

The Jaina Rock-Cut Caves at Aṅkai-Taṅkai

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In the ninth and tenth centuries CE. Ellora's Jaina monuments attracted devotees from neighbouring regions and served as an important ritual center for the site's local communities. In subsequent centuries, other Jaina rock-cut sites emerged and directly contributed to the development of Jaina art and practice in southern Maharashtra. In this article, I will examine a group of twelfth-century caves located at the village of Aṅkai in Maharashtra. While these Jaina monuments relate to Ellora in interesting ways, they also reveal significant changes in the tradition of rock-cut architecture and in Jaina iconography.

The Jaina excavations at Aṅkai are located approximately fifty miles west of Ellora. Though governed and protected by the Archaeological Survey of India, the site does not attract Jaina pilgrims or tourists, nor it is considered today to be an important Jaina *tīrtha*.¹ This being the case, the caves at Aṅkai have received only limited scholarly attention.² However, as we shall see, there are some compelling similarities between Aṅkai and Ellora. Also of interest is the impact that Aṅkai's excavations appear to have had on later renovations and additions at Ellora. Indeed, the visual ties between these sites seem to indicate a sustained form of artistic and devotional contact in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries C.E.

The ten Jaina caves at Aṅkai are carved mid-way up the mountain ridge that overlooks the village. Access to the caves is provided by a dirt path and by a stairwell that has been constructed to link the village to a late medieval fort that crowns the top of the ridge further west of the caves.³ The first eight caves, numbered from west to east, are excavated as a group along the southern face of the hill, while Caves 9 and 10 are located at a somewhat lower level. Two small cisterns are excavated next to Cave 1 while a larger water tank is situated in front of Cave 9.

The Digambara Jaina caves at Aṅkai vary in their state of preservation. A number of the caves exhibit extensive damage to their facades. This is particularly true for Caves 6 and 10 which are today reconstructed with masonry walls. Though damaged, the architectural components of Aṅkai's caves- which include a veranda main hall, and shrine-

can still be discerned and examined.⁴ In terms of the size of these excavations, their dimensions are quite similar to those of Ellora's side-wing excavations at the upper level of the Indra Sabhā complex.⁵ Most of the verandas at Aṅkai measure between seven and twelve feet deep while the main halls of the caves are twenty to twenty-five feet square. Caves 2 and 3 at Aṅkai are also carved with a small antechamber or vestibule that precedes the main shrine. As the majority of the caves at Ellora do not feature this architectural element, its inclusion at Aṅkai may be based on the growing importance of the antechamber in medieval structural Digambara temples.⁶

Indeed, it is the structural aspects emphasized in Aṅkai's cave-temples that differentiate them visually from Ellora's Jaina monuments. For example, the double-storied Cave 2 and the neighbouring Cave 3 (Pl. 3.1) are carved with a pierced-screen facade.⁷ The carving of these elements creates a new aesthetic for the Jaina cave-temple as it masks the cave's interior, making the monument appear more massive and structural in form. In fact, pierced screens can be found on the exteriors of some early medieval Jaina and Hindu structural temples further south at Bādāmī and Paṭṭadakala. Thus the artists at Aṅkai appear to have been using both the structural temple and rock-cut monument as their models for these excavations.

In addition, the caves at Aṅkai are carved with a sizable plinth that adds height to the facade of the monuments. In Cave 3, this plinth is carved with a series of alternating balusters and elephants, much like those forming the base of some of the lower-story caves of the Indra Sabhā complex at Ellora. Fragments of an elephant balustrade have also been found amongst the rubble at Aṅkai and these sculptures are currently placed in front of Cave 6. The elevation of Aṅkai's monuments is further emphasized through rock-cut stairs that head up to the entrance into each cave.

