

# INDIAN ART

## FROM INDUS VALLEY TO INDIA TODAY

Talk 3

Post-Muarya art

2<sup>nd</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE



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## Post-Mauryan scene

We have evidences of temples,  
both rock-cut and structural, belonging to  
Buddhist, Jaina and Hindu faiths  
form the time of Asoka.

But very few survive,  
though a fairly good idea can be  
gleaned from the remains.

But, still fewer remain of the sculptures in them,  
and almost nil of the paintings.



## Political scene

The Mauryan Empire resulted in an unprecedented unification of the sub-continent, and hence its break up also caused a major change, namely, the rise of new centres of political powers, though with attenuated strength.



The Indo-Greeks on the north-west,  
the Kushanas in the north,  
the Shungas in the central region and  
the Satavahanas in the Deccan  
established their rule.



Though, the Tamil kingdoms were not part of the Mauryan empire, their rise and consolidation of a unique culture in the deep south is another significant aspect of this period.



## Economic scene

A thriving trade contributed to economic development, most commodities were 'articles of aristocratic necessities'.



This had a great effect in the development of art and artisans, and their importance.

The mention of many professions, as many as 36, during this period is astounding.

It can be surmised there was a lot of give-and-take among artisans across cultures.



The working population had organised themselves into guilds, contributed to economic stability and expansion.

The trade was most brisk with a number of ports on the western and eastern coast.





## Cultural scene

It was during this period that  
Buddhism got patronised by foreign rulers.  
The concept of Trinity got established in Hinduism,  
contributing to image worship and  
the concept of bhakti.  
Jainism also consolidated its hold on  
substantial population.  
The period, moreover, saw the introduction  
of Christianity in India.



The period was equally bright in terms of developments in language and literature, for we see the beginning of Kavya style in Sanskrit and flowering of Sangam literature in Tamil.



The period was notable for  
significant developments  
in science and technology,  
significant progress made largely owing  
to contact with the West.



## Art scene

Arts and crafts witnessed a remarkable growth. The renovation of stupas of Sanchi and Vidisa, construction of many rock-cut chaityas at Bhaja, Karle and Ajanta and earliest specimen of Ajanta paintings are sample hallmarks of this period.



The translation into stone of the delicate work on gold, ivory and terracotta suggests the versatility of the early Indian artist.

That a goldsmith and an ivory carver could chisel stone with the same dexterity is really astounding.

This adaptability can be surmised from inscriptions found in the sites.



Interestingly the Indian artisans never used a model,  
and always the image was  
obtained through mental visualisation.

According to Ananda Coomaraswamy,  
the process, at first, no doubt, unconscious,  
was prescribed by *sastraic* injunction later on.

Thus the form is always reached by  
a process of synthesis and abstraction,  
rather than by observation.



Thus, whenever changes take place  
this must be ascribed  
to heightened consciousness,  
a more complete identification of  
consciousness with the theme itself,  
in other words,  
to a more profound empathy.



While studying art of this early period  
one can see an urge  
to narrating stories attempted  
to fulfil an edifying purpose.

Though most of these are Buddhist in theme,  
these are not religious,  
but are realistic and sensuous, and  
are similar to the ancient cults  
of mother-goddesses and fertility spirits,  
not in the sense of the Great Enlightenment.





The art that followed the Mauryan period had certain common features.



During the Asokan rule,  
a beginning can be seen  
in art and architecture,  
but the sculptures were of individual pieces,  
like the pillars with capital and individual  
sculptures like yaksha-yakshi.

It is only from the next phase that  
we have compositions that  
depict scenes with characters and narrations.



In fact, this is the real beginning of Indian art that blossomed to become one among the most important religious arts of almost a third of the world.

In this early phase, the Buddha was only represented through symbols, the Wheel, the Bodhi Tree, an Empty seat, an Umbrella, the Feet or Triratna.



The costume and accessories are very similar.  
Monotony in the postures,  
the crowding of personae and  
the lack of perspective are  
characteristic features of this period.



It was during this post-Maurya period that three schools of art emerged namely, the Gandhara School in the north-west, the Mathura School in the north and the Amravati School in the south, each of these uniqueness to its own, exhibiting 'unity in diversity'.



The subject of our talk today is  
the creative background of  
these three schools of art,  
which in turn were the prelude  
to the greatest epoch in Indian art history,  
the classical age of the Imperial Guptas!



Content of Talk 3  
Post-Muarya art  
(2<sup>nd</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE)



*The development in the field of art  
in the post-Mauryan period is  
attempted now,  
through a virtual tour of four sites:  
Bharhut (Madhya Pradesh)  
Bhaja (Maharashtra)  
Sanchi (Madhya Pradesh)  
and  
Khandagiri-Udayagiri (Odisha).*

*Except for the last, which is a Jain site,  
the remaining three have Buddhist relics.*





*The choice of these locations is fortuitous for another reason. In these we have the visual representation of the earliest historical phase*








What is ahead?





Mathura, Gandhara and Amaravati schools of art  
Golden age of Guptas  
Art of painting

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Art in the southern region during medieval period  
Art elsewhere during medieval period  
Post-Pallava art of Tamilnadu

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Bronzes  
Indo-Islamic art – A review  
Indian influence in Indian Asia – A review





