

# PRELIMINARY DATA ON PETROGLYPHS FROM GEBEL GURGURIB NEAR SHEMKHIYA IN THE FOURTH CATARACT REGION

Karol Piasecki\*

While with the PCMA expedition to the Fourth Cataract, directed by Bogdan Żurawski, between 10 February and 5 March 2006, the present author carried out a pro-

spection of the Gebel Gurgurib area near Shemkhiya. Altogether 64 rock-art sites were identified and documented provisionally (the coding of the sites – KP with number – is only for the purposes of the present report and will be adapted to the general survey recording system upon completion of the work);<sup>1</sup> some of the single petroglyphs may have been recorded during earlier prospection in the area. Moreover, following further studies, certain sites may have to be treated jointly for technical and formal reasons.

All the inventoried sites are located from one to five kilometers east and north of the center of the village of Shemkhiya where the expedition's base was located [Fig. 1]. The glyphs were made on hard crystalline rocks covered to a varying extent with waste and desert patina. The selection of surfaces for making drawings depended on exposure with regard to communication trails. It is only exceptionally that the glyphs appear on the horizontal surfaces of rock bars or on small boulders lying in the wadi bottom. An absolute majority is accessible from ground level or

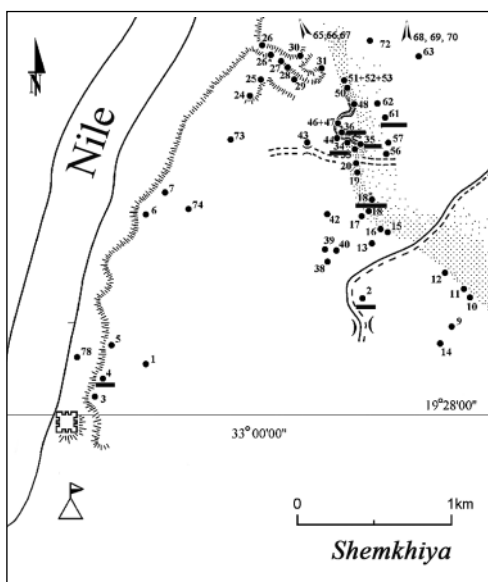


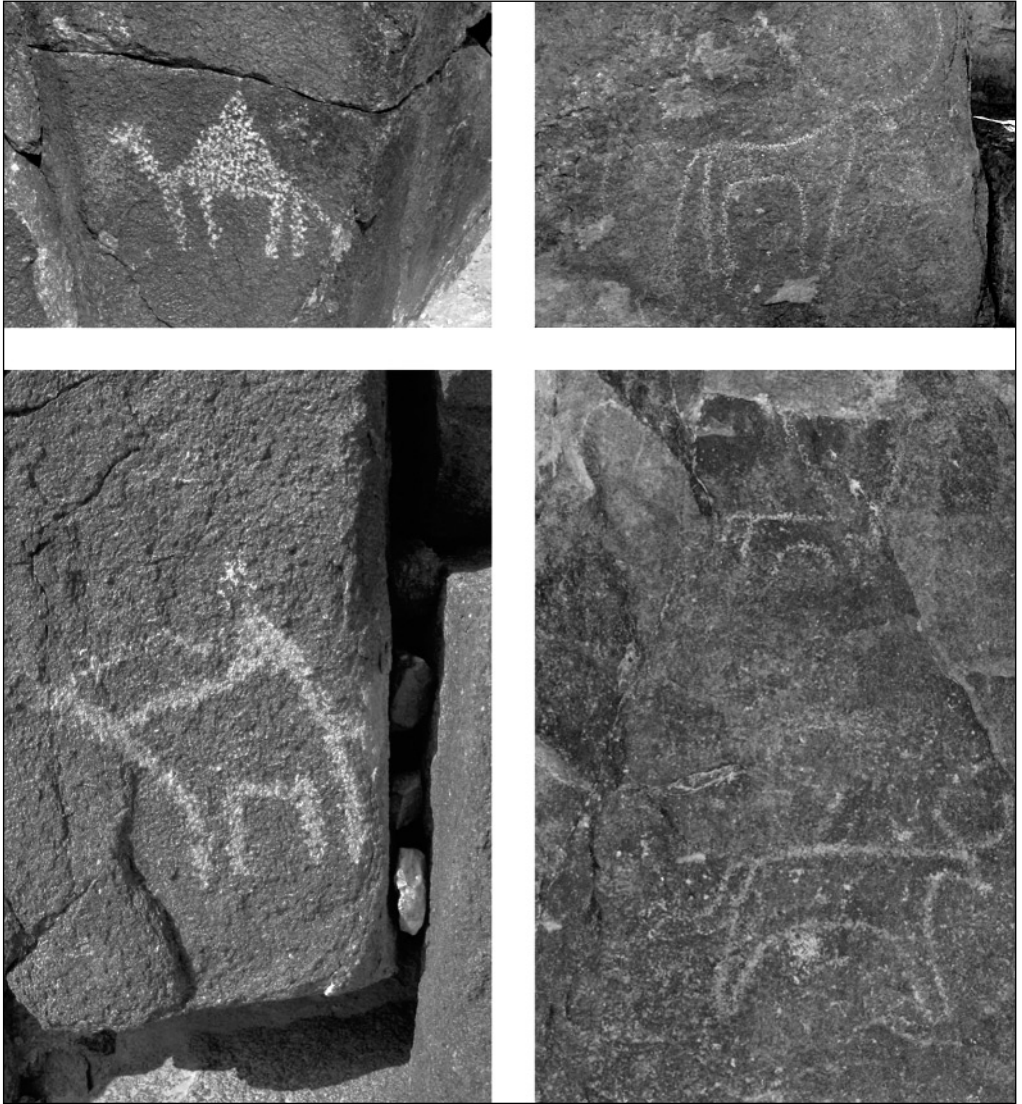
Fig. 1. Schematic localization of sites inventoried during the prospection in the spring of 2006 (flag marks the location of the expedition base)

