

LIBYCO-BERBER INSCRIPTIONS AT OUED MESKAOU (MOROCCO)

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PREFACE

Until the late nineties of the last century nobody paid attention to the subject of Libyco-Berber rock inscriptions in Morocco. Some of them were found by chance in the fifties like Foum Chenna, Taouz or Azib n'Ikkis. Despite of some photos no systematical documentation existed. In 1990 Rodrigue published some inscriptions from Msemrir/Vallée du Dadès, a re-visitation of the site in 1999 made it possible to add some new lines (Pichler, Rodrigue 2000). In the late nineties a well-aimed search resulted in the discovery of several inscriptions at well known rock art places like Ait Ouazik, Ouaremdaz, Tazzarine and Meskaou.

THE SITE

Formerly known as "El Mahdaoui", the site of Meskaou was first described by Simoneau in 1969. He published some drawings of gazelles and rhinoceros. He mentioned the site again in his Catalogue (1977). The site is located at twenty kilometres east/north-east of Akka, not far from the road between Akka and Tata, nearby the bridge over the waddi Meskaou. The engravings are located at the upper part of the range of hills. The majority of the drawings are in large and deeply polished lines, some of them in Tazina style, other in thin carved lines. Pecked drawings are very seldom.

THE INSCRIPTIONS

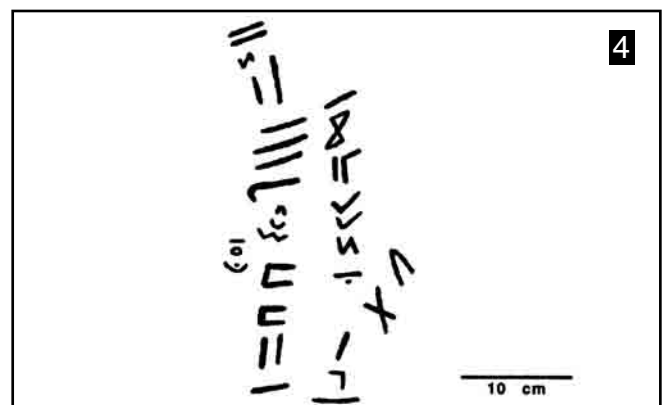
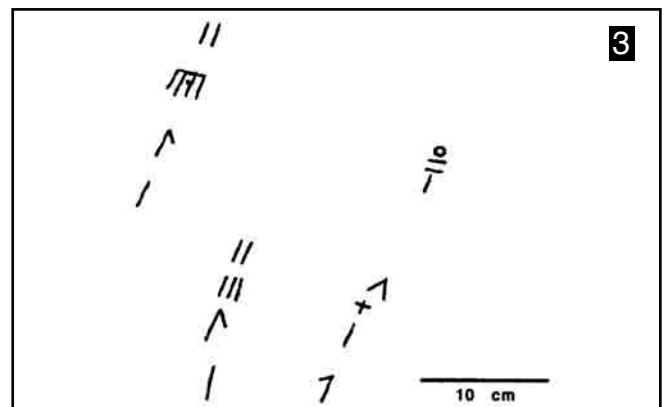
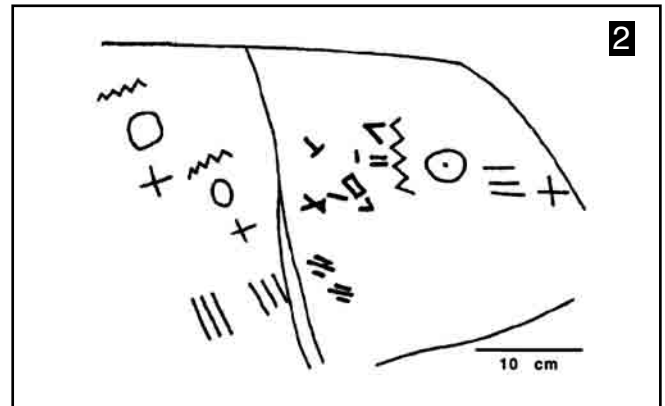
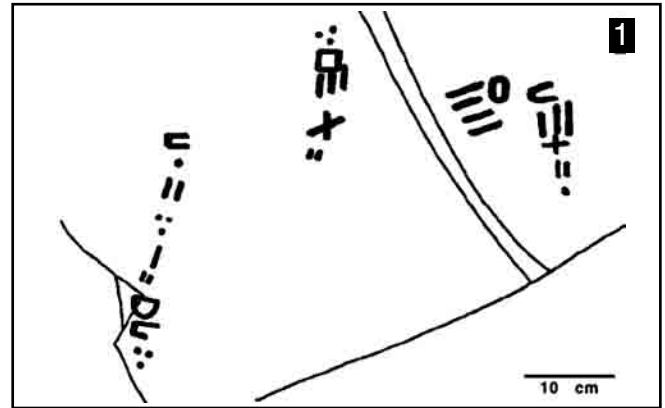
In 1999 the author documented the panels 1 – 3, in 2000 Rodrigue supplemented panel 4. They are scattered over the range of hills in distances from 100 m to nearly 1 kilometre.

Panel 1: On a nearly flat rock surface, carved in coarse and deep lines, 3 – 4 mm wide. A lot of linear scratches and dots make it difficult to demarcate the signs.

Panel 2: On a horizontal surface, consisting of two groups:
Group a: Three nearly identical lines with thin and shallow scratches.
Group b: About ten signs with thicker and deeper scratches. All of them could be letters, but they are not arranged in lines.

Panel 3: On an inclined rock with dark surface. Some linear compositions make it difficult to identify the script. There seem to be four lines.

Panel 4: On a nearly vertical surface, some lines on the right side of a great "nasse" – a very frequent but most enigmatic sign. Beneath these two elements there lies a net of very old



lines with nearly black patina. Most of the letters are carved large and deep in contrast to two groups of very thin letters.

Even if one must be very cautious in interpreting patina, because the panels have different exposition (two to the south, one to the north, one horizontal) a striking difference must be pointed out: the patina of the four panels reaches from very dark to very light. If this could be an indication of age, the chronology would be : 3 (oldest) – 4 – 2 – 1 (youngest). The question is, if this assumption fits to formal aspects of the letters or not. One of the rarely indications of age is the occurrence or missing of punctiform signs. Nobody knows at which time these signs were introduced instead of linear signs (e.g. ••for↑↑ = k). But there is conformity about the fact, that the punctiform signs (except .) have been introduced relatively late. Now an examination of the four panels from Oued Meskaou shows that no punctiform sign appears at those three panels which are supposed to be the older ones, k is only present in the lines with very light patina.

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