

## ANCIENT PICTOGRAPHS IN BAKHTEGAN COUNTY OF FARS PROVINCE, IRAN

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**Abstract:** One of the oldest traditional arts in the world, which has lasted for thousands of years, is rock art. The rocky face of the mountains seems to be the first painting canvas on which our antediluvian ancestors tried to record their artful works. Although other methods of recording the works of art were available to primate humans, they became obsolete over time due to the deficiency of the dialyzed materials used. There are different opinions attributing a thorough chronology to these types of ancient paintings. Although in many areas, these motifs are dated to the Paleolithic period, in different parts of Iran, similarities in terms of subject and style can be perceived between these motifs and motifs presented on the pottery samples each one relating to the different cultural periods. Perhaps we can deal with the chronology of the patterns by the comparative approach. The study of these ancient motifs has been given special attention in the world for several decades, but in Iran, the comprehensive studies have not been done yet and generally, the majority of the presentations only include the descriptive collections of the motifs. The preceding researches demonstrate that the art of pictographs can be seen in most parts of Iran, especially on the Zagros and the Central Plateau. In the Fars province, due to its geographical location in the South Zagros, rock art has been identified and introduced from different regions, including petroglyphs and pictographs. In the present research, studying the Bakhtegan county of Fars province, we identified some of the pictographic instances, and in this article, we try to introduce their patterns. The present study prepared by the field and library study methods to document, classify, and attribute a relative chronology of the patterns based on the comparative approach. The studied motifs are of the color-painting type embracing the human, animal, plant, and symbolic motifs.

**Keywords:** Rock art, pictograph, Rock shelter, Bakhtegan, Fars.

**چکیده:** از سنت‌های هنری بسیار قدیمی در دنیا که طی هزاران سال تداوم داشته، نقوش صخره‌ای است. به نظر می‌رسد بستر صخره‌ای کوه اولین بستری بود که انسان برای ثبت آثار هنری خود انتخاب کرده است. گرچه روش‌های دیگری برای ثبت آثار هنری در اختیار بشر قرار داشته، اما به دلیل خاصیت تجزیه‌پذیری مواد مورد استفاده با گذشت زمان از بین رفته‌اند. در مورد تاریخگذاری نقوش فوق نظرات مختلفی وجود دارد، هر چند بر بسیاری مناطق، این نقوش به دوره پارینه سنگی تاریخگذاری شده اما در نواحی مختلف ایران شباهت‌هایی از نظر موضوع و سبک بین این نقوش با نقوش روی سفال‌های ادوار مختلف فرهنگی دیده می‌شود که شاید بتوان با این مقایسه به گاهنگاری نقوش پرداخت. هر چند چندین دهه است که در جهان مطالعه این نقوش مورد توجه ویژه قرار گرفته اما در ایران هنوز مطالعات جامعی صورت نگرفته و عموماً شامل توصیف مجموعه‌های نقوش است. پژوهش‌های صورت گرفته نشان می‌دهد که هنر صخره‌نگاری در بیشتر نقاط ایران، به ویژه زاگرس و فلات مرکزی دیده می‌شود. در استان فارس نیز با توجه به موقعیت جغرافیایی و قرار داشتن آن در زاگرس جنوبی تا کنون از مناطق مختلفی هنر صخره‌ای شامل کنده‌نگاره و رنگ‌نگاره شناسایی و معرفی شده است. نگارندگان نیز در شهرستان بختگان استان فارس نمونه‌هایی از رنگ‌نگاره را شناسایی نموده و در این مقاله سعی بر آن است تا به معرفی نقوش پرداخته شود. پژوهش حاضر با روش‌های مطالعه میدانی و کتابخانه‌ای به مستندنگاری، طبقه‌بندی، گاهنگاری نسبی نقوش بر اساس مطالعات تطبیقی و معرفی نقوش مذکور پرداخته است. نقوش مورد بررسی از نوع رنگ‌نگاره بوده که شامل نقوش انسانی، حیوانی، گیاهی و نمادین است.

