

The Rock Paintings and Engravings of Kabylia Region, Algeria: Sites of Azru Imeyazen, Tarihant, Algeria

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Abstract—Rock paintings and engravings are widespread over all the Kabylia region of Algeria. The paintings are predominantly adorned with red ochre ornaments, while some engravings can also be found on sandstone rocks. These artistic expressions can be found in various locations, such as shelters, rocks, and sandstone blocks in the northern part of Kabylia. These sites showcase a diverse range of decorations, including human figures, animal silhouettes, enigmatic designs, symbolic drawings, engravings, and Libyan characters. The research will involve conducting fieldwork at the Azru Imeyazen site to identify and study the different paintings and engravings present. This research aims to provide a detailed description of the rock paintings and engravings found in Kabylia, specifically focusing on the Azru Imeyazen (Tarihant) site.

Keywords—Rock paintings, engraving, Kabylia, Tarihant, Azru Imeyazen

I. INTRODUCTION

TARIHANT is a Kabyle village located in the municipality of Boudjima (Tizi-Ouzou) about 130 km east of Algiers. Tarihant, which means “myrtle” in French, owes its name to the fact that the founders of this village settled near a place colonized by this shrub. It is one of the oldest inhabited regions of Kabylia. Very rich lithic industries have been discovered: quartzite tools such as scrapers and blades which mark the Middle Paleolithic period and also some shard stones from the Ibero-Maurisian (Epipalaeolithic) [1]. The remains of this distant period found on the site attest to the existence of several prehistoric civilizations and an almost complete chronological sequence.

Tarihant (Fig. 1) is reported to have five shelters with rock paintings, the most important one being Azru Imeyazen [1].

II. LOCATION OF THE AZRU IMEYAZEN SITE

The site is located about 1500 m south of the village of Tarihant, in the middle of olive trees, not far from a river on the south side called Stita (Fig. 2). It was discovered by Mister Bordes in June 1965 [2].

Description

The Azru Imeyazen site consists of a huge rock, egg-shaped Numidian sandstone overhung by a platform 6 m high from the ground (Fig. 3). To access it, seven cavities of 10 cm in diameter are dug in the rock. On this platform are two rock

shelters of different depths and orientations. The walls of these two shelters are yellow in color. In this shelter there are cells of different sizes. Azru Imeyazen is home to many paintings: human and animal silhouettes, enigmatic designs and Libyan inscriptions similar to the Tifinagh.

Two colors were used for these paintings: bright red ochre and dark red ochre.

This site was a meeting place for wise men from part of the Ath Ouaguenoun villages to settle their disputes, hence its name “Azru Imeyazen” (*The rock of the wise* or the *rock of the scholars*). However, tales, even local myths, speak of “a refuge for artists and poets” in the region. They came to this shelter to express themselves in peace. Sometimes they noted their artistic works on the walls. This is why we often say, out of confusion, “Azru Imedyazen” (*The rock of the poets*) instead of “Azru Imeyazen”. But according to one person, his ancestors, his parents and themselves, they had always designated it by the name “arzu am yizen” because of its resemblance to the head of a lion. This site was until recently revered and rain festival ceremonies were held there whenever drought threatened agriculture and human life. Indeed, it is at the foot of this rock that the population of this village immolated the oxen offered as sacrifices.

Shelter n°1 (North-East Side)

The shelter (Fig. 4) has a larger area compared to the second one: 3 m in height, 13 m in width, some parts are smooth, and some are not too deep niches.

There are five panels:

First Panel

On the far left (Fig. 5), we see a large animal silhouette that resembles an ostrich with a 30-cm-long neck and a 7-cm-long tail. Its lower limbs and posterior section measure 8 cm. Next to the animal, we can see an individual who holds a weapon in his right hand and seems to confront this animal.

Second Panel

This panel depicts a human figure with outstretched arms and legs (Fig. 6 (a)); at the top of the right arm, we notice a stick 11 cm long and 3 cm thick (it can be a weapon).

