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**Erratum :** une malencontreuse erreur s'est glissée dans l'article de J.-L. Le Quellec publié dans le précédent volume d'Archéo-Nil (19, 2009). A la page 24, à la place de « *une expédition organisée de concert avec Mark Borda* », il faut lire « *une expédition organisée par Mark Borda* ».

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# Recent discoveries of rock art in the Eastern Desert of Egypt

Tony Judd<sup>1</sup>

*Avant 1997, l'art rupestre du désert Oriental de l'Égypte n'était que très partiellement connu, grâce notamment aux publications de Winkler et de Červíček. Depuis cette date, les expéditions organisées par Rohl ont révélé la profusion de documents rupestres dans cette région et ont abouti à la publication de milliers de scènes inédites, récemment découvertes à l'est de Louxor. Le présent article s'intéresse à ce nouveau corpus.*

*La topographie du désert Oriental est ici décrite, avec une attention particulière pour la propension du rocher à fournir des surfaces adéquates pour le dessin et la représentation des images. Une sélection des plus importants sites d'art rupestre est exposée et illustrée en détails. Les scènes sont ensuite décrites, et réparties en cinq catégories : animaux sauvages, animaux domestiques, anthropoïdes, bateaux et formes abstraites. Les exemples les plus représentatifs sont reproduits sous forme de dessins d'après photographies.*

*L'art rupestre du désert Oriental est, enfin, brièvement replacé dans le contexte de la Vallée du Nil, et l'absence de document du même type dans les autres régions est discutée.*

*Before 1997 the rock art of the Eastern Desert of Egypt was known only partially, through the publications of Winkler, Červíček and others. Since that date expeditions initiated by Rohl have revealed its full extent and resulted in publication of thousands of hitherto unknown rock art images from hundreds of recently discovered sites in one region of the desert east of Luxor. This paper reviews this mass of new data.*

*The terrain of the Eastern Desert is described with particular reference to the propensity of the rock to provide suitable surfaces for the drawing and display of images. A selection of some of the most important rock art sites are then described and illustrated in more detail. Finally, the images themselves are described. They are divided into five categories: wild animals, domestic animals, anthropoids, boats and non-representational forms. Typical examples of each are presented by means of tracings made from photographs.*

*In conclusion, the Eastern Desert rock art is briefly placed in the context of that of the Nile Valley, and the absence of data on rock art from other regions is noted.*

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank Mr Geoff Phillipson for permission to use the photographs that form Figures 2 and 9, Dr Peter Dixon for Figure 11, Mrs Maggie Morrow for Figure 10, and Mr Mike Morrow and Mr Phillipson jointly for Figure 3. The tracings that form Figures 14-19 were all derived from photographs.

## Introduction

The presence of ancient rock art in the Eastern Desert of Egypt has been known to the world of archaeology for many years but its extent was hardly appreciated before the end of the last century, and it was only after 1997 that its true extent and richness began to be apparent. Travellers in the desert in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries noticed a few of the images on the rocks of the wadis through which they journeyed and recorded some of them, mostly in an unsystematic manner (see, for example, Lepsius 1852; Green 1903; 1909a; 1909b) and particularly Weigall 1909). In 1926 the eighth DIAFE (*Deutsche Inner-Afrikanische Forschungsexpedition*) under the leadership of Leo Frobenius explored part of the Nile Valley, the Wadi Kharit east of Aswan and the region in the vicinity of the Wadi Hodein (south-west of Berenike) more systematically but, apparently, not in great detail, and most of the images they recorded were not published for many years. It was a further decade before Hans Winkler began his revelatory work. He travelled in the Eastern Desert in 1936 and again, with the support of Sir Robert Mond, in 1937, and it was the prompt publication of his findings that brought the desert rock art properly to the attention of western scholarship (Winkler 1937; 1938).

The interest was temporarily extinguished by the onset of the Second World War, but was rekindled first by Walther Resch, who visited the Wadis Hammamat and Barramiya and published a selection of his findings together with some of those of Frobenius and Winkler (Resch 1967), and then by Pavel Červíček (1974). Červíček extended Resch's work, included many of Frobenius' records in his publication, and made an important attempt to classify and interpret the images. He also provided a detailed account of the earlier explorations and the resulting publications, to which reference should be made if the reader wishes to supplement the present brief summary. Later workers in the field owe a great debt of gratitude to Winkler and Červíček, who

jointly laid the foundations for all our current studies of the Eastern Desert rock art. They were, however, aware of only a small part of what is present. In the 1980s new metalled roads gave easy access to some of the wadis, allowing Gerald Fuchs to explore the Wadi Barramiya (Fuchs 1989), and Susan and Donald Redford to visit sites in the vicinity of the Wadi Hammamat (Redford & Redford 1989). Nevertheless the desert away from the roads remained largely unvisited until two technological advances, reliable off-road vehicles and the GPS navigation system, facilitated access. Whereas Winkler and the other early explorers had travelled by camel, their journeys each taking several weeks and incurring considerable expense, now the farthest parts of the desert could be reached from the Nile Valley or the Red Sea coast conveniently and cheaply in a few days in the comparative comfort of a four-wheel-drive Toyota, and GPS made it easier to find the rock art sites and to record and report their locations.

These advances were exploited from 1997 by David Rohl who initiated a series of short expeditions into the desert with the purpose of re-locating Winkler's rock art sites and searching for others. The expeditions were professionally led but financed by the participants who were in the main amateurs (or "volunteers"). In the period 1997-2001 ten such expeditions were mounted, each lasting for five or six days. Of Winkler's 52 Eastern Desert sites between the Wadis Barramiya and Atwani 29 were found and recorded, as well as 10 of Fuchs' 12 sites. Most importantly 159 "new", hitherto unknown, sites were discovered, thus more than trebling the number of rock art images available for study. The value of these findings was enhanced by prompt publication (Rohl 2000; Morrow & Morrow 2002).

