

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

Lenka Suková

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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. The study, published in 2011 as a separate monograph, is concerned only with occurrences of rock paintings and coloured (incrusted) petroglyphs in the two research area. The nine shelters treated herein constitute only 0.64 % in the whole corpus from the Czechoslovak concession predominated by petroglyphs – just as in most of Northeast Africa – 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 – that may point to an inspiration or influence from the Egyptian sphere).

In my work, I put the main emphasis on an archaeological approach to the evidence. First, I provide a detailed description and analysis (where possible given the quality of the archival documentation available for study) of 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 of the evidence into particular sequences of Lower Nubian (pre-)history is made based on the thematic, stylistic, and syntactic aspects and their comparisons with other two-dimensional and three-dimensional archaeological and iconographic evidence from the region. Horizontal and vertical stratigraphy on individual panels is studied, focusing not only on 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 provide a diachronic reconstruction in each case of the transformation of the natural rock surfaces into the rock-art surfaces, employing the concept of “*rock-art layer*” and “*rock-art event*”.

Having analysed each of the painted shelters in this manner, I evaluate the significance of the evidence at hand. I do not concern myself primarily with an interpretation of the original, *intentional* meaning the rock paintings may have had in the past. Instead, I 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. In evaluating the individual occurrences as well as the corpus as a whole, I put forward some thoughts, *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 the *unintentional* significance as well as the archaeological approach employed to a considerable degree in this study may significantly extend the information value this engaging, but obscure class of archaeological material for the understanding of cultures, societies, and history in Lower Nubia and beyond.