

CHAPTER III

SAṄGHA: AJAṆṬĀ'S COMMUNITY AND ITS PATRONS

A Brief Reprise, The Three Jewels

I go for refuge to the Buddha. I go for refuge to the Dharma. I go for Refuge to the Saṅgha. Whether one declares this before a congregation or in silent solitude, by reciting these refuges one becomes a 'Buddhist.' With this formula one accepts a canon of signs that encode what someone who is a Buddhist accepts as his religious ideal -- the Buddha -- accepts as his religious beliefs and practices -- the Dharma -- and accepts as his religious community -- the Saṅgha.

The Three Jewels express the range of symbolic values delimiting a Buddhist identity. As Ajaṇṭā's patrons supported the creation of iconic representations of Buddhism's ideals, participated mentally in its doctrines and physically in its rituals, and created a place for a community of its religious, so they constructed their own identities as Buddhists. Similarly, the Ajaṇṭā caves can be identified as a Buddhist site insofar as they contain representations of the Three Jewels. The full range of Ajaṇṭā's material remains -- paintings, sculptures, inscriptions, architectural plans, as well as minutiae, such as door-fittings, chiseling styles, plaster materials, and numerous other details -- are signs of an understanding, a set of values, a structure of meaning, shared by the site's community. The painting of a distressed princess in a *jātaka* illustration and the serene smile of a guardian sculpted at the entrance to a Buddha's shrine are religious artifacts alongside the site's monolithic icons and hagiographic renderings.

We may even speak of a Buddhist culture as predicated of the Three Jewels: the complex culture of Buddhism at the Ajaṅṭā Caves. Culture works to bind a community in its webs of significance as it supplies the shared signs through which a community knows its world and as it fosters a communally shared interpretation thereof. But the study of culture as a semeiotic enterprise works by reading a community's objects, its artifacts, as signs implicated in an indefinite web of interpretations. For the members of an ancient Indian Buddhist community, a knowledge of themselves *as Buddhists* involved an integration realized pragmatically in action. We designate this act of interpretation by other well-known terms: patronage, excavation, decoration. We find these Buddhists' religion in the iconographies accepted, iconologies intended, decorative schemes, donative formulae used, epithets adopted. Signs all, meaningful as public and shared displays. Through these acts the public selves of ancient Buddhists have themselves become objects, which in our modern academic environment are signs for analysis. Indeed, all three elements of Pierce's triadic sign are present equally in my study of Buddhist culture at Ajaṅṭā: the *object* is the self-understanding of Ajaṅṭā's community represented in the Ajaṅṭā caves *as sign*; the interpretant being this very dissertation you read presently.

The preceding chapters sought to present Ajaṅṭā's historical setting, to delineate the body of sources apropos to Ajaṅṭā's study, and to explicate an understanding of how this history and these texts exist *as sources* for the study of Ajaṅṭā. I designated these matters "prolegomena" to signal my expectation that the material contained therein provides the foundation for any study of Ajaṅṭā's religious culture. I now begin the dissertation's second half, wherein one such study will be attempted. As should be clear by now, my aim is to explicate Buddhism at Ajaṅṭā as the manifest expression of a community's self-understanding. Because I treat religion at Ajaṅṭā as a matter of public display, I find it necessary to first determine what that 'public' was and who was included within it. This is

why, although one goes for refuge first to the Buddha, and then the Dharma, and Saṅgha, I will treat these Three Jewels in reverse order, the Ajaṅṭā's community being the subject of the present chapter.

Delimiting Ajaṅṭā's Saṅgha

What is the Buddhist *saṅgha*? One answer, that given to the householder Anāthapiṇḍada when he first asked this question, reads as follows: "O householder, there are sons of good family, belonging to *kṣatriya* families, who cut off their beards and hair, put on red robes, and with proper faith follow in renunciation the Blessed One, who himself went forth from the home to the homeless life. Similarly, there are sons of good family, belonging to *brāhmaṇa* families, to *vaiśya* families, and to *sūdra* families, who cut off their beards and hair, put on red robes, and with proper faith follow in renunciation the Blessed One, who himself went forth from the home to the homeless life. This, O householder, is called the 'saṅgha.'"¹

Here is one elementary way Buddhists explain the saṅgha: the community of monks. Too overly inclusive, this definition little helps one to identify Ajaṅṭā's particular saṅgha. Nor, however, does it exhaust the Buddhist understanding of what constitutes a 'saṅgha.' Within the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, the Buddhist saṅgha is further categorized under a number of rubrics, which may be analyzed into two basic modes: the enumeration of internal divisions within the saṅgha and the distinguishing between different individual saṅghas. In regard to the first, perhaps the most inclusive list of divisions within a saṅgha

¹ *santi gr̥hapate kṣatriyakulād api kulaputrāḥ keśaśmaśrū avatārya kāṣāyāṇy vastrāṇy ācchādya samyag eva śraddhayā anāgārād anāgārikāṃ tam eva bhagavantam pravrajitam anupravrajitāḥ; brāhmaṇakulād api vaiśyakulād api sūdrakulād api kulaputrāḥ keśaśmaśrū avatārya kāṣāyāṇi vastrāṇi ācchādya samyag eva śraddhayā anāgārād anāgārikāṃ tam eva bhagavantam pravrajitam anupravrajitāḥ; sa eṣa gr̥hapate saṅgho nāma.* Raniero Gnoli (ed). *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Śayanāsanavastu and the Aḍbikaraṇavastu, Being the 15th and 16th Sections of the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin.* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1978): 15. I have read the manuscript's *anāgārād* as *āgārād* in both instances.

is found at the beginning of the MSV's *Śayanāsanavastu*, the Chapter on Lodgings. In this story, monks residing at the Jetavana monastery in Śrāvastī argue among themselves as to which monk is the most worthy of honor and respect, and therefore worthy of the first seat, first water, and first alms. The possibilities enumerated include, a Śākya renunciate, a brāhmaṇa renunciate, a kṣatriya renunciate, a vaiśya renunciate, a sūdra renunciate, a renunciate from a high family, a renunciate from a wealthy noble family, a monk who is handsome, comely, pleasing, one who speaks well, one skilled in the pronunciation of words, a well-known monk, a monk possessing much merit, a preserver of sūtras, a preserver of the vinaya, a preserver of the *māṭṛkās*, a learned monk, a preacher of the Dharma, a Sthavira, a royal monk, a monk who dwells in the forest, a monk who keeps only three robes, one who wears robes of felt, one who wears robes taken from the dust-heap, one who lives only on alms begged, one who eats in a single sitting, one who does not eat after the time to cease, one who dwells at the roots of trees, one who dwells in cemeteries, a monk who dwells in the open air, a monk who sleeps in a sitting posture, a monk who takes any seat that is offered, a monk who has attained awareness of impermanence, and finally an arhat who meditates upon the eight deliverances.²

In the end, none of these monks is placed at the head of the saṅgha as the most worthy, deserving of the first seat, first water, and first alms. That distinction is reserved for the senior-most monk. Be this as it may, here the MSV analyzes Śrāvastī's saṅgha in terms of the familial backgrounds of its members, the types of learning they hold, the particular ascetic practices they undertake, and their individual levels of spiritual attainment. Echoing

² *tatraiḥ evam ābhuḥ śākyaḥ pravrajita iti; anye tv evam ābhuḥ yo brāhmaṇaḥ pravrajita iti; apare yaḥ kṣatriyaḥ pravrajita iti; apare yo vaiśyaḥ pravrajitaḥ; apare yaḥ sūdraḥ pravrajitaḥ; apare uccāt kalāt pravrajito 'nyūnāt; ādhyāt kulāt pravrajito 'dīnāt; apare yo 'bbirūpo darśanīyaḥ prāsādikaḥ kalyāṇavākyo vākkaraṇenopeto jñāto mahāpuṇyaḥ sūtradbaro vinayadbaro māṭṛkā-dbaro babuśruto dbārmakathikaḥ sbaviro rājanyaḥ āraṇyakaḥ traicīvariko nāmatikaḥ pāmsukulikaḥ piṇḍapātikaḥ ekāsanikaḥ khalu paścādbhaktiko vṛkṣamūlikaḥ śmāśāniko 'bhyavakāśikaḥ naiśadiko yathāsamstariko yo lābhī anityasaṃjñāyāḥ pūrvavad yāvat yo 'rbhann aṣṭavimokṣadhyāyīti. Gnoli. Gilgit Manuscript of the Śayanāsanavastu, 3.*

this narrative's subtext of competition between set groups within the saṅgha, Hsüan-Tsang's testimony concerning monastic practices in Mathurā suggests that similar divisions and rivalries persisted at least as late as the seventh century: "In the 'Three Longs' of every year, and on the six Fastdays of every month, the Brethren with mutual rivalry make up parties, and taking materials of worship with many valuables, repair to the images of their special patrons. The Abhidharma Brethren offer worship to Sāriputra, the Samādhists to Mudgalaputra, the Sūtraists to Ānanda."³ The pilgrim Fa-Hien observed much the same practices for the early fifth century as well, also in Mathurā.⁴

Internal divisions within the saṅgha based upon such matters as traditions of learning and spiritual practices are well documented within the MSV, and seem to have had a great deal of significance for the MSV's authors. Unfortunately, we possess no evidence from Ajaṅṭā that can be related directly to these textual precedents. Yet, Buddhist literature does hold a second way of specifying a saṅgha, one that is at both more restricted and more useful than the answer given to Anāthapiṇḍada: the individuation of local saṅghas based upon geography. This second approach has direct consequences for this dissertation's attempt to recover Ajaṅṭā's own saṅgha.

The most renowned of local saṅghas in the Buddhist corpus is doubtless that of the Vṛjiputrakas from the city of Vaiśālī. According to legend, by the time one hundred years had passed after the Buddha's *mahāparinirvāṇa*, the monks of Vaiśālī fell away from the Buddha's vinaya, breaking established rules on ten points, including eating after noon, drinking spirits, and handling gold and silver. These lapses were discovered by Yaśas, a monk from a region to the west of Vaiśālī, who convened a council of 700 monks from

³ Thomas Watters. *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India (A.D. 629-645)*. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1973): vol. 1, 302.

⁴ Fa-Hien. *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*. Trans. by James Legge. (New York: Dover, 1965): 44-46.

western India and the Deccan to judge the Vaiśālīan monks and set them straight.⁵ The historical verity of this council and the details surrounding it are of less importance for us here than this tale's documentation of a Buddhist mentality that placed great import upon geography. One finds this emphasis in the distinction between eastern and western monastic traditions, in the care this tale's narrator takes to preserve the itinerary Yaśas followed as he solicited monks to join the council, and, of course, in the strong identification of the ill-behaved saṅgha with the city of Vaiśālī. At a slightly later moment in the Buddhist institutional history, one finds that schismatic *nikāyas* were occasionally identified by their geographical locations. For instance, several subsets of the Mahāsāṃghika *nikāya* were named after mountains surrounding the Amarāvātī stūpa, the *Pūrvaśaila* (East Mountain) and *Aparaśaila* (West Mountain); other *nikāyas* named for a location include the *Andhaka*, *Haimavata*, *Caitīya*, *Uttharāpathaka*, and *Sannagarika*. Again, in Sri Lanka, there are sects, such as the *Jetavanīya* and *Abhayagirivāsin*, named after the monasteries in which they originated.

Such geographical specificity seems to stand in opposition to characterizations of the Buddhist saṅgha as an organization of wandering mendicants having no fixed location: the *caturdiśa bhikṣusaṅgha*, the corporation of monks belonging to the four quarters. This epithet is found as 'early' as the composition of the Pāli canon.⁶ And it is found as 'late' as the fifth century Bāgh copper plate of Mahārāja Subandhu, who makes a gift of a village in order, among other things, to supply members of the *caturdiśa bhikṣusaṅgha* with

⁵ See Étienne Lamotte (*History of Indian Buddhism: From the Origins to the Śaka Era*. [Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut Orientaliste, Université de Louvain, 1988]: 124, n. 43) for a bibliography on the Buddhist councils.

⁶ However, see Gregory Schopen ("Two Problems in the History of Indian Buddhism: The Layman/Monk Distinction and the Doctrines of the Transference of Merit," *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik*. 10 [1984]: 9-47) for the problems with treating this canon as representative of 'early' Buddhism.

clothing, food, and so on.⁷ Moreover, one finds that representing the saṅgha as a unity of nomadic mendicants did not preclude acknowledging the saṅgha to be rife with internal divisions. This is witnessed, for instance, in a dedication from the Valabhī King Guhasena, dated 575 C.E., where he grants goods to "the community of noble Śākya**bbikṣus** belonging to the eighteen *nikāyas*, who have come from many directions" (*nānādiga**bbhyāga-tāṣṭādaśanikāyā**bbhyantaraśākya**ryy**bbikṣusamaṅgha*****).⁸

In point of fact, there seems to have been a certain amount of slippage between the saṅgha conceived as a body of wandering mendicants and as residents associated with specific places. For instance, in the Pāli vinaya's *Cullavagga* (6.9.1) it is recorded that Anāthapiṇḍada established the Jetavana monastery, the principle dwelling place of Buddhist monks in Śrāvastī "for the Order of the four quarters, present and to come."⁹ Yet, in the *Mahāvagga* (3.13.1) one also finds notice that the "saṅgha of Śrāvastī," dwelling at the Jetavana, made rules binding for its local members.¹⁰ In the same vein, this tension may explain a distinction drawn between "*caturdśa* monks" and "*bbikṣu* monks" in the *Ta pi-k'ieou san ts-ien wei yi* (*The Tree Thousand Good Manners of Great Monks*), a manual of Indian monastic life translated into Chinese sometime between 148-170 C.E.: "Nor should one take objects belonging to the *caturdśa* monks and place them among the *bbikṣu* monks' things."¹¹ This text's "*bbikṣu* monks" would presumably be monks belonging to and identified with a specific monastery or locale, whereas the "*caturdśa* monks" would

⁷ Vasudev Vishnu Mirashi. *Inscriptions of the Kalachuri-Chedi Era*. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, volume IV. (Ootacamund: Government Epigraphist for India, 1955): 20-21.

⁸ Georg Bühler. "A Grant of King Guhasena of Valabhī," *The Indian Antiquary*. 4 (1875): 175.

⁹ I. B. Horner. *The Book of Discipline (Vinaya-Piṭaka) Volume V: Cullavagga*. (London: Pāli Text Society, 1988): 230.

