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## The Earliest Two and a Half Shrine-antechambers of India

### Abstract

The shrine antechamber is a standard component of the Indian temple architecture. It was originated in the Buddhist context, and the context was the rock-cut architecture of the Deccan and central India. The first antechamber was attempted in circa 125 CE in the Nasik Cave 17. It was patronised by Indrāgnidatta, a *yavana*, who possibly hailed from Bactria. The second antechamber was created in Bāgh Cave 2 in *ca.* late 466 CE. The patron remains unknown. The third antechamber was initiated in Ajanta Cave 16 within a few months. It was patronised by Varāhadeva, the Prime Minister of Vākāṭaka Mahārāj Hari Ṣeṇa. When the third antechamber was only *half* excavated, the plan was cancelled by the patron himself due to a sudden threat posed by the Alchon Hūṅs led by Mahā-Ṣāhi Khingila. The Nasik antechamber was inspired from Bactria, the Bāgh antechamber was inspired from the parallels in the Greater Gandhāra region, whereas the Ajanta Cave 16 antechamber was inspired from Bāgh Cave 2.

**Keywords:** Buddhist rock-cut architecture, Nasik caves, Bagh caves, Ajanta caves, shrine antechamber, central pillar, Gandhara, Alchon Hun Khingila, Vakataka

### Introduction

This article shows how the earliest *two and a half* shrine-antechambers of India were developed. The shrine antechamber, as we know, is an integral part of the Indian temple architecture. It was, and still is, found in the temples of all the mainstream Indian religions: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, and other religions or sects.<sup>1</sup> What is not hitherto

<sup>1</sup> For example, the Swaminarayan temples, Brahmakumari temples, Shirdi Sai Baba temples, Phutaparti Sai Baba temples, Kabir temples, Sikh temples or gurdwaras, Arya Samaj temples, Birla temples, Dada Bhagwan temples, etc.

revealed systematically is the story of how it came to be. When and where did it originate? Who were the persons who created them? Which are those temples where the earliest antechambers are found? Can they function for us as windows to view the larger picture of the times and the contexts that produced them? Is the subject worthy at all of an advanced scientific inquiry?

A survey of the early Indian architecture will show that the earliest shrine antechambers are to be found in the domain of the *rock-cut* architecture.<sup>2</sup> The first attempt was made in the Nasik Cave 17<sup>3</sup> (Plate 4.6). The second attempt, I argue, was made in Bāgh Cave 2 (Plates 5.11, 6.5). The third attempt, I argue, was made in the Ajanta Cave 16 (Plates 5.14, 6.6). The last one, I argue, was initiated, but was only *half* executed before the plan was cancelled by the temple's donor himself. I shall describe the reasons and how the *two and a half* antechambers came about.

In the story that follows I shall describe intermittently some war scenarios too because the Hūṇ factor, which caused the troubles for the caves is factored here for the first time; it requires some contextualisation.

### Nasik Cave 17, ca. 125 CE

The inauguration of the Nasik Cave 17<sup>4</sup> (Plate 4.6) took place in ca. 120 CE.<sup>5</sup> It would have taken some years for the masons to reach the area of the sanctum sanctorum. Therefore, circa 125 CE may be suggested as a rough conjectural date for the excavation

<sup>2</sup> Some noted surveys of the Indian rock-cut architecture with published ground plans are by Fergusson and Burgess (1880), Burgess (1883a; 1883b), Dehejia (1972), Nagaraju (1981), and Dhavalikar (1984).

<sup>3</sup> This numbering is by the Archaeological Survey of India, also followed by Dhavalikar (1984, pp. 7–8) and Nagaraju (1981, p. 270). The numbering by Burgess was “Cave XII” (Fergusson and Burgess 1880, pp. 271–272).

<sup>4</sup> ‘No. XII’ according to Fergusson and Burgess (1880, pp. 271–272) and Burgess (1883a, pp. 38–39).

<sup>5</sup> According to the dedicatory inscription, vide Senart (1905–1906, pp. 90), Nagaraju (1981, p. 344), and Dhavalikar (1984, p. 5). The inscription mention “*leṇasa cetiyaghara*” that may be translated as “the rock-cut dwelling consisting of a house or chamber for the *cetiya*.” The vocabulary clearly distinguishes between the *leṇa* (rock-cut edifice meant for dwelling, Skr. *layaṇa*) and *cetiyaghara* (the house or chamber of the *cetiya*, Skr. *caitya*). It is clearly implied that the latter is *with* the former. The ground plan (Plate 4.6) shows that the latter is *inside* the former. Semiotically speaking, the *linguistic signifiers* read with the *architectural signifier* tell us that the *cetiyaghara* (Pali/Prakrit; Skr. *caityagrha*) is *not* the entire edifice, for the edifice is the *leṇa*, whereas the *cetiyaghara* is the sanctum sanctorum *per se*. The signifiers also tell us that the *cetiyaghara/caityagrha* does not have to be an apsidal and vaulted structure; it can very well be a quadrangular and flat-roofed structure. If this reading is correct then many other similar edifices, e.g. Ajanta Caves 1, 2, 16, 17 (Plate 5: Figs. 19, 26, 14, and 17 respectively) – that are quadrangular and flat-roofed residential halls with the sancta sanctorum – should better not be called *vihāras* (Jain or Buddhist convent or temple) unless in very general and broader terms. It is also unscientific and misleading when we exclusively reserve the word *caityagrha* for the apsidal and vault-roofed structures as those of Ajanta Caves 9, 10, 19, and 26 (Plate 5: Figs. 2, 1, 7, and 8 respectively). Our signifiers tell us clearly that whether an edifice is apsidal or quadrangular, vault-roofed or flat-roofed, if there is a *cetiyaghara/caityagrha* (Buddhist sanctum sanctorum) inside, the edifice is fit to be called a *leṇa-cetiyaghara* (Pali/Prakrit, but Skr. *layaṇa-caityagrha*) or – if one wants to be more specific – a *leṇa-maṭapa-cetiyaghara* (Pali/Prakrit, but Skr. *layaṇa-maṇḍapa-caityagrha*) wherein the word *maṭapa/maṇḍapa* means a hall for congregation, dining,

of the antechamber. The sanctum sanctorum was never completed. Perhaps a war had broken out.<sup>6</sup> The donative inscription tells us that a person named Indrāgnidatta was the patron. We are told that he was a *yavana* (Greco-Roman) whose native has been traced to Bactria. We need to underline that Indrāgnidatta had made a great contribution to the history of the Indian architecture. He had introduced a new type of architecture in India whose ancestry lied in the architectural tradition of Bactria and the Greater Gandhāra region.<sup>7</sup> The type belonged to the quadrangular and flat-roofed monasteries that also had sanctum sanctorum. The only distinction was that the structures in Bactria and Greater Gandhāra were *built* of stone, brick, and wood whereas the one in Nasik was *excavated* inside a mountain cliff. The greatest advantage of this type of building was that it was multi-functional. There was provision for monastic residence, congregation, and worship. This type, termed here DCW2a (Plates 3, 4.6), did not exist in India then. What we had in India then was a scheme of things where the edifices had a single function. A rock-cut edifice was meant either exclusively for the monastic residence, or exclusively for congregation, or exclusively for worship. The three functions were not unified and amalgamated under the same roof. These distinctions were based on functions. A monastic establishment had to *construct* three buildings or *excavate* three caves for the three different functions. In financial terms three different budgets were required for the three edifices. In terms of time you needed three calendars or schedules. As far as the architectural aspects are concerned the edifices that were meant for the monastic residence, congregation, dining, or resting were invariably quadrangular with flat ceilings. Whereas those edifices that were meant for worship were vault-roofed with the *chaitiya* at the back of the nave.

In contrast, Indrāgnidatta's edifice was so smart. It was such a revolutionary plan at least in India, which combined all the three functions under the same roof. It meant saving time, money, and labour. The revolutionary concept was to be picked up gradually although not systematically for the next two hundred years (Plate 4). It was only from

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or resting. Based on a plethora of other variations found in the architectural layouts, functions, and vocabularies of the inscriptions, a special system of lexicons was recently formulated under a new reclassification system, vide Singh (2018, 220) whose revised version "2.1" is included here (Plate 3).

<sup>6</sup> Dhavalikar (1984, p. 8).

<sup>7</sup> The quadrangular and flat-roofed edifices with sancta sanctorum were known in Greater Gandhāra region. It has been rightly observed that "There was probably a heavy influx of foreigners. Graeco-Romans (*Yavana*) and Sakas as the inscriptional records would testify and it is likely that some *Yavana* artists were also working at sites like Nasik as the occurrence of classical motifs would suggest. But so far as Cave XVII is concerned, it is likely that the donor Indragnidatta, a *Yavana* from Demetrias, would have desired to have a *chaitiya*-cum-*vihara* at Nasik, the like of which already existed in his native country. This would lead us to the problem of the origin of quadrangular, flat-roofed *chaitiya-grihas*. It may be noted in this connection that of the stupa shrine types, the quadrangular was the most popular in Gandhara and the earliest occurrence of the quadrangular stupa shrine with an antechamber is met with in the *Griha-stupa* A13 of the Kalwan monastery at Taxila (Marshall 1951, pl. 72). The combination of a stupa shrine with the *vihara* was present in Gandhara even in the latter half of first century A.D. and the credit of its introduction in Maharashtra has to be given to Indragnidatta, the *Yavana* donor of cave 17" (Dhavalikar 1984, p. 8). For a revised plan of the sacred areas and monasteries at Kālawān, Taxila, vide Behrendt (2018, p. 151), after Marshall (ibid.).

the fifth-century that the concept of the multi-functional edifices became more prevalent, not that it has been realised sufficiently in the published scholarship.<sup>8</sup>

Indrāgnidatta's edifice was to house a relief stupa on the rear wall of the sanctum. It was a unique and unprecedented idea. Because never before there was anything called a sanctum sanctorum, which was quadrangular and flat-roofed inside a hall. We are really looking at the very first sanctum sanctorum of India. What is even more interesting is the fact that inside the sanctum there was no plan for a three-dimensional stupa. What was planned was a relief stupa on the rear wall. Unfortunately, the sanctum could not be completed. It was abandoned midway. There was something else too, which was equally unique and unprecedented. It was the pair of pillars in the rear of the hall, just before the shrine doorway. Why are those pillars excavated there when the hall has no other pillars? Actually, pillars were seldom made in the halls of the early Indian rock-cut architecture.<sup>9</sup> Then why did Indrāgnidatta make those two pillars in that location? The answer is simply that he wanted to emphasize the importance of the sanctum. In the language of architecture, the two pillars were such vocabularies that signified the *emphasis*. The particular locale that was selected for the emphasis is the same which in the later times came to be occupied with the antechamber. Further, the antechambers of the future were going to have pillars in them, although not always. The pillars, the location, and the future developments convey that what Indrāgnidatta's planners had provisioned was nothing other than the first attempt to formulate the idea of the shrine antechamber in India. However, what Indrāgnidatta might not have known was that his attempt was going to be the only attempt up to *ca.* late 466 CE.

### Bāgh Cave 2, *ca.* late 466 CE

The next shrine antechamber was attempted in India in the Bāgh Cave 2 (Plates 5.11, 6.5).<sup>10</sup> Bāgh is located in a remote area of central India. There is no dated inscription for the antechamber. However, we know that the Bāgh caves were repaired in the Gupta Era 167 = *ca.* 486 CE.<sup>11</sup> Through a complicated process involving a plethora of related data, features, and facts Walter Spink has suggested a dating framework for the Bāgh caves, which is circa 462–480 CE.<sup>12</sup> In this timeframe he has also included all the fifth-century Ajanta caves (Plate 5.7–5.35), the Aurangabad Caves 1 and 3<sup>13</sup> (Plates 5.36, 7.9),

<sup>8</sup> For more on this, vide Singh (2018).

<sup>9</sup> Two exceptions are Koṇḍāne Cave 2 (Fergusson and Burgess 1880, pl. VIII) and a pillared cave in Pohale (Dhavalikar 1984, p. 72).

<sup>10</sup> Weiner (1977, pp. 42, 48) had deduced it but did not explain how the conclusion was arrived.

<sup>11</sup> This is worked out based on the Bāgh cave plates (Mirashi 1955, I, pp. 19–21) and the Barwani plate (Mirashi 1955, I, pp. 17–19). For the dating in Gupta Era, vide Ramesh and Tewari (1990, pp. vii–viii).

<sup>12</sup> Spink (2005, pp. 335–336), (2014, p. xii), (2017, pp. 16–36, 187).

<sup>13</sup> Spink (2005, pp. 326–335).

the Banoṭī caves<sup>14</sup> (Plates 5.20, 6.11), Dharashiva Cave 2<sup>15</sup> (Plates 5.12, 6.3), and the Ghaṭotkacha cave<sup>16</sup> (Plates 5.25, 7.5) to which may be added the Loṇāḍ cave (Plate 8.2)<sup>17</sup> and certain developments in Kānherī<sup>18</sup> and Pitalkhorā.<sup>19</sup> I have re-inspected the relevant multi-disciplinary data, direct and indirect evidence, and *in situ* details following which I came to the conclusion that Spink's dating framework is based on the widest data sampling coming from the Deccan. It is certainly a challenge for the researcher to figure out how so many monuments from the above sites developed within such a short timeframe. Spink has described a chronological account of how the monuments developed year by year,<sup>20</sup> cave by cave,<sup>21</sup> motif by motif, and feature by feature.<sup>22</sup> I have re-examined the cited evidence, features, data, interpretations, and arguments. Consequently, my study has yielded a slightly different dating for the caves of the late fifth century CE: *ca.* 460–480 CE. I also maintain a difference of opinion on many finer details of how things developed or faced problems. Some differences are minor, others are major and radically different. This comparison is only to convey that there are lots of points of convergence and divergence between Spink's study and my study. Here, I shall stay confined to the topic to describe how in my study the antechamber of Bāgh Cave 2 was developed.<sup>23</sup>

Spink argued that Bāgh Cave 2 was inaugurated during *ca.* 462 CE. The sanctum sanctorum was excavated within one or two years (463–464 CE).<sup>24</sup> It is a large edifice that was obviously well executed with a high degree of skill. Even under a tight schedule the large and elaborate edifice comprising of the frontcourt, façade, porch, multi-pillared hall, shrine antechamber, and the sanctum sanctorum would have taken more than two years. This is suggested by the evidence of the antechamber itself, which is a key element in resolving the relative chronology. Let's look at Bāgh Cave 4, which has a sanctum sanctorum but does not have any shrine antechamber (Plates 5.10, 6.1). Spink has dated the sanctum sanctorum to *ca.* 465–468 CE. So, for Spink this sanctum sanctorum was created a couple of years later than the former example. Naturally, we are prompted to ask: why a later sanctum sanctorum does not have the shrine antechamber? What was so bad about it? As far as we can see the antechamber of Cave 2 looks very beautiful and quite desirable. Unless we find a good reason why the planners of a later sanctum

<sup>14</sup> Spink (2005, pp. 336–343).

<sup>15</sup> Fergusson and Burgess (1880, pl. XCIII) misprinted it as Cave I.

<sup>16</sup> Spink (2005, pp. 352–361).

<sup>17</sup> Spink (2005, pp. 362–365) identified Loṇāḍ as a 'post-Vākāṭaka' monument.

<sup>18</sup> Spink (2005, pp. 361–362).

<sup>19</sup> Spink (2005, p. 365); cf. Morrissey (2009, pp. 138–151). I have added more caves in this time period (Plate 8).

<sup>20</sup> Spink (2009).

<sup>21</sup> Spink (2007).

<sup>22</sup> Spink (2014).

<sup>23</sup> In the published scholarship, the antechamber of Bāgh Cave 2 has escaped serious scrutiny. Its importance was only briefly noted by Weiner (1977, pp. 42, 48).

<sup>24</sup> Spink (2014, p. xii).

sanctorum would not have purposely wanted to have an antechamber, we need perhaps to think differently and probe differently.

