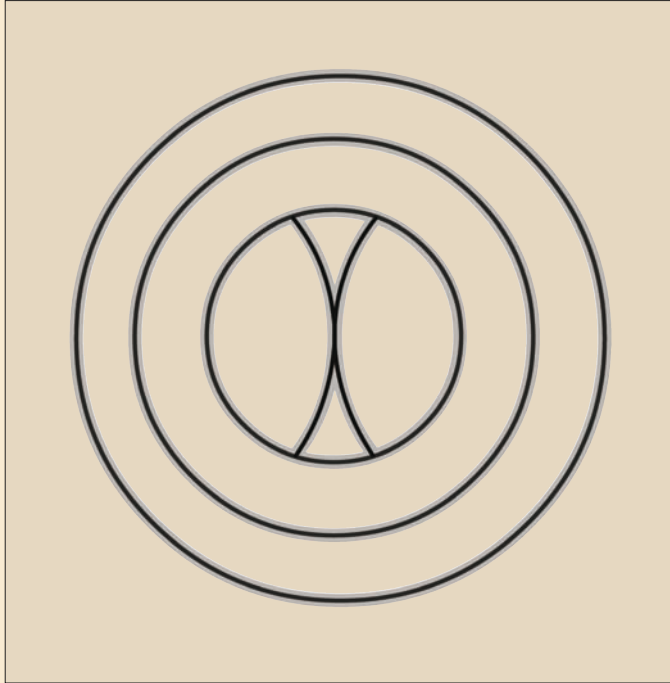


# ALMOGAREN

46-47/2015-2016



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Susan Searight-Martinet

## Nomenclature of engravings of axes in Moroccan protohistoric rock art

Keywords: Morocco, protohistory, rock art, axes

### Résumé

Cet article tente de rectifier une erreur dans un rapport publié dans le dernier numéro d'Almogaren sur le site de gravures rupestres de Lejuad du Sahara Occidental. Le nom attribué dans le titre de cet article à des images de haches gravées sur le site est "hache de type Metgourine", quand en effet il s'agit de haches connues sous le nom de "*haches-peltes*".

### Abstract

This short article attempts to straighten out a mistake in a report published in the last *Almogaren* on the rock engraving site of Lejuad in the Western Sahara. The name given in the title of this article to images of engraved axes on the site is "Metgourine type axe", when in fact these axes are not at all of Metgourine type but are axes known under the name of "*haches-peltes*".

### Resumen

Este artículo intenta mostrar que el título de un trabajo sobre un conjunto de grabados rupestres en la zona de Lejuad, en el Sahara Occidental, no es justo. El nombre dado en el título de este trabajo es "hachas de tipo Metgourine", pero en realidad estas hachas son llamadas "haches-peltes".

### Zusammenfassung

Dieser kurze Artikel versucht, einen Fehler aufzuklären, der in der letzten *Almogaren*-Ausgabe im Zusammenhang mit Felsbildern der Fundstelle Lejuad (Westsahara) veröffentlicht wurde. Gravuren von Äxten, die als "Metgourine-Typ" bezeichnet wurden, sind tatsächlich dem "*hache-pelte*"-Typ zuzurechnen.

## Introduction

The recent article by Sáenz de Buruaga on the rock engravings of Lejuad (Tiris, Sahara Occidental) (2013-2014) provided useful information on this interesting site. But the author has confused two types of axe well-known in Morocco: the axe known generally as the "Metgourine axe", and the "*hache-pelte*".

This is not the place to discuss the various – very different – images that have been called "axes". This article merely proposes to point out that the

engravings illustrated in the above article are not the "Metgourine" type of axe but are in fact the "*hache-pelte*" axe.

