else given to the cave, or its presiding hermit, some time after the completion of the cave. Most of the small inscriptions are of this character; and their evidence amounts to this, that the caves existed from before, and were places of great sanctity, in which gifts were looked upon as highly meritorious; they do not necessarily fix the date of the cave. The Lát inscription in Cave No. XII. is a record of this description, and, therefore, the date of the cave must, according to this supposition, be older than the lowest limit of the Lát character.

NOTES ON BABU RAJENDRALALA MITRA'S PAPER ON THE
AGE OF THE CAVES AT AJANTÁ. By JAMES FERGUSSON,
V.P., D.C.L., F.R.S.

WHEN this paper was first presented to the Council in July last, I objected to its being received, inasmuch as it contained a vast amount of irrelevant matter, and personalities, which I should regret to see introduced into any discussion in this Society. Since then Mr. Grote, in the exercise of a discretion given him by the author, has cut it down to about one-half its original length, and now presents it in a form to which I personally can have no possible objection. I would only, however, like to observe, that the title now given to it is a little misleading. It would hardly be worth while, if an attempt to fix their dates were all the paper contained, to print a disquisition on the age of the Caves at Ajantá by a person who has never visited them, and who, though eminent as a Sanskrit scholar, has hitherto shown no aptitude for, or knowledge of, archæological subjects. It seems too singularly inappropriate at the present moment, as a quarto volume, containing 111 closely printed pages, with numerous illustrations, has just been presented to the Society, by its author, Mr. Burgess. This volume is the result of several weeks spent in examining the Caves at Ajantá last cold weather, and was, I believe, his fourth or fifth visit to them during the

last ten or twelve years. During that interval he has visited almost every series of caves in Western India. Babu Rájendra has not seen this work, and it is consequently not clear how far Mr. Burgess's intimate knowledge of the subject might have modified his views. For the benefit of those who have not seen it, I may mention that we are perfectly in accord as to the dates of the caves belonging to this group, and he has left me an almost equally extensive account of them to be embodied in a work I am now passing through the press, conjointly with him, and which I hope may appear in the spring.

All this, however, is of very little importance at the present moment, as Babu Rájendralála Mitra's paper is not what its title imports, but is, practically, an attempt to prove—

First, that I am wrong in the date I assign (A.D. 600 to 640) to Cave No. I. at Ajantá, which contains certain pictures avowedly admitted to be those of foreigners.

Secondly, that I am equally wrong in believing that these pictures contain portraits of Khùshrú Parviz of Persia, and Pulakêsi, King of Mahârâshtra.

Both these propositions are stated with unobjectionable fairness in the paper as it now stands, and are not only perfectly legitimate subjects for discussion, but are, I believe, of sufficient interest to be well worthy of the attention of this Society.

To these two points, and to them only, I shall confine the remarks I have to make; but before doing so, it will add to the clearness of what follows, if I make a few observations on the long extract the Babu makes from his unpublished second volume of "The Antiquities of Orissa."

In this passage, and elsewhere, he represents me as inventing a system of "gradual improvement," "according to which the simplest caves are assigned to the earliest period, the most ornate to a comparatively recent date;" and he proceeds to illustrate this by various very irrelevant examples. As this proposition is stated here, I cannot object to its form, but I beg leave to state, most emphatically, that I have done nothing of the kind, and that it is founded on

an entire misconception of my meaning. What I have attempted to do during the last forty years has been to apply to Indian architecture the same principles of archæological science, which are universally adopted, not only in England, but in every country in Europe. Since the publication of Rickman's "Attempt to Discriminate Styles, etc.," in 1817, style has been allowed to supersede all other evidence for the age of any building, not only in Mediæval, but in Byzantine, Classical, and, in fact, all other true styles. Any accomplished antiquary, looking at any archway or any moulding, can say at once, this is Norman, or Early English, or Decorated, or Tudor, and if familiar with the style, tell the date within a few years, whether it belongs to a cathedral, or a parish church, a dwelling house, or a grange; whether it is part of the most elaborate shrine, or of a pigsty—is not of the smallest consequence, nor whether it belongs to the marvellously elaborate quasi-Byzantine style of the age of the Conqueror, or to the prosaic tameness of that of the age of Elizabeth.

