

ALMOGAREN

44-45/2013-2014



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Rodrigue, Alain (2014): The rock engravings of Tighremt n'Ouazdidene (High Atlas, Morocco).- Almogaren 44-45 / 2013-2014 (Institutum Canarium), Wien, 167-172

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The rock engravings of Tighremt n'Ouazdidene (High Atlas, Morocco)

Keywords: Morocco, High Atlas, engravings, weapons, Berber

Résumé:

La station rupestre de Tighremt n'Ouazdidene est une station secondaire du Haut Atlas marocain. Elle regroupe sur deux dalles plusieurs centaines de figurations stéréotypées de « cadastres », rouelles et autres dessins énigmatiques. Parmi ces images, certaines gravures sont à relever, qui traduisent les thèmes récurrents du monde berbère, thèmes encore très vivaces.

Abstract:

The rock engravings station of Tighremt n'Ouazdidene is a secondary station of the Moroccan High Atlas. It regroups on two main slabs many hundreds of stereotyped figures of "land registering look-alikes", roundels, and many more enigmatic drawings. Among these images, some of them are worth to be mentioned, illustrating the recurrent Berber themes, which are still so vivid.

Zusammenfassung:

Die Fundstelle Tighremt n'Ouazdidene kann als sekundäre Felsbildstation im marokkanischen Hohen Atlas bezeichnet werden. Sie vereinigt auf zwei hauptsächlichen Steininformationen mehrere Hundert von stereotypen Motiven: "Kataster" (wie Landaufteilung aussehend), Kreisförmiges und andere enigmatische Figuren. Manche davon sind erwähnenswert und illustrieren wiederkehrende Berber-Thematiken, die immer noch lebendig sind.

Situation and history

The rock engravings station of Tighremt n'Ouazdidene is located in the Moroccan High Atlas, five kilometers south-west of Eç Çour (road from Marrakech to Ouarzazate), in the valley of the river Sous (Assif n'Sous). This station, on the Saharan mountainside of the Atlas, belongs to the group of sites including Oukaimeden, Yagour, Rat and some less important sites as Tainant and Aougdal n'Oumzouar. It bears the national inventory number 150068.

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Although the station is well-known (at least since the prospecting of A. Simoneau, 1977), none of its pictures was published.

The rock engravings have been drawn on two beds of sandstone, emerging one hundred meters south of the village of Tighremt n'Ouazdidene. The ridges of sandstone are a kind of resurgence from the huge layers that cover a great part of the High Atlas, on the northern side of the mountain. These layers (Permian / Triassic), offering large flat surfaces, are particularly favorable to the carving.

The registration of the engravings of Tighremt n'Ouazdidene is rather difficult because the drawings are covering the two surfaces without any order, cross-checking each other, many of them vanishing, without rendering any distinct image, except an amount of squares, "cadastres", round drawings, roundels (Fig. 1 & 2) ... all the non-figurative drawings that can usually be found on the engravings sites of the recent period (Pichler & Rodrigue, 2011). And once again, from this inextricable mess of signs, one can extract three groups of drawings that can illustrate the main themes and subjects.

Weapons

This group includes what can be considered as rectangular shields (Fig. 4 / 1-3). In our analysis of the engravings of the High Atlas (Rodrigue 1999), we proposed these images as shields made of wooden slats, decorated with metallic nails (perhaps even painted) and belonging to the first period of the atlasic bronze age.

Surprisingly, the rectangular shields of Tighremt n'Ouazdidene are drawn in a recent environment (horses, camels, adornments). More singularly, one of these shields has been decorated in its center part with two (perhaps three ?) daggers, which is the first known image of that kind (Fig. 4 / 2).

Yet, we cannot avoid the hypothesis of the representation of an adornment (fibula) or chest plaques. This is particularly obvious with the drawing of the figure 4/1 : we must admit that the two protuberances at the top and at the lower part have nothing to do with a shield. It can also be a re-used shield and turned into a fibula. It could also be the case in the image of a decorated rectangle, just below an animal (very probably a horse, fig. 4 / 4).

Daggers represent important series. The handle can be terminated by a pommel (two kinds, upward or downward, fig. 4 / 5, 7) or a sphere (Fig. 4 / 6). The blade is rather short and slightly bent at the end. The curved extremity must be the representation of the case and so the image of theses daggers is always the one of a dagger in its case. One engraving gives the image of a dagger linked to its shoulder-belt in (intentional ?) relation with a forearm

(Fig. 4 / 6). One must notice that the shoulder-belt is attached to the case by four points (two on each side of the weapon, rings ?), excrescences that we find on most images of this kind. We propose here a drawing of what probably was the system of attachment (Fig. 3). These weapons are usually said to be from Arabic influence (what is not yet proved) and are, anyway, very different from the straight blade daggers of the High Atlas (atlasic bronze age).

Animals

They are of two kinds :

- very schematic and unskilful images of horses with saddles (Fig. 4 / 4, 8). This is the perfect representation of the animal in the Libyco-Berber style of engravings in sites as Foum Chenna (Pichler, 2000) or Marrakesh (Rodrigue 1994).
- camels : very explicit drawing of the animal (Fig. 4 / 9), with the long head, the hanging belly, the large soles and, of course, the hump.

Adornments

The images of fibulas are not so rare in the prehistorical rock art of Morocco. Some are already known in the region of Mcissi and in the High Atlas. They usually give the details of their indented contours and the delicate works of toreutic (cross and perhaps the representation of settings of semi-precious stones). In Tighremt n'Ouazdidene, one can find good examples of the classic Berber shoulder fibula, which includes two triangular plaques united by a chainlet (Fig. 4 / 7). The left element is linked to a dagger. The fibula on the right, close to the double fibula on the ground, is a more simple one, but both are still used today, with an open buckle and a needle.

