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Dakhleh Oasis: Research on Petroglyphs, 2000

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DAKHLEH OASIS

RESEARCH ON PETROGLYPHS, 2000

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The research on petroglyphs in the Dakhleh Oasis, started in 1986,¹⁾ was continued in the autumn of 2000. In similarity to the previous seasons,²⁾ the work of the Petroglyph Unit – which is part of the research program of the Dakhleh Oasis Project (DOP) – was carried out by the Polish Center of Archaeology (Warsaw University) in association with the Poznań Archaeological Museum and was supported by a number of institutions.³⁾ The fieldwork started on November 17 and terminated on December 10, 2000.

The season had three key objectives:

- 1. Survey of the area described in the records of the Dakhleh Oasis Project as Mud Pan, including a full recording of petroglyph sites;*
- 2. Relocation of petroglyph site 69 found in the late 1930s;*
- 3. Recording of site 67 discovered in the same time period.*

1) The fieldwork was carried out by the author of the report, assisted by Ms Ewa Kuciewicz and Ms Eliza Jaroni, both students of the University of Poznań.

2) Cf. L. Krzyżaniak, *PAM X, Reports 1998* (1999), 131-134 (with earlier references).

3) The field party received valuable financial support from the following institutions: Polish Center of Archaeology (Warsaw University), Dakhleh Oasis Project, Center of Archaeological Research in Africa and the Near East (Foundation of the University of Poznań) and the Poznań Archaeological Museum. The field party wishes to express its gratitude to the Director of the D.O.P., Prof. Anthony J. Mills, and the Director of the Polish Center of Archaeology, Prof. Michał Gawlikowski.

SURVEY OF THE MUD PAN

The Mud Pan area is a flat expanse of land situated in the Eastern Dakhleh (aerial photograph sheet No. 61-37), several kilometers in diameter, with a surface build of heavily eroded sandstone and shale. Sandstone hills and spurs surround it, while some rocky forms occur in its center. This Pan was systematically walked in its northern, southern and eastern parts where all rock surfaces were examined with the aim of finding petroglyphs. In total, seven petroglyph sites have been discovered in this area in the course of the present fieldwork (one of these had been found by the project several years ago, but was located again only this year). In terms of style and chronology, the sites represent

two groups: dynastic and prehistoric. While dynastic sites seem to bear characteristics of the Egyptian Old Kingdom style, the "pre-dynastic" petroglyphs come from a different tradition, believed to date to the older periods of the Holocene. Their chronological positioning should be established in the course of future research.

On five of the prehistoric sites (30/450-E4-4, 30/450-E4-5, 30/450-E4-7, 30/450-E7-2 and 30/450-E7-3) the petroglyphs represent two major categories of motifs: animals and "goddesses" (images of a female executed in sitting or standing position, depicted in a manner, from practically naturalistic to schematic).

