

**Archaeological Discoveries at Wadi Qarn, Taif City, Saudi Arabia****اكتشافات أثرية جديدة بوادي قرن في مدينة الطائف بالمملكة العربية السعودية****Mohamed A. El-Tonssy***Professor of Ancient Archeology Faculty of Arts Helwan University-Cairo-Egypt & Faculty of Arts Taif University-Kingdom of Saudi Arabia***محمد عبد ربه التونسي**

أستاذ الآثار القديمة بكلية الآداب جامعة حلوان (مصر) وكلية الآداب جامعة الطائف (المملكة العربية السعودية)

[tonssy55@gmail.com](mailto:tonssy55@gmail.com)**Abstract:**

This paper deals with ten rock engravings discovered recently at the sandstone hills of the archaeological site of Wadi Qarn, to the north-west of Taif city. Although this rock art in Wadi Qarn has been well-known to the locals in the area for many years ago, it has not yet been scientifically documented. Trying to shed light on the archaeological history of Taif province, this paper gives the full scientific publication for ten engravings which have not been published before. This work can guide future studies on rock art sites in valleys like Taif or other locations. It became clear through the study that the site of Wadi Qarn represents a great importance in the development of rock art history in Saudi Arabia. The study concluded that the Rock art site of Wadi Qarn at Taif is dated to the Neolithic Period to the end of the Bronze Age .

**Keywords:** Petroglyphs; Wadi Qarn; Taif rock art; west Saudi Arabia.

**الملخص:**

يتناول هذا البحث بالدراسة والتحليل نشر عشرة رسوم صخرية اكتشفت مؤخراً في منطقة وادي قرن الأثرية شمال غرب مدينة الطائف. وأنه على الرغم من أن الفن الصخري في وادي قرن معروف جيداً لدى السكان المحليين في المنطقة منذ سنوات عديدة، إلا أنه لم يتم توثيقه بشكل كامل علمياً حتى الآن. وفي محاولة لإلقاء الضوء على التاريخ الأثري لمحافظة الطائف من خلال رحلة عبر الماضي، يقدم هذا البحث أدلة علمية للباحثين الجدد لتركيز دراساتهم المستقبلية على النقوش الحجرية في الوديان المماثلة في الطائف، والتي تشير إلى أن الطائف كانت محطة للاستقرار والاستيطان الحضاري تارة، والترحال تارة أخرى، منذ الألف الثاني قبل الميلاد على أقل تقدير.

**الكلمات الدالة:** رسوم صخرية؛ نقوش صخرية؛ وادي قرن؛ الفن صخري بالطائف؛ غرب المملكة العربية السعودية.

## Introduction:

The study of rock art sites in Saudi Arabia is in dire need of more studies, when we recognize that the country contains thousands of unpublished rock art sites. Fortunately, a series of scientific survey expeditions and archaeological studies in several rock art sites have been documented to-date<sup>1</sup>.

The first archeological survey to have published rock art sites in Saudi Arabia was Anati's work. This comprehensive study is based on the documentation survey of Philby and his team<sup>2</sup>. Dozens of rock art sites have been documented and registered as a direct result of many successful archaeological survey programs that have been launched across the country since that time<sup>3</sup>.

Several hundred Paleolithic and Neolithic rock art sites are situated in many regions of Saudi Arabia, among which are the most outstanding corpus of petroglyphs in the northern region of Hail which had been listed in the UNESCO world Heritage List in 2015. The three rock art sites at Jabal Umm Sinman, Jabal al-Manjar and Jabal Raat near Shuwaymis are of great interest for their value through human history at Arabian Peninsula<sup>4</sup>. Another remarkable rock art site had also been added to the UNESCO List, which is the amazing complex of petroglyphs of Al-Qara and Jabal al-Kawbab in Najran at the southern border of Saudi Arabia<sup>5</sup>.

The site of Wadi Qarn is one of the most important dry riverbeds to the northwest of Taif city, located c.894 km. south-east of the capital Riyadh. The valley is situated at a longitude of 40° 24 22 16 E. and a

<sup>1</sup>PARR, P., HOLDING, J., & DAYTON, J., « Preliminary Survey in N.W. Arabia 1968 », *Bulletin of Institute of Archeology*, London, 1970, 193-242.

<sup>2</sup>ANATI, E., *Rock Art in Central Arabia*, Vol.1, The Oval Headed People of Arabia, Louvain: Bibliothèque du Muséon, 1972.

<sup>3</sup> For more elaboration about rock arts survey programs at Saudi Arabia review; ADAMS, R., PARR, P., IBRAHIM, M., & MUGHANNUM, A.; «Report on the First Phase of the Comprehensive, Archaeological Survey Program», *Atlal: Journal of Saudi Arabia Archaeology* 1, N°. 21, 1977, -40; PARR, & OTHERS, Preliminary Survey, 193-242; ZARINS, J., & WALEN, N., « The Comprehensive Archaeological Survey Program », *Atlal: Journal of Saudi Arabia Archaeology* 4, 1980, 30-31; MACDONALD, M., & SEARIGHT, A., «Inscriptions and Rock Art of the Jawa Area», *ADAJ* 26, 1983, 571-576; LIVINGSTONE, A., & KHAN, M., «Epigraphic Survey 1404-1984 », *Atlal: Journal of Saudi Arabia Archaeology* 9, 1985, 128-144; KHAN, M., «Rock Art Research in the Arabian Peninsula, Levant and Anatolia», *World Rock Art Series*, London, 1996, 95-103.

