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BIFAO 111 (2011), p. 13-22

Sabri Youssef Abd El-Rahman

Amun-nakht Fighting Against an Enemy in Dakhla Oasis: a Rock Drawing in Wadi al-Gemal.

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Amun-nakht Fighting Against an Enemy in Dakhla Oasis: a Rock Drawing in Wadi al-Gemal

SABRI YOUSSEF ABD EL-RAHMAN

This paper is an attempt to study a rock drawing featuring a falcon-headed god fighting against an enemy which is carved in a rocky area located at the eastern end of Dakhla Oasis, some 5 kms south of the modern village of Tenida. The site is huge, extending on both sides of the Kharga-Dakhla road, the ancient Darb al-Ghubari, but mostly towards the north. The traditional name of the overall area is al-Aqula العقولة. In 2009, the Dakhla CSA Prehistoric unit, of which the author is in charge, registered the area of the petroglyphs under the name of Wadi al-Gemal وادي الجمال, widely used nowadays in Dakhla in reference to a famous hill shaped like a camel due to erosion.[1] Registration and caretaking are intended to protect the petroglyphs against the threats of land reclamation, some flat areas around the sandstone hills being now under cultivation. Indeed, the site holds water resources and shows remains of ancient wells. We even noticed deep square pits, sunk in the sandstone rock, along a line. These should be part of a *qanat*, an underground rock-cut gallery draining water trapped in the sandstone bedrock, an irrigation system documented in Kharga, where it was used from the Persian to the Roman Period.[2] The presence of water explains that the site was always frequented, although not inhabited.

The rock drawings scattered on a lot of hills and outcrops consist of human or animal figures, different designs, and footprints, dating from the prehistoric to Ottoman periods, and of hieroglyphic to Arabic inscriptions. As early as the 1930s, Winkler pinpointed the site on a

1 See C.S. Churcher, A.J. Mills (eds.), *Reports from the Survey of the Dakhleh Oasis, Western Desert of Egypt 1977-1987*, *DakhlOP-Monograph* 2, 1999, p. 59, fig. 2.4.

2 B. Bousquet, *Tell Douch et sa région: géographie d'une limite de milieu à une frontière d'Empire*, *DFIFAO* 31, 1996, p. 172-203; M. Wuttmann, "Les qanāts de ʿAyn-Manâwîr (oasis de Kharga, Égypte)", in *Irrigation et drainage dans l'Antiquité, qanāts et canalisations souterraines en Iran, en Égypte et en Grèce*, *séminaire tenu au Collège de France sous la direction de Pierre Briant*, *Persika* 2, 2001, p. 109-135; *id.*, "Ayn Manawir", *EgArch* 22, 2003, p. 36-37.

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map and published some related petroglyphs.[3] Then, from 1985 onwards, the Dakhleh Oasis Project surveyed the area.[4] During this work, the late Lech Krzyżaniak recorded the graffito that we intend to study and published a drawing with a simple caption.[5] However, thinking that it deserves more than a mention, we would like to put forward the following comments, based on an original examination and another drawing of the stone.

The rock drawing is engraved on a big sandstone block fallen from a hill (fig. 1). It is carved in the middle of the stone, on an area left untouched by many other previous drawings, especially a row of caprines (fig. 2). The sandstone being very soft, it was easy to carve with any pointed tool, so that the outlines are continuous.

A striding falcon-headed god (H. 30.5 cm) points a spear at a smaller human figure (H. 21 cm) holding weapons (fig. 3, 4). The god wears a clumsily designed crown. In fact, its rear part fits in with the shape of the red crown. The vertical line on the front part and, maybe, a very faint horizontal line at the top could be understood as an attempt to complete it as a double crown. The wig is awkward too, but recognizable. Short vertical strokes indicate the feathers of the neck. Two curved wings are shown at shoulder height. The gesture of the arms holding the spear is standard. The god wears a kilt, a belt, and a kind of corselet, featuring oblique strokes, leaving the right shoulder bare. The strokes on the kilt suggest feathers or scales of armour and remind us of gods featured in roman military attire.[6] Behind the front (left) leg of the god, an

3 H.A. Winkler, *Rock-Drawings of Southern Upper Egypt* II, *ASEg* 27, 1939, p. 7-9, 12-15, 27-32, pl. I-VI, VIII-IX, XI, XXXIX-L: sites 61-69, "area of Tenida".

