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Japanese team finds mural painting at Afghanistan's Bamiyan.

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BAMIYAN, Afghanistan, June 29 Kyodo

A Japanese research team has discovered part of a mural painting in the ruins of the colossal stone Buddha statues in Bamiyan, central Afghanistan, that were destroyed by the country's former Taliban rulers.

The mural was found in a small cave carved into a cliff on the eastern side of the statues, according to team leader Kazuya Yamauchi, chief researcher of the National Research Institute for Cultural Properties of Tokyo.

The painting, made on the dome-shaped roof of the cave measuring 2.5 meters across, appears to be of the torso of a Buddha, Yamauchi said.

Patches of a vivid blue pattern made with lapis lazuli are all that remain of the painting, which is thought to have originally been of several Buddha images radiating outward from the center of the roof.

The cave is likely to have fallen in on itself, and as a result the overall shape of the painting is obscured by rocks that have accumulated inside.

"If the rocks are removed, there is a good chance we can ascertain the remainder of the mural. It must be preserved without delay," he said.

Kosaku Maeda, a Wako University professor emeritus of Asian history who confirmed the finding, said it is rare to find a mural in the Bamiyan ruins, considering the destruction by the Taliban and looting of artifacts. Less than 20 percent of all the mural paintings are thought to have survived.

"They are an invaluable resource for studying Buddhist culture of Asia," Maeda said.

Dye characteristics date the mural to the sixth or seventh century, the golden age of Buddhist culture at Bamiyan, according to Maeda.

In March 2001, the Taliban destroyed the two giant Buddha statues. The archeological remains were registered on the World Heritage List of the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in July 2003.

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