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NEW PETROGLYPHS IN ZIAD ABAD AND HASSAN ROBAT PLAINS (ISFAHAN PROVINCE, IRAN)

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ABSTRACT

An evaluation of the engraved petroglyphs of Meymeh Plain in the Central of Iran, from field work in 2014 is presented. More petroglyphs were detected in South and South-West of Meymeh near the villages of Hassan Robāt and Ziād Abād on the old road Meymeh- Golpāyegān around the seasonal rivers locally called Chāvorchān and Pāgodār that are dewatered today. The petroglyphs can be placed in three groups: animal, human, and inscriptions related to the Islamic period which is introduced here. The research was conducted using the archaeological and field methods. Two inscriptions of Islamic period and the painting of the ibex on them can be helpful in dating the petroglyphs as engraving that has the highest frequency among the paintings. Comparison of the stylistic of the ibex motif with the rock motifs in the other regions in the Near East and its relationship with prehistoric settlements and its usage to the subsistence economy of the Neolithic, especially chalcolithic period implies that the ibex motif in the rock art has begun at least from the Chalcolithic period. Another aspect of the mixture motifs used on the surface of the rocks in the Meymeh plain is their symbolic style. To some extent, such a feature can be seen in their abstract images. The Central plateau of Iran in the Islamic middle centuries was a part of the caravan's routes. Images of animals such as camels and a rural with a suffix "Robat" (Cāravānsarā) with Islamic inscription in this area could be a reason for depicting Cāravān (traveler) pathway in the past (Fifth Century AH/11th c AD).

KEYWORDS: Meymeh Plain, Animal Petroglyph, Ibex Motif, Human Petroglyph, Islamic inscription

1. INTRODUCTION

The petroglyphs (rock art) always have been used since prehistory by mankind and to express feelings and opinions. This art is of great importance to identify the culture of the past. Rock art includes markings on the ground by people who are wandering between politically neutral areas and open spaces (Burno and Lourandos 1998, 193-194). This art can be considered a form of nonverbal and visual communication (Fossatti 1990, 24). Therefore, it is very important from this point of view to reconstructing past cultures. Rock art in the modern sense is the painting with the main cave motifs such as small and sometimes miniature images; Animals, shapes, symbols, plants, and humans as a single image or in hunting scenes and events, battle, dance and social ceremonies and rituals and the technique employed for these Petroglyphs are carved image (Rezaie and Joudi, 2010). Rafifar speaks of rock art as a world art not only with the most ancientness among other well-known arts; rather, it has dedicated to its own a special place as well. In his view, the art has been able to show the first well-known effects of the artistic and aesthetic sensibilities of distant ancestors of human beings in many parts of the world with meaningful words (Rafifar 2004, 46). This study attempts to explore the petroglyphs of Meymeh and make a comparison to other rock arts in Iran.

The remote past of the history of rock art in Iran goes back to 48 years ago when Izadpanah discovered several petroglyphs in Dosheh and Mirmalas in Kouhdasht in Lorestan (Izadpanah, 1969). But six years before it, Italian geologists found a number of Petroglyphs in the area Gazoo while exploring the minerals in Baluchistan (Dessau 1960). Some of the rock arts of ancient Iran were studied in 2007 (Vahdati 2011, 10). In recent years, petroglyphs of Iran has been studied several times in Esfahan province (Mohammadifar and Hemati Azandaryani, 2015; Hemati Azandaryani *et al.*, 2015). including flooding Golpayegan (Naserifard 2007, 35), fish pond Mobarakeh (Karimi Mobarakabadi, 2013) and mountain Donbeh (Karimi, 2014).

2. GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF MEYMEH'S ROCK ART

The city of Meymeh is located about 100 kilometers north of Esfahan and it is a neighbor to cities such as Kāshān, Natanz, Ardestān, Golpayegān, and Delijān. Meymeh Plain is located in the central part of Iran plateau and in the north of province Esfahan and in longitude 50 degrees and 48 ' to 51 degrees and 12' east, and in latitude 33 degrees and 27' to 33 degrees and 14' North. The total area of the Plain is 2098 km². Meymeh is located at an altitude of 1970

meters above the sea level with a cool climate in winter and warm in summer. Meymeh vegetation consists mainly of small wild plants in its deserts. There are many springs in the area that provided the conditions of nomadic life for the people of the area along the wild bushes and canals filled with water. While Meymeh Plain has had an important role for communication between different parts of Iran from the distant past to the present day due to its convenient location in the center of the plateau of Iran. Meymeh's Petroglyphs from two villages, Ziad Abad and Hassan Robat are mostly along the old road from Meymeh to Golpayegan and along the dried up river of Meymeh district. Ziād Abād village is located at a distance of 4 km Southwest of Meymeh and Hassan Robāt village at a distance of 22 km west of Meymeh in the western part of Karkas mountains.

3. MEYMEH'S PETROGLYPHS AND ITS SPECIFICATIONS

Meymeh petroglyphs have been created in the hills on the western slopes of Karkas Mountains in Ziad Abad and Hassan Robat villages. All motifs have been created on a relatively vertical rock walls by knocking and wearing. Meymeh's Petroglyphs have been carved on the generally locally known (Schist) limestone rocks and painting is easy on them. Petroglyphs of the region have not much height from the surrounding lands and more than 85 percent of paintings are at an altitude of between 0.5 m to 1.5 m and few of them are at an altitude of over 1.5 meters from the ground.

Meymeh's Petroglyphs based on the motifs are generally created by wearing and knocking and can be classified into three groups in terms of contents and topics: 1- animal engraved Scenes. 2- Human Motifs (mainly in hunting). 3- Inscriptions of the Islamic period.

Some of these motifs have been damaged so that the blueprint cannot be identified; however, most scenes are describable. In recent years the local population, especially shepherds have created carvings with traditional rock arts different from old ones in terms of features. The tools used to create motifs are white flints with black veins that are found naturally in the area. This was a common way in the creation of rock arts in prehistory world (Terzi 1992, 10).

The kind of engraving made is most interesting, i.e. about 88% of used scenes are a first or last name or holy names like God, Mohammad or Ali sometimes the date and time of engravings are craved along them. Similar examples of holy names can be seen in the Negev desert (Avner *et al.* 2016) in the southwest of the fertile crescent (Levant).

