

Contributions to the Early History of Saudi Arabia Initial Results of the Saudi-Belgian Research Project⁽¹⁾ in the Region of the Al-Ghat Governorate

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Abstract: *The aim of the joint Saudi Arabian-Belgian Al-Ghat field project was three-fold: the study of the iconographical and textual material incised on rocks, a survey and study project looking for early human activity in the area, and the topographical documentation of significant sites. The rich textual and iconographic material in the Wadi Markh area adds to the importance of the Al-Ghat region for the ancient history of Saudi Arabia. In bringing forward evidence of prehistoric cultural connections to Africa as well as the Levant, the project contributes to the unravelling of the early expansion history of our species in a landscape different from today.*

Keywords: *Al-Ghat, Wadi Markh, Jebel Samar, cultural connections, Inscriptions, rock art, Stone structures.*

The Al-Ghat Project

The Abdulrahman Al-Sudairy Foundation and His Excellency Marc Vinck, former Belgian ambassador in Saudi Arabia instigated a research inquiry in the Al-Ghat region in North Central Saudi Arabia. Two surveys took place, the first between the 27th of December 2012 and the 12th of January 2013 and the second between the 1st and the 18th of March 2014. Dr. Ibrahim Al-Raseeni and his colleagues (Al-Raseeni 2002: 52-53; al-Meshari 1) conducted previous explorations of the area on several occasions.

Following priorities were set during this two-year program: a survey project looking for early human activity, the study of the iconographical material incised on rocks, the study of the textual material incised on rocks, and the topographical documentation of the important sites in the Al-Ghat region.³

The Saudi-Belgian project is conducted under the auspices of the following institutions: the Saudi Commission for Tourism and

Antiquities (Mr. Mohammed Ali Alsalouk) and the University of Leuven, Department of Near Eastern Studies (Prof. Joachim Bretschneider - since October 2014 affiliated to the UGhent), and cooperates with the University of Leuven, Department of Archaeology (Prof. Philip Van Peer) and the Université Catholique de Louvain, 'Institut des civilisations, arts et lettres' (Prof. Jan Tavernier).⁴

The success of the research campaigns was made possible owing to the vast guidance of Mr. Jamal Omar and Mr. Mohammed Ali Alsalouk and the outstanding accommodation and support provided by Dr. Salman Al-Sudairy and the Abdulrahman Al-Sudairy Foundation. We wish to express our warmest gratitude to all of them.

Location of the surveys

The governorate of Al-Ghat is located about 200 km northwest of Riyadh, with the town of Al-Ghat positioned between Al-Majmah in the south and Al-Zulfi in the north. The topography of the Al-Ghat area includes the mountain range

of Al-Tuwaiq and several valleys (Al-Raseeni 2002: 46). The region of the Wadi Markh area with the Jebel Markh, the Jebel Samar and surrounding hills as well as the Qurayy as Sumur formed the focus of an intensive surface survey. These sites are all situated between 11.5 and 12.5 km east (Jebel Samar and the Qurayy as Sumur) and northeast (Jebel Markh) of the old city of Al-Ghat.

Two sites of early human occupation in the Al Ghat region

During the surveys of 2013 large surface concentrations of Palaeolithic artifacts had been sampled at two localities, Jebel Samar and Jebel Markh to the north (Fig. 1). These seemed to point at a very early presence of humans in the area and, therefore, it was decided to give these sites more attention during the 2014 study campaign.

Jebel Samar

This site is located in a heavily dissected area of characteristic black hills capped by a thin layer of strongly silicified coarse-grained sandstone. The latter is undoubtedly the reason of Palaeolithic human presence here, as demonstrated by the quantities of lithic artefacts out of this raw material which are scattered across the hill surfaces. We collected portions of these scatters and we dug a small test trench on the south pediment of one of the hills. This revealed the presence of a truncated red soil developed in fine slopewash deposits underneath the desert pavement. No artefacts, however, were observed in stratigraphic context. It is most likely that these scatters have never had a sediment cover and that they occur more or less in situ at the present surface, as in many other areas of the Saharan-Arabian belt (Olszewski et al. 2010).

