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## AN INTRODUCTION TO Central Madhya Pradesh style school rockpaintings

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**Abstract:** This introductory paper deals with a group of a thousand rock paintings in brush technique, called “Central Madhya Pradesh style school” rockpaintings. The central research problem is change, evolution and detecting phases. There are nearly a dozen localities, the main among them are Locality 1 and 2; some results of neighbouring sites as Locality 3 and 4 are presented as well.

Representing larger numbers of paintings, especially animals often in series, is a major characteristic of this style. The development in the paintings in Locality 1 and Locality 2 has been taken as a model for the evolution of the “Central Madhya Pradesh style school” (henceforth CMP), developing through style drifting from one distinct style towards a style school with a multiplicity of coexisting interrelated substyles and possibly also inter-band contact spreading over a wide area. The specific approach consists in distinguishing relevant substyles. This needs to be confirmed through further research in Locality 1, Locality 2 (henceforth L.1, L.2) and other localities.

### Introduction

India has one of the most important collections of rock art in the world. A formidable diversity in style, technique and content is one of its fundamental characteristics. The so-called unity of Indian rock art, referred to sometimes, reflects more an intellectual attitude than an art-historical reality in the field (Schaap 2008). Numerous artistic traditions can be distinguished in this fascinating material. The first step in any relevant analysis of a rock art style must be a clear definition of what is understood by the concept of “style”, the second step being a clear description of its stylistic attributes (Schaap 1982).

### Style

The study of style is one of the fundamentals of art studies. Contrary to current opinions in some archaeological circles it should also be a core activity in the study of prehistoric arts. A positive side-effect of style analysis, as a method, is that the attention is redirected to the paintings themselves.

## Definitions

Undoubtedly the internationally most well-known paper in English is Schapiro's "Style" (1953). He defines style: "as the constant form and sometimes the constant elements, qualities, and expression in the art of an individual or group." There are many definitions echoing Schapiro, but they are mainly a rephrasing.

"We use the concept style, then, as a way of characterizing relationships among works of art that were made at the same time and/or place, or by the same person or group. If we do not know where, when, or by whom works of art were produced, then the process may be inverted to allow hypotheses that works of the same style are from the same time, place, or person(s)."

It is of the utmost importance to realise that the more work we want to ascribe to a specific style definition, the more unreal the definition tends to become (Lützel 1975). In other words the style definition coincides not with the style characteristics. A substyle refers to the oeuvre of one or a few specific artists or masters (my definition).

Another serious problem with style analysis is how closely our spoken or written language describes a painting correctly.

Two relevant points emerge: 1) what an author thinks style is or should be; 2) how it can be used. For the art researcher style is the main goal, for the archaeologist style is an element out of many others. Some researchers insist that a definition is only relevant if it can be successfully applied (Ackerman 1962). This is important because in Schapiro's view the meaning of an art should be included as well. As the meaning of a prehistoric art needs confirmation by its authors, this aspect is not very helpful in any style definition of a prehistoric art. Emphasis on the form component in a style definition applied to a prehistoric art seems therefore very important to me (See also Kubler 1962 and Sackett 1977).

## Style analysis as a method

Style analysis is an intuitive and much debated method and often misunderstood. Generalised attacks on the use of style analysis as a relevant method of research, have been common practice, worrying and criticizing it was a cause celebre in the recent past ("style versus direct dating") (Lorblanchet & Bahn 1993). Contra-intuitive methods were the favoured ones. In my view the central problem in style analysis is the aspect of change. This leads very easily to unverified projections about development or evolution. However, longitudinal studies, whereby the evolution in a single specific style over a longer time period, are not possible without painting stratigraphies. The starting point for any sound diachronic approach in style analysis must be a clear painting stratigraphy.

Thus, emphasis on the form component in a style definition applied to a prehistoric art seems very important to me. It can be used profitably as a research tool. If conducted in a serious way, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. At the moment there are very few alternatives, as <sup>14</sup>C AMS dating is not yet a substitute for style analysis. Style analysis is like a useful medicine, it also has side-effects.

## Precursor Central Madhya Pradesh style school

In the context of the C.M.P. style school which is essentially an animal art, one tradition in particular can be seen as a forerunner of the C.M.P. style school and with the same visual conceptualisation. In this precursor the core of the depiction consists of a rectangle. This artistic tradition produced rather robust angular drawings, which can be seen all over Central India. As a rock art researcher with long-term experience with European and Saharan rock art I want to underline the rather particular character of this way of representing.

We cannot know what really happened, but I imagine that somewhere in time one or a few persons created out of this established artistic tradition a new one, namely the C.M.P. style school. Whatever the process, either a slow gradual development with subtle changes or a sudden creative outburst, the outcome is very clear: white paintings depicting animals, especially deer, are detectable in one specific locality, namely Locality 1 (L.1) in the centre of Madhya Pradesh.

It is unknown to me if the first or early white paintings of deer, visible in L.1, correspond with the start or initial phase of the C.M.P. style school. Perhaps the first artists experimenting with the C.M.P. style school were not allowed to paint in an aberrant style in the main locality of the band or tribe. Whatever the answer to this fascinating question, the first white deer representations visible in L.1 are technically and artistically mature works; notwithstanding their mediocre state of preservation.

The very characteristic style of painting, technically brush painting, is easily recognizable even in the maze of lines or profusion of superimposed paintings. This applies especially to the paintings in red. It can be variously used as fixed point, a reference point, a time line or a temporal marker (*before* – C.M.P. style school – *after*) when organizing and ordering paintings. In my opinion it can be applied to a typical situation met by many cave and rock art researchers, namely a cluster of superimposing painting series in an indistinct chronological position (my definition); a so-called floating chronology (Ucko & Rosenfeld 1967). It is particularly useful in attempts to reconstruct the relative order as part of the relative chronology of Central Indian rock art. It also has some use as a quick reference point during reconnaissance field trips in the central area of C.M.P. when checking the local painting stratigraphy.

