

## ROCK ART DISCOVERIES IN THE NORTHERN YEMEN

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In 1975/76, Fritz Kortler had the opportunity to visit the Arabic Republic of the Yemen as a free-lance travels writer. At this occasion, he had the rare chance to travel through the north-eastern part of this country, called Djouf after the homonymous wadi which traverses the rugged highlands over 150 kms (cf. the sketch map). He knew that this part of the Yemen is inhabited by very xenophobic bedouin tribes like the Dahm and the Dhu Hussein who are constantly in war with one another. Being above all interested in the Arabic nomadism, he was attracted by the marginal areas of the big desert Rub Al-Khali where he hoped to find people still living their traditional nomadic way of life.

Provided with a letter of recommendation addressed to a bedouin sheikh of the mighty Dahm tribe, Kortler left in January 1976 the capital Sana'a for the Rub al-Khali. During the following ten weeks, he crossed on foot or on camelback with bedouins large tracts of land which can be with high probability considered as not yet visited by any European in modern times. Almost every day, Kortler's guides drew his attention to "helalic" rock pictures and inscriptions – they are called so after a legendary pre-Islamic ruler Abu Seet El Helali by the local bedouins who name themselves his sons. Kortler realized that these petroglyphs were, for their most part, hitherto unknown prehistoric and protohistoric monuments. He therefore endeavoured to copy and to photograph most of the graffiti, sometimes even against the resistance of the bedouins. In the Rimal (Sands) which is the name given by the local bedouins to the Rub al-Khali, Kortler traversed many times the route of Abdallah Philby who travelled through this region in the late twenties on his way from Er Riadh to Hadramaut. Old bedouins narrated Kortler that Philby recorded a few "kataba" (rock inscriptions).

Kortler observed that the pre-Islamic inscriptions predominated on the margins of the highlands, abruptly sloping down towards the north-east, presumably in the proximity of ancient camel tracks, whereas the rock pictures showing hunting and war scenes, bovines, horses and otriches were more numerous on the many volcanic hills of the open sandy desert. He estimated that there still must be thousands of undiscovered rock pictures and inscriptions in the northern Yemen.

### *Catalogue.*

(for the location of the sites below see the sketch map from W to E)

S i t e : D a h y a n

Fig. 1

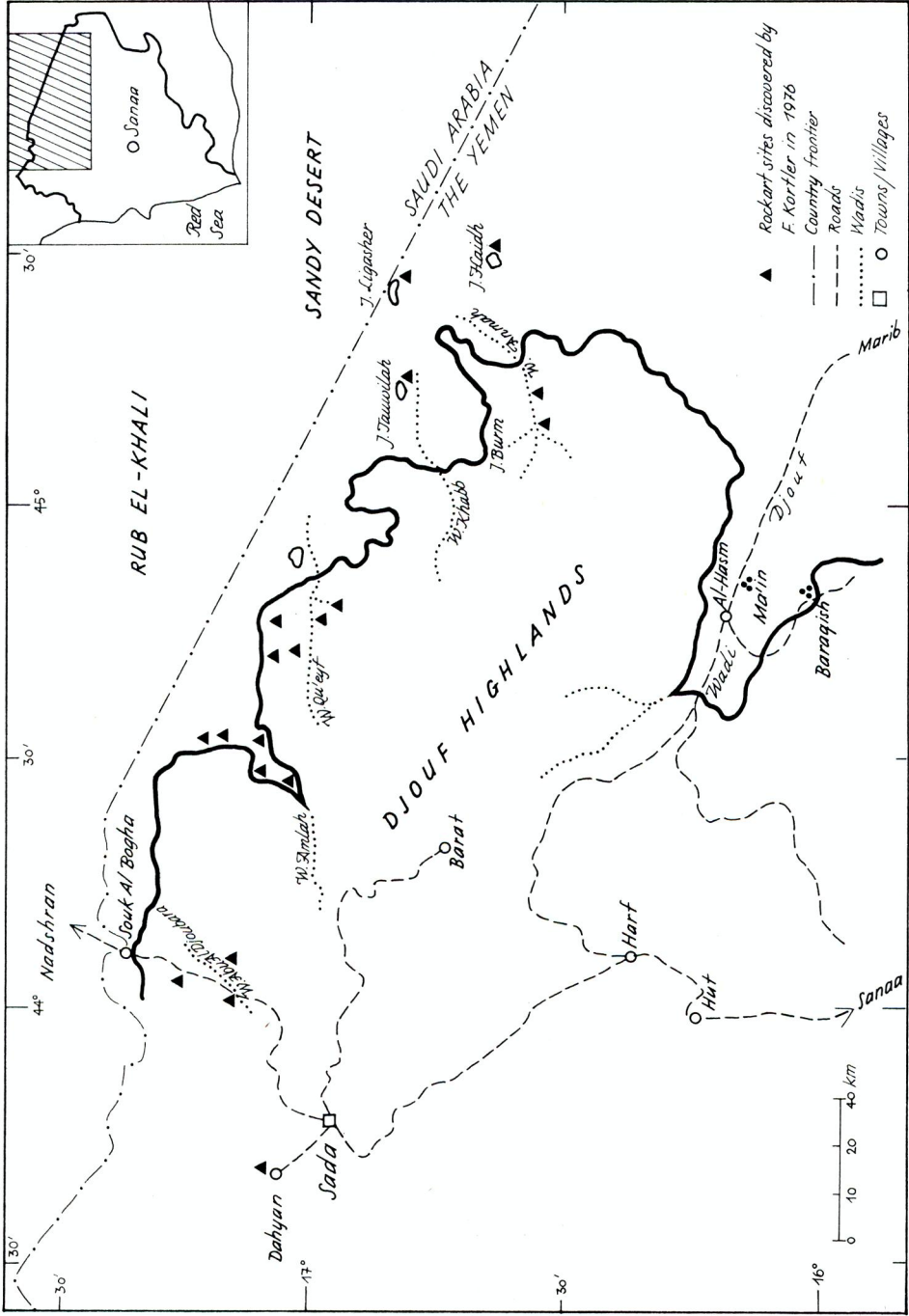
Ibex, attacked by dogs.

Engravings in a pecking technique. The patina of engravings is much lighter than that of the rock.

Fig. 2

Two ibexes (the smaller one superimposed on the bigger left one), camel-rider.

Engravings in a pecking technique. The patina of the engravings is lighter than that of the rocks, that of the superimposed ibex a little lighter than that of the bigger animal.



Sketch map of the northern Yemen

Site : W a d i A b u A l D j o u b a r a

Fig. 3

Two ibexes; the lower one attacked by two dogs.

Engravings in a pecking technique, the patina of the engravings is lighter than that of the rock. The three markings within the body and the head of the lower ibex are lighter patinated than the remaining lines.

Fig. 4

Horseman with a long spear (above); anthropomorph with raised arms, carrying a spear and a shield; to the left there is another similar anthropomorph, not represented here.

Engravings in a fine pecking technique, the patina of the engravings is much lighter than that of the rock.

Site : W a d i A m l a h

Fig. 5

Short-horned humpless bovine and ibex. To the left on the same rock there is another ibex, camel-riders et al. engraved.

Engravings in a fine pecking technique; the figures are pecked all over their surfaces except the eye, muzzle and the tail brush of the bovine. The patina of the engravings is lighter than that of the rock on which a watch-tower stands.

Fig. 6

Horseman, brandishing a long lance.

