

Fig. 2
Satellite image with localisation of Qurta I, II and III. The modern village of Qurta is in the foreground. The distance between QI and QIII is about 1.5 km (modified after Google Earth 2006).

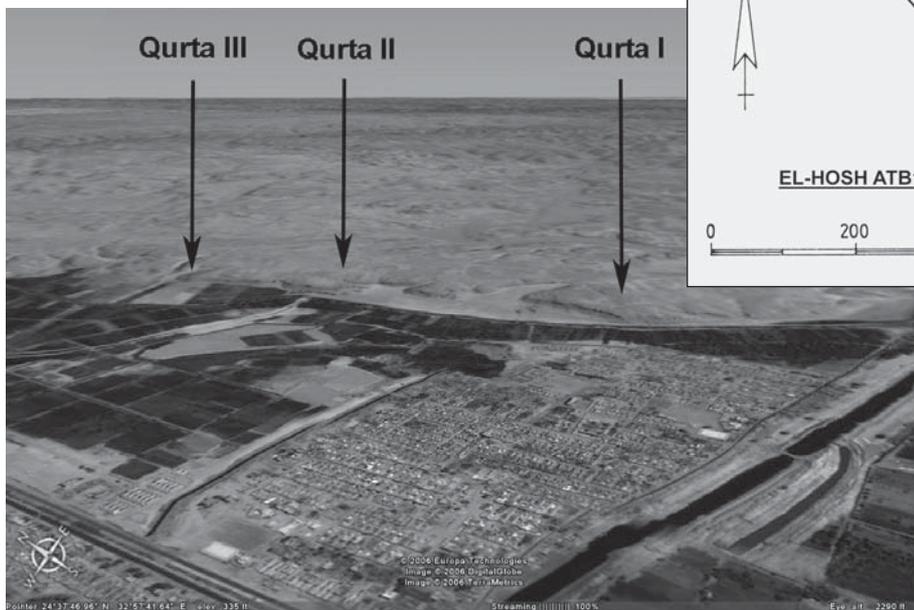
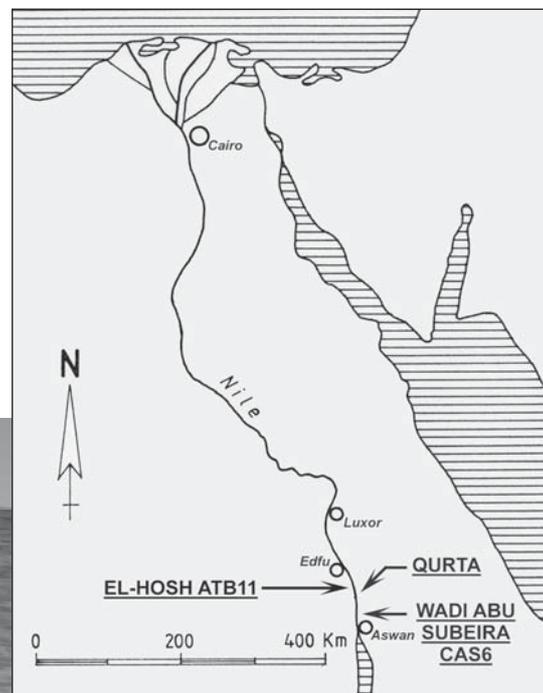


Fig. 1
Map of the Egyptian Nile Valley showing the location of Late Palaeolithic rock art sites.



Site	Locations	Panels	Figures	% Figures
Qurta I (QI)	6	12	111	62.0
Qurta II (QII)	7	15	54	30.2
Qurta III (QIII)	2	3	14	7.8
Total	15	30	179	100.0

Table 1
Number of locations, panels and individual figures at the Qurta rock art sites.

Late Palaeolithic and Epipalaeolithic Rock Art in Egypt: Qurta and El-Hosh

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Whereas the bulk of Egyptian rock art dealt with in this issue of *Archéo-Nil* can be ascribed to the Neolithic and Predynastic cultures immediately preceding and foreshadowing pharaonic civilization (5th-4th millennium B.C.), much older petroglyphs have come to light in the Nile Valley in the course of the past decade. This contribution deals with two major Nilotic rock art assemblages, Qurta and el-Hosh, that can tentatively be attributed to the Late Palaeolithic (c. 16,000-15,000 B.P.) and the Epipalaeolithic (c. 8,000 B.P.) respectively. Recently, it has become clear that these assemblages are not isolated occurrences, but parts of a much more complex picture. Rather than discussing the rock art of Qurta and el-Hosh in detail, which has already been done to some extent in other publications, I will try to sketch the broader environmental and cultural context in which these oldest Egyptian petroglyph traditions flourished.

