

Analysis of Buddhist Rock Carvings in Diamer Basha Dam Reservoir Area, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan

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Abstract : This paper focuses on the Buddhist rock carvings in the Diamer-Basha reservoir area, Gilgit-Baltistan, which is perhaps the largest rock art province of the world. The study region has thousands of rock carvings, particularly of the stupa carvings, engraved by artists, devotees or pilgrims, merchants have left their marks in the landscape or for the propagation of Buddhism. The Pak-German Archaeological Mission prepared, documented, and published the extensive catalogues of these carvings. Though, to date, very little systematic or statistically driven analysis was undertaken for in-depth understandings of the Buddhist rock carving tradition of the study region. This paper had made an attempt to examine stupa carvings and their constituent parts from the five selected sites, namely Oshibat, Shing Nala, Gichi Nala, Dadam Das, and Chilas Bridge. The statistical analyses and classification of the stupa carvings and their chronological contexts were carried out with the help of modern scientific tools such as STATA, FileMaker Pro, and MapSource softwares. The study had found that the tradition of stupa carvings on the surfaces of the rocks at the five selected sites continued for around 900 years, from the 1st century BCE to 8th century CE. There is a variation within the chronological settings of each of selected sites, possibly impacted by their utilization within particular landscapes, such as political (for example, change in political administrations or warfare) landscapes and geographical (for example, shifting of routes). The longer existence of the stupa carvings' tradition at these specific locations also indicates their central position on the trade and communication routes, and these were possibly also linked with religious ideologies within their particular times. The analyses of the different architectural elements of stupa carvings in the study area show that this tradition had structural similarities and differences in temporal and spatial contexts.

Keywords : rock carvings, stupa, stupa carvings, Buddhism, Pak-German archaeological mission

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