



**Dakhleh Oasis Project, Petroglyph Unit. Rock Art Research, 2008**

Author(s): Ewa Kuciewicz, Michał Kobusiewicz

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# DAKHLEH OASIS PROJECT PETROGLYPH UNIT ROCK ART RESEARCH, 2008

Ewa Kuciewicz,<sup>1</sup> Michał Kobusiewicz<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Archaeological Museum in Poznań,

<sup>2</sup>Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Poznań

**Abstract:** Continued surveying of the 'Painted Wadi' for rock art by the Petroglyph Unit brought the total of recorded and documented sites to 60, confirming the overall pattern of occurrence observed in previous seasons. An elephant image was recorded, among others, only the second engraving of this animal known from the oasis. A new area selected for the survey southwest of Taneida proved rich in rock art, but almost completely devoid of prehistoric petroglyphs.

**Keywords:** Dakhleh Oasis, Painted Wadi, Taneida, petroglyphs, prehistoric, Dynastic, Islamic, giraffes, elephant

The Petroglyph Unit, which is part of the international interdisciplinary Dakhleh Oasis Project (DOP), organized two short field campaigns, first continuing the

recording of rock art sites in the so-called Painted Wadi and then reconnoitering the area southwest of Taneida in search of new sites.

## PAINTED WADI

Following documentation of the central part of the wadi in 2006 (Kuciewicz, Jaroni, Kobusiewicz 2008) and its northern part in 2007 (Kuciewicz, Jaroni, Kobusiewicz 2010), the Unit undertook a comprehensive survey of the remaining part of the central wadi and its southern extremes.

The two areas that were surveyed have the following GPS coordinates:

- N 25°30'47.9" E 29°09'39.5"
- N 25°30'48.2" E 29°09'44.4"
- N 25°29'24" E 29°09'06"
- N 25°29'30" E 29°09'32"

- N 25°29'30" E 29°09'32"
- N 25°29'02" E 29°09'04"
- N 25°29'01" E 29°09'25"
- N 25°27'38" E 29°08'51"

Prospection of the hills in these two areas located 22 sites with rock art, bringing the total of locations inside the Painted Wadi to 60. All of the sites were recorded, the petroglyphs were photographed and sketched, and the most interesting ones also traced on transparent film in 1:1 scale.

The pattern of occurrence of rock art observed in previous seasons has been

confirmed overall. Petroglyphs of different date were also separated in space, being placed in different parts of the same location, if coexisting with earlier ones. Scenes from the Neolithic age were executed on carefully chosen, prepared and exposed panels, blocks or stone walls. Sometimes there was only a single depiction or scene on the whole site, but it somehow marked the hill making subsequent artists avoid it (for example, sites nos 1, 2, 4, 15, 20/08). The situation differed considerably with regard to petroglyphs of Dynastic and later origin. In these cases (e.g. sites nos 6, 7, 12, 13, 22/08), the hills were literally covered with dozens of different single motifs, executed sometimes on random rock surfaces.

The following is a presentation of a few sites recorded this year pending detailed analysis of the data.

**Site 1/08.** An apparent small shelter in the northern part of the *yardang*, on its eastern side. Featured on a vertical wall was a single depiction of a giraffe, delicately incised except for the animal's belly and head, which were pecked. The emphasized belly could suggest pregnancy as similar

depictions have already been noted [Fig. 1].

**Site 2/08.** Partly recorded in 2003 (Krzyżaniak 2004: 184, Fig. 4), the site has now been fully documented. Three separate images of giraffes being led on a rope can be seen on a large vertical panel facing west [Fig. 2, top]. It is a recurring motif in Dakhleh Oasis rock art iconography, possibly indicating efforts to tame these animals or generally a special attitude towards them. Additionally the scene features an unidentified creature with mixed anthropomorphic and zoomorphic traits [Fig. 2, bottom].

**Site 4/08.** The site is a shelter of sorts in the northern part of the *yardang*. The petroglyphs were carved on a vertical wall and on a boulder lying in front of it. There are at least six figures of giraffes, one representation of a bushy giraffe's tail [Fig. 3, top], two hands, three sandals and schematic anthropomorphic figures. The depiction of the three giraffes is the most interesting: the heads of all the animals point in one direction, but not the rest of their bodies, creating a kind of optical

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#### Team

*Survey dates:* Double campaign, 28 January–14 February and 29 November–9 December 2008

*Coordinator:* Prof. Michał Kobusiewicz (Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Poznań branch)

*Team:* Eliza Jaroni (Archaeological Museum in Poznań), Ewa Kuciewicz (Archaeological Museum in Poznań), Anna Longa (Institute of Archaeology, Jagiellonian University, Kraków)