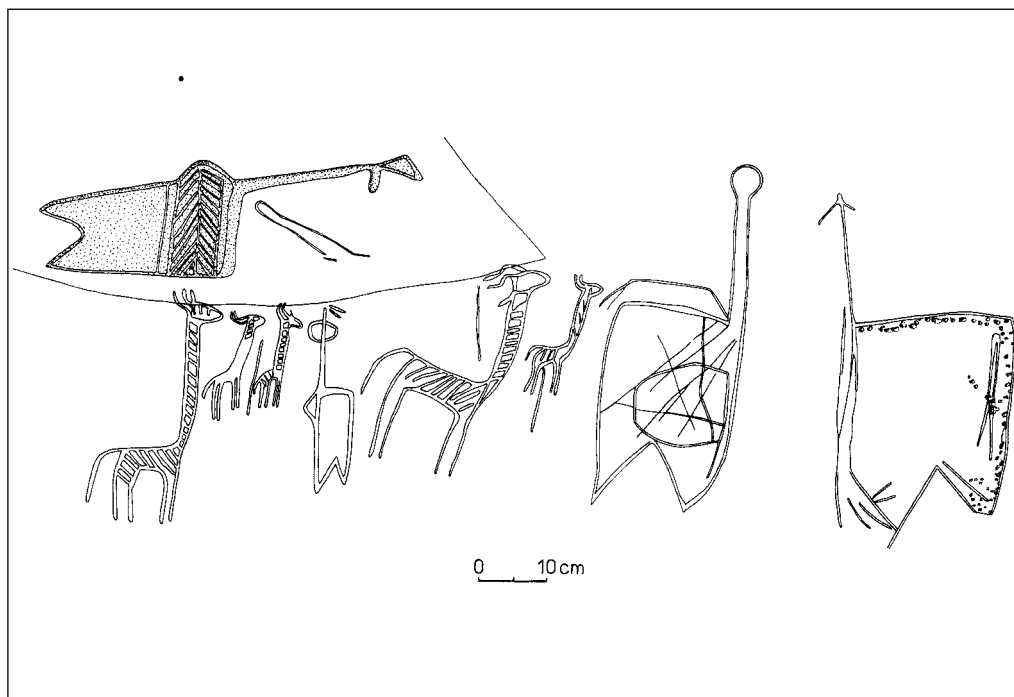


Fig. 1. Site 30/450-E4-7. Petroglyph showing giraffes facing female-shaped figures (Drawing E. Jaroni, E. Kuciewicz)

Site 30/450-E4-7 is particularly deserving of a brief description here in view of the excellent artistry of its petroglyphs and the rarity of the depicted scenes when compared to the totality of known sites from the Dakhleh Oasis. The site contains what looks like two separate scenes. One of these appears to be the image of a “goddess” facing an adult and one young giraffe. The other scene depicts what is probably an adult giraffe accompanied by two young giraffes, all of them facing one or two “goddesses” (Fig. 1, lower row). While this scene is engraved on an almost vertical rock face, the adjoining flat and practically horizontal rock surface bears the depiction of yet another “goddess” (Fig. 1, upper row). The giraffes and female-shaped human figures

from this site clearly belong to the rock art tradition of the Eastern Dakhleh, described first by Winkler as the “Early Oasis Dwellers”,⁴⁾ although they are not exactly similar to the petroglyphs discovered by the project in the Dakhleh in previous seasons.

As regards the other sites of similar chronology found in the Mud Pan area, the well executed petroglyphs of antelopes from site 30/450-E7-2 should be mentioned here (Fig. 2).

Petroglyphs of the two sites of dynastic age found in the Mud Pan area clearly focus on domestic animals. Among these, cattle predominates. The largest number of petroglyphs of this period has been recorded in the relocated site 30/450-E4-6, where several large, flat, upright-standing stones

