

Rock Art Discoveries in Washuk, Khuzdar and Jhal Magsi, Balochistan

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Abstract

The mountains of Balochistan in Pakistan are full of undocumented rock art sites. This work deals with the newly discovered rock art sites in Washuk, Khuzdar and Jhal Magsi districts in Balochistan. They are either petroglyphs or pictographs of geometric, human, and animals depicted in different combinations. They range from prehistoric to historic periods. The study also deals with a comparative study with its surrounding areas.

Keywords: Balochistan, Rock Art, Pictographs, Petroglyphs

Introduction

Geographically, Balochistan is covered 60% with mountains (Franke 2015: 11). Washuk, a district of Balochistan, is a mountainous region with Siahari and Ras Koh ranges (Washuk, District Development Profile 2011: 4). The mountains in the southeast of Khuzdar, another district of Balochistan, are narrower, steep, and barren (Franke 2015: 16). Furthermore, Jhal Magsi, the north-western district of Balochistan, is occupied with a part of the Kirthar mountain range on its west (Jhal Magsi, District Development Profile 2011: 4). According to locals, these areas are full of different rock art sites.

Since the rock art of Balochistan generally consist of animals, we should know about the animals of the area in the past and present. Evidences of wild animals like elephant, onager, boar, spotted deer, swamp deer, blue bull, cattle, water buffalo, blackbuck, gazelle, goat (ibex) and sheep have been found in Neolithic Mehrgarh in Kachi-Bolan, Balochistan. Some of them were

found till Bronze Age like onager, boar, swamp deer, blackbuck and gazelle. On the other hand, humped cattle, goat and sheep were domesticated during this period and onwards. The evidences further suggest that onager, boar, blue bull¹, gazelle and sheep were found in later periods too at Nausharo (Kachi-Bolan) Balakot (Lasbela) and Pirak (Kachi-Bolan) (Meadow 1991: 55-56). Moreover, domesticated cattle, and wild animals like gazelle, onager, canes, birds, rodents, fishes, reptiles and mollusks bones were found from Shahi Tump I in Kech-Makkuran (Desse et al. 2008: 163). Moreover, the discoveries from either Naal II or Naal III in Khuzdar include wild animals as ass, gazelle, fox, goat, bear (the latter two were only found in Naal II) and mustelid; moreover, the domesticated included cattle, sheep, goat and dog (only found in Naal III) (Beneke and Neef 2005: 83). Many types of wild animals i.e., ibex, sheep, *markhor*, leopard, black bear, wild ass, wolf, lizard, kinds of foxes, kinds of birds, tortoise, kinds of snakes, kinds of fishes, and different types of insects occur in Balochistan (Hughes-Buller 1908: 8-9).

Rock art is the first visual expression. It is the expression that depends on the awareness of one's experiences of nature (Saraswati 2013: 3). However, it is also regarded as the 'idle aesthetic urge to decorate one's living rooms' (Agarwal and Kharakwal 2002: 126). The experts of the field assume that the purpose of rock art must have been for magical, religious, aesthetical, totemic mythical, etc. (Saraswati 2013: 2). The painted rock art sites, additionally, may have been used 'for aggregation, for renewing friendships, strengthening political alliances and arranging marriages, like they do in the tribal societies today' (Agarwal and Kharakwal 2002: 129). In the context of Pakistan, the oldest pictographs are found in Musakhel district in Balochistan. They are human and animal figures in red and black. Some of them are dated to

¹ It was only found at Balakot.

Upper Paleolithic period² (Khan 2000: 1). Generally speaking, Balochistan is replete with undocumented pictographic and petroglyphic rock art sites. Rock art of the province has been ignored by the researchers largely which requires special attention. Moreover, there is much potential in the rock art of Balochistan; it can fill the important cultural and chronological gaps. There is a dearth of the reported rock art sites from Khuzdar and Gandava in Jhal Magsi. However, there are few reports of rock art sites in Washuk and its adjacent areas (Hasan 1989a; 1989b; 1996). Moreover, rock art sites have been discovered in Loralai, Zhob, Quetta, Ziarat and Chaghi districts of Balochistan (Kakar 2005: 22; Hasan 1989b: 37; Qamar 1986). To add more, the inhabitants of Balochistan and Indus region in the Indus Age may have lived side by side the farmers and pastoralists or other people (Possehl 1999: 168).