My conclusion after a detailed re-examination is that the Bāgh edifices might have begun during *ca.* 460–461 CE, and the antechamber of Bāgh Cave 2 was probably excavated in late 466 CE (Table 1). The justification would become clear as we proceed. We have to factor many other related developments, not only at Bāgh but at other sites too. The developments were not just art historical, iconographic, architectural, but also military and cross-border migrations of the monastics. The last one was, I propose, due to certain upheaval in the times. To understand this we would need to consider certain microscopic and macroscopic details.

The absence of the antechamber in Bāgh Cave 4 indicates the plausibility that there was no such concept or thing known to the planners of that edifice. This would have been true when the sanctum of that cave was being excavated. It means that our antechamber was created *after* the idea and the concept of the antechamber was well introduced at the site. In other words, the sanctum of Bāgh Cave 4 was already excavated when the idea of the antechamber was introduced in our Bāgh Cave 2. Hence, the sanctum of Bāgh Cave 4 is earlier than the one in Bāgh Cave 2. Based on a complex corpus of data at my disposal I would date the sanctum of Bāgh Cave 4 to circa late 465 CE (Table 1). The rationale of this dating will be hopefully clarified as we proceed.

At the time, it appears certain, no one in India had heard anything about the shrine antechamber. The ancient Nasik Cave 17 belonging to the early second century CE was never completed; it was abandoned; it would not have been in worship. It was certainly long forgotten. That is why not only the planners of Bāgh Cave 4, but also those of the other contemporary caves of Ajanta 11, Dharashiva 2 and 3, and Mahāḍ 1 would have been oblivious about Nasik Cave 17. None of these caves has a shrine antechamber (Plate 6: Figs. 1–4). That is why we are led to deduce that the antechamber was probably first introduced in our Bāgh Cave 2, and then, the concept and the idea got percolated in other caves not only in Bāgh but also in other sites. Consequently, the planners of the other caves that were still developing or those that were still to be inaugurated began to adopt the idea — subject to the feasibility. The factor of the feasibility was available in some of the edifices, namely, Ajanta caves 16, lower 6, 17, 4, 1 and the Banoṭī cave (Plate 6: Figs. 5–11). However, the scope was simply not available in many other caves, namely, Bāgh Cave 4, Ajanta 11, Dharashiva 2, and Mahāḍ 1 (Plate 6: Figs. 1–4). This was only because the sancta sanctorum in those caves had already been excavated to some extent or the other. This is not to imply that the antechamber was always there in the initial blueprint of our Bāgh Cave 2. On the contrary there are reasons to suppose that it was not there in the blueprint of any of those caves that were begun during *ca.* 460–466 CE. This would be true of all the related sites, i.e. Bāgh, Ajanta, Dharashiva, and Mahāḍ.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> There was no other site where rock-cut edifices were being made during this time. We suppose, the antechamber was not there even in the structural temples of the Hindus, which had started to evolve from the previous century (4<sup>th</sup> c. CE).

If that was so, our antechamber seems to have been a rare case. It was the first antechamber after the Nasik attempt of *ca.* 125 CE.

The above conclusion projects further questions. What was the source of inspiration? Where did the idea come from? Could it have come from Nasik Cave 17 itself? If yes, what is the common feature between the two? The fact is that there is hardly anything common. The Nasik attempt was archaic; it's hard even to call that a proper antechamber. Whereas that of Bāgh Cave 2 is a highly developed, well designed, wonderfully executed work. There are more differences than the common features. So, we come back to the question. If Nasik was not the source, then where did the idea come from? More importantly, *when* did the idea come? Because the idea had obviously not come when the sanctum of Bāgh Cave 4 was excavated.

To answer the questions we need go back in time to picturise how the two caves of Bāgh might have begun. We can begin with the reasonable assumption that our Cave 2 was inaugurated later (*ca.* 461 CE) than Bāgh Cave 4 (*ca.* 460 CE). The excavation schedule would have been way behind that of Cave 4 so that when the sanctum of Bāgh 4 was already excavated in *ca.* late 465 CE, the masons in our cave were still excavating the hall area. By the time they had shaped up the sophisticated arrangement of the interior pillars at least three quarters of the year had elapsed. When it was past the middle of *ca.* 466 CE, the masons were still excavating the back areas of the hall. Still there was no plan of any antechamber. Nobody had perhaps known what it was.

Then, our latest assessment points out that, there would have come a group of monks from the far away land of Greater Gandhāra. They were likely displaced on account of a disturbance that occurred there in *ca.* 465 CE. The Hephthalites had pushed out the Alchons (r. 430/440<sup>26</sup>–600<sup>27</sup> CE) from Gandhāra and Taxila<sup>28</sup> who had earlier pushed out the Kidarites a decade ago.<sup>29</sup> The Kidarites were now intruding into Central Asia. The Alchons had nowhere else to go but to push towards the east and bite into the Gupta

<sup>26</sup> Göbl (1967, II, pp. 59, 322) proposed 430/440 as the earliest date for the Alchons, which is shared *inter alios* by Melzer (2006, pp. 259) and Kurbanov (2013, p. 372).

<sup>27</sup> Kurbanov (2013, p. 373), but cf. “c. 651: Khingila dynasty was usurped by the Turks” (Kurbanov 2010, fig. 87).

<sup>28</sup> Kurbanov (2010, fig. 87).

<sup>29</sup> The Alchons' campaigns were led by Khingila (r. 440 to 492–496 CE). He attacked the Kidarites in Gandhāra during *ca.* 451–453/454 CE. See also Zeimal (1996, 127). Göbl (1967) called it Alchon Khingila's conquest of Gandhāra and Taxila based on a coin inscribed with the name Khingila (NumH 57/13). “The date of the conquest of Taxila and Gandhara has been used by Göbl to date Khingila's reign. The date has been determined as 460 AD based on the book of travel of the Chinese pilgrim Songyun. This pilgrim states that he met the Hephthalite king of Gandhara in 520 A.D., and that the Huns had already been ruling this region for two generations (520-2 x 30 = 460)” (Melzer 2006, p. 259). The same source was also used by Majumdar and Altekar (1946, pp. 177–178): “Ephthalites or White Huns occupied the Oxus valley and conquered Gandhāra. They destroyed this kingdom and set up a king who was cruel and vindictive and practiced the most barbarous atrocities. According to the Chinese pilgrim Sung-yun, this took place two generations before his time (520 AD). It is evident, therefore, that not long after his accession to the throne Skandagupta found his empire menaced by the onrush of these barbarians who had crossed the Indus, carrying devastation and destruction all around”. However, Gandhāra was raided earlier also in the late 4<sup>th</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> c. CE by the Kidarites until the Alchons pushed them out. So, there were multiple wars.

territories. They were already occupying the Indus and Jhelum belt after a defeat from the Gupta Emperor Skandagupta (r. 455–469) in *ca.* 455 CE.<sup>30</sup>

So, in the late 465 CE the Alchons seem to have been occupying Purushpura, Kashmir, Punjab,<sup>31</sup> eastern Sindh, and the Indus delta. They were coming towards central India. At this time the support system for the monasteries, the organised economy, and established trade networks would have been already disrupted. The displaced monks from Gandhāra could not have gone towards the west. The regions on the northwest of Gandhāra were more troubled at the time. They would have undoubtedly heard about the peaceful kingdoms of the two Great Emperors of India: Skandagupta of the Gupta dynasty and Hari Ṣeṇa (*ca.* 459–477 CE)<sup>32</sup> of the Vākāṭaka dynasty. The latter by this time had vastly expanded his kingdom stretching from the Narmada to the Krishna Rivers including the western coasts.<sup>33</sup> Skandagupta was guarding the frontiers from the Sutlej to Saurashtra. Even greater attraction for the monks was that Hari Ṣeṇa too was supporting Buddhism as did the Guptas. This kind of promising stability and sustainability was at a premium elsewhere during the sixties of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, there are art historical pointers that the troubled monks journeyed towards India. Kashmir and Punjab were long affected. So, they kept marching and reached the Narmada region. Caravans of the ordinary Buddhists and merchants would have also been migrating towards the Narmada and Tapi belt. Some of them seem to have arrived in the Bāgh area, which would have been already known to the Buddhist world due to the new and fabulous rock-cut temples that were being developing over there. The Bāgh monasteries are located deep into the forests in the centre of one of India's biggest tribal belts stretching from Saurashtra to Amarkantak. The belt is still densely forested at many places. The green geography would have been perfect to support a good agrarian economy. It was, therefore, a good place of refuge for the harried monks who had escaped from Gandhāra.<sup>34</sup> We are sure

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Eventually, the Hephthalites drove the Alchons out. Consequently, Khingila was forced to move towards India. "The last destruction of Gandhara was in *ca.* 560–566 by the Hephthalites" (Grenet 2002, p. 221).

<sup>30</sup> Singh 2020a, pp. 21–22. The Alchons led by Khingila had raided eastern Punjab, Haryana, Delhi or Mathura region during 454/455 CE. Ghatotkachagupta (r. 416–448–455) resisted but was perhaps killed in the battle. His successor Skandagupta (r. 455–469) managed to repulse them and announced the victory in 455 CE in the Junagadh rock inscription. Two Junagadh rock inscriptions of the time of Skandagupta are dated in the Gupta Era 136, 137, 138 (455/456, 456/457, and 457/458 CE). They mention about Skandagupta's victory over the foreign tribes (J.F. Fleet 1888, pp. 56–65, No. 14), (Sircar 1965, pp. 307–316, No. 25), (The British Library 2017, <http://siddham.uk/object/OB00029>).

<sup>31</sup> Zeimal (1996, p. 128).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *ca.* 460–477 CE by Spink (1981, p. 109), (2005, p. 166) and endorsed *inter alios* by Bakker (1997, pp. 35, 170) and Singh (2012a, p. ix). This is against "500–520 A.D." by Burgess (1883a, pp. 53, 128), "about 475 A.C. to 500 A.C." by Mirashi (1963, pp. vi, 104), "*ca.* 475–*ca.* 510 A.D." by Majumdar and Altekar (1946, p. 121) and Dhavalikar (1984, p. 1), and "*ca.* 480–510 CE" by Shastri (1997, p. 212).

<sup>33</sup> As per my study, Skandagupta had likely ceded Avanti and Lāṭa to Hari Ṣeṇa in *ca.* 459 CE. Then, in *ca.* 460 CE, Hari Ṣeṇa assimilated Vidarbha and Ṛṣika/Khandesh; in *ca.* 462, Aparānta and Trikūṭa; in *ca.* 463 Āśmaka and Kuntala; and in *ca.* 473–474 Kosala, Kalinga, and Andhra.

<sup>34</sup> It is well understood now that even during the Hūn occupation Buddhism in Greater Gandhāra and Central Asia continued to flourish to some extent or the other, vide, e.g. Behrendt (2007, p. 89), (2008, pp. 17–19).



that they had not reached Ajanta by this time the reasons of which are too complicated to be detailed here. The monks seem to have reached Bāgh quite quickly within a year or so.<sup>35</sup> The plausibility is suggested by many concordant features. One of them is the striking similarity between the painting styles of Jinan Wālī kī Dherī (near Taxila) dated

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According to Kuwayama (2006) the destruction was caused later by the Turks. It has also been studied that natural calamities like earthquakes and flooding had a role to play in the decline of the Buddhist establishments (Tucci 1958, pp. 281–282), (Behrendt 2018, p. 151). In the case of the late 5<sup>th</sup> c. rock-cut monuments of the Deccan, which have countless *in situ* evidence suggesting that the caves were suddenly or rapidly abandoned, the theory of the natural calamity does not apply. There is no sign of destruction either. Therefore, we must look for other answers as to what caused the collapse of the Buddhist world in the late 5<sup>th</sup> c. CE. It has already been suggested that the Alchons led by Khingila (r. 440 to 492–496 CE) had menaced the lands from the Hindu Kush to Narmada during ca. 447–477 CE. In 478 CE, they were repulsed from India by Buddhagupta (r. 477–495 CE). It was after this date that the Alchons appear to have adopted liberalism as statecraft, which is corroborated by the Schøyen copper scroll inscription *inter alia*. The Alchons' marriages to South Asian women, permissions to their princesses, queens, and daughters-in-law to openly practice Buddhism, and even supporting the Buddhist monasteries and stupas are reminiscent of the fabled change of heart of King Asoka's after the Kalinga war. The change turned into fables and tales to be recorded as such in Kalhana's *Rājatarāṅginī*, 1.305–306, 1.309–1.311 (Stein 1900, p. 46), Xuanzang's *Sī-yu-ki* (i. 167 sqq.), and Sung-yun's *Sī-Yu-Ki* (I, xcix. Sqq.); the last two citation are from Stein (*ibid.* 43). It was the same liberal state policy that the Early Guptas and Vākātaka Hari Ṣeṇa were following (Singh 2020a, pp. 59–63). Perhaps, the failure after all the prolonged raids and looting had instructed the Alchons that liberalism was the only way forward if they had to become acceptable in the foreign lands. This might explain how and why Buddhism was accommodated by the Alchons later on. However, their liberalism was rather like a statecraft, for no Buddhist symbol ever found a place in their coinage whereas symbols and motifs from Zoroastrianism, Vaiṣṇavism, and Pāsupata Śaivism are found in plenty. In extension, and from the observations of Kuwayama (2002), it is plausible that the Hephthalites had also adopted a similar statecraft at some point or the other, which allowed them a stable rule for almost a century until they were ousted by the W. Turks during 560s CE. For the new study of the Alchons and how they plausibly affected the Deccan caves, vide Singh 2020a, pp. 19–42.

<sup>35</sup> The estimated time comes out from a story. Four days ago, I took a break from this paper and picnicked in a tribal village of Chhota Udepur, Gujarat. The village is in Kavānt taluka, which is 120 kilometres from Baroda. I had gone with my tribal friend Nandu Rathwa, a retired professor of the M. S. University of Baroda. Kavānt is located between the Vindhya mountain range and Narmada River. It is famous for the tribal population and Pithora paintings. The dinner was arranged in the hut or house of Nandu's sister. There I met a cousin of Nandu. I was told that four times he had performed the *parikramā* (religious circumambulation) of the holy Narmada River. His 5<sup>th</sup> *parikramā* was to commence in the coming months. So, I inquired: "how long does it take?" He said: "one year in the normal course, but my last *parikramā* was done in six months." I inquired: "what is the total distance, how many kilometres it is both ways?" He said: "1600 kilometres on one side, i.e. 3200 kilometres for the round trip." When I was struggling to calculate how many kilometres he walked per day, he helped me promptly: "Sometimes, I walked 40 kilometres per day when I completed the round in 6 months." I was shocked to hear this and asked in excitement and disbelief: "Can I join you in your next *parikramā*?" He said: "why not? There are many people in the group. I do not walk alone." That night I kept thinking, alas, if somebody was there to feed my family when I was away from home for the *parikramā* without the worry of earning money and livelihood. I knew it was not for me. But, the revelation was tremendous. I could figure out that the harried monks who journeyed from Bactria or Greater Gandhāra to the Bāgh caves – situated in Dhar dist. of Madhya Pradesh, which was just 117 km from Kavānt where I was talking to the man – could have completed the journey within six months or one year at the maximum. This is because if one walked today from the farthest possible site of Fayaz Tepa in Uzbekistan to the Bāgh caves, the distance is 2399 km according to my search result in Google Earth. This is nearly 800 km less than the round trip of the Narmada River. (I do not, of course, wish to imply that the ancient monks took the same route as projected by Google Earth.)

to 5th c. CE and Bāgh and Ajanta.<sup>36</sup> As we found in the context of the Nasik cave, the Bactrian and the Greater Gandhāra regions had a robust and old tradition of architecture. One of the prominent building types was the one which had all the three functions combined together: dwelling, worship, and congregation. There were stupa shrines with antechambers prevalent from the first century itself. The first-century stupa shrines of A1, A13, A14 in Kālāwān monastery of Taxila<sup>37</sup> that were in use up to at least the 4th century CE, the apsidal stupa shrine L3 at the Dharmarājikā complex in Taxila where the developments continued up to the 5th c. CE,<sup>38</sup> and the corner stupa at Tepe Shutur, Haḍḍā<sup>39</sup> had shrine antechambers.

