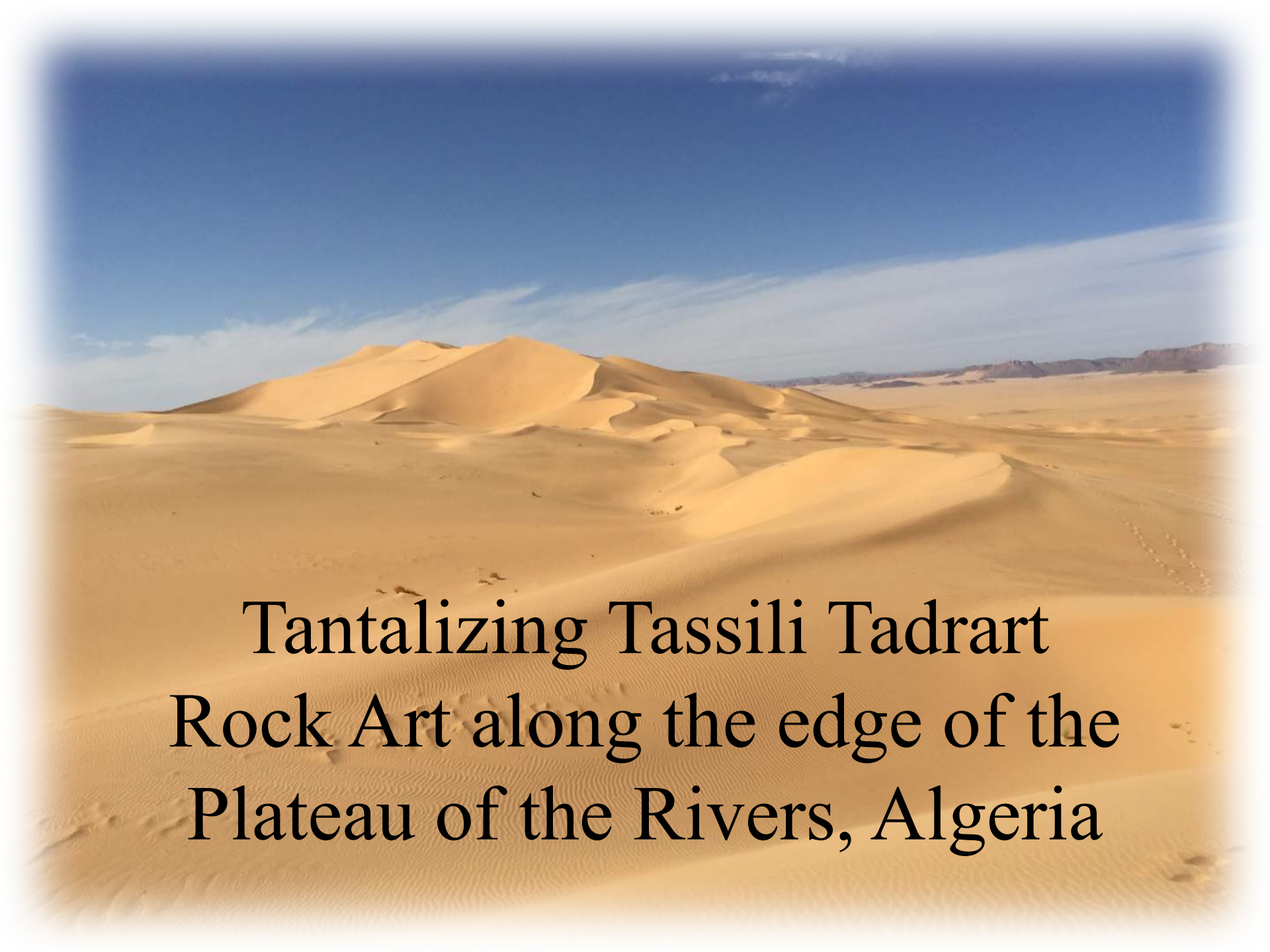
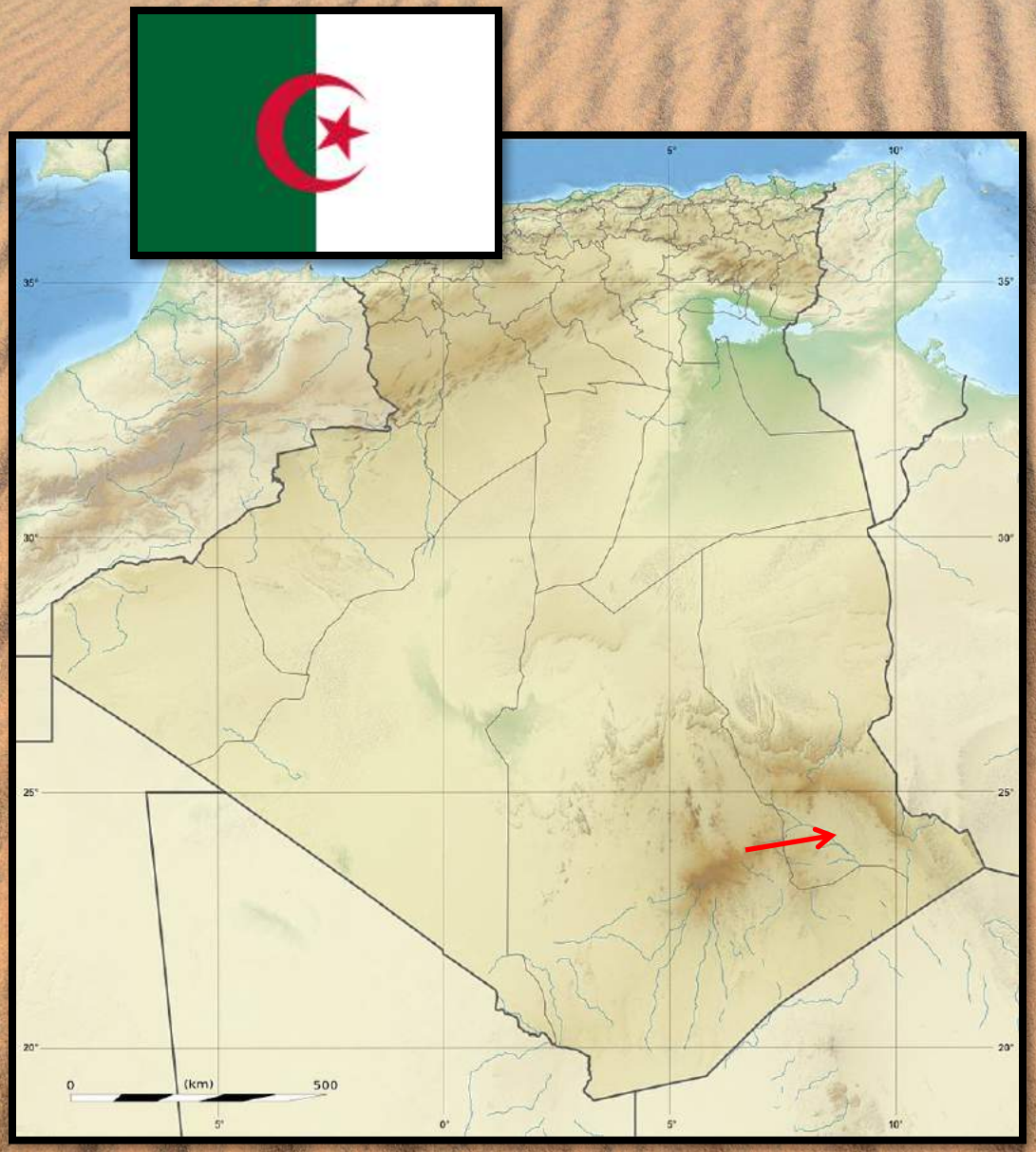

Tantalizing Tassili Tadrart
Rock Art along the edge of the
Plateau of the Rivers, Algeria

