
Preliminary Report of New Rock Art Sites in the Betwa Source Region of Raisen District, Madhya Pradesh

Shaik Saleem¹ and Parth R. Chauhan¹

¹. Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Sector 81, Mohali, Punjab – 140 306, India (Email: saleemshaikhdc@yahoo.co.in, parthrc@iisermohali.ac.in)

Received: 26 July 2019; Revised: 13 September 2019; Accepted: 07 October 2019

Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology 7 (2019): 252-265

Abstract: Recent surveys carried out in the Raisen District of Madhya Pradesh were mainly intended to document as well as to study various aspects of previously reported rock art sites. During these surveys, however, 11 new sites were discovered in the unexplored parts of the Betwa source region in Raisen District. The surveys carried out by Shankar Tiwari in 1975 reported a few isolated areas in different parts of the study area which had not been explored since then. The present paper gives preliminary information about these new rock art sites and associated cultural material of different periods found in the unexplored parts of the Betwa source region in the Raisen District.

Keywords: Rock Paintings, Human Figures, Animal Figures, Cultural Material, Betwa River, Raisen District, Madhya Pradesh

Introduction

Raisen District is located on the eastern side of Bhopal, the capital city of Madhya Pradesh. The source region of the Betwa River in Raisen District is a saucer-shaped floodplain spread out on the foot of the Vindhyan range, between 77° 21'E 77 45'E and 22° 55'N to 23 18'N on the southern edge of the Central Indian plateau over-looking the Narmada Basin. The five hundred square miles of this semi-circular floodplain in the central part of Raisen District was created by the Betwa River and its tributaries and it is surrounded by a chain of sandstone hills. These hills are sedimentary rocks of the Vindhyan formation with large rock outcrops, rock overhangs and rock shelters. These shelters were inhabited during the Late Quaternary (Wakankar 1984, 1992, Misra 1986, et al 1979) by different ethnic communities since prehistoric period and have been painted at different locations. In the last five decades, rock art scholars like Wakankar (1984, 1992), Pandey (1992, 1993) and Tyagi (1988, 1992) have discovered numerous rock art sites in the Bhopal hills, Satkunda and Kharwai hills in the north, isolated rock shelters at Bhojpur in the east; and the four hills adjoining Bhimbetka hill in the south were brought to light and studied. Among the thirty-one individual sandstone hills that encircle the Betwa source region, painted rock shelters were found only on eleven

sandstone hills during the surveys carried out by Shankar Tiwari whereas four sandstone hills have no rock shelters. The remaining sixteen hills covering more than half of the length of the necklace-like chain of hills surrounding the Betwa source region have been left unexplored and hence termed as *terra incognita* (Tiwari 1976, 1984).



Figure 1: Location map of new rock art sites in Betwa source region in Raisen District

Location of the New Rock Art Sites

During 2017-18, one of the authors of the present paper (S.S.) not only documented rock art sites in Raisen District, but also explored a few isolated and unexplored hills in the Betwa source region (Figure 1 Table 1). These surveys have resulted in the discovery of eleven new rock art sites among which nine are located between Raisen and Chiklod. The other two sites, namely Barla, located between Raisen and Sanchi and Peela Pani is five kilometres away on the north-western side of Raisen town. During these surveys, cultural material belonging to different time periods ranging from prehistoric to Historic periods were noticed in and around the rock art sites. A few sites such as Sita Talai and Ghatla have been previously reported by Chaubey

(2014). According to Tiwari (1976, 1984), rock art production in the Betwa source region was initiated from Chalcolithic period onwards. According to Schaap (2013), the rock paintings found at Raisen are of a different style than from other regions and thus, has termed it as the *Raisen style*.

Table 1: 3385 figures in 56 painted rock shelters of 11 new rock art sites in Raisen District, Madhya Pradesh

Name of site	Animals	Humans	Birds	Decorative or <i>Alpana</i> designs	Plants / trees with beehives	Intricate and Geometric	Hand prints	Abstract/ others	Faded
Barla	27	15	1	–	–	1	2	–	67
Bhadka	71	110	1	–	–	–	4	1 / 1 Chariot	6
Bhutiya Khoh	42	51	–	–	1	–	–	–	80
Dam Dalar	47	53	–	–	1	–	–	–	71
Dhaniya Khedi	237	165	5	2	–	–	–	9 dots, 3 cupules, 2 flowers, 35 finger prints, 1 engraving	287
Dumavli	112	211	2	–	–	–	3	1 stupa, 1 incomplete figure, 1 animal skin	300
Islam Nagar	3	2	2	–	–	–	–	–	7
Karhoda	78	43	–	2	–	–	–	61 small lines, 1 crocodile	143
Karmodiya	264	110	2	–	1	2	–	11 modern engravings of names, flower and swastikas	307
Maser	80	67	1	–	–	–	–	1 flower, 1 bow, 2 arrows, 1 spear, 1 unidentified design	145
Peela Pani	5	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	11
Total figures 3385	966	828	14	4	3	3	9	134	1424

