

MACMICHAEL'S ROCK DRAWING AT JEBEL QEILI¹

Pavel Onderka²

ABSTRACT: This paper brings forth preliminary results of recent re-examination of the cave shrine at Jebel Qeili, the site best known for the rock carving showing Meroitic Prince Shorakaror. The painted depictions in the cave shrine were examined, described, and published by H. A. MacMichael and other scholars in the 20th century. Their descriptions and reproductions are summarised and commented upon. Then they are confronted with the results of recent documentation. Using the modern digital imaging it was possible to improve the previous observations and partly re-evaluate the painted depiction of the god Amun.

KEYWORDS: Jebel Qeili – Harold Alfred MacMichael – cave shrine – Amun – Meroitic Period – digital imaging

Introduction

Jebel Qeili is a Sudanese rock formation and an archaeological site located circa 100 km east of the Sudanese capital, Khartoum. The site is known above all else, for a rock carving showing Prince Shorakaror (of the 1st century CE) in front of a sun deity in all likelihood, the syncretic god Helios-Zeus-Ammon, depicted with Hellenistic traits. However, Shorakaror's inscription is not the only monument at the site dated to the Meroitic Period. A cave shrine, towards which the Shorakaror's inscription is oriented, contains a number of rock drawings, the earliest of which being discovered and described by the British colonial administrator in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Harold Alfred MacMichael (1882–1969) [Fig. 1; Pls. 1–3].

H. A. MacMichael, 1912

MacMichael visited Jebel Qeili in 1912. In a brief note he published in his book titled *A History of the Arabs in the Sudan: and some Account of the People who preceded them and of the Tribes inhabiting Darfur*, MacMichael noted Shorakaror's monument incised on the northern face of a granite boulder,³ and another monument dated to the Meroitic Period

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2 Contacts: Pavel Onderka, National Museum – Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures, Ancient Near East and Africa Collection, Prague, Czech Republic; e-mail: pavel.underka@nm.cz. The article was written within the framework of the project 'The Building Program of King Natakamani and Queen Amanitore' supported by the Czech Science Foundation (grant no. 18-00454S). The present author is much indebted to Juweriya Osman, Abdelrahman Ali Mohamed, and Madin Hassouna.

3 Cf. Eide et al. 1998, pp. 909–912; Hintze 1959, pp. 189–190, Fig. 2.



Fig. 1. Schematic plan rendering the topography of the main rock formations of Jebel Qeili and location of the Merotic cave shrine complex.

(ca. 300 BCE – 350 CE), namely a ‘drawing which Mr. Griffith⁴ thinks represent the lion-headed Arsenuphis [i.e., Arensnuphis] or Apizemak [i.e., Apedemak]’.⁵ MacMichael used the term ‘cave’, an actual cave shrine,⁶ located in the vicinity of Shorakaror’s monument. The cave shrine takes the form of a shelter. Its sides consist of fallen boulders from the main jebel, which incidentally formed an arched inner space tapering towards its end.

MacMichael made a reference only to a single rock drawing located in the cave shrine [Pl. 4], as he probably paid attention only to the largest feature of the south wall’s decoration. Later visitors documented more features of the wall’s decoration, while the current examination brought further details to light.⁷

J. W. Crowfoot, 1920

Eight years after MacMichael, the site was visited by the British educational administrator and archaeologist, John Winter Crowfoot (1873–1959). His description of Meroitic monuments at the location was more elaborate. Again, he began with Shorakaror’s monument and then preceded to the inside of the cave shrine:

The carving, which is merely traced in outline, represents a Meroitic King, whose name was cut in an illegible cartouche above his head, worshipping a rayed solar divinity to whom he was apparently a number of captives bound in the conventional manner; the free spaces of the rock face are covered with unfinished outline sketches of man falling in battle. Opposite this on the lower slopes of the Jebel are some paintings in red in the inner side of some rocks which form a sort of arch: these paintings in red on the inner side of some rocks which were first reported by Mr. MacMichael, are hard to make out, one of them probably represents the lion-headed Meroitic god, Apezimek [i.e., Apedemak], others though painted with the same colour are the works of much ruder hand and depict animals in the style of three animal figures carved on a neighbouring rock to which we shall return later. All the details of the principal carving are characteristic of the Meroitic culture which flourished just before and after the beginning of the Christian era...⁸

Crowfoot apparently saw the very same drawing inside the cave shrine, as MacMichael had done. He also pointed, however, to smaller figures of animals which surrounded the assumed image of Apedemak, and made an important note concerning two different qualities, or styles in rendition of the divine figure and the animals.