¹⁰ I. B. Horner. *The Book of Discipline (Vinaya-Piṭaka) Volume IV: Mahāvagga*. (London: Pāli Text Society, 1982): 202.

¹¹ Sylvain Lévi and Édouard Chavannes. "Quelques Titres Enigmatiques dans la Hiérarchie Ecclésiastique du Bouddhisme Indien," *Journal Asiatique*. xi Serie. 5 (1915): 216.

be wanderers. In the MSV, as well, the saṅgha in a particular locale is often described as *āvāsikanaivāsika*, i.e., comprised of resident monks and non-resident monks.

This tension between local and wandering monks raises interesting questions for Ajaṅṭā because of the nature of the site. As I noted in this dissertation's first half, this complex of monasteries and caityas had an inner tension vis-à-vis its patronage and its resident community. These were not a royal vihāras established in the capital city, in which lived monks fattened for state ceremonies. Rather, they were at quite a remove from the Vākāṭaka capital, in a territory that knew its share of war, along a route that led from Hariṣeṇa's Vatsagulma to the sea. This is not to say that Ajaṅṭā's monastic community may not have included *rājanya* monks, chartered by royal commission. And to be sure, the MSV is replete with stories of patrons who entice a single monk or community of monks to dwell semi-permanently in the monasteries they build. But we must also assume that this community included *caturdiśa* wandering monks, raising the question of how these monks, some perhaps belonging to different vinaya or doctrinal traditions, or hailing from different locales, or revering competing teachers, coalesced into a functional unit at Ajaṅṭā. Can we speak of 'Ajaṅṭā's saṅgha' as a corporate group, consisting of permanent residents whose number was supplemented by itinerant monks travelling along highways opened up by the brief pax Vākāṭaka, which linked the central Deccan with routes to India's western coast and the North?

I raise this issue for, as Sukumar Dutt has observed, "in its later development as a body corporate, it was the unitary character (*Samaggatā*) of each saṅgha that was taken as the basic principle of its constitution. A saṅgha could only function as an entire undivided body."¹² Dutt, here, is commenting upon the Buddhist traditions of the Aśokan era. But I-Tsing shows that this ideology of saṅghic unity continued at least as late as the seventh

¹² Sukumar Dutt. *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988): 83.

century C.E. I-Tsing nostalgically recalls the close adherence to vinaya he witnessed in a monastery in Tāmralipti (a city on India's eastern coast) at which he resided, where "when any business happened, it was settled by the assembly; and that, if any priest decided anything by himself alone . . . without regarding the will of the assembly he was expelled."¹³

If saṅghic unity is so highly valued, how is it obtained and why is this important for the study of Ajaṅṭā? For a saṅgha to be unitary and unanimous it must first be defined in geographical terms. That is, before the saṅgha can gather as a corporate whole for the sake of performing monastic actions, it is necessary to determine which monks should be included in that whole. This is done by the setting of geographical boundaries. For monastic actions to be undertaken, distinct boundaries must be set whereby a single local saṅgha is identified. These boundaries, called *sīmā*, can define a large space using large, natural demarcations: "The Blessed One said: 'First, the resident monks and visiting monks should set fixed markers for a large boundary in all four directions. To the East, the marker [can be] a wall, tree, rock, rampart, or mountain-slope; to the South, West, and North, the marker [can be] a wall, tree, rock, rampart, or mountain-slope. . . . Following that, a single monk should make a motion and an action [of the saṅgha] may be performed."¹⁴ Alternately the *sīmā* can be small, and adopt things such as a road, a designated rock, or pillars erected and set in the ground to mark its boundaries.¹⁵ Indeed, within the Pāli

¹³ I-Tsing. *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practiced in India and the Malay Archipelago (AD 671-695)*. Trans. by J. Takakusu. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1982): 62-63.

¹⁴ *bhagavān āha | pūrvam tāvad āvāsikanaivāsikair bhikṣubhir mahatyāḥ sīmāyāś caturdiśaṃ stbāvaranimittāni saṃlakṣayitavyāni | pūrvasyāṃ dīśi kuḍyanimittaṃ vā vrkṣanimittaṃ vā śailanimittaṃ vā prākāranimittaṃ vā prāgbhāranimittaṃ | dakṣiṇasyāṃ paścimāyāṃ uttarasyāṃ dīśi kuḍyanimittaṃ vā vrkṣanimittaṃ vā śailanimittaṃ vā prākāranimittaṃ vā prāgbhāranimittaṃ | . . . tataḥ paścāt ekena bhikṣuṇa jñaptiṃ kṛtvā karma kartavyam |* Nalinksha Dutt (ed). *Gilgit Manuscripts*. (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1984): vol. 3.4, 84.

¹⁵ *mārgikaṃ vā kathikaṃ śilā vā ucchrāpitā kūlakā nikhātāḥ*. Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts*, vol. 3.4, 88.

tradition, one of the failings of the Vṛjiputraka monks from Vaiśālī was that they did not respect *sīmā* boundaries, or the requisite unity of the saṅgha within a *sīmā*. According to the *Cullavagga* (12.2.8), the monks of Vaiśālī allowed members of different residences (*āvāsa*) within a single *sīmā* to hold separate *Poṣadha* ceremonies -- contravening the singularity of the *sīmā* -- and they performed formal acts of the saṅgha without that saṅgha having all its members present -- contravening the requirement for unity.

This tale from the Pāli vinaya explicates one ideological current that may have been important for Ajaṅṭā, albeit this Pāli tale itself cannot be directly applied to this site, which I have been treating as related to the Mūlasarvāstivāda *nikāya*. The set of ten transgressions associated with the Vaiśālī's monks differ from Buddhist tradition to Buddhist tradition. And neither of the two points from the Pāli vinaya mentioned in the preceding paragraph is found in the MSV's account of the second council. Nevertheless, that the MSV's *Poṣadhavastu* (Chapter on Observance) stands within the same current is demonstrated by the following passage, one of many on this familiar theme: "A *bhikṣu* should go for the *Poṣadha* [ceremony] on the fifteenth [day of the half-month] from a dwelling where there are monks to a dwelling where there are monks, wherein the monks are pure and share the same views. A *bhikṣu* ought not to go for the *Poṣadha* on the fifteenth from a dwelling where there are monks to a dwelling where there are monks, wherein the monks are quarrelsome, mischief-makers, argumentative, contentious and litigious."¹⁶

Interestingly, the MSV's 'table of contents' describes the section containing this

¹⁶ *gantavyaṃ bhikṣuṇā tad eva poṣadhe pañcadaśyāṃ sabbhikṣukād āvāsāt sabbhikṣukam āvāsaṃ yatra bhikṣavo bhavanti pariśuddhāḥ samānadrīṣṭāyaḥ | na gantavyaṃ bhikṣuṇā tad eva poṣadhe pañcadaśyāṃ sabbhikṣukād āvāsāt sabbhikṣukam āvāsaṃ yatra bhikṣavo bhavanti kalakāraḥ bhaṅḍanakāraḥ vivādakāraḥ vighrakāraḥ ādhikaraṇikāḥ | Dutt Gilgit Manuscripts, vol. 3.4, 114-5.*

passage as one concerned with "*bbedavimativyagra*,"¹⁷ i.e., divisions, varying inclinations, and dis-unity. And one finds much the same vocabulary used in the *Abhidharmakośa*'s discussion of this topic. Vasubandhu discusses a type of *saṅghabbedā*, i.e., saṅghic schism, called a division due to actions, *karmabbedā*.¹⁸ Reading Vasubandhu's text in conjunction with that of his commentator, this occurs when there is dis-unity in monastic actions, such as when more than one *Poṣadha* ceremony is performed in a single *sīmā* by monks of varying inclinations. As a category of monastic action *saṅghabbedā* is the worst of the worst. However, we cannot determine whether *karmabbedā* was at all acceptable, for Vasubandhu does not stipulate whether any demerit attaches to *karmabbedā*; the *Kośa*'s commentator merely adds that *karmabbedā* is not like other types of *saṅghabbedā* in that it does not result in the performer's immediate rebirth in the lowest hell.

So far I have framed the potential for internal tensions at Ajaṅṭā between monks of different orders around the distinction between resident and wandering monks. In this, I was implicitly following the MSV's distinction between resident and non-resident monks, with the assumption that the residents themselves were not in conflict or of varying inclinations. But this assumption may not be correct. Here is another problem we face in reconstructing Ajaṅṭā's saṅgha. Inscriptions nos. 58 and 90, from Caves 10 and 22, identify donors of intrusive period Buddha images as potentially members of *nikāyas* other than the Mūlasarvāstivāda. These donors may have belonged to the Cetika *nikāya* and Aparasāila *nikāya* respectively. In both these cases, the donation with which the inscription is associated is fairly minor. Neither Cave 10's Cetika nor Cave 22's Aparasāila

¹⁷ Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts*. vol. 3.4, 114.

¹⁸ Text: *anyas tu saṅghabbedāḥ karmabbedād bhavati | yady ekasīmāyāṃ vyagrāḥ karmāṇi kurvanti | Commentary: anyas tu saṅghabbedā iti | cakrabbedād anyāḥ | nātrānantaryam ity abhiprāyaḥ | yasmād asau karmabbedād bhavati | vyagrā iti | nānānmatayaḥ | karmāṇi | poṣadhādīni saṅghakarmāni | Vasubandhu. *Abhidharmakośa and Bhāṣya of Ācārya Vasubandhu with Sphūṭārthā Commentary of Ācārya Yaśomitra*. Ed. by Dwarika Das Shastri. (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1987): 728.*

donor can be viewed as a major or programmatic patron. These two may well serve as examples of non-resident monks, passing through. Yet, these examples raise the possibility that not all the *residents* at the site were affiliated with the Mūlasarvāstivāda *nikāya*, and raise the question: Was there a single monastic lineage, or did Ajaṅṭā's resident monks belong to a diversity of monastic lineages? In terms of the vinaya -- that is to say, in terms of *sīmā* boundaries -- did Ajaṅṭā have one saṅgha or did it have several?

Despite the significance of *sīmā* boundaries for defining individual local saṅghas, we have no evidence for whether the Ajaṅṭā caves as a whole were considered a single *āvāsa* within a single large *sīmā*; whether the individual caves were separate *āvāsas* within a single *sīmā*; or whether individual or smaller groups of caves were designated such that this quarter-mile horseshoe on the Waghora river was subdivided by numerous *sīmā* boundaries. The only documentation touching upon this issue is Hsüan-Tsang's description of Ajaṅṭā, which might be read as suggesting that the site functioned as a single unit of religious space. Hsüan-Tsang observed that "on the outside of the gate of the *saṅghārāma*, on the north and south side, at the right hand and the left, there is a stone elephant."¹⁹ These elephants are likely the two that flank the entrance to a path leading from the Waghora river to Cave 16 (Figs. 25, 26). Hsüan-Tsang does not stipulate, however, whether the *saṅghārāma* whose gate these elephants flank is this single cave or the site as a whole; context would suggest the latter. Nevertheless, one must remember that Ajaṅṭā was probably not a functioning monastery at the time of Hsüan-Tsang's visit. The Chinese monk could be over-interpreting these elephants' significance within the site's overall programme. Indeed, numerous other caves, if not all, had their own paths to the river; at present evidence exists for Caves 4, 6, 7, 10, 16, 17, 19, and 26. In the present day,

¹⁹ Hsüan-Tsang. *Si-Yu Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World, translated from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsiang (A.D. 629)*. Trans. by Samuel Beal. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981): vol. 2, 259.

Cave 16 is the only vihāra whose entryway and path from the river remain largely intact; it may have been so in Hsüan-Tsang's day as well.

Hsüan-Tsang's external evidence apropos to Ajañṭā's spatial and, therefore, ritual unity was not very helpful. This leaves internal evidence derived from programmes of excavation and decoration within the caves themselves. However, a full-blown attempt to interpret this latter species of data will lead me further afield than I wish to travel. That is, since I would rely upon Spink's relative chronology to contrast the motival and physical evidence found within individual caves, in order to implement this study of internal evidence I would have to reconsider first the site's relative chronology. This is a problem because Spink implicitly presupposes an original homogeneity in the site's architectural and decorative programmes. In terms of architecture, Spink presupposes that every one of Ajañṭā's vihāras was modeled upon a single type; the architectural genealogy of all Ajañṭā's vihāras being traced to the type represented by the first-period vihāra Cave 12, an astylar hall with monk's cells on three walls (Fig. 27). Accordingly, Spink understands motifs such as internal pillars, a central *maṇḍapa*, and Buddha-shrine excavated in the rear wall to be developments in ritual architecture *sui generis* at Ajañṭā (and Ghaṭotkaca), conceived by patrons and artists inspired by the artistic ferment surrounding them. Several other deviations from this genealogical forbearer, such as Cave 7's ground plan (Fig. 28), are explained by the constraints placed patrons and artisans due to physical circumstances, such as the proximity or positioning of adjacent caves; the anomalous architecture of Caves 14 and 20 (Figs. 29, 30) are explained by appeal to Ajañṭā's reconstructed history: these two caves look the way they do because their patrons' had to rush them to completion. Similarly, Spink assumes that all things being historically equal (which they were not), every vihāra would have been painted in a manner similar to Caves 1, 2, 16, and 17, with *jātakas*, scenes from the Buddha's life, and the like. I am not claiming that

Spink is mistaken on these matters, only that his silent imputation of a single ideal type for Ajaṅṭā's vihāras must be assessed before distinctions between the caves can be associated with Buddhist institutional divisions. That done, I would then need to determine whether there is a basis for the assumption that art-historical and architectural variations can be attributed to internal divisions in the saṅgha, such as *nikāya* affiliations. This investigation would also require a study of the relationship between patron, artisan, and saṅgha vis-à-vis the conception and creation of monasteries.

