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## THE WALL OF DISCS AT MSEMRIR/VALLÉE DU DADÈS (MOROCCO)

**ABSTRACT:** In 1988 Alain Rodrigue found a most interesting rock art site near Msemrir/Vallée du Dadès. A vertical rock wall shows 70–80 discs of a diameter from 5–40 cm. Further visits led to the discovery of seven lines of the Libyco-Berber script.

**KEY WORDS:** Rock art – High Atlas/Morocco – Libyco-Berber inscriptions – Discs

From Boumalne in the Vallée du Dadès there leads a well established road into the Gorges du Dadès, but in the higher parts of the valley it turns to a difficult track. Immediately in front of the first houses of the little village Msemrir a track branches off into the valley of Oussikis. About 200 meters before this bifurcation one reaches at the western

edge of the track the opening of a little dry valley, whose area is used for agricultural purposes and is demarcated by dry rock walls. The northern edge of this flat area is limited by a striking smooth wall of rock: the place of a very interesting manifestation of rock art (*Figure 1*).

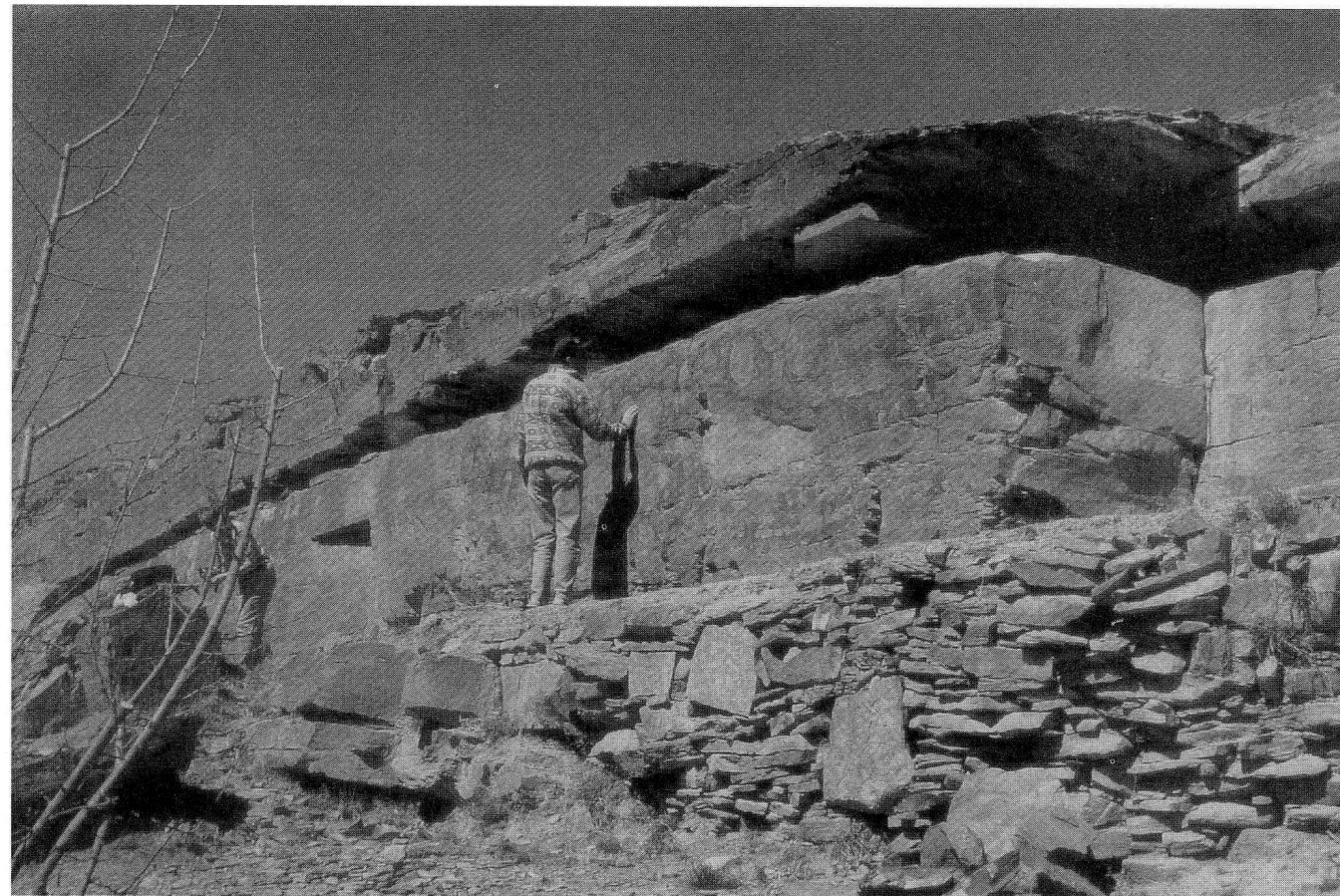


FIGURE 1. The site of Msemrir.