4 L. Krzyżaniak, K. Kroeper, "Dakhleh Oasis Project. Report on the Reconnaissance Season of the Recording of Petroglyphs, December 1985", *JSSEA* 15, 1985, p. 138-139, pl. VIII-XI; L. Krzyżaniak, "Dakhleh Oasis Project: Interim Report on the First Season of the Recording of Petroglyphs, January/February 1988", *JSSEA* 17, 1987, p. 182-191, pl. XVII-XVIII; L. Krzyżaniak, K. Kroeper, "The Dakhleh Oasis Project: Interim Report on the Second (1990) and Third (1992) Seasons of the Recording of Petroglyphs", *JSSEA* 20, 1990, 1993, p. 77-88; *id.*, "A Face-mask in the Prehistoric Rock Art of the Dakhleh Oasis?", *Archéo-Nil* 1, 1991, p. 59-61; L. Krzyżaniak, "Petroglyphs and the Research on the Development of the Cultural Attitude towards Animals in the Dakhleh Oasis (Egypt)", *Sahara* 3, 1990, p. 95-97; *id*, "Dakhleh Oasis, Research on Petroglyphs, 2000", in M. Gawlikowski, W.A. Daszewski (eds.), *Reports 2000*, *PAM* 12, 2001, p. 249-257. See also: L.L. Giddy, *Egyptian Oases: Bahariya, Dakhla, Farafra and Kharga During Pharaonic Times*, Warminster, 1987, p. 256-257, 283-289; M. Baud, Fr. Colin, P. Tallet, "Les gouverneurs de l'oasis de Dakhla au Moyen Empire", *BIFAO* 99, 1999, p. 1-19.

5 L. Krzyżaniak, "Dakhleh Oasis, Research on Petroglyphs, 1998", in M. Gawlikowski, W.A. Daszewski (eds.), *Reports 1998, PAM* 10, 1998, front cover and, p. 133, fig. 3. We are grateful to Anthony Mills, director of the D.O.P., for the reference and for granting his kind agreement to our study.

6 It is a well documented feature, the most famous examples of which are probably the two statues of Anubis guarding the entrance of the main burial chamber of Kom el Shoqafa (end of 1st cent. A.D.): Fr.W. von Bissing, *La catacombe nouvellement découverte de Kom el Chougafa. Les bas-reliefs de Kom el Chougafa*, Alexandria, 1911, pl. XII; J.-Y. Empereur, *A Short Guide to the Catacombs of Kom el Shoqafa, Alexandria*, Alexandria, 1995, p. 13-15, fig. 19. Falcon-headed Horus is often shown wearing armour as well, see bronze British Museum Inv. EA 36062 (1st cent. A.D.): *Cleopatra's Egypt: Age of the Ptolemies, Exhibition Catalogue, Brooklyn, The Brooklyn Museum, October 7, 1988 - January 2, 1989,* Brooklyn, 1988, nos. 134, p. 245-246, pl. XXXV; bronze Moscow Pushkin Museum I,1a 2794 , in the posture of spearing: O.E. Kaper, "Horus Imperator als Harpunier", in *Ägypten Griechenland Rom. Abwehr und Berührung*, *Exhibition Catalogue, Frankfurt, Städelsches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie 26. November 2005 - 26. Februar 2006,* Frankfurt, 2005, p. 617-618, no. 197; terracotta bust: P. Perdrizet, *Les terres cuites grecques d'Égypte de la collection Fouquet*, Nancy, Paris, Strasbourg, 1921, no. 110, I, p. 36, II, pl. LI. Even on a funerary stela, Horus and Anubis wear military garb, see A. Abdalla, *Graeco-Roman Funerary Stelae from Upper Egypt*, *Liverpool Monographs in Archaeology and Oriental Studies,* Liverpool, 1992, p. 39, no. 71, pl. 28 b.

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animal is pouncing on the enemy. Its head and ears clearly belong to a dog, while its tail ends like a lion's. According to the models, the animal attacking with the god should be a lion. The opponent of the god holds a short sword in his upraised right hand, ready to strike, and an oval shield in his left hand. He is shaggy-haired. He wears a short-sleeved pleated tunic, a belt and shoes. His mouth is comparatively large and seems wide open, as if he was shouting at the moment of the attack. Overall, he does not look like the usual pharaonic foreigner and enemy, but fits well into the Roman image of the barbarian.[7] This feature gives a sound argument for dating the graffito to the Roman period. Although naïve and awkward in some respects, overall the drawing matches the Egyptian graphic rules while using features of its time as well.[8] Thus, it must have been carved by somebody having a minimum knowledge of the models.

Indeed, at first sight, the scene looks familiar as it displays a picture fitting into the well known pattern of the triumphant king or god.

