

# Ancient Indian Art Until 300 CE

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

The Chaitya Hall at Karle, India, is one of the oldest examples of Buddhist architecture. In this lesson, you will explore:

1. **Period and Location: Chaitya Hall at Karle**
2. **Stylistic and Architectural Elements of the Chaitya Hall**
3. **Examples of Stylistic and Architectural Elements**

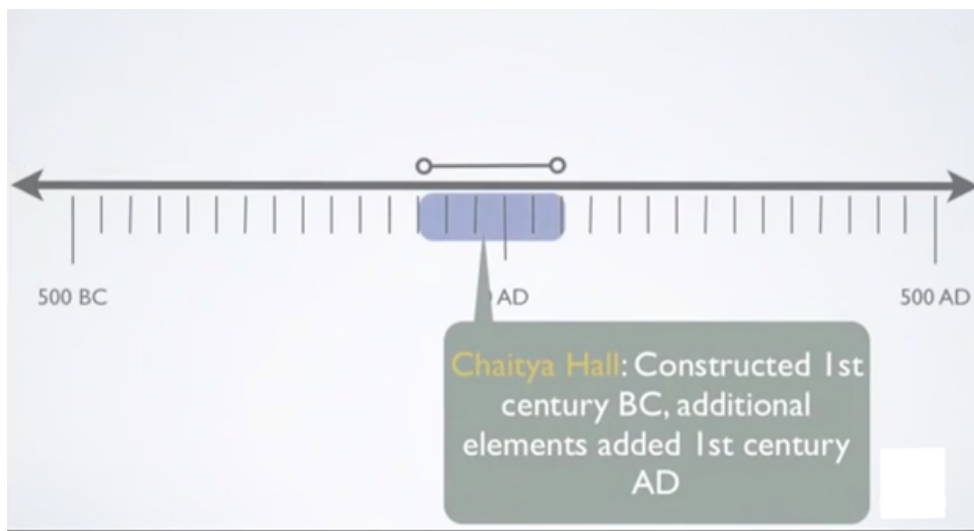


## BIG IDEA

The chaitya hall is a type of prayer hall in a Buddhist or Jain shrine. Originally, chaityas were colonnaded structures built around a stupa with the purpose of housing a large number of followers. They also echoed the form of domestic architecture in the area. While the earliest chaityas were built out of wood and no longer exist, eventually it became more commonplace to carve them out of living rock. This means that the hall is carved directly into rock where it stands, instead of quarrying it and moving the stones to a new location. Hundreds of Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain shrines in India have been made using this technique.

## 1. Period and Location: Chaitya Hall at Karle

Construction on the Chaitya Hall at Karle began in the 1st century BCE, but elements were added in the 1st century CE. Karle, India, is near Sanchi, India, where the Great Stupa is. This area is near the west coast of India and the Indian Ocean. At this location are a number of caves that once housed Buddhist monks.



Sanchi, India, and the Great Stupa were explored in previous lessons.

## 2. Stylistic and Architectural Elements of the Chaitya Hall

The **Chaitya Hall** at Karle incorporates stylistic elements from the Gandhara period in India. This style is called the **Gandhara style**, and it demonstrated a blending of Greek and Indian styles.

The chaitya hall consists of a stupa at one end of a long hallway, or nave, that has a colonnade, or row of columns, on either side. At the top of the colonnade is a series of rounded arches. These elements resemble Roman columns and rounded arches.

Buddhists spread their religion along the Silk Road, which was a series of trade routes that extended from China to Europe. Buddhist temples and shrines were often located along trade routes, where monks would offer food and shelter to travelers passing through.

The spread of the Greek Empire during the reign of Alexander the Great went as far as the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent. Because of this expansion, an exchange of cultural ideas is apparent in the architecture of the chaitya hall, particularly in the stone columns that line the central hall.



The other interesting architectural element is the use of rounded arches. These arches were made of wood rather than stone. Some chaityas include carved wood elements, while others feature carved stone decorations that imitate wood. The overall design of chaityas somewhat resembles Christian churches, with a long, central hallway, or nave, that seems to have been used for processions. However, the chaityas predate Christianity, so this similarity is coincidental.



**Chaitya Hall**

A prayer hall in a Buddhist or Jain shrine.

