

**Sheila Weiner, *Ajanta: Its Place in Buddhist Art*. Berkeley,
University of California Press, 1977. 214 pp., illus., \$14.75**

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des parterres selon les saisons. L'art du jardinier prolonge celui du peintre et vice versa, les parterres étant arrangés comme la palette, avec une prédominance des couleurs claires et la juxtaposition de grandes masses monochromes, telle celle de l'extraordinaire allée d'iris mauves qui devient tableau en 1900 (photographie, p. 134, et reproduction d'un tableau sur le même thème, p. 67).

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SHEILA WEINER *Ajanta: Its Place in Buddhist Art*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1977. 214 pp., illus., \$14.75.

Sheila Weiner's ambitious book attempts not only to deal with the problems of Ajanta alone, but also to define the broader position that the site occupied within the Indian Buddhist world. Ajanta is located in Maharashtra state, some 200 miles northeast of Bombay, and consists of about thirty artificial rock-cut excavations dedicated to Buddhism. A small number of the caves were constructed during the time of the early Christian era or perhaps earlier, while the majority of caves were founded during the fifth or perhaps sixth century AD. The present book concerns itself almost solely with the excavations belonging to the later period.

The major contributions of the book are contained in three rather lengthy chapters. In the first, 'Historical Setting,' Weiner establishes the basic scaffolding for the chronology of the later caves. Of crucial importance for this chronology is the undated Cave 16 donative inscription undertaken by King Harishena's minister. While this inscription is largely a family panegyric, the epigraph credits Harishena with the conquests of ancient 'Kuntala, Avanti, Kaliṅga, Kosala, Trikūṭa, Lāṭa and Andhra.' A copperplate inscription dated to AD 493 from Kanheri in the ancient Trikūṭa region indicates that the Traikūṭaka Dynasty was in possession of the same Trikūṭa listed in the Cave 16 inscription. Weiner has

assumed from these inscriptions that 'It seems only obvious that if the Traikūṭakas were in control of Trikūṭa in AD 493, the inscription of Cave XVI at Ajanta in which Harisena is credited with having conquered the same area could have been inscribed only after that date' (p. 31). The evidence is in no way conclusive, however, for there do not exist corroborative inscriptions suggesting Vākāṭaka Dynasty presence in either the Trikūṭa region or in any of the countries which are mentioned in the Cave 16 record. The claim of conquests should be seen rather against the normal Sanskrit courtly tradition of military boasting. Using the same evidence as Weiner, Walter Spink has erred in the opposite direction by concluding that Cave 16 must have been begun *before* AD 493, since the Trikūṭa region at that time was assumed to be no longer under the domination of the Vākāṭakas. All that can be inferred from these two records is Traikūṭaka possession of the Kanheri region in that year.

Additional problems exist with interpretations discussed in the same chapter; space here allows only one further example. The intriguing suggestion is made that the fragmentary Rāshtrakūṭa stone inscription in the forecourt of Cave 16 may belong to the Early Rāshtrakūṭas of Mānapur (and date to the 'late-fourth- or early-fifth century') and not to a much later dynasty with a similar name as B. Ch. Chhabra has suggested (p. 25). Yet there is absolutely no speculation about the extent of the Rāshtrakūṭa contribution to Cave 16 or to any other cave at the site. In reference to a nearly complete inscription of the façade of Cave 16, it may be correct to assert for a variety of historical reasons that the 'façade of Cave XXVI may be somewhat earlier than the inscription of Cave XVII' (p. 30), yet again there is no attempt to bolster this suggestion with art historical criteria or to suggest a relative dating for the two caves.

The next important chapter, 'Iconographic Developments,' offers a discussion of the innovations and developments manifested in Ajanta and related sites. For Bagh, Cave 2, it has been argued that this excavation appears to be possibly the earliest extant example in India

of a rock-cut *vihāra* with a shrine preceeded by a distinct antechamber. The 'structural prototype' for the antechamber at Bagh, here with standing Buddha images on either side, is claimed to be found at the Tepe Shutur site at Hadda, Afghanistan, said to date to the fourth century. How this single feature from distant Hadda came to influence the design of *vihāras* in the Deccan is nowhere called into question nor is the dating of the Hadda example. It seems more likely that the antechamber was developed in the Deccan *sui generis*; in this period of tremendous excavation and religious innovation, experimentation with architectural groundplans was common.

The analysis of *caitya* 19 relates the façade of the worship hall to the *stūpa* forms represented on the famous drum slabs from Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda. The form of the *caitya* window at Cave 19, for example, is compared to the dome of the *stūpas* in Andhra, the balcony and canopy to the *āyaka* platform, and so forth. Disregarding what is at least a full century separating these two distinct phases of Indian art in two parts of the Deccan, this theory does not explain how the Ajanta architects were exposed to the Andhra *stūpa* relief nor why these reliefs should have been used as models. It is more reasonable to suggest that the basic shape of the *caitya* window at Cave 19 was drawn from earlier *Himayāna* worship halls in the northwest Deccan itself. The overall design of the façade and much of the imagery were probably borrowed from contemporary structures built in perishable materials. If one is to seek sources for or similarities with Ajanta one must look at the fifth- and early sixth-century world of the Guptas in central India and not to the early Andhra region.

