

## I. The Art of Ajanta : Sculpture

I am beholden to Denjong Chogyal and Dr. A. M. D’Rozario, respectively President and the Director of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, for having invited me to deliver Sir Tashi Namgyal Memorial Lectures at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology. The late Denjong Chogyal Chempo Tashi Namgyal was known as a distinguished personality in many fields of human activity. He will be long remembered on account of his intellectual and scholarly pursuits. I, therefore, feel honoured for being called upon to deliver these three lectures instituted in his memory. I do not profess to be a scholar in Buddhism but have studied, during the course of my long service in the Archaeological Survey of India, the Buddhist Art of India, including that of the remarkable centre of Indian art namely Ajanta, which is well-known for its mural paintings. During the course of my work in north India I was fortunate to visit the monasteries in the Lahul and Spiti District of Himachal Pradesh and to study the paintings at Tabo. I thought that it would be appropriate to talk on Ajanta (fig. 1) and Tabo during the course of my lectures. The first two lectures would be devoted to Ajanta while the third will deal with Tabo which can be aptly described as the ‘Himalayan Ajanta’. I shall try to bring home to the learned audience the importance of these monuments in the history of world art.\*

India has a great art tradition traceable through the centuries in her literature and archaeological remains. Of the latter, Ajanta occupies a place unique in the history of world art as the foremost art-centre of ancient India. Though well-known as a rich repository of mural paintings, it has architectural splendour and sculptural beauty rarely matched by any other centre of art in the country.

The art of Ajanta owes its inspiration to those early Buddhist *bhikshus* who came to western India in the wake of the spread of Buddhism under the patronage of Aśoka (273-36 B.C.). Among many cultural emissaries who went to different parts of India and Ceylon to preach *Dhamma*, the name of (Yavana) Dharmarakshita stands out for he appears to be responsible also for starting a new architectural activity in the Deccan, connected with the propagation of *Dhamma*. It is believed that he commenced his work from Śūrpāraka (modern Sopara, District Thana), a flourishing port-town and a find-spot of the edicts of Aśoka. The perpendicular cliffs of the amagdaloidal trap formation of the Sahyādri with horizontal beddings must have caught the imagination of the Buddhist monks as being ideal for the excavation of monasteries and

\* The photographs illustrating the talk have been reproduced here by the courtesy of the Archaeological Survey of India.

prayer halls. It is very likely that the inspiration for such experiment might have evidently come from the early Aśoka caves attempted in the quartzose gneissic rock of the Barabar and Nagarjuni hills in District Gaya, South Bihar. These early caves, excavated by Aśoka and his grandson Daśaratha, appear to have set the new style for carving out, in the more permanent medium of rock, monastic centres meant for quiet contemplation and religious study by the monks. Such caves are undoubtedly in the tradition of the ancient Indian custom vouched in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* which describes a place a monk should use for quiet meditation. It says 'śabda-jal-āśray-ādībhiḥ mano' nu-kūle na tu chakshu-pīdane guhā-nivātāśrayaḥ prayojayet.' The serene grandeur of a mountain abode always attracted the recluses and the *bhikṣus* found the hillside of the Sahyādri suitable for the establishment of *saṅgharāmas* (*vihāra*) and *chaitya-grīhas*. It appears from the available evidence that structures in the rock-cut form were brought into existence in western India some decades after the arrival of (Yavana) Dharmarakṣita. Examples conforming to Hīnayāna have been located at Bhaja (District Poona), Kondane (District Colaba), Pitalkhora and Ajanta (District Aurangabad) and many other places.

These early excavations were patronized by merchant-princes who lived and prospered under the benign rule of the Sātavāhana kings with their capital at Pratiṣṭhāna (identified with Paithan in District Aurangabad). Although these rulers professed Brahmanism, they were also tolerant towards Buddhism. The country was rich, prosperous and peaceful under their rule. Trade and commerce within the country and with the Mediterranean world brought in enormous riches. The early stage of rock-cut activity belonged to the Hīnayāna faith as the other school—Mahāyāna—was non-existent at that time. The excavations of this period can be placed in two centuries before and after the Christian era.

In this context it will be worthwhile examining the location of different Buddhist rock-cut caves in the Deccan. This study at once reveals that most of these Buddhist establishments were situated on the ancient *Sārthavāhapathas* or caravan-routes. Ajanta was no exception. The situation of Ajanta is significant in more than one ways. It is about 130 kilometres north of Paithan (ancient Pratiṣṭhāna), the capital of the early Sātavāhanas and lies on the ancient arterial trade-routes connecting north India, through Ujjain and Māhishmatī, with Pratiṣṭhāna in Dakṣiṇāpatha and further with ports on the south-eastern coast, through Ter (ancient Tagara), Kondapur, Amaravati (ancient Dhānyakataka), Guntapalli, etc. Half-way between Ajanta and Pratiṣṭhāna is a place called Bhokardan which can be identified with Bhogavardhana of the early Sanchi inscriptions. The last-mentioned place, which has recently been excavated by the Universities of Nagpur and Aurangabad, has yielded remains of the Sātavāhana period including a very fine ivory figurine showing affinity with the ivory figure of Lakṣmī of Indian origin found

at Pompeii in Italy. Ajanta also lies near another trade-route connecting Broach (ancient Bharukachchna, Barygaza of the *Periplus* and Po-lu-kachep'o of Hiuen Tsang) with Pratihāna through ancient townships like Frakash and Bahal recently brought to light by excavation. As already mentioned, the selection of the site was conditioned by the chief consideration of quietude and scenic beauty. At Ajanta, the serene grandeur of nature is at once in evidence and the words of the Upanishadic seer (see above, p. 2) that an ideal place for the contemplation of the Divine is a hidden cave protected from wind, situated in surroundings made favourable to the mind by the sound of water and other features and not offensive to the eye, are amply borne out by the selection of the site. The stream Waghora, rushing down from the high grounds, takes seven leaps at the head of the semi-circular end of the gorge: the resultant waterfalls, pools of water (Sāt-kuṇḍ) as also the melody of running water add charm to the place. In an inscription in Cave 16, the valley is described as resonant with chirping of birds and chattering of monkeys and the monastery as inhabited by great *yogins*.

