

# NEWLY DISCOVERED PETROGLYPHS OF HÜRĀND COUNTY

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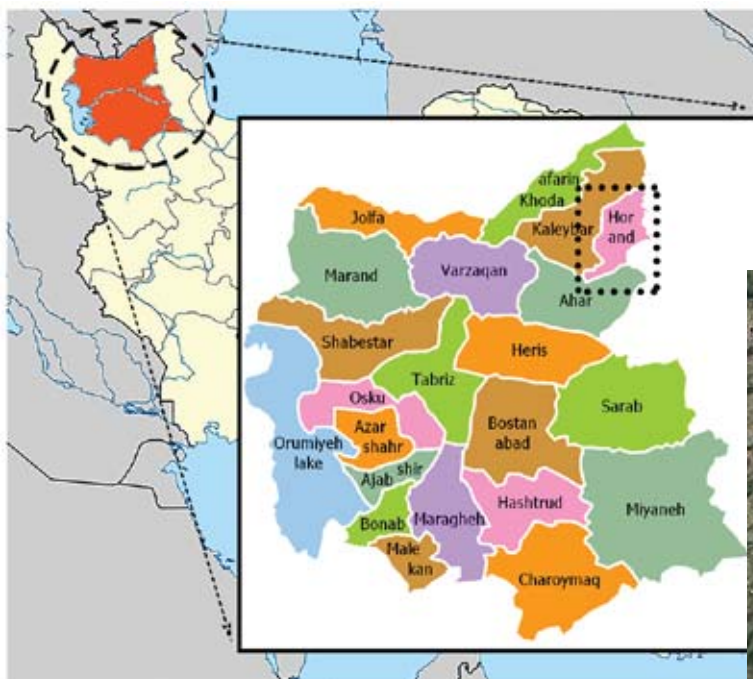
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Rock art is to be found in many parts of the world and provides some of the best evidence for identifying the environment, beliefs, and culture of its creators. Most petroglyphs are located in semi-arid regions, covered with stone and rocks, but near water sources (Karimi 2007). Archaeological studies in the vicinity of petroglyph sites may help to determine their cultural-historical context, and their study is further enhanced by comparison with finds from similar ancient sites.

Archaeological investigation of Hūrānd (Horand) County, in East Azerbaijan, Iran, in 2013 by Reza Salmanpoor and Zahra Abtahi revealed some remarkable cultural remains in the region, among them numerous petroglyphs from Qawtanlū and Nawqada on the northeast and northwest of the township. Until recently in Iran, the petroglyphs which have been studied are ones located everywhere but in the north of the country. The first important studies

on rock art in Iran were done forty-six years ago upon discovery of some petroglyphs by Hamid Izad panah in the Kūh Dasht region in Luristan (Qasimi 2007). Although Iranian archaeologists and anthropologists generally have studied motifs of rock art, the subject of dating them has received less attention.

The pioneering study of rock art in the north of Iran dates from the work of Jalāl al-Dīn Rafī'far on Ahar and Hūrānd petroglyphs in 2004. Also, Kyumarth Karimi studied petroglyphs of the Navasar region on the banks of the Qara Soo River in the southern part of Hūrānd (Karimi 2013). The goal of this paper is to introduce, analyze and compare the newly discovered petroglyphs of Hūrānd and to determine their dates. While the focus is on the discoveries from Qawtanlū and Nawqada on the north of Hūrānd, the comparative examples include the Liqan petroglyphs in the same region.



## The location of Hūrānd and its petroglyphs

Newly established Hūrānd County is one of the northern townships of East Azerbaijan. This mountainous county, covering an area of 670 km<sup>2</sup> is located at 150 km northeast

Fig. 1 a) Location map of Hūrānd County; b) satellite image showing mountainous region north of the county capital.

Image sources: Wikipedia; Google Earth.



of Tabriz and 52 km north of Ahar. Its capital city is Hūrānd at an altitude of 1110 m above sea level, at N 4303933 latitude, E 705636 longitude. It is bordered on the north and west by Kalibar, on the south by Ahar, and on the east by Meshkin Shahr in Ardabil (Khamachi 1991). Located on the highest part of the Qara Daq to the north, Hūrānd's best known mountain is 2220 m Hasht-e Sar (Hashe Sar). Other important mountains of the region are Yeli Yourt (2124 m), Qala Ci (1230 m), and Nawrouz Qawzie (1226 m) (Hūveyda 1973).