The image of the king smiting an enemy or a group of enemies and securing by this act the permanently renewed victory of order over chaos is so archetypal of the assertion of Egyptian monarchy that it hardly needs to be mentioned. It occurs already on the Narmer palette and remains one of the main royal motifs till the Roman period.[9]

7 Z. Kiss, "Représentations de barbares dans l'iconographie romaine impériale en Égypte", in *Die Antike und Europa, Zentrum und Peripherie in der antiken Welt. Beiträge vom 17. Internationalen Eirenekongress, Berlin, 11.-15. 8. 1986, Klio* 71/1, 1989, p. 127-137; R.M. Schneider, *Barbar II (ikonographish)*, *RLAC Suppl.* I, 1992, p. 895-962. During the Hellenistic period, the main sculptural pattern is the "Gaulish type" derived from Attalid models in which the shaggy hair is a typical feature. See, for instance, the marble head Caire CG 27475 found in Egypt, C.C. Edgar, *CG, Greek Sculpture*, Cairo, 1903, p. 20, pl. X. In this type, the warrior is naked or bare-chested. Later on, the barbarian, still hirsute, but wearing clothes and shoes, an image mostly derived from Northern European peoples, but also from Parthians, is typical of the Roman period and becomes a generic type. See, for instance, the famous group Liverpool, National (World) Museum Inv. 1971.180, Septimus Severus slaying a barbarian: C. Vermeule, D. von Bothmer, "Notes on a New Edition of Michaelis: Ancient Marbles in Great Britain", *AJA* 63, 1959, p. 163, no. 29, pl. 36, fig. 10. It has often been reproduced and discussed; see the up to date comment by C. Maderna ("Statuengruppe eines römischen Kaisers mit besiegtem Feind", in *Ägypten Griechenland Rom. Abwehr und Berührung*, p. 586-587, no. 159). One finds the same scene in a coarser style, due to the material, on the terracotta Berlin Staatliche Museen Inv. 22737 (end of the 3rd cent. A.D.) displaying a kneeling barbarian, hirsute, with a large face, holding a roundish shield and a short sword: L. Castiglione, "Diocletianus und die Blemmyes", *ZÄS* 96, 1970, p. 90-91, fig. 1.

8 Let us quote, as a relevant local occurrence of Graeco-Roman Egyptian art, the two famous decorated tombs of Qaret al-Muzzawaqa (1st-2nd cent. A.D.), see J. Osing *et al.*, *Denkmäler der Oase Dachla. Aus dem Nachlass von Ahmed Fakhry*, *ArchVer* 28, 1982. The winged apotropaic god putting a foreigner to flight on the front of two burial niches could be the same as ours, *ibid.*, p. 87, pl. 26 b, p. 89, pl. 28a; H. Whitehouse, "Roman in Life, Egyptian in Death: the Painted Tomb of Petosiris in the Dakhleh Oasis", in O.E. Kaper (ed.), *Life on the Fringe. Living in the Southern Egyptian Deserts during the Roman and early-Byzantine Periods*, *Proceedings of a Colloquium Held on the Occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies in Cairo, 9-12 December 1996*, Leiden, 1998, p. 253-270.

9 Narmer palette: J.E. Quibell, "Slate Palette from Hieraconpolis", *ZÄS* 36, 1898, pl. XIII; *id.*, *Hierakonpolis* I, ou *BSAE* 4, 1900, pl. XXIX; B. Midant-Reynes, *The Prehistory of Egypt From the First Egyptians to the First Pharaohs*, Oxford, 2000, p. 243-246, fig. 22. As for late monumental occurrences, see, for instance, Trajan (98-117 A.D.), accompanied by a lion, smiting a group of enemies before Khnum, Nebtu and Neith on the western outer wall of the hypostyle hall of Esna temple, S. Sauneron, *Esna* 7, 2009, p. 189, no. 619. Concerning the topic, see E.S. Hall, *The Pharaoh Smites his Enemies. A Comparative Study*, *MÄS* 44, 1986.

