

‘Here come the brides’: reading the neolithic paintings from Uan Derbuaen (Tasili-n-Ajjer, Algeria)

Aquí vienen las novias: leyendo las pinturas neolíticas de Uan Derbuaen (Tasili n’Ajer, Argelia)

Augustin F. C. Holl^a

ABSTRACT

The Tassil-n-Ajjer mountain range is well known for its phenomenal richness in rock-shelters and cave paintings. Generations of researchers have surveyed, mapped, drafted and discussed different facets of these Tassili paintings. The diversity and versatility of the paintings traditions of the Tassili make difficult any attempt at straightforward generalization, whether stylistic or thematic. Each painting’s station appears to be unique and conveys its own suggestions that have to be studied extensively and systematically. In the approach outlined in this paper –the iconographic approach–, paintings are viewed as complex sets of ‘artifacts’ arranged by the creative minds of the actual artists. How did these artists practice their crafts? What iconic elements did they choose to represent and why? How and why are these selected elements arranged and combined? These are some of the questions addressed in this paper. The new readings of the Uan Derbuaen paintings allow to suggest a staging and grand representation of matrimonial arrangements, the final travel of the brides.

RESUMEN

La cordillera montañosa del Tasili n’Ajer es bien conocida por su fenomenal riqueza en abrigos y cuevas pintados. Generaciones de investigadores han prospectado, cartografiado, dibujado y discutido diferentes facetas de estas pinturas del Tasili. La diversidad y versatilidad de las tradiciones pictóricas del Tasili hace difícil cualquier

intento de generalización directa ya sea estilística o temática. Cada estación pintada parece ser única y expresiva de sugerencias propias que deben ser estudiadas extensa y sistemáticamente. En el enfoque esbozado en este artículo, un enfoque iconográfico, las pinturas son consideradas como series complejas de “artefactos” organizados por las mentes creativas de los artistas reales. ¿Cómo desarrollaban sus habilidades esos artistas? ¿Qué elementos icónicos escogieron para la representación y por qué? ¿Cómo y por qué esos elementos seleccionados se organizaron y combinaron? La nueva lectura de las pinturas de Uan Derbuaen permite sugerir una puesta en escena y una gran representación de los arreglos matrimoniales, el viaje final de las novias.

Key words: Rock Art; Cognition; Tassilian Iconography; Central Sahara; Uan Derbuaen.

Palabras clave: Arte rupestre; Iconografía del Tasili; Sahara central; Uan Derbuaen.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are different approaches to art in general and past rock art in particular. This diversity is partly understandable in terms of academic traditions and individual’s idiosyncrasies. Some approaches are predominantly descriptive and taxonomic. Others are above all interpretative, with however several degrees of gradation between these two poles. In rock art research, addressing

^a Dépt. d’Anthropologie, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense. 200 Avenue de la République. 92000 Nanterre, France. Dept. of Ethnology and Anthropology, Xiamen University, Fujian, P.R. China. E-mail: hollafc@gmail.com
Recibido 10-XII-2015; aceptado 6-V-2016.

the issues summarized under the terms: “When”, “Where”, and “Why”, is not as easy as it sounds at first glance. It is nonetheless the main aims of scientists’ works in this research field. Adding the “How” question to these basic “Ws” makes the analysis much more difficult but generates exciting approaches to the topic.

The issue at hand is fundamentally cognitive from all sides of the equation. First, from the artists’/painters’ viewpoints. Second, from that of Tassilian pastoralists’ viewers and performers. Third, from that of contemporary researchers and analysts. And fourth, from that of present-day readers and viewers. Whatever position – emic and/or etic – one would like to adopt, it is axiomatic that all contemporary researchers, from local and/or foreign extractions, are outsiders. Is it possible for outsiders to read, decipher, and understand the iconographic and symbolic expressions of remote and vanished societies from the past? That is the key question. “...narratives from a distant culture, remote in time and space, are inserted in a world of symbolic values and pragmatics of discourse forms that give them meaning. They require transcultural translation efforts and consequently, an anthropological hermeneutics” (Calame 2015: 34-35, my translation).

The burgeoning development in the field of past rock art research suggests the answer to be an emphatic YES! But how does one manage to do that?

As the saying goes, “the devil is in the details”. A straightforward interpretative approach to rock art is very tempting but misleading most of the time. A “Rosetta Stone” approach based on well-grounded ethnography can be very helpful (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1999; David 2002; Lewis-Williams and Pearce 2004; Lewis-Williams and Challis 2011). Such situations are not only exceptional almost everywhere (Smith 1993; Muzzolini 1995; Bâ and Dieterlen 1966a, b; Lefebvre 1962; Lhote 1966, 1973; Le Quellec 2002, 2006) but also severely limited in their possibilities of shedding light on remote and vanished cultural practices and experiences. The “How” question, referring to techniques and “Know-how”, intends to take the Tassilian artists/painters seriously into consideration. One has to try to understand their craft, their know-how, and their techniques as rigorously and systematically as possible.

In this paper, the research program sketchily outlined above is implemented through the

iconographic theory and methodology. An approach developed and tested on a number of case studies during the last two decades (Holl 1995, 2000, 2002, 2004a, b; Holl and Dueppen 1999). The methodology crafted to analyze complex Tassilian paintings integrates embedded hierarchical levels. 1) The basic unit is the element: a line, color, or any other aspect of a recognizable shape. 2) Different elements are combined to create motifs: identifiable beings or objects. 3) A combination of motifs produces scenes, with most of the time, a narrative character. 4) A combination of scenes generates a composition. And finally, 5) series of compositions form the repertoire of a paintings’ station. The analytical framework presented above is robust, simple, and straightforward. The interpretation of what is being represented is harder. Demonstrated historical cultural continuity in which descendant-communities are linked to past creations can be helpful. The absence of such possibilities leaves the researchers with difficult options. In one, adopted in this paper, the performances drafted in the paintings can point to aspects of social life documented in the current literature on pastoral societies anthropology. Gestures are polysemic, sometime ambiguous, and culture-specific. But the actual landscape, patterns of land-use, the archaeological record, as well as re-iteration and similarity of contexts of certain art-motifs can help narrowing the range and pointing to plausible meanings.

Considered from the vantage point of more than a century and half of research and exploration, Central Sahara paintings sites are clearly not distributed randomly throughout the landscape. They are instead clustered differentially, as intentional part of larger Tassilian pastoral-nomads cultural landscapes.

2. TASSILIAN PASTORAL-NOMADS CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

The Tassili-n-Ajjer (the Mountain of Rivers in Tuareg language) is a rugged mountain range located in the Central Sahara (Fig. 1). It is oriented Southeast-Northwest, with elevation ranging from 1600 to 1750 m above sea level (asl). It is surrounded along its northern flank by sandy and

rocky lowlands. Pastoral nomadic societies took root in Central Sahara during the Early Holocene and left evidence of their presence in both lowlands and highlands. In rainy seasons and depending on the quality and quantity of rainfall, pastoralists groups were scattered in small family units in the sandy lowlands where thousands of their fire-places were recorded. They practiced transhumance, in the Tadrart Acacus and the Tassili-n-Ajjer as well, using the multiple rivers valleys as transhumance corridors. The highlands, at higher elevations with their springs and other permanent water bodies, were optimal dry seasons camping areas. In simple terms, the Tassilian pastoralists' cultural landscape was made of sandy lowlands, optimal rainy season camping areas, with almost all the burials and cemeteries recorded in the study area. That extensive grazing area was complemented by the highlands optimal dry seasons camping area, with virtually all the rock paintings stations recorded so far. And finally, the hydrographic network, with the rivers valleys used as transhumance corridors.

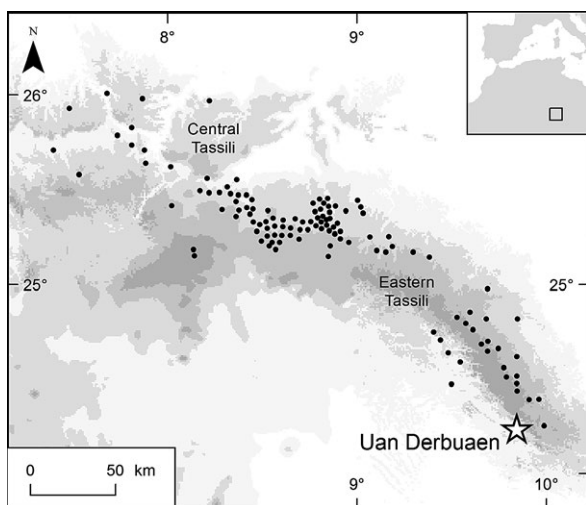


Fig. 1. General distribution of paintings stations and location of Uan Derbuaen in the Tassili-n-Ajjer, south-eastern Algeria (modified from Holl 2004: XVII, Map 1). Digital Elevation Model source: GTOPO30 (Data available from the U.S. Geological Survey). Continent boundaries source: ESRI Data & Maps. Map by Antonio Uriarte González (Laboratory of Remote Sensing and Landscape Archaeology, Institute of History, The Spanish National Research Council - CSIC).

Tassilian rock paintings sites have fascinated researchers during the last 20th century. Explorations are still going on, with new sites being found today (Smith 1993, Muzzolini 1995; Lhote 1966, 1973; Hachid 2000; Le Quellec 2002, 2006; Holl 2004a, b; Barbaza 2015). They are distributed in two large concentrations 1). One is in the central Tassili and the other in the Eastern Tassili.

