

SHORT REPORT

A Short Report on Megaliths and Petroglyphs on Natural Rock Surfaces from Farkawn and Khankawn Villages, Champhai District, Mizoram, India

Lalhminghlua and Amrita Sarkar

Megalithic tradition which is a worldwide phenomenon has been practiced by the Mizo society in the North-eastern part of India till recently. Expressions of thoughts and memories were incised on the megaliths. It is a significant feature through which the early history of the Mizo society can be reconstructed. This article tries to highlight the various megaliths found in the villages of Farkawn and Khankawn, their associated folklores and features. It also attempts to draw attention to the fact that besides building megaliths in memory of deceased people it was also a medium for expressing individual human experiences and emotions of the Mizo society.

Introduction

The district of Champhai (23° 28' 28" N, 93° 19' 32" E) is located in eastern Mizoram bounded by the two districts of Aizawl and Serchhip in the west, the state of Manipur in the north and Myanmar in the east having a total area of 318,500 hectare (ha). Champhai meaning 'flat land' derived its name from the vast paddy field situated below the foothill of the Champhai town with a population density of 39 per ha. The district is dominated by the scheduled tribe (98.19%) recognized by the Constitution of India (Directorate of Census Operations, Mizoram 2011: 7, 10 and 11). In the present day scenario, Mizo and English are the principal languages and Christianity is the dominant religion.

The mythical origin of the Mizo tribes is based on the legend of Chhinlung (capstone) covering a hole in the ground through which various tribes of the Mizos have emerged (Malsawmdawngliana 2015: 57, Pachuau 2009: 2, Chhangte 2013: 3). Another legend of origin is the story of Khampat in Myanmar from where the Mizos migrated due to pressures from the Shan (Lalthangliana 2013: 6, Malsawmdawngliana 2015: 58–59, Chhangte 2013: 11–15, Lalzarzoa 2013: 22–23).

The Mizos while living in the Chin Hills between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries had the practice of erecting memorials for the departed which was continued to the present day Mizoram (Hmar 2010: 17). The Chins of the north erected memorials made of a thick plank of hard wood about fifteen foot high where a head is carved on the top which represents the dead chief. There are other carvings such as men, women, children, animals, gongs

(a metal disc giving a booming sound when struck), beads and guns etc. which represents the chief's family and the animals he had killed (Carey and Tuck 1932: 194–195). The Maras (a branch of the Lai tribe of Chins, speaking a language closely similar to Lai) living in southern Mizoram also had the practice of erecting wooden post called *thangri* along with stone monuments called *longphei*. Apart from the *thangri* and *longphei*, there are two kinds of monuments which are restricted to only the chiefs and wealthy nobles known as *phura pachang* (similar to megalithic cairns) and *longdong* (square enclosed four stone walls) (Parry 1932: 414–417). The megalithic monuments of Mizoram are usually rough having different shapes like rectangular, polygonal, cylindrical and conical. Menhir is the most common type of monument and the stones are erected at the entrance of the villages facing no particular direction (Hmar 2010: 18).

Study Area for the field season 2015–2016

The selected study areas are the villages of Farkawn and Khankawn (**Fig. 1**) where the various megalithic monuments and petroglyphs are found. Some reports about the sites are available (Monoliths and Landmarks of Mizoram, Volume–I and II, A Report on Explorations in Mizoram, March 2015). The available published literature are mere catalogs of the megaliths and petroglyphs found and lacks detailed documentation and supportive ethnographic studies. Hence, this particular field visit was undertaken with a view of detailed documentation of the megaliths and petroglyphs. The research also incorporated an ethnographic study on the present day society and their use of tools and stone.

Aims of Study

- To visit and record all the known megaliths and petroglyphs made on natural rock surfaces in the two villages.

