



KEYWORDS: *Pictogram* – *Abdozou rockshelter* – *Zagros* – *Fars* – *Iran*

NEWLY FOUND PICTOGRAMS FROM ABDOZOU ROCKSHELTER, FIROUZABAD, SOUTHERN ZAGROS, IRAN

Taher Ghasimi, Cyrus Barfi and Reza Norouzi

Abstract. During an archaeological survey in the Firouzabad area of southern Zagros region in 2004, a cluster of rock art was discovered in a small rockshelter near the village of Lashkar Moselou. The site was re-surveyed and studied by the authors in 2006. The rock art consists mainly of finger paintings in red ochre. Depicting animal and geometric motifs, dotted patterns are observed inside or outside of some depictions. A bladelet core and a flake were found in the vicinity of the site, which might help in placing the rock art in a tentative chronological framework. According to archaeological evidence, the cave and rockshelter sites in Fars region were occupied at least from the Middle Palaeolithic through Upper Palaeolithic, Epipalaeolithic and Neolithic periods. The Epipalaeolithic occupations are the most common. The fact that no late pre-Historic and Historic archaeological materials were found in the site, along with the occurrence of two lithic artefacts found near the site, suggests that the cave was occupied possibly during the early Holocene (Neolithic-Chalcolithic periods).

Introduction

The Fars province in southern Iran is one of the most archaeologically attractive regions in Iran due to the presence of such important sites as Persepolis and Pasargadae and many more places in the surrounding areas, having been one of the primary areas to attract archaeologists from both inside and outside the country. However, except for the intermontane plain of Marvdasht, which has been a centre for intensive excavations and surveys, the other parts of Fars have not been adequately explored, or at best limited to a brief introduction to an important Historical or Islamic site.

Appreciating this lack of information concerning the pre-Historic period, pioneering studies are conducted recently by Abdolreza Dashtizadeh and other Iranian researchers, especially on Palaeolithic sites, which yielded new information on the pre-History of the region (Amiri 1995; Atayi 2006; Barfi 2007; Biglari 2007; Dashtizadeh 2003, 2006; Shidrang 2004; Zeidi and Tsuneki 2008). However, in all of the recent surveys, little attention has been paid to the rock art evidence and the pictograms, and in fact the present paper is one of the first surveys of its kind to introduce and describe the pictograms of Fars.

Of other pictogram clusters surveyed in Iran, the Mirmalas, Dosheh, and Homian in Kouhdasht, Lorestan (Garazhian et al. 2001; Izadpanah 1969; McBurney 1969; Otte et al. 2003; Remacle et al. 2006); the pictograms of Bastak, Hormozgan (Sadeghi 2002), Maimand cave near Kerman (Karimi 2006), Cheshmeh Sohrab cave in Kermanshah (Biglari et al. 2007) could be mentioned, and Tang-e Teyhooee cave and Tang-e Tadavan rockshelters in Fars (Fazel 2011; Fazel and Alibaigi 2012) (Fig. 1).

The Abdozou rockshelter is located in the central part of the province. The nearest urban areas are Firouzabad in the central and Meimand in the east-ern part. Firouzabad is located in the southwest of Fars province, at about 1327 meters a.s.l. It lies in a rather

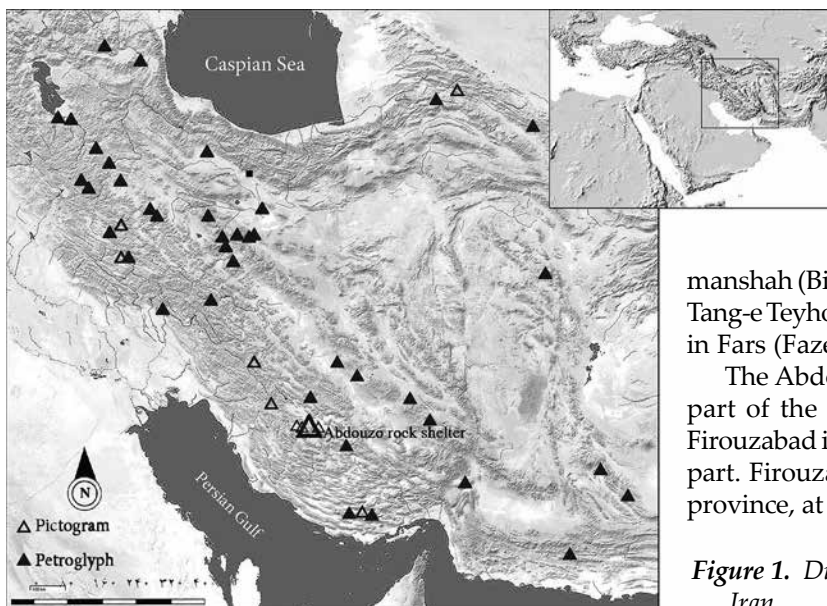


Figure 1. Distribution map of known rock art sites in Iran.

