

THESES TO DISSERTATION

THE ROCK ART OF NORTHEAST AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF ROCK PAINTINGS FROM THE CZECHOSLOVAK CONCESSION IN LOWER NUBIA

SKALNÍ UMĚNÍ SEVEROVÝCHODNÍ AFRIKY: PŘÍPADOVÁ STUDIE SKALNÍCH MALEB Z ČESKOSLOVENSKÉ KONCESE V DOLNÍ NÚBII

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Year of submission: 2014

In Northeast Africa, a large amount of diverse archaeological sources are at hand for the study of the past developments and the civilisation process in this region. Frequently represented among these is rock art – non-utilitarian anthropic marks made on natural, unmovable rock surfaces by means of techniques involving reductive (petroglyphs) and additive (pictograms) processes (Bednarik 2003: 16). Since the beginning of systematic rock-art surveys and research in Egypt and Nubia at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (for history of research, see, *e.g.*, Červíček 1974: 3–10; Huyge 2003: 59–68; Edwards 2006; and Kleinitz 2007a), thousands of panels bearing depictions of wild and domestic animals, human figures, boats, and a broad variety of symbols and (geometric) signs, dating from the late Palaeolithic until the Islamic Period, have been brought to light in the Nile Valley and adjacent deserts in Egypt and the Sudan. And the corpus, just as the number of publications dealing in one way or another with the rock art of this region, is still growing with the ongoing projects both in Egypt and the Sudan. In the latter region, where also rock gongs have been recorded, acoustic aspects of the local ancient landscapes have begun to be investigated as well (*e.g.*, Kleinitz 2010).

In Egypt and the Sudan, which form the main focus of this overview, the rock art recorded up to the present appears to consist of several regional and local traditions, for the evaluation of which a regional approach should be adopted (*e.g.*, Huyge 2003: 60–68; Kleinitz 2007a: 230–231). Nevertheless, they all share certain characteristics for which they can be grouped very broadly into one specific “rock-art province”. A nearly absolute majority

of the rock art in the Nile Valley and the deserts to the east and west of the Nile are *petroglyphs* made by pecking, hammering, incision, rubbing, scraping, drilling, and, as the case may be, other techniques involving reductive processes. *Coloured or incrustated petroglyphs*, in which techniques involving reductive and additive processes are combined, and *genuine rock paintings* made by application of (wet) paint occur only sporadically in the Nile Valley and the adjacent deserts, with the exception of Gilf Kebir and Jebel Uweinat at or near the present-day border of Egypt, Libya, and the Sudan – two areas with rock paintings *par excellence* – that appear to refer more to the central Saharan (especially the Round Head and the Bovidian) artistic repertoire (Huyge 2009a: 4) or recent phases of Ennedi (Muzzolini 1995: 624) rather than to the Nilotic region. As compared with Central Sahara and other areas, the figures animating rock surfaces in Egypt and the Sudan are of *smaller dimensions*, usually not exceeding 40–50 cm. Last but not least, from the point of view of iconography (themes, styles, syntax), the rock art from this “province” shows *close correlation with other two- and three-dimensional objects (of art)* often found in well-documented and dated archaeological contexts. The latter fact not only extends the possibilities of a more effective chronological-cultural seriation of the available rock-art record, but allows for discerning of (at least) certain layers of the original, *intentional* meaning of some of this rock art (Huyge 2002: 192; 2003: 59).

Solid dating constitutes a fundamental starting point for an effective study of any archaeological material. The same applies to rock art, in which only determination of the age of the evidence opens paths to comparison in both synchronic and diachronic perspectives and to interpretation of the *intentional* as well as the *unintentional* significance of the evidence. Nevertheless, rock art in itself is rather difficult to date. A broad variety of methods and approaches, involving direct observation of the varied aspects of the evidence as well as natural scientific analyses (in particular physical and chemical methods), are usually applied to organise the material on a time-scale (for an overview of the varied techniques used for direct and indirect dating of rock art, see, *e.g.*, Chippindale & Nash 2004a: 3–7).