In my conception the term C.M.P. style school has multiple meanings. The style is present in the centre of the state Madhya Pradesh, the main centre of the rock paintings in Central India. At the same time we are dealing with a very important artistic tendency, a style school (Muzzolini 1995) with a multiplicity of coexisting and interrelated substyles.

## **Important localities**

### **The Locality 1 with the main shelter and the masterceiling**

The Locality 1 in the centre of the main area with prehistoric rock art in Central India is undeniably the most important site, culminating in the main shelter and the grandiose decorated ceiling, labelled by me “the masterceiling” because of its superior artistic quality. This locality, with several painted rockshelters and rock walls full of beautiful paintings in different substyles, must have been a ceremonial centre and a major sanctuary of the society, band or tribe.

There are many painted rockshelters and rock walls in this important valley with paintings in the C.M.P. style school in white, red, in both colours or three-coloured (white, red, orange). Besides colour differences there are relevant stylistic differences and in significant number. It seems therefore more appropriate to conceive this substantial stylistic diversity as a style school rather than one single style. L.1 with the main shelter and masterceiling is of fundamental importance in the study of change, evolution and detecting phases and relative chronology of the rock paintings in this area. Thus, L.1 is fundamental for the understanding of this phenomenon of multiplicity of coexisting and interrelated substyles.

The artists working in the C.M.P. style school, especially the white paintings, were very style conscious and clearly didn't like to superimpose their own paintings or those of their fellow artists. (See also on the area-availability-and-use-pattern). Deliberately superimposing or related superimpositions as a means to express composition also seems absent. There is no occurrence of superpositioning: one painting placed on top of another

painting, either overlapping the previous painting in part only, or completely covering it. Certain representations show evidence of retouches like modification or renewal, or also re-use, re-outlining. The artists did beautify, rejuvenate, revitalize, complete, adapt, “correct” their paintings or comment upon them or those of their fellow artists. As a result some paintings are completely transformed. It should be noted that retouching, or the “first version versus later addition” problem, is a neglected aspect of the study in rock art. I also favour the view that a work of rock art is more like a process than a finished object.

Contrary to what has been sometimes suggested, the Central Madhyan Pradesh style school is in my view essentially a white painting phenomenon. It is worth mentioning that white constitutes a powerful colour with a tremendous symbolic potential, highly appreciated in many religions. White C.M.P. style school paintings can be extremely numerous locally, but have a limited distribution. Red C.M.P. style school paintings on the contrary are comparatively less in number locally but have the largest distribution. However, given the white predominance in other styles, it is possible that white C.M.P. style school paintings are not being recognized in the profusion of white paintings in other styles. The quite aggressive attitude, bordering to iconoclasm, towards C.M.P. style school paintings in white, red or whatever colour, must also be remembered. I consider some two-coloured and some red versions as substyles, as important examples of the C.M.P. style school. Without question most white paintings have been completed with red details and all the two-coloured paintings have a white basis. Some “red paintings” have a white basis too, and as I mentioned before, many paintings are completely transformed. There are even three-coloured paintings, for example in the well-known panel in the main shelter with the forceful muscular rhinoceros, etc. This panel is famous for the freshness of its colours and a delight for art-lovers. The beautiful and well preserved powerful representation of the rhinoceros has a faint white basis, the second step consists of thick red paint and finally there are some retouches in orange.

The attractive main rock shelter in L.1 is, to the best of my knowledge, the sole locality with some different superimposed paintings in the C.M.P. style school, white superimposed by red. The specific stratigraphy in the main shelter suggests a complex development of this style and is therefore important for the central research problem of change, evolution and detecting phases. Besides the clearly different substyles this diachronic argument also justifies the introduction of the concept of a broader artistic movement, a style school.

The masterceiling in L.1, being in a very inconvenient place, can only be reached safely by using trees or long ladders with scaffolding necessary for the production of paintings. Probably only two or three related major innovative C.M.P. style school phases with two-coloured paintings are abundantly present. Furthermore in the margin are some two-coloured paintings in the C.M.P. style school in a different and rather conventional substyle. On this masterceiling I have not come across earlier paintings than work in the C.M.P. style school and I tend to believe that the artists working in one or another C.M.P. substyle were the first to use this particular ceiling. In the same margin are also a few unimportant, graffiti-like paintings of later periods; probably left-over ladders and scaffolding of the C.M.P. style school artists were used.

L.1 is the only locality where the paintings in the C.M.P. style school are rarely superimposed by work in other styles; a quite exceptional situation! Normally the amount of superimposition by other styles has been such that most of the C.M.P. style school paintings are completely obliterated. There is some limited superimposing by other styles in the main shelter but it is totally absent on the masterceiling and many of the neighbouring painted rock shelters and rock walls.

## **Distribution**

Besides the very important L.1, C.M.P. style school paintings have a much wider distribution. In discussions with Indian researchers on the importance, number and distribution of C.M.P. style school localities I noticed divergent opinions, varying from two localities to eight. In the main area with prehistoric rock art in Central India are a number of important localities with C.M.P. style school work like Localities nr. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. and 7. On the impressive L.8, I noted in a number of instances, some fragments of beautiful red C.M.P. style school paintings, partly superimposed by heavy white painting in a different style. Perhaps L.9 should be added to this list as well. Except for a few directly neighbouring localities like L.2 which has white paintings and which I consider as a kind of annexe to L.1, all the other localities are presenting mainly red paintings. Is this distribution reflecting the internal development and spatial dispersal in time of the C.M.P. style school? Probably this list sums up only the most expansionist mainstream red phase of the paintings. I surmise that other C.M.P. substyles are less well understood and therefore not recognized by every researcher.