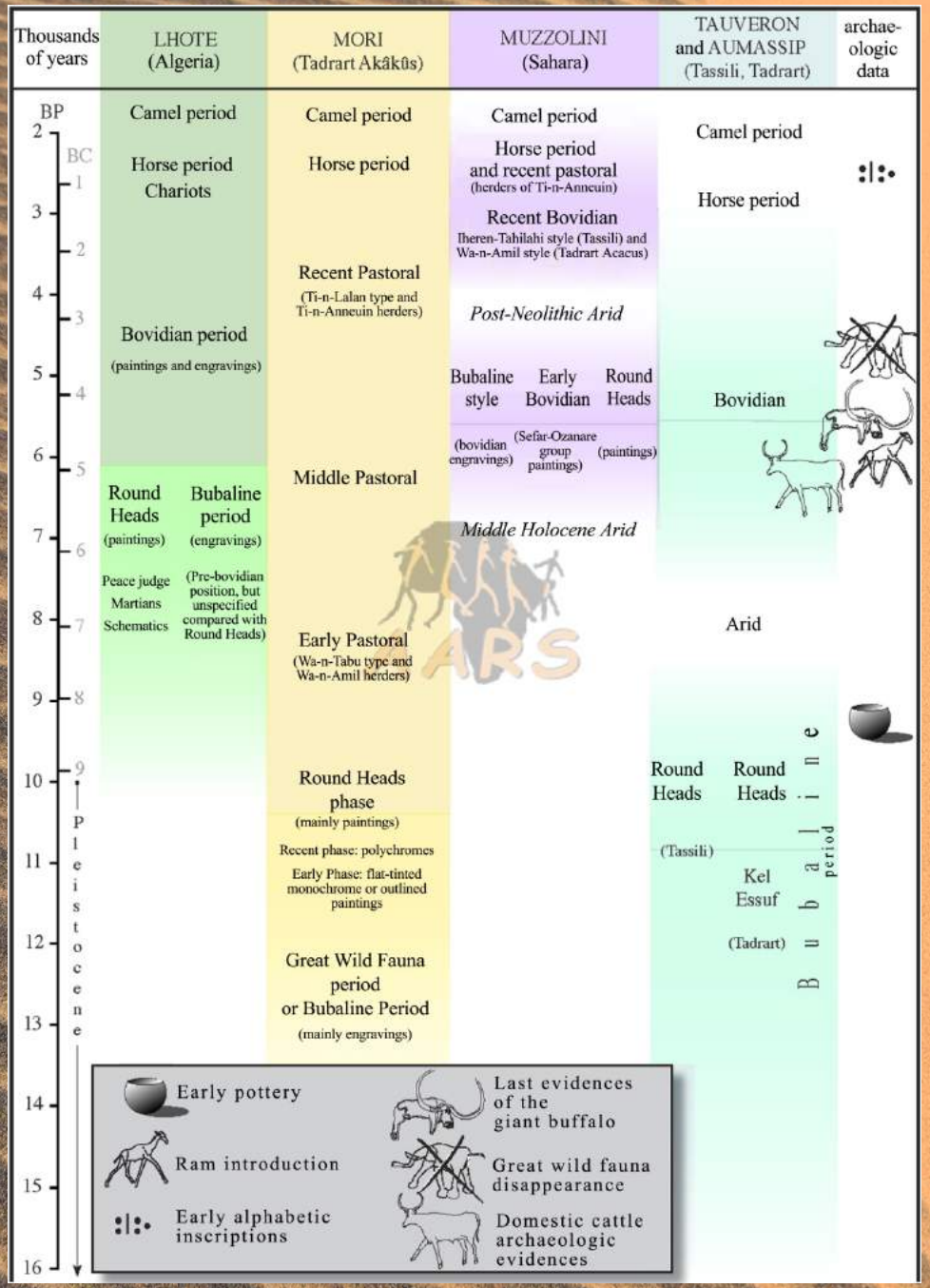


- 10th largest country in the world
- Largest country in Africa
- Berbers are the indigenous inhabitants

Tassili n'Ajjer
Plateau of the Rivers

- First reported in 1910
- Dates beginning in the early Neolithic at the end of the last glacial period
- Savanna - Large wild animals including antelopes, crocodiles cattle herd and humans engaged in hunting and dancing.
- Designated as a World Heritage Site in 1986
- Much of the park is off limits
- Sandstone and sand
- Lowland Camps – Tadarat (rainy season)

Some styles of rock art were similar across the Sahara



- As the climate grew more arid the style and subject matter of the rock art changed.
- Small # of absolute dates for rock art
- Researchers differ in their interpretations by style.

https://aars.fr/index.html

Climate Change

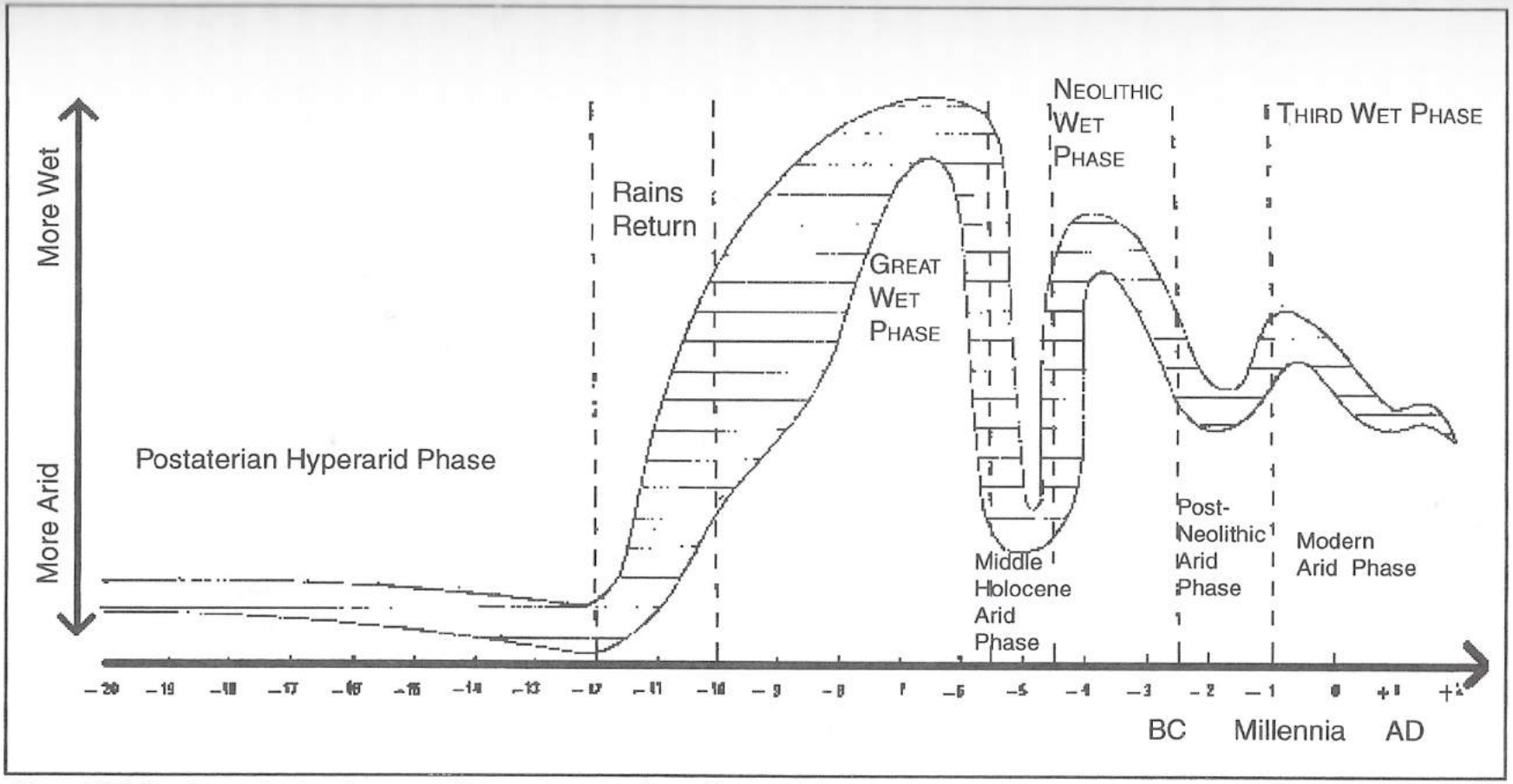


Figure 19.2. Semi-quantitative chart, roughly summing up the evolution of the average overall Saharan climates during the Holocene (excluding local variability).

Earliest examples of Saharan rock art are invariably engravings ~10,000-7,000 BCE

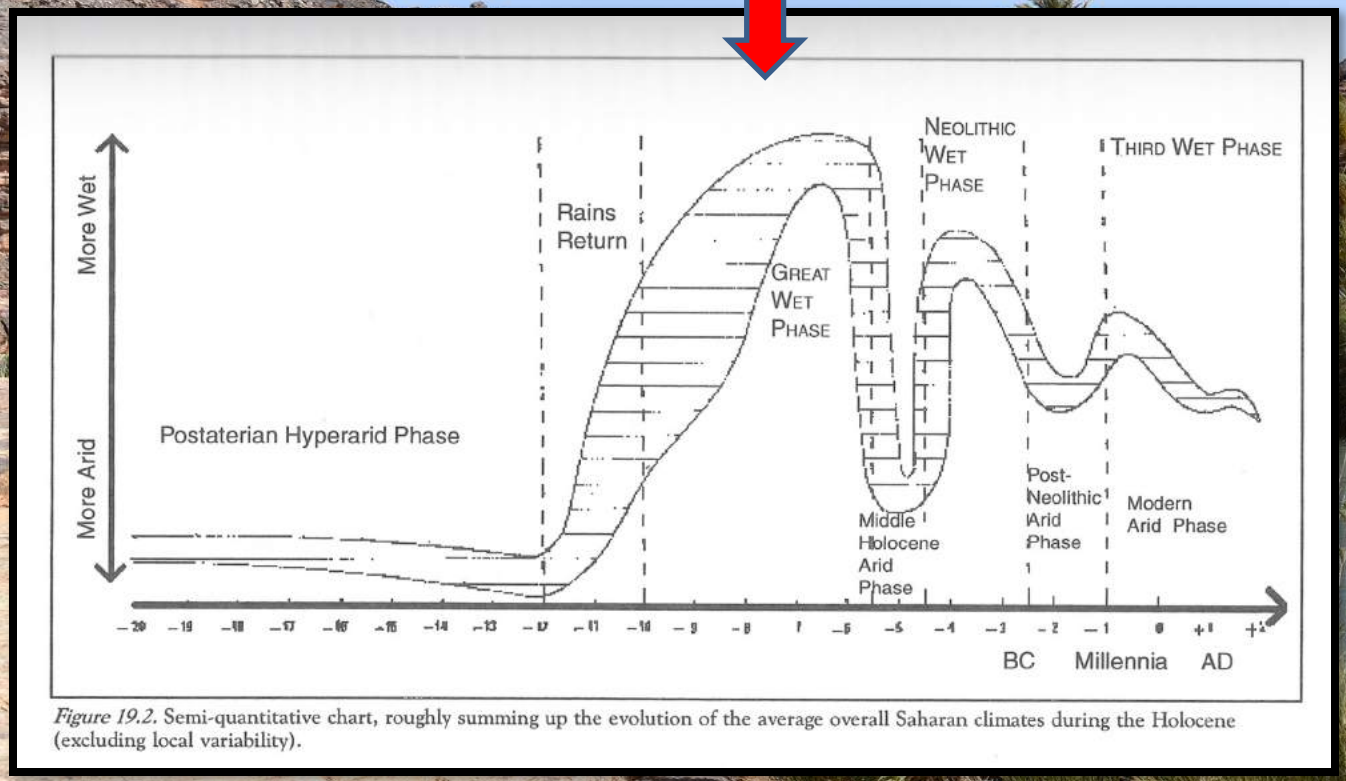


Figure 19.2. Semi-quantitative chart, roughly summing up the evolution of the average overall Saharan climates during the Holocene (excluding local variability).

