

6. The harbour.

(a) The Gezireh el Anshetea, off the Fort Yamen end of Kitchener's Wall.—On it can be seen the remains of Fort Jafferich, and where the sea has eroded away its edges animal and human bones can be seen.

(b) Condenser, or Quarantine Island.—Old ruins of the hospital and other buildings. The jetties and piers have been rusted away and only the piles remain. The bricked-in swimming bath is still present. This island was the starting point of the Suakin-Berber railway, and remains of the rails, etc., can be found. The causeway between the island and the mainland, built in 1884, is also still present.

(c) The Quarantine station.—Now used for pilgrims.

(d) The European cemetery, near the Quarantine station. —The graves of those who fell in the 1884-5 campaigns are separated off from the others. All the graves are numbered, and can be identified by referring to the cemetery book, which is kept in the Muhamfaza.

ROCK PICTURES IN NORTHERN DARFUR.

By A. J. Arkell, M.B.E., M.C.

(PLATES XIV-XXII).

I. AT MERBO IN TAGABO.

(Human beings, cattle, rhinoceros, elephant, giraffe and antelope.)

THE existence of these paintings was unknown until my friend Count d'Almasy paid a visit, which he has described in *Sudan Notes and Records*¹, to the famous old Bedai guide in this locality. Count d'Almasy has a wonderful flair for finding rock pictures, as he showed by his discoveries at Uwenat, in the Gilf el Kebir and elsewhere, but his skill in this direction seemed to me little short of uncanny when after two or three days' absence from El Fasher, during which he had been travelling nearly all night as well as all day in his efforts to run the elusive Bidi to earth in the short time at his disposal, he came back not only having succeeded in his quest but to tell me that he had heard of rock paintings at Merbo. And I, who had been keeping my eyes and ears open for this sort of thing in Darfur as far as the exigencies of government service would permit for the best part of ten years, had heard nothing of them.

I was unable to go to Merbo until September, 1935, and then I was only able to stay there a very short time. Merbo (*mer bo* means "girl village" in the now practically extinct Berti language), is a fertile area a few miles east of Mabo in the main range of the Tagabo hills and some five miles west of the village of Gabrallah, which is situated on the motor road from Mellit to Jebel Meidob, a short distance north of Sayah wells. The rock paintings are at the north-west end of a small hill which crowns a sand-hill. The rock of the hill has weathered into peculiar shapes, which may have exercised the imagination of primitive man. At the south-east end of the hill there is a low cave, that would have provided shelter for at least one large family, and near it there is a remarkable low arch of natural rock about 20 yards wide.

The whole hill would undoubtedly repay a thorough examination. Near the rock paintings I picked up on the surface of the ground some fragments of pottery and a few artifacts which I submitted to Dr. K. S. Sandford of Oxford University, who writes:—

"The material is clearly the refuse from a flaking site: the finished articles may have been carried away for use, but further investigation of the neighbourhood would almost

¹ Vol. XVIII, p. 271. Bidi Awad died in August, 1936.

certainly produce good results. The importance of the present collection lies in the clear indication that flaked stone industries are present in the area. The flakes are certainly not of lower or middle palaeolithic type, but are probably post palaeolithic: two specimens exhibit small cones of percussion on smooth, unflaked platforms; another shows that narrow flakes have been detached successively from a core, probably about 1-2 inches long. There is a much battered triangular piece of quartz about half an inch long and a quarter of an inch high, the crest of which has been flaked or battered as if it were a minute anvil: I think this is fairly widespread in the northern Sudan, always in surface sites. It is impossible to give any close estimate of age at present; it might even range into fairly recent times in these regions."

At the corner of the hill, between the rock paintings and the cave above-mentioned, I found a number of other fragments of pottery, all of which seem to have been made by the same method as that existing in Darfur to-day, but some of which were much thinner and harder than anything produced now, even by the potters of Sayah, who make the best pottery in Darfur. Any evidence of previous human inhabitants in the cave itself is no doubt buried below the manure of the goats which were sheltering in the cave at the time of my visit.

The situation of the rock paintings is shown in Plate XIV. The overhanging rock makes a shelter, which as it faces north always provides protection against the sun, and to a great extent against the rain also. In fact it was probably looked on as a desirable residence by the people who made the paintings. It is owing to this favoured situation that we owe the preservation of two groups of paintings, on the edge of which can be seen traces of a number of other paintings which have been almost completely washed out by the rain.

They are all silhouettes in red or brown pigment. The red and brown ones are evenly distributed, and give the impression of being all of approximately the same age, although they appear to be the work of several artists.