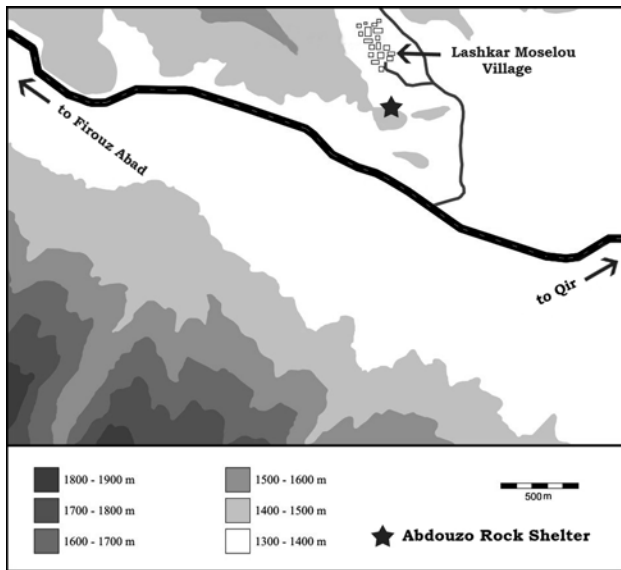


Figure 2. Location map of Abdouzo rockshelter in the study area.

mountainous region where the weather is frequently changing, with cold winters and moderate summers, while Meimand lies in a hot and dry region. Firouzabad together with Dejhgah (in the west) are the most extensive plains in the Fars province.

Research background

Considering the fact that the Fars province has been inhabited by since at least the Middle Palaeolithic period, many archaeological remains from this and the later periods have been left in the caves and rockshelter sites of the region (Amiri 1995; Atayi 2006; Barfi 2007; Biglari 2007; Dashtizadeh 2003, 2006; Dashtizadeh and

Hosseini 2008, 2009; Dashtizadeh and Mohamadi 2009; Field 1939; Piperno 1972; Pullar 1975; Shidrang 2004; Zeidi and Tsuneki 2008). In addition to the studies and surveys conducted by non-Iranian archaeologists on the Palaeolithic sites of the region, the Iranian archaeologists, especially Abdolreza Dashtizadeh and Cyrus Barfi, also conducted extensive surveys in the region in recent years, resulting in the discovery of more than 250 Palaeolithic and Epipalaeolithic sites (Barfi 2008; Dashtizadeh 2003, 2006; Dashtizadeh and Barfi n.d.). But, up to now, very few pictograms have been discovered in these sites, among which the Abdozou cluster possesses unique properties. Abdozou pictograms were discovered during a survey by Reza Norouzi (Norouzi 2005) and a year later re-surveyed by the authors in 2006. In this survey, the pictograms were recorded by means of photographs and video tapes and then the motifs of the pictograms were digitally redrawn using Photoshop and Corel Draw. Comparable pictograms with the Abdozou pictograms are known in a few rockshelter sites in Fars province and in a cave site near Maimand, Kerman (Karimi 2006)

