

# Ancient Egyptian Rock Inscriptions and Graffiti

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This is the 2006 revision; another is underway.

Graffiti from Egypt divide into two categories: 1) rock inscriptions, carved on natural desert surfaces; 2) graffiti proper, added to the surfaces of existing monuments. These include both carved and painted texts and depictions, and the Egyptians appear to have made no distinction between the media employed in making the inscriptions. Although the term *graffito* is not strictly proper as a reference to all of the techniques employed, and although the generally negative connotations of the word in the modern world are seldom consistent with the ancient motives, Egyptologists often employ the term *graffito* to refer to rock inscriptions of all types (Peden 2001; Thissen 1976; contrast Vanderkerckhove and Müller-Wollermann 2001: 9-11). An important source for understanding the history and culture of pharaonic Egypt, rock inscriptions preserve some of the earliest art and writing of the ancient Egyptians, and the latest datable hieroglyphic text is itself a graffito at Philae. Although some are amongst the oldest artistic productions of predynastic cultures, the Middle Kingdom is perhaps the golden age of Egyptian rock inscriptions. The flourish of rock inscriptions in Western Thebes comes slightly later in the New Kingdom. The heyday of temple graffiti follows from the Third Intermediate Period through the Greco-Roman era.

## Predynastic Rock Inscriptions I: The Creation of Ordered Space—Expansion and Recreation of the Cosmos—Niloticizing the Desert

The major sites of rock inscriptions from the Predynastic Period derive, with few exceptions, from Upper Egypt. The few recorded, probable Neolithic rock art sites in the western Negev and Sinai appear to be related to the rock art of the Levant and Arabia; some petroglyph sites in the northern portion of the Eastern Desert, and of questionable date (probably first millennium BCE or later) likewise do not belong to the Upper Egyptian and Nubian traditions so well attested both along the Nile Valley and in the Eastern and Western Deserts (Huyge 2003: 60-61).

The earliest rock inscriptions of Nilotic Upper Egypt may be the apparent fish weirs of el-Hosh, perhaps as early as 5600 BCE (Huyge 1998; Huyge, *et al.* 1998). Most of the early rock art surviving in Egypt belongs iconographically to the known Predynastic culture groups of Upper Egypt. Some rock art, however, may result from the importation into the Egyptian sphere of already developed rock art traditions from more distant regions, such as the elaborately abstract, Abkan affiliated (for the Abkan see Hellström, *et al.* 1970 [particularly corpus group X]) art of Bir Nakheila (Osing *et al.* 1982: 39-40 and pl. 9, nos. 47-48) and Rayayna (Darnell, D. 2002: 160-161; Darnell, J. C. forthcoming a), and the handprints of Farafra (Huyge 2003: 67-68; Barich 1999: 37-39) and Rayayna (Darnell, D. 2002: 161 and pls. 90-91; Darnell, J. C. forthcoming a). Many concentrations of early rock art appear in the Eastern and Western Deserts, most of the former associated with routes between the Nile Valley and the Red Sea (Winkler 1938-1939; Morrow and Morrow 2002; Wilkinson 2003; Mark 1998: 81-87), the latter located near the Nile Valley and the western oases, and along the routes interconnecting those areas.

Predynastic Egyptian inscriptions appear to have functioned as a means of creating space in what might otherwise have seemed a desert void; later inscriptions as well created places and markers where no human landmarks may previously have existed (compare the Middle Kingdom military dispatch from the fortress of Semna, in which a probable rock inscription is a landmark for a patrol— Smither 1945: pl. 3a, l. 12). In the proper geophysical context, rock art in Egypt, as elsewhere, may serve as a means of human engagement with the landscape in which they live, and impart to that landscape a proper expression of their worldview, essentially a socialization of the topography (see conveniently the numerous essays in David and Wilson 2002; Chippindale and Taçon 2000; Bender 1993 and 1999; Chippindale and Nash 2004). Many of the early rock inscriptions are in the hinterland of urban centers and along desert routes; a few rock inscription sites also present clearly associated archaeological remains (Bietak and Engelmayer 1963; Darnell, J. C. 2002b; *idem.* 2002c). The Predynastic Egyptians appear to have been adept at the use of graffiti, and occasionally produced groupings of inscriptions, sometimes involving large spatial areas. The movements through a rocky environment of mobile, cattle-herding groups (Kuper 2002; Wendorf and Schild 2002; Wendorf *et al.* 2001: 625-629, 631-632, 655-658, 671; Hassan (ed.) 2002: 11-26, 198-201, 209-223) appear to have led the early Egyptians to

link areas through rock inscriptions, and to adjust and augment those inscriptions and groupings over time. By the Naqada II period rock artists were grouping images in such a way as to express more information than any of those images alone might impart. For example, the great number of boat depictions (Engelmayer 1965; Wilkinson 2003: 134-161; Darnell, J. C. 2002a: 23-26; *idem.*, forthcoming c) (Figure 1) alongside images of riverine animal life and human fishing and hunting activities appear to represent attempts to Niloticize the desert environment of rock art and inscription sites. Although the exact relationship is yet unclear, the development of visual symbols, and the use of such over space and time in elaborate rock inscription tableaux may well have set the stage for the development of writing in Egypt.