It is not known what was the ancient name of Ajanta. However, about less than half a kilometre from the cave group is a place called Lenapur (cave town). It is not unlikely that this small hamlet came into existence about the time the first group of workers came and settled down at Lenapur for the purpose of excavating a monolithic cave-establishment. The name Ajanta, however, can perhaps be the ancient Ajitañjaya, a place mentioned in the *Mahāmāyūrī*, with the *yaksha* Kūṭaḍamshṭra ('one with peak-like teeth') as its patron deity. The caves have obtained their present name of Ajanta from a neighbouring village, the usual local pronunciation of which is Ajinṭhā. It would thus be seen that the words Ajitañjaya and Ajanta seem to be very closely related. It is also likely that the full ancient name of this monastic establishment was Ajitañjaya-sthāna from which the word Ajinṭhā could be an easy derivative. Ajita is also the lay-name of Maitreya or the Future Buddha.

The caves, now famous throughout the world, were once lost into oblivion and were re-discovered in the first quarter of the last century. A recently discovered inscription engraved in the plaster over a pillar in Cave 10 gives the name of a British officer with the date 1819. It appears that this first recorded visit took place immediately after the caves were noticed by the officers of the Madras Army in 1819.

The caves, however, find mention in the travel accounts of Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim who stayed in India for about fifteen years in the first half of the seventh century. It appears that he did not visit the caves and his description is mainly based on hearsay. He says 'In the east of this country (Mo-ha-la-ch'a = Mahārāshṭra) was a mountain range, ridges one above another in succession, tiers of peaks and sheer summits. Here was a monastery the base of which was in a dark defile, and its lofty halls . . . and storeyed terraces had the cliff on their back and

faced the ravine. This monastery had been built by A-chê-lo of West India ... Within the establishment was a large temple above 100 feet high in which was a stone image of the Buddha above seventy feet high ; the image was surrounded by a tier of seven canopies unattached and unsupported, each canopy separated from the one above it by the space of three feet. The walls of this temple had depicted on them the incidents of Buddha's career as Bodhisattva, including the circumstances of his attaining bodhi and the omens attending his final passing away, all great and small were here delineated. Outside the gate of the monastery, on either side north and south was a stone elephant.'

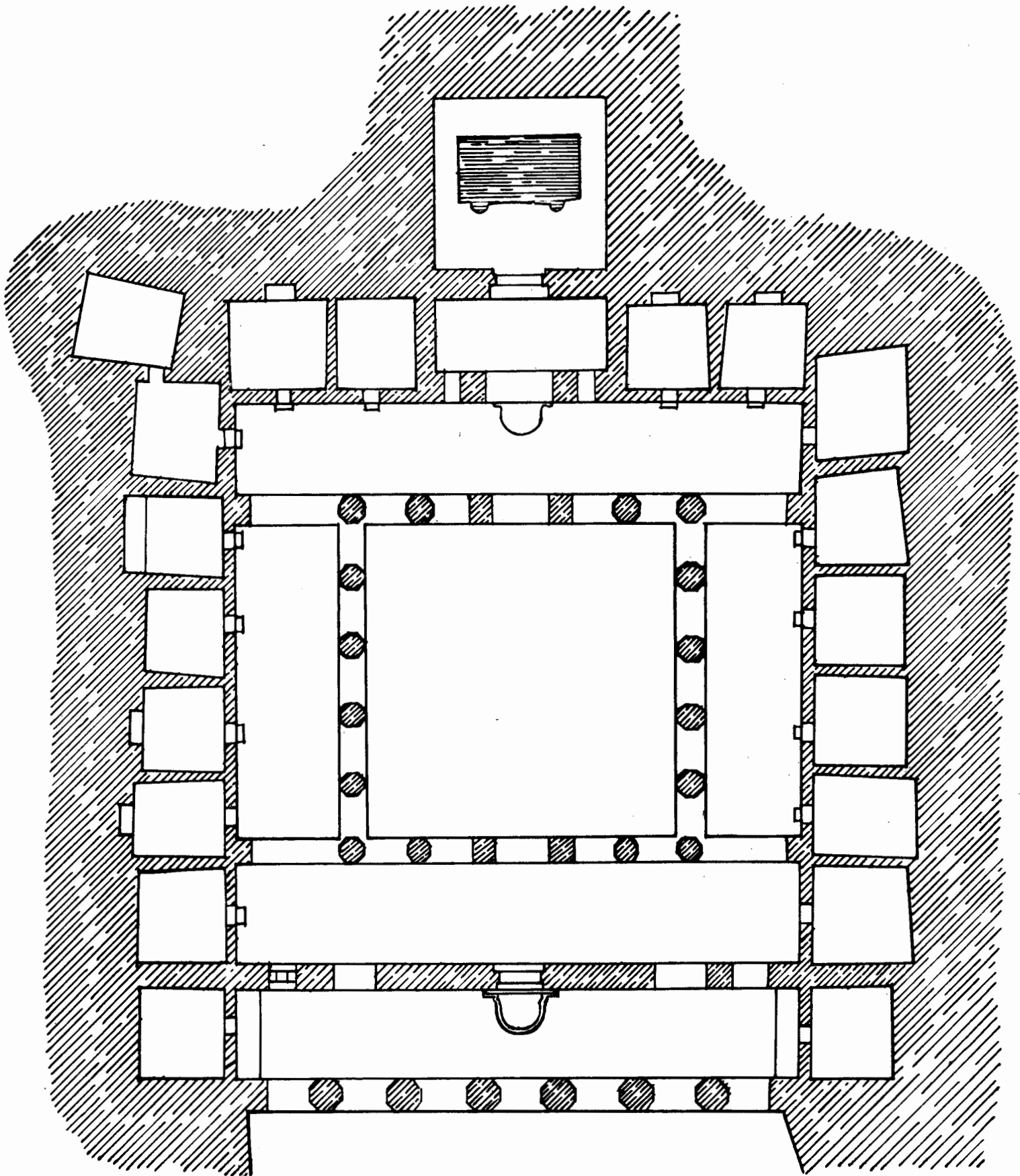
At the outset it must be made clear that the thirty caves at Ajanta were excavated over a long period when the country was being ruled by the Sātavāhanas and the Vākātakas. The Vākātakas hailed from Basim (ancient Vatsagulma, District Akola), about 130 kilometres north-east of Ajanta. The later caves, containing inscriptions, testify that a minister and a subordinate vassal of Vākātika king, Harishena, were responsible for the excavation of Caves 16 and 17. The Vākātakas, besides being contemporary of the Imperial Guptas of north India, were matrimonially connected with them and thus this royal house came to represent the classical artistic tradition in the Deccan. In fact, Ajanta caves symbolize the high water-mark of ancient Indian tradition and the paintings assume great interest as giving a vivid picture of the social life and customs of ancient India.