Thus, when the Gandhāran or Central Asian monks came to Bāgh it is plausible that they introduced the idea of the antechamber.<sup>40</sup> At the time the masons were still excavating the rear part of the hall. So, it was feasible for the planners to incorporate the new idea. However, there was no such scope in the Bāgh Cave 4 whose stupa sanctum was already excavated in the last year. It appears that the antechamber was not the only thing that was introduced. The itinerants, when there came more of them after a few years, also seem to have introduced the Mūlasarvāstivāda texts,<sup>41</sup> Buddhist Sanskrit literature, Bodhisattva, Avalokiteśvara,<sup>42</sup> anthropomorphic Buddha, Mahāparinirvāṇa theme,<sup>43</sup> Hārītī, Dipāṅkara Buddha, bhadrāsana, the ‘triad,’ ‘foreigners,’<sup>44</sup> and many other motifs. I agree with Brancaccio<sup>45</sup> that the subject warrants further probing from this angle.

<sup>36</sup> Further studies are necessary to probe the connections with Greater Gandhāra and Central Asia, especially the sites that are known to have been active up to the 4th and 5th c. CE. In Pakistan: Jinan Wāli-kī-Dherī, Takht-i-Bāhi, Paṭvano Gaṭai rock shelter; Butkarā I, Great Stupa; Jamāl Garhī; and other related sites in Taxila and Swat. In Uzbekistan: Kara Tepe, Fayaz Tepe, and Balalik Tepe. In Chinese Turkestan: Miran. In Afghanistan: Mes Aynak, Haḍḍā, and Tapa Sardār. Studies in the direction have been initiated by Weiner (1977, pp. 42, 48), Callieri (1997–1998, cat. 7.39, pl. 24), Divakaran (1989), Khan (2008), Brancaccio (2011a, p. 107), (2018, pp. 62–65), Muzio (2012), (2014), and Compareti (2014). Other relevant works are by Ashraf Khan and Mahmood-ul-Hassan (2004), Muzio (2008, figs. 4–7, 9, 13), Zin (2013), and Khan (2016). The list is only fractional.

<sup>37</sup> For plan, vide Behrendt (2018, p. 151), (2006, p. 86) after Marshall (1951, pl. 72).

<sup>38</sup> For plan, vide Behrendt (2018, p. 160), (2006, pp. 84–85) after Marshall (1951, pl. 45).

<sup>39</sup> Plan reproduced by Weiner (1977, p. 49).

<sup>40</sup> This has already been suggested by Weiner (1977, p. 48).

<sup>41</sup> Brancaccio (2018, p. 64) and Cohen (2000).

<sup>42</sup> Brancaccio (2018, pp. 67–69).

<sup>43</sup> Prior to the monolithic Mahāparinirvāṇa panel of Ajanta Cave 26 (conceived ca. 468 CE), the theme had only a couple of precedents in India in loose sculptural depictions, whereas it was quite popular in Gandhāra. From ca. 475 onwards, it became more popular, almost standard, in the so-called “central pillar caves” of Kucha (Plate 10). It was also prevalent in west of the Peshawar basin in Afghanistan, Bamiyan, Sorcuk, Dunhuang, and Adjina Tepe in Uzbekistan (Brancaccio 2018, pp. 64–65).

<sup>44</sup> People from Iran, Central Asia, and East Africa (Compareti 2014), (Brancaccio 2018, pp. 69–71).

<sup>45</sup> “The rebirth of Buddhist sites of the Ajanta range can be reasonably related to the connections built between the western Deccan and the *Silk Road* during the fifth and the sixth century CE. A better understanding of the *Cotton Road* and the involvement of Sogdian merchants, as well as a revision of traditional historical paradigms associated with presence of the Huns in Afghanistan, Khotan and western India, may hold the key to explain the occurrence of so many crossovers in the Buddhist world of the time” (Brancaccio 2018, pp. 72).

### Ajanta Cave 16, ca. late 466-early 467 CE

The *addition* of the antechamber in Bāgh Cave 2 was a great innovation in the history of the Indian architecture. Just how compelling the idea was may be gleaned from the fact that the planners of every single edifice henceforth, in all the times to come, across all the religions and regions of India, were now going to have a shrine antechamber in the plan subject of course to the feasibility. It was soon to become a standard, an indispensable component, of the Indian temple architecture in general.

For some planners though it was not so easy to implement the idea. There were some serious obstacles. In some of the edifices that were being simultaneously excavated the addition was simply not feasible, because the sancta in those edifices had already been excavated to some extent or the other, e.g. Ajanta Cave 11 (Plates 5.16, 6.2), Dharashiva 2 and 3, and Mahād 1 (Plates 5.12–13, 6.3–4). The sancta of those caves had already been hewn out through the last one year (late 465–late 466 CE). They were apparently following the model of Bāgh Cave 4, which had no antechamber. Even the excavation of the stupas or *caityas* had already been excavated to some extent or the other. This was the scenario in late 466 CE (Table 1).

But, the scenario in the Ajanta Cave 16 was more perplexing (Plates 5.14, 6.6). That edifice was being patronised by Varāhadeva who was the prime minister of Hari Ṣeṇa, the Western Vākāṭaka king who had now become a mighty emperor after integrating many neighbouring lands.<sup>46</sup> The planners of Cave 16 would have been excited but also confused at the same time after coming to know of what had just been achieved in Bāgh Cave 2. Naturally, they would have also wanted to add an antechamber to the grand edifice.

The edifice had been inaugurated as Type DC2bii (Plates 3, 5.4) about four–five years ago in ca. 461/462 CE along with many other edifices at Ajanta (Table 1).<sup>47</sup> Since then the work had progressed at a good pace. By the end of ca. 465 CE the hall was mostly excavated. Even the rear wall was more or less defined. The masons were scooping out the rear cells whose doors they had already penetrated. It was at that particular juncture (late 465 CE) that the work seems to have been paused. This was because of the new idea to add a stupa or *caitya* sanctum. Not only here but throughout the Deccan, the planners of every residential edifice were now thinking to *convert* the dormitories into temples.<sup>48</sup> To do this, the most basic necessity was to add a sanctum.<sup>49</sup> At Ajanta, it seems, the first

<sup>46</sup> It was a unified Vākāṭaka empire at this time. Hari Ṣeṇa (ca. 459–477 CE) had already subordinated his cousin Narendrasena in ca. 460 CE (sovereign, 457–461; subordinate to Vatsagulma/Hari Ṣeṇa, ca. 461–472 CE). Narendrasena was the king of the Eastern Vākāṭaka branch with capital in Nandivardhana. The next year (462 CE), Hari Ṣeṇa had subordinated Dahrasena, the Traikūṭaka king (sovereign, 447–462; subordinate to Vatsagulma/Hari Ṣeṇa, ca. 462–477 CE). Hence, Hari Ṣeṇa's empire had become indeed very big. He almost controlled from Vidarbha to Konkan, from the Narmada-Tapti belt to the Krishna River. The dates and events are from Singh (2020a, pp. 25–26, 37).

<sup>47</sup> Spink (2014, p. xii), Singh (2012b, p. 46), (2014, pp. 135–144).

<sup>48</sup> From the Type DC2bii to Type DCW2b (Plates 3, 5.12–32).

<sup>49</sup> The aspect has already been recognised, vide Spink (2009, pp. 26–28), Weiner (1977, pp. 110–111), Singh (2012b, pp. 56–59, 95–99, 161–166), and Brancaccio (2018, p. 62).

venture to make the *conversion* was begun and executed in Cave 11 (Plate 6.2).<sup>50</sup> The planners of that cave were in such a great hurry that they ended up spoiling the work. They had actually found a way how to do the conversion; how to essentially *retrofit* a sanctum in a dormitory. Theoretically the solution was easy: just enlarge a rear cell to make it a sanctum. But, practically, it was not so easy, as they evidently messed up the work. Everything had gone so bad in the process that the work had to be halted. The stupa, the ambulatory, and the sanctum chamber was never completed according to the plan that was in place at the time, i.e. conversion from Type DC2bii to DCW2b (Plates 3, 5.16, 6.2).

The fiasco would have been watched, of course, by everybody at the site. Therefore, the planners of Cave 16 intelligently took time to figure out how exactly to go about the process of *adding* a sanctum with a proper stupa/*cetiya*. The situation here was that it was a much bigger hall requiring an equally large sanctum, which could not have been achieved by simply modifying a rear cell like it was attempted in Cave 11. Over here it required a much larger space, which were all unfortunately occupied by as many as three central cells in the rear wall (Plate 6.6.c). The cell doorways had already been excavated. Even the interiors of the cells were scooped out to some extent or the other. How exactly to add a sanctum in this scenario would definitely have been a baffling question. But it had to be done, more so because it was the Prime Minister's munificence. Therefore, pausing the work on the rear cells, the planners took a breather and shifted the attention to complete some of the other things in the edifice. There was so much else to be done when you wanted to convert a dormitory into a temple. Everything had to be redesigned. Most importantly the paintings were now required.

During the period when the work on the rear part of the hall was halted (since late 465 CE), many new ideas had cropped up. The latest was the antechamber of the Bāgh Cave 2. It had become a new task for everybody to re-think towards how to add, now, a shrine antechamber. It was simply not possible in many caves wherein the sancta had already been excavated to some extent or the other, namely, Ajanta caves 11, Dharashiva 2 and 3, and Mahād 1 (Plate 6.2-4). Whereas for the planners of our Ajanta Cave 16, it could have been somehow feasible, because they had incidentally waited for about a year.

So, now in the late 466 CE, the planners of our Cave 16 began the work on the antechamber. The antechamber is nowhere to be seen today (Plates 5.14, 6.6). Its existence was first detected by Spink.<sup>51</sup> One might also be able to detect it from the excellent floor plan by Burgess (Plate 6.6). However, a detailed inspection of the *in situ* evidence is indispensable to properly detect the antechamber, which remains obliterated beneath the later changes. So, the plan at the time was to excavate a *caityagrha*<sup>52</sup> following the excavation of an antechamber.

<sup>50</sup> Spink (2014, p. 463). Singh's earlier study (2014, pp. 315–317) on the conversion process in Cave 11 may be valid to an extent. However, his assumption that the shrine Buddha was planned and executed before the stupa is incorrect in view of the observations recorded in our Plate 6.2.

<sup>51</sup> Spink (2007, pp. 193–197).

<sup>52</sup> *Caityagrha* would have been one of the names of the stupa sanctum just like *cetiya* was the name in the days of Indrāgnidatta (Nasik Cave 17 inscription mentioned earlier). The difference now would have been purely

For excavating the antechamber, the three central cells on the rear wall of our Cave 16 had to be surrendered. The adaptation work was difficult to say the least. The masons had to leave the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> cells untouched. It were the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> cells that had to be modified into the shrine antechamber (Plate 6.6.c). But, the impediments were the cell doorways. They had already been defined. Even the interiors were excavated to some extent. So, the challenge here was not simply how to excavate a large antechamber befitting the large hall, which was appropriately called by a name ending in “-viśāla” (grand/huge).<sup>53</sup> This challenge could have been met by merging the cells. The real challenge was to figure out how the antechamber could be provided with pillars like it was in Bāgh Cave 2. How to do that from the extant rock between the cells’ doorways? As it turned out, they ultimately found a way to do it. They did it so cleverly that these adaptations remained undetected in the scholarship. Even while inspecting the site it would not be easy to detect it unless one spends many weeks probing every inch and meditating upon the circumstances. Fortunately, it can be detected in the good plan by Burgess if one had sharp eyes especially trained to read the plans of the rock-cut architecture.

After having defined the antechamber pillars the masons began to scoop out the rock for creating the antechamber space. This was all being done in late 466 CE. It would barely have been a few weeks of work, and the antechamber was still not fully revealed; it was only *half* done when something terrible seems to have happened; an incident that seems to have applied a sudden break to all the works that were happening in all of Varāhadeva’s caves.<sup>54</sup>

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linguistic, for Sanskrit had taken over Prakrit in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. We know the fact from epigraphy and textual sources. For a corpus of the Ajanta inscriptions, vide Cohen (Spink 2006, pp. 273–339); for the expanded corpus of the Vākāṭaka inscriptions, vide Shastri (1997); for a list of some architectural terms from the Ajanta inscriptions, vide Singh (2016a, below “Architectural lexicons of Ajañṭhā”); for a list of the architectural terms from the Kānherī inscriptions, vide Gokhale (1991, p. 157); for the other inscriptions of the contemporary times, vide Mirashi (1955).

Apart from epigraphy, the prevalence of Sanskrit is also attested by the literary sources of the Ajanta paintings. Roughly 54% of all the painted narratives of Ajanta (belonging to the earlier and the later phase) have the nearest versions in the MSV and other literary sources. These sources are either in Sanskrit or in translations (Chinese, Tibetan, Mongolian, Khotanese, and Tocharian B) from the Sanskrit originals. The fact is revealed more clearly by the studies of Schlingloff (2013), (1999), and Zin (1998), (2000). These studies catalyzed new documentation efforts. For a *concise bibliography* of the nearest textual sources of the 15 narratives of Ajanta Cave 1, vide Singh (2017). It also has a *comprehensive* photo documentation of the extant scenes of the 15 narratives of Cave 1. For an *abridged* photo documentation and *short summaries* of the narratives of Ajanta caves 1, 2, 16, and 17, vide (Singh 2019).

<sup>53</sup> Ajanta Cave 16 inscription, verse 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*” (Mirashi 1963, pp. 109, 111).

<sup>54</sup> It is well-known from the donative inscriptions of the Ajanta Cave 16, verse 30 (Mirashi 1963, pp. 109, 111) and that of the Ghaṭotkacha cave, v. 18 (ibid. pp. 117, 119) that these edifices were being patronized by the Prime Minister Varāhadeva. What has escaped the attention of the scholars is the plausibility that the development, or the re-development, of the Mahāḍ Cave 1 (Plates 5.13, 6.4) might also have been authorized by Varāhadeva. The older and incomplete cave of ca. 3<sup>rd</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE (my conjectural dating) was now taken up for *completion* by the new master in the late 466 CE. Mahāḍ was located in the ancient Aparānta country near the Trikūṭa Mountains. Aparānta was being ruled by Dahrasena who, as suggested elsewhere, had been subordinated by Hari Ṣeṇa just a few years ago in 462 CE (Singh 2020a, pp. 25–26). Dahrasena was now ruling Aparānta as a vassal king of

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The unfortunate event was nowhere in or nearby Ajanta. It was not in the Deccan. It happened in other countries. The Alchon kings<sup>55</sup> led by Mahā-Śāhi Khingila whose date as a warlord may be ascribed from 440 to 492–496 CE had been attacking India.<sup>56</sup> They were in federation and ruled different regions. They had all been across the Jhelum so far. Skandagupta (r. 455–469<sup>57</sup>) had repulsed them a decade ago. But, now, after a decade they seem to have regathered the strength and created even bigger armies of unstoppable warriors. Some of the Alchons had already intruded into the Sutlej region while the others were aiming to raid central India and the Narmada regions.