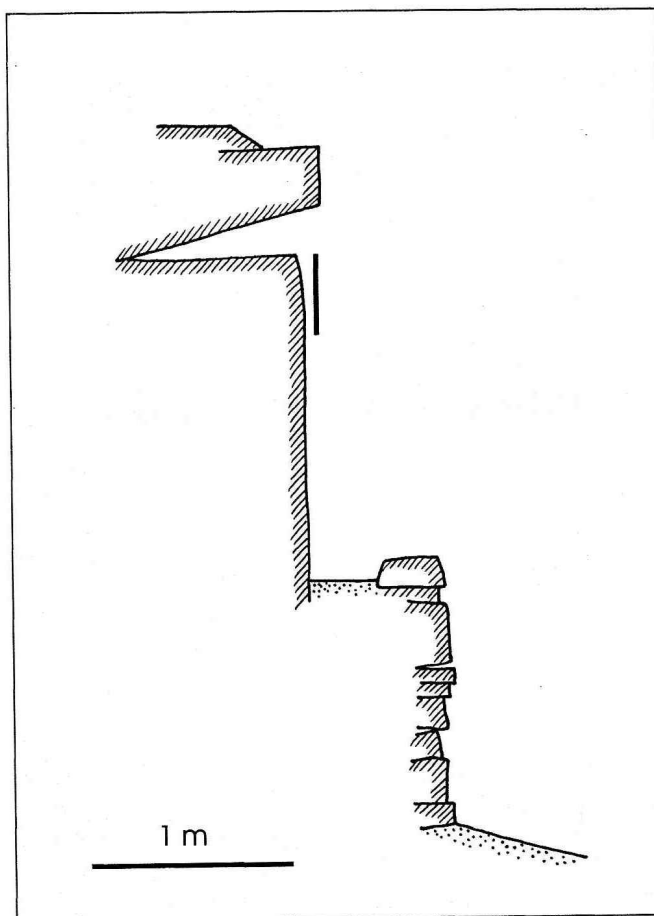


FIGURE 2.

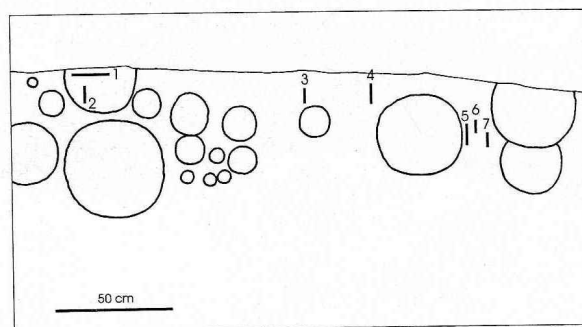


FIGURE 3.

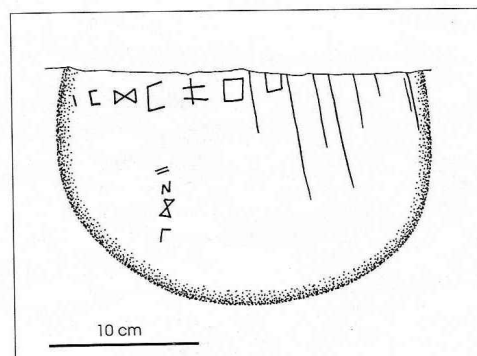


FIGURE 4.

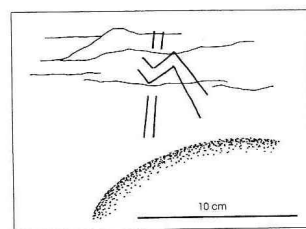


FIGURE 5.

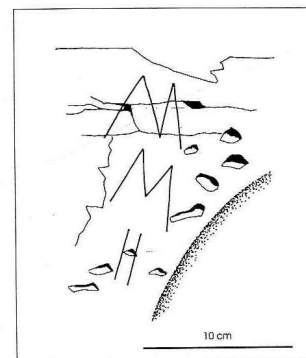


FIGURE 6.

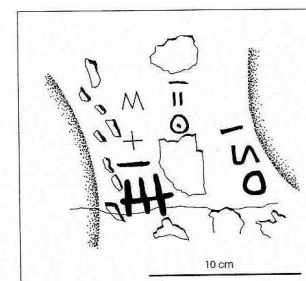


FIGURE 7.



FIGURE 8. One of the great discs.

In 1988 Alain Rodrigue found this site, noticed a great number of discs and some Libyco-Berber inscriptions and published a first description (Rodrigue 1989/90). Further visits of the site led to the discovery of more inscriptions, very tiny and difficult to recognise.

The vertical rock wall shows, on a surface of  $8 \times 2$  meters, 70–80 discs of a diameter from 5 to 40 cm. There is no comparable place to find in Morocco, probably in the whole Northern Africa.

An imaginable scenario of the run of events could be as follows:

1. The circles were engraved
2. The inner surfaces were polished
3. Inscriptions were engraved
4. Parts of these manifestations were destroyed by rough pecking.

### THE DISCS

They have been engraved in the "pecking-and polishing" method. Many of them are only pecked out and thereby are made of imprecise outlines. Some of the discs are very carefully made, by precise and complete engravings, then very softly polished on the whole surface, thus producing a very neat and sleek place to write on (Figure 4).