There are also two Libyan inscriptions written vertically, the first is composed of four characters and the second of three characters (Fig. 6 (b)). The inscriptions are similar to those

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found in the Libyan steles of Kabylia [3]-[5].

Third Panel

In a large niche, in the center of the shelter, there is a set of

paintings, some are remarkably well preserved and others less. Prominently positioned at the top is the depiction of an animal, measuring approximately 12 cm, with 5-cm legs (possibly a dog) (Fig. 7 (a)).

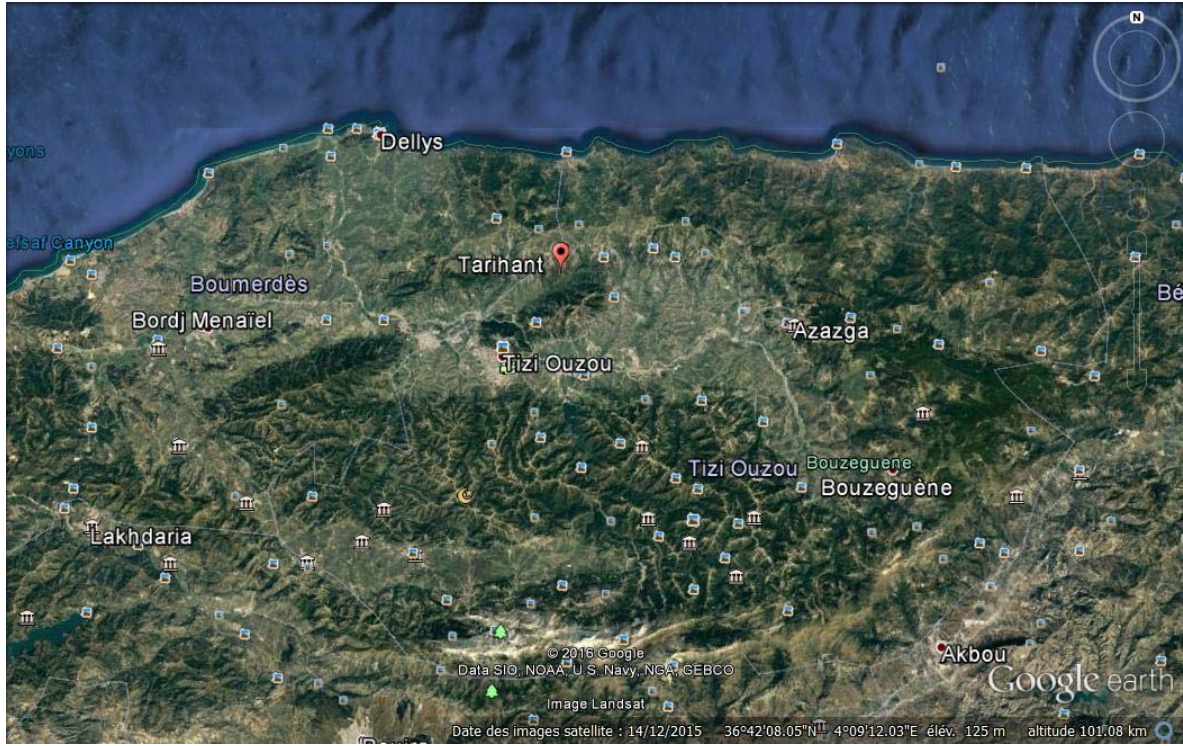


Fig. 1 Tarihant region

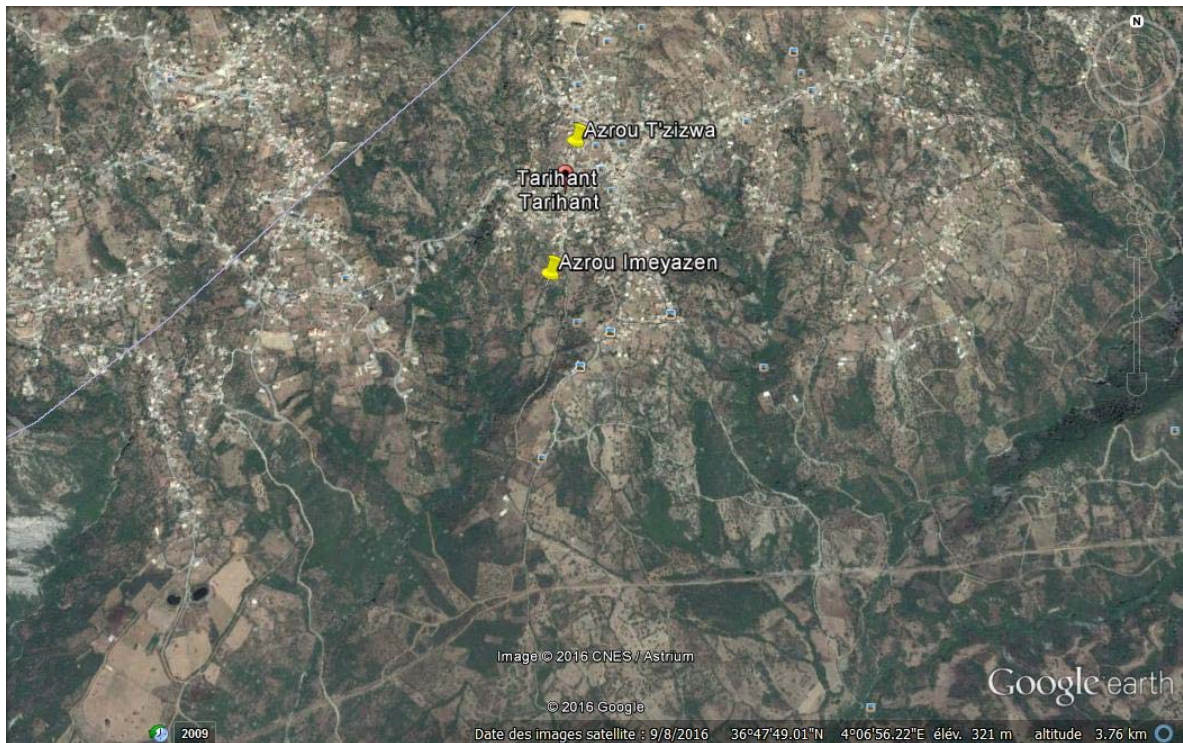


Fig. 2 Azru Imeyazen site



Fig. 3 Azru Imeyazen shelters



Fig. 4 Shelter n°1

