

RESEARCH PAPER

Pictograph and Petroglyphs of Saravan (Sistan - Baluchistan, Iran)

Fereshteh Sarhaddi*

Rock art is one of the richest cultural resources in the world which depicts the earliest expression of human beliefs and ideas. It is a form of visual non-verbal communication. Rock art is broadly divided into two categories: (a) Pictograph or the pigmented art (b) Petroglyph or extractive art. In Baluchistan both Pictograph and Petroglyph have been identified in great numbers but rock art studies in Baluchistan have been received little attention. The main purpose of this paper is to introduce rock art of Saravan as a rich cultural heritage which needs systematic and scientific study and protection. Protection of rock art sites is itself an important task and proper conservation through technical discipline is most essential. Rock arts are fragile resources of cultural property and it must be conserved, studied and protect and familiarize the general public with the importance of them to be saved and enjoyed for a long time.

Introduction

Sistan-Baluchistan province is located in South-East of Iran, and it holds more than 11% of total area of the country and is the largest province in Iran. Its area is 187502 square kilometers in which 179385 square kilometers is belonged to Baluchistan, it is bordered by South Khorasan from the North, from the West by Kerman and Hormozgan, from the South by Oman Sea and from the East by Afghanistan and Pakistan (Noori, 2010: 6). Saravan city is in the far Eastern part of Sistan-Baluchistan province, it is about 23880 square kilometers (leaflet of Saravan, 2000: 1) with a rich historical background (**fig. 1**). Iranian Baluchistan is a large extensive area and its ecological diversity is noticeable. It has been homeland of different generation of rich cultures since the remote past.

The first significant archaeological research in the region was done by Sir Aurel Stein during early 1930s. His efforts focused on the Bampur valley where he recorded numerous sites and conducted a few excavations. Stein research demonstrated that Baluchistan has been inhabited by people who had cultural affiliation with those in western Iran. (Stein, 1937: 105)

In 1966 Beatrice de Cardi conducted limited excavations at Bampur to clarify the region's prehistoric sequences. These excavations revealed sequence which remains the basic reference for the prehistory of Iranian Baluchistan (De Cardi, 1966). According to her in third millennium B.C there was cultural relation between the region with India, Afghanistan and Persian Gulf region (De Cardi, 1970: 237).

Gary. W. Hume (1976) surveyed the Sarhad region in 1966–1967 looking especially for Paleolithic sites and discovered later prehistoric sites. The pottery from these sites

was studied by Judith. T. Maruchek (1979) who later conducted a systematic archaeological investigation of that region. Baluchistan may have been inhabited first during Pleistocene as proposed by Hume based on the Paleolithic sites found in Ladiz valley and discovery of Ladizian tools (Hume, 1976). The only other archaeological research completed to date was Maurizio Tosi's study of Damin grave goods in 1970 (Tosi, 1970). After these archaeological research in the region many sites were discovered in Baluchistan but despite the wealth of the sites there has been very little and limited work done in some areas, like Konarak, Gosht, Espidez, Nikshahr and Qasr-e-Qand. In 2002 and 2006 Mortazavi conducted systematic surveys on Damin and Bampur river and discovered many Bronze Age sites which revealed that the two areas in Bampur valley functioned as intermediaries between important sites in the Indus valley, Oman, Shahr-i-sokhte and Iranian Plateau (Mortazavi, 2006, 2010).

Baluchistan is a region whose archaeological potential should be recognized. It seeks care, attention and systematic study. In this paper it is intended to introduce rock art of Saravan which is one of the most precious relics in Baluchistan.

