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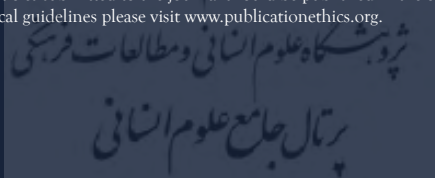
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Petroglyphs of Chah Abdullah of Harat, Yazd Province, Iran

Minoo Salimi¹, Mohammad Hossein Azizi Kharanaghi²

Abstract

Petroglyphs are a form of human artistic expression that can be found in various locations around the world, displaying similar features despite being created in different eras. This art form, commonly found in mountainous and rocky areas, is often associated with shepherds and hunters. The themes depicted in petroglyphs typically revolve around hunting scenes, weapons, goats, sheep, dogs, and other activities related to hunting and herding. However, religious motifs can also be observed in some cases. While a variety of petroglyphs can be found throughout Iran, sites in central regions such as Yazd province have received less attention from archaeologists due to the desert climate. The petroglyphs we will discuss in this article are located in the Chah Abdullah region of south Yazd province, in central Iran. In 2021, the author conducted an archaeological survey of Harat City, identifying various cultural and historical sites from different periods. While most of the sites identified were historical monuments, several historical sites, including the Chah Abdullah petroglyphs, were also discovered. Based on the type of motifs and the depth of carving, this site is associated with different historical periods. However, it is fascinating that the creation of rock motifs continues even in contemporary times.

Keywords: Archaeological Survey; Iran; Yazd; Harat; Petroglyphs; Common Human Art.

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Introduction

Archaeological surveys of the Khatam district, Yazd Province, were conducted in April and May 2021. The survey coincided with the peak of the COVID-19 spread in Iran, which posed several challenges. Khatam district is situated in the center of Iran, south of Yazd Province (Fig. 1). It spans an area of 8,201 square kilometers and has an elevation of 1,600 meters above sea level. Khatam district is located 240 kilometers south of the center of Yazd province. It is bordered by Mehriz district to the north, Abarkoh district to the northwest, Shahrabak district of Kerman province to the east, and Bavanat district of Fars province to the west. The district comprises two parts, Harat and Merovest, along with four villages: Chahak, Fatehabad, Isar, and Harabarjan (Statistical Yearbook of Yazd Province, 2013-29-32) (Fig. 2).

During the archaeological survey, a total of 220 cultural and historical sites were discovered. These sites include historical monuments (71), Qanats (81), archaeological sites (34), caves and rock shelters (8), and historical cemeteries (25) (Figs 2 and 3).

Chronologically, the oldest petroglyphs identified in the survey date back to the Middle Paleolithic period (around 40-50 thousand years ago). The evidence of this culture includes several diagnostic lithics, which have been identified in front of several rock shelters and open sites, potentially representing the oldest evidence of the Middle Paleolithic culture (Moustri) in central Iran. Non-prehistoric sites have not been recognized between the Middle Palaeolithic period

to the historical period (Partian/Sasanian), except for two prehistoric pottery shards on the historical/Islamic sites. The catchment area of the Azam River was a place where there was a possibility of discovering such prehistoric sites. Unfortunately, following the Islamic Revolution and the expansion of extensive industrial agriculture, particularly in the last decade, any possibility of prehistoric cultural evidence in this area has been destroyed. From the historical period (Parthian/Sasanian), the region was re-inhabited, and sites from this period were identified in different places, especially around the watershed of the Azam River. From the Safavid period onwards, particularly during the Qajar period, the region has been heavily populated (Azizi Kharanaghi, 2021).

In the western part of the surveyed area (the border between Fars and Yazd provinces), due to the climatic conditions (Wild pistachio/ almond forests, permanent rivers, and lots of springs), nomadic life has a long history in this area, and there are numerous historical and nomadic cemeteries as well. It was identified from the historical period (Khraft Khaneh) to the Safavid period.