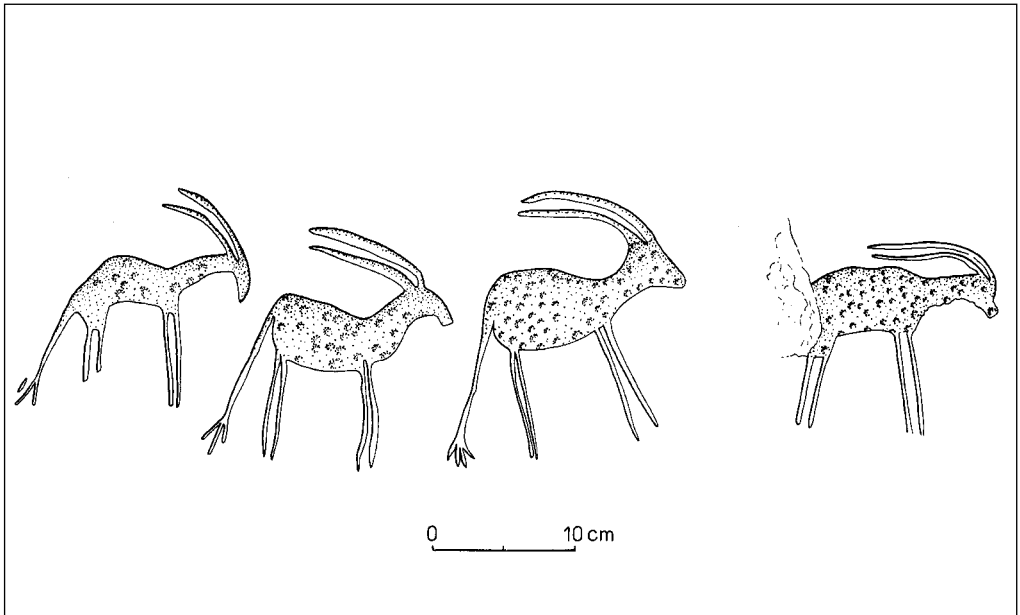


Fig. 2. Site 30/450-E7-2. Petroglyph depicting a row of antelopes (Drawing E. Jaroni, E Kuciewicz)

4) H.A. Winkler, *Rock-Drawings of Southern Upper Egypt II*, The Egypt Exploration Society (London 1939), 27-30.



Fig. 3. Site 30/450-E4-6. Depictions of cattle (top), as well as a donkey, saluki dog and antelope (bottom) (Photo L. Krzyżaniak)

(originally forming a hut substructure) were found to bear engravings depicting cattle, donkeys, a dog and some game (antelope, ostrich, monitor) (Fig. 3). An unique surface find from this hut is a fine piece of art

mobillier – a relief of a female dancer found during one of the previous seasons (Fig. 4). An Old Kingdom origin for this hut is also suggested by numerous potsherds of this date noted inside it.

