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## Four elephant hunt scenes among the Iheren style paintings of Tagelahin, Aharhar Tasset and Tamrit (Tasili-n-Ajjer).

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*Abstract: During four visits to the Tasili of Tamrit (east of Djanet) and the Tagelahin and Aharhar Tasset regions (west of the oasis of Iherir) between 2011 and 2016, the author had the opportunity to visit all principal rock-art localities in the area. Processing the taken digital photographs with DStretch®, plug-in of ImageJ developed by Jon Harman (Le Quellec et. al 2013), it was possible to discern elephant hunt scenes at four well known localities which have not been published by previous authors.*

*Résumé: Au cours de quatre voyages sur les plateaux de l'Ajjer, à Tamrit (est de Ganet) et dans les zones de Tagelahin et d'Aharhar Tasset (à l'ouest de l'oasis d'Iherir) entre 2011 et 2016, l'auteur a pu visiter les principaux sites rupestres de ces régions. Grâce au traitement des clichés numériques pris durant ces séjours avec DStretch®, greffon de ImageJ® développé par Jon Harman (Le Quellec et al. 2013), des scènes de chasse à l'éléphant inédites ont pu être mises en évidence dans quatre sites bien connus.*

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### Isalamen

This locality is the first to be encountered if ascending the Tagelahin plateau from Iherir, lying about three kilometers to the west of the pass, and one kilometer and a half to the south of the Tahilahi shelter already known since 1950 (Breuil, 1954). It was first reported by Jean-Dominique Lajoux (1962), who published several photographs of scenes from two different shelters he visited in 1960 or 1961 (Lajoux 2012). One of these photos depicts striking human figures with zebra-striped body decoration. The image caption mentions an elephant in outline in the same shelter (Lajoux 1962: 171), but gives no further information on

the context of the figures. This scene appeared in several subsequent publications to illustrate the Caucasian character of these human figures (eg. Muzzolini 1981: Fig.1; 1995: Fig.26; Hachid 1998: Fig.379; Maestrucci & Gianelli 2008), but again only concentrating on the humans without their overall context in the shelter.

The scene is on the ceiling of a medium-sized shelter, quite far removed from other faint and damaged paintings depicting cattle and humans on the rear wall. On the spot, the human figures are quite hard to make out in the unfavorable light conditions, and only some incoherent traces of red paint may be discerned to the right of them (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** Elephant hunt scene at Isalamen (original photograph).

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**Fig. 2.** *Idem* Fig. 1, processed with *DStretch\_CRGB*.

After processing with *DStretch*, it becomes evident that the incoherent blobs are actually an elephant, with a thin red body contour and a black infill that by now has almost completely disappeared (Fig. 2).

Once recognising the elephant, the posture and actions of the human figures become clear. The right figure is running from the elephant with head turned back towards it, while the central figure is holding one of the characteristic curved objects in an outstretched arm above his head. On close scrutiny, one may observe three of these curved objects embedded in the trunk of the elephant with blood streaking from the points of impact. This implies that these curved objects are not boomerangs or throwing sticks as proposed by Alfred Muzzolini (1981:127; 1995:13), but throwing knives, something also suggested by their pointed tips visible on a number of Iheren style scenes (Hallier & Hallier 2012). Such curved objects are clearly used as knives (Fig. 3) in the Tikadiwin butchering scene (Muzzolini & Boccazzi 1991, Giannelli & Maestrucci 2010).

While identifying the curved objects as throwing knives appears plausible given the depict-



**Fig. 3.** Butchering scene at Tikadiwin (note curved objects used as knives).

ed scene, it also raises a number of questions. Such a weapon, made of wood with knapped stone blades fitted for the point and cutting edge (eg. Caton-Thompson & Gardner, 1934: plate XXVIII) would only be effective against smaller game. It is hard to conceive how without sufficient mass and momentum, it could penetrate the hide of an elephant, even on the softer trunk. A massive, sharp and pointed metal object thrown with a powerful force could achieve this, and such throwing knives made of iron were in general use among Saharan people in historic times, however there is no archaeological evidence to suggest that the Iheren people used any metals.

