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A Giraffe's Tale. On Enigmatic Composition from Site 04/08 in the Central Dakhleh Oasis, Egypt

1. The rock art in the central part of the Dakhleh Oasis

Until 2002 the research conducted by the Petroglyph Unit (which is part of the Dakhleh Oasis Project – DOP) was almost entirely focused on the eastern fringes of the Dakhleh Oasis (for references and general outline of the research, see Polkowski *et al.* 2013). However, in 2002 a new area was opened for scientific investigations of rock art, namely the Central Oasis – the rocky area between the modern villages of Ismant and Balat (Krzyżaniak 2004). Subsequent field seasons have yielded a high concentration of rock art findings and to date almost 1400 rock art panels, distributed among more than 250 sites, have been recorded (for the distribution of sites and panels, see Polkowski 2016: 38-44, figs. 1.13-1.19). The petroglyphs which are the subject of this paper were found by Lech Krzyżaniak in 2002, and later recorded by the team led by Michał Kobusiewicz in 2008 (Kuciewicz and Kobusiewicz 2011: 238-9). The site has been registered as site 04/08.

The site is located in the southern part of the research area, approx. 6 km south of the tarmac road (Fig. 1-2). In this part of the sandstone ridge the *wadis* are broader than in the northern area; site 04/08 is located in the so-called Painted Wadi – the long and wide sandy valley running from north to south. The hill in question is situated within the *wadi* and resembles an isolated island. The surroundings of the site are surprisingly devoid of rock art, with only two registered sites within the 0.5 km radius (one of these contains solely dynastic petroglyphs,

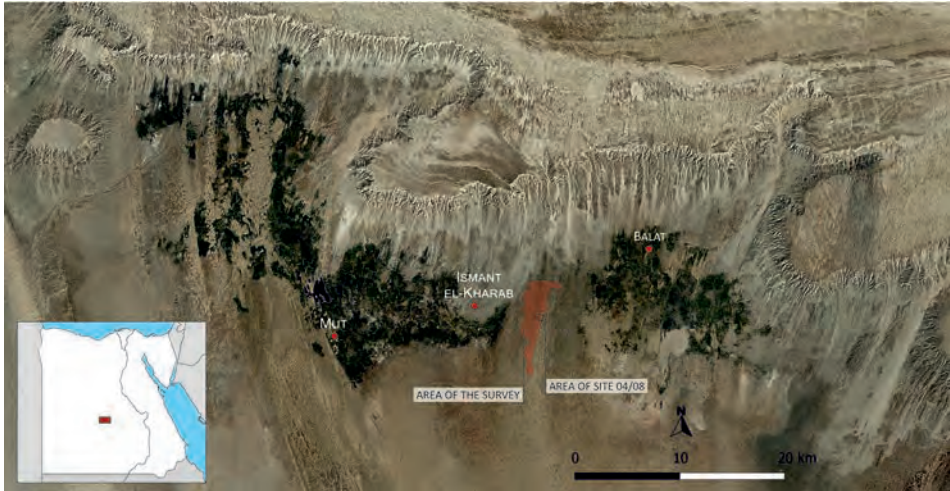


Fig. 1. Dakhleh Oasis. Research area in the central parts of the Oasis, as well as the area of the site under study (04/08), are indicated. The rock art complexes investigated by Hans Winkler (late 30's) and Lech Krzyżaniak (1985-2002) are situated southeast of the easternmost cultivation area