The sites under discussion have been discovered from different districts of Balochistan. This is the first time these sites are being reported. These sites may be dated to prehistoric to historic periods. There are pictographic and petroglyphic sites with human, animal, and geometric motifs or a certain combination of them. Before the innovation of writing, people might have expressed themselves through such expressions at certain times. Every pictograph and petroglyph perhaps present a hidden story or event to be decoded. Fazal Dad Kakar (2005: 22-3) comments about the Zhob and Loralai pictographs in the following words:

The technique most commonly used for the paintings is that of outlined figures, but human figures are more realistic and the groupings of animals are more sophisticated prominently displayed are small animals with long tails that appear to be either wolves or jackals. Other animals that appear in the cave include leopards, curved and straight horned [markhor], wild sheep, and horses. While some of the animals are easily identified, others have odd-shaped extensions that could be horns or a tail, or possibly even someone riding the animal. In addition to these animal paintings,

² However, Khan (2000: 1-2) dates them from Neolithic to Bronze Age and Abro (taken from Kalhor 2014: 73) dates them from prehistoric, Iron Age, Buddhist and historic periods.

representations of humans, hunting scenes, and abstract signs were also found and are of equal importance. All these were probably paintings with a finger or stick, using red ochre, black and turquoise colours, oxides of iron, manganese, and copper, respectively.

To add more, the other rock art sites also include wild horses, wild boars, humped bulls, etc. (Kakar 2005: 24). Moreover, Hasan (1989b: Figs. 1-5, 10, 14, 16-18, 20, 23-25, 28, 35, 37 and 38) also shows deities and stories about hybrid or mythical animals as well.

There are no accepted dates for the very early times in Balochistan due to limited researches; one may assume the dates based on excavations of the adjacent regions i.e., Afghanistan, Potohar Plain, Rohri Hills and Indian Peninsula dates for now (Kakar 2005: 22).

Epi-Paleolithic	c.10,000+1000
Upper Paleolithic	c. 30, 000-10,000
Middle Paleolithic	c.100, 000-30,000
Lower Paleolithic	c.+700,000-100,000
Earliest Stone Tools	c.+ 2MYA-700,000

General Paleolithic Chronology (Courtesy: Kakar 2005: 22).

The present rock art is consisting of engravings/petroglyphs and pictographs of human, animal, and geometric patterns or a certain combination of them. This research is based on primary data either the authors attempted to go on the field or they requested other locals or friends in the areas to observe and take pictures of the rock art sites. An attempt is made to analyze and comparatively study the data. The following is the list of sites with their descriptions:

Site in Washuk

Site: Pictographic site

Location: Washuk Mountains

*Tentative Period*³: Iron Age (red-colored paintings) and historic (orange-colored paintings) (Figs. 1-4)

Description: The site looks like a rock shelter. The red and orange painted motifs are geometric and animal figures. The red paintings seem older as few of the orange paintings overlap the few of the red paintings. There are geometric dotted motifs, two dotted-circle figures, the tree-like figures, and a four-footed unidentified animal (Figs. 1-4). However, there are recent drawings with black and white colour as well. The figure 2 alongside tree figures has an unidentified animal figure, a dotted 8 shape, and an arrow-like design with a wavy stick. Moreover, this rock painting shows a rider with a sword (?) in an attacking position on an unidentified animal painted with light orange pigment (Fig. 4). Ibex figures have been noticed⁴.

Comparison: Riding animal figures with some sort of weapon also have been identified elsewhere in Balochistan and Iran (Qamar 1986: Pls. L a, LI a, LII b; Hasan 1989b: Figs. 31, 35-36, 38; Naserifard, taken from Facebook on 23-02-2020). In Zhob and Loralai areas, one can find carved circle disk motifs differently dotted (Nasar np. Figs. 17, 18; Qamar 1986: Pl. XLIX a). Tree paintings have been discovered in Tibet China (Bellezza 2015: Figs. 80-82, 86, 89; Huisheng and Zhiwei 2004: 168-69). Painted or carved ibexes have been documented in Balochistan and Iran (Nasar np. 32, 34-35, 43; Hasan 1996: Pls. 2-4; 1989a: 4, 7-8; Mohamadi et al. 2016: Figs. 2-3, 6; Naserifard, taken from Facebook Wall on 23-02-2020, etc.). To be on the safe side, it is dated to Iron Age—red paintings and historic—orange paintings.

