

BUDDHIST ROCK ENCRAVINGS IN DIR

By Prof. Ahmad Hasan Dani

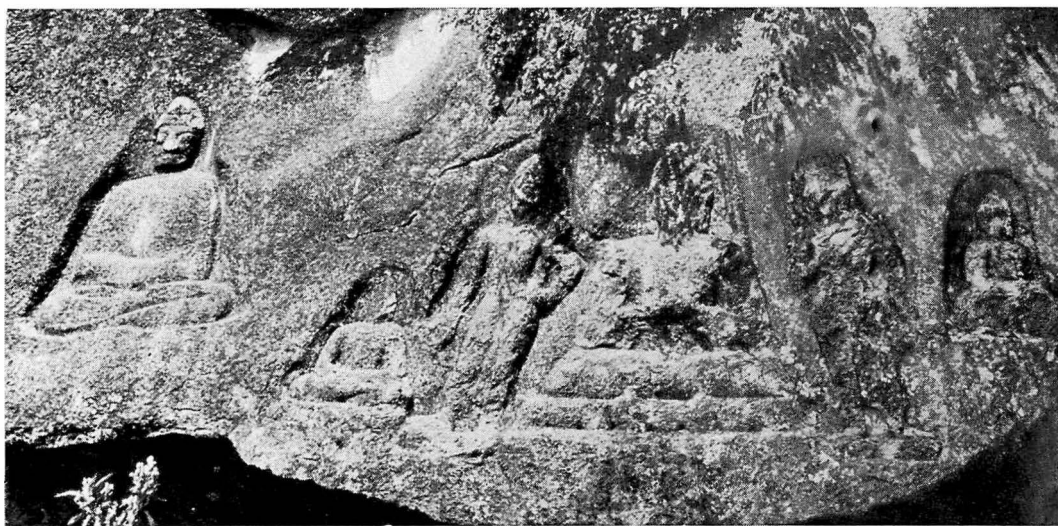
Rock carvings in the Frontier regions have been long reported. One group of these carvings has been firmly dated by the late Col. D.H. Gordon. To this same category belong the newly-discovered carvings at Gogdara in Swat. But there is another group representing Buddhist figures. Prof. Tucci vaguely surmised about their dating. The new materials found in Dir have now placed at our disposal sufficient evidence to give a definite chronology to these carvings. According to this chronological scheme they fall in 6th-7th centuries. A.D. and thus they bear out the chief evidence that the Gandhara art did not come to an end in the fifth century by the so-called destruction of the White Huns. It continued and evolved new forms and styles until it merged itself in the art of the Hindu Shahis.

Prehistoric rock carvings in Gandhara have been found in several places. Paterson and Drummond, in their work *Soan the Palaeolithic of Pakistan*, have illustrated a few of them from Mandori in the Nizampur Valley on the right bank of the river Indus. Col. D.H. Gordon (*Prehistoric Background of Indian Culture*, PP. 111-112) has discussed the merits of these carvings in great length and placed them in a proper chronological perspective. At Mandori there is also one line of Kharoshthi inscription. These carvings are rather very crude and the tools with which they have been worked are extremely primitive. Almost all of them are drawn by deep lines of scratching on the surface of the rock. The subject matter is too simple — some animals, humans or objects like cart.

Such primitive engravings were noticed by us at several places in Dir near Timargarha and Khal. Prof. G. Tucci, in his "Preliminary Reports and studies on the Italian Excavations in Swat (Pakistan)", published in *East and West*, Vol. 9. Dec. 1958, reports the discovery of such carvings. He writes, "I discovered on the occasion of the survey I made of the spur of mountain which closes the valley of Udegram, dividing it from that of Gogdara. The whole side, above which towers on the right an image of the the Buddha, is carved with drawings of wild or domestic animals, of various sizes, some of them truly remarkable. These are not only graffiti, but deep-cut engravings of which some are hollowed in the rock by the use of a yet harder stone, so that the surface thus excavated seems to be polished; the feline animals are recognizable by the stippling scattered over their bodies, imitating their spotted skins. The drawing and the *ductus* of the body consists of two triangles whose apexes touch, while the tails of the animals end



a. No. 193. Mane Tangai. — Dhyani Buddha



b. No.194. Mane Tangai — Seated Buddhas and standing Padmapanis
on a huge boulder :



