

CH. 15: Cave 25—the ill-fated *upāśraya*

Introduction	269
Some crucial features and evidence	272
• The puzzling floor levels, courtyards, and staircase	272
• The revealing cubical monolithic platform	272
• The porch and asymmetrical porch-end vestibule	274
• The ominous hole	275
• The porch's right wall and a revealing asymmetry	276
• The porch's rear wall	277
• The crooked hall	278
• The façade	279
• Authorship points to monk Buddhahadra	283
• Why the <i>upāśraya</i> was needed as an adjunct	284
Phase I of excavation	285
• The original layout faced south	285
Phase II of excavation	287
• The revised plan faced the east	287
• Working on the revised plan	288
• The work halts again, this time for making radical changes to the layout	289
• The cave becomes a wing of the <i>śaityagrha</i>	289
• The annexe of the <i>śaityagrha</i> cave-complex	290
Phase III of excavation	291
• The blunder	292
• The abandonment of the cave	294

INTRODUCTION

IN CHAPTER 13, we noted that the creators of Cave 26 (stupa temple) decided to halt the work at a time when the temple was just about half-cut from the top but had already reached the expected depths in the interior. The halt was to address

the provisional as well as the long-term requirement of lodging. It is at this point of time, circa early 462 CE (I hold that work on the stupa temple began on the holy day of Āṣāḍha Pūrṇimā in circa 461 CE) that the lodging need was prioritized. An *upāśraya* was needed nearby, as none existed anywhere between this location and the Sātavāhana-group of caves at a distance (Figure 12, 180-181). The new *upāśraya* was going to be Cave 25 (Figures 180-181, 191).

The *upāśraya* is most unfortunate. It was ill-fated right from the stage of its early development up to the last days of work on it. It is still ill fated, since hardly any scholar in the last two centuries of scholarship on Ajantā has given any attention to it, except the solitary studies of Spink who seems to have left no stone unturned. At the time, however, when this chapter was being written (2006), even Spink had not published anything on the cave. Now (2013) after the publication of his six volumes on the subject, where he has explained the various facets of Cave 25 in many volumes, and under many contexts, little required to be changed in my original draft. This is because Spink has described the story of the cave's development without looking at some vital clues and on-site evidence that caught the attention of this researcher, and which presents a dramatically different account of the cave's development.

The *upāśraya* witnessed a troubled development. Many times the work halted on it. Many times the work re-started with fresh plans and innovative solutions to the problems that inflicted it and the adjoining caves from time to time. Ultimately, however, the cave's ill-fated doom could never be arrested. Notwithstanding the cave's vagaries, it has somehow preserved such vital evidence that present a fascinating story of the site's developments. It stands as an example of bold human efforts; of what scalability can be achieved in the seemingly rigid and austere medium of the monolith; and of the lurking dangers and risks at every step of the work. For a brief resume of its development, see Table 11. The story is closely connected to and dictated by the donor of the cave, whose identity was not known. Our study reveals the name of the donor, and even the architects. The donor was none other than Buddhabhadra, the well-known patron of Cave 26. And, the architects were none other than Bhikkhu Dharmadatta and Bhadrabandhu, the architects of the Cave 26-complex.

The story of the cave would not make any sense without the knowledge of the cave's architectural details, layout, dimensions, and components (Figures 33-34). One also requires recording the extant evidence on the site that are relevant for an analysis. We are therefore documenting below some of

the notable and relevant features that would be required for the discussion and analysis.

SOME CRUCIAL FEATURES AND EVIDENCE

The puzzling floor levels, courtyards, and staircase

The cave is situated on the proper right of Cave 26-*śaityagr̥ha* (Figures 180-181). Its floor-level meets with the base level of the *śaityagr̥ha*'s arch. The *upāśraya* appears to have a spacious outer courtyard and a sizable inner courtyard separated by a mysterious wall-like structure of which the upper portion seems to have been perished (Figure 193). What is the purpose of this 'divider' between the outer and inner courtyard? The cave has a two-pillared porch (Figure 191) and a hall. Presently, the cave is approached by a monolithic flight of curvilinear steps rising from the court of neighbouring Cave 24 (Figure 199). Is it the original staircase? Why locate it from the side, and not from the front? What was the compulsion? Let us also note that the floor of Cave 24 is at a lower level; the difference in floor elevation of the two caves is nearly 12 feet.

