

Colloquium

**"The Signs of Which Times? Chronological and
Palaeoenvironmental Issues in the Rock Art of Northern Africa"**

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North Africa's Place in Rock Art Research

by

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SUMMARY. — The talk will focus on the history of rock art research in general, with particular reference to events in North Africa, starting with the first discoveries by the world of scholarship; the earliest art known in the region at present; the problems of dating -- from stylistic comparisons and the range of fauna depicted to attempts involving patination, archaeological levels in potential association with the art, archaeological levels that actually cover art, and most recently some examples of direct dating of deposits on the rock surface, or of sediments masking figures; the history of recording by stampings, tracings and photography; and finally current concerns regarding conservation, such as tourist access, the erection of unsuitable fences (as in the Libyan desert), former chalking (e.g. Qurta, on the Nile), new graffiti (notably in the Western Sahara and Libya), and deliberate destruction (as at el-Hosh/Abu Tanqura Bahari in Egypt), as well as the dangers of excessive publicity, as with the famous Dabbous giraffes (Niger).

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The Perceived Environment: Some Clues from Rock-Art Works

by

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SUMMARY. — Although ecological models are currently accepted as the more powerful explanations of the cultural change which occurred in the past, very little attention, up to now, has been given to the way in which modifications in the environment could be perceived by man. Within this general perspective, a more specific question is whether, and to what extent, rock art can offer a representation of unstable climatic conditions. As a matter of fact, according to some authors, the various paintings and engravings which make up African art did not aim to reflect, illustrate or express social themes or strategies, as the art itself is the medium through which thought is conveyed in order to perpetuate social life and strategies.

As regard Saharan art the interpretations have swung between two extremes: at one end is the formal approach which is overly tied to visible features; at the other end these features are ignored, to focus on the hidden structure behind them. For example, a key to reading the Saharan “Round Head” art comes from the proposal to associate it with the pre-pastoral hunter-gatherer horizon, which stylistically would be the direct continuation of Bubaline art. Therefore, the hunter-gatherer world would offer the socio-historical context in which to place the rich and diverse narrative of the whole Round Head production. Something similar was suggested also for the pastoral iconography which was considered to faithfully mirror the world of the Saharan herders.

In light of this, a consideration of the social context should be able to offer significant clues for the rock art reading, although in itself it couldn't contribute a complete and exhaustive meaning, since the importance of the universal symbols which transcend cultures, and at the same time, representations of cults, re-birth myths and so on cannot be disregarded.

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Chronological and Palaeoenvironmental Aspects of Djaras Rock Art (Egypt)

by

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SUMMARY. — Djara is situated on the Egyptian Limestone Plateau halfway between Asyut in the Nile Valley and the Farafra Oasis. From 1993 until 2002 archaeological surveys and excavations were conducted in this area by the University of Cologne and revealed more than 240 open-air sites as well as a rich rock art repertoire inside the dripstone cave. The complete documentation of the rock images indicates a total of 133 figures, representing mostly wild animals of the dry savannah, humans, and some erratic signs. In the lack of direct dates for the art, the dating evidence of the archaeological context, both inside the cave and on the open-air sites in the surrounding can be used as the most important source for the chronological affiliation.

The archaeological sites reveal an occupation which lasted from approximately 7,700 until 5,200 calBC. Moreover, few small sites report a final, sporadic occupation between 5,000 and 4,500 calBC before the climatic deterioration stopped human subsistence in this region. Some radiocarbon dates from a habitation site inside the dripstone cave can be parallelised with the occupation phases indicated from the open-air sites. Judging from the occupational history of the area, it is suggested that the rock art of Djara can be dated to the Holocene humid phase, c. 8,000-4,500 calBC.

