SAHARA

20

Preistoria e storia del Sahara
Prehistory and history of the Sahara
Préhistoire et histoire du Sahara
Rudolph Kuper
A Paradise off Rules? 7

Savino di Lernia and Marina Gallinaro
The Rock art of the Acacus Mountains (SW Libya), between originals and copies 13

Azhari Mustafa Sadig
Preliminary Observation on the Neolithic Settlement Patterns in Central Sudan 31

Heiko Riemer
A potsherd from northwest of Abu Minqar and the dispersal of Sheikh Muftah pottery in the Western Desert of Egypt 57

Maria Carmela Gatto, Morgan De Dapper, Merel Eyckerman, Rainer Gerisch, Hannah Joris, Claire Newton and Stan Hendrickx
Landscape reconstruction of the Predynastic site at Nag el-Qarmila (Upper Egypt) 63

Adriana Scarpa Falce
Borou Sud 06, quadri di un’esposizione (conca di Ouri, Tibesti nord-orientale, Ciad) 69

A. José Farrugia de la Rosa, Werner Pichler and Alain Rodrigue
The colonization of the Canary Islands and the Libyco-Berber and Latino-Canarian scripts 83

Ulrich W. Hallier et Brigitte C. Hallier
L’« èpoque des Chasseurs Anciens » dans la Tassili-n-Ajjer (Algérie du Sud) 101

Amenti Ament Amentet
Jean Daniel Degref
The Jebel Uweinat relief of Mentuhotep II: a jubilee scene? 121

Julien d’Huy
New evidence for a closeness between the Abû Râ’s shelter (Eastern Sahara) and Egyptian beliefs 125

Giancarlo Negro
Segnalazione di nuovi siti d’arte rupestre nel Great Sand Sea egiziano – Seconda parte 127

Lorenzo De Cola, Maria Emilia Peroschi and Flavio Cambieri
Il sovrano della Water Mountain e i suoi prigionieri 140

Osservazioni su un dipinto in oca rossa nel Deserto Occidentale egiziano

Marta Guzzafame, Francesco Marino and Nicola Pugno
The Libyan Desert Silica Glass as a product of meteoritic impact: A new chemical-mechanical characterization 143

Documenti rupestri Documents of rock art Documents rupestres
Stan Hendrickx and Maria Carmela Gatto
A Rediscovered Late Predynastic-Early Dynastic royal scene from Gharb Aswan (Upper Egypt) 147

Fabio Maestrucci and Gianna Giannelli
Amakamak, il riparo degli uomini-sciacallo (Tassili-n-Ajjer settentrionale, Algeria) 151

Aldo Boccazzi and Donatella Calati
Tre siti d’arte rupestre del Tibesti nord-orientale 159

Alec Campbell and David Coulson
Afar II 164

Maarten van Hoek
Egyptian temple petroglyphs 171

Brigitte C. Hallier
The warriors of Wadi Oumashi (western central Tassili-n-Ajjer, South Algeria) 177

Ulrich W. Hallier et Brigitte C. Hallier
Grossesse et naissance au Néolithique (et pensées sur l’évolution de l’art rupestre) (Séfar et Tin Tazairti, Plateau de Tamrit / Tassili n’Ajjer – Algérie du Sud) 180

Mark Borda
Survey of an unnamed plain in Egypt’s Western Desert 184
During March, 2008 members of the Trust for African Rock Art (TARA) visited the Messak Plateau and Akakus Mountains to record rock-art sites for the Trust’s archive. We visited some 40 sites including Afar II where we spent about two hours examining the site, photographing all the art we found and completing site record forms. We did not visit Afar I or Afar III.


Earlier researchers have tended to concentrate on only the panel displayed in the National Museum, although some mention is made of two other panels. There is no mention of other paintings or important aspects of the site. Jelinek, in particular, and Lupacciolu compare the paintings of Afar I and II.

Because we recognise the site as probably once a place of great importance to those who used it, we discuss all the paintings and the site as a whole. However, we believe that a better understanding of Afar II (and other Afar sites) would be gained by detailed comparisons of all aspects of the Afar sites. Perhaps the following comments will lead to more comprehensive examinations and new thoughts about the meanings of the paintings and uses to which the sites were put.

