



2 - Minutes Series

(Foundational topics prerequisite for Civil Services)

For

26th October 2021

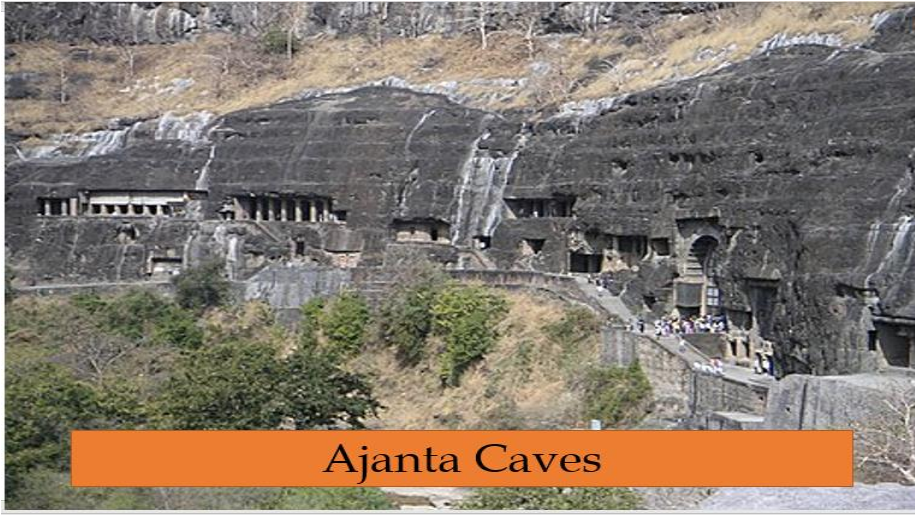
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History

Ajanta Caves



Discovery

- They were covered by jungle until accidentally "discovered" and brought to Western attention in 1819 by a colonial British officer **Captain John Smith** on a tiger-hunting party.

Geography

- The caves are in the rocky northern wall of the **U-shaped gorge of the river Waghur**, in the Deccan plateau.

Location

- **Aurangabad District, Maharashtra. (Sahyadri Range - Western Ghats).**

Prominent Religion reflected

- **Buddhism.**

Time Period

- **2nd century BCE to about 650 CE.**
- **Approx. 29 rock cut Buddhist cave Monasteries. (25 - Viharas and 4 Chaityas)**
- They were built in 2 phases -
 - **Phase I - 2nd cen BCE.**
 - **Phase II - 400 CE till 650 CE.**

Important Designation

- UNESCO World Heritage Site (1983) and Protected Monument under care of ASI.

What all is depicted in these caves ?

- **Ancient monasteries and worship-halls** of different Buddhist traditions carved into a 75-metre (246 ft) wall of rock.
- The caves also present **paintings** depicting the past lives.
 - Rebirths of the Buddha, pictorial tales from Aryasura's Jatakamala, and rock-cut sculptures of Buddhist deities.

Important Point

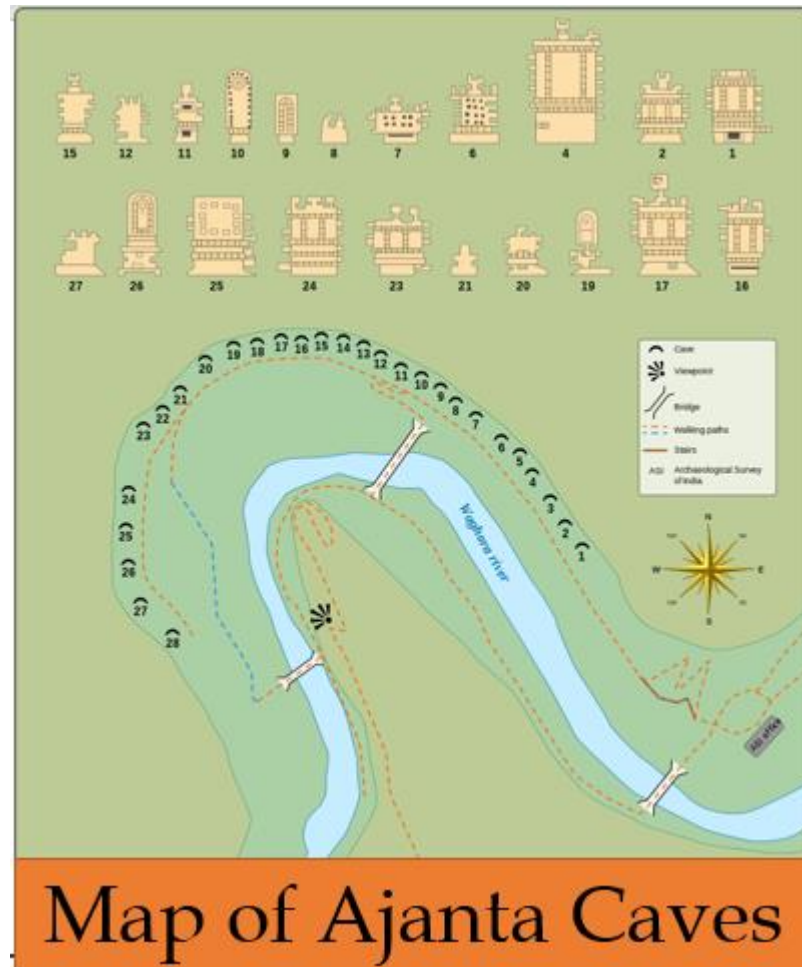
- Caves 16, 17, 1 and 2 of Ajanta form the **largest corpus of surviving ancient Indian wall-painting**.
- Mixture of Chaityas - Viharas and Stupas.

Purpose ?

- Textual records suggest that these **caves served as a monsoon retreat for monks**, as well as a resting site for merchants and pilgrims in ancient India.
- Numbering of Caves is just for reference and **does not reflect the chronological order of their constructions**.

References in other Important Texts

- Travel accounts of **Chinese Buddhist travellers Fa Hien** (during the reign of Chandragupta II; 380- 415 CE) and **Hieun Tsang** (during the reign of emperor Harshavardhana; 606 - 647 CE). .
- The Ajanta caves are mentioned in the **17th-century text Ain-i-Akbari by Abu al-Fazl**, as twenty four rock-cut cave temples each with remarkable idols.



Caves of the first Period

- **Earliest Caves**
 - Consists of caves 9, 10, 12, 13 and 15 A.
- **Time Period -**
 - Roughly around 100 BCE to 100 CE.
- **Patronage -**
 - **Satvahana Dynasty**
 - The first Satavahana period caves **lacked figurative sculpture**, emphasising the stupa instead.

Caves of the Second Period

- **Time Period -**
 - Around 5th century (4th till 7th CE).

- **Patronage**
 - **Vakataka Dynasty (Emperor Harisena).**
 - The second phase is attributed to the **theistic Mahāyāna, or Greater Vehicle tradition of Buddhism.**
- Important Point - Ajanta Caves encompass both Theravada (Hinayana) and Mahayana Buddhist traditions.
- The paintings are in "**dry fresco**", painted on top of a dry plaster surface rather than into wet plaster.
 - One of the striking features is the **absence of blue colour.**
- Cave No. 8 - Oldest of the monasteries.
- Cave No. 9 - Oldest Chaityas.



The "Hope" Experiment