The Abdozou rockshelter

Abdozou rockshelter is located at 1408 m a.s.l., some 200 m to the south of the village of Lashkar Moslou (Fig. 2). The initial surveys at the site showed the Abdozou rockshelter to be an isolated rock, 160 × 170 × 120 cm in dimension, originating from a higher rock face that had collapsed and fallen down the slope, probably as a result of an earthquake (Fig. 3). Almost all the rockshelters and most of the caves discovered in the limestone ridges of the Zagros are formed as a result of limestone dissolution along fractures or bedding planes within the rock mass (Heidari 2007), the Abdozou rockshelter being no exception. The Abdozou pictograms are painted on the concave part of the rock block (the former shelter roof or wall) in red colour, probably using red ochre pigment. At present the rock is positioned in a way that its concave part with the pictograms on the surface is almost facing the base of the slope. The movement and collapse of the rock from the upper heights has caused the original block to break into two large pieces. This breaking of the original block into two pieces supports the notion of the rock collapse and its movement downslope (Fig. 4). The position of the pictograms shows that they must have been painted before the collapse event. Furthermore, considering the little damage to the main body of the shelter, the rock fall from the source could not have been more than a few metres. At present the access to the Abdozou pictograms is only possible through a natural crack at an angle of c. 90° on the top of the rock, which was probably there before the block's movement. A pit dug under the rock by clandestine excavators has made the access easier. Studies on the trench show no layers or sediments with archaeological remains lying under the rock, a fact which indicates that the rock is possibly not in its original position.



Figure 3. Close view of Abdouzo rockshelter pictograms.

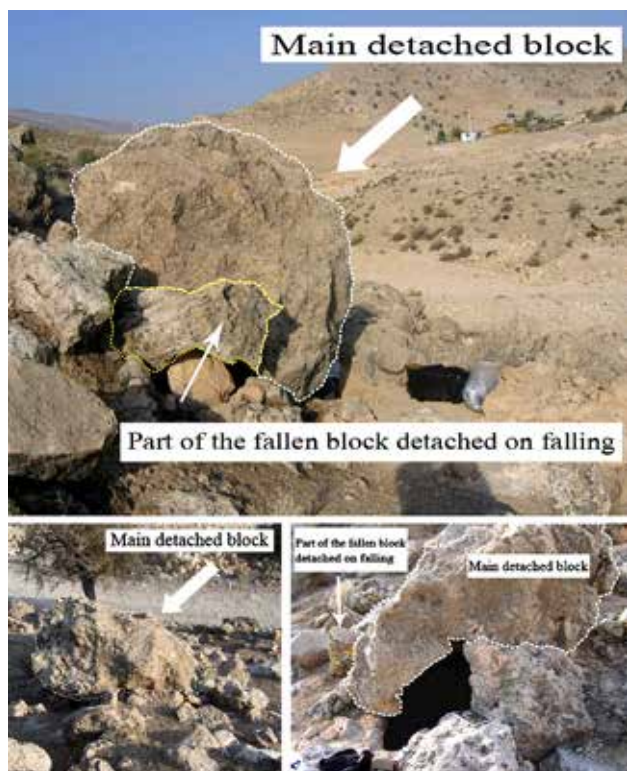


Figure 4. Different views of the main detached block and the associated detached falling.

Downward from the Abdozou rockshelter, at a distance of less than 100 m, a seasonal river is located. Because of the sharp slope in front of the shelter and the erosional action of water, the authors were able to collect only a few lithic artefacts. The artefacts were gathered at various distances, 50 to 100 m, from around the Abdozou rockshelter. These consist of plain, broken blades made from milky-white chert, a plain flake made of greenish-grey chert and a bladelet core made of light-grey chert (Fig. 5).

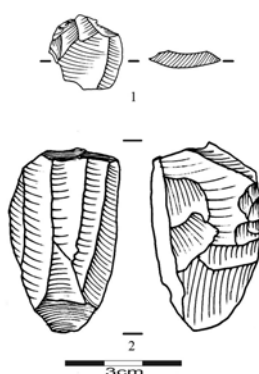


Figure 5. The lithic artefacts from Abdouzo rockshelter.
1. Simple flake;
2. bladelet core.

In terms of typo-technology, the artefacts collected probably belong to the Neolithic or Chalcolithic period. In the survey conducted, no piece of pottery was found at 200 m radius around the Abdozou rockshelter. A vast surface scatter of potsherds near the nearby village seems to have no relationship with Abdozou rockshelter. Except for one piece of pottery from the Historical period, the other pieces examined among the potsherds mentioned above belong to the Islamic period.

Description of the pictograms

The pictograms of the Abdozou rockshelter were



Figure 6. An animal-like pictogram.



Figure 7. The horned animal (wild goat?).

