

REPORT ON A JOURNEY TO THE NORTHERN PART OF GILF KEBIR, SW EGYPT, FEBRUARY/MARCH 2001

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In 1998 a new rock art site had been found in Wadi Hamra (Berger, 1999) with petroglyphs on the flanks and with stone circles on the flat top of a hill (see Fig. 1).

Another tourist group, under the guidance of El-Mahdy, found over Christmas 1999 a circular stone arrangement on a hill in the eastern branch of wadi Abd el Malik, possibly the remains of a hut (Fig. 2). On the flanks of this hill there are petroglyphs, Fig. 3 is an example.

Close to this location a pictogram was re-discovered in 1999 which was first seen by Peel during his two-days-walk in Wadi Abd el Malik with Bagnold (Bagnold, 1939). Fig. 4 shows one of the cows. The udder is depicted in twisted perspective between the hind legs, a stylistic element which is frequently found in the eastern Sahara from Ennedi over Gebel Kissu and Gebel Uweinat to Gilf Kebir.

In Gilf Kebir some Barbary sheep have survived. Their tracks and their remains can be frequently observed. Fig. 5

shows a layer of approx. 10 cm dung in the entrance of a small cave and some bones in the foreground.

In a tributary wadi of the lower wadi Abd el Malik from the west a yardang field was discovered (Fig. 6) with yardangs up to 50 cm high.

Our journey then led us to the unnamed wadi (N. Wadi in Fig. 1) where Negro (1995) had found his second rock art site. Few hundred metres north of Negro's site a huge rock with relatively even, but slightly inclined surface was noticed. On the upper surface there are several grinding hollows (Fig. 7). They are surrounded by a pecked line containing some cupules.

With the experience from 1998 in Wadi Hamra and 1999 in Wadi Abd el Malik we then checked all hills and mountain spurs in Wadi Hamra for stone circles on the flat top and rock art on the flanks. In total eleven sites were found (Fig. 1b), including the known ones. Some have stone circles only,

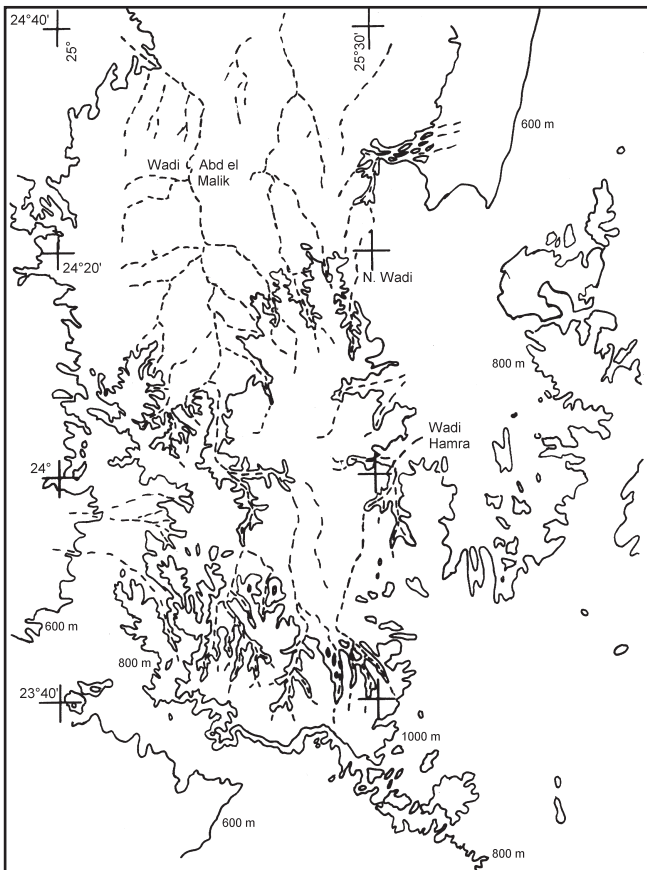


Fig. 1a. Northern part of Gilf Kebir.

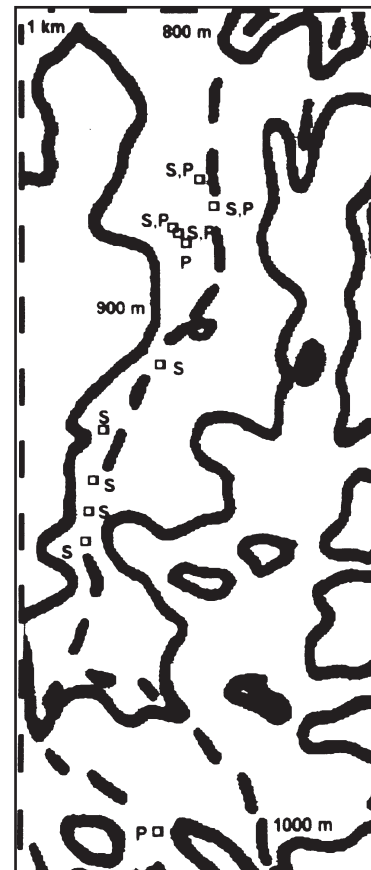


Fig. 1b. Wadi Hamra (p = petroglyphs, s = stone circles)



Fig. 2. Circular stone arrangement.



Fig. 3. Petroglyph of bovid ?



Fig. 4. Pictogram of cow, udder in twisted perspective, damaged by pecking.

Fig. 5. Dung and bones of Barbary sheep.



Fig. 6. Yardangs.



Fig. 7. Rock with grinding hollows.





Fig. 8. Stone circles.

some petroglyphs only, and some have a combination of both. Fig. 8 is an example with two stone circles.

In the literature some reports on this kind of stone circles can be found. Clayton (1933:256) for example shows several on a map near "Peter and Paul", two mountains between Gilf Kebir and Gebel Uweinat. Peel and Bagnold (1939:293) found some on the plateau of the southern Gilf Kebir. Peel (1942:76) mentioned that many stone circles can be found in the Libyan Desert.

Many are old, but some among Tibu settlements in Gebel Uweinat seem to be recent. On the ancient donkey route Dakhla - Abu Ballas - Gilf Kebir which Bergmann established 1999/2000, several deposits of jars are in close proximity to stone circles, wind breakers and to petroglyphes (Bergmann, 2001:367-460).

On the floor of the wadis in Gilf Kebir occasionally isolated ceramic sherds can be found. Three of them were thermoluminescence dated. This method is known for its low accuracy. Two pieces were dated 3000 ± 400 years and 5000 ± 750 years, respectively (Labor Kotalla, n°. 0133020 and 0233020, Basis 2001). This confirms their Neolithic age. A third sherd, Fig. 9, possibly from the decorated rim of a vessel, is surprisingly young with 1500 ± 300 years (n°0333020).



Fig. 9. Sherd with decoration.

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