

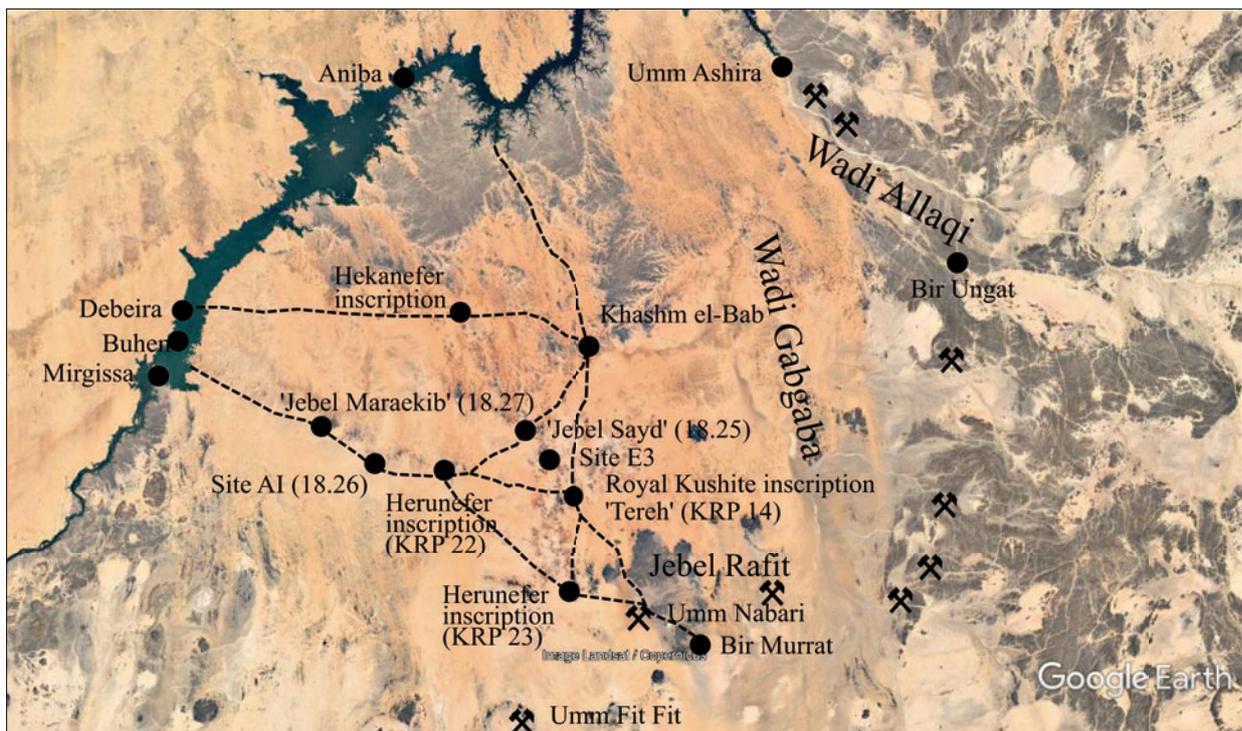
Boats and Routes: New Rock Art in the Atbai Desert

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In 2018 the SARS-Yale expedition to the Eastern Desert of Sudan surveyed some previously documented sites and also reconnoitred under- or un-explored regions of the desert for future fieldwork opportunities.¹ The main goal of the expedition was to survey gold mines in the Wadi Amur region and also epigraphic sites in the deserts of the 'Korosko Road' east of Lower Nubia. This desert is well-known for its Egyptian inscriptions, almost entirely New Kingdom in date, which reveal the presence of an imperial Egyptian administration deep in the desert (Castiglioni and Castiglioni 2006; Davies 2014; Ruffieux and Bashir 2014). Many of the same locales bearing pharaonic inscriptions also exhibited a generally earlier phase of rock art, usually depicting cattle and other fauna. As part of this wide survey of the Eastern Desert of Sudan, two new and noteworthy rock art sites were

discovered by the SARS-Yale 2018 expedition, site 18.25 and site 18.27, the latter of which will be presented here as a unique record of 4th millennium BCE Naqadan or possibly A-Group iconography in the Sudanese Eastern Desert. The unnamed site 18.27 was named by the mission 'Jebel Maraekib' (Map 1), derived from Arabic plural of marakib 'boat' due to the depiction of 13 boats on the rock walls of the jebel.