## **Stratigraphy of rock paintings**

In order to clarify the stratigraphy of the rock paintings, defined as providing a relative reference frame for chronology, the selection of panels with a maximum of superposing paintings, including characteristic works in the C.M.P. style school, is of utmost importance. As mentioned before some of the paintings are in white, others in red, and there is two-coloured and even three-coloured work. Which one is the first, is there a colour period, or what dictates the colour choice? Red colour sometimes doesn't adhere evenly to the underlying layer of white paint and white paint tends to come through the overlaying layer of red paint. Because of these negative properties some rock art specialists experience difficulties and feel uncertain when studying the relative order of red versus white paintings.

One of the most important panels to help us answer these questions is present in the main shelter of L.1, namely the main panel at the right wing. This main panel with a complicated stratigraphy may give the conclusive clue to what is first and what is the reasoning behind the specific use of colour. Other important panels for stratigraphic purposes are in the right side wing higher up in the main shelter, in the area between the main shelter and the masterceiling, in the masterceiling itself and finally in the section with the many bee colonies close to the masterceiling.

Besides stratigraphy other important parameters in sequencing are colour, infilling and spatial distribution.

## **C.M.P. style school characteristics and sequence.**

My analysis of the superpositions of the main panel shows that the C.M.P. style school series in this panel clearly starts with larger white representations of deer, so red is succeeding white.

The fundamental form element of the C.M.P. style school is the rectangle. The rectangle presents the main frame in this type of painting, be it C.M.P. style school or their forerunner tradition where the core of the representation consists of a rectangle, a precursor producing rather robust angular figures. The outlines of the paintings have thick brushwork.

In the rectangle or mainframe there is always some infill. The most important types are V/W shape, fish-bone and zigzag, also some vertical lines, cross-hatching, M-shape and horizontal lines infill.

For example in a work with V/W infill the major part of the body is with diagonal lines divided into many triangles. Diagonal parallel lines further subdivide the triangle into smaller triangles, etc.

In two unfinished neighbouring paintings probably belonging to a somewhat advanced series of red representations of deer in L.1, it is clearly demonstrated how fundamental this element is. First a rectangle is drawn, then a doubling of the abdominal (belly) line, next the foremost leg of the two forelegs and hindmost leg of the two hind legs, after that the second (inmost) foreleg, next the second (inmost) hind leg and finally the rest of the representation like the neck, head, infilling, etc.

In my view an animal drawn in the C.M.P. style school is largely an addition of separate segments and elements, divided into distinct units, and does not constitute a real and thoroughly integrated form unit. Some artists deviated from emphasising on separate elements, instead they created work with more balanced and integrated whole forms.

### **Characteristics of the C.M.P. style school**

There are many different substyles with varying stylistic characteristics in the C.M.P. style school. I am of the opinion that knowledge progresses by studying similarities and dissimilarities instead of focusing only on similitude. As 99% consists of animal representations, it must be clear from the outset that the animal representations are the starting point in my definition of the C.M.P. style school phenomenon.

The C.M.P. style school is technically a brush painting with linear, rectangular and angular features forming the key attributes. Rectangular core is the main characteristic feature in animal representations. It forms the main frame of the drawing and sometimes tends to have a slightly oval shape. A second important element is the heavily emphasized contour or outline, executed with thick brush. The area inside the rectangular core consists of different types of infilling, always linear and angular; round shapes are rare or non-existent. In a series of paintings the type of internal infill is on the whole very consistent; there are important exceptions however, for example in the masterceiling. Apart from clearly unfinished work, an animal representation belonging to the C.M.P. style school will always present a more or less elaborate infill, as this constitutes an essential component. However, not every painting showing infilling can be ascribed to the C.M.P. style school.

The main types of infill are: V/W shape, fish-bone and zigzag infilling, also some vertical lines, cross-hatching, M-shape and horizontal lines infill.

Oblique lines are an important recurrent type and create a V- or W-shaped infilling. For example three diagonal lines in the front part and three diagonal lines in the hind part create a wedge-shape in the centre, for example in substyles of the group "Early white paintings" and "Red paintings" group and zigzag patterns in "Red paintings, zigzag infilling"; cross-hatching and M-shaped infill are less often applied alternatives. A quite unusual element in a red C.M.P. substyle is the rare depiction of a foetus or baby animal(s) inside paintings with zigzag infill. Also vertical lines and horizontal or vertical fish-bone motifs are an option. Vertical lines are rare except in a substyle consisting of small paintings (a so-called "Materialstil"). Horizontal lines are rare and points and dots as infilling are exceptional. Small V-shapes are used in large numbers especially in the series of "White paintings with tiny infillings" (e.g. L.2). Some representations of deer show in the hind part a rectangle, this form element, a particular stylistic convention, has been used in white, red and two-coloured paintings (main shelter and masterceiling). It is as if the hind part of the animal is puffed up and presented from the back instead of in profile, for example in "Early white paintings" and "Two-coloured paintings, white strips surrounding the rectangle". The infilling of white paintings is sometimes less exuberant than it is in the red paintings.

Sometimes a few lines are used to indicate the hair on the back, head, neck and manes. The head is often small, but the neck is an element that can receive much attention. By changing the focal point, the depiction of a very long graceful neck adds an element of elegance and refinement. In another substyle however the neck has been completely omitted (e.g. L.3 “Red substyle”), resulting in a considerable change in form language.