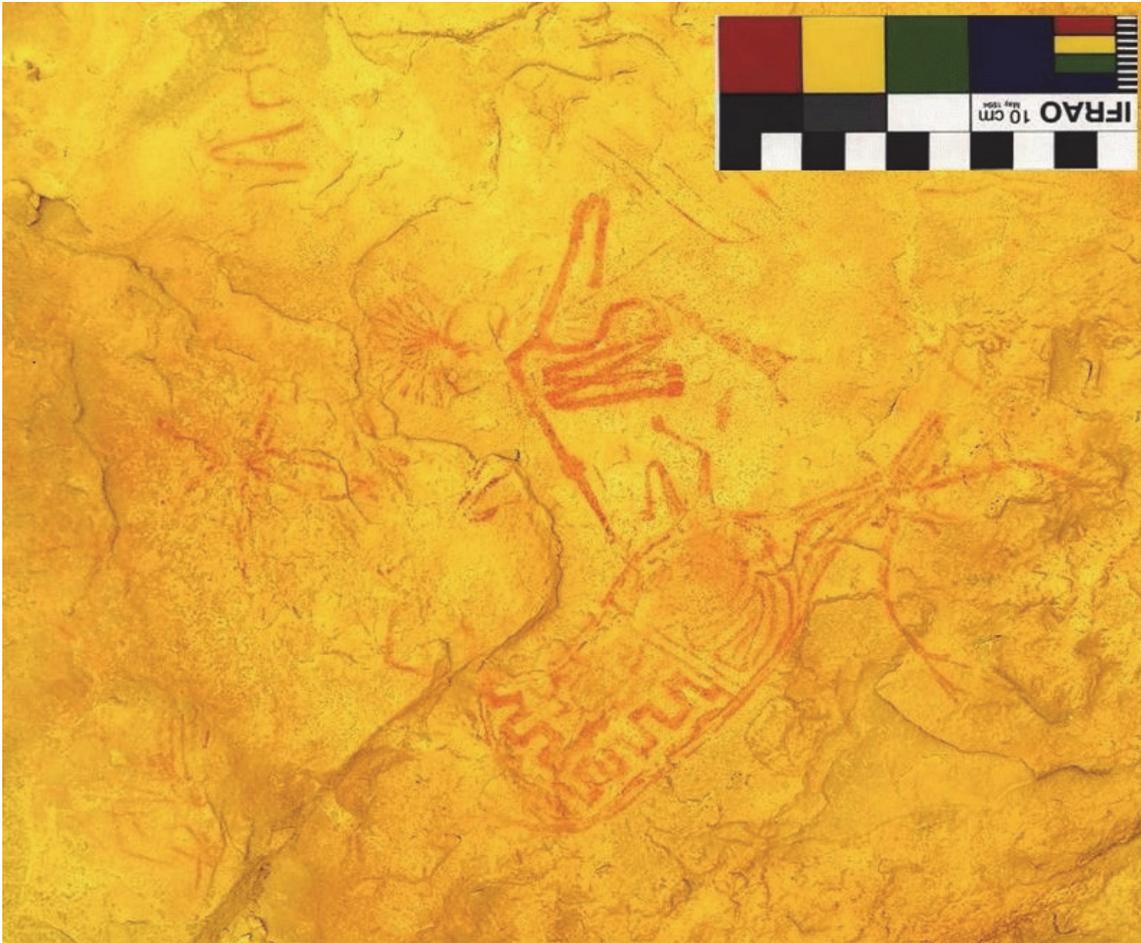


Figure 2: Butchering scene at Maser



Figure 3: Stick shaped human figures in hunting scene at Barla

Rock Art and Associated Cultural Material

This study was not only intended to study various aspects of rock art, but also to find rock paintings of Non-Iconic and Iconic phases/categories with substantial pigment preservation for various scientific studies (Saleem 2015) as it is very difficult to find rock paintings with solid pigments (Cockburn 1884). Various scientific studies will help to establish a chronometric sequence for different types of rock paintings as well as to solve the disputes about the origin and antiquity of rock art in India (Saleem 2015, 2017). According to Bednarik and colleagues (2005) and Banerjee and Chakravarty (2014) efforts have been made to directly date rock art in this region, but estimating the precise ages of individual paintings remain as one of the most challenging tasks in South Asian archaeology. Not only is pigment preservation inadequate for sample collection but most often, such samples rarely yield any organic material required for absolute dating.