Prior to the late 1990s, a number of chronologies of the regional rock art (*e.g.*, Almagro Basch & Almagro Gorbea 1968; Hellström 1970; Davis 1984a; Červíček 1978, 1984, 1986, 1992–1993; Huyge 1995) had been elaborated (for the mostly indirect methods employed, see Červíček 1992–1993). Since the late 1990s, the first attempts were made at direct dating of petroglyphs (*e.g.*, Huyge *et al.* 2001 for Epipalaeolithic fish-trap designs at el-Hosh in Upper Egypt) as well as pictograms in Egypt (*e.g.*, Hobbs & Goodman 1995 for rock paintings in the northern Eastern Desert of Egypt; *cf.* Huyge 2003: 60–62 for rock paintings at

Hierakonpolis). Also, several finds of layers covering rock-art imagery made it possible to employ OSL, TL, or IRSL dating to get a *terminus ante quem* for such rock art (e.g., Huyge & Vandenberghe 2011: 24 for Late Palaeolithic rock art at Qurta in Upper Egypt; Bobrowski *et al.* 2013 for cattle imagery in the Red Sea Mountains). Where direct dating of the images is not possible, dating by contextual archaeological and palaeoenvironmental evidence has been employed on a larger-scale in particular for a chronological and cultural attribution of some of the geographically limited traditions of prehistoric rock art in the Western Desert of Egypt (e.g., Barich 1998; Classen *et al.* 2009; Riemer 2009; Riemer 2013). Last but not least, an important contribution is being made by the recently launched long-term project of the Humboldt University in Berlin concerned with the recording and study of petroglyph-like drawings of Meroitic and post-Meroitic date that adorn the Great Enclosure at Musawwarat es-Sufra in Central Sudan (e.g., Kleinitz 2008b; 2013b).

The above-stated results as well as ongoing projects constitute important achievements in the rock-art research in Northeast Africa both from the point of view understanding and extending the chronology of the regional rock art – in particular with respect to the confirmation of Late Palaeolithic and Epipalaeolithic rock-art horizons in Egypt – and from the point of view of dating methodology in general. Nevertheless, while the chronology is getting more elaborate and more of the rock art can be dated absolutely using (some of) the above methods, it still remains a mere interval dating into variably long periods of time. Over the years, attempts have been made at creating more general chronological frameworks covering extensive parts of this “rock-art province” (e.g., Červíček 1986; 1992–1993; Huyge 2003: 68–69); however, these entailed a considerable simplification, obliterating the local or regional variations and particularities discernible between individual areas (admitted by Huyge 2003: 69; see also Kleinitz 2007a). In order to address these variations and particularities, more chronologies based on quantified rock-art data – such as that provided by Huyge (1995; *cf.* 2002) for Elkab rock art – must be elaborated. Only in such a way it is possible to obtain a controllable basis for solid comparisons in space and over time as well as for a well-founded interpretation of the rock art.

As a direct testimony left behind by prehistoric and historical peoples of themselves and of their lived and/or thought worlds as they experienced them and/or conceived them, the rock art has a theoretical potential of revealing quite a different world of the past societies as compared with the lithics, ceramics, bones, and other *more material* remains that tell us rather about the technological and economic developments than of thought, perception, and religion (Chippindale & Nash 2004a: 1). However, while constituting the greatest attraction of this

type of archaeological source, the original, *intentional* meaning the images of the past once had for their creators and direct audience is difficult to grasp without what Taçon & Chippindale (1998: 6) have called “informed knowledge”, *i.e.* some source of insight on the content, meaning, and motivation passed on directly or indirectly from those who made and used the rock art.