The revealing cubical monolithic platform

A remarkable feature of Cave 25, and a very important evidence for the researcher, is a curious cubical monolithic

platform that is extant on the rear right corner of the cave's inner courtyard (Figure 195). It is clearly visible that the platform is created by lowering the remaining parts of the courtyard's floor, as cave excavations happen downwards from top. This area left out from excavation is quite sizable, which is nearly six feet square, and four feet high. Most interestingly, which the visitors are not likely to notice at first, there is a shrine situated exactly underneath the cubical platform (Figure 199). The shrine belongs to the left outer wall of the neighbouring Cave 24. Two things would become apparent from observation and analysis: 1) The platform was created to save the roof of the shrine underneath; 2) The shrine already existed when the floor of Cave 25 was lowered. Any attempt of levelling the floor would have cut the shrine's ceiling. A question now emerges: Why did the floor of Cave 25 wait for and allow the intrusion of its floor space by the left outer shrine of Cave 24? The shrine itself was not the first thing that happened in Cave 24; in fact, outer shrines are a very late feature of the fifth-century phase of Ajantā. What we are saying is that it required a while for Cave 24 to be planned and executed, and the floor of Cave 25 must have been kept waiting during those years. It must have been virtually abandoned, or else the 'intrusion' would not have been sanctioned. What had went wrong with Cave 25 so that it laid abandoned in that period, and then why at a later stage work re-started on it so that

the to lower the floor was lowered down to the expected level with the cubical platform?

Let me numerate another evidence of the multi-phased development on the vertical level of excavation. The lower portions of the walls and pillars as well as the floor have rough chisel marks that indicate that the floor level was executed at a later stage. This adds to the evidence provided by the cubical monolithic platform that indicates that the floor was lowered at a later stage. Hence, the vertical cutting down of the cave seems to have undergone multiple phases (Table 11).

The porch and asymmetrical porch-end vestibule

The porch has two pillars and two pilasters (Figures 191, 194). They are octagonal and devoid of carvings or decorations. Signs of incompleteness are there and toward the bases, there are such chisels marks, such inconsistencies in the shaping out, and such incomplete areas, which together suggest that the floor was surely lowered at a later stage as if there was two distinct phases in which the floor level progressed. The porch looks nice from the viewpoint of habitation, but has a glaring anomaly. The porch's northern (right) wall is plain, but the southern (left) wall shows a high and wide vestibule without pillars (Figure 196). There is an inner cell on the vestibule's rear wall, which is only

half excavated. There is another cell on the vestibule's right wall, which looks to be largely completed to the expected size and shape. Interestingly, there is no cell on the vestibule's left wall (Figure 30). Now, one of these cells contain a shocking and revealing feature, noted for the first time here, and it goes a long way to suggest what really happened in this cave, and why things happened the way they happened in the future of the cave-conglomerate.

The ominous hole

The cell on the vestibule's rear wall has a never before noticed but highly important evidence that has nothing artistic about it. It is a hole in the dark through which if one peeps, the interior of the neighbouring *śaityagṛha* (Cave 26) is seen. The hole is nearly ten inches long or wide. The hole is also seen from the nave of the *śaityagṛha*. While standing in the nave, if one looks up towards the front-right ribs, the hole can be seen in a corner of the big *śaitya* arch. In a corner of the vaulted ceiling, it can be found between two rafters. The creation of the hole was obviously an accident. If one observes from inside the cell, especially the rear wall where it exists, it is clearly recognised that the workers had no idea how thick or thin was the wall they were excavating; as if they forgot at the time that they were excavating just inches from the temple on the other side (Figure 33). The reckless excavation work resulted in the

accidental damage to the temple's vault. Surely, no patron expending so much of time, fund, and interest in the creation of an ambitious temple would have wanted a thing like this; the damage to the temple must have been inexcusable. In fact, the abandonment of the excavation work in the cell and the neighbouring ones clearly suggest that the abandonment at that stage of work was directly the result of the accident. It cast a blow to the plans of Cave 25. It sealed its future. But, when exactly did the accident happen is a question to probe. We shall discuss on this later. It is ironical in a way though that the accident had a positive and dramatic impact on the future plans of the cave-conglomerate. The accident rang the alarm bell that no such risky plans should take place again. That is why perhaps the left interior cells of the hall were never started.

