The petroglyphs of Kal Husseina in Nehbandān, eastern Iran

By HAMID REZA GHORBANI and SARA SADEGHI

Introduction

The site of Kal Husseina is located some 1 km from the village of Kal Husseina in the Nehbandān County in South Khorāsān Province of Iran. The site comprises four scatters of boulders of basalt. The motifs are in danger of damage and erosion from the high impact of weathering. The site was well known to local inhabitants but was only documented for the first time archaeologically following its ‘discovery’ in 2013. The main technique applied in producing these petroglyphs is hammering, sometimes rubbing and very rarely engraving. The images in these sites include zoomorphs, anthropomorphs and geometric motifs, indiscernible shapes and some inscriptions that are engraved on the boulders. The petroglyph complex is near other sites in southern Khorasan province (Ghorbani 2013): the petroglyphs of Penhani from Nehbandān (Yarabbi et al. 2017) and a rock art site of Nakhlestān in Nehbandān (Ghorbani and Heydarian 2018) are the most important rock art localities reported from the eastern part of Iran so far. The Nehbandān area, due to its proximity to the desert, is a relatively large plain. Broadly, the region in the north contains elevations such as Kuh-Sorkh, Kuh-Bobak and Kuh-Bidmeshk reaching an elevation of 2500 m. In general, the slope in the Nehbandān region was south and south-west, and it leads to the plain of Sistan in the east and south-east, and in the south and south-west to the Dasht-e Lut Desert.

As mention above, four clusters of petroglyphs identified in this area were made on the basalt blocks (Fig. 1). The images include zoomorphs, anthropomorphs, geometric or symbolic motifs, indiscernible shapes and some inscriptions.

The first group occurs on all of the surfaces of the Kal Husseina 1 panel, where the majority of the more significant petroglyphs like presumed ibexes and the word Ya Allah are to be found (Fig. 2). Allah (/ælə, ˈælə, əlˈlaː; romanised: Allah) is the Arabic word
for God. The next cluster, Kal Husseina 2, is presented in Figure 4: six ‘ibexes’, one geometric and one undiscernible shape. The geometric motifs include grids or reticulate patterns.

Kal Husseina 3 panel contains several ambiguous and indistinguishable geometric forms and one ‘ibex’ (Fig. 4). The last site, Kal Husseina 4, includes two stone slabs. On the first one, the Arabic name of bu Saeid is engraved, and on the other, a few Persian and Arabic inscriptions were written, including the names of local shepherds and farmers. We have recorded several ‘layers’ of inscriptions that have been superimposed upon earlier ones, over several decades, and this has impacted on older petroglyphs (Fig. 5).

These four rock art panels were identified in the Nehbandān geographic region by the authors. This region is a highland area which is favourable for dry-land farmer and pastoralist groups. The main animal motifs on the petroglyphs are presumed ibex (or, generically, ovicaprids), depicted in different sizes and poses. According to the studies, only one ‘human’ figure, which is mounted on a ‘horse’, has been found at Kal Husseina. Inscriptions and geometric forms are the other motifs found in the region so far. By comparing the patterns of rock arts in the south of Khorasan with motifs elsewhere in eastern Iran we can see a lot of similarities, especially in Jorbat (Jajarm) (Vahdati 2012), Marzbanik (Moradi et al. 2013), Toos (Saffaran and Mozhdekanloo 2014), Negaran (Sarhaddi Dadian et al. 2015), Bishiklik (Rezaei et al. 2016), Nakhlestān (Ghorbani and Heydarian 2018) and Penhani (Yarabbi et al. 2017).

Acknowledgments
The authors give thanks to Seyed Ahmad Barabadi (Head of Research and Studies), Mohammad Reza Soroush (archeologist), Hamza Hamza (Head of Public Relations, Cultural and Social Affairs), Mohammad Farjami (archeologist), Maysam Jannati (photographer), Sarah Banmran (photographer), Ruqia Saffranloo (design supervisor) and Jamal Lahafian (rock art researcher) for their helpful guidance and suggestions.

Prof. Hamid Reza Ghorbani
Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Art, University of Birjand, Birjand, Iran
ghorbani.hr@birjand.ac.ir

Dr Sara Sadeghi
Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Humanities, Univer-
REFERENCES