Although space does not permit me to implement this investigation in a full or thoroughgoing manner, I do wish to pursue it briefly. Is there an internal basis for finding various *nikāyas* at work at Ajaṅṭā? In my presentation of a 'canon' useful for the discussion of Ajaṅṭā, I determined the Mūlasarvāstivāda *nikāya* might have had a major presence at the site because the painted Caves 1, 16, and 17 all contain narrative depictions that can be linked to versions of these stories now preserved exclusively in the MSV. In that same discussion I cited a passage from the MSV chartering representations just as we find them in these caves: jātakas on the walls, garland bearers at the entrance to the Buddha shrines, etc. And as I just noted, Spink expects that the other vihāras at Ajaṅṭā would have been similarly decorated, but were not because Ajaṅṭā's functional life as a Buddhist monastic site was foreshortened due to war. In addition to the caves renowned for their paintings, several other vihāras also retain programmatic painting. Let us focus upon those in Cave 20 (Fig. 31). Unlike Caves 1, 2, 16, and 17, Cave 20's walls seem not to have been covered with jātakā tales, but with simple bands of color and geometric designs. Indeed, in the same way that we turned to the MSV to give a literary precedent for the other caves, we might turn to the Pāli vinaya for Ajaṅṭā's Cave 20. In the *Cullavagga* (6.3.2), the Buddha forbids figural imagery: "Monks you should not have a bold design made with figures of women, figures of men. Whoever should have one made, there is an offence of wrong-

doing. I allow, monks, wreath-work, creeper-work, swordfish teeth, the five strips (of cloth design)."²⁰ On the one hand such restrictions as these could be viewed as having had an influence on Cave 20. Or, on the other, the simplicity of Cave 20's painted designs could be accounted for within Spink's chronology by the pressures leading up to the hiatus of 472, rather than by an attempt to adhere to vinayic restrictions.

Let us turn to the Bāgh caves for comparison. Bāgh is the only Buddhist monastic complex in India other than Ajañṭā at which sufficient paintings were preserved inside of monasteries to enable us to say something about this subject. Moreover, Spink's chronology places Bāgh as contemporaneous with Ajañṭā; he claims that when workmen fled Ajañṭā in the hiatus of 472, many went to Bāgh, whose viḥāras he dates between 464 and 478 (Fig. 2).²¹ Looking at Bāgh's viḥāras, it is clear that its Cave 2 had walls decorated in a mode quite different than Ajañṭā's major caves. Here the painting was not figural or even narrative, but purely floral and decorative (Fig. 32). Portions of Bāgh's Cave 3 was also painted in a manner akin to that of Ajañṭā's Cave 20 (Fig. 33). Again, the painting inside Bāgh's Cave 4, like that inside Bāgh's Cave 2, displays floral and geometric motifs for the most part, with no apparent narrative scenes. In Cave 4, however, there appears to have been some figural imagery as well. On the wall between cells L5 and L6 one finds painted a standing haloed figure (Fig. 34), which I suppose had a *jaṭā-mukuṭa* as is often found on Ajañṭā's images of ascetics and bodhisattvas. Similarly next to cell L5, facing L6, there appears to be an image of a seated Buddha, suggested by faint traces of a squat white figure overhung by a parasol in front of which hang flower garlands. The third and final figure I found in Cave 4 at Bāgh is to the immediate left of cell L7. Standing and

²⁰ Horner. *Cullavagga*, 213.

²¹ See Walter Spink. "Bāgh: A Study," *Archives of Asian Art*. 30 (1976/77): 143-69, and Walter Spink. "The Vākāṭaka's Flowering and Fall." In *The Art of Ajanta*. Ed. by Ratan Parimoo et. al. (New Delhi: Books and Books, 1991): 78.

haloed, it wears a crown. Although this figure is a mere shadow, and I cannot ascertain the visual context, its body appears to face towards the cave's front, while its head is turned, looking towards the doorway to cell L7 behind it. These latter two figures were too faint for me to photograph. The only narrative scene I know of from Bāgh was painted on the exterior wall connecting Caves 4 and 5. Reproductions of this mural show that it rivaled those from Ajañṭā for quality and beauty.²² Vogel suggests it depicted an unidentified *avadāna* or *jātakā* tale.²³ Unfortunately, this painting is now completely lost.

Surely, even given the few figures in Bāgh's Cave 4, it would seem that a vastly different sensibility of what could function as appropriate decorative motifs for Buddhist vihāras functioned at Bāgh and Ajañṭā, although both sites may have used many of the same workmen at about the same time. Accordingly, Bāgh serves as an ideal control for determining the parameters of Ajañṭā's own architectural and decorative schemes; differences between the two sites' paintings can here be attributed to the desires of patrons alone. This, of course, does not mean that vinaya considerations alone guided Ajañṭā's and Bāgh's patrons' choice of subjects. For further comparison one might refer to H. Sarkar's investigation of the monasteries of Taxila and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa.²⁴ This is the only serious study with which I am familiar that attempts to index monastic architectures and ritual spaces to specific *nikāyas*.

To recap the discussion up to this point: Attempting to determine how one might recover Ajañṭā's saṅgha, I began with a definition of the Buddhist saṅgha as a corpus of monks. This was too overly broad a definition, and the bulk of this section explored ways in which to circumscribe it. One delimitation is a distinction drawn between resident and

²² John Marshall, et. al. *The Bagh Caves*. (Delhi: Swati Publications, 1982): plate 19.

²³ Marshall. *The Bagh Caves*, 46.

²⁴ H. Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture of India*. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1966).

non-resident monks at a monastery; a second distinction having bearing for Ajaṅṭā is that between members of different *nikāyas*. These distinctions are important and problematic for Ajaṅṭā for the following reasons. First, because there is a normative precept found throughout Buddhist literature on monastic practices, which holds that a saṅgha must be both unitary and unanimous when it performs ritual actions; second because before a saṅgha can be unified, its members must first agree upon specific geographical boundaries, separating that particular saṅgha from all others; and third, because we cannot determine where these boundaries would have been at Ajaṅṭā. Accordingly, we cannot determine how many saṅghas were in fact residing on this slope over the Waghora river. And we cannot necessarily rely upon information from Buddhist literature for assistance, because historical and material circumstances might have had as much influence upon the caves' architectural and decorative schemes as did stipulations in the vinaya. Although this would be a valuable study to pursue further, perchance to solve, in this dissertation I have opted for breadth over intensive depth. We must move on.

Patronage and Community in the Configuration of Ritual Space

The above discussion drew largely upon the MSV's *Poṣadhavastu*, a principal locus for instructions concerning the formation of local saṅghas for the performance of monastic rituals. This examination of monastic unity left aside all consideration of the *Poṣadha* ceremony itself. I wish now to turn to the *Poṣadha* as a transition to this new discussion wherein I explore the formation of Ajaṅṭā's saṅgha in the interaction between patrons and patronized.

Let us begin with the tale of the *Poṣadha* ceremony's introduction as a Buddhist practice, paraphrasing the MSV: Every day the *upāsakas* of Rājagṛha would go to the Buddha and his monks for teachings and to attend upon them. One morning, thinking

they were too early and that the Buddha would still be cloistered, Rājagṛha's *upāsakas* went to a park. There Buddha's devotees overheard teachers from other sects discussing sitting meditation, monastic concordance, and the *Poṣadha*; the *upāsakas* discovered that *tīrthikas* have knowledge of these three practices, but that Śākyamuni's monks do not. The *upāsakas* of Rājagṛha then left this park and visited the Buddha. They recounted what they heard from these *tīrthikas*, and requested that Buddha instruct his monks in the *Poṣadha* ceremony. Śākyamuni agrees, declaring that henceforth monks should observe the *Poṣadha*.²⁵

The Buddha's monks were not familiar with *Poṣadha*, so they asked what it is and how to practice it. The MSV's answer: *Poṣadha* occurs on the half-month, at which time monks recite the *prātimokṣa sūtra*.²⁶ S. Dutt has suggested that *prātimokṣa* "etymologically means 'bond,'"²⁷ and in its most primitive form, this ritual was "a symbolical expression of

²⁵ *bhagavān rājagṛhe vibarati veluvane kalandakanivāpe | tena kbalu samayena rājagṛhīyakā upāsakāḥ divādivam evodyuktā abhūvan bhagavantam darśanāyopasaṃkramitum paryupāsānāyai | atha rājagṛhīyakānām upāsakānām etad abhavat | atiprātas tāvad asmākam bhagavantam darśanāyopasaṃkramitum paryupāsānāyai | pratisaṃlīno bhagavān pratisaṃlīnās ca manobbhāvanīyās ca bhikṣavo yan nu vayaṃ yenānyatīrthikaparivṛājakānām ārāmas tenopasaṃkramema | atha saṃbabulā rājagṛhīyakā upāsakā yenānyatīrthikaparivṛājakānām ārāmas tenopasaṃkrāntāḥ | upasaṃkramyānyatīrthikaparivṛājakaiḥ sārḍham saṃmukham saṃmodanīm saṃrañjanīm vividhām kathām vyatisāryaikānte niṣaṇṇāḥ | athānyatamas tīrthyānam idam avocat | kin nu bhavatām eva niṣadyā kriyā poṣadhas ca prajñāyate | āhosvit śramaṇānām api śākyaputrīyānām | athānyatamas tīrthyas tīrthyānam idam avocat | asmākam eva bhavanto niṣadyā kriyā poṣadhas ca prajñāyate na tv eva śramaṇānām śākyaputrīyānām | atha saṃbabulā rājagṛhīyakā upāsakāḥ saṃbabulānām anyatīrthikaparivṛājakānām bhāṣitam nābbinandanti na pratikrośanti | anabbhinandyāpratikrośya utthāyāsanebhyah prakrāntāḥ | te yena bhagavāms tenopasaṃkrāntāḥ | upasaṃkramya bhagavataḥ pādau śirasā vanditvaikānte niṣaṇṇāḥ | ekāntaniṣaṇṇā rājagṛhīyakā upāsakā yāvān evaiśam abhyulpagamya] saṃbabulair anyatīrthikapravṛājakaiḥ sārḍham antarākathāsamudābhāras tat sarvaṃ bhagavato vistareṇārocayanti | evaṃ cābuh | abo vata bhagavān asmākam api niṣadyāṃ kriyāṃ poṣadham ca prajñāpayed anukampām upādāya | adbhivāsayati bhagavān saṃbabulānām [rājagṛhīyakānām] tuṣṇīm bhāvena | atha saṃbabulā rājagṛhīyakā upāsakā bhagavatas tuṣṇīm bhāvenādbhivāsānām viditvā bhagavato bhāṣitam abhinandyānumodya bhagavato 'ntikāt prakrāntāḥ | tatra bhagavān bhikṣūn āmantrayate sma | tasmād anujānāmi bhikṣubhir adyāgreṇa niṣadyā kriyā poṣadhas ca pratijāgartavyaḥ | uktaṃ ca bhagavatā | adyāgreṇa bhikṣubhir niṣadyā kriyā poṣadhas ca pratijāgartavya iti | Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts*, vol. 3.4, 71-2.*

²⁶ Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts*, vol. 3.4, 80-81.

²⁷ Dutt. *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries*, 69.

the unity (*samaggatā*) of the *saṅgha*.²⁸ Whatever the 'primitive' significance of *prātimokṣa*, that meaning rapidly gave way before one in which the *prātimokṣa* became identified as a code of monastic rules (the MSV's "*prātimokṣa sūtra*"), and the *Poṣadha* ceremony became a gathering in which monks affirmed their own compliance with these rules of the order. Returning to *Poṣadha* as a ceremony symbolic of saṅghic unification however, it was not a means for unifying the saṅgha alone. The story that charts this ceremony is one in which the Buddhist laity, dissatisfied with its access to the Buddha and his monks, request a certain time be set aside for that access. As certainly as rehearsal of the *prātimokṣa* reaffirmed the saṅgha's internal unity -- a symbolism that remained even after it became a recitation of rules -- the *Poṣadha* may be viewed as a ceremony that unified the monks with the laity into a unified saṅgha, a Buddhist society broadly conceived.

Whereas the MSV does not elaborate upon the interactions between monks and the laity during this celebration, the *Abhisamācārikā* -- a vinaya text belonging to the Lokottaravāda division of the Mahāsāṃghika *nikāya*, one Sanskrit manuscript of which was preserved in Tibet -- offers interesting information vis-à-vis donor/saṅgha relations on the *Poṣadha* day. In point of fact, this text treats donors, called *dāyakaḍānapati*,²⁹ as an integral part of the *Poṣadha* ceremony. Here, beyond the monks' concordant recitation of the *prātimokṣa sūtra*, individuals monks were deputed to distribute *śalākās* to resident and non-resident monks,³⁰ to collect the *śalākās*, to give a religious discourse, to tell tales,

²⁸ Dutt. *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries*, 67.

²⁹ Sanghasen Singh and Kenryo Minowa. "A Critical Edition and Translation of the *Abhisamācārikā Nāma Bhikṣuprakīrṇakāḥ* (Chapter One)," *Buddhist Studies* 12 (1988): 81.

³⁰ *Śalākās* are "tally sticks" whereby monks are counted. Before a ceremony can be performed, all the monks present are given a *śalākā*, these are then returned and counted. In this way, the monks can know if everyone who is resident at the monastery or visiting the monastery is accounted for and how many there were.

and to request a gift.³¹ The recitation of a religious discourse and tales, as well, of course, as the requesting of a gift were moments in this monastic ritual that directly involved interaction between the monks and the laity.³² At another point in this text we find an interesting passage describing donors who brought a religious gift on the occasion of the *Poṣadha* but refuse to give it because all the monks are not yet present; because they have work to perform, these donors do eventually capitulate and give the gift, although the saṅgha is still not whole; they leave annoyed.³³

I relate these examples from the *Abhisamācārikā* because the *Poṣadha* ceremony one finds represented therein bears a remarkable resemblance to the *Poṣadha* ceremony as described by the seventh century traveller I-Tsing, whose account of this observance is the most complete we possess for ancient India. I-Tsing's observations, in turn, are valuable as an entre into the issue of patronage at Ajaṅṭā, for they describe the bringing together of Buddhist communities, lay and monastic, into a social whole. In fact, I-Tsing's description of the *Poṣadha* day makes no mention of the *prātimokṣa*. The celebration he recounts is that of a feast for the saṅgha, complete with dancing girls.

More to the point, in I-Tsing's telling, the *Poṣadha* observance focussed upon the ritual worship of the Buddha and other deities. This is witnessed in the very constitution of

³¹ *yo pratibalo bhavati so adhyeṣitavyo. Ayam sānaṃ śalākāṃ cāresi, tvam śalākāṃ praticchesi, tvam pratimokṣasūtram uddiṣeṣi, tvam bhāsesi, tvam parikathāṃ karesi, tvam dakṣiṇāṃ ādiṣesi.* Singh and Minowa. *Abhisamācārikā*, 82.

