

# From the DOP Petroglyph Unit Archives: an Old Kingdom “dancing girl” image from Site 30/450-E4-6



**Abstract:** The rock art discovered in the 1980s and 1990s by the Dakhleh Oasis Project Petroglyph Unit is for the most part unpublished or only briefly mentioned in reports. The paper—the first of a planned series—offers a description and brief comparative study of a petroglyph showing a woman with a plait-and-disk hairstyle, found in the southeastern part of the oasis. The contextual information given for the petroglyph includes a description of the site. Selected features of the petroglyph are discussed. A comparative study of the decoration of nearly 30 tombs, containing figures with similarly rendered hairstyles, helps to explain the various attributes of the petroglyph and discuss its chronology.

**Keywords:** dancer, plait-and-disk hairstyle, *Kugelzopftracht*, watch post, Dakhleh Oasis

The rock-art piece under study was discovered in 1990 by Lech Krzyżaniak<sup>1</sup> in a place called the Mud Pan. It is an area located south-east of the modern boundaries of Dakhleh Oasis, distinctive for its characteris-

<sup>1</sup> The Dakhleh Oasis Project Petroglyph Unit was directed by Lech Krzyżaniak from 1985 to 2004. For PU research from the establishment of the expedition to the present day, see Polkowski 2019a.

**Paweł L. Polkowski**

Polish Centre of Mediterranean  
Archaeology, University of Warsaw  
Poznań Archaeological Museum

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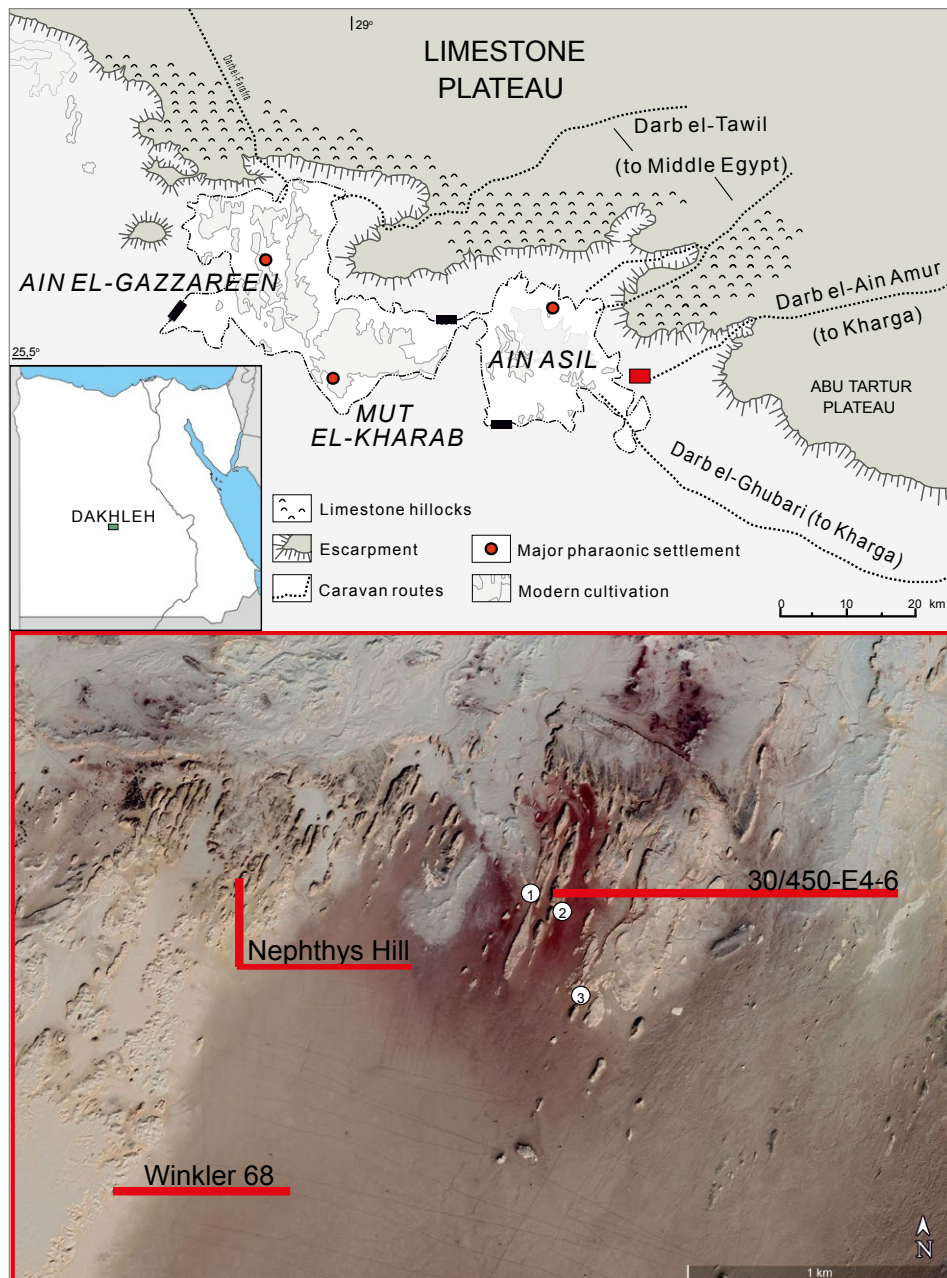


