

## Rock Art Proves the Presence and the Use of Camels in North Africa

**Ashraf Sobhy Saber\***

Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Sadat City, Sadat City, Egypt

\*Corresponding Author: Ashraf Sobhy Saber, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Sadat City, Sadat City, Egypt.

Received: October 26, 2021; Published: January 28, 2022

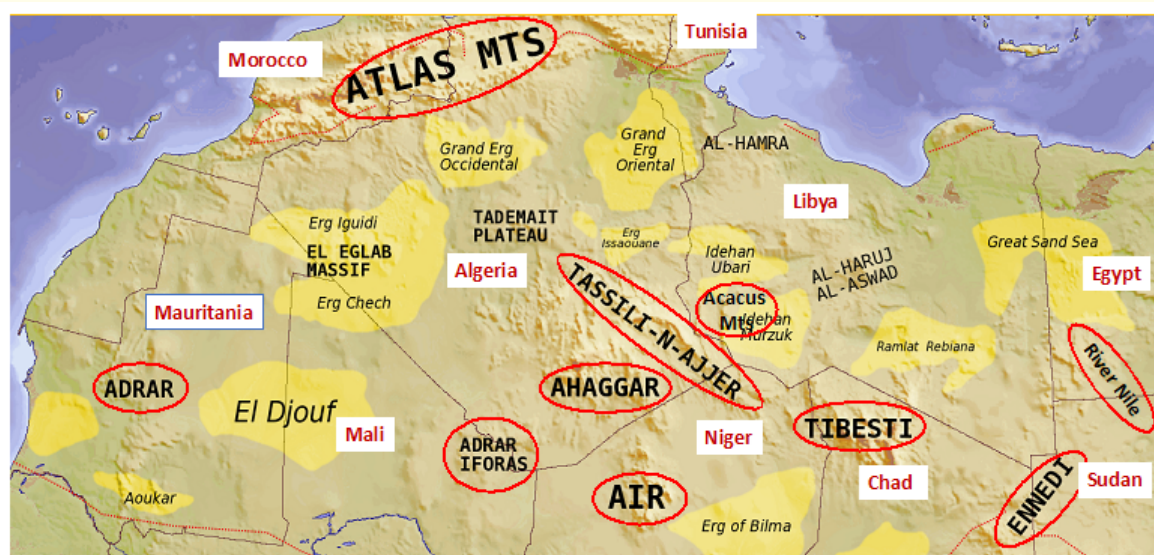
### Abstract

The beginning of the camel period of rock art in the eastern Sahara was about 2,000 years ago when camels first seen in Africa coming from the Middle East (camels was suggested to enter Egypt by 2,500 BP and may be earlier). The rock art spread westward across the Sahara and has lasted until today [8]. Camel painting and engravings which prove the presence and spread of camels, as well as its use, were found and followed in Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Chad, Niger and Mauretania.

From the rock art discovered, we can conclude the presence of camels in the daily life as well as the other domestic and wild animals and birds. Camels depicted were domesticated and were used as a mean of transport (in caravans), ridden without saddles or with saddles and harnesses. Camels were used also in hunting and in war as the riders of some engravings were armed with daggers and spears in their hands together with the saddle lines. Lastly, two species of camels were identified based on their painting colour; the white and the brown (red) species.

**Keywords:** Rock Art; Camels; North Africa

**The Sahara rock art:** The Sahara is the largest desert in the world, with an area reaching about 8,600,000 km<sup>2</sup>, including most of northern Africa, from the Red Sea to the Atlantic Ocean [8] (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** The Sahara Rock Art is found principally in the desert mountains and hill ranges.

It is composed of many regions and environments differ greatly in natures. The Sahara includes sand seas, stone deserts, seasonal watercourses, oases, mountain ranges and rocky plains. Rock art is discovered in this area, mainly in the desert mountain and hill ranges, where stone is plenty: the regions of the Atlas Mountains in Morocco and Algeria, the Tassili n'Ajjer and Ahaggar Mountains in Algeria, the mountainous areas of Tadrart Acacus and Messak in Libya, the Gilf Kebir plateau of Egypt and Sudan, along the length of the Nile Valley, the Ennedi Plateau and Tibesti Mountains in Chad, Adrar in Mauritania and Adrar des Ifoghas in Mali, as well as the Air Mountains of Nigeria [9] (Figure 2).