³² To be sure, monks too could play the role of *dāyakaḍānapati*, as one sees in I-Tsing (*Record*, 40). See Schopen ("Two Problems") on the lay/monk distinction and patronage.

³³ *Bhagavān Srāvastyāṃ vibarati Sāstā devānāṅ ca manuṣyānāṅ ca vistareṇa nidānam kṛtvā saṃghasya dāni poṣadho. Āyuṣmān Nandano saṃghasthaviro. Upanamdano dviṭiyasthaviro. Saṃghasthaviro āgato. Bhikṣū āgatā. Dviṭiyasthaviro nāgacchati. Dāyakaḍānapati dāni deyadbarmāni ādāya pratipārenti. Samagram ca bhikṣusamgham vandiṣyāmaḥ. Deyadbarmāṅ ca pratiṣṭhāpayiṣyāmo ti. Te dāni pṛcchanti, Ārya, samagro bhikṣusamgho. Ābaṃsu, nobetam dirgāyū. Ko kbalu nāgacchati. Ābaṃsu, dviṭiyasthaviro nāgacchati. Te dāni ojhbāhyanti. Vayam pi karmāntāṃ choriya āgatā. Gacchāma. Samagrasya saṃghasya pādāṃ vandiṣyāmaḥ. Deyadbarmāṅ ca pratiṣṭhāpayiṣyāmaḥ. Dviṭiyasthaviro nāgacchati. Te dāni mūhūrttamātram pratipāliya āsitvā deyadbarmāṃ pratiṣṭhāpayitvā gatāḥ.* Singh and Minowa. *Abhisamācārikā*, 84.

sacred space for the ceremony: At the room's front was placed an offering for the arhats, and perhaps the Buddha and bodhisattvas; following that, the monks were seated a row in order of seniority;³⁴ and finally in the hall's recess, at the lowest end of the row, was placed an offering for the *yakṣiṇī* Hārītī.³⁵ This description of a seventh century *Poṣadha* hall is of great interest for this study of Ajaṅṭā. A consideration of this ritual space in the context of the social concerns it expresses can assist us in the interpretation of the social dimension of the ritual space constructed within Ajaṅṭā's Cave 2. The pattern described for Cave 2 may, in turn, assist us in understanding the ways in which the construction of Ajaṅṭā's caves as a whole also resulted in the construction of a 'Buddhist society.' This chain of interpretations takes its start from I-Tsing's notation that the *yakṣiṇī* Hārītī is included as a crucial participant in the *Poṣadha* ceremony. Before I explore her place at Ajaṅṭā, however, let us review I-Tsing's account.

After introducing Hārītī's liturgical location within the *Poṣadha* hall, I-Tsing gives a redaction of her history, which may be condensed as follows. As a result of a minor slight, a woman of Rājagṛha vowed that in her next life she would return as a demoness, and devour all the children in the city. Because of this vow, she was indeed reborn as a *yakṣiṇī*/demoness: Hārītī. She had 500 sons of her own, but every day she ate several children belonging to the city's human matrons. The people called upon the Buddha for assistance. To tame Hārītī, the Buddha then stole the youngest of her sons, her most beloved, and hid the young demon in his bowl. Hārītī came angrily to the Buddha, demanding her son's return. As befits a moral exemplum, the Buddha called Hārītī's attention to her new-found empathy for the heartache of Rājagṛha's mothers, observing

³⁴ The *Abhisamācārikā* (Singh and Minowa, 99) adds an interesting tidbit on this point. The auspiciousness of the occasion on account of which a donor invites the monks for a meal, such as a birth or death in the family, determines where the monks will sit: If they have been invited for an auspicious occasion, they sit on the right side; if inauspicious, on the left.

³⁵ I-Tsing, *Record of the Buddhist Religion*, 35-7.

that if Hārītī felt so strongly about losing one of her 500 sons, how much more so must human mothers feel about losing their only children to sate Hārītī's blood lust. Chastened, Hārītī agreed to forgo human flesh. She became a lay-follower. To replace her awful diet, the Buddha charged the monks to make daily offerings of food to Hārītī and her sons. For this reason, according to I-Tsing, the image of Hārītī is found either in the porch or in a corner of the dining-hall of all Indian monasteries depicting her as holding a babe in her arms, and three or five children around her knees.

I relate the story of this dread demoness because a shrine was dedicated to her at Ajaṅṭā (Fig. 35). This shrine, fronted by pillars (an architectural device denoting sacrality), was excavated into the rear wall of Cave 2. It is one of two subsidiary chapels within the vihāra, located on either side of the Buddha shrine's antechamber (Fig 36). To the right of the Buddha, the Hārītī shrine holds monolithic carved images of Hārītī and her consort Pañcika on its back wall (Fig. 37). Murals depicting devotees performing pūjā were painted on its side walls (Figs. 43, 45). Balancing Hārītī's shrine, to the antechamber's left, is a chapel holding monolithic images of Padmanidhi and Śaṅkhanidhi, embodiments of the wealth and power controlled by Pañcika (Fig. 39). These are the only two chapels excavated *within* an Ajaṅṭā vihāra as part of an original patron's program dedicated to 'deities' other than the Buddha.

Significantly, two small tableaus were carved in the upper corners of the Hārītī shrine's rear wall, each of which depicts one of the pivotal moments in Hārītī's conversion. In the upper right we see Hārītī enraged, confronting the Buddha (Fig. 41); at the left is Hārītī and the dear son she 'rescued' taking refuge in the Buddha (Fig. 42). Not only does this chapel confirm I-Tsing's observation of the importance of the mother of demons within monastic architecture, but the narrative depicted at Ajaṅṭā coincides with the tale I-Tsing tells. Indeed, of the many examples available, I have chosen this one from I-Tsing,

for it is not merely about conversion or the pacification of disease. Rather, focussing upon Hārītī, I-Tsing tells of patronage and the formation of societies; he tells of the Buddhist saṅgha as a recipient of alms and giver of boons. The pattern of patronage involved in the Hārītī shrine's creation may serve as a model for the site as a whole.

Yazdani observed that the figures of yakṣas contained in Cave 2's chapels were designed with a feeling of reverence akin to that shown in the carving of the figure of Buddha himself, this cave's cultic center.³⁶ One basis for such reverence would have been Hārītī's ability to pacify disease, whose demonic etiology is well known to all strata of Indian literature. In the same tenor, I-Tsing tells that Hārītī will grant children and riches to her devotees. But to tie this story to Ajaṅṭā's formation, I will focus upon an alternate affective structure. That is, beyond being a practice for maintaining health, this daily offering brings us to the heart of the saṅgha's social role.

Recall, in I-Tsing's telling of Hārītī's history, it is not the monks who were afflicted by disease, but the children of Rājagṛha. By fulfilling the obligation to feed Hārītī, the monks appropriate for themselves a distinct institutional role in Indian society. In Michael Carrithers felicitous phrase, this monastic ritual works to "domesticate" the saṅgha. Carrithers has introduced domestication as the "fundamental" issue of Buddhist sociology. But I will instead build upon the work of another sociologist, Ivan Strenski, who presents domestication as an ongoing process through which the saṅgha participated in dynamic social relations. In brief, Strenski shows that points of institutional contact between saṅgha and society -- involvements of a residential, ritual, social, political, and economic nature -- may be explained through an account of domestication based upon the institution of *gift exchange*. "Above all," Strenski writes, "the *sangha* is a ritual receiver of gifts."³⁷ This is the

³⁶ Ghulam Yazdani. *Ajanta*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1930-55): vol. 2, 2.

³⁷ Ivan Strenski. "On Generalized Exchange and the Domestication of the *Sangha*," *Man*. 18 (1983): 465.

case if we ask about the coalescence of a saṅgha for the sake of attending an *Poṣadha* ceremony of the sort I-Tsing describes, and it is the case if we ask about the formation of a Buddhist community at Ajaṅṭā. Based upon this primary understanding of the saṅgha's social role, Strenski formulates the question of the saṅgha's domestication, to be: how was Buddhist society formed in the process of ritual giving?

As an answer, he analyzes the web of relations within which these interchanges took place into two basic modes: Restricted Exchange and Generalized Exchange. Restricted exchange involves what may be called a commercial element: two parties contract an equitable exchange of goods or services on a reciprocal basis. In relation to Hārītī, the dynamic of restricted exchange is clear: Buddhists feed her, she does not eat local babies. Generalized exchange, by contrast, is not linear, but complex, in its configuration. In Strenski's words, generalized exchange "seeks an unbalanced condition between exchange partners, which requires repayment at some unspecified time, typically by another group or person than the original receiver of the first gift: A gives to B who gives to C . . . until A finally receives his due. . . . Generalized exchange links its members in a theoretically open system of indebtedness, the momentum of which tends to build up social solidarity."³⁸ Accordingly, Strenski parses the term 'domestication' as "the condition of the *sangha* within a system of generalized exchange. 'Domestication' simply names a process of the *sangha's* participation in a certain social solidarity."³⁹ For my purposes, this analysis translates into the following question: how did the evident relation of restricted exchange between Buddhists and Hārītī contribute to the saṅgha's domestication, its socialization within the cycles of generalized exchange? And more importantly, can this pattern of exchange relations aid us in understanding the formation of Ajaṅṭā?

³⁸ Strenski. "On Generalized Exchange," 471.

³⁹ Strenski. "On Generalized Exchange," 471.

Here I wish to call again upon the work of Jonathan Z. Smith, in particular his crucial observation that "ritual is a way of performing the ways things ought to be in conscious tension to the way things are."⁴⁰ This might be reformulated as, ritual is life lived in the subjunctive mood. In explaining the mechanisms through which ritual directs attention towards and resolves conceptual and existential incongruities, Smith valorizes *place* as a fundamental component of ritual: the establishment of ritual space initiates this process of differentiation, by clearly demarcating an area apart, drawing attention to difference. In Smith's words, "within the temple, the ordinary becomes significant, becomes 'sacred,' simply by being there. . . . Sacrality is above all a category of emplacement."⁴¹

The previous section's discussion concerning the setting of a *sīmā* as a prerequisite for the performance of Buddhist monastic rituals can be understood within this rubric. Moreover, this more recent discussion has introduced two maps of the space within which Hārītī's feeding took place, and two ritual contexts. The first was the *Poṣadha* hall; the second Ajaṅṭā's Cave 2. The first involved a cycle of exchange wherein monks functioned primarily as recipients; in the second, they were themselves givers. In the first, the monks were domesticated by their supporters, I use the passive voice; in the second, the monks actively performed the work of domestication upon themselves. I would, in fact, suggest that these two rituals may be viewed as complementary within the structure of generalized exchange. In both cases, a rite based upon the dynamic of restricted exchange on the part of the giver resulted in the saṅgha's social emplacement. Both *Poṣadha* and the daily feeding of Hārītī were not rituals that merely *involved* giving; they were instead performative moments that created hierarchies of the sacred, analogically expressed by the

⁴⁰ Jonathan Z. Smith. *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987): 109.

⁴¹ Smith. *To Take Place*, 104.

spatial dynamics instituted for the rite. And it was the saṅgha's role in the creation and elaboration of these sacral hierarchies -- both as recipient and as giver -- that was the basis of its domestication.

During the *Poṣadha* ceremony, Hārītī was mapped as the sacred opposite of the Buddha, bodhisattvas or arhats, who were placed at the *Poṣadha* hall's front. Together with these epitomes of Dharma, she functioned to bracket the ritual space. Placed between these antipodes, the monks were defined spatially as mediators between transcendental and chthonic powers, between the Buddhist ideal and the all-too socially real. A patron's performance of this ceremony would have established the Buddhist saṅgha as a ritual entity whose presence pacified the worst horrors and simultaneously promised the highest good; through the saṅgha, everyday life was able to coexist with the subjunctive life of ritual space. Returning to Strenski's observations, in the *Poṣadha* rite one finds an act of restricted exchange between donor and Hārītī bestowed upon the saṅgha a fundamental role in the generalized cycle of social exchange. Like the ideal figures -- Buddha, arhat, bodhisattva -- who received offerings at an *Poṣadha* hall's other end, Hārītī served as the condition of possibility of the saṅgha's domestication: one chaos that made acts of ordering, such as the *Poṣadha* meal, not only possible, but also necessary.

The geography of ritual in Ajaṅṭā's Cave 2 is clearly not homologous to that of the *Poṣadha* hall. In the latter, sacrality was constructed through the binary opposition of potential harm and potential perfection, a space mediated by the saṅgha. In Cave 2, a binary opposition does not obtain, but a complementarity between the figures in the side chapels and the central Buddha. Treating this cave's space as a programmatic whole, one finds that no matter what the order or direction of approach a devotee may have taken to the various icons, the spatially central Buddha never lost its ritual centrality. Here the yakṣas and yakṣiṇī in the side chapels do not bracket the space so as to delimit a dualist

cosmology. Instead this configuration suggests a continuous, perhaps functional, hierarchy of sacrality. Granted, Hārītī's occasional demonic nature was recollected for the worshipper in the little carvings behind her monolithic image. Nevertheless, as a presence she is regal, maternal, and eminently approachable. She is in the Buddha's sphere, and portrayed *as if* the monks living at this site have maintained the diurnal duties to her and her sons set upon them by the Buddha: her icon is the ever-present and unchanging sign of the Buddha's power and the saṅgha's performative success. Of course, to invoke Smith again, this incongruity between the ever-certain knowledge that Hārītī is potentially deadly and the never-changing portrayal of her as benign is the very basis of ritual. The fact that Ajaṅṭā's monks would have placated Hārītī who was represented as a sweetly maternal figure itself bespeaks an awareness of her ever present demonic appetites, which would return in the absence of the Buddhist control mechanisms.

And there is more. Cave 2's Hārītī shrine is the best preserved space of its sort in India. Not only has the image come to us virtually intact, and not only has its place within a broader spatial context been retained, but this shrine is singular in that the paintings on its walls are also preserved. By all accounts, they stand as some of the finest work coming from a site known for the quality of its work. Let us look at these paintings, for they tell the story of the saṅgha's domestication.

