



KEYWORDS: *Rock painting – Upper Palaeolithic – Sassanid-Islamic Period – Iran*

DISCOVERY OF CAVE ART IN THE PROVINCE OF FARS, SOUTHERN IRAN

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Abstract. Recent archaeological surveys carried out in southern Iran (Fars region) resulted in finding two rock painting sites in this area. These newly discovered rock art sites, one being a rockshelter and the other one a cave, are located in the proximity of the Qare Aqaj river in southern Fars province. A purported hunting scene and geometric figures in red pigments are the main phenomena pictured on the walls of these sites. It should be noted that in the area surrounding this cave and rockshelter occur paintings on Sassanid-Islamic potteries and lithics dating to the Upper Palaeolithic period. Obviously any connection between these surface artefacts and the pictograms is difficult to establish and theoretical debate is not the aim of the present report. Concerning the chronology of these pictograms, sampling of pigment in order to do AMS ¹⁴C dating would be more relevant but has not been attempted.

Introduction

Although the archaeological remains of caves and rockshelters are more widely recognised in the western part of Iran under the current studies, only a few such rock art sites have been discovered so far, which are all located in the Zagros Mountains. Over four decades after the first discovery of a decorated rockshelter situated in Lurestan in the central Zagros region (Izadpanah 1969a, 1969b, 1984; Goff 1970), only ten such sites have been found in Iran. These endangered paintings have all been found within caves and rockshelters and no examples have been discovered in open and unsheltered areas in Iran till now. These sites contain plain paintings in geometric, zoomorphic (animal-shaped) and human patterns, supposedly dating from the Palaeolithic to the Sassanid era (Adeli et al. 2001; Izadpanah 1969a, 1969b, 1984; McBurney 1969; Goff 1970; Bewley 1984; Otte et al. 2003; Rémacle et al. 2006, 2007; Asadi 2007; Biglari et al. 2007; Vahdati 2010; Vahdati Nasab et al. 2008). These designs are sometimes painted connected to each other (panels) and sometimes as individual figures (motifs).

Archaeological investigation of Firouz Abad – Sarvestan in the area of the Firouz Abad, Jahrom and Sarvestan counties located in Fars province carried out in the autumn and winter of 2008 led to the identification of numerous archaeological remains and sites. The pictograms of Tang-e Tadavan Rockshelter located in Khefr district in Jahrom County and the paintings of Tang-e Teyhooee Cave located in Seymakan district in the north-eastern part of the same county are some of

those discovered remains. The authors of this paper try to add a little to our knowledge about the rock art in this area by introducing these newly discovered sites.

Tang-e Tadavan Rockshelter

This rockshelter is located in the southern part of Sepidar mountain known as Tang-e Tadavan, situated in the south of Khefr district in Jahrom County (in the province of Fars, Iran) and north of Tadavan village along the Qare Aqaj River, at an elevation of 1273 metres ASL (Figs 1 and 2). It has a width of 15

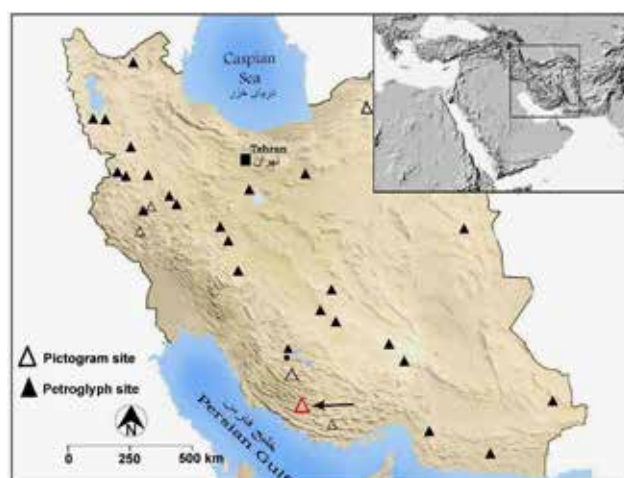


Figure 1. Map of Iran; the position of some studied areas containing pictograms and location of the Tang-e Teyhooee and Tang-e Tadavan sites are shown.



Figure 2. View of Tang-e Tadavan Rockshelter located on the edge of the Qare Aqaj river valley.

metres and a depth of 3.5 metres. So far, this area has been a seasonal habitat of various Arabian and Turkish nomad tribes in the autumn and winter. As it can be seen from their remains, nomads of this area have used this place for sheltering their livestock and people.

A large number of stone implements are distributed at the front area and adjacent to this rockshelter. Parts of the floor of the shelter have been coated with cement by nomads. The mentioned stone implements comprise mostly flakes and blades and date back to Palaeolithic periods according to their typology.

The paintings of Tang-e Tadavan Rockshelter are a panel of paintings containing 'animal', 'vegetable',



Figure 4. Entrance view of Tang-e Teyhooee Cave.



Figure 3. Pictograms in Tang-e Tadavan Rockshelter.

'human', wavy and other motifs. This includes an L-shaped arrangement of pictograms of a length of 1.5 metres and a width of 1 metre. There are some dotted figures located around and in the centre of this panel. Some wavy motifs are painted above this arrangement (which to us resembles a hunting scene) and some further marks can be observed around it. Some of the surrounding figures are fainter than the possible hunting scene and seem older (Fig. 3). The apparent subject matter of these paintings within Tang-e Tadavan Rockshelter is comparable with those in Eskaft-e Ahoo (the Eskaft of Gazelle) located in Bastak County, in Hormozgan (Asadi 2007).

