

PAINTINGS OF I-N-SELOUF (OUED ARIDJ)

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In the early 90's, during a trip on the Fadnoun Plateau in the Tassili-n-Ajjer (Algeria), we visited the shelter I-n-Selouf (Fig. 1) in the Oued Aridj [1].

We documented the site by means of photos, slides, GPS-coordinates and notes, which now form the basis for the following description of the site.

Oued Aridj meanders across the Fadnoun Plateau till it flows down to Oued Imirhou through several cascades. The shelter I-n-Selouf is situated in the last dead end part of this oued. Our guide told us that we were the first Europeans to visit this site.

The paintings appeared to be in good condition and the pictures very informative. However, what makes this site so unique, is the fact that two main sections were prepared before being painted.

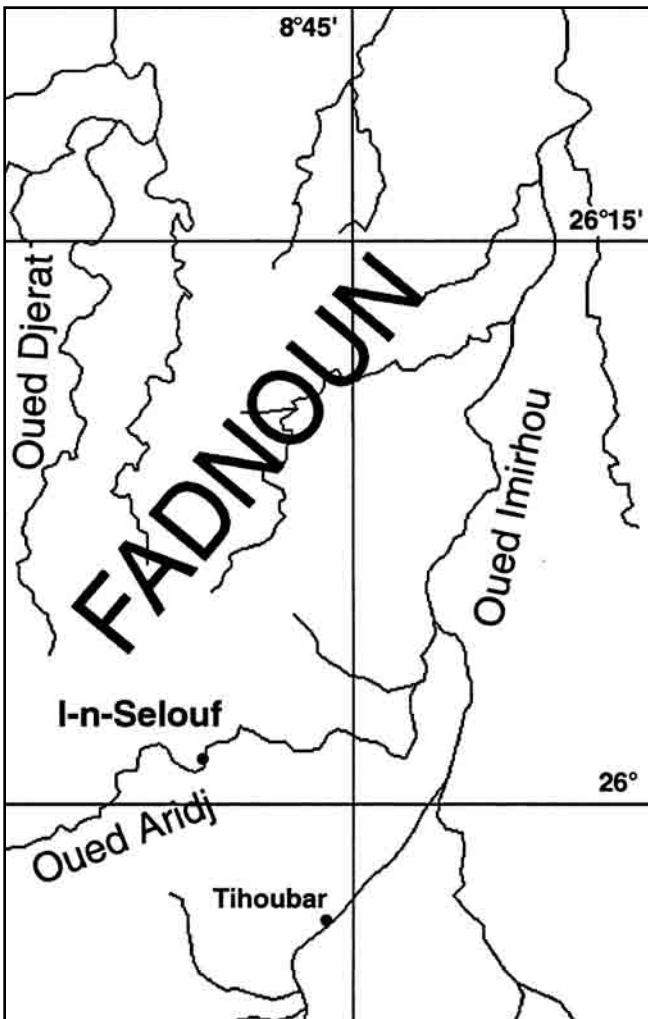


Fig. 1a.



Fig. 1b.

DESCRIPTION

In fact the shelter is only an eroded horizontal crack in the rock, about 10 meters long. The paintings are situated in the central part which is about 6 meters long. From left to right we found successively : several free standing paintings, some of which affected by moisture, a panel with several scenes of which one prepared section, a panel with a second prepared section, and finally some indistinct spots and lines. Only the two panels are described in detail, because these contain the most interesting features.

The first panel

The first panel, about 3 meters long, contains nine or ten scenes, apart from several free standing pictures and remains of pictures of people and cattle. On the top left we find a herd of red and red-white cattle with big symmetric white upward curved horns. Often the legs are depicted parallel against each other (Fig. 2).

Below are four red archers with yellow loin-cloths. The leg of the archer on the right was painted across an older picture, which seems to be a red pot on a cylindrical foot. Both



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.

the archer as well as this pot are painted partly across the legs of two vague human figures in white (Fig. 3).

