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LISA NADINE OWEN

Constructing Another Perspective for Ajaṇṭā's Fifth-Century Excavations*

Since its British "discovery" in 1819,[1] Ajaṇṭā has been accorded a privileged place in many studies of Indian art. Not only are its spectacular pictorial programs the earliest surviving examples of Indian Buddhist painting, but Ajaṇṭā also lays claim to being the first monastic complex to enshrine large anthropomorphic Buddha images inside its *vihāras*.[2] Although the inclusion of Buddha images is often acknowledged as an innovative feature at the site, the significance of excavating a shrine within the monastic residence to house such images has not been fully investigated. Instead, most scholarly attention focuses on how Ajaṇṭā's shrine imagery demonstrates that the site's fifth-century *vihāras* are mature "Mahāyāna" excavations. The designation of Ajaṇṭā as a fully developed "Mahāyāna" site has also resulted in its positioning as the "original source" from which later sites such as Aurangābād and Ellorā ultimately derive. This in turn has fostered the impression that these later excavations are necessarily Tantric or esoteric. Furthermore, comparisons between Ajaṇṭā and only later sites that have similar features, specifically Buddha images, have perpetuated the strict categorization of the caves by both date and proposed sectarian affiliation. Due to these "restrictions," many scholars have not viewed Ajaṇṭā's rock-cut architecture in light of earlier excavations.

In this essay, I will look at the fifth-century *vihāras* at Ajaṇṭā from a perspective which incorporates a consideration of how they continue and

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* This essay is extracted from my Master's thesis, "Locating the Buddha: Ajaṇṭā's Place in Western India's Rock-Cut Excavations," (University of Texas at Austin 1997) written under the supervision of Janice Leoshko and Gregory Schopen.

1. The caves were "discovered" in 1819 by a company of officers in the Madras army who were in the area hunting tigers. Although the officers involved did not publish an account of their findings, one of them, John Smith of the 28th Cavalry, scratched his name above a Buddha painted on one of the interior pillars of Cave 10.

2. Although the term *vihāra* is often translated as "monastery," I am using it as a convenient gloss for the monastic residence hall.

further develop elements found in some earlier *vihāras* in western India. These *vihāras*, dating from the second through fourth centuries C.E., are found at the sites of Nāsik, Wai, Shelarvadi, and Mahād. I have chosen this select group of caves primarily for their floor plans which are similar in arrangement to those found at Ajaṇṭā. These early *vihāras*, are however, rarely compared to the fifth-century caves at Ajaṇṭā primarily because they contain rock-cut *stūpas* and have consequently been identified as late "Hīnayāna" excavations. Nonetheless, recent investigations into documented conceptions regarding *stūpas* reveal that structural *stūpas* were thought of in terms of an actual living presence.[3] This in turn suggests a closer symbolic connection between *stūpas* and images of the Buddha than has usually been thought, at least in terms of making his presence manifest. Thus the inclusion of *stūpas* in these early *vihāras* may foreshadow, at least conceptually, the Buddha images in the fifth-century *vihāras* at Ajaṇṭā. However, it should be noted that I am not proposing a linear, systematic development or attempting to demonstrate a direct artistic dialogue between these early caves and Ajaṇṭā's fifth-century excavations. What I am suggesting is a more conceptual link – that the concern for housing the Buddha's presence within the monastic residence is *not solely* a fifth-century phenomenon, rather the *way* it is manifested at Ajaṇṭā is innovative.

In order to locate Ajaṇṭā's place within the tradition of cave excavation in western India, it is useful to first examine the floor plans of the site's fifth-century *vihāras*. As constructed space is never value-free, an investigation into how Ajaṇṭā's monastic community conceived and created its place of residence may reveal what was of primary importance to those who lived there. Out of the seventeen "completed" fifth-century *vihāras* at the site, there are at least fourteen residences that closely resemble one another in terms of architectural lay-out.[4] Although

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3. Vidya DEHEJIA, ed.: *Unseen Presence: The Buddha and Sāñchī* (Mumbai: Marg Publications 1996); and Gregory SCHOPEN: "Burial 'Ad Sanctos' and the Physical Presence of the Buddha in Early Indian Buddhism: A Study in the Archæology of Religions," *Religion* 17 (1987): 193-225.

4. The term "complete" is an admittedly subjective term as the majority of caves at Ajaṇṭā are "unfinished" in one way or another. However, I am referring primarily to their general state of excavation, not decoration. The fourteen fifth-century *vihāras* that I will be referring to in this essay are Caves 1, 2, 4, L6 (Lower 6), U6 (Upper 6), 7, 11, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, and 23. However, it should be noted that the shrine Buddha for Cave 23 was never carved.

any one of these fourteen caves can be analyzed in detail, Cave 1 might serve as a representative example as it is perhaps the best preserved *vihāra* at the site (Fig. 1).

The excavation consists of three component parts: a pillared veranda, the main hall or "courtyard" with individual residential cells, and a shrine carved deep into the back wall of the hall. There are three entrances leading into the main hall, the central doorway being both the largest and most fully decorated with an elaborately carved and painted doorframe. Two large windows flank this entrance, providing light into the hall. Other architectural features of Cave 1 include the remains of a small pillared porch projecting from the center of the veranda, a carved architrave, and at least four residential cells excavated on either side of the cave. Measuring approximately 64 feet square, the main hall of Cave 1 contains twenty rock-cut pillars and fourteen residential cells. Five cells are carved into each of its side walls while the back wall contains only four. Excavated between these four cells is a pillared antechamber leading into a larger cell or shrine.

The significance of this floor plan is readily apparent particularly when compared to one of Ajaṇṭā's earliest *vihāras*, Cave 12, dating from ca. 100 B.C.E. to 100 C.E. (Fig. 2). As in most residences excavated during this early period, Cave 12 is a simple quadrangular hall. The hall measures approximately 36 feet square and contains four residential cells in the back and side walls. Although the facade is destroyed, remaining evidence indicates that it probably had a narrow pillared veranda with a single central entranceway leading into the main hall. The only decoration inside the hall consists of a row of *candraśālas* carved alongside and above the doorway of each cell.

Compared to Cave 12, the fifth-century *vihāras* reveal major changes in both the conception and excavation of residential space. These changes are particularly evident in the back of the *vihāra* which emphasize the cell located in the center of the back wall. What had earlier been a row of indistinguishable monks' cells now presents a hierarchical arrangement of spaces with the back central cell enlarged, embellished, and preceded by an antechamber. Furthermore, housed in this back central cell, or shrine, is a rock-cut sculpture of a Buddha (Fig. 3).

Though anthropomorphic Buddha images were commonly made since the first century C.E., it is generally accepted that they were not incorporated into rock-cut *vihāras* until the fifth century. The relatively late appearance of the Buddha image inside the monastic dwelling has

prompted scholars, such as Gregory SCHOPEN, to investigate possible explanations.[5] SCHOPEN suggests that the inclusion of the Buddha image in post-fourth-century excavations reflects a concern for identifying and locating the Buddha as a juristic personality – a concern that is indicated in Buddhist donative inscriptions and land grants dating from the fourth through fourteenth centuries. Though these records cover a broad geographical and chronological range, a reasonable number have survived from the rock-cut caves in western India. As these inscriptions document transactions of land and other gifts to the Buddha, the language used is precise in identifying him as a recipient of property.

In many of these inscriptions, the Buddha is legally recognized as the "head" of the community of monks – *buddhapramukhaṃ bhikṣu-saṃghaṃ*. Similar expressions using the term *pramukha* ("head") are also found in sixth-century documents that describe other important individuals as the "head" of a specific corporation or legal entity, i.e., groups that are "headed by the banker"[6] or "headed by the elders."[7] Thus, whether in reference to the Buddha himself or to other "legally recognized" individuals, these inscriptions indicate that the term *pramukha* was not used as a symbolic title or appellation. If this is indeed the case, as SCHOPEN suggests, then it seems probable that the Buddha was considered to be not only the legal "head" and conse-quently, the legal "owner" of a monastery, but that he also was believed to be *living* in that monastery. Thus, the Buddha as the "head" of the monastic community is literally carved in stone.

The conception of the Buddha as a living "person" within the monastic complex at Ajaṇṭā is not only suggested by the inclusion of rock-cut images but also by the site's dedicatory inscriptions. Although the

5. Gregory SCHOPEN: "The Buddha as an Owner of Property and Permanent Resident in Medieval Indian Monasteries," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 18 (1990): 181-217.

6. This particular expression ("the council of citizens headed by the banker") is found in an inscription from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa and is discussed by Gregory SCHOPEN in his article, "The Buddha as an Owner of Property": 190-91.