As already stated, the earliest caves at Ajanta belong to the Hīnayāna tradition. An inscription on the façade of the oldest *chaitya-griha*, Cave 10, mentions that the *ghara-mukha* (façade) was the gift of one Vasithiputa Kaṭahādi, and that *vihāra*, Cave 12 was the gift of a merchant Ghanamadada. Recently two new inscriptions have come to light (A. Ghosh, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXXVI, Part VI, pp. 241—244) in Cave 10 and these belong to the second century B.C. One mentions a donation of a *bhīti* (wall) by Kanhaka of Bahada while the other mentions the gift of *pāsāda* by Dhamadeva.

The work at Ajanta began in the middle of the second century B.C. when Caves 10 and 12 were excavated. Almost about a century later was excavated Cave 9 which is a *chaitya-griha* with a closed façade. To the same period belong the Caves 8, 13 and 15A. However, the second phase of activity at Ajanta is of great importance. Almost after an interval of about 600 years, very ambitious excavations were planned at Ajanta to encompass the entire crescentic valley in order to meet the changing and growing needs of the faith, namely the broad-based Mahāyāna Buddhism. Accordingly, two magnificent *chaitya-grihas*, Caves 19 and 26 (the third one, Cave 29, was left unfinished) and commodious *vihāras*, Caves 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 11, 15, 16, 17 and 20-24, each of the latter type, almost invariably with a shrine of Buddha and some with subshrines for minor deities e.g. *yakshas* and niches for Buddha and

# AJANTA

PLAN OF VĀKĀTAKA PERIOD VIHĀRA (CAVE NO.17)



# AJANTA

## PLAN OF CHAITYA CAVE NO. 10

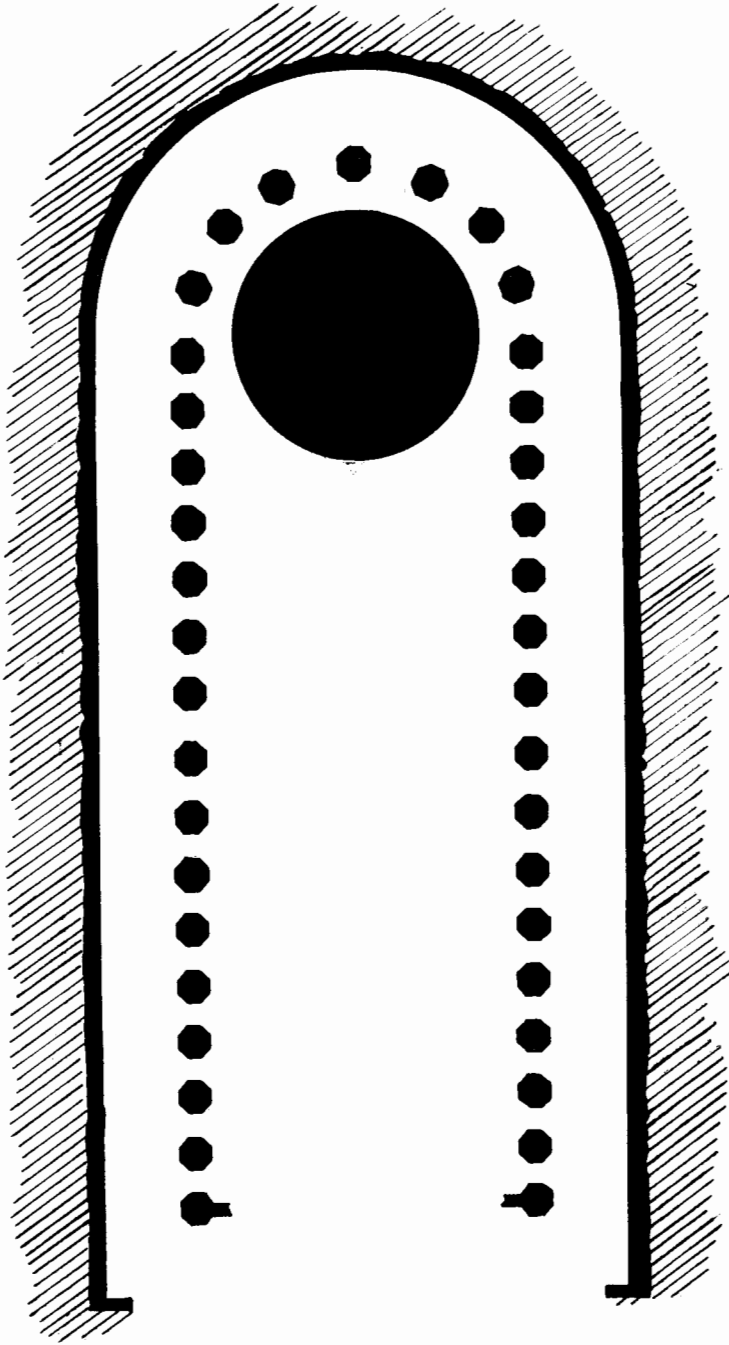


Fig. 2  
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*Plate 1. Ajanta, Cave 9: interior of the chaitya-griha*

Bodhisattvas, were excavated. Almost all the excavations were completed in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. under the patronage of the Vākāṭaka rulers. An interesting inscription in Cave 16 in Ajanta mentions the dedication of a dwelling which was fully adorned with windows, doors, beautiful picture gallery and stairs and had a temple of Buddha inside, by one Varāhadeva, the minister of the last of the Vākāṭaka rulers,

Harishena, of about A.D. 475-500. Another inscription, in Cave 17, tells us of a chief of a family subordinate to Harishena. It describes how under his patronage was excavated a gem-like monolithic *maṇḍapa*, Cave 17 itself, with a shrine for Buddha and an adjacent water-reservoir and a *ganāha-kuṭī* ('perfumed-chamber'), which evidently is the *chaitya* Cave 19.