Owing to its perfect originality and freedom from all foreign admixture or influence, I believe these principles, so universally adopted in this country, are even more applicable to the Indian styles than to the European. During the half century during which I have been occupied in the matter, I have found no exception to their applicability, though frequently in the very inverse sense from that the Babu represents me as adopting. The Rails at Buddha Gaya, and Bharhut, and the Caves at Udayagiri, and Pitalkhora, are among the oldest, the most elaborate, and most ornate specimens of art yet discovered, but these were succeeded by many of almost Doric simplicity.¹ As it

¹ It is hardly worth while saying much about the argument derived from the "Pillars," which the Babu would never have brought forward, had he ever visited the Western Caves, or even studied their plans. In the West of India, the Hall is the most prominent and most essential feature, and into it all the cells open. Consequently, when these became numerous, and the hall necessarily large, pillars became indispensable to support the roof, which otherwise would have fallen in, and eventually they became a most important feature. In Orissa, on the contrary, all the cells open on the outer air, and their doors are only covered by shallow verandahs, and there are no halls in which internal pillars

happens, it is quite true that the earliest Caves at Ajantá, and generally in the West, are the plainest and least ornamented, but that is not a consequence of their age, but because they belonged to a sect remarkable for its puritanical asceticism. On the Eastern side of India, the conditions were reversed. At Buddha Gaya, Bharhut, and Udayagiri, the contemporary structures, if not the most richly ornamented, were at least as much so, as any that succeeded them. In fact, in so far as anything I have ever written on the subject is concerned, there is not one single paragraph in any work of mine that can be tortured into the expression of a belief, on my part, that greater or less richness of ornamentation is a test of age. Style is a test, and by style alone can their age be ascertained.

I believe I am tolerably familiar with all that Babu Rájendra has written on archæological subjects; but I have not yet found one paragraph in any of his works in which he shows that he ever heard of the science of Archæology, as it is understood in Europe, nor certainly one instance in which he has applied its principles to ascertain either the relative, or positive, age of any building. He is, in fact, in the exact position of the antiquaries of the last century, puzzling over inscriptions, or annals, or traditions; but having no knowledge of style nor any certain guide, and consequently tumbling into mistakes only calculated to excite wonder and amusement in the present generation of antiquaries.

At the same time, I am far from either rejecting or undervaluing the assistance gained in all these researches from the study of Palæography. It is always a help, and frequently a guide, which is in some instances indispensable; but it never—so far as I can judge—is capable of the same precision, nor can be so implicitly relied upon as Archæology, when this is properly understood and applied. I do, however, object

could possibly be introduced. There is, in fact, no analogy between the disposition of the caves in the East and those in the West. I need hardly, however, attempt to explain here in what the difference consists, as in the book on the subject I have in the press, conjointly with Mr. Burgess, the subject will be fully entered into.

to Prinsep's alphabets being used as an argument in the present discussion. We have made immense progress during the last forty years in our knowledge of the alphabets of India, and Prinsep only knew of that used in these caves from some fragments copied by gentlemen who neither knew the letters nor the language, and whose copies are consequently of the least possible value.¹

As I hope to show presently, the evidence derived from the inscriptions in these Caves is in perfect accord with what we learn from their architecture, as must indeed always be the case, when there exists sufficient means of comparing them together. In the present instance, I feel confident, that when the evidence derived from inscriptions is added to that deduced from the style in which the caves are decorated, the two, taken together, will be more than sufficient to prove that I was not mistaken in the date I assigned to Cave No. I.

In order to state his case more clearly, Babu Rajendra has divided the Caves at Ajantá into three groups. About the first there is no dispute. In the paper read to this Society in 1842, I stated that they all were excavated before the Christian Era, which the Babu admits. They are, however, interesting as showing how superior the Archæological method is to the Palæographical. Because, he says, they have all inscriptions in the Lât character, he argues that they must all be of one age—or very nearly so—though what that age is he does not venture to specify. Now, I defy any architect or antiquary to look at them without seeing at a glance that they are not all of the same age, that there is a succession, and a considerable interval must have elapsed between the earliest and the latest; and had he ever seen them, or known anything of archæology, even he must have admitted it was so. IX. and X., for instance, are Chaitya Caves, situated side by side, but so different, in every essential respect, as to prove that they belong to different ages. If their inscriptions

¹ Journ. Asiatic Soc. Bengal, vol. v. plates ix. and xxix.

were all in the same character, it would only show how worthless Palæography is for the purpose to which the Babu applies it; but the fact of the matter is, there are only two short inscriptions in the four caves which can, even by courtesy, be called "in the Lāt character," and they are in its most modern form, and certainly not of the same age.¹ This, however, is of little consequence here, as the group has absolutely no bearing on the age of Cave No. I.