The group with the inscriptions (Figure 3) shows examples of perfectly circular discs, some of them possessing the greatest dimensions (diameter: 38 cm). Some of these great discs have been surcharged with anarchical impacts (phase 4).

Decoration: we have to reconsider here the only two discs having external or internal decorations. The first one has ten tiny "cupules" pecked on the external upper rim. The second disc is polished and is divided into four quadrants by a rather rough and not very deep pecked line, which bears polishing traces (Figure 8).

Context: it is very important to quote that no other subjects have been engraved on the wall of Msemrir (except the inscriptions, of course). There is no weapon, nor animal or human figuration. In the meantime, the discs of Msemrir can be considered as belonging to the context of the circles and discs of the High Atlas, drawn along with daggers or halberds, or alone, as in the case of the site of Tainant (some arrows or spear heads).

During a long period, the discs of the High Atlas have been read as symbols, linked with cosmogony or lunar rites. Today, it is generally agreed to read them as representations of circular shields. We proposed a heraldic significance for these shields, not only used as defensive weapons, but also as motives of tribal adherence (Rodrigue 1988).

### THE LIBYCO-BERBER INSCRIPTIONS

The inscriptions can be found in the central part of the 8 meters covered by discs, all of them in the upper part of the wall in comfortable height of 1.60–1.80 meters (Figure 2). Two of them are engraved in the inner surface of the discs (inscriptions 1 and 2), five lines are positioned between the discs. Six of the seven lines are written vertically (Figure 3).

Technique: A predominant part of the signs is engraved in the manner of very narrow and shallow lines (Figures 4–6) with the exception of some signs in the lines 5–7: they are 3–4 mm wide and deep and look as if they were pecked and rubbed afterwards (Figures 7, 9).

Inventory of signs: The completeness of an alphabet among a sample of 28 signs cannot be expected here. But the 14 different signs cover a great part of the alphabet.

Compared with the "classical" Libyco-Berber alphabet represented in RIL (Chabot 1940) one can recognise an astonishing conformity: nearly all the usual signs are represented, only  $\equiv$  (III) is missing. Two signs from Msemrir are not known from the classical alphabet:  $\#$ ,  $\#$ .

Compared with the inventory of Moroccan tombstone inscriptions compiled by Galand (1966) one can recognise the same conformity: this alphabet also knows the sign  $\#$ .

One fact is quite surprising: The sign  $\Sigma$  – not existing among the 350 signs of IAM (Galand) – is represented at Msemrir two times. That means this is the first appearance of this sign in the whole area of Morocco.

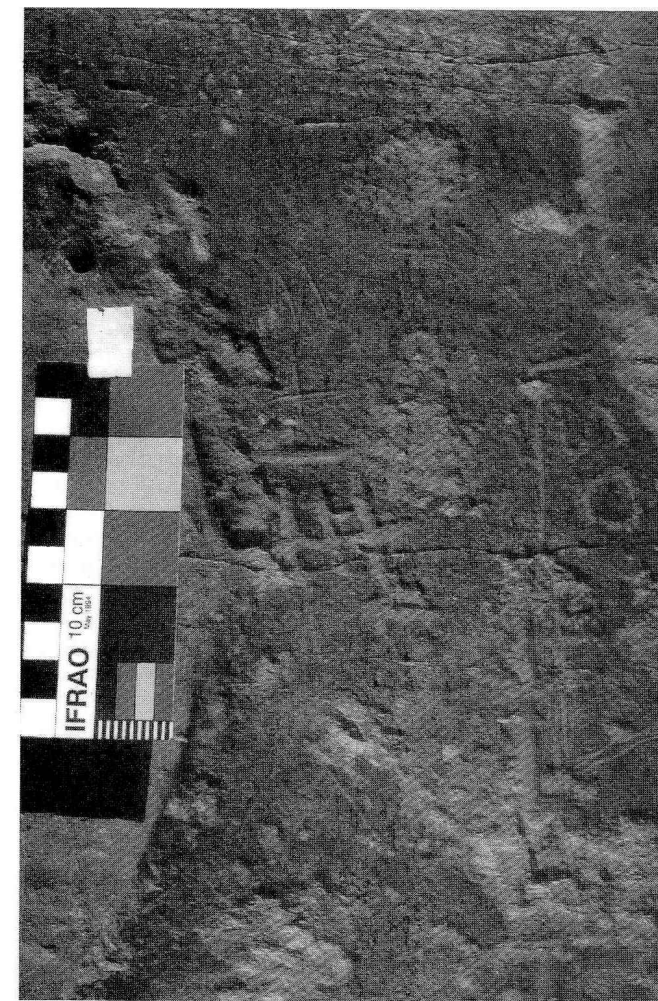


FIGURE 9. Inscriptions 5–7.

The significance of this observation cannot be estimated at the moment, further investigation at other sites will be necessary to comment it.

What can be stated already now with great security is, that these inscriptions of Msemrir do not belong to young Tifinagh script, but to ancient Libyco-Berber script.

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