Painted using a red pigment, which is probably red ochre, on the wall (at present ceiling) of the rock face. They consist of abstract motifs resembling animal and geometric figures. Generally, the pictograms can be divided into two categories: the first category includes most of the pictograms comprising of figures in which the outlines were first drawn and then the inside and outside filled with fingerprints (dot patterns) and hatched oblique lines in two directions, in a way the artist has skillfully painted all parts of the animal-like motif. The second category consists of pictograms drawn in linear forms, with lines giving a curved impression. However, what at first sight catches the eye of the observer is the single pictogram painted on the upper eastern part of the ceiling of the rockshelter. This rock art is most probably the figure of an animal-like creature with comparable body parts. In this motif, the painter has masterfully decorated the body, filling the inside with dotted patterns and hatched lines of various sizes. Unlike other motifs, this one is just a little deteriorated and thus remained mostly undamaged, with much of the original red colour still preserved (Fig. 6).



Figure 8. An animal-like pictogram.

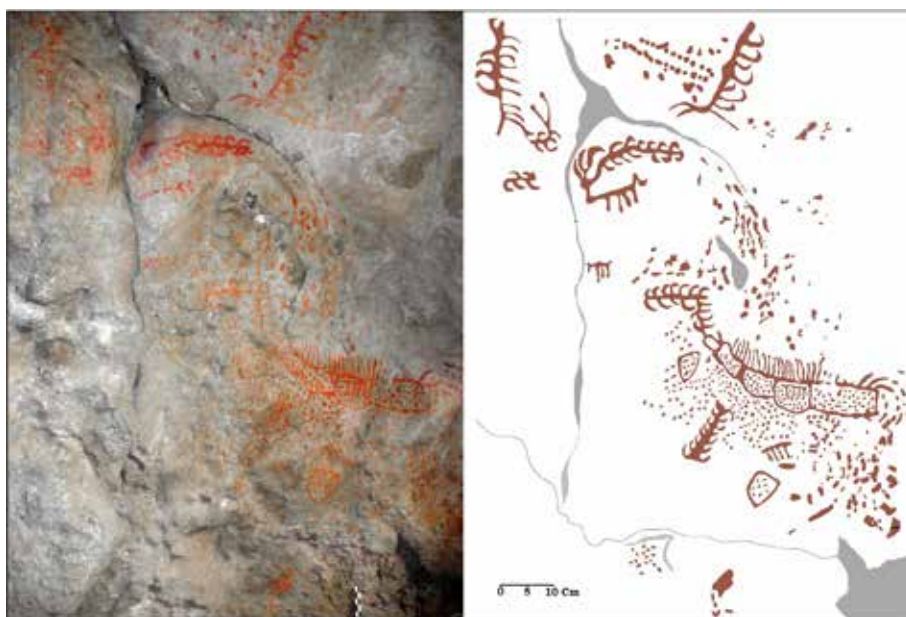


Figure 9. View of the Abdouzo rockshelter pictograms.

Another recognisable motif is that of a 'wild goat' painted on the ceiling of the shelter. Parts of the head and the body of the figure are heavily damaged, but the horns, which have been painted skilfully, escaped damage (Fig. 7). Next to these images in the centre of the ceiling an indistinct picture, seemingly an animal, can be observed. The motif is in reddish-brown colours (Fig. 8). Besides these motifs, there are a series of geometrical triangle-like depictions, the insides of which and in one case the outside space are decorated by finger dot paintings. These decorations, obviously filling the inside and outside areas of the motifs, are one of the notable features to be mentioned about these pictograms

(Fig. 9), comparable to the pictograms found in the late Magdalenian cave art of south-western France. The pictograms at Marsoulas, Bedeilhac and Niaux belong to c. 12 to 15 ka. Some of these motifs are in several aspects similar to those of Abdozou pictograms, like the use of red pigment, filling the inside of the depiction with dotted patterns and obliquely extending hatched lines on two sides of the body (Jaubert n.d.; Clottes 1995; Fritz 2004). The dotted patterns in Marsoulas are done using only one hand to create the finger paintings.

This style and technique of painting — like the use of fingers and colour pigments — most probably also holds true for the pictograms of Abdozou. In the Abdozou cluster of pictograms, the artist has been able to make successful use of the natural properties of the shelter, like the embossments and sunken parts of the walls and the ceiling.

Unlike the pictograms of Mirmalas and Homian in Kouhdasht, in which the colour pigment used is thick, in the Abdozou pictograms the pigment looks to be diluted.

