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THE PETROGLYPHS OF DASHT-E-MORGHĀB IN THE FARS PROVINCE OF IRAN

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Abstract. Dasht-e-Morghāb is a fertile plain situated in the Fars province of Iran. Several petroglyph sites are identified in the region, which mostly have been pounded on the stone walls of Achaemenid (c. 550–330 BCE) castles of the Pasargadae World Heritage site. Moreover, several petroglyph panels are identified on the rock outcrops in the area. The depictions consist of zoomorphs, anthropomorphs and aniconic markings. A preliminary chronology can be established according to the patination and archaeological evidence, including Historic constructions and inscriptions, which suggest that most of the depictions were probably made after the Achaemenid period.

Introduction

Although the archaeology of rock art is a relatively new field in Iran, a considerable number of petroglyph concentrations have been identified in different parts of the country in recent years. The first attempt to study rock art in Iran was made by Dessau, an Italian geologist who reported two petroglyph panels in Iranian Baluchistan to the east of the country (Dessau 1960). In addition, the engravings of Lakhmazar in Birjand (Khaniki and Bashash 1994) and Teymareh (Farhady 1998), the petroglyphs of Sangestoon in Kahak (Ghasrian 2007), Kuh-e Dokhtar in Reshm (Roustaei 2007), the rock art of Kurdistan (Lahafian 2004, 2013; Ghasimi 2006, 2007), the pictograms of Eshkaft-e-Ahou (Asadi 2007), the rock paintings of Shamsai and Gorgali rockshelters (Azandaryani et al. 2015a), the petroglyphs of Dustali valley (Azandarian et al. 2015b) and those of the Gotvand region (Azizi Kharanaghi et al. 2011) are some examples of recent rock art discoveries in Iran. A small number of rock art sites have also been reported from the Fars province.

The rock paintings of Abdozu in Firoozabad (Ghasimi et al. 2010, 2014) and the pictograms of Tang-e Teyhooee and Tang-e Tadavan have been discovered in Jahrom in the south of the Fars province (Fazel 2011; Fazel and Alibaigi 2012). The rock paintings of Pir-Bareh (Ghasimi and Ghasemi 2013) are reported from the eastern part of the region. The pictograms of Helak were identified along the northern coast of Parishan Lake (Vahdatinasab et al. 2008) and a number of engravings were also identified in Nagh-e-Rostam (Khanipoor and Azizi Kharanaghi 2012). In addition, numerous petroglyph panels, mostly including zoomorphic motifs, were reported in the Beyram plain in the south

of the Fars province (Sarkhosh et al. 2015). A number of the depictions engraved on the Pasargadae structures were also briefly described by Azizi and Salimi (2013), but these authors have not reported the petroglyphs on the stone outcrops in the Dasht-e-Morghāb plain.

The main objectives of this research are to provide more details and bring attention to the petroglyphs of Dasht-e-Morghāb, and to report new rock art sites recently identified in the area. In addition, the authors will propose a preliminary chronology for the area's rock art using archaeological evidence, including Achaemenid constructions of Pasargadae and ancient inscriptions associated with some of the petroglyphs.

Location and geographical characteristics of Dasht-e-Morghāb

Dasht-e-Morghāb, also known as Marghāb, is a fertile plain located in the Fars province of Iran (Fig. 1a), a small plain 25 km long and about 17 km wide. The Morghāb plain has semi-arid climate and is situated about 1900 m above sea level. The Polvar River flowing from the north to the south is the most striking geographical characteristic of the area (Stronach 1978). In addition, recent geological studies have revealed the presence of an ancient small lake in the western and southern parts of the plain (Bahrami and Aminzadeh 2007). Pasargadae, the first capital of the Achaemenid dynasty, was built in the area by Cyrus the Great (559–530 BCE), the founder of the Achaemenid kingdom (Schmitt 1983: 414-426). Pasargadae consists of several structures, including the tomb of Cyrus, Zendan-e-Soleiman and Takht-e-Soleiman constructions, the Gate House, the Audience Hall, and the Residential Palace or Private Palace (Fig. 1b). Pasargadae has been registered

