

ROCK ART OF ASIA: AN OVERVIEW

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This paper presents a picture of the rock art heritage of Asia. It offers an understanding of the cognitive as well as cultural development of the people in the continent through documentation of this art form. Though rock art is known to exist in most, if not all, Asian countries, there is a paucity of information mainly because of non-availability of reliable literature in English. However, the information that could be gathered has been presented by grouping the countries broadly into South, East, North and West Asian regions as per their locations. This paper offers a detailed account of rock art in India including its history of research, distribution, nature and chronology besides presenting a review of rock art forms representing prehistoric, proto-historic and Historic periods. It is also interesting to note that Sri Lankan rock art is extremely rich in stylistic variations and is characterised mostly by the presence of open air sites comprising of rock boulders. Rock art reports from Malaysia, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Oman are encouraging and throw fresh light on their characteristic features. Interestingly, southern Jordan offers a peculiar example of rock art panels which have been signed by the artists who have also often annotated their drawings. Like India, Chinese rock art is fairly well reported. It is broadly divided into six geographical regions starting from the north to the south, mostly executed in open either on the surfaces of vertical cliffs or on boulders. Except some highly abstract forms, Chinese rock art exhibits regional characteristic features. However, a lot needs to be done for the Asian rock art so that this work is on par with other advanced countries in the areas of conservation, preservation and documentation besides working on chrono-cultural issues by employing an advanced scientific multidisciplinary approach, considering the backdrop of the respective countries' perspectives which are supported by archaeological, literary, ethnographic and oral traditions.

Professor V.H. Sonawane retired as a Professor of Archeology from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. Professor Sonawane was also the Director of Field Archaeology at the university. He has 36 years of experience during which he extensively worked on various aspects of prehistoric, protohistoric and historic archaeology including the discovery of more than 100 Harappan and Chalcolithic settlements and discovery of rock art shelters in Gujarat.

Professor Sonawane was also the coordinator of the UGC-SAP (Phase-I: 2002-07) at the Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, Maharaja Sayajirao University. He has completed a project on the "Investigation of Rock Art of Western India with Specific Reference to Gujarat" and presently working on "Symbolism of Rock Art in India". Prof. sonawane has presented a number of papers in various national and international seminars and almost 100 of his article/ research papers were published in national and international journals.

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