

GHALIGAI HILL ENGRAVINGS REVEAL A PERSONIFICATION OF UTTARASENA, KING OF UḍḍIYĀNA: A NEW THOUGHT

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Introduction

From the time immemorial, stone surface has been used by man for engraving, painting and writing as an undying material used to make these impressions everlasting. Rock engravings commemorate a particular event, exhibit buildings or images, or bear witness to the cultural glory of the land. The term “engravings” is used here for the artistic expression found on natural rocks, cliffs, caves, and on the surface of boulders.

This paper focuses on the phenomena of the Buddhist period engravings explored during the recent field survey conducted by the author in the Swat valley. Here are appraised and highlighted two newly discovered Buddhist rock engravings found in the middle of Ghaligai hill at Swat. Both the reliefs reveal two different scenes. Their documentation, interpretation and publication shall contribute to the history of the region and, also, broaden the curiosity of art students, archaeologists, historians and researchers.

Ghaligai village is situated about 12 km west of Mingora city on the main road leading to Peshawar. The prehistoric archaeological evidence, discovered in the Swat valley, is reported from Ghaligai Rock Shelter, which occupies an important place in developing the human history of the valley (Stacul:1987). The sites of the newly explored engravings are located in the middle of the Ghaligai hill, accessible through a pedestrian path from the above mentioned main road. They are situated on the back cliff of the Ghaligai Buddha and Hindu Ghar engravings, mentioned by A Stein and G Tucci in their reports (Stein 1930:31-32; Tucci 1958:294). Following is the catalogue and detailed description of the newly discovered engravings.

Plate-1: Buddhas and Bodhisattvas

Measurements of the boulder: 188x170 cm.

H. 72cm, W. 117cm, D. 14cm

Material: Marble

Reference (Sardar 2005:96, Pl. 54)

Orientation: Facing southeast

This carving shows four seated and one standing images. Starting from the right, there are three images of equal size in one row. The first one is a defaced Dhyāni Buddha in meditation pose, while on his right is a standing unidentified Bodhisattva, mostly defaced and chipped off, his head is almost missing. The clinging drapery of the figure reaches below the knees, he holds an unidentified object in the left hand, and the right one hangs down. The figure on the extreme left is seated Padmapāṇi in *lalitāsana* in meditation pose. His right hand rests on the right thigh, while the left hand on the left holding a lotus flower. Beside these figures there are two small images one above the other of Dhyāni Buddhas, occupying little spaces on the rock surface.

These images are in poor state of preservation and are mostly broken and defaced, caused by human and natural activities. The background of this relief is almost invisible and has lost its sharpness and luster. The local people and the casual visitors had rubbed off most of their artistic details. The nearby heap of pebbles gives us an idea that these were thrown at them by the passers-by as well by the cattle herders. These images are also withered by the climatic conditions, humidity, pollution with foam and patina, which appear directly on the boulders and penetrate into the surface.

Plate-2 (King Utrasena along with Brahmanical Deities)

Measurements of the rock: 80x138 cm

H.80cm, W.138cm, D.13cm

Material: Marble

Reference (Sardar 2005:97, Pl. 55)

Orientation: Facing east

This engraved relief is situated further up towards the top of Ghaligai hill. Here on a living rock is an engraved relief with five figures. Starting from the right, the first one is the image of the Brahmanical god Ganeśa¹, with an elephant face and human body, seated on a high throne. This is the second example of this god from the Swat valley. The first one was noticed at Nangriyal hill by A Stein and later by the Italian Mission (Stein 1930:51, Fig. 7; Faccenna 1993:263). Considering Ganeśa's universal popularity in the Hindu pantheon and the Buddhist philosophy, It is surprising that only two sites in the whole of Swat valley reveal the image of this Brahmanical divinity. On his right is a small standing female figure dressed in frock like costume, her right hand raised in an act of throwing floral leafs over a figure standing to her right. Next to her is a standing male figure holding in his hands at the chest level a relics pot. On his right is another small standing female figure, slightly bent backward and her right hand is raised in the act of throwing flowers. On the extreme left is another Hindu god Śiva² having four hands.

It was during the first century AD that the cults of the Hindu gods developed and figures of the Hindu deities carved. In subcontinent the earliest figure of Śiva purely in human form come from Gandhāra (Blurton 1992:84). Śiva image in the Swat valley was identified for the first time by Tucci in Supalbandai village of Murghazar valley (Tucci 1958:307, Fig. 26; Taddei 1962:289; Rahman 1993:9; Faccenna 1993:263). It is exciting to mention here that four images of Śiva have so far been noticed in the Swat valley (Sardar 2005:85, 97, 107, 126). More interesting is the manifestation of two Brahmanical deities Śiva and Ganeśa in a single scene, also recorded for the first time in the valley. Their representation, in spite of their poor workmanship, is very important because they are the only non-Buddhist deities. Their existence in the Swat valley is testified from Hsuan-tsang's accounts (Beal 1969:122). In the late Mahāyana philosophy, Buddhism adopted Brahmanical divinities, ideas and practices, however, the Buddhism remained the centre of all religious activities in one way or the other. The portrait of two Brahmanical divinities in a single engraved relief provides evidence that the then rulers of Uḍḍiyāna were equally tolerated in Buddhism as well as Hinduism. It also demonstrate that, with the passage of time the Mahāyana beliefs accepted the influence of Hinduism and prepared the way for the ultimate merging of the non-monastic form of Buddhism with Hinduism.