Although Aṅkai's veranda exhibit similar dimensions to those carved in some of the cave at Ellora, they nonetheless articulate space in a slightly different way. All of the verandas are closed off from the main hall of the temple. Rather than having a low railing that separates the veranda from the *maṇḍapa* (as seen in the majority of Ellora's Jaina caves) a solid wall is kept intact at Aṅkai to completely isolate these spaces. With this design, one cannot see into the main hall from the veranda. Moreover, access into the main hall is strictly controlled by a single entrance. At Aṅkai, much attention is lavished on the doorway leading into the *maṇḍapa* (Pl. 3.2). This can be seen in the number of *śākhās* that frame the entrance, as well as the elaborate *candraśālā* that precedes it. The amount of imagery that is carved on either side of the doorway, particularly a series of seated Jaina deities, is yet another feature that parallels structural temple design during this time period.



Pl. 3.1: Cave 3, Ankai, c. 12th century



Pl. 3.2: Entrance to Cave 1, Ankai

While the veranda is presented as a separate architectural unit, the main halls of Aṅkai's excavations are similar in layout to Ellora's Jaina monuments. Like the ninth-century caves, the space within the main hall at Aṅkai is articulated by two to four rock-cut pillars.⁸ The pillars at Aṅkai, however, are more slender in form than those at Ellora. Nonetheless, some of the caves feature pillars with the *pūrṇaghāṭa* motif that is used extensively at Ellora. Other motifs carved on the pillar shafts at Aṅkai include: twisting vines, a scroll pattern, a series of rosettes enclosed in a diamond shape, a *kīrtimukha*, multi-armed *yakṣīs* and/or a bell suspended by a chain.⁹ In addition, the pillars at Aṅkai are crowned by large figural brackets depicting *yakṣas* or *gaṇas*. While these are similar to the playful *yakṣas* as supporting the roof caves of Ellora's unfinished cave-temple 14, the figures at Aṅkai are multi-armed. Another element found at both sites is a large, open lotus carved on the ceiling.¹⁰

Carved in the center of the rear wall of Aṅkai's excavations is the shrine room (Pl. 3.3). Like the veranda, the shrine is demarcated as a separate architectural unit through both the antechamber (Cave 2 and 3) and the multiple *Śākhās* that surround the doorway. The *Śākhās*, and the heavy lintel seemingly supported by these elements, present the shrine as its own pavilion, much like the sanctums at Ellora. The dimensions of the shrine rooms at Aṅkai are similar to those at Ellora as well, typically measuring seven to twelve feet square. And, like the ninth-century C.E. monuments, Aṅkai's sanctums were designed to house an image of a Tīrthaṅkara.

Here is where the similarities end, however, as the shrines at Aṅkai do not contain an image of an enthroned Jina, but an empty rock-cut seat (Pl. 3.4). The base of the seat (still intact in Caves 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8) is two-tiered and measures approximately two feet in height. Most of the seats have only limited carved motifs and include a tall, oval backing that extends to the ceiling of the sanctum. The back of the seat, which is undecorated, may have served as framing device for a stone or metal Jina image that included an elaborate *parikara*. Indeed, the design of these stone seats suggests that Aṅkai's shrines originally housed loose sculptures.¹¹

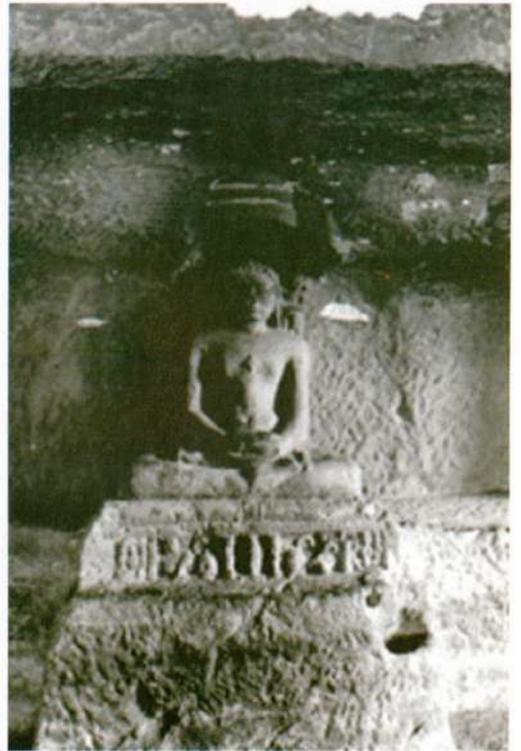
The decision to house loose Jina sculptures not only imitates artistic and devotional practices more commonly associated with structural temples, but it may also indicate the importance of the *abhiṣeka* at this site. According to medieval Digambara texts, the ritual lustration of the Jina image often involved a portable sculpture that could be moved from the shrine to the *abhiṣekaśālā*.¹² The employment of loose images in Aṅkai's shrines may be an adaptation for the particular ritual *abhiṣeka*. In fact, Viraj Shah notes the carving of water chutes along the sanctum floors in Cave 3 and 8.¹³ Indeed, water for the lustration of the Jina images could be collected from either the cisterns or the large tank in front of



