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## AZANDARYAN: NEWFOUND PETROGLYPHS IN HAMADAN, WESTERN IRAN

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**Abstract.** The subject petroglyphs in this article have all been newly discovered near Azandaryan in Hamadan Province, western Iran. They are in total 631 petroglyphs, located on the hillsides and valley floors of mountains in Qeshlagh Dali, Baghali Darasi, Ashaghi Kolangah and Ashaghi Nehanjah. These petroglyphs have been made using rubbing, hammering and less frequently engraving techniques. The themes of the studied compositions include images of 'ibexes', 'dogs', 'vegetal' motifs and anthropomorphous ones. The anthropomorphs are subjectively described as riding, hunting, shooting and fighting humans. All these petroglyphs are comparable with those of other regions in Iran or even some others beyond Iran's current borders. In the end, it is to be stated that conducting direct dating studies is needed.

### Introduction

Compared with other areas of archaeological research, rock art became only recently targeted in Iran. Although such works are abundantly seen across the country, they are less known than other archaeological remains. However, some researchers became recently focused on rock art, which could pave the way to revise previous views in this area of investigation.

Petroglyphs are regarded as one of the most

outstanding artistic cultural remains in different fields of study, such as archaeology, history of art, social sciences and so on. So far, a large number of such petroglyphs have been identified from different parts of Iran, including the Divin valley of Alvand in Hamadan (Saraf 1997), Timareh (Farhadi 1998), Kurdistan (Lahafian 2004, 2010), Arasbaran (Rafifar 2005), QalehBozi in Isfahan (Ghasrian 2006), Sangestoon (Mohamadi Ghasrian 2007), Eshkaft Aho Bastak (Asadi 2007), Mazrae Haj Mad and Dare Morad Beig (Rashidi Nejad and Zamaniyan 2009), Basin area (Azizi Kharanaghi et al. 2011), Cheshmeh Malek and Dareh Divin (Rashidi Nejad et al. 2012).

Hamadan Province with an area of 19546.818 km<sup>2</sup> is a part of the Iranian highlands which is surrounded by other provinces such as Zanjan and Qazvin in the north, Lorestan in the south, Markazi in the east, and both Kermanshah and Kurdistan in the west. Hamadan generally has a cold climate during winter and a mild one in summer, and it has lush green vegetation. The town of Azandaryan is located in Hamadan Province, 45 km to the south-east of Hamadan city, and 35 km from the town of Malayer in the north-west. This town, which is one of Malayer's peripheral townships, is situated on Malayer-Hamadan route. It is at the elevation of 1795 m above sea level. Our subject area stretches from Jokar Plain in the south of Azandaryan to Gardaneh Zagheh (= Zagheh Defile) in the north. In the course of conducting surveys over this area, four petroglyph sites in the vicinity of Azandaryan were identified (Fig. 1).

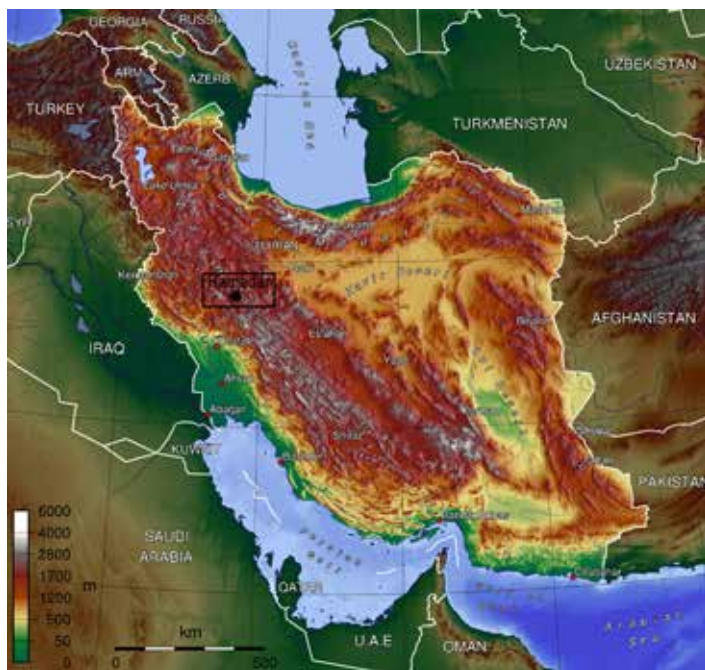


Figure 1. The location of rock art in Azandaryan area, Hamadan, Iran.