Engraving in a crude pecking technique; the patina of the engraving is much lighter than that of the rock.

Fig. 7

Ibex.

Engraving in pecked contours. The patina of the engraving is only slightly lighter than that of the rock.

Site : N o r t h o f W a d i Q u ' e y f

Fig. 8

Camel-rider carrying a rifle(?), camel.

Engravings in a crude pecking technique; the patina of the engravings is much lighter than that of the rock.

Fig. 9

Two camel-riders brandishing long lances, two men carrying shields and long spears, one man flourishing a shield and a sword(?). The camels wear bells or amulets on their necks.

Engravings in a pecking technique, worked all over their surfaces. The patina of the engravings is much lighter than that of the rock.

Fig. 10

Camel engraved in contours, a cross-like symbol.

The patina of the engravings is lighter than that of the rock.

## Fig. 11

Symbol-like and snake-shaped engravings on an ancient tombstone.

The patina of the engravings is lighter than that of the rock; that of the right part of the snake on the top of the boulder is lightest.

## Fig. 12

Two layers of pecked engravings on two ancient tombstones. The lower layer consists of a horseman and two orants on the left stone and of the oval-shaped figure on the right stone; its patina is lighter than that of the stone surfaces. The upper layer consists of four snake-like figures on the left stone and of the snake on the right stone; its patina is much lighter than that of the lower layer.

## Fig. 13

Horseman and a camel-rider, armed with spears, in combat.

Engravings in a crude pecking technique, the patina of which is much lighter than that of the rock on which there are further similar engravings.

## Fig. 14

Two pairs of camels, ibex.

Engravings in a pecking technique, the patina of which is lighter than that of the rock on which there are further similar engravings.

## Fig. 15

Three dogs(?). The biggest animal is 20 cm long.

Engravings in a crude pecking technique with an almost white patina which contrasts with that of the rock.

## Fig. 16

Horseman brandishing a spear, oval-shaped symbol.

Engravings in a crude pecking technique the almost white patina of which contrasts with that of the rock.

## Fig. 17 = Photo 1

Male anthropomorph carrying a shield and a long spear, wearing a feather head-dress.

Pecking technique with several recent scars (iconoclasm?). This figure is called Abu Suba (Father of the Penis) by the bedouins.

## Site : W a d i Q u ` e y f

## Fig. 18

Long-horned bovine with an anthropomorph on its back; two anthropomorphs.

Crudely pecked engravings with a very light patina contrasting with that of the rock.

## Fig. 19

Anthropomorph riding on the crupper of a camel, brandishing a sword; a male anthropomorph leading a saddled camel; three camels.

Crudely pecked engravings with a very light patina contrasting with that of the rock.

## Fig. 20 = Photo 2

Snake-shaped engravings superimposed on symbol-like figures, a camel (bottom) and a camel-rider (top right).

Pecking technique.

## Fig. 21 = Photo 3

Two ibexes with hypertrophied horns attacked by dogs, superimposed on older engravings.

Pecking technique.

Fig. 22

Two male anthropomorphs, carrying weapons(?).

Engravings in a pecking technique with a very light patina; on the same rock, there are further pecked engravings, all of them with a darker patina.

Fig. 23

Horseman, brandishing a long spear.

Pecked engraving with a patina lighter than that of the rock.

Fig. 24 = Photo 4

Camel-riders, horsemen, anthropomorphs.

Palimpsest engravings in a pecking technique.

Fig. 25 = Photo 5

Horsemen, camel-riders, snake, anthropomorphs, ostrich, camels, symbols, Arabic script.

Palimpsest engravings pecked all over their surfaces.

Fig. 26

Ibexes, axe(?), footprint(?) and a “five-legged” symbol.

Pecked engravings with a patina lighter than that of the rock.

Fig. 27 = Photo 6

Symbols, camels, a seated orant.

Pecked engravings with various shades of the patina.

Fig. 28

Three horsemen carrying long lances, two birds.

Pecked engravings with a patina lighter than that of the rock.

Fig. 29

Horseman, dog, ibex with hypertrophied horns.

Crudely pecked engravings with a very light patina contrasting with that of the rock.

Fig. 30

Palimpsest engravings; the horsemen brandishing long lances are superimposed on the camels and the male anthropomorph.

Pecking technique; the patina of the horsemen and the oval-shaped symbols is much lighter than that of the remaining engravings.

Fig. 31

Camel ridden by two anthropomorphs, one of them sitting on the crupper of the animal.

Crudely pecked engraving with a very light patina contrasting with that of the rock.

Fig. 32

Three orants, the left one carrying a spear, a shield and a dagger(?).

Crudely pecked engravings with a patina lighter than that of the rock.

Site : J e b e l B u r m

Fig. 33

Two pairs of footprints, fat-tailed sheep(?), sickle-shaped object.

Pecked engravings with a dark patina which is, however, lighter than that of the rock.

## Site : Jebel Ligasher

## Fig. 34 = Photo 7

Anthropomorph carrying spears, a shield and wearing a feathered head-dress.

Pecking technique.

## Fig. 35

Anthropomorph carrying a shield piercing with two long spears another anthropomorph wearing a feathered head-dress; hands; rectangular figure.

Pecked engravings with a patina lighter than that of the rock.

## Fig. 36

Long-horned, humpless bovine of almost natural size with a small bovine (calf?) beneath it.

Pecked engravings with a patina slightly lighter than that of the rock.

## Site : Jebel Haidh

## Fig. 37

Bovine with a checked hide pattern; in front of it, an anthropomorph with raised arms.

Paintings in reddish brown colour, heavily weathered.

## Fig. 38

Symbols; one of them later worked on and completed so as to represent a camel.

Pecked engravings with a patina lighter than that of the rock; the completed parts of the camel have by far the lightest patina. There are more symbols engraved on the right part of the burst boulder which are, however, heavily weathered.

## Fig. 39

Long-horned bovines.

Crudely pecked engravings with a patina lighter than that of the rock.

## Fig. 40 = Photo 8

Anthropomorphs with feathered head-dresses, most of them carrying shields, spears and some wearing daggers; schematic animals; symbols.

Pecked engravings with a patina lighter than that of the rock.

## Fig. 41

Two anthropomorphs, the big one carrying a stick and wearing a feathered head-dress; symbols.

Pecked engravings with a patina lighter than that of the rock; the small anthropomorph and the circle on the right have a lighter patina than the remaining engravings. On the whole slab, there are almost white recent scars, most probably where the engraved rock was hit with intentionally pelted stones (iconoclasm?) .

The rock art material collected by Kortler can be iconologically divided into the following main groups: armed camel-riders and horsemen (figs. 4, 6, 8, 9, 12–13, 16, 19, 20, 23–25, 28, 30, 31); anthropomorphs posing with arms and orants (figs. 4, 12, 17, 22, 24, 26, 32, 34, 35, 40, 41); symbols (figs. 10–12, 20, 25–27, 33, 35, 38); ibexes (figs. 1, 2, 3, 7, 21, 26, 29) and bovines (figs. 5, 18, 36, 37, 39). There are also rock drawings of camels and dogs alone (figs. 10, 14, 15).

