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A Report on New Petroglyphs from Lianpui Village, Champhai District, Mizoram

Lalhminghlua¹, Vanlalhuma Singson², C. Lalrinkima²

¹Department of History, Higher and Technical Institute, Mizoram (HATIM), Kawmzawl, Pukpui, Lunglei.

²Art and Culture Department, Government of Mizoram, Chanmari, Aizawl.

E-mail: mahluasailung@hatim.ac.in

Abstract: Art is critical and essential for expressions that have been reflected on various materials throughout human history. Petroglyphs forming an important aspect of rock art is critical in understanding and reconstructing Mizoram's history from an archaeological perspective. Art and its various forms of expressions have been extensively made on megaliths and this is further added by petroglyphs found on natural rock surfaces. Lianpui with its numerous megalithic engravings as well as petroglyphs, location on the peripheral area with instances of migrations in the past shows archaeological richness and potential. Interpretation and understanding of the archaeological materials would contribute towards the progress and development of archaeology and enrich the cultural heritage of Mizoram.

Keywords: Art. Petroglyphs. Mizoram. Lianpui

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Introduction

Reconstruction of the past from archaeological perspective in Mizoram is relatively young and at a preliminary level. Archaeological literatures are significantly lesser in comparison to other disciplines. A common form of archaeological material are the megalithic monuments (Lalhminghlua & Sarkar, 2017) amongst which menhirs are the most numerous (Malsawmliana, 2017) and concentrated in the eastern region, gradually thinning out in other directions. Megaliths in Mizoram can be divided into two types based on surface treatment – engraved and nude. Menhirs with surface engravings have depiction of various figures such as humans, animals, and materials (Malsawmliana, 2019) and petroglyphs have

also shown multiple features on them although they are lesser in number (Lalhminghlua, 2025). The nature of engravings on the menhirs and rocks (petroglyphs) are not extremely divergent although some petroglyphs have few different features (Lalhminghlua, 2025). Beside menhirs, petroglyphs are also found in various parts of the state forming an important feature in the archaeological record. Petroglyphs can be found in villages such as Zote, Lianpui, Vangchhia, Farkawn, and Khankawn from Champhai District, Hmunzawl (Serchhip District), Chawngtlai (Khawzawl District) to name some (Lalhminghlua, 2025; Lalhminghlua & Sarkar, 2017).

Lianpui (named after Lianpuia of Palian clan) has multiple archaeological sites distributed in various parts of the village. Known archaeological localities at Lianpui are *Lungphunropui*, a menhir avenue with multiple engravings (Fig. 1), pit/depression/posthole, and petroglyphs (Lalhminghlua, 2025). The known petroglyph is locally called as *Lungziaktlang* (N23.2449472, E93.3487556) with engravings on three slabs (Fig. 2 & 3) (Lalhminghlua, 2022). The newly discovered petroglyph (N23.24666, E93.34738) is located approximately one kilometre from the village at an elevation of 1375m above mean sea level. For the purpose of recording and classification, the authors have decided to name the newly discovered locality as *Lungziaktlang 2* and the previously known petroglyphs as *Lungziaktlang 1*. The distance between the two localities is approximately 230m on the southern side of the village. Both the petroglyphs are located above the present-day kaccha road going to Myanmar. The new locality is located closer to the village and was accidentally exposed in the course of quarrying by the locals.



Fig. 1: Lianpui avenue



Fig. 2: Lungziaktlang 1 – Slab (1 & 2)



Fig. 3: Lungziaktlang 1 – Slab 3

Aim

The survey has the following aims:

1. To visit, record, and document the new petroglyph.
2. To collect relevant lore, stories, history, and present-day local knowledge regarding the known and new archaeological materials.
3. Coordinate plotting (GPS) in order to mark and record the site location.

