

# Rock Art in the Swat Valley of Pakistan: Documentation and its Present State of Preservation

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## Abstract

*The innumerable ancient remains—stupas, monasteries, viharas, forts, castles, rock inscriptions, painted shelters and stelae are scattered in the plains and the hilly slopes all over the valley. The archaeological materials from these sites bear testimony of its cultural relations with the East and West. Several hundred archaeological sites spanning 5000 years of history speak about this. This paper will also focus on the phenomenon of Taliban movement emerged in the Swat valley since 2006. The author will try to underscore Taliban insurgency in Swat and its impacts on the Buddhist legacy (rock relief's, engraving, painted shelters, inscriptions, stupas & monasteries) of the Swat valley. It will highlight the Buddhist period treasury and the cultural wealth of area and would expose the damage caused by the militants. The basic theme of this paper is to appraise the efforts made by militants for destruction of past glory of the Swat valley.*

*This paper concentrates on the discovery of about 100 rock art sites, including carvings, petroglyphs, painting and inscriptions in the Swat valley. Tremendous concentration of Buddhist period reliefs, petroglyphs and inscriptions have been documented in successive campaigns by the indigenous and foreign scholars (Stein 1930; Faccenna et al. 1993:257; Ashraf Khan 1994: 455; Ashraf Khan 1996; Filigenzi 2006; Filigenzi 2014; Olivieri 1993: 257; Olivieri 1994: 467; Olivieri et al. 1994: 333; Olivieri & Vidale 2002: 173; Olivieri & Vidale 2004: 121; Olivieri 2005: 215; Olivieri & Vidale 2005: 445; Olivieri & Vidale 2006:73; Olivieri 2008:15; Olivieri 2010:13; Olivieri 2011: 123; Olivieri 2012: 1; Olivieri 2012:185; Olivieri 2015; Olivieri 2016: 20). The connection between China and ancient Udiyana across the hanging passages is well attested in Chinese sources (Tucci 1958: 279).*

**Keywords:** *Udiyana, Suvastu, Swat, Ora or Oora (Udegram), Bazira (Barikot), Buddhist period rock reliefs, petroglyphs, painted shelters and inscriptions.*

## Introduction

Swat valley is an administrative district in the Province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa of Pakistan. The fertile valley drained by the Swat River together with the adjacent territories of Buner, Dir and Bajour correspond to the ancient Udiyana (modern Swat Valley). Swat River which rises in the Hindu Kush range is mentioned in the Rig Veda as Suvastu. Swat has been inhabited since 3300 BC. Historically, the region has played host to Alexander of Macedonia, the Mauryans, the Indo-Greeks, the Indo-Sythians, the Kushans, the Turk-Shahis and the Hindu-Shahis in different periods. In 327 BC., Alexander the great fought his way to the local towns; Ora (Udegram) and Bazira (Barikot). By 305 BC., the region became a part of the Mauryan Empire. Ashoka patronize Buddhism in Swat and the inhabitants of Udiyana were converted to Buddhism. Buddhism left its mark in the form of stupas, monasteries, rock art, paintings, coins, pottery and other relics. Numerous religious monuments of the ancient Udiyana testified wide spread influence of Buddhism even today.

The innumerable ancient remains—stupas, monasteries, viharas, forts,

castles, rock inscriptions, painted shelters and stelae are scattered in the plains and the hilly slopes all over the valley. The archaeological materials from these sites bear testimony of its cultural relations with the East and West. Several hundred archaeological sites spanning 5000 years of history speak about this. Four hundred archaeological sites from Palaeolithic to medieval time have been explored (Olivieri 2006: 25). Fifty Buddhist sites have been scientifically excavated and hundred rock reliefs have been documented. Fort painted rock shelters ranging from Bronze Age to historic period have documented by IsIAO Mission (Olivieri 2004: 373).