In many white paintings the animals are depicted with straight legs. Especially in the red paintings the legs are often drawn in a rather stereotyped and clumsy way by a horizontal V-shape (<) sometimes giving the animals a shaky and uncertain appearance. Other artists used nearly straight lines, which makes for stiff legs, not in any way lively or natural. Animals like rhinoceros have very heavy straight legs, for example in the well-known panel in the main shelter. In two-coloured paintings, usually paintings with a white basis, red outlining and/or red additions, we sometimes have a zebra-like patterning on the legs as in L.2.

The hoofs in the C.M.P. style school receive little attention.

There are striking differences in the depictions of horns and antlers. Sometimes more detailed white antlers have red outlining right from the start or are subsequently re-outlined with red lines; this later version results inevitably in less naturalistic stiff and stick-like antlers especially in the right side wing of the main shelter in the “White paintings with red additions” substyle. Often such additions are done with less care as in the area with the bee colonies near the masterceiling and the masterceiling itself. The antlers often receive much attention; in representing the antlers some artists have given their utmost. It is obvious that antlers belong to the most inspiring elements of a deer.

Primary sex characteristics like male genitals, are often clearly indicated, also an elephant in the “must” condition, but sexual activities are never explicitly depicted in the C.M.P. style school.

The expression of movement either is not particularly developed, as it is often rather static. In particular gaur, buffalo and elephant are often represented as if walking slowly, with heavy steps. There is little variety of stances, an exception are some deer representations, with the neck and/or the head expressing some movement as in the main panel in the main shelter or masterceiling. Many animal representations, especially the larger ones and in series, are oriented to the right.

### **The C.M.P. style school as an animal art**

The C.M.P. style school is an animal art par excellence. The vast majority of recognizable representations consist of a very limited number, a deliberate selection, of species. In most cases the same species are repeated over and over again. The list of non depicted animals is impressive (Sálim Ali 1996; Menon 2003). The choice of this limited number of animal species is probably first of all culturally inspired. It is not legitimate to deduce facts about the fauna as it obviously does not reflect the environment of the prehistoric painters. The paleontological guide fossil principle should not be applied to prehistoric art (Schaap 1982). Representing larger numbers of animals is a general principle in the C.M.P. style school.

The animal representations are drawn with clear and sure lines, but not always portrayed with great accuracy. They are represented in profile. The relative size is not always respected and the scale is not always consistent.

The size of the paintings is relatively modest, from approximately 3 to 45 cm. Some sizes of the red paintings: the well-known beautiful red representation of the rhinoceros on the central panel of the main shelter measures 40 x 27 cm; a larger red deer painting 45 cm; the smallest red painting 3 cm, the minimum size for deer representations is about 10 cm; some sizes of red deer representations: 13 cm, 16 cm, 23 cm, 25 cm, etc. There are white paintings

in a somewhat larger size (the norm being the size ca 40 cm of the above mentioned red rhinoceros representation in the main shelter).

Amongst the animals most commonly represented are medium size and large herbivore mammals like deer, antelope, buffalo, gaur, rhinoceros, elephant; also monkey, porcupine and some birds. Clearly deer is the most represented animal category, often shown in rows. There are a few representations of carnivores like tiger and other catlike animals, but often drawn in a rather simplified and clumsy way. Noteworthy is the question of the presence or absence of wild boar; this animal is present, sometimes even frequently, in many other Indian rock art styles. In L.1 and 2 there are some paintings that could be interpreted as depictions of wild boar, but if this is not the case then the wild boar is apparently absent in the C.M.P. style school, which would be surprising. The same could be said about the absence of depictions of fish.

The birds are mostly shown flying in flocks or flying up, in front view. Exceptionally a couple of peafowl, cock and hen (*Pavo cristatus*) are in profile. Another bird (peafowl or a crane) nearby lying dead on the ground nearby with a long but broken distorted neck and stripped of its feathers is in bird's-eye view. Whenever birds are in red or the two-coloured technique and located in between C.M.P. style school work we can attribute them to this style.

Hands are present in many Indian rock art groups but clearly absent in the C.M.P. style school, non-naturalistic representations like isolated intricate designs and geometrical designs and patterns are also absent. There are some red dots and some oval-shaped red or white dots. I have not come upon follow-the-dots-pictures in the works of C.M.P. style school until now. The C.M.P. style school's *raison d'être* seems to be the representation of animals with a rectangular core and patterned infilling.

### **Human beings**

In the C.M.P. style school human beings are rarely represented, there is no clear age or sex differentiation, there are no women, youngsters, small children or babies; nor does the art show male genitals or sexual activities. Human beings are always shown slim. The human imagery looks exclusively masculine and is limited to hunters, especially archers with stringed bows. In the white paintings the human representations are exceptional. I noted a white one on the L.1 masterceiling, another in the margin of a panel in the main shelter of L.2. A two-coloured painting, with a white base, on the masterceiling in L.1; a smaller one in the margin of the masterceiling and another one nearby in area with the bee colonies, all clearly belong to a C.M.P. substyle. Those on masterceiling and in L.2 resemble each other very closely: the form elements, position, orientation and association with animals are the same; both are facing a large elephant in the "must" condition.

It would be an unlikely coincidence that both types of subjects (animals-humans) all of a sudden and exactly at the same time changed in appearance. Given the rarity of human representations a more orthodox artistic treatment is not a far-fetched expectation. It remains to be proven that animal and human representations undergo a comparable development at the same pace; a differential evolution seems more probable.

It should not be forgotten that a single isolated representation of a human being in for example L.1 does not necessarily imply that it belongs to the C.M.P. style school. Many different types of human representations are present in L.1, for example a panel with beautiful well preserved sticklike human figures or in the concave margin of this panel the much discussed S-shaped human figures, in this instance in brown colour. The L.1 is clearly visible and especially the main shelter is a very inviting rock shelter. Any hunter or hunter-gatherer could have executed a representation of a human being in one of these shelters.