Rock paintings of both Non-Iconic and Iconic phases/categories have been noticed at the new rock art sites and are described in more detail below.

Non-Iconic Phase: Intricate patterns of Non-Iconic or Pre-figurative phase are not found at the newly discovered rock art sites, but two geometric patterns were found at Karmodiya (Figure 11a) and similar geometric patterns have been found at Bhimbetka and Urden (Saleem and Chauhan 2019). However, large number of animal figures found at these rock art sites were found with body decorations of intricate or geometric patterns.

Iconic Phase: Human Figures: Different types of human figures such as 'S' shaped, stick-shaped and square-shaped human figures have been noticed at Karmodiya, Maser, Barla, Bhadka, Islam Nagar, Karhoda, Dumavli, Dam Dalar and Dhaniya Khedi. The 'S' shaped human figures were earlier assigned to the Upper Palaeolithic period on the basis of rock art attributes such as style and superimpositions (Wakankar 1984, 1992, Wakankar and Brooks 1976). However, our perception of the Indian Upper Palaeolithic phase has changed significantly over the decades. Today, it is known to be archaeologically ambiguous and does not consistently and exclusively occur chronologically between the Middle Palaeolithic and Mesolithic phases, but overlaps considerably with both in many regions of India. Therefore, maintaining an Upper Palaeolithic label for all painted 'S' shaped human figures in India is speculative. Only scientific study of such paintings will better help in establishing absolute dates for these 'S' shaped human figures and associated animal figures. A few human figures painted in green and red colours were found at Dhaniya Khedi and Karmodiya. The human figures in green colour found at Dhaniya Khedi are highly faded and are superimposed by animal and human figures painted in red colour. But the 'S' shaped human figure found at Maser is painted in red colour and it is unique as it represents butchering activity in which one 'S' shaped human figure is shown as removing an arrow from belly portion of a hunted deer. Such kind of rock paintings representing butchering activities were rarely found in the Indian rock art sites.



Figure 4: Stick shaped human figures in dancing scene at Karmodiya

The male figure in the scene is shown as holding an arrow in the left hand and has kept a bow and a spear on the ground, whereas an arrow is shown as stuck in the belly portion of the deer is partially visible, suggesting that the deer was hunted (Figure 2). The 'S' shaped figure is shown as removing an arrow from the belly of the deer, but an unidentified object similar to a cutting tool or a scraper or a flake painted in red colour was placed near the forelegs of the deer. The 'S' shaped human figure is shown as wearing bands on both elbows and ankles as well as a one-piece cloth-like dress shown as a langot. The deer figure is painted in red colour and it was drawn in naturalistic outlines using the x-ray style showing the internal organs. The deer is shown as lying on the ground with one of its forelimbs bent while one is almost straight, suggesting a lifeless position. One of the hind legs is bent whereas the other is partially faded. Although all anatomical features are not proportionate or diagnostic enough, the antler morphology suggests that the *barasingha* species (swamp deer) is represented. Another 'S' shaped human figure painted in red colour is shown on the right side of this panel as watching the butchering of the deer. Both 'S' shaped human figures are shown as wearing a similar feathered head-dress whereas among them one is shown with facial features which is a rare feature. Another faded human figure equipped with bow and arrows on the left side of this panel was shown as walking towards the deer. The entire panel on which this scene is located is currently facing natural weathering and exfoliation. Representations of butchering activities were rarely found in Indian rock art sites. But representation of a butchering and feasting scene stylistically assigned to Chalcolithic period was found at Chibbadnala (Kumar *et al* 1992). In fact, scenes of butchery are extremely rare even globally and are currently known from some young contexts (e.g. Mark and Billo 2009).