Pl. 3.3: Interior of Cave 1 towards shrine



Pl. 3.4: Throne in the shrine of Cave 6



Pl. 3.5: Jina image on rear wall of Cave 5

Cave 9. In addition, the rock-cut seats in Cave 3 and 6 are carved in the center of the sanctum, thereby facilitating circumambulation - an important part of the *abhiṣeka* ritual and medieval Digambara *pūjā* in general.

Although there are no shrine Jina images in situ to compare with Ellora's Jaina monuments, there are carvings of Jinās in the verandas and main halls, not to mention some loose sculptures currently housed in Cave 3 at Aṅkai. As will be demonstrated below, these Jina sculptures exhibit some unique iconographical features. Though these images reveal significant differences in comparison to Ellora's ninth and tenth-century C.E. Tirthaṅkaras, interestingly they have a great deal in common with some of the later images (c. twelfth and thirteenth century C.E.) carved at Ellora.

Carving the Jina at Aṅkai

Although Aṅkai's shrines remain empty, we can examine other carvings of Jinās at the site in order to see how the Tirthaṅkara is presented. There are a total of six Jina reliefs still in situ at Aṅkai : two in Cave 3 and four in Cave 5. There are also fragments of stone sculptures stored inside Cave 3. In addition, three sculptures from the site are currently housed at the Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya in Mumbai (formerly the Prince of Wales Museum). I will start my examination with Cave 5 as this excavation not only has the largest number of Jina images but it also has the only image of Gommaṭeśvara (Bāhubalī) at the site.

On the back wall of the veranda, flanking the entrance into Cave 5, is a relief of the Jaina figure Gommaṭeśvara and an unidentified standing Jina. The image of Gommaṭeśvara is carved to the left of the doorway and measures just over five feet in height. Though damaged, the vines that entwine the legs of the figure are still visible, as are the flanking females who assist in removing the creepers. Small seated devotees, a male and a female, are carved in the lower corners of the relief. Just above these figures are shallow carvings of animals. Unlike the sculptures of Gommaṭeśvara at Aīhole, Bādāmī, Ellora, Hallūr and Śravaṇabelgola, the animals represented in Aṅkai's relief do not include the standard cobra emerging out of an anthill.¹⁴ Instead, we find a water buffalo (on the right) and a carving of a cobra and mongoose (on the left). Though mortal enemies in nature, the cobra and mongoose are brought together here in peace to witness Gommaṭeśvara's attainment of *kevalajñāna*. Thus, rather than following earlier visual models, the artists at Aṅkai seem to present their own version or knowledge of this narrative which included these specific animals. In fact, another relief, featuring a monkey in adoration of a Jina, is carved to the left of the Gommaṭeśvara image. The scene presented here is not recorded in any textual or visual sources that I am aware of and thus may relate to another local legend or story.

Carved on the right side of the doorway and thus visually paired with Gommaṭeśvara is a standing Jina. Though not identifiable as Pārśvanātha, the inclusion of a Tīrthaṅkara seemingly paired with Gommaṭeśvara has some resonance with the layout of Imagery at Ellora and Hallūr. The Jina is of the same height as Gommaṭeśvara and is carved in a similar rectangular recessed niche. Moreover, both figures have two small devotees carved in the lower corners.