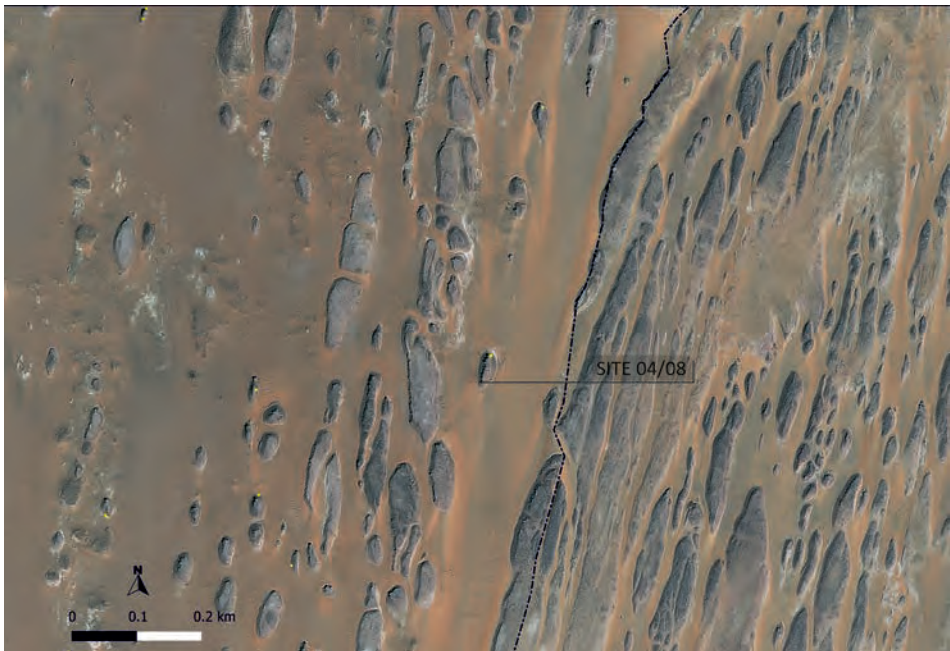


Fig. 2. The vicinity of site 04/08. The hill is located at the bottom of the sandy Painted Wadi. The valley is relatively wide and at this length rather devoid of rock art. The site under study provides an example of just one of a few locations with petroglyphs within the radius of approximately 0.5 km. Yellow points indicate rock art panels

and is, therefore, outside the scope of this paper). However, as the survey has only reached the eastern flank of the Painted Wadi, we still do not know whether more rock art sites exist to the east of the site under study.

Hill 04/08 is a flat-topped *yardang* with almost vertical walls rising above the low slopes (Fig. 3). The slopes are covered with loose stones and gravel. In contrast, the northern part of the hill has almost no loose boulders. Instead, a shallow shelter is situated there, of which two sides (southern and western) are formed by the solid nearly vertical walls. From the north it is protected by a huge rectangular boulder, which apparently, fell off the northern wall in antiquity. The shelter, when approached from the eastern direction, reveals to the observer many of its petroglyphs. However, most of the figures are only visible at close range, from the inside of the rock niche.



Fig. 3. Site 04/08. The hill viewed from the east. It is a relatively flat-topped *yardang* with highly eroded slopes. To the right is the *abri* where most of the rock art is situated



Fig. 4. Site 04/08. View from the north. The panels with petroglyphs are located in both the “shelter” itself or upon the huge boulder, which fell off the wall. Only two panels out of six are to be found outside the rock niche. Panel 6 is not indicated in this figure

Six panels have been registered on the site (Fig. 4). Five of them seem to contain petroglyphs dated broadly to the prehistoric period of history of Dakhleh. Panel 1 is located upon the horizontal surface of a huge boulder in front of the shelter. There, besides the sandal engraving from a later time, a human figure holding a bow is depicted. Just next to it a petroglyph is situated, which was interpreted by Krzyżaniak as representing the “female” anthropomorphic figure type (the so-called Winkler’s “goddess”; see Krzyżaniak 2004: 186-7, fig. 7; cf. Polkowski *et al.* 2013: 106-11). The third petroglyph depicts a hand, although in this case one cannot be sure of its Neolithic origin. On panel 3 a unique motif was registered, namely an animal tail. It seems to be a bushy tail of a giraffe, which characterizes many representations in the Oasis (Kuciewicz and Kobusiewicz 2011: 238-40, fig. 3). Petroglyphs on the southern wall of the shelter are barely visible and some of them

are damaged. One of such figures seems to depict a tree or a hand and a forearm(?). Panel 4, also located on the rear wall of the *abri*, contains at least three representations of giraffes (Fig. 5). They clearly differ in size and stylistic features. The most visible one is the biggest giraffe with an extremely long neck. Moreover, it seems that the petroglyph was not only outlined, but also smoothed and executed in a manner which resembles sunken relief. The two remaining animal depictions are smaller and more rectangular in shape (however, one of them has also a very long neck, although straight, not curved). Panel 5, the last one associated with the shelter was produced during the Dynastic era. The final panel (panel 6) depicting giraffes, is located in the south-eastern part of the hill, away from the shelter. It is badly damaged and only some of the animals can be recognized. They seem to be of the same size and executed by the same person.



Fig. 5. Panel 4, fragment. On this almost vertical wall several petroglyphs of giraffes are executed. Each differs stylistically from the others. The one in the picture is characterized by an elongated and very massive neck, the non-naturalistic shape of its back and wide and exaggerated legs

This is the context, in which one finds the most intriguing panel on the site – panel 2 (Fig. 6), situated on an even, vertical wall facing east. The uppermost petroglyph is a hand motif. It consists of 4 lines – three strokes inserted between the ends of a U-shaped line. A single giraffe depiction is engraved in the central part of the panel. It has no tail and no head, and it seems that these features were omitted intentionally. The overall impression is of a very crude drawing, consisting of shaky lines. What is, however, characteristic, is the orientation of this animal, for we deal here with the so-called “sitting” giraffe motif – an animal turned through 90° (*cf.* Deregowski and Berger 1997; Van Hoek 2005).