In some parts of the world explanations of the meaning of the local rock art can be gained thanks to the (until recently) still living rock-art practice or existing oral traditions (*e.g.* in South Africa, Northwest America, Australia). With prehistoric rock art in general and most historical rock art as well, however, there is no possibility to obtain any true insights into the rock art on account of the considerable chronological gaps and/or significant intellectual and mental shifts that have obliterated and/or entirely severed the link between us today and the (more distant) past. Some rock-art researchers thus do not concern themselves with uncovering the original, intentional meaning of the rock art at all (recently *e.g.* Judd 2009 for the prehistoric/Predynastic rock art of the Eastern Desert of Egypt). Others, on the other hand, are of the opinion that it is still possible to “read” prehistoric rock art and understand its meaning (*e.g.*, Rozwadowski 2009). To get keys to unlock the ancient minds and unveil the past and forgotten meanings, diverse domains – such as psychoanalysis, phenomenology of religion, or anthropology of shamanism – are exploited (Le Quellec 2006: 166), and/or comparisons made with chronologically or spatially more or less distanced ethnographic evidence. However, the argumentations in favour of any one of such theories are usually axiomatic, *i.e.*, when any such theory is accepted, it appears to be at first sight a functional one. The problem rests in the fact that using one and the same image each one of them can lead us to markedly different conclusions (*cf.* Le Quellec 2006).

In recent years, D. Huyge provided a critical examination of the four main motivations – magical (or hunting magic) hypothesis, totemistic interpretation, religious interpretation, and concept of ideology – proposed in the past for the Egyptian rock art (Huyge 2002: 192–194) and explored a strategy for rock-art interpretation based on the study of 11 petroglyph localities at Elkab, one of the important Predynastic and dynastic centres in Upper Egypt (Huyge 1995). In his approach, Huyge assumed *a degree of cultural and religious continuance and of conceptual conservatism* between Predynastic and later dynastic times in Egypt and viewed *rock art* not as an isolated phenomenon, but *as an integral part of the historical chain of development* (Huyge 2002: 194–196). His evaluation of the local rock art and its varied aspects (themes, styles, syntax, lateralisation, location, *etc.*) from the individual periods in the light of the archaeological-historical context provided by the diverse diachronic

and synchronic iconographical, archaeological and other sources available in Egypt allowed him to suggest a range of meanings and motivations for the local rock art corresponding to religious, ideological and other mental shifts traceable through time in the culture-historical record (Huyge 2003: 71).

His interpretative analysis constitutes an example of a quality regional study that appears to successfully uncover some levels of meaning and motivation of the local rock art. However, there are some pitfalls in Huyge's conclusions. First, he evidently uncovers only *certain levels of meaning and motivation*, which is most probably given by the comparatively small size of the sample – only 354 “datable” rock drawings – on which he has based his interpretative analysis. Second, there is a degree of uncertainty in some of his interpretative constructs and claims, caused by the insufficient statistical foundations of some of them. Third, his disregard in his discussion (judging based on Huyge 2002) for the presence of a multi-ethnic component in Egypt from Predynastic and/or through Pharaonic times (*e.g.*, Friedman 1992, 1999 for Hierakonpolis; Kemp 1977, cited in Friedman 1992, for Elkab; more recently also *e.g.* Raue 2002, 2008 for Elephantine) eliminates the possibility of “non-Egyptian” authors and audience that could have made possible a variant reading of some of the imagery and suggest a different (non-Egyptian) type of symbolism (partly) underlying rock art not only in areas further afield (*e.g.*, in Lower Nubia, as suggested by Huyge), but also in this particular case.

Nevertheless, Huyge's balanced approach constitutes an important contribution to the developing of methodology for study and interpretation of the regional rock art, as he works with a *controllable, quantified (albeit small) sample* of rock art, as he employs the *principle of proceeding from the known* (ancient Egyptian iconographic, written, and other sources) *to the unknown* (rock art), and as he stresses the necessity of *good knowledge of the local context*. However, without comparative and quantified data sets from Upper Egypt, Lower Nubia, and elsewhere, the applicability of his interpretative constructs and claims themselves on a larger scale remains uncertain (also Huyge 2002: 204; Huyge 2003: 71).

