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Werner Pichler & Alain Rodrigue

Oued Rheris II: A new site of rock paintings in the South of Morocco

Keywords: Morocco, Oued Rheris, rock art, Libyco-Berber inscriptions

Résumé:
Le cours moyen de l'Oued Rheris, dans la région de Taouz (Sud Marocain), a été l'objet de la découverte de quatre sites comportant des inscriptions Libyco-Berbères. Il s'agit d'inscriptions gravées, à l'exception des signes du site II, sous abri, qui consistent tous en des signes peints. La densité et l'originalité des inscriptions confèrent au gisement un intérêt certain, tandis que celles-ci enrichissent notablement le corpus actuellement en constitution des inscriptions Libyco-Berbères du Maroc. Sur la plupart des dix huit panneaux les inscriptions Libyco-Berbères sont mélangées avec des dessins géométriques et anthropomorphiques.

Abstract:
The middle course of the Oued Rheris, in the region of Taouz (Morocco), was the subject of the discovery of four sites including Libyco-Berber inscriptions. All are engraved inscriptions, except those of the site II, a shelter where the signs are painted. The density and the originality of the inscriptions attribute a real interest to the site, while these paintings notably enlarge the corpus of the Libyco-Berber inscriptions of Morocco, which is progressively making up. On most of the eighteen panels the Libyco-Berber inscriptions are mixed up with geometric and anthropomorphic depictions.

Zusammenfassung:
Im Mittellauf des Oued Rheris in der Region Taouz (Marokko) wurden vier neue Fundstellen mit libysch-berberischen Inschriften entdeckt. Alle sind graviert mit Ausnahme der Fundstelle II, einem Abri mit gemalten Zeichen. Das Ausmaß und die Originalität der Inschriften sind beachtlich und stellen eine Bereicherung des Corpus der Inschriften Marokkos dar. Auf den meisten der achtzehn Paneele treten die libysch-berberischen Inschriften zusammen mit geometrischen und anthropomorphen Darstellungen auf.

The site

The painted shelter of Rheris II was discovered by L. Masselin and A. Rodrigue in May 2006. After a first evaluation and the taking of a date in May 2007, the paintings of the inscriptions were briefly published by two of us (A. Rodrigue, W. Pichler, 2008). The present note is the results of the new and

extended works on the site by W. Pichler, A. Rodrigue and L. Masselin in 2007 and presents the inscriptions within their context.

The shelter of Rheris II is located at the beginning of a narrow and dry valley (a *shaba* in Arabic) which comes to its way out in the main valley of the Wadi Rheris, coming itself out of the mountain pass (a *foum* or a *fam*) between Jebel Mechot and Jebel Talhamadat. The shelter itself is located on the left bank and some 12 meters from the bottom of the dry valley (Fig. 1 - 3). It's facing the west and our plan gives the precise location of the painted stratum (Fig. 4). Figure 5 provides the exact position of the eighteen painted panels.

Problems of documentation

Normally methods of DIP (Digital Image Processing) are a very helpful tool to clarify hardly visible rock paintings. At the site Oued Rheris II there are two difficulties:

- There is no sun on the panels of the shelter, especially at panel 9/ inscription 4 which has an inclination of 180° (looking to the ground).
- The rock surface itself presents red/brown colours so that there is a very bad contrast to the red paintings.

To solve these problems of documentation we tried different methods of image enhancement and compared the results to obtain an optimal solution.

The basis of every examination is to enhance colours and contrast by "standard" methods which are provided by widely used programs such as ADOBE PHOTOSHOP or COREL PHOTO-PAINT:

- Saturation adjustment: changes the selected colour intensities
- Hue rotation: transforms targeted colours
- Curves: adjusts the tonal levels
- Levels: darkens rock art/lightens background

For complicated cases it is recommended to use special programs like D-Stretch by Jon Harman which is able to bring out elements nearly invisible to the eye by applying a Karhunen-Loeve transform to the colours of the image. For red paintings it is recommended to use the LRE- or YBR-colour spaces.

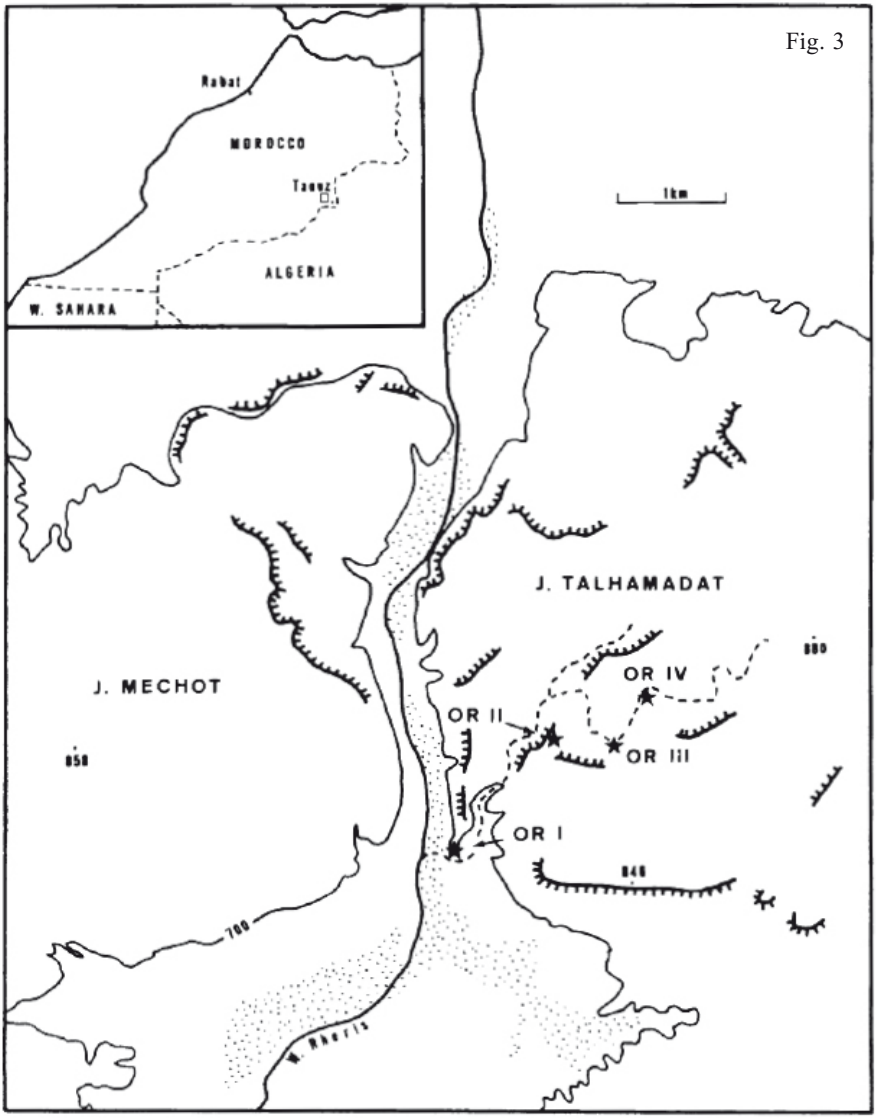
In our special case of painted inscriptions with very vague outlines it is important to define the edges of the painted areas. This is possible by the method of vectorizing the image with programs such as COREL TRACE: the picture is divided into some thousands of objects with different colours (the amount of objects depends on the selected percentage of exactness). Now one can delete all objects with "non-red-colours". If B/W images are needed for publication, you can mark the contours with black lines or fill up the painted areas with black.