Rock-cut activity at Ajanta commenced, as already stated, from the middle of the second century B.C. and continued till almost the end of the sixth century A.D. During this long period, the artistic and architectural activity underwent development and the caves excavated in different periods beautifully illustrate such a development. Before we examine this process, it will be appropriate to understand the significant features of the two principal types of caves, namely the *chaitya-grihas* and the *vihāras*. A *chaitya-griha*, sometimes called simply a *chaitya*, was a prayer hall, apsidal or rectangular on plan, with a nave and side aisles marked out from each other by a row of pillars and a *stūpa* (often called *chaitya*) at the remote end of the nave (fig. 2 and plate I). A *saṅghārāma*, often called *vihāra*, is a monastic abode and had as its nucleus a central hall with flanking residential cells (fig. 3). At Ajanta, the progressive architectural development in the *chaitya-grihas* excavated during the Sātavāhana rule under the Hīnayāna influence and those excavated under Vākāṭaka patronage with Mahāyāna influence can be clearly detected. The early *chaitya-grihas* closely imitate contemporary buildings built in timber, the vaulted ceiling thereof still retaining the original attached wooden ribs. The later *chaitya-grihas* excavated under the Vākāṭakas, although following in a general way the plan of the typical *chaitya-griha*, were more elaborate in structural and sculptural treatment. Caves 19 and 26 exemplify the later efforts. Both these cave temples have received the highest attention by the addition of elegant pillared porticoes, charming façade and skilful integration of architectural and sculptural details. These two *chaitya-grihas* have forecourts with attached pillared rooms to provide for the accommodation of priest monks.

The later *vihāras* of Ajanta, of which Cave 1 or 17 may be taken to be the most representative examples, presuppose a long development from the pillarless and rather austere examples of the earlier period. The *vihāras* of the later period had a pillared porch or a verandah supported by elegantly decorated pillars, the sculptured capitals of which carry spectacular entablatures with friezes or panels of sculptures including scenes from the life of Buddha (plate II). The interior hall was supported by pillars arranged in a square and cells for monks pierced into the walls. An antechamber leads the visitor to the sanctum enshrining a colossal image of Buddha through well relieved door-frames.

In the fifth century and perhaps a few decades later, activity at Ajanta was so brisk that the work progressed simultaneously in different sectors. The *vihāras*, Caves 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7, together with smaller intervening





*Plate II. Ajanta, Cave 1: panel showing the four events which led the Buddha to renounce the world*

caves, were excavated at the outer end of the valley and Caves 11, 16, 17 and 20 in the central sector. The other *vihāras*, Caves 21 to 24, together with the *chaitya-griha*, Cave 26, at the inner end, were commenced a little later but were executed during the early part of sixth century and some were left unfinished.

#### *The Sculpture of Ajanta*

The splendour of the paintings of Ajanta has overshadowed the elegance and serene dignity of its sculpture, as a result of which the latter has not received its due attention. The study of Ajanta sculpture is of utmost importance for the understanding of plastic art in the Deccan.

The sculptural activity in Buddhist caves in the Deccan is broadly divisible into two main periods. Ajanta does not, however, contain any

sculpture of the earlier period, covering about four centuries, from the second century B.C. to the second century A.D., when the caves associated with Hīnayāna at Ajanta, the *chaitya-grihas*, Caves 10 and 9, and *vihāras*, Caves 8, 12, 13 and 15A, were excavated. The lacuna is now filled by the fortunate discovery of a large number of early sculptures in the cave-group of Pitalkhora in District Aurangabad, about 70 km. to the west-south-west of Ajanta. Sculptures in the caves at Bhaja, Kondane, Nasik, Bedsa, Karla and Kanheri further help in showing an almost unbroken tradition of sculptural art of the earlier period. Thereafter, there was a comparatively unproductive period in the northern Deccan, the centre having shifted to Āndhradeśa, where, under the patronage of the later Sātavāhana and Ikshvāku rulers, the existing art-tradition blossomed forth as exemplified in the Buddhist monuments at Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda. The discovery of sculptured limestone slabs of the Amaravati type at Ter (ancient Tagara) in the Deccan attests to the synthesis of these art-traditions. The northern Deccan came into prominence once more with the rise of the Vākātaka power, when an all-round development of fine arts like sculpture, painting and architecture was witnessed. Under the new impact of iconic Buddhism, figures of Buddha and the Bodhisattvas came to be carved as the chief objects of worship in the caves. Vākātaka inscriptions in the Ajanta and Ghatotkacha caves would indicate that this second phase was ushered in the last quarter of the fifth century A.D. Once a beginning had been made, side by side with the excavation of new caves, the existing Hīnayāna ones were suitably modified and sculptures or paintings of Buddha and the Bodhisattvas added thereto as at Pitalkhora, Karla, Nasik and Kanheri, while entirely new groups of caves were excavated at places like Aurangabad, Ellora and Ajanta itself.

Ajanta imbibed artistic influences which penetrated into the Deccan from both the north and the south. The figure-sculpture of Ajanta thus reflects the best in the art-tradition of contemporary India, generally drawing its inspiration from the artistic movement set afoot under the aegis of the Guptas and the Vākātakas yet retaining fundamentally autochthonous elements. The basic character of Ajanta sculpture is unconsciously but quite naturally related to the indigenous school of the Deccan sculpture which flourished under the Sātavāhanas and was later nurtured in the Krishna and the Godavari valleys. Indirect influences also travelled from north India. A recently-noticed inscription on the pedestal of a Buddha-image in the sanctum of Cave 4 of Ajanta states that the image was the *deya-dharma* or religious gift of a person named Māthura who was the son of Abhayanandin and the owner of the monastery (*vihārasvāmī*). The name of the person may suggest that he hailed from Mathura, an important centre of Buddhism and Buddhist art in northern India. The influence of Sarnath is apparent on the sculptured decoration introduced during the fifth and the sixth centuries at several centres in



*Plate III. Ajanta Cave 1: Buddha in dharama-chakra-pravartana-mudra*

the Deccan. The later carvings, specially in the *chaitya* Cave 3 at Kanheri, show nearly the same refinement of modelling and spiritual expression as are met with at Sarnath. These features, which form the fundamental characteristics of Gupta art, are palpable at Ajanta in the standing figures of Buddha on the façades of Caves 9, 19 and 26 and particularly

in the standing figure of Buddha in *abhaya-mudrā* in Cave 19. Barring such exceptions, the general character of the sculpture has a certain amount of ponderosity and heaviness of form, despite a conscious attempt at imparting a spiritual expression and finer sensitivity to the sculpture by refined modelling.