Thus far, the entire collection from Jebel Samar has been subjected to a preliminary

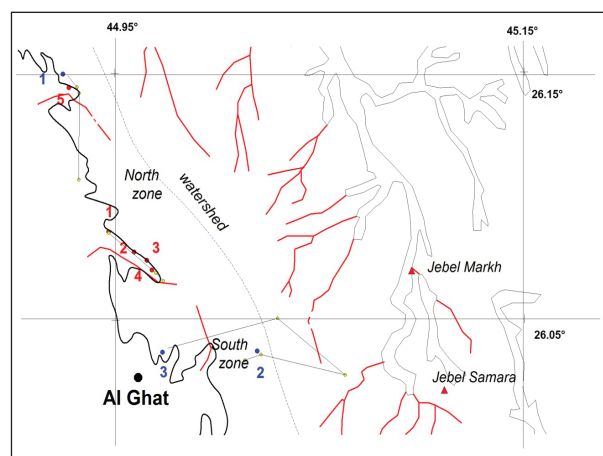


Fig. 1: Simplified topographical map of the Al Ghat area. Thick black line represents the limestone escarpment bordering the Al Ghat plain. Surveyed findspots are numbered (red = locations on pediment slopes; blue = surface scatter on the limestone escarpment). Thin black polylines mark survey routes in the western survey zone. The locations at Jebel Markh and Jebel Samara are marked by triangles

analysis only. However, some general technological features can be pointed out. In the first place, it is obvious that the large bulk of the artefacts are of Middle Stone Age affiliation and that, in this sense, the collection displays a certain homogeneity. For the sake of this preliminary description, we consider it as one assemblage although it is most certainly a palimpsest composite.

The artefacts are almost always made of the local raw material. Imported raw materials such as flint are extremely rare. Typically, the artefacts show a rather strongly developed reddish patina and some degree of wearing of edges and ridges. It is clear that they have been exposed at the surface for a long period of time. The assemblage comprises cores in various reduction states and debitage while retouched tools are rare. This composition is quite characteristic of MSA workshops. As the use of the term MSA suggests, the technological systems represented in the Jebel Samar collection show distinct African

connotations, the use of the Nubian 2 method in particular (Van Peer et al. 2010). This is a specific variant of the Levallois method of blank production, designed to produce pointed flakes from broad triangular cores on which a guiding ridge is achieved through lateral preparation of the core table. The narrow distal end of such cores has a characteristic carinated appearance. In northeast Africa such assemblages are comprised in a cultural facies known as *Early Nubian Complex* (dating to around 130,000 years ago) and associated with *Homo sapiens* populations. At Sodmein Cave in the Eastern Desert of Egypt, for instance, an Early Nubian Complex level occurs in association with a large fire pit that has been dated to 118 ± 8 ka (Mercier et al. 1999; Moeyersons et al. 2002; Schmidt et al. 2015).

Jebel Markh

Downstream from Jebel Samar, at the junction of the small tributary wadi to the main drainage system is the site of Jebel Markh (Fig. 2). At its surface the same quartzitic sandstone formation as at Jebel Samar is cropping out. The Jebel Samar is immediately adjacent to the western wadi terrace and fine overbank deposits fan out on the lower part of the hill slope. Thus, this site provides stratigraphic conditions to recover archaeological material in buried conditions and, as a matter of fact, we have observed occasional artefacts in the exposed sections of the small gully.