This review is a summary of this body of material. It is confined to rock art sites in the region, lying between 25° 00' and 26° 09' N, and 33° 03' and 33° 50' E, that was explored most thoroughly by the recent expeditions. This excludes sites in and west of the Nile Valley, Winkler's sites in and near the Wadi Surai, most of Frobenius' sites, and

some recent discoveries south of the Wadi Barramiya (for which see Judd 2009). The review consists of a brief account of the nature of the desert terrain and its rocks and rock art sites. This is followed by descriptions and illustrations of a few of the most outstanding and important sites. Finally there is a summary of the main categories of the images illustrated by tracings of representative examples.

## The Terrain

The Eastern Desert is a desert of rock and gravel, with only a little sand. Behind the narrow cultivable plain on the right bank of the Nile is an area of low hills divided by an array of wadis. To the south the hills are mainly of red Nubian sandstone with igneous dykes and intrusions while north of the Wadi Hammamat they are mainly limestone. To the east they rise higher until they reach the jagged igneous mountains which overlook the Red Sea coast. The wadis form a network so intricate and confusing that, without the aid of local guides, it was nearly impenetrable to westerners before GPS navigation became available.

The region experiences almost no rainfall except for rare but sometimes severe storms in the mountains. Although the wadis are normally quite dry the influence of water is apparent in that the floors of stones and gravel are level and in many places have been scoured into channels by the flash floods which occur at intervals of perhaps five or ten years. The effect of these floods can be seen where there are pans of silt with a smooth crust that has cracked and curled as it dried. There is evidence that in the past water has moved immense quantities of stone and gravel both into and out of some of the wadis. In the Wadi Atwani there are petroglyphs on a vertical rock face that is high above the wadi floor and now quite inaccessible (Rohl 2000: 145), while in the Wadi Umm Salam there are petroglyphs that are now half buried beneath the gravel of the the wadi floor (Rohl 2000: 62).

Some wadis are completely bare but in others, where flood water is retained in the subsoil, there is a little vegetation consisting of dry thorny bushes and grasses with occasional trees of acacia and tamarisk, and sometimes a few flowers. A few gazelles survive on the attenuated pasture of the wadis and in the rockier places there are hixes and ibexes. The desert is home to a few groups of wandering Bedouin people who keep small herds of sheep and camels. North of the Wadi Hammamat road is the territory of the Ma'azi people, members of the Ma'aza tribe, while to the south live the 'Abadi people of the 'Ababda tribe.

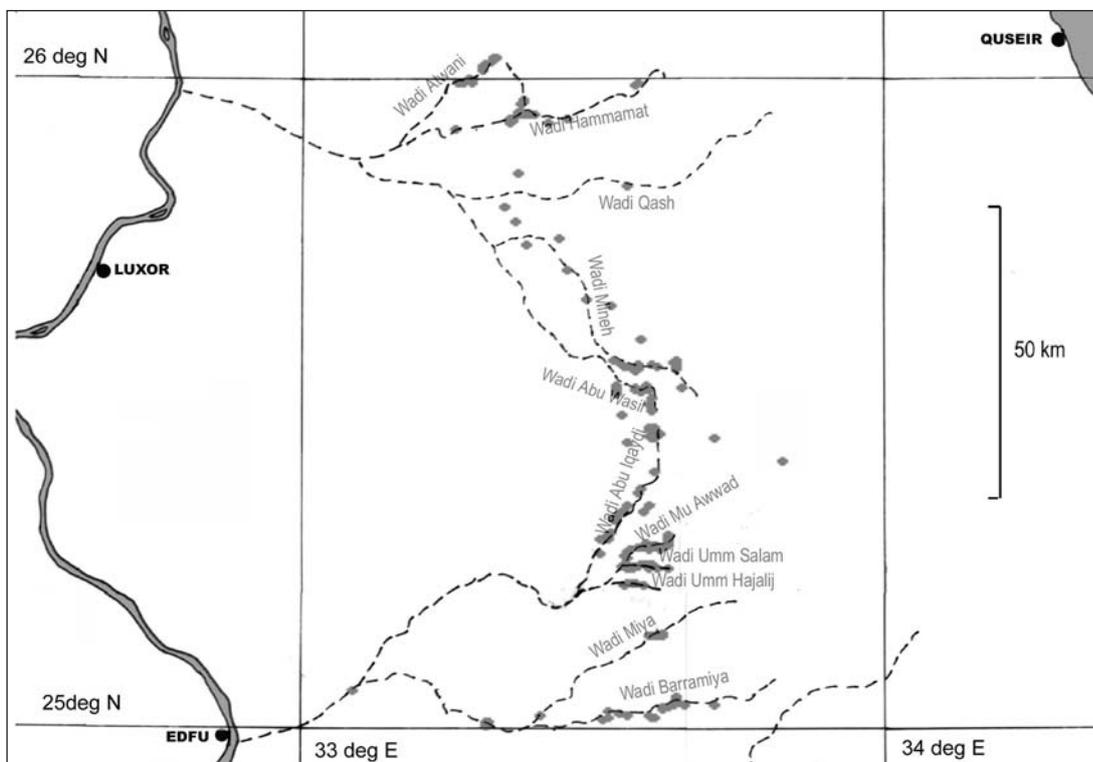
The whole landscape is heavily eroded, in places by water but mostly by the wind. Erosion rates can be as high as a millimetre per year, and over the millennia the sandstone can be cut into fantastic shapes, often with deep rounded hollows, some small, the size of peas, clustered along the bedding lines like the perforations in an unused sheet of postage stamps, others up to a metre across. In places this has left the rock weak and brittle so that its jagged surface crumbles underfoot.

The surface of the sandstone exposed to the atmosphere acquires a patina which may be of any colour from orange-red to brown or black. In the quarries in the Wadi Hammamat, for example, it is a characteristic chocolate brown. The patina can easily be removed by hammering or scraping, revealing the underlying rock which is yellow or salmon-pink in colour and contrasts strikingly. This may be the colour of the unweathered rock, or possibly the colour of a weathering rind<sup>2</sup>. Thus the patinated rock provides an ideal surface for drawing or writing: the image or inscription can be made with a minimum of physical effort, and initially it is prominently visible. However as soon as it is exposed the rock begins to form a new patina, so the work of the artist becomes gradually fainter until, eventually, it is the same colour as the surrounding undisturbed patinated surface and distinguishable only by its slight inden-

<sup>2</sup> See Bednarik 2007: 217.

tation. The rate of re-patination depends strongly on humidity: in the current arid conditions it is very slow, but before around 3000 BC when the climate was more moist it would have been faster. The patina formed on limestone is not differentiated in colour from the substrate in such a marked way as that on sandstone, so petroglyphs on limestone are not nearly so prominent. In many places the walls of the wadis, which may be 10 to 30 metres high, have at their feet jumbles of boulders, typically 1 to 5 metres across, sometimes with narrow passages or caves between them. The boulders, like the cliff faces from which they have fallen, often have smooth patinated surfaces suitable for drawing, and these form the petroglyph sites. In some wadis there are many large smooth rock surfaces available for petroglyphs while in others there are only smaller boulders.