\* University of Szczecin, Chair of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology

<sup>1</sup> Partly in association with other PCMA expedition staff, students of archaeology from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Krzysztof Gawroński, Łukasz Moczulski and Marcin Swoboda. For more on the rock art in this region, see below, contribution by E. Kuciewicz in this volume.

required only a small scaffold to be executed. There are practically no examples in places inaccessible without the use of mountain-climbing techniques or not visible from modern or ancient trails. Consequently, there is every reason to

believe that with the exception of the oldest drawings, which are heavily patinated, poorly visible and occasionally overlaid with later glyphs, the present survey has recorded an absolute majority of rock art in the region.



*Fig. 2. Schematic image of a camel and rider (Site KP 61), note punch stuck in the rock crack on the right (bottom left); camel executed in surface technique (Site KP 18\*, top left); longhorned cow (Site KP 61, top right); cows (Site KP 2) (Photo K. Piasecki)*

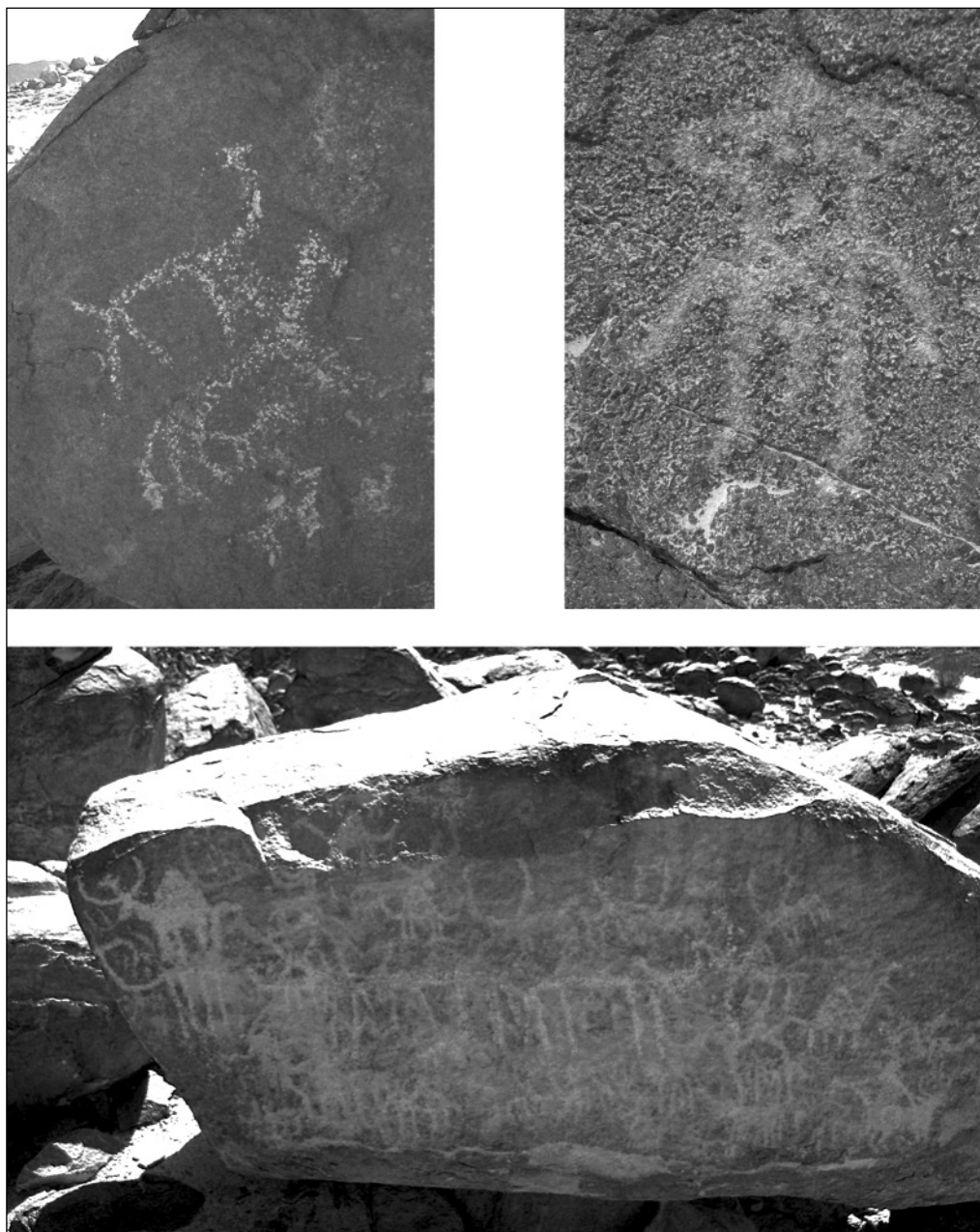


Fig. 3. Representation of two giraffes (?) with their young (Site KP 35, top left); unidentified human figure, possibly a shaman (Site KP 34, top right); and fragment from Site KP 36. Note on the left a cow with a cross between its horns and added camel hump. Assuming the cross is a Christian contribution, then we are dealing here with a case of double transformation of the original image (Photo K. Piasecki)

Most of the drawings are from twenty some to fifty centimeters. A few representations, the ones that are less well visible and undoubtedly older, exceeded a meter and in a few cases of assemblages of glyphs, 5 m in size. The drawings were executed in a variety of techniques, but with a predominance of the linear one, using stone punches, mostly made of quartzite [Fig. 5]. The degree of patina and the superposition of some drawings combine with stylistic differences to indicate chronological variation. Some glyphs were damaged intentionally, others were re-made. At least some of the drawings may be modern in date.