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Libyco-Berber inscriptions

The shelter of Rheris II presents at least 18 panels with painted figures (some additional ones show now only traces of colour), 7 of them containing Libyco-



Berber inscriptions. All of them are situated on slim rock bands − this may be the purpose why four of the ten script lines are written horizontally: there is no smooth surface for longer vertical inscriptions.

Inscription 1 (panel 3): a horizontal line with some clearly identifiable Libyco-Berber characters (in the left part) amongst additional signs such as anthropomorphic and geometric figures.

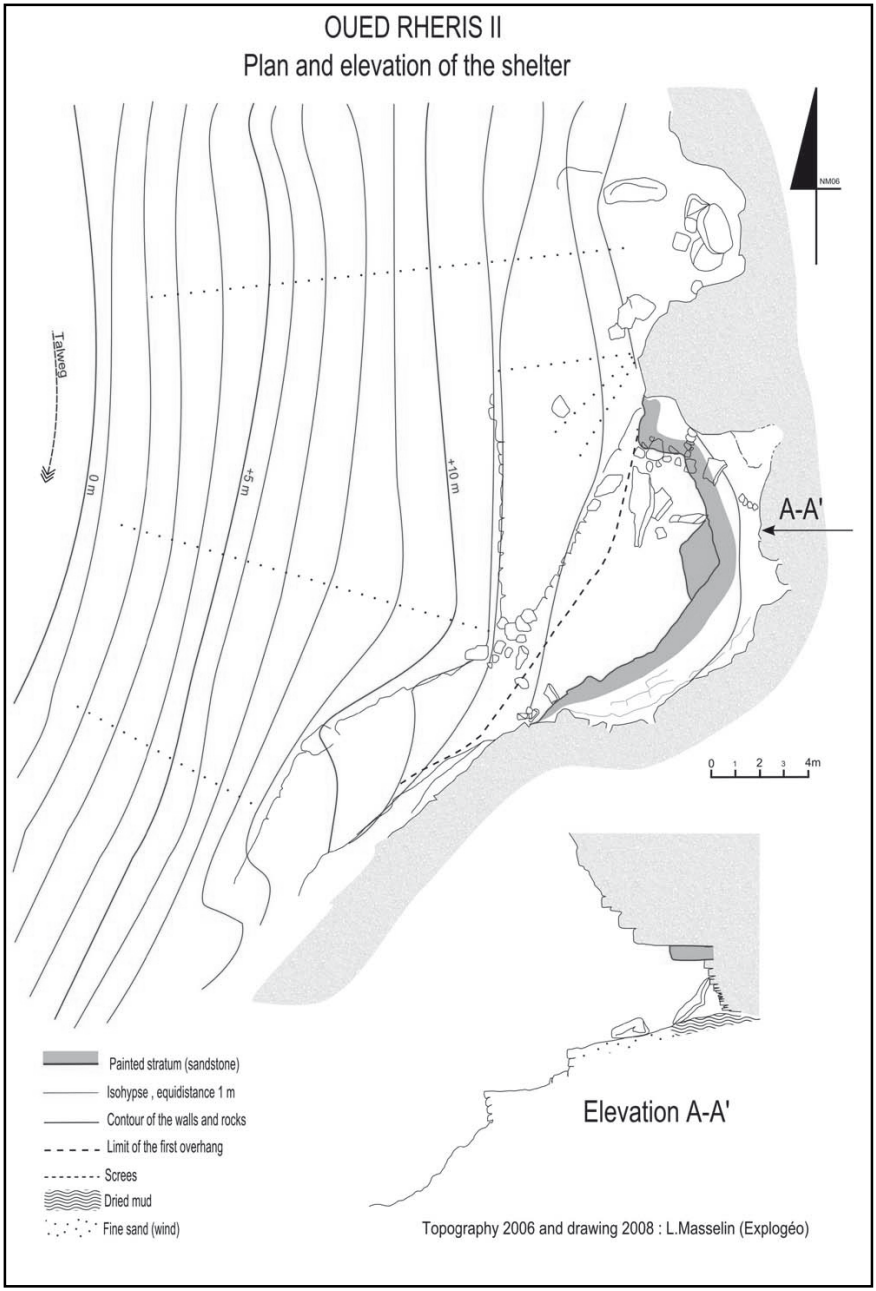
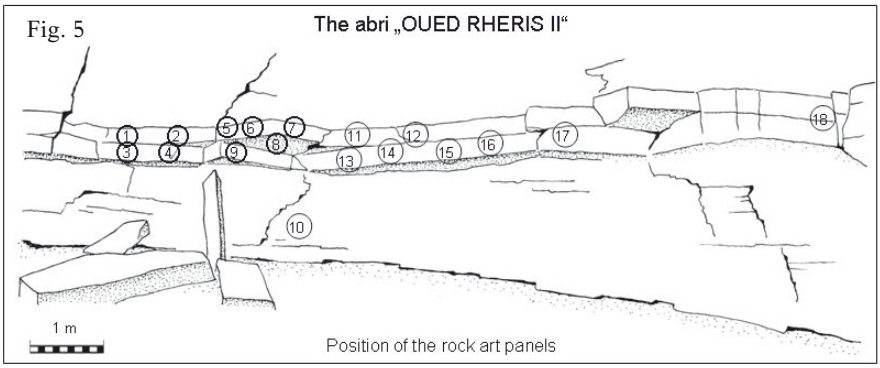

OUED RHERIS II
Plan and elevation of the shelter
NM06
Talweg
0 m
+5 m
+10 m
A-A'
0 1 2 3 4m
Painted stratum (sandstone)
Isohypse , equidistance 1 m
Contour of the walls and rocks
Limit of the first overhang
Screes
Dried mud
Fine sand (wind)
Elevation A-A'
Topography 2006 and drawing 2008 : L.Masselin (Explogéo)

Fig. 4



Transliteration: TMLR or TMNYR.