Fig. 6. Panel 2. The panel is situated upon the western wall of the “shelter”. The surface is even and shaded for most of the day. A hand motif is engraved at the top while in the middle and to the right a “sitting” giraffe image has been engraved. The scene involving the three giraffes figures is located at the very bottom of the wall (compare fig. 7)



Fig. 7. Panel 2, detail. Three quadrupeds, no doubt giraffes, are placed in a row and directed to the right. They resemble each other stylistically, although some minor differences occur as well. The petroglyphs are in a good state of preservation, except for the central giraffe image, which has been covered with another animal figure of unclear shape, possibly an oryx antelope(?) (photo: E. Kuciewicz)

The figures which are the subject of my inquiry are positioned at the bottom of the wall (Fig. 7). We find there three giraffe images, oriented to the right. The first giraffe has a long straight neck ended with a barely visible head. However, the remnants of the ears and ossicones are still recognizable. It has long legs and a short tail. The forelegs and hind legs meet at their very ends. Additionally, a pointed stroke is juxtaposed with this figure, being directed towards the giraffe's dorsum. The giraffe at the centre is roughly similar in terms of stylistic traits. The difference lies in the arrangement of the animal's legs. They are significantly outstretched and the forelegs seem to be raised slightly higher than the hind limbs. The muzzle is clearly indicated, as well as the ears and ossicones (however, there is no differentiation in their size). The only interpretational difficulty concerns the

hindquarters area of the animal. It seems that another animal drawing has been superimposed on this part of the petroglyph. According to the tracing published by Kuciewicz and Kobusiewicz (2011: 239, fig. 3), there is an unidentified quadruped imposed upon the legs of the two giraffes. This is quite probable; however, it is equally likely that we deal here with the depiction of an oryx whose short legs are drawn upon the hind limbs of the giraffe at the centre. Then, the deep slightly curved line connecting the left and central giraffes may be interpreted as the long horns of the oryx. Altogether, such a “style” of execution is fairly widespread in the whole Dakhleh Oasis and elsewhere (Fig. 8). There is also a possibility that the curved line, and the second one below it, had been executed before the oryx was added to the composition. Then, the horizontal lines touching the back of the giraffe at the centre could be treated as contemporary with it, and the antelope – as a later addition, where, subsequently, one of the existing lines was used to form the long horns. I will return to this ambiguity later in this paper. The last giraffe, (on the right) is again very similar to the other two, at least when it comes to the manner of execution. The top part of the animal is almost the same as that of the giraffe at the centre. The difference lies, however, in its overall orientation, as it is turned through 90°, in relation to the other giraffes. The legs are straight and perpendicular to its body, which also distinguishes the animal from the other two.



Fig. 8. Site CO52, panel 3. An image of an oryx antelope executed in a similar manner as the one superimposed on the central giraffe figure on site 04/08, panel 2. Both figures were pecked. The shape of their bodies is not naturalistic. The legs and the tails are schematically drawn and obviously too large in both cases

The prehistoric rock art in Dakhleh is relatively rich in scenes involving animals, giraffes in particular. There are, for instance, rare “hunting scenes” with humans and/or dogs preying these animals (*e.g.* Krzyżaniak 1990: 95, fig. 92) or less unique scenes showing together giraffes and anthropomorphic figures with exaggerated buttocks (*e.g.* Kuciewicz *et al.* 2010: 309, fig. 7). Equally common are the compositions which bring together several giraffes, as if representing the herds (*e.g.* Polkowski 2016: figs. 5.42, 5.76). Doubtless, they are scenes constituting pictorial narratives, which likely must have involved story-telling. It is beyond the scope of this paper to suggest whether these stories should be treated as “simple” narratives about the observed phenomena, depictions of events or perhaps as representation of mythological realm. What I intend to explore by analysing panel 2 is a more diachronic dimension of such a rock art scene. It stems from an observation that we tend to treat similar compositions as representing one event, in which every petroglyph represents a single entity. In other words, they all “co-exist” in a story simultaneously as separate entities (for instance, in a scene depicting a row of giraffes, which is usually interpreted as a herd consisting of separate walking animals). I would like to consider an optional interpretation – that particular petroglyphs in a scene may represent the same entity in different stages of one story. In this case, it would be a story of **one** giraffe (not three!), with the narrative most probably divided into three parts.