By mineralogical and chemical analyses done on the pigment traces of pictograms in Abdozou, much useful information regarding the type(s) of colour pigments used would be obtained which could aid in offering the suitable method(s) for absolute dating of these pictograms.¹

Relative chronology of the pictograms

One of the major obstacles in studying the rock art sites in Iran is the lack of absolute chronology for the pictograms and, as a result, this branch of archaeolo-

¹ Such analysis on colorant has resulted in highly useful information about pictograms of the caves of Europe. For example, in the pictograms painted in black and purple in the Lascaux cave, it has been discovered that they contain manganese oxide. Inside the same cave in some other pictograms in black, natural charcoal has been used, or in the same rock arts painted in red, ochre and yellow iron oxide has been found, or in the pictograms painted in white, talc powder has been used (Jaubert n.d.).

archaeological studies in Iran is deprived of a well-dated chronological framework. Therefore, our knowledge of the chronological order and stylistic changes of Iranian rock art is very limited. With these problems of dating, other resources must be used to help in determining the relative chronology.

As for Abdozou pictograms, two resources may be available; firstly, by comparing other pictograms discovered in Iran as well as in other countries where the chronology of the pictograms has been determined; secondly, by referring to the data obtained during archaeological surveys in the same region the Abdozou site located. The important point is that all the discoveries related to pictograms in Iran have been reported from the central and southern Zagros regions. Archaeological evidence shows the continued occupation of the caves and rockshelters of Fars province since the Palaeolithic periods up to the Neolithic period (Barfi 2007; Tsuneki and Zeidi 2008). Taking this into consideration, attributing the pictograms of the Abdozou rockshelter to Neolithic or Chalcolithic periods might not be far from the truth. On the other hand, the widespread distribution of Epipalaeolithic remains in the rockshelter and cave sites of Fars province, besides the unique style of the pictograms of the Abdozou rockshelter, supports the possibility of attributing even an earlier date to these pictograms.

Conclusion

The intention of the painter(s) for creating the cluster of Abdozou pictograms and the concepts they may have wanted to convey are not known to us. We can only conjecture about them based on some presuppositions. Perhaps the purpose for painting these pictograms was a symbolic expression of the surrounding natural environment or to represent some concepts of religious or ritualistic ceremonies. Further ethnological studies might provide us with some clues, because even today in most regions of Fars province the migrating nomads still live the same way as they did in ancient times; a close study of their societies from different perspectives can help us to better interpret the rock art. The pictograms of Abdozou are unique in terms of style, manner of production, content and subject matter and none of the known clusters in other parts of Iran are comparable with them. Except for some similar rock arts reported from the Maymand Cave in Kerman Province (Karimi 2006), the pictograms of Abdozou rockshelter do not have any chronological indicators, unlike other rock arts which do have indicators like horse and rider, bow and arrows etc., such as finds from Teimareh region (Farhadi 1998), Mirmalas and Homian in Kouhdasht (Garazhian et al. 2001; Izadpanah 1969; McBurney 1969; Otte et al. 2003; Remacle et al. 2006), Cheshmeh Sohrab cave in Kermanshah (Biglari et al. 2007), and Karaftoo cave and Oraman region in Kurdistan (Ghasimi 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c; Lahafian 2004, 2010).

Acknowledgments

Special thanks go to Fereidoun Biglari who read the drafts of this paper several times and provided useful comments. Special thanks also to Mosayeb Amiri for his support in conducting this survey, and to Professor Jacques Jaubert for helpful comments and support, as well as thanks to Sonia Shidrang and Sedigheh Abdullahi for their useful comments on describing the panels. Arastu Rahimian, Abdulreza Dashtizadeh, Iraj Mohammadzadeh and Akam Ghasimi are thanked for their kind assistance, and the science editor Ellen Vuosalo Tavakoli for her rigorous editing of the English text. Sarem Amini accomplished the final proofreading and made some critical modifications. We express our particular gratitude to the four *RAR* referees of this paper, for their constructive comments.

Taher Ghasimi
Université Toulouse-Le Mirail
TRACES-UMR 5608
France
sghasimi@gmail.com

Cyrus Barfi
Cultural Heritage and Tourism Base of The Historic Town
of Bishapur
Kazeroun
Iran
barficyrus@gmail.com

Reza Norouzi
Iranian Centre for Archaeological Research
30 Tir Street, Emam Avenue
Tehran
Iran
rmorouzi@yahoo.com

Final MS received 30 September 2013.

