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Petroglyphs and Inscriptions along the Darb Ayn Amur, Kharga Oasis

Hierzu Tafel XXII–XXXI

Trade routes and the Darb Ayn Amur

A large part of any country's history is shaped by its internal trade and transportation routes, as well as its links with the outside world. Thus, a study of roads, caravan routes, and tracks sheds important light on a country's history, especially the different relationships between the various parts of a country, its relationship and accessibility to its neighbours, and its potential for controlling its borders and access to trade routes. The Kharga Oasis is one of the largest oases in Egypt's western desert (fig. 1). It has been a major part of the trade network connecting the Nile Valley to Egypt's other western oases, parts of the Sudan (e.g. Darfur), as well as to Libya¹. A long section of the Darb el-Arbain (the forty days road) passes through Kharga, and tracks connect the oasis to Uweinat and the Gilf Kebir on into Libya² (figs. 1, 2). Many of these important trade routes seem to have been extant since the Old Kingdom, if not earlier³. The evidence for the antiquity of many of these routes takes the form of lithics, pottery, petroglyphs, inscriptions, fortresses⁴, fortified caravanserais, and other, smaller, features.

One of the major arteries that connects the Dakhla Oasis⁵, Egypt's south westernmost oasis, through Kharga to the Nile Valley, is the Darb Ayn Amur. Leaving Dakhla, the Darb Ayn Amur climbs the flat plateau that divides the two oases, crosses the spring at Ayn Amur (Spring of the Beautiful One), whence it takes its name, enters Kharga, and carries on through the oasis, and onto the Nile Valley. This track was one of the two major routes between the two oases⁶, especially as it included a water source, and is consequently an important road to study if one is to understand the relationship between the two oases through time. Furthermore, generally speaking the northern part of the Kharga Oasis has been so far investigated only in a fragmentary way⁷. One aim of the North Kharga Oasis Sur-

⁵ Dakhla means "to enter". The name suggests that Dakhla Oasis was regarded as a point of entry into Egypt and marked its western frontier.

⁶ The second is the Darb el-Ghubbari, which went south from Dakhla, skirted around the base of the plateau, and entered Kharga without crossing any water source.

⁷ Aside from the excellent work of Ahmed Fakhry in the first half of the twentieth century, and the Predynastic survey undertaken by G. Caton-Thompson, little archaeological work had taken place in the Kharga Oasis until relatively recently, and its history was unknown. There has been much more archaeological work in Dakhla. The Dakhla Oasis Project, directed by A. Mills, has long been active, with a mission from the IFAO, and now Columbia University is working there too. In Kharga, the archaeological mission of the IFAO has been working for several years in the southern part of the oasis, notably at Douch. Thus, there is an understanding of the history and archaeology of the southern part of the oasis. However, little work has been done in the north until now. Recently Strasbourg University has started some work in the north,

¹ No doubt this role is reflected in its name. Kharga means "to go out".

² Each track has several names, and there are minor variations within these paths.

³ Petroglyphs suggest that many of these routes date to the Predynastic period. However, during that period these routes may have been less important than they became later, as the Predynastic landscape was much greener, and thus more routes with water and food sources would have been available to traders and travellers.

⁴ See Morkot 1996.

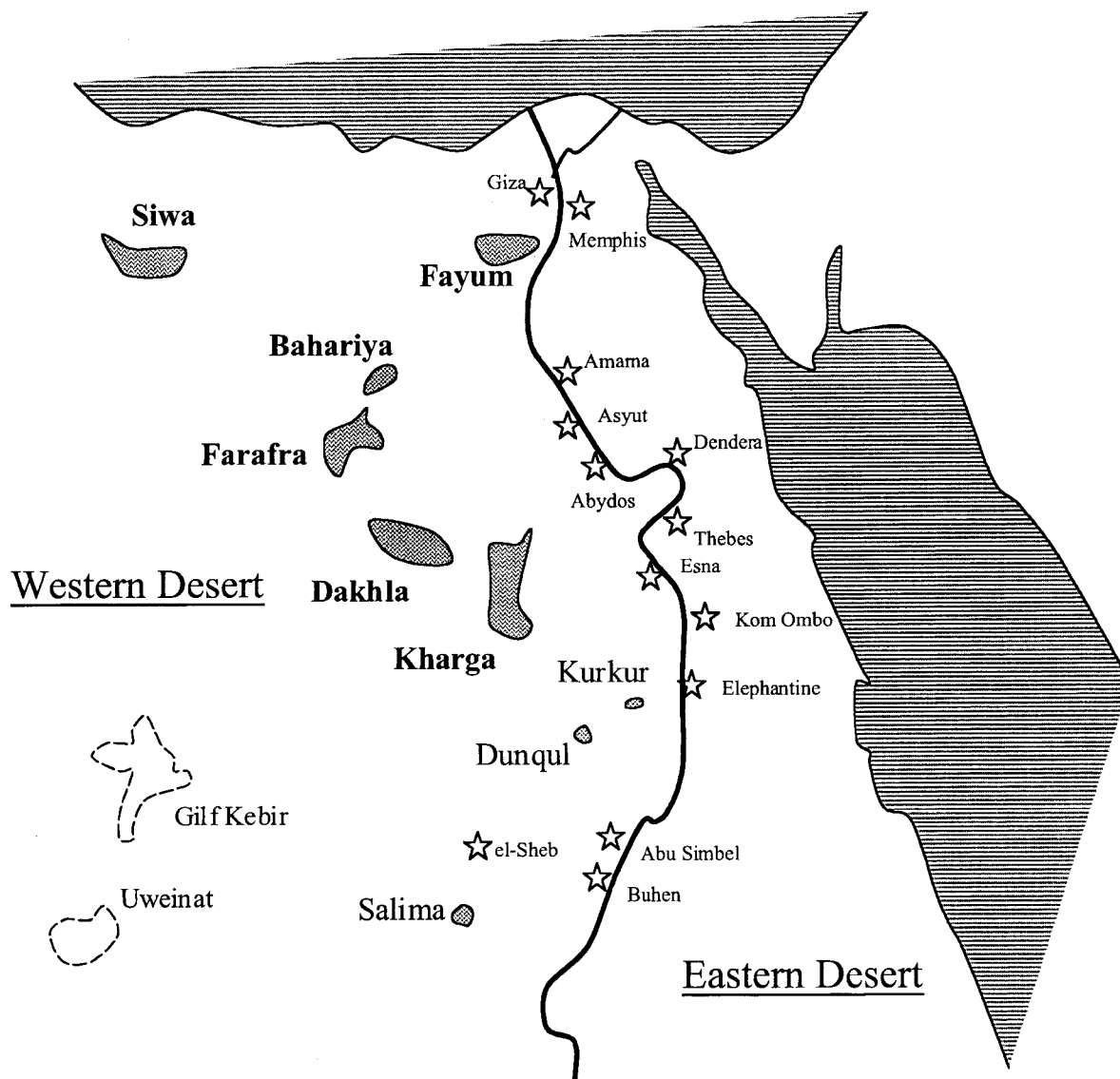


Fig. 1. Sketch map of Egypt with the most important oases and mountains of the Western Desert and some well-known archaeological sites along the Nile

vey (NKOS) is to reconstruct the network of connections existing in the oasis by mapping the caravan routes and documenting any archaeological evidence along them. This article focuses on the portion of the Darb Ayn Amur that stretches between Ayn Lebakha and Umm el-Dabadib, a distance of some eighteen kilometres. The reason that this portion of the track was first chosen for examination is that the other nineteenth and twentieth century antiquarians and archaeologists who had used the Darb Ayn Amur and recorded their observations either did not visit the area (such as A. Edmonstone and

H. E. Winlock⁸), or left a vague account of their travel (such as B. Drovetti⁹), and thus nothing is known about it.

together with the Supreme Council for Antiquities. The North Kharga Oasis Survey (NKOS) is also currently documenting the different sites and connecting routes in the northern portion of the oasis, including the Darb Ayn Amur. See Rossi 2000, Gascou and Wagner 1979.

⁸ Edmonstone 1822, Winlock 1936.

⁹ Drovetti (1822) wrote that "between Qasr Gebb el Sout and Qasr Ayn Amur, we found another little Oasis, formed by two villages, called Om El Debadeh