The Alchons were a branch of the Iranian Hūns.<sup>58</sup> As mentioned earlier, the Hephthalites had pushed them out from the Greater Gandhāra region in ca. 465 CE. So, forced by the Hephthalites they were marching towards India to loot and occupy new and more

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what must have been a unified and extended Vākāṭaka Empire. So, it is hardly surprising if Varāhadeva had visited Aparānta, and then Mahād over there, which still reverberates with natural beauty. Mahād is situated along a creek that used to bring the merchant ships, especially during the high tides. There was an ancient Buddhist settlement dating back to the pre-Christian Era, which supported the rock-cut monasteries over there. One of the rock-cut edifices was this abandoned *maṭapa* (Skr. *maṇḍapa*, pavilion for congregation). For some reason it was never completed in its times. When Varāhadeva likely visited Mahād prior to ca. 466 CE, he would have taken notice of the old, incomplete, and abandoned Cave 1. The idea of converting the dormitories or halls into temples was already the latest thing. He was himself involved in such conversion plans in his Ajanta Cave 16 (Plates 5.14) and the Ghaṭotkacha cave (Plates 5.25, 6.6). Thus, he would have been more than happy to find the large, but alas, abandoned *maṭapa*. It was as if waiting all these centuries to be converted into a temple. The attraction was not just for devotional reason. It would also have been quite economical to do so, for the edifice had been largely completed in the antiquity (Phase I). The remainder or the additional tasks for the *completion* would have entailed only a modest budget, a smaller task force, and much shorter time schedule. All that was needed was to complete the porch, excavate the sanctum sanctorum, the monastic cells, and apply a decoration programme that was the latest at the time. Accordingly, when the work started the new layout, decoration themes, pillar designs, capitals, and other motifs had to match with the latest fashions being developed in Ajanta, more particularly, in Varāhadeva's own caves, i.e. Ajanta Cave 16 and Ghaṭotkacha cave. These are exactly what have been noticed in Mahād Cave 1, vide Dhavalikar (1984, pp. 46–47). However, Dhavalikar did not probe further as to how the concordant features might have come about.

<sup>55</sup> The following names are now known: Khingila, Javūkha, Mehama, Lakhāna, Toramāṇa, Devaputra-Śāhi, Śārada-Śāhi, Sādavīkha, and Mihirakula. For a corpus of the Alchon coinage, vide (CoinIndia n.d.). Some of the kings are also named in the Schøyen copper scroll inscription (Melzer 2006, p. 274), (Bakker 2018, p. 6), Singh (2020a, pp. 51–53).

<sup>56</sup> The present and the subsequent paragraphs may be read with a study by Singh (2020a, pp. 20–43). That study includes in a tabular format numerous revised dates of various events. The study is an attempt to formulate some logical event reconstructions. It attempts to resynchronise the chronologies and events associated with the Alchon Hūns, Early Guptas, Vākāṭakas, Trikūṭakas, the Deccani rock-cut monuments, Gandhāra, and Kucha. Through this reference, I only wish to avoid the duplication of copious evidence given in the notes and references of that study. This would also save nearly two thousand words here.

<sup>57</sup> “[Skandagupta’s] death without issue probably took place in or shortly after Gupta Era 148 (467–468 CE), the last year given on his coins” (Willis 2005, p. 141). He may have been killed in the Hunnic battles of ca. 469 CE (Singh 2020a, pp. 32–33).

<sup>58</sup> According to the widely accepted classification by Göbl (1967), the “Iranian Hūns” (385–600 CE) had four branches or migrations: the Kidarites (385–440 CE), the Alchons (430/440–600 CE), Nezak kings, and Hephthalites

prosperous lands. The *primus inter pairs* of the Alchon federation was Mahā-Śāhi Khingila also mentioned in the Schøyen copper scroll inscription.<sup>59</sup> He is known from many coins.<sup>60</sup> In their last invasions, about ten years ago, the Alchons had already perhaps killed Ghaṭotkachagupta (r. 416–448–455) who was the Gupta Emperor then. Afterwards, Skandagupta had become the emperor. He had immediately repulsed the enemies, and pushed them back towards the Indus. The victorious Skandagupta had subsequently “restored the peace” in his lands and resurrected the “fallen fortunes” of the Gupta dynasty. He had appointed powerful governors on the north-western and western frontiers to fend off the *mlecchas*, and “Hūṅs.” These words used in his inscriptions seem to refer to the different Alchons tribes. For the last one decade (*ca.* 455–465 CE) the Alchons had occupied Greater Gandhāra, Sindh, Western Punjab, and the regions south of the Hindu Kush. But, since the last few years, the Hephthalites had wedged a war on them. They pushed them out from Greater Gandhāra and western Sindh in around 465 CE. Being chased by the Hephthalites, the Alchons migrated eastwards and now by the end of *ca.* 466 CE they were intruding further into the shrunk Gupta Empire from the western sides. The forces of Skandagupta were finding it increasingly hard to resist the “formidable” enemies.

However, the Deccan was in absolute peace at the time. But the peace could have been ruptured any time if Skandagupta was to fail like his predecessor Ghaṭotkachagupta. Therefore, it was natural for the Vākāṭaka Hari Ṣeṇa with the capital in Vatsgulma (Washim district, Maharashtra) to stand on high alert. We cannot rule out the possibility that struggling Skandagupta even asked for Hari Ṣeṇa’s help. After all the two emperors had matrimonial relations, and they had many other shared interests too. Hari Ṣeṇa had, in the last few years, expanded his kingdom as noted earlier. In some ways, he had become no less powerful than Skandagupta himself. There was no reason or rhyme for Hari Ṣeṇa to look the other way when the enemy was knocking on the door; and the door was Skandagupta himself. The door needed to be protected at all costs. It seems very likely that Hari Ṣeṇa made a prudent decision to rise to the support of Skandagupta. There is a high likelihood that he ordered his Prime Minister, Varāhadeva, to prepare the defences. It seems that Varāhadeva was also with the military generals when his armies marched towards the western borders to fight under the flag of Skandagupta.

Varāhadeva was not perhaps ready for such a sudden programme. Otherwise, he would not have initiated the work on the antechamber of his Ajanta Cave 16 and on the sanctum of his Mahāḍ Cave 1. The work in his Ghaṭotkacha cave was still underway in the front areas of the hall. All such works had to be now suddenly halted. After all, the raiders were such “formidable” foes. There was no guarantee of the outcome of the battle. Defeat was not the option. A defeated prime minister, if still alive, had no reason or rhyme to return to the capital, for the capital would not survive anyway, and nobody could tell what would happen to the women and queens. So, Varāhadeva would now have been staring at

(440s–565 CE). “They are clearly to be distinguished,” say Kurbanov (2013, pp. 369–370), (2014, pp. 317–318) and Zeimal (1996, p. 126). For an overview, vide Kurbanov (2013, pp. 370–377).

<sup>59</sup> Line 38 (Melzer 2006, pp. 258–260, 266, 272), (Bakker 2018, p. 6), Singh (2020a, table 2).

<sup>60</sup> For a corpus of Khingila’s coins, vide (CoinIndia n.d., <http://coinindia.com/galleries-khingila.html>).

the situation that his three fabulous cave temples might not be able to see the light of the day. He, therefore, ordered the halt of all the architectural works and evaluated whether his ultimate wish could somehow still be fulfilled. The ultimate wish was, needless to mention, the consecration of the stupas or *cetiya*s. It was what ultimately mattered in a temple. Thus, it appears, that he ordered the masons out and called the sculptors in.

In the Ghaṭotkacha cave (Plate 5.25) the sculptors had a seemingly impossible task, for the excavation of the hall had just begun before the work was halted in late 466 CE. Only the front aisle was exposed of the interior. Where and how to carve a *cetiya*ghara would have been the ghost question. There was no possibility of getting to the expected location of the sanctum sanctorum, since the hall would have taken many more years to complete. But, there was no time. So, it appears that the planners made a radical decision. They carved out a large *cetiya*, in relief, on the right and rear of the front aisle.<sup>61</sup> It was indeed the oddest place for a *cetiya* sanctum in the entire history of the Buddhist architecture. The oddity had to be done because there was no alternative.

What were the scenarios in the other projects of Varāhadeva? The appropriated Mahāḍ Cave 1 (Plate 6.4) has no antechamber. It indicates that the large stupa sanctum had already being scooped out well before the idea of the antechamber had become known in the Deccan. The excavation of the sanctum had started some months ago. Now, the masons were already shaping a *central block* from which they wanted to reveal the stupa.<sup>62</sup>

The idea of the central block probably came from Dharashiva Cave 2 (Plate 6.3), 3, and 4 (Burgess 1878: pl. VII.1, VIII.1), which were a Jain edifics. Dharashiva is situated some 330 kilometre east of Mahāḍ. It was about 110 kilometres closer than Ajanta was. The proximity and a host of comon features support the plausibility that the planners of Dharashiva caves 2, 3, and 4 were closely following what was being done in Bāgh, Ajanta, and Mahāḍ. They too now needed to add sancta to the dormitories. In those sancta, whether they wanted at the time the Jain stupas or the images of the gods is difficult to tell. In the ancient times the Jains too were involved in the stupa worship as is learnt from Kankali Tila, Mathura.<sup>63</sup> Even today the stupas or memorials are constructed for the deceased Jain *munis*.<sup>64</sup>

Whether for the stupa or for the three-dimensional image of the Jain God Pārśvanāth Śeṣphaṇī that is extant *in situ*<sup>65</sup> there occurred the need to first excavate a cubical shaft or block in the centre of the sanctum. They did not evidently prefer the other option that was for relief sculptures on the sancta's rear walls. From the cubical shaft or central block<sup>66</sup> the masons and sculptors were to carve out the stupa or Jina sculptures. In other

<sup>61</sup> Singh (2012b, fig. 34).

<sup>62</sup> It was Spink who first detected the central block in some Ajanta caves; vide, e.g. Spink (2014, p. 65).

<sup>63</sup> Smith (1901, pls. III–IV), Porwal (2016), etc.

<sup>64</sup> Flügel (2010).

<sup>65</sup> Buress (1878, pl. III).

<sup>66</sup> It came to be known as the *central pillar* in the modern studies when the idea travelled to Kucha from the Deccan in about 475 CE (Plates 1, 9, 10). For a conjectural reconstruction of the events that led to the transportation of the ideas, vide Singh (2020a, pp. 33–38).



words, two central blocks were created in these two caves. The two examples appear to be the first known set of the central blocks / pillars in the entire history of the world's rock-cut architecture.<sup>67</sup>

When the knowledge of the central block reached Mahāḍ and Ajanta, it was found to be a useful idea. It was perceived as a secure procedure for the sculptors who were meant to carve the stupas in Mahāḍ Cave 1 and Ajanta Cave 16. The central block was essentially a *procedural* item that, at least theoretically, eliminated the risk of distortions in shaping the stupa. They had already taken a lesson from the errors committed in Ajanta Cave 11 (Plate 6.2) where no such procedure was devised or followed. Accordingly, the central block was perhaps the first thing the masons started to block out inside the sanctum of Mahāḍ Cave 1 (Plates 5.13, 6.4). That was the case in late 466 CE just before Varāhadeva had decided to halt the architectural works before departing with the army. However, what the patron now wanted was an expedient and speedy work to create the stupa within the shortest possible time. Perhaps, every single day counted. We should not be surprised if the sculptors were granted not more than a week or two for the new priority. So, the sculptors moved in to carve out the stupa from the central block in the Mahāḍ Cave 1.

Back to Ajanta, some 450 kilometres to the northeast, what was the scenario in Cave 16 (Plates 5.14, 6.6)? As noted earlier, the antechamber was still only *half* done at the time (late 466 CE). What was worse, it was supposed to be a large antechamber for what would certainly have been planned as a large sanctum befitting the large hall; the sanctum's envisaged dimensions would not have been less than the one in Mahāḍ Cave 1 (6.10 x 5.19 m). The fact that the antechamber was never completed here as per the ongoing plans indicates just how urgent was the scenario. There was no time. Completing the antechamber, then creating the central block, and then defining the stupa in a large sanctum would have meant a work of many months. Whereas the compulsion was that the whole thing needed to be done within a few weeks. Faced with such an urgency it seems that there was no choice but to drastically cut down on the plans. If a sacrifice was needed the poor antechamber was the candidate, for the sanctum or the stupa could not have been sacrificed. Therefore, Varāhadeva made a tough decision and ordered for the cancellation of all the further work on the antechamber. He now ordered that the sanctum with the central block must be excavated right away. Hence, the work on the central block began at once. However, there was no end to the traumas. There are factors suggesting that even before the masons could complete the work on the central block, the sculptors were rushed in to simultaneously start carving the stupa from the parts of the central block that were being revealed. There would have been naturally the thinking that if the work was completed fast, the stupa could be consecrated before the patron left for the battlefield. In the devotional context this would have been very much desirable. Unfortunately, however, no matter how fast they expedited, the deadline

<sup>67</sup> Nothing so far has come to light to suggest that there was any central block or "central pillar" in the Kucha caves or any other Central Asian or Chinese caves by this date, i.e. ca. 466 CE.

could not be achieved; perhaps Varāhadeva's deadline to leave for the battlefield came sooner than later. The Alchons were knocking at the door. It could only have been for this reason that neither the Mahād Cave 1 stupa nor the Ajanta Cave 16 stupa was ever completed. The planned consecration never happened (at the time). Varāhadeva left, and all the work had to be aborted.

Thus it was that the antechamber of Ajanta Cave 16 was never completed. It was cancelled by the patron himself. The plans were abandoned *halfway*. That is why we have to call it the *half antechamber*.<sup>68</sup>

\* \* \*

The battle it seems did not last very long. Within a few months when it was early 467 CE the joint military from the Indian side, led evidently by Skandagupta, was successful in repulsing the enemies. The Alchons had been pushed back again. They retreated again. However, they had already lost Gandhāra to the Hephthalites. In retreat, they were now confined between the Hindu Kush Mountains and Jhelum. They had been pushed so far back is learned from the later art history of the caves. Because after this date, there was a great rejuvenation and reinvigoration of the work in the caves. That would not have happened if the Alchons had remained anywhere close to Sutlej, Narmada, or Tapti Rivers. After the battle, the Emperor Skandagupta promptly proclaimed the victory in the Bhitari pillar inscription. He named the "Hūṅs" as the most "formidable" enemies.<sup>69</sup>

When Varāhadeva returned, he was probably a changed man. After all no such victory ever comes without a price. Only he would have known what kind of losses he had suffered or what kind of bloodbaths he saw. He had perhaps realised very well that the Hūṅs were very different kind of warriors. It was not like the wars among the Indian kings where some kind of rules or ethics were generally followed even in the battlefield, e.g. it was not generally the rule to kill women, children, or old people. The Buddhist India would have had a slightly different temperament influenced to whatever degree by the doctrine of non-violence and many other ethics of conduct. But, the Alchons, it appears, had no such rule whatsoever. They came from a very different worldview. They persistently attacked in waves; they came repeatedly, and were not ashamed to run away in defeat. Therefore, it was only a matter of time when they would come back again for yet another series of attacks. Perhaps it was due to such fears that the ongoing plans in Varāhadeva's caves were seriously curtailed. Whereas the work in the other caves patronised by other patrons

<sup>68</sup> These factors are not found in Spink's studies. Therefore, his explanations and conclusions are different. He was right to deduce that there must have been a war-like scenario, but in his neglect to look into the Hūṅ angle, he ended up manufacturing a Rṣika-Aśmaka war theory for which we are not provided with any credible evidence except the disputed interpretation of the *Daśakumāracarita* by Daṇḍin, the 6<sup>th</sup>–early 7<sup>th</sup> century ancient Sanskrit writer of prose romances. For Spink's rather extensive and repetitious elaborations vide, e.g. (Spink 2005, ch. 4, 6, 10), (2009, pp. 53–65, 80–85), (2014, pp. xii–xiv, 1–11).

<sup>69</sup> J.F. Fleet (1888, No. 13, 52–56), Chakrabarti (1996, p. 191), Zeimal (1996, p. 127).

remained largely unaffected. This was before the so-called “recession” (*ca.* 469–471 CE) and “hiatus” (*ca.* 472 CE).<sup>70</sup> It was still the late 466–early 467 CE.<sup>71</sup>

What happened next, and what developments were happening in the other caves, is not described here. That would be outside the scope of the article.<sup>72</sup> We will have to foreclose the story by adding that the fate of Varāhadeva was never going to be alright. Because there came again a time when he was forced to cancel the whole idea of the stupa. He did it in spite of the fact that the stupas were already begun to be excavated in his *sancta sanctorum*. What is even more remarkable, he was not the only one to do such bizarre things. It was a pattern that was seen and followed in every cave throughout India wherever any rock-cut excavations were going on (Plates 5, 6, 7, 8).