The red colour of the pot is the same colour of three herdsmen who are standing next to the two cows below. The cows have brighter colours (red, yellow and white) and are better

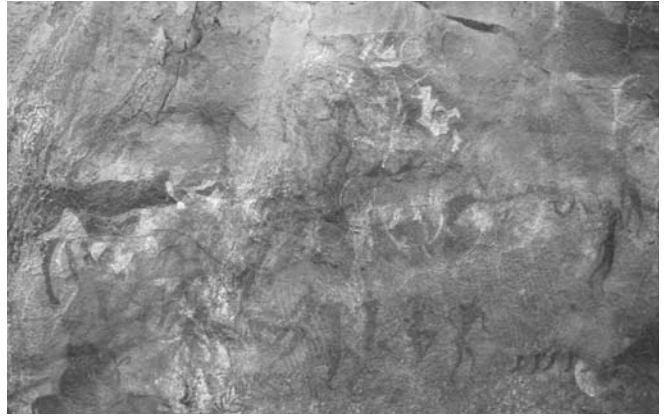


Fig. 5a.

preserved than the human figures. The last cow bears luggage, hut arches and a big pot on the horns. The painting is so detailed that even the ropes are visible (Fig.4b). This scene is painted across a bigger, drawn cow. The lowest paintings of this scene are very eroded. Although sometimes recognisable in detail, they show not much of a coherence.

These will not be explained here any further (Fig.4a).



Fig. 4a.

At the right side of the paintings mentioned above, there is a lime-stroke, that seems to form a natural separation of the paintings. The pictures do not cross this stroke.

The upper part of the tableau is dominated by two scenes of cattle, of which the biggest has the most faded colours. They represent cattle made of red outlines filled with red, yellow and white patches. This group is escorted by red and yellow coloured men. In spite of their naturalistic style, it is striking that some cows have red-

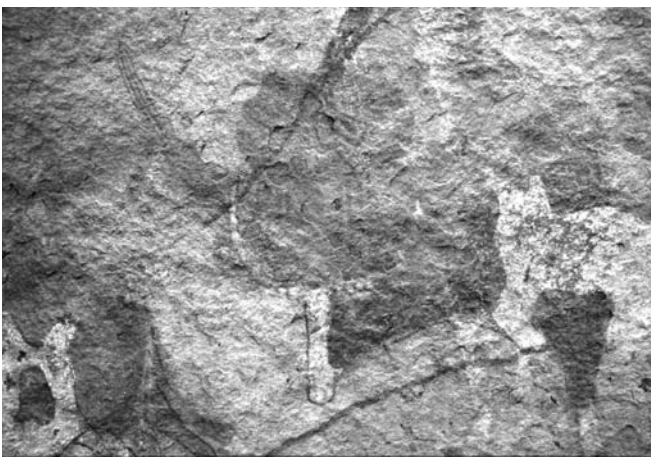


Fig. 4b.



Fig. 5b.



Fig. 6.

coloured indentations on their backs (Fig.a5). Above this herd walking to the right, two cows turn to the left. Both are green-white coloured (Fig.5b).

The other group of grazing cattle painted in red and white that constitutes the right side of the scene is oriented to the left. When both horns are shown, one of them is always curved downwards (Fig.6). The lowest cow seems to have been a later addition. It is less eroded than the others and is the only one with the same feature - parallel legs - as the herd of cattle in the upper left corner on this panel. Between these two groups of cattle there are several men in red. They seem to be the herdsman of the cattle, meeting each other here.

An image of a woman is shown to the right of the lime stroke, below the cattle. She is entering the panel, sitting on an ox. She has a curved staff in her hand and wears a beehive-hat, like the ones we know from engravings in the Oued Djerat (Fig. 7) [2]. The ox has dark symmetrical horns and a wide white blaze. Three human figures in yellow seem to be waiting for her (Fig.8).

On the right side of this woman, below the cattle, a section of the panel has been prepared. About 60 cm of the panel contains vertical stripes, as if they were made with a comb. It is not clear whether paint was applied to the rock or whether it was scraped away. There are no traces of possible images between those comb-stripes to be seen.



Fig. 7.



Fig. 8.



Fig. 9.

Fig. 9.

This section shows a scene with five men wearing loin-cloths, who seem to meet three people with coats. The five men are dynamically depicted next to something that looks like a dead animal. The other three are rather statically depicted and their coats have almost completely vanished by erosion. Only the heads and legs are clearly visible. One of them has white stripes across the red legs, as if he or she was wearing stockings (Fig.9).