a. No.195. Mane Tangai — Preaching Buddha
flanked by Padmapanis



b. No. 196. Mane Tangai — Dhyani Buddha
and standing Padmapani



c. No. 197. Mane Tangai — Dhyani Buddha
and standing Padmapani



a. No. 198. Mane Tangai — Padmapani
in lalitasana pose

b. No. 199. Mane Tangai — Padmapani
surrounded by other figures

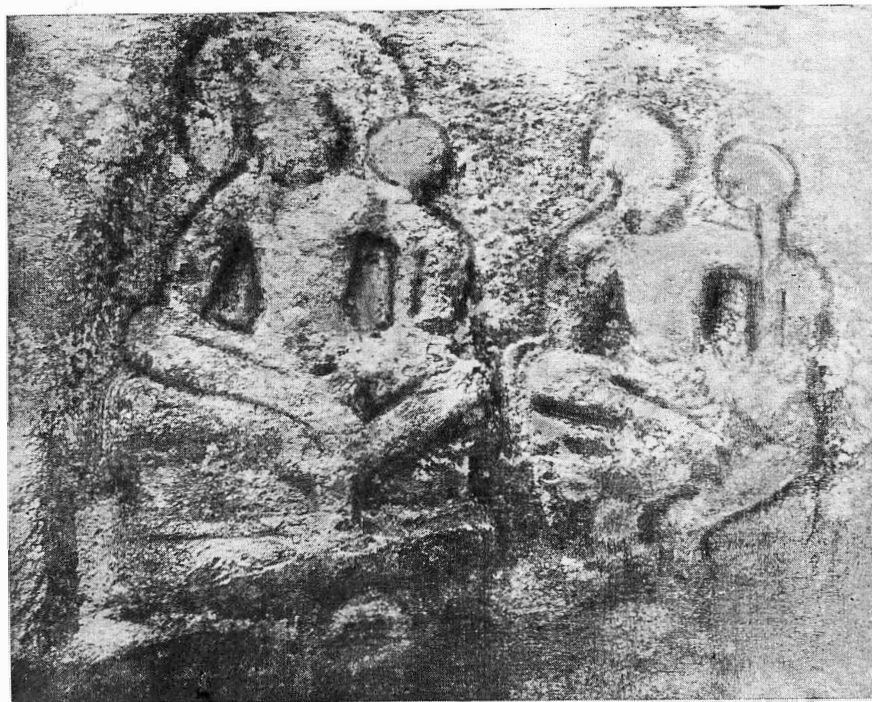




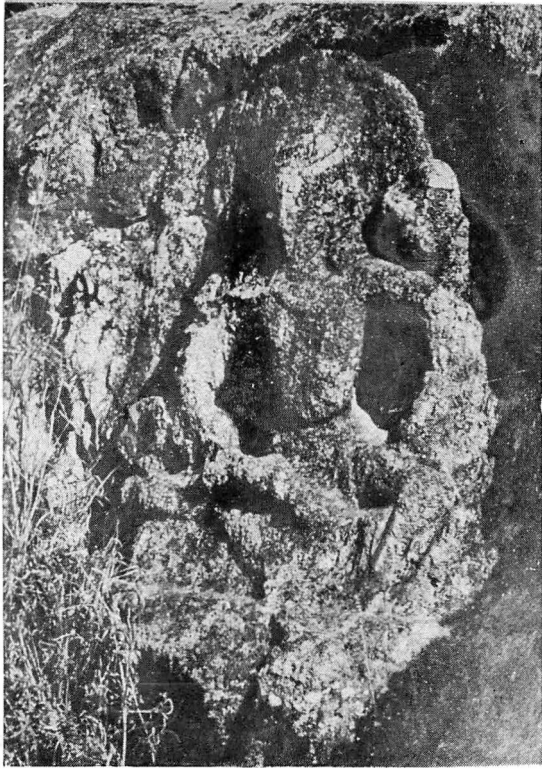
a. No. 200. Mane Tangai — Seated Buddha



c. No. 202. Mane Tangai — Two Dhyani Buddhas



b. No. 201. Mane Tangai — Two Seated Padmapanis



a. No. 203. Damkot — Seated Padmapani



b. No. 204. Damkot — Seated Padmapani



c. No. 205. Damkot — Seated Padmapani
and Dhyani Buddha

a. No. 206. Damkot — Two Padmapanis



b. No. 207. Damkot — Two Padmapanis

in a spiral. These carvings are very like the paintings of animals on the vases of ancient Iran.

