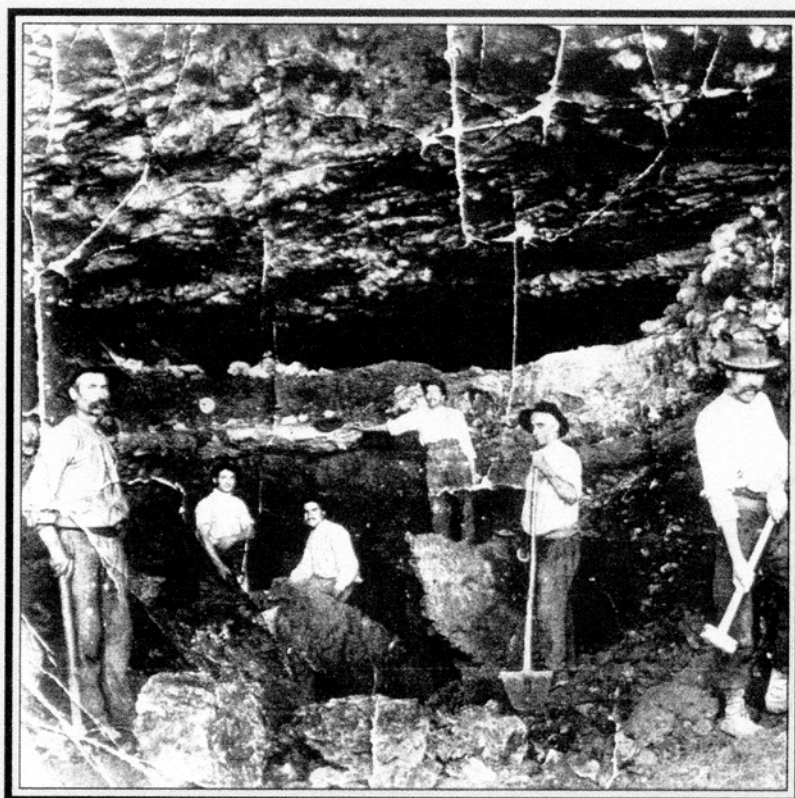


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# RIVISTA DI SCIENZE PREISTORICHE

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fondata da Paolo Graziosi



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## Rock engravings at Ejerssa Gara Hallo (Southern Ethiopia)

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The appearance of rock art in several African regions has been scientifically recorded since the middle of XIX century; in Southern Ethiopia accounts of such art are much more recent and date back to the second half of last century. The first information about the existence of rock art in Southern Ethiopia was supplied by F. Anfray, subsequent reports come mainly from researches carried on by R. Joussaume and the present writer.

At the moment, in the archaeological literature regarding the said region eight rock art stations are recorded:

1. *Chabbé*<sup>1</sup>: on the walls of a cliff at the bottom of which runs a stream;
2. *Galma*<sup>2</sup>: situation similar to the previous one;
3. *Soka Dibitcha*<sup>3</sup>: two big rockies adjoining blocks on the right shore of the river Bolé;
4. *Gesuba shelter*<sup>4</sup>: cave made up by a shelter and a small cave opening onto a calcareous cliff facing the river Weyo;
5. *Dalato Gongolo shelter*<sup>5</sup>: small cave in a little gorge about 5 metres above level of the homonymous stream;
6. *Akirsa shelter*<sup>6</sup>: two adjacent caves opening onto the cliff which dominates the river Akirsa;

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<sup>1</sup> Anfray 1967.