Figure 5: Stick shaped human figure in life-size proportions at Bhadka

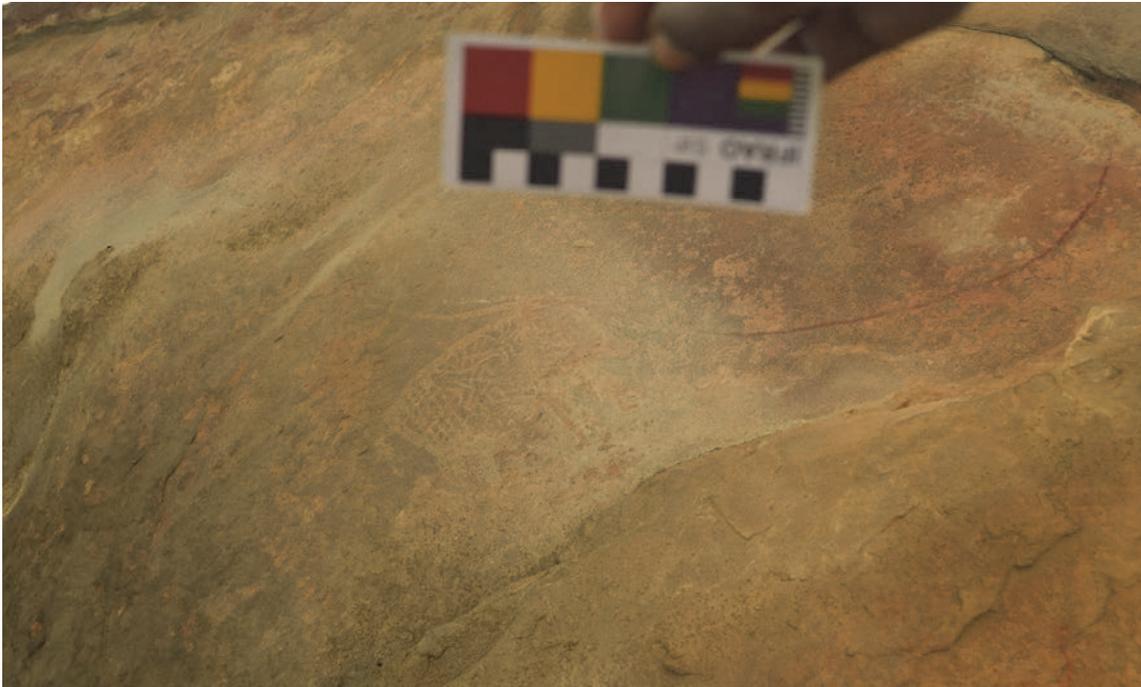


Figure 6: Wild boar figure at Maser

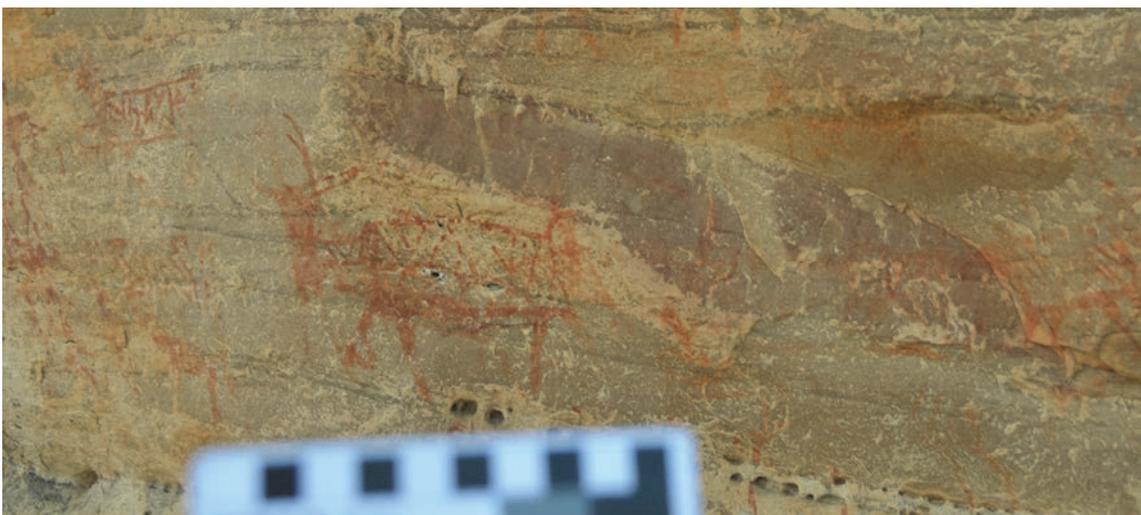


Figure 7: Bull figures at Karmodiya

Stick-shaped human figures stylistically assigned to the Mesolithic period by previous researchers (Wakankar 1984, 1992), have been found in the rock art sites of Maser, Barla, Karmodiya, Karhoda, Bhadka, Dhaniya Khedi, Islam Nagar, Bhutiya Khoh and Dumavli. The Stick-shaped human figures found at Bhadka, Bhutiya Khoh, Karhoda, Karmodiya, Dumavli, Islam Nagar, Maser and Barla were shown in hunting activities (Figure 3) whereas the stick-shaped human figures at Bhadka, Dam Dalar, Barla, Maser, Dumavli and Karmodiya were shown in dancing activities (Figure 4). However, the stick-shaped human figures found at Bhadka are unique as they are painted in life-size proportions and they have body decorations on elbows and shown as wearing a similar horned head-dress, and shown as equipped with bow and arrows in quiver

(Figure 5) whereas a few stick-shaped human figures in life-size proportions were shown in dancing postures as well. Similar representations of stick-shaped human figures in life-size proportions have not been reported so far from any other rock art site in India whereas a few stick shaped human figures found at Lakhajoar are 40cm in height (Saleem and Chauhan 2019). A few stick-shaped human figures found at Bhadka were painted in yellow colour and they were shown as equipped with bows and arrows. These figures were