
New Archaeological Findings from the Rock-art Sites of Bhimlat and Gararda and Adjoining Areas in the Bundi District of Rajasthan

Himanshu Moreshwar Mahajan¹, Aniruddh Bahuguna², Priyank Talesara³ and Om Prakash Sharma⁴

- ¹. Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology, Rashtrasant Tukadoji Maharaj Nagpur University, Nagpur, Maharashtra – 440 001, India (*Email: himanshumahajan201@gmail.com*)
- ². Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology, Awadhesh Pratap Singh University, Rewa, Madhya Pradesh – 486 003, India (*Email: aniruddhbahuguna91@gmail.com*)
- ³. Madhav University, Madhav Hills, Bharja, Sirohi, Rajasthan – 307 026, India (*Email: thelostworld.in@gmail.com*)
- ⁴. House Number 43, New Colony, Bundi, Rajasthan – 323 001, India (*Email: kukkibnd@rediffmail.com*)

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Abstract: *This article presents new archaeological findings from the rock-art sites of Bhimlat, Gararda, and the adjoining areas in the Bundi district of Rajasthan, shedding light on the prehistoric and historical significance of these locations. The region, rich in rock shelters adorned with paintings and inscriptions, provides evidence of human occupation from the Mesolithic period through the early historic era. The Bhimlat site features nine rock shelters with paintings depicting hunting scenes, animals, and geometric motifs, along with a rare Brahmi inscription dated to the 5th century CE. Similarly, the Gararda site contains 30 to 40 rock shelters with artwork ranging from the Mesolithic to the historical periods, illustrating cultural and artistic continuity. The article also discusses lithic assemblages discovered at these sites, including microlithic and Palaeolithic tools, which underscore sustained human activity in the region. Recent discoveries near Astoli village provide further evidence of prehistoric occupation, including a large discoidal core and other stone tools. These findings highlight the need for scientific analysis and increased public awareness to preserve this invaluable cultural heritage.*

Keywords: Bundi, Rock Art, Mesolithic Period, Historical Period, Brahmi Script, Prehistoric Occupation, Cultural Continuity

Introduction

India is one of the three countries with the richest rock art heritage in the world, alongside Australia and South Africa. These artistic expressions, etched or painted on rock surfaces, offer a window into the lives and cultural landscapes of ancient peoples.

Rock art sites have been extensively documented across the length and breadth of India, with Central India recognized as the epicenter of this remarkable heritage. The earliest report of an Indian rock art site was made by A.C.L. Carlleyle in 1867, and since then, numerous scholars have continued to discover and document these invaluable cultural resources.

Recent archaeological explorations in Rajasthan, particularly in the Bundi district, have unveiled a wealth of rock art and artifacts that illuminate the prehistoric and early historic periods. The region is rich in rock shelters adorned with paintings that span from the Mesolithic to historical times. These artworks depict hunting scenes, geometric motifs, animals, and symbolic imagery, reflecting a wide range of human activities and artistic styles. Sites such as Bhimlat and Gararda have emerged as significant repositories of this heritage, showcasing both artistic and inscriptional evidence from various cultural epochs.

Moreover, the discovery of microlithic tools, Palaeolithic artifacts, and lithic assemblages near these rock shelters underscores the continuous human occupation of this region since prehistoric times. A recently documented Brahmi inscription at Bhimlat, dated to the 5th century CE, offers a rare glimpse into the historical usage of these sites. Such findings highlight the archaeological and cultural importance of Bundi's rock art and underscore the urgent need for scientific research and increased public awareness to ensure the preservation of this shared heritage.