Below this scene, also in the prepared section, an ornamental border in the shape of an almost closed circle is depicted, with a large flock of sheep in front of it. Two women are seated within this border, face to face, wearing white cloths on their heads. One of them wears a red blouse and a beige skirt. The other one wears yellow and red clothes. Above

these women, within the border, some undefined forms are painted (Fig.10a). At the entrance of the circle a cow peeps in. Behind the cow, at least forty sheep in red, yellow, white and beige, are standing close together before the entrance. In most of the cases only their heads and backs are depicted, giving the painting a perspective effect (Fig. 10b). More to the right the images become less visible. Some people, some cattle and a more simple circle like ornament can be recognised, but they are too far eroded to distinguish any mutual relation.

The scene most to the right on this panel shows some cattle in red and green and human figures in yellow and red (Fig. 11a). Among them we again see the woman with the beehive-hat, riding a cow, this time without horns (Fig.11b).



Fig. 10a.



Fig. 10b.

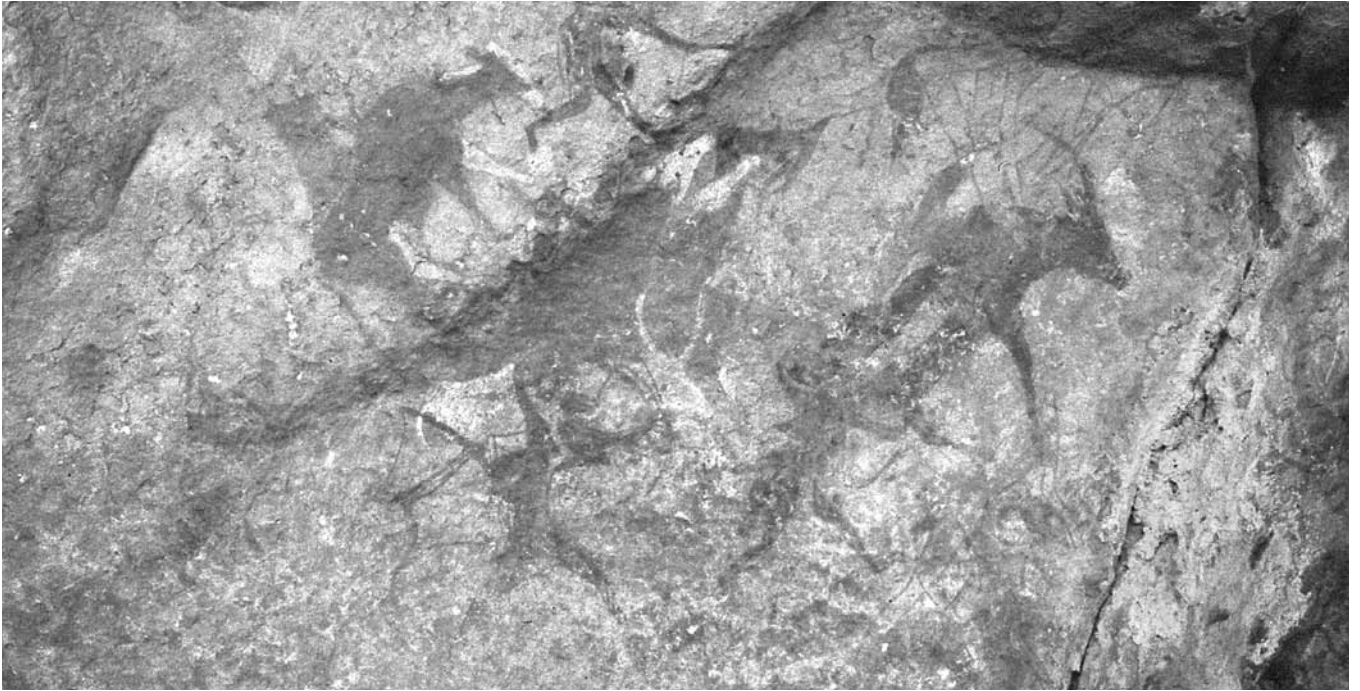


Fig. 11a.



Fig. 11b.

The second panel

The second panel consists of a flat rock surface of about 2 meters long. Again the central part of about 60 cm was prepared in the same way as the first panel. In this case however we do see some remains of paintings between the "comb" stripes. The remains are too vague to be interpreted.

The scene covers the full width of the panel and represents a battlefield. On the left side are two red-white cows, well preserved and painted across some archers. The rest of the panel contains only vague archers in several tints of red and yellow, shooting arrows and throwing things in all kinds of postures. On the battlefield no casualties are depicted (Fig.12a).



