
Anthropomorphs of the Djado Mountains: Ancestors of the Tasīli-n-Ājjer Roundheads?

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Résumé : De nombreuses superpositions permettent de suivre l'évolution des anthropomorphes à tête pointue du Djado (Nord-Niger) vers des formes de tête de plus en plus arrondies. Avec d'autres observations, cela conduit à l'idée que ces anthropomorphes pourraient avoir été les ancêtres des Têtes Rondes tassiliennes.

Abstract : Many superimpositions allow to follow the evolution of the pointed-head anthropomorphs of the Djado (N-Niger) to more and more roundish-head-forms. This and other findings allow the idea that Djado-anthropomorphs may have been the ancestors of the Tassili Roundheads.

This article is dedicated to the memory of Dirk Huyge and his life-work. It was presented at the Brussels conference *What Ever Happened to the People? Humans and Anthropomorphs in the Rock Art of Northern Africa*, but, due to technical problems, couldn't be included in the proceedings.

Eighteen years of investigation of the rock art of the enneris (wadis) of the Djado plateau in northern Niger (Hallier 1995) have shown that this region is rich in all kinds of rock art except the youngest, the latest ones, i.e. the horse and the camel period (Figs. 1-2).

Most of the rock art consists of petroglyphs (almost exclusively peckings), i.e. pictures which are deepened into the surface of the rocks (Figs. 3-6) Anthropomorphous figures are sometimes displayed solely, sometimes in a scenic order, i.e. together with other humanoids or also with figures of animals.

Pictographs (paintings) are rare — the reason seems to be that rock-shelters, where paintings usually are found, are a rarity in the Djado region.

But actually it was a painted rock face, an abri, which brought about some of the most important results of our work : firstly the position of the painted area on this rock face is very informative because the paintings are concentrated in its centre, whereas the rock face on the right and the left of the paintings does not show any paintings (Fig. 7) The apparent reason seems to be that these side parts over and over show the traces of running water which must have run down in former times on both sides heavily and probably for a long time — this seems to explain why the artists chose the dry central part of the rock face and possibly it tells us that the paintings were done during a period of heavy rain falls, of high precipitations (Figs. 8-10)

Possibly this conclusion is supported additionally by the group of four large animals on top of the painted wall : two lions, an elephant

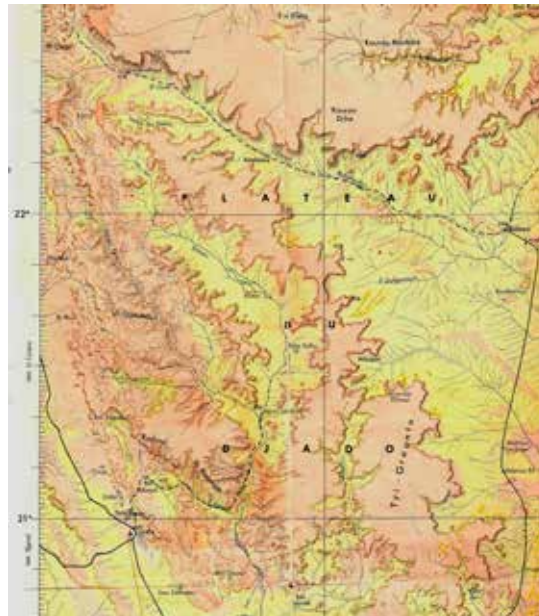


Fig.1. Geographical map of the Djado-region and its enneris: the largest wadi is Enneri Blaka; the northern part of the map shows part of the Manguéni (or Mangeni) Plateau.

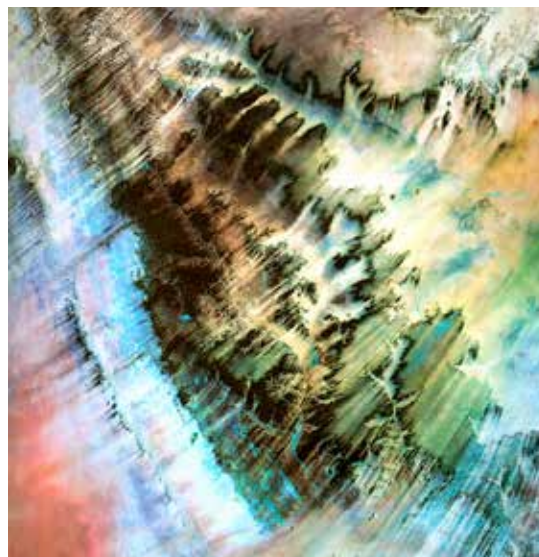


Fig. 2. A false-colour-satellite-photo shows the same region and the characteristic aeolian sand shadows blown by the NE-trade wind from NE to SW, eroding the Trias sandstone landscape.

