and northwestern India, with their traderoute connections to Ajanta; but it appears to have been completely new as an established form in central India. In any case, having been introduced to Ajanta in Caves 16 and 26, it rapidly revolutionized conceptions at the site. Within the next two or three years, in the Period of Disruption, its authority was rapidly established, while in the subsequent sites of the late fifth (Kanheri) and sixth century (Aurangabad and Ellora) it was clearly the image of choice, surely due in part to the prestigious character of its introduction at Ajanta. And then, to further its impact, Varahadeva and his planners decided to place this radically new image within a palatial pillared setting and, as already mentioned, realized this plan by incorporating into it the two adjacent old unfinished cells which had already been planned, but which by good fortune had been only barely penetrated in 469.[50]

[50] See Spink 1975.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Bakker (1997, 43 note 145) "fails(s) to see why the Buddha seated in bhadrasana is necessarily a late feature", touching upon a matter which has great relevance for Buddhist iconography and history. Yet a study of the form in context forces us to the conclusion that, as far as the Vakataka caves are concerned, this was absolutely the case. The type appears in sculptures at the site first in 477, hardly a year before the consistent patronage of the site collapses, as the new focal image in the great monk Buddhabhadra's caitya cave 26, and then perhaps just some weeks or months later, in the Prime Minister's (Cave 16).[51] The former may have been fully carved (but not yet painted) in 477, but the Cave 16 image, judging from its context, was not fully carved until early in 478, after which it was rapidly painted, despite the incomplete state of the elaborately planned shrine in which it sits.

Indeed, so compelling was the interest in this new sculptural form, that in Cave 26, on the stupa front, it was expediently crowded into a stupa projection originally defined, almost a decade earlier, for a very different type of Buddha—almost certainly a standing image. With a similar expediency, as we have noted above, the huge Cave 16 image was ingeniously created from the uncut mass of matrix which had been left in the (intended) shrine antechamber area when that cave was earlier abandoned in 469.[52] It seems likely that the prestige of these two great donors explains the fact that within the next (final) three years of the site's troubled patronage, literally dozens of bhadrasana Buddhas are carved or painted in the caves, as if preparing for the huge surge of interest in such types in the monuments of the next century.

It is evident that Varahadeva saw his new Buddha type as revolutionary, and wanted it to have as great an impact as possible. Thus he ordered the sculptor to squeeze it into the available matrix (left in 469) as fully as possible, to maximize its size and enhance its positioning. To do this the sculptor first of all had to forfeit the expected positions for the bodhisattvas; there obviously was not enough matrix to form them, so they were expediently shifted to hitherto unused (in sculpture) positions behind the throne. Then, again because of

[51] Like a number of other iconographic forms, the bhadrasana image appears in paintings about a decade before it is carved.

[52] See Spink 1975, 168 (text figures 3 and 4).

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

the insufficiencies of the available matrix, the image had to be shifted considerable to the right, so that it is no longer properly aligned with the central axis of the cave. Then, in compensation, the sculptor adjusted various elements of the throne, so that it not properly symmetrical. Finally, because the huge image did not quite fit into the available matrix, there were a number of areas where parts of the image sustained losses in places where it extended beyond the available matrix. Thus, in the proper right calf, there is a deep "wound" caused by the fact that the stone needed was now missing, having been cut away in the 469 phase.[53] The same thing happened on the proper left shoulder, and in a few other places. However, this was in fact not a serious problem, since these areas could be filled in with mud plaster and then, when painted over, would not even show. However, there was one such "wound" which had to be given special treatment. This was the area which now appears as a box-like depression on the top of the proper left foot. This must have been a similar problem area which the later sculptor then trimmed neatly on all sides, so that he could drop a rectangular stone "plug" into it, before covering it with a thin plastered and painted surface. This special treatment must have been necessary because worshippers would be expected to touch the feet during their devotions, and a mud-plaster fill would soon have been destroyed. Of course, today, the stone plug is missing, and the "receptacle-like" space left serves as a convenient tray for offerings, which are not discouraged by the cave's attendants.

The vigorous creation of the great image and the time-consuming creation of its palatial context must have been mostly the work of 477, when the site, and its expectations, were flourishing. But still, the remarkable new shrine had neither been fully carved nor fully painted when Harisena died and the world took a new turn. In 478, with time at a premium, when all further cutting of "this magnificent dwelling to be occupied by the best of ascetics" (Ajanta Cave 16 inscription, verse 22) was abandoned—the pillars, walls, and ceiling of Cave 16's unique shrine chamber were still rough, not even properly ready for plastering. The fact that so much of its context is

[53] These "wounds" are very different from those caused by error or inexperience—where, as occasionally happened, the carvers misjudged the boundaries of the images that they were revealing.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

incomplete proves that the image itself could not have been plastered and painted (and perhaps was not even fully carved) before this time: it can have been completed and dedicated only in 478.

The two fronting pillars with their carved decoration, which would have belonged to the originally intended shrine antechamber had its development not been aborted in 469, were now provided with expediently recessed fittings—cutting away some of the old decoration—in an attempt to convert them into door jambs for the double doors which would close off the image.[54] Wooden frames were pegged onto the pillars (the attachment holes alone remain, but they seem unnecessary given the presence of the pivot holes cut into the beam above and the floor below. It may be that, once put in place, they were too ineffective to hold the doors, which could be hung more securely by means of the more standard pivot holes. In any case, once the entrances two heavy entrance panels were inserted, they did not fit perfectly; arcs have been chiseled on the uneven shrine floor to ease their opening.[55]

The plastering of the rear aisle ceiling, which would not have taken long, was probably done along with that of the main rear wall, in 478. At this point the planners did not bother to trim away the minor unfinished areas of the wall, as they almost certainly would have done in better times, before proceeding with the plastering. The ceiling might have even been started late in 477, when last minute wall details were being worked on. In any case 478 came on too soon, and the ceiling was left undecorated, while the wall was hurriedly supplied with significant scenes to frame the important new Buddha image. Painted processions approach and honor the image from either side while beyond, appropriately major iconic groups, centered upon bhadrasana images, are painted. With their pairs of supporting nagas beneath, and standing Buddhas among the attendants, they appear to be complex variants of the familiar Sravasti Miracle.

With a dramatic renewal of activity started in the cave in 477, it is hardly surprising that the excavation of the cells at the rear (together

[54] It seems evident that the space on the other sides of the two pilasters was closed off in some way when the central portion was converted into a doorway.

[55] Shrines completed in 478 in which the door fittings were cut are: 2, Upper 6 (very rough), 7, Aur. 3. Door fittings were not cut in 4, 11, 15, 21, 26LW, and Ghatotkacha.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

with L5), barely begun in 469, was now taken up again. We can assume that their cutting went on in a normal and vigorous way right up to the time of Harisena's death, and that at least one of them (R6) was fully completed by this time, for it was supplied with the expected D-mode fitting, while the front cell wall is much thicker than the typically thinner walls of cells which had been largely defined earlier.

When the situation became difficult (particularly for the Vakatakas) after Harisena's death, it would appear that these cells were hurriedly completed; even the recesses for the expected D-mode fittings were roughly defined, although (typically) they would still require further trimming when the doors were hung. But the latter process of adjustment was time-consuming, for the recesses would have to be reshaped to get the alignment of the pivots exact. And in this new and darker climate, with standards necessarily lowered, and with important concerns such as the completion of the shrine complex (and perhaps even of the Buddha image itself) taking priority, the workers took the easy way out. Instead of struggling to adjust the recesses, they merely made a place for the pivot at the base, and then cut a hole at the top; into the latter they inserted a (presumably) wooden plug with a hole cut in it to receive the upper door pivot. The plug could then be moved back and forth or sideways, and then wedged in tightly when the door was properly positioned. Although the actual plugs are gone, it is clear that his variation of the D-mode (called the E-mode) must have been very easy and effective, even though it would have been unacceptably expedient in more demanding and less hurried times.[56] Nor had they troubled with it when, in the later phase of work on the cave all of the old A-mode cells were given recessed door fittings in the far more practical D-mode.[57] We can assume that monks started to move in at this point—possibly even before the doors were hung. It seems clear that they continued residence (as we would expect) in the Period of

[56] The only cell not fitted out is the B-mode L4, which was almost fully roughed out in 469. The workers, in 477, started on the barely penetrated cells further toward the rear, and in the rush of 478, never got back to L4, with its obsolete projection, which would have only made their task more difficult when (in 478) they were using the E mode.

[57] The fact that niches were not added when the door-fittings were cut suggests that this work was done after 475, for niches were in fashion then. As noted earlier, Cave 16's late phase probably did not start until about 477.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Disruption, and this assumption is confirmed by the fact that all of the cells (except the lowest priority ones at the ends of the rear aisle) were plastered.[58] Most of the plastering of cells at the site was done in this period, although the idea was introduced as early as 477, in the porch cells of Cave 2. Who did such plastering and why, in the Period of Disruption, remains a question. Further evidence that the cave attracted the interest of devotees in the Period of Disruption is to be seen in a number of intrusions painted on the previously plastered, but unpainted, walls of the main hall. The most interesting is a series of four Buddhas donated, and inscribed, by the monk Dharmadatta, whom the great monk Buddhabhadra, in his inscription, thanks for having "seen to the excavation and completion of this temple (Cave 26) in my behalf" (Cave 26 inscription verse 14).[59] At this very moment, when Dharmadatta, with his Asmaka connections, was "invading" Varahadeva's cave, the Prime Minister, having been ejected from his own cave, and from Ajanta, was fleeing with his emperor's grandchildren, for safety to their uncle's stronghold in Mahismati.

Thus the development of the Vakataka prime minister's impressive shrine fits the same pattern that we have seen in all of the Vakataka shrines in the greatly contrasting years just before and just after Harisena's death, showing vigorous developments in 477, and expedient and hurried ones in early 478, followed by the ouster of the patron by mid-478, and the takeover of his properties at the site by intruders thereafter. The only shrine which does not fit this all too familiar pattern is that of the emperor Harisena's Cave 1; for in that case the patron (all too suddenly) had died. It was of course this tragic loss of the emperor which tore the happy world apart.

Cave 16: Circumambulation Reconsidered

Indologists in general look with far greater care at epigraphs, even in the library, than they do at the often far more informative "texts" available to them in the form of a given monument's myriad details.

---

[58] See Spink 1975, 168 (text figure 4) showing the manner in which the cells were plastered, suggesting the changes made as time ran out.

[59] For Dharmadatta and others who used the cave for their intrusive images, see Volume III Cave 16.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

There seems to be something about "art" which denies it the soberer reputation of science, as if feeling were the antipodes rather than a complement and sponsor of thinking. Remove the "art" from the equation, as in the generally more astute discipline of archaeology, and you are thought to be once more in the realm of trust. With what care the archaeologist will brush away the dust from an ancient door-pivot hole, attempt to preserve it, and then discuss its usage and its context in his report. But how many scholars have ever noticed the fascinating variety of such pivot holders in Ajanta's caves—features which define Ajanta's evolution more precisely than any other forms at the site, allowing an almost yearly sequence to be established.

By the same token, scholars would not so insistently declare that the shrine of Cave 16 was designed so that one could "circumambulate the image" if they would actually climb up through the never-finished cell doorway which the Prime Minister himself would have had to use as an "entrance". And after squeezing though that, he would have had to stumble over the floor-beams so inappropriately troubling his path, and then finally leave clumsily through the unfinished "exit"—another unfinished and abandoned cell doorway. No one doing this could ever again see the (non-)passage as an "ambulatory".

The truth is that this "pradaksinapatha" in Cave 16 is an illusion. When, after 475, plans were made for a palatial new type of setting for the Prime Minister's revolutionary new image, the barely penetrated flanking cells started nearly ten years before had to be dealt with in some way.[60] They could have merely been closed up with a heavy plaster fill, to assure the Buddha privacy; but it seems more likely that they were—at their own insistence—grudgingly welcomed into the new shrine design to provide better light and air. In any case, they have nothing to do with a *pradaksinapatha.*

In fact, much scholarly opinion to the contrary, there is not a single vihara at the site where circumambulation was intended or practiced, even though right up until 471 (with Cave 1) the Buddha images were set in (or were intended to be set in) the center of the shrine chamber, just like the stupas in most of the caves at Bagh. Even in Cave 11, where a stupa backs up the image, but was never

[60] See Spink 1975, 168; especially text figures 3 and 4.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

either fully carved nor plastered nor painted, the "circumambulatory path" to which some scholars refer was really nothing more than the totally unimproved space which had to be opened up to define the stupa at the shrine center; left in its very rough state when the stupa itself was abandoned, it was obviously not made as a passage.

Ultimately, all of the later viharas managed to discard the old "centralizing" convention. Unfortunately, Cave 1's shrine had already been half blocked out before the Hiatus, and as a consequence the image, with its now-required bodhisattvas, had to be squeezed into the confines of a clearly inadequate and old-fashioned central block; one consequence of this evident compression was the loss of the proper left arm of the left bodhisattva. Precisely the same thing happened in the huge Cave 4 image, which is equally constricted by the margins of the "primitive" block which contains the group. Later Buddha images (with their bodhisattvas) could spread out more comfortably on the rear wall of the shrines, and starting with the creation of the image in Cave 2, this became the arrangement of choice—a new mode of design which could never have happened if pradaksina had been a concern. This was true not only at Ajanta, but at Aurangabad Cave 3, and also in the Prime Minister's Ghatotkacha vihara, begun a year or two later than Cave 16. If pradaksina was so important in Cave 16, as some would say, why was it not a feature of the Ghatotkacha vihara, sponsored by the same donor?

Even at Bagh, where vihara shrines with stupas were completed, there is little reason to think that *pradaksina* was ever practiced. In the paired shrines of Bagh Cave 3 there were no stupas, nor any space for circumambulation.[61] Instead, Buddha images (now missing) were set up on the rear and side walls; one could not go around them. Bagh Cave 7's stupa, although much damaged (and improperly restored) was originally fronted by a Buddha image and two attendants set into its projecting platform; the devotional focus was surely upon them, rather than around the stupa.[62] Two deep slots at either side of the Bagh Cave 4 stupa may well have been cut to similarly "plug in" attendant figures, which would have flanked a

[61] For this and other Bagh shrines, see Spink 1976/1977.

[62] The projecting monolithic platform was originally rectangular in format, but has been confusingly restored, with the front left corner cut off, along with the socket hole which must have held the left attendant which was probably there.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Buddha image once set up between them.[63] In Bagh Cave 2 there is no evidence of any such triad having been later set in front of the stupa, but the beautiful attended Buddhas carved (probably as late additions) in the antechamber suggests the same shift toward a focus on images. In the slightly later Bagh Cave 7 (which copies Bagh Cave 2 but now, significantly, has an axial focus) a presumably similar group of attended Buddhas, done as freestanding images, were "plugged into" the antechamber walls; the receiving-holes remain. These two similarly disposed antechamber groupings—the loose images of Bagh Cave 7 of course long since gone—must both date somewhat later than the original phase of work on Cave 2. The fact that they involve Buddha images (and associated figures) attending the shrine suggests a relatively late date. The concept does not start at Ajanta until 477; and indeed the influence may have come from Bagh.

[63] The fact that there is no hole in the floor at this point suggests the central image was a more stable seated Buddha (as in Cave 3 and possibly Cave 7) rather than a standing one.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

CHAPTER TWELVE

UNDERSTANDING THE SITE'S COLLAPSE: THE ASMAKA CAVES

The Progress of Work in 478 in the Asmaka Caves: A Summary

The previous chapter has focused on what I have called the "Vakataka" caves, described at the moment when the shockwave of Harisena's death so drastically affected the site early in 478. In all of these "Vakataka" caves, except in the already abandoned excavations of the local king (Caves 17, 19, 20, 29) and in that of the just-expired emperor's Cave 1, one can see how the patrons rushed their images to dedication under the pressure of time, just before they vacated the region as quickly as they could. This was because by mid-478 the aggressive Asmakas had rejected the overlordship of Harisena's weak successor, Sarvasena III, and must already have been laying plans to take over the empire. Obviously, the site (and the region) was no place for the old "Vakataka" patrons to be. Even if these powerful donors were not there in person (which is quite likely, considering their mounting concerns) their connection with the site and with the images they had struggled to finish would now have been harshly severed by the insurrectionist stance of the aggressive Asmakas.

I am using the term "Vakataka" in a special way here, to distinguish between the "Vakataka" patrons involved in excavations in the "main" area of the site (Caves 1–16) and the Asmakas who (as feudatories of the Vakataka emperor) sponsored the caves in the western extremity (Caves 21–28). Although all patrons at Ajanta were subjects of the Vakataka emperor, at least while Harisena was alive, the "Vakatakas" were those who were closely connected with (and/or loyal to) the emperor, while the Asmakas, responsible for all of the caves at the site's western extremity, were contentious almost from the start, and eventually mounted an insurrection against Harisena's son. Thus when "Vakataka" is used I am specifically referring to the patrons at Ajanta and connected sites, not to the Vakataka dynasty as such, to which both the "Vakataka" patrons and the Asmaka patrons were subject.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Packing so many inscriptions, we cannot in fact be sure that all of the donors in the main area were "Vakatakas" as opposed to Asmakas. However, this seems to be the case, since all of the main area caves under consideration show the same anxious rush to complete the main Buddha, in order to get the merit, during the first months of 478, even though this meant abandoning (or drastically limiting) all of their well-laid plans to do so. This rush was clearly because of the Asmaka threat. This must have been a great concern even early in 478, the situation became insupportable when the Asmakas, around the middle of that year, renounced their nominally feudatory status, and declared their independence. This is not to say that the Vakataka emperor by any means accepted the Asmaka's self-proclaimed takeover of the region; but the cold fact is that the Asmakas now controlled it. And as a consequence, all of the "Vakataka" patrons, anticipating the Asmaka takeover, had precipitously left the site by the middle of this troubled year.

As we might expect, work on the Asmaka caves, extending along the site's western extremity from Cave 21 through Cave 28, continued in something like a normal course, for as the new rulers of the site after 475, they had reason to believe—or at least to hope—that they could somehow, even if hurriedly, get their caves completed in due course.[1] However, the thinking at the site was obviously different from the thinking at the Asmaka court, where plans were being made to destroy the Vakataka empire and take it over for themselves. This of course would cost both men and money, and by the end of 478 the site could no longer stand the obvious drain on its resources, even if they were now totally focused on the Asmaka undertakings. So, at the end of 478, the Asmaka patrons too had to leave, after a last minute burst of realization, during which they too struggled—not always successfully—to get their own images done and to acquire the merit therefrom.

Quite suddenly, at the beginning of 479 (even by mid-478 in the "Vakataka" caves), the site entered its Period of Disruption. The Asmaka confidence, and the Asmaka controls over the site, were now completely gone, and a spate of intrusive donations by eager

[1] Cave 29, high up between Cave 20 and 21, was sponsored by the local king, not the Asmakas. Its confusing numbering is due to the fact that it was hidden by debris when the caves' numbering was first established in the nineteenth century.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

new donors, answerable to no one but the Buddha himself, now began. But this is another story.[2]

There are clear and significant differences between the situation of the non-Asmaka ("Vakataka") patrons and their Asmaka counterparts in the final year (478) of the site's established patronage. Cohen rightly characterizes this latter year (478)—what I call "The Period of Anxious Consolidation"—as involving "a flurry of rushed activity, occasioned by the patrons' realization that central India's *pax Vakataka* was soon to end in a maelstrom".[3] However, such a characterization of this turbulent year can be even more precise when we involve ourselves with *in situ* observations. We will find that, if the "Vakataka" patrons were reacting with fear to the situation after Harisena's death, the Asmaka patrons had quite different concerns. For them—since after all they had controlled the site since 475, and had boldly rejected the Vakataka overlordship in mid-478—the only threat was the destructive potential of a war initiated by their own people, which might (and indeed did) rapidly erode the sources of their generous support.

I have assigned the final breakdown of consistent patronage at the site to the end of 478, by which time Asmaka military concerns, requiring significant funding, had forced the ending of their latter phase of vigorous patronage, which had started in 475. In the previous chapter, I have shown that, due to the Asmaka assertion of independence in mid-478, the "Vakataka" patrons had hurriedly dedicated their expediently finished shrines and were anxiously leaving this now inhospitable environment by that time. There is no evidence to show that the Asmaka patrons also had to leave, or wanted to leave, or had any intention of leaving at this same time. In fact, although the turbulence at the site must have been disturbing, they would have had plenty of workmen—at more competitive prices—available for work on their own caves as soon as the other patrons left.

The final year of Asmaka patronage was very different in character from that of the "Vakataka" patrons who, during the first few months of 478, were rushing to finish and dedicate their shrine Buddhas in the main area of the site. We would probably be right

[2] For the Period of Disruption, see Volume III.
[3] Cohen 1995, 74 (rephrasing Spink's outline of developments).

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

in assuming that there were certain "lesser" Asmaka patrons, or at least certain assistants like "the monk Dharmadatta" as well as Buddhabhadra's "good pupil Bhadrabandhu" who saw to "the excavation and completion" of Cave 26 (Cave 26 inscription, verse 14), who were associated with Buddhabhadra and who must have supported his decision to give up work abruptly on such unfinished major caves such as 24 and 28 to say nothing of Cave 23A, and the barely revealed 24A.[4]

It is even possible that the Asmaka patrons were all monks, since, as I have asserted elsewhere, Buddhabhadra himself exercised nearly total control over the whole group of Asmaka caves.[5] This being the case, we might logically believe that all those associated with him in the great project were members of the sangha, or at least closely connected with it and with Buddhabhadra in particular. Even though the Asmaka minister Bhavviraja and his son/successor Devaraja are praised fulsomely in the Cave 26 inscription there is no suggestion that they were involved (other than as a source of support!) in these donations; nor were any inscriptions referring to lay patrons placed anywhere, as far as we know, in the site's western extremity prior to the Period of Disruption. Of course we can well imagine that all or most of the members of the sangha were eager to make their own donations even while they were cooperating on the development of the caves; but again (as far as we know) this was never allowed. Their desires could be fulfilled only when the site was in collapse; and at that point, in 479–480, new (previously "uninvited") donors take over the site with a great urgency. It is relevant to note that the great majority of them were monks, probably largely members of the sangha still remaining at the site.[6]

It is evident that the Asmakas hoped to get at least some of their excavations finished and decorated before the obviously deteriorating

[4] We have no absolute proof that the Asmaka patrons were all monks, but I shall make the case that Buddhabhadra exercised nearly total control over whole group of Asmaka caves, which would be less likely if important lay patrons were involved. Furthermore, the greatest Asmaka project, the Cave 26 complex, was the work of Buddhabhadra himself and two other members of the sangha, as its inscription confirms; but we have no similar inscriptions referring to lay patrons.

[5] Discussed at length in a later volume.

[6] Cohen 1995, 412 lists thirty-six intrusive inscriptions by monks, obviously representing only a portion of the monastic population at the site in the Period of Disruption and immediately thereafter.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

situation forced an end to everything that they were doing too. However, unlike the "Vakataka" patrons, they did not anticipate a particularly sudden end to their involvement. Although they had realistically abandoned work on the barely-started caves, in those which were more favored, they did not feel constrained to turn their whole attention to rushing their main Buddhas to completion. Therefore, although the work done in the Asmaka complex in 478 did not, except in the great caitya hall and its important Left Wing, show the care and quality of the work that was going on during the happy years before, it tends to proceed in a more or less normal course.

That the very incomplete caves both in the Asmakas' part of the site, and along the main scarp, were abandoned immediately after Harisena's death is an assumption based on the impossibility of their ever being completed in the rushed context of 478, when expediency was the rule and when so many hard choices had to be made. Significantly, there is no evidence of an uncharacteristic slackening of discipline in these abandoned caves, as there so clearly was during 478 in the case of Caves 21 and 23 and portions of the great Cave 26 complex. Instead, those selected for oblivion were peremptorily abandoned immediately after Harisena's death.

The general Asmaka attitude toward work in their more favored excavations is in striking contrast to the expedient treatment, concentrated on the shrines alone, which we discover in the "Vakataka" excavations. However, the evidence in the Asmaka caves shows that the Asmaka patrons' analysis of the festering political situation was not in line with reality; perhaps, as monks, they put too kindly a view upon the attitudes which were guiding the Asmaka court. In any case, they prejudged the future wrongly, and had too little time (and realized it too late) to properly finish most of their already-compromised work. The works of the spirit were compromised by the works of war.

Cave 21

Cave 21 typifies the Asmaka approach in 478—and the consequences thereof. First of all, although the patron intended to get the cave fully decorated, it was evident from judging the eroding political situation, that it was impossible to do any more time-consuming excavation work than was absolutely necessary. Therefore, both the porch

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

and most of the main hall's ceilings and walls were hastily plastered, even when this required covering over still-rough wall-surfaces or still uncut door recesses; these unfinished details were obviously now seen as "expendable" features. A striking example of this can be seen at Cell R4, where the outer recess of the doorway, the cutting of which was never started, was covered at the same time the surrounding wall was plastered. One can see that the plaster goes right over the lines which the excavator had earlier scratched to define the margins of the recess.

At the same time, either from hubris or hope, the patron or his planner had not given up completely on features that they still considered of particular importance. Thus the workers were ordered to carefully avoid plastering the area reserved for a conventional carved panel on the right wall (the other three had already been finished by the time of Harisena's death), clearly revealing that the patron still wanted to finish it, no matter how hastily other work in the cave was proceeding. In fact, he probably *expected* to finish this fine carved relief at the time when he ordered the more general plastering done; for that would still have been early in the year, when a certain degree of optimism was understandable, considering the vagaries of politics. Perhaps the situation would change, and work could once again go on as before.

However, in the absence of better news, the hasty course of decoration proceeded as efficiently as possible. The workers, following convention, first began the painting of the now-already plastered hall ceilings and pillars, both elements typically decorated before the walls. Although if normal procedures were followed, the porch (the first area plastered in 478) would be decorated first, the patron obviously gave priority to work in the hall—and in the event, the porch never received any painted decoration at all.[7] As for the interior, the workers started by painting overly fussy designs on the front aisle ceiling; probably following the intended earlier program conceived in 477. But they rapidly gave up such demanding designs as work progressed. The main hall ceiling was done in an extremely cursory fashion, even neglecting to properly (architectonically) connect its

[7] Since, in the porch, the same plaster continues onto the walls of the still-rough right porch end, it is clear that it was not applied until 478; nonetheless, the patron obviously decided to give the painting of the main hall priority.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

painted "beams" with the hypostyle pillars; in ceilings done in better times the architectonic implications were far more evident than here, where haste and expediency appear to be the rule.

Such reversals of the normal course of work—the putting off of the painting of the porch and of the carving of the panel on the right wall—reflect and in retrospect justify the Asmaka's developing fear that time might run out; but the assumption was still prevailing that it would run out more slowly than it did.

The same assumption explains why the patron so unwisely left the shrine and shrine antechamber until the last. The antechamber pillars, planned to have typically late female brackets, like those in Caves 1 and 2, had been roughed out, along with the shrine doorway, in the happy context of 477, but now the dire reality of the situation dawned on the planners. They expediently started cutting the condemned brackets away to save time, but the process was interrupted in mid-course, when one (that at the left) was still intact. Thus when work on the cave ended at the end of 478, one has a record of both what had been originally intended and what was actually done, and can understand how political realities were exacting their toll in this troubled year.

The preparation of the cave for garlands is equally informative. This cave, more than any other at the site, was generously fitted out for floral decoration; but as we can understand, such "luxury" efforts could only have been done in the untroubled years before Harisena's death. Understandably, the particular year that the holes were drilled and the iron hooks pounded in would have been 477, for this was only done when the walls and relevant capitals (from the top of which some garlands would also hang) had been chiseled quite smooth.[8] This of course makes sense, technically, and since we know that the smoothing of the walls was mostly completed by 477, it is clear that most (indeed probably all) of the hooks were inserted at that same time. Wall-smoothing and hook-insertion were not actions which the stressed patrons authorized in the increasingly troubled 478, except perhaps in the most crucial areas. Confirmation of this is to be found on the wall just to the left of the antechamber, where the final smoothing was abandoned (as in the antechamber itself) just after Harisena's death; and in this wall area, significantly,

[8] In "hidden" areas, such as the rear corners of the hypostyle, insertions were sometimes made in relatively rough surfaces.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

there is neither a hook nor a hole to hold one. In fact, this is the single area of the interior, except for the two "invisible" rear faces of the two front pillar capitals, where the strong iron garland hooks had not once been placed. The total complement would have been 44 if the rear wall area had been smoothed as planned.[9]

Something similar happened to the Buddha image, whose old padmasana format had been established in 476 or possibly early 477, along with the bodhisattvas and converging dwarfs that would be out of fashion a year later. Instead of presciently rushing it to completion as soon as the ominous Asmaka takeover of the site occurred in mid-478, those responsible made the mistake of working on the cave in a more or less normal way. As a result, at the last minute, they found they had delayed too long, and had to abandon work on the barely sketched-in throne back and halo, leaving the legs of the attendants (especially at the right) very unfinished. Nor was there time to apply even a single garland hook to the halo.[10] The base motifs were also probably somewhat unfinished at that time, judging from the fumbling treatment of the ends of the throne pad; only a particularly imaginative scholarly eye would be able to make out the obliterated vestiges of the wheel and deer, with kneeling devotees (rather than lions), at either side.[11]

The connections of the unfinished (but dedicated) image in Cave 21 with the image in Cave 2 (finished before mid-478) are particularly close. Indeed one can surmise that the Cave 21 image was delayed because the sculptor of the image in Cave 2 had been contracted to do them both, the initial blocking out being undertaken, probably at the same time, by his (family?) assistants. If so, he was so pressed (perhaps also on the palm!) by the worried patron of Cave 2 that he could not turn his full attention to the image in Cave 21 until the anxious "Vakataka" patron had got his image dedicated and had

---

[9] Front aisle 7 holes (one uncertain) and 5 hooks; left aisle 3 and 5; right aisle 2 and 6, rear aisle 1 and 4 (one never drilled); central section 4 and 6. Two hooks (one broken) and two holes are in rear porch wall, the left rear corner and middle one on the right apparently never cut. All holes (with or without their hooks) are high up on the walls, near the ceiling.

[10] This was hardly a requirement, but one or more such hooks are often found.

[11] It seems reasonable to believe that these now conventional base figures would have been at least roughed out when the image was started. It is likely that, as in the somewhat similar case of Cave U6, they were being sliced away late in 478, and the process was never quite completed (as in the case of the shrine antechamber brackets.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

fled the site about mid-478. The rush which characterizes the whole treatment of the image group has also left the Buddha inappropriately bald, even though his traditional hair-curls (normally carved) must have been painted on in the interests of speed. Indeed, as expected, one can still find tiny traces of what appear to be thin plaster and paint in protected areas of the image, but these should be analyzed. There are clearer evidences of a red wash over much of the image, but this could be (but may not be) more modern, as is surely the case with the coloring on the small intrusive Buddha at the left of the left porch window.

After this, the image must finally (and hastily) have been dedicated. Common sense alone suggests this, considering the efforts made to rush the image to completion and the fact that Asmaka patrons, in 478, were threatened by nothing other than their own king's territorial greed, and its material consequences. And the matter is virtually proven by the presence of intrusions, added in the Period of Disruption, in both the hall and the porch. Nonetheless, the definition of the shrine area is most expedient; one still has to stumble through the shrine antechamber, past the elaborately planned but abandoned shrine doorway, to get into the poorly cut out shrine. The shrine can hardly have been used for worship for more than a few weeks or months, if it was significantly used at all, for there are no fittings provided for the hanging of the ritually necessary double-leaved shrine door, while the doorway itself was still very much in the process of being cut when time ran out.

A final comment:

There is one curious feature in Cave 21 which eludes easy explanation. This involves the decoration of the panels over the complex cells at the rear of the cave. We know that, in the frieze over the related complex cell at the center of the left wall a loving couple (yaksha and yakshi) appear under an arch at the center, flanked by equally amorous nagas. We also know that when consistent work on the cave was interrupted with Harisena's death, the place had been prepared for a corresponding frieze over the pillared complex at the center of the right wall; presumably it would have "balanced" that on the left wall by showing loving nagas attended by yakshas.

Not surprisingly, in the similar pillared complexes at the rear, the position of honor was apparently to be occupied by teaching padmasana Buddhas. At least this is the case in the highly elaborated

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

frieze at the left rear, where the Buddha is attended by a yaksha on the left and a naga on the right. However, we see a most anomalous situation at the right rear, where the Buddha, instead of being, as expected, in the center, is replaced by a naga in the prime position, the Buddha himself now being downgraded to a position at the left, matching a yaksha at the right. It has been suggested that this relief was not originally finished, and that, in the Period of Disruption, some eager devotee took over this attractive space for his own intrusive Buddha image; but this would make little sense unless the relief at the left rear had a "matching" yaksha in the center instead of a Buddha.

Since the panel on the right wall never got started, we can assume that none of these panels were started before 477. We might also suppose that in that same year both the panels at the rear were planned, like those at the sides, to focus on yakshas and nagas, and that work on the right rear one was actually begun, with a naga already carved in the center. However, then Harisena died, and here as in a number of other instances at the site, the interest turned to a focus on Buddha images. Thus, when the still untouched left rear panel was begun, the Buddha was placed at the center, while in the partially finished panel at right rear, the still-remaining space at the left was given over to a Buddha image too, even though the balance of the two compositions—originally so important—had to be sacrificed. One should probably also assume, if this hypothesis seems acceptable, that the fine left rear panel (together with the added Buddha in the right rear panel) was done early in 478, when the planner obviously thought that there was time to do such elaborate things as the left rear panel; it is inconceivable that it was done at the end of that year, as the expedient treatment of the whole shrine area makes clear.

Cave 22

The tiny Cave 22 was placed above and between Caves 21 and 23—one of the few possible locations still remaining in the "Asmaka area"—the site's western extremity—when the cave was started in 477.[12]

[12] Its position was required by the fact that the abutting porch cells of Caves 12 and 23 filled the space below.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

The little porch with its badly restored two-pillared front(the left pilaster alone is original) and its characteristically late but still conventional "T-shaped" doorway was probably finished in that still vigorous year, along with the small hall and the barely penetrated four cells. As we might expect in such a tiny cave (as opposed to the huge but abandoned Caves 24 and 28) work might have continued in 478, just as it did in the neighboring Caves 21 and 23. However, if so, it was never finished; and since there was so little left to do—it could have been completed very quickly indeed—we must conclude that it was treated as a very low priority concern, both because of its small size and its inconvenient positioning.

The most suggestive evidence for this is the simple format of the two shrine antechamber pillars; although unfinished, we can see that they were being made as simple as possible, in striking contrast to the complex porch doorway, which speaks of more generous times. Even though small, had they been defined in 477 rather than 478, they would surely have been planned with the same desire for complexity as is evident in the porch doorway. That is, they would almost certainly have included the decorative brackets now in vogue; even the small intrusive shrinelets 10A and 10b (both dating to 479), with their inset wooden(?) pillars (now missing), had a place for brackets to be attached, so much in vogue was this feature now. In 478, of course, the need was to save time and proceed efficiently to the shrine area—especially so in such a tiny cave where the cells were surely going to have to be left incomplete—so it may be that, as in Cave 23, the matrix for the brackets was intentionally omitted. Or, if the matrix had already been reserved in 477, they would have been simply trimmed off in 478, as in Cave 21.

In any case, the shrine was never reached before the work stopped at the end of 478 or (given the problems confronting even the Asmaka patrons at this time) even earlier in that year. The rear wall of the shrine antechamber had been clearly defined, but the shrine doorway which was to open through it was never started. Instead, in 479—for this was a priority location—what was probably the first of many intrusions in the cave was added, using the recently completed (478) bhadrasana Buddha group in the right wing of Cave 26 as its model. One might hazard the thought that the cave's main image was placed in this expedient way in the anxious context of 478, just to get it done and dedicated. However such a thought could hardly be sustained, since in this arrangement there would be

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

no provision for a shrine doorway; and there is no shrine image at the site for which such a provision was not made.[13]

More relevant is the fact that if the complex image was in fact carved in 478, it would surely have been painted, so that it could be dedicated; this final process could have been accomplished very hastily, as in Cave 21 which, like Cave 22, was under the same authority. However, this was not done, so it is evident that the image (like all in the cave's interior), was carved only in the Period of Disruption, when its unusual location would not be anomalous at all. There is reason to believe too, that it was not carved until 480. The complexity of its composition would surely allow this assumption, which is confirmed by the presence of the two small bhadrasana Buddhas which were cut into its left margin, probably by associated donors. Since both the larger and the small images were clearly painted at the same time, and since it appears to be the case that small bhadrasana panels are never found at the site until 480, this almost certainly locates the whole group to the same point in time. One might suggest, too, that the work was done close to the end of 480, for the painting of the three images and even the cutting of the margin seems particularly rushed. Such a conclusion finds support in the fact that the two-Buddha panel to the left has been only half cut; and though the panel to the right is finished, a number of other panels on the rear wall of the hall are quite incomplete or are finished in a most summary way.

This brings up an interesting concern. I have said that during the Period of Disruption (479–480) intrusive images were never placed in excavations in which the Buddha image had not been completed and dedicated; but this is obviously not the case here, for what might at first appear to be the intended shrine Buddha is actually an intrusion itself. It may be that because this little cave could so conveniently be taken over, the general rule was broken. Indeed, there are two similar situations in this same general area: the similarly pillared court cell at the left of the never dedicated Cave 24, created in 477, was transformed into a significant shrinelet with an intrusive Buddha in 479, while at the left of the never dedicated Cave 23

[13] Admittedly, the doors of the anomalous shrine of Cave 16 were expediently fixed to the previously cut antechamber pillars, but there is no evidence that this was going to be case here.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

what was perhaps a similarly late and unfinished court cell was taken over and filled with a number of intrusive images during the Period of Disruption.

Furthermore, in already dedicated caves such as Upper 6, 19, cells, either complex and simple, were often turned into intrusive shrinelets, while a number of independent intrusive excavations such as Caves 9A, 9B, 9C, 9D, and 10A also are relatively elaborate units (sometimes fronted with pillars) where the intrusions have no previously dedicated Buddha image to justify their presence.[14]

It must be that the abandoned Cave 22, even in its unfinished state, was eventually recognized as a sensible spot for intrusive donors to utilize, even if it had not been enlivened by the presence of an already dedicated image. But the likelihood that all of its intrusions date from 480, rather than from the start of the Period of Disruption, suggests that there was some resistance at first to taking it over, presumably because, bereft of a dedicated image, it was not "alive". Then, as was so often the case at Ajanta, expediency was invoked, and the tiny cave, like the similar court cell in the abandoned Cave 24, was taken over to use for intrusive offerings by a number of later donors who could not pass it up, particularly since other perhaps more desirable locations were rapidly filling up.