Fig. 1. Location of Dakhleh Oasis in Egypt indicated with a green rectangle (inset); the oasis with three major pharaonic settlements marked with red dots and the area of study as a red rectangle; and the Mud Pan area with the three watch post sites mentioned in the text and three late prehistoric sites: 1 – Loc. 256; 2 – Loc. 257a; 3 – Loc. 257b (top, P. Polkowski, based on H. Riemer’s map in Förster 2015: Fig. 77; bottom, satellite imagery Google Earth)

tically reddish color of the shale-rich ground [Fig. 1]. That same year, the site was visited by Mary McDonald who recorded clusters of prehistoric lithic and ceramic material nearby (Localities 256 and 257a–b), as well as some remains of Old Kingdom huts and some pottery (M. McDonald, personal communication and field notes; McDonald 1990: 63). The petroglyph in question was still *in situ*, when Krzyżaniak revisited the site in 2000. Several other sites were discovered during a more extensive rock art survey carried out in the Mud Pan area at the time (Krzyżaniak 2001). The report from that reconnaissance is not the only illustration of the petroglyph in question (Krzyżaniak 2001: Fig. 4) because the site and image have been referred to also by others (McDonald 1990: 63; Kaper and Willems 2002: 82), but these mentions are brief, lacking any detail let alone deeper study. Considering the potential relevance of this unique representation for confirming Old Kingdom Egyptian

presence on the outskirts of Dakhleh Oasis, this state of research is surprising at the very least.

It goes without saying that a proper in-depth approach to the “dancing girl” petroglyph, collecting observations of a formal nature and discussing its context and parallels, will enhance understanding of the image, while a comparison with formal iconography from the Nile Valley will help to evaluate the significance of the petroglyph for the dating of the watch post. Of necessity, this study relies on the archival documentation currently kept at the Poznań Archaeological Museum. The records include several black-and-white photographs, a tracing on transparent foil made *in situ*, and McDonald’s and Krzyżaniak’s field notes. The author has yet to examine the image in person, hence the unavoidable bias, affecting, for instance, the accuracy of the digital line drawing presented in this paper. However, the findspot is currently inacces-

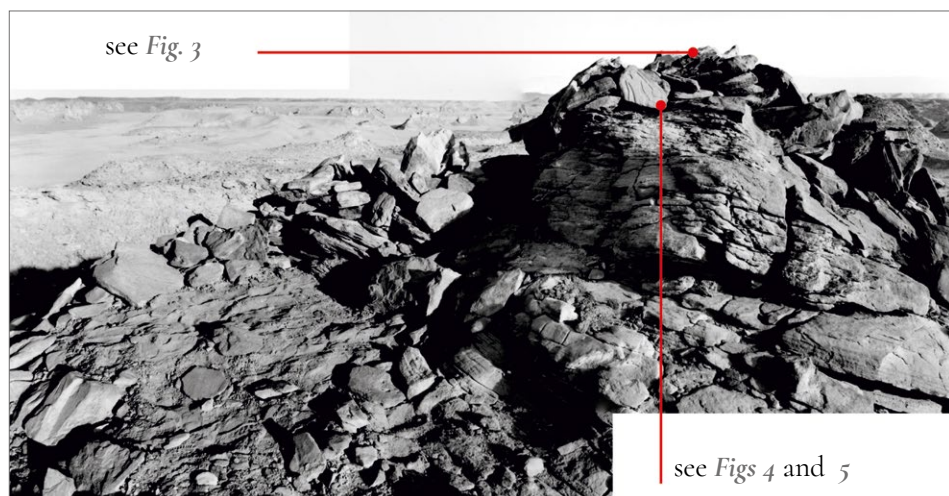


Fig. 2. The largest hut at site 30/450-E4-6 on the top of the hill: the “dancing girl” petroglyph can be seen on top of the outcrop (© Poznań Archaeological Museum & The DOP Petroglyph Unit | photo L. Krzyżaniak)

sible, not to mention the unknown present whereabouts of the rock art piece; it could still be on site, but as a mobile artifact it could have also been moved

to an official antiquities storeroom in the area. This issue should be cleared up once the site is revisited following a reopening of fieldwork in the oasis.

## THE “DANCING GIRL” PETROGLYPH: FROM SITE TO IMAGE

Site 30/450-E4-6 is located in the southern part of an elongated hill within the northern limits of the Mud Pan embayment. Another site, Loc(ality) 257a (30/450-E4-2) was registered at the base of this hill; it yielded some prehistoric material (McDonald 1990: 63). The current site number was assigned probably in 2000; before the references to Loc. 256 and 257 could have been the source of some site numbering confusion. Discussing Old Kingdom watch post sites, Olaf E. Kaper and Harco Willems (2002: 82) gave it the number 30/450-E4-1, which is actually an alternative designation of Loc. 256, where some Old Kingdom pottery was found as well (McDonald 1990: 63). However, the watch post lies about 100 m east of that site. In 2000, Krzyżaniak surveyed and registered several other rock art sites, assigning the “dancing girl” locality its present number.

The exact number of stone huts at the site is not stated anywhere. However, the petroglyph in question was located inside a stone structure occupying the highest spot on the hill, near its southern edge, offering a broad view of the surroundings [Fig. 2]. The available documentation indicates a rather homogeneous assemblage of rock art, all of the petroglyphs being clearly of Dynastic-period origin. At least three such compositions were found inside the largest stone hut (Krzyżaniak 2001: Fig. 3) [Fig. 3:a–d]. One was carved onto a vertical

surface of a large slab (if not solid rock) firmly embedded in the sandy floor of the hut [Fig. 3:b]. It shows two donkeys, a dog chasing a hare(?) and some less clear traces below them. The petroglyphs were apparently made by two different hands, the quadrupeds being engraved in outline and the hunt-scene animals made in a technique resembling sunken relief. Having only the photograph to study, it is difficult to decide whether the rock surface had been partly smoothed before carving.

The second panel contains two depictions of cattle resembling donkeys in style, albeit somewhat less naturalistic in execution [see Fig. 3:a]. a similar cattle image is found on yet another upright slab [see Fig. 3:c]. These petroglyphs should be dated to the Dynastic period, even if the subject matter and the ‘style’ hinder a more precise dating.