The Babu's second group is very extensive, and arranged in a manner that passes my comprehension; but that, too, is of no consequence, as not bearing on the argument, nor has the accustomed inaccuracy with which they are described. I would, however, remark that Cave VIII. is not a "Chaitya," but one of the meanest Viharas in the place, and has no "inscription," and "no painted Buddha over the entrance;" Cave VI. has neither the one nor the other; and Cave XVI. is not the Zodiac cave; this last, however, is a mistake of Bhau Daji's, for which the Babu is not responsible. All this, however, is only what might be expected from any one writing on a subject of which he has no special knowledge. There are, however, two Caves in this group, XVI. and XVII.,² which have important inscriptions, which, with their architectural peculiarities, bear directly on the subject in hand, and regarding which, I should consequently like to say a few words.

Cave No. XVI. contains an important inscription of the Vindhyaśakti dynasty (J.B.B.R.A.S., vol. vii. p. 56), which I would like any one to compare with the Seoni plates of the same dynasty (J.A.S.B., vol. v. pl. xxxiii.). The alphabet is the same, but the form of characters is so different, that it would be competent to any one to argue that there was—on palæographic evidence—50 or 100

¹ Journ. Asiat. Soc. Bengal, vol. vii. inscriptions 1 and 2, on the third plate of Bhau Daji's paper. p. 63.

² Woodcuts of the interior of these two caves will be found in my *Eastern and Indian Architecture*, woodcuts 84, 85, and 86, and lithographic representations of them, plates iv. and v. of my *Rock Temples*, folio, London, 1845.

years between them, one way or the other. But even that does not concern us here, its direct bearing is only to show that it is anterior, probably to the extent of 50 or 100 years, to the inscription in the Zodiac Cave No. XVII. That inscription is most important for our present argument, because, when Bhau Daji's copy is compared with Mr. Burgess's photograph of that on Cave No. III. at Badami (Reports, vol. i. pl. xxxii.), they are found to be practically identical, in so far as the palæographical evidence is concerned. The alphabet, and the form of the letters, are the same, with only such differences as may arise from the one being an eye copy, the other an 'estampage,' and the geographical distance being 400 miles may also account for some slight differences; but it would require a very keen and practised eye to detect any of importance, or to say which is the oldest of the two. Now the great and cardinal fact is that the Badami inscription contains a date, "500 years from the Coronation of the Saka King," or in other words 578-9 A.D.

This Badami date is by far the most important discovery that has been made of late years for fixing the chronology of the architecture of the period. It is the cardinal point on which every discussion must hinge. Any attempt to fix the date of any cave without taking it into account is worthless.¹ We know exactly what the form of the character is in which it is written, and we know exactly what the architecture of the cave is in which it is found (Burgess, Reports, vol. i. plates xxiv. to xxxv.), and are consequently able to say what was before and what came after it; and with this knowledge I have no hesitation in asserting that Cave No. I. at Ajanta, is subsequent to Cave No. III. at Badami, consequently to A.D. 579. But it is just here that the argument between me and the Babu breaks down. He calls this an "opinion of mine." It is just such an opinion, however,

¹ I pointed out the value of this date in my original paper (Vol. XI. p. 160), but the Babu has an unpleasant habit of passing over "sub silentio" any facts that militate against his theories. Had he realized its importance, this paper would probably never have been written.

as that I have formed that Henry the Seventh's Chapel is more modern than Westminster Abbey, or such as I would form, if any example of Tudor architecture were pointed out to me, and I were asked its age relatively to any example of the Edwardian Gothic. The Babu does not see this, because he never heard of styles being so used, and we cannot of course come to an understanding regarding it, because one of us is speaking in a language the other does not understand. What the exact interval between the two cases may be, it is not so easy to determine, but certainly not less than twenty or thirty years.

