

The anthropomorphic engravings of Azrou Iklane (Guelmim Region, Morocco)

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The site of Azrou Iklane (the « Tattooed Stone ») is perhaps the oldest rock art station reported in Morocco, at the end of the 19th century (Duveyrier 1875). The approximately 10,000 pecked engravings is attributed to the Bovidian style (*ca.* 3000-1000 BC), succeeded by the Libyco-Berber style, also known as the « stage of the horsemen » (*ca.* 500 BC-1500 AD), before the tradition was perpetuated into modern and contemporary times (Graff *et al.* 2016). Although each of the chronological phases has its own particular iconographic themes, the anthropomorphic image seems to be constantly present, in varying forms and numbers.

Contexts of the site and engravings

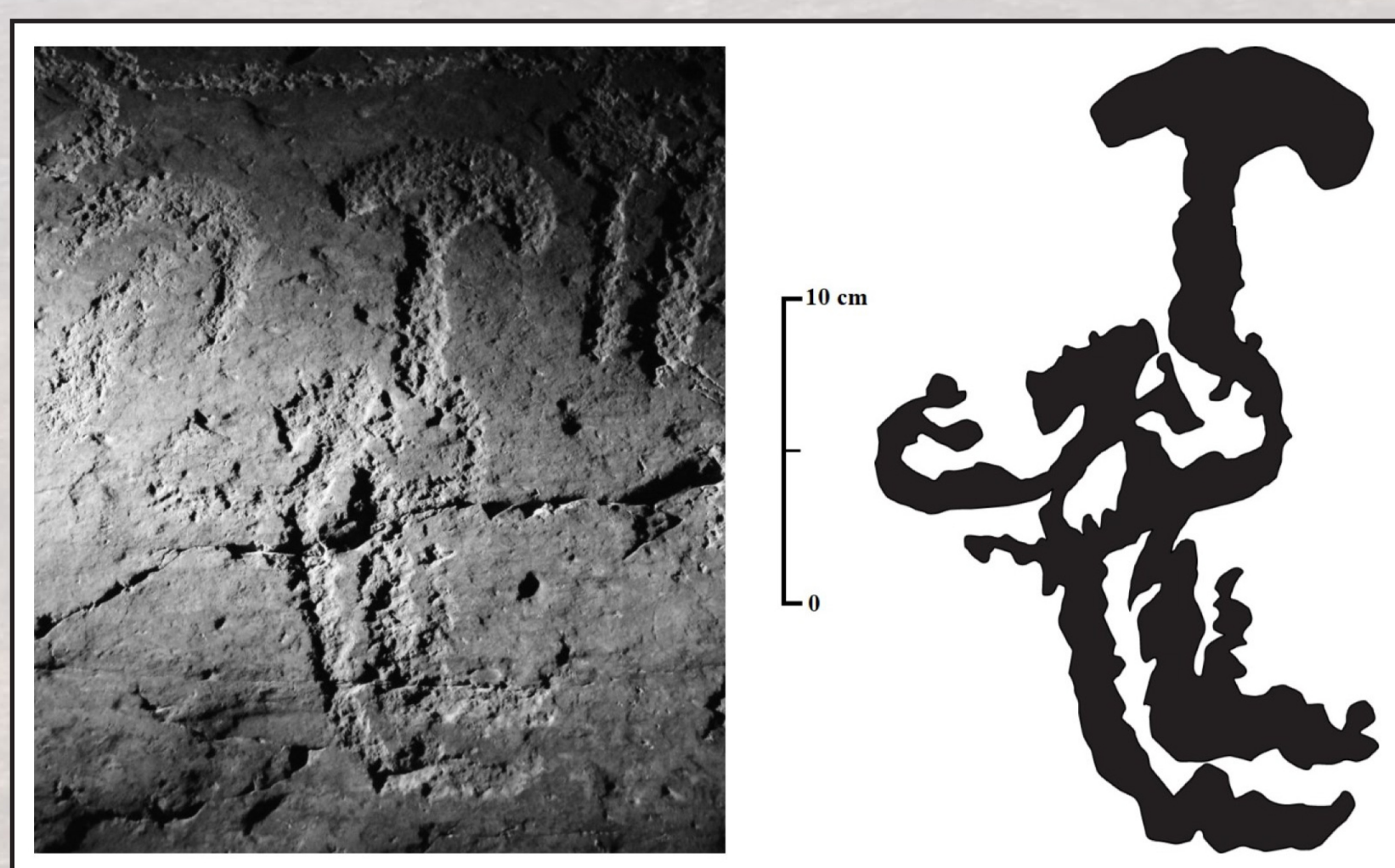
Azrou Iklane is located in south-west Morocco, about 200 km south of Agadir, on the southern edge of the Anti-Atlas. The site is a summer camp for various groups of the Aït Oussa Arabic tribe, which makes it an area for important social expressions. It is characterized by the presence, on the dry river bed of the oued, of a slab of brown quartzitic sandstone 140 m long by 20 m wide where the engravings were made.



Situation map of Azrou Iklane (© Microsoft Corporation ; J. Masson Mourey)

At Azrou Iklane, most human representations (about 650) are highly codified and appear in the form of small horsemen and infantrymen as well as isolated body parts (mainly podomorphs). Others, 83 in number, are still in full-length and have more heterogeneous dimensions and iconography.

Bronze Age anthropomorphs?



Several anthropomorphs could correspond to the very first phases of engraving of the slab. For example, we see the representation of a character with raised arms, brandishing an « hache-pelte » with a very curved edge and angled fitting. Similar images of weapons are represented in the High Atlas and their context appears generally of the Bronze Age (Chenorkian 1988). The isomorphism between the edge of the object and the head of the character is here an interesting detail.

Photography (by night) and recording of an anthropomorph of the Bovidian phase (© G. Graff ; J. Masson Mourey ; Mission « Paysages Gravés »)

Recurrences and differences within the corpus



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For the more recent phases, some anthropomorphs are strongly sexed (often male), others not at all. Some have two points represented on or below the shoulders. Many anthropomorphs for which there are few comparisons off the site display an enigmatic horizontal line crossing the body from side to side. Are they daggers or swords ? Sometimes, the hands of the characters are figured with outsized fingers and spread out.



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The most schematic anthropomorphs correspond to the letter Z of the current tfinagh alphabet which means « men » (« imazighen »). This motif, composed of a vertical bar for the trunk and two opposite arcs for the upper and lower limbs, is since the 1960s a symbol of Berber resistance.

References

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