Rock art

Rock art occurs throughout the world. The human inclination to leave drawings painted and scratched on enduring surfaces extends far back in to prehistory (Gerald, 1983: 84). Rock art is one of the richest cultural resources in the world which depicts the earliest expressions of human beliefs and ideas (Sonawane, 1999: 15). Rock art is a form of visual non-verbal communication (Fossati, 1990: 24). It is broadly divided into two categories: (a) pictograph or the pigmented art (b) petrography or extractive art (Sadasiba, 2001: 1). In Baluchistan both pictograph and petroglyphs have been identified in great numbers. In this

* Dept. of Archaeology, Deccan College, India
fereshteh_sarhaddi@yahoo.com

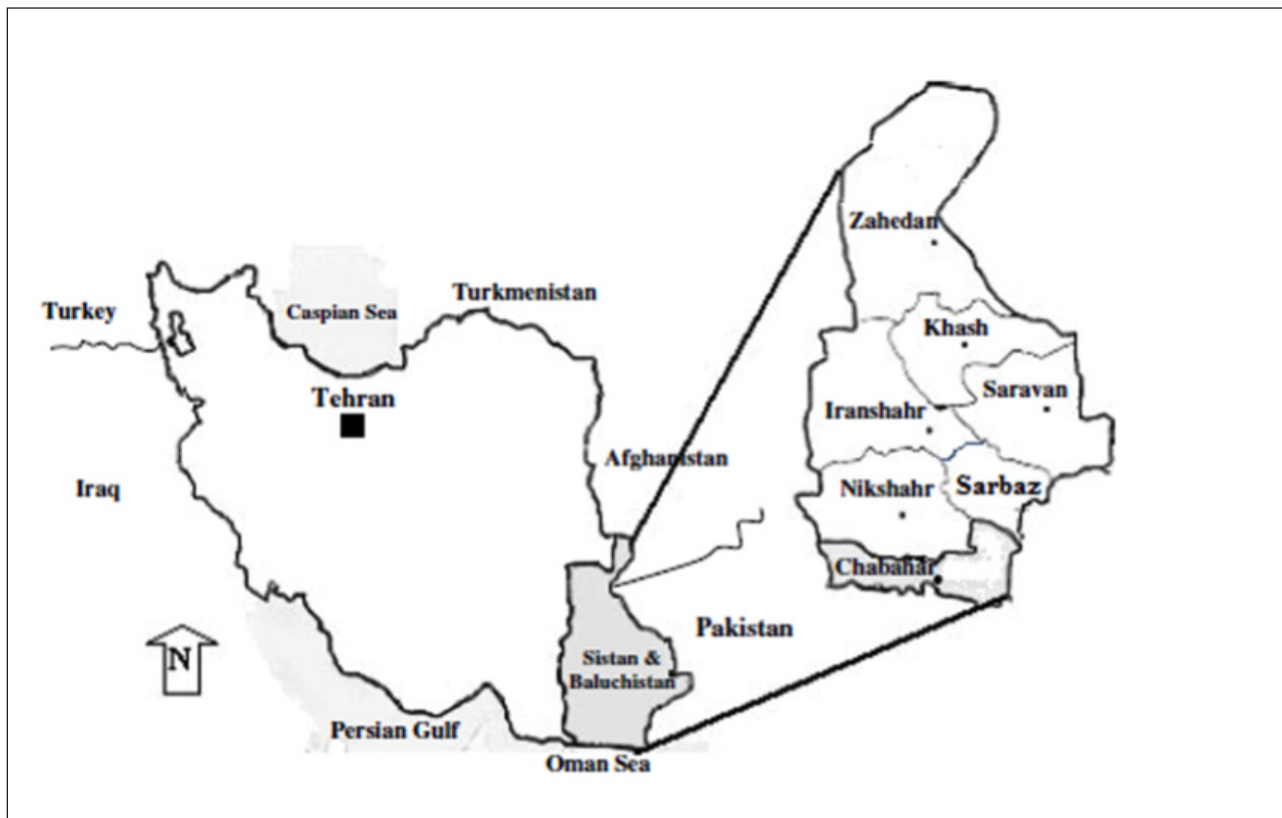


Figure 1

paper the painting and engravings occurrences in the following different area are considered:

1. Pictograph of Pir-e-Gooran
2. Petroglyphs in Negaran valley
3. Petroglyphs in Kandig valley
4. Petroglyphs in Shir o Palangan valley
5. Petroglyphs in Dronezg valley
6. Petroglyphs in Darsavat valley

Pir-e-Gooran (Nahook)

