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Unit : Rock and Research, 2009**

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# DAKHLEH OASIS PROJECT PETROGLYPH UNIT: ROCK ART RESEARCH, 2009

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**Abstract:** The Petroglyph Unit, which is part of the international interdisciplinary Dakhleh Oasis Project (DOP), carried out investigations in the Central Oasis in 2009, discovering six new rock art sites. The sites were recorded to the extent permitted by the short season. Sites 21/08 and 22/08, noted in the 2007 season, were documented thoroughly.

**Keywords:** Dakhleh Oasis, rock art, petroglyphs, Painted Wadi

The Petroglyph Unit, which is part of the international, interdisciplinary Dakhleh Oasis Project (DOP) and is organized by the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw (PCMA UW), worked for a week in the early winter of 2009, carrying out documentation simultaneously in two zones: the southern part of the Painted Wadi and a new area for the survey located about 2 km to the west of the Wadi.

In the southern part of the Painted Wadi the team concentrated on a thorough documentation of sites 21/08 and 22/08, which could not be fully recorded in the previous season for lack of time. The unusual concentration and concurrence of petroglyphs in the Painted Wadi (see Kuciewicz *et alii* 2007; 2009; 2010; Kuciewicz, Kobusiewicz 2011) made this essential.

**Site 21/08** (GPS coordinates: N 25° 27' 43.0", E 29° 08' 55.2"). Elongated gebel with massive vertical wall facing north. Seven concentrations of rock art were recorded on the northern side and another two on the southern one. None of the iconographical motifs identified here were new compared to already published examples (Kuciewicz, Kobusiewicz 2011: 243), but the size and sheer number of the petroglyphs called for continued tracing of the rock art motifs on transparent film. As for the dating of the petroglyphs, those of Neolithic date were interspersed with images seems from the Dynastic period with only a few being of possibly Arab origin (probably *wusum*, tribal symbols of nomads).

**Site 22/08** (GPS coordinates: N 25° 27' 39.8", E 29° 08' 57.7"). Another elongated *yardang* of a kind common

in Dakhleh Oasis,<sup>1</sup> located only about 50 m southeast of site 21/08. Dozens of individual petroglyphs cover the whole hill, especially its top vertical part and southern slope. Most of them depict schematic images of hands, feet and sandal tops of various kind (see also site 6/09). Schematic representations of cattle were located on the top of the hill [*Fig. 1*]; and other unrecognizable quadrupeds were also recorded. The repertoire of known iconographical motifs suggests that these petroglyphs can be associated with Dynastic times.

The area newly investigated this year was located about 2 km west of the Painted Wadi. It was never surveyed before, necessitating a thorough inspection of all of the numerous *yardangs*. The initial reconnaissance confirmed the existence of rock art sites. Altogether six new sites were mapped and recorded, the petroglyphs photographed and sketched, the most interesting ones being also traced on transparent film in 1:1 scale.

**Site 1/09** (GPS coordinates: N 25° 31' 19.3", E 29° 08' 39.1"), located on the top of an elongated hill framing a slope descending to the east. Petroglyphs were found on two horizontal slabs of stone: a pecked zigzag motif on one and an elaborate scene depicting two presumed giraffes and two human figures, all pecked, and an unidentified incised shape [*Fig. 2*]. The composition appears to have been intentionally designed. The rock art was tentatively associated with the Neolithic period.

**Site 2/09** (GPS coordinates: N 25° 31' 18.0", E 29° 08' 39.5"), located on the top of the hill. Rock art representations were identified on three horizontal slabs of stone, all of them situated in the northern part of the gebel. Two of them bear roughly pecked unidentified animals, the third is covered with round objects of unknown significance [*Fig. 3*].

**Site 3/09** (GPS coordinates: N 25° 31' 17.5", E 29° 08' 41.0"). Single panel situated on the western side of the hill,

#### Team

*Dates of work:* 27 November-5 December 2009

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*Archaeologists:* Ewa Kuciewicz, Eliza Jaroni (both Archaeological Museum in Poznań), dr. Andrzej Rozwadowski, Eliza Palka (both Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań)

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<sup>1</sup> Streamlined hill carved from bedrock or any consolidated or semi consolidated material by the dual action of wind abrasion, dust and sand, and deflation.

on a vertical surface about 2 m above the ground. It is a scene depicting an animal parade: gazelles, oryxes, ostriches, single bovids and presumed giraffes (the identification was impeded by the poor state of preservation [Fig. 4].

