



## THE PARALLEL BETWEEN ROCK ENGRAVING AND PEBBLE DRAWING IN REPRESENTING MYTHS

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**ABSTRACT** - Har Karkom is a holy mountain of prehistory, where worship is evidenced by, beside cult structures and funerary fields, several thousands of rock engravings left on top of the plateau and spread in the surrounding valleys.

Another, less common form of art present on top of the mountain is drawings on the landscape. Depictions of large geoglyphs representing animals, geometric or abstract figures, sometimes humans, are found on the flat surface of the plateau, in relationship to the ancient structures and remains. Based on the animal figures, and on the knowledge of the palaeontology of the area, it is possible to ascertain that the geoglyphs were drawn in different periods, from the late Pleistocene to the Holocene.

The study of geoglyphs confirmed that this kind of art at Har Karkom is a response to the need for rock art with the same meaning in the same area at least during the Holocene period, the same animals having been depicted by both techniques, including the ibex *Capra nubiana*, which represents the totemic animal of the mountain during the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze ages.

In conclusion, drawing on the landscape also led our ancestors to represent through this form of art some ancient myths and beliefs related to the holiness of Karkom Mountain.

**RIASSUNTO** - Har Karkom è una montagna sacra della preistoria, sulla quale i fenomeni di culto sono testimoniati, oltre che da strutture in pietra e campi funerari, anche da migliaia di incisioni rupestri in cima all'altopiano e sparse nelle valli circostanti.

Un'altra forma di arte meno comune presente sulla montagna è quella dei disegni sul terreno (geoglifi). Figure di grandi geoglifi in forma di animali, geometrici o figure astratte, a volte antropomorfe, si trovano sull'altopiano in connessione con i resti di antiche strutture. Sulla base delle figure animali, e della conoscenza della paleontologia nella regione, è stato possibile verificare che i geoglifi furono eseguiti in periodi diversi, dal Pleistocene finale all'Olocene.

Lo studio dei geoglifi ha confermato che almeno durante l'Olocene questo tipo di arte a Har Karkom risponde allo stesso significato dell'arte rupestre nella stessa area, quando con entrambe le tecniche sono stati rappresentati gli stessi animali, compresa la *Capra nubiana* che rappresenta l'animale totemico della montagna durante il Calcolitico e l'Antica età del Bronzo.

In conclusione, anche mediante questa differente forma di arte, cioè i geoglifi, i nostri predecessori rappresentarono antichi miti connessi alla sacralità della montagna di Har Karkom.

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Har Karkom is a holy mountain of prehistory, worshipped for millennia. Beside cult structures and funerary fields, several thousand rock engravings were left on top of the plateau and spread about in the surrounding valleys. As many as 50,000 figures were engraved on the rocks of Har Karkom. A complete classification of these engravings has been published by Emmanuel Anati first in 1979, then in 1993 (p. 91) and, with Federico Mailland, in 2009 (pp.22-26). Anati divided the rock art of Negev and Sinai into 8 main styles and 4-5 sub-styles, corresponding to different periods, though the beliefs behind the individual rock art (RA) representations may have lasted for far longer across the periods. A typical example of that is the representation of the ibex from RA III (Chalcolithic) to RA V (Roman-Byzantine age) and later.

The period of interest for this report is the so-called Bronze Age Complex (BAC), including Chalcolithic, Early Bronze and Middle Bronze I, during the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE. This period corresponds to the RA style III (Chalcolithic) and IV-A (Early Bronze) and is characterised by the recurrence of an animal figure, the ibex, which is present in 80% of all the rock engravings of that period. The image of the ibex refers to a wild goat, *Capra nubiana*, which has adapted to life in a rocky arid environment and is still extant in the area of Har Karkom. Its figure is represented in a naturalistic way in RA style III (Figure 1), with a rectangular body, sometimes filled in by engraving, four legs, a triangular muzzle with ears and beard, and a short tail. The horns

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are exaggerated to reach the middle of the dorsal line. The particularity of the horns is not random, as it refers to the crescent image, and in fact the ibex was the representation of the lunar god Sin. The cult of Sin had been known in Mari (Mesopotamia) since the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium and from there spread to the West, reaching the Anatolia and the Siro-Palestinian area. It continued during the Bronze Age, and at Har Karkom it is evidenced by the rock engravings of the RA style IV-A (Figures 2 and 3), where the animal figure is stylised, with the body rendered by one or two parallel lines, four lines for the legs, and two curved lines as long as the whole animal body, as a result of the maximisation of the only important particular of the figure, i.e. the horns identified as the moon crescent.