Research Literature

Studies on Iran's petroglyphs have accelerated in recent years, and rock art has been reported in the following provinces and local cultural-historical areas.

Studies conducted in two parts of the Qom province, Kahak (36 km south of Qom) and Khalajestan (40 km west of Qom), have revealed more than 30 locations. The Kahak study included the

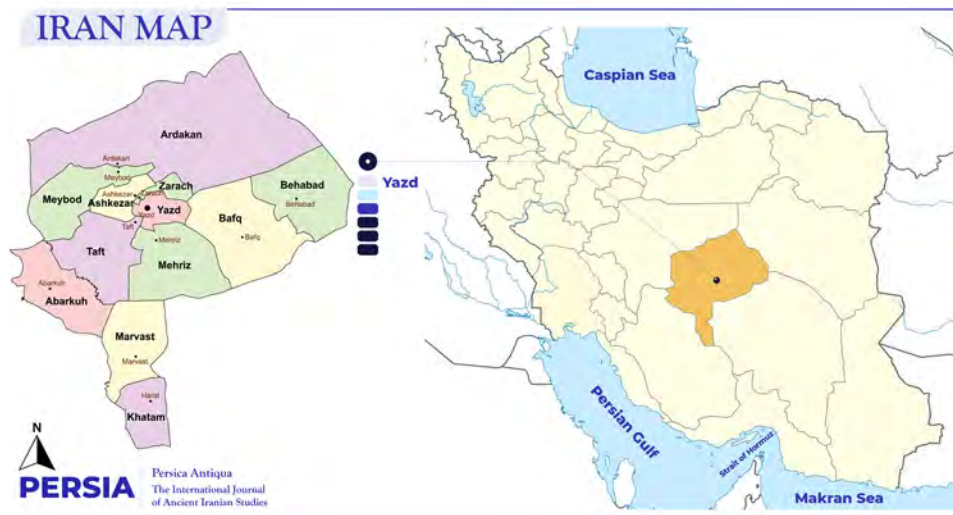


Fig. 1. Map of Iran and Yazd Province

(Adapted by *Persica Antiqua* from a Map from Wikimedia Commons under a Creative Commons Licence CC BY-SA 4.0)

plain and the valley of Baren Gouri. The Baren Gouri plain is covered with foothills nearly 17km west of Bidhand, a village 11km southwest of and part of Kahak. There are petroglyphs (16 sites over 1 km) at the end of the Baren Gouri plain, opposite a relatively high peak overlooking the plain, which always seems covered with snow. Within 1 km of Baren Gouri, a valley of the same name features 8 engraving sites on small stones within a 100m radius.

The Meimand village is situated in the center of a rural agglomeration of the same name, located 37 km northeast of Shahr Babak in Kerman Province. Rafsanjan is in the north, and Sirjan is to its southwest. The Meimand short-term survey, which included the village and surrounding areas (Korom, Markhazineh, Gargonder, La Ashkourkoyeh, and others), identified more than 30 engraving complexes (Karimi, 2007). Petroglyphs in the mountainous south of the

Boeen-Zahra district in the Qazvin province were identified and documented during a comprehensive archaeological survey (summer 2007) by Mollasalehi, Mohammad Saeidpour, Atousa Momeni, and Mohammad Bahramzadeh. Petroglyphs on the banks of seasonal dried rivers were made on flat, smooth, transparent surfaces. They occur in only three regions: Ghelich Kandi, Chalambar, and Yazli. The Ghelich Kandi engravings are located 65km from Boeen-Zahra with 40 ensembles; those of Calamari are 55km south of Boeen-Zahra with 45; the Yazli petroglyphs are 50km from Boeen-Zahra with 17, at a height of 5m from ground level (Mollasalehi *et al.*, 2007).