Nahook village is located to 35 km North-East of Saravan. The main river is Nahook, streaming from Moorpish Mountain and flowing to Hamoon e Mashkid in Pakistan. Agriculture and animal husbandry is the main activities in the area, and economic life is based on subterranean system (Scheme and Budget Organization, 1990: 6–7). Pictograph of Pir e Gooran is depicted on a low mountain facing to the South of the village and its palm gardens (**fig. 2**). The depicted images are symbolic and include some plant shape motifs which resemble drawing of chalcolithic pottery found in Indus Valley and Bampur which are considered as palm trees. The rock bears a circle motif in the center which might be representation of the sun. The symbol of the sun has been found in almost all ancient culture of the world and sun motif on ancient ceramic proves that the sun accepted by the people from the earliest time as something supreme to be worshiped and venerated (Satyawadi, 1994: 137). Sun worship started as far back as the Neolithic times. Maringer (1960) pointed out that the solar system is fairly common



Figure 2

in Neolithic time. The worship of the sun is based on the concept of the natural phenomenon as a source of light warmth and fertility (Satyawadi, 1994: 39). There are variety of the sun motifs observed on ceramics of Indus Valley and Bampur.

Just below the circle image there are two symbols which are surrounded by a curved line on the top, and on the right side there is a motif which is alike to an abstract image of an eagle, with the head turned to the left and open wings. Eagle is considered as a symbol of height, of the spirit as the sun and of the spiritual principle in general. The eagle is a bird living in the full light of the sun and it is therefore considered to be luminous in its essence. It is identified with the sun and with the idea of male activity which fertilize female nature. The eagle also symbolizes the father, and according to Vedic tradition it is also important as a messenger being the bearer of the Soma from Indra (Cirlot, 1985: 91).

Among the painted images of this panel there is another palm leaf motif with dropping leaves which is similar to the chalcolithic pottery design found in Daimabad India (Datta, 2000: 148).

There are two Tridents in this panel, one at the left bottom of the rock and one faded trident on the top and in the right corner of the painted scene. The trident is a symbol familiar to many ancient cultures, this symbol first appears on clay seals from Mesopotamia and the ancient Harappan civilization of the Indus Valley, where it possibly arose as an early symbol of Shiva (Beer, 2003: 130). Trident is also a symbol for the tree of life (Vries, 1974: 475).

These signs and symbols certainly had a meaning for their creators, they might have been painted for some kind of social and religious rituals but understanding the meaning of these images requires scientific and systematic studies. There has not been any protection for this painting and just above the rock there is a water tank construction. It had been also eroded by natural factors in course of time and unprotected from direct sunlight and other destructive agents of weathering. Images are getting faded and some are barely visible, some parts of rock is broken and collapsed, therefore proper preservation is needed.

Negaran valley

Negaran valley one of the beautiful valleys of Siah Mountain is about 70km from Saravan and is located at the end of floodplain of Sardasht, around 36km from Nahook village. A rough road is only route to reach Negaran valley. Along the way in Sardasht plain there are many boulders and rocks with depicted images of human and animals like ibex, camel, wolf, dog, fox and the gazelle which now has been extinct from the region. Negaran means a place full of depicted images and as the name implies, there are great variety of drawing in this area and due to rich source of food and water it would have been a good living and hunting place for the people who lived there.

The images in this place are varied and include Anthropomorphic, Zoomorphic and geometric figures.

Anthropomorphic images

Human figures in different postures, on foot, riding the horse, fighting, hunting, naked or with clothes, and some humanlike images with horn and tail are depicted.

Zoomorphic images consist of wild and domesticated animals like ibex, wolf, wild ass, buffalo, gazelle, fox, snake, dog, horse, camel, panther, also there are dots and spiral images.

There are many fighting scenes among the depictions of Negaran valley. In one boulder composition of the scene shows an invasion and human figures with bow and arrow attacking horsemen. In this panel an ibex with exaggerated horns is depicted and on the right corner of the rock there are sixteen dots in an ordered manner with some sort of schematic uniformity in their representation (**fig. 3**).

Other scene is depicting some naked men with big ears fighting with bows and arrows and on the right side of the rock there are many dots or shallow cup marks which are created by hammering (**fig. 4**). According to Bednarik (2000) cup marks or cupules are cup-shaped hemispherical petroglyphs. They are probably the most common form of rock art in the world and they can be found in the very early and archaic traditions but also in recent ones.



