

DEPARTMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY, TRIPOLI, LIBYA  
ENI NORTH AFRICA, TRIPOLI, LIBYA  
SAPIENZA, UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA, ITALY

# EDEYEN OF MURZUQ

Archaeological Survey in the Libyan Sahara

Edited by

Giuma Anag, Luca Cosentino and Savino di Lernia



*All'Insegna del Giglio*

This book is the photographic summary of the archaeological survey in the Edeyen of Murzuq – April 10, June 9 2006 – in the Eni North Africa contract areas (Blocks 161-1, 161-2/4,176-3) under the aegis of the Department of Archaeology, Tripoli and “The Italian-Libyan Archaeological Mission in the Acacus and Messak”, *Sapienza*, Università di Roma.

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## Editors' Preface

The Great Libyan Jamahiriya hosts 5 of UNESCO's world heritage sites, of which only the rock art of the Acacus represents the prehistoric phase of the human race's long history. This remarkable lack of proportion is due in part to a longstanding way of interpreting the places and historical features considered "representative" of humanity, but also to an evident imbalance which disadvantages African countries (and particularly those a large proportion of whose territory is occupied by desert).

Today, these attitudes and prejudices are fortunately a thing of the past, and a concerted attempt to redress these unfair differences is underway.

In particular, our knowledge of Libya's archaeological and historical heritage, both on the coast and in the desert regions, has vastly improved thanks to the efforts of the Libyan authorities and some international missions which have worked in Libyan territory for years.

Today, as mentioned on various occasions in this book, new demands are putting this incredible wealth at risk and, by an ironic twist of fate, it seems that these dangers are destined to concentrate in precisely those areas whose beauty and abundant archaeological heritage have remained completely intact for centuries or millennia.

Increasing tourism and the country's need for development have in recent years affected parts of the Sahara where in previous centuries only

the wind molded the dunes. Today, these areas are crossed by legions of 4X4 vehicles, bulldozers open up new roads as new oil reservoirs are sought and the machines of the "Great River" have only recently completed their task of laying pipelines to carry water from southern Libya to the large cities of the Mediterranean coast. These are complex demands which represent a serious challenge for the Libyan authorities and the foreign institutions operating in various capacities in the Great Jamahiriya.

This book responds to the need to meet this challenge, adopting a positive course of action which we hope will become a systematic rule in the near future: in the region of the Edeyen of Murzuq, between April and June of 2006, over 40 archaeologists and technicians from the Libyan Department of Archaeology and *Sapienza*, Università di Roma worked in the areas where Eni North Africa was to undertake petroleum exploration activities.

For the first time in Libya – but the same is certainly true of many neighbouring countries, among others – a team was able to work without limitations on resources and time before exploration activities began. This helped us to gain detailed knowledge of a large area of the Sahara desert, ensuring a scrupulous recording process and appropriate procedures for selecting sites of special historical and archaeological interest, to be saved at all costs.

It is important to stress that this book, which appears exactly a year after our fieldwork ended, is

the first scientific publication of archaeological risk assessment work undertaken in Libya. This is cause for even greater satisfaction among those who supported and worked for its publication, thanks to the efficient and fruitful collaboration between three different institutions: the Libyan Department of Archaeology, Eni North Africa and *Sapienza*, Università di Roma.

This is a deliberately *handsome* volume, aimed at the general reader, but it nonetheless presents a wealth of scientific and analytical information which we hope will adequately represent the extraordinary richness and importance of the Sahara's prehistoric archaeological heritage, so often ignored, scorned and disregarded.

The idea of reconciling the need for development and the safeguard of cultural heritage is thus a challenge which we can meet, especially when both these needs are considered essential and when the danger of irreparably compromising entire chapters of human history is high, as is the case in south-western Libya, a region of enormous importance in the cultural developments of the great Saharan civilizations.

In *Background and Field Data* (Part I) the book briefly outlines some general aspects of the difficult but often productive relationship between development and antiquities, before going on to analyse in greater detail the history of the archaeology and rock art of this extraordinary country. The results of the Murzuq survey are

comprehensively presented, to the extent that it is at all possible to summarize thousands of years of human history in a few pages.

*Iconography* (Part II) is a large collection of images presenting the major natural and cultural features encountered during the Murzuq survey, together with a selection of rock art photos from

neighbouring regions: the Tadrart Acacus Mts. and the Messak plateau. The photographs, taken during fieldwork, show the Murzuq environment with its animals and vegetation, the most important parts of the fieldwork, the main sites found, the artefacts of the past and those of the present and our maps of archaeological risk.

This book will remain as a witness of this scientific expedition, with the hope that the wind will eventually wipe out our traces and restore this extraordinary place to its pristine beauty.