"Whatever may be the conclusions to which we shall be led when all the rock drawings are brought to light and when the yet untouched soil is uncovered, there would seem room for believing that we have here come to the dawn of the life of Udegram, and that these documents date back to proto-historic times". This belief of Prof. Tucci has never been fulfilled. Though all the carvings have now been exposed and the culture-bearing strata excavated, still there has not appeared a detailed study of the carvings along with the proper analysis of the contents of the strata. However, from the technical point of view the carvings are not different from what Prof. Tucci published in his fig. 8., which bears a drawing of a standing Kushana king with a Kharoshthi inscription giving the name of Huvishka. On this rock the other figures are also visible. They appear to be slightly earlier in date than the Kharoshthi inscription. But in any case they must fall in line with the other rock carvings in Gandhara.

There is a second category of rock engravings found on the road side in Sdat. They were first observed by Sir Aurel Stein (See "An Archaeological Tour in Upper Swat and Adjacent Hill Tracts" in *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India*). Prof. Tucci has made a detailed reference to them in his "Preliminary Reports and Studies". Some of them have now been removed to the reserve collection of the Swat Museum in Saidu Sharif. These were noted by us and described in the Introduction, Chapter (IV). Prof. Tucci comments "The rock carvings represent either a Buddha, standing or sitting, sometimes alone, sometimes accompanied on both sides by a Bodhisattva, also standing or sitting. The representations of a peculiar Bodhisattva far exceed in number those of the Buddha or other Bodhisattvas and lead one to believe that the former represented, at least, during a certain period, the most popular deity of the country, a kind of protecting or patron God. This Bodhisattva is generally found in two forms: one is that of Lokeshvara in *rajalilasana* i.e. with left leg gently hanging from the throne and the lotus in the left hand; much more rare is the image of the same God standing". While commenting on the stylistic comparison, Prof. Tucci remarks. "One has the impression that with the change of the religious contents the style also was greatly modified and one is inclined to see in this style the influence, even if remote, of the aesthetic ideals which developed in India during the Gupta period and which made the statues of Swat the westernmost though independent counterpart of those of the Pala art I should say that generally they cannot be older than seventh century and later than the tenth".

As I examine the photographs published by Prof. Tucci and verify them in situ, I subdivide them into two groups. The first group includes the Buddha figures given by Prof. Tucci in Nos. 6 and 11. Here we find the Dhyani Buddhas in the typical Gandharan style but their late date is obvious from the semi-circular fall of the robe in front of the seat. This style is found at Chatpat (see pl. No. 53). There is, no doubt, that these two must be still later in date as the type became conventional very soon. We can also note chronological difference between Tucci's figures 6 and 11. These figures do not show any influence from the Gangetic Valley and they continue the older tradition. However, in the facial cut of figure 11, we may mark the high cheek bones of the Buddha. How far late they should be dated, must be decided on the evidence of the possible time when Buddhism received the last patronage in this region. Apparently this must be before the coming of the Hindu Shahis.

The second group includes the new type of the Bodhisattvas. Almost all the figures have been identified by Prof. Tucci as Lokeshvara, but his fig. No. 23 is said to be that of Vajrapani. This identification is not above doubt. Though the object held in his left hand is broken, still sufficient portion remains to suggest long stalk. And then all other features are similar to those seen in other figures. Prof. Tucci has rightly seen in them influence from the Gupta classical style as we have noted in our plate 56 a, No. 109, which belongs to the third period of Chatpat. In this third period more influences came from the Ganges valley. But there is nothing in them that speaks of the Pala art as has been vaguely surmised by Prof. Tucci. We have earlier noted the reason how Gupta influences could reach here from the time of the Kidar Kushanas onwards. But we can hardly see any reason for the Pala influences. In fact these figures do not compare at all with the Pala School of art. Therefore they should not be dated later than the 7th century A.D.

