

Sławomir Rzepka

Deir El-Bahari: Rock Graffiti Above the Temple of Hatshepsut

Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean 10, 183-190

1999

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

ROCK GRAFFITI ABOVE THE TEMPLE OF HATSHEPSUT

Sławomir Rzepka

One of the important objectives of the Polish-Egyptian Cliff Mission in Deir el-Bahari was to document the graffiti found on the rocks above the Hatshepsut temple, in an area where no regular graffiti survey has ever been done before.¹⁾

J. Černý and A.A. Sadek had not included this area in their big project, carried out in the late sixties and early seventies, to document the graffiti of the Theban necropolis.²⁾ Rock inscriptions marked with numbers from the Černý-Sadek project have been noted only at the southernmost edge of our concession. The highest number found is 4066, and the next graffiti to north of it is our number A1. However, since the last published number in their study is 3973, our documentation work should be continued southwards until this last published graffiti is reached.

Neither was the area in question included in two other important works concerning

the graffiti of the Theban region, published by W. Spiegelberg³⁾ and by J. Černý.⁴⁾ The scholars must have noticed some of our graffiti, as evidenced by arrows scratched in the rock, but – at least to my knowledge – nothing of this material has ever been published.

Our approach stood in contrast to that of the above mentioned scholars who had been concerned mainly with hieroglyphic and hieratic inscriptions, paying much less attention to demotic, Coptic and Greek texts, not to mention figural graffiti from different periods. Our objective was to record practically every stroke made by human hand on the rock surface, naturally ignoring the obviously modern drawings made by recent occasional climbers to the site. Our findings, totally neglected so far in publications, could be the source of important new information, even if for the moment their meaning is to be speculated on.

DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA

The area investigated this season was divided into six sections, based on the topographical features, and marked with the letters A to F

(*Fig. 1*). Within each section the graffiti were numbered starting from the south (sections A, B, C, D) and from the west (sections E, F).

¹⁾ For a brief history of studies on graffiti from the Theban necropolis, cf. Ch. Desroches-Noblecourt, "La quête des graffiti", *Textes et langages de l'Égypte pharaonique. Hommage Champollion*, *BdE* 64,2, (1972), 157-159, 161-163, 165-166, 170, 181-183.)

²⁾ The results of this project were published in a monumental four-volume work entitled: *Graffiti de la montagne thébaine* (Le Caire 1969-1983).

³⁾ W. Spiegelberg, *Ägyptische und andere Graffiti (Inscriben und Zeichnungen) aus der thebanischen Nekropolis* (Heidelberg 1921).

⁴⁾ J. Černý, *Graffiti hiéroglyphiques et hiératiques de la nécropole thébaine*. Nos. 1060 a 1405 (Le Caire 1956).

Section A. The lowest part of the area, directly above the temples of Tuthmosis III and Hatshepsut, on both sides of an uninscribed tomb (the tomb is not included in PM; monks living in it in Coptic times left graffiti inside). The section includes a "chimney" (narrow vertical passage) above the tomb, leading to the upper parts of our site. Marking the southernmost extent of the section is Černý-Sadek's graffito no. 4066. To the north, the section continues far above the Hatshepsut temple – this part will be investigated in the next season. This year only part of the graffiti nearest to the chimney has been recorded.

Section B. Its southern limit is the top of the chimney. It continues northward to the

so-called "gate" (a narrow passage between the main cliff massif and a huge rock).

Section C. Extends from above the "gate" to the entrance to the niche. In the middle of this section there is a short rock ledge (about 5 m long and from 0.5 to 1 m broad). It must have extended further north in antiquity, as we have found many graffiti on a level suggesting that they had been executed by people standing on its extension (these graffiti are 4-5 m above the modern ground level).