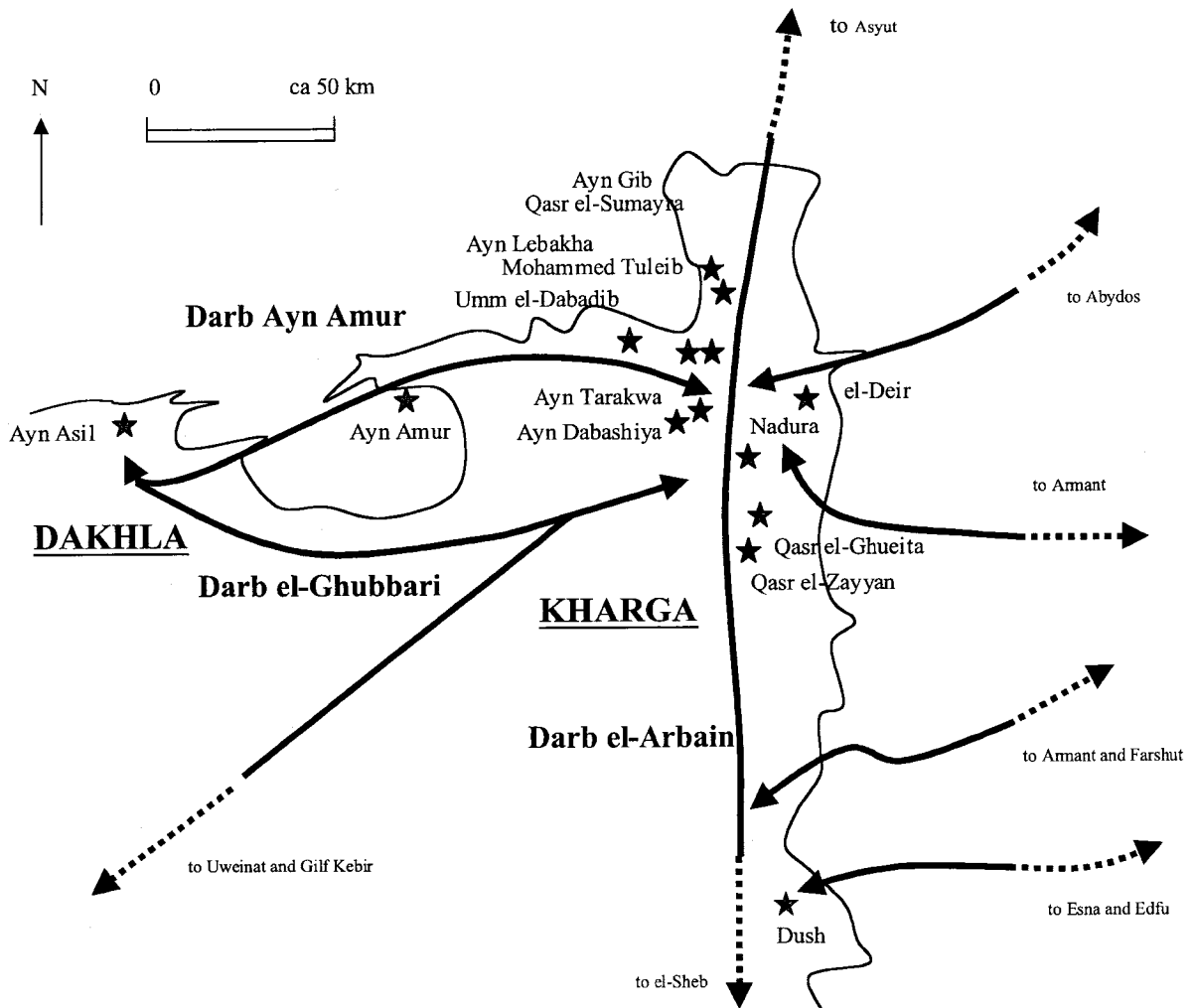


Fig. 2. Sketch map of the Kharga Oasis and its major caravan routes

The Darb Ayn Amur is punctuated by impressive mud-brick fortresses¹⁰, as is indeed the case with many of the routes found in Kharga. These buildings, some still standing over twenty metres high, date to the Roman Period (possibly constructed sometime during the early 2nd century AD, and used up to at least the fifth century AD by the Romans)¹¹. No doubt these are situated on top of, or surrounding, earlier settlements

and El Lengeh", evidently referring to Umm el-Dabadib and Ayn Lebakha. The two sites, however, are separated by 13 km of barren desert. Probably Drovetti visited one of the two and was told about the existence of the other.

¹⁰ The relationship between these fortresses has been briefly analysed by Wagner (1987). See also Morkot 1996.

¹¹ The fortresses in the northern part of the Oasis are currently being studied by the North Kharga Oasis Project and will be discussed in detail separately.

and structures. Certainly they were reused as Coptic monasteries, and continued to be used as stopping places through the Mamluk period¹², if not later. This chain of forts was built to control the routes at the southern border of Roman Empire, while utilising available water sources. The starting point for exploring this part of the Darb Ayn Amur was the fortress of Ayn Lebakha. The site, situated near a spring, is comprised not only for a fortress, but also of town mounds, two temples, and two necropoleis¹³. The termi-

¹² A few glazed sherds (green) dating of the fourteenth/fifteenth centuries AD were found at Umm el-Dabadib. We are grateful to G. Scanlon and R. Wade-Haddon for the identification of these fragments.

¹³ Work at different portions of the site of Ayn Lebakha is being carried out by the SCA (settlement), Strasbourg University (necropolis) and NKOS (fortress).

nation point for this section of the route was the enormous fortress of Umm el-Dabadib, located near a spring, with its surrounding settlement, irrigation system (still operational until the 1950⁷–), religious buildings, and tombs.

The Itinerary

As mentioned above, the section of the Darb Ayn Amur between Umm el-Dabadib and Ayn Lebakha has never been documented, is now rarely used and is therefore unclear. Thus, the first task was to establish the route. At the very north-eastern point of Umm el-Dabadib stands a much ruined square mudbrick tower. Taking advantage of the topography, it is oriented along a northeast-southwest axis, with its entrance on the south-western side so that it overlooks a large path that skirts around the edge of the escarpment, and goes on towards Ayn Lebakha. This could tentatively be identified as a check point on the Darb Ayn Amur route, leading to Ayn Lebakha, and must have been the “official” access to the track. Surprisingly, at Ayn Lebakha, thus far, no obvious guardpost or marker indicating access to the fortress and settlement of Umm el-Dabadib via the Darb Ayn Amur has been found.

As the crow flies, the east-west distance between the forts of Ayn Lebakha and Umm el-Dabadib is only about 13 km, but the characteristics of the desert in that area (long north-south rock outcrops, narrow and deep wadis, chains of barchan dunes) do not allow of an easy journey. It is possible to drive from one site to the other, but the route for a 4 × 4 vehicle between the two fortresses starts south of Ayn Lebakha, follows a complicated line across high sand dunes and enters the plain of Umm el-Dabadib from south. Thus, Corinna Rossi, accompanied by Adriano Molinaro and Saad Fuad, decided to walk the ancient track¹⁴. This track was marked

with camel and human footprints, as well as with motorbike tracks, along its entirety. The actual length of the track is about 18 km.

The Darb Ayn Amur between these two fortresses runs along a fairly parallel line to the high plateau which represents the north-western border of the oasis’ depression (fig. 3). The edge of the plateau is cut by wadis where the sand blown from the northern wind accumulates and generates chains of dunes. These dunes move slowly and inexorably southward across the whole depression, swallowing whatever comes across their path. The track between Umm el-Dabadib and Ayn Lebakha crosses several north-south wadis filled with “barchan” (half-moon shaped) dunes. In some cases the dunes proceed at some distance from one another, in other cases, especially closer to Umm el-Dabadib, wadis are filled almost to the top by huge waves of sand. The central part of the track, however, wends its way across a mountainous landscape through narrow winding wadis deeply incised by the wind and the rare, but fierce, rainstorms. However, for the most part, the route was relatively easy to find as it was marked by foot and hoof prints, and changes in direction were marked by a few cairns whose date was indeterminable. Some cairns were added during this trek in order to facilitate finding the path for future travellers.

The 18 km walk between the two sites (which, due to logistical difficulties was done as a round-trip) took seven hours the first time, including the time spent to record the material found along the way. The return journey, by the same route, took only four hours on the following day when “camel speed” was attained by the trekkers, according to Saad Fuad, the desert guide. Corinna Rossi and Adriano Molinaro recorded the route by plotting nineteen significant points on a Global Positioning System (GPS), a Garmin GPS II. The GPS establishes the latitude and longitude of a point through the position of eight geostationary satellites, and this model is accurate to within fifty metres. Along

¹⁴ For the organisation of the expedition C. Rossi wishes to thank Inspector Ibrahim Bahghat of Kharga Oasis, the guide Saad Fuad, Rawya Ismail of the Egypt Exploration Society, Cairo, and Claudio Aiolfi. Special thanks to Adriano Molinaro, who trekked with her and

helped to record the itinerary. The expedition took place in April 1999, and was generously funded by Christ’s College and the Worts Travelling Scholars Fund, University of Cambridge.

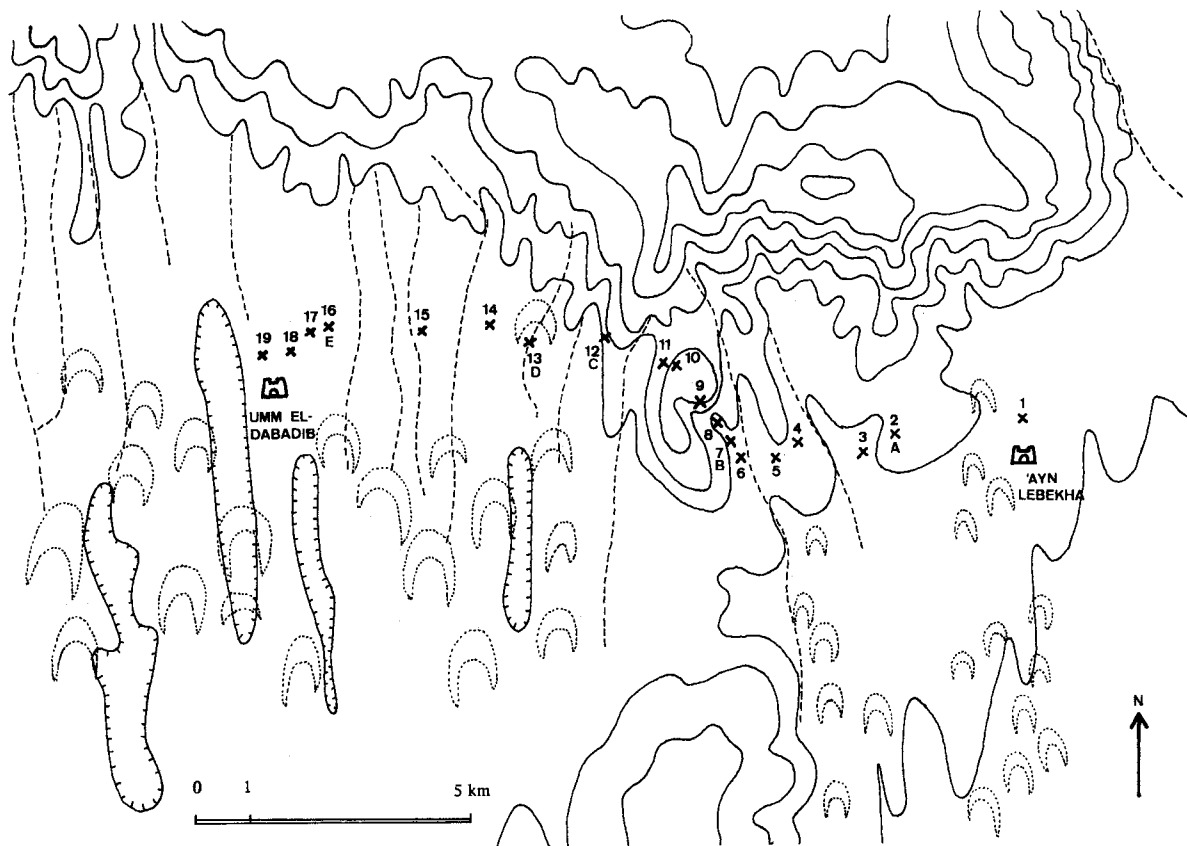


Fig. 3. Map of the area between the Roman fortresses of Umm el-Dabadib and Ayn Lebakha with GPS points and archaeological sites recorded in 1999

the route, several interesting inscriptions were noted and recorded, and marked by the GPS (fig. 4). Point 1 was taken in the area of the large temple at Ayn Lebakha, and point 19 corresponds to the southern edge of the northern settlement¹⁵. All drawings included in this article are by C. Rossi.

