



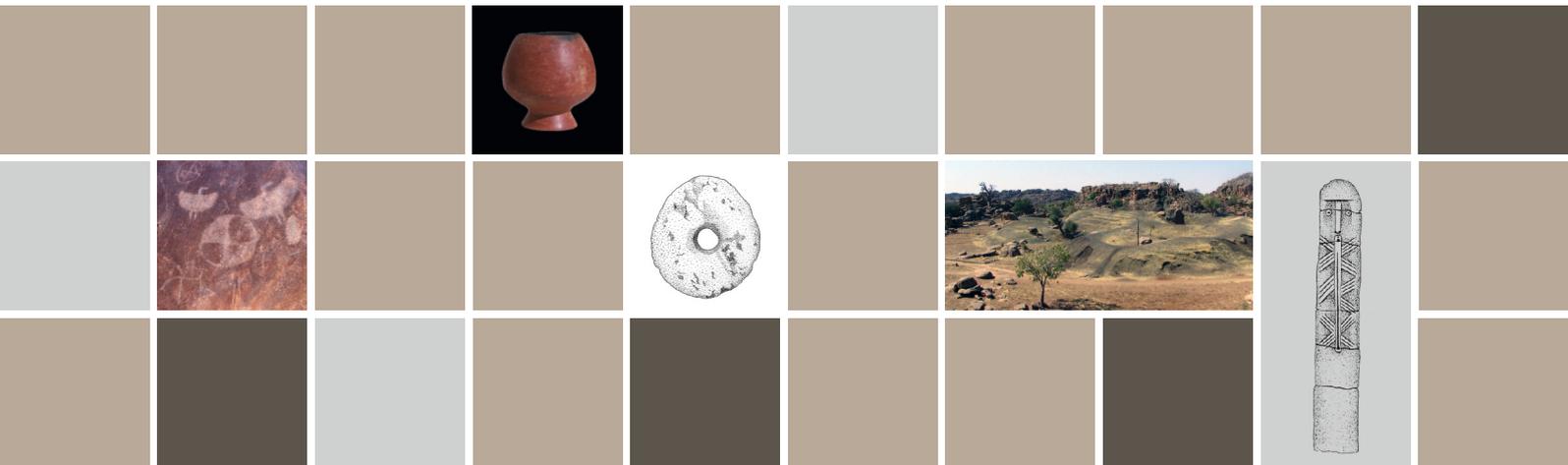
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Editorial office

Claire LETOURNEUX

Translation

MAGEN O'FARRELL

Layout, graphics

Fabien TESSIER

The contributions should be addressed to:

REVUE P@LETHNOLOGIE

Vanessa LEA, Research associates

TRACES - UMR 5608 of the CNRS

Maison de la recherche

5 allées Antonio Machado

31058 Toulouse cedex 9, FRANCE

Phone: +33 (0)5 61 50 36 98

Fax: +33 (0)5 61 50 49 59

Email: vanessa.lea@univ-tlse2.fr

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Article outline

LIBYCO-BERBER ROCK ENGRAVINGS: From One Shore of the Sahara to the Other

Michel BARBAZA

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LIBYCO-BERBER ROCK ENGRAVINGS:

From One Shore of the Sahara to the Other

Michel BARBAZA

Abstract

Based on recent observations of Libyco-Berber rock representations (mainly engravings), I propose new elements concerning their nature, chronology and meaning. Current studies, while part of a general inventory, are also involved in the implementation of an analytical approach without which the final corpus is likely to be lacking in eloquence, as are the many representations already identified and published. A number of sites with Libyco-Berber engravings distributed between the great bend of the river Niger and the Maghreb, when considered in the light of the work carried out by the research community, will facilitate solid commitment to this analysis.

Keywords

Africa, Sahara, Sahel, Markoye (Burkina Faso), rock art, rock engravings, Libyco-Berber.

1 - The Libyco-Berber engravings

1.1 - General information and research orientation

While well known to all Saharan archaeologists, the informational potential of Libyco-Berber engravings that can be attributed to late Saharan Protohistory is still underestimated. These numerous engravings, often characterised by small horsemen and small horses, constitute a documentary source that may contribute to the study of this period across an area covering the Sahara. Currently, while an inventory is essential, it seems equally necessary to construct a framework that will stimulate and structure analyses and studies. With this in mind, the study of these engravings will involve the examination of their geographic distribution, both in terms of latitude and longitude, their chronology, and above all the concrete arguments that support their analysis and interpretation.

1.2 - Definitions

The diversity of definitions proposed to characterise these Libyco-Berber engravings to some extent reflects the lack of in-depth studies of these types of images. Without entering in detail into the literal meaning of a designation resulting from the history of our discipline, it should be noted that the expression refers on one hand to a geographical area contained, according to the Greek understanding of the term “Libya”, between the west of Egypt and the Columns of Hercules, and on the other, to an early indigenous African population, the “Berber” anthropological roots of which stem from the beginning of prehistory (Camps, 1987; Hachid, 2001) and whose descendants have maintained all or part of that population’s traditions for thousands of years in the face of external influences. It is accepted that these engravings represent the most recent works

of Saharan rock art, dating from between 500 BC and 500 AD, during the Caballin and Camelin periods with, according to some authors, a possible continuation of this artistic production until the beginning of the second millennium AD.

The rock art figures themselves are most often engravings produced by a rather basic, sometimes cursory pecking technique to depict the generally sketchily-drawn figures of single, pairs or groups of horsemen (armed with a lance, a throwing stick or a shield; figures 1-2), scenes of pursuit or duels, numerous lone horses, hunting scenes featuring ostriches, gazelles, antelopes, sheep etc.), decorated circles or a variety of symbols (figure 3). The style of the representations is figurative, generally geometric, simplistic and sketchy. Even where the engraved rock is particularly hard and tough (granite, gabbro, etc.) some isolated engravings provide perfect counterexamples of artistically successful works. Dromedaries and Tifinagh script are sometimes associated with these engravings.



Figure 1 - Markoye [Burkina Faso], group of horsemen (photograph: M. Barbaza).



Figure 2 - Markoye [Burkina Faso], group of armed horsemen, lone horses and diverse circular signs (photograph: M. Barbaza).



Figure 3 - Markoye [Burkina Faso], oryx and ostriches (photograph: M. Barbaza).

1.3 - Distribution: a Saharan area

While perhaps not constituting evidence of political, social and cultural homogeneity in this very varied geographical space, the presence of these engravings both in the heart of the Sahara and also on its north and south “shores” at least indicates a minimum level of coherence, demonstrated by the common use of symbolic forms of representation. This is one of the main objectives of this study. The idea of the Saharan unit during Protohistory and of the maintenance of exchanges despite the aridity of the region are now established facts (Hachid, 2011).