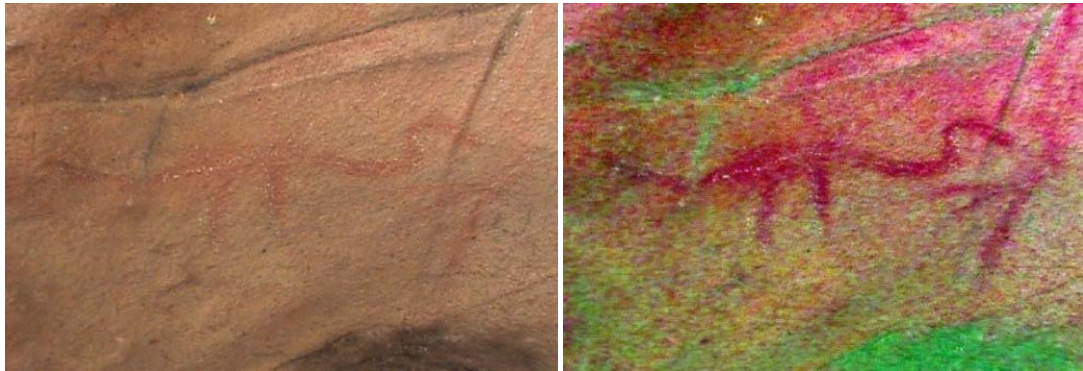


Fig. 5 First panel



Fig. 6 (a) The second panel 1



Fig. 6 (b) The second panel 2

Below, we can see three human silhouettes, two of identical style located at short distance away from each other (Fig. 7 (b)). The first individual has his head marked by a line, has long arms and long legs and is in a seated position, legs crossed. The second individual also seems seated, his head marked by a line. We notice his genital organ and a third member. According to Poyto [1], this last one represents a leg but we notice that it is shorter, so it can be either a weapon stick or a weapon. The third individual has a big round head, arms crossed, thin body, widened hips and we also notice his genital organ.