The Sudanese Eastern Desert, also known as the Atbai, is a seldom researched region, peripheral to ancient Egypt and Nubia. Quite distinctive from the Western Desert in its mountainous and undulating landscape and access to plentiful seasonal grasses and scrub along wadi beds, the difficulty of vehicular access to the deeper Atbai has meant that very few archaeological missions have been able to devote themselves to the archaeology of the region. Notable explorations have been undertaken by the Centro Ricerche sul Deserto Orientale (CeRDO) missions directed by Alfredo and Angelo Castiglioni, in addition to the comprehensive mapping of gold mines by Rosemarie and Dietrich Klemm (Castiglioni, Castiglioni and Vercoutter 1998; Castiglioni and



Map 1. Possible and approximate routes and tracks in the Eastern Desert of Lower Nubia, with goldfields marked.

¹ The work was a joint expedition between Yale University and SARS, and was carried out with the permission and encouragement of Dr Abdelrahman Ali, Director General of NCAM. The team consisted of Julien Cooper (director), Vivian Davies, Pierre Meyrat, Hozaiifa Abdelmagid (archaeologist, representing NCAM), Mubarak Adam, and Osman Dafalla. Funding and support for the project was provided by the Egyptian Exploration Society, the Gerald Avery Wainwright Fund and the William K. & Marilyn M. Simpson Endowment for Egyptology. We are also thankful for Derek Welsby who provided a gazetteer and coordinates of sites visited as part of the 2013 Korosko Road project and Wouter Claes for commenting on a draft of this paper.

Castiglioni 2003; Klemm and Klemm 2013). A recent Polish mission surveying deep in the Atbai desert in Wadi Diib has revealed a huge rock art tableau depicting cattle and other fauna, among other anthropomorphic depictions (Pluskota 2012). These depictions were earlier noted by Sandars and Owen 1951, 330). New fieldwork in this desert has the potential to expose many new sites and change our view on both the ancient indigenous nomads of the region as well as their relationship with the urban states of Egypt and Nubia.



Routes in the Lower Nubian Desert

Prehistoric and later

The rock art of Jebel Maraekib can be contextualised in a complex set of routes and desert tracks in the deserts of Lower and Upper Nubia. While routes in this area are sometimes known under the moniker ‘the Korosko Road’, a linear route linking Korosko with Abu Hamed, in antiquity there was a great and complex network of tracks crossing the desert, many of which had little to do with Korosko. Most of these tracks led from nodes on the Nile to goldfields and pastoralist centres in the interior desert. The functions of these tracks were manifold. In historical periods, gold mines, particularly those at Umm Nabari, Umm Fit and Abu Siha were likely at least part of the goals of Egyptians traversing these routes – and there were many mines beyond this in the Wadi Gabgaba basin and the hills to its east (Castiglioni and Castiglioni 2006, 401-410; Castiglioni and Castiglioni 2007, 35-36, 50; Klemm and Klemm 2013, 544, 549).² But there must have been also many tracks used by local nomadic populations, including seasonal migratory routes for pasturage and trade. For example, the general route along the range east of the Second Cataract is likely the one used by the itinerant Medjay of the Semnah dispatches. In this administrative Middle Kingdom text, Egyptians patrolling near the fortress of Iqen (Mirgissa) encounter a group of the Medjay who exclaimed they came from a desert well called ‘Ibheyet’ (Smither 1945, 3-10; Liszka 2011, 158ff). Intertwined with this function of these routes as migratory corridors for indigenous nomads, such paths must have conducted semi-regular trade between the desert and the Nile. Texts, such as the Annals of Amenemhat II, describe many goods arriving from the Medjay land of Webat-Sepet, pointing to a recurrent

activity where desert populations brought local produce to the Nile (Altenmüller and Moussa 1991). The presence of a phase of prehistoric rock art in many of the same nodes where one finds pharaonic inscriptions suggests that the later pharaonic tracks tapped into an indigenous network of sites and routes in this desert.

The archaeological manifestations of these trade routes are only slowly being uncovered. Working on the explorations of CeRDO, the previous 2014 SARS expedition in the ‘Korosko Road’ revealed a number of watering stations similar to the Abu Ballas trail, where large New Kingdom amphorae functioned as water-supply depots in lieu of reliable wells (Förster 2015). Middle Nubian ceramics, likely of Kerma and Pan-Grave affiliation, are also encountered on these routes, showing that these desert tracks were likely used by Kermans, Egyptians, and more frequently by the indigenous nomads.³ Near Jebel Umm Nabari, the CeRDO expedition identified a ceramic object called a ‘Clayton Ring’. This kind of object is otherwise known from sites in the 4th and 3rd millenniums BC Western Desert and is considered to be part of a toolkit for ancient desert travel (Gatto 2012, 52. For these objects in general see Riemer 2013, 80-84).