3. THE PAINTINGS FROM UAN DERBUAEN

Henri Lhote research and art recording methods have been harshly criticized during the last few years (Keenan 2002; Bahn 2010). For Keenan (2002), he was a self-aggrandizing and destructive collectors of artifacts. For Bahn (2010: 180) who focuses on Lhote and team's art recording techniques, "the wetting certainly contributed to severe damages. It makes the figures clearer in the short term, but far less clear in the long term". The reliability of some of Lhote team's recording of tassilian paintings has been questioned by some writers (Keenan 2002). Does this revisionist approach to Lhote's research legacy requires to throw away all the recorded paintings? My answer is no. When feasible in the near future, sites' visits will help check the accuracy of the copies if the originals are still available.

Uan Derbuaen rock-shelter is located in the central part of the Eastern Tassili, approximately at 24° 34' 31" latitude North and 9° 38' 36" longitude East, at 1750 m asl. The discussion presented in this paper is based on a series of paintings, originally made by Mr. De Colombel as artist-member of Henri Lhote Tassili Expedition, published in Küper (1978). Precise details of the shape, size, structure, and location of Uan Derbuaen site are elusive at best. As has been the case with Dr Chen shelter in Central Tassili, one has to start with the analysis of each of the published panel, termed composition, and search for a certain coherence, or lack thereof.

3.1. Composition 1: Cattle Herd on the Move

Composition 1 features a cattle herd on the move (Fig. 2). It is a marvelous drafting exercise.

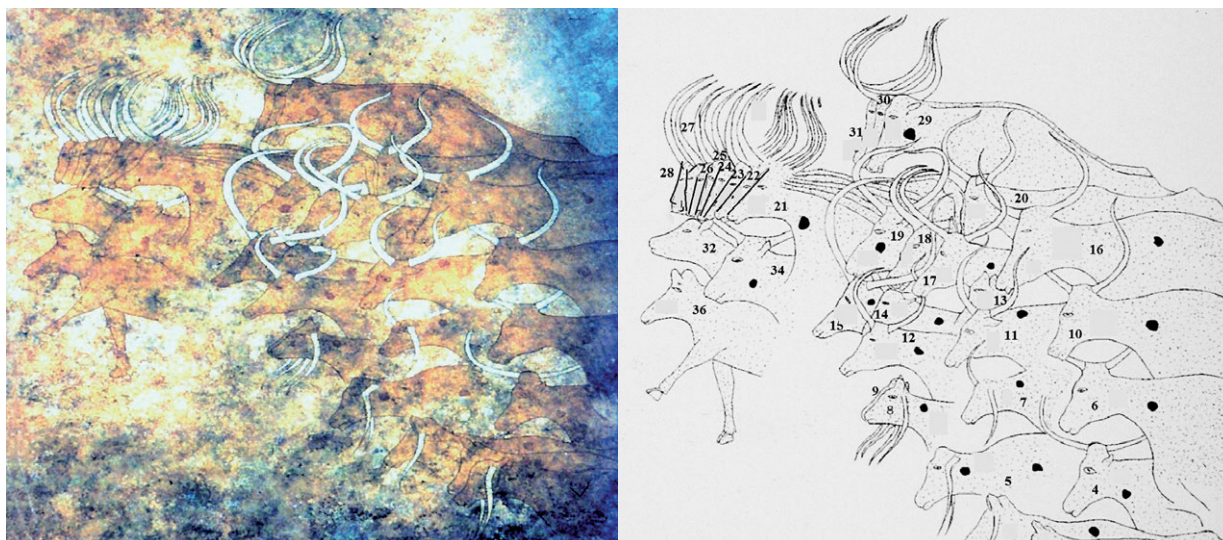


Fig. 2. Uan Derbuaen composition 1 (after De Colombel, artist of the Lhote Tassili Expedition, in Küper 1978) (in colour in the electronic version).

The animals' coats are painted in yellow reddish ochre. The horns are white. The painting is made of distinct portions. The cattle heads are drafted in parallel lines, with however significant distinct features. The front line includes specimen 34, 35, 36, one mature animal with a red dot on the cheek (34) and two hornless calves (35 and 36). The top second line presents a symmetric mirror effect with specimen 21 to 28. Eyes, horns, and the animals back line are drafted in perspective, with a red dot on specimen 21. The same technique is used for the drafting of the specimen 29 – 31 group in the top middle of the composition. The remaining part of the herd is drafted in three more or less parallel lines.

Specimen 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 12, 14, 15 are in the front line and present two distinct horn-shapes. The specimens in the bottom center have downward-pointing horns. Those in the center –specimen 12, 14, and 15– have upward oriented horns.

Line 2 is made of specimen 4, 7, 11, 13, 17, 18 and 19, with mostly upward horns and red dots. And finally line 3, the rear one, is comprised of specimen 6, 10, 16 and 20.

The series of red dots delineate regular linear patterns that crisscross the whole herd. The horn-shapes point to individual aesthetic preferences as they can be manipulated to meet individual pastoralists taste.

3.2. Composition 2: riding ladies

Composition 2, with polychrome motifs, is made of two scenes. Scene 1 is located along the left margin of the composition (Fig. 3). It is comprised of the hind part of all cattle, specimen 12 and 18, already represented in Composition 1 (5 and 10). Scene 2 at the center includes a group of four elegantly dressed women riding oxen and five cattle heads. The animals are painted in white and yellow reddish ochre. Each woman has a unique garment and hairdo.

Woman 4 on ox 2 is holding a riding string in her right hand. The string is attached to the ox chin. Her garment is dark red with parallel darker bands at bottom as well as vertical parallel black lines from the left shoulder. Her hairdo is rectangular in shape and reddish ochre in color. Two additional walking animals (1 and 9) are represented by their horns only.

There is a “hard to decipher” motif 7 between oxen 2 and 14. It nonetheless looks like the top of the hairdo of a worn-out lady who may have been riding ox 9.

Woman 22, riding the white and yellow-red-dish ox 14, wears a dark red ochre garment with parallel black bands along the lower fringe. The larger band is made of herring-bones patterns. The



Fig. 3. Uan Derbuaen composition 2 (after De Colombel, artist of the Lhote Tassili Expedition, in Küper 1978) (in colour in the electronic version).

hairdo, dark red in general, is complemented by a white bonnet on top.

Woman 15 riding ox 13 has an elaborate costume. She is wearing a broad puffy white dress spread all over her mount, capped on shoulders with a yellow scarf. Her hairdo is dark-red with pointed ends in the front and the top. She seems to have in addition a leather handbag at her left arm.

Finally, woman 23 riding ox 25 is partly concealed by the other riders. She seems to hold a harness string in her right hand. Her hairdo light yellow in color is double-crescent shape in front and back. She wears a yellow reddish garment with patterns of oblique crisscrossed lines.

Motif 10 in the bottom left of the composition represents an unusually long horn associated with a red dot. It is also worth noting that each of the mounted oxen has been stamped with a red dot.

Clearly and unambiguously, composition 2 features a group of well dressed women riding oxen and following a cattle herd. This kind of procession arrangement can take place in many circumstances; moving from one camping site to the next as part of the annual transhumance cycle; going to visit a neighboring group for a celebration; or going to the performance of important regional ritual ceremonies.

3.3. Composition 3: merging with the “Cargo-train”

Composition 3 features an additional component of a pastoral-nomads group on the move. The drafting technique used in this case too is articulated on parallel oblique lines, with however clusters representing different activities (Fig. 4).

Proceeding from rear to front, the rear line is comprised of specimen 20 and 21 in the bottom right, 37 and 69 in the center, and finally 62 and 43 at the center top. Each of the drafted ox has a specific horn shape; tilted downward for specimen 21, 37, and 69; oriented forward for specimen 63, and finally, pointing upward for specimen 20 and 62. The coat also is unique for each specimen. The white ox, specimen 63, is mounted by a partly worn out woman wearing a black fringed reddish yellow garment. Specimen 62 at the top end of the line is a pack-animal carrying a load on the head/neck.

The mid-line, that runs from specimen 19 at bottom to 58 at top, includes six drafted animals, with some extensively worn-out. As is the case for the rear line, in this one too, the artist(s) managed to single out each individual animal. Only the head with peculiar horn-shape of specimen 19 is preserved as is the case for the horns of specimen 35. Specimen 36, with a dark red and white coat is hornless. Specimen 32, 33, and 47, with light yellow to partially dark coats fill the mid-center part of the line, each with a specific horn-shape. Specimen 48 is a pack animal carrying a load, an elaborate leather bag on the head/neck. There is an interesting motif, that of a large crescent shape big-horn (60), unattached to any ox head. And finally, specimen 58, at the end of the line, with a white and black coat and lyre-shape horns, is a pack animal carrying a leather bag on the head/neck.

The third oblique line runs from specimen 18, represented here by its horns, in the bottom to specimen 38 in the top. It includes the representation of 7 oxen, each with individualized characteristics. Their coats are polychrome, light yellow, dark red and white. Specimen 18 has lyre-shape upward horns. Specimen 17 has concave forward pointing horns and a S-shape tail. Specimen 16 head is worn out. It has a red dot on the back and a tail twisted on the left flank. Ox 31 is hornless with a red dot and a tail in still position. Ox 24 has long round-shape horns. Its coat is dark red with two red dots on the rear flank. It is a pack animal carrying a particularly elaborate leather bag. Specimen 30 has special ‘antelope-like’ horns tilted downwards and in opposite direction; the left one is curved backward and the right one forward. Finally, ox 38 at the top end of the line is mounted by woman 43. She is carrying, a series of objects difficult to identify: a stick-like object (39); a small container attached to a pipe (45); and an unknown instrument (46). Her garment is dark red with white horizontal and parallel bands on the fringe. It is decorated with a series of dark vertical lines in a fan-shape arrangement. Her hairdo is dome-shape, dark red in color, with a black outline. It is difficult to be too assertive, but she also seems to be wearing a necklace.