2 - The South and the North

2.1 - Elements of Sahelian Protohistory

2.1.1 - *The Sahel: an attractive but restrictive environment*

In this article, the main argument is that the constraints of the Sahelian climate and a dense population played an important role in the creation of “rock art” in this area. Another effect of these constraints is envisaged by the theory according to which the end of the kingdom of Ghana was provoked, not directly by the Almoravid conquest in 1076, but by a severe dry period incompatible with urban life (Conrad, Fischer, 1982, 1983).

Here we will anticipate our argument by envisaging that, in Sahelian Antiquity, the stresses that resulted from these constraints may have in part been formalised in stone. This is suggested indirectly by D. Diakit  in his examination of the early Sudanese empires, when he indicates that, during a persistent dry spell, the ancestor of the *men of iron tapped a rock* with his club, whereupon *the water fell from the sky and filled the pool* (Diakit , 1989). This entire region had access to at least two essential resources: omnipresent iron ore, and wood for heating, available in the sandy-clay valley bottoms.

2.1.2 - *Markoye: Protohistoric metal-working establishments at the heart of a multi-purpose terrain*

To date, our research has concerned a zone of 600 km² around Markoye (Burkina Faso). The engravings are concentrated on the volcanic outcrops (gabbroic rock) close and to the north and east of the village. The remains of early habitations are evident in this area, together with traces of metal-working activities. Beyond to the north, i.e. towards the Beli, a tributary of the river Niger, research carried out from 1998 onwards has revealed many workshops for the reduction of iron ore, with the bases of several thousand reduction furnaces and associated specialised installations (see J.-M. Fabre, this edition).

The results of the chronological evaluation of residual radiocarbon play a fundamental role in the development of a general model which places the majority of Markoye’s archaeological territory at the transition between the first two millennia AD. The relatively homogeneous chronology, but also the absence of any true habitation linked to the workshops, confirms the idea that these establishments reflect a genuine functional complementarity: permanent habitations in Tondo Loko, a camp linked to pastoral activity in Zigb ri, and iron ore reduction workshops near the Beli thus add together to constitute a homogeneous and complex “terrain” with several systems for the acquisition of goods and resources (iron, finished or semi-finished objects, food resources etc.). The rock formations near which the main habitations were found demonstrate, mainly by means of engravings, some of the spiritual characteristics of the population (Barbaza, 2005, 2006, 2011).

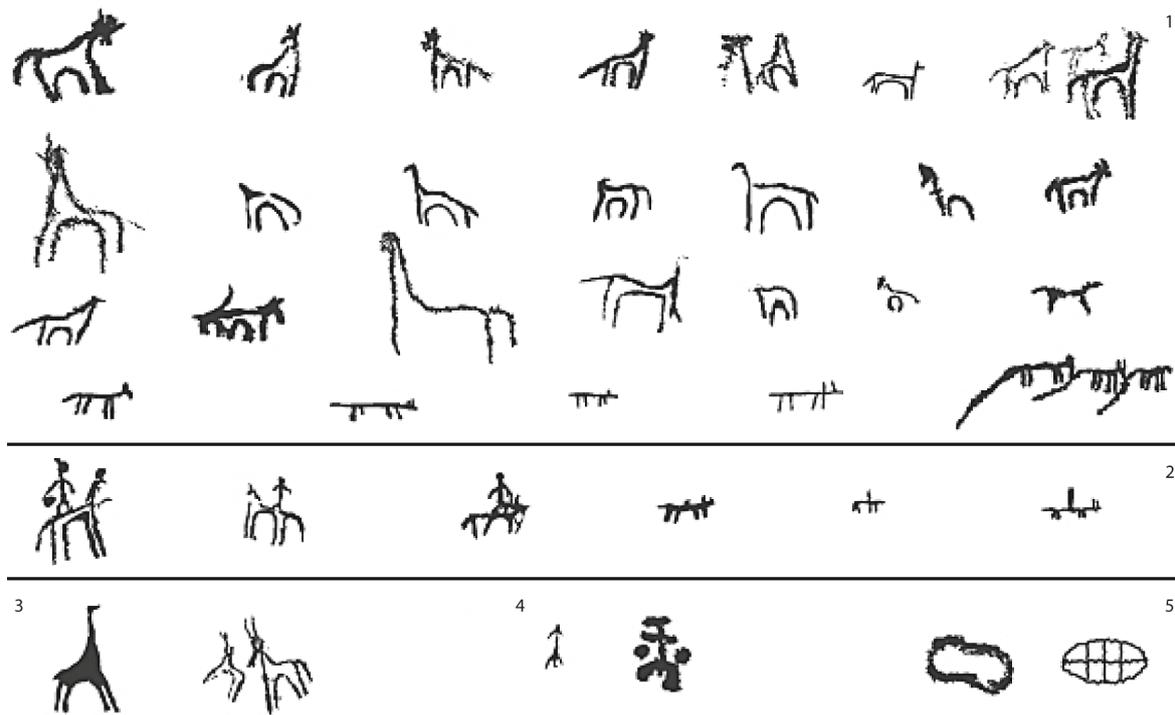
2.1.3 - Rock data art

2.1.3.1 - Nearly 10,000 engravings

The examination of all of the iconographical motifs has enabled the engravings to be divided into two groups, characterised by the sites of Sorbaia (Assemblage 1) and Tondiédo (Assemblage 2). The second of these “reference” sites in fact constitutes a vast and complex assemblage (Barbaza, Jarry, 2004). Sorbaia, on the other hand, is an isolated site with some few points of comparison in the context of rock art in West Africa. The iconographical themes, with “beaters”, “dumbbells”, “curviline”, hooked, spiral or “floral” motifs, and turtles in varying degrees of realism (figure 4), vary clearly from those of Tondiédo, which are of clear Libyco-Berber inspiration (figure 5). More occasionally, this “Saharan” assemblage contains wild animals (lions, lines of bustards, antelopes and gazelles, giraffes, lizards, jackals, etc.), anthropomorphic figures – sometimes reduced to the level of an elementary outline of the body or given a supernatural dimension by the addition of specific attributes such as “winged man” or anthropomorphic androgynous “beings”. “Sandals”, isolated weapons, decorated circles (figures 6-7), and various geometrical and abstract motifs (Barbaza, Jarry, 2002, 2003) also appear.



Figure 4 - Markoye [Burkina Faso], “floral” motifs, tortoises and signs (photograph: M. Barbaza).



Figures 5 - Markoye [Burkina Faso], "Saharan" motifs of Tondiédo (tracing: M. Barbaza).