G. O. Whitehead and F. Addison, 1926

The next account on the Meroitic monuments at Jebel Qeili came out a further six years later, when G. O. Whitehead and F. Addison published their treatise about the site.⁹ As

4 Francis Llewellyn Griffith (1862–1934), the British Egyptologist and decipherer of Meroitic script.

5 MacMichael 1967, 1.45, footnote 2; see also Zach 1995, pp. 105–106.

6 Williams 2006, pp. 152–153.

7 Onderka and Abdelrahman Ali, *in prep.*

8 Crowfoot 1920, p. 88.

9 Whitehead and Addison 1926.

a rule, they dedicated most of their attention to Shorakaror's monument, but they also published tracing of drawings from the cave shrine discovered by MacMichael in 1912 and seen by Crowfoot in 1920.

Having presented the analysis of Shorakaror's monument, Whitehead and Addison extensively described:

a picture painted upon a smooth slab of rock some 3 feet long by 2 ½ feet high. It is to be found above one's head at the entrance of the cave and faces inward. The main figure is of a seated god. [...] The god is apparently ram-headed rather than lion-headed, and so represents Ammon [!] rather than Apezimak [i.e., Apedemak]. Behind him stands a goddess recognizable from her vulture headdress. [...] Two figures approach the deities. The first is a typical Meroitic queen. [...] Behind her stands a man...¹⁰

The above quoted text describes the second most famous Meroitic monument at Jebel Qeili, namely the panel showing seated ram-headed Amun with a feather crown on his head, followed by his standing consort Mut with a vulture headdress and the double crown of the Two Lands (not recognised by Whitehead and Addison but apparent from their drawing),¹¹ approached by a queen and a prince/royal consort.¹²

In fact, only later in the text, Whitehead and Addison turned to the drawing which had been previously described by both MacMichael and Crowfoot. The drawing is located at the southern side of the 'arch'. The sloping wall of the cave shrine i.e., one side of the arch is formed by an almost flat side of a boulder, which served as an ideal background for rock drawings of even vast dimensions. Whitehead and Addison documented both horizontal ends of the wall by drawings which were published as part of their article.¹³

The rear end of the wall is described in the following terms:

Fig[ure] 3 taken from the right-hand wall of the cave and some distance in, consists almost entirely of goats, which may be recognized by their short upturned tails. The mass of lines covering the right hand side of Fig. 3 are hardly intelligible. If it is one figure it is out of proportion to the rest. There is some indication of a beak at the top, so that a bird or birds with long necks and long tail-feathers or stilt-like legs may have been intended [Fig. 2, *right*].¹⁴

The front end is described as follows:

Fig[ure] 4 shows a group of animals on the right-hand side of the entrance to the grotto [i.e. the cave shrine]. These are clearer, bigger, and better drawn than those inside. All are cattle with the possible exception of the animal at the right-hand bottom corner which, from its arched tail and hollow back, may represent a monkey [Fig. 2, *left*].

¹⁰ Whitehead and Addison 1926, p. 52

¹¹ Whitehead and Addison 1926, Fig. 2.

¹² Cf. e.g. Zach 1995.

¹³ Whitehead and Addison 1926, Figs. 3–4.

¹⁴ Whitehead and Addison 1926, p. 53.



Fig. 2. Whitehead's and Addison's tracing of the drawing of Amun and its accompanying depictions (Whitehead and Addison 1926, Figs. 3–4).

Whitehead's and Addison's suggestion that the right-hand end of the wall showed a disproportionately large figure was correct. Judging from the descriptions by MacMichael and Crowfoot as well as from their disregard of other figures which were clearly distinguishable in the panel showing ram-headed Amun, Mut, the queen and the prince, one may assume that the large-scale figure at the northern end of the south wall was the depiction observed and described by MacMichael and Crowfoot.

Butana Expedition, 1958

In 1958, the Butana Expedition of the Humboldt University, headed by Fritz Hintze (1915–1993) visited Jebel Qeili and examined the drawings on the southern wall:

There are rock paintings on the southern slope of the mountain in the large cave where there is the Meroitic painting on the roof [...] The paintings in the cave which are red in colour are on the right wall (seen from the entrance) and originally covered an area 5.45 × 2.40 m, but now there are only traces left near the entrance and on the inner end of the wall. These were noted by Addison, who published exact details.¹⁵

The Butana expedition's preliminary report concludes the overview of first-hand accounts describing the drawing which MacMichael recorded in 1912.

¹⁵ Hintze 1959, p. 191.

Current research

Over the past couple of years, the present writer has made several visits to the archaeological site of Wad Ben Naga. One of the purposes was to carry out a systematic survey of the site with special attention paid to Meroitic monuments. During this survey, the southern wall of the cave shrine was documented by means of digital imaging. This type of documentation enabled the manipulation of the photographs in order to raise the visibility of the drawings preserved on the wall of the cave shrine [Figs. 3–4].