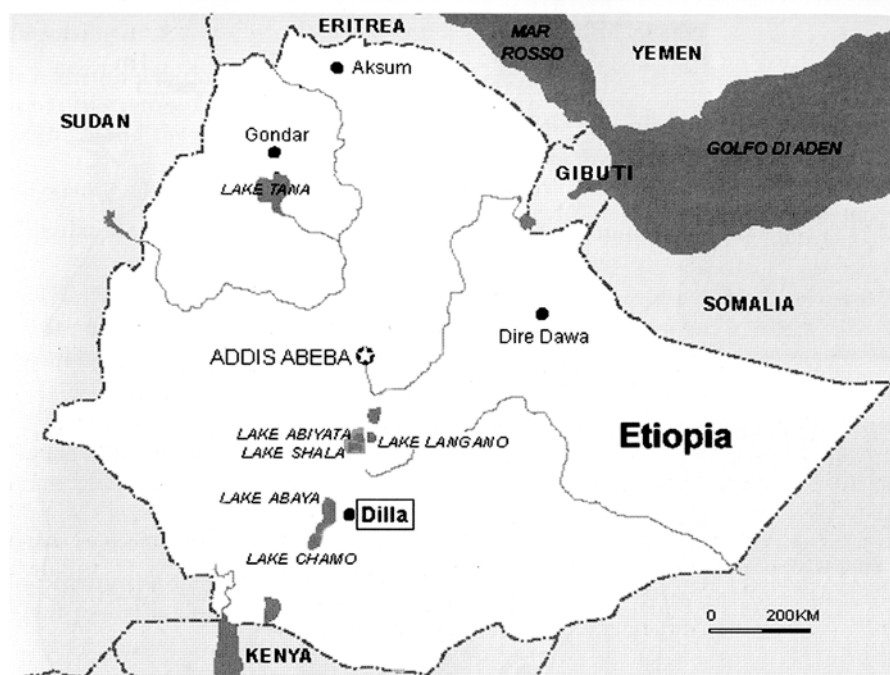
<sup>2</sup> Anfray 1976.

<sup>3</sup> Joussaume, Barbier, Guthertz 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Bachechi 1995; 1999; 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Joussaume 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Joussaume 1999.



a



b

FIG. 1. — Location of Ejerssa Gara Hallo site, near Dilla; 2) the rock with the engravings (*photograph by G. Abegaz*).