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Fig. 3. Enigmatic scene: two roundheaded and four-fingered male human figures (35 cm each) with hypertrophous penes and scrota, wearing pecked horn-masks (?).

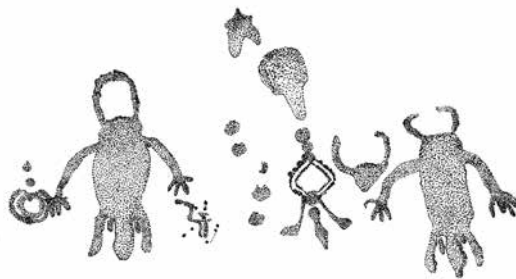


Fig. 4. Tracing of Fig. 3.

Fig. 5. Pecked hunter (26 cm) with penis, bearing a long-bow and wearing feathers(?) on his head.

Fig. 6. Two pecked human male figures, exhibiting a Roundhead-typical posture: father(?) laying his hand on his sons's(?) head. Large figure 20 cm.

and — on the very top — a *Bubalus* (also *Peloroavis* resp. *Syncerus*, formerly *Homoioceras*) *antiquus*: this giant buffalo belonged to the savanna-fauna of a humid period, as we know. The fact that a) the *Bubalus* was painted on top of the paintings and b) with its length of 95 cm is — beside of the elephant — the largest figure of all may point towards a prominent role this animal played in the artists' imagination. On the other hand it may be also that this group of four big animals was positioned above the

main part of the wall because the area below was already covered by several layers of paintings. It is interesting also that this picture of a *Bubalus* is the only really undoubtful presentation of this animal in Roundhead art as far as we know so far; besides it proves that the Roundheads knew this animal which was extinct about 4000 years ago..

Very important for answering the question asked in the title of this conference («What ever happened to the People? Humans and Anthropomorphs in the Rock Art of Northern Africa») — was the fact that the paintings on this rock face exhibited beside a number of symbols like systems of concentric circles and stacks of semicircles and a large number of animals, also 69 anthropomorphous figures (Fig. 11). Most of these figures appeared like dwarfs or goblins; for that reason we called this overhanging rock face the «Rock Shelter of the Goblins» (Hallier & Hallier 1999).





Fig. 7. The “Rock Shelter of the Goblins” (Djado / N-Niger). Paintings on the central part of the rock face; on both sides traces caused by running water.



Fig. 8. Centre of the painted part of the rock face. (Scale in units of 20 cm.) *Bubalus* on top: length 95 cm without horns.



Fig. 9. The same photo, after a DStretch_LAB treatment.



Fig. 10. Tracing of the whole rock shelter with anthropomorphs, animals and symbols.

