



ABSTRACT

A neighbor of Gonoa

'The Man of Bunige' and his game

Tilman Musch

This article presents engravings from the rock art site of Bunige in the northern Tibesti (Republic of Chad). Bunige is located barely 10 km from the rock art site of Gonoa and, apart from a brief mention in a French article from 1966, does not seem to have been explored in any detail. However, Bunige deserves the attention of experts because of its large depiction of an archer and also because of the relatively large number of enigmatic circular objects engraved on the rocks scattered over the site. This article assumes that the archer represents a hunter and the round objects represent traps. Because of its abundance of water, Bunige may have attracted wild animals and therefore have been of particular interest to hunters. The aim of this paper is therefore not only to trace the context of hunting through the symbolism of the engravings, but also to place the latter in direct relation to their environment. In doing so, some topographical and geomorphological features of Bunige will be highlighted, and basic ethnographic references will be made to the Tubu who inhabit the area today.

KEYWORDS

Tibesti, Archer, Rock-Engravings, Waterbuck, Stone Traps

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Introduction

¹ In 1966, Paul Huard, a proven expert on Saharan rock engravings, published together with a certain Lieutenant Léonardi (Huard – Léonardi 1966) an article entitled 'Nouvelles gravures rupestres des chasseurs du Fezzan méridional, du Djado et du Tibesti'. In this article, among others, six 'new' – i.e. still undiscovered by 'Western' science – rock art sites are presented. One of them is called 'Bénigué' (northern Tibesti). This site was explored by Léonardi; apparently Huard did not see it with his own eyes. In about half a page, the two authors give the inventory of the site. There, they mention 'an engraved archer, strongly patinated, with the profile of a bird's conical beak, with, apparently, a small crest'¹ (Huard – Léonardi 1966: 150). In addition to sketches of the fauna depicted in 'Bénigué', a small, highly schematized and not detailed sketch of the archer is reproduced in the article.

² The little attention that the authors gave to this archer is surprising. Because, in reality, it is an almost man-sized representation of a human being, and this hardly 10 km away from the large and very well-known rock art site of Gonoa, discovered by G. Nachtigal in 1869 (cf. Staewen – Striedter 1987), where an almost two-meter-high human being is depicted – the world famous 'Man of Gonoa'. Since such large representations of humans are rare in the Tibesti², these two engravings in close proximity to each other are almost sensational.

³ In March 2021, my ethnographic work³ took me for a day to 'Bénigué', which, correctly transcribed, is called Bunige. I did not know Huard and Léonardi's article at that time. I was therefore surprised to come across the rock engravings. As usual in

¹ 'Un archer incisé, fortement patiné, au profil en bec conique d'oiseau, avec, semble-t-il, une petite crête.'

² This assertion is based on inventories of recognized rock art researchers (cf. Huard 1953; Staewen – Striedter 1987) and my own visits to numerous rock-art sites in the Tibesti since 2017.

³ I am doing ethnographic fieldwork in the Central Sahara since 2014 and in the Tibesti since 2017. My current work focuses on horticulture in oases and wadis in the Tibesti. It is part of the 'Sahara Garden' project funded by the Gerda Henkel Foundation, which supports sustainable horticulture in the Tibesti.



Fig. 1: The water-rich *enneri* of Bunige in March 2021. In the foreground, one of the numerous small wells.

such cases, I photographed them, although the day, with its extremely dust-covered sky, was not very suitable for such an undertaking. Since this visit was not planned as archaeological research, the engravings could not be examined and measured more extensively.⁴