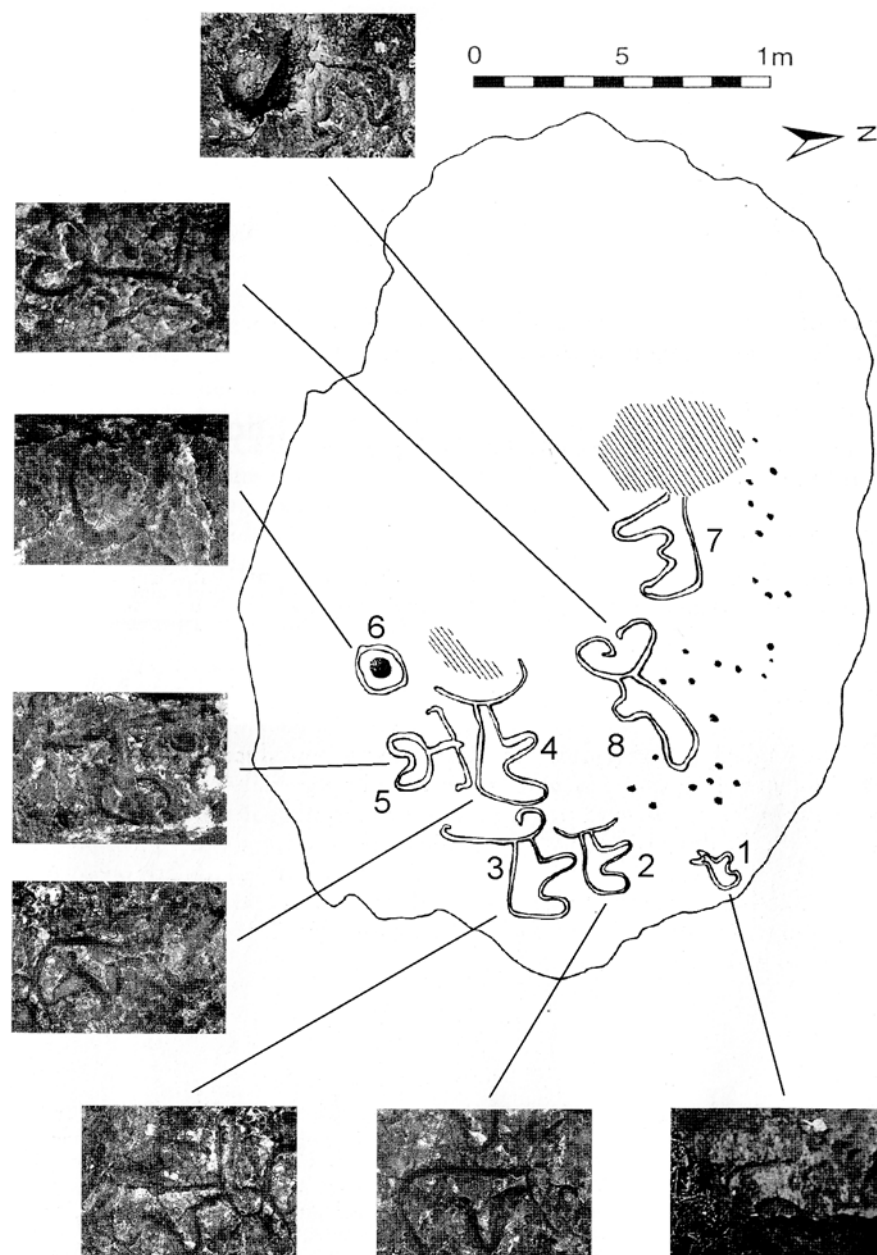


FIG. 2. – Relief of the rock with engravings of Egerssa Gara Hallo (*drawing by F. Stefanini*).

*Engraving n° 5*

It is the only anthropomorphic figure in the site; it is a stylised figure, with horizontally stretched out arms. It looks headless even if the neck is sketched. It is 17 cm high and the open arms span is 20 cm.

*Engraving n° 6*

Circular mark with a big slightly sunked cupel in the middle. Size 15 x 15 cm.

*Engraving n° 7*

Figure of bovid turned right. No head, since part of the rocky surface has been lost. The remaining figure is 20 cm long and 15 cm high.

*Engraving n° 8*

Figure of bovid turned rightwards: 30 cm long, 11 cm high. It has oblique tongs-shaped horns.

*Other engravings*

In proximity to engravings nn° 1, 7 and 8 there are twenty- six circular cupels. Their patina is similar to that of the other engravings.

## CONCLUSIONS.

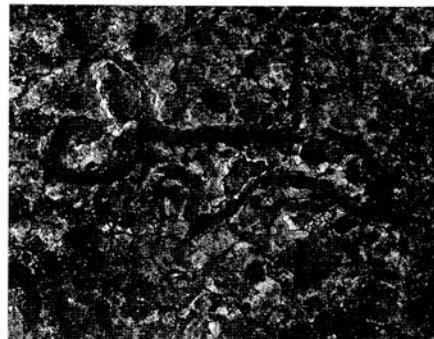
The engravings referred to the bovids always reproduce in profile, stylised humpless animals, just one fore leg and one hind leg are drawn, the head and the big horns appear as they were seen from above; the animals are indifferently turned right or left; the dimensions of the engravings are between about 20 and 30 cm.

Such stylistic elements well fit in the first phase (Surre) of the Ethiopian-Arab style<sup>10</sup>, an artistic phase to be found also in the other places with high reliefs and / or engravings of Southern Ethiopia (Chabbé, Galma, Soka Dibitcha, Gesuba, Akirsa, Laga Harro and Godana Kindjo) (Fig. 3).

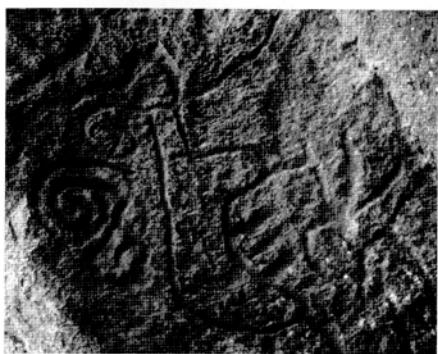
<sup>10</sup> The chronological sequence of East Africa pastoral art is almost uniquely based on the style of the most common figures, those of the bovids. In this area, the appearance of rock art from late prehistory is characterized by a style called Ethiopian-Arab (Cervick 1971, 1978-79; Joussaume 1981), an artistic trend prevailing in Central Arabia, Eritrea, Ethiopia and, to a lesser degree, in some areas of North Africa (Cervick 1978-79, p. 8). The Ethiopian-Arab style has been divided into two different stages (Cervick 1978-79; Joussaume 1981). The first is the Surre style, which takes its name from the eponymous site (Surre o Genda-Biftou) of the Ethiopian area of Harar, with the territorial limits of Southern and Eastern Ethiopia. The second is the Dahthami style (Anati 1972), named after a place in Central Arabia and characterised by a wider geographic diffusion (Central Arabia, Eritrea, Eastern Ethiopia, Southern Somalia) and greater variety of styles. Compared to older figures such styles show the tendency towards schematism and, in the most recent phase, the disappearance, in the iconographic repertory, of the zebu and the camel, besides a myriad of schematic or abstract patterns.