Cave 23

Cave 23 was not as fortunate as the similar Cave 21 in reaching the point where it could be dedicated. Here again it may well be that the excavators in 478 "wasted" too much valuable time working on the less essential hall, when they should have turned immediately to the task of completing the shrine. In retrospect, this seems particularly true, since Cave 23 was considerably less advanced in its excavation than Cave 21 when the trauma created by Harisena's death at the end of 477 occurred, causing the normal course of work throughout the site to be either totally disrupted, as in the "Vakataka" caves, or greatly affected, as in the caves associated with the Asmakas. The very high quality of many of the features of the porch makes

[14] Caves 9A, 9B, and 10A all have inserted (wooden?) pillars on their fronts, as retaining holes suggest. There are even extra holes for brackets in 9A and 9B.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

it clear that the porch was nearly completed in 477. In fact, the porch ceiling was even plastered before the "normal" course of work broke off. No further plastering, to say nothing of painting, was ever done in the cave.

It is clear that at the last minute—much too late—the planners turned their attention to the shrine area where the antechamber pillars (which must have been planned with now-standard brackets) and the shrine doorway had been roughed out in 477 when work on the cave was vigorously proceeding. But, just as in Cave 21, the expected brackets now must have been sacrificed in the interest of haste, even though such measures could hardly solve the seriousness of the problem, with both time and money rapidly running out. The brackets may have already been blocked out in 477, and then removed (as was being done in Cave 21) in 478. But it seems more likely that the pillars were cut in this simpler fashion sometime around the middle of 478, when expectations were already suffering a reduction.

With so much remaining to be done in the cutting of the shrine/shrine antechamber area of Cave 23, the Buddha image was never even started, even though by the end of 478 it appears that the rear shrine wall was being prepared to receive it. However, this must have been very late in that hurried year, since some of the rock in the shrine never got cut away. Had there been a few more months available, the image would probably have been started; but this was not the cas.

Various scholars have noted that the so-called "overlapping acanthus" molding on Ajanta 23's "T-shaped" porch doorway (probably finished about mid-477) suggests that it is later than the various similar instances on "Gupta" temples such as Deogarh, which would date to c. 500 or slightly later. Williams feels that since it appears only once at Ajanta, "the motif could hardly have originated (there)" (Williams, 1983). However, I would contend that it only appears once because it was one of the many new "imported" forms constantly being added to Ajanta's doorways in its last few years, and in fact it did not make its appearance at the site iuntil Cave 23's doorway was decorated in 477. Although a number of other complex doorways were underway at this same time, they were already all fixed in their decorative schemas, and so could not include this particular motif, even if they had wanted to do so. If consistent patronage at the site had gone on after 477, we certainly could have expected to see the motif in question again; but in 478 and later

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

nobody had the time or interest to make such fancy doorways. Therefore, the only progeny that we could expect to find would be in those later sites, such as Nachna, Deogarh, Rajim, etc., to which the displaced workers probably moved after Ajanta's collapse. This being the case, it is hardly surprising to see the motif's later survival in those surviving remnants of the once-great empire.[15]

Cave 26

As we might expect, very special attention was paid to Buddhabhadra's splendid Asmaka caitya hall in 478, particularly since it was being developed as the sole ceremonial center of the site, now that Upendragupta's Cave 19 had been abandoned as a result of the Asmaka takeover. Just as Upendragupta's superb caitya retained its sumptuous expectations even at the expense of his associated viharas when time was running out in 471, Buddhabhadra's almost equally fine (and more elaborated) hall has nothing of the expedient treatment found on the final stages of work in Caves 21, 23, 25, and 27. In fact, Buddhabhadra may have expected, and surely hoped, that he could finish it in the best possible manner before time ran out. Indeed, by the time he had the image dedicated and the cave inscribed in mid-478, the main face of the cave and the whole interior had been carved and painted; his program of work was starting in the unfinished ambulatory. Although we can assume that, like various other caves at the site, Cave 26 was put into ritual use as soon as dedicated, even though final work on it was continuing, such usage by the original patrons was probably limited to a few months in late 478. Beyond that, it was surely used for a few years after 478 by the monks still resident at the site, as well as by local devotees, but the total time during which it was in worship must have amounted to only a very few years. This helps one understand why its remaining paintings are almost free of soot deposits.

It is important to recall that in 475, when the Asmakas had conquered the region and the patronage of the site began again, the Cave 26 complex was in a still very roughed-out state, with not a single image or decorative detail as yet even started and much of

[15] For Rajim, see Stadtner 2004, esp. figures 12.5–12.8.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

the hall floor (and various other areas) still obscured by a deep layer of unexcavated matrix.[16] So it is not surprising that the elaborate sculptural decoration of the interior hall proper continued very late, well into 478. Nor is it surprising, when we realize that all of the Asmaka caves continued in generally normal course (though with varying degrees of discipline) in 478, that the main façade would already have been decorated before that time. Significantly, we find only padmasana images on this huge area's carefully planned surface, which had obviously been fully carved before the burst of interest in bhadrasana Buddhas, emulating the main images of Caves 26 and 16, occurred at the site in 478.[17]

Although the Cave 26 façade may already have been painted before 478—for at Ajanta, the plastering and painting was usually started as soon as the more forward areas of the caves were ready—the painting of the interior was surely not completed until well into 478. This is evident when we examine the relationship between the huge Dying Buddha panel and the ceiling above. Although much of the plastered and painted ceiling is lost, one can still see (when looking critically) that in a number of places the ceiling's mud plaster "invades" the top margin of the huge sculptured panel. This means that the Dying Buddha must have been was cut prior to the mud-plastering (and painting) of the aisle ceiling; and since the ongoing work in the ambulatory (along with all programmatic work in the cave) was aborted at the end of 478, it is reasonable to date the Dying Buddha along with Buddhabhadra's other ambulatory panels to that year.[18]

In Buddhabhadra's other ambulatory panels, the tell-tale mud-plaster just above is either lost, or there is an intervening space between the panel and the ceiling, so the same evidence is not available, even though our analysis of the dating of Buddhabhadra's

---

[16] See conjectural view of Cave 26.

[17] Except for the main images in Cave 26 and 16, both started in 477, no carved (as opposed to painted) bhadrasana images were created at Ajanta prior to the time when these two crucial images were carved. Although there are five small such images in the friezes of Cave 26, it is likely that they were conceived only after the main image in the hall was begun.

[18] This is undeniably clear, but requires scrutiny, since the ceiling plaster at the margin of the Dying Buddha panel has much fallen away. There is even one small area where the white plaster of the panel appears to fill in a place where an edge of the ceiling's mud-plaster had fallen away, or perhaps had been broken by a worker when the Dying Buddha panel itself was being lime-plastered.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

ambulatory panels would remain the same.[19] It seems likely that in at least some of the latter situations the margin was left because the ceiling painting above was already underway; breakage of the plaster was thus avoided when the sculptured panels were cut. But the evidence of the Dying Buddha is itself enough to date the aisle ceiling to 478, and the fact that Buddhabhadra never had time to fill up the whole ambulatory with his high-quality panels, makes it evident that those which he did manage to finish should all be assigned to this troubled year (478) at the end of which time ran out, both for him and his fellow Asmakas.

Of course some or all of these panels may well have been conceived, and some even started, during the exuberant months just before Harisena's death. But it is evident that all or most of these impressive but scattered "offerings", understandably occupying the most desirable spaces, represent only a portion of the full complement which must have been planned and would ultimately have filled up the whole ambulatory—filling spaces later rapidly usurped by "intrusive" donors in 479 and 480. In any case Buddhabhadra was not lacking either in zeal or confidence even in the turbulent contexts of 478; for after all, the Asmakas were now on the rise and (at least in their own eyes) were now the *de facto*, if not the *de jure*, rulers of the site. But this does not mean that, up in the capital, the decision-makers wanted to keep Ajanta supplied with funds.

Although the ambulatory ceiling, which forms part of the patron's overall decorative program, could not have been plastered and painted before the adjacent Dying Buddha was well underway, and the workers had finished carving its upper margin, this is not to say that the Dying Buddha is entirely earlier than the decorating of the ceiling. Work on such panels almost always progressed from the top down, so the ceiling plastering could have been started even while the great Buddha image was still very much in process. And certainly, judging from the evidence throughout the Asmaka caves, Buddhabhadra—despite the high quality retained in his caitya hall—was in a rush; therefore it seems very likely that the ceiling was completed first.

[19] This is the case above the Temptation scene, where the ceiling plaster along the margin has all fallen away—probably because of the tendency of bats to sleep (hanging) at such junctures of the wall and ceiling, particularly in the darker reaches (as here) of such caves.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

This might explain the small margin left over Buddhabhadra's panels in the right aisle, which is not found in either the Dying Buddha or the Temptation panels.[20] As noted above, it may have been kept as a kind of protection, so that the right aisle sculptors could carve those panels without damaging the already completed ambulatory ceiling in that area.[21]

There are a number of fine red sketches, mostly of faces, on the concave stretch of lime-plaster over the recumbent Dying Buddha. Although it has been suggested that these are preliminary sketches and that therefore the image never got painted, this is not very likely considering the importance of the figure and the fact that, if speed was needed, it could surely have been painted on the already prepared surface in a single day. What seems to be the case is that the painted surface appears to have adhered very badly to the smooth lime-plaster, perhaps in part because such plaster might be affected by moisture in the atmosphere. Thus on such carefully prepared surfaces the paint has completely fallen off, revealing some of the artist's preliminary drawings.[22] However, if we look in more protected spots, like between the leaves of the tree at the left, we find distinct traces of surviving green pigment; and surely if the trees were once painted, the main figure of the Buddha must have been painted too. This fairly obvious conclusion gains support from the fact that there are many traces of paint on the closely related Temptation scene as well. Also the Temptation scene shows various colored areas which may have survived somewhat better because the paint was applied in a thin wash. A thin wash was also used to define the Dying Buddha's mandorla, at first glance, because of its very pale tone, the mandorla is not very noticeable against the limeplaster backing.

The cave's main Buddha image, which must have been underway before the cave's ambulatory panels were begun, was probably started in 477 and, like its counterpart in Cave 16, may not have been finished until early 478. As I have noted elsewhere, the main image

[20] This would imply that the left ambulatory panels were started before those of the right, which in fact do not extend as far down the aisle and for this reason too might have been started later.

[21] Although traces of mudplaster remain on the ceiling of the right ambulatory, no relevant evidence remains just above the panels.

[22] The same thing seems to have happened in the Nidhi Shrine at the left rear of Cave 2, between the two major figures.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

has been squeezed into a space not originally intended for it, forcing the bodhisattvas—their presence now required by convention—into inadequate locations on the stupa drum. Such attendants are assigned to their proper positions, however, in the three beautiful and closely related so-called Sravasti Miracle panels at the front of the right aisle, which are more comfortably composed versions of the crowded central group. Along with five little bhadrasana panels in the friezes of the hall—all equally dating to 477 or early 478—they must be the first carved images of this type created at the site, following the main figures in Cave 26 and 16.[23] Similar figures do not even appear in the original decoration of the cave's façade, which could not have been completed before 476.

There is one other related Sravasti Miracle panel (L8), probably also sponsored by Buddhabhadra, at the rear of the ambulatory. This location, which at first would seem a very low priority one, actually had (and has) the virtue of always being strongly illuminated. This is due to the fact that the stupa, instead of being centered in the nave, was displaced to the right, apparently in an attempt to get a better solstitial alignment. This must be the latest of the ambulatory panels that Buddhabhadra managed to get completed; in fact its base (generally the last area to be worked on) was never fully finished, further suggesting that this was the last panel which Buddhabhadra was able to sponsor before time suddenly ran out. Its very late date, in 478, is further confirmed by the fact that it includes the only figure of the goddess Tara—soon to become so important—done by any of the original patrons at the site. Paired with Vajrapani on the right, she replaces Avalokitesvara as the attendant at the left of the small Buddha over the image at the upper right.

As for the fine Eight Buddha series, its location at the very top of the right ambulatory wall, fitted closely against the Sravasti Miracle triad, would be hard to explain if it were an intrusion; for the "selfish" donors in the Period of Disruption almost invariably picked the most visible and easily accessible spaces, as long as the surface was already prepared. With Buddhabhadra it was different; this lengthy composition, if it had been put at eye level, would have usurped valuable space that Buddhabhadra must have planned to reserve for other

[23] Surprisingly, the type appears in painting a decade earlier.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

panels. Therefore, by raising it up high and positioning it neatly against the already underway Sravasti Miracle triad, he saved the valuable space below the other images, even though of course time ran out before he was able to use it.

The quality of the eight Buddha series is particularly fine, both in terms of its carving and its rhythmically ordered composition, with bodhisattvas flanking one image while devotees and flying dwarfs flank the next. The panel appears to have been done by the same sculptor who, in 478, decorated the lintel of the shrine doorway of Cave 4, to enhance the context of the huge Cave 4 Buddha, then being rushed to completion. Both, surprisingly, show Maitreya as the "first" of the series, placing him at the extreme left. However, it would appear, as described below, that Maitreya's anomalous placement was determined in the Cave 26 panel first, and that the group in Cave 4 is an ingenuous copy of that in Cave 26.[24]

Since Maitreya is the "eighth" and last emanation, his placement here is obviously unconventional; but like so many other such anomalies at the site, it typically finds its explanation in the impact of geology upon iconography.[25] The unexpected arrangement was apparently determined after the series had been roughly blocked out, revealing a previously unnoticed (or at least disregarded) deep vertical flaw at the left end of the panel. There are plenty of such flaws at Ajanta, of course, but when this series of eight seated images—like a similar sketched-out series on Cave Upper 6's left rear wall—was traced out on the wall, it was discovered that the aforementioned flaw cut straight downward from the chest through the belly of the first (i.e. most leftward) of the images in the series.

If the normal sequence was kept, the presence of the flaw would clearly disallow the repeated dharmacakra mudra for the *Vipasvi* Buddha, the first in the historical sequence.[26] Therefore, the positioning of the whole series was reversed, Maitreya being expediently shifted to the extreme left, since he could be shown in abhaya mudra, which the flaw would not directly affect. Such expedient adjustments—such transformations—are generally not sanctioned by the

[24] See Volume III, Cave 26.
[25] See Spink, "Flaws in Buddhist Iconology", 1982 (Publ: 1986).
[26] The historical Buddhas are identified by inscription in an intrusive painting in Cave 22, where (as is usual) they are in the "proper" order.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Buddhist texts, which aim to keep things in order. But Ajanta itself is a "Buddhist text", providing solid evidence in the stone, and unlike all other more ephemeral texts, with their constant losses and additions, and their imprecise origins and destinations, Ajanta provides us with a record of which we know the precise date, the precise patronage, the precise location, the precise origin and the precise ending.

The four "programmatic" panels ascribable to Buddhabhadra's patronage—Mara's Temptation of the Buddha in the left aisle and the "Eight Buddhas" (really Seven Buddhas plus Maitreya) next to his fine Sravasti Miracle triad in the right aisle—are among the finest sculptures at the site. The Dying Buddha, most startlingly of all, reflects and reveals the esthetic quality that the site's high patrons sought. Even the last and most hurried of Buddhabhadra's panels—the replicated Sravasti Miracle (Panel L8)—is of commendable quality, although it is now badly damaged.

The placement of the Temptation scene makes it reasonable to assume that it must have been started slightly later than the Dying Buddha and the Sravasti Miracle triad, which are located at the well-lit front of their respective aisles. The rather wide separation between the Dying Buddha and Mara scenes is typical rather than surprising, since each of these large compositions would have required space-consuming scaffolding.[27] This would confirm what we would in fact assume, namely that the two compositions were underway at the same time, although the Dying Buddha panel, considering its location, was undoubtedly started first. Since time must have run out before Buddhabhadra could add further panels to the ambulatory walls—he must have planned to fill the space between these two panels too—those which he did manage to complete must have been worked on throughout 478, being finished just before the façade returns and then the ambulatory were taken over by intrusive donors, starting in 479.

[27] See Cave Upper 6 shrine antechamber.0. Various other examples can be found showing the effects of scaffolding; e.g., the central porch ceiling painting in Cave 16 could not be started until the carving of the porch door below was completed and the scaffolding taken down. See also discussion of antechamber sculptures in Cave Upper 6. In Buddhabhadra's own Sravasti Miracle triad R2 and R4 appear from the treatment of their frames to have been done before R3, which must have at first been blocked by the scaffold.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

It has sometimes been suggested that the manner in which the Temptation composition "jogs out" at the left, over the clearly intrusive bhadrasana Buddha panel which occupies the space between Buddhabhadra's two great scenes, suggests that the Temptation scene is later than Buddha just to the left. But this does not take into account the freedom with which both sculptors and especially the site's mural painters could extend their compositions as they wished. The Dying Buddha, with its flourishing trees and his grieving disciple at the right rejects any "Renaissance-type frame" even more boldly, while the more rearward of the three Sravasti miracles on the right wall also projects to the left at the base level to include two extra devotees. So it is more to the point to say that the Temptation scene has a "jog" at the left because at the point when it was underway nothing had been planned for (or at least started in) the adjacent area.

I have been at pains to separate the donations that were part of Buddhabhadra's original program, ending in 478, from those of the immediately following "intrusive" phase. According to my analysis of such "uninvited" votive images, the very small panels with padmasana Buddhas clustering close to the Dying Buddha would have been donated early in 479, when such a high priority location was still available. The large bhadrasana Buddha (panel L2) occupying the convenient lower level of the space between the Dying Buddha and the Temptation scene would have been started next, "fitted" beneath the angled projection on the Temptation scene's left margin. Adjustments at L2's base—note the imbalances in the treatment of the deer, lotuses, and devotees—prove that the little padmasana panel at its lower left was already "in the way".

Further confirmation (not really needed) of the slightly later date of the L2 image is to be seen in its surprising iconography. The large intrusive Buddha panels in the ambulatory which are clearly referable to 479 all have bodhisattva attendants; however, in 480, standing Buddhas normally play the attendant role. But panel L2 combines the best of both worlds, with a standing Buddha appropriately placed on the seated image's proper right paired with a standing bodhisattva Avalokitesvara at the proper left. Although Avalokitesvara generally is to be found at the Buddha's right, it seems evident here that he has renounced such pride of place in honor of the standing Buddha. That this image (unique for Ajanta) is in fact "transitional" in terms of its actual date is of course unprovable, but

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

it is surely transitional in terms of the iconographic processes going on in the brief Period of Disruption, and so is of considerable Buddhalogical interest.

Shortly after, perhaps still in 479, the larger of the small padmasana Buddha panels, located just over the L2 Buddha, must have been begun. It would seem at first to be placed unnecessarily high, but this is almost certainly due to the roughness of the rock surface just beneath, which had not been quite fully finished by Buddhabhadra's own workers, who had to give up their efforts at the end of 478.[28] It also contains an arcing flaw which the new sculptor probably wished to avoid. Since the dimensions of the panel were presumably decided upon by the new donor, who contracted to have it done by the sculptor in this particular size for a fixed payment, we can understand why the sculptor would take it upon himself (or have received permission) to make such minor adjustments in its positioning.

In 480, by which time small (as opposed to large) bhadrasana Buddha panels had come into use, the same less convenient upper reaches of this still desirable space above panel L2 started to fill up with further intrusions. After the padmasana image just discussed, the next was surely the larger bhadrasana Buddha at the left. It was located in what generally appears to have been the more desirable lower portion of the available space, and perhaps would have been placed lower still had it not been for the "projecting" devotees, which the sculptor may have thought would have caused too much crowding if the group had been moved over and down. Or possibly the space below was intended for a painted inscription, now lost; such lost inscriptions may have filled a number of apparently "unused" spaces at the site.[29] But whatever the reason, the sculptor (like whoever made the image just above) had no reservations about cutting away some of the leaves of the Dying Buddha's sal tree, just as some of the little padmasana panels at the front of the same composition cut away portions of what was once the painted trunk of the tree close to the Buddha's head. In fact, although no intrusion ever cov-

[28] Some of the less desirable portions of the ambulatory wall was still somewhat rough when Asmaka patronage ended at the end of 478.

[29] This could even be the case with the padmasana panel just discussed. The two large intrusive standing Buddhas on Cave 9, a number in Cave 22, etc. almost certainly once had painted inscriptions on the smoothed areas just below.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

ers a completed (i.e. dedicated) Buddha image anywhere at the site, there are numerous examples where unfinished Buddha images or stupa-reliefs, to say nothing of foliage or lotuses surrounding completed images, are cut away without concern.

Cohen proposes that Buddhabhadra himself sanctioned the completion—at least the plastering—of these intrusions, along with his own great Dying Buddha panel. He states that "This can be determined by the fact that the same white plaster Spink deems to be programmatic [i.e. planned by Buddhabhadra for the Dying Buddha] was also slathered over several haphazardly placed 'intrusive' panels to the right of the Mahaparinirvana scene. In fact, one of these intrusions plastered by Buddhabhadra was carved directly into the Dying Buddha scene itself, into the leaves of the right Sala tree near the Buddha's feet."[30] Thus he suggests that "it may be possible that, for some donors, (their) programs included a provision for 'intrusive' images to be added on an occasional basis to the cave, producing merit for the image's donor as well as for the particular Vakataka luminary who helped that good person to produce merit."[31]

Whether Buddhabhadra would have been willing to share the merit, even if he allowed such intrusions, is a matter for Buddhologists to decide. My concern is whether Buddhabhadra, even in the unlikely event that he was willingly sharing such space, would tolerate his beautiful composition being cut into. Instead, it is far more reasonable to consider the intrusive donors as typically untroubled—in this cave as in others—about the plans and concerns of the now disenfranchised patrons. Furthermore, at least in this case, we cannot say that the white lime-plaster "slathered" (in fact applied very carefully!) over the Dying Buddha was equally applied to the intrusions. The more precise finishing of the Dying Buddha composition is very different from the quicker surfacing of the adjacent intrusions.

When we observe the Dying Buddha carefully, we can see that the whole carved surface was prepared with a varied layer of fine

[30] Cohen 1995, 190. Actually there are two "intruding" panels at the right, and two placed over the trunk at the left, as I have mentioned.

[31] Cohen 1995, 191. I once thought that the patrons of Cave Upper 6 and Cave 7 somehow cooperated with the new donors who took over the caves for their own purposes; and Cohen cites these views as found in my unpublished A Scholars' Guide. However I no longer believe this. See discussion of these caves in Chapter 11 of this Volume.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

mudplaster, prior to the white lime plaster being applied. Such careful treatment is not found in the adjacent intrusions, nor in fact in any of the intrusions in the cave, which were notably controlled by expediency. And as if to confirm this difference, Buddhabhadra's fine Temptation scene on the other side of the same group of intrusions reveals the same careful mud-plastering beneath the white plaster surface; and again, it was hardly "slathered" but instead was very carefully applied. The plasterers even reconstructed the flawed nose and lip of the Buddha.[32] If any "slathering" was done it was done to the intrusions alone; and in this case it does seem that they were all surfaced at once.[33] This would seem to bring them close together in time and would suggest a connection between their patrons, if indeed (as I assume) they are the offerings of different intrusive donors.

Since the monk Buddhabhadra was so closely connected with the Asmaka court, and since it was his dedicatory inscription which so conscientiously defined the end of the Vakataka overlordship, (at least as viewed by the Asmakas), the above analysis is directly relevant to our understanding of the political and/or economic (and/or military) situation at the time when the Asmaka patronage of the site came to an end. I have suggested, in my analysis of developments in other Asmaka caves—Cave 21 most strikingly—that time ran out for the Asmakas quite precipitously at the end of 478, by which time the whole site was totally bereft of its once so well established patronage; at this point the pious "intruders" took over. This surely tells us that the rebellious Asmakas cut off their support of the site very suddenly, and the logical conclusion must be that this was in order to better prepare for war, for only some kind of an official edict could effect the shutdown of the site's established patronage so decisively.

Although it is clear that a war would shatter the Vakataka empire within the next few years, this insurrection had not started yet, for in 479 and 480 the site was flooded with intrusions which could only have been ordered, made, and paid for, when the situation at

[32] The added plaster has now mostly fallen away, but the remaining traces reveal the contemporary repair. The nose of the more forward standing Buddha in the antechamber of Cave Upper 6 was similarly repaired, but with mud plaster secured by the painting applied over it.

[33] At least this seems to be true of the upper five panels; the two below have lost their surfacing.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

the site was still relatively stable, despite the fact that the old patrons were now gone. Of course, as pointed out earlier, the Period of Disruption (479–480) appears to have ended very suddenly also—at least as far as the donation of images was concerned. I have suggested that the cause of this sudden break may well have been the eruption of a local battle, in which the Asmakas sought (successfully) to throw off the final remnants of their feudatory heritage in the region, as part of their larger developing campaign to take over the whole empire.[34]

In 479 and 480 the rest of the Cave 26 ambulatory was gradually, and quite sequentially, filled up with intrusive images which have nothing of the complexity or quality of Buddhabhadra's 478 panels, which were of course their models.[35] This decline is evident even at the start, and continues inexorably as time rapidly moves toward its sad conclusion. But in the site's burgeoning days, even (in caves such as Buddhabhadra's Cave 26) we are in a different world, with a potential which in the end was never realized, although it was already preparing for a productive future at sites which can be seen as Ajanta's progeny. Buddhabhadra's Temptation scene, perhaps most of all, expresses the potential, for it is the most complex sculptural composition at Ajanta, predicting the coming achievements at Elephanta—as if work in the sculptural medium had finally caught up with the site's sophisticated mural compositions.

Had the high and consistent patronage at Ajanta gone on for another decade or two—had Mozart lived until fifty!—what wonders we would have seen. As it was, the artists, full of experience, had to search—perhaps often for years—for a new patronage. Those that went east may well have found it at sites like Deogarh and Nachna Kuthara, where their own knowledge and ability, fused with the local idiom, can help to explain the superb quality of the sculptures in that area. Those who went east—or the sons of such travelers—may have been working, starting a decade later, at sites such as Kanheri, where the donations are often of a quality worthy of the source.[36] But the exuberant excess of Ajanta is gone, as was so

[34] See "Patronage" for discussion of the possibility that the Ajanta region was in the path of the advancing armies.

[35] These will be discussed in detail in Volume III.

[36] The colossal Buddhas in the porch of Kanheri Cave 3 could almost be considered

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

often the case in Mozart's followers. It is not until we reach Elephanta, or hear Beethoven, that we realize that both a true continuation, and a renewal, has taken place.

The point of this review of the Asmaka caves at the western end of the site is to show that, especially in Buddhabhadra's great caitya hall, work proceeded in a vigorous and consistent fashion throughout 478, and that in the lesser Asmaka caves it also progressed in a relatively normal, even if increasingly hurried, fashion. Compared with the "rush for the exit" in the "Vakataka" caves, this clearly confirms the authority of the Asmakas at the site in these latter days. Of course, as can be seen from the evidence of Caves 21 and 23, to say nothing of Buddhabhadra's aborted ambulatory program, all work in the Asmaka's western extremity of the site suffered an eclipse somewhat earlier than expected, being totally cut off by the end of 478.

Cave 26 Left Wing

Surely it was his sense of impending crisis that urged Buddhabhadra, as the end of 478 approached, to get shrines hurriedly started in Caves 25, 26RW, and 27, the three "lesser" wings of his Caitya 26 complex. In fact, he had paid them little heed earlier, leaving them all unfinished while he lavished attention on the great hall itself, on the slightly later and more successful Left Wing and, not least, upon the grand Cave 24. But now he must have been feeling the same compulsions which had driven the Vakataka patrons, a few months earlier, to so expediently rush their main Buddha images to dedication. Unless a donation was "completed"—that is, unless the image was dedicated—no merit would accrue, for the image, and the cave itself, would not be "alive". So in a sense this was a last minute campaign to make as much merit as he could, knowing that, once established, it "will endure for as long as the moon and the sun continue" (26 inscription, verse 8).

In the already blocked out Left Wing (Cave 26LW) this was not a problem, for the richly decorated shrine and the shrine antechamber must already have been started in 476 or 477, when there was

---

as upright versions of Ajanta's Dying Buddha. In fact they both measure 23 feet from head to foot.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

still no fear for the future. The main Buddha had surely been started in about 476, being similar in type to those in Caves 2 and 21, characterized by the padmasana pose, flanking bodhisattvas, flying dwarfs, kneeling devotees instead of lions.[37] However, since both the shrine doorway and the antechamber pillars were not finished until 478, the Buddha itself may not have been completed and dedicated until that time. It is clear that the double-paneled shrine doorway got put in place on schedule, for pivot holes appear at the doorway's base, even though the top has broken away.

That the shrine was not finished until 478 seems evident from the unconventional but late character of its assorted features. Its shrine doorway no longer follows the more worldly trend of doorways in the last years of the site's consistent patronage, where loving couples—as an established empanelling motif—become increasing amorous in their attentions. Instead, like the shrine doorway of Cave 4, also redesigned in 478, it reflects a changed psychology by the substitution of the formerly conventional motifs by a vertical series of upright Buddhas. However, just as the couples on the porch doorways of Cave 24 and 26, finished only the year before, turn strongly inward for the first time, the Buddhas here also direct their movement toward the cave's axis. Surprisingly—although the evidence is nothing more than the legs of one horizontal figure at the upper right—this "divine focus" may have been amplified by a converging series of flying Buddhas on the lintel, a variant of the flying celestial devotees in the same position on the porch doorways of Cave 24 and 26.[38]

It has been mentioned earlier that between 475 and 478, when the Asmakas were in control of the site, they almost certainly discouraged any representation of the standing Buddha in abhaya mudra, since that was focal image of the defeated Upendragupta's rival caitya hall. However, one such image seems to have been carved at the top right corner of this shrine doorway, where a distinct flaw in the rock necessitated that the Buddha's right hand be raised in the abhaya mudra rather than the lowered varada. However, close examination reveals that these particular images are not, after all, of the same

[37] Its higher than normal elevation appears to have been necessitated by a serious flaw in the base.

[38] This evidence is minimal; it is conceivable that they are lesser celestials; but the Buddha does sometimes fly at Ajanta (Cave 16, painting above left aisle doorway). The upper left corner (and the whole lintel) is restored in cement.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

type as the authoritatively standing hieratic Buddha on the stupa of Cave 19. These are images, enhancing the sense of the doorway's active focus, are actually *walking, not standing,* Buddhas. Thus they combine both the increasing emphasis on Buddha images (rather than loving couples) seen in the contemporaneous decoration of the Cave 4 shrine doorway with the increasingly axial emphasis, whereby the inner edge of the frames were cut away as in the just mentioned Cave 24 and Cave 26 examples.

We should also note that the doorway does not have the T-shaped format (containing goddesses) conventional for doorways cut in 477, as if such niceties had now to be given up. By the same token the major outer border is occupied by a series of active standing dwarfs; only the female figures and nagas at the base—much reduced in size—recall the compositions of a year or so past. In fact the whole doorway (again like the re-designed shrine doorway of Cave 4) lacks the compositional integrity and the increasingly convincing structural references which had been gained in the doorways of the last few years, done when the patrons' concerns were very different.[39]

It should also be noted that the shrine antechamber pillars (largely lost now) were completed with an expediency also characteristic of 478; the sculptor appears to have decorated them, in a clearly late fashion, without taking the time and trouble to modernize the old shafts, which had not progressed past a square (still unfinished) format when work on the complex had to be abandoned in 468. Like so many other forms in this left wing, they would have followed the stylistic lead of their far more richly realized counterparts in Upendragupta's Cave 20.

The cave walls were probably painted, as would be expected, at the same late date that the image in the shrine was finally finished, in 478. However, all traces of paint have by now been lost due to the extremely exposed condition of the cave, most of the ceiling of which has fallen in. The original paintings were probably iconic, which would be expected in a caitya complex and would be especially characteristic if, as seems likely, the work was done in the

[39] The arduous character of my journey on the gravelly pathway toward truth is suggested by the fact that I once assumed (quite logically?) that excavated doorways would at first replicate structural prototypes, and gradually lose that connection, while their carved decoration (to be painted anyway) would gradually be renounced for the more cost-efficient readable and colorful painted forms.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

increasingly pious context of 478. This would explain why later donors never cut or painted intrusive images on the cave's walls, with the result that the integrity of the cave's walls has been preserved. Not surprisingly, one finds none of the hooks or hook holes often connected with such intrusions, again suggesting that in 478 the walls were covered with paintings ordered by Buddhabhadra himself.[40]

A survey of Cave 26LW's cells suggests that, with the probable exception of the most forward of all, the single cell cut into the originally plain end wall at porch right none were yet significantly underway when work on the complex so suddenly ended late in 468.[41] As noted elsewhere, throughout Buddhabhadra's Cave 26 complex, the procedure was to block out the whole before starting the cells and other details. Presumably, by 467 or 468 the shaping of the whole cave had progressed far enough for the two porch cells to be undertaken, either in the A mode (in 467) or the B mode (if cut in 468). This is clear from the fact that when they were "updated" after the Asmaka "restoration" in 475, the original thinness of the "early" front wall of the cell was reflected, on their conversion, in the attenuated pillars of the later complex carved at this point.[42] The cells of the Left Wing's interior hall may have been started shortly thereafter, by 468, but it is not likely that they were more than barely penetrated at that time.[43] This is because the rather consistent thickness of their doorways—at about 17" much greater than the recut wall of the earlier cell at porch right—suggests that they were all continued by contract sometime after 475; the treatment of the D-mode door fittings shows a similar consistency and of course helps to confirm this dating.

It is reasonable to assume—given the need for housing—that the cells of the hall were underway by 475, which would explain why

[40] If Cave 26LW (like 26RW) had to be finished in a rush toward the end of 478, this could explain why no hooks were inserted in the walls.

[41] If there was indeed room for a cell at the left porch end—which was probably the case, it has long since fallen away, with so much of the more forward portions of the complex.

[42] As in Cave 26RW, the original doorway was probably of the B mode (of 468) but of course the revealing projection would have been cut away when the fronting pillars were cut from the thin front wall of the original cell.

[43] The B mode projections characteristic of 468 (and found in Cave 26RW) were either not revealed when the cave was first abandoned or else were later cut away.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

their walls, although thicker than those of most pre-Recession cells, do not have the conventional thickness of those underway a year or two later, in the other Asmaka viharas. But it was probably at least late 476 or 477 before their D-mode doors were hung and that their various residential conveniences were in place. This is suggested by the lack of excavated niches in their back walls; these amenities apparently go out of fashion (replaced by wooden counterparts?) sometime in 467, surely by 477. Since there are none in the cells of the Left Wing, we can assume that these cells, as well as the new pillared cell at porch right with its D-mode inner cell, were probably not finally finished until close to the time of Harisena's death.

Cave 26 Right Wing

The creation of the shrine in Cave 26's Right Wing (26RW) in 478 was an eleventh hour decision, in a cave which, because of its geological problems and its now-obsolete format, had been abandoned since the beginning of the Recession. Nonetheless, there was now a last-minute compulsion to add an image to the anomalous projection which had been revealed for that very purpose—to provide a place for the Buddha image—in 468, even though, because of the Recession, it had remained merely blocked out for the past decade. That this addition did not take place until 478 is evident from the character of the new shrine image—it is clearly a variation of the main bhadrasana Buddha in the caitya hall.

At the same time the cut-back at the left, which was created as a byproduct of the projection and had been earlier roughed out in 468, was now turned into a bed similar to that under the famed Dying Buddha, also finished in 478. Although conceived as a "space-filler" it happens to have been just the right length for a fifth-century monk. It could not have been created prior to the Recession, when there was no detailing of motifs at all in the complex; and an intrusive donor never would have wasted his time or money on such a nicety in the Period of Disruption. Instead it fits very well into the context of 478, when Buddhabhadra still had the time, the funds, and the interest to create some of the finest works at the site, despite the tension of the times.

As for the adjacent cell's old and obsolete B-mode doorway, which had been cut in 468 but never fitted out, it was now upgraded to the more convenient D-mode, even though it had a troublingly thin

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

early (468) wall. In fact, this was probably done in 475, when the much-needed cell would have been fitted out for use by the monks; we can assume this because the niche in the rear wall is a feature which goes out of fashion very shortly thereafter.[44] This would suggest (quite reasonably) that the cell, having already been defined in 468, was put into use as soon as the Asmakas took over the site in 475. The same would have been the case with the now collapsed cell R1; as we can tell from the ruinous remains of the door base, it too had a B-mode doorway converted to the D-mode, so we know that the cell was still intact in the late 470s. But the cave was hardly a high priority concern of Buddhabhadra's, being not only obsolete in design but relatively useless either for worship or residence. It could never be supplied with a "proper" shrine at the rear, for by the time the concept entered Ajanta, the courtyard of Cave 24 was being cut in this area and the courtyard's floor lay at a level which made it impossible to even cut cells in the rear wall of Cave 26RW. This is because the amount of rock which would have existed between the ceiling of such cells and the courtyard floor of Cave 24 was insufficient to avoid a breakthrough.

The potential problem was compounded by a bad flaw running along the Cave 26RW's rear wall only about two feet from the Cave 24 courtyard floor above; were the two rear cells or a shrine put in this area, their ceilings would have had to be cut above this flaw. Furthermore, it was impossible to add cells to Cave 26RW's primitive porch; that they had not even been conceived when the cave was originally planned is proved by the location of the cistern abutting the porch at the left. Two other cells could never be realized; that at the rear of the right wall could not be revealed because of the corruption of the rock in that area. Furthermore, since work on the cave was early abandoned and not taken up again until 468, the complex right porch cell of the main cave, having priority, had usurped dthe available space in that area of the right wing. With all these problems, it is hardly surprising that Buddhabhadra, right up to 478, had concentrated on more promising portions of his great cave complex.

[44] By 476 such niches may already have gone out of fashion. In 477, they are also rare, and always wider; in the latter case I call them "shelves", to distinguish them from "niches".

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

However, in 478, with a sense of time running out, Buddhabhadra made a distinct effort to get Buddha images in all of the four wings of his great hall carved and dedicated. Using the previously defined projection, revealed a decade earlier, he now supplied it with an up-to-date image, turning his attention to this Right Wing, as to the Left, surely because these areas were so intimately collected with the main hall, where the image must have been completed some months earlier. By contrast, he had put off similar concerns in the two upper wings too long. This is clear from the fact that, despite his desire to supply them with shrines too, those shrines never got done.

Cave 25 = Cave 26 Upper Right Wing

Buddhabhadra's confidently pious undertakings in 478 extended also to the long-abandoned and embarrassingly old-fashioned upper wings (Caves 25 and 27) of the great Cave 26 caitya hall. These upper units both must have been started without any clear attempt to integrate them—as the "true" lower wings were integrated—into the plan of the caitya hall itself. This is understandable, since they do not share the courtyard which connects all the areas below.[45] Being among the very first viharas excavated at the site, and being underway as the upper levels of the great hall were revealed, they are monuments to inexperience, with problems of access and difference of size as well as of focus.