What is worse, the *sancta* of his Ajanta Cave 16, Ghaṭotkacha cave, and Mahāḍ Cave 1 were to remain practically abandoned for many years when no development at all took place.<sup>73</sup> Then in *ca.* 477 CE Varāhadeva finally got back to complete the *sancta*. However, the idea now was not to complete the incomplete stupa, but to carve out colossal Buddha images from the same blocks of stone.<sup>74</sup> The age of the stupa had gone by. The ones that were excavated could not have been thrown away. But, it was clearly a different age within a decade or so. No one wanted stupas after *ca.* 468 CE; everybody wanted the Buddha image.<sup>75</sup> The world had changed long ago. It was now the world of the Mūlasarvāstivādins who insisted on the cult of the Buddha image, Bodhisattvayāna, *avadānas*, Sanskrit texts, and a host of other complex mythologies that had been alien to the older Śrāvakayānists, i.e. the stupa worshippers.

It was in such melting pots that the earliest two and a half antechambers had taken the births.

## Conclusion

Thus, we have seen how an otherwise simple art historical subject of the shrine antechamber of the Indian temple architecture is capable to reveal many unknown facets and some complex and hidden aspects of history. Our investigation has reconfirmed that

<sup>70</sup> Vide Spink’s time chart and reconstruction of events (2014, pp. xii–xiii). I call it Rupture II (*ca.* 469–472 CE) under my broader timeline of the Indian rock-cut architecture (Plates 1–2).

<sup>71</sup> Varāhadeva’s fear was not misplaced, for the enemy did return within two years. They struck again in *ca.* 469 CE with such a brutal force that Skandagupta was plausibly killed in the war along with many other kings (Singh 2020a, pp. 32–33).

<sup>72</sup> Spink has described the chronological development of all the Ajanta caves in his volume 5 (Spink 2007). For a somewhat different account of the Ajanta caves 1, 2, 16, and 17, vide Singh (2012b); for Ajanta Cave 26, vide Singh (2012a); and for the Ajanta caves Lower 6, 7, 8, 11, 19, 25, 26, and 27, vide Singh (2014). The list is by no means complete.

<sup>73</sup> Spink’s Time Chart (2014, xii).

<sup>74</sup> For the photos of Ajanta Cave 16 Buddha, vide Singh (2012b, figs. 191, 196) and Spink (2009, fig. 98), (2014, 88, pl. 23). For the photo of Mahāḍ Cave 1 Buddha, vide Dhavalikar (1984, pl. XXXIb).

<sup>75</sup> Vide, Spink’s chart of Buddha’s features in the *sancta* (2014, pp. 459–460, 463).

it was in Nasik Cave 17 that the first known attempt of creating a shrine antechamber was made in circa 125 CE. We found that this innovation was rather imported to India from Bactria. The import, however, did not have immediate repercussions, for it was soon forgotten for the next few centuries.

However, in the fifth century CE when there was a resurgence of the rock-cut architecture in central India and the Deccan there were being made many rock-cut edifices, which did not originally have any provision for a shrine antechamber. Then, it so happened that there took place some serious disturbance in the Greater Gandhāra region. The disturbance kept moving towards the east caused by three of the four main migrations of the Iranian Hūns: the Kidārites, Alchons, and Hephthalites. Due to the wars, the monks fled from Greater Gandhāra and migrated to central India and the Deccan when it was still very peaceful there during the rule of the Early Guptas and Vākāṭaka Hari Ṣeṇa. The monks brought with them new ideas of art and architecture from Gandhāra to central India and the Deccan. Among the endless array of things that were experimented due to the influx of the ideas there was the re-introduction of the idea of the shrine antechamber.

As a result, the ongoing excavations in many caves of central India and the Deccan were redesigned and many functional and typological changes were implemented. Thus it was that the second known attempt to add a shrine antechamber in a piece of the Indian temple architecture is to be found in Bāgh Cave 2. This attempt may be dated to late 466 CE.

After this date, the third attempt to add a shrine antechamber in a piece of the Indian temple architecture is to be found in the Ajanta Cave 16. That particular shrine antechamber may be dated to late 466 or early 467 CE. However, it was aborted halfway due to the raids by the Alchon Hūns led plausibly by Mahāṣāhi Khingila.

In the course of the investigation we came across some crucial historical dimensions, which call for a rethink of everything else that was happening in the fifth-century South Asia.

**Table 1. Conjectural inauguration dates**

Cave No.	Inauguration of the edifice	Inauguration of antechamber/sanctum
Nasik 17	120	125
Bāgh 4	462	465
Ajanta 11	462	Early 466
Dharashiva 2	462	Mid 466
Mahāḍ 1	3rd–2nd c. BCE	Late 466
Bāgh 2	462	Late 466
Ajanta 16	462	Early 467
Ajanta 6 Lower	462	Early 467

Note: all the dates are expressed in circa and CE unless specified otherwise.

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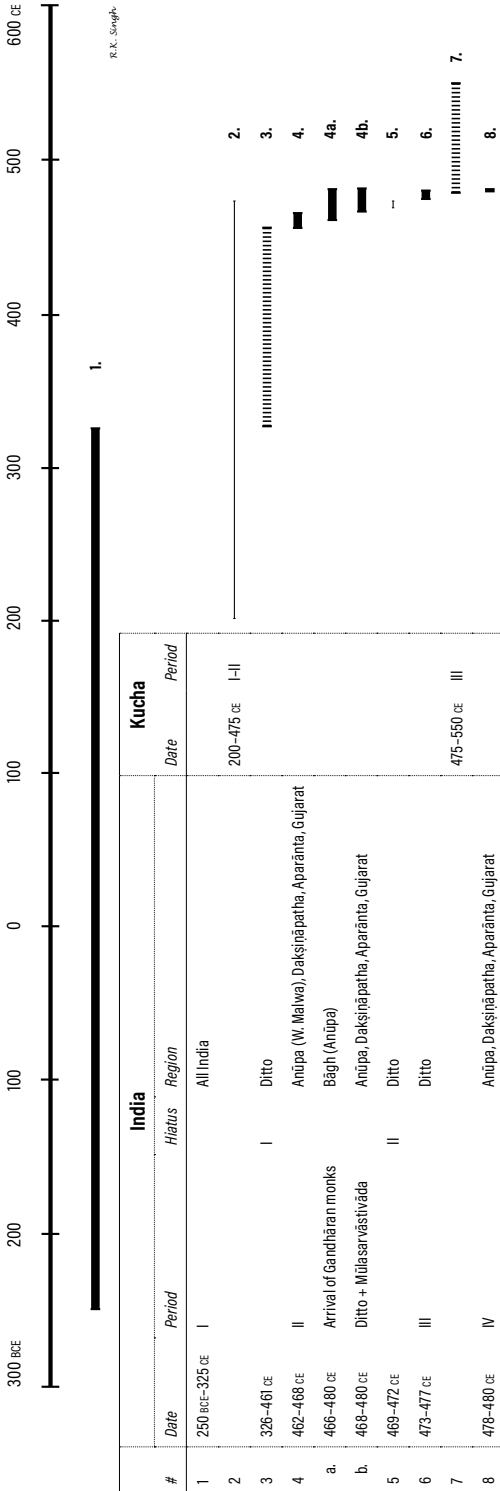
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## PERIODISATION AND TIMELINE OF THE INDIAN ROCK-CUT MONUMENTS VIS À VIS KUCHA. Ca. 250 BCE–ca. 550 CE. Version 2



**PLATE 1.** Revised after Singh (2018, 217). All the dates are in circa and CE unless specified otherwise. **Notes:** —

1. It was the age of Śrāvakaṃvāna when the cetiyaḡharas (temples), maṭapas (congregation halls), lenas (residential halls), and tēpa-cetiyaḡharas (temples-cum-residence) were made.

2. Ca. '200' CE (Howard and Vignato 2014, 107). During Periods I–II there prevailed the Dharmagupta School (ibid. 156, 164).

3. Buddhism eclipsed. Except some non-buddhist caves of Udaygiri no other rock-cut monument can be securely assigned to 326–461 CE.

4. Renaissance in the rock-cut architecture. Initially, it was all about the stupa- / cetiya-worship and Pali Buddhism; later transition to the image worship and Mūlasarvāstivāda. It was the age of the cetiyaḡharas (cetiya-shrines), layanas (residential halls), and layana-cetiyaḡharas (temple-cum-residences). The age was cradled by Vākāṭaka Hari Ṣeṭa. Concerned monuments: Elephanta 2–4, Lonādi; Phase I of Ellora 27, 204; Maṅḡapeswara,

Banofī (Phase I), Bāgh caves 4, 2; later Ajanta caves: Ghāṭokaca; Mahād 1; and Dhārāshīva 2 and 3 (Jain). Cetiya planned in the sancta for which the procedural Central Block was devised. Originally, only two layouts were designed: one for worship and congregation, another for dwelling and congregation.

4(a). Further arrival in Bāgh of the displaced monks from Baetria and the Greater Gandhāra region who were disturbed after the Hephthalites' war on the Alchons in ca. 465 CE.

4(b). The arrival of the Gandhāran monks in Ajanta and other sites of the Deccan and south-western India leading to a sea change: introduction of the image cult, Bodhisarvāna, Avalokiteśvara cult; the plans for the stupas/cetiya discarded for the Buddha images; the jātakas were replaced by the avadānas, introduction of parmirvāna theme, Hāriti, and MSY scriptures, etc.

5. The Alchon Hūns led by Manāṣāṅki Khingira (r. 440 to 492–496) advanced into central India during 469 CE. A coalition of the Gupta- Vākāṭakas repulsed them. Next attack came in ca. 472 wherein many Indian kings were killed. Finally Vākāṭaka Hari Ṣeṭa repulsed them. But the scenarios led to Hiatus II after

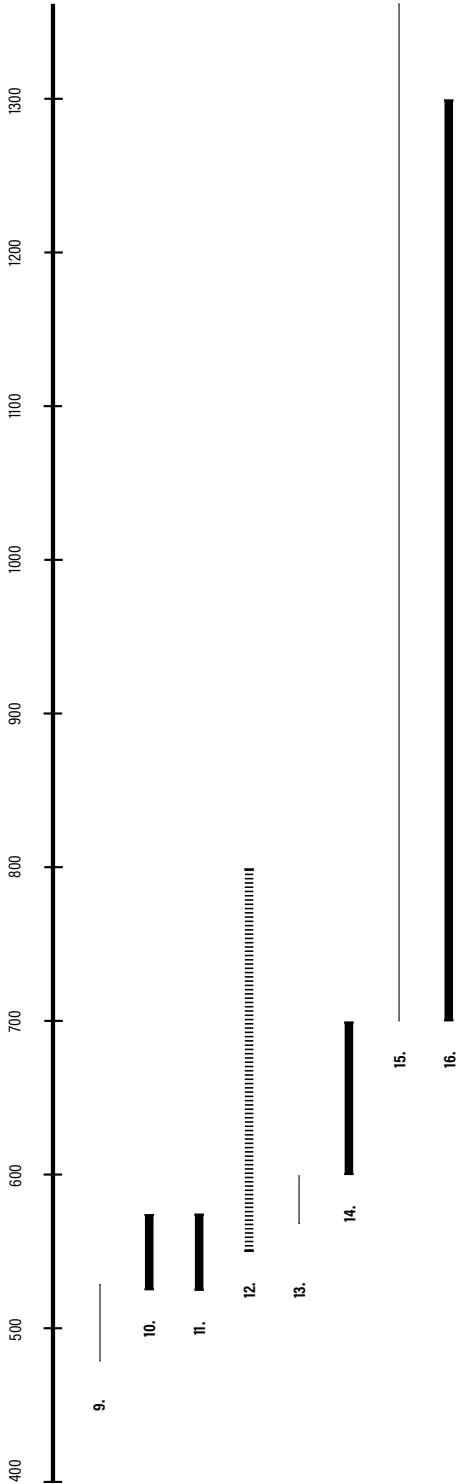
a 'recession' in patronage. The monks had dispersed. Some migrated to far countries including Kucha.

6. Hari Ṣeṭa was victorious. He restored peace. New renaissance-like activities developed for about 5 years. But, the Alchons attacked again in ca. 477 CE. Gupta Emperor Kumāragupta II and Vākāṭaka Emperor Hari Ṣeṭa were killed inter alios. India was trampled. Patronage was cut off. The sites were abandoned. Some Buddha shrines were expeditiously completed. Priority accorded to the shrine sculptures and the consecration.

7. The monks who had fled from the Deccan during Hiatus II (469–472), reached Kucha. They introduced the Gandhāran plus the Deccani ideas, viz. Bodhisarvāna, quadrangular sanctum in residential caves, multi-functional layouts, the Central Block with the Buddha image, the quadrangular corridors, MSY scriptures in Sanskrit, the avadānas, and the parmirvāna motif. These resulted into what the German school calls the '1st Style' paintings, or what Vignato (2014, 5) calls the 'A Style paintings. The 'central pillar' was also formulated in the Kucheian Period III.

8. Itinerant monks, nuns, and laity donated 'intrusive' images.

PERIODISATION AND TIMELINE OF THE INDIAN ROCK-CUT MONUMENTS VIS À VIS KUCHA. Ca. 481-1300 CE. Version 2



#	India				Kucha		
	Date	Period	Hiatus	Religion	Region	Date	Period
9.	481-525 CE		III		All India		
10.	525-575 CE	V-A		Mulasarvāstvāda	Aurangabad (4 caves), Gujarat		
11.	525-575 CE	V-B		Pāśupati Śaivism	Dakṣiṇāpatha, Aparānta		
12.				Mulasarvāstvāda		550-800 CE	IV
13.	575-600 CE		IV	For all	All India		
14.	600-700 CE	VI		Buddhism, Hinduism	Dakṣiṇāpatha (mainly Ellora), Aurangabad, M.P., Karnataka, Tamil Nadu		
15.	700-present		V	Buddhism	All India		
16.	700-1300 CE	VII		Hinduism & Jainism	Dakṣiṇāpatha (mainly Ellora) including Karnataka, Andhra, Tamil Nadu		

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PLATE 2. Revised after Singh (2018, 217). All the dates are in circa and ce unless specified otherwise.

TAXONOMY OF THE INDIAN BUDDHIST ROCK-CUT ARCHITECTURE. Ca. 250 BCE–ca. 700 CE. Version 2.

