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Dakhleh Oasis Project : Research on the Petroglyphs, 1990

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This season¹ was a continuation of fieldwork carried out previously. In 1985, a method for recording petroglyphs in the Dakhleh Oasis was tested² and in 1988 the first full programme of recording was initiated in a sample area.³ This area continued to be investigated in 1990.

The investigation of petroglyphs is part of the research of the Dakhleh Oasis Project (DOP) Expedition organized by the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto and directed by Prof. Anthony J. Mills. He was kind enough to invite a team from the PCMA to join in the project. Speaking for the petroglyph team, the present author wishes to express gratitude to Professor Mills for his initiative and kindness.

The petroglyph research programme in the Dakhleh Oasis comprises the recording of their total in sample areas, improving the typology and chronology hitherto established for known drawings⁴ and using them as a source of information for studies of the way in which human attitudes toward animals developed in the oasis.⁵ This

¹ The fieldwork was done by Assist. Prof. Lech Krzyżaniak (Poznań Archaeological Museum) and Dr. Karla M. Kroeper (Egyptian Museum in West Berlin).

² See L. Krzyżaniak, K. Kroeper, Report on a reconnaissance season of recording petroglyphs, December 1985, *Journal of the Society of Study of Egyptian Antiquities*, vol. XV/4, 1985, pp. 138-139.

³ L. Krzyżaniak, Dakhleh Oasis Project: interim report on the first season of the recording of petroglyphs, January-February 1988, *Journal of the Society of Study of Egyptian Antiquities*, in press.

⁴ H.A. Winkler, *Rock Drawings of Southern Upper Egypt II*, London 1939.

⁵ L. Krzyżaniak, Petroglyphs and the research on the development of the cultural attitude towards animals in the Dakhleh Oasis (Egypt), *Sahara*, vol. 3, 1990, pp. 95-97.

source is to be combined with the evidence yielded by habitation sites in this area, which are being investigated by a different team of the DOP.

The aim of the research programme concerning the petroglyphs at Dakhleh is to record the total of these remains in the sample area – square E3 – situated in the eastern part of the Oasis. The tested area covers the better part of one square kilometer and in 1988 some 18 petroglyph sites were found here. In 1990, the team continued making tracings on transparent film and describing in words these remains; some were re-photographed as well. Eight sites were fully recorded during this season (Nos. 61-39/E3/1-8). Also, several other petroglyph sites were found in the area adjacent to the sample square; a photographic record was made of most of the finds.

Almost all of the recorded petroglyphs seem to be dated to the time period between the Early Holocene (8th millennium BC) and the 3rd millennium BC. The majority depict animals and humans, sometimes in association. These associations seem to refer to different stages and forms in the development of the human attitude to animals in this area and turn out to be useful evidence in our studies on this subject. It is worth mentioning that the animal species depicted in the petroglyphs were identified in the field by the archaeozoologist of the DOP. Some of the petroglyphs clearly constitute prehistoric art of high quality. They are executed using different kinds of engraving and sunk relief; no paintings have been found.

The recorded petroglyphs can be classified in three groups by subject and style. The first and most numerous group is composed of pictures of animals, only seldom in association with humans. The species depicted were identified as antelopes, giraffes and other unidentified quadrupeds, ostriches and schematically executed human figures, seldom in association with animals. In one case such an association shows a scene of giraffe hunting by what appears to be men with bows, assisted by dogs (Fig. 1). This group of petroglyphs

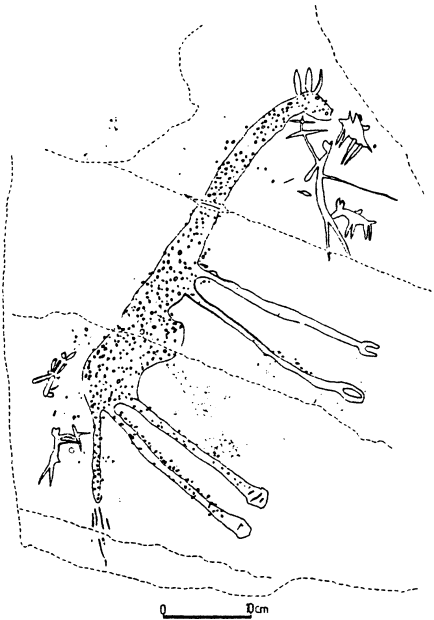


Fig. 1. Eastern Dakhleh Oasis, site 61-39/E3-3, petroglyph No. 1. An engraved scene showing a giraffe hunt with what seems to be bowmen assisted by dogs.

