

Lenka Suková

Pictures in place: a case study from Korosko (Lower Nubia)

To the memory of Ján Midžiak (1932–2013), member of the Czechoslovak epigraphic expeditions to Lower Nubia (1963–1964)

Introduction

In 2004, the range of publications devoted to rock-art research was extended by *Pictures in Place: The Figured Landscapes of Rock-Art*, an archaeological book on rock art that places an emphasis on landscape and the relationship landscape has with the art, the artist and the audience (Chippindale and Nash 2004a; 2004b). In one paper included in the volume – *From millimetre up to kilometre: a framework of space and of scale for reporting and studying rock-art in its landscape* –, Christopher Chippindale (2004) proposed a framework of scales of study of rock art, moving up by orders of magnitude in physical dimensions (Chippindale and Nash 2004b). This artificial framework of four, closely inter-connected scales was used during the oral presentation at the 2011 Dymaczewo conference to provide a description (from kilometre to millimetre) and a discussion and evaluation (from millimetre to kilometre) of one of the nine painted shelters documented by the Czechoslovak expedition in the framework of the UNESCO-organised salvage campaign in Lower Nubia. Since the “Painted Shelter at Korosko” – together with the other occurrences of rock paintings from the Czechoslovak concession in Lower Nubia – has recently been published *in extenso* (Suková 2011a; 2011b), the first part of the presentation (from kilometre to millimetre) is reduced in this

written paper to a mere setting of the scene¹ to allow more space for a discussion and evaluation of the evidence stepping up from the millimetre up to the kilometre scale. However, this paper differs from the case study presented by Christopher Chippindale in one important aspect: since the “Painted Shelter at Korosko” and the landscape in which the exquisite rock paintings preserved in its interior had figured for millennia as “pictures in place” no longer exist, the description and evaluation of this rock-art surface constitutes the outcome of the study of “pictures of the pictures in place”, i.e. the field documentation deposited in several archives in Europe and Egypt,² and the “pictures out of place”, i.e. the blocks cut out from the rock-art panel and deposited or exhibited in the Museum of Nubia at Aswan and elsewhere in Egypt.³

General description of the occurrence

The rock-art panel (Czechoslovak expedition’s field number 17 R XIII A) was recorded in Khor Fomm el-Atmur, a great valley that cut from south to north through the Korosko hills on the right bank of the Nile and discharged into the river by the village of Korosko East (ca. 180 km upstream of Aswan). It was located under an upward-moving projection of the upper section of a large sandstone boulder that stood at the north-western foot of a low, broad-based hill on the east side of the khor ca. 2.5 km to the south of the Nile. The rock surface bore what appears to be a painted procession of cattle, humans, and boat(s) that was interspersed with and, in some cases, superimposed by images of animals and humans produced by techniques involving reductive processes (Fig. 1). In the vicinity, minor petroglyph surfaces were recorded on separate surfaces of the same boulder (altogether 2) and on separate sandstone blocks scattered in front of or around the boulder (18) (Váhala and Červíček 1999: 84-85; Suková 2011a: 13-15, 49-55; 2011b: 150-173).

The excavation of the floor of the shelter by the EES Nubian Survey team in 1961 brought to light the evidence of occupation of the place during the A-Group (Early Nubian) and C-Group (Middle Nubian) times and of an ephemeral re-use of the shelter during the post-Roman or Christian (Late Nubian) times (Smith 1962: 79-90).⁴

¹ For a detailed description and illustration of the rock-art surface, see Chapter 2 in Suková (2011a) and Surface A under Ref. No. [17 R XIII A-B] in Suková (2011b: Tab. 4).

² Besides the archive of the Czech Institute of Egyptology (Charles University in Prague), these are: the Archive of the Egypt Exploration Society in London, the Centre of Human and Social Studies in Madrid, and the archive of the Museum of Nubia in Aswan.

³ See *Appendix* in Suková (2011a) for the current location and condition of the removed blocks.

⁴ The terms “Middle Nubian sequence” and “Late Nubian sequence” are adopted from Trigger (1965).



Fig. 1. “Painted Shelter at Korosko” (Czechoslovak expedition’s field number 17 R XIII A) (photo Zbyněk Žába)

The millimetre scale: the dimension of the technique

Only a small number of occurrences of rock paintings are known from the Nile Valley in Lower Nubia, as compared with the wealth of petroglyphs of varied themes, styles, and dates. On the present rock-art surface, we find techniques involving additive processes (painting) employed alongside those involving reductive processes (petroglyph) for the marking of the natural rock. A close observation of the panel in the field (Smith 1962: 80) confirmed employment of three colour types for the production of painted figures: red, white, and blue. The former two are represented also on other painted surfaces in Lower Nubia (Weigall 1907; Bietak and Engelmayer 1963; Almagro Basch and Almagro Gorbea 1968; Suková 2011a; 2011b). The latter, on the other hand, constitutes a rarity in the rock art of the region (*cf.* Smith 1962: 91 and Suková 2011a: 45), but is known

from the colour-map of the C-Group peoples who combined it extensively with paints of red, yellow, white, and green colour types for decoration of their incised pottery and funerary stelae (Suková 2011a, 45-46; see, *e.g.*, Firth 1915, 19; Pl. 16b, 35a; Wenig 1978, 25ff.).

The paints were used either to create monochrome images, or combined to produce bichrome figures (Table 1). They were applied onto the surface by means of brushes the strokes of which are well-visible in a number of cases. The subtlety of lines noticeable on some of the figures attests to masterly handling of the brush(es) and paint(s) by some of the painters.

With monochrome images (altogether 34), all but two⁵ were surface paintings drawn first in outline, the inner surface of which was subsequently filled in with the paint of the same type, in some cases applied in multiple layers. With bichrome images (34), one colour type was used as a primary colour and the other one as a secondary colour for the rendering of selected details or parts of body (markings on hides, legs, udders, kilts). Two different approaches to combining the paints for production of bichrome images could be discerned on the available photographs:

- a) 26 motifs were first painted by means of the primary colour (dark red, blue) and selected parts were left blank to be subsequently filled in with the secondary (white) colour (*e.g.*, A.52, A.53, A.46, A.47; Fig. 6); or
- b) 3 motifs were first painted by means of the secondary colour (white) applied in a thick layer on the parts that were to be white on the finished painting and in a thin layer on the rest of the motif; subsequently, the thinly covered parts were painted over by means of the primary (dark-red) colour (see A.31 on Fig. 4 for an unfinished figure of this type, and A.29 and A.30 on Fig. 5 for two finished motifs). With 5 bichrome figures, the exact procedure of their making cannot be established on account of their bad or incomplete preservation.

The paints of the three colour types were recorded on the rock-art surface in 13 (red), 4 (white), and 3 (blue) colour values. The marked variation in the preserved colour values of especially the red paints, the pigment for which was obtained from a red-ochre surface layer at the base of the shelter, can be explained as resulting from a number of causes and processes, including (but not limited to):

- a) distinct composition and/or consistency of individual batches of paint prepared in the course of one and the same rock-art event by one and the same artist (Bietak and Engelmayer 1963: 38);

⁵ These two figures (A.72, A.74) are preserved on the surface only as (incomplete) white outlines and may represent unfinished (or decayed?) animal (probably cattle) figures.