REFERENCES

- AMIRI, M. 1995. Survey of Paleolithic remains of Marvdasht plains (Ashkft Gavi) *Asar* 25: 232-215.
- ATAI, M. T. 2006. Report on the study of artefacts, stone rampart Persepolis. *Bastanpazhuhi* 2(4): 22-31 (in Persian).
- BARFI, C. 2007. Preliminary survey of Epipalaeolithic sites around Parishan Lake, 2005. *Bastanpazhuhi* 2(4): 132-133 (in Persian).
- BIGLARI, F. 2007. Introduction. In A. Tsuneki and M. Nishida (eds), *Stone tools from Arsanjan area, Fars Province, Iran*, pp. 2-4, Tsukuba University.
- BIGLARI, F., A. MORADI BISOTOUNI and F. JAMSHIDI 2007. The pictograms of Cheshmeh Sohrab cave, Kermanshah. *Bastanpazhoohi* 2(3): 50-54 (in Persian, with an English abstract).
- CLOTTE, J. 1995. *Les cavernes de Niaux: art préhistorique en Ariège*. Seuil, Paris.
- COOPER, J. C. 1988. *An illustrated encyclopedia of traditional symbols*. Thames and Hudson, Ltd, London.
- DASHTIZADEH, A. 2005. Paleolithic survey on the Kazeroun's plain. In S. Zare (ed.), *Proceedings of the Second Symposium of Iranian Young Archaeologists, Tehran University 2004*, pp. 27-48. Cultural Heritage of Tourism Organisation, Tehran (in Persian).
- DASHTIZADEH, A. 2006a. Report of archaeological survey of Paleolithic sites at Marvdasht, Fars Province, Iran. In A.

