Nargeseh: newly found rock art in Lorestan Province, western Iran

MOHAMAD BAHRAMI and MOUSA SABZI

Lorestan Province is a mountainous part of western Iran. This province is one of the most important archaeological regions of Iran, with significant evidence from the Palaeolithic to the contemporary period. The town of Chegeni is located west of Khorraramab, and south of Sefidkouh mountain. Pictograms of Mirmalas and Homian Caves in Kouhdasht and Dosha in Chegeni were the first reported rock art sites in Iran (Izadpanah 1969; McBurney 1969; Otte et al. 2003; Remacle et al. 2006). Today, these studies have been expanded and more evidence of pictograms (Vahdati 2010; Ghasimi et al. 2014; Karimi 2014) and petroglyphs (Ghasimi 2007; Hemati et al. 2015; Sabzi and Hemati 2017) have been identified in various parts of Iran.

In 2016, archaeological surveys at Chegeni identified a series of pictograms and petroglyphs (Bahrami 2016). Nargeseh is the name of a village located 5 km east of Chegeni and 26 km north-west of Khorraramab. This rockshelter is located 19 km north-east of Dosha Cave and about 65 km east of Homian and Mirmalas Caves (Figs 1 and 2). This area is geologically located in the Asmari Formation, a limestone found in much of the Zagros Mountains that formed in the Oligo-Miocene (Darvishzadeh 1982). The assemblage consists of a total of 58 motifs, comprising both pictograms and petroglyphs. Pictograms in the region have sometimes been made with charcoal, as in Dosha Cave, and occasionally with ochre, as in Mirmalas and Homian Caves. In the Nargeseh shelter, pictograms were placed inside it in order not to be exposed to rain.

Ochre pigments: unfortunately, a number of the motifs have disappeared due to natural and human factors, with only traces remaining. Out of a total of 17 recognisable motifs, only nine motifs can still be seen, and eight others show body parts such as legs or horns. One anthropomorph seems to be a rider; other motifs are horned zoomorphs. In this collection, apart from one animal that is depicted looking right, all the other motifs have been depicted looking left. The motifs are shown in side view and all four legs and two horns are depicted. In size they range from 12–26 cm. The largest motif, No. 5, is 26 cm high and 25 cm long. The smallest, motif No. 8, is drawn from the left to the right down the panel and is without a horn. It is 12 cm long and 11 cm high (Fig. 3). Most likely, the ochre soil near the shelter was used to make these pictograms. The dimensions of the horns have been exaggerated and in some of these motifs the horn size is shown larger than the body of the animal. On the left and bottom of the panel, there are indications of the presence of other quadrupeds.

Black colour: motifs that have been executed in a

Figure 1. Locations of Nargeseh (1), Dosha (2), Homian (3) and Mirmalas (4) in Lorestan Province, western Iran.

Figure 2. Locations of rockshelter and open air rock art north of Nargeseh village.
black colour on the internal wall of the rockshelter and the surrounding rocks were created as single motifs and without any apparent connection between them. The total number of these motifs is 16, including 14 horned zoomorphs and two anthropomorphs. In some of these motifs, the body is filled in with pigment, and in other motifs it is filled with lines. Their sizes are between 10 and 20 cm. The two anthropomorphs are depicted standing.

Petroglyphs: the Nargeseh petroglyphs are divided into two panels and single motifs. One panel is located on a rock at the northern side of Nargeseh village. There are 12 motifs in this panel, including two horned zoomorphs, two apparent riders, two anthropomorphs on foot, four zoomorphs without horns and an apparent vegetal motif (Fig. 4). About 7 m east of this rock, another panel includes an anthropomorph, a horned zoomorph, and a zoomorph lacking horns. Two animals have been depicted facing right. An anthropomorph with open hands stands facing them, apparently holding an object. In this panel, as in the previous, the images have been depicted very close and attached to each other (Fig. 5). The style of these motifs is uniform and they are likely to have been created in a single period. Single petroglyph motifs have been made by scratching, totalling 12 horned zoomorphs and two anthropomorphs. These motifs have been drawn individually and without any apparent thematic connection between them.

Due to having high mountains, inter-mountain fertile valleys and an annual precipitation of about 500 mm, Lorestan is considered as an environmentally rich region. The ibex is the most abundant wild animal in Lorestan. Sefidkouh Mountain to the north of Nargeseh (Fig. 2) is a natural habitat of this animal. The people of Lorestan have had a nomadic and animal husbandry lifestyle. They spent the autumn and winter in the south-western lowland regions of Iran (Susiana Plain) and during the spring and summer they lived in the Lorestan heights, deriving part of their diet from wild animals. The pictograms in Nargeseh are comparable to the rock arts of Mirmalas, Homian and Dosha Caves to the west, and petroglyphs are comparable to the rock art of Borujerd sites in the east of Lorestan. Some regard ibex as the god of water (Schmandt-Besserat 1997). The ibex, in fact, has long been a conspicuous symbol for prosperity and abundance in ancient Iranian myths, bearing a strong association with water.
that is generally regarded as the source of prosperity (Samadi 1988). Detailed research on the chronology of pictograms and petroglyphs has not been carried out in Iran, so we cannot suggest any date for the newly found rock art in Nargeseh.

Mohamad Bahrami
Department of Archaeology, Lorestan University
m_bahrami79@yahoo.com

Mousa Sabzi
Department of Archaeology, Lorestan University
sabzi.m@lu.ac.ir

REFERENCES