Finally, there is a group of oxen represented in the bottom left of the composition. The number of represented specimens is difficult to figure out

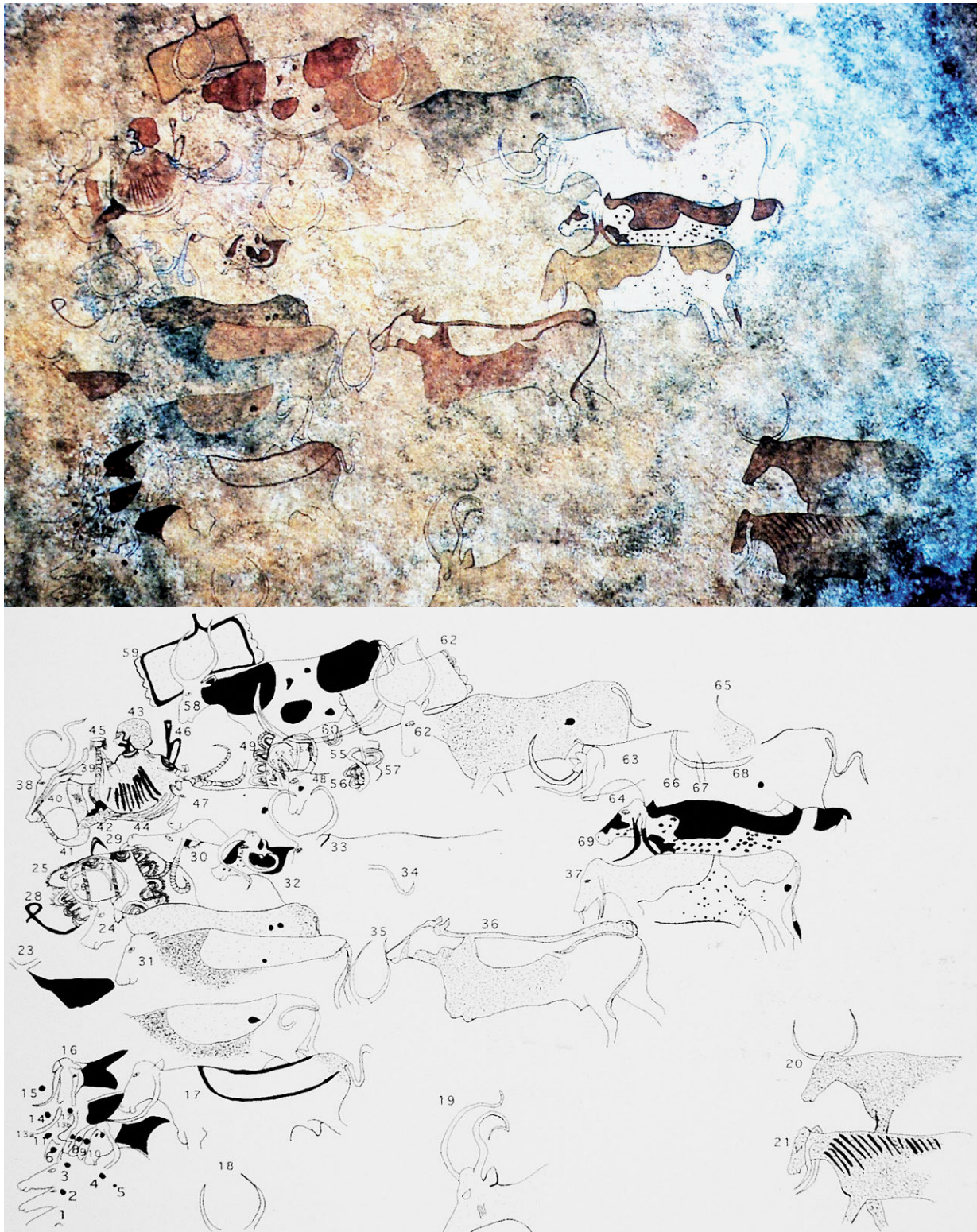


Fig. 4. Uan Derbuaen composition 3 (after De Colombel, artist of the Lhote Tassili Expedition, in Küper 1978) (in colour in the electronic version).

because of the mirror effect. One can nonetheless single out specimen 1, 2, and 3, drafted from the muzzle to the eyes with associated red dots; then the succession of specimen 7, 8, 9, and 10 with their red dots; specimen 13 and 16. All the represented horns are tilted downward and there is a series of floating red dots (4, 5, 6, 11, 14, 15), unattached to any specific animal. Specimen 23, with part of its coat and horns represented sets the top limit of this cluster.

Relying on all the clues discussed so far, the red dot, horn-shape, coat color, performed action, composition 3 appears to be organized into three scenes. Scene 1, at the bottom left of the composition, includes a series of 10 oxen or more in static position.

Scene 2, is spread almost all over the bottom half of the composition and includes all the non-red-dot oxen, specimen 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, and 36. The herd without cattle-marks represented in this case appears to come from a different direction to merge with the red-dotted cattle.

Finally, Scene 3 is stretched across the top part of the composition. It represents the “Cargo train” with pack animal 24, 48, 58, and 62 in the care of riding women 43 and 65. They are moving in the company of red-dotted oxen 16, 31, and 47 in the front and specimen 37 and 69 in the rear. Based on subtle differences in a combination of characteristics such as the elaborateness of hairdo, dress code, and position in the procession, it can be suggested that the four leather baggage’s in care of the modestly dressed riding women belong to the four riding ladies from the previous composition 2.

Composition 3 thus features the merging of cattle herds, the red-dot and the non-red-dot, from distinct Tassilian pastoral-nomad groups on their way to a specific but as yet unknown place and event.

3.4. Composition 4: the Merging Party on the starting line

Composition 4 features the merging party, another pastoralist group, moving in the same direction, toward the same goal. It represents a cattle herd along with a group of 7 riding women (Fig. 5). As is now well understood, the artists/painters relied on the now familiar technique of

oblique and parallel lines for the rendering of wave-like motions of the herd. All the riding women are drafted in the top half of the composition, with the remaining portion filled with the rest of the herd.

The front line starts from motif 1 in the bottom left and ends with image 22/23 and 24-29 in the top left. Specimen 1 represents the light yellow ochre rear end of an ox. Specimen 17 at mid-line is the 2/3, from the chest to the rear end, of a relatively large animal with yellow – dark reddish coat. Two humans and one mounted animal are represented at the top end of the front line. The male, image 23, wearing a long dark-reddish dress lifts his right arm and seems to be holding an undetermined object/creature (22), maybe a very young calf. His hairdo is convex-shape with two symmetric horn-like items. He is very likely, the principal herder. His body is clearly tilting back in a considerable effort to slow down and stop. His lifted right arm, sends the “STOP” signal to the whole party, riding women and the rest of the herd. The principal herder is accordingly organizing the convoy, for an orderly departure of this other pastoral-nomad group. Finally, the mounted woman 26 and her mount, ox 24, closes the top end of the line. The rider wears a dark yellow garment with horizontal and parallel dark red bands along the lower fringe. Her hairdo, dark red in color, is fur-cap like in shape with concave top. The mount, specimen 2, is a relatively large and strong bull with light yellow ochre coat and profuse stripes on the neck, chest, as well as the top rear.

The second line is comprised of oxen 3, 18 and 19, with in addition riding women 34 and 37. All featured oxen have the same horn-shape, crescent-like, with however subtle gradation in coat’s colors. Specimen 3 at the bottom end has a light yellow ochre coat with a red dot at neck. Specimen 18, toward the center, has a bi-chrome coat, light yellow ochre all over, with two darker yellow-reddish bands. In addition, there is a vertical band in the front part, on shoulder-neck down to the front legs, and a thin horizontal one on the rear back and tail. The third ox in line, specimen 19, is also bi-chrome, light-yellow ochre, a red dot at mid-abdomen, and darker yellow-reddish large vertical bands in the front and the rear. The mount of riding women 34 is clearly a bull. The head is light-yellow ochre. The rest of the coat is entirely dark-yellow ochre with a relatively large red dot.

