

RHINO-HUNT SCENE OF THE 'GHORA MANGAR' ROCK-SHELTER, MIRZAPUR : A REAPPRAISAL

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The 'Ghora Mangar' rock shelter (District Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh) is about 28 kms south of Robertsganj tehsil headquarter and about 12 Kms south-west of village Mau. Except in the rainy season 'Ghora Mangar Pahār' is approachable by Jeep from Robertsganj via Churk and village Mau. Robertsganj is well connected with Mirzapur and Allahabad by train and bus. Regular bus services are available from Varanasi for Robertsganj. Upto Churk one can reach by metalled road and onwards by the forest road leading to village Chirui. From the base of Ghora Mangar hillock the rock shelter is about 3 kms., which can be approached on foot. Boarding and lodging facilities are however available at Robertsganj.

The famous Rhino-hunt scene was first reported by J. Cockburn in the year 1883 (Cockburn : 1883 : 56-64). After Cockburn many scholars like B. B. Lal (1951 : 34-35), Jagdish Gupta (1967 : Hunting scenes, plate IV, Fig. I) and Mathpal (1981 : 22 ; 1984. Fig. 47) etc. illustrated it in their research articles and books. A copy of that is being illustrated here for reference (Fig. 1). In 1979-80 the author of this paper revisited 'Ghora Mangar' rock shelter while he was exploring this area in connection with his research work (Tewari-1982 (A) : 1-16 ; 1982(B) ; 1985 : 23) and noticed some important differences between the original painting (Fig. 2) and the scene published earlier by Cockburn and others.

It seems that after Cockburn none of the scholars visited this shelter personally. They have simply reproduced the scene published by Cockburn. Even if they visited the shelter they did not take care to inspect this scene minutely. So the mistakes initially made by Cockburn are being repeated by the scholars upto now. In this regard it will

be useful to compare the earlier published scene and the exact tracing (Fig. 2) of the original painting.

The Rhino-hunt scene of the Ghora Mangar is the most natural and rare amongst the scenes of Rhino-hunt found in the rock-shelters and caves of India (Neumayer; 1983: 69, 79, 1980. Fig. 27, 36, 167) and Africa (Lommel : 1976, 150). Primitive painters have painted it in dull ochre with a thin but dark outline. The scene measures about 93x60 cm. A wounded Rhino, surrounded by eleven hunters, is depicted here in a very lively form. Five pierced harpoons can be noticed in different parts of the one horned Rhino, three in the back, one in the hip and one below the knee. His anger at being attacked and the expression of acute pain due to the wounds has been very well depicted by his open mouth. The giant charging crusader has thrown a hunter high by a powerful sweep of his mighty horn. Two hunters from the front, two from the left, one from the back and one from the right are attacking the Rhino with their multi-barbed harpoons. The weapon of the hunter who is attacking from behind is deeply pierced in the hip of the Rhino. A couple of hunters, an archer and a harpoon holder, are shown at the