<sup>4</sup> BEDNARIK, R. & KHAN, M.: «A Chronology of Saudi Arabia Rock Art», *XXVI Volcamonica Symposium*, 2015, 1-6.

<sup>5</sup> KHAN, M., «Rock Art of Saudi Arabia», *Arts* 2, N°.4, 2013, 447-475.

latitude of 21°16 30 34 N., about 48 km. west of Taif city.<sup>6</sup> It is administratively affiliated with the Emirate of Mecca region<sup>7</sup>. Perhaps the valley gained its Arabic name "WadiQarn" which means in Arabic language: "the valley of horn". This can be explained by the fact that the mountain is curved upward like a ram's horn. It is bordered on both sides by mountain ridges, while the middle is quite flat, making it suitable to use by trade caravans or travelers in pre-Islamic era.

The prominence of Wadi Qarn mainly lies in its permanent use as one of many ancient basic roads to Mecca. The valley connected with Wadi Al-Noman from the west. As a source of rainwater collected in puddles from the surrounding mountains, Wadi Qarn became one of the most famous main routes for Arabian commercial caravans heading north in summer and heading south in winter<sup>8</sup>.

The topography nature of Wadi Qarn is like other valleys in the Western region of Saudi Arabia. It is extremely rugged, particularly in some narrow passages. After four kilometers from its beginning at the south, the valley becomes cruelly steep, and one is obliged to revive the ancient Arab manner of riding camels to safely pass through its rugged terrain.

### **1.The Petroglyphs study of Wadi Qarn (Fig.1:3):**

Although Taif site represents an open-air museum for rock art, such as the valleys of Asherah, Jebel Al-Arfaa, Qea, Baqarah and Jabal Thoulasah, unfortunately, there has been no extensive and ambitious project to document and register these remarkable sites so far<sup>9</sup>.

The spectacular collection of petroglyphs includes rock art panels and engravings with high scientific, artistic, and historic values, scattered at the foothills of the valley. This collection directly offers a great and clear testimony of the beliefs, cosmological rituals, and socio-economic activities of ancient Arabs in the Hijaz region before the Islamic period.

<sup>6</sup> MOOSAVI, S., GROSE, M. & LAKE, P., «Wadis as Dryland River Parks: Challenges and Opportunities in Designing with Hydro-Ecological Dynamics», *Landscape Research* 45, №2, 2020, 193-213; MASOUD, M., «Rainfall-runoff Modeling of Ungauged Wadis in Arid Environments (Case Study Wadi Rabigh- Saudi Arabia) », *Arabian Journal of Geosciences* 8, №. 5, 2014, 2587–2606.

<sup>7</sup> LAMMENS, H. «La cité arabe de Ta'if à la veille de l'hégire», *MFOB* 8 ,1922, 113-327.

<sup>8</sup> MASOUD, «Rainfall-runoff Modeling of Ungauged Wadis in Arid Environments (Case Study Wadi Rabigh- Saudi Arabia)», 2587–2606.

<sup>9</sup> EL-TONSSY, M., « Archeological Study of Unpublished Rock Art Inscriptions at Taif», *JGUAA* 22, 2019, 21-40; ZARINS & WALLEN, *The Comprehensive Archaeological Survey Program*, 30-31.

The study methodology begins from the entrance of the valley in the southeast, near the local district of Al-Rehab, down to the northwest.

### 1.1.(PL. 1) (FIG. 4):

The surface of this limestone rock is badly crumbled and cracked. This is because of the natural processes of deterioration that usually happen over time in such desert sites.

The artist chose a fine sandstone, smooth, and visibly overlooking the plain. This petroglyph consists of six incised signs, four of which seem to be triable symbols indicating ancient Arabian tribes or clans.

The symbols were engraved scattered across the rock surface, taking the shape of the early Musnad letter "y" a symbol relating to the tribe's name or its geographical borderlines<sup>10</sup>. The two other signs are possibly representing one letter from the Musnad alphabet which is likely the letter "b". However, the sign underneath the figure to the right is incomplete. Accordingly, the simple nature of this inscription suggests that it was engraved by traveler or nomad joined the trade caravans<sup>11</sup>. There are many traces of white spots around the figure, which is mostly due to the modern weapon shooters. Plentiful modern Arabic inscriptions were written around this inscription.

### 1.2.(PL. 2) (FIG. 5):

The second example of rock art is located on the left side of the valley. Unfortunately, it is badly damaged, particularly in its upper part. The preserved part shows a common hunting scene from Arabia. To the uppermost left of the panel, there is a fully pecked bird, which is well-executed on a black rock surface.