Next to the human silhouettes is depicted an unknown animal silhouette with two large ears (Fig. 7 (c)).

Below, we notice two human silhouettes, one of them holding a stick or a sharp weapon. Between them are two animal silhouettes that resemble either a dog or a jackal. At the bottom is a painting in the form of a fence; beside it, a human silhouette

with legs and arms outstretched (Fig. 7 (d)). Beside it is depicted a tall animal silhouette that resembles a giraffe (Fig. 7 (e)).

Fourth Panel

This deeply recessed ovular shaped alveolus measures 70 cm by 45 cm and is densely covered with paintings that are challenging to interpret. The majority of the imagery appears to be composed of enigmatic abstract symbols. In the upper left, a painting that resembles a foot with six sticks can be discerned. Adjacent to this, two identical patterns consisting of three horizontal bars dissected by a vertical bar are visible. These figures, obscured by white paint inscriptions, bear resemblance to human silhouettes. To the right, a depiction of an animal, possibly a dog or a jackal, is present, accompanied by a small stick positioned above it (Fig. 8).

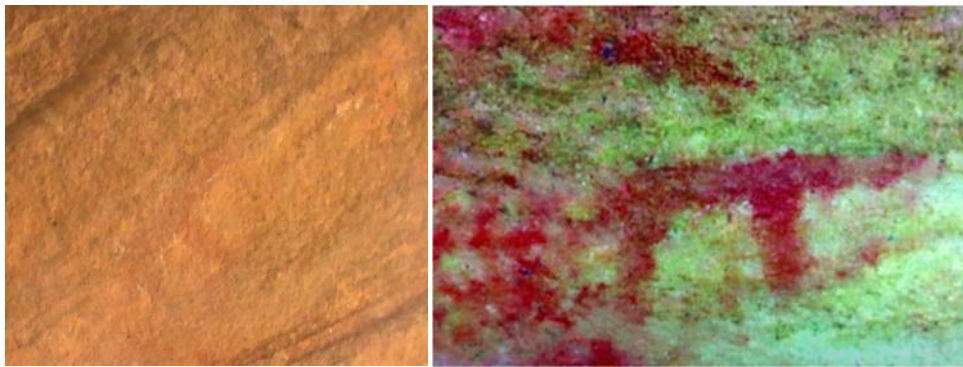


Fig. 7 (a) The third panel



Fig. 7 (b) The third panel (Human silhouettes)

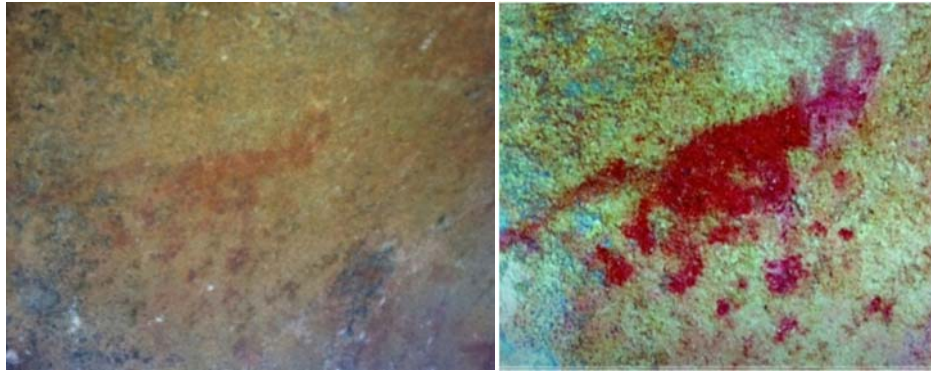


Fig. 7 (c) The third panel (Unknown animal silhouette)



Fig. 7 (d) The third panel (human and animal silhouettes)



Fig. 7 (e) The third panel (A tall animal silhouette that looks like a giraffe)



Fig. 8 The fourth panel

Panel n°5

In the alveolus located in the ceiling (Fig. 9), there is a pattern

in the shape of a “+” and a stick. In another cavity, on the right we can see a square of 12 cm side in the shape of a pear containing four dots.



