

A

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE GUIDE

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TO THE

ROCK-CUT CAVES OF ELEPHANTA

GHARIPURI—BOMBAY.



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SUPERINTENDENT OF CAVES.



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Preface.

FEW visitors to Bombay, possessed of any curiosity or liking for antiquities, neglect the opportunity of seeing the famous Hindu rock-cut temple of Elephanta. But on entering it, the stranger not conversant with Hindu mythology feels the want of some guide to explain the meaning of those gigantic and monstrous mutilated statues with their surrounding sculptures that fill the various compartments of the walls. They have been several times described, but these accounts are not generally known or accessible, and as the want of a separate and condensed description would undoubtedly be a great desideratum to the visitors, I have studied the different works on the subject, chiefly "Fergusson and Burgess Caves of Western India," "Burgess' Rock Temples of Elephanta," and "Places of Interest Bombay Gazetteer, Thana" and have extracted from these works all that I think will interest a casual visitor, in most cases quoting verbatim, more so in the case of the Great Cave, where it would be impossible to curtail without detriment to the lucid and minute description of each and every figure.

Many tourists visiting these caves remark on the resemblance to the Egyptian style of sculpture, specially in the case of the right hand Doorkeeper at the south door of the Linga Chapel, where the similiarity is distinctly perceptible from the waist upwards. One gentleman in particular to manifest the possibility of the Egyptian workmanship, illustrated how he had found the Lotus flower (which is *purely* an Indian flower) carved on several sculptures in Egypt, and as these are known to be

over 5,000 years in existence, it can be regarded as evidence sufficient to establish the fact of the Egyptians having visited India before that period to have been able to obtain this flower. If the carving was not done by them exactly at, or about that period, their services may have been utilized at some subsequent date, and this possibility may strengthen the greater antiquity of the caves, bringing us nearer the native theory of the 4,000 years (page 12.)

From what I have been able to gather from the several works I have studied, and with all due respect to the theories recorded, I am fully of opinion that the caves are of greater antiquity than the eighth or ninth century as stated, and for one reason in particular; the Indian Ambassadors visit to Bardisanes the Mesopotamian, in the reign of Antoninus of Emesa (Elagabalus) about 220 A. D. described under the heading of Antiquity (page 12.) If the ambassadors' description of the half-man and half-woman image can be accepted as referring to the Elephanta Caves, and in reference to which Dr. Burgess says . . . "*particulars that could only refer to something very like what is actually found here,*" then there is every possibility they may have been in existence even before 220 A.D. Further, to strengthen this theory, we have on record that on the top of the East Hill at the North corner there is a small dome-like knob the remains of a Buddhist burial mound, *authenticated as of the 3rd Century*, proving beyond dispute that the Island was inhabited at that time. With the Buddhists there must have been Hindus, and it is quite possible these Hindus may have built, and worshipped in the Caves even at this time or previous. Against the foregoing, we have but the theories of the similarity of Architectural designs exist-

ing between this Cave and other authenticated Caves putting aside the feasibility of Elephanta being the Original, and others copies only.

Then, as we have nothing but theories before us, I maintain one theory is as good as another, and I am fully convinced the antiquity of the Elephanta Caves are more nearer the 2nd or 3rd Century than the 8th or 9th.

I notice that in all the Accounts of the Caves there is not a single allusion to the destruction of the Palaces and City that is said to have been on this island from about the third to the Tenth Century (page 14). How they disappeared or became demolished is a riddle that evidently no one could solve, but that they did exist is evidenced by the Brick Masonry discovered in excavations at the present day, and the depths at which these are found would lead us to the supposition that the whole place must have at some time been the scene of an Earthquake, the Caves escaping destruction by some miraculous power.

I wish to record my indebtedness to the Bombay Branch Royal Asiatic Society for the great assistance they gave me in lending the works from which I have been able to compile this book, also my best thanks are due to Dr. R. G. Bhandarkar Ph. D. for the information he kindly gave me with reference to the same.

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THE COMPILER.

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