In addition to these reliefs, the main hall of Cave 5 contains two seated Jinas. One of the sculptures is carved on the left wall while the other is located in the center of the rear wall. As this excavation lacks a sanctum, it can be assumed that the latter Jina served as the main image for worship. The Jina is seated on a lion-throne that features *dharmacakra* rendered in profile in the centre of the throne base (Pl. 3.5). At either end of the base are the Jina's *śāsanadevatās*. Given the condition of the sculpture, it is difficult to identify the deities, however, the female figure appears to hold a club and an elephant goad. In contrast to Jina reliefs at Ellora, at Aṅkai we see a greater interest in presenting the enthroned Jina with his specific attendant deities.

Out of the six Jina reliefs at Aṅkai, only two can be identified with some certainty: the Jina Pārśvanātha and the Jina Śāntinātha. Both are carved flanking the antechamber of Cave 3. The relief of Pārśvanātha, on the right side of the antechamber, depicts the Jina with his serpent canopy. Padmāvatī stands to his proper right. Similar to some of the Pārśvanātha reliefs at Ellora, this carving seems to present an abbreviated form of the demonic attack on this Jina. Carved above Pārśvanātha's head are two figures that hold their arms up towards the ceiling. Their open palms support oblong-shaped boulders that they intend to throw at the meditating Jina. Carved in the lower right corner of the panel is an elaborately ornamented male figure who makes a gesture of homage. The inclusion of a solitary male, rather than a royal couple (as at Ellora), follows the artistic convention of Pārśvanātha reliefs found in the Jaina caves at Aīhole and Bādāmī.

On the left side of the antechamber in Cave 3 is a richly carved image of the Jina Śāntinātha. Stylistically, it appears to have been carved sometime after the relief of Pārśvanātha, perhaps in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century C.E. Its identification as the sixteenth Jina is based solely on the small deer (or antelope) carved in the center of the Jina's pedestal. However, carved above the deer is a *dharmacakra*, an element that is often combined with the deer on a number of post-Gupta-period Jina images. Thus, this motif may not necessarily serve as the Jina's *lāñchana*. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that a tenth-century inscribed image of Śāntinātha is found at Ellora. These two sculptures may reflect an emerging regional interest in this particular Jina.

Adding to the complexities of the iconography of Aṅkai's Jina images is the curious fact that all the Tīrthaṅkaras are depicted with snail-shell curls that culminate in long strands of hair upon their shoulders. This attribute- which generally designates images of the first Jina Ṛṣabhnaṅtha and the figure of Gommaṭeśvara - is even found on the site's Pārśvanātha and Śāntinātha sculptures. The image currently housed in the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai also demonstrate this peculiarity. This is quite interesting as the museum pieces are stone *Tritīrthikas* sculptures that depict a central Jina flanked by two Tīrthaṅkaras. As it is highly unlikely that those sculptures represent three Ṛṣabhnaṅthas, the attribute of long hair must simply be understood as a standard element for all Jinas produced at this site.

Another interesting features of Aṅkai's Jina images is the reduced role of *cāmaradharas* and other attendant figures. For example, in the main image of Cave 5, the fly-whisk attendants are reduced to small figures that appear above the shoulders of the enthroned Tīrthaṅkara. This presentation contrasts greatly to Ellora's Jina images which are typically flanked by a number of attendants and flying figures. In fact, the majority of Jinas at Aṅkai, including the loose sculptures, depict a central Jina flanked by other Tīrthaṅkaras. For example, in Cave 3, the image of Śāntinātha has two *cāmaradharas* by his feet but is also presented with two larger flanking Pārśvanāthas. The relief on the left wall of Cave 5 depicts an enthroned Jina flanked by and unidentifiable standing and seated Tīrthaṅkara.¹⁵

Of significance, the main image carved on the rear wall of Cave 5 (Pl. 3.5) may have originally been presented in a similar fashion. A long rock-cut shelf, or altar, extends across the entire back wall of the cave at the height of the image. Thus it is possible that loose sculpture of the Jina were set up here next to the main *mūrti*. Fragments of standing and seated Jinas are stored in Cave 3 and given their size, they would easily fit upon this rock-cut altar. Thus the original presentation of this rock-cut image may have shown the Jina as being flanked by other Tīrthaṅkaras.