**واژگان کلیدی:** نقاشی صخره‌ای، رنگ‌نگاره، پناهگاه صخره‌ای، بختگان، فارس.

## I. Introduction:

Rock carvings and paintings are the most prominent works of art in various fields of study, including archeology, art history, social sciences, etc. Petroglyphs function as a branch of rock art in many societies, cultures, and civilizations used as a means of expressing the thoughts and beliefs of the cults and the ancient rituals of a culture (Gillette *et al.*, 2014: 1) (Sheikh Akbarzadeh *et al.*, 2013). Generally, the subjects represented on the petroglyphs are influenced by the geographical, cultural, and environmental conditions prominent in each region, and historically, rock art motifs continue from the Paleolithic period to the present day. However, defining the absolute chronology for such motifs is a difficult task for a variety of reasons.

In general, petroglyphs are visible in a wide geographical area and in many countries in Central Asia, Europe, and Africa. These motifs can represent a specific historical event, a story, or a myth. They might define a specific territory or be related to the performance of the specific ritual. Although some of these motifs seemingly indicate the occurrence of real events, some of them absolutely exhibit abstract individual art (Vahdati, 2010: 15). These samples were discovered by chance in Bakhtegan County by the authors. Due to the location and characteristics of this area, there might be more rock motifs. Bakhtegan County should be studied archeologically by the scientific methodology. This will help to illuminate the dark corners of this art as well as the different parts of the life of the ancient people who

were the creators of this art. The present study identifies and classifies the rock motifs of Chehel Dokhtaroon and Chashme Roni and according to the archaeological studies focusing on this field, we can propose a relative chronology for the mentioned motifs.

## II. The research background:

The first scientific study on rock carvings in Iran began when Italian geologists in the Balochistan region were working to discover and extract minerals in 1958. They discovered a number of rock carvings in the Gezo region (Dessau 1960). In 1969, Hamid Izadpanah came across the red and black paintings for the first time in the caves and rock shelters of the Kuhdasht region (Izadpanah, 1997: 308-307). In the same area, in Do-shah Cave, on the flat walls of this cave, he discovered one hundred and ten paintings all painted in black (Izadpanah, 1997: 173). Charles McBurney studied the rock carvings of Do-Shah and Mir-malas in 1969 (Burney 2005: 16-14). In 1987, Sarraf and Bashash identified the petroglyphs of Tuysarkan in Hamedan province (Sarraf & Bashash 1987: 6, Sarraf 1997: 304-310). In 1992, the petroglyphs of Lakh Mazar in Birjand were studied (Labafkhaniki & Bashash, 1994: 4). In 1993, Bigleri and Jamshidi studied the paintings of Cheshmeh Sohrab Cave in Kermanshah (Bigleri *et al.*, 2007: 50-55). The Hanjiran motifs have been introduced in the Mahabad civilization book (Pedram, 1994: 82-80). In 1994, Rasoul Ashtoudan, in his dissertation paper entitled "Overview of Karaftoo Cave", explained the paintings inside the cave in one chapter (Ashtoudan, 1994: 98-92). In 1997, the listed articles to mention; Mahnaz Fooladvand wrote her master's thesis on the Homian, Mir-malas, and Do-shah (Fooladvand, 1978). In 1997, Lakhmzar Birjand paints by Mohammad Reza Badi (Badi, 1997), paintings of Divin Alvand Valley of Hamedan by Mohammad Rahim Sarraf (Sarraf, 1997), rock carvings of Sirjan by Babak Farhadi (Farhadi 1997), and the petroglyphs of Arnan mountains in Yazd (Shahrzadi, 1997: 133-142). In the following year, the collection of rock paintings of the Teymareh region was published as a comprehensive book containing many pictures and patterns (Farhadi, 1998). Newer research has also been done by Mohammad Naseri-Fard in Teymareh (Naseri-Fard 2009). During the years 1998 and 1999, the archeological evidence of pictographs in Mashhad County, and a collection of rock motifs in Toos Plain were identified and studied (Bakhtiari-Shahri 2009: 21-24). For the first time, Jamal Lahafian began to study and research the rock motifs of Kurdistan province (Lahafian, 2001-2002). In 2001, the pictographs of Ashkaft-i Ahoon in Bastak county in Hormozgan province were examined (Bahador, 2001, Sadeghi, 2002), and the study of recently discovered paintings began at the same time (Garajian *et al.*, 2001). In 2003, the pictographpaint of Balochistan pictograph