Sites in Gandava, Jhal Magsi

Site: Rock boulders' carvings of Mehar Tuk Hill

³ The dating of all the sites is tentative based either on comparative or thematic studies.

⁴ The photo has not been given.

Location: Near Mian Saleh Graveyard in Gandava, Jhal Magsi

Tentative Period: Historic (Figs. 5-7)

Description: The first rock boulder (Fig. 5) is full of moving engraved human figures holding swords, shields, etc., and some are riding animals while fighting; it looks like a battle scene. There are animals i.e., ibexes, horses (?), etc. There is carving which looks like an elephant on the top left side. On the second boulder (Fig. 6), there is an unknown engraved figure, a geometric round figure divided into four segments, and an animal with a rider. In the third photo (Fig. 7), there are two hunting scenes, one fighting scene between two human beings and one figure is in action with his hands up.

Comparison: Human figures alone or associated with some other figures or things have been found from Balochistan and Iran (Hasan 1989a: Figs. 3, 5-6; Qamar 1986: Pls. XLIX a-b, LIII a; Naserifard, taken from Facebook on 23-02-2020). Moreover, human figures are also found on Harappan Civilization script (Possehl 1999: Fig. 2.40). Hunting scenes have already been attested in Balochistan i.e., Zhob, Quetta, and Loralai, Kharan/Washuk and in Iran (Kakar 2005: 23; Hasan 1989b: Figs. 14, 31-32, 35-36, 38; Nasar np. Figs. 12-13; Hasan 1996: Pls. 2-3, 12; Mohamadi et al. 2016: Figs. 2-3; Naserifard, taken from Facebook on 23-02-2020). The round geometric figure which is divided into four segments occurs twice at Gandava, Jhal Magsi (see Fig. 11). Painted or carved ibexes have been documented in Balochistan and Iran (Nasar np. 32, 34-35, 43; Hasan 1996: Pls. 2-4; 1989a: 4, 7-8; Hasan 1989b: Figs. 7, 17; Mohamadi et al. 2016: Figs. 2-3, 6; Naserifard, taken from Facebook Wall on 23-02-2020, etc.). Two human figures fighting each other have comparisons in Iran (Mohamadi et al. 2016: Fig. 4; Naserifard, taken from Facebook on 23-02-2020). Elephant remains have been found in Mehrgarh II (Meadow 1991: 55) and terracotta head of an elephant was found in Nausharo III (Franke and Cortesi

2015: 343) and on the seals of Harappan Civilization (Possehl 2002: 129). However, apart from comparisons, the engraving traces look historic and the animals and equipment are used in the historic battles.

Sites in Khuzdar

Site: Engraved and painted rock arts

Location: Khuzdar Mountains

Tentative Period: Bronze Age (Fig. 8) and Historic (Figs. 9-10)

Description: This (Fig. 8) is a rock boulder with two engraved animals i.e., two-humped bulls. The other two figures (Figs. 9-10) have some sort of script written in black with five rows and three rows, respectively. The script requires further research.

Comparison: Carved bulls (mostly humped bulls) occur at Suleman Range (Kakar 2005: Fig. 7; Hasan 1989a: Figs. 3-4, 6; 1989b: Figs. 2, 6-7, 9, 12, 21, 25, 33-35). They also occur in Zhob area and Ras Koh in western Balochistan (Nasar np: Figs. 23, 27-31, 33, 40; Hasan 1996: Pls. 5-6, 9, 16). Humped bull figurines and painted motifs are also found on Kulli pottery—c.2600-1900 BCE which have also been reported from this area (Stein 1931; Jarrige et al. 2011). Furthermore, mythical figures have largely been identified in Balochistan (Hasan 1996: Pls. 7, 11). Humped bull figure has been found on Harappan Civilization seals (Marshal 1931: 43). It might be dated to Bronze Age.

Site: Rock carvings near Mulla River

Location: 35 km from Gandava, Jhal Magsi

Tentative Period: Historic (Fig. 11)

Description: It is a large rock art with hunting scenes, humans riding animals, animals i.e., ibexes, etc. geometric shapes like divided round shapes, a divided squarish shape, a rectangular

shape, hand shapes, handprints, trident—five spiked (*trishul*), and some recent Urdu words are written as well.