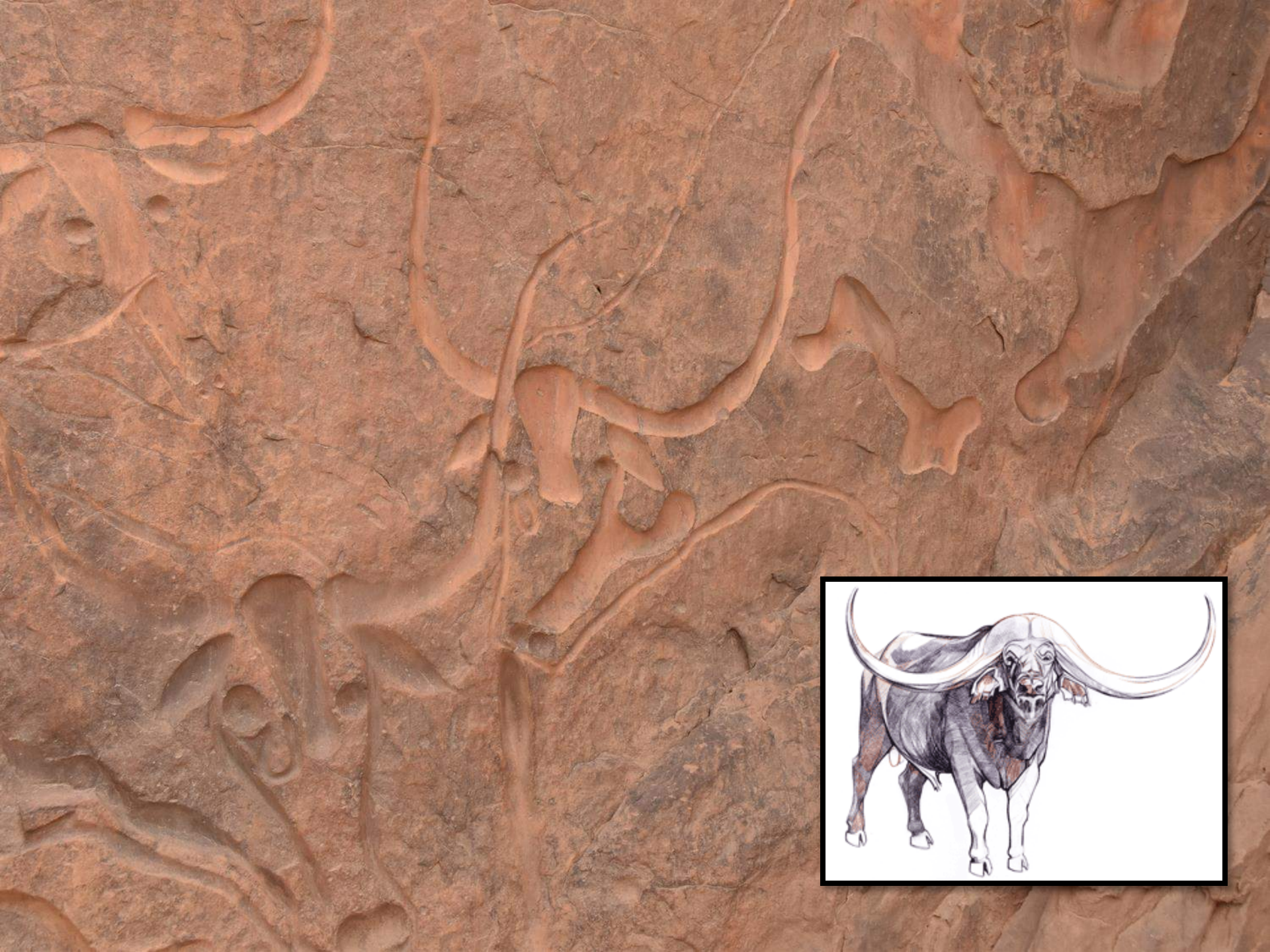
Bubalus or Large Wild Fauna Period

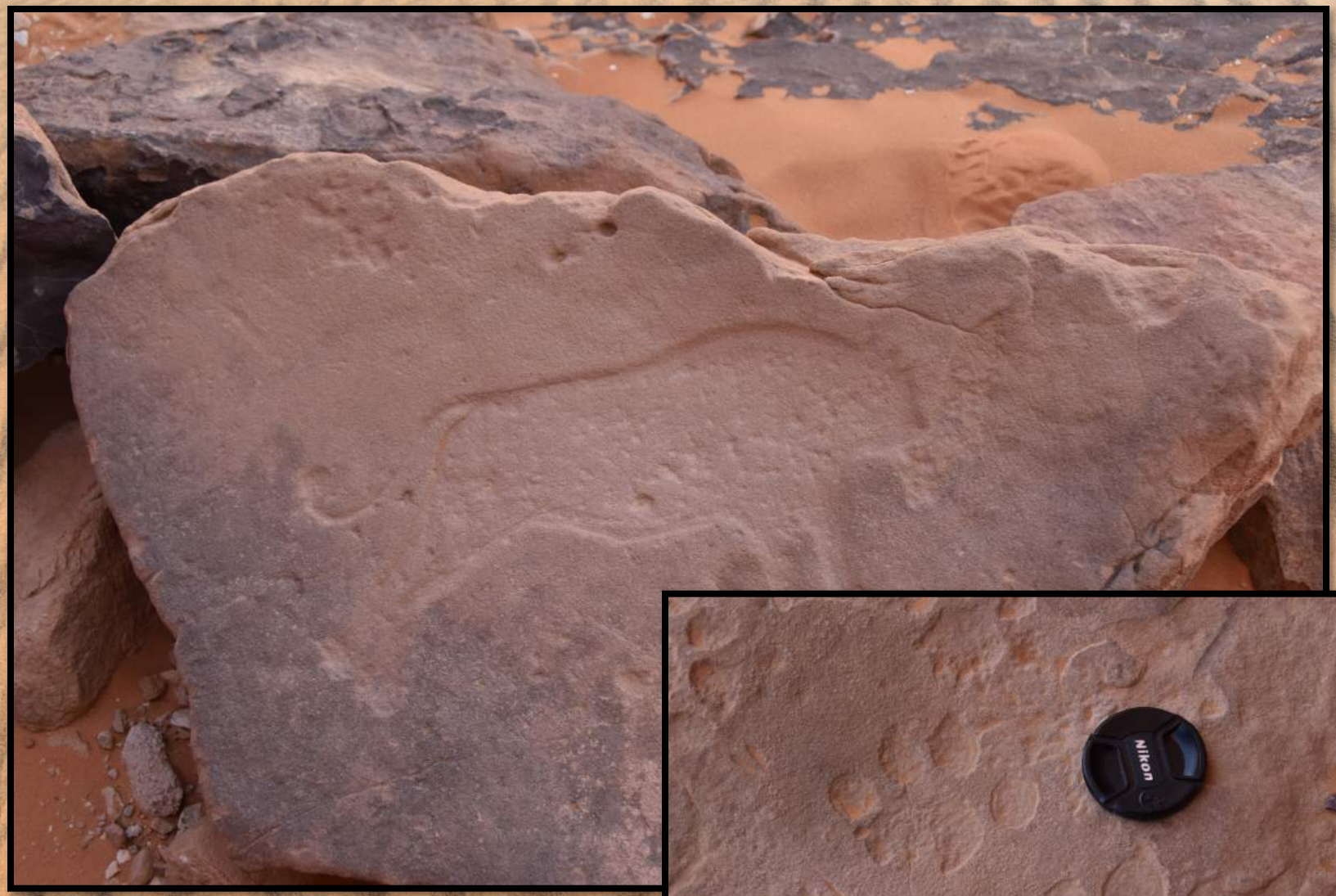
- Earliest examples of Saharan rock art are invariably engravings
- ~10,000-7,000 BCE
- Found over a large area of the Central Sahara
- Giraffes, elephants and now-extinct species of bovine, etc.
- That they were hunters is inferred from a lack of domestic animal representations.
- Fairly Naturalistic
- Later period – domesticated cattle & ovicaprids

Tin Teret,Oued Diger

Deeply engraved crouching gazelle 0.47 meters, with polished lines is typical of this style.

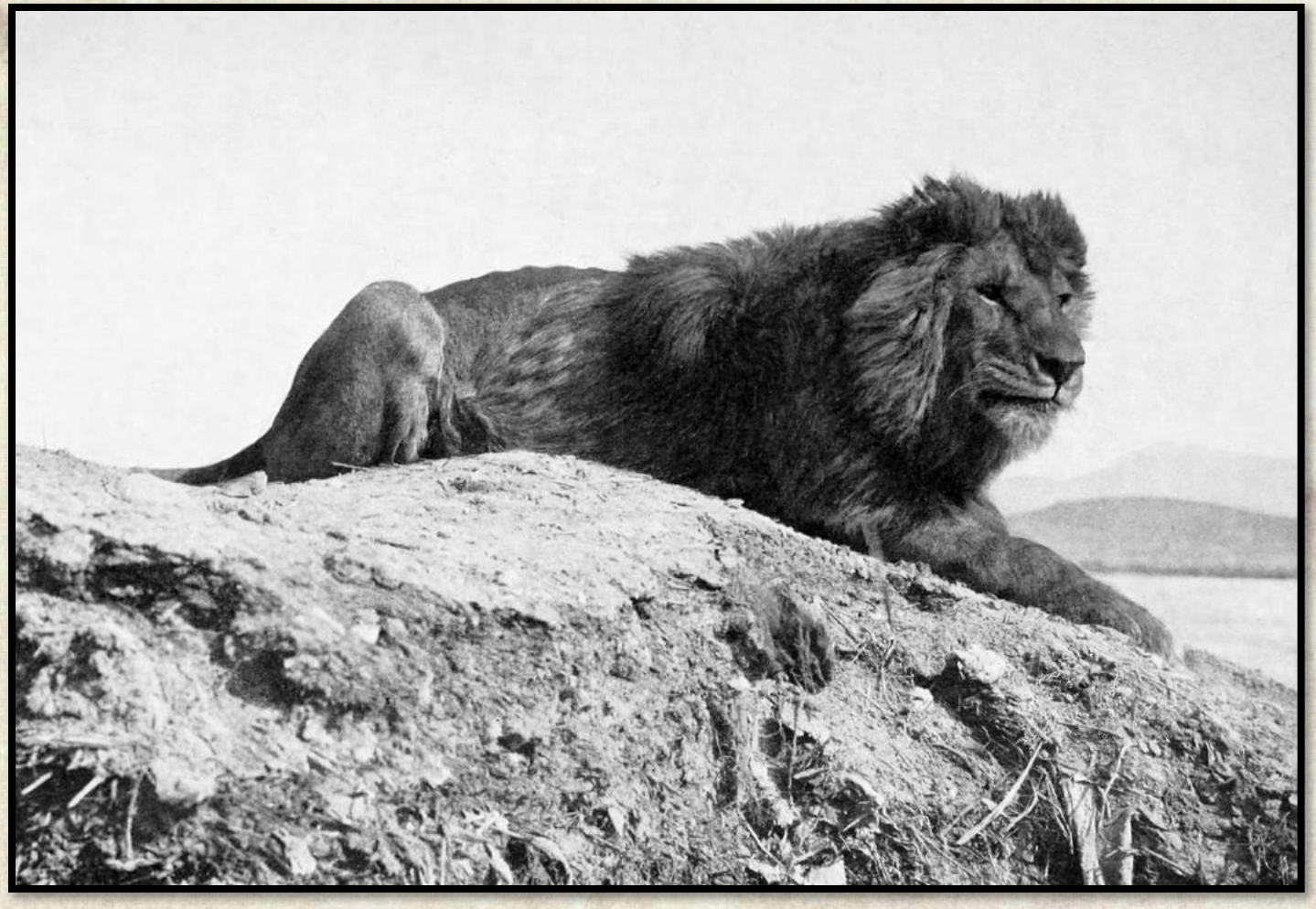
- Bubalus antiquus – appear 2.5 million years ago in Africa, became extinct about 12,000 in Europe and 4000 years ago in North Africa.
- Monumental scale only found in this style