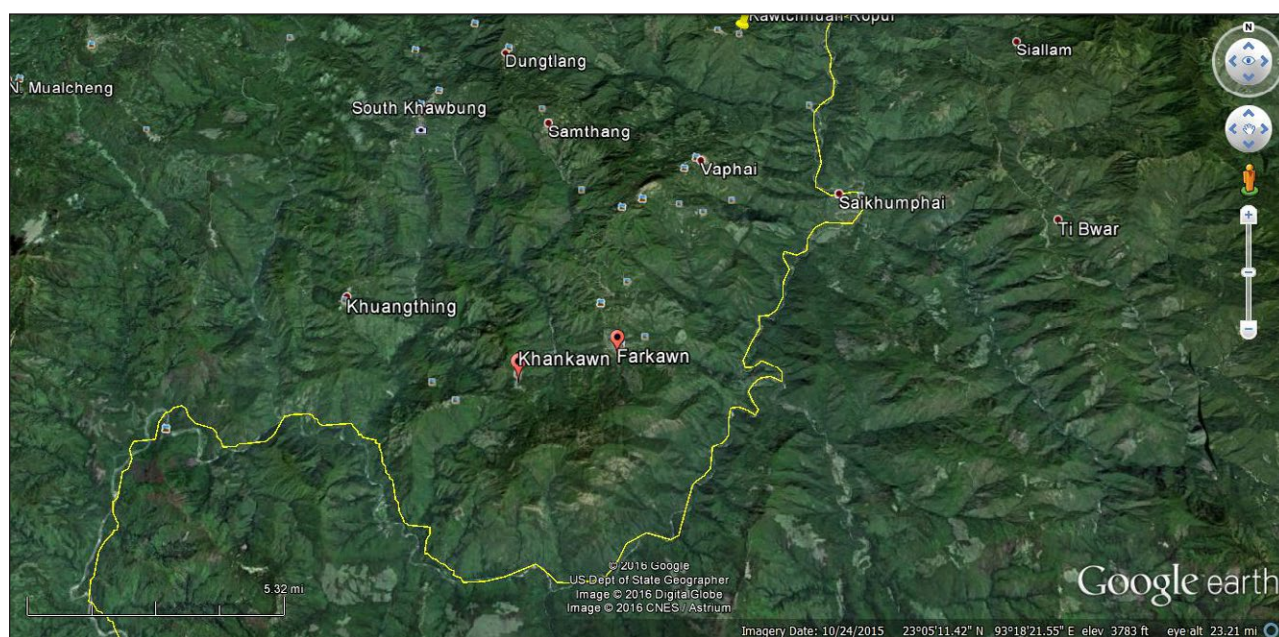


Figure 1: Map of Farkawn and Khankawn village, Mizoram, India.

- To conduct interviews and collect any folklore and stories associated with the megaliths and petroglyphs on natural rock surfaces.

Methodology

- Taking photographs of all the visited megaliths and petroglyphs on natural rock surfaces including GPS location.
- Village to village survey.
- Ethnoarchaeological study.
- Collection such as folklore/story associated with the petroglyphs on megaliths and natural rocks.

Megalithic findings from Farkawn village

Chhura Chi Rawt Lung (Salt Grinding Stone of Chhura) (**Fig. 2**): This megalith is located outside the village of Farkawn (23°04.939' N, 093°18.264' E) at an altitude of 1,213 meters and it is composed of sandstone. It is a monolith which has the upper section smaller than the base with a blunt pointed tip looking like a head on a shoulder. The stone is over a meter in height. It has four cupules facing South-West direction. *Lungkeiphawtial* River flows at the base of the hill. It has been protected by Directorate of Art & Culture, Mizoram.

Lung Hmel Pu (Stone Containing Faces) (**Fig. 3**): This megalith (23°04.932' N, 093°18.231' E) is located beside *Chhura Chi Rawt Lung* at an altitude of 1,233 meters. This stone has been found in the vicinity where it presently stands and it has been re-erected by the locals. It has depictions of six human faces and five heads of animals most likely of the bovine family, perhaps the mithun/gayal (*Bos frontalis*) done by incision technique. A small portion at the base of the stone on the right has broken off. This stone is not named in any existing literature and

has been named for the first time by the first author during his exploration.

Lungkeiphawtial (Rock with marks of a tiger) (**Figs. 4 and 5**): This rock (23°04.970' N, 093°18.555' E) is located about one hundred meters below the site of *Chhura Chi Rawt Lung*. It is on a slope and below which a mud road goes toward *Tiau River*. The river at the base of the hill took its name from the site which joins the *Tiau River* at the border separating India and Myanmar. The petroglyphs are incised on a single flat sandstone rock on the ground declining towards the base of the hill. A protective roof structure has been built to cover the site.