A most significant observation in this chapter is that the Buddha in the teaching gesture (*dharmacakra*) and seated in the 'European' pose (*pralambapādāsana*) assumed a great importance at the site in its latest phase (Fig. 1). This type of image occurs as the principal figure in Caves 16, 22, and 26 and is frequently encountered among intrusive panels or niches on largely finished excavations. This new type rightly implies a religious shift from the more narrative, historical



FIGURE 1. Ajanta, Shrine, Cave 16. From Weiner.

Śākyamuni, represented in the Ajanta cave shrines as seated crossed-legged in teaching gesture with deer and a wheel (*cakra*) at the base, to a Buddha of more transmundane qualities.

In the penultimate chapter, 'Stylistic Trends and Developments,' an attempt is made to connect the early sculptural style of the Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda reliefs with the early work at Ajanta, notably the impressive standing Buddhas flanking the doorway of Cave 19. Of the early Andhra influence at Ajanta, this reviewer would reiterate that the more tenable connections are to be found in fifth-century central India. The majority of the main shrine images, observed to be done in a more heavy and hieratic mode, are dated to ca. AD 475 and compared to several dated sculptures from the first half of the fifth century in central India and to the four seated Buddhas surrounding the Great Stūpa at Sanchi. Weiner considers these Sanchi Buddhas as a synthesis of Mathura and Sarnath idioms which served as a possible source for Sarnath influence in the Deccan. It has been overlooked, however, that these four images are usually considered to be dated by an inscription to AD 450-51, a full quarter-century before the mature Sarnath style appears (see J.F. Fleet, *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors*, no. 62).

Given the immense scope of the book, perhaps it would have been wiser to plan two separate, longer volumes. The first would spell out

the chronology of the cave sites by refuting systematically the chronologies proposed by Spink and by Begley. Moreover, such a chronology, based on inscriptional evidence and stylistic analysis, should involve close inspection of the majority of the caves rather than a concentration on four or five major caves as we have here. The second volume might be devoted to iconographic problems and the complex stylistic sources for Ajanta and the western Deccan. On both counts Ajanta is probably best understood in light of the fifth-century world of the Guptas rather than that of early Andhra.

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SIMON OTTENBERG *Masked Rituals of Afikpo: The Context of an African Art*. Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1975. 229 pp., 85 illus., \$25.00.

As measured against art historical literature of other fields, the writing in the specialized study of African art has, with few exceptions, consisted of photographic surveys with minimal text. In truth, much of the literature devoted to the study of African art has been directed primarily towards the identification and placement of objects in a geographical and linguistic context, those of one tribe with one language in one geographical region. It has been only within a comparatively short period of time that in-depth contextual studies in African art have emerged, and scholars are now turning to the definition of traditional African art within the total synaesthetic framework of a society. This attitude views the objects as participating elements in a greater cultural nexus which includes the rôle of the object within society, its appearance, and its association to costume, music, and choreography, supported by myth and symbol.

As defined, this full cultural study is a demanding undertaking requiring the multiple skills of anthropologist and linguist allied to an awareness of art and aesthetics.

Fortunately Simon Ottenberg brings these skills and sensitivities to his study. This is the latest in a series of works that Ottenberg has produced as a result of his field research among the Igbo and Afikpo of eastern Nigeria. While among the Afikpo, Ottenberg recorded in detail their rituals, 'plays,' dances, and songs, as well as their masks and carvers. His study is comprehensive in scope and informative in depth. It is objective in its reporting and sympathetic in its discussion of the Afikpo people and their multiple arts. The book draws upon Ottenberg's obvious knowledge and store of data regarding Afikpo masks and their use, and it presents its case with a high order of organization.

The first part opens with a description of the Afikpo and places them in their social and cultural setting. The Afikpo belong to a sub-group of the Igbo called Ade or Edda, who, according to Ottenberg, numbered about 35,000 in 1960, living in twenty-two close village groups along the banks of the Cross River in East Central State of Nigeria. These village groups share, with local variations, similar rituals, shrines, and customs, while also being influenced by their neighbouring peoples with regard to certain mask types and forms.

The following chapter, 'Afikpo Art,' places primary emphasis upon the major sculptural product — masks. It describes the function of art within the context of Afikpo society and its rôle as a mechanism of 'social readjustment.' It considers the masked plays in relationship to the change of seasons and tells that the Afikpo use this time when not working in the fields for ceremony and to devote their energies to re-establishing harmony within the village. 'The ceremonial season is one in which social conflict and judgment are everyday affairs, and the Afikpo turn their productive energies to realigning and readjusting human social ties. The masked rituals are an aspect of this social productivity: they complement and reflect it, as well as having their own particular aesthetic aspects.' Then follows a long and detailed *catalogue raisonné* of mask types and styles. Each mask type is named, its general identifying features described, and its sub-styles or variations given.