Despite the clumsiness with which these two upper wings were both conceived and executed, and despite the fact that work on them was soon abandoned as other parts of the great complex were given priority, Buddhabhadra, at the eleventh hour, clearly decided that they too should finally be supplied with shrines, no matter how expediently. This shows how committed and inclusive his interests were, even at a late date, when there were dark clouds gathering on the horizon. It is clear that he wanted to make sure that a Buddha would be resident in each of the complex's four wings before time ran out. But although the world was expected to end, no man knoweth the time thereof, and Buddhabhadra obviously guessed

[45] The compositional connection between the main hall and its wings at the lower level was of course much more evident before Cave 26LW was not only moved back but was much expanded.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

wrong. Thus he joined the company of a host of other great donors throughout history, who were surprised, to their grief, by reality.

What is particularly significant is that, in Cave 25 (as in the other wings too) it is also clear that general excavation work, rather than just anxious work on a Buddha image, was going on in 478. This varied work focus, so different from what was happening in the same year (478) in the "Vakataka" caves, is evident from the fact that the floor of the old unfinished porch was now being lowered, as was long ago intended. However, the excavators were now unable to cut it down to the desired level at the right, because of the presence of a recent (477) excavation just below. This "barrier" to further excavation was the partially finished complex court cell at the left of Cave 24. It had been started, in 477, when throughout the site such court cells were being added, always at this very late date.[46] But it was never finished due to Harisena's death. Therefore, since the work in the porch of Cave 25 was subsequent to the Cave 24 court cell (excavated in 477) this is absolute proof that here, as in other Asmaka caves, general excavation work was proceeding "in normal course" in 478—an approach in clear contrast to the compulsively shrine-focused work being done in the "Vakataka" caves just prior to their abandonment in about the middle of this same year.

These efforts in Cave 25 were apparently aimed at "improving" and updating the porch and the porch alone, for no more work could be done in the interior, where the high floor could not be lowered because of the fact that the adjacent Cave 24's left cells now penetrated deeply under it. Buddhabhadra had in fact abandoned the very unimpressive Cave 25 when the huge and highly impressive Cave 24 was planned shortly before the Recession. So there was no reasonable way to put a shrine at the rear of Cave 25's half-finished old hall. However, since now, in 478, Buddhabhadra was determined to put a shrine in each of the four wings of the Caitya Hall, another location in Cave 25 would have to be found.

The location which Buddhabhadra apparently chose for the Cave 25 image was an anomalous one at the right of the porch, where a loose image could have been set into the (unfinished) deep niche being cut into the wall at the right. That this was indeed intended

[46] The cell was converted in 479/480 into a shrine for an intrusive Buddha, which has no effect on its usefulness for dating the continuation of work on Cave 25.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

to be the location for Cave 25's image is suggested by the presence of a very similar niche cut into the unfinished front wall of Cave Upper 6 right in the middle of a series of flanking intrusive Buddha panels. The fact that the entire front wall of Upper 6 is given over to Buddha images clearly suggests that this niche was made for a similar purpose, and supports the assumption that the same type of niche in Cave 25 was also intended for a Buddha image. However, in the absence of further evidence, this must remain a hypothesis—strengthened by the realization that there would seem to be no equally satisfying alternative explanation.

Although it was impossible to lower Cave 25's porch floor area at the right, it would appear that the planners made the best of a bad thing by conceiving the recalcitrant matrix there as a platform which could be used for ritual purposes and perhaps also to protect the image presumably intended for the niche at its rear. Although two unusual (and unfinished) cells were added at this time to the left of the porch, they were more probably intended to provide much-needed istorage for the effects of the caitya hall than for residence. Indeed, these have no door fittings, and there was no attempt to add residence cells along the walls of the interior, where the floor could no longer be lowered due to Cave 24's cells beneath. That the planners now had no intention of putting cells even along the left side (under which Cave 24's cells of course did not extend) is clear from the disposition of the more rearward porch cell; it usurps the area into which the first of the left cells would have been cut. Indeed, it seems clear that when work on the cave was renewed in 478, after a gap of more than a decade, the planners were concentrating on the porch alone, as the locus for the planned shrine. This must be why they were "improving" it by redesigning and recutting both the porch's colonnade and (more surprisingly) the now relatively functionless central doorway into the hall. Like everything else in this revivified porch this work seems both hasty and clumsy and was never finished. If Buddhabhadra, having taken the best workers, gave the highest priority to finishing the work on the main cave in 478, the opposite is true here. It is clear where his main interest lay.

The character of these late revisions confirms the very late date of the reworked porch. The doorway—the lintel alone has been roughly completed—shows a highly developed trabeated format, with a doubled roof-motif interspersed with arch-forms, closely comparable to the new types found in Caves 23, 22, 26, and the revision of

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Cave 15's porch doorway, all in 477, or sometimes just possibly continuing into early 478.

The Cave 25 porch pillars were also being finished and re-designed in 478. This is clear from the late "quarter-round" form into which the capitals have been trimmed, and from the indecisive addition of the rib motifs on the right one, crudely reflecting the contemporaneous motifs seen in Caves 22 and 23. It is clear, too, that the projecting base moldings were roughed out when the surrounding floor was cut down in 478; they emulate the late base motifs seen in Cave 2's porch, and also the less assertive examples in Cave 26's hall. The pillars of both of the latter were also originally blocked out in the early octagonal format, before being transformed. And since the creation of a conventionally late square base (the design of choice at this time) would attenuate the shafts too much, a compromise was reached by cutting the pillars in Cave 26 and in Cave 2's porch down to a sixteen sided format. This was still far more "decorative" (and desirable) than the early eight-sided type, which still can be seen—untransformed—at the low priority apse end of Cave 26. This was probably the plan for the Cave 25 pillars too; the eight-sided shafts now seen are either what were cut just before the cave's abandonment in about 466, or else they represent the first step in a late process of moving toward a more complex and up-to-date design.

Since there was no suggestion that all of this busy work in the porch had anything to do with fitting this old cave out for habitation, it is hard to think of any other reason for its being done, except to make the area fit—even if minimally—as a proper context for an image. But in detail after detail time ran out, and no matter what Buddhabhadra's intentions were, it seems evident that the image was never installed.

Cave 27

Buddhabhadra's compulsion to insure that all of the four wings associated with his caitya hall should now, when time was so clearly running out, finally be supplied with Buddha images, explains the latest burst of effort in Cave 27 (the complex's upper left wing) too.[47]

[47] For greater consistency, I have numbered the two main wings, at either side of the courtyard of Cave 26 as 26 Right Wing and 26 Left Wing (26RW and

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Cave 27, like all of the other three wings of the hall, was originally planned as an astylar "dormitory" without any thought of a shrine whatsoever; four simple cells (two quite damaged) would have been planned for the rear wall (facing the main courtyard), and an equal number of cells were intended for both the left and the right walls. The excavation, just as that of Cave 25, might have been started as early as 462, since both would have been reached early in the course of the cutting down of the caitya hall proper As we might expect, considering the very early date when it was initially blocked out, the cells would not have been started until the entire space was roughed out, and the walls (again, characteristically for such an early undertaking) would have been quite imprecise in their alignment—as is indeed the case).[48]

The orientation of the cave, at 90 degrees to Cave 25, may seem peculiar in any case, and the peculiarity is made even more striking by the later location of the shrine. As suggested above, when the cave was started, because the present layout of the court area, with the two lower wings, may not have yet been conceived, it would seem that little thought was given to the matter of access.[49] Therefore, just as with Cave 25, the solution was both expedient and anomalous. Unfortunately, with the fall of so much of the complex at the front left, our suggested reconstruction must be somewhat hypothetical.

One thing is clear, that access to Cave 27 (at least once the whole complex's excavation had assumed its present form) could only have been up into the porch area from the left side of the court; and even with the extensive loss of the rock in front of the whole great complex, there remains a clear hint as to where this approach was located. This evidence is provided by what appears to have been a worn step at the left front corner of the main courtyard, just to the left of the sequence of ganas, which it in fact interrupts. It is hard

---

26LW) even though the latter has traditionally been called Cave 27, and the cave above "Upper 27". I call the upper level excavations "Cave 25" and "Cave 27", rather than "wings" for they are less intimately associated with the great chaitya hall than the lower caves, which are closely linked to it, in plan, via their shared courtyard.

[48] As mentioned earlier, the architect of the 26 Cave complex did not start any detailing, or even the penetration of any cells, until the whole was reamed out.

[49] Such lack of foresight was common when the site was in its very beginning stages and the direction of development was not yet sufficiently known. For instance, for the first few years, cell and main doorways at the site were cut (in the A mode) while still innocent of plans for fitting them out.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

to find any other explanation for the presence of this otherwise apparently unnecessary stone block. Presumably this monolithic riser, which protrudes so surprisingly in the otherwise fully leveled courtyard, was the first of a series of stone steps that led up over the wall (now broken) at the left end of the wide plinth of the left wing, and then on up over the fallen left porch cell and thus into the Cave 27 porch.[50] What finally argues that this was the access route is that once Cave 26LW was excavated directly below Cave 27 there was no other possible route into the upper cave.

Although the presence of the large unfinished shrine or shrine antechamber (explained below) suggests that the wall into which it is cut is indeed the rear wall of the cave, that is not the case. The rear wall, quite properly, is aligned with the porch, which opens out over the courtyard of the main complex. It is even possible that when the main cave was originally planned, just as in the almost equally early Caitya Cave 19, the idea of adding the two lower wings had not even developed, the primary concern being the creation of the caitya hall proper.[51] In this case access to Cave 27, directly from the open area in front of the main hall, would have been no problem, either for Cave 27 or for Cave 25. But such a situation would have existed only briefly, since it is clear from the early character of the lower right wing (underway before the lower left) that this developed courtyard area was surely underway by 464.

It appears that the cave, like its smaller counterpart at the upper right (Cave 25) was abandoned as early as 465 or 466, as Buddhabhadra concentrated his attention on the great hall below, and at the same time was already fervently developing plans for the far more up-to-date Cave 24. But while this initial phase of work was going on, probably before the cells of the interior hall were even begun, he added a now up-to-date single cell (much broken) at the right porch end.[52]

---

[50] We assume that when the whole cave complex was started, there was space enough in the once much deeper (now much fallen) scarp, for this "left porch cell"; however, any certain evidence is gone today. If the "left porch cell" never was cut, it would have been even easier to have cut the steps in this area.

[51] For the proof that the "wings" (or court cell complexes) of Cave 19 were "afterthoughts", see Volume II; they were laid out in response to the warping of the façade, rather than when the cave was first planned.

[52] Such porch end cells were added, almost compulsively, to most of the early porches at the site, if at all possible, in 465 and 466 (see Defining Features). The plan of the Cave 26 complex, originally published in Yazdani 1955, page 16 and

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

(The left cell, as mentioned above, was probably also excavated, but has long since fallen away). A decade or more later, this single cell, like its counterpart in the Left Wing below, was converted to a conventional pillared complex, its cell doorway cut in the expected D mode. Again, as in its counterpart below, the fronting pillars, cut from the thin front wall of the original cell, have broken away, leaving only their molded bases. As in the complex below, its originally thin walls and deep format—hardly to be expected in a standard vestibule—reveal its much earlier origins as a simple cell.

As for the cells in the hall, a few of them along the rear wall, (originally A mode in type), may have been barely penetrated before this first phase of work was abandoned. Work on them was surely not taken up again until after the Hiatus, and indeed probably not until Buddhabhadra suddenly took a renewed interest in the cave and began work on the (unfinished) shrine area early in 478. At this point the cells along the rear wall (those along the left wall have fallen away) were provided with D-mode fittings, while work on those along the right wall was somewhat delayed because of Buddhabhadra's new plans for that area.

Surprisingly, the first cell in the right wall (R1), was eventually fully completed (also in the D mode), probably because it must have become clear, as time ran out in 478, that the projected shrine at the center of the same wall could never be completed. This may be the reason that R1 was converted into what was obviously a simple shrine, as a kind of modest "replacement" for its ambitious but aborted neighbor. Unique in being the only painted "cell" at the site, it was decorated with a ceiling medallion, at the center of which a broken garland hook still remains; it is unique at the site in this regard too. A niche, cut at the back, may have held a small image, since it has a single hole (surely for yet another garland hook) at its top margin.[53] It is also interesting to note that instead of the single standard doorstop, it also boasts a second, so placed that it could secure the door when it was open. Here again, the situation is unique

---

often reproduced, is very inaccurate; among other things it does not show the remaining traces of this right porch cell and the stumps of its (later-added) fronting pillars, cut from the original front wall of the cell.

[53] Niches tend to go out of fashion by 476, but are occasionally found thereafter, as late as 478; the later examples are usually somewhat larger and I call them "shelves".

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

at the site, suggesting an interest in facilitating access and egress in the course of worship.

Although cells were rarely either started or completed at Ajanta in 478—when patrons had much more image-focused concerns in mind, we can assume that the cells here, and perhaps a number throughout the Cave 26 complex, were an exception. This was, after all, Buddhabhadra's dedication, and his authority and power is manifest throughout—ranging from the amazing sculptures that he sponsored in this troubled year, to the many untypical additions and revisions which he made throughout the complex.

We would of course not expect that any shrine had been started in Cave 27 during its brief early phase, which probably was interrupted, along with work on Cave 25 and Cave 26RW, in 465 or 466, even before the sudden compulsion to transform viharas into places of worship had begun. It appears that then, for many years after their abortive inaugural phases, both Cave 25 and Cave 27, awkward both in conception and location, lay untouched for many years, while activity in the complex was focused upon the great hall itself and the greatly enlarged left wing (Cave 26LW) However, in 478, when concerns about the future arose throughout the site, Buddhabhadra obviously was determined to add a shrine to Cave 27 also, although it could no longer be placed in the conventional position, because the earlier cells at the rear of the cave were in the way. Fortunately, however, there was a model to follow, for the revolutionary shrine and image of Cave 16 had just been started the year before, and the shrine there was being developed by incorporating two barely-penetrated earlier cells into it.

We can see that something similar was now being done in Cave 27, where the space to the right of the roughed-out right antechamber pillar incorporates the prior penetration (or at least the intended location) of what would have been Cell R2, while the roughed-out left pillar of the antechamber takes advantage of the fact that at this point the early cell (R3) had not even been started, although this would seem to be the cell's expected location. Indeed, some remaining matrix in front of the pillar suggests that stone was reserved at this point for a step (or typically early candrasila) when the hall floor was cut down in the early phase; at such an early date, as is still clear in the very-unfinished Cave 25, the whole space of the hall would have been reamed out before the cells were penetrated. Of course, since there is no evidence of an image being started in this

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

still very roughly penetrated area, the Cave 27 cutting may have been intended for a relatively conventional shrine antechamber rather than a copy of Cave 16's anomalously palatial shrine chamber. If so, work never progressed as far as the wall into which the shrine doorway would have opened.

But what is of particular interest is the positioning of this developing shrine on the right side wall rather than, as expected, on the expected rear wall of the cave; for it would seem that, with a bit of ingenuity, it would have been quite possible to incorporate the two center cells in this rear area into the shrine plan instead. The reason that this was not done, very significantly, almost certainly lies in the proximity of the unfinished Cave 28, probably the last major cave started at the site. When Cave 28 was undertaken in 477, Buddhabhadra had obviously not developed his obsession for adding shrines to these obsolete old upper stories, both of which were probably to all intents and purposes still abandoned at that time. Certainly done under Buddhabhadra's aegis, probably to match its grand counterpart Cave 24, Cave 28 had to be abandoned at the end of 477 because there could be no expectation of completing it, given the new political (and economic) situation.

However, because no one had thought of the implication of Cave 28's positioning in advance, when Buddhabhadra became obsessed with the idea of adding the shrine/shrine antechamber complex to Cave 27, it was impossible to place it in the normal and conventional position at the rear of the cave. This is because it would extend under—perhaps actually break into—the right aisle cells of Cave 28. The creation of those cells, of course, was never realized; but it is surely correct to assume that Buddhabhadra had every intention of finishing the great Cave 28 cave once the aggressive Asmakas had won the coming war and things had settled down again—which of course never happened.[54] There could be no more convincing proof that this addition of a shrine to Cave 27 was started in 478; and of course this conclusion is supported by its unfinished state. For here, too, time ran out. Thus ritually, both Cave 27 and Cave

[54] If, in 477, Buddhabhadra had thought of putting a shrine in (or even finishing) the old Cave 27, he probably would have had Cave 28 located farther to the left. But since he was not then concerned about Cave 27, he followed the general pattern at the site of not wasting any space, leaving only enough room to accommodate the cave's projected right porch cell complex without breaking into Cave 27.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

25, with their shrines never completed, were dead; and as we would expect, neither of them has a single intrusion.[55]

But, beyond being clearly datable to 478, the presence of this barely undertaken shrine area in Cave 27 (like the presence of the unfinished anomalous shrine in Cave 25) is very revealing in other ways too. The fact that they had only been started, when time ran out, proves that Buddhabhadra was certainly not expecting the situation caused by the Asmaka revolt against the Vakatakas to become critical as soon as it did. Of course, the cut-off of activity, which at the end of 478 drew a sudden close to Asmaka patronage in Cave 21, 23, 26, 26LW and 26RW, was surely not caused by an immediate outburst of the war which the various Vakataka feudatories were indeed planning to wage against their new overlord, Sarvasena III.

For one thing, the Asmakas, after just having declared their independence, were probably not yet ready to take on the empire. But also, we must allow at least a few years for the rule of Harisena's successor, Sarvasena III, as the *Visrutacarita* implies, and as is suggested by inscriptional evidence. For instance, scholars generally agree that Maharaja Simhavarman of the Kadamba family who, in the recently discovered Mudigere plates, was "honored by Maharaja Sarvasena with coronation" was a contemporary of Harisena's son, Sarvasena III, rather than one of the previous Vakataka kings of that name.[56] We do not know how long after Sarvasena's accession this occurred, but it may well represent an attempt by Harisena's troubled heir to strengthen his connections in the face of the coming troubles. On the other hand, as Cohen has pointed out, such political support "might have contributed to the Vakatakas' and Ajanta's decline by further taxing the resources of that family.[57]

By the same token it is unlikely that the hundreds of votive intrusions carved or painted in the next two years (479–480), even though mostly the donations of monks still resident at the site (as we can deduce from their inscriptions) could have been produced in a time

[55] If there was indeed a little loose image set up in "cell" R1 as a substitute focus of worship, it is reasonable to assume that it was taken away when the Asmaka patrons were forced to leave the site.

[56] Sharma 1992, 51–56.

[57] Cohen 1995, 74; although he assumes that Harisena's line "had been in decline since the collateral branch under Prithivisena reasserted its strength"; this is the reverse of my own view of the altercation between the two Vakataka branches.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

of war, even if the site itself was not the focus of the conflagration. Similarly, the total and decisive cutoff, immediately after 480, of this spate of patronage, can perhaps *only* be explained by the shift from confusion to clear crisis—from the helter-skelter votive imagery of 479–480 to absolutely no imagery at all.

This is why we find that so many of the very latest intrusions at the site—generally in very low priority ("last to be chosen") contexts—were abandoned in mid course. The examples in the darkest, roughest locations in Cave 26's ambulatory are a telling example, where over a dozen images waited in vain for their carvers to return on the morning of New Year's Day, 481.[58] This private patronage in the Period of Disruption did not peter out little by little. It ended suddenly and totally.[59] If this did not specifically signal the start of war, it looked toward it with a new and overriding concern, leaving the past behind. Thus the most likely date for the beginning of the insurrection against Sarvasena's empire would be 481, and it is reasonable to assume that the destruction was finished by 483. Presumably, by that time Harisena's granddaughter had safely reached her uncle's unsafe court in Mahismati.

[58] We assume that the reader will understand the benefits of such oversimplification in our dating. For justification see Chapter 2 of this Volume ("A note on the dating of Ajanta's Vakataka phase.").

[59] Other compellingly "abandoned" intrusions are found in the shrine of Cave 4, in a number of places throughout the hall and porch of Cave Upper 6, and in Cave 22.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CAVES ABANDONED AT HARISENA'S DEATH

In the previous chapters I have been at pains to show how the "shock wave" of Harisena's death almost immediately affected the site. This was manifest not merely in the fact that at the same point in time—along the very same "fault line" or stratum that we can establish on iconographic and developmental grounds—the normal course of work suddenly stopped in all of the "Vakataka" caves. And at the very same time the normal course of work was significantly affected—even if not completely stopped—in the caves of the now-dominant Asmakas. In the latter case, the only exception would seem to be the focal Asmaka caitya hall; in that, at least, the quality did not decline, although it is possible that the progress of work was slowed, as the monk Buddhabhadra, its patron, was forced also to deal with the developing austerities.

But just as Buddhabhadra had to give the order to have the eleventh-hour work rushed on Cave 21 and 23, and on the four wings of his caitya hall, he faced the new realities by stopping work completely on a number of his minor or very unfinished excavations, where (so it must have seemed) there was no hope at all of their reaching a point where their intended main image could be completed and dedicated, and the merit gained. These caves are Cave 22, Cave 23A, Cave 24A (if it is indeed a projected cave), and Cave 28.

By the same token, among the "Vakataka" caves lying toward the east, a number of caves were so barely started that in the ominous circumstances occasioned by Harisena's death, the donors gave up work on them suddenly and completely. But they too are very revealing; for they too are the victims of the same "shock wave". It is only that, in the midst of the tremors which merely troubled the Asmaka devotees, the "Vakataka" patrons felt no hope at all. These extremely unfinished caves are Cave 3, Cave 5 (actually begun very early) and Cave 14.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Cave 3

Like most of these late and suddenly abandoned undertakings, Cave 3 was placed at a high level, in an area well above, and between, Caves 2 and 4, whose cells extend beneath it. It had to be placed high up, not only because there was no longer any room along the main level, but also to avoid jeopardizing the caves below by being cut too close to them. Being barely begun, it is difficult to ascertain its plan, but we can assume that it would have followed the now-established pattern, with cells at the sides of the porch and interior, and a shrine at the rear. In any case, given its location and its incomplete state, no one would be tempted to place it at any other point in time.

One point of interest is that the porch pillars were obviously planned with no bracket capitals, and in this they relate to a similar development in the equally late Caves 14 and 23A. Why such a decision was made at this time—477—when the world was expanding rather than contracting, can not be explained, and perhaps needs no explanation. Ajanta was always experimenting with new ideas and forms, and someone may have asked the very reasonable question: "What is the point of the conventional bracket-capitals in any case?".

Cave 5

Cave 5 appears to have been a cave in which the patron encountered many problems, as is suggested by its sporadic, and ultimately incomplete, development. Its excavation must have started about 463 and, after a few fits and starts, ended abruptly at the death of Harisena late in 477. In the busy heydays—both early and late—of the site, it may be that the patron lacked the clout (the money or the prestige) to keep his work going, and to keep his workmen from straying to richer pastures. The excavators also ran into serious problems with the rock at cave right; in fact, this is why Cave 4, when it was next started, was located at a much higher level in the scarp, rather than being cut next to Cave 5, as one would otherwise expect.

We must, of course, distinguish between Cave 5's two phases; in fact the cave provides a mini-laboratory bearing upon the site's developmental history. In its first brief phase, its interior was barely penetrated, if at all, but its porch was fairly fully roughed out. Its four

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

porch pillars were surely intended as early octagonal types, like those of Cave 4. However, when work on them was interrupted, they must have been only grossly revealed, for later, after the Hiatus, it was still possible to cut the up-to-date square bases, even if they could not be as high as desired, because of the manner in which they already had been roughly shaped out. Cave 5's porch ends, originally, were of course plain; and here too a conversion was made after 475. The plain right porch end was opened up into a conventional late pillared cell complex, with the expected vestibule. It was, however, never finished, either inside or out. What looks like a door at the right end of the porch is really the reserved open space between the two intended pillars. Presumably this cell complex is unfinished because time ran out with Harisena's death. However, it is possible that the excavators were happy to concentrate on the many other things that needed attention during the late phase of work, because the corrupted character of the rock at the right end of the porch was going to make the finishing of the fronting pillars a nightmare.

The left porch end would have presented no such geological problems; but it could not be similarly updated, for the simple reason that the equally early Cave Lower 6 closely abuts it. The excavators who started the cave had no idea that within a year or two, plain porch ends would go precipitously out of fashion, and would be replaced (re-cut) if at all possible, with either single cells (in 465/466) or pillared cell complexes (from 467 on). The fact that a single cell was not started at the right porch end, suggests that for some reason the first stage of work on the cave may have ended by 465, after a mere year or so of work; otherwise the workers would probably have started a single cell at the right, since everyone was adding porch-end cells, if at all possible, by 466. The present (unfinished) cell complex would not have been started until work was finally taken up on the cave again after 475—indeed probably not until 477, considering how little got done in this later phase too, as well as the very late character exhibited in the renewal of work on the various other features of the cave.

The windows again show their early origins. They were started as relatively small vertically oriented openings, similar to those made in Caves 15 and 20, but when the Recession came this work, like everything else in the porch, was given up. Later, after the Hiatus, they were "updated", being converted to typically late wide square

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

windows. Happily (in terms of our investigations) we can see that this transformation was never fully effected, since traces of the older narrower openings remain at the lower level of the later unfinished forms.[1] The deep cut at the bottom of the left window looks like some excavator's error, but in fact defines the lower margin of the old opening, as we can tell by checking the related heights in Caves 15 and 20, even though here perhaps as much as six inches of cement on the floor below confuse one's observations by making it seem that the old window cuts are excessively low. The windows are decorated in what was, in 477, an up-to-date style, even though time ran out before the work was finished.

The rear wall of Cave 5, and much of the area at its right end, together with the totally roughed out left end of the porch colonnade, was not finished at the time of the Recession. However, instead of attending to the less compelling task of finishing the unfinished, the patron, perhaps able to get some sought-after sculptor to do his bidding, ordered work on the porch doorway to start right away; his haste is responsible for the bad connection between the still-rough wall and the doorway, particularly at the lower right. This was surely due to eagerness rather than to any sense of time running out, for the doorway was decorated in 477, when everything was going most expeditiously at the site.

At the same time, work was continued on the barely begun interior. We can conclude that the front aisle had been no more than slightly penetrated in the early phase, since the fact that the intercolumniation of the two central pillars is stressed shows that a shrine was already planned when these pillars were cut, and this was surely not the case during the first (earlier) phase of work on the excavation, when the plain porch ends and the small vertical windows were being defined. Since the latter features suggest that this early work was going on in 465 and earlier, it is evident that no shrine would have been planned at that time. Therefore, we can ascribe the strongly stressed intercolumniation of the (very unfinished) front center pillars—the widening in anticipation of an image shrine in the rear—to the vigorous, even if aborted, second phase of work on the cave.

[1] Remaining evidence shows that the old windows of Cave Upper 6 were converted in the same way. Many other windows may have been similarly transformed (esp. Cave 4; Cave 2), but the new shapes mask the old.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

We have noted, considering how little was in fact done in Cave 5's early phase, and how early the cave was started, that something must have interrupted the cave's early patronage. This could have been a personal (financial?) problem, or (perhaps more likely) it could be that he lost out in the stressful competition for workmen that must have gone on as the drama of development mounted at the site in the years just before the Recession brought the demands of reality into the picture. But if the patron suffered from a lack of workmen as competition mounted at the site in the mid-460s, the same appears to have been true in his post-war (i.e. post-the Hiatus) efforts, when developments at the site (with the exception of the donations of the defeated local king) were going so well once again.

No doubt, after the war (Hiatus), it took some time for many of the workmen who had earlier migrated to places like Bagh and Kanheri to get to Ajanta again; this may be why some of the less prestigious excavations, such as Cave 5, seem to languish before starting up again. In any case, work on Cave 5 appears not to have been renewed until 477, or possibly late 476. This is because the doorway type is characteristic of 477, and being the most important element, was probably started before the recutting of the (never-finished) windows, or the updating of the porch pillars with their very late (3.5 ribs) capitals, or the rough cutting of the right end porch complex. None of these things, or even the small amount of work done in the interior, would have taken more than a few months to accomplish, if indeed the work had been brought to a conclusion.

The primary clue to the very late date of the doorway (which must have been imposed upon an earlier roughed out form) is its trabeated character, and the consequent provision of a T-shaped extension for the disposition of the two goddesses with their notably late attendants. The mithunas along the sides and top are also standard for this late date, but the placement of a seated Buddha at the center of the main surround is a particularly late and significant innovation, at least for porch doorways at Ajanta.[2] A yaksha appears in the candrasala above, while the others, although possibly reserved for painted motifs, never got carved. They may indeed be unfinished, for the lower level of the door is equally unresolved, surely in part

[2] Of course the porch doorway of Cave 17 has eight Buddhas; but often motifs appear in painting earlier than in sculpture.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

because the matrix desired for guardian nagas or the like had been cut away when the simpler original form of the doorway was defined.

Thus Cave 5 joins the other relatively minor excavations which had no life at all after Harisena's death.

Cave 14

Cave 14 was placed well up above the old Hinayana Cave 13, because space was unavailable anywhere below at the late date when it was inaugurated. It must have been started in 477, judging not only from its very advanced porch doorway design, but also from the fact that its excavation had proceeded no farther than the rough exposure of the front aisle colonnade when work was halted. Like the contemporaneous Cave 3 or the barely started Cave 23A, it appears to have instituted a new pillar design, which has square shafts with no projecting capitals. The general form of the pillars, even to the "shield" design beneath the upper elements, seems to have been derived from the first pair of pillars in Cave 26. All of the pillars have thin raised bands relieving the severe shafts; we can assume these would have had painted decoration. The two central pillars originally had added closely carved vertical flutings, but they have been totally covered up in an unfortunate course of restoration. Happily they can be seen in certain very early photographs.[3]

As we would expect at this late date, complex pillared cells were being cut at the porch ends when work was interrupted. Neither has progressed past the rough cutting of the vestibule. Lest the out-sized "doorway" at the left porch end be misunderstood, it is useful to note that its cutting follows the conventional procedure for opening the space up between the two intended pillars. The two large square windows are of the expected late type, although the planned decoration was never started. They would have had the conventional late inner shutters, but these were never started.

At this late date, we can assume that the two aisle doorways would have been decorated like those of Cave 24 or Cave 26; but they never reached this stage. However, the main porch doorway is of particular interest and is surely one of the very latest created dur-

[3] See ACSAA Ajanta fiche 28:36.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

ing the site's consistent phase of patronage. This is immediately suggested by its "T-shaped" format which sponsors the new post-and-lintel (trabeated) arrangement; to effect this, conventional female figures are taken off their previous supports and relegated to enclosing projections in the upper corners, where they are treated with honor, but are out of the way of the doorway's trabeated structure.

Such trabeated "T-shaped" doorways never date prior to 477, although work on some of those in the Asmaka area may have continued into 478. However, in the "Vakataka" area, work on this doorway and on that of Cave 5 surely stopped abruptly with Harisena's death, when it was obvious that there was no possibility of finishing the excavations. Although the trees above and the aquatic forms below were never completed, the twisting female figures, surrounded with attentive companions, parallel the advanced character of the whole doorway. This character is further confirmed by the "squared meander" motif barely sketched out on the right margin; it probably was suggested by the similar motif which makes its first appearance at the site on the shrine doorway of Cave 2 in 477. It seems to have caught the attention of the planners immediately, since it appears with slight variations during 477 and 478 on the porch doorways of Cave 26LW and Aurangabad Cave 1.

One can also see, from a single unfinished panel, that the doorway would have had the conventional border of amorous couples, probably both across the top (seated) and along the sides (standing). But a particularly fascinating aspect of the doorway's incomplete state is that we can see that the work was precisely divided between two different sculptors, who were working on different motifs and in different ways, each on their own side. Although they follow a generally similar pattern—perhaps established by a master planner—they very much "do their own thing", so that it is clear that even had the doorway been finished, the two halves would not have "fitted" perfectly. The process, and the result, has striking connections with those features in the porch doorway of Cave 17 a decade earlier, where two different carvers were also at work. In the case of the Cave 17 doorway, it appears to be likely that the sculptors also painted their own half of the doorway, and that was probably going to be the case here too. At least, color has been applied to the completed upper half of the lintel on the left side, surely by the sculptor himself, perhaps to signal to his supervisor that this part at least was done.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Cave 21A

Cave 21A (not previously described) is the most unfinished, and was probably to be the smallest, excavation at the site. Whereas its upper counterpart, Cave 22, was located well above the abutting porch-end cells of Caves 21 and 23, Cave 21A was located well below them. Like Cave 23A and 14 its two fronting pillars, following the latest mode, were to have no bracket capitals.

Unfortunately, the whole lower part of the excavation, which was quite deep, was recently filled up with cement, with the justification that people might otherwise have fallen in; a simple little rail would have provided a more appropriate protection. Some of the cisterns in this area have also been filled completely up with cement. This again hides useful information in the interest of progress, even though they are supplied with new and secure doorways which offered any necessary protection.

Cave 23A

Cave 23A is a tiny, and barely started, excavation placed well up above and between Caves 23 and 24. Like Cave 3, and Cave 22, it had to be placed high enough to avoid any possibility of breaking into the porch end complexes of the two caves below it. Its fronting pillars, which surely would have been decorated if finished, have no projecting capitals, in this following the new and very late trend seen in both Cave 3 and Cave 14. This was not, however, a simplification aimed at saving time and money, because all of these three caves were started during the heyday of the site, when Harisena was alive. And all of them were abruptly abandoned when he died.

Cave 24A

Located up above Cave 24, this hardly looks like a cave. However, it may well be the bare beginning of a fairly large one, started in 477 when available space, even at this upper level, was fast disappearing. It seems that the scarp was just beginning to be cut back and sheared away to form a flat façade plane, when work was given up due to Harisena's death. This method of revealing the façade

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

plane before the penetration of the porches started was probably used for all or most of the caves, although it is impossible to determine this in most cases. We have clear (if complex!) evidence that this was the case with Cave 23, where a remnant of the plane (left when the cave was shifted to the left) is still to be seen at the right.[4] An unfinished cave at Nasik (Cave 1) provides a particularly striking example of the procedure.

Cave 28

Cave 28 was to be a very large cave, almost certainly intended to follow the pattern of the impressive and influential Cave 24. Although now inaccessible (except by ropes from the cliff above) this was surely not the case in the fifth century. We know from the evidence of the adjacent left wings of the Cave 26 complex that very extensive portions of the original cliff face have fallen away in this area; in any case, we must assume that it once was conveniently approachable, if only for the workmen employed on it. Furthermore, it almost certain that a cistern, into which water from above would have been channeled, was cut somewhere in front of the cave, since the one in the courtyard of the great caitya hall is inconveniently far away. This too suggests how much of the rock-face in this area has fallen away.

It seems quite likely that Buddhabhadra, when he located his great caitya hall in the center of this as yet undeveloped and vast stretch of scarp, saw the splendid Cave 26 as the center of a monastic complex which would eventually fill up the space both the left and right. Obviously the space to the right was easier of access, and so excavations began there first, while Cave 28 was the first of a group of caves planned for the other side, but of course never begun.

It must have been because Cave 28 was so barely penetrated that work on it (as on Cave 24) would have been terminated abruptly when H arisena died. However, the fact that, in these vigorous days, it would not have been started much, if at all, before 477, provides us with useful evidence bearing upon Buddhabhadra's patronage

[4] This curious remnant of Cave 23's façade plane, is discussed when that cave is described in a later volume.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

activities in that same year and the year thereafter—477 and 478. I have mentioned earlier that Buddhabhadra appears to have had a sudden burst of practical piety—his goal being the acquisition of merit—just as soon as it was clear to him and to the site in general that time was fast running out. It is clear that at this point, in 478, Buddhabhadra decided to rush the shrines in the two lower wings of his caitya complex to completion, and also to hastily add shrines to the long-abandoned upper stories (Caves 25 and 27).

This was obviously a spur of the moment decision. We know that as late as 477, Buddhabhadra still had no plan to add a shrine to the obsolete Cave 27; for if this had been the case, he would not have put the newly undertaken Cave 28 so close to Cave 27's rear wall. Considering the very flawed nature of the rock in this area, and the fact that the shrine and shrine antechamber, as in Caves 21 and 23, would extend back well over twenty feet, this unworkable proximity of Cave 28 to a new shrine on the rear wall of Cave 27 would have created a most unstable situation. Thus we can say that no shrine was planned for the essentially abandoned Cave 27 during 477, the very year that Cave 28 was underway. Then, when Buddhabhadra did at last plan a shrine for Cave 27, he was forced to locate it, anomalously and expediently, on the right of the hall, rather than at the rear. But since the Cave 27 shrine antechamber was only generally roughed out by the fateful day of December 31, 478, it had to be peremptorily abandoned.

The development of Cave 27 and the other wings of the great Cave 26 complex is discussed elsewhere. For the moment, Cave 27's history is relevant only to show that the adjustments made there in 478 prove that Cave 28 was already in place by that time. It is evident that it had already been started in 477 and, since it was hopeless to try to complete it, it was surely abandoned at the time of Harisena's death.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

RELATED CAVES OF THE VAKATAKAS OR THEIR FEUDATORIES

The excavations made by the "Vakatakas" or Vakataka feudatories at other sites have many parallels with the situation at Ajanta and provide insights into matters of both politics and patronage. These excavations include the Ghatotkacha Vihara, Caves 1, 3, and 4A at Aurangabad, Bagh, Dharasiva, Banoti, Lonad (?), and (probably) certain sculptures from the stupa in the so-called cemetery at Kanheri. What is of particular interest here is that the shrine Buddhas in the majority of these sites, like those in most of the caves at Ajanta, were rushed to completion in 478—that painful and anxious year just after Harisena's death. This was when established patronage ended at Ajanta, and the same was probably the case throughout the empire.

This rush to dedicate the main images is evident in the Ghatotkacha vihara, Caves 3 and 4A at Aurangabad, Caves 2 and 3 (and perhaps others) at Dharasiva. It would surely have been the case at Banoti too, had the patron been able to go on; instead work at Banoti appears to stopped abruptly a year earlier, at the end of 477, when Harisena died. Only Bagh, of the certain Vakataka cave sites, shows no final rush, almost certainly because the site, limited in area, had already been filled up by the time even before the time of the great emperor's death; but it is also evident that Bagh remained as a functioning monastery after Harisena's death because it was in Anupa, which managed to hold out against the onslaught which totally shattered the rest of the Vakataka empire.[1] In fact, there is good evidence that the Vakataka connection continued in Anupa, since (if I am correct) Harisena's granddaughter, taken there for safety, became the wife of Maharaja Subandhu of Mahismati, who ruled over that region and indeed, according to his Bagh plate (Mirashi 1955, 19–21) "repaired the caves" at the site.

