Ch. 20: Cave 19-complex—inaugurated on the last *pūrṇimā* of *Ćaturmāsa* (Kārttika Pūrṇimā) in circa 384 Śaka era, and aligned to the morning sun of the subsequent three winter *upoṣathas*

PŪRVA-PAKṢA: Spink's theory of the astronomical alignments to solstices

Spink was the first to suggest that Cave 19 is of archaeo-astronomical value. Spink's observations and a critique of the same is included in Chapter 14. In his view, Cave 19 is oriented to the winter solstice on 21/22 December, and Cave 26 is oriented to summer solstice on 21/22 June. He says that these orientations were not originally planned in any of these caves. He believes that after a few years of development, the workers discovered that the two temples were

'by chance' facing the approximate angles of the sunrise on solstice days. So, the workers attempted to achieve the closest alignment possible. For this, they had to make significant adaptations to the original plan. They wrenched the nave of the cave, and twisted the face of the façade as well as moved the location of the stupa somewhat forward and to the right. Spink concludes that in spite of the best efforts there was no way to achieve the perfect alignment, since a lot of excavation on the exterior as well as interior had already taken place. Spink says that 'the order came from the capital' to wrench and twist the cave in such a way as to align with the morning sun of solstice. A part of the evidence of how the façade of Cave 19 was wrenched or twisted is visible in Figure 151. Spink also makes a confession that the rational of alignment to solstices is not known to him. He says that there is a Hindu temple at Washim which is also aligned to solstice.

UTTARA-PAKṢA: A NEW THEORY OF CAVE 19'S ASTRONOMICAL ALIGNMENT TO THE WINTER *UPOṢATHAS* (BEGINNING FROM KĀRTTIKA PŪRṆIMĀ, I.E. THE LAST *PŪRṆIMĀ* OF THE *ĆATURMĀSA*)

After prolonged study and examination of the extant data and evidence, I have found Spink's conclusions untenable and illogical. My entirely different conclusions, based on a range of additional data, were shared and discussed with

Spink on many occasions in the last 3 years. Through dozens of emails and over several meetings at the site of Ajantā, we discussed the matter in details but could not come to unanimous conclusion. He confessed to his inability to understand the Indian calendar systems, and Buddhist monastic practices, rites, festivals, and ceremonies according to the Buddhist almanacs, which are critical components of my study, data analysis, and conclusions.

The summary of my ideas are as follows[102]. While one temple-complex of the fifth-century phase of Ajantā is oriented to mark the onset of *Varṣāvāsa* (starts from Dharma Day or Āṣāḍha Puja), the other temple-complex (Cave 19) is oriented to mark the end of the *Varṣāvāsa* season. Even the third temple-complex (Cave 29, inaccessible and grossly incomplete) was oriented like the second one.

Whereas Cave 26 felicitates and is aligned to the Dhamma Day as well as to day of the commencement of *Varṣāvāsa*, caves 19 and 29 felicitate and are aligned to the last Pūrṇimā of *Varṣāvāsa*, i.e. Kārttik Pūrṇimā as well as the 3 subsequent winter *upoṣathas*.

The data and research at my disposal indicate that the orientation was not to solstices. I feel that the temple commemorates the end of *Varṣāvāsa* in November; at the same time, it is oriented to celebrate the Kathina festival that falls on the first full moon after the end of the vasa

season. This marks the onset of winter season. The monsoon season itself, the full three to four months, are important as far as the orientation of the cave is concerned. Many important festivals fall in the succeeding season of winter, including Buddha Jayanti (the day of the birth of the Buddha) and the Buddhist New Year. They fall on the full moon days from Margasirsa to Magha months of the Śaka calendar, which is a lunar calendar. This corresponds from November to February of the Julian year (Table 12). During the season—called variously as 'winter' and the 'cold season' by Xuanzang (see Table 14)—the morning sun sweeps through the interior of the nave including the stupa. The phenomenon is apparent from the data given in Tables 18 and 19.

Let us understand the above in detail. Since the nave of Cave 19 is oriented to 137° E-SE, it is obvious from Table 19 that the morning sun would light the nave of the temple every day of the winter for a brief while. It may be noted that the *very first rays of the sunrise* coming through the doorway and the *ćaitya* arch would not squarely fall on the *centre of the stupa*. Because the nave's angle is 137°, the sun's first rays would not enter the caves that are at the lower elevation in the Ghats. At the time of the entry, the broad beam of the rays would first sweep the left, the southern, part of the interior (Figure 153). Thereafter, within an hour or so, as the sun would rise higher and move southward in the sky, the

broad beam of light (some 11 feet wide and equally high) would be aligned precisely with the nave's angle. The precise alignment will surely happen, but on different hours of different dates in November, December, and January. This would include, of course, the date of winter solstice of the Gregorian calendar (21/22 December). Because the alignment happens for the whole winter season, and not just on the dates of 21/22 December (selected by Spink), the 'solstice theory' of Spink stands rejected. The above conclusions were corroborated by the site staff when I interviewed them.