2. From static petroglyphs to figures in motion

There are two implications stemming from the above deliberations: the animal figures on panel 2 may represent just one giraffe, depicted in different stages of a “story”, and secondly – it is a story of movement, so the giraffe would be represented in different stages of motion. The idea that prehistoric art in some instances could represent animals’ movement due to accumulation of images is not new. It is especially the Palaeolithic imagery that seems to provide good examples of such visual treatment (*e.g.* Azéma 2005; Azéma and Rivère 2012; Luis and Batarda Fernandes 2009). Marc Azéma (2005) distinguishes between “breaking down movement” by superimposition of figures and juxtaposition of successive images. The first employs an image, which is covered by more depictions of similar shape in order to create a visual illusion of a moving animal. It is, however, the latter type of composition, which may be comparable with the panel 2 scene. Juxtaposed figures are not separated by any “artificial” features – they just represent the same characters in different actions and poses. Azéma brings examples of

such “split-action movement” depictions from variety of contexts, including the Palaeolithic art of France. He notes, however, that this artistic mode was used to depict movement (therefore, a story) also in historical times, *i.a.* in the Egyptian paintings (*e.g.* the Middle Kingdom scenes of fight and wrestling in Beni Hasan tombs, see Newberry 1893: Pl. V). Does the scene on panel 2 provide an example of similar visual mode?

I believe one should not exclude such a possibility. Firstly, one deals here with three highly similar depictions of giraffes, and the degree of resemblance may point not only to the same artist, who would be responsible for drawing them, but also to his very intention to depict the same animal. The rendition of heads and body, and the overall size of the figures all add to such a possible conclusion. Secondly, the impression is strengthened by the arrangement of the petroglyphs in the form of a register. All drawings are based at the same level, and even though there is no baseline indicated, they all are placed just above the edge of a broken rock. One cannot know this for sure, but it is possible that the rock had already been broken when a prehistoric artist, or artists, decided to execute the petroglyphs on panel 2. Moreover, the figures are all turned in the same direction, *i.e.* to the right. The three possible poses of the animal seem to be depicted in a very “natural” order and the overall impression of the intended successive changes of its position looks very probable. Needless to say, these arguments are highly dependent on intuition and impression. As persuasive as they may be, one cannot forget that such a regularity and linear “reading” of a scene may also be affected by modern comprehension of visual arts.

Having commented on the general similarity of the figures and their supposed linear composition, I would like to focus now on particular features of these images. Firstly there is the congruence between the rendition of the animals’ poses (especially the legs) and the behavioural patterns. There are only two types of a giraffe’s gait. The first one is walking “with both legs on one side off the ground simultaneously” (Innis 1958: 254). The second is a gallop (giraffes do not trot), in which the forelegs and the hind legs work together in pairs. During gallop the hind feet land outside and a bit ahead of the forefeet (Innis 1958: 254; Innis Dagg 1971: 5; Jolly 2003: 12; Peterson and Ammann 2013: 101). It means that, when a giraffe is running fast, the legs become outstretched (Fig. 9-a) and subsequently the hind feet and forefeet meet at more or less one point (Fig. 9-d). I argue then, that both the giraffe to the left and the central one on panel 2 represent two stages of a galloping animal. The first image would show a moment, in which the legs of the giraffe are bunched together, and the second would be a depiction of an out-

stretched position. Two more features may strengthen my argument. First, while running, a giraffe curls up its tail (Estes 1991: 204). Only the giraffe image to the left seems to have its tail still visible. It is in the horizontal position. Although it is not a proper rendering of a curled up tail, neither is it shown as hanging down and inert. Instead, it seems to be somewhat 'stretched out'. The second feature concerns the position of the giraffe's neck. Neck movement constitutes an important element of the overall giraffe movement pattern. When the forelegs extend forward, the neck moves down to a more horizontal position. Should the forefeet and hind feet join together, the neck changes its position to a more vertical one (Holdrege 2005: 52-3). The giraffe at the centre on panel 2 has a slightly bowed neck, while the one to the left seems to be in a more erect position. Obviously, these differences do not provide conclusive evidence for the whole argument and the complete image as such may be 'in the eye of the beholder'. Nevertheless, I think these factors should at least be considered before the final scientific evaluation of the petroglyph scene.