Late Palaeolithic rock art: Qurta

The particular circumstances of the finding of the Qurta rock art, which is, at least in part, a rediscovery, have already been detailed in previous publications (Huyge *et al.* 2007; Huyge 2008; Huyge & Claes 2008) and will not be reiterated here. At Qurta, situated on the east bank of the Nile, along the northern edge of the Kom Ombo Plain, about 40km south of Edfu and 15km north of Kom Ombo (**fig. 1**), three rock art sites have been identified: Qurta I, II and III (henceforth QI, QII and QIII) (**fig. 2**). These sites are located high up on the Nubian sandstone cliffs bordering the Nile floodplain, at an altitude of about 120-130m above sea level (*i.e.* about 35-45m above the current floodplain). At each of them several rock art locations, panels and individual figures have been identified (see **table 1**). In total there are at least 179 individual images.

Table 2

General composition of the Qurta rock art assemblages. The counts include 'definite', 'probable' and 'possible/uncertain' identifications. The total number of 'definite' identifications is indicated between brackets.

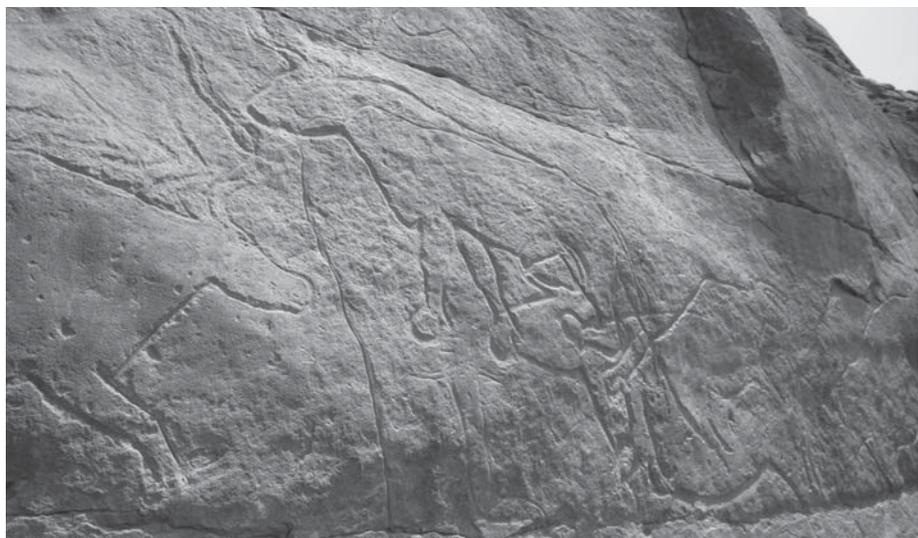
Subject	QI	QII	QIII	Total	%
Bovid (cattle)	93	36	7	136 (117)	76.0
Hippopotamus	2	3		5 (3)	2.8
Hartebeest		1		1 (0)	0.6
Gazelle	3			3 (2)	1.7
Indeterminate mammal	6	2	1	9 (9)	5.0
Bird	2	5	4	11 (6)	6.1
Fish	1		1	2 (2)	1.1
Human figure	2	7		9 (7)	5.0
Sign	2		1	3 (2)	1.7
Total	111	54	14	179 (148)	100.0

The majority are naturalistically drawn animal figures. As can be inferred from **table 2**, bovinds (cattle) are largely predominant (76% of the total assemblage), followed by birds, hippopotami, gazelle, fish and hartebeest. In addition, there are also several highly stylized representations of human figures (mostly shown with protruding buttocks, but no other bodily features) and a small number of probable non-figurative or abstract signs. All of the rock art images are very darkly coloured. They bear a substantially developed patination and/or rock varnish that completely merge with the surrounding rock surface. Most of the images also show traces of intensive weathering through sandblasting and/or water run-off. In this respect, the rock art at Qurta is highly homogeneous. In spite of the fact that there are numerous superimpositions of images, it seems to represent one relatively brief manufacturing phase.

None of the animals present shows any evidence for domestication. There is little doubt that the bovinds represented (**fig. 3**) should be identified as *Bos primigenius* or aurochs (wild cattle). In general, they seem to be rather short-horned, but there is archaeozoological evidence available (moreover from Late Pleistocene faunal material collected in the Kom Ombo Plain) that the Egyptian form of *Bos primigenius* bore smaller horns than that of the European type but was otherwise of about the same size (see Churcher 1972: 81; Linseele 2004).

Fig. 3

Detail of panel 1 at Qurta I, locality 1 (QI.1.1) showing bovinds and stylized human figure with outstretched arms (below centre).



