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VOLUME IIB. PATTERNS OF PATRONAGE

PART I: PATRONAGE: CONSISTENT VS. COLLAPSING

Ajanta differs from most other Buddhist sites, generally created as community undertakings, in that it was purely "elitist", developed by less than a dozen major patrons, who planned it with great care in essentially one great burst of enthusiasm. This enthusiasm turned to desperation immediately after Harisena's death, when the patrons anxiously rushed their shrine images to completion, in order to secure the merit from so doing. During the fifteen years or so that the site flourished under the aegis of these proud donors, including the emperor Harisena himself, no "outsiders" ever could donate a single thing. But once the great patrons had rapidly departed from the collapsing site during the disastrous reign of Harisena's successor, the monks still resident there, along with local devotees, briefly sponsored a helter-skelter spate of votive donations, also to make merit while they could. After about 480 this activity probably stopped completely, the craftsmen having gone away. The monks continued to live in some of the caves for perhaps as much as another decade after which the site was totally abandoned, except for the use of a few cells by Saivite sadhus and the like in later centuries.

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PART II: PATRONAGE: THE HINAYANA CAVES

WITH EMPHASIS ON THEIR REDECORATION IN VAKATAKA TIMES

Although we can assume that, being so readily available, the old Hinayana viharas and caitya halls would have been used both for residence and worship when excavation work began again at Ajanta in about 462, it appears that no one troubled to redecorate or refurbish them until the new Vakataka phase was well underway—perhaps not until the very last year of Harisena's reign. The fact that these efforts came all too late is evidenced by the manner in which they soon had to be brought to a halt, due to the political situation. After this, "intrusive" donors took over, filling most of the still available areas with their votive offerings. All of these developments contribute to our knowledge of Ajanta's turbulent history.

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