In recent years, attempts have been made to use the rich corpus of the ancient Egyptian iconographical and textual sources for the “reading” of the complex prehistoric rock-art imagery in the Gilf Kebir area, in particular in the Cave of Swimmers (Wadi Sura I) and the Cave of Beasts (Wadi Sura II). The first proponent of this approach was J.-L. Le Quellec who paid a primary attention to the enigmatic figures of the headless beast – a composite of different animals – and the small figures of “swimmers”, both of which are confined to a relatively small area of the southwest corner of Egypt. To him, they seemed to represent early

illustrations of a mythology of the next world, as known from the ancient Egyptian *Coffin Texts*, the *Book of Caverns*, and the *Book of the Dead*. In his “reading”, the “swimmers” were compared with the deceased floating in the primeval ocean, or the Nun, and the “beasts” with zoomorphic demons threatening to swallow the deceased, in particular with the Devourer known from the famous scene of judgment of the deceased (in particular Le Quellec 2005; 2008).

The same approach was subsequently adopted by M. Bárta who claimed to identify other compositions with an apparently strong relation to the ancient Egyptian civilisation, *inter alia*, a forerunner of the Pharaonic etiological composition showing the sky and earth as the sky-goddess Nut supported by the earth-god Geb, and an early representation of the “smiting-the-enemy” composition of the Pharaonic times used to express since the Late Predynastic Period the triumph of an Egyptian ruler over his enemies (Bárta 2009: 69–76; 2010).

Both these attempts have been severely criticised and rejected by varied scholars as being far-fetched, highly inconclusive, and highly speculative (*e.g.*, Huyge 2014; Förster & Kuper 2013; Zboray 2013: 23; but also Le Quellec 2010: 66–68; for a positive response, *cf.* Tassie 2014: 136–139). Both these attempts and the subsequent critical reactions are of relevance for refining the strategy and methodology of interpreting the regional rock art. In this case, we encounter another example of application of an interpretative principle that proceeds from the *known* (ancient Egyptian civilisation) to the *unknown* (prehistoric rock art), similarly as D. Huyge in the case of Elkab rock art discussed above. It is fundamental, however, that unlike D. Huyge, the approach of J.-L. Le Quellec and M. Bárta is not strictly regional. In this remains the main weak point of their attempts: they work with an analogy that is both temporally and spatially not insignificantly remote (but *cf. e.g.* Dumézil 1997 for the case of Indo-European studies in which this concept has been productive).

As the basic precondition for interpretation of the local rock art – a systematic and thorough documentation and presentation of the imagery *in extenso* in the case of the Cave of Beasts – has just been fulfilled (see Kuper 2013), careful analysis of the complex imagery, employing the concept of *rock-art layers* and *rock-art events*, and (re-)evaluation of both local and regional archaeological and palaeoenvironmental evidence, should now open paths to a more constructive response to the two above attempts in the form of still-lacking better-grounded suggestions as to the meaning and reading of this extraordinary rock art. It is beyond doubt that the question whether and to what extent it is permissible to “read” this complex of single motifs, compositions, and scenes, as well as other regional prehistoric rock-

art corpora, using ancient Egyptian sources will remain in the heart of both methodological and interpretative discussions.

The understanding of the original, *intentional* meaning the images of distant past once had for their creators and direct audience no doubt represent the ultimate goal of any rock-art research. Nevertheless, the quest for it is often hindered not only by the very imagery that may refer to types of symbolism alien to us today, but also by what I call *complex spatial and temporal dynamics* attested on some rock-art surfaces. On these, we see that the pictorial statements made at one time by some artists with a particular meaning in their mind were *added to, modified, or even reduced* (destroyed) by others who felt the urge for one reason or another to leave their own characteristic trace on the particular panels and thus to represent themselves on or to appropriate the panels and to charge them with extended, updated, or even new – their own – meanings. In such cases, we are no longer dealing with single meanings, but entire *layers of more or less interwoven past meanings*. Of these, some may be more general and refer to the belief system or understanding of the world of the rock-art creators, while others might be merely situational.