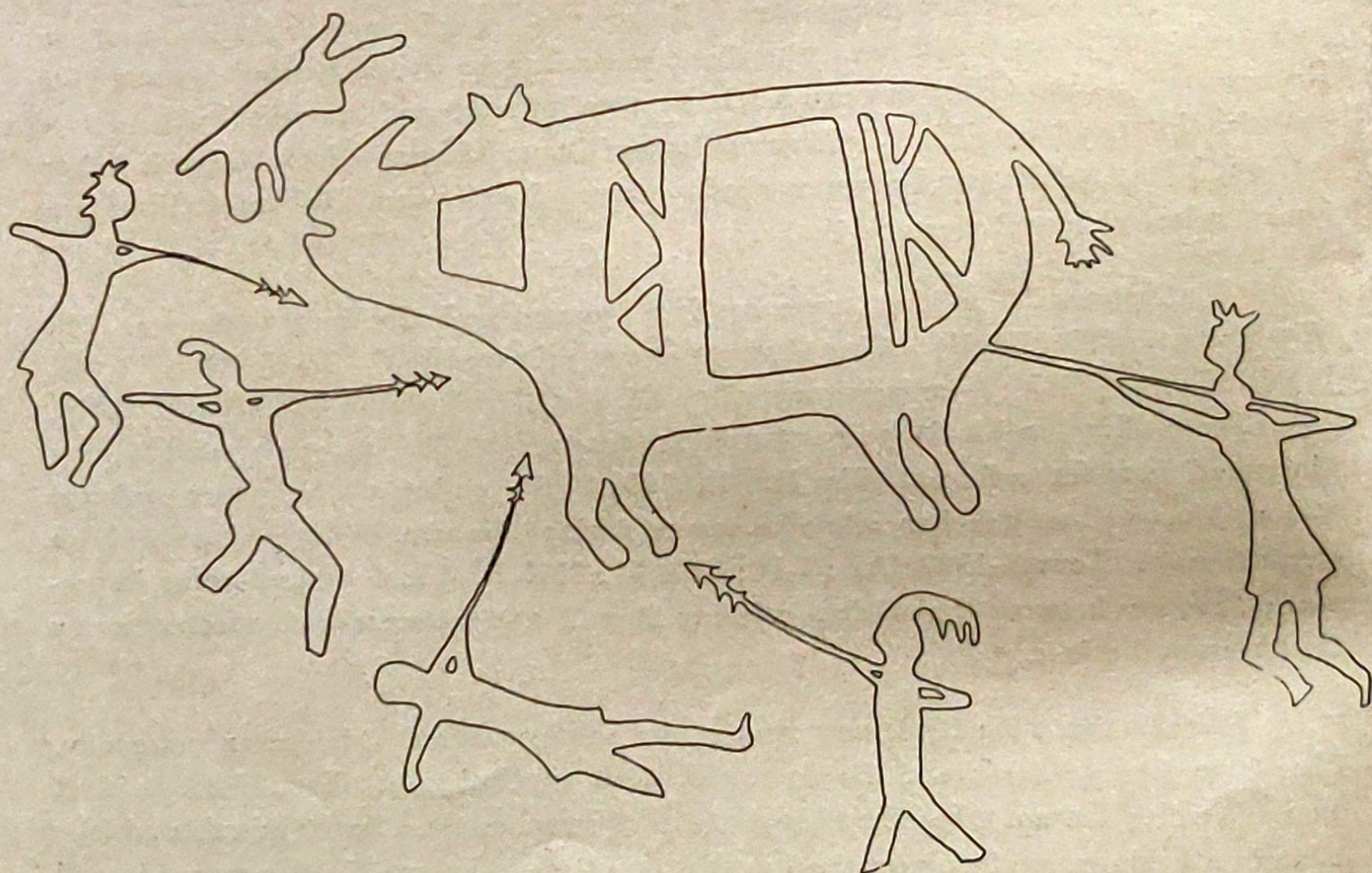


Fig. 1 Line Drawing, Earlier Illustration

extreme right, approaching the Rhino. Two more unarmed hunters are present in the upper and lower sides behind the Rhino, probably they have already thrown their weapons on the prey. It seems by the head-dresses of the hunters that they have camouflaged themselves with feathers, leaves and tree branches to come nearer to the Rhino. The enthusiasm of the hunters, their expression while attacking the Rhino and natural depictions are distinctive evidence of the artistic awareness and superb talent of the primitive painters.

Though Cockburn dated this scene not earlier than 300 years (Cockburn : 1883) but now generally its antiquity is assigned to the Stone Age. The harpoons shown in the hands of the hunters appear to have been made with wooden shafts and stone blades. This evidence clearly puts this scene in the Late Upper Palaeolithic or Mesolithic period.

Following differences have been found in the comparative study of the original and earlier published scenes :—

