

# The Cave Paintings of Libyc Inscriptions of Tifra, Kabylia, Algeria

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**Abstract**—The Tifra site is one of 54 sites with rock paintings discovered in Kabylia (Algeria). It consists of two shelters: Ifran I and Ifran II. From an aesthetic point of view, these two shelters appear poor. It shows a human silhouette, a hand, enigmatic designs and especially Libyc inscriptions. The paint used, is the natural red ocher. Today, these paintings are threatened by the frequentation of tourists to the sites as well as by the degradation which result from it. It is therefore vital to us to list and analyze these paintings before they disappear. The analysis of these paintings will be focused on the epigraphic and iconographic level and their meanings.

**Keywords**—Cave painting, Libyc inscription, conservation, valorization.

## I. INTRODUCTION

IN Kabylia, paintings and engravings are relatively abundant. Of the 54 sites discovered, 25 are holders of Libyan inscriptions. Most of these paintings and rock engravings were discovered by Poyto and Musso [1] assisted by Bordes and Laguen. The research was conducted from 1965 to 1967, and the total amount of discovered sites reached to over 52. Other sites came to be added to the list later on. The bulk of these inscriptions contain ornaments painted in red ocher. They are found in shelters, on rocks and sandstone blocks of the northern part of Kabylia [2]-[4]. The Tifra site is one of those containing cave paintings [5]-[7].

## II. GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF TIFRA

Tifra is one of 12 towns in the municipality of Tizirt, located 39 km north of Tizi-Ouzou, 130 kilometers east of Algiers (Figs. 1 and 2).

Tifra is located 7 km south of Tizirt - It is limited:

- To the south by the municipality of Boudjima and the Timizar,
- To the east by the town of Iflissen,
- To the west by the two villages; Cheurfa and El Kala, and
- To the north by Tizirt, Cherfa and Taksebt.

## III. SITUATION OF THE IFRAN SITES

The Ifran site, which contains most of the archaeological vestiges in the area, is located about 2 km north of the village Tifra. This site, isolated by the two rivers (Tafouzelt and Tansa), is on slightly hilly terrain of about 15 ha, which served until a few years ago as a shieling. The rocky part of Tifra is home to many caves, hence the name Ifran (caves) [1]. Among

them, three are decorated and called Ifran I, Ifran II, Ifran III (see Figs. 3 and 4).

## IV. THE IFRAN I SITE

### A. Situation

In the middle of the site and bushes, stands the Ifran I shelter. It is located on the front of a large rock resting on a platform of about 30 m<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 5).

### B. Description

This shelter is 6 m long, 4 m high and 2.5 m wide. The shelter's walls are decorated with Libyc inscriptions, and three drawings (a human figure, a hand with four fingers and a visible enigmatic drawing) painted in red ocher (Fig. 6).

### C. Inscription

The inscription consists of 14 lines written vertically.

- The first line contains three characters and well above an isolated sign (Fig. 7).
- The second line, four characters (Fig. 8).
- The third line, 12 characters and two points (Fig. 7).
- The fourth line consists of three groups (Fig. 8); the first group contains five characters (Fig. 9), the second, four characters and a period (Fig. 10), and the third, four characters (illegible).
- The fifth line five characters and a point (Fig. 7).
- The sixth line has two groups separated by a hand.
- The first group consists of five characters (Fig. 11) and the second, six characters (Fig. 12).
- The seventh line is composed of two groups; the first group contains five characters (illegible) (Fig. 14), and the second four characters (Fig. 15).
- The eighth line composed of two groups, the first group of eight characters and the second five characters (illegible) (Fig. 14).
- The ninth line, which is higher than any previous lines, has five characters (illegible).

### D. Figurine

Among all these inscriptions we can distinguish three drawings:

- At the top of the fifth line we notice a great character in the form of + or x considered a human figure by Poyto and Musso (Fig. 12) [1].
- In the middle of the sixth row, a hand whose thumb does not appear; this hand measure 18 cm high and 10 cm wide (Fig. 12).
- At the top of the eighth line there is a much washed out

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- human silhouette measuring 11 cm tall (Fig. 16).
- Note in the third line, the presence of a dark spot of about 3 cm in diameter, painted with the same tan. Its meaning is unknown (Fig. 17).
- At the top of the eighth line, there is a very washed out human silhouette measuring 11cm tall (Fig. 18).