The porch's right wall and a revealing asymmetry

Symmetry ruled Ajanta, as far as possible. Therefore, the left porch-end vestibule with inner cells expects a symmetrical counterpart on the opposite side, i.e. the porch's right wall. However, there is no such thing on that side. A survey of asymmetrical features on Ajanta would show that every such example was the result of a compulsion, a prohibiting situation, when it was simply not possible, or not advantageous to have the symmetry. Cave 25's asymmetrical porch-vestibule is no exception. Next, we are led to ask:

What was the compulsion? Analysis would show that the compulsion was none other than the neighbouring, in fact bordering, Cave 24, which is dangerously close to the right wall of Cave 25. There was no room for the right vestibule, let alone the point of inner cells. These factors indicate the relative chronology and sequence of what happened. It will be found that there was no plan initially in c. 461-462 CE to have any vestibule. That is why Cave 24 was allowed to be excavated in such a close proximity in c. 463-464 CE. Around c. 465-466 CE, the idea of having a porch-end cell or vestibule was mooted in Cave 25, but it was not feasible any more to have the same on the right side because of Cave 24.

The porch's rear wall

There are three doorways in the rear wall of the porch allowing access to the hall (Figure 30). The rectangular doorframes are neatly done but there are no carvings. There is nothing to suggest that any carvings were planned. Perhaps the flat jambs and lintels were intended to be painted. The scheme looks similar to the pillars that do not have any carvings either. Cave 17's doorway also had the same initial scheme of plain jambs. In fact, most of the early doorways at Ajantā have the same plain scheme. Later doorways are more developed and elaborate. They have elaborate carvings. When compared and analysed in this way, we shall make no mistake in identifying that the doorways in Cave 25 are very early.

We have thus an indication of the cave's early beginning—one of a number of evidences that points to the cave's early beginnings.

The crooked hall

The hall measuring 26'.5" by 15.4" is also curious. The most striking feature is the absence of cells. Except the earliest caves, history of Buddhist rock-cut architecture tells us that an *upāśraya* can hardly be without cells, unless it was not possible. What was the context or compulsion here? The spacious frontcourt and the pillared porch in themselves indicate the further level of development upon the Sātavāhana-period *upāśrayas*, many of whom do not have any porches, pillars, or frontcourts. The doorways here are not just one but three. Even the hall itself is spacious. In spite of the advanced level of conception, it is surprising that the hall has no cells. Our study and analysis of various features indicate that even the hall had multiple phases of developments. There was certainly a plan for cells in the hall. However, when the edifice lay virtually abandoned for some years, when Cave 24 came up on the north, the planned cells were never excavated. Later, in c. 469 CE when the work was resumed in Cave 25, there was no room for excavating the cells. As regards the southern side, the planners must have been too scared after the workers accidentally broke through the *caityagṛha's* vault. Thus, no risk was taken again, and

the planned cell in the hall were never initiated. Perhaps, this was the reason why the hall itself was wrenched rightwards to maintain a safe distance from the *śaityagr̥ha*'s vault (Figure 33).

The façade

Let us now observe the front of the upasraya, which does not display developed forms. The dimensions are smaller than most other fifth-century mandapas. It does not have a large dimension of many Mahāyāna *vihāras*. Also, one finds here a great degree of simplicity. There are no carvings or designs. There are no eaves, canopy, balustrades, or friezes here. The facade is cut on the right side of the *śaityagr̥ha*'s upper half portion. Horizontally, it occupies a measure of space on the cliff, which is comparable to that of the *śaityagr̥ha*'s upper half portion, which in my view was already cut when this was inaugurated (Spink does not think so). Let us keep this relative location in mind when we shall discuss ahead what it implies. We may also note here that the slope on the cliff here is rather perpendicular, which as we shall see ahead, was not the case a few metres on the left where the *śaityagr̥ha*'s upper half portion was excavated. Judging from the location of the perished main gate of the *śaityagr̥ha* (Figure 205) and also of the whole Cave 26-complex with annexe, one can easily estimate that the cliff on the location of the *śaityagr̥ha* originally extended about thirty