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From Rock Art to Rock Inscriptions in Upper Egypt

by

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SUMMARY. — The rock art of Upper Egypt between ca. 4000 and 3000 BCE presents a progression from individual iconic images to tableaux of images with specific symbolic import and syntactic rules. These later scenes and tableaux are harbingers of the fully developed hieroglyphic writing system, in which both the position and pairing of individual signs may change and augment the meaning of a text. Most of these Predynastic and Protodynastic Egyptian images provide a visual representation of the solar cycle and eventually allow for various artists over time to employ these cosmographic images in the creation of groupings of images. Initially assembled according to rules of iconographic attraction, whereby images of like kind congregate at a certain site or part of a site, by 3250 BCE the Upper Egyptian practitioners of rock were composing large tableaux employing certain images in pre-determined positions and making use of established groupings of two or more image. The development of these tableaux, applying rules of iconographic syntax to the earlier cosmographic signifiers, allows the nascent Protodynastic Upper Egyptian state to create iconographic cycles relating cosmic order to human order. The appearance of these tableaux shortly before 3250 BCE predates by but a short time the appearance of true Egyptian writing. The origin of Egyptian writing has long been a subject for speculation, with ideas of economic necessity and administrative control usually dominating the discussion. The recognition of the existence of an elaborate series of cosmographic symbols arranged according to iconographic syntactic rules, with some possibility for individual alteration and commentary on the established images and syntax, reveals that a sort of meta-textual writing involving cosmic and ultimately politico-cosmic commentary existed in Upper Egypt at the time of the birth of both the proto-pharaonic state and the Egyptian writing system. From the end of the cosmographic cycles, ca. 3100-3000 BCE, two rock art sites in Upper Egypt present terminal versions of the earlier cosmographic tableaux with early hieroglyphic annotations, allowing for a potential understanding of the early literate Egyptians' comprehension of their own proto-hieroglyphic cosmographs.

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Chronology, Archaeology and Rock Art in the Sahara. An Endless Challenge

by

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SUMMARY. — After one hundred and fifty years from the first note on Saharan rock art, the debate on its chronology still appears confuse and inconclusive. The conflicting dichotomy between “long” and “short” chronology is based on circumstantial evidence, both lacking of hard data and sound information. Human and financial energies have been painstakingly devoted to this aspect, without a true progress in terms of our understanding of the complexity of rock art. A major shift is therefore urgently needed, which passes through: i) creation of multidimensional research programs; ii) collection of ethnohistorical and ethnoarchaeological information; iii) setting of an international panel for a common – open access – Saharan database. In this sense, recent archeological activities in the area of Messak and Acacus provided fresh and sound information to re-insert the rock art evidence in its proper social and cultural context. This should be considered as a first, simple step towards the creation of international research programs. After such a long period of unfruitful debate, the new challenge is in fact to overtake the national borders, and set up transboundary projects, capable of raising funds from different bodies and increase our knowledge of Saharan rock art heritage.

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**Les trois époques de réalisation
des gravures rupestres de l'Adrar des Iforas (Mali)**

par

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RESUME. — Des prospections menées dans l'Adrar des Iforas à la fin des années 1980 ont conduit au recensement de plusieurs milliers de gravures rupestres. Leur relevé systématique le long de six vallées successives permet de multiples recoupements d'observations entre roches ornées et, par là même, la reconnaissance d'expressions distinctes sur les plans des thèmes et des styles. Certaines d'entre-elles se trouvent liées par superposition sur des parois communes. L'étude des tracés en recouvrement révèle trois époques de réalisation dont les cadres chronologiques peuvent être fixés grâce au progrès des connaissances enregistré en Afrique septentrionale au cours de ces vingt dernières années dans les domaines de l'archéologie, de la paléoécologie et de la paléontologie animale.

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Investigating the ‘Cave of Beasts’ at Wadi Sura II (Gilf Kebir, SW-Egypt)

by

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SUMMARY. — The so-called Wadi Sura II shelter in the north-western Gilf Kebir (SW-Egypt), also known as "the Cave of the Beasts", ranges among the most important prehistoric rock art sites in the eastern Sahara. Discovered in 2002 by J. Foggini & A. Mestekawi, the shelter's rear rock wall bears thousands of well preserved painted figures – humans, various animals, apparent mythical creatures, and others – as well as some engravings. Due to their exceptional richness and variety in terms of motifs and style, the representations offer unique insights into a past cultural world when living in this remote area of the Libyan Desert was still possible.