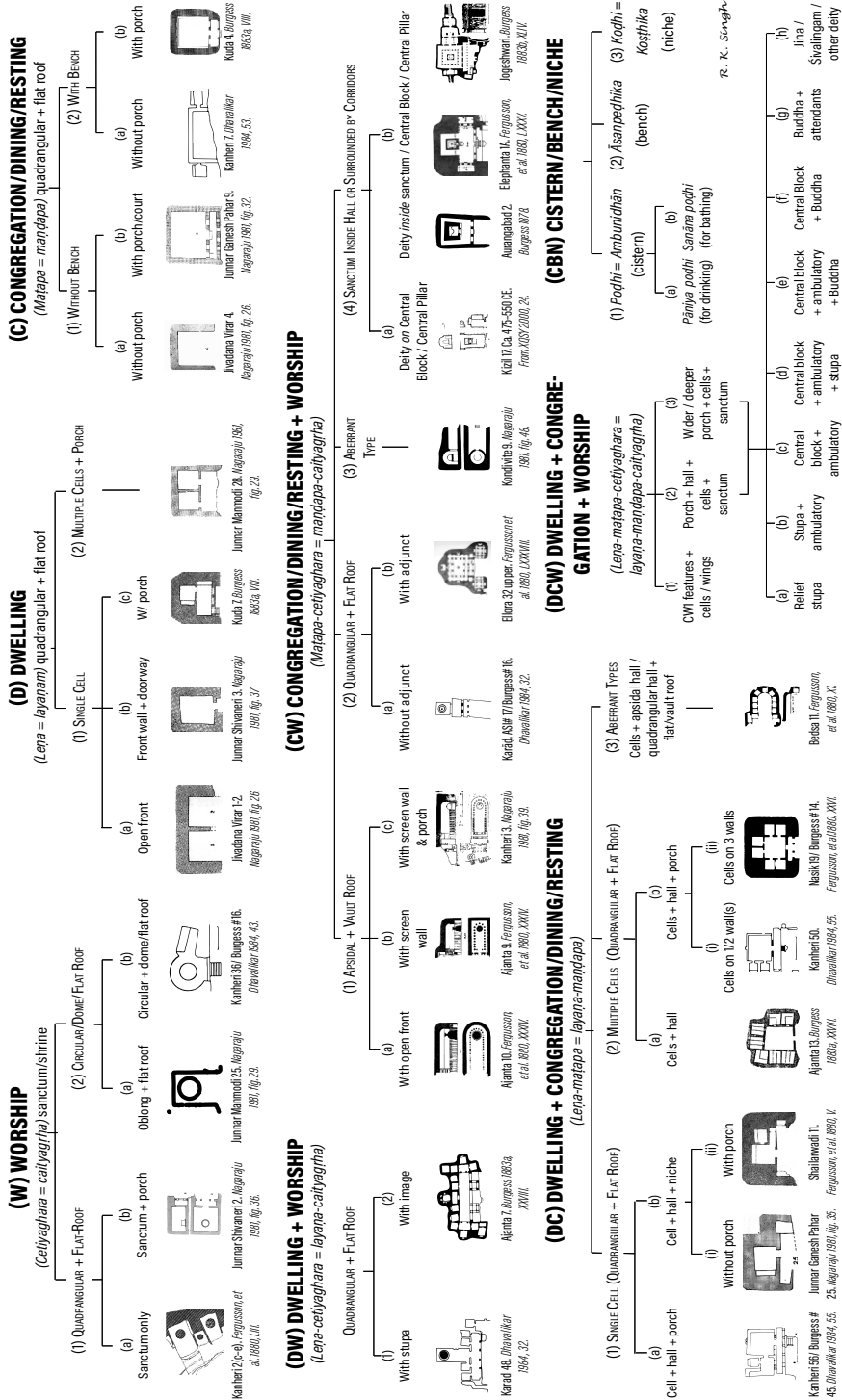
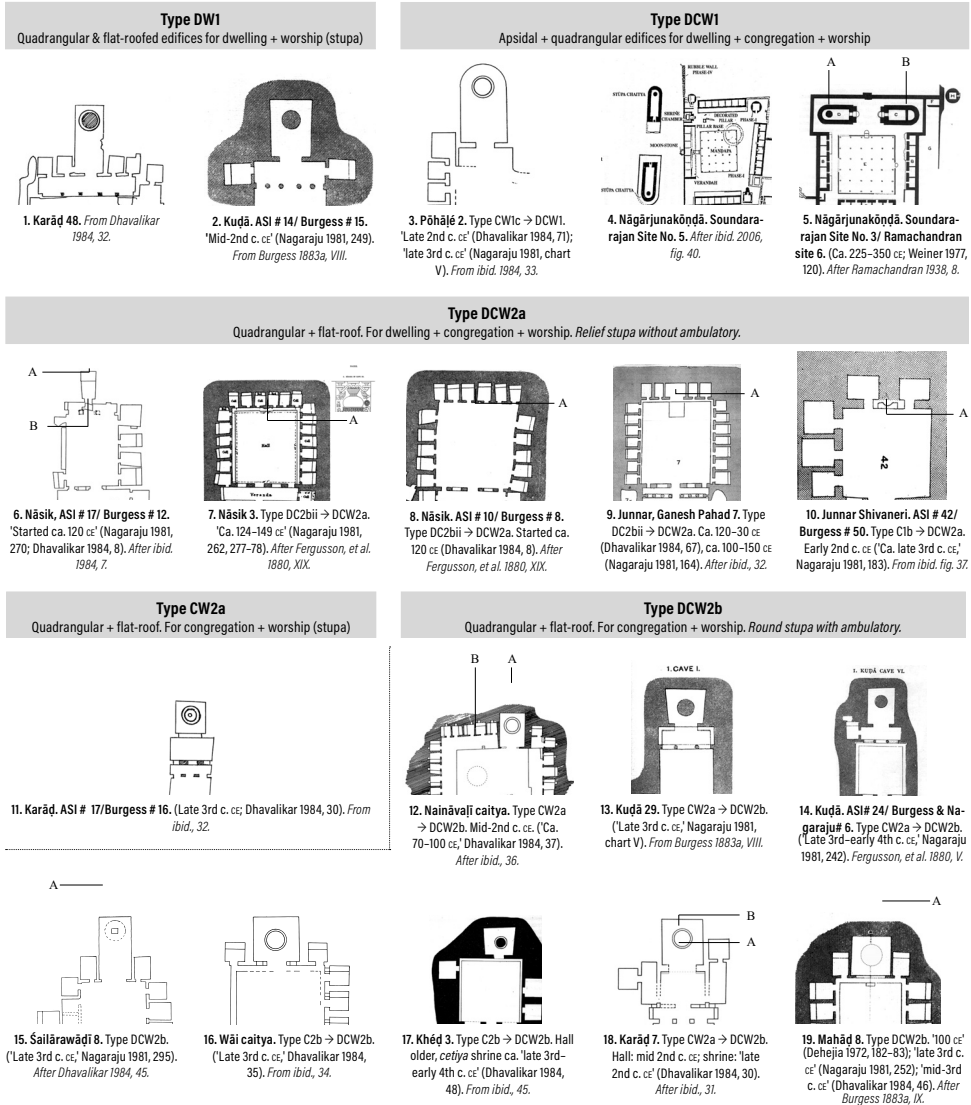


PLATE 3. Revised after Singh (2018, 220); cf. Nagaraju (1981, 68-71). Formula: function > layout > layout variety. The illustrations are random examples. The Indic terms are quoted from or coined after relevant inscriptions. Type CW4 evolved into further varieties, which are outside the scope of the present chart.

**PERIOD I. SOME EARLY MULTIFUNCTIONAL EDIFICES.** The Deccan & Āndhra. Ca. 120–325 CE. Version 2.


**PLATE 4.** Revised after Singh (2018, 223). To be read with 'The Taxonomy of the Indian Rock-Cut Architecture, version 2.' The above multi-functional types were developed during 2nd–3rd c. CE. The cetiya gradually entered into the lenas (dwelling units) and matapas (congregation halls). Figs. 3, 10, 12–14, 17–18: The cells are least likely to have been in the original plan. Figs. 4–5: Structural examples from Nāgārjunakoṅḍā show the multi-functional edifices with a cetiya-shrine, an image-shrine, a congregation hall, and cells for dwelling. Other examples are Site # 2, 5, 9, 24, 38, 78, 85, 97, 105, 106, and 108 (Soundararajan 2006). Figs. 4–5, 15: The circumambulation path seems more like an architectural convention than functional because of the constricted space. Fig. 5. 'B'–A blockage in the ambulatory disallowed circumambulation. Fig. 6: The word 'cetiyaḡhara' is found in the donative inscription. However, the inner shrine was never completed. 'A': A relief cetiya was likely intended. 'B': The first known shrine-antechamber. Figs. 6–10: The relief cetiyas did not permit or require the ambulatory suggesting that circumambulation was not integral to the stupa worship.

**Fig. 7:** 'A': The relief cetiya is inset in the wall suggesting an afterthought. **Fig. 8:** 'A': The relief cetiya projects forth from the wall suggesting prior planning by the time the rear wall was excavated. **Fig. 9:** 'A': One of the Aṣṭavināyakas adapted from the earlier relief cetiya. The shrine doorway has the early Buddhist motif of the elephants carrying lotuses. **Fig. 12:** The edifice had at least two phases. Phase I: the cetiya-shrine 'A' was on the axis of the erstwhile hall. Phase II: The hall was enlarged more to the left than to the right side, and then the benches and cells were carved around the newly created walls. Then, a masonry cetiya, constructed upon a monolithic base, was placed in the newly gained spaces. The purpose of the second stupa might have been to commemorate a deceased monk. **Figs. 13–14:** The shrine-antechamber reappears after about two centuries. **Fig. 18:** 'A': The hall. 'B': The bench seems to have been cut away for the shrine. **Fig. 19:** 'A': The traces of a cetiya on the floor and the well-preserved umbrella in the ceiling. – The author does not necessarily endorse the quoted dates.

PERIODS I-III.

Taxonomy & reclassification of some rock-cut monuments of Ajanta, Bagh, Banoṭī, Dhārāśiva, Ghaṭoṭkaca, and Mahād. Version 2.

PERIOD I. 3rd-2nd c. BCE

**Type CW1.** For worship + congregation.

Apsidal + vault roof  
 CW1a CW1b



1. Ajanta 10. 3rd. c. BCE. From Fergusson, et al. 1880, XXXIV.



2. Ajanta 9. 2nd. c. BCE. From Fergusson, et al. 1880, XXXIV.

**Type D1b.** For dwelling.

Quadrangular + flat roof



3. Ajanta 30. 3rd. c. BCE. Sketch plan by Singh.

**Type DC2a.** For dwelling + congregation.

Quadrangular + flat roof



4. Ajanta 12. 3rd. c. BCE. From Fergusson, et al. 1880, XXVIII.



5. Ajanta 13. 3rd. c. BCE. From Burgess 1883a, XXVII.



6. Ajanta 15A. 3rd. c. BCE. From Nagaraju 1981, fig. 19.

R.K. Singh

PERIOD II. Ca. 462-469 CE.

**Type DCW1**

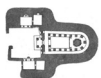
Apsidal + vault.

For worship +

congregation +

dwelling.

Shrine excavation: 463-469



7. Ajanta 19. Type CW1c → DCW1. From Fergusson et al. 1880, XXXVII.



8. Ajanta 26, 25 & 27. Type CW1c → DCW1. Yazdani 1952, 16.



9. Ajanta 29. Ca. 469- ce. Type DCW1 (incomplete). From Spink 2009, fig. 33.

**DCW2b**

With caitya-shrine + ambulatory.

Shrine excavation: 465-466



10. Bāgh 4. From Marshall, et al. 1927, IX.



11. Bāgh 2. From Marshall, et al. 1927, I.



16. Ajanta 11. Type DCW2b → DCW2g. Fergusson et al. 1880, XXVIII.

**DC2bii → DCW2b → -c → -d → -e → -f → -g**

Retrofitted caitya-shrine with Central Block + ambulatory.

Shrine excavation: 466-467



12. Dhārāśiva 2. Type DC2bii → DCW2c → -h. Fergusson et al. 1880, XCIII.



15. Ajanta 6 lower. From Fergusson et al. 1880, XXXII.



18. Ajanta 4. From Fergusson et al. 1880, XLVI.



19. Ajanta 1. From Fergusson et al. 1880, XL.



20. Banoṭī. Sketch plan: R.K. Singh.

**Type DCW2**

Quadrangular + flat-roofed. For dwelling + congregation + worship

**DC2bii → DCW2g**

Plans to retrofit caitya-shrines replaced by Buddha-shrines w/o Central Block & ambulatory.

Shrine excavation: 468-469



21. Ajanta 8. From Jadhav 1987, fig. I-B.



23. Ajanta 7. Type DW2a → DW2 → DCW3g. Burgess 1883a, XXVIII.



25. Ghaṭoṭkaca cave. From Fergusson et al. 1880, LII.



27. Ajanta 6 upper. From Fergusson et al. 1880, XXXII.



22. Ajanta 15. From Burgess 1883a, XXVIII.



24. Ajanta 20. From Burgess 1883a, XXVIII.



26. Ajanta 2. From Fergusson et al. 1880, XLIV.



28. Ajanta 24. From Burgess 1883a, XXXIV.

**DCW2g**

Buddha with attendants.

Shrine excavation: 473-478



33. Aurangabad 3. From Fergusson, et al. 1880, XLVI.



35. Ajanta 14. From Burgess 1883a, XXVIII.



36. Aurangabad 1. Burgess 1878, pl. XL.



34. Ajanta 22. Type CW2a + DCW2g. Spink 2009, fig. 27.



29. Ajanta 27. From Yazdani 1952, 16.



30. Ajanta 5. From Spink 2009, fig. 8.



31. Ajanta 23. From Burgess 1883a, XXXIV.



32. Ajanta 21. From Burgess 1883a, XXXIV.

→ typological conversion  
 ~ same type as previous

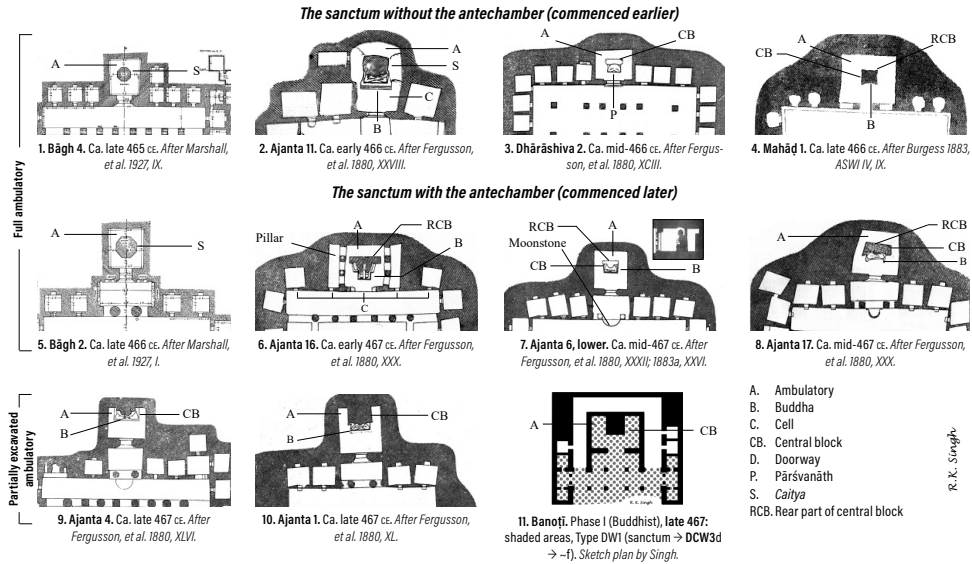
**PLATE 5.** Revised after Singh (2018, 225). To be read with the chart: 'Taxonomy of the Indian Rock-Cut Architecture, version 2.' Formula: chronology > function > layout > layout variety > sanctum variety. The following caves could not be accommodated: Ajanta caves 3 and 28 (both Type DCW2g), Cave 25 (Type C1b), and Cave 18 (Type CBN1a). Each class is arranged chronologically by the relative inaugural dates of the edifices. The division between Period II (Figs. 7-32) and III (Figs. 29-36) is strictly based on the excavation dates of the sancta although some work or the other was simultaneously happening in most of the caves, i.e. right after they were inaugurated on whatever date. The dates for Periods II & III endorse, in most general terms, the timeframe of Spink (2014, xii).