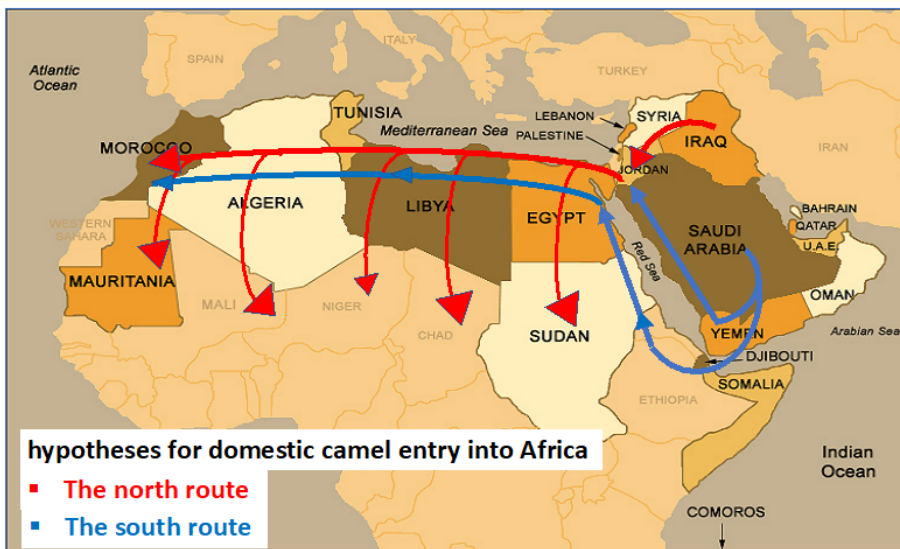


Figure 2: Hypotheses of domestic camel entry into Africa; north route and south route.

Images mostly depict and represent both wild and domestic animals. In addition, many images of humans, sometimes with belongings such as weapons and clothes were also discovered. Images found may be engraved or painted, in the same plateau. Engravings are usually more common, a matter which may be argued to their greater durability [9].

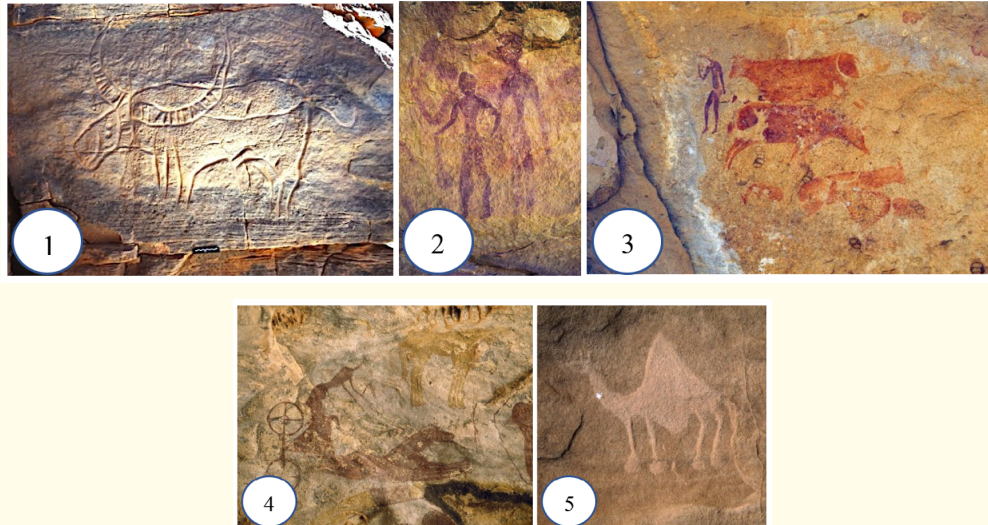
The nature of rock art places varies depending on the environmental factors - for example, Moroccan rock engravings are usually found on open rocky places, while Tunisia’s Djebibina rock art places have all been discovered in rock shelters [9].

Rock art is generally depicted or painted by unknown hunters, nomadic peoples, or pastoralists, if compared with contemporary groups, such as the Fulani peoples [9]. Occasionally, association with writing in the form Libyan-Berber or Arabic graffiti, for example, can give an expected dating range [9].

It is not easy to expect the rock art date. So, in addition to a little direct (AMS) and Carbon-14 dates estimated in the Tadrart Akakus and OSL dates estimated in Upper Egypt (Qurta), where the rock art have been dated to 16,000 - 15,000 BP [3]. In addition, experts have, used degrees of fading, superimposition, style, content, associated archaeological dates and changing climate to build a chronology [6].