Chronologically, the group of the bovine representations is probably the most ancient. It shows only humpless cattle, which has been absent in the Arabian Peninsula since prehistoric times but is depicted in its rock art (Howe 1950: fig. 1, pl. IA; Anati 1968a: figs. 3, 69, 74, 76; Červíček 1971a: pl. I). Our examples from the northern Yemen do not belong to the schematic Ethiopian-Arabian or Dahthami style (Červíček 1971b: 130f.; Anati 1972: 72–73) which is typical of bovine representations in Arabian and Ethiopian rock art. Their naturalistic style is reminiscent of similar bovine representations in Upper Egyptian, Nubian and Libyan rock art which bear resemblance to pottery decorations of the Nubian C-Group peoples who inhabited Lower Nubia from the end of the 3rd to mid-2nd millennia BC (Červíček 1974: 182–183). The cow-and-calf motif of fig. 36 recurs in Ethiopian, Eritrean, Nubian and Libyan rock art (Červíček 1975: 50–51) as well as on the C-Group pottery (Steindorff 1935: p. 57/1, 14).

The ibex, which is in our material mostly shown attacked by hunting dogs, is a widespread motif of Western and Central Asian rock art. In most cases it shows over-naturalistic horns like one variant of this motif in South Arabian decorative art dating from about the seventh century BC onwards (Doe 1971: 22, 104, pl. 7). Our fig. 29 represents an ibex with hypertrophied horns facing a dog and a horseman – datable funerary reliefs from Yemen showing horsemen go back to the first century BC (Bulliet 1975: 96, fig. 43). The smaller ibex in fig. 2 seems on the grounds of the same patina contemporary with the camel-rider on the left for which the second millennium BC can be considered as a tentative terminus a quo when the camels may have been introduced to Arabia (Doe 1971: 50).

The group of anthropomorphs with feathered head-dresses posing with arms in fig. 40 (photo 8) can be dated according to the dagger with the very broad lunate pommel carried by the warrior figure bottom right; this weapon is typical of Alaça Hüyük in Anatolia and Ur in Southern Mesopotamia in the mid-3rd millennium BC as well as of the Jebel Qara rock art in Central Arabia (Anati 1968a: 74–75, fig. 19). Similar in style are figs. 17 (photo 1), 34 (photo 7) and 35. As to the orants (figs. 4, 12, 24, 32), an analogous figure was found carved in a plinthstone for a statue dating from about 2000 BC in Bahrain (Glob 1955: 191, fig. 7) but the juxtapositions figs. 12 and 24 indicate that some of them were contemporary with the armed horsemen and camel-riders. In Central Arabia, similar orants have been dated to the late 2nd and the 1st millennia BC (Anati 1972: 156). This motif also occurs in Upper Egyptian and Nubian rock art (Červíček 1975: 144–145) but it is characteristic of the Bronze Age rock art of Scandinavia and Siberia. The Siberian orants, which are paralleled in pottery decorations, have been interpreted as shamans in praying posture (Okladnikov 1966: 136, fig. 43). Horsemen and camel-riders are the most common motif in our material and their characteristic feature is the long lance, the length of which would range, proportionally to the associated animal and human figures, between 2 and 4 metres. The Greek historian Herodian reports that the Arabs in the army of the Persian Artabanus when he fought the Roman emperor Macrinus in 218 AD “forced their way by jabbing from above with their long spears” (Herodian, 4.14. 3–15.3). The use of the long lance is further attested by funerary reliefs from the Yemen dated to the third or fourth centuries AD which often show the defunct as camel-rider armed with this weapon (Grohmann 1963: 227, pl. XVIII, 1; Bulliet 1975: 96, fig. 43) and by Arabic poetry in which the lance is considered to be ideally a horseman’s weapon despite the fact that it became a characteristic weapon of camel-riders (Schwarzlose 1886: 46–47). Apart from Arabia (cf. Field 1970: pls. 1–3; Anati 1974: figs. 175, 176, 178, 179, 195, 196, 270, 271, 289, 290), this motif is frequent in Nubian rock art – corresponding lances with leaf-shaped iron points, 30 cms and more long, and wooden shafts of over 2 metres in length have

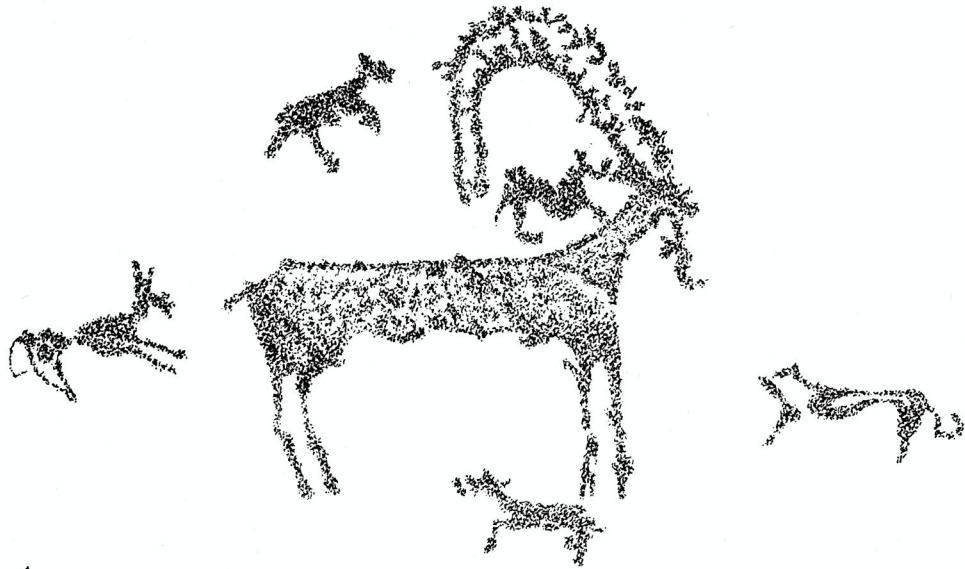
been excavated in Meroitic and Ballana cemeteries (Červíček 1973: 3, 6, chart NM7, X1). In fig. 19, the camel in the centre carries the North Arabian saddle šadād, composed of two large saddle bows shaped like inverted V's, which enabled the camel-rider for the first time to use the lance and armour and thus fully develop his military capacities (Dostal 1959: 20, 24, Fig. 5). It came into use among the Bedouins in the 3rd century AD and inaugurated the fully developed Bedouin Period of horse- and camel-riding warriors (Dostal 1958: 10, fig. 21).

On the evidence of the juxtapositions in figs. 20 (photo 2) and 25 (photo 5), the symbols are at least partly contemporary with the horsemen and camel-riders. The pre-Islamic symbol assemblages like in figs. 11, 27 (photo 6) and 38 are widespread throughout Central and Southern Arabia (Anati 1968b: passim; Doe 1971: figs. 63, 64, 69, 123, 124, 128). The superimpositions in figs. 12 and 20 (photo 2) show that the snake is more recent than the other symbols and the remaining graffiti.