The investigation of the geoglyphs recently begun at Har Karkom led to the interesting observation that the figure of the ibex had also been rendered by pebble drawings on the landscape, mainly stylised as in the RA IV-A engravings.

Despite the geoglyphs of Har Karkom being drawn in ancient times – the upper surface of stones presenting a very old patina compared to the lower one and to the ground under the stones – we made an attempt to date each of the pebble drawings by style and by represented figures. In the middle of the plateau, where there are several hut floors and material culture belonging to the late Middle Palaeolithic/early Upper Palaeolithic, figures of large mammals were probably drawn before their extinction in the area, at the end of the Pleistocene. A description and tentative significance of these geoglyphs in that period has previously been discussed by Mailland (2011 & 2012).

Pebble drawings of ibex belong most probably to later times, and are contemporary to the RA style IV-A, when the ibex was the totemic animal of the mountain and represented the shape of the lunar god Sin. Some of these geoglyphs representing the ibex figures are described below.

*HK/101b - WGS84 coordinates 30°18'14.9'N, 34°44'08.6'E (Figure 4)*

This geoglyph is a profile drawing of an ibex, 5.2 m long and 3.5 m high. The figure has an orientation northeast-southwest, with the head at the northeast and the legs at the southeast. The figure was made by aligning brown stones over the pale yellow limestone ground. It is characterised by a line for the body, the head being a prolongation of the body line, two curved, parallel lines for the horns and four lines for the legs.

This geoglyph is in the middle of a small flat area, surrounded by black rocks with rock art mainly of the RA IV-A style.

*HK/10b - WGS84 coordinates 30°18'10.7'N, 34°44'42.1'E (Figure 5)*

This is the profile drawing of an ibex, 8.0 m long and 4.2 m high. The figure has an orientation northwest-southeast, with the head at the northwest and the legs at the southwest. The figure was made by aligning brown stones over the pale yellow limestone ground. It is characterised by two lines for the body, the head being a prolongation of the body. Two curved, parallel lines represent the horns which reach the middle of the dorsal line, and four disturbed lines represent the legs.

This geoglyph is on the top of a small hill, near to an orthostat and a flint workshop of the BAC period. It is associated with a stone rectangle, 2.0 m long and 1.0 m wide. It is not clear whether the rectangle is contemporaneous to the ibex figure or if it was added later.

*BK/176 - WGS84 coordinates 30°19'28.38'N, 34°44'19.78'E (Figure 6)*

This is a small drawing of an ibex, 2.0 m long and 1.8 m high. The figure was made by aligning clear lime stones over the pale yellow loess ground. It is very visible at sunset. It is characterised by one horizontal line for the body, a vertical line for the head, continuing in a circle representing the horn. Four lines perpendicular to the body represent the legs.

This geoglyph is near a courtyard site which represents a seasonal agricultural settlement of the Chalcolithic Age at the foot of Har Karkom on the northern side.

Beside the ibex other animal figures populate the rock art of Har Karkom, especially from the Bronze Age, although at a lower rate compared to the totemic animal. The ensemble includes images of the animals that have populated the Har Karkom area in Holocene period, since the advent of the humid Neolithic period, when the land became fertile. Smaller mammals compared to the Pleistocene period were living there, including canines, felines, gazelles, wild donkeys (*Equus hemionus*), camelids, and also large birds, like ostriches and ducks, and small reptiles. Many of them are represented in the rock art of the Bronze Age, and parallels were found in the pebble drawings of Har Karkom.

Among these animal figures, the ostrich is present in different rock engravings. A sample of these graffiti is presented in Figures 7 and 8. A geoglyph of an ostrich was found as follows:

*HK/10b - WGS84 coordinates 30°18'10.0"N, 34°44'42.0"E (Figure 9)*

Not far from the aforementioned figure of the ibex, there is a second geoglyph, representing a biped, probably an ostrich. The drawing has been made by placing pale yellow stones over the brown ground. Dimensions are about 4x4 m. The line head-tail is orientated southwest-northeast, and the animal is represented by a heavy body and long, thin legs. The similarity with the ostriches engraved on the rocks is evident.