Inscription 2 (panel 5): a very tiny horizontal line, the left part is clearly Libyco-Berber script; the right part is hardly visible.

Transliteration: WDGST.

Inscription 3 (panel 8): the upper and lower part of this great panel (looking to the ground!) is consisting of rather chaotic arrangement of signs, most of them possibly Libyco-Berber characters (using two different colours!). The middle part presents possibly four vertical lines of Libyco-Berber script, but very hardly visible. The drawings are only an attempt of reconstruction and should not be used for epigraphic analysis.

Inscription 4 (panel 9): a vertical line of four characters including one anthropomorphic figure.

Transliteration: T*DST.

Inscription 5 (panel 10): a horizontal line with Libyco-Berber characters which is continued to the right by some hardly visible anthropomorphic or geometric figures.

Transliteration: NZMT.

Inscription 6 (panel 16): presenting seven signs, most of them possibly Libyco-Berber characters, using two different colours.

Inscription 7 (panel 17): a vertical line with 3 signs: the upper one is presenting no Libyco-Berber character; perhaps the present situation is fragmentary.

Transliteration: FS*

The alphabet

The seven inscriptions of Rheris II contain approximately 40 – 50 characters, most of them in clear lines, some as isolated signs. Thus it cannot be expected that they cover the whole alphabet: at any rate it is surprising that

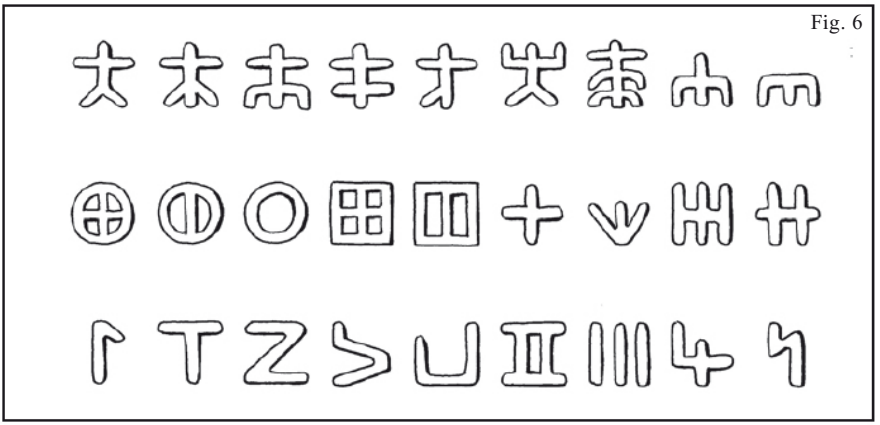
only the signs for /b/, /y/ or /k/ are missing. Anyway, there is not the slightest indication for elements of the Transitional of Tifinagh alphabets (such as pointed signs or typical incipits) so that we can attribute the inscriptions to the ancient Libyco-Berber alphabet.

The context of the inscriptions

In the case of the site Rheris II it is impossible to draw the line between script signs and not-script signs. There are a lot of isolated signs such as crosses or circles which, of course, could be characters. In addition there are a lot of signs which look like characters but are not belonging to a Libyco-Berber alphabet.

Thus the whole sample of approximately 160 figures can be divided only roughly into some groups. One third is characterized in distinct script lines. 20 % can be called script-like signs (Fig. 6, third line). Some of them look like Libyco-Berber characters (1 − 3 from left), others even like Roman or Arabic numerals (6 and 8 from left). Another 20 % are isolated geometric figures such as circles, squares, most of them divided into parts by one or two lines (Fig. 6, second line). However, the most typical feature of the shelter of Rheris II is approximately 27 anthropomorphic depictions, all of them painted in a very abstract, geometric way, so that there are melting transitions to simple crosses and “tree-like” signs (Fig. 6, first line).

Fig. 6



Commentary to the figures 7 - 26

As it was not possible to publish the paintings in colour we decided to do without the original photos because they can give no illusion of the graphic representations. The documentation is carried out in three steps:

1: it presents the best results of DIP. Unfortunately this result is reduced considerably by printing in black-and-white.

2: it shows the result of vectorizing, converting the original red and yellow colours into black.

3: as both methods provide differences in details of the contours of the paintings we decided to add a subjective interpretation by drawing generalized contours of what we believe to be the original paintings − to the best of our knowledge and belief.

References

Rodrigue, A.; Pichler, W. (2008): Nouvel abri peint au Maroc. Bulletin no. 57 de la Société d'Études et de Recherches Préhistoriques des Eyzies. 57-61.