### **The "*hache-pelte*"**

The engravings on the Lejuad site are classical "*haches-peltes*", engraved in the High Atlas and in eastern and southern Morocco. As a reminder, they have a thin, crescentic, metal blade mounted in the middle of a curved or sharply bent shaft, forming an unbroken unit. The resulting image reproduces the silhouette of an umbrella. It is sometimes brandished by an anthropomorph. No metal or stone artefacts have been discovered which could have been the "blade". While the term "*hache-pelte*" – used by Chenorkian (1988: 322) – is far from satisfactory, it has passed widely into the rock art literature and is likely to remain there.

Chenorkian certainly points out the similarities between the "*hache-pelte*" and the "Metgourine" type of axe, essentially in the way in which the blade is attached to the shaft (although as far as the former is concerned, this can only be conjectured). However, he underlines the distribution difference between the two types, the "Metgourine axe" remaining (as yet) firmly Saharian.

An example of an engraving of a "*hache-pelte*" was found recently at Adrar n'Metgourine, south Morocco (El Graoui and Searight, 2009) (Fig.1). It is very small: the blade is 4 cm long and 0.80 cm wide; 4 cm separate the top of the blade from the bend of the shaft. The shaft is only 5 cm long and is attached to the middle of the blade. The patina of this small engraving is almost total, which renders it extremely difficult to see except in a certain light. This does not of course mean it is older than the cattle engravings of the site, many of which have a lighter patina. It is probable that it was engraved by a more recent visitor to the site.

Among examples of "*haches-peltes*" that can be mentioned is one engraved at Akka Issil (close to Adrar n'Metgourine), planted in front of an elephant (Fig. 2). Two others with long shafts were associated with an anthropomorph at Tircht (Fam el Hesn) (Fig. 3) while another rock on the same site carried a complicated scene involving also two *haches-peltes* (Fig. 4).

### **The "Metgourine" axe**

This weapon, bearing only a very superficial semblance to the above "*hache-pelte*," has a large, broad, fan-shaped cutting blade, producing a rather stubby image (far from the "*hache-pelte*" crescent). The blade narrows sharply before the hafting point and is set at right angles to a presumably wooden shaft. Several engravings of this weapon have been found on southern Moroccan

rock art sites, but none so far in the High Atlas. The essential difference of course between this type of axe and the "*hache-pelte*" lies in the silhouette of the blade (metallic in both cases) and the junction of blade and shaft.

As is the case for the "*hache-pelte*", this axe has been wrongly called the "Adrar n'Metgourine axe", since it was not in fact engraved on the Adrar n'Metgourine site but on the nearby ridge of Ingrad Tayaline. But such is the force of tradition, that this incorrect name has found a firm place in the literature. The appellation "Southern Moroccan axe" is preferred by Searight (2004), since it is at least geographically correct.

Among the sites showing this type of axe is the original one giving its name (wrongly) as "Medkourine" (Fig. 5) (Simoneau, 1972) and also Tazout du Dra (Fig. 6) (Simoneau, 1975).

## Conclusion

While the mistake in the identification of the axes engraved at Lejuad has probably no influence on their possible age, this mistaken appellation could have far-reaching repercussions when the distribution of these weapons is considered. But as far as chronology is concerned, Sáenz de Buruaga's application in the Western Sahara of Rodrigue's patination proposition for the engravings in the High Atlas (Rodrigue, 1999) is a daring step, inferring (as he does) a direct relation between the type of patination and the engraved motif – whatever their relative positions on the site.

Finally, it is surely a pity if the distinction between the numerous images of so-called axes engraved in the High Atlas becomes blurred, to include any number of dubious, contested forms. Let us keep to the distinct form of the "*hache-pelte*", different from the Metgourine type.

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**Figures:**

Figure 1. Engraved "*hache-pelte*" discovered on the site of Adrar n'Metgourine (photo El Graoui) (engraving in the middle of the photograph)

Figure 2. "*hache-pelte*" engraved in front of an elephant at Akka Issil (photo El Graoui)

Figure 3. Two "*haches-peltes*", engraved at Tircht (Fam el Hesn) (photo El Graoui)

Figure 4. Another two "*haches-peltes*", also at Tircht (photo El Graoui)

Figure 5. Axe from Adrar Metgourine (sic) (photo from Simoneau)

Figure 6. Axe engraved at Tazout du Dra (photo from Simoneau).