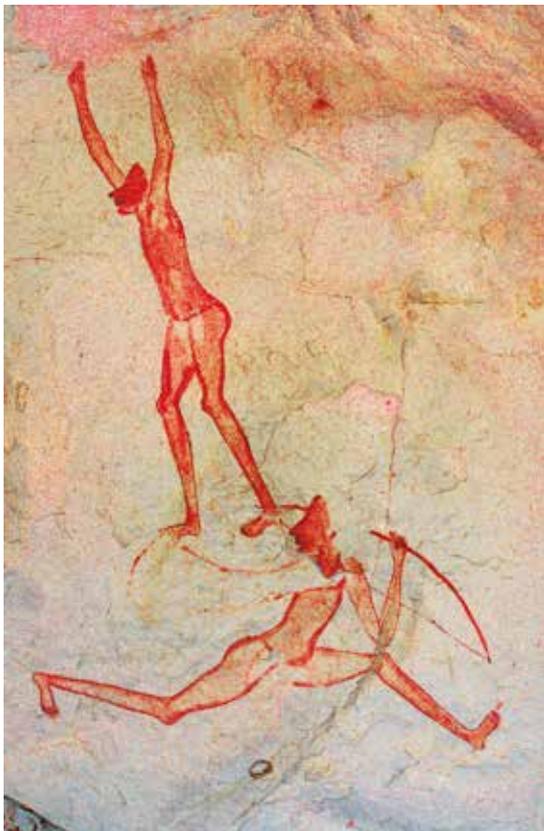
### Iheren II

Lying about ten kilometers to the west of the ascent from Iherir, this second Iheren shelter was found during the 1970/71 winter by the franco-algerian expedition led by Henri Lhote, less than one kilometer to the North of the principal Iheren shelter he discovered in 1969 (Lhote, 1972). While Abdelaziz Benzodmi, Pierre Colombel and Yves Martin made some copies of the scenes, these remained unpublished until recently (Mus e de Louviers, 2014). A few of the scenes were published by Alfred Muzzolini (1981; 1995), Malika Hachid (1998; 2000) and more completely (but not fully) by Ulrich W. and Brigitte C. Hallier (2012). Alfred Muzzolini shows a seemingly naked human figure with raised arms (1995: Fig. 98), the same figure is illustrated by the Halliers but in more context, showing that it is associated with two archers, who however were considered to be three independent figures (2012: Fig. 16-18).

Looking at this same scene in good lighting conditions, it was possible to discern a very faint dark shape to the left of the three human figures. After image enhancement, two elephants may be



**Fig. 4.** Elephant hunt scene at Iheren II (*Photoshop\_AC*).



recognised, executed with black paint, partially overlapping and facing in opposite directions (Fig.4). This revelation immediately places the human figures in context. The figure with the raised arms is facing the elephant in a courageous intimidating posture while the archer under him appears to flee from it (Fig.5). The other archer (with a fine sheep behind him) is aiming his arrow at the charging elephant (Fig.6).

#### **Tedar**

This large shelter is located about five kilometres south west of where the Djanet-Illizi



**Fig. 5.** Detail of Fig. 4, human with raised arm and fleeing archer (*DStretch\_LRE*).

**Fig. 6.** Detail of Fig. 4 (at the right bottom corner), archer with sheep (*DStretch\_LRE*).



**Fig. 7.** Elephant hunt scene at Tedar (Photoshop\_AC).

highway crosses the oued Tasset. It was also located during the 1970/71 winter Franco-Algerian expedition (Lhote, 1972), but only a very brief description was given, probably on account of the fact that the majority of the older paintings on the rear wall of the shelter are obscured by recent superimpositions of camels and tfinagh inscriptions. Some better preserved scenes were published by J rgen Kunz (1978), Malika Hachid (2000) and Brigitte C. Hallier (2010), including an Iheren style lion hunt. Malika Hachid also published a fine Iheren style archer and another reclining figure adjacent to a sheep (2000 : Fig. 70, 101), but nothing is provided of their context.