The surface of the hill is densely covered with lithics. Many of them have only a light yellowish patina or even none at all. At the base of the hill we have opened up a 25m² test area, of which a number of 1m² squares were carefully excavated. Artefacts were encountered but, thus far, we have not reached a true buried occupation level. It seems that many of the excavated lithics have moved downward into the sediments as a consequence of taphonomic

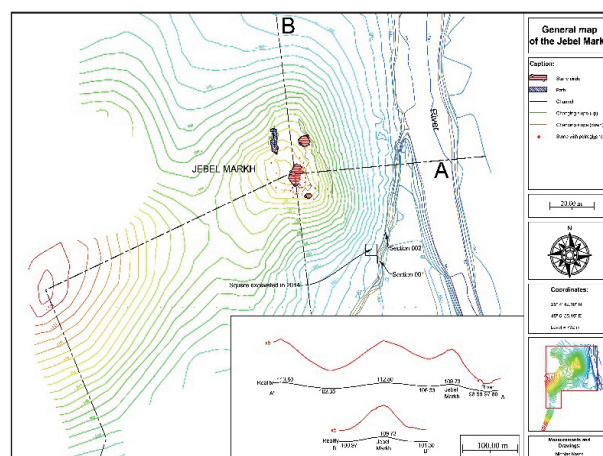


Fig. 2: Topographical map of Jebel Markh (recorded and produced by N. Kress)

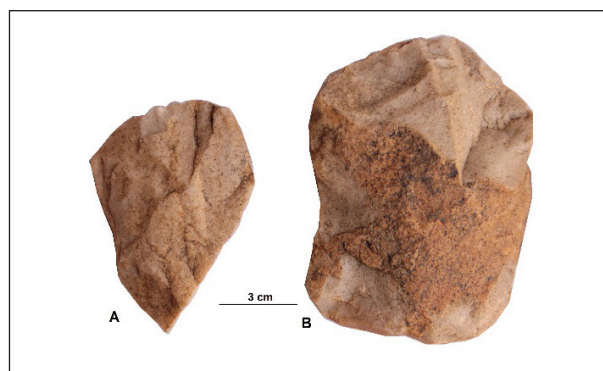


Fig. 3: Two items showing affinities to the Nazlet Khater axe-type from Jebel Markh.

processes such as desiccation wedges.

There are quite a few bifacially retouched tools present in the assemblage, mostly thick forms. Noteworthy among the bifacial tools are two items which show a lot of morphological similarity to the Nazlet Khater axe type (Fig. 3) (Vermeersch et al. 2002). This is a tranchet-like tool, with one or two opposed bifacially worked bits and with lateral concavities. They are elaborated on slabs or big flakes. Large façonnage production flakes are present in the assemblage. At this preliminary stage, it is difficult to propose an attribution to a formal cultural unit, all the more so because we have no chronological evidence to go by, direct dates nor a regional chronostratigraphic framework

to which we might attempt to correlate Jebel Markh. If Nazlet Khater axes are present indeed, this would suggest an early Upper Palaeolithic occurrence. Alternatively, this techno-typological spectrum also fits MSA or Middle Palaeolithic industries such as the Lupemban in northeast Africa or even the Pre-Aurignacian from the Levant (Rust 1950).

The Stone Structures and Rock Drawings at the Jebel Markh

No less than 71 quartzite stones with Old North Arabian and Modern Arabic inscriptions and/or figurative drawings were documented on the Jebel Markh.

The Jebel Markh is located on a sandstone formation and mounts ca. 11 m above the adjoining plain. The hill measures ca. 53 (east-west) by 63 (north-south) m at its largest and is roughly oval in shape with a large outcrop in the southwest. The majority of the engraved stones were discovered on the eastern and south-eastern slope of the hill.

Stone structures (Fig. 4)

Within the layer of sandstone rocks covering the hill several architecturally distinct components were observed while surveying the area. Three distinct circular structures – A, B and C – were constructed from natural and irregular-shaped slabs of different size with regular intervals between each stone. Several slabs are positioned upright, with a maximum height of 0.92 m.