The rock art is situated northwest and northeast of Hūrānd, 500-800 m above sea level. All the rock art sites are located in natural valleys where the smooth slope of the mountains descends to river beds. The mountains slope from north to south, with the petroglyphs on the south side of rocks extending over an area of 3-11 hectares. Most of the petroglyphs found here have the same structure, style, and motifs as those elsewhere in Iran and in other parts of the world. The rocky and semi-arid region in which they are located is similar to that of rock art sites elsewhere (Karimi, 2007).

### General characteristics of the petroglyphs

All Hūrānd petroglyphs were inscribed on black granite. Although it is abundantly available in the region, the petroglyphs are to be found only in certain areas. Unfortunately, high erosion and varnishing make it impossible to be certain about the tools used for carving. However, comparative examples suggest that similar markings had been made by striking the rock surface with a sharp-edged, hard stone (Rafi'far 2005). The depictions include both linear outlines (that is, stick figures) and evocations of the volume of the bodies.

The Hūrānd petroglyph complex may be divided into three groups: zoomorphic, anthropomorphic figures, and symbolic designs. Most of the motifs are animals, shown either individually or in groups. It is possible to identify humans, ibexes, dogs, rams, camels, deer, and antelope. Some of the anthropomorphic figures and symbolic designs cannot be identified because of the erosion. Of some interest is one panel on which are numerous motifs belonging to different eras. This suggests that the region was ritually and religiously important over an extended period.

### The motifs

#### *Zoomorphic designs*

The main animal motifs on the Nawqada, Liqan, and Qawtanloo petroglyphs are **ibex** (or, generically, oviscaprids), depicted individually or in herds with different sizes and motions. Some of their features

are similar to those of other ibex petroglyphs in Iran, for example at Ahar, Meshkin Shahr, Hamadan, and Oraman. The ibexes of the region are shown with stylized, long, and detailed curved horns [Fig. 2, see plates at end of article], short curved horns [Fig. 3], or, rarely, with long, knotted curved horns [Fig. 4]. The tail of this animal is in two sizes, short and curved [Fig. 5], or long and straight [Fig. 6]. In some cases the tail is depicted bent at a right angle [Fig. 7]. The body is shown as a thin or thick line or with volume. Legs are represented by four plain, vertical lines in different sizes, long [Fig. 8] and short [Fig. 9]. The shape of the legs and body may convey a sense of the animal's movement [Fig. 10]. More often than not, in both the individual representations and the depictions of herds, the animals face right [e.g., Figs. 9, 10, 25]. Only rarely are ibexes shown confronting one another.

**Deer:** Among the newly found Hūrānd petroglyphs are deer motifs, where the horns are shorter than ibexes' horns and the tail angles downward.

**Ram:** This motif is found only in Qawtanloo. It differs little from the depiction of the ibex; its horns are short and angled. A straight line under the chin shows its beard [Fig. 11].

**Camel:** Among the notable Hūrānd petroglyphs are images of camels on two rocks at Nawqada. There, four camels are depicted on two separated panels. The camels are drawn in linear style with a long tail, oval and hollow hump, small head and short ears. In one scene, two camels are accompanying a rider [Fig. 12].

**Dog:** Among the petroglyphs of Dashli Sara and Qawtanloo is an animal with small body, short ears and long tail which is similar to a dog. This motif is depicted in three scenes. In Qawtanloo two scenes have a dog accompanying an ibex, and in another scene a dog is depicted with a symbolic design [Fig.13].

**Antelope:** One of the petroglyphs of Nawqada has an animal depiction that seems to be an antelope. It has long feet and muzzle, short and jagged horns [Fig.14].

**Animals of indeterminate type:** On the petroglyphs of Dashli Sara and Nawqada are two animal depictions that cannot be identified due to erosion and weathering. In one of the scenes is a man with an animal and ibexes. This animal is drawn in linear style and has long body and tail [Fig.15], but with no legs or ears (probably due to erosion). The body form with the long tail and small head suggest that it might be a leopard. Also, among the Nawqada petroglyphs is an animal which resembles a rabbit with oversized ears [Fig.16].

