

RESEARCH PAPER

Recently Noticed Inscription from Lohagadwadi (Fort Lohagad), District Pune, Maharashtra, India

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In 1969 an early Jaina inscription was discovered from Pale cave, Taluka Mawal, District Pune, Maharashtra, by H.D. Sankalia and Shobhana Gokhale, Pune (1971: 67–69). It was an important discovery of an early Jaina inscription in western India. While studying the Pale inscription, both the authors had cited that “There must be many more such inscriptions, which need to be discovered.”

Recently an inscription is noticed in one of the small rock-cut excavations group in fort Lohagad, Lohagadwadi by a group of trekking and exploration enthusiasts. While observing this inscription, it proposes some early characteristics of Brāhmī script. It is significant to mention that the Lohagadwadi inscription starts with ‘*Namo arahantānaṃ*’ and the donor’s name Idarakhita. Interestingly, the inscription shows close affinity to the Pale cave inscription and proposes to be an important early inscription of Jainism in Maharashtra by the same donor mentioned in the Pale inscription. Probably, a small cave complex of Lohagadwadi, as primarily described in this article, dates back to the early rock-cut activity of Jainism in Maharashtra.

Introduction

The well-known medieval fort of Lohagad is located approximately 25 km south of Pale Cave. An early Brāhmī inscription related to Jainism was reported from Pale Cave in 70s of the last century (Sankalia and Gokhale 1971: 167–68). The fort has close vicinity to the famous early Buddhist caves of Bhaje and late medieval fort ‘Visapur’. Visapur fort is situated apposite to the fort Lohagad; in the result the pass is formed in between the two forts, known as ‘*Gaimukhkhind*’. Notably, six Brāhmī inscriptions from the fort of Visapur were discovered. These inscriptions date back to the first half of the second century CE. The inscriptions record the gift of water cisterns and mention the regional year of Vasisthiputra Pulumāvi the Sātavāhana king, and his minister Kosikiputra Vinhudata (IAR 1984–85: 134) (Figure 1).

The triangular shaped fort of Lohagad is naturally adorned with three-sided high rock cliffs. These cliffs made the fort very difficult to climb and to conquer. However, there are three lesser known groups of rock-cut excavations, located on the top of the fort, the rock precipice of eastern and the northern precipices respectively. Among these, the eastern side group is of special interest. It consists of seven excavations which include rock-cut niches, cells, halls with cells and benches and water cisterns in a group. Other two excavations are also noticed in the same

eastern precipice, though both are located a little distance from the above-mentioned excavations. Earlier, Burgess observed few rock-cut excavations at the fort Lohagad, in Mawal Taluka of Bombay Presidency. Particularly, Burgess mentioned numerous water cisterns (1885: 98, 99). Most of the rock-cut excavations of Lohagad show a number of large and small water cisterns, on the top, and eastern and northern precipices of the fort. Interestingly, the eastern and northern groups of excavations are mostly dominated by rock-cut water cisterns, which is significant.

The eastern precipice of Lohagad has the only constructed step way that leads to the upper fort. The steep wall like crag and manifold fortification, essential gateways to the fort, made it more defensive. While at the base and ingress steps, one can notice a few broken steps carved in the sloping side of the cliff rock. Following these carved steps further north, one can see a number of rock-cut excavations hidden in the trees and thickets of the forest. These isolated excavations form a small group of seven rock-cut excavations. The caves are horizontally placed in three different levels i.e. lower, middle and upper. The upper most caves are carved in about 9 m higher in the crag, though they are inaccessible to visit because of the fragmented pathway. Presently, this whole group cannot be easily approachable. The said group is located in the close vicinity to Lohagadwadi, a small hamlet of fort Lohagad; hereafter the group shall be termed as “Lohagadwadi caves” (Figure 2).

The lesser known and minor group of Lohagadwadi caves is not adorned with any special architectural or visual representation or art that might directly indicate affiliation to any religion or faith, except newly noticed donative inscription on one of the water cisterns, i.e. *podhi*.