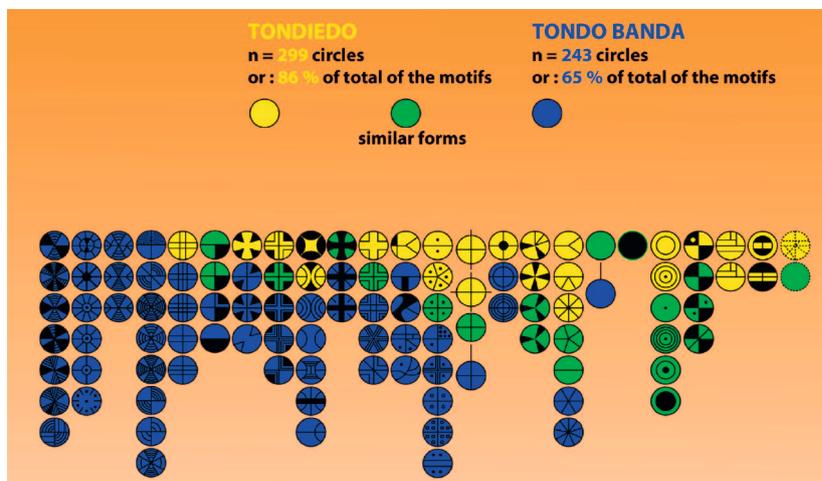


Figure 6 - Markoye [Burkina Faso], variety of decorated circles from the sites of Tondiédo and Tondo Bando (CAD: M. Jarry).



Figure 7 - Markoye [Burkina Faso], decorated circles at Tondo Bando (photograph: M. Barbaza).

The documentary interest of the rock engravings in Assemblage 2 is obvious, both as a result of the similarities with the assemblages from the Sahara and the Maghreb, and because of the position of Markoye to the south of the river Niger. These similarities pose a question on the nature of the relationships that may have existed between these regions in the past, with the corollary issue of the settlement of the Sahel by the creators of the "Libyco-Berber engravings", which are undoubtedly similar to a large proportion of the iconographical resources found at Markoye. It should be noted that the engravings found in the Saharan massifs contain few, or most often, no circular symbols, while these are found in the north.

2.1.3.2 - On the age of a Berber presence in the Sahel

With the tens of thousands of engravings at Markoye, the assemblage formed by Kourki in Niger (figure 8; Rouch, 1949), and Markoye, extended by at least part of the engravings at Aribinda and Pobé Mengao, confirms without doubt its belonging to this area. It extends the set of similar, well-identified engravings in the southern Sahara, starting with Taouardéi in Mali, on the Adrar des Ifoghas plateau (Calegari, Simone, 1993; Muzzolini, 1995). As at Taouardéi, Markoye presents characteristic horses, “posed” on ground lines (figure 9). Further to the north, the stations of Oued Tamokrine and Kori Mammanet, in the Air (figure 10), constitute relay posts leading to the numerous stations of the central Saharan massifs, where engravings appear sporadically (Ouan Tahar and Oued Ahor in the Teffedest mountains; Oued Tafarakrak and Oued Anaserfa in the Immidir mountains) and innumerable others in Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania, Mali and Niger.



Figure 8 - Kourki [Niger], armed horsemen (photograph: M. Barbaza).

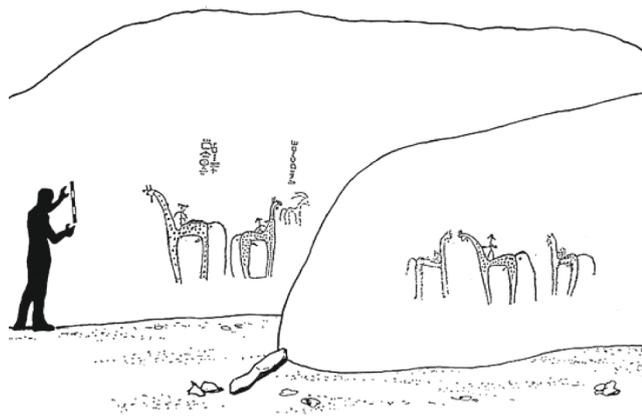
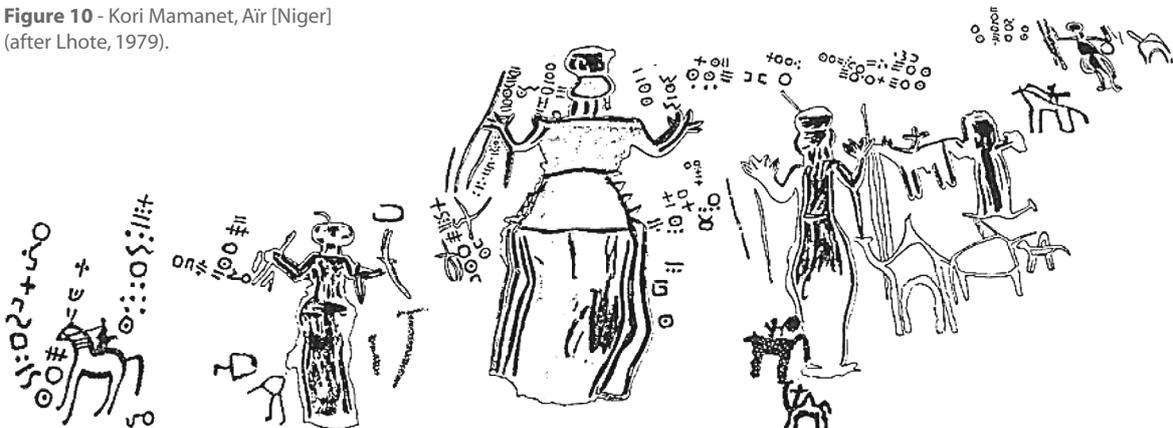


Figure 9 - Taouardei [Mali] (after Calegari, 1993).

Figure 10 - Kori Mamanet, Air [Niger] (after Lhote, 1979).



2.1.4 - The iconology of a representation: the Scriptures and other tales

2.1.4.1 - From Tuareg stories to the Bible

Within the theme of the horseman which is so common in the area considered, there exist several examples of the representation of two figures, of different sizes, mounted on horses proportional to their stature (figure 11¹⁻³). It is impossible to resist the notion that this association refers to a pair well-known in the Sahara: the *mythical figure* – uterine nephew of Ammamelen (Hoggar), Aniguran or Aliguran (Aïr), avatars of Almeroquis – called, depending on the location and the Adelasegh groups, “Abatis” (“fatherless one”), or “Elias” and his servant, Abou (Claudot-Hawad, 1993, 2001). The rocks around the Aïr (Lhote 1975; 1979, pl. 40; 1983, 1984) and the Adrar des Ifoghas (Dupuy 1991, 1992) offer numerous representations of this theme, in a variety of forms.