The panels →

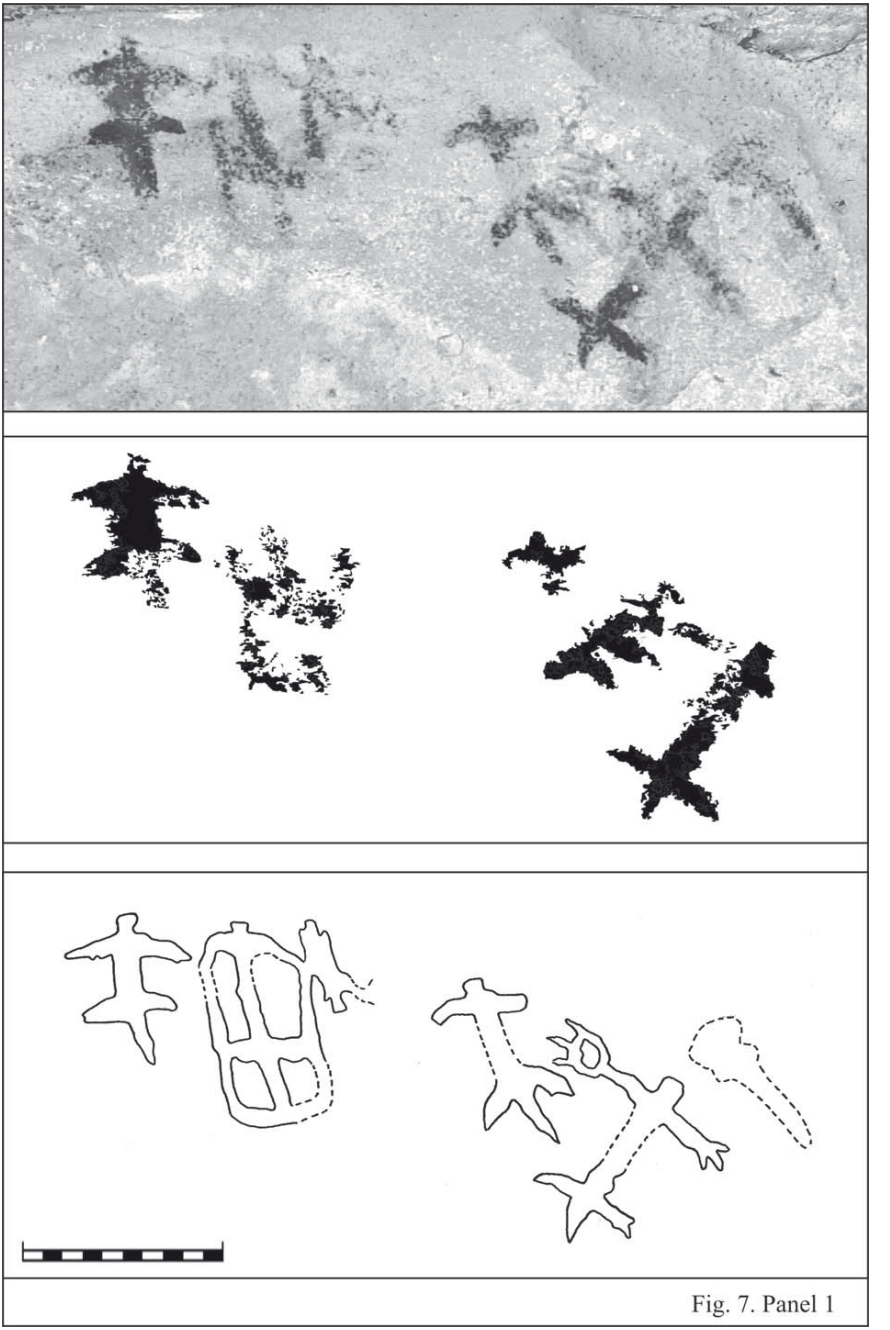


Fig. 7. Panel 1

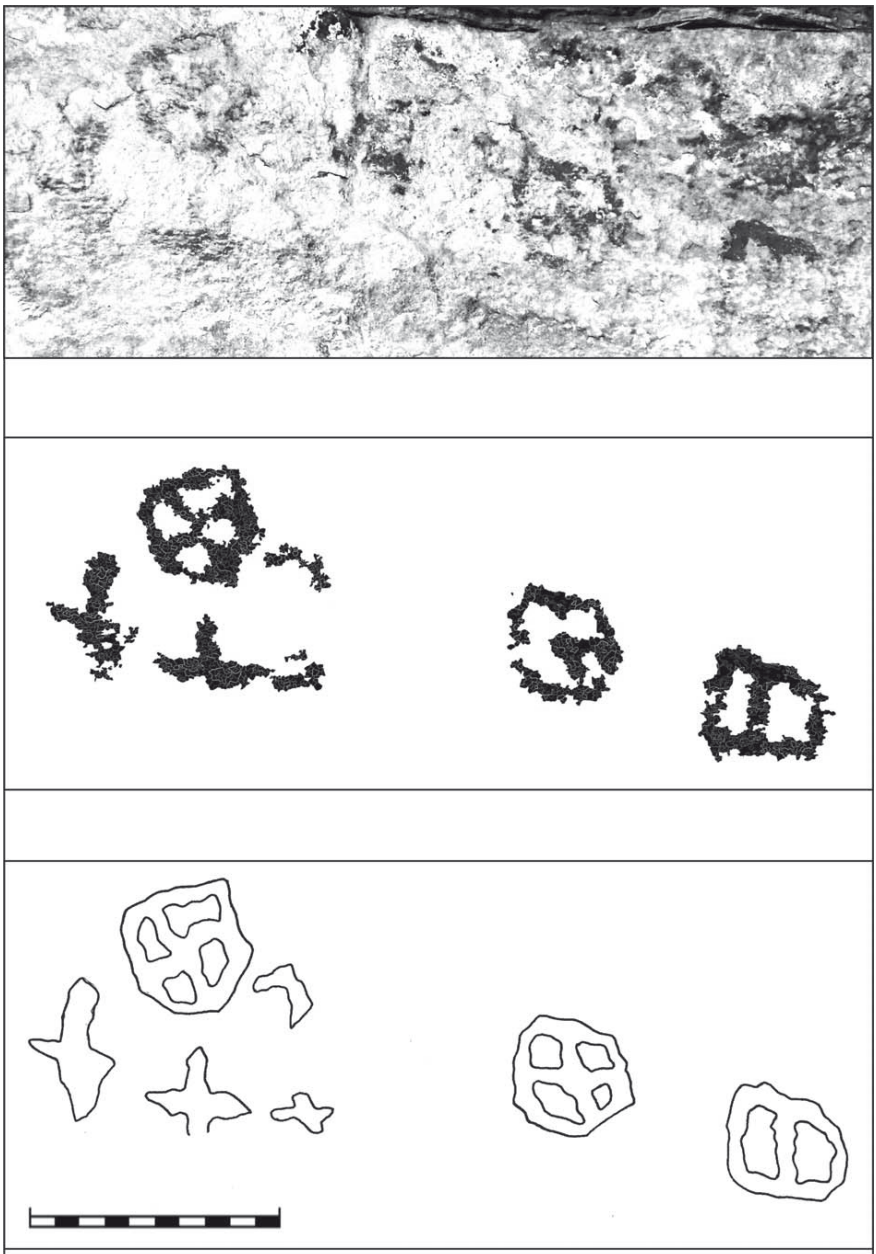


Fig. 8. Panel 2

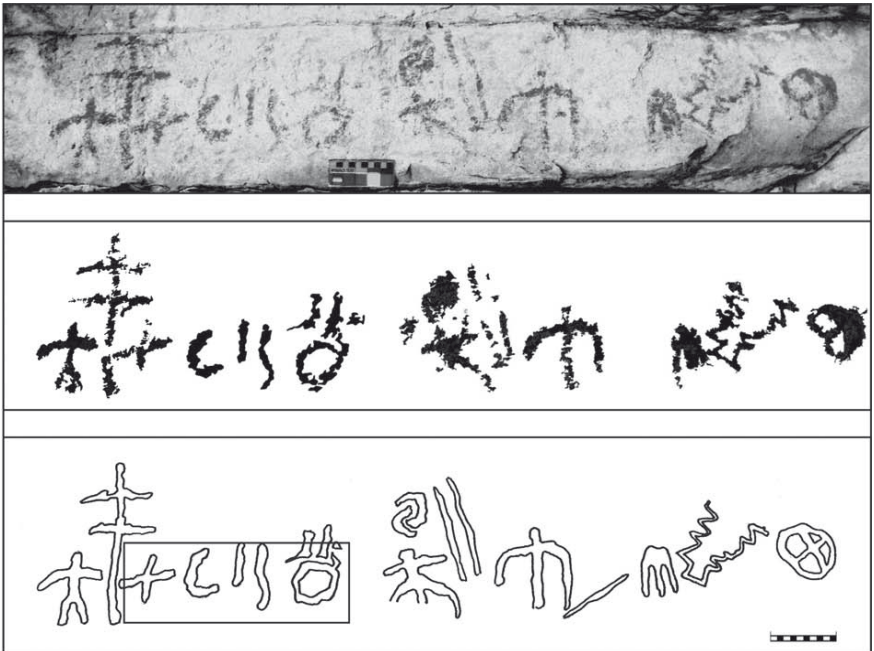


Fig. 9. Panel 3

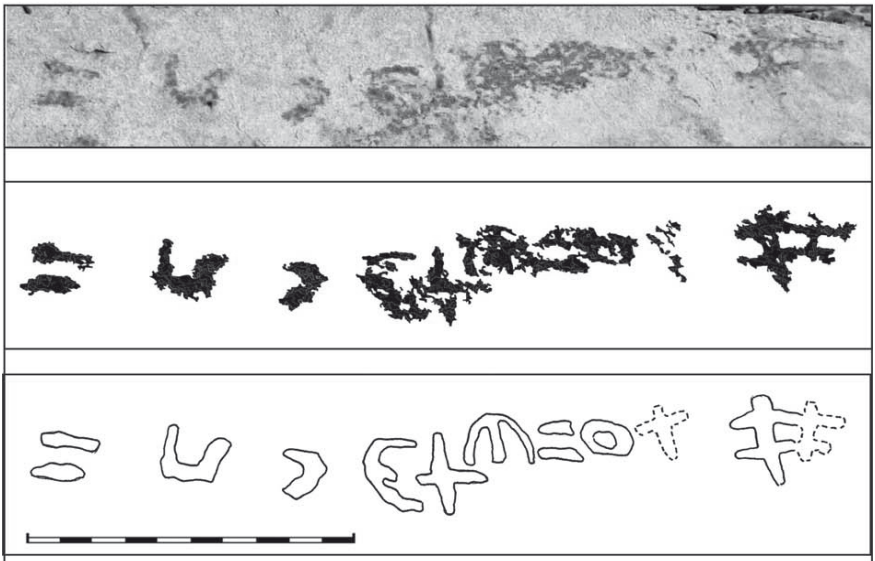