**Site 4/09** (GPS coordinates: N 25° 31' 13.3", E 29° 08' 40.6"). On the top of the elongated *yardang*, in its northern part. Silhouettes of two female figures of a form typical in the rock art of the Oasis (Winkler 1939: 27–30) were represented in antithetic position on a horizontal stone slab. The images are extremely schematic. On the western side of the hill there was a scene depicting the parade of at least five giraffes on a vertical wall. The state of

preservation and the location of the scene (constantly in the shadow of the overhang) impeded a clear 'reading' of the scene; correct tracing and photography will be possible only with the use of an extra light source. Both sets of rock art images can be attributed to the Neolithic period in the history of the Oasis.

**Site 5/09** (GPS coordinates: N 25° 31' 10.1", E 29° 08' 41.7"). A massive rock wall about 7 m wide and 3 m high on the eastern side of the hill turned out to be the highlight of the season [Fig. 5]. Below a considerable overhang there was a considerable concentration of various images dispersed all over the rock face. Outstanding motifs included:



*Fig. 1. Schematic depiction of cattle on the top of the hill. Site 22/08  
(All photos E. Kuciewicz)*

– two bovids following one another, carefully executed in sunk relief and pecked inside; pecking in the area of the horns has damaged this element;  
– at least three schematic depictions of female figures (Winkler 1939: 27–30) [Fig. 7];

– three figures of giraffes, two ostriches and five antelopes (some of them could be oryxes); the species of a few other quadrupeds could not be recognized;  
– geometric motifs, such as spirals and zigzag lines shaped in a kind of closed, irregular bend. [Fig. 6]

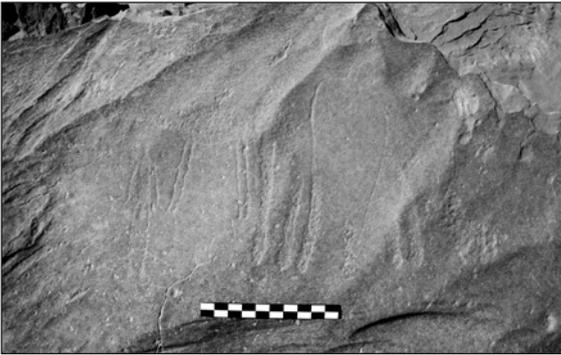


Fig. 2. Scene showing two giraffes, two men and an unidentified incised shape. Site 1/09

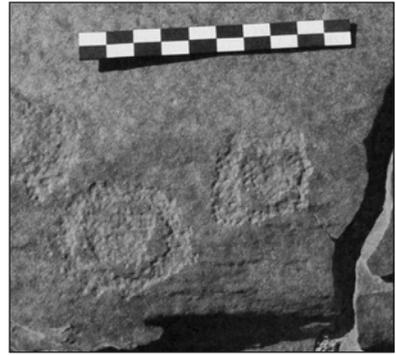


Fig. 3. Round pecked petroglyphs of unknown significance. Site 2/09

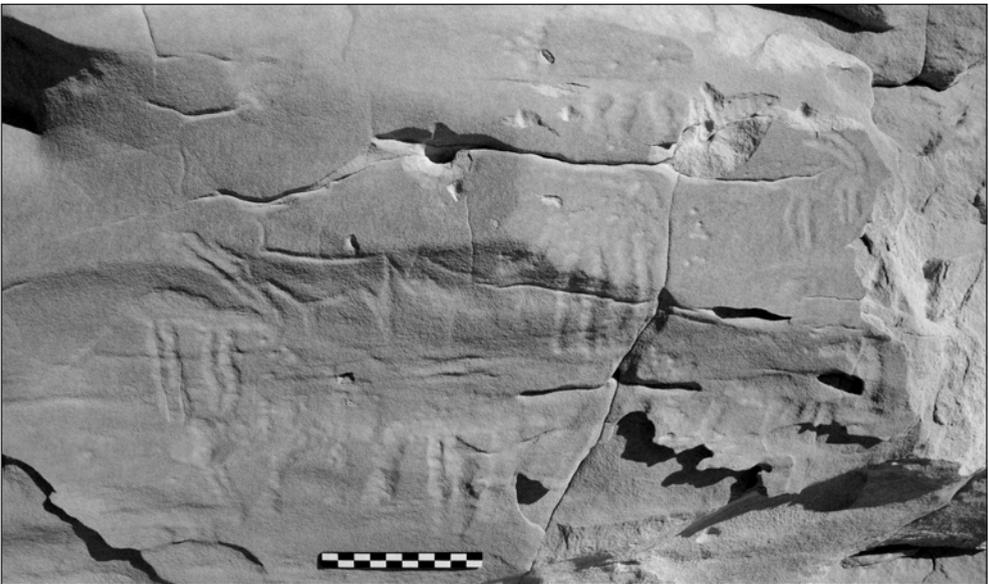


Fig. 4. Parade of animals: gazelles, oryxes, ostriches, single depictions of bovids and probably giraffes. Site 3/09