Mr. Burgess (p. 57) dates Cave XVI. at about A.D. 500, in which he is probably correct; but the difference in the architecture and the alphabet of Cave XVII. is so great that we can hardly allow less than seventy or eighty years; thus on palæographical and archæological grounds bringing it abreast of Cave III. at Badami. But assuming this, the progress of the style of Cave I. is so great that it is difficult to believe that it could be accomplished within the thirty years the above theory assumes. The real difficulty is to get all one requires into the space. Probably by putting XVII. back some ten or fifteen years, and No. I. forward to a like extent, we may arrive more nearly at the exact truth. The paintings may have been—and probably were—executed some time after the events they were designed to represent.

Another point that tends to determine the age of this cave with tolerable precision is its position in the group. It certainly, from its locality, is the last excavated at that end of the series, and when we compare it with those next before it, and those opposite, at the other end, it seems impossible to escape the conviction that we are very near the age when cave-digging ceased to be the fashion, which, from various circumstances too long to enter upon here, we may assume to have been about 650 to 675 A.D.

As the Babu has so strong a leaning to palæographic evidence, which he "considers much more authentic and less misleading, than"—what he is pleased to call—"æsthetic tests," it is a pity there is no important inscription in

Cave No. I. by which he could test the value of his theories. It is true he says, "No. I. has more than one painted inscription of the same character as the preceding group." Where are they to be found? I saw none, and I examined the cave with considerable attention. Dr. Bird saw none. Mr. Burgess devoted twenty-three closely printed quarto pages to the description of this cave, but mentions none.¹ It is true, however, that Dr. Bhau Daji on his third plate, p. 64, huddles together some eight or nine insignificant inscriptions, which he describes as "painted inscriptions on Caves Nos. I. II. and X.;" but which is in No. I., which in No. II., and which in No. X. he does not specify. As engraved they are all so much alike that, if they prove anything, it would be, that No. X., avowedly before the Christian era, was of the same age as Nos. I. and II., which are avowedly long after it, or *vice versâ*. If the Babu knows which belongs to Cave No. I., he ought to say so; or if he has any information not available to others, he ought to produce it. As the case at present stands, there is no palæographic evidence to show in the remotest degree what the age of this cave is, and certainly nothing that in the smallest degree invalidates the conclusions arrived at, from the style of the architecture, or that of its paintings and sculpture, which prove beyond a shadow of doubt, so far as I am capable of judging, that it was excavated in the first half of the seventh century of our era.

The second part of the task I have undertaken is infinitely more difficult than the first. Not that I think there is anything in the Babu's criticism that in the smallest degree invalidates what I advanced in my original paper; but the class of objections he puts forward are from their nature so indefinite, that it is almost impossible to return answers which will prove satisfactory. With the caves we had something tangible to go upon; but when it comes to questions of costume or likeness, or probabilities whether one or

¹ Since the above was in type, I have received from Mr. Burgess a letter dated Lanouli, 29th November, in which he says, in answer to my telegraphic inquiry, "*There is no inscription, in Cave No. I. at Ajanta, either cut or painted.*"

two embassies took place, or other events happened, we are evidently on a wide sea, from which it would require both skill and judgment to reach a port. When we venture into the hazy region of the politics of Persia and India in the seventh century, we must not look for a precision that would satisfy a conveyancer in Lincoln's Inn, and unless prepared to take a large and liberal view of matters, it would be better to leave them alone. Under such circumstances as we find, then existing, there is nothing so easy as to express doubts, and demand explanations. And, after all, such carping criticisms seldom lead to anything, and are generally confined to anonymous writers in third-class periodicals. They are so easy when there is no responsibility to produce something better. I cannot call to mind any instance of their being admitted into the publications of any scientific or literary society, unless it is to clear the space for the erection of some better structure, which is certainly not the case in this instance. However, as the Babu's lucubrations have been printed in our JOURNAL, I must say a few words, lest otherwise judgment may go against me by default.

First with regard to the name Pulakêsi. It was no invention of mine—it was suggested by Professor Nöldeke, who is, if not the best, at least one of the best Arabic scholars in Europe. It is no answer to him to repeat the various possible readings which he himself suggested, but rejected, after due consideration, in favour of the one he adopted. To this the Babu objects, as a matter of course—any one can do that; but has he anything to suggest in its place? If he has, he had better put it before the Professor, who, I have no doubt, will give him a reply. I hope it will not be such a crushing one as he received from Prof. Weber in the *Academy* of Nov. 15, 1879.