Figure 2. Landscape of Qeshlagh Dali's petroglyph dispersal.



Figure 4. 'Abstract' motif, Qeshlagh Dali.



Figure 3. The main group of petroglyphs, Qeshlagh Dali.



Figure 5. The 'ibex' motif with exaggerated long horns and 'archer hunter', Baghali Darasi.

were discovered dispersed over 43 single boulders. They and other rock art forms in the region occur on the rocks and flat surfaces — referred to as *yaghli ghieh* by the locals — with highly dense schist having formed flat panels due to geological events. The major technique applied in producing these petroglyphs is hammering, sometimes rubbing and very rarely engraving. Interestingly, the directions of the surfaces of these rocks are mostly, with a few exceptions, to the south, being subjected to the maximum sunlight and also having a relative dominance over the nearby plain; they are also exposed to the regional and seasonal wind as well as the annual rainfall. Therefore we cannot generalise, as some scholars do, that petroglyphs are usually located in places which are hidden from view and kept safe from climatic effects (Rafifar 2005: 141). Petroglyphs of this area have been located on the hillsides and valley floors of mountains in Qeshlagh Dali, Baghali Darasi, Ashaghi Kolangah and Ashaghi Nehanjah.

#### General description of rock art in the subject area

Petroglyphs of Azandaryan area have been located through a transect survey, and a total of 631 of them

#### Qeshlagh Dali

This site is located 6 km to the south-west of the town of Azandaryan and is known as Qeshlagh Dali by the



Figure 6. The main group of petroglyphs with motifs of long-horned 'ibexes', 'humans', 'dogs' etc., Baghali Darasi.



Figure 7. The 'ibex' motifs with various horn patterns, Ashaghi Kolangeh.



locals, mostly because it adjoins Qeshlagh village. On the whole, there are 104 petroglyphs on 11 boulders (Fig. 2), including images of apparent 'ibexes', 'dogs' (Fig. 3), anthropomorphs and other (Fig. 4) motifs.

#### *Baghali Darasi*

This site is located 2 km to the south-west of Azandaryan. This place, locally known as Baghali Darasi, is adjacent to a verdant intermountain valley with several springs, meadows and numerous trees. A total of 261 petroglyphs were detected on eight boulders, including images of 'ibexes', 'dogs', 'vegetal' motifs and a supposed scene of hunting (Fig. 5). Among all the boulders and cliffs mentioned earlier, the highest numbers of petroglyphs are placed on part of a rock measuring  $12 \times 2.5$  m (Fig. 6).

#### *Ashaghi Kolangeh*

This site complex is located in 2 km from the town of Azandaryan north-westward; it is referred to as Ashaghi Kolangeh by the local residents. Comparing it to the other districts, the petroglyphs of this locality have a more widespread dispersal pattern and are mostly in the form of individual rock panels. On the whole, there are 247 petroglyphs, mostly 'ibexes', on 18 boulders (Figs 7, 8) in this location.

#### *Ashaghi Nehanjeh*

This site is located 5 km north-west of Azandaryan, next to Nehanjeh village in the eastern part of a lush valley floor with the same name and is called Ashaghi Nehanjeh by the locals. In total, 19 petroglyphs on four boulders were discovered and studied in this site (Fig. 9). One of the strikingly noteworthy differences between the petroglyphs of this site and those

Figure 8. The 'ibex' motifs, Ashaghi Kolangeh.



Figure 9. Landscape of Ashaghi nehanjeh's petroglyph dispersal.



Figure 10. Petroglyphs depicting anthropomorphs, some on horseback and apparently bearing arms, Ashaghi Nehanjeh.

described above is that pictures of 'ibexes' and 'felines' are in minority here, while the most distinctive petroglyphs of this area are those displaying what appear to be narrative scenes, involving riders and anthropomorphs carrying various objects (Fig. 10).