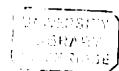
In the more easterly of the two groups two men, one armed with a hooked stick or possibly a sling, are driving a herd of four antelope, one of which has a calf. The fourth and largest antelope is facing in the opposite direction to the other three, and part of its head can just be seen in the photograph of the group (Plate XVII(a)). In the foreground near the heads of the third and fourth antelope can be seen a small indeterminate figure (? human). We have here probably a hunting scene. It is not unlikely that the antelope are being driven into some form of a trap, as gazelle are still



THE SHELTER CONTAINING THE PAINTINGS AT THE NORTH END OF J. MELBO.



THE WESTERN OR THE TA-JA-MAIS GROUPS OF ROCK PAINTINGS AT MEROE.
A composite photograph. The paintings were first photographed as found, and then after the chief ones had been outlined in chalk. They are reproduced here as they came out best.



driven into nets in Darfur to-day. It is even possible that the schematic figure under the giraffe in the other group of pictures (see Plate XV) may represent a trap, for it is unlike any tribal sign or other design that I know. The two groups are very close together, on adjacent faces of the rock.

Above the herd of antelopes I could make out the faded figures of three animals and two men, and below there are other figures that have been almost completely washed out by the rain.

In the second group (Plate XV) we appear to have a herd of cattle being driven out of an enclosure or village by men. The cattle appear to be of two types, one with horns which are wide and almost circular, and remind one of the cattle on the predynastic palettes of ancient Egypt, while the other has horns which grow forward and downward in a remarkable way. The cattle are not so life-like as the antelope or even the rhinoceros (see below), but the general style in which they are drawn seems to be related to the rough designs of animals on predynastic pottery, especially in that the length of leg, the cloven hoof, and in some cases the knee joint, are all exaggerated. The cattle with the horns that grow forward and downward unfailingly recall the Garamantian cattle, first described by Herodotus,¹ to which Nachtigal² related the rock drawings of cattle, all with their horns bent forward, which he found at Udéno in Tibesti. Cattle of a type in which the horns grow forward and downward are not uncommon in Darfur and Kordofan to-day (Plate XVII (b)), although this peculiarity does not prevent them from grazing in the normal manner; and it is not improbable that they are survivors of the old Garamantian stock, examples of which were owned by the people who made the rock paintings at Merbo.

Among the cattle, depicted at Merbo, a woman with long hair appears to be dancing. By her side stand a girl and a small boy. It has been suggested to me that for a certain obvious reason this figure must be that of a man, but I take it that the feature in question is a strip of cloth hanging between the legs, akin to what is known as the *kanfis* in Darfur

¹ Bk. IV, c. 183. "Among the Garamantes are the oxen that go backwards as they graze, whereof the reason is that their horns curve forward, therefore they walk backward in their grazing, not being able to go forward, seeing that their horns project into the ground. In all else they are like other oxen, save that their hide is thicker and different to the touch." (Loeb tr.)

² *Sahara und Sudan*, Vol. I, p. 307.

to-day. Further, I consider that the attitude of the arms of the large figure, and the size of the small figure conclusively support my interpretation.

Close to these cattle is a roughly executed giraffe, apparently being surrounded by two or three men, just below one of whom is the mysterious schematic design to which I have already referred. To the right of this design is a conventional elephant, and below it, still further to the right, is either an elephant of a very different pattern or possibly a rhinoceros, for it has no trunk. Further to the right still is a rhinoceros that is full of life.

Giraffe and antelope are still found in northern Darfur, elephant last appeared in northern Darfur in 1921 and a few still exist in south-west Darfur, but rhinoceros do not seem to have been seen in Darfur for years, and I am not inclined to believe the entry on Messedaglia's map of Darfur to the effect that rhinoceros were found in Dar Zaghawa in the middle of last century.

The impression I get from these drawings is that they are very old, and possibly the oldest trace of man that has been yet found in Darfur, apart from certain stone implements. Indeed I should not be surprised if they were not connected in some way *via* the Libyan desert with the artists of predynastic Egypt: and I hope that it will not be long before some expert has the opportunity to examine them and the whole site at Merbo thoroughly.

About 20 yards further west and also on the cliff face, about ten feet or so above ground level, are a number of rough drawings of horsemen in black pigment, in which the high ends of the saddle are much exaggerated. These pictures are similar to those at Gharra Murtega described below: and are in my opinion of about the same age, approximately 13th century A.D., when Kanem, owing largely to its new weapon the horse, was able to include Darfur in its empire. The site of the legendary palace of Nàmadu (*na madu* in the Berti language means "the red king") less than ten miles north-west of these rock paintings near the Mabo wells in the main pass through the Tagabo hills, which I have not yet had an opportunity to visit, was probably a strong point, of which the function was to guard the route through the Tagabo hills on behalf of Kanem: and these pictures of horsemen were probably inspired by mounted members of the garrison at Mabo.



AN ENLARGED VIEW OF SOME OF THE CATTLE AND HUMAN BEINGS IN THE ROCK PAINTINGS AT MERBO.