One of the logical destinations of these routes leading east of Lower Nubia would have been the well of Bir Murrat, a favourite stopping point of camel caravans well into the 19th century and the location of a British fort during the Mahdiyya. Judging from the ubiquitous prehistoric faunal representations and easy access to water, the Murrat area and the massif of Jebel Rafit was probably a major node in the Eastern Desert for both foreigners and indigenes. The region was a strategic location in the middle of the Korosko route, and possessed some pasturing opportunities and gold mines.

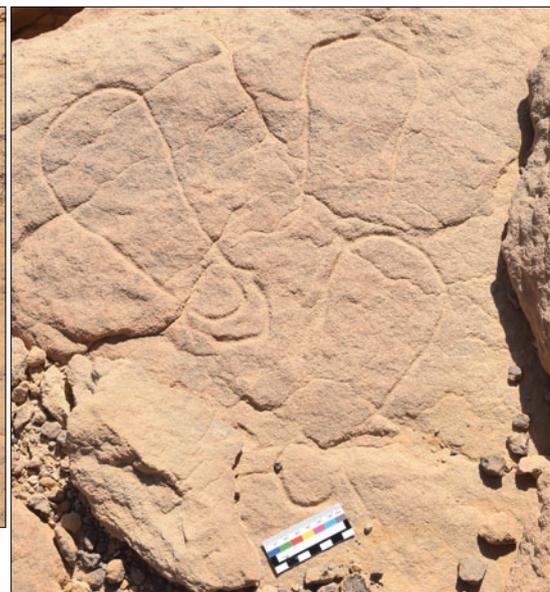
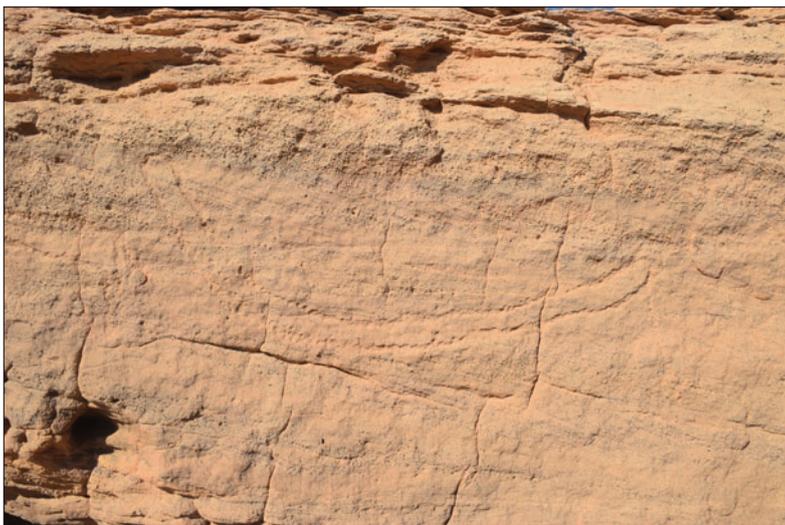


Plate 1. Site AI, a single boat petroglyph and a depiction of three feet with sandal-strings on the rock-shelf above.

² It also plausible that New Kingdom Egyptians used these routes to bypass the Nile and make the shortcut to Abu Hamed; consult the discussion in Davies (2017, 32-33).

³ Manzo (2012, 79-82) notes Kerma, Pan-Grave and other ceramics along the route. See also the extensive discussion in (Manzo 2017, 108-110) on the greater significance of this region to indigenous Pan-Grave people.



Plate 2. An enigmatic depiction at 'Jebel al-Sayd', possibly depicting boats (?) or a bird (?) (below) and a scene of a hunting, depicting dogs chasing quadrupeds (above) (Photo: V. Davies).

Hieroglyphic and hieratic inscriptions are found at Murrat and on the west side of Jebel Raft, where there are also earlier faunal representations, chiefly of cattle (Davies 2014, 31-34). Natural water sources, generally scarce in this part of the Eastern Desert, are found on all sides of Jebel Raft, including Murrat (A good account of the water sources and vegetation around Raft in the 19th century is in Mitford 1937, 77-78. See also Gleichen 1905a, 87-88; Gleichen, 1905b, 2-3).