7. The full expression, translated by SCHOPEN, reads, "to the inhabitants of the district headed by the elders of the village and district officer," and is found in a land grant from Andhra Pradesh. See Gregory SCHOPEN: "The Buddha as an Owner of Property": 190; and S.S. Ramachandra Murthy: "Hyderabad Museum Plates of Prithivi-Sri-Mularaja," *Epigraphia Indica* 38 (1969): 192-195, esp. 194, line 15. For additional examples of the term *pramukha* in epigraphical mate-rial see Gregory SCHOPEN: "The Buddha as an Owner of Property": 210 n. 37.

expression *buddhapramukhaṃ bhikṣusaṃghaṃ* does not appear in these records, the Buddha's exalted position as the "head" of the monastic community is nonetheless evident. For example, the dedicatory inscription for Cave 16 identifies the *vihāra* as an "excellent dwelling to be occupied by the best of ascetics" (*udāraṃ ... veśma yatī[ndra-sevyam]*).[8] The inscription in Cave 26 identifies the excavation as "a stone residence ... for the Teacher" (*śaila-gṛham ... śāstuḥ*).[9] The use of the term *gṛha* (residence, house, home) is significant, for Cave 26 is not a *vihāra* but a fifth-century *caitya* hall. Though there are what seem to be residential cells excavated off the veranda, as well as two shrinelets with Buddha images in the left and right wings, the inscription appears to refer to the *caitya* hall itself as it is the object of the dedicatory inscription. Considering that the main image in the worship hall is a monolithic *stūpa* carved with a seated Buddha in *dharmacakramudrā*, the identification of the excavation as the "residence for the Teacher" seems appropriate. This would then indicate that both types of excavations (the *vihāra* and the *caitya* hall) were places where he is present. Moreover, the fact that the Buddha is almost always referred to as a "person" in Ajaṇṭā's inscriptions, i.e., the Tathāgata, the Sugata, the Teacher, or the best or king of the ascetics, rather than as an "image" (*bimba, pratikṛti,* or *pratimā*) further suggests the belief in his living presence within these excavations.[10]

Although the Buddha's presence and position as "head" of the monastic community is clearly articulated at Ajaṇṭā, there are some earlier

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8. For the Cave 16 inscription see V.V. MIRASHI: *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* 5 (Ootacamund: Government Epigraphists for India 1963): 103-111, esp. 109, line 18.

9. For the Cave 26 inscription see the translation by B. Ch. CHHABRA in G. YAZDANI: *Ajaṇṭā: The Colour and Monochrome Reproductions of the Ajaṇṭā Frescoes based on Photography,* vol. 4 (London: Oxford University Press 1930-1955): 114-118, esp. 115, line 6.

10. Significantly, out of forty-one legible donative inscriptions connected with Buddha images at Ajaṇṭā, only two use a Sanskrit term for "image." For a convenient listing of Ajaṇṭā's inscriptions, including their location, content, and sources of publication, see Richard S. COHEN: "Setting the Three Jewels: The Complex Culture of Buddhism at the Ajaṇṭā Caves," (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms 1995), Appendix A, 325-383. The forty-one inscriptions are cited in COHEN as nos. 11-17, 19, 23, 25, 26-27, 29-31, 33-36, 48, 51-54, 56-61, 65, 70-74, 89-90, 94-96. Nos. 52 and 90 use the term *bimba* in reference to a Buddha image.

vihāras in western India that also seem to make accommodations for the Buddha's presence. These *vihāras*, located among the excavations at Nāsik, Wai, Shelarvadi, and Mahāḍ, exhibit an earlier concern for incorporating an "image" (either a *stūpa* in *bas-relief* or a three-dimensional *stūpa*) into the monastic residence.[11] Even though these *stūpas* are indeed different from the main shrine Buddhas at Ajaṇṭā – at least in formal terms – they are nonetheless similarly housed in the back of the *vihāra*, directly opposite the entrance to the cave.

The Early Excavations

The earliest *vihāra* in western India to designate a space in the back wall for an "image" – in this case a *bas-relief* of a *stūpa* – is Cave 3 at Nāsik. This excavation is also called the Gautamīputra cave due to the reference to this Sātavāhana king in two inscriptions.[12] The first inscription, located on the left wall of the veranda, contains two separate grants dated in the years 18 and 24 (124 and 130 C.E.). The grant dated in the year 18 records the gift of a field by Gautamīputra Śātakarṇi to the monks in residence. The second grant also records the gift of a field to the monastic community by the king along with his mother Balaśrī in the year 24. The second inscription is incised on the back wall of the veranda over the left doorway. It also contains two grants, dated in the 19th and 22nd year of the king's son Puḷumāvi III (149 and 153 C.E.). It is this second inscription that records the actual dedication of the cave as well as the gift of a neighboring village.[13]

In plan, Cave 3 exhibits features of the standard "early" *vihāra* including a pillared veranda and quadrangular hall with cells carved into the back and side walls (Fig. 4). The hall itself measures approximately 41 feet in width, 45 feet in depth, and 10 feet in height. A stone bench running the length and width of the cave has been left intact. There are a total of twenty cells, almost identical in dimension, which contain rock-cut beds. One cell, though aligned with the left wall, can only be entered from the veranda. This strange arrangement, coupled with the inscrip-

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11. By the term "image," I am referring to any object that appears to have been the central focus of devotional activity.

12. E. SENART: "Nāsik Inscriptions," *Epigraphia Indica* 8 (1905-6): 60-75. For the chronology of the Sātavāhanas, I am relying on Seshabhatta NAGARAJU's reconstruction in *Buddhist Architecture of Western India (c. 250 B.C.-c. A.D. 300)* (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan 1981): 23, Table 2.

13. E. SENART: "Nāsik Inscriptions": 60-65.

tional evidence, suggests that the cave was excavated in two phases. Vidya DEHEJIA proposes that the original plan of the cave, excavated under the authority of Gautamīputra Śātakarṇi, consisted of the present veranda which led directly to three cells carved into the rear wall and a fourth at the right end of the veranda.[14] Gautamīputra's inscription regarding his grant of a field to the monks in residence (i.e. in those four cells) was incised on the left wall. The second phase of excavation resulted in the cave's present form with the dedicatory inscription on the back wall of the veranda identifying Gautamīputra's mother, Balaśrī, as the patron. Directly beneath this inscription is the grant dated in the year 22 which records the gift of a village to the community in residence and indicates that the cave was then known as "the Queen's cave."[15]

Carved in the center of the back wall of this *vihāra* is a *bas-relief* of a *stūpa* flanked by two female devotees (Fig. 5). The figure to the left of the *stūpa* clasps her hands in adoration, while the female on the right holds a *chauri*. Carved above the devotees are a seated lion and a *cakra*, respectively. In the upper corners of the relief, located below twin umbrellas, are two flying figures bearing garlands. The panel itself projects from the surface of the rock indicating it was planned during the excavation of the back wall. Its location between the third and fourth cells represents the first attempt to establish an "image" in what will become the back central cell or shrine in later *vihāras*. The absence of other images or decorative features within Nāsik 3 seems to verify the significance of its presence, emphasized further by its position opposite the main entrance into the cave. Moreover, this entrance is fronted by stone steps and adorned with an elaborately carved *toraṇa* recalling the structural gateways of the Great *Stūpa* at Sāñcī. Standing on either side of the door are large attendant or guardian figures, who provide protection and glorification to those in residence.

The emphasis given to the center of the rear wall in Nāsik 3 also appears at another cave at the site, the Nahapāna *vihāra* – or Nāsik 10 (Fig. 6). This *vihāra*, which was excavated slightly earlier than Nāsik 3,[16] is similar in both plan and dimensions. The veranda has two

14. Vidya DEHEJIA: *Early Buddhist Rock Temples: A Chronology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1972): 95-96.

15. E. SENART: "Nāsik Inscriptions": 65-71; and Vidya DEHEJIA: *Early Buddhist Rock Temples*: 96.

16. It is generally accepted that this *vihāra* was excavated prior to Gautamīputra's defeat of Nahapāna. Both art historical and epigraphical evidence support this

pilasters and four pillars, the latter exhibiting a wider space between the central pair. A flight of stone steps leads up to the central doorway which is flanked by two windows and two smaller doors. The hall itself is 46 feet wide, 45 feet deep, and 10 feet high. There are a total of eighteen cells with rock-cut beds, two of which are located at either end of the veranda. Each side wall of the hall contains five residential cells, with six carved into the back wall. Although it appears that the *vihāra* was not originally planned to house an "image," a shallow relief of a *stūpa* was carved into the back wall between the third and fourth cells.[17] The addition of this relief suggests both the importance of bringing an "image" into the *vihāra*, and most significantly, where it should be located. As in Nāsik 3, the interior hall of Cave 10 contains no other imagery, again suggesting the *stūpa*-relief's function as an object of devotional activity.

The actual excavation of a back central cell containing a three-dimensional *stūpa* can be found among the eight excavations at Wai. The caves are located in the village of Lohāri, approximately 2.5 miles north of Wai. Due to their "early" features which include rock-cut beds and stone benches spanning the perimeters of the halls, these caves are generally dated to the third century C.E.[18] The largest of the *vihāras*, Wai 2, measures approximately 31 feet in width, 29 feet in depth, and 8 feet in height (Fig. 7). There are a total of seven cells; four carved into the right wall and three in the rear of the cave. The back central cell is architecturally set off by its larger size. This cell, which houses the *stūpa*,[19] is also flanked by windows and there is evidence of a cell door.

Located approximately 50 miles from the excavations at Wai and along the same ancient trade route as Kārlī, Bhāja, and Bedsa, is the site

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sequence. There are seven inscriptions in Nāsik 10. Five are found in the veranda and two are incised in the *viharā's* side walls. Three record the donations of Nahapāna's son-in-law Uśavadāta; two record those of Uśavadāta's wife; one is dated in the 9th year of king Iśvarasena; and one is illegible. The cave itself was donated in the 42nd year of Nahapāna by his son-in-law. The two veranda cells are the gift of Uśavadāta's wife. See E. SENART: "Nāsik Inscriptions": 78-89.