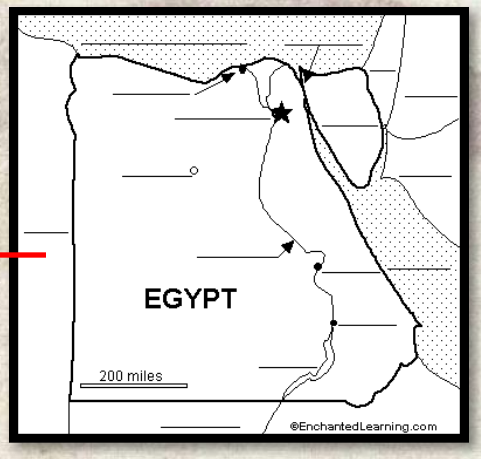
Atlas (Barbary) Lion

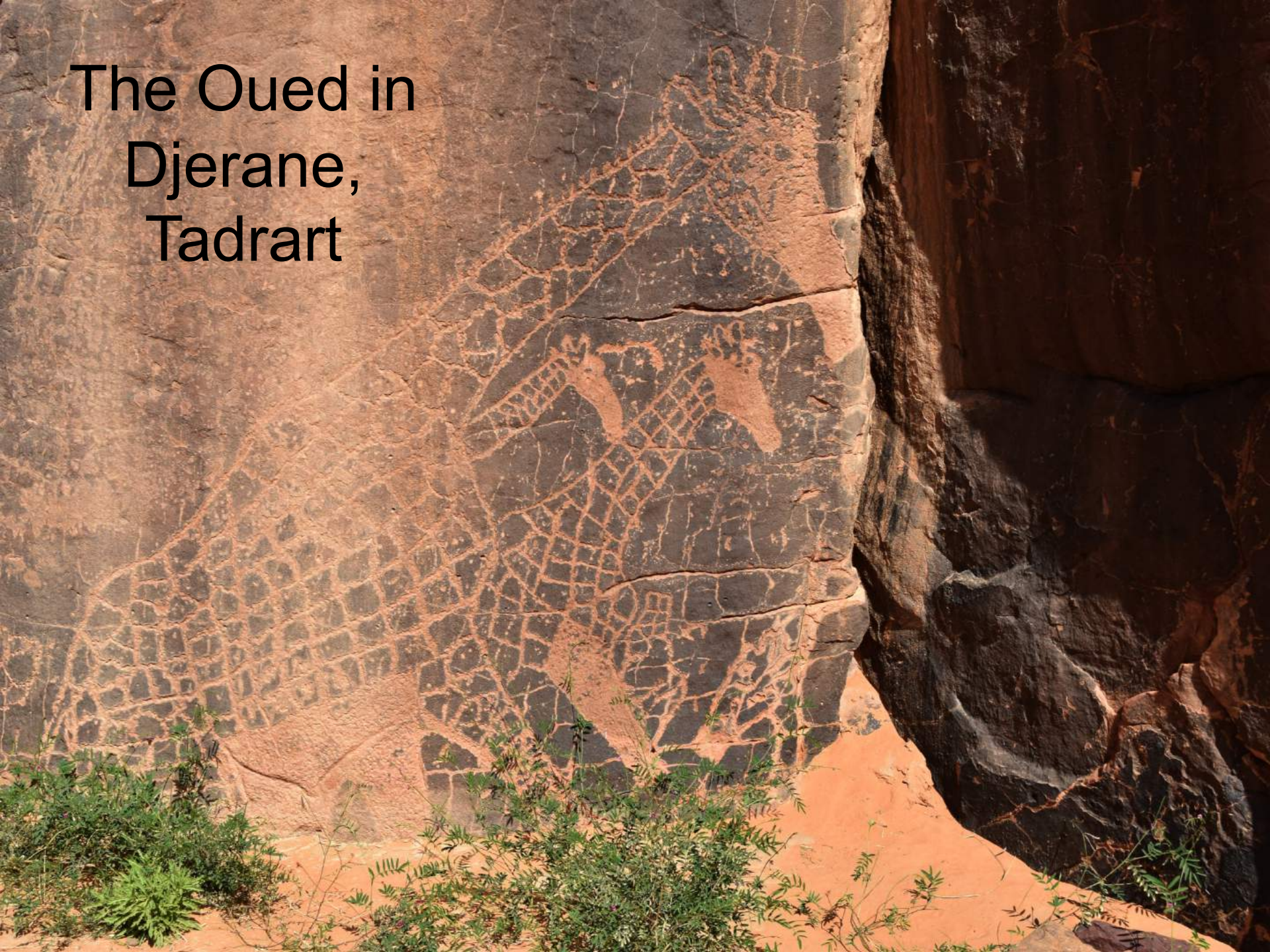
Photo from 1939 – Edward Pease

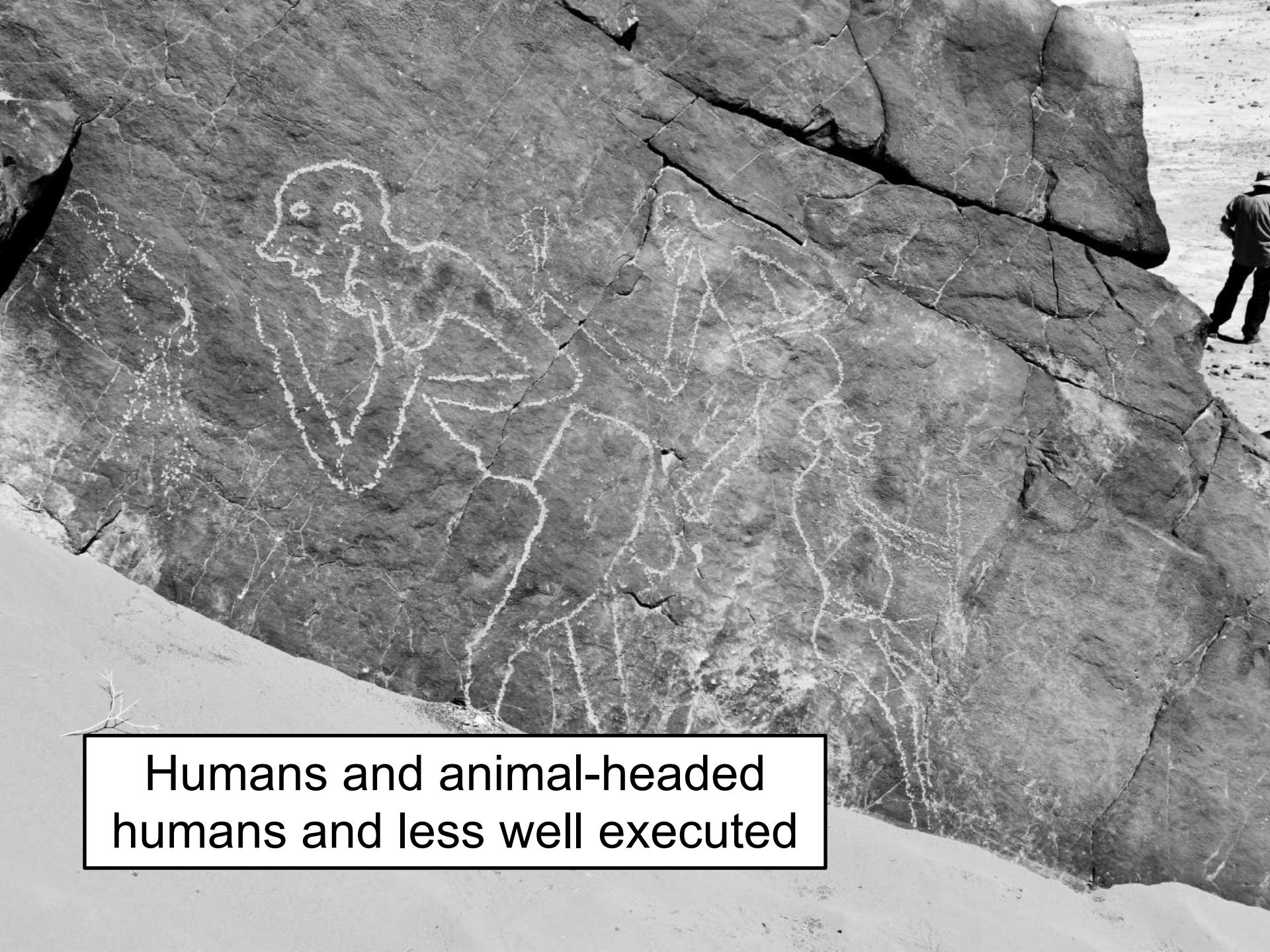


By Alfred Edward Pease (29 June 1857 – 27 April 1939) - https://archive.org/stream/bookoflion1913alfr#page/112/mode/2up, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=12273815