Figure 3



Figure 4

He also stated the function of cupules was often though certainly not always ceremonial or symbolic (Bednarik, 2000: 37).

According to Pande (1971) the bow appears to be of the simple segment type so commonly used in Neolithic times (Pande, 1971: 136). In some fighting scene fighters are represented with spear or sword and shield (**fig. 5**). In another huge boulder at the height of about 5m from the ground level there are depictions of fighters, hunters accompanied by dogs and images of wild animals (**fig. 6**).

The fighting is between individuals and groups of horsemen and trace of shooting is showed by some lines. At the right side of the panel a horseman is shooting a leopard and another hunter is aiming an ibex (**fig. 7**). On the top of the panel there are two symbolic motifs alike Swastika with three arms. Similar images are found in Edakal cave in south India which are considered as sun and fire sym-



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8

bols (Fawcett, 1901: 413). Swastika symbol is to be found in almost every ancient and primitive cult all over the world. During the Iron Age it represented the supreme deity (Cirlot, 1985: 323). The Swastika is commonly found on Mesopotamian ceramics as evidenced from Halaf pottery and Iranian pottery from Sialk II and Sialk III, Susa I, Bakun, Bampur and Kurab (Satyawadi, 1994: 60). It is said that if it is depicted in clockwise manner it means: increase, growth, the vernal sun, lucky and white magic, and if it is in counter clockwise it shows decay, darkness, and death, the autumnal sun and black magic (Vries, 1974: 451). In this boulder also there is an oval shape image with a thick line cutting it in the middle. Among the depicted images of this panel there are buffalos, ibexes, dog and a humped back animal which seems to be a camel with out-sized organ of generation, and some scattered dots below its legs (**fig. 8**).

There are also many isolated images in this region including:

1. A naked man raised hands over his head and exaggerated head in length.
2. Another figure is a man with hands out-stretched, fingers are apart and big (**fig. 9**).
3. Another boulder bearing faded human figures and according to their body movement, raised one hand and other hand is down, it seems they are dancing, with clusters of hammering dots above them (**fig. 10**).



Figure 9



Figure 11



Figure 10

4. There are images with human and animal character with horn, tail and humped back (**fig. 11**).
5. There is engraving of two humanlike figures which are moving towards a wild ass.
6. In another rock there is an anthropomorphic figure similar to one rock engraving image from Afualligskop, Orange state in Africa (**fig. 12**) with horn, tail and an outsized generative organ (**fig. 13**).
7. There are images of wild ass, camel, horse and ibex with exaggerated horns and antelopes.

According to Veena Datta (2000) antelopes were a favorite subject of Chalcolithic period be it in Iran or Indus valley civilization (Datta, 2000: 92). The ibex motifs have considerable similarities with the motifs depicted on the Chalcolithic potteries and is seen at Susa I in Iran and Mehargarh III in Indus valley region and a little later in East Iran and North Baluchistan (Satyawadi, 1994: 149). It is believed that horn is symbol of strength and power (Cirlot, 1985: 151).



Figure 12

Another interesting image is a spiral engraving which might represent a snake (**fig. 14**). It is said that the snake is considered as a symbol of obedience and symbolizes rain, hence fertility. Snakes are guardians of springs of life and immortality and also of those superior riches of the spirit that are symbolized by hidden treasure (Cirlot, 1985: 286).

According to subject matters of Negaran valley rock arts, it seems there have been invasions in this region and there might have been conflicts for domination of territory between local people and invaders. Due to natural



Figure 13



Figure 15



Figure 14

factors and manmade vandalism the petroglyphs have suffered many damages.

Kandig

Kandig valley is about 9km on road from Saravan. In Baluchi language Kandig means carved and carving. The petroglyphs in this area are varied and include hunting scenes, animal and human figures in different postures. One of the interesting images in this place is an anthropomorphic picture with horn and a vigorous pose with out-stretched arms and wide open legs and on the right side there are two humans showing in movement and a naked male bellow those figures. After about 20 minutes



Figure 16

walk and at the end of Kandig valley we enter Shir o palangan valley with rocks bearing depicted images of animals and human figures sometimes naked with small head and strong arms in a vigorous pose (fig. 15).