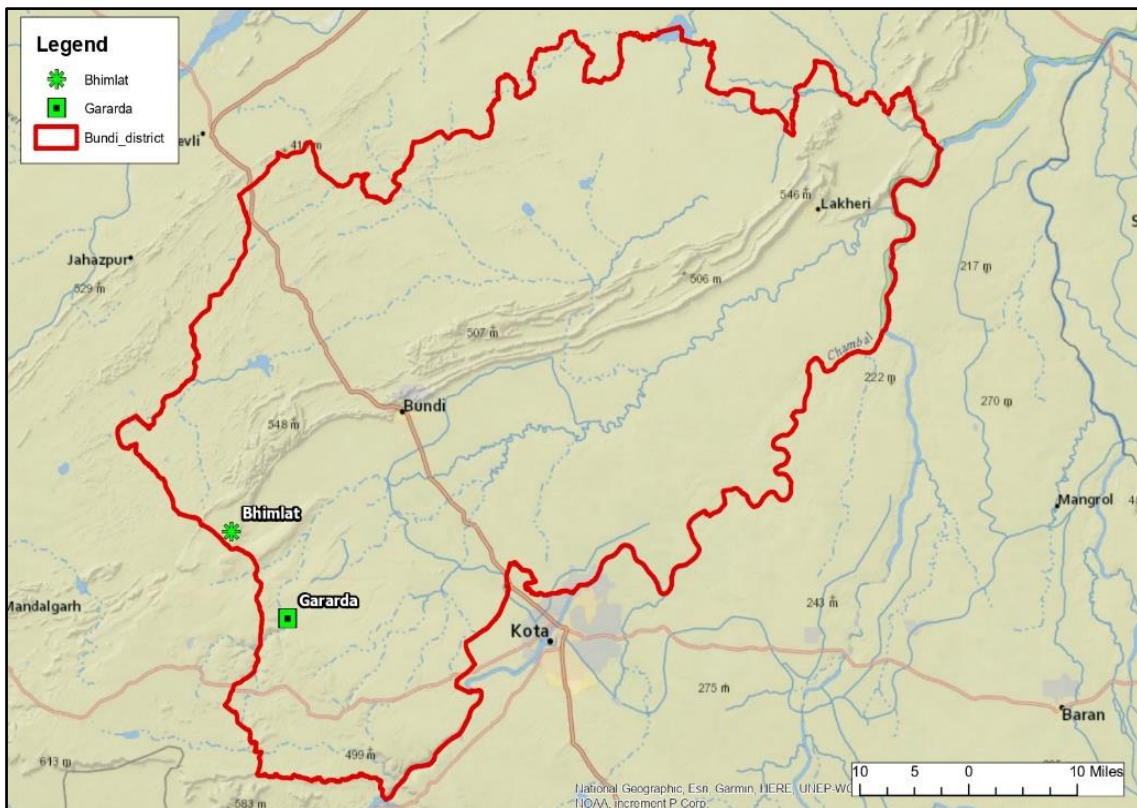


Figure 1: Site location Map (Bundi District)

Study Area

Bundi district (Figure 1), located in southeastern Rajasthan, is geographically bordered by Tonk district to the north, Sawai Madhopur to the northeast, Kota to the east and southeast, Chittorgarh to the south, and Bhilwara to the west. Covering an area of approximately 5,776.5 square kilometers, it lies between latitudes 24°59'22.09"N and 25°53'03.41"N, and longitudes 75°15'35.63"E and 76°21'32.20"E. The district features a well-organized drainage system, with the Chambal River and its tributaries flowing predominantly from southwest to northeast, encompassing most of the region. Additionally, the northern part of the district is partially drained by tributaries of the Banas River.

Topography

The topography of Bundi district is characterized by flat to gently undulating terrain, punctuated by small, isolated mounds. The Vindhyan Range, which trends from northeast to southwest, almost bisects the district. The southern section of this range generally slopes from southwest to northeast, while the northern section shows a west-to-east gradient. Notable high-elevation hills are found in the southern part of the district near Budhpura and to the west of Bundi city. The Chambal River, the district's principal watercourse, is joined by several important tributaries, including the Dungari, Bhimlat, Mej, Bajian, Sugli, and Kupal.

Geology

Geologically, Bundi district comprises distinct rock formations belonging to two major supergroups. The region extending from the northeast to the southwest is predominantly underlain by rocks of the Bhilwara Supergroup, which includes the Hindoli, Mangalwar, and Jahajpur Groups. In contrast, the southeastern to northeastern parts of the district are dominated by sedimentary sequences of the Vindhyan Supergroup. These formations, part of the Upper Vindhyan sequence and dated to approximately 100–600 million years ago, are prominently exposed across the region. A major geological feature—the Great Boundary Fault, a significant reverse fault—separates the Vindhyan Supergroup from the older Bhilwara Supergroup. Within the Vindhyan sequence, the Kaimur, Rewa, and Bhandar Groups are particularly well-represented in the district, reflecting a diverse and well-preserved geological history.

Previous Work

The earliest expressions of human creativity in India are vividly preserved in its extensive prehistoric rock art heritage. Rajasthan, in particular, boasts a dense concentration of such sites, with significant discoveries in the districts of Bhilwara, Chittorgarh, Jaipur, Kota, Bundi, Jhalawar, Sikar, Sirohi, Nagaur, Ajmer, and Baran. The rock paintings found across this region span an impressive chronological range—from the prehistoric period to the historical era—offering valuable insights into the evolving cultural and artistic traditions of its ancient inhabitants.