## The Petroglyph Sites

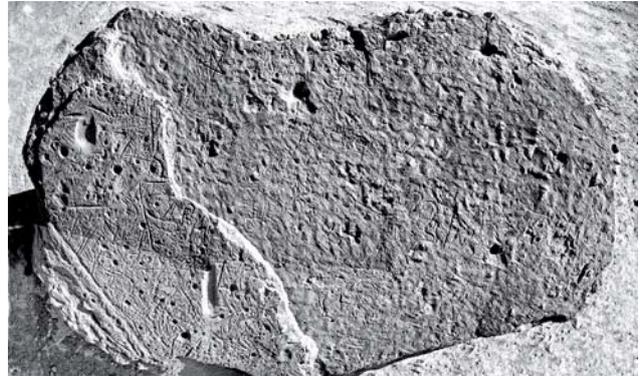


**Fig. 1**  
Known rock art sites in the Eastern Desert.

In the region identified above, in which the recent explorations have been concentrated, a total of 247 petroglyph sites have been found and reported. Their locations are shown in **fig. 1**. Many of them are in wadis that form parts of routes across the desert. One is the modern road from Qift to Quseir via the Wadi Hammamat, which follows an ancient route from the Nile Valley that served not only the Hammamat quarries but also the gold mine at Umm Fawakhir. Another is the modern road from Edfu to Marsa Alam via Kanais, the location of the “miraculous” well attributed to Seti I, and the Wadi Barramiya where there were ancient gold mines. The third is the route from Coptos (modern Qift) to Berenike via the Wadi Mineh that is referred to by Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History* (Eichholz 1962). There is another group of sites, however, in and around the Wadis Umm Salam and Abu Iqaydi, that cannot be associated with any obvious through route.

The sites vary enormously in size. Some consist of large rock panels covered with dozens, and in a few cases hundreds, of individual images, while others have only one or two. Some are prominent, visible from a distance, while others are hidden in crevices and caves. Some are detached boulders lying on the wadi floor, others are cliff faces that are part of the wadi wall. The following are some of the largest and (in the author’s opinion) most interesting.

## Wadi Hammamat (Qasr el Banat)

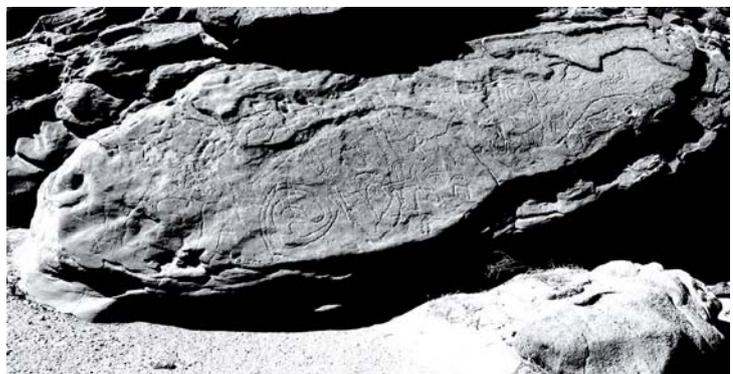


**Fig. 2**  
Wadi Hammamat  
– Qasr el-Banat.

**Fig. 3**  
Qasr el-Banat –  
upper surface of  
the large boulder  
– composite  
photograph.

Immediately to the north of the road to Qusier, about half-way between Qift and the quarries at Umm Fawakhir, there is a large isolated rock or small mesa known as Qasr el Banat (fig. 2; Morrow & Morrow 2002: 202-203). It bears various petroglyphs including a very realistic image of a horse's head. Immediately to the east are three large boulders. Two of them also have many petroglyphs and Arabic inscriptions. The upper surface of the third (towards the left of fig. 2), which is about 2x4 metres in extent and almost horizontal, is covered with an array of cupules, smoothed patches and incised lines forming many shapes such as squares and rectangles, a pentagram and at least 30 loops that appear to represent the soles of sandals (fig. 3).

## Wadi Abu Wasil



**Fig. 4-5-6** : Wadi Abu Wasil.



The Wadi Abu Wasil lies for the most part between low sloping walls. Some 15 kilometres above its confluence with the Wadi Mineh it makes a sweeping bend to the south (fig. 4). It is about 500 metres wide at this point and its floor is covered with sparse vegetation. The broken cliffs around the bend form a natural amphitheatre and are decorated with many petroglyphs (see Rohl 2000: 102-119, Morrow & Morrow 2002: 176-177. Rohl refers to the location as the “Wadi Abu Markab el-Nes”: both Rohl and the Morrrows report several separate sites but they are probably better considered as one). There are many images of animals including several cattle, some “led” by their apparent owners, and many plumed anthropoids. There is a rock

covered with spirals (fig. 5). There are also many boats, some shown in the simplest outline while others are very elaborate. Among these is probably the most arresting single image so far discovered in the Eastern Desert: that of a square boat over a metre long, carrying five large figures, two of whom have double plumes and carry what appear to be bows held horizontally (fig. 6; Rohl 2000: 102; Winkler 1938: pl. XXII). It is surrounded by other images of boats and animals, and is displayed prominently on a vertical rock face.