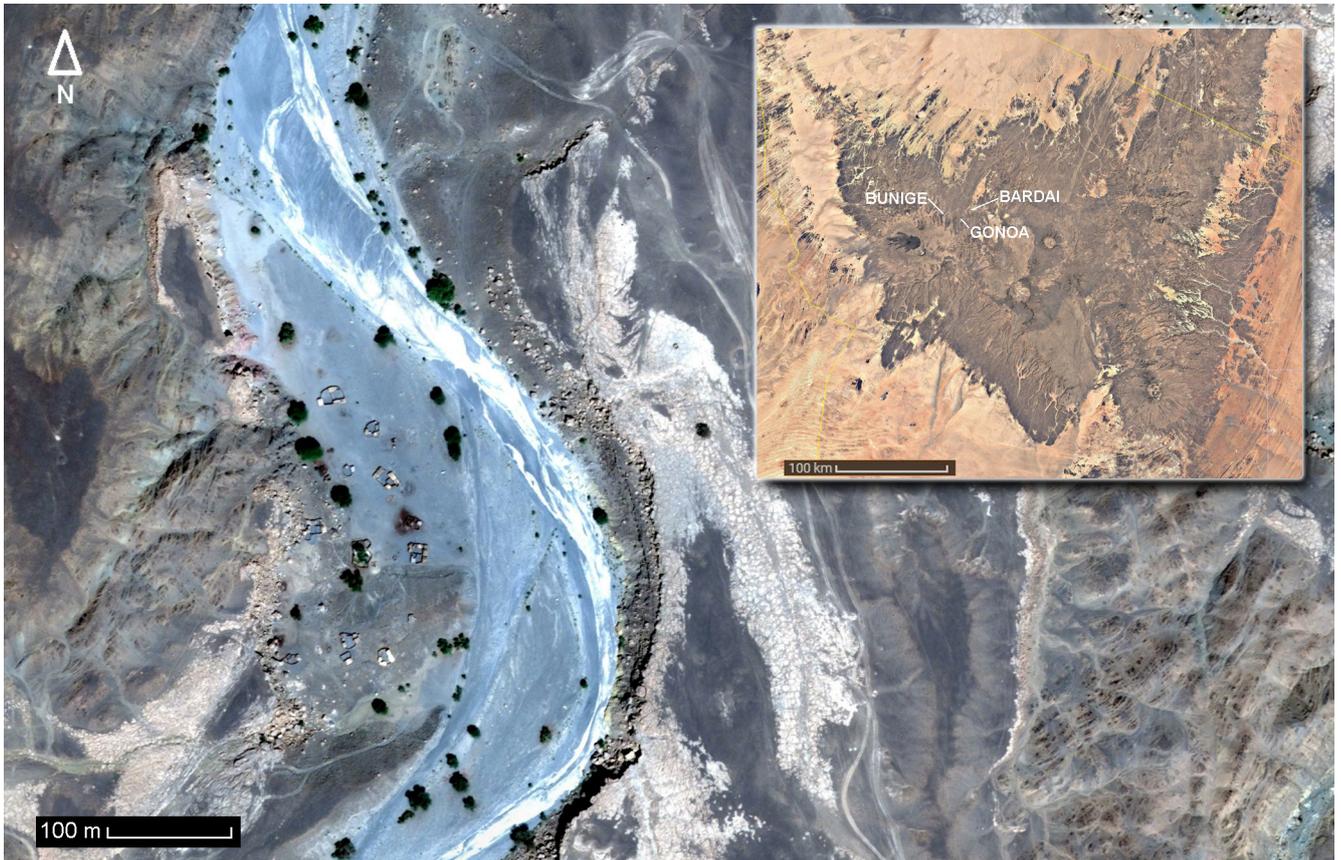
⁴ Bunige deserves the attention of experts because of the large depiction of the archer and also because of the relatively large number of enigmatic round depictions engraved on the boulders scattered on the site. In this article, I will suppose that the archer represents a hunter, and that the round depictions represent traps. Due to its abundance of water, Bunige, indeed, may have attracted wild animals and therefore may have been of particular interest to hunters. Therefore, the aim of my contribution is not only to trace the context of hunting through the sole symbolism of the engravings, but to relate the latter to their particular environment. In so doing, I will highlight some topographical and geomorphological features of Bunige and give, at the same, basic ethnographic references to the Tubu who currently inhabit it.

Bunige and its engravings

⁵ Bunige is barely 10 km in a W–NW direction from Gonoa, and 20 km in a W–SW direction from Bardai. The village is located next to a rock face in its west and lies on a low fluvial terrace, next to the base flow and streamflow beds of the *enneri*⁵ Bunige

⁴ Also for this reason, the scales given in the captions are estimated.