The scene depicts types of Chlamydotis (a genus of large birds), the Houbara bustards, which are well known in arid regions of Saudi Arabia. The figure of the Houbara bird is executed perfectly with a big belly and long neck. The gender of the birds is mostly male, based on the larger size in comparison with females, which are usually smaller than males<sup>12</sup>.

At the bottom of the Houbara figure, there are three drawings. The first, to the left side consists of two horses drawn in stick style with a poorly preserved outline; it seems clear that a horseman rides the horse to the left side. Behind this figure, there is only one readable inscription,

<sup>10</sup> KHAN, M., *Wusum-The Tribal Symbols of Saudi Arabia*, Vol. 1, Riyadh, Ministry of Education, 2000, 57-59.

<sup>11</sup> MACDONALD & SEARIGHT, *Inscriptions and Rock Art of the Jawa Area*, 571-576; KHAN, *Wusum*, 57-59.

<sup>12</sup> JENNINGS, M., «The Birds of Saudi Arabia: Past, Present and Future», *Proceedings of the 1st Symposium Wildlife Conservation and Development in Saudi Arabia*, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, February 1989, 255-262.

which usually gives the name of the horseman in the Thamudic script. The inscription is written in a vertical line as follows: **l w r d M : l w r d m** : "by Wr dm." The writing of this text seems very questionable, due to the missing left part of the stone and the incompleteness of the fourth letter, which could be the Thamudic letter "d". This allows one to suggest another possible reading but not fully secure as: "by Wr dm " The verb **w r d** "wr d" or "wardm" was mentioned in Sabaean texts, which means the rainfall<sup>13</sup>. To the right side of the stone, there are six incised tribal symbols or *Wusum*<sup>14</sup>. It takes the shape of Thamudic sign **y** which is the last letter of the Ancient South Arabia script. Some uncompleted *Wusum* are scattered on the far right of this panel<sup>15</sup>.

### 1.3.(PL. 3) (FIG. 6)

At an altitude of eleven meters, there is a characteristic drawing of an Arabian oryx standing in a birth-giving posture. This simple drawing is of considerable interest. It has been engraved in profile with a quite schematic style. The head and two legs of the fawn can be clearly seen. Usually, the first giving birth position of the Arabian oryx is in a standing posture, as it is shown in this petroglyph. While the oryx lay on the ground to complete the birth process safely.

This birth scene is the only figure of an oryx giving birth in this position in the rock arts of Saudi Arabia known so far. A destroyed figure of a hunter with an arrow is also likely engraved on the right top of the panel. The hunter is incised in the stick style, which is common in different sites of rock art in Saudi Arabia, the most important of which are the hunting scenes in Shuwaymis at Hail region<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> BIELLA, J, *Dictionary of the Old South Arabic Sabaean Dialect*, Harvard Semitic Museum, 1982, 25,147.

<sup>14</sup> KHAN, *Wusum-The Tribal Symbols of Saudi Arabia*, 57-59.

<sup>15</sup> WOODARD, R. (ed.), *The Ancient Languages of Syria Palestine and Arabia*, Cambridge, NEBES, N., & STEIN, P., 2008, 147-178.

<sup>16</sup> MARAQTEN, M., «Hunting in Pre-Islamic Arabia in Light of the Epigraphic Evidence», *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 26, 2015, 208-234; GUAGNIN, M., JENNINGS, R., CLARK- BALZAN, L., GROUCUTT, H., PARTON, A. & PETRAGLIA, M., « Hunters and Herders: Exploring the Neolithic Transition in the Rock Art of Shuwaymis, Saudi Arabia», *Archaeological Research in Asia* 4, 2015, 3-16.

**1.4.(PL. 4) (FIG. 7)**

Although a large part of this panel has been unfortunately destroyed, the rest is in a good state of preservation. It contains the depictions of two animals and two birds. The lower part of this inscription shows a well-known feline depicted in profile facing to the left, standing while the tail is hanging down. The most distinguished element of this feline is the five retractable and sharp claws adapted to kill.

Above the feline, there is a fine outline of an onager heading left towards the bed of the valley. It has been fully incised in a static posture. This wild ass appears standing with two longish ears spread to the left and right direction.

The panel contains two ostriches. The figure is incised with the same outline style in a static posture. The first ostrich stands, in front of the onager, with raised neck and open peak. It is notable to mention that the position of the open peak of the ostrich may refer to the squawking posture that the ostrich usually uses in terror times and fear. The second one shows looking to the left. The figure is carefully chiseled with a svelte tall tarsus and a long thin neck <sup>17</sup>.

**1.5. (PL. 5):**

This simple figure is carved to the right side of the valley, facing west probably to be clearly visible from a long distance. The figure depicts the famous so-called “Arabian red foxe”, which is well known among zoologists by the scientific name *Vulpes vulpes*.

Red foxes are known to live in the desert areas. This identification is particularly based on their slender body the long bushy tail. Unfortunately, the retractable claws of the fox have been slightly erased from the rock<sup>18</sup>.