### The petroglyph motifs

#### 'Ibex'

Petroglyphs thought to represent ibexes occur as percentages of 34.6%, 80.8%, 84.2% and 31.5% in the sites in the order listed, which — compared to neighbouring regions and countries — is a high rate of abundance. This motif has been often depicted in profile on four legs with long curved horns that attract more attention than the whole body; it is sometimes seen that various ranges of lines in different degrees of thickness have been used for drawing the 'ibex' bodies, which suggests different production dates for them.

Considering all other, previously conducted research on this area, it could be inferred that by and large

the motif of 'ibex' at 57.78% is the most abundant and also probably the most important motif over the study area, and there are different points of view of scholars about this. Some regard it as ibex, the god of water (Schmandt-Besserat 1997). The ibex, in fact, has always been a conspicuous symbol for prosperity and abundance in the ancient Iranian myths, bearing a strong association with water that is generally known as the source of a blessed prosperity (Samadi 1988).

#### 'Dog'

This motif has been reported from the four sites with percentages of 14.4%, 3%, 4% and 21% respectively. The motifs collectively interpreted as dogs is either seen in individual or narrative scenes. In individual ones, those 'dogs' have been displayed in profile and sometimes with oblong bodies, both in abstract patterns and with thick lines. In depicting this animal, no particular subtlety is observed. In the narrative scenes, these 'dogs' are usually shown in apparent association with anthropomorphs.

#### 'Vegetal motif'

The only 'vegetal' motif exists on a boulder at a hunting ground in Baghali Darasi. It has been engraved in the form of a shrub with spreading angular branches.

#### Uncertain motifs

Based on the results of the studies, the percentage of these types of motifs in the first three sites are 17.3%, 4.9%, and 2% respectively, and there was no example of this type at over district 4. Unfortunately, different study approaches such as analysing, investigating, comparing, collating and even ethno-archaeological studies on this cluster of motifs are not as easy to do as those on nature-oriented motifs; it is actually too demanding to attribute the unidentified motifs to their environs. As an illustration, we can point to a petroglyph in Gheshlagh Dali (Fig. 4) which has some parallels in the historic site of Timareh with names such as TangeGharghab, Shahneshin Ashnakhour and Mour siah Farnam (Farhadi1998: 276–279).

### Anthropomorphs

Anthropomorphous motifs are in minority in comparison with the motifs of zoomorphs; they make up 10.5% in district 1, 7.5% in district 2, 8.9% in district 3, and 47.3% in Ashaghi Nehanjeh. This motif, like the others mentioned, has been displayed both in individual and apparent narrative scenes. It has been reported from all these four sites with the difference that it is illustrated in three of them in a linear style, but in Ashaghi Nehanjeh in a finely detailed, semi-naturalistic style. Anthropomorphs are hardly found on separated panels; as a matter of fact, they are mostly seen in apparent narrative and thematic contexts (riding, hunting, shooting, and fighting humans) (Figs 5, 10). These individual petroglyphs of humans in the study area have all been illustrated using exiguous lines for drawing legs in the shape of an inverted V, depicting torsos by a line and the head and neck with a point, although such characteristic is seldom seen in individual petroglyphs. In other words, we could say a set of lines in various ranges of thicknesses have been applied for displaying the human body.

### Conclusion

Studying and analysing more than 631 petroglyphs at the four described sites for the present research and then comparing them with some other parallels in other different places of Iran or even beyond its frontiers indicates some uniformity in both topics and motifs. In addition, the role of climatic and environmental circumstances is so essential that it leads us to think that apparently all of these petroglyphs have intentionally been formed near verdant intermountain valleys with appropriate pasturelands and meadows having adequate water resources. These petroglyphs, besides showing similarities in subjects and contents, bear strong resemblances with other known and studied sites in the region.

The petroglyphs have significantly different degrees of patina and varnish in this area, which shows that their time of production ranges over different time periods. However, no laboratory or field studies to determine their chronology has been conducted in Iran, so we cannot provide any form of chronology for the newly found petroglyphs of Azandaryan.

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