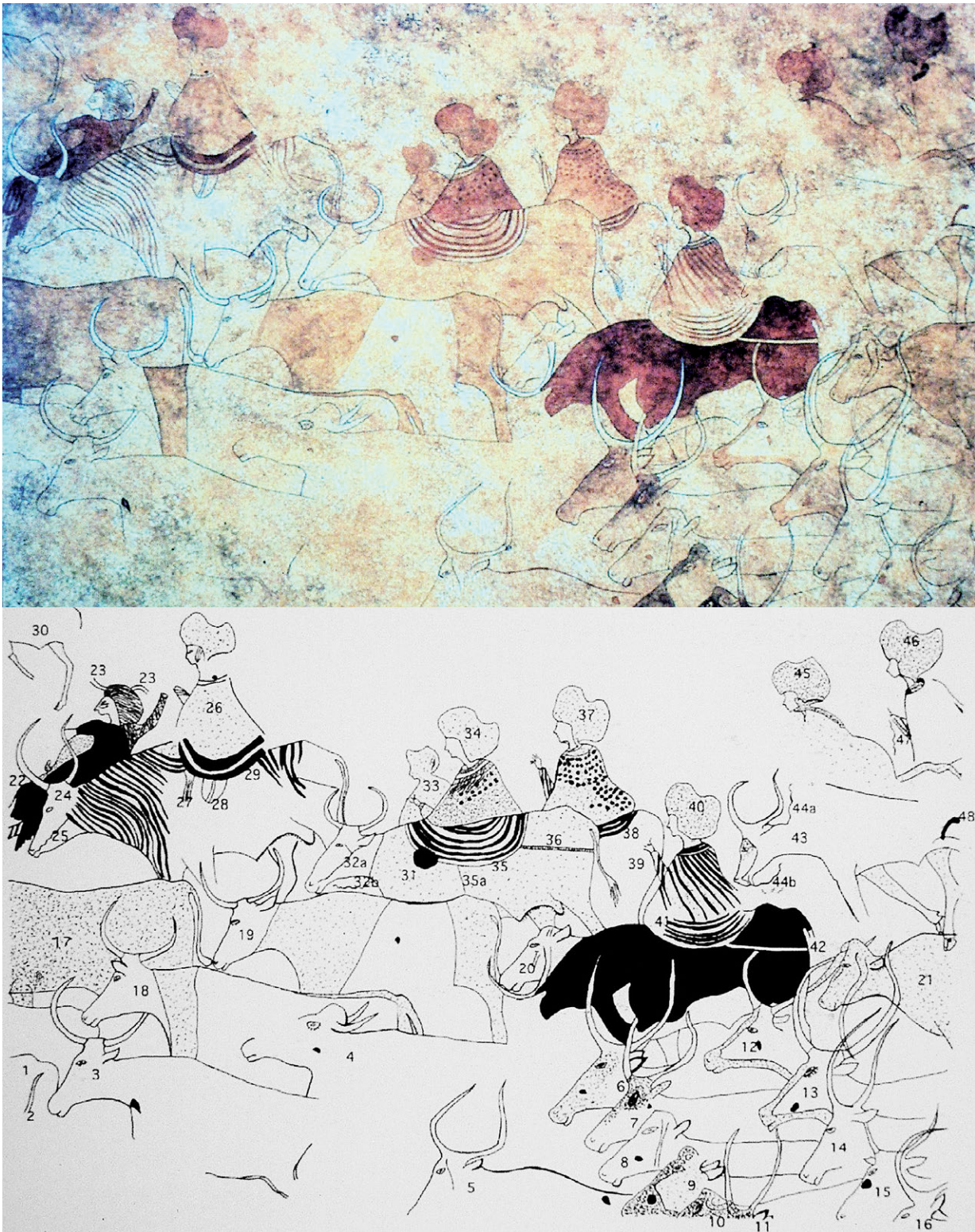


Fig. 5. Uan Derbuaen composition 4 (after De Colombel, artist of the Lhote Tassili Expedition, in Küper 1978) (in colour in the electronic version).

Riding woman 34 wears a dark red ochre shawl with parallel oblique dots lines over a fan-shape longer dress. It has a series of six horizontal and parallel dark-reddish lines along the lower end. Her hairdo is puffy with a small concavity at the middle top. Finally, riding woman 37 on mount 39 sets the top end of the second line. The later, ox 39, represented by small portion of the rear part, has a light yellow coat. The rider, with one lifted arm, wears a yellow dark reddish ochre garment with patterns of horizontal and vertical dotted lines. It is worth noting the presence of two images “off-line”: riding woman 33 in the top but front edge of the line and specimen 4 almost at the bottom but rear edge of the line. The former has the same hairdo and dress style as the other riding women discussed so far. And the latter, certainly a young animal with a light yellow ochre coat, a red dot on the cheek, and nascent rear-pointing horns.

The third line starts from specimen 5 in the bottom center and ends with riding woman 46 at the top left. It is thus comprised of one standing ox (5), three riding women (40, 45, and 46), and finally, two visible mount oxen (20 and 43). Ox 5 has a light yellow ochre coat, a red dot at mid-back, and lyre-shape horns. Riding women 40 and her mount ox 20 are carefully drafted at mid-line. The rider has the standard dark reddish puffy hairdo. She wears a light-yellow to reddish ochre garment with oblique vertical dark stripes and horizontal and parallel bands on the lower fringe. The mount has a brown coat with small patches of light yellow ochre on the front limb. The head is light yellow in color and the horns are concave, oriented downward, with up pointing tips. The image of the riding woman 40 and her mount ox 20 stands in striking contrast with all the surrounding images. Riders 45 and 46 and mount ox 43 set the top end of the third line. The mount of rider 46 is not drafted *stricto-sensu*. It is suggested by her gesture –holding a harness string in one of her hand–, attitude and the posture of her body. Her hairdo is the standard one, the same for the whole composition, puffy dark reddish with concave top. Her garment is light yellow ochre with a darker necklace-like outline around the neck. Mount ox 43 has crescent shape horns. It is a bull with a light yellow ochre coat and well delineated legs. The rider, similar to all the others, wears a light yellow ochre garment. She is holding a string attached to the mount’s mouth.

The bottom right portion of the composition is filled with the representation of a cattle herd. It is comprised of 11 cattle heads drafted in two parallel and oblique bottom-right top-left lines, with the 11th specimen featured alone in the rear. It is worth emphasizing the fact that the linear arrangement of this cattle herd is perpendicular to the axes of lines 1 – 3 discussed so far.

Line 4, the front line of the cattle herd consists of five oxen specimens, all with light yellow ochre coat and darker reddish heads. Specimen 10/11 at the bottom end of the line is represented by its long lyre-shape horns and the cervico-dorsal line. The next specimen in line, ox 9, is hornless with a red dot on the muzzle. Specimen 8, at mid-line is also red-dotted, with downward horns. Ox 7, red-dotted, has a remarkably high frontal bone and lyre-shape horns. Finally, specimen 6 at the top end of the line has significantly long and crescent-shape horns, as well as a red dot on the muzzle. In summary, each of the oxen represented in line 4 has a distinctive horn-shape.

Line 5, the rear line in this case, is essentially made of the representations of the front part of five oxen. Specimen 15 and 16, the former with a red dot on the muzzle, are represented by the upper part of their head. They both have crescent-shape horns. Specimen 14 at mid-line, without any red dot, has elongated lyre-shape horns. Specimen 12 and 13, at the top end of the line are similar, with a darker yellow ochre muzzle outline, a red dot, and crescent-shape horns. The last animal from the herd, specimen 21, is a singleton. It has a dark yellow reddish coat, with long downward pending horns.

In summary, composition 4 features the preparation of a convoy, almost ready to start its move, with the arrangements choreographed by a male herder. The party includes a group of seven riding women with the herds organized in two distinct sets. One herd set consists of 4 red dotted specimens out of 12. It is singled out by the relative large size of the represented animals, arranged in three parallel and oblique rows in harmony with the riding women. The other set, virtually with the same number of individuals, 11 oxen, is predominantly made of red-dotted muzzle, 7 out of 11 specimens. It is as if, two distinct but connected pastoral-nomads groups managed to form a single convoy, ready to go elsewhere.

3.5. Composition 5: the Reception Ceremony

Composition 5 stages human groups in face to face interaction. It is made of three scenes, each with two to three representations (Fig. 6). Scene 1 is drafted in the left side of the composition. There are three adult males, two (1 and 2), facing individual 21 with in-between curved broom-like objects difficult to identify, and bat-like flying items. All three men appear to be in festive gears. Individual 1 and 2, dark yellow in color, have the same body motion, slightly parted legs as if walking forward, slightly bent, the left arm folded upward and holding an undetermined object (3 and 4), and the right one slightly flexed and oriented downward. There are body paintings all over their bodies, on legs and torsos. Both are bearded with the same hairdo,

straight hair pulled downward on the back of the head. It is very likely that they may have been wearing masks. It is however difficult to assert that that was indeed the case. Individual 21, the partner in this dialogic situation, is entirely painted in yellow-reddish ochre, without body paintings. He is also bearded with straight hair on the head's back, wearing a dark-reddish skirt. His body language is symmetric and strictly similar to that of his partners 1 and 2. The left arm is folded up. The right one is stretched downward. And one of the leg is one pace before the other. It is extremely difficult to determine the nature of the artifacts 5a, 5b, and 5c, drafted in the interim space of interaction. If combined, 5a and 5b look like a string musical instrument, a kind of Kora. 5c has the appearance of a wind musical instrument, a sort of horn.