The Afar II Site (Fig. 1)

There are a number of sites with early paintings in the Afar region, mainly shallow overhangs with back walls suitable for paintings (Guidoni & Ponti, 2004; di Lernia & Zampetti, 2008). However, the earliest paintings in the Round-Head style are confined to a limited number of sites, sometimes concentrated in fairly small areas, although other sites throughout the Akakus area are suitable for painting, many of which contain the art of the Pastoral and later periods. If many Round-Head style paintings have not disappeared over the intervening millennia, there were good reasons why only certain sites were chosen.

Afar II is one of three painted sites situated within a few hundred metres of each other. All three shelter-type sites include small caves (Lupacciolu, 1995, Plates V and IX; Jelinek, 1982 [\ldots ‘rock chapels’ or ‘sanctuaries’]). Afar II is located high in the valley wall under a cliff overhang in a sandstone spur. The summit of a knife-edged sand dune resting on the talus slope passes about 10 metres in front of the site creating a shallow dip between dune-summit and cliff. The site faces west, is more-or-less concealed from below, and commands views of the valley in two separate directions.

Near its outer (north or, when facing the site, left) end, the spur has cracked vertically forming a

Fig. 1. Left side of Afar II site with main painted panel, fissure and summit of dune.
fissure in the cliff and creating a passage that penetrates some 20 metres through the spur. Within the fissure there is a chamber, and a window that looks north over the valley. A ledge, commencing at the fissure entrance and about three metres above local ground level, runs to the right around the cliff for several metres, narrowing before terminating about five metres above an 80 m² semi-protected floor.

The paintings have been divided according to their disposition on the cliff. There are three painted 'scenes' above the ledge (Pl. H1 and Figures 2, 3 and 6), two small painted vignettes (Figures 4 and 5), a 'scene' with giraffe (Figure 7) at the fissure entrance, and a silhouette animal (Figure 8) just within the entrance.1 A boulder with kettle, cupules and grinding depressions (Pl. H2) is balanced near the ledge's right end; there is a grinding hollow in the floor of the ledge, and a second rock with kettle and cupules lying tilted on the ground below the ledge that could have fallen from above.

Today, one doesn't know whether the dune existed in its present form when the site was in use, whether it was covered with vegetation, or whether the site was hidden from the valley floor. Nor is the extent of any flat area below the ledge known.

We treat the site as consisting of fissure with hidden chamber, paintings, kettle, cupules and grinding hollows, protected area and commanding position (Pl. H3).

The Paintings

The main 'scene' (Figure 2) is situated near to and above the left end of the ledge with the second scene (Figure 3) directly below it. One vignette (Figure 4) is situated slightly lower than and about 50 cm to the right of the scene in Figure 2. The second vignette (Figure 5) and third scene (Figure 6) are located respectively about 1.5 metres above the left and right ends of the boulder with kettle and cupules. The fourth scene (Figure 7) is at the entrance to the fissure, while the single red painting (Figure 8) lies just within the fissure.

Figure 2

'Scene' with an animal surrounded by human figures, together with two somewhat enigmatic designs. Images are mainly dark red or maroon, while some human images have faded yellow or white decorative lines on thighs and backs. The large animal (1) has cloven hooves, a tuft of hair at its navel and a partially obliterated head, but lacks horns. Mori calls this animal 'Bos', Le Quellec a 'bull' (Taureau), and Jelinek a bull, possibly wild. Lupacciolu describes it as a pregnant cow. We recognise the animal as a bull, probably domesticated or perhaps even mythical. A thin white or faded yellow line runs just within most of the bull's outline, and faint white lines decorate its legs and possibly its jaw. A person, arms extended and facing right, sits within the bull's body (21).