Canines are present in Har Karkom rock art of the Bronze Age, mostly in hunting scenes (Figure 10). A canine was identified among the pebble drawings, in the context of large mammals belonging to the Palaeolithic period.

*HK/24c - WGS84 coordinates 30°17'47.6"N, 34°44'45.8"E (Figure 11)*

This geoglyph represents a canine with erect tail, in an aggressive or dominant stance. The animal is represented by two lines for the body, four lines for the legs, drawn stretched out in a running posture. The figure is 11 m long and the line head-tail is orientated west-east. Although the figure was found in the context of Palaeolithic geoglyphs, the style and the movement of this geoglyph allow the assignment to the Bronze Age group: the canine is probably hunting or affirming its dominant status, with the erect tail, and the stretched legs suggesting that it is running.

The figure of the antelope is rare in Har Karkom rock art; nonetheless it is present in the engravings of the Bronze Age.

*HK/24c - WGS84 coordinates 30°17'48.28"N, 34°44'44.83"E (Figure 12)*

This is a small geoglyph of an antelope, 6 m long, represented by one line for the body, two straight lines for the horns, starting from the vertex of the triangular head, and four lines for the legs, representing the walking animal in a naturalistic way.

This pebble drawing is near to a large geoglyph of an elephant from the Palaeolithic period, and appears to be a later addition.

*HK/38b - WGS84 coordinates 30°17'29.9"N, 34°44'45.7"E (Figure 13)*

This is a 12 m long pebble drawing of a feline, maybe a leopard. This figure is represented in a naturalistic way, with rectangular muzzle, large thorax and slim abdomen, legs ending in quite large feet, long tail. The line head-tail is orientated southwest-northeast and the figure is surrounded by small platforms characterised by a square corner.

Felines were rarely drawn in any period of Har Karkom rock art. This geoglyph has a parallel in the Uvda valley, where in the so-called Shrine of Leopards a number of felines were drawn by aligning flat stones inserted in the ground in a vertical position (Figure 14). The parallel with the geoglyphs of Uvda suggests dating the HK/38b geoglyph to the late Neolithic period.

## CONCLUSION

Rock art is universally recognised as an expression of religious beliefs and myths in ancient times. Thousands of rock art sites above and around the mountain of Har Karkom confirm and validate the religious meaning of rock engravings during prehistory. Drawing on the landscape is a different form of art which would have been common in prehistory, even if less common than rock paintings and engravings, and less durable than the rock art.

Many geoglyphs have been found above the Har Karkom plateau, and to a certain extent geoglyphs have also been found in the surrounding valleys. The ancient date is not in doubt, as very old patina is evident on the upper surface of the stones, while a much lighter patina is present on the lower surface and on the ground under the stones.

They belong to different periods, as evidenced by differences in represented subjects and styles. Ancient people felt the need to draw on landscapes, depicting very large figures that are better visible from the sky. Whatever the significance for them was, they would have had a sufficient knowledge of mathematics and of proportions to allow them to draw figures which were hardly visible from the ground. This is particularly surprising for the most ancient geoglyphs ever reported (many of the Har Karkom geoglyphs represent the shape of animals extinct by the end of the Pleistocene period, thus they date back to the Palaeolithic period).

A characteristic of the pebble figures of the Bronze Age at Har Karkom is that they were mainly drawn in proximity to tumuli, and funerary fields or boulders with rock engravings. Pebble figures would have been drawn as markers of holy places at Har Karkom during the Bronze Age, in particular the ibex as the totemic



figure of the mountain. This is confirmed by the presence of the rectangle in proximity to the ibex at the site HK/10b. If we can adopt the significance of the rectangle at Har Karkom from the art of statue menhirs, the engraving of a rectangle means “territory”, and in HK/10b the presence of the rectangle near the ibex would mean “territory of [god] Sin”.