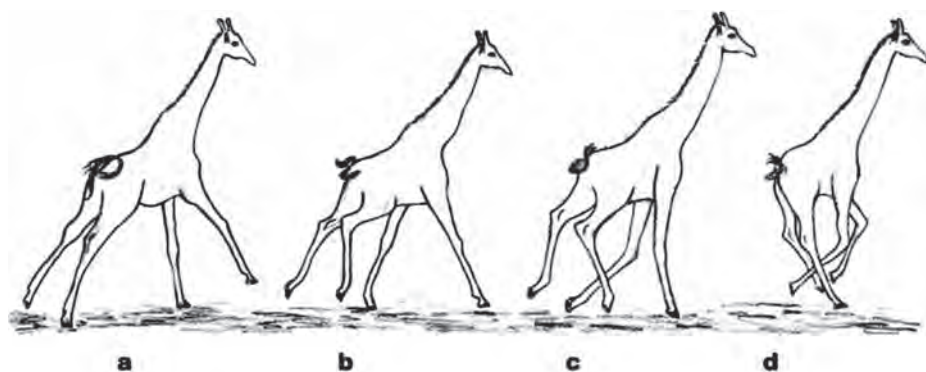


Fig. 9. A schematic drawing of a galloping giraffe. The following stages (a-d) show an animal in its most extended position (legs stretched out forwards and backwards) through intermediate stages, to the position, in which legs are bunched together. The position of the legs is coordinated by slight movements of the neck. After Holdrege 2005: 53, fig. 18

And what about the third image of a giraffe, located on the right side of the panel? We can see there an animal, which unlike the rest of the figures, seems to be depicted in a rather unrealistic position. Being turned through 90° it resembles a "sitting" giraffe more than a walking or a running one, however *sitting* should be taken in inverted commas. As I mentioned before, this kind of representa-

tion has been recognized throughout the whole of the Sahara, and an array of interpretational proposals has been put forward in that matter. Deregowski and Berger (1997: 88ff) proposed that this kind of imagery is a direct effect of certain perceptual issues, therefore it is a psychological and universal rule. The directional cues, or their lack in any given place, would be responsible for placing the animal figures in a “sitting position”. Marteen Van Hoek (2005) reasonably refuted this hypothesis and showed that the perceptual rules of Deregowski’s and Berger’s model cannot help in answering many questions as regards the “sitting” zoomorphs. Panel 2 engravings seem to provide a good example of why this model is doubtful. If one assumes that all three giraffe petroglyphs were executed by the same hand, then one deals here with pure intentionality in their placing. Two of the giraffes are placed horizontally (one may say – in a naturalistic way) and parallel to an imagined ground line created by the broken rock. However, the third giraffe, although close to other figures, was chosen to be turned perpendicularly. It would be difficult for me to believe, that this situation was the outcome of purely perceptual factors. I rather prefer to see it as evidence of intentional and meaningful action. Neither do I share the view that the depiction may be just the result of the position (*e.g.* seated or lying), in which a prehistoric artist found himself when drawing, as suggested by Salima Ikram (2009b: 270).

If one refutes the simple explanation that the rightmost image on panel 2 was a depiction of a resting animal (after, supposedly, gallop), especially as such a position is absolutely unnatural for a giraffe, one may ask, what other possible circumstances may be depicted here. Deregowski and Berger (1997: 92) mention the work of Ulrich Hallier (1995), who considers the “sitting” giraffes to be representations of dead animals. Hallier (1995: Abb. 34, 76) provides examples from the area between Tassili and Tibesti, therefore a considerable distance from the Dakhleh Oasis, but at least two scenes found there seem to give us some insight into the giraffes scene on panel 2. Both scenes recorded by Hallier (Fig. 10-11) involve two giraffes and in both cases one animal is depicted as “sitting”. In the first scene the animal to the left seems to be represented in one of the stages of gallop. The giraffe to the right, similar in style to the first one, is turned through 90°. It resembles the panel 2 configuration of giraffes, but without the central animal image. In the second scene from the Central Sahara we come across a very similar situation involving two giraffes, however they are not as close to each other as in the first scene. Moreover, the giraffe on the left does not seem to be running, but rather standing. Still, the scene’s idea reminds that of panel 2, which would be a representation of one animal, but in different stages of motion/story.