#### *Images of humans*

At least twelve different scenes in the Nawqada and Qawtanloo petroglyphs, include humans [Fig.17].

Possibly there were more, but they have eroded away. Jalāl al-Dīn Rafī'far (2005) mentioned some ambiguous human depictions in Liqan (the Jeiran Vallay and Taze Kand in Qawtanloo). The human depictions are quite stylized and plain, most rendered in linear fashion with either narrow or thick lines. Only two of the images show the volume of the body, in once case at Nawqada depicting three naked men standing with open hands in the company of an ibex. The significant degree of erosion suggests that this may be the oldest petroglyph in the region [Fig. 18]. Unlike the rock art at other sites in Iran such as Arges in Hamadan (Beikmohammadi et al. 2012), Farahan in Arak (Poor Bakhshande 2007), and Oraman (Qasimi 2007), which includes various hunting scenes involving humans, at Dashli Sara (Nawqada) there is only one hunting scene in which a rider with a lance in his hand hunts an ibex [Fig. 19].

The other petroglyphs in the region depicting human figures show them in three poses, with open arms [Fig. 20], arms raised, or arms lowered [Figs. 21, 22]. In one case the human seems to be riding or herding animals that include an ibex, a camel and another of an indeterminate type [Fig. 23].

#### *Symbolic designs*

Some images seem to be symbolic designs, depicted either by themselves or next to a human or an animal [Figs. 22, 24]. However, it is difficult to determine what exactly is represented, due to erosion.

#### **Archaeology and the chronology of the petroglyphs**

Since most of the rock art in Iran lacks specific ethno-cultural attributes, establishing the chronology of the images relies upon the broader cultural and historical context. Thus, to identify the date of the petroglyphs of this region, the researchers studied landscape and the neighboring ancient sites of Nawqada and Qawtanloo.

To the north of Hūrānd rock arts extend over 9 km where flowing seasonal rivers such as the Akiabad and Qarasoo have invited occupation of the region by different tribes from the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE (the Eneolithic) to the Islamic periods in the 11<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. There are Iron Age cemeteries and fortified settlement sites located 200–2000 m from the petroglyphs. One of the those forts, Ala Sandal, occupied from the 2<sup>nd</sup> - 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE, is 200 m from the Qawtanloo petroglyph site, and 300 m from that of Madan. The proximity to Qawtanloo suggests that that the region was a ritual place. Altogether, eight settlement sites and a cemetery, dating back to Iron Age, have been identified in the region.

Determining the age of petroglyphs has always been a major challenge in rock art studies. Absolute

chronology may be established by scientific analysis: radio carbon dating, potassium argon dating, thermoluminescence dating, uranium dating, and analyzing rock crystals and sediments. Relative dating, on the other hand, relies on the context of remains, comparative anthropological studies, and, in the case of petroglyphs, especially the study of their style and any inscriptions (Pahlavid, Arabic, Persian) (Qasimi 2007).

For Hūrānd rock art, relative chronology is used. Hūrānd petroglyphs in their style and subject content are comparable with the Sonqūn and Dai Mamiq petroglyphs in Ahar (Rafī'far 2005), Shahryeri (Horshid 2007), Oraman (Qasimi 2007), Khere Hanjiran in Mahabad (Pedram 1994), and Erqes Sofla in Hamadan (Poor Bakhshande 2007). Also, Hūrānd petroglyphs can be historically and culturally compared with Shahryeri. Both petroglyphs of Hūrānd and Shahryeri are located in the vicinity of Iron Age sites (Horshid 2007). The ibex motif is the central one in both regions. An indication of the fact that ibexes had a close relationship with people's lives in the past (from the Neolithic to the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE), is the common depiction of the motif on manmade objects, such as bronzes and pottery, even as its depiction on rocks became less frequent in the more recent eras. It was mostly used as a symbol of fertility, life, moon, water, etc. (Hatam 1995).

Of particular interest are the petroglyphs which can be dated to several eras, as can be determined from patination, weathering, and layering of the rock art in the regions of Nawqada, Liqan, and Qawtanloo. Sometimes motifs which are engraved over older ones ruined the previous motifs. Different motifs from different periods show that the region played a culturally and ritually important role over an extended time. It appears that depicting humans was more common in the earlier period than later.