Swat valley maintained one of the richest rock art traditions in northern-western regions of Pakistan. Evidence from the site of Gogdara site shows that an artistic traditions and ritual associated with it, extends back at least 2000 BC (Olivieri 2005: 215) The earliest evidence of engravings is 3000 years old, but new finds could extend this as well. During my field for data collection in the Swat I come across with three kinds of rock art sites. They are;

- Reliefs engravings

- Rock paintings
- Rock inscriptions

The entire data is divided into two groups;

- Non-Buddhist reliefs
- Buddhist period reliefs

### **Buddhist Reliefs**

The Buddhist rock reliefs of the Swat valley usually represent Buddha often together with Bodhisattvas. The figures were preferably carved on rock outcrops or blocks with smooth surfaces. The rock reliefs are usually hundreds of meters away from the sacred areas and they are likely to mark old routes towards them. The rock reliefs and stelae so far described, show Mahayanist subject, represent isolated Bodhisattvas and sometime triads of Buddhist period (Filigenzi, 1995: 625). The figure of Bodhisattvas, flanking the enthroned Buddha. Speaking chronologically and stylistically they belong to the late-Kushan period. They are often occurring in the vicinity of sacred areas. The magnificent collection of the Buddhist rock reliefs may be divided in three groups. Buddha images, Bodhisattva figures and Brahmanical images

### **Buddha Images**

Although the figure of the Buddha was widespread and popular in Gandhara art and it is generally agreed that the earliest images of Buddha appeared in the Gandhara. I seldom found the image of Buddha among the rock reliefs of the Swat. The elaborated Buddha image in Swat valley with both shoulders usually covered by the monastic robe with undulating folds, curly hair, the *ushnisha*, the *urna* on the forehead; long ears and haloed head. Among the rock reliefs the few known examples are, however, of high aesthetic quality. The only surviving principal/colossal image of *Dhyani* Buddha of Jahanabad.

Buddha is mostly found seated with crossed legs, hands joined at the lap, eyes are half closed. The meditative Buddha some time is seated on a double petalled lotus cushion. Seated Buddha is shown in *Dhyani* pose but rarely represented in standing or preaching pose. In a triad reliefs Buddha sometimes represented in center of the scenes. In other cases he even occupies a small space on the edge of the boulder. In addition to the Buddha image, there are also representations of Bodhisattvas.

## Bodhisattvas

It is a general idea among the scholars of Buddhism that the concept of doctrine of the Bodhisattvas belongs to the Mahayana phase of Buddhism (Krishan 1984:199). Bodhisattvas commonly appear as cult images showing complex scenes, particularly in later periods, and they display diverse iconographic forms. Traditionally Bodhisattva wore the dress of the Indian princes; his naked torso was adorned with jewels, necklace garlands, ear-rings and bracelets, a turban and a diadem were placed on an elegant curled coiffure, a rich robe was draped round his hips.

Their representation are numerous than those of the Buddha. Buddha figures are found seated frontally, and have a strictly symmetrical posture, while Bodhisattvas are generally emerged in two forms; seated in *lalitasana* and standing in *varadamudra*: in his left hand he holds a kind of stick. Contemplating Bodhisattva images of a seated Padmapani, with one leg extended and the right hand rose near the face with the elbow resting on top of the knee are very common in Swat. Among a variety of Bodhisattvas represented in Swat rock reliefs four prominent types

emerged. The most popular Bodhisattvas are Avalokitesvara or Padmapani, Maitreya, Mañjūśri and Vajrapani.

## Avalokitesvara

Avalokitesvara is always represented as a personification of mercy and wisdom, invoked by those in need or danger. In his simplest form, generally distinguishable from the Buddha by his headdress, Avalokitesvara might be holding a full-blown lotus-flower. Avalokitesvara the most favorite deity of the Buddhist creed is known as the lord of mercy. He is found seated on *simhasana* and some time on *padmasanainlalitasana*. Always dressed in Indian dhoti and adorned with neckbands and bracelet, his headdress is highly elaborate with pyramidal crown, bearing *Dhyani* Buddha Amitabha (fourth *Dhyani* Buddha) cross-legged or in yoga pose. The curling tresses of hair lock gracefully fall on the shoulders. In this simplest form he is shown either as an ascetic or a princely figure. His is always depicted in a contemplative mood constantly engaged in finding ways to alleviate human suffering and misery.