### Predynastic Rock Inscriptions II: The Giraffes, Boats, and Asses of Elkab—Imaging the Solar Cycle

Much of the surviving early Upper Egyptian religious symbolism takes the form of rock inscriptions and rock art, with zoomorphic petroglyphs predominating. By the time of the earliest Predynastic cultures, the bulk of Egyptian rock art is symbolic, not purely representational. An examination of the rock art at the Upper Egyptian site of Elkab has revealed that the expression of religious imagery—rather than hunting magic or totemism—is the motivation behind much of the rock art of Predynastic Upper Egypt (for this section see Huyge 1999 and 2002).

In the desert east of Elkab, on a detached portion of the escarpment in the Wadi Hilal (“Vulture Rock”) giraffes are the most common motif during the early Predynastic Naqada I Period (Horizon I). Although most of the rock art at the site is oriented towards the viewer’s right, most of the giraffes are depicted as if moving towards the viewer’s left, an orientation representing a conscious departure from the normal direction. At Elkab the giraffes move around the Vulture Rock as if rotating in an east to west, north to south motion, fitting the concept of the giraffe as an early carrier of the sun (Westendorf 1966a: 37 and 84-85; Huyge 2002: 199-200). The giraffes and serpopards ultimately become the *w3s*-scepter (Westendorf 1966b: 207-208) in Egypt; the symbolism of the giraffe appears to continue to develop in Nubia, particularly Kerma (Bonnet 2000: 99 *et passim*). In the middle Predynastic Naqada II Period (Horizon II) boats (Types 1 and 7) appear, along with human figures with raised arms, donkeys, and ibexes. Type 1 boats, human figures with raised arms, and ibexes

are common on decorated vessels that are almost exclusive to a funerary context; type 7 boats have a religious import. The boats of Horizon II continue the solar rotation of the giraffes. Depictions of donkeys are—on the basis of later Egyptian symbolism—most probably representations of chthonic power, and in their orientation toward the viewer's right they oppose the east to west movement of the solar cycle, as represented by the giraffes and boats at Vulture Rock. As these images appeared to revolve around a large natural object, they allowed various people, even different generations, to participate in a recreation of the solar cycle.

### Predynastic Inscriptions III: Human Intervention in the Solar Cycle

By the middle Predynastic, solar mages in rock art began to achieve self-propulsion in a solar boat, and the solar giraffes required human control. In order to tame the zoomorphic solar carriers, human figures sometimes appear—so the men who hold giraffes by ropes in a number of Predynastic representations (compare Váhala and Cervicek 1999: nos. 24 and 25/A; Scharff 1929: 150-151 and pl. 14; Asselberghs 1961: pl. 17; Darnell, J. C. forthcoming b), and those who restrain the serpopards on the later Narmer Palette (Asselberghs 1961: pl. 95). Earlier visual descriptions of the cosmic cycle become images of human intervention, and earlier hunting scenes develop into more clearly expressed depictions of the subjugation of chaos, not only in a terrestrial but in a cosmic sense as well. Mixed images combining the old animal carrier and the solar bark also appear in Upper Egyptian rock art (Westendorf 1979; Váhala and Cervicek 1999: No. 334; Darnell, J. C. 2003b: 112). These suggest a solar deity in control of his or her own movements, although with reference to the human world. A number of later Predynastic depictions of boats in rock art show tow ropes, and the often schematic towers, sometimes exhorted by overseers (Basch and Gorbea 1968: 179 and 191; Váhala and Cervicek, 1999: no. 307/B; Darnell, J. C., 2003b: 113; *idem*, forthcoming b), perhaps representations of actual religious riverine processions.

### Protodynastic Rock Inscriptions IV: Human Order Mimics Cosmic Order

The concept of symbolic imagery, apparently evolved for the solar cycle, and perhaps first finding elaborate expression in rock art, found application to the human world and its political organization by the Naqada II Period. On the Gebelein Shroud

and in the Painted tomb (Tomb 100) at Hierakonpolis are early representations of a later much-repeated cycle of images associated with the royal Jubilee (Adams and Cialowicz 1997: 33-48; Williams and Logan 1987). Not surprisingly, similar tableaux—scenes of riverine processions, hunting, and associations of flotillas and animal groups—appear in rock art (compare Basch and Gorbea 1968: 35-36; Váhala and Cervicek 1999: nos. 221 and 287).

Rock inscriptions as memorials of specific events appear by the beginning of Dynasty 0, rivaling the historical content of surviving sources from the Nile Valley (Cialowicz 2001). The Scorpion tableau from Gebel Tjauti in the Theban Western Desert (Darnell 2002a: 10-19; Hendrickx and Friedman 2003) reveals the application of symbolic groups, derived from the animal cosmographs of the solar cycle, as annotations to a scene of human activity—military victory depicted in the proper cosmic and religious context. The Gebel Sheikh Suleiman inscription in Nubia (Williams and Logan 1987: 282-285; Cialowicz 2001: 62-63) is an important document for understanding the expansion of pharaonic hegemony over Lower Nubia. These early tableaux contain elements of historical events and the ritualization thereof, the celebration of the event in terms of its cosmic significance by means of incorporation within the royal Jubilee imagery (Hornung, 1966; Serrano 2002).

### Early Dynastic Rock Inscriptions: Sealing the Desert—Ownership, Hegemony, and the Extension of Ordered Space

The Predynastic Upper Egyptians' groupings of signs to mimic and ensure the continuation of the cosmic cycle appear to have created a symbolic language that subsequently gave rise to expressions of human order and royal power. The inscriptions soon move from a participatory recreation of the cosmic cycle in order to ensure stability and continuity to equating and comparing the natural order with the now increasingly ordered human society.