Section D. Niche. The graffiti are numbered clockwise, starting with the southwestern part of the niche. They were found 3-4 m above the modern ground level left by Naville who removed large masses of debris from inside the niche. Following our excavations,

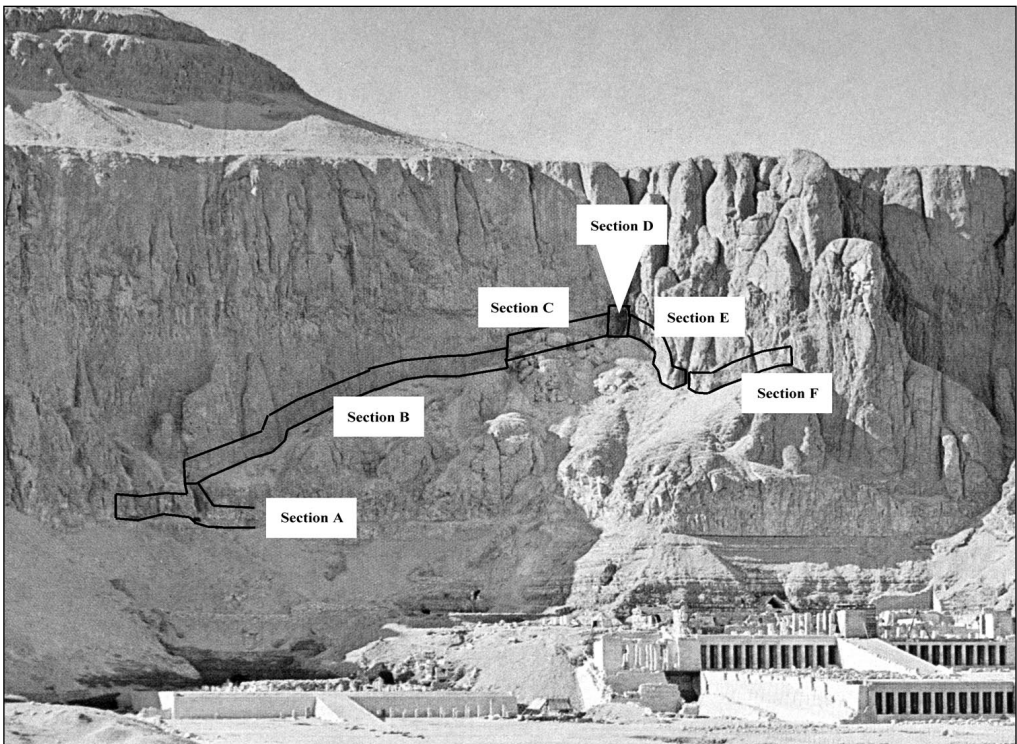


Fig. 1. General view of the site
(Photo A. Niwiński)

the graffiti are now about 7-8 m above ground level and fairly inaccessible.

Section E. A long rock wall between the eastern edge of the niche and the entrance to the crevice.

Section F. From the entrance to the crevice on the west to a place called "Head of Senenmut" (a rock formation resembling the cuboid statues of Senenmut) on the east.

DESCRIPTION OF THE GRAFFITI

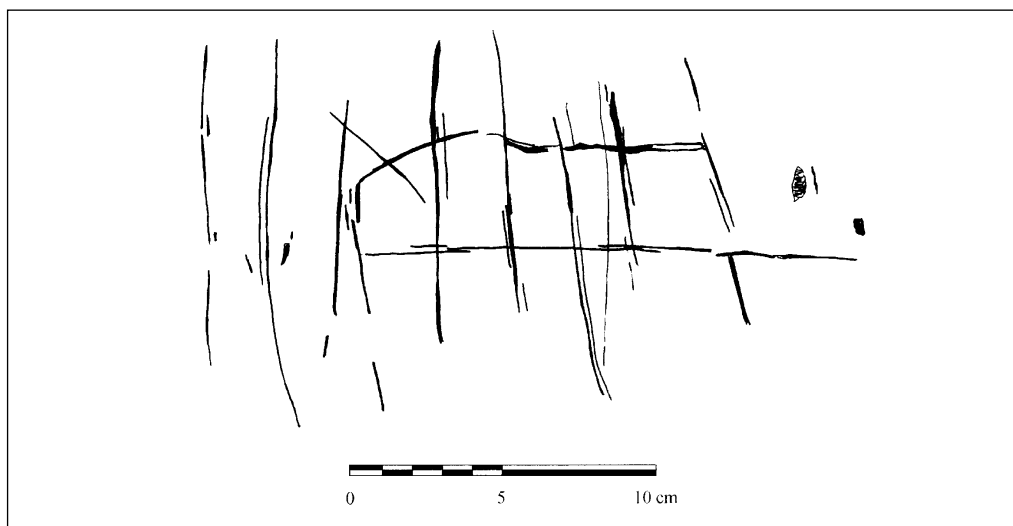
The survey findings, including over 200 graffiti, can be divided into the following groups, to be discussed separately for each section: hieroglyphic inscriptions (the least numerous group); hieratic inscriptions; Greek inscriptions; Coptic inscriptions; rock drawings from different periods, including figures of humans, animals, plants, ships, geometric figures (stars, crosses, nets etc.); "technical" drawings; and others.