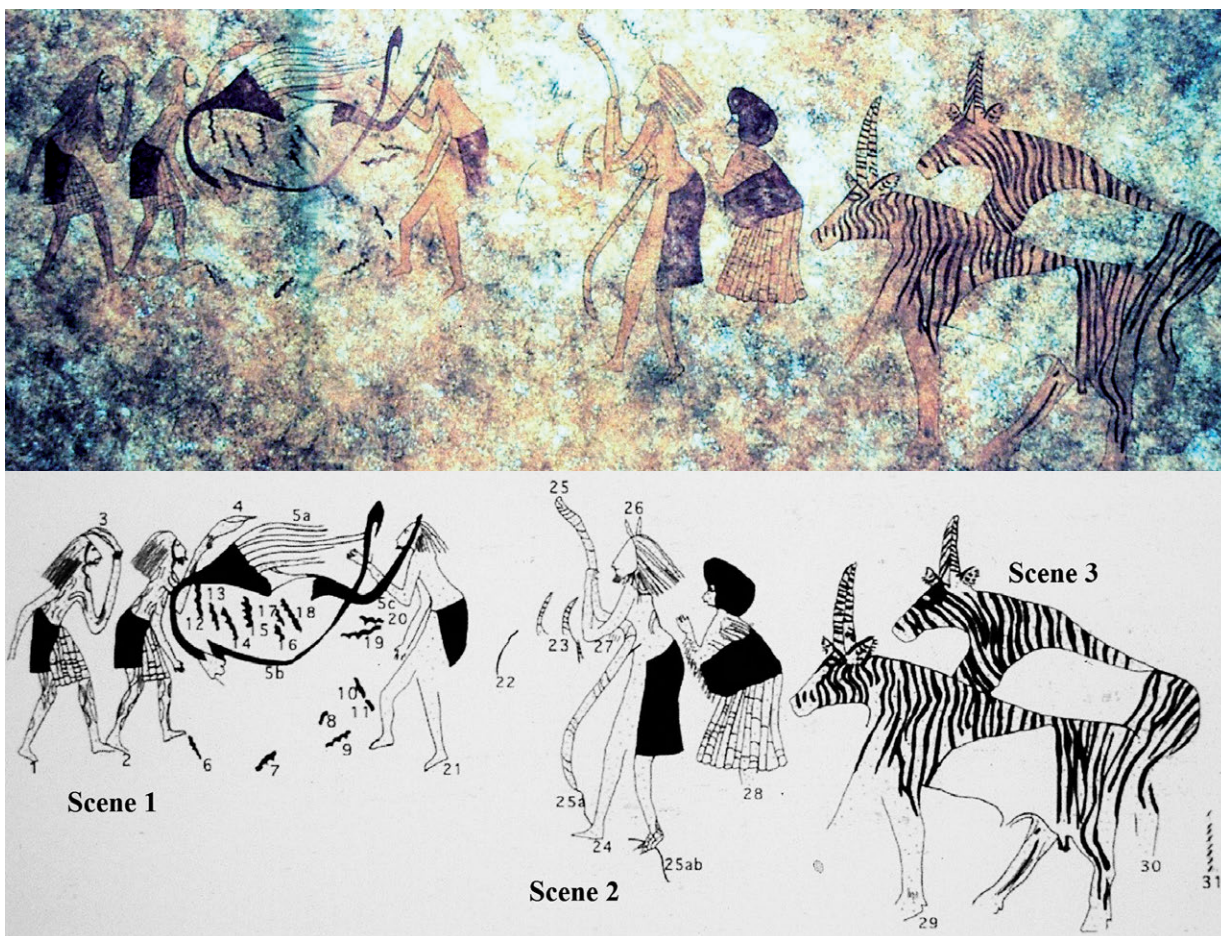


Fig. 6. Uan Derbuaen composition 5 (after De Colombel, artist of the Lhote Tassili Expedition, in Küper 1978) (in colour in the electronic version).

The former artifact is associated with individual 1 and 2 party and the latter is clearly connected to individual 21. The flying “bat-like” items are distributed into two distinct groups. The first group is located within the space delineated by artifacts 5a and 5b. The second group is stretched in the right bottom part of the scenery. Surprisingly, both groups have the same frequency of iterations, 7 in each: item 12-18, item 7-11, and 19-20. The dialogic and formulaic nature of the interaction represented in this scene is un-mistakable. This can well be the endless string of greetings formulas common among African pastoralists. It can also be coded formulaic addresses uttered in the context of well-choreographed welcoming ceremony.

Individual 21 is clearly part of a party of two additional humans and oxen. Both humans, an adult male and female, are drafted at the center of the composition. They are facing left and are associated with series of horns (22 and 23), likely from worn-out animals’ representations. The adult male 24 is painted in yellow ochre color. He is bearded with straight hair on the head’s back and two horn-like features pointing from the forehead. The later features are reminiscent of the male herder from the previous composition 4. He is wearing a relatively long dark skirt falling down to the knees. He holds a long snake-like artifact, a long and twisted stick (25) with an attached string (25a and 25ab). It is tempting to consider this artifact as a string musical instrument, a kind of harp. The adult woman, individual 28, with a lifted arm is drafted on the right flank of the male individual. She has a puffy convex dark hairdo, wearing a long yellow reddish ochre dress with a dark shawl at mid-height.

The third and last scene, drafted in the right end of the composition, is made of two strictly identical bulls. Their horns are straight upward, their abdomen white, and the coat painted with black and white vertical stripes. These oxen with their painted horns were clearly adorned for a special ceremony.

In summary, composition 5 features the reception of one visiting delegation. The latter consisting of two adult males and one adult female arrived with two especially decorated oxen.

What are the social events alluded to by the artists/painters in all these compositions? The issue, to be dealt with later, is difficult, challenging, and exciting.

3.6. Composition 6: a ritual performance!

At first glance, composition 6 refers to a completely different topic (Fig. 7). The drafting techniques are totally different. This composition is famous in Saharan rock art research (Lhote 1966; Le Quellec 2002; Bâ and Dieterlen 1966a, 1966b). According to Lhote (1966: 12), this composition represents “the ox walking in the magical U”. He then explains that “the whole scenery has a kind of magical atmosphere, suggesting the ritual ceremony of cure of the white ox under the spell of snake-like animals. Some are trying to walk the ox through the U-shape gate toward a person possibly endowed with especially beneficial power”. For Bâ and Dieterlen (1966b: 152), the same scenery features the “ritual crossing of an inverted U-shape foliage gate by a bovid. This gate, to be walked through by all animals during the “lootori” was made with tied wines and adorned with leaves At that time, all the herders work together to make all the herds walk through the gate. This ritual protects livestock from illness, epizooties, and sterility”. In summary, interpreted as featuring crucial aspects of the “Lootori”, this painting from Uan Derbuaen, along with others, was relied upon to assert the Saharan ancestry of West African Fulani pastoralists. These fascinating findings and interpretations have been discussed at length in Saharan rock art research (Lajoux 1977; Muzzolini 1995; Le Quellec 2002, 2006). It is not the purpose of this paper to pursue this line of argumentation. What is done instead, is a detailed iconographic analysis of this composition. A composition that features what is without any doubt a ritual performance.

There are a number of action sets, scene, distributed all over the composition. They will be discussed starting from the left to the right. Images 1 – 4 are clustered in the bottom left of the composition. They are all linear and elongated, very difficult to decipher. One (1) looks like a snake-head.

Scene 1, in the top left includes two images, two humans (23 – 26). Both, without any visible element of clothing and facing right, are painted in black. One (23-25) is represented with the upper body, with both arms lifted. The other (26) is standing with both hands at hip. They seem to be following ox 30.

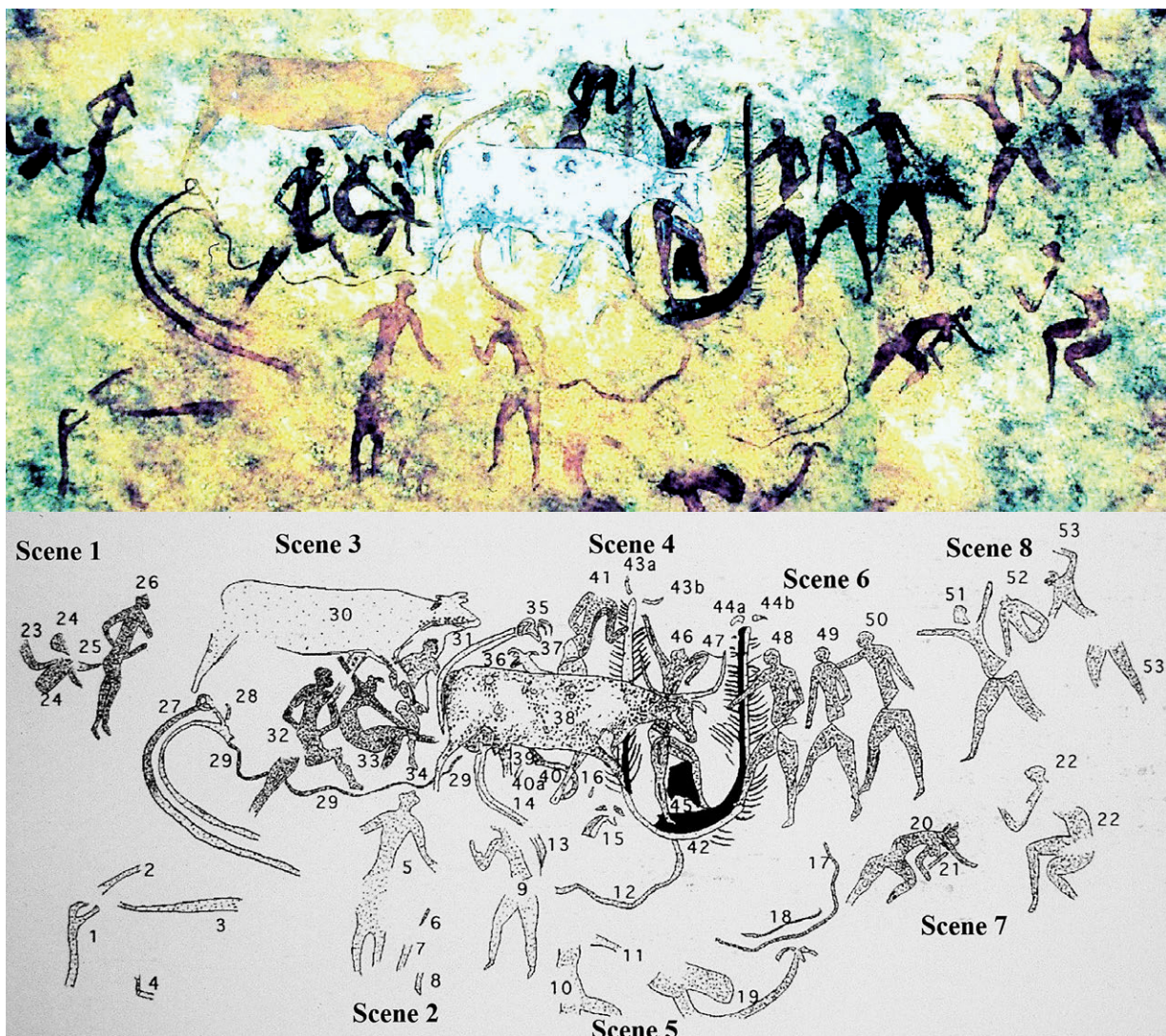


Fig. 7. Uan Derbuaen composition 6 (after De Colombel, artist of the Lhote Tassili Expedition, in Küper 1978) (in colour in the electronic version).