Graffiti and Archaeological Remains

The track between Umm el-Dabadib and Ayn Lebakha was punctuated by several examples of carved graffiti from different periods. The majority of the graffiti seem to be Bedouin marks, although there are some Pharaonic, Greek, Demotic and Arabic inscriptions, in addition to crude drawings of indeterminate periods. In several areas it was quite difficult to separate the

marks as they were so overwritten as well as being very weathered as the soft sandstone is easily abraded and eroded by the action of wind and sand. There was little pottery found along the route, and few architectural features of any kind. The paucity of architectural features is hardly surprising as it only takes between four to seven hours to get from one fortification to the other, thus no large-scale way-stations would have been necessary as shelter could be found under an overhang or rocky outcrop in the escarpment. As one might expect, the graffiti discovered along this route generally appear in such shaded places. The absence of guard-towers would suggest that this was a relatively secure route or one that could be speedily defended by the soldiers stationed at the forts that mark its beginning and end. Of course, it is possible that any towers that originally overlooked, or were associated with, the route have now vanished or might have been missed.

¹⁵ See Rossi 2000, fig. 7.

GPS points	Archaeological sites	Short description	Tafel	GPS points	Archaeological sites	Short description	Tafel
1		starting point, area of the temple at Ayn Lebakha		12	C	narrow wadi with Greek, and hieroglyphic inscriptions and graffiti	XXIII a, b, XXIV a, b
2	A	denuded remains of rectangular huts		13	D	rock covered by graffiti and rock-drawings of various periods	XXV a, b XXVI a, b XXVII a, b XXVIII a, b XXIX a, b XXX a, b XXXI a
3		wadi with motorbike tyre marks					
4		chain of barchan dunes					
5		cairn		14		cairn (vertical slab of stone)	
6		ridge		15		descending wadi	
7	B	narrow wadi with hieroglyphic inscription	XXII a	16	E	pass with graffiti	XXXI b
8		90° turn in the wadi		17		last pass with a view of Umm el-Dabadib	
9		large wadi with point of arrow	XXII b	18		vaulted rooms of Umm el-Dabadib	
10		cairn		19		night camp at Umm el-Dabadib, southern edge of the northern settlement	
11		pass					

Fig. 4. Summary of the itinerary (see fig. 3)

Site A, located not far from Ayn Lebakha, surprisingly is the only area which had signs of architectural remains. The site consists of the very denuded remains of rectangular huts, sheltered by the side of a small wadi. The irregular walls, made of small slabs of stone, had an average length of 2 metres and were surrounded by small and much weathered fragments of pottery. From here the route crossed a small wadi where motorbike tyre marks were visible, and a "river" of barchan dunes, then climbed a small hill marked by a cairn and reached a little plateau leading to a narrow wadi marked as Site B.

Here on the west side of the path, a group of graffiti was found (Tafel XXIIa). The upper and right parts of the inscription appear to have fallen off long ago. The broken sign on the left was probably a five-point star, recorded as an XVIII Dynasty mason's mark¹⁶. The sign on the

left below the star is a representation of female genitals, one of the most common signs left by either the evidently lonely soldiers that served in the desert, or wandering Bedouins¹⁷, whilst the sign in the centre might be a *w3s* sceptre¹⁸. Giddy reported that the same sign was found on a sandstone fragment among Old Kingdom sherds at Halfat el-Bir in Dakhla¹⁹.

A series of turns leads down to a flat plain where a few flint implements have been washed from the narrow wadi, with the most striking one being the large point of a lance or spear

¹⁷ Winkler 1939, pp. 8, 9, 13, 16 and plate IX.3; Hellström and Langballe 1970, corpus Aa9-16.

¹⁸ The *w3s* sceptre might be related to building activities, since it is recorded as the name of a sub-gang of workmen involved in the construction of the pyramid complexes of Snefru, Khufu and Menkaure (Rowe 1942. See also Petrie 1910, pl. V.2, and Reisner 1931, plan XII, Sa3-North face, Sa3-Top, Cheops 5, 79 and 80).

¹⁹ Giddy 1987, p. 255.

¹⁶ Badawy 1965, fig. 13.

(Tafel XXIIb). The path, marked by a cairn, then climbed a small hill and reached another narrow wadi, marked as Site C. Two Greek inscriptions were found here. One was visible (Tafel XXIIIa), but the other was too eroded and faint to copy. According to Dr Sarah Clackson, the first is a three-line Greek inscription of Roman/Byzantine date, whose meaning may be “Good luck to Anoubion (the) Mauros” (alternatively “Good luck to Anoubion son of Mauros” or “Good luck to Anoubion and to Mauros”).

She prefers to interpret the term Mauros in this text as a personal name rather than an ethnic designation, but acknowledges that it might be tempting to see Anoubion as a member of the Ala Maurorum which is known to have had connections with Kharga (Wagner, 1987, 29, no. 11; 386). As to the date of this inscription, she suggests a 4th-century date based on stylistic grounds: similar short inscriptions beginning with the ‘good luck’ formula have been found elsewhere in the Oasis (for example, Wagner, 1987, 33, no. 34; 34, no. 37; 36, nos. 45, 48; 41, no. 61; 54, no. 7; 59, no. 1).

As the path turns south, a large flat boulder is located at the corner. Here travellers from different periods have left their marks, one on top of the other (Tafel XXIIIb). The majority of these are undecipherable. In instances when there are several such signs a relative chronology can be worked out if the signs overlap, but it is impossible to establish an absolute date for any of these marks. On the right, a figure of a king wearing the red crown is most clear, although it remains difficult to date²⁰. One other mark on the bottom right might possibly be a drawing of a tool, similar to those listed by Hellström and Langballe²¹.

Almost in front of the boulder another graffito was carved into the rock of the cliff. The carving, located quite high on the rock, and

probably made by someone who was mounted on a camel, is a *wasm*, a Bedouin tribal mark²² (Tafel XXIVa). At a distance of a few metres an Old Kingdom inscription was found on a stone that appeared to have fallen beside the path (Tafel XXIVb). The area was searched for any other remaining portions of the inscription, but nothing was found. Most probably the stone was already in situ by the path when the inscription was carved on it. It appears to be the title of a scribe, *sš hry w3d.t*, but the precise meaning of the inscription is not straightforward. With the help of various experts, we explored several possibilities, none of them entirely satisfactory. One solution is that the scribe might have been the “head of the *wadjt*” meant as one of the *phyles*, the groups of workmen of the pharaoh, but Dr Ann Macy Roth noted that this spelling for *wadjt* is not attested for the Old Kingdom. Dr Dilwyn Jones suggested that the whole inscription might simply be the name of the scribe Hor-Wadjt²³, but Dr Stephan Seidlmayer was not convinced by the spelling and suggested that the title might be indeed “scribe in charge of the *wadjt* ...”, possibly with a final element missing, the *wadjt* being not the *phyle* but some other words from the same root but with a different meaning. Even if the precise meaning must remain for the moment unclear, it is important to note that the palaeography suggests a date between Dynasty IV–VI. This fits in very well with the chronology of Ayn Asil, the important Old Kingdom settlement in the Dakhla Oasis from which several other important caravan routes departed, beside the Darb Ayn Amur and the Darb el-Ghubbari (fig. 2).

Site D is located in the flat area not too far from the escarpment (point 13, fig. 3), in an area dominated by a large rock. This sandstone rock, together with tumbled boulders around it, was covered by a remarkable concentration of drawings and graffiti from various periods. A

²⁰ An early representation of the king wearing the red crown only can be found on Cairo Fragment 2 of the Palermo Stone (JdE 39735, see Wilkinson 2000, fig. 7), but the style of the representation is different.

²¹ Hellström and Langballe 1970, corpus W 24.

²² Harding King recorded the use of this *wasm* in the early twenty-first century in the desert around Dakhla (Harding-King 1925, p. 180).

²³ Ranke 1935, p. 246 [14] = Berlin 7286. Thanks also to Dr. Stephen Quirke and Professor Patrizia Piccentini for their help with this inscription.

particularly interesting incised graffito depicts a naked man with upraised hands (in praise or supplication?), next to a grid made of very faintly incised lines (Tafel XXVa). H. Winkler has attributed human figures in a similar posture to the so-called “Earliest Hunters”, contemporary with the Amratian/Naqada I culture²⁴, but the style of this representation suggests a later date, possibly well into the Dynastic Period. Similar images are recorded in Hellström and Langballe’s corpus²⁵. It is strange that the hands and feet are so truncated.

The largest flat surface of the rock hosts a series of superimposed signs dating to various periods (Tafel XXVb). The sketch of a crocodile²⁶ and a man holding a lance and a shield in the centre, accompanied by some hieroglyphs (hard to make out), and the large boat on the right²⁷ seem to point to the Old Kingdom, although the man might be a later addition. A few triangular depictions of female genitalia also adorn the rock together with Arabic graffiti, and perhaps *wuṣūm*, Bedouin marks. On the extreme right of the rock is a depiction showing a man carrying a water pot, with an unidentifiable animal standing beside him. This resembles some other Arab sketches found in the Dakhla Oasis²⁸. The shrine-like depiction on the right might date to the pharaonic period, although the foot carved next to it might suggest a later date. Another more clearly identifiable shrine appears in a different area of the rock (Tafel XXVIa). It appears to represent a portable shrine, and is doubtless of pharaonic date, from the New Kingdom or later.

²⁴ Winkler 1938, pl. XXXI, 1; Winkler 1939, p. 32 for the chronology and pl. XIII, 2 for a similar figure.

²⁵ Hellström and Langballe 1970, corpus numbers A 155, 160 and 172.

²⁶ For other representations of crocodiles, see Winkler 1938, pl. XXVI, 1, XXVI, 2 and XXVII, 1 and for the dramatic graffito found in the Dakhla Oasis see Winkler 1939, pl. IV, 2. Note that in all these cases, the crocodiles are represented as if seen from the top, whilst this one is shown from the side.

²⁷ See Hellström and Langballe 1970, corpus 89 B and 153 a, b.

²⁸ See, for example, Winkler 1939, plates IV, 1 and V, 2.

The rock also had an unusual drawing showing a long-horned cow with a calf next to it. The cow’s body contained a Demotic inscription which is difficult to decipher (Tafel XXVIb). According to John Ray, its translation may be “Psenpsais whose mother is Rwtý(?)”, and it might have been carved during the late Ptolemaic or early Roman period.

Depictions of human feet (*plantae pedis*) are scattered over the rock’s surface. They could be of any period, though such representations enjoyed the greatest popularity in the Graeco-Roman era, and are found in both the Eastern and Western deserts²⁹. These mark the path of pilgrims or are a simple record of someone’s presence in a specific area. Z. Žába recorded a case of a man called Lukas who even signed his footprint³⁰. Apart from those visible in Tafel XXVb, two more *plantae pedis* were copied from another section of the same rock (Tafel XXVIIa, b). The foot shown in Tafel XXVIIa, looks as if there is a sandal strap around the ankle. In the vicinity of the graffito shown in Tafel XXVIIa there was a shallow depression in the surface of the rock in the shape of a human hand. Hand prints are also quite common images left in the desert. In the Islamic period hand prints are not only a mark of someone’s presence at a particular site, but, attached to the symbolism of the hand of Fatima, possess apotropaic significance.