Section A. Total number 33 (this number will grow once the northern part of this section is investigated in the next season), including 10 Greek inscription, three

Coptic ones, three rock drawings, five "technical" drawings and 11 others.

The oldest of this group is a rock drawing, A 19e, representing a ship with mast, hulk, ropes connecting the mast with the hulk, and a rudder. Similar rock drawings have been found elsewhere in Upper Egypt where they were dated to the "Dynastic period".⁵⁾ Some Coptic inscriptions, presumably the work of monks living in the tomb by the "chimney", were scratched on top of this old graffiti.⁶⁾

The term "technical" drawings (graffito A 17, (*Fig. 2*) refers to graffiti representing



*Fig. 2. Graffito A 17
(Drawing S. Rzepka)*

⁵⁾ H.A. Winkler, *Rock-drawings of Southern Upper-Egypt, I*, (London 1938), pl. X-1.

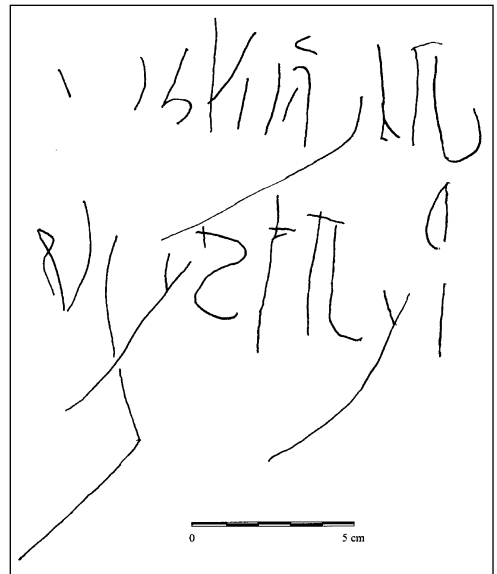
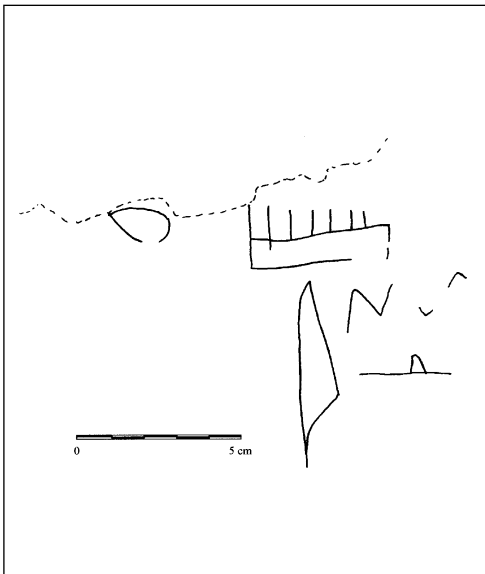
⁶⁾ The Coptic inscriptions from our site will be studied by Dr. K. Urbaniak-Walczak.

grids, groups of parallel or crossing lines etc., which do not represent any objects or figures, but are scratched in so regular a manner that they can hardly be accidental. These drawings should be considered, in my opinion, as technical instructions of sorts, drawn by (or for) workers doing their job in the rocks – cutting the rock, installing ladders or scaffoldings etc., i.e., preparing a passage for transport purposes (*Fig. 6*). If this interpretation is correct, graffito A 17 is trace of work done in the chimney, either its cutting or the installation of some ladders in it. Some of the other "technical" graffiti were found also in steep places (e.g. graffito B 4), i.e., where special installations of some kind were required to transport larger objects.

Section B. Total number 31, including one hieroglyphic inscription, four hieratic ones, four Greek ones, one Coptic, two rock drawings, three "technical" ones and 16 others.