1



2



3



4

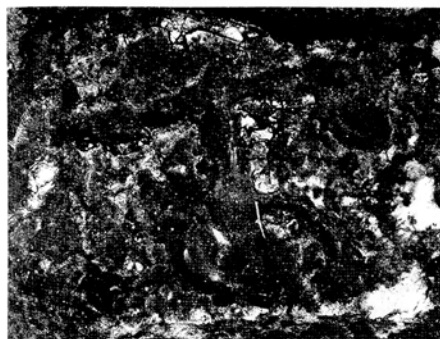


5



6

FIG. 3. — Figures of bovids in the rock art of Southern Ethiopia. 1-2) Ejerssa Gara Hallo (*photographs by C. Cavanna*; 3) Gesuba; 4) Akirsa; 5) Chabbé; 6) Galma.



1



2



FIG. 4. – Antropomorphic figures in the rock art of Southern Ethiopia. 1) Egerssa Gara Hallo (*relief by F. Stefanini*); 2) Gesuba.

The only human figure at Egerssa Gara Hallo is headless and extremely stylised. The style shown by this figure is quite close to that of some subjects of the pictorial groups in Eritrea<sup>11</sup>, but at the same time it is also close to the only anthropomorphic representation among Southern Ethiopia engravings: the Gesuba one. In both cases the figures are drawn through only one vertical segment which represents trunk and sex, while the arms are reproduced by a downwards stroke passing through the trunk (Fig. 4). According to what P. Cervicek maintains<sup>12</sup>, the headless figures might be a stylistic characteristic peculiar to the Ethiopian-Arab current.

<sup>11</sup> Graziosi 1964.

<sup>12</sup> Cervicek 1971, p. 132 e nota 49.



As regards the circle with a central cupel, usually the schematic or abstract motifs made by geometrical or stylised symbols are referred to the Ethiopian list of the later period of the second stage (Dahthami) of the Ethiopian –Arab style and they are often associated to representations of zebu and camels. Nevertheless, in our case, due to the condition of the patina, the circle seems to be contemporary to the other engravings. We find a similar situation also at the nearby Gesuba station, where we see figures of bovids associated with an anthropomorphic image and with many symbolic signs. Still at Gesuba, like at Ejerssa Gara Hallo, naturalistic figures are associated with groups of cupels.

The whole stylistic characters of our artistic expressions suggest then to set the engravings of the Ejerssa Gara Hallo station within the first stage of the Ethiopian-Arab style. On the basis of the stylistic affinities with the material culture and the Nubian C-Group art<sup>13</sup>, it is possible to date such style between the end of the third millennium and the course of the second millennium BC<sup>14</sup>.

The new place with engravings of Ejerssa Gara Hallo is then another document of the artistic flourishing in the Ethiopian region during the millenniums immediately before our era. In such art the outstanding position of descriptions of bovids must have corresponded to the role these animals had in the ideology of the native populations whose main occupation was breeding. At the same time this discovery contributes to plug the large gap in our knowledge of recent prehistory in Ethiopia and the whole East Africa, a fact mainly due to the still scarce archaeological records available.

(translated by Laura Baggiani)

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<sup>13</sup> Clark 1970, p. 206; Cervick 1974, pp. 182-183a.

<sup>14</sup> Cervick 1978-79; Joussame 1981.



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RIASSUNTO. — INCISIONI RUPESTRI A EJERSSA GARA HALLO (ETIOPIA MERIDIONALE) — Si descrive un masso con incisioni rupestri scoperto in una località dell'Etiopia meridionale. In base ai loro caratteri stilistici le incisioni possono essere datate al periodo compreso tra la fine del III e il II millennio a. C. (primo stadio dello stile Etiopico-Arabo).

RÉSUMÉ. — GRAVURES RUPESTRES À EJERSSA GARA HALLO (ETHIOPIE MÉRIDIONALE) — L'A. traite de la découverte d'un site préhistorique comprenant de l'art rupestre découvert en Ethiopie méridionale. Il s'agit d'une grande roche avec quelques gravures. Les figures peuvent être attribuées à une période s'étendant entre l'extrémité de la troisième millénaire et le deuxième millénaire av. J.-C. (première étape du style Éthiopien-Arabe).

SUMMARY. — ROCK ENGRAVINGS AT EJERSSA GARA HALLO (SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA). — The A. deals with the discovery of a prehistoric site with rock art, found in Southern Ethiopia. It is a big rock with some engravings. Taken into considerations only stylistic comparisons, the figures may be dated back to a period ranging between the end of the third millennium BC and the course of second millennium BC (first stage of the Ethiopian-Arabic style).