⁵ The Tubu of the Tibesti use the term *enneri* to refer to the desert valley (“wadi”). For the formation of valleys in the Tibesti from a geological point of view, see Obenauf 1971. In the latter, the author presents in more detail the *enneri* Gonoa, which is located in the immediate vicinity of the *enneri* Bunige and belongs to the same river system. For ethnographic aspects of the Tibesti hydrology, see Musch 2021.



(Fig. 2). This desert valley runs from south to north in the west of the *enneri* Gonoa and is part of the Bardage river system.

6 The terrace on which the present village and its engravings are located is particularly protected from erosion because it is partially surrounded by a spur. This could also have been a protection against potential attackers for the inhabitants at former times. Meanwhile, probably due to the absence of floods, houses are even built on the former stream bed.

7 The top layer of the rock face consists of ignimbrite, below which is a sandstone base. The sandstone as well as fissures in the ignimbrite could have a function as aquifer. At the time of the engravers of Bunige there may have been seeps and springs here. Still today the place is very rich in water, which is also indicated by its name: ‘Buni-ge’ means ‘by the well’ in Tedaga, the language of the local Tubu Teda. The acacias (*Acacia sp.*) and tamarisk trees (*Tamaris sp.*) on today’s base flood bed, which prefer to grow in water veins, indicate permanent moisture (Fig. 2). Still in March 2021, local residents obtained water from simple small wells located in the *enneri* (Fig. 1).⁶

8 Bunige’s approximately 85 engravings (most of them part of compositions) are engraved or pecked into about 17 faces of fallen ignimbrite blocks which are located along a rock face running from north to south with an adjacent scree (Fig. 2 + Fig. 3). They depict a large and a small archer, four elephants (*Loxodonta africana*), possibly a rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*), three animals whose horns resemble those of Barbary sheep (*Ammotragus lervia*), and six undefinable animals. Forty-five engravings show either cattle or other bovinds. In addition to these depictions of living beings, there are those of 24 round devices. One recent Arabic graffito, not counted here, is carved into an

Fig. 2: Section of the *enneri* Bunige with the village of Bunige (bottom left). Well visible the spur that partially shields the terrace from the river, as well as the trees in water veins. The older houses of the village are on the terrace; newer ones are built into the former stream bed of the river. The engravings are on ignimbrite blocks at the foot of the rock face to the west of the old houses. The inlet shows a general map of parts of the Tibesti mountains.

6 These wells have a diameter of about 50 cm and a depth of between 1.5 and 2 m. Their edges are secured by simple dry stones. The neighboring valley of Gonoa, on the other hand, does not seem to have been inhabited since already a longer period of time.



Fig. 3: Section of Bunige's ignimbrite wall with engravings. On the lower left in the foreground, a dilapidated dry-stone granary with a roof from *Calotropis* timbers. Are represented several cattle (block 1 = Fig. 5), a trap-stone (block 2 = Fig. 7), the 'Man of Bunige' (block 3a side facing south-west = Fig. 4), elephant standing on a bovine (block 3b side facing south-east = Fig. 6), Barbary sheep and waterbuck (block 4a side facing south = Fig. 9), waterbuck caught in trap (block 4b side facing east = Fig. 10).

ignimbrite block next to cattle engravings. Because of the size of the engraving (about 1.5 m) and its proximity to the 'Man of Gonoa', Bunige's large archer is particularly striking, although both figures are depicted in a very different style. The 'Man of Bunige' (Fig. 4 + Fig. 11), engraved with a rough, brought and deep pecked line and covered by a light to medium patina, is represented with protruding buttocks and a long, lateral phallus close to his right side. His head is small compared to the rest of his body, and his face tapers into a pointed 'beak'. It is possible that this is a mask. The engraving of Bunige has the simple bow and the oversized representation of the phallus in common with human representations from other regions of the Sahara (cf. Dupuy 1989: 165). In contrast, the nearly 2 m high engraving of the 'Man of Gonoa' depicts with finely incised stroke a striding and probably masked man armed with a club (cf. Staewen – Striedter 1987: 40, 229).