Fig. 12a.



Fig. 12b.

On the left side archers are walking in the direction of the fight. Amongst them at least two archers carry some kind of shield. Several archers of the left party wear a false tail in the fashion of others engraved in the Oued Djerat (Fig. 12b and 13) [3].

REMARKS

On the preparation of the surface

Other examples of prepared panels are hardly found in literature. We can only guess what the reason of preparing the surface might be. Maybe there was originally an image on the wall, which was not suitable for reasons of space, art, culture or politics.

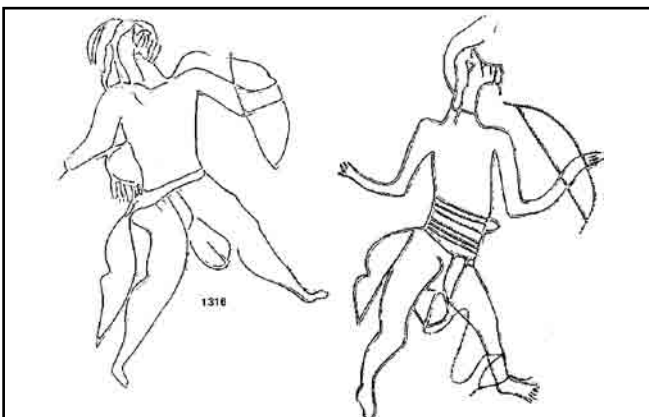


Fig. 13.

The remains in the second panel might point to that. Flattening the surface was certainly not the reason, because these prepared sections show no other surface than the unprepared parts beside them. One can conclude from the preparation of the surface that the artist planned to paint something of importance or anyhow to make something special.

On the content of the prepared sections

We distinguish three representations. On the first panel we see two scenes: the encounter of two groups of people as well as the enclosure with the women and the cattle in front. On the second panel the battlefield is depicted.

The encounter scene is difficult to read. The artist represented the parties as extremes : loin-cloths versus coats and dynamic versus static. And attributes like a dead animal or striped legs neither give clear information. Every interpretation would be a wild guess.

The scene with the ornamented border and the herd is familiar. Circle like shapes with people inside are interpreted as huts, tents or living places without cover. Representations of two women sitting together in such a living place are neither rare. Schematic elements within naturalistic paintings are not found frequently and the ornamental border of the living place seems unique. Also interesting is the way the herd is depicted. The sheep are leaded by a cow, not by a ram or billy goat, and are very close to the living place, even partly within the enclosure. In comparable scenes animals are seldom close to these kind of structures. A nice example of animals that are rather close to these structures is the famous painting of Iharen, showing herds-men and their animals that just came home (Fig.14) [4].

Possible explanations for the position of the I-n-Selouf flock so close to the hut is that the herds woman just went inside or that the animals need to be milked.

The depiction of the battle probably tells about an important event. When archers bring their shields along to a battle, it is not a matter of an occasional fight, but of a prepared combat. It looks as if this battle is depicted as having just started, showing no casualties and men still coming in from the side. This last fact indicates that this battle is not a ceremonial fight. Ceremonies are meant for spectators as well as participants and one can assume that



Fig. 14.

in a time that clocks and diaries are not invented yet, they will start only just when everyone has arrived.

On the style

All paintings of this shelter show an unity in style which clearly belongs to the last part of the Pastoral period. Most of the cows can be accredited to one hand and it is obvious that there is a relation with the paintings on the Iherir-plateau. The sheep show the same link too.

On the depicted men personal embellishment, which is typical for the Iharen-Tahilahi-school, lacks and the dynamic postures remind strongly of the Abaniora-school (Muzzolini, 1995).

And finally there is this schematic ornament around the living place, painted as integral part of a beautifully executed naturalistic painting. Maybe the artist was inspired by decorations on imported goods, maybe he discovered the shape himself. Fact is that it is an anomaly in the naturalistic style of the Pastoral period.

NOTES

- [1] On the IGN map Illizi NG-32-XV, Oued Aridj is named Assiguedal. We decided to hold on the name Aridj since our guides know the oued as this.
- [2] Fig. 7 : from Lhote (1976, fig. 1165-1672).
- [3] Fig. 13 : from Lhote (1976, fig. 1316 & 1328).
- [4] Fig. 14 : from Colombel (1978, fig. 10).

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