Table 1. Motifs produced by techniques involving additive processes (painting) and the colour types employed for their making: R – red, W – white, B – blue

Motif / Colour	R	W	B	R∅W	B∅W	W∅R	R∅B	Total
Cattle	16	10	1	12	1	1	1	42
Probable cattle	2	3	0	1	0	0	0	6
Human figure	2	0	0	17	0	0	0	19
Travelling boat	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	20	13	1	32	1	1	1	68

Table 2. Motifs produced by techniques involving reductive processes (petroglyphs) and the techniques employed for their making: I – incision, E – engraving, H – hammering, R – rubbing (abrasion)

Motif / Technique	I	E∅H	I∅H∅R	I∅R	Total
Cattle	12	0	0	2	14
Hippopotamus	0	0	1	0	1
Ostrich	0	1	0	0	1
Indeterminate quadruped	11	0	0	0	11
Human figure	1	1	0	0	2
Total	24	2	1	2	29

- b) distinct composition and/or consistency of the red paint prepared by different artists for the creation of new motifs, or for intentional interventions in – modifications of – existing figures (for the latter, see, *e.g.*, A.33, A.34, A.37, A.38, and the neck of A.36 on Fig. 5);
- c) particular method of application of the paint(s) resorted to by the painter(s) (the approach chosen for the production of bichrome images, the actual number of layers of paint applied); and
- d) differential exposure of the paints to the elements both from the point of view of place (location, quality of surface) and time (varied length of time allowed for weathering).

Among the techniques involving reductive processes (Table 2), incision in line or outline (27) clearly predominated (see, *e.g.*, Fig. 2). Engraving and hammering were

employed to a smaller extent, either to make whole figures (A.14, A.58; Figs. 3, 6), or as techniques complementary to incision (3) for an indication or differentiation of certain parts or details of motifs (A.67, A.86, A.93; Figs. 2, 7). In addition, the same techniques, together with scratching, were employed for interventions in painted motifs. These included repairs and restorations of painted images (e.g., A.51, A.90), or destruction of selected painted motifs (e.g., A.15, A.46) or the panel as a whole.

The centimetre scale: the dimension of the figure and the motif

The identifiable motifs represented on the panel include 75 animal figures (56 cattle, 6 probable cattle, 1 hippopotamus, 1 ostrich, 11 indeterminate quadrupeds), 21 human figures, and 1 travelling boat produced on the rock-art surface by techniques involving additive or reductive processes. In addition to identifiable motifs, there were numerous non-figurative traces or marks some of which may represent remains of no longer distinguishable motifs.

Among painted motifs (Table 1), (probable) cattle clearly predominate. They include 17 long-horned and 5 short-horned cattle, 3 hornless individuals with a prominent lump on their forehead (Osborn 1998: 195), and 20 beasts with no horns discernible or preserved. There are 11 cows distinguished by udders shown on the underside of their bellies, 1 bull with the organ clearly depicted, 33 beasts with no gender indicated or discernible, and 3 calves. The dimensions of the painted cattle vary from 4.5 cm with calves to 36 cm with adult individuals. They are depicted as standing and shown consistently with their bodies in side view and horns and ears (where depicted) in front view; only in one case (A.30), short, forward-pointing horns are shown in side view. The orientation of the painted cattle is to the left (43), to the right (1), and downwards (head down) with the back turned to the left (4).

Most of the painted cattle is portrayed with a great care for the general body shapes and individual body parts and details, such as the head, ears, horns, markings on hides, tail, udder, legs, knees, and (often cloven) hoofs. The varied rendering of the general body shape and the peculiar (“diagnostic”) details, size of the figures, and the approach adopted by the painters in their utilisation of colours observable on the photographs makes it possible to assign most of the cattle figures to groups or styles some of which can be deemed to represent the work of different artists. The most distinctive of these are three styles among the cattle painted in dark-red or dark-red and white, which I have designated as Style A (3; see A.35 and A.36 on Fig. 5), Style B (8; see, e.g., A.8, A.10, A.24, A.52, A.53 on Figs. 3, 4, 6), and Style C (3; see A.29-A.31 on Figs. 4, 5). Stylistic analysis and assignment to groups or styles is impossible with 20 cattle that appear on the surface as heavily weathered or decayed remains of figures (A.1-A.3,

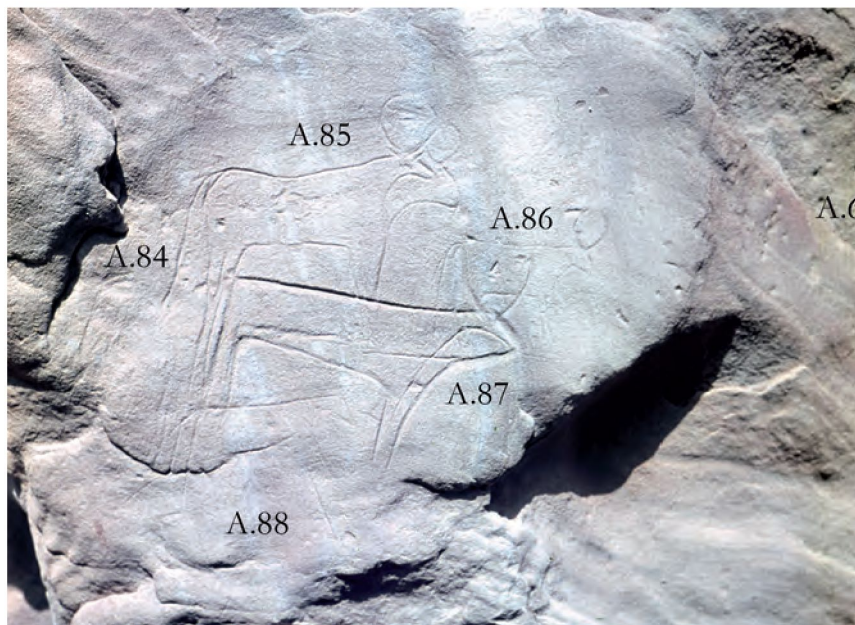


Fig. 2. Leftmost side of the rock-art surface (photo Zbyněk Žába)

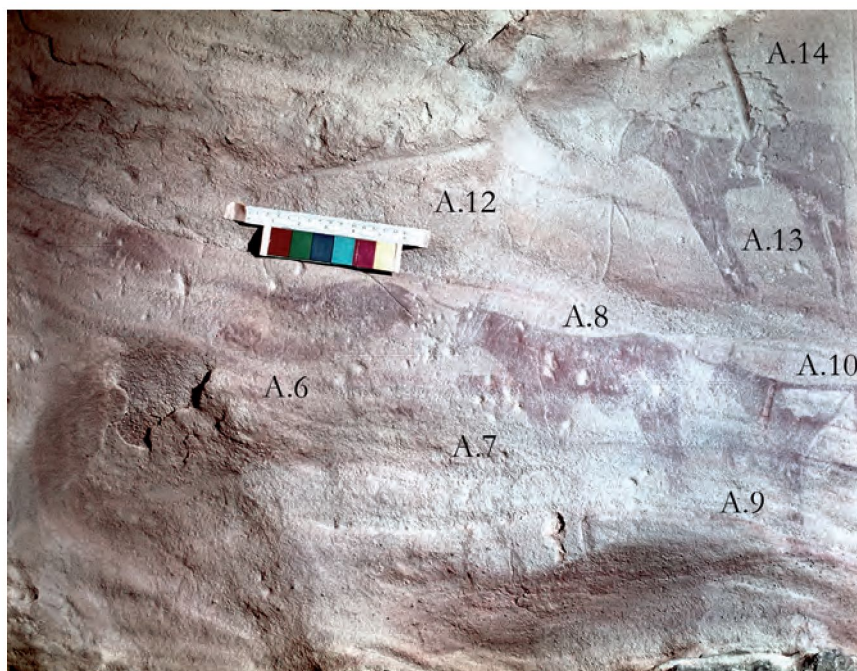


Fig. 3. Left part of the rock-art surface (photo Zbyněk Žába)