The “dancing girl” petroglyph takes on special importance in this context. It, too, was found within the hut limits, on top of the outcrop on which the stone structure sits [see Fig. 2]. When found, the flat stone of irregular shape, which the image was carved in, was considerably damaged [Fig. 4]. The part broken off slightly below the thighs of the anthropomorphic figure was never found. The surface of the stone is also damaged, particularly in the part around the figure’s head. The rest of the

anthropomorph survives in good condition, preserving some of the most distinctive features.

The manner of execution of this figure—bas-relief— is commonly reserved for more formal iconography known from tombs and temples. Added to the subject matter, this technical aspect accounts for the uniqueness of this petroglyph in

Dakhleh as well as in the entire Western Desert.

The maximum preserved height of the image is about 26.5 cm, the width (at shoulder level) about 11.5 cm. The body surface appears to be nearly perfectly flat, curving down gently only at the edges. The height of the relief cannot be estimated based on the available documentation.

### THE “DANCING GIRL” PETROGLYPH AND FORMAL ICONOGRAPHY FROM THE NILE VALLEY

To the best of the author’s knowledge, the Dakhleh motif is unparalleled in Egyptian rock art and the only available

comparanda are the images in relief and sculpture presented below (see *Table 1* and accompanying listing). No parallels

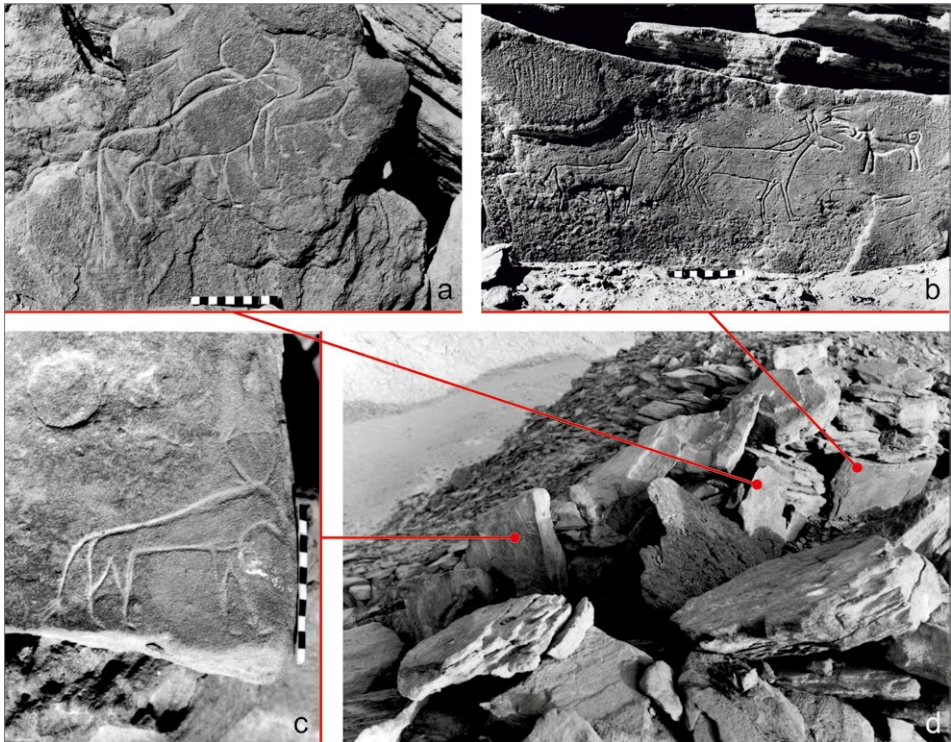


Fig. 3. Other rock art panels found on the site: a) two figures of cattle; b) two donkeys and a dog chasing a hare; c) depiction of cattle; d) all three panels viewed *in situ* at the site (© Poznań Archaeological Museum & The DOP Petroglyph Unit | photos L. Krzyżaniak)