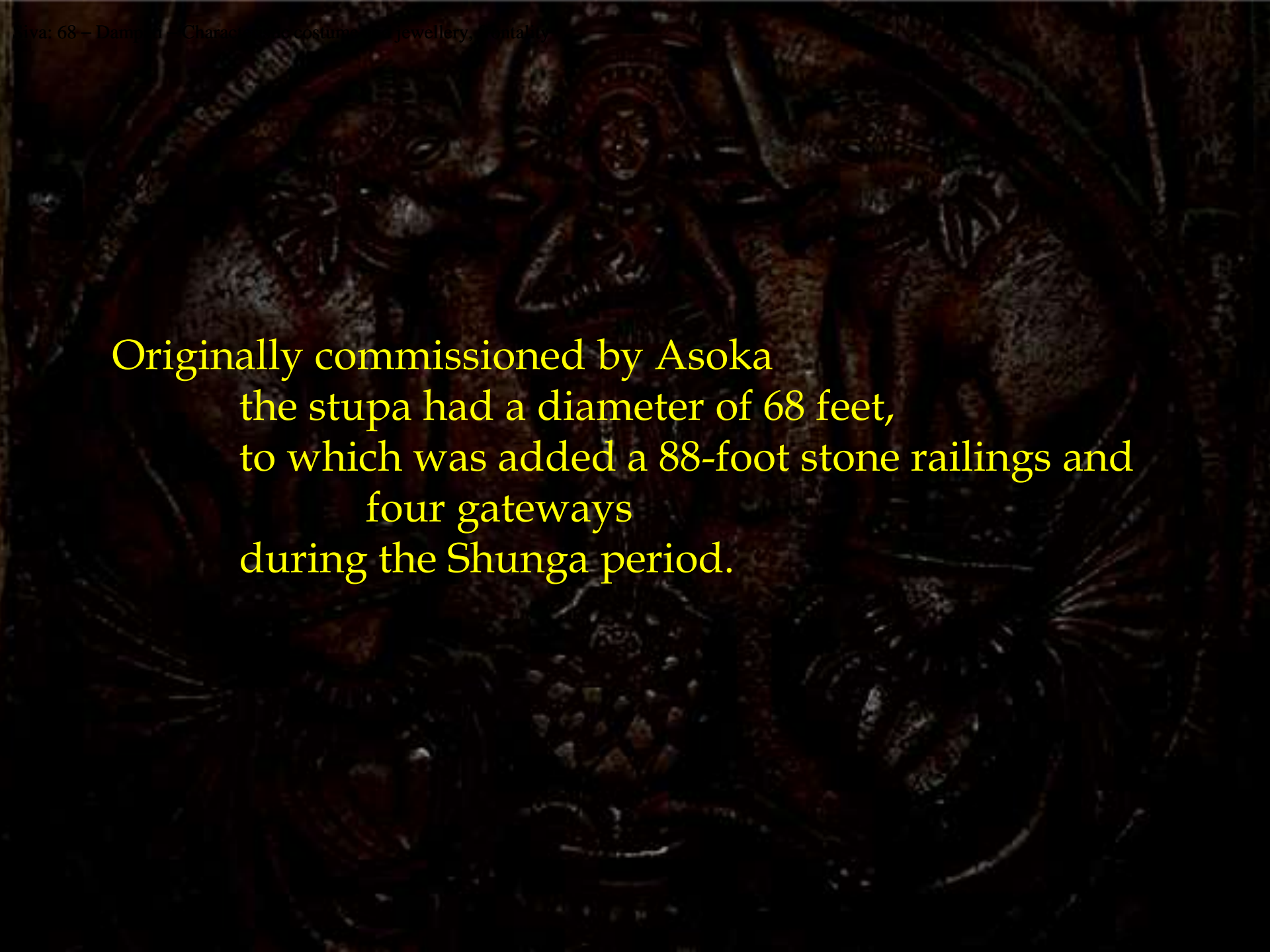
# Bharhut

## Dawn of new era



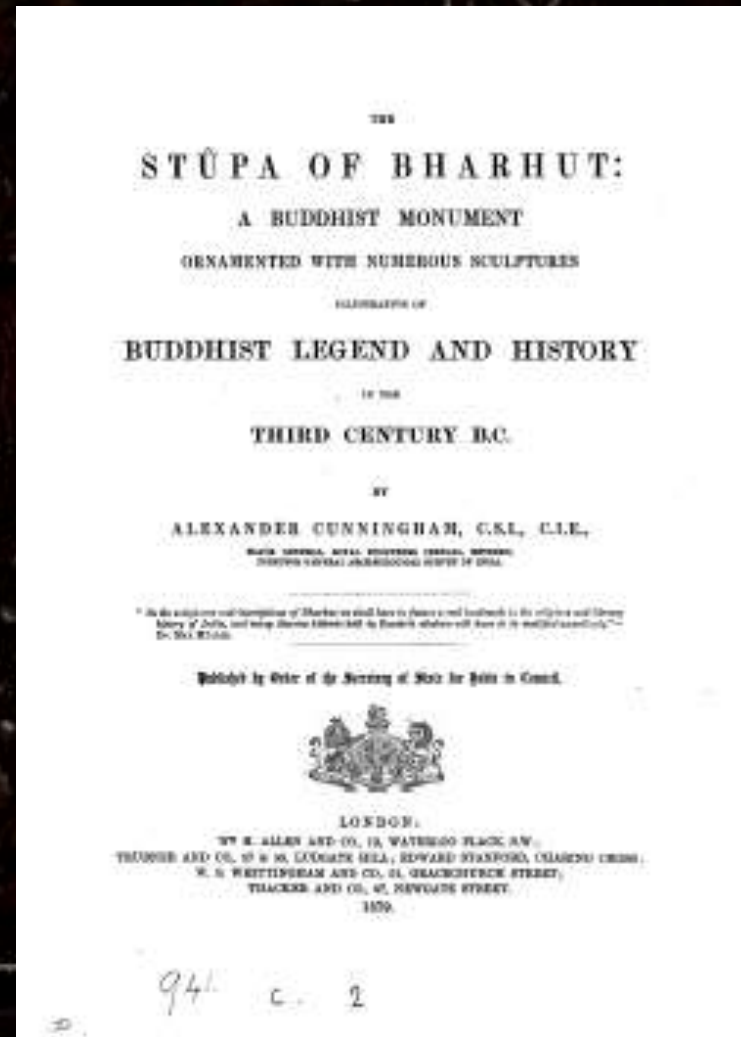
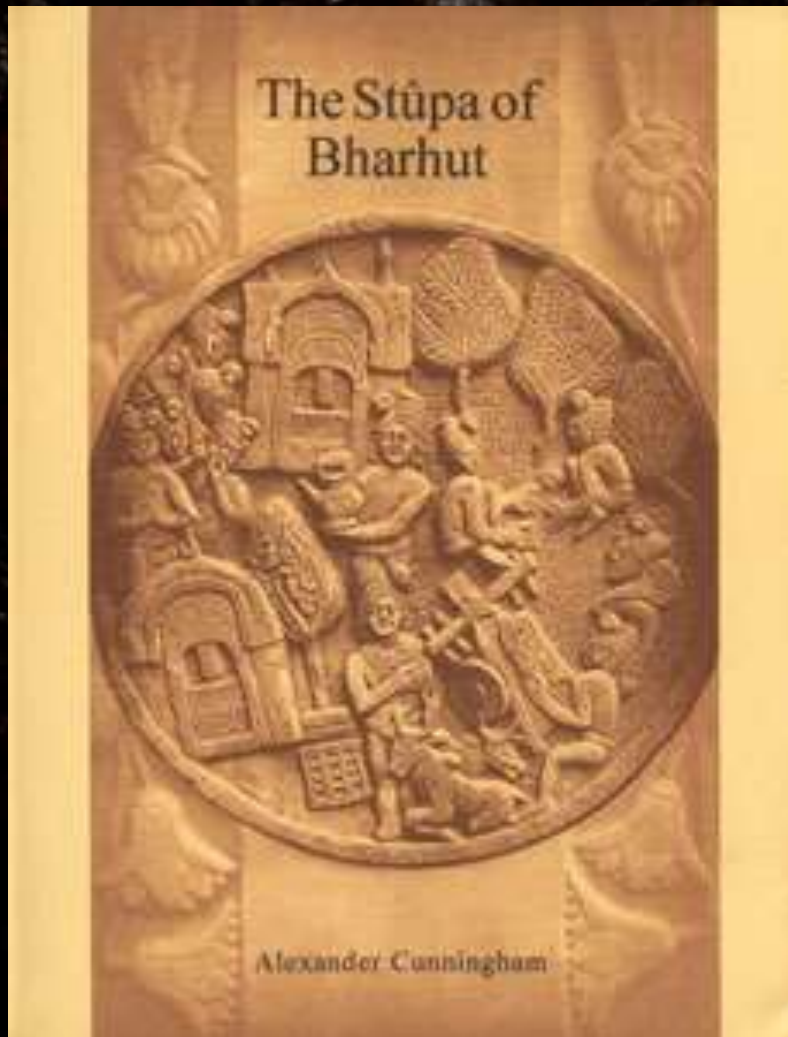
The stupa that existed in Bharhut in MP is  
an important link in our art history.

It contains some of the earliest examples of Indian art,  
and provides the most eloquent picture of  
life, culture, and civilization  
in India of the second century BCE



Originally commissioned by Asoka  
the stupa had a diameter of 68 feet,  
to which was added a 88-foot stone railings and  
four gateways  
during the Shunga period.

It was excavated by Alexander Cunningham in 1874 and in 1876 published *The Stupa of Bharhut*





At the original site no more than the foundation remains.





The gateways, the railings and the sculptures  
have been reassembled and  
are on display in Indian Museum, Kolkata.





Mahakapi Jataka

Narrations of Jataka stories and incidences from the life of the Buddha start from here.

Many of them are in the shape of large, round medallions.









There are also yaksha, yakshi and other local spirits assimilated into the institutionalised religion.





Special mention must be made of floral, animal and monster motifs and lotus rosettes often enclosing heads of men or women.