The Oued in Djerane, Tadrart




The Oued in
Djerane,
Tadrart



Humans and animal-headed humans and less well executed

Roundhead period

Photo – Jeff LeFave

- This peculiar style is limited to paintings in the Tassili and isn't found in the rainy season camps.
- The exact dating of this period is also a matter of heated debate

- Human and human-like figures express high degree of symbolism
- Animals depicted are still mainly the wild fauna

Pastoralist - Neolithic

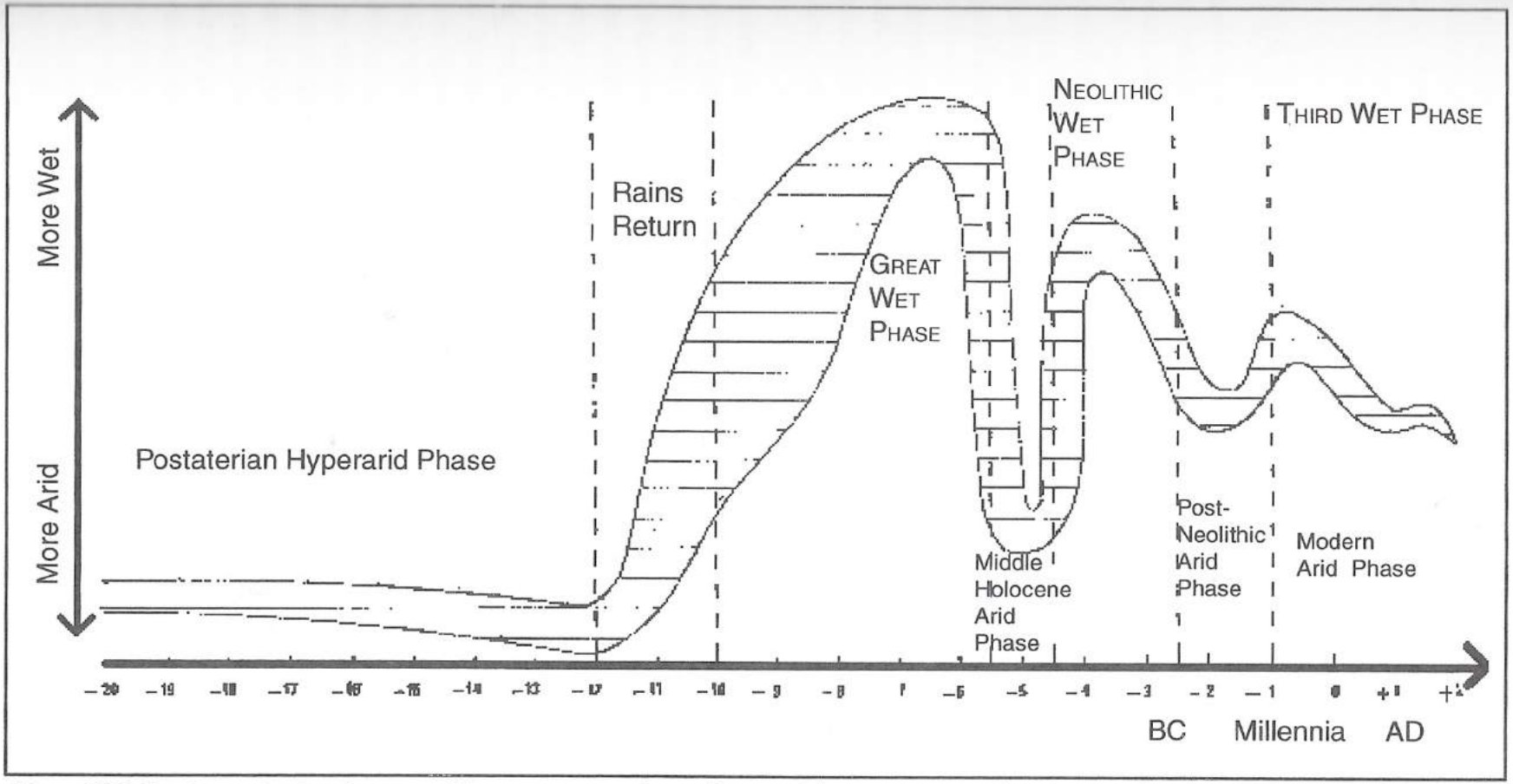
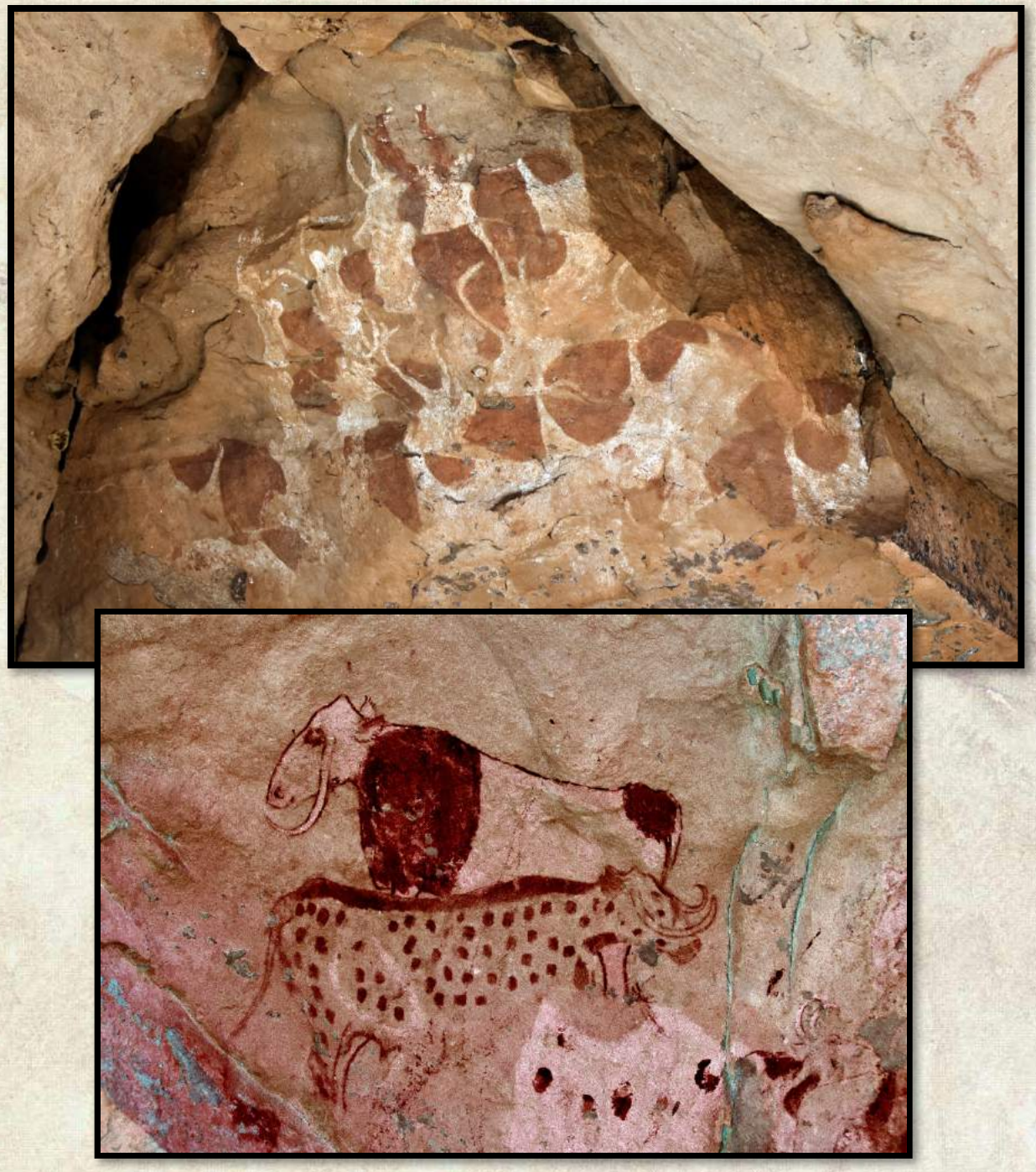


Figure 19.2. Semi-quantitative chart, roughly summing up the evolution of the average overall Saharan climates during the Holocene (excluding local variability).