Since 2009, a joint project of the University of Cologne, the German Archaeological Institute in Cairo and the University of Applied Sciences in Cologne is devoted to the documentation and analysis of the rock art, but also aims at investigating the palaeoenvironmental and settlement history of the whole Wadi Sura region, including the famous "Cave of the Swimmers" or Wadi Sura I (cf. the contribution by Heiko Riemer). This paper will report on some recent results of the ongoing project.

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L'apport des monuments funéraires à la question des datations et de la Chronologie de l'art rupestre du Sahara central

par

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RESUME. — Parmi les nombreuses traces anthropiques de l'Holocène, les monuments forment, avec l'art rupestre, une base de données riche et variée, d'une importance cruciale pour la compréhension des populations sahariennes et de leur évolution. Les rites funéraires, dont ces monuments sont une des expressions, sont généralement spécifiques d'un groupe culturel (ou d'une ethnie) et à ce titre, ils sont de bons marqueurs. D'une part, ils donnent une bonne idée de la diffusion des populations qui en sont à l'origine, et d'autre part, ils aident à mieux cerner – grâce aux datations – les époques de transitions qui parfois coïncident avec des événements climatiques majeurs. Des transitions équivalentes sont perceptibles dans l'art rupestre ! La mise en parallèle des aires de diffusion de ces deux phénomènes conduit à l'hypothèse de relations biunivoques entre divers types de monuments et des ensembles rupestres. Les *Monuments en trou de serrure* ont une aire de distribution qui coïncide assez bien avec celle des peintures en style d'Iheren/Wa-n-Amil. L'attribution aux mêmes auteurs permet ainsi de connaître - indirectement - la fourchette temporelle d'existence de ces peintures. D'autres corrélations art rupestre/monument semblent fonctionner et conduisent à affiner la chronologie de l'art pariétal, au moins pour le Sahara central.

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From Savanna to Desert: Animal Engravings and the Changing Prehistoric Environment of the Wadi al-Hayat, Libyan Sahara

by

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SUMMARY. — Traditional stylistic classifications have not provided conclusive dates for the rock art of the Sahara, and thus the imagery cannot be placed securely in its cultural or environmental context. Based on the animal engravings recently recorded in the Wadi al-Hayat, Libyan Sahara, a new methodology is proposed. Content and patina of the engravings are used to establish a chronological sequence, against the background of changing palaeoenvironmental conditions. This framework can then be used to explore aspects of the relationships between the rock art and the changing Holocene landscape.

The species depicted are shown to reflect the local fauna, and their habitats coincide with the palaeoclimatic conditions of the central Sahara. Additionally, recent geomorphological analyses of the rock surfaces of the Messak provide a chronology for the patina, and show that the formation of each type of patina was dependent on environmental conditions. Through analyses of the animal engravings, categorised according to positively identifiable species and patina types, a direct correlation between the content (i.e. species depicted) and patina of the engravings, and the palaeoenvironment can be demonstrated. Both content and patina of the engravings indicate a development from wet savanna to dry savanna, and finally to desert conditions, consistent with the Holocene climatic sequence. This provides a chronological framework for the engravings and places them into a palaeoenvironmental context.

The locations of the engravings of each patina group also correspond to the changing lake levels of the al-Hayat palaeolake identified in previous palaeoenvironmental research projects, which in turn supports the chronology of the engravings. Through spatial analyses, the locations and landscapes preferred by the engravers for the creation of rock art can be identified, whilst the new chronological sequence allows us to explore changes in the cultural conventions which underlie the creation of the engravings.

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Un projet de datation directe et indirecte des images rupestres du Tassili des Ajjer, de l'Ahaggar et de l'Atlas saharien (Algérie)

par

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RESUME. — Par convention signée entre le CNRPAH (Ministère de la Culture, Algérie) et le CNRS (Ministère de la Recherche, France), un projet algéro-français d'analyse et datation des images rupestres du Sahara algérien, dirigé par Jean Loïc Le Quellec (CNRS) et Malika Hachid (CNRPAH), vient d'être mis en œuvre. Les techniques de datation directe et indirecte par AMS et OSL sont actuellement en cours de test sur le plateau du Tassili des Ajjer, dans l'Atlas saharien et l'Immidir (Ahaggar), et les premiers résultats sont encourageants. Ils se doublent d'une campagne de relevés photographiques en lumière naturelle et sous différentes longueurs d'onde. Il est attendu que cette approche permette une contribution majeure au vieux débat sur l'âge des images rupestres sahariennes les plus anciennes.