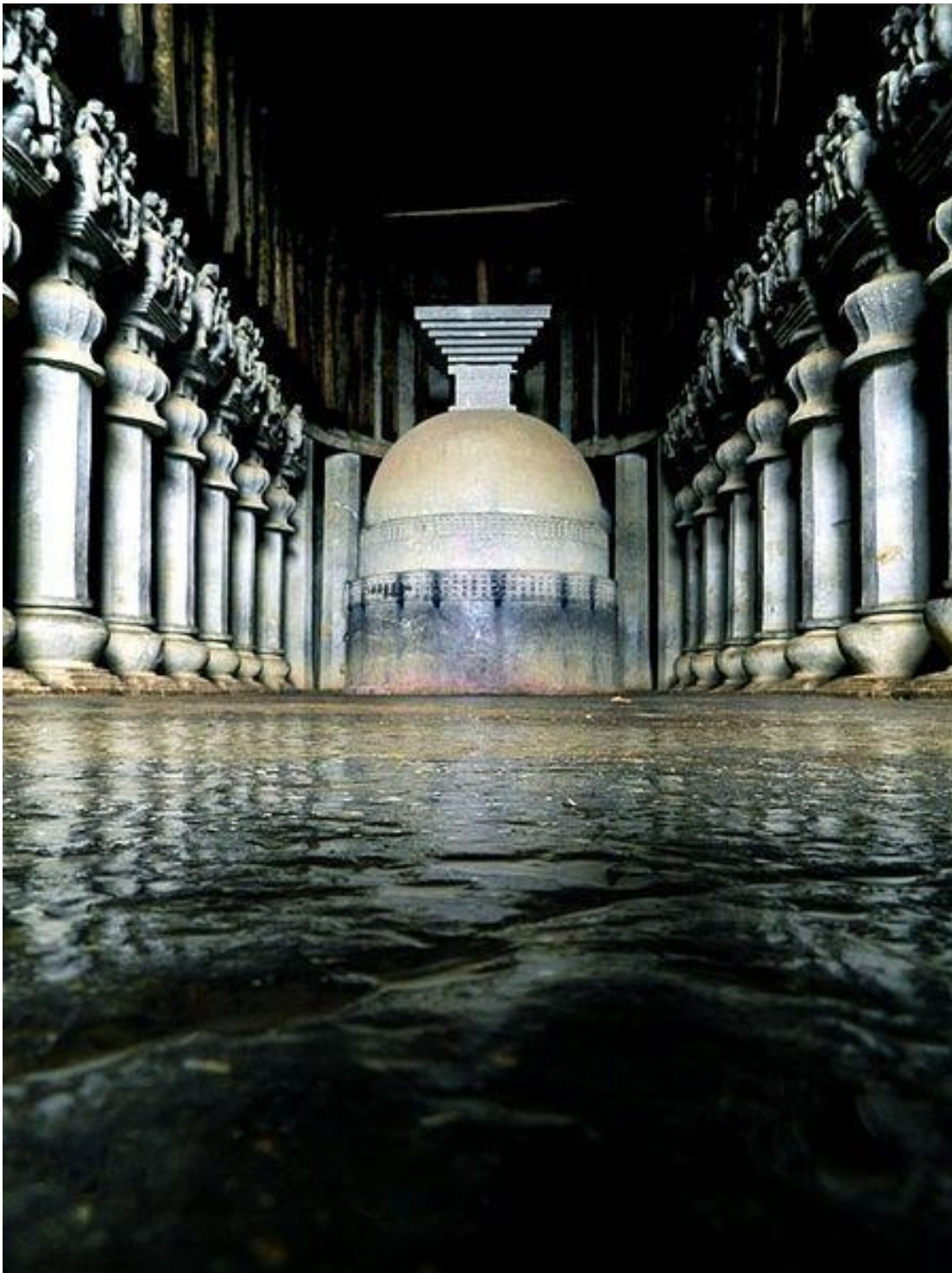
**Gandhara Style**

Stucco or stone sculptures; a style of Buddhist art that showed Greek and Indian influences.

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## 3. Examples of Stylistic and Architectural Elements

Take a look at the image below. Notice the repetition of form in the columns and consider how it might function as an aid to meditation.



Chaitya Hall in Karle caves

The next image shows such stylistic and architectural characteristics as:

- The wooden, rounded arches
- The Greco-Roman-style stone column
- The stone stupa (characteristic of a Buddhist shrine)



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the **period and location of the Chaitya Hall at Karle, India**. The Chaitya Hall at Karle, India, is one of the oldest and largest examples of Buddhist architecture carved out of living rock. Chaityas provided a space where Buddhists could show their devotion and were located along trade routes where monks would assist travelers and spread their beliefs. You explored the **stylistic and architectural elements of the chaitya hall**, such as the colonnade on either side of the long, central hallway, or nave, the use of rounded arches, and the presence of a stupa, followed by several other **examples of these stylistic and architectural elements**.

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## TERMS TO KNOW

### Chaitya Hall

A prayer hall in a Buddhist or Jain shrine.

### Gandhara Style

Stucco or stone sculptures, a style of Buddhist art that showed Greek and Indian influences.