In Gandhara and Udiyana his worship become popular towards 3rd century AD., and reached its climax in the 7th century AD (Getty 1928: 68), Fa-Hien and Hsuan-Tsang speak of him in reverences in the accounts of their travelers in India. In Swat rock reliefs the highest numerical representation, however, is that of Avalokitesvara and Padmapani. Apart from some stelae or triads where he is depicted in standing. He is usually represented sitting in *ardhaparyankasana*, with his left leg pointing downwards and his right leg folded upon the seat, in pensive attitude with a long stemmed lotus in his left hand. Avalokitesvara was especially worshipped in Swat. Hsuan-Tsang is the first to mention an image and a temple Avalokitesvara on the right bank of the river Swat (Tucci 1958: 322).

### **Padmapani**

After Buddha's death, Padmapani is believed to have undertaken the assignment of propagation of Buddhism, for this reason he is extremely popular in Tibet and Japan. He is also said to be the favorite deity of the Nagas (Getty 1928:61). Padmapani not only saves all living beings from immediate danger, but also watches over the world until the

appearance of the future Buddha Maitreya. Because of his role as savior, the cult of Padmapani became extremely popular among the Mahayana Buddhist by the Gupta period in India. Lotus is the most distinctive attribute of the Padmapani and hence his name Padmapani or lotus bearer the characteristic attribute. Large scale standing and seated figures of Padmapani have been noticed in Swat rock reliefs. Standing figures are shown on lotus thrones holding a lotus stalk, in the left hand, while the right hand in *varadamudra*. In rare cases he is also represented seated on a high throne in *lalitasana*, his right hand rests on the right thigh in *varadamudra*, while his left one is resting on the left thigh holds a lotus stalk.

### **Maitreya**

A Bodhisattva holding an ascetic staff and a Kamandalu, shaped like a conical vase with a semicircular handle, represents another iconographic type that could be identified as Maitreya or future Buddha. The third most important figure after Padmapani, who if represented in the rock sculptures of Swat is Maitreya. The Buddhists regard Maitreya as the messiah who is yet to

appear. Maitreya is the future Buddha and is yet to make his appearance; it is believed that he lives in the meantime as a Bodhisattva in the Tushita heaven, where he is engaged in preaching the true religion and will land after 1400 years from now (Getty 1928: 78.).

Maitreya carries the bottle of immortality and sometime a stupa in his crown. His right hand with the palm turned towards the *vesmayamudra* (surprise or pride pose) is frequently encountered in Swat rock reliefs. As compared to those of Avalokitesvara and Padmapani, very few images of Maitreya have been recorded. Maitreya images are found always standing on a low lotus throne holding a Kamandalu or water flask in his left hand, while stretches the right one in *varadmudra*.

### **Vajrapani**

The Mahayana pantheon easily adopted him as a Bodhisattva later on it evolved into Vajrayana Buddhism. Vajrapani began his career in early Buddhist literature as well as in Gandhara art as a constant companion and guardian of Buddha. Conceptually, of course, he is none other than Indra, the thunderbolt-wielder. Later on in Vajrayana

Buddhism, and especially in China and Tibet, where his cult was significantly popular and he was frequently worshiped in his angry aspect (Getty 1928: 57).

He is the bearer of vajra, (thunderbolt) and was originally presented as companion of Indra, but soon became the faithful assistant and protective of the Buddha. He was to assume the rank of Bodhisattva in the Mahayanist pantheon, figuring next to the leading protectors of the Law. Like Maitreya the carvings of Swat area represent Vajrapani on a low throne wearing Indian dhoti, right hand stretched down in *varadamudra*, while the left one he holding a thunderbolt. I noticed the image of Vajrapani in Shanglow Mera stele opposite to Kukarai village in Jambil valley.

### **Mañjūśri**

The word Mañjūśri means of pleasing appearance. Mañjūśri is the Buddhist god of wisdom and as such is the counterpart of the Brahmanical goddess of wisdom, Sarasvati (Getty 1928:79). He is commonly represented with a manuscript and a sword. The manuscript symbolizes gnus, while the sword is to

dispel ignorance. He is always represented as a normal human being, very much like the simple image of Avalokitesvara and Maitreya. Mañjūsri personage represents the manifestation of the wisdom and supreme perfection of the master's doctrine, Mañjūsri being more particularly the Bodhisattva of the word and sound. Mañjūsri, often endowed with a youthful aspect, sometimes bears a sword, a book or the blue lotus, which distinguishes him from Avalokitesvara. In Swat valley too, Mañjūsri is represented as a normal human being, very much like the simple image of Avalokitesvara and Maitreya. He is commonly represented with a manuscript and a sword. One of his figures was identified at Rehman Cheena site in the tributary valley of Jambil.