The use of serekhs on desert routes appears already during Dynasty 0 (Darnell, J. C. 2002a: 19-22; Wilkinson 1995) as a means of incorporating a route and an area within the pharaonic realm. Serekhs at several significant desert posts and in Nubia attest to the hegemony of several First Dynasty rulers (Winkler 1938, pl. 11; Žaba 1974: 239-241; Váhala and Cervicek 1999: no. 149; and Darnell, J. C. 2003b: 112), and such serekh “sealings” of the desert continue during the Second Dynasty (Žaba 1974:

30-31). The reign of the Horus Qaa, last ruler of the First Dynasty, is—relatively speaking for this early period—well attested in rock inscriptions at what were probably strategic route posts (Plate 1) (Huyge 1984; Wilkinson 1999: 80-81; Ikram and Rossi 2004 [the apparent pock above the arm is probably the *k* of Qaa’s name]; Darnell, J. C., forthcoming c). An inscription of late-Heracleopolitan/mid-Eleventh Dynasty date refers to the “annexation” of a portion of the desert by use of the verb *htm*, “to seal,” a means of claiming ownership (Darnell, J. C. 2002a: 30-34), and the rock artists and lapidary scribes of Protodynastic and Old Kingdom Egypt appear to have inscribed serekhs at distant sites as one means of literally staking the pharaonic realm’s claim to the deserts.

### The Old Kingdom: Soldiers, Miners, and Priests

With the advent of the high Old Kingdom—particularly during the Fourth Dynasty and later—more explicit rock inscriptions with more expansive textual elements appear. At the same time, the rock inscriptional memorials of “private” individuals increase in frequency (Peden 2001: 4-13 [including expedition inscriptions]; Darnell, forthcoming b), especially in association with expeditions (Eichler 1993; Bell et al., 1984). Quarrying and military endeavors appear to account for the bulk of Old Kingdom rock inscriptions on the margins of the pharaonic realm. Quarry texts occur at such sites as Hatnub, Wadi Hammamat, Eastern Desert routes out of Edfu, and are particularly prominent in Sinai (Peden 2001: 6-10, 12-13). Rock inscriptions in several areas (such as along the Edfu to Mersa Alam road) may relate both to quarrying expeditions and long distance travel, and more specifically travel related are inscriptions at several Western Desert sites (Darnell 2002a: 26-29, 119; Kuhlmann 2002: 132-139) and in the Wadi Sheikh Ali (Meyer 1983). Old Kingdom inscriptions at Deir el-Bahari (Rzepka 2003) may relate to early religious activity at the site, although this is unclear. Inscriptions at Aswan and in the Wadi Allaqi may relate to a number of enterprises, quarrying as well as military; those in the Wadi Hilal in the desert to the east of Elkab may relate to some extent to the route through the Wadi Hilal (Vanderkerckhove and Müller-Wollermann 2001), but most importantly contain important information on the temple and cult of the desert temple of Elkab (see below).

Rock inscriptions from Nubia augment meager historical information from other sources. Inscriptions of high Old Kingdom date from the Khor el-Aquiba (Figure 1),

east of the Nile near Tomas, record military activity of considerable scope, one text mentioning an Egyptian force of 20,000, another referring to 17,000 Nubian captives (Lopez 1966: nos. 27 and 28; Lopez 1967; Basch and Gorbea 1968: 237-238; Eichler 1993: 112-113, 125). The increasingly martial character of Nubian rock inscriptions provides further evidence for the changing nature of Egypto-Nubian relations during the Sixth Dynasty (Eichler 1993: 146-7). Old Kingdom expeditions also left records of their visits to the oases of the Western Desert, and the region southwest of Dakhla Oasis preserves evidence of Old Kingdom and later activity on the route to Abu Ballas, Uweinat, and perhaps points beyond (Kuhlmann 2002; idem 2005; Riemer, Förster, Hendrickx, Nussbaum, Eichhorn, Pollath, Schonfeld, and Wagner, 2005).

#### The First Intermediate Period and the Early Middle Kingdom: Travelers, Policemen, and Foreigners—Personality and History

A number of monuments of the First Intermediate Period show affinities with rock inscriptions, including non-standard iconography and paleography, and a general disregard for the usual rules of register and proportion. Some stelae of the period are essentially “free-standing rock inscriptions” (Compare Fischer 1964: pl. 33, no. 38). As with the Predynastic and Protodynastic Periods, rock inscriptions from this period fill gaps in the documentation available from the Nile Valley. During the period of instability and feuding nomarchs in Upper Egypt that followed the collapse of the Old Kingdom, the networks of desert roads focusing on the Thebaid were of considerable strategic importance. Inscriptions at Gebel Tjauti, a site in the network of roads through the Qena Bend, refer to conflict between a Heracleopolitan vassal in the Coptite nome and an unnamed enemy, apparently the growing power of the Theban Eleventh Dynasty (Darnell, J. C. 2002a: 30-46). A relatively large number of graffiti in the quarry of Hatnub (Anthes 1928) also provide considerable evidence for the political and social conditions in Egypt during the early Middle Kingdom (Willems 1983-1984), augmenting the otherwise meager evidence for the internal turmoil that plagued the middle years of the reign of Amenemhat I. From perhaps the same time a number of rock inscriptions from Lower Nubia may refer to local dynasts who opposed Egyptian hegemony (Morkot 1999: 183-186). The inscriptions of the Nubian soldier Tjehemau, just south of Aswan, provide evidence for events during the nascent Twelfth Dynasty from the point of view of a person at least initially on the fringes of pharaonic society

(Darnell, J. C. 2003a and 2004). By the late Eleventh Dynasty, royal and private rock inscriptions are becoming more explicit, providing details of the composition, equipment, and route of travel of desert expeditions (Schenkel 1965: 25-28, 222-25, 260-70; Seyfried 1981; note particularly the inscription of Henu in the Wadi Hammamat—Lichtheim 1988: 52-54).