## Wadi Mineh



**Fig. 8**  
Wadi Mineh.

**Fig. 7**  
Wadi Mineh.

There are other sites that were clearly chosen by the artists in order to allow their work to be obvious to every passer-by. About 3 kilometres below the Bir Mineh the low cliffs at the junction of a side-wadi face north-west down the Wadi Mineh and can be seen for a large distance. On them prominent images of animals including realistic giraffes and cattle, and boats (fig. 7; Rohl 2000: 94-95). Nearby there are other images, among them “caricature” giraffes, drawn on the rocks and boulders at the foot of the cliff in positions that cannot be seen until the observer is close (fig. 8). The giraffe images are caricatures in that the outstanding features of the animal such as the long neck and the tuft of hair on the tail are exaggerated.

## Wadi Umm Salam



**Fig. 9**  
Wadi Umm Salam.



**Fig. 10**  
Wadi Umm Salam  
– the “Jacuzzi”.

Another clearly visible site is to be found about 2 kilometres up the Wadi Umm Salam from its confluence with the Wadi Abu Mu Awwad. It is one of many in the vicinity and consists of many images of boats and animals (including two comically-exaggerated elephants) drawn

**Fig. 11**  
Wadi Umm  
Salam.



on three smooth rock faces about 3 metres high and spanning a total width of some 50 metres, all at the level of the wadi floor and readily visible (Morrow & Morrow 2002: 56-57).

In contrast to these prominent sites there are others, including the largest (in terms of numbers of images) that have so far been discovered, that are hidden from general view. It is as if the artists in these cases did not want their work to be seen. Perhaps the most remarkable lies in the entrance of a small side wadi and is hidden from the main wadi behind three large vertical boulders (fig. 9). In the floor of the side wadi there is a steep-sided circular depression about three metres in diameter and two deep, like a large bath-tub, that has led to the site being dubbed “The Jacuzzi” (fig. 10). It was presumably cut, in a past geological era, by an eddy in a fast-flowing stream. Around the “jacuzzi” there are several smooth vertical rock faces up to four metres high, which are covered with hundreds of images of animals of all types, together with a few boats (fig. 11). The images are crowded together and sometimes overlap. They are arranged in no discernible order with no obvious focus or centre. Most are around 30 centimetres across and are drawn with little skill. Some, notably the giraffes and ibexes, have exaggerated features. Immediately to the east high on the walls of the main wadi there are two large images of camels.

## Kanais and the Wadi Barramiya



**Fig. 12**  
Wadi Barramiya.

There are several prominent sites in and around the Wadi Barramiya, each displaying a number of elaborate images of boats. One such consists of a large prominent cliff face with at least 16 boats in a variety of styles, some very simple, some with elaborate decoration (fig. 12; Morrow & Morrow 2002: 159-160). Neighbouring sites have many rather simpler boats (Rohl 2000: 37-45). Some 32 kilometres to the west at Kanais there is a small speos temple, the well of Seti I and a Roman fort. On the cliff face immediately to the east of the temple there is another group of at least 8 boats (fig. 13). There are other boats and other images both on the cliff and nearby boulders (Rohl 2000: 16-21). In all in the Wadi Barramiya and its immediate vicinity there are nearly 140 boat images.

**Fig. 13**  
Kanais.

## The Petroglyphs

By far the majority of the petroglyphs are representational in the sense that they were clearly intended to look like a real subject. They fall into three categories: animals; beings in human form; and boats. A little over half the total number of images are of animals, about a third are of boats and the remainder are of anthropoids (not counting the anthropoid figures in some of the boats) (Judd 2009).

In contrast to the rock art of the Egyptian Western Desert that of the Eastern consists almost entirely of petroglyphs, and there are only a handful of paintings. Only a single instance has been found of a partially-coloured petroglyph (Rohl 2000: 129), and one of a drawing in a black medium (Morrow & Morrow 2002: 112).

The great majority of the drawings are quite small. Few of the animal images are more than 50 cm across; few of the boats are more than 100 cm long. Most of the images were pecked while a substantial minority were incised or scratched with a hard implement. Most notably the technique of most of the work is, to modern eyes at least, quite crude and lacking in artistic merit. Many of the animals appear, to us, like caricatures with simplified forms and grossly unrealistic features. For example many of the ibexes have exaggerated horns longer than their bodies, some of the giraffes have necks that are disproportionately long and many elephants have comically raised ears. It is particularly surprising that there are only a very few instances that approach the sophistication of the highly-developed technique of the Old Kingdom tomb reliefs (see, for example, Judd 2007).

In general the Eastern Desert rock art has many similarities, both in subject matter and in technique, to the majority of the rock art of the Nile Valley (but not the recently-discovered and apparently very ancient images at Qurta (Huyge *et al.* 2007; Huyge 2009a)). Most of the types of images that now lie under the waters of Lake Nasser have close parallels in the Eastern Desert (see for example Hellström & Langballe 1970). On the other hand there is nothing in the Eastern Desert resembling the large and lifelike images that are common in the central Sahara (for example Le Quellec 1998: 55-125; 2004: 14-55).

## Wild Animals

The presence of images of wild animals that now are found in the savannahs of East Africa, in Kenya for example, suggests strongly that they were drawn some time before about 3000 BC when the climate in North Africa was sufficiently moist to support a grassland flora.

So far around 50 images of giraffes have been discovered. About a quarter of them are quite realistic with reasonably accurate shapes and proportions (fig. 14a), while the remainder are “caricatures”. Many of these have bodies represented by a simple oval (fig. 14c) or a rectangle. Some have grossly elongated necks and others equally long tails, and the tails of a small group of about eight, mostly in the Wadi Umm Salam, bear an even more exaggerated tuft of hair (fig. 14b & d). Most of the giraffes appear in ones and twos at different sites, but at a site in the Wadi Umm Salam there are nine, crowded onto a rock face with dozens of other images (Morrow & Morrow 2002: 62).