Scene 2, in the center top left, is made of four images, three humans, and in this case adult males, and an ox (30). They are all facing right, with humans represented without any apparent clothing. Individual 32, at the bottom end of the group, is standing with his leg wide apart and hands at hip. Individual 33 in the middle appears to be sitting in an unstable position with both arms widely stretched. Individual 34, at the top end of the group appears to be walking, holding a string (31) attached to ox 30 muzzle. Ox 30 on the right flank of individual 34 is clearly in mo-

tion. It is a hornless animal with a yellow-reddish ochre coat. This group is very likely waiting in line for its turn to walk his animal through the gate.

Scene 3, in the center-bottom, is comprised of two individuals (5 and 9) painted in light brown color face to face in what looks like conversational posture. Individual 5 in the left and facing right has both arms away from the torso. Individual 9 in the right and facing left has his right arm folded upward. There are in addition 3 short colored lines (6, 7, and 8) that are un-decipherable.

Scene 4 is located at the center-top of the composition. It features the key component of the ritual performance. It is comprised of different kinds of beings: elongated snake-like creatures, some with horned heads (12, 13, 14, 15, 27, 28, 29, 35, 36, and 40), the white ox 38, two adult males (41 and 46), and finally the inverted U-shape gate. The snake-like creatures appear to delineate the climactic ritual space. Specimen 27-28 painted in yellow reddish and dark colors, has two horns. It is facing right with a long tongue-like wavy line (29) connected to the white ox. Items 12, 13, and 14 appear to be one and the same yellow-reddish linear feature connecting the U-shape gate to the ox udder. The horned creature 35 in light yellow ochre starting right from behind the white ox, faces, its head above the ox back, sets the top-left limit of scene 4. The head of another horned snake-like creature 36 is drafted slightly above the middle back of the ox, with the rest of its body (40) under the abdomen. Finally, specimen 15 under the ox and next to the U-shape gate, even if difficult to clearly identify, look like a horned head. The white ox 38 is drafted in motion, entering the U-shape gate. It has long crescent-shape horns, the head and neck already going through the gate, with the right front leg ready to step in. As suggested by series of symmetric parallel elongated leaves, the U-shape gate is very likely made of tied date-palm fronds with adorned upper extremities. The U-shape gate crossing is operated by individual 41 and 46. They can be referred to as Masters of Ceremonies. Individual 41, the assistant-master of ceremony, is headless. But this seems to have resulted from rock exfoliation. He is wearing a tight white short, holding the left part of the gate with his left hand. Individual 46, the master of ceremony, is also dressed in a tight white short. His arms are raised and he seems to move on the side to let the white ox walk through the U-shape gate.

Scene 5 in the center-bottom of the composition is extensively worn out and difficult to figure out. It is essentially comprised of two motifs. One (10-11), painted in yellow-reddish ochre, seems to represent the torso and arm of a human. The other (19) looks like a horned snake-like creature painted in dark brown color.

Scene 6 is drafted on the right flank of the U-shape foliage gate. It is comprised of black shadows of three walking adult males, facing left

and all dressed in tight white shorts. Individual 48 at the left end of the line is walking just before the right side of the U-shape gate. His right arm is stretched forward, the left one folded at right angle at elbow, with the right leg forward. Individual 49, the second in line, replicates individual 48 motions. Finally, individual 50, the third and last of the group has a raised and stretched right arm reaching individual 49 shoulder. His left arm is extended along the torso. The group is clearly walking toward the U-shape gate or standing nearby. It is very likely that they are the representatives of the group that brought the white ox for the performance of this important ritual. In that perspective, they are waiting for their ox walk through the gate to complete the ritual sequence.

Scene 7 is located in the bottom right of the composition. It is separated from the central area by two parallel lines (17 and 18). The scene includes two/three images (20, 21, and 22), painted in dark brown color in face to face interaction. The magnification of image 20-21 reveals a breasted person, facing right, bent forward, arms wide open, and holding a stick-like artifact. Individual 22 is seated. He is facing left, slightly bent forward toward individual 20, with one arm folded at right angle. Clearly, there are different actions' set taking place around the core area of the ritual performance.

Scene 8 is found in the top right part of the composition and includes three adult males painted in dark brown color. They appear to be rushing along a slope toward the central area, each with a different body posture. Individual 51 at the left end has both arms raised. Individual 52 in the middle is represented by his torso, the right arm stretched along the body and the left one folded at right angle on the side. The third and last individual 53 has the left arms lifted up, and the right one stretched down.

Composition 6 features the different components of an important ritual performance. There are different patterns of gradation suggested by the interplay of lines and colors. The core of the ritual performance, with scene 3, 4, and 6, is delineated by series of lines, snake-like creatures. It is the case for creature 27-28 and line 29 in the left, 12-13-14 in the center, and 17-18 in the bottom right. Scene 1, 2, 5, and 7, located on the outer-perimeter, all feature two agents. All the individuals drafted in the three central scenes (3,

4, and 5) are dark shadow images. Those on the perimeter are painted in light to dark brown color. Groups of 3 individuals are predominant in the central scenes.

In summary, amidst a broad range of activities, delegations of three from different pastoral-nomadic groups take their respective oxen to perform the rite of walking through the U-shape foliage gate. The core of the ritual is performed by a master of ceremony (46) and his assistant (41). The theme and drafting style of composition 6 are peculiar and self-contained. This composition has no connection with the other 5 described in the previous pages.

4. DECIPHERING THE ICONOGRAPHIC SYNTAX

Tassilian paintings are clearly the works of specific artists/painters. It is these individuals/groups of individuals who formulate in their own original iconographic language their understanding / views / hopes / philosophies of their respective societies. Contrary to what is suggested by categories such as "naturalism; realism", representational visual art is not a photographic reproduction of the real pastoral-nomads daily life. It is interstitial, an interface between the artists' sensibility, perception, life experience,

and skills. One can therefore expect different and distinct signs of the pastoral-nomads daily life, to be combined skillfully to convey a sense of understanding of what is being featured in an image. The paintings from Uan Derbuaen are essentially made of humans and cattle representations (Tab. 1). Their relative frequency varies considerably from composition to composition. Composition 1 is made exclusively of livestock, with 36 animals represented. Composition 2 with 11 representations features 7 cattle heads, 4 of which are mounted by 4 female ridders. Composition 3 has 2 women ridders, 4 pack animals carrying bags, and a herd of 26 cattle heads. Composition 4 presents the highest frequency of humans, 7 female ridders and 1 male, along with 27 cattle heads, 7 of which are mounted. Composition 5 and 6 are made predominantly of human representations: 5 humans –1 female and 4 males– and 2 bulls in the former; and 18 humans –1 possibly female and 17 males– and 2 oxen in the latter.

The relative size, location, and orientation of the individual images along with signs like "red dot", coat color, horn-shapes, gender, etc... are combined in embedded constructions, iconographic syntax, to stage different facets of Tassilian pastoral-nomadic societies. A sample of these key signs (horn-shapes, cattle-marks, gender and age) is selected for further discussion in the remaining portion of the paper.

Composition No	Humans			Animals				
	F	M	Total	Herd	Mount	Pack	Red Dot	Total
Composition 1	-	-	-	36	-	-	33	36
Composition 2	4	-	4	3	4	-	4	11
Composition 3	2	-	2	26	2	4	20	32
Composition 4	7	1	8	20	7	-	12	27
Composition 5	1	4	5	2	-	-	-	2
Composition 6	1?	17	18	2	-	-	-	2
TOTAL	15	22	37	90	13	4	69	107

Tab. 1. General frequency distribution of humans and cattle in Uan Derbuaen paintings.

4.1. Horn-shapes: distribution and meaning

Anthropological research carried out among different populations of cattle pastoralists all over Africa has shown that oxen are much more than simple subsistence insurance. They are prestige items and key elements in all major social transactions (Evans-Pritchard 1937; Dyson-Hudson 1958; Kronenberg 1961; Dupire 1962). Some of the selected oxen go through sustained human manipulations to display a range of characteristics selected by their owners. “Horn-shapes play an important role among the characteristics defining different categories of cattle. As is the case for color and coat motifs, horn orientation and shape are codified, and each morphology is given a name. This taxonomy varies from one population to the next, and makes the system much more complicated” (Chaix 2004: 337).