superimposed by a chariot figure which was painted in red colour; similar chariot figures were classified as Chalcolithic by previous researchers. Four stick-shaped human figures found at Bhadka were painted in white colour and they were shown as wearing different type of head-dress and equipped with bows and arrows (Figure 12 a, b and c). Different types of stick-shaped human figures found at the new rock sites such as Barla, Dumavli, Maser, Karmodiya, Bhadka, etc. (Figure 3, 4, 5, 12 a, b & c) were shown as wearing different types of head-dresses and body decorations and equipped with various types of bows and arrows suggests that there is a long continuity in the depiction of stick-shaped human figures, and requires an elaborative study as well whereas two varieties of stick shaped human figures among which the stick shaped human in dull red colour are found superimposed on those in dark red colour were found at Putli Karar (Saleem and Chauhan 2019). A few square shaped female figures found at Karmodiya (Figure 11b) were shown as wearing long-skirts decorated with various designs. Similar Square shaped female figures wearing long skirts with different types of body decorations have also been noticed at Putli Karar (Saleem and Chauhan 2019).



Figure 8: Food collection scene at Dam Dalar



Figure 9: Horse riders and human figure with swords and shields at Dam Dalar



Figure 10: Fragments of iron slag at Dumavli

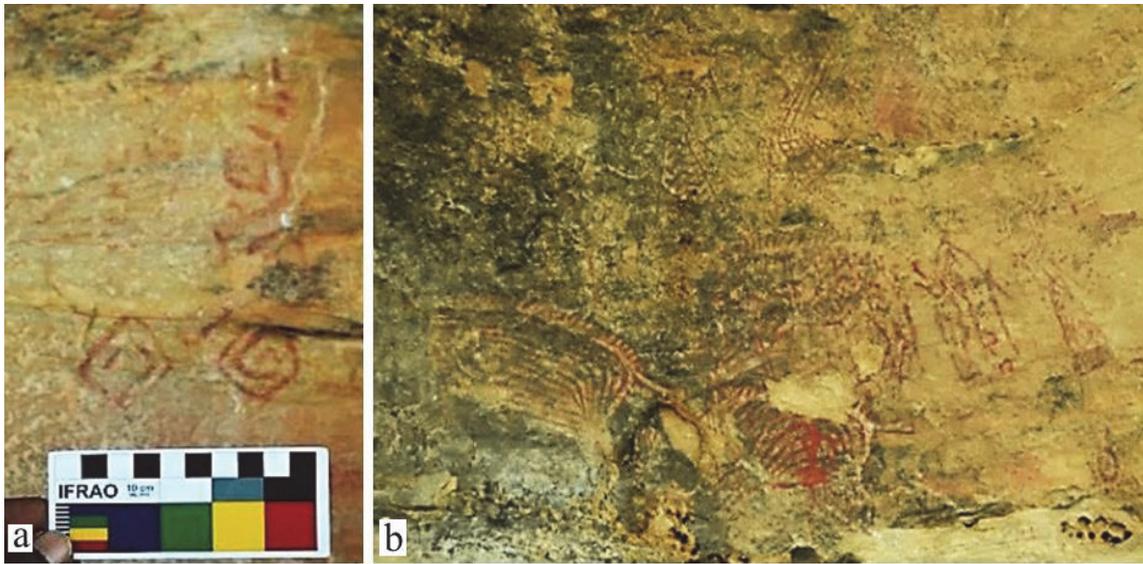


Figure 11: (a) - Geometric pattern at Karmodiya and (b) - female figures at Karmodiya