Pastoralist (Neolithic)

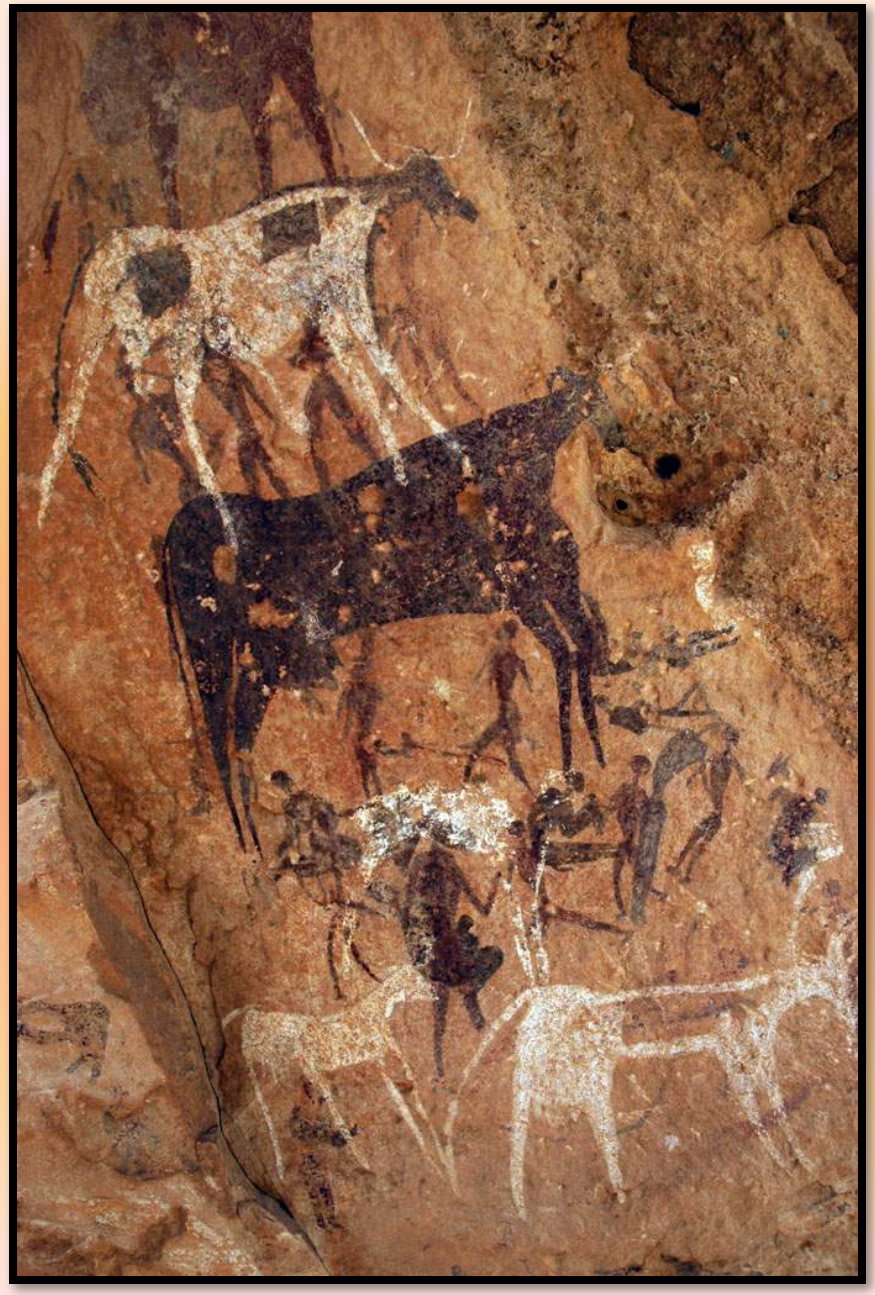
- This period produced the most numerous prehistoric rock art sites, both engravings and paintings.
- Wild animal representations become scarce,
- Their place is taken over by innumerable representations of cattle, both solo and in herds, sometimes of over a hundred.
- Other scenes show people doing their daily activities, all in a very “artistic” and refined manner.
- Society was one of nomadic herders.



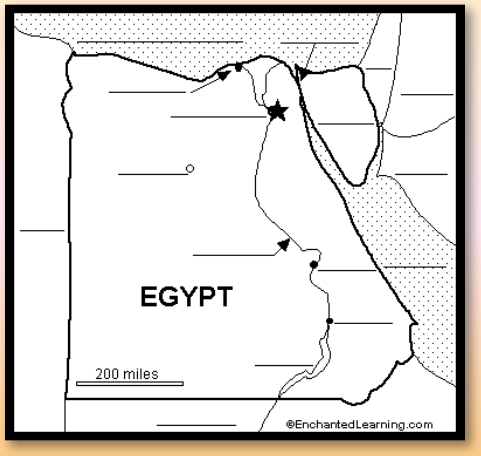
Lion Hunt, Tadrart

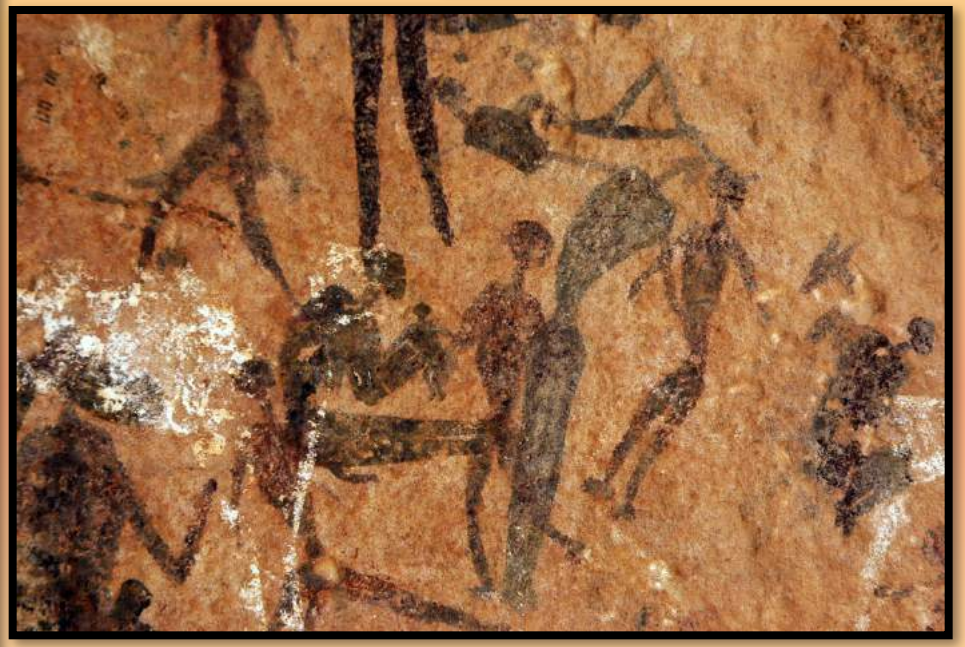
Dstretched Photo by Wilma Hutson

Scenes show people doing their daily activities, all in a very artistic and refined manner

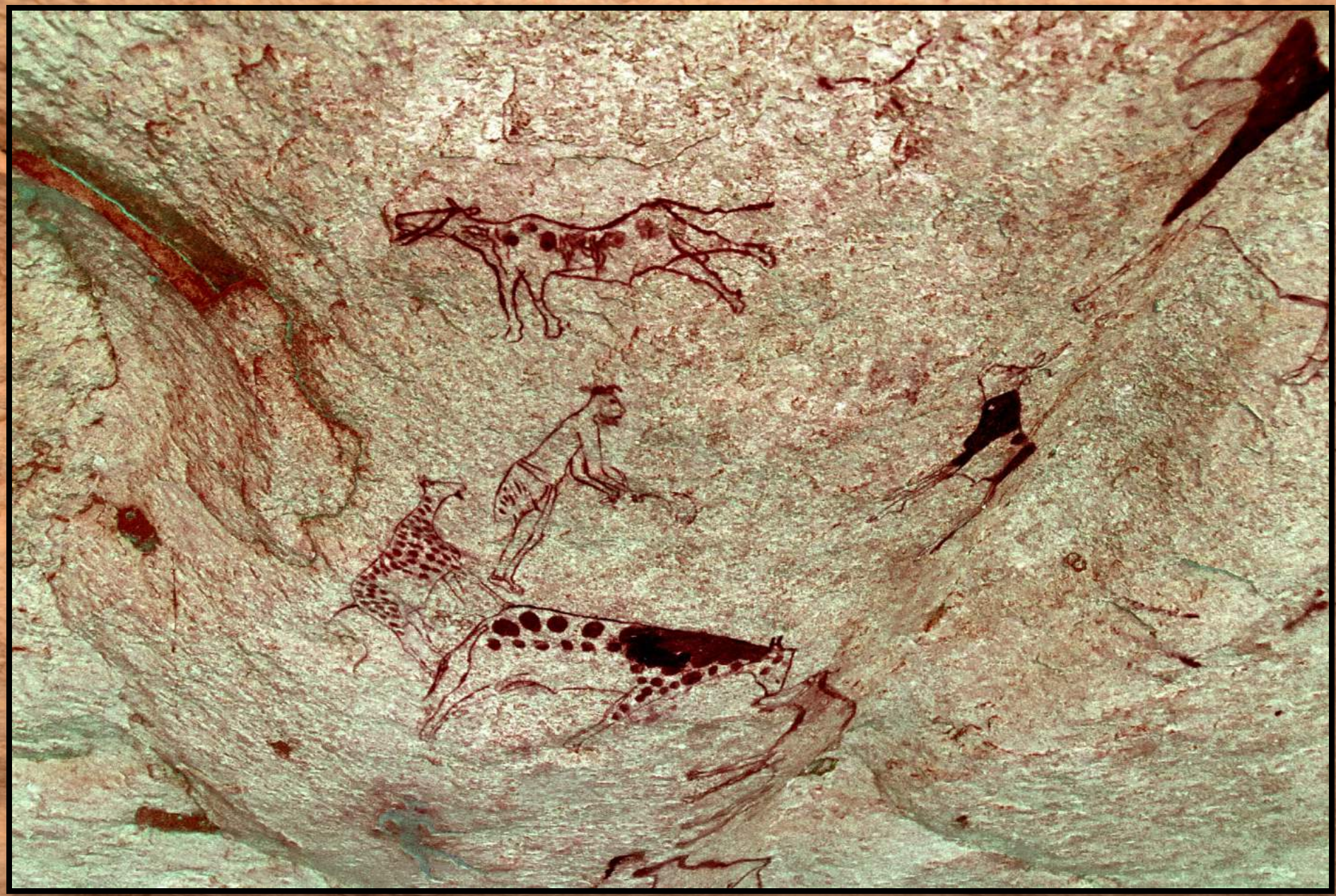


Egypt





Pastoralist Style Bovines super-imposed over small figure style family scene



Introduction of domesticated animals correlates in many places to a rapid change from grassland to scrubland vegetation
After the drying of the climate the herders to move south.