Most of the graffiti in this section are concentrated in its northern part, in the vicinity of the so-called "gate", which is a narrow passage in the rocks used in Pharaonic times for transport purposes as indicated by a hieroglyphic graffito (B 16, *Fig. 3*, left) and four hieratic inscriptions.

One of the latter (B 15, *Fig. 3*, right), written on the west wall of the gate, belongs to the scribe Butehamun, who was inspector of the necropolis in the period of the 20th-21st Dynasty.⁷⁾ The inscription also gives the name of his son, Ankhefenamun. About



*Fig. 3. Graffiti B 16 (left) and B 15 (right)
(Drawing S. Rzepka)*

⁷⁾ Butehamun and his family have been the subject of several recently published articles: A. Niwiński, "Butehamon - Schreiber der Nekropolis", *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur* 11 (1984), 135-156; K. Jansen-Winkel, "Der Schreiber Butehamun", *Göttinger Miszellen* 139 (1994), 35-40; B.G. Davies, "Two many Butehamuns? Additional observations on their identity", *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur* 27 (1997), 49-68; A. Egberts, "Piankh, Herihor, Thutmose and Butehamun: a fresh look at O. Cairo CG 25744 and 25745", *Göttinger Miszellen* 160 (1997), 23-25; T. Kikuchi, "Das Graffito 3981a und eine aus den Late Ramesside Letters bekannte Familie der Nekropolenschreiber", *Göttinger Miszellen* 160 (1997), 51-58.

130 inscriptions of Butehamun have been recorded in all of the Theban necropolis, the most being concentrated around important tombs (e.g. in the Valley of the Kings). Graffito B 15 is the first of a series of six graffiti of this man, found in the vicinity of the niche, suggesting that a tomb was indeed to be found somewhere in the area.

Section C. Total number 36, including three hieroglyphic inscriptions, four hieratic ones, one Greek, three Coptic, nine rock drawings, a single "technical" one and 15 others.

Three hieroglyphic and four hieratic graffiti are proof of some intensive activi-

ties having been concentrated in this relatively small section in Pharaonic times. Hieroglyphic inscription C 11 was written by a priest of Khonsu Djab.⁸⁾ Three hieratic graffiti (C 4, C 22, C 23) belong again to Butehamun; in one case (C 22) the graffito also gives the name of his father Djehutimes. The fourth hieratic graffito (C 6) was written by a man bearing the title of "servant in the Place of Truth";⁹⁾ his name was Nau-nedjem.¹⁰⁾ This man is known from two other graffiti in the Theban necropolis.¹¹⁾

The Coptic period is represented with inscriptions (C 3, Fig. 4, left) and figur-

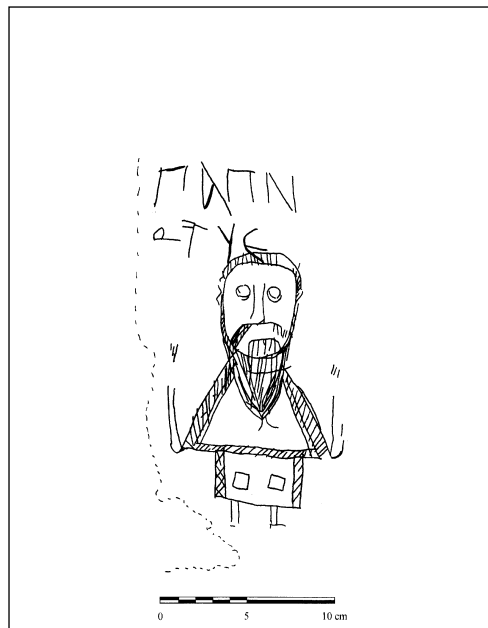
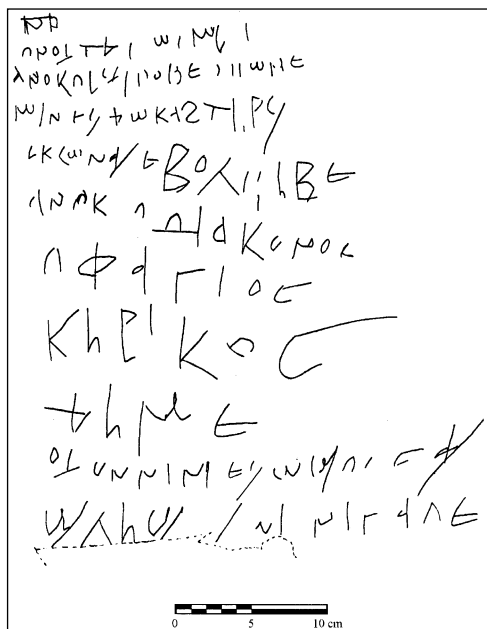