This fascinating engraved relief reveals the actual story of Uttarasena, the King of Uḍḍiyāna, as narrated by Hsuan-tsang in his account, when he visited Wu-chang-na or Uḍḍiyāna in 629-645 AD. According to the Buddhist traditions the *Mahāparinirvāna* of the Buddha took place at Kuśinara in

about 483 BC. The site has been identified with Kaśia in the Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh in India. When THE Buddha was about to enter *nirvāna*, he called the council of disciples and said “after my *nirvāna*, Uttarasena ought to receive a portion of my relics”. When the kings were going to divide the relics of the Tathagata equally among themselves, Uttarasena arrived late, and this delay was attributed to a sentiment of contempt. King Uttarasena obtained the share of relics of the Buddha, brought it back to his kingdom on a white elephant and erected a stupa in his kingdom to honour them. Herald Deane and Aurel Stein had identified the stupa of Shankardar at Swat erected by king Uttarasena for the Buddha relics (Stein 1930:30-31). The Italian Professor Giuseppe Tucci do not agree with them and described the location of the stupa near the village of Nawakali about 500 meters to the north of Kota (Tucci 1958:300).

Here in this relief, king Uttarasena is portrayed as an Indian prince with a muscular body wears a crown over his head, dressed in a luxurious costume of a prince. His costume shows the typical Indian *dhotī*, a skirt like dress which tied around the waist and hangs down almost reaching just above the knees. He is adorned with necklace and ear pendants. His long curled hair slinging on over his shoulders. He holds the casket of the Buddha’s relics up to his breast height, to show a great respect and regards to the relics of Lord Buddha. The relief shows that Uttarasena with casket proceeds towards Shinkardar stupa which is located on the back side of the hill to deposit the relics. He is accompanied by two Brahmanical divinities; Ganeśa on the left side and four handed Śiva on the right. The relief also portrays two small female royal attendants on each side of Uttarasena showering flowers of reverence over the relics.

According to the Buddhist traditions after the *mahāparinirvāna* of the Buddha, his cremated relics were put in the Council Hall of Kuśinara in the custody of the Mallas for a week for the homage of his followers. A dispute arose among the leaders of various tribes over the division of his remains, but these hostilities were settled down by a Brahman, known as Drona, who distributed the relics among the tribes (Zwalf 1985:38). Receiving their shares, the heads of states transported the relics to their respective states and buried them in stupas at Rajagriha, Vaiśāli, Kapilavastu, Allakappa, Ramāgrāma, Vetha Dīpa, Pava and Kuśinara. Subsequently, Aśoka opened these stupas to extract the relics of the Buddha, to redistribute and bury them in thousands of other freshly built stupas (Swati 1996:75).

In support of my interpretation of the relief, I reproduced here the accounts of Hsuan-tsang, he narrates (Beal 1969:126-27):

To the south-west of the town of Mungali 60 or 70 li there is a great river, on the east of which is a stupa 60 feet or so in height; it was built by Shang-kiun (Uttarasena). Formerly when Tathagata was about to die, he addressed the great congregation and said: “After my Nirvana, Uttarasena-*raja*, of the country Udyana (U-chang-na), will obtain a share of the relics of my body. When the kings were about to divide the relics equally, Uttarasena-*raja* arrived after (the other); coming from frontier country, he was treated with little regard by the others. At this time the Devas published afresh the words to Tathagata as he was about to die. Then obtaining a portion of relics, the king came back to his country, and, to show his great respect, erected this stupa. { ... }

In 1926 Aurel Stein visited the site of Hindu Ghar engravings in Ghaligai and identified it as an image of king Uttarasena. The figure stands on pedestal surrounded by smaller ones two on the right and three on the left. He is holding his hands at breast height and is crowned by a radiating halo. Stein considered him as king Uttarasena on the strength of its proximity to the large stupa still preserved there (Stein 1930:31-32). But Tucci rejected the Stein thesis on the ground that this is not a unique image, for, similar images have been noticed in different places in Swat. He further argued

that his image bears resemblance to the Kuṣāṇa kings, found on their coins but also on the graffito of Kalatse of Vima Kadphises (Tucci 1958:294-95, Fig. 7). On the basis of solid proofs Tucci has discarded Aurel Stein identification of king Uttarasena at Hindu Ghar engravings in Ghaligai.