(Heidari, 2003). In 2004, a joint group from the Liege University in Belgium, led by Marcel August, in collaboration with Jalal Adeli a member of the Lorestan Cultural Heritage Organization, studied lately discovered petroglyphs in the same region (Ott *et al.*, 2003: 8-12). During the archeological revisions of the Bardsir County samples, a number of patterns were studied. In 2005, Jalaluddin Rafiefar published a book entitled Arasbaran petroglyphs (Rafiefar, 2005). In the same Iran-Belgium joint group, a number of new paints were identified in the Kuhdasht region (Remacle *et al.*, 2006). Taher Qasimi, in his dissertation entitled "Study on the rock motifs in Kurdistan Province," examined these motifs (Qasimi 2006, 2007: 71-81, Ghasimi 2007, 106-89). In 2006, Sirvan Mohammadi introduced the rock carvings of Qala-e-Bazi mount in Isfahan (Mohammadi-Qasrian, 2006, 62-65) and a number of rock carvings of Qom County as a preliminary task (Mohammadi-Qasrian, 2007) and with Naderi's cooperation, he examined the pictograph paint in Khore Hanjiran of Mahabad (Mohammadi-Qasrian & Naderi, 2007: 64-61). In 2007, the pictographs of the southern mountains of Buin Zahra County in Qazvin province were identified and documented within the framework of a research project (Mulla-Salehi *et al.*, 2007-2006). In the framework of a research project, a collection of rock motifs in the Gotvand region of Khuzestan was studied (Azizi, Khoranaghi *et al.*, 2011). During the archeological study of Gabrik Dam in Hormozgan, a collection of rock motifs was identified (Darabi, 2007). Mohammad Naseri-Fard published the results of his research in the field of rock art in Iran in 2009 and published his latest studies in this field (Naseri-Fard, 2009). In 2008, during the archeological study of Bazaft Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari region under the supervision of Rasoul Borujeni, several sets of rock motifs were identified (Seyedin-Boroujeni, 2008). A number of pictographs were identified in the Hulk Caves Complex in Fars Province (Vahdati *et al.*, 2008: 91-96). In 2009, during the archeological survey of Boyer-Ahmad County, a collection of pictographs was identified (Alamdari, 2009). One of the newest books published on rock art is "Stone Canvas" about rock art in North Khorasan Province (Vahdati, 2010). Yaghoob Mohammadifar and Ismail Hemmati in 2012 introduced paints in Malayer that include a collection of about 700 different patterns (Mohammadifar & Hemmati, 2014: 223-252). In 2015, Ghorbani and his colleagues studied the petroglyphs of the historical region of South Khorasan Province (Ghorbani *et al.*, 2015: 82-57). A number of pictographs were identified in the Saravan County, Negaran Valley, and Marzbanik Valley in Baluchestan (Sarhadi Dadian *et al.* 2015; 2021; Moradi *et al.* 2013). In Fars province, petroglyph motifs from Naqshe Rostam (Khanipour *et al.*, 2015), Passargad (Azizi Kharanaghi & Salimi, 2016),

Bavanat (Khanipour *et al.*, 2018), Eghlid (Barani *et al.*, 2019), a pictograph of Abduzo Rock Shelter, Firoozabad (Qasimi *et al.*, 2010: 27-17), and the Tonge Teyho (Fazel&Alibagi 2012).