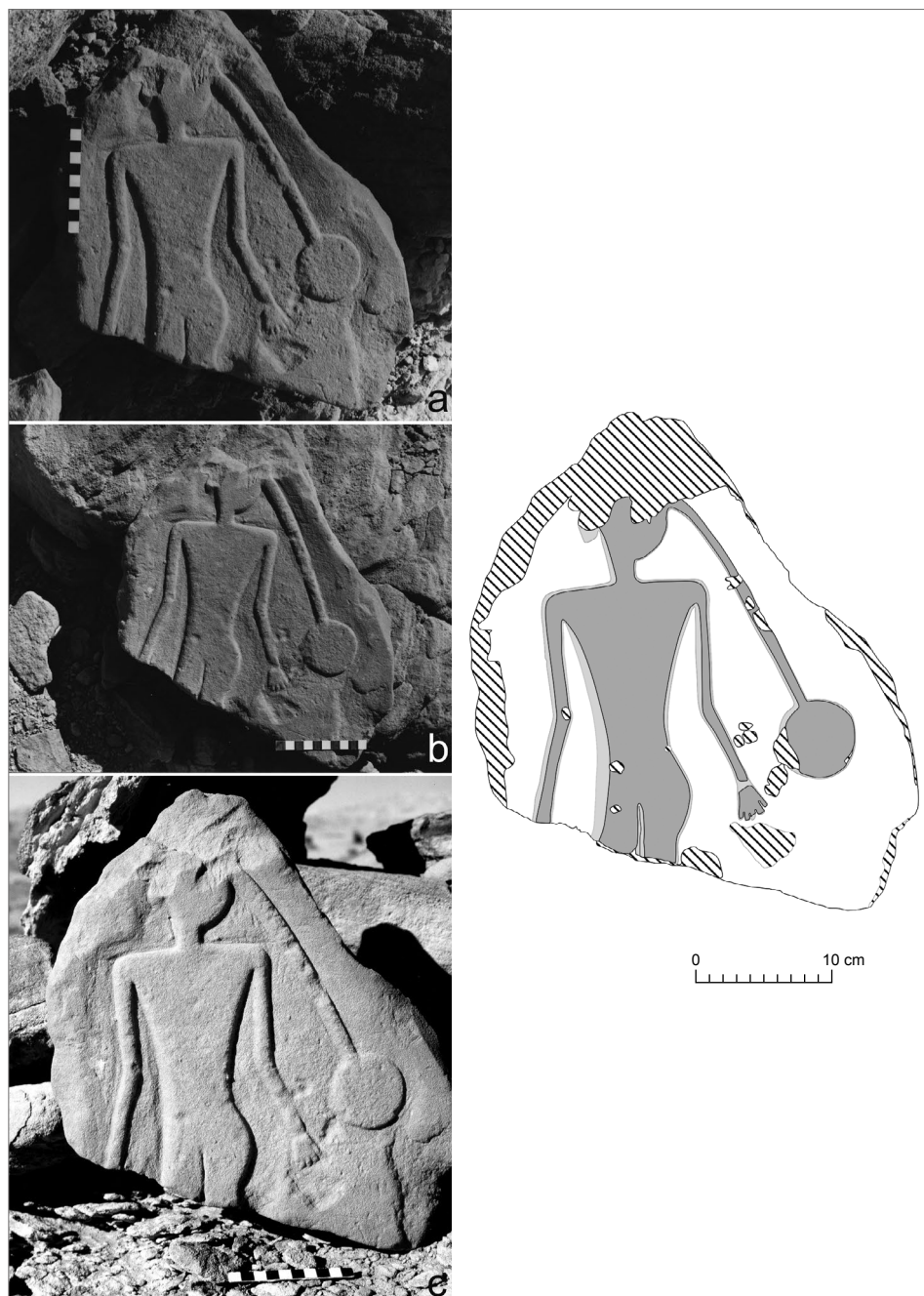


Fig. 4. Stone with a “dancing girl” petroglyph: three views on the left, digital tracing on the right, dark grey indicating flat surfaces and light grey the dropping surfaces around the edges (not collated *in situ*) (© Poznań Archaeological Museum & The DOP Petroglyph Unit | photos L. Krzyżaniak; drawing P.L. Polkowski)

are known from the oasis itself, so one has to rely on Nile Valley material. This poses a methodological problem, especially with regard to dating issues. At Dakhleh, a remote province on the fringe of the kingdom, the application of iconographic motifs could have had its own dynamics, not necessarily identical with those from the core areas of the valley. In other words, they could have been in use for a shorter or longer time than their counterparts elsewhere, not to say that they could have acquired different connotations and meanings (see Polkowski 2019b: 163–164). This does not exclude comparisons *a priori*, but one should be aware of inherent bias. Even so, the singular specificity of the present petroglyph and its skilful execution could indicate an informed understanding of contemporary funerary iconography in the Nile Valley, inviting a discussion of its formal traits by comparison.

The most conspicuous element of the figures in question is the hairstyle consisting of a long plait ending in a circular termination.<sup>2</sup> Such a plate-and-disk or *Kugelzopf* coiffure (see von Bissing 1899; Brunner-Traut 1958: 24; Kinney 2008: 161–162) is attested in the relief and painted decoration of more than two dozen Old Kingdom tombs, as well as several First Intermediate Period and at least one Middle Kingdom monuments (see *Table 1* and accompanying listing). Figures of this type occur also on stelae like that of *B3.wj* (CG 20504, Cairo, Sixth Dynasty, Teti–Pepy I; Kanawati 1988: Pl. 13b) and *Mkt.t.j* (ÄS 5896,

Vienna, Eleventh Dynasty; Hein and Satzinger 1989: 176). One should add to this at least two sculptures showing females with pigtailed terminating in either a disk (Macramallah 1935: 13, Figs 6, 7; late Old Kingdom, in Kroenke 2010: 730, No. 142 = JE 37756) or a ball shape (Decker and Herb 1994: 710–711, No. R3.7, Pl. CCCXCI = ÄM 14202; see also Kinney 2008: 161–162). In terms of chronology, the early Middle Kingdom seems to be an upper limit for this particular hairstyle, which can still be attested as a variant at Beni Hassan (in the form of three plaits, each with a conical termination; see Hudáková 2019: 413 and Figs 11.2–11.9), only to disappear shortly thereafter.

The few mentions of the petroglyph under study refer to it as a “female dancer” (Krzyżaniak 2001: 253) or a “dancing girl” (McDonald 1990: 63; Kaper and Willems 2002: 82), but the plait-and-disk hairstyle is in fact restricted neither to dancers nor females. That the petroglyph does not show a male is indeed quite clear, as demonstrated by a survey of tomb decoration where the plait in male figures is always shown at the side of the head [*Fig. 5:a*] (Nos 3, 4, 10, 25; numbers refer to the listing following *Table 1*), while the manner of depiction in the discussed petroglyph is reserved exclusively for females [*Fig. 5:c–d*]. It is quite evident that this form of hairdress was used to mark the young age of individuals, but not so much of children as of youth (Kanawati 1999: 292–294). In case of the male figures mentioned above, they all represent either the sons of tomb owners (Nos 3,

2 See, for instance, a comprehensive catalog of dancing figures, of which some have this type of hairstyle: Kinney 2008: Figs 1.15, 1.17–18, 1.25–26, 1.31, 1.33, 1.36–37, 2.17, 5.6, 5.8–12, 5.16, 6.1–2, 6.9, 6.14, 6.17–18, 6.20–21, 6.30, 9.1–8, 10.1 and the references therein.