Another image showing a standing human figure clasping a stick with a standard in front of it (Tafel XXVIIIa) might date back to the late Predynastic period. In particular, Toby Wilkinson pointed out the similarity between the beaky head of this figure and those found in the painted tomb at Hierakonpolis, dating to Naqada IIc³¹. A very similar human figure was found in Dakhla by Winkler, accompanied by animals drawn in the Arab style³². Other representations of animals found at the site might date to this later period (Tafel XXVIIIb, XXIXa). Tafel

²⁹ Winkler 1939, p. 13 and pl. IX, 2; Hellström and Langballe 1970, corpus Aa1–Aa8 and Aa17–Aa32.

³⁰ Žába 1974, p. 202.

³¹ Quibell and Green 1902, pls. LXXV–LXXVIII.

³² For both, cfr. Winkler 1939, pl. I, 2.

XXVIIIb shows a sign consisting of two interlocked V's, which appears to be a cattle brand³³. It also appears on the hindquarters of the bovid (?) on top of the drawing, as well as on the middle of the bull depicted in the lower part of the drawing. The lower bull is interesting in that it has a ground line. The tails of these cattle and the obviously male canid (or might it be a donkey?) are very distinctive. Other images illustrated in Tafel XXVIIIb show a small canid (upper right), a foot, possibly a bird (Coptic?), and vulvae.

Tafel XXIXa shows more vulvae, some random signs, perhaps Bedouin, a canid or, following Pontus and Hellström, a 'doubtful mammal' on the right. A horned animal on the lower right is similar to one found by Žába above a Meroitic inscription in the region of Abu Handle³⁴. Tafel XXIXb shows a long-horned cow. Unlike the ones depicted in Tafel XXVIIIb, this cow has a straight tail with no 'tassel', and probably also dates to the Arab period³⁵. The cow shown in Tafel XXXa has a tasselled tail and is lyre-horned. Its head is shown frontally, like that of the bull in Tafel XXVIIIb. A vulva is shown to the right of the cow. Tafel XXXb shows a 'doubtful mammal', perhaps a canid³⁶.

Different sorts of animals are a frequent subject in rock art. Animals are represented for a variety of reasons: they are carved as a statement of possessions, as a representation of game, or for the purposes of sympathetic magic. The most frequently depicted animals along this section of the Darb Ayn Amur are cattle and canids. Quite possibly near Ayn Amur gazelles will be more commonly depicted as they frequent the green area around the spring. The rock also hosted a number of undatable signs, illustrated in Tafel XXXIa, as well as groups of

faded and illegible graffiti. These signs could be of Bedouin origin or made by other travellers.

The next portion of the track runs up and down a sequence of large wadis filled by barchan dunes. In the middle of one of these lies a large yardang, a lacustrine deposit eroded by the northern wind, more than 10 m high. The size of this yardang indicates that the huge lake which covered the depression must have kept this area submerged for hundreds of years. Smaller yardangs appear at the bottom of other wadis in the same area (and can also be seen along the paved road north of the town of Kharga and in the southern part of the oasis en route to Baris). Prehistoric settlements, or indications of prehistoric activity, are often found near yardangs; however nothing obvious was noticed on this visit near the massive yardang that was located along the Darb Ayn Amur.

In this last portion of the track the path was clear, but this might have been a minor branch of the route. Heavy-loaded caravans might have found it easier to head north and march closer to the scarp. This is probably one reason why no archaeological material was found near Umm el-Dabadib. The only graffiti discovered (Tafel XXXIb) was located on the left-hand side of the narrow passage leading to the last large wadi (now partially occupied by barchan dunes) before the plain of Umm el-Dabadib (Site E). It consisted of some incised lines that could have been carved at any period, but are most probably made by Bedouins.

Conclusions

Although it is premature to draw many conclusions from the assortment of graffiti and sites found on this section of the Darb Ayn Amur that runs between Ayn Lebakha and Umm el-Dabadib, one can make some general observations. The prehistoric evidence that was found (flint implements) confirms that this portion of Kharga was also, like much of the rest of the oasis, occupied for several thousand years³⁷. As one might

³³ This sign, however, is not classified as a *wasm* on the available publications on the subject (Winkler 1937, Goyon 1957, pp. 169–70; see also MacMichael 1913).

³⁴ Žába 1974, fig. 14.

³⁵ Hellström and Langballe 1970: Corpus C 96 and C 217 provide close parallels, as does Winkler 1939, plate I.2.

³⁶ Hellström and Langballe 1970, corpus P 103 and P 104.

³⁷ Caton-Thompson 1952, Simmons and Mandel 1986.

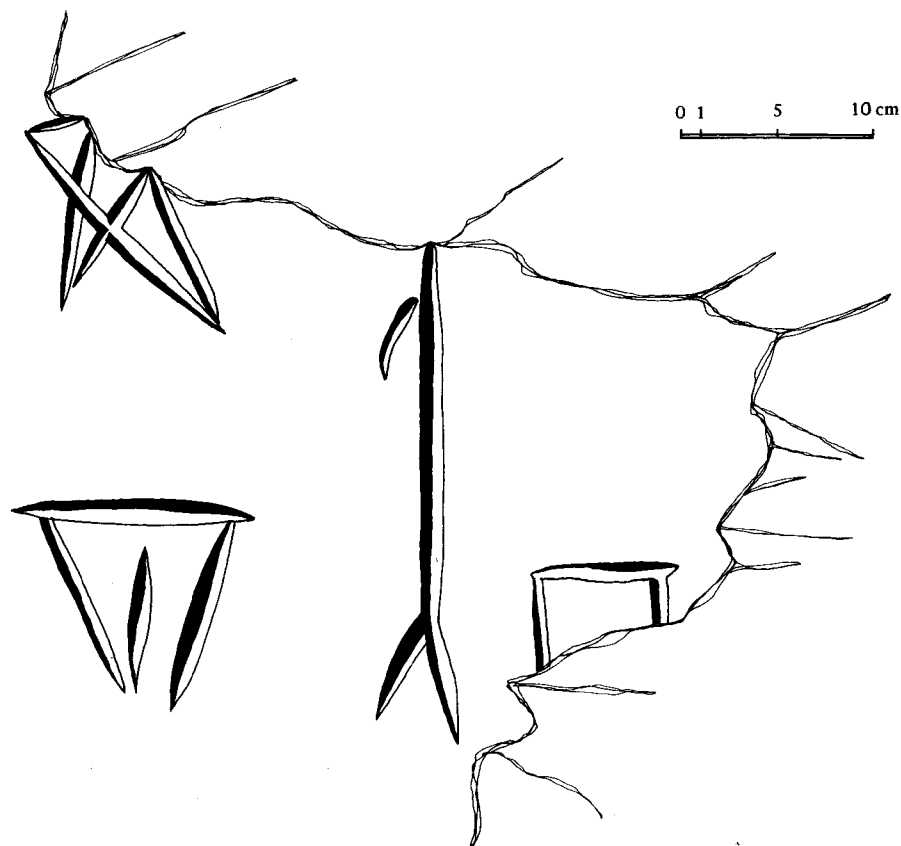
expect, there is plentiful evidence of the track's usage from Graeco-Roman times on through the Arab period. The very important find of hieroglyphic graffiti pushes the date of pharaonic presence back into the Old Kingdom, a period poorly attested in Kharga. It also provides a possible link with Ayn Asil in Dakhla. Future research in the area and along the longer track of the Darb Ayn Amur between Umm el-Dabadib and Ayn Amur may prove extremely important in understanding the relationship that existed during the Old Kingdom between the complex settlement at Ayn Asil in Dakhla, and the still elusive Old Kingdom activities in the Kharga Oasis.

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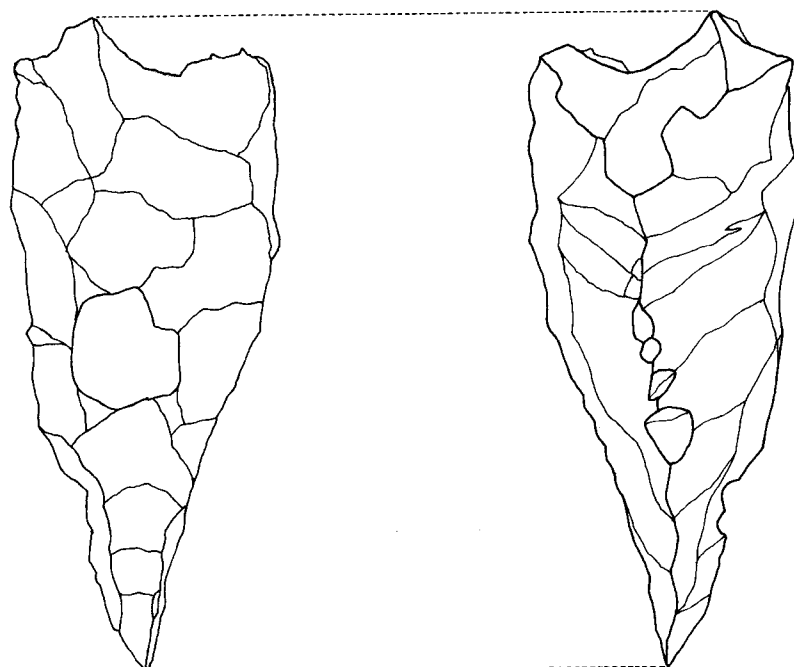
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SUMMARY

This brief article contains the result of a preliminary exploration of part of the Darb Ayn Amur, one of the two caravan routes that connected the Oases of Dakhla and Kharga. The prehistoric, Greek and Arab material collected along the way finds many parallels in the body of graffiti, rock-drawings and inscriptions recorded elsewhere in the Western Desert, and confirms that the track was used by travellers of all periods. The presence of Old Kingdom graffiti is particularly important not only because it provides new evidence concerning Old Kingdom activity in Kharga Oasis, but also because it links Kharga to the period of maximum expansion of the powerful Old Kingdom settlement at Ayn Asil in Dakhla.

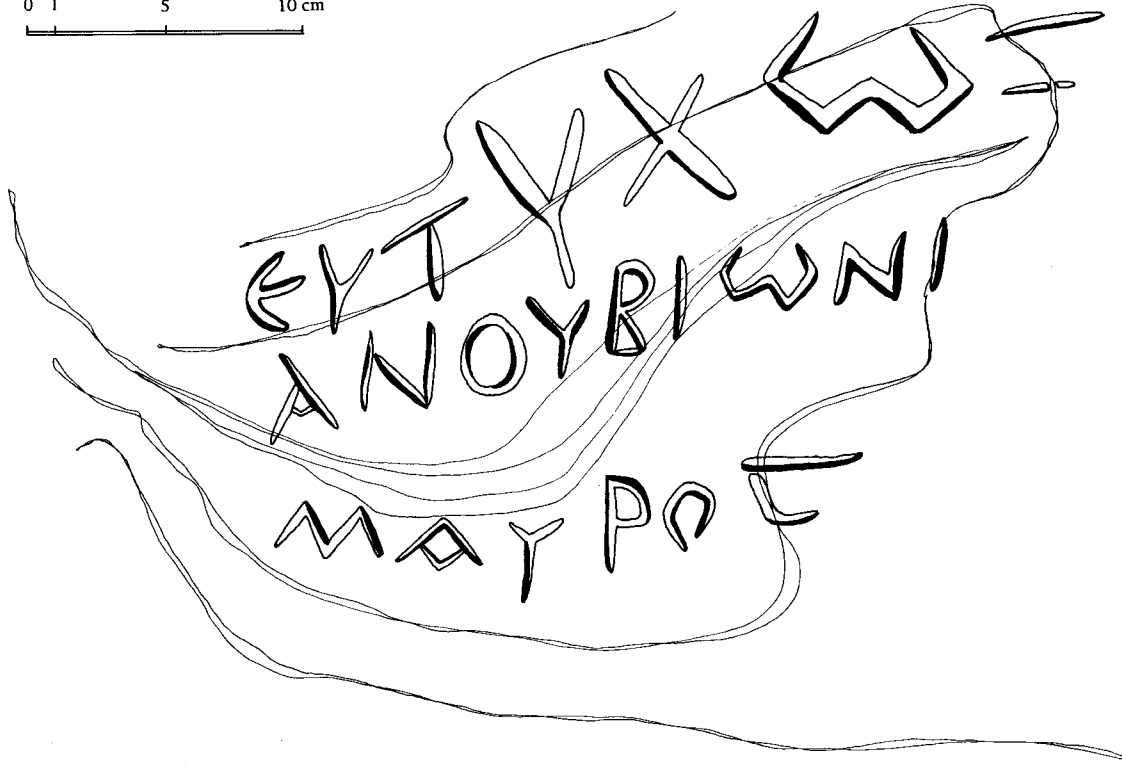


a) Dynastic graffiti from Site B (zu Rossi and Ikram, Petroglyphs)



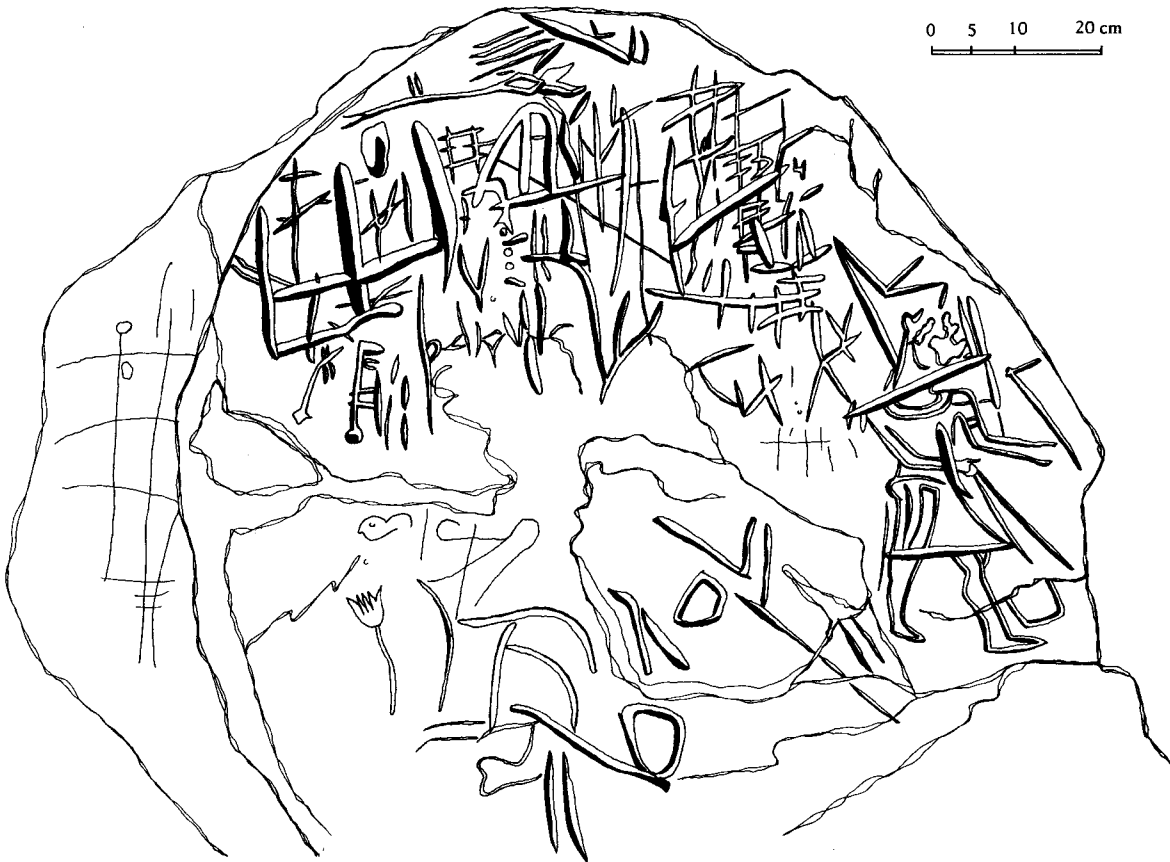
b) Point of a lance or spear (zu Rossi and Ikram, Petroglyphs)

0 1 5 10 cm

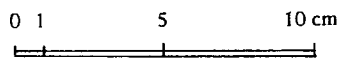
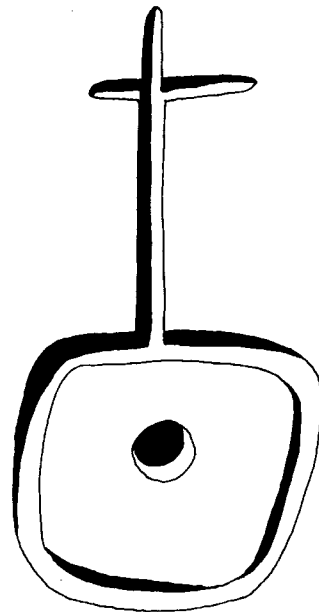


a) Greek inscription from Site C (zu Rossi and Ikram, Petroglyphs)

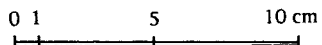
0 5 10 20 cm



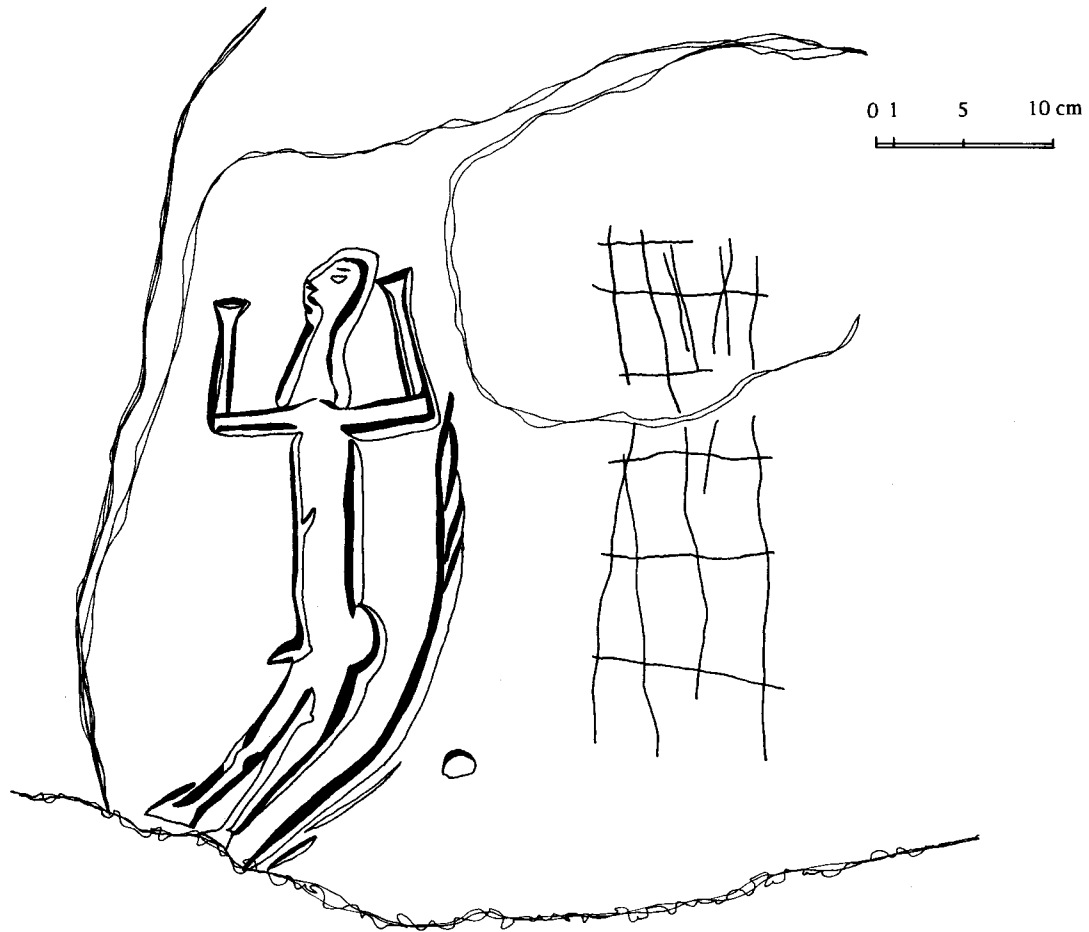
b) Graffiti from Site C (zu Rossi and Ikram, Petroglyphs)



a) Bedouin tribal mark (*wasm*) from Site C (zu Rossi and Ikram, Petroglyphs)



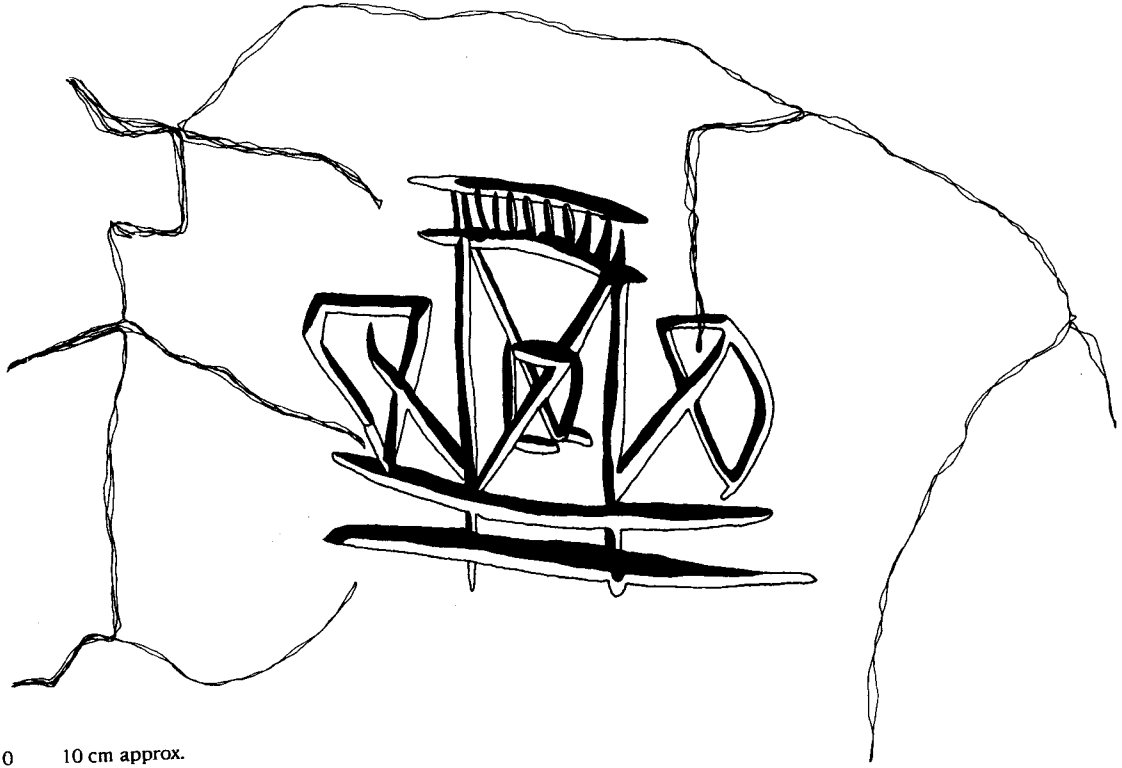
b) IV—VI Dynasty hieroglyphic inscription from Site C (zu Rossi and Ikram, Petroglyphs)



a) Dynastic (?) graffito from Site D (zu Rossi and Ikram, Petroglyphs)

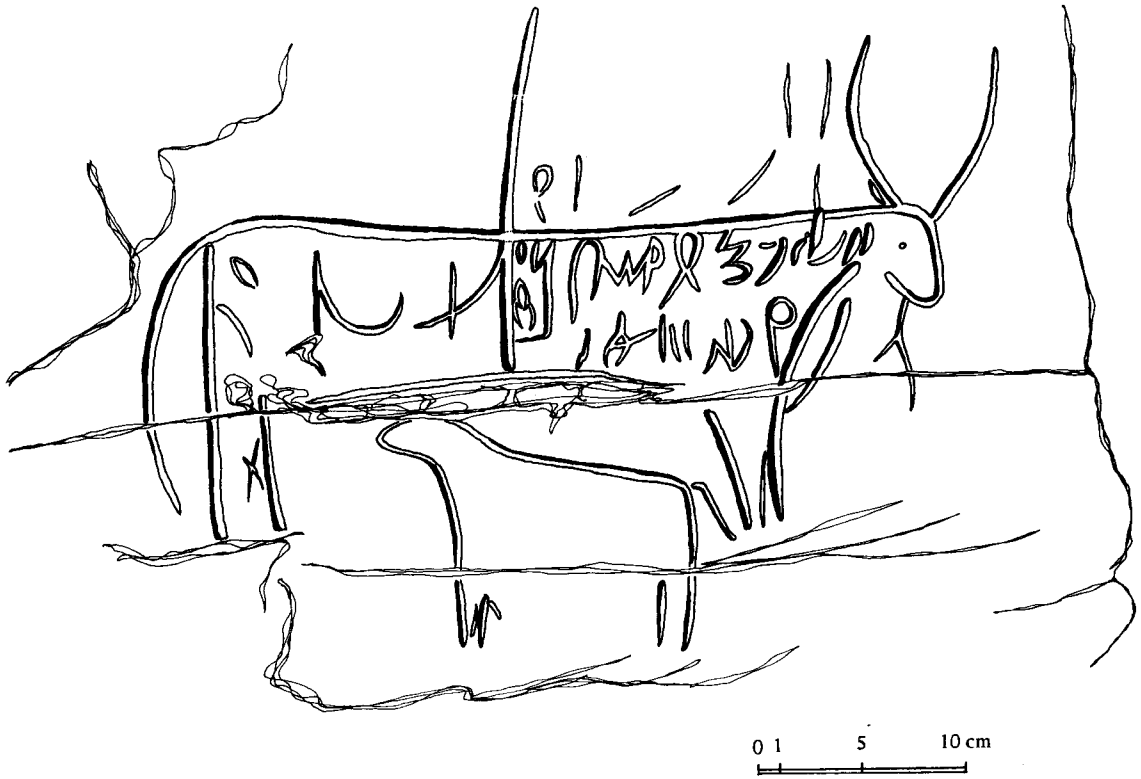


b) Graffiti of various periods from Site D (zu Rossi and Ikram, Petroglyphs)



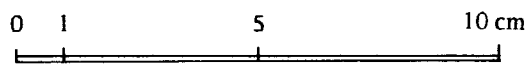
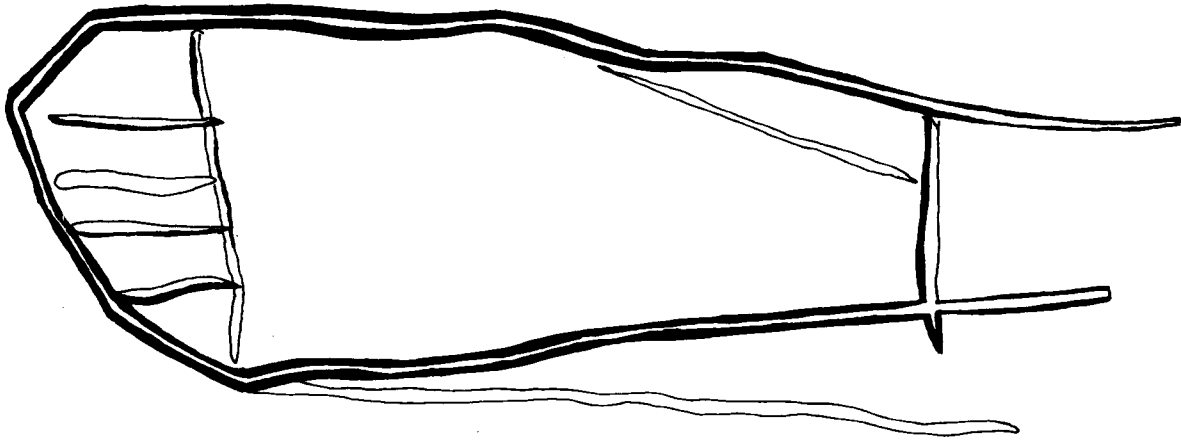
0 10 cm approx.
└──────────┘

a) New Kingdom or Late Period (?) representations of a portable shrine from Site D (zu Rossi and Ikram, Petroglyphs)

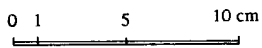
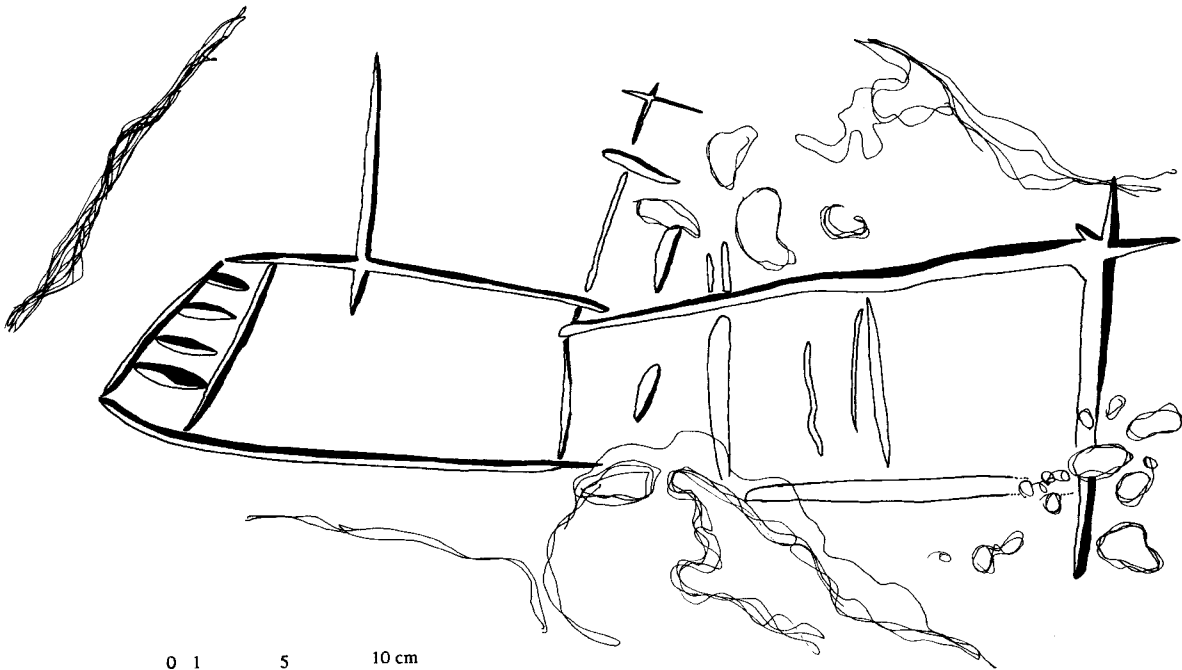