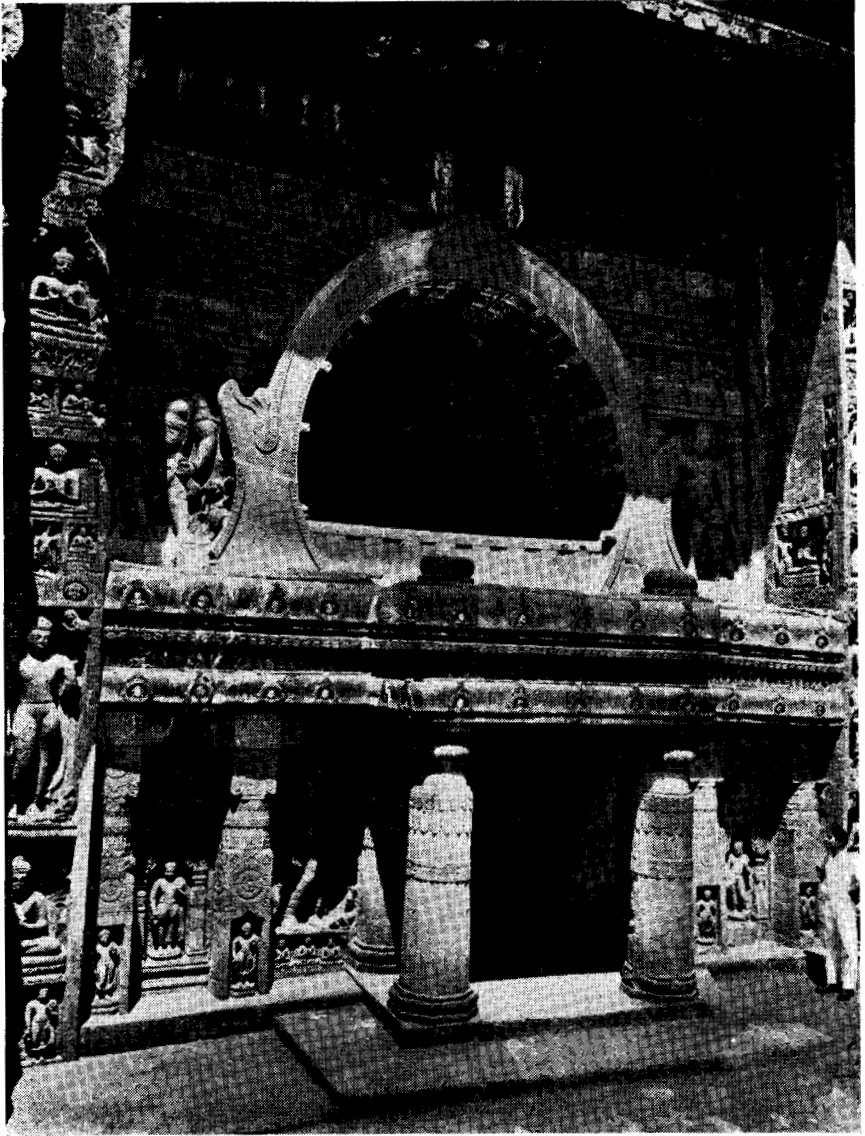
In the present context, I have selected a few important subjects to illustrate the rich variety of Ajanta sculpture. The most important subject is naturally the Buddha. The worship of Buddha as the saviour of humanity had taken roots in the Deccan by at least the fifth century A.D. and the artist took particular delight and care in fashioning his figure in rock. The presentation of Buddha in both *chaitya-grihas* and *vihāras* had become a necessity. The colossal images of Buddha carved in the *garbha-grihas*, located at the rear end of the pillared *vihāras*, thus form a class by themselves. In this class, Buddha is usually shown seated in *vajrāsana*. Flanked by a Bodhisattva acting as the whisk-bearer, the figures of Buddha have a sublime spiritual expression and appear to be the embodiment of *karuṇā* or benevolence in most cases. Among such figures, special attention may be drawn to the sculpture in Cave 1 (plate III) In another case, however, probably to match the greatness of Buddha, a sculpture of colossal proportions was carved in Cave 26, where the *parinirvāṇa* (extinction) of the Master is treated with an utmost warmth of feeling (plate IV).

The figures of Buddha flanking the entrance to the *chaitya*, Cave 19, are remarkable examples where the sculptor has lavished all his skill in bestowing on the Master a superb expression of detachment as also of universal love. He has refrained from producing colossal but has, for once, produced masterpieces. The fine modelling and the delineation of feeling by subtle touches have given a rare charm to these sculptures.

The highly-ornate façade of the *chaitya-griha*, Cave 19 (plate V), has a wealth of reliefs affording an opportunity for the study of sculpture of the classical period. Some plastic decoration cropped up here and there later on, but it only helps in understanding the artistic decadence and the changing pattern and needs of the faith. The façade was artisti-

Plate IV. Ajanta, Cave 26: *Mahāparinirvāṇa* of Buddha





*Plate V. Ajanta, Cave 19: façade of the chaitya-griha*

cally conceived with a view to achieving an aesthetic unity by the harmonious blending of architecture and sculpture. The carvings on pillars and pilasters, the rows of chaitya-arches framing pretty faces, scrolls of foliage in horizontal bands—all these were introduced on the façade to project pleasing architectural features and to bring out the beauty of sculpture thoughtfully introduced at appropriate places.

