

A Unique "Yaksha" Sculpture at "Manikdurg" Fort Maharashtra, India

Shivendra Kadgaonkar, Sachin Vidyadhar Joshi, Abhijit Dandekar

Introduction

Fort "Manikdurg" is located in Taluka Chiplun village Savarde (Pl.I) in the Western Ghat of Maharashtra state. (N17°22'05.7"E73°30'20.6") The closest village to the fort is village Mandkikhurd. The fort's height is about 200 meters above the sea level. The post-graduate research institute affiliated to the Department of Archaeology of the Deccan College had done exploration & excavation on the fort in the year 2010. On the west side of the fort seven water cisterns/ caves were excavated. All were either unfinished or partially excavated. Only on one lintel has two "yaksha" figures, one elephant, one human figure (very much weathered) carved in a band (Pl.II). The two "yaksha" figures are carved on each corner of the band. One is on the left side & another one is on the right side of the band. In between these "yakshas," figures of an elephant and a human are carved. The length of the band is 1.5 meters and the height is 50 centimeters. Both "yaksha" figures' hands are in upward position as if they are carrying the load of water cistern roof. The position explains their purpose of carving. They are the load bearers or "bharvahakas". Symbolically these yakshas are carrying the load of the cave or the load of the roof of the cave or the water cistern. Both the "yakshas" are pot-bellied. Their folded hands, short legs, face, and ears are visible. One of the yaksha's is wearing an ear ornament ("kundala") and a necklace ("har") (Pl.V).

"Yakshas" in Art as a "Bharvahaka" or Load Bearers

These types of "bharvahaka yakshas" or load bearers or atlantes carved at Pitalkhore caves no. 3 (Pl.III,B), at Aurangabad (State=Maharashtra), Nasik cave no. 3 (State=Maharashtra) (Pl.IV,B), Badami cave no.3 (State=Karnataka), Sanchi stupa "torana" (State= Madhya Pradesh) (Pl.IV,A) , Bharut stupa (State=Madhya Pradesh), Bodhgaya (State=Bihar) (Pl.III,A), and Amravati stupa (State= Andhra Pradesh). These "yakshas" on these caves or "stupas" are carved as carrying a load of "torana" or cave or beams. All the above mentioned Buddhist sites belong to the period between 2nd century B.C. to 2nd century A.D. This tradition of carving load bearers or "bharvahakas" continues on medieval temples of Maharashtra & Madhya pradesh states between 10th century A.D. to 12th century A.D. On the temples load bearers are carved on the top of the pillars. These pillars are in the main hall or "mukha mandapa". Here the figure of "yaksha" is symbolically carrying a load of temple roof. For example, Karneshwar temple, Tal. Sangmeshwar, Dist. Ratnagiri, Siddheshwar temple, Tal. Akole, Dis. Ahamad nagar etc. (Gore shilpa 2009)

Deccan College, Postgraduate and Research Institute, Pune, India.