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In the Royal Netherworld Books of the New Kingdom, gods overcome Ra's foe Apopis, as, for instance, in the Seventh Hour of the *Amduat*.[10] Then, papyri, reliefs and statues feature the fighting god, mainly Seth, empowered to play such a part thanks to his strength and fierceness,[11] striking the evil being with a spear.[12]

In the Ptolemaic and Roman temples, the same image of a god featured as a lancer is used, mainly within the framework of the Osirian myth. One finds its most fully developed display in the *Triumph of Horus* carved on the inner face of the western enclosure wall of Edfu temple.[13] In this composition, the variations show how much the triumph over evil beings in both the mythic and the human world is not only equivalent but connected: Horus in the barge hits a very small hippopotamus embodying Seth while the king standing on shore strikes it too,[14] Horus hits a hippopotamus while the king smites a human enemy (fig. 5),[15] Horus Behedety spears a hippopotamus while Harsiesis, playing the part of the king, kills a prisoner,[16] and both Horus Behedety and Harsiesis strike a captive foreigner.[17]

Considering such a background, our relief fits into a classical pattern. However, it is not perfectly in accordance with it, as a major discrepancy appears clearly. Indeed, as far as we know, the enemy is always depicted as already defeated. Even in the complex New Kingdom representations of wars, featuring a great number of individuals, all the foreigners, without any exception, are shown pierced by arrows, fallen, fleeing or, at least, begging for mercy.[18] Here, on the contrary, the opponent of the god, although one third smaller and obviously fated to die, is still standing in an aggressive posture. As noticeable as it is, this flaw may be well understood if we consider that the scene is a graffito drawn in a remote area.

10 E. Hornung, *Das Amduat. Die Schrift des verborgenen Raumes. Herausgegeben nach Texten aus den Gräbern des Neuen Reiches*, *ÄgAbh* 7, 1963, p. 123, nos. 505, 507, siebente Stunde: Isis and *ḥḳ3 smsw* "the Eldest Wizard" (Seth), standing at the prow of the solar barge in order to fight Apopis, already pierced by knives and kept on a leash by Selkis.

11 H. Te Velde, *Seth God of Confusion, A Study of his Role in Egyptian Mythology and Religion, PdÄ* 6, 1967, p. 99-108.

12 The most explicit is a scene from the papyrus of Heruben B (21st dyn., Cairo Museum, without a number), A. Piankoff, "Les deux papyrus 'mythologiques' de Her-Ouben au musée du Caire", *ASAE* 49, 1949, p. 136, pl. VII-VIII; *id.*, *Mythological Papyri*, *BolSer* 40.3, 1957, p. 75-76, fig. 54. See also stela Copenhagen AEIN 726 (19th dyn.), a winged bull-headed Seth holding a spear, O. Koefoed-Petersen, *Les stèles égyptiennes, PGNy Carlsberg* 1, 1948, p. 35, pl. 43; fragment of a stela from Matmar (probably 19th dyn.), a winged god (certainly Seth according to the provenance from the 11th Upper Egypt nome), G. Brunton, *Matmar*, *BME 1929-1931*, 1948, p. 61, pl. XLIX, 13; glazed plaque MacGregor collection (Ramses II), winged Seth-Reshep striking a snake with a spear, Fr.Ll. Griffith, "The God Set of Ramessu II and an Egypto-Syrian Deity", *PSBA* 16, 1894, p. 88-90; bronze statue, Copenhagen AEIN 614 (19-20th dyn.), striding Seth, right hand upraised, M. Jorgensen, *Catalogue Egypt* V, *Egyptian Bronze, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek,* Copenhagen, 2009, p. 118-123, no. 40; bronze statue Michaelidis collection (late New Kingdom), winged Seth, J. Leibovitch, "Une statuette du dieu Seth", *ASAE* 44, 1944, p. 101-107, pl. XIII; limestone plaque Baltimore 22.39 (Ptolemaic ?), winged falcon-headed god, accompanied by a lion, spearing an enemy, G. Steindorff, *Catalogue of Egyptian Sculpture in the Walters Art Gallery*, Baltimore, 1946, p. 327, no. 319, pl. XLI. One finds from around 1500 B.C. onwards very similar forms of smiting gods all over the Levant and the Eastern Mediterranean. The smiting god survives until the 3rd cent. A.D. as Zeus Dolichaios, see D. Collon, "The Smiting God. A Study of a Bronze in the Pomerance Collection in New York", *Levant* 4, 1972, p. 111-134.

13 H.W. Fairman, *The Triumph of Horus. An Ancient Egyptian Sacred Drama*, London, 1974.

14 É. Chassinat, *Le temple d'Edfou* 13, *MMAF* 30, 1934, pl. DVIII.

15 *Ibid.*, pl. DXIII.

16 *Ibid.*, pl. DXXV.

17 *Ibid.*, pl. DXXVII. As for Harsiesis, see A. Forgeau, *Horus-fils-d'Isis. La jeunesse d'un dieu*, *BdE* 150, 2010.