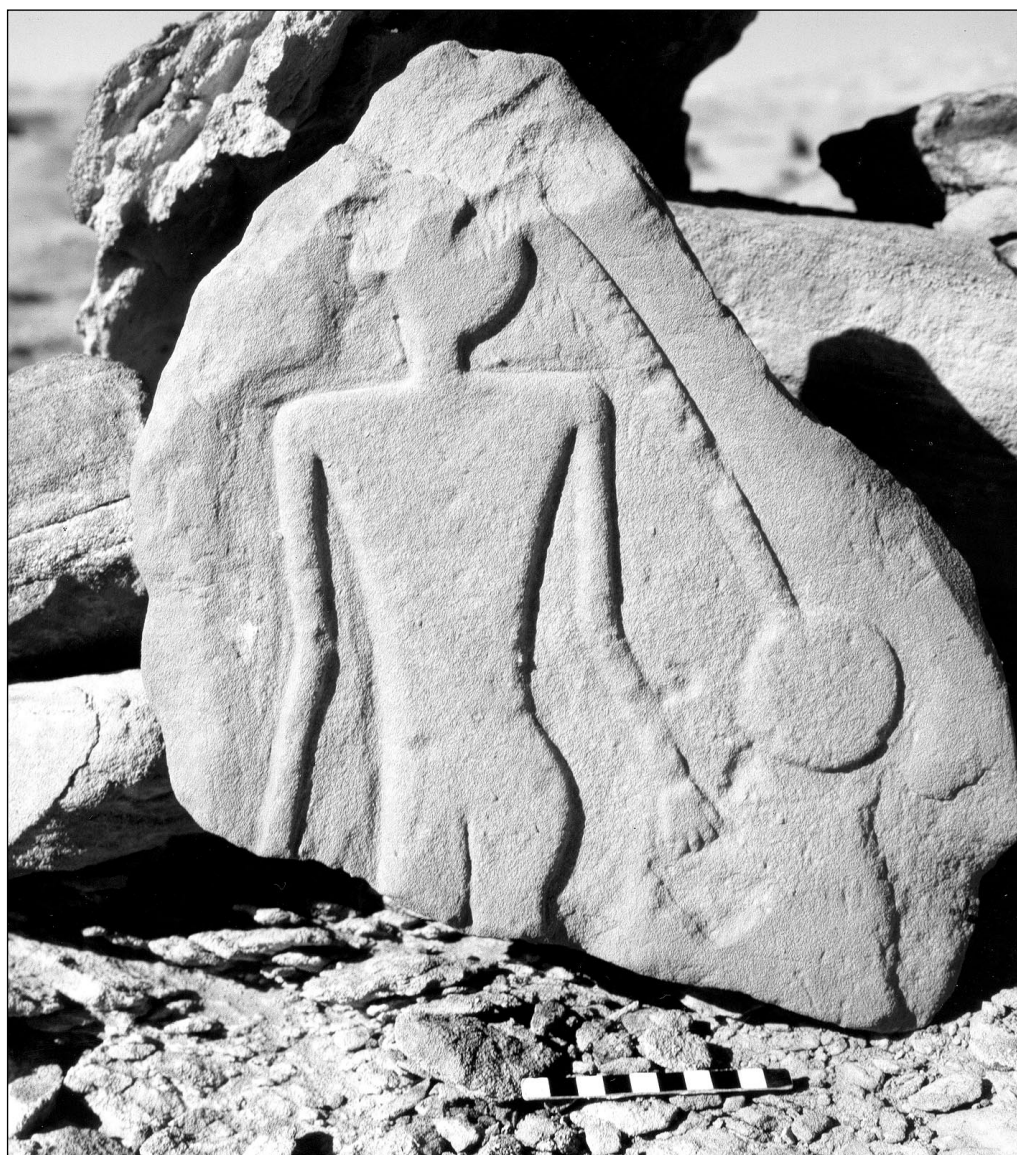


Fig. 4. Site 30/450-E4-6. Depiction of a female dancer executed on a loose piece of stone (Photo L. Krzyżaniak)

RELOCATION OF SITE 69

With the successful relocation of Winkler's site 69 this season, the topographic position of all the petroglyph sites discovered in the late 1930s is now known. Site 69 turned out to be a cluster of

sandstone hills of different size and form, located in the Eastern Dakhleh. During our few visits to this area we were able to find almost all of the petroglyphs from this site published by Winkler (*Figs. 5, 6*).