Dronezg

Dronezg is 15km from Saravan city. Anthropomorphic, Zoomorphic and geometric motifs are depicted images found in this area. At the height of about 6 meter on a stone panel there are faded images of ibexes with exaggerated horns and a big circle motif which might represent the sun (fig. 16). There are representation of sun and ibex in different parts of the world, on the potsherds



Figure 17

of Harappan period the sun motif is found above and around the animals in Rehmandheri II and Rehmandheri III, Mehargarh, Harappan, Kot diji, Chanhudaro I, Hissar 1B and within the curve of the horns of an animal at Susa I. The sun also appears above at the back of the animals on Halaf pottery at Arpichiyah in Mesopotamia (Satyawadi, 1994: 115). Another interesting image in this boulder is a square which is divided into nine portions (**fig. 17**) and a naked male with curved arms is observed on the left.

Darsavat

Darsavat is another valley in Siah Mountain and located in 18km North-West of Saravan. There are depicted images of camel, ibex, dog, wolf, horse and human figures all over the valley but hand engravings are the most eye catching images in this area (**fig. 18**). Hand prints and stencils are widespread images of every continent. They occur in Africa, America, Asia, Australia and Europe. It is said that the hand print has been used as a medium to make a connection between the present world and the super natural world and the rock surface works as a membrane between two worlds (Clottes & Williams, 1998: 96).

Interpretation of Rock Art

As Sonawane (2008) pointed out there is no universally standard method for interpretation of rock art, subjectively is always present leading speculative identification and interpretations (Sonawane, 2008: 11). Emmanuel Anati (1993) says perhaps drawings and rock carvings prior to the invention of alphabets constitute languages with its own grammar and syntax. Rock art is a sort of pictographic writing which constitutes humanity's largest and most significant archive of its history for 40,000 years till the advent of conventional modern ideographic and then alphabetic writing (Anati, 1993: 2).



Figure 18

The evolutionary emergence of writing from rock art images was also advocated by Majeed Khan who supposed that an evolution took place in Saudi Arabia from human and animal figures in naturalistic style to schematized human and animal figures then to stick human and animal representations and finally to alphabetic letters (Quellec, 2006: 166).

Andre Leroi-Gourhan (1982) thinks this art is religious and says whether pre historians accept or deny the magic or religious character of the designs or their deliberate or fortuitous placing in different parts of subterranean systems. All authors find themselves very generally agreeing that the images in the caves were the framework for an ideology which is expressed in symbols associated with fertility and hunt (Gourhan, 1982: 8). For the purpose of depicting rock images shamanism was proposed by Lewis William (Clottes & Williams, 1998).

There is no doubt there has been a motivation behind creating these images, but we should be very cautious while interpreting rock arts and I think there is still a long way to go for understanding significant meaning of these images.

Dating of rock arts

Although it is difficult to establish an exact age of the rock art they can be dated by two methods:

1. Relative dating techniques
2. Absolute dating techniques

As it was mentioned earlier, in Baluchistan no scientific and archaeological exploration has been carried out at rock art sites therefore it is hard to date them precisely but according to the subject matter, style and context they can be dated from prehistoric period to Islamic era.

Conservation and protection of rock arts and deduction

Rock art is one of the most fragile resources of cultural property (Seglie, 2000: 82) and conservation of rock art should be taken seriously before they are lost forever. Due to natural factors and human interferences the decay of evidences of rock art is inevitable (Chakraverty, 1999: 46). But to protect the rock art as B. B. Lal (1999) suggested detailed documentation for recording all significant features of rock art is required (Lal, 1999: 36). Protection of rock art sites is itself an important task and proper conservation through technical discipline is most essential (Sonawane, 1999: 16).

Rock arts of Baluchistan are exposed to the danger of getting damaged either by human or natural agencies. This paper is a preliminary attempt to precisely document some of these rock arts of the Saravan which otherwise might fade out unnoticed and unrecorded.

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How to cite this article: Sarhaddi, F 2013 Pictograph and Petroglyphs of Saravan (Sistan - Baluchistan, Iran). *Ancient Asia*, 4: 3, pp. 1-8, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/aa.12312>

Published: 13 November 2013

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