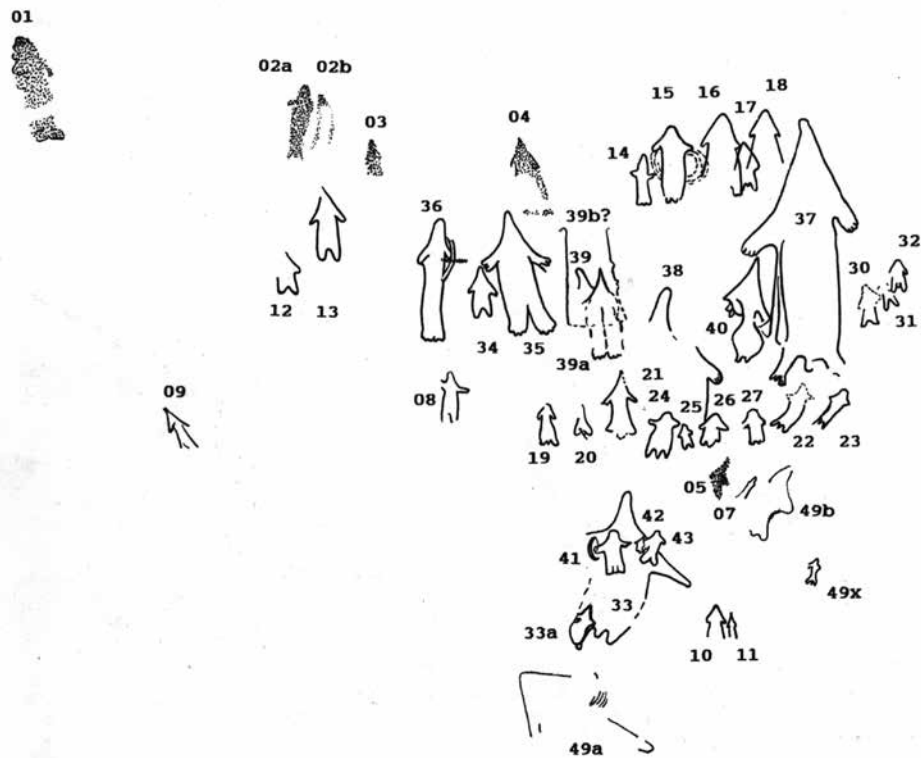


Fig. 11. Tracing of all the anthropomorphs (except the two couples of the youngest, uppermost layer of paintings: see fig.18). Largest figure (no.37) = 67 cm.

Scrutiny of the paintings and investigation of their sub- and superimpositions with the help of infrared-films led to the result that they were painted in six to eight layers. This made it possible to date the anthropomorphous figures relatively, thus leading to an evolutionary succession within the painted wall, starting with very simple, rather amorphous “humanoid” figures (some with, some without contour) and developing to contoured, more and more detailed anthropomorphous figures. Their sizes differ between about 4 cm and 67 cm.

This evolution concerns a number of characteristics: above all the changing shape of their heads, but also the increasing differentiation and number of the fingers and the toes, the gender features and the upcoming familiar gestures and discernible interpersonal relations. The latter observations may be of special interest since they are special and acknowledged characteristics of the Tassili Roundheads, too (Muzzolini 1995).

The apparently earliest types of “humanoids” are painted in plain white, without a contour. These “anthropomorphs” or rather “amorphs” cannot always be filed with certainty to humanoids, at least when they are lacking distinct human forms like legs or arms. This changes when the figures start to be contoured — a contour makes them clearly recognizable as anthropomorphs, even if they do not exhibit more human-like details.



Fig. 12. Section showing different types of anthropomorphs: early forms of fingers and toes; different head-shapes from “pointed” to “roundish”; figures “with penis” and “without penis” : male and female ?

Fig. 13. Section with archer (fig. n°.36 = 31 cm) and “mother and daughter” (?).



Fig. 14. Group of figures, differentiated by “with penis” and “without penis”. From left to right : male (18 cm) – female – male – male; exhibiting painting-technique of the Tasili-n-Äjjer Roundheads: dark contour, interior plain white.



Fig. 15. Couple male / female (28 / 26 cm): latest painting, closely related to the Tassili-n-Ājjer Roundheads; female: breasts positioned under the armpits.

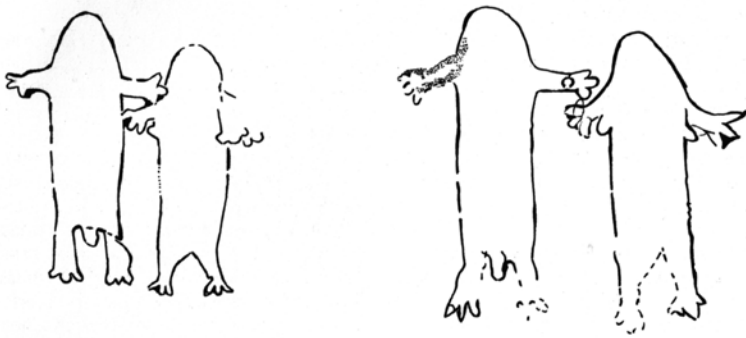


Fig. 16. Tracing of the two couples (different scales) of the latest layer of paintings: 31 / 28 cm (left) and 28 / 26 cm (right). Note fingers and toes.

The next group consists of anthropomorphs with pointed heads and figures reminding fir- or christmas-trees with hanging arms, mostly in a 45°-angle like hanging fir branches. In the beginning these figures show at first neither fingers nor toes, but this changes little by little, later ones exhibit fingers and toes which are just faintly indicated, still later on they appear more distinctly and separated.