Stone structure (SS) A at the top of the hill measures ca. 9.6 m north-south and 4.9 m east-west, forming a semi-circle, with an opening towards the eastern slope. In the centre lie several large abutting flat rocks – JM-II, III, IV, V, VI, VIII and IX – incised with figurative drawings and inscriptions (Fig. 5). On JM-V two cupules – small bowl-shaped shallow indentations – have been identified. Both seem

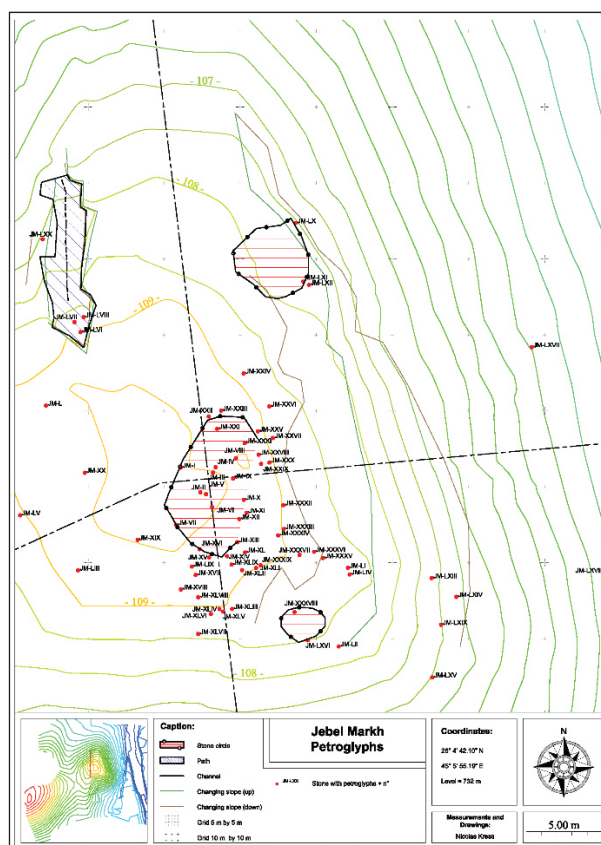


Fig. 4: Map of the Jebel Markh with indication of stone structures and petroglyphs (recorded and produced by N. Kress).



Fig. 5: Stone structure A (Photo: J. Bretschneider).

more recent than the petroglyphs on this rock.

Stone structure B is situated 8 m to the north of SS A and consists of a closed circle of ca. 5 m in diameter. The slabs on the eastern part appear to be deposited in an upright position two of which display petroglyphs. One stone carries

petroglyphs on either side: JM-LXI facing the inside and JM-LXII facing the outside of the circle.

The smallest stone circle – stone structure C – is located 5.4 m to the southeast of SS A and measures ca. 2 m north-south by 3 m east-west. Two slabs display petroglyphs on the outer side of the circle.

Ten meters to the northwest of SS A, another feature was distinguished, consisting of three large smooth flat slabs covered with petroglyphs: JM-LVI, LVII and LVIII (Fig. 6). Three circular and shallow cupules similar to the ones described above were pecked into these boulders. The cupules display a very dark patina not unlike the colour of the rock varnish itself, yet darker than the other designs. This indicates that they are older than any of the petroglyphs on these rocks. A number of straight – mostly parallel and perpendicular – lines are incised into all three slabs. Even though most lines traverse the petroglyphs themselves, they appear to be artificially made as if to divide the surface into distinct registers.

The area surrounding these three slabs was excavated more thoroughly and a ‘ramp-like’ structure – stone structure D – sloping down the hill ca. 11 m, appeared. No other petroglyphs were identified. The centre of the ‘ramp’ is equipped with a straight carved channel-like indentation running north to south. The etched ‘channel’ blends into the intersection between the different adjoining stones more downward. The ‘ramp’ may be more recent than the contiguous weathered surface due to the unnatural lesser concentration of large blocks and the presence of the indentation.⁵

Patination

The so-called desert varnish shrouds the surface of the sandstone rocks with a thin black coating. To generate motifs and



Fig. 6: Part of stone structure D – JM-LVI (Photo: J. Bretschneider.

inscriptions, this patina was removed via various engraving techniques – such as incising or pecking – revealing the lighter interior of the rock. The lighter depictions grew darker with their own patination over the subsequent centuries. Consequently, a relative chronology of petroglyphs on the same rock surface is determined from the distinct shades of patination: the darker, the older (Anati 1999: 23-24). Certainly, patination is not an easily-measured gradual process; on the contrary, it is very variable, contingent with several factors, such as climate, topography and surface geometry (Bednarik 2002: 3-4).