Coming to the principal carvings on the façade, we notice two sculptured panels set within an architectural framework of delicately-carved



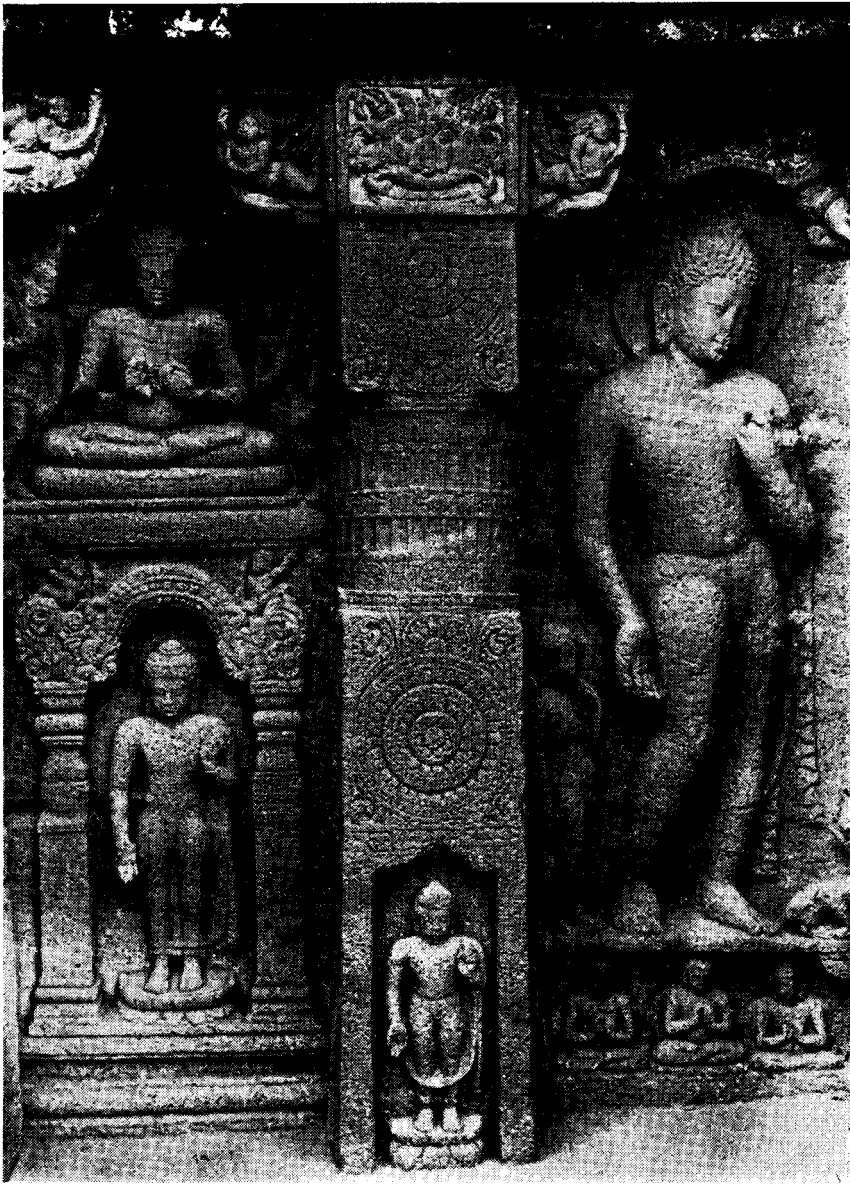
*Plate VI. Ajanta, Cave 19: Buddha handing over the begging bowl to Rāhula*

pilasters on either side of the *mukha-maṇḍapa* and a standing figure of the *yaksha* Kubera on either side of the *chaitya*-window. The first set of sculpture flanking the entrance depicts Buddha. In the sinister panel he appears in his mendicant's garb at the palace-door at Kapilavastu where his son Rāhula, led by his mother Yaśodharā, receives the begging-bowl from him (plate VI). His peerless wisdom and compassion are indicated by his superhuman stature and spiritual expression. The crown held over his hallowed head by heavenly cherubs further enhances this effect. The scene is, no doubt, inspired by the painting in Cave 17 and is a masterpiece of Ajanta sculpture as the latter is of Ajanta painting. The corresponding figure on the dexter side (plate VII) depicts Buddha in *varada-mudrā*, his figure steeped in *karuṇā*. On his right side is a standing woman bereft of all ornaments and near his left foot is another woman, this time prostrating. Probably both represent Āmrāpālī, the favourite courtesan of Vaiśālī, who, according to Aśvaghosha, appeared 'in white garments and devoid of body-paint and ornaments before Buddha like a woman of good family at the time of worshipping' and 'prostrated her slender body like a blossoming mango-creep and stood up full of piety'.

As a total composition, the principal figures in the niches flanking the entrance stand gracefully in slight *tribhaṅga* postures half-inclined inwards and, therefore, facing the devotee entering the shrine, their benign expressions creating a feeling of assurance in the heart of the worshipper. The soft mellifluous contours of the bodies which were enriched originally by painted plaster, coupled with the charming expression exuding spirituality, make these figures stand out from the rest.

The adjacent panels on either side depict Buddha as an object of cult worship; on the sinister side, he is portrayed as standing on a double lotus with *varada-mudrā* against the drum of the *stūpa* under a finely-carved *makara-torana*, above which rises the *aṇḍa*, *harmikā* and triple *chhatravāli* flanked by *nāga*-celestials. The corresponding panel on the right has two compartments, the upper one having a seated figure of Buddha in *dharmacakra-pravartana-mudrā* and the lower, a standing figure in *varada-mudrā*.

The upper part of the façade is relieved by a central *chaitya*-window of an elegant design, with a figure of richly-bedecked and majestically-standing *yaksha* on either side. These two guardian *yakshas*, in the classical Gupta-Vākāṭaka idiom, are generically related to the *yakshas* of the Sātavāhana period (Pitalkhora and Nasik). Verging on corpulence, they stand in *tribhaṅga* posture with a tight belt (*udara-bandha*) around their belly. The general contours of the body are soft and fleshy. The legs are rather heavy and short but less so than their archetypes. The facial expression is calm and charming with a smile concealed under a thick lower lip. The round halo around the face bestows an air of spirituality. A dwarf attendant emptying the bag of wealth of its jingling



*Plate VII. Ajanta, Cave 19: Buddha figure flanking the entrance*

contents adds greatly, by contrast, to the majesty of the *yaksha*, who has a Buddha-figure on his crest which is a unique feature.