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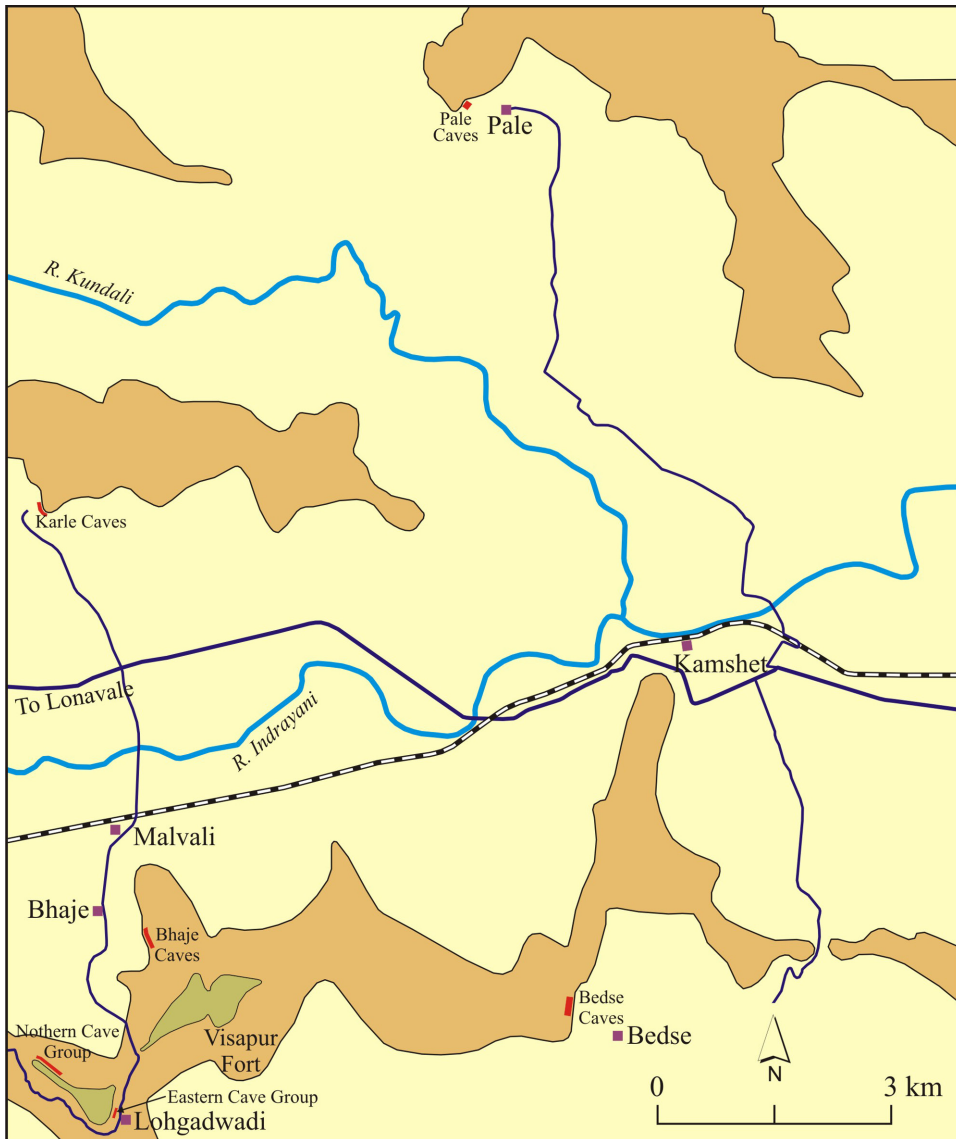


Figure 1: Pale and Lohagadwadi caves, Lohagad and Visapur fort, location.