Parallel to these small changes the shape of the heads is developed more and more from being pointed to a more roundish shape, but always it is positioned directly on the shoulders — necks are not discernible. This is another special and an acknowledged characteristic of the Tassili Roundheads (Muzzolini 1995).

Another change concerns the sex: all early figures seem to belong to the male sex, as the — sometimes hypertrophous — penes show. But things change by and by: some of the later figures do not display a penis, they have none, so we maybe can assume that “no penis” might have meant “female”?

Figs. 12 and 13 exhibit two enlarged groups of anthropomorphs of Fig. 11. They show different types (resp. stages of evolution) of these human-like figures.

Fig. 12 shows the largest of the anthropomorphic figures (n° 37 = 67 cm) and also different distinct representations of pointed or roundish heads. Fig. 13 exhibits one of the two archers on this rock face and also different presentations of the numbers of fingers and toes. Fig. 14 exhibits a group of anthropomorphs with different attitudes; the one to the left measures 18 cm.

The final stage of the evolution to “Djado-anthropomorphs” is found in the uppermost, i.e. the youngest layer of paintings of the “Rock Shelter of the Goblins”. This layer consists of two pairs of humanoid figures, apparently both couples of a man and a woman which appear to be very close to the earliest, the oldest period of the Roundheads of the Tassili, the group of the so-called “Primitive Martians”. (Figs. 15-16, comp. also Fig. 10)

A main feature of these four figures is their neckless round head. This extremely brachycephalous representation is an important feature and another special and acknowledged characteristic which led to the designation “roundhead” of the Tassili Roundheads (Breuil & Lhote 1954). These four figures exhibit distinctly three fingers and three toes each on all extremities, but — as all the other anthropomorphs, too! — no sensual organs like ears, eyes, mouth or nose.

But now another important feature has been developed: the female sex. Instead of “no penis = female” both female figures exhibit their

breasts; but since the interior of the figures — i.e. inside the limiting contour — always is painted in plain white colour and never used for displaying any details, these breasts are placed “outside” the body under the armpits. This is exactly the way the female “Primitive Martians” of the Tassili are displayed : see e.g. the “swimming” gravid woman to the right of the “Great God of Sefar” (Soleilhavoup 2007: 96-97, Hallier & Hallier 2010: fig.1) and also the “Venus of In Tahadoft” (Hallier & Hallier 2005, Figs. 37-38).

Another remarkable point is the difference of the figures’ height, their gender-dimorphism : they measure 28 / 26 cm (right couple) and 31 / 28 cm (left couple) and — according to the “normal” gender-depending difference of the height between males and females — it is in both cases the female that is the smaller person (Note: the drawings of the two couples on Fig.16 have different scales).

But again it is noteworthy that male and female of each couple exhibit familiar gestures when they are presented as couple and when they exhibit discernible relations, e.g. when they touch each other. Even the colour of each couple tells us that they were meant to be couples: the character of the colour is the same within each of the couples, but different between the two couples. As mentio-



Fig. 17. Abri I-n-Elighi : large figure of “Primitive Martians”-type with line of connection to a small “Pointedhead”-figure.

ned above, familiar gestures and discernible relations between persons are special and acknowledged characteristics of the Tassilian Roundheads, one of the peculiarities which define this group (Muzzolini 1995).

It is interesting that among so many sites of rock art on the Tasili-n-Äjjer plateau also



Fig. 18. Small “Pointedhead” figure in the Abri I-n-Elighi.

Fig. 19. The same photo, after a DStretch_LDS treatment.

Fig. 20. Section of the animals of Abri I-n-Temeilt (Ifedaniuwen ridge).



Fig. 21. Tracing of another section of Abri I-n-Temeilt: wild boar (or male hippo) and leopard.