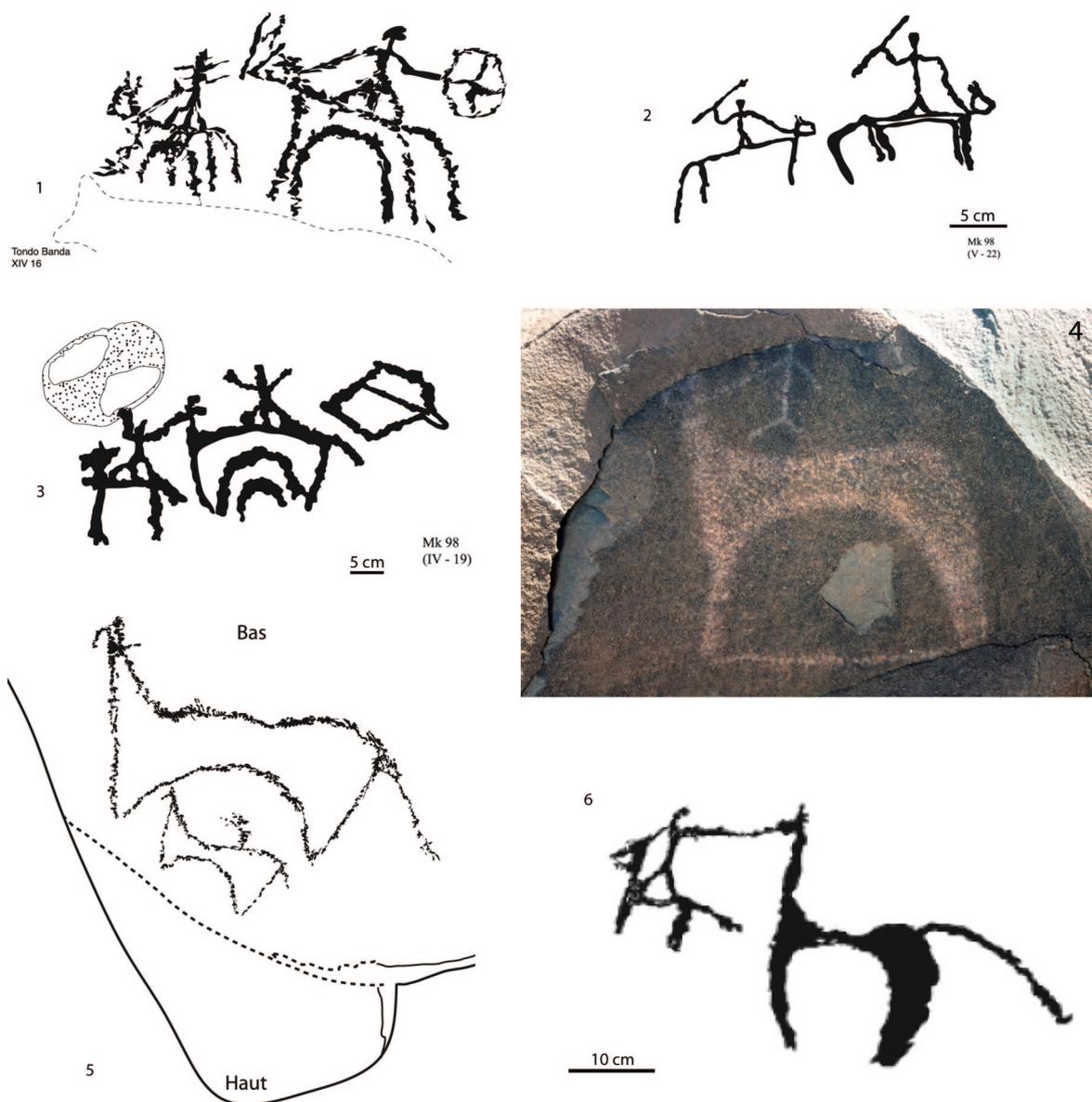


Figure 11 - Markoye [Burkina Faso], 1 to 3: couple of horsemen; 4: horse on the ground level and levitated horseman; 5 and 6: small horseman and large horse (photographs and tracings: M. Barbaza).

It seems that the representation of Elias has become mentally superimposed onto that of Adelasegh, providing the latter with an aspect whose origin can be found in Muslim mythology in the prophet Ilyas, for whom the Quran re-employs the biblical figure of the prophet Elijah (Book VI). Elijah, desirous of punishing the priests of the temple of Baal installed by King Ahab, had obtained from God the power to stop the *rain*. The ensuing struggle concerned the mastery of the waters of the sky and the earth, because Baal was himself, according to a very long Semitic tradition from Syria and Canaan, the god of fertility, *riding* the clouds and causing storms. According to some sources, he may also have been an ideal substitute for Zeus /Jupiter. The confrontation is thus well characterised. The first Book of Kings is very explicit in its references to drought and famine (1 Kings 18, verses 1 and 2), to water sources and brooks, and to the pastures that were essential for avoiding having to slaughter the animals (1 Kings 18, verse 5). The Biblical Ahab supported the cult devoted to Baal, while Elijah turned towards God, who manifested himself by *fire* (1 Kings 18, verses 24 and 38) and enabled his prophet to make rain (1 Kings 18, verses 41, 42, 44 and 45; Duchet-Suchaux, Pastoureau, 1994: 137-138). Elijah-Elias-Ilyas, whether an interpreter of God's word or simply a legendary hero, is the intercessor to invoke and call upon in order to obtain rain. He is also named in Hebrew characters close to the engraving of a mounted horseman at Pigeon Rock in the Ouled Naïl mountains, in the Saharan Atlas (Oliel, 2009).

The events punctuating the duration of his earthly sojourn are fundamental to his identification – whether in the Bible, in which Elijah, after having climbed Mount Sinai, as did Elias on the mountain of Azrou, is taken up to Heaven in a whirlwind, or in the Quran, where Ilyas, after having attacked the idols (sura 37, The Arrangers, verses 120 to 130) is *taken up* by Allah. His ascension removed Elias from the death threatened by his pursuers. According to H. Claudot-Hawad, mount Azrou is “reputed to be the location of Ilyas; in other words, according to Muslim mythology, the place where Ilyas entered into the *world of the invisible* (figure 12), the immaterial...” (Claudot-Hawad, 2001: 88). According to other versions in which Elias appears, the hero of Tuareg mythology (Claudot-Hawad, 2001) ascended into Heaven following the miraculous emergence of the rock of mount Azrou beneath the feet of his horse; in this way he was saved from the hostile intentions of his pursuers. In this situation, Elias once again dominated the fire by means of which his aggressors attempted to destroy him (Roset, 1990). In the Nigerian Tuareg tradition, Elias was half angel and half human; he is not dead, which explains his many reappearances, but has been “transported to heaven on a *fiery horse* and transformed by God into a being of light *covered in feathers*, at once