### III. Geographical location and history of Bakhtegan county:

There are comments about Abadeh-Teshk region in many books, especially those ones mention Fars County, called Fars-nameh locally. Especially around Teshk Lake and Bakhtegan Lake, which are among good locations accommodating human settlements since prehistory. The area around the Lakes is one of the most important centers of ancient Iranian civilization. The Achaemenid and Sassanid buildings in this region, the principal of which was the Istakhr county located next to Bakhteganeh or Neyriz Lake, and around them, there were extensive villages and towns (Mashkour, 1992: 556). In the fifth century AH, Ibn Balkhi says in his book Farsnameh: "Abadeh is a town with a strong fort and has a temperate climate", (Ibn Balkhi 2006: 133). In the eighth century AH, Hamdollah Mostofi called Abadeh a town with a strong fortress and a temperate climate and said; "the water is from the grace of the river kour, bringing on a lot of grain and grapes feeding the countless huts and villages" (Mostofi 1983: 129). It is stated in Naseri Farsnameh: "Abadeh Tashk is bounded on the east by the Neyriz and Bavanat blocks, on the north by the Sarchahan [Sarchahan] and Qonqari blocks, on the west by the Karbal block, and on the south by the Bakhtegan Lake. The climate of this block near the Bakhtegan Salt Lake tends to be temperate. Water is from canals and springs, cultivation of chickpeas, wheat, barley, cotton, sesame and castor. Its orchards are adorned with almonds, pomegranates, and grapes. It is better in flavor and sweetness than most Persian pomegranates. Its trade wealth is almonds and pomegranate paste. This block is 12 farsakhs from Hosseinabad to Tashk village. It is two and a half farsakhs from Bakhtegan Lake to Bijehkan and Khajeh Jamali. The name of the town is Abadeh. Tashk is the name of a village under the Abadeh subdivision authority 23 miles east of Shiraz. Its houses are made of raw clay, mud, and wood. Their number is close to 250 doors. This block consists of 8 rich villages" (Fasaei 2008: 1242). Abadeh Tashk district became a county in 2009 after its separation from Neyriz County.

### IV. Chel-Dokhtaroon petroglyphs:

At a distance of 10 km northwest of the county of Abadeh Tashk, in the foothills known as Kow-khom, is a village called Tashk (Fig. 1). At about 1 km northeast of this village and in a part of the mountain known as Chel-Dokhtaroon, there are several rock shelters. In one of these shelters (UTM, 751923-3303469) a collection of pictographs on the body of the rock facing

west is visible (Fig. 2). This collection is either an individual or a group work consisting of animal, plant, and symbolic motifs all painted red.

There are three animal figures in one of the Chel-Dokhtaroon rock shelters. The first painting depicts a goat with a long, curved neck and a slender waist. Conversely, the horn motifs of the historically prominent goats, which are seen on pottery as a large crescent from the head to the tail of the animal, the horn of this animal is oblique and have large appendages to the middle of the body. The body of the animal engraved with the connected triangles and patterned with crossed lines. In front of this goat a plant was painted (Fig. 4: 1 and Fig. 3). Below the painted triangular goat, a completely different animal is depicted. The body of this animal painted asymmetrical oval and the inside decorated with diagonal lines. The head and neck of this animal are smaller than the body and its horn is much larger and more complex. The horn is extended diagonally with a slight arc in the direction of the body and irregular horizontal lines are engraved on it. The painting is probably of a deer (Fig 4: 2 and Fig 3). The third animal in the collection of the forty-two rock carvings is a strange painting, and considering its appearance, it can even be said that the painted animal is imaginary. The whole body and head of this animal are drawn in a unified manner without dividing lines and the body of the animal and from the head to the end as a band with a small width. Each leg of this animal is drawn by a smooth and simple line. Its neck is completely turned backward and continues from the point of curvature to the end of the body. Inside the narrow strip that forms the body is decorated with a wavy line and a dot, parts of which have now been removed, and on its neck a wavy line as a mane, and on the animal's head two small crown-like appendages. There are two small appendages along the neck that resemble the beak. This animal has a short tail that is drawn and turned 90 degrees toward the animal's body (Fig 4: 6 and Fig 3).

