

## WESTERN GUARDIANS OF THE INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM: AJANTA BUDDHIST CAVES

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### ABSTRACT

Currently Ajanta Caves are seen as the Indian knowledge tradition. Many Westerners have contributed to the preservation of this Indian knowledge tradition. Some of these western officers have been mentioned by the author in the paper.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

At a distance 100 to 110 km from Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district, in Soygaon taluka, near the Waghur river, in dense forest, carved on rocks in a wide hill range 15-30 meters (40-100 ft) above the riverbed, there are 29 Ajanta Buddhist caves built during the 4th century.

Jataka stories from before the birth of Buddha, Buddha's life, incarnations of Buddha - his subsequent births, various events in Lord Buddha's life and depiction of many Buddhist Vibhuti, marking of stories based on Jataka stories are depicted in Ajanta caves. The artists who created the Ajanta Caves created two different caves, Vihara and Chaitya. The philosophies of two sects of Buddhism, Hinayana and Mahayana, are visible in Ajanta Caves. According to archaeological evidence, Ajanta Caves were built in two different periods.

#### 1. Hinayana period

This period is generally around the second century BC. Caves 9, 10, 12, 13 and 15-A were carved during the Hinayana period. Based on the excavations till date and the available Buddhist literature, Chaityagriha is a temple with a stupa, Hinayana sect caves have chaityagriha. Therefore, Buddhadarshan is in the form of a stupa from all these caves. Caves No. 9 and 10 are Chaitya Grihas and Cave Nos. 12, 13, and 15-A are viharas.

#### 2. Mahayana period

There is no chaityagriha in Mahayana caves. Around the sixth and seventh centuries BC is considered the Mahayana period. Caves 19, 26 and 29 of the Mahayana period are Chaityagrihas and 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, Caves No. 27 and 28 are viharas. From these caves, the form of Buddha that is known to the general public can be seen. The Mahayana caves were carved during the reign of the Vakataka kings. Hence they are often referred to as Vakataka Caves. After the decline of the Vakataka Empire, the construction of these caves suddenly stopped and the Ajanta Caves lost their projected magnificence.

The caves are not numbered in chronological order of formation but in the order of successive caves.

#### Creation purpose

In ancient India, caves and temples were built mainly on trade routes to provide a safe haven for travelers to rest. They had Rajasraya, Dharmasraya and Lokashraya. The construction of the Ajanta Caves may also have started with this purpose. According to historical records, many medieval Chinese Buddhist travelers have cited these caves in their travelogues up to the time of Akbar.

Bharat Bhushan Ajanta Cave Paintings are a unique invention of exquisitely beautiful art. 12 tourist destinations across the country have been selected by the Indian Union Ministry of Tourism under the prestigious tourist destinations project. These include Ajanta-Verul Caves in Maharashtra. UNESCO In 1983, Ajanta Caves was declared as a World Heritage Site. Ajanta Caves got the honor of being India's first World Heritage Site. The Seven Wonders of Maharashtra were announced in June 2013.

Ajanta Caves is the major wonder. One of the cave paintings features a cave image on a 20 rupee note in Indian currency. Ajanta Caves has become a favorite tourist destination of domestic and foreign tourists.

Many Westerners visited Ajanta Caves in the pre-independence and post-independence period. Some of them tried their best to bring glory to the caves, to promote and spread this precious Bharat Bhushan in the world. Similarly, some tried to conserve the caves. Some westerners unknowingly damaged the caves. Some such westerners have been mentioned here.

## Western Guards and Predators: Ajanta Buddhist Caves

### 1. John Smith

In 19<sup>th</sup> century, John Smith, an officer of the Madras Presidency, while hunting a tiger discovered the Ajanta Caves. After the discovery of these caves by John Smith, which became valuable to the world, nothing was done for the next 24 years. But the reports were prepared according to British methodology. A thorough study was conducted. Consequently in 1844 the company appointed Captain Robert Gill to Ajantha.

### 2. Alexander James Edward

Alexander James Edward Stirling was a British (Scottish) colonial officer in India. He joined the Madras Cavalry in 1821. The news of Smith's discovery spread rapidly. Out of curiosity, he visited the Ajanta Caves in February 1824. He published a description of these amazing cave paintings. Many British officers had visited Ajanta Caves before him. But he was the first British officer to raise the profile of this Indian pride by publishing an account of the visit. It was published in 1829 in the Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland. Publication "Notice of a visit to the Cave Temple of Adjunta in the East-Indies", TrRAS 2:2, 1830, 362-370.

### 3. James Prinsep

James Prinsep FRS (20 August 1799 – 22 April 1840) was an English scholar, orientalist and archaeologist. He was the founder executive editor of the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. In the field of epigraphy, English scholar and orientalist James Prinsep first reproduced some of the many inscriptions (over ninety recorded) in 1836. In 1836, James Prinsep published notes on Mr. Ralph's visit to the caves in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Bhau Daji translated and added to this collection when he visited the caves in 1863.

### 4. Walter M Spink

Ajanta has been studied chronologically with Walter M. Spink. In a prolific career span of five decades or more, he has meticulously reconstructed step by step the excavations of the period under the Vakataka emperor Harisena. His comprehensive research has significantly reduced the arbitrariness of dates and shed light on the many sociological and political influences that shaped the course of history at Ajanta.