[1] For the situation in Mahismati (Anupa) that was responsible for Bagh's "survival" see Chapter 4 of this Volume.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Aurangabad Cave 1, 3, 4A

The situation at Aurangabad is very different from that at Ajanta. The three relevant (Vakataka) caves there—the others belong to the sixth century—are Caves 1, 3, and 4A, all placed in the left group, close to the old Hinayana caitya hall, which was probably still used as a devotional focus. Caves 1, 2, and 4A were not even started until 475 or later, by which time the Asmakas had defeated the local king and had taken over the control of the Ajanta area as the local feudatory power. The present-day Aurangabad area (ancient Mulaka), some hundred 100 kilometers to the south of the Ajanta caves, was probably part of the central Asmaka domains.[2] Therefore, it may well be that the Asmakas now decided, in the exuberance of victory, to create a new devotional complex, which would be very specifically their own, while of course continuing their patronage at Ajanta.

Suggestive of their particular interest in this new monastic center, they lavished great attention upon it. Despite the poor quality of the rock, Cave 3 and Cave 1 outdo any of the viharas at Ajanta in the richness of their design and decoration, while Cave 1, although excavated only as far as the front aisle, augments this complexity with its massive size. Indeed, the many highly elaborated features of the Cave 1 porch essentially prove that it was not started until 477. But then, after the difficulties caused by Harisena's death, work on Cave 1 was abruptly discontinued, for its very size and incompleteness must have made it evident that, like the equally impressive Asmaka Caves 24 and 28 at Ajanta, there was no hope of completing it.[3]

Aurangabad Cave 3

Aurangabad Cave 3, unlike Aurangabad Cave 1, continued underway in the following year (478) and appears to have been wholly brought to completion and dedicated in normal course. It exhibits

[2] The Aurangabad area is sometimes considered to lie in ancient Mulaka, between Risika and Asmaka; but since Asmaka had triumphed over Risika, Mulaka would have to have been under the control of the rising Asmaka power in any case.

[3] Normally, when work continued on a cave after Harisena's death, either the quality or the program itself is compromised. Aurangabad Cave 1 is like Ajanta Cave 24, in that one sees a distinct break but no evidence of rush or decline.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

neither the concentrated rush which characterized the work on the "Vakataka" caves at Ajanta nor the problem of time unexpectedly running out, as in most of Ajanta's too-innocent Asmaka excavations. Even though we can assume that here, in "Asmaka territory" work continued with more confidence right through 478, Cave 3 "made it just in time", perhaps with the help of many of the increasingly unemployed workmen from Ajanta. Activity must have been particularly intense in that last year, since many of its features would have been unthinkable before that time. Afterwards, of course, with preparations for war mounting, nothing was done either at Aurangabad or Ajanta after that difficult year which followed Harisena's death.

The splendid shrine image in Aurangabad Cave 3 is of the new bhadrasana type—not developed at Ajanta until 477.[4] It follows the authoritative lead of the main image in Ajanta's Caitya Cave 26, but with a distinct increase of confidence, augmented by the spaciousness of the disposition both of the Buddha itself and its elaborate throne, the towering bodhisattvas at the sides, and the strongly projecting flying couples converging from above.

The startling devotees, ranged in life-size groups along the right and left walls of the shrine in Aurangabad Cave 3, are far more developed than any of their counterparts at Ajanta, although their enlargement was already suggested by their magnificent prototypes in Ajanta Cave 4. The latter could not have been completed until 477, while the whole politically-threatened Cave 4 was abandoned early in 478. Thus it seems possible that the Cave 4 sculptor, having finished these wonderful images shortly before his patron fled Ajanta, then decided to come to, or was called to, the still relatively stable Asmaka stronghold of Aurangabad, where the established work programs were still going on throughout 478. Sculptors of his quality would surely have been welcome there, and with Ajanta already in decline would have been wise to make the shift.

The shrine doorway, surely not completed (and perhaps not started) until 478, is the most elaborate and the most "three dimensional" of all Vakataka shrine doorways—only rivaled in its complexity in the very unfinished Aurangabad Cave 1's porch doorway. The latter would have been underway hardly a few months later, but already

[4] However, one should note the curious fact that like other iconographic motifs (such as Buddhas attending the Buddha) the bhadrasana type appears in paintings (of 470–471) on the walls of Cave 19.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

shows, despite its ambitiousness, a sloppiness of execution which would seem to presage the cave's impending abandonment. By contrast the complexities of the Cave 3 shrine doorway appear to be totally unaffected by any thought of the coming drought; indeed the character of the whole of Cave 3, from the complex hall to the complex shrine, suggests that the Asmakas were "riding high" when, early in this crucial year of 478, they were about to break away from the rule of their overlords, and apparently had every expectation of good times ahead. The same sense of confidence, revealed in the sculptural program—the associated painting being gone—is of course revealed in the major ambulatory carvings, to say nothing of the splendid burden of general decoration, in the great caitya hall at Ajanta, where the tolls of midnight were all too soon to strike.

The elaborately bracketed shrine antechamber pillars and the pillars and pilasters of the main hall and of its lateral extensions, to say nothing of the elaborated marginalia of the fronting of the same area, represent one of the stylistic (or decorative) extremes reached by the Vakataka planners. This is true also of Cave 3's particularly sophisticated window and door fittings, where the technology has been developed to the degree that the shutters (or doors), when open, fold back entirely into recesses cut for that purpose into the back of the cave's front wall. Furthermore, as if to keep up with new (and anxiously oriented) developments in iconography, the planners have most surprisingly sacrificed the expected balance in the design of the outer (aisle) friezes over the lateral colonnades of the hall. They have "replaced" the loving couples which had already been carved in the panels at the left with seated Buddha panels at the right. The shift (which could not possibly go the other way) tellingly reflects the change in attitudes between the happy days of 477, extended (for the Asmakas) into the early months of 478, and the anxious context of the latter months of 478. As if to confirm the very late date (478) of the apotropaic Buddha images in the right frieze, a number are in the new bhadrasana pose.

As in so much else, we must see here the influence of the highly developed decoration of Buddhabhadra's caitya hall, where a few of the new bhadrasana forms, possibly completed in 477 but more likely dating early in 478, are similarly included in the friezes above the pillars as well as in the center of the top of the stupa's projecting image frame. As is evident in Aurangabad Cave 3 they appear to have been carved at points which still were waiting to be sculpted

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

at this very late moment, for they break the bilateral symmetry expected in the decorative scheme, perhaps reflecting the vagaries of scaffolding.[5] The Aurangabad Cave 3 planners would seem to have followed Ajanta precedents too in their decision to carve another bhadrasana image at the crucial center of the shrine doorway lintel, just as a similar figure had been placed at the equally important center of the lintel above the stupa image in Buddhabhadra's caitya hall.

Thus Cave 3 was completed in normal course and without hazard in 478, probably already being well underway by that time. Like; and like the confidently court-supported (even if ultimately doomed) splendid Cave 26 at Ajanta, it reflects the assurance of the Asmaka patronage at Aurangabad in 478. Such an attitude was diametrically opposed to the anxious mind-set of the despairing "Vakataka" patrons at Ajanta who, caught up in their last-minute pious frenzy, must have been hard and undependable to work for. It need hardly surprise us that Aurangabad flourished mightily, even if so briefly, in these last days.

Unless there were intrusive paintings on Aurangabad 3's walls, from which nearly all of the original painting has now been lost, or in the various fallen portions of the cave's front, Cave 3 has no intrusions, even though it had surely been dedicated and thus would have "qualified" for such added imagery. Since its extremely complex sculptural program was fully completed, it seems likely that the painting program—which could have been done in the matter of weeks—was finished too by the end of 478.[6] However, the mere traces remaining today allow no proper judgment. We can only say that if the total painting and sculptural program of the cave had not been completed, the possible addition of intrusive sculptures in those

[5] As noted previously, in discussions of the antechamber of Cave U6, the Cave 26 ambulatory panels, and elsewhere, gaps were often left between the assignments of men working on scaffolds, to be completed later when the scaffolds were moved.

[6] One surprising break in the expected symmetry is to be seen in the decoration of the rear wall. Four deep square holes, placed at appropriate points, surely were to "plug in" a freestanding (wooden?) image of a large bodhisattva (Vajrapani?) and a smaller attendant at the right of the shrine antechamber; a very similar arrangement is to be found in Bagh Cave 7. However, at the left there are no such holes; an "equivalent" painting (of Avalokitesvara?), now obliterated, must have been painted there. The very fact that such "loose" figures were applied at the right rear would support the conclusion that the left rear had already been painted; and that, in fact, the whole cave had been painted and dedicated before time ran out.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

areas would be evidence that time had run own for the original patron's program. However, since there is no evidence for this, it seems safe to assume that the whole cave was completed and dedicated in due course, just before time ran out—something that cannot be said of a single cave at Ajanta![7]

At the same time, there is quite clear evidence that the patron or patrons of this splendid—even if almost excessively detailed—cave "barely made it". Of the doorways of the four residence cells, one never received its necessary pivot holes at all, and the others were obviously fitted out in a most expedient manner, with shallow or clumsy pivot holes which must have worked very poorly, if at all. Indeed, even the great shrine doorway was fitted out in a rush, for the admirably functional set-backs which received the double shutters of the main doorway and windows have no counterparts here; despite the significance of the doorway, it is provided only with a narrow and hastily cut recess.

Addendum: Brancaccio Comments

In a very perceptive article (Brancaccio 2000, 41–50) Brancaccio suggests that the Caves 1, 3, and 4A "can be interpreted as a statement of power by the new Aurangabad patrons wanting to outdo the imperial productions at Ajanta", and that these elaborate caves were "perhaps sponsored by the same feudatories that took over this territory after the collapse of the Vakataka empire" (p. 43) I would certainly agree that these hurriedly but richly created caves represent a telling political statement, but my own view is that these three caves were created out of the access of enthusiasm which accompanied the Asmaka takeover of Ajanta in about 475. Thus I would suggest that Aurangabad's patrons were not "*new local kings* (my italics) (who) excavated Aurangabad for political reasons, in order to

[7] The carving of one small section at the upper right of the shrine doorway's major surround, with its loving couples, was never completed; but this is obviously due to the presence of a major flaw in this area; we can assume, considering the highly finished state of the whole doorway, that this area was once completed, after plastering, with painting.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

create continuity with practices of patronage initiated by their illustrious predecessor", but that they were created while the Vakataka emperor was still their overlord. They would not reject the strong Vakataka overlordship until the reign of his weak successor Sarvasena III, who came to power in 478. By that time, chaos was rapidly descending upon the empire due to the Asmaka-led insurrection, which by 479/480 (The Period of Disruption) surely had put an end to consistent patronage not only at Ajanta but at Aurangabad as well, where preparations for war must have been in full swing. Thus although I am in full agreement with Brancaccio's recognition of the political significance of these Asmaka undertakings, I would argue that they were created not after the reign of "their illustrious predecessor" but during that very reign, taking advantage of his authoritative rule—the continuing Pax Vakataka—to create these emblems of their own increasing power. The fact that they had, a few years before, defeated the local feudatory king and taken over control of the Ajanta region, without any apparently intervention on the part of the emperor Harisena, is alone a sobering witness to their developing power and sense of power; for the empire itself (but only after Harisena's mysterious death) was next on their list!

These observations in no way contradict Brancaccio's important point, that the Asmakas were more and more coming into their own, and that their monuments at Aurangabad, even more dramatically than their contemporary monuments at Ajanta, underline their ominous political psychology. What Brancaccio has revealed about the remarkable life-size devotees which line the left and right walls of the shrine of Cave 3 is directly in line with her observations about the startling sense of confidence and commitment that these unique figures display. She suggests (p. 44) that "they are certainly not generic devotees" such as are typically found at Ajanta, but with their carefully individualized head-dresses and ornaments "appear to be individually characterized members of a royal group", obviously of the Asmaka elite. One might say that in terms of their remarkable size, their assertive occupation of this sacred space, and the insistent care with which they are created and disposed, they embody the very pride and power and rising potential which, soon turning to the left, was going to tear the whole empire apart.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Aurangabad Cave 1

Although it was begun (in 476 or 477) when the Vakatakas were the overlords of the region, Aurangabad Cave 1, like the more immediately accessible Cave 3, was also specifically a product of the emperor's powerful feudatories, the Asmakas. Probably because these caves were in an area close (or closer) to the Asmaka's own center of power, it is clear, as noted above, that particular attention was lavished upon these "homeland" donations. The development of an interest in having "their own" group of caves may have come relatively late; but this very lateness surely explains why the decorative overlay of such excavations had become so very rich.

Work on Aurangabad Cave 1, which was planned as the largest (and among the latest and most lavish) of any Vakataka excavations in the Ajanta/Aurangabad area, appears to have continued right up to the moment when Asmaka patronage abruptly stopped, at the end of 478. It is as if here in (or closer to) their "homeland" the Asmaka patron(s) remained confident that the end was not so near as it turned out to be. Or perhaps the patron(s) felt—as it would seem that Buddhabhadra also did in relation to his Cave 26 (but not his other caves)—that some dispensation would be allowed for these few very special monuments, just as some years earlier Upendragupta, the local (Risika) king, exempted his own monuments, as long as he could, from his strict cutbacks on money and labor.

This judgment—that somehow work would continue on to its conclusion, even in such problematic times—is confirmed by the extremely late character of its porch doorway, its porch windows, and its elaborately bracketed pillars and pilasters, all of which develop from—indeed develop beyond—their counterparts at Ajanta. Even the character of the finished pilaster medallion at porch right takes that step to step evolution (as seen at Ajanta) to its point of greatest complexity. However, Cave 1's excavation never progressed beyond the reaming out of the front aisle and, needless to say, this was due to the fact that it was started all too late, and was harshly cut off too soon.

Though there are many intrusions in the porch and around the courtyard, they all belong to the sixth century, when there was a renewal of patronage activity here under the Early Kalacuris. During their rule intrusions could be added to such an abandoned cave,

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

even though it had not been dedicated.[8] The fact that none of these intrusions belong to the Period of Disruption (479–480) is understandable, for work was interrupted long before the shrine area had even been reached, so the cave was never "brought to life" by virtue of the completion and dedication of the image. However, its intended richness and complexity, like the staggering impressiveness of the huge Dying Buddha in Cave 26 at Ajanta, speaks of the wonders and the expectations that could never come to realization due, in fact, to the aggressiveness of its own patrons, or at least of the powers that supported them.

Aurangabad Cave 4A

Aurangabad Cave 4A, a fine little shrinelet, was found some years ago buried under debris in the declivity in front of the later (i.e. 6th century) Cave 5, and just to the right of the old (Hinayana) caitya hall, Cave 4. Although in a state of collapse, the shrinelet itself must have looked like those often started (but never finished due to Harisena's death) in the courtyards of the caves at Ajanta during 477. It had, like its counterparts at Ajanta, a small vestibule fronted by two pillars and pilasters; the stumps alone of these fronting elements remain, while the originally excavated roof is gone. However, unlike these late complexes at Ajanta, which were so often converted to shrines during the Period of Disruption, it was surely carved for the residence of the Buddha, not to house some important monk. Over the centuries the corrupt rock, typical of the site, obviously washed and crumbled away, so that the whole little complex, when found, had pulled away from the very matrix from which it was cut, and had slid and tilted downward at a decided angle.

By good fortune, the large image, although now woefully weathered, itself remained quite intact during this hazardous shifting.[9] It is a beautifully carved bhadrasana image which must be dated to

[8] That is, the rules had been changed. In the same way, the Early Kalacuris quite obsessively oriented their earlier monuments to the east, but some decades later, at Ellora and Aurangabad they no longer followed such a rule.

[9] Despite complaints to the authorities, it remained exposed to the weather for many years, and has suffered major losses. It now has been provided with a protective concrete canopy. For its original condition, see Spink 1968.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

478, for the Buddha, with its attending figures, takes as an evident model its counterpart in the nearby Cave 3. In fact, this impressive Buddha can lay claim to being the last great image of the Golden Age, for it is unlikely that it was finished before the late in 478, the final year of Asmaka patronage.

The throne, with its well-carved and conventional throne side and base motifs is of the strongly "structural" type found in the latest Vakataka contexts. What is remarkable—other than the authority of the image—is the fact that a number of tiny standing Buddhas, obviously intrusive, have been squeezed into available spaces at the very top between the throne back and the left bodhisattva, while three other similar figures, similarly damaged, once were crowded in, one over the other, to the right of the right bodhisattvas. By now, because of unfortunate exposure to the elements, most of the latter have been totally lost.[10]

Most of the large right bodhisattva, of which only the right half had survived the centuries, has fallen away too. This has occurred through a combination of recent neglect and original geological faults; one can see how a bad flaw ran vertically straight down the face and torso, and how the original carvers fitted in a large replacement by means of pegs (the holes remain) at the chest and thigh levels. There are also two little padmasana Buddhas (intrusive) at the left end of the shrinelets' small broken front, and there must be have a few more once at the right and probably in a few other now missing areas. It may well be that the power of the image, and the troubles of the times, attracted the many intrusions here.

The now greatly exposed caitya hall (the Hinayana Cave 4) was probably refurbished when the site was newly flourishing in 475 and after, and may have been "properly" redecorated at this time, even though no traces of paint now can be seen. But such later "official" attention to the hall is suggested by the presence of the large red bricks which formed some low platform or the like in front of the cave. Their relatively late character, similar to those found across the river from the caves at Ajanta, suggests (quite logically) that they are part of the late Vakataka context. This is not the kind of work that would be done during the Period of Disruption, although of course it is quite possible that there were once a number of (now

[10] They can be seen, as when first revealed, in ACSAA slide # 7830.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

lost) painted or carved intrusions around the old caitya hall, just as they cluster around the recently discovered Buddha image in Cave 4A. In fact, one intrusive small standing Buddha can indeed be seen toward the front of the caitya hall's left wall. This is hardly surprising, because both the large Buddha shrine and the old caitya hall were "alive", unlike the barely started Aurangabad Cave 1, which was never dedicated, and so attracted no fifth century intrusions.

One might wish to believe that the splendid offerings at Aurangabad, along with the great monk Buddhabhadra's donations at Ajanta, would have been given a slight dispensation when the Asmakas began fomenting the insurrection against their Vakataka overlords at the end of 478. After all, these were major religious offerings, and the Asmakas were now in firm control of both sites. However, this does not seem to have been the case. Had it been otherwise, Buddhabhadra could perhaps have completed the decoration of his Cave 26 ambulatory, the Cave 21 Buddha would not have been still rough when it was hurriedly brought to completion, and Caves 22, 23, 25 and 27 would have been provided with images, even if the work was hasty. After all, we know from the evidence of widespread "intrusive" activity in the subsequent Period of Disruption that there were plenty of workers still around for the next year or two. It seems clear, therefore, that work was stopped on the Asmaka donations by fiat, relating to the buildup of the military, and not by any gradual erosion of patronage due to the drying up of support, either local or courtly.

Bagh

Since Bagh was also a "Vakataka" site, made in the region controlled by a son of Harisena "by another wife", and since Dharasiva also lies in a region (ancient Kuntala) which was under Harisena's control, and since they both show distinct connections with developments at Ajanta, they should be briefly mentioned, even though (at least at Bagh) the caves appear to have been completed before the late period which is the focus of the present chapter. I have suggested that many workmen, eager for both funds and peace, moved to these sites during the period of Ajanta's troubles in the late 60s and early 70s (see Time Chart). Then later, most may have moved back to Ajanta with the establishment of Asmaka control, and a new (if brief) period of peace, starting in 475. Quite apart from that,

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Bagh must have been well underway by this time, and good jobs may have been at a premium.

A comparison between developments at Bagh and at Ajanta strongly suggests that it flourished mightily at the very time (469 through 474) that Ajanta's activity was seriously limited by the Recession and then totally stopped during the Hiatus. Because of the softness of the Bagh sandstone and the relatively vertical fall of most of the scarp, work could proceed very fast. Also, the numbers of workers arriving from Ajanta after the opening weeks or months of 469 was surely very great, since only four of the twenty three Ajanta caves which had already been started (Caves 1, 17, 19, 20) continued to be developed during the Recession at Ajanta.[11] Even more workmen would have arrived when Ajanta's Hiatus started in 472. Thus, by the end of 474, after six years of vigorous activity, it is reasonable to suppose that the available scarp, which is limited in extent, was perhaps well on its way to being filled up.[12] Then, with no battles to cause disruptions, the Bagh caves appear to have been used for residence and worship right up to, and presumably beyond, the time that Maharaja Subandhu offered it his support in about 486.[13]

Banoti

The small cave at Banoti is located in a startlingly beautiful gorge, close to a waterfall which spouts dramatically not over but *through* the wall of rock where the ravine, like that at Ajanta, comes to a "dead end". This powerful setting may account for the location of the ancient cave, as well as for the presence of a later Saivite cave-shrine close to the river's edge. The Banoti cave is only ten or fifteen kilometers from Ajanta as the crow flies, but is some seventy kilometers away by road, the last twenty kilometers difficult to negotiate except by jeep. It is then an approximately five kilometer walk (if one knows the best path) starting at the modern dam and following

[11] Upendragupta's brief work on Cave 29 apparently ended the very year that it was started (469).

[12] The huge "hall?" at the rear of Bagh Cave 3 appears to have been abandoned in mid-course, possibly because the character of the rock made it impractical to continue.

[13] The caves at Bagh are discussed in detail in a later volume.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

the course of the river to the cave.[14] Access to the cave is difficult, even dangerous, although it has recently been made somewhat more accessible.

The cave is of particular interest because it has two distinct phases; in fact it is the only Vakataka cave in Maharashtra which was expanded a century or so later.[15] The first phase is definitely Buddhist, for although no image is now to be found in the shrine, the shrine doorway has a distinct stupa as its central motif. This first phase must have started in or shortly after 475 and then stopped abruptly with Harisena's death in late 477, as was the case with many of the more unfinished caves at Ajanta.

Banoti's second phase is more problematic. That it has two distinct phases is evident from the transformation of one of the two unfinished shrine antechamber pillars, discussed below. And that the second phase must be referred to the last half of the sixth century when a Saivite power may have controlled the region seems clear from the fact that a passage (unfinished) was being cut around the earlier shrine chamber. This feature parallels similar passages first in the mid-sixth century east wing of Elephanta and in the slightly later related caves (Hindu) at Ellora and (Buddhist) at Aurangabad.

One should also note a representation of what appears to be a "Siva Nataraja" in the medallion on the cave's right front pilaster. If this is an image of Siva, it could belong only to the second phase, and would seem to mean that a Saivite sect rather than some other sect, was responsible for the second phase of the cave. However, the decoration of the pilaster, like that of the associated fronting pillars, seems typically fifth century. Thus we must assume that the "Siva" image, which is too small and worn to show the expected attributes, is a vigorous representation of a yaksha or the like.

There is nothing else in the cave which suggests a Saivite takeover, but it would nonetheless be of interest to clear the heavy debris from the image platform in the shrine, to see if a lingam might have later

[14] The site can also be approached by driving on a good road and then continuing (only by jeep or on foot) along the bullock-cart path to the top of the mountain above the cave. From there one can descend to the riverbed, the cave being rather high up on the opposite (steep) hill. But this pathway (which many villagers negotiate) is extremely steep and hazardous.

[15] Of course, at Aurangabad the site was expanded, but only by making new caves; at the same time, intrusions were added to Cave 1.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

been inserted into it. If so, it is conceivable that the stupa over the shrine door was converted by plastering into a lingam, or interpreted as a phallus, for the similarity of forms would allow this.

The unusual recutting of the Banoti cave has significant historical implications. Since we know that the Early Kalacuris had extended their control to the Ellora and (probably) to the Aurangabad regions by mid or late sixth century, the use of the "Early Kalacuri" format at Banoti might suggest that this region, and therefore the Ajanta area too, may also have been dominated by the expanding Early Kalacuris at this time. If so, we can imagine that they justified their "invasion" by asserting that they were only reclaiming their original homelands. Proper claim would have been made to lands by the founder of the dynasty, Maharaja Subandhu, through his marriage to Harisena's granddaughter in Mahismati.[16] It is possible, too, that the Early Kalacuris' ecumenical attitude, reflected in their tolerance and at least indirect support of the Buddhist undertakings at Aurangabad in the last half of the sixth century, derives from their direct, indeed familial, association with the great Buddhist complexes at Ajanta, Aurangabad, Ghatotkacha, and Bagh. Even Banoti's earlier phase would confirm this connection, since it links so directly to the monuments of the Early Kalacuri's Vakataka forebears.

Banoti's first phase is of modest proportions and format. Unless the rather elevated extensions at the left and right of the hall were begun in the fifth century, the cave in its first phase consisted of nothing more that a simple porch fronted by a four-pillared colonnade and opening into a pillared shrine antechamber with shrine behind. It is just conceivable that the architect was influenced by the plan of Cave 7 at Ajanta, which (truncated by necessity) had taken its present form in 467 and/or 468.

The fronting colonnade consists of four heavy pillars of the late Ajanta square-based and decorated type.[17] The decoration seems to be characteristic of Vakataka forms, although the zoomorphic figures on the first capital at the right are less exuberantly detailed than in many parallel contexts. The second pillar capital from the right parallels Ajanta too, with its four supporting ganas. The remaining pil-

[16] This is discussed at length in Chapter 4 of this Volume.

[17] The square-based pillar format is conventional from 475 on, again probably reflecting influences from Bagh. It has precedents in the hall of Chaitya Cave 19.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

lars are largely destroyed, but the pilaster capital at the right has a fine flying couple and a seated yaksha very much in the Ajanta style.

On either side of the otherwise plain hall, there are pillar-fronted extensions like those in Aurangabad Cave 3, the latter begun in 475 or shortly thereafter. However, similar pillared extensions appear in Aurangabad Cave 7 of the mid-sixth century. One must consider the possibility that these features, like the "corridors" (ambulatory) were added in the mid-sixth century, and that their somewhat dry decorated pillars are late reflections of fifth century forms. The fact that both these extensions and the "corridors" are raised well up from the porch floor might support this view; fifth century porch end cells at Ajanta are generally not raised up, except in the anomalous Cave 7.[18] Also, the decoration of these pillars (only those at the left were finished) is less rich than is generally found in Vakataka caves elsewhere, suggesting that it may have been done, like that of the left shrine antechamber pillar, in the cave's later (sixth century) phase.

The rearward side walls of these extensions open into unfinished cells. More cells, clearly of the late sixth century, were being cut in the unfinished ambulatory being added at that time around the shrine; two have been started at the right, and one (of an expected two) at the left. It might be noted that in the sixth century Buddhist Caves 6 and 7 at Aurangabad, cells were also placed along these "corridors". This would seem to be further evidence that the cave remained as a Buddhist one in the sixth century. Hindu caves would not have such provision for residence.

The ambulatory, started in the mid-sixth century, did not progress much beyond the exposure of the left and right "corridors", but its rear "corridor" was started on both sides, so it is clear that it was to be a pradaksinapatha. This passage is placed considerably higher than the porch floor, perhaps (?) in the interest of saving time. Or this might have been done to "match" the height of the left and right porch extensions, which in turn reflect the arrangement of the (sixth century) Buddhist Cave 7 at Aurangabad.[19]

---

[18] Cave 7 at Ajanta has such raised extensions, but they are by no means conventional; their elevation was caused by the proximity of Cave 8, cut at a lower level. Similarly, the porch ends of Cave 11 and Cave 20 are raised up for expedient reasons, not because of convention.

[19] Raised lateral areas are found also at Mandapeshwar; also at Jogesvari, in the entrance area devoted to the Mothers, Ganesh, etc.; also in Cave 21, Ellora.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

In Banoti's fifth century phase, the rear wall of the porch (or "hall" if one prefers) must have extended without a break all the way along the back, except for the pillared opening into the shrine antechamber. The antechamber pillars are of great interest, for they alone would provide sufficient evidence that the excavation had two distinct phases. The right pillar has an uncut bracket on either side, which if finished would surely have been similar to the paired brackets on the antechamber pillars of Aurangabad Cave 3, underway or perhaps completed in 477. Such "salabhanjika" brackets become conventional in viharas after Ajanta's Hiatus, the first being started in Cave 1 and then in Cave 2, in 475 and 476 respectively.[20] The "double" Aurangabad Cave 3 example is the latest of all, but in 478 a number of others were either cut away or not included in order to save time.[21]

It is evident that work on Banoti's right antechamber pillar, so characteristic of "Vakataka" forms, was abruptly abandoned at Harisena's death. The left pillar must have been similarly designed, similarly unfinished, and similarly abandoned. However, but in the last half of the sixth century, when it was no longer conventional for such complex bracketed pillars to front shrine antechambers, the brackets on the left pillar were cut away, as would have been the case with the right pillar too, had time allowed.[22] The "new" left pillar, dating to the second (late sixth century) phase of work, has a relatively dry purnaghata capital and very a series of eight simplified medallion motifs ringing the top of the newly designed shaft; both features are more characteristic of the later period than of the fifth century forms once intended.

If the original character of the shrine antechamber pillars makes it evident that Banoti was underway and then abandoned at the

[20] The vyala brackets in Cave Upper 6, reflecting vyala brackets on pillars L1 and R1 in Ajanta Cave 26, were surely the first to be done after the Hiatus. For a similar "architectural" bracket see the Mahajanaka Jataka palace representation. Later on (479) brackets (carved of wood?) were attached to the inset (now missing) pillars fronting Caves 9A and 9B.

[21] In 478, to save time, they are sometimes cut away (Cave 21) or omitted (Caves 23, 26LW, 27) In Ajanta 4, 15 and Ghatotkacha vihara the antechamber pillars were roughed out before 468, prior to the time when brackets were introduced into vihara shrines. The brackets in Cave 1 were "squeezed" out of the earlier roughed-out pillars forms, in 475.

[22] The brackets in Ajanta Cave 21were similarly cut away to save time, but this was done a century earlier. The expected brackets in Cave 23 were probably never roughed out when the hasty work was going on in this area in 478.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

time of Harisena's death at the end of 477, the format and decoration of the shrine doorway clearly supports this conclusion. It directly parallels doorways belonging to the very latest phase of consistent patronage at Ajanta, most notably that of Cave 24, probably the latest doorway carved prior to Harisena's death. Like the latter, the Banoti doorway has the distinctive "T-shaped" format, created by displacing the customary goddesses to the upper corners, so that a post and lintel "structure" can be revealed. Since one normally expects structural references to diminish as time goes on and as the original connections to built forms are lost, this reverses the expected trend of development. Quite possibly, with so many workmen from varied traditions being attracted to Ajanta, some newly arrived and assertive architect imported the idea from his prior experience with structural temples. Such T-shaped and "trabeated" doorways never appear at Ajanta before very late 476, become increasing more complex in Asmaka excavations in 478, and have their progeny (or developed counterparts) at Deogarh, Nachna Kuthara and Jogeswari, and elsewhere.

The lower portions of the shrine doorway have been destroyed by the action of centuries of flooding and the building up of debris, which all too quickly corrupts basalt. However, the upper two thirds of the doorway are intact and in good condition. What is more, they display a quality of design and carving which suggests that a highly skilled sculptor, probably from Ajanta itself, and knowing Ajanta's most advanced conventions may have been brought to carve the doorway. The most significant motif of all, since it provides the only absolute clue to the religious orientation of the patron, is the garlanded stupa at the center of the molding just below the not-quite-finished quasi-structural lintel. Not only in its general shape but in its specific central placement, it reminds one immediately of the crown which is the focus of the ranks of converging celestials on the Ajanta Cave 24 porch doorway. It is easy to see how the form could have "migrated" to Banoti as a stupa. Surprisingly, the transformation was never made in any of the doorways at Ajanta.

As in the very late porch doorway of Ajanta Cave 26, soaring couples converge upon the lintel's central motif, while the standing lovers in the panels framing the doorway opening are remarkably similar to Cave 24's too. The innovative cutting away and angling of the inner margins of the panels in which the lovers stand again parallels the late design of the Cave 24 and Cave 26 doorways, and

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

creates the same insistent (and new) axial focus. The empanelled lovers have now become more explicit in the suggestive positioning of their hands; at Ajanta the couples increasingly overcome their initial inhibitions as time passes, with the climax of this subtle yet confident eroticism coming just as the site begins to collapse. We are reminded, to use Bakker's phrase (1997, 44) of the "world of sensuous pleasures and sophisticated refinement (that) we find in the Ajanta murals" and the ominous implications of this uxorious focus. And finally, the apparently unfinished character of the panels at the upper right speaks directly, and painfully, of a high world in decline.

The goddesses, now displaced to the arms of the "T", as in similarly late doorways at Ajanta, still are of a commanding size and are shown with demandingly attractive poses. The left one has her proper left arm raised in the traditional tree-touching gesture, while she lowers the other upon a stick or support. The right goddess has a small female attendant, upon which she leans, while holding a flower (or mirror?) in the other hand. Neither goddess has the expected makara below, but this could be because that area, along with a few other portions of the surround floral band, has not been finished—or at least has not been carved.

The fact that the ambitious doorway was very slightly unfinished, to say nothing of its clear assignment to the very year that Harisena died, helps to explain why the shrine's double doors were never hung. Time obviously ran out. However, the fittings of the shrine doorway are untypical for this date, when the excavators normally used the "Bagh type" (D mode) inner recesses to hold the pivot holes. Here, although there are no fitting holes, we have what appear to be old-fashioned monolithic (B mode) projections, perhaps representing an idiosyncrasy of the planner. These went out of fashion by 475, but we should note that they often continue in use for double doors in the Period of Disruption (479–480) in the intrusive shrinelets in Cave Upper 6 and elsewhere, as well as for cistern chambers, so the old type did have a clear survival value.[23]

[23] Possibly the Banoti excavator remembered the very assertive projections carved as holders for the doorway of chaitya Cave 26. Although they had been roughed out by 468, the whole cave was so developed in style after 475 that he may not have realized that they were in fact obsolete forms. In any case, such projections continued in use at Ajanta for cisterns and shrinelets, although never for porch or shrine doorways in the 470s.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Thus the little known Banoti takes its place among the Vakataka monuments done in Harisena's reign; and in fact can be thought of as among the very latest, for being so clearly connected with Ajanta counterparts of 477 it is unlikely that it was started earlier than 476. At the same time, it is clear that its original patron did not attempt to continue it after the great emperor died at the end of 477, probably being caught up in the troubles of those times. Similarly, the later patron, who was updating the cave in the late (?) sixth century, also saw his work suddenly aborted. Possibly this was due to the fall of the (we assume) supportive Early Kalacuri power, similarly reflected in the cut-off of patronage in the many unfinished caves at both Ellora and Aurangabad at the end of the sixth century.

Dharasiva

The Jain caves at Dharasiva, of which we shall discuss Cave 2, have a complicated development. Considering Cave 2's various early features, often clearly related to those at Ajanta, we can conclude that it was started by the mid-460s, and that work continued through Ajanta's Recession (469 through 471), probably benefiting from the displacement of the many workmen who would have left Ajanta during that period of reduced patronage. It is possible that work continued at Dharasiva during the time of the local Asmaka/Risika war, although there is little evidence for this; alternatively, it is possible that the conflict adversely affected the Dharasiva region too, for it lay close to and even perhaps within the sphere of the rising Asmaka power. After the period when Ajanta suffered the Recession, there seems to have been little work done on Dharasiva Cave 2 until well after the Asmaka/Risika war was over and things were underway vigorously once again at the greater sites such as Ajanta, Bagh and Aurangabad. At this point such work probably involved the splendid, now largely ruinous, carved decoration of the pillars and capitals, and of course the carving of the image upon the face of the now-outmoded central block within the shrine.

I have suggested that the first "revolutionary" vihara plan at Ajanta was the huge hypostyle-type conception made (not surprisingly) for the Prime Minister Varahadeva and then very rapidly adopted by other patrons, with certain adjustments, in Cave 17, 4, and 1. This carefully worked-out and grand schema went far beyond the site's

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Hinayana prototypes, such as Cave 12. However, Cave 16, like the ancient Cave 12, was at first conceived without a shrine; the very idea did not strike the site until about 466, and when that happened it happened forcefully.

A less striking but equally revealing development to be found at Ajanta is the shift, in about 465, from cutting porches with plain ends, following the Hinayana model upon which the excavators at first were so dependent, to (sensibly) adding cells at these important points. The fact that Dharasiva Caves 2 and 3 (and a few lesser caves) also were planned with no cells at the porch ends surely confirms the relatively early date of the inauguration of work on the cave, even though again there could have been some delay in the transmission of influences or the movement of planners and workmen coming to this distant and provincial site. At Ajanta, since space at the porch ends was never, prior to 465, utilized for cells, it was common and convenient to put cisterns in these convenient and otherwise unused areas.[24] After 465, cells were always put at these points, very sensibly utilizing these spaces to maximize the residence potential of the caves. The fact that Dharasiva Cave 2 (and also Cave 3) has a cistern at one of the porch ends confirms the assumption that these caves were underway very early.

Even if there were some delay in the transmission of ideas from the greater site—for Dharasiva is nearly two hundred fifty kilometers from Ajanta, even taking the more direct crow's route—the evidence would suggest that these Dharasiva caves were started well before the period of Ajanta's Recession. It should also be noted that the porch windows of Dharasiva Cave 2 have the vertical format typical of the earlier excavations at Ajanta. It was only about 467 or 468, in Ajanta Cave 1, that the square format had become firmly established.[25]

In any case, at Dharasiva,by the time that the front aisle of these caves was being opened up a shrine was already anticipated at the rear, since the axial pillars have the wider intercolumniations that signal this. Thus we can conclude that the excavation of the inte-

[24] See Ajanta Caves Lower 6 and 25RW. Similarly the proximity of the cisterns in a number of other caves (e.g. 17, 20, 4) is probably the reason that the planners sometimes elevated the porch end cells when they were finally carved.

[25] An exception at Ajanta is Cave Lower 6, with its clumsy outer fittings. Window type and decoration was not standardized at Ajanta until 475, just after the Hiatus.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

rior hall was developing sometime by 466 or shortly thereafter. This would tie in reasonably with the assumption that the cells, with their outer recesses as well as a number of B-mode door fittings (mentioned below), were underway in 468 or 469 and possibly even a bit later—but not before. Indeed, it is quite possible that, just as was the case in the early phase of the Cave 26 complex at Ajanta, the workers did not cut the cells until the whole interior hall was reamed out.

The fact that in Dharasiva Cave 2 there is an "extra" inner hypostyle is easily explained by the large size of the interior, which is (very roughly) 80' square. The soft conglomerate stone at the site is so bad that the ceiling clearly required this extra support. In this regard Cave Lower 6 at Ajanta supplies a precedent, even though in the latter cave the extra pillars, not originally planned for, were added in the course of excavation in order to provide support for the upper storey when it was added to the total conception early in 465.