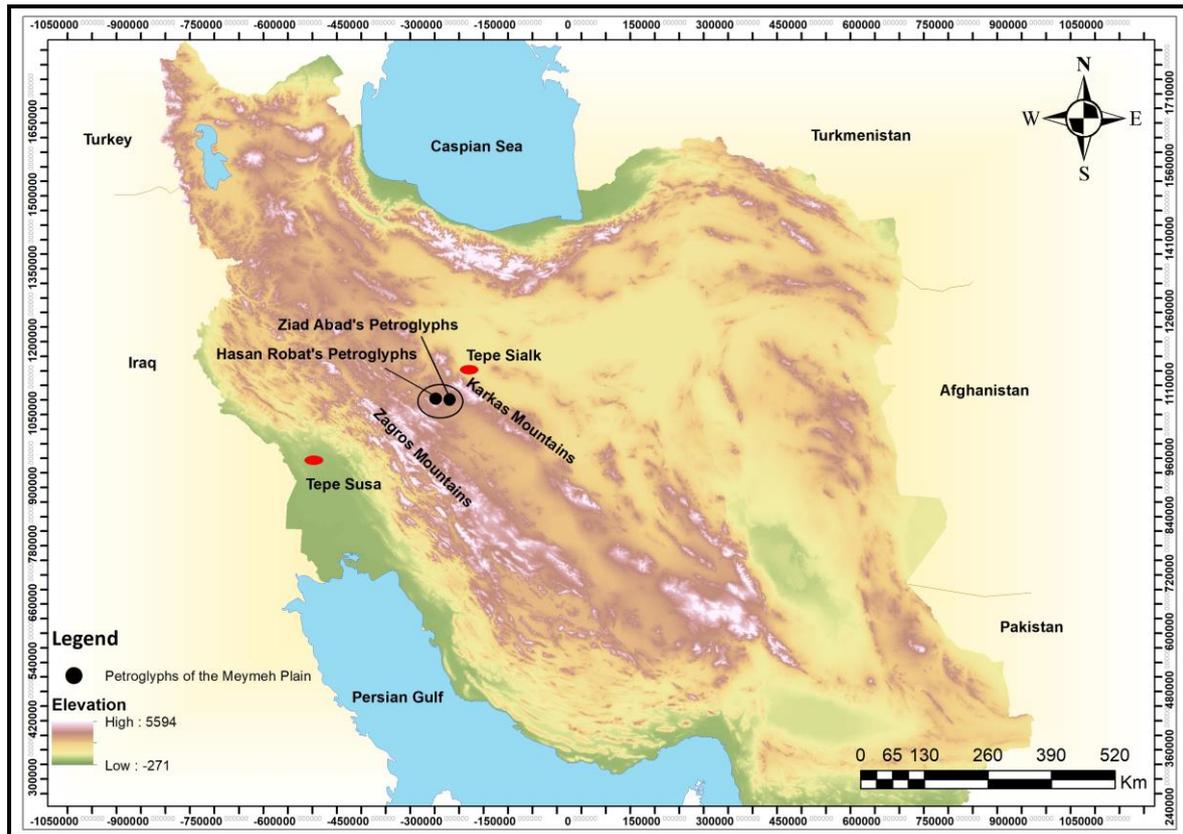


Figure 1. The Position of Petroglyphs of the Meymeh Plain in Iran Map (Drawn By Bahraminia)



Figure 2. The Position of Petroglyphs on the Limestone known as KAL, Near Hasan Robāt village (Photo: By A. Aarab)

Some of locals have pointed to an interesting topic: before the making of motifs, they have seen the Ibex with long horns that has been carved on rocks in the past. They again engraved these designs due to beauty of Ibex motifs.

4.1 ANIMAL CARVED MOTIFS

Most carved motifs are for various animals. Animal carved images among the petroglyphs of Meymeh include 5 parts: caprine, camels, turtles, equine and carnivores (canine). As expected, most scenes are related to ibex (Figs. 3 and 4) and the engraving of wild ibexes forms more rock carved arts in Iran (over 90%) including carved paintings and colorful paintings (Naserifard, 2007). All over the northern hemisphere – in Asia and in North America – above the places where goats have their habitat we find petroglyphs of the male ibex (Berggren, 2004). On the slopes of the Karkas Mountains, In addition to Meymeh's rock arts, is located the Tepe Sialk near Kashan. A permanent settlement with a combinatorial subsistence economy based on the cultivation of domesticated animals and plants (Kourampas *et al.* 2013), related to the Neolithic and Chalcolithic period. In addition to discovering the bone of the domesticated goat, on some of its chalcolithic potteries, goat image with long horns in the form of the Lunar crescent has been painted (Ghirshman 1938; Dibon-Smith, 2015). Today, Karkas Mountains is a suitable place to breed goat and sheep.

All carved ibexes are drawn in profile and designs are in a styled form. Ibexes engraved in Meymeh Plain can be divided into two categories: 1) Ibexes whose bodies are engraved with a simple line, 2) Ibexes whose bodies are engraved as a rectangular shape with more similarities to present ibexes. Ibex is shown in profile mode and their horns are in a semi-circular curve in both species. Horn is much larger than the body and the body length of the animal in a few cases. According to an inscription from the Islamic period (see below, Fig 12-13) with the second ibex species introduced (rectangular body); It can be said that the ibexes with a rectangular body shape may have engraved in the Islamic period and the first species with less resemblance to modern ibexes drawn with a thin line are older than the latter (without ibexes imitated from ancient by some present shepherds). The horn carved design (especially in the first species of ibexes) is more attended relative to other body parts. Mountain goat image reflects the wonderful importance of this animal as well as its important position in the beliefs and mythology of past people. Of course, this animal might be considered the oldest known symbols in human history, according to the documents available (Rafifar, 2002). In the southwest of Iran in the