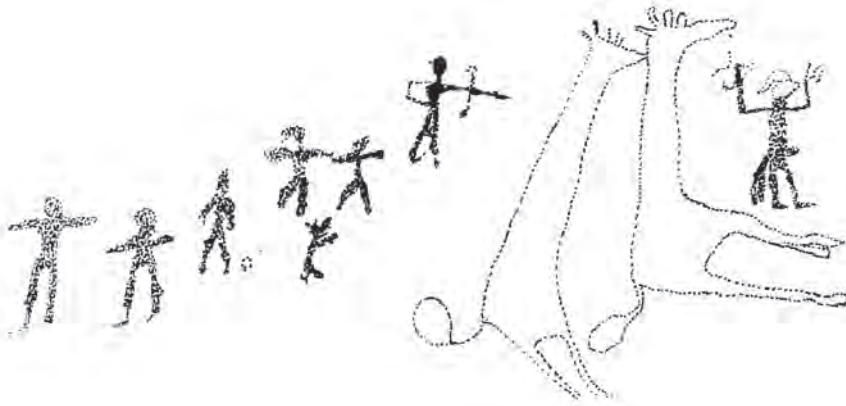


Fig. 10. Rock art panel with a potential “hunt scene”, Tassili-Tibesti region. The giraffes are depicted rather schematically. The oversized oval ending of their tails is a characteristic feature. A group of anthropomorphic figures is situated to the left of the animals and only one figure stands to the right of them. Humans nearest to the giraffes hold bows, albeit in different positions. No scale as in the original tracing. After Hallier 1995: 150, fig. 76-U

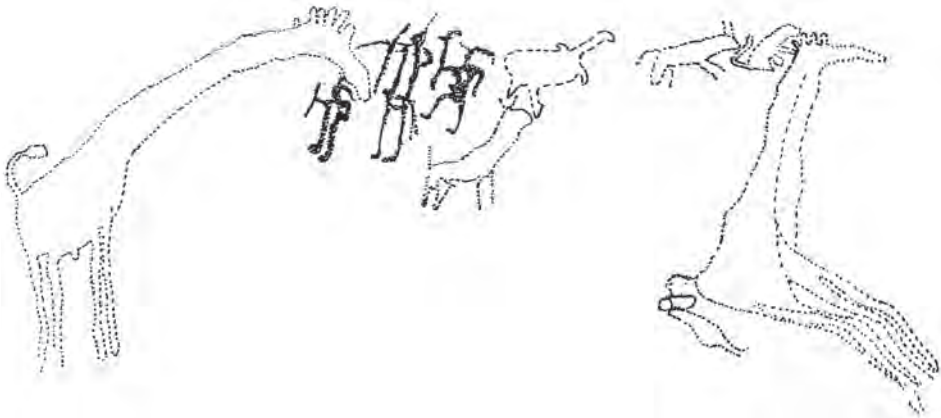


Fig. 11. The second “hunt scene” from the Tassili-Tibesti region. It is a slightly more developed scene involving similar elements as the one in fig. 10 and some additional figures, such as a dog chasing an ostrich. The giraffes are drawn in a manner similar to the ones from the first scene, but the position and the shape of their tails are much more accurate. Three anthropomorphs armed with bows are facing the animal on the left. The one to the right seems to be attacked by two dogs. No scale as in the original tracing. After Hallier 1995: 150, fig. 77-U

What is different in the scenes described by Hallier, is the presence of human figures. Thus, in the first scene the left side of the composition contains six anthropomorphs and a dog. One human figure holds a bow with an arrow pointing at a giraffe. To the right, next to the “sitting” giraffe there is another human figure with an attached tail(?) and a bow. It raises its hands and is called by Hallier

