

This detail of an Ajanta cave mural shows a procession of elephants.



18.5 Painting

The Gupta Empire is known for its paintings. This art form was an important part of life for noble families. These families were wealthy people of high birth. No home was complete without a painting board or an easel. Popular subjects included deities and other religious topics. Nobles and members of the royalty also hired artists to create works of art. Some paintings highlighted the luxury of noble life. They were often done on long scrolls.

Perhaps the greatest ancient Indian paintings are those known as the Ajanta (uh-JUHN-tuh) cave murals. The murals cover the walls of the 30 caves that make up an ancient Buddhist monastery in central India. The paintings are done in rich, bright colors including red, purple, and green. Artists made the paints from minerals and clay.

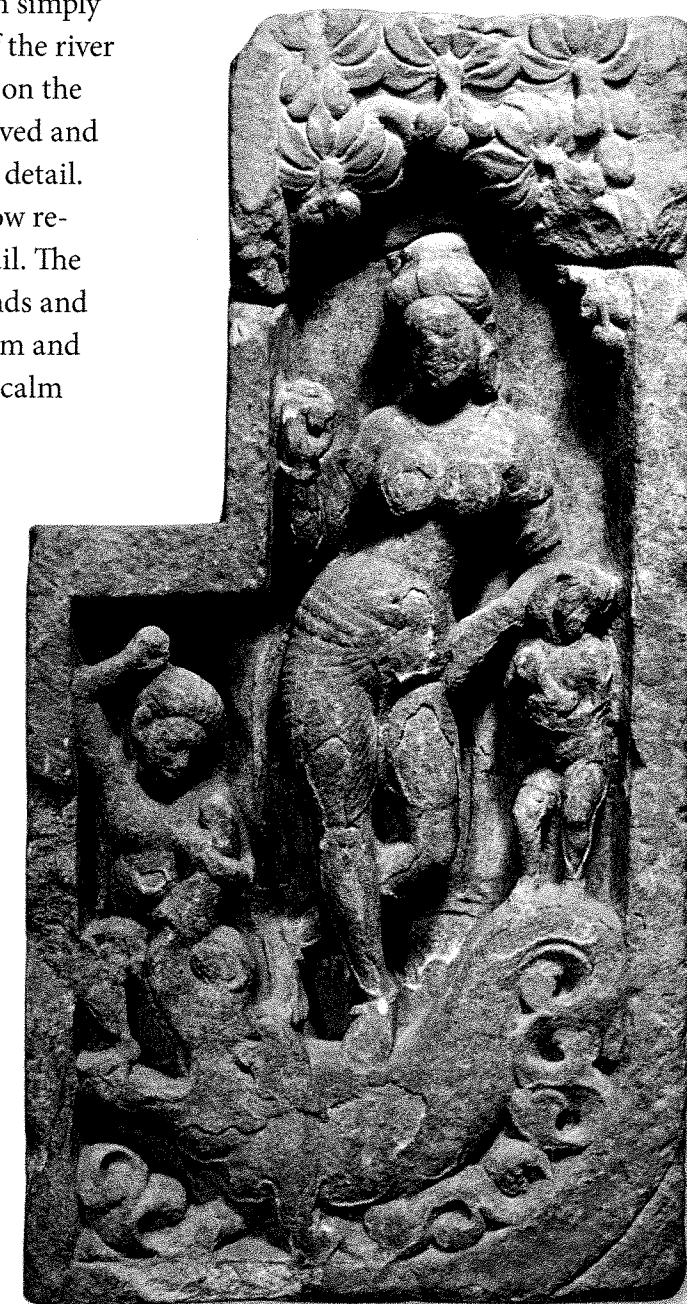
Some of the Ajanta murals show scenes from the Buddha's life. Some murals portray stories that reflect Buddhist values, such as love and understanding. Many of the scenes include graceful images of kings, queens, musicians, and dancers. Other scenes show animals and hunters in the forest. These woodland scenes are decorated with flowers, trees, and complex patterns. Gupta artists were skilled painters.

18.6 Sculpture

Another art form in the Gupta Empire was sculpture. Sculptors created statues out of stone, wood, bronze, and terra-cotta clay. Many of these statues portrayed the Buddha or Hindu deities. Some sculptures showed scenes from important people's lives. Many sculptures were created to stand on their own foundations. Others were carved into the walls of temples and caves.

Gupta sculptures portrayed the human form simply and gracefully. One example is the sculpture of the river deity, Ganga, shown on this page. She is riding on the back of a sea monster. The statue's lines are curved and elegant. Her dress and hair are carved in much detail.

The temple statue of the Buddha shown below reflects the same attention to clean lines and detail. The Buddha sits on a highly decorated seat. His hands and legs are smoothly crossed. His expression is calm and peaceful. The sculptor used lowered eyes and a calm face to portray the Buddha's wisdom.



These sculptures of the river deity, Ganga (right), and the Buddha (left), are typical of Gupta sculptures.