

Buddhist Monasteries and land grants in Western India

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Abstract: During the reign of Mauryan Emperor Ashoka, particularly after Pataliputra council, Buddhism spread extensively in India. Spread of Buddhism in western India resulted into the evolution of rock cut architecture. From about the first century B.C. we begin to get archaeological evidence in the form Buddhist caves. Distribution and location of rock cut caves in this region give us an idea of spread of Buddhist communities along the ancient trade routes. The monasteries were established at Karle, Nasik, Junnar, Kuda, Kanheri and many other places between 1st century B.C. and 2nd Century C.E. Buddhist cave architecture in India grew in response to certain specific needs of the Buddhist Sangha. The needs were two fold, residential and devotional. The epigraphic data throws a welcome light on the fact that activity of creating rock cut monuments in western India received a generous patronage for which the rulers and people from all walks of life came forward. The donations or the gifts varied in nature. At the beginning, food, clothing etc. were the important items of dana (donation) to the Buddhist monks. Donations were made for the creation of the monuments or its part such as Viharas (Cave dwelling), Stupas (the Place of worship), Chaityagrihas, (the Prayer hall) etc. Later on among the items of donation, land and even money became very significant. This was for maintenance of the monastic community. The present paper aims at focusing on Buddhist monasteries in Western Indian caves, patterns of donation in general and the land grants in particular. This is based on epigraphic data of the region during the early centuries of the Christian era.