0 1 5 10 cm
└──────────┘

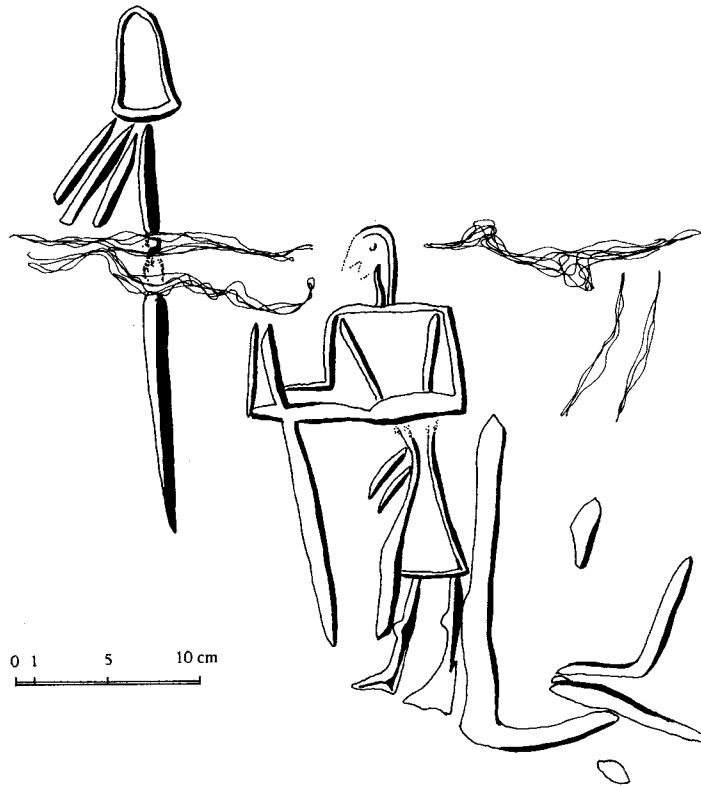
b) Graffito of a cow with a calf and a Demotic inscription from Site D (zu Rossi and Ikram, Petroglyphs)



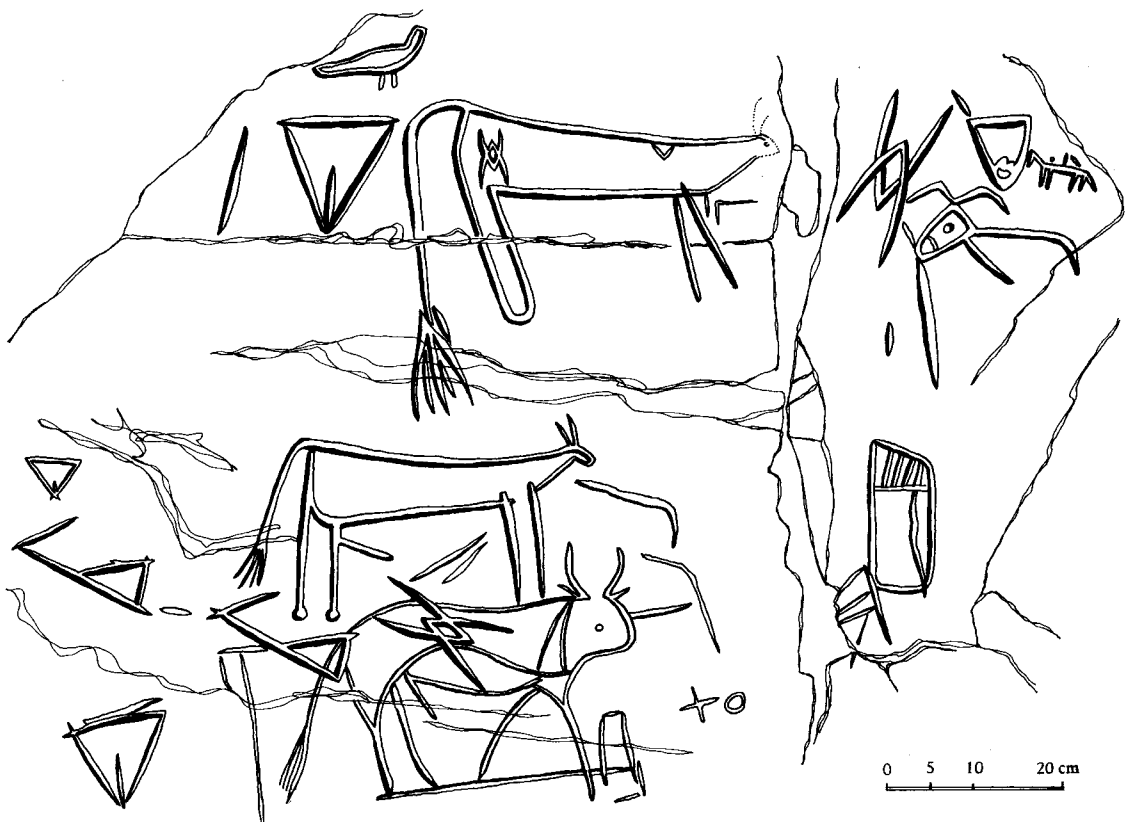
a) *Planta pedis* with sandal from Site D (zu Rossi and Ikram, Petroglyphs)



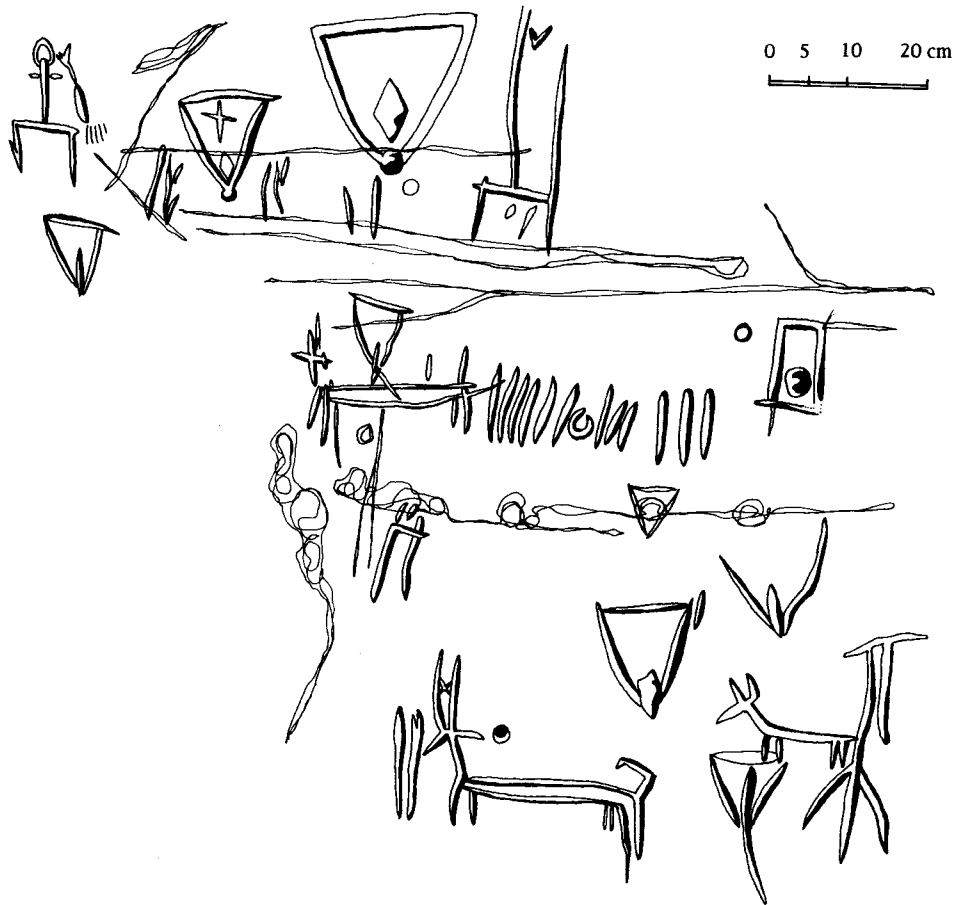
b) *Planta pedis* from Site D (zu Rossi and Ikram, Petroglyphs)



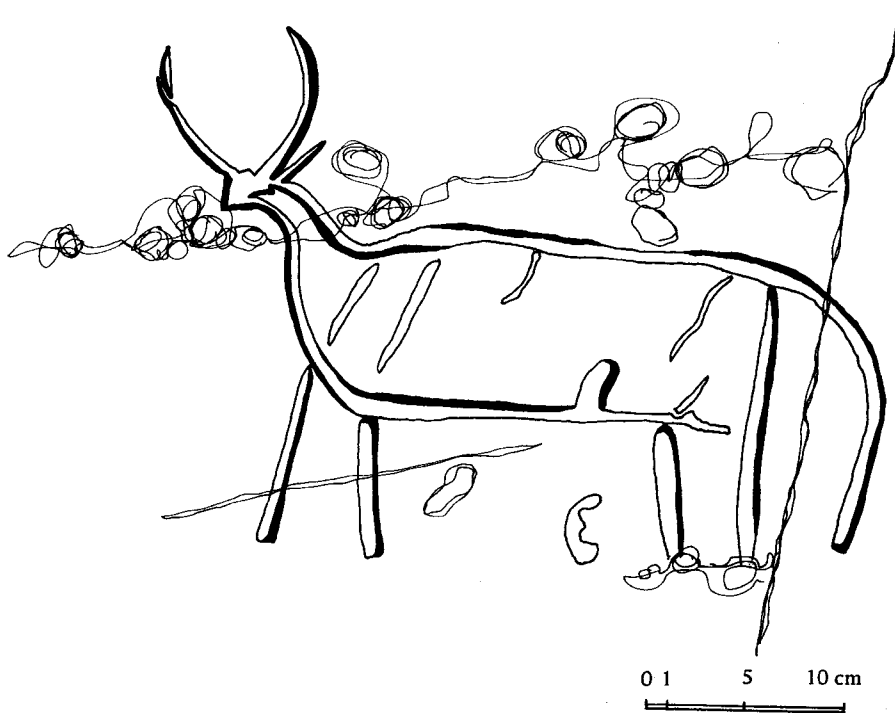
a) Late Predynastic (?) human figure from Site D (zu Rossi and Ikram, Petroglyphs)