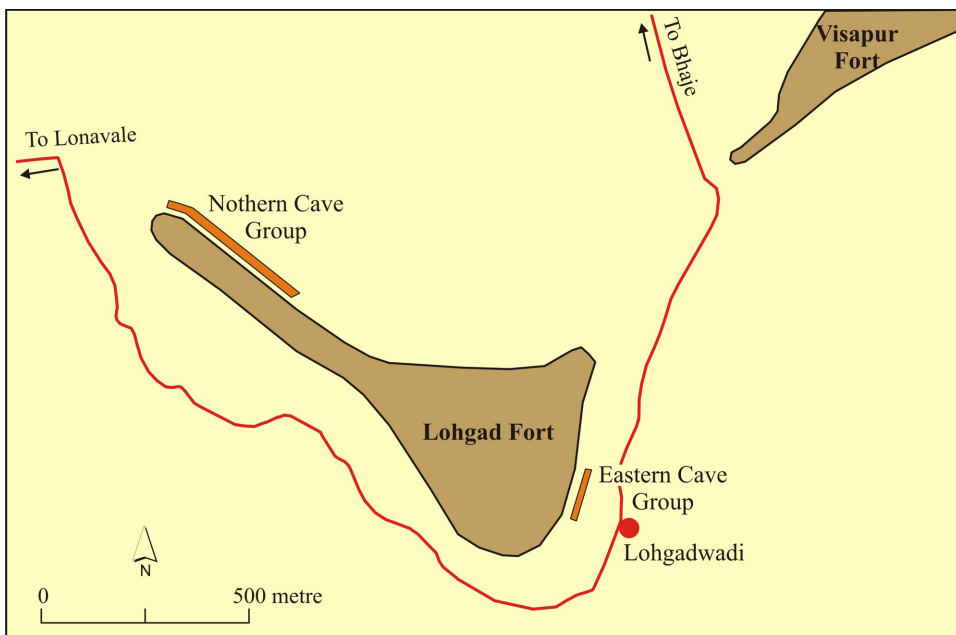


Figure 2: Lohagadwadi eastern and Lohagad fort northern cave groups.

Recently another inscription is noticed in the nearby region of Pale cave. The inscription is noticed in one of the small rock-cut excavations group in fort, Lohagadwadi. A group of trekking and exploration enthusiasts including Mr. Vivek Kale, Saiprakash Belasare, Ninad Bartakke, Amey Joshi, Abhinav Kurkute and Ajay Dhamdhare reported few lesser known caves in the stiff rock cliff of famous medieval fort of Lohagad, in Mawal Taluka, Pune District of Maharashtra. During their visit, they noticed a Brāhmī inscription on the façade of a small rock-cut excavation. These heritage enthusiasts later on communicated with the first author for its detailed study. Thus, we have come to know about the unpublished inscription from Lohagadwadi Cave.

To understand the rock-cut excavations of the group and to comprehend the newly noticed inscription in this group, the individual excavations are briefly described.

Lohagadwadi cave group

As mentioned earlier seven rock-cut excavations form the Lohagadwadi eastern group of caves. The group consists of two separate excavations of small caves with verandah, halls, cells and benches, i.e. *āsanapeḍhikā*. Other five excavations are of cell, recess, large water cisterns i.e. *poḍhis* and one different type of architectural excavation, probably reused water cistern. All these caves are located in three different levels placed one above other, as lowermost cave, middle and upper caves. The first excavation in the group is on ground level i.e. lowermost cave. The middle level caves comprise minor excavations or recess, cistern and large *poḍhis*. Among these large *poḍhis*, one *poḍhi* is inscribed. All these rock-cut excavations are located in the middle level of the group. Finally, the small cave is located to the southern end on the top of all caves, is in the upper level of the group.

All these caves are briefly described below. The cave numbers given below are attributed by the authors to describe each excavation, caves and finally the location of the newly noticed inscription in the group (**Figure 3**).