Figure 2: Rock art inscription with its Eye-copy

Bhimlat Rock Art Site

The Bhimlat rock art site (25.9008°N, 74.5053°E) is situated approximately 38 kilometers west of Bundi, the district headquarters. The site is primarily located along a waterfall and the adjoining riverbanks, with rock art distributed across nine shelters spread over a 2-kilometer stretch on both sides of the river valley. Based on stylistic elements, color usage, design motifs, and superimposition patterns, the paintings at Bhimlat are attributed to a time span ranging from the Mesolithic to the Historical period. The historical-era paintings vividly depict scenes of warfare, featuring warriors armed with swords, shields, and spears. Inscriptions from this period are also present at the site. The prevalence of superimposed artwork in many of the shelters reflects the site's prolonged use and the cultural transitions that occurred over time.

Bhimlat-I: The closest rock shelter to Bhimlat town, this site has suffered significant weathering, resulting in the fading and partial destruction of much of its artwork. Only faint traces of ochre pigment remain visible in certain areas.

Bhimlat-II: Located approximately 800 meters from Bhimlat-I, this shelter contains minimal remnants of rock art. It appears to have been used for ritualistic purposes (puja) by local villagers. The surviving artwork includes depictions of hunting scenes and images of bulls.

Bhimlat-III: A large sandstone shelter, Bhimlat-III features geometric designs and various motifs. However, much of the art has been damaged due to modern vandalism and a general lack of visitor awareness.

Bhimlat-IV: This shelter showcases superimposed paintings, with later historical imagery painted over earlier artworks. Notably, a significant historical inscription is also present on the rock surface, adding to its archaeological importance.

Bhimlat-V and VI: These two shelters preserve limited traces of rock art, with paintings confined to small sections of the rock surfaces. The artworks are less abundant and less prominent compared to other shelters in the group.

Bhimlat-VII: This shelter contains some of the earliest known rock paintings in the Bhimlat area, primarily depicting animals and hunting scenes. Over time, exposure to natural elements has caused the paintings to fade and deteriorate.

Bhimlat-VIII: A relatively smaller shelter within the Bhimlat complex, it features several paintings, including representations of animals and human figures.

Bhimlat-IX: Among the oldest shelters in the Bhimlat group, this site preserves a rich collection of paintings, including depictions of animals and human motifs. Despite environmental wear, many of these artworks remain visible and are crucial to understanding the site's chronology.

New Findings: Inscriptions

The rock art of Bundi district provides clear evidence of shelter use during the early historic period, with several painted inscriptions illustrating a chronological transition from the prehistoric to the historical era. When analyzed alongside other paintings within the same shelters, these inscriptions contribute to establishing a coherent timeline of cultural development. Notably, the earliest known inscriptions have been recorded in the Bhimlat-I rock shelter. During our exploration of the Bundi district, we identified a historical inscription within this shelter (Figure 2). Rendered in a dull red pigment, the inscription has suffered partial erosion and vandalism, likely due to religious practices and prolonged exposure to natural elements.

Inscribed rock art is a rare phenomenon in India, with most examples dating from the Gupta period. The inscription found in Bhimlat-1 is particularly significant for its historical context:

- **Language:** Sanskrit
- **Script:** Brahmi
- **Date:** 5th century CE
- **Inscription:** Śri Kavilana li(khi)tam kamvatam

The inscription was deciphered by Dr. K. Munirathnam Reddy, Director of the Epigraphy Branch, Mysuru, Archaeological Survey of India. The paintings in this shelter, predominantly in red ochre, correspond to the historical period, as indicated by depictions of battle scenes alongside the inscription.

Fieldwork in Bundi District: Gararda Rock Art Site

Gararda (25°12'27.56"N, 75°29'20.74"E), located approximately 40 kilometers southwest of the Bundi district headquarters, is a prominent rock art site in the region. Nestled along the banks of the Reva River within the Vindhyachal mountain range, Gararda

village lies about 30 kilometers from the Jaipur-Kota National Highway and 55 kilometers from Kota city. The site comprises 30 to 40 rock shelters situated on both sides of the river. The paintings here were created using natural pigments such as hematite, ochre, and limestone, with red ochre, faint red, and white being the dominant colors.

The rock art at Gararda spans a broad chronological range—from the Mesolithic to the historical period—and includes a rich variety of subjects (Figures 3–7). These encompass depictions of animals, hunting scenes, dancing figures, deer, cattle, human activities, and geometric motifs. The detailed and expressive nature of the artwork offers valuable insights into the social and cultural life of the region's ancient inhabitants, reflecting their customs, rituals, and everyday experiences.