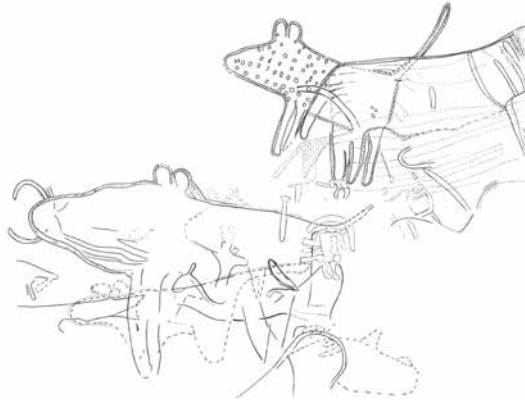


Fig. 22. Horned animal (42 cm) of the “Rock Shelter of the Goblins”- (Djado).

some few representations of Pointedheads are found – e.g. under the abri of I-n-Elighi (or Eleli): there we find right beside of a large Roundhead figure of the “Primitive Martians”-type which exhibits a large, clumsy and clearly round head a small huma-

noid figure: its pointed head and also its arms which look like fir-branches with pointed ends, spreading in angles of about 45° — all this is exactly similar to “Pointedhead”-figures of the Djado: comp. Figs. 17 and 18-19. Likewise some of the sites of the Tasīli-n-Ājjer plateau exhibit paintings of animals which seem to be very related to those of the Djado. One of these sites is the Abri I-n-Temeilt at the western end of the Ifedaniuwen ridge. Some of its paintings represent a sort of a key-site for relations between Djado and Tasīli-n-Ājjer (Hallier & Hallier 2003 / 2005, Figs. 20-21, 22-23). Relationships of the anthropomorphs and the animals between Djado and Tasīli-n-Ājjer make it likely that — at least during an early period — relations existed between the high plateau of the Tasīli-n-Ājjer and the lowlands close to Lake Mega-Chad. In regard



to the relative closeness between the Tasīli-n-Ājjer Mountains and the Lake Chad region — bee-line-distance about 500 Km — this is not astonishing. In this regard it is not at all a surprise, but rather obvious that apparently also in the closer geographical “neighbourhood” — north of the Djado, in the Algerian Tadrart — pictographs are found which are closely related to the Djado paintings.

Since these paintings are not identical, but closely related with the Djado pictographs of Pointedheads and Roundheads we differentiate in our publications (Hallier & Hallier 2014) between three separate groups of paintings in this region: 1. the group “Roundheads of the Tasīli-n-Ājjer”; 2. the group of “Djado-

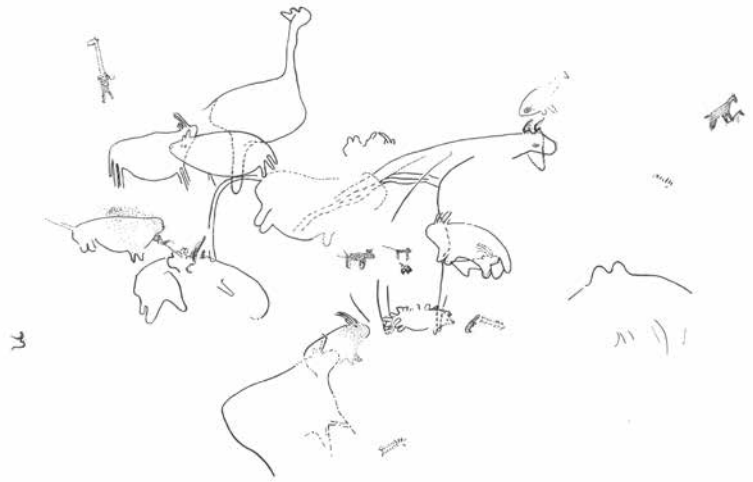


Fig. 23. Tracing of all the animals of the “Rock Shelter of the Goblins”- (Djado) except the four “large animals” on top : comp. Fig.10.



Fig. 24. Paintings of the main wall of the Abri Freulon (Algerian Tadrart).

Fig. 25. The two lowermost hunting scenes of the main wall of the Abri Freulon (comp. Fig. 24): figures partly with and in part without contour. The upper one of these two hunting scenes(?) exhibits another "Pointedhead".



Roundheads" and "Djado-Pointedheads" and 3. the group of "Tadrart-Roundheads" and "Tadrart-Pointedheads".

A larger number of this latter group of the Tadrart pictographs is found in the "Abri Freulon". These paintings were found in 1951 by the French geographer Freulon and published 1954 in a short paper. The abri was rediscovered in 2003 by the team of Karl Heinz Striedter, Nadjib Ferhat and Michel Tauveron. Extensively it was published in 2014 (Hallier & Hallier 2014).

