

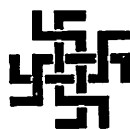
IGNCA ROCK ART Series-1

Rock Art in the Old World

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INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE ARTS

Rock Art in India

Erwin Neumayer

Rock art in India was discovered more than 120 years ago, yet very few archaeologists will be able to recall an image of Indian rock art when it is spoken of.

The spectrum of rock art in India is huge in thematic as well as in stylistic content. This paper will try to spread more "images" of Indian rock art. Most of the reproductions given here have not been published before and quite a few were discovered only in the last two years during my project work on rock art in India.

I am greatly indebted to the Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung of the Austrian Ministry of Science and Research which funded the project.

Discovery

In the winter of 1868-69 Archibald Carlyle noticed some "crude paintings" on the rock walls on the northern scarp of the Vindhya mountains (Smith 1906: 185-195). His competitor in search of antiquities John Cockburn left his signature in the Baldharia shelter which he visited around 1880 (Cockburn 1883 and 1899).

Now, more than 100 years later, innumerable rock paintings, bruising and engravings are known from all over the Indian subcontinent and the island of Sri Lanka (fig. 1).

The rock art found in the northernmost area is on the banks of the river Indus and her tributaries in the Ladakh and Gilgit regions (Franke 1902). On boulders and rock walls, engravings of ibexes, goats and hunters with bow and arrows are to be found (fig. 2 top). On these walls are also found horse riders armed with spears and swords. On several sites, Buddhist symbols like stupas with flags and holy syllables from the Tibetan alphabet are frequent.

The earliest of these engravings probably go back to the Neolithic Age. But the tradition of fashioning rock engravings in the Karakoram and the Himalayan regions continues right to the present (Jettmar 1980).

Further south, in the foothills of the Himalayas, in the mountains of Garhwal and Kumaon, several sites with red paintings have been found in the last few years (Mathpal 1984; *IAR* 1983-84: 87-88).

The most important region concerning rock art is the Vindhya Range. Geologically, these mountains consist of sedimentary quartzite and basaltic trap rock. All the paintings here are found in the quartzite region.

