

ROCK ART STUDIES IN INDIA

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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by Somnath Chakraverty

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Front cover : Animals drawn in successive layers. Rock art of Pachmarhi, Madhya Pradesh
Back cover : A large painted motif of a wild boar and hunters. Bhimbetka, Madhya Pradesh

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discoveries and studies. In 1877, another of his articles, entitled "Rough notes on some ancient sculpturings on rocks in Kumaon, similar to those found on monoliths and rocks in Europe", was published in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. In that article he reported the discovery of another site with cup marks about twelve miles north of the military station at Ranikhet in Kumaon (contemporarily in the Uttaranchal State). He attempted to decipher the purpose of the cup marks at both Kumaon and Nagpur through historical analysis. The cup marks in both sites are arranged in rows and according to Rivett-Carnac such cup marks were 'conventional symbols'. According to his own analysis "these markings are the rude records of a nomadic race which at an early epoch of the world's history left the central Asian nursery, and travelling in different directions have left their traces, in Europe and in India, of tumuli and rock sculpturings, generally to be found in hill countries, and inaccessible spots whither at a later period they were forced to retreat before the advance of a more civilized and a more powerful race" (Rivett-Carnac 1877: 11).

John Cockburn, an European officer who had assisted colonel Rivett-Carnac during his archacological expeditions, had, during March 1883, discovered a rock painting depicting rhinoceros hunting scene at Ghormangar cave in Parganna Bijoygarh of Mirzapore district (now in the state of Uttar Pradesh). The report of his discovery from Mirzapur was subsequently published in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1883). Two years earlier, in July 1881, Cockburn had discovered the mineralized remains of a rhinoceros skeleton from the ravines of Ken River, near the township of Banda. Cockburn's primary interest was to understand how rhinoceros became extinct in that area due to gradual environmental changes as the land became arid. Discovery of the red haematite

painting representing rhinoceros hunting was additional evidence in support of his hypothesis on the presence of rhinoceros in that region. Soon Cockburn became more involved in rock art studies with the encouragement of his superior officer Colonel Rivett-Carnac. Cockburn acquired an overall knowledge of the rock art and tribal art in South America, Australian aboriginal bark paintings and Bushman rock art in Africa etc. In Ghormangar, or horse cave, the outlined figures include a group of six hunters attacking a rhinoceros from all directions (*Fig.: 2*), the animal having tossed one of the hunters with its horn so that the man appears sprawling in the air. The hunters are armed with barbed harpoon-like spears that are aimed at the animal. According to Cockburn's view, the spear is made of wood and is stone-tipped. Further, he compared the structural details of the spear with similar wooden piercing implements that were manufactured and used by primitive groups existing in other parts of the world.