4, 25) or the tomb owners themselves (No. 10). The only exception is the scene of males with baskets in the tomb of *Mrr.w-k3* (No. 3; Kanawati et al. 2010:

Pl. 96). Females wearing a pigtail terminating in a disk are shown as wives (Nos 1, 7, 12), daughters (Nos 4, 5, 16, 18, 19, 21?, 24, 25) and even granddaughters (No. 13)



Fig. 5. Selection of figures with plait-and-disk hairstyle from Nile Valley tombs: a – male with a lotus flower and a bird; b – female wearing a long gown; c – female dancer with a double cross-band on the chest; d – harpist (After: a – *The Sakkarah Expedition 1938*: Pl. 8; b – Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2008: Pl. 57; c – Simpson 1976: Pl. XXIV; d – Blackman 1924: Pl. X)

of the deceased, and also as tomb owners (Nos 2, 28). Some of them are shown smelling lotus flowers (e.g., No. 12), others bring offerings (e.g., No. 26) or play the harp (e.g., No. 18). Most of the females are just holding a lotus flower, while male figures are mostly shown with a bird in one hand and a lotus flower in the other.

Dancers feature in a considerable number of scenes and in terms of the numbers of individual figures, they are surely the most represented group. The largest scene, involving about 30 pigtailed figures, is known from the tomb of *W<sup>c</sup>(j).tt-h.t-Hr.w* at Saqqara (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2008: Pl. 60). Other fairly crowded scenes with dancers also occur at Saqqara: in the mastabas of *Mrr.w-k3* (The Sakkarah Expedition 1938: Pl. 87 with 14 dancers) and *Mr(j)ḏf-nbḏf* (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: Pl. XII with at least 11 dancers and six harpists). Elsewhere there are fewer dancing figures with plait-and-disk hairstyle, the number reduced at times to just a pair of dancers (like in some of the El-Hawawish tombs; see Nos 21 and 22). Clearly, females are depicted more frequently and in more diversified contexts

than males, and thus the hairstyle alone cannot serve as an unambiguous marker of gender, not to mention occupation or status.

Thus, it is somewhat problematic to refer to the studied petroglyph as a “dancer”. First, the figure is shown with no characteristic details other than the hairstyle. There is no trace of female dress or any other of the most frequently depicted costumes for that matter, whether a short close kilt<sup>3</sup> (Nos 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 14, 17, 21, 22, 27, 29), a pointed skirt (Nos 3, 15) or a long and tight gown (often with shoulder straps, usually worn by female clappers; Nos 3, 7, 11?). Neither is there any visual evidence of the common accessories of pigtailed dancers, such as bracelets, anklets, or necklaces. This could be partly because of the damage to the figure depicted on the stone, as only one of the four limbs is preserved in full. That arm actually shows a hollow where the palm meets the rest of the hand. However, as this feature cannot be compared with the other arm, one cannot conclude as to its intentionality: it could have represented a sort of wristband, but it could have also been unintended.

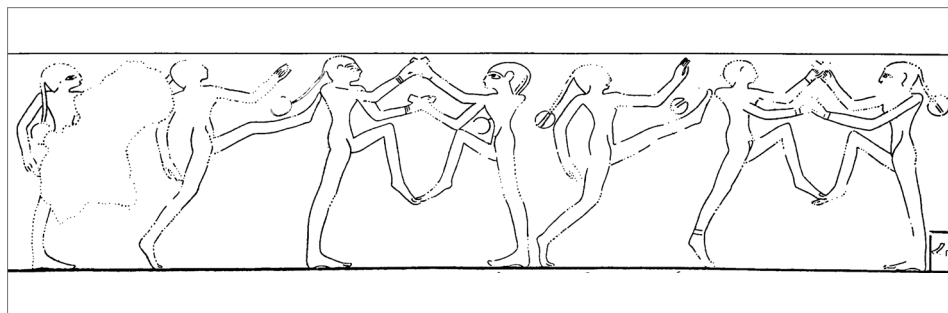


Fig. 6. Naked dancers from Deir el-Gebrawi (After Davies 1902/II: Pl. VI)

3 Some resembling a sarong skirt; see Kinney 2008.

The apparent lack of dress does not preclude, however, the identification of the figure as a dancer. Not only are naked dancers attested in Old Kingdom iconography (e.g., the tomb of *K3(ꜣj)-m-ꜥnh* at Giza; see Kanawati 2001: Pl. 35), but nude performers wearing a plait-and-disk hairdress are also known (e.g., No. 23) [Fig. 6]. More of a problem is the posture of the Dakhleh figure. With both hands slightly bent and pointing down, and the legs most probably together, the pose of the figure does not bring to mind any of the known Old Kingdom dance moves (see Kinney 2008: Appendix B). Neither does it correspond to any pose adopted by the rhythmists. It resembles more closely some pigtailed figures holding a lotus flower or an offering, although these (apart from some male depictions, e.g., No. 4) usually have only one arm pointing down. The hand being dam-

aged here, it is entirely possible that it had held an item of some kind. That being said, the petroglyph may well depict a “dancer”, but even if it does, the figure does not seem to be “dancing”.

The gender of the alleged dancer does not seem to raise any doubt, although the evident absence of any outline of the breasts introduces some uncertainty. This part of the petroglyph is in pristine condition, so there can be no question of damage affecting the rendering of the silhouette overall. Again, however, parallels can be cited (No. 23) to demonstrate this manner of rendition of the body as intentional. It could have had something to do with the young age of the represented individuals (see Davies 1902/II: 10). Besides, the carving of the hairstyle, coupled with the figure’s slim and shapely waist, go a long way to confirm its identification as a female.