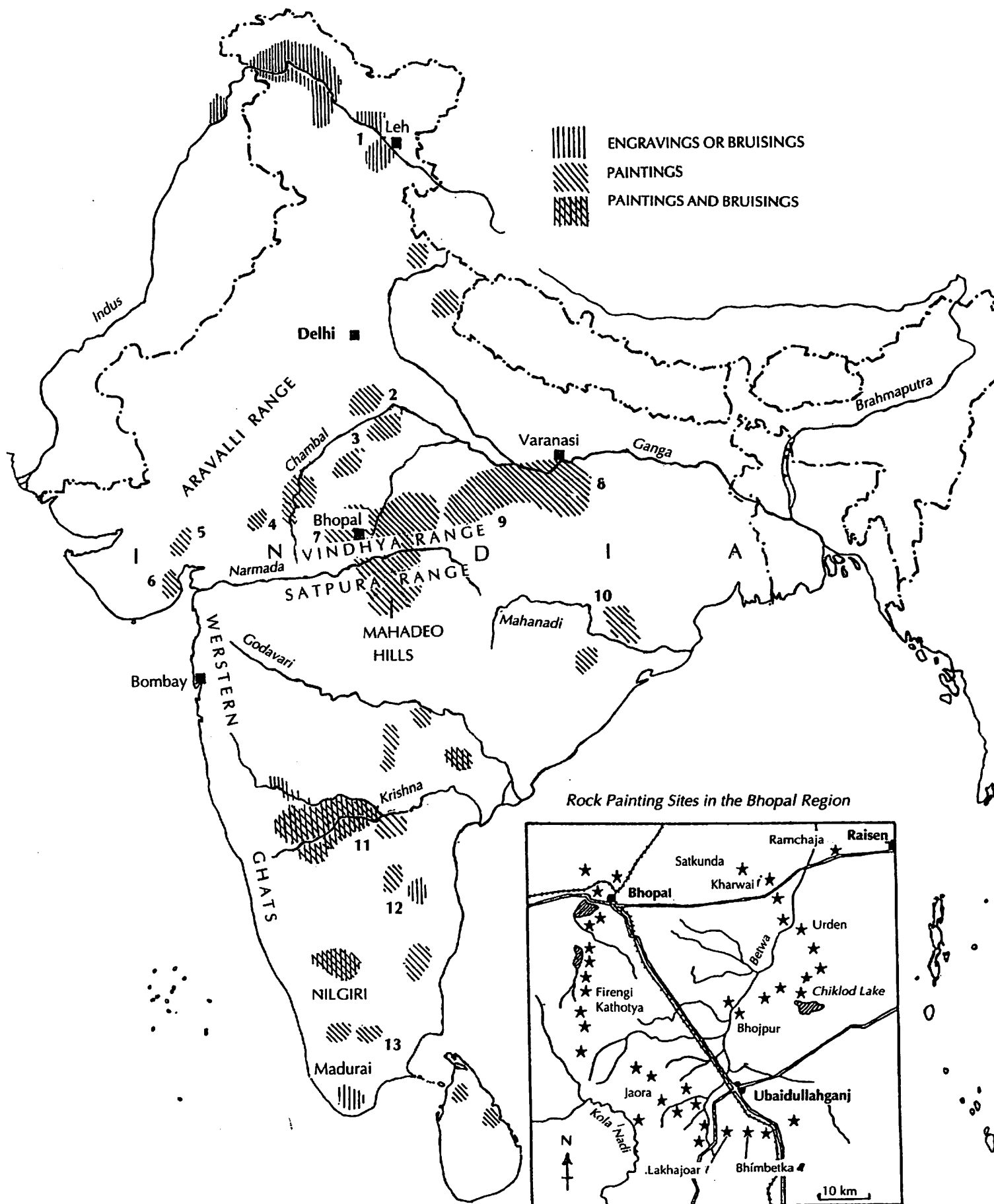


Figure 1 Rock art sites in India.

Site Index

<i>fig.</i>	<i>site name</i>	<i>district/state</i>	<i>no. on fig. 1</i>
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2	Firengi	Bhopal/MP	7
3	Lakhajoar	Raisen/MP	7
3	Kharwai	Raisen/MP	7
4	Urden	Raisen/MP	7
5	Chiklod	Raisen/MP	7
5	Badami	Bijapur/Karnataka	11
5	Urden	Raisen/MP	7
6	Gupha Masir	Vidisha/MP	7
6	Kathotya	Raisen/MP	7
7	Kharwai	Raisen/MP	7
7	Gupha Masir	Vidisha/MP	7
7	Lakhajoar	Raisen/MP	7
8	Jaora	Raisen/MP	7
8	Kathotya	Raisen/MP	7
9	Lakhajoar	Raisen/MP	7
9	Kathotya	Raisen/MP	7
10	Bhimbetka	Raisen/MP	7
10	Sagar	Sagar/MP	7
11	Kharwai	Raisen/MP	7
11	Kanjadei	Kota/Rajasthan	3
11	Jaora	Raisen/MP	7
11	Mandasor	Mandasor/MP	4
12	Chatur Bhoj Nath	Mandasor/MP	4
13	Kathotya	Raisen/MP	7
13	Chibbar Nulla	Mandasor/MP	4
14	Tikkla Village	Gwalior/MP	2
14	Gambhipura	Sabhar Kantha/Gujarat	5
14	Narsinghgarh	Rajgarh/MP	7
15	Bhimbetka	Raisen/MP	7
15	Firengi	Sehore/MP	7
15	Satkunda	Raisen/MP	7
16	Mahadeo Hills, Agamdwar	Hoshangabad/MP	9
17	Kowarkhoh	Mirzapur/UP	8
17	Lakhamara	Sundargarh/Orissa	10
18	Kowarkoh	Mirzapur/UP	8
18	Chamardi	Bhavnagar/Gujarat	6
19	Chintakunta	Cuddapah/AP	12
19	Koppagalu	Bellary/Karnataka	11
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20	Sirumalai-Meenputti	Madurai/Tamilnadu	13

Rock Paintings of Mirzapur in Uttar Pradesh

Rakesh Tewari

The Mirzapur district is very important in the context of Indian rock paintings because the painted rock shelters were discovered for the first time in this area in 1867-68 and this is the second largest rock art centre known in the country. This district is located in the southeastern corner of Uttar Pradesh, between latitude 23°52' and 25°32' north and on longitude 82°33' east.

The middle plateau—area of Mirzapur district—contains almost all the known painted rock shelters. It is about 110 km east to west, 32-48 km north to south and 150 m high (average height) above M.S.L. (Drake 1911: 1-2). Huge sandstone rocks have formed thousands of rock shelters in this area on flat hillocks, in gorges and cliffs near waterfalls and streams, some of which have paintings.

The area in question is full of wild fauna like leopard, bear, deer, boar, etc. and a variety of flora. Thus the three basic requirements of livelihood—food, water and shelter—are readily available in this region. That is why primitive men chose to live here from the very beginning. Evidence of Stone Age—Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic—and subsequent cultures has been found in abundance in this region. The forested areas of the district are mainly inhabited by tribals like the Baiga, Agariya, Gond, Kharwar, etc. Industries and towns are growing fast in the comparatively flat and deforested areas.