The largest number of motifs of this rock are simple plant motifs that are engraved using vertical and horizontal lines and oblique lines. The trunk and the plant are drawn with a vertical line and their branches with diagonal lines with a sharp angle or horizontal lines with a 90-degree angle. Some of the floral motifs are drawn more elaborately, the branches are fractured at the end and bent down at a sharp angle, with a small dot between each branch. Some of the other motifs drawn on the rock are the painted plants with downward branches. The stem of the plant was drawn in a straight and vertical line with branches at right angles to the stem. The end of the branch, which has a small appendage, is engraved downwards (Fig. 6 and 4: 3 and Fig. 3).

One of the symbolic paintings is a square whose three sides are marked with a straight line and all three sides are decorated with interconnected triangles from both sides. The fourth side is not lined. A zigzag line and a painted circle are drawn below it without connection to the main body of the figure. The inside of the square is divided into four parts by two lines, like the main sides, decorated with triangle motifs, and there is a dot inside each triangle. In the three triangular parts of the square a relatively large dot and at the top of the upper side of the square there is a plant pattern with four branches (Fig. 4: 5 and Fig. 3). Other symbolic

motifs include dots, painted circles, vertical, horizontal, and oblique lines. These motifs are drawn separately or collectively or next to other motifs (Fig. 4: 7 and Fig. 3).

**V. Cheshme Roni pictographs:**

On the northern slope of Wool Mountain, at the mouth of the crossroads, on the right side of Sarchahan-Abadeh road at the distance of 23 km north of Abadeh Tashk county, there is a spring known as Cheshme Roni (Fig. 1).