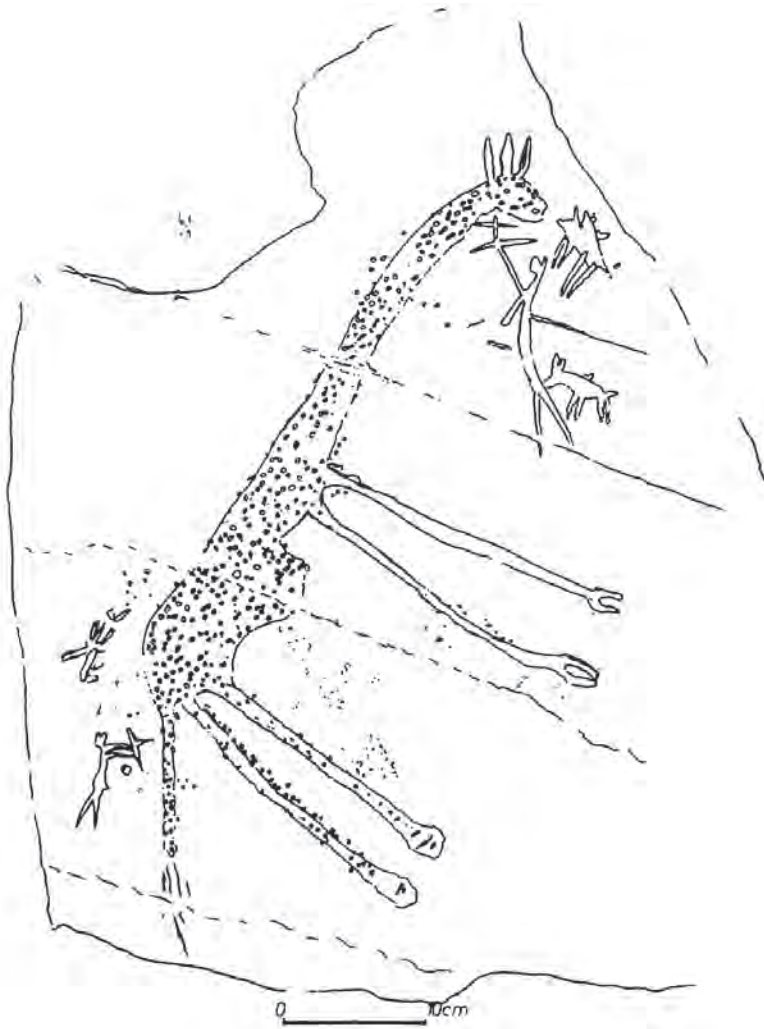


Fig. 12. Site 61-39/E3-3, eastern Dakhleh Oasis. The oversized giraffe (possibly pregnant?) is surrounded by the anthropomorphic figures holding bows. The latter are accompanied by two dogs. In the case of the forelegs the cloven-hooves are indicated. After Krzyżaniak 1987: 186, fig. 2

a “worshipper” (*Adorant*). In the second scene three humans are turned to the left, thus facing a giraffe. They are armed with bows(?). To the left of them a dog is chasing an ostrich, and even further to the left two dogs are depicted near a head of a “sitting giraffe”. It seems then that both cases mean to represent a hunt, which is mainly indicated by the dogs and armed anthropomorphs. In fact, these may be two stories divided into two episodes: 1) a hunt in progress and 2) hunted game goes down, therefore suggesting a successful hunt. If this is the case, it would be quite convincing to treat the “sitting” zoomorphs as dead game.

In fact, a very similar scene comes from the Dakhleh Oasis itself and was published by Lech Krzyżaniak (1990: Fig. 2). It shares an array of features with Hallier's compositions, notably human figures with bows, attacking dogs and, of course, a giraffe (Fig. 12-13). The main difference seems to be that at Dakhleh only a single giraffe is depicted and that it is turned through approx. 45°. Nevertheless, if anthropomorphs delineate the imagined ground line, then obviously the position of the hunted quadruped is distorted. In view of what has been said above, one may carefully assume that we deal here with a representation of a dead animal (indicating a successful hunt). Hence, the scene from Dakhleh site 61-39/E3-3 provides an analogy for other hunting scenes in terms of potential subject-matter, but not in terms of narrative strategy as it depicts only one (final?) stage of a story. Nevertheless, all of the above mentioned compositions may support the theory that the “sitting” giraffes could connote dead game. Let me then turn once again to the panel 2 scene in order to read the possible narrative of its petrolyphic content.



Fig. 13. The photograph of the panel from fig. 12. Photo: Lech Krzyżaniak. Archives of the Poznań Archaeological Museum

3. Towards a fuller interpretation

Looking at the scene from left to right, one sees a giraffe, which most probably runs in a gallop gait and is shown, first having its legs bunched together, and subsequently spread possibly moving at full speed. The third image may depict the final episode – the fatal state. Assuming that giraffes run fast on rare occasions, in most cases while escaping (*cf.* Seeber *et al.* 2012: Table 1, “canter”), I think that panel 2 contains a narrative telling us a story of a fleeing giraffe, which eventually died. If this was the basic tenet of the story, then one or two other elements may support this theory.

The first of these features would be a short line parallel to a neck of the giraffe image to the left. This straight line makes a strong impression of being in motion and directed towards the animal’s body. If we now compare this scene with the other mentioned before, we may hypothesize that the line is actually a metonymy for a human being and therefore for a hunt. If that were the case, the line may possibly be depicting an arrow or a spear, albeit extremely simple, almost symbolic in nature. Although the scene is very well preserved, the giraffe at the centre has been superimposed and thus damaged by other petroglyph(s), which I had already mentioned. One can only regret that happened, because it is extremely difficult to say now whether a line protruding from the back of the animal was once an independent feature or is exclusively part of the zoomorphic figure. If the first option is valid, then one may deal here with a depiction of an arrow/spear, which impacted into a back of the quadruped. Unfortunately, the current documentation of panel 2 does not allow to resolve this uncertainty once and for all. In any case, this would be the second feature pointing to a possible hunt story on the panel.