The survey of the Lower Farahn in Arak was undertaken between 1989 and 1996. Upper Susan Abad is a small village in the Northwest of Arak, 500m east of Cheraghchy, an isolated mountain. Mountains are about 100m high, and engravings are scattered from the mountain-

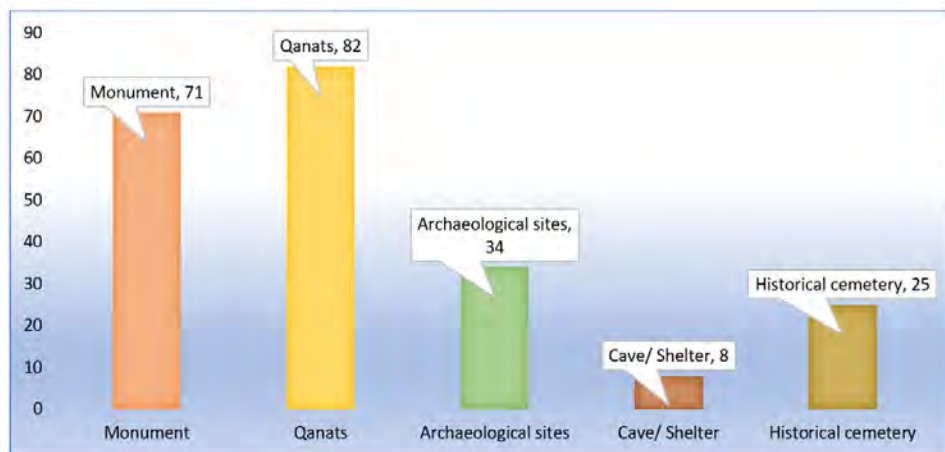


Fig. 2. The Variety of Sites Identified in the Archaeological Survey of Khatam District

side to the top (Pourbakhshandeh, 2007). The Cheshmeh Sohrab cave in Kermanshah was identified in 1975 by Massoud Golzari, and in 1993 it was surveyed and studied by Biglari and Jamshidi. Biglari and Heidari identified a second site in 1999 in their survey of Maiwaleh. In 2003, Shidrang identified new sites in its vicinity (Shidrang, 2005). This cave is about 33km northeast of Kermanshah as a bird flies, and nearly 1km from the Kermanshah village on the hillside of Mar Awaza. The cave is about 1460m above sea level and about 150m from the valley floor. It is 21m deep, about 12m wide, and 5m high. Its floor is sedimentary and about 65 m² (Biglari *et al.*, 2007). During surveys of Paleolithic sites in southern colluvial Maiwaleh, in northern Kermanshah, in 1999, several designs were identified not far from the Malaverd Gorge in Sorkheh Lizeh (Shidrang, 2007).

Petroglyphs in the Mahabad Kurdistan province were identified for the first time in 1967, 26km southeast of Mahabad, in the western Azerbaijan

province, and beside the road to Mahabad-Sardasht at an altitude of 1330m above sea level. The area is made up of foothills, and the rock art is at the top of a hill on schist rocks from the Tertiary (Pedram 1994). 30 motifs are engraved on two stones (Ghasrian and Naderi, 2007). The most important research about the paintings in Eshkaft-i Aahou was a thesis by Khaled Sadeghi (Sadeghi, 2002). Eshkaft-i Aahou is 1900m high in the Mountain Gav Bast, 4-5km north of Bastak. Bastak is in the northwest of the Hormozgan province, and the Gav Bast mountain range is the highest mountain in the Bastak region. This location has been recorded as No BS186 in the archaeological surveys of Bastak conducted in 2005. It is in a small valley with dense vegetation (Asadi, 2007). The Ouraman site was studied and published by Jamal Lahafian (Lahafian 2000:2001). In 2004, Marcel Otte, from the University of Lille, Belgium, Fereidoun Biglari, a Paleolithic researcher at the National Museum of Iran, and Iqbal Azizi, an archaeology ex-

