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Rock Art Research in the Fourth Cataract Region : Preliminary Report

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ROCK ART RESEARCH IN THE FOURTH CATARACT REGION

PRELIMINARY REPORT

Ewa Kuciewicz

The research on petroglyphs in the concession of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw in the Fourth Cataract region took place on 7-16 December 2006.¹ Based on an earlier prospection of the region,² the present reconnaissance covered territory

around Hagar el-Beida and Gamamiya, as well as on Jebel Gurgurib, close to Shemkhiya. Three clusters of rock art sites were discovered, significantly different when form and function are taken into consideration. The data will help to plan further research in the region.

HAGAR EL-BEIDA AND GAMAMIYA REGIONS

The reconnaissance located already known sites, as well as several previously unnoted ones, making up two of the above-mentioned clusters.

JEBEL EL-KITABA

The first of the clusters is located on a single, relatively massive eminence situated on the southern side of the wadi leading into the Nile valley. It is characteristically grandiose, towering over the surrounding landscape. The hard granite is heavily scratched and incised, the lines parallel and crossing at various angles [*Fig. 1*, top left]. Other geometrical symbols like squares with diagonals, cross marks, etc., are rare and figural represen-

tations are nonexistent. Different degrees of patination of the lines and incisions demonstrate activity over a considerably long period of time.

The awesome landscape and the general character of the glyphs inevitably bring to mind a contingent ritual function. Apparently the place still holds meaning for local inhabitants and ethnographical studies may well provide an explanation of its significance.

WADI EL-KHINEISH

Rock art sites previously identified in the el-Gamamiya region (Chłodnicki *et alii* 2007: 343-345) now proved to be part of a bigger body of sites spreading over

1 Carried out by the present author within the framework of the PCMA expedition directed by Bogdan T. Żurawski.

2 A preliminary survey of the Shemkhiya area had been conducted earlier in the year by Karol Piasecki; for his remarks on this prospection, see above, contribution in this volume. Information on the presence and general location of rock art in the region was also passed on by ethnographer Piotr Maliński.

a considerable area around Wadi el-Khineish. The full extent could not be determined during the brief reconnaissance this year. The petroglyphs were carved on irregular sandstone ridges running independently of the course of wadi. The ease with which this stone could be cut and incised must have contributed greatly to its choice as a background for the glyphs.

A preliminary examination of the drawings has identified beside the numerous and quite recent representations of camels [*Fig. 1*, bottom], several glyphs of bovines and giraffes [*Fig. 1*, top right], showing different degrees of weathering. There are also many geometrical motifs and complicated arrangements of unclear nature requiring a closer examination in the future.

JEBEL GURGURIB IN THE SHEMKHIYA REGION

The huge blocks of granite making up Jebel Gurgurib conceal an abundance of interesting petroglyphs. It is a natural passage from the east, from the deep desert into the Nile valley, frequented even today by goat and sheep herders. One wadi was selected for thorough documentation in order to gain a general idea of the character of this cluster of rock-art sites. About a half of the wadi was completed this season. Some 22 sites were noted, ranging from single representations on isolated blocks to big clusters consisting of up to 14 boulders and more than 100 petroglyphs. The wider context is considered when documenting, paying attention to the location of petroglyphs, their relation to the surrounding environment and the way they are incorporated into the landscape.

The general impression is that the petroglyphs in this wadi are like a gallery of pictures for the nomads approaching the Nile valley. They are executed in perfectly visible places, very often natural points of navigation and indeed, this may have been

their original function. Places suitable for a night's rest are exceptionally abundant in rock art. These are natural stone shelters rising above the floor of the wadi, protected from the sun and cold winds, giving instead a marvelous view of the herds grassing below.

Most of the petroglyphs depict camels or camel riders, sometimes in groups of up to 15 individuals [*Fig. 2*, top]. They differ in style and technology of execution. Seldom encountered are representations of other quadrupeds – dogs, goats, sheep, bovines. Geometrical signs and crosses are also present. Much more rare are the evidently older petroglyphs, distinguished by heavier patina and a different style and subject matter; these are mainly images of long-horned bovines [*Fig. 2*, bottom]. A closer examination of some cases of evident superimposition interesting could be helpful in establishing a chronological sequence. Evidence of settlements and temporary human activity, found in a few cases, should also be of assistance in this respect.

