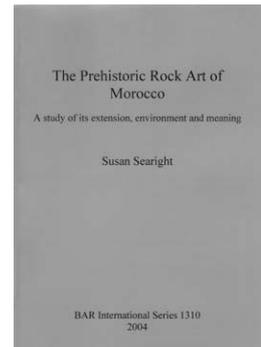

BOOK REVIEW



The Prehistoric Rock Art of Morocco: A Study of its Extension, Environment and Meaning. *By Susan Searight.* BAR International Series 1310, 2004, 246 pp., ISBN 1-84171-659-6. Price £ 36.00.

When the editors of this journal asked me to write a review on S. Searight's book, I was very interested to know what she had found out about Morocco's prehistoric rock art in its entirety. A brief overview had been given before in a catalogue established by A. Simoneau (Catalogue 1977). In recent years, several authors have concentrated on regional studies (*e.g.* KAACHE 1999; RODRIGUE 1999; HECKENDORF 2004). S. Searight's treatise is based on her Ph.D. thesis, which was accepted in March 2001 by the Department of Conservation Sciences of Bournemouth University (UK). Her objective is to examine all aspects of Moroccan rock art and to place it into an archaeological and environmental context. Considering the overall state of research on rock art, prehistoric settlement and environmental change in Morocco, these aims seem to be highly ambitious.

In the introduction, the author places her study of Moroccan rock art into the wider scheme of heritage-conservation. The term "rock art" is to be used as a simple way of discussing the images in question, independently of any aesthetic appreciation. Quoting internationally recognized rock-art researchers (*e.g.* R. Bradley, W. Davies, K. H. Striedter), she repeatedly stresses that rock art provides information on "non material phenomena", that it is important for the "reconstruction of prehistoric values", and as a "medium for a wider study of prehistoric society". Deplorably, the actual potentialities of the application of these notions to the rock art under study are not put into concrete terms. Nevertheless, in the face of increasing man-made destruction, there is no doubt that

there is an urgent need for systematic survey and complete recording of the Moroccan rock art sites.

Part I (Chapter 1-5) is meant to place Moroccan rock art into its general setting. In Chapter 1 (Aims and methods), eleven aims of the study are specified and nine approaches to achieve these aims are enumerated. For the purpose of the enquiry, Morocco has been divided into nine main zones. Their delimitations are illustrated on two identical maps (Fig. 2 and Fig. 50). The description of their geographical features (appendix 1) was done without taking notice of some relevant geographical literature (*e.g.* DESPOIS & RAYNAL 1967; LE HOUÉROU 1990; MÜLLER-HOHENSTEIN & POPP 1990). Moreover, there is no clear definition of key terms, such as "pre-Sahara". Furthermore, Fig. 51 (page 182) has been doubled and the descriptions of zones 3-6, which would be on page 181, are incomplete or missing (at least in my copy). This is regrettable, as the major part of the rock art known in Morocco is situated in these zones. In preparation for the fieldwork, the available information about the rock art sites was recorded on individual data-sheets (Fig. 3). A single "site" was defined either as one listed as such by A. Simoneau (Catalogue 1977), who has never explained his site-concept, or as a unit which is separated by at least 500 m from any other. Unfortunately, these definitions do not allow for any analysis of the position of rock art sites in the prehistoric landscape as intended in subsequent chapters of the study (Chapters 7 and 13). It goes without saying that S. Searight's deserving fieldwork in the remote mountains and deserts of Morocco took often place under extremely difficult cir-

cumstances. About one half of the known sites have been visited in the field. Four sites were considered to be representative of the four main rock art groups distinguished by her and have been studied in detail (Chapter 8). There is no particular reason to contest the author's notion that the rock art had a purpose and a meaning, or that the engravers had seen the animals and objects they depicted. Nonetheless, it is quite illogical to assume on the one hand that the animal images did not necessarily represent the full range of the living fauna, and on the other hand that the frequency of depiction of one species against another corresponds to their real proportions in the contemporary environment.

Chapter 2 (Previous research on Moroccan rock art) consists merely of an enumeration of the "who is who" and "who found what" throughout the Kingdom in the last 130 years or so. Decidedly, it would have been more interesting to discuss the classificatory concepts that were applied to Moroccan rock art in the past and the interpretations that were advanced by the different authors involved. By doing so, it would have become clear to what (large!) extent S. Searight's own conceptions are committed to them.

Chapter 3 (Holocene climate and flora) regards the reconstruction of climatic change during the Holocene in North Africa and the Sahara in general, and in Morocco in particular. The author assumes that these changes had indirectly affected the distribution of rock art sites and are reflected to a certain extent in the rock art. Again, it would have been profitable to consider a larger choice of the relevant literature (*e.g.* LAUER & FRANKENBERG 1980; FONTES & GASSE 1989; HOOGHIEMSTRA *et al.* 1992; NEHREN 1992a: 26, Abb. 6; ADAMS & FAURE 1995). Besides, the particular difficulties that impede climatic reconstruction in the area under study should have been taken more seriously. Even today, climatic variety is a dominant characteristic of the Maghreb, and especially of Morocco. This is due to the peculiarities of its orographic structure and the specificities of its north-south and east-west extension, which did not change very much during the Holocene.

In Chapter 4 (An outline of the Prehistory of Morocco), the author is trying her hand at an examination of Morocco's prehistory. This quite incomplete overview suffers from the neglect of some older, but thoroughly prepared and therefore still not outdated

compilations, such as those presented by D. GRÉBÉNART (1997) and by R. NEHREN (1992).

In the review of radiocarbon dates for Neolithic sites, some relevant articles published in J. EVIN *et al.* (1999) were also omitted. The contributions that were made particularly by G. SOUVILLE (1959, 1965, 1968) on the subject of pre-Islamic tombs and monuments in Morocco are likewise ignored. Additionally, the origins of the drawings that were put together in Fig. 5 and which show copper and bronze items that were found in Morocco are not indicated.

Chapter 5 (Neolithic and later fauna as revealed by excavations and texts) contains a list of animals that were either mentioned by previous authors or identified in archaeological excavations only in North Morocco. In this account, the judicious archaeo-zoological observations that have resulted from B. OUCHAOU'S (2000) study of the excavated faunal remains from archaeological sites in northern Morocco are left out. A discussion of the evidence concerning the introduction of domesticated animals is given in Chapter 10.

Part II (Chapter 6-9) concerns the rock art and the rock art sites. In Chapter 6 (Themes represented in Moroccan rock art), the themes that were found on the sites are listed and the inventory of engraved animals is compared to the faunal evidence from archaeological excavations (Chapter 5). A proper thematic analysis would have necessitated a systematic classification of the rock art motifs and a survey of the part each motif has in the total number of engravings of the rock art sites under study. At present, the overall state of research on site composition clearly does not permit any well-founded statistical investigation. Astonishingly, the author considers that, in view of the variability of the contents of the rock art sites in the different zones (Chapter 7), such an exercise would not be very useful (page 47). There is also no clear definition of key concepts, such as "scene". In addition, the animal species are only named on a general level and some determinations are dubious. To give two evident examples, a pecked cattle engraving with a forward pointing horn was identified as "barbary sheep" (Fig. 19c) and two polished lion drawings were classified as "monkeys" (Fig. 37a). Anyway, as a result of her review, the author believes to have demonstrated that the people responsible for the rock art were interested in material objects (chariots, trapping equipment, weapons) and that they were preoccupied with animals as