It was A. Carlyle of the Archaeological Survey of India who pioneered the discovery of rock paintings in the Mirzapur area but only a mention was made about it in the *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* in 1883 (Carlyle 1883: 49). Later it became known through subsequent writings (Brown 1889: 134-139; Smith 1906: 185-195). Cockburn discovered many more rock-painted shelters in this district and published several articles about them (Cockburn 1883a: 56-64; 1883b 125-126; 1884: 141-143; 1899: 89-97). Gazetteers published afterwards incorporated this information (1909: 84; Drake 1911: 189-200).

Dixit reported a few painted rock shelters and Ghosh prepared copies of the previously known rock paintings between 1918 and 1932 (Ghosh 1932: 15-20). A new era of the exploration of rock paintings started in the year 1956-57 with the expeditions of G.R. Sharma (*I.A.R.* 1956-57: 11-14). After him many explorers of the Allahabad and Banaras universities reported numerous painted rock shelters in the western and eastern parts of the district (*I.A.R.* 1962-63: 31-32; 1963-64: 39, 51-52; 1969-70: 38; Narain and Pant 1962-63: 115-135). Other scholars also discovered a few such shelters in this area (Gupta 1967; *I.A.R.* 1960-61: 67; Kesari

1984: 51-52; *I.A.R.* 1975-76: 56; 1976-77: 58).

Several articles and notes were published about the aforesaid discoveries from time to time, but they are mainly limited to small areas like Bhaldaria, Likhaniya, etc. The first serious attempt made by Varma to provide relative chronology for the rock paintings of Mirzapur by the study of their superimpositions in 1964 (Varma 1986: 206-213) and the detailed account of these paintings published by Gupta (Gupta 1967) are worth mentioning here. However, more explorations of the other remaining areas and systematic study of all the rock paintings were needed. The author of this paper, visited previously known painted rock shelters and, by exploring a large area, discovered more than 120 such shelters between 1973 and 1988 (Tewari 1982a; 1982b: 1-16; 1985: 256-258; 1986a: 105-112) which raised the number of known painted rock shelters of Mirzapur to about 240 (fig. 1).

Rock Walls and Techniques

The painted rock shelters of Mirzapur are about 1.5 m to 5 m deep, 1 m to 5 m high and 2 m to 90 m long (fig. 2 top). Microliths, sometimes along with a few rubbed pieces of haematite, are found on the floors or in the nearby areas of the painted rock shelters. Paintings are usually executed on the inner wall and ceiling of the shelters and rarely on bare rocks. Some of them are at a considerable height. The use of some type of scaffolding of bamboo and tree-branches is probable. Paintings have been depicted many times over the earlier ones. Weathering has adversely affected the paintings of open shelters. Some of them are in a bad condition due to the chipping of the surface and the figures are not recognizable, while other figures are covered with patina. A few of them have been damaged by dust, insects, animals and smoke caused by the fire lit by shepherds and hermits who reside in these shelters.

Generally smooth and even surfaces were chosen for painting without any preparation. Different shades of ochre are the most common colours. Beside this, black and white colours are also used. It may be concluded on the basis of the analysis of the colour samples that red and its different shades were prepared from iron oxides like haematite, black from magnesium oxides, and white from limestone. These minerals were probably ground to obtain powder which was mixed with water and used for paintings. The possibility of mixing with resin or animal fat, etc., is suggested by some scholars (Mathpal 1984a: 189; Neumayer 1983: 6; Tewari 1982a: 19), but their traces were not found in the analysis of the colour samples.

Usually paintings are executed in one or two colours. The outlines of some of the examples are depicted with white, yellow and dark thin or thick line in ochre or black colours. The inner portion is filled with another colour. Sometimes only the outline of the figure is shown while in other instances they are partly or fully filled with colour. Polychrome paintings are rare. The probability of the use of bamboo shoots, animal hair and porcupine quills, etc. for brushes, suggested by