PATRON: WHETHER UPENDRAGUPTA, OR UPENDRAGUPTA II, OR DHARADHIPA?

Among the many finds of Spink is the rectangular space over the main doorway in the interior of Cave 19, which was obviously prepared for the donative inscription, but the inscription could never be incised there due to the sudden, almost overnight, abandonment of not only this cave but the entire site. The space in question is 190 cm long and 79 cm high.

However, the donative inscriptions of Caves 17 and 20 provide clues to the patron. Cave 17 inscription seems to refer to Cave 19 as '*gandhakūṭī*.' The donor donated these caves in a row: from 17 to 20. The donor's name is debated. Spink calls him Upendragupta (W. M. Spink 2005-2013). Mirashi

who read and edited the inscriptions did not ascribe any name due to certain missing *akṣaras* (Mirashi 1949) (Mirashi 1963). Shastri is quite confused in naming him, since he has named him both Ravisāmba and Dharādhipa (Shastri 1997).

Spink is mistaken, because even if Upendragupta was the name of the donor, we ought to designate him Upendragupta II, since exactly the same name appears a few generations earlier in the given pedigree of the donor. The two different identifications, i.e. Upendragupta II for Spink and Dharādhipa or Ravisāmba for Shastri, are adding to the confusion. In Cave 20 inscription the donor is 'Upendra…' the son of Kṛṣṇa [dāsa?]. At the same time, in Cave 17 inscription, Kṛṣṇadāsa is the father of '…gupta'. They hailed from Ṛṣika country, the region where Ajantā lay in ancient days[103].

THE ORIGINAL LAYOUT HAD CAVES 17 & 20 AS RESIDENTIAL ADJUNCTS

The donative inscriptions of caves 17 and 26 suggest that a conflict had surely taken place between the two neighbours: Ṛṣika and Aśmaka. This happened during circa 469-471 CE. During this time the flow of fund was affected and the work on the site was slowed down. Spink calls it 'recession' (Figure 225). Then, at one point, the work on most of the caves was completely halted when the battle might have been more severe. This period is known as hiatus. After the

hiatus, the Ṛṣika king seems to have been defeated. And, he was not seen again on the hill. The caves patronized by the Ṛṣika king were now adopted by the Aśmaka king—who restarted work on some of them, albeit with the change of plans.

No temple is ever planned without residential adjuncts. Cave 19 was not an exception either (Figures 28-29). It is to address the residential needs that caves 17 and 20 were planned. These two caves are flanking Cave 19. Initially, the two must have been conceived as adjuncts to Cave 19.

Thus, the whole monastic complex with the temple was envisaged to be located in the centre of the cave-conglomerate of the Sātavāhana-period caves on one hand and temple-complex being developed by Buddhabhadra on the other (Figure 12). The new complex was exclusive in every sense. The cistern was well excavated with two pillars. This we know as Cave 18 (Figure 140). Today, the cistern appears to be unique on the site. However, similar pillared *maṇḍapa* for cistern must have existed beside Cave 6L, which is now perished.

TORAṆA-DVĀRA

Clearly, the temple was accessed directly from the riverbed through a long flight of steps. This was not only because the caves in the neighbourhood did not yet exist; they had not

even begun. Caves 17, 18, and 20 (Figures 133) were all planned but because they were adjuncts to this cave, they were started somewhat later. They were provided with separate flights of steps. Caves 6, 16, and 17 had provision of tunnelled staircases springing up from the ravine below (Figures 134). Probably, this cave too had a tunnelled staircase.

There was once an imposing *toraṇa-dvāra* now perished, as can be inferred by the remains of the north-eastern jamb of the lost *toraṇa-dvāra* (Figures 143-145, 148-150). The extant parts of the right jamb shows a beautiful and life-size figure of 'Nāgendra' as the temple's *dvārapāla* or doorkeeper (Figure 145). He stands majestically in the *tribhanga* (three folds) posture. He wears attractive ornaments; he has everything to make him the *nāga* king. He is attended by a *pramatha* or *gaṇa* figure considered auspicious on doorways. There is a flying creature, perhaps a *gandharva* depicted above the *gaṇa* or *pramatha* figure. Very likely, another identical image must have been carved on the opposite side of the gate. We can figure out the dimensions of the gate. It was nearly 5 feet wide; the jambs were 3 feet wide and 4 feet thick. The height is difficult to figure out. Perhaps, it was equally high as the pillared portico of the temple: 8 feet (Figure 142). The lintel was about 4 feet thick; the cross section of the lintel must have been in the shape of a *ćaitya*

motif. The *toraṇa-dvāra* would have been akin to the contemporary palace and city gates depicted in Ajantā paintings.

