

GAMBHIRPUR ROCK PAINTINGS

Ravi G. Hajarnis

The village Gambhirpur (latitude N.P. 23°5' east longitude 73°3') is about three kms. to the north of Īḍar in the Gujarat State. The erstwhile Īḍar State, now merged in the Sābarkāṇṭhā District, is rich in antiquities. The territory of the former Īḍar State lay mostly to the east of River Sābarmatī and north of the River Mahi, between 23°6' and 24°30' north latitude and 72°49' and 73°43' longitude. The State had an area of 1,669 square miles.

The Arvalli hills lay on the southern borders of the State. These granite hills almost surround Īḍar, and some isolated hills occur as far as Himatnagar. The main river system in this territory is formed by the Sābarmatī and its tributaries—the sāi, Harṇāv, Hathimatī, Meṣvo, Vātrak and Mājum which flow through the plains of the western and southern parts of the former State.

History

U. P. Shah traces some connection of Pratihāra King Venivatsarāja (c. A. D. 783-808) with Īḍar hills on the basis of folk-lore.¹ According to a legend, the king's mother, consort of the king of Śrīnagara (i.e. Teheri Ghadḥvāl District of the Himalayan region), was brought to the Īḍar hills by a monster-bird during her pregnancy.²

The Chinese pilgrim Hsüen T'sang (c. A. D. 640) mentions a place which he calls "O-cha-li", or Vaḍāri. Cunningham identifies this place with Īḍar (*also Rāsmālā*, 235).³ *The Bombay Gazetteer* Vol. V, however, identifies Vaḍāri with Vaḍālī (23°56' N. 73°3' E) to the north of Īḍar.⁴

According to Shah, Vaḍālī, which is referred to in Hsüen T'sang's accounts, was under the Maitraka rule, with Ānandapura to its west, Mālva or Mālavaka to the east, and Khetaka to its south.⁵ He further guesses his route of travel to be from Daśapura (Mandasor), or Ujjain area, to Bṛgukaccha via Duṅgarpur through Bhiloḍā, Śāmalāji, Harṣapura (Harsol) to Kārpaṭavāṇijya (Kapaḍvanj), Kaṭhlāl, and Naḍiād in Khetakamaṇḍala.⁶

Devnimori, about 45 kms. to the south of Īḍar was one of the great Buddhist settlement during the late Kṣatrapa period. The cultural and artistic activities of this region, however, go back to a period anterior to Kṣatrapa times. The present author, during the course of his explorations discovered rock paintings from Sapāvāḍa, Lāloḍā and Īḍar which has cast fresh light on the art history of this region from stone age to historical periods.⁷

The Śāmaḷāji evidence proves the association of this area with Buddhism. The author recently has brought to light one other series of rock paintings showing signatory association with religious, cultural and art-activities of the Buddhist period. In all, there are seven *stūpas* depictions painted on the inner vertical surface of the rock shelters at Gambhirpur (Īḍar). These are for the first time discussed in English here.

Description of the paintings :

Shelter 14

This shelter faces full front; the figure of a *stūpa* is visible even from the road side. The *stūpa*-figure is painted with thick red lines of *geru* (Indian red) colour. It is flanked by *chatra-yaṣṭi*. *Chatra* is shown with (a sort of) perspectivity in view. The platform of the *stūpa* cannot properly be discerned. The *patākā* (flag) is drawn by red lines with no block-filling. Although the proportions are not perfect, the figure is useful as an idea representation of the contemporary *stūpa* shape. The pigment used here is *geru* and a white colour as a fillar (Fig. 1.)

Shelter 15

The paintings in shelter 15 are not well preserved. Two *stūpa* figures, however, can be clearly recognised; their configuration is delineated in red, the inner area rendered in white (Fig. 2).

The first figure from the left is larger than the second. The *stūpa*'s outline has somewhat suffered due to weathering. The shape of the *chatra-yaṣṭi* and of the platform etc. cannot therefore be fully discerned.

The configurative lines of second *stūpa* figure are also damaged. These two *stūpa* figures illustrate the more developed form compared to the figures of shelter 16 to be discussed below, being the work arguably of a superior artist. The space distribution and the force of line are remarkable. The *chatra-yaṣṭi* and the *hermikā* are carefully drawn. The *chatra* is drawn after moon-shape.

Shelter 16

Three *stūpa*-figures are met with here.

The first *stūpa* figure from the left side is not drawn with perfect symmetry. The lines too are uneven in thickness and reflect irregularity in proportions. The uneven rock-surface may have contributed to this "mishappen" appearance.

The second, which is the middle, *stūpa* figure is in better condition than the first *stūpa* figure, drawn carefully as it is. The lines are fine and more accurate compared to the preceding instance. However, the rendering of the *chatra-yaṣṭi* and the hanging *patākā* is not very accurate.