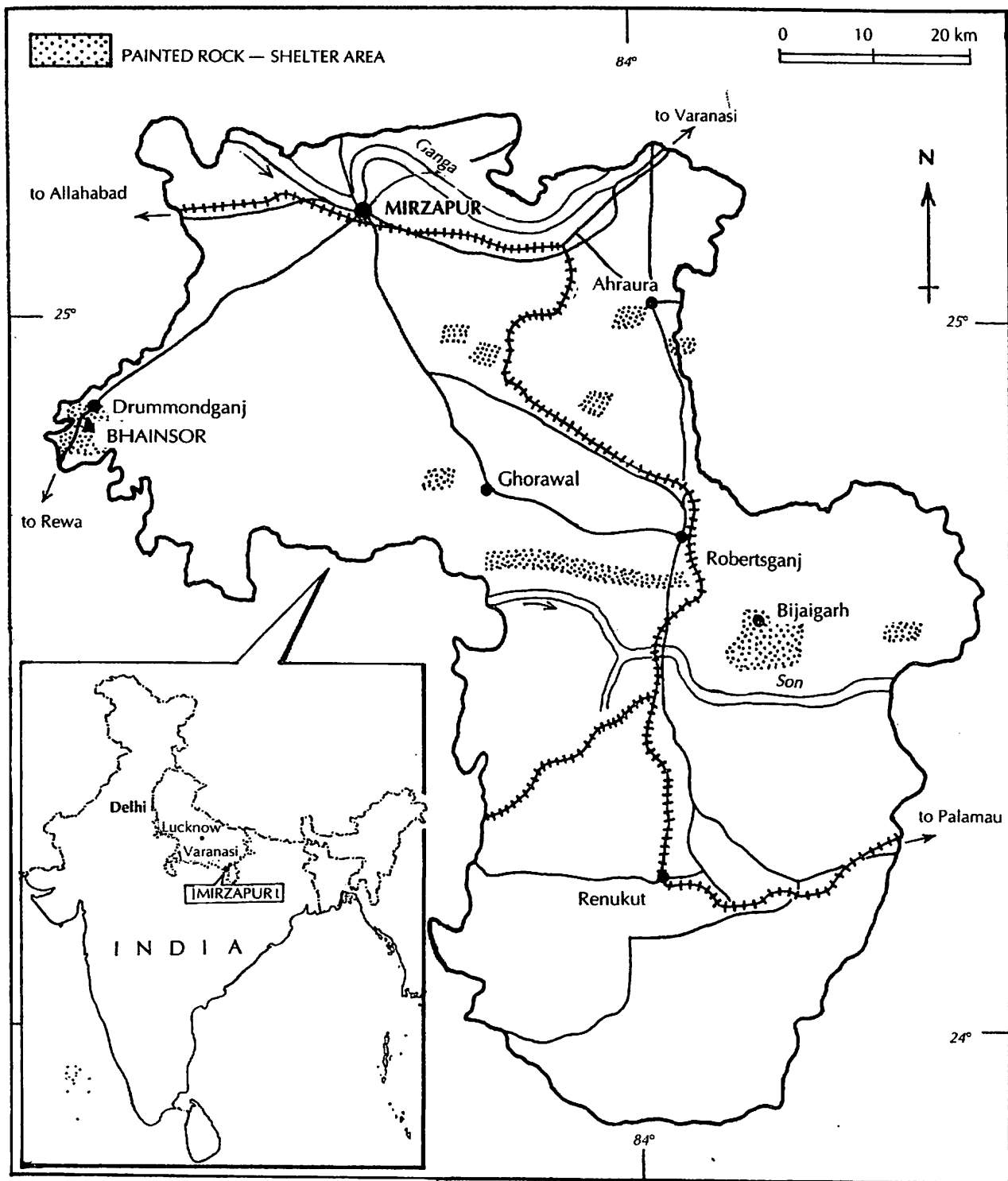


Figure 1 Location of the painted rock shelters of Mirzapur.

Wakankar and Mathpal, seems logical in the case of Mirzapur too (Wakankar and Brooks 1976: 5; Mathpal 1984a: 190).

Subject Matter and Styles

The subject matter of the paintings includes many motifs, themes and symbols. The number of human figures is twice that of the figures of other living creatures. There is a great variety of human figures: we have identified 258 different types of these. They include dancers (33%), hunters (11%) and warriors (4%). They are also shown engaged in other activities such as fruit-gathering, tree-climbing, rowing, etc. The largest of them is 75 cm and the smallest 2.5 cm in height. Only 18% of the figures are recognizable as male and 3% as female (fig. 3 bottom).

About 213 styles of headdresses made from feathers, leaves, horns and other materials might have been used to show the rank and position of a person in his clan, as a camouflage against the animals for hunt, for decoration and fashion, for head protection in war or for ritualistic purposes (Tewari 1982b: 1-16).

Among the animal figures, deer is the most common (42%) (fig. 4 top). Others include one horned rhino, elephant, bison (fig. 4 bottom), leopard, wild boar, wild bull, *neelgai* (antelope), monkey, cattle, porcupine, horse, camel, dog and lizard (*goh*). A few depictions of birds—peacock, crane, water birds, ostrich (?)—fish and snakes are also recorded.