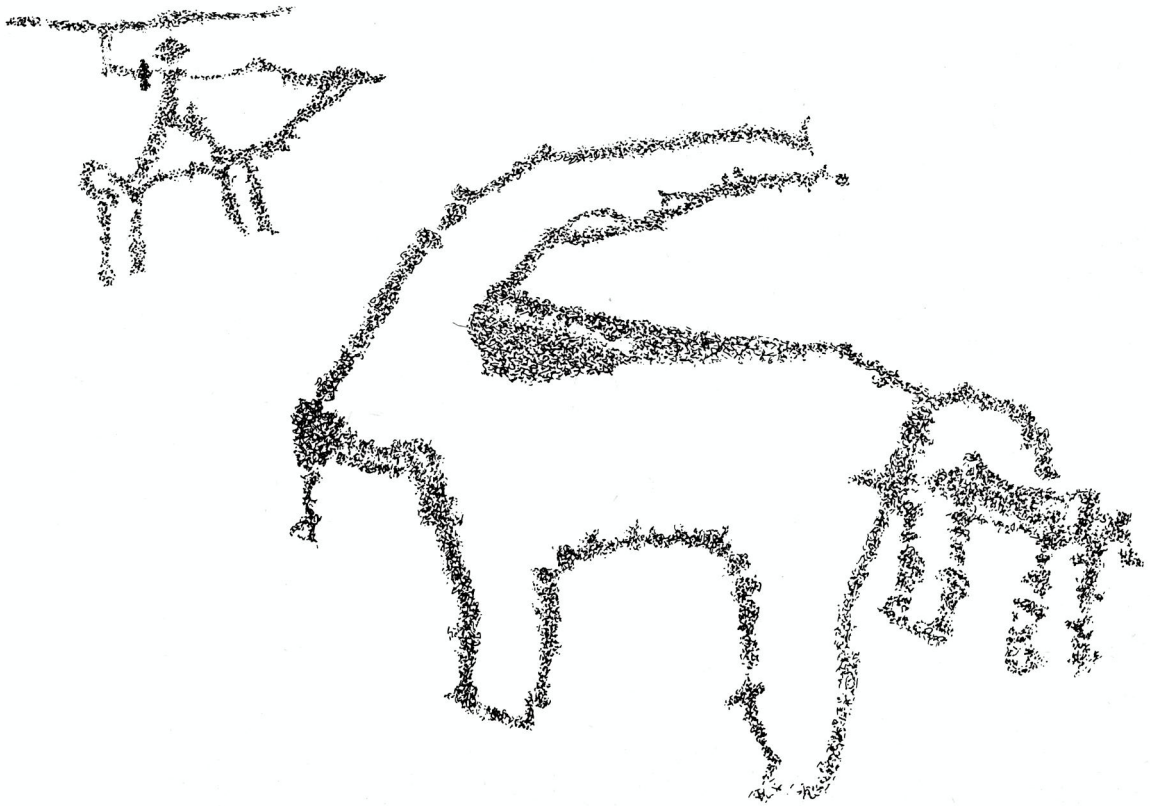
What can we learn from the discussed rock art about the history of Yemen? In the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC, there existed a cult of the humpless cattle and a cult of the ibex in the northern Yemen, the former of African, the latter of Asiatic origin. Both cults were reflected by representations of humpless bovines, sometimes with anthropomorphs adoring them, and by those of ibexes with over-naturalistic horns. They are echoed in the Sabaeen religion where both the bull and the ibex were sacred animals of the supreme god 'Almaqah (Grohmann 1963: 244). In the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, representations of horse- and camel-riding warriors, paralleled in Nubian rock art, mark the change from proto- to fully developed bedouinism.

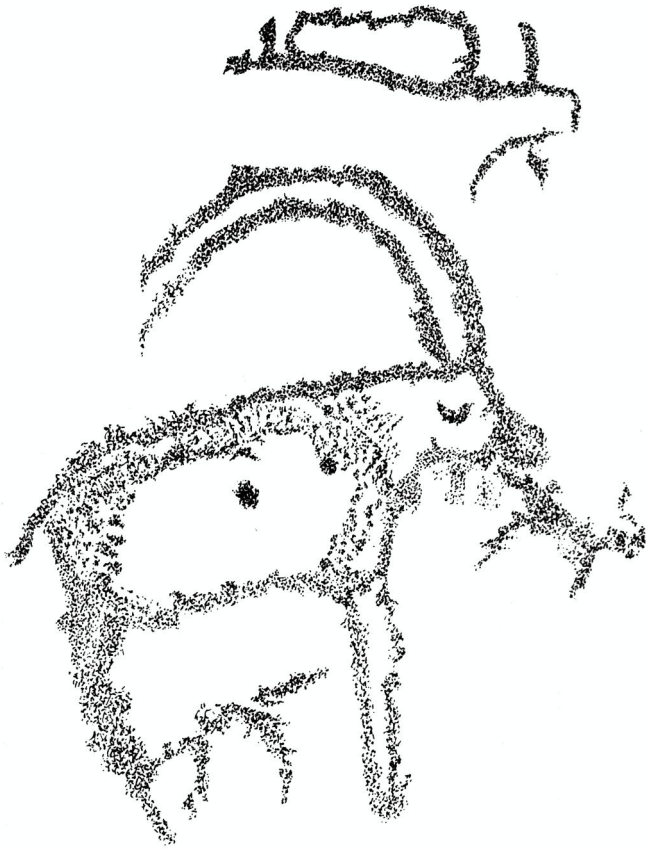
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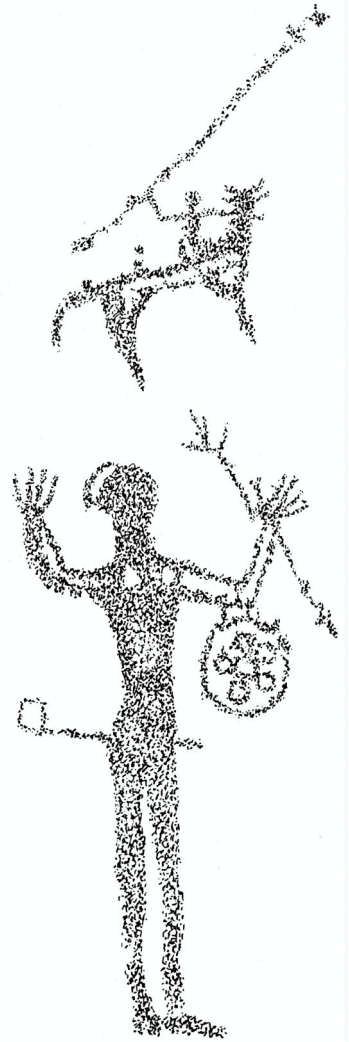


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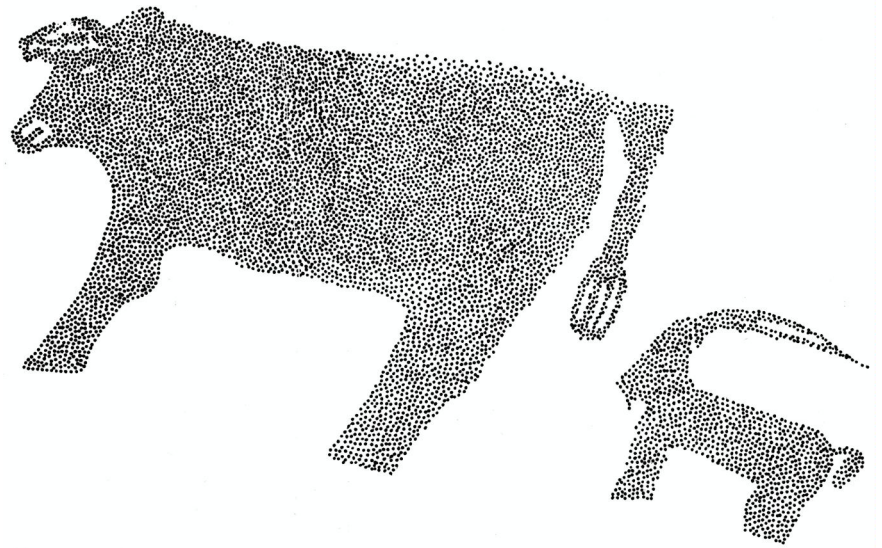