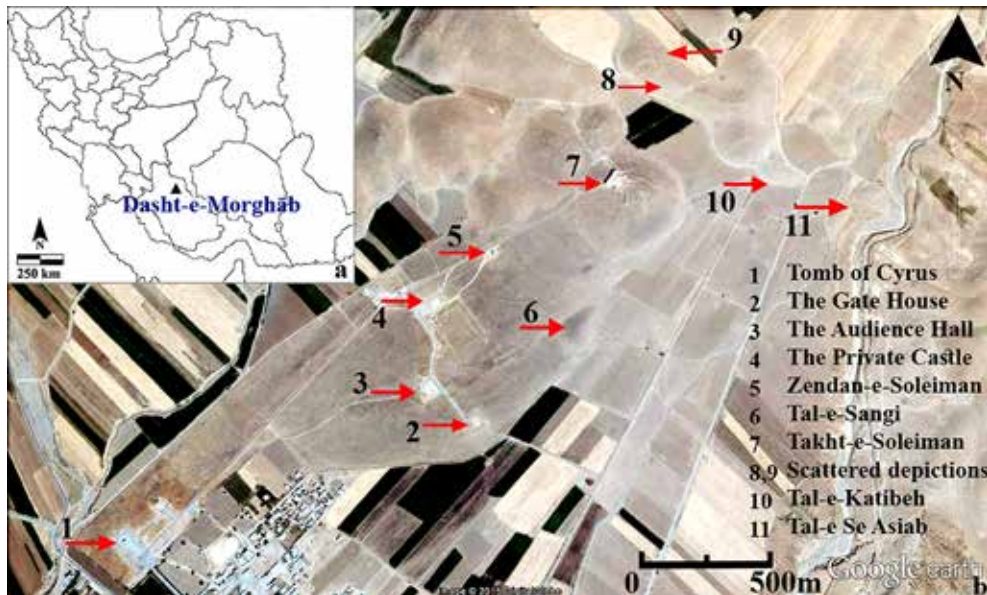


Figure 1. (a) Location of Dasht-e-Morghāb in southern Iran. (b) Map showing location of the petroglyph sites at Dasht-e-Morghāb (Google Earth; www.google.com/earth/).

as a UNESCO World Heritage site since 2003.

The tomb of Cyrus is a small stone building, which is suggested to be the burial chamber of Cyrus the Great. The building is made of two different features: a platform including six receding levels and a tomb chamber, which is gabled in design (Stronach 1978: 24–27). Zendan-e-Soleiman, which means the ‘Prison of Solomon’, is a square tower made of stone blocks. A triple-steps platform forms the base of the tower and a staircase situated on the north-west of the structure leads to a small room on the upper part of the monument. The main function of the building is still unknown but several interpretations have been suggested. Some experts have interpreted it as a fire sanctuary, while others propose that it could have been used as a royal tomb. In addition, it is suggested that the building was probably in use as a repository to protect objects of royal or religious importance (ibid.: 132). Located at the eastern limit of the region, the Gate House is a rectangular building with a hypostyle hall. The bas relief of a four-winged guardian figure (Stronach 1978: 47–49), known as the winged man, is located at the Gate House. A trilingual cuneiform inscription reading ‘I, Cyrus, the King, an Achaemenid’ in old Persian, Elamite and Akkadian languages, is inscribed on the bas relief (ibid.: 47), according to which some archaeologists suggest that the figure is a representation of Cyrus the Great, while others believe this is a guardian figure originating from the magical guardian in Assyrian art (ibid.: 53–54). The Audience Hall is a palace located midway between the Gate House and the Private Palace (Figure 1b). The Audience Hall is a hypostyle structure surrounded by columned porches on four sides (ibid.: 56). The Private Palace, also known as the Residential Palace of Cyrus the Great, is situated to the west of the Audience Hall (Fig. 1b). The castle includes a rectangular hall with thirty columns in five

rows and there are two columned porches at the northern and southern sides of the construction (Stronach 1987: 78–79). The last major structure in the Pasargadae is the Tal-i Takht, which is a large platform situated at the northern limit of the Pasargadae and was established by Cyrus the Great. The building was possibly made for ceremonial purposes, which was changed later to military uses (ibid.: 146).

Several clusters of petroglyphs were made on the limestone surfaces of the Achaemenid

buildings of Pasargadae. These were created on the structures after the Achaemenid period (c. 550–330 BCE), i.e. after the site was occupied. Moreover, Tal-e-Sangi, Tal-e-Se Asiāb and Tal-e-Katibeh are three stone outcrops bearing more petroglyphs in the region (Fig. 1b). Furthermore, several scattered panels of petroglyphs also have been identified in the area. A considerable number of petroglyph panels showing anthropomorphs, zoomorphs, geometric markings, and Arabic and Persian inscriptions have thus been identified on the stone surfaces, mostly of limestone, of the Achaemenid constructions in Pasargadae. Zoomorphs comprise quadrupeds, including ‘ibexes’, ‘horses’, canines and several other animal images.