**1.6.(PL. 6) (FIG. 8):**

This petroglyph is located at the top of the plateau, at an altitude of about twelve meters. It shows a damaged hunting scene depicted on a

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<sup>17</sup>AL-TALHI, D., «Almulihiah: A Rock Art Site in the Hail Region, Saudi Arabia», *Arabian Archeology and Epigraphy* 23, №.1, 2012, 92-98. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0471.2011.00350.x>

<sup>18</sup> MACDONALD, D., «The Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) in Saudi Arabia: Loose-knit Groupings in the Absence of Territoriality», *Journal of Zoology Volume* 249, No. 4, 1999, 383 – 391.

large boulder face. The drawing seemingly begins from the right side with a hunting man in a running position, which is well-known in many other hunting petroglyphs in Arabia <sup>19</sup>. The hunter is incised in the traditional boxy shape which is well known as stick-style art. Three Houbara bustards appear standing in front of the hunter. It is noteworthy to mention that the artist succeeded in showing the terror and anxiety of the Houbara birds by engraving their necks in a raised position, as if they were in squawking posture <sup>20</sup>.

The hunter runs towards an undefined shape which is drawn in front of the hunter <sup>21</sup>. This shape more likely depicts a bow and an arrow which were usually used in such hunting scenes in Arabia <sup>22</sup>. To the end of the panel on the left-hand side; There is an erased and unclear Thamudic letter, it could be the letter "b" of the Arabian Musnad script <sup>23</sup>.

### 1.7.(PL. 7) (FIG. 9):

The most fascinating and outstanding collection of rock art in this valley or even at Taif as I know so far, is this exceptional panel, which is carved to the right side of the valley at a height of about ten and a half meters. This marvelous panel depicts four horizontal registers carved in base-relief on the face of a large, dark rock. The first register consists of three pairs of Houbara bustards, each pair raising their necks towards their partners. The heads of each pair are close to give the sign of affection and sympathy to begin mating <sup>24</sup>.

The ancient man was very skillful in drawing this impressive and interesting picture of the Houbara bird's courtship strategies for mating; each pair of birds displayed normal mating behavior by raising their heads

<sup>19</sup>ZARINS & WALLEN, «The Comprehensive Archaeological Survey Program», 30-31, PLS. 13-15.

<sup>20</sup>GORIUP, P., «The World Status of the Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis Undulata*», *Birds Conservation International* 7, No. 4, 1997, 373-397; MARAQTEN, *Hunting in Pre-Islamic Arabia in Light of the Epigraphic Evidence*, 208-234.

<sup>21</sup>GUAGNIN & OTHERS, *Hunters and Herders*, 3-16.

<sup>22</sup>MARAQTEN, «Hunting in Pre-Islamic Arabia in Light of the Epigraphic Evidence», 208-234; KHAN, *Rock Art of Saudi Arabia*, 447-475; AKSOY, C., « A Combat Archaeology Viewpoint on Weapon Representations in Northwest Arabian Rock Art », *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry*, 17, N°4, 2017, 1-17.

<sup>23</sup>WOODARD, *The Ancient Languages of Syria Palestine and Arabia*, 147-178.

<sup>24</sup>JOHNSON, K., & BURLEY, N., « Mating Tactics and Mating System of Birds », *Ornithological Monographs* 49, 1997, 21-60.

upwards in a series of mutual head tossing to freely exhibit their desire of copulation<sup>25</sup>. Once more, one must admire the artist's cleverness and craftsmanship in engraving the male Houbara birds larger than the females on this unique rock art panel<sup>26</sup>.

Eight antelopes are depicted in the second row, appearing with tall horns, and standing horizontally in one line. It is worth mentioning that the artist once again carved the four female figures smaller than the male ones, to show the strategies of the mating system for the Arabian antelopes<sup>27</sup>.

In the third register, there are eight Houbara bustards. Five of them have been chiseled in a queue facing right, except for one pair heading to the right side. This couple has been incised facing each other to show the courtship posture which is one of the mating tactics among birds<sup>28</sup>. There is only one Houbara bird depicted at the beginning of the row to the right side. Three Houbara bustards seem to be slightly erased.

The fourth and last register depicts several antelopes standing in one row, heading to the left side. Parts from the right side of this row are regrettably erased, but it was supposed to have at least two antelopes for a total of eight<sup>29</sup>. This number is based on the erased space at the right middle part of the stone. It is notable to mention that there is one antelope depicted larger than the others. This likely indicates that it is the only dominant male among the herd<sup>30</sup>. To the bottom left of the panel at the left corner, there are two figures. The first figure represented a hunting man chiseled in the common boxy stick style chasing one of the Houbara birds.

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<sup>25</sup> JOHNSON & BURLEY, *Mating Tactics and Mating System of Birds*, 21-60.

<sup>26</sup> KINGWOOD, S. & DAVID, P., *Antelopes: Global Survey and Regional Action Plans, part 4: North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia*, IUCN, Cambridge, 2001, 54-62.

<sup>27</sup> OSTROWSKI, S., WILLIAMS, J., MESOCHINA, P. & SAUERWEIN, H., «Physiological Acclimation of a Desert Antelope, Arabian Oryx (*Oryx leucoryx*), to Long-term Food and Water Restriction», *Journal of Comparative Physiology B* 176, 2006, 191-201. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00360-005-0040-0>.