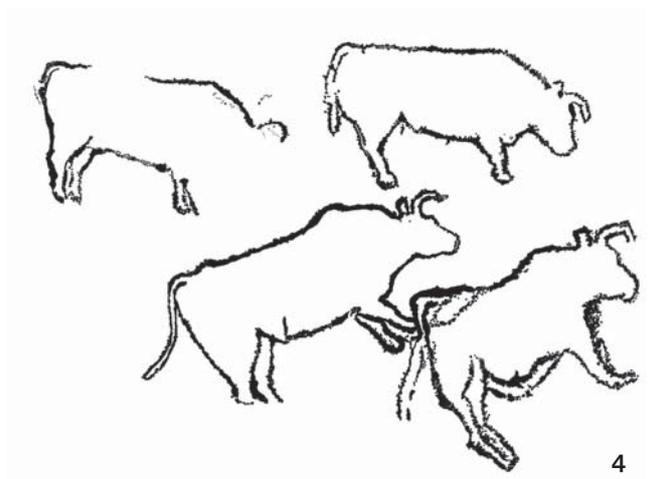


Fig. 4
Tracing of panel 2 at Qurta II, locality 4 (QII.4.2). The total length of the panel is about 1.75 m. The double belly line of the lower right bovid is typical of the Qurta II bovids.

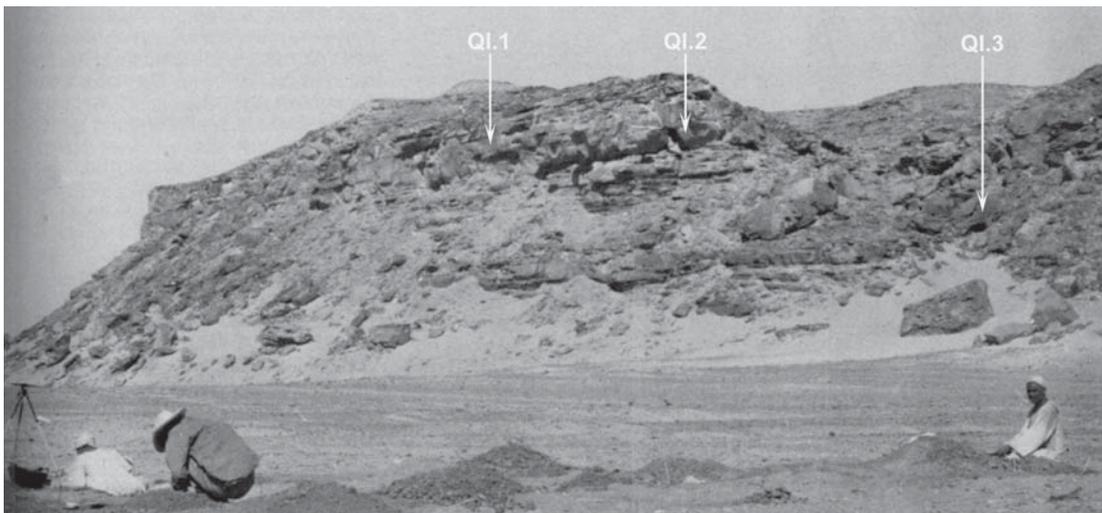
Fig. 5
Detail of panel 1 at Qurta II, locality 2 (QII.2.1) showing a bovid with scratches over the head and neck.

As far as the spatial organization of the Qurta rock art is concerned, there are no evident scenes (compositions displaying a narrative content). Compositions are limited to the juxtaposition of a few images (for instance, two opposed bovids and a bird frieze composed of three drawings at QII). Figures seem rather to be conceived as individual images. In contrast to the rock art of the Predynastic Period, there are no imaginary ground lines present. Images can be drawn in all possible directions (and frequently the head is represented upward or downward). Quite often the animals are shown in dynamic poses, their backs curved and their legs bent as if in motion. In some cases the raised position of the tail seems indicative of running. Some bovids may be rendered rolling in dust or mud or may even be shown dead (in some cases explaining their unnaturally bent legs). In this respect the Qurta animal figures are also different from Predynastic representations, which are mostly stiff and static. Among the bovids, various types of horns can be distinguished. Additionally, these animals are drawn in different ways (for instance, with the horns either in true or twisted perspective and with or without hooves). Several sub-styles and qualities of workmanship can be distinguished, probably suggesting different 'traditions' and/or 'hands'. A notable difference between the bovids at QI and QII, for instance, is the frequent presence of a double belly line at the latter site (fig. 4).

From a technical point of view, both hammering and incision have been practised to create the images. In a considerable number of cases, both techniques have been combined to create or complete a drawing. Some of the figures are almost executed in bas-relief. Furthermore, the dimensions of the drawings are exceptional. Quite often the bovids are larger than 0.80m (the largest example even measuring over 1.80m). In this respect the Qurta rock art is again quite unlike the rock art of the Predynastic Period, in which animal figures only exceptionally measure over 0.40-0.50m. Natural features, such as the relief of the rock surface and/or fissures in the surface, have in some cases been integrated into images. The best example of this is a large bovid at QII, where a (only slightly modified) natural vertical crack in the rock surface has been used to render/suggest the back part of the animal. A further particularity of this art is that the naturalistic images of animals are combined with highly schematized human figures (closely comparable to stylized human figures as known from the Magdalenian cultural phase of Palaeolithic Europe). Quite often it is clear that the drawings are deliberately left incomplete. Elaborately engraved bovids, for instance, lack front legs or are otherwise unfinished. In a number of cases animals (both bovids and hippopotami) show scratches over the head and neck that evidently must have some kind of symbolical meaning (fig. 5).