Most ingenious is the never-ending creeper, kalpavalli,  
issuing from the celestial elephant,  
with a variety of motifs  
that give us a glimpse of the contemporary life



Marching elephants and dancers

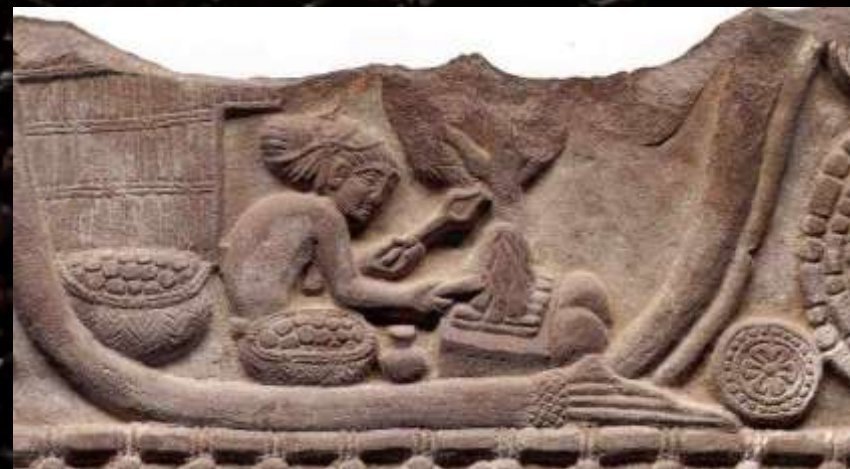




Enjoying a game of dice



Common man cooking







From Alexander Cunningham's book *Bharhut Stupa*, 1879

Chronologically, this is earlier than  
the Sanchi stupa and the early Ajanta caves.

The inscriptions identifying donors in Brahmi characters  
are noteworthy.

Most were monks and nuns.

How did they possess so much of resources,  
is puzzling.

Here and elsewhere, we would find that  
most Buddhist monuments were funded  
by the public and not by the royals,  
making these the earliest examples of popular art.

Many inscriptions identify characters of  
the narrative panels, which is novel feature.



Being the very early phase exhibits naïve primitiveness, for certain lack of modelling of human figures, of rendering human anatomy and strict frontality characterise Bharhut art.





In spite of all these  
an astonishing and poignant sense  
of the beauty of the human body  
combined with  
wonderful decorative fitness  
can be seen in  
some of the pillar figures.



Fergusson says:

*'The human figures, too, though very different from our standard of beauty and grace, are truthful to nature, and, where grouped together, combine to express the action intended with singular felicity.'*

*'For an honest purpose, like pre-Raphaelite kind of art, there is probably nothing much better to be found elsewhere.'*



Fergusson says:

*'Some animals such as elephants, deer, and monkeys, are better represented there than in any sculpture known in any part of the world; so too are some trees, and the architectural details are cut with an elegance and precision that are very admirable.'*







Sivaramamurti says:

*'The attribution of almost human feelings to animals and the moral pointed by every fable depicted at Bharhut are noteworthy features of the representations there.'*

The sculptor not only presented narrative episodes affectively but often introduced suggestions for enhancing the value of such depictions.

In the case of Maya's dream the lamp immediately signifies night, and thereby the dream Maya experiences.







Gajalakshmi, standing on a lotus bathed by elephants, is represented for the first time at Bharhut. This came to be used extensively in Hindu temples.





Dampati

Characteristic costume  
and jewellery.

Frontality, rigid and lifeless





Chulakoka Yakshi, a tree spirit, stands gracefully with her arms and one leg entwined around a flowering tree.

More lively, shown raising her left leg; both arms in movement; face, not frontal, but turned sideways.



The profuse jewellery and the mode of wearing the under garment and the head-dress demonstrate the feminine fashion of the period.





Ruru Jataka

It is the story how the compassionate Bodhisattva, born as a Golden Deer, forgives an ungrateful person whose life was saved by him.





Ruru Jataka

An excellent composition, with foreground (river), middle (men) and a background (trees). Though animals are in various natural poses, men are rigid, but beginning to show movement like the man aiming an arrow.

Thus began a tradition of  
Indian narrative relief and decoration  
of sacred architecture.

Belonging to the earliest phase,  
it is archaic and primitive,  
but exhibits creative spirit here and there.





An archaic treasure





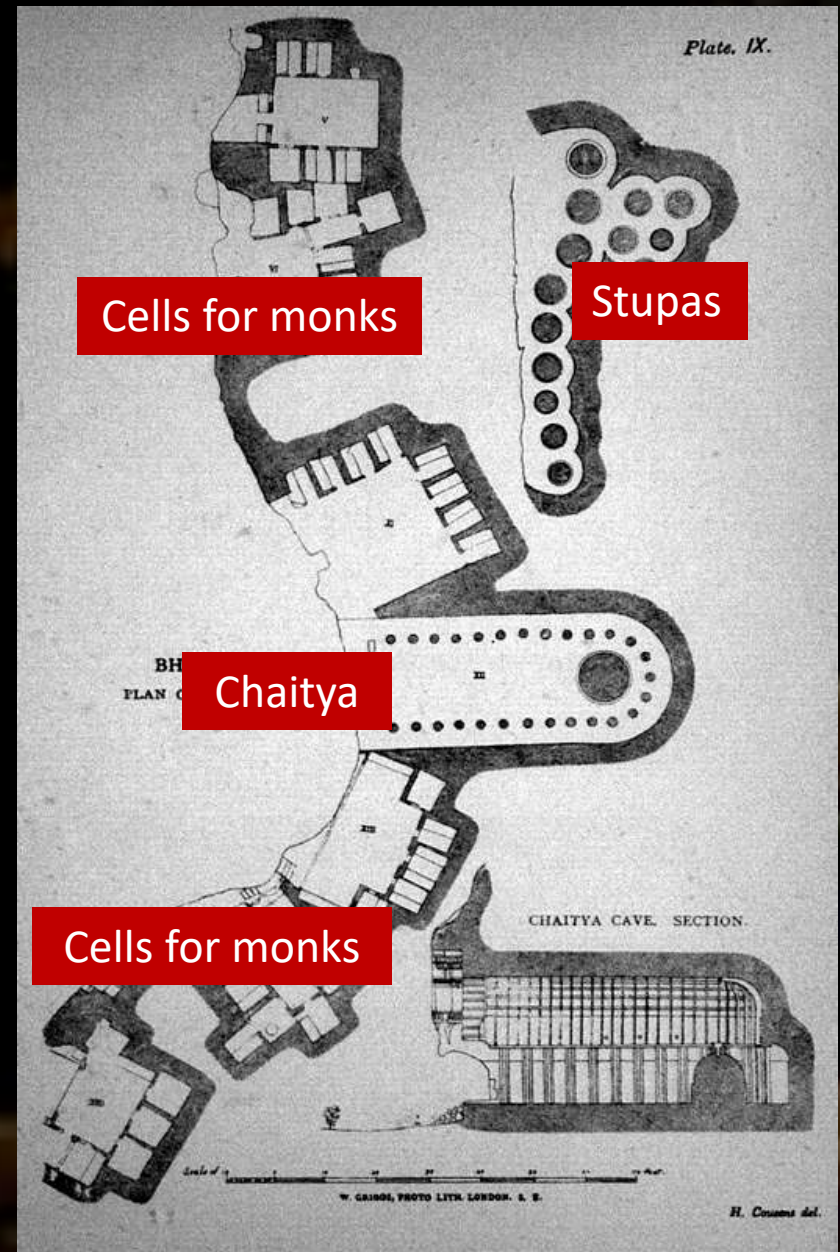
# Bhaja Caves

## Overture to Indian sculpture



Bhaja cave on the Western Ghats  
dated during the Satavahana period  
(2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE)  
contain the oldest sculptures of this period.

Around the chaitya  
are excavated  
a number of cells  
for the monks and  
stupas for monks  
who died here.



The façade is impressive  
with miniature chaitya  
on either side above and  
a full view  
to a majestic interior.

At present,  
the entrance of the hall  
is completely open.  
But originally a wooden  
screen was present  
in front.







The chaitya is impressive even by today's standards.

It is about 25 feet wide, 60 feet long and 12 feet high.

It must be built as a copy of wooden structure.

On the ceiling wooden beams are fixed and the pillars incline inwards as required for wooden construction.