The lord of the *nāgas* with his consort on his left and a standing whisk-bearer on his right (plate VIII), carved in a niche on the flanking wall at right angles to the façade of Cave 19, is a product of superb





Plate VIII. Ajanta, Cave 19: nāgarāja with his consort

artistry. Steeped in dignity, he is seated on a rocky platform in *mahārājā-līlā* posture with a seven-hooded cobra behind his head. The form of the body is graceful and slim and bears an expression of peace and devotion. The lavish ornamentation, besides adding beauty to the sculpture, makes up for the paucity of costume worn by the figures.

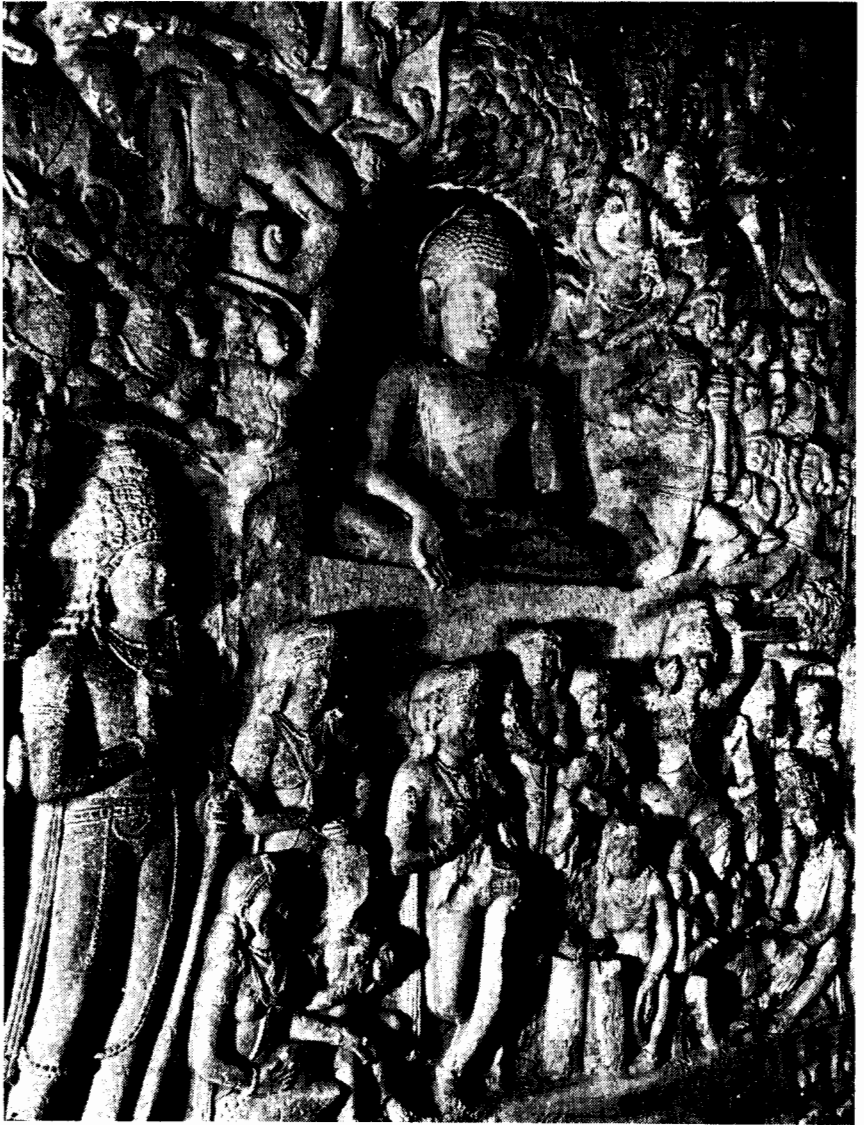
All the *vihāras* of Ajanta usually have a *garbha-griha* to enshrine a

colossal figure of Buddha. Cave 1 contains a fine specimen of such a sculpture depicting Buddha in *anāraṃchakra-pravartana-muārā* (see above pl. III). On the pedestal is seen the Wheel of Law flanked by a deer on either side to suggest the provenance of the sermon, viz., Mṛiga-dāva (Sarnath). The main object of worship, Buddha, is flanked on either side by a stout whisk-bearer. These attendant figures are similar to the *yaksha*-figures on either side of the *chaitya*-window in Cave 19 in regard to modelling and may, therefore, represent the work of the same group of artists. The *vidyādhara*s, with garlands in hands on either side of the painted halo amidst clouds represented by ringlets, are also well-conceived figures. The composition is extremely well-integrated and the attention of the onlooker is focussed on the main object of worship. The sculpture, however, tends to be rather heavy and lacks the grace of those on the façade of Cave 19.

The story-telling pattern followed in the paintings of Ajanta is at times repeated in sculpture. One such example is to be seen over the cell to the left of entrance to Cave 1. The four great encounters in the life of Gautama which prompted him to forsake the life of pleasure are carved here on the façade (see above, p. 8). The life of pleasure led by the prince is also depicted in the panel above the central *chaitya*-arch, where he is seen listening to the music produced by a lady holding a *vīṇā* on her lap. The two panels to the right depict the young prince Gautama on a horse-driven chariot going for a ride, where scenes of death, old age and disease confront him.