### **Brahmanical Images in rock reliefs**

Till today it was considered that Gandhara and Udiyana have produced only one or two earliest figures of Hindu deities. But Hindu deities are not lacking among the rock reliefs of Swat valley. According to Tucci that Buddhism did not completely dominate the kingdom of Swat. The collected data from the field reveals few Brahmanical art pieces, the bulk of the rock reliefs remained

Buddhist. Hindu representation and its influence should not be flatly denied. The collected data reveals two Hindu deities, e. g. Ganesha and Shiva (Sardar 2005: 85, 97 & 107). Both are in situ and are intact to some extent. Their presence is important because they are the only relics of non-Buddhist religion.

### **Ganesha**

Ganesha venerated both by the Hindus and Buddhists, is one of the most popular of the Hindu deities. He is immediately recognizable on account of his elephant head joined to a childlike human body. It represents an elephant headed figure with four hands, but occasionally having six, eight or even more hands and faces. The Hindu regards him as the symbol of good fortune (Getty 1928: 91). He is also known as Ganapati and both words mean lord of the tribe or people. Like Indra and Brahma, Ganesha was also a Brahmanical god accommodated by the Buddhists in their religion. Only two sites reveal the image of this divinity in the entire Swat valley. The representation of Ganesha found on top of Ghaligai hill and NangriyalQala.

### **Shiva**

Shiva is one of the most influential members of the Hindu mythology. He is associated with the act of *samhara* (destruction) or (absorption) in particular. The earliest figures of Shiva which show him in purely human form come from Gandhara. His figure is recorded from Gandhara sculptures dated 1st century AD (Blurton 1992: 92). The followers of Shiva consider him to be associated with the acts of creation and preservation. All these powers when put together make up his fivefold 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. Three rock art sites reveal Shiva image in entire rock reliefs horizon of Swat. The first one is a triad scene on the rock at Supalbandai village. The 2nd one is the individual image of Shiva on the boulder at Banjotvillage, the last and third one is another triad scene on a rock spur at Ghaligai.

More interesting are the manifestations of two Brahmanical deities of Shiva and Ganesha in a single relief was recorded for the first time in valley. Their existence in the Swat valley is testified

from Hsuan-tsang's accounts (Beal 1969: 122). It is fact that in the late Mahayana philosophy, Buddhism adopted Brahmanic divinities, its ideas and practices. The portrait of two Brahmanical divinities in a single engraved relief provides evidence, that the then rulers of Udiyana were equally tolerated towards Buddhism as well as Hinduism. It also demonstrate that, with the passage of time the Mahayana beliefs accepted the influence of Hinduism and prepared the way for the ultimate merging of the non-monastic form of Buddhism with Hinduism (Sardar 2006: 134).

### **Pre-Buddhist**

In Swat valley pre-Buddhist engravings have been found at Gogdara village. At the time of their discovery, the rock carvings of Gogdara were dated as prehistoric. After a detailed studies conducted by the IsIAO, the engravings of Gogdara were dated between Late Bronze and the Early Iron Age. According to Olivieri the mature phase of Gogdara could possibly be attributed to the beginning of the 1st millennium BC (Olivieri 1998: 82). During the survey conducted by the author in the valley, discovered two new sites of

engravings (petroglyphs) belonging non-Buddhist culture.

### **Charai (Madiyan)<sup>1</sup>**

The most outstanding is a group of archaic petroglyphs that distinguish them clearly from the historic reliefs. This site of petroglyphs is not been reported earlier. The exposed portion of the boulder reveals a rough outline of two human bodies, both are in standing position. The natural form of man is not portrayed by the artist. Sufficient details are given to recognize the forms as human, it looks like that the artist was interested in man's action rather than in human form. Rough outline of the human body in a rectangular shape with rounded head on top, hands extended sideways, legs are straight down. The face could not be reproduced in its true form. These archaic pictures are technically reveals a common theme of hunting, which was the chief means of livelihood of the primitive society.

