

2021

Reviews of Rajesh Singh, *Periodisation of Rock-cut Monuments of India* and *Khīṅgīla vs. Buddhist Caves*

Charles Willemen
retired

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/iijbs>



Part of the [Buddhist Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Willemen, Charles (2021) "Reviews of Rajesh Singh, *Periodisation of Rock-cut Monuments of India* and *Khīṅgīla vs. Buddhist Caves*," *The Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies*: Vol. 21 , Article 9.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/iijbs/vol21/iss1/9>

This Book Review is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It is brought to you for free via open access, courtesy of DigitalCommons@Linfield, with permission from the rights-holder(s). Your use of this Book Review must comply with the [Terms of Use](#) for material posted in DigitalCommons@Linfield, or with other stated terms (such as a Creative Commons license) indicated in the record and/or on the work itself. For more information, or if you have questions about permitted uses, please contact digitalcommons@linfield.edu.

Rajesh K. Singh, *Periodisation of Rock-cut Monuments of India*, Ajanta Mahāpitaka I 3. XII + 89 pp. Hari Sena press, Baroda 2020. ISBN 978-81-925107-9-8.

The author is now well established as an authority in the field of Indian rock-cut art and architecture, which cannot be separated from Buddhism. This book again shows his erudition and insight.

The book formulates a system of periodisation. The criteria are both historical and stylistic.

Contents p. IX-X; Plates p. XI – XII; Introduction pp. 1-9

P. 10-52 : Seven periods and 5 times a hiatus. Period I, ca. 250 BCE – 325 CE, p. 10, followed by hiatus I, ca. 326 CE – 461 CE. On p. 14 the term “Dark Age” is used. Then period II 462 CE – 468 CE, p. 14. Hiatus II, 469 CE – 472 CE, p. 21. Period III, ca. 473 CE – 477 CE, p. 24. Period IV ca. 478 CE – 480 CE, p. 30. Hiatus III ca. 481 CE – 525 CE, p.32. Period V A ca. 525 CE – 575 CE, p. 33 – 47. Here four Aurangabad caves are described. Then the author mentions the Kuchean connection, p. 38. He explains the ‘central pillar caves’ and their influence on the whole neighborhood. Then period V B ca. 525 CE – 575 CE, p. 47 –50. Here *śaivite* rock-cut architecture is mentioned. With this period the periodisation really comes to an end. There still are hiatus IV ca. 575 CE – 600 CE, p. 50; period VI ca. 600 CE – 700 CE, p. 51; hiatus V ca. 700 CE – present, p. 51; period VII ca. 700 CE – 1300 CE, p. 52.

While it is explicitly said that rulers and emperors, or Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna are no valid criteria for periodisation (p. 5 and 6), the author then uses terms such as *śrāvākayāna* and *bodhisattvayāna*. It is, of course, true that political developments and rock-cut monuments cannot be separated. Motives and styles are linked. I appreciate note 55 p. 18. Indeed, research must not be limited to present India.

P. 18 one reads such terms as Mūlasarvāstivāda and *avadāna* literature, Avalokiteśvara cult, Sanskrit language, *bodhisattvayāna*. In the fifth century these terms had become very important. Ca. 400 CE Sanskrit had become the main Buddhist language. This is very clear when one consults e.g. Chinese

translations from that period. It is very interesting to read about *avadāna* literature and Mūlasarvāstivāda for the fifth century. Internationally this last term only appears from the end of the seventh century on. It is very important to know that in India a school, *nikāya*, is defined by its *vinaya*, not by doctrinal considerations. Asaṅga, relative of Vasubandhu, ca. 400 CE, was a Mahīśāsaka founder of a very Mahāyāna school. Let me just repeat what I have explained elsewhere recently, namely that Mahāsāṅghikas are Mahāyāna. When e.g. Sarvāstivādins, or Mahīśāsakas, use one of their techniques, texts, ideas, they call the result Mahāyāna too. When Mahāsāṅghikas use an idea of their antagonists, they call the result Ekayāna. When a school or a group within a school believes in an *abhidharma* spoken by the Buddha, they are Hīnayāna. One should not attach too much importance to doctrinal arguments in the Indian context. Avalokiteśvara is a *bodhisattva*, but he (she in China) also belongs to traditional Sarvāstivāda groups. Mantrayāna is Sarvāstivāda, even though the yoga has changed, adopting Hindu yoga. Belief in Sukhāvātī, an intermediate existence, *antarābhava*, is Sarvāstivāda. Chan or Zen Buddhism is Sarvāstivāda, practicing a path called *prayogamārga*, path of preparatory application, in Sarvāstivāda *abhidharma*. It would be wrong to think that the Vaibhāṣika *abhidharma* is the main Sarvāstivāda *abhidharma*. It actually can be called Hīnayāna, while the schools I just mentioned are Mahāyāna.