Fig. 10. Panel 5

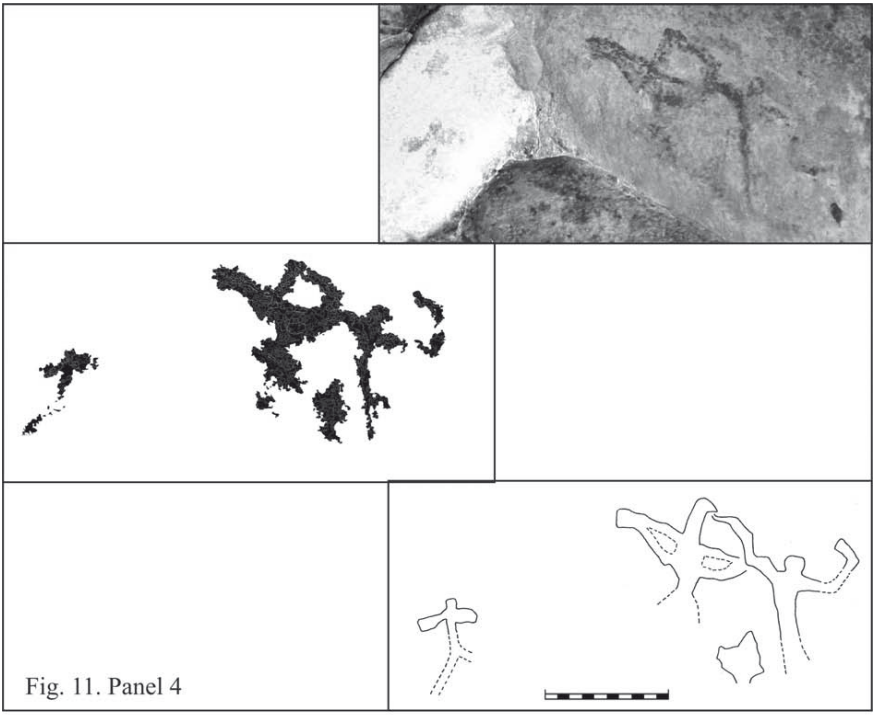


Fig. 11. Panel 4

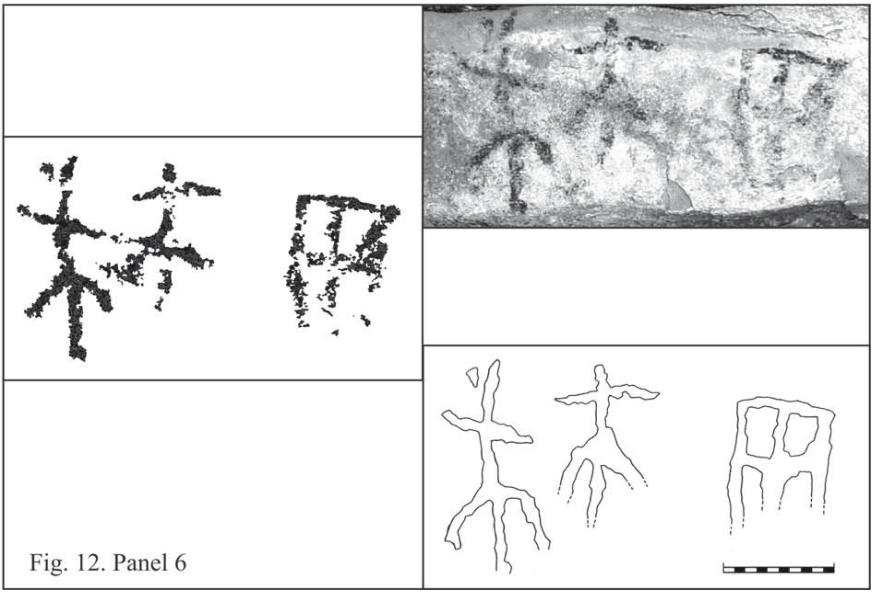


Fig. 12. Panel 6

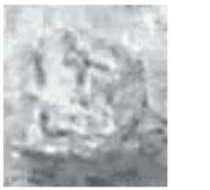
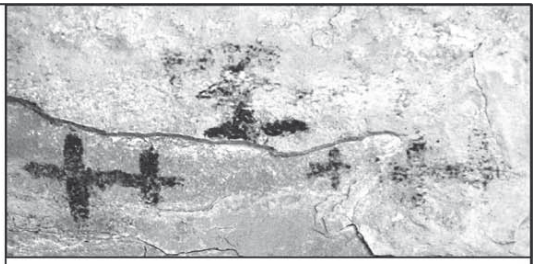