The giving of nicknames is a very ingenious device, a good deal resorted to in certain pleadings in some courts not in very high order; but never, so far as I know, in earnest scientific discussions. To call the principal person, in the so-called drinking scene, a "Bacchanal," certainly diverts the attention from the idea of his being a person of consequence; but it leaves untouched the question, why, being a foreigner

(Persian), his portrait appears four times as the principal person in the four most important points of the roof of a Buddhist Vihara in India. If he was only a Bacchanal, this seems to me strange.

In like manner, to call the messenger delivering a letter to the King, in the "Court scene" "The Ambassador," diverts attention from the fact that there are at least half a dozen ambassadors of the same rank in the place, and with their horses held outside. They are, in fact, grooms, or at least horsemen, of some sort, bringing a letter with the usual nuzzurana, from some king or potentate to some other, whoever he may be. They have no costume or state, nor any attendance that would lead any one to suspect that they were in any sense the *representatives* of the King who sent them.

The Babu cannot see any likeness in feature or costume between the Bacchanal and the Ambassadors. Nor can I. But I would not be distressed if I could not trace much likeness between the face of George the Fourth, as painted by Sir Thomas Lawrence, and that of a foreign office messenger, who arrived at the court of a foreign prince, after a long journey on horseback, wearied and travel-stained, in the costume of his profession. Nor would I be more surprised to find the state costume of Khùshrú and Shirín at Takht-i-Bostan did not resemble those of the Bacchanal, than I would be to find that the costume of any king and queen, in their robes of state, differed considerably from that they adopted when retired to their private apartments, and put on their dressing gowns and slippers. Surely such questions as these are not worthy of being treated seriously by grown-up men.

There is, however, one question which is perfectly legitimate, and which the Babu takes up in a proper spirit, and supports with sufficient references. It is that of the crimped streamers, or Banderoles, which I believed, and believe, belong exclusively to the Sassanian period. As Wilson's *Ariana Antiqua* is accessible to any one, it is easy to judge whether I am correct in asserting that the fillets in the first five

plates referred to, are only the ordinary Greek or Roman fillets usual on classical coins and statues. As we get near the Sassanian period (Plates IX. to XII) they get longer; but there are no true "crimped banderoles," such as are found on all the Sassanian sculptures in Persia, till we reach Plate XVI., where the Sassanian coins begin.

The works of Ker Porter, of Texier, and Flandin and Coste, are equally accessible, and if any one will take the trouble to study them, and realize what a true Sassanian crimped banderole is, as portrayed everywhere in Persia, I have no doubt that he will arrive at the conclusion that it is found only on Sassanian sculptures, Sassanian coins, and on the roof of Cave No. I. at Ajantá.

It surely can hardly be worth while noticing the objection that, as in Tabari there is "no allusion to a return embassy," the inference should be, that this very Irish correspondence began and ended with a single letter in one direction. As I read it, the whole context in Tabari shows that the relations between the Persian and Indian kings must have been long and intimate, and that many letters must have passed to and fro before such an incident could have occurred, as the one thus almost accidentally brought to our notice.

I have now, I hope, said enough to prove—what appears to me one of the most incontestable facts in the Cave Chronology of India—that Cave No. I. at Ajantá was excavated in the first half of the seventh century, and that consequently the paintings on the roof and walls cannot represent "Phases of Indian life 1800 to 2000 years ago," as Babu Rajendra persists in maintaining.

If this is so, it seems impossible that the persons represented on the paintings in the Cave can be either Bactrians or Assyrians—as these terms are usually understood, and there is nothing, so far as I can judge, in his paper to invalidate the conclusion I have arrived at that the figures on the roof do represent Khùshrú and Shrirín, and the "Court scene" on the walls, the delivery of a letter from that Persian Monarch to Pulakêsi, King of Mahârâshtra.

If these propositions are granted, I am quite willing to accept his conclusion, that "the intercourse between the Indians on the one hand, and the Persians, the Assyrians, and the Egyptians on the other, was probably more frequent in past times than it is now." But I would only ask, was the magniloquent announcement of such a truism worth all the pains and paper it has cost to bring it before the world? With regard to the long-extinct kingdoms of Egypt and Assyria, it is no doubt absolutely true; and with regard to Persia, it is a testimony in favour of the views I have just had the honour of laying before the Society, which I willingly accept.