Fig. 6

Excavations at GS-III by the Canadian Prehistoric Expedition in 1962-1963. Rock art locations QI.1, QI.2 and QI.3 are situated at a distance of only 150 to 200 m from the Late Palaeolithic settlement (modified after Smith 1976).



With the exception of hartebeest, which is rarely represented (only one probable example at QII), the animal repertoire of the Qurta rock art closely matches the faunal assemblages that were recovered about forty-five years ago at several Late Palaeolithic settlements in the northern part of the Kom Ombo Plain (for a general discussion, see Smith 1976). Both in the rock art and in the Late Palaeolithic faunal collections, large ‘Ethiopian’ faunal elements, such as elephant, giraffe and rhinoceros, are conspicuously lacking. The Late Palaeolithic settlements, the most important of which are GS-III (at a distance of only about 150 to 200m from QI; see **fig. 6**) and GS-2B-II (about 1.3km southwest of Qurta), were excavated in the early 1960s by the Canadian Prehistoric Expedition (Smith 1966; 1967) and the Yale Prehistoric Nubia Expedition (Phillips & Butzer 1973). The greater part of them, including GS-III and GS-2B-II, are currently attributed to the Ballanan-Silsilian culture (see Wendorf & Schild 1989; Vermeersch 1992; Midant-Reynes 2000: 54-55). Other occurrences of this culture are known from Ballana (near Wadi Halfa in Sudanese Nubia), Wadi Kubhaniya, Esna and Arab el Sabaha (near Nag Hammadi). The Ballanan-Silsilian culture is dated to about 16,000 to 15,000 years ago (B.P.). Climatologically this corresponds to the end of a hyperarid period, preceding a return of the rains in the Upper Nile region and the ‘Wild Nile’ stage of about 13,000-12,000 B.P. (Paulissen & Vermeersch 1989). The fauna of the Late Palaeolithic in the Kom Ombo region in general and of the Ballanan-Silsilian in particular (Churcher 1972; Peters 1990), suggests a culture of hunters and fishermen with a mixed subsistence economy oriented towards both stream and (to a much lesser degree) desert for food resources (see below). Incised fragments of sandstone found at GS-III (briefly mentioned in Smith 1985) prove that the Late Palaeolithic inhabitants of the Kom Ombo Plain practised the technique of engraving rock. Apart from the Late Palaeolithic settlements (and some older, Early and Middle Palaeolithic materials), no other prehistoric finds have ever been reported from the northern part of the Kom Ombo Plain. Forty years ago, K.W. Butzer and C.L. Hansen (1968: 191) stated that the Nile Valley at Kom Ombo appeared to be “*an archeological void between Late Paleolithic and Eighteenth Dynasty times*”. The situation has not changed since this statement was made, as any archaeological record for Neolithic-Predynastic use is still completely absent within this region. Moreover, at Qurta and within the desert hinterland east of it, there is not a single petroglyph to

be spotted that is typically Predynastic in nature. It seems therefore extremely likely that the Qurta rock art sites and the nearby Late Palaeolithic settlements are closely related and contemporaneous. Direct ages for the Qurta rock art are not yet available, but analyses are under way to explore its potential for AMS 14C dating of organics in the varnish rind and U-series dating. The recent discovery of several rock drawings still partly or wholly covered by scree accumulations at QII offers further dating possibilities. As these sandy and rocky deposits can probably be dated using Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) hope exists that a valid *ante quem* date for the rock art can be obtained.

The rock art of Qurta is not an isolated occurrence. Two other sites are known, both with a limited but highly homogeneous assemblage of drawings, that display a very similar art, from a thematic as well as a stylistic point of view. The first, Abu Tanqura Bahari 11 (ATB11) at el-Hosh, is situated about 10km to the north of Qurta on the west bank of the Nile; the second, Wadi (Chor) Abu Subeira 6 (CAS6), lies about 45km to the south and on the same bank (**fig. 1**). ATB11, discovered by the Belgian archaeological mission prior to the rediscovery of the Qurta rock art (in 2004), has not been studied and recorded in detail as yet (see Huyge 2005). The assemblage of about 35 drawings consists mainly of naturalistically drawn bovids (26, *i.e.* 75%) (**fig. 7**), but also seems to include some stylized human representations similar to the above-mentioned figures at Qurta. CAS6, discovered in 2006 by the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities (Aswan), is composed of animal figures only (see Storemyr *et al.* 2008). About 35 have been recorded to date, 14 of which are clear bovids. Two fish, one hippopotamus and possibly hartebeest and gazelle are also present; less likely is the identification of one animal as a donkey. It can hardly be coincidental that Late Palaeolithic archaeological materials and possible habitation sites also occur in the vicinity of both ATB11 and CAS6. Moreover, the geographical situation of ATB11 and CAS6 is very similar. Like at Qurta, the rock art is situated at or near the mouth of a large wadi and in a very prominent position, high up on the Nubian sandstone cliffs or steep hill slopes, offering a vast panoramic view over the wadi floor and the floodplain, which would have been considerably more elevated in Late Palaeolithic times than today (up to more than 15 m in the Aswan region according to Wendorf and Schild 1989).