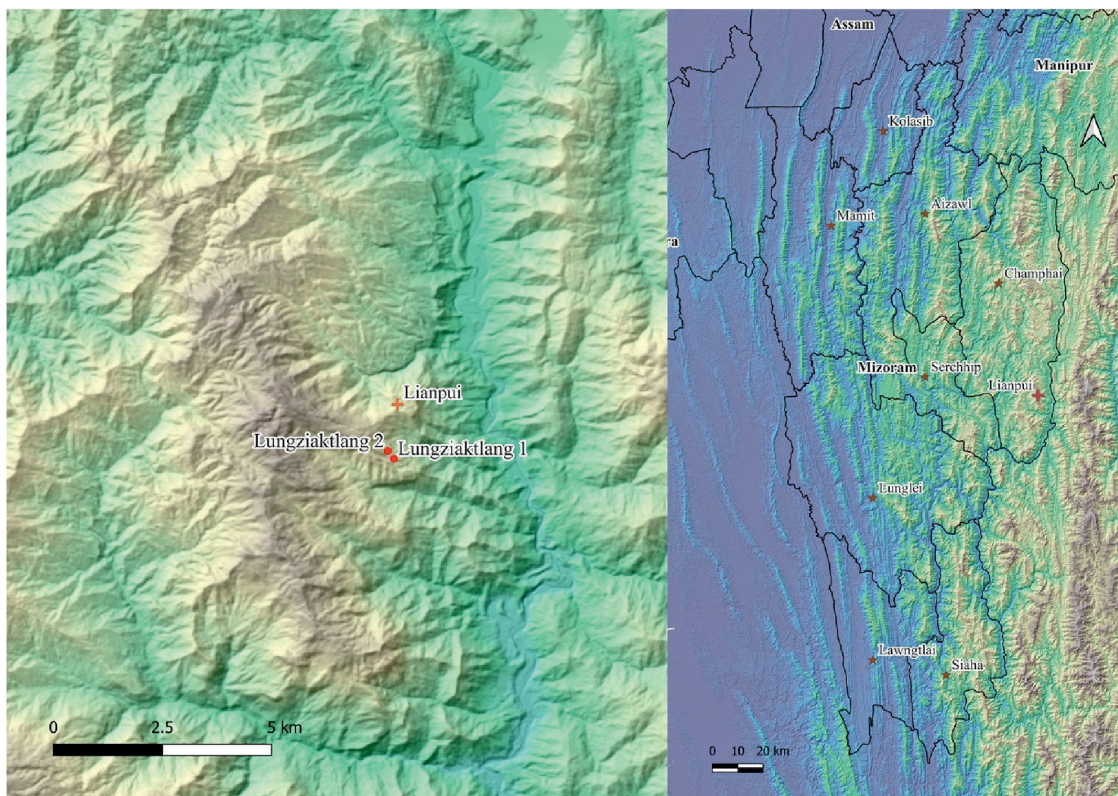
Methodology

The survey has adopted the following methodologies:

1. Surface exploration of the site and its surrounding areas.
2. Ethnoarchaeological approach.
3. Photographic documentation of the site and its surrounding areas.
4. Interview.

Study area

Geologically, the landscape belongs to Barail Formation (Pachau, 2009) (Phukan, et al., 2021) of the Oligocene epoch with Tiau River flowing at base of the mountain. This river serves as a natural and political boundary for the present-day countries of India and Myanmar. The petroglyphs have been carved on buff sandstone on a steep surface. A small stream called *Tuiridur* originates from the same landscape and is located approximately about 5m from the petroglyphs. The location of the petroglyphs on a steep terrain makes accession difficult.



Map 1: Lianpui village with petroglyphic localities

Dense and thick vegetation covers the landscape and some of the common floras are Hnahkhar (*Macaranga indica*), Vaube (*Bauhinia variegata*), Hnahkiah (*Callicarpa arborea*), Thîl (*Lithocarpus pachyphyllus*), Hlâi (*Quercus helferiana*), Thingsia (*Castanopsis tribuloides*), Fâh (*Lithocarpus dealbatus*), and Khawhthli (*Quercus griffithii*). There are also varieties of faunal species and some of the popular animals are deer (*Muntiacus vaginalis*/*Muntiacus muntjak*), wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), stag (*Capricornis rubidus*), Tlaiberh (*Pycnonotus cafer*), Setâwt (*Pycnonotus flavescens*), Kawlrit (*Hemixos flava*), and crabs (*Potamidae sp.*, *Gecarcinucidae sp.*) etc.