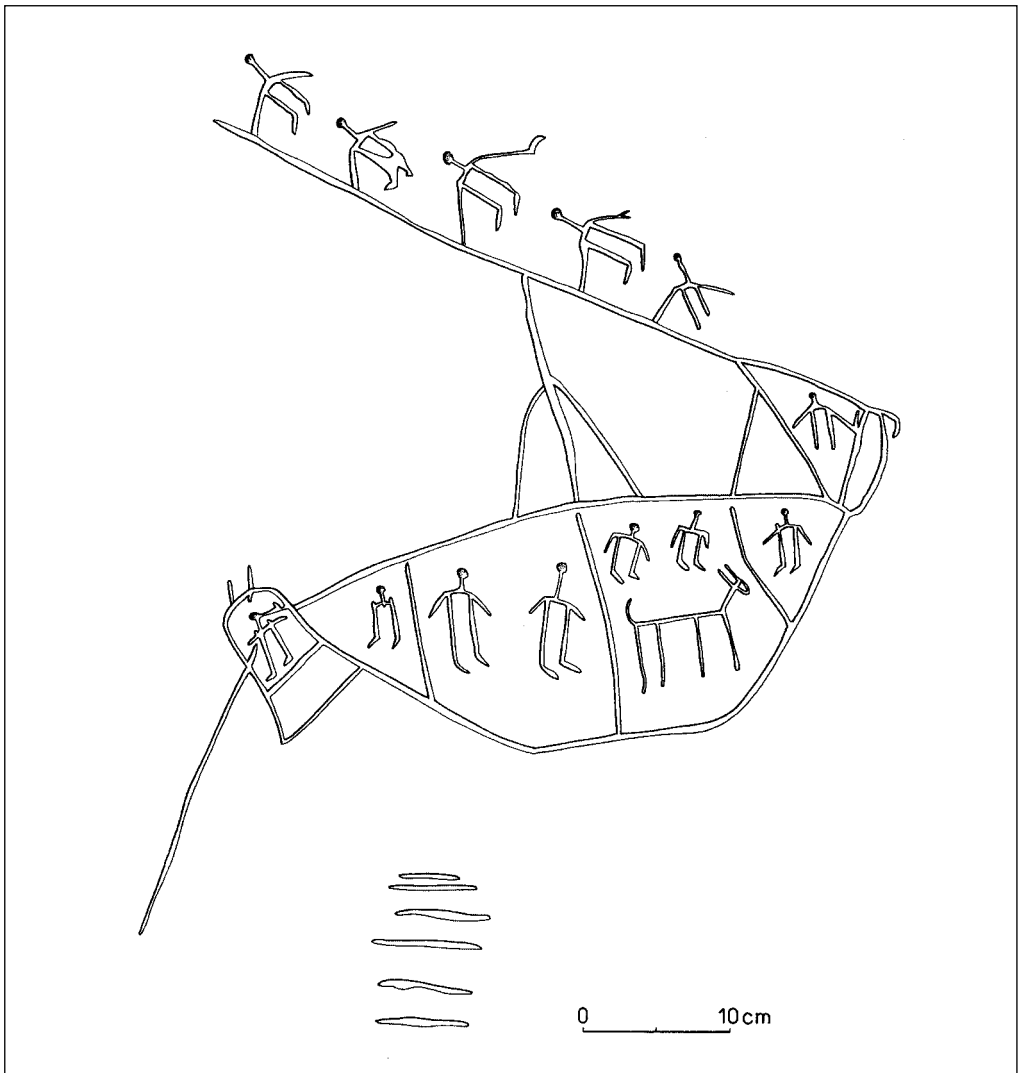


Fig. 5. Winkler's site 69. Engraving of a boat transporting humans and animals (Drawing E. Jaroni, E. Kuciewicz)



Fig. 6. Winkler's site 69. Engraving of a caravan of slaves (top) and a crocodile swallowing a man (bottom) (Photo L. Krzyżaniak)

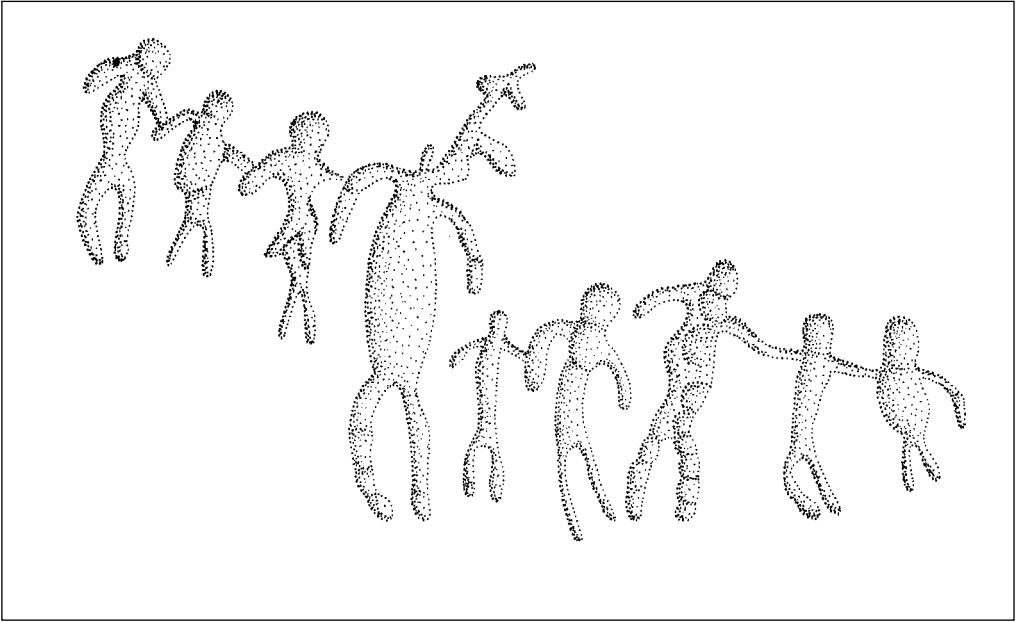


Fig. 7. Winkler's site 67. Engraving depicting a group of dancers
(Drawing E. Jaroni, E. Kuciewicz)