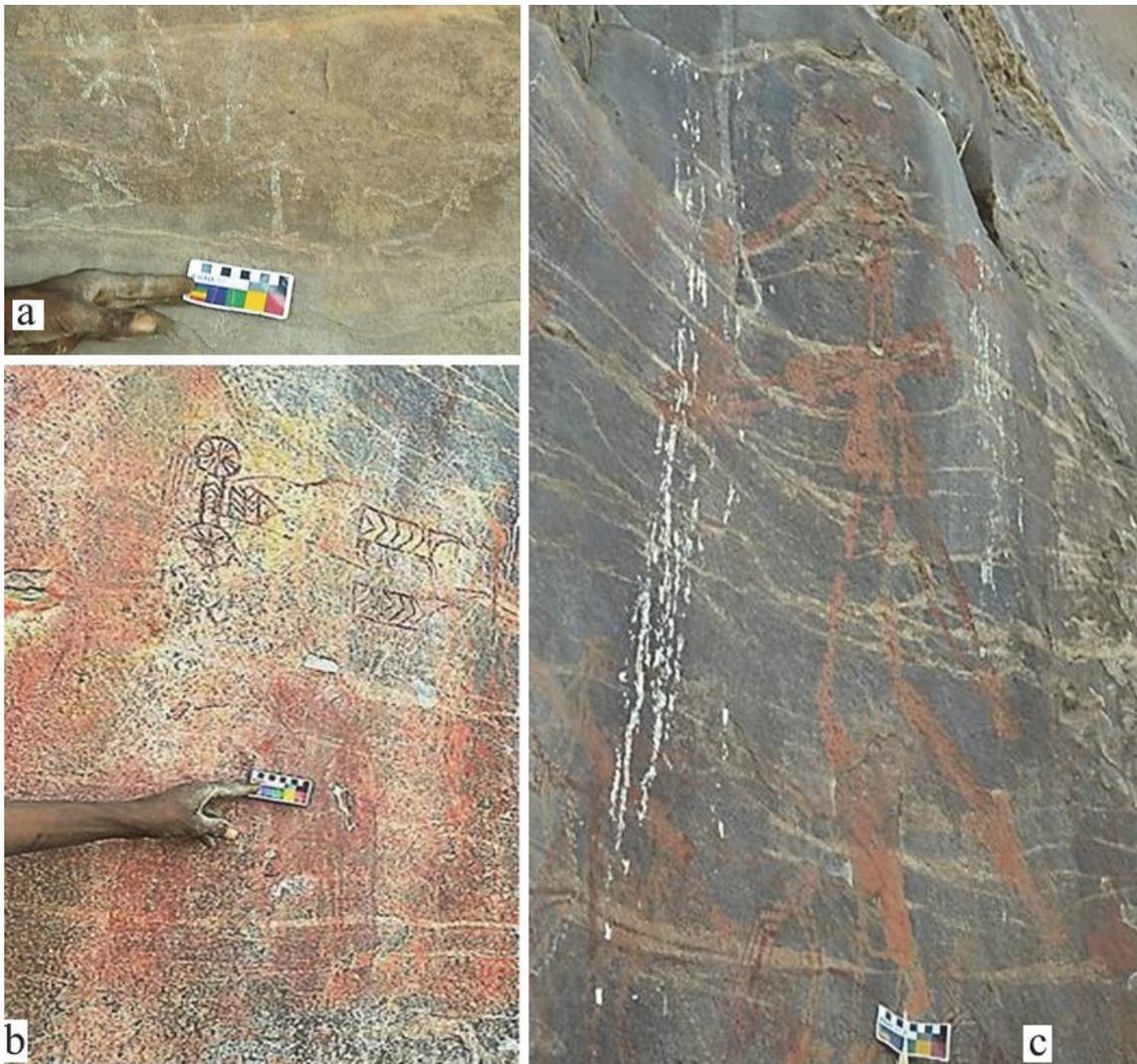


Figure 12: Stick shaped human figures in white, yellow and red colours at Bhadka

Animal figures: A large number of animal figures found at the new rock art sites and they were painted in green, red, black and white colours and appear to belong to prehistoric to historic periods. The body portion of these animal figures was drawn in naturalistic outlines and decorated with intricate or geometric patterns, or the body portion was left blank. Similar representations of animal figures were sometimes shown in association with 'S' shaped, stick and square-shaped human figures (Figures 2 & 3) were relatively assigned by previous researchers to Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods respectively (Wakankar 1984, 1992). A number of wild boar figures stylistically assigned to the Mesolithic period (by previous researchers) were found at Barla, Maser, Karhoda, Karmodiya and Bhadka and the stick-shaped human figures were shown as hunting these wild boars. But a few representations of wild boars termed as the mythical wild boar similar to those found at Bhimbetka and Lakhajour were also found at Maser (Figure 6). Stylistically the animal figures found at Maser, Karmodiya and Dhaniya Khedi are similar to the rock paintings found in the painted rock shelters of Raisen.

A sudden change appears in the form of depiction of animals and in their style, theme and subject matter (although absolute dating is required to verify this). The earlier dynamic paintings of the (presumably) Mesolithic period appear to have been replaced by stiff and static paintings of the early agriculturists and cattle keepers phase. Representations of the domesticated animal figures such as cattle appear to have been painted from this phase onwards, a trend that is visible across the Indian Subcontinent. The body portion of the animal figures was partially drawn in outlines as well as in flat wash and decorated with vertical, horizontal, wavy lines or dots (Figure 7).

The paintings of the stiff and static nature of the early agriculturists and cattle keepers phase appear to have been subsequently replaced by stylistic depictions of humped and long-horned cattle (Neumayer 1993, Sonawane 1992). Similar representations of stylistic animal figures drawn during the Chalcolithic period were found at most of the new rock art sites. Human figures drawn during both these phases were found in flat wash and sometimes they were shown in food-gathering activities, such as at Dam Dalar (Figure 8).