**Figs. 10-11:** Bāgh caves 4 and 2 had triple functions from the very beginning. **Figs. 12-32 (except # 20 & 23):** These edifices were started as places for dwelling and congregation only. Later on, the additional function of worship was added or attempted to be added by retrofitting a sanctum sanctorum. **Figs. 12-20 (except # 16):** These have the Central Blocks with quadrangular corridors (originally, ambulatory) that were intended and/or excavated for the caitya-shrines. In midway, however, the caitya-shrines were turned – or attempted to be turned – into the image-shrines. **Fig. 16:**

Although it was also originally Type DC2bii, it is distinct from others (Figs. 12-32) because the shrine was excavated very early so that it does not have the Central Block. **Fig. 20:** The Banoṭī temple had three phases. Late 467: shaded areas, Type DW1 (but sanctum → DCW3d → -f). Ca. 540-570: white areas, → CW4b. 8th c.?: → DCW3h. **Figs. 21-28:** The sancta sanctorum of these edifices commenced somewhat later. So, when the displaced Gandhāran monks arrived at Ajanta in ca. 468 ce they introduced the image cult. Consequently, the ongoing plans of the Central Blocks and stupas were replaced by the Buddha images. It was just feasible to carve the Buddha figures with the attendants on the rear walls of the sancta sanctorum. **Fig. 23:** Cave 7's layout without a hall is exceptional at Ajanta but not elsewhere. **Figs. 28-32, 35-36:** The Buddha with the attendants would have been carved in the sancta sanctorum had the work not been abandoned due to the last and decisive attack on the Gupta-Vākāṭakas by the Alchon Huns led perhaps by Mahāśāhi Khingila in ca. 477 ce. **Figs. 29-32:** These too began as Type DC2bii but cannot be grouped together with Figs. 21-28 because the sancta were being excavated during ca. 473-478 ce. **Figs. 33-36:** These edifices started so late as to permit the three main functions with the Buddha shrine right from the beginning.

## PERIOD II. TYPES DCW2b-g. ANŪPA &amp; DECCAN. Ca. 465-467 ce. Version 2.

Quadrangular + flat roof. For the dwelling + congregation + worship.



**PLATE 6.** Revised after Singh (2018, 227). To be read with 'The Taxonomy of the Indian Rock-Cut Architecture, version 2'. The above sancta sanctorum underwent at least five stages of transformations during Periods II (ca. 462–468 CE) & III (ca. 473–477 CE) from Type DCW2b to DCW2g. They are the earliest shrines to have been commenced after Hiatus I (ca. 326–ca. 461 CE). Except Bāgh (Figs. 1, 5) and Banoffi (Fig. 11), the above caves had begun as Type DC2bii (dormitories), but were converted midway into Type DCW2d. Bāgh caves 4 and 2 were the first edifices that followed Type DCW2, which had remained on the margins only during Period I (ca. 250 BCE–ca. 325 CE) (Singh 2018, 223) and established it as the foremost variety of the rock-cut temples of the future for all the regions and religions. The Bāgh blueprints had the inner sancta containing the caityas and ambulatories, which the planners of the above Ajanta caves were not initially familiar with.

Figs. 1–4: These sancta sanctorum were commenced earlier because there is no antechamber. Figs. 5–11: Commenced somewhat later because they have the antechambers (in Cave 16, the antechamber excavation was aborted). Figs. 1, 5: The first rock-cut temples, initiated after a gap of nearly one and a half century (Hiatus I), was interestingly not planned as Type CW1 (apsidal-and-vault-roofed temples). The Bāgh planners radically chose Type DCW2b (layana-maṇḍapa-caityagrha) variety, partly because of the porous rock but mostly because it was much more economical and practical. One building was enough for three functions: dwelling, worship, and congregation. Fig. 2: The erstwhile cell 'C' was reworked to retrofit a caitya-shrine. The ambulatory 'A' and caitya 'S' were excavated during early 466 CE. Then, there arrived some Gandhāran monks after disturbance by Iranian Hūns. The caitya worship was replaced by the image worship under the new Mūlasarvāstivāda doctrine. So, the planner now discarded the plans for the caitya and ambulatory. Instead, a Buddha image 'B' was carved on the front of the caitya. The Central Block had not been conceived so far. Fig. 3: Although Jain temples, Dhārāśhiva caves 2 and 3 followed the Buddhist architectural model. A Central Block was carved for the figure of Pārśvanāth Śeṣaphaṇi, but then the work was halted due to Hiatus II (ca. 469–472 CE), and the image could only be carved at the end of Period III (ca. 473–477 CE). Fig. 4: The older dormitory, Mahād 1 of Type C2b, was retrofitted with a caitya-shrine during Period II. Like Dhārāśhiva 2 (Fig. 3) and 3, the ambulatory was mostly excavated while reserving the Central Block for the caitya. Then, the work was similarly halted due to Hiatus II, and the image could only be carved at the end of Period III. Fig. 5: The shrine-antechamber, first seen in Nasik Cave 17 (= Burgess # 2) of Period I was re-introduced. From here on it became a standard component of the Indian temple architecture. Whereas the antechamber could not be retrofitted in the shrines already excavated (Figs. 1–4) it was retrofitted in those sancta that were commenced a bit later (Figs. 7–11). Fig. 6: The shrine of Ajanta Cave 16 had five distinct stages: (1) The doorways of the five rear cells 'C' having equal gaps among them were already excavated before the frenzy of

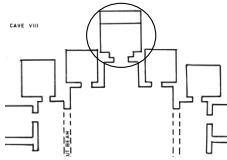
converting Type DC2bii into Type DCW2c/d gripped Ajanta. (2) After Bāgh Cave 2, a shrine antechamber was also planned, which was partly excavated with the two antechamber pillars. (3) But, the work on the antechamber was aborted due to the donor's battle with the Alchon Hūns. (4) The expediency became now to carve out the caitya and ambulatory. From the available matrix of rock a Central Block, after Dhārāśhiva 2, 3, and Mahād 1, was shaped up for the caitya, which biproduced the quadrangular corridors. However, the adjacent cells posed limitations. So, they reworked on the intermediary walls between the cells to carve out the pillars inside the shrine. But, soon came Hiatus II. (5) In Period III, the caitya was a dead idea. A colossal Buddha figure was created rather late in ca. 477 CE. The work on the 'ambulatory' had no reason to resume. It had turned an eyesore long ago, for it consumed the precious spaces that were now needed later for the Bodhisattva, gandharva, and donor figures (Spink 2007, 195).

Figs. 7–9: Briefly during Period II, the moonstone before the shrine antechamber made a temporary appearance (Spink 2014, 462: yr. 464–467). Figs. 7–8: The central blocks 'CB' meant for the caityas were already excavated when the idea to replace the caitya with the Buddha figure 'B' descended the site. Nothing could be done about the ambulatories but the Buddha figures were somehow accommodated within the mass of the Central Blocks. Fig. 7: The evidence of the erstwhile caitya is the unique inverted lotus above the Buddha's head (see inset), which, originally, was the relief umbrella for the caitya. Another evidence is the enigmatic 'lofi' or a horizontal cut over the rear wall, which had resulted due to the deeper cut made for reaching down to the planned depths of the chamber at a time when they were working downwards from the top to excavate the caitya and ambulatory. Figs. 9–11: What appears to be half ambulatories are actually the aborted extent of the excavations at a time when they were revealing the Central Blocks. The works were simultaneously progressing on the caitya blocks when the Gandhāran monks arrived. They introduced the image cut. So, the plans for the caityas were discarded. The cut for the lateral corridors is shallow in Fig. 9 and deeper in Figs. 10 & 11. They had, subsequently, to level up the floor and walls to cleverly hide the aborted plans. Fig. 11: Banoffi phase I (Buddhist), late 467: shaded areas, Type DW1 (but sanctum → DCW3d → ~f). Phase II (Buddhist), ca. 540–570: white areas → CW4b. Phase III (Śaivite), 8th c.: → DCW3h. In Phase I the layout was of Type DW1, which might have inspired the nearby Ajanta Cave 7, which was transformed from Type DW1 to DW2 and then to DCW3g. The hall is absent in these types. Phase II: After Type CW4b of Aurangabad, there was an attempt in the mid-6th c. CE to retrofit a quadrangular ambulatory around the sanctum. Residential cells were also being excavated. In Phase III perhaps an attempt was made to convert the cave to a Śaivite temple indicated by a Natarāja image on the right porch pilaster. Was the Buddha image, if it was there in the shrine, removed for a Śivaliṅgam as in Ellora caves 15 and 27?

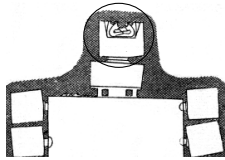
### PERIOD II. TYPE DC2Bii → DCW2g. THE DECCAN. Version 2.

For the dwelling + congregation + worship. The retrofitted *caitya*-shrines converted into the Buddha-shrines w/o Central Blocks / ambulatory.

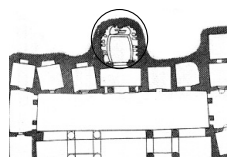
The shrine excavation: ca. 468–ce



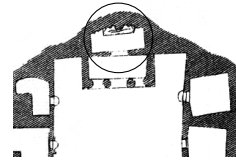
1. Ajanta 8. After Jadhav 1987, fig. 1-B.



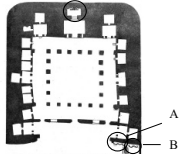
2. Ajanta 15. After Burgess 1883a, XXVIII.



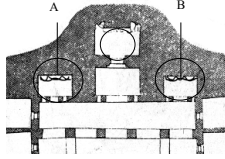
3. Ajanta 7. Type DW1 → DW2 → DCW3g. After Burgess 1883b, XXVIII.



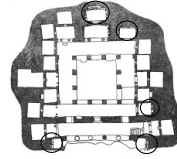
4. Ajanta 20. After Burgess 1883a, XXVIII.



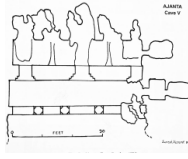
5. Ghatōtkacha cave. Buddha-, nāga-, and yakṣa-shrines. After Fergusson, et al. 1880, LII.



6. Ajanta 2. Buddha- and yakṣa-shrines. After Fergusson, et al. 1880, XLIV.



7. Ajanta 6 upper. After Fergusson, et al. 1880, XXXII.

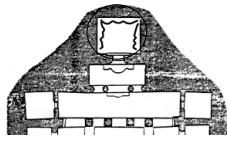


8. Ajanta 5. From Spink 2009, fig. 8.

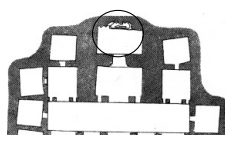
### PERIOD III. TYPE DCW2g. THE DECCAN. Version 2.

For the dwelling + congregation + worship. The Buddha and the attendants planned from the beginning.

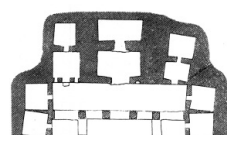
The shrine excavation: ca. 473–477 ce



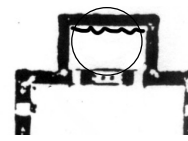
9. Aurangabad 3. After Fergusson, et al. 1880, LXVI.



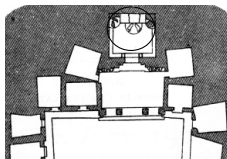
10. Ajanta 21. After Burgess 1883a, XXXIV.



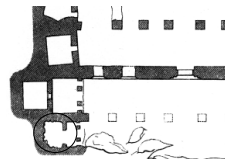
11. Ajanta 23. From Burgess 1883a, XXXIV.



12. Ajanta 22. After Spink 2009, Fig. 27.



13. Nāsik 20/Burgess # 15. Ca. 170 ce; Type Cz2b. Ca. 478 ce; Type DCW2g. From Fergusson, et al. 1880, XXXVI.



14. Ajanta 24. After Burgess 1883a, XXXIV.

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**PLATE 7.** Revised after Singh (2018, 229). The plate shows the next two phases in the evolution of the sancta sanctorum marked by the absence of the *caitya*, Central Block, and corridors / ambulatory.

**Figs. 1–8:** These edifices were just dormitories in the original plan and were mostly excavated as such, i.e. Type DC2Bii. However, the works towards the rear of the halls were so delayed that they eventually benefitted from the delay. The retrofitted sancta did not have to undergo the painful adaptations from the stupa and ambulatory to the Central Block and the Buddha image. These sancta were able to have the First Sermon scenes right from the start of the excavation of the shrines. The setting included the Buddha, Bodhisattvas, gandharvas, deer, dharmacakra, and donor portraits (instead of the five ascetics). It was planned in the relief because the three dimensional sculptures were neither mandatory for worship nor spatially feasible. The relief setting needed the entire rear wall of the sanctum.

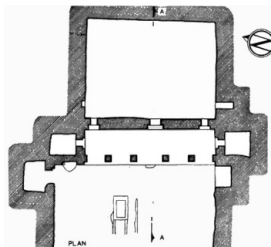
**Figs. 9–14:** These edifices started very late. So, the planners were able to include in the blueprint not only the sancta but also the First Sermon scenes with all the attendant figures. There was no need or room for the Central Block, stupa, or ambulatory in these caves.

The circled areas are the Buddha shrines. Exceptions are Figs. 6(A) Yakṣa Mañibhadra and Puṇnabhadra shrine, and Fig. 6(B) shrine for Yaḥṣiṇī Hārītī and Yaḥṣa Kubera (or Jambhālā or Pāñcika?). Fig. 1: Perhaps, a portable Buddha figure was installed. Fig. 5(A&B): The shrinelets came to light a few years ago. 'A': Perhaps Hārītī and Kubera. 'B': 'Nāgēndr', also found on the passage to Ajanta Cave 16 donated by the same donor Varāhadēva. Fig. 7: The main Buddha shrine is datable to ca. 468–469 ce, but the additional shrines were carved later on during Period III. Fig. 11: The cave was abandoned before the shrine Buddha could be excavated. Fig. 14: The Buddha in the outer shrine was carved during Period III.

## PERIODS II-III. APARĀNTA &amp; THE DECCAN. Ca. 462-477 CE. Version 2.

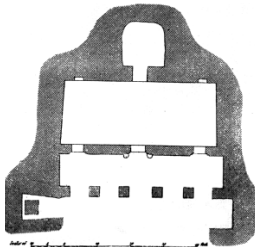
Other types

Type C1b, ca. 462-465 CE.

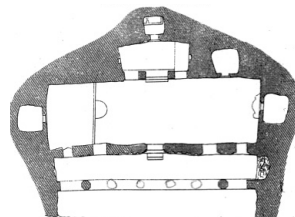


1. Ellora 20A. Ca. 462-465: Type C1b (Buddhist hall). From Soundararajan 1981, fig. 7.

Type CW2a, ca. 466 CE.

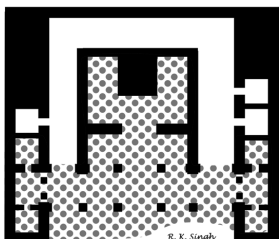


2. Lonāḍ. Period I: Type CW2a + relief stupa in sanctum (incomplete). Period V-A: → CW4b (incomplete). From Burgess 1883b, XLVI.

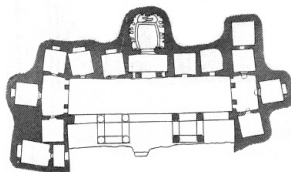


3. Ellora 27. Phase I (Buddhist), ca. 466 CE, Type CW2a. → Phase II (Śaivite), 6th/8th c. CE(?), Type DCW2h. From Burgess 1883b, XXXV.

Type DW1, ca. 468-469 CE.



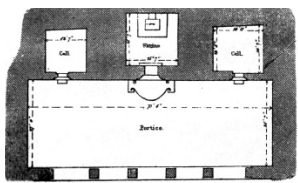
4. Banofī. Late 467 (Buddhist), shaded areas: Type DW1 (but sanctum → DCW3d → -f). Ca. 540-570 (Buddhist), white areas: → CW4b. Late 6th c.: → DCW3h (Śaivite). Sketch plan by R. K. Singh.



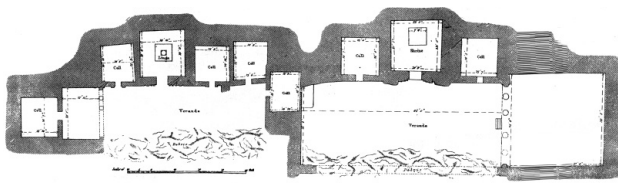
5. Ajanta 7. Ca. 468, Type DW1 → DW2 → DCW3g. From Burgess 1883a, XXVIII.

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Types DCW3e-h, ca. 477-480 CE.