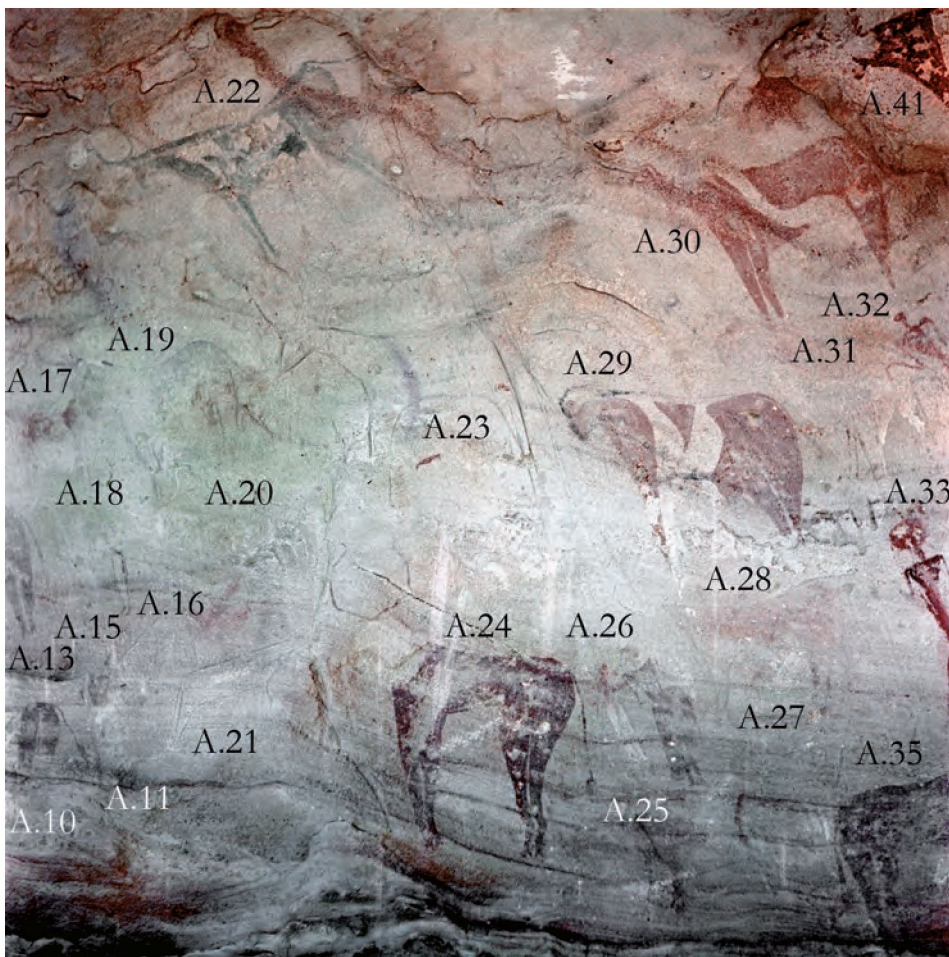


Fig. 4. Left-central part of the rock-art surface (photo Zbyněk Žába)

A.5, A.40, A.56, A.62, A.69, A.70, A.75, A.77, A.78, A.80), incomplete (unfinished) figures (A.42, A.72, A.74), or effaced figures (A.17, A.20, A.27, A.73).

Some of the painted cattle show evidence of intentional interventions, which I consider to be of an utmost interest:

- a) 5 cattle figures of Style A (A.10, A.24, A.52) and Style B (A.36, A.49) have a deep groove engraved across their necks as if in an attempt to sever their heads from their bodies;
- b) 2 cattle figures of Style B (A.24, A.53) have their head entirely erased by scratching or rubbing; the horns of one of them (A.24) were left intact;

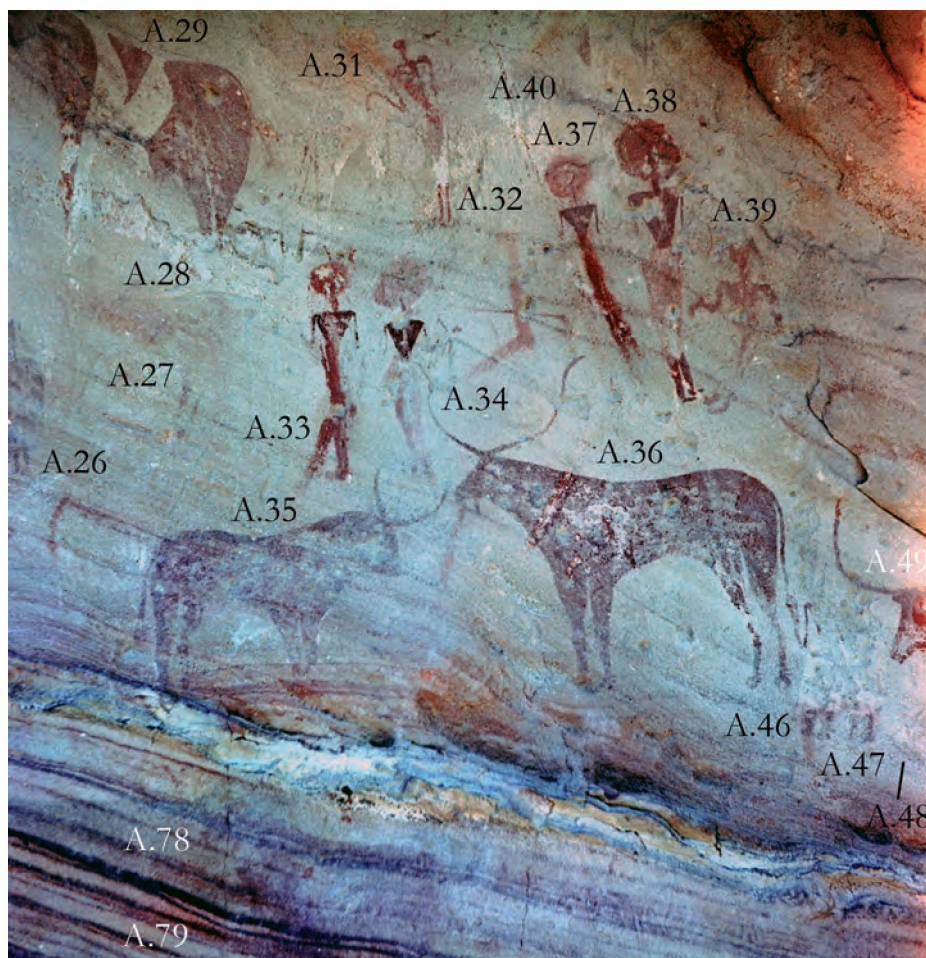


Fig. 5. Central part of the rock-art surface (photo Zbyněk Žába)

- c) 3 cattle figures with the deep grooves engraved across their necks (A.10, A.36, A.49) have the grooves repainted with a red paint preserved in a colour value distinct from the one used for the making of the cattle; and
- d) 9 cattle figures feature additional contouring lines incised along their legs (A.8, A.10, A.24, A.52, A.53), around their head and along their legs (A.13), around the horns and other parts of the body (A.51), around the head, neck, and belly (A.29), and at the place of the head from where the paint appears to have fallen off (A.90); in one case (A.29), the incised contouring line is filled in with blue paint.



Fig. 6. Rightmost side of the rock-art surface (photo Zbyněk Žába)

The cattle figures appear singly, in groups, or are arranged in a limited number of stereotyped spatial compositions. These include: the cow-and-calf motif, i.e., cows preceded by small calves (A.7+A.8, A.9+A.10, A.78+A.79), combat of two bulls over a cow (A.35+A.36+A.49), copulation of cattle (A.91+A.92), and cattle led or followed by one or two humans (altogether 8).