The manner in which Cave 2's sidewalls angle distinctly outward—the cave's width is 79 feet at the front but 85 feet at the back (see plan) is not immediately obvious, but is surely surprising. As discussed at length elsewhere, this typically early "splaying out" was caused by the initially inexperienced excavators' difficulty in cutting the side walls back. They gradually chiseled away too much stone, thus causing a cumulative, even if slight, angling outward of the wall surfaces being revealed. By the same token, early ceilings and floors tend to rise upward from the horizontal plane as they approach the rear.[26] I did not observe the ceiling levels at Dharasiva when I was there; but the original rise (from front to back) of the ceiling and floor in comparably sized Cave 4 at Ajanta, remarkably, was almost five feet, before finally being corrected later, at great expense; so it is reasonable to assume that Dharasiva Cave 2's ceiling was at least somewhat angled. However, these discrepancies would always be more troubling to the architects (or at least the patrons) than to the residents or devotees, for the level of floor would be kept parallel to that of the ceiling, as carving proceeded, by a constant (bamboo?) measure; with their angled surfaces moving constantly together and the lateral pillars being adjusted in compensation for the rise, it is hard to notice that they are both in fact angling upward toward the

[26] See discussion of Cave 4, in Volume II. Also Spink 2004.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

rear. By the same token, it is difficult to notice the splaying and/or warping of the side walls, particular since the side aisle colonnades themselves again deviate in response to the angling out of the walls. Needless to say firmer technical disciplines soon prevailed at Ajanta, but this came too late for Dharasiva.

A few cells inDharasiva Cave 2 have projecting B-mode fittings—a highly revealing form which appears at Ajanta only in 468–469. Because the rock is so weak, a few other B-mode projections may have fallen away, or (as at Bagh) could not be cut in any case, because of the friability of the stone. However, the presence of at least a few of these distinctive fittings strongly suggests that some of Dharasiva's cells were significantly penetrated only after 468, and quite possibly later still, if there was some delay in the transmission of features between the sites. Furthermore it is likely, that as was common in various early excavations at Ajanta, the penetration of the cells did not begin until the cave's walls were essentially roughed out, which would explain why such cells date later than the definition of the porch and interior.

All of these features suggest that Dharasiva Cave 2 was started by the mid or possibly later 460s as a relatively primitive conception strongly influenced by precedents at Ajanta. This is hardly surprising, since the regions were under the same imperial control. However, the more remote Dharasiva, with its unhappy rock-quality and its less powerful (Jain rather than courtly) patronage, probably had great difficulty attracting quality workmen (or workmen in general) in sufficient numbers. And quality may not have been a prime concern. This workforce problem is an important factor in understanding the development of Ajanta itself, where the lesser patrons, it would seem, often lacked the clout to keep their crews. A few decades later, it will be notably evident at Elephanta, where it appears that work abruptly stopped on the earlier (eastern) group of caves and possibly on Jogesvari as well when the great cave was started.[27]

Such a factor may explain why at first work appears to have progressed very slowly in these Dharasiva caves; indeed, Cave 3, which abuts Cave 2 and has many similar features, was almost surely not

[27] Cf. Darryl D'Monte, writing in the Lokmat Times, Aurangabad, July 20, 2001 about the competitive multinational conservation of Angkor: "The French and Americans snapped up the several virtually unskilled Cambodians the Indians had trained, post-1991, at higher wages."

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

started until Cave 2 was well underway, for by that time Cave 2's clumsy and unintended trape ape had become properly squared in Cave 3; also we can see that Cave 3's left cells reflect the previous presence of Cave 2's already excavated right cells—certainly an example of poor planning.

If Dharasiva got off to a slow start in the mid-460s, things understandably speeded up, just as they did at Bagh, when work was dramatically truncated at Ajanta starting in early 469. The arrival of new workmen, attuned to Ajanta's latest developments, would certainly have stimulated Dharasiva's patronage, and would explain various telling new features, such as the B-mode door fittings, mentioned above, and the character of the image, discussed below.

The use of pillars with high square bases in various contexts in Dharasiva 2 and 3 is another late feature which was introduced at Ajanta in the late 460s, in Cave 1 and Cave 19, and becomes conventional during Ajanta's second flowering after 475. Although the pillars must have been blocked out quite early in Dharasiva Cave 2, it is likely that at first they remained as roughly squared forms, following a common excavation procedure whereby caves were often blocked out completely before being more fully defined. Almost surely, they were originally intended to be cut into "early" octagonal types (as in Ajanta Cave 17, 16, etc.) but having been left in a simple roughed out form, it was possible (and desirable) to update them with square bases later on.

Dharasiva Cave 2's ribbed pillar capitals follow Ajanta precedents (Cave 17, 4, Upper 6) but are even more richly elaborated, a departure possibly recommended by the ease with which the site's weak rock could be carved. The ribbed decoration on capitals at Ajanta evolves very consistently; early examples, as in the porches of Cave 11, and at the right of Cave 7, having 5.5 ribs, the number gradually being reduced to 3.5, before capitals with simply plain undersurfaces become more popular. Those of Dharasiva 2 seem to fit in about mid-way into the ribbed-type sequence, relating to those in Ajanta Caves 17 and 4. The bands of design on the shafts again bear certain connections with Cave 17 and other relatively early caves.

One should also note that the various cell doorways have shallow outer recesses; at Ajanta this feature was first developed in Cave Lower 6 in early 469, in order to hurriedly define the door openings in the still-rough rear wall of the cave. Although never used before, it became an invariable feature at Ajanta from 469 on; so

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

one can conclude that this feature in Dharasiva dates from no earlier than (and probably somewhat later than) that date.

It is evident from the stressing of the cave's axis—the approach to the shrine—that (following precedents at Ajanta) the cave's main hall would have been started sometime after 466, the year when the concept of supplying the viharas with shrine images made such a dramatic appearance at the "parent" site. Like Cave 4 at Bagh, or the anomalous Cave 11 at Ajanta, Dharasiva's shrines have no antechamber, possibly because of the difficulty of carving relatively small fronting pillars from the site's unfortunate rock. However, the plan of the shrine itself is highly informative, for like all of the first Ajanta shrines (even the aborted shrines of Caves 7, 15, and 20) the image was planned for placement at the center of the shrine, still reflecting the arrangement of the stupa shrines from which it derives. This old-fashioned (centralized) shrine plan locates the work here (by analogy with Ajanta and Bagh) to a date no later than 471.[28] At the same time, the presence of attendants flanking the image, first seen at Ajanta in Cave 17, suggests that it could not be earlier than 471 if, as seems likely, it was following Ajanta's precedent.

Indeed, both this image and the rather similar one in the adjacent Cave 3 are, without question, much later than we might expect. Like the influential image in Ajanta Cave 1, they do not easily fit the constraints of the constricted and old-fashioned central block, which was probably roughed out earlier (around 468 or 469) at a time when a much less complex image group, without attendants, was envisaged. It seems likely that just when the cave, with its centralized shrine, had been essentially cut out, further work was interrupted by the Asmaka/Risika war starting in 472. Then, a few years later, the vigorous renewal of work at Ajanta in 475 may have further slowed down developments at the lower-priority Dharasiva. This can hardly be proved with presently available evidence, but is a reasonable suggestion, for the development of all such sites was ultimately dependent upon the circumstances of patronage.

What is certainly clear is that, by analogy with Ajanta, where the course of development is totally telling, the Dharasiva Cave 2 and Cave 3 images could not have been carved before 477, despite the

[28] See Chapter # 3 of this Volume. The centralized shrine plan still persists in Cave 17, even though adjusted slightly to allow for the inclusion of bodhisattvas. In Cave 20 it was intended, but aborted, since time was running out in 471.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

fact that the centralized shrine, now so out of date, must have been at least roughed out some years earlier, around 469. What we have, rather like Cave 1's shrine image, is a late form forced to fit onto an early-defined and constricting block. In fact, the imperial image in Cave 1, which may well have been known by the sculptors at Dharasiva, may well have influenced the composition at this lesser site, possibly in 478 or even slightly later.

Even though, in 478, Asmakas began their rebellion against Harisena's successor, there is reason to believe that the Dharasiva area was not immediately affected. The fact that Kuntala is included in the Vakataka Prime Minister's Cave 16 inscription as one of the territories over which the emperor Harisena was holding sway in 477, when the record was put in place, helps to explain Ajanta's impact upon Dharasiva at this late date. Although it perhaps cannot be proved that Dharasiva was part of ancient Kuntala—its boundaries are difficult to reconstruct—it may have been, or was certainly close enough to have significant connections. We know that shortly after Harisena's death his son and successor Sarvasena III is said to "consecrated or crowned" the Kadamba king Simhavarman who, as M. J. Sharma (1992, 53–55) incisively argues "may have to be . . . the lord of Kuntala". So it is likely that for a few years after Harisena's death, Kuntala had not joined the feudatory rebellion; and by the same token it is possible that Dharasiva could still have been developing in this period. Thus the late images in Caves 2 and 3 might have been brought to completion even a year or so after 478, despite the fact all established patronage activity at Ajanta had ended at the end of that turbulent year.

However, the hold of the weak Sarvasena over his Kuntala feudatory (as well as over his other feudatories!) was all too fragile, for sometime early in the 480s the great insurrection had started, rapidly leaving the empire in ruins. In this, the lord of Kuntala, conspiring with the lord of Asmaka, played a powerful role.[29] Thus, by this time, shortly after 480, Dharasiva must have suffered the fate of all of the former "Vakataka" sites. It seems reasonable to assume that the final stages of work on the images must have been over before 480, possibly even having been finished in 478, when the tremors of the shockwave of Harisena's death would have been felt even in this distant area.

[29] Kale 1966, 360.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

The evidence that Dharasiva's shrine format was distinctly obsolete by the time the image was carved from the central block is evident from the cramped composition of the whole image group, which now, according to convention, must include attendant figures. In fact, the images in Dharasiva Caves 2 and 3 have the same placement problems as those of Ajanta Caves 1 and 4 where (as here) the shape of the central block could not be altered when their highly developed image groups were started some years later. Thus the attendants at Dharasiva, as in Ajanta Cave 1 and 4, had to be uncomfortably crowded in behind the image; their legs, although present, cannot even be seen.

Actually, it is unlikely that the image in Dharasiva Cave 2 was started before 477, since it has so many telling compositional connections with the influential (even if crowded) imperial image in Ajanta Cave 1, which must have been well underway in 476, but not completed until 477. This connection, which would have been facilitated by the fact that the Asmaka/Risika war was now over, would also explain the presence of the fat flying dwarfs, even though although flying couples become the celestials of choice for such main images from 477 on at Ajanta, it is possible that Jain sensibilities would prefer to place the less sensual dwarfs in these important positions.[30] Or again, their presence may be explained by a year or two's delay in the transmission of motifs. After all, dwarfs had been the conventional celestials through 476 at Ajanta; carved flying couples do not appear there before 477, and in fact never appear above the myriad standing Buddhas at Ajanta.

Many elements of the Dharasive Cave 2 throne, including its distinct structural references, clearly postdate those of the Ajanta Cave 1 image, even though the latter image had barely been finished when Harisena died. The draped throne cloth is first found at Ajanta in 477, when the Cave 2 image was underway, while the late manner in which the attendants are crowded behind the throne appears at Ajanta only in 477, in the expediently composed Cave 16 image and a number of derivative groups.[31] Similarly, the treatment of the

[30] Flying couples are sometimes used in the fifth century, although it is possible that they are not earlier than 477, when the first examples are found at Ajanta. (See Tirthamkara, Siddha Ki Pahari, published (as mid-fifth century) in K. Khandalavala The Golden Age 1991, page 66, figure 2. Later images at Ellora do commonly show flying celestial couples.

[31] However, the legs of the attendants do show, as in Ajanta Cave 1.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

lions is a notably advanced feature, again reflecting developments of about 477 at Ajanta. The lions in such late figurations are no longer treated as living animals, as in early shrine Buddhas, but as leonine throne legs with structural elements both above and below; the nubs which cap these "throne legs" again are a feature which never appears at Ajanta until 477, at least in sculpture. These transformations at Ajanta appear at the same time as the newly assertive bhadrasana image, and if they look back to Kushan imperial portraits as their source, they survive in the later enthroned images of the Mughal and even British emperors, where such leonine supports added to the ruler's authority.[32]

The paired deer on either side of the Dharasiva Cave 2 image are anomalous from the point of view of Ajanta. However, they may well have a specifically Jain significance, since they appear often in the Jain caves at Ellora. They of course once flanked a wheel of the complex late Ajanta type which appears somewhat better preserved in Cave 3. There is a legend, discussed at length in contending articles by Mirashi and Dhavalikar, which suggests that the wheel in Cave 2 may possibly have been intentionally cut away to avoid confusing the Jina with a Buddha image.[33] Admittedly, the fact that the image is protected by a seven-hooded snake, the cognizance of the Jina Parsvanath, might allow some confusion, since the Buddha himself is sometimes protected by the naga Muchalinda. However, at Ajanta, the Buddha under Muchalinda occurs only in a single instance, in the antechamber of Cave 7, and never in a significant central setting; whereas naga-protected Parsvanath figures are extremely common in Jain art from this period and later.

However, in the end, neither of these contending scholars notes the most compelling point. Although both the Buddha under Muchalinda and the Jina Parsvanath are often shown meditating, the Buddha when in the meditative (dhyanasana) is never shown with the dharmacakra below. On the contrary, the appearance of the dharmacakra below is almost conventional with meditating Tirthankaras in the fourth and fifth centuries. (Tiwari 1990, 25–36) Indeed, it is even sometimes shown below standing tirthankaras. Thus the question can probably be put to rest, while the presence of much

[32] For a perceptive discussion of the meaning of the bhadrasana type, see Weiner 1977, 97, 98, 114.

[33] See Dhavalikar 1964–65; Mirashi, 1960?

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

surrounding Jain imagery on the cave exterior—and throughout the site—would further confirm the Jain ascription for Dharasiva Cave 2, as well as for the flanking Caves 3 and 1. Significantly, the Sreenivasachar (1953, 2) reports "in front of the central Shrine between, and a little in front of the central pillars, there is a piece of rock which must have been part of the pedestal of a Caumukha". This seems to be a sufficient confirmation of the Jain character of at least this cave; and it also supports the conclusion that those we have been discussing are Jain dedications also.[34]

One final "minor" but telling point should help to locate the completion of Cave 2 to the last year of Harisena's rule (477), or perhaps to the year immediately thereafter (478). The Dharasiva planner appears to have copied a feature which was not developed at Ajanta until 477, even though it was convenient and practical. This involves the manner in which the rear side of the front wall of the shrine is so amply recessed that when the shrine doors were opened they could swing back into it and be "out of the way". In the long development of shrine doorways at Ajanta and Aurangabad, this sensible and sophisticated device was not "discovered" until at least 477 (possibly 478) in the treatment of the shrine doorway in Aurangabad Cave 3.

Dharasiva, as a site, has suffered greatly, particularly those exposed areas in front of the caves, where there were sometimes dancing "ganas" and guardian figures done in what I would call a high and often splendid Vakataka style. But I do not have adequate documentation to discuss them fully.

The Ghatotkacha Vihara

The large vihara at Ghatotkacha, begun about 464, a dozen miles as the crow flies from Ajanta, was a donation of Varahadeva, the Vakataka Prime Minister himself. Not surprisingly, as originally conceived, it was closely modeled upon the same important donor's Ajanta Cave 16, although it underwent a number of significant transformations as time went on. Like most of the excavations at Ajanta

[34] By contrast, Cave 7 may be the most important of the Brahmanical caves at the site. (See Sreenivasachar, 1953, 13, 14)

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

(including Cave 16), it was finished in two distinct phases, one ending in 468 (with a hurried addition allowed early in 469) and the other starting in 475 and in most cases continuing until the end of 478.[35] However, the distinction between them is often obscured by the late motifs that typically cover some of the cave's early elements, such as the doorways and windows of the porch, and even the early-exposed shrine antechamber pillars.

The Ghatotkacha vihara would surely have had conventionally plain porch ends when it was started in the early years, and although conventional pillared cell complexes were later cut in these positions, this was not done until 475 or slightly later, when the cutting of nearly all of the cells in the cave was finally underway. This late dating for the beginning of work on the cells is particularly evident on the right side of the hall. For instance, the anomalous positioning of Cell R1 was clearly a response to the placing of the monolithic stupa in this area in early 469, when Varahadeva decided to create this "altar" before circumstances forced him to totally give up work on Ghatotkacha, at least until after the Recession and Hiatus. The other cells along the wall also appear not to have been penetrated until 475, for when all such work on the cave stopped with Harisena's death, not one had been finished enough to have been provided with the recessed (D mode) doorways for which their thick walls were intended; and nowhere in the cave does one find the monolithic B mode fittings which would have been carved had any of the cells been significantly underway by 468.

In fact, the evidence of a mere shallow cut for the "missing" Cell R3 suggests that when work was resumed in 475, there was no immediate intention of placing pillared complexes at the mid-point of the right and left walls. The aborted Cell R3 had been carefully placed with the expected "view" directly between Pillars R2 and R3; it was certainly not cut at this point after the pillared vestibule of the projected Cell Complex R4, which crowds it out, was already underway, and plans for the "missing" Cell R5 must have been abandoned for the same reason. The cells along the right wall progressed somewhat faster once they were started after the Hiatus; indeed Cell L3 must have been well underway when the pillared

[35] My early study of Ghatotkacha discusses the significance of both the early and late features being specifically related to Varahadeva's patronage. However, I had not at that time developed a very precise chronology. See Spink 1966.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

complex L4 was begun, but is much compressed as a consequence. Along the right wall, the first five cells (L1–L5) actually received their D mode fittings, a few of which show some signs of wear; but the fact that L6 and L7 were never fitted out, and that the two pillared complexes at the rear were never finished or used, makes it evident that although work was vigorously going on here after 475, time ran out all too quickly. Even the double panels of the shrine doorway were never hung, although the image was put into worship.

It is clear from this brief analysis that the Ghatotkacha architect, like the planner of the Cave 26 complex, preferred to ream the whole excavation out in a general way, before getting involved in the cave's decoration, or even the cutting of its cells. This of course speeded up the course of revealing the whole interior. In this regard we can say that he had penetrated well into the shrine antechamber by the time that work was interrupted by the Recession. This explains why, although the antechamber elements were finally decorated with great (and "late") complexity in the cave's late phase, the antechamber pillars are devoid of the female brackets which would be expected at this time, judging from what we see in Caves 1, 2, Upper 6, 21 (although cut away), and Aurangabad 3; that is, the matrix needed for them was cut away in about 468, when (particular starting at the upper levels) the antechamber was being penetrated. In other words, the situation is comparable to what happened, similarly, in Cave 4, where the antechamber, at least at the upper levels, had already been penetrated, and the antechamber pillars already trimmed, by the time work was interrupted in 468.

Although the excavators, working in the years before 468, gradually exposed the cave's pillars as they progressed toward the rear, they would have been first cut in a roughed-out square format, with those toward the front probably having reached the next stage of trimming-down, to reveal a very rough octagonal outline. In their untrimmed state, there would have been plenty of room for adjusting the positioning of those in the front row sufficiently to allow an axial emphasis, since this became a feature of caves, whenever possible, once the idea of adding shrines to the old viharas impacted upon the Vakataka sites starting in 466. As is not surprising, the axial emphasis between the two rear center pillars is somewhat more pronounced than between the two front center pillars, for when the "requirement" for an axial emphasis affected the cave, the rear colonnade would not have been more than summarily exposed.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Just as at Ajanta, the dramatic change occasioned by the intended introduction of the Buddha and his shrine into what had been begun as a "mere dormitory", explains why, as work got started up again after 475, such emphasis was given to the elaborate cell complexes. Influenced by the layout of Cave Upper 6 and Cave 21 at Ajanta, where the complex plan was developed in 468, just before the Recession, the planner at Ghatotkacha, when work was renewed on the cave in 475, located these impressive features not only at the porch-ends and at the cave rear, but uncomfortably crowded them into the left and right aisles as well, revising the arrangement on those walls almost as soon as the originally intended sequence of nothing more than simple cells had been begun.[36]

The planner of the Ghatotkacha vihara probably did not establish the pattern of the pillar brackets until 467 or 468, even though they must have been roughly excavated earlier. Perhaps he actually completing them toward the front of the cave, following the format of those in Cave 16 and 17, where the number of "volutes" or "ribs" has already been reduced by two units, as compared to the earlier ones found in Cave 11 and 7 at Ajanta. It is at first surprising to note that such pillars are supplied with the square bases which become conventional only from 475 on, but this is probably because even when the upper part of the pillar shafts along with the capitals was being roughed out, the floor of the cave still needed to be cut down another foot or two. Therefore, when work started up again in 475, it was still possible to include the now conventional square bases, even though they were abnormally reduced in height. That the floor matrix was still quite deep (uncut) in 468 is suggested also by the evidence of roughness at this level in various areas throughout the cave and perhaps even helps to explain the unexpectedly high steps in front of Cells L6 and L7, which were surely rushed in their last-minute excavation. By the same token we can explain the much higher (indeed "normal") square bases of the shrine antechamber pillars by noting that the floor matrix must have been much deeper in this rear area when the pillars were defined.

The relative thinness of the cave's front wall is a typically early feature. As we might expect, the main and aisle doorways were cut

[36] As noted earlier, cells L3 and R3 would never have been started in the positions originally planned, had Cells L4 and R4 been conceived at that time.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

in the early and featureless A mode, although they all had to be later converted to allow the doors' hanging.[37] The windows, like early forms at Ajanta—even as late as Cave 1's—were framed and (inconveniently) shuttered from the outside. The slight (and unexplained) setback of the ends of the front aisle, as in Ajanta Cave 4 is also an early feature; perhaps an idiosyncrasy of the Prime Minister's architect, it is also found in Cave 16, which was surely the model for this remote excavation.

The uneven (warped) treatment of the vihara's side walls is virtual proof of the cave having been largely reamed out in the early phase, prior to the Recession, when excavation techniques were still very imperfect. Most early excavations (notably Caves 4, 11 and 17 show a similar lack of technical control.[38] At the same time (see Burgess' typically trustworthy plan), it looks as if the splayed-out right wall may have been excavated somewhat in advance of that on the left, which seems to have been "pulled in" by the embarrassed planner when it was discovered how much wider the back of the cave was going to be if its "primitive" and inept wall definition continued.

One feature of the cave, at first surprising, is the enlargement of the pillars of the hypostyle toward the rear of the cave. This is clearly a response to the discovery, as excavation work progressed, of a startlingly wide and deep vertical flaw running more or less straight across the center of the cave, from left to right; the response was similar to that which created the "supporting" shrine antechamber toward the rear of Ajanta Cave 20. It is interesting, too, to see here a (rather subtle!) confirmation of the conclusion that the left side of the cave progressed slightly faster than the right. It may have been for this reason that pillar R3, although already (roughly) defined to some degree, could also be somewhat enlarged, whereas pillar L3 could not.[39] Even so, R3 could not be enlarged as successfully as the quite unfinished pillars farther toward the rear.

It seems clear that the Prime Minister's Cave 16 at Ajanta was left quite untouched, perhaps for even as much as two years, when work was renewed at Ajanta in 475. Just possibly, he had a particular interest in the remote, but impressive Ghatotkacha vihara, and

---

[37] The two aisle doorways were converted, after 475, to the sensible D mode.
[38] Early excavation processes and problems are explained in Spink 2004.
[39] Of course Pillar L3 precedes the massive crack; but had the right side progressed faster, L3 could still have been enlarged to provide further support.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

sent his crews there to work instead. Whatever the reason, it seems evident that work did begin, quite efficiently, after the Hiatus, at Ghatotkacha. Since the rear of the hall was still very much under excavation in 475, it is not surprising that he started the decoration of the cave in the porch. The main doorway still retains—as does Cave 21 at Ajanta—the simple "early" format, with the goddesses being supported on the pilasters. The fascinating (and unique) decoration of the surrounds shows simplified scenes from the life of the Buddha at the sides, and scenes focused on a stupa and (just below) on a seated yaksha along the top. The window and aisle doorway decorations are equally idiosyncratic (and undisciplined), with Buddhas seated under arches within pavilions at the upper levels, pilastered female (etc) figures at the sides, and an usual "procession" of elephants under the window at the left. The window is surprisingly wide, if carved by around 465; but it has not been enlarged, like those of Cave 5 and Cave Upper 6, for it retains its primitive external sockets to hold the frames. Its uncharacteristic format perhaps reflects the fact that at such an early date such forms were in flux, vying for survival.

Although the underlying format of the shrine antechamber pillars was established by 468, their decoration, as we would expect, is late. Like the work on the fine related pilasters, it was clearly done in those happy times when Harisena was still alive. The late but conventional shrine doorway too had been mostly decorated by the time that Harisena died, and then like some other elements in the antechamber) was left unfinished in 478. Its "trabeated" and T-shaped format relates it to similar doorways underway at Ajanta in 477.

It is hardly surprising that the Prime Minister would have used his emperor's Buddha image as a model for his own image, and this is clearly the case in the Ghatotkacha vihara.[40] However, having been developed only after the Hiatus, it includes a number of more advanced features; and since the insistence of the central image block was finally broken, the image in the Ghatotkacha vihara suffers none of the former image's constrictions; it can now spread out upon the whole rear wall of the shrine, like all of the other contemporaneous

[40] The minister's bhadrasana image in Cave 16—its hugeness perhaps intended to rival that of the Cave 4 image then underway—is a slightly later conception than that in the Ghatotkacha vihara, even though they were underway and finished at the same time.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

padmasana images in shrines conceived after 475.[41] We can imagine that, just in Cave 2, plans were laid for this type of image group as soon as the site came to life again after the Hiatus, and that it had been generally roughed out during 476; but features such as the converging flying couples, to say nothing of "extra" celestials, proves that its more thorough detailing could not have been underway until 477 (See Chart of Buddha Iconography). At that point there would have been no particular sense of rush, because times were good, but we can assume that when 478 came, it was hurried to a conclusion, perhaps only needing to be painted at that time. The fact that the closely associated shrine doorway was still unfinished at the end of 477—and then was abandoned—would confirm this, since in normal times, the Buddha image and the shrine doorway would have been brought to completion at the same time.

The Ghatotkacha vihara houses literally thousands of bats, as well as a myriad cockroaches, whose actions and excreta have destroyed any painting in the cave; but since the cave has so many unfinished elements we can be sure that in any case it had not been painted in normal course from front to back. However, because of the signal importance of the image—and of getting it done and dedicated—we can assume that it was given priority treatment, and must have once been painted, although almost certainly this was not accomplished until 478. As we might expect, fittings were never added to the shrine doorway, further suggesting that the image was painted and dedicated only after Harisena's death, in early 478, and that the cave was in worship only briefly, if at all.

We can be sure that the image (and the cave) was thus brought to life, because of the presence of the many intrusive images added during the Period of Disruption. Typically, they appear in the more desirable areas, such as the shrine antechamber walls, as well as at the right end of the front aisle.[42] The intrusions in the latter area—a hit-or-miss grouping of seated and standing Buddhas—appear both on and around the large relief stupa. The stupa had been cut there as an expedient devotional focus in early 469, when it was clear—

[41] Caves 2, Upper 6, 21, 26LW. The anomalous positioning of the earlier images in Caves 7, 15, and 20 was due to their shrines being cut so hastily that they could not conform to the original centralized format.

[42] There are no sculptured intrusions in the shrine, but it is very possible that there were intrusive paintings there instead.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

due to the Recession—that the image itself could not be revealed at that time.[43]

What made the surprising creation of this projecting relief stupa possible was the fact that when the normal course of work broke off at the end of 468, due to the Recession, there was still a mass of uncut matrix at this right end of the aisle. Indeed, even the adjacent right front pilaster of the vihara had not been fully exposed and defined at that time, for the stupa utilizes matrix which would have earlier been trimmed away if the pilaster had already been revealed. This evidence alone suggests that work on the cave had not progressed much beyond the roughing out of the main hall when work was interrupted by the Recession, as pointed out above.

The creation of this expedient devotional focus during the first few weeks or months of the Recession in 469 clearly parallels the hurried completion of the Buddha images of Ajanta Caves Lower 6, 7, 11, and 15 in this same year; however, the situation was somewhat different: the large Ghatotkacha vihara must have been in such a rough and unfinished state at the time that the patron, Varahadeva, did not struggle to open up the shrine area. Even though he was the Prime Minister who, according to his Cave 16 inscription, "governed the country righteously", he was not immune to the effects of the Recession. As we have seen, the pressures to which he was subject very soon aborted his ambitious attempt to bring his whole Cave 16 at Ajanta to completion, with the result that when he had to give up his work in 469, his Buddha image had not even been started. Thus the limited goal of making a stupa shrine in the Ghatotkacha vihara, no matter how surprising an innovation it was, was ultimately more successful than his merely hopeful attempt to bring his related vihara at Ajanta to a hurried completion early in the Recession. I have suggested earlier that the relief stupa may very slightly antedate the few Buddha images (in Caves Lower 6, 7, 11, and 15) done at the beginning of the Recession, representing a moment of transition between the time when all of the intended shrines at Ajanta were probably conceived for stupas and the time, very shortly thereafter, when all thoughts and desires were focused on the emergence of the Buddha himself.

[43] The seated Buddha on the front of the relief stupa is an intrusion (479–480); the supporting yaksha is original.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

While the relief stupa was carved from matrix remaining in 469, the triad of standing Buddhas opposite it was carved as a later (479) intrusion into the low-priority front wall when the second course of normal excavation work on the cave was abruptly stopped due to Harisena's death at the end of 477.[44] The depth of the unfinished front wall of the cave, which thickens considerably toward the less fully excavated floor level, made it possible to cut these intrusions quite deeply. There was even room to expose the recess or platform, forming a place for offerings, upon which they stand. A host of other intrusions were also added to this aisle-end area in 479–480, for it clearly had a particular sanctity because of the presence of the stupa carved there a decade before.[45]

There is a mere sketch (incised) of a small standing Buddha on the right front pilaster; and yet another intrusive seated Buddha, with two small attendants, appears on the left front pilaster. Both of these hurried and unfinished votive carvings are probably dateable to the end of 480. There is a short formulaic inscription on the left pilaster, very different in character from those of the Period of Disruption at Ajanta; this is surely one reason that Cohen (1995, 386) dates it to the eighth century. Because the inscription appears above rather than below the still incomplete (and thus probably "dead") image, and is written quite carelessly, it is reasonable to assume that it was put on the pilaster later, by some Buddhist pilgrim coming through the area. Though it has been suggested that the clumsily executed image was carved when the inscription was written, it is far more reasonable to connect the image with the other intrusions in the cave, rather than to assume that the "eighth century" visitor had a sculptor in tow.

A few other small excavations were also started near the Ghatotkacha vihara. The ruinous and unfinished one to the right still contains a fallen capital, now buried in the debris, which is carved with a four-deer-with-a-single-head motif nearly identical to the two on the right aisle pillars in Ajanta Cave 1 in about 475.[46] This is clear evidence

[44] Just as the dark and distant (from the shrine) front walls of the caves tended to be painted last, they were also the ones that the excavators left until last.

[45] For the intrusions, see Volume III.

[46] When I last visited the site in 2004, this capital was not visible. Recently, in 2005, Yasuko Fukuyama found that it was still in the same location, but totally covered over with dirt which had washed in to the little cave, which is open to the elements.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

that this, and presumably the other even more unfinished little caves at the site, were underway along with the great vihara. They must have been cut off in their development by Harisena's untimely death, as was the main vihara, even though work on the latter continued the year after (478), in order to get the image dedicated.

Kanheri

Although nearly all the caves at Kanheri belong either to an early Satavahana phase probably starting in the first century A.D. and continuing past the middle of the second century A.D., or to the later Traikutaka phase of the late fifth and early sixth century, there appears to have been a small number of donations dating from the Vakataka period, specifically to the reign of the emperor Harisena in the 460s or the 470s. This is suggested by the character of certain images which have been removed from the so-called cemetery, or from stone panels still remaining at the base of some of that area's various structural (brick) stupas. The fact that the panels show series of simple padmasana images, ranged beneath floral festoons very much like decorative forms found at Ajanta is suggestive. By contrast, the Traikutaka images at the site are more likely to be the bhadrasana images which became increasingly popular at Ajanta and elsewhere after 477. One might also note that the molded and shaped bricks on the stupas are not unlike the simple forms in the Vakataka excavations at Ajanta, and at a number of roughly contemporary Vakataka sites in the Nagpur region.

The ascription of this material to Harisena's reign makes sense if, as part of his territorial expansion, he extended his sway over the Konkan, and this is strongly suggested by two significant pieces of evidence. First, the Visrutacarita lists the ruler of the Konkan as one of the many insurrectionists—presumably all feudatories—who destroyed the power of Harisena's successsor, Sarvasena III, the new Vakataka overlord.[47] Secondly, S. Gokhale (1991, 61–62) has reasonably argued that the Konkan is the territory whose name has been lost in the Prime Minister's Cave 16 inscription, where the territories controlled by Harisena are listed. She supplies the word *paranta*, a shortening

[47] Kale 1966, 360.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

of *aparanta* (i.e. the Konkan), the change necessitated by the verse form. This interpretation has been supported by a number of Sanskritists.[48]

Even the Kanheri Copper Plate inscription (Mirashi, 1955, 39–42), dated in accordance with 494 A.D., which was given in "the augmenting kingdom of the Traikutakas" hints at the fact that, like so many of Harisena's other former domains, they were struggling to consolidate their newly-won independence. This situation would seem to be confirmed by the fact that although there are Traikutaka inscriptions *before* Harisena's reign, and Traikutaka inscriptions *after* Harisena's reign, there is only silence from the Traikutakas during the period when he might have held sway over them.

Lonad

The cave at Lonad, consisting of a 14.40 × 3.00 meter porch, a 13.50 × 5.70 meter hall, an unfinished shrine at the rear, and a few unfinished cells, was considered by Burgess (1882, 53–54) to be a brahmanical excavation dating to the eighth century. R.V. van Leyden later recognized that it was in fact a Buddhist excavation, but still dated it much too late, to the early eighth century. I myself (Spink 1978, 23) suggested that it was a very early Early Kalacuri excavation, which would locate it around 525. However, even this revision assigned it to too late a date. Furthermore the fact that it is not oriented to the east would make it unlikely that it was an Early Kalacuri work, since all of the earliest excavations of that dynasty, up to and including the Great Cave at Elephanta are compulsively positioned toward that direction.

Recently, M. N. Deshpande and A. P. Jamkhedkar rightly recognized Lonad's various connections with Ajanta and Aurangabad Cave 3 and therefore dated it to the end of the fifth century. Although they do not assign a dynastic connection, that with the Vakatakas is implied because of its "affinity with the Vakataka art style" or

[48] They include Dr. Madhav Deshpande of the University of Michigan, and Dr. Arvind Jamkhedkar, former Director of Museums and Archaeology, State of Maharashtra. See also 1995, 59, note 23, who agrees that Paranta is possible, but has other reservations.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

with "the Vakataka tradition".[49] Since Lonad has no bodhisattva or Buddha panels, they would assign the friezes there to a time "before such stereotyped sculptural decoration became the fashion in the coastal region, notably at Kanheri."[50]

Deshpande and Jamkhedkar note, in particular, the high quality of the long frieze depicting the Vessantara Jataka, which they identify. They are certainly correct in seeing many affinities with certain Ajanta sculptures and with Ajanta paintings too. In my view the Temptation scene in Cave 26 has particularly close connections with the extremely beautiful large panel at the right of Lonad's court area. However, I myself would see some of the architectural features as more suggestive of its probable date, for they reveal differences from their Vakataka forebears rather than similarities; and differences always suggest a separation, whereas similarities provide no such evidence.

Of course, after the Vakataka debacle in the early 480s no sculptured reliefs were made at the Vakataka sites, whereas there are many architectural or quasi-architectural features relevant for comparison at the nearby site of Kanheri, which enjoyed a renaissance under the Traikutakas. If the frieze at Lonad does indeed remind one of Ajanta, this could well be because one of the Ajanta sculptors or some younger members of his family had migrated to this region and was able to get work when the excavation of Lonad began. In such a case they might well work in the way that they had earlier learned; whereas architectural features would be more likely to be affected by changes in the many (now lost) structures which we can assume were being built in the region.

In any case, these architectural motifs at Lonad, although not particularly abundant, in fact suggest a post-Vakataka date, though not one as late as the Early Kalacuri period, as I myself previously suggested. I would now assign the cave (like most of the contemporary work at Kanheri) to the time of Traikutaka rule over the region, in the period just subsequent to the Vakataka fall. This was a time when Harisena's former feudatories were now on their own, and the craftsmen who had worked on the Vakataka sites—even in certain areas at nearby Kanheri (as noted earlier)—must have been widely

[49] Deshpande and Jamkhedkar 1987, 166–167; However, it might be noted that in their view the Vakataka presence would continue somewhat longer than it does in mine, since I assign the fall of the dynasty to the early 480s.

[50] Ibid.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

available. This would place Lonad sometime between the Vakataka collapse sometime shortly before 485 and the takeover of the region by the (Saivite) Early Kalacuris between 505 and 533.[51] Its Buddhist focus would also support a Traikutaka assignment. Furthermore, the fact that the shrine is unfinished might suggest the later date; possibly its development was aborted by the Early Kalacuri takeover and the dramatic shift from the patronage of Buddhism to the worship of Siva as Lakulisa.[52]

As is not surprising in a relatively isolated monument, many of the forms—like the plan of Lonad itself—are idiosyncratic. The massive porch pillars, those at the center having squared cushion capitals with fluted "kalasa" elements below perhaps have a slight connection with the (now incorrectly restored) anomalous porch pillars of the very late and very unfinished Cave 14. However, in the more lateral pillars, the treatment of the heavily ribbed undersurfaces of the capitals, adorned with a "strap-motif" (found also in a few instances at Ajanta) is more reminiscent of the forms at Bagh, while the simplified medallion forms are a type later found at Aurangabad (Cave 6, etc.) and Ellora.

The demi-pillars which hold up the architectonic five-division lintels of the central doorway follow a trabeated formula which did not develop in the Vakataka cave sites until the very year (477) of Harisena's death, and indeed the Lonad forms link more closely with the later work of the Early Kalacuri phase than with their Vakataka prototypes. Similarly, the naga dvarapalas at the base of the side doorway are set into the base of the doorway in a way distinctly different from the Vakataka manner, but which can be found in structural temples of the sixth century. Finally the developed base moldings at the cave front are more complex than those at Ajanta, though of the same general type; they can be linked better with Traikutaka forms at Kanheri or the Early Kalacuri forms in the lesser unfinished caves at Elephanta, which had all been begun before the Great Cave.

Thus it seems most reasonable to see Lonad as a Buddhist monument developed under the Traikutakas. It was probably excavated

[51] For the dates see Gokhale 1972; 1974; 1992.

[52] For the shift in the area to Siva worship, and in particular to the worship of Lakulisa, see Spink 1983, 235–282.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

during the interim restoration of Traikutaka rule over the Konkan in the late fifth or (perhaps better) the early sixth century.