While Raft and its environs must have been the destination of Pharaonic expeditions, the presence of rock art of a likely Predynastic or prehistoric age along the routes east of the Second Cataract also points to a much earlier use of this region by Nile dwellers. In the period contemporary to the boat petroglyphs presented in this communication (Plates 3-6), the nearby Nile is the home of A-Group people, a cultural complex extending across almost the entirety of Lower Nubia and into Upper Egypt. In addition to this site, another site perched on this range, known as 'site AP' in the CeRDO gazetteer, also exhibited a Predynastic boat likely dating to Naqada II (Plate 1). In fact, this site displayed several very similar features to that of Jebel Maraekib, including 'sandal' petroglyphs, 'tally marks', as well as faunal representations in addition to some Middle Nubian ceramic material. This site was at the head of a wadi containing a small rock shelter approximately 20km east of Jebel Maraekib.⁴ Further east of 'site AP', the SARS-Yale mission discovered another rock art site, site 18.25. This site was christened 'Jebel al-Sayd', Arabic 'Mountain of the hunt' due to the features in the rock art of a hunting scene. The rock art site consisted

⁴ Registered by our mission as site 18.26. Some ceramic material from nearby sites are discussed in Manzo 2012, 79-82.

of a large rock shelter situated on a prominent inselberg in the middle of a ubiquitous but unnamed pass in a range of rocky hills. The petroglyphs were mainly of faunal nature, including cattle, canines, oryx, and giraffes. Some other petroglyphs and features at this site require further investigation and recording to be properly identified, for example a unique scene that might depict birds or, perhaps less likely, boats (Plate 2).

The 'string' of these sites east of the Second Cataract argues for a well-established prehistoric and dynastic route leading east of Lower Nubia to the deeper desert straddling the range of hills east of the Second Cataract. At the end of this range, this route would likely bifurcate into further tracks, some leading southeast towards Raft and the deeper desert and its goldmines, and another leading northeast towards the Khashm el-Bab and thence northwards to the beginning of the bend in the Nile in the region of Korosko and Kuban. The Khashm el-Bab, a pass that allowed access along a north-south route, would be another major node in this network; the features of this site, both pharaonic inscriptions and earlier faunal representations, suggest it was in use for several millennia (For Khashm el-Bab, see Sadr, Castiglioni and Castiglioni 2004, 197; Castiglioni and Castiglioni 2006, 406-407; Castiglioni, Castiglioni and Vercoutter 1998, 112-114; Davies 2014, 36-37). Judging from the location of a single inscription mentioning the New Kingdom personage 'Hekanefer, prince of Miam', a further route perhaps left the region of the Second Cataract due east towards Khashm el-Bab (Sadr, Castiglioni and Castiglioni 2004, 198; Damiano-Appia 1999, 514-515; Davies 2014, 30 n. 3). The arrangement of these desert routes would also explain the prominence and placement of the important inscription at KRP 14, a well carved inscription mentioning a late Middle Kingdom or Second Intermediate Period Kerma ruler called 'Tereh' (Davies, 2014, 35-36. For this inscription see also Cooper 2018, 148-149). The location of this inscription would be right on the junction of where the north-south 'Korosko Road' met with the east-west route leading from the Second Cataract. The capture of this strategic juncture would allow Kerma or Egypt to control the movement of people and goods across much of the desert region. It is very likely that future surveys in the region will reveal more features associated with these desert roads and the indigenous inhabitants of the Eastern Desert.

There has been little work on the palaeoecology of the Eastern Desert, but one could expect a generally more favourable climate in the 4th and 3rd millennium BC than the hyper-arid desert today, perhaps typified by sporadic rainfall and seasonal grasses. This would especially be the



Plate 3. The boat tablean on the east face of Jebel Maraekib. Each boat is numbered sequentially from left-right.



Plate 4. The central wall depicting 'angular' boats (nos 5-10).



Plate 5. Southern wall with four boats (nos 1-4) including the 'official' boat. Note that much of the right part of the hull of the official ship follows a natural crack in the rock surface.



Plate 6. False colour image of the 'official' boat from Dstretch revealing features in greater detail.



Plate 7. A natural hole with artificial marks on the main wall, next to boat no. 8.

case further south in the Eastern Desert, and while there has been little paleoclimatic research in this specific region, studies at near comparable latitudes in the Western Desert (Laqiya, Wadi Shaw) would indicate a climate much more conducive to desert travel than the present day with much more advantageous seasonal water sources and vegetation (Riemer, Lange and Kindermann 2013, 177ff). From the indigenous perspective, such conditions would have made herding and migratory nomadism much easier along these routes in the prehistoric than ensuing periods.