seems to have many traits in common with a style defined previously as the Earliest Hunters Style, which has been considered the earliest in the Oasis.⁶

The second group of petroglyphs is characterized by depictions of female figures, sometimes richly decorated (Fig. 2), seldom shown in association with humans or animals. In one such case, a scene shows an antelope apparently being pulled by a man towards a schematically depicted female figure (Fig. 3). This group is tra-

⁶ Winkler, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.

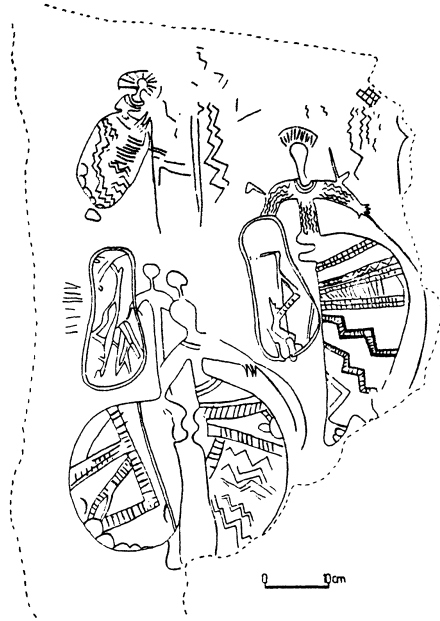


Fig. 2. Eastern Dakhleh Oasis, site 61-39/E3-2, petroglyph No. 1. An engraved group of decorated female figures and later (superimposed) sandals. An engraved group of decorated female figures and later (superimposed) sandals.

ditionally considered as later than the one described above and is defined as "Early Oasis Dwellers".⁷

The third and latest group of petroglyphs in the local sequence is dated to the 3rd millennium BC. Many of them are represented by small finds excavated from well stratified contents of stone "rings" – remains of huts dated to the 5th-6th dynasty, judging from the numerous fragments of Egyptian pottery and seal impressions on

⁷ Ibid., pp. 27-30.

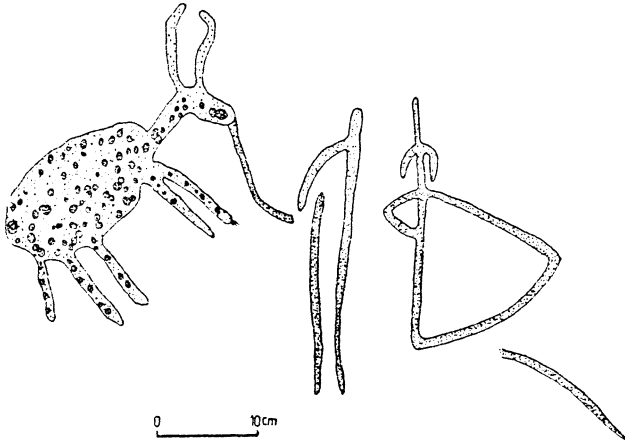


Fig. 3. Eastern Dakhleh Oasis, site 61-39/E3-15, petroglyph No. 5. An engraved and stylized scene, apparently showing an antelope being pulled by a man towards a female figure.

clay found in the same context. The depictions show figures of long-horned cattle, donkeys and bulls in association with men and scenes of hunting with dogs.

The evidence yielded by petroglyph sites in Eastern Dakhleh seems therefore to point to different stages and forms in the development of the human attitude toward animals and their exploitation in the Oasis, such as hunting (killing, trapping, capturing) and husbandry (cattle, donkey). The fieldwork will be continued in 1992.