9 Many of Bunige's cattle representations (Fig. 5, Fig. 6, Fig. 9, Fig. 10) are engraved with outlines only. In some cases, did the engraver attempt to depict the coat pattern as well, mostly by dots. Many cattle have lyre-shaped horns. 10 of the animals resembling cattle have horns curved forward in a peculiar way (Fig. 9 + Fig. 10). They might represent antelopes. However, their figures are very schematic, so that an identification may look difficult. With reference to their forward curved horns and in relation to hunting scenes and depictions of traps, I will show in the following that these animals could be waterbucks (*Kobus ellipsiprymnus*).

10 The elephant depictions of Bunige are once a group of three animals lined up in a row and once the very damaged engraving of an elephant standing with its front legs – as if on a pedestal – on the neck of a bovine (Fig. 6). Another, smaller bovine is represented in the 'belly' of this (pregnant?) animal. The latter composition is engraved into the rock with a uniform rough, broad and deep pecked line, close to this one of the 'Man of Bunige'. It is covered by a medium, partially even dark patina.



Fig. 4: The 'Man of Bunige'. The height of the engraving is approximately 1.5 m.



Fig. 5: Engravings of cattle with different coat patterns. The height of the block is about 0.8-1 m.



Fig. 6: Very damaged engraving of an elephant from Bunige. His forelegs are posed on the neck of a (pregnant?) bovine. The elephant has a height of about 0.3–0.45 m.

11 About 24 devices represent round shapes divided by one or two parallel ‘diagonals’ (Fig. 7 + Fig. 8) and showing a light or medium patina. Some of these ‘diagonals’ continue outside the circle; some of them run out into a kind of noose. One of the circles is crossed by about a dozen parallel lines (Fig. 8). In two cases (Fig. 9 + Fig. 10), the ‘diagonals’ continue outside the circle in the direction of the legs of a bovid with forward-curved horns, and seem to connect with the former. If this bovid was cattle, one could assume that the round devices were tethering stones (cf. Pachur 1991). If, however, this bovid was an antelope, the stones could be a kind of ‘anchor’ to which traps have been attached (cf. Huard 1965; Huard – Leclant 1973). When I showed photos of the engravings to Mahadi Chaha, an elderly respected camel guide from the Emi Koussi region, and asked him what they may represent, he spontaneously replied: ‘des pièges’ (‘traps’) and did not mention devices to tether livestock.⁷

12 In the case of traps, the rope tied to the stone may have ended in a noose, which could have been combined with a so-called ‘spiked-wheel trap’ (cf. Lindblom 1928: 4; Riemer 2009: 182–185). As argue Gallinaro and di Lernia (Gallinaro – di Lernia 2018), ‘tethering’ stones may have served as a multifunctional device in different periods of the Pastoral Neolithic. First, they may have ‘made and used as hunting devices (...) and then further modified and changed for other important purposes, such as the tethering of domestic cattle and small livestock’ (p. 17). This long period of use could provide an explanation for why the round objects shown here are covered with different patinas. Some of the round objects could represent the traps themselves and not the stones the former have been tied to – the first object on the left in Fig. 8 might be a trap in which the animal gets caught with its foot.

13 As mentioned above, the figures of Bunige are engraved in the rock with lines of various depth and they show different patinas from light to dark. Fig. 9 may serve as an example of differences in the intensity of the patina: The small archer and the Barbary sheep in the higher part of the surface have both a light patina, as has also

7 According to Mahadi, he himself had not yet encountered such depictions. His interpretation could therefore not have come from a third party, but seemed to have been intuitive.



Fig. 7: Round device, probably a trap-stone. The diameter of the device is approximately 0.3 m.