18 See, for instance, *The Battle Reliefs of King Sety I, Reliefs and Inscriptions at Karnak* 4, *OIP* 107, 1986, pl. 23, 28, 29, 34.

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From which model has the author of our winged god borrowed his inspiration? A famous relief from the hypostyle hall (reign of Darius I) of Hibis temple in Kharga Oasis shows a falcon-headed winged Seth, accompanied by a lion, trampling a big snake and striking it with a spear (fig. 6).[19] Even closer, only 9 km from our spot, at Ayn Birbiya temple, a 2.80 m high relief carved in the central recess of the southern jamb of the gate shows the falcon-headed winged god Amun-nakht, wearing the double crown, spearing an enemy (fig. 7). A lion accompanies the god and bites the enemy. Moreover, the foreigner seems to emerge from a pedestal on which are drawn eight other captives, so that the god tramples on the Nine Bows, like the king usually does. This relief dates back to Octavian /Augustus. The scene has been published by Olaf Kaper, who thoroughly studied the cults of ancient Dakhla and on whose work we rely.[20] Amun-nakht is first named in Edfu around 100 B.C. His personality combines features of Amun and Horus. He is Lord of *Jmrt*, Ayn Birbiya, in Dakhla, his unique temple. There, a short text says: "Amun-nakht who runs fast over the desert, while he makes an end of the enemy. He has overthrown the enemy in the wadi / the gang in (this) town".[21] He appears mainly as Horus avenger of his father Osiris.

Thus, there are grounds for identifying the winged god of our graffito with Amun-nakht. First the argument of proximity is obvious. Then the relief of the Ayn Birbiya gate, being early Augustan, may predate the graffito. Finally, following a remark of Kaper's dealing with the distinctive traits of Seth and Amun-nakht,[22] Seth is specialized in fighting against Apopis, the cosmic enemy of Ra, as he does in Hibis temple, while Amun-nakht, as featured in Ayn Birbiya, strikes a human enemy. In the latter occurrence, the image unites fully the heir of Osiris and the triumphant king, as Amun-nakht, mythical avenger of Osiris, tramples on the generic enemies of Egypt. Indeed, it is a trend of the Roman period that Horus could assume the appearance of the emperor.[23]

Thus, it seems likely that Amun-nakht was chosen, as he was a local god and moreover the graffito might be a transposition of the Ayn Birbiya relief. The meaning of the graffito is obvious. Drawn in an area close to the desert, the image of the victorious god is intended to guard people from dangers. The warrior god acts as a protective deity, a typical feature of Egyptian religion during the Roman period,[24] whose last metamorphosis is the Christian

19 N. de G. Davies, *The Temple of Hibis in el Khargeh Oasis*, III, *The decoration*, *MMAEE* 17, 1953, pl. 42, 43.

20 O.E. Kaper, "How the god Amun-Nakht came to Dakhleh Oasis", *JSSEA* 17, 1987, p. 151-156; *id.*, *Temples and Gods in Roman Dakhleh. Studies in the Indigenous Cults of an Egyptian Oasis*, *PhD thesis, Groningen University*, Groningen, 1997; *id.*, "Temple Building in the Egyptian Deserts during the Roman Period", in O.E. Kaper (ed.), *Life on the Fringe, op. cit.*, p. 139-158.

21 O.E. Kaper, *op.cit., JSSEA* 17, 1987, p. 151.

22 O.E. Kaper, *Temples and Gods in Roman Dakhleh*, p. 83.

23 One of the best examples is the statue British Museum Inv. EA 51100, Horus *imperator* seated on a throne, *Égypte romaine: l'autre Égypte*, *Exhibition Catalogue, Marseille, musée d'Archéologie méditerranéenne, 4 avril-13 juillet 1997,* Marseille, 1997, p. 230, no. 252; O.E. Kaper, "Horus Imperator", in *Ägypten Griechenland Rom. Abwehr und Berührung*, p. 617, no. 196; *id.*, "Synkretistische Götterbilder in hellenistischer und römischer Zeit (Kat. 188-199)", in *ibid.*, p. 305-309.

24 A recent authoritative study points to the warrior god as emblematic of the period: D. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt. Assimilation and Resistance*, Princeton, 1998.