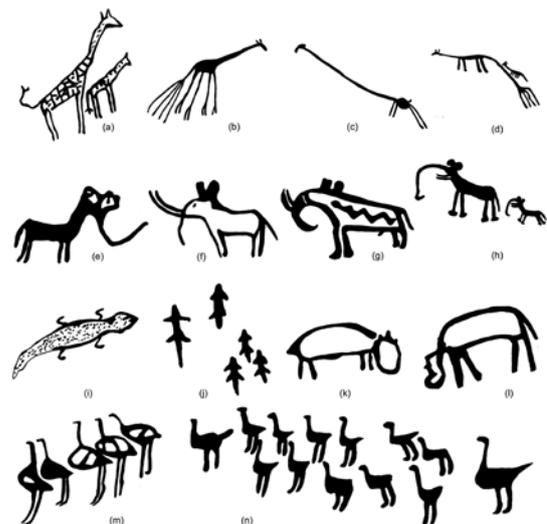


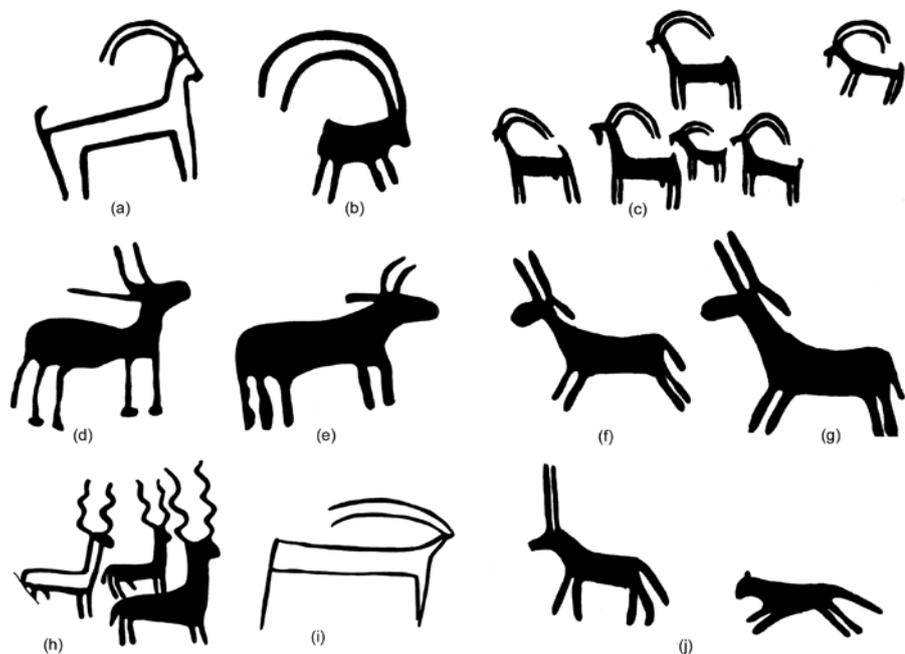
Fig. 14

Wild Animals 1.

a: Wadi Mineh; b-e, i, k, m: Wadi Umm Salam; f: Wadi Hammamat; g: Kanais; h: Wadi Miya; j: Wadi Atwani; l: Wadi Abu Wasil; n: Wadi Barramiya.

There are about 40 images of elephants. They differ from the giraffes in that very few can be described as realistic. Most have “Mickey Mouse” ears raised above the head (fig. 14f). Many have elongated trunks, sometimes bent in the form of “V” (fig. 14e), and others have elevated tusks or unrealistic markings (fig. 14g). As with the giraffes most of the elephants are solitary but there are five in the Wadi Atwani (Winkler 1938: pl. XXVII.3) and seven in the Wadi Miya, all with elevated ears and elongated trunks (fig. 14h; Morrow & Morrow 2002: 162). While it is fairly clear that what is now the desert was once grassland it seems very unlikely that it was ever wet enough to support large aquatic animals. Nevertheless there are about 20 hippopotamuses (fig. 14k & l) and slightly fewer animals that are probably crocodiles (although as there is no way the scale of the images can be judged they might be lizards) (fig. 14i & j). They are all rather more realistic than the giraffes and elephants, although the images are simplified. There are ostriches at about 60% of the sites. They are usually very simple in form (fig. 14m) and often appear in flocks of five or more, sometimes, apparently, with young (fig. 14n).

**Fig. 15**  
Wild Animals 2.  
a: Wadi Abu Wasil; b, d-e: Wadi Umm Salam; c: Wadi Mineh; f-g: Wadi Barramiya; h: Kanais; i: Wadi Mu Awwad.

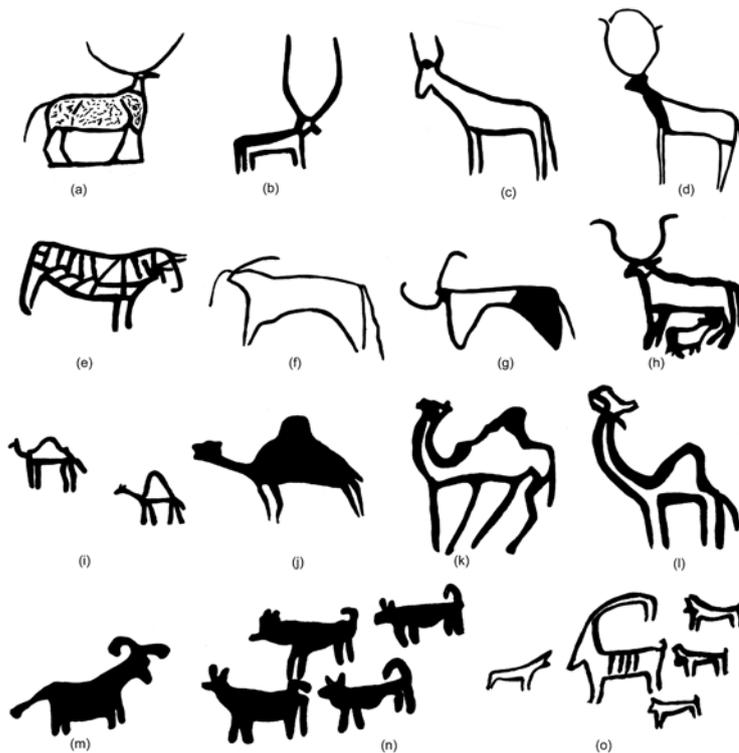


Ibexes appear at around 80% of the sites and apart from cattle are the most commonly represented animals. The images are almost all “caricatures” with exaggerated horns (fig. 15a-c). They are often scattered among images of other animals, and they often appear as the quarry in hunting scenes. There are about 80 images of a quadruped with a short upright neck, raised ears (or possibly short horns) and a rounded muzzle curved slightly downward. It is usually taken to be a wild ass. However most interestingly most of them are shown to have an appendage attached to the back of the neck (fig. 15d-f). It might be an unrealistic representation of a mane (Judd 2006), but more likely it represents a “magic” arrow or spear to make harmless the animal which was thought obnoxious or malignant (Huyge 2009b). Asses are often shown being hunted.