Figurative rock art

The figurative rock art is classified in four distinct groups: anthropomorphic depictions, zoomorphic depictions, a combination of both and an additional category of indecipherable motifs.⁶

Anthropomorphic depictions are identified on JM-XXIX, LXV, LXIX, LVI, XXXIV and possibly also on XLIX. Except for the stone depicting JM-LVI (Fig. 6), which is part of SS D, all images are located on slabs, which are not part of the previously described structures. Five individuals display a stick-shaped form with raised or spread arms and/or legs.⁷ One figure (JM-XXIX) shows indications of breasts

and male genitalia. On JM-LVI a motif is visible between the person's legs; perhaps interpretable as a new-born, in which case the depiction represents childbirth.⁸ A snake, with wave-shaped body completes the iconography on this rock. The figure on JM-XLIX seemingly embodies a rounder person with both arms raised above the head and bent legs, contrary to the straight legs of other figures. Between both a small rounded motif is visible. The upper and lower half of the figure seem virtually symmetrical. Owing to the atypical way of picturing a person, this motif could also represent a reptile or amphibian.

Zoomorphic depictions were recognized in JM-II, VII, XXXVIII, LVII, XXI, V, LXIII and LVIII. All but one are located on slabs that are part of a stone structure: four to SS A, one to SS C and one to SS D. Four slabs show one or two quadrupeds, sometimes horned, sometimes depicted as stick figures. JM-XXI exposes two animals; a camel and a possible quadruped. Another camel is illustrated on JM-V, its body depicted as a solid shape with exception of the hump, drawn as an outline. On JM-LXIII the outline of a dromedary, with a straight upward neck and a large hump is visible. JM-LVIII on the other hand pictures a snake, with what appears to be a folded up tail.

A combination of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic motifs can be recognized in two designs. JM-XXII is engraved on a rock which is part of SS A and represents an ostrich hunt. A person on a long tailed quadruped seems to follow an ostrich (Fig. 7). A long line – perhaps a weapon – protrudes from the human figure to the back of the bird. JM-XX shows a stick figure with both arms raised. On the right side, he seems to hold a quadruped by its head.

Two motifs are undefined; JM-IX possibly depicts a quadruped and according to Tavernier and Gorris JM-XLVIII might represent a magic



Fig. 7: JM-XXII – An ostrich hunt (Photo: J. Bretschneider).

face with three pairs of eyes.

Some Inscriptions from the Al-Ghat Region

Ancient languages of the Arabian Peninsula

For many scholars who study the Ancient Near East, the Arabian Peninsula remains unexplored and unknown territory. Yet the immense Arabian Desert, where several tribal communities were settled, was home to an ancient civilization with a high degree of literacy (MacDonald 1993: 382-388; Id. 2010: 15-16; Id. 2015: 1). Most of the communities were involved in the commerce along the frankincense and spice routes, running across the peninsula.

Presently, modern scholarship distinguishes two large groups of ancient Arabian languages, both belonging to the Semitic languages (Ancient South Arabian and Ancient North Arabian)⁹. While the Ancient South Arabian

languages (Sabaic, Minaic, Qatabanic and Hadramitic) and script (*musnad*; *zabūr*) were mainly used in actual Yemen and southwestern Saudi Arabia, the North Arabian languages and alphabetic writing systems were dispersed over the western two-thirds of the Arabian Peninsula, including the Transjordan region and the Syrian Desert.