The stupa at the back has a hemispherical dome on a cylindrical drum crowned by *harmika* and provision of hole for a top for inserting a wooden umbrella. There is space around for paramambulation.





Fourteen rock-cut stupas,  
some inscribed with the name of monks



Among the monasteries Cave 18 is important for the two famous relief sculptures, of Surya and Indra. These are the earliest compositions, with a number of figures participating in an event.



Surya

Indra







Surya is driving a chariot driven by four horses.

He is attended by two women, one carrying an umbrella and the other a chawri.

Surya





Above the four horses  
are two horse-riders,  
one on the left  
being a woman.

They, perhaps, are escorts.

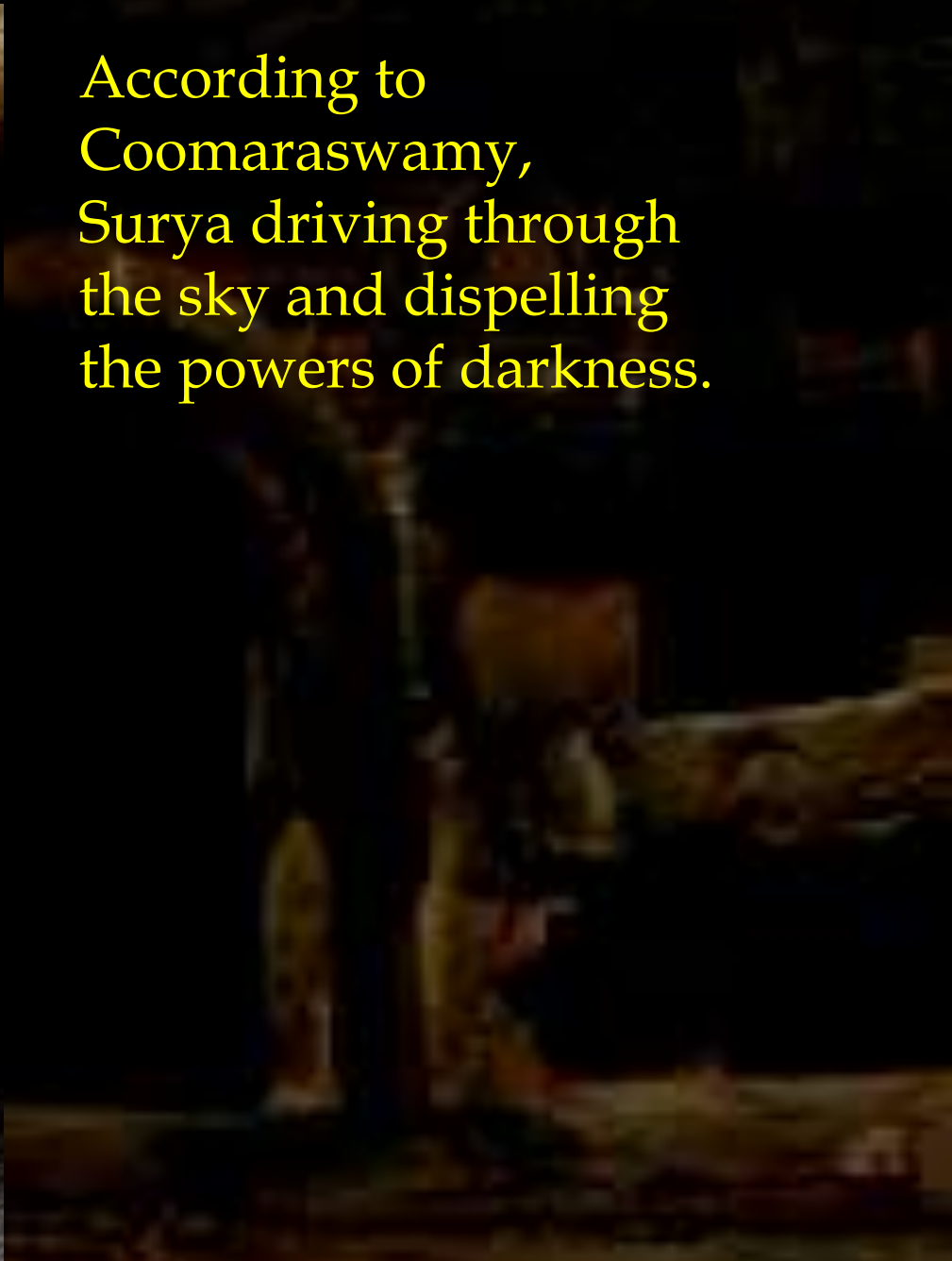
His chariot is  
trampling over  
a 'grossly proportioned  
nude female demon'.







According to  
Coomaraswamy,  
Surya driving through  
the sky and dispelling  
the powers of darkness.







All the characters are shown dynamically, but in strict frontality and inappropriately large size for demonesses betrays the archaic phase.

On the other side  
is a scene of Indra  
Driving Airavata.

The scene is complete with  
his attendant who carries  
a banner and spear.

But a number of characters,  
all in miniature sizes  
fill the wall,  
which is intriguing.



Indra



That Indra carries an uprooted tree can be barely understood, but to find a number of people falling from it is puzzling.







Below is a court scene.  
The king, designated by  
a royal umbrella,  
is seated on a wicker throne.  
A chauri-bearer is at his side.  
A chauri-bearer is at his side.  
Before him are dancers and  
an entourage of musicians,  
that includes, interestingly,  
a tabla player!





To its right an elephant,  
whose size is no more  
a foot of *airavata*!







Further to the right a more confused jungle scene, in which appear an armed man and a horse headed fairy.







We are at loss how these are connected to the main composition, namely, Indra striding across the sky.



But, all the characters, large and small,  
are lively and articulate,  
though modelling and balance are yet to reach maturity.

At nearby Karla, excavated a little later  
greater maturity and technical can be seen.



Relief on the facade



Interior



The loving couple  
is heavy-bodied.



Another couple







Grand overture





# Sanchi Stupas

Unseen presence of the Master

Sanchi holds an important place in our cultural history:  
an Asokan pillar,  
three stupas and  
a Gupta temple  
makes it a great heritage site.



Asokan pillar



Buddhist stupa



Gupta temple



The Great Stupa is a wonderful structure.

It is large and stately.

The hemispherical dome, that can be circumambulated,  
contains relics of the Buddha.

It is surrounded by a railing with four gateways.





Starting as a small brick structure during the Asokan times (3<sup>rd</sup> cent. BCE), enlarged during the Shunga period (2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BCE) and gateways added by the Satavahanas (1<sup>st</sup> cent. BCE). It is during the Shunga times were built the remaining two stupas.