The two main types of representations of human beings in the C.M.P. style school are those with and those without weapons. Most of the red or brown representations of human

beings are depicted frontally, with their arms stretched out and with open hands with the fingers clearly shown. This emphasis on the arms in the red or brown paintings is particularly striking; these humans look powerful and dominant. In the white painting on the masterceiling the arms are again emphasized, they are enormously long and have the same size as the legs. The remaining group of representations of human beings consists of hunters equipped with bow and arrow, never with spears or sticklike objects.

On a few other panels in the L.1 are one or two red representations of human beings that can be attributed to the C.M.P. style school.

### **Scenes**

The C.M.P. style school is remarkably poor in scenes. There are no scenes with human-animal interaction in the white paintings, except a white hunter pointing a T-shaped arrow towards a white elephant in the main shelter of L.2 (“White paintings with tiny infillings”). The same subject is shown in a two-coloured version on the masterceiling. There are however a few undisputable scenes in the red paintings, for example hunters aiming at a porcupine, and a person standing with his arms stretched out near a deer.

### **Paintings in structured series and selection of the rock wall**

The paintings are usually organized and arranged on the wall(s) in horizontal series, or sometimes even in very long sequences, often in several registers, from top to bottom or from the bottom upwards. On the ceiling of rock shelters the paintings are presented in the same orderly fashion, depending on the position of the artist.

They are often presented in structured series with paintings put well apart and with always the same distance between individual paintings. In some cases the entire wall of a very large and high rock shelter has been filled completely and coherently. It looks as if it was created as a meaningful visual unit right from the start. Every register has a large number of paintings all using the same imaginary baseline, twenty or more paintings are not exceptional. The paintings are grouped together in more than one register, at least two, but also three, ten or even more registers.

The choice of the rock wall also seems important. A certain preference can be observed: they selected a concave light-coloured rock wall with dark-coloured protruding edges suggesting a frame enclosing the paintings. The available room was exploited meticulously to accommodate the large composition fitting exactly inside the framework. Larger and smaller rock shelters have been used in such a way as well, sometimes appropriate walls were lacking. They made no use of natural shapes and apparently the rock walls have never been prepared by smoothening. Immediately the question arises again in what way weathering processes are involved here.

Concerning the question of weapons and “wounded” animals in L.2 we find in the central area of the panel with many representations of deer, a few nearly invisible, orange T-shapes superimposed on the animals. They are sometimes placed on vital spots like the neck or vertebral column. The T-shapes have a long and a short beam, the short beam is always on the point of impact on the body. The use of such an item is clearly demonstrated in the depictions of archers with bow and an arrow with a T-shaped arrow tip, which is always pointing to the animal. Some paintings superimposed with a T-shape have also some other orange traces. A T-shaped arrow tip provokes heavy bleeding, however these traces are not in red. Maybe red was intended and the colour changed afterwards. In the C.M.P. style school painting stratigraphies the orange colour is as a rule on top, so “later” in time. Therefore the orange T-shapes are perhaps not concomitant and constitute a later addition. However on this rock wall there are also some small orange coloured traces in areas completely devoid of paintings.

In “the panel with the two unfinished red animal drawings” near the main shelter in L.1 there are, as mentioned above, some drawings of birds, a couple of peafowl, etc. There is one drawing of a dead bird in bird’s-eye perspective, mentioned before. This drawing is clearly linked to the two other bird representations. It could be a crane, for example *Grus antigone*. This bird with a broken and distorted neck seems to be the only clear example of a killed animal!

It seems to me, as I clearly indicated before, that in the example of L.2 the works in large series were designed right from the start as a meaningful unit. In such works where order, structure and cohesion is so obvious, the technical quality is sometimes less than in works not belonging to series. Perhaps the representing of larger unities, nearly mass production, was so demanding in creativity and energy that individual aspects had to be neglected. In L.2 we are witnessing a process of transposition from the macro-level to the micro-level. Thus structuring of series in several horizontal registers is repeated in the infilling.

Individual works can be real masterpieces, typically those are outside the main rock shelters and even situated outside the main localities in nearby adjacent localities (e.g. L.4) (See also: “Some relevant substyles”). The merit of the first type of work is its structured cohesion; the quality of the second type of work is its technical expertise and sometimes originality.

### **Some relevant substyles**

As every artist has an individual and unique interpretation of form, we have to take into consideration that probably several artists were working parallel to each other in one or another C.M.P. substyle, except perhaps in the first initial phase. Sometimes a substyle coincides with the oeuvre or body of work of one or a few specific masters, but there are also a great number of intermediate stages or phases. Some relevant substyles are presented here. Future research may produce some other relevant subdivisions of the white, two-coloured and red paintings, especially the numerous two-coloured ones are promising.

Animal representations are the starting point. The three most important elements are: a heavily emphasized contour or outline, executed with thick brushstrokes; a rectangle presents the main frame. The completion of the rectangular core varies, infilling is always linear and angular, round shapes are rare or non-existent. White, red or both colours and some orange are used; red is always on top.

Any sound diachronic approach in style analysis must be a clear painting stratigraphy, otherwise unverified projections about the evolution of style and style in time will happen. Such type of unprofessional use of style analysis has to be avoided. Painting stratigraphy in the C.M.P. style school however is rare. The emphasis is therefore on distinguishing diversity and variety and not on reconstructing evolution, only a red period postdating a white period seems to be the general trend. Spatial distribution suggests two-coloured painting with V/W infilling between white V/W and red V/W painting.