The rock engravings in Dir are of an entirely different category. They have been studied only in two places although information about other places has also been received. One group of these engravings is seen at the foot of the Damkot Range just on the bank of the Swat river worked on the stray rocks lying in the neighbourhood. These were possibly done by the Buddhist monks who lived in the monasteries on the top of the hill. They must have come down to the river Swat for fetching water and in their leisure hours they spent the time in carving these figures. The second group can be seen in the scattered boulders in the village of Mane Tangai, about three miles north of Mian Barangola, which is itself eight miles west of Chakdara fort. High up on the hill is the proper monastery but in the village itself near a modern mosque there is a huge granitic boulder stand-

ing upright facing east. There are other boulders scattered for about a mile. On the tall standing boulder and on a few of them in its neighbourhood the engravings have been done. It seems that the Buddhist monks on way up to the monastery must have stopped here for rest, and finding suitable stone they worked the figures on them.

At Mane Tangai the stone being granite is much better preserved and the figures can still be distinctly recognised. At Damkot the stone boulders are of schist and they have been constantly washed by the flood water of the river Swat. As a result they are much decayed and it is difficult to recognise the figures. Years of exposure have blackened the surface and the camera can hardly catch the lines of the figures. The photographs are consequently not very clear. The usual method of carving was to smoothen the the surface by under-cutting and chiselling and leaving the space in the middle for the figures. The lines of the figures were drawn on the left-over stone surface and the unwanted portion was cut out. Thus all these figures were actually made in low relief. But as the depth was too small, they have not come out boldly. The Buddha figures show very crude handling but those of Padmapani are very well drawn. The limbs of the body, the drapery and the lotus stalk are all distinctly depicted.

There is a preponderance of the figures of Padmapani in these engravings and all of them, with only two exceptions of standing figures, are seated in the *latitasana* pose. The special preference for this Bodhisattva and the way of depiction at once relegate the engravings to a late date. Some of them also show the diaphanous dress of the Gupta classical art. The Buddha figures are putting on the typical Gandharan robe covering both the shoulders. The body is not well proportioned. The hands and legs have pronounced lengths and they are drawn pillar-like. In such a depiction they stand in great contrast to those of Padmapani. The style of these *Dhyani Buddhas* is entirely different from those seen in the rock engravings in Swat. In these examples the garment is hardly visible separate from the body. There are no lines of folds nor do we have the lower ends falling over the legs. The figures are too rough and crude and they appear to belong to the last stage of Buddhism in this region, when the figures of Padmapani had attracted greater attention of the people but the Buddha had become a mere convention. These figures of Padmapani along with those from Swat seem to belong to the same last period. They can be dated to the 6th-7th centuries A.D., when the Indian influences had brought in Gupta classical elements in this region.

MANE TANGAI

The tall standing boulder about fifteen feet high has its surface

smoothly flattened and a shallow carving has made a niche-like arch. Within this arched panel, at its lower end, two sets of figures have been engraved in shallow relief (Pl. 99 b, No. 194). The figures are six in all.

Pl. 99a; No. 193, is on the extreme south and is the largest seated Buddha in *Dhyani mudra*. The broad shoulder of the Buddha has been exaggerated. The two folded legs can be clearly seen but the hands, which are joined at the lap, are mixed up and their elbows are sharply drawn. The face is rather very crude. The eyes are half closed. On the forehead there is the auspicious mark and the *ushinsha* overhead is distinctly visible. The halo behind the head is very dimly visible.

The second set occupies the northern side of the big boulder (Pl. 99b, No. 194). There are five figures. The two end ones are seated *Dhyani Buddhas* (Pl. 100 b. and c.) at different levels. Though the face of these two figures is decayed, the lotus seat is dimly recognisable. The other three figures can be best seen in pl. 100 a, No. 195. In the centre is seated the Buddha in preaching pose on a lotus seat. The fingers of the hands as well as the face are damaged beyond recognition. But the main body is better drawn in this example. The simple halo behind the head is too large. On his either side stands Padmapani drawn in a fashion inclined towards the Buddha. They are dressed in the Indian dhoti which has its ends falling in front. The upper part of the body is bare with only the upper shawl falling from the left shoulder in a great swoop right across. Their left hand is at the waist or extended down holding the lotus stalk. The right hand of Padmapani on the left is stretched down while that of the other figure is at the chest. The face of both of them is damaged but the halo is slightly visible. These standing figures of Padmapani are equal in height to the seated figure of the Buddha.