## **DAKHLEH OASIS WATCH POST 30/450-E4-6 IN LIGHT OF THE “DANCING GIRL” PETROGLYPH**

Site 30/450-E4-6 was apparently a watch post functioning during the Old Kingdom period. Similar sites are known from the outskirts of the oasis, with a particularly dense scatter being located in the southeast. Some of the watch posts were excavated, including the one lying closest to 30/450-E4-6, namely, Nephthys Hill (Kaper and Willem 2002) [see Fig. 1]. The ceramic assemblage found at the latter (and several other sites) was dated to the Fourth–Fifth Dynasties. This led to the assumption that most sites of this kind were established and functioning prior to the

Sixth Dynasty. However, some new studies on pottery from several watch posts suggest the prevalence of Sixth Dynasty material in the assemblages: according to Amy Pettman, as many as five of the six watch posts that she studied operated only during the Sixth Dynasty (Pettman forthcoming). Among them is Winkler’s Site 68 (30/450-D4-5; Winkler 1939: 8, Pls VIII:1, IX), another watch post lying close to the “dancing girl” site [see Fig. 1].

Can the “dancing girl” petroglyph add anything to the discussion on dating watch posts in Dakhleh? First, it should be said that even if a given petroglyph

Table 1. Tombs containing in their decoration “dancing” figures like that of the Dakkheh petroglyph, grouped in chronological order (see listing on the following page spread); the dating of the tomb decoration is marked in red (based on the cited sources and Lashien 2015: Table A); less certain dating is in brown

PERIOD	Old Kingdom										First Intermediate Period			Middle Kingdom	
	LOCATION	KING	Sixth	Sixth	Sixth	Sixth	Sixth	Sixth	Seventh	Eighth	Ninth	Tenth	Eleventh	Twelfth	
<b>TOMB OWNER</b>			Teti	Pepyl	Mererne I	Pepy II	Mererne II								
1. Šps.j-pw- <i>Pth</i>	Saqqara														
2. Jh.y(j) r/tu Jd.wt	Saqqara														
3. Mrr.w-k3	Saqqara														
4. W(j).tt-h-t-Hr.w	Saqqara														
5. K3(εj)-gm(j).nεj	Saqqara														
6. Hnk.w/Htt.j	Gebrawi														
7. Mr(j)εj-nbsεf	Saqqara														
8. 'nh(εj)-n-(w)-Hr.w	Saqqara														
9. HZ(j).j r/tu S:šm-qtj	Saqqara														
10. Mr(j).y-Tt.j	Saqqara														
11. Hm-R' w/Jz.j	Gebrawi														
12. Jn(j)(t)-wj-Mn.w	Saqqara														
13. Hw(j).n-Wlt	Quseir														
14. Mlt.w	Saqqara														

PERIOD		Old Kingdom										First Intermediate Period			Middle Kingdom
DYNASTY	LOCATION	KING	Sixth	Sixth	Sixth	Sixth	Sixth	Sixth	Seventh	Eighth	Ninth	Tenth	Eleventh	Twelfth	
	<b>TOMB OWNER</b>			Teti	Pepy I	Merentre I	Pepy II	Merentre II							
15. <i>Jd.w</i>	Giza														
16. <i>Jp.j</i>	Saqqara														
17. <i>Jb.j</i>	Gebrawi														
18. <i>Pp.y- nht(w)-hr.j-jb</i>	Meir														
19. <i>Njr.tj</i>	Hamra Dom														
20. <i>Jd.w/Smn.j</i>	Hamra Dom														
21. <i>Šps.j-pw-Mtn.w/Hn.j</i>	Hawawish														
22. <i>K3(εt)-Hjp.w/Th.j-jqr</i>	Hawawish														
23. <i>D3.w</i>	Gebrawi														
24. <i>Jr(Ḳ).n-3t.tj</i>	Giza														
25. <i>Mt.tj</i>	Saqqara														
26. <i>Mf(Ḳ).y-3</i>	Hagara														
27. <i>Tt.j</i>	Hawawish														
28. <i>Hm.j-R.w</i>	Busiris														
29. <i>Jmj-tjt-jqr</i>	Qurna														

**Listing of tombs** (possibly not exhaustive) containing a “dancing figure” motif in the decoration (see *Table 1*); the name of the tomb owner is followed by the tomb location, period (specific reign if known), gender (M = male; F = female) and identity/occupation of the figure(s) with *Kugelzopf* hairstyle. Dating according to the cited references and Lashien 2015: *Table A*.