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<sup>1</sup>Charai (Madiyan) is a famous small hamlet in upper Swat valley, situated on the road side leading to Kalam, about 2 km short of Madiyan. The locality is famous for Buddhist archaeological vestiges. Charai hamlet is situated on the left bank of the river Swat. The site of petroglyphs is on the left side of the road leading to Madiyan.

On the other hand we have got solid body made up in a bi-triangular style, well known in metal from TepeHissar dating to third millennium BC. Such a bi-triangular form of the body is seen in another example in which the hands make a bracket. This style is known in the trans-Pamir region and could be dated to 3rd or 4th millennium BC. (Samashev 1993: 36). The artistic details of this petroglyphs reveal close similarity with carvings of Muhammad-patai, Bang-doghal and Lekha-gata of Kandak valley (Olivieri&Vidale 2004:134-35). These primitive engravings bear patina over the rock surface due to climatic action

The Petroglyphs of CharaiMadiyan reveal solid body, made up in a bi-triangular style, well known in metal from TepeHissar dating to third millennium BC. This style is known in the trans-Pamir region and dated to 3rd millennium BC. (Samashev 1993: 36). They also reveal close similarity with engravings of Muhammad-patai, Bang-doghal and Lekhe-Gati of Kandak valley discovered by IsIAO Mission. While designed of the Bang-doghal, are carved in depth, together with other examples

from Hatiano Kandao and Bajaur sites dated to the same horizon.

### **Painted rock shelter**

Ancient paintings are found in almost every part of the Sub-continent where there are rock shelters or overhangs paintings were applied to them in many ways by using fingers or brushes. The painters always used natural substance of red, yellow, black and fine clay for white. Executions of ancient paintings were not done for aesthetic reasons to decorate or beautify a shelter. It represents a cultural activity, which existed in the everyday life of the artists of ancient time. Painting is a key to understand the complex symbolic rituals and ceremonies of the remote antiquities. Although it seems that few paintings may be executed as a record of everyday occurrences. Symbolism and ritual played an extremely important part in the lives of these people, who possessed no written language. Painting is one of the mediums in which ancient artist has tried to express his mind, his desires and aspirations. This medium of expression started in Pakistan much earlier than other continents of the World.

The limited archaeological explorations so far conducted by the scholars have now been confirmed that shelters bearing Palaeolithic time traces of paintings are situated in the province of Baluchistan (Kakar 2005: 21-25). The paintings discovered in Tor Ghar area of Loralai District and Sulaiman Range of Zhob District in Baluchistan. In Tor Ghar area 20 shelters and Sulaiman Range 27 shelters of paintings are reported (Kakar 2005: 22). Subject matter of both the sites is representations of fighting and hunting. They are figural paintings of animals and human beings, painted in red or black on the undressed surfaces of rock-shelters. Some of the animals are shown in triangular form, rendering the body by two triangles at one corner. This method is commonly used in the rock-engravings of the Upper Indus Valley (Nasim Khan 2000; 2).

In the Swat valley painted shelters were reported in Kafir-Kot area, near Thana village, representing a Buddhist sacred area with bow men (Nazir Khan et al. 1995: 333). Traces of the paintings were also reported from Hinduanohtai, Shamo and Marano-tangai. Marano-tangai shelter reveals a set of abstract symbols, squares intersected by a cross

and square filled with a single dot (Nazir Khan et al. 1995: fig. 14). Paintings of all these sites were dated between 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. (Nazir Khan et al. 1995: 350).

In 2000, IsIAO Mission discovered three painted rock shelters in Kandag valley of Swat, namely Sargah-Sar, Kalkai-kandao & Dwolasmannai-patai (Vidale & Olivieri 2002: 173). Sargah-Sar paintings reveal, human figures, carrying weapons, animals and elaborate geometric symbols. Kalkai-kandao shelter represents crowded designs, vivid composition of animals, humans & geometric patterns. Dwolasmannai-patai shelter shows complex, irregular geometric pattern and human carrying weapons. They are dated between 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD (Vidale & Olivieri 2002: 189). Another important painted shelter known as Kaferi Smasta near Kukrai village in Murghazar valley of Swat was discovered by the author (Sardar 2016: 125-38).