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Rock Art Around Settlements: The Boats and Fauna at Hierakonpolis, Egypt

by

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SUMMARY. — The site of Hierakonpolis (ancient Nekhen) near Edfu in Upper Egypt is well known for its late Predynastic and Early Dynastic archaeological localities. These localities, which have been excavated and researched over many decades, lie adjacent to rock beds and hills presenting rock art of various forms. This ranges from simple marks and incisions to various fauna and elaborate boats with animal heads. The themes of the rock art and close proximity to archaeological sites present unique research opportunities, an unfortunate aspect of this beautiful site however is that it is under threat from illicit quarrying activities. This paper will present the results of the first season of intensive survey of the site's rock art and some initial insights into the relationship of the rock art with the activities, functions and chronologies of the overall archaeological sites.

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Dating South-Moroccan Rock Art: Problems and Possibilities

by

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SUMMARY. — The rock art of Morocco is mainly to be found in the mountain zones of the High Atlas and also in the semi-desert or desert areas of the so-called “Presahara” and the Western Sahara. The rock engravings of South-Morocco belong to three main periods: As to the most recent phase, the interpretation of the drawings is corroborated by ethnographic sources. With regard to the intermediate period, certain descriptions that were given by ancient authors substantiate our reading of the so called “libyco-berber” depictions. As regards the most ancient pictures, their classification has to rely exclusively on archaeological methods. The engravings of this period were traditionally attributed to the “Bubalin” (Tazina-Style) and “Bovidien” rock art of South Morocco. These main rock art groups can be divided into several distinct sub-groups. Through recent research it was demonstrated that these rock art groups date from the metal ages, that is to say from the Copper Age and from the Bronze Age (HECKENDORF 2008). Quite a few representations show that the relationship between Atlantic Morocco and Europe, which is clearly illustrated by the rock art of the High Atlas, extends far more south, down to the edge of the desert.

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Rock Art and Early Dynastic Iconography at Naq' el-Hamdulab (Aswan, Egypt)

by

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SUMMARY. — The recently relocated and newly discovered rock art sites at Naq' el-Hamdulab (Hendrickx et al. 2009; Hendrickx & Gatto 2009; Storemyr 2009) allow to investigate the chronological relation between late Predynastic rock art and the developing Egyptian iconography of Dynasties 0 and 1. At present, five sites are known at short distance from each other, on the rocks confining the sandy plain west of the village of Naq' el-Hamdulab. However, the location of the individual sites differs and reflects the conceptualisation of the landscape.

The exceptional character of the Naq' el-Hamdulab sites allows new reflections on the interpretation of (late) Predynastic rock art and the reasons for its presence both close to the Nile and in remote desert areas.

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Real or Ideal: Rock Art as a Reflection of the Environment of Egypt's Western Desert

by

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SUMMARY. — Rock art has often been interpreted as a reflection of the environment of the time. This paper will examine the rock art discovered by the North Kharga Oasis Survey over the past 3 seasons in Kharga Oasis, as well as some of that found in Dakhla Oasis, with reference to what is known about the diachronic change in the environment of the area, and explore whether the images accurately reflect reality and their reliability as dating criteria. This study of diachronic change will use representations of animals as its main focus. The range of creatures, their juxta- and supra-positioning, the presence of these animals in the archaeozoological record, and the correlation between modes of depiction in this area as compared with the Nile Valley will all contribute to establishing a preliminary sequence of intra-site dating for the rock art of the Great Oasis and its surrounding desert.

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Dating the Petroglyphs of the Egyptian Central Eastern Desert

by

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SUMMARY. — The petroglyphs of the Egyptian Central Eastern Desert are mainly found within an area bounded by the Wadi Hammamat-Quseir road in the north, the Red Sea Hills in the east, and the Wadi Baramiya-Mersa Alam road in the south. Survey reports by Winkler (1938), Rohl (2002) and Morrow & Morrow (2002) have covered fifteen wadis and resulted in a corpus of over eleven hundred human figure petroglyphs, eight hundred boats and two thousand animals. Many of these are from the predynastic era when a moister climate pertained until around 3,500 BCE, after which aridification took place.