The Late Pleistocene landscape of the Kom Ombo Plain has been studied in detail by K.W. Butzer and C.L. Hansen (1968: 86-195), who attempted to review the archaeological findings in the light of the palaeoenvironmental evidence. Almost all Late Palaeolithic sites in the northern part of the Kom Ombo Plain are found in relation to seasonal overflow channels of the Sahaba-Darau Formation (*c.* 17,000-12,000 B.P.) and in similar ecological settings. Some of the occupations, according to Butzer and Hansen (1968: 177), may have taken place after the flood peak had passed. C.S. Churcher (1972: 126), however, has deduced from the presence of young animals of many of the taxa present that the sites were rather occupied during the spring or early summer (with some winter occupation as well on the basis of the avifauna). Butzer and Hansen's attempt at a reconstruction of the Kom Ombo Plain

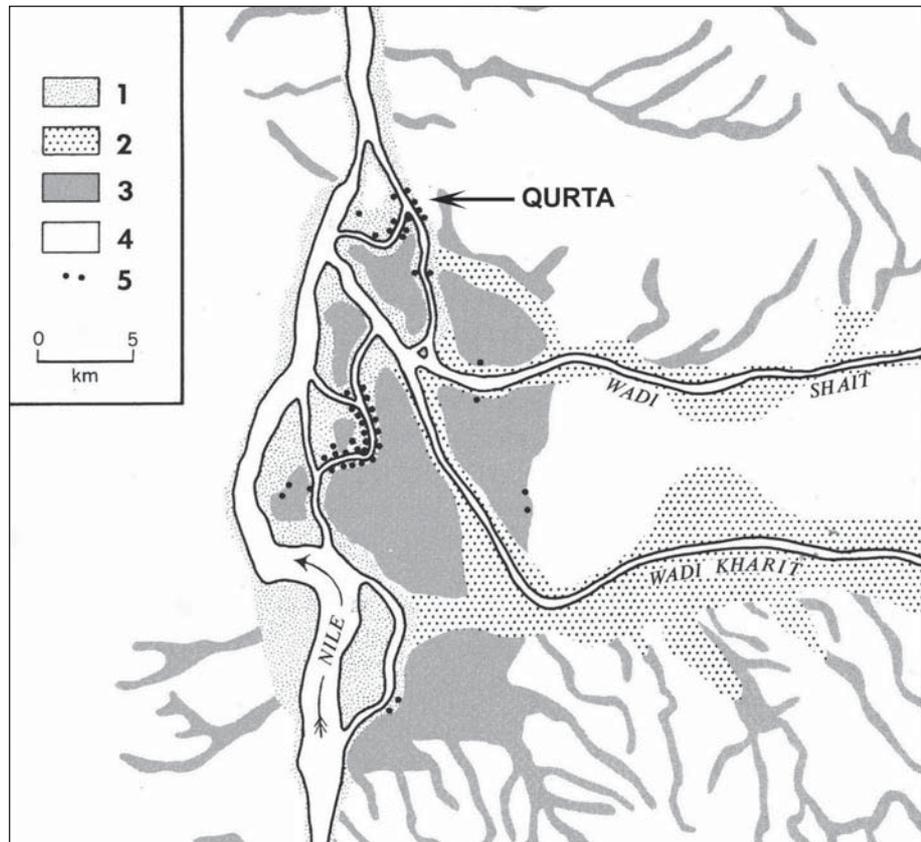


Fig. 7
Superimposed
bovids at el-Hosh,
Abu Tanqura
Bahari,
locality 11
(ATB11)
overlapped
by what seems to
be a human leg.

Fig. 8

Reconstruction of the Kom Ombo Plain at the time of Late Palaeolithic occupation.