Fig. 13. Panel 11



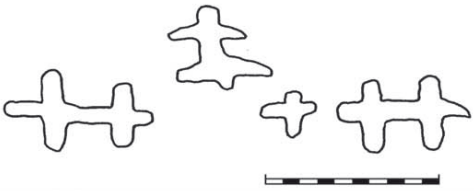
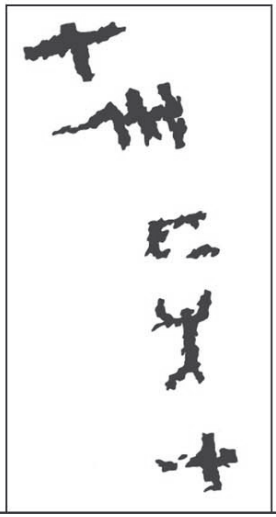


Fig. 14. Panel 7

Fig. 15. Panel 9



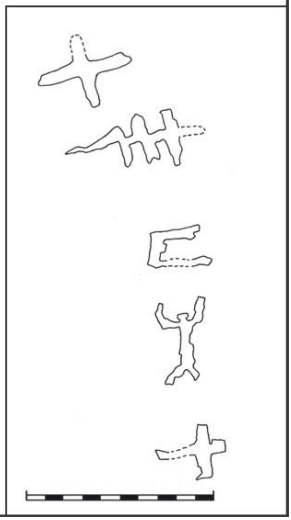


Fig. 16. Panel 8/1

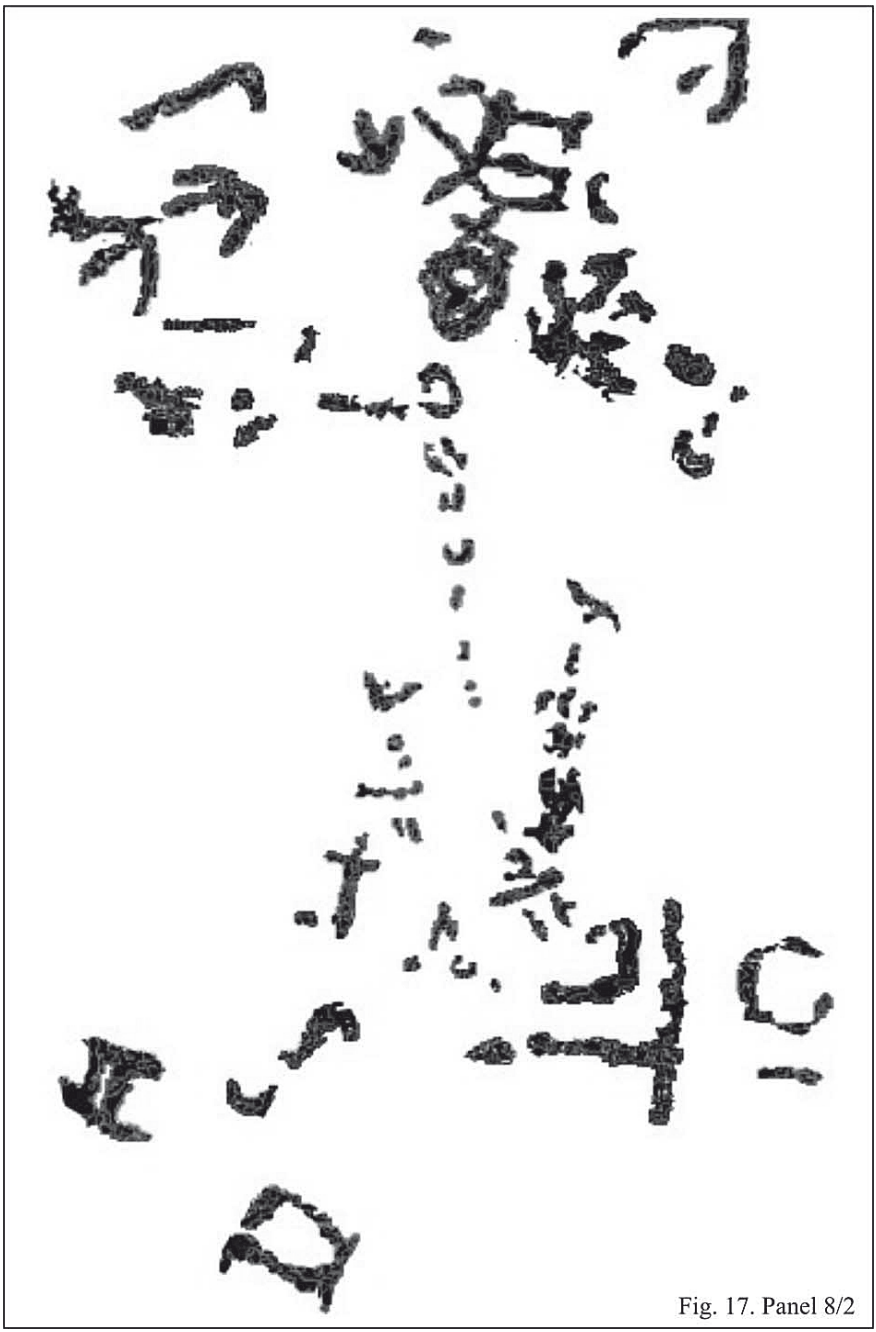