There are a few images of animals with wavy – presumably helical – horns (fig. 15g). They might represent kudus but more probably they are addaxes, which are animals of the semi desert that became extinct, or nearly so, in North Africa quite recently. There are rather more animals with straight or nearly straight horns (fig. 15h). These are probably oryxes, of either the scimitar-horned or straight-horned subspecies. In one case the animal is shown as being chased by what appears to be a feline, possibly a lioness or a leopard (fig. 15i).

## Domestic Animals

More than a hundred images of cattle have been found in this part of the Eastern Desert, more than of any other animal apart from ibexes. In most cases they are drawn quite realistically, although while the animal is seen from the side its horns are almost always shown as seen from the front. In most cases the horns are long (**fig. 16a & b**), sometimes curved inwards almost to meet (**fig. 16d**), sometimes outwards to form the shape of a lyre (**fig. 16h**), and only a few of the animals have short horns (**fig. 16c**). In a few cases the horns are asymmetric, with one horn apparently drooping down in front of the animal's head (**fig. 16f & g**). In about 30%



**Fig. 16**

Domestic  
Animals.

a, f: Wadi Miya;  
b, l, o: Wadi Abu  
Wasil; c: Kanais;  
d, h, k, l, n:  
Wadi Mineh; e:  
Wadi Atwani; g:  
Wadi Abu Iqaydi;  
j: Wadi Umm  
Salam; m: Wadi  
Hammamat.

of the cases the pattern on the animal's hide is indicated. Sometimes it is speckled (**fig. 16a**), sometimes reticulated (**fig. 16e**). The sex of the animal is rarely indicated, and there is only one instance, in the Wadi Mineh, of a cow suckling its calf (**fig. 16h**).

There are many images of camels, but most of them are simple "caricatures", often with exaggerated humps (**fig. 16i-l**). There is, however, a group of large realistic camel images in the Wadi Umm Salam, placed unusually high on the wall of the wadi.

Dogs are almost certainly domesticated because most of them appear in the context of hunting scenes (**fig. 16o**). They usually have erect ears and many have curly tails (**fig. 16n**) and they often accompany archers as they hunt ibexes or antelopes. Curiously there are very few images that can be said with certainty to be of sheep. The few that there are are characterized by arched horns like those of Barbary sheep (**fig. 16m**). There are many animals of indeterminate species, some of which may have been intended to represent sheep, but none has unequivocally sheep-like features.

## Anthropoids

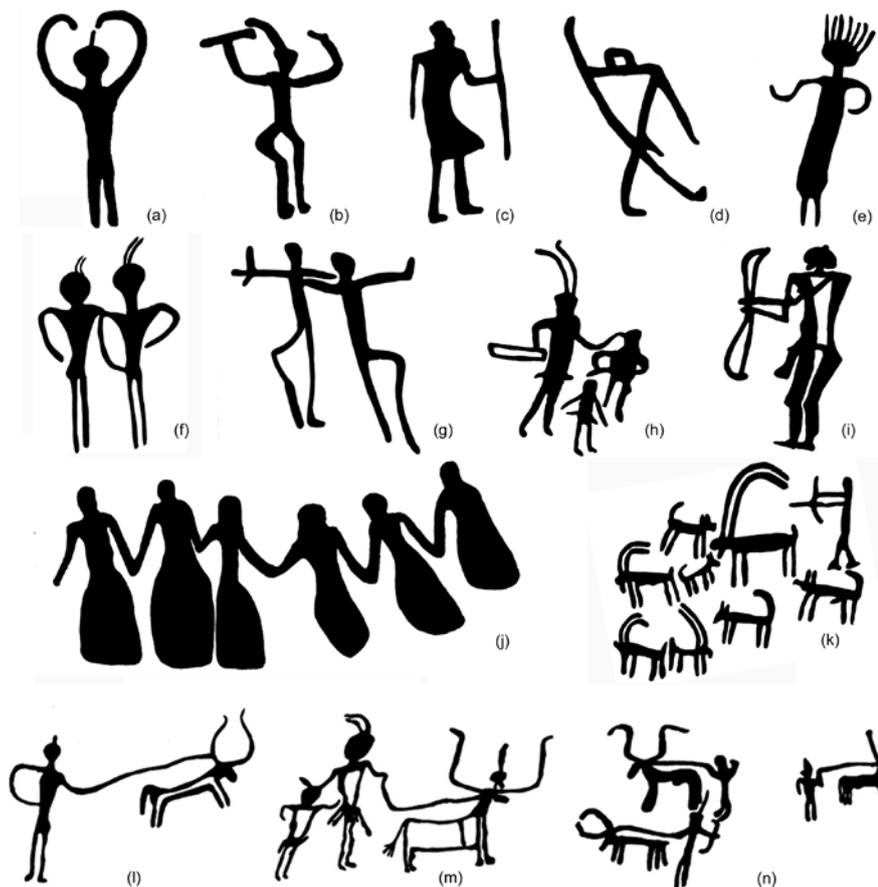


Fig. 17

Anthropoids.  
 a, f, l: Wadi Barramiya;  
 b, d, g: Wadi Hammamat;  
 c: Kanais; e, m, n: Wadi Abu Wasil;  
 h, i: Wadi Mineh;  
 j: Wadi Atwani; k: Wadi Shallul.

There are many images of beings in human shape that could represent either gods, spirits or people. Some (see below) are associated with boats but there are about 250 that are not. A few are in a style familiar from the tombs and temples of the Nile Valley and clearly relate to the Dynastic culture. There is for example an image of the god Min in the Wadi Mineh (Rohl 2000: 80) and other images in the Wadi Hammamat (ibid pp126, 130). These Dynastic images are characterised both by their realism and the representation of facial features, but they are outnumbered by much simpler images that, in almost every case, lack indications of eyes, nose or mouth.