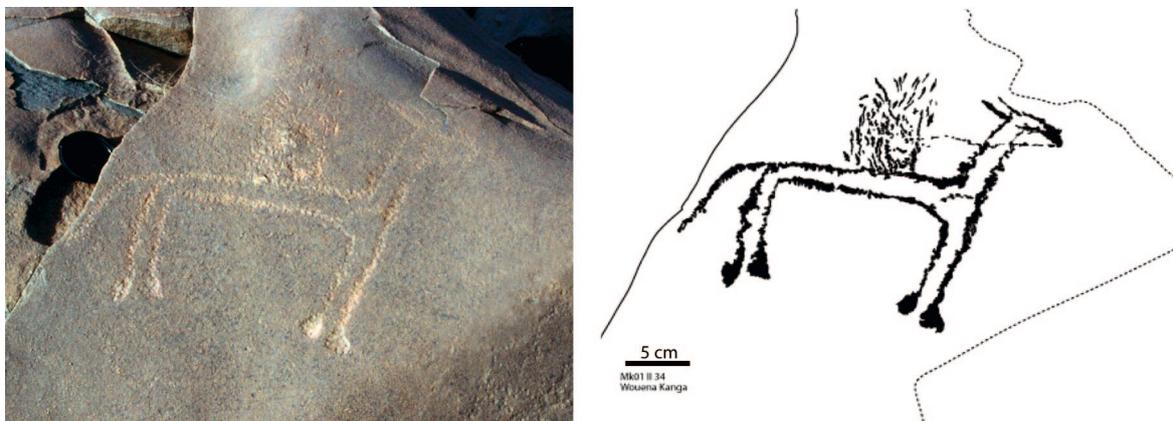


Figure 12 - Markoye [Burkina Faso], horse with a curved ventral line and a desintegrating horseman (photographs and tracing: M. Barbaza).

terrestrial and celestial” (Aghali-Zakara and Drouin, 1980: 99-100). Do the engravings from Kira Bora at Markoye represent a detail from this tradition? Foreshadowing the hornbill – the mythical bird of West Africa – they may also herald the arrival of another (figure 13).



Figure 13 - Markoye [Burkina Faso], winged “humans”, circular signs and a horseman (photograph: M. Barbaza).

2.1.4.2 - From Tuareg stories to the Markoye engravings

While it seems relatively easy, as has been seen above, to insert a significant number of the images from Markoye into the mental universe of the Tuareg from around AD 1000, an interpretive approach is stimulated by some figures found close to the summit of Wouéna Kanga, above the valley of Tondo Banda. They contribute both to the attempted connection discussed above and the reading of the numerous figures of *solitary* horses.

The first figure is essential, both in terms of its content and the quality of the representation. An engraved image that is homogeneous and consistent, it possesses a brief but undeniable diachronic dimension (figure 14). It was executed by light pecking of the eastern face of a large

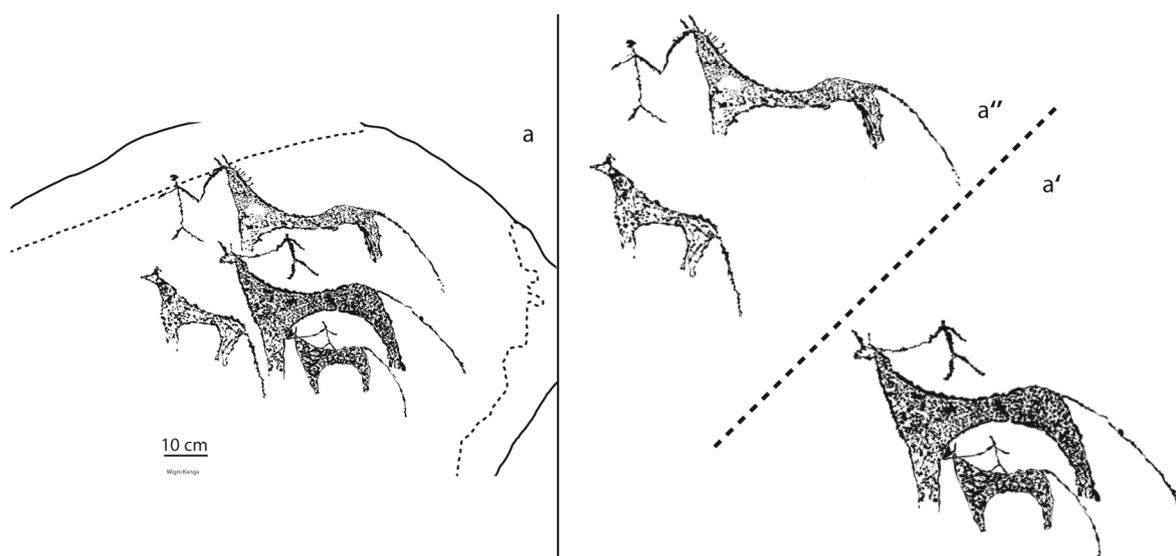


Figure 14 - Markoye (Burkina Faso), diachronic sequence of Wigni Kanga at Tondo Banda. a: complete tracing of the engraved panel; a': arrival of the two horsemen and beginning of the greatest ascension (large horse); a'': the servant (small size and small horse) is holding his master's mount after his disappearance into Heaven (tracing: M. Barbaza).

rock, on which there is an association of three figures and four horses, two large and two small, the whole divided into two parts. The first part of the sequence, constituted of a horseman mounted on a small horse and by a second figure suspended above the back of his large horse, depicts the exact instant of the ascension of Elias, who is still visible. This is the first “snapshot”. The second part is constituted of a small solitary horse and a figure on foot, holding a large horse by the bridle. The small horse belongs to Abou, and has remained in the lower part of the composition while Abou holds the bridle of the mount of his master, who is now in Heaven.

Examination of the hills at Markoye has shown this figure appearing several times, varying from a mounted horseman holding a second horse by the bridle (figure 11⁵⁻⁶) to a figure on foot also holding a lone horse by the bridle. The same is true throughout the Sahara. In the same way, lone horses, dispersed on numerous stone blocks scattered throughout the hills, may represent in minimalist form the idea of the precise, sacred instant of the disappearance of Elias: the accomplishment of his ascension being expressed through the solitude of his horse. How else can we understand the numerous engravings, very stiff, simplified and cursory in execution, totally inexpressive in their isolation and in the extreme simplicity of a representation that is limited to the evocation of a single horse?

2.1.4.3 - For a syncretic interpretation between magic and mythology

It seems simple to admit that a work of artistic and religious rock art may contain dimensions that are at the same time both magic and mythological, with the desire to set the voluntaristic action in a sacred discourse through which, in very variable proportions, spirituality, superstition, mythology and magical practice are able to blend their complementary contributions in order to shape religious feelings that are extremely diverse, and cults which are even more so. The engravers of the “Libyan warrior” or “Libyco-Berber horsemen” school, whose final works we are analysing, were certainly not exempt from this principle.

2.1.4.4 - Elias, master of fire and rain

Among the various iconological readings which have been proposed, that suggested by J.-L. Le Quellec (2004) is particularly interesting. This author proposes that the Biblical myth of Elias as transmitted by Islam is one of the foundations of the late rock art of the Aïr. According to an interpretation that we have also employed, Elias is “master of the rain and guardian of the desert [...], appearing to lost travellers to indicate the correct way” (Le Quellec, 2004: 17), which undoubtedly justifies the position of the figures along the edges of communication routes. At Markoye, the unusual use of the figure of Elias is in no way contradictory with that employed in the Aïr; rather, they complement each other, each containing as it does different properties.