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horseman saint.[25] As a matter of fact, other graffiti, within the very area of the Oases, display a lancer god and were probably carved for the same purpose.[26]

Furthermore, one may surmise that our scene is more significant than a mere votive graffito along a track. The numerous rock drawings of all periods and the evidence of ancient wells around show that the area, although situated at the fringe of the desert, was frequented. According to this location and to the comparative quality of our graffito, we would suggest that the scene was intended to be used in the area, as a permanent apotropaic feature at least, or even as a kind of small popular cultic relief borrowed from the great official image of the temple.[27] If so, it might as well have marked the hill as a spot in the mythical landscape of Amun-nakht's triumph.

25 S. Lewis, "The Iconography of the Coptic Horseman in Byzantine Egypt", *JARCE* 10, 1973, p. 27-63.

26 A. Fakhry, "The Rock Inscriptions of Gabal el-Teir at Kharga Oasis", *ASAE* 51, 1951, p. 412, fig. 21, a ram-headed winged god identified by Kaper as Amun-nakht himself (O.E. Kaper, *Temples and Gods in Roman Dakhleh*, p. 75), and p. 414, fig. 22, a falcon-headed god facing Amun or Min. In the cliffs of western Thebes, there are also graffiti showing a falcon-headed god holding a spear or striking an enemy with it, A.F. Sadek, *Graffiti de la montagne thébaine*, III/4, *Fac-similés, CollSc* 16, 1972, pl. CXCIV, no. 3082; M. Shimy, *Graffiti de la montagne thébaine*, III/7, *CollSc* 19, 1977, pl. CCXCIII, nos. 3839, 3846.

27 See a highly suggestive study dealing with New Kingdom Memphite stelae displaying a scene of triumph derived from a relief carved on a pylon, D. Devauchelle, "Un archétype de relief cultuel en Égypte ancienne", *BSFE* 131, 1994, p. 38-57.

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FIG. 1. Dakhla, al-Aqula/Wadi al-Gemal, the hill, view W/E.



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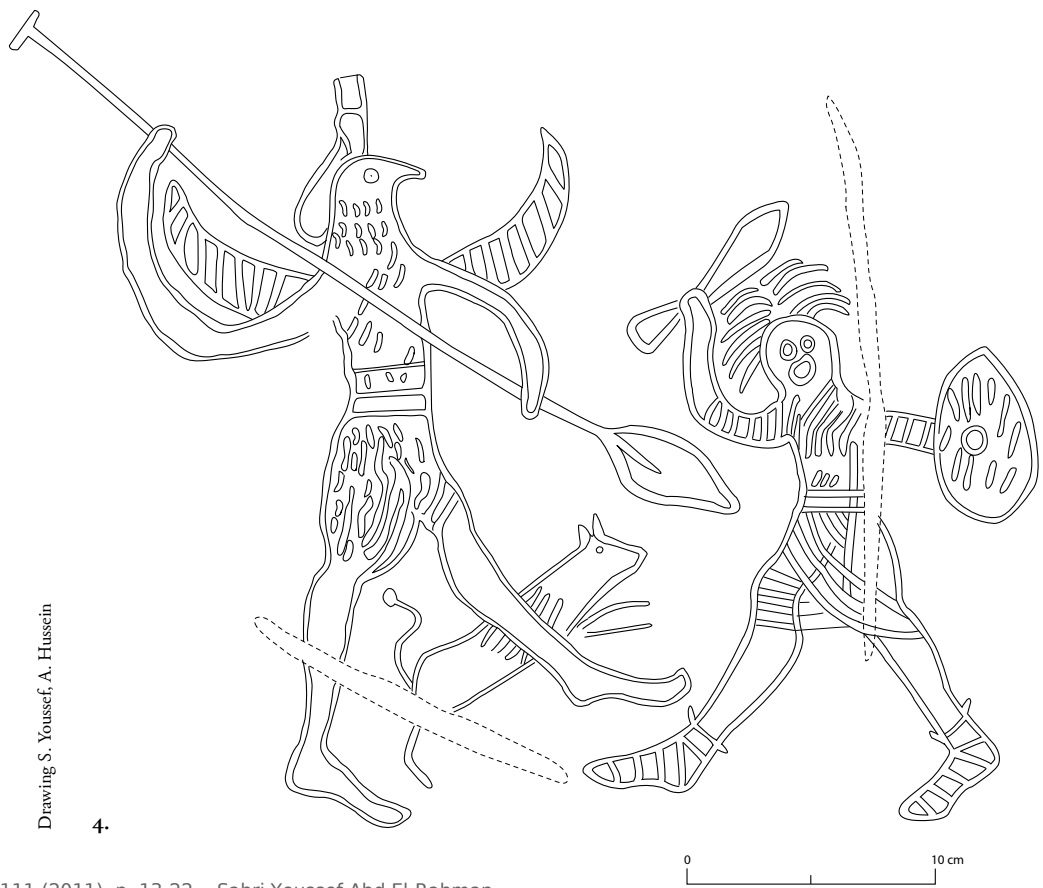
FIG. 2. Dakhla, al-Aqula/Wadi al-Gemal, the rock, view NW/SE.