What one reads on p. 18 may be better understood when one knows that Mūlasarvāstivāda, *avadāna* literature, the cult of Avalokiteśvara, bodhisattvayāna, and the use of Sanskrit in the fifth century are all phenomena linked with traditional Sarvāstivādins, also called Mūlasarvāstivādins from the end of the seventh century.

Theravāda Pali Buddhism is Hīnayāna. It hardly plays a role in rock-cut monuments in India.

Charles Willemen 魏查理*

* Rector, International Buddhist College, Thailand (泰国国际佛教大学).

Rajesh Kumar Singh, *Khīngīla vs. Buddhist Caves: A Synchronised Chronology of the Early Alchon Hūns, Early Guptas, Vākātakas, Traikūtakas, and Buddhist Caves (ca. 451 – 480 CE)*. Ajanta Mahāpiṭaka I 2. Hari Sena Press, Baroda, 2020. PP. XII + 84 + Plates. ISBN 978-81-925107-8-1.

This study deals with the history and the art of South Asia, of India, late fifth century. It mainly reconstructs chronology and compares different chronologies relevant for fifth-century rock-cut monuments. Those monuments were almost all Buddhist.

The study informs us that excavations had begun ca. 461/2 CE, and that by about 480 CE the cave temples were abandoned, before completion. The study of the chronologies throws some light on the reasons.

Ca. 465 CE Hephthalite Hūns attacked the Early Alchon Hūns in Greater Gandhāra, dispersing monks towards the Deccan and elsewhere. The ousted Alchons, led by Mahāśāhi Khīngīla (ca. 440 – 492 / 6 CE), advanced into India, up to the Narmada – Tapti valleys. Important battles were fought, in which great Indian emperors died, such as Kumāragupta I and II; Skandagupta; Narendra Sena, and others. Indian disturbances forced both migrant Gandhāran and resident Deccan monks to go to Central Asia, to Kuqa, etc. . The Alchons, ousted by Buddhagupta ca. 478 CE, then ruled from ca. 479 to ca. 600 CE from Greater Gandhāra to the Narmada Valley.

P. 59 – 63 one finds the conclusion of the historical research.

The author mentions, p. 4, that many stories of the Ajanta narrative paintings were Mūlasarvāstivāda. He is surprised at the large amount of Sanskrit. Let me just point out that in the fifth century the word Mūlasarvāstivāda was not used yet. Xuanzang, who returned home in 645 CE, does not know the word. Yijing 义净 (635 - 713 AD) who returned end seventh century, only knows the word. When one looks at the original Indian language of the translated Chinese texts after ca. 400 CE, it is clear that the main Indian language had become Sanskrit. Mūlasarvāstivādins are the traditional Sarvāstivādins, who always remained more numerous than the Vaibhāṣikas, established ca. 200 CE in Kāśmīra.

174 *The Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies* 21, 2020

Traditional Sarvāstivādins, who came into existence in the time of Aśoka, were called Mūlasarvāstivādins when they re-affirmed their presence and when the number of Vaibhāṣikas decreased. From the end of the seventh century the traditional Sarvāstivādins are known as Mūlasarvāstivādins. Their *Vinaya* contained many stories. So, it is no surprise that their literature is reflected in the Buddhist caves in the fifth century. Independent *avadāna* literature begins when the Vaibhāṣikas established their brief *Vinaya*, removing most of the stories. Theravāda and the Pali language did not play any role.

The study is well documented. See Bibliography p. 65–76.

Charles Willemen 魏查理*

* Rector, International Buddhist College, Thailand (泰国国际佛教大学).