In addition to the *tritīrthika* presentation of the Jina, another interesting feature that is found on three of Aṅkai's Jina images is a pair of elephants that are carved above the triple *chatra*.¹⁶ Each elephant holds a water vessel in its trunk and is in the process of pouring its contents over the head of the Jina. While such imagery can be found on early Hindu sculptures (particularly those of Gaja-Lakṣmī), this motif and its obvious reference to the *abhīṣeka* is not commonly found on Jina images until the late tenth or eleventh century. Elephants with vessels - or simply holding up their trunks in veneration of the Jina - seem to have been a popular element on Tīrthaṅkara images from northern Digambara sites such as Deogarh and Khajuraho. Of significance, this motif does not seem to be as popular in medieval images produced in southern India.

Another element that is typically associated with northern Digambara imagery is the inclusion of *śrīvatsa* on the chest of all of Aṅkai's Jinas. The *śrīvatsa* is carved in the shape of a diamond just as those found adorning Jina images from Deogarh and Khajuraho. The inclusion of this auspicious symbol is quite surprising at Aṅkai, as it is rarely found on images produced in the Deccan or further south.¹⁷ Thus it appears that northern artistic traditions also played an important part in the creation of this site. Contact with Digambara sites further north may explain the interest in *tritīrthikas* at Aṅkai as this type of imagery can be found along the outer walls of Deogarh temples 15, 16 and 24A and in loose sculptures at Khajuraho.¹⁸ In addition, contact with these sites may help to explain the long hair found on Aṅkai's Jinas, as Ṛṣabhnaṅtha was the most popular Jina carved at Deogarh and Khajuraho.¹⁹ A final bit of evidence that also supports artistic and devotional interactions with northern Digambara sites is the seated posture of Aṅkai's Jinas. Rather than being presented in *ardhapadmāsana* seen in Ellora's Jinas and in other images produced in the Deccan, the Tīrthaṅkaras at Aṅkai are in strict *padmāsana* with the soles of both feet exposed on the top of the thighs. This is also the seated posture for Jinas at Deogarh and Khajuraho.

The evidence of both northern and southern artistic interactions at Aṅkai highlights the unique position of this site at the geographical crossroads of Digambara devotional activity. Lay pilgrims coming from the north, perhaps initially coming to Ellora, may have also stopped at Aṅkai and then proceeded south to Śravaṇabelgola. This contact, fueled by pilgrimage practices, has also left its mark at Ellora. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries C.E. a new series of excavations were carved to the northeast of the main complex while some of the sites' (ninth and tenth-century C.E.) caves received new coats of plaster and paint.

At the outset of this renewed period of artistic and devotional activity, a few rock-cut residential cells were created to permanently house important members of Ellora's monastic community. Carved to the east of the Indra Sabhā complex is a series of five residential cells. The cells are joined together by a small entrance area, with two cells aligned along the left wall and three across the back. The dimensions of the excavated cells slightly differ, with the smallest measuring approximately five feet square. The largest space, located in the cell to the far right, measures thirteen feet across at its widest point. All of the cells are roughly carved out and their walls do not contain any traces of plaster or pigment. Nonetheless, carved within these cells are a total of seven Jina images. Four of the reliefs are *tritīrthikas* and the largest one features the elephant-*abhīṣeka* above the central Jina. In addition, some of the Jinas are carved with diamond-shaped *śrīvatsa* on their chests, and if depicted seated, the Tīrthaṅkara is represented in *padmāsana*. As Ellora's

ninth and tenth-century C.E. Jinas are not carved with these features, the images in the site's residential cells may have been carved by artists who were working at nearby Añkai. The artistic activity lavished on Ellora during the twelfth and thirteenth century C.E. not only indicates a strong Jaina presence at this well-known site, but at Añkai-Tañkai as well. Indeed, it appears that both sites fully participated in solidifying their positions as active medieval Digambara *tīrthas* on the crossroads between northern and southern Jaina places of pilgrimage.