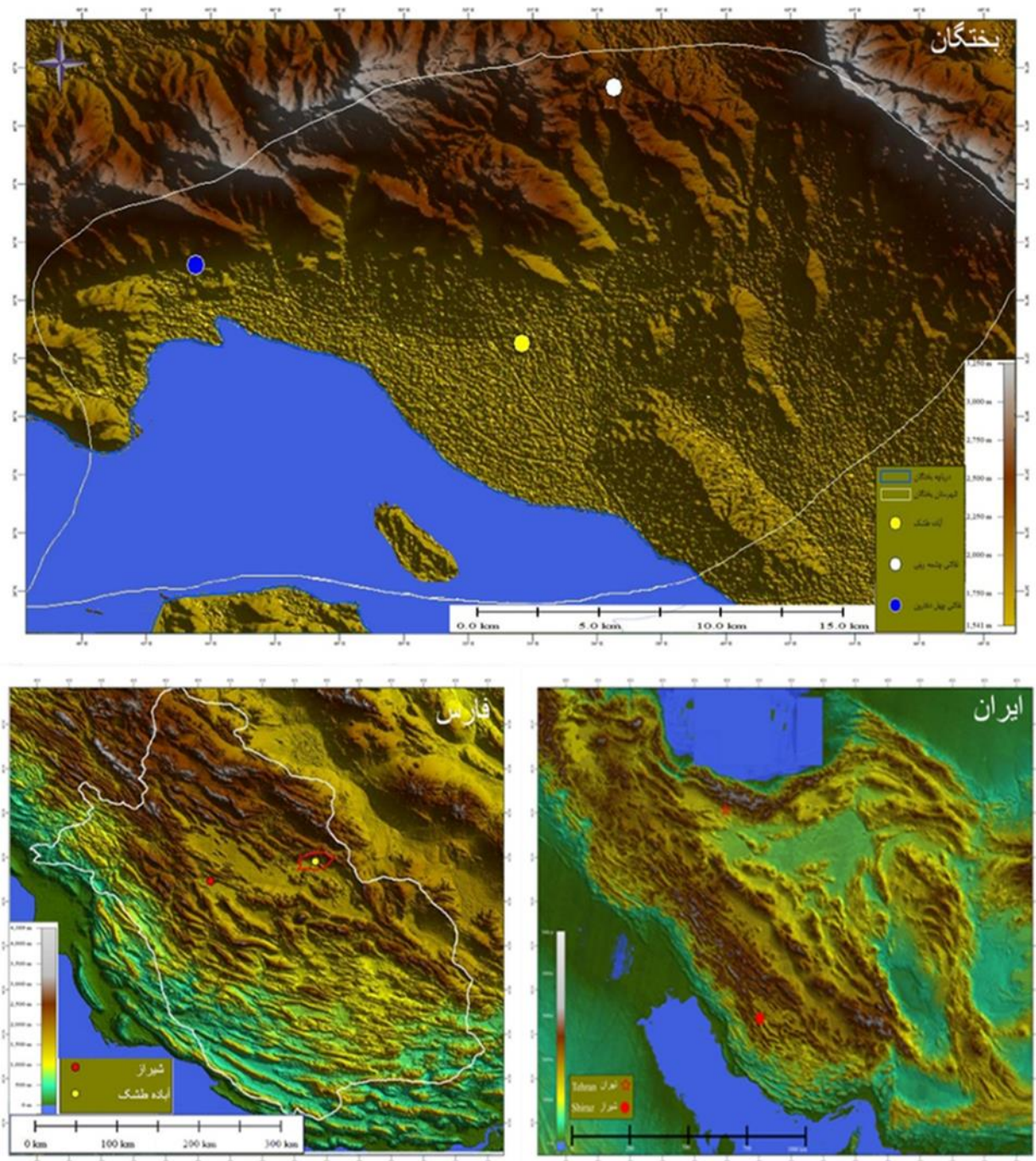


Figure 1. Location of Chel-Dokhtaroon and Cheshme Roni (by Authors).

About 100 meters south of the spring, a small cave is located in the geographical position (UTM) 766691-33310312 (Fig. 5), where paintings of humans are visible on the eastern body of the entrance of the cave. On the eastern wall of the entrance of the cave with a width of 150 cm, a length of about 10 m, and a height varying from 60 cm to 3 m, the image of three people is engraved (Fig. 6 and Fig. 4).

It can be seen inside a depression in the cave wall. In this painting, three humans can be seen, two with a larger body at the top and one with a smaller body in front of the others. All three human beings move outwards with their hands separated from their bodies and their legs drawn moving forwards.



Figure 2. The location of the pictograph of Chel-Dokhtaroon (by Authors).



Figure 3. Chel-Dokhtaroon pictographs (by Authors).

### VI. Chronology

One of the most important problems in studying rock patterns is their chronology and dating. This can be achieved by sampling and executing laboratory operations and interdisciplinary studies. Unfortunately, in Iran, due to the impossibility of laboratory studies, the exact dating of these designs cannot be realized, but by doing comparative studies, their relative dating can be achieved (Mohammadiafar & Hemmati, 2014). Most of the studies done in the field of Iranian rock art have paid less attention to the chronological issues.

The chronologies presented so far are often based on the semiotics of mental recognition of the elements and items displayed, stylistic and comparative studies, and the iconography of patterns and similar items (Mohammadi Ghasrian, 2007).

The use of such methods has become the only reason for obtaining a relative chronology and cannot indicate the exact time of rock formation (Mohammadi, 2006). By relative dating, several things can be considered, and based on them, the approximate time frame of the patterns can be estimated.