The Ancient North Arabian language group is not just one language, but refers to various dialects, being Dumaitic, Taymanitic, Dadanitic, Safaitic, Hismaic, Thamudic B, Thamudic C, Thamudic D and “Southern Thamudic”. Inscriptions recorded in those dialects are dated from the 8th century BCE to the 4th century CE (Macdonald 2004: 490). The Thamudic inscriptions are dated until about 250 CE (Macdonald & King 2002: 467).

Ancient North Arabian texts are mostly shorter inscriptions incised on rocks (petroglyphs). These rock inscriptions often contain no more than one personal name (with or without patronymic) or one short phrase, which makes it sometimes difficult to identify the script or language it was drafted in. The fact that these texts are mainly graffiti also implies that they were incised by the individuals themselves for their own purposes and that, accordingly, they were not commissioned by for instance their overlords (Macdonald 2010: 8-9).

Belgian Epigraphic Missions in Saudi Arabia

In 1951, the Saudi Arabian king Abdul Aziz Ibn Sa’ud granted a Belgian academic team the permission to study the pre-Islamic cultural heritage of his country. The result of this permission was a three-month lasting expedition, generally known as the Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens expedition, which travelled to Saudi Arabia in 1951-1952. The scientific team undertook an exploration mission from Jeddah to Riyadh over a distance of 5400 km

and recorded more than 12.000 pre-Islamic texts (Ryckmans 1952). Along their journey, the team documented Old North Arabian as well as Old South Arabian petroglyphs and inscriptions. The sketches and photographs of these texts, which are currently preserved in the Ryckmans archive (Université Catholique de Louvain), contributed to a large extent to the decipherment of the Ancient South Arabian languages.

Inspired by this first Belgian expedition in Saudi Arabia, Belgian epigraphists of the Université Catholique de Louvain (Prof. J. Tavernier and Dr. E. Gorris) expanded the already mentioned Al-Ghat surveys. They focused mainly on the Wadi Markh area, where a large number of stones bearing inscriptions and/or figurative drawings were discovered and documented. Although petroglyphs were found on three sites (the Jebel Markh, the Jebel al-Samar with some surrounding hills, and the Wadi al-Samar), this article will concentrate on the Jebel Markh site.

Inscriptions on the Jebel Markh (Fig. 4)

Of all three found spots, this hill has yielded the highest number of textual and iconographical material. Most of the graffiti are written in the Thamudic B script, a script used by nomads from Yemen to southern Syria (Macdonald 2000: 72 n.117; Macdonald and King 2002: 468). The inscriptions of the Jebel Markh can be added to the already large number (over 11,000) of Thamudic inscriptions (Macdonald 2000: 44). More than 9000 of these inscriptions were found by the Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens expedition in the southwestern part of Saudi Arabia. As a result, the inscriptions discussed here are relatively “northern”.

Some inscriptions are written in the Safaitic alphabet and this makes them the nearly most southern Safaitic inscriptions, together with the

ones found at Madā'in Šāliḥ (Macdonald 1993: 304). Safaitic texts were inscribed by nomads on rocks and currently, about 33,000 Safaitic inscriptions are known (Macdonald 2000: 35; al-Jallad 2015: 1).

The nearest other Ancient North Arabian inscriptions can be found in the Ḥā'il region (cf. Winnett and Reed 1973).

It must be noted that not all graffiti attested on the Jebel Markh are actual ancient North Arabic inscriptions. Some stones are engraved with modern Arabic graffiti or bear various modern tribal marks, called *wasm*.

Some examples of texts from the Jebel Markh Hill

- JM-V (Fig. 8)

Here two inscriptions are situated above the drawing of a camel. Inscription 1 runs from left to right and can be read just above the camel. Inscription 2 is situated above inscription 1. Both inscriptions are Thamudic.

Transliteration inscription 1

Lktt "By Ktt".