There are depictions such as blade, spearhead, bovine head of probably mithun/gayal (*Bos frontalis*), serow head (*Capricornis rubidus*), bead necklace, geometric shapes etc. The list of depictions and the number of depictions are as follows:

1. Blade (*Chem/dao*) – five
2. Spearhead – three
3. Bovine head – nine
4. Serow head? – two
5. Circle – five
6. Semi-circle – one
7. Circles in sequential line – three
8. Circle with dot in the center – two
9. Circle inside circle – two
10. Bead necklace – one
11. Unknown animal – one
12. Unknown figure – one
13. 'n' shape figure – one
14. Boat like figure – one
15. Abstract figures



Figure 2: Chhura Chi Rawt Lung.



Figure 3: Lung Hmel Pu (Stone Containing Faces).



Figure 4: Lungkeiphawtial.

Farpui Tlang Reserve Lungphun (Farpui Hill Reserve Menhirs) (Fig. 6): The menhirs are located on top of the Farpui Tlang which is close to the Indo-Myanmar border. It is located about four km from Farkawn village. There are many menhirs some of which have fallen. At the center are two menhirs which have incised depictions with a stone platform. The taller menhir has three depictions while the shorter menhir has eight depictions. The depictions are bovine head, probably of mithun/gayal, blades, animal horn, geometric and unknown symbols etc. *Lungkeiphawtial River* flows at the base of the hill which joins the *Tiau River*.

The list of depictions and the number of depictions are as follows:

1. Circle – one
2. Circle inside circle – one
3. Bovine head – one
4. Blade (*Chem/dao*) – two
5. Animal horn – one
6. Horseshoe shape figure – one
7. Unknown figure – four

The hill also has many menhirs lying on the slope along the way which must have been left behind by those erectors. The site has vegetation growth which shows disturbance as some of the stone bases have been unearthed.

Darthingi Lung (Darthingi's Stone) (Fig. 7): This monument is located at the entrance of the village on the road side. It is a single memorial stone which is a little shorter than one meter. The stone has carvings done by incision technique. It has depictions such as:

1. Smoking pipe – one
2. Bead necklace – three
3. Walking stick? – one
4. Headgear – one
5. Bangles – eight
6. Hole above the figure – one
7. Copper string belt (*Darzai kawngghren*)? – three
8. Hoe or ax head? – one
9. Unknown container – one
10. Unknown circle like figure – one
11. Oval figure below the necklace – one



Figure 5: Tiger marks at Lungkeiphawtial.



Figure 6: Farpui Tlang Reserve Menhirs.



Figure 7: Darthiangi Lung.

Finding from Khankawn village

The finding from Khankawn village includes petroglyphs both on megaliths and natural rock surface.

Chawngvungi Lungdawn (Erected Stone of Chawngvungi): The megaliths and petroglyphs (23°03.998' N, 093°16.380' E) are located on the bank of the *Klawva River* which is a tributary of the *Tiau River*. The site has one huge rock lying naturally on the ground. There are three menhirs of which two are standing upright and one menhir reclines along the upper slope on the right side which had broken in the middle. One of the standing menhirs does not have any carvings. There are depictions such as bovine head (probably mithun/gayal), human face, blade, spearhead etc. using relief and incision technique. The site was covered by vegetation and had to be cleared before documentation.

Petroglyphs on natural rock (Figs. 8 and 9): This rock is on the ground upon which the petroglyphs were made in relief form on the top and the side. The list of depictions are as follows:

1. Human face – six
2. Bovine head – six
3. Bead necklace – two
4. Circle – three
5. 'n' like figure – one
6. Tool like figure – three
7. Cupules – eight
8. Ax head? – two
9. Mound-like shape – one
10. Triangle like figure – one

Standing menhir with carvings (Fig. 10): The stone is over one meter in height and stands behind the petroglyphs. The depictions are made by incisions on the stone. The list of depictions are as follows:

1. Spearhead – one
2. Carved blade (*chem/dao*)? – one
3. Shield? – one
4. Blade (*chem/dao*) – one
5. Small circle – one

Reclining menhir (Fig. 11): This menhir is on the right side of the petroglyphs reclining against the slope beside a tree and has been broken and repaired. It is roughly about one and a half meters in height. The base of the stone has been cut in a straight parallel manner with a pointy top. The list of depictions are as follows:

1. 'n' like figure – two
2. Circle inside circle with stand and a baseline – two
3. Circle – four
4. Cherry shape figure – one
5. Boat like figure – one
6. Human faces – nine
7. Ladder? – one
8. Shield? – one
9. Unknown figure – five



Figure 8: Chawngvungi Lungdawh.



Figure 9: Chawngvungi Lungdawh (view from top).