## VII. Conclusion

The lack of coherent archaeological studies on Bakhtegan County made the historical monuments of this region remain unknown until now. The authors' current study of the rock motifs of this county is one of the few archaeological studies about the region. A comprehensive study of this county, in addition to recognizing the cultural developments of the region during various periods, can also help us to determine the chronology of the identified patterns. Examining and analyzing these petroglyphs and other well-known collections can help us to study the stylistic features and their evolution over time from prehistoric times to the present. The motifs identified in Chel-Dokhtaroon and Tong Roni is all pictographic.

The Chel-Dokhtaroon motifs include 3 animal motifs, 8 plant motifs, 1 symbolic motif, and two sets of dot motifs. The motif of 3 humans can be seen in

Cheshme Roni. Some of the Chel-Dokhtaroon drawings and their meanings are unknown to us, and probably the purpose of this painting was to symbolically express the natural environment around or to display some religious meanings. Ethnological studies can provide us with clues because even today in most parts of Fars province, the life of nomadic tribes is still similar to their ancestral lifestyle in ancient times. Careful study of their communities from different perspectives can help us to better interpret the concepts of rock art. Some of the Chel-Dokhtaroon paintings and Cheshmeh Rooney are unique in terms of style, method, and type, and the production, content, and theme are not comparable to the paintings that have been obtained so far from other parts of Iran. By a relative comparison, these motifs can be attributed to prehistory. It should be noted that laboratory studies must be performed to ensure the dating process.

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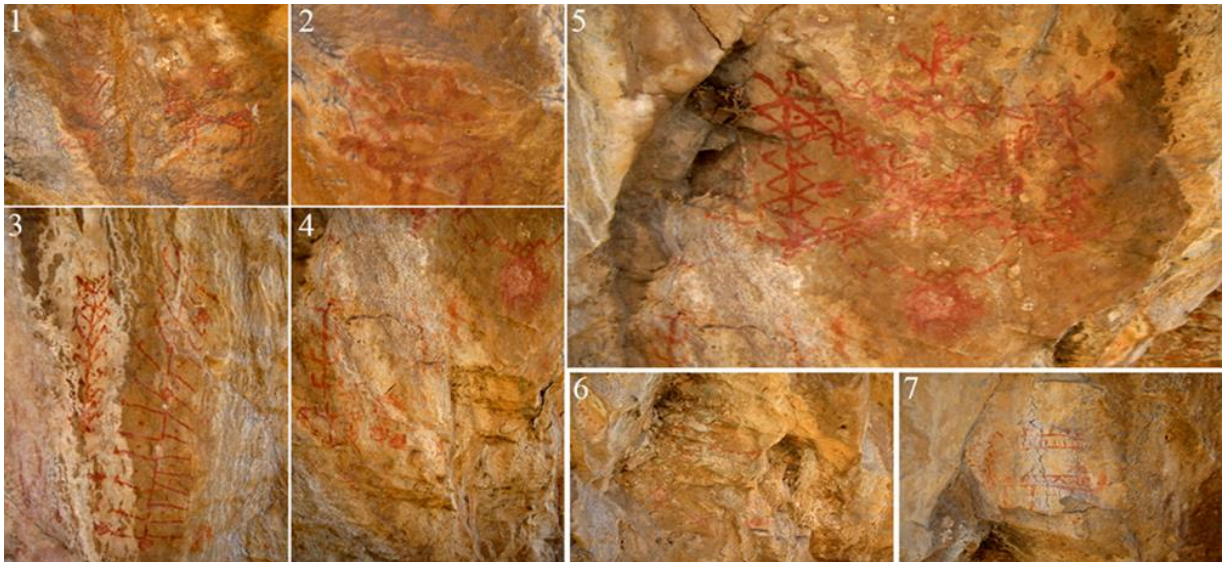


Figure 4. Animal, plant and symbolic rock motifs of Chel-Dokhtaroon (by Authors).