While each of the rock-art events attested on any rock-art surface was no doubt driven with a particular intention, the final result – the vertical and horizontal stratigraphy – constitutes an accumulation of these intentions, but is in itself *unintentional*. And this can be used as a tool for approaching rock art and its significance for the study of the past. Instead of speculating on the original, *intentional* meanings, we can employ “formal methods” (Taçon & Chippindale 1998: 7) and focus on what the ancient artists told us about themselves and their lived- and thought-worlds *unintentionally* by creating their distinctive images or conducting specific actions at particular places in the ancient landscapes and/or by (not) engaging into “dialogues” with the landscape and other graphic – both pictorial and inscriptional – and archaeological evidence. Without understanding the *intentional* meaning of the original and the reworked composition in the above mentioned case, there is this *unintentional* significance of the evidence.

It is evident that such an approach to rock art opens door to a whole range of themes. At this point, I shall draw the attention to a number of issues that appear particularly important at least for investigating the rock art in Lower Nubia and that mostly revolve around simple questions of “where” (*cf.* Chippindale & Nash 2004b) and “who”.

Rock art in settlement landscapes. In recent years, rock-art research have become an integral part of broader regional projects that combine archaeological survey, excavation, environmental and landscape studies, study of settlement patterns, *etc.* (*cf.* Huyge 2003: 71).

Compared with pottery, lithics, human bones, and other material sources, rock art constitutes a less material, but very durable evidence of human presence in a particular region that is in overall majority found exactly where it was meant to be (Chippindale & Nash 2004a: 1). A confrontation of the archaeological evidence from one region with that provided by chronologically organised rock art may reveal different patterns in the past (see, *e.g.*, Kleinitz 2007a: 227; 2008b, for an example from the Us island in the Fourth Cataract region).

Hierarchy within rock-art landscapes. The fundamental precondition for rock-art creation is the occurrence of a suitable rock support. However, rock art is not found everywhere where the geomorphology allows its creation, but only at certain places. Its location is not a givenness, but the result of choices made by the creators. For distribution maps, mere dots are used to capture the location of rock-art stations in particular landscapes. However, within these landscapes, there are rock-art stations of clearly diverse ranks. The particular thematic, stylistic, structural, technical and/or locational aspects and/or the marked spatial and temporal dynamics occurring at some rock-art stations allow us to view certain localities as “Places”, *i.e.*, as locations that had in a particular period, or gained through time, for one reason or another, some significance – as places of dialogue or encounters over millennia (*e.g.*, Polkowski *et al.* 2013: 111–115 for the Dakhleh Oasis rock-art project), places of cult (*e.g.*, Edwards 2006; 2012: 151, Fig. 6.13, for Christian Period shrines in the Third Nile Cataract region), and/or places of social and/or other significance (*e.g.*, Friedman 1992, 1999 for HK64 at Hierakonpolis and other sites). Again, the confrontation of the archaeological record with that provided by rock art may allow contemplations on the lived- and thought-worlds of the past societies and on the (changing) perceptions and/or (symbolic) uses of particular landscapes that may not always be possible based on archaeological data alone (*e.g.*, Kleinitz 2007a, 2008a, for the Fourth Nile Cataract region).