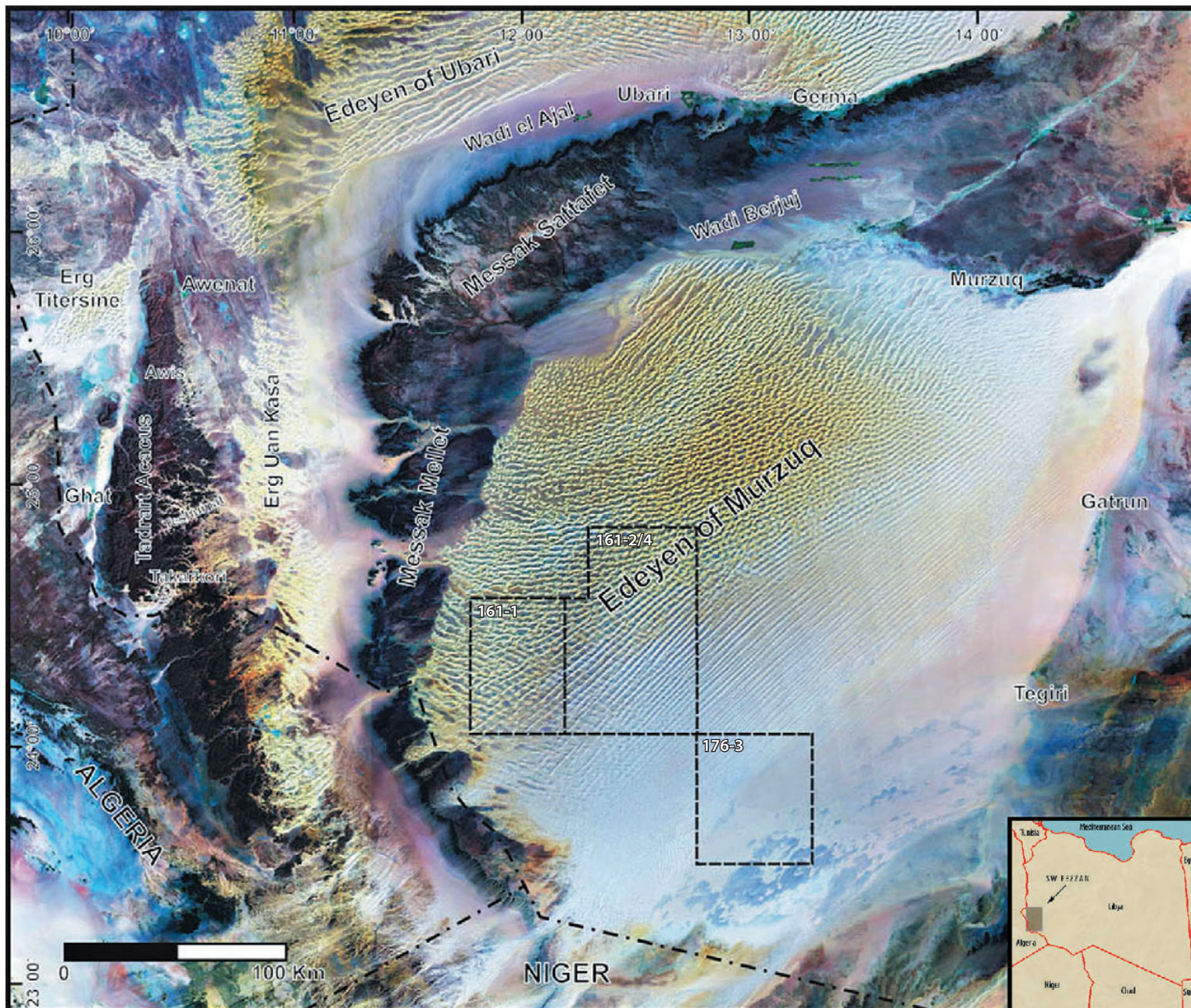
Rome, Tripoli, March 27<sup>th</sup> 2007





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We owe the success of this expedition to many people. The Italian-Libyan team wishes to thank the entire staff of the Department of Archaeology in Tripoli for their help and support during the organization of fieldwork. Many thanks to Enermass Oil Services staff, and namely Ms Eman Sherif and Ms Abir Abuturkia, for their tireless assistance and kind support. One Casa provided logistics and services: we wish to thank Mr Bashir Galgam and Mr Saif Nasser for their constant presence in the field and for having met all our requests during our work. Furthermore, we would like to thank all the One Casa staff – workers, cooks and mechanics – and particularly the head driver, Mr Warzakan Mohammed Hassan: without him, most remote areas would have remained inaccessible. In Italy, we wish to thank Prof. Mauro Cremaschi and Dr Alessandro Perego, University of Milan, for their invaluable help during the desktop studies phase. The staff of Eni North Africa enormously supported our work, both during organization and in the field.