The oases of the Western Desert, though not so well represented in the corpus of rock inscriptions as Nubia and the Eastern Desert, due to the vagaries of geology and discovery, certainly begin to produce rock inscriptions by the end of the Old Kingdom. Rock inscriptions from Dakhla provide unique information on the administration of the oasis during the Middle Kingdom (Baud, Colin, and Tallet 1999), and yield some information regarding the policing of the periphery of the oasis (Kaper and Willems 2002). An inscription from southwest of Dakhla—of late Old Kingdom or First Intermediate Period/early Middle Kingdom date—records an expedition to search for a group of oasis dwellers (see Burkard 1997, with corrections in Darnell, 2002a: 73; Kuhlmann 2002, but with reservations regarding many of the interpretations offered there), and inscriptions from Bahariya may also relate to traffic through the oasis (Castel and Tallet 2001). On the desert routes of Egypt, the numbers of inscriptions increase dramatically, and at some sites the period between the late Old Kingdom and the late Middle Kingdom is the time of the greatest production of rock inscriptions. Along with archaeological material known from at least some of the actual routes (Darnell 2002c: 107-8), rock inscriptions may also demonstrate the use of particular routes during antiquity (for the Darb et-Tawil compare the Old Kingdom inscription published by Minault-Gout 1985), and reveal the changes in titles of expedition members (rock inscriptions reveal that the use of naval titles in expeditions ceased during the early Twelfth Dynasty—Abd el-Raziq, Castel, Tallet, and Ghica 2002: 43).

### The Middle Kingdom: Expeditions and Outposts

Beginning already by the Old Kingdom (Vandekerckhove and Müller-Wollermann 2001: 347-349), a clear lapidary hieratic develops during the Middle Kingdom. Recognizing that the cursive forms of normal hieratic are not always suited to carving, and at the same time cognizant of the time and skill required to produce proper hieroglyphic inscriptions, Egyptian scribes developed a hybrid script, blending hieroglyphic, semi-cursive, and pure hieratic forms to create a group of signs better

sued to carving than to writing with ink. The Egyptians employed this script in both rock inscriptions and on free-standing stelae (compare the grave stelae in Reisner 1932, p. 161 fig. 59 and the accompanying photographs), the largest percentage of such hybrid hieratic and hieroglyphic rock inscriptions being of Middle Kingdom date (Ali, 2002: 12-22). The Wadi el-Hudi texts also present interesting hybrids of stelae and rock inscriptions (Fakhry, 1952; Sadek, 1980-1985).

This lapidary hieratic, which proliferates in the rock inscriptions of Middle Kingdom Nubia, appears to have been the product primarily of scribes on expeditions (for the military nature of Middle Kingdom Nubian inscriptions, see Gratien 2004). A number of the Nubian rock inscriptions of the Middle Kingdom allow for the reconstruction of the course and order of various military expeditions (Obsomer 1995: 237-306), and indicate the former presence of archaeologically invisible or unrecognized outposts of probably temporary construction (compare Žaba 1974: no. 73, l. 6; Obsomer 1995: 247-248). In the Sinai, at Rod el-Air and Serabit el-Khadim, rock inscriptions attest to the incredible vigor of Middle Kingdom activity (Peden 2001: 32-34; Seyfried 1981: 153-237; Gardiner, et al. 1952, 1955). The inscriptions list members of the expedition, and occasionally provide rare mineralogical and climatological descriptions, such as in the stela of Horwerrê (Iversen 1984; Aufrère 1991; Kurth 1996). A wealth of inscriptions from the Wadi Hammamat and the other routes between the Nile and the Red Sea coast attest to the extensive use of tracks in the Eastern Desert during the Middle Kingdom (Abd el-Raziq, Castel, Tallet, and Ghica 2002; Morrow and Morrow 2002; Seyfried 1981: 241-283; Peden 2001: 35-37; Goyon 1957; Couyat and Montet 1912-1913), and often preserve considerable information on the organization of the expeditions (*cf.* Farout 1994).

Foreign workmen and mercenaries accompanied Middle Kingdom expeditions, and inscriptions from Sinai record numbers of Asiatics—some bearing weapons for the Egyptians—as members of mining expeditions (Valbelle and Bonnet 1996: 34-35 and 147; Gardiner et al., 1952, 1955: 19 and 206). An interaction of these Semitic-language-speaking groups with Egyptian military and expedition scribes appears to have led to the invention of an alphabetic script attested in two inscriptions from the Wadi el-Ḥôl (Darnell, J. C. 2003c) and in the more numerous proto-Sinaitic inscriptions at Serabit (Sass 1988; Hamilton 2006). Employing signs derived from lapidary hieratic Egyptian shapes, and assigning to this limited number of signs acrophonic phonetic

values based on the Semitic-language names of the objects depicted, the melting pot of Egyptian expeditionary forces created the predecessor of modern alphabets during the Middle Kingdom (Darnell, J. C. and Dobbs-Allsopp, 2005).

