

FALCON GRAFFITI IN THE EASTERN DESERT

By P. DE BRUYN

ABOVE the plateau on which is situated the fortress of Abrak¹ there is a ridge about 40 m. high, just below the top of which there is a small natural cliff, facing east, on which is the graffito shown in pl. XIV, 1. It is 34 cm. long, the hieroglyphs reading 'the overseer of scribes and military magistrate Inu'. The falcon in a boat on the left of this graffito³ has nothing to do with it, and must have been drawn before the graffito, for it has forced the author of the inscription to place the final out of line below the boat; nevertheless, the style of both is similar.

It would seem improbable that this graffito is earlier than the fortress. Down in the valley, on the other side of the fortress, is a well at the entrance to a narrow rocky ravine in which, some 40 m. behind the well, is a group of four large rocks. On the eastern face of the middle rock is the drawing shown on pl. XIV, 2. Above two parti-coloured long-horned cows with white calves is a large falcon about 45 cm. high (shown on a larger scale in 3); in my opinion the cows and the falcon are contemporary.⁴ There are other petroglyphs around the falcon and cows, which occupy the best surface; at the top left-hand corner of pl. XIV, 2 can just be seen a rhinoceros and a hunter.⁵ Below the cows is a boat containing a falcon which is being towed by a small stylized human figure which is just visible on the bottom right of the photograph, and to the left of it is just discernible what appears to be a ritual scene which shows a dog-headed divinity to the right of a priest who holds a small pick-shaped object to the head of a cow. This could be a scene of sacrifice by pole-axing.

At Umm Kerwau, a small isolated shrubless valley 6 km. north of Abrak, is another group of petroglyphs (pl. XIV, 4) in which the cows and the falcon appear to be contemporary. The dog and leopard (?) hunting an oryx may be recent. Within 20 km. of Abrak are many other petroglyphs, perhaps a hundred groups of five to twenty drawings. The subjects comprise about 85 per cent. cattle, 5 per cent. oryx, 4 per cent. human figures, 3 per cent. ostriches and dogs, 2 per cent. camels and horses, 1 per cent. rhinoceros and elephant.

Sherds of a ware pale yellow to pale pink in colour occur near some of the many

¹ See *JEA* 42, 121.

² The sign is a hieratic form.

³ On the falcon-in-boat signs and and the deity they represent see *AEO* II, 17* ff.: 50* ff.: 63*: 69* ff. For a Dyn. I representation see Petrie, *Tombs of the Courtiers*, pls. 2, 6; 12, 5. Compare possibly also Winkler, *Rock Drawings*, I, pl. 15, 1, and a graffito of a falcon drawing a boat in Wādi el-'Allākī published in *JEA* 33, pl. 10.

⁴ On the other hand, L. Keimer, who saw the photograph in 1953, thinks that the cattle are much older than the falcon.

⁵ Two other rhinoceros petroglyphs occur near by, one 10 m. behind the rock in question and the other at the junction of Wādi Hodein with Wādi Aneith.

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stone tombs of C-group type in the Abrak area—two in Wādi Gehab, twenty in Wādi Hadmip near Abū Sāfi, and thirty, utterly destroyed, at Abrak. These sherds are mostly plain, but some have incised on them patterns composed of triangles filled with dots or hatched with lines. The colour of the ware leads me to suggest that it may have been made by a Mesopotamian technique, although the designs seem reminiscent of C-group and Pan-grave pottery.

The interpretation of the Abrak rock-pictures is not easy. I attribute them all to local inhabitants except for the graffiti of Dhuthotpe (*JEA* 42, 121) and Inu (pl. XIV, 1), which are evidence of the presence of Egyptians in the area. The position of the falcons shown on pl. XIV may be significant in that both face eastward towards the sunrise. The association of a falcon with cattle (pl. XIV, 2, 3) may also have significance, as well as the fact that the parti-coloured cows have white calves as near the head of Wādi Hodein.¹ Since in the latter place is a stylized human figure pulling a white calf by a rope and in pl. XIV, 2 a similar figure tows a boat carrying a falcon, it is possible that there may be a connexion between the falcon-in-boat, the sign for the god 'Anti, and the white calves. From their primitive style I am inclined to the view that the falcons and cows of pl. XIV, 2 and 3, as well as the rhinoceros, are of predynastic date, but Dr. A. J. Arkell, to whom I am indebted for help and criticism, prefers for all of them a date between the Old and New Kingdoms, attributing them all to the C-group people or their Pan-grave successors. Nevertheless, I do not see why the ancestors of the C-group should not have been established in the Eastern desert in predynastic times.

¹ Colston and Purdy, *Bull. de la Soc. khédiviale de Géogr. d'Égypte*, [2], 1886, p. 525, first noted rock pictures in Wādi Hodein.