Footnotes

1. For example, the caves at Añkai are not included in the section on Jaina sites in Maharashtra Kurt Titze, et. al., *Jainism; A Pictorial Guide to the Religion of Non-Violence*, Delhi, 1998. In addition, Cave 2 at Añkai now serves as a Hindu place of worship.
2. Although the cave at Añkai have not been featured in a monograph, they have been examined in detail by Viraj Shah, (*Jaina Rock-Cut Caves in Western India*, Delhi, 2008, pp. 166-193). To date, this is the most comprehensive work conducted on Añkai and on Jaina rock-cut architecture in Maharashtra.
3. Suggestions for restoring the stairwell at Añkai are recorded in the *Progress Report of the Archaeological Survey of India, Western Circle*, Bombay, Government Central Press, 1920, 51.
4. The only exception is Cave 5, which does not have a sanctum.
5. According to Jose Pereria's numbering system these are J19 and J20 at Ellora. See his book *Monolithic Jinas; The Iconography of the Jaina Temples of Ellora*, Delhi, 1977.
6. However, the association between the antechamber and the structural temple may also be seen at Ellora as the monolithic Choṭā Kailāśa has a substantial antechamber.
7. Cave 7 may have also exhibited this element, though it is too damaged to be certain.
8. See for example the plans of Ellora's J10, J19, J20, J24, J25 and J26, Pereira, 1977.
9. The latter motif is a common feature found on pillars and pilasters of Digambar temples dating 10th to 12th centuries C.E. striking example of the bell motif can be found in the remains of the Ghantai temple at Khajuraho.
10. At Añkai, the lotus is found in Caves 1, 2 and 3.
11. It is also important to note that the seats do not exhibit any type of damage, so it seems unlikely that images originally carved with the seats have been subsequently cut out. The employment of loose images is also mentioned in the early accounts of Añkai. According to Dr. Gibson, the shrine image of Cave 3 was displaced from its throne. See his account in John Wilson, "Memoir of the Cave-Temples and Monasteries, and the Ancient Buddhist, Brahmanical, and Jaina Remains of Western India," *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3, pt. 2, 1850, 70. Fergusson and Burgess, *The Cave Temples of India*, London; W.H.Allen, 1880; reprint New Delhi, 2000, pp. 507-8.
12. For a detailed examination of this ritual and its description in medieval Digambara sources, see Lisa N, Owen, "Absence and Presence: Worshipping the Jina at Ellora," Himanshu Prabha Ray, ed., *Archaeology and Text: The Temple in South Asia*, New Delhi, 2010, pp. 96-123.

13. Viraj Shah, *Jaina Rock-Cut Caves in Western India*, pp. 177 and 188.
14. Cobras slinking out of anthills at Gommateśvara's feet are described in Jinasena's *Ādipurāṇa* 36.107-109. A few of Ellora's Gommateśvara images include other animals too, such as deer antelope. M.N.P. Tiwari, "Images of Bāhubalī in Ellora," Ratan Rarimoo, ed., *Ellora Caves, Sculptures and Architecture*, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 335-44.
15. The attendant Jinas are carved only on the right side of the central image as the left side is unfinished.
16. This is found above the image of Śāntinātha in Cave 3 and on two of the steles from the Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai.
17. Moreover, the few southern images that have *śrīvatsas* typically exhibit them on their proper right pectoral area, not centred on their chests. For illustrations, see Pratapaditya Pal, ed., *The Peaceful Liberators: Jaina Art from India*, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1994, 156, cat. no. 43; and C. Sivaramamurti, *Panorama of Jaina Art: South India*, New Delhi, 1983, p. 21, Pls. 14 and 16.
18. Klaus Bruhn, *The Jina Images of Deograh*, Leiden; E.J. Brill, 1969, pp. 97-8, 156-8, 167-8; M.N.P. Tiwari, *Khajurāho kā Jaina Purātattva*, Khajuraho: Sāhū Śānti Prasād Jaina Kalā Sangrahalaya, 1987, plates 26 and 41. The sites also feature *dvitīrthikas*.
19. M.N.P. Tiwari, *Elements of Jaina Iconography*, Varanasi, 1983, p. 33 and n.2. At Deogarh, early medieval images of this Tīrthānkara have lateral strands of hair but lack the bull *lāñchana*, just as at Ankai.