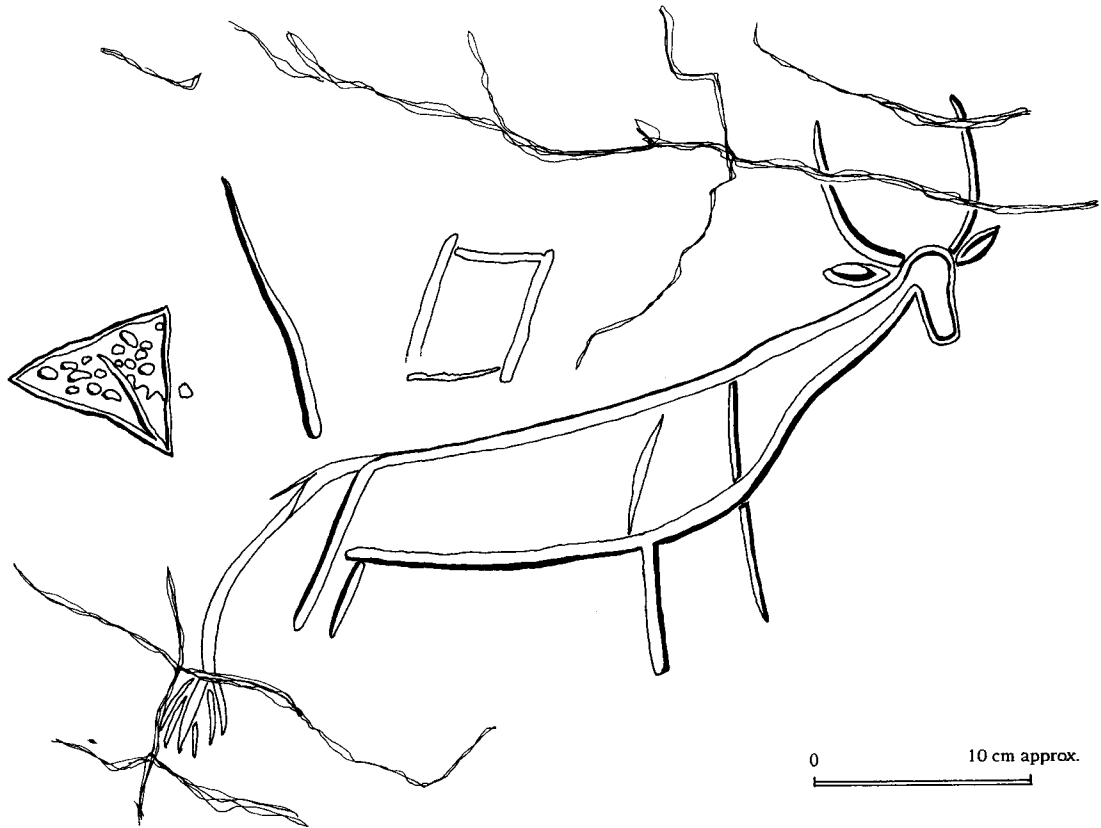
b) Arab and Bedouin graffiti from Site D (zu Rossi and Ikram, Petroglyphs)



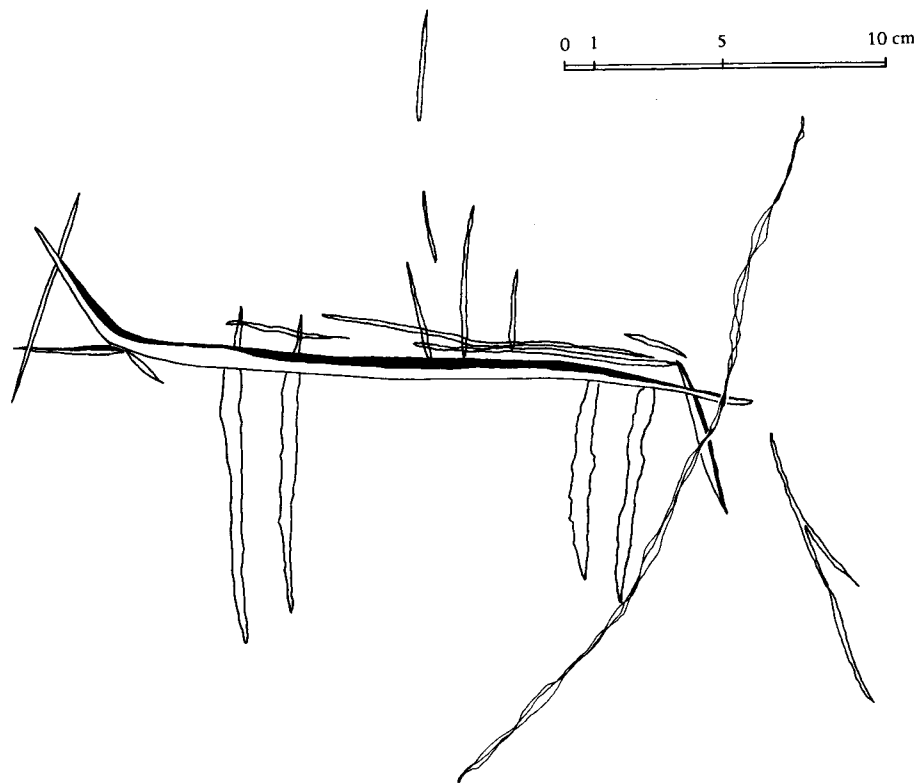
a) Arab and Bedouin graffiti from Site D (zu Rossi and Ikram, Petroglyphs)



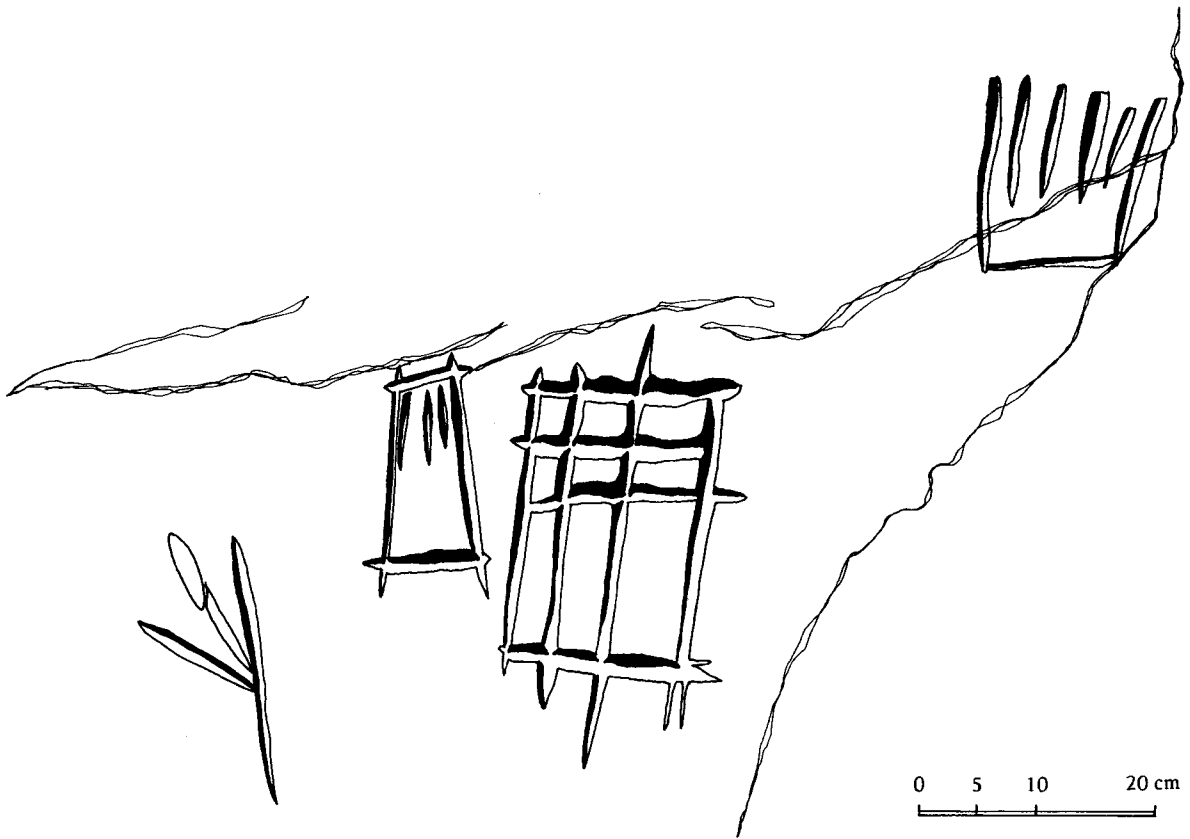
b) Arab graffito from Site D (zu Rossi and Ikram, Petroglyphs)



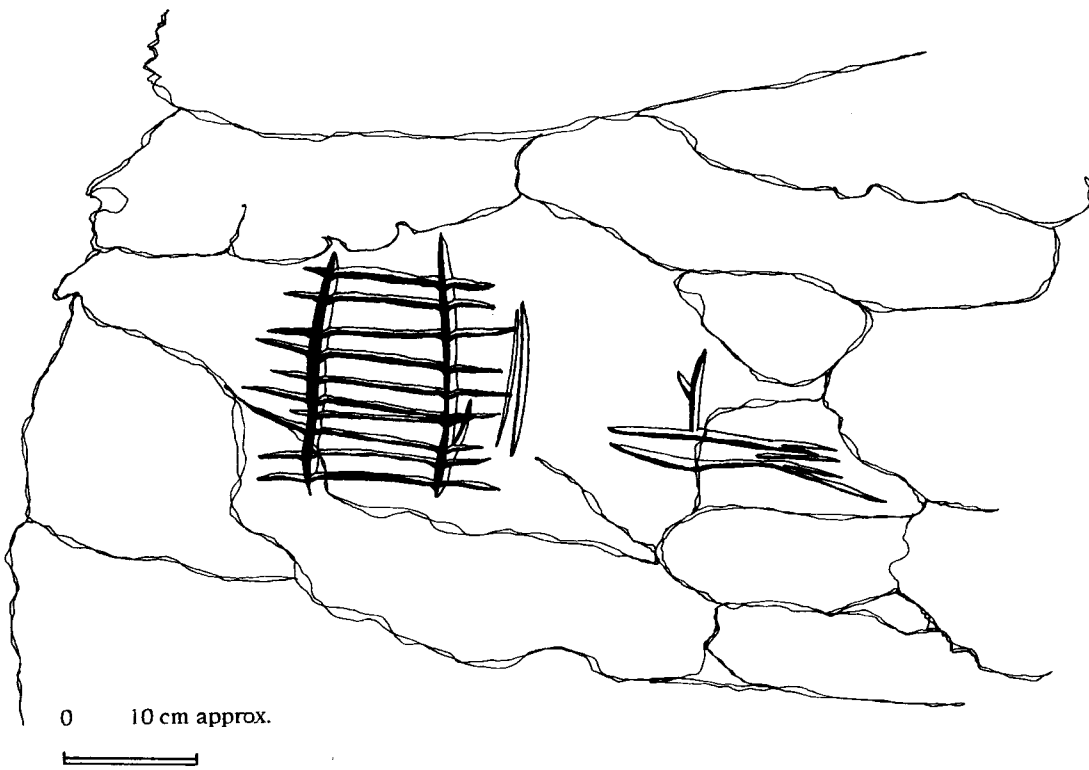
a) Arab graffito from Site D (zu Rossi and Ikram, Petroglyphs)



b) Graffito from Site D (zu Rossi and Ikram, Petroglyphs)



a) Undatable signs from Site D (zu Rossi and Ikram, Petroglyphs)



b) Undatable sign from Site E (zu Rossi and Ikram, Petroglyphs)