The petroglyphs of Pasargadae

The tomb of Cyrus and Zendan-e-Soleiman

The first cluster of petroglyphs includes a number of anthropomorphous and zoomorphic depictions as well as Islamic inscriptions engraved on the surfaces of the limestone blocks of Cyrus the Great’s tomb. The next complex of petroglyphs is engraved on the northern, western and southern sides of the Zendan-e-Soleimān structure (Fig. 2). Stronach (1978) previously pointed out briefly the petroglyphs on the northern side of the construction and attributed them to the recent Islamic era. A pounded hand motif, Persian poems and Arabic names are amongst the considerable number of depictions on the northern wall of the structure, which is the largest panel of petroglyphs in the rock art of Dasht-e-Morghāb (Fig. 2). An anthropomorph illustrated with open arms and legs is a remarkable depiction in the Zendan-e-Soleimān, which is also identified in several more panels in the other petroglyph concentrations in Pasargadae. Some anthropomorphs are shown riding horse-like quadrupeds and, in some cases, have been depicted in a standing position on the

backs of the animals (Fig. 2). Ethnographic accounts show that horse-riding competitions were previously held in Pasargadae by Ghashghaei nomads during their marriage ceremonies (Sedaghatkish 2001: 111–112). With regard to the inscriptions and their patination which is similar to that of the depictions, most of the images of this panel presumably cannot be older than the recent Islamic era. The western side of the construction also includes a considerable number of depictions such as unknown quadrupeds, anthropomorphs riding 'horses', and a 'winged man'. Geometric markings including circles, horse-shoe-like motifs and equilateral crosses are also found on the panel. 'Ibexes' and geometric marks comprise the petroglyphs on the southern part of the construction (Fig. 3). Remarkably, the patination of the motifs seems to be much older than on those of the northern and western sides of the building.

The Gate House and the Audience Hall

Petroglyphs can also be found in the Gate House and the Audience Hall (Fig. 1b). The most striking depiction (Fig. 3a) in the Gate House is a zoomorph resembling a two-humped 'camel' (Fig. 3b), which has been engraved on the bottom of the Achaemenid bas relief of the 'winged man' (Fig. 3a). The other panels on the different sides of the bas relief show un-recognisable quadrupeds, which in some cases resemble horses with riders on the back of the animal (Fig. 3c). The petroglyphs in the Audience Hall (Fig. 1b) consist mostly of geometric markings such as circles and horse-shoe motifs. The most substantial panel of this cluster depicts anthropomorphs and geometric forms, which are engraved below an Achaemenid cuneiform inscription, on the limestone surface of a cubic pillar located in the south-east porch of the palace (Fig. 4).

Private Castle

Another cluster of petroglyphs is found on the surfaces of the Achaemenid pillars in the Private Castle. Among these, a considerable number of geometric forms engraved on a pillar can be considered as the most remarkable panel in the Private Castle (Fig. 5). Some of these geometric shapes are still without any parallel in the area. Two ibex-like motifs are the only zoomorphs engraved



Figure 2. Petroglyphs on the northern side of the Zendan-e-Soleiman, Pasargadae.