Five people (7, 8, 10, 12 and 14) with breasts are presumably women. Ten people are paired together (4, 5, 6, 7 and 14). One person (11) has a predator-animal's head (20). Two people (probably male) with abnormally large hips (4) stand face-to-face, wear loincoths and are joined together. Five people wear skirts (7, 8, 10, 14 and 15). One probable woman (10) stands between bull and designs (2 and 3) holding a stick, possibly with a figurine at its upper end. A crouched person under the bull's tail (9) holds an instrument to the bull's anus. Some male figures (5, 7 and 9) have white stripes on bodies and/or legs. Two seated men (6) have schematic, animal-shaped heads. Most people face right and portray actions: holding objects, diving after a companion, tending to the bull, seated and so on. Only one pair of people (7) involves a man and woman; other pairs involve only what appear to be men. With one exception (4), we do not believe the people express sexuality.

Several figures may have been painted at different times as some are more faded than others (21, 22, and one or more figures in groups 15, 17 and 19). Faded people and both designs have been omitted from Jelinek's 1982 illustration and also in reproductions of that illustration used by Le Quellec (1993a and b).

The two designs (2 and 3) should be seen as a single image, but are here divided for purposes of easier reference. The left design (2) forms an oval with internal divisions and a crenellated line running below the oval's upper curve. One lower division forms an approximate quarter-circle containing a design with circle, semi-circle and short lines, while a second division contains 'floating', small round or oval shapes. At the right end of the oval is a nodule shaped like an animal's head facing right, while numerous vertical lines descend onto two animals (20). These animals are described by Jelinek as 'domestic desert dogs'. Taking into account the animals' stance and shape of tail, stomach and ears, this could be correct. Otherwise, they are probably antelope.

-Sahara 20/2009-
The right design (3) represents a schematic person with small body, elongated arms and legs, possibly seated, and with head wearing a cap and turned to the left. The design appears to have been touched up or even repainted at least once.

Although painted in red, both designs employ slightly different shades of colour to those used for the bull and its surrounding people. And although the designs form a part of the whole scene, they may not have been painted at the same time as the bull.

Figure 3
A scene which may be divided into upper and lower sections by separating images 1-10 from 12-13. One person (11) fits into neither section.

Almost all people (1-10) are painted in monochrome dark red or maroon, and are drawn in the same style as people in Figure 2. Two paired people (1) wear headdresses. A diving man (3) and two paired men (5) are bent right, while another pair (6) is bent left.

A tall person (2) has raised arms replicating the headdresses of pair (1). A clothed person (7) strides right. Two small paired figures with breasts (4) appear either to gambol or to lie on the ground. A clothed man (8) holds a possible musical instrument or, less likely, a hunting bow. The seated man (9), is drawn in the same style as seated men in Figure 2, but has a conventionally-shaped head. A person wearing a dress (10) 'floats' right between two other faded people. The scene may represent a dance.

The person with head turned to the left (11) is drawn in a different style, proportions and colour to the other people in this scene and may be an addition.

In the lower panel, one animal (12) has the shape of a cow, but either lacks or has only a very small head. Four other animal shapes are now faint and hard to discern. One of these is a predator lying down and facing right, while another has a single upright horn. The remaining two animals could be schematic cattle. A human figure with raised hands (13) is similar to images of people in Figure 7 and could be a later addition.

Figure 4
A polychrome, naked figure, about 18 cm in length, holds an instrument to his mouth and appears to be 'flying'. His body, painted in dark red pigment similar to that used for people in Figures 2 and 3, is surrounded by a pale red 'cloud'. Two smaller, monochrome, dark-red figures face forwards, each with one arm crooked and the other hand holding a crescent-shaped object (penis?). This vignette is not mentioned by earlier authors.

Figure 5
Round-Head style, polychrome, seated man outlined in white or very faded yellow. He has white (or faded yellow) decorative lines on thigh, hip and back. A second seated person, now very faded although the feet are clearly visible, faces him. This vignette is also not mentioned by earlier authors.