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3.



Drawing S. Youssef, A. Hussein

4.

FIG. 3-4. Amun-nakht fighting against an enemy, scale 1:3.

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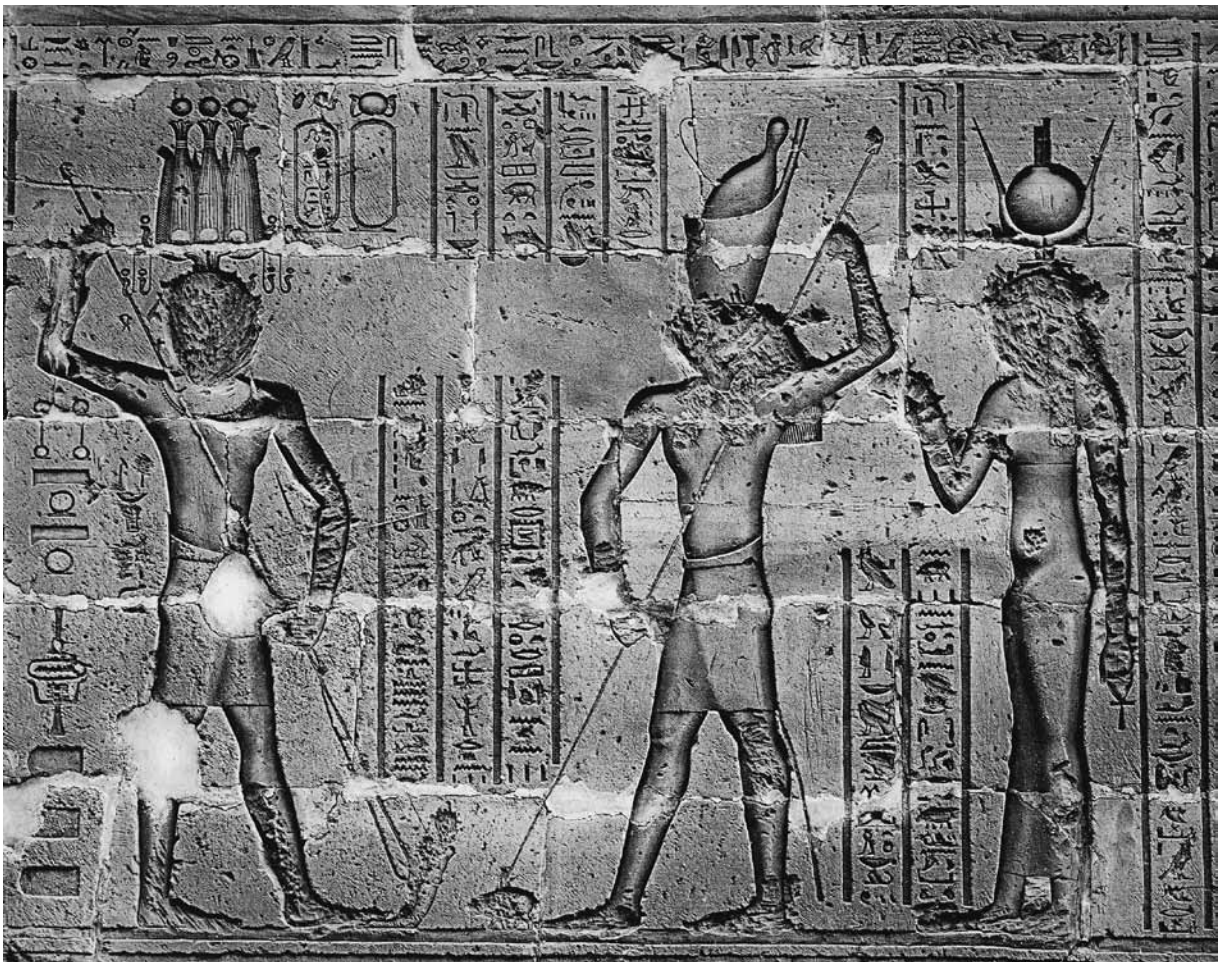


FIG. 5. Edfu temple, inner face of the western enclosure wall, "Triumph of Horus": Horus hits a hippopotamus while the king smites a human enemy, after *Edfou* XIII, pl. DXIII.