metres forward, all that is now perished in rockslide. Coming back to our Cave 25 facade, we can tell that the cliff here too was gradually receding, but the recession was not very great, as is visible now. The reasons will be explained at an appropriate place ahead. The next point is that of the gap between Cave 25 and the *caityagrha*. This gap exists on two levels: on the exterior and interior. On the exterior, the gap is about three feet or so, which is a critical point to be noted, because this gap is negligible as compared to the gaps between most other caves. Almost everywhere else, the gap is greater ranging from eight to fifty metres. There is no rule about it, but such a proximity is uncommon and proved to be disastrous later. Combine this with the next level of measurement, i.e. in the interior. The gap there is up to *minus* ten feet. In other words, the porch's vestibule with cells left no gap at all between Caves 25 and 26. The lack of gap was the main reason why the inner cell of Cave 25 invaded into the space of Cave 26—resulting in the breakage of the latter's vault. We do not yet know why the excavators of Cave 25 invaded into the *caityagrha*'s space, when the latter was not even completed. We do not know why the vault was broken through creating a hole, which looks so bad. We shall explore this later, but it is important to take a note of some of these features, which has never been noted before (with the exception of Spink), and thus we have missed the chance of asking questions, and seeking their answers.

Let us now talk about the axial orientation of the cave, which is the same as, and parallel to Cave 26 adjoining on the proper left. They are oriented toward the east, and sunrays can enter their interiors during winters. Such an orientation was a matter of course, even necessary, at the time of excavation. Soon, however, the orientation would become a point of great regret, whose reasons will be described ahead.

At the end, we shall speak of something very interesting, which Spink has missed out. This regards the cave's entrance. The reader will be surprised to know that once there existed a proper "entrance door" to the left of the frontcourt. This was situated on the court's left side. No evidence of any such door exists today. It has been totally perished. Not a trace remains. But, fortunately, it has been preserved in at least three references. One, in the accounts of Burgess (Fergusson et al. 1880, 341-42; Burgess: 1883, 58); two, in an early photograph (Figure 192) taken by the British painter and photographer Captain Robert Gill, and; three, in Gill's ground plan of Cave 25 (Figure 31). I am reproducing all the three evidences here for the first time. The door's description by Burgess has been quoted earlier. The notices of Fergusson and Burgess inform us that: (a) Cave 25 had an enclosure, (b) There were two entrances on the enclosure, (c) One entrance was on the court's left rear, (d) The left

entrance had a "door" and "steps" on its exterior, (e) These steps were connecting the left door with the *caityagr̥ha's* porch, (f) The *caityagr̥ha's* porch had a "terrace" or "balcony," now perished, and; (g) From the right of this "terrace," the "steps" went to Cave 25's left door.

These references bring many questions to our mind. Why did they need to enter Cave 25 from the terrace of the *caityagr̥ha's* porch? How did they climb up to the porch's terrace? The steps could not have been from the porch's front. It could only have been in the corner, on the right outer wall. But, Gill's photograph or Burgess's autotype do not show it. Was there any such remainder of the steps at all for climbing up to the porch's terrace? And might it all have been just to enter Cave 25? Why to make such a complicated entrance that would also disturb the *caityagr̥ha's* façade, especially when one could easily have a frontal access to Cave 25 without any obvious problem? Also the two caves have been numbered separately by Burgess as Cave 25 and 26, which implies that the two are separate edifices; also, could one possibly argue that the donors were different? If this was the case, how to explain the physical connection of the two caves based on the evidence of the left door and steps?

My on-site investigations, study of the ground plans, analysis of the physical, deductive, and the circumstantial evidence give rise to a picture of the development process

which I shall now describe, which would answer the above questions. In the story of the cave's development that is presented next, there may be some points that do not connect the dots. I hope that further research will correct the errors in my reconstruction of events.

Authorship points to monk Buddhābhadda

In the previous chapter, we saw how Cave 26-*śaityagṛha* was initiated, and how in Phase I the upper half was cut and how simultaneously the full depths of the interior (like Cave 29) was reached. The lower half was still uncut, the porch was not yet revealed. In the interior, the mass of rock below the vault had also not been cut, not to speak of the *śaitya* or the stupa of which only the upper crest, the *vedikā* and *harmikā* were only blocked out. The *śaitya* window was exposed together with the vault and the upper part of the stupa. However, the frontcourt and main gate were not yet exposed. Thus, the *śaityagṛha*'s porch, frontcourt, and the interior's lower half were all remaining. The floor level at this time was near the sill of the arch. The terrace was the floor level at this time, since the porch was not yet revealed. It was at this juncture when further work was temporarily halted on Cave 26 for the sake of starting the work on Cave 25. This was to address the provisional and long-term lodging needs. The need must have been urgent.