### The New Kingdom I: Royal Workmen at Thebes

Perhaps the topographically largest single concentration of rock inscriptions from the pharaonic realm is in Western Thebes, most of these inscriptions being the work of the royal workmen of the New Kingdom, based in the closed artisan's community of Deir el-Medina (Peden 2001: 134-265 and references therein). These inscriptions provide genealogical information augmenting other written documentation, and give some indication on the activities of the workmen, including work within the royal tombs themselves (Compare Altenmüller 1984). By the time of the New Kingdom, the old lapidary hieratic of the Middle Kingdom has become much more cursive. Nevertheless, though often all but indistinguishable from inked hieratic, the paleography of New Kingdom hieratic rock inscriptions of the Deir el-Medina workmen preserves lapidary peculiarities (Ali 2002).

The inscriptions at Western Thebes are particularly important for the history of the late Twentieth Dynasty, and the early Twenty-First Dynasty. Certain of the inscriptions relate to the tomb robberies and the tomb clearances of the late New Kingdom, and are integral in the arguments surrounding the plundering of the royal tombs (Jansen-Winkel 1995).

### The New Kingdom II: Tourists, Nubia, and the Borders of the Empire

The variety of rock inscriptions decreases during the New Kingdom, but particular genres are well-attested at this time. The northern pyramid fields and Theban tombs contain ample evidence of tourism by New Kingdom travelers who left graffiti attesting to their appreciation of the already ancient monuments (see below) (Peden 2001: 58-71, 95-107, 118-123). Other visitors, such as those to the "grotto" overlooking Deir el-Bahri, may have employed their skills for political commentary (Wente 1984).

Relatively few rock inscriptions at quarries and mining regions date to the New Kingdom, although the exploitation of some of these regions, such as the mines at Sinai, may actually have increased during the same period (Peden 2001: 76-81; Tallet

2003: 470-473; Hikade 2001). Nevertheless, inscriptions in southern Sinai reveal important details about New Kingdom expeditions, dispatched under a bipartite civil (royal) and military (local) command from a staging area near the mouth of the Wadi Tumilat—the “Frontier of Re” (Tallet 2003).

The routes crossing the Qena Bend of the Nile attest to a similar shift in activities. Archaeological evidence from the caravansaries of Gebel Roma and Qarn el-Gir demonstrate a steady flow of traffic throughout the New Kingdom, including mounted patrols, letter carriers, and massive grain shipments (Darnell, J.C. 2002b: 138-139; for the use of horses along the roads, see also *idem* 2002b: 132-135). The few New Kingdom inscriptions at the Wadi el-Hôl support the interpretation of activities attested in the archaeological record (Darnell, J.C. 2002a: 155, 159-160)—the name of a grain measurer and the title and image of a chief of the scales of Amun augment the botanical remains of what appear to be shipments of grain to Karnak; the image of a mounted man and the signature of a chief of the stable support the evidence from Twenty-First Dynasty stelae for the use of the road as a courier’s route.

Unlike sites in the Eastern and Western Deserts, Nubia preserves a large number of New Kingdom inscriptions (Peden 2001: 83-94, 110-117, 127-133). What appear to be the official boundary markers of the southernmost extent of the pharaonic realm are rock inscriptions of Thutmose I and Thutmose III at Kurgus, part of an ensemble of carved and painted rock inscriptions at Hagar el-Merwa (for recent work at the site, see Davies 1998, 2001, 2003, 2004). A tableau at Nag Kolorodna in Nubia (Basch and Gorbea, 1968: 50-57) apparently depicts a Nubian campaign and its result, an unlabeled version of scenes such as those appearing in the speos of Horemheb at Gebel Silsila and the Beit el-Wali temple of Ramesses II (Thiem 2000: vol. 1, 141-153 and 318-311, pls. 55-61 and vol. 2, pls. 8-9; Epigraphic Survey 1967: pl. 9). As with the desert serekhs of the early dynastic period, the New Kingdom royal tableaux in Nubia extend and delineate the boundaries of pharaonic influence. The New Kingdom private and royal inscriptions at Aswan and in Nubia, characterized by their “formal” appearance, further blur the division between rock inscriptions and other commemorative monuments, a trend that continues in the Third Intermediate Period.

### The Third Intermediate Period: Formal Tableaux, Temple Annotations, and Priestly Families

The Post-Ramesside Period sees the addition of a number of formal tableaux to earlier temples that mimic more official continuations of earlier decorative programs. These tableaux range themselves with earlier rock inscriptions through the use of lapidary hieratic signs forms, and by their positioning in areas in which other, lesser, graffiti are added (Peden 2001: 266-274). An important series of graffiti on the “quay” before the First Pylon of Karnak record the level of the Nile (Peden 2001: 268-69), and even an important record of Osorkon III’s response to the inundation of Luxor Temple outwardly takes the form of a small scale hieratic graffito (Daressy 1896). Pinudjem I, Osorkon I, and Osorkon III also added hieroglyphic inscriptions, some with elaborately carved scenes, to the façade of the Colonnade Hall and the back wall of the Ramesside Court in Luxor Temple (Epigraphic Survey 1998). The inscription of Pinudjem I even necessitated the partial erasure of earlier decoration (Epigraphic Survey 1998: pls. 199-200 and pp. 52-54). The continued additions to the façade of the Colonnade Hall suggest that the area immediately to the left of the entrance was the object of particular “popular” worship and a place of votive inscriptional surcharging of the walls during the Third Intermediate Period and later (Bell 1985: 270-271, 275; *idem* 1997:135 and 163-172).