Judging from the motifs of Hūrānd rock arts, we can but loosely date the petroglyphs of the region in the period from the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE into the historical period.

#### **Summary and conclusion**

Much work remains to be able to achieve more precise results, where until now, for example, there are rather limited data for any kind of statistical analysis or comparative study. At Nawqada 41 petroglyphs have been studied. There are 30 with animal motifs, of which 14 depict ovicaprids in a group, 13 show single ibexes, two depict camels (individually and in a herd) and one a dog. Also, there are four images with humans, three of them riders, and the one image with three naked men and an ibex. In the Dashli Sara region are 36 petroglyphs, of which 90% include identifiable

animal motifs. Of particular interest is the image of a dog with a symbolic design. Most of the motifs are simple stick figures (linear drawing), but four show the volume of the bodies. Most of the animals are shown in a herd, and there is one hunting scene similar to that in Hūrānd. Another of the regions studied is Zardrasi, where there are about 18 petroglyphs (16 animal motifs, depicted singly, and 2 human figures). 27 petroglyphs have been studied in the Qawtanloo region. Most of the animals are shown in herds, and several motifs are carved atop each other, which emphasizes the importance of the region in different periods. The drawing style is linear, with less attention given to showing the volume of the animals' bodies.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Fig. 2



Fig. 3

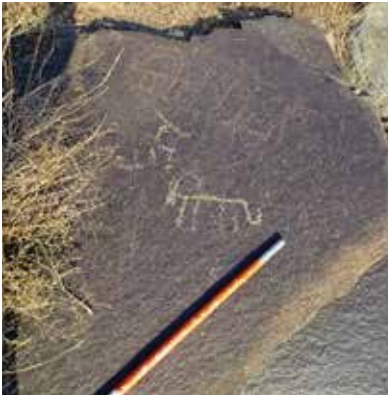


Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10





Fig. 11

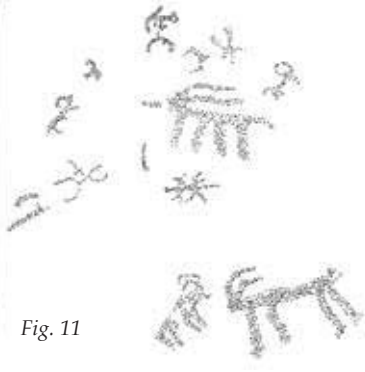


Fig. 12

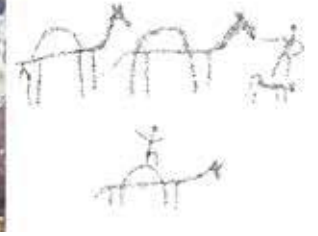


Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15

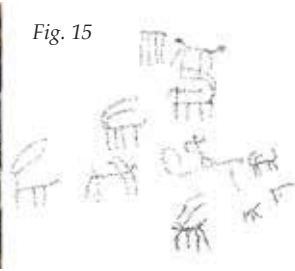


Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18

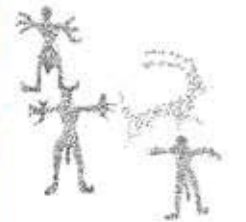


Fig. 19

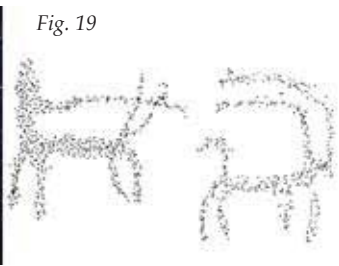


Fig. 21

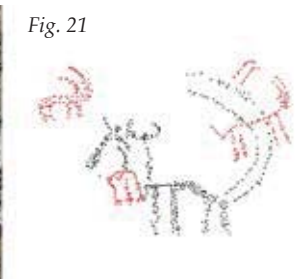


Fig. 20





Fig. 22



Fig. 23

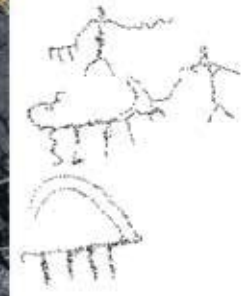


Fig. 24



Fig. 25