Horse or Caballine Period

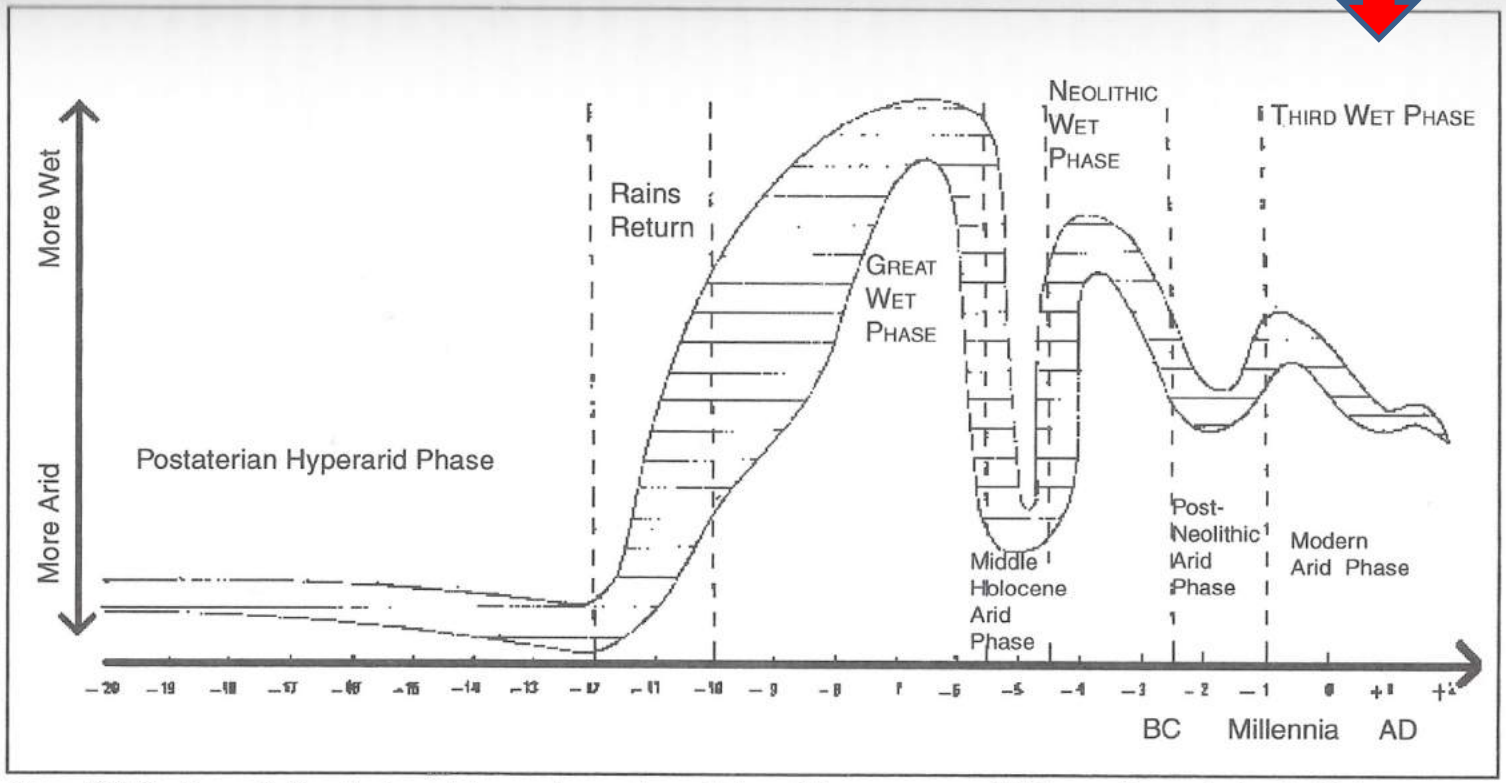


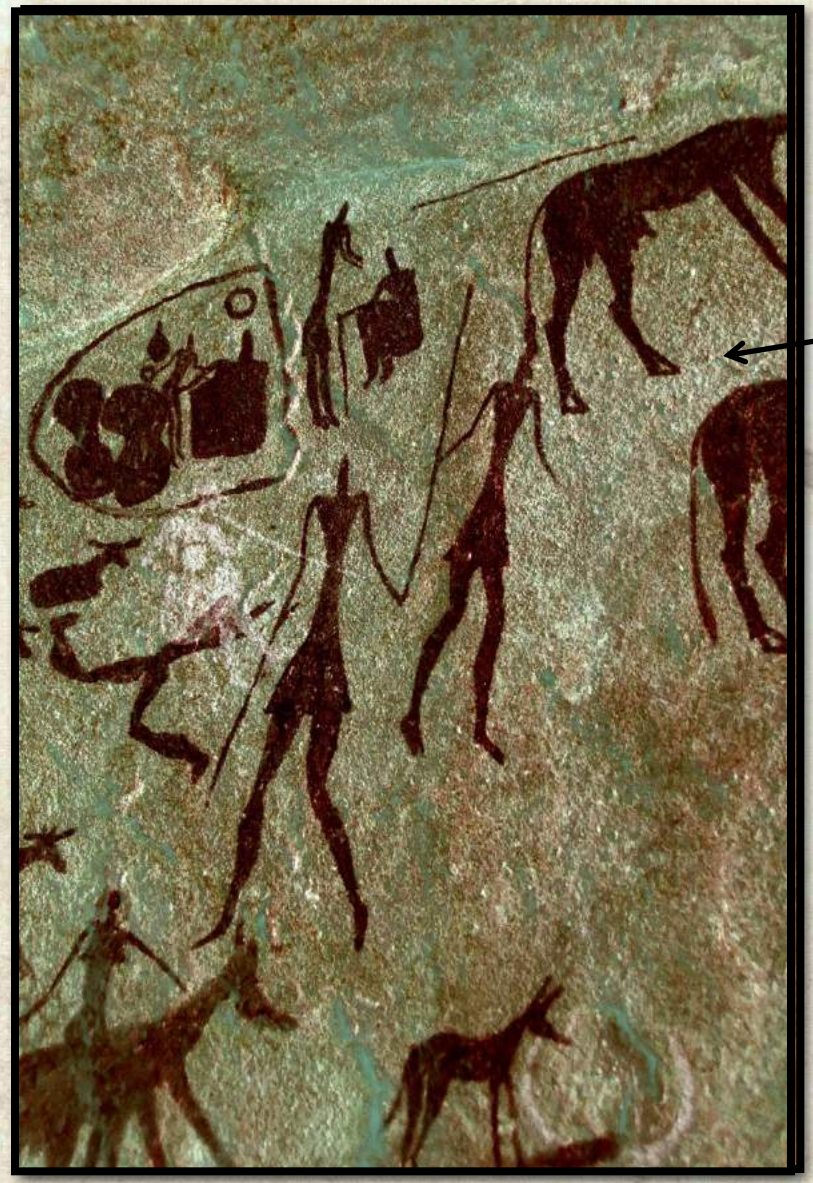
Figure 19.2. Semi-quantitative chart, roughly summing up the evolution of the average overall Saharan climates during the Holocene (excluding local variability).

- The horse was introduced to the Sahara about 1,200 B.C.
- Horse drawn chariots used along the Saharan trade routes up until classical times

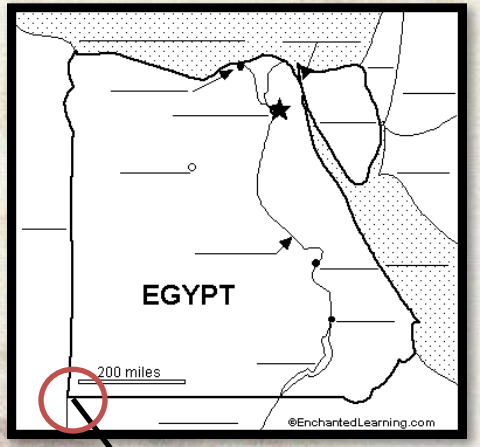
Stylized Anthropomorphs

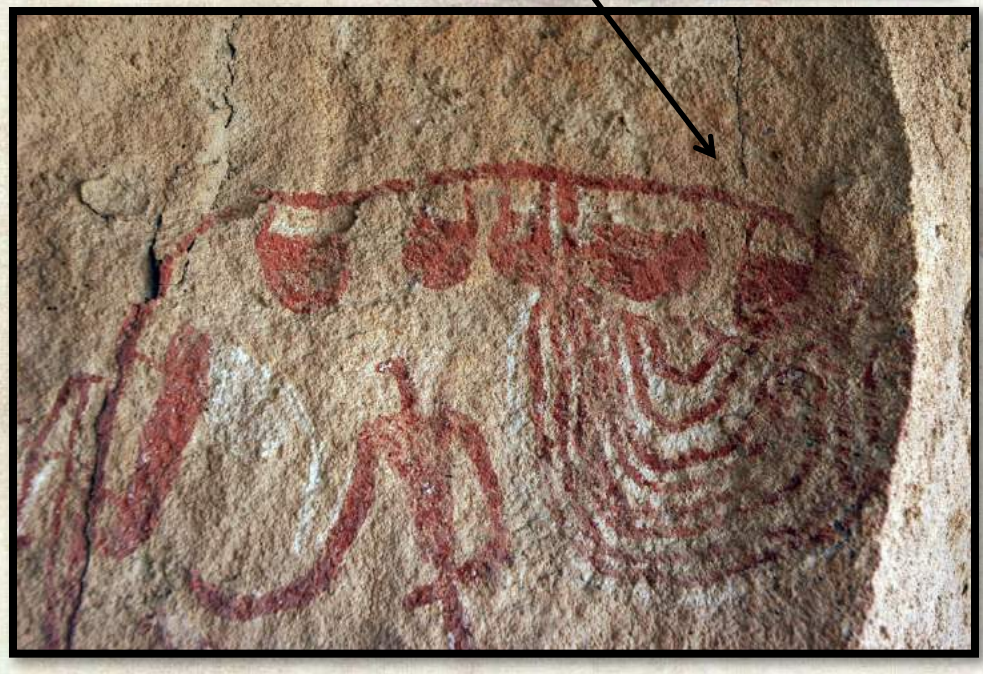
- Heads which consist of a line
- Women – long elegant dresses
- Slight steatopygia
- Style stretches from southwest Libya to the Atlantic Coast

Homestead Scenes



Tadrart, Algeria





Show possible conflict

•Characterized by small hour glass shaped human figures.