Why the upāśraya was needed as an adjunct

As an upāśraya, Cave 25's most immediate purpose was to address the needs for lodging, resting, dining, surveillance, and supervision of the work on Cave 26. Because of the isolated location on the cliff, there was no other upasraya nearby that could have been used as a 'site-office.' The height of the *śaityagr̥ha* is so great that it would not have been practical to officiate and supervise from the riverbed. Things could not have been managed from the top of the hill either, as climbing up and down would have been inconvenient, to say the least.

Normally, the 'site office' would be first excavated, constructed, or built for any architectural project. It was not done at first here, because the donors were not sure that the novice workers were competent to execute the project. This was because a rock-cut stupa-temple was initiated after about three centuries in India. Once the *śaityagr̥ha* was half-cut from the top, the planners must have felt satisfied with the result. Hence, they now decided to address the pending needs before progressing further on the *śaityagr̥ha*.

PHASE I OF EXCAVATION

The original layout faced south

Let us visualise the time when Cave 25 was planned and the work was about to be initiated. There were perpendicular outer walls on left and right of the half-cut *śaityagr̥ha*. An adjunct *upāśraya* could be initiated on either wall. As it happened, the right wall was selected. The *upāśrayas* did not need any designs or complex plans. This was planned somewhat like the Sātavāhana-period *upāśrayas*—caves 13 or 15A. No porch, frontcourt, or pillars were planned, as suggested by the 'left door' noticed in the description by Burgess, seen in the plan by Gill (Figure 31), and Gill's photograph (Figure 192). This *upāśraya* was facing in the direction of Cave 27, which did not yet exist. The overall plan must have been like Caves 15A and 13 (Figure 26).

Thus, it was first the door (Figure 192), which the workers carved before the hall. The door and the steps leading from the side of Cave 26 remained extant even after the *śaityagr̥ha*'s lower half was cut. The steps were apparently functional only for the time being. In c. 469 CE, they fell in disuse, when another staircase was excavated from the side of Cave 24 (Figure 193), which visitors use today for reaching Cave 25. The left (Figure 192) with the

steps prove that they were connected to the *caityagr̥ha* and that the *caityagr̥ha* must pre-date the door.

The original plan of Cave 25 had a hall, but was any cells planned? In order to answer this question we will have to look at the possibility and constraints presented by the cliff here. Earlier, we have pointed out that the cliff on the location of Cave 25 gradually receded several metres. Had it not been so, we would have found an exact counterpart of Cave 27 on this side, equal in size. But this is not the case here. The cliff's position, therefore, was not what is seen today; rockslide has perished much of it. The cliff certainly permitted a small hall with cells on eastern, norther, and western walls (none of these is extant), except some traces and corners of the eastern wall (Figure 193). The double doors, in front, as seen in the plan by Gill (Figure 31) might have been the doors of the eastern cells.

We surmise that the upasraya in Phase I served no good purpose perhaps due to functional deficiency or some geological flaw. The cliff had barely accommodated the edifice no matter how modest it was. Or, a mistake in excavating a cell or hall might have broken through the cliff, thus destroying the plans. The possibility cannot be ruled out since the masons have left evidence of occasional errors and inexperience. The hole in the inner cell of Cave 25's left porch vestibule; the hole in the inner cells of

caves 23 and 24, the collapse of the ceiling in Cave 4 are few such examples of errors of judgement. The layer of the lava flow (Figure 194) near the ceiling level only helps us to imagine that something wrong had happened to Phase I of excavation leading to the disbanding of the original layout and creation of a totally new layout.

PHASE II OF EXCAVATION

The revised plan faced the east

The plan was entirely revised in Phase II (Table 11). The new plan was rotated 90°. Now, it faced the east, like Cave 26. For this, the entire edifice was removed, save only a part of the eastern walls (Figure 193). The entire space was now made into the frontcourt of the new plan.