Field Report

The new locality coming into public knowledge through media was visited and surveyed by the authors in order to determine the location, nature, typology of engravings and interact with the locals. The necessity of survey was also considered by the locals who conveyed their thoughts to the authors.

The petroglyphs are engraved on two separate slab surfaces. On the left side is Slab 1 which is engraved using relief technique containing various figures outlined as follows:

Table 1: Lungziakltang 2 - Slab 1

Sl. No	Figure	Number	Sub-number	
			Row 1	Row 2
1	Human figure	4 rows	Row 1	8 (all female)
			Row 2	13
			Row 3	14
			Row 4	13
2	Spear	1	NA	
3	Bead necklace	2	NA	
4	Headgear	1	NA	
5	Knife?	3	NA	
6	Unidentified figure	2	NA	



Fig. 4: Lungziakltang 2 - Slab 1

The human rows are depicted in a systematic manner. The top row figures based on the presence of downward-pointing triangle on the pelvic region is considered as a representation of feminine gender and no anthropogenic disturbances were observed.. Cases of anthropogenic activities have been observed by the authors in other areas. Here the hairs are depicted pointing down in a slanting manner.

The second row has thirteen human figures including one large figure considered as the prominent figure. The sixth and seventh figure in the middle and the prominent figure in the eleventh position are depicted with an upward headgear (counting from left to right).



Fig. 5: Lungziaktlang 2 – Slab 1 – Human figure row 1 & 2 (Scale 20 cm)

In the third row, human figures have an upward hair depiction on the sixth and seventh position while the rest point downward (counting from left to right).

The fourth row of human figures all have their hair depicted downward.



Fig. 6: Lungziaktlang 2 – Slab 1 – Human figure row 3 & 4 (Scale 20 cm)

An interesting feature of this slab is the depiction of the prominent figure holding a spear and an unidentifiable figure while wearing bead necklaces. The figure is depicted wearing *Chhawunku* (hair of slain enemy) fixed on a *ngênchi* (cone shaped brass object for fixing decorative materials). Such headgear was adorned only by those who have killed enemies. Another possible meaning is that of *Sumku* where the tail of *Vakul*/Greater Racket tailed Drongo (*Dicrurus paradiseus*) is worn but only by those who have achieved *Thangchhuah* (a social prestige and status achieved through series of feastings). Instances of such depiction can be found on numerous menhirs at *Lungphunropui*, *Kawtchhuahropui* (in Vangchhia), North Vanlaiphai, Chawngtlai, and Pukzing etc.

The prominent figure has a height of 45cm while the rest of the human figures in all four rows from the top to bottom have an average height of 28, 29, 29, 30cm. The height of the slab is 1.6m while the width measures 1.3m. The rows of humans are joined with the arms in V shape. Observation of the relief technique shows chiselling marks creating depression which were not smoothed. However, the figures are visible and observable.

Slab 2 interestingly do not feature any human figures and was executed using incision technique. The figures observed on the Slab 2 are geometric, material, animals, and unidentifiable figures, the details of which is laid out as follows.

Table 2: Lungziaktlang 2 – Slab 2

<i>Sl. No</i>	<i>Figure</i>	<i>Number</i>
1	Rectangle	10
2	Fish	1
3	Spear	1
4	Kingkawt (knife)	3
5	Hoe	3
6	Bird	2
7	Mithun (<i>Bos frontalis</i>)	4 (Male – 2)
8	Female Stag	2
9	Unidentified animal	6
10	Unidentified figure	5

The dimension of Slab 2 measures 2.52m in height and 1.9m in width. The length of the of the geometric rectangle depicted consecutively in horizontal manner is 1.4m with the height of each individual rectangles measuring 40cm while the width ranges from 13 to 16cm. Physical observation of the slab shows that probably the engravings may have been executed in two phases evident by the the second layer. If this holds true, the engravings on the second layer would be later in date. An interesting feature is that of two male mithuns as gender identification is not commonly found for this species despite being one of the most numerous depicted species in Mizoram.

