

Rock carvings in Varzaqan, a window into ancient nomadic life



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The Director of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization of Varzaqan, a city in East Azarbaijan Province, underscored the importance of recently unearthed rock carvings on stone slabs as pre-Islamic rock art linked to the South Caucasus, emphasizing their value for further research as a pivotal means to comprehend the socio-anthropological landscape in the northwest of Iran. Mosayeb Narimani noted that Varzaqan, situated in the northwest of Iran, has long been a focal point in archaeological investigations. Previous studies in the area have unveiled a variety of ancient structures such as fortresses, cemeteries, rock architecture, and tombs

from the Islamic era, chn.ir wrote. "In 2021, an archaeological survey near the Sungun Copper Mine revealed a range of rock carvings. This rock art on stone slabs, akin to similar discoveries in other parts of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan, plays a crucial role in enriching our understanding of pre-Islamic rock art in Iran and the South Caucasus."

He added, "The carvings, identified both individually and in clusters on black stone slabs using pecking techniques, predominantly depict mountain goats, aligning with comparable examples from Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan. These carvings suggest the nomadic lifestyle and hunting practices of the artisans behind these creations. Due to the absence of laboratory

studies in Iran, the exact time periods of these carvings remain undetermined, making it challenging to establish a specific chronology through comparative analyses.

He said: These rock carvings are located at an altitude of 1300 meters above sea level. Additionally, this area has been suitable for pastoral activities, and from ancient times, the primary occupation of the people in the region has been animal husbandry, especially the breeding of goats and sheep.

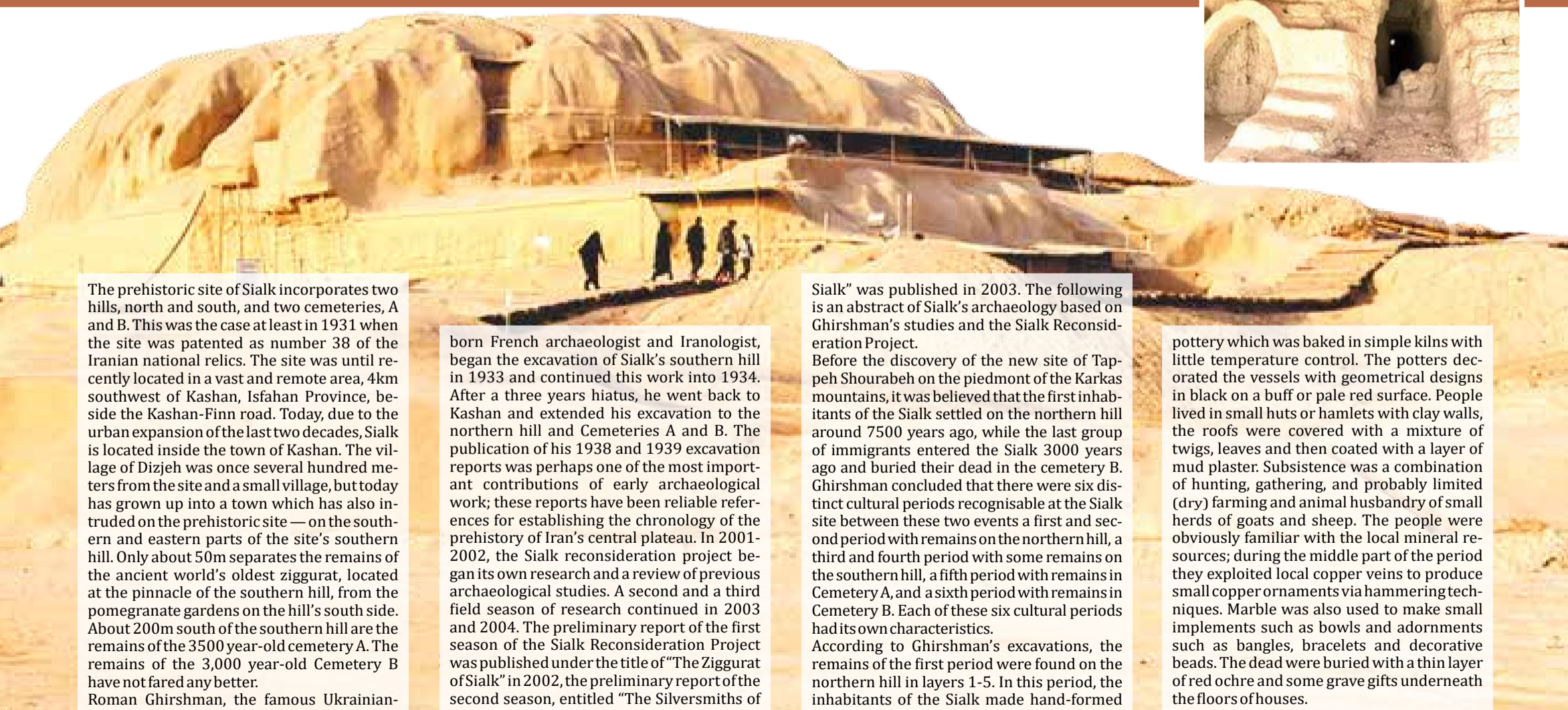
Referring to the importance of conducting studies in the field of rock art and understanding the socio-anthropological and human aspects of the region, he said: This site includes carvings of goats, deer, and humans that have been displayed separately or in groups.