Cave no. 1

A small *leṇa*-type cave consists of halls and adjoining cells. The cave faces to the east. The right-side cell of the large hall has two doorways, one opening to the outer side in verandah? (the front portion of this cave is collapsed; hence it is difficult to identify as hall or verandah) and another one, opening to the inner hall or central main hall. Interestingly this cell has two narrow benches or *āsanapeḍhikā*. These benches are cut along the side walls, flanking to the doorway, which is an opening to its central hall. The other cell of the cave is in the back side of the central hall. It is a simple cell without any unusual architectural element. However, the central hall is divided into two parts by constructing a masonry stone wall. This stone wall indicates the re-use of this cave in the medieval period. A separately attached horizontal water cistern like excavation is another feature to this cave. It is adjoining to the central hall, located to the immediate left side to the main cave. It has a single doorway, opening to its verandah or a front hall. This cell like cave has small sockets carved at equal distance in a row, in its back and right-side wall. This row of sockets is close and parallel to the ceiling of the cave. These sockets were probably used for timber work. The 2 m deep excavated floor of this cave, makes it as if it is a large water cistern; perhaps this cave was re-excavated in subsequent phase of its use in later period. The whole excavation of the cave is situated on the lower level of the group. The area of total excavation, including cistern is horizontally extended about 22 m long and about 12 m deep in the stiff overhang rock-cliff.

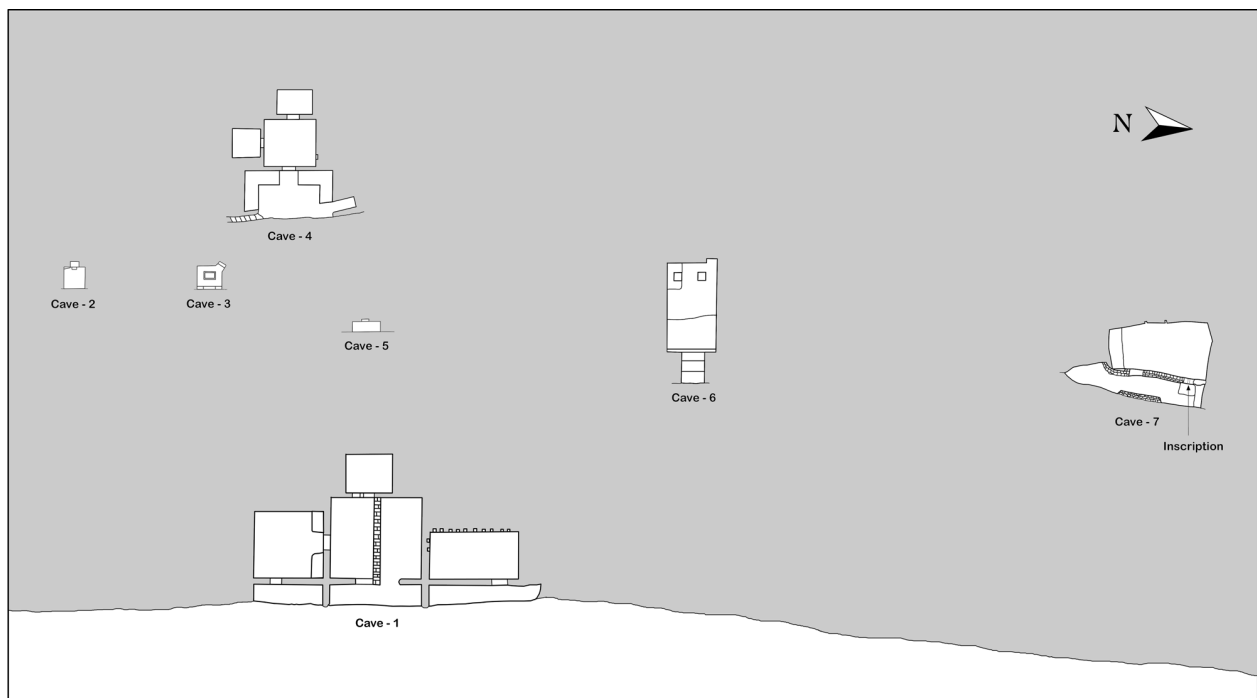


Figure 3: Site map of the Lohagadwadi cave group (not to the scale).