**Fig. 8.** Elephant hunt scene at I-n-Etwami.



The Iheren archer and the other figure published by Malika Hachid were located near to each other on the ceiling of the shelter, free from any recent

superimpositions. With the benefit of having already identified the previously described scenes, a faint dark elephant was noted immediately to the right of the archer and under the reclining figure. After a slight image enhancement, the scene becomes clear, with the elephant executed with the customary black paint. The archer at left is aiming his arrow at the charging elephant while other less distinct figures appear to attack the animal with spears among its legs (Fig. 7).

#### I-n-Etwami

At I-n-Etwami, on the Tasili of Tamrit (just west of Ti-n-Tazarift, really a «suburb» of the latter), there is a long shallow shelter, in which the only readily recognisable paintings are a mounted, lance-wielding horseman of historic age, accompanied by a dog and tfinagh script and the very faint traces of two more ancient cattle (Fig. 8). Processing this scene with *DStretch*<sup>®</sup> reveals a charging elephant executed in dark grey colour, surrounded by small archers, firing their arrows towards the animal (Fig. 9). This scene was copied by Andr  Vila in 1959 during the second Lhote expedition (MNHN 59-59, Frederique Duquesnoy pers. comm.) but, like most of the tracings made by the «Lhote's painters», it was never published.

The small human figures are not easy to make out, however the twisted body posture is repeated in several Iheren style scenes, and a close-up photograph (Fig. 10) reveals the characteristic striped body decoration on the leg of the lower figure clearly identifying the scene as Iheren style. The same photograph reveals streaks of blood ema-



nating from the trunk of the animal at the impact points of the arrows (which are not visible), very similar to the already presented scene at Issalamen.

#### Comparable scenes

The best preserved Iheren style elephant hunt scene (Fig.11) is in the shelter of Ti-n-Ämarasuzi/Timerasawsin, first reported by Fabio Mastrucci and Gianna Gianelli (2008) and more extensively published by Brigitte C. Hallier (2010). It lies at a distance of about five kilometers from both Issalamen and the Iheren II shelter. Here too, the elephant is executed with a fine red outline and a much faded black infill. Processing the image with *DStretch*<sup>®</sup> reveals that it is partially painted over two overlapping giraffes executed in outline only (Fig.12). There are three hunters facing the elephant, two apparently fleeing while looking back towards the animal, the third standing with arms stretched above the head, holding a pair of throwing knives (Fig.13). Both the style of the elephant and the opposing humans presents a close analogy to the In Etouami, Issalamen, Iheren II, and Tedar scenes.

With the five presented examples, it is evident that the scene surrounding the dark elephant with the elaborately decorated human figures (Fig.14) in the Tahilahi shelter (Boccazzi & Calati, 2003) shows a similar elephant hunt. Alfred Muzzolini (1981) considered this elephant to be older and not a part of the Iheren style composition, but in the presented comparable examples, the animal is invariably executed with a similar black paint, with or without a red outline.

At the Ihetsen shelter, about twenty five kilometers to the east of Iherir, there is a further remarkable Iheren style elephant hunt scene (Fig.15), with two elephants being surrounded by more than forty hunters, wielding throwing knives and bows (Gianelli & Mastrucci, 2010). Here too, the elephants are executed in a dark grey/black colour with red outline, while the human figures are in the usual red outline with polychrome body decorations.

At the mostly unpublished Baidakoré shelter located at the foot of the Fadnun plateau just off the Djanet – Illizi road (Lhote 1972, Kunz 1979), there is also a very fine pair of Iheren style elephants executed in red outline only, though here the hunting element appears to be absent (Fig.16). There is a second very damaged scene in the same shelter

**Fig.9.** *Idem* Fig.8, processed with *DStretch\_LDS*.

**Fig. 10.** Detail of Fig. 8, running archers turning backwards to fire arrows (note streaks of blood emanating from the trunk of the elephant at lower right (*DStretch\_CRGB*)).