<sup>28</sup> JOHNSON & BURLEY, *Mating Tactics and Mating System of Birds*, 21-60.

<sup>29</sup> KINGWOOD & DAVID, *Antelopes*, 57-60; DUNHAM, K., « A Population Growth of Mountain Gazelles *Gazella* Reintroduced to Central Arabi», *Biological Conservation* 81, 1997, 205-214.

<sup>30</sup>For more elaboration about the life of antelopes' review; BERE, R., *Antelopes: The World of Animals*, New York, 1970, 38-51.

As for the second figure to the left side, it shows a Christian cross, which has been gently incised in a square shape, with eight pointed, equal arms. This distinctive cross most probably has been added to the panel by Christian merchants or travelers who were accompanying Arabian trade caravans<sup>31</sup>. It might have been related to the famous Incan cross of the ancient Andean Empire, where it was known among the aboriginals as a Chakana<sup>32</sup>.

### 1.8. (PL. 8A: B) (FIG. 10):

This panel includes three engravings, two of which are involving Arabian symbols or *Wusum* which were commonly used among ancient Arabian tribes. The third inscription shows an outline of a slightly incised engraving of an Arabian dromedary with a howdah on its back.

The archeological records in Arabia show that the depiction of dromedary in ancient times was only focused on their military and hunting uses<sup>33</sup>. Most rock art data obtained in Arabia does not support the appearance of a howdah, as a gradual development of the Arabian riding saddle, before the second half of the 6th century AD, or at least from the beginning of Islamic era onward<sup>34</sup>.

The first Wasm “y” is slightly incised on a black rock surface to the left side of the valley. This Wasm is the last letter in the ancient Arabian alphabet of Musnad. The second Wasm “□” represents the fifth letter of the Musnad alphabet, but it is eventually incised in different dimensions<sup>35</sup>. It is worth mentioning that all these Arabian Wusum at Taif or elsewhere in Arabia are nothing but the first letters of the ancient Arabian tribe names

<sup>31</sup> IRFAN, S., « Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times», *Journal of Sematic Studies* 26, 1981, 150-153; CARTER, A., « Christianity in the Gulf during the First Centuries of Islam», *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 19, 2008, 71-108.

<sup>32</sup> JUNIOR, V., VALLE, R., SULLASI, H. & OLIVERIA, D., «Direct Dating of Petroglyphs in Rio Grande Do Norte, Brazil», *Rock Art Research* 35, N°1, 2018, 85-97.

<sup>33</sup> BRAUER, R., «The Camel and its Role Shaping Mideastern Nomad Societies», *Comparative Civilizations Review* 28, 1993, 106–151.

<sup>34</sup> For more details review; FOSSATI, A., « Current Finds in the Rock Art Research of Oman: A Review and Update», *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry* 17, N° 4, 2017, 75-88; BRAUER, *The Camel and its Role Shaping Mideastern Nomad Societies*, 106-151; KHAN, *Wusum-The Tribal Symbols of Saudi Arabia*, 57-59.

<sup>35</sup> WOODARD, *The Ancient Languages of Syria Palestine and Arabia*, 147-178.

as their local and well-known signs among Arabian tribals, as written in the Musnad script.

### **1.9.(PL. 9A, B) (FIGS. 11:12):**

Three figures of animals have been chiseled into the rock face, showing the commonly depicted ibexes in Arabia as the main component in most hunting scenes (Fig.11). The scene has been lightly chiseled in base relief in two different rock sites in the valley. The first one is found on the surface of the valley over the right of the hill. The figure is incised in the well-known stick style, and depicts two standing ibexes, with tall crescent-shaped horns, which distinguish this kind of ibex.

The third figure is eleven meters high, on the right sandstone hill of the valley (figure 12). The figure shows a simple shape of an ibex standing upside down, with tall crescent-shaped horns like the above mentioned two ibex figures.

It should be noted that, there is no convenient place to stand at the steep hill surface to engrave such ibex figure. This view is based on the nature of the site in terms of rock topography, one could suggest that the ancient artist might have leaned on his belly at the top of the stone to carve this figure. What strongly supports this hypothesis is that the top of the hill is situated closely to the chosen rock. However, this act was very difficult and risky work. Therefore, the ancient artist was possibly unable to complete the panel according to this view.

### **1.10.(PL. 10):**

This Islamic panel is located about one and a half miles from the southern entrance of the valley, it is found on the left side of the valley. The inscription consists of four short lines inscribed on a simple and rocky eroded surface. The text is simply written in unornamented Kufic script, as follows:

— رحمت الله  
— على محمد بن  
— سليمان وكتب؟

– سليمان.

- The mercy of Allah
- Upon Mohammed son of
- Sulayman and wrote?
- Sulayman.