– altogether eleven human figures of unknown gender, probably males, executed in a peculiar style: unusually elongated and extremely schematic silhouettes [Fig. 8].  
– a presumed lizard, but the identifications is uncertain [see Fig. 6, right]

The canvas for the above described representations was the same homogenous stone surface, but individual images did not appear to form any organized unity. Some constituted micro scenes, however without any obvious link to the others. The glyphs



Fig. 5. General view of site 5/09

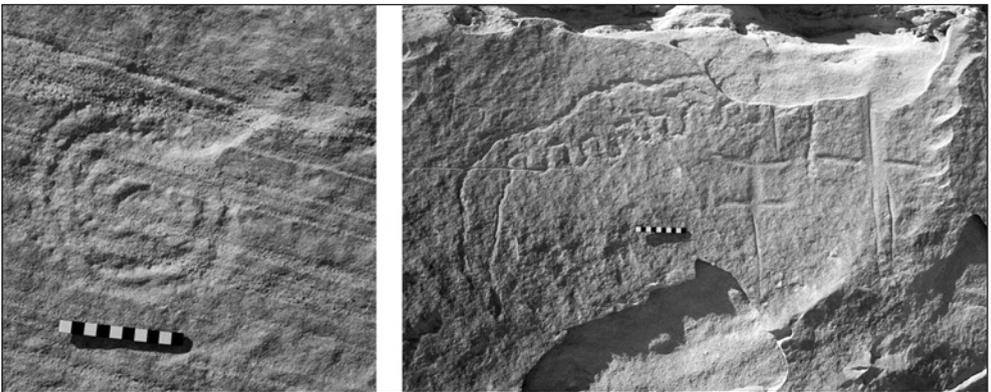
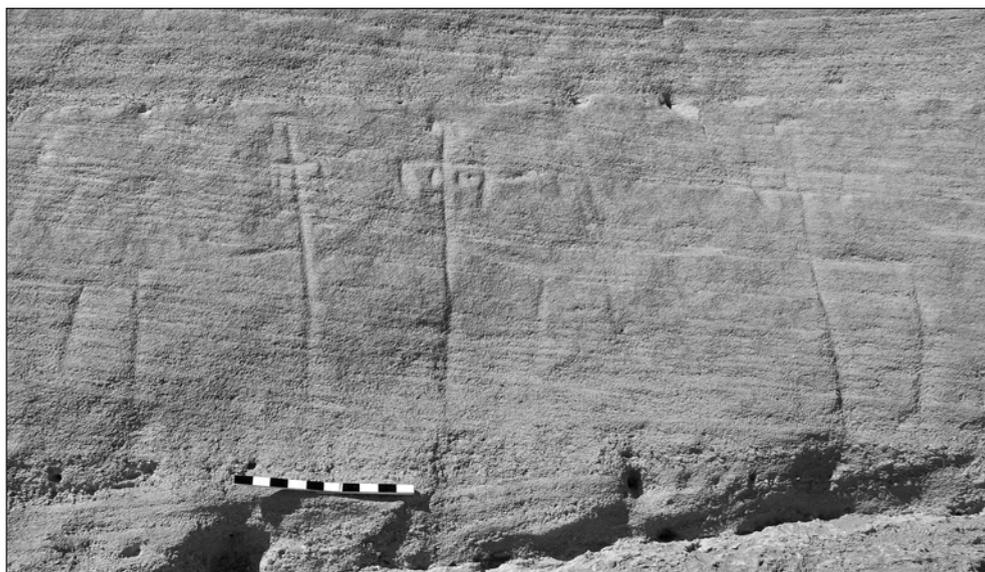
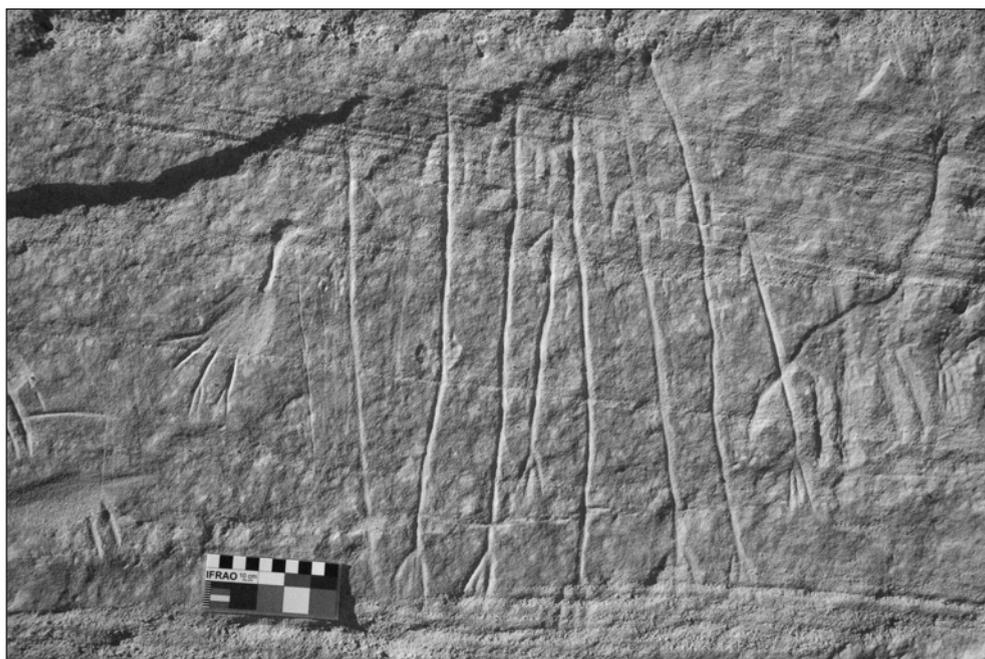