1: seasonally inundated Nile floodplain, probably with woodland or tree-savanna;
 2: periodically inundated wadi floorplains, probably with thorn-savanna;
 3: edaphically favoured zones with high water-table in minor wadis and adjacent to Nile floodplain, probably with semi-desert shrub;
 4: desert;
 5: major Late Palaeolithic occupation sites (modified after Butzer & Hansen 1968: fig. 4-4).



at the time of Late Palaeolithic occupation (**fig. 8**) illustrates the different ecological environments that were available to man for exploitation. These include principally the riverine woodland or gallery forest that bordered the river and the main floodplain channels, the thorn-savanna and grasslands in the major wadi floorplains and the desert wasteland beyond. The mammalian fauna that populated these environments was relatively poor in species, according to A. Gautier (1987) due essentially to the consequence of a combination of climatic (for instance, aridity) and azonal ecological (annual flooding) limiting factors. Of the large game animals represented both in the faunal assemblages of the major habitation sites and in the Qurta rock art, hippopotamus, aurochs and hartebeest were apparently largely restricted to the floodplain, whereas dorcas gazelle must be considered a 'desert species'. Desert animals, which also included Nubian wild ass and barbary sheep (not represented in the Qurta rock art, although the former is possibly present at CAS6), account for less than 15% of the Kom Ombo ungulates (Peters 1990). Oryx, addax and ibex, all three of which species were almost certainly present in the Eastern Desert at this time, are completely absent both from the occupation sites and the rock art. This may indicate that the Late Pleistocene hunters ventured little if at all into the desert proper. It appears that the Late Palaeolithic groups confined themselves to the Nile floodplain and its immediate environs. North-south movements along the Nile may well have taken place (possibly as vaguely attested by the distribution of the known Ballanan-Silsilian sites); east-west movement, however, must have been greatly restricted and ultimately determined by the seasonal behaviour of the river. The same seems to be true on a much larger geographical scale than within the Kom Ombo area alone. With the possible exception of some Upper Palaeolithic occurrences (possibly corresponding with a short wetter spell *c.* 25,000 BP) in Sodmein Cave near Quseir in the Eastern Desert (Vermeersch *et al.* 1994), no Upper or Late Palaeolithic sites have yet been discovered in the Red Sea Hills or in the Western Desert (Vermeersch 2001). Apparently, because of the extreme aridity, these areas were scarcely if at all visited during the Late Pleistocene (see Kuper & Kröpelin 2006).

Alas, little meaningful information can be presented concerning the meaning and motivation of the Late Palaeolithic rock art in the Nile Valley. As the geographical situation of QI-III, ATB11 and CAS6 is very similar, the local setting of the rock art must definitely be significant. In view of the fact that the petroglyph fauna (apart from hartebeest) closely resembles the animals that were actually hunted and consumed by the Late Palaeolithic inhabitants of the Kom Ombo Plain, and considering the fact that the rock art locations offer a spectacular view over the Late Pleistocene hunting grounds, it is tempting to relate the rock art to some kind of 'hunting magic' (the above-mentioned animals showing scratches over the head and neck may also be suggestive in this respect). Admittedly, 'hunting magic' is not a popular explanation in current 'Palaeolithic art theory' and definitely not generally applicable to the European Palaeolithic scene (see Bahn & Vertut 1997: 171-180), however, for the time being, it does not seem possible to put forward a more plausible hypothesis.

Epipalaeolithic rock art: el-Hosh

The Late Pleistocene hyperaridity lasted until about 10,000 B.P. The advent of the 'Holocene Wet Phase' (from *c.* 10,000 until 7,000-6,500 B.P.) must have changed things substantially. As the deserts, both east and west of the Nile, became less dry and more hospitable, human activity in these environments must have increased considerably. As yet, this is archaeologically evident, however, only for the Western Desert. With regard to the Nile Valley and the Eastern Desert, there seems to be a hiatus in occupation between about 11,000 and 8,000 B.P. Whether or not this is a gap in our knowledge because of a taphonomic bias or a real absence of human presence because of unfavourable environmental conditions (reduced floodplain with limited resources as a consequence of down cutting of the Nile?), is not entirely clear. According to S. Hendrickx and P. Vermeersch (2000) it is likely that settlements from this time span in the Nile Valley are simply covered by modern alluvial deposits when considering a narrowing of the floodplain and the normal location of sites located on the fringe of the low desert. This, however, does not explain the apparent complete absence of sites in the Eastern Desert proper. From about 8,000 B.P. onwards, human presence is again attested both in the Nile Valley and the Red Sea Hills. At Elkab, in the Upper Egyptian Nile Valley, about 15km north of Edfu on the east bank of the river (**fig. 9**), a small cluster of Epipalaeolithic settlements was found, dating to about 8,000-7,700 B.P. (Vermeersch 1978). The Elkabian culture is characterized by a subsistence economy entirely based on hunting, fishing and gathering, with no indication whatsoever of organized food production. A short time ago, in 1996, an unmistakably Elkabian-related site (Tree Shelter) was discovered in the Eastern Desert, near Quseir, at a distance of only about 25km from the Red Sea coast (Vermeersch 2008) (**fig. 9**). This find (as the crow flies, *c.* 180km from Elkab) strongly suggests that the Elkabian people should be viewed as nomadic hunters, following east-west routes with fishing and hunting in the Nile Valley in late summer to autumn periods and exploitation of the desert during the wet summer months (Hendrickx & Vermeersch 2000). Possible relationships between the Elkabian and more or less contemporaneous Western Desert (Dyke area) assemblages have also been proposed. P.M. Vermeersch (1984; 2008: 91) has even suggested a seasonal migration of Western Desert Epipalaeolithic groups, the El Ghorab variant in particular, to the Nile Valley at Elkab (even though the El Ghorab settlements are, in general,



Fig. 9 • Satellite image with localisation of el-Hosh, Elkab and Tree Shelter. Wadi Atwani, north of Wadi Hammamat, contains one of the most important assemblages of geometric rock art in the Eastern Desert (modified after Google Earth 2008).

