Rock Art in Egypt’s Eastern Desert

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Rock Art - The
‘Eastern Desert’

Survey area-
• 125 km by 50 km
• 6,250 sq km - 3% of Eastern Desert
• 25° 00’ to 26° 05’ N & 33° 15’ to 33° 45’ E
• Sandstone range angled NNW to SSE
The Surveys

- Eastern Desert Survey (Followers of Horus) 2000 D.Rohl
- Rock Art Topographical Survey (RATS) 2002 Morrow & Morrow

Inspired by
- Weigall (1909) Wadi Hammamat-north, & Kanais-south
- Winkler (1938) Robert Mond Expedition-north & centre

100 sites re-recorded + 120 new sites in EDS/RATS

  (Adds 22 sites, 31 boats, 1 elephant, 2 crocodiles, 6 giraffe, 21 asses, 31 dogs, 48 ostriches, 48 cattle, 53 ibex, 36 human figures)
The Desert Wadis

- Umm Salam (south)
- Qash (north)
- Abu Mu Awad-Shalul (south/central)
- Atwani (north)
- Umm Salam (south)
Evidence of rainfall-Wadi Qash

Rock pool: Wadi Umm Salam

Wadi Abu Wasil

* Climate moister until 3500 BC; then increased aridity
Gourd picking

Desert traders

Traders’ merchandise

Ababda encampment
North/Central/Southern routes

- North: Wadi Hamammat route to gold mines and quarries, & Red Sea.
- Centre: Gebel & Bir Shalul.
- South: Wadi Baramiya route to gold mines & Red Sea.

*Rock art mixed Late/Predynastic Pharaonic/ especially in Wadis Hamammat and Baramiya, with less rock-art and fewer predynastic motifs in central Wadis Iqaydi and Shalul.
• Only one painted in whole ED (with pigment from rock underneath) in Wadi Hamammat-north
• Similar to Tomb 100?
Rock Art Evidence-South of Baramiya

• Similar motifs in the Kom Ombo Drainage Basin (unpublished)
• About 100 sites recorded & perhaps another 50+ remain unrecorded
Site Heights

• **Low**
  (1-5 metres): 85%

• **Medium**
  (6-10 metres): 7.5%

• **High**
  (11+ metres): 7.5%
Wadi Umm Salam-south
Why are most sites ‘Low?’

- narrow West-East wadis
- wadi walls hard to climb
- most suitable rock faces at low level
- many sites on smooth face reached by sand ramp or small boulders

(Sites end part way along wadis-esp. Umm Salam because rock becomes unsuitable & vegetation disappears)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animal</th>
<th>Sites</th>
<th>Geog.Bias?</th>
<th>No. Animal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crocodile</td>
<td>16 (14?)</td>
<td>South/Nor?</td>
<td>31(15?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hippo</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elephant</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Even</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ass</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giraffe</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ostrich</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>South/Cent</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>South/Cent</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>224+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibex</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>Even</td>
<td>1000+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cattle

Judd (2006)
Later vs. Predynastic Images
‘Control’

- cattle at 40% of sites
- 63% of cattle petroglyphs are singletons
- ‘control’ at 24 sites
- 4 bovids controlled at MUA-3
  - is the largest group
- only 5 sites with multiple ‘control’-2/2/4/1+1/1+1 bovids each
Saharan Comparison

Iheren (Holl, Saharan Rock Art, Archaeology of Tassilian Pastoralist Iconography, 2004, Altamira Press.)
Cattle-south of Baramiya

Structures on cattle backs only south of Baramiya
(Judd, 2006)

Cattle motifs Wadi Midriq
(photo courtesy Cheryl Hanson)
Hunting

3 ‘family’ groups

Later hunting scene

147 figures closely engaged in hunting

Added ibex

36 direct attacks

Omo valley-not every figure with a feather may be early
More ‘Attractors’: SAL-14
‘Tableau’: Wadi Abu Wasil-Winkler’s Site 26

Boats and Cattle on rocks to right of main face
Dating

- Climate-worsened in 4th millennium so large fauna died out (or hunted out)
  BUT-hippos, crocodiles and giraffes in Pharaonic NV art & hunting/mining/trips made into desert + Ptolomeic war elephants (but none show manhouts)
- Dateable objects
  BUT-Historical Health Warning-the hippo rock art example is unique

- Scientific dating not feasible; use of patination limited
- Ibex, ostrich living into modern times
Historical Health Warning

“...we must be suspicious of such overt Egyptological references and be careful not to force the well-structured elements of the Pharaonic repertoire on to a cultural scenario which was still in its early stages.”