Comments

The most difficult point with rock art stations like Tighremt n'Ouazdidene is to establish if they are ancient or not. The location of drawings, their complete disorder, the piling up of enigmatic images are some of the typical indications that allow us to say that the station doesn't belong to the bronze age, as it is established in the High Atlas. Some elements (horses, camels) belong to the Libyco-Berber style and themes. Despite the fact that the adornments bear a patina, one can think that they have been drawn yesterday! The vanishing pecked out subjects are indeed very less attractive than the Tazina style rhinos and elephants. This is certainly not a sufficient reason to ignore them.

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Figures:



Fig. 1: Engraved slab of Tighremt n'Ouazdidene (Photography A. Rodrigue).

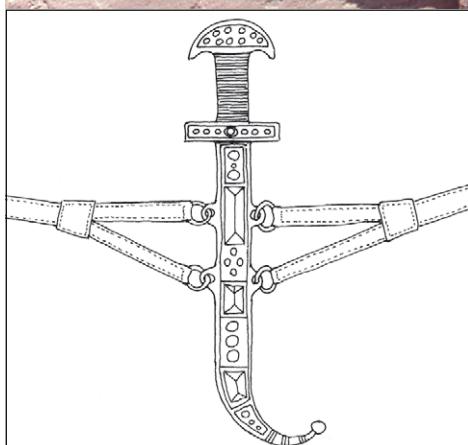


Fig. 2: Engraved slab of Tighremt n'Ouazdidene (Photography A. Rodrigue).

Fig. 3: Attempt of reconstitution of the attachment system of the dagger.

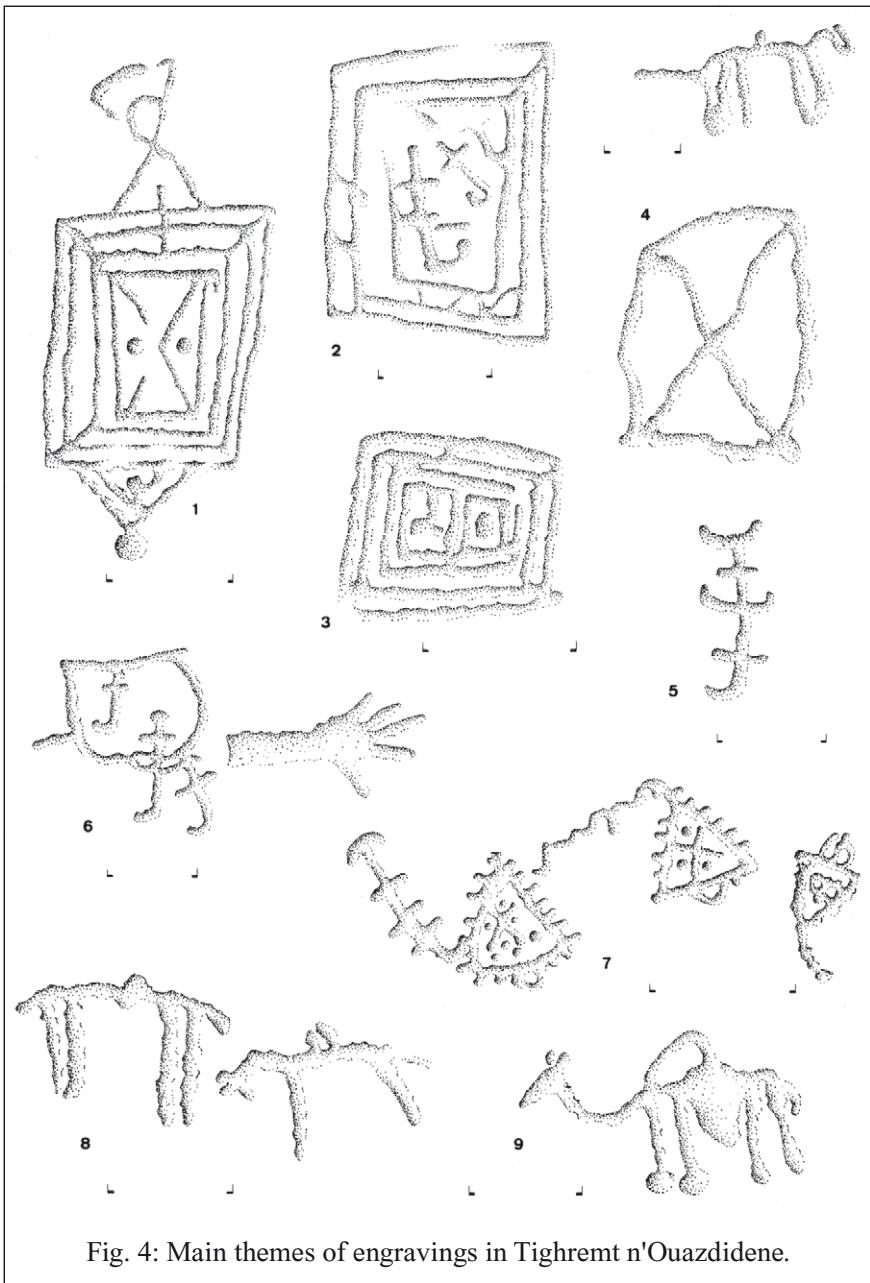


Fig. 4: Main themes of engravings in Tighremt n'Ouazdidene.

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