Five stylistic image-based dating has been used to form a chronology of Saharan rock art periods that is widely accepted, although dates are contested: The Early Hunter or Bubalus Period [2,8], The Round Head Period, The Pastoral Period, The Horse (and Libyan-Warrior) Period and The Camel Period (around 2,000 years ago to until now i.e. from the Roman times till present) features domestic

one-humped camels, which we know to have been widely used across the Sahara from that time (engraving, Karkur Talh, Jebel Uweinat in Sudan [2,8] (Figure 3).



**Figure 3:** Saharan rock art periods that is widely agreed upon

- 1) The first stage, known as the Early Hunter, Wild Fauna or Bubalus Period, is posited at about 12,000-8,000 years ago
- 2) Round Head Period: 10,000 - 8,000 years ago
- 3) Pastoral Period: 7,500 - 4,000 years ago
- 4) Horse Period: 3,000 - 2,000 years ago
- 5) Camel Period: 2,000 years ago - present.

The prehistoric group of coloured materials used in African cave painting by Bushmen artists consisted of earth pigments. Reds and browns from bole or hematite; yellows, orange and reds from ochre; white from zinc oxide; blue from iron and silicic acid; blacks from charcoal or soot. The blue pigment used in African cave paintings is especially unusual and does not appear in the rock art of Europe [4]. Mazel, *et al.* (2010) [5] mentioned that paintings are used on the walls of the shelter with three main colors: red, black and white. Some literature mentioned the use of animal urine of different species such as birds, lizards or snakes as a white pigment.

**Wild camels:** Wild dromedaries presumed to have been lived in North Africa into the Neolithic period. However, their complete disappearance from the early Saharan rock drawings and from writings and tomb and temple paintings of ancient Egypt indicates that by historical times wild dromedaries were not existed any more in North Africa as mentioned by [1]. The domesticated camels enter Egypt after that times. This may lead us to support that domestic camel have entered Egypt from Sinai side in the north i.e. the north route of entry as suggested by [7].

**Domesticated camels:** The suggested time of dromedary domestication is earlier than 2000 B.C. in central Arabia [7], where prehistoric rock paintings of them as game and riding animals have been found [10].

Camel painting and engravings which prove the presence and spread of camels, as well as its use, were found and followed in Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Chad, Niger and Mauretania (Figure 4-9).





**Figure 4:** Engravings of 15 camels, humans and other animal species found in Gabal El Owainat, Egypt (left) and Bas relief camel from Sudan (right).



**Figure 5:** Rock art occurs in two main areas in Libya: the Tadrart Acacus and the Messak Plateau. Notice: The rider sits in front of the hump (left) and red and white camel breeds and harnesses on the white camels (right).



**Figure 6:** Procession of camels and riders (Caravans!), "Tassili-n-Ajjer "in Algeria. Notice: The hunting scene.





**Figure 7:** View of engraved rock art on a rock face, showing a camel with rider. Drâa Valley, Morocco. (left) and Rock art on a rock face, showing two dromedaries infilled in white upright facing right, legs crossed as if walking. Between the dromedaries there is another white smaller dromedary (calf) upright facing left. Notice: The pacing stride of the camels. Bishagara, Chad (right).



**Figure 8:** Kozen Pass, Chad. Notice: The pacing stride of the camels and the rider's posture on the rear of the camel hump and White and red camels (Left) and the majority of the country's rock art - made up predominantly of engravings - is located in the northern desert area, in and around the Air Mountains, Niger (Pecked outline of a camel, right).



**Figure 9:** Two camels and riders (in front of the hump), infilled in red, schematic with bulbous feet on camels and bulbous heads on riders. Camel rock art in Mauritania.

### Conclusion

- The rock art registered the presence of camels in the daily life as well as the other domestic and wild animals and birds in north Africa.
- The rock art recorded that the camels used were domesticated and were used as a mean of transport (in caravans), ridden without saddles or with saddles and harnesses.
- The camels were used also in hunting and in fight as the riders of some engravings were armored, carried daggers and spears in their hands together with the saddle and reins.
- The pacing stride characterizes the camel walk was accurately depicted in some paintings.
- Two species of camels were identified based on their painting colours, the white and the brown (red) species.

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**Volume 7 Issue 2 February 2022**

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