Altogether more than half a thousand drawings were identified. Most of these – more than 300 – were images of camels, some even with riders [Fig. 2, top], and

representations of cows [Fig. 2, bottom left]. Horses are much less frequent – only a few dozen images, including two with riders [Fig. 4]. There are four presumed represen-



Fig. 4. Horse and rider glyph (Site KP 4)  
(Photo K. Piasecki)



Fig. 5. Stone punches, the middle one of quartzite, stuck in a crack after making a glyph (Site KP 8)  
(Photo K. Piasecki)

tations of giraffes [*Fig. 3*, top left] and a doubtful drawing of an elephant and antelope, a single bird drawing (ostrich or bustard), six crosses with one evidently Coptic in overall appearance (and another potential one), six “stars” and a single human figure interpreted possibly as a shaman [*Fig. 5*, top right], two inscriptions in Arabic and a few dozen most frequently unfinished images which are difficult to identify.

Site KP 36 is an exceptional assemblage comprising a number of rock boulders covered with glyphs (for location, see *Fig. 3* on p. 437). One of the rocks has a lateral surface, measuring 4.50 by 1.80 m, covered with four rows of damaged and superimposed drawings [*Fig. 3*, bottom]. A rock gong was also found nearby. The iconographical program of this assemblage is extremely complicated.

While more analysis of the uncovered material is required, the following pre-

liminary conclusions can be formed. The variety of stylization, techniques of execution and superposition of images differing between themselves in terms of technique and style points to a temporal continuity of this group of rock-art sites. Successive human groups apparently made use of the same places, often intentionally transforming existing drawings. The said variety suggests a cultural difference between particular groups. Detailed dating requires comparative analyses, but even so, the total absence of wild game indicates that the glyphs cannot be earlier than the late Neolithic; the sequence of cows altered into camels leaves little doubt about later continuation. The few unquestionable signs of a cross and contemporary, surely modern, Arabic inscriptions are proof of a lasting tradition. The presence of numerous stone punches stuck into cracks in the rock near glyphs is noteworthy.