Fig. 4. Graffiti C 3 (left) and C 18 (right) (Drawing S. Rzepka)

⁸⁾ H. Ranke, *Die altägyptischen Personennamen*, I (Glückstadt 1935), 405,1. The name is attested several times during the New Kingdom.

⁹⁾ For this title, see e.g.: J. Černý "L'identité des «Serviteurs dans la Place de Vérite» et des ouvriers de la nécropole de Thèbes", *Revue de l'Égypte ancienne* 2 (1929), 200-209; id., "A Community of Workmen at Thebes in the Ramesside Period", *BdE* 50 (1973), 45; D. Valbelle, *Les ouvriers de la tombe. Deir el Médineh à l'époque ramesside* (Le Caire 1985), 24-25.

¹⁰⁾ Ranke, *Personennamen* I, 170,15.

¹¹⁾ Graffiti no. 1303 (Černý, *Graffiti hiéroglyphiques*, 19, pl. 54) and graffiti no. 2769 (Graffiti de la montagne thébaine, op. cit., III,3, pl. CLV). In graffiti no. 2769 the name is damaged, but it can be reconstructed as Nau-nedjem.

al drawings (C 16,¹²) C 18 – *Fig. 4*, right).

Section D. Total number 41, including one hieroglyphic inscription, two hieratic ones, seven Greek, five Coptic, six rock drawings, five "technical" drawings, and 15 others.

The only hieroglyphic inscription in this section was found high above all the others (D 19). It is a name, possibly read as Suherqenen.¹³ To judge by the position of the graffito, the scribe must have been using some kind of ladder or scaffolding.

Greek and Coptic inscriptions are especially frequent in the niche, particularly on its northern wall. Also from this section come some drawings, of which the most remarkable one represents a lion with a bird standing on its back (D 25). The quality of the drawing, especially the excellent

lion's head, suggests a trained artist, probably one of the draftsmen working in the necropolis.

Some "technical" graffiti were also found in the niche: grid patterns, partly inside oval shapes (D 2-D 6). Signs, probably hieratic, are visible beside the grid lines. These "technical" graffiti should probably be linked with some activities carried out on the "balcony" – a small rock ledge about 10 m above the bottom of the niche. In this inaccessible place (we could reach it only by climbing down from the top of the cliff using professional equipment) we found obvious traces of human activity: two graffiti (*Fig. 5* illustrates one of these graffiti) and traces of chiselling. The graffiti are not intelligible and cannot be dated. We can only speculate that they were scratched there by prospectors look-

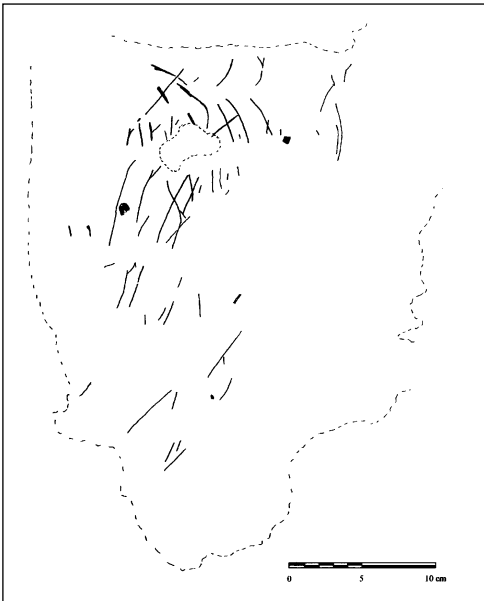


Fig. 5. Graffito from the "balcony"
(Drawing S. Rzepka)