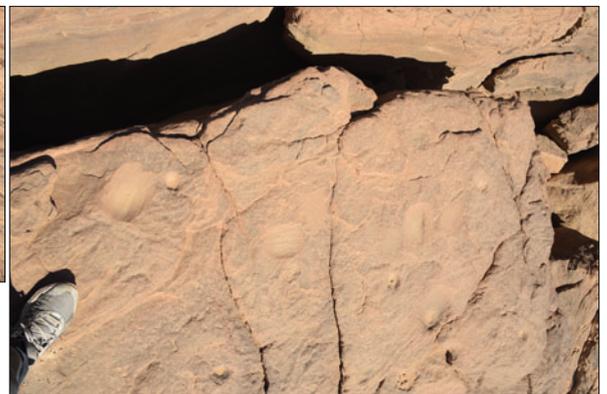


Plate 8. Cups in the rock (left) and rows of notches or tallying marks on the small plateau above the boat scene (right).

The Rock Art at Jebel Maraekib (Site 18.27)

Heading west from the region of Khashm el-Bab towards the Nile at Wadi Halfa, several rock art sites of particular interest were discovered in the 2018 survey.⁵ At site 18.27, the mission identified one of the most remote sites with boat petroglyphs in the Sudanese Eastern Desert currently recorded, being the furthest southeasterly example of these images. These petroglyphs are generally a feature of the deserts of Upper Egypt and are also known at sites on the

⁵ Due to the brevity of the survey, it cannot be discounted that nearby cliff faces in the surrounding valleys may also bear rock art. The survey spent approximately half a day at site 18.27.

Nubian Nile.⁶ The jebel is situated along a long range of hills emanating east-southeast of the Second Cataract region. This range has been explored briefly and several sites with Middle-Nubian ceramics as well as rock art have been noted. There is also a single New Kingdom inscription at the eastern end of this range mentioning a scribe Herunefer (Roccati 2007, 58; Davies 2014, 37).⁷ The rock art site was identified on an isolated jebel that comprises a southward extension of the main range. On the top of this jebel, the expedition discovered the tableau on its east face near the summit (Plate 3).

The main feature in the tableau are 13 large heavily pecked boats, displayed across four faces of the rock. The two eastward facing surfaces contain most of the boats (nos 1-10), while a small cleft to their north also contains three smaller boats (nos 11-13). Judging from this repertoire of boats, it appears that the artists used the entire rock

surface on the two eastward facing walls, while carving the remaining boats in a small niche behind a boulder to the north of these walls. Almost all the boats are identical in character, being large flat-bottomed boats with a vertical prow and an undecorated stern (Plate 4). No decorative nor structural features are depicted, except for a rope protruding from the top of the prows of boats (nos 1, 2, 4, 5, 13). We labelled this type 'angular boat' since the whole structure almost forms a right angle. They recall, although only from an aesthetic

perspective, the black boat of the famous Painted Tomb at Hierakonpolis (This tomb is securely dated to the Naqada IIC, see Quibell and Green 1902, 20-21, pls. LXXV-LXXIX). The ceremonial barque that appears on Djet's comb (Naqada IIIC1) is another interesting parallel (Egyptian Museum, Cairo (JE47176): Jimenez-Serrano 2002, 96, fig. 56). These peculiar boats, which are in fact oddly oriented sickle-shaped boats,

⁶ The nearest known Eastern Desert site exhibiting boat petroglyphs are the petroglyphs from Wadi Allaqi, approximately 190 kilometres to the north. For the publication, see Piotrovsky 1983, 113.

⁷ Several unpublished sites from the Castiglioni expeditions also note rock art or ceramics in this range, most notably sites AE, AG, AH, RD 19, RD 20 and site 'A1' (note this is not site 'A1' mentioned in Castiglioni, Castiglioni and Vercoutter 1998, 177).



Plate 9. Figural representation in the rock art.

are rare but not unique.⁸ At close distance to the left of the main group, a similar boat (no. 5) is engraved though more elongated. Its high prow and the short protruding rope leaves no doubt as to its orientation to the left, so in the opposite direction than the adjacent fleet.