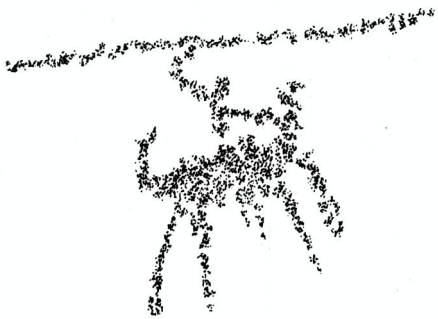
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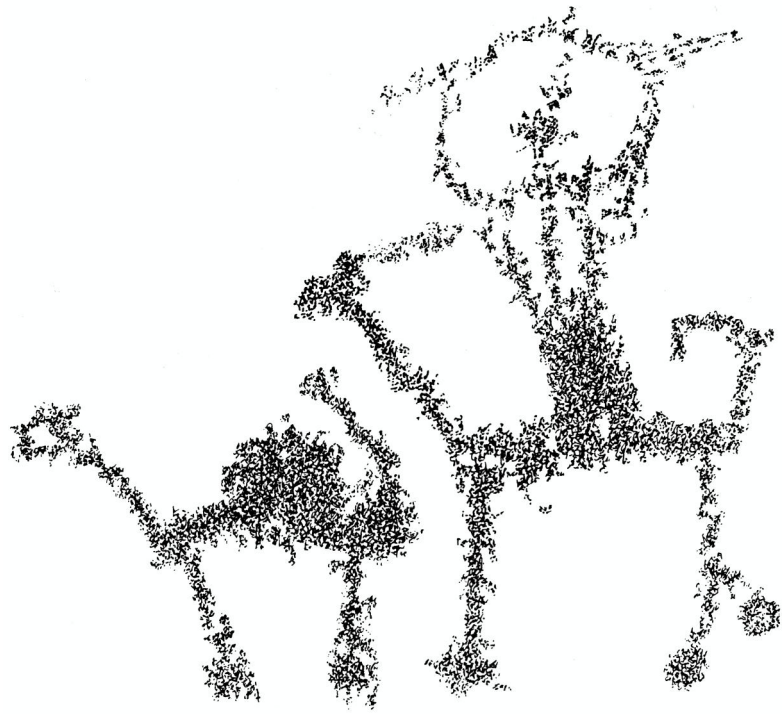
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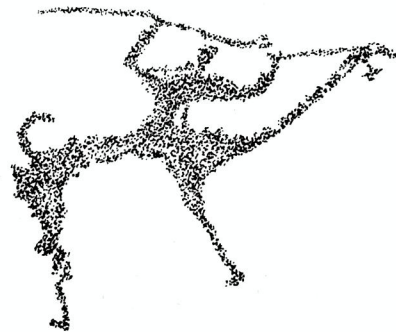
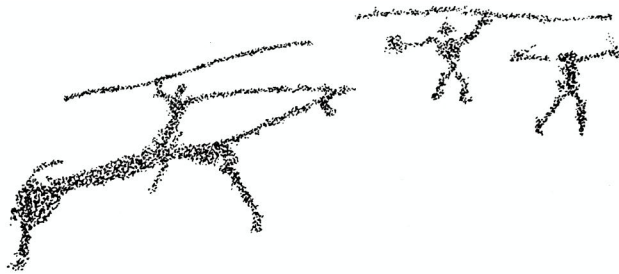
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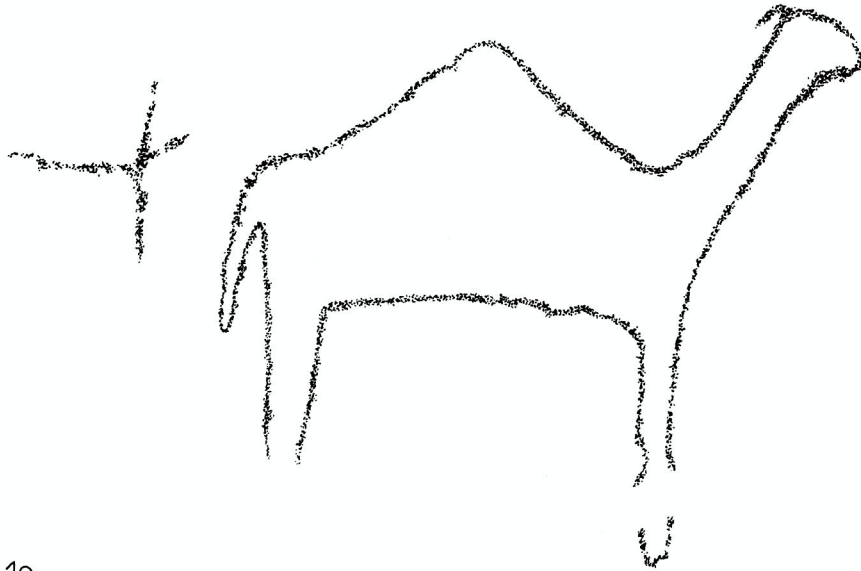


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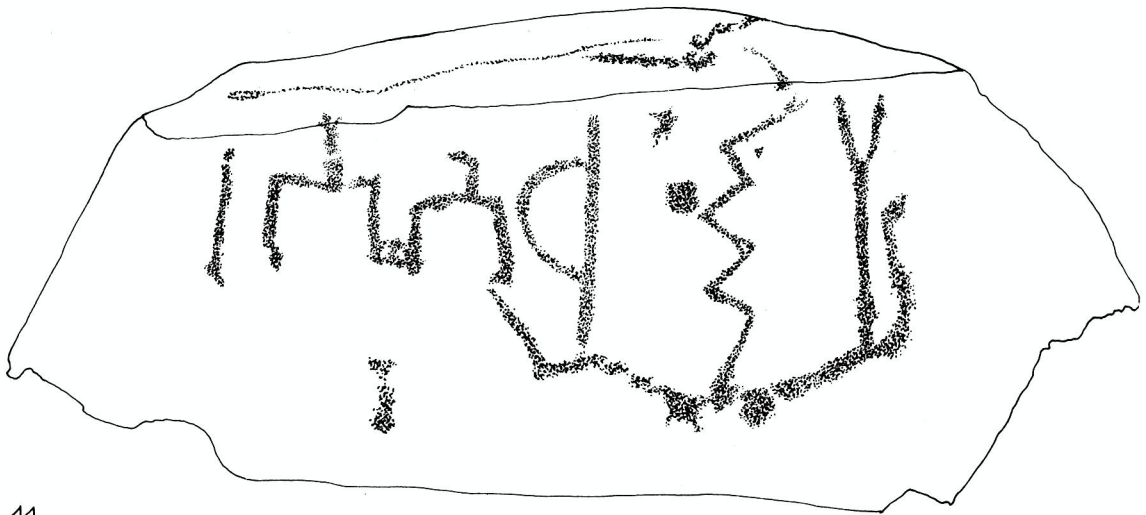