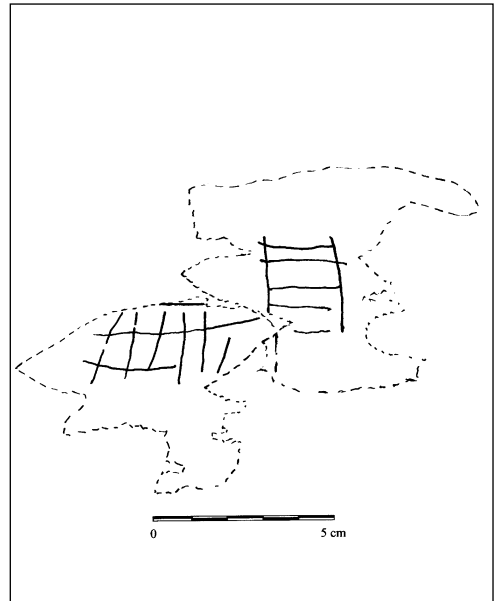


Fig. 6. Graffito from the robber's tunnel
(Drawing S. Rzepka).

¹²) A similarly odd representation of a human figure can be found in Winkler, *Rock-drawings*, op. cit., II, pl. I.3.

¹³) Neither this nor any other similar name is included in Ranke, *Personennamen*.

ing for a good location for a tomb, or by workers cleaning the place of loose stones that could have endangered the people working in the niche.

A "robbers' tunnel" with a "technical" graffito was found in the niche (*Fig. 6*). The distance between parallel strokes has been assumed to be a unit of measure – an Egyptian cubit. For the horizontal part of the drawing, it gives us 5 cubits = 2.5 m. This is the actual length of the robbers' tunnel. The tunnel had not been finished apparently (anyway the robbers did not find the tomb they were looking for) – the section represented in the upper right corner of the drawing was never executed.

Section E. Total number 35, including one hieroglyphic inscription, two hieratic ones, one Greek, one Coptic, 13 rock drawings, one "technical" drawing, and 16 others.

In this section, we found again two graffiti of Butehamun, the first just beside the niche (E 4), the second midway between the niche and the crevice (E 14). An interesting set of graffiti (E 17 - *Fig. 7*, E 17a, E 18) was found at the eastern end of the section, just beside the entrance to the crevice. These hunting scenes composed of figures of men with bows, hounds, antelopes, and fish, should be dated to the prehistoric period,¹⁴⁾ making them the oldest graffiti on our site.

Section F. Total number 32, including one hieratic inscription, two Greek ones, 15 rock drawings, two "technical" drawings, and 12 others.

Graffiti in this section occur in concentrations: a big one just beside the entrance to the crevice in the western end of the section and another, smaller one nearer to the eastern end, in the vicinity of a rock formation called the "Head of Senenmut".

The seventh graffito of Butehamun (F 22) was found in the eastern part of the section, at a considerable distance from all the other examples.

Figural graffiti are undoubtedly the most numerous in this area. Five of them were obviously executed by the same hand (F 1, F 8, F 9, F 10b, F 13). All are characterised by distinctly deep and narrow lines, cut with a very sharp tool. They represent a hunter, very schematic forms of animals (fish, birds?), a man seated on an animal.



*Fig. 7. Graffito E 17
(Drawing S. Rzepka)*

¹⁴⁾ Prehistoric rock graffiti with similar representations of animals are known from other parts of western Thebes, cf. M. Rémy Cottevielle-Giraudet, "Gravures protohistoriques de la montagne thébaine", *BIFAO* 30 (1931), 545-552.

SUMMARY

The numerous rock drawings in the area (over 200 examples) range in date from the prehistoric period until Arab times. They include a variety of inscriptions: hieroglyphic, hieratic, Greek and Coptic, as well as figural and geometrical representations, and "technical" instructions. Part of the material is difficult to interpret, due to the very poor condition of the rock surface in places. "Technical" graffiti are one of the categories distinguished;

these drawings may have been simple plans for work to be executed in the rocks, like cuttings, ladder installation, etc. Findings of further material of this type (which is quite abundant on the rocks north of the Hatshepsut temple) should permit a verification of this preliminary interpretation. Two graffiti found high above the niche, on the "balcony", are unquestionable proof of human activity in this inaccessible spot.