Pl. 101 a, No. 198. This figure is carved on an isolated boulder next to the above. Here we find Padmapani seated in *lalitasana* pose on a high seat, with the right leg on the seat and the left hanging down. The folds of the Indian dhoti are distinctly marked. The muscular body is very well drawn. The right hand is folded and the fingers are touching the chin. The left hand is on the thigh, holding the lotus stalk. The face and the head are dimly visible. The halo behind the head is remarkably large. The head is slightly tilted to his left. Similarly the upper half of the body is also slightly tilted. On the whole the figure is very well drawn.

Pl. 101 b, No. 199: On the next boulder we have a composition with Padmapani seated in the middle in the same fashion as given in the earlier figure. At the top on either side of the head of Padmapani there is a seated

Buddha of smaller size. Down below at the seat there is a donor on either side. On the right corner there is another seated Padmapani but it is very badly preserved.

Pl. 102 a, No. 200: On a single boulder a trefoil arch is carved on the rock, the arch is very dimly visible in the photograph. Within this arch the Buddha is seated on a half-blown lotus in the *dhyani mudra*. The face is damaged but the large halo is quite distinct. This type of the Buddha within trefoil arch is a common motif at Chatpat (See pl. 63 b, No. 124).

Pl. 102. b, No. 201: In the next boulder, we find two Padmapanis seated in *lalitasana* pose with the lotus stalk held in the left hand, which is resting on the thigh. The right hand is doubled and its fingers are touching the chin. Both of them have halo behind the head.

Pl. 102 c, No. 202: On a small boulder at the farthest end we have two Dhyani Buddhas seated together on a full blown lotus. The detail of the figures is not very clear.

DAMKOT

At the foot of the Damkot hill on the river side there are several boulders still standing on the bank. In their proximity the people still take bath. These people of the locality informed about the rock engravings. They are all in a very bad state of preservation. At present only six boulders contain the carvings. The first boulder has a group. In the middle we have Padmapani (Pl. 103 a, No. 203) seated in *lalitasana* pose with his left hand on the thigh holding the lotus stalk. The right hand is in *Varada mudra*. He is putting on the short Indian dhoti. Behind the head is the large halo. The figure on his left is completely gone while the standing figure on his right is dimly visible. One of his hand is stretched down while the other is at the waist.

The second boulder has become completely dull. It is not illustrated here. There are three figures. One is the Buddha seated in *Bhumisparsha mudra*. On his left two figures are visible. One is seated and the other is standing. They have all halo behind their head.

The third boulder has a single figure — a seated Padmapani in *lalitasana* pose (pl. 103, b, No. 204). The left hand which is on the thigh is holding the lotus stalk. The right hand is partly broken. The head is slightly tilted to his right and the body is also slightly bent. The large halo behind the head is dimly visible.

The fourth boulder shows a group. In the middle is seated Padmapani in *lalitasana* pose (pl. 103 c, No. 205) with the left hand on the thigh holding the lotus stalk. The right elbow is resting on the right knee and the right arm on right calf. The twisted curls fall on the shoulder. To the right top of the halo is a *Dhyani Buddha*. Perhaps there was another *Dhyani Buddha* on the left top but now broken.

The fifth boulder shows two Padmapanis (Pl. 104 a, No. 206) seated in *lalitasana* pose. The left leg of the left hand figure is hanging down while the right hand figure has the right leg down. The lotus stalk is quite clear in the left hand of the left figure. The right hand of the right figure is on the seat.

The last boulder again shows two Padmapanis (Pl. 104 b, No. 207) seated in the *lalitasana* pose. Their hand poses are exactly alike the right one on the lap and left one on the thigh holding lotus stalk. But the right figure is slightly at a higher level.

All these figures have slim body and put on diaphanous dress. Prof. Tucci has rightly emphasized the Mahayana character of these figures. These rock carvings have a great significance as they bear clear testimony to the continuance of the Gandhara art in this late period of 6th-7th centuries. The recognition of this last phase of the Gandhara art will now enable many art critics to review the dating of many sculptures that lie in the different museums. The Peshawar Museum has quite a few sculptures of this period.