The presence of the other animal figures drawn by pebbles on the landscape may lead to different interpretations: they may have had the meaning of power. The animal was depicted in order to take on some of its characteristics: strength, speedy running, leaping, sharp eyesight, hearing, sense of smell, quick reflexes. The same animals depicted in rock engravings mainly during the Bronze Age are found in the geoglyphs, and this fact gives a validation of pebble drawings as a less durable form of art, endowed with the same meanings and religious significance as rock art. In particular, the feline image refers to the presence of the mythical leopards in the Shrine of the Uvda valley.

In conclusion, drawing on the landscape led our ancestors to represent by this form of art some ancient myths and beliefs related to the holiness of Har Karkom mountain. Our challenge will be to study the rock engravings and the pebble drawings with the aim of understanding the messages left by them as the heritage of modern human beings.

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Figure 1: ibex, RA III from site HK/5a



Figure 2: hunting scene with stylised ibexes and dogs, RA IV-A, site BK/183



Figure 3: stylised ibexes with horns long as the whole animal body, RA IV-A, site HK/101a



Figure 4: geoglyph of an ibex, site HK/101b (cross = 1m)



Figure 5: geoglyph with ibex and rectangle, site HK/10b



Figure 6: small geoglyph with ibex, site BK/176



Figure 7: three ostriches, an ibex and archer, RA IV-A, site HK/47



Figure 8: two ostriches, RA IV-C, site BK/131

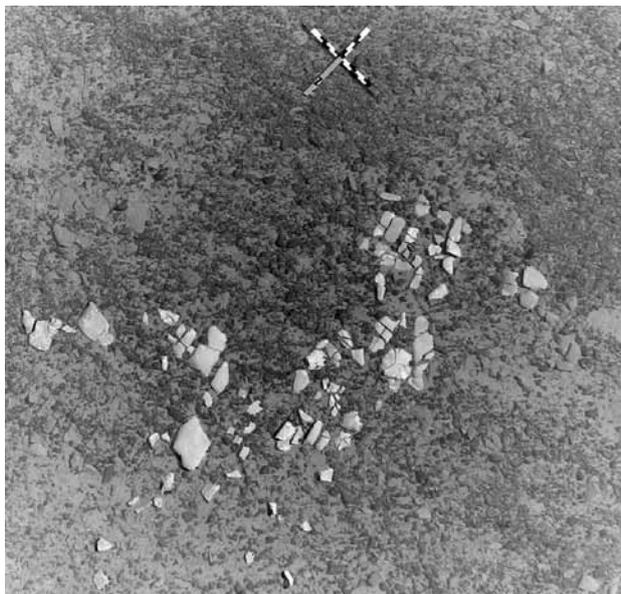


Figure 9: geoglyph of an ostrich, site HK/10b



Figure 10: hunting scene with dogs in aggressive stance. The elements with lighter patina are contemporary to the Greek inscription. RA III and RA V

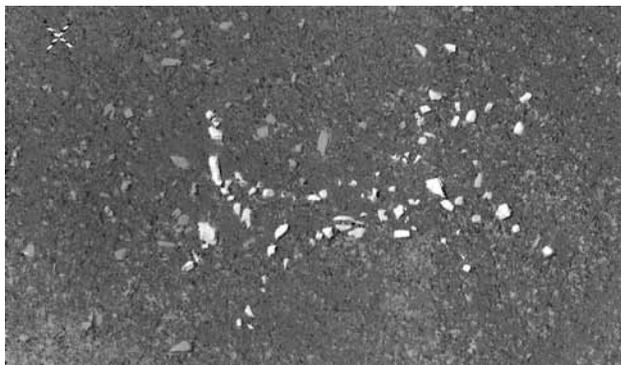


Figure 11: geoglyph with a running canine, in aggressive or dominant stance, site HK/24c

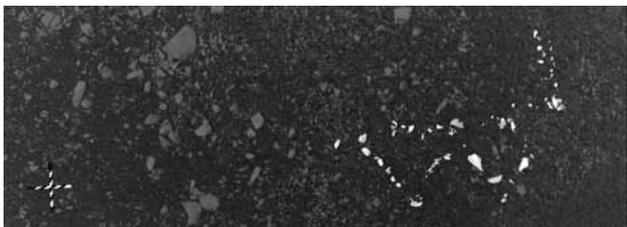


Figure 12: geoglyph of walking antelope, site HK/24c



Figure 13: geoglyph of leopard, site HK/38b



Figure 14: geoglyph from the shrine of leopards, Uvda valley.