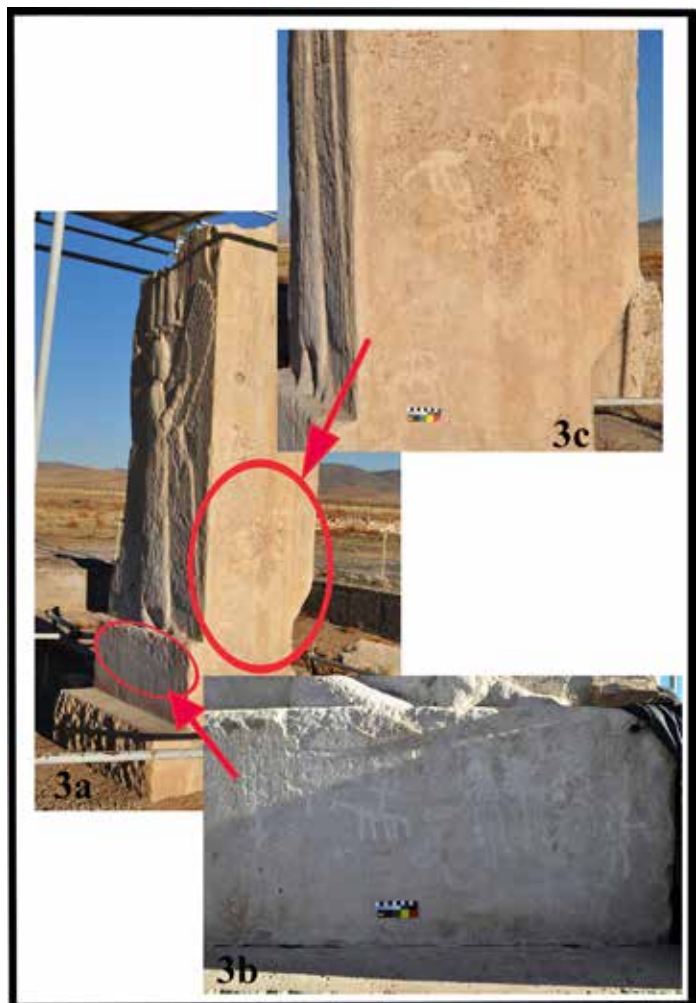


Figure 3. The petroglyphs on the Achaemenid bas-relief of the 'winged man', Gate House, Pasargadae.



Figure 4. A panel showing anthropomorphs, zoomorphs and geometric shapes depicted below an Achaemenid inscription, Audience Hall, Pasargadae.



Figure 5. Photographs showing geometric markings on different sides of a pillar in the Private Castle, Pasargadae.

on the pillar, while circles, a horse-shoe motif, a lozenge, an arrow etc., are examples of different geometric markings engraved on the panel (Fig. 5). Some of the geometrics show the same patination and may be related with each other.

Tal-e-Takht

A few panels and numerous single motifs showing anthropomorphs and zoomorphs are also engraved on the southern and western sides of the Tall-e-Takht (Fig. 1b), which is another Achaemenid construction. In addition, there are more panels carved on the metamorphosed dolomite boulders located on the eastern side of the Tall-e-Takht construction. The panels illustrate anthropomorphous shapes, which differ in style from the other anthropomorphs of Pasargadae.

The petroglyphs on the stone outcrops

Tal-e-Sangi, Tal-e-Katibeh and Tal-e Se Asiāb are large metamorphosed dolomite outcrops, which include several petroglyph panels (Fig. 1b). The first complex, Tal-e-Sangi, is situated about 400 m to the south of the Tal-e-Takht construction (Fig. 1b). Tal-e-Sangi constitutes a number of geometric markings, anthropomorphs and zoomorphs including ibex-resembling motifs. The geometric markings consist of horse-shoe motifs, circles etc., which is similar in style to those in Tal-e-Katibeh. The anthropomorphs of Tal-e-Sangi have been depicted in open-arm position, and show stylistic similarities with those at the eastern side of the Tal-e-Takht. Most of the depictions of Tal-e-Sangi have been highly eroded due to the high impact of weathering.

The second stone-outcrop, Tal-e-Katibeh, is situated about 300 m to the north-east of the Tal-e-Takht (Fig. 1b). The word Katibeh in Persian means inscription, as the site includes a few Pahlavi inscriptions, which are attributed to the late Sassanid period (224–651 CE) and first Islamic centuries (Stronach 1978: 163). The first panel shows a large geometric marking (Fig. 6), which is situated beside one of the Pahlavi inscriptions. The inscription was earlier named 'inscription D' (ibid.). Stronach (1978: 163–165) explained that the inscription was written with Late Middle Pahlavi script, but it has been highly eroded and cannot be read (Stronach 1978). Stronach recorded the geometric marking and explained that the panel shows a plan of a castle with roundish and square towers, which may have been made by one of the early visitors of the site in order to show the position of

the Tal-e-Takht and its related constructions (ibid.: 165). The geometric pattern depicts different shapes such as circles, horse-shoe motifs and squares connected to each other with lines. It may show the position of different locations or constructions in the area. The geometric shape may pertain to the Sassanid-Islamic period and it may even be in relation with the inscription, since they seem to be similar in patination. The next panel consists of a zoomorph resembling an ibex or a deer and geometric forms such as horse-shoe motifs etc. (Fig. 7). There is another panel on the outcrop showing an unrecognisable zoomorph, with a geometric marking depicted on the back of the animal (Fig. 8). The name of Ibrahim also has been engraved, which suggests that the panel probably cannot be older than the Islamic period (Fig. 8). The outcrop also includes a small number of cupules, which Stronach (1978: 163) suggested to be 'fire bowls'.