Summing up, the range of rock art motifs identified this year is generally consistent with what has already been recorded for

other parts of the Sudanese Nile Valley (Hellström, Langballe 1970; Jesse 2005; Kleinitz, Koenitz 2006; Kleinitz, Olson

2005), with the exception of the petroglyphs from Jebel el-Kitaba, which have no known parallels. Rock art in the region is proving to be of considerable informative value for the study of early

societies in this part of Africa and the opportunity for extending our knowledge is justification enough for continuing extensive prospection in the Fourth Cataract region during the coming season.

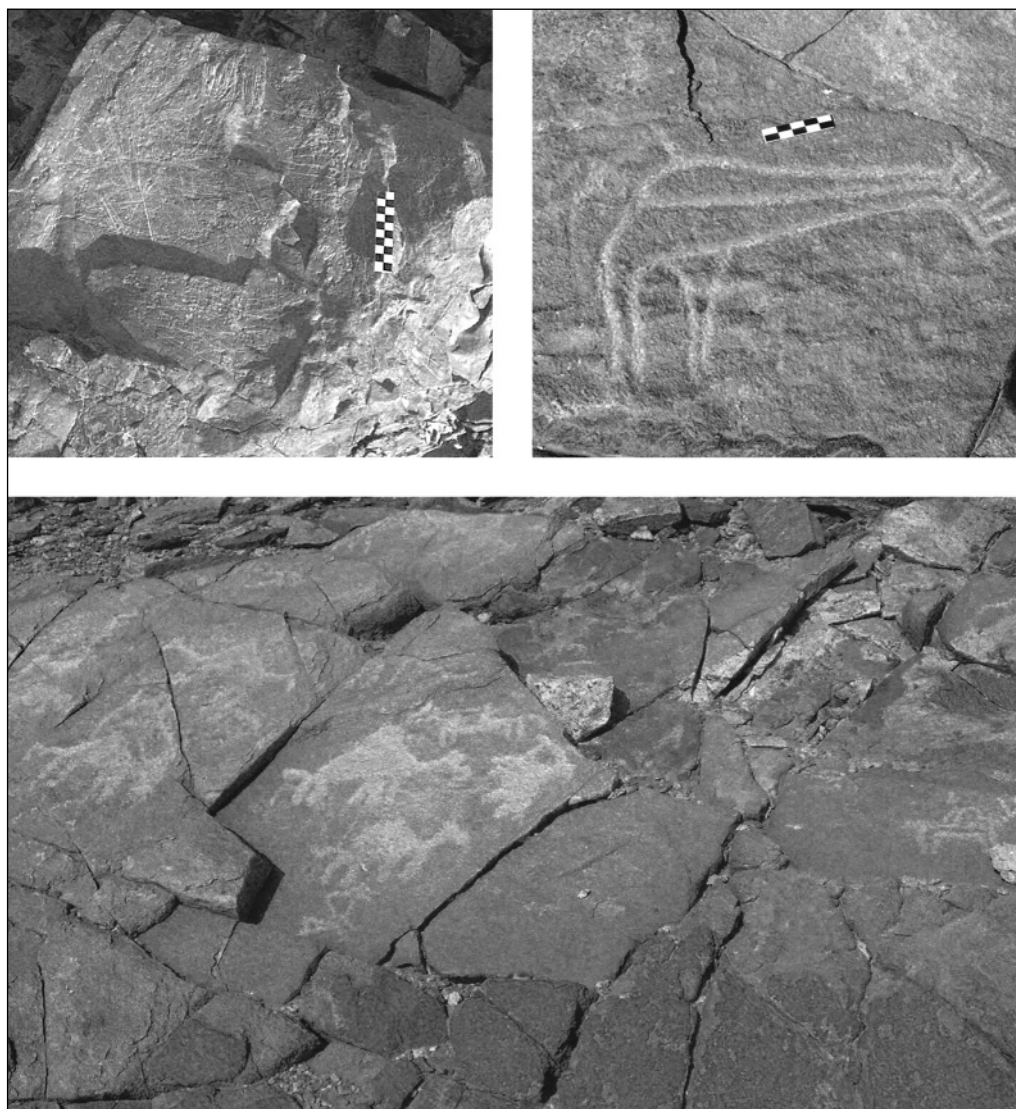


Fig. 1. Jebel el-Kitaba. Characteristic scratches and incised lines (top left); Wadi el-Khineish. Representation of a giraffe (top right) and camels (bottom) (Photo E. Kuciewicz)