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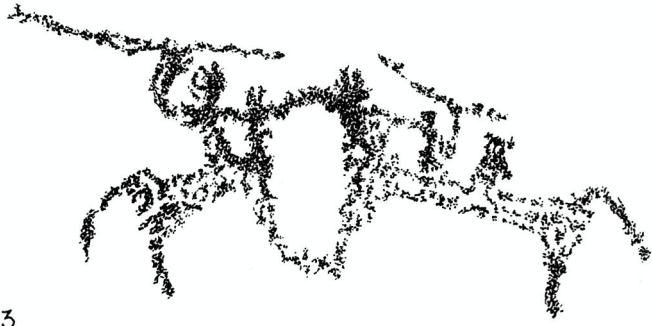




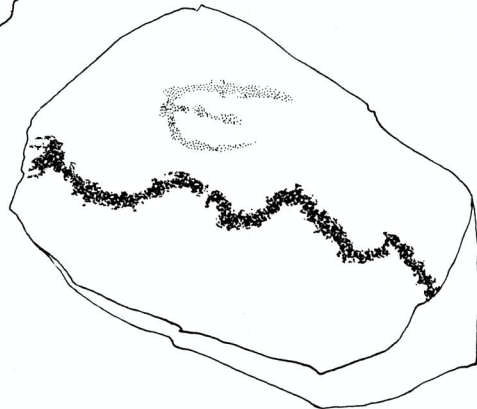
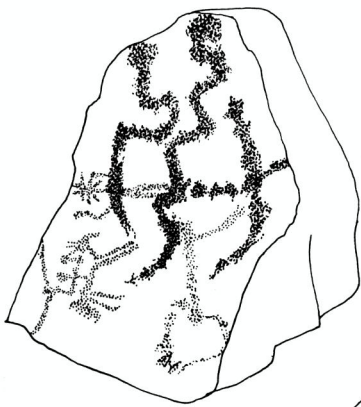
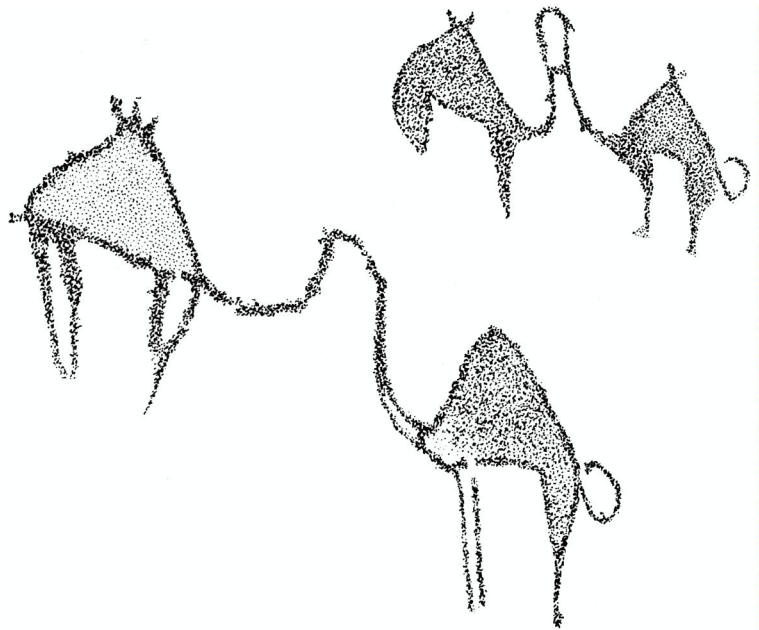
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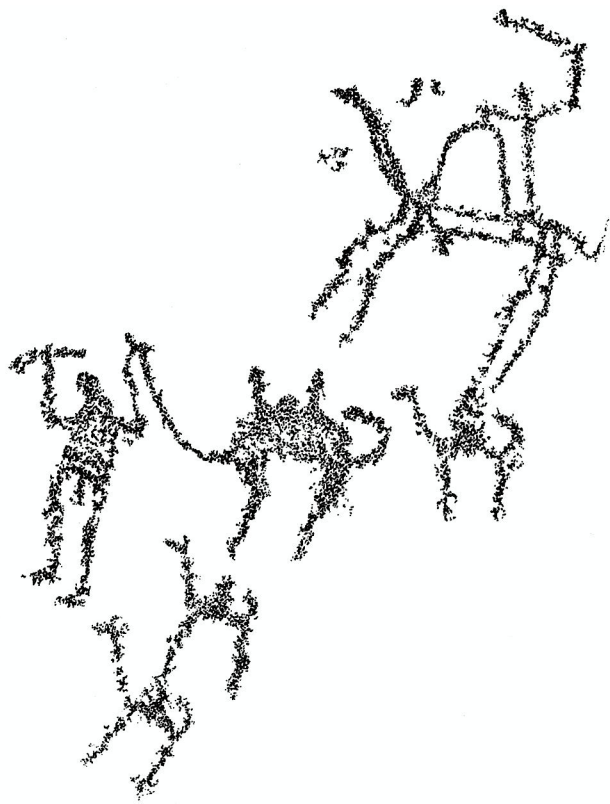
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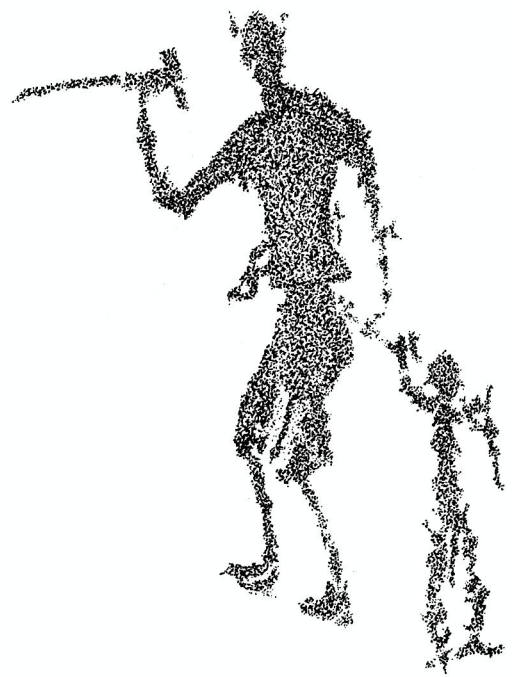
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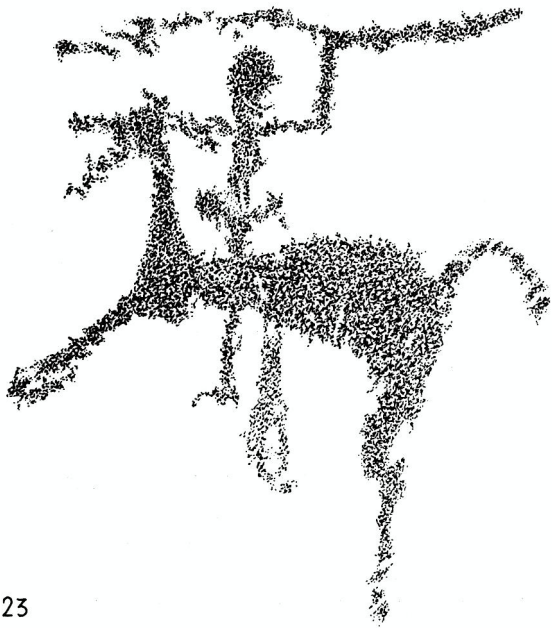
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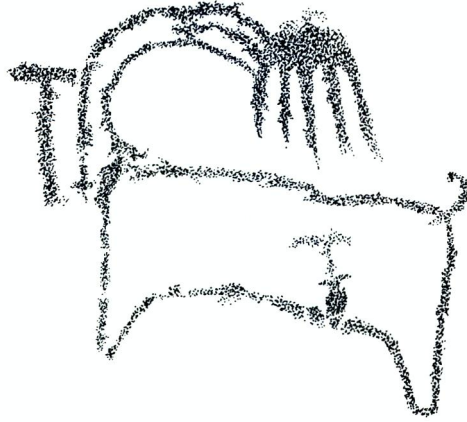
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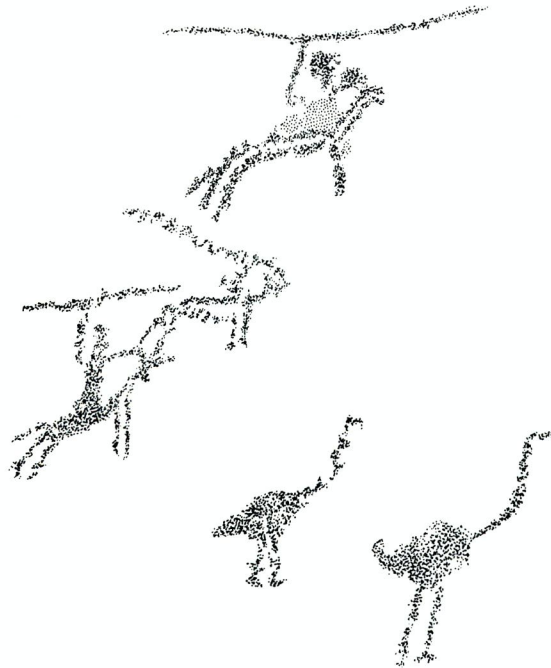