In Nubia and the quarry regions, rock inscriptions of definite Third Intermediate Period date are rare. The only lengthy historical text relating to the native Nubian rulers of this period is the large graffito of Queen Katimala, carved over erased New Kingdom decoration on the temple façade at Semna (Caminos 1998: 20-27; Darnell, J. C. 2006).

### The Late Period

Hieroglyphic and hieratic graffiti decline in number during the Late Period, while demotic graffiti begin to appear, the earliest securely dated of these being inscriptions near the Darb Rayayna road, dated to the reign of Darius I and probably left by a visitor from Kharga Oasis (di Cerbo and Jasnow 1996). Phoenician, Carian, and Greek soldiers leave graffiti in their native languages at Abu Simbel during the Nubian campaign of the third regnal year of Psammetichus II (Vittmann 2003: 61-62 and 260, n. 78). Phoenician and Aramaic graffiti also appear in a portion of the temple of Sety I at Abydos (Vittmann 2003: 62-65 and 260-261, nn. 81-88), and Aramaic inscriptions occur in the Wadi Hammamat (Vittmann 2003: 119). Greek graffiti

ultimately appear throughout the monuments of Egypt, many being visitor's inscriptions like those in the tombs of the Valley of the Kings (Baillet 1926), others *proskynemata*, inspired—like many of the Egyptian graffiti—by religious devotion (see *inter alia* Bernand 1969). During the Graeco-Roman Period visitors came to identify the northern of the two colossal statues that stand at the entrance to the ruined mortuary temple of Amenhotep III in Western Thebes with Memnon, son of Aurora, and the statue attracted a number of graffiti, including poetry composed by the court poetess Balbilla during the visit of the emperor Hadrian (Bernand and Bernand, 1960).

Demotic Egyptian graffiti—carved and written—appear at many sites. The quarries and desert roads continue to attract such inscriptions (Devauchelle and Wagner, 1984; Jasnow 1984; Cruz-Uribe 1995; Preisigke and Spiegelberg 1915; Darnell 2002a), and they proliferate at certain temples as well (lists of demotic graffiti, albeit incomplete, appear in Farid 1995 and Dijkstra 2005 [curiously omitting (p. 58) rock inscriptions from desert areas]). The small Eighteenth Dynasty temple at Medinet Habu, and its later annexes, contain a wealth of such inscriptions, a number of which take the form of documents otherwise known from papyrus sources (Thissen 1989; Edgerton 1937). Demotic graffiti from Philae and other temples to the south preserve important information regarding the final centuries of pagan cults in Aswan and Lower Nubia, and are valuable sources for understanding the interactions of Rome, Egypt, and Meroe in the Dodecaschoenus (Depauw 1997: 171; Burkhardt 1985). At Philae are the latest datable hieroglyphic (Griffith 1935-37: pl. 69 [no. 436], dated August 24, AD 394) (Figure 2) and demotic (Griffith 1935-37: pl. 55 (no. 365), dated December 11, AD 452; Hoffmann 2000: 240-242) texts, the latter approximately two centuries after the last securely dated papyrus and ostrakon (Depauw 1997: 25). Coptic and Arabic rock inscriptions are beyond the scope of the present survey, as are the bulk of the non-Egyptian rock inscriptions. Such graffiti may themselves, however, record much of interest regarding Egyptian cults; for example, primarily Greek graffiti in the temple of Sety I at Abydos augment the evidence from Ammianus Marcellinus and Coptic sources regarding the oracle of the god Bes in that temple (Frankfurter 1998: 128-129 and 170-171).

## Rock Inscriptions, Graffiti, and Religion

Although many may seem informal and the results of anything but official sponsorship and influence, a number of rock inscriptions and graffiti played definite rolls in supporting the official social and religious order. Already during the Protodynastic Period, rock inscriptions record royal Jubilee tableaux, and reveal the interactions of royalty and divinity. The formal rock inscription tableau of Monthuhotep II in the Schatt er-Rigal may in fact provide evidence for the existence during the Eleventh Dynasty of the “Theban version” of the doctrine of the divine birth of the king (Winlock 1947: 58-76; Berlev 1981; Darnell, J. C. 2004a: 26-28), well before the earliest explicit text referring to the same.

Members of the priesthood left inscriptions at a wide variety of sites, some as members of expeditionary forces (Seyfried 1981) and others traveling as part of their religious duties (Darnell 2002a: 95, 102, 120). Textual and archaeological evidence for royal statues in the desert might have been a further facet of priestly presence at rock inscription sites (Darnell 2002a: 103-4). Inscriptions of Old Kingdom priests at the Wadi Hilal, although earlier than the surviving temples of the site, nevertheless indicate the earlier presence of temples at the site and provide information on the functioning and object of the cult (Vandekerckhove and Müller-Wollermann 2001: 341-42; Darnell 2004b: 154-155). Priestly graffiti in temples provide information on the composition of particular cults, and on the manner in which members of the priesthood may have followed the divine procession (Jacquet-Gordon 2004). Middle Kingdom rock inscriptions also provide evidence for religious practices—a number of Theban graffiti of Middle Kingdom date relate to the early history of the Theban festival cycle (Winlock 1947: 77-90; Peden 2001: 29-32).