Acropole cemetery in Susa, ibex or mountain goat motif has been drawn on the clay Beaker dated to ca. 4 millennium BC is one of the most common symbolic motifs in the prehistoric period. The goat, *Capra hircus*, is native to the Zagros Mountains (Matthews *et al.*, 2013) a short distance from Susa and is the wild ancestor of the domestic goat. although the meaning of the symbols on this beaker is not clear, in Sumerian iconography the goat represented fresh water as well as vital procreative forces (Harper *et al.*, 1992, 32; Le Breton, 1957). also in Iranian myths and legends, wild ibex is a symbol of culture- the part of daily life and subsistence economy- and even water (Rafifar, 2004, 111-122) as an important symbolic element for reproduction and increase of creatures.



Figure 3. Carved scene of "ibex" on the limestone rock, Meymeh Plain.



Figure 4. Carved scenes of horned Ibexes with a rectangular body, in large and small sizes.

Similar samples of animal petroglyphs in Meymeh can be compared with petroglyphs of Khānsār,

flooding Golpayegān (Naserifard 2007, 35-39). Howz Mahi of Mobārakeh (Karimi Mobarakabadi, 2013) and Qom (Mohammadi Ghasrian 2007) at the central of Iran, Dowzdaghi in the Northwest of Iran (Kazempur et al. 2011), Hamadan in the West of Iran (Mohammadifar and Hemati Azandaryani 2014; Mohammadifar and Hemati Azandaryani 2015) and even Sarāvān in Southeast of Iran (Sarhaddi 2013). But except for ibexes, other caprine images are also visible in the petroglyphs. Among which the deer can be mentioned as one of the most interesting carved motifs in the Ziād Abād (Fig. 9). The deer is engraved as if being hunted by a man with a bow in hand. The shape of snout and horns of the deer have engraved very artistically and it shows that the artist had recognition of deer completely and Meymeh was a habitat for the animal. However, this engraving is very much damaged and worn. This deer is comparable to similar sample in the area Komijān in Markazi province (Naserifard 2007, 59) as well as Doost Ali in Hamadan (Hemati Azandaryani et al. 2014). There is another caprine engraving similar to ram among the Petroglyphs in two scenes (Fig 6). A similar example can be seen in the engraving of Azandaryan in the Hamadan province (Mohammadifar and Hemati Azandaryani 2014, 20).



Figure 5. Single hump camel with the Eroded surface

Camel carved image can be mentioned alongside the images. Camel engraving is seen between the petroglyphs of Meymeh in 3 scenes. Camel humps have been attended specifically and little fatter than normal (Fig 5). While the camel carved scenes can be a sign of being Pathways of Cāravāns (Travelers) Meymeh Plain, due to its geographical condition in the center of the plateau of Iran. For the camel's images, generally, are located on the old road from Meymeh to Golpayegān and near the Hassan Robāt.

The name of the village with suffix Robāt (Cāravānsarā) can also be another reason for the existence of caravans in the old road while the engraving of the camel is seen less in Iran. Among the Petroglyphs, there is an animal from the family feline (Leopard) or canine. Since details of the animal's body (no clear) is not indicative of leopards or other animals. Hands and feet of the animal are shown separately identified but without the animal's claws and details of the head. The tail is proportional to body length, but its body does not fit very well. The animal was seen in the scene attacking carnivores like ibexes and ram (Fig. 7).



Figure 6. Ibex with long horns and a bird with open wings

There is apparently some sort of move in this scene. In this way, the artist wanted to show from left to right the attack of the animal to caprine in a narrative scene, Canine expresses in the rock art of Meymeh are comparable to Azandaryān in Hamadan (Mohammadifar and Hemati Azandaryani 2014, 15-21).

The carved image of the horse is of other animal Petroglyphs in this series. Totally 2 carved scenes of the horse are displayed symmetrically. The images are shown as camels with more proportionate and close to reality. The main feature of both designs is the proportionality of body parts relative to the ibexes. The horses have more details. The Saddle of horses here is tried to be portrayed; as well as the ears are clearly shown. The horses are of little fatter and shorter than normal. This is the only case where a horse was portrayed without a rider on the petroglyphs. The engraving of such a horse is found less on the petroglyphs of Iran. The turtle image found on the petroglyphs only once (Figs 12-13). Here it seems clear that this turtle shows the left area of the inscription and the ibex engraving is carved on the right side with an explanation.