In most cases the head is indicated by a filled circle (fig. 17a & f) while occasionally it is square or trapezoidal (fig. 17b). The body is featureless, sometimes reduced to a single line (fig. 17b), rarely indicated by a wedge shape (fig. 17d). In some cases one or both arms are shown as semicircles as if the hands are resting on the hips (fig. 17e). In others the arms are shown as being raised above the head with the hands almost meeting, a pose that has been described as “orant” (fig. 17a). The penis is shown on about a quarter of the images (fig. 17d), but none has any recognizable female characteristics.

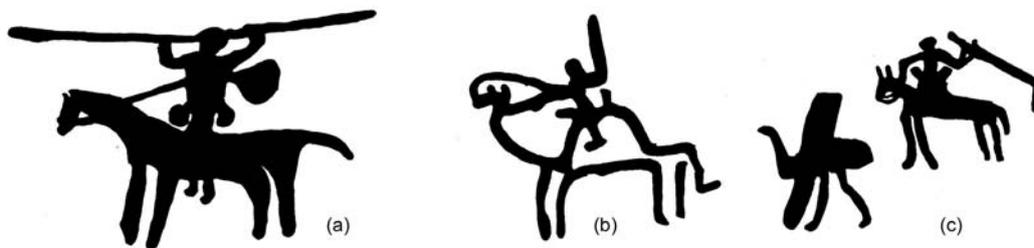
The heads of about a quarter of the images are decorated with one or more vertical lines, mostly vertical, sometimes curved, that might represent plumes (fig. 17. f & h). Most have one or two “plumes” and a few have more, up to seven (fig. 17e). Sometimes they diverge so that they look like the antennae of an insect. Many hold what appear to be bows indicated by straight vertical

lines curved at each end (**fig. 17i**). However these “bows” are almost always held near one end, not in the middle as would be appropriate if they were being used (**fig. 17h**). Other images hold what appear to be simple staves (**fig. 17c**).

There are about 20 groups that appear to be hunting scenes. Each consists of one or more anthropoids carrying bows (in these cases holding them as if for use), accompanied by dogs and attacking animals such as ibexes (**fig. 17k**), asses, ostriches or (as mentioned above) in two cases a bovid. There are several small groups of two or three figures, sometimes apparently including a child (**fig. 17h**). Most of the figures are erect with no indication of movement, but a few look as if they might be dancing (**fig. 17g**). In the Wadi Atwani there is a group of seven figures holding hands and all wearing what appear to be skirts or kilts (**fig. 17j**).

There are several images of a figure attached by what appears to be a rope to the base of the horns of a bovid (**fig. 17l-n**). These have been interpreted in two ways: they show either wild animals being caught by a lasso, or domestic animals being led by their owners. The former interpretation suggests that the cattle are, in the main, wild, while the latter that they are in some sense domesticated. It may be thought that other aspects of the cattle images – the care and accuracy with which most are drawn in comparison with the crudity of many of the images of wild animals, and the attention to details of the shape of the horns and the pattern of the hide – tend to support domestication.

Horses are rare, appearing in most cases as the mounts of armed men carrying either long lances (**fig. 18a**) or what appear to be swords or other weapons. There are also a few images of armed men riding camels (**fig. 18b**) and foot soldiers. Some of the horsemen are apparently hunters (**fig. 18c**).



**Fig. 18**  
Riders.  
a-c: Wadi Mineh.

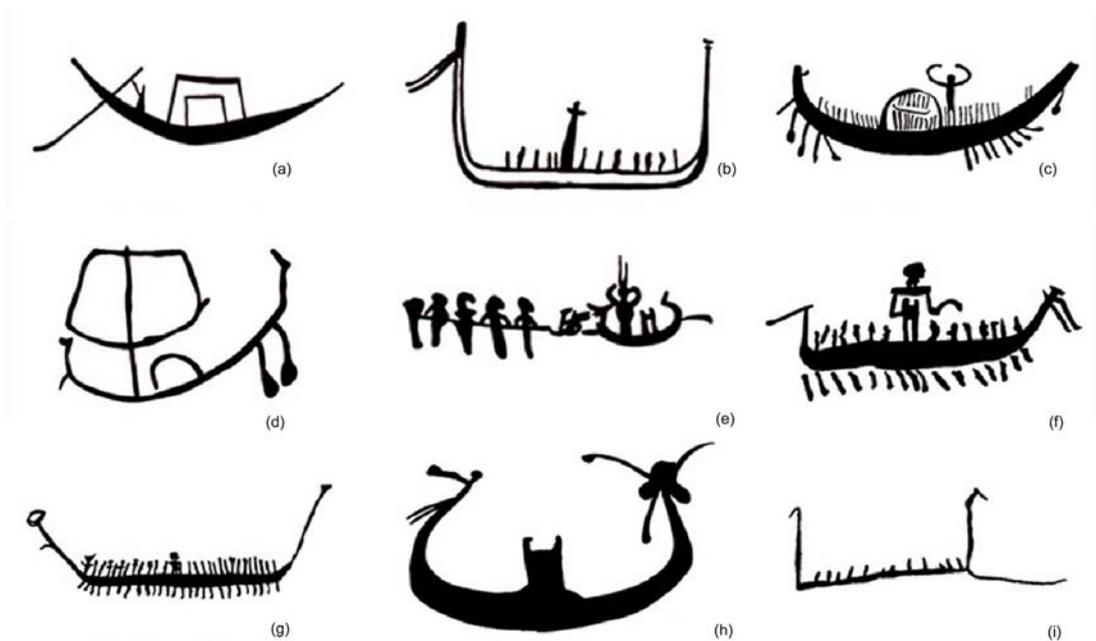
## Boats

Undoubtedly the most remarkable features of the rock art of the Eastern Desert are the images of boats. There are well over 800, far more than any other type of image, and the presence of so many, more than 100 kilometres from any navigable water, implies that they had great significance for the people who drew them.