(Midant-Reynes: 1992)
Dating Boats to NV Design

Naqada II: 9

Naqada III: 3

Pharaonic: 41

- only 90 dateable by this method
- by association approx. 260 (33%) in total of boat motifs are predynastic
- 301/710 dateable

37 ‘frond vessels’
Context

Fuchs 1989
Boat Characteristics

- 49% are hulls & wide variety of designs
- boats with cabins: 126
- boats with steering oar: 38
- boats with mast/sail: 32
- boats with oars: 38 (only 10 with oars & cabin)
- boats with (stick figure) crew: 199
- boats with one or more central figures on board: 212
- (From total: 710 boats)

CONCLUSION: composing a general typology is impossible
-only description possible
Other Boat Evidence

Hierakonpolis HK61 (Nekhen News)
‘Arms Raised’ Figure Examples

Wadi Umm Salam

Wadi Baramiya

Wadi Baramiya

Wadi Abu Wasil

Wadi Midriq (photo courtesy of AWT)
‘Arms Raised’ Figure Evidence-El Kab

Figurine Evidence

• from Badarian era onwards
• many unprovenanced
• many purchased

P. Ucko 1968 Anthropomorphic Figurines of Predynastic Egypt & Neolithic Crete
Rock Art: ED Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HAJS</th>
<th>ABB</th>
<th>BAR</th>
<th>HAJS</th>
<th>SAL</th>
<th>MUA</th>
<th>MIY</th>
<th>IQA</th>
<th>SHA</th>
<th>DAH</th>
<th>WAS</th>
<th>MIN</th>
<th>QAS</th>
<th>HAM</th>
<th>ATW</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

North 16 29% (14%)
Central 6 11% (38%)
South 34 61% (48%)

Total % all sites
56 (60)

‘Arms Raised’ Figures in Boats

- 22 (/56) stand in boats-39% at 16 (/27) sites-59%
- ARFs in southern wadis strongly associated with ‘three frond’ boat type
- None associated with boat type akin to that on D Ware

South

North/Central
New Find

above BAR-4
Above BAR-4 (February 2008)

Van Craeynest (2004)
The ‘Golf Club’ Boat

Weigall 1909
D Ware

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unprovenanced</th>
<th>Provenanced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 female figures</td>
<td>16 figures (15 female/1 male)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 vessels</td>
<td>Vessels’ (10) Distribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All but two with boat(s)</td>
<td>Naqada: 2  Semainah: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>El Amrah: 2  Harageh: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abydos: 3  Adaima:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All with boat(s)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 19 vessels/31 figures (Graff 2002)

+ 2 female & 3 male figures found since

► Total 36 figures on 469 D Ware

(244 D Ware with boat motifs)
• Theme of male figure ‘presenting’ stick to female ARF/addax or ‘supporting’ her not found in the ED rock art
D Ware
Unprovenanced Examples

• Two examples without boat(s) present
• Example with five in a row is unique
‘Arms Raised’ Figures

- 16+ figurines
- 4 Gebelein linen
- 4 C Ware
- 36 D Ware
- 65+ rock art
Total:125 (+)

- few ARF figurines & figurines rare in graves
- Gebelein linen suggests ARFs part of complex ‘dance’
- feature of D Ware on 4% of vessels
- found at 18.5% of ED rock art sites which may have predynastic elements (in turn 30% of rock-art sites)
- associated in the rock art with hunting & boats
- associated on pottery with addax, ibex, ostrich & boats
Interpretation (I)

• ‘Bird Dance’
  based on the figurines’ face
  [connection to the rock art/wider Naqada culture?]

• ‘Cow Dance’ analogy
  (Anchole people)
  * cattle association in rock art not clear
Interpretation (II)

• Orant figure-praying for luck in hunting or mourning gesture (Winkler 1938)

• Symbolic/magical-cause rain or sun (Ucko 1968)

• Dance in honour of the deceased (Turin museum)

• Fertility dance (associated with the Great Goddess) & precursor of ‘Ka’ sign (Červiček 1993)

• Part of ‘Renewal of Life’ theme-tomb as a container for this purpose (Graff 2002) - precursor of pharaonic burial practices

• Sun-bearing posture associated with regeneration of the deceased through the diurnal rise of the sun—“the cardinal tenet of AE thought” (Huyge 2002)
Later Rock-Art

300+ ‘later’ figures
-especially fighting
-common in central wadis
Conclusions

- Cattle-herding small scale (if it exists) in EDS/RATS survey area
- Cattle herding feature south of Wadi Baramiya
- Few riverine & large mammals represented
- Boats a significant feature
- Boat typology is problematic-leads to concentration on description
- Boat dating by comparison to Nile Valley motifs & association in context with rock-art motifs
- ‘Arms Raised’ Figure is a significant motif- associated with boats and hunting + parallels (but not exact) on D-ware
- Hunting is an extremely common feature over a long time period
- Many figures are hunting or stand in boats
- Later rock art features horse & camel riders fighting-conflict absent from earlier rock art