17. It should be noted, however, that the *stūpa* relief has been subsequently carved with an image of Śiva.

18. M.K. DHAVALIKAR: *Late Hīnayāna Caves of Western India* (Poona: Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute 1984): 35.

19. The *harmikā*, which has been broken off, is now placed in front of the *stūpa* and worshipped as a Śiva *liṅga*.

of Shelarvadi. There are eleven excavations at Shelarvadi which are geographically separated into two groups: those numbered 1 to 8 face southwest while 9 through 11 overlook a valley towards the northwest.[20] The monastic complex consists of four cisterns (excavations 2, 4, 5, and 7) and seven *vihāras*. In general, the *vihāras* are small in dimension and have only one to four residential cells. An exception to this is the largest *vihāra*, Cave 8, which has a total of ten cells and is the most significant excavation for this essay (Fig. 8). Unfortunately, the veranda and front wall of Cave 8 are completely destroyed, so there is no way of determining how many doors provided access into the *vihāra* or what the exterior decoration might have included. The hall itself measures approximately 25 feet in width, 20 feet in depth, and 8 feet in height. There are three cells excavated into the left wall,[21] four cells in the right, and three in the back wall. The central cell in the back wall is a long rectangular chamber (13 x 25 x 9 ft.) which originally contained a monolithic *stūpa*. However, only the *harmikā* and a rough circular pattern on the cell floor are extant. Carved on the back wall, above the left cell, is an inscription that has been paleographically dated to the second or third century C.E.[22]

In plan, Shelarvadi 8 exhibits some of the features seen in the principal residence at Wai. Like the Wai *vihāra*, the back wall of Shelarvadi 8 contains two residential cells flanking the main shrine. There are also a similar number of cells excavated in the side walls. However, there are some interesting differences between these two residences that are noteworthy. The residential cells in Shelarvadi 8, for example, lack rock-cut beds. Moreover, this excavation does not contain an interior stone bench. The absence of these features has led M.K. DHAVALIKAR to attribute a late third to early fourth-century date for the cave.[23] DHAVALIKAR also notes that in plan, Shelarvadi 8 has some resonance with the arrangement of spaces exhibited in Ajaṇṭā's Cave 8 (Fig. 9). This particular

20. Seshabhatta NAGARAJU: *Buddhist Architecture of Western India*: 294.
21. The dividing wall between the first and second cell is destroyed.
22. C.C. DAS GUPTA: "No. 14- Shelarwadi Cave Inscription," *Epigraphia Indica* 28 (1949-50): 76-77. The contents of this inscription will be examined below. Both C.C. DAS GUPTA and Vidya DEHEJIA date the inscription to the second century C.E., while Seshabhatta NAGARAJU dates it to the late third century C.E. See Vidya DEHEJIA: *Early Buddhist Rock Temples*: 183; and Seshabhatta NAGARAJU: *Buddhist Architecture of Western India*: 295.
23. M.K. DHAVALIKAR: *Late Hīnayāna Caves of Western India*: 47-48.

cave at Ajaṇṭā has created problems for those interested in the relative chronology of the site as it exhibits both "early" and "late" features. The location of the cave in the center of the escarpment and its proximity to the ca. 100 B.C.E.- 100 C.E. *caitya* hall 9, has prompted Susan HUNTINGTON to assign a first-century C.E. date to Ajaṇṭā 8.[24] On the other hand, Suresh VASANT and Walter SPINK argue for a fifth-century date based on the small excavated antechamber, chiseling techniques, and cell door-hinges that are comparable to other fifth-century caves at the site.[25] Moreover, both VASANT and SPINK note the significance of the rock-cut bed in the back central cell, or shrine, and suggest that this feature may have supported a loose image. Whether or not this was the case cannot be ascertained, however, it is at least interesting to consider the possibility that either an anthropomorphic image (or a *stūpa*-relief as at Nāsik) was placed in this important cell.

The final early site under consideration is Mahāḍ, located approximately 95 miles southeast of Mumbai. Among its twenty-eight excavations, dating stylistically to the second through fourth centuries C.E., two *vihāras* – Mahāḍ 1 and 8 – exhibit a similar ground plan as the principal *vihāra* at Wai.[26] The *vihāra* numbered Mahāḍ 8 is only slightly smaller than the Wai excavation, measuring approximately 27 feet wide, 24 feet deep, and 9 feet high (Fig. 10). The hall has a total of nine cells; three carved into each wall. The back central cell, which once housed a three-dimensional *stūpa*, is the largest cell and measures approximately 15 feet square. Only fragments of the monolithic *stūpa* are extant – the *chattra*, which is still attached to the ceiling, and a rough circular surface on the cell floor. Other features of the cave include rock-cut beds in the residential cells and a stone bench spanning the side and back walls of the hall.

24. Susan HUNTINGTON: *The Art of Ancient India: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain* (New York: Weatherhill 1985): 239 n.2 and 242.

25. Suresh VASANT: "Ajanta Cave 8: A Study," in M.S. Nagaraja Rao, ed., *Kusumāñjali: New Interpretation of Indian Art & Culture.* Sh. C. Sivaramamurti Commemoration Volume II (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan 1987), pp. 249-253; and Walter SPINK: "The Archæology of Ajaṇṭā," *Ars Orientalis* 21 (1991): 93 n. 3.

26. The remaining excavations at Mahāḍ include single and double-celled *vihāras*, cisterns, and single quadrangular halls.

According to M.K. DHAVALIKAR, these features are indicative of a mid-third-century *vihāra*.[27] However, other dates have been proposed for Mahād 8 by various scholars which include an assessment of the cave's epigraphical material. Incised on the back wall between the central and right residential cell is a dedicatory inscription. Seshabhatta NAGARAJU dates the cave on both stylistic and paleographic grounds to the late third or early fourth century C.E.[28] Using the same body of evidence, but focusing primarily on the paleography of the inscription, Vidya DEHEJIA proposes an even earlier date of ca. 100 C.E.[29] Regardless of these differences in opinion, it can at least be stated that Mahād 8 is another early excavation that seems to foreshadow what is found in the floor plans of Ajaṇṭā's fifth-century *vihāras*.

Mahād 1 provides further interesting evidence in regard to the Buddha's presence within the monastic residence. Located at the extreme left of the complex, Mahād 1 is probably the latest excavation at the site – dating stylistically to the late fourth century C.E. (Fig. 11). The veranda has six pillars and two pilasters, but only the left pilaster and adjacent pillar are finished. The square base of the pillar and the carving of the column itself which alternates between an octagonal and sixteen-sided shaft is similar to those found in the interior of Ajaṇṭā's Cave 16. Based primarily on this evidence, Walter SPINK posits that Mahād 1 dates to the fifth or sixth century C.E.[30] However, I agree with DHAVALIKAR's assessment that the finished pillar may actually reveal a later (ca. sixth century) re-cutting.[31] As in Mahād 8, the hall of Mahād 1 (measuring 57 feet wide; 35 feet deep; 10 feet high) has a running bench in addition to cells. All of the cells are unfinished, with the right wall containing only chisel marks. The back wall has five cells; the largest cell occupying the central position. It is flanked by two large windows, a feature already noted at Wai.

Inside the back central cell of Mahād 1 is a square-shaped rock which I initially assumed was intended for the *stūpa*. However, Walter SPINK questions the practicality of blocking out a square matrix instead of a

27. M.K. DHAVALIKAR: *Late Hīnayāna Caves of Western India*: 46.

28. Seshabhatta NAGARAJU: *Buddhist Architecture of Western India*: 251-52.

29. Vidya DEHEJIA: *Early Buddhist Rock Temples*: 182-83.

30. Personal communication with the author.

31. M.K. DHAVALIKAR: *Late Hīnayāna Caves of Western India*: 46-47.

more rounded form if a *stūpa* was to be carved.[32] Instead, he suggests that this mass of rock may have been originally intended for an enthroned Buddha figure, similar to those at Ajaṇṭā. This possibility is supported by the subsequent modifications made to this rock. Carved on the front face is an enthroned Buddha in *pralambapādāsana*, flanked by *chauri* bearers. Considering that the "European pose" does not appear at Ajaṇṭā until a relatively late date,[33] this revision of the rock probably dates to the first quarter of the sixth century C.E.

The excavation of this matrix in the center of the cell is identical to the placement of Ajaṇṭā's earliest fifth-century shrine Buddhas. In contrast to the latest shrine Buddhas at Ajaṇṭā (which are carved directly from the back wall of the cell), the earliest Buddhas (i.e. inside Caves 11, L6, and 17) are carved in the center of the shrine, paralleling the placement of the *stūpa* as seen in earlier western caves. The question of whether the matrix of rock inside Mahāḍ 1 was originally intended for a three-dimensional *stūpa* or for an enthroned Buddha thus becomes less significant if we consider the possibility that both types of "images" may be used to indicate his presence. This leads us into an examination of one of the earliest *vihāras* at Ajaṇṭā to make accommodations for a rock-cut Buddha.