Fig. 17. Panel 8/2

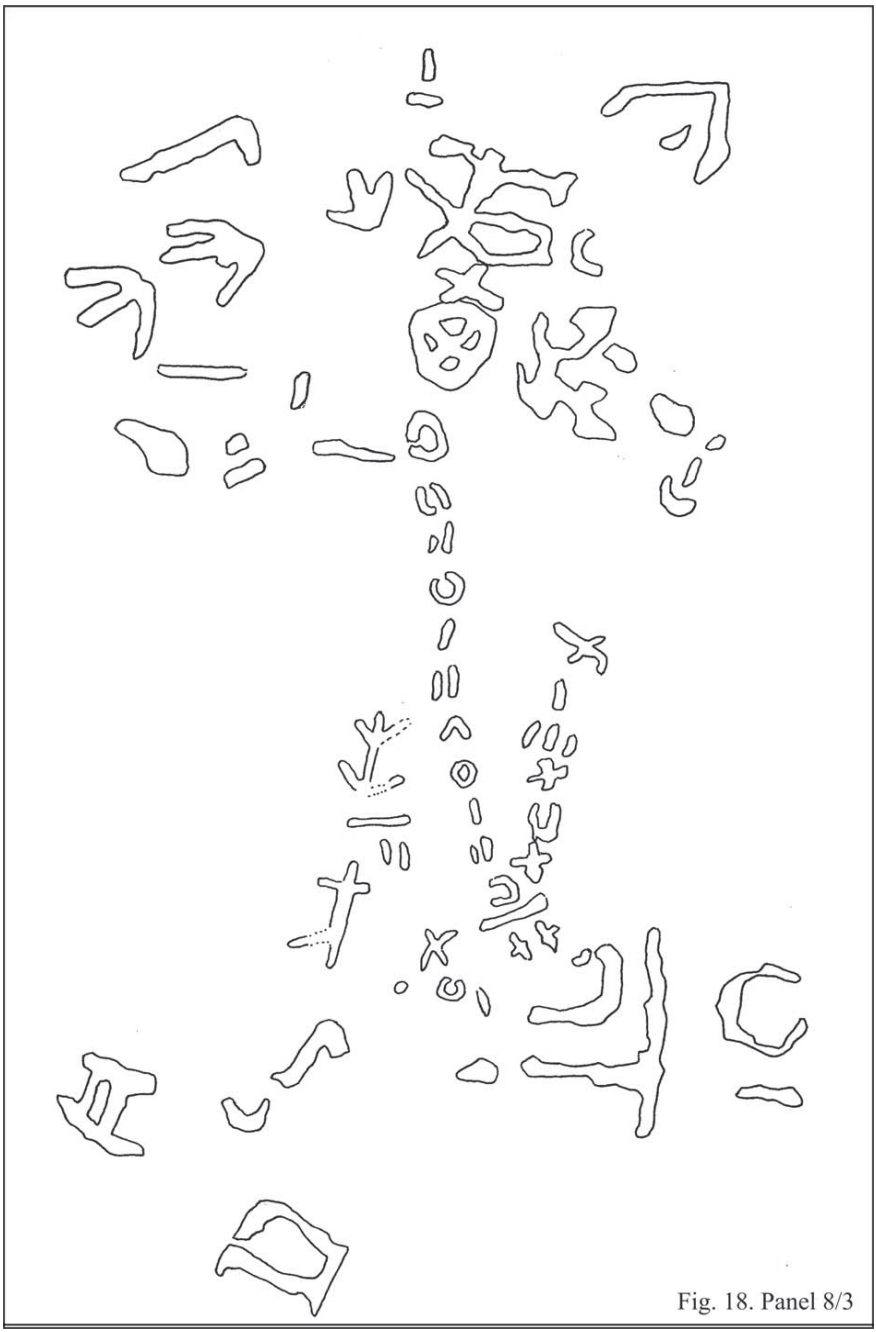
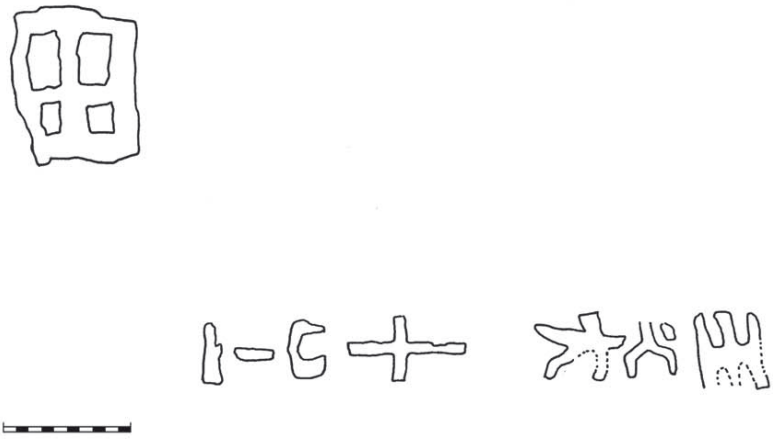


Fig. 18. Panel 8/3



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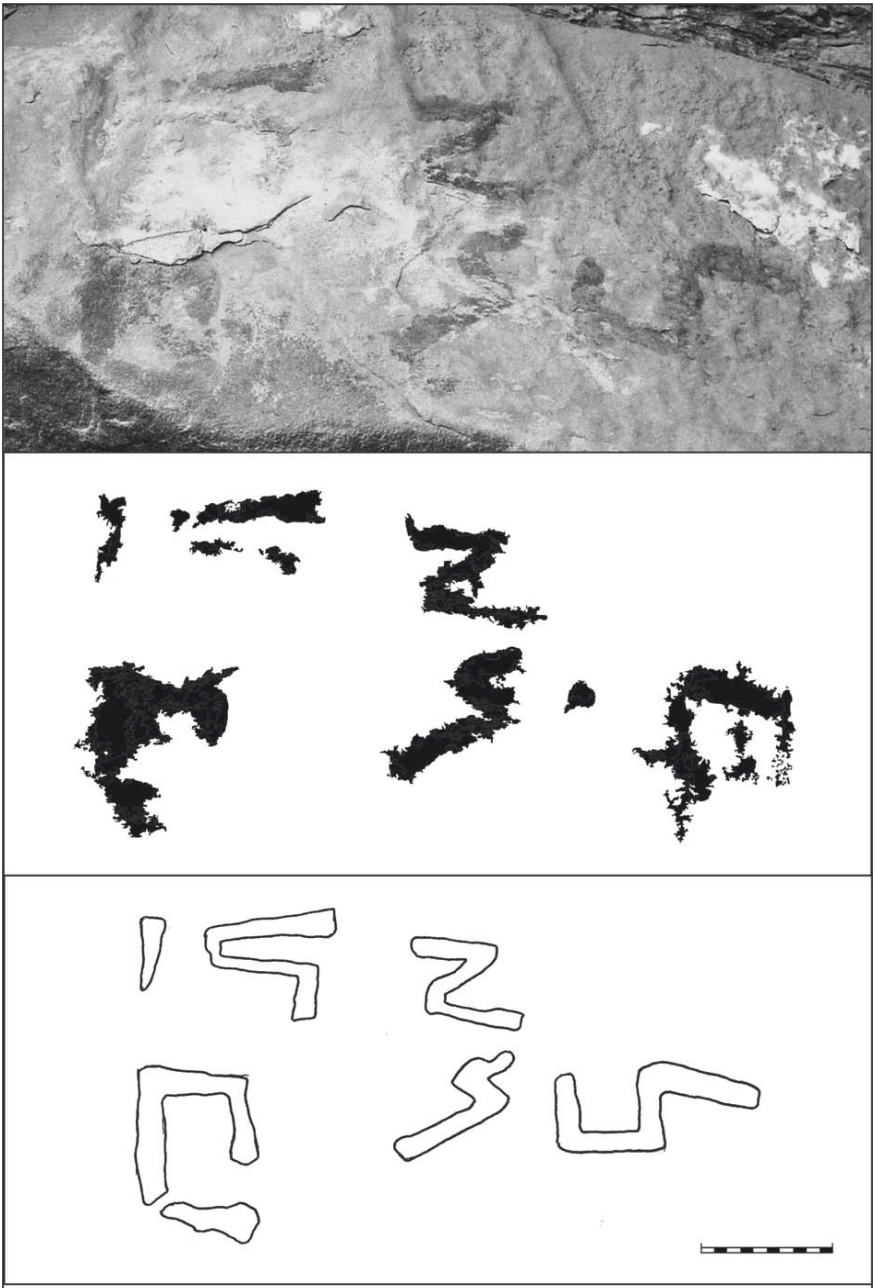