Identity. As mentioned above, there is growing archaeological evidence attesting to the presence of a multi-ethnic component in Egypt since Predynastic times. This is in sharp contrast with the picture painted in the ancient Egyptian iconographical and written sources and invites confrontation of such sources with the archaeological “realities” (recently *e.g.* Smith 2003). Further to the south, Lower Nubia constituted over millennia a dynamic interface and zone of shifting frontiers between (dynastic and Ptolemaic-Roman) Egypt in the north and (the kingdoms of) Kerma, Napata, and Meroe in the south, in which phases of development of local polities (A-Group, C-Group, X-Group, Christian Kingdoms) alternated with phases of control (dominance) by or influence from other polities (Middle Kingdom and New Kingdom Egypt, Classic Kerma, Ptolemaic-Roman Egypt, and Meroe), and in which

there were frequent encounters in different times of groups of varied ethnic (or cultural) identities and origin (recently *e.g.* Török 2009). The understanding of the regional rock art can thus be hardly obtained without asking the question of “who were the authors of the images”, “who was the audience targeted at by the authors”, and, in the case of anthropomorphs, “who were the figures represented on the rock-art surfaces”.

While such identifications are no doubt difficult to make in the case of earlier, pre-historic rock art (*cf.* Winkler 1938, 1939 for the first attempts in this respect), the wide array of archaeological and iconographic sources from well-documented contexts in Egypt and the Sudan make it possible to consider some thematic, stylistic, and syntactic particularities as “identity markers” (*e.g.*, Winkler 1938: 15–17 for the rock art of the Blemmys). Tracking such markers, whether in *clean*, *derivative*, or *mixed* forms, across space allows for contemplating on (non-)existence of contact, exchange, influence, and/or shifting boundaries of different kinds, including political, cultural, and ethnic ones (*e.g.*, J. C. Darnell 2009 for a case study from the Theban Desert). The occurrence of different distinctive traits on one and the same surface further allows identifying such places – depending on the spatial dynamics and the type of interventions present and on the type of interventions attested on such surfaces – as the very locations of contact, dialogue, or conflict (*e.g.*, Suková 2011a: 12–57, *i.e.*, *Chapter 2* in this dissertation).

Nevertheless, the question of identity is not limited merely to the cultural or ethnic groups attested (whether archaeologically or otherwise) in a particular region, but involves also individuals. As opposed to rock inscriptions abundantly attested in Egypt, Nubia, and the Sudan, giving explicitly the names, filiation, and other information on concrete individuals, rock art offers more discreet means for detecting individuals in the record (see Suková 2008). One of these are the technical aspects of the rock art, more specifically the particular (groups of) techniques employed for the creation of images in differing sequences or combinations, the distinguishing of which can allow us, together with evaluating the thematic and stylistic aspects, to hypothetically attribute the particular works to concrete individuals (*e.g.*, Judd 2009 for certain petroglyphs of giraffes in the Eastern Desert of Egypt; Huyge 2009b for some naturalistically drawn animals at Qurta; and Suková 2011a: 12–57, 58–72, *i.e.*, *Chapters 2* and *3* in this dissertation). The identification of individuals through the stylistic and technical aspects of their work could allow one to track the mobility of an individual in the landscapes and, more importantly, to contemplate on the question of *scale* – how many authors of rock art there could have been responsible for the creation of rock art (not only) during particular periods.

Connected therewith is the question of “social identity” of the authors and/or the audience that revolves around possibly necessary (rights of access to) particular knowledge (or resources) to execute or understand the rock art and the possible existence of (rock-art) specialists. While some suggestions have been made in this respect by several authors (*e.g.*, Huyge 2002 for Horizons II–V in the rock art at Elkab; Suková (2011a: 82–99), *i.e.*, *Chapters 5–7* in this dissertation for the Late Nubian sequence in Lower Nubia), this question still remains rather unexplored.