Cave no. 2

Middle level excavation, above cave no. 1, is located at the southern end of the group. A minor excavation, probably unfinished or a partially preserved, showing unidentified purpose. This cell like excavation measures about 2 m wide with opening of 1.5 m in height and 2 m deep in the rock, forming a recess like excavation. The inner back wall of this excavation has a small carved niche, with step like projection in front of it.

Cave no. 3

An unusual excavation is located on the middle level of the fort, with upper recess and lower cell with doorway. This excavation seems to be one storied excavation of upper and lower cells. Interestingly the lower cell has a doorway and a peculiar ceiling with a carved rectangular opening. This rectangular opening is measuring about 0.80 m wide and 0.40 m in breadth. Remarkably, the rectangular has a carved stepped frame to fix wooden lid to the *poḍhi*, a common feature of a *poḍhi* in many of the western Indian rock-cut caves. The upper recess is located exactly on the top of this lower cell. This recess is divided by the ceiling of the lower cell with a rectangular opening as mentioned above. As a result, the hollowed ceiling of a lower cell is turned as a floor to upper cell with rectangular opening. A small niche is seen carved in the northern corner of this upper cell.

The rectangle shaped carving in the floor of the upper cell appears like a mouth to the *poḍhi*. It is highly suggestive that the whole excavation of cave no. 3, originally was the *poḍhi*. Perhaps in the later period the lower storage of *poḍhi* was reworked; carved a doorway to its front side, facing to the east and turned it, into a small cell. Obviously, it was divided into two parts i.e. upper and lower cells. Perhaps, the purpose might be to use these excavations as a storage place in later period. However, the whole excavation became unusual to understand.

The excavation of cave no. 3 is close to cave no. 2, on a parallel level of its left side towards northern direction. This excavation became unapproachable, due to crumbled carved stairway.

Cave no. 4

The uppermost excavation of the group is situated on the southern corner of the fort in the cliff. The cave has a front hall with a simple rock-cut *āsanapeḍhikā*, inner hall and adjoining two cells and a small water cistern-*poḍhi*. The cave had carved stairway, leading to the front hall of the main cave from its southern side. It seems that the cave was well connected with other excavations by stone carved stairways. However, the approach stairways are badly ruined and have become very difficult to reach today.

The partially dilapidated rectangular front hall of the cave is approximately measuring about 7 m in width and 5 m in breadth. This simple rectangular hall has a central doorway in the back wall, which is opening to its inner cells. The inner cell has two attached cells with

doorways, one at its back and other to its right side. There is a small niche carved in the right-side wall of this inner cell.

Two 'L' shaped benches '*āsanapeḍhikās*' of the hall is a prominent feature of this cave. These two benches are flanking the opening doorway to the inner cells of the hall. Both benches are carved along back and side walls of the hall. Both measuring approximately about 0.50 m high and 1.15 m in width, with 2 × 2 m long. Probably verandah type or open space was attached to this hall. At the right side corner of this verandah or hall, a small water cistern recess is situated.

Cave no. 5

Unfinished or collapsed cave excavation with niches like carving and a recess in its middle remaining.

Cave no. 6

It is a middle level large excavation or underground *poḍhi* or water cistern with a narrow entrance. This excavation is located about 23 m in the distance to the northern side of cave no. 5. The large cistern measuring about 4.50 m in the width and 9 m long with 2.50 m deep storage area. The cistern has carved pillars at its back.