Figure 6
Above right end of boulder, a scene with a Round-Head style, striding man outlined in white or very faded yellow (1) holding in one outstretched hand a possible figurine (2) and in the other hand a hanging object, perhaps a skin bag. He is followed by a line formed of a small, polychrome man (3) leading three polychrome women with upraised
hands wearing skirts (4). There are two further figures at the left end of the line, now too eroded to reproduce. Below the line of people, a man bent right at hips extends his hands above a seated person facing right. A small faded red animal (6) facing left could be an antelope or another dog. It is uncertain if the Round-Head man and small figures were drawn at the same time, but their dispositions on the rock presuppose that they now form a single 'scene'. This scene was not mentioned by earlier authors.

Figure 7
Two late Round-Head style giraffe enclose and partially superimpose a faded, yellow Round-Head figure with headdress facing forwards. A faded red silhouette animal with something between its legs, possibly a calf, faces right. Above the giraffe is a line of eight bichrome, red and with a colour-now-missing, men. They face forwards and all are joined together at hands and feet. Some very faded blue shapes (not included in Figure 7) may be animals. This scene is briefly mentioned by Jelinek (2004), but not illustrated.

Figure 8
Eroded, red silhouette painting of an animal facing right (lion?) above a faded silhouette animal facing left. This painting is not mentioned by earlier authors.

Boulders with kettles, cupules and grinding hollows
A rectangular boulder (Pl. H2), with a more-or-less flat upper surface about 80 cm wide and over two metres long, lies balanced on the right end of the ledge and immediately below Figures 5 and 6. Its upper surface bears a single kettle, about 50 cm deep, with a shallow, ground drainage channel leading from its lip to the boulder's edge. There are also on the boulder some 20 cupules, several grinding hollows, shallow grooves a relatively recently-pecked circle and a crudely pecked 'sandal'.

There is a shallow grinding hollow in the ledge itself and near it, a more-recently pecked small oval with central bar. On the ground below the ledge lies a fallen tilted boulder with a kettle and cupules. No earlier authors mention boulders, kettles, cupules, grinding hollows or recently pecked engravings.

Position
The site has a commanding position facing west to overlook a considerable distance of valley, while the window in the fissure overlooks the same valley to the north (Pl. H3). It is uncertain whether this elevated position is important to any interpretation of the site.

Previous researchers' opinions
Previous researchers comment only on and illustrate Figure 2, except for Jelinek (2004), and Faleschini and Palmentola who also briefly comment on the upper section of Figure 3. In 1982, Jelinek published a reproduction of the bull and surrounding people in Figure 2, but omitted the two designs. In his 2004 book he included photographs of the two designs and the upper human figures in our Figure 3. Both Jelinek and Faleschini-Palmentola considered the paintings to belong to the Round-Head style.

Jelinek wrote that Figure 2 reflects a ritual scene from the commencement of cattle domestication in the Sahara with the bull as a 'worshipped animal(s) prepared for sacrifice'.

Faleschini and Palmentola (1993) published a photograph depicting the whole of Figure 2, a drawing of the two designs, and the upper half of Figure 3. They call the site Riparo della Fertilità (Fertility Shelter) and describe Figure 2 as symbolizing the reproductive cycle. The adjoining designs are described as representing pregnancy, formation of the foetus and birth. They describe the upper half of Figure 3 as an armed engagement with figures holding bows or lying lifeless on the ground.

Muzzolini (1982) thought the scene in Figure 2 represents a ritual 'bull-jumping' dance. Le Queulec includes Jelinek's illustration both in his book Symbolisme (1993) and in his chapter in Memorie (1993). He also compares the panel to the 'Bull-jumping' paintings of Minos Crete, which he calls by their Greek term taurokoathapsia. Noting that ancient perspectives differ from those of today (are people actually above the animal, or are they portrayed as standing and seated around it?),
and the dangerous nature of 'bulljumping', he concludes that the scene may well reflect the essence rather than the actual actions of 'bulljumping' — young athletes bravely demonstrating their right to adulthood. He suggests that the scene demonstrates a rite-de-passage, initiation into adulthood, and places it in the Pastoral Period. Later, Jelinek (2004) appears to have changed his mind and also describes the scene as representing taurocathapsia. He proposes that 'bulljumping' originated in the Sahara and spread over thousands of years through Egypt to the Mediterranean.