The humans accompanying the cattle (11) are all standing figures shown with their upper body in front view and lower body in partial profile. Their height equates to ca. 20 cm on average. They feature a round head, longer neck, straight or bent arms, trunks tapering from wide shoulders down to the waist, kilts, and feet.

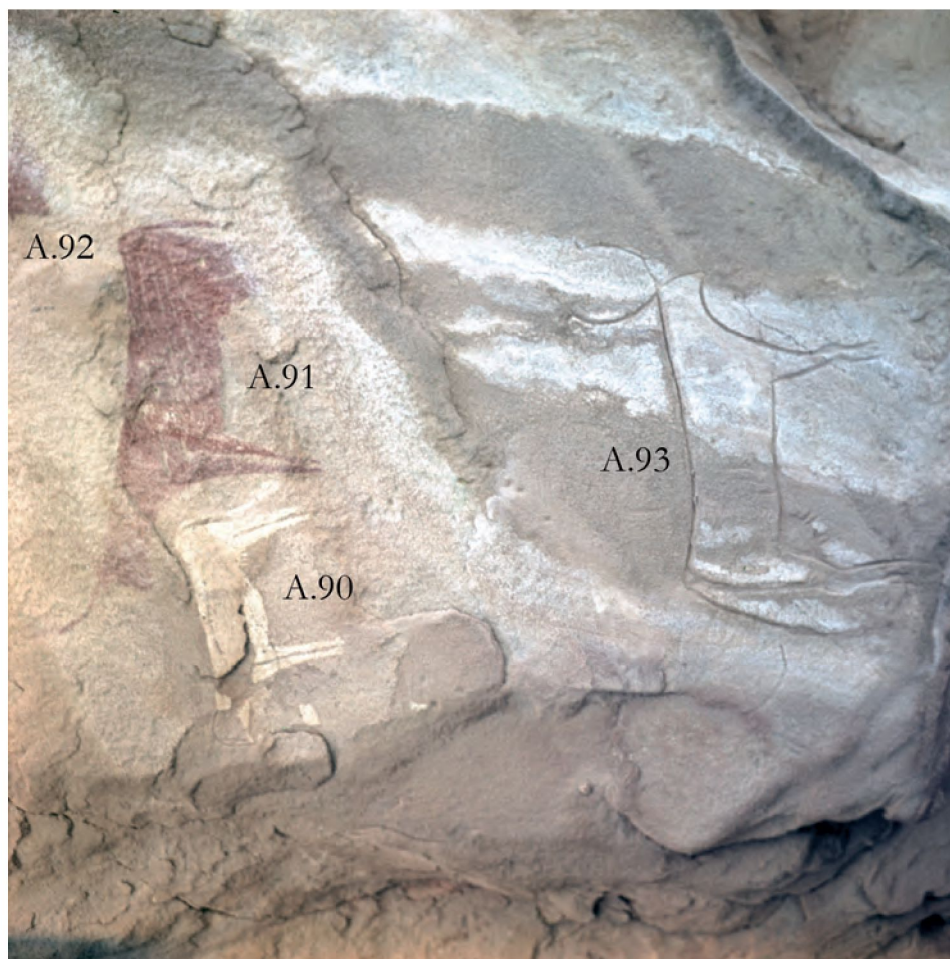


Fig. 7. Central part of the ceiling of the shelter just above the rear wall (photo Zbyněk Žába)

Apart from one figure (A.76) that is oriented to the right and faces a cattle figure in solid white (A.75), all the humans respect the orientation to the left in compliance with the dark-red or red-and-white cattle they are associated with. One of the figures accompanying the cattle (A.26) is blocked in monochrome (red) and features a wide and long red skirt corresponding to the bustle skirts of leather typical of females of the C-Group peoples (Firth 1915: Pl. 33; Emery and Kirwan 1935: Pl. 24; Steindorff 1935: Taf. 72, 94; Williams 1983: 97-99; Friedman 2004: 49, Pls. 1, 2; 2007: 60, Colour plate XXVI). The rest of the figures (10), on the other hand, have white kilts of varied widths and lengths, which may represent linen kilts characteristic of

the “dressing code” of the ancient Egyptians, and the rest of the body (head, arms, trunks, legs) painted in red (e.g., A.11, A.25, A.46–47); in (at least) one case (A.16), the white kilt is provided with a red contour. As no sexual attributes are indicated, the gender with most of the figures clothed in white kilts cannot be securely ascertained, except for two individuals (A.16, A.32) that are equipped with what appear to be a (herding) stick (or axe) and a bow and may be therefore regarded as representations of males – archers/herders. The ascertainment of gender with humans clothed in white kilts is further complicated by the fact that most of these figures are badly damaged or (nearly) entirely obliterated by hammering, scratching, and rubbing (e.g., A.15–A.16, A.25, A.43, A.46–A.47).

Similar acts of iconoclasm badly affected also three standing figures (A.54, A.55, A.57) that form a secluded group of humans in no direct association with cattle (Fig. 6). All three are oriented to the left and are clothed in white kilts of varied widths and lengths, in one case (A.57) contoured by means of red paint. Unfortunately, the bad preservation of these figures and the uncertain representational value of the remains of white and red paints surrounding these figures make it impossible to sex the humans with certainty and to ascertain in what activity they may have been engaged.

There is another group of humans on the panel that show no direct association with cattle (A.33, A.34, A.37, A.38; Fig. 5). The distinct shape of these large-headed figures, their gender differentiated by means of clothing (male with no kilts in the case of A.33 and A.37 and female clothed in red – or rather pink – skirts in the case of A.34 and A.38), and their inconsistent orientation to the left (A.33), to the right (A.38), and no distinct orientation (A.34, A.37) are the result of intentional interventions in – modification and remaking of – earlier images of humans with small round heads and white kilts and oriented to the right. The original versions of these figures are still discernible underneath the layers of red paint of distinct colour shades applied over the original motifs in red and white and over the additional incised lines contouring their small heads (A.37, A.38) and/or their bodies (A.33, A.38).

Attached to these four central humans is another human figure (A.39) that appears to have been made by a less skilful hand different from the one(s) involved in the making of the rest of the figures. This presumably standing (male) figure blocked in monochrome (red) is holding a (herding) stick (or axe) in the right hand and is oriented to the left.

The presence on the panel of humans clothed in white (linen) kilts according to the dressing code of the ancient Egyptians (majority of the figures), a female representative of the Nubian populations (A.26), and the remaking of four figures

dressed in white kilts into figures clothed in more non-Egyptian (if not entirely Nubian) style (A.33, A.34, A.37, A.38) bring to the fore questions concerning the ethnicity and identity of the figures actually depicted on the panel, of their makers, and of their audience and consumers (Smith 2003).

At least four human figures form part of the largest motif painted on the panel – a large travelling boat (A.81, 73.5 cm in length; Figs. 1, 6) with a flattened bottom and a hull narrowing and curving out as it progresses towards the prow and stern posts. The sides of the hull show leashing indicated by a zig-zag line. At least three figures blocked in monochrome (red) and oriented to the right (oarsmen, or helmsmen) appear to be keeping the boat in motion by means of long (steering) oars. Another human figure, dressed in a white kilt, is standing to the right of them. Further to the right, faint traces of red paint may represent faded remains of a cabin or a deck-house. The bad preservation of the paint makes it impossible to determine the direction of movement of the boat.