Ajaṇṭā's Cave 11

Generally acknowledged for housing one of the earliest shrine Buddhas at the site, Cave 11 measures 37 feet in width and 28 feet in length and contains four central octagonal pillars (Fig. 12). There are a total of eleven residential cells, four of them with entrances from the pillared veranda. Four cells are carved into the back wall, three are located on the left side of the hall, while the right side contains a stone bench spanning the length of the cave. Although this *vihāra* exhibits some of the features found in other fifth-century excavations at the site, there is evidence that this may not have been the original conception. According to Walter SPINK, Cave 11 appears to have been substantially altered during excavation.[34] The original intention seems to have been a simple

32. Personal communication with the author.

33. Sheila WEINER was the first scholar to note the relatively late date of the *pralambapādāsana* pose at Ajaṇṭā. See Sheila L. WEINER: *Ajaṇṭā: Its Place in Buddhist Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1977): 62-3, 70.

34. Walter SPINK: "Ajaṇṭā's Chronology: Politics and Patronage," in Joanna G. Williams, ed., *Kalādarśana: American Studies in the Art of India* (New Delhi:

square *vihāra* with three residential cells in each of its three walls. Perhaps out of fear of penetrating the neighboring Cave 10, the excavation of cells in the right wall had to be abandoned. To compensate for this loss in residential space, the four veranda cells were subsequently carved as was the far left cell located in the back wall of the hall.

Other changes also appear to have been made inside the *vihāra*. By carefully examining the ground plan it is obvious that the shrine containing the Buddha image is literally a converted monk's cell. The back wall of this cell has been extended in order to carve the image, with the space of the "original" cell now functioning as an antechamber. Further evidence suggesting the conversion of this cell is the treatment of the shrine doorway. Unlike the later fifth-century excavations, the doorway of the Buddha's cell is not distinguished from those of his fellow monks by an elaborately carved and painted doorframe. The lack of this architectural element, as well as a pillared antechamber, supports the early date of this cave among the fifth-century excavations.

Although Walter SPINK believes that the image and its shrine were not planned during the initial excavation, the importance of making accommodations for such an image inside the *vihāra* is nonetheless evident. A conscious choice was made as to where, and in which cell, the Buddha image would be carved. Although the back wall of Cave 11 was altered to have an even number of cells, the Buddha image was carved in the cell that is centered along the longitudinal axis of the cave. Its location directly opposite the entrance to the cave, visually framed by the octagonal pillars, not only mirrors the excavation of the shrine in earlier *vihāras*, but it also suggests a similar alignment with what Michael MEISTER identifies as the "axis of access" in Hindu temple architecture.[35] Though the caves at Ajaṇṭā are residences for Buddhist monks, there are interesting similarities between these two types of monuments that are rarely acknowledged. Like the Hindu temple complex, the *vihāras* at Ajaṇṭā provide shelter for both the image and worshipper as well as the space where ritual and mundane activities can occur. The nature of rock-cut architecture not only furnishes the monk with a permanent residence, but alludes to his presence within the cosmic

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Oxford and IBH Publishing with the American Institute of Indian Studies 1981), pp. 112-115.

35. Michael W. MEISTER: "The Hindu Temple: Axis and Access," in Kapila Vatsyayan, ed., *Concepts of Space, Ancient and Modern* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts & Abhinav Publications 1991): 269-80.

mountain – or abode of the gods. It seems significant that as one approaches the main shrine he is simultaneously entering deeper into the mountain.

This longitudinal axis is enhanced in some of the caves at Ajaṇṭā where there is a wider space between the central pillars of the veranda and between the central pillars of the front and rear rows within the main hall.[36] Although the employment of this feature is not consistent in the caves, other methods of accentuating the "axis of access" can be found. For example, in Caves 16 and 17, the middle pillars in the front and back rows do not show a wider intercolumniation, but are differentiated from the remaining interior pillars. The four central pillars in Cave 16 have tall square bases, sixteen-sided shafts and ornamented bracket-capitals in contrast to the slightly tapering octagonal pillars found elsewhere in the *vihāra*. Cave 17's axis pillars are also more elaborately carved than the others, particularly the rear pair which are adorned with lions.

However, the most important and prevalent architectural feature that both reinforces the visual emphasis towards the main image and marks a change in space is the pillared antechamber. Out of the thirteen *vihāras* at Ajaṇṭā that house Buddha images in the back central cell, ten are preceded by this feature.[37] The antechamber not only emphasizes the importance of the shrine and its occupant, but also seemingly separates residential space from sacred space. The antechamber gives the shrine a greater sanctity by further removing it from the other cells. This demarcation of space not only enhances the longitudinal axis of the cave but it implies a vertical ascent as well. The Buddha's space is further articulated by the ornamentation of the shrine doorway which echoes the architectural and motival elements found on the central exterior entranceway to the *vihāra* itself. By repeating these motifs, which include *mithuna* couples, floral and lotus designs, and small Buddha figures, the Buddha's chamber is clearly marked. As one passes through the exterior doorway to enter the main residence hall, so too must he pass through another doorway to enter the Buddha's "residence."

36. The *vihāras* that exhibit this wider intercolumniation are Caves 1, 21, 23, and 24. The following caves only have a wider space between the two central pillars of the veranda as they lack interior pillars or are unfinished: Caves 3, 5, 14, 22, and 28.

37. The ten caves are: 1, 2, 4, L6, U6, 7, 15, 17, 20, and 21. The three that do not contain antechambers are Caves 11, 16, and 22.

Although the longitudinal axis leading to the shrine and its image is much more clearly defined and articulated at Ajaṇṭā than at Nāsik, Wai, Shelarvadi, and Mahād, this "axis of access" is nonetheless an integral component in the early excavations. All of the *stūpas* are in alignment with the central entrance to the cave. If the *stūpa* is three-dimensional, it is located in an enlarged cell complete with shrine door. Though there is limited decoration inside these caves to further differentiate this back central cell from the other cells, the exterior of some of the *vihāras*, particularly Nāsik 3 with its door guardians and *toraṇa*, clearly allude to the sacred presence housed inside. Thus, these early excavations suggest that the arrangement of space in Ajaṇṭā's fifth-century *vihāras* actually reflects much earlier concerns for housing the Buddha's presence within the monastic residence. In fact, the dedicatory inscriptions from these early sites seem to support their conceptual connection with Ajaṇṭā.

An Examination of the Inscriptional Evidence

Further understanding of the relationship between the *stūpa* and the anthropomorphic Buddha image within the monastic setting might be gleaned from the epigraphical evidence from both the early *vihāras* and from Ajaṇṭā. Of the *vihāras* at Nāsik, Wai, Shelarvadi, and Mahād, only Wai is lacking in inscriptional evidence. The inscriptions incised in Nāsik 3 and 10 have already been briefly discussed. Apart from their interesting information concerning grants of neighboring villages in support of the monastic community, the combined inscriptions from these two caves provide us with a single term for the excavations, *leṇa*. Often simply translated as "cave," this particular term is found throughout the epigraphical material of the early western caves. According to Franklin EDGERTON, the term *leṇa* as it is found in both contemporary and later textual sources often connotes the idea of refuge.[38] For example, he notes that *leṇa* often appears with the synonyms *trāṇa* and *śaraṇa*, and as a masculine noun, is found in the *Mahāvastu* as an epithet of a Buddha.

Whether or not there is a direct correlation between the meaning of *leṇa* in epigraphical and textual material cannot be easily determined. Comparisons between these two sources in terms of word choice and meaning are not often made by scholars due to the assumed differences

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38. Franklin EDGERTON: *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1953): 463.

in both content and style of writing in text and inscription. However, as shown in Gregory SCHOPEN's work, both materials can share the same terminology particularly when documenting conceptions of the Buddha.[39] Furthermore, if we consider that the Sanskrit equivalent of *lena, layana*, found in the dedicatory inscription of Cave 16 at Ajaṇṭā,[40] denotes "a place of rest, a house, a cell"[41] it is at least possible that *lena* meant more than just "cave" in the second century C.E.

Interestingly, the more frequent terms for identifying the excavations at Ajaṇṭā include *maṇḍapa, vihāra*, or *veśma*; the latter two having a stronger connotation of "residence" than the term *layana*.[42] This is not to suggest that the terms *vihāra* and *maṇḍapa* do not appear in the early inscriptions – they do – but with less frequency than at Ajaṇṭā. To my knowledge, the term *veśma* (in reference to the rock-cut excavation) appears only sporadically in the inscriptional records of the early western caves. The variety of terms found to describe the excavations at Ajaṇṭā, therefore, may represent either a change in architectural terminology, or it may signify a greater emphasis on the fifth-century cave as the Buddha's residence.

However, other terms in addition to *lena* also appear in the inscriptions of the early *vihāras*. In the dedicatory record of Shelarvadi 8, for example, the excavation is identified as a *cetiyaghara*, not a *lena*. This inscription, transcribed and translated by C.C. DAS GUPTA, reads:

> *Sidha therāṇaṁ bhayata-Sihāna ateāsiṇiya pāvaiti[k]āya Ghapa[rā]ya bālikāā Saghāya Budha(dhā)rā cha chetiya-gharo deya-dhama māta-pita udisa saha [cha] savehi bhikhā(khu)-kulehi sahā cha āchari[ye]hi bhata-vireyehi samāpito*

> Success. The meritorious gift of a *chaitya* hall is made by Budhā and Saghā (Saṁghā) (who was) the daughter of the nun Ghaparā, a female disciple of the

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39. Gregory SCHOPEN: "The Buddha as an Owner of Property": 181-217.

40. The term *layana* appears twice in the inscription of Ajaṇṭā's Cave 16 (lines 24 and 26). *Ālaya*, also derived from the root *lī*, is found in the dedicatory record of Ajaṇṭā's Cave 26 (lines 3 and 12).