Pitalkhora

The helter-skelter array of paintings in the ambulatory and on the pillars of the old Pitalkhora caitya hall (Cave 3) may belong to the same troubled period (479 through 480) when, at least at Ajanta and at nearby Aurangabad, devotees were anxious to make merit while they could, in the troubled years following Harisena's death. It seems likely that the ancient site, like the nearby Aurangabad caves and Ajanta itself, was under Asmaka control at this time, although its many donative inscriptions do not give us specific information in this regard. The random disposition of the various images parallel the situation in Ajanta's Period of Disruption, but it is conceivable that these paintings were applied even during Ajanta's heyday, if there was no strong controlling authority at this remote site. It is unlikely that they were applied after 480, assuming that Pitalkhora was also affected by the coming conflagration, since all intrusive donations had stopped at both the Aurangabad caves and Ajanta by that date. At the same time we must allow the possibility that a group of devotees did manage to find a number of willing painters and to make donations there even during a time of troubles. Nothing among the paintings, which relate closely to works at Ajanta, suggests that they were added as late as the sixth century.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE NEED FOR STUDY IN SITU

Ajanta as a Text

Those who are not art historians often feel that great monuments, when bereft of dated records, reflect history rather than define it; that with enough good textual and or epigraphic evidence the "pictures" will fall into place, rather than vice versa. However, when the historical implications are as immense as at Ajanta, monuments such as the constantly evolving Cave 26, or "Harisena's" splendidly dignified Cave 1, should not have their meanings defined and their fates decided by "outside" evidence. For Ajanta is itself a text, and the reader has to read it correctly in order to understand the progress of history not only at the site itself but in the crucial period that it illumines.

The problem with Bakker's otherwise impressive study, which would deny the validity of the "Short Chronology", is that it fails to deal with much relevant art historical evidence, advising that "the matter should be left to art historians to settle"—as if the discipline involved something more mysterious than just looking and thinking.[1] Too often, when considering the position of excavations which are bereft of inscriptions (such as Cave 1, where the absence of an inscription in such a remarkable cave is itself significant), or which have records of apparently ambiguous import (such as Cave 26 or even Caves 16 and 17) scholars offer opinions rather than analyses. What it comes down to is that any scholar in any discipline who is working on material in this general period must treat the sites themselves as essential evidence. They should treat them just as they would an important inscription, and not think they can get at the precise facts by studying them in translation.

[1] Bakker 1997, 41 "In particular, the caves at both ends of the crescent, Caves I and XXVI, XXVII, may be of later date. The matter should be left to art historians to settle".

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Bakker's exemplary care and commitment, applied to the relevant epigraphic material and to his "iconological" investigations, have led him to many compelling insights regarding the cultural, political, and religious context of the essentially Hindu material to which he consciously limits his investigations. But by having to quote Mirashi to locate Varahadeva's Cave 16 inscription "on the left side wall at the extreme end outside the verandah" he is missing the chance to explore *in situ* evidence, which can often yield surprising and significant information. In this case, on the spot investigation would reveal that Varahadeva's record was originally to be placed in the panel earlier prepared for it (but never used) on the rear wall of the porch—the same position chosen for his inscription in the Ghatotkacha vihara. Varahadeva apparently shifted the positioning of the Cave 16 record to parallel the more desirable placement of the slightly earlier Cave 17 inscription. Like some billboard advertisement which the eye cannot avoid, Varahadeva's long and self-aggrandizing panegyric is located in such a way that it cannot be missed as one comes up to the cave through the tunneled stairway.

Painters, Paintings, and Painting

The problems involved in the production of the host of rock-cut sculptures and architectural forms at the site differs significantly from the problems involved in the production of the paintings. This is because Ajanta's workers (who undoubtedly worked in all three media) had essentially no prior experience in making such rock-cut monuments.[2] Even temples made of stone, where Ajanta's workers might have got experience, are notably absent in the western Vakataka domains; and they are rare in the eastward areas as well in this period. Thus the excavators had to draw upon the much earlier Hinayana caves (in particular those at the site) as their initial models, while gradually learning to translate their wide experience in working with wood and clay into their development of the stone medium. Nearly all of the astylar—and very early—Vakataka viharas directly

[2] The extremely simple undecorated cave at Patur, perhaps dating to the late fourth/early fifth century would appear to be the single significant prototype. A. M. Jamkhedkar, who took me to it, plans to publish it.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

depend upon the simple plan of the Hinayana Cave 12. Similarly, the Caitya Cave 19 unthinkingly copies even some of the apparently vestigial features of the Hinayana Cave 9, while the Caitya Cave 26 follows the general pattern of Cave 10.[3]

By and large—at least in the creation of the splendid murals at the site—the workers who did such paintings had much less of a problem. Instead of figuring out, for the first time in over three centuries, how to cut a monument which "cannot even be imagined by little-souled men" (Cave 17 inscription, verse 25) out of the recalcitrant rock, they merely had to cover the walls with virtually the same kind of compositions with which they had long been familiar as traditional artisans. And the "style" they used, depending upon the region from which they came, was essentially the style they had been developing out of years of experience. Thus, from the start, Ajanta has many "styles" and these many styles, at least in the murals, do not "develop" in any easily definable way; nor is this surprising, since the total span of painting activity at Ajanta for such mural painting is a mere decade (468–478).

It seems evident that those who, in 468, started work on the earliest of the Vakataka period paintings must have been already at the site, working with the chisel rather than the brush, but ready to turn their hand to whatever work needed to be done. A consideration of the fascinating treatment of the splendid porch doorway of Upendragupta's Cave 17 shows how two painters, surely from different families and perhaps from different regions, could cooperate on a single contractual assignment; and they were probably responsible for the carved decoration of the doorway under consideration too.

Generally, the carving of doorways, and of other such major forms, appears to be the work of a single master, even though (following Indian traditions) his efforts were probably abetted by the work of his sons and other male family members.[4] However, the porch doorway

[3] For instance, the vestigial vertical attachments to the front center pillars are already meaningless "structural" references in Cave 9, but are nonetheless repeated in Cave 19. Similarly, the small windows of Cave 9 have been transformed into niches in the front aisle of Cave 19. Cave 26, like nearly all early caves, was planned with simple octagonal pillar shafts, even though (except for eight at the rear) these were later elaborated.

[4] Probably, just as is often the case in excavation or road work today, the women carried away the debris; at Ajanta it could readily disposed of by dumping it over the edge of into the ravine.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

of Cave 17, perhaps in the interests of efficiency, was clearly turned over to two sculptors, as was in fact the unfinished porch doorway of Cave 14. One need only look at the very conventional decorative carvings on the pilaster shafts to see that two distinct hands are involved. And it seems most likely that once these fine pilasters and the supported goddesses were completed, they put their chisels away and took out their brushes and their palettes. However, having almost certainly come from different families and from different family traditions, the pigments that they used to paint the doorway had certain remarkable differences.

As per contract, but following the general design pattern already established and perhaps roughly drawn on the doorway's surrounds either by their "master" or by one of the painters themselves, they each took half of the doorway as their painting assignment. That they each worked in a notably different "style" is evident from the surprising disjunction in their efforts; every motif on the left, whether the thrones of the Seven Buddhas plus Maitreya figured at the top under their respective trees, or the lotus scrolls just below, or the other patterns and figures, is distinctly different from the same motif on the right. But particularly startling, quite apart from the differences in the Buddha figures, their two distinct types of thrones, and haloes (with tiny blue flames added only at the left), is the difference in the skin color of the eight images at the top. The three images at the right have what, as described in marriage advertisements today, is a desirable "wheat color", whereas the four images at the left are pure black! Although the Ajanta guides often explain this (with an apparently unconscious racism!) as representing the lower level of moral and spiritual progress of the earlier Buddhas, the actual explanation lies in the lead compound with which the skin-color pigments of the painter at the right were mixed, perhaps back in town by his wife. Those at the left (along with a few other motifs below) have, over the centuries, oxidized, following the same inexorable chemical process which caused the originally pink toenails of a number of the supporting yakshas painted under Cave 1's capitals to turned to a deep black. Such coloration of the nails may be fashionable in certain western circles today; but this was surely not the case in India in the fifth century.

How then do we explain the intermediate tone of the skin of the fourth Buddha from the right? Can we not hypothesize that the painter at the right, up on the scaffold working along with his

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

counterpart on the left, and running out of his own "skin-tone" pigment at the end of the long day, asked to borrow a bit of his fellow worker's "skin tone" pigment in order to finish his figures before finishing the day's work. Therefore, because of the admixture of the two once similarly toned (but differently composed) pigments the Buddha in question has darkened noticeably over the centuries, being neither like those to the left nor those to the right, although obviously painted at the same time. The dark, intermediate, and light tonalities of the Eight Buddhas is very obvious today, but when they were just finished we can assume that their complexions were nearly identical.

At a site under such pressure from patrons, monks, and lay devotees alike, it is not surprising that often two men were used where, in other circumstances, one would do. Many revealing instances could be cited, but a few will make the point. In the shrine of Cave 2, hurriedly plastered and then painted in early 478, once the ceiling and the shrine image had been finished, attention was turned to the painting of the three rows of four very similar padmasana Buddhas which fill each of the left and right walls. Concentrating on the images at the right, we see that among other revealing differences Painter A finished his lotus pedestals with a simple swipe of red paint, whereas Painter B, working right next to him, preferred to leave his lotuses in a pristine state, instead of spending the ten seconds or so that would have been needed to treat his own lotuses in the same way. The two friends (who worked very closely together in harmony) then moved to the next pair, treating them according to the same formula, until all six pairs were done. Since the painting of this wall, done in a time where haste was of the essence, must have been accomplished in hardly more than a few days at the most, it is tempting (and probably sensible) to believe that they then turned their attention to the painting of the two large bodhisattvas on the lower-priority front wall of the shrine. One need only look at the remarkable differences in the way the toes of these two figures were painted to see that they are the work of two quite distinct painters.

If quite different brushes (perhaps out of an available selection) must have been used to define the crisply rendered toes of the image on the right front wall on the one hand, and the much more "painterly" (even messy) toes of the image on the left, we can also note that sculptors also were able to select different chisels, depending upon either the work or the preference. The initial reaming out

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

of an excavation was accomplished with a very large pointed chisel held by one worker, while (if we can judge from procedures used today) a second would slam a hammer or sledge down on it, trying not to damage the hands below. We can see in cave after cave how great swathes of rock could be rapidly removed in this way, and the rapidity of the work would only be enhanced by the helpful flaws (which could cause later problems) to which Ajanta's basalt is subject and which the excavators more and more learned to utilize to their own benefit.

When the excavation work, moving from stage to stage, was nearing completion, the techniques of cutting of course changed. Generally Buddha images and elaborate sculptures now would be finished with a pointed chisel, and wall surfaces smoothed with a flat blade, usually about a centimeter in width. However, this "rule" was by no means binding, and in the final detailing of pillars in particular we often find both chisels being used. We find a quite characteristic example in Cave Upper 6, where both pointed and flat chisels were sometimes used on the same pillar faces.[5] Of course cannot be absolutely sure that the different workers were doing their cutting at the same time, although a particularly telling example in Cave 16 would support the assumption. Here, at the left end of the rear wall of the porch, at about eye level just to the left of the aisle doorway, we can see that the wall is being smoothed with parallel strokes of a flat chisel, while about two feet farther to the left, we see a similar area obviously smoothed with a pointed chisel. Then, just as with the painters of the shrine of Cave 2 discussed above, it is clear that both workers moved over to the left at the same time, and did another two sections, again with their own chisels. They then jointly moved to the left once again, to the same effect, although at this point the strict parallelism starts to be less apparent, also being confused by modern cement conservation.

Having seen so much evidence of obvious cooperation, both in painting and sculpture, we might now return to Cave 17's fine porch doorway and ask: who painted the carvings on the doorway once the sculptural work was done? Would this not be the responsibility

[5] This is particular clear on the generally more finished left pillars. Pillar L3, still barely revealed, shows how much larger pointed chisels were being used to shape the pillar from its originally roughed-out square format, to octagonal sections.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

of the original sculptor? But when we realize that the pigments used for the better preserved painting of the goddess on the right appear to be the same as those used to paint the surrounds on the same side, does it not suggest that the right-hand sculptor also was the right-hand painter; or to put it another way, that the right-hand painter was the right-hand sculptor? The implication would be that two (not four) sculptor/painters were apparently responsible for the whole contract. We can then extend such observations to the remaining traces of the once-splendid but now-ruinous panel (probably once a scene with Vajrapani) to the right of the doorway. This appears to have pigments similar to those on the same (right) side of the doorway—none of which pigments appear to have been subject to oxidation. Indeed, when the carved leaves of the tree above the goddess were painted, it is apparent that the same green (and in fact a painted extension of the same carved tree!) protrudes into the adjacent painted panel, further suggesting a connection between the doorway and the bodhisattva scene, the doorway being finished with painting first, and then, when the obtrusive (bamboo?) scaffolding was taken down, work having been taken up on the adjacent panels, whose original beauty probably accounts for their near total destruction (except at the very top) by nineteen century art (or money) lovers.[6]

The richly decorated porch ceiling of Cave 17 would seem to show a different kind of sharing. Here, except for the colorful central medallion, the whole expanse, painted in a manner which one, if generous, would classify as carefree rather than as careless, shows an overall consistency of design as well as a uniformity and simplicity of palette. Its undemanding architectonic organization would seem to have been conceived by a single planner who, being among the first to decorate a ceiling at the site, fills most of the "coffers" between the faux-beams and faux-crossbeams with simple and repetitive groupings of lotus blossom and leaves, occasionally containing

[6] There are differing accounts about who "troweled-off" so many beautiful paintings (especially heads) and why they did so. Many were apparently taken (for a small fee) by enthusiasts; but being on nothing but a mud-plaster base, most must have crumbled onto the floor of the bullock carts or on the impossible roadways. A single small fragment is known to have survived, ending up in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, having been bought for 1000 pounds at Sotheby's auction in 1910. It came from a virtual ravine of missing figures (mostly heads) traversing the left wall of the hall of Cave 16's Nanda scene. See Begley 1968, 25.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

geese or aquatic forms. These figurations are essentially all of a type, but it seems evident that various sections of the ceiling were done by different, although closely related, hands, all using the same palette. What seems likely is that we see here the work of a chief painter combined the work of other painters whom he may have trained: in other words, this may well have been a family group—perhaps a father and his sons.

As was normal during the consistent phase of patronage at the site, the ceiling was done before the paintings on the rear porch wall, and almost certainly before the porch doorway was painted but after it was carved. This is self-evident in the very slightly earlier (468) porch ceiling of Cave 11, where the yakshas who support the major ceiling beams are painted on the walls; but here they have been moved up to the ceiling itself, presumably to avoid intruding into the wall compositions below. However, there is one interesting feature which clearly shows the priority of the ceiling compositions and at the same time gives notice of the friendly interplay between the workers in the porch. The painter who did the beautiful scene of happily ensconced royal lovers Udayin and Gupta (who all too soon will join monastic orders!) used a splendid and apparently precious (because infrequently used) vermillion pigment in painting the pavilion under which they sit.[7] Then, as he was finishing this mural painting, he reached up with his loaded brush and added touches of the bright color to the otherwise somewhat drab area of ceiling above. We can imagine that he apprised the ceiling painter(s) of the brilliant improvement of their composition that he had made; but what it tells us is that the ceiling (or at least this section) must have already been painted at the time the mural below was done—confirming what we had assumed in any case.

In terms of the total development of Cave 17, it is reasonable to assume that the carving of the porch doorway was underway in 468, at the same time as that in the adjacent Cave 16, the painting of which had to be rushed to a highly expedient and simple completion in early 469, due to the impact of the Recession. However, Upendragupta's excavations were exempted (by Upendragupta himself!)

[7] This same pigment was used for the medallion with conjoined flying figures at the center of the porch ceiling. It is also used in the right front quadrant (only) of the ceiling of Cave 1, and a few of the murals.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

from the sumptuary proscriptions; and this privileged status perhaps explains the richness of the doorway's design and of the closely connected ceiling and walls.

However, the forms of architecture, like those of sculpture and painting at Ajanta, are constantly changing, often in revealing ways. By studying the underlying structure of the Cave 17 porch doorway we can see that its structure, as carved, does not quite properly "fit" with its subsequent painted decoration. Rather like the contemporaneously carved doorway of Cave 16, the Cave 17 doorway was to have a slightly raised beam or margin at the very top, and the presence of this suggests that the impressive row of the Seven Buddhas plus Maitreya was not conceived of until after the carved format of the doorway had been finished. This is why—perhaps to the dismay of the two painters responsible for the doorway's final decoration—the haloes of the eight Buddha images had to be painted on a bi-level surface. Observations such as this are admittedly minor, but they tell us something about the speed of change at the site. In fact, it is just possible that in 468, perhaps no more than a few months before, when the porch doorway was cut, a far simple painted design was intended.

The only other two painted porch doorways (Cave 11, Cave 16) decorated before that of Cave 17 have nothing more than simple floral and geometric motifs. This simplicity of course might have resulted from the impact of the Recession on those caves, an impact from which the royal Cave 17 was (at least at first) immune. However, the richness of the Cave 17 conception in any case is in line with Upendragupta's mounting enthusiasm, which urged him to use both the power of his privilege and "the power of the expenditure of wealth" (Ajanta 17 inscription, verse 17) to intensify the delights of the works already underway, in a setting "which cannot be even imagined by little-souled men" (Ajanta 17 inscription, verse 25). With a hubris which within a few years would do him in, he even started yet another caitya hall, Cave 29, as soon as he forced the rival Asmakas to leave the site.

Until 468, all of the artisans at the site, no matter what their preference, must have been working on cutting out the excavations and/or carving the sculptured details, although a few of them now could be assigned to work on the first areas in the caves which had been fully trimmed and were ready for their painted decoration. These areas at first were hardly either extensive or time-consuming:

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

the porch pillars and the lateral stretches of the porch ceiling of Cave 16; the ceiling, pillars, and portions of the wall of the porch of Cave 11; and the now exposed (and barren) porch and forward portions of the main wall of the hall of Cave Lower 6.[8] Otherwise, the painting work did not begin in any extensive way until 469, at which time, except for the hasty work in the shrines alone in Caves Lower 6, 7, 11, and 15, it was limited to the most privileged caves alone (1, 17, 19, 20) due to the strictures of the Recession. If the artists had been summoned to the site for the particular purpose of painting such caves, they would hardly have been called just to decorate these porches—which a few men could have decorated in a few weeks—when the interiors were still being cut out.

Since there must have been at least forty or fifty different painters at the site, if we consider the total amount of painting finally accomplished each painter would have been able to paint no more than a single wall if, merely for purposes of our calculations, we assume that their shares were equal (which of course they were not).[9] Thus since they obviously worked very fast (paid not by the hour but by the job!) there was really only enough painting work to occupy any given painter (again on the average) for more than a few weeks or months at the very most.[10]

We can hardly believe that painters—if they were exclusively that—would have come from Vatsagulma and Nandivardana (the capitals of the western and the eastern Vakatakas respectively) as well as other distant areas only to work so briefly upon their allotted share of the painting. This too demands the conclusion that they could, and did, turn their hands to various pursuits, just as so many craftsmen do today. Indeed, when we see how the carved designs of so many architectural features in the caves—doorway and pillars in particular—require painted details for their completion, it is logical to assume that the carved and painted features were both conceived and executed by a single master, probably with his sons or others working under his supervision.

---

[8] See "Chronology of Paintings at Ajanta" in this Volume. Based on Spink 1994, 35–36.

[9] Francoeur 1998, has estimated that 49 different paintings (some in family groups) were at work.

[10] See also discussion in Chapter 2 of this Volume.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Of course all of these decorative details, whether painted or carved-and-painted would have been part of a catalog of motifs already familiar to these hereditary workers. Even the mural paintings must have involved compositions already familiar to these artists, who would have long since been covering the walls of the now lost structural palaces and temples in the cities with related designs. If the murals, displaying a variety of "styles" brought by the artists from their different regions, seem to burst upon the site full-blown, showing no clear sign of any "development", this is because the familiar compositions, the result of years of experience, could be so easily transferred to the prepared stretches of wall in the caves. Certainly neither the plans of the caves, nor the painting programs, were developed in the villages near the site.

By contrast, the relatively "inessential" painting of the various cave ceilings does indeed develop, perhaps at the local planners' behest. Propelled by a productive rivalry among both patrons and artists, the ceilings, less based upon past experience, are consistently enriched in both design and palette over the course of the single decade in which they were all created, starting with the simplicities of those of Cave Lower 6 (468–469) and finally achieving the complexities of those of Caves 1 and 2 (476–477). These designs too, of course, must derive from those of the decorated ceilings in (wooden) structural palaces, and are typically architectonic in their "beam and crossbeam" layout. However, at Ajanta their expansive flat ceiling surfaces (largely uninterrupted by literally projecting beams and crossbeams) allowed something of the variations of musical form, increasing in complexity year by year, as the planners and the painters, for reasons of both pride and profit, sought to outdo the productions of every year before.

Although the dramatic evolution of the ceiling paintings may have been stimulated by the interest of the patrons and artists living and working in the cities of the empire, who surely were aware of developments at the site, it was in the planning of the mural programs that their involvement seems particularly clear. It is likely that such compositions had already been laid out in the workshops of the cities, for subsequent copying or transfer at the site. And since the cave plans themselves would have been conceived in the same official contexts and would have been on record, the designers could take necessary account of the placement of doorways and windows, and work out the compositions accordingly. Then they could be sent

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

down to the site—perhaps in some cases along with the court painters specially hired to do the job. This implies that the patrons, who paid the bills, had a fairly good knowledge of what was going on, and that there was a fair degree of communication between the site and the cities as work progressed, as well as (understandably) between the various workers and planners at the site.[11]

Cave 17: "Imported" Paintings

Perhaps especially in the royal caves, one would expect some bureaucratic division of responsibility, when it was necessary to make major decisions. In the following example, for instance, we have to ask why the staff members (presumably up in the capital) who were presumably responsible for both the subject and the design the painting of the Wheel of Life at the left end of the porch of the local king's Cave 17 did not know that a new cell had been added to the wall in question at the time when the "template" for the painting was sent down to the site. The fact is, this new cell (Cell PL) would not have shown up on their original plan, for (following the impetus supplied by the Cave 11 additions just discussed, it had only recently (465 or 466) been cut, like so many others now so compulsively added at porch-ends throughout the site. Quite possibly, different "officers" or departments were responsible for these different functions and decisions, and it seems clear that they were not sufficiently coordinated either in this particular case or in other related ones to be mentioned below.

The problem encountered in positioning the Wheel of Life is only one piece of evidence that such mural paintings were early conceived in the capital, but that sometimes unexpected (or "unreported") architectural modifications at the site caused revealing problems, before such murals were put in place. The Wheel of Life, with its myriad figures, placed at the left end of Cave 17's porch, must have been planned up in Upendragupta's "Ministry of Culture" prior to 465 (along with all of the rest of the overall mural program) while the

[11] The manner in which groups of artisans came and worked at the site has telling parallels in the Middle Ages in the west. See the remarkable The Contractors of Chartres, Wyong, 1981 by John James.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

cave was being excavated according to the carefully worked out original plan. We can deduce this because in every cave where the porches were underway by 465, the walls at the porch ends were originally always left plain, without cells being cut into them. However, after that date (465), as we have explained, extra residence cells were invariably added throughout the site at the caves' porch ends if at all possible.[12] So when the prepared design for the painting of the Wheel of Life, drawn before 465 and then brought down to the site, had to be applied to this area, it didn't fit.[13] Surely to the great surprise of those who unrolled (?) the design, there was not enough space to scribe the great Circle of samsara without its arc being broken by the newly cut, but previously unanticipated, cell doorway.[14] The latter could not be centered, as was the "rule", because of the positioning of the cistern chamber, excavated before 465, when no one had any idea that a porch-end cell would later be cut into the wall.[15] By displacing the cell to the right—it is the only porch-end cell at the site not "properly" centered—the desired location for two beds (or sleeping areas) on either side of the doorway was preserved.

Thus the upper part of the doorway (note the notches) had to be expediently filled in with a plug (stone or wood or mudplaster) to allow for the full completion of the Wheel.[16] Once plastered over and painted, the "adjustment" would not have been visible, even though a few monks may have bumped their heads getting into the cell. (This was not a problem in the right porch-end cell doorway,

[12] No cell could be put at the left porch end of Cave 5, because Cave Lower 6 abuts it so closely, having been well underway before 466. On the other hand, a complex cell, started in 468 and never finished, was put at the right porch end.

[13] I am assuming that the original drawing (perhaps on fine cloth?) was either copied or somehow transferred to the wall. Paper was not available at such an early date.

[14] Schlingloff (1988, 167–174; figs. pages 383–384) gives a disputed interpretation, suggesting that the wheel was deliberately "cut" to allow for the doorway; but he has recently revised his opinion (see Schlingloff 1999, under Cave 17).

[15] Burgess's otherwise excellent plan fails to locate the cistern chamber, which would explain the anomalous positioning of the porch-end cell.

[16] See Ralph 1836, 559, recording a conversation with a Mr. Gresley at Ajanta in 1836. Here they are discussing the "zodiac" (our Wheel of Life) in Cave 17. Ralph is saying: "The Zodiac is incomplete. I think about a third of it is wanting, and the lower part of the circle could never have been complete, for it must have been over this door of the cell. G. Perhaps they covered the top of the doorway with something in order to complete the circle. R. You admire it so much: you are willing to suppose it must have been complete."

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

which did not require such adjustments.) The only alternative at the left would have been to reduce the size of the Wheel, but this would have been extremely difficult, because the complex scenes within it would have been either directly copied, or transferred. In any case, the order from the royal capital (for this was the cave of the local king) may have specified the wheel's dimensions, or demanded that it be as large as possible.

As if to confirm this relationship between the already-planned paintings, and architectural changes which were not anticipated when the cave's plans were developed, there are equally trenchant examples over the aisle doorways of Caves 16 and 17. Here too the clearly extended aisle doorway openings, which the planner or the patron ("without telling Delhi") may have heightened on his own initiative in order to better illuminate the richly decorated dark side aisles, had to be filled in to accommodate the surrounding paintings, when the authorized compositions for the latter, laid out according to the original plan, were sent down from the capital. The "disembodied" Buddha head (evident from traces of usnisa and flaming halo) over Cave 16's left aisle doorway opening, and of a half animal at the upper left of the left aisle doorway of Cave 17 can only be explained in this way.[17] All of these examples of "non-conformity" in the porches of Caves 16 and 17 are very revealing of a "disjunction" between the activity at the site and the intentions of planners in the capital.

The Cave 17 Record and the Image Group Below

One can also see, in the case of the related Cave 17 record, that there are significant features about it, which can only be understood by direct viewing at the site. The slightly too narrow eave above, on the left side of the façade, can hardly have been defined with the inscription in mind, which is hardly surprising when we realize that the cave was begun almost a decade before the *prasasti* was composed.

[17] As supporting evidence, Cohen (1995, 372–3) refers to a late-sixth to eighth century graffiti, starting "sri". He states, "if this inscription was any longer than 'sri', the only place the additional aksaras could have gone was over what is now the doorway's empty space." It is some interest to note that the replacements were still in place at this somewhat later date.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Therefore, in 471, when the laudatory inscription, with its inflexible verse format, finally was sent down from the capital, it was necessary to harshly and expediently cut back the adjacent side of the left porch pilaster to properly accommodate it, and to keep this honorific record from the rain. It is also evident, since the Asmaka invasion was imminent and the whole cave now so rushed, that there was just no time to properly smooth the "violated" pilaster, despite the high esthetic standards of its patron, the king Upendragupta. Its uncharacteristic roughness clearly proclaims his mounting problems—the last-minute rush that he and his workers were involved in.

The 3-Buddha panel below takes advantage of the deepened setback, but belongs to the much later Period of Disruption; and it almost surely dates to 479—the beginning of that period—because such desirable locations were typically taken over first.[18] It is interesting to note the traces of fittings at the base, evidently to support a low wooden platform, surely for worship and/or other rituals. Surprisingly, two similar constructions—the wood of course now missing—were affixed beneath each of the similarly intrusive Buddha groups added to Cave 19's court complexes in 479 or possibly 480, while yet another was under the intrusion at the left rear of Cave 20.

What is suggestive is that no such unusual and obviously functional "platforms" ever appear under any other of the multitude of intrusions at the site; they appear only in connection with the long abandoned caves (17, 19, and 20) of the local king. Is it possible that as soon as the Asmakas had renounced their connection with the site at the end of 478, the banished local king, or his family, was able to take a renewed interest in these three caves, and to make these special, even personal, additions to them?

According to the *Visrutacarita*, there was still an active "king of Risika" among the insurrectionists who overthrew Sarvasena III (Harisena's successor) in the early 480s. This was most probably King Gomika of the Thalner inscription, or his successor.[19] But since it seems clear that after 478 the Asmakas no longer were involved in the ongoing (even if troubled) life of the site, it is just conceivable that Upendragupta, on his own initiative or with Asmaka approval, was able to return there during the Period of Disruption,

[18] For discussion, see Volume III: Cave 17 Intrusions.
[19] See discussion of Gomika, etc., see below.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

and to make these "personal intrusions" at the site from which he had been earlier banished. It is even possible that it was he (or his successor) who was again the "king of Risika" of the *Visrutacarita*, having regained some of the power that he had earlier lost to the dominant Asmakas, with whose insurrectionist plans he now may have become allied.

The same (hypothetical) involvement by the defeated Upendragupta and/or his family is suggested by the fact that in this same Period of Disruption we find numerous representations of a hieratic standing Buddha with his right hand in abhaya mudra and his left holding the robe at a similar height. This is the pose of the central Buddha in Upendragupta's beautiful caitya hall, Cave 19, which was planned as the focus of the site, even though the splendid hall was forcibly abandoned almost as soon as it was dedicated in 471. Interestingly, it appears that the conquering Asmakas, during the period when they controlled the site (475 through 478), discouraged representations of this particular Buddha type, so clearly associated with Upendragupta.[20] So its "return" seems to be significant—perhaps even suggestive of Upendragupta's renewed presence at the site.[21]

Caves 17, 19, and 20: The Connected Caves of the Local King

Clearly, if one is going to elucidate the site's remarkably detailed history—and consequently the history of the Vakatakas in the fifth century—one must study everything in context, and this should include not just the forms of art, but the activities of the patrons themselves. This can even have a direct bearing on the interpretation of important inscriptions at the site, such as the much disputed and much damaged donative record on the left porch pilaster of Cave 20. The reason for this is that Cave 20 is so intimately associated with Cave 17 and the Caitya Cave 19 that it undeniably

[20] A similar standing image was probably part of the original conception for the Asmaka chaitya hall (Chapter 11, Cave 26); the fact that after 475 Buddhabhadra chose a very different central image, even though the space was too constricted, may have been occasioned in part by the desire to avoid replicating their enemy's image.

[21] See further discussion in this Volume, Chapter 12, Cave 26LW.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

belongs to the same donor, known to be the local king. In fact, no other caves at the site have such close and striking connections. Not only is it linked to them in terms of location, but it must be one of the royal caves, since its temporal and consequently its stylistic development distinctly parallels that of Caves 17 and 19. Those two splendid donations of the local king, like the emperor's Cave 1, were the only caves besides Cave 20 upon which work was allowed to continue right up to the beginning of the Hiatus in early 472.

But the anxieties of the royal patron were increasingly manifest just before this crisis—the war with the Asmakas—occurred. At this point work, having been increasingly rushed in all three of local king's caves, broke off so suddenly that the Cave 20 image and the shrine doorway (both modeled on their counterparts in Cave 17) had to be hurriedly completed with mud plaster and paint. Similarly, work on Cave 17's rear walls (including the shrine area) and on many of the doorways at the rear of the cave were treated in an increasingly rough way as time started running out.

Indeed both of these shrines had to be anomalously (and revealingly) shaped to save time. Even so, Upendragupta was careful to get Cave 17's beautiful shrine image completed, perhaps reflecting the possibility that he himself is depicted as one of the Buddha's attendants.[22] However, shortly thereafter he had to abandon work on the cave so rapidly that the important shrine walls never got painted. Nor did the shrine walls of Cave 20 ever get painted. Indeed, their abandonment could be virtually predicted by the noticeable decline in the image's quality as work proceeded from the upper and central areas downward toward the floor level.

The same rush can be seen not only in the expedient placing of the Cave 17 inscription discussed above, but in the fact that Cave 19's inscription never got incised, even though a particularly large recessed area on the front wall over the doorway had been prepared for it. Surely composed (or being composed) as a panegyric in the capital, it either did not get done in time to get sent down from the

[22] Leela Wood has suggested that the two life-sized figures standing in front of the Buddha's throne may represent Upendragupta and his beloved (but deceased) brother. Proof is difficult, but the suggestion is reasonable, considering the total commitment of Upendragupta to his patronage, to say nothing of the unique character of the arrangement, and the "human" rather than saintly appearance of the pair.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

site, or was caught on the suddenly dangerous roads. Its absence stands as poignant witness to the mounting troubles of the closing days of Upendragupta's reign, and of his self-appointed (and too expensive) campaign to "adorn the earth with stupas and viharas" (Cave 17 inscription, verse 22), rather than to prepare for war. The same eleventh hour haste also explains the lax composition and the summary content of his expediently placed donative record on Cave 20's left porch pilaster.

Upendragupta sponsored no less than four of the major monuments at Ajanta itself, and (since he was the local king) may well have invested his funds and energies into building associated structures such as the extensive brick building on the other side of the river. Besides 17, 19, and 20, an ambitious second caitya hall, Cave 29, was started in 469, but had to be abandoned after about a year as Upendragupta's awareness of the Asmaka threat increased.

Upendragupta also donated Cave 18, an elaborate cistern chamber between Caves 17 and 19, which was probably shared by both. It is referred to fulsomely in his Cave 17 inscription.[23] Its pillar capitals, originally like those of Cave 17's façade pillars, with their unique double row of inset "checks", are now confusing in type, having been incorrectly reconstructed. Like most cisterns, Cave 18 was cut very early; it was already in place when porch-end cells came into fashion in 465 which, as pointed out above, explains the displacement of the cell doorway at the porch's left end. Of course, as it turned out, Upendragupta's money would have been better spent on tanks and guns.

Even in their inauguration, Upendragupta's Caves 17, 19, and 20 are closely linked, further suggesting that they were the enthusiastic donations of the same donor, who was clearly so committed to the site's development. It is of course logical to assume that Cave 19, as the site's central caitya hall was one of the first excavations started, but this is easier to see in the viharas, Caves 17 and 20, which flank it on either side.

One single example, out of many possibilities, may sufficiently prove the point. Up until 466, and never thereafter, caves were planned with plain porch-ends, following standard Hinayana prototypes. Immediately after, during 466 (and probably into 467) simple

[23] Ajanta Cave 17 inscription, verse 26.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

single cells were placed at these points, and wherever possible such single cells were cut into the end-walls which were earlier plain. Then, starting in 467 and 468, more complex cells with pillared vestibules suddenly came into use at the porch-ends wherever possible—wherever room still allowed. Such was the rule of convention at the site![24] Needless to say, if it is obvious that the single cells were cut into a previously defined plain end-wall, then it is evident that the porch had been essentially defined prior to 465; and this is the case in both Cave 17 and Cave 20.

As pointed out above, in the discussion of the Wheel of Life, it is clear that Cave 17's cistern chamber—the contiguous Cave 18—was excavated prior to 466, at a time when cells were never placed at porch ends anywhere at the site. Thus the planners had earlier allowed Cave 18 to penetrate into the area behind Cave 17's left porch end wall. Consequently, when (according to new conventions) the left porch end cell was added in about 466, its door could no longer be "properly" centered in the wall, since space was needed on either side of the entrance for the monk's beds.[25]

As for the cell at the left porch end of Cave 20, it too had to be adjusted because of the presence of a cistern which was excavated in the area below it before any such porch end cell was planned. This is why it is raised up far higher than would otherwise be expected. Admittedly, the cistern cannot now be seen, although the heavy surfacing of cement on the courtyard floor surely covers it, while the small raised platform on the porch's plinth has parallels in various cistern chambers at the site. Finally—and interestingly—two circular depressions in the shallow platform were probably made to hold the water pots in ancient times.

As proof that here, as in Cave 17, the porch cells were an "afterthought", one can see that the porch end walls were cut back at either end to make it possible to cut the steps to the new cells; the porch end walls were originally (and conventionally) in line with those of the interior hall (See Cave 20 plan). Also the ends of the complex beams of the porch ceiling over these extensions have clearly

[24] The developmental sequence given in Defining Features is clear, although the specific dates might vary slightly, since the dating of the site's development has to be somewhat arbitrary.

[25] These may have been mats on the floor, although it seems just as likely that beds (charpoys) were used; see Chapter 12 for discussion.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

been added in a new phase of work, since they do not quite match the more precisely executed original beam pattern.

I am insisting that all of these three caves, so closely connected both in space and time, must be seen (along with Caves 18 and 29) as the donations of Upendragupta. This conclusion is based on their telling connections in style, iconography, technological features, and even in the shared character of their cutting and plastering. It is finally and compellingly confirmed by their similarly "tragic" and precipitous abandonment just before the outbreak of the Asmaka/Risika war. And when work at the site was vigorously renewed throughout the site starting in 475, after the Asmaka victory, these beautiful caves alone remained untouched, clearly because of their association with the defeated king.

Upendragupta's great Cave 17 remained as a residence for monks even after Upendragupta lost control of it shortly after 471. Its heavily begrimed condition—caused by deposits from oil-lamps—alone would confirm this. Indeed, Cave 17 and Cave Lower 6, and possibly Cave 11, where the cells were fully cut and the shrines (and rear areas in general) are deeply begrimed, are the only caves at the site which appear to have continued in active worship from the time of their dedication (469 and 471 respectively) right up to the time of the site's demise.[26] Admittedly, the Buddha images in Caves 7 and (possibly) 15 were dedicated in 469, but if they were in active worship this would have been sporadic at best, judging from the evidence of soot deposits, while Caves 19 and 20, both dedicated in 471, appear to have been abandoned completely during the Asmaka takeover, not being used again until the Period of Disruption.

Surely because of its connection with Upendragupta, the new Asmaka rulers never allowed the spacious Cave 17 to be properly finished, even though they did allow its continued use as a residence for the monks, almost certainly because of the pressing need for such accommodations. It is of course possible, even likely, that monks took up residence in caves which were still very incomplete and/or not yet dedicated, for purely practical reasons; but it is evident that

[26] Time ran out before cell R6 in Cave 17 could be fitted out, although its C mode fittings were cut; in the Period of Disruption it was (like all other cells) plastered. This would suggest its usage—although doorless—at the time, unless its plastering was merely an error of the contractor.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

there was a serious lack of living space until well after 475, when the site started to flourish once again, and even then most caves (none of which were ever fully finished) remained unoccupied right up until the time that the site was abandoned.