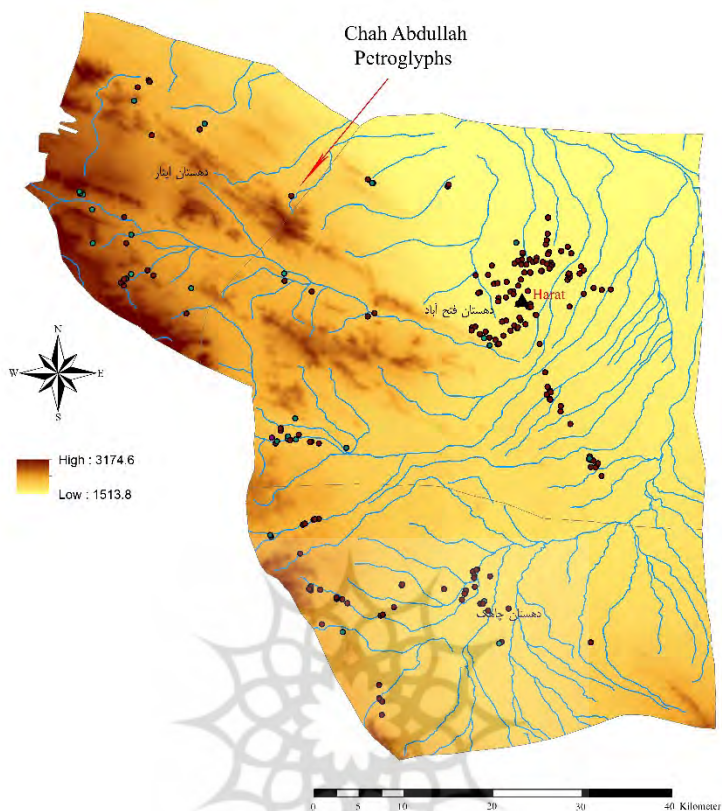


Fig. 3. Distribution Map of the Identified Sites in the Archaeological Survey of Khatam District

pert in the cultural heritage organization of Kurdistan, visited the sites in Bardemir and Martash near the village of Darki Ouramanat.

The region, characterized by high, Rocky Mountains with deep and narrow valleys, was studied again in 2005 by Taher Ghasimi. The Ouraman mountain peaks at 2700m, and the Sirvan River is only at 900m altitude. Eight groups of rock art were identified in four areas. Those in Ouraman-i Takht are 27.5km southeast of Marivan and 11km southwest of Sarv-Abad. The petroglyphs are in two locations, one inside the village and the other northeast. The Souren rock art is 4.7 km

northeast of Ouraman-i Takht, 8km southwest of Sarv Abad, and 25km southeast of Marivan. The Sirvan River is approximately 5 km from the art, which is situated 550 m above the river level. The petroglyphs are on the long, high (2630m) and rocky Kouhsalan Mountain. Darki is 20 km south of Marivan, and its art is located in three places: Bardemir, Ben Ghellay, and Martash on the Kouhsalan mount. The Bardemir rock shelter is 2km northeast, Ben Ghellay art is 2.3km northeast, and the Martash shelter is 2.5km northeast of Darki (Ghasimi, 2007).

The Shahriyeri archaeological site is situated in the Pirazmian village,



Fig. 4. Aerial Photo and Location of the Petroglyphs of Chah Abdullah

Lahroud District, Meshkin Shahr, Ardabil Province. The Qarasu River flows south-east, east, and northeast of this area. Carved rocks are east of the village and southeast of the Shahriyeri archaeological site, along the Qarasu River. Rocks, according to their positions, are divided into two groups. The first one is north-east of the village in the foothills, east of the Qarasu River, and the second is to the east and southeast of Shahriyeri, and to the left of the river. Surveys were conducted in the summer and autumn of 2003 (Hourshid, 2007).

In February and March 2004, the Shahroud and Bastam plains in Semnan Province were studied as part of an archaeological project on Iran's central plateau landscape. In the survey of a mineral area near the Reshm village, on the Kouh-i Dokhtar mountain 10km north-northwest of Reshm, a rock art site was found with 26 images (No. 48) (Roustaei, 2007).