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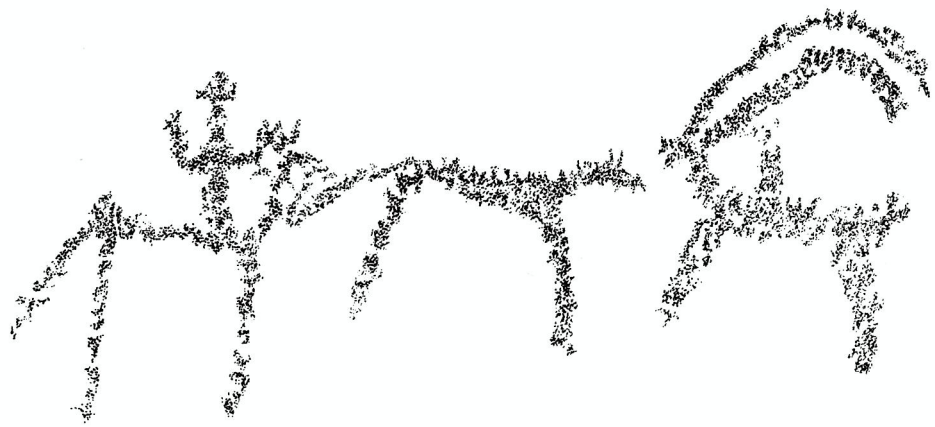
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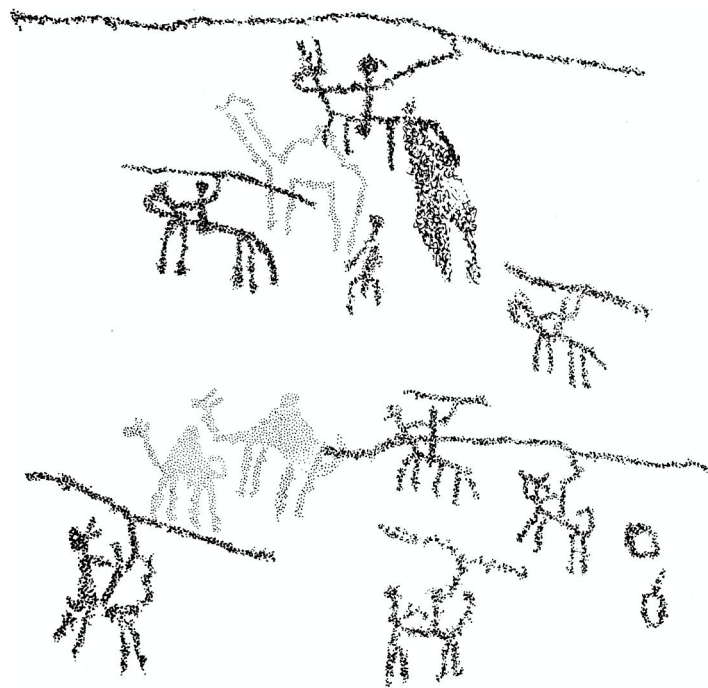
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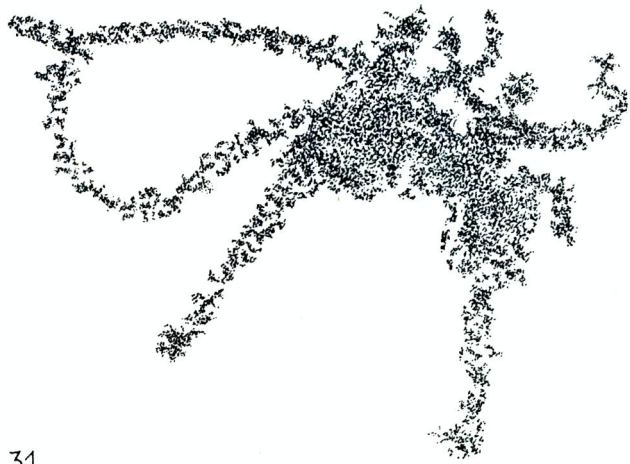
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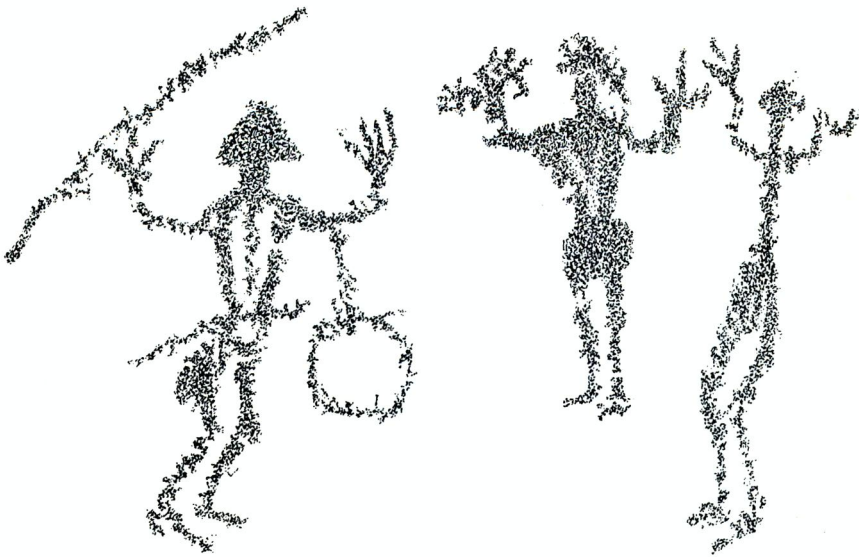
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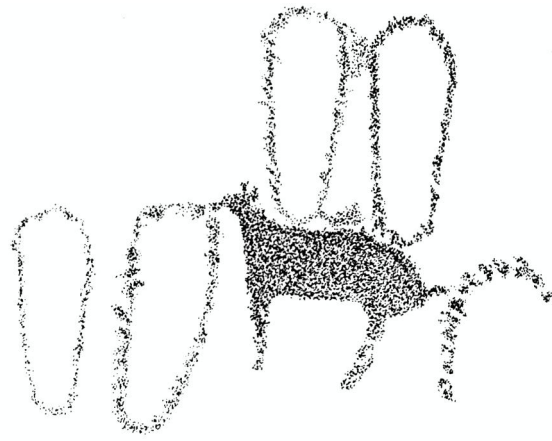
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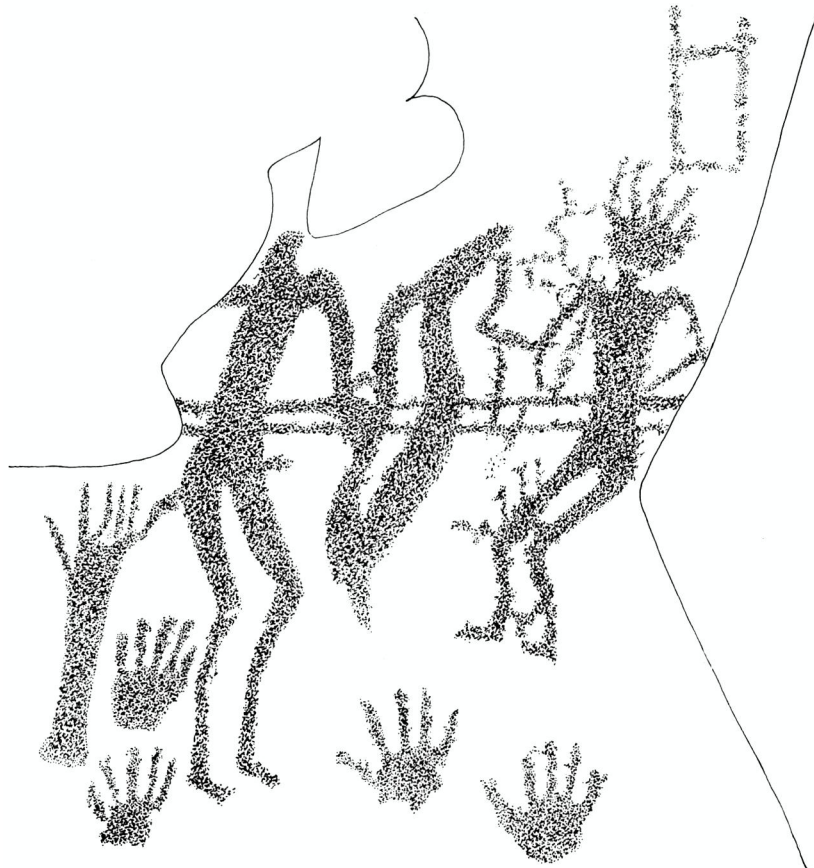
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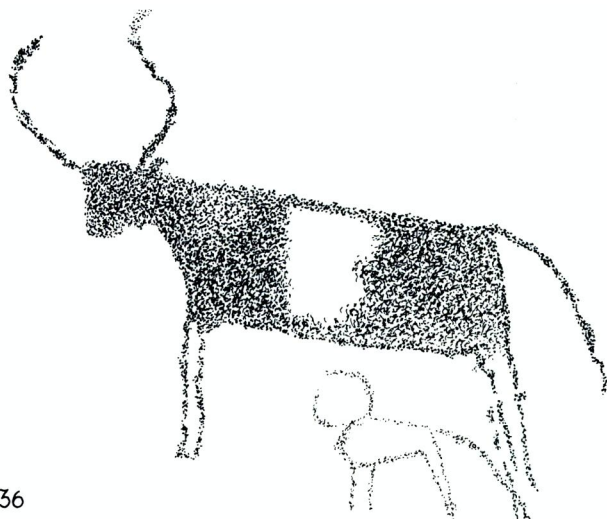
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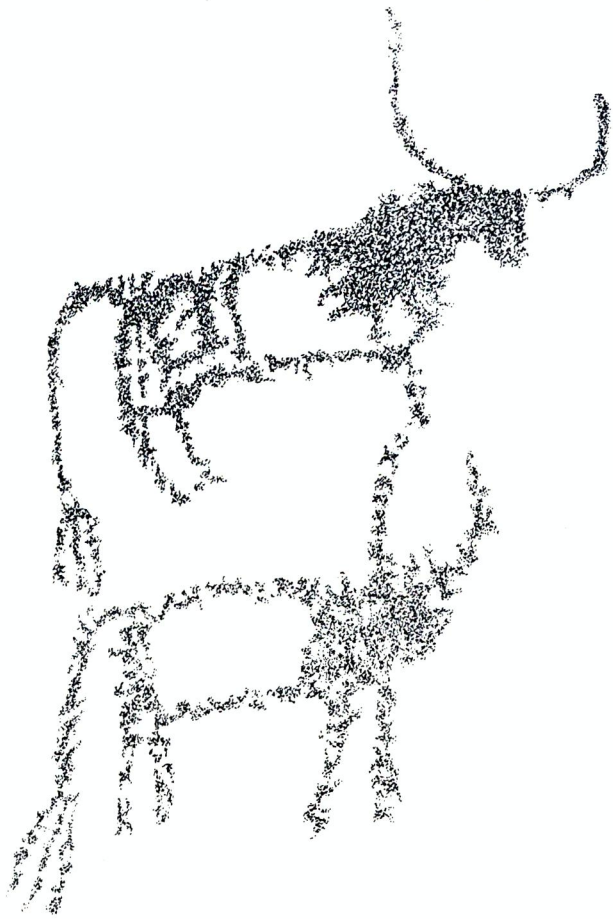