Even in Cave Lower 6, which like Cave 17 was actively in worship for some years before the Asmakas took over the site, the cells were not supplied with proper doorways until 475. At that point, the still-unfitted old A mode doorways were all finally converted into the efficient D mode types, the convenient niches were cut in the rear walls, and holes for shelves and clothes-poles and functional wooden pegs were all added, apparently by the same contractor. That such essential work could be done in Cave Lower 6 (as opposed to Cave 17) is because its patron was clearly not specifically associated with the defeated local king.[27]

In Cave 17, after 475, certain improvements were made, but they had nothing to do with properly finishing the cave, but rather involved practical necessities. In two of the more rearward cells, which had already been planned as storerooms—L5 with its special shelving, and L6, with its deep added chamber—more up-to-date locking arrangements were added, clearly for better security. This involved a conversion of the door-fittings to the late D mode, effecting a tighter closure, along with improved door-stops. The other conversion to the D mode is more problematic; it involves the cell at the left end of the porch (Cell PL), which alone among the other completed cells had not been converted between 468 and 471 to the A+ mode (i.e., quasi B or C mode) perhaps because of the anomalous reshaping of its doorway which had to be significantly lowered to make room for the Wheel of Life. After 475, either it too was converted to the D mode for some special function such as storage; or perhaps, because of its priority location, it was fitted out for a chief monk or possibly for visiting dignitaries. The point is, it appears that

[27] Although the walls and ceilings of Cave Lower 6 are heavily covered with ritual soot, it is very surprising that there is no plaster breakage around the series of hook (or holes for missing hooks) hung in the series of ceiling designs on the approach to the shrine. It is hard to explain this except to say that the cave was long and vigorously worshipped, but was not attended in other ways. The fact that its cells were not fitted out until 475 or later suggests that it was not used for residence until that time, even though it was used for worship, perhaps because in the early years there were so few Buddha images available for worship, particularly in Caves like Lower 6 and 17 which were quite fully decorated.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

only minor revisions, such as these, were made once the Asmakas took over the cave, even though they sensibly allowed its continued use for residence. However, the Asmakas never made general improvements, such as fitting out the still somewhat unfinished Cell R6, or attending to the significant task of finishing the decoration of the inappropriately barren shrine walls.

On the other hand, the quite unfinished Cave 20—only the porch cells were ready for residence by 471—has only minor smoke deposits; it was probably not used for worship until the Period of Disruption, when "intruders" carved their own devotional images in the cave. Both cells R1 and R2 may have been used for residence at this time, the latter being hurriedly supplied with a very late and sloppy E mode fitting characteristic of the Period of Disruption. Cell R1, which had been carefully cut in the A mode as early as 467, shows a conversion to the more practical D mode. Since it is very unlikely that the Asmakas allowed such work, or even residence in the cave, this would suggest that the simple process of recessing and fitting out this doorway may have been done by the intrusive donor who created the large image at the cave's left rear, establishing active worship in the cave once again.[28] If we are right in surmising (and only surmising) that Upendragupta himself or his successor or certain family members returned to the site in 479, shortly after the antagonistic Asmakas left, it is conceivable that they were responsible for fitting out Cells PR, R1, and R2, all in a most cursory way.

Cell L1 was also provided with an inner (D mode) recess, presumably at this same time, but it never was provided with the necessary pivot holes to make it possible to attach a door, while Cell L2 needed far too much further excavation work to be of interest to such "intruders". Such an unconcern with practicalities further suggests that these conversions (simple in R1, sloppy in R2, uncompleted in L1) took place in the Period of Disruption, even though the fitting out of doorways was far from a priority at that time. The two porch cells had already been fitted out with B mode projections in 468 or 469 but the projection in the right porch cell had broken, apparently while in use (as the hole in the threshold suggests) and it too was roughly converted to the D mode (presumably also in the Period of Disruption) by shifting the fitting to the other side.

[28] For a more detailed discussion of the treatment and use of the cells during the Period of Disruption, see Volume III: Cave 20.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

It is certainly clear that worship was disallowed in Upendragupta's beautiful caitya hall, Cave 19, during the years of Asmaka control, for it has no apparent smoke damage and nor telling wear and tear around the garland hooks or hook-holes.[29] Indeed, to complete their rejection of the conquered Upendragupta and of the hall which he had planned as the site's ceremonial center, they violated both of the cells at the front of Cave 19's courtyard by cutting a path directly through them to provide a more convenient access to their own caves at the western extremity of the site. There could be no more telling evidence of their assertive supremacy. And this insulting action also suggests that, just as worship had been disallowed in Cave 19 during the Asmaka supremacy, the associated cells were not at that time used for residence.[30]

The point of such an analysis is this: that by seeing such monuments as these three privileged but ultimately unlucky royal caves only from afar, we will inevitably fail to recognize the undeniably intimate connections between them. And we will be in jeopardy of moving away from rather than toward the truth. We must go to the site, to see the evidence.

Cave 17 and Cave 20: Concerns about Kr!

Having asserted that Cave 20's patron was the royal donor of Cave 17 and 19, we may turn to the much argued matter of the name of this major donor, which is lost in the Cave 17 record. However, it is partially preserved in the Cave 20 record, as Upendra . . . This

[29] One exception, at the center of the ceiling in the cave's front aisle, has recently "conserved" with a plaster filler, which obscured the evidence. The original effect of damage has now been "restored" at my suggestion, although the appearance is not quite natural. It is reasonable to suggest that this hook, although inserted during Upendragupta's reign, was probably not used until the Period of Disruption. Quite possibly, oil lamps would have been utilized also during the Period of Disruption, but if so the smoke damage caused in this brief period was so slight than it has left no evidence.

[30] Actually, the front right cell, prior to being fitted out for use (the doorway has no latches) was converted to what appears to have been a cistern chamber through which water could be brought from the adjacent "Cave 18" (actually a cistern chamber). It is also possible, judging from the cement masking the floor, that a cistern had been dug in this very cell, to provide Cave 19 with a much needed and convenient water supply.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

is undoubtedly to be reconstructed as Upendragupta, while the name of his father, which remains only as Kr . . . , is almost invariably reconstructed as Krishnadasa.[31] Such a reconstruction, as Upendragupta, is strongly supported by the fact that the name of the father of the (name missing) donor in Cave 17 is also Krishnadasa.[32] Given the unarguably close connections between the two caves (as well as with Cave 19, which lies between them) it is reasonable to identify the royal donor of Cave 17 as Upendragupta, son of Krishnadasa, also.

The Cave 20 record, like that of Cave 17, appears to have been incised at about the same late date (471), and in considerable haste or expediency, judging from its "unprepared" location, its brevity, and its sloppiness. This apparent contemporaneity of both the record and the cave itself with the record and the excavation of Cave 17 supports the conclusion that these two adjacent and closely connected caves were the donation of the same "Upendragupta", son of "Krishnadasa". The fact that Upendragupta is a name which appears earlier in the local king's genealogy (given in Cave 17) is relevant too. Admittedly, this early Upendragupta would have been—as Bakker (1997, 38) wryly points out—the "great-great-great-great grandfather" of the "Upendra. . . . ." who was about to lose his heritage in the early 470s. Nonetheless, the connection is suggestive, for kings (and commoners too) often look back to their ancestors for significant family names.

No matter how much we wish to argue about Kr . . . , it is finally only by analyzing the caves themselves and concluding that they are the dedications of the same royal patron—the "proof" of which I have only touched on here—that we can link the inscription of Cave 20 to that of Cave 17 and can, with relative confidence, call the local king "Upendragupta". When Bakker (1997, 38) says that because "Cave XX is not Cave XVII or Cave XIX . . . . (it) is difficult therefore to consider Spink's theory as any more than ingenious speculation", he is not giving the site its due. Monuments do not have to be inscribed, and inscribed with unarguably clear inscriptions, to be located in time—as is witnessed by the fact that essentially every motif at Ajanta can be located in an approximately year by year

[31] see Cohen 1995, 374, for a different view.

[32] See Gupta 1991, 100–104. I earlier made much the same point an article of which Gupta was apparently not aware; see Spink 1975, 143–4, note 2.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

sequence. When Bakker (1997, 42), using epigraphy alone as his authority, states that the caves that with certainty pertain to the period of Harisena's rule are "XVI, XVII, and XIX", this should only be the beginning of an appropriate investigation; it does not do justice to Cave 20's proximity, in every sense, to its closely related royal relatives. If I am correct, we should see all of the caves at the site, rather than just three, "as pertaining to the period of Harisena's reign". The problem is to piece out the distinctions *within* this brief period, not to seek beyond it.

Cave 17's Inscription: The Matter of Risika

I have offended a number of my colleagues by calling the territory over which Upendragupta ruled "Risika", in this regard following Mirashi (1953), who identified it as modern Khandesh. The very fact that "Risika" is specifically included in the Visrutacarita's list of territories who rose up against the Vakatakas early in the 480s (according to my chronology) suggests its importance, while the fact that it was not included in the Cave 16 record of Harisena's "conquests" would seem to prove that it was part of the central (and presumably adjacent) domains which he inherited upon his accession. So Risika fits well as the very region where Ajanta lies.

Here again art history lends support, for an analysis of Ajanta's history reveals that it was attacked and taken over by Asmaka, which thus would have been distinct from the region in which Ajanta lies, and surely adjacent to it, particularly since it was part of Harisena's inherited, and clearly connected, domains. By the same token, the conclusion, based on their connections, that workmen migrated to Bagh (i.e. Anupa) during Ajanta's Recession and Hiatus shows that this nearby region also was separate from Risika, since it was not subject to the Asmaka attack in the early 470s. The same, of course, was true of (adjacent) Western Vidarbha, where Harisena, to whom Upendragupta refers as his overlord, was ruling at that point. So there is a convincing geographical "slot" into which "Risika" fits, on the basis of evidence drawn from Ajanta itself. Indeed, Mirashi (1953) draws the same conclusion from his study of inscriptional and textual evidence, stating: "All these references plainly show that Rsika was contiguous to Asmaka, Vidarbha and Anupa . . . . (and) the only country which answers to this geographical position is Khandesh."

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Of course it is certain that the boundaries of Risika would have been reduced after the Asmakas took over Ajanta and the surrounding territories. But since the Asmakas control over the site (or at least their support of it) had ended by 479—as the evidence in Buddhabhadra's caves reveals—it is just possible that Upendragupta or his successor now were able to assert their control over Ajanta once again. However, particularly if the Asmakas—although no longer patronizing the caves—still retained their control over the region, the "King of Risika" who joined the Asmakas in the insurrection of the 480s may more likely have been the Maharaja Gomika who, according to the Thalner inscription was ruling over northwestern Khandesh in the third year of Harisena's reign (i.e., c. 463) and may have become the sole ruler of the region once Upendragupta had been defeated in the east. Certainly this "king of Risika"—or possibly a later successor—was either one or the other (Gomika or Upendragupta himself).

In any case, if we are willing to believe what the Visrutacarita says, Risika was controlled by a single king in the early 480s, even though in the early 470s it was obviously divided into a northwestern domain under Gomika, and a southeastern domain under Upendragupta. Of course if (as seems likely) Upendragupta's territories were still retained by Asmaka, after their conquest in the 480s, the "king of Risika" (Gomika or his successor) would have probably controlled only their own hereditary domains in Khandesh. The fact that Gomika ruled over an area more protected from the Asmakas by virtue of distance would of course help to explain his independence, even though the Asmaka's political power may well have coerced him and other feudatories into joining the rebellion.

What is certain is that Ajanta was and had always been part of Risika; for "Risika", like "Vidarbha" (where two kings also often reigned) is properly a territorial designation. After the early 470s Ajanta became part of Asmaka, from a political perspective. But geographically it still lay within "Risika".

Bakker (1995, 37) says: "The confusion created by introducing Rsika in Vakataka history is illustrated by the fact that Spink . . . identifies this country with the region of Ajanta itself." But it still was a reality, no matter who controlled it, either wholly, or in part. So I would say that if any confusion is created, it is created by not taking account of the information which can be found from a study of the site itself. Once again Ajanta, whose "account" parallels that of the Visrutacarita,

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

can provide us with the evidence required, in order to make the connection between this country which needs a location and this location which needs a country. Happily, we do not need to leave a gap in the middle of the Vakataka empire.

It should be admitted, however, that scholars are in great contention about the location of Asmaka. But this is partly because Asmaka, like Great Britain or Portugal in past centuries, appears to have been at different times "all over the map", suggesting an authority and power which explains its apparent aggressions. At one time, it was even identified with "Maharashtra in its entirety" (Cohen 1995, 61–62), while the Visrutacarita suggests that, at least briefly, it took over nearly all of the vast domains of the defeated Vakatakas. This would invalidate Cohen's assertion (1995, 62) that Asmaka is "a territorial, not a political, designation"; for we can hardly say that all of the various areas cited which were identified with Asmaka in various sources—including Ajanta after the Asmaka takeover—become "the land of Asmaka". It would seem that Cohen (1995, 62) makes this assertion merely to allow his dark conclusion that "it is in fact possible that the great and powerful Asmaka king . . . is Harisena himself."

This assumption is more dramatic than tenable. If it could be substantiated, chaos would crowd into the historical pattern which has been presented here. For this reason I have analyzed Cohen's challenging contentions at length in a forthcoming volume.[33]

[33] See Volume II: Cohen's "Possible Histories".

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

APPENDIX ONE

THE DAŚAKUMĀRACARITA OF DAṆḌIN, UCHCHHVÂSA VIII

BY
M. R. KĀLE, B.A.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Uchchhvâsa viii

He, too, said—"Lord, while travelling (in search of you) I came to the Vindhya forest, and there encountered by the side of a well a boy about eight years of age, in great distress, though unworthy of distress, on account of hunger and thirst He said to me, with his voice chocked with fear—"Noble sir, kindly help me, who am in distress. An old man, who was my only support, has fallen into this well as he was drawing water to gratify my exceedingly unbearable thirst. I am not able to rescue him." I immediately approached, and using a certain creeper (as a rope) took out from the well a venerable old man; and knocking down with stones five or six fruits of some Lakucha tree as tall as the ascent of an arrow, and drawing up some water by means of a bamboo pipe I helped them to refresh their spirits, and then sitting under a tree I asked the old man—"Sir, who is this boy, who are you, and how has this distress come upon you?" With tears choking his throat he said—"Magnanimous one, be pleased to listen. There is a country called Vidarbha whose king was Puṇyavarmá. He was the ornament of the race of Bhoja, a partial incarnation, as it were, of the God of Justice, mighty, truthful, liberal, and well-behaved; he was the educator of his people, and kept his servants well pleased; famous, conspicuous both by his intellect and his imposing form; ambitious of greatness, defender of the faith, and an undertaker of things possible to achieve and beneficial in the end. He respected the wise and promoted his dependants; he raised his kinsmen to dignity, but buried his foes in misery; he never lent his ear to nonsensical talk; ever a seeker of merits, he was thoroughly proficient in all the arts; he was fully coversant with sacred lore and political science; he would doubly repay even a slight good turn; he himself looked after his treasury and conveyances, took great pains to supervise (and appreciate) the work of the heads of the various departments, and encouraged with honour and fitting rewards those who well acquitted themselves of the duties entrusted to them. He at once removed calamities human as well as divine; he was an expert in the employment of the six expedients in foreign politics; he himself led (*i.e.* maintained in order) the four classes according to the path laid down by Manu, and his name it was auspicious to repeat. Having lived the full period of human life by the force of meritorious deeds, he came to be numbered among the immortals, owing to the want of religious merit on the part of his subjects. His

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

son Anantavarmá succeeded him; he was graced with every excellence, but unluckily held the science of politics in little esteem. Once an old minister of his, Vasurakshita by name, who was highly respected by his father and was eloquent in speech, said to him in private—"Prince, all the excellences of the soul, beginning with nobility of birth, seem to exist fully (*lit.* do not seem to be wanting) in you. And your intellect, naturally sharp, and developed by its knowledge of the arts of music, dancing, painting, and poetics in all its branches, surpasses that of others. But the same intellect, not being exercised in its proper subject, *viz.* the study of the science of government, does not shine prominently, like gold that has not been refined in fire; and the prince, whose understanding has not been thus cultured, is unable to see, however exalted he may be, how he is overridden by others, nor is he able to act having properly discriminated the objects to be effected and the means by which they are to be attained. Acting injudiciously, and thwarted in his undertakings, he is disregarded by his own servants and by strangers as well; and when a king is despised, his orders fail to give safety to, or ensure the welfare of, his subjects; and when the subjects once learn to transgress the orders of the king, they, talking anything, and doing whatever they like, will upset all order; and demoralized subjects ruin themselves as well as their master, in this world and in the next. When the path of action is seen by the lamp of political science, the course of worldly affairs proceeds smoothly on. The science of politics is but the divine eye, the operation of which is never obstructed in giving insight into things, past, present and future, as well as hidden or far removed from sight. Devoid of that (eye), a man, although having long-stretched and large eyes, is no better than a blind creature, owing to his inability to penetrate into political ends. Abandon, therefore, the attachment to mere external accomplishments, and study the science of government, your family inheritance. Putting into practice its precepts, and with the three royal powers successfully employed, rule long over the sea-girt earth, your authority being unobstructed!"

On hearing (this advice), the king, saying—"Rightly is the advice given by the revered one; it shall be attended to," entered the inner apartment. On hearing the matter mentioned in the course of talk by the king before the ladies of the harem, an associate of the king from his very childhood, Vihárabhadra by name, who was sitting not very far, who was skilled in acting according to the wishes of

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

(*i.e.* in humouring) his master, and who was known to be the royal favourite; who had a good insight into (*i.e.* knew) singing, dancing, and playing; who was libidinous, clever, of licentious tongue, skilled in paronomastic and enigmatical speeches, devoted to finding the weak points of others, and could excite laughter; who took delight in scandal; who was an expert in craft and in the art of receiving bribes even from ministers; and who was a professor of all the wicked acts and a pilot of libertinism;—he smiled and said—"Sire, whenever by the favour of fortune a person is blessed with prosperity, clever rogues, worrying him with various temptations, accomplish their own designs: Thus some, inspiring hopes in him about the supreme felicity to be enjoyed after death, get his head shaved, gird him with a string of holy grass, clothe him in skins, smear his body with butter, send him to sleep without his supper, and manage to appropriate all his property: there are (other) heretics more terrible than these, who persuade him to relinquish children, wives, and even life. If there be a person naturally shrewd enough not to let his property slip out of his hands in exchange for such mirage, then there are others who surround him and say—"We can convert even a single cowrie into a lac of coins, destroy all foes without weapons, or make even a single bodied mortal an Emperor, if only one is ready to follow the path we shall show." And when he asks them what that path is, they reply—"There are four branches of royal knowledge, *viz*., the three Vedas, the practical arts (such as agriculture, commerce &c.), logic with metaphysics, and the science of government. Of these, the first three are vast and bear fruit slowly; let them alone, therefore; study only the fourth; it has been recently composed by the learned Vishṇugupta in six thousand stanzas for the use of the King, Maurya (Chandragupta), which, when well studied and put into practice, yields the desired fruit." Agreeing to do so, the king reads and hears it, and just grows old while doing so. (For) that Śástra is connected with others; unless all are read, nothing is thoroughly known! Let its principles be grasped after a short or long time (*i.e.* let the question stand apart): When this Śástra is learnt, the first lesson taught is—Not to trust one's wife or child. As regards the filling of one's belly, the precept is—So much rice is needed to make up so much boiled rice, and so much fuel is sufficient for cooking it; hence let them be measured before they are served out.

Now (as regards a king's daily course of life), a king, on rising, when he has scarcely washed his mouth fully, must devote the first

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

watch of the day to the examination of the day's receipts and expenditure, admitting (*i.e.* taking into account) a handful or half a handful* (of anything); and yet even while he hears, the clever superintendents will defraud him of twice as much. By the force of their own ingenuity they multiply a thousandfold the forty modes of defrauding set forth (*i.e.* pointed out) by Chàṇakya. In the second watch, the prince, with his ears painfully assailed by the squabbles of contending subjects, lives a most wretched life. Even therein, the judges and others, disposing of the suits favourably or unfavourably to the litigants as they please, join their sovereign with sin and infamy, and, indeed, themselves with money. In the third watch, he finds leisure to bathe and eat; but, until his food is digested, he lives in dread of poison. In the fourth, he rises to stretch forth his hands to receive gold (presents). In the fifth, he has to suffer great mental strain on account of the consideration of political schemes. In presenting these, too, the counsellors, appearing to be neutral (*i.e.* impartial), enter into mutual agreement, and pervert at will merits and defects, misstate the reports of the ambassadors and spies, misrepresent possibilities and impossibilities, confound all distinctions of place and time, and live upon (*i.e.* seek their own ends through) the friends of their own partisans or enemies; and secretly stirring up internal and external factions, and then appearing to allay these openly, they bring their helpless master into their power. In the sixth, the king is to divert himself as he likes or to consult his ministers (of amusements); and the time thus allotted for self-amusement is an hour and a half! In the seventh watch, he has the troublesome task of reviewing his troops. In the eighth he has to worry himself with ambitious projects in the company of his generals (war-ministers). In the evening, in the first watch of the night, after the performance of the evening twilight-duties, he must receive his secret emissaries, and through their medium instruct their extremely cruel-hearted agents entrusted with the work of using the sword or fire or administering poison (where necessary). In the second, after eating, he must begin, like a Bráhmaṇa, to con his portion of study. In the third, with the sounds of the trumpets he is sent to sleep, which he may enjoy in the fourth and fifth; but how possibly can the poor man get any repose, his

* Or, 'admitting a *mushti* or half a *mushti* as measures for reckoning.' See Notes for these technical terms.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

mind being distracted by constant, anxious thought? In the sixth, he must begin to prepare for the duties prescribed by the Śàstras and the business to be attended to. In the seventh, he must consult with the ministers regarding the dispatch of agents and emissaries; and these fellows, as is well-known, increase the money obtained from both sides by saying sweet things, by trading on the road, being free from the fear of having to pay taxes; and making work even in a slight degree where there is none, they wander about at all times. In the eighth, the Purohita and others, assembling, relate to the king—"Last night we saw a bad dream; the planets are not favourably situated; besides, the omens are evil; so (to avert the threatened misfortune) let propitiatory rites be performed. Let all the sacrificial implements be made of gold; when this is done, the rites are prolific in their effect. Here are these Bráhmaṇas, each like Brahmá himself; the benedictory rites performed by these lead to a blissful result; they are in distressful poverty, have large families, are constantly engaged in devotional rites, are endowed with Brâmhaṇical lustre, and yet have not received any donations (from you); whatever is given to them will be rewarded by long life accompanied by heavenly happiness and good fortune (*lit.* destruction of calamities)." And thus having persuaded the king to confer rich donations upon them, they secretly enrich themselves through these. Thus, leading the day and night in which not the least happiness is to be obtained, which abounds in troubles and is full of constant worry,—let alone the lack of supreme sovereignty on the part of a politic prince, his own principality he will find it difficult to preserve! There is a general mistrust as regards whatever a politic prince (*lit.* guided by politicians) gives, esteems, or lovingly talks of, all that being supposed to be meant for deception: And mistrust is the birthplace of disaster. To what extent the course of worldly existence can proceed without policy, is seen from our usual experience of ordinary life. We need have no recourse to Śâstra in this matter; even a suckling manages to get milk from its mother by various means. Abandon, then, all restraint, and enjoy the pleasures of sense as far as you can. Even those who say—Thus the senses should be subdued; thus the six natural foes should be shunned; expedients of pacification and others should be employed with reference to allies as well as enemies; and all the time should be spent in the discussion of questions of war and peace, and not the slightest room should be allowed to pleasures;—even by these cranes of counsellors, whatever money they manage to pilfer

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

from you, is spent in the houses of harlots. What of these beggarly fellows? Take the case of such stern dictators of policy, as Śukra, Aṅgirasa, Viśâla, the six foes subdued by them, or the precepts of the Śâtras put into execution?—They, too, were confronted by success or failure in the undertakings set on foot by them. Again, there are many, who, being well-read, are taken in by those who have never read the Śâstras. Surely, Your Majesty has got all this, *viz.* an exalted pedigree which commands universal homage, unfaded youth, a lovely body, and immeasurable prosperity. Don't you therefore render all these advantages vain by attention to state-craft, which is the source of all mistrust, an impediment in the way of the enjoyment of pleasures, and which is never without uncertainty on account of its having to have recourse to various kinds of tricks. You have ten thousand elephants, three lacs of horses, and an innumerable host of foot-soldiers. Besides, your treasury is filled with gold and jewels; and even if all your subjects enjoy them for thousands of years, they cannot exhaust your granaries. Is all this insufficient, that an effort should be made to acquire anything more? The life of mortals lasts but for a short time (*lit.* four or five days); and even out of that, the portion suitable for enjoyment is very small. But fools perish while they go on acquiring money, and do not wish to enjoy even the least of what they have earned. But why expatiate on this? Leave the burden of the kingdom to those who have your confidence, who are able to bear the responsibility, and are loyal, and do you enjoy your corporeal existence sporting with the damsels of the palace that vie with the nymphs of heaven in beauty, holding singing, musical, and drinking parties as would suit the season." So saying, he long prostrated himself on the ground, touching it with the five parts of his body and with his folded hands kissing his forehead, while the youthful denizens of the harem laughed heartily with eyes expanded through joy; the king, too, said with a smile—"Rise! Surely you are my Guru, since you have given me proper advice; why do you then act in a way contrary to the position of a Guru?" So saying, he raised him, and remained there deeply engaged in amusements.

Now the king, being daily urged to his duties, as they arose, by his old and wise counsellor, professed to accept his instructions, but paid no heed to them, as though he did not know his mind (correctly read his thoughts). On seeing this, the wise old man thought—"Oh, my childish action through folly (blind love for this prince)! I have become an eyesore to him and an object of derision, like a

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

beggar, by urging him to attend to matters distasteful to him. Clearly, his behaviour towards me is not as before; for, he has now no affectionate look for me; he does not address me with a courteous smile; does not disclose his secrets to me; does not touch my hand; does not sympathize with me in my misfortunes, and has no favour to bestow upon me during festivities. He no longer sends me any handsome (*lit.* tempting) gifts; takes no notice of (*or*, appreciates no longer) my good deeds; he never asks after my family, nor has a regardful look for my partisans; he never admits me to his inmost secrets, nor ever gives me an access to the harem. But, on the contrary, he appoints me to unworthy (*i.e.* disagreeable) duties, and allows my seat to be occupied by others; he evinces confidence in my opponents, never condescends to reply to my questions, holds up to ridicule those whose offence is similar to mine (*i.e.* who give him wholesome advice), laughs at me so as to prick my vital parts, rejects even his own opinions when set forth by me; does not accept with joy the presents sent by me, howsoever valuable they may be; and makes fools proclaim in my presence the errors of politicians. Truly has Cháṇakya observed—'Counsellors (even though undesirable), if they follow the bent of the king's mind, ingratiate themselves into his favour; while on the other hand, such as are wise and just come to incur his hatred, if they fail to minister to his whims (*or*, if they are ignorant of the fitful tendencies of the king's mind).' Still, what is to be done? This prince, disobedient as he is, is not to be abandoned by men like me who have served his father and grandfather; but, then, what good can I do to him, even though I do not leave him, as he never listens to my counsel? Surely now this kingdom will fall into the hands of Vasantabhânu, the ruler of Aśmaka, who is adept in policy. Would that the calamities that are in store for him would restore him to his natural disposition (bring him to his senses)! But (I feel) that though dislike to certain things may be produced in him when under calamities wherein mishaps easily befall, it will not make him love a life of rectitude. Be it as it may; calamity is sure to occur; I shall anyhow manage to remain at my post, putting a check on my tongue (so) ready to give advice."

While the minister was in this (shaky) state of mind, and the king acting licentiously, (it happened that) Chandrapâlita, the son of Indrapâlita, minister of the king of Aśmaka, under the pretext of being expelled by his father for his profligate conduct, came to Vidarbha with a numerous train of musicians and dancing girls

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

greatly skilled (in their art), and numerous retainers and spies in various disguises, and soon won over Vihârabhadra by means of diverse sports. By such course of conduct he soon acquired a hold upon the king; and on getting an opportunity he eulogized whatever amusement the king diverted himself with, as the proper one. Thus—When hunting was the theme, he would say, "Lord, no other sport can do so much good to the body as hunting. For, being the best kind of exercise, it generates swiftness of foot, which enables a man to traverse a long distance and is thus of great service in times of difficulty; as it removes phlegm, it improves the appetite (*lit.* stirs up the gastric fire), the sole root of health; as it destroys the fat, the limbs become firm, hardy and exceed, ingly active; by it one gets the power to endure cold and heat, as well as hunger and thirst; and by it one becomes acquainted with the thoughts and actions of various animals in different conditions. By killing the deer and wild Yáks, one can prevent the mischief they do to crops; roads and bypaths are all made safe by the destruction of tigers and wolves; and one comes to have a look into (*lit.* knowledge of) the woods and hilly regions which serve in more than one way; it gains (for the king) the confidence of those that tenant the wilds, and serves to stir their warlike enthusiasm, impressing at the same time intimidation on hostile armies: such, and other virtues, this hunting is calculated to ensure. Even gambling reveals the incomparable largeness (*i.e.* unbounded munificence) of one's mind on account of the abandonment of a hoap of wealth as so much straw; it gives power not to yield to joy or sorrow (*i.e.* good or ill luck), owing to the instability of victory or defeat; besides, it kindles to a great extent anger (high-spiritedness), the only main-spring of manliness: it endows one with infinite acuteness of intellect, on account of the marking of subtle tricks, difficult to be observed, used in the handling of dice and moving the pieces in squares. One acquires wonderful power of concentrating the mind, as it has to be fixed on one object, and an extreme love for adventures which depend upon determined perseverance; one becomes unassailable, as one has often to face very rough persons; besides, one knows definitely what self-respect is, and one can maintain the body with a noble dignity. The enjoyment of beautiful damsels is but making the two objects of wealth and virtue yield their fruit; it reveals a great pride in manhood, skill in knowing the inner sentiments, freedom of action not hampered by greed, and cleverness in all the arts; it offers full scope for eloquence and

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

ingenuity, as measures have to be constantly devised for gaining the damsel loved, preserving her when acquired, enjoying her when preserved, pleasing her when enjoyed, and pacifying her when offended; owing to the body being excellently decorated (for her sake), it gives one an imposing look on account of the winsome dress (appearance); it creates affection for friends, a high regard for attendants, sweetness of address (*lit.* speaking with a smile preceding it), an exuberance of spirit (*or*, vitality), and a behaviour marked by courtesy; (but, above all), by the generation of progeny, it becomes the source of felicity both here and in the next world. As regards drinking, it long preserves youth, owing to the use of liquors of various sorts so effective in removing diseases of various kinds, and dissipates anxiety of every kind, as it engenders on overwhelming sense of self-sufficiency; it stimulates one's capacity to enjoy beautiful damsels, as it inflames the passion of love; it removes the darts from (*i.e.* anything rankling in) the mind, as it blots out from memory the crimes committed; it increases a sense of confidence, inspired by the free talks that indicate candour (*lit.* absence of cunning); it creates unmixed joy, as it cuts short all feeling of envy; by it one can have the uninterrupted enjoyment of all the objects of sense, such as sound and others; as it induces the habit of distribution, it enlarges the circle of one's friends, imparts incomparable beauty to the limbs, leads to unsurpassed blandishments, and makes a man fit for the battle-field, as it takes away all sense of fear. Harshness of speech, severe punishment, and imposition of money-penalty, are themselves of service, as occasion arises, to a king; for a king devoted to a life of peace like a saint can neither keep in check his foes nor carry on the administration of his kingdom properly." The king followed his advice like the instructions of a Guru, and the people imitating the king threw off all restraint and became universally licentious. All being equally guilty, nobody tried to poke at the vices of others; the administrators of different departments, acting in imitation of the king and the subjects, devoured the fruits of their offices; then gradually all the channels of revenue were closed, and those of expenditure multiplied, day by day, owing to the subserviency of the king to rogues; the feudatory princes, as well as the chief officers of the state, being fully trusted by the king owing to parity of pursuits and admitted to drinking parties in company with their wives, abandoned their usual observances. The king under various disguises held intercourse with their wives; and these latter, being free from fear, enjoyed various pleasures in

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

the company of the inmates of the royal harem who had abandoned their character. All women of family, taking pleasure in the witty talk (*or*, coaxing words) of the lewd, breaking through all reserve (*lit.* hold on their character), listened to the intrigues of their lovers, in utter defiance of their husbands (*lit.* considering them not worth even a straw); then angry affrays proceeding from such practices became frequent; the weak were assaulted by the strong; the rich were robbed of their money by thieves; all fear of reproof being removed, the paths of sin were freely trodden (*i.e.* all led sinful lives). The people, with their kinsmen killed, deprived of their riches, and distressed by murder and unlawful confinement, piteously cried aloud. Inordinate and unjust punishment gave rise to fear and disaffection. The families, that were reduced to poverty, grew avaricious, and the spirited, who were disrespected, burned with indignation (*i.e.* smarted under the infliction of insult). Intrigues of the enemy succeeded in bringing to pass foul deeds of every kind. Then the agents of the king of Aśmaka, employed to administer poison, and others (entrusted with similar duties), reduced Anantavarman's army to sore straits, its principal warriors being killed, by inducing some to enter mountain-valleys full of dry grass and clumps of bamboo-trees and affording no passage out, by giving lively descriptions of hunting dresses and the abundance of game therein and then setting fire to them at the very entrance; by urging some to kill tigers and such other beasts, and then letting them fall into the jaws of the same by making some go so far off in search of a desirable well to gratify their thirst, that they eventually sank under extreme hunger and thirst; by diverting some to run along perilous paths that would cause a fall into pits or from precipices covered over with straw and leaves; by extracting thorns from the feet of some, with poisoned lancets; and by killing with ease some when left all alone, their followers being cut off from them, having to run in different directions; by purposely discharging arrows at some under the pretext that they missed to hit the bodies of the deer; having with a wager ascended along with some the peaks of mountains, very difficult to mount, and then by thrusting them down without being noticed by anyone else; by waylaying some who had a spare following, under the guise of mountaineers; and by making some forcibly enter crowds gathered on the occasions of gambling, bird-fights, fairs and festivities, (and getting them) killed by causing injury to others. They secretly caused damage to be done to people, and openly receiving complaints from

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

them, and having communicated the same to witnesses, they made some bolt away as the means of hiding their disgrace; they induced some, who were sensualists, to approach others' wives as their friends, and killed the paramours, the husbands, or both (as was possible), giving out that theirs was that desperate deed; they ignominiously murdered many who were lured to appointed places by means of attractive women, by first lying there concealed and suddenly attacking them; they enticed some to caverns and then worked their destruction, accomplished under the pretext of accidents met with while digging for a treasure, or acquiring some superhuman power by means of incantations; (they destroyed the army) by urging some to ride furious elephants, and then refraining from taking countermeasures (*i.e.* allowing them to be destroyed by the elephants); by rousing to anger a mad elephant, and then letting him on the bodies of the chief persons as a mark of his vengeance; by secretly killing those who quarrelled over ancestral property, and then casting the ignominy on their opponents; by privately killing many profligates in the towns of the feudatory princes, and then announcing the names of their foes (as the perpetrators of the crime); by causing some to catch consumption by inducing them to indulge day and night in the company of women whose bodies were saturated with poison; by the aggravations of the diseases (of some) under the pretence of treating them, by their skill in saturating with poison clothes, ornaments, garlands and unguents (they were made to wear); and the (many) other means.

Vasantabhánu now incited Bhánuvarman, the king of Vanavásï, and made him wage war with Anantavarman. Anantavarman, having the border of his kingdom invaded, mobilized his army to march against him. Vasantabhánu came first of all the feudatory princes, and became a great favourite with the king; other princes, too, soon joined him. Having marched out, they encamped at a short distance on the bank of the Narmadâ. At that time Anantavarmà called Kshmátalorvaśî (Urvaśî-on-earth), a female dancer in the service of the chief feudatory prince, Avantideva, the ruler of Kuntala, whose mastery of the art of dancing was highly praised by Chandrapálita and others, and enjoyed the sight of her dance; and being passionately attached to her, he enjoyed her while she was under the influence of liquor. Vasantabhánu, the ruler of Aśmaka, saw Kuntalapati in private, and said—"This haughty tyrant violates our females; how can we bear such insults? I have one hundred ele-

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

phants and you have five hundred; let us, therefore, join together and plot with Vîrasena, the chief of Muralà, Ekavîra, the ruler of Ṛishîka, Kumáragupta, the ruler of Konkan, and Nâgapâla, the prince of Nâsikya. They, too, being impatient of insult, will surely follow our counsel. Besides, this Vanavâsî king is my beloved friend. Engaged by him in front, we shall strike this wicked tyrant in the rear. We shall then distribute his treasure and vehicles among ourselves." When he, being delighted, approved of this plan, he won over to his side through confidential agents—sending as presents twenty rich garments and twenty-five saffron-coloured shawls with gold borders—all the other feudatory princes also. The following day Anantavarmà fell a prey to those princes and to the Vânavásya, as he was totally averse to the science of politics. Vasantabhânu, having taken into his possession his dispersed treasure and transport, proposed that it should be divided among all according to their respective power, expressing at the same time his desire of being content with whatever portion they may be pleased to give him; pleasing all with this stratagem, and holding forth that as a bait (bone of contention), he stirred up a quarrel among the princes, brought about the destruction of all, and seized for himself all their wealth. He gave a small portion of it to Vànavâsya, and, marching back, established himself in the kingdom of Anantavarman.

