

SOME CUP-AND-RING MARKS OF WESTERN AÏR?

Fig. 1. shows apparent cup-and-ring marks, noted by M. Milburn on 16 January 1976, while travelling between IZEZOU WELL (19 25 N 07 24 E) and OURARENE WELL (19 32 N 07 11 E) in Northern Niger. These designs, on horizontal rock, lie towards the ESE edge of a low outcrop—one of thousands in the vicinity—interspersed with the typical rolling desert of this region, at an estimated altitude of around 470 metres. The scale is graduated in tens of centimetres.

While only one small carved animal representation was observed on the same outcrop, there are numerous others within several hundred metres distance, both horizontal and vertical, seemingly typical of the degenerate style published by French authors slightly further East. Very similar designs are known, as will be seen on referring to the bibliography below, in isolated cases in every continent except, perhaps, Antarctica.

The writers are aware at present of no similar Saharan designs, published or unpublished. What appears equally certain is that these presumed cup-and-ring markings are quite different from the other known types of carvings, pits or grooves of Aïr, namely:—

- 1 Carved designs, mostly of pecked technique, depicting animals, humans, chariots, etc. (Lhote, 1976: Mauny, 1954.)
- 2 Smallish “cups” often arranged in geometrical patterns, in many African areas. Lhote (1962, 98) describes them as “des cupules symétriques ont pu servir de jeux.” P. Townsend refers to them elsewhere (personal communication) as “open-air rock boards”, an opinion common to that of Reygasse (1935), who mentions relatively recent symmetrical cups, used for a well-known game by sedentary Arabs and nomads alike.
- 3 Deep cylindrical shafts in horizontal surfaces, noted by Lhote (1976, 206) “SW of Aoukaré” and elsewhere, although he specifically declines to suggest what was their possible use. More were seen by M. Milburn on 18 January 1976 at about 19 29 45 N 07 36 30 E, in similar rock surfaces, at oued level, below a rich assortment of carved rock art at the large unpublished site just to West of the junction of Oued Selseli with Oued Tamangouit. We concur with the dimensions given by Lhote, namely up to 25 centimetres diameter and 30–40 centimetres deep. Outside Niger they seem to exist, for example, in Libya (Mori, 1970, fig. 2a), described in the singular as “marmitta emisférica scavata”, as also at an enigmatic site near Ronda in Southern Spain (Milburn and Köbel-Wettlauffer, 1976, 288 (h)).

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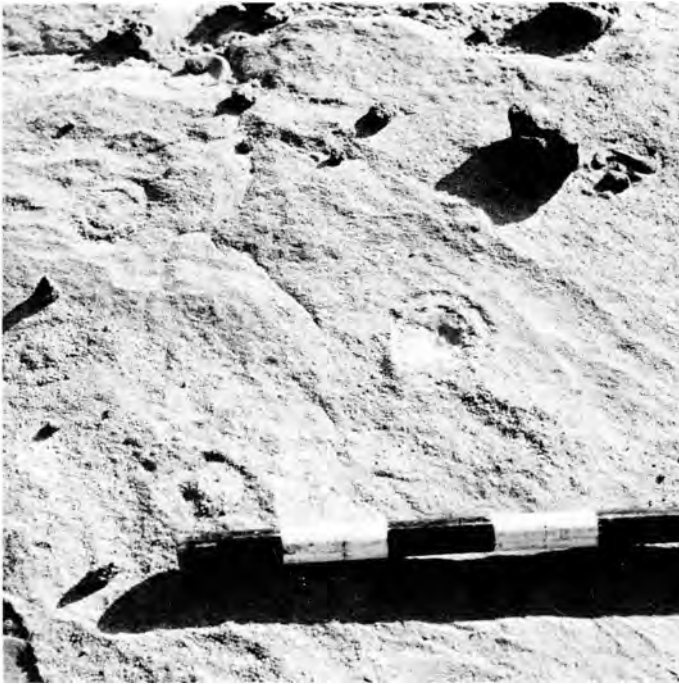


Fig. 1: Apparent cup-and ring marks in Western Aïr (Niger). Photo Milburn.



Fig. 2: A typical cup-and-ring, carved on a huge boulder at Point Farm, Kilfinnan, Argyll, Scotland. Photo Morris.



Fig. 3: Mr Carl B. Compton, the well-known Texas archaeologist, at a typical cup-and-ring carved stone at Kilmichael Glassary, Scotland, Photo Morris.