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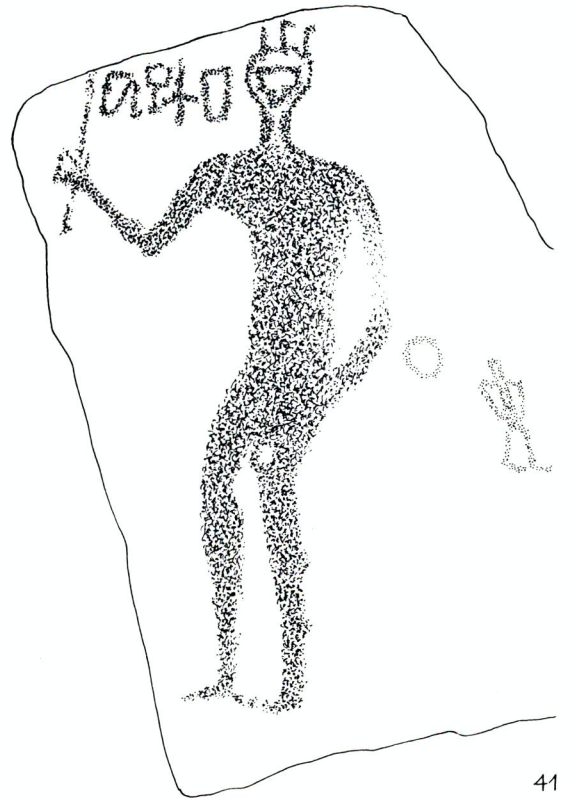


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