The exception to this scheme is one larger sickle-shaped structure (no. 4), likely the ‘official boat’ of the fleet, which is depicted with two cabins and what appears to be tethering ropes (?) connecting it to another boat (Plates 5 and 6). A pecked line crossing the boat near the stern may designate a rudder oar. The side poles of the cabins are crossing the deck to join the base of the hull. Two facing angular boats are situated right above it. Arguably, this boat is used as an expression of power and as an allegorical rendition of political authority in an otherwise undifferentiated flotilla (Hendrickx and Eyckerman 2010, 127-133; Vanhulle 2018a). The prow and stern of the boat appear to have decorative elements, some of which are notably encountered on similar depictions at sites like Wadi Magar (Darnell 2013, 123, 353, pl. 146-148), Wadi Abu Subeira (Lippiello and Gatto 2012, 273, tab.1), and Nag el-Hamdulab (Hendrickx, Darnell, and Gatto 2012, 1073-1075, figs 6-9; Hendrickx, Darnell, Gatto, and Eyckerman 2012, 305, fig. 8). A close parallel, albeit without prow decorations, is to be found in the Wadi Hammamat (Rohl 2000, 129, fig. 6. Another parallel, also in Wadi Hammamat, is Winkler 1938, pl. XXXIII.11; Morrow *et al.* 2010, 224). This panel shows indeed an angular boat of 45 cm long above a sickle-shaped one that measures 73 cm long. Its two cabins also have vertical elongations that protrude from their roof. These productions can be dated to the Naqada IID and IIIA period.



Plate 10. Footprints on the plateau above the boat-scene.

⁸Two good parallels have been observed at Khor es-Salaam (Červiček 1974, 28, fig. 84) in the Egyptian Nile Valley. Another one is situated along the road between Qena and Quseir (Červiček 1986, 7, fig. 33). An engraving from the Wadi Hammamat shows some similarities (Rohl 2000, 129, fig. 6). Vulture Rock, in Elkab, also bears one very similar angular boat (Huyge 1995, 122, pl. 64 A-B). In Lower Nubia, such boats have been documented at Khor Takar II (Engelmayer 1965, 24, pl. XII, fig. 4), Umm Galan Bahari (Engelmayer 1965, 58, pl. XLIII, fig. 1), between Khor Abu Bakr and a Coptic installation (Engelmayer 1965, 53, pl. XXXVIII, fig. 6b), and at Nag Kolorodna (Basch and Gorbéa 1968, 35-36, 109, fig. 3a-b, 83). It is interesting to note that the example from Khor Takar II has a helmsman and a rope fixed at the top of the prow. The boat engraved between Qena and Quseir also has a rope attached to its prow.

An interesting feature in the depiction of this ship is that the ancient artist has used a long diagonal crack to depict the base of the hull (Plate 6); clearly a deliberate venture of the artist which shows the care they took in placing the elements on the rock surface. The wall at Jebel Maraekib contained several natural holes, and in one case the hole has been artificially touched, with several scrape marks emanating from its mouth (Plates 4 and 7). Whether this was just a utilitarian sharpening or shaping procedure for requisite carving tools or somehow served as part of the artistic unit or even a ritualistic function is not certain.

In addition to the boats, other rock art features were noted



Plate 11. View from the plateau above the boat scene, Pierre Meyrat pictured.

on the small plateau directly above the main wall. Several artificial features sometimes known as ‘scoops’, ‘cups’, or ‘cupules’ were found, as were a series of linear strokes (Plate 8).⁹ These kinds of notches, interpreted by some scholars as counting or tally marks, are well-known from other desert sites such as those on the Abu Ballas trail and hilltop sites around Dakhleh oasis (Förster 2015, 267-271 and Kaper 2009, 171. The site recorded by Liverani near Jebel Barkal also contains both notches and cups, see Liverani 1997, 176). Additionally, a standing anthropomorphic figure was also identified (Plate 9). This figure is somewhat unique, with no certain or exact parallels, but close examples with ‘triangular’ torsos are known from other rock art sites (Dunbar 1941, pl. XXIII.133; Hellström and Langballe 1970 (volume 1:2), corpus A99 and/or 303; Kaper and Willems 2002, 85, fig. 4). Elsewhere on the summit there was a depiction of feet or footprints with apparent sandal straps (Plate 10). Footprints or sandal-prints are ubiquitous in the rock art of Egypt and Nubia, but are generally dated to the Old Kingdom and later, although some have entertained prehistoric dates for these images.¹⁰ The contemporaneity of these rock art-features

⁹ For parallel cups in the Atbai, see Castiglioni and Castiglioni 2007, 19-20 and elsewhere, see Winkler 1939, 29, pl. 44 (site 67, Dakhla); Suková 2011, pls 4-5, 9, 78 (Lower Nubia); Vila 1977, 39 (Amara West); Liverani 1997, 176 (Jebel Barkal). Similar scoops were also encountered on the plateau above the inscriptions at site KRP 8 in the Eastern Desert by the SARS-Yale mission, for this site see Davies 2014, 33-34.