Majority of the engraved reliefs are extremely fuzzy and ruined. Most of them have been eroded and defaced by floods. The run off water of the small seasonal ravines has constantly caused their erosion. Many years of exposure to open sky marked by climatic hazards and affected the artistic details of the figures. Sometime a natural crack in the middle of the boulder played vital role in damaging the reliefs. The relentless process of erosion, of washing away and various layers of patina over the rock have by now made many details illegible. However, it has still been possible to redraw a sufficiently complete picture of their iconographic inventory.

As for the question of date and chronology is concerned, it is very difficult to put all these reliefs in chronological order, because they represent different workmanship and they may spread over a large span of time, but one thing is clear that they cannot be older than the 7th and later than the 10th century AD. Unfortunately no evidence of inscription has found so far to establish their chronology. These rock engravings remind us the spiritual experiences this land had exercised before the coming of Islam. These rock engravings are like an index to show what role this mountain zone of ancient Uḍḍiyāna played in the history of South Asia for more than a thousand years. The people who carved these thousands of rock carvings are gone and forgotten, but their creations will long remain a source of great importance for historians as an impressive part of the artistic heritage of Pakistan.

Similar rock engravings are also frequently reported in the neighboring districts of Bunēr, Dīr, Shangla, and Malakand and Bājaur Agencies. Their artistic composition display Mahāyana features; most of them show isolated Bodhisattvas figures and sometimes reveal the triad. Occasionally these engravings portrays the Buddha figure on a high seat flanked by Bodhisattvas. These images on rocks, boulders and stelae have been engraved specially for religious purpose and were mainly found in the vicinity of sacred areas, i.e., stupa and monastery (Faccenna *et al* 1993:262).

Notes

¹ Ganeśa venerated both by the Hindus and Buddhists, is one of the most popular Hindu deities. Like Indra and Brahma, Ganeśa was also a Brahmanical god accommodated by the Buddhists in their religion. The Hindu regard him as a symbol of auspiciousness, and therefore all invariably begin with the invocation of Ganeśa. He is known as Ganapati and both words mean lord of the tribe or people. In Puranic mythology, Ganeśa was adopted as the oldest son of Śiva Paravati (Pal, 1975: 50 fig. 1). It represents an elephant headed figure with four hands, but occasionally having six, eight or even more hands and faces.

² Śiva is one of the most influential members of the Hindu mythology. He is associated with the act of *Samhara* (destruction) or *Pralaya* (absorption) in particular. But the limited number of followers of Śiva considers him to be associated with the acts of creation and preservation, the special domains of Brahma and Viśnu. Śiva is also gifted with the acts of *anugraha* or *prasada* (conferment of grace) and *tirobhava* (power of concealment or obscurity). All these powers when put together make up his five fold activities. He has numerous manifestations given to him by his worshippers. He has many attributes, but one of the most important is the trident. He may appear in many forms both peaceful and angry. In the mediaeval Brahmanical texts, Śiva is also described as the originator and the best exponent of various arts and accomplishments, such as those of deep concentration (yoga), expounding the music, dancing etc.

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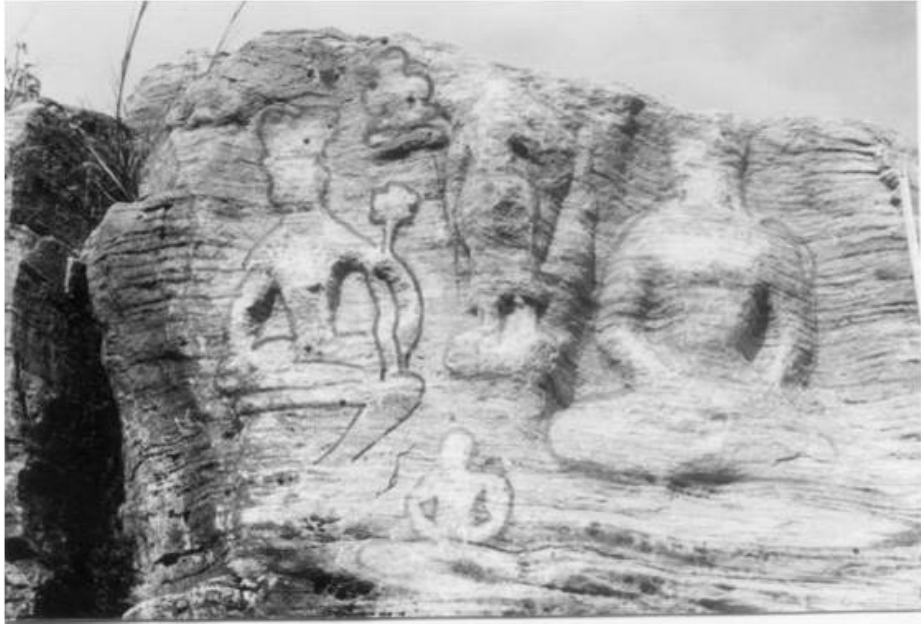


Plate 1: Buddhas and Bodhisattvas



Plate 2: King Utrasena along with Brahmanical Deities