1. *Šps.j-pw-Pth*, Saqqara, Sixth Dynasty (Teti), F, tomb owner’s wife (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2001: Pl. 37)
2. *Jh.y(j)* reused *Jd.wt*, Saqqara, Sixth Dynasty (Teti), F, tomb owner (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2003: Pls 53g, 54, 62, 65, 67, 70, 71; also Macramallah 1935: Pls VII, IXb, XIb, XV, XVIa, XVII, XX)
3. *Mrr.w-k3*, Saqqara, Sixth Dynasty (Teti), M + F, dancers + youths with baskets + tomb owner’s son (Kanawati et al. 2010: Pls 22, 35, 46, 47, 48, 66, 76, 84, 95, 96; 2011: Pls 20, 22, 33, 76, 80, 89; also The Sakkarah Expedition 1938: Pls 8, 23c, 48c, 81, 82, 86, 87)
4. *W<sup>c</sup>(j).tt-h.t-Hr.w*, Saqqara, Sixth Dynasty (Teti), M + F, dancers + tomb owner’s daughter and son (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2008: Pls 55b, 56, 57a, 58, 59, 60a, 61, 62)
5. *K3(εj)-gm(j)-nεj*, Saqqara, Sixth Dynasty (Teti), F, tomb owner’s wife (von Bissing 1905: Pls XXI, XXVI.9a)
6. *Hnq.wHtt.j*, Deir el-Gebrawi, Sixth Dynasty (Teti), F, dancers (Kanawati 2005: Pl. 40a; also Davies 1902/II: Pl. XV)
7. *Mr(j)εf-nbεf*, Saqqara, Sixth Dynasty (Teti–Pepy I), F, musicians + dancers (Mysliwiec et al. 2004: Pls XXII, XXIII, LXVII–LXIX, LXXI, LXXIV)
8. *nḥ(εj)-m<sup>c</sup>(.w)-Hr.w*, Saqqara, Sixth Dynasty (Teti–Pepy I), F, dancers (Kanawati and Hassan 1997: Pl. 58)
9. *Hz(j).j* reused *S:šm-nfr*, Saqqara, Sixth Dynasty (Teti–Pepy I), F, youths carrying birds (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1999: Pl. 53)
10. *Mr(j).y-Tt.j*, Saqqara, Sixth Dynasty (Teti–Pepy I), M, tomb owner (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2004: Pl. 47)
11. *Hm-R<sup>c</sup>.w/Jz.j*, Deir el-Gebrawi, Sixth Dynasty (Teti–Pepy I), F, dancers (Kanawati 2005: Pls 49, 64; also Davies 1902/II: Pl. XX)
12. *Jn(j)(.t)-wj-Mn.w*, Saqqara, Sixth Dynasty (Teti–Pepy I), F, tomb owner’s wife (Kanawati 2006: Pls 5, 6, 44)
13. *Hw(j).n-Wh*, Quseir el-Amarna, Sixth Dynasty (Pepy I), F, tomb owner’s granddaughter (El-Khouli and Kanawati 1989: Pls 1, 13, 37, 38)
14. *Mh.w*, Saqqara, Sixth Dynasty (Pepy I–Merenre I), F, dancers (Altenmüller 1998: Pls 48, 49, 50)
15. *Jd.w*, Giza, Sixth Dynasty (Pepy I–Pepy II?), F, dancers (Simpson 1976: Fig. 38, Pl. XXIV)
16. *Jp.j*, Saqqara, Sixth Dynasty (Pepy I–Pepy II), F, tomb owner’s daughter (Borchardt 1937: Pl. 50; Brovarski 2008: Pl. 5b)
17. *Jb.j*, Deir el-Gebrawi, Sixth Dynasty (Merenre I–Pepy II), F, dancers (Kanawati 2007: Pl. 49; also Davies 1902/I: Frontispiece, Pls IX, X)
18. *Pp.y-nḥ(w)-hr.j-jb*, Meir, Sixth Dynasty (Merenre I–Pepy II), F, musicians (tomb owner’s daughters) (Kanawati 2012: Pls 56, 88, 89; also Blackman 1924: Pls IX, X)
19. *Nfr.tj*, Hamra Dom, Sixth Dynasty (Pepy II?), F, tomb owner’s daughter (Säve-Söderbergh 1994: Pl. 49a)
20. *Jd.w/Snn.j*, Hamra Dom, Sixth Dynasty (Pepy II), F, tomb owner’s relative (Säve-Söderbergh 1994: Pl. 8; also Villiers Stuart 1879: Pl. 38)
21. *Šps.j-pw-Mn.w/Hn.j*, El-Hawawish, Sixth Dynasty (Pepy II), F, dancers (tomb owner’s daughters?) (Kanawati 1981: Fig. 22; 1989: Fig. 37a)
22. *K3(εj)-Hjp.w/Tt.j-jkr*, El-Hawawish, Sixth Dynasty (Pepy II), F, dancers (Kanawati 1980: Fig. 12)
23. *D3.w*, Deir el-Gebrawi, Sixth Dynasty (Pepy II), F, dancers (Davies 1902/II: Pl. VII)
24. *Jr(j).n-3h.tj*, Giza, Sixth Dynasty, F, tomb owner’s daughter (Hassan 1950: 16, Fig. 11)
25. *Mtt.j*, Saqqara, Sixth Dynasty, M + F, musicians (including tomb owner’s daughter) + tomb owner’s son (Ziegler 1990: 32, 35, 143, 147)
26. *Mr(j).y-‘3*, El-Hagarsa, late Sixth–early Eighth Dynasty, F, offering bearer (Kanawati 1995: Pls 12, 41)
27. *Tt.j*, El-Hawawish, late Sixth–early Eighth Dynasty, F, dancers (Kanawati 1988: Fig. 10)
28. *Hm.j-R<sup>c</sup>.w*, Busiris (Fitzwilliam Museum no. E.6.1909), Tenth Dynasty (but see Kanawati 1999: 294 for a Sixth Dynasty dating), F, tomb owner (Fischer 1976: Figs 8, 9)
29. *Jnj-jtjεf-jqr*, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Twelfth Dynasty (Amenemhet I–Senusret I), F, dancer (Davies 1920: Pls XXIII, XXIIIa).

were to be dated precisely, it would not automatically date the entire site. As trivial as this statement may appear, it is actually an important reminder, because scholars are sometimes tempted to take such links for granted. Thus, care should be taken in assessing possible chronological links between sites and the petroglyphs or inscriptions which they bear. The discussed watch post could have been in operation for a long time, while the petroglyphs may have been executed only at a given point(s) of its history. Nevertheless, it remains plausible that the images, including the “dancing girl”, were made by someone who indeed served at the watch post or was visiting the watch post crew when the post was in use. Assuming this scenario, the presented image could indeed add something to the chronological discussion.

Of the 29 tombs (the listing is comprehensive even if not exhaustive), 25 were decorated during the time of the Sixth Dynasty (Nos 1–25) [see *Table 1*]. Another three should probably be dated to the Sixth Dynasty as well, although a First Intermediate Period dating is also possible (Nos 26–28). The author is aware of only one certain attestation of a pigtailed figure in Middle Kingdom tombs (No. 29). This shows that the bulk of figures with a *Kugelzopf* hairdress comes from Sixth Dynasty funerary contexts. Going further and assuming that the proposed chronology of the tombs is largely correct, one sees 10 out of 12 tombs decorated during the reign of King Teti, and in the time from Teti to Pepy I being located at that 10 out of 12 tombs decorated during the reign of King Teti, as well as later, through the