Some rock inscriptions provide evidence for the functioning of otherwise poorly attested rituals (Darnell, J. C. 2002c: 112-114). Several Middle Kingdom visitors to the Wadi el-Ḥôl vividly describe their visit as *wrš ḥr ḏw pn ḥr ḥrw nfr*—“spending the day beneath this mountain on holiday” (Darnell, J. C. 2002a: 129-138). In combination with other inscriptions depicting singers and the goddess in her bovine form (Darnell, J. C. 2002a: 93-94, 126-27), the “spending the day” inscriptions provide evidence of Hathoric worship in the remote desert. A deposit of ostrich feathers with inscribed sandstone flake at the site of Hk64, a low *Inselberg* at the northwest desert edge of Hierakonpolis—itsself preserving an interesting array of rock art and inscriptions—also

suggests the veneration of the goddess Hathor, and provide tangible evidence for desert dwellers and Nubians bringing objects of cultic significance to trade or offer in Egypt (Friedman et al. 1999; Friedman 1999). Other depictions of sporting activities, such as ritual combat and wrestling (Dunbar 1941: pl. 19 fig. 92; Váhala and Cervicek 1999: no. 459; compare Decker 1991) may also allude to festival events. Figures in festal garb and poses (holding flowers, etc.) (*cf.* Darnell, J. C. 2002a: 65-67; Váhala and Cervicek 1999, no. 292) also appear to relate to festival activities at rock inscription and graffiti sites. Some inscriptions are the products of specific festivals (Jéquier, 1933: fig. 12), and an inscription at Abu Sir links the royal cult with the worship of the goddess Sakhmet, ritual drunkenness, and the apotropaic effects of graffiti writing (Kitchen 1968-1990: vol. 3, 437).

Rock inscriptions of cultic significance may cluster at areas providing shade and something of a natural “shrine,” such as the Gebel Agg shrine near Toshka East in Nubia (Simpson, 1963: 36-44) and the *Paneaia* of the Coptos to Berenike route (Colin 1998). Quarries possessed their own divinities (Meeks 1991: 233-41), to whom a number of graffiti—especially demotic and Greek—address themselves (compare Preisigke and Spiegelberg 1915: pl. 22 [no. 306]; De Morgan, et al. 1894: 366 [b and c] and 369). Many rock inscriptions on the island of Sehel appear to relate to pilgrimage to the striking locale overlooking the First Cataract, and contribute to a proper understanding of the local religious cults (Gasse and Rondot, eds., 2004).

Inscriptions of feet (*vestigia*) appear as rock inscriptions at desert sites (Váhala and Cervicek 1999: no. 45 *et passim*; Darnell, J. C. 2002a: 121; Kaper and Willems 2002: 85-88), and are prominent in temple graffiti (compare Welsby and Anderson, eds. 2004: 169), the outlines often containing the name of the carver, with perhaps filiation (Jacquet-Gordon 2004). Although some may have the appearance of footprints, or of feet seen from above, many depict unlaced sandals. The *vestigia* are pictorial versions of inscriptions that express the desire that the name of the carver remain in the presence of a deity (compare Thissen 1989: 197-98). Probably under influence of this earlier Egyptian practice, votive feet become prominent in the Graeco-Roman Period cults of Isis and Serapis (Darnell 2003b: 112). Some *vestigia* are even depictions of naked feet, and combinations of feet and sandals (Basch and Gorbea, 1968: 62-63, 66, 78, 100). Other items of personal equipment sometimes appear in rock

art (such as archers' wrist guards—Kaper and Willems 2002: 85 and 88; Darnell 2003b: 114), and these may as well serve a similar function to that of the *vestigia*.

A number of New Kingdom rock inscriptions record hymns and prayers, most addressed to Amun (e.g. Spiegelberg 1921: nos. 904 and 914; Cerný 1956: nos. 1345 and 1394; Marciniak 1974; Klemm and Klemm 1993: 204). Injunctions to personal piety also appear (e.g. Cerný 1956: no. 1396; Gardiner 1928); a particularly fine votive inscription in sunk relief made by a man named Pahu exhorts visitors to worship the goddess Hathor properly (Plate 2) (Darnell, J. C. forthcoming d). The *ir nfr ir nfr* formula, like certain visitor's graffiti, appears to represent a standardized template for some New Kingdom religious graffiti (Marciniak 1968; Kitchen 1968-1990: vol. 7, 166-67). Some rock inscriptions also contain curses against those that would erase or damage the inscription (Žaba 1974: nos. 24, 56, 57, 58; Marciniak 1974: no. 51; also note the forthcoming publication of a “donkey curse” from the Western Desert, which applies to anyone who creates (rather than erases) an inscription—Darnell, J. C., forthcoming d). The permanent nature of rock inscriptions at times inspired funerary references, such as *hṯp di nswt* formulae (Marciniak 1981; Hintze and Reineke 1989: 37, *passim*; Darnell, J. C. 2002a: 95). Some rock inscriptions served apotropaic functions, even recording spells for magical protection, and the simple viewing or reading of texts may receive a promise of health and safety (compare Darnell, J. C. 2002a: 103-4, and the references therein). A demotic inscription in the Wadi Hammamat records a magical spell for protection against scorpions, apparently for the benefit of travelers who might not have the appropriate text in copy or memory (Vittmann 1984, 1989, and 2003: 118-119; the text contains Aramaic elements).