Figure 7. A kind of Canine engraving attacking the ibex.



Figure 8. The Image of an animal as symmetrical like a horse.

4.2 HUMAN CARVED MOTIFS

Human carved images are portrayed in different ways and often with animals and hunting them. Human carved images in Meymeh can be divided into two categories (a the on-foot man or b on horseback). In some scenes, humans have weapons and in other scenes without weapons. All human images of petroglyphs are in abstract form and some of them have a bow in hand while they pointed their weapons towards an animal. A roughly similar example can be observed in the rock art of Har Karkom plateau (Anati 1978). The man's weapons include bows and wand. This human while hunting with a bow in one of the artistic images (Fig. 10). It seems that a kind of canine also accompanies human in the hunting. In this scene, the ibex bottom is not visible due to the loss of a cliff. Comparable samples of such an image can be viewed in Azandaryan of Hamadan (Mohammadifar and Hemati Azandaryani 2014, 21) and Timereh-e Khomein (Farhadi, 1997, 241).



Figure 9. Hunting scene of an animal like a deer by a Human with a bow in hand.

It should be noted that there are still traditions of hunting in Meymeh region, given that this region is one of the most important habitats for wild animals. Ibexes are generally located next to the man image. More mounted human carved paintings are along the old road Meymeh- Golpāyegān and on-foot human carved paintings along the seasonal dewatered river Chāvorchān of Ziad Abad in Meymeh plain. The engraving more than a man is seen in some images (Fig 9) which the image has been damaged a lot as well. Human engraving on horseback with a sword-like weapon is visible in Fig.11 that the man has raised his weapon toward an ibex with the right hand. This scene is also damaged abundantly. A comparable example of this motif can be seen in Azandaryan of Hamadan (Hemati Azandaryani *et al.* 2015, 205) and Asbaghteh of Yazd (Ayatizadeh 2014, 86).



Figure 10. The scene of a huntsman is hunting ibex with a bow, it seems that man has gazehound.



Figure 11. The abstract scene of a man that is hunting an ibex.

While similar examples of such humans engravings are found in different parts of Iran including Kerman (Farhadi 1999, 307-311), Kurdistān (Lahafian 2013, 335) and Arnān in Yazd (Naserifard 2007, 39).

4.3 ISLAMIC INSCRIPTIONS

Two inscriptions in Arabic found in the Meymeh have ancientness. One of the inscriptions has a script dated to 481 AH (Anno Hegirae)/ 1088 AD which apparently are associated with the concept of forgiveness. It is located along the old road Meymeh to Golpayegan possibly as a monument stone for a deceased in this road.



Figure 12. An inscription of Islamic era with the concept of forgiveness dated 481 AH/1088 AD



Figure 13. An inscription of Islamic era with the image of an ibex and a turtle on top of it dated 481 AH/1088 AD

Image of ibex and turtle can be seen in the upper part of it that was discussed previously. Another inscription dated to 497 AH/ 1104 AD with the name of a person "Abouali Abolghāsem" in it. Given that this inscription is also along the old road Meymeh to Golpayegan such a memorial stone may be built after the death of this person in this way for him. Construction technique of the two inscriptions is a little different from other petroglyphs. The carved parts of the inscriptions have been created in more depth and with engraving method and 2 inscriptions have a 16-year-old interval with each other, and recognizing the petroglyphs in direct sunlight is difficult due to engraving method of them. The existence of date on both inscriptions can be given is of great importance especially for rock art on which dating is hard.