reign of Pepy I, are located in Saqqara, with just two found elsewhere (Deir el-Gebrawi). There is a clear change with regard to the tombs dated to the reigns of Pepy I to Pepy II (Nos 13–23); of these only three tombs are located in the Giza–Saqqara region, while the rest is to be found in the provinces (Quseir el-Amarna, Deir el-Gebrawi, Meir, Hamra Dom, El-Hawawish). Others may have been decorated even as late as the Seventh or Eighth Dynasties (Nos 26–28). It could imply that the figure with a plait-and-disk hairstyle was introduced first in the Memphis region and then, sometime during the reigns of Pepy I/Merenre I/Pepy II, it started to be featured in the iconography of tombs at various provincial cemeteries. Considering that Dakhleh was an even more remote province, one can reasonably(?) speculate that the motif arrived in Dakhleh at least equally late. And this, in turn, would match well with the peak of Old Kingdom activity in Dakhleh, corresponding to the building of the mastabas of the oasis governors at Qila el-Dabba (dated to the rule of Pepy I–Pepy II, see Castel, Pantalacci, and Cherpion 2001: 3–4) and the palace at nearby Ain Asil (during the reign of Pepy II; see Soukiassian, Wuttmann, and Pantalacci 2002, and recently Jeuthe 2018), as well as the Abu Ballas Trail leading from the oasis to the southwest (of late Old Kingdom origin, see Förster 2015).

This must remain a supposition, however, and it is possible that the “dancing girl” petroglyph was executed either in the early Sixth Dynasty or as late as the early Middle Kingdom. It is perhaps not

insignificant that the comparison here concerns officially commissioned tomb decoration on the one hand and a piece of rock art found in a very different context on the other. Should a proposed Sixth Dynasty date for a large part of the watch

posts (Pettman forthcoming) be accepted, and assuming that the spread of the motif to the provinces took place in the times of Pepy I–Pepy II, a mid-to-late Sixth Dynasty date for the discussed petroglyph appears at least possible.

## EPILOGUE:

### THE PETROGLYPH ON THE HILLTOP

The motivation behind the carving of this petroglyph is perhaps the most difficult question. Even if a Sixth Dynasty dating is accepted and the image is identified as a female dancer, it still escapes understanding why should anyone want to carve such a figure at a watch post in the remote desert. A trivial explanation that it was made to pass the time cannot be entirely dismissed. But even then the petroglyph would have been meaningful, embodying some of the maker's thoughts, experiences and knowledge. It demonstrates the unquestionable skill of the person capable of carving in sandstone. It also suggests a good knowledge of funerary iconography.<sup>4</sup> It cannot be ruled out that the maker knew a role model for the figure, but with such scanty contextual data it is difficult to say anything beyond that and with any certainty.

The petroglyph was made by a skilled person, perhaps even a professional sculptor, but there are some attributes that are hardly observable in official imagery. There are no facial features, at least on the pre-

served part of the head, no indication of the hair (apart from the plait), eyes and ears. As the damage appears only in the upper part of the head, it seems that these features were never rendered. Another idiosyncratic element is the size of the disk and the length of the plait. The disk is slightly bigger than the figure's head, contrary to the representations known from the above-listed tombs. Some of the largest disks are attested in figures known from the tombs of *Jd.w* (Simpson 1976: Pl. XXIV) and, especially, *Jb.j* (Davies 1902/I: Frontispiece), yet none of them is of head-size. The only parallel is a wooden sculpture of a woman, from Naga el-Deir, dated to the Sixth–Eighth Dynasty (Kroenke 2010: 730, No. 142); the diameter of the disk here is clearly bigger than the head [Fig. 7]. Moreover, the plait of this figure is also of a length similar to that in the petroglyph, reaching the buttocks. This is another feature which does not occur in tomb decoration, with the exception of some of the figures in the tombs of *Mrr.w-k3* (The Sakkarah Expe-

4 As a matter of fact, other petroglyphs from the site contain motifs attested in the funerary iconography of the period. Cattle and donkeys feature widely in various husbandry and agriculture-related scenes (e.g., Kanawati and Woods 2009: Pls 113–119, 205, 207, 208), while dogs chasing wild game are a common element of the desert hunt theme. A dog snatching a hare is depicted already in the Fourth Dynasty tomb of *Nfr-m3.t* (Petrie 1892: Pl. XXVII), as well as in the First Intermediate Period tomb of *nh.tjefj* at Mo'alla (Vandier 1950: 95, Fig. 46).



Fig. 7. Wooden statuette of a female with *Kugelzopf* from Naga el-Deir (After Kroenke 2010: Figs 208, 209)

dition 1938: Pls 86, 87) and *Hnq.w/Htt.j* (Kanawati 2005: Pl. 40a), where the plait appears to reach the waist. Finally, the incomplete arm is unnaturally long. Flaws of this kind are quite common even in formal depictions, but taken together with the other deviations mentioned above, it could indicate a talented amateur despite the undoubted rock-carving skills. In light of the available data, this question must remain unanswered.

To conclude, it is probable that the “dancing girl” petroglyph from site 30/450-E4-6 was executed sometime during the Sixth Dynasty, possibly during or after the reign of Pepy I. It is a unique im-

age in the rock art repertoire of the Western Desert, with a considerable number of parallels in more formal contexts of funerary iconography and statuary from the Nile Valley. It is likely that it shows a dancer, although other possibilities exist, as no other attributes apart from the pigtail can be recognised in the image. Once the findspot is excavated, it is to be hoped that other contextual data, or even the missing fragments of the petroglyph, will be found. A much more insightful study should be possible then, adding to the discussion of not only this particular image, but also the system of watch posts and Egyptian activities on the fringes of the oasis.

#### Dr. Paweł L. Polkowski

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3842-2180>

University of Warsaw, Polish Centre  
of Mediterranean Archaeology  
pawelpolkowski@uw.edu.pl  
Poznań Archaeological Museum  
pawel.polkowski@muzarp.poznan.pl

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