M. Lupacciolo (1993) included one photograph of Figure 2 and six other photographs of details taken from that scene. She believes the painting belongs to the Round-Head style and sees the animal as a pregnant cow, probably wild; some of the surrounding people to be sexually active; and recognizes the two designs as pregnant wombs. She thinks the whole picture represents a fertility ritual involving both humans and animals.

F. Mori (1998) comments on some of the images in Figure 2 and illustrates them with eight photographs that include the two designs, but does not link the designs and 'Bos'. He agrees with Lupacciolo... The whole gives the impression of a collection of scenes relating to animal procreation, accompanied by human figures in attitudes of support. He does not comment on taurocathapsia.

Discussion

Attempting today, millennia after their use, to guess at meanings and uses of ancient sites is fraught with danger. But failure to make any such attempts gains nothing. However bizarre they may be, such attempts can provide other researchers with ideas for discussion and for formulating their own views.

We believe the site to be extremely important. Almost certainly, it was in use at a time when domestic animals first formed part of the Saharan economy, probably seven millennia and more years ago. The variety of art offers opportunities to guess some of the many possible uses the site could have had. We believe that each painting added its strength to a powerful site and that the paintings must not be seen in isolation of each other, but as a whole. In other words, single panels of paintings should not be taken out of the context of the whole site.

We agree with other researchers that the paintings belong to the Round-Head style, but the time frame and order in which they were painted is another matter. This could stretch over a considerable period, a century, five centuries, a millennium, and could be important when attempting interpretations.

Before launching into a discussion of the paintings we mention the problems of perspective when 'groups' of images painted on rock faces may be described as 'scenes' but lack background details such as landscapes to pull them together. Apart from use of superimposing one image over another, Saharan rock art portrays no background detail and thus little or no three-dimensional perspective. Thus, when one image is surrounded by others, it does not necessarily mean that the images portrayed above others represent people/objects physically above and below each other. Placing images — cattle, people, objects, designs and so on — randomly on a rock face is a convention used the length of Africa. In the case of the scene in Figure 2, the woman touching the bull's tail (8) is not standing in space, nor is the woman (7) actually seated on the bull's back. We see the people and the bull as all standing, seated and so on at ground-level. Thus, we cannot see people leaping over the bull, rather we see them as surrounding it. The same applies to images in Figure 3; in the artist's eye, they all stood and gambolled or lay at the same level.

The difference of colour intensity between very faded and fairly bright human images in Figure 2 suggests later additions and touching up or even repainting. Nor do we know when the bull's head was obliterated; this may be the result of natural erosion, but could possibly have been deliberately done to change the nature of the scene.

The two designs (2 and 3) in Figure 2 may have been painted at a different time to the painting of the bull scene, possibly added after the scene had been completed. In Figure 6, the striding person (1) may have been painted before the smaller people (3) were added, but with them now clearly forms a scene.

The shape of the fissure's entrance, like a female vulva (Fig. 1 and Pl. H3), its depth of penetration into the cliff, its inner chamber, internal twilight atmosphere and window onto the outside world all suggest a hidden place, and a place of mystery. The chamber with its window could have acted as a place of worship, or concealed a person or persons performing some part in rituals connected with paintings, or even have been the entrance to the home of, or provided access to, a powerful mountain spirit or spirits. In the Akakus, numerous paintings occur next to holes or entrances into the rock suggesting a relationship between cavities and art.

The scene in Figure 7, probably Round-Head in style, is deliberately placed at the entrance to this fissure, has been created in a totally different style to other paintings and is probably not related to them. For this reason, we believe it has a different but significant purpose from other paintings. Two giraffe superimpose a yellow Round-Head figure with a headdress.

The line of people facing forwards, joined at hands and feet, suggests a concerted effort, an amassing of human strength. The scene may at some stage have protected the inner sanctum from unauthorized entry and illicit use, or protected those who entered it while in the presence of a spiritual power. Likewise, the predator (possibly a lion) superimposing another animal (Figure 8) may have provided some form of protection.