- K. Singh and R. A. Sharma (eds.), *School of Ancient History, Culture and Archaeology Studies, book of abstracts*, pp. 28–29. Gwalior, Jiwaji University.
- DASHTIZADEH, A. 2006b. Survey of a Paleolithic region, Sadat Shahr Plain in north-east Fars Province, Iran. In A. K. Singh and R. A. Sharma (eds.), *School of Ancient History, Culture and Archaeology Studies, book of abstracts*, pp. 29. Jiwaji University, Gwalior.
- DASHTIZADEH, A. and S. A. HOSSAINI 2008. Report of discoveries of Paleolithic remains in Bab-Anar Plain, SE of Fars Province, Iran. In S. Darvishi (ed.), *2nd International Congress of Society of South Asian Archaeology*, pp. 29–30. Kazeroun Azad University.
- DASHTIZADEH, A. and F. MOHAMMADI 2009. Evidence from a Middle Paleolithic workshop in the Kohmare Sorkhi region of SW Shiraz, Fars Province, Iran. *An Ethnoarchaeological Observation National Seminar on Buddhism in Orissa and Joint Annual Conference, book of abstracts*, p. 13, Orissa State Museum, Orissa State Archaeology and Orissa Institute of Maritime and South East Asian Studies.
- DASHTIZADEH, A. and N. H. Hossein 2009. The study of utilization patterns of Paleolithic caves and rockshelters in south part of Zagros Mountain Range, Iran. *An Ethnoarchaeological Perspective, Nationals Seminar on Buddhism in Orissa and Joint Annual Conference book of abstracts*, pp. 12–13, Orissa State Museum, Orissa State Archaeology and Orissa Institute of Maritime and South East Asian Studies.
- FARHADI, M. 1996. Museum in the wind; report of new findings from Taimareh region. Allameh Taba Tabaei University Press, Teheran (in Persian).
- FAZEL, L. 2011. Tang-e Teyhooee Cave and Tang-e Tadavan Rockshelter: two new rock art sites in the province of Fars, southern Iran. *Modares Archaeological Research* 2–3(4–5): 69–78 (in Persian, with an English abstract).
- FAZEL, L. and S. ALIBAIGI 2012. Discovery of cave art in the province of Fars, southern Iran. *Rock Art Research* 29: 187–190.
- Field, H. 1939. *Contributions to the anthropology of Iran*. Field Museum of Natural History Anthropological Series 29(2) (2 vols.), Chicago.
- FRITZ, C. and G. TOSELLO 2004. Marsoulas: une grotte ornée dans son contexte culturel. *XIVe Congrès de l'Union Internationale des Sciences Pré- et Protohistoriques, Liège 2001*, ERAUL 107, pp. 55–67. Université de Liège.
- GHASIMI, T. 2006. The survey and study of rock art in Kurdistan Province. Unpubl. MA dissertation, Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Human Sciences, Tehran Central Branch, Azad University (in Persian).
- GHASIMI, T. 2007a. A survey report of the Ouraman rock engravings. *Bastanpazhuhi* 2(3): 70–81 (in Persian).
- GHASIMI, T. 2007b. A review on the history of rock art research in Iran. *Bastanpazhuhi* 2(3): 18–19 (in Persian).
- GHASIMI, T. 2007c. La gravures rupestres d'Uraman (Iran). *Préhistoire, art et société* I.XII, pp. 89–106, Bulletin de la Société préhistorique Ariège-Pyrénées.
- GARAJIAN, O., J. ADELI and L. PAPLY YAZDI 2001. Recent pictograms of Houmian. *Journal of Anthropology* 2: 84–101 (in Persian).
- HALL, J. 1994. *Illustrated dictionary of symbols in Eastern and Western art*. Icon Editions, New York.
- HEYDARI, S. 2007. The impact of geology and geomorphology on cave and rockshelter archaeological site formation, preservation and distribution in the Zagros Mountains of Iran. *Geoarchaeology, an International Journal* 22(6): 653–669.
- IZADPANA, H. 1969. Prehistoric paintings in caves of Luristan. *Bastan Chenassi va Honar-e Iran* (Review of Iranian Archaeology and Art) 3: 6–11 (in Persian).
- IZADPANA, H. 1969. The pictograms of Doushe Cave in Lorestan, *Bastan Chenassi va Honar-e Iran* (Review of Iranian Archaeology and Art) 4: 13–59 (in Persian).
- JAUBERT, J. n.d. *L'art pariétal paléolithique*. PACEA, UMR 5199 CNRS, Université Bordeaux 1.
- JAFARI, A. 1989. *Ecosystem of Iran, Vol. 1: Mountains of Iran*. Organization of Geography and Cartography of Gitashenasi Press (in Persian).
- KARIMI, F. 2006. Maymand's rock art. A field report in Maymand, Kerman Province. Unpubl. report submitted to Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization, Tehran.
- LAHAFIAN, J. 2004. Petroglyphs of Kurdistan. *Rock Art Research* 21: 3–10.
- LAHAFIAN, J. 2010. Cupules in Kurdistan rock art. *Rock Art Research* 27: 177–183.
- MCBURNEY, C. B. M. 1970. Palaeolithic excavations in the Zagros area. *Iran* 8: 185–186.
- NOROUZI, R. 2005. *Archeological survey of Firouzabad*. Fars Encyclopedia and Fars Cultural Handicrafts & Tourism Organization Press, (in Persian).
- OTTE, M., J. ADELI and L. REMACLE 2003. West Iranian rock art. *International Newsletter on Rock Art* 37: 3–10.
- PIPERNO, 1972. Jahrom, a Middle Palaeolithic site in Fars, Iran. *East and West* 22: 183–197.
- PULLAR, J. 1975. The Neolithic of the Iranian Zagros, PhD thesis, University of London.
- REMACLE, L., M. LEJEUNE, J. ADELI, S. MOHAMMADI and M. OTTE 2006. Art rupestre de Houmian, province de Luristan, Iran. *Anthropozoologica* 41(2): 13–27.
- SADEGHI, K. 2002. A survey of Eshkaft-e Ahouei (Bastak) pictograms. Present condition and threats, and a proposal for their conservation. Unpubl. BA thesis, College of Relic Conservation, Isfahan University of Art (in Persian).
- SHIDRANG, S. 2004. Survey report of a cave and two rockshelters near Persepolis. *Archaeological Reports* 3: 31–36 (in Farsi, with an English abstract).
- TSUNEKI, A. and M. ZEIDI 2008. *Tang-e Bolaghi: the Iran-Japan Archaeological Project for the Sivand Dam Salvage Area, Al-Shark* 3. University of Tsukuba, Studies for West Asian Archaeology, Iranian Center for Archaeological Research and Department of Archaeology, University of Tsukuba.
- UCKO, P. and A. ROSENFELD 1967. *Paleolithic cave art*. World University Library, New York and Toronto.
- VIALOU, D. 1998. *Prehistoric art and civilization*. INC Publishers, New York.