The right wall of the chapel (Fig. 43) presents a scene in which women and their children bear offerings to Hārītī, lay them in a pile before her, and then proceed to pay homage at her feet. Although there is a feeling of narrative continuity between the sculptured figures and those painted next to them on the wall, there is an artistic discrepancy. The sculpted figures are hard not in substance alone, but also in spirit: they maintain a quasi-iconographic stoniness absent from the painted figures, which are mannered, yet naturally individual. This dynamic interplay of formal and informal figures

within a continuing narrative sequence is particularly evoked by the nonchalance with which a languid painted *chaurī*-bearer seems about to step into the sculpture and take the place of the stolid stone attendant at Pañcika's side. Another character painted in this mode is in the background closer than this *chaurī*-bearer to the sculpture: bejeweled, sitting serenely in the position of royal ease upon a rug, he holds a white lotus in his right hand and gazes devotedly at Hārītī and Pañcika, while the rocks behind him form a natural body-halo (Fig. 44). Interestingly, although the *chaurī*-bearer clearly approaches the sculpture, by flattening the perspective one can create a curious ambiguity as to whose attendant she really is. Scholars have sometimes identified this seated figure as the bodhisattva Padmapāṇi. This may be so. But he may also be a renowned member of the royal family, or more-likely a conflated figure suggesting a king-as-bodhisattva or prince-as-bodhisattva. In either event, he is a figure of no small authority, and through his worshipful attitude he lends legitimacy to the goings-on in the shrine.

Art historians have assumed that the left wall of this chapel (Fig. 45) depicts roughly the same activities as those on the right. However, there is no sense of the direct interplay between it and the sculpted figures so important for the right wall's interpretation. Rather, breaking the flow of action towards the chapel's rear, and parallel to the right wall's so-called Padmapāṇi, is one disrespectful woman facing away from the sculpted image of Hārītī, looking out from the shrine just as Hārītī does (Fig. 46). Unlike the other figures in these murals, this woman's hands appear to be held in *mudrās* characteristic of a divinity rather than a devotee: her right hand suggests the *varada-mudrā*, the gesture of gift giving; the fact that it is also holding a child suggests the giving of children; her left hand is in the *śrī-mudrā*, signifying good fortune, wealth, and royalty, formed by the joining of the ring-finger and thumb. The frieze's composition also sets this woman apart. By placing her to the extreme right of the group of four votaries -- all of

whom appear to be in attendance upon her, though in informal poses -- the artist highlights her position as the focus of the scene. The sense that she is the center of attention is augmented by the placement of a stylized mountain scarp directly to her right: she becomes impassable, the action of this scene having no other direction than towards herself. Finally, she has two children with her, also heading away from the sculptural group. Is it not possible that this figure is Hārītī herself, slimmed and beautified in accord with the mannered naturalism of these friezes, come to speak with her devotees?

If this figure is Hārītī, then there is not a spatial but a temporal continuity between the scenes on the right and left walls of this chapel. The right wall depicts the performance of a *pūjā*; thus the painted figures proceed towards those in stone. The left wall portrays the desired outcome of that *pūjā*, in which the great *yakṣiṇī* Hārītī grants her devotees *darśan* and satisfies their hopes and desires in accord with their petitions.

The fact that these images of lay folk performing a ritual to Hārītī grace a shrine in which the monks would have actually performed rituals to her encapsulates in living color the monastic Hārītī 'cult' as it worked at the levels of restricted and generalized exchange. The saṅgha and the yakṣiṇī have a relationship based upon restricted exchange -- the saṅgha feeds Hārītī, she does not feast upon human babies. And this introduces the saṅgha into the generalized exchange structures of Indian society. That is, without recompensing society for any specific offerings it provides, this monastic ritual offers security, health, babies, ample crops, and so on to whoever might benefit, regardless of that individual's personal relationship with the saṅgha. Recall Smith's statement that ritual draws attention to difference, presenting ideality in conscious tension to reality. All the representations in this shrine conjure such a scene: a placid Hārītī whose potential violence is ever recollected in stone, is set in the context of an idealized ritual, the subjunctive realization of the monks' daily feeding. Of course, the exchange is not unidirectional. Whatever

protection a particular saṅgha may offer to its surrounding community will be contingent upon that saṅgha's integrity being maintained through its reception of alms. The saṅgha requires habitations and support to function within this cycle. Cave 2 itself, a monastic dwelling, may be viewed as a particularly explicit trace of this web of exchange relationships.

As this system worked on the level of the general laity, so one may observe that the political economy too was supported within this process. According to the classical literature on Indian kingship, the king serves as an intermediary between the powers of nature and society; he is an essential factor for the well-being of the people. A good king blesses his subjects, a bad king destroys them, by allowing drought, disease, and war to afflict his population.⁴² More to the point, verses from the Maitrībala jātaka in Ārya Śūra's *Jātakamālā* were inscribed in Ajaṅṭā's Cave 2 (app. A, Nos. 7-8); and from this story we learn that ogres, goblins, and imps who feed on human flesh and fat have no power in a realm ruled by the righteous king, whose rule accords with the Dharma.⁴³ If one will remember the Maitrībala story: a group of five demons request a righteous king to feed them with his own body, since they are unable to attack or devour any beings living within his territory's boundaries. And so, through the mechanism of a restricted exchange with Hārītī, the saṅgha enters into a generalized exchange relationship with the King: by pacifying this and other demons, the saṅgha functionally supplements the king's own royal majesty which is supposed to keep demons at bay. Clearly the Hārītī ritual also works within the conceptual space usually delimited by the term 'legitimation:' it provides a means for controlling a perceived precariousness of the social and cosmic orders that simultaneously reinforces the symbolic and coercive authorities of the reigning king.

⁴² Jan Gonda. *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966).

⁴³ Peter Khoroche (trans). *Once the Buddha was a Monkey: Ārya Śūra's Jātakamālā*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989): 48.

Indeed, the painted images from this Hārītī shrine place it clearly within a royal milieu: the princely figure benignly approving the proceedings, the decrepit attendant of the main celebrant, and her regal bejeweled form all bespeak royalty. Spink has argued that Cave 1 at Ajañṭā was the donation of Vākāṭaka King Hariṣeṇa;⁴⁴ and that Cave 2, the cave in which this Hārītī shrine is located, may have been patronized by one of Hariṣeṇa's wives (personal communication). Among the many details which led Spink to link these two caves is that the capital on the left peristyle's second pillar holds the same sculpted iconic group as that found in the Hārītī chapel: Hārītī and Pañcika, with an unidentified girl holding a parrot in her left hand a lotus in her right standing between them (Fig. 38); the capital on the third pillar in Cave 1 displays Śaṅkhanidhi and Padmanidhi, paralleling the main figures in the Cave 2's pillared shrine to the left of the Buddha chapel (Fig. 40). Although some other caves at Ajañṭā have images of Hārītī et. al., only Caves 1 and 2 display these figures in these precise iconic groupings, and both do so within the inner hall.

Spink's association of both caves with the region's ruling family is particularly suggestive for our consideration of Hārītī and the patronage of her shrine. As one will recall from the first chapter, the Vākāṭaka royal family had two branches, the Vatsagulma and Nandivardhana. Their common ancestor was the greatest Vākāṭaka emperor of all, the third century Samrāṭ Pravarasena (cf. Fig. 6). And as one will recall from my reconstruction of Ajañṭā's history, Vākāṭaka land-grants typically begin by recounting the grantor's genealogy. Within genealogical lists, Pravarasena is praised by kings from both Vākāṭaka branches for having performed numerous sacrifices etc. But there is one significant

⁴⁴ Walter M. Spink. "Ajañṭā's Chronology: Politics and Patronage" In *Kalādarśana*. Ed. by Joanna G. Williams. (New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing in collaboration with the American Institute of Indian Studies, 1981): 109-126; Walter M. Spink. "Ajañṭā's Chronology: Cave 1's Patronage and Related Problems." In *Cbhavi-2* (=Rai Krishnadasa Festschrift). (Benares: Bharat Kala Bhavan, 1981): 144-155.

difference between the praise for Pravarasena found within Vatsagulma inscriptions and those belonging to the Nandivardhana. Namely, Hariṣeṇa's branch of the Vākāṭaka family, and only Hariṣeṇa's branch, bestowed the epithet *Hārītīputra* upon this common forbearer.⁴⁵ *Hārītīputra* translates literally as "the son of Hārītī." In short, one way Hariṣeṇa and his fathers set themselves off from their cousins though their claim of descent from the yakṣiṇī Hārītī.

The precise significance of *Hārītīputra* is unknown. It is also found within the records of other dynasties contemporary with the Vākāṭakas. Mirashi observes that "in later records Hārītī is represented as a sage."⁴⁶ In the case of the Vākāṭaka records, however, *Hārītī* is definitely feminine. If the Hārītī referred to therein is indeed this Buddhist *yakṣiṇī*, it might suggest military prowess, as Hārītī's 500 sons formed the bulwark of the *yakṣa* army. Whatever *Hārītīputra*'s precise significance, no female figure named Hārītī is definitively identified from this period other than the Buddhist *yakṣiṇī*. Accordingly, a monastic ritual for Hārītī at Ajaṅṭā may not have merely introduced the saṅgha into a generalized, structural system of exchange and political legitimation, but may have explicitly reinforced whatever claims Hariṣeṇa's particular family could have made based upon its claim of descent from this emblematic ancestress. Here the distinction between restricted and generalized patterns of exchange would be conflated, with the result that Ajaṅṭā's saṅgha, located at this kingdom's geographical periphery, may have straddled that interval in direct service to king Hariṣeṇa's political center.

The Hārītī icon's position within Cave 2 signals her domestication on two levels: literally brought into the Buddhist house, Hārītī is tamed in perpetuity. A member of the

⁴⁵ Vasudev Vishnu Mirashi. *The Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, volume V. (Ocatamund: Government Epigraphist for India, 1963): 96, line 3; Krishna Mohan Shrimali. *Agrarian Structure in Central India and the Northern Deccan (c. AD 300-500): A Study in Vākāṭaka Inscriptions*. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1987): 82, line 5.

⁴⁶ Mirashi. *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*, 98, n. 12.

royal family may have provided the physical space within which that domestication was maintained; that same queen may have emplaced the monastic ritual within a visual environment dominated by an image of herself paying homage to her and/or her royal husband's demonic foremother. Such ritual emplacement may well encapsulate the saṅgha's location within Vākāṭaka society. By performing daily devotions to Hārītī within an explicitly royal context, the saṅgha, though at a remove from the palace, would have participated in the palace's, and Vākāṭaka society's, most intimate workings. By bringing the palace to the monastery through the representations on this shrine's walls, the monks' good effects returned to the palace and the society for which it was responsible.

Interlude: A Reaffirmation of Vākāṭaka Control over Ajaṅṭā

Generalizing these observations about the patronage involved in the creation of Cave Two's Hārītī shrine, one is left with a broad range of questions the answers to which will set the parameters for ascertaining the generalized exchange relationships responsible for Ajaṅṭā as a whole. Who were the patrons? Who were the recipients? Why did these individuals participate in this project? What were the limits of their participation? It should be clear from my discussion of the Hārītī shrine that by treating patronage as a sub-species of generalized exchange, one must forswear an expectation of complete elucidation of these questions. As Barbara Stoler Miller and Richard Eaton observe, patronage is "a multi-dimensional, sometimes loosely codified network of exchanges involving not only the production of art and literature, but also its performance, transmission, reinterpretation, and preservation . . . Patronage networks in India, as elsewhere, lie embedded in particular socio-political systems which in turn rest in deeply pervasive and culturally

patterned conceptions of power and authority."⁴⁷ The complex diversity of social institutions that could ramify upon the performance of patronage combined with the general lack of available evidence and the semiotic nature of the evidence that we do have will necessarily leave this examination incomplete.

Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that the social geographies of fifth-century India did play their role in shaping Ajañṭā's religious landscape. Although this study separates the religious dimension out for special consideration, Ajañṭā's Three Jewels, beginning with its saṅgha, were integrally woven into the fabric of fifth-century Vākāṭaka society. The above discussion of the Hārītī chapel, as well as Spink's chronology, have made explicit a conception of patronage at Ajañṭā that binds these caves explicitly to the social programme of the Vākāṭaka polity. In fact, Spink holds that the work was more or less orchestrated from the Vākāṭaka capital, where architects and artisans were hired by "a consortium of the emperor's richest and most powerful courtiers."⁴⁸ He envisions the site being micro-managed by a strong-handed bureaucracy whose authority reached so far that, as political pressures threatened to break-off the excavatory work, that absentee administration could decree which "few privileged donors . . . [would be] *allowed* to rush their images . . . to completion,"⁴⁹ and which hapless donors would be forbidden from quickly finishing their images thus.

Spink's interpretation of the evidence may be a bit overblown here. Yet, there are numerous examples of mistakes at the caves which only make sense if executive control over decoration or excavation was not held on site. The Cave 17 Wheel of Existence

⁴⁷ Barabara Stoler Miller and Richard Eaton. "Introduction." In *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture*. Ed. by Barbara Stoler Miller. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992): 3-4.

⁴⁸ Walter Spink. "The Archaeology of Ajañṭā," *Ars Orientalis*. 21 (1992): 69.

⁴⁹ Walter Spink. "The Earliest Vakataka Cave Shrine: An Anomalous Stupa in the Ghatotkaca Vihara." In *M.S. Nagaraja Rao Commemoration Volume*. Forthcoming.

discussed in the previous chapter can serve as an example. In the previous chapter I explained how this Wheel was likely a complete circle, and not a pie with a wedge cut out as Schlingloff hypothesizes. Yet the question remains, why was the circle too large for the space in the first place? Why did the top of the cell door have to be filled in order to accommodate the Wheel? The answer comes in two parts. First, Spink has shown that Cave 17's side porch doors were late additions to this cave's plan, for the placement of the left cell door is anomalous and unique at the site in that it is off-center. As Spink writes, "it is off center simply because the porch-end cells had not been conceived when Cave 17's porch was excavated; consequently, the nearby cistern ("Cave 18"), dug early as always, had intruded into this area. When the cell was finally added, the door was centered in relation to the cell, rather than the porch wall, to better allow space for the conventional placement of beds along the cell's left and right sides."⁵⁰ Second, assuming that the Wheel of Existence was part of the decorative plan from the beginning, Spink further reasons that this "complex and learned decorative program was conceived 'back in the capital.'"⁵¹ Because of mis-communication or lack of communication between the site and the capital, however, the Wheel was not down-sized to accommodate this architectural element. "The wheel was laid out as large as possible and the 'official' orders for its design and execution transmitted to the humble workers at the site, who then coped as best as they could, but in somewhat the way as the village tailor, told to copy a shirt exactly, delivers the finished duplicate just as ordered, and with the same tear in the sleeve."⁵² Indeed, a second anomaly of this door way is that it is not of the same height as that on the right side of the porch, but 8-9 inches lower. This suggests that when the doorway was cut, "the problem to

⁵⁰ Walter Spink. "A Scholar's Guide to the Ajañṭā Caves." Unpublished typescript.