Are the two kettles, cupules and grinding hollows related to the paintings? We do not know when they were made or how they were used; but their position on a narrow ledge five metres above ground-level suggests they were used to prepare things involved with the use of the art above them rather than having anything to do with preparation of food or other more mundane commodities. We noted in Ethiopia and Egypt that some modern women seeking to become pregnant lick grindings taken from ancient grooves; perhaps a fertility belief also attaches to this boulder. The pecked circle, sandal and barred oval, obviously made much later than the kettles,
suggest the site's continued use over a long time period, or at least continuing recognition of its power.

We do not know whether the dune existed in its modern shape when the site was in use, providing a semi-concealed and protected area below the ledge. If it did exist at that time, the protected area would have afforded a place under the ledge and the boulder with its kettle for the performance of ceremonies and rituals or, less likely, for human accommodation.

The scenes in Figures 2, 3 and 6 appear to be related. The people in Figure 2 and 3 are so similar to each other in design and colour that a direct relationship between them must have existed. The white (or faded yellow) lines on the back and thighs of people in Figure 2 are repeated on the back and thigh of the seated person in Figure 5. In addition, the skirts worn by women in Figures 2 and 3 are similar to those worn by women in Figure 6. Although the various paintings are separated, we believe they are all related.

In Figure 2, the seated person (21) with raised arms within the bull's body implies a human relationship between the bull and surrounding people. Beneath the bull's neck, a man (11) with animal's head (therianthrope) stretches hands to the bull's foreleg. Below the bull's tail, a crouching man (9) holds an object to its anus, while a woman (8) touches its tail. The bull is being tended in some ceremony or ritual, in the one instance, by a supernatural figure (therianthrope). Are those tending the bull communicating with the figure within its body; does that figure represent the bull's spirit?

The bull's lack of horns may mean that it was domesticated; on the other hand, the horns may have been omitted from the original painting to make the animal less dangerous. If the bull's head was deliberately erased, this may also indicate an attempt to diminish some of the danger the bull may have provided to the site. The bull may also be a mythical animal or an animal of the spirit world, possibly involved with rain if the design (2) to its right is interpreted as a cloud (see below).

Several figures (5, 7 and 19) appear to be falling forwards as though trying to catch something. Does this have anything to do with catching a wild beast?

A woman (10) standing between bull and designs with one arm extended back to the bull and the other hand holding a possible figurine towards the designs, clearly suggests a link between bull and designs (2 and 3).

We believe that bull, people and designs form a single 'scene'. The general shape of the left design (2) with possible head, crenellated line that can be seen as a backbone and internal features may, as others think, represent a schematic animal. At the same time, its lack of legs, general rounded shape with internal features and falling lines could also be described as a living cloud manufacturing rain with showers falling onto two domestic animals (20).

The second design (3) appears to represent a schematic, small-bodied person, perhaps seated, with embracing, elongated arms, long, spindly legs and human head wearing a cap and turned to the left. It could reflect a spirit rather than a human-being.

We would differ with Jelinek, Muzzolini, Faleschini and Palmentola who see the bull as a 'bull-god' (dio-toro) and suggest that the bull represents a sacred animal, not a god, while the men and women around it perform rites that speak to the bull and infuse through it a direct contact with nature, and that the bull, as a cloud animal (2) linked to a possible spirit-being (3) brings rain to succour life on earth. We doubt the bull represents a sacrificial animal, there appears to be no evidence for this. Rather we see it as providing strength to people and nature in the same way that Apis, the sacred bull of Memphis, provided strength to Egypt's pharaoh and through him to the land.

In Figure 3, images 1-10 repeat some aspects of those in Figure 2: similar styles of portraying figures, people in pairs, a seated man, and a plunging figure. Such similarities may imply that both panels were painted at about the same time, even by the same artist, and are related. We cannot imagine the scene to portray a battle with men holding bows and some lying dead as do Faleschini and Palmentola. The people appear all to be related to each other and to form a scene in which a central clothed figure follows a man holding a musical instrument while others dance after them. For us, the scene portrays joy.