According to Mr. Lalmangaihhsanga, a local who discovered the petroglyphs in the course of clearing earth while searching for stones to quarry, Slab 2 was partially covered by earth on the lower side while Slab 1 was entirely covered. Being conscious of the importance of heritage and the role it plays in the reconstructions of the past; the quarry workers have decided to refrain from taking any further action. This was further established by the village authorities completely restricting quarrying at the site and surrounding areas.



Fig. 7: *Lungziaktlang 2* - Slab 2

Comparing *Lungziaktlang 1* and 2

With a spatial distance of approximately 230m between the two localities, the two petroglyphs exhibit similarity in style, technique, typology, and theme with few differences such as the presence of shield and geometric circles at *Lungziaktlang 1*.

The intention, manner, and decision are clear on what and how to depict on each slab. In both localities, human figures are generally not depicted in conjunction with other forms on the same row or column. Even if human figures are displayed along with other figures on the same slab, there is a clear differentiation between human and other figures. With regard to female depiction, *Lungziaktlang 2* Slab 1 has more depictions than *Lungziaktlang 1* Slab 3 which has only one depiction on the bottom row – seventh figure from the left (see Fig 3). However, the manner of depicting sex on both localities is the same with a downward pointing triangle on the pelvic region. The presence of prominent figure among the human rows around the fringe area is clearly observable. The depiction of animals does not seem to deviate extremely in both localities except for the presence of few distinct animals such as lizard at *Lungziaktlang 1* Slab 3. Over all, based on the nature, style, method, and technique of engraving, it may be posited that it is the work of similar culture, group, and possibly within similar chronological range as well.

Local knowledge and chronology

According to local knowledge, the village has been named after Lianpuia of Palian clan who set up settlement after being ousted from Farzawl village (located on Myanmar side), on account of suspected liability of the sudden demise of Lianchia. Inquiry has shown that Lianpuia was believed to have crossed Tiau River and set up settlement at the site of present-day Lianpui by c. 1650 CE;

and that the menhirs and petroglyphs are further believed to be earlier than Lianpuia's period (Sena Chhakchhuak – personal communication, June 16, 2024). However, historical writing put the death of Lalvunga (chief of Farzawl who ousted Lianpuia) around 1715 CE (Zawla, 1989) and 1770-80 CE (Lalthanliana, 2000). In both the cases, the date appears to be pre-1700 CE.

Observations and Archaeological Prospect

Owing to its location and being on the periphery where migrations and various movements have occurred in the past; its proximity to other villages all rich and abundant with history and historical records contributing to the archaeology of the state, the eastern areas of Mizoram and in particular Lianpui village holds an important and significant place in the reconstruction of history. Oral traditions and local history have shown that settlement could go back beyond 1700 CE, indirectly stating the archaeological materials to be older. This would mean that archaeological investigations would have to be conducted in various nature and forms. At present, the archaeological extent is yet to be unearthed. Hence, the necessity of archaeology in the present and in coming future.

When oral and historical literature are put together, they yield information which taken into consideration gives a glimpse of migration, evident from the relocation of Lianpuia. This is further aided by the migration and settlement of Thangkanglova at Mualbawk (a few hundred meters below *Lungziaktlang 1* on a small hillock) after Lianpuia moved further west. It is not clear if he moved into the present-day location of Lianpui. However, his descendants continued to rule without any break till chiefdom was abolished in 1954. The present-day area came to be occupied again only in 1985 (Sena Chhakchhuak – personal communication, June 16, 2024). Based on field observations, it appears that oral sources, historical writings, and archaeological sources are necessary to be brought together in order to reconstruct the past.

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Competing interest

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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