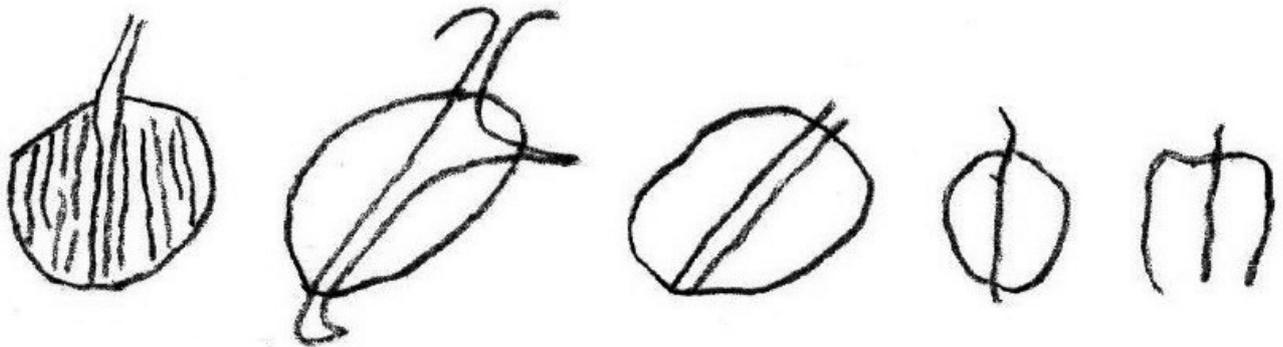


Fig. 8: Various engravings of objects interpreted here as trap-stones or traps. Estimated diameter between 0.1 m (two objects on the right) and 0.2-0.4 m (objects on the left).

one of the two Barbary sheep to the right of the picture's center. The waterbuck caught in the trap in the left part of the surface has also a light patina. These figures might be enough recent. The waterbucks on the right in the lower part of the surface with their medium patina might be older (in this part, the number of the subjects is probably underestimated, as the visibility is very scarce).

14 Possibly, the different patinas and styles characterize 2 or more distinct groups of petroglyphs executed in different phases. Thus, the depiction of the 'Man of Bunige' (Fig. 4) and the elephant (Fig. 6), with their deep, broad and rough pecked line and a patina that ranges from light to medium for the archer and from medium to dark for the elephant, could be assigned to one group. In the case of the figures engraved with a rather superficial and finer line (e.g. Fig. 9 + Fig. 10), there could be an older and a younger group. The latter would include the representations of the Barbary sheep, which, in contrast to the cattle, is indeed still found in the Tibesti today.⁸

8 Nevertheless, the intensity of the patina cannot be taken as the sole indicator of the relative age of the figures, as differences can also be due to different states of preservation. This is shown by the elephant and the cattle in Fig. 6. The boulder on which these figures are engraved shows clearly both, a dark and a medium patina, on a same side. Also in Fig. 9, the second Barbary sheep to the right of the picture's center shows a medium patina whereas all the other barbary sheep show a light one. One may nevertheless hypothesize that these animals, depicted in the same style, were all engraved in the rock at about the same time in a relatively recent epoch.



Fig. 9: On the upper left, an archer aiming at a Barbary sheep (light patina), and below, a waterbuck caught in a trap. On the right more traps, 2 Barbary sheep (light and medium patina) and waterbucks (medium patina). Estimated height of the block 1.2–1.5 m.

Bunige – a hunter’s station

15 The archer of Bunige is likely to represent a hunter. Two observations allow me to make this assumption. First, the smaller of the two human representations from Bunige – also an archer – aims at a Barbary sheep (Fig. 9). Second – and much more important – there is a very similar, although with 0.5 m significantly smaller representation of a human from Gonoa: This one seems to aim with a bow-like object at the neck of an antelope (Fig. 11). This human is also shown with a prominent phallus and a protruding buttock; his face tapers similarly into a pointed ‘beak’. The antelope, like some of Bunige’s bovids, has prominent forward-curved horns. If the archer of Bunige represents a hunter, one can assume that hunting was very important for the inhabitants of this place. Why else would a hunter have been portrayed so prominently in this size?