There was now a two-pillared porch, as seen today. The size of the edifice was vastly enlarged. The cells in the hall were planned too, but due to certain problems in future, they were never excavated. The porch-end walls were planned blank. The vestibule and inner cells were planned and executed in Phase III (c. 465 CE). What the planners had not realised at the moment that a mistake could directly damage the temple on the left, as it did in c. 465 CE. If the present orientation were planned from the beginning, a safe

distance from Cave 26 would have been maintained, especially from the left cells.

Working on the revised plan

The process of excavating the upāśrayas was different from excavating stupa-temples. Here, the vertical excavation would be completed before reaching the full depths; porch can be entirely done before the hall was fully penetrated, as can be seen in Caves 3, 5, 14, and 28. But, in the *śaityagṛha*, the vertical and horizontal excavations go side-by-side. Cave 29 is such a case in point, as was also Phase I of Cave 26. Similarly, Phase II of Cave 25 began. But, it was never fully completed. The floor level was not reached. The then floor level was at least two feet higher than the present level. This is judged by the presence of the cubical platform in the frontcourt. It was in Phase III (c. 465 CE) that the present floor level was reached. The octagonal pillars with simple capitals and without bases were excavated along with simple doors.

The work process must have been rapid. Perhaps, a greater workforce had been employed to complete the court, porch, pillars, doorways, and part of the astylar hall within a matter of few months.

The work halts again, this time for making radical changes to the layout

Before further progress could be made, especially to reach the expected floor-level, a problem had arisen. Perhaps, it was felt that the growing needs of lodging could never be fulfilled by this upasraya, which could not afford cells in the hall. They obviously realised of late that there was little room for the left cells. The edifice was dangerously close to the *śaityagṛha*. Thus, they decided seemingly to halt all work here and instead planned a new edifice. There is evidence that the work of Phase II was halted midway in c. 461- 462 CE. Even the pillars, doors, and porch floor were incomplete. The monolithic cube (Figure 195) on the court is testimony to the halt of work.

The excavation somewhat resembled like Cave 28 (Figures 180-181) when the plan for Cave 27 emerged, which was now started on symmetrically opposite side, albeit at a safe distance from Cave 26.

The cave becomes a wing of the śaityagṛha

After the planning of Cave 27, Cave 25 became a symmetrically positioned adjunct of Cave 26. All the four adjuncts were not planned in c. 461-462 CE. Had they been planned Cave 25 would have been facing Cave 27 and would have been positioned

exactly above Cave 26's lower left wing. If the wings were planned from the start proper symmetry would have been ensured in terms of their relative placements, orientations, dimensions, as well as architectural features. Whereas, they are discordant in many respects and have vast differences. Cave 25 acquired the status of a wing only after the *vihāra* Cave 27 (Upper Left Wing) was planned on symmetrically opposite side, i.e. on the proper left of the *śaityagr̥ha*. By the virtue of this newly planned counterpart, Cave 25 was able to acquire the status of a wing even though the required symmetry had been greatly lacking in it. In other words, if Cave 25 was planned as a wing from the start, it would have been facing south on right angles to the *śaityagr̥ha* (like the lower right wing).

The annexe of the śaityagr̥ha cave-complex

While the original plan of the *śaityagr̥ha* and the expanded plans of the cave-complex were being executed one after another, a number of other excavations had been initiated by other donors mainly around the site's nucleus defined by the Sātavāhana-period caves. As discussed earlier, the site was administered by the local king of the Ṛṣika janapada. Our donor, Buddhabhadra was affiliated to the neighbouring Aśmaka *janapada*. The two countries had sour relation and they had armed conflict in future.

Caves 21, 23, and 24 (Figures 169-176) do not have separate passages from the ravine. They were accessible by the *śaityagṛha*'s main gate and through a small doorway and staircase to reach the court of Cave 24 (Figure 200). While the work was progressing rapidly on Cave 24, it created a cell on the left outer wall. The year must have been late 464 CE after the idea of such cells on the porch-ends and outer walls had emerged. This establishes the sequential linkage between caves 24 and 25. The outer cell of Cave 24 occupies the matrix of rock directly underneath the court of Cave 25. As a result, when Cave 25 was revived in Phase III, the monolithic cube on its court had to be retained while lowering the floor so as to save the ceiling of Cave 24's outer cell! Cave 24, started after caves 21 and 23, had to utilize all the possible spaces available between caves 25 (on proper left) and 23 (on proper right). That is why it had to intrude (on south) into the area of Cave 25. Its left outer cell, thus, was allowed to dig into the rock underneath Cave 25's court thereby disallowing the latter's future expansion downwards. Cave 25 was now squeezed from all sides.