The third *stūpa* figure in this shelter is by far the superior of the three. The method in drawing adopted here is slightly different. Because of the uneven

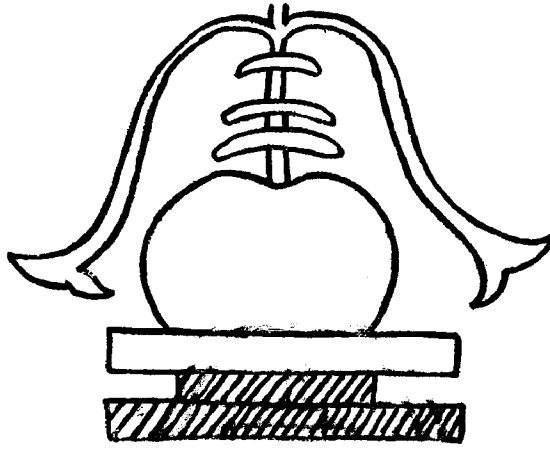


Fig. 1
Painted stupa in shelter 14

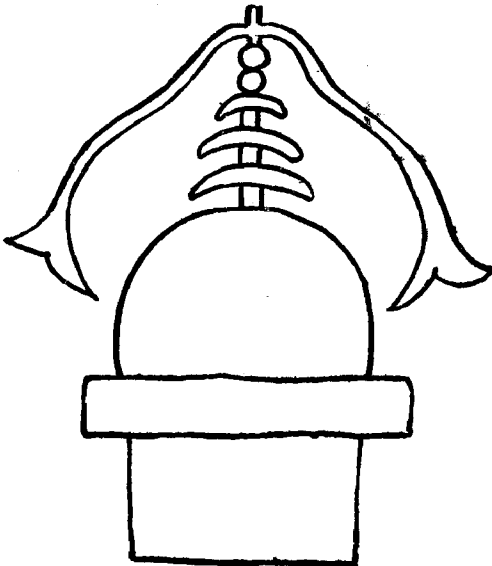


Fig. 2 (A)

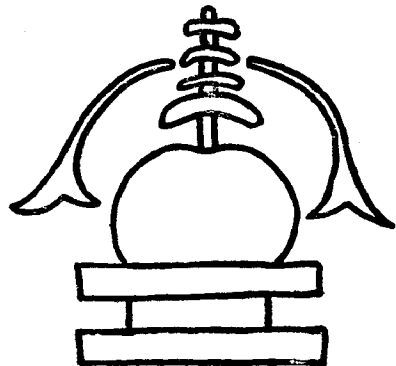


Fig. 2 (B)

Painted stupas in shelter 15

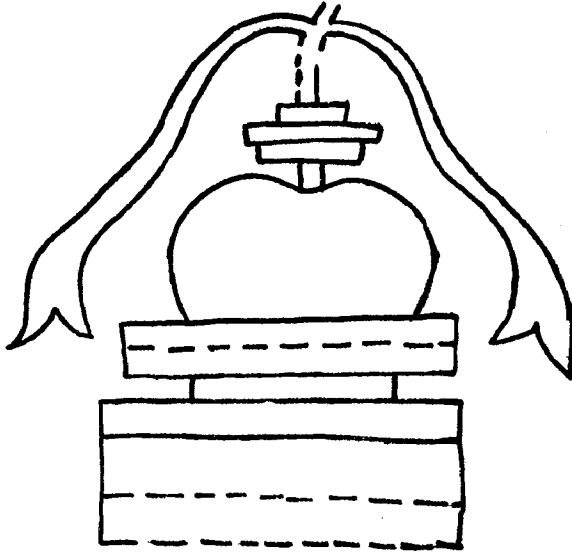


Fig. 3
Painted stupa in shelter 16

rock-surface, the entire figure is directly drawn by the artist. The *chatra* portion is semi-rectangular. But its top part is not clearly visible (Fig. 3).

Shelter 18

It is located on the way leading to 'Īḍario Gaḍh', Īḍar, near the place locally called Ruṭhi Rāṇi-no Mahel. There, on the inner wall of shelter a superimposed painting is discernible. Although superimposed, the semi-circular shape of the *stūpa* and some Brāhmī letters above it can be discerned. The entire writing is not preserved or clearly legible. (A few letters may be read as "Rajas".) Palaeographically, the characters are assignable to the 4th and the 5th cent. A. D. All these painted *stūpa* configurations may, therefore, be assigned to the bracket 4th-5th cent. A. D.

Such painted configurations of the *stūpa* inside rock-shelters are not reported from any other part of the country. The paintings prove the prevalence in this area of Buddhism in the early Gupta period.

Notes and References

1. U. P. Shah, "Sculptures from Shamalaji and Roda", *Bulletin of Museum & Picture Gallery, Baroda* 1960, p. 2.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency*, Vol. 5, Bombay 1880, p. 434.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Shah, *Sculptures.*, p. 5.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Ravi Hajarnis and M. D. Verma, "Sāberkāṇṭhā māñ maḷi āvelā Gufā-citro" (Gujarāṭi), *Kumār*, Feb. 1979; also by the same authors, "Sāberkāṇṭhā nāñ citro nuñ Samayāṅkana" (Gujarāṭi), *Vidyāpīṭha*, July-August 1980, pp. 47-49; and the same authors with C. K. Date, "Gujarāt-madhil gufā-citre" (Marathi), *Svarājya*, 2nd Oct. 1982, p. 12.

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