Stupa 2



Stupa 3



We shall have a quick round of the Great Stupa







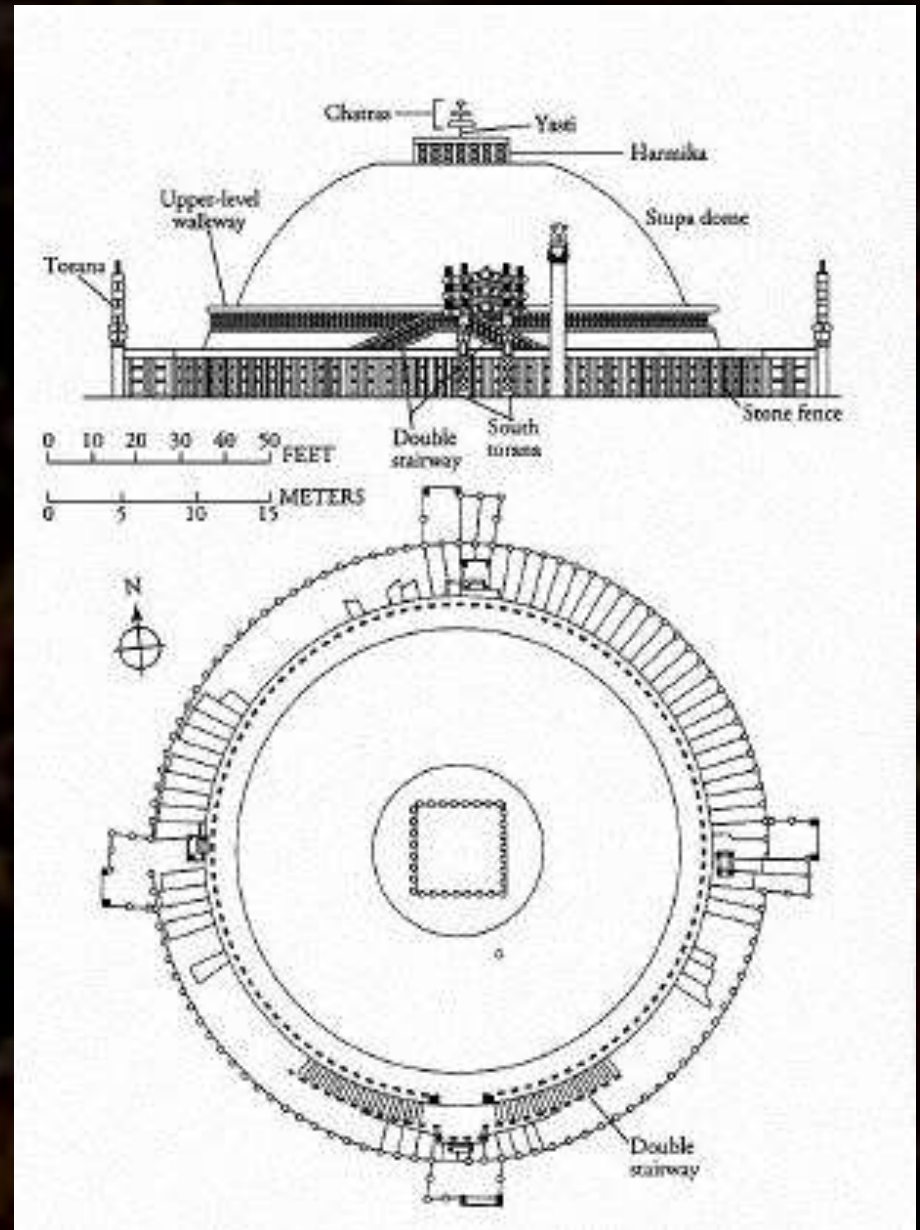


A posts of gateways



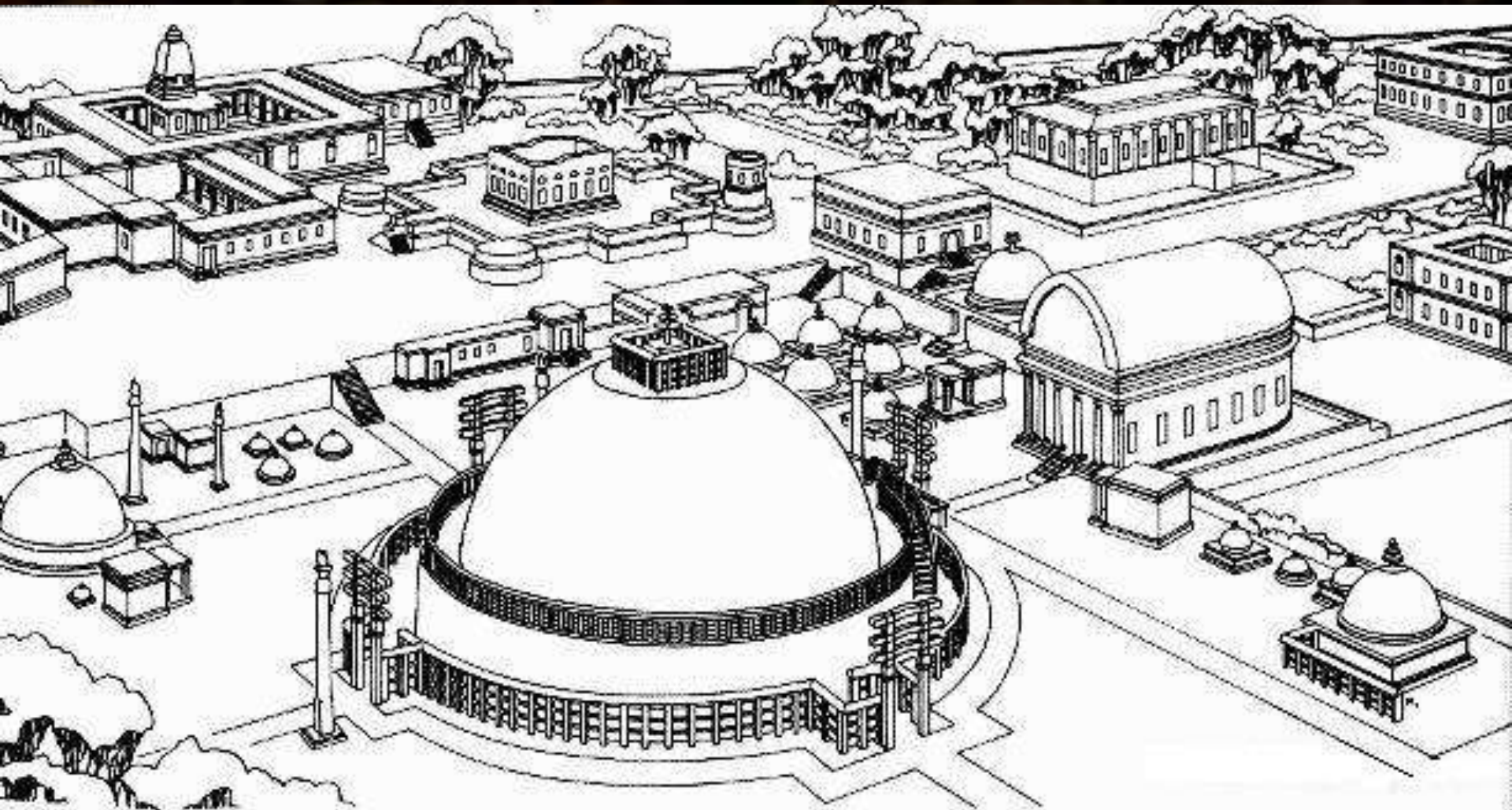
Buddha statues, like this, exuding the Gupta grace added later lend additional value





Great stupa - Detailed





How Sanchi would have looked two millennia ago



How the Great Stupa  
actually looked two  
centuries ago





How it actually looked two centuries ago  
as recorded by Simpson





Let us appreciate the art of Sanchi

Sculptural embellishments are found on the gateways.



The toranas give the best idea of the grandeur of the monument.



Here are ambitious carvings telling holy tales 'in long friezes, crowded with animated scenes, and with many human figures variously posed'.



Vishvantara Jataka

The principal themes are drawn from the life of Buddha and from the *jatakas*.





Mara's episode

Not only the narrations themselves are gripping, the sculptures exhibit the delicacy of the ivory carver.



Mahkapi Ja taka



It is also record of contemporary civilisation.



Life of common people



Large-sized  
yakshi guardians  
the gateways  
keep an eye on  
the visitors, and  
for the visitors  
they are eyefuls!

Eastern gateway







The yakshi-guardian, *salabhanjika*, hanging gracefully from the branches is a figure of no mean beauty.

This is beginning of lovely female figures that the Indian artist carved with such delight in the following centuries.

The elephant by her side and the peacock above attract our attention.

The art of Sanchi is an advancement  
in techniques and treatment  
over Bharhut and Bhaja





Earlier

At Sanchi itself,  
there are two phases,  
the primitive style of  
the Shungas,  
and  
advanced phase of  
the Satavahanas,  
the latter exhibiting  
impressive dexterity  
in modelling.