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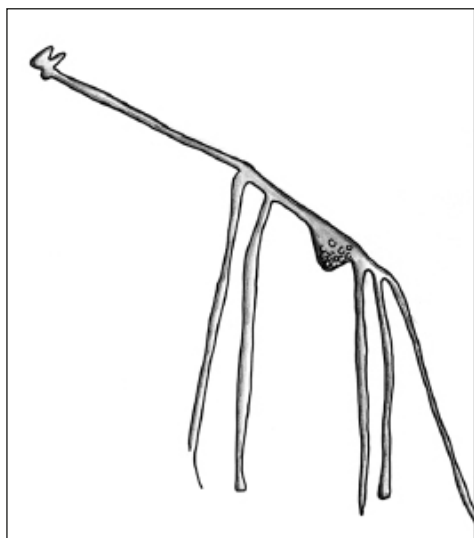


Fig. 1. Painted Wadi. Site 1/08: pregnant(?) giraffe  
(All drawings and photos E. Kuciewicz)

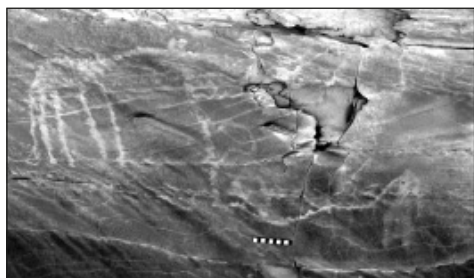


Fig. 2. Painted Wadi. Site 2/08: Giraffe led on a rope (top) and unidentified creature

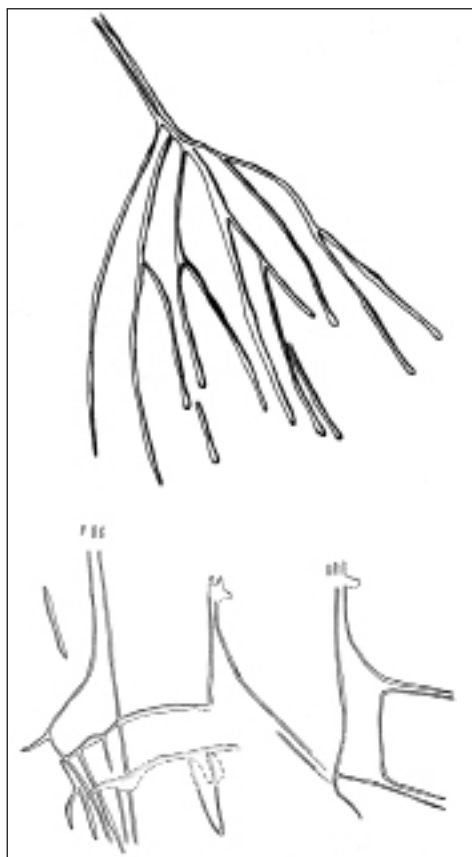


Fig. 3. Painted Wadi. Site 4/08: bushy giraffe's tail (top) and depiction of three giraffes



Fig. 4. Painted Wadi. Site 11/08: antelope and milking(?) scene

illusion. The animal in the middle is a mix of at least three animals [Fig. 3 bottom]. Another scene on the southeastern side of the hill, facing east, depicts a row of six animals heading south; at least three of them are giraffes.

**Site 11/08.** Different zigzag lines and two antelopes are depicted on three loose blocks originally forming one rock piece, found on a big hill with flattened top [Fig. 4]. All the glyphs were pecked, except for the legs of one antelope, which were first incised, then pecked. Under the antelope's belly there is an unidentified figure (milking scene?).

**Site 15/08.** A single nicely executed depiction of a stylized giraffe appears on a panel almost like a stretched easel on the western side of the *yardang* [Fig. 5 left]. The body is geometrically decorated, indicating coat color [Fig. 5 right].

**Site 18/08.** The site is a comfortable shelter protected from the northern winds with three oval stone structures, probably huts, built inside it, very promising in terms of potential excavations [Fig. 6 top]. Numerous petroglyphs of different birds, ostriches included, appear on the vertical walls [Fig. 6 bottom], as well as giraffes, a single bovid and a figure of a man. Most of the figures are executed in sunken relief.

**Site 21/08.** Petroglyphs were concentrated on the northern side of an elongated hill in the southernmost part of the wadi, partly on a massive vertical wall facing

north, partly on loose blocks and other suitable surfaces. Only two additional panels with rock art were encountered in the south part of the hill. The most impressive of the scenes on the vertical wall was a distinctly outlined elephant [Fig. 7 top], only the second engraving of this animal in the oasis (for the first, see Winkler 1939: Pl. LVI:1). Remains of the head of a female figure typical of the Oasis (Winkler 1939: 27–30), a head, foot and a zigzag line, also a possible “water mountain” symbol appeared on loose blocks. A fine representation of a giraffe led by a man occurs also facing north, but moved a bit to the south of the hill [Fig. 7 bottom].