16 Certainly, one could argue that the large number of bovids depicted in Bunige, 35 of which can be identified with certainty as cattle, contradicts the last assumption made. However, hunting and cattle husbandry have been complementary forms of prehistoric economic activity. In reference to the Adrar des Iforas engravings in present-day Mali, Dupuy writes that the naturalistic rock art can be attributed to a society of cattle and sheep herders ‘who lived next to a Sudanese fauna to which they attached a certain symbolism and which they undoubtedly used to acquire proteins; the shepherd becoming in the circumstance hunter’ (Dupuy 1989: 169). In this context, one can read from the engraving where an elephant places its front legs on the neck of a cow (Fig. 6), if not complementarity, then at least contemporaneity – even if the meaning of this engraving cannot be explained, both cattle and elephant must have been depicted at

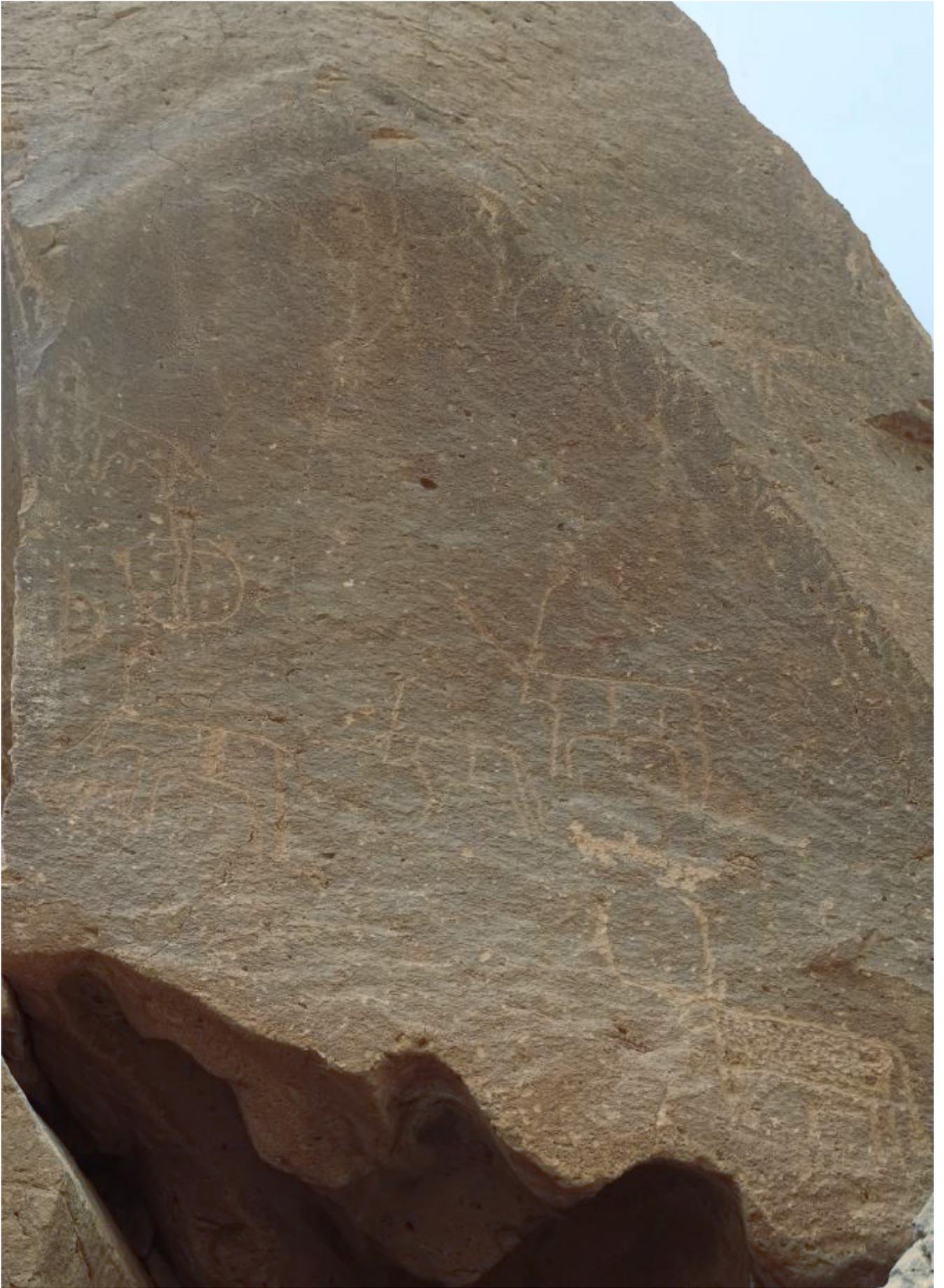
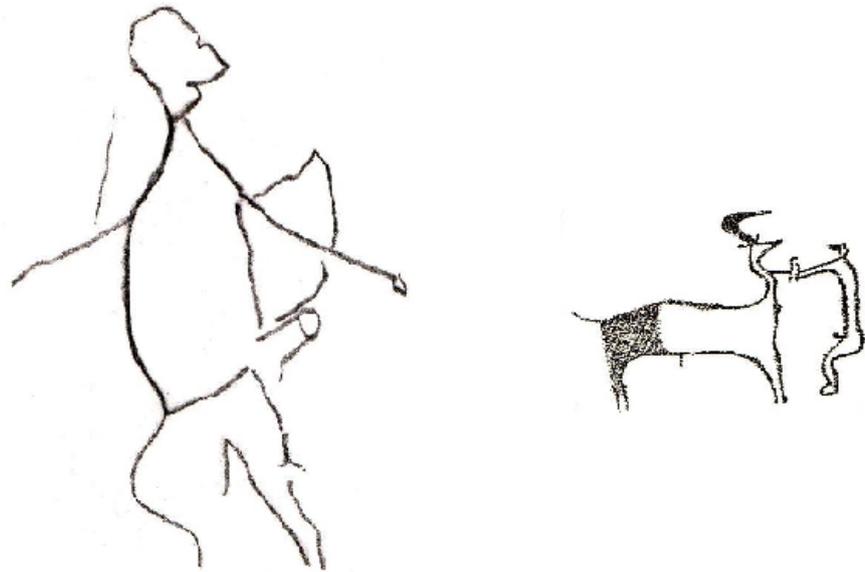