Two figures of fish-like creatures found in Lakhma rock shelter are interesting but could not be identified because of the highly stylized depiction (fig. 2 bottom). The figures of wild boar are less frequent in comparison with other animals. Except for a few depictions of leopard, the animals of the feline family are conspicuous by their absence. Figures of porcupine are found only in the Dhokawa Maharani and Matahwa rock shelters. The horse is restricted to the paintings of Historical period. Camels are shown only in the Kauva-khoh rock shelter while the sole depiction of snake is recorded in Lakhma. Paintings of a long-necked bird have been recently discovered in the rock shelter of Jhandi Pahar, which seems to be an ostrich (?).

The weapons include thirteen sub-types of bows and arrows, twenty sub-types of bows and twelve types of harpoons, fourteen of swords and eleven types of shields, spears, sticks and barbed weapons.

The hand-prints from Mirzapur rock paintings include negative and positive types. In some of the examples the outlines of the palms are shown (fig. 6).

Inscriptions in Brahmi, Sankha and Nagari scripts are also found in some shelters. Some of the names included in them have been dated to 400-800 AD (Ghosh 1932). A Nagari inscription bears a date of 14th century AD.

Many circular, semi-circular, triangular, square and irregular designs included in the rock paintings are comparable to the alphabets of Ashokan Brahmi and

symbols of the punch-marked coins. Most important and earliest among them are those found in the lowermost layer of phase I in the rock shelters of Matahwa and Ghoramangar. These vertical lines are in black colour and might be examples of the earliest art forms.

Some very attractive linear patterns known as *Alpana* also belong to the recent phases.

Styles

Most of the human and animal figures look like shadows. They are usually executed devoid of eyes, nose, fingers and hooves. The heads of the human figures of earlier groups are generally round or oval; they are square and triangular in the later group. In a few examples the mouth is shown open, resembling the open beak of a bird and the nose appears to be horned. Sometimes only one hand or leg is shown, symbolizing both hands or legs. The torsos of the early human figures are cylindrical, linear and often "S" shaped, while later (Historical) they are depicted by triangles joined at their apexes. Generally the human figures are shown in profile, nude or wearing cloaks. Warriors of the later paintings are shown with medieval costumes.

X-ray style of depiction is very popular in the paintings of group one and early phases of group two (fig. 3 top). They may be classified in six sub-groups, in which (a) wind pipe and lung, (b) wind pipe and lung along with skeleton, (c) only skeleton, (d) foetus in the womb, (e) connecting tube from mouth to lower part of the body, (f) body filled with geometric patterns are shown.

Scenes

Dance is the most important social celebration depicted in the rock paintings of Mirzapur (fig. 3 bottom). It must have been directly and inextricably related to every aspect of their lives, for the occasions for celebration were manifold. Deity worship, solicitation of favours from gods and goddesses, black-magic chants, praying for a fruitful hunt, thanks giving for the same and the onset of each new season with its plethora of vivid flora must have brought a spring to the step of those primitive men who did the paintings.

About sixty dance scenes recorded from Mirzapur (Tewari 1982a) may be classified in six broad sub-groups: (a) dancers in a row, (b) dancers in a row holding each others hands or waist, (c) dancers in a circle, (d) dancers in an indefinite file, (e) dual dancers, (f) single dancers.

We find a remarkable demonstration of weapon-wielding, hand-raised dancers aligned together in a dance scene of Hathvani of the first sub-group. Another example of this group of Ghormangar is unique because of its figures, depicted as half fish and half frog, which seem to be dancing.

The dance form of the second sub-group is still very popular in Mirzapur. In

dence is not in favour of earlier antiquity of the rock paintings either. Hence the suggestion of the date of 6000 BC for earliest rock paintings and a time-bracket of 8000-300 BP for all of them is logical at the present state of our knowledge.

Though the themes (such as hunting, dance, war) styles of depiction (silhouette, X-ray, etc.) location and state of preservation are almost similar to that of contemporary rock paintings of other regions and countries, the rock paintings of Mirzapur to some extent have their own specialities. A few points of similarities and diversities in this regard are given here.

The depiction of animals being surrounded and killed, wounded animals, tossing away a hunter with their horns, pregnant animals, weapons, child birth, honey collection and figures of rabbit, rat, crow, duck, sparrow and python are absent in the Mirzapur area while being present in central India.

Many illustrations of animals being hunted in herds are found in central India, Europe and Africa, while Mirzapur has the maximum number of solitary animal hunt scenes. Animals with weapons embedded in their body, touching them or aimed towards them with the shaft still in the hands of hunters are shown more frequently in the Mirzapur area.

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