These carvings can provide insight into some socio-anthropological and human concepts based on nomadic life, animal husbandry, and hunting activities.

The goat carvings indicate an economy based on animal husbandry and nomadic activities, while the deer symbolizes hunting in this society. Some researchers in Iran associate the creation period of these carvings, especially the goat carvings, with prehistoric times. However, due to the lack of laboratory studies in Iran, it is not possible to determine the antiquity of this rock art, and a specific timeframe cannot be considered for these artifacts. These carvings are highly important in completing the information related to rock art in Iran and the South Caucasus.



Mysteries of Sialk prehistoric site in Kashan



The prehistoric site of Sialk incorporates two hills, north and south, and two cemeteries, A and B. This was the case at least in 1931 when the site was patented as number 38 of the Iranian national relics. The site was until recently located in a vast and remote area, 4km southwest of Kashan, Isfahan Province, beside the Kashan-Finn road. Today, due to the urban expansion of the last two decades, Sialk is located inside the town of Kashan. The village of Dizjeh was once several hundred meters from the site and a small village, but today has grown up into a town which has also intruded on the prehistoric site — on the southern and eastern parts of the site's southern hill. Only about 50m separates the remains of the ancient world's oldest ziggurat, located at the pinnacle of the southern hill, from the pomegranate gardens on the hill's south side. About 200m south of the southern hill are the remains of the 3500-year-old cemetery A. The remains of the 3,000-year-old Cemetery B have not fared any better.

Roman Ghirshman, the famous Ukrainian-

born French archaeologist and Iranologist, began the excavation of Sialk's southern hill in 1933 and continued this work into 1934. After a three years hiatus, he went back to Kashan and extended his excavation to the northern hill and Cemeteries A and B. The publication of his 1938 and 1939 excavation reports was perhaps one of the most important contributions of early archaeological work; these reports have been reliable references for establishing the chronology of the prehistory of Iran's central plateau. In 2001-2002, the Sialk reconsideration project began its own research and a review of previous archaeological studies. A second and a third field season of research continued in 2003 and 2004. The preliminary report of the first season of the Sialk Reconsideration Project was published under the title of "The Ziggurat of Sialk" in 2002, the preliminary report of the second season, entitled "The Silversmiths of

Sialk" was published in 2003. The following is an abstract of Sialk's archaeology based on Ghirshman's studies and the Sialk Reconsideration Project.

Before the discovery of the new site of Tappeh Shourabeh on the piedmont of the Karkas mountains, it was believed that the first inhabitants of the Sialk settled on the northern hill around 7500 years ago, while the last group of immigrants entered the Sialk 3000 years ago and buried their dead in the cemetery B. Ghirshman concluded that there were six distinct cultural periods recognizable at the Sialk site between these two events a first and second period with remains on the northern hill, a third and fourth period with some remains on the southern hill, a fifth period with remains in Cemetery A, and a sixth period with remains in Cemetery B. Each of these six cultural periods had its own characteristics.

According to Ghirshman's excavations, the remains of the first period were found on the northern hill in layers 1-5. In this period, the inhabitants of the Sialk made hand-formed

pottery which was baked in simple kilns with little temperature control. The potters decorated the vessels with geometrical designs in black on a buff or pale red surface. People lived in small huts or hamlets with clay walls, the roofs were covered with a mixture of twigs, leaves and then coated with a layer of mud plaster. Subsistence was a combination of hunting, gathering, and probably limited (dry) farming and animal husbandry of small herds of goats and sheep. The people were obviously familiar with the local mineral resources; during the middle part of the period they exploited local copper veins to produce small copper ornaments via hammering techniques. Marble was also used to make small implements such as bowls and adornments such as bangles, bracelets and decorative beads. The dead were buried with a thin layer of red ochre and some grave gifts underneath the floors of houses.