Although this text is quite clear to read, the end of the third line is obscure, and the handwriting is quite rough. There are three dots seem to be written in error over the first letter *m* of the word *Mohāmed* in the second line<sup>36</sup>. The personal name *Sulāymn* is written without the middle *ālif*, and the top end of the letter *lam* seems to take the shape of a crescent. Although, the word *Sulāymn* can be easily read in the third line; the rest word is illegible. But it is possible to complete the text depending on the conjunctive *wāw* and the letter " *b* " to suggest the word *Kātāb* "the one who wrote it down", a commonly used word accompanied in such early Islamic graffiti with the name of the writer<sup>37</sup>.

## 2. Discussion:

It appears that the natural vegetation of Qarn valley was spread among its passages, dells, and drains. Thus, the natural plants turned the valley into an attractive location for wild ibex, oryx, ostrich and Houbara bustard. Accordingly, these animals and birds were familiar to humans in desert environments as a part of their daily life for food. The ibex and oryx figures are found in different rock art sites in Saudi Arabia. They were the common artistic elements in the Neolithic site of Jubbah and Hail in the north and Najran in the south<sup>38</sup>.

Generally, the depiction of Houbara bustard is rare in rock art sites in Saudi Arabia, the Qarn valley contains amazing rock arts for these birds which were pecked in vertical positions on the valley hills(panels:2,6,7).

<sup>36</sup> Miles, G.: «Early Islamic Inscriptions Near Ṭā'if in the Ḥijāz», *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 7, N°4, 1948, 236-242.

<sup>37</sup> AL SALAMEEN, Z., «Jabal Haroun during the Islamic Period: A Study in the Light of Newly Discovered Inscriptions», *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 18, 2007, 258-264; SHARAFADDIN, A., «Some Islamic Inscriptions Discovered on the Darb Zubayda», *Atlat: Journal of Saudi Arabia Archaeology* 1, 1977, 69-70, PLS. 49-50, PLS. 49-50; Gabban, A., «The Inscription of Zuhayr, the Oldest Islamic Inscription (24 AH/AD 644-645), The Rise of the Arabic Script and the Nature of the Early Islamic State », *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 19, 2008, 210-237.

<sup>38</sup> Review; KHAN, *Rock Art of Saudi Arabia*, 447-475; GUAGNIN & OTHERS, *Hunters and Herders*, 3-16.

The Houbara bustard figures have been replaced by ostriches in the rock art sites of Hail and Najran regions <sup>39</sup>. The Thamudic inscriptions which were found on panel number two of this study may suggest a tentative date between the early sixth century BC and the seventh century AD <sup>40</sup>.

### Conclusion:

Studying these petroglyphs, several ideas could be noted as follows:

- The Qarn Valley was one of the main trade routes in the Hijaz region ever since 1500 B.C. The exceptional concentration of these rock carvings, with common depictions of wild animals such as ibexes and birds, as well as humans with bows and arrows, could suggest that the ancient local people and trade caravans used the valley as a main road from ancient south Arabian kingdoms to the region of Mecca.
- It is particularly interesting from an archaeological and historical as well as a theology view that this valley was once a destination for people in ancient times, where they left their living traditions, customs, and beliefs on its hills. The ancient lives of humans and animals in this valley totally depended on the rainwater supply. There is rainwater in the valley nowadays, but it rains less than before.
- The Arabian *Wusum* which have been chiseled on the rocks belong to some Arabian tribes. This suggestion is based on ancient Arabian life traditions before Islam <sup>41</sup>.
- These petroglyphs clearly reveal the artistic activity related to some religious beliefs of the ancient Arabians, and his/her perceptions and thoughts. The depiction of humans with animals and birds in the first nine panels give important scientific information about ornithology and zoology in this region of the world. Twenty-five local desert animals and twenty-two birds have been documented on these petroglyphs, in addition to some Arabian *Wusum*.

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<sup>39</sup> For more details review; KHAN, *Rock Art of Saudi Arabia*, 447-475.

<sup>40</sup> ALANSARY, A., GHAZEL, A., & KING, G., *Alula wa Madain Salih Hadharat Madaintaeen*, Riyadh: King Saud University, 2005, 26,93.



















<sup>41</sup> For more details about ancient Arab life review; Hitti, P., *History of the Arabs*, 10<sup>TH</sup> ed., Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2002.

(Table 1) The number and kind of animals and birds that depicted in Qarn valley rock art.

Panel	Animals	Number	Birds	Number
2	Horse	2	houbara	1
4	Oryx	1	ostrich	2
	Feline	1	-	-
	onager	1	-	-
5	Fox	1	-	-
6	-	-	houbara	3
7	antelope	15	houbara	16
8	dromedary	1	-	-
9	Ibex	3	-	-