Satellite image of the area licensed to "The Italian-Libyan Archaeological Mission in the Acacus and Messak", *Sapienza*, Università di Roma. The dashed lines indicate where fieldwork was carried out, in the Edeyen of Murzuq (Blocks 161-1, 161-2/4, 176-3)

# Foreword

Roberto Casula

*Eni North Africa – Managing Director*

In December 2005, Eni North Africa was awarded a permit to conduct exploration activities in 3 blocks of the Murzuq Basin, located in the heart of that part of the Libyan Desert commonly known as the Edeyen of Murzuq. This was an extremely significant achievement for Eni North Africa, but it also represented a new challenge, given the area's environmental fragility and the richness of its archaeological heritage.

The Edeyen of Murzuq is in fact one of the wildest, best preserved and most fascinating areas of Libya and possibly the whole world. The majestic landscape of this desert, with its long rows of imposing sand dunes and ever-changing colours, has always deeply impressed the few visitors that for one reason or another have come across this area in the past.

Over the last 20 years though, this remote area has become one of the strategic regions of Libya. On the one hand, several oil discoveries were announced in the region of the Messak Plateau and to the north of the Sabha-Ubari connection road, in turn triggering new industrial projects that created job opportunities for the local economy but also changed the overall landscape of the region. On the other hand, the work carried out by "The Italian-Libyan Archaeological Mission in the Aca-cus and Messak", *Sapienza*, Università di Roma, founded by Prof. Fabrizio Mori in 1955 and currently directed by Prof. Savino di Lernia, has revealed to the world the extraordinary importance

of the cultural heritage of this area, now believed to be one of the cradles of human civilization. Finally, the area's archaeological interest has been a key element in the sudden flourishing of a tourist industry that, as in the case of oil discoveries, has led to new growth opportunities for the local economy.

The oil industry and tourism, however, are also major threats to the fragile ecosystems of the desert and its scattered, unprotected archaeological sites. Anyone travelling through the Edeyen at any time of the year will likely meet in his wanderings huge lorries full of seismic equipment or drilling tools roaring along the sandy tracks, or caravans of 4-wheel drive vehicles packed with Italian, German or Japanese tourists dressed as explorers and holding digital cameras.

The threat is considerable, because the area's cultural heritage is so widely distributed and accessible, tempting tourists to collect souvenirs. It is considerable because the wildlife is so scarce and dispersed that any disturbance has a heavy impact on the ecosystem, and also because the desert, unlike the bush, preserves everything over time. Any waste is likely to remain here for years; any pollution has a lasting effect.

These facts were clear to us when we decided to bid for the exploration blocks in the Murzuq, but we decided to accept this challenge, with the declared objective of minimizing, or if possible eliminating, the impact of our operations in

the area. In this respect, in accordance with the requirements of Eni best practice, we initiated a series of environmental and archaeological baseline surveys, aimed at identifying the critical issues and subsequently defining the operating instructions to be given to contractors working in the area.

This is how our cooperation with the Libyan Department of Archaeology and *Sapienza*, Università di Roma was initially conceived. The project was then carried out by a joint team of 15 archaeologists working in the field for a period of over 8 weeks, with the systematic exploration of all the main basins and dune corridors of an area covering around 10,000 Km<sup>2</sup>. In the end, the main results of this survey were summarized in a set of "archaeological risk" maps that will form the main guidelines for all field operations. Today, the breadth and quality of the work performed allow us to consider the Murzuq project a benchmark for future surveys of this kind in sensitive areas of Libya and possibly elsewhere, setting new standards for both corporate and individual behaviour and responsibility.

From a scientific perspective, the Murzuq project has also represented an extraordinary opportunity for a thorough inspection of the area, largely unexplored from an archaeological point of view. More than 200 previously unknown sites, some around 300,000 years old, have been discovered and described; their importance proved to be

much greater than expected. Stone artefacts, countless pottery sherds and hundreds of faunal remains from Neolithic Pastoral sites represent the treasure collected and described in the basins and intradune areas.

For all these reasons, this book is intended not only to be a tribute to the beauty and extraordinary richness of the Edeyen of Murzuq's cultural heritage. Our aim is also to raise the awareness of all those visitors who, for reasons of work or tour-

ism, will travel through these wonderful places in the future. Knowledge is the only way of ensuring the preservation of this rich heritage and its transmission to future generations.

This ambitious project was undertaken by a number of specialists from different disciplines and of different nationalities. In particular, we wish to acknowledge the work carried out by teams from *Sapienza*, Università di Roma and the Department of Archaeology of Tripoli, the im-

mense task of surveying hundreds of kilometres of desert, searching for and mapping the traces of our Saharan ancestors. In addition, we wish to dedicate a personal mention to Prof. Savino di Lernia, Director of "The Italian-Libyan Archaeological Mission", and Dr. Giama Anag, Chairman of the Libyan Department of Archaeology, for their invaluable contribution to the programme as a whole. Their commitment and professionalism have made this project possible.