The inability to use scientific dating methods, the rarity of useful superimpositions and the problematic nature of using relative patination except on a rock surface open to the same influences mean that using stylistic dating is unavoidable. This paper proposes that by comparison with Nile Valley cultural examples found on mobiliary art, especially on pottery and in tomb paintings a considerable number of the petroglyphs can be dated and reasons given for their creation.

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Chronologie de l'art rupestre marocain: contraintes et perspectives de la recherche

par

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RESUME. — Le Maroc est un des importants foyers de l'art rupestre en Afrique du Nord. Sa partie sud est en même temps un espace qui renferme la quasi-totalité de ce type de patrimoine. Du fait que la région occupe la ceinture nord du grand Sahara, les premières recherches en la matière ont extrapolé la chronologie saharienne aux sites marocains, jugeant que l'aire rupestre du nord est une extension logique de celle du grand Sahara. Les pionniers ont proposé une classification pour le nord similaire à celle du désert. Ce constat est encore majoritairement défendu, alors que la classification à l'échelle régionale est loin d'être achevée. De ce fait, la classification et la chronologie actuelles restent difficiles à défendre.

L'objectif de cette intervention est de proposer deux axes pertinents de recherche pour contribuer à combler les lacunes de chronologie rupestre marocaine: **Le premier** concerne une réflexion sur les représentations «*fossile directeur*» comme repère chronologique pertinent (Chars, Inscriptions rupestres, cheval, dromadaire...); une étude des compositions et associations, de patine, des styles et des thèmes représentés. **Le second** intéresse l'étude paléo environnementale des deux systèmes de répartition du Patrimoine Rupestre marocain, les aires des hautes altitudes et celles des zones actuellement arides.

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Adaptation or Aesthetic Alleviation? Pastoralist Responses to Saharan Aridification

by

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SUMMARY. — The chain of causation in aridification and pastoralist livelihoods has been a central topic of prehistoric research in the Sahara ever since Heinrich Barth as the first European discovered Saharan rock art in 1850. In order to make a sustainable living prehistoric settlers of the Sahara region could either migrate to favourable areas or they could try to cope with a degrading environment in place. The Ennedi Highlands in NE Tchad seem to exemplify both strategies. Pastoralist settlement starts relatively late at c. 3000 BCE when further East in the Wadi Howar living turned unbearable and people started moving out. But once having appropriated the highlands cattle herders seem to have stayed there long after the region had reached the presently prevailing aridity that inhabitants of today consider unsuited for cattle herding. During this period pastoralist rock art evolves but it does not directly mirror the climatic conditions and their effects, rather it seems to ignore or counter-balance them. Obviously responses to climate change were not only material but also epistemic in character, supporting behaviour and livelihoods that would seem unsustainable in a western, scientific view of the ecotope.

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Intra-site Chronology and Palaeoenvironmental Reconstruction at Khor Abu Subeira South (Aswan, Egypt)

by

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Summary. — The rock art site KASS1, re-discovered in 2005 by “The Aswan-Kom Ombo Archaeological Project,” is positioned along a lateral branch of the main southern tributary of Wadi Abu Subeira, located north-northeast of Aswan. The unique geological features associated with KASS1 make the site an excellent case study for the reconstruction of palaeoenvironmental conditions. In addition, the detail and clarity of the rock art allows for the development of an intra-site chronology. Rock art is analyzed with consideration to 1) the environment and 2) the current understanding of the socio-political system within the region during the Predynastic Period. The authors seek to provide additional insight regarding the placement of rock art sites within geographically distinctive areas as well as the internal artistic and ideological development of particular iconography.