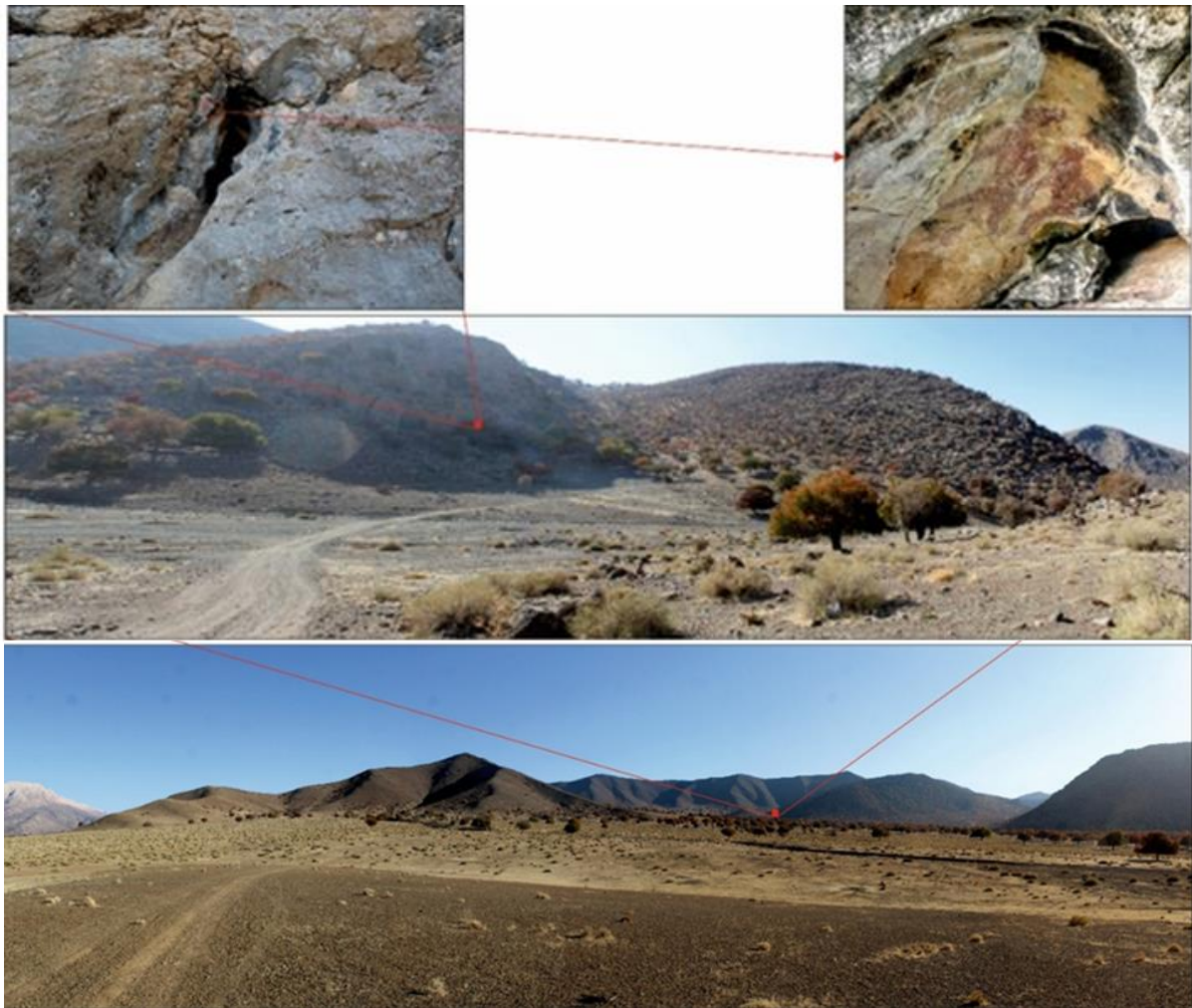


Figure 5. The location of Cheshme Roni and the paintings of Cheshmeh Roni cave (by Authors).



Figure 6. Pictograph of Cheshme Roni (by Authors).



Figure 7. Pictograph of Cheshme Roni (by Authors).