Graffiti annotations to tombs, as invasive and distracting as they may seem to the modern viewer and epigrapher, nevertheless appear to have been both expected and even desired by tomb owners. A Saite Period inscription provides one of the most explicit statements surviving from ancient Egypt regarding visitor's graffiti, and suggests that such texts were anticipated, welcome, and efficacious to those who will find them later (Kuhlmann 1973). Such texts appear to originate relatively early and but become more common beginning with the Eighteenth Dynasty (Peden 2001: 27, 58-69). Many of the New Kingdom visitors inscriptions follow a standard literary formula—a visitor declares that he has come to see the place, has found it beautiful like heaven with rays shining in it; he then adds perhaps an offering prayer, perhaps

also asking that heaven rain myrrh and incense upon the monument (for the formula compare McDowell 1993: 29-30). What appear to be graffiti and *dipinti* in New Kingdom tomb shafts at Aniba (Steindorff 1937: 55-57, pls. 31-33) may in fact represent the work of the tomb cutters, being a form of visitor's graffiti left by members of the actual burial party. Other graffiti, such as those within the pyramid of Sesostris III, are perhaps the spontaneous products of unanticipated "visitors" (Arnold 2002: 42-43, pls. 21 and 23-27).

### Monumentality, Innovation, and Intimacy

Although rock inscriptions are often the product of anonymous artists and even semi-literate authors, they may reveal images and inscriptions of an unexpected, even unique character, and evince an understanding of the traditional Egyptian interplay of image and text. Several Middle Kingdom inscriptions near the Second Cataract fortresses record Nile water levels (Hintze and Reineke 1989: 127-133, nos. 369-382A), some writing the word *r3*, "level," atop the upper horizontal border, which thereby becomes the mark of the actual water level, a blend of text and scene worthy of more grandiose monuments (Hintze and Reineke 1989: 129-130, nos. 374-375). An inscription may also be termed an *wḏ* "stela" (Darnell, J. C. 2003a: 35), or a *mnw*- "monument" (Darnell, J. C. 2002a: 97-98), even if it does not have the shape or outline of a free-standing monument.

The authors of rock inscriptions may also exploit the natural surfaces on which they carve, incorporating natural rock shapes into the images. Cracks in the rock surface may also become part of the image, and towropes of predynastic vessels may enter into fissures in the rock, portals into another realm (Darnell forthcoming b; compare Whitley 2000). One of the farthest flung of pharaonic rock inscriptions is a rock stela—approximately 1m high and .5m wide—depicting Ramesses III offering to Hathor, with a dedicatory inscription of a pharaonic official below, high on a rock face overlooking the mining temple at Timna in the Arabah (Ventura 1974). Although in subject matter the rock stela is a monument, the style of carving is shallow incising more appropriate to less formal inscriptions.

Several rock inscriptions record texts of no small literary merit, and a few appear to be spontaneous literary productions. A hieratic inscription at the Wadi el-Ḥôl dating to the terminal Middle Kingdom/Second Intermediate Period contains a unique

royal encomium (Darnell, J. C. 2002a: 107-119). Other rock inscription authors chose to cite extensively from known literary works, such as Sinuhe's letter to Senusret I (Figure 3) (Darnell, J. C. 2002a: 96-101), and visitors graffiti often employ formulae present in religious texts. Autobiographical inscriptions, such those in the Wadi Hammamat and at Hatnub, and the inscriptions of the soldier Tjehemau at Abisko, are so well-composed as to be literature. Finally, one of the most extraordinary pseudepigraphic literary productions takes the form of a rock inscription—the famous Famine “Stela” on a large bolder atop Sehel Island (Simpson 2003: 386-391 and references therein; Grenier 2004).

### Tools and Techniques

Apart from *dipinti*, rock inscriptions and graffiti were carved, many perhaps with flint tools (Vandekerckhove and Müller-Wollermann 2001: 347; Dunbar 1941: 22-25; Winlock 1947: 85). Those making the inscriptions may also have employed weapons or other tools, and metal workers are indeed attested at rock inscription sites (Darnell, J. C. 2002a: 58; idem, forthcoming b; Darnell, J.C. and Darnell, D.: 90 fig. 15). The techniques for making graffiti and rock inscriptions (Dunbar 1941: 19; Jacquet-Gordon 1981: 239-240) differed based on the surfaces into which they were cut. In general, engraving appears in both the limestone and sandstone countries, predominating in the former, softer stone; pecking is most common in sandstone and hard stones, although it also appears in limestone. Scraping and proper chiseling is perhaps most common in the schists and other stones of the Eastern Desert. Occasionally true sunk relief (e.g. Plate 2) and raised relief (e.g. Vandekerckhove and Müller-Wollermann 2001: vol. 2, 130 [O 11], 131 [O 14, 15, 16], *et passim*) appear at rock inscription sites, and reveal the apparently pervasive lack of boundary in the minds of the Egyptians between “formal” and “informal” epigraphic monuments. A single tableau or image may also mix multiple techniques.

### Readings:

An excellent introduction to the geographical range and general content of Egyptian rock inscriptions is Peden 2001, replacing the earlier overviews of Thissen, 1976; Desroches-Noblecourt, 1974; Habachi, 1974; Goyon, 1974; Yoyotte, 1960. For demotic graffiti see as an introduction the notes of Depauw 1997: 189 (sv. “graffiti”)

and Hoffmann 2000: 226-242 and 294-296. Much of the Predynastic material is referenced in Hendrickx 1995, and updates thereof in *Archéo-Nil*. Further inscriptions discovered by the Theban Desert Road Survey and the Yale Toshka Desert Survey will appear both in print and to some extent at: [www.yale.edu/egyptology](http://www.yale.edu/egyptology).

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