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## Unfinished Works

History leaves works of art untouched after certain periods of time, but historians decide the question of whether the work was finished. There are multiple methodologies to answer this question. Spink embraces historical events to analyze progress while Parker believes the work of art itself should be telling of completion. The differences between the sites of Ajanta and Mamallapuram illuminate why these varied approaches may be required in varied circumstances.

The Ajanta caves are a particular phenomenon because of the piecemeal approach by which they were created. Spink draws connections between political events and the cave carving to generate “levels” that signify progress. The change in power between feudatories like the Asmakas altered the focuses in development of the cave. Spink mostly avoids the question of whether or not the caves were finished by positing no finished/unfinished dichotomy for the caves. He instead examines the patronage changes the site endures. Parker is critical of a “binary” view of completion but states “This general approach [of examining patronage] has been widely taken to be the most practical or reasonable by scholarly disciplines operating through Western conceptions of history. And this has proven to be a productive and compelling approach that I do not disparage” (Parker 53). Thus, Parker’s alternative is not mutually exclusive with Spink’s but provides a different lens for interpreting history.

Mamallapuram is an ideal site for Parker to survey because the sculptures are fragmented with what appears to be incompleteness. Mamallapuram, unlike Ajanta, is a Hindu site. This juxtaposition is important because Parker undertakes

his mission to be an ontological unearthing of the figures at Mamallapuram. The biggest conflict between Hindu and Buddhist philosophies may be that of their differing ontological theories. Thus, it should be expected, under Parker's view, that the meaning and completion of sculptures in Ajanta is entirely different from those in Mamallapuram. Parker believes the Hindu concept of deity is important for understanding why sculptures are abandoned: "the living presence of the deity that has been ritually invited to reside in the temple and its images [is the focus]. [...]" When it is abandoned by the deity, the material form of a Hindu icon is liable to be publicly treated as an inauspicious corpse" (Parker 73). Thus, completion is almost a delirious concept for Hindu temples because the question relies upon presence of a sacred space. Once that space is no longer sacred, the corpse may be destroyed without guilt. This is different from the way Buddhism is worshipped during the Harisena reign in Ajanta. Spink writes of how whenever war was on the Horizon, Buddha images were pushed to completion. If Parker were to analyze the Ajanta caves, perhaps he would have to consider historical events in order to form a framework to understand the ontological precedence of the Buddha image.

Spink and Parker use drastically different methods to theorize on the history of Ajanta and Mamallapuram, but these methods are not entirely desperate. Neither of them generalizes a binary finished/unfinished view of the sites. Spinks finds a gradient of production across "levels" that is informed by the events of an era. Parker uses cultural epistemology to understand the thoughts of an era. At the end of the day, one could create a richer analysis of both sites by combining these two methods.