FIG. 6.
Seth of Hibis spearing Apopis, scale 1:20, after N. de G. Davies, *The Temple of Hibis in el Khargeh Oasis*, III, pl. 42.

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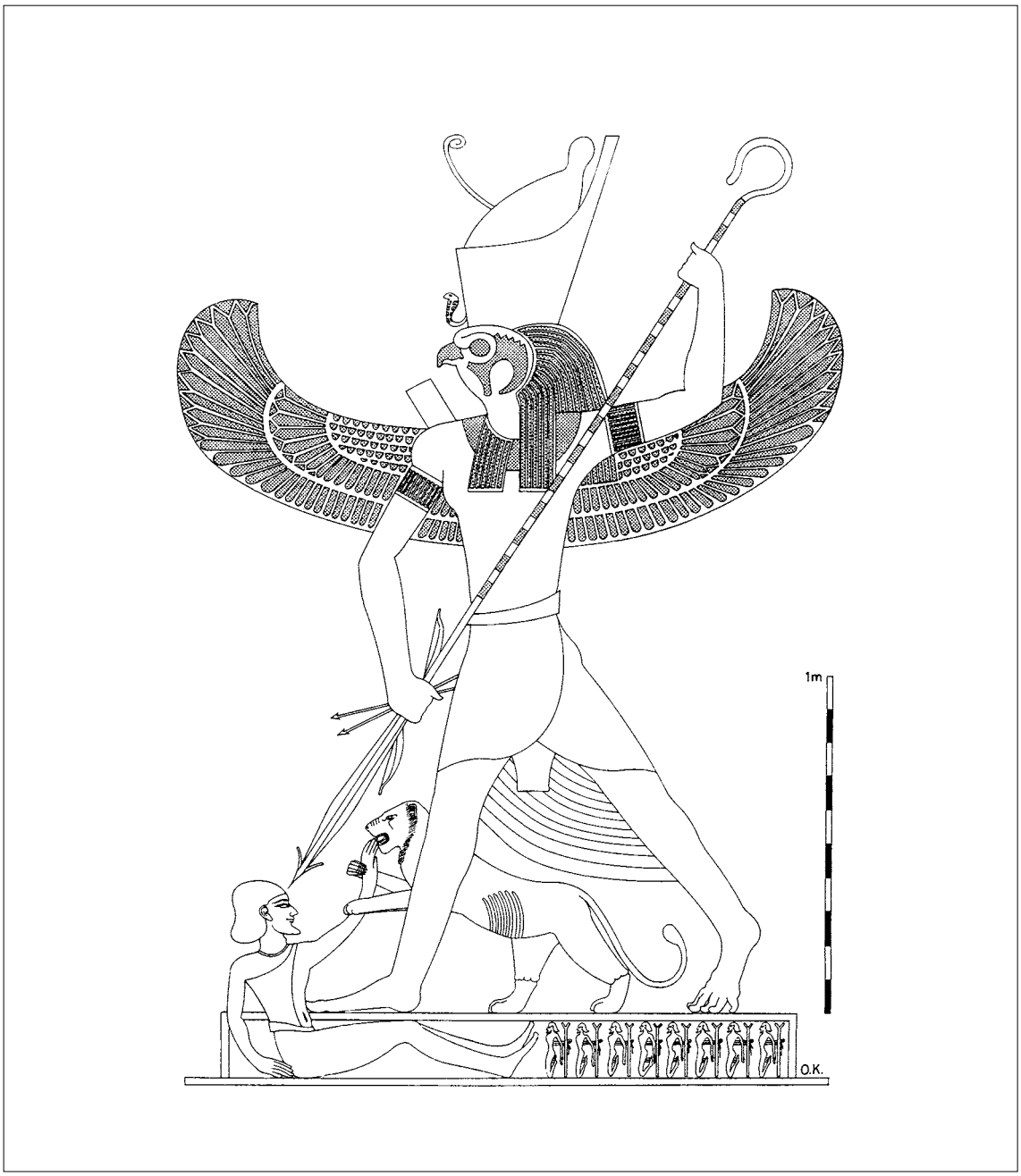


FIG. 7. Amun-nakht of Ayn Birbiya, scale 1:20, after O.E. Kaper, *Temples and Gods in Roman Dakhleh*, p. 73, fig. 40.

BIFAO 111 (2011), p. 13-22 Sabri Youssef Abd El-Rahman
Amun-nakht Fighting Against an Enemy in Dakhla Oasis: a Rock Drawing in Wadi al-Gemal.
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