Figure 10: Standing menhirs at Chawngvungi Lungdawh.



Figure 11: Reclining menhir at Chawngvungi Lungdawh.

Folklores associated with the megaliths

From the sites that were visited and documented, there were some sites which have associated stories. They are as follows:

Lungkeiphawtial: In the village of Farkawn, previously known as Bawlte, a certain person called Pualdenga lost his daughter to a tiger. He grieved over her death so much that even when a festival was celebrated during that time, he chose to wander around the outskirts of the village. Finally, he came to a flat rock on the ground upon which he carved various features like *dar* (gong), *se lu* (head of mithun/gayal), *puanchei* (textile), *chem* (blade) and a tiger attacking a human. (Fiara Memorial Cultural Club 2009: 24).

Darthiangi Lung: The stone is located about three km north outside the village of Farkawn. The story associated with this megalith mentions about a barren couple (Chatterjee 1979: 45). The megalith has incised representations of a woman known as Darthiangi who was the beloved wife of Chertuala, then chief of Farkawn including various other elements. Darthiangi was a beautiful woman from the village of Dulzawl, and Chertuala, chief of Farkawn felt highly honored when she married him. However, the couple was barren and this drove their marriage into unhappiness and constant mental conflict. As the rule of the society would have it, a child was required to keep the chief's bloodline intact which gave an emotional tussle in the mind of the chief and his love for Darthiangi. Though the chief Chertuala often thought of divorcing his wife, her beauty, charms and attachments to her made him revoke his decision on many occasions. Ultimately, the chief's bloodline has to continue which saw the two parting ways. While Darthiangi was about to leave, she wept bitterly and sang many songs. A memorial stone was erected by the couple before they departed to show their love for each other. Some of the songs are:

1. "A ia chan nuam che maw Zawllunghnemi,
Kan khaw karah Hranglungphun thiang chang dun i,
Chang dun ilang liankhuaah mi za selin"

Darling, would you like to erect our memorial stone which will commemorate our deep mutual love and make everybody remember our names on this account.

(Translation by Chatterji)

2. "Chhungah chuli pawnah chulchhuaki
Fa panglian chawiin ka mawi love"

Withering inside I wither on the outside
I am in no condition to bear any healthy child
(Translation by first author)

Such songs of grief were sung while departing.

Chawngvungi Lungdawh (Erected Stone of Chawngvungi): The story associated with this megaliths and petroglyphs memorial was also provided by Zirthanga (personal communication). According to the story which

was mentioned to Zirthanga by his father, there was a man named Sawngkhara of low status who fell in love with Chawngvungi who was famous for her beauty. When Sawngkhara was to wed Chawngvungi, the bride's price placed by Chawngvungi's family was very high. Since her family did not like the groom, they also asked for a *Darhuai* (high prized copper bell) from the groom's family. Eventually, the two got married. However, Chawngvungi soon died without bearing any child. During that time, dead bodies were put in a wooden coffin and then heated till the flesh decompose and dry up. Following this, the bones were collected by the family and later given a secondary/fractional burial. Sawngkhara began to heat the coffin for days. He was tired and fell asleep during which the bride's family stole her bones and ran away with it. Sawngkhara chased them till *Fanai Silai Khawthlakna* (a place where the warriors of Fanai, a sub-tribe of the Mizos threw their guns down a cliff) which is a few kilometers away, but eventually gave up. However, he found two of her nails. Having nothing of her remains but two nails, Sawngkhara erected this memorial and killed a mithun/gayal (*Bos frontalis*) in the ritual process.

Discussion

Folklores/stories associated with these memorials talks about the survival of pre-Christian culture in this region and explanations as to the causes for making these megaliths and petroglyphs. Such folklore/stories are rapidly dying out now and many, no doubt have been lost. Thus, this research recognizes the fact that these folklore/stories and the depicted complex symbolism on the megaliths and petroglyphs can be used as a tool to explore the socio-cultural interactions of the community who erected them. These imbued symbols embody both physical and conceptual philosophies about the nature of the world that was inhabited by these megalithic and petroglyph builders. If the meaning behind these symbolic representations could be ascertained, it would not only throw light on the political, social and economic reorganization of the society but also their greater connection with the universe and spiritual realm. Thus, to throw light on the meaning of the symbols that were found on the megaliths, an ethnographic survey was done on the existing communities close to the megalithic site inhabiting similar landscape as those of the megalithic builders. The ethnographic survey also made sense to the authors as certain similarities were found between them symbols depicted and similar cultural material looked upon as significant by the present community. The parallels found between the symbols and the present cultural material in the area are gong (copper bell), bead necklace and smoking pipe etc.