Cave 26, a *chaitya-griha* not far removed in time from Cave 19, contains on its interior walls a large number of small and large sculptured panels, suggesting a definite departure from the earlier tradition of decorating the interior wall of caves with paintings. The wall-space on the left of the cave is covered by two large panels connected with the life of Buddha. While the rear and right sides bear panels depicting Buddha flanked by the Bodhisattvas. On the left side is depicted the temptation of Buddha by Māra; its lower portion showing the dalliance of his daughters to allure Buddha (plate IX). Failing in his attempt to disturb Buddha meditating under the Bodhi-tree, Māra thought of spreading a golden snare and commanded his youthful daughters Rati (lust), Trishṇā (thirst) and Ārati (delight) to tempt him by their bewitching charm. Their coquettish gestures, attractive dance and melodious music, all failed to tempt Gautama and swerve him from the path of Enlightenment. They are then shown seated on the right lower portion with their father, dejected at the failure of their mission. The story-telling quality of the sculpture, the unity of the composition and the ingenuous disposition of the figures attest to the mastery of the sculptor in his art equalling that of his brother-artist in painting.

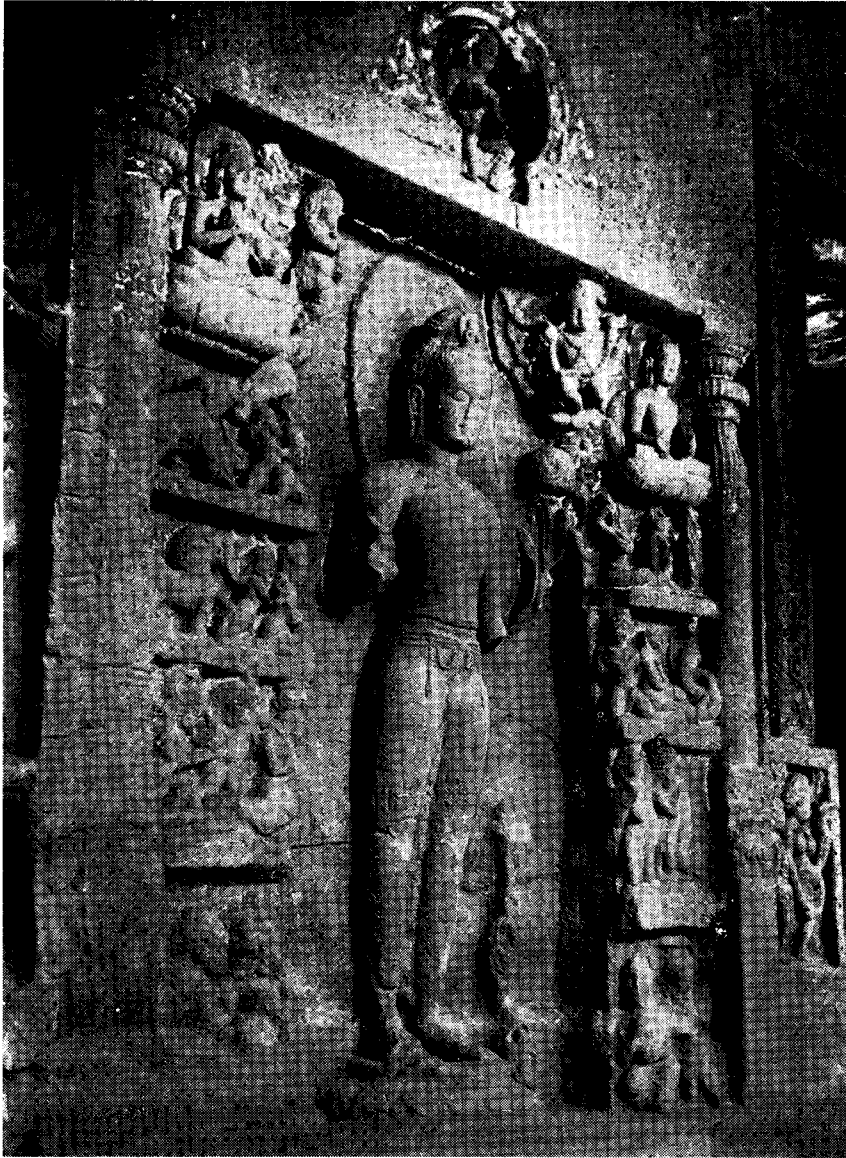
Under the influence of polytheism of Mahāyāna, the worship of the Bodhisattvas began to have an irresistible appeal to the Buddhist laity



*Plate IX. Ajanta, Cave 26: temptation of Buddha*

on account of the more humane qualities and the spirit of self-sacrifice of the Bodhisattvas to the extent of abjuring the highest knowledge and Buddhahood for the good of humanity. Bodhisattvas, who had till now been sculptured as attendants of Buddha, now came to be carved independently. Particularly popular was the litany of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara depicted both in painting (*garbha-griha* of Cave 2 and veran-

dah of Cave 17) and in a large sculptured panel in the verandah of Cave 4 (plate X) and another two panels near Cave 26. The litany usually contains a central figure of Avalokiteśvara with eight small panels, four on each side, showing him in the act of giving protection to the devotees from the calamities of life. He is usually shown with *jatā-mukuta* (matted hair) with Amitābha on his forehead. He holds a



*Plate X. Ajanta, Cave 4: Avalokiteśvara litany*

lotus-stalk, with an opening bud in one hand and generally a rosary in the other. He is invoked in all cases of danger and distress, and it is interesting to notice that they are varied, such as those that caravan-leader might suffer in his journey by land and sea, the fear of wild animals like the lion, elephant and cobra and of goblins, fire, assassins, incarceration and shipwreck. Such panels had a special appeal to the people engaged in commerce by land and sea. Similar panels are met with at the Buddhist cave-groups of Aurangabad, Ellora and Kanheri, the one at Aurangabad being the most vivid and the best executed one. One of the representations at Kanheri depicts Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara with his consort Tārā standing in the centre amidst smaller panels illustrating his benevolent actions in granting protection to devotees in distress.

Besides these representations, mention must be made of the sculptures of *yaksha* Pāñchika and his consort Hārītī, the goddess auspicious to children. Pāñchika (also called Jambhala, the Buddhist god of wealth) and Hārītī are invariably met with in the monasteries of the Gandhāra region and their worship also became popular in western India. Cave 2 of Ajanta and Cave 7 of Aurangabad have subsidiary shrines dedicated to them, while at Ellora they are sculptured in a separate niche in the middle of the group of the Buddhist caves. At Ajanta, smaller panels depicting only Hārītī with children or with Pāñchika are carved in Caves 2 and 23 on the architraves of the cells inside the *vihāras*.