The rock paintings of the Historical period are almost similar to those of the Chalcolithic period. The main difference between the paintings of Chalcolithic and Historical periods is that the rock paintings drawn during the latter phase gradually shifted towards particular themes and sometimes accompanied with inscriptions in Brahmi or Shankha scripts. Depictions of chariot figures were rarely found in the paintings belonging to the Chalcolithic period, and are almost absent in those of the Historical period. Such representations of chariot figures drawn during the Chalcolithic period were found at the new rock art sites of Bhadka and Karmodiya. Depictions of horse-riders became a standard theme in the Historical period. Similar representations of horse-riders equipped with swords, shields and spears were shown as fighting with soldiers on horse-back or on foot were found at the new rock art sites

(Figure 9). A few representations of horse-riders and soldiers found at these new sites are similar to those found in the rock art sites of Mahadeo Hills.

Stone tool assemblages of Lower and Middle Palaeolithic periods were found at Dumavli, Islam Nagar, Maser, Karhoda and Bhadka whereas microliths were found scattered in and around the rock shelters of all the new rock art sites. Ceramic assemblages of the Historic period were found in the rock shelters of Dumavli, Dam Dalar, Karmodiya, Maser and Bhutiya Khoh. Fragments of iron slag were found abundantly in the rock shelters of Dam Dalar and Dumavli (Figure 10). A few rock shelters at Dam Dalar, Dumavli, Maser and Karmodiya have sedimentary deposits which can be excavated for material remains. Surveys in other isolated hills and the study of the cultural material of different time periods found in and around the new rock art sites needs further investigations.

Acknowledgements

We are thankful to the Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi for a research grant (Project title: *Documentation, Study and Scientific Analysis of Rock Art in Raisen District, Madhya Pradesh*). We are also thankful to DFO, SDFO and Forest Rangers of Obaidullaganj and Chiklod divisions, Madhya Pradesh, Valaram Prajapati, Shubham Sharma and his family members, Sevaram from Barla and Karhoda, and Rajeev Chaubey of Raisen for helping S.S. while visiting rock art sites in Raisen District. Shaik Saleem is thankful to the Archaeological Survey of India for providing the licence for fieldwork. Facilities and laboratory space provided by IISER Mohali are also appreciated. We are thankful to Shashi Bhushan Mehra, IISER Mohali for helping us in preparing the Google map that shows the newly discovered rock art sites.