Tal-e-Se Asiāb, which is located beside the course of a dried river, is the last dense complex of petroglyphs in Dasht-e-Morghāb (Fig. 1b). It also features artefacts such as stone tools and pottery shards from pre-Historic periods, probably of the Bakun A (4200–3800 BCE) (Alizadeh 2006), and up to the Islamic centuries. The petroglyphs, consisting of zoomorphs and geometric markings (Figs 9, 10), have been made on the metamorphosed dolomite boulders. Most of the depictions are geometric images such as horse-shoe motifs, circles etc., which mostly are similar to those in Tal-e-Katibeh and Tal-e-Sangi. However, some of the geometric shapes in Tal-e-Se Asiāb (Figs 9, 10), such as the wave lines illustrated in Figure 9, are completely different from those in the previous sites. It seems that some parts of this panel have been added later, since the spiral depictions show different patination. There is also another remarkable series of several zoomorphs, which seem to be canines and ibex-like motifs, depicted in one row around the boulder (Fig. 10). Furthermore, a large geometric image, which is composed of several concentric circles, is depicted above the zoomorphs on the boulder (Fig. 10). This panel is unique, and it differs in style and theme from all of the other petroglyphs in Dasht-e-Morghāb. In addition, several scattered panels, mostly depicting geometric markings (Fig. 11) and a few anthropomorphs, have been identified on the boulders to the north-east of Tal-e-Takht (Fig. 1b).



Figure 6. The geometric marking and the Pahlavi inscription (arrow) of Tal-e-Katibeh.



Figure 7. A panel including geometric markings and a zoomorph, Tal-e-Katibeh.

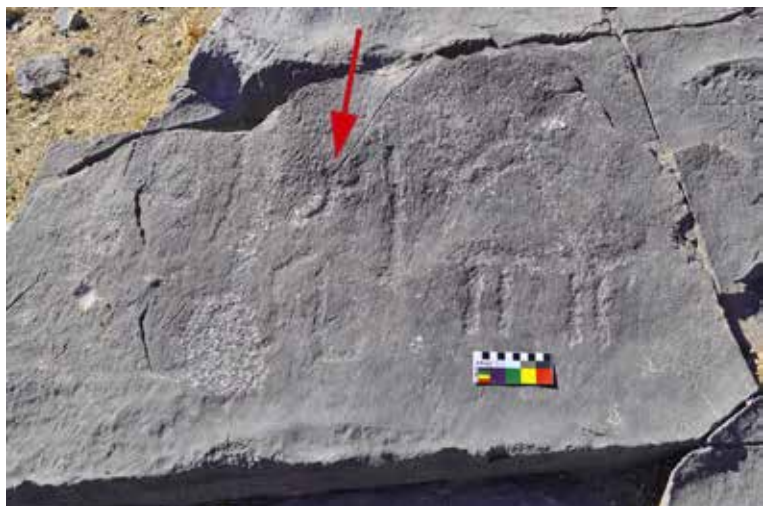


Figure 8. A panel showing geometrics, zoomorphs and the name Ibrahim (arrow), Tal-e-Katibeh.

Discussion

By reference to the Achaemenid structures and the Pahlavi and Islamic inscriptions, a preliminary



Figure 9. A panel showing geometric markings in Tal-e-Se Asiab.



Figure 10. A panel showing zoomorphs and circular motifs in Tal-e-Se Asiab.



Figure 11. Panel showing a geometric marking, north-east of Tal-e-Takht.

chronology can be suggested for the rock art of Dasht-e-Morghāb. All of the petroglyphs engraved on the walls and boulders of Achaemenid structures in Pasargadae can be attributed to the post-Achaemenid periods, since Pasargadae was a royal site during the Achaemenid Empire (c. 550–330 BCE) and the

petroglyphs could have only been made after this time, when the royal palaces and other constructions had been abandoned. With regard to the Arabic and Persian inscriptions and their contents, most of the petroglyphs on the boulders of Achaemenid constructions such as those on the blocks of Cyrus the Great's tomb are attributable to the recent Islamic era. However, the petroglyphs on the southern side of the Zendan-e-Soleiman are of a different style compared to those on the northern and western walls of the building.