¹⁰ For some parallels in Nubia, see Osman and Edwards 2012, 97, 253, 257-258, 361, 371, 375; Liverani 1997, 176; Hellström and Langballe 1970 (volume 1:2), corpus Aa; Basch and Gorbéa 1968, 62, 101, fig. 21, fig. 75 (Nag Kolorodna), 134, fig. 120 (Khor Zurqan). Consult also the lengthy discussions in Verner 1973, 21-53 and Polkowski 2018. Scholars generally date these features to the terminal 1st millennium BC and early 1st millennium AD (Ptolemaic-Late Roman or Meroitic-post-Meroitic), although there are certainly earlier dynastic examples of footprints or sandal-prints, for instance at earlier Old Kingdom rock art sites, cf. Kaper and Willems 2002, 81-82 and Middle Kingdom example in Darnell 2002, 121. Červíček 1974, 192-193 dates the type of sandal with loose straps, as pictured here, to the prehistoric but he

is uncertain, but the footprints would seem to favour a multi-period use of this site postdating the boat petroglyphs (Similar features are known from the site of Nephthys hill at Dakhleh oasis, interpreted as an Old Kingdom police watch post, see Kaper and Willems 2002). There seems to be two spaces of activity on the jebel, boats on the horizontal cliff faces, and sandals, tally-marks and a figure on the summit. Several other features were found around the jebel, a single figure of a quadruped, an amphora handle of Roman date, and the possible remains of a collapsed alam ‘stone cairn’, although there was not sufficient time to search the nearby hills for other archaeological features. There were no obvious water sources or shelters around the jebel, but human activity at the site might well be ascribed to the position and height of the mountain, which allows for a good vantage of the surrounding plain, both the passages east towards the interior desert and west towards the Second Cataract (Plate 11).

Boats from Jebel Maraekib in context

As already stated, the angular boats from Jebel Maraekib are peculiar and only few direct parallels are known. Among the arguments that allow us to assume a late Naqada II date as a terminus post quem are the rounded extremities, which recall the clubbed-ends of Naqada IIC-D sickle-shaped boats,¹¹ and the organization in the form of a flotilla. This last aspect finds an echo in elite iconography known in Egypt during the Naqada IID-III A period.¹² The sickle-shaped boat with an elongated prow is easier to apprehend since its typology finds good parallels in rock art depictions dating from Naqada IIIA, especially in panels 1b, 2a, 2c, 3c and 7d at Nag el-Hamdulab. Such an elongation of the prow to an almost vertical position testifies to evolutionary stages in the history of the Naqadan sickle-shaped boat.

It should be stressed that vertical prows are a good chronological indicator since they are a distinctive feature of boats during Naqada IIIA-III B. If it is true that D-Ware ceramics of the late Naqada II show prows decorated with vertical fronds or mats and even, in two instances, vertical sterns painted in red,¹³ vertical prows do not seem to appear before Naqada IIIA.¹⁴

is in the minority opinion in this regard.

¹¹ A Naqada IIC-D model kept in the Ägyptisches Museum of Berlin (inv.13801) is one of the best representatives of this boat (Merriman 2011, 208, n°182). The main boat from Site 48 at Elkab is another example (Green 1903; Huyge 2014, 95-97, fig.2).

¹² The Naqada II Gebelein Painted Linen fragments (Patch 2012, 38, 64, 114, 130, cat. 25, 64, 94); the already mentioned Painted Tomb; the Jebel el-Arak, Metropolitan and Hierakonpolis knife handles (Williams, Logan and Murnane 1987; Delange 2009; Vanhulle 2018b); panel 7a at Nag el-Hamdulab.

¹³ Ashmolean Museum, E 2878: Graff 2009, 333, n°420; Louvre Lens, inv. AF 6851: Graff 2009, 350, n°471.

¹⁴ It has recently been suggested that the black boat from Hierakonpolis has in fact been modified at the beginning of the Naqada III period,