In the meantime, the old minister, Vasurakshita, in conformity with some hereditary servants of the king, managed to escape, taking with him this youth, Bhâskaravarman, and his elder sister Mañjuvâdinî, about thirteen years old, along with the queen Vasumdharâ, their mother; but, as it was fated to happen, he died of a burning fever. Friends like me took the queen to Máhishmatî and consigned her with her children to Mitravarman, her husband's brother by another mother, for protection. He, however, wicked that he was, entertained sinister motives regarding the noble queen; and when he was repulsed, he through cruelty wished to put her son to death, saying to himself—"She, of unviolate chastity, means to raise her son to the throne." When the queen knew it, she said to me, "Dear Nâlîjaṅgha, fix upon some (safe) place and dwell with the prince there, while he is alive. If I live, I shall soon follow him; when you will go safely, let me know the news about you." I somehow led him out of the crowded palace and plunged into the Vindhya forest. As he was fatigued by walking on foot, I gave him rest, that he might regain vigour (by staying) in a hamlet of shepherds. But

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

there, too, apprehending an attack by the officers of the king, I travelled to a long distance. In our journey, wishing to give the boy water as he was oppressed by dreadful thirst, I lost my balance and fell into this well, and was thus favoured by you. You yourself should now be the protector of this helpless prince." With these words he folded his hands before me; and when I asked to what family his mother belonged, he replied that she was the daughter of Kusumadhanvan, king of Kosala, by Sâgaradattà, daughter of Vaiśravaṇa, a merchant of Pâṭaliputra. Saying—"If it is so, his mother and my father had the same maternal grandfather," I embraced him very affectionately. The old man asked me which of the sons of Sindhudattá was my father, and he was very pleased when he knew that it was Suśruta. I vowed that I would raise my little kinsman to the throne of his father by removing, by policy alone, the king of Aśmaka, who was very proud of his strategy; and then I began to think of how I should appease his hunger. At this moment, there came up two deer, having outstripped three shafts of some huntsman. I snatched from his hands his bow and the remaining two arrows, and shot them (the two deer). One of them fell with the arrow piercing him to its feathery part, the other with the arrow piercing him through so as to leave its feathers behind. One I gave to the hunter; the other I skinned and cleaned. Then removing the entrails and dissecting it, I removed the thighs, bones, neck &c., and spitting it with a stake roasted it on the embers of a wild fire; and we gratified our hunger with the flesh. I then asked the forester, who was highly pleased with my skill, if he knew of the affairs at Máhishmatî. He replied that he did, since he had just come from the place, having been there to sell tiger-skins and leather-bags; and that the city was astir with a festival, as Prachaṇḍavarman, the brother of Chandavarman, was to come there for espousing Mañjuvádinî, the daughter of Mitravarman. I then (on hearing this) spoke in the ears of the old man—"By treating the daughter affectionately, clever Mitravarman wishes to gain the confidence of the mother, and through her recover the person of the prince, so that he may put him to death. Go back to the queen, and tell her privately of your safety and my own account; then, in concert with her, give out that the prince has been killed by a tiger. That villain (Mitravarman), pleased at heart, will apparently show himself to be grieved, and will endeavour to pacify the queen. Then the queen should speak to him through you, that the prince for whose sake

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

she had rejected his proposal was dead through her sin; she was therefore, ready that day to do his wish. Thus addressed, he will be pleased and will make advances to her. Then let her dip a necklace in water mixed with this poison named Vatsanâbha, and strike him on the breast with it, saying—'If I am faithful to my lord, may this wreath be as a sword unto thee.' Let her then again wash the garland in water mixed with this drug, and present it to the princess. Finding him (Chandavarman) dead and her unaffected by it, the subjects will necessarily believe the queen to be a Pativratá, and will abide by her will. She should then send word to Prachaṇḍavarman to accept the princess along with the kingdom, now without a ruler. In the meantime we will arrive in the disguise of Kápâlika mendicants, receive alms from the queen, and take our station in the cemetery outside the city. Let the queen again say in private to the aged citizens, mostly noble-minded, and old ministers who are interested in her—"The goddess Vindhyavàsinî has done a great favour to me in a dream, saying—'Prachandavarmâ will die on the fourth day from to-day; on the fifth day, from out of my temple on the bank of the Revá, when people will retire home and there will be no one, a Bráhmaṇa youth will issue out in company with your son. He will save this kingdom and will establish your son in sovereignty. I in the form of a tigress had carried off your son, in order to conceal him from his foes. I have also ordained that the princess Mañjudadinî shall be the wife of that Bráhmana youth.' You should keep all this a secret until it comes off to be true." The old man, being highly pleased with my plans, started off, and our purpose was effected fully to our expectations. And the people began to talk everywhere, saying—"Oh, the great power of the Pativratás! For, the garland when thrown upon him (the king) proved to be the stroke of a sword; and it cannot be said that there was fraud in it, since the same when given to her daughter became the ornament of her neck. (Therefore), whosoever will trangress the words of this Pativratâ will be reduced to ashes."

Now, on seeing me and her son enter the palace for alms in the disguise of great ascetics, the Queen, with her breasts oozing out milk, rose up in joy and said—"Revered Sir, here I fold my hands before you; be pleased to take this helpless person in your favour, and tell me if what I have seen in a dream would come true or not." I replied that she would see the fruit of it that very day. At this she said—"If it is so, great is the good fortune of this your humble

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

servant! For that dream foretells a protector for this (my daughter) here." With these words she caused Mañjuvádinî, who was confused by the rise of love at my sight, to bow to me, and once more said with suppressed joy—"If the dream proves false, this young ascetic, your follower, will be arrested by me to-morrow." I, too, whose stability of mind was shaken by Mañjuvádinîs glance (*lit.* eye) full of (*lit.* steeped in) love, said smilingly—"So let it be." Having got alms I departed, making a sign to Nâlîjaṅgha to follow us. Then I gently asked him, as he followed me, where the renowned Prachandavarmá, of short life, was. He replied that he was in the reception hall of the royal palace, amusing himself in the company of the dancers (*or*, singers), now quite sure (*or*, free from fear) that the overeignty was his. "If it be so, wait in the garden;"—so saying to the old courtier, I deposited all our chattels in an empty temple on one side of the wall, and having left the prince to guard them, I put on the gay attire of a dancer, and came to Prachandavarman and diverted him. When it was sunset, I performed in various styles dancing and singing, and imitated different voices, calculated to add to the knowledge of the multitude, and then displayed different athletic feats, such as jumping on hands, raising my legs up, and whirling my head while my palms rested on the ground, and also raising up one leg and contracting the other (*or*, pressing together the feet) and dancing sideways, as well as moving like a scorpion, or leaping like a crocodile, or darting like a fish. I then borrowed the daggers of the persons near me, and fixing them all round my body, displayed various feats not easy to perform, such as the swoop of a hawk or the flight of an osprey. Whilst thus engaged, I struck Prachaṇḍavarman, although he was at a distance of twenty yards, on the breast with a poniard, exclaiming, 'May Vasantabhánu live a thousand years!' One of the bard-warriors tried to strike me, but I at once jumped on the top of his fat shoulders, making him senseless by that much, and the frightened multitude look up. I then leapt over the wall of the height of two men. I plunged into the (adjacent) garden, and having just said to Nâlîjaṅghá—'This my path can be seen by my pursuers, I ran in the eastern direction, through a Tamála bower lying along the rampart, while the marks of my foot-steps were levelled by Nālîjaṅgha; and then turning to the south I made off, my track not being noticed owing to the ground being paved with bricks; and at last leaping over the rampart and the encircling ditch, I quickly entered the temple. Then having put on my former (*i.e.*

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

mendicant's) garb, I, in the company of the Prince, repaired to the region of the cemetery, having found my way with difficulty at the royal gate tumultuously crowded owing to my daring deed. In the temple of Durgá, which stood there, I had already dug up a cavity (leading from the outside to) just below the pedestal of the image, with its outer entrance concealed with a large slab of stone, its sides being set loose (*lit.* having their firmness broken).

Then, as midnight was passing, we, having put on the silken dresses, with ornaments of very costly gems, brought to us by a (confidential) eunuch (from the queen), entered that chasm and remained there all still. The queen, having caused the previous day the funeral ceremonies for Prachaṇḍvarman to be fittingly performed, and sent word to Chanṇḍavarman that his fate was due to the contrivance of the ruler of Aśmaka, came, early in the morning of the next day, as had been previously arranged, to the temple with her ministers, worshipped the goddess, and got it ascertained in the presence of all the people that the surrounding room of the shrine was unoccupied, remained waiting, in company of the people, with her gaze fixed (on the closed door), and ordered the drums to be beaten loudly. Receiving the signal at the sound that reached me through a very minute chink, I lifted up with my head the iron pedestal along with the image, and placed it aside, holding one part of it with my two arms although it was too heavy even for a muscular man to be removed with effort, and issued out and also took out the prince. After replacing Durgá as before, I opened the door (of the sacred closet), and appearing before all, addressed the subjects, who, filled with astonishment, bowed to me, with their eyes directed to me owing to the realization of the vision, with horripilation clearly visible and folded hands raised up (to their brow):—"The goddess Vindhyavásinî thus orders you through me—'This prince was in distress; out of pity I, in the form of a tigress, kept him concealed; here I return him to you to-day. Knowing that his maternal party is not weak, as he is considered by me as my son, you should acknowledge him as such.' Besides, you have to consider me as his protector, whose spirit is able to smash the pot in the form of Aśmaka, cruel by his intrigue now brought to light by the desperate and deep-laid plot that he had cleverly hatched; and, as compensation for the protection extended to him by me, the goddess has allowed me to accept the hand of his sister, this beautiful-browed princess before you." Having heard it, the subjects exclaimed

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

with delight—"very fortunate, indeed, is the race of Bhoja, that has a guardian like you granted by the goddess!" As for my mother-in-law, she found herself in a stage of joy impossible to be described in words, and made me accept the very day the sprout-like hand of Mañjuvâdinî. When night fell, I closed the chasm entirely. The people too, who did not detect my trick, dared not transgress my commands, regarding me as a partial divine being on account of my telling what one had lost (or, what one had in one's clenched hand), or what one was thinking of and such other things—being employed as other means (of gaining the object). The prince, too, came to be believed as the son of the goddess, a belief that was to contribute to his prosperity. On an auspicious day, having got him shaved, I had his thread-ceremony performed by the family-priest; and instructing him in politics, I carried on the work of administration. I thought—"A kingdom, as is well known, is maintained by three kinds of power; these powers are diplomacy, authority (*or*, regal power), and (personal) energy (activity); these, mutually assisting each other, dispatch all affairs. Diplomacy determines objects, authority commences them, and energy effects their attainment. For this reason, the tree of Policy serves an administrator a great deal: it has counsel consisting of five elements for its root; the twofold authority is its stem; the fourfold Utsáha (personal energy) forms its main branches; the seventy-two Prakṛitis (subjects) are its leaves, the six qualities of royalty its blossoms, power its flowers and success its fruit; and as it (the tree) is of a nature complex (*lit.* depends upon many supports), it is very hard to make it yield fruit (*lit.* to turn it to account) by one who has no one to back him up. It would be very good (*i.e.*, to our advantage) if we could win over to our side (secure the services of) Aŕyaketu, the minister of Mitravarman, who was possessed of all the qualifications of a skilful counsellor, and who belonged to the side of the queen, being a native of the same country Kosala, since Mitravarman had come to ruin in consequence of his having disregarded his counsel." So thinking, I privately instructed Nálîjaṅgha thus—"Friend, say to the evered Aŕyaketu in private—"Who is this impostor (*or*, a man of marvellous powers) that has appropriated the sovereignty of this state? Moreover, this our prince has been entirely caught in his grip by this serpent. Will he disgorge the prince or swallow him?"—and tell me what he will say on hearing this." He one day brought me his report to this effect—"I waited upon him several times with presents, introduced various topics, shampooed his

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

feet, and in an hour of great confidence asked him the question according to your instructions. Aŕyaketu thus replied—"Good man, speak not in this manner. He is evidently descended from a noble (*lit.* pure) family; he has extraordinary acuteness of intellect; he possesses superhuman strength, a boundless nobility of mind, wonderful skill in missiles not a little knowledge of the arts, and a mind always disposed to favour; while his prowess (lustre) is unbearable and valiant enough to cope with (*i.e.*, quell) all his enemies. He thus combines in himself qualities, which it is very difficult to find in others even singly. He is a poisonous tree to the enemies (of the state), but a sandal tree (that would give its grateful shade) to those who approach him submissively; so regard Aśmaka, who vainly prides himself upon his being an adept in state-craft, as uprooted, and this prince as firmly and securely placed on the throne of his forefathers. You need not entertain doubt (as to his sincerity towards the prince and the state)." Having heard it, and having tested his sincerity by various trials, I admitted him as a colleague in state-craft. With his assistance, I secured the services of devoted and upright ministers and of spies under various disguises. With their help I knew which of the subjects were covetous and rich misers, which very proud, and which mostly refractory; and thinking that I might amass great wealth if I gave proofs of my own want of greed, inspired a sense of duty (among the people), tormented the heretics, cleared out all who stood like thorns in the way of the prosperity of the state, thwarted the secret plans of the foes, and firmly established the four castes in their respective religious spheres and duties—since all undertakings that are based on policy emanate from wealth, and that no sin would be worse than showing weakness in adhering to the principles of policy—I zelously took all the proper measures.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

APPENDIX TWO

INSCRIPTIONS OF 4, 16, 17, 20, AND 26

Translation Cave 16[1]

(Verse 1) Having bowed to the sage (Buddha) who extinguishes the rising flames of the three worlds' sins, ... I shall describe the ancient succession of kings.

(V. 2) There was a famous Brāhmaṇa (*lit.*, a twice-born man) on earth (*named*) **Vindhyaśakti** whose strength increased in great battles, whose valour, when he was enraged, was irresistible even by the gods, (*and*) who was mighty in fighting and charity . . . . . .

(V. 3) He, whose majesty was like that of Indra and Upendra (Vishṇu), who, by the might of his arm, conquered the whole world, ... became the standard of the Vākāṭaka race.

(V. 4) He, eclipsing in battles the sun with the masses of dust raised by (*the hoofs of*) his horses, making the enemies . . . . . made them intent on salutation to him.

(V. 5) Having subdued his enemies for (*accomplishing*) the work of the gods, he made a great effort to acquire religious merit . . . . . .

(V. 6) His son was **Pravarasena (I)**, whose lotus-like feet were kissed by the rays of jewels worn on the heads of hostile kings (*and*) whose eyes resembled fresh, blooming blue lotuses.

(V. 7) The rays of the sun . . . . . **[Sarvasena]**[2] was Pravarasena (I)'s son who defeated all armies.

(V. 8) The illustrious **Vindhyasena**,[3] the noble son of the lord of kings, governed the earth righteously, having conquered the lord of Kuntala . . . . . .

(V. 9) His son was **Pravarasena (II)** who became exalted by his excellent, powerful and liberal rule . . . . . .

---

[1] In this translation I have derived some help from Dr. Bühler's rendering, though I have differed from him in the interpretation of certain passages.

[2] Bhagwanlal and Bühler read the name of this prince as Rudrasena. See above, p. 3.

[3] Bühler read Pṛithivisheṇa as the name of this prince.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

(V. 10) His son . . . . . who, having obtained the kingdom when eight years old, ruled well.

(V. 11) His son became king (*named*) **Devasena** on earth . . . . . by whose lovely enjoyments, the earth . . . . . of the lord of gods.[4]

(V. 12) Through the greatness of the religious merit of (*that*) king . . . . . properly . . . . . (*there*) was **Hastibhoja**, the abode of excellences, ... the illustrious Commander of the elephant force[5] on earth.

(V. 13) He who had a broad and stout chest and lotus-like eyes (and) who destroyed the partisans of his enemies, (*who had*) . . . arms . . . resembled a scent-elephant (stationed) in a quarter.

(V. 14) Obliging, modest, loving, agreeable, obedient to (*the king's*) wishes . . . . . faultlessly . . . . . .

(V. 15) Similarly, on account of his being a well-wisher of the world as well as by his happy and excellent rule, he was indeed always dear and accessible (*to the people*) like (*their*) father, mother and friend.

(V. 16) . . . . . The king, being at ease and having entrusted (*the government of the kingdom*) to him, engaged himself in the enjoyment of pleasures, acting as he liked.

(V. 17) Then his son became king . . . . . **Harisheṇa**, who in loveliness resembled Indra,[6] Rāma, Hara, Cupid, and the moon, and who was brave and spirited like a lion.

(V. 18) He (*conquered*) **Kuntala**, **Avanti**, **Kaliṅga**, **Kosala**, **Trikūṭa**, **Lāṭa**, **Āndhra** . . . . . which, though very famous for valour . . . . . .

(V. 19) The son of Hastibhoja, renowned on earth, became the minister of that king . . . . . the whole earth . . . . . .

(V. 20) Beloved by the king and the subjects, he, who was of staid and firm mind, endowed with the virtues of liberality, forgiveness, and generosity and intent on (*the performance of*) religious duty, governed the country righteously, (*shining brightly*) with the rays of his fame, religious merit and virtue.

---

[4] Perhaps the sense is that the earth vied with the world of the lord of gods.

[5] *Hastikosha* seems to be a technical official title as in the Godāvarī copper-plate grant of Pṛithivīmūla. Dr. Fleet took it to mean an official who kept the purse and made disbursements on account of the establishment of elephants. *J.B.B.R.A.S.*, Vol. XVI, p. 119.

[6] *Hari* of the text should be taken to mean Indra, not Vishṇu, as Rāma, an incarnation of Vishṇu, is separately named.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

(V. 21) He amassed a large store of religious merit for . . . . . especially, after which he, (*regarding*) the sacred law as his (*only*) companion, made this sacred dwelling,[7] being extremely devoted to (the Buddha), the teacher of the world.

(V. 22) (*Realizing that*) life, youth, wealth, and happiness are transitory, ... he, for the sake of his father and mother, got constructed this magnificent dwelling to be occupied by the best of ascetics.

(V. 23) On the best of mountains on which hang multitudes of water-laden clouds (*and*) which is inhabited by the lords of serpents . . . . . in the thickets of the slopes (?) of which . . . . . by the lord of the goddess of heroism.

(V. 24) (*The dwelling*) which is adorned with windows, doors, beautiful picture-galleries,[8] ledges, statues of the nymphs of Indra and the like, which is ornamented with beautiful pillars and stairs and has a temple of the Buddha inside.

(V. 25) Which is situated on the top (*of the mountain*), appears attractive . . . a canopy, which is provided with a large reservoir of abundant water and (*is also ornamented*) with a shrine of the lord of the Nāgas[9] and the like.

(V. 26) . . . . various pleasures . . . . in a fierce wind blowing all round . . . . warmed by the heat of the rays of the summer sun and affording enjoyment of well-known comforts in all seasons.

(V. 27) (*Which resembles*) the palaces of the lord of gods and is similar to a cave in the lovely Mandara mountain . . . . . as desired by the people.

(V. 28) Which . . . . shines on (*the slope of*) this matchless mountain . . . . . since it removes fatigue.

(V. 29) The cave on this (mountain) . . . . clothed in the brilliance of Indra's crown, which the people, with their love expanding through joy and gratification, have named—**viśāla**.[10]

---

[7] *Kārā* seems to have been used here in the unusual sense of 'a place of worship'. It may be noted that *kāra* in Pālī means 'an act of worship' or 'homage'. Bühler translated 'He made a prison (?) all round for the teacher of the world'.

[8] *Su-vīthi* was translated as 'splendid verandahs' by Bhagwanlal and as 'beautiful terraces' by Bühler. It probably refers to the picture-galleries in the cave. Burgess thought that the *Chaitya-mandiram* must have been structural and outside; but it undoubtedly refers to the shrine containing a colossal statue of Buddha at the back of the cave.

[9] This refers to the shrine of the Nāga Rāja 'in the staircase leading down from the front of the cave'.

[10] The Cave XVI seems to have borne a name ending in *viśāla*.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

(V. 30) Having presented (the cave) with devotion to the Community of Monks, **Varāhadeva** together with the multitude of his relatives, having enjoyed royal pleasures, ruled righteously being praised by Sugata (*i.e.*, Buddha).

(V. 31) As long as . . . . . with the multitude of the hoods of serpents resembling crowding clouds . . . . . as long as the sun (*shines*) with rays reddish like fresh red arsenic,—even so long may this spotless cave containing an excellent hall (*maṇḍapa*) dedicated to the three *ratnas*, be enjoyed!

(V. 32) (*May*) this mountain, the peak of which contains various (*types of*) caves, which is inhabited by great people . . . . . and may the whole world also, getting rid of its manifold sins, enter that tranquil and noble state, free from sorrow and pain!

Translation Cave 17[1]

(Verse 1). Having bowed to the sage (Buddha) who has completely mastered the three lores and who is a thunderbolt[2] to the tree of worldly existence . . . . . , I will set forth a description of the excellences of the donor of the Vihāra whose deeds are pure.

(V. 2). To the lord of men (named . . . . . .) who wore a parasol (*over his head*) and who made his name significant by the protection of the people, was born a son, **Dhṛitarāshṭra** by name, who had a white parasol.

(V. 3) [The son] of that king . . . . . was **Harisāmba** whose face was lovely as a lotus and the moon. Again, the son of that king was king **Śaurisāmba**, endowed with spotless beauty.

(V. 4). The resplendent **Upendragupta** of wide-spread fame . . . . . (was begotten) by him. Again, he had a younger son who became well known as king **Kācha** (**I**).

(V. 5). [From him was descended]. . . . . **Bhikshudāsa** in order to deposit his splendour and glory on earth. The son of that ruler was the king named **Nīladāsa**, famous on earth.

---

[1] In this translation I have derived some help from Dr. Bühler's rendering though I have differed from him in the interpretation of several passages.

[2] The poet is fond of using *aśani* (a thunderbolt) in the sense of an instrument of destruction. See verse 12 below.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

(V. 6). His son of brilliant fame . . . . . became well known as **Kācha (II)**. Then to that king was born **Kṛishṇadāsa** who augmented the splendour of (his) race and line.

(V. 7.) His wife was **Atichandrā**,[3] the daughter (of) . . . . . clad in garments as white as the rays of the moon, whose face resembled the full moon and whose ornaments were modesty and virtuous conduct.

(Vv. 8–9). [He] obtained (her) who brightened the land in the form of supplicants[4] . . . . . From her he had two sons resembling Pradyumna and Sāmba, who had longish, lotus-like eyes and lovely bodies like burnished gold . . . . . The elder (*of them*) bore the title of a king, while the second bore the appellation **Ravisāmba**.

(V. 10). Having subjugated prosperous countries such as Aśmaka . . . . . [the two princes] whose prowess had become fruitful, shone like the sun and the moon.

(V. 11). While they, whose honour was dependent on . . . . . and whose creeper-like affection and glory had grown very much, were living always in concord and happiness—

(V. 12). [Fate] . . . . . whose decree is not to be evaded even by superhuman beings and whose dread power was produced by the deeds done in a previous life,[5] announced the thunderbolt of impermanence in the case of the younger (*brother*).

(V. 13). [Having overcome] as if with firmness, the diseases of the body and the mind, [the elder brother] . . . . . having always the consciousness of transience[6] made the great tree of religious merit grow.

---

[3] Bühler restored the queen's name as *Suchandrā*. That the name ended in *chandra* is certain, but the first part of it was probably *ati*, rather than *su*. See above, p. 10, n. 11.

[4] This description is probably suggested by the queen's name *Atichandrā* (one who has surpassed the moon).

[5] Bhagwanlal took this as a description of the elder brother who, he thought, murdered the younger brother, but Bühler rightly inferred that the meaning of the verse was that the younger brother perished suddenly by an accident or died of a disease.

[6] The use of the word *sachiva* in *anitya-saṁjñā-sachivaḥ* has misled all previous editors. They took *anitya* (*achintya* or *achitya*) as the name of a minister who, they thought, had donated the *Vihāra*. But why the minister should come in abruptly here has not been stated. The *Amarakosha* gives two senses of *sachiva*: (*i*) a minister, and (*ii*) an associate. Cf. *Mantrī sahāyaḥ sachivau* (*Amarakosha*, III, 207). At the end

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

(V. 14). He served those[7] who . . . . . , who possessed great learning, liberality, compassion, contentment, friendship, forgiveness, courage and wisdom, and who felt pleased with . . . . . .

(V. 15). He, who was of very pure conduct, habitually imitated in his deeds honourable kings of noble conduct . . . . . .

(V. 16). He made . . . . . The supplicants being satisfied (*with the gifts*) spread, in the same way, the fame of other supplicants.[8]

(V. 17). He released, by the power of the expenditure of wealth. . . . . whose eyes were suffused through fear, as though they were his (*own*) dear sons.[9]

(V. 18). Even he who had been treated affectionately like a son, repeated like a knowing human being the excellent and pure thoughts in his heart.[10]

(V. 19). '[Rich persons] .. .. failed to attain, because of their wealth, the *siddhi* rightly so called (*obtainable*) by devout meditation on the Omniscient (Buddha).'[11]

---

of a compound, *sachiva* conveys the sense of 'assisted by' or 'provided with' (Monier Williams). To illustrate this sense, the St. Petersburg Dictionary cites the following passage from Śankara's *Bhāshya* on the *Chhāndogya Upanishad* (I,2) *doshavad-ghrāṇa-sachivatvād = viddhā ghrāna-devatā*. *Anitya-saṁjna-sachivaḥ*, therefore, means that the elder brother was always conscious of the transitoriness of life. *Anitya-saṁjnā* (Pāli, *anichcha-sañña*) is mentioned in Buddhist literature as an object of meditation, which destroys the sense of *ahaṅkāra* (Pāli *asmi-māna*). Cf. *anichcha-sañña bhāvetabbā asmimāna-samugghātāya*, (*Udāna*, IV, 1). The verse therefore states that the elder brother, being always mindful of the impermanence of existence, engaged himself in the acquisition of religious merit. The donor of the *Vihāra* was this elder brother of Ravisāmba, and not his minister.

[7] These were probably Buddhist monks.

[8] The meaning of the verse seems to be that the king bestowed so much wealth on supplicants that they themselves made munificent gifts to others which made them famous.

[9] This seems to refer to the release from bondage of animals as well as human beings. Compare the fifth Pillar Edict of Aśoka which interdicts the capture of animals in certain seasons of the year.

[10] Bhagwanlal being probably misled by the word *vadhya*, wholly misunderstood the purport of the verse and translated it as follows: '(The minister) who, although he knew that the king has acquired in his heart a conscience purified from murderous tendencies, did not disclose . . . . .' Bühler thought that the text was corrupt here and took the sense to be that even learned men had to acknowledge the minister's purity of heart. Both these renderings are incorrect. The verse probably refers to a domesticated parrot kept in the palace which, like a knowing human being (*vidan-nṛivat*), repeated the thoughts in the prince's heart.

[11] These are probably the words uttered by the parrot. They point out the

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

(V. 20). He adorned the whole world by the light of his fame, bright like the rays of the moon .. .. by collecting materials .. ..

(V. 21). While that moon among princes **Harisheṇa**, whose face resembles a lotus and the moon and who does what is beneficial for (*his*) subjects .. .. is protecting the earth—

(V. 22). He who has a very marvellous store of merit .. .. adorned the earth with *Stūpas* and *Vihāras*, and caused the joy of supplicants by conferring gifts (*on them*).

(V. 23). On a spur of the **Sahya** (*mountain*), looking beautiful with clouds which, with the confused noise of . . . . always pass over it (as if) to provide it with a canopy.[12]

(V. 24). [He excavated] this monolithic excellent Hall, containing within a *Chaitya* of the king of ascetics (*i.e.*, of the Buddha) and possessing the qualities of stateliness . . . . . .

(V. 25). Having expended abundant [wealth], [he] caused to be constructed this donated (*Hall*) which is almost measureless and which cannot be even imagined by little-souled men . . . . . .

(V. 26). He caused to be dug (*near it*) a large cistern pleasing to the eyes and filled with sweet, light, clear, cold and copious water . . . . . .

(V. 27) . . . . . delightful to the eyes and the mind. In another part of it in the west, he caused to be constructed a grand *Gandhakuṭī*.[13]

(V. 28). May all the blessings desired for the attainment of *siddhi* caused by devout meditation on the lord of sages (*i.e.*, Buddha) attend him[14] who in all his deeds strives for the welfare of the people . . . . . !

(V. 29). 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!

---

obstacle caused by wealth in the attainment of *siddhi*. Bühler, who did not risk a translation, thought that the general sense of the verse was that misfortunes fled (*apeyuḥ*) from the pious minister, being overcome by his supplications (*praṇidhāna*) addressed to Buddha (*sarvajñabhāva*). This is wide of the mark.

[12] Bühler has omitted this verse completely in his translation.

[13] Bhagwanlal thought that the *Gandhakuṭī* was Cave XVIII from which an image of the Buddha had been removed, Bühler's rendering 'on the other side of this (Buddha's) body on the left' is obviously incorrect. The reference is undoubtedly to the Chaitya Cave XIX which actually lies to the west of Cave XVII.

[14] This probably refers to the prince who caused the Cave XVII to be excavated.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

Translation Cave 26

Luck!

(Verse 1) Victorious is Muni who applied his mind to people's welfare (*and*) strove for it, who accomplished . . . happiness . . . , who had realized the ultimate reality, who possessed (*all*) the three-fold magnificent virtues, who knew no fear, (*and*) whose compassion beamed forth as the very moonlight—

(V. 2) —again, who had won complete victory over death and the like, who had attained to the state where one neither decays nor dies; and who, even after having entered into *nirvāna*—the state of utter calm and bliss, beyond fear and void of locality—, fulfils the desires of (*all the beings in all the three*) worlds!

(V. 3) —Obeisance and praise (*offered to him*) will never turn fruitless from him, (*they rather*) bring abundant (*and*) great reward from him, and (*even*) a single flower offered to whom yields the fruit known as paradise (*and even*) final emancipation.

(V. 4) Therefore it behoves the wise man, treading the noble path in this world, to show extreme reverence to the Tathāgatas who are exalted through their reputed excellences (*and*) have kindly feelings for humanity—have their heart melting, as it were, with compassion.

(V. 5) Gods, being (*time and again*) harassed by troubles, can hardly aspire after victory; (*let alone gods*,) even Śiva had to undergo a curse whereby he became a horrid-eyed one; Kṛishṇa, too, though free of all bondage, fell a victim to death. Therefore the Sugatas, who are absolutely free from fear, excel (*over all*).

(V. 6) The venerable sage Achala, even though he had achieved all which he aspired to (*and had no further desire*), out of gratitude built a cave-dwelling for the Master, which is proclaiming (*so to say*,) His teachings.

(V. 7) Why should not a monument be raised by those possessing wealth, desirous of mundane happiness as also of liberation?—(*such a charity should indeed be performed*) far rather by Bodhisattvas ('those beings who aspire after pure knowledge') for the happiness of the world as also for (their own) final emancipation?

(V. 8) A man continues to enjoy himself in paradise as long as his memory is green in the world. One should (*therefore*) set up a memorial on the mountains that will endure for as long as the moon and the sun continue.

(Vv. 9–13) The monk Buddhabhadra has caused (*this*) temple of Sugata to be made in honour of his parents as well as in honour of (*that*) Bhavvirāja who served the mighty king of Aśmaka as the

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

latter's minister, who was attached to him (*the monk*), in friendship through many successive births, who was steadfast, grateful, wise, learned, expert in the polity both of Bṛihaspati and of Śukra, proficient in social laws and customs, worshipping only the Buddha, supplying the needs of all the needy; who was very eloquent, was exhalted through his virtues, was all humility, was renowned the world over for his pious character, was blessed with a son, an equally foremost personality, Devarāja (*by name*), who accomplishes with tact and sweetness only, even such tasks as would normally call for rigours and active struggle, who is (*now*) the excellent minister of the king (*of Aśmaka*), and who, on the demise of his father, raised the (*dignity of his*) office by his excellences.

(V. 14) Thanks to the monk Dharmadatta as well as to (*my*) good pupil Bhadrabandhu; for it is these two who have seen to the excavation and completion of this (*cave*) temple on my behalf.

(V. 15) Whatever merit is here, may that be for the attainment of fruit (*in the shape*) of supreme knowledge as well as the multitude of all the pure qualities by them and by (*all the beings in all the three*) worlds!

(V. 16) He who, born of a noble family, endowed with great learning, with his mind purified by righteous conduct, (*competent to lead the people on the path of liberation*), having perfectly mastered the course of the Buddha's teachings, became a monk in his early age.

(V. 17) [Owing to the serious lacunae in the text as a result of the damage done to the inscribed portion here, a coherent translation of the extant part is not possible.]

(V. 18) This (*cave*) temple has been established for the welfare of . . . , on the top of a mountain, which is frequented by great *yogins*, and the valleys of which are resonant with the chirpings of birds and the chatterings of monkeys, . . .

(V. 19) And this *praśasti* of Sugata has likewise been ccmposed by the same teacher . . . for long in the world.

Translation[1]

(Verse 1) Victorious is he who is called the Buddha, the sage among sages, the teacher among teachers, the immortal among

[1] In this translation I have derived some help from Dr. Bühler's rendering, though I have differed from him in the interpretation of several passages.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

immortals, the best among the eminent (*and*) a store of marvels—(*he*) who attained enlightenment by abstension from the enjoyment (*of worldly pleasures*).[2]

(V. 2) (*Victorious*) next (*is*) the Law promulgated by him who knows the law; and (*victorious*) also (*is*) the Community, the best among all communities, having done service to which, a worthy recipient, the sons (*of men*) become exalted.[3]

(V. 3) In the southern country is well-known a great race of most eminent Brāhmaṇas named **Vallūras**, which (*race*) has accumulated religious merit and glory since (*the age of*) Brahmā and is honoured by the great.

(V. 4) In that (*race*) was born famous **Yajña[pati]**,[4] an excellent Brāhmaṇa, who resembled the primeval Brāhmaṇas Bhrigu, Atri, Garga and Aṅgiras, noted for their good qualities.

(V. 5) His son was **Deva**, who, being wise, learned, proficient in political wisdom and engaged in the performance of religious rites, resembled the God (Kṛishṇa); being guided by whom, the whole kingdom together with the king performed religious duties even as Pārtha (*i.e.*, Arjuna) did (*under the guidance of Kṛishṇa*).[5]

---

[2] *Anābhoga* is 'lack of attention or interest, disinclination' (*A Critical Pali Dictionary* by Trenckner, Anderson and Smith). Bühler translates it as 'abstaining from fruition'.

[3] The sense of the second half of this verse is somewhat obscure. *Kāra* seems to be used here in the same sense as in Pāli, *viz.*, a deed, service, act of mercy or worship, homage. *Kārāpakāra* is apparently used here in the same sense as *Kāra-kāraka* 'one who performs a religious duty or service' (*Pali Dictionary* by Rhys Davids). *Kārā* has also been used in l. 17 of the Vākāṭaka inscription in Cave XVI at Ajanṭā evidently in the sense of 'an act of service' or 'a place of worship'. See *Hyderabad Archeological Series*, No. 14, p. 14, n. 3. This verse has puzzled previous editors. Bhagwanlal translated, 'Even an ungrateful and unjust prison(?) dedicated to his virtuous person, becomes the bestower of good.' Bühler gave the following rendering:—the Community (of ascetics) . . . . placed in which as in a beautiful vessel, even those who have sinned by committing murder, become exalted.' In a note he adds, 'The phrase *kārāpakārāstanayāḥ* is very ambiguous as it may be taken as one compound, consisting of *kārāpakāra* and *astanaya*, or as two words *kārāpakārāḥ* and *tanayāḥ*, and as *kāra* may be interpreted "effort" or "a Yati" or "murder". If it is taken as a compound it may be translated by "those whose efforts are offences and who thus cast aside good behaviour or prudence," or by "those who offend against ascetics, and thus", etc.—or by "those whose offence is murder and who thus" etc. If we adopt the second division, *tanayāḥ* means "sons" and *kārāpakārāḥ* can again be taken in various ways. The poet no doubt intended to puzzle the reader. But in any case the general sense remains the same, and the half verse is intended to assert that sinners are purified by joining the Buddhist Sangha.'

[4] This name is almost certain.

[5] Bühler who read *nātha* in place of *Pārtha*, translated as follows:—'Under whom

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

(V. 6) From him was born **Soma**, a second moon as it were; who, performing religious duties as enjoined by the Vedas and Smṛitis, gave his love (*equally*) to wives of the two (*castes*), born in Brāhmaṇa and Kshatriya families.

(V. 7) On a Kshatriya wife of noble birth and character, he begot a good-looking son named **Ravi**, possessed of marks of royalty, who established his sway over the whole territory.[6]

(V. 8) From other Brāhmaṇa wives he obtained sons who fulfilled their desires in mastering the Vedas,—whose habitation named **Vallūra**[7] is even now (*well-known*) in the southern country.

(V. 9) The son of **Ravi** was **Pravara**. From him sprang **Śrī-Rāma.** His son was **Kīrti** of good repute and from him was born **Hastibhoja**.

(V. 10) When the **Vākāṭaka Devasena** was ruling, **Hastibhoja** distinguished himself by his excellences—(*he*) whose noble birth (*and*) charity . . . . . even now[8] . . . . . .

(V. 11) Among the resolute, intelligent, efficient and meritorious colleagues .. .. when the King's....

(V. 12) (*Occupying*) a half of whose seat .. men .. .. in the assembly .. ..

(V. 13) Then there (*is*) **Harishena,** the son of **Devarāja**[9] .. .. Hastibhoja .. .. ..

(V. 14) Observing (*his*) fame as white as moon-beams .. ..

---

when he had gained possession of the kingdom and of the king, lawful rites were performed just as in the (*time of the*) Lord (*Buddha*).' With the reading *dharmyāḥ kriyāḥ* which Bühler adopted, this construction is impossible; for the verb would be expected to be in the plural, not in the singular as here (*prachakkre*). As shown above, the reading is undoubtedly *Pārtha* and so the simile seems to have been suggested by the name *Deva*. The sense seems to be that the whole kingdom together with the king did its duty being guided by Deva, even as Arjuna had done before by the advice of the God Kṛishna.

[6] As shown above, the reading *Malaye* is not likely. Ravi was therefore ruling over the territory round his native place Vallūra, not over Malaya.

[7] As the reading is clearly *Vallūra-nāmnā* here, as given by both Bhagwanlal and Bühler, Vallūra is primarily the name of the village. The family became known by that name as it was living at the place.

[8] This indicates that Hastibhoja was dead when the inscription was incised.

[9] Bhagwanlal taking *Devarāja* to be a proper name, identified him with the minister of the Aśmaka king mentioned in an inscription in Cave XXVI at Ajaṇṭā, while Bühler thought that it meant the lord of Gods, Indra. The reading *Devarāja-sūnur=Harisheṇo*, given above for the first time, shows clearly that this Devarāja was none other than the Vāḳāṭaka king Devasena and his son was the same as Harisheṇa. The cave was thus excavated during the reign of Harisheṇa, and not of Devasena.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access

(V. 15) Then there was born (*to Hastibhoja*) a dear son[10] who was his (*very*) self, possessed of a hundred good qualities .. .. ..

(V. 16) Among his many sons[11] .. ..

(V. 17) .. .. .. the entire reward .. .. ..

(V. 18) Here is **Varāha**[**deva**] thoroughly considered.. .. .. ..

V. V. MIRASHI

[10] This son was probably Varāhadeva who is mentioned in the large Vākāṭaka inscription in Cave XVI at Ajaṇṭā as the successor of Hastibhoja and minister of Harisheṇa.

[11] Perhaps this verse stated that of the numerous sons of Hastibhoja, Harisheṇa selected Varāhadeva for the post of his Prime Minister.

Walter Spink - 978-90-47-41635-7
Downloaded from Brill.com12/22/2020 03:25:52PM
via free access