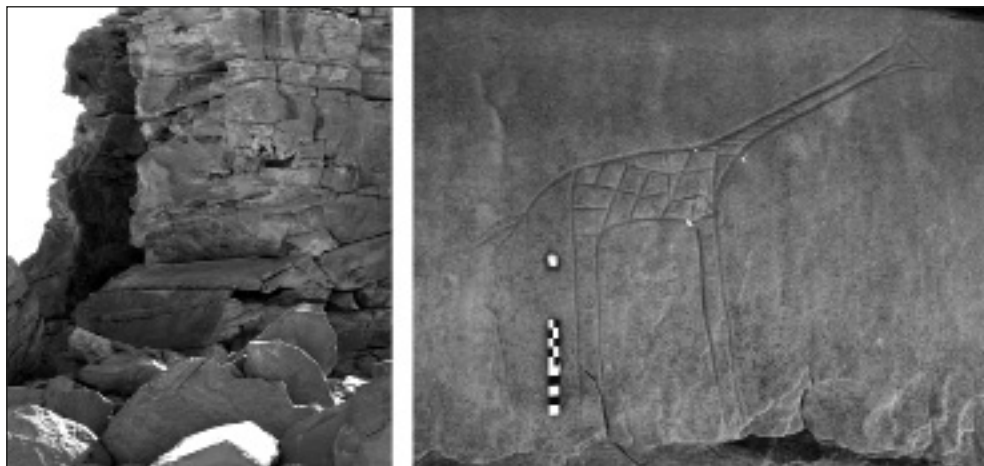
#### OTHER SURVEY RESULTS

As in the previous years, surveying of the wadi also included recording of all traces of human activity. Numerous sites with potsherds and with flint and stone implements were recorded. Only two sites with stone structures were found, one of them, 18/08, described above. The experiment with ochre for coloring petroglyphs (Krzyżaniak 2004: 189) was continued. Scenes executed in 2003 were photographed digitally using an IFRAO scale to compare with data from previous seasons by means of appropriate software. The surveying and recording of the Painted Wadi was completed this year, providing material for a more complex analysis of rock art sites and petroglyphs.

## SURVEY IN TANEIDA

Six days of surveying in the beginning of December were focused on random places within walking distance from the asphalt road (forced by trouble with the mission's

vehicle) in order to locate a new area for future detailed recording. The area selected for this reconnaissance was located southwest of Taneida. It proved to be rich in



*Fig. 5. Painted Wadi. Site 15/08: location of the panel, left, and stylized giraffe*



*Fig. 6. Painted Wadi. Site 18/08: general location, left, and ostrich on vertical wall*



*Fig. 7. Painted Wadi. Site 21/08: elephant, left, and giraffe led by a man*



engravings from the Dynastic and especially the Arab period, but almost completely devoid of prehistoric petroglyphs.

Two groups of sites were located and recorded, ten in the first group and four in the second one. All are presented below.

#### GROUP 1

**Site 1** (N 25°27'28.3" E 29°19'55.3"), on the eastern side of an extended *yardang*, about 1 m above ground surface, three panels containing rock art: 1) two rows of schematic camels, some with riders, two birds of unknown species [Fig. 8]; 2) schematic camel; 3) probably very simplified camels and other quadrupeds.

**Site 2** (N 25°27'30.7" E 29°19'57.7"), north of Site 1; at least six separate rock art clusters on horizontal sandstone slabs. Among them: numerous pecked dots, heavily eroded depictions of different feet and sandals, oval symbols with cross-hatching, probable representation of ship, camels and quadrupeds of various species.

**Site 3** (N 25°27'34.6" E 29°19'53.2"), on the eastern side of a massive hill; visible signatures of two travelers, possibly from the beginning of the 20th century, since the date 1917 is incised nearby. Above them, an almost completely patinated

depiction of an animal with pecked body and, possibly, a female figure.

**Site 4** (N 25°27'57.6" E 29°20'03.0"), extended *yardang*, its top covered with numerous different petroglyphs, almost all on horizontal surfaces, some inaccessible. Different kinds of feet and sandals, lines and scratches, probable grinding places and incised lines and holes connected together. A representation of at least seven horseriders and a man, probably fighting, on a vertical panel on the eastern part of the slope.