**Fig. 11.** Elephant hunt scene at Ti-n-Ámarasuzi.

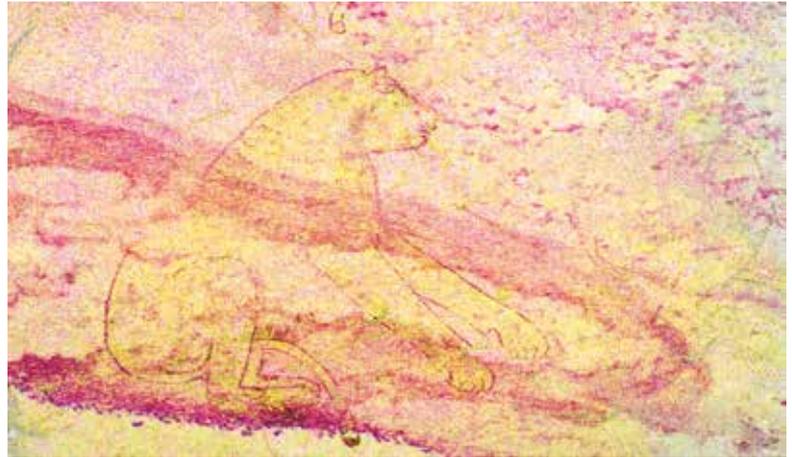
**Fig. 12.** Detail of Fig. 11, elephant superimposed over a pair of giraffe in outline (*DStretch\_YRD*).

**Fig. 13.** Detail of Fig. 11, hunters including figure with raised arms, holding a pair of throwing knives (*DStretch\_LRE*).

**Fig. 14.** Elephant hunt scene at Tahilahi.

**Fig. 15.** Elephant hunt scene at Ihetsen (*DStretch\_LDS*).





where only some legs of an elephant may be discerned in association with an Iheren style human figure, this too may have been an elephant hunt scene.

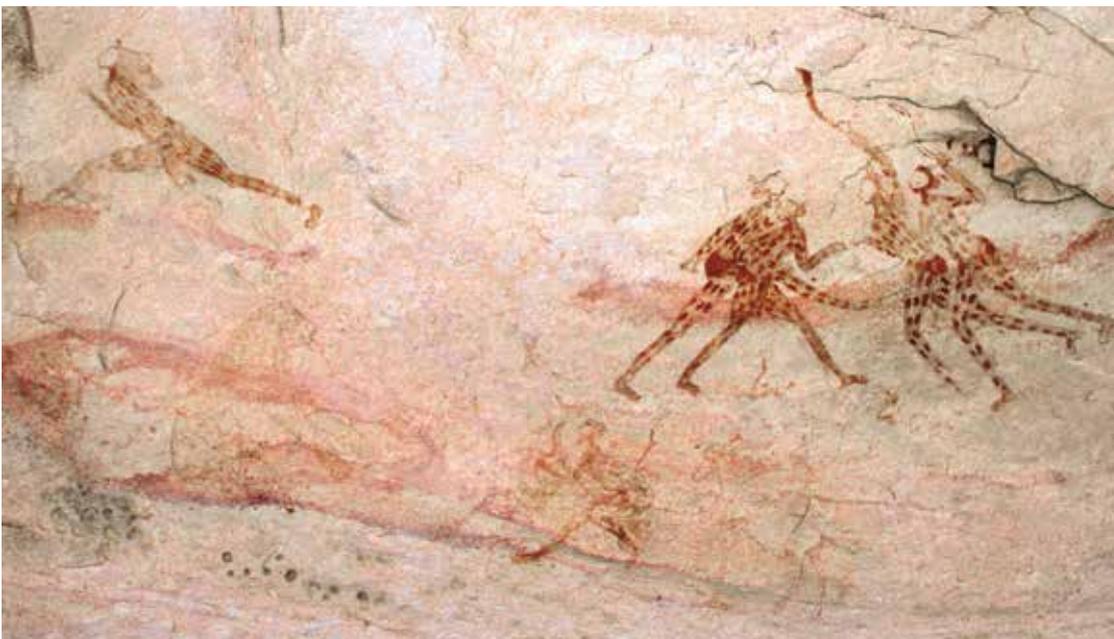
There is a further comparable scene in the Iheren II shelter itself. Henri Lhote already mentioned the presence of a lion among the paintings (1972), it is very faint and seems to have gone unnoticed by other authors. *DStretch*<sup>®</sup> reveals that there are in fact two lions, not one, seated in identical postures (Fig. 17). There is a group of elaborate human figures which in part flee from, and in part attack the lions with throwing knives (Fig. 18). The entire scene was copied by Abdelaziz Benzodmi (though he failed to note the second lion) in 1970 (MNHN 70-18), however it remained unpublished until recently (Musée de Louviers, 2014). Other authors only observed the group of human figures, which were either considered to be dancing or engaged in a ritual fight (Muzzolini 1995, Hallier & Hallier 2012), not realizing the full context of the figures, very similar in layout to the other elephant hunting scenes. However, Ulrich W. and Brigitte