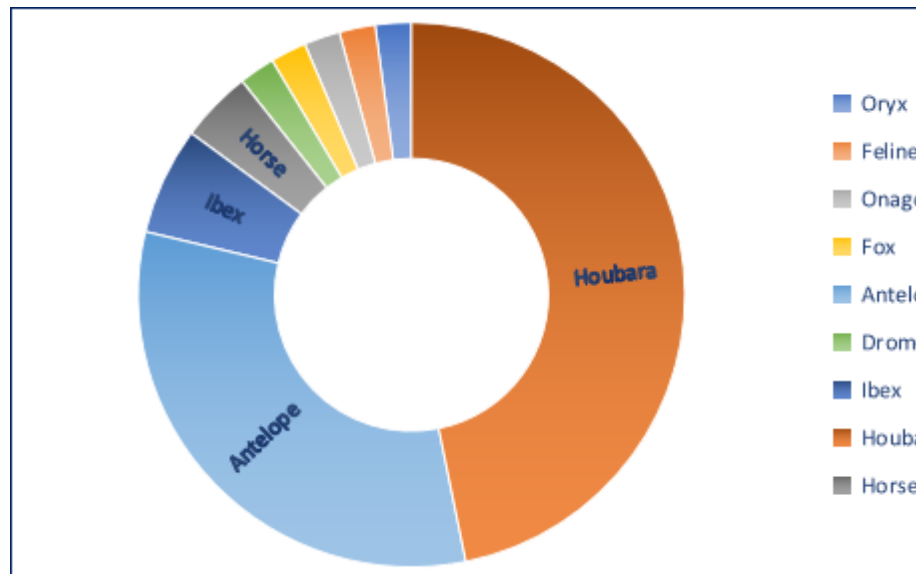
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(Table 2) Rock art epigraphy of human figures, animals, birds and Wusum that inscribed in the valley hills.

kind	Rock art figures									Total number s
Human Figures										٣
Animal s										٢٥
Birds										٢٢
Wusu m										١٢

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(FIG.13) Graph showing the numbers of documented animals and birds in valley Qarn at Taif.



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- The nine panels of rock art in Qarn Valley cannot be easily dated, Moreover, they differ in some artistic details from other sites in Saudi Arabia. Regarding to Guagnin's criteria for dating the rock art sites of Jubbah, which is based on the radiocarbon method, the possible date of the rock art in question could be generally established from as early as the Neolithic to the end of the Bronze Age <sup>42</sup>.
- The depiction of a Christian cross in the seventh panel may indicate the presence of some Christian merchants or Arabian followers who used to pass through the valley joining the commercial caravans. Those followers depicted their religious symbols on local rocks. Accordingly, one could speculate that some southern Christian subjects from the Christian kingdom of Najran or elsewhere used this valley for their commercial purposes <sup>43</sup>. However, there is generally at present no archaeological evidence except this cross to support this hypothesis at the valley or in other valleys at Taif so far.
- The existence of Islamic inscriptions at the left base of the valley strongly shows a historical continuity of Arabian human activity in the region. The region was used by Muslim caravans during the Islamic era. This based on paleographic grounds, including the characteristics of the writing and the

<sup>42</sup> GUAGNIN & OTHERS, Hunters and Herders, 3-16.

<sup>43</sup> About the position of Christianity in Arabia in the first century of Hijra, review; CARTER, *Christianity in the Gulf during the first centuries of Islam*, 71-108.

comparative study of the letter forms such as the *yeh* letter in the preposition *ālā*, or “upon,” and the *dāl* letter, in the second line. This Islamic inscription can be dated to the first quarter of the second century AH/the second quarter of the eighth century AD <sup>44</sup>. Furthermore, it is possible to suggest that Sulāymn died during a trade journey used the valley. His father *Sulāymn* may have written this text after buried his son in the vicinity of the place where the inscription was found. This view is strongly supported by the fact that, there are many ancient graves around the Qarn Valley at Taif.

Finally, this scientific work about the rock art site of Qarn valley in Taif City in Saudi Arabia may encourage archeologists to plan for future comprehensive studies on this virgin region, to document all the rock art sites in Taif governorate and beyond.

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<sup>44</sup> MILES, *Early Islamic Inscriptions Near Ṭā'if in the Hijāz*, 239-240.