Similar sites have been found in Hormozgan Province, Rudan City, and Badafshan Village. This village is located in a colluvial, hot, and humid region on the Kourang River, which originates in the Ali Abad Mountains to the southwest and passes west of Badafshan. The village's drinking water comes from a spring. Dates and citrus are grown. On the sides of Badafshan, there are rock designs on four large, isolated stones, featuring poorly visible goats, humans fighting, and geometric patterns. The technique used was pecking and, in one example, scraping. Designs are abstract, and the horns of male goats are exaggerated (Hassani, 1999).

One of the most interesting petroglyphs in Iran, which has been identified, is located in Pasargad, a UNESCO World Heritage site in Fars Province. On the remains of the palaces from the Achaemenid period, various petroglyphs have been created, which demonstrate that



Fig. 5. The Southern View of the Site of Chah Abdullah

the long cultural tradition of creating petroglyphs extends beyond the prehistoric period. In Pasargad, this cultural

tradition has remained popular from the Achaemenid period to the modern era. Pasargad was destroyed by Alexander the



Fig. 6. The Human Motifs of Chah Abdullah

Great. This area is a fertile plain and was inhabited by pastoral and nomadic people (Azizi Kharanaghi and Salimi, 2023).

Chah Abdullah Petroglyph

The Chah Abdullah petroglyphs are situated 24 km northwest of Harat city in the Khatam district of Yazd province, the center of Iran. Due to its remote location, accessing the site is challenging. The petroglyphs were engraved on black

rocks (weathered sediment) covering an area of approximately 153 square meters (9x17 meters) (Figs 4- 5). The carved motifs include depictions of dogs, goats, sheep, hunters, semi-mythical motifs, horsemen, and more. These motifs appear to have been deeply carved into the stone using metal tools. Most of the motifs in this collection can be considered as historical depictions, names of individuals, and political and social slogans.



Fig. 7. Animal Motifs of Chah Abdullah

These carvings were made in the last few decades, and even as recently as last year, by shepherds or local people from the region who visited the site to view other motifs. Except for a few motifs that appear to be older, it is challenging to es-

tablish a specific chronology for the collection due to factors such as weathering, erosion, and the use of a deep engraving technique. The creation of new motifs has continued until the contemporary period.



Fig. 8. The Inscriptions of the Chah Abdullah

Motifs Classification

Human motifs: This group predominantly features depictions of standing humans with open hands, and in some cases, visible fingers. Some individuals are portrayed holding guns, while others are shown engaged in activities such as hunting, riding, or fighting animals. Additionally, human handprints can be observed within this collection (Fig. 6).

Animal motifs: The Chah Abdullah petroglyph collection showcases a diverse range of animal carvings. Given the area's status as a hunting ground, various depictions of wild sheep, goats, dogs, foxes, leopards, camels,

and horses are present. Nearly all of these motifs are related to hunting (Fig. 7).

Gun patterns: As previously mentioned, some motifs within this collection were engraved during contemporary times. The presence of guns in the hands of hunters serves as an indicator for dating these particular carvings, which can be observed in several instances (Fig. 6).

Inscriptions: Among the petroglyphs, there are inscriptions consisting of names of individuals, poetry, as well as political and religious slogans. These inscriptions are relatively recent, dating back to the last decade (Fig. 8).



Fig. 9. The Drawing of Human and Animal Motifs of the Chah Abdullah

Conclusion

Petroglyphs, an ancient artistic tradition,

have been observed worldwide throughout different periods, showcasing various

themes such as nature, humans, hunting, riding, mythical motifs, and religious and national symbols. In Iran, the Chah Abdullah petroglyph collection stands out as one of the most recent discoveries in central Iran, specifically in the Harat region of the Khatam district in Yazd Province. These petroglyphs represent a continuation of the motif creation tra-

dition. They are found in a mountainous area inhabited by diverse species of wild animals that have fascinated hunters and herders since ancient times. The presence of stones with a black crust in the region has facilitated the creation of these motifs. Overall, the tradition of creating petroglyphs remains vibrant in Iran.

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