In light of the current examination, one has to point out that the divine figure discovered by Harold Alfred MacMichael represents the ram-headed Amun (who dwelt in Jebel Qeili) and not Apedemak. The current examination better documented individual features of the figure by raising the transparency of the drawing. The god is shown striding to the right. The front part of the body is badly preserved, as already indicated by the drawing of Whitehead and Addison.¹⁶ His wide ram's eye is clearly visible. His



Fig. 3. The drawing of the figure of Amun from the cave shrine at Jebel Qeili. The comparison of: from left the tracing of Whitehead and Addison, digital photography, and digital photography manipulated with dedicated software (Photo: Pavel Onderka).

16 Whitehead and Addison 1926, Fig. 3.

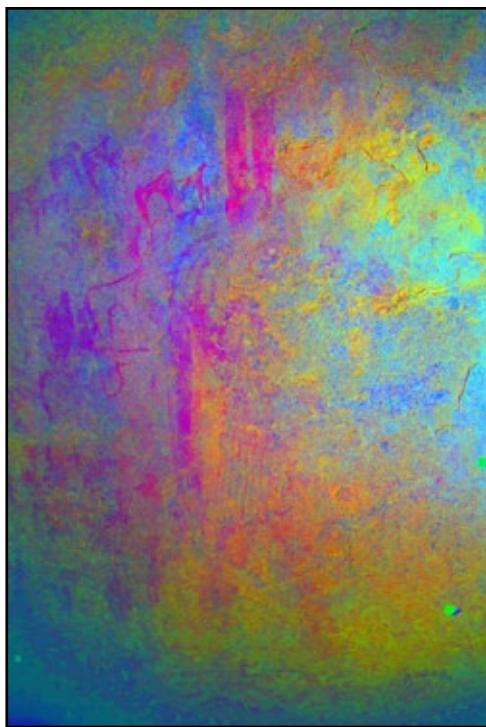


Fig. 4. The digital photography manipulated with dedicated software of the drawing of the figure of Amun and its surroundings from the cave shrine at Jebel Qeili (Photo: Pavel Onderka).

head is adorned with a crown consisting of two ostrich feathers, a solar disc, and an *uraeus*. He has a shoulder-length wig, wears a pleated kilt fastened around his waist and a scale-shirt. His left arm is not preserved. His right arm hangs down along his body. He likely holds an *ankh* in his right hand. The figure is painted in red pigment and no other colouration was detected.

The quality of drawing meets the same standards that one witnesses in the case of Shorakaror's monument. The figure of Amun is highly elaborate, as individual details of both his body and garment may be recognised. The major difference between the two rests in the technique of the two depictions. Shorakaror's monument is carved into the granite boulder, as it stood outside and was exposed to weathering while MacMichael's figure was hidden under the arch of the cave shrine. Therefore, there should be no doubt that the figure of ram-headed Amun was a piece of 'official art', and not a mere manifestation of personal piety. The figure might have originally been a part of a larger scene, possibly similar to that seen on the panel set into the arch's roof.

Conclusion

In 1912, MacMichael, while inspecting the cave shrine, discovered the largest preserved figure on the southern wall of the cave shrine's arch which he incorrectly identified, with the help of F. L. Griffith, as that of the Meroitic god Apedemak or Arensnuphis. The next one to see the drawing was Crowfoot in 1920. The drawing that they mentioned is in fact an larger-than-life-size figure of ram-headed Amun striding towards the entrance to the cave shrine.

Surprisingly, neither MacMichael nor Crowfoot made an allusion to the panel on the roof of the cave shrine's arch which depicts ram-headed Amun, Mut being approached by the queen, and the prince. Only Whitehead and Addison recorded and described the panel in 1926 and thus should be considered as its discoverers.

The rock drawing represents one of numerous attestations of indispensable Meroitic activity at the site, of which thorough analysis is needed in order to understand the role Jebel Qeili played in religious, economic, and political life of the Kingdom of Meroe.

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Pl. 1. Location of the Shorakaror's monument and the cave shrine at Jebel Qeili, aerial view.



Pl. 2. Location of the Shorakaror's monument and the cave shrine at Jebel Qeili, view from the foot of the main rock formation (Photo: Pavel Onderka).



Pl. 3. Location of the Shorakaror's monument and the cave shrine at Jebel Qeili, view from the top of the main rock formation (Photo: Pavel Onderka).



Pl. 4. The cave shrine at Jebel Qeili (Photo: Pavel Onderka).