Later



Earlier

*These earlier reliefs are in silhouette without any differentiation of planes, the only approach to modelling appearing in the occasional rounding of the contour; the feet are always in side view, regardless of the position of the figure.*

*- Ananda Coomaraswamy*



A relief belonging to the earlier period





*Other reliefs . .  
exhibit a much greater knowledge  
of the figure, of spatial relations,  
and represent pose and movement  
not merely with animation,  
but with conscious grace.  
- Ananda Coomaraswamy*



Later

Regarding a suggestion that these changes are due to foreign influence, Coomaraswamy observes:

*Development at one stage of any artistic cycle is as natural and inevitable as degeneration at another stage. . . .*



Let us follow one composition in some detail





Royal procession  
leaving a city gate

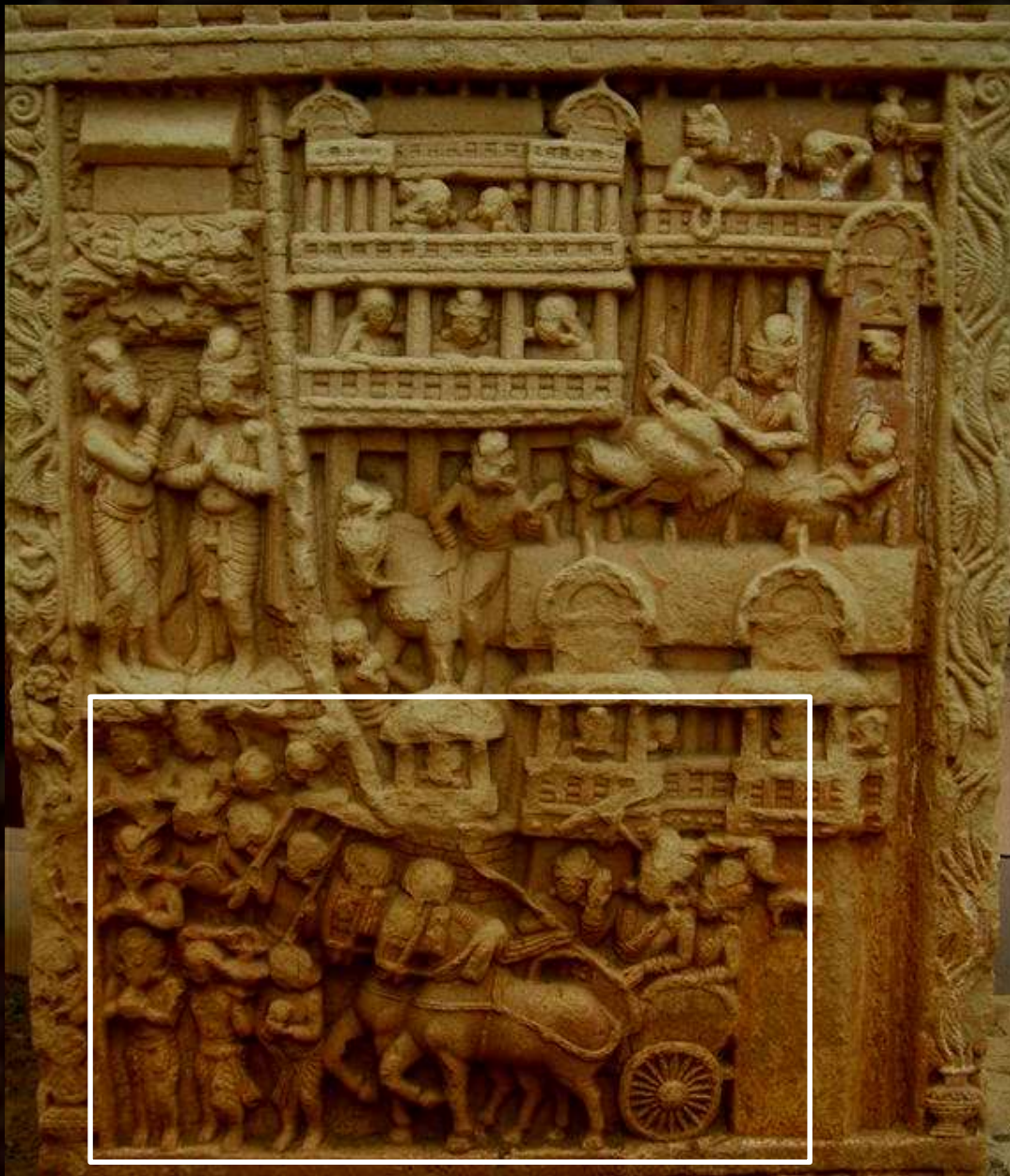




Here we have  
a bird's eye view  
of the city.

A distinct attempt  
at showing  
in perspective,  
with a river running.





At the bottom is shown a prince in a chariot accompanied by his men-at-arms leaving a city gate. The procession that follows is shown in layers above.





Just above the vaulted roof is an elephant with a rider and ahead of him is a horse-rider, with men and women peering from the windows and balconies to watch the spectacle.





Houses  
with balconies  
perhaps made of  
wood and bamboo  
are fascinating  
document of  
the dwellings of  
the period.



This is an animated and lively scene,  
with many persons, most in movement,  
and no one is stiff any more.

Both horses and elephant well carved.





But the proportions of the figures are still heavy.

For figures assume light and graceful contours  
we have to wait for Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda,  
a few centuries away.