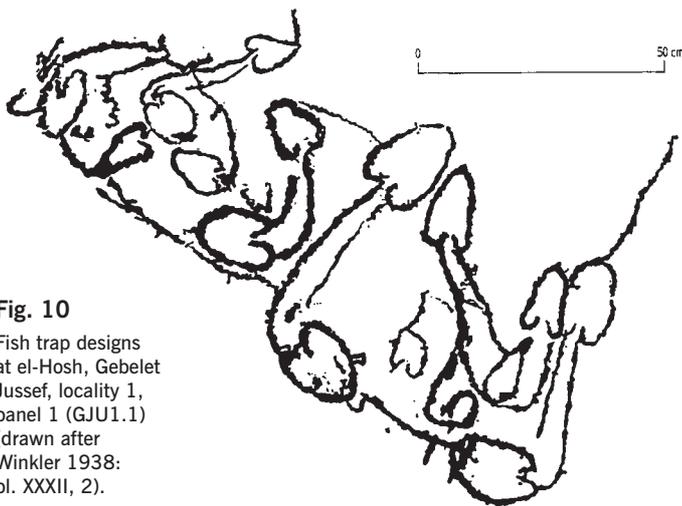


Fig. 10
Fish trap designs at el-Hosh, Gebelet Jussef, locality 1, panel 1 (GJU1.1) (drawn after Winkler 1938: pl. XXXII, 2).

dated slightly older than the Elkabian). It may safely be postulated that such mobility could be true for other, thus far unidentified cultural groups that may have been present around this time in Egypt.

It seems to me that the above-described Epipalaeolithic cultural situation may be used as an historical framework to understand and explain what goes on 'artistically' in Egypt during the Early Holocene. We have no idea what happened in this domain between about 16,000-15,000 B.P. and 8,000 B.P. (if anything), however, the second oldest art in the Nile Valley seems to be a clean break from the naturalistic Late Palaeolithic art tradition. El-Hosh, 30km south of Efdu on the west bank of the Nile (fig. 1 & 9), is one of the key-areas in this respect. The el-Hosh rock art has been studied by the Belgian archaeological mission since 1998 (see, most recently, Huyge 2005). It is primarily characterized by bizarre-looking mushroom-shaped designs that can convincingly be identified as representations of labyrinth fish traps (Huyge *et al.* 1998) (fig. 10). Frequently appearing in clusters and occasionally as isolated figures, these designs are often associated with geometric and figurative motifs, including circles, ladder-shaped drawings, human figures, footprints and crocodiles (fig. 11). AMS 14C dating of dark rock varnishes covering the fish trap designs has suggested an age prior to 6690 B.P. (Huyge *et al.* 2001), which is definitely not in contradiction with an attribution of this rock art to the Epipalaeolithic. The

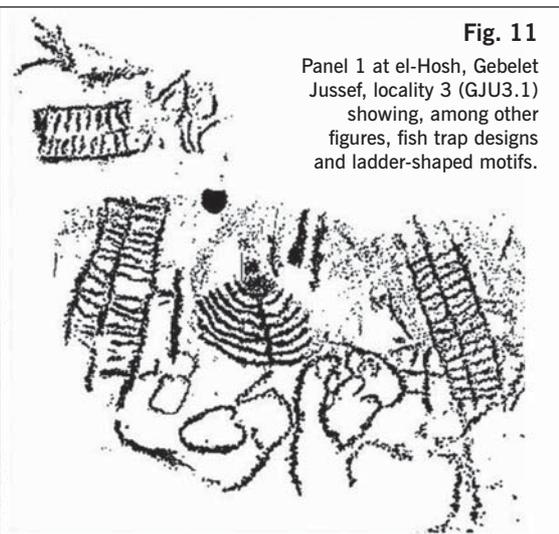


Fig. 11
Panel 1 at el-Hosh, Gebelet Jussef, locality 3 (GJU3.1) showing, among other figures, fish trap designs and ladder-shaped motifs.