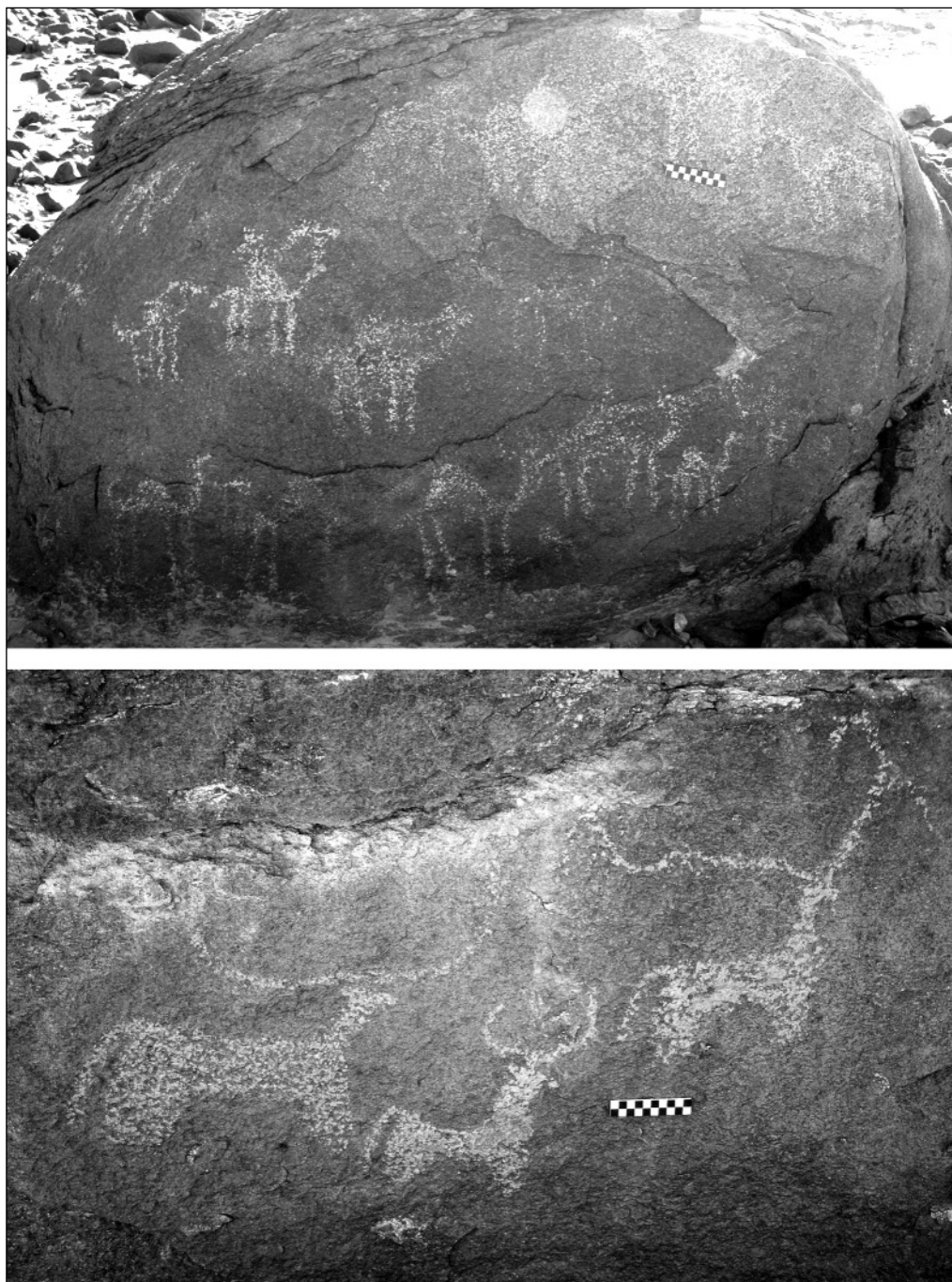


Fig. 2. Jebel Gurgurib. Assemblage of camels (top) and bovines executed in sophisticated style (Photo E. Kuciewicz)

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