An excellent gateway to Indian art

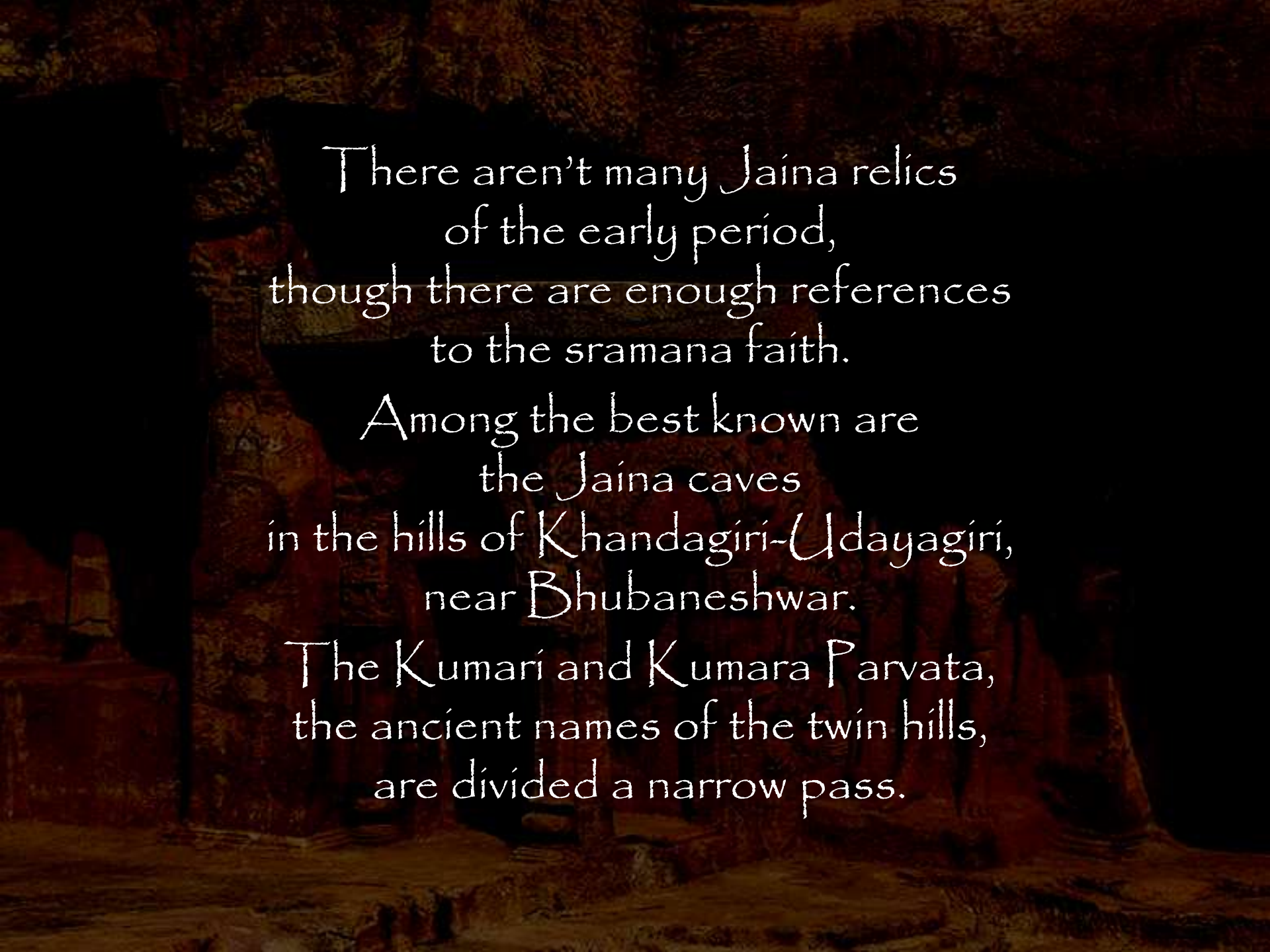




# Khandagiri-Udayagiri

## The yogi and the artist





There aren't many Jain relics  
of the early period,  
though there are enough references  
to the sramana faith.

Among the best known are  
the Jain caves  
in the hills of Khandagiri-Udayagiri,  
near Bhubaneswar.

The Kumari and Kumara Parvata,  
the ancient names of the twin hills,  
are divided a narrow pass.



The inscription of Kharavela, 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BCE, in the Hathi Gumpaha), no more than a natural cavern, is well known.



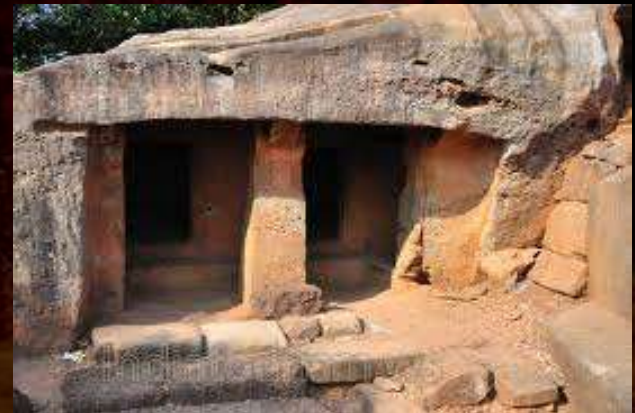


The thirty-three caves, among them a few double storied, have been excavated during the reign of by Kharavela of Chedi dynasty and his successors in the first century BCE

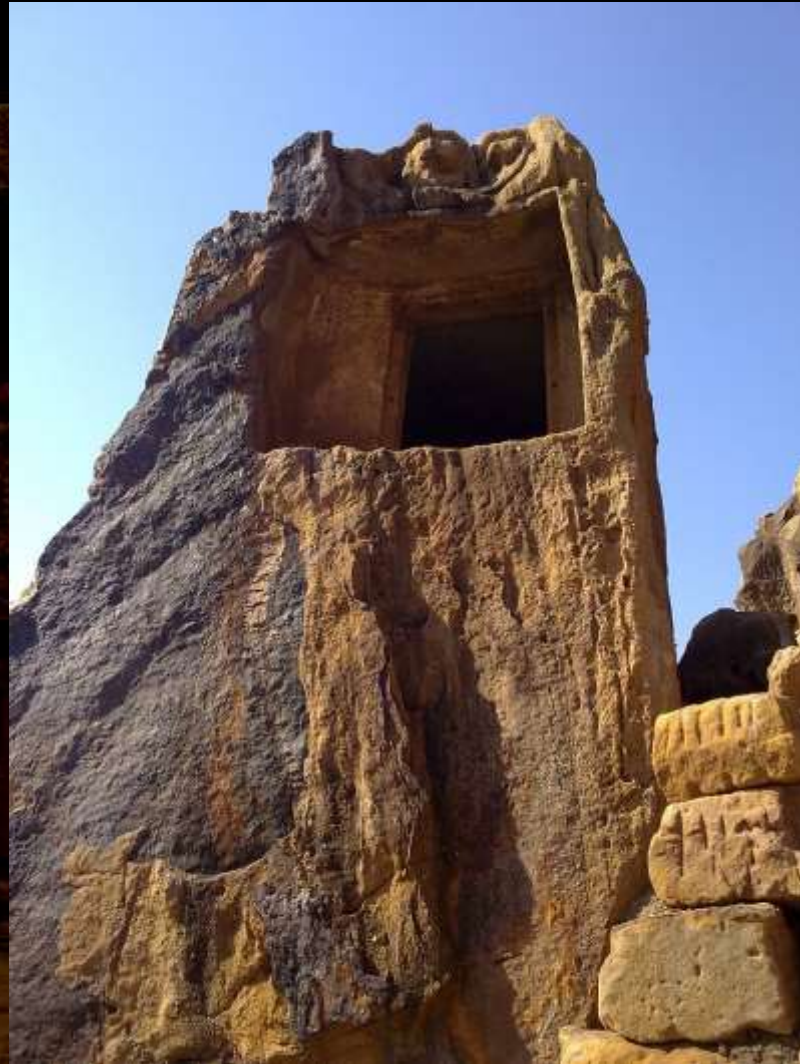




The rugged terrain coupled with the Jaina ascetics keeping away from all attractions perhaps dictated the very architecture of the caves, no more than a row of cells, all stern and bereft of any amenities.



But the very rugged terrain triggered the imagination of the 'architects' to try some very uncommon excavations, some fanciful and ludicrous too.