**Site 5** (N 25°27'55.7" E 29°20'08.8"), on the eastern side of a hill; on vertical surfaces: different lines, triangles, crossed squares, cows and other quadrupeds, Arabic inscriptions and representations of human figures, one being a relief of a man with raised left arm [Fig. 9].



Fig. 8. Taneida. Group 1, Site 1. Panel 1: two rows of schematic camels



Fig. 9. Taneida. Group 1. Site 5: relief of man with raised arm

**Site 6** (N 25°27'25.7" E 29°20'06.2"), passage between two hills with petroglyphs on both sides: men with cows and a horse executed in the Dynastic manner, as well as camels and other unidentified animals

**Site 7** (N 25°27'21.9" E 29°20'02.9"), row of camels on a vertical surface on the east side of a hill.

**Site 8** (N 25°27'43.2" E 29°20'01.6"), mainly on the west side of a hill: depictions of feet, single incised lines and geometrical figures, quadruped (camel?), pecked oval shape, crosses and human figure.

**Site 9** (N 25°27'51.7" E 29°20'00.7"), hill covered with petroglyphs of various kinds, also on the hilltop; additional images on a big boulder at the base of the hill, on its northern side. Featured among others, sandals, incised lines and geometrical figures, horseriders, camels, Arabic inscriptions.

**Site 10** (N 25°27'54.6" E 29°20'01.6"), mainly on northern hillside, different incisions, geometrical figures and horse riders.

## GROUP 2

Four hills were inspected and partly recorded in this area. All the sites were concentrated around Site 1 with GPS coordinates of N 25°26'48.9" E 29°19'08.5".

**Site 1**, extended *yardang*, petroglyphs concentrated on the northern and eastern sides (individual stones and vertical surfaces) and on horizontal slabs of stone. Altogether, 20 panels with rock art were recorded and photographed (some also traced). The most interesting include a depiction of man and woman in mirror reflection (panel 2); at least five animals, among them an incised giraffe with pecking inside, and a bird (panel 8); group of depictions on vertical surfaces and individual stones in a sort of shelter halfway up the hill: very schematic representations of



Fig. 10. Taneida. Group 2, Site 1. Panel 20: horse rider hunting with a dog

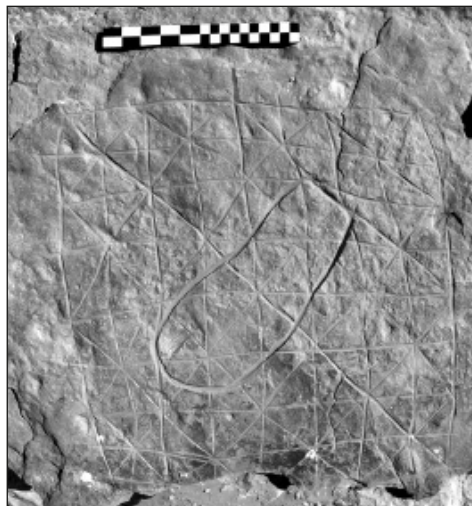


Fig. 11. Taneida. Group 2, Site 3: game board



Fig. 12. Taneida. Group 2, Site 4: man, woman and child



horseriders, some of them clearly hunting with dogs (for example, panel 20) [Fig. 10], at least four pairs of armed and fighting people and an ostrich escaping hunters.

**Site 2**, petroglyphs concentrated on horizontal stone slabs, at least eight recorded this season. The hill behind it was not surveyed this year for lack of time. Images included game boards of different kinds horse and camel riders, some of them hunting; very sophisticated and elegant image of an individual camel and, probably, a woman in dancing pose.

**Site 3**, long extended *yadang*, covered with petroglyphs on all sides of the hill (with the largest concentration on its northern side), both on vertical and horizontal surfaces. Featured images included game

boards of different kinds [Fig. 11], camels, horse and camel riders, some hunting scenes, feet and sandals, many different incisions and lines, depiction of a hand, horses and other unidentified quadrupeds.

**Site 4**, a sort of shelter found on the northern part of the hill (the only part inspected in the time available). A very unusual representation was found on a nearly horizontal stone lying halfway up the hill, just above this interesting and well preserved structure. It appears to be a “family portrait” — a woman, a man and a child between them, all executed in the same style, with exaggerated fingers and toes [Fig. 12]. Further huts and stone structures were noted on the hilltop. The survey of the hill will be completed next year.

Prof. Michał Kobusiewicz  
Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Poznań branch  
61-612 Poznań, Poland  
ul. Rubież 46  
e-mail:kobusiewicz@iaepan.poznan.pl

Ewa Kuciewicz  
Archaeological Museum in Poznań  
61-781 Poznań, Poland  
ul. Wodna 27  
Pałac Górków  
e-mail: yevka@wp.pl

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