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Quelques aspects de l'art pariétal et mobilier préhistorique de la région du Rif oriental (Maroc)

par

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RESUME. — Les recherches préhistoriques que nous avons entrepris, depuis l'année 2004, dans la région du Rif oriental en collaboration avec des chercheurs de la KAAK ont permis la mise au jour de plus de 200 sites dont l'occupation s'étale sur une fourchette chronologique allant du Paléolithique inférieur jusqu'à l'époque préislamique. Certains gisements qui ont fait l'objet de fouilles programmées ont conservé les témoins d'occupations humaines notamment durant le Pléistocène supérieur et l'Holocène. Parmi eux figurent les sites d'Ifri El Baroud, de Taghit Haddouch, de Hassi Ouenzga et d'Ifri n'Amman. Ce dernier a révélé l'existence d'une peinture pariétale ibéromaurusienne qui remonterait selon la datation de la couche qui la couvrait à environ 13 000 ans. Elle constitue ainsi la plus ancienne manifestation artistique préhistorique jusqu'à présent signalée au Maghreb. Très probablement, à la même époque remonte une représentation d'un animal (équidé?) dessiné en bas relief sur un fragment de côte d'*Equus* (j'attends la confirmation des datations en cours et j'espère les communiquer lors de cette rencontre).

La grotte d'Ifri El Baroud a également fourni un élément d'art mobilier ibéromaurusien sous forme d'une cheville osseuse d'antilope, polie sur toute sa surface et portant des incisions circulaires, regroupées en petits nombres différents et placées quasiment dans sa partie proximale. Les résultats d'une analyse tracéologique ont montré que les incisions ont été effectuées en deux temps à l'aide d'un outil en silex. Des incisions similaires ont été aussi observées sur des outils en os.

La grotte de Taghit Haddouch a révélé dans des niveaux épipaléolithiques, datés entre le 10^e et le 8^e millénaire B.P., la présence d'un objet digne d'intérêt. Il s'agit d'une vertèbre de bovidé où fut fixé dans son extrémité distale la partie médiane d'une lamelle brute. L'analyse tracéologique de cette dernière a montré l'existence de traces de résine et d'ocre rouge. La fragilité de l'os conjugué aux traces d'ocre sur le fragment de la lamelle ainsi que la découverte à proximité d'une plaque en calcaire portant les traces de broyage de la même matière, laisse croire qu'il s'agit, en toute vraisemblance, d'un outil ayant servi au tatouage corporelle.

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A Stone Stela from the Ténééré

by

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SUMMARY. — The Africamuseum of Tervuren, Belgium (KMMA-MRAC) has in its collections a remarkable stone stela with profuse and well preserved circular and geometric decoration. The stela has been found buried in the sand of the Ténééré. The paper presents the stela and the data regarding its find and compares the KMMA stela to related objects in public and private collections.

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**Rock Art and Habitation Sites in their Landscape.
Archaeological Survey at Wadi Sura, Gilf Kebir (SW Egypt)**

by

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SUMMARY. — In 2009 Cologne University has started a project on the rock art and archaeology of the Wadi Sura area including a systematic survey of the micro-region to document and interpret the rich rock art heritage of the southern Gilf Kebir (SW Egypt) in context to landscape configuration, habitation sites, and environmental factors. This approach begins to offer new insight in chronological, palaeoenvironmental and economic aspects of the rock depictions, as well as in the settlement history of the entire area.

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Holocene Rock Art in Morocco: Hard Facts and Hopeful Hypotheses

by

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SUMMARY. — Morocco presents an annoying picture for rock art researchers: in the south of the country, where most of the recorded 300 rock art sites are to be found, there have been almost no excavations and no pertinent dates; in the north-west, where there is almost no rock art, extensive archaeological excavation has produced reliable dates from the Lower Palaeolithic through to the Copper/Bronze Age. So, this short presentation on the dating of Moroccan rock art has had to rely on the few hints offered by studies on the climate, the appearance or disappearance of certain animal species, the introduction of new elements such as metal weapons, chariots or writing, the patination process, and the rare direct dates available which have some sort of link with rock art.