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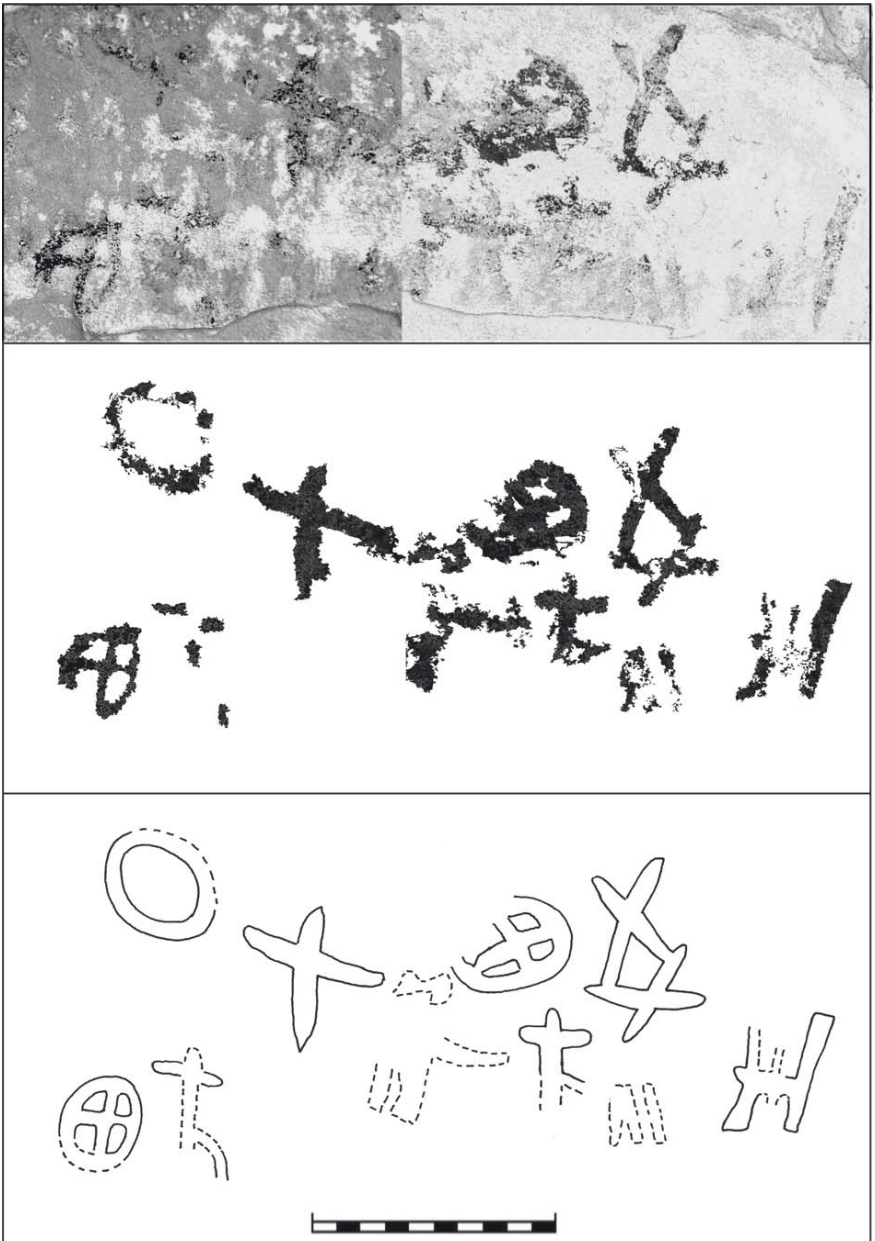


Fig. 21. Panel 13

Fig. 22. Panel 14

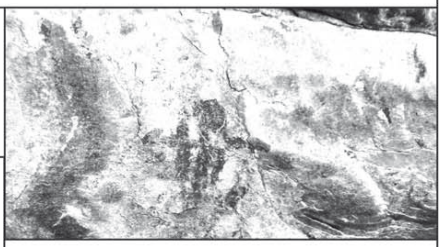
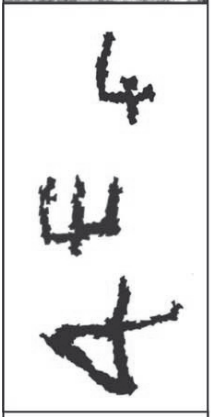


Fig. 23. Panel 15

Fig. 24. Panel 16



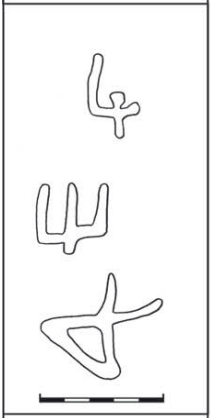


Fig. 25. Panel 17

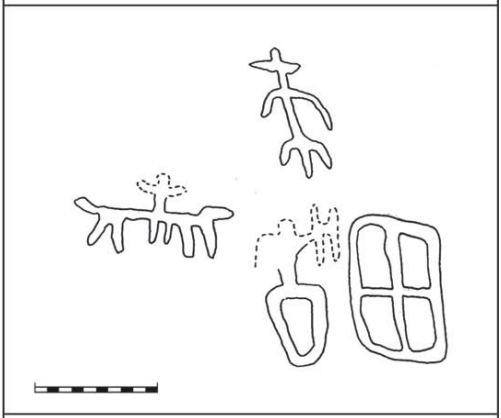


Fig. 26. Panel 18