### 5. Lieutenant Blake

In 1839, the Bombay Courier published a fairly informative account of Ajanta's monumental works on Indian architecture written by Lieutenant Blake, an officer in the Madras Army.

### 6. Famous author James Ferguson

Famous writer James Ferguson visited the caves in 1839 and presented his paper Rock Cut Temples of India to the Royal Asiatic Society in 1843. Horrified by the widespread vandalism and neglect of Ajanta's paintings, Ferguson led a campaign to preserve the delicate artifacts in the caves. He was the first to recognize their Buddhist origins and dated the work from about 200 BCE to about 650 CE. Succeeded in attracting attention, which commissioned Major Robert Gill of the Madras Army to make replicas of all the paintings in the caves.

### 7. Principal John Griffiths

In 1872, John Griffiths, Principal of the Sir JJ School of Art, Bombay, along with his students resumed the work undertaken by Major Gill at the behest of the Bombay Government. Over ten years, he and his students produced 300 paintings. Of these, he sent 125 copies of the paintings to the South Kensington Museum, where they were exhibited. Again, 87 of these copies were destroyed in a fire in 1885, but fortunately not before they were photographed. From the copies that survived the fire, Griffiths compiled his work on the Buddhist Cave Paintings at Ajanta, published in 1896, a work of truly significant importance.

### 8. Lady Herringham

Suffragette and art patron Lady Herringham, with the help of the Calcutta School of Art, made remarkable efforts to replicate the paintings over the following decades. At the instigation of Ananda Kumaraswamy and William Rothenstein, Lady Herringham took up the project and arrived at the site in 1910 CE. She was assisted by a team of contributors that included contemporary Indian artists Nandalal Bose and Asit Kumar Haldar. It became a great artist. Lady Herringham worked mainly in the winter of 1910 - 1911 CE. The finished paintings were exhibited in 1915 by the Indian Society of Calcutta and London. Preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, it was also reproduced in her book Ajanta Frescoes in 1915.

### 9. Dieter Schlingloff

Dieter Schlingloff is widely recognized for his extensive study of Ajanta murals. His life's work is the identification of many Jataka stories, their interpretation, their iconographic significance and their relation to Buddhism. He also has the strong support of Monica Zinn in many cases.

#### 10. Arai Kampo

Another attempt to make copies of the murals was made by the Japanese artist Arai Kampo, who was invited to India by the great literary and poet Rabindranath Tagore to teach him Japanese painting techniques. Kampo Arai came to Santiniketan in 1916 CE; Later he also studied Ajanta's murals and made copies of them. Campo made copies with tracings on Japanese paper from 1916 to 1918, and his work was preserved at Tokyo Imperial University until the material was destroyed in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923.

#### 11. Sir John Marshall

The Nizam of Hyderabad, under whose jurisdiction the Ajanta Caves had fallen, was persuaded to restore the paintings. He thus empowered the Archaeological Department to prepare a complete photographic record with the active encouragement of his able Finance Minister Sir Akbar Hydari.

He was ably assisted by Sir John Marshall, Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India. The greatest achievement of the Nizam's Department of Archeology was the micro-conservation of the Ajanta Murals under the guidance of Sir John Marshall at a cost of Rs.30 lakhs. This was done with the help of two expert professors from Italy, Lorenzo Cecconi and his assistant Count Orsini.

#### 12. Lorenzo Cecconi and his assistant Count Orsini

Major Robert Gill applied a thick coat of varnish to protect the warped, crumbling pictures from the lingering humidity of the monsoons and to make their colors more vivid. The process had obscured the original brushwork and caused irreparable damage to the frescoes, which were rapidly fading with varnish. These two Italian experts worked at Ajanta from 1920 to 1922, delicately removing the old varnish, dirt and smoke from the surface, with breathtaking results. This extended the life of the fresco by two centuries.

#### 13. M Faucher

The Department of Archaeology, with the help of the famous French connoisseur M. Faucher, published an "authoritative account of the paintings both from the artistic and iconographic point of view". On the orders of the Nizam, roads, bridges and a large and comfortable rest house were built for the convenience of tourists coming to Ajantha.

## 2. CONCLUSION

Western officer John Smith discovered the Ajanta Caves. Alexander James Edward published a description of the amazing Ajanta Caves. James Prinsep published the notes of the visit of the Western officer Ralph to Ajanta Caves. Walter M. Spink reduced the arbitrariness of dates by studying Ajanta chronologically. Lt. Black published a comprehensive description of Ajanta's Indian architecture. James Ferguson led the expedition to preserve the delicate artifacts in the Ajanta Caves and numbered the caves. Principal John Graphics produced three hundred paintings of Ajantha. Lady Herringham reproduced several paintings of the Ajanta Caves. Arai Kampo made several copies of the paintings of the Ajanta Caves Sir John Marshall assisted Sir Akbar Haidri, Finance Minister of the Nizam of Hyderabad, in the work of recording the Ajanta Caves and in conserving the paintings. Lorenz Cecconi and his assistant extended the life of the Fresco by two centuries by removing the dirt and smoke applied to the varnish. M Faucher built road bridges and rest houses for tourists. Thus many Western authorities participated in the preservation of Indian knowledge system.

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