These rock art designs in this shelter include the figures of four zoomorphs, including two apparent ibexes with long curved 'horns', a hyena-shaped creature standing in front of an anthropomorph which seems like a hunter's dog, and a hornless zoomorph with a large head bearing a hump on its back.

Painted on the sides of the arrangement are the shapes of two anthropomorphs, which we interpret as hunters with bow and arrow. We emphasise that we have no ethnographic information about the meaning



Figure 5. View from inside the cave.



Figure 6. Plan of Tang-e Teyhooee Cave and position of the pictograms within the cave.

of these images and simply use our subjective imagination in these pronouncements.

There are some dot-like marks painted at the top of the 'hunting scene'. These were probably made by fingertips dipped in paint and placed all around the supposed hunting scene. Some other marks can be seen surrounding the arrangement but seem less purposeful to us.

Tang-e Teyhooee Cave

Tang-e Teyhooee Cave is located in a gap of the Beylang (Bilang) mountain known as Tang-e Tooee in the village of Doze in Seymakan district of Jahrom County, at an elevation of 1527 metres ASL. The paintings of this cave are located on the cave walls in a rugged and high terrain of Tang-e Teyhooee Mountain. The entrance of the cave is divided into two parts, an upper and lower entrance (Figs 4 and 5). The cave's opening leads to a room with niches in the walls. This room is connected to the main part of the cave by another corridor. The main part of the cave is a space 5 metres wide, over 15 metres long with a height of over 2.5 metres. Some carved marks can be observed within this natural cave. This space continues to a narrow and dark corridor. There are two recesses at the bottom of the main part's wall (Fig. 6).

Some paintings can be seen in red on the walls of

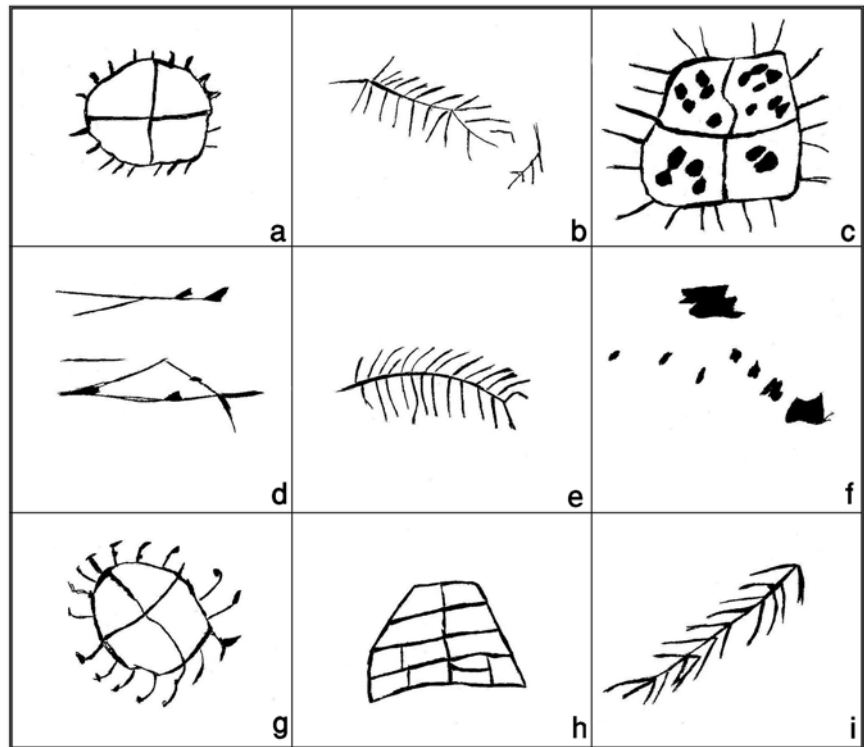


Figure 7. Drawings of pictograms found in Tang-e Teyhooee Cave.

the cave. These figures contain purported vegetable motifs, as well as geometric, dot-like and other motifs. All of them were painted in red, probably using ochre as the pigment (Figs 7 and 8).

Four 'vegetable' motifs resembling wheat are painted on the walls. The dimensions of these figures range from 16–26 centimetres in length and 6–9 centimetres in width.

Among the other motifs are four geometric figures, including a square and two irregular circles divided into four parts by internal lines and surrounded by 'rays'. In one case each part of the circular design is dotted by some marks, numbering 2-4-5-7 in the four quadrants. Besides these figures, there is a motif painted of a roughly oval shape with similar divisions and external 'attachments'. Moreover, some other figures can be seen at a corner of the cave's wall in the shape of undefined marks. Dot-like marks, which are similar to rain drops, have been caused by scattering the paint on the walls.

Although estimating the age of these paintings is not conceivable at this stage, this cave's use is considered to have occurred in historical times. A few potsherds of



Figure 8. Pictures of various figures painted in Tang-e Teyhooee Cave.

the Sassanid-Islamic period can be seen on the access track and in the entrance of this cave.

Conclusion

In view of the small number of identified rock painting sites in Iran, the examination of the paintings of Tang-e Teyhooee Cave and Tang-e Tadavan Rockshelter seems important. Although the possible existence of some hunting tools such as bow and arrow or some animals like a hunting dog have interested the investigators to help estimating the ages these figures, they provide certainly no conclusive evidence. While some believe that the paintings date back to a pre-Historic period, the recent studies tend to suggest that they belong mostly to Historic times. We conclude that the age of these paintings cannot be discussed confidently at this stage.

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