Cave no. 7

A middle level excavation with an inscription, is located 8 m high in the cliff from ground level and extreme northern side to the entire group. This large excavation of a water cistern measures about 9 m wide and 4 m broad at one side and 5.50 m long on another side. The cistern is carved 1 m deep to its floor. The quadrangular shaped cistern has about 2.5 m wide opening. Interior facing wall and adjoining ceiling of the cistern have carved small sockets. These sockets may have been used for timber work. On the flooring of the cistern, a platform like projection is seen carved. It is carved along the right-side wall of the cistern measuring about 0.50 m in width with 0.25 m high and 4 m long. A masonry wall with a doorway is obviously a later addition. It is constructed to close the wide open façade of the cistern. Probably in the subsequent phase of medieval occupation the cistern was converted into the chamber for unknown purpose. Similarly, another wall is also seen constructed in front of this wall, also a later addition. A few remains of stairway are evidently seen in the southern corner. The northern corner of this cistern cave has a small *poḍhi* or water cistern. It is closely attached to the main cistern. An uneven hole or a channel to its base perceived it was permanently connected to the main water storage, contained in the large cistern. Exactly above to the *poḍhi*, on the cornice of open façade an inscription is incised (**Figures 4, 5a and 5b**).

Inscription

The inscription is incised on a specially prepared surface, though the rectangular edges and a few letters of the inscription are partly weathered. The whole area of the incised space is 53 cm in width and 40 cm in height. This



Figure 4: Lohagadwadi, Cave no. 7.

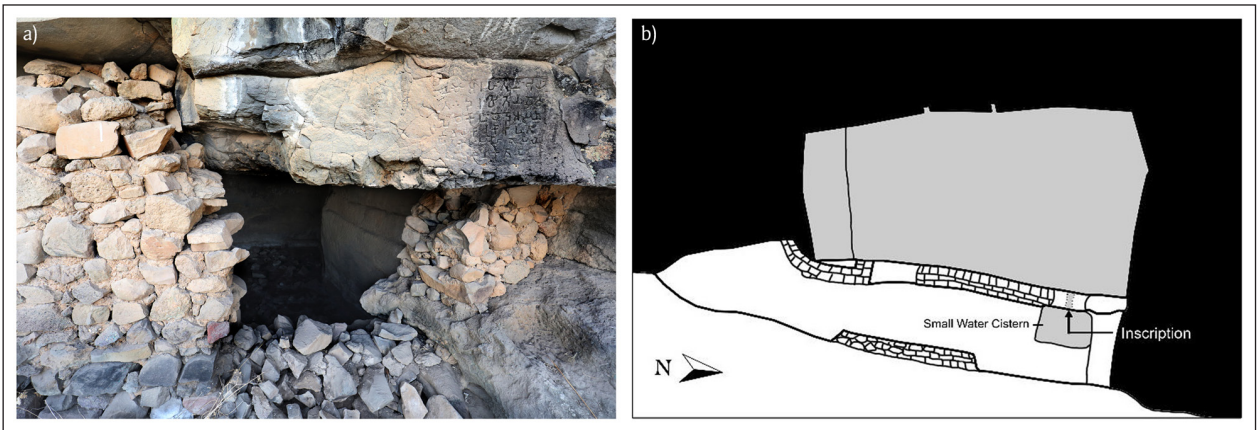


Figure 5: a) Location of the Inscription. b) Plan of the Cave no. 7, Lohagadwadi.

six-lined inscription occupies the area of 46 cm × 32 cm. The inscription is in Brāhmī script and the letters are average 4 cm in height. The bold and deeply engraved letters seem to be slightly eroded evenly by elements or heavy rain fall in the area. The features of the letters of this inscription show very close resemblance to the early inscription of Naneghat (Burgess 1883b: Pl. LI). The language of the Lohagadwadi inscription is Prakrit influenced by Sanskrit. However, the letters like 'mo' in first line with vowel signs of 'ā' and 'e' of 'ma' are perfectly incised, which is compared to the first line 'mo' of Naneghat inscription (Burgess 1883b: Pl. LI). Interestingly in the famous Pale inscription, the 'Namo' of first line is like 'ma' is incised without vowel sign, that may be read as 'Nama' (Sankalia and Gokhale 1971: 167). The vowel 'i' in the Lohagadwadi inscription has a similarity with Naneghat and is denoted in triple dots. It may comparable to the early Brāhmī inscriptions. The other word like *kātunā* in Pale inscription occurs in this inscription as *katon[r̥]*, Sanskrit *kṛtvā* and other word *kārāpitā* i.e. Sanskrit *kāritā*. The Paleography of the inscription might be assigned to the first century BCE, correspondingly to the Pale inscription as ascribed by Sankalia and

Gokhale (1971: 167). Further, Sankalia (1975: 2) remarks the date of Pale inscription, might go back to the end of second century BCE. The paleography of Lohagadwadi inscription also matches with a similar period as above-mentioned.