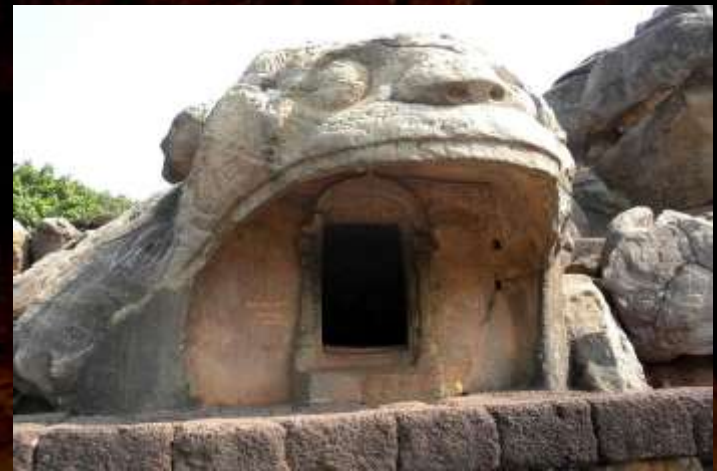




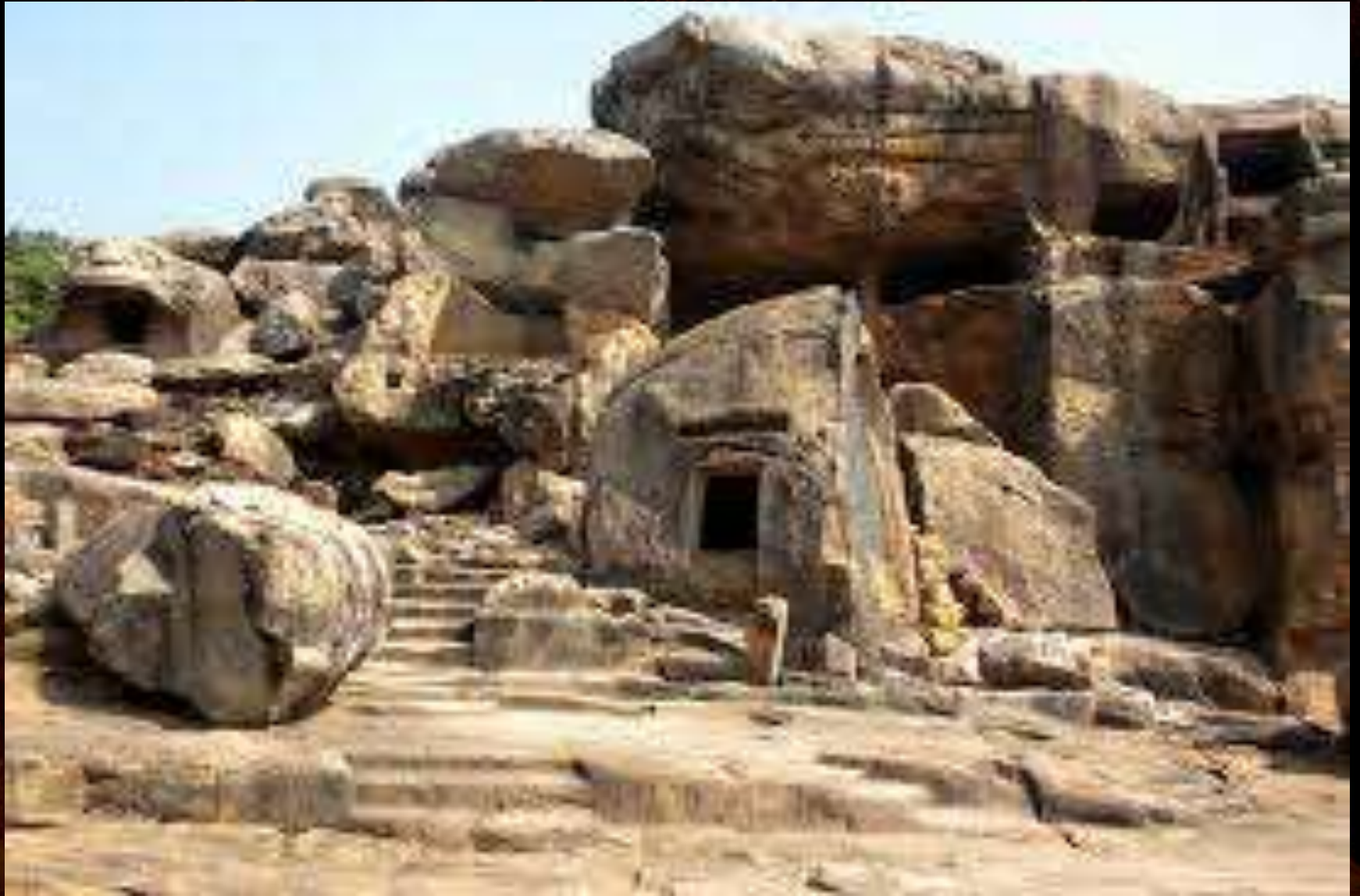














The only sculptural decorations are the friezes around the entrance arches to the cells.



These are lively sculptures . . . . .



.....depicting popular legends .....



A monkey episode



.....depicting popular legends .....





..... religious observances .....



Worshiping in a chaitya



..... historical episodes .....



Ashvamedha-yaga



.....dancing performances.





The decoration includes animal motifs .....





.....trees, fruits , .....



Mango and banana trees



and creepers and sala-bhanjikas.








Besides, individual guards, bracket figures, vidyadharas, floral and geometrical patterns are noteworthy.



The background image shows the interior of the Rani Gumpah, a double-storied rock-cut structure. It features several tall, slender columns supporting a flat roof. The walls and ceiling are covered in intricate carvings and friezes. The lighting is dim, highlighting the textures and details of the ancient stone.

Rani Gumpah or the queen's palace is the architectural marvel of the entire complex.

It is double-storied and the largest.

It is the most decorated, and contain some excellent friezes, many yet to identified.



Rani Gumpha





Rani Gumpha





King Kharavela and Queen Simhpatha





Hunting scene



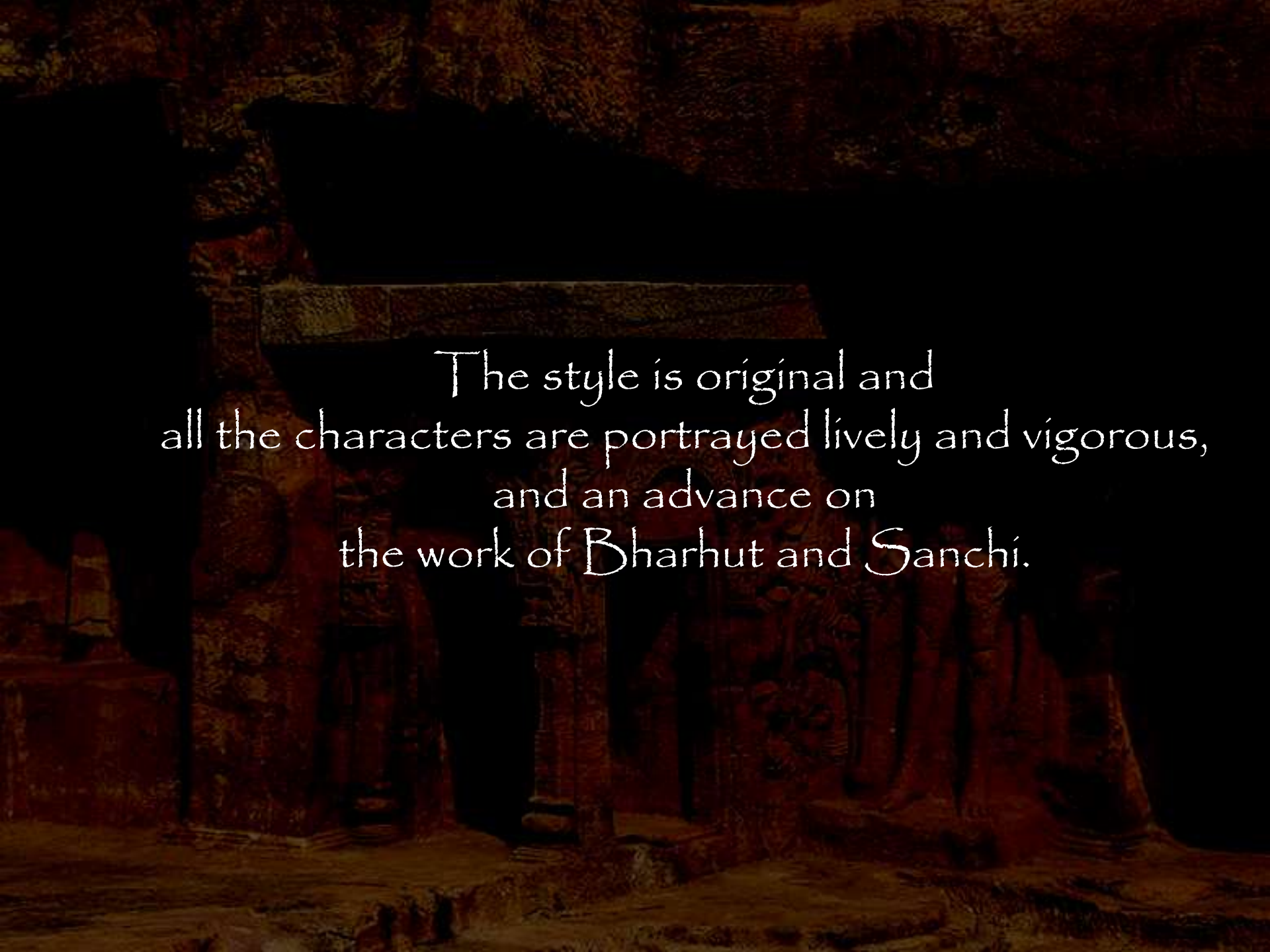


Abducting a princess





Hunting of a winged deer



The style is original and  
all the characters are portrayed lively and vigorous,  
and an advance on  
the work of Bharhut and Sanchi.





Gems in a rubble



Bye, till we meet the Master in the three Schools