Fig. 6. Pecked spiral (left) and zigzag line running in an irregular arch next to a presumed lizard image. Site 5/09



*Fig. 7. Three schematic depictions of female figures. Site 5/09*

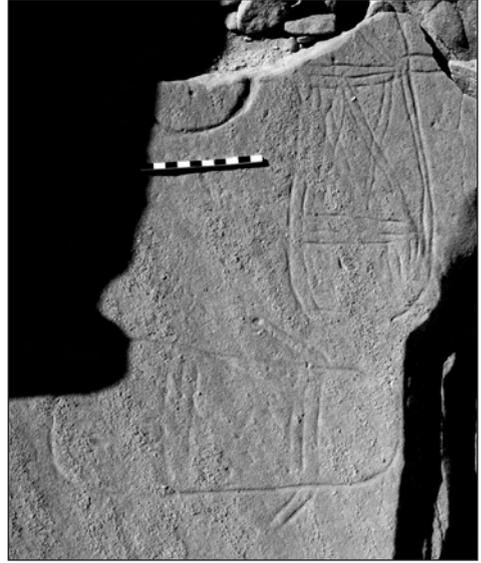


*Fig. 8. Elongated stick-like human figures, probably males, depicted together with an ostrich and giraffe. Site 5/09*

can be dated tentatively to the Neolithic, although a younger age is also possible. It is impossible to determine whether they were executed concurrently.

**Site 6/09** (GPS coordinates: N 25° 30' 55.5", E 29° 08' 48.7"). An isolated *yardang*. The hill has three main parts, each covered with numerous petroglyphs:

- top: five panels with glyphs, comprising decorated and plain foot impressions and sandal tops, unidentified geometric objects, parallel lines with holes (not game boards) (Kuciewicz, Kobusiewicz 2011: 243–244).
- eastern side: 23 panels located mostly on loose blocks on the slope, decorated with various images, including sandal tops [Fig. 9 ], impressions of feet, schematic human figures, star-like shapes, schematic birds and quadrupeds, Arabic inscriptions and one



*Fig. 9. Decorated depictions of sandal tops. Site 6/09*



*Fig. 10. Frieze of ostriches. Site 6/09*

depiction of a pecked giraffe of obviously older origin.

- western side: 14 panels, decorated with images of an unidentified geometric object, schematic animals and human figures, as well as at least 40 images of ostriches, with incised legs and bodies executed in sunk relief [Fig. 10]. The scene contains also men with weapons and dogs.

The extensive rock art on sites 5 and 6 could not be sufficiently documented this year; a thorough recording is planned in a forthcoming campaign.

#### RECAPITULATION

Summing up, the repertoire of iconographic motifs recorded on the rock art sites discovered this season generally agrees, although with some exceptions,

with the known range of representations identified in the Oasis so far. The limited focus of the research to date (mostly the Painted Wadi in the Central Oasis) needs to be broadened in the future to include more areas to the east of the Oasis, which were reconnoitered by Lech Krzyżaniak in the 1980s and 1990s (1987; 1990; Krzyżaniak, Kroeper 1987; 1993; see also previous reports in PAM: Krzyżaniak 1991; 1993; 1994; 1999; 2001; 2004) and a reconnaissance of the western part. In studying the rock art from the oasis researchers should keep in mind that knowledge of archaeological remains from the Oasis itself, as well as from the desert to the south of it, is modest at best (Riemer 2009), but growing dynamically all the time.

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