Text

1. *Namo araham̐tānam bhayaṛṇ*
2. *ta Idarakh̐itena pōḍhi*
3. *[pe?][the] [kā?] patho doāsanā*
4. *[ni] veyikā ca kārāpitā*
5. *[sa][ha] kehisah[ā]gosāle*
6. *.....[ni]katon[r̥]*

Discussion

The inscription records the name of Bhadam̐ta **Idarakhita** i.e., Indrarakṣita together with certain **Gosāla**, the *patho* probably connected path, *doāsanā [ni]* i.e. probably two *āsanapeḍhikā* the benches, water cistern, the *poḍhi* and the *veyikā* i.e. *vedikā* the rail or railing. It is assumed that these donations may be attributed to certain excavations in the group. A mentioned *poḍhi* is attributed to cave no. 7 itself, a middle level excavation of a large water cistern

and connected small cistern. Before *patho*, three partly eroded letters are seen i.e. *pe the (kā?)*. The first letter '*pe*' is partially broken, whereas vowel sign '*ā*' or '*o*' of *ka* is not clear, if read *pethe (kā?) patho*, it may suggest a place name *pethekāpatho*. Whereas *doāsana [nī]* is interesting donation. The name '*āsanapeḍhikā*' suggests the benches for sitting. The term given by Burgess, based on his interpretation of the Kanheri inscription no. 16 (1883b: 80). In the inscription *doāsana [nī]* possibly proposes the donation of two benches.

There are two excavations in the Lohagadwadi group i.e. cave nos. 1 and 4 where such benches are seen carved along the walls of a cell and the hall. However, the hall of cave no. 4 has two large 'L' shaped benches carved along the three walls flanking to the doorway of the hall. The donation of *veyikā* of the inscription is identical to *veyikā* of two inscriptions of Karle, inscription nos. 15 and 16 and from Nasik, inscription no. 3 (Burgess 1883a: 91, 99). This donation may be attributed to the wooden or stone railing to the caves or along the path or cistern itself.

This inscription consisting of six lines of Lohagadwadi cave group strikingly records the identical inaugural 'obeisance' expression of *Namo arahantānam*, dedicated to the Jaina faith and the same donor Bhadamta *Idarakhita*, of only known Jaina inscription from Pale, in Maharashtra. Fascinatingly, this is the second inscription in Maharashtra that begins with "obeisance to *arahantās*, the Jaina Tīrthaṅkaras" as an expression of *maṅgalācaraṇa* dedicated in the Jaina context, as shown by the early authors of 'A Brāhmī Inscription from Pale'(Sankalia and Gokhale 1971: 167–68).

The Lohagadwadi inscription mentions Bhadamta *Idarakhita* as a chief donor together with certain *Gosāla*. Probably the same Bhadamta *Idarakhita* mentioned in the Pale inscription would have been making donations to the Lohagadwadi. However, regarding Pale inscription, both the authors have mentioned that Bhadamta *Idarakhita* may have made his Pale donation, together with others. As mentioned, the name of *Gosāla* as another person with *Idarakhita* in Lohagadwadi inscription, however, *Gosāla* may be the probable name of that 'other' person in Pale inscription.

The evidence indicates that Bhadamta *Idarakhita* made both the donations at Pale and Lohagadwadi, dated to the first century BCE. Both the donations are earliest, made by one person and dedicated to the Jaina faith in Maharashtra. However, scholars such as Vidya Dehejia questions about the affiliation of Pale inscription with Jainism; she more inclined towards suggesting its Buddhist connection (1972: 222). Whereas Sankalia strongly established its Jaina dedication (1975: 1–12). S. Nagaraju discussed the problem about the association of Pale inscription with Jaina or Buddhist and undistinguishable type of rock-cut or monastic architecture of both the faiths of early period in his scholarly note. He tends to keep this question open (Nagaraju 1981: 42).