C. Hallier did observe that the curved objects have pointed ends, and «probably did not serve as throwing sticks, but rather as pointed weapons for stinging purposes».

A similar well known lion hunt scene may be seen in the principal Iheren shelter (eg. Muzzolini 1995: Fig. 131), and at the Tedar (Kunz 1979: Fig. 18/1) and Ti-n-Āresu shelters (Fig. 19; Gouarat, 1993 Pl. O). With the exception of the Tikadiwin shelter (Muzzolini & Boccazzi 1991), where the target of the central hunt scene are giraffes, in all other principal Iheren style sites there is a prominent scene depicting the hunt of either lion or elephant. Neither animals may be considered a primary food source (which was readily available in any case from the cattle and sheep depicted in large numbers), and the hunt of both animals with hand weapons involves considerable personal risk. A likely and plausible explanation is that these scenes represent rites of passage or other «demonstrations of power», their prominent place in all the main Iheren style sites suggests that such hunts were an important part of social activities despite the pastoralist economy.

**Fig. 16.** Pair of Iheren style elephants at Baidakoré (*DStretch\_YRE*).

**Fig. 17.** Seated lion at Iheren II. Note remnants of second lion at right (*DStretch\_CRGB*).

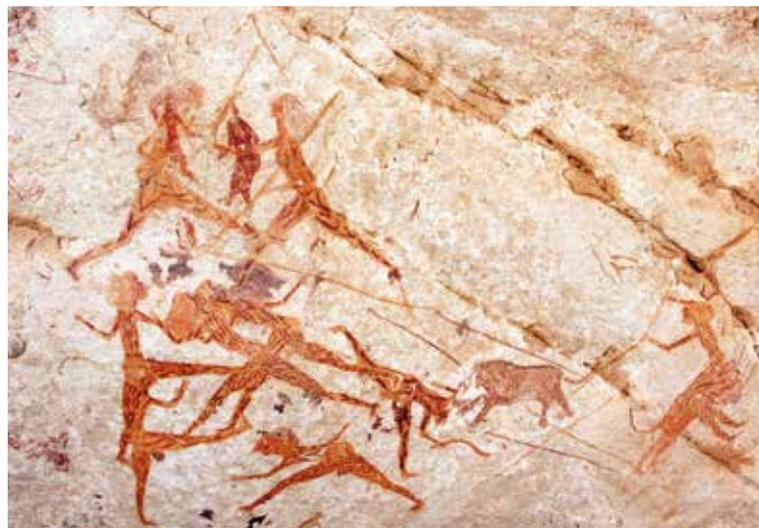


**Fig. 18.** Lion hunt scene at Iheren II (*DStretch\_RGB0*).

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Photos from the author unless otherwise specified.



**Fig.19.** Lion hunt scene at Ti-n- resu (photo Jean-Lo c Le Quellec).