Fig. 10: On the upper left, a waterbuck with his hind leg caught in a trap. Below engravings of cattle. All engravings show a light patina. Estimated height of the block 1.2–1.5 m.

Fig. 11: On the left, sketch of the 'Man of Bunige'. Height approx. 1.5 m. On the right, hunting scene from Gonoa with a similar depiction of a hunter. Height 0.5 m.



the same time, because the group is uniformly engraved in the ignimbrite with a broad, deep and roughly pecked line and in a naturalistic style.⁹

17 If we now take the importance of hunting for the inhabitants of Bunige as given, then the round devices could be explained as traps. In this context, special attention deserves the bovid with the forward curved horns, which seems to be caught in such traps in two separate scenes (Fig. 9 + Fig. 10). If these traps were tethering stones, the following question would arise: Why are only cattle with forward curved horns tethered to such stones, while the large number of 35 cattle depicted in other ways seem to have nothing to do with them? As with the above mentioned engraving of the archer and the antelope from Gonoa (Fig. 11), the bovids with forward curved horns must thus be hunting game.

18 Which antelope species could be depicted here? Among today's African antelopes, the waterbuck has characteristically forward-curved horns which stand out in particular when viewed in profile. The waterbuck is 'a water-dependent species partial to scattered woodland and bush' and occurs in present-day Africa in areas where mean annual precipitation is between 400 mm and 1600 mm (Kingdon – Hoffmann 2013: 463). Places, such as the *enneri* Bunige, where there was always enough water, and its bordering areas could have represented a refuge for the waterbuck and other game in environments that became increasingly drier.

19 The waterbuck, as also the elephant¹⁰ and other species, might have been hunted at Bunige with traps as depicted in the engravings. According to Lindblom (Lindblom 1928: 4), spiked wheel-traps were primarily used to catch antelope. However, in Uganda and along the White Nile, they were also used to catch larger game, such as

9 According to a scheme by Le Quellec (Le Quellec 2013: 32), cattle husbandry in what is now the Sahara began shortly before the 5th millennium BCE and ended shortly after the 2nd millennium BCE. According to Kuper and Kröpelin (Kuper – Kröpelin 2006), most evidence for cattle husbandry is found between 6000 and 3500 BCE. Gabriel (Gabriel 1972: 61) gives the C14 age of a cattle bone from the *enneri* Bardage as 7455 ± 180 years BP. Elephants may have been present in the Tibesti since at least 9000 BP to the last B.C. millennium (cf. Gabriel 1972: 61; Le Quellec 2013: 32). Gabriel (Gabriel 1972) dates the C14 age of an elephant skeleton from the *enneri* Bardage to 6435 ± 225 years BP, and that of an elephant femur from the *enneri* Direnao to 2690 ± 435 years BP.