The main wall of this abri is situated in its innermost part (Fig. 24). Its paintings are representative for the group of "Tadrart-Roundheads" and also for the "Tadrart-Pointedheads". Here I want to present four hunting scenes separately (Figs. 25-28). Among the game, a wild boar (Fig. 29) and a leopard with a spotted fur (Fig. 30) are presented.

On the lower part of the rock the fig. 31 exhibit a scenario which has become the most well-known of this site: a Roundhead-man – DStretch-treatment makes clearly discernible

Fig. 26. The lowermost hunting scene of the main wall of the Abri Freulon (rather amorph figure of an archer, with dog?).



the round line of demarcation of his skull – is wearing a belt and is standing in a boat of 28cm: Fig. 32. This boat seems to be made on bundles of rush which are tied together – we know this technique from a similar rock painting representing a man in a similar boat: the “barque de Bodouhé” (Ennedi) was published by the late G.Jacquet in 2000.

Very similar to the Bodouhé-boat were also rush- or papyrus-boats which were used – until recently – on the remainders of Lake Chad for fishing or also for hunting crocodiles. These boats show clearly that they also were made on bundles of reed which were tied together.

Right above this boat or canoe of the Abri Freulon there are about half a dozen peculiar “bodies” which are dotted and look very much alike this boat: several other boats or coracles?

At the entrance to the Abri Freulon another little scene exhibits several small anthropomorphs, accompanied by a number of crescent-shaped bodies which can be interpreted as boats, too (Fig. 34).

The habitat, the living space of the epipaleolithic and the neolithic man in Northern Africa must have been, to a certain extent, also an aqualithic one – this is evidenced by a great number of rock pictures showing



Fig. 27. Hunting scene in the middle of the main wall; with dog? The large white animal on this figure which is visible only in part, belongs to the oldest layer of paintings on this wall.

boats, swimmers and different kinds of fishes (Hallier & Hallier 2013).

Right beside of the boat of the Abri Freulon a large (30 cm) contoured Pointedhead with a

Fig. 28. The uppermost hunting scene of the main wall: two contoured archers, hunting a horned animal.





Fig. 29. Boar with rough, bristle-covered coat.



Fig. 30. Leopard with spotted fur.



Fig. 31. The “man-in-a-rush-canoe”-scenario on the painted large main wall: a man, standing in a dotted boat of 28 cm length. Nearby some more bodies, similar to the boat: other boats or canoes or coracles??



Fig. 32. Detail of the “man in the boat”.

belt is standing — a counterpart to the Pointedheads of the “Rock Face of the Goblins” of the Djado (Fig. 33).

The close coexistence of these two men — a Roundhead and a Pointedhead — shows what we know from the Djado that most certainly the Pointedheads developed to Roundheads; but it shows also that apparently for a longer or shorter time both types have existed — resp. were painted — together, side by side.

This close being-together of Roundheads and Pointedheads is documented also by another part of the Abri Freulon: near its entrance the rock face is covered by a number of — sometimes human-looking, but mostly enigmatic— figures which are painted very carefully in doubled lines; their interspaces are filled with rows of dots. In the right lower corner of the painting we find several small figures of Roundheads and also of one Pointedhead (Fig. 35).

As long, as the rock art of the Sahara has not been dated to a larger extent we cannot answer the question, if and when Roundheads developed definitely from their supposed predecessors, the Pointedheads.

Summarizing all these features of the youngest paintings of the latest layer of paintings in the large Djado-abri and comparing them with corresponding features from the Tadrart and also with the corresponding features found with the oldest paintings of humans of the “Primitive Martians” in the Tasīli-n-Ājjer we come to the following conclusion :

It seems very likely that the beginnings of Roundhead art did not start ex nihilo in

the Tasīli-n-Ājjer, but have to be placed in the lowlands-region southeast of the Tassilian mountains and close to the Lake Palaeo-Chad or Mega-Chad (Hallier & Hallier 2013).



Fig. 33. Contoured painting of a neckless “Pointedhead”-figure (30 cm), wearing a belt, with arms hanging like branches of a fir-tree.

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Fig. 34. Tracing of a scene at the entrance to Abri Freulon: 4 or 5 small anthropomorphs, accompanied by semi-lunar bodies, probably rush-boats.



Fig. 35. Drawing of a complex of enigmatic bodies, painted in several colours and in doubled lines with a row of dots in between the double-lines. In the lower right corner, several Roundhead- and Pointedhead-figures.