

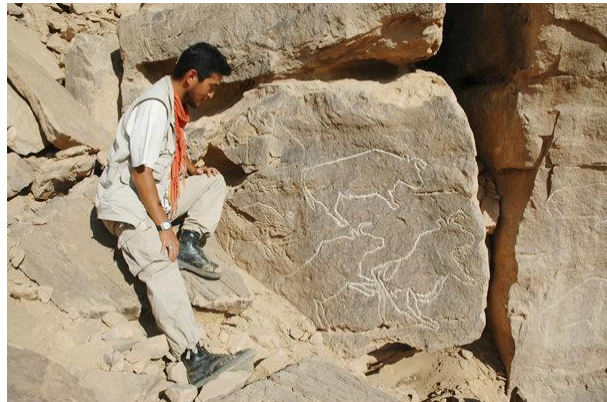
# [Anthropology.net](http://Anthropology.net)

Beyond bones & stones

## Egyptian Palaeolithic Rock Art Found At Qurta, Kom Ombo

Nice story from [Al-Ahram Weekly](#), on the recent discovery of a stunning array of engraved rock art at [Qurta](#) in Upper Egypt, which may be 15,000 years old, making it contemporary with the [Magdalenian](#) era of north western Europe, whose most well known sites from this era are Lascaux and Altamira, amongst a host of others; moreover there is an apparent stylistic similarity with its northern neighbours.

However, this rock art isn't situated deep within caves, instead being engraved onto large rocks at an open air site; the engraved figures are described as being in pristine condition – it's worth bearing in mind that although Egypt has been viewed as an essentially sun-drenched realm since the golden days of its dynastic civilisation, there is evidence of significant rainfall and flooding there between about 10,000 bp and 5,000 bp, and again between about 4,000 bp and 3,000 bp., so the preservation of outdoor sites as ancient as this, is all the more remarkable.



Here's a description of the find made by the team of Belgian archaeologists from the Royal Museum of Art and History, funded out of Yale University, who have announced the news of this find...

*“The story of the discovery began two months ago when a Belgian archaeological mission from the Royal Museum of Art and History, financed by Yale University, resumed its intensive archaeological survey on the Nubian-sandstone cliffs at Qurta. While carrying out their routine survey, excavators stumbled upon three rock art sites spreading over a distance of about two kilometres on the eastern side of Qurta. Entitled Qurta I, II and III, each site contains several prehistoric rocks bearing a rich collection of Palaeolithic illustrations featuring a large number of bovids, hippopotami, birds and human figures.”*

*Bovids are the most common animals depicted in the illustrations, with at least 111 representations in different positions. Of other animals there are seven examples of birds, three hippopotami, three gazelles and two fish. There are also 10 highly stylised human figures shown with pronounced buttocks, but with no other distinct bodily features.*

*All the rock art images are very darkly coloured and seem to be covered by a substantially developed varnish. Most of the images also have traces of intensive weathering through Aeolian abrasion and water run-off.*

Very interesting to note that as is the case with European rock art, the human figure is more an abstract motif than a naturalistic portrayal, and it's tempting to ask whether there was any kind of direct or indirect contact between Magdalenian Europeans and Palaeolithic North African people, and whether one group influenced the other. I don't have a good enough knowledge of rock art from the rest of the world dating to this era to make a comparison, although Australian rock art seems to have developed in a degree of isolation, as it is so markedly different from its occidental equivalent.



At the risk of sounding Eurocentric, I wonder if some Magdalenians might have decided to head out of Ice Age Europe for the more temperate climates of an Egypt less chilly – I don't know of any contextual lithic, artefactual or organic evidence that would confirm or refute this. Alternatively, it's also possible that people from what is now Egypt may have travelled up into Europe and seen some of the parietal work there, returned to Egypt and constructed the panels, which appear to represent a single and isolated phase of rock art.

Magdalenian rock art and its associated culture seems to have been very well entrenched in north western Europe over many millennia, and although it would have been physically possible for people to travel between there and North Africa, maybe it's just as likely that goods or artefacts could have made longer journeys than the humans who passed them along what could have been longer lines of economic or cultural communication than otherwise supposed.

Obviously, I wouldn't wish to deny Egypt any part of its Palaeolithic heritage, so for the time being, and with nothing substantial to back up a putative 'cultural exchange event', I'm going with the assumption that Qurta was a local phenomenon, created by people indigenous to the region at that point in time.