41. M. MONIER-WILLIAMS: *A Sanskrit English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1995): 903.

42. The term *maṇḍapa* is used to describe Ajaṇṭā's Cave 20 (line 1) and is found in the inscription of Cave 17 (lines 24 and 29). Cave 17 is also identified as a *vihāra* (line 1). The term *vihāra* is also used in line 22 where the brother of Ravisamba is said to have "adorned the earth with *stūpas* and *vihāras*." *Veśma* is used in both Cave 16 (line 18) and Cave 26 (lines 12 and 17). It thus appears that in the fifth century, a much broader and descriptive vocabulary for cave excavations was utilized.

elder (*thera*) Bhadanta Siha for the sake of parents together with all communities of the *bhikshus* and the teachers.[43]

The use of the term *cetiyaghara* in this inscription is significant for two reasons. First, we know that Shelarvadi 8 is a monastic *residence*. Second, there are no congregational worship halls (i.e., what we often call *caityagṛhas*) at this site. Therefore, the inscription must be self-referential. The term *cetiyaghara* must then either refer to the excavation itself or just to the back central cell.

Inscriptional evidence from another early *vihāra* from our selected group provides further clarification. Carved on the back wall of the hall inside Mahāḍ 8 is the following inscription transcribed and translated by James BURGESS:

> *Sidham kumārasa kāṇabhoasa vhenupālitasa* [*e*]*sa leṇa chetieghara ovarakā cha aṭha 8 vi*[*ti*]*kamaṁ niyutaṁ le*[*ṇa*]*sa cha ubhato pasesu poḍhiyo be 2 leṇasa aluganake patho cha dato etasa cha kumārasa deyadhamaṁ*

> Success! Prince Kāṇabhoa Vheṇupālita's *Leṇa*, *Chetiyaghara* and eight (8) cells: this much is allotted; and two (2) cisterns on each side of the *leṇa*, also a path connected with the *leṇa*, are presented. It is a meritorious gift of that prince.[44]

Like the site at Shelarvadi, the Mahāḍ excavations do not include a congregational worship hall. Thus it appears that it is the back central cell that is identified as the *cetiyaghara*, as it is differentiated from the other eight residential cells (*ovarakā*) and from the excavation (*leṇa*) itself. All three are written in the nominative case, suggesting that they are structurally (and grammatically) three separate entities. Furthermore, the identification of these architectural components in this inscription corresponds with the floor plan of the cave.

Although it is clear that Shelarvadi 8 and Mahāḍ 8 are monastic dwellings, the use of the term *cetiyghara* to identify the back central cell is not necessarily problematic. The term *cetiya* (Skt. *caitya*) can refer either to an object or a person worthy of veneration.[45] In some instances

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43. C.C. DAS GUPTA: "No. 14- Shelarwadi Cave Inscription," 76-77. Although DAS GUPTA transcribes the phrase *bhata-vireyehi samāpito*, he does not include it in his translation, stating that "the meaning of the word *bhata-vireyehi* is not clear." However, Gregory SCHOPEN suggested to me in a personal communication that *bhata-vireyehi* is probably the name of the individual (Bhadanta Virya) who was responsible at that time for the cave's completion (*samāpito*).

44. James BURGESS: *Report on the Buddhist Cave Temples and their Inscriptions*, A.S.W.I., vol. IV (London: Trübner & Co. 1883): 88, no. 1.

45. Franklin EDGERTON: *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*: 233.

it can even refer to the Buddha himself.[46] The term *ghara*, in both Pali and Sanskrit (*gṛha*) is defined as house.[47] It then appears that the term *cetiyaghara*, at least in the rock-cut caves in western India, can be applied to any enclosure of a sacred object or person, i.e. both the hall for congregational worship and the cell or shrine within the *vihāra*.

What is especially interesting, however, is the use of the term *caitya* at Ajaṇṭā in reference to the back central cells and their Buddha images. The term appears in two inscriptions – in Caves 16 and 17. Translated by V.V. MIRASHI, verses twenty-two and twenty-four of Cave 16 read as follows:

> [Realizing that] life, youth, wealth and happiness are transitory, ... he, for the sake of his father and mother, caused to be made this excellent dwelling to be occupied by the best of ascetics (*udāram...veśma yatī[ndrasevyam]*).

> [The dwelling] which is adorned with windows, doors, beautiful picture-galleries, ledges, statues of the nymphs of Indra and the like, which is orna-mented with beautiful pillars and stairs and has a temple of the Buddha inside ([*ni*]*veśitābhyantaracaityamandiram*).[48]

Again in these two verses of Cave 16 we find various terms used to identify the architectural components. The excavation itself is referred to as a dwelling (*veśma*) while the temple (*mandiram*) located inside the dwelling (*niveśitābhyantara*) houses a *caitya*, i.e. the Buddha. There can be little doubt that the *caitya-mandiram* is the cell in which the Buddha resides, for the term *mandira*, often used to refer to Hindu temples, further emphasizes the location of a sacred being.[49]

Furthermore, the term *caitya* is also found in the dedicatory inscription of Cave 17:

> [He excavated] this monolithic excellent hall, containing within it a *chaitya* of the king of ascetics (i.e., of the Buddha) and possessing the qualities of stateliness ... (*gāmbhīryyagunair upetam* [/] *niveśitāntarmunirājacaityam ekāśmakam maṇḍa-paratnam etat*).[50]

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46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid*, 220.

48. V.V. MIRASHI: *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*: 111. I have included part of the Sanskrit from MIRASHI's text on page 109, lines 18 and 20.

49. M. MONIER-WILLIAMS: *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*: 788. The interesting use of the term *mandira* in a Buddhist excavation also raises questions concerning broader cultural notions of sacred space and ritual practices.

50. V.V. MIRASHI: *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*: 129, verse 24. I have included the Sanskrit from MIRASHI's text on page 127, line 24.

The fact that the term *munirājacaityam* (*caitya* of the king of ascetics) is not compounded with *mandira* or *gṛha* suggests that it refers to the Buddha image itself, or more accurately, the presence of something (or someone) worthy of veneration. The use of the term *caitya/cetiya* in the epigraphical material from the *vihāras* at Ajaṇṭā, Shelarvadi, and Mahād, therefore clearly suggests similar conceptions about the Buddha's presence within the monastic dwelling – despite the formal differences in the articulation of this presence. In this connection, we might take a brief look at the fifth-century site of Bāgh.

The Bāgh Caves

Bāgh is an interesting site for this examination because it provides both inscriptional and art historical evidence that supports the Buddha's residency – as well as his proprietorship – in the context of the monastic dwelling. The rock-cut caves at Bāgh are located in the Vindhya hills in Madhya Pradesh and are approximately 135 miles northwest of Ajaṇṭā. Excavated from the local reddish-pink sandstone are at least ten caves in various stages of completion. Five of the caves appear to have functioned as residences, while others are rectangular pillared assembly halls. The most significant *vihāras* for this essay are Caves 2, 4, 7, and 8.[51]

Although there are no extant legible inscriptions at the site, a copper-plate land-grant was found inside Bāgh Cave 2 in 1928.[52] Measuring 8.3 inches in length and 4.5 inches in height, the plate is inscribed with fourteen lines recording the gift of a village. Although the grant refers to the reign of Mahārāja Subandhu, a king of Māhiṣmatī, the lower right corner of the plate, which would have presumably contained the year, is lost due to breakage. Fortunately, another copper-plate grant that is believed to be associated with this same king was found in Barwāni and

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51. Although Cave 3 also appears to have residential cells, this cave does not share similar characteristics with the other residences at the site, nor with those at Ajaṇṭā. Caves 1 and 10 have collapsed and are currently filled with debris. Caves 5 and 9 are pillared assembly halls that do not include individual residential cells. Although Cave 6 is a quadrangular excavation with a total of five cells in the back and right wall, John ANDERSON suggests that these cells most likely served as storage facilities. See John ANDERSON: "Bāgh Caves: Historical and Descriptive Analysis; Architecture, Sculpture, Painting," *Mārg* 25/3 (June 1972): 15-56.

52. V.V. MIRASHI: *Inscriptions of the Kalachuri-Chedi Era. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* 4 (Ootacamund: Government Epigraphist for India 1955): 19-21.

it is dated in the year 167 of an unspecified era.[53] Therefore, there are generally only two possible eras that the Barwāni grant can be assigned to: the Kalacuri-Cedi era, providing a date of ca. 417 C.E., or the Gupta era which would date the grant ca. 487 C.E. Based on the art historical evidence of the site, however, the later date for both grants seems more plausible.[54]

According to V.V. MIRASHI's translation, the land-grant found inside Bāgh 2 records the gift of a village to a community of Buddhist monks:

> in order that it may be used for (*defraying the expenses of*) perfume, frank-incense, flowers and offerings as well as for maintaining an alms-house, for repairing broken and rent portions (of the *vihāra*) and for providing the Community of Venerable Monks coming from (*all*) the four quarters, with clothing, food, nursing of the sick, beds, seats as well as medicine in the Monastery called Kalāyana (the Abode of Art) caused to be constructed by Dattaṭaka, as long as the moon, the sun, the oceans, planets, constellations and the earth would endure.[55]

However, in his translation, MIRASHI failed to include the key phrase "for the Blessed One, the Buddha" contained in the actual grant.[56] This omission has serious ramifications for understanding this legal transaction of land which was "to be used" to provide perfume and other

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53. V.V. MIRASHI: "The Age of the Bagh Caves," *The Indian Historical Quarterly* 21/2 (June 1945): 79-85.