10 Even if one has to acknowledge that the waterbuck engravings (Fig. 9 + Fig. 10) seem to be more recent than the depictions of the elephant with his forelegs on the back of a cattle (Fig. 6), there exist significant habitat relationships between the waterbuck and the elephant; both species are attracted by the riparian strip, the former moving perpendicularly to and the latter ranging along it (Henshaw 1979). As already mentioned, smaller groups of elephants might have been present in the Tibesti as late as the last B.C. millennium (cf. Gabriel 1972: 61).

elephants, rhinoceroses, giraffes, and buffaloes (Lindblom 1928). Usually, several traps were set at the same time (which may explain the large number of 24 engravings of these traps) at places often frequented by game, such as paths or watering holes (Lindblom 1928). The water-rich Bunige may have been particularly suitable for trapping game animals that came to water.

20 When looking at the numerical ratios of depictions, then the representations of cattle seem to dominate (35 engravings). However, when adding up all engravings related presumably to hunting (24 representations of traps, 4 of elephants, 3 of wild sheep, 2 of archers, 10 of waterbucks, and 1 possibly of a rhinoceros), then the latter dominate with 44 depictions. This would relativize the importance of cattle husbandry for Bunige's inhabitants.¹¹

Conclusion

21 In this article I have given details of the the rock-art site of Bunige and presented the latter as embedded in its particular water-rich environment. With reference to hunting, I have tried to contribute some elements to the explanation of the engravings. Because of its size and its spatial proximity to Gonoa, the 'Man of Bunige' seems to give the rock-art site a special significance. If, as assumed, the 'Man of Bunige' represents a hunter, then one can deduce that hunting had a particularly important economic or symbolic role among the inhabitants of the place. Why else would they have depicted a hunter so prominently? The big number of engravings that could refer to a context of hunting – including in particular the big number of traps – also supports this assumption.

22 The proximity of the rock-art sites of Bunige and Gonoa, the fact that there is a large representation of a human at both, and the parallels between the 'Man of Bunige' and a smaller hunter representation from Gonoa, raise the question of how the two sites and their inhabitants were related. The relatively small site of Bunige may have been frequented at a moment when hunting was significant or regaining importance as a source of protein. Perhaps the water-rich Bunige – well protected by the mountain spur but too small for a larger settlement – was an outpost of Gonoa where cattle pastoralism still predominated. At Bunige, undisturbed by the life of a larger settlement, it was possible to hunt the game that came to water. However, about the actual relations in which the 'Man of Bunige' stood with his neighbor from Gonoa, can only be speculated today.

23 GPS coordinates: 21°19'25" N, 16°48'12" E

Acknowledgements

24 My thanks go to the inhabitants of Bunige, who welcomed me in their village, to Mahadi Chaha (Faya), and to the geographers Barbara Sponholz and Erhard Schulz (Würzburg) for their comments on geology. Thanks also to the Gerda Henkel Stiftung for funding my fieldwork since 2018.

11 For comparison: Staewen found 663 single engravings and compositions in Gonoa. If these are broken down into individual representations, there are 800 images (Staewen – Striedter 1987: 26). With 346 representations, cattle is 'by far the most frequently depicted animal species' (Staewen – Striedter 1987: 35). Thus, cattle representations in Gonoa account for 43.25 % of the individual representations. In Bunige there are 35 cattle engravings among 85 single representations, which would be 29.75 %.

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Fig. 10: T. Musch

Fig. 11: T. Musch; Source: Staewen – Striedter (1987: 177, fig. 3 + 4)

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