As simple as it may seem at first glance, the scene on site 04/08 may have been treated by prehistoric dwellers of the Dakhleh Oasis as a very rich and meaningful composition. Although, it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore further potential meanings of these petroglyphs, a few comments may be of importance. First of all, even if the scene was executed for the purpose of telling a story about one giraffe being chased and killed, other spectators could have easily treated the whole composition as containing the figures of three different animals. Secondly, even if recognized as a hunt scene, the composition might have referred to an array of contexts and events. Possibly perceived as a one-time event, a hunt, it could have also been associated with ritual practices, mythological events or hunting in a more generic sense. It could have even been associated simultaneously with all of these potential scenarios, as hunting and mythology are often inseparable (in

the context of rock art studies, see e.g. Dowson 2009: 382). What must be underlined, is the fact that I do not intend to imply that the rock art composition was infested with meanings and that there was just one set of meanings to be decoded by others. There certainly must have been a meaningful intention behind creating the scene, possibly well understood by people from the same community, but the images themselves have always played their own roles in the never-ending interpretational game (cf. Ljunge 2013). The meanings emerging from an interaction between the people and rock art are always unique, though may be also similar across the time. Thirdly, it is the social aspect, which should be expanded upon for the purpose of a deeper understanding of such scenes. The societies inhabiting Dakhleh in the 6th and 5th millennia BC, a possible chronological frame for the petroglyphs on panel 2, (cf. Riemer 2011: 248) were economically dependent on hunting, despite the increased significance of pastoral elements (for the latest overview of the Dakhleh Oasis Neolithic phase, see McDonald 2016). One may assume that game hunting played an important role at many various levels of people's social life and its economic significance was just one of them. Animals, no doubt, formed a part of the same world as humans, and their mutual engagement in this world could have been embraced by what we call mythology. However, it seems that there was often no division between the real and mythical realm, just one realm seemed to exist, in which humans, animals and many other entities dwelled (cf. Ingold 2000). The great interest in giraffes all over the eastern and central Sahara, measured in thousands of petroglyphs and paintings, provides an invaluable clue, namely that we are dealing with elements (images), which once belonged to a wide and apparently coherent and intersubjective system of knowledge. It was not merely about drawing images of animals. It was about important features of the world – about the prehistoric “truths”. Finally, there is a whole array of questions regarding the very context of rock art execution. Was panel 2 created during a one-time event? Was it produced as an element of a performance, e.g. a ritual or storytelling? Was the artist alone or surrounded by other members of a group, when drawing the images? Was the place of site 04/08 regularly visited because of the presence of the petroglyphs or was it abandoned after the figures were put on a rock face? There can be many questions asked regarding the *biography* of this rock art location (cf. Polkowski 2015).

All of these issues must temporarily remain unanswered as the main purpose of this brief contribution is to shift attention towards an alternative approach to understanding petroglyphs. In their studies, scholars tend to treat the human and/or animal figures as separate entities, but, in some instances, this approach may

only be appropriate at the formal level. No doubt, in the case of panel 2 one deals with at least seven petroglyphs; this by no means indicates that there are seven different entities involved in the narratives of this panel. I argue that at least three petroglyphs represent the same entity, namely a giraffe, which was hunted. Such a diachronic vision of a rock art scene, if accepted, may in future, serve as inspiration when interpreting other Saharan compositions involving similar figures. Perhaps scenes depicting herds of game in fact represented movement of certain individual animals? We can only guess what was the narrative content accompanying the figures when they were approached and perceived by people. But I am willing to believe that these petroglyphs formed just a part of a bigger whole. As Luis and Batarda Fernandes (2009: 1315) write, “behind action lies a narrative, a speech that most certainly sustained those artistic manifestations”.

In conclusion, I would like to comment on two isolated petroglyphs situated high up on the rock wall. They certainly do not make the interpretation of the panel easier. The first one, is a single depiction of another “sitting” giraffe, either unfinished or intentionally incomplete. As no other petroglyphs are juxtaposed with it, one tends to treat it as an isolated image, possibly “telling” the same story as the “three giraffes” composition, but in a very different artistic mode. This would not be a diachronic chain of events, but only a final stage of the narratives: a dead giraffe (a “snapshot”, see Luis and Batarda Fernandes 2009: 1307). And then there is the second petroglyph, depicting a hand. Not only does its presence open another discussion on the possible significance of site 04/08, but also forces one to ask further questions relating to chronological relations and interdependencies between the different elements constituting the site. Another issue, which must be, regrettably, put aside for the time being.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Anthony Mills, the head of the Dakhleh Oasis Project. I also thank Michał Kobusiewicz, Ewa Kuciewicz and Eliza Jaroni for shared effort during the fieldwork and the very memorable time in every season of work in the Oasis. All photographs were taken by the author, unless stated otherwise. The research was sponsored by the Polish National Science Centre (grant No. 2016/23/D/HS3/00805).

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