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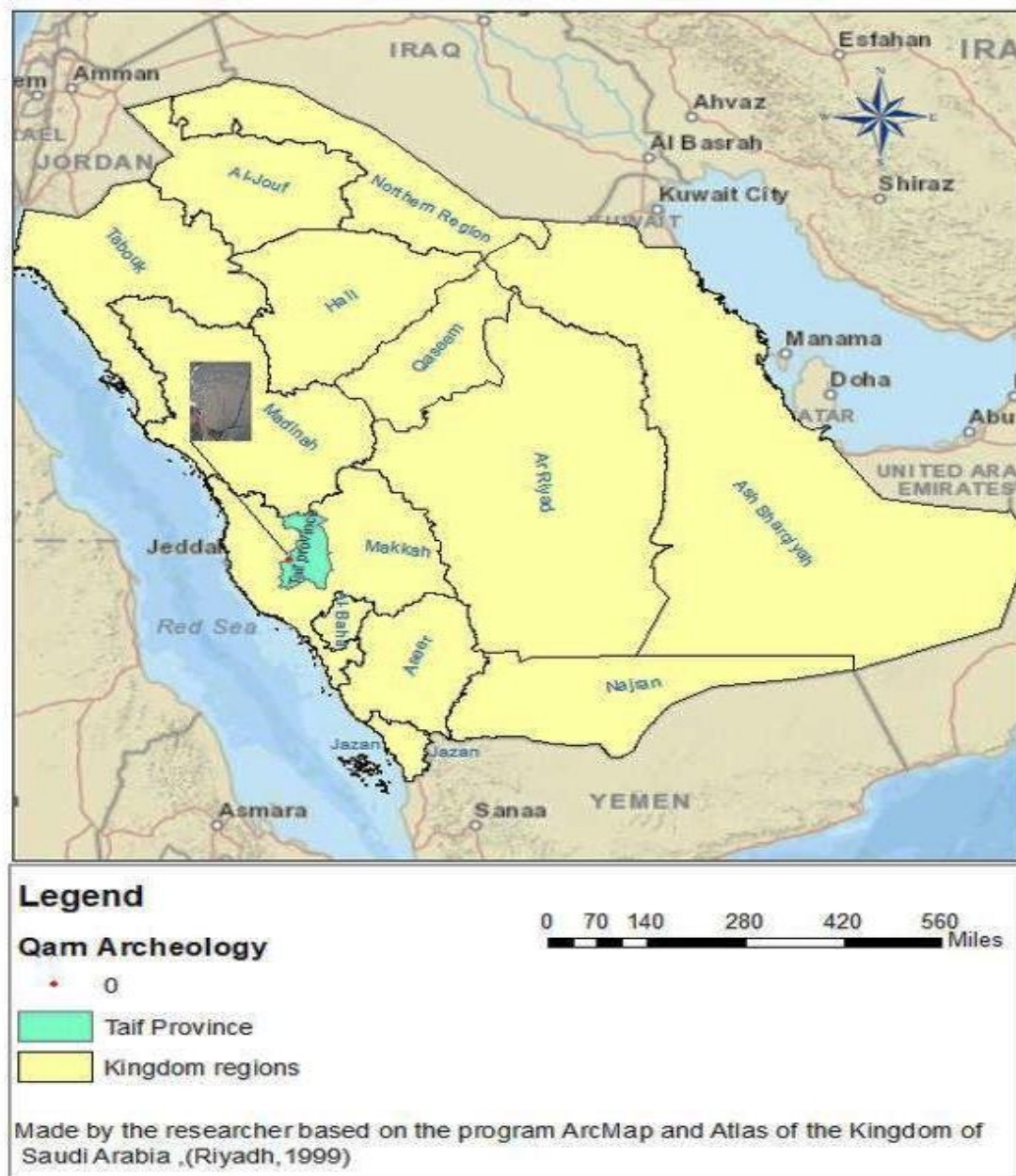
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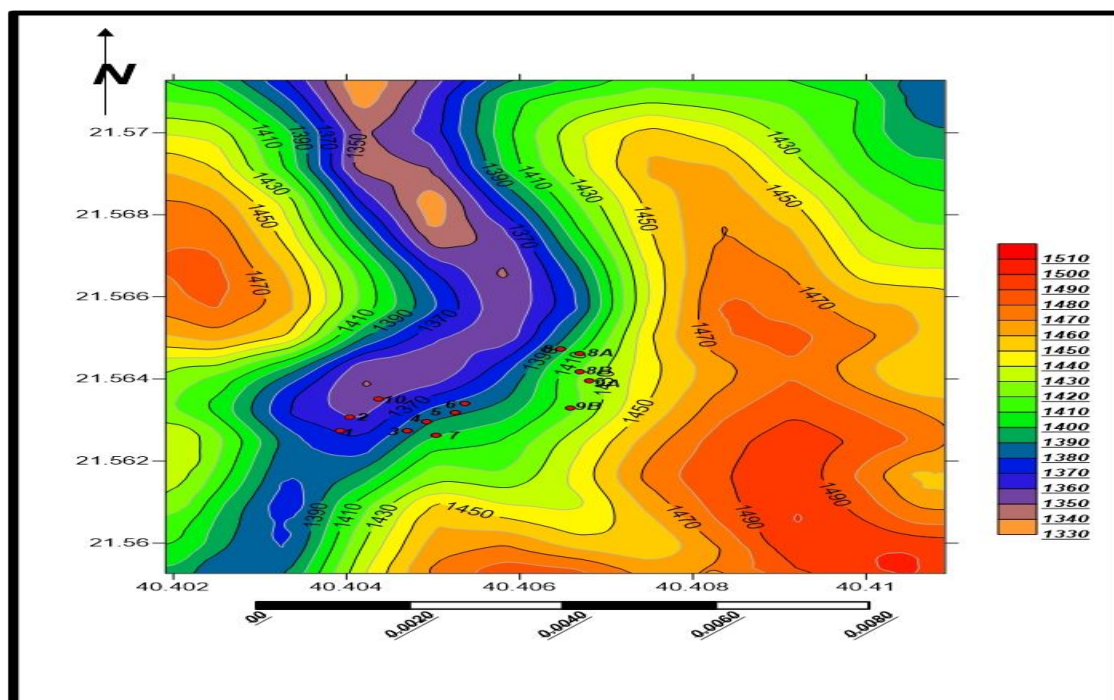
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