Figure 14. An inscription of Islamic era in the Hassan Robot of Meymeh, dated 497 AH/1104 AD



Figure 15. An inscription of Islamic era in the Hassan Robot of Meymeh, dated 497 AH/1104 AD apparently appealing a mercy to a man called Abouali Abolghāsem.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Meymeh's petroglyphs in Isfahan are engraved on the rocks locally called KAL generally related to Ziad Abad and Hassan Robot in the south of Meymeh Plain of Iran. These paintings have been created or along the old road Meymeh to Golpayegan, or along the today's dewatered river. In general, the approximate dating the rock art is more than anything based on the analysis of archaeological landscape. Meymeh's petroglyphs are located in Highland plain in the north of the province Esfahan leading to Delijan from the north and to the Moorcheh khort plain from the south. Although this area has not yet been investigated in terms of archaeological and anthropological studies, future research will prove any ancient settlements in the plain. The importance of Rock Art in the central plateau of Iran is that most of the carved scenes are located near prehistoric and historical sites, the places where have a mixture subsistence economy based on the livestock and agriculture. The most important of these sites is Tepe Sialk near Kashan. According to the image of the goat in the Rock Art mentioned above, it can be said that most of the motifs are probably engraved in the rocks during the prehistoric times, especially in Chalcolithic period. It is necessary to note that the basis of our dating is the style and shape of the motifs used on the surface of the rocks in Meymeh plain and compare them with Rock Arts elsewhere, while there is no yet absolute chronology of rock art yet luminescence is promising (Liritzis *et al* 2017).

The population centers in the area (in the size of the village) can be seen in most parts of the plain whose urban planning rationale is rather the fine water resources related to the mountain. Based on the available evidence, Meymeh plain rock art is located in a landscape which is basically used by

shepherds for grazing cattle. Using the bow to hunt animals and presence of animals like the extinct rams in images above is likely evidence of the old age of the petroglyphs. Though there are no stable reasons for it.

Dibon-Smith (2015) suggests three general stage to the evolution of the ibex as an iconographic symbol in the ancient Near East: stage one, the beginnings in Samarra and surrounding communities; stage two, the artistic dominance of the Ibex; stage three, the demise of the Ibex as a cultural symbol. Most of the rock arts in the Meymeh plain can be categorized in the third stage introduced by Dibon-Smith. According to scenes on the Pottery and rock, can be said that in Near East use of symbolic motifs at least was begun from the Chalcolithic period, is contemporary with the evolution of painted ware production technology and drawing mixture animal and human scenes on the wares and finally the change in the social structure in the fourth millennium BC (Ayatollahi 2003).

In the Har Karkom, the motif of ibex with crescent-shaped horns is considered a symbol of the god Sin. These cult scenes dated to the Bronze Age (Anati 2013, 34). While in Iran there is no connection between the role of ibex and the gods. the creation of such symbolic motifs can be related to the change in social structure and a reflection of a daily life (Livelihood) from 4,000 to 3,000 BC. Although at the 4 millennium BC (Charvát 2013, 97; Harper *et al* 1992, 22) and the Bronze Age (Sołtysiak and Nashli 2010), we see the emergence of monumental building and temples in many of the sites of these periods in the Iranian Plateau.

Moreover, along with these images, camel engraving indicates being caravan-transit of Meymeh Plain because of its unique location in the central plateau of Iran. Besides the images, two inscriptions related to the Islamic period in the area with a history of the fifth century AH/11th c AD implies use of the stones "KAL" to insert thoughts and events happening in the area. Meanwhile, given the demographic considerations in place, it became clear that this tradition still prevailed among the people and it even had been inspired from some of the older ibex's motifs for engraving through enjoying the KAL rocks in all cases. An interesting volume on the Arabian Rock Art has been recently compiled where similarities and methods of dating are presented for a useful comparison with the Iranian petroglyphs (Bednarik 2017; MAA 2017).

Perhaps the reason for using this type of stone by people of this region in the past to the present is easily creating the engraving on them. A stone tool is the main apparatus that is used to create the petroglyphs. The Repetition in making these styles of rock

art in other areas is a point that denies the belonging of the engravings to present local shepherds. However, as noted above, a number of petroglyphs are carved on the rocks by the people and local herders. But it seems that most of these engravings have been

created in the past, as evidenced from two inscriptions of the 5th century AH 11th c AD assigning a pre-Islamic age of these motifs is impossible due to the lack of evidence.

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