⁵¹ Spink. "A Scholar's Guide"

⁵² Spink. "A Scholar's Guide"

be created by the Wheel of Life was already realized, but if so the adjustment made was not enough."⁵³

Whether the artist who designed Cave 17's Wheel of Existence was a monk, a professional artisan, or the patron-king himself, Spink's knotting of this icon within a web of extra-iconic contexts and contingencies has broader implications for patronage at the site as a whole. Here the icon was preserved according to plan. In some cases even strongly established iconographic motifs had to give way before contingencies; as when a standing Buddha carved on the left wall of Cave Upper 6's Buddha shrine was carved with his *left hand* in the gesture of giving because the sculptor had not left sufficient room to use the customary right hand. In today's India, using the left hand for giving to others would be considered impolite, even insulting. This etiquette may have been in force in the fifth century, for this anomalous Buddha's left hand is turned inward, a second anomaly.

As these icons and images were inextricably set within a physical matrix, so Buddhism's Three Jewels -- here focussing on its saṅgha -- seems to have been knotted within a web of extra-Buddhist assumptions and expectations. At this point it would be valuable to investigate all the donors at the site, to determine their social status; to assess their familiarity with Buddhist and Hindu lore, mythology, and doctrine; to analyze their actions in light of normative prescriptions for people of their status; to review which canons they personally accepted, encoded in the artifacts they left behind. Time and patience not being infinite, however, the remainder of this chapter will only attempt to lay down the fundamentals for this broader study of Ajaṅṭā's saṅgha within its social and cultural contexts by means of a census of the patrons responsible for work at the site.

A Census of Ajaṅṭā's Patrons

⁵³ Spink. "A Scholar's Guide"

In my discussion of literary sources available for the study of Ajañṭā, I noted that the site boasts a total of ninety-seven inscriptions, sixty-one of which may be classified as donative records from the Vākāṭaka period (Fig. 47). Following Spink's chronology, we can further analyze these into programmatic and intrusive donative inscriptions. The former group is comprised of five records: the long verses incised on the porches of Caves 16, 17, and 26, a brief, formulaic inscription cut into the stone on the pedestal beneath the main Buddha image in Cave 4, and a very fragmentary record found on the left pilaster on the porch of Cave 20. The remaining fifty-six donative records may be placed in Ajañṭā's intrusive phase. Of these, 36 were made by monks, 7 by lay disciples, and the remaining 14 are of indeterminate origin. In the following pages I offer a brief overview of these groups.

Programmatic Donors

Turning first to Ajañṭā's programmatic donors, we find that this group presents a rather unified face, both sociologically and in terms of broad doctrinal associations. In the chapter on Ajañṭā's chronology, I already introduced the donors of Caves 16 and 17, both of whom were directly involved in the Vākāṭaka polity: Cave 16's donor Varāhadeva was King Hariṣeṇa's minister, Cave 17's was Hariṣeṇa's feudatory. In fact, as I mentioned in the first chapter, Caves 17, 18, 19 and 20 are widely regarded as a complex of caves that were all the work of that same Vākāṭaka feudatory.⁵⁴

The Cave 19 attribution is fairly certain, based upon Cave 17's verse 27, wherein Cave 17's donor claims to have "commissioned an extensive *gandbakuṭī* in another section

⁵⁴ On this point see, for example, Spink. "Archaeology of Ajañṭā," 76; Karl Khandalavala. "The History and Dating of the Mahayana Caves of Ajanta," *Pathik*. 2 (1990): 21; Chandrashekar Gupta. "The Authorship of Ajanta Caves 17 to 20." In *The Art of Ajanta*. Ed by Ratan Parimoo et. al. (New Delhi: Books and Books, 1991): 100-104. Spink alone adds Cave 29 to this list, and he has only done so orally.

of this [monastic complex], to the West." The *gandhakuṭī*, literally perfumed hall, was originally the name of the Buddha's personal residence at Jetavana, Anāthapiṇḍada's monastery in Śrāvastī, but came to be identified with the central shrine of any monastery.⁵⁵ As such, the Buddha shrine at the rear of this vihāra might well be called its *gandhakuṭī*. This placement for the *gandhakuṭī* would be further supported by the vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivāda sect of Buddhism, which describes the following basic floor-plan for monasteries of that sect:

The Blessed One said, 'If you have three cells made, a *gandhakuṭī* should be placed in the middle and two cells on the two sides. Thus in a structure with three walls, there are nine cells. In a four walled structure, the *gandhakuṭī* [should] face a door-way in the center [of the wall opposite it]; and two cells [are to be placed] on the sides of the door-way.'⁵⁶

That Cave 17's Buddha shrine is not the *gandhakuṭī* in question, however, is suggested by this verse's stipulation that the *gandhakuṭī* is in another section to the West, as well as by the fact that earlier in this record, verse 24 mentions a separate caitya for the King of Sages excavated in the cave's recesses. A similar disjunctive pairing of *gandhakuṭī* and *tathāgatacaitya* is found in the MSV on several occasions. In one instance, the *gandhakuṭī* and Buddha's hair-and-nail stūpas are named as separate edifices that monks should repair when damaged;⁵⁷ in another, the text prescribes that if no other source of revenue is available with which to care for a sick monk, his nurse can sell a parasol, a pennant, flags, an ornament, or scented waters otherwise reserved for the saṅgha to cast upon the

⁵⁵ For studies of the Buddha's chamber see John Strong. "Gandhakuṭī: The Perfumed Chamber of the Buddha," *History of Religions*. 16 (1977): 390-406, and Gregory Schopen. "The Buddha as an Owner of Property and Permanent Resident in Medieval Indian Monasteries," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*. 18 (1990): 181-217, esp. 193ff.

⁵⁶ *bhagavān āba: yadi trilayanam kārayasi madhye gandhakuṭiḥ kārayitavyā dvayoḥ pārśvayoḥ dve layane; evaṃ triśāle nava layanāni; catuḥśāle madhye dvārakoṣṭhakābbimukhaṃ gandhakuṭiḥ; dvārakoṣṭhakapārśvayor dve layane* Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Śayanāsanavastu*, 10-11.

⁵⁷ Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts*, vol. 3.2, 143.

tathāgatacaitya or the *gandhakuṭī*.⁵⁸ This latter passage suggests that although these two structures were physically distinct, they shared similar rituals. Cave 17's inscription also suggests that a *gandhakuṭī* and *munirājacaitya* were two distinct elements in its donor's plan. Yet, taking these to be the Cave 19 stūpa and the Cave 17 Buddha shrine respectively, we find that a certain ritual symmetry obtained between the two, for the same two images flank the entrance way to both excavations: on one side of the door is the bodhisattva Sumati⁵⁹ paying homage to Buddha Dīpaṅkara, on the other side, Rāhula, the Buddha's son, receiving his 'inheritance.' (The significance of these images will be discussed at length in the next chapter.)

That Cave 20 was also the production of Cave 17's donor is less secure. The argument most frequently articulated to support this position is based upon Bühler's reading of Cave 20's programmatic dedicatory inscription, wherein he suggests that "Upendra or Upendra [*gupta*]" was this cave's donor, and that his "father's name may have been Kṛi[*śhṇa*] or Kṛi[*śhṇadāsa*]."⁶⁰ The possible significance of these names vis-à-vis a relationship between this cave and Cave 17 is presented by Chandrashekhara Gupta as follows:

The fragmentary [*sic*] inscription in Cave 20 is also written in box-headed characters identical to those of Caves 16 and 17. It mentions donation of this cave (*maṇḍapa*) by one Upendra(*gupta*) whose father and grandfather were named but got destroyed [*sic*]. An important clue is obtained by the presence of a letter *Kri* in 1.2 succeeding the word *pautrasya*. It makes clear that here the name of the father of Upendra was mentioned which is rightly reconstructed as Krishna or Krishnadasa by Bühler. Now we know one Krishnadasa from inscription [*sic*] in Cave 17 whose son got caused number [*sic*] of *vihāras* and *chaityas*. So there remains no doubt that the

⁵⁸ *yat tathāgatacaitye vā gandhakuṭyāṃ vā chattraṃ vā dhvajam vā patākā vā ābharaṇakam vā saṃghena pāṇiyam pātavyam iti | upasthāyikena vikṛīya* Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts*, vol. 3.2, 125.

⁵⁹ This is the name given the bodhisattva of the "Dīpaṅkara jātaḥ" within the *Divyāvadāna*. In the Pāli *Nidānakathā*, he is called Sumedha; in the *Mahāvastu*, Megha.

⁶⁰ James Burgess. *Report on the Buddhist Cave Temples and their Inscriptions*. (Varanasi: Bharatiya Publishing House, 1975): 132.

name of the feudatory chief who got excavated [*sic*] Caves 17 to 20 was Upendragupta as there is sufficient space after his name in 1.3 of the second inscription and one Upendragupta is also present in the genealogy [*sic*] of the first inscription.⁶¹

There are quite a number of places in Gupta's argument at which the absolute certainty of his claim that "Upendragupta" patronized Caves 17-20 can be rendered not so very absolute. In light of Gupta's analysis, one wants to know what to do with the °*trasya* in line 5, which could be the remnant of *putrasya*, and the genitive singular °*sya* seemingly found in lines 6, 7, and 8, all of which must be shown to be epithets of the so-named Upendragupta of line 3, for otherwise they could quite possibly be the names of other members of the genealogy. More troublesome for Gupta's interpretation of the inscription, however, is that he begins his analysis by appeal to paleographic similarities between the Cave 17 and Cave 20 inscriptions. However, the *kr̥* of Cave 17's Kṛṣṇadāsa (Fig. 49) looks nothing like the so-called *kr̥* of the Cave 20 record (Fig. 48).⁶² Instead, the medial vowel read by Gupta as °*r̥*° at Cave 20, looks either like a sub-joined °*y*° (Fig. 50) or a sub-joined °*ṣ*° (Fig. 51). Indeed, this Cave 20 *akṣara*, if read *kr̥*, would be morphologically unique at Ajañṭā.⁶³ Thus, treating Cave 20's inscription in isolation as an

⁶¹ Gupta. "Authorship of Ajanta Caves 17 to 20," 102-3.

⁶² These figures, like those discussed in appendix B, were created using a flatbed scanner etc. However, because the estampage found in Burgess's *Report* has served as the basis for all analyses of this inscription, I reproduce that facsimile even though it is "worked up:" a process that makes the individual letters more distinct at the price of introducing bias into all subsequent use of the estampage. Moreover, because I use Burgess' "worked up" estampage for the Cave 20 record, I have used his estampage of the Cave 17 inscription for parity.

⁶³ Again, allow me to clear up a possible point of confusion. One may wonder about the basis upon which this *akṣara* was originally read as *kr̥*. The answer is that *kr̥* with a right-facing hook is found in India's North at least as early as the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta (mid-4th century). However, the thesis presented by Gupta, and the point to which I am responding in the body of my essay, is that the Cave 17 and Cave 20 inscriptions have a paleographical kinship. A northern-style, right-hooked *kr̥* is found neither in the Cave 17 inscription, nor anywhere else at Ajañṭā, a southern site paleographically speaking. Surely, a scribe from India's North could have been responsible for the Cave 20 inscription (to make this case, one is required to explain why that scribe would have used a southern-style *ma* alongside the northern *kr̥*). However, this latter proposition would not in anyway bolster the argument that Caves 17 and 20 had a shared source of patronage.

integral donative record, one cannot be certain that Upendra, let alone Upendragupta, was the name of the *maṇḍapa's* donor; nor does it seem possible that someone whose name begins *Kṛ°* was the immediate ancestor of the donor. As these two points are ambiguous in the Cave 20 inscription, it is unsound to map the chronology and patronage of Cave 17 onto Cave 20 based upon epigraphic evidence.

Whereas the epigraphic evidence does not support this equation, Cave 20's donor does begin his dedication with his genealogy, a device not often found outside of royal inscriptions. Beyond the epigraph, Spink holds that the same donor was responsible for Caves 17 and 20 because Cave 20 possesses decorative motifs that he ties only to the period between 469 and 471 C.E., when all the donors but those of Caves 1, 17, 19, and 20 left off work. Although I problematized Spink's absolute chronology and narrative history above, I have found little to fault in his relative chronology. Accordingly, although the Cave 20 inscription does not establish an identity between its donor and that of Cave 17, we can at least posit the two had a close relationship based upon motival evidence. Reasoning thus, we might place Cave 20's donor within a royal milieu.

Cave 26's donor, Buddhahadra is the only programmatic monk. Yet he too is deeply involved in court culture: Buddhahadra is himself from a noble family (No. 93, verse 16); he affirms a friendship with a minister of the Aśmakan king that has persisted over the course of many lives (verse 9); that minister being deceased, Buddhahadra flatters his son, also in the king's employ (verse 12); and Buddhahadra dedicates the cave itself to that minister's memory along with the memory of his own parents (verse 13).

Finally there is the question of Cave 4's donor. Does he fit in this royal group? Cave 4's inscription identifies its donor, named Māthura, with two epithets that may suggest an answer. These two epithets call Māthura a "*vibārasvāmin*" and identify him as a member of the "*kārvvateya sagotra*." Unfortunately, the former title has received a variety of

interpretations and the latter has no clear meaning. *Vihārasvāmin* may be translated literally as owner or master of a monastery. In addition to *vihārasvāmin*,⁶⁴ contemporary inscriptions also know of an *anekavihārasvāmin*, the owner/master of many vihāras,⁶⁵ and one *vihārasvāminī*, a female vihāra owner.⁶⁶ Fleet opines that this is "a technical religious title of office,"⁶⁷ and he interprets the female *vihārasvāminī* as designating the wife of a *vihārasvāmin*. Fleet's view of this as an institutional title is seconded by Gokhale, as is Fleet's understanding of the female title as designating a wife. Gokhale corrects Fleet's ignorance of Buddhist practice, however: no evidence exists that Buddhist monks took wives. In turn, Gokhale suggests *vihārasvāmin* be understood neither in line with the term's denotation, nor as an ecclesiastical office, but rather as a governmental position. Accordingly, a *vihārasvāmin* would be an officer responsible for the maintenance of a monastery or monasteries. In defense of this theory, Gokhale cites the Aśokan office of the *dharmamahāmātra* and the Gupta post of the *vinayasthitisthāpaka*, officers specifically charged with Buddhist affairs. "His general duties could have been the building, endowment and upkeep of the monasteries that enjoyed royal grants. In some cases he could have been wealthy himself, favorably disposed to Buddhism in his personal faith, considering it an act of merit to build or endow a monastery at his own expense."⁶⁸

Gokhale's observations, if applied to Cave 4's Māthura, would clearly place him with Ajaṅṭā's other known donors as a participant in royal culture. However, a somewhat

⁶⁴ John Faithfull Fleet. *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors*. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, volume 3. (Varanasi, Indological Book House, 1970): 279.