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Rock Art and Archaeology of Ifran-n-Taska, Eastern Jbel Bani, Morocco: First Results of a Moroccan-Italian Research Programme

by

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SUMMARY. — The paintings of Ifran-n-Taska are one of the rare testimonies of this kind of non-engraved rock art in Morocco. The site is of high relevance for a comprehensive approach of archaeology of the whole Eastern Jbel Bani which lays to the South-West of Zagora, in the presaharan fringes of Morocco. A Moroccan-Italian research programme has been set up to study these paintings in their whole ethnoarchaeological context. The first fieldwork has been undertaken from 10 to 25 of October 2009 by a pluridisciplinary team composed by four prehistorians, one anthropologist and one geologist. The drawings have been made of red ochre, white, black and yellow, on the inner sides of five shelters at the edge of a dry river. Besides the inventory and study of these paintings, the fieldwork has undertaken an extensive prospection in the whole of the plateau of Tafraout-n-Taska. Comprehensive interviews have also been conducted with the chiefs of a couple of Aït Atta nomadic families that are living in the area of the paintings. The objectives of the programme are both to understand the geological and cultural context of the paintings and to analyze the components of the painting material and, if possible, dating analyses.

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The Age and the Natural Context of the Western Saharan Rock-Art

by

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SUMMARY. — The Western Saharan rock-art is composed by engravings, paintings and reliefs of different age and thematic. In previous studies it was classed following the methods proposed by Monod, Mauny and Lhote. However, during the study on recently discovered painted rock-shelters, we realized that the methods used by them were not precise enough to study the Western Saharan rock-art because they masked its chronological and regional diversity.

For this reason we classed the paintings in several styles by morphotechnical criteria and, after that, we dated them by the means of the weapons, animals and texts depicted.

Unfortunately the age of the most abundant style of engravings, the Tazina style, is still very difficult to deduce because of the scarce human representations and the vague paleoenvironmental signification of the depicted animals. However some other styles of engravings can be clearly related to the paintings and, therefore, we got a possible date for them too.

In this colloquium we will discuss about the age of those styles in the context of other archaeological and environmental data available in the Western Sahara.

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Attempts at Relative Dating of the Geometric Rock Art by the First Nile Cataract

by

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SUMMARY. — Recent survey by the QuarryScapes project has shown that the hinterland at Gharb Aswan, by the first Nile cataract opposite modern Aswan, has a significant corpus of geometric rock art. It is comparable to corpora at Abka by the second cataract and El-Hosh close to Gebel el-Silsila, but appears to be more varied. "Standard" Predynastic (c. 4-3000 BC) rock art usually accompany the geometric motifs. Based on previous documentation and analysis (Storemyr 2008, 2009), this contribution gives a critical review of the attempts at relative dating of the geometric corpus. Such attempts are primarily based on 1) regional comparison of motifs, 2) detailed visual comparison of rock (desert) varnish and weathering phenomena on panels, partially also across the landscape, considering rock properties and climate change, 3) superimposition (which is rare) and 4) the distribution of panels across the landscape. It is suggested that the oldest geometric motifs were made in Epipalaeolithic (7-5000 BC), perhaps even earlier, whereas the youngest may stem from the early Predynastic period.

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Éléments intéressant la chronologie relative des gravures rupestres du Plateau du Messak au Fezzan (Libye)

par

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RESUME. — L'hétérogénéité des patines et la qualité variable d'exécution de sujets similaires rend la chronologie relative difficile à établir. Cependant, la prise en compte simultanée de critères physiques, thématiques et historiques redondants peut étayer quelques hypothèses de chronologie relative des sujets gravés.

La persistance, en Afrique, de traditions graphiques permet de détecter actuellement, au Nord comme au Sud du Sahara, des éléments homologues à certains thèmes gravés présents dans le Néolithique Saharien.

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A Minimum Age for the Qurta Rock Art (Upper Egypt) through Luminescence Dating of its Sediment-Cover

by

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SUMMARY. — The rock art at Qurta (Upper Egypt) has tentatively been attributed to the Late Palaeolithic. This age is inferred from the nature and stylistic properties of the petroglyphs, and their patination and weathering; so far, no numerical ages – as obtained through application of natural-scientific dating methods – are available. This contribution reports on optically stimulated luminescence (OSL) dating of sedimentary quartz to establish a reliable absolute minimum age for what is thought to represent the oldest Egyptian rock art.

OSL dating is an absolute dating method that allows determining the time when sedimentary grains were last exposed to sunlight. We outline the basic principles of the dating method and clarify how it can be used for indirect dating of the rock art at Qurta. Some intricacies typical to the context are discussed; these relate to the nature of the material itself, as well as to its complex surroundings. We then present a suite of optical ages for sediments covering the petroglyphs. Internal and external evidence is used to evaluate the reliability of the dates, and their implications as to the age of the Qurta rock art are discussed.

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Chronological and Environmental Data on Some North Africa Rock Art Contexts

by

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SUMMARY. — The contribution deals with some well preserved rock art sites, located in the Libyan Fezzan and the Nile Valley. The data collected concern the topographical, environmental and contextual features of the artworks. As we know, the open air sites seem to prevail along the Nile valley while in the Saharan massifs the rock art is often concentrated in shelters and caves. This suggest at first a different definition of the term “rock art site”: sometimes, as in the Nile valley and in some regions of the Libyan Fezzan, the site encompasses the entire side of a wadi or a small jebel because it is really impossible to cut, sometimes it is similar to a *classical* (in European terms) rock art site (shelters and caves). This different sizes make more difficult the comparisons but the configuration of a “site” is a critical concept because it represents the meeting point between the natural environment and the human activities. For analytical purposes the documents are included in two broad categories according to their structural arrangement (architecture) and/or the abundance and variety of the figurative repertoire: 1. Complex sites 2. Simple sites. The chronological value of each feature is considered also in connection with the archaeological evidences.

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A Proposed Absolute Chronology for the Rock Art of the Central Libyan Desert

by

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SUMMARY. — A series of massifs and plateaus occupy the central Libyan Desert (Eastern Sahara) near the convergence of the borders of present-day Egypt, Sudan and Libya which have long been known to harbour prehistoric rock art. Already in 1923 the Egyptian explorer Ahmed Hassanein noted engravings of wild animals at Jebel Uweinat, which he correctly assumed to be of great antiquity. Subsequent explorers discovered a number of spectacular paintings and engravings, however until recently no systematic exploration or recording of sites was attempted, and awareness of the sites remain limited even among rock art specialists.

The author organised twenty expeditions to the Gilf Kebir plateau and Jebel Uweinat, initially with the modest objective of visiting known and recorded sites. However as familiarity with terrain and sites increased it became apparent, that large unexplored areas promise new discoveries. During the past six years large areas were systematically explored, and over 300 new rock art sites were found. To date, more than 800 sites have been documented and published in the region.

A significant aspect of the new finds was the identification of several distinct cultural horizons, some unique to localized geographical areas, and some spanning the whole region. Their relative chronology may be established based on a number of preserved over-paintings. Recent paleoclimatic research in the Gilf Kebir offers an opportunity to correlate dated climate periods with the rock art of the area, providing an absolute chronology for the cultural history of the central Libyan Desert that spans the full range of the early to mid-holocene climatic optimum.

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Rock Art from the Tadrart Acacus and Messak Settafet (central Sahara, Libya): Geoarchaeological, Palaeoenvironmental, and Chronological Issues.

by

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SUMMARY. — The importance of the SW Libyan rock art is known since a long time, thanks to the pioneering works done by P. Graziosi and F. Mori. Its stylistic and cultural issues have been widely discussed by scholars and amateurs, but a convincing chronology is not yet available. Furthermore, most of the Authors generally focalized on the cultural interpretation of pictographs and petroglyphs, with scarce attention to their geoarchaeological implications.

For that, in the frame of the activities of the Italian-Libyan Mission in the Acacus and Messak of the Sapienza, University of Rome, the group of the University of Milan has recently carried out a geoarchaeological reconnaissance of rock art in its environmental context. The geoarchaeological approach and the comparison with independent palaeoclimatic data collected in the region allowed us to interpret the Acacus and Messak rock art in the perspective of the Holocene climate change.

The most critical aspect of our research concerns rock art dating. Even though, important results have been acquired in the field of relative dating, and mostly are on the basis of rock varnish study, at the moment radiometric techniques seem hard to be applied. Radiometric dating results should be carefully evaluated, considering the environmental context and the climatic history of the region; in many cases age determinations could be put in relation with modification in environmental moisture and biological activity, determined by the local climatic changes occurred throughout the Holocene.

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