

Elephants in Indian Rock Art: An Appraisal for Relative Chronology

Ruman Banerjee

ABSTRACT

Time markers like elephants, promptly help to identify the nature of the panel and hence the make-up of that particular rock-shelter. It is clear from previous studies (Varma, 2012, Tewari, 1990, Robinson *et al.*, 2008) that animals like elephants provide early historic chronology when thematic dating and other associated paintings from the same panel are taken into consideration. Most of the times elephants in Central Indian rock art are associated with battle scenes, depicting metal weapons. Robinson *et al.* (2008), used the scheme of superimposition to trace the relative chronology of a painted panel from the rock art sites of Birappa and Hiregudda hill, in South-Central India, identifying time markers like elephant in the region which dates back to c. 300 BC (Allchin and Allchin, 1994 – 1995:323). In Central Indian rock art corpus elephants and horses are quite common and might serve as time markers for relative chronology aided by superimposition analysis. This implies that not only styles and subject matters continued throughout the evolutionary scheme of rock art production and consumption, but also actual methods of execution did continue from Epi-Palaeolithic period to Historic period. In this paper we aim to elucidate the importance of elephants as a time marker in the Indian context, where we could see numerous depictions of elephants. The relative chronology of specific rock paintings and collage could be ascertained by the presence and absence of elephants and superimposition of other elements.

Keywords: *Elephants, Rock Art, Relative Chronology, Time Marker, Superimposition*

Associate Research Fellow, University of Bristol, BS8 1UU, UK, Department of Archaeology and Anthropology