The existence alongside the figurative images, of shapeless, coalesced or disjointed areas of impacts, also suggests that the primary significance was placed on the percussion itself rather than the motif which it produced. The latter may have taken shape and consistency during the percussion, with the intention of reinforcing the action and setting it in a sacred context. The scansion and the accompaniment of a chant with percussion would also be satisfied by an explanation of this type. The assemblage is entirely compatible with the account (see above) of an early practice according to which the “men of iron” in the Mandingo region *struck a rock* with their clubs to make it *rain* (Diakit , 1989). The many lithophones known in proximity to the engravings support the same idea (figure 15).

A text by the Arabic geographer al-Bakri (11th century) shows another face of the same phenomenon by means of a story which is a retelling of the Biblical myth of Elias, with the struggle between adherents to the magical solicitation of the stones and a marabout who had caused the rain to fall on the country in exchange for the king's conversion to Islam. The ancestor of the iron producers was also therefore a maker of rain and possessed mysterious powers employing animist practices which were contrary to the spirit of Islam (Devisse, 1990). This ideological confrontation may contain the “root of the never refuted hostility between Muslims and the men of iron” (Devisse, Sidibé, 1993: 148).



Figure 15 - Markoye [Burkina Faso], lithophone of Fondiso at Tondo Banda (photograph: M. Barbaza).

Striking the rocks was therefore also a means of attracting attention to the ills of the world, particularly to the anxiety linked to the quality of the next rainy season after a long and painful period of drought. The invocation of Elias, or Ilyas, by means of the spontaneous and unremitting percussion of stones, or through engravings regulated by audible rhythm and sacred representation, appears therefore to correspond to a coherent set of data and behaviour. The presence at Tondo Banda of a horse with a triple ventral line in the form of an arch may be a reference to a rainbow (figure 16).

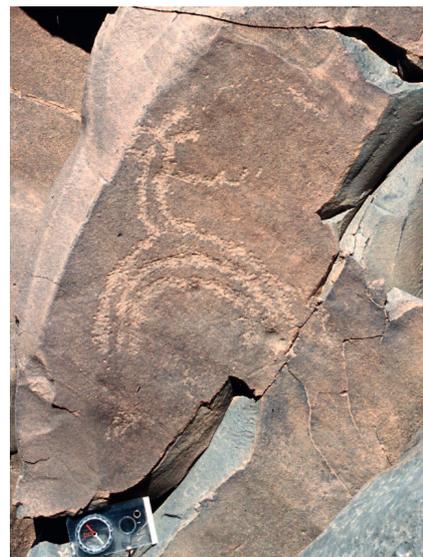


Figure 16 - Markoye (Burkina Faso), horse with a triple ventral line assimilated with the rainbow (photograph: M. Barbaza).

2.1.5 - Materials for constructing the history of the Sahel: from rock art to History

2.1.5.1 - Two populations in a single territory or one group undergoing transformation

The almost perfect juxtaposition of the areas of distribution of the two iconographical assemblages suggests the existence of two populations, originally sharing a single territory with some functional complementarity. An alternative hypothesis is that a single population underwent a transformation of its representation system in a relatively short period at the same time as its habitations were moved towards the uplands.

2.1.5.2 - The Protohistoric Sahel perceived by archaeology and linguistics: area of Berber influence and cradle of the Songhai empire

It seems possible to admit that between the 8th and 13th centuries, the area of the bend of the river Niger, penetrated at an early date by Berber and Islamic influences, as at Gao, may have played an increasing economic role in a circuit of exchanges dominated by the north. Some time later, when the Arab-Berber expansion began to reach its limits, great kingdoms were created on the base of activities stimulated by dynamic and prosperous commercial currents. In this context, it is tempting to see the Songhai language (Nicolai, 1981, 1990) as a “pidgin form of Tuareg” (Nicolai, Creissels, 1993: 258), the concretisation of a cultural phenomenon rather similar to the processes of acculturation indicated by the engravings (Barbaza, 2006).

2.1.5.3 - The Sahel: southern bank of the medieval Mediterranean world

The non-native character of Assemblage 2, which is clearly of “Berber” inspiration, but also the history of this region in this period, suggest that the influence was imposed from the north to the south, in line with a hypothesis proposed by J.-P. Roset (1993). While it is possible to imagine that the incentive of this cultural movement was economic, it remains impossible given the current state of the archaeological data to specify in detail the methods employed: membership and participation in a generalised economic and cultural phenomenon or assimilation, conversion or subjugation to some extent voluntary, forced or violent.

A living environment probably forming part of the economic sphere of influence of the medieval Mediterranean and Near Eastern worlds, the Sahel of Burkina Faso, long penetrated by complex pre-Islamic influences, entered into Islamic culture in a variety of ways at the transition of the 1st and 2nd millennia AD.

2.2 - The classical Libyco-Berber field

2.2.1 - Libyco-Berber representations in the Sahara

There are countless Libyco-Berber representations in the Sahara in the form of engravings – and a few paintings – to the extent to which, even when they are mentioned, their presentation is often extremely cursory and limited to a very brief description. There are, however, some remarkable works on the subject (Chasseloup-Laubat, 1938; Lhote, 1979, 1983; Dupuy, 1991; Hachid, 1992; Muzzolini, 1995; Le Quellec, 2004).

Regarding the Sahara itself, there is no question of attempting a summary here. References to a few sites (figure 17), other than those that have already been mentioned, are simply intended to demonstrate the complete lack of discontinuity between the two “shores” of the Sahara, from the

Atlas mountains to the area of the bend of the Niger. The site of Taouardéi constitutes a milestone on the route to Markoye.