This site is in danger since Naulong dam is under construction; they are likely to submerge in the dam water which is near the site. These rock arts require preservation by the responsible authorities before they are destroyed.

Comparison: Either petroglyphic or pictographic ibexes have been found in Balochistan and Iran (Nasar np. 32, 34-35, 43; Hasan 1996: Pls. 2-4; 1989a: 4, 7-8; Hasan 1989b: Fig. 7, 17; Mohamadi et al. 2016: Figs. 2-3, 6; Naserifard, taken from Facebook Wall on 23-02-2020, etc.). Riders on animals have often occur in Balochistan and Iran (Hasan 1989b: Figs. 9, 29, 32, 35-36; 1996: Pls. 9, 12-13; Nasar np: Figs. 8-11; Kakar 2005: 23; Qamar 1986: Pls. XLIX a, L a-b, LI a-b, LII a-b; Naserifard, taken from Facebook on 23-02-2020). The round designs quartered into four occur (see Pl. 5). They also occur in Ras-Koh Balochistan (Hasan 1989a: Fig. 8). Carved or painted ibexes are largely found in Balochistan and all over Iran (Nasar np. 32, 34-35, 43; Hasan 1996: Pls. 2-4; 1989a: 4, 7-8; Hasan 1989b: Fig. 7, 17; Naserifard, taken from Facebook Wall on 23-02-2020, etc.). The squarish segmented carved motif has comparisons in Iran (Naserifard, taken from Facebook on 23-02-2020). There is also one squarish segmented with dots in the segments recorded in Zhob (Nasar np. Fig.15). A similar motif has been found in Swat but in painted form. However, they are segmented from the centers (Olivieri 2013: 9). Moreover, handprint occurs in Zhob (Nasar np. Fig. 37). The round geometric and segmented figure with dots and two square segmented designs have been reported from the upper regions (Dani 1983: 70, 74; 1985: 93). Carved tridents have been found and they are used by Buddhists and Shaivites (Arif 2001: 112). Fig. 5 in this work seem to have ibexes. Furthermore, handprints have been found in upper regions (Bandini-König *et al.* 1997: 36). Dani (1983: 62) reports a

handprint in Chilas. According to Saraswati regarding handprints in India (2013: 5), “The handprints in several shelters symbolize faith authentication of tradition”. There are ibexes or caprids on the Kulli ceramics (Stein 1931; Jarrige et al. 2011). Others have no comparison in the region. As compared and analyzed, the engravings look historic instead.

Ibex in Focus

Ibexes have been common throughout Balochistan—from Neolithic to historic period—in the shape of bones and pottery motifs evidences (Meadow 1991: 55-56; Stein 1931; Jarrige et al. 2011; de Cardi 1965). It is also found on almost every rock art research paper of Balochistan (Nasar np.; Hasan 1996; 1989a: 1989b). Hence, it is not easy to comparatively use ibex until stylistic parameters are set.

General Comparisons with Other Regions of Pakistan

Alongside horse riders, ibexes, humped bulls, hunting scenes, fighting scenes, deities or mythical figures and geometric figures are reported from Sindh (Kalhoro 2011: 306-08; 2018). The northern regions (Gilgit, Chitral, Swat, etc.) have humans, animal riders, hunting scenes, ibexes, etc. They are petroglyphs mostly on rock caves, boulders, etc. (Khan 2013: 101-10; Cacopardo 270: 380); there are similar depictions as found in Khuzdar and Gandhava. In the Swat region, apart from the all said petroglyphs, similar pictographs have been found. Moreover, geometric patterns, some similar ones to those recently found in Khuzdar, have also been recorded (Olivieri 2010: 239-320). Additionally, apart from religious petroglyphs in northern regions, ibexes (usual), hunting and fighting scenes, horse or animal riders, geometric motifs, deities, mythical animals or stories, etc. witnessed (Bandini-König *et al.* 1997: 29-70). Dani (1983: 19-94; 1985: 89-123) and Jettmar (1992) also report ibexes, human figures, horse riders, fighting scenes, different animals, geometric designs, etc. from the northern regions of Pakistan.