PHASE III OF EXCAVATION

In c. 464-465 CE when interest in Cave 25 was revived, a new staircase was needed. This was because the earlier approach from Cave 26's terrace had now become dysfunctional or

inconvenient after the temple's lower half portion was excavated. Now, an alternative passage had to be devised for reaching up to Cave 25. Such an entrance could not have been from the front, as there was lower right wing underneath, and a passage (a flight of steps) had already been cut for routing the visitors from the main entrance gate to Cave 24. Hence, the only place left was the court of Cave 24. Accordingly, a new flight of steps was excavated that starts from Cave 24's court and goes up to the front right corner of Cave 25. This served the purpose fine without any difficulty. This staircase is used today for reaching Cave 25.

The blunder

Apart from the staircase, the monolithic cubical platform suggests the fact of Phase III. There was about 2 or 3 years of gap between Phase II and III. When Cave 25 was abandoned for last three years, what prompted the revival of work on this forgotten cave?

During this period, the cave lay virtually abandoned. What could have been the logic of the revival of interest in Phase III? The only answer feasible under the circumstances is that the planners must have been satisfied with the overall progress of work so far: the entire *śaityagrha*-complex with the adjuncts had been completed for the most part, and the progress on the annexe (Caves 21, 23, and 24)

was smoothly underway. Cave 25, meanwhile, had been left on its fate. It was looking odd among the beauties—a cockroach into the soup. Fresh attention was thus required on this cave to revive its completion. First and foremost, it was necessary to get the floor done, since the excavators had halted halfway from the top. If the floor could be fully exposed, if a few cells could be added in feasible locations, and if pillars were spruced up, then the cave could be made useful. Hence, the work seems to have been resumed to complete the pending tasks.

A major constraint in lowering the floor was the emergent Cave 24 that had already created on outer cell underneath the floor. The intrusion indicates that no plan must have been there to revive Cave 25 in c. 464 CE.

As regards the porch-end area, by c.464-465 CE, porch-end cells had become a necessity in most caves (Figure 172). First, a cell was excavated on left porch-wall. Due to Cave 24, right porch wall could not be touched. Soon, the porch-end cell was converted into a vestibule. Further inner cells were begun on the vestibule's walls. A hole was created by mistake when the workers were scooping the rear wall of the vestibule's inner cell. They had no knowledge that the *caityagr̥ha*'s vault is right there. Hence, as they scooped, they recklessly broke through the rear wall into the *caityagr̥ha*'s vault. The work now could not proceed anymore.

This mistake was serious, as there was now a hole in the vault of the painstakingly planned temple. The accident had added to the existing woes of Cave 25. As a result, work on the inner cells was abandoned in the same state of incompleteness. Even the planned cells inside the hall were never taken up in the fear that the masons might repeat the mistake and destroy the *śaityagr̥ha* further. This abandonment of the planned cells on hall's left wall had, of course, a resonating effect on the rear and right walls, wherein the cells could not have been carved because they would have no symmetry. The cave's hall had thus landed in a disastrous end. This disaster ironically was somehow a gain for Cave 24, which had just been planned and started vigorously. Cave 24's cells on court, porch, and hall invaded into those areas previously earmarked for Cave 25's cells on right.

The abandonment of the cave

The *śaityagr̥ha* had been damaged. We do not know what repercussions the accident must have created, for a hole in the temple's ceiling was the last thing the patron would have desired. The fact that no further work is seen on these cells, vestibule, floor, pillars, and hall, which are all incomplete, indicates that the damage was considered irreparable. The worker's mistake had probably come heavy on the patron who seems to have abandoned all future work on the

cave. Thus, Cave 25 had been surrendered to the previously unplanned but now prioritised Cave 24 in c. 464 – c. 465 CE.

The vagaries of Cave 25 were thus the results of unfolding situations and unexpected compulsions, authored principally by the patron himself whose needs and ambitions had been growing incessantly over the period.