The geometric markings made on a pillar in the Private Palace (Fig. 5) were also probably made during the Islamic era, as in the period of Salghurids of Fars (Atābakān-e-Fars) (1148–1286 CE) (Spuler 1987) some of these pillars were used to convert the tomb of Cyrus to a mosque. The pillars were still there until 1971 (Stronach 1987: 296–299). According to Stronach (1987: 297) some of these pillars were related to the Private Castle and the Audience Hall. Inscriptions and depictions with Islamic themes can also be seen on the other similar pillars located beside the Audience Hall. The petroglyphs of the other Achaemenid castles including the Audience Hall and the Gate House can only be attributed to the post-Achaemenid period.

According to the Pahlavi and Islamic inscriptions, some of the petroglyphs of Tal-e-Katibeh can be dated to the Sassanid-Islamic period and first Islamic centuries (Figs 6, 8). However, some of the petroglyphs in the region, including those in Tal-e-Se Asiab (Figs 9, 10) and Tal-e-Sangi, are not attributable to any specific period at this stage. A significant aspect concerning the petroglyphs of Dasht-e-Morghāb is the lack of hunting scenes, which is a prevalent theme in the rock art of Iran. In general, the petroglyphs of Dasht-e-Morghāb have their own thematic and stylistic characteristics, which is different from the rock art of the other parts of the country. Some of the geometrics in Pasargadae are similar to the geometric forms engraved on the Parthian (around 247 BCE–224 CE; Schippman 1987) bas relief of Gardanah Galūmushk located near a mountain pass of the same name, which is situated about six kilometres to the north-east of the city of Qir in southern Fars (Vanden Berghe 1986: 141–155; Potts 1999: 380–381) (Fig. 12) in the south of the Fars province. The depictions on the Gardanah Galūmushk bas relief were probably made after the Parthian period (247 BCE–24 CE). They could have been made during the Sassanid (224–651 CE) or Islamic times, as a number of Islamic names have also been engraved on the bas-relief (Fig. 12).

According to the style characteristics, the typology of motifs and the Sassanid-Islamic inscriptions, it seems that the petroglyphs of Dasht-e-Morghāb were made in different periods.

Based on the historic and ethnographic evidence (Sedaghatkish 2001), before conducting archaeological

excavations in the Pasargadae, the Zendan-e-Soleiman structure was attributed to the Prophet Solomon. The local inhabitants also believed that the tomb of Cyrus was the burial chamber of the Prophet Solomon's mother and it was considered to be a holy shrine, but only women were permitted to enter the tomb (ibid.: 88–89). The tomb was associated with several beliefs of the local inhabitants of the region. For example, accompanied by another person, people suffering from rabies were going to the tomb to circumambulate it to become healthy (Sedaghatkish 2001: 98, 110). In addition, nomads of the region were rubbing some yogurt or other dairy product on the walls of the tomb to keep their sheep safe from diseases (ibid.: 96–97). To cure disease and infertility, women were also pouring some soil of the area around the tomb into water to ingest it (ibid.: 107). Although this ethnographic evidence does not indicate any direct relation to the petroglyphs, it shows the importance of the site for the locals and the nomads of the area who probably made some of the rock art during recent centuries.

Conclusion

The Dasht-e-Morghāb plain shows great potential for rock art research and more fieldwork may result in identifying new sites. To shed more light on the rock art of the region, fieldwork should be conducted in different parts of the Fars province, such as the Qir-o-Karzin region, as well as the Beyram plain in the south of the Fars province, where recently a number of petroglyphs were identified (Sarkhosh et al. 2015). The petroglyphs of the Dasht-e-Morghāb differ from those in Beyram region stylistically, which indicates a possible stylistic variation in the rock art of the Fars province. Although a provisional chronology is suggested according to the archaeological evidence, direct dating methods are required to provide more reliable dating for the petroglyphs of the area, particularly for those engraved on the stone outcrops. The mapping of rock art sites all over the Fars province will be of great help to better understand rock art in the region and may provide information to study rock art in the context of its environment.

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Figure 12. Geometric markings and Islamic names on the Parthian bas relief of Gardanah Galūmushk in Qir, southern Fars (photograph from: www.gundeshapur.com).

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