Fig. 1





Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

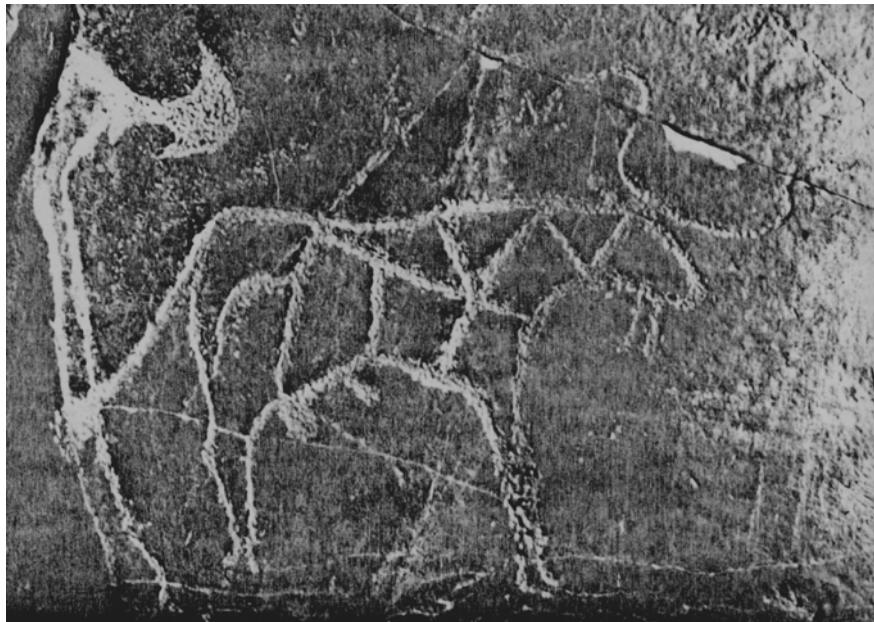


Fig. 5

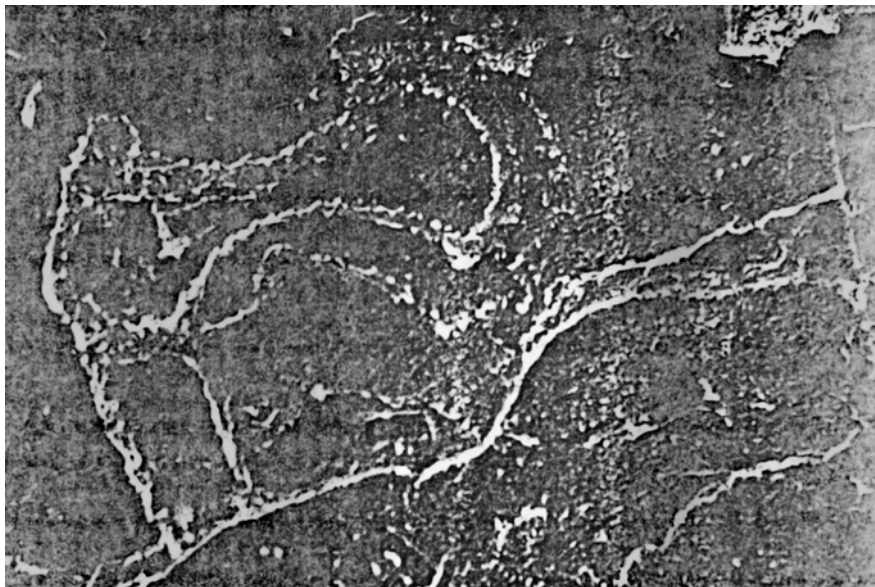


Fig. 6