The gongs (copper bell) (Fig. 12) are used even in the present day on occasions such as festivals like *Chapchar Kut* (a festival celebrated during the period when the slashed down jungles are left to dry. *Chap* means the wood, bamboos etc. cut down in the field; *char* means dry; *kut* means festival). It is beaten in harmony with the drum and dancing. There are different types of copper bell in the Mizo society such as *darkhuang*,

darmang etc. of which *darkhuang* is the biggest and is considered to have a very high value. Elderly Mizos have a saying “*Hmeichhe man sial, mipa man darkhuang*” which means the price of a female is mithun/gayal and the price of a male is copper bell (*hmeichhia*– female, *mipa*– male). It was owned only by the chiefs and wealthy persons. It was used in ceremonies such as *Khuangchawi*, the last and most expensive ceremony in *Inlam Thangchhuah* (*Inlam* – domestic, *Thangchhuah* – in simple term it would mean accomplished fame) which was integral in the belief system of the early Mizos in order to gain social mobility and status in the afterlife (Malsawmdawngliana 2015: 133–134, Lalthangliana 2013: 117, 145–148).

Bead necklaces (Fig. 13) have always been part of the traditional dresses of the Mizos. Till today, it is integral to the traditional dress worn during the festivals.

Smoking pipe (*vaibel*) (Fig. 14) has been part of the material culture of the Mizos. It is considered as a pipe

for the men with a silver piece fitted inside for lining. Previously, the head was made of clay which is connected to a bamboo pipe (Lianhmingthanga 1998: 108).

The analogy from these materials shows that even in the present day certain materials do still play an important function in the society. It also proves the continuity and use of the materials reflected in the megaliths from the past to the present day. The folklores and stories associated with these megaliths show the psychological feelings of the past people who did their best they could to represent their feelings and love for their dear ones.

It is also equally interesting to note that though many of the megalithic monuments found in these two villages are associated with deceased people, as is the generic understanding of the relationship between megaliths and burial customs, few are built to commemorate events related to personal feelings of the living. As for an example, the megalith of *Darthiangi Lung* which symbolizes the deep love between a deranged couple who couldn't be together and



Figure 12: Copper bell: (a) Darkhuang, (b) contemporary of (a), (c) Darmang, (d) contemporary of (c) Courtesy: John Lalfakkima (images b & d).



Figure 13: Bead necklace: (a) & (b) Depictions of bead necklaces (c) A Mizo lady in traditional attire wearing a bead necklace (Courtesy: Lalhmangaihi Chhakchhuak; image c).

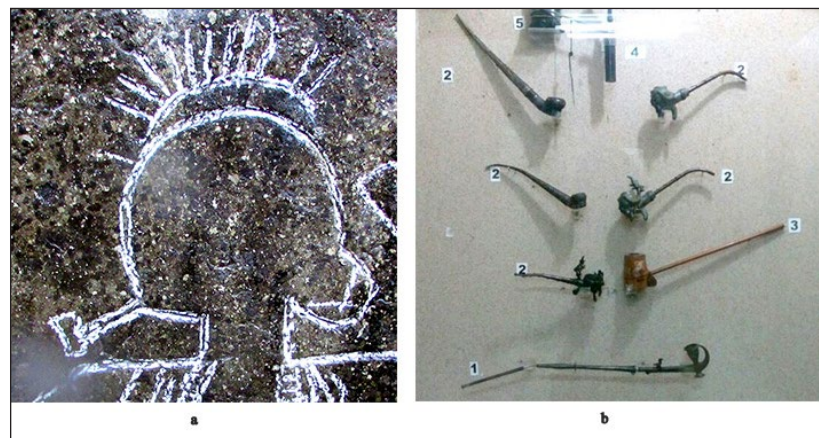


Figure 14: Smoking pipe – (a) Depiction of a smoking pipe (b) Traditional Mizo smoking pipe (Courtesy: Mizoram State Museum).

parted their ways because of societal norms. It also brings out the norm of women being held responsible in case of a childless couple and probably came under so much condemnation that the only choice left with the wife was to leave her husband even if they were in love with each other. In this particular case the folklore story actually is an evidence that shows how megaliths lost their true funeral characters in the popular mind and the replacement of that by the emotions of the living.