Last but not least, the understanding of the original, *intentional* meaning the images once had for their creators and audience is not needed to contemplate on the varied functions rock art may have had in the past. Certain magical practices – acts of iconoclasm attested at a number of rock-art surfaces in Northeast Africa (and beyond) – suggest that (some of) the local rock art may have been believed to live its own, parallel lives, with the figures represented considered by some of their audience to be true living beings. However, the fact that such acts of iconoclasm were not directed only against figures regarded as potentially “dangerous” just as the “beasts” in the rock art of Gilf Kebir (*e.g.*, Le Quellec 2012), but also against “beneficial” ones such as cattle (Menardi-Noguera & Soffiantini 2008 for a rare example from Jebel Uweinat; and Suková 2011a: 12–57, *i.e.*, *Chapter 2* in this dissertation for Lower Nubia), suggests that the motivations for such acts could have varied from religious, mythical, or ideological reasons to social, economic, or even personal ones. However, rock-art creation could have also constituted a mere accompanying activity to or result of another (ritual, *etc.*) behaviour, as could be the case with the magico-religious signs of the Late Nubian sequence that are known to have been employed during divination practices (Červíček 1978: 58; see Suková 2011a: 82–99, *i.e.*, *Chapters 5–7* in this dissertation).

Even without understanding the original, *intentional* meaning the rock art may once have had, diverse information can be gained through rock-art research focused on the *unintentional* significance and through more detailed attention paid, *inter alia*, to higher-rank locations in the ancient, through rock art humanised landscapes and through exploiting the technical aspects of the available record as an independent tool itself. The object in our mind should be to consider the rock-art record in the broader historical, archaeological, cultural and other context(s) and to outreach from the very imagery to the people that stand behind.

The study I hereby submit as a dissertation is part of my long-term project aimed at a critical evaluation of the rock-art and archaeological evidence gathered in two sections of the Nile Valley in Lower Nubia by the Czechoslovak expedition working in the framework of the UNESCO-organised salvage campaign (*e.g.*, Suková 2008, 2011b). The thesis, published in

2011 as a separate monograph (see Suková 2011a), is concerned only with occurrences of rock paintings in the two research area. The nine shelters featuring ten surfaces with evidence of genuine rock paintings or coloured (incrusted) petroglyphs constitute only a minor portion (0.64 %) in the whole corpus from the Czechoslovak concession predominated by petroglyphs of varied themes, styles, and dates. Nevertheless, this painted corpus is a valuable collection that, as opposed to petroglyphs, represents works that were more demanding from the technical point of view and require detailed analysis of technical aspects, is more amenable to stylistic analysis, and, last but not least, the colour scheme itself plays part in interpretation (for instance, in the case of white, probably linen kilts or tunics in two of the shelters – 17 R XIII, 17 R XIX B – that may point to an inspiration or influence from the Egyptian sphere).

In my work, I put the main emphasis on the archaeological approach to the evidence. First, a detailed description and analysis (where possible given the quality of the archival documentation available for study) was made as to the locational, thematic (subject-matter), stylistic (styles of representation of the subject-matter), syntactic (compositions), and technical (represented techniques and their sequences and combinations) aspects. A chronological attribution into particular sequences of Lower Nubian (pre-)history was made based on the thematic, stylistic, and syntactic aspects and their comparisons with other two-dimensional and three-dimensional iconographic evidence from the region. Horizontal and vertical stratigraphy on individual panels was studied, focusing not only representational, but also non-representational evidence, including also evidence of diverse *additional interventions* concerning individual motifs or the rock-art panel as a whole. Using the above aspects and the stratigraphy, I subsequently attempted at a diachronic reconstruction of the transformation of the natural rock surface into the rock-art surfaces, employing the concept of “*rock-art layer*” and “*rock-art event*”.

Having analysed each of the nine rock-art surfaces in this manner, I evaluated with each of the occurrence the significance of the evidence at hand. I did not concern myself particularly with an interpretation of the original, *intentional* meaning the rock paintings may have had in the past. Instead, I contemplated, *inter alia*, on the function(s) of the individual locations with rock paintings, on the function of the rock art in some particular cases, and on the identity of the authors, of the represented figures, and of their audience.

I believe that this as well as the archaeological approach employed to a considerable degree in this study may significantly extend the information value of this “engaging, but obscure class of archaeological material” (Chippindale & Nash 2004a: 1) for the understanding of cultures, societies, and history in Lower Nubia and beyond.

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