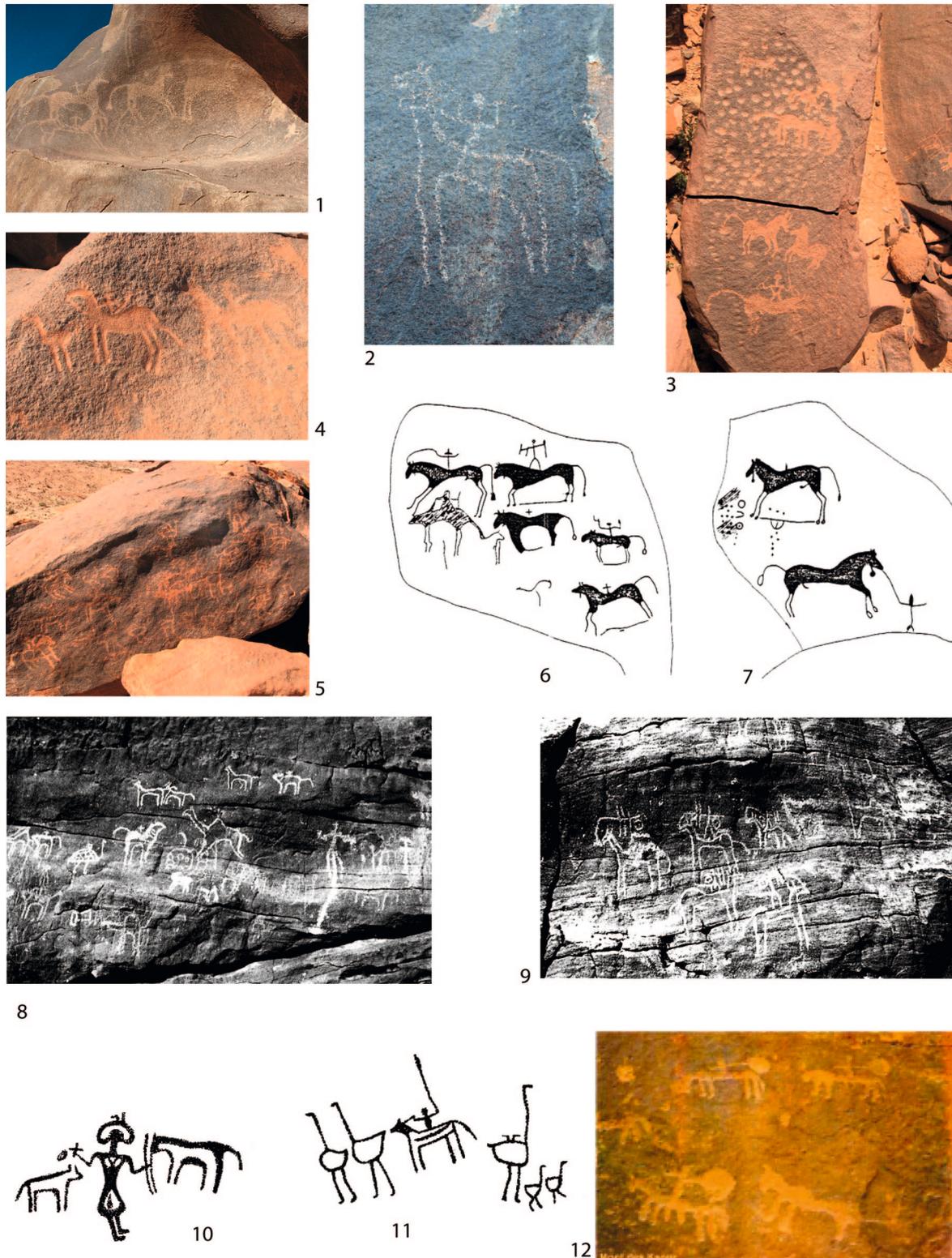


Figure 17 - Central Sahara, 1:Tit, Hoggar [Algeria] (photograph: M. Barbaza); 2: oued Ahor, Téfedest [Algeria] (photograph: M. Barbaza); 3: near Hirafok, Hoggar [Algeria] (photograph: M. Barbaza); 4 and 5: Wadi Tahart, Téfedest [Algeria] (photographs: M. Barbaza); 6 and 7: Afara Valley, Adrar of the Ifoghas [Mali] (after Dupuy, 1991); 8, 9 and 10: Wadi Tamokrine, Air [Niger] (after Lhote, 1983); 11: Seroka, Air [Niger] (after Lhote, 1983); 12: Mont des Ksours, Saharan Atlas [Algeria] (after Lhote, 1984).

2.2.2 - The Maghreb

The mountains of North Africa were the initial site of the identification of Libyco-Berber engravings (Flamand, 1892, 1921). The majority of later authors have used this expression with variable content in terms of detail, but in general conformity with the original definition. It concerns “the central Saharan camel period and, in addition, like the period with recent tfinars and their accompaniments: horsemen, swords, javelins, round shields, sometimes high cantle saddles” (Muzzolini, 1995: 377). Among the latter publications, the work of A. Bravin, while describing the somewhat heterogeneous nature of the representations, recognises a “Libyco-Berber kernel that, according to the majority of specialists, consists of figures of horses with horsemen, alongside which [...] the other themes develop” (Bravin, 2009: 31). It could not have been better stated, as the formula corresponds both to the chronological and regional characteristics expressed as a function of the environmental determinants of time or place, but also to the use of models common to the Abrahamic religions.

An annotated bibliography of works and articles is irrelevant here. A few summary works can be mentioned by means of complementary orientation (Malhomme, 1950, 1959, 1961; Lefebvre, Lefebvre, 1967; Lhote, 1970, 1975, 1984; Simoneau, 1977; Camps, 1987; Hachid, 1992, 2001; Rodrigue, 1999, 2009; Amara, 2001; Salih, Heckendorf, 2002; Jelinek, 2004; Searight-Martinet, 2009; Yahia-Hachèche, 2009).

3 - Conclusions and prospects

3.1 - Markoye, or the encounter between two worlds

The rocky hills of Markoye and their engravings illustrate the contact between two different mental universes around the end of the 1st millennium AD. They constitute a remarkable milestone of the southerly expansion of the Saharan and North African Berberising influences which confirm observations in the field at two other sites in Burkina Faso: Pobé Mengao (figure 18) and Aribinda (figure 19), which are further south by around one hundred kilometres. At this point, a border begins to take shape that remains unaltered by what follows, between on one hand, a sort of “distant Mediterranean” of Islamic lands and, on the other, the Africa of animism; not between desert and steppe in the north of a populated Sahel, but between steppe and savannah.



Figure 18 - Pobé Mengao [Burkina Faso], horsemen sitting astride and ostrich hunt. Upright mounted horsemen are also represented on this granitic stone (photograph: M. Barbaza).



1: horsemen



2: lance

Figure 19 - Aribinda (Burkina Faso). Aribinda ("beyond the water" in Songhay) is the southernmost site attributable with certitude to the Libyco-Beber group (photographs: M. Barbaza).

The lines of connection that it is now possible to trace from one side to the other of the Sahara certainly pass via the Air and the Adrar des Ifoghas; perhaps also from the Moroccan south through the regions close to the Atlantic, as iconographical similarities between the two regions – particularly in terms of decorated circles – would lead us to believe. As a result, it is tempting to associate the metal-working engravers of Markoye with those of the Atlas, even though it is likely that the engravers of Tizi n’Tighist, near Yagour, were not themselves metal manufacturers (figure 20). According to suggestions that have already been clearly expressed, connections remain to be established between the mines and the great sites of Libyco-Berber rock art, as at Foug Chenna,



1: group of armed horsemen



2: decorated circles and lances

Figures 20 - Tizi n’Tighist, High-Atlas [Morocco] (photographs: M. Barbaza).

in the upper valley of the Draa (figure 21), close to Tainant or Akka, or at Taouz in the valley of the Ziz (Rosemberger, 1970a, 1970b); sites close to which are generally noted the presence of very numerous tumuli and fortified establishments of variable size, the nature and chronology of which are yet to be clarified. As a result of greater chronological and cultural accuracy, the connection of the study of rock art with these conventional archaeological approaches will enable the organisation of the study of this protohistoric rock art, disconcerting in its crudity, monotony and general inexpressiveness, but so promising due to the importance of its area of extension.