Fig. 12
Simple labyrinth fish trap with attached guiding wall in the vicinity of Ain Sukhna, Red Sea coast (photographed in October 2005).

emphasis on fishing in the el-Hosh rock art (even though fish themselves are not represented) may find a clear echo in the above-discussed Elkabian culture. The faunal composition at the Elkabian Nile Valley sites (Gautier 1978) demonstrates that developed fishing practices existed, with fishing not only in the receding high waters of the floodplain, but also in the main channel of the Nile. According to W. Van Neer (2004), the Nile Valley ichthyofaunal assemblages indicate a shift around 10,000-8,000 B.P. from almost exclusive fishing in the floodplain towards an exploitation of the whole fluvial system. Technological innovations must have been involved that allowed the exploitation of the main Nile channel, including the development of stable vessels. The extremely sophisticated fish trap devices displayed in the rock art at el-Hosh, although in all probability primarily used in the floodplain waters, may well have been another of these Epipalaeolithic technological novelties. Can it be a coincidence, in view of the Elkabian presence at Tree Shelter near to the Red Sea, that labyrinth fish traps of a design identical to the el-Hosh specimen are still in use in that coastal area, as exemplified by the illustrated example from the vicinity of Ain Sukhna (**fig. 12**)?

Whereas the fish trap designs in rock art are essentially limited to the el-Hosh area [a few isolated examples are known from Sudanese Nubia (Hellström 1970: plate 108, 4) and Gharb Aswan (Storemyr 2008: fig. 10, P334)], several other assemblages of 'geometric' petroglyphs are currently known that are probably somehow or other 'culturally' related to the el-Hosh rock art. This is neither the place nor the occasion to present a detailed overview of these assemblages. A good deal are listed in a recent article by P. Storemyr on the prehistoric geometric rock art at Aswan (see Storemyr 2008: fig. 1; Storemyr this volume: fig. 1). The inventory comprises sites in the Sudanese Nile Valley (Abka near Wadi Halfa), the Upper Egyptian Nile Valley (Gharb Aswan) and the Eastern Desert (Wadi Atwani, Wadi Abu Markab el-Nes and Wadi Umm Salam). Examples of similar rock art in the latter region could probably be multiplied [other occurrences are, for instance, known from Umm Eleiga (Klemm 1995) and Wadi Mia (Morrow & Morrow 2002: 161-162)]. In addition, 'geometric' or 'abstract' rock art assemblages, including curvilinear 'labyrinth' designs, 'serpenti-forms', footprints and animal tracks, have recently been reported from the oases in the Western Desert, Kharga (S. Ikram, pers. comm.), Farafra (Barich 1998) and Siwa (Giddy 1999) in particular. As the corpora relating to the above rock art sites have barely been studied, let alone published, it is probably too soon to try to establish more precise temporal or cultural relationships between them. The vast distribution of this type of rock art, however, I would argue, perfectly accords with the apparent extreme mobility of the Epipalaeolithic hunter-gatherers.

In his treatment of the Gharb Aswan rock art, P. Storemyr (2008) has identified two different types of geometric assemblages: firstly the 'Cobble Ridge Group', characterized by a wide range of motifs, from circles to complex compositions, often associated with crocodiles; and secondly the 'Wadi el-Faras Group', featuring a few geometric patterns related to giraffes. If the latter group is an archaeological reality (it does not seem to be represented at el-Hosh), it may well constitute a transitional phase from the (almost) exclusively geometric Epipalaeolithic to the (almost) exclusively figurative Predynastic rock art tradition of the 4th millennium B.C. In that case, however, I would suggest a somewhat older age for the 'Wadi el-Faras Group' than Storemyr's (early?) 4th millennium B.C. date.

As is the case for the figurative Late Palaeolithic rock art described above, little of significance can be said about the meaning and motivation of the Epipalaeolithic imagery, which, due to the particular nature of its graphical constructs, appears even more hermetic than the Late Pleistocene petroglyphs. In an earlier publication (Huyge *et al.* 1998) I have suggested that the el-Hosh fish trap designs possibly relate to ritual techniques that had to be observed in order to increase the efficiency of fishing gear and to secure a 'miraculous draught of fishes'. I considered it ethnographically plausible that the area of el-Hosh was, in fact, the location of a seasonal congregation of people that gathered there during the time of the flood or shortly afterwards to perform concerted fishing activities, and quite possibly, associated ceremonies and rituals, that may have included the creation of rock art. This suggestion, which basically amounts to a variation of the 'hunting magic' hypothesis, may explain the fish trap imagery; it does not elucidate the whole gamut of geometric rock art. P. Storemyr (2008), in a roughly similar approach, favours the reading of some of the Gharb Aswan rock art as 'images of landscape', be it topographical 'maps' of local wadi systems or bird's-eye views of game trapping structures, but clearly states that such interpretations are entirely inconclusive at the current state of knowledge. However, it does seem quite reasonable to suppose that the early nomadic hunters who are responsible for this fascinating body of rock art, not unlike the Bedouin of more recent times, felt an irresistible urge to 'mark their environment'. Whether this urge was fed by day-to-day worries or by metaphysical concerns is, of course, still far beyond our present understanding (and will probably remain so).

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