⁶⁵ Georg Bühler. "The New Inscription of Toramana Shaha," *Epigraphia Indica*. 1 (1892): 240.

⁶⁶ Fleet. *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings*, 263.

⁶⁷ Fleet. *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings*, 279, n. 5.

⁶⁸ Balkrishna Govind Gokhale. "Buddhism in the Gupta Age." In *Essays on Gupta Culture*. Ed. by Bardwell L. Smith. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983): 144.

more contemporary and less speculative explanation for the term may be gleaned from I-Tsing, who writes that the term *vihārasvāmin* was used to designate a vihāra's founder: "the founder of the establishment was, in fact, honored as the master of the temple, Ssu-chu. In Sanskrit he was know as Pi-ho-luo-sha-mi, Vihārasvāmin."⁶⁹

Unfortunately, contemporary Sanskrit literature provides little assistance. The only use of this term I have found in the MSV comes at the end of a tale about a brāhmaṇa who pays reverence to the Buddha, takes refuge, and is blessed by his field giving forth barley of gold. Amazed at this miracle, the brāhmaṇa runs to the king and declares "a grand monastery should be erected by your superintendent,"⁷⁰ a request the king eventually allows. Immediately following this tale in the text is one involving 500 farmers who see Śākyamuni Buddha, become monks and attain arhatship. The Buddha's disciples are amazed by these 500 farmer/monks and ask the Buddha what in their past lives resulted in this chain of events. Buddha then tells a tale of five hundred farmers who became monks at the time of Kāśyapa Buddha, but were slackards spending their days eating the alms provided by the faithful. At the end of the story, Buddha claims the five hundred farmers were those five hundred monks from Kāśyapa's day, and that the *vihārasvāmin* of the story is now this householder. Unfortunately, this story as told in the *Divyāvadāna* and MSV has no prior mention of a "*vihārasvāmin*" or a "householder." It would seem from context and the general logic of Buddhist narratives that in a fuller version of this tale the "householder" may have been the brāhmaṇa with the golden barley; this brāhmaṇa's support for a grand monastery for Śākyamuni then being explained by his status as a

⁶⁹ I-Tsing. *Chinese Monks in India: Biography of Eminent Monks who Went to the Western World in Search of the Law During the Great T'ang Dynasty*. Trans. by Latika Lahiri. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986): 54.

⁷⁰ *deva mayā yavāḥ prakīrṇās te sauvarṇāḥ samvṛttāḥ | tatrādbiṣṭhāyikena prasādaḥ kriyatām iti* | Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts*, vol. 3.1, 70; Edward Byles Cowell and R. A. Neil (eds). *The Divyāvadāna*. (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1987): 462.

vibārasvāmin at the time of Kāśyapa Buddha. In short, the MSV adds little to our understanding of the term.

The *Abhisamācārikā* though not overly explicit on this matter, seems to have understood *vibārasvāmin* as a term used exclusively for lay Buddhists. In the course of a set of rules concerning appropriate forms of address between monks and between monks and their kin it is said that, "it is not fitting for a monk [who] wants to speak to a female *upāsaka*, *dānapati*, or a *vibārasvāminī* [to use terms] such as mom, dear-heart, or lady."⁷¹ Interestingly, in the subsequent discussion, prescribing monastic address to lay male kin, the appropriate terms of address are *upāsaka* and *dānapati*, but *vibārasvāmin* is not mentioned.

The most extensive study of this term is found in an article by Sylvain Lévi and Edouard Chavannes, which discusses the transformation whereby nominally lay ownership of monasteries was replaced by monastic control, as witnessed in the fact that the monk in charge of dwellings came to be called *vibārasvāmin*. Within the time frame surveyed by Lévi and Chavannes, this substitution of ecclesiastic control for lay ownership was by no means complete: Māthura is doubtless a lay figure. Lévi and Chavannes's study provides little foundation for Gokhale's supposition of a *vibārasvāmin* having a governmental role. Yet, the literature they survey suggests that a *vibārasvāmin*, even if lay, would have had some sort of hand in running the monastery itself. Glossing *vibārasvāmin*, the *Fan fan yu*, a sixth century (?) Chinese glossary of Sanskrit terms, observes that "according to grammarians: If one conforms oneself directly to the sounds of the foreign lands, it would be necessary to say *mo-mo-to-ko-mi-t'o-t'o*. *Mo-mo-ti*, in translation, is 'the director of the temple;' *ko-mi-t'o-t'o*, in translation, is 'governor.' Thus this means the governing director of

⁷¹ *eṣo bhikṣuḥ upāsakāṃ vā dānapatīnāṃ vā vibārasvāminīṃ vā śabdāyitumkāmi bhavati nāpi kṣamati ambeti vā atteti vā bhaddeti vā* | *atha khalu upāsakaketti vā dānapati tti vā vibārasvāmini tti vā śabdāyitavyaṃ* | B. Jinanda (ed). *Abhisamācārikā (Bhikṣuprakīrṇaka)*. (Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1969): 127-8.

the temple."⁷²

Turning to Māthura's identification of himself as of the *Kārvateya sagotra*, we have even less to go on than before. Sircar was unable to make much sense of this word, averring "the Kārvatiyā *gotra* is not known from ancient Indian literature."⁷³ Hints for what *kārvateya* may signify, however, come from Buddhist Sanskrit literature and the Ajaṅṭā caves themselves. According to Edgerton, the word *kārvatika*, found in the *Dīvyāvadāna* and MSV, may be translated as "chief of a village."⁷⁴ Edgerton further suggests that the village of which a *kārvatika* is the chief may be located in the mountains:⁷⁵ *kārvatika* is a derivative of *karvataka*, a term the *Mahāvīyutpatti* (#9356) translates into Tibetan as *ri 'or wa*, which S. C. Das translates as denoting "people living in the neighborhood of mountains and forests."⁷⁶ Sircar's epigraphic glossary translates *karvataka* as "market town."⁷⁷ Monier-Williams records that Sanskrit lexicographies record *karvataka* signifies a mountain slope, but that it is also used in the sense of a village, a market-town, or the capital of a district comprised of many villages;⁷⁸ the associated *kāvata* and *kāvatika* being defined in lexicographies as districts of 100 and 200 villages respectively.⁷⁹ What this all means for the study of Ajaṅṭā is that Cave 4's donor possibly belonged to a family that governed a village or a large number of such villages; these villages may have been in the

⁷² Lévi and Chavannes. "Quelques Titres Enigmatiques," 202.

⁷³ Dinesh Chandra Sircar. "Inscription in Cave IV at Ajaṅṭā," *Epigraphia Indica*. 33 (1959-60): 260.

⁷⁴ Franklin Edgerton. *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985): 179b.

⁷⁵ Edgerton. *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*, 171a.

⁷⁶ Sarat Chandra Das. *A Tibetan-English Dictionary*. (New Delhi: Gaurav Publishing House, 1985): 1177a.

⁷⁷ Dinesh Chandra Sircar. *Indian Epigraphical Glossary*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1966): 150.

⁷⁸ Monier Monier-Williams. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988): 259c.

⁷⁹ Monier-Williams. *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 280a.

mountains or forest. Indeed, Cave 4's size and (had it been completed) opulence suggest that Māthura was a man with considerable wealth at his disposal, perhaps more than the taxes from a single village would provide. It is also interesting to note that the designation of *kārvvateya* as a *sagotra*, if interpreted thus, gives evidence for the local economy's movement towards a feudal pattern, since this indicates that governorships were here not merely a matter of royal appointment but were being treated as a *jāti* within the 'caste' hierarchy.

Turning from social information we possess about these programmatic donors based upon their inscriptions to the religious, we again find a remarkable coherence. Ajaṅṭā's programmatic donors appear to have been overwhelmingly associated with beliefs and practices that are typically categorized as "Mahāyāna." This is a tentative claim, made as part of a synopsis. I will explore the question of Ajaṅṭā's *yānic* associations in greater depth within the chapter on Dharma. Here, I wish simply to enumerate the evidence that leads me towards this observation. Cave 4's Māthura dedicates the merit of his donation using the formula: "Whatever merit there is in it, may that serve [his] mother, father, and paternal grandmother -- to whom belongs the principle share --, as well as all sentient beings' attainment of unexcelled knowledge." According to Schopen's study of Buddhist epigraphs this dedication found in Cave 4 is a variant of a formula that is "virtually the exclusive property of the Mahāyāna."⁸⁰ Although the Cave 20 inscription is so fragmentary, it too seems to use a variant on this same formula, as does verse 15 of the Cave 26 inscription. As I have noted above Cave 26's Buddhabhadra is the only monk among the programmatic donors, and thus holds greater value as an epitome for normative Buddhism at Ajaṅṭā. Accordingly, it is particularly significant that Buddhabhadra characterizes himself in verse 7 as one of a number of "bodhisattvas," who put their "power and affluence" to

⁸⁰ Gregory Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," *Indo-Iranian Journal*. 21 (1979): 12.

work by patronizing the excavation of cave temples. The equation between the bodhisattva path and the Mahāyāna is found throughout Mahāyānist literature, and has been with us in the West almost as long as Buddhism. Since I will discuss this in greater length below, I restrict myself here to a single example. Paul Williams summarizes this line of thinking in his recent textbook on the Mahāyāna: "this, if anything, characterizes the Mahāyāna. . . . To set the path of the Bodhisattva as the ultimate aspiration for all seems to be a uniquely Mahāyāna conception."⁸¹ In light of this equation, Cave 17's donor's description of his activity as being "for the perfection of [his] vow [to become] a Buddha (*munīndra*)" would place him directly within the Mahāyānist fold. Similarly in verse 18, he speaks of a teaching he held dear named "The Perfect Equality of Affect Towards the Wise Man and the Criminal." Although this particular practice is not known from other sources, its title suggests a kinship with a set of practices described in the eighth chapter of Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, whereby a bodhisattva strives to identify himself with others, and to substitute himself for others; these practices described by Śāntideva have retained such importance that they number among the first contemporary Tibetan teachers impart to their Western students. One final example from Cave 17's inscription is found in verse 20, where this vihāra's donor is said to be "constantly amassing the accumulations" of knowledge and merit. These 'accumulations' (*sambhāra*) were very important within Nāgārjuna's presentation of Mahāyāna doctrine. In the *Ratnāvalī*, a text written for a 'popular,' even royal, audience, Nāgārjuna claims that the accumulations of wisdom and knowledge are the causes of Buddhahood,⁸² and are taught exclusively within the

⁸¹ Paul Williams. *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*. (New York: Routledge, 1989): 25.

⁸² *Ratnāvalī* 3.11: *de lta bas na tshogs 'di gñis | sangs rgyas ñid ni thob pa'i rgyu* | Michael Hahn (ed). *Nāgārjuna's Ratnāvalī*. (Bonn: Indica et Tibetica Verlag, 1982): 74.

Mahāyāna.⁸³

Cave 16 is the only programmatic donation for which we have epigraphic evidence that does not give any indication its benefactor was influenced by ostensibly Mahāyānist doctrines. In point of fact, Varāhadeva's verses are more or less devoid of doctrinal content that could be meaningfully associated with either *yāna*. The only verse that could suggest a *yānic* affiliation for Varāhadeva is the final one, a dedication that wills that "the entire world enter that peaceful and noble state free from sorrow and disease, [attained] by destroying the many faults." Varāhadeva's description of the ultimate goal as a place that is *śānta* (peaceful), *aśoka* (free from sorrow), and *nirjvara* (free of disease) echoes the conception of nirvāṇa presented in the *Lotus Sūtra's* seventh chapter, where nirvāṇa is described as being like a city the Buddha magically conjures in order to afford his disciples a place to rest enroute to the greater goal of Buddhahood. But, whereas the *Lotus* declares the City of Nirvāṇa to be a mere expedient, Varāhadeva presents this as the highest goal. The *Lotus Sūtra's* doctrine comes far closer to the view of nirvāṇa presented in verse 2 of Buddhahadra's inscription -- "[the Buddha] has departed for the City of Tranquility, which is blissful [and] free of fear, [but] without any fixed location -- than suggested by Varāhadeva's text. In the same vein, Varāhadeva's phrase *vyastadoṣaprabāṇa* (destroying the many faults) echoes a common cliché used throughout Buddhist literature to describe the attainment of Hīnayānist arhatship, *sarvakleśaprabāṇa* (the destroying of all afflictions).

Far more interesting information for our recovery of Indian Buddhism will be found in this inscription's verse 30, where Varāhadeva refers to himself by the title "*śāstā*," i.e., teacher or ruler, and claims to be "celebrated as a *Sugata*." It is remarkable to find these two epithets in this context. Throughout Buddhist literature both are commonly used

⁸³ *Ratnāvalī* 4.67: *bodhisattvasya saṃbhāro mahāyāne tathāgataiḥ | nirdiṣṭaḥ* Hahn. *Nāgārjuna's Ratnāvalī*, 118.

to refer to the Buddha himself. Granted, these epithets are not exclusively technical terms referring to the Buddha. In fact, they may well have been used colloquially for someone in Varāhadeva's position -- *śāstā* can simply designate a "ruler;" a *sugata* can be somebody who has done well for himself, and is used at least once in the MSV to designate someone destined for a heavenly rebirth.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine that these terms' strong associations with the Buddha were unknown to this verse's author or were unintended. The significance of Buddha as ruler, and Varāhadeva as ruler as Buddha, will be explored in greater depth in the subsequent chapter on Buddha.