Categorization

There are two types of rock art found in Balochistan: painted (pictographs) and carved (petroglyphs). Moreover, these types include humans, animals, mythical, and geometric depictions or a certain combination of them. They are either witnessed on rock boulders, in caves or at rock shelters.

Tentative Chronology

The tentative chronology of rock art is often formed from excavations at certain sites through their material remains. Moreover, stylistic criteria are used to tentatively date the rock art sites. The authors have used comparative and thematic methods for establishing the tentative chronology. The chronology of the sites is tentative which is from prehistoric to historic.

Discussion

These people in Balochistan were certainly different from a different culture than those living in Europe and elsewhere in the world; they even have a different time period too. They date back from prehistoric to historic times. They are petroglyphs and pictographs. They comprise humans, caprids/ibexes, hunting scenes, fighting scenes, geometric motifs, etc. Their comparisons can generally be found in Iran, Sindh, the upper regions of Pakistan and elsewhere as well but the farther regions stylistically somewhat differ; however, Iranian rock art can give better comparative understandings to the rock art of Balochistan. Generally, the making techniques for these engravings are carving or chiseling and pictographs have been drawn with some sort of brush using probably ochre. They are outlined mostly. Furthermore, there are somewhat stylistic differences which is perhaps due to the difference of periods. Each of the pictograph and petroglyph has a hidden story to tell which are yet to be decoded. The creators of

these rock art might be hunter-gatherers in ancient context, shepherds in historic context and/or seasonal migrator in both ancient or historic contexts at some places⁵.

Conclusion

To conclude, Balochistan has a wealth of information in rock art which has not gained proper attention of the scholars. The rock art of Balochistan has changed over time; there is continuity and change too. In the past, human groups have survived hunting animals all around the world so is the case in Balochistan. They have also gathered plants about which rock art of Balochistan is silent. They must have performed rituals and seasonal migrations. The purpose of making of these pictographs and petroglyphs is not clear but it can be assumed that some of them were made for teaching purposes. Furthermore, some of the signs may be related to their cultural and ideological symbols. Also, the painted and carved rock arts show the ideas and artistic abilities of the artists. These concepts might differ from place to place and time to time in Balochistan. The paintings or carving may relate to these interpretations i.e., figures with swords, riding animals, surrounding animals, etc. Many of these rock arts are endangered and are to be preserved soon.

The rock arts in Washuk, Khuzdar and Gandava, Jhal Magsi present the art of ancient inhabitants of this region which are part of Balochistan cultural heritage. This heritage can help in the understanding of their cultures. The rock arts consist of paintings and carvings which depict humans (common), animals (most common), geometrics frequently in certain combination. Ibexes have been the most common animal which has been either painted or carved. According to locals, there are many petroglyphs and pictographs in different parts of

⁵ The principal author interviewed several shepherds in Washuk who claimed that they make different kinds of rock art to pass their time.

Washuk, Khuzdar, and Jhal Magsi districts which have not received scholarly attention yet. They may belong to different times beginning from prehistory.

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Figures



Figures. 1 and 2. Geometric and Floral Motifs, Washuk (Photos Courtesy- Atiq Baloch)



Figures. 3 and 4. Geometric, unidentified animal painted motif; animal rider, Washuk (Photos Courtesy- Atiq Baloch)



Figure 5. Rock boulder with engraved hunting scenes, etc., Gandava, Jhal Magsi



Figures 6 and 7. Engraved mythical figure (?) animal rider and a geometric motif and hunting and fighting scenes, Gandava, Jhal Magsi



Figure 8. Engraved humped bulls, Khuzdar Mountains (Photo Courtesy- Sultan Shahwani)



Figures 9 and 10. Some sort of written script, Khuzdar Mountains (Photos Courtesy- Sultan Shahwani)



Figure 11. Human, animal, animal rider, and geometric engraved motifs, Khuzdar near Gandava (Photo Courtesy- Abdul Ghani Mangi)



Figures 12 and 13. Close look of the figures, Khuzdar near Gandava, Jhal Magsi (Photos Courtesy- Abdul Ghani Mangi)



Fig. 14. Close look at the figures, Khuzdar near Gandava, Jhal Magsi (Photo Courtesy- Abdul Ghani Mangi)



Fig. 15. Sherd from a Kulli site in Panjgur with a frieze of caprids/ibexes