Some relevant superimpositions are: red fish-bone over white V/W; late white V/W over red fish-bone; red zigzag over red fish-bone; red V/W over white fish-bone; red cross-hatching over red V/W; red cross-hatching over two-coloured V/W; red vertical lines infill over white V/W; red cross-hatching over white V/W; red cross-hatching over red vertical lines infill, red vertical lines infill over red cross-hatching; red cross-hatching over M-shape infill; red V/W over white V/W.

White paintings with V/W infilling are the earliest and red paintings with cross-hatching the most recent. There seems to be a duo-style or duo substyle situation, with advanced white paintings with V/W infilling parallel with red fish-bone infilling.

### ***Early white paintings***

Medium-sized white paintings, especially deer representations. The infilling consists of three diagonal lines in the front part and three diagonal lines in the hind part creating a wedge-shape in the centre. In a few cases some extra white paint emphasizes this wedge-shaped element. These earlier robust white paintings are somewhat larger than other white and all the red paintings (red paintings are generally 40 cm size on the rhinoceros panel in L.1).

### ***White paintings with red additions***

Medium-sized white paintings with red additions. These high quality paintings differ from the robust early white paintings in their tendency to more slender forms and subtle details. Some of these paintings are without red additions; therefore “additions” seems to be more appropriate than two-coloured. It is in L.1, especially in the main shelter, a very important substyle from the point of view of quality and quantity. In future research details of the outlining of this type of painting will be used to reaffirm the fourfold evolution of certain “two-coloured” substyles in L.1 main shelter en masterceiling.

### ***White paintings with tiny infillings***

Medium-sized white paintings with tiny infillings of different shapes used in large numbers. These paintings differ from the robust “Early white paintings” and the high quality “White paintings with red additions”. The infilling is reduced to several horizontal series of tiny horizontal or downwards V-shapes or vertical zigzag shapes. Compared with the “White paintings with red additions” we are here witnessing a shift from paying a maximum of attention to the aspect of infilling of the individual painting to an emphasis on the rendering of the series of paintings. The systematically structuring of the series has been transposed to the infilling of individual paintings in the same series. The top-down decoration of the main shelter in L.2 probably reflects an animal mythology with medium-size and large herbivores like deer, antelope, gaur, buffalo, rhinoceros and elephant.

### ***Two-coloured paintings, white strips surrounding the rectangle***

Medium-sized two-coloured paintings. This substyle is found on the masterceiling. The two most striking form elements are the long white strips surrounding the rectangle with infilling and the striking angularity of the representations. The infilling of this series especially of deer is remarkable because of its diversity. Only two have more or less the same V/W infill, all the others have varying infillings consisting of many lines. The difference between male and female is clearly indicated. The males are shown with large antlers and a long neck and they keep their heads up. This by contrast to the deer represented without antlers; the neck seems shorter and the position of the head is lowered compared to the male deer with the tails shown in an upward position. All the deer have a puffed up hind indicated by a rectangle in red or exceptionally two-coloured (white-red). Some “Early white paintings” (deer) in the main shelter have also similar white rectangles on the rump.

### ***Two-coloured deer paintings***

Medium-sized two-coloured paintings. There is less emphasis on the rectangular core and we do not find the typical addition of segments and elements. It is much more an integrated whole, the result being a somewhat more naturalistic painting. The successful integration of the long delicate neck with the body and the slightly curving forceful contour

are the decisive form elements here. Its provenance is clear; like the bottom part of the drawing with the straight horizontal belly line and the rather stiff straight legs, all these elements are typical conventional traits belonging to the C.M.P. style school. The subtle integration of the delicate neck with the body is the innovative element here, while the rigid angular bottom part of the drawing is still very conventional. Except this bipartition, the overall impression is that of an animal in forward motion. These paintings are among the best of the C.M.P. style school and artistically the richest. In the right side wing of the main shelter are many and in the area with the bee colonies nearby the masterceiling also are some white paintings of deer with red additions. These “Two-coloured deer paintings” in the masterceiling are qua form related to and possibly a further development of these “White paintings with red additions” in the main shelter.

### ***Red paintings***

Medium-sized red paintings. The infilling consists of oblique lines creating a V/W infilling. Some red paintings resemble qua form language of the “Early white paintings”, which is understandable because these early white paintings must have been present everywhere. From the point of view of variety, quantity and distribution the most important substyle. Here is Lützelers remark justified that the more work we want to ascribe to a specific style definition, the more unreal the definition tends to become (Lützeler 1975). This substyle is present in many shelters at L.1 and L.4.

### ***Red paintings, zigzag infilling***

Medium-sized red paintings. The infilling consists of vertical zigzag infilling, sometimes a horizontal line is added. Hair on head and neck is sometimes indicated. From the point of view of variety, quantity and distribution this substyle together with the “Red paintings” substyle are the most important substyles. Present in many shelters in L.1.

### ***Red paintings “Rhinoceros panel”***

Medium-sized red paintings, probably late red substyle. The body is divided into many triangles, with one, two or sometimes more lines drawn parallel. The mouth in cross-section showing both the jaws with teeth. Famous rhinoceros panel, main shelter. From the point of view of quantity a minor substyle.

### ***Location 3 red substyle***

Medium-sized red paintings. The head is more or less directly connected to the body, without a neck, or a very short neck. As opposed to the heavy emphasis on the neck in several substyles, this substyle at L.3 is remarkable. These paintings with more rounded contour lines and zigzag infilling are more playful. Main “Red shelter”.

### ***Red “Materialstil” paintings***

1) Small paintings with red outlines and vertical red lines as infilling. The infilling consists of seven to twelve vertical lines. 2) Small paintings with red outlines and cross-hatching as infilling. The paintings in this particular substyle can be very small (ca. 10 cm) as in the main shelter of L.1; but if more room is available they can be larger. These small paintings are placed in between series with larger paintings or in very small recesses. These are the smallest paintings attributable to the C.M.P. style school. I called this a “Materialstil”, as size is imposed by the availability of room on the rock-wall.