### **Kaferi Smasta<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup>In 2000 I found a shelter with the vestiges of paintings in Charoona Dara locality on south of present Kukrai village in Murghazar valley of Swat. This shelter is about three-km south of Kukrai village in Charoona Dara locality.

The Kaferi Smasta (shelter), with paintings of hunters and human figures, is shallow, semi-circular of about 1.50m in depth and 5m height. No signs of artificial intervention were found. It is open to southeast side. The paintings executed inside the natural undressed surface of the shelter. The images are painted on the right side wall of the shelter, with a mud pigment. On the right side wall where the ceiling begins to slope down reveal seven figures and representation of a monument. The paintings may be divided into two groups although they make up a uniform composition. The top register reveals a person standing in front of monument in akimbo position. The stairs like structure/monument, branches out on top, almost like vertical antennae. A stupa like structure with six stages, a human figure on top of stupa. This monument, in my opinion has a marked affinity with the so-called derivative stupa. Human figures of the lower register are standing frontally in different position. All figures are opened wide hands and legs. It seems that they are celebrating a hunting scene. The technique most commonly used for the

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Situated on the crest of Gishar hill in west of Mt. Ilam.

painting is that of outlined figures, but human figures are more realistic on the wall of the shelter. The original paintings there were in white, and a faint white line remains visible round figures subsequently repainted in yellow. KaferiSmasta paintings are characteristically in a yellowish cream shade, which at times can be made to look pink from the underlying red sandstone.

However, the shelter greater exposure to the weather is responsible for demolishing many of the paintings. Shepherds have frequently utilized the site for shelter, the fleece of their flocks rubbing paintings from the walls, or smoke from their fires eliminating those most of the artistic details.

### Rock Inscriptions

In result of my field survey conducted in 2002 and in the subsequent years in the valley, I visited Jahanabad hamlet, previously known as Shakori famous for Buddhist establishments (Stein 1929: 78). This hamlet is situated at distance of about one and half kilometer Northeast of Shakhorai village and about five kms Northeast of Manglaur village on the left bank of Sairkhar, is approachable by a

Jeep track from main Malamjaba road. I found three inscriptions on two gigantic living rocks, one is known as “Oba Ghat” while other is “KhazanaGhat”, disclose engravings of Buddhist period inscriptions. Two inscriptions are on “Oba Ghat”, meaning the rock of the water and there being a spring below it. The third inscription is on a huge isolated rock of “KhazanaGhat”. Their location, existing state of preservation, stylistic details and literary compositions are as below;

#### Inscription-I

- Line 1:  
sarvvapāpasyākaranakusalasyopa  
sampada
- Line 2: svacittavyavadānam
- Line 3: caetadbudanusasanam

Translation: “Not to commit any sin, to acquire merit, to purify one’s mind—that is the teaching of Buddha”

Inscription-I is a Sanskrit rendering of Dhammapada, verse 183 (Bühler, 1979: 135). It carved on the upper portion of the rock immediately above the cave is engraved in bold and deeply incised characters. The inscription contains three lines in north south direction,

carved high up in the center of the rock face; no one can reach or touch it from the ground surface. This inscription has suffered mostly by weathering.

### Inscription-II

- Line 1: vācānurakst
- Line 2: samvrtahkkāyanacaivakusalannak  
urvan
- Line 3: tāstrāyinkarmapathānuisokyaārag  
hye
- Line 4: nmārgamrppipraveditam

Translation: “(let him be one) who guards his speech, is well restrained in mind, and commits no evil with his body. Keeping these three roads of action clear, one may gain the path taught by the Sages.”

### Inscription-III

Inscription-III is a rather free Sanskrit rendering of Dhammapada, verse 281(Bühler, 1979: 135). Engraved in bold and deeply incised characters, having four lines, extends over a surface of about four meters in length in north south direction. The lower inscription is carved in the right lower corner of the rock and easily accessible to human

activities. It is exposed to both natural and human vandalism. Both inscriptions engraved on the western face of the rock, contain Sanskrit verses from the Dhammapada. The palaeographic character of their letters, according to Bühler’s analysis, seems to date the inscriptions as from the early Kushan period (Stein, 1929: 78).