Commentary

This name has not yet been explained satisfactorily. According to Harding (1971: 494 and 495; Ociana, consulted on 13/05/2016) it is attested eleven times in Safaitic inscriptions and could be related to Arabic *katt* "thin, lean" or Arabic *katīt* "mean, stingy". Winnett and Harding (1978: 605) do not propose an explanation of this name.

Transliteration inscription 2

Ks₂dy "Kas₂day" or "Kas₂dī".

Commentary

This name is attested in Ancient North Arabian inscriptions at least 17 times (Harding 1971: 500; Harding and Winnett 1978: 605;



Fig. 8: JM-V (Photo: J. Bretschneider).



Fig. 9: JM-XXXIV (Photo: J. Bretschneider)

Ociana, consulted on 13/05/2016). Most likely it is connected with the ethnonym "Chaldean", which is frequently attested in the Ancient Near Eastern textual material. Moreover, the ethnonym as well as the personal name also occur in Ancient South Arabian texts.

- JM-XXXIV (Fig. 9)

On the left bottom of this stone, an interesting phenomenon can be noticed. There is the clear drawing of a lizard, whose hind legs seem to form the letter w. This could very well be the indication of the first letter of the word for “lizard” in Safaitic and Thamudic. At least in Safaitic the word for lizard is *wrl* (Classical Arabic *waralun* “lizard, perhaps scincus” [Fig. 10]; cf. al-Jallad 2015: 353). To the right of the lizard one can see a *wasn* or a Safaitic 𐤨.

- JM-XLVII (Fig. 11)

Here a reading *ytr* yields a personal name *Ytr*, attested in both Safaitic and Thamudic inscriptions (Harding 1971: 657) and once in a Dadanitic text (Ociana; consulted on 10/05/2016).

- JM-LXI (Fig. 12)

Transliteration

‘In

Commentary

The form ‘In is a personal name for which two analyses are possible. It may be related to Arabic ‘In “to tell, to reveal” and is as such at least four times attested in Safaitic inscriptions (Harding 1971: 432). An alternative possibility is to consider the name as a variant of ‘l and to connect it with Arabic ‘l “to be ill” (Harding 1971: 429).

Conclusion

Within the context of the wider question of early modern human demography, the discovery of the Jebel Samar site constitutes important new evidence. While the expansion of groups into the Sahara during early MIS 5 is quite well established (Wendorf et al. 1993; Smith et al. 2007) such sites were non-existent for the east, let alone for the Arabian Peninsula across the Red Sea. With this evidence from Central Saudi Arabia coming to light, it increasingly seems that the regional distribution of the Nubian 2



Fig. 10: Scincus (Wilfried Berns/Tiermotive.de, first upload in wikipedia on 25.11.2005 by Wilfried Berns, CC BY-SA 2.0 de, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=467890>)



Fig. 11: JM-XLVII (Photo: J. Bretschneider).



Fig. 12: JM-LXI (Photo: J. Bretschneider).

technological system is recording an early, Last Interglacial migration out of Africa (see also Crassard and Petraglia 2014). These are the first two Palaeolithic sites to be reported from this region in Central Saudi Arabia but there is no doubt that many more will be found with continued surveying. Especially the area north of Jebel Markh is promising. Here, river terraces and fine floodplain deposits seem to be rather well preserved, opening the prospect of finding sites in primary context. In the light of the ongoing development of the area, intensified archaeological attention seems urgent.

Concerning the rock art, Khan stated that the images in Saudi Arabia exemplify animals to which the local population was accustomed, such as cattle, camels, deer, gazelles, dogs, snakes, lizards and goats (Khan 2014: 539-556). The rock art depictions appear to be of symbolic significance and once communicated connotations known to the artist and the ancient people. The Jebel Markh figurative rock art primarily portrays animals (12 examples) – such as camels (3), snakes (2) and quadrupeds (7). The latter are hard to recognize due to their schematic style of engraving; they might represent sheep, goats, horses or other animals. The anthropomorphic motifs include uncomplicated stick-shaped figures (6), or human figures hunting an ostrich (1) or ‘holding’ an animal (1). Probably Bedouin and semi-nomadic pastoralist groups with a lifestyle

of hunting, gathering and herding applied these petroglyphs.