Identifying Ajaṅṭā's Intrusive Donors: On Collective Patronage

By way of introduction to Ajaṅṭā's intrusive donors let us recall why they are deemed "intrusive." According to Spink's chronology, Ajaṅṭā's nineteen year history saw two periods of excavation and decoration, each of which concluded with a phase of rushed programmatic work and then a cessation of work. These two broad periods differ significantly, however, in that one more sub-phase is associated with the second, an "intrusive phase" between the rush to completion and Ajaṅṭā's final abandonment. Spink ties every image, every inscription, every donation that cannot be associated with a cohesively planned, well-ordered pattern of excavation and decoration to this intrusive phase. This view of patronage at the site only makes sense, however, in light of a vision that sees Ajaṅṭā's programmatic patrons as having an exclusivist membership and as having a high degree of control over their caves. The august individuals familiar to us from Caves 4, 16, 17, and 26's donative inscriptions fulfill Spink's exclusivity requirement. As for bureaucratic control over the site, I treated this matter above through the example of Cave 17's Wheel of Existence. Supplementing that discussion, however, we find that Spink takes

⁸⁴ Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Śayanāsanavastu*, 38.

the apparent cessation of all activity at Ajañṭā between the two periods of programmatic work as proof positive for a strong distinction between programmatic and intrusive phases. Spink calls this intermediate period of no activity a "Hiatus," during which "not a single image of any type whatsoever was added to any of the caves at the site."⁸⁵ Spink interprets the lack of all patronage during the Hiatus to "not so much suggest the site's abandonment during this period" as "its continued occupation and preservation of the insistent exclusiveness that had characterized the site's patronage from the start."⁸⁶ Accordingly, the lack of all work at Ajañṭā during the Hiatus proves to Spink that programmatic patterns of decoration and central control over the site were inextricably linked. For "had controls relaxed during the Hiatus, we would surely find intrusive images interrupting the programmed work done after 475; but we do not. Indeed, all obvious intrusions at the site 'fit' into a much later period (479-80)."⁸⁷

The importance of Spink's dichotomy between programmatic and intrusive phases lies in its ability to segregate the strata of donative activities, synchronically across the entire site and diachronically within a single cave. Lacking this periodization, we would possess only a murky vision of the patterns of patronage at Ajañṭā. Nevertheless, even if one does not question Spink's relative chronology or characterizations of motival development, one problem can be found with Spink's presentation of patronage at Ajañṭā. Earlier in this chapter I claimed that Spink presupposes a certain general homogeneity at the site vis-à-vis programmes of excavation and decoration. Here, too, we find that he presupposes a single canon for patronage; namely, that every cave at Ajañṭā was the donation of a single wealthy and powerful man or woman who bought himself or herself a

⁸⁵ Spink. "Archaeology of Ajañṭā," 81.

⁸⁶ Spink. "Archaeology of Ajañṭā," 81.

⁸⁷ Spink. "Archaeology of Ajañṭā," 94, n. 24.

place among the "consortium of the emperor's richest and most powerful courtiers"⁸⁸ that patronized and controlled the site. Above, I questioned -- though did not dispute -- the assumption of homogeneity in decorative schemes; and I referred to the breadth of Buddhist institutions, some of which have restrictions against figural representations of the sort found in the major painted caves. By comparing Ajañṭā with Bāgh, I suggested that some caves may be painted differently than Cave 1, 2, 16, 17, or even not painted at all, not as a result of the site's troubled history, but because alternative vinaya regulations or aesthetic sensibilities guided their programmes. Similarly, now, we might inquire whether other alternate paradigms for patronage were available to Ajañṭā's donors, and whether the caves other than 4, 16, 17, 20, and 26 may have been created by patrons who understood their undertaking accordingly. We may wonder whether these other patronage paradigms would have yielded as coherent a programme as that found in, e.g., Caves 16 and 17. And we may ask whether many caves have no programmatic dedicatory inscription naming a single donor because the patronage responsible for them would not have required such an inscription.

Turning to an earlier period in the history of Buddhist patronage, one finds a very different conception indeed. Inscriptions found in Ajañṭā's Caves 10 and 12 from the first phase of activity, suggest these excavations were collective group efforts, not the exclusive property or dedication of an individual donor. Thus Vāsiṣṭhīputra Kaṭahādī, possibly a member of the royal Śātavāhana family, dedicated Cave 10's façade (app. A, No. 40); one Dhamadeva dedicated this same cave's *prāsādas* (app. A, No. 41);⁸⁹ and Kanhaka of Bāhaḍa was responsible for a wall (app. A, No. 42). Similarly, although the single inscription from Cave 12 is problematic, it seems to suggest that the merchant

⁸⁸ Spink. "Archaeology of Ajañṭā," 69.

⁸⁹ See my discussion of this inscription in the appendix for the different meanings of *prasāda*.

Ghanāmaḍaḍa dedicated the cell beside which this inscription is located, and not the entire vihāra.

These examples from Ajaṅṅā's first stage fit into a broader pattern of collective patronage characteristic of the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E. As Romila Thapar puts it: "Examples of [community patronage] become evident during the period from the second century BC to the fourth AD in the patronage extended to the building of *stūpas* such as those at Sanchi, Bharhut, and Amaravati and the rock cut caves of the Western Deccan, all of which had at source donations of the Buddhist *saṅgha*. The donations came substantially from artisans, guilds of craftsmen, traders, monks and nuns, small scale landowners and to a lesser extent from royalty and families in high and administrative political office."⁹⁰ On the same theme, Vidya Dehejia observes that "collective patronage was a pan-Indian phenomenon during this early period. . . . Stable political conditions apparently led to considerable economic prosperity, and surplus money seems to have accumulated in the hands of a wide section of the community."⁹¹

Conversely, in this earlier period, royal non-collective patronage of Western Indian Buddhism is "in evidence only at one site, Nasik, and there too in just two caves."⁹² This, by contrast with the fifth century and after, when the patrons of religious temples and arts like Ajaṅṅā "were great monarchs . . . who constructed entire monumental structures to collect both fame and religious merit for themselves."⁹³ Thapar similarly notes the relative paucity of royal patronage in the earlier period and the predominantly royal nature of

⁹⁰ Romila Thapar. "Patronage and Community." In *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture*. Ed. by Barbara Stoler Miller. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992): 22.

⁹¹ Vidya Dehejia. "The Collective and Popular Basis of Early Buddhist Patronage: Sacred Monuments, 100 BC-AD 250." In *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture*. Ed. by Barbara Stoler Miller. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992): 44.

⁹² Dehejia. "Collective and Popular," 39.

⁹³ Dehejia. "Collective and Popular," 35.

patronage in the Gupta era and after.⁹⁴

Is it possible that a pattern of collective donations did continue into the latter half of the fifth century? From the "Hindu" side there is at least one well known instance of patronage in this period involving a donation by a corporate body of non-royal devotees. I am referring here the building and reconstruction of a temple to the sun god Sūrya by a guild of Silk-Weavers in the city of Mandasor.⁹⁵

Evidence for cooperative, if not collective, donation of monasteries at Ajañṭā during its Vākāṭaka phase, can be found through an analysis of plastering in the shrines of Caves Upper 6, 7, and 26. That is, in these three caves a single application of plaster was spread over a set of sculptures that included programmatic and intrusive images both. The details regarding the positioning, composition, and contents of these images all have bearing upon how one determines which are programmatic and which intrusive. However, I will leave aside that laborious excess of information, and instead cite Spink's general observations on the plastering of Caves Upper 6 and 7: "It is interesting to note that the very same mix of fine gray white-seeded plaster, applied without a break and then painted covers both the huge Buddhas [(which are programmatic donations)] and the little intrusions in the shrine antechamber; indeed, it continues over the shrine doorway and its still-rough margins, and appears to be identical in type and application with that covering the main Buddha image. Thus, just as in Cave 7, it appears that although the original patron was drastically affected by Hariṣeṇa's death, and had to somewhat reduce his ongoing carving program in both the shrine and shrine antechamber, he did not feel as compelled as most of his peers to get his Buddha image completed and dedicated in 478, which he surely could have done . . . Just like his counterpart in the adjacent Cave 7, the

⁹⁴ Thapar. "Patronage and Community," 30.

⁹⁵ A. L. Basham "The Mandasor Inscription of the Silk-Weavers." In *Essays on Gupta Culture*. Ed. by Bardwell L. Smith. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983): 93-105.

patron of Cave Upper 6, having waited until the eager new 'intruders' had filled all of the available spaces in his shrine antechamber, saw to the more or less proper completion of the whole grouping."⁹⁶

In Cave 26 too there is at least one instance in which programmatic plaster clearly covers intrusive images: on the wall of the left aisle, in conjunction with Ajaṅṭā's renowned carving of the scene of Buddha's Mahāparinirvāṇa. There are a vast number of Buddha images lining the aisle walls of Cave 26, but Spink identifies this panel of the Dying Buddha as one of only a small number attributable to Buddhabhadra's own design; the remainder, sculpted helter-skelter, are designated 'intrusions.' Significantly, in Spink's telling, Cave 26's Dying Buddha was not yet finished before the intrusive phase began. He writes, "Even while it was being painted, time ran out; a few sanguine sketches on the white plaster show precisely when -- in 478 -- the decisive moment came."⁹⁷ As in Caves Upper 6 and 7, prior to the coming of that end, intrusions were already added to this cave. This can be determined by the fact that the same white plaster Spink deems to be programmatic was also slathered over several haphazardly placed 'intrusive' panels to the right of the Mahāparinirvāṇa scene. In fact, one of these intrusions plastered by Buddhabhadra was carved directly into the Dying Buddha scene itself, into the leaves of the right Sala tree near the Buddha's feet (Fig. 52).

This example from Cave 26 is particularly telling, because we know the identity of its programmatic donor, and know that he claims responsibility for the entire cave. Accordingly, we must presume that Buddhabhadra sanctioned the carving of at least these few intrusive images, including the one that mars his own composition. One explanation for Buddhabhadra's rationale might be found in the final verse of Cave 17's dedicatory

⁹⁶ Spink. "A Scholar's Guide"

⁹⁷ Spink. "A Scholar's Guide"

inscription, where this royal donor hopes that his vihāra will "help good people to produce merit as long as the sun dispels darkness by its rays." Perhaps the donors of Caves Upper 6, 7, and 26 were attempting to realize a similar aim, by allowing good people to make merit through the creation of Buddha-images within their caves.

These are tentative and preliminary observations from which I have excluded a wealth of details. Beyond a more in-depth examination of these examples, additional evidence for alternate patterns of patronage can be found in Caves 9, 10, 23 as well as through further exploration of Cave 26, and comparative evidence from Taxila and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa. Suffice it to say, a study of Ajaṅṭā's programmatic inscriptions shows a pattern of patronage wherein single, male, wealthy donors, each possessed of a singular vision of his cave's architectural, decorative, and iconographic programmes, controlled that cave until he was forced to relinquish it due to historical circumstance. Nevertheless, it may be possible that, for some donors, those programmes included a provision for "intrusive" images to be added on an occasional basis to the cave, producing merit for the image's donor as well as for the particular Vākāṭaka luminary who helped that good person to produce merit.

Intrusive Patrons

So far I have identified Ajaṅṭā's donors and discussed patterns of patronage based upon the information contained in the programmatic donative inscriptions. As noted in the previous chapter concerning textual sources for the study of Ajaṅṭā, the inclusion of a written dedication with a donation seems to have been an optional practice. Leaving aside whole caves, the intrusive icons lacking an identification of their donors far outnumber those for which the donor is identified. Accordingly, one should be clear that whereas these dedicatory inscriptions provide the best documentary evidence for identifying and

understanding Ajaṅṭā's saṅgha, it does not exhaust the subject.

The epigraphs and images associated with Ajaṅṭā's intrusive patrons provide us with little indication of the people behind the works. As I noted in the previous chapter, these inscriptions are typically highly formulaic. The only indexical information they provide about a donor is usually the individual's name and whether he (or, in only one instance, she) is a lay or monastic Buddhist. Based upon this information, as one can see from Fig. 53, donors in the intrusive phase were far more often monks than members of the laity. And, accordingly, one finds monastic epithets like *bhikṣu* (monk), *bhadanta* (reverend), and *ācārya* (teacher) far more often than *upāsaka* (lay devotee).

If one will recall from the previous chapter, in Rappaport's analysis, liturgies -- and the liturgical use of donative inscriptions -- provides canonical information, in addition to the indexical. This canonical information is encoded in the invariant aspects of the liturgy/inscription, and tells us about the tenets a patron accepted. Within Ajaṅṭā's intrusive inscriptions, canonical information is found principally in two places. First there is a patron's use or non-use of a formula for dedicating merit, and the particular wording this formula takes. A second canonical element is the donors' use of the epithet *Śākya* to prefix to the traditional lay and monastic identifications, *upāsaka* and *bhikṣu*. I include this as a canonical element, because it provides qualitative information, telling us what kind of *upāsaka* or *bhikṣu* such and such a donor was.

In fact, putting aside donations of indeterminate origin, a full 80 percent of Ajaṅṭā's monastic donors use a single epithet before their names: *Śākyabhikṣu*; of the lay donors, a little less than half use the parallel title: *Śākya-upāsaka*. Although until this point I have referred to Ajaṅṭā's saṅgha as associated with the Mūlasarvāstivāda *nikāya*, in view of these inscription, it might be more meaningful to speak of it as the *Śākya-saṅgha*, comprised of Buddhists who identified themselves with *Śākya*. Unfortunately,

Śākyabhikṣu and *Śākyā-upāsaka* have no immediate institutional or ideological significance. The title *Śākyabhikṣu*, whether it is an honorific or an institutional designation, is extremely rare in Indian Buddhist literary sources. Nevertheless, nearly 4 out of 5 of the dedications dated to Ajaṅṭā's intrusive period employ this term. To understand the portion of Ajaṅṭā's saṅgha responsible for these intrusive inscriptions and donations, we need to ascertain who Ajaṅṭā's *Śākyabhikṣus* and *Śākyā-upāsakas* were. Why did so many of Ajaṅṭā's Buddhists adopt these epithets? What was their place within the greater Buddhist community?

Allow me to foreshorten this discussion of Ajaṅṭā's intrusive patrons, and leave these matters dangling past the end of the present chapter. These questions, the final from a chapter that has asked many and answered few, provide a bridge to the next chapter, wherein I introduce the Dharma of Ajaṅṭā's community.