Camel Period – final onset of arid period

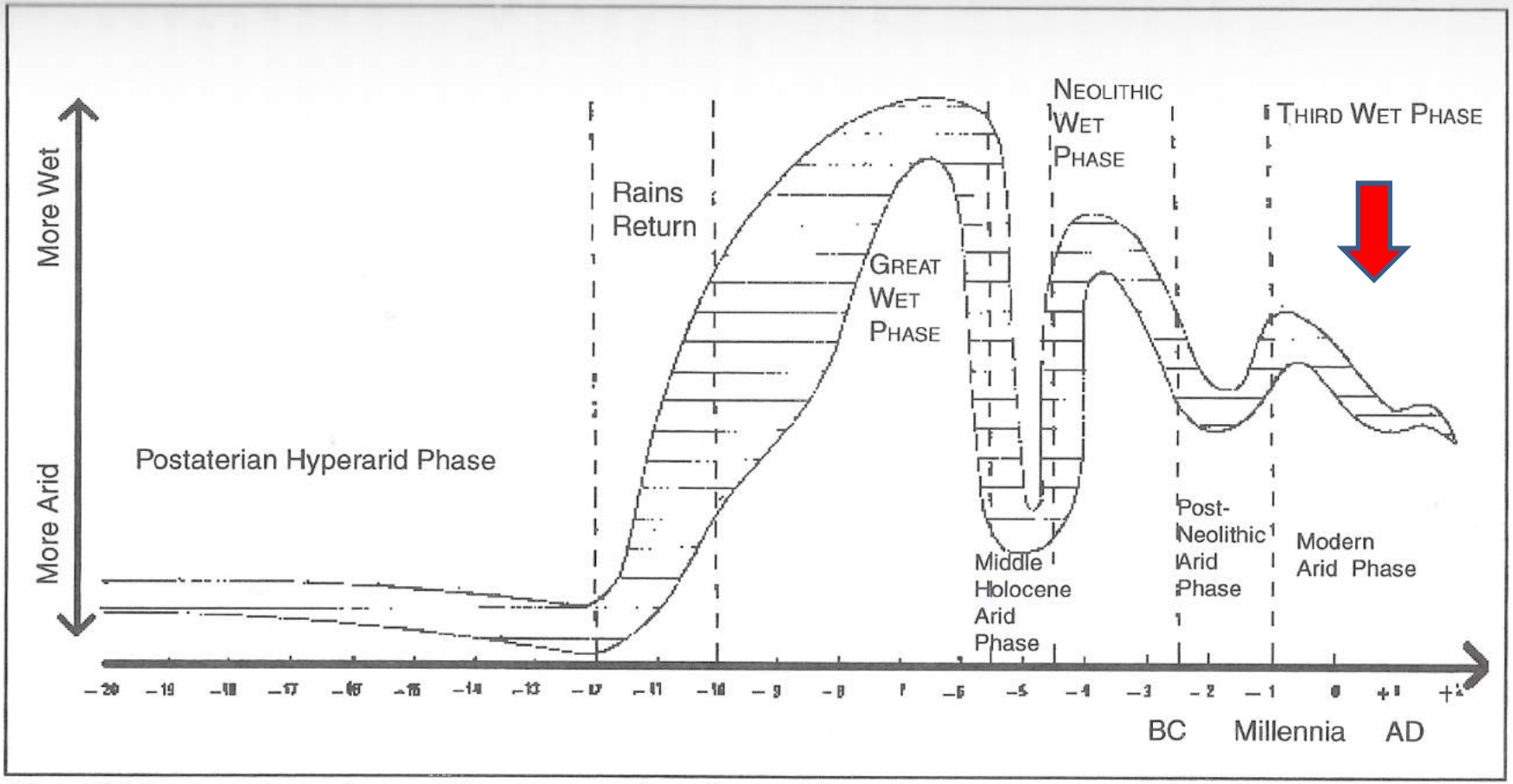
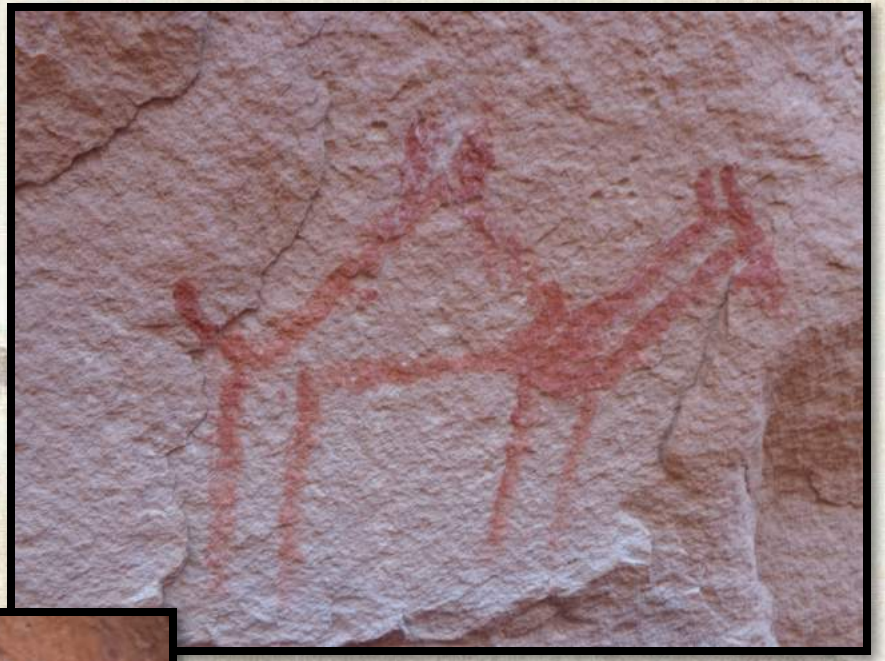


Figure 19.2. Semi-quantitative chart, roughly summing up the evolution of the average overall Saharan climates during the Holocene (excluding local variability).

Camel period

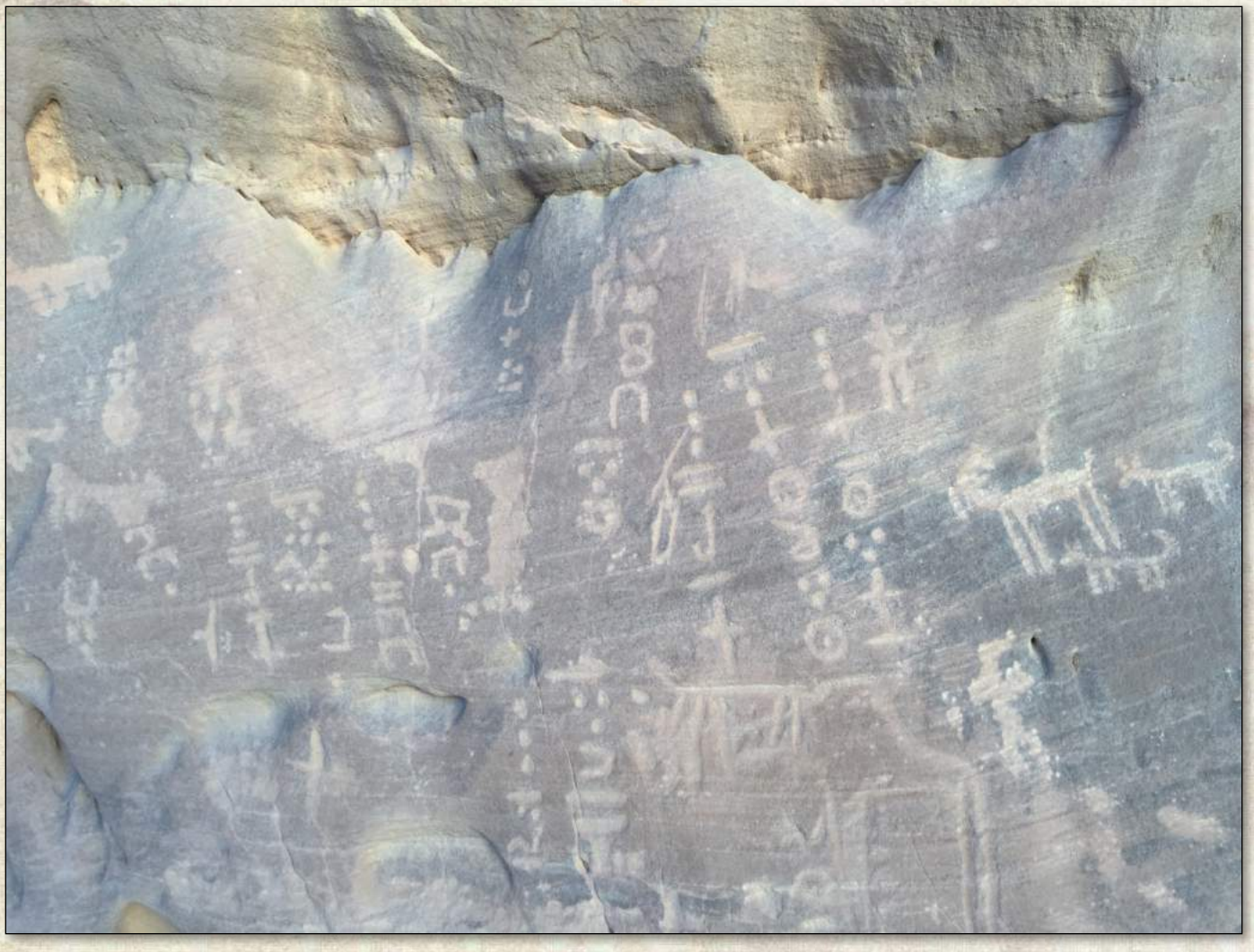
- Began ~ 2000 BP when camels first appeared in the desert
- Final onset of aridity the camel replaced the horse as the beast of burden,
- Earlier images were beautifully executed but later ones drawn in a crude style

Camels replace the horse



Often the imagery is not as "artistically" executed.

Sometimes accompanied by the Tifnar script of the Tuaregs



Quechua