The number of inscriptions on the Jebel Markh is not very abundant, certainly if compared with other finds in the Syrian and Jordan desert or in the southwestern part of the Arabian Peninsula. With regard to the content of the inscriptions, so far only personal names and possible scribal games are attested. Nevertheless, the graffiti found on the Jebel Markh are very significant, since they most likely prove that the Jebel Markh was either an important stop on the trading route which ran from Gerrha on the East Arabian coast to the Mediterranean, or even on the Trans-Arabian axe, or it was a major (religious?) centre for the local nomadic shepherds. As a matter of fact, the importance of the site is also demonstrated by the presence of the access path on the north-western slope of the hill.

The petroglyphs were engraved at different points in time as illustrated by the difference in patination. Nonetheless, the exact date of the particular representations cannot be ascertained. Presumably the figurative depictions as well as the inscriptions were carved between the 8th century B.C. and the 3rd century A.D. At the very least it can be inferred that the stone engravings present a sporadic window into the minds of the people responsible for their creation.

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ملخص: كان الهدف من مشروع الغاط الميداني السعودي البلجيكي المشترك ذا ثلاثة أبعاد: دراسة المواد الأيقونية، والنصوص المحفورة على الصخور بطريقة الحز، ومشروع مسح ودراسة يبحث عن النشاط البشري المبكر في المنطقة، والتوثيق الطبوغرافي للمواقع الهامة. فوفرة المواد النصية والأيقونية في منطقة وادي المرخ تزيد من أهمية منطقة الغاط في تاريخ المملكة العربية السعودية القديم، ولتقديم أدلة على العلاقات الثقافية مع إفريقيا وبلاد الشام، يساهم المشروع في كشف تاريخ التوسع المبكر لفصيلة البشر على بقعة مختلفة عما هي عليه اليوم.

Notes

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- 2 The section on the survey project looking for early human activity was written by Ph. Van Peer (KU Leuven), the study of the iconographical material incised on rocks by J. Bretschneider (UGhent & KU Leuven), G. Jans (KU Leuven) and A.-S. Van Vyve (UGhent & KU Leuven), the study of the textual material incised on rocks by J. Tavernier and E. Gorris (UCLouvain), and the topographical documentation of the important sites in the Al-Ghat region was conducted by N. Kress (UCLouvain).
- 3 We owe a special thank you to Prof. Jan Driessen (UCLouvain) for allowing us to benefit from the expertise of his team.
- 4 A total of nineteen people participated in the missions: five members from the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (Mohammed Ali Alsoulouk, Jaza Abdullah Al Harbi, Tariq Abdullah Al Julajel, Ammar Abdulkareem Al Sewan, Bader aba Hussin) while eleven came from the University of Leuven Belgium (Prof. Joachim Bretschneider, Prof. Philip Van Peer, Dr. Michel Debruyne, Greta Jans, Ellen Van Belle, Anne-Sophie Van Vyve, Wim Verhulst and the students Shanah De Boeck, Dave Geerts, Romy Heyrman and Marjolein Van der Waa) and three from the Université Catholique de Louvain Belgium (Prof. Jan Tavernier, Dr. Elynn Gorris and Nicolas Kress).
- 5 We thank Prof. Philip Van Peer for helping us clarify this structure by means of photographic documentation.
- 6 JM-V, VII, XXII, XXXIX, LVIII, LXIII were previously documented in the survey of the Al-Ghat Governorate (Al-Meshari 1, p. 47-49, 51, 53 & 60) and JM-VII in al-Raseeni 2002: Pl. 5.16.
- 7 JM-XXXIV possibly represents a lizard.
- 8 A similar depiction was observed in Har Karkoum in the Negev Desert, see: Anati 1999: cover page.
- 9 See Macdonald (2000: 29-31) for a clear classification of the North and South Arabian languages.

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