The official boat of the Naqada IIIA-B period shows a prow which is vertical and higher than the stern. The stern is also vertical and has a large triangular profile. Such a category of boat, which usually supports a trapezoidal seat situated amidships and is sometimes steered by a helmsman, notably appears on the famous Qustul incense burner (Williams 1986, 108-112, 138-147, 360, fig. 171, pl. 34; Williams, Logan and Murnane 1987, 249, 252-253, 257) and on a D-Ware vessel, probably from the same site, decorated with one of the oldest sailed boats known in Egypt (Huyge and Darnell 2010). Although rare in Egyptian rock art and limited to the south of Upper Egypt,¹⁵ it is well attested in Lower Nubia (Among the plausible parallels are Dunbar 1941, fig. 50; Engelmayer 1965, 20-22, 28, 36, 43, 45, 48, 51, pl. X, fig. 1, X, fig. 6, XI, fig. 2a, XVII, fig. 3, XXIV, fig. 4, XXXI, fig. 1a, XXXI, fig. 7, XXXIV, fig. 1, XXXV, fig. 1d; Resch 1967, pl. 57a; Basch and Gorbéa 1968, 177-178, 232, fig. 172, 230; Vahala and Červiček 1999, 33, 35-36, 42, 51, 107, 153-154, pl. 42-161.7, 45-170.3, 45-172.1, 54-212.1, 68-259.1, 162-639.1, 245-954.16). This relatively strong presence south of Aswan raises interesting questions: since this boat appears on the Qustul incense burner, should we suspect a Lower Nubian, and more precisely an A-Group, origin of this specific type? Although this observation remains highly hypothetical and should be explored further, the development of a royal power in the Qustul-Sayala region during Naqada IIIA could indeed justify some iconographic and ideological innovations (Gatto 2006, 70-72; Williams 2011). By the reign of Iry-Hor, the prow of what has become the official 'state-boat' is rather slightly raised than vertical. Fine examples of this last evolutionary stage are clearly attested at Wadi 'Ameyra, in the South Sinai Peninsula (Tallet 2015, 5-6, 10, 13, 18, fig. 26, pls 1-3, 5-6, 7-8, 13-15, 24, doc. 273, 276, 277, 285, 299), on the Narmer Palette (Köhler 2002; O'Connor 2011) and on the Jebel Sheikh Suleiman rock panel (Tallet and Somaglino 2014). Boats such as the 'official' one of Jebel Maraekib could thus be the missing link between the Naqada IIC-D classical sickle-shaped boat and the Naqada III 'State-barque'.

The visual connection with the black boat of the Painted Tomb is, at best, a mirage. This black boat has been identified as a ceremonial barque accompanied by a naval procession symbolising the political control and domination of natural chaos. This main composition is the focus point of a more global composition in which appear several other scenes showing hunting activities, smiting of enemies, dances, etc (William, Logan and Murnane 1987, 253-255, 270-272;

when a vertical prow would have been added to it (Huyge 2014).

¹⁵ Four are attested in the Eastern Desert (Wadi Gash: Červiček 1993, 42, fig. 2; 308, 549; Wadi Shalul: Morrow *et al.* 2010, 146; Wadi Umm Salam: Morrow *et al.* 2010, 101; Wadi Madriq: unpublished) while two have been documented in Elkab (Vulture Rock: Huyge 1995, 137-138, pl. 92B, 97A; Červiček 1974, 40-41, 109, fig. 155) and one in Wadi Abu Subeira (Lippiello and Gatto 2012, 273, tab. 1). One possible exception to this southward distribution of these boats could be an engraving from panel IV at Wadi 'Ameyra, in the South Sinai Peninsula (Tallet 2015, 18, pl. 23, doc. 295).

Wengrow 2006, 109-111, 114-115). We are thus facing a form of ideological syncretism in which the ceremonial, ideological, and political spheres meet in a single artistic production. The same organisation can be seen on Panel 7a at Nag el-Hamdulab where a similar sacred barque is associated with four 'official' boats and with a royal suite. This is the last evolutionary stage of an iconographic theme that first appears on the Gebelein Painted Linen and on Tomb 100: 'the Nag el-Hamdulab cycle is unique and bridges the iconographic worlds of the Predynastic and Dynastic Jubilee images; it is a hybrid of the two' (Hendrickx, Darnell, Gatto, and Eyckerman 2012, 1081). It is thus difficult to identify this ideological and political discourse in Jebel Maraekib since a flotilla of sacred barques with only one, almost disconnected, sickle-shaped boat would make no sense at all. Moreover, the Predynastic sacred barque is papyriform, which means that it imitates a papyrus raft, and has a vaulted cabin, convincingly identified as a shrine (Hendrickx, Darnell, Gatto 2012, 300). This cabin is lacking on our angular boats, which are not papyriform but rather distorted sickle-shaped boats.

We can tentatively conclude that the engravings from Jebel Maraekib are an attempt to copy contemporaneous official productions. These boats do not reach the same quality standards as, for example, those of Nag el-Hamdulab, and have most probably not been created by professional artists. It is difficult to identify their authors. However, the political discourse they convey is clear: the boat, as an allegory of power and domination, is used in order to fix on the stone the affirmation that the local authority is controlling the area and the main desert roads. This demonstrates the large geographical extent of Naqadan ideology and its iconographic codes, but also their impregnation by the A-Group and, most probably, by the people roaming in the deserts during this crucial phase of the Nile Valley's history.

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