### Inscription-III:

- Line 1: anityāvava (sic! for vata)  
samskāraūtpādayaya
- Line 2: dharminahutpadya hi  
nirud (dh)yantetepā (read tesām)
- Line 3: vyupasamassukham

Translation: “the Samskaras are truly subject to originating and decay. For, after originated the disappear. Calming them is happiness”

This is the famous verse spoken according the Maha-Parinibbana-Sutta, vi. 16, by Indra at the time of Sakyanuni’s death, or proclaimed by Buddha himself according to the Maha-Sudassana-Jataka (Bühler 1979: 134). According to P. O. v. Hinüber, the inscription is well written in spite of two very obvious mistakes as indicated. On basis of palaeographical detail the

inscription can be dated roughly to the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. It is certainly not younger than about 650 at the very latest. All the three are deeply and boldly incised on rough stones. The letters, which vary between two and four inches in height, resemble in many respects the so called North-Western Gupta Brahmi characters.

However, the paleographic investigation in the Swat valley is still in its very beginnings, and final classification can be reached only after a comprehensive study of the entire materials. Large numbers of inscriptions have been found in area during the last few decades, an enormous amount of work is still required for its study and documentation. The great mass of material still scattered un-noticed and un-documented in the entire valley. Since it is dispersed over an extensively inaccessible area and over a long span of time, when read and translated fully, will help in dating and interpreting the connected rock reliefs and stelae.

### **Purpose of this Art**

The work is of strictly religious character, being concerned specifically with worship and ritual. Reliefs

sculpture on rocks and stelae in the Swat valley display Buddhist subject of the Mahayana sect. Most of them show isolated figures of Bodhisattva Padmapani. The reliefs are chiefly found in the tributary valleys on the banks of the river Swat and near ravines (*khwars*) of different dales. This distribution of the images negates the idea put forward by some scholars regarding the carvings of Swat valley on the routes followed by the Chinese pilgrims.

The Buddhist period rock art discussed in this research studies were produced over a period of about three hundred years (6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century AD). They do reflect the basic characteristics of homogenous aesthetic traditions, and reveal a rich variety of forms and style. As stated earlier, these sacred images on rocks, boulders and stelae have been carved with specific purpose. The Buddhist zealous artists and those patronizing Buddhist faith, specially the late Mahayana Buddhism with its different schools developed various gods and goddesses such as the mountain gods, river gods, highway gods, gods of valleys, etc. However, the centre of all

religious activities one way or the other remained in the Buddhism.

The concept of Bodhisattvas that had found important places in the Buddhist pantheon at a very early stage got popularity with the passage of time. In the late Mahayana Buddhism, the popularity and number of Bodhisattvas increased manifold. It was during this period that the Buddhist turned to carve sacred reliefs on living boulders and rocks. However the concept might have come to mind and into practice at a fairly early time as is usually thought by the scholars. It is certain that the purpose of carving of these sacred images on rocks at isolated places and sometimes even beyond reach of man to a greater extent was no other than religious.

A large number of images in stone and bronze conforming to the dhyanas have been found in various parts of the valley. The most popular deities were the Buddha, the Avalokitesvara, Padmapani and Maiterya. The material in question is fairly late probably 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century AD and displays iconographic characteristics linked with the world of Mahayana Buddhism, with the presence of Hindu elements identified in a few cases. Speaking chronologically and

stylistically these belong to the post-Kushana period.

After the detailed study of the entire data two groups of figures come to light i.e. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The first group includes DhyaniBuddhas in typical Gandharan style of the late period as is obvious from the semi-circular fall of the robe in front of their seat. 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 Hindu Shahi Period.

The second group includes the Bodhisattvas most of whom are the figures of Padmapani. All the Bodhisattvas reveal influence from the Gupta classical type. Some of them also show the diaphanous dresses of the Gupta classical art. These figures of Padmapani along with those forms Dir, Buner and Puran areas seems to belong between same last periods. They can be dated to the 6<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> century A D., when the Indian influences had brought in Gupta classical element in this region.