Deformed horns are documented archaeologically and ethnographically (Chaix 1996, 2004, 2006, 2011). They are the result of sustained effort at distinction and convey information on the owner’s identity and group’s affiliation.

The number of horn-shapes variants documented in Uan Derbuaen paintings ranges from 1 (composition 5 and 6) to 7 (composition 3). They are distributed in three main categories, downward, upward, and backward, with three classes (Tab. 2).

There are only two specimens with backward oriented horns. One is found in composition 3 and the other in composition 4. The case of ox 47 in composition 3 is very intriguing. The horns have

Downward	6	–	13	2	–	–	21
Straight	5	–	8	1	–	–	14
Concave	–	–	2	1	–	–	3
Others	1	–	3	–	–	–	4
Upward	22	4	10	15	2	1	61
Straight	–	–	–	1	2	–	3
Crescent	5	2	4	8	–	1	20
Lyre	17	2	5	5	–	–	29
Backward	–	–	1	1	–	–	2
Variants	4	2	7	6	1	1	7

Tab. 2. General frequency distribution of horn-shapes in Uan Derbuaen paintings.

been shaped like those of large antelopes. They are grown from a thick and raised frontal torus, are torsaded, oriented backward, with forward pointing tips. Ox 4 from composition 4 is very likely representing a very young animal.

Upward pointing horn-shapes are largely predominant. Lyre-shape horns, while absent from composition 5 and 6, are the most frequent, ranging from 17 in composition 1 to 2 in composition 2. Crescent-shape horns, amounting to a total of 20 cases, are recorded with frequency varying from 1 in composition 6 to 8 in composition 4. Finally, straight upward pointing horns are documented in composition 4 and 5 with 1 and 2 cases.

Downward pointing horns, with three distinct classes documented, are more restricted in their distribution. Straight downward horns are found in composition 1, 3, and 4, with frequency ranging from 1 to 8. The concave variant, with 1 to 2 specimens, is restricted to composition 3 and 4. It is worth emphasizing the fact that composition 3 has the greatest diversity of horn-shapes, followed by composition 4. An issue to be discussed later. At this juncture, suffices it to say that the range of the represented horn-shapes may refer to the number of livestock owners/herding groups contributing to the featured herds. Accordingly, it can be assumed that the actual viewers with accurate knowledge of the different groups practices will easily know “who is being represented by what horn-shape”, and by extension “who is being excluded”.

The diversity of horn-shapes variant is also instructive. The greatest diversity is recorded in composition 3, the “Cargo train”, composition 4, the “Merging groups in the starting blocks”, and finally, composition 1, “Herds on the move” (Tab. 2). These are in fact situations of herds from different groups merging into a single consolidated one.

4.2. Red dots: distribution and meaning

Some animals are depicted with one or two red dots and others are un-marked. As is generally the case in art analysis, this specific element, the red dot, can be considered from different perspectives. On the one hand, the red dots can be considered as an artistic device, purely “fictional”, to achieved

an aesthetic effect. This option appears to be relevant for composition 1 (Fig. 2).

The recorded red dots network appears to delineate series of more or less parallel and/or intersecting lines, depending on the selected axis. When looked at, from the vertical bottom-top axis and starting from rear to front, the rear line is comprised of Ox 2 - 3 - 4 - 6 - 10 - and 16 (Fig. 2). The middle line is made of Ox 5 - 7 - 11 - 17 - and 29. And finally, the last and front line consists of Ox 5 - 8 - 12 - 15 - and 19. Ox 1', 21, and 34 are clearly "off-line" in this reading.

There are more but shorter lines when read from the horizontal left - right axis. Proceeding from top to bottom, the top horizontal line includes Ox 21 - 19 - 17 - and 16. The next one consists of Ox 34 - 15 - 14 - 11 - and 10. The fourth line at mid- bottom is comprised of Ox 8 - 7 - and 6. The last bottom line is made of Ox 5 and 4. Ox 29 at top, 12 in mid-front, and 1, 2, and 3 at bottom, are "off-line".

In both cases, there is a sense of regular/rhythmic distribution. Such an artifact is well in line with the search for aesthetic effect. It is however not incompatible with the hypothesis of cattle-marks, the second option.

The hypothesis of cattle-marks is based on the identification rationale. In this perspective, individual and/or groups adopts identification signs that are "stamped" on their livestock. The situation of the sign on the animals' body could then refers to different sub-groups within a larger group. The presence and absence of cattle-mark, as well as its situation on the represented animals body are significant information.

Ninety-five oxen are drafted in Uan Derbuaen compositions discussed in this paper. 54 of these cattle heads have single or double red dots, while 41 are un-marked (Tab. 3). In decreasing frequency, single red dot is found on the head, neck, chest, and rear. Twin red dots animals are found in composition 1 and 3. Specimen 5 in composition 1 is a herd animal, with downward horns, one dot at neck and the other on chest. Specimen 24 from composition 3 is a pack animal, with crescent shape horns and twin red dots on the rear left flank.

Head-marked animals are predominant in composition 3, and 4, respectively with 11 out of 18 and 7 out 12 specimens. The remaining 4 found in composition 1 (Tab. 3). Neck marked

Composition	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Single Red dot	18	4	18	12	-	-	52
Head	4	-	11	7	-	-	22
Neck	11	-	-	2	-	-	13
Chest	3	2	2	3	-	-	10
Rear	-	2	5	-	-	-	7
Function							
Mount Animal	-	4	1	1	-	-	6
Pack animal	-	-	4	-	-	-	4
Herd Animal	18	-	15	11	-	-	42
Double Red dots	1	-	1	-	-	-	2
Un-Marked	15	4	9	9	2	2	41
Function							
Mount Animal	-	-	1	5	-	-	6
Herd Animal	15	4	8	4	2	2	35
TOTAL	34	8	28	21	2	2	95

Tab. 3. General frequency distribution of cattle-marks in Uan Derbuaen paintings.

oxen are found in composition 1 and 4; 11 specimens out of 18 in the former, and 2 out of 12 in the latter. Chest-marked cattle heads are almost evenly distributed among composition 1 to 4 with 2 - 3 specimens in each. And finally, rear marked animals are confined to composition 2 and 3, with respectively 2 and 5 cases.

Most of the cattle represented, marked and un-marked, are herd animals (Tab. 3); 44 out of 54 marked oxen, and 35 out 41 un-marked. Interestingly, there is exactly the same number of marked and un-marked mount oxen, while all pack animals are marked. Pack oxen are confined to composition 3 "the Cargo train", each specimen having a distinct marking: 1) twin red dots in the rear (specimen 24); 2) single red dot on the head (specimen 48); 3) single red dot on chest (specimen 58); and finally, single red dot in the rear. The mounted oxen are found in composition 2, 3, and 1. In composition 2, specimen 14 and 17 have single red dot on chest, 2 and 26, single red

dot on rear. Specimen 63 in composition 3 has single red dot on rear. And finally, specimen 31 in composition 4 has a large single red dot on chest.

The distributional patterns suggested in the above discussion point to the choreographed interaction of two large social entities: the “red-dot” pastoralists on the one hand and the others on the other hand. The “red-dot” pastoralists are sub-divided into smaller segments differentiated by the number (1 - 2) and location (head, neck, chest, rear) of the red dots. Where are these subtle distinctions leading to? A detailed analysis of age and gender representations can help addressing this interesting issue.

4.3. Age and gender: distribution and meaning

All humans' representations recorded in Uan Derbuaen paintings are exclusively adult individuals. They amount to 37, 15 females and 22 males (Tab. 1). The highest frequency of males, 17, is found in composition 6, with possibly one female individual. As argued above in previous discussions, composition 6 stands on its own and has neither stylistic nor thematic connections with any of the other five compositions. It is therefore excluded from the discussion to follow.

There are 19 human representations in the sample under consideration, 14 females and 5 males. 13 out of the 14 females riding mount animals are present in composition 2, 3, and 4, with frequency ranging from 2 (composition 3) to 7 (composition 4). The remaining woman (28) from composition 5 is part of a delegation with two adult males. Males are restricted to composition 4 and 5. Individual 22, the adult male from composition 4, is the principal herder organizing the soon departing convoy. And finally, the four males from composition 5, two for each party, are involved in a complex welcoming/reception ceremony.

In summary, the main theme iterated in five compositions from Uan Derbuaen rock-shelter, revolves around the move of two distinct groups of adult females: a group of 6 “red-dot” pastoralists in composition 2 and 3 on the one hand, and that of 7 “un-marked” females pastoralists on the other. Each of the four riding women from composition 2 is singled out by differ-

ent combinations of attributes, including dress arrangement, color and decoration, as well as hair-style and color. It is as if this group is the central element of all the activities and movements painted on Uan Derbuaen shelter's walls. Both riding women from composition 3 are modestly dressed. They are probably in charge of the baggage's of the leading ladies from composition 2. The seven riding ladies from composition 4 have elaborate garments with minor color differentiation and the same and unique hair-style. Their mount oxen (particularly 20) dark-brown coat with downward crescent shape up pointing horns, and specimen 24, stripped coat with lyre-shape upward horns, have peculiar characteristics. This group of well dressed women from the non-marked pastoralists groups are very likely representing allies. Finally, woman 28 from composition 5, is wearing a unique long dress with a dark brown shawl, that sets her in a different category. She is very likely a mature woman, member of an important delegation. The role of male adults seems to be confined to logistics, safety, and negotiation upon arrival.