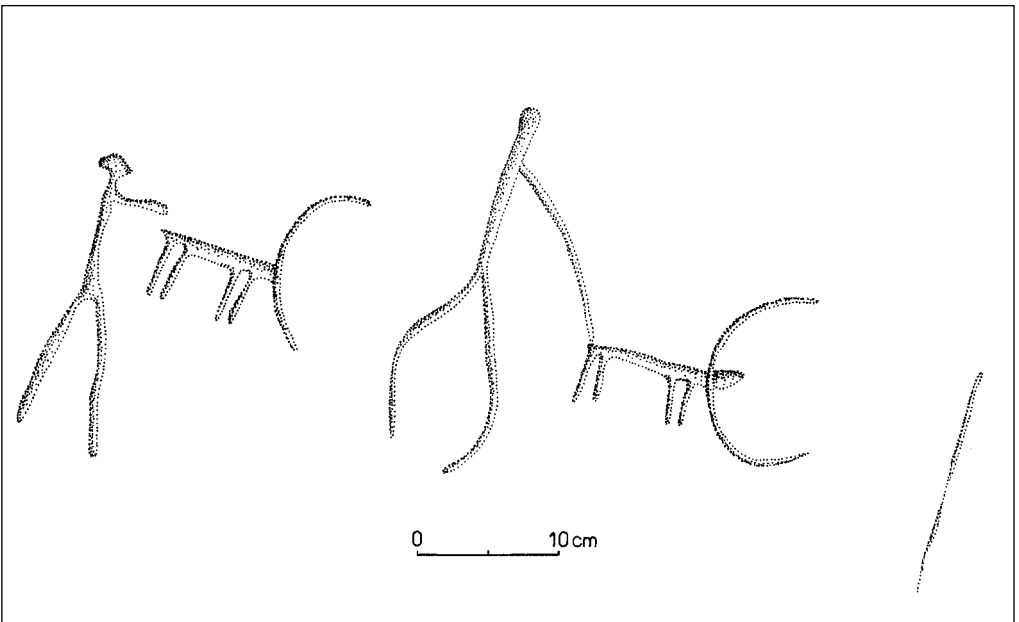


Fig. 8. Winkler's site 67. Engraving of two men and long-borned cattle, possibly a scene showing the leading of cattle in a ceremonial ritual (Drawing E. Jaroni, E. Kuciewicz)

RECORDING OF SITE 67

The Petroglyph Unit also embarked upon a systematic recording of Winkler's site 67, which had been relocated during our initial seasons in the Eastern Dakhleh. Similarly to other petroglyph sites noted by Winkler, site 67 is composed of a cluster of sandstone hills and outcrops of different size and form, surrounding in part a small pan-like expanse. In his work of more than sixty years ago Winkler appears to have published only a selection of the petroglyphs from this site.⁵⁾ Since the petroglyph documentation appears to be lacking, a detailed recording of this site has now been undertaken.

Most of the petroglyphs from the site once published by Winkler have been rediscovered. They represent exclusively the "classical" period in the development of Dakhleh rock art, referred to by Winkler

as the "Earliest Hunters" and "Earliest Oasis Dwellers".⁶⁾ The most characteristic ones include images of female-shaped figures, "goddesses", as well as numerous wild animals.

It was also possible to locate again an unique petroglyph executed on a flat piece of stone (*art mobilier*) showing a row of humans with one much larger person in their center (wearing a head-mask ?), apparently a scene of men dancing, holding each other by the hands, and with an important person in their midst (*Fig. 7*). Another relocated petroglyph from this site, also published by Winkler, seems to show men with their long-horned cattle, perhaps being led in a ceremonial ritual (*Fig. 8*). The recording of this rich site – perhaps the richest among the sites found by Winkler – will be continued next season.

The fieldwork carried out so far in the Eastern Dakhleh clearly indicates that the Oasis is one of the richest and most important centers of rock art in the Eastern Sahara. The season also shed more light on petroglyphs in the Oasis dated to the different periods of dynastic Egypt by their stylistic and thematic similarities to the art of the Nile Valley. It is planned,

therefore, to continue fieldwork in the fall of 2002 with the objective of continuing the survey and the systematic recording of Winkler's sites. It is also hoped that the results of this work will provide the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities with data that will be useful for the protection and management of the Dakhleh petroglyphs.

5) Winkler, op. cit., 8.

6) Winkler, op. cit., 27-34.