The individual types and styles of the painted cattle and human figures and the stereotyped spatial compositions depicted on this panel are not uncommon in the rock art of Lower Nubia. More importantly, they are known also from the C-Group representational art (Williams 1983: 97-109, Figs. 9, 10, Pl. 96, 97; Emery and Kirwan 1935: Pl. 24; Firth 1915: Pl. 33a, 35a, 35b) and/or from other dated contexts – in particular the decoration of ancient Egyptian funerary monuments dated to the Old to New Kingdoms (e.g. Vandier 1969; Blackman 1915) and the painted decoration of the *Kerma Classique* funerary temple K XI at Kerma (see Bonnet 2000: 91, Figs. 66, 67). This makes it possible to attribute these motifs to the Middle Nubian sequence (C-Group times).⁶ The same time span – the Middle Nubian sequence – can be claimed for the painted boat which finds the closest parallels with boats travelling on a ceremonial journey that recur in the relief decoration of the ancient Egyptian funerary monuments dated to the Old Kingdom onwards (Landström 1970; Vandier 1969) and appear also in the wall paintings adorning the *Kerma Classique* funerary temple K XI at Kerma (Bonnet 2000: 100, Figs. 63, 65).

The corpus of motifs produced merely by techniques involving reductive processes is dominated by cattle figures (14) and indeterminate (or incomplete) quadrupeds (11), incised in outline and, in one case, in line (see Table 2). Their dimensions vary from 4.8 cm to 27.5 cm. They are oriented to the left (9), to the right (11), upwards (head up) with the back turned to the left (4), and upwards

⁶ This corresponds to Horizons IV and V in the chronology suggested for the rock art of the El-Kab region by Huyge (2002) and to C- and D-Horizons in the chronology defined for the Upper Egyptian and Lower Nubian rock art by Červíček (1986, 1992–1993).

with the back turned to the right (1). Among the cattle figures, there are 2 cows distinguished by udders and 12 beasts with no gender indicated. Majority of the cattle (11) are provided with horns of varied shapes and lengths (11); with 3 cattle figures, no horns are depicted or discernible. The cattle figures differ in the rendering of the general body shapes and parts (in particular the head, legs, tails) and in the inclusion or exclusion of certain details (such as ears, hoofs, knees, beards). Of a particular interest are three cattle figures (A.85, A.86, A.93; Figs. 7, 8) that appear to have been inspired by the forms of the painted cattle and two cattle images (A.18, A.28) that are incised over two effaced red-painted cattle (A.17, A.27) as if in an attempt to restore or revive the effaced images (Figs. 4, 5).

With the indeterminate quadrupeds (11), the absence of diagnostic details makes it impossible to identify the species of the animals depicted; in one case (A.48), however, we may consider the small quadruped to represent a calf on account of its close association with a painted cow (A.49). The animal figures represented on the panel include also a single figure of an ostrich (A.58, h. 18 cm) and a hippopotamus (A.67, 24 cm from ears to rear side), both of which are oriented to the right. Last but not least, there are two humans produced by techniques involving reductive processes. One of them (A.14) is a stick figure of a rider mounted on the back of one of the red-painted cattle. The other one is a simple standing stick figure (A.82).

With the motifs produced by techniques involving reductive processes, the types and styles of the animal species identified on the panel allow attributing the animal figures to the Middle Nubian sequence. The two human figures (A.14, A.82), on the other hand, can be placed – based on their forms – to the Late Nubian sequence.⁷

The metre scale: the spatial and temporal dynamics of the rock-art surface

The identifiable motifs and non-figurative traces and marks were spread over ca. 5 metres of the rear wall and the ceiling of the shelter (see Fig. 1 and Table 3). A great majority of the figures (81) and most of the traces of paints and incised marks and lines was located on the upper section of the rear wall where the smooth, evenly-grained sandstone offered the best-quality surface for the creation and preservation of rock art (A.1-A.76, A.84-A.88). The stratified and heavily-weathered lower section of the rear wall was found to bear only seven identifiable figures (A.77-A.83), although faint traces of red paint noticeable in particular in the upper zone of this section suggest a former presence of more, no longer discernible motifs.⁸ The coarser surface of the ceiling of the shelter just above the rear wall bore five

⁷ This corresponds to Horizon VI of Huyge (2002) and the Napatan-Meroitic Period of Červíček (1978).

⁸ The presence of other boats, no longer distinguishable, was suggested by Smith (1962: 80).

Table 3. Distribution of the identifiable motifs over the sandstone surfaces of variable quality

Surface/Motifs	C	PC	IQ	O	H	HF	B	Total	NF
Lower section	4/1	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/1	1/0	7	+/+
Upper section	39/7	6/0	0/7	1/0	0/1	19/1	0/0	81	+/+
Ceiling	4/1	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	5	+/+
Peripheries	0/0	0/0	0/4	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	4	?/?

C – cattle, PC – probable cattle, IQ – indeterminate quadruped, O – ostrich, H – hippopotamus, HF – human figure, B – boat, NF – non-figurative marks and traces (possible remains of other motifs); the counts are given for techniques involving additive/reductive processes; “+” – presence, “?” – uncertain presence, “-” – absence

images (A.89-A.93) and a group of small V-shaped marks produced by means of red paint. Four more images (A.94–A.97) were distributed over other sections of the coarse sandstone on the underside of the overhang on the peripheries of the painted panel.

The painted motifs represented on the rock-art surface give an impression of forming a procession of cattle, humans, and boat(s) datable to the Middle Nubian sequence (C-Group times). However, the different types and styles of the cattle and human figures evince that this orderly procession constitutes the work of a number of individuals and consists of several layers of rock art. The exact chronological sequence in which the individual events of rock-art activity had taken place is difficult to establish in particular due to the rarity of superimposition of the paintings made in different styles. Nevertheless, some insights can be gained from the overall horizontal stratigraphy of the rock-art layers and the differential preservation of the paints.

The earliest rock-art layer on the panel is represented by 11 cattle figures painted by means of dark-red and white paints in *Styles A* and *B* attributable to two artists (if not one and the same individual) which occupy the best-quality surface of the upper section of the rear wall. All of the cattle are oriented to the left, i.e., towards the more open (east) end of the shelter, except for one figure (A.35) in the dynamic centre of the panel that faces to the right in a challenge to its neighbour (A.36). This consistent orientation of the cattle together with the positioning of some of them on slanting layers of the sandstone surface as on base lines (see Figs. 3-6) gives the rather static red(-and-white) cattle an appearance of a small herd walking up on paths through the landscape of the rock surface. These cattle figures, the most dominant motifs on the surface, can be deemed to constitute the central part – or the “backbone” – of the whole scene represented on the panel.

This “backbone” determined the placement on this part of the rear wall of the other motifs whose authors in all but one case (A.56) respected the earlier images and fitted their figures into whatever space was available. This is the case also of most of the human figures associated with the red(-and-white) cattle of *Styles A* and *B* (8) and the original forms of the humans in the centre of the panel (A.33, A.34, A.37, A.38) all of which appear to have been produced on the surface only after the red(-and-white) cattle were in place. Nevertheless, the correspondence of the preserved colour values of the dark-red paint recorded on these humans with that recorded on the particular cattle figures could suggest that they may still have been painted in the scope of the same rock-art event.

The exact sequence in which the infilling of the free space on the upper section of the wall may have taken place cannot be established with certainty. Nevertheless, the only case of superimposition of painted figures recorded on the panel – that of the white cattle A.56 over the human figures A.54, A.55, and A.57 – suggests that the white cattle were the last figures to be added to the surface. This is supported also by the location of majority of the white cattle on the low-quality portions of the upper section of the rear wall on the leftmost and the rightmost side of the panel.