References

- Banerjee, R and S. Chakravarty. 2014. Absolute Dating of a Time Marker from the Satpurus An Appraisal through Uranium Series for Central Indian Rock Art, in *Suitable Techniques in Dating Rock Art*, Malla B (Ed.), pp. 169-189, New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts.
- Bednarik, R. G., G. Kumar, A. Watchman and R. G. Roberts. 2005. Preliminary Results of the EIP Project, *Rock Art Research* 22(2): 147-197.
- Chaubey, R. 2014. *Yug Yugeen Raisen*, (in hindi), Bharatiya Itihas Sankalan Samiti Madhya Bharat, Bhopal.
- Kumar, G., R. K. Pancholi, S. Nagdev, G. S. Runwal, J. N. Srivastava and J. D. Tripathi. 1992. Rock Art of Chambal Valley Part I: Rock Art and Rock Art Sites, *Purakala* 3 (1-2): 13-68.
- Mark, R. and E. Billo. 2009. Pictographs at Hunters Shelter: Possible Extension of the Red Linear Style into the Guadalupe Mountains of Southern New Mexico, *Plains Anthropologist* 54(211): 201-210.
- Misra, V. N. 1986. Bhimbetka: 'Reflexion of Life in Cave Art', *Science Age* 4 (6): 17-26.
- Misra, V. N., Y. Mathpal and M. Nagar. 1979. Bhimbetka- The Prehistoric Paradise. *Prachya Pratibha* 3 (2): 7-29.

- Neumayer, E. 1993. *Lines on Stone: The Prehistoric Rock Art of India*. Manohar Publishers, New Delhi.
- Pandey, S. K. 1992. Central Indian Rock Art, in *Rock Art in the Old World*, M. Lorblanchet (Ed.). Pp. 215-248, New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts.
- Pandey, S. K. 1993. *Indian Rock Art*. New Delhi: Aryan Books International.
- Saleem, S. and P. R. Chauhan. 2019. Documentation and Study of 34 Rock Art Sites in Raisen District, Madhya Pradesh, India. in Rajesh, S. V., Abhayan G. S. Nayar, P. and E. R. Ilahi. (eds.). *Human and Heritage: An Archaeological Spectrum of Asiatic Countries (Felicitation to Professor Ajit Kumar)*. New Bharatiya Book Corporation. New Delhi.
- Saleem, S. 2015. Importance of Scientific Studies in Indian Rock Art: Problems and Future Perspectives, *Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology* 3 (2015):665-691.
- Saleem, S. 2017. Review of Rock Art Studies in India: Origin, Interpretation and Chronological Aspects, in *Kailashnath Hethu Festschrift to Shri K. N Dikshit, (Essays in Prehistory, Protohistory and Historical Archaeology)*, Ajit Kumar, S. V. Rajesh, G.S. Abhayan (Eds.), pp. 59-82, New Delhi: Bharatiya Kala Praksashan.
- Schaap, B. 2013. An introduction to Raisen style rock paintings, *Purakala* 23: 27-46.
- Tiwari, S. 1976. Twenty Five Years of Rock Painting Exploration in the Betwa Source Region – A Re-Appraisal, *Prachya Pratibha* 3: 28-38.
- Tiwari, S. 1984. Twenty Five Years of Rock Paintings Exploration in the Betwa Source Region: A Re-Appraisal, in Chakravarty, K.K. (Ed.), *Rock Art of India: Paintings and Engravings*, Pp. 228-38. New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann.
- Tyagi, G. S. 1988. 'Comments on Dr. Kumar *et al.* Paper', *Rock Art Research* 5(1): 49-50.
- Tyagi, G. S. 1992. Decorative Intricate Patterns in Indian Rock Art, in *Rock Art in the Old World*, M. Lorblanchet (Ed.), Pp. 303-317. New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts.
- Wakankar, V. S and R. R. R. Brooks. 1976. *Stone Age Paintings in India*. Bombay: D.P. Taraporawala Sons and Co.
- Wakankar, V. S. 1984. Bhimbetka and Dating of Indian Rock Paintings, in Chakravarty, K.K. (Ed) *Rock Art of India: Paintings and Engravings*, Pp. 44-56. New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann.
- Wakankar, V. S. 1992. Rock Paintings in India, in Lorblanchet, M. (Ed.), *Rock Art in the Old World*, Pp. 319-336. New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts.