

Rock art from West Bank Aswan and Wadi Abu Subeira

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Since 2005 the "Aswan-Kom Ombo Archaeological Project" has been working on the rock art sites from Gharb Aswan and Wadi Abu Subeira. Many are the localities recorded up until now, mainly along the river and on wadi bottoms. The representations are dated from prehistory to the Islamic Period and show a variety of subjects: wild animals, cattle, boats, camels, human figures etc. Hereafter three of those sites will be described in detail: two are located in Gharb Aswan, midway between Aswan and Kubbaniya and the third is located south of Wadi Abu Subeira.

Introduction¹

Since 2005 the "Aswan-Kom Ombo Archaeological Project"² has been investigating selected areas between Aswan and Kom Ombo, more specifically the West Bank from Qubbet el-Hawa north to Kubbaniya north, Wadi Kubbaniya, Wadi Abu Subeira and a section of the desert southeast of Kom Ombo. The archaeological evidence in the region is varied and rich and includes many rock drawings of different style and age. Presently, rock art sites have been recorded in West Bank Aswan and Wadi Abu Subeira³, while no evidence was found in the section

1. Written by Gatto and Zampetti.

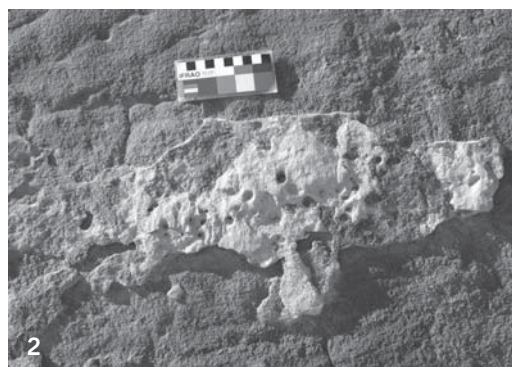
2. The project is a joint venture between The British Museum (from 2005 to 2008), University of Rome "La Sapienza" (since 2007) and Yale University (since 2008).

3. The sites recorded up until now are all located along the Nile or along Wadi Abu Subeira and its tributaries. The temporary limitation of the survey in the aforementioned areas has been intentional, avoiding "unpleasant" overlaps with the work of two additional archaeological projects on the same plateau; both mainly devoted to the study and conservation of ancient quarries (*cf.* the QuarryScapes project, directed by Elizabeth Bloxam and the SCA mission, directed by Adel Kelany). Rock art sites were found also in quarry contexts (Storemyr 2007; 2008; this volume; Storemyr *et al.* 2008).



Fig. 1
Map of Egypt with the location of the three rock art sites mentioned in the text.

Fig. 2
Hagar el-Ghorab, example of rock patina.



of the Kom Ombo desert. Hereafter, only the three rock art sites currently under systematic investigation will be described. Gebel Qurna and Hagar el-Ghorab are located on the West Bank in the Sheikh Mohamed district, just along the riverside (fig. 1). Locality KASS 1 is situated on a lateral branch of Wadi Abu Subeira (Khor Abu Subeira South). The relationship between the rock drawing location and the surrounding environment differs significantly between the three examples. The sites on the West Bank are easily accessible and visible from a distance, while the site in Khor Abu Subeira has a more “hidden” position.

More than sixty surfaces (8 at Gebel Qurna, 22 at Hagar el-Ghorab and 37 at Khor Abu Subeira) with more than three hundred visible petroglyphs have been recognized so far in the aforementioned localities⁴. The morphology and topography, the changing climatic and environmental factors as well as the type of activities performed in these three areas explain both the different degree of conservation of the walls and the different kinds of patina observed (fig. 2). For the chronological seriation and the stylistic features of the subjects and scenes, we refer to the contribution by Huyge on the Elkab rock art (2002). For a description of the processes of rock markings, we refer to the manual by Bednarik (2001: 193-205).

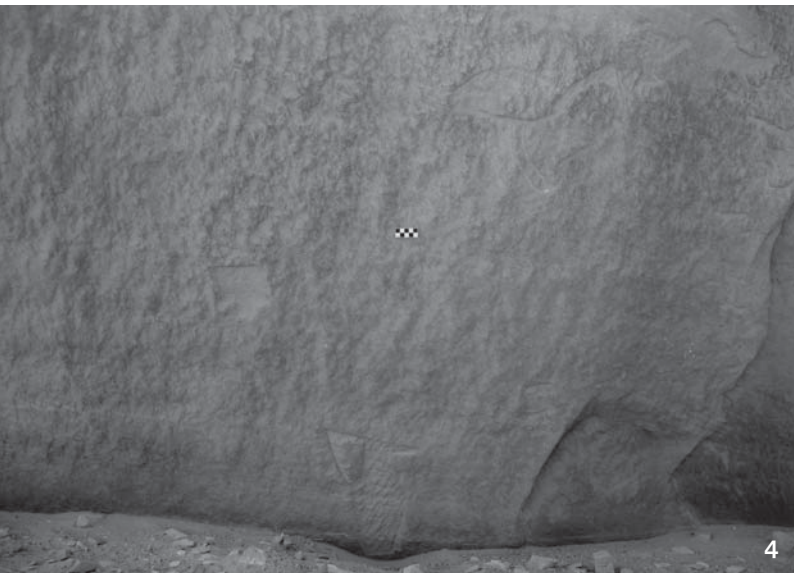
Gebel Qurna⁵ (fig. 3)

Gebel Qurna is an elongated sandstone hill, oriented N-S and located at the southern fringe of the Sheikh Mohamed district⁶. In antiquity, it would have served as a landmark for anyone approaching Elephantine from the Nile. The remains of a possible Roman or Byzantine watch tower exist on the top of Gebel Qurna, while traces of a Ptolemaic quarry lie on the east side and modern quarry activities on

4. In this paper the many Pharaonic, Demotic and Coptic rock inscriptions, observed both at Gebel Qurna and Hagar-el-Ghorab will not be described (for them, see Maree in Gatto *et al.* in press).

5. Written by Zampetti.

6. The hill is also known as “Khnum Mountain”. Sheikh Mohamed is the locality where Predynastic/A-Group, Middle Kingdom (maybe also C-Group) and Byzantine cemeteries were excavated by Junker (1919).



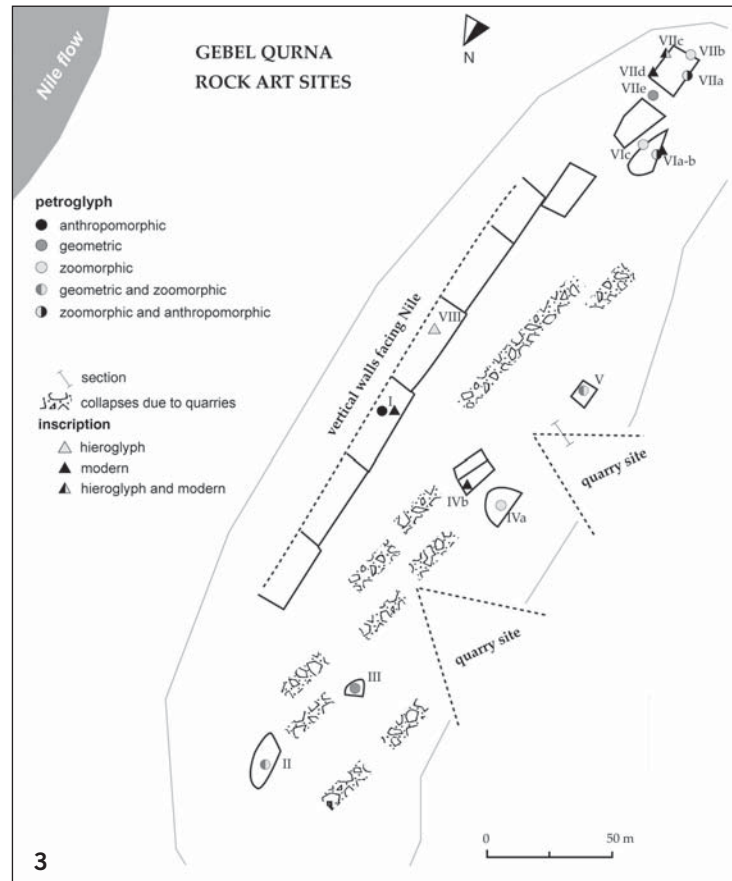
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the west side. Most likely, some of the older rock art was destroyed through quarrying activities, but several other inscriptions were disturbed through weathering as well as numerous superimpositions of more recent rock marks and drawings. An idea of the original contexts may be offered by a few of the eight walls decorated with 42 subjects, representing the remains of past artistic activity.

Wall I belongs to a large series of artificial walls due to quarrying, representing the eastern side of the gebel top. Here a horse and, on top of it (or maybe behind it), a man throwing a spear has been depicted (see also Červiček 1974: fig. 67). The figure, more likely Islamic in date, could be part of a scene representing a skirmish or a hunt but no other subject completing the scene is present. The figures are executed in a pecked technique and the petroglyph is well preserved (Horizon VI of Huyge's seriation, 2002). On the left, where the quarry activities were performed, there are three images: an ibis, probably representing the god Thot, a *hnm* vessel (Gardiner W9), the writing of the name Khnum and an offering table, all Ptolemaic in date⁷ (fig. 4).

Wall II is located beneath the top of the gebel's north side, in a location, at present, very difficult to reach and ill-suited as a stopping point. Here, two giraffes and a possible gazelle, with their heads oriented eastward, are executed in a pounding or pecking technique. They form an oblique row and are moving toward the top of the gebel. The tails of the two giraffes are very long and look like a fifth leg (for an example of a similar style, see Almagro Basch and Almagro Gorbea 1968: 269, fig. 283). The actual legs of the gazelle are no longer visible. Under the head of the giraffe on the right there is a roughly round figure that is greatly damaged. The type of subjects and the style seem to suggest an attribution to the Naqada culture (Horizon I of Huyge's classification, 2002: 195, fig. 2). Giraffes are commonly interpreted as cosmological symbols and solar carriers (Huyge 2002; Darnell in press a; this volume). The patina is light to medium in colour depending on the different action of the weathering factors.

A similar chronology may be proposed for the two giraffes decorating the lower part of *Wall a*, *Boulder IV*, located near the top and not far from the preceding wall



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Fig. 3

Gebel Qurna, sketch map.

Fig. 4

Gebel Qurna, Ptolemaic drawings.

7. Similar Ptolemaic representations are recorded in the quarry site of Nag el-Fuqani (Kubbaniya) and along the gebel wall connecting Hagar el-Ghorab to Sheikh Mohamed.

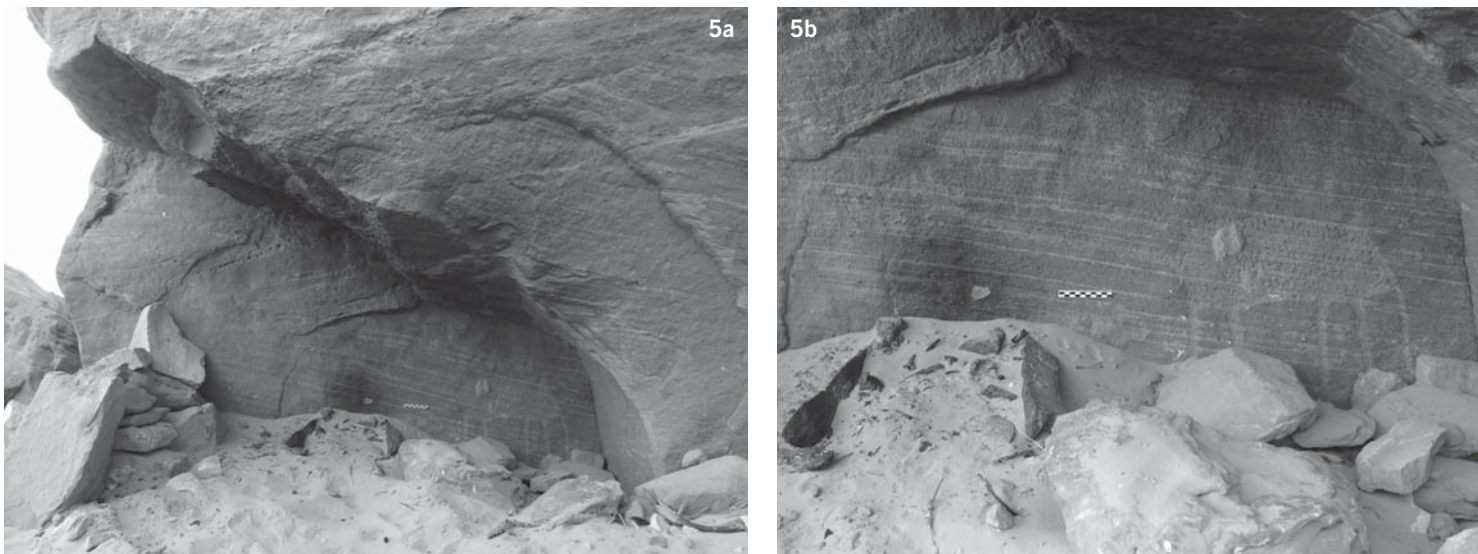


Fig. 5
Gebel Qurna,
giraffe from
Wall IVa.

(**fig. 5a**). The giraffes are oriented to the south-west and form a line, with a 1.70m distance between each figure. The largest giraffe is located in a niche (**fig. 5b**). The animals seem to descend toward the lower part of the gebel. The style and the patina indicate a similarity between these giraffes and the preceding samples, even though the more protected position allows for better preservation. The neck of the smallest giraffe is tied with a long rope. According to Darnell (in press a) the rope implies human intervention in the solar cycle, represented by the giraffe as solar carrier (see above). This change in the relationship between humans and the natural world appears to date to the Naqada II Period (Darnell in press a; this volume). The execution in pecked technique results in deliberate and deep markings. The bodies are filled completely with percussion markings, indicating stylized visual realism and not outlined type figures (Huyge 2002: 196, fig 3).

Another area with a concentration of petroglyphs, not destroyed by the quarrying activities, appears at the top of the southern end of the gebel. Here the walls of two boulders (*VI and VII*) bear a few petroglyphs of late date. *Wall VIa* resembles a shelter. It shows a very dense scatter of several petroglyphs. The more recent rock art is similar to depictions with Late Pharaonic themes and pictographs, graffiti and Arabic words. The older Pharaonic rock art is poorly preserved, surviving depictions include a miniature scene associating a herdsman with a stick, a quadruped with a light patina and two asses with a medium patina (Horizons IV and V: Huyge 2002). The most interesting drawings are located in a higher position (*Wall VI b*, at least 4.50m from the present floor). The elevated location makes the rock art difficult to photograph. A giraffe, another quadruped (a dog?) and an anthropomorphic figure form a row cut by a fracture of the wall (**fig. 6**). These three images also may date to the Predynastic Period (Horizon II of Huyge's seriation, 2002). The location of these petroglyphs is of interest, since they could be considered as a kind of *terminus post quem* for the petroglyphs in the shelter below. At present, no floor exists in front of the wall, on the top of the shelter, thus the execution of the petroglyphs may antedate the formation of the shelter. Finally, *Wall VI c* is decorated with two cattle; both short horned, in pecked technique, one bovid in front of the other. Their stylistic and technical (outline design) character seems to fit within Horizon V of Huyge's seriation (2002).



Fig. 6
Gebel Qurna,
location of
Wall VIc.

Wall a of boulder *VII* is decorated with three drawings in pounding or pecking technique characterised by two different kinds of patina from light (a quadruped perhaps recently reworked) to medium (a bovine with the horns roughly V shaped and a small anthropomorphic figure). The two herbivores are located on the lower portion of the wall, while the anthropomorphic figure is situated higher. The technique applied to this last petroglyph (outline design executed by a small pointed tool) resembles the technique used for several drawings of *Wall XXI* at KASS1 (see below). The anthropomorphic image could date to the Predynastic Period (Huyge 2002: Horizon II or III) while the bovine with a medium patina could go back to Horizons IV or V. *Wall b* hosts a unique engraved representation, probably made with a metal point. The drawing represents the Christian symbol of a bird resting on a branch with a berry on the top of its beak. The style is realistic but also to some extent “baroque”. It is definitely Coptic in date.

Other fragmentary documents consist of two slabs, not *in situ*, with highly eroded surfaces, showing possibly late geometric petroglyphs (*Walls III and V*), as well as two geometric engravings and an Arabic text on the floor, at the top of the gebel (*Wall VIII*).

As a whole, the rock art in this area seems to cover more or less a period spanning from the Predynastic through to Late Roman times. The single narrative scenes with anthropomorphic figures or the isolated zoomorphic figures refer to hunting activities (*Wall VI b*), wild animal species (*Walls II, IV*), pastoral activities (*Wall VI a*), domestic cattle (*Walls VI d, VII a*) and to a skirmish or a battle (*Wall I*). It is difficult to reconstruct the religious or symbolic meaning of the petroglyphs, since they appear as elements of more complex scenes that are now isolated due to the possible disappearance of other petroglyphs that would otherwise add to the setting and meaning; for example, the “heliophorous” giraffes (Huyge 2002: 199), the asses and the cattle. It is interesting to note, that unlike rock art at Elkab (Huyge 2002: fig. 7) giraffes are not oriented to the north.

Hagar el-Ghorab⁸ (fig. 7)



Fig. 7
Hagar el-Ghorab,
sketch map.

The site of Hagar el-Ghorab consists of a section of the gebel wall close to the modern bridge of Kubbaniya where rocks form small shelters. Again it was definitely a landmark to anyone who was passing by the river and it served as a convenient watch post. Differences between this area and Gebel Qurna may be seen in the lower areas of the rock surfaces (100 to 120m a.s.l.) and the almost continuous record (78 subjects) of petroglyphs, pictographs and hieroglyphic texts⁹ extending to the Coptic, Pharaonic and Predynastic Periods. C-Group, Middle Kingdom, New Kingdom and Ptolemaic potsherds were collected on the surface and in a small test excavation made at the main sheltered area (Giuliani & Gatto in Gatto *et al.* in press). The latest ceramic examples were attributed to activity from the New Kingdom and Ptolemaic times when the site functioned as a cemetery. C-Group and Middle Kingdom sherds are the evidence of an older occupation, possibly as a check point manned by Nubian soldiers. An even more ancient use of the shelter during the Predynastic Period is unfortunately only attested by the rock drawings. The repertoire of the engraved scenes encompasses the entire chronological sequence of the local rock art (Huyge 2002; only Horizons II and VI are not yet recorded). Contrary to Gebel Qurna, here quarrying activities are not well attested; nevertheless the area is heavily disturbed by modern activities connected to the building of New Aswan City.

Apart from large isolated boulders, located mostly to the south and along the modern road, the main rock art representations are located along the wall of the gebel. In general, the recent representations have a patina from medium to light. The most frequent techniques employed in the creation of rock art

8. Written by Gatto, Hendrickx and Zampetti.

9. For the study of the rock inscriptions see Maree in Gatto *et al.* in press.

include pounding, pecking and outline drawings. In addition, at least one boat and the bovid in front of it, from *Wall Vq* (Horizon IV: Huyge 2002), are engraved. The marks are wide and superficial.

On *Boulder I* many rock inscriptions are partially covering and include older Predynastic representations, mostly giraffes. Traces of red paint on a boulder (*Wall II*) deserve further analyses; however, the area is disturbed by modern human activity, so any chronological attribution of the painting is unrealistic. From south to north the main representations on the gebel wall are:

- A long-horned cow with visible udder and, below the neck, a pendent or more likely a tethering rope (*Wall Va*, Horizon V: Huyge 2002); this representation may be connected to the Middle Nubian art (for similar representations see Hellström & Langballe 1970: type C224).
- A large boat with two geometric human figures (**fig. 8**), *Wall Ve*. The shape of the boat, in particular the rounded finials are reminiscent of Predynastic/Early Dynastic vessels. The larger central figure above the watercraft appears to be orientated to the left and most likely is a man, if indeed there is a penis sheath visible on his pelvis area. The raised arms are an expression of power/victory. It is curious that the arms are not curved (as it is so frequent on D-ware and in rock art), but somewhat “angular”, making his attitude similar to that of the victor holding a mace and prisoners on Hierakonpolis ivories, as well as the large figure of Narmer on the Narmer palette (although Narmer holds the prisoner somewhat differently). Thus, a general expression of power within a political-religious context, in which the boat may one hand by itself represent the power of its (not depicted) owner (Hendrickx *et al.* this volume) and on the other hand be an idiom of the solar cycle (Huyge 2002; Darnell in press a; this volume).
- A Predynastic giraffe and below a dog hunting an ibex (*Wall Vf*, Horizon I: Huyge 2002)¹⁰.
- An archer with a double-arched bow hunting animals, among them an ass and ibex (*Wall Vg*, Horizon II: Huyge 2002).



Fig. 8
Hagar el-Ghorab,
Predynastic
boat with men,
Wall Ve.

¹⁰. The orientation of the giraffe towards the east is similar to a giraffe at Gebel Qurna that does not follow the orientation recorded at Elkab (Huyge 2002).

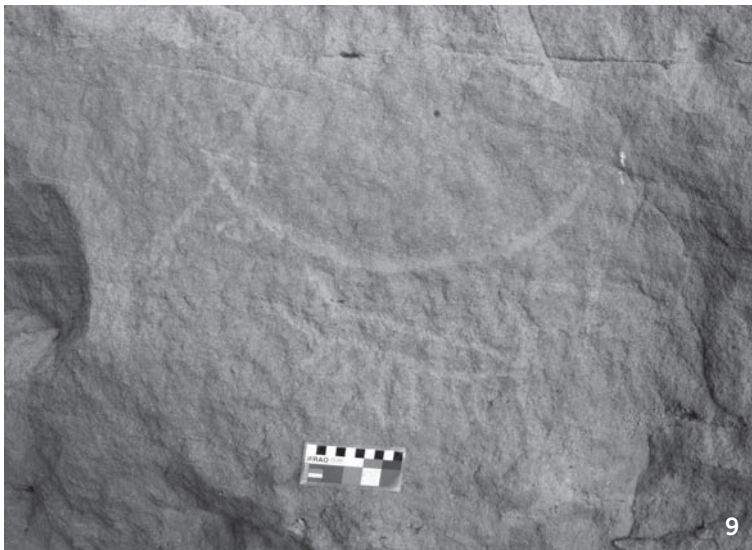


Fig. 9

Hagar el-Ghorab, representation of a Dynastic boat with a scorpion, Wall Vq.

Fig. 10

Hagar el-Ghorab, Predynastic vessel with a man on top of it, Wall IX.

- Early Dynastic boats facing towards the river (*Wall Vi*, Horizon III: Huyge 2002).
- Another archer (for similar representation see Hellström & Langballe 1970: type A242) hunting a long-horned bullock or a bull¹¹ with a pendent below its neck (again for comparison see Hellström & Langballe 1970: types C82, C86) and an isolated bullock/bull nearby. All the images in this grouping most likely date to the Early Dynastic Period (*Wall Vi*).
- Two geometric human figures close to the archer and bullock (*Wall Vi*, Horizon IV?: Huyge 2002).
- A boat and below it a scorpion (*Wall Vq*, **fig. 9**). The two figures seem contemporaneous regarding location, style and patination. Stylistically, the boat resembles other Dynastic watercrafts, by extension the scorpion may date to the same period. This is to some extent confirmed by the fact that the scorpion only has “legs” below him (for a similar representation of a scorpion see Hellström & Langballe 1970: type T2). For early scorpions, the legs are generally (but not always) on both sides (*cf.* the Gebel Tjauti rock inscription 1, Darnell *et al.* 2002: 10; see also Hendrickx *et al.* 1997-1998).
- Nearby another scene representing a possible Middle Kingdom boat and a cow (*Wall Vq*, Horizon 4: Huyge 2002).
- Two stylized cows (*Wall Vr*, Horizon 4 or 5: Huyge 2002).

One of the most relevant and well preserved documents has been observed in a small, elongated shelter that is now difficult to climb to. The shelter opens at the top of *Wall Ve* and from there a narrow passage connects with the shelter. The petroglyphs fill the surface of a narrow and elongated wall IX (length: 11.65m). On the low opposing wall is an engraved anthropomorphic figure with a triangular trunk (Horizon IV: Huyge 2002). The petroglyphs on the main wall have different kinds of patina (brown to yellow) and are representative of the II and III Horizons (Naqada II-III), with the anthropomorphic figure with triangular trunk as a later addition. The drawings are both outlined and not outlined and the techniques are pounding, pecking and carving. A row of three medium patina ostriches, carved with deep cuts, likely represents the older grouping of petroglyphs. Beneath the ostriches a series of anthropomorphic figures appear to overlap with the ostriches’ feet. Potentially, these figures are associated with a boat that is manned by a central figure (**fig. 10**). This central figure is orientated to the right and seems to hold a mace in his left hand. The scene represents the same idea found on *Wall Ve* and

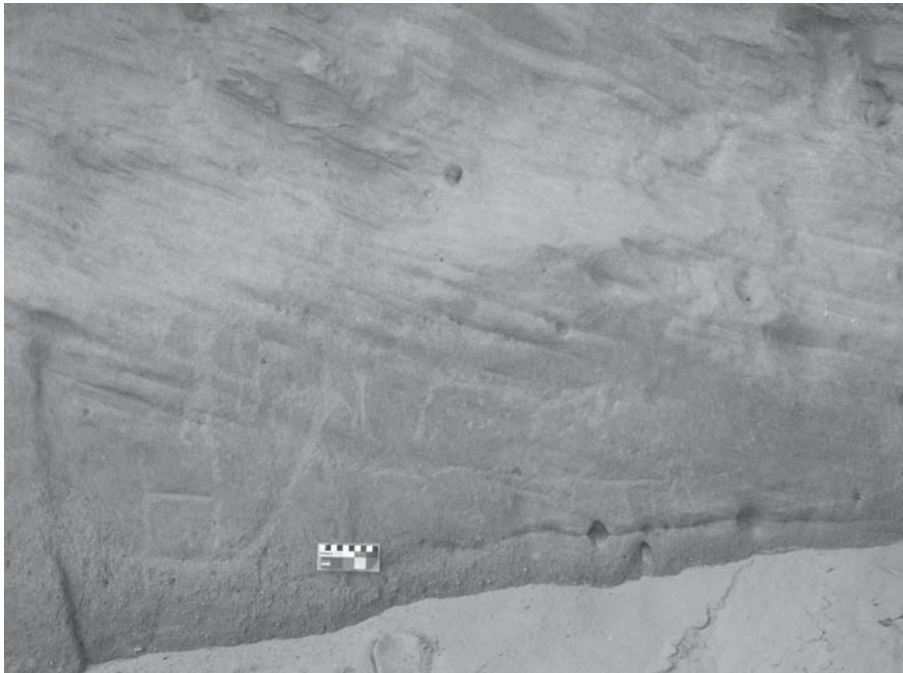


Fig. 11
Hagar el-Ghorab,
Predynastic boat
with an antelope
head, Wall IX.

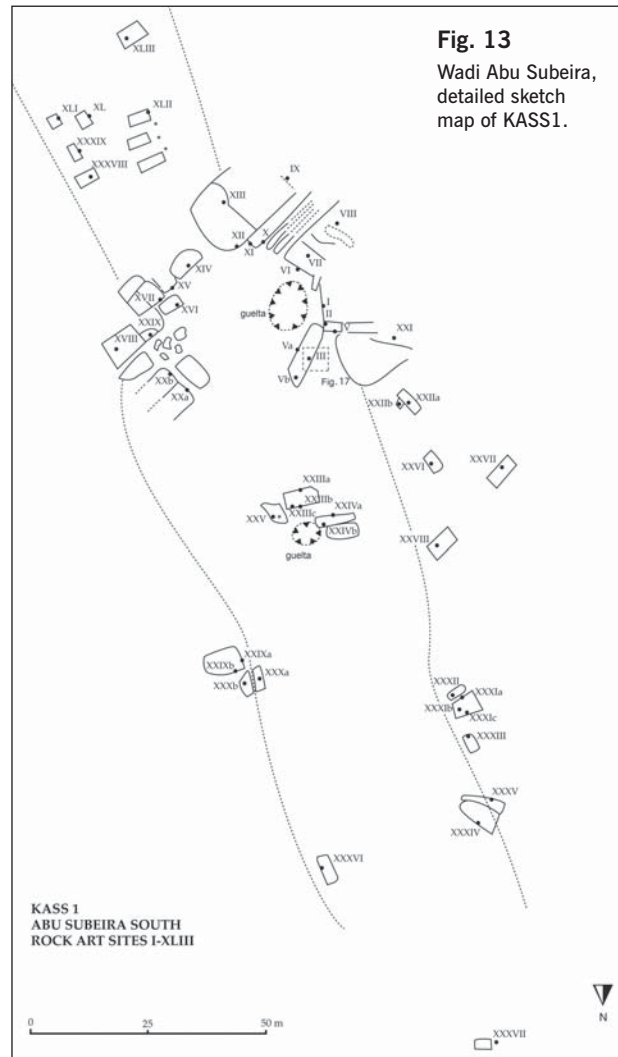
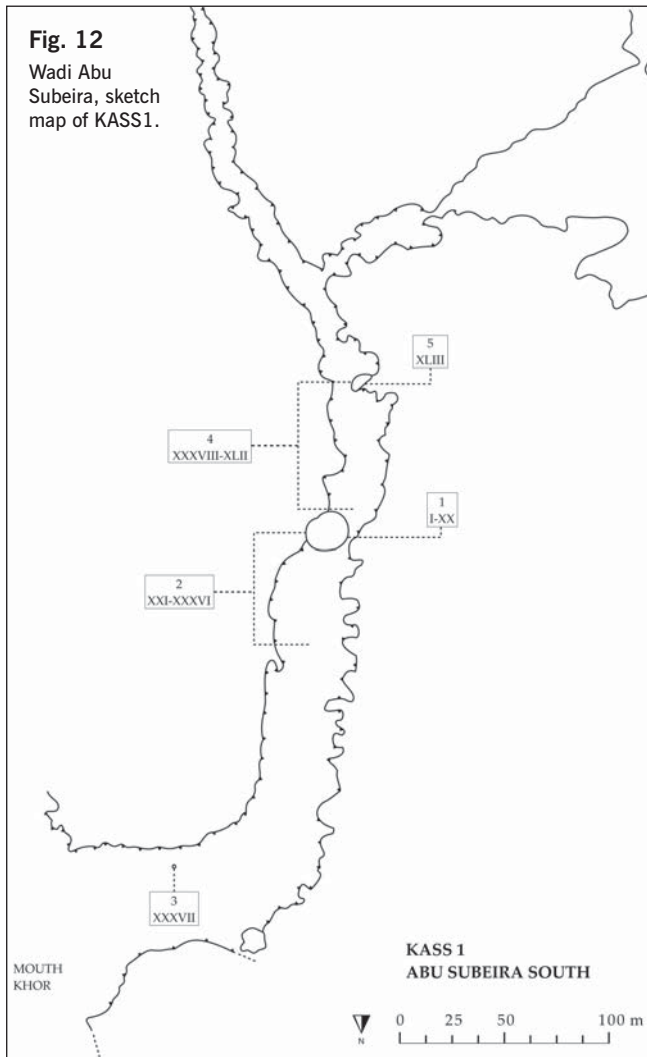
should be roughly contemporaneous. It is important to note that the mace is often associated with war as opposed to hunting. The scene is concluded by another row of anthropomorphs and by a boat with a high prow and a low stern with a possible antelope head at the top of the prow (**fig. 11**). Similar vessels are reported in Wadi Magar in the Theban Western Desert (Darnell in press b). A rope is attached to the boat and it seems that several persons are towing the vessel (for other examples see below site KASS1 and Darnell this volume). An archer is carved above the watercraft and an ass precedes the prow. Unfortunately, one can not be certain that the vessel dates to the same period as the remainder of the scene. But if it actually is, then for the third time a similar theme is represented on the site: a victorious/armed person on top of a boat. Curiously the weapon this time is a bow. Of course, this could be a later imitation of the previous scene, as the two stand close to one another. The lively character of the tableau and its components fit into the symbolic interpretation of the “solar barque” with its “regeneration” meanings (Huyge 2002 : 200-201) while the hunting attitude of the archer on the top of the boat could be connected to the concept of “order triumphant” (Huyge 2002: 201; see also below for site KASS1).

Khor Abu Subeira South¹² (figs. 12 & 13)

The site is at the beginning of a lateral branch of the main *khôr* south of Wadi Abu Subeira where the rocky outcrop, articulated in large blocks, creates steps going down from the surrounding plateau to the wadi bottom. It consists of numerous carved panels, located on different walls and on different levels. A short description made by Murray and Myers in the 1930s states that *the drawings were near a depression in the wadi where water remains after there has been rain* (Murray & Myers 1933: 129). Only a small number of rock engravings were mentioned by the original discoverers; Murray and Myers (1933: pl. XX.1) also recorded the presence of a Clayton ring and a disk on the *gebél* near the site. These types of objects are

11. No bull attributes are shown; for an interpretation of this scene see Darnell & Manassa in Gatto *et al.* in press.

12. Written by Gatto, Hendrickx and Zampetti.



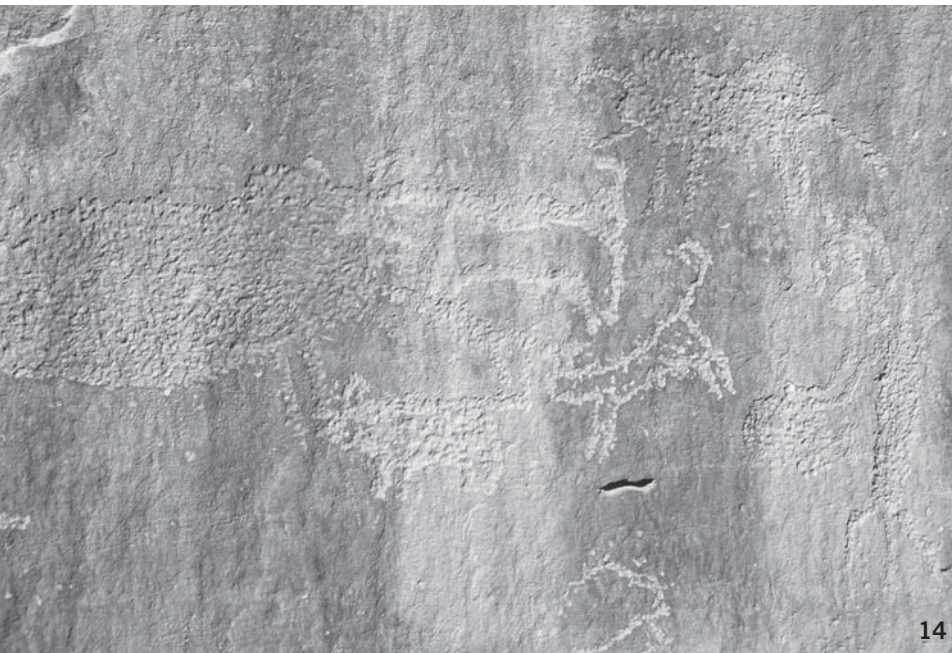
commonly recorded in the deserts and mainly date to the Predynastic/Old Kingdom (Riemer & Kuper 2000; Gatto 2002-2003; Riemer 2002; 2004).

During the past field season a drill coring test was made in the depression and the geomorphological study of the sediments confirmed the occasional presence of water in this natural pool (De Dapper per. comm.). More precisely, two “*gueltas*”¹³, are located more or less at a distance of 200m from the beginning of the branch, in the middle of the wadi bottom (fig. 13). The upper one consists of an abrupt step of about two metres.

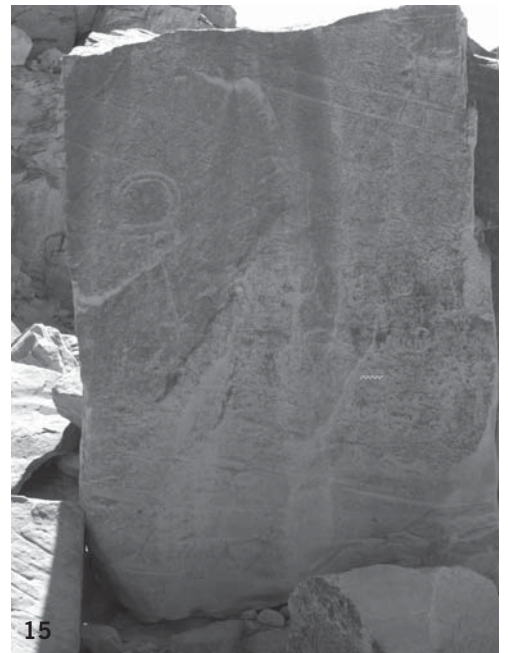
The higher concentration of rock art in this small part of the wadi must be related to both the secluded position of the site and the occasional presence of water. Indeed, all the rock art scenes are found near the two *gueltas*¹⁴. A repertoire of 199 subjects has been described. The technique employed is always pounding and/or pecking. The filling of the contours, always using the pounding/pecking techniques, is another special feature of the most elaborated drawings (“not outlined drawings” in Huyge 2002). Besides the more common ibexes, donkeys, gazelles, cattle, ostriches, a few giraffes and elephants, a single hippo and an amphibian (possibly a lizard) were recognized. Hunting figures (archers) are sometimes associated with the wild fauna. Boats represent some of the most prevalent images depicted. More than twenty samples were recorded so far, the majority of which are located on the

13. This term is used in the Sahara to define natural basins where rainwater remains trapped.

14. A survey along the (right) branch of the *khors*, as well as along the other two branches, shows no additional rock drawings in the area, except for a few scattered and late representations recorded in the central branch of the *khors*.



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western side of the *chor* and close to the main *guelta*. They can be divided in three types: the sickle-shaped vessel (Červíček type 1, 1974: 98-138), with or without ornaments, paraphernalia and human figures; the squared boat, again very simplified or more articulated, with or without human figures (Červíček types VII and XIV, 1974: 98-138); and boats with a shrine or altar. Fewer representations exist of the final type and they probably date to the Dynastic Period. All the human figures related to boats are male. Most of them are shown with raised arms, while on the Predynastic Decorated vessels and the painted wall of Hierakonpolis Tomb 100 we always find female figures in this attitude. The connection to a funerary context of the latter examples is clearly attested, yet the rock art at Khor Abu Subeira South does not appear to have this additional level of meaning.

As already indicated by the different degrees of patina that occur, not all of the drawings are necessarily contemporaneous. Contrasts in patina indicate important chronological differences and the heavily patined depictions of giraffe representations may be among the oldest drawings, similar to the rock art from Elkab (Huyge 2002: 197)¹⁵. There is at least one case (**fig. 14**) where, judging from the different degree of patina, dogs have been added to earlier animal representations to turn them into hunting scenes (*Wall XXI*). Although it is hardly possible to date the patina, the rarity of superimpositions seems to indicate that the majority of the boats, hunting scenes and human representations are roughly contemporaneous. The distribution of these scenes shows a number of elements indicative of an organized decorative program extending across the site.

Moving up the *chor*, the first part of the site consists of a rocky area surrounding the small *guelta*, on the back of which a large (c. 4x2m) free standing stone is located (*Wall XXIII*), marking a sort of “entrance”. At the centre of this almost perfectly rectangular stone, a human figure with raised arms and two feathers on his head is depicted (**fig. 15**). Similar figures, presumably all male, are not only well known from other rock art sites (Rohl 2000: 38.9, 73.2, 103.13; Morrow & Morrow 2002: 65.a),

Fig. 14

Wadi Abu Subeira, KASS1, Wall XXI, dogs added later to a previous scene.

Fig. 15

Wadi Abu Subeira, KASS1, Wall XXIIIa, human figure with rising hands.

15. However, the experience of the Theban Desert Road Survey shows that dating derived solely from patina is untrustworthy (Darnell *et al.* 2002: 7).

but also from victory scenes on White Cross-lined pottery (Dreyer *et al.* 1998: 114-115, Abb. 13; Hendrickx 1998: fig. 6). Hunters are regularly shown with feathers on their head, as seen on the “Hunters palette” (Spencer 1980: 79, n° 575) and from an impressive rock art panel from “Dominion behind Thebes” (Darnell 2002: fig. 17). Within the context of the Wadi Abu Subeira rock art, with its numerous hunting scenes, there can be no doubt that the entrance to the rock art site is marked by a victorious hunter. This is however not necessarily to be understood as referring exclusively to the practice of hunting (*cf. infra*).

To the left of the human figure on the aforementioned stone (*Wall XXIII*) is an ibex with a line leading from one of its front legs to a cross-like object. This represents a log of wood attached to a spiked trap, functioning to immobilise the animal (Le Quellec *et al.* 2005: 128-133, especially figs. 323; 326). To the right of the human figure are two small representations of boats, suggesting that the most numerous iconographic elements depicted at the site, hunting scenes and boats, are announced at the “entrance” of the site and also that a particular relation exists between them.

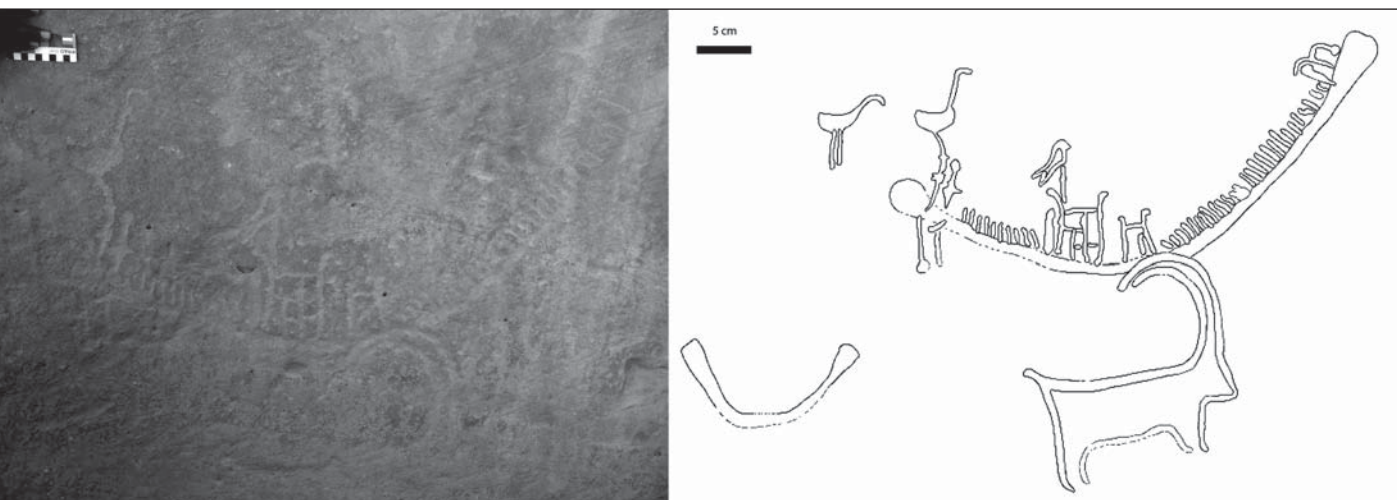
Most interesting, on another stone (*Wall XXIV*), immediately in front of the large rectangular stone (*Wall XXIII*), a hippopotamus with a man in front of it is visible¹⁶. The line leading from the hand of the man to the mouth of the animal represent a harpoon attached to a rope. This motif is seen frequently on Predynastic pottery, both Decorated and White Cross-lined (Hendrickx & Depraetere 2004: 816-819). The floats attached to the rope that are generally depicted on the pottery have been omitted.

For the spectator, the hunter and the trapped ibex are oriented into the wadi, facing towards the desert. Conversely, the hippo and its hunter look out of the wadi, facing the valley. The position of the animals can hardly be a coincidence and refers to the contrasting environments where different types of hunting took place.

The second, central part of the site is a roughly oval space with a steep cliff face. At present, the ground surface is flat and sandy, but there is no doubt that it was at a lower level when the water was still collected here in previous times. This is corroborated by the presence of a few drawings partially covered by the sand.¹⁷

The main hunting scenes of this second, central part of the site occur on the steep cliff faces and consist of dogs chasing ibexes, gazelles and other animals. Found in

Fig. 16
Wadi Abu
Subeira, KASS1,
Wall III,
boat with falcon.



16. The man with raised hands and the hippopotamus and hunter are located on facing rock walls.

17. The appearance of the second part of the site shows a marked similarity with site SAL 14 at Wadi Umm Salam, called the “Jacuzzi site” by Morrow & Morrow (2002: 61-63). SAL 14 also has a remarkably high number of rock drawings compared to the surrounding area.

conjunction with these images are a number of boats with different types of standards. The central element of this area is a boat with a remarkable falcon standard, located on an isolated slab of rock (**fig. 16; Wall III**) that must have been the first point of visual attraction when visiting the site. Although boats of this type occur frequently on Decorated pottery characteristic for Naqada IIC (*cf.* Graff in preparation), a falcon standard is never found on them (Hendrickx & Friedman in press). The only parallels known for the falcons are from the “Wadi of the Horus Qa’a”, located east of Gebel Tjauti on an off-shoot of the Alamat Tal Road (Darnell in press b; this volume). From the early Naqada II Period, the falcon is already a symbol of royal (and religious power) (Hendrickx & Friedman 2007; in press). Although the exact meaning of the falcon standard on the boat at Khor Abu Subeira can not be specified, it nevertheless seems obvious that it represents an element of elite power expression, corroborated by the central position of the drawing within the rock art display in this part of the site.

A most remarkable element occurs at the rear end of the “falcon boat”. Here we see what initially looks like a bird with a male figure in front of it. However, the single “leg” of the “bird” is elaborated with a few details that seem to turn the “leg” into a highly stylised female representation, emphasizing the buttocks and breasts. The combination of women with the head of birds is well known from Predynastic figurines (e.g. Needler 1984: 335-344) and can also be found on a palette from Diospolis Parva (Petrie 1901: pl. XI.12; see also Graff 2007). The combination of human and animal elements is considered one of the basic elements of Predynastic iconography and consequently of religion (Hendrickx 2002; in press a; in press b).

One of the largest scenes (**fig. 17; Wall I**), created on a smooth surface and protected by a natural overhang, consists of hunting scenes dominated above by a large boat pulled with a rope by a row of men. These types of scenes can not be found among the frequently occurring representation of boats on Decorated pottery; however, parallels are not uncommon for rock-art (Rohl 2000: 33.11, 105.13 [= Winkler 1938: pl. XII.1 26 M 241a], 119; Morrow & Morrow 2002: 91.A, 169.A, 226 [= Winkler 1938: pl. XIV 18 M 141 a]; Darnell this volume). Already, the presence of boats at many rock art sites located far from the Nile is remarkable. Obviously, they are not mere imitations of the actual functioning of boats on a river. The large figures that often occur on the boats obviously refer to power and have religious and sociologic implications. This is illustrated by the regularly occurring gesture of raised arms, the equally regular ithyphallic representations and the presence of weapons, mainly bows. Furthermore, Predynastic representations have no narrative intentions but refer to a structured and highly symbolic universe. Boats are to be considered as important symbols by themselves referring to the elite and eventually to the journeys of the gods. These are anyhow intimately linked because the religious context confirms elite status. The lines of men in front of the boats therefore symbolize the involvement with the religious world, and although actual rituals including boats being towed could be imagined, there is no hard evidence for this in the Predynastic Period. For a site such as Khor Abu Subeira, it seems obvious that the combination of boats with hunting scenes situates the latter in a context that goes far beyond the eco-

Fig. 17
Wadi Abu Subeira, KASS1, Wall I, large boat with human figures and animals.



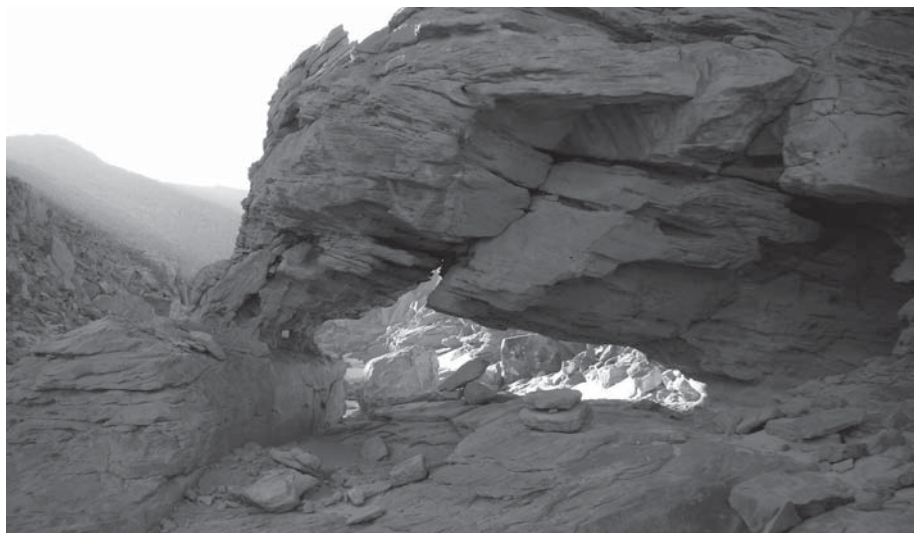
nomics of hunting. Humans in boats holding animals outside the boat by a rope or lasso prove the relationship between boats and hunting (Morrow & Morrow 2002: 49.D-E, 66.A, 84A). This is paralleled by animals tied to boats without human presence (e.g. Rohl 2000: 28.2, 59.2, 161).¹⁸ The frequent occurrence of animals “in” (*i.e.* immediately above) boats refers to the same idea (see also Darnell in press a).

In this respect, it is to be mentioned again that hunting was hardly of any economic importance in Egypt during the 4th millennium B.C., illustrated by the archaeozoological record (Vermeersch *et al.* 2004: 268-270; Hendrickx 2006: 735-736; Linseele & Van Neer pers. comm.). The only contexts in which the remains of wild animals are more numerous are the early temple sites of Hierakonpolis (Linseele & Van Neer 2003) and el-Mahasna (Anderson 2006: 258-260). In general, this means that the principal context in which hunting occurs is that of elite behaviour. This also explains why dead animals are almost never shown. The idea of the hunt is more important than the actual result, which aims at capturing animals to be slaughtered later in a ritual context. This is confirmed by the frequent occurrence of animals being lassoed (e.g. Rohl 2000: 29.1, 41.9, 76.8, 91.1, 102.8, 105.17, 106.18, 114.4, 148.6; Morrow & Morrow 2002: 42.D, 46.A, 64.D, 95.B, 107.E, 145.B; Winkler 1938: pl. XV.1)¹⁹, or tethered/trapped (see above).²⁰

The central area just described ends in a steep transition to the upper part of the wadi. Here the third part of the site starts, which is dominated by a small natural shelter (**fig. 18**). Behind this, no more rock drawings occur and the shelter obviously represents the ultimate part of the site. The shelter is in a prominent position, allowing one to overlook both sides of the wadi. Within the shelter is a kind of low “bench” (*Wall XLIII*), covered entirely with drawings. The number of human representations among them is remarkably high, with several figures

Fig. 18

Wadi Abu Subeira, KASS1, shelter. Wall XLIII is that sort of bench/flat long wall to the left of the shelter.



18. Parallel to the animals, prisoners also occur tied to boats or on boats, for example on the Gebel Sheikh Suleiman relief (Murnane 1987) and two of the Qustul incense burners (Williams 1986: 138-146 – *cf.* Hendrickx *et al.* this volume). For the symbolic importance of ropes, see also Menu 1996: 44-45.

19. Some of these examples have been described as spearing, but this seems highly unlikely since the line, representative of either a lasso or a spear, always points to the neck, horns or legs and never to the body itself.

20. Exceptionally, animals hit by arrows are depicted. Two examples involving ostriches (Winkler 1938: pl. XX.1; XXIII.3; Dunbar 1941: fig. 107) are indeed hunting scenes. But in a scene where a hunter with a bow confronts a bull (Rohl 2000: 106.10 = Winkler 1938: XVIII.1), the arrow is connected with the bull by an additional line, turning the scene from anecdotic into symbolic.

in the familiar position with raised arms. Furthermore, there is at least one hunting scene consisting of a dog chasing ibexes. In this way, the panel seems to refer to the use of the shelter and the wadi by the hunters themselves.

Finally, in the area opposed to the shelter, there are a few isolated drawings. High upon the rock cliff, a boat (*Wall XXXIX*) and the representation of an ithyphallic hunter with a bow occur (**fig. 19**; *Wall XXXVIII*).²¹ On yet another rock nearby (*Wall XL*), a single bull occurs above a bull lassoed by a man (**fig. 20**). Although the two images are different in style, both are nevertheless to be considered Predynastic. It can not be said for certain which image is the earliest, but it can hardly be a coincidence that the animal as “victim” is shown below the “powerful” bull. The latter can of course be found on the “Bull palette” (Louvre E.11255) and the Narmer palette (Cairo JdE 32169), but occur already from the Naqada I Period onwards as illustrated by a White Cross-lined vessel from cemetery U at Abydos (Dreyer *et al.* 2003: Abb. 5).

All in all, the presence of these scenes at the “end” of the site, mirroring those at the entrance, offers an exceptional occasion for our understanding of the organisation of Predynastic rock art.

Returning to the geographic particularities of the site, it is obvious that the place is an ideal location for hunting because the wild animals would be attracted by the occasional presence of water in the *gueltas*. Chasing animals into the wadi would inevitably cause them to be trapped at the site. The actual catching/killing of animals would have taken place at the far end of the site where the main *guelta* is located and where the largest concentration of hunting scenes occurs. The elite character of hunting gives specific importance to the place and is expressed through the numerous individual drawings that can be considered elements of a larger concept encompassing the entire site. The iconography for doing so is part of the Predynastic visual language, in which expression of power is an important element. In this way the site was adapted for the frequent return of an elite group for which hunting was a possibility for social networking and self confirmation. The public presentation in a ritual context of the captured animals must have made the social position of the elite visible for the whole community.

Bovines at Khor Abu Subeira²²

An important number (at least 28 figures) of bovine representations characterizes the zoological *repertoire* of KASS1. These representations deserve a more detailed discussion, among others because the animals can be misinterpreted as being domesticated.

On the basis of the internal criteria such as rock patina formation and external iconographical correlations, most of the bovines from Khor Abu Subeira can be attributed to the Predynastic Period. Bovines are involved in two main kinds of representation. In most cases, cattle drawings are depicted in isolated contexts and even when more of them occur in the same location (*e.s.* in *Wall XIII*); no material relationship between them is observed. All the animals are characterized by long, U-shaped horns typical of Terminal Predynastic-Early Dynastic Period (Huyge 2002: 198, Horizon III). One scene in particular (*Wall XL upper scene*) (**fig. 20**) illustrates a very strict iconographic correlation, connecting

21. For a close parallel for the hunter with the bow, see Morrow & Morrow 2000: 155.C and 188.A.

22. Written by Roma.

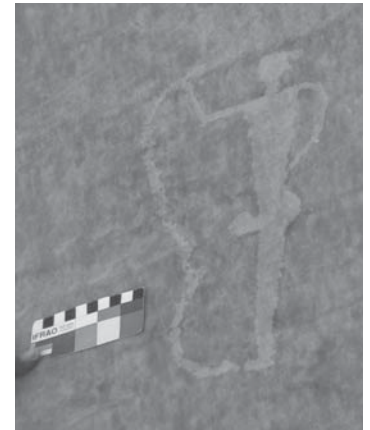


Fig. 19
Wadi Abu Subeira, KASS1, Wall XXXVIII, ithyphallic hunter.

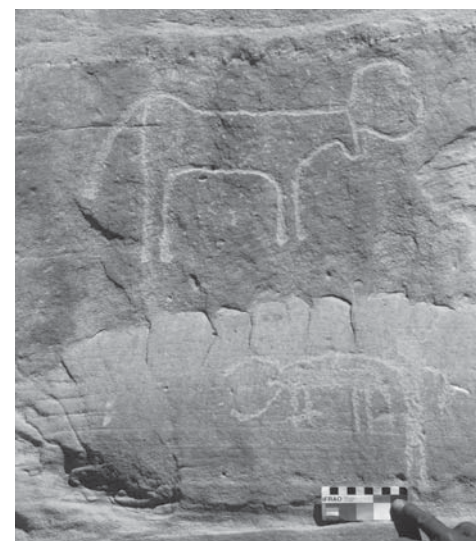


Fig. 20
Wadi Abu Subeira, KASS1, Wall XIII, two different representations of bull.

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the cattle representation of Khor Abu Subeira with the “charging” bull carved above one of the two sickle-shaped boat with animal heads found at Hierakonpolis (locality HK61) dated to the Late Predynastic (Berger 1982; 1992). Like the HK61 bull, the Khor Abu Subeira bovine is depicted moving “*confidently forward with his head lowered for the attack*” (Berger 1992: 108). The similarity with the figure found at Khor Abu Subeira could be even more persuasive if, as some scholars have argued (Lacovara 1988), the bull from HK61 was carved at a different time from the boat and therefore conceived as an isolated animal figure.

The representation of bovines (most likely wild) involved in hunting/capture scenes where a human figure is depicted holding the animal by a rope (lasso?) pointed to the bovine neck/horns is frequent at Khor Abu Subeira (fig. 20). The same motif occurs also in one scene with more marked narrative content implying an interaction between the bovine and other wild animal species.

From the beginning of the Predynastic Period, the symbolic value of the cattle is a matter of fact (Hendrickx 2002; Huyge 2002). Regarding the particular context of Khor Abu Subeira, the isolated figures of bovines (bulls) seem to have functioned as a symbolic mean of re-creating the presence of royal (and religious) power. This possible interpretation is reinforced by the fact that according to aforementioned interpretation of KASS1, in the same site also the falcon depicted in combination with a boat (*Wall III*) may be another symbolic image of royal power. Moreover, it is possible that the observed presence of isolated bovine figures at different points along the *khor*, served as material means for reinforcing the idea of royal presence at the site and for characterizing the natural place in cultural sense, as “dominion of”.

In addition, the depictions of hunting/capture scenes, in which bovine presence is signalled, may represent attempts to affirm and reinforce the idea of regal power and “triumph”²³, placing the natural world under human control. Dominion over disorder and chaotic forces is symbolized by the (wild) bovines, while the anthropomorphic figure represents the cultural domain, and has the ability to recreate a new cosmos (ordered space), in which the domesticated (natural) forces are transferred into and embodied by the royal figure. In this sense wild bovids (bulls), as well as other wild animals (vultures and scorpions), are probable “bestial allegories of kingship” (Huyge 2002: 201).

23. A similar interpretation may be applied to rock art at Elkab, where none of bovid representations can be dated prior to the Naqada III Period (Huyge 1995; 2002). The rock art complex is characterized by numerous images referring to royal ideology, including the “*wild “raging” bull*” (Huyge 2002: 201). However the author regards the majority of bovines dating to the same Horizon III (as well as in the following Horizons IV and V) as representing sacrificial animals, linked to the oldest archaeological evidences of religious architecture in the Elkab area (Huyge 2002: 202).

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