The painted images of cattle and boat on the lower section of the rear wall (see Figs. 1, 5, 6) are more difficult to place with certainty in the relative chronological sequence of the rock paintings in the shelter on account of the progressed weathering and discoloration of the dark-red paint resulting from the differential qualities of the lower section of the rear wall and its increased exposure to the elements, in particular the wind-blown sand. An insufficiency of space on the good-quality surface taken up by the “backbone” and, possibly the other figures, could well serve as an explanation for the positioning of the travelling boat transporting a human figure dressed in a white kilt – the largest motif in the shelter – onto the available space on the stratified rock below. However, we cannot exclude that the natural stratification of the sandstone could have been utilised already in the earliest rock-art event(s) represented by the cattle of *Styles A* and *B* and/or the human figures dressed in white kilts: perceived as a representation of the waters of the Nile on which the boat would have been moving, it could have provided a complement to the other part of the Nile landscape – the land represented by the smooth surface of the upper section of the rear wall through which the red-painted cattle, accompanied by humans, were walking on paths provided by the surface layers of the sandstone. In such a case, the rock-art surface would provide a well-illustrated evidence of the importance of the natural properties of the rock surface for the early painters’ laying-out their scene.

With the cattle figures identified on the stratified lower section of the rear wall (A.77-A.80), on the other hand, the reduced legibility of details make it impossible to use stylistic and technical aspects to determine whether the cattle images were added to the surface in the framework of the earliest rock-art event(s), or only after most of the space on the upper section of the rear wall had been already taken up by the remains of former artistic activities.

The motifs produced by techniques involving reductive processes appear to have been added to the surface in the course of several rock-art events all of which postdate the creation of most of the painted cattle. This is evidenced, on the one hand, by superimpositions of some of the petroglyphs over motifs painted in red (A.14, A.17, A.27, A.58, A.83) or white (A.61), by the style of rendering of some of the incised cattle figures (A.85, A.88) which appears to have been inspired by the painted cattle of Style B and, last but not least, by an apparent syntactic association of some incised animals (A.21, A.48) with those made by means of paint.

On the basis of the thematic, stylistic, and syntactic aspects of the rock art, the apogee of the rock-art activities on the rear wall and the ceiling of the shelter – involving additive as well as reductive processes – can be placed into the Middle Nubian sequence. The respect shown by later painters to the earlier figures may imply that the acts of creating new painted images – the individual rock-art events attributable to different painters – may have been motivated by a shared artistic (or other) design and have been carried out within a shorter period of time. Only 2 human figures (out of 21) attest to minor artistic activities having taken place during the Late Nubian sequence.

Nevertheless, of utmost importance as far as this panel is concerned is the observation that the natural rock surface in the shelter was transformed into the multi-layered rock-art surface that was eventually documented by the Czechoslovak team not only through acts of addition, but also through intentional interventions in the existing painted motifs. I divide the latter into acts of *modification* and *reduction*.

Among the acts of *modification*, I distinguish:

- a) ‘functional (ritual) destruction’ of selected motifs through particular acts of iconoclasm; in the present shelter, it is the cutting-off and/or erasure of the head of the cattle painted in Styles A and/or B, all of which remained well-recognisable after these acts had been committed; and
- b) ‘restoration’ of whole figures or their parts affected by human action, natural processes (decay of pigments, weathering), or otherwise; these included:
 - the refilling of the grooves cutting-off the heads of some of the cattle in Styles A and B with a red paint differing from that used for the making of the motifs;

- the re-animation of two effaced (washed-off?) cattle figures (A.17, A.27) by incising the figures A.18 and A.28 around the traces of red paint (see Figs. 3, 4);
- the incision of additional contouring lines around cattle (9) and human (3) figures, and, in one case (A.29) the refilling of the contouring lines with a paint of another (blue) colour type;
- the restoration of the head of the cow A.90 by incision after the white paint had fallen off; and
- the remaking of the original form of four human figures with small heads and white (linen) kilts in the centre of the panel by means of varied red paints into large-headed females dressed in red (pink) skirts (A.34, A.38) and males with no kilts (A.33, A.37) in the course of which the white front legs of the cattle A.40 were superimposed by the enlarged head of A.38.

As far as *reduction* is concerned, I differentiate:

- a) 'selective destruction' bringing along (nearly complete) obliteration or removal of certain figures from the rock-art surface, namely:
 - the destruction of most of the human figures dressed in white kilts by hammering, scratching, and/or rubbing (Figs. 4-6); and
 - the removal (washing-off?) of some of the cattle figures blocked in monochrome (A.17, A.18) or painted in red and white (A.20, 73); and
- b) 'indiscriminate destruction' directed against the panel as a whole (by hammering, scratching).

Of the intentional interventions involving modification, the cutting-off and the erasure of the heads of several cattle are of utmost interest. These acts affecting the figures have obviously been committed not with the aim to destroy the images, but to kill or deactivate the selected cattle. As the acts concerned only pictures attributable on stylistic grounds to two authors (if not to one and the same individual), we may assume that the identity or individuality of the painter(s) was known to those committing the acts; for this reason these acts of modification must have occurred shortly after the backbone of the scene was in place. The character of the acts suggest that the functional (or ritual) destruction (deactivation) of the cattle, all of which remained well-identifiable even after these acts (as compared with A.17 and A.27), were carried out with the aim to impair the standing or to affect the possessions (cattle) of the painter(s) and/or the groups, to which they may have appertained, through magic or ritual destruction of the figures representative of these individuals and/or groups, their identity and world.

Interestingly, with three of these killed cattle, attempts at rectifying the damage and reactivation of the animals appear to have been made through repainting of the grooves with another type of red paint. This particular “treatment” of selected cattle on the present rock-art surface, unprecedented in the rock art of Lower Nubia (Menardi Noguera and Soffiantini 2008), attests that once created, the rock art may have lived its own life:⁹ the evidence from the “Painted Shelter at Korosko” suggests that it could have played a role in expressing or implementing dynamics of intra- or intergroup social, economic, or other relations of the local Nubian (C-Group) communities.

Of significance is also the selected destruction (*reduction*) of the human figures dressed in white (linen) kilts – according to the ancient Egyptian “dressing code” – and the remaking (*modification*) of four such figures into humans clothed in a rather non-Egyptian (if not entirely Nubian) style. These acts may suggest a marked dynamics of relations and/or encounters of the (representatives of the) local Nubian (C-Group) communities some of which may have come into contact with, or have adopted, some aspects of culture of the ancient Egyptians.

The kilometre scale: the place of the rock-art surface in the rock-art landscape of Korosko and beyond

The present rock-art panel is one of the 519 rock-art surfaces recorded by the Czechoslovak expedition in Khor Fomm el-Atmur (Váhala and Červíček 1999; Suková 2011b), the great wadi that formed the approach to the frequented caravan route connecting Korosko in Lower Nubia with Abu Hamid in Sudan (Fig. 8). The panel was concealed in a north-oriented shelter that was roofed by an overhang of a large, dark-patinated sandstone boulder that constituted a conspicuous feature in the open landscape of Khor Fomm el-Atmur (Fig. 9). The shelter was an ideal place for occupation, as it was of good size, ease of access, and protected from the sun for most of the day (Bietak and Engelmayer 1963,16). Moreover, it offered clear views both down Khor Fomm el-Atmur straight to the Nile and up the khor into the interior of the Korosko hills. The views may have counterbalanced the conspicuousness of the boulder in the open landscape of the wadi and increased the attraction of this space for occupation. Archaeological evidence of former human occupation of the shelter was brought to light through excavation of the floor of the shelter.