They are very varied in style. Some are extremely elaborate and detailed, drawn with great care and showing many details (not all of which are necessarily realistic), while others are extremely crude, consisting of no more than a roughly pecked line in the shape of a hull. There have been several attempts to classify the images with the hope of relating them to the design of real boats and thereby dating them (Winkler 1938; Červíček 1974; Judd 2009), but with at best partial success. The only obvious distinction that can be made is between boats shown as having a curved keel (“sickle-shaped” or “banana-shaped”, **fig. 19a, c & h**) and those with a flat, straight

**Fig. 19**

Boats.  
a-c: Wadi Hammamat ;  
d, e: Wadi Abu Wasil;  
f, g: Wadi Umm Salam;  
h, i: Wadi Barramiya.



keel (“square”; **fig. 19b, g & i**). Winkler attempts to relate the different shapes to boats from different places and of different ages, but the differentiation is not entirely convincing because there are many boats which could be described as either “sickle” or “square” (**fig. 19b & g**), and also because many of the images are so grossly simplified. “Sickle” and “square” boats are roughly equally numerous.

About 12% of the boats have oars (**fig. 19c, f & g**) and about 40% have a series of vertical lines above the hull which are usually assumed to represent oarsmen (**fig. 19b, c, f, g & i**). Some have distinct steering oars (**fig. 19a, c & d**) and about 25 % have one or more objects that look like cabins (**fig. 19a, c & d**). Many have vertical posts or finials at bow and stern, and in about 40% of cases these bear what appear to be decorations, sometimes apparently in the form of branches or fronds of vegetation (**fig. 19b & f**), sometimes in an elaborate form that looks like a large flower (**fig. 19h**). Comparatively few – less than 10% – have a mast, sail or rigging (**fig. 19d**). A few boats appear to be being towed by groups of figures pulling on a rope (**fig. 19e**).

A striking feature of some 30% of the boats is that they appear to carry a large anthropoid figure (**fig. 19e & f**). A few have more than one. The “passenger” is disproportionately large, often has plumes on his or her head, and sometimes has arms raised in the “orant” posture (**fig. 19c**). Sometimes he or she points in the direction the boat is going.

Boat images are mainly concentrated in four regions: the Wadis Atwani and Hammamat in the north, the Wadis Mineh and Abu Wasil, the Wadi Umm Salam and its neighbours (the largest concentration), and the Wadis Miya and Barramiya in the south. In these regions, each extending over ten or twenty kilometres, there are hundreds of boats at dozens of separate sites. At a site in the Wadi Hammamat there are five sickle-shaped boats, some with cabins, one with an “orant” passenger, in a style that is reminiscent of, but not identical to, that of the boats illustrated on Naqada II funerary pottery (**fig. 19c**).

### Non-Representational Forms

There are a few relatively simple geometric forms, such as spirals, concentric circles (Morrow & Morrow 2002: 78, 90, 107), nested squares (Morrow & Morrow 2002: 57), and circles surrounded by radiating lines (Morrow & Morrow 2002: 57, 59, 153, 199). In the Wadi Abu Wasil there are two rock faces with some eight images of what appear to be square objects each

topped with two peaks (Morrow & Morrow 2002: 174). The same surfaces also have several examples of what are thought to be Bedouin *wusum*, which can also be found at many other locations.

There are hieroglyphic inscriptions, notable near the ancient wells at Bir Shallul (Rohl 2000: 70) and Bir Mineh (Rohl 2000: 98,99), and in vast profusion at the Wadi Hammamat quarries (Morrow & Morrow 2002: 214-223). In and around a cave in the Wadi Mineh not far from the Roman fort at Didime there are inscriptions in Latin and Greek (Winkler 1938: pl. VIII). There are inscriptions in Arabic at many sites (Morrow & Morrow 2002: 178, for example). The irregular networks of lines that have been found at a few sites have been interpreted as maps of the surrounding wadis (Cherry 2000, in Rohl 2000: 166-168).

## Conclusion

This brief summary is only part of the story of the rock art of the Eastern Desert. Firstly the region covered is, as Figure 1 shows, quite limited. Within this area the recent expeditions have probably found most of the rock art in the wadis they have explored, but in the intricate maze of which the Eastern Desert is composed there are no doubt other wadis as yet to be explored. Secondly the adjacent regions remain largely unvisited. A little work has been done in the region south of the Wadi Barramiya (Resch 1967; Judd 2009) but there are several major wadi systems that have not been examined. Resch gives tantalising indications that the rock art, while in the main similar to that farther north, has intriguing differences. It would be surprising if the Wadi el Kharit and its vicinity in particular would not reveal many interesting sites. The limestone region north of the Wadi Hammamat seems not to have much rock art, but apart from Winkler's visit in 1936-7 little has been done to explore it thoroughly. Similarly although the igneous rock of the Red Sea mountains is less attractive as a medium for rock art there is certainly some there (Hobbs 1989: 114), awaiting discovery.

The rock art of the Nile Valley is rather better known than that of the Eastern Desert, but even so recent work has shown that there is still much to be found, especially in the vicinity of Aswan (Storemyr et al 2008; Gatto et al 2009; Hendrickx & Gatto 2009). Particularly interesting are the recent discoveries at Qurta of rock art that appears to be much older than that of the rest of the Eastern Desert (Huyge et al 2007; Huyge 2009a). Most of the results of the recording work that has been done by the Belgian group in the wadis east of El Kab remain to be published (see Vandekerckhove & Müller-Wollermann 2001). Fortunately the extensive rock art province that has been lost under the waters of Lake Nasser was well recorded before it was inundated (Engelmayer 1965; Almagro Basch & Almagro Gorbea 1968; Hellström & Langballe 1970; Červíček 1974; Curto et al 1987; Otto & Buschendorf-Otto 1993; Váhala & Červíček 1999).

Recording the rock art is only the first step: it needs to be followed by interpretation to ascertain what it reveals about the prehistory and history of Egypt. Some work on dating and interpretation has been done (Winkler 1938; Červíček 1986; Huyge *et al.* 2001; 2002; Judd 2009) but in the absence of archaeological work in the desert wadis the conclusions are tentative. The rock art tells us that there was a lot of activity in what is now the desert, but we are only beginning to understand how that activity related to the civilization of the Nile Valley. It is to be hoped that the recent renewal of interest in the Eastern Desert will improve our knowledge of the origins of Egypt.

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