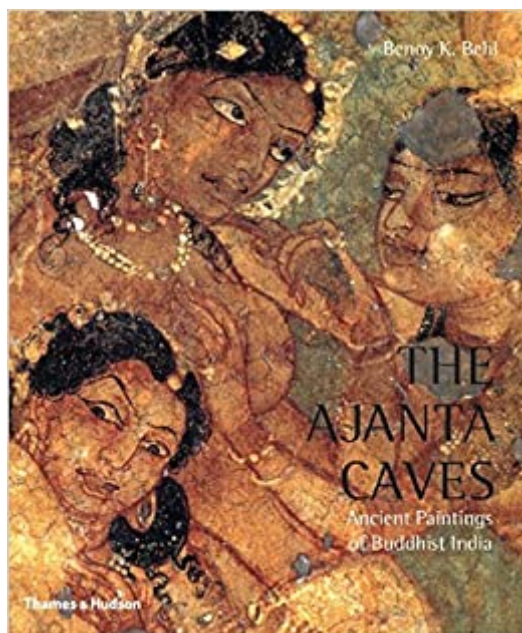


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# The Ajanta Caves: Ancient Paintings Of Buddhist India



## Synopsis

In 1819, a group of British soldiers chanced upon the Ajanta caves, lying in a ravine of the Waghora river some 200 miles north-east of Bombay. Ranging in date from the 2nd century BC to the 6th century AD, the exquisite Buddhist paintings and sculptures that they found there now rank among the world's most important cultural treasures. Here, Benoy K. Behl captures some of the finest works of Buddhist art in all their glory and luminosity. The exquisite murals depict the Jatakas (tales of previous incarnations) of Lord Buddha, scenes of princely processions, ladies with their handmaidens, bejewelled animals, ascetics in monasteries and fantastical birds and beasts, all with a startling degree of sophistication. What is unique about the paintings is their humanity: the men and women of this world have the capacity to adore - they look upon each other with expressions of infinite caring. Ajanta provides virtually the only evidence remaining of painting styles that first developed in India and then travelled with the spread of Buddhism as far as Japan and Korea. A potent symbol of the great beauty of India's rich artistic past.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Some 2000 years ago, the first of the magnificent temples of Ajanta were carved directly into the great volcanic cliffs of the Waghora River in western India. In a series of creative bursts over the centuries, they were decorated with hundreds of subtle and beautiful murals depicting scenes from the lives of Buddha and the Buddhist cosmology. Although most of the other ancient temple murals of India disappeared long ago, those in Ajanta have survived in the dark of the cavelike temples. To

further the murals' preservation and enhance the viewer's understanding of how beautiful they are in their original setting as seen by an oil lamp's dim light, the author has photographed the murals for the first time without using strong artificial lighting. Since Buddhist art spread with the wandering monks into Southeast Asia, China, Korea, and Japan, these murals are a fascinating glimpse at the wellspring of a great deal of Asian art. The 189 superb color photographs are complemented by a concise text and a series of explanatory line drawings and maps. Highly recommended. David McClelland, Philadelphia Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

The ancient caves of Ajanta in western India, rediscovered by British soldiers in 1819, are the only known examples of Buddhist carvings and paintings from an epoch of extraordinary vitality. The earliest of the 31 designed caves along the Waghora River date from the second century B.C., when the first Buddhists forbade representation of the Buddha himself, leaving artists free to employ a lexicon of symbolic figures. Six centuries later, the most splendidly realized of the caves were created to express the visions of the Mahayana order. Here the Buddha is lovingly portrayed seated, and the story of his life is depicted in sensuous detail. As adept a commentator as he is a photographer, Behl provides fascinating explanations of the techniques used to carve the animated reliefs and paint the richly detailed murals. He writes, "It is the life of the spirit rather than that of worldly existence which pervades these paintings," and, indeed, their contemplative beauty inspires a joy not unlike a foretaste of the purported ecstasy of enlightenment. Donna Seaman --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This beautiful book serves both as an introduction to the Ajanta Caves before going and certainly as a documentary of what you've seen, once you're back. But don't consider packing it for the journey as it's quite heavy. The text contributors are knowledgeable and aptly chosen.

If you are planning a trip to India, you should consider visiting the caves at Ajanta. If you are planning to visit the caves, you should read this book before the trip. You will get a lot more out of the experience of the caves if you know the Jataka stories and understand the Buddhist iconography described in this book. Even if you have no plans to travel to Ajanta, the book contains beautiful photographs which will make a nice addition to any collection of art books or, for that matter, to any coffee table.

Beautiful

I ordered this book because I'd run across a couple of photos online showing the carved exteriors of these caves in India. The photos showed a place straight out of an Indiana Jones adventure, not unlike the Petra cave in Jordan that was used as a location for the third Indy movie. So, I bought this book expecting to see more of those kinds of images in addition to cave interiors and cave paintings. Sadly, the book shows very little of the cave exteriors/interiors and devotes most of its pages to just the murals. The paintings are beautiful, but the book could've shown more of the carved cave surfaces and their location to provide context and atmosphere.

He is a pretty bad art historian

Amazing photos.

The caves at Ajanta span a thousand years of Buddhist art. Getting to the site requires a vehicle. You have hawkers trying to sell you genuine sculptures, and so on, recently made of course. Then you go through the gate, and a government licensed tour guide will offer his services. It's worth it. This place is incredible, and the book takes me back there. Well worth it, to me. Compare this to *The Mysteries of Angkor Wat* (Traveling Photographer), and other Buddhist temples, including Borobodur, as in *The World's Must-See Places: A Look Inside More Than 100 Magnificent Buildings and Monuments*. It's a lot smaller. But fascinating for all that.

The Ajanta caves can be considered among the wonders of the ancient world, both in terms of their artistic and their spiritual value, and this book captures the beauty and detail of the remarkable murals. If I were to make one criticism, it would be that it emphasizes the murals at the expense of largely neglecting the sculptures, which are magnificent in their own right. The book might better be titled, "Murals of the Ajanta Caves." I ordered it without seeing it first, and I was a little disappointed to see how few photographs were included of the sculptures. Nevertheless, the beautiful and clear photographs of the murals alone are worth the price of the book, and I'd certainly recommend it to anyone interested in the Ajanta caves, or in ancient Indian or Buddhist art.

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