Interestingly, the rock-art and archaeological evidence appear to paint a different picture of the former human occupation of and activities at this place. The

⁹ Cf. the rock art of Australia where, according to the ethnography, the point may be in the act of creating the images rather than in their enduring existence thereafter (Chippindale and Nash 2004: 7).

character and distribution of the debris revealed during the excavation points to a seasonal occupation of the shelter during the A-Group (Early Nubian) and C-Group (Middle Nubian) times and the main, if not the only function of the shelter being “domestic” (Smith 1962: 81, 89). In the light of the evidence of the rock art, however, the rock shelter appears to stand out rather as a special purpose site or a site of some social and/or religious significance.¹⁰ This is suggested by the very presence of motifs produced by techniques involving additive processes, generally very rare in Lower Nubia, and, more importantly, by the inter- or intragroup “discussion” preserved on the rear wall and the ceiling of the shelter that attest to a complex history of use of this place for artistic and other activities during the Middle Nubian (C-Group) times.

While the individual types of motifs – cattle, humans, and boat(s) arranged in a procession – fall well within the rock-art repertoire of Lower Nubia,¹¹ the particular combination of single motifs, their groups, and four stereotypical spatial compositions involving cattle and humans finds the closest parallels in the relief decoration of ancient Egyptian funerary monuments of the Old to New Kingdoms in which processions (and presentations) of cattle of varied types accompanied by humans – sometimes even Nubian herders/archers (e.g. Blackman 1915, Pl. IV) – and boat(s) constitute a popular thematic cycle (see in particular Vandier 1969). An inspiration or influence on the present surface deriving most likely from the ancient Egyptian art and/or world is strongly suggested by the type of travelling boat and by the ancient Egyptian “dressing code” of the majority of the human figures represented on the panel. The female wearing the typical C-Group bustle skirt of leather, the non-Egyptian style of representation of the humans dressed in white linen kilts, the heterogeneous herd consisting of cattle portrayed in compliance with the C-Group representational art, and the utilisation of the particular characteristics of the natural rock surface (instead of introduction of artificial registers), however, rather suggest that we are dealing with an adjustment or adoption of this thematic cycle recurring in built funerary monuments for decoration of a natural place with a possible social and/or religious significance.

¹⁰ A social and/or religious significance of the “Painted Shelter at Korosko” was suggested already by Trigger (1965: 78) who considered the place to constitute an early (i.e. Early Nubian) ledge shrine.

¹¹ In the area of Korosko, interestingly, there are several surfaces that bear painted or incised images that could well have been made by the same hands as those involved in the marking of the rear wall and the ceiling of the present shelter. With painted figures, this is the case of the painted shelter 17 R XVIII-1D in Khor Aweis el-Gurani (see Chapter 3 in Suková 2011a and Surface [405D] under Ref. No. 405 in Suková 2011b). For petroglyphs of cattle reminiscent of those painted or incised on the present rock-art surface, cf., e.g., Cat. (Ref.) Nos. 438A, 508, 515, 853C, 853L, and 949A in Váhala and Červíček (1999) and Suková (2011b).

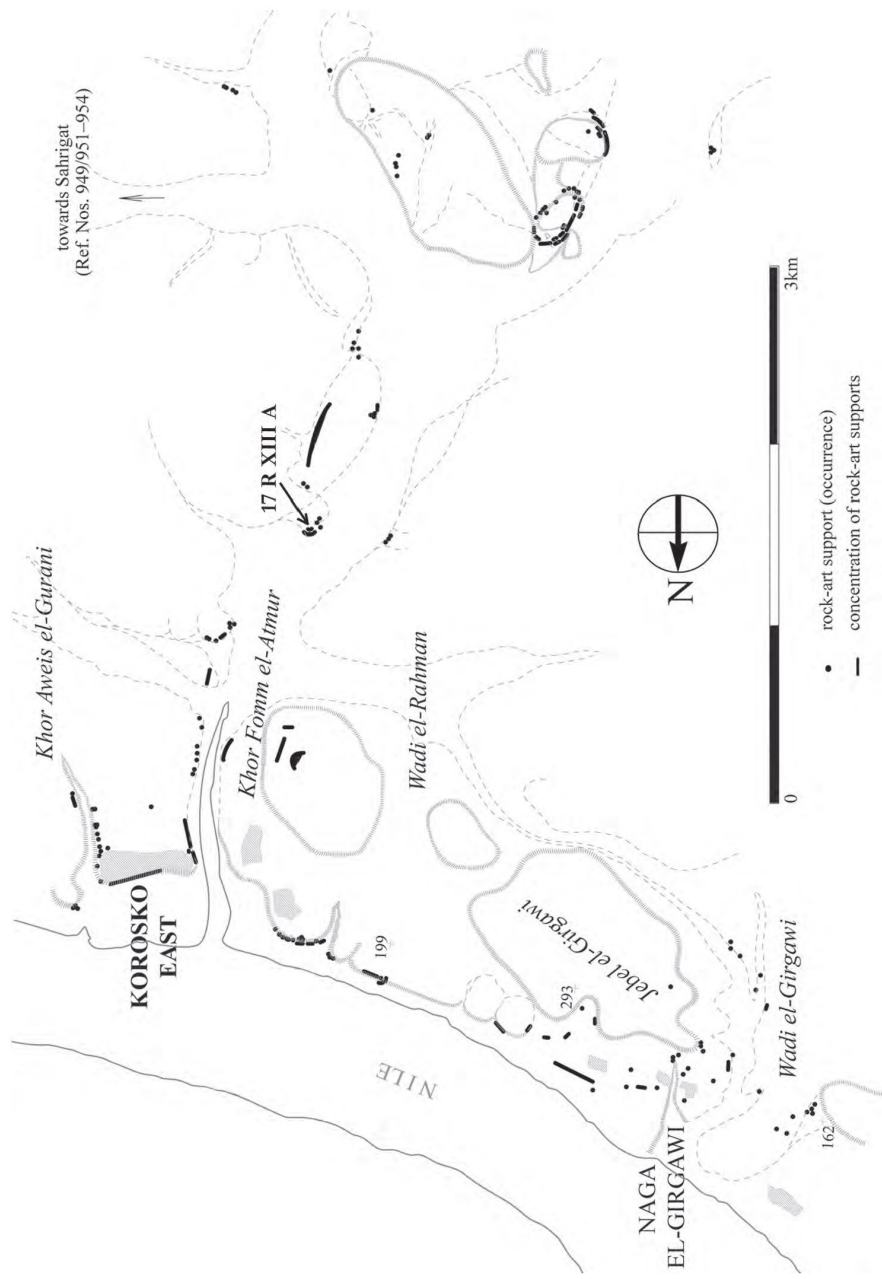


Fig. 8. Location of the "Painted Shelter at Korosko" in the rock-art landscape of the right bank of the Nile in the upstream part of the southern section of the Czechoslovak concession in Lower Nubia (drawing L. Suková and L. Váreková)

The present evidence brings to the fore the questions regarding the (ethnic) identity of the figures appearing on the panel, of the individuals responsible for their additions, modifications, and reductions, and of the (un)targeted audience and consumers of the rock art (Smith 2003). The oscillating identity (ethnicity) of the figures could also point to the actual function of this place. With the location of this site in the borderland between the Nile and the mountains – the two of which are represented by the natural properties of the rock surface – in the open landscape of one of the largest khors, it would seem plausible to see in this place a venue of social and/or religious gatherings of the local Nubian (C-Group) communities some of which may have come into contact with an Egyptian influence, or even a venue where the encounters of two different worlds – the Nubian and the ancient Egyptian – could have taken place. The presence of the ancient Egyptians in this region during the Old Kingdom and in particular the Middle Kingdom – albeit of a rather specific character – and the adoption by the local Nubian communities of some aspects of the ancient Egyptian culture in life and upon death during the Second Intermediate Period and the New Kingdom are attested by the large number of rock inscriptions recorded in the vicinity of the modern village of Naga el-Girgawi, in Khor Fomm el-Atmur, and in Sahrifat (Žába 1974) and by the (Late) C-Group and New Kingdom cemeteries excavated in the Korosko region (Emery and Kirwan 1935), respectively.