It is a minor substyle and a later phase. Main shelter, some smaller rock shelters.

### ***“Diagonal perspective” red paintings***

Small red paintings, mainly deer. They are drawn more supple and playful than usual. The legs are straight, but less stiff and wooden. The focus is on the large antlers which are depicted very gracefully. The paintings are aligned along one or more oblique axes instead of a horizontal one. In front or on a lower level is one larger animal or are some larger animals and higher up some smaller animals. Maybe some sort of diagonal perspective was intended here, suggesting continuous recession. In some rock shelters near main shelter L.1.

### ***Locality 4 red paintings***

Medium-sized red paintings. In L.4 are a few of the finest red paintings, very individualistic varying expressions with emphasis on movement or combining different form elements of varying origin in one single forceful painting. In one case details of the head (the mouth) suggest a link with paintings on the rhinoceros panel in L.1 main shelter. From the point of view of artistic quality very important, however considering the stylistic diversity and limited number it cannot be considered to be a substyle.

### **Some comments on the substyles**

The masterceiling needs elaborate constructions to reach, so probably some of the L.1 main shelter paintings are first in time and those of the masterceiling second. Also details of the outlining of the two-coloured paintings suggest such a sequence. There is however no stratigraphy proving this relative order. There are no superpositions on the masterceiling.

The masterceiling is important when studying the central research problem of change, evolution and the related problem of substyles. The paintings in the masterceiling are as usual ordered in straight lines but not always completely horizontal as the painters did not have a common reference point and overview, presumably as they were standing on a man-made platform in a cramped position or lying supine under the rooftop. At the right and left side at the margin of the masterceiling there is a series of paintings perpendicular to the main orientation. Maybe it is possible to reconstruct the shape and utmost limits of the platform.

There are twelve small and large series with numerous paintings on this exceptional ceiling, most of them well preserved and some of them of high quality, very beautiful and a delight for art-lovers. Some notable stylistic differences can be observed, a few of them are fairly unusual and therefore interesting. All this justifies a detailed treatment of the masterceiling.

An important stylistic convention that connects a few groups of representations of deer are the vertically placed rectangles in the hind parts, white as in L.1 main shelter “Early white paintings” and red or two-coloured in the masterceiling “Two-coloured paintings, white strips surrounding the rectangle” substyle.

### **White versus red C.M.P. style school paintings**

Whenever series with white and red C.M.P. style school paintings are superposing each other, my observations always indicate the positioning of red paintings on top of white paintings.

From the artistic side some series of red paintings look like direct copies of white series and in a black-and-white photocopy the differences are nearly or completely indiscernible. On the other hand there are often important and sometimes enormous differences between white paintings and there are often important differences between some red paintings. Similar or dissimilar, it depends largely on what we are comparing.

Concerning the content, the white paintings depict the broadest repertoire of animals. There are less human representations in the white series. How conclusive and decisive this small numerical difference is, is probably also a matter of perception in a figurative art assemblage essentially representing animals. White paintings can be locally extremely numerous, but have a limited distribution. Red paintings on the contrary seem locally less numerous, except in L.1, but have a much wider distribution. However, given the white predominance in other styles, it is possible that white C.M.P. style school paintings are not recognized in the enormous jumble of white paintings. I mentioned already the quite aggressive attitude towards C.M.P. style school paintings in any colour, resulting in a draconic overlapping bordering to iconoclasm.

Resuming: red paintings have a smaller diversity of animals but a slightly larger number of humans and white paintings have slightly more diversity regarding animals and a smaller number of humans.

Furthermore: a) the white paintings decorate the largest rock walls as a coherent visual unit, b) the two-coloured paintings with a white basis and overlaying red additions are second, c) the monochrome red paintings have the smallest areas at their disposal.

Perhaps this area-availability-and-use pattern is hiding a time-development pattern. Some interesting speculations are therefore possible, however further study is needed to test this. It looks as if the white paintings were the first to be positioned in the better or best places. Remember that the artists working in the C.M.P. style school, especially the white paintings, did not like to superpose their own paintings, thus they used a maximum of suitable places. In the end the only remaining option for the red painting tradition was to superimpose their red paintings on top of the white ones or to go elsewhere. Furthermore, because most or all of the suitable walls were already used by the white painting tradition, it became difficult or even impossible to decorate very large rock walls completely in the red painting substyles, simply because these walls were no longer available.

## **Reconstructing the stylistic evolution**

From the above preliminary study of the C.M.P. style school we can see its evolution based on painting stratigraphy as follows:

White paintings with V/W infilling are the earliest and red paintings with cross-hatching the most recent. There seems to be a duo-style or duo substyle situation, with advanced white paintings with V/W infilling concomitant and parallel with red fish-bone infilling.

Spatial distribution suggests two-coloured painting with V/W between white V/W and red V/W, it suggests also zigzag infill succeeding two-coloured painting with V/W. Fish-bone and zigzag infilling are linked, yet it needs to be confirmed that fish-bone succeeds two-coloured painting.

a) a white painting group in L.1, intermediate areas and L.2, L.5; b) a red painting group in L.1, L.3, L.4; c) the pivot and overlap being in L.1.

The provisional conclusion must be that the white paintings in L.1 and in L.2 are probably largely parallel in time. The reasoning behind this conclusion is that the diversity and especially the very large numbers of the paintings in these two localities suggest a longer frequentation period. During and after the rainy season the habitable zones near L.1 were limited because large areas must have been flooded by the nearby water bodies. Therefore a seasonal movement to other areas is likely. We do not know the frequency of painting but seasonal or cyclical painting activities in different localities by the same band can be expected.