54. However, some scholars have dated the Bāgh caves even earlier than the fifth century. In order to account for a clause contained in the Subandhu land grant for "repairing broken and rent portions (of the *vihāra*)," V.V. MIRASHI, John ANDERSON, and Karl KHANDALAVALA have independently suggested a late fourth-century date for the site to provide enough time for an accumulation of damage that would necessitate "repairs" to the monastery. See V.V. MIRASHI: "The Age of the Bagh Caves": 84-85; John ANDERSON: "Bāgh Caves: Historical and Descriptive Analysis; Architecture, Sculpture, Painting": 19; and Karl KHANDALAVALA: "Bagh and Ajanta," in Karl Khandalavala, ed., *The Golden Age: Gupta Art- Empire, Province and Influence* (Bombay: Marg Publications 1991), pp. 93-94. However, the attribution of such an early date is completely at odds with the art historical evidence and fails to acknowledge that "repair" clauses are a standard feature in grants pertaining to Buddhist monasteries.

55. V.V. MIRASHI: *Inscriptions of the Kalachuri-Chedi Era*: 21.

56. This is pointed out in Gregory SCHOPEN's analysis of this inscription in "The Buddha as an Owner of Property": 207 n. 15. The Sanskrit reads: *bhagavato buddhāya gandhadhūpamālyabalisatropayojyaḥ ... āryyabhikṣusaṅghasya cāturddiśābhyāgatakasya cīvarapiṇḍapātaglānapratyayaśeyyāsanabhaiṣajya-hetor ...* See V.V. MIRASHI: *Inscriptions of the Kalachuri-Chedi Era*: 20, lines 6 through 9.

requisites. Moreover, *both* parties are said to be residing in the Kalāyana monastery (*kalāyanavihāre*). This monastery, literally "the Abode of Art," is probably Cave 2 where the copper-plate was found. Thus, if the Buddha's residential status is at least alluded to, if not clearly stated, in this grant, then we might expect to find his presence manifested in the art historical remains of the cave itself.

Cave 2 at Bāgh is a quadrangular *vihāra* with the main hall measuring approximately 86 feet square (Fig. 13). It has a total of twenty residential cells, a pillared antechamber and a large back central cell. Similar to Ajaṇṭā's *vihāras*, the central doorway leading into Bāgh 2 is differentiated from the other two entrances in terms of both size and decoration. Other external decorative features of Cave 2 include fragments of the architrave which were found amidst fallen debris. There are no extant paintings or sculptures found on the rest of the facade, however, there are two niches with carved images located on either end of the veranda preceding the damaged colonnade. In the right niche is a nineteenth-century Ganeśa constructed of mud-plaster and paint which assumedly covers the original image of a Buddha.[57] Due to the extensive damage of the rock, the image in the left niche has been variously identified as a *nāgarāja*, a *yakṣa*, or a Buddha.[58]

The visual emphasis inside Bāgh 2 is on the shrine and its antechamber. Aligned on the axis of the cave and framed by the *vihāra's* central pillars, the antechamber measures approximately 26 feet in width and 12 feet in depth. Carved into the side walls are the only extant figurative

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57. See C.E. LUARD: "The Buddhist Caves of Central India," *Indian Antiquary* 39 (1910): 228 and A.K. HALDAR: "The Buddhist Caves of Bagh," *Burlington Magazine* XLIII (October 1923): 159. Mukul Chandra DEY also mentions this image in his diary, stating: "At each end of the veranda is a small recess; that on the right contains a very modern figure of Ganesh, the Hindu god of luck, usurping the place of the earliest figure of the Buddha, which is known to have been there originally by the Buddhistic emblems of flying figures holding garlands." See M. DEY: *My Pilgrimages to Ajanta and Bagh* (London: Oxford University Press 1925): 163.

58. C.E. LUARD and E. IMPEY identify the figure as a Buddha; J. Ph. VOGEL and Walter SPINK suggest either a *nāgarāja* or a *yakṣa*. See C.E. LUARD: "The Buddhist Caves of Central India": 228; E. IMPEY: "Description of the Caves of Bāgh, in Rāth," *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* V (1854): 548; J. Ph. VOGEL: "Sculptures," in John Marshall, et. al. *The Bāgh Caves in the Gwalior State* (London: The India Society 1927), pp. 38-39; and Walter SPINK: "Bāgh: A Study," *Archives of Asian Art* 30 (1976/77): 65.

sculptures of the Buddha found inside the cave. Although large Buddha sculptures are found in the antechambers of Ajaṇṭā's Caves 4 and U6, the figural group at Bāgh is closer to Ajaṇṭā's main shrine images where the Buddha is flanked by two attendants. On both sides of the antechamber at Bāgh, the Buddha is over life-size (Fig. 14). Standing on a small lotus, the Buddha displays the gesture of giving (*varadamudrā*) with his proper right hand and holds the hem of his robe in his left. As in Ajaṇṭā's main shrine images, the Bāgh Buddhas exhibit the standard iconographical features, including tightly-curled hair, *uṣṇīṣa*, and extended earlobes.

The sculpted Buddhas and attendant figures in the antechamber demarcate the sanctity of space and allude to the presence contained within the shrine. However, the main shrine image in Bāgh 2 is not an anthropomorphic Buddha but a three-dimensional *stūpa*. In fact, Bāgh 4, 7, and 8 also exhibit nearly identical floor plans which incorporate a three-dimensional *stūpa* in the shrine. In light of the grant which locates the Buddha as a living person within the Kalāyana monastery, the presence of a *stūpa* within these fifth-century *vihāras* suggests a continued use of the *stūpa* to denote the Buddha's presence that I noted in the earlier *vihāras* at Nāsik, Wai, Shelarvadi, and Mahāḍ. Thus the presence of a *stūpa* inside the shrines at Bāgh indicates that the *stūpa* in the fifth century still articulated the Buddha's presence.

Though clearly the *stūpa* was considered to be, or at least contain, the presence of the Buddha – this presence was more fully defined and articulated at Bāgh than in the earlier *vihāras* that contain *stūpas*. This is evident not only in Bāgh 2's antechamber imagery which contains anthropomorphic Buddha images, but in some very interesting modifications to the shrines themselves. On the ground in front of the *stūpa* housed in the back central cell of Bāgh 7 is an extention of stone that contains a deep socket-hole centered between two smaller holes. Walter SPINK suggests that these holes served to affix a Buddha image flanked by two attendants.[59] Evidence confirming the attachment of separate Buddha figures can also be found in Bāgh 1, 3, and 7, and in front of the *stūpa* in Cave 8.[60]

The juxtaposition of the anthropomorphic Buddha and *stūpa* is also found in Ajaṇṭā's fifth-century excavations, though in monolithic form.

59. Walter SPINK: "Bāgh: A Study": 62.
60. *Ibid*, 64 and 84 n. 39.

For example, the Buddha enshrined in Cave 11 is actually carved from (or backed by) a *stūpa*. Interestingly, a more emphatic presentation of the *stūpa* as the Buddha's body occurs inside Ajanṭā's *caitya* halls 19 and 26. Instead of having a plain domed *stūpa* as the object of veneration, both of these halls contain a *stūpa* that is carved with a Buddha figure on its front face (Fig. 15).[61] Rather than seeing these images as "solutions" or "compromises" between *stūpa* and Buddha image worship, it appears that their joining of forces, so to speak, is a literal, further articulation of the Buddha's presence.

Conclusions

In this essay, I have chosen to move beyond the chronological and sectarian frameworks in which Ajanṭā is most often discussed. With this approach we can focus on how Ajanṭā's excavations relate to important aspects of some earlier *vihāras*. Though clearly not all of western India's early *vihāras* demonstrate a concern for housing the Buddha's presence, some do nonetheless reveal conceptual similarities with Ajanṭā in terms of their architectural and epigraphical evidence. The second through fourth-century excavations at Nāsik, Wai, Shelarvadi, and Mahāḍ seem to foreshadow not only what becomes further defined and articulated in the fifth and post-fifth-century archæological records, but also the increasing concern expressed in the later epigraphical sources that locate and identify the Buddha as a living person. Though the objects of worship in the early and later *vihāras* are indeed *formally* different, both the *stūpa* and the anthropomorphic figure were conceived of as *being*, or at least *containing*, the living presence of the Buddha. Seen in this light, the early *vihāras* are in actuality the keys to understanding what is presented more explicitly at Ajanṭā.

   Although these early excavations exhibit a concern for locating the Buddha's presence within the monastic residence, there are nonetheless, some differences in *how* this presence is manifested at Ajanṭā. Not only is his presence articulated in human form, but the *nature* of his presence is also more fully defined. Rather than simply incorporating a solitary image, the caves at Ajanṭā create a celestial environment for their permanent resident. The rock-cut sculptures of the Buddha are not only

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61. It is also noteworthy that such monolithic *stūpa-cum-Buddha*s are found at the roughly contemporary sites of Dhamnar and Kolvi, and in the seventh-century *caitya* hall at Ellorā.

surrounded by a retinue of attendants, garland bearers, musicians, and other deities, but are often presented among an array of Buddha images that are either carved or painted in Ajaṇṭā's antechambers.[62] Thus at the same time the Buddha's presence is made more concrete at Ajaṇṭā, his divine nature is also emphasized, suggesting his presence as a super-mundane figure. This emphasis on the Buddha's cosmic nature may in fact better correspond with the abstract presentation of the Buddha's presence in *stūpa* form. In other words, it was not just the Buddha figure that could replace the *stūpa* inside the *vihāra*, but an entire celestial ensemble may have been required in order to evoke the same power or presence as the *stūpa* in the earlier caves.[63] Although further investigation is needed into how such imagery becomes as powerful as the *stūpa*, clearly at Ajaṇṭā this is so.