Fig. 9 The panel n°5

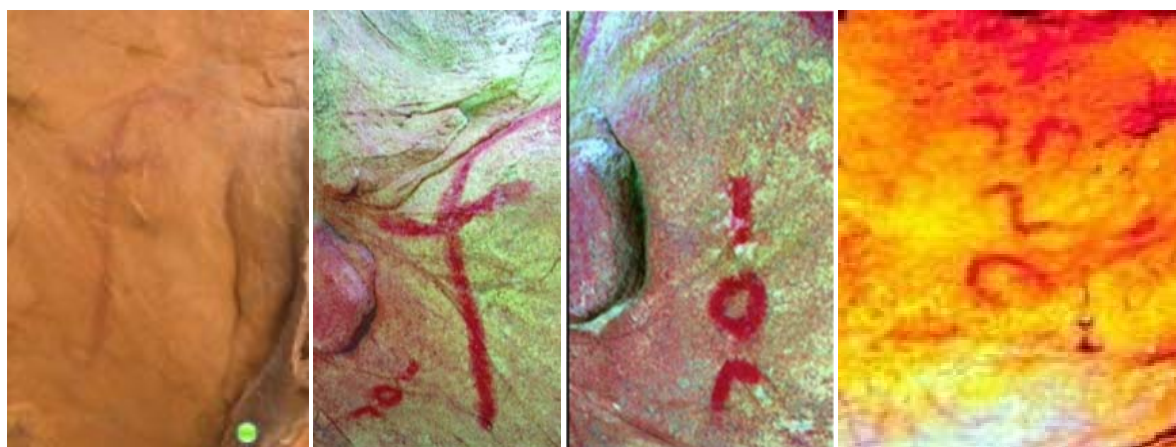


Fig. 10 The panel n°6

Panel n°6

In a large niche, on the right we notice a large f-shaped pattern (an individual) with a Libyans inscription underneath (Fig. 10).

Panel n°7

On the floor of the platform is scattered about 20 cupules, shallow depressions in the rock surface (Fig. 11). The interpretation of the use and meanings of the cupules remains difficult, as well as their dating which ranges from the Magdalenian to the Bronze Age and the Megalithic period.

Shelter n°2 (South-West)

This shelter is situated 3 m below the first shelter towards the south. It is oval-shaped and is 8 m long, 5 m high and 1 m deep.

It is made up of a large alveolus which contains a set of well-preserved paintings (Fig. 13):

- The first is made up of two lines 72 cm long, which meets at the top and bottom.
- The second is made up of two short lines that resemble a halberd.
- From the left side of the two lines is a pattern that looks like an animal.



Fig. 11 The panel n°7



Fig. 12 Shelter n°2



Fig. 13 The first panel of shelter n°2

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- On the lower vertical part of the wall of the shelter, we notice a set of paintings consisting of a set of dots and lines of different sizes which occupies an area of 30 cm² (bright ochre).
- There is also an inscription of four Libyan characters written vertically.

III. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, our study of the painting site yields the following observations:

- Human silhouettes are depicted by a narrow line, representing the head, neck and body without any

- indication of hands, feet, or clothing.
- Animal silhouettes are present, ranging from small jackals and dogs, to large animals, possibly ostriches or giraffes.
- Enigmatic symbols, including dots, rods, and rectangles, are scattered throughout the paintings, along with paint stains.
- Libyan inscriptions are also present at the site.

Some paintings are damaged and difficult to interpret due to the effects of time and erosion, as well as human intervention. An archaeological site like this one represents a valuable resource for local development, provided there is a genuine commitment from local authorities to protect and preserve this

cultural heritage before it is lost forever.

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