Most of the reliefs were found in the vicinity of the sacred areas, which

suggest that they might have been dedicated to the sacred areas and had some sort of close association with those religious places. In most cases the groups of sculptures are located in close vicinity to already known sacred areas, or ruins most probably once important belonging, to residential establishments. These reliefs bear no inscription and carrying no reference as to the creators of these wide spread carvings and stelae. It is certain that some of them were unquestionably creative geniuses, as is apparent from a cursory glance at such rock carvings as RehmanCheena and Jahanabad.

### **Present State of preservation**

The rock reliefs have been vandalized since early 1970's when Wali (ruler) of Swat lost his power over the area. Most of them were found badly disfigured because of neglect, human hazards and weathering, thereby, creating great difficulty in their scientific analysis. Besides the rock reliefs still in situ, visits were made to different localities where rock reliefs were earlier reported but many of them were found blasted and destroyed. Rock carving near Sapalbandai Bridge in Mughazar valley and the one near Slampur areas known

as (Baluo) are now completely missing. Similarly the owner of the land has blasted the rock carving and inscription of Teerat area (Madiyan).

Another one in the Manglaur valley at the locality of Shingrai near the stupa remains (ruined) on the right side of the Banjot khwar was blasted by the landowner for the construction and extension of his house. The remains of the stupa and the blasted rock can be seen from the roadside. In Banjot village in the reliefs near Bus-Stand was blasted for road extensions. Near the main bridge of Manglaur in the locality of Salanda (village) just above the road leading towards Malamjaba there was a rock carving now blasted by the local for constructing a mosque. In Jahanabad not only colossal rock image of Buddha was defaced, but a statue of Padmapani in middle of apple orchard on isolated rock has been blasted by the local Taliban, once published by the author (Sardar 2005:10 fig. 71). No different was the story of the rock reliefs in the area of Kokarai village in the Jambil valley.

No doubt that the exposure to the elements is causing damage. Major threat to the rock art is humans. Mostly background of these rock reliefs are

obscure and is hard to photograph properly. Most of them have lost the sharpness and luster. Majority of them are extremely fuzzy. They preserve dark gray patina over the surface particular stylistic features, partially covered or overlapped by engravings of more recent periods. It may be added that modern iconoclasts, who have written over a large surfaces of the rocks, have caused damages.

These sculptures are not in satisfactory state of preservation today. Most of the reliefs have been washed and defaced by the floodwater of the river such as the images at Gogdara. In few places they were blasted and destroyed and also fired with guns by the ignorant people such as the site of Kokrai and Nangriyal. They are much decayed and it is difficult to recognize the figures. Years of exposure to open sky with climatic affects have blackened the surface and camera could hardly catch the lines of the figures. In a few instances, the people have be-headed the images and only the lower parts of the bodies were left which are now surviving as in the case of Padmapani of Nangriyal. These images were not only damaged by the cruel hands of man, but also weathered

by the climatic conditions, humidity, pollution with foam, which appear directly on the boulders and penetrate into the surface. Sometime a natural crack in the middle of the boulder played vital role in the damaging process of the reliefs.

## **Conclusion**

Stone has been used from the time of immemorial for engraving, paintings and writing purposes. It was undying material, used by the primitive man and one of its great functions was to make the rock art everlasting. We must remember that any form of rock art has the capacity to display the unknown scene before our eyes. It should not be simply viewed as events depicting daily lives of the remote society. Rock art also renders a spiritual reality before us. These carvings are the living evidence of our cultural history and are the legacy of the Buddhist period that prevailed here up to 8th centuries A D. The Buddhist artisan revealed on rocks and boulders the soul-inspiring story of their gods and other religious divinities. Their presences are living proofs of the fact that Udiyana (modern Swat valley) was once the center of Buddhism. Although neglected for few decades and if

properly preserved can still attract Buddhist community, religious pilgrims, social scientists, scholars, archaeologists, historians and visitors from far and wide. I believe that proper stewardship and proper investigation of these sites may provide important information that is crucial to the understanding of the people and cultures that have existed here over the millennia.

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