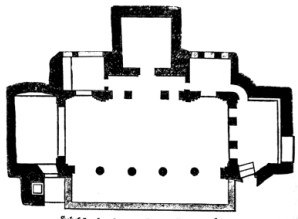


6. Elephanta 4. Phase I (Buddhist), 468-469 CE, Type DCW3f. → Phase II (Śaivite), mid-6th c. CE(?), Type DCW3h. From Burgess 1883b, XLVI.

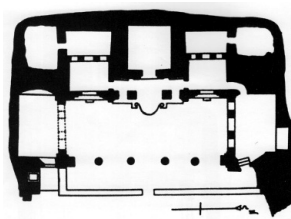


7. Elephanta 3 &amp; 2. Phase I (Buddhist), 468-469 CE, Type DCW3e. → Phase II (Śaivite), mid-6th c. CE(?), Type DCW3h. From Burgess 1883b, XLVI.

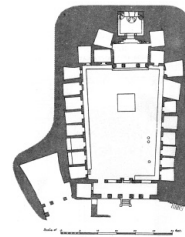
Type DCW2f, ca. 477-478 CE.



8. Mandapeśwara. Phase I (Buddhist), 468-469 CE, Type DCW3e. From Fergusson, et al. 1880, 481.



9. Mandapeśwara. Phase II (Śaivite), mid-6th c. CE, Type DCW3h (earlier Type DCW3e). From Brancaccio 2011, 48.



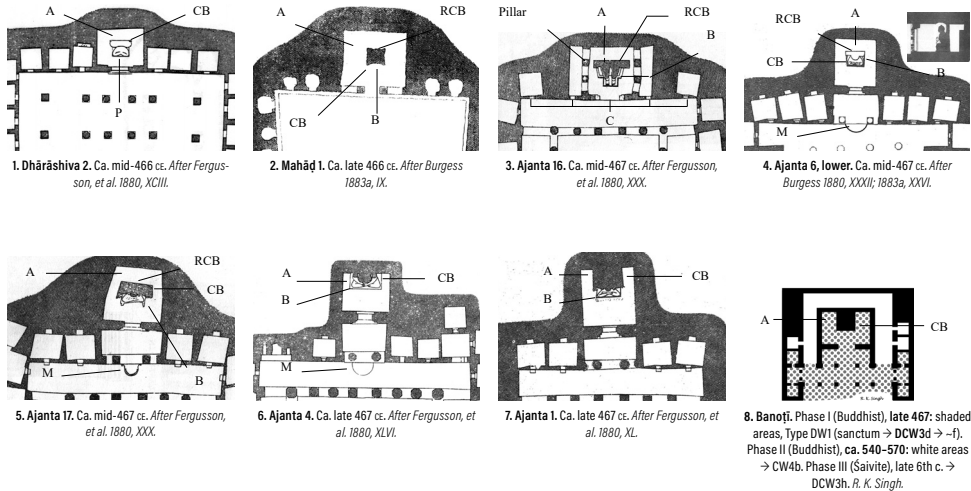
10. Nāsik 20/Burgess # 15. Phase I, ca. 170 CE, Type C2b. → Phase II, ca. 478, Type DCW2g. Fergusson et al. 1880, XXVI.



## PERIODS II to V-B. TYPE DCW2e TO TYPE CW4. THE DECCAN, KUCHA &amp; APARĀNTA. Version 2.

Period II. The Deccan. Ca. 466–467 CE.

Type DCW2e: The Central Block + quadrangular corridors + Buddha.



From Kuchean Period III to Indian Periods V-A &amp; V-B. Kucha, Aparānta &amp; Aurangabad. Ca. 475–575 CE.

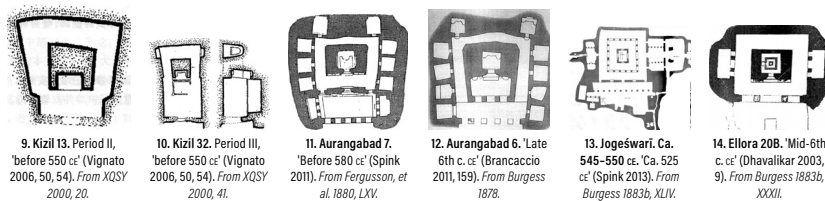
Type DCW2e mutates into Type CW4. For congregation + worship + meditation.  
The sanctum moves inside the hall. The Central Block becomes the pivot.

Type CW4a  
 Period III. Ca. 475–550 CE. Buddhists of Kucha.  
 Early 'central pillar caves'.

Type CW4b  
 Period V-A. Ca. 525–575 CE.  
 Buddhists of Aurangabad + Gujarat.

CW4b  
 Period V-B. Ca. 525–575 CE.  
 Śaivites of Aparānta & Deccan.

A. Ambulatory  
 B. Buddha  
 C. Cell  
 CB. Central block  
 M. Moonstone  
 P. Pārsvanāth  
 RCB. Rear of central block  
 S. Caitya



R. K. Singh

**PLATE 9.** Out of a myriad of experiments that were done in the Deccan caves during ca. 466–467 of Period II three elements were cardinal for the transformations in the later caves of Kucha, Deccan, and Aparānta: the Central Block, the quadrangular corridors, and the Buddha carved on / inside the Central Block. The migration of the ideas entailed major transformations. The need of a separate congregation hall was omitted. The sanctum sanctorum moved inside the hall. A new typology was created, i.e. Type CW4. The plan manifested differently in the three regions, which created the subtypes CW4a and CW4b.

**Type CW4a** (Figs. 9–10) was developed by the Buddhists of Kucha in Central Asia. The Indian ancestry of Kucha's 'central pillars' is found in the above eight caves of the Deccan that have the Central Blocks (Figs. 1–8). Around that time, there had come Hiatus II (ca. 469–472 CE) forcing the people to migrate from the Deccan toward Kucha that was the only safe place from the disturbance of the Iranian Huns. The Deccan monks carried the idea of the image worship, the Mūlasarvāstivāda scriptures, the sanctum of the Type DCW2e, the First Sermon motif, the Bodhisattva cult, and many other art, architectural, and iconographic ideas that were prevailing at

the time (ca. 467) in the Deccan. Allowing for a couple of years for the travel and some years for the ideas to incubate in Kucha's local conditions, it appears that the first central pillars started to be carved in Kucha after ca. 475 CE onwards. Thus began Kuchean Period III or Style I (term from Su Bai and Vignato) of the paintings. Looking from Ajanta, the developments in Kucha were a direct continuation from the Deccan.

**Type CW4b** (Figs. 11–12) was formulated by the Buddhists of Aurangabad during Period V-A (ca. 525–575 CE). The function of the monastic cells was changed from the dwelling to meditation. Aurangabad caves 2, 5, 6, 7, and Banoti's Phase II (Fig. 8) belong to this variety.

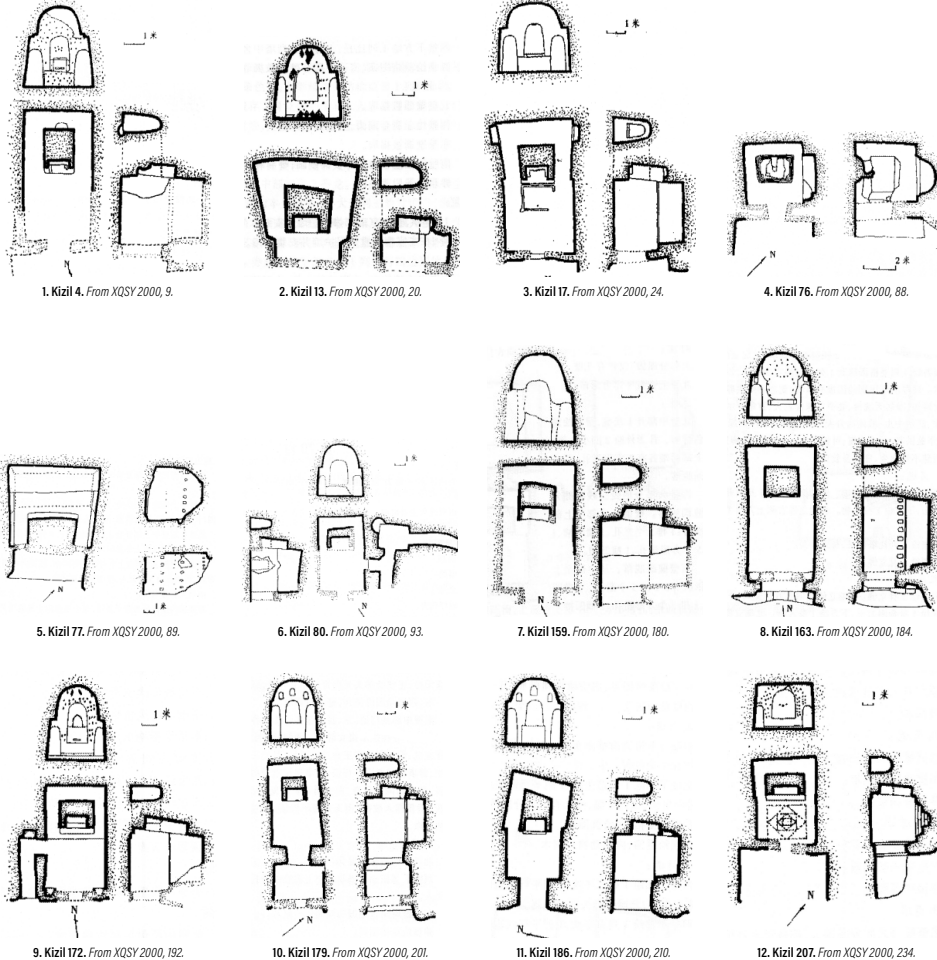
**Type CW4b** (Figs. 13–14) was also followed by the Śaivites of Aparānta, which we call Period V-B. It was contemporary to Period V-A, but needs to be classified separately because of the distinct subtype that was developed in a different area by a different religion or community for different kinds of functions and needs. The Śaivites without prior experience in rock-cut architecture appear to have adopted some of the elements from the Buddhist innovative prototypes.

**Figs. 9–14** are samples only.

### KUCHEAN PERIOD III. Ca. 475-Ca. 550 CE. Version 2.

#### The Deccani Central Block becomes Kucha's 'central pillar.'

Type CW4a. For congregation + worship. The sanctum inside the hall or surrounded by corridors. The deity carved on the Central Block/Pillar.



**PLATE 10.** The plate shows a random selection of some early 'central pillar caves' of Kizil, which belong to the Kuchean Periods II and III (Vignato 2006, 50, 54; Howard and Vignato 2014, 174). Other such caves are ascribed to the Kuchean Period IV.

They call for some readjustments in the dating. Circa 475 CE may be the dividing point between the Kuchean Periods II and III. It marks the beginning of the 1st Indo-Iranian style if ca. 550 CE is the dividing point between Periods III and IV' as suggested by Vignato (2006, 50, 54).

The above caves show the next logical stage in the typological evolution of the sanctum sanctorum succeeding Type DCW2e in the Deccan (Period II, ca. 468 CE). The Deccani Central Block also inspired Type CW4b of Periods V-A and V-B, which developed in the Deccan and Aparānta during ca. 525–575 CE.

The Kuchean Period III displays a direct typological continuum from the highpoint of Period II in the Deccan. Indeed, a closer study of Type DCW2e that developed during Period II (Deccan) and Type CW4a that developed during the Kuchean Period III would indicate that the earliest 'central pillars' of Kucha are the direct

successors of the Central Blocks of the Deccan. The gap would have been hardly more than a few years between the last Central Block of the Deccan (ca. 468 CE) and the first central pillars of Kucha (ca. 475 CE onwards). The gap must be allowed for the travel time from the Deccan to Kucha as well as for the incubation of the ideas. The idea export was the direct result of Hiatus II in W. India (ca. 469–472 CE). Following the attacks by the Alchon Hūns, the Gandhāran monks dispersed to Kucha via the Deccan. Some also might have migrated to Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Tibet from the Deccan.

The Central Block can be detected in Dhārāshiva Caves 2 and 3, Mahād 1, Ajanta 16, Lower 6, 17, 4, 1, and Banoḥī (Phase I). It was formulated as a procedure for the carving of the caitya in the sanctum sanctorum. But, while the excavations were hardly completed, there came the attacks dispersing the monks.

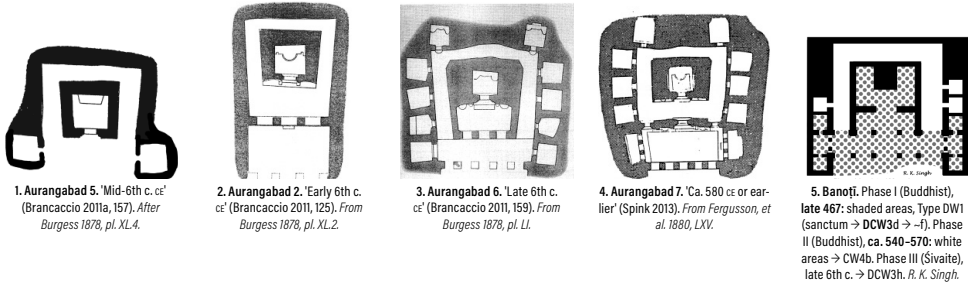
The transported ideas include: 1. typological conversion of caves; 2. Central Block; 3. quadrangular ambulatory; 4. dome shape; 5. barrel vault; 6. image cult; 7. the Mūlasarvāstivāda scriptures; 8. Mahāparinirvāṇa motif (planned in Ajanta Cave 26, ca. 468 CE), etc.

### PERIODS V-A AND V-B. Type CW4b. Ca. 525–575 ce

For congregation + worship. The sanctum moves *inside* the hall or surrounded by corridors.

#### PERIOD V-A

*The Buddhist cave temples of Aurangabad & Banoṭī*



#### PERIOD V-B

*The early Śaivite cave temples of Konkan (southwestern Aparānta) and the Deccan*

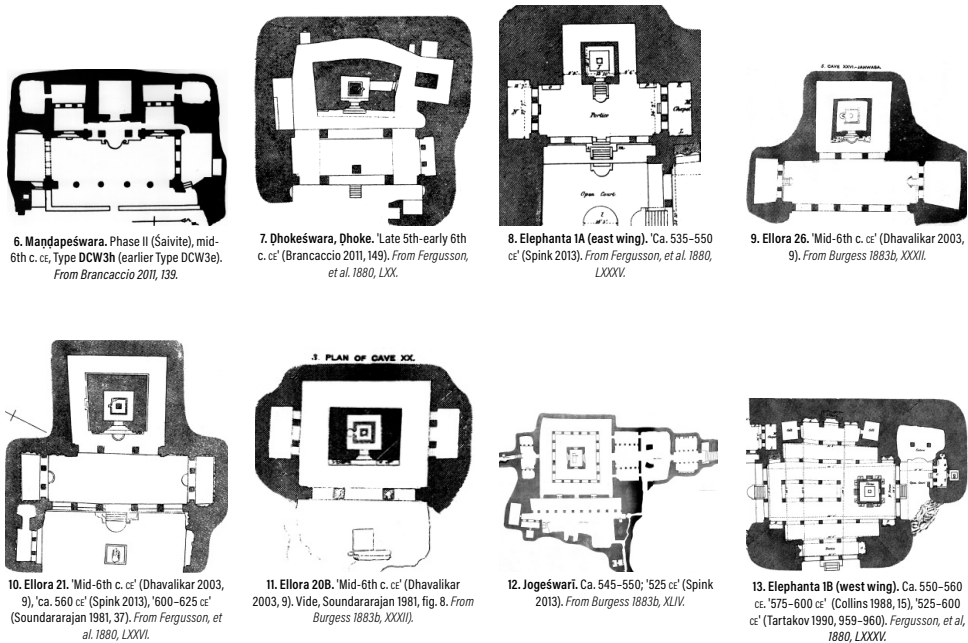


PLATE 11. Periods V-A and V-B, version 2. The illustrations are random samples of the monuments.