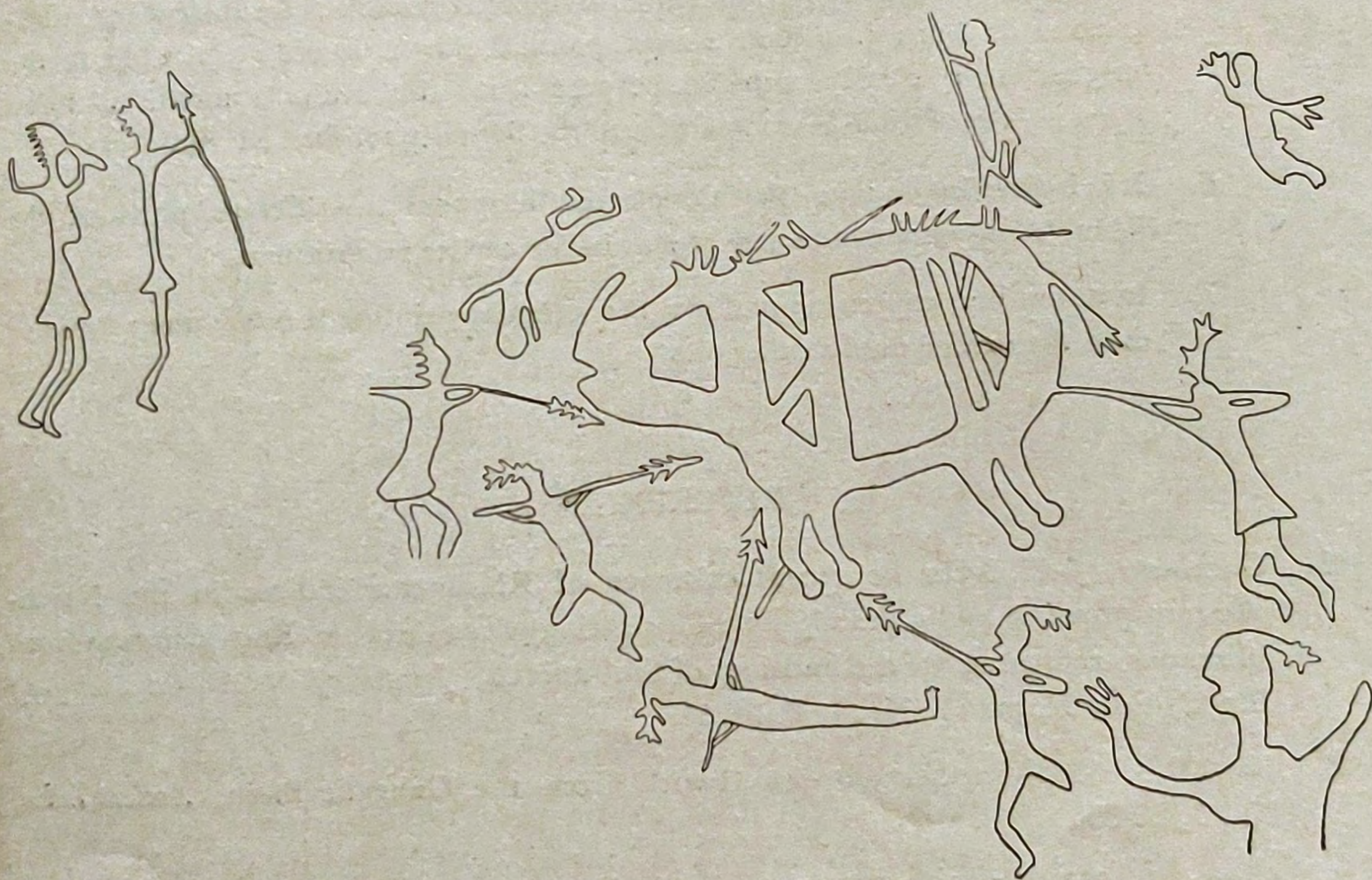


Fig. 2 Line Drawing, Tracing of the Original Painting

1. In this composition eleven hunters have been depicted around the Rhino, while only six hunters were shown in the earlier published scene. Hunters holding arch and harpoon in the extreme right, unarmed hunters with raised hands and a spear-holding hunter are absent in the earlier illustrations.
2. The swift attacking posture of the hunter, who is injecting his harpoon in the hip of the Rhino, and his head-dress are not evident in the earlier publications.
3. The head-dresses of all the hunters are distinctively different from the the earlier drawings.
4. The harpoons of the earlier illustrations look like metallic harpoons. They have been shown more pointed. While in the original painting their tips are less pointed and rough. It seems that they are representing the harpoons made with wood and stone implements. There is a clear difference in the numbers of the barbs.
5. The posture and shape of the Rhino is also comparable. In the earlier publications its horn has been shown pointed like a sword's tip, while in the original it is clearly rounded. Apart from this, Rhino's mouth is more open in the original in comparison to the figures published earlier.
6. It is interesting to note that the pierced harpoons in different parts of the Rhino's body are completely absent in the earlier publications.
7. In naturality, expression and art, the original painting is much more superior than the earlier published copies.

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