1: ostriches and circles



2: group of armed horsemen

Figures 21 - Foug Chenna, high valley of the Draa [Morocco] (photographs: M. Barbaza).

3.2 - Chronology and geographic limit to the north

The Atlas mountains constitute a clear limit to our area in the north. Libyco-Berber engravings barely extend beyond the latitude of Marrakesh, and do not concern the Middle Atlas. They are present in Tunisia, in the mountainous areas where research has illuminated the existence of a phase of Libyco-Islamic rock representations posterior to the main body of Libyco-Berber figurations (Yahia-Achèche, 2009). It would be interesting, however, to ask, as in the South, the question of contact between, on one hand, the successive establishments of early colonisation which have, to put it simply, introduced into history a margin of fertile plains bordering the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean and, on the other, a practically infinite, mountainous and arid hinterland which was protohistoric until the Almoravid unification of the 11th century. The particularly difficult access to this area was undoubtedly one of the reasons why it was kept isolated from the early Mediterranean world. Another cause is perhaps also to be sought in the defence of the mineral wealth produced by its subsoils.

3.3 - And towards the east?

3.3.1 - *The Arabian peninsula: extension or origin of the myth?*

At Pobé Mengao, the presence of a number of horses with their legs depicted as “quotation marks” is noteworthy. Here, among the very numerous engravings similar to those at Markoye, appear some horsemen represented astride their mounts. The manner of handling the horses’ legs is strangely similar to that of Yemeni engravings (Garcia, Rachad, 1997: 74-75 and cover illustration). Of course we cannot exclude a simple similarity of forms, but the resemblance becomes disturbing when we remember that some Tuareg consider one of their possible origins as the Arabian peninsula (Hureiki, 2003), and still further when we observe that the episode of Elias can be perfectly applied in reading the panel in question (figure 22). Naturally, prudence is required,

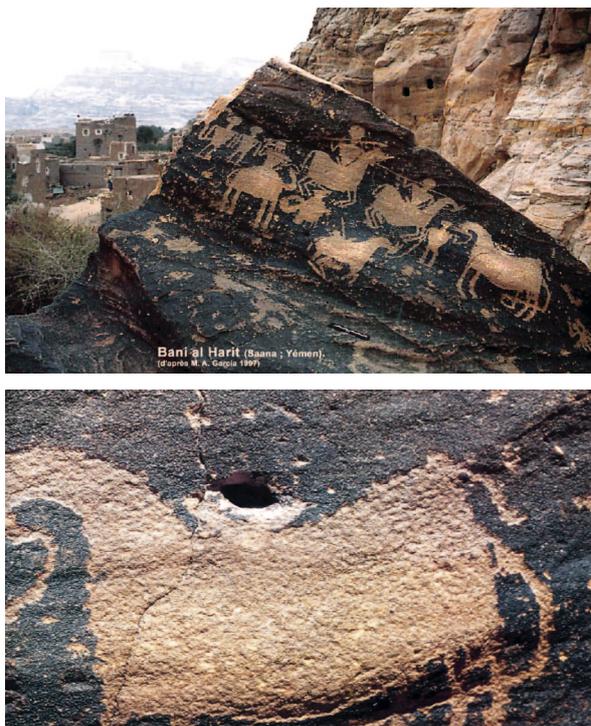


Figure 22 - Bai Harit-Shibam Magras [Yémen]
(after Garcia, Rachad, 1997).

since stories and tales travel much more easily than those who tell them. Wherever they are located, however, the theme places its users in a pre-Islamic cultural environment which, moreover, appears well established, to the extent that it was possible to use Elias in the form of his various avatars and aspects of his biblical personality: guide to travellers in the Sahara, master of the rain in the Sahel, master of fire etc. In the engravings of the village of Bani Harit-Shibam Magras in Yemen, one detail deserves special notice, because on one hand it validates the interpretation and on the other it provides a rare example in these contexts of the use of a particular natural feature. We observe here that the saddle of the supposed horse of Elias has been placed at the precise location of a natural orifice in the rock (Hureiki, 2003: 74), by which, according to this interpretation, the prophet would have been able to escape from particularly aggressive pursuers. Here also, Abou, his servant, holds his horse and that of his departed master.

The information available for the rock art of Saudi Arabia, while somewhat minimal and extremely localised, allows us to perceive, amidst an obviously vast documentary background, a set of representations on the theme of the horseman, of a style and organisation very similar to the Saharan and Maghreb figurations (figure 23; Arbach *et al.*, 2010). We recognise in particular equestrian clashes, charges, pursuits, scenes of hunting with dogs, and a duo of horsemen – one large and one small – which would not be out of place in the Sahel or the Maghreb. Numerous representations depict animals (horses or dromedaries) with arched ventral lines, similar in style to the engravings of these same regions.

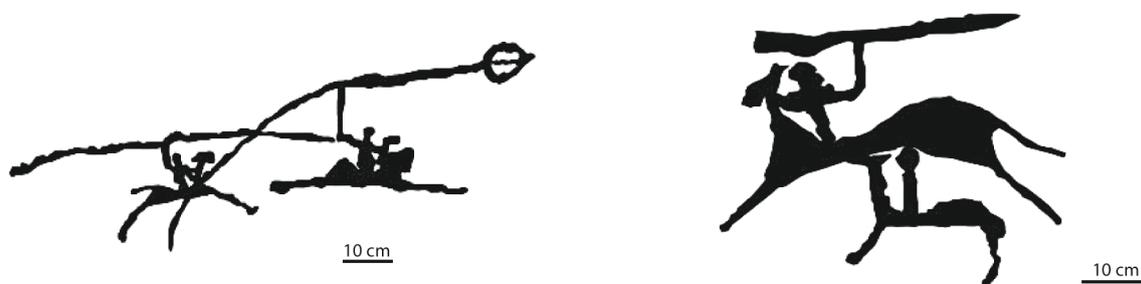


Figure 23 - 'An Jamal, Najran [Saudi Arabia]
(d'après Arbach *et al.*, 2010).

3.3.2 - An open world

Far from the received idea of a world cloistered by the harshness of the desert, an image is gradually revealed of a vast open landscape, crossed in all directions by powerful economic and cultural currents ensuring its coherence, functioning in its own right for several centuries before its subjugation and division. There is no doubt that the Berber language currently used in its various dialects across this vast territory is a distant reflection of this unity.

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Michel BARBAZA

Professor emeritus

University of Toulouse, Traces (UMR 5608)

Toulouse, FRANCE

barbaza@univ-tlse2.fr



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