We do not know whether the person with head turned to the left (11) forms part of the scene or not. Nor do we know if the animals (12) at bottom left are associated with the figures or even painted at the same time. This may be clearer when the art is compared to the paintings at other Afar sites.

The polychrome seated figure facing right (Figure 7) has white (or faded yellow) decorative lines on legs, hip and back, while its white outline and general shape are typical of Round-Head style images portrayal in southern Akakus. However, the figure is considerably smaller (about 20 cm high) than most other outlined figures. One must wonder if the body marks are related in any way to the markings on people in Figure 2.

The people in Figure 6, although not necessarily all painted at the same time, clearly form a scene. The tall (60 cm high) Round-Head man (1) appears to have an umbilical hernia. He carries in one hand what may be a figurine and in the other hand a possible medicine bag, and leads a line of people, one of whom is bent at the hips and apparently ministering to a seated person before him. If this scene occurred in southern Africa, we would suspect the bent man to be a shaman in trance ministering to a seated person during a dance ceremony. Certainly, the scene reflects a ritual, possibly a curing ceremony.

The more-recently pecked engravings of circles on the kettle boulder and a barred oval next to the grinding hollow on the ledge suggest the site continued in use, or its power was still recognised, long after Round-Head style art ceased to be made. We did not discover whether the fallen kettle was naturally or manually dislodged from above.

Conclusions
We see the site as comprising much more than just the paintings; it must include the fissure, the boulders with kettles, etc., the protected space below the ledge and possibly its commanding position.

The paintings are Round-Head in style, probably painted and used towards the end of the style's era, more or less at the
time when domestic animals first appeared in the Central Sahara, more than 7000 years ago. More recently, pecked symbols next to the kettle and grinding hollows indicate that people either continued to use the site, or at least recognised its power long after the Round-Head era ceased.

We believe the site was recognised as a powerful place where groups of supplicants through ceremonies and rituals made requests for help to spirits resident in the rocks/mountains. We agree with previous researchers that rituals could involve fertility, initiation and possibly even early domestication of wild cattle. We are, however, doubtful about 'bull-jumping' and are certain the animal is a bull, not a cow. We do not see the bull scene as being overtly sexual. Nor do we see fighting in Figure 3.

The paintings predominantly involve people combined in group activities. The variety of paintings and the boiler(s) with kettle, cupules and grinding hollows suggest a range of practices. We offer the possibility that the paintings portray different ceremonies or rituals. Figure 2 could involve fertility and attempts to manage the environment. Figure 3 may involve dancing and appears to reflect pleasure and perhaps thanksgiving; and Figure 6 may express the concept of healing.

The therianthrope in Figure 2, the flying man with instrument held to his mouth, perhaps implies out-of-body travel, and the man in Figure 6 bent at hips over another person all suggest contact with the spirit world suggesting the activities portrayed may be of a religious nature. These scenes may reflect many other rituals such as divination, success in hunting, marriage and even funerals if the two female figures in Figure 3 actually represent the dead.

The deep fissure with its inner chamber is an important element of the site. The shape of the fissure resembles a female vulva. Entry into the inner chamber could have been associated with sex and fertility. Figures 7 and 8 possibly protected the chamber from illicit entry, or provided protection to those people who entered for legitimate purposes. Here, note the eight men (Figure 7) joined at hands and feet possibly to provide strength to the purpose for which the panel was created. If the animal (Figure 8) does represent a lion, this could have similar intent.

We believe that detailed recording and comparisons of all the art in the Afar sites could lead to a better understanding of religious beliefs at this very early period.

References

**DI LERNIA S. E D. ZAMPETTI (EDS), 2008. La Memoria dell'Arte. Le pitture rupestri dell'Acacus tra passato e futuro. Firenze: All'insegna del Giglio, 378 p.**


Pl. H1. A. Campbell and D. Coulson.
Afar II (Libya). The main painted panel.
Afar valley. Looking southwest over boulder with kettle, cupules, grinding hollow, pecked circle and possible sandal.