If the Lohagadwadi cave group is attributed to the Jaina faith, it might provide evidence of early rock-cut activity of Jainism in the region (Figure 6). In the area surrounding to Pale and Lohagadwadi, there are many rock-cut excavations whose religious affiliation is not known such as caves at Uksan and Kambre villages in Mawal taluka (Pradhan,

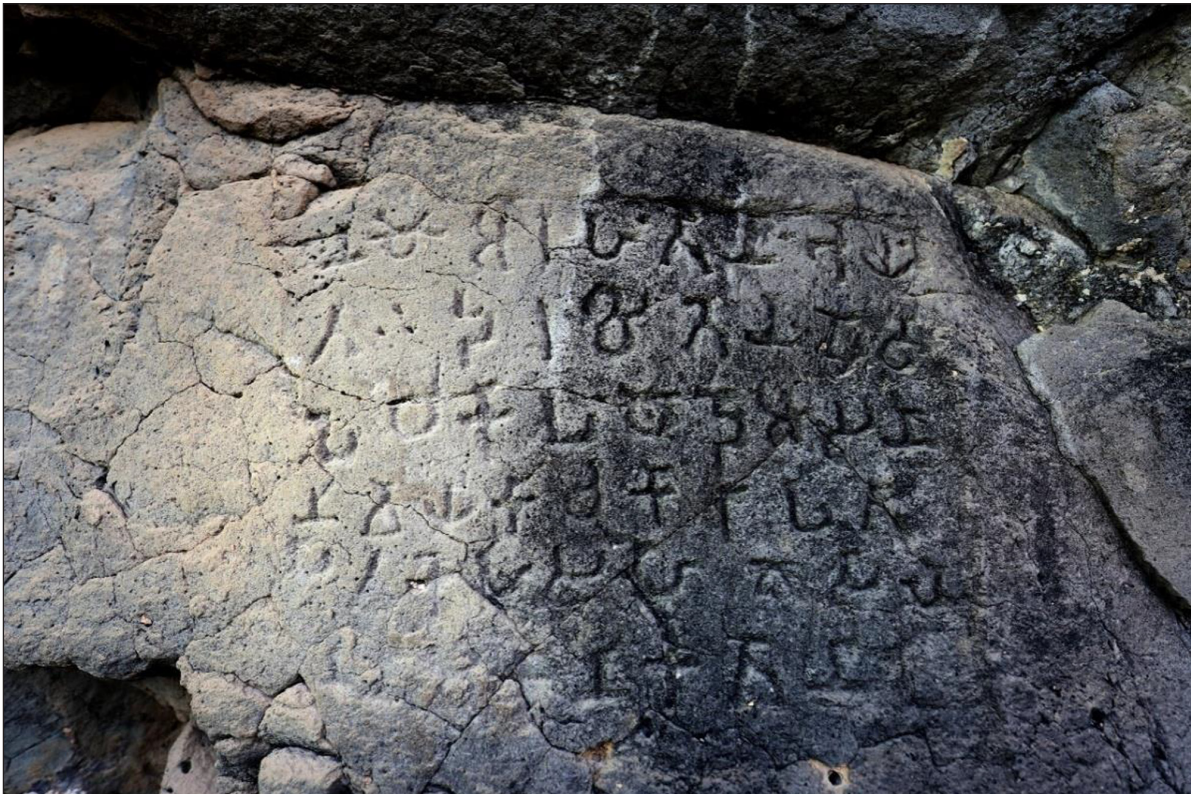


Figure 6: Lohagadwadi Cave No. 7, inscription of Idarakhita.

Dandawate and Joshi 2014: 183–87), northern excavations at Lohagad fort, etc. However, such excavations need to be re-examined in the light of recently noticed inscription discussed in this article.

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Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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