Therefore the white painting group can be understood as representing a period, the first one, during which a band or successive bands were roaming in a territory that at least included L.1, intermediate areas, L.4, L.5 and L.2. The second and red painting group represents a later period, with a territory that at least included L.1 and L.3 and occasionally L.4.

This second period is also the expansion period of the C.M.P. style school, a period in which this style school gained momentum and diffused over much larger areas. The large numbers of paintings and the substantial distribution suggest a considerable time span, but also temporarily absences from some major sanctuaries.

Very intriguing is that I haven't noticed any substantial trace of inroads of other bands producing paintings in a different style in between the layers with C.M.P. substyle painting series.

## Dating prospects

Many fascinating substyles can be distinguished and of course we should catalogue them all. It is however in no way possible to determine the exact production date of a painting. Out of perhaps a thousand paintings there are only two  $^{14}\text{C}$  AMS dates available of a two-coloured painting representing a rhinoceros in the central panel of the main shelter in L.1.

4810  $\pm$  370 years BP for the white component, gypsum-bassanite, (chest area) and 2780  $\pm$  40 years BP for the red haematite component (hind leg). This seems to indicate that a white painting received a later red addition.

The archaeology of Central India ranges from Early Palaeolithic to Medieval times. L.1 and many other sites in the area show abundant "mesolithic" material. The "microlithic Stone Age" with "Upper Palaeolithic" and "Mesolithic" ranges from 40.000 to 5.000 years BP (Mishra *et al* 2013). This lithic material is therefore not very helpful by our efforts in understanding the production date of any painting attributed to the C.M.P. style school.

Chalcolithic cultures start between -3500 B.C. and -2000 B.C. depending on the area. Saurashtra-Gujarat -3500 B.C. (calibrated) (Joglekar 1993-94:35-39); Indus-Sarasvati-Dhrishadvati basin -3100 B.C. (calibrated) (Gupta 1992-93:21-29); Banas-Chambal valley -2800 B.C. (calibrated) Mishra *et al.* 1997:35-36); Upper Chambal basin-Malwa -2200 B.C. (calibrated) (Wakankar 1967:44-46); Tapti-Godavari basin -2000 B.C. (Gupta 1992-93:21-29) Subject matter of the C.M.P. style school suggests a hunter-gatherer economy, however ideology can be very conservative.

Cattle breeding started with humpless cattle in the late phase of the Mesolithic, in the latter half of the ninth millennium B.C. in Ganga valley, in the beginning of the sixth millennium B.C. in Narmada valley and in the sixth millennium B.C. in Banas-Chambal basin. In Neolithic cultures in the eighth millennium B.C. in Bolan valley in Baluchistan, in the seventh millennium B.C. in Belan river valley and in the beginning of the third millennium B.C. in Krishna valley (Kumar 2014). The specific form language of the C.M.P. style school complicates identification of Gaur and buffalo versus domesticated cattle (humped/humpless). Depictions of humped cattle are superimposing C.M.P. style school paintings.

Stratigraphies where painting substyles are superposing each other are rare or missing. Establishing at this moment a detailed intra-site and inter-site chronology, with the relative order of most of the substyles, is not possible, only a red period overlaying a white period seems to be the general trend. A problem-oriented selection of the white and red paintings, being the first and best suited, should be dated in the near future with methods like  $^{14}\text{C}$  AMS,

with extensive micro-stratigraphical (Vandenabeele 2004) and pigment analyses included (See also Bednarik's various contributions on dating).

<sup>14</sup>C AMS dating is a largely overrated method and the central problem in my view is that it is of little use for the subtler analyses preferred by art researchers (limited time-span). The issue at stake here is that an art researcher prefers to think in terms of a lifespan of an artist and aims at reconstructing his oeuvre; some substyles probably reflect the oeuvre of a specific master. In doing so he is not so focused on thinking in terms of x-thousand years before present. Furthermore dating should be problem-oriented and not object-oriented. A painting is an element taken out of a chain of artistic events. Dating of a single isolated element has little relevance, only the dating of the chain has relevance (Schaap 2011). (See also: Alcolea Gonzalez & Balbin Behrmann 2006 on the <sup>14</sup>C AMS dating debacle in N. Spain).

## **Provisional results**

In this paper more emphasis is given to results provided by the figurative component rather than to theoretical and methodological considerations. The figurative art assemblage called C.M.P. style school is essentially an animal art (99%) and a white painting phenomenon. Its imagery evokes the idea of a universe abounding in animals, copious, rich and abundant. Violence and death seem to be of minor importance and are only very implicitly present.

The analysis of the paintings in L.2 and the superimposed paintings in L.1 shows a general trend towards a two-period division, namely a red period postdating a white period. It has also provided a series of subdivisions, called substyles. Unfortunately it has provided limited results in understanding the sequence of the substyles, because the starting point must be a clear painting stratigraphy. A major problem with the C.M.P. style school, especially the white paintings, is that its artists were very style conscious and did not like to superpose their own paintings or those of their fellow artists, so such stratigraphies are rare or absent. This leads to the conclusion that a limited synchronic approach is feasible but a thorough diachronic approach is not possible at the moment. The paper summarizes some of the findings and provisional results of my project: the study by contrastive descriptive analysis of its stylistic characteristics, its variation and content.

The results clearly point to the need for further study of the research problem of change and evolution and a deliberate search for painting stratigraphies of the substyles. For example a next step based on spatial distribution is a fourfold evolution of the two-coloured paintings.

Besides research on the intra-site level there is thus need for further investigation on the inter-site level.

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