Fig. 1 Tifra region

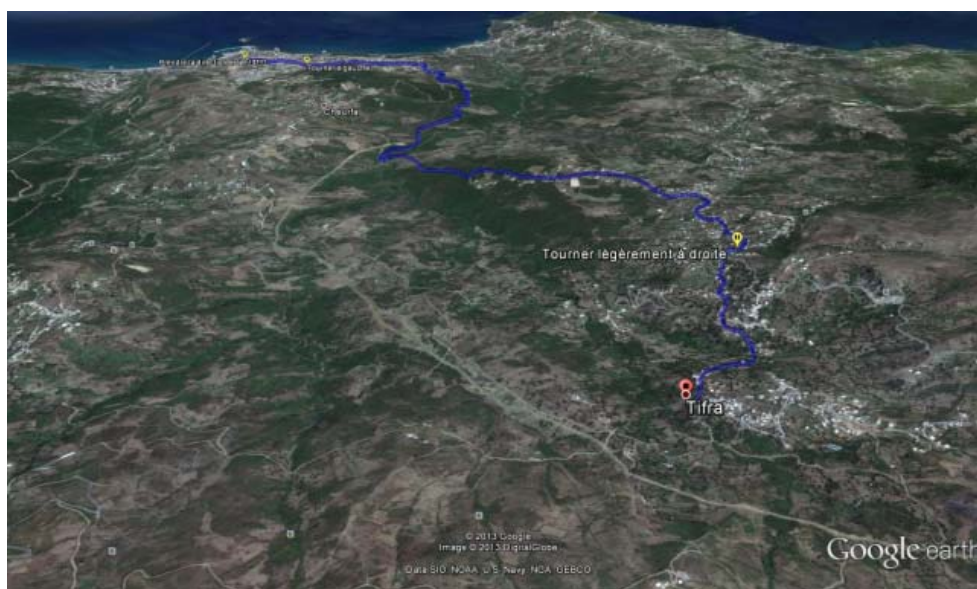


Fig. 2 Tifra par satellite



Fig. 3 Ifran sites

## V. THE IFRAN II SITE

### A. Situation

The Ifran II site is located 100 m north of the first one, overlooking the east bank of "Ighzar Tqes" where stands a big rock carrying Libyc characters.

### B. Description

It is a big rock that consists of a cave. This cave is 6 m long, 3.5 m high and 2.5 m deep. On the smooth wall, we distinguish Libyc inscriptions painted in red ocher (Figs. 19 and 20).



Fig. 4 Ifran sites



Fig. 5 Ifran I site [Source: Malik Ouhammad]



Fig. 6 Decorated wall with Libyc inscription [Source: Malik Ouhammad]



Fig. 8 Libyc characters [Source: Malik Ouhammad]



Fig. 7 Libyc characters [Source: Malik Ouhammad]



Fig. 9 Libyc characters [Source: Malik Ouhammad]



Fig. 10 Libyc characters [Source: Malik Ouhammad]



Fig. 11 Libyc characters [Source: Malik Ouhammad]



Fig. 12 Libyc characters [Source: Malik Ouhammad]



Fig. 13 Libyc characters [Source: Malik Ouhammad]



Fig. 14 Libyc characters [Source: Malik Ouhammad]



Fig. 15 Libyc characters [Source: Malik Ouhammad]

### *C. Inscription*

The inscription consists of six lines, five written vertically and one horizontally:

- The first line on the left is composed of four characters (Fig. 21).
- The second line four characters (Fig. 21).
- The third line three unreadable characters (Fig. 21).
- The fourth line seven characters and a sign at one side (Fig. 22).
- The fifth line written horizontally composed of four characters (Fig. 23)



Fig. 16 Figurine [Source: Malik Ouhammad]



Fig. 19 Ifran II [Source: Malik Ouhammad]



Fig. 17 Figurine [Source: Malik Ouhammad]



Fig. 20 Ifran II [Source: Malik Ouhammad]



Fig. 18 Figurine [Source: Malik Ouhammad]



Fig. 21 Libyc characters [Source: Malik Ouhammad]



Fig. 22 Libyc characters [Source: Malik Ouhammad]

The set of characters of these two sites is about 91;

- Among 91 characters we could get 25 different signs (Fig. 24),
- Some characters are hardly damaged and unreadable because of the weather and erosion and also human hand.

It is noted that there are two different types of characters in the Libyc inscriptions:

- category of sure signs,
- category attested but rare signs.



Fig. 23 Libyc characters [Source: Malik Ouhammad]

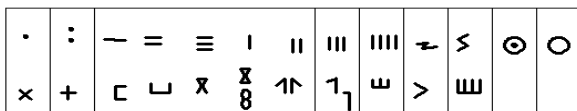


Fig. 24 25 Different signs

## VI. DETERIORATION OF ROCK HERITAGE IN KABYLIA

Unfortunately, the site of Ifran continually undergoes a number of forms of degradation of a natural order because they are located almost exclusively in the open air; its paintings do not necessarily escape the various impacts of the weather such as snow, rain and changes in temperature, as well as the pillage and destruction from human action. This cave site is threatened with extinction in the coming years if no quick preservation project is set up.

### A. The Cause of Site Destruction

The destructive action from erosion and thermal variations result in fractures and cracks in the rock, eventually, cave figurations lines when they are traversed by these cracks, are deemed to disappear under the effect of dismantling of the films from the rock of surface (Figs. 10, 18 and 21).

- The absence of a guardian in the rock art sites area, which facilitates the pillage of these sites by tourists.
- Vandalism of some visitors who write and draw on paintings and engravings (Fig. 23).
- The extraction of the rock sites for its operations in the cut stone.
- The use of caves by shepherds as shelters.

Though, sites that have stood for thousands of years to the hazards of nature can disappear in less than a decade.

### B. Safeguarding of Rock Art Sites

The measures that must be taken in our opinion to ensure this protection are:

- 1- Installing a study center which should provide on different functions:
  - It must identify and study all the rock engravings and paintings for preservation and collection purposes;
  - It will exploit the assembled document for education purposes at a local level.
- 2- The creation of checkpoints and guard posts in various sites of Kabylia by the recruitment of well specialized staff.

- 3- The development of means of communication and liaison with the different regions, as well as monitoring and control stations.
- 4- Installation of fences around the sites with signs containing all the necessary information about the site.
- 5- The sensitization of local residents to the importance of their heritage and denouncing any practice aimed at the destruction of these cave sites.
- 6- Enact a law ordering action to be taken against the destruction of these sites.
- 7- The integration of these sites into tourism projects that will help the development of the region on the cultural, economic and social levels.
- 8- Cleaning technology for engravings and paintings designed to remove all graffiti.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Archaeological sites are a gold mine for local development if, however, a genuine awareness is displayed by local managers of public affairs. Therefore, a comprehensive safeguarding strategy and development plan must be implemented immediately. It is time for the local authorities to take a new and more active role. We must save this cultural heritage before it is too late.

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