62. The most popular scene depicted in Ajaṇṭā's antechambers is the multiplication miracle at Śrāvastī. Painted representations of this event are found in Caves 1, L6, and 17. Cave 7 contains two carved panels which cover the side and front walls of the antechamber. It is interesting to note that in the three *vihāras* that do not have pillared antechambers (Caves 11, 16, and 22) representations of the multi-plication miracle (or a variation of this theme) are found on the rear wall, as close to the main shrine as possible.

63. I would like to thank Janice Leoshko for this suggestion.
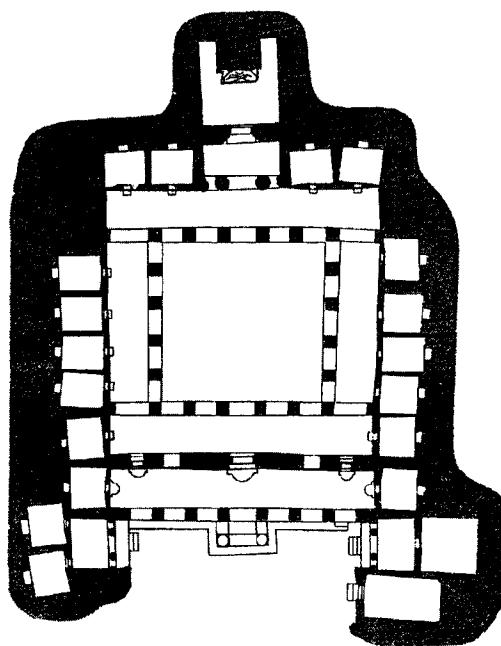
Figure 1. Ajaṇṭā Cave 1, floor plan, fifth-century excavation. Reproduced from James FERGUSSON and James BURGESS, *Cave Temples of India* (London: W.H. Allen 1880): plate xl.
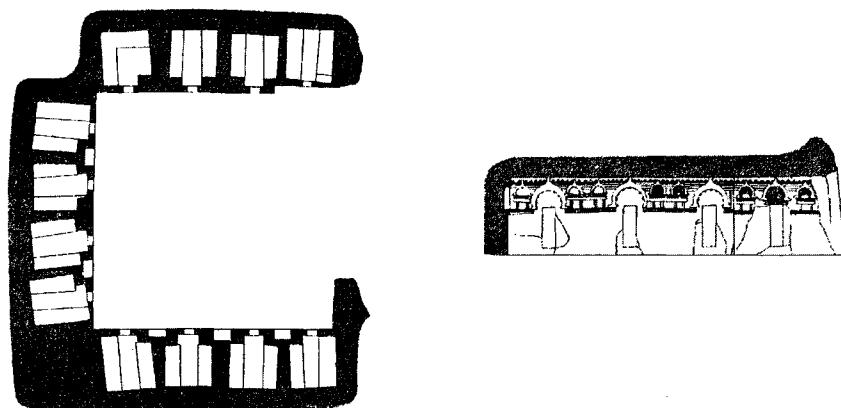
Figure 2. Ajaṇṭā Cave 12, floor plan and longitudinal section, ca. 100 B.C.E. to 100 C.E. Reproduced from James FERGUSSON and James BURGESS, *Cave Temples of India* (London: W.H. Allen 1880): plate xxvii.
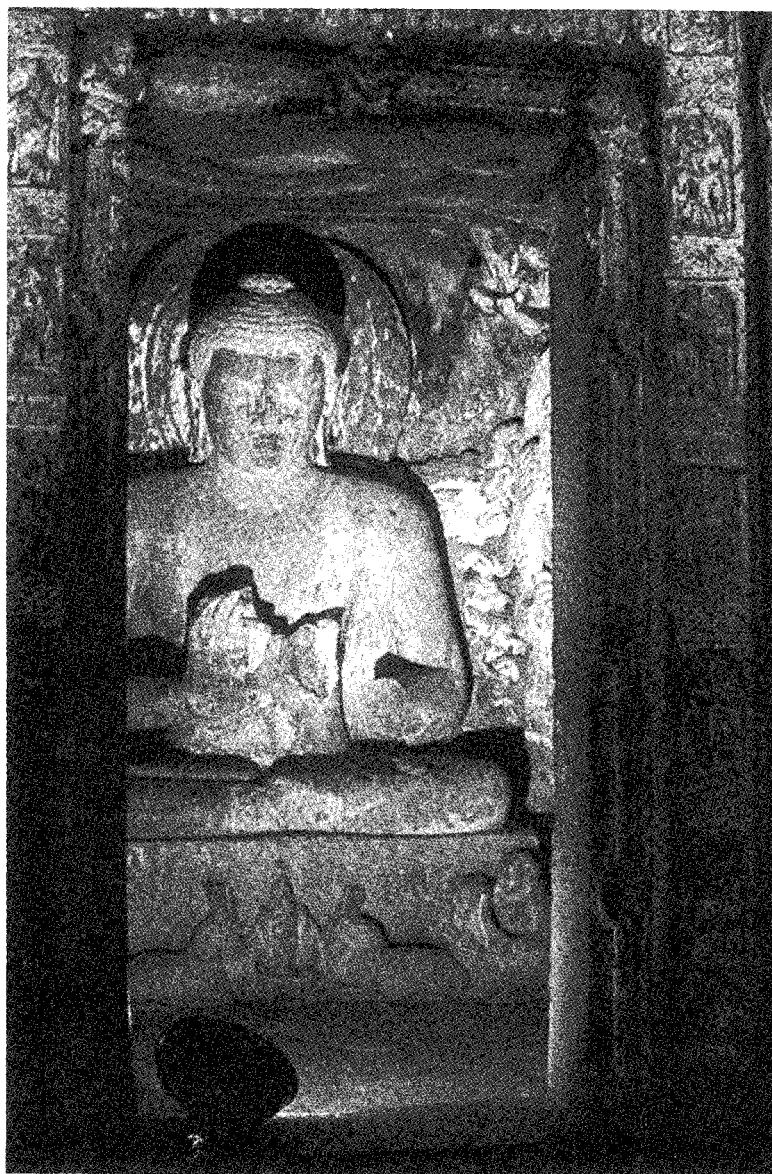
Figure 3. Ajaṇṭā Cave 2, main shrine Buddha, fifth century C.E. Photo courtesy of Lance Nelson.
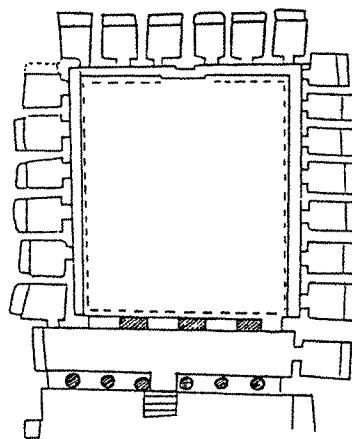
Figure 4. Nāsik 3, floor plan, second-century excavation. Reproduced from M.K. DHAVALIKAR, *Late Hīnayāna Caves of Western India* (Poona: Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute 1984): figure 7.
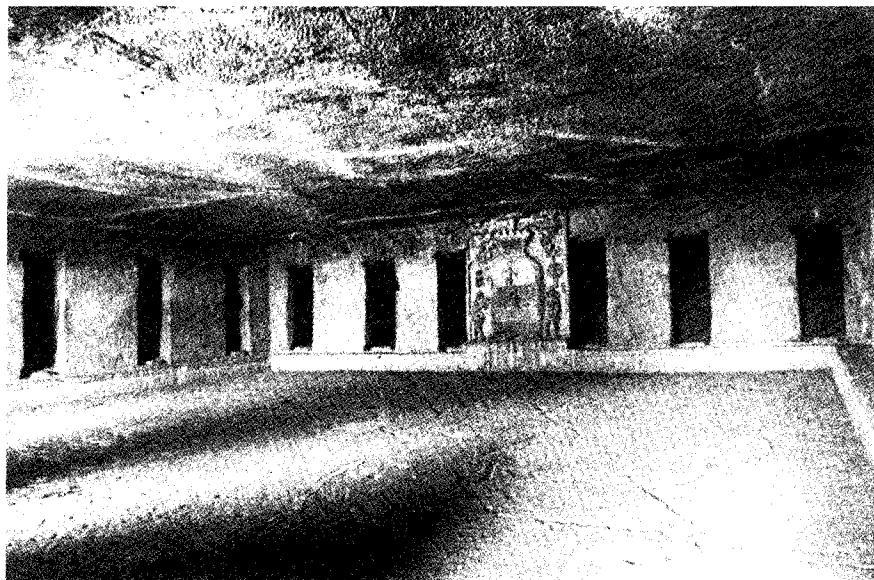