5. SUCCESSFUL MATRIMONIAL TRANSACTIONS

Humans and cattle are the principal elements mobilized in the paintings from Uan Derbuaen. The successive arrangement of compositions suggested in this paper up to this point is an initial hypothesis that can now be submitted to a stringent test. There are different ways of assembling the different compositions to achieve coherent and meaningful narratives

Composition 1 features a rather impressive cattle herd, with a broad range of horn-shapes, some specimens with red dots, and others without. The herd is accordingly made of cattle heads originating from different pastoralists groups participating to this matrimonial network. It can be interpreted as the bride-wealth, and as such can either open or close the matrimonial transaction cycle. In the first and “opening” option, a relatively large cattle herd obtained from the brides' kins and relatives gifts, is displayed in front of the procession. In the second and “closing” option, the herd is shown at the very end of

the procession, after the “Reception Ceremony” (composition 5). The rear part of composition 1 herd is present on composition 2, supporting the “opening” option. Composition 2, Here come the Brides, features four elegantly dressed adult women, traveling on mount oxen. Each one is singled out by a unique combination of attributes. They all belong to the “single red-dot” pastoralists group. The general atmosphere conveyed by the artists/painters is festive. There are many social circumstances, including dances parties and beauty pageants, that may require such attention to dress and appearance. It is nonetheless suggested here that, after successful matrimonial negotiations, four young adult women from the “single Red Dot” social segment are leaving their respective kins’ groups to join their spouse(s) pastoralists group(s). This suggestion is based on the assumption of patri-virilocal post-marital residence practices.

Composition 3 that follows, represents the four brides’ belongings and an additional portion of the bride-wealth under the care of two riding women. There are 4 large leather bags carried by 4 pack oxen. Four leather bags for four brides is not a coincidence. The information conveyed in this case is straightforward. The general attire of both riding ladies, one being unfortunately extensively worn-out, is less elaborate. Generically, they are very likely, “women of company” of the brides riding in the front part of the procession.

Composition 4 features the preparation of allied groups ready to merge with the main procession. The convoy, arranged by an adult male, includes a group of 7 riding women, well dressed with the same hair-style, and additional livestock, from the “single red-dot” as well as “non-marked” groups. It is certainly not too farfetched to view the livestock from composition 4 as a kind of present of the allied groups to the partners of the successful matrimonial alliance.

Finally, Composition 5, features two distinct groups, one with 2 mature adult males and the other with 1 mature adult female and 2 mature adult males, in dialogic interactive posture. Dress codes and presence/absence of body paintings clearly differentiate the interacting partners. In fact, this composition, dubbed composition 5, makes more sense if it is placed at the very beginning of the Uan Derbuaen narrative.

6. CONCLUSION: THE NARRATIVE OF UAN DERBUAEN

Read from the new perspective just outlined above, the Uan Derbuaen narrative features the reception of four brides from a specific social segment, “the Single Red Dot group”, after different cycles of matrimonial transactions. The narrative opens with 1) the “Reception ceremony” in what can now safely be termed Tableau I. 2) The bride’s wealth featured as “a herd in the move” is displayed for all to see in Tableau II. 3) The brides, riding mount oxen and dressed in lavish and elegant garments, then enter the scene in Tableau III. 4) The brides’ belongings, in large leather bags, taken care of by two ‘ladies of company’ and carried by pack animals, with additional livestock are presented in Tableau IV. And finally, 5) Allied groups, from different affiliations and represented by 7 riding women, join the celebration and bring additional livestock, marked and un-marked. Composition 6, featuring an elaborate ritual performance, is another story.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Mr. Antonio Uriarte González (Laboratory of Remote Sensing and Landscape Archaeology, Institute of History) for redrawing figure 1 map. I am very grateful to both anonymous reviewers for their critical readings and astute questions. They helped in the clarification of some difficult methodological issues. They however do not share any responsibility in the ideas developed in this paper.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bâ, A. H. and Dieterlen, G. 1966a: *Koumen Texte initiatique des pasteurs Peul*. Mouton “Cahiers de l’Homme”. Paris/La Haye.
- Bâ, A. H. and Dieterlen, G. 1966b: “Les fresques d’époque bovidienne du Tassili n’Ajjer et les traditions des Peul: hypothèses d’interprétation”. *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* 36: 141-157.
- Bahn, P. G. 2010: *Prehistoric art: polemics and progress*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.
- Barbaza, M. 2015: *Les Trois Bergers: du conte perdu au mythe retrouvé*. Presses Universitaires du Midi. Toulouse.

- Calame, C. 2015: *Qu'est-ce que la mythologie grecque?* Gallimard. Paris.
- Chaix, L. 1996: "Les bœufs à cornes parallèles: archéologie et ethnographie". *Sahara* 8: 95-97.
- Chaix, L. 2004: "Les bœufs africains à cornes déformées: quelques éléments de réflexion". *Anthropozoologica* 39: 335-342.
- Chaix, L. 2006: "Bœufs à cornes déformées et béliers à sphéroïde: de l'art rupestre à l'archéozoologie". *Cahiers de l'Association de l'Art Rupestre Saharien* 10: 49-54.
- Chaix, L. 2011: "Cattle skulls (*bucrania*): an universal symbol all around the world. The case of Kerma (Sudan)". In M. Bárta, F. Coppens and J. Krejčí (eds.): *Abusir and Saqqara in the Year 2010/1*. Charles University. Prague: 1-16.
- David, B. 2002: *Landscapes, rock Art and the dreaming: An Archaeology of Preunderstanding*. Leicester University Press. London.
- Dupire, M. 1962: *Peuls nomades. Étude descriptive des Woodabe du Sahel nigérien*. Travaux et mémoires de l'Institut d'Ethnologie 64, Paris: 13-36.
- Dyson-Hudson, N. 1958: "The Karimojong and the Suk". *Uganda Journal* 22: 173-180.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E. 1937: *The Nuer*. Clarendon Press. Oxford.
- Hachid, M. 2000: *Le Tassili des Ajjer. Aux sources de l'Afrique. 50 siècles avant les Pyramides*. EDIF 2000/Paris Méditerranée. Alger/Paris.
- Holl, A. [F. C.] 1995: "Pathways to elderhood: research on past pastoral iconography: the paintings from Tikadiouine (Tassili-n-Ajjer)". *Origini* XVIII: 69-113.
- Holl, A. F. C. 2000: "Modes, temps et espaces des images: les gravures rupestres du Dhar Tichitt". *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'Afrique noire Ch. A. Diop* 49 (serie B, 1-2): 5-82.
- Holl, A. F. C. 2002: "Time, space, and image making: rock art from the Dhar Tichitt (Mauritania)". *African Archaeological Review* 19,2: 75-118.
- Holl, A. F. C. 2004a: *Saharan rock art: archeology of Tassilian pastoralist iconography*. AltaMira Press. Walnut Creek.
- Holl, A. F. C. 2004b: *Holocene saharans: an anthropological perspective*. Continuum Publishing Group. New York/London.
- Holl, A. F. C. and S. Dueppen, 1999: "Iheren I: research on Tassilian pastoral iconography". *Sahara* 11: 21-34.
- Keenan, J. 2002: "The Lesser Gods of the Sahara". *Journal of Public Archaeology* 2/3: 131-150.
- Kronenberg, A. 1961: "The Longarim favorite beast". *Kush* 9: 258 - 277.
- Küper, R. (ed.) 1978: *Sahara, 10000 Jahren zwischen Weide und Wüste*. Museen der Stadt. Köln.
- Lajoux, J. D. 1977: *Tassili n'Ajjer. Art rupestre du Sahara préhistorique*. Chêne. Paris.
- Lefebvre, L. 1962: "Hypothèse nouvelles sur les peintures rupestres du Tassili-n-Ajjer d'après Koumen de A. Hampaté-Bâ et G. Dieterlen". *Libyca* IX -X, 27: 1-274.
- Le Quellec, J. L. 2002: "Henri Lhote et le Lootori". In J. L. Le Quellec (ed.): *Ithyphalliques, traditions orales, monuments lithiques et art rupestre au Sahara: Hommages à Henri Lhote*. *Cahiers de l'Association de l'Art Rupestre Saharien* 7: 141-156.
- Le Quellec, J. L. 2006: "Lhote et le Lootori: Le Retour". *Cahiers de l'Association de l'Art Rupestre Saharien* 10: 149 -150.
- Lewis-Williams, D. J. and Dowson, T. A. 1999: *Images of power: understanding San rock art*. Southern Book Publishers. Johannesburg.
- Lewis-Williams, D. J. and Pearce, D. G. 2004: *San spirituality: roots, expressions and social consequences*. Double Storey. Cape Town.
- Lewis-Williams, D. J. and Challis, S. 2011: *Deciphering ancient minds: the mystery of San Bushman rock art*. Thames & Hudson. London.
- Lhote, H. 1966: "Les peintures pariétales d'époque bovidienne du Tassili. Éléments sur la magie et la religion". *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* 36 (1): 7-27.
- Lhote, H. 1973: *À la découverte des Fresques du Tassili*. Arthaud. Paris.
- Muzzolini, A. 1995: *Les images rupestres du Sahara*. A. Muzzolini. Toulouse.
- Smith, A. B. 1993: "New approaches in rock art". In L. Krzyzaniak, M. Kobusiewicz and J. Alexander (eds.): *Environmental change and human culture in the Nile Basin and Northern Africa until the second millennium BC*. Poznan Archaeological Museum. Poznan: 77-89.