Megaliths are part of the material culture of the community that builds them and the material world is crucial in the processes of enculturation and cultural transmission, in shaping daily experience and perceptions, and in

orienting actions. In this way, the megaliths as material culture carries symbolic information on human cognition.

Conclusion

Megalithic traditions are worldwide phenomena. Stonehenge (UK), Gobekli Tepe in southeastern Turkey and monolithic Moai of Easter Island have all been interpreted as ceremonial or ritualistic structures. Megalithic monuments were frequently decorated with a variety of art forms, including petroglyphs, various abstract signs and symbols, pictographs, motifs, cupules, cup and ring marks, and other incised imagery. However, the true meaning behind the construction and decorative art of megalithic stone structures is still an enigma. The recon-

ceptualization of space and architecture within archaeology has instigated a renewed interest in the meaning of the megalithic monument. This has led to an approach to megalithic analysis that is strikingly different from previous interpretation of their significance to prehistoric people, which was from the view point of social organization to one of individual human experience.

The megaliths from the villages of Farkawn and Khankawn raises interest and curiosity into the nature of such individual human experience of the Mizo society. The introduction of writing came late only along with the British missionaries due to which the preliterate Mizos made their expressions and thoughts on the megalithic monuments and rock surfaces. However, with the coming of Christianity, the Mizo society began to evolve towards modern culture due to which the traditional and customary practices underwent changes. This led some cultural practices to vanish while new practices were being inducted.

With regards to chronology, it is difficult to give exact dates of the early Mizo history. Though historians have made certain chronologies regarding the migrations of the Mizos into the present day Mizoram, however, there are no absolute dates to confirm them. Archeological researches are still lagging as compared to other states in India. Extensive archeological excavations and dating are required to give a better chronology and to establish a proper time framework which is still a major lacuna in the history of the Mizos.

Acknowledgements

The survey work that was conducted in the selected areas would not be fruitful if it were not for the contributions of persons namely K. Vanlalruata, S. Zothansanga, J. Sangthuami, Zirthantluanga, Rev. K. Lalfakzuala, Lalmuanawma and Zirthanga. Apart from them, there are two other persons Lalhmangaihi Chhakchhuak and John Lalfakkima who have allowed their personal material to be used in this research. The State Museum of Mizoram has also helped in the research by providing some images

from the collection. We owe our gratitude and thanks to all of them for their support and assistance in the research processes.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

References

- Census of India, Mizoram** 2011 *District Census Handbook: Champhai*. Mizoram: Directorate of Census Operations.
- Chatterji, N** 1979 *Monoliths and Landmarks of Mizoram*. Calcutta. Firma KLM Private Limited.
- Chhange, L** 2013 Mizo Origin Myths. In: Malsawmdawngliana and Rohmingmawii (Eds.) *Mizo Narratives: accounts from Mizoram*. Assam: Scientific Book Centre, pp. 11–15.
- Fiara Memorial Cultural Club** 2009 *Farkawn leh a Chhehvela Pipute Sulhnu*. Farkawn: Fiara Memorial Cultural Club.
- Hmar, M** 2010 Megalithic Monuments of Mizoram: a Descriptive Study. Ph. D dissertation. North Eastern Hill University, Meghalaya.
- Lalthangliana, B** 2013 *Mizo Culture*. Aizawl: F. Vanlalringa.
- Lalzarzoa** 2013 Migration of the Mizo Tribes: a Brief Overview. In: Malsawmdawngliana and Rohmingmawii (Eds.) *Mizo Narratives: accounts from Mizoram*. Assam: Scientific Book Centre, pp. 22–23.
- Lianhmingthanga** 1998 *Material Culture of the Mizo*. Calcutta: firma KLM Private Limited.
- Malsawmdawngliana** 2015 *Negotiating the Past: Memory, History and Culture of Mizo*. Assam: Scientific Book Centre.
- Pachau, R** 2009 *Mizoram: A Study in Comprehensive Geography*. New Delhi: Northern Book Centre.
- Parry, N E** 1932 *The Lakhers*. Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Limited.

How to cite this article: Lalhminghlua and Sarkar, A 2017 A Short Report on Megaliths and Petroglyphs on Natural Rock Surfaces from Farkawn and Khankawn Villages, Champhai District, Mizoram, India. *Ancient Asia*, 8: 1, pp. 1–13, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/aa.122>

Published: 10 January 2017

Copyright: © 2017 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.