Figure 5. Nāsik 3, interior showing *stūpa* relief, second century C.E. Photo courtesy of the American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS Neg. No 688.68).
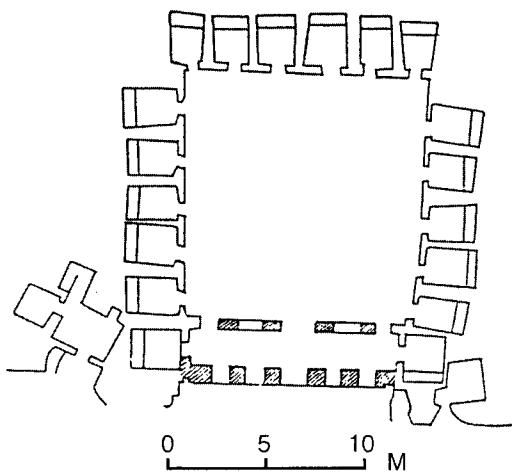
Figure 6. Nāsik 10, floor plan, second-century excavation. Reproduced from M.K. DHAVALIKAR, *Late Hīnayāna Caves of Western India* (Poona: Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute 1984): figure 6.
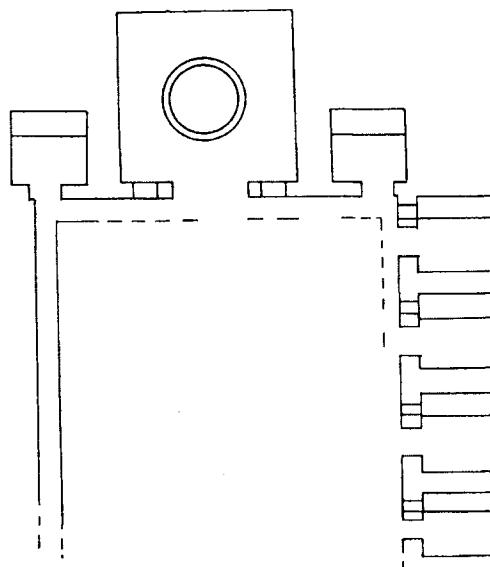

Figure 7. Wai 2, floor plan, third-century excavation. Reproduced from M.K. DHAVALIKAR, *Late Hīnayāna Caves of Western India* (Poona: Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute 1984): figure 24.
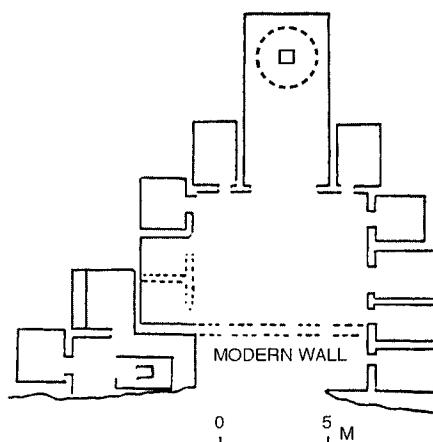
Figure 8. Shelarvadi 8, floor plan, late third to early fourth-century excavation. Reproduced from M.K. DHAVALIKAR, *Late Hīnayāna Caves of Western India* (Poona: Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute 1984): figure 34.
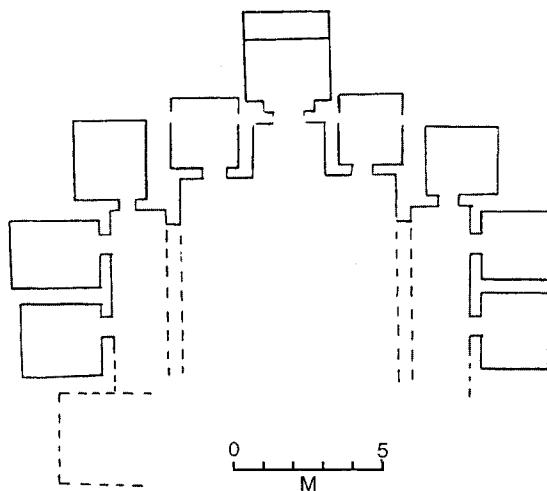
Figure 9. Ajaṇṭā Cave 8, floor plan, late fourth to early fifth-century excavation. Reproduced from M.K. DHAVALIKAR, *Late Hīnayāna Caves of Western India* (Poona: Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute 1984): figure 36.
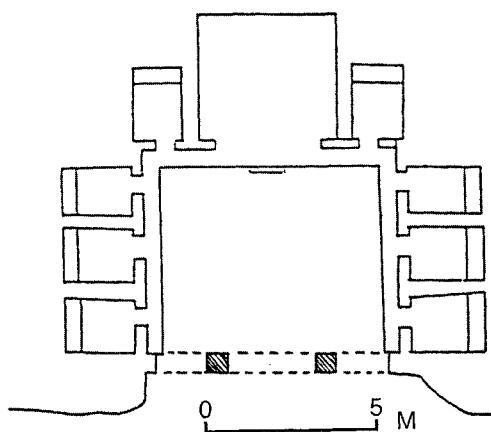
Figure 10. Mahāḍ 8, floor plan, late third to fourth-century excavation. Reproduced from M.K. DHAVALIKAR, *Late Hīnayāna Caves of Western India* (Poona: Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute 1984): figure 32.
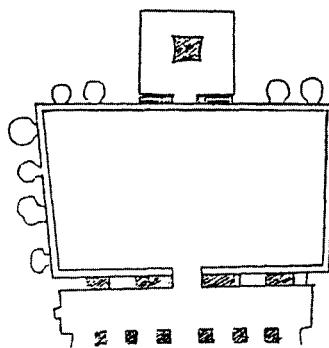

Figure 11. Mahāḍ 1, floor plan, late fourth-century excavation. Reproduced from M.K. DHAVALIKAR, *Late Hīnayāna Caves of Western India* (Poona: Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute 1984): figure 33.
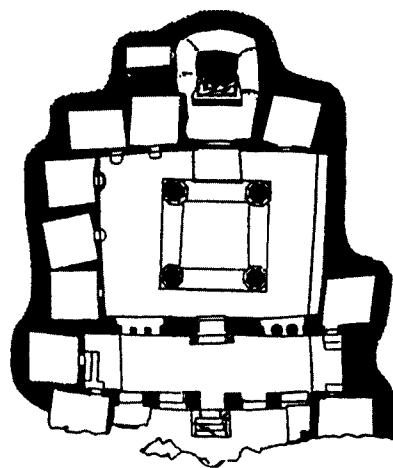
Figure 12. Ajaṇṭā Cave 11, floor plan, fifth-century excavation. Reproduced from James BURGESS, *Report on the Buddhist Cave Temples and their Inscriptions*, A.S.W.I. IV (London: Trübner and Co. 1883): plate xxviii.
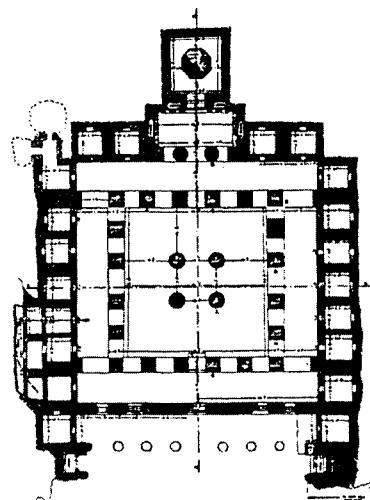

Figure 13. Bāgh Cave 2, floor plan, fifth-century excavation. Reproduced from John MARSHALL, et. al., *The Bāgh Caves in Gwalior State* (Delhi: The India Society 1927): plate I.
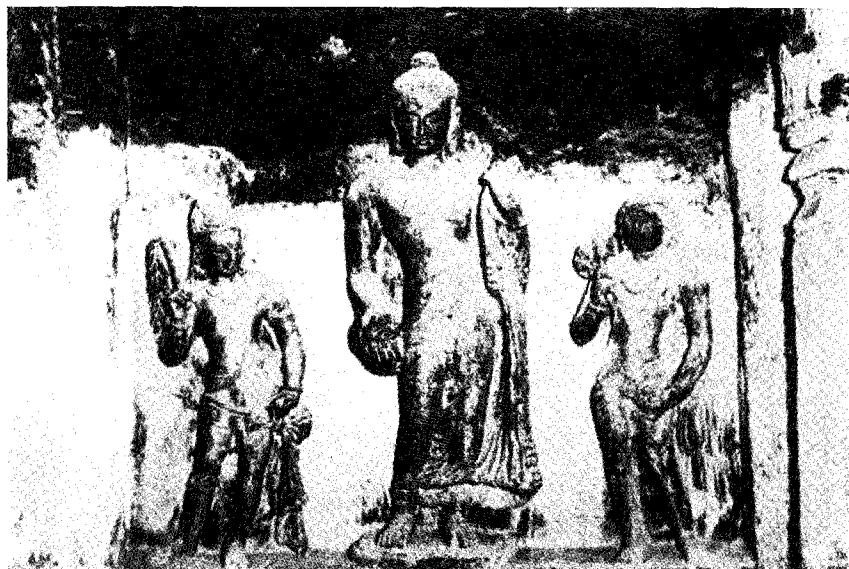
Figure 14. Bāgh Cave 2, Buddha and attendants, left antechamber wall, fifth century
C.E. Reproduced from John MARSHALL, et. al., *The Bāgh Caves in Gwalior State*
(Delhi: The India Society 1927): plate VIb.

Figure 15. Ajaṇṭā Cave 26, *stūpa*, fifth century C.E. Photo by the author.