During our field exploration, we conducted a detailed survey of the Gararda rock art site and made several notable discoveries. In close proximity to the shelters, we identified numerous cup marks along with a diverse assemblage of Mesolithic tools (Figures 8–9). These tools, crafted from fine-grained cryptocrystalline materials such as chert, chalcedony, and agate, exhibit a variety of forms and functions. Prominent tool types include blades, bladelets, burins, as well as both geometric and non-geometric microliths. Many of the blades and flakes were skillfully retouched into finished tools, with blade removal from cores accomplished through both direct and indirect percussion techniques.

In addition to the microlithic assemblage, the site also yielded a selection of Lower and Middle Palaeolithic tools, indicating a long and continuous sequence of human occupation. These findings affirm Gararda's significance as a major prehistoric habitation and cultural center within the Bundi region.



Figure 3: Paintings in rock shelter



Figure 4: Paintings in rock shelter



Figure 5: Superimposed rock painting



Figure 6: Paintings with honeycomb pattern



Figure 7: Gararda Rock Shelter on the bank of river Reva



Figure 8: Stone slab with Cup marks



Figure 9: lithic assemblage collected from the site

Recent Findings from Astoli

Astoli village, situated approximately 7 kilometers from Bundi in the Bundi tehsil of Rajasthan, emerged as another significant site during our recent exploration. In the vicinity of the village, we discovered several prehistoric artifacts (Figure 10), including a large discoidal core fashioned from quartzitic sandstone, along with additional tools

made from chert. These findings further reinforce the evidence of early human activity in the region and contribute to our understanding of prehistoric settlement patterns in the Bundi area.



Figure 10: Stone tools collected from Astoli

Discussion and Conclusion

The archaeological findings from the rock art sites of Bhimlat, Gararda, and the recent discoveries near Astoli village provide valuable insights into the continuous human occupation of Bundi district from the Mesolithic period through the early historic era. These discoveries reflect the region's rich cultural and technological evolution, as evidenced by both the extensive rock art and the variety of lithic tools uncovered across these sites.

The Bhimlat rock art complex, comprising nine shelters, offers a striking example of long-term cultural continuity. The paintings span from the Mesolithic to the historical period, depicting hunting scenes, symbolic motifs, and vivid battle imagery characteristic of the Gupta period. This is further substantiated by a rare 5th-century CE Brahmi inscription, inscribed in Sanskrit, discovered at the site. This inscription not only anchors the rock art in a specific historical context but also highlights the dual function of these shelters as spaces for both artistic and inscriptional expression. The association with the Gupta civilization underscores Bhimlat's significance as a culturally and historically important landmark. Similarly, the Gararda site, with its 30 to 40 rock shelters lining the Reva River, exemplifies the enduring artistic traditions of the region. Created using natural pigments such as red ochre, faint red, and white, the paintings illustrate a wide array of subjects, including animals, hunting scenes, dancing figures, and abstract symbols. These artworks reflect the cultural beliefs, rituals, and everyday life of the region's early inhabitants. In addition, the discovery of both Microlithic and Palaeolithic tools—crafted from chert, chalcedony, and agate—points to prolonged human activity in the area. The range of tool types, including blades,

bladelets, burins, and geometric forms, suggests the site's sustained use for hunting, tool production, and possibly ceremonial purposes. Recent discoveries near Astoli village, including a large discoidal core and other tools fashioned from quartzitic sandstone and chert, further reinforce evidence of prehistoric human presence in the region. These artifacts add to the growing body of material that situates Bundi as a significant hub of early human settlement and activity.

Collectively, these findings deepen our understanding of prehistoric and early historic lifeways in Bundi district. The rock art serves as a vivid visual archive of cultural, social, and spiritual expression, spanning thousands of years. The presence of the Brahmi inscription at Bhimlat-I uniquely bridges the prehistoric and historic worlds, emphasizing the continuity of cultural expression into the early historic period. Meanwhile, the region's rich lithic assemblages—from the Lower Palaeolithic through the Microlithic—demonstrate evolving technological skills and adaptation over millennia. Despite their immense historical and cultural value, these sites face growing threats from vandalism, natural erosion, and ritualistic practices. To ensure their preservation, urgent scientific documentation, protective conservation, and public outreach efforts are essential. Raising awareness among local communities and integrating their participation in preservation initiatives can play a pivotal role in safeguarding this cultural legacy. This research highlights the pressing need for continued collaboration among archaeologists, historians, conservationists, and local stakeholders to protect and study the archaeological heritage of Bundi district. By doing so, we not only preserve the material traces of early human life but also enrich our understanding of the complex tapestry of India's ancient past.

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