Conclusion

In the present paper, the framework of scales proposed by Ch. Chippindale (2004) for the reporting and study of rock art as pictures in place was used for the presentation of one of the most exceptional rock-art surfaces from Lower Nubia that, since the 1960s, is accessible for research only through “pictures of the pictures in place” and “pictures out of place”. Each one of the four, closely inter-connected scales made it possible to bring to the fore and discuss the technical, thematic, stylistic, syntactic, and locational and archaeological aspects of this rock-art occurrence that finds no parallels in the rock art of Lower Nubia. Despite the limitations of the sources available for the reconstruction of the transformation of the natural rock surface in the shelter into the multi-layered rock-art surface that was eventually documented by the Czechoslovak expedition, it was possible to build up an evaluation of the significance of the evidence and to raise a number of important issues, including (but not limited to) those concerning the (ethnic) identity, (social) dynamics, and function of rock art among the Nubian populations during the Middle Nubian sequence (C-Group times). Nevertheless,



Fig. 9. Location of the conspicuous boulder with the “Painted Shelter at Korosko” in the open landscape of Khor Fomm el-Atmur (photo Zbyněk Žába)

many of these issues have to remain open because those who could provide the appropriate answers are long gone and the pictures they had left of themselves, their life-worlds, and their aspirations have disappeared for good together with their places.

Acknowledgements

This study was supported by the Charles University Scientific development programme No. 14: Archaeology of non-European areas, Sub-project: Ancient Egyptian civilisation research: cultural and political adaptations of the North African civilisations in Antiquity (5,000 BCE–1,000 AD). The research into the rock-paintings of Lower Nubia and the presentation of the paper at the 2011 Dymaczewo conference were made possible thanks to the financial support extended by the Grant Agency of Charles University to the research project No. 15009 (*The rock art of Northeast Africa in the context of landscape and archaeology*).

REFERENCES

- ALMAGRO BASCH, M. and M. ALMAGRO GORBEA. 1968. *Estudios de arte rupestre nubio. T. 1., yacimientos situadós en la orilla oriental del Nilo, entre Nag Kolorodna y Kasr Ibrim (Nubia Egipcia)*. Madrid.
- BIETAK, M. and R. ENGELMAYER. 1963. *Eine Frühdynastische Abri-Siedlung mit Felsbildern aus Sayala-Nubien*. Wien.
- BLACKMAN, A. M. 1915. *The Rock Tombs of Meir*. Part 3 (= Archaeological Survey of Egypt, vol. 24). London.
- BONNET, CH. 2000. *Édifices et rites funéraires à Kerma*. Paris.
- ČERVÍČEK, P. 1978. Notes on the chronology of Nubian rock art from the end of the Bronze Age onwards. In: J. M. Plumley (ed.), *Nubian Studies: Proceedings of the Symposium for Nubian Studies: 57-63*. Cambridge.
- ČERVÍČEK, P. 1986. *Rock Pictures of Upper Egypt and Nubia*. Roma. Herder.
- ČERVÍČEK, P. 1992-1993. *Chorology and Chronology of Upper Egyptian and Nubian Rock Art up to 1400 B.C.* Sahara 5: 41-48.
- CHIPPINDALE, CH. 2004. From millimetre up to kilometre: a framework of space and of scale for reporting and studying rock-art in its landscape. In: Ch. Chippindale and G. Nash (eds.), *Pictures in Place: The Figured Landscapes of Rock Art*: 102-117. Cambridge.
- CHIPPINDALE, CH. and G. NASH (eds.). 2004a. *Pictures in Place: The Figured Landscapes of Rock Art*. Cambridge.
- CHIPPINDALE, CH. and G. NASH. 2004b. Pictures in place: approaches to the figured landscapes of rock-art. In: Ch. Chippindale and G. Nash (eds.), *Pictures in Place: The Figured Landscapes of Rock Art*: 1-36. Cambridge.
- EMERY, B. and L. P. KIRWAN. 1935. *The excavations and survey between Wadi es-Sebua and Adindan 1929-1931*. Cairo.
- FIRTH, C. M. 1915. *The Archaeological Survey of Nubia, Report for 1909-1910*. Cairo.
- FRIEDMAN, R. 2004. The Nubian Cemetery at Hierakonpolis, Egypt. Results of the 2003 Season: Excavation of the C-Group cemetery at HK27C. *Sudan & Nubia* 8: 47-59.
- FRIEDMAN, R. 2007. The Nubian Cemetery at Heirakonpolis, Egypt. Results of the 2007 Season: The C-Group Cemetery at Locality HK27C. *Sudan & Nubia* 11: 57-71.
- HUYGE, D. 2002. Cosmology, Ideology and Personal Religious Practice in Ancient Egyptian Rock Art. In: R. Friedman (ed.) *Egypt and Nubia: Gifts of the Desert*: 192-206. London.

- LANDSTRÖM, B. 1970. *Ships of the Pharaohs: 4000 years of Egyptian shipbuilding*. London.
- MENARDI NOGUERA, A., and M. SOFFIANTINI. 2008. The rock-art sites of the upper Waddan (Jebel Uweinat, Libya). *Sahara* 19: 109-128.
- OSBORN, D. J. 1998. *The Mammals of Ancient Egypt*. Warminster.
- SMITH, H. S. 1962. *Preliminary Reports of the Egypt Exploration Society's Nubian Survey*. Cairo.
- SMITH, S. T. 2003. *Wretched Kush: Ethnic identities and boundaries in Egypt's Nubian Empire*. London and New York.
- STEINDORFF, G. 1935. *Aniba I*. Glückstadt.
- SUKOVÁ, L. 2011a. *The Rock Paintings of Lower Nubia (Czechoslovak Concession)*. Prague.
- SUKOVÁ, L. 2011b. *The Rock Art of Lower Nubia (Czechoslovak Concession)*. Prague.
- TRIGGER, B. G. 1965. *History and Settlement in Lower Nubia*. Yale University Publications in Anthropology 69. New Haven.
- VÁHALA, F. and P. ČERVÍČEK. 1999. *Katalog der Felsbilder aus der Tschechoslowakischen Konzession in Nubien*, 2 vols. Prag.
- VANDIER, J. 1969. *Manuel d'archéologie égyptienne*, Tome V, Bas-reliefs et peintures, scènes de la vie quotidienne. Paris.
- WEIGALL, A. E. P. 1907. *A report on the antiquities of Lower Nubia (the First Cataract to the Sudan Frontier) and their Condition in 1906-7*. Oxford.
- WENIG, S. 1978. *Africa in Antiquity. T. 2., The Arts of Ancient Nubia and the Sudan*. New York.
- WILLIAMS, B. 1983. *Excavations between Abu Simbel and the Sudan frontier, C-Group, Pan Grave, and Kerma remains at Adindan Cemeteries T, K, U, and J*. The University of Chicago Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition, Vol. V. Chicago.
- ŽÁBA, Z. 1974. *The Rock Inscriptions of Lower Nubia: Czechoslovak Concession*. Praha.