Old Rock Art Sites in Mizoram

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Why in News?

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has announced the discovery of 4 centuries-old rock art sites in Mizoram, estimated to date between the 16th and 19th centuries.

- **Survey conducted areas -** Champhai, Khawzawl, Saitual, and Serchhip districts.
- **Findings -** In Maite village, a rock cliff features a prominent human figure surrounded by smaller human figures, animals, gongs, a row of mithun heads, and some unidentified symbols.



- The ***mithun (Bos frontalis)*** is a semi-domesticated bovine found in the region.
- Carvings found at Lianpui in Champhai district include a prominent human figure, stacked rows of human figures, animals, fish, spears, dao (a type of machete), hornbills, and rectangular chambers.



- In Khawzawl district, findings at Tualte included etched mithun heads, human figures, grooved marks, and rectangular figurines on a vast rock surface.
- At Chhawrtu, also in Khawzawl, carvings comprised a unique combination of human figures, mithun heads, rows of human heads, a *circular figurine with tendril-like lines*, and a fish motif, all intricately carved.
- These discoveries highlighted the rich cultural heritage of Mizoram and the artistic expression of its ancient inhabitants.
- **Vangchhia site -** The recently identified rock art sites, recommended for preservation, are situated in the area around Vangchhia in the Champhai district.
- In January 2016, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) recognized Vangchhia as a location with indications of a substantial settlement, possibly linked to a "lost civilization" from the Neolithic Era, and referred to it as a ***"living history museum."***
- The Vangchhia site, covering about 45 square kilometres yielded pictographs etched on large stone slabs, *menhirs (large standing stones), a necropolis (a large burial ground),* and other relics.
- Particularly noteworthy were a structure identified as a *water pavilion and numerous strategically drilled holes*, ranging from less than one foot to one metre in diameter, found in sandstones across several hill slopes.
- Archaeologists developed theories behind the seemingly simple science of water harvesting techniques employed at Vangchhia, likely capable of sustaining local populations for at least a year.
- They noted how inhabitants appeared to have trapped rainwater flowing down slopes by utilizing natural fissures and veins in the rocks, enhanced by the drilled holes.
- Researchers suggested this natural adaptation might have obviated the need for constructing large water tanks, despite the apparent capability to do so.
- Among the theories proposed for the *drilled holes were denying enemies easy access to water sources*, luring animals for hunting, and possible ritualistic practices.
- However, all theories converged on the primary function of efficient water harvesting.

Reference

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