THE *PRĀKĀRA* (ENCLOSING THE *BAHIRANGANA*)

The *prākāra* or the enclosure wall of the courtyard is quite revealing if analysed closely. From the extant right half (Figures 143, 145, 148-150), we know that the walled enclosure was 6 feet high, and 9 feet long on either side of the gate. It spanned 31 feet from the left to the right outer wall of Cave 19.

The prākāra and *toraṇa-dvāra* would have been excavated after leaving some space in front on the cliff. At least few metre of rock might have been removed before the main gate and the prākāra could be defined on the cliff. Some traces of this outer space outside the main gate is extant. Spink has also suggested about the space that permitted pathways for reaching up to the adjacent Caves 18, 17, and 20.

In my view, there might have occurred a rockslide at the time that damaged the frontal access system. That is why the planners had to break the front cells of the outer shrines on either sides of the frontcourt. A passage was thus made to access the adjacent caves (Figures 146-147). This passage is used by visitors today.

The rail motif on the prākāra is suggestive of the early beginning of the edifice (Figure 143), which is also seen in Cave 6L (porch rear wall, Figure 59) and plinths of the porch of Cave 26. These rail motifs were made in circa 462-463 CE. Later, they went out of fashion.

During circa 477-479 CE some intrusive Buddha images and miniature stupas were sculpted in the period of disruption, circa 477-479 CE (Figure 225). These are extant on the left side.

THE *BAHIRANGANA* AND THE FLANKING BUDDHA-*MAṆḌAPAS*

The *prākāra*, *toraṇa-dvāra*, and the *bahirāngana* (frontcourt) must all be dated to later years, i.e. circa 463-464 CE. Monolithic rock-cut excavations begin from the top and move downward to reach the floor; at the same time, while beginning from the cliff face, the excavation penetrates gradually to the full depths of the interior. Cave 29 illustrates the process very well (W. M. Spink 2009, fig. 33). The same process, of course, must have been observed in Cave 19. Thus, it took some time before the temple's lower half was excavated. It is for this reason that we would expect the *toraṇa-dvāra*, *prākāra*, and the entire lower half of the temple to be excavated in the following years, and not in the inaugural year of circa 462 CE.

Originally, there was no provision of the outer Buddha shrine or the pillared chambers flanking the frontcourt (Figures 160-164). As noted earlier, it is from circa 465 CE that outer cells and pillared chambers were begun to be excavated on the 'wasted areas' (Figure 225). Perhaps the Buddha shrines (Figure 161), those carved on the rear walls of the pillared chambers on either sides of the frontcourt, are among the latest developments on the cave attested by a number of factors. The pillars are round (Figure 160), which are of the latest styles at Ajantā. The Buddha's mudra is not in *padmāsana*, but *pralamba-pādāsana* (Figure 161), which was never introduced at the site before circa 475 CE. The door fittings are all in the D mode (Figure 226) with corner recesses or were adapted so in the last phase of activity.

INTERIOR PILLARS AND PAINTINGS

In the interior (Figure 152), the front axial pillars display uniqueness. They have square bases supporting first the octagonal and then the sixteen-sided shafts (Figures 156-158). On the four corners of the octagons are carved seated dwarfs. Then there are jewel-bands above (Figure 158); further above the shaft becomes circular and circled with additional jewel-bands. Above the circular parts of the shafts are seen a decorative pattern with hanging pearls and gems. Further above are other sets of the jewel-band pattern,

which are now conjoined with foliage-bands. This whole theme—sixteen-sided shaft, jewelled-bands, and pearl and gem hangings—is repeated above. In the uppermost parts there is a band of some complex lotus motifs, the *āmalaka*, the inverted bell, and ultimately a square at the crest. There are *śālabhanjīkās* with *vidūṣakas* on the axial sides of the capitals. The pillars of the colonnade in the nave shows a distinct variety of designs; in fact there are many varieties. There is no particular consistency or a distinct programme there (Figures 156-157).

The wall paintings do not depict narrative themes. They are all seated Buddha images in different gestures. But all of them have the same posture—i.e. *padmāsana*. The enthroned Buddhas have attendants. They are often the Bodhisattvas. But curiously some of the attendants are not Bodhisattvas but curious looking figures; a few of them resemble ordinary human beings. On the right wall a green colour figure appears consistently in many such depictions. It appears that the 'green attendant' is someone very special. Perhaps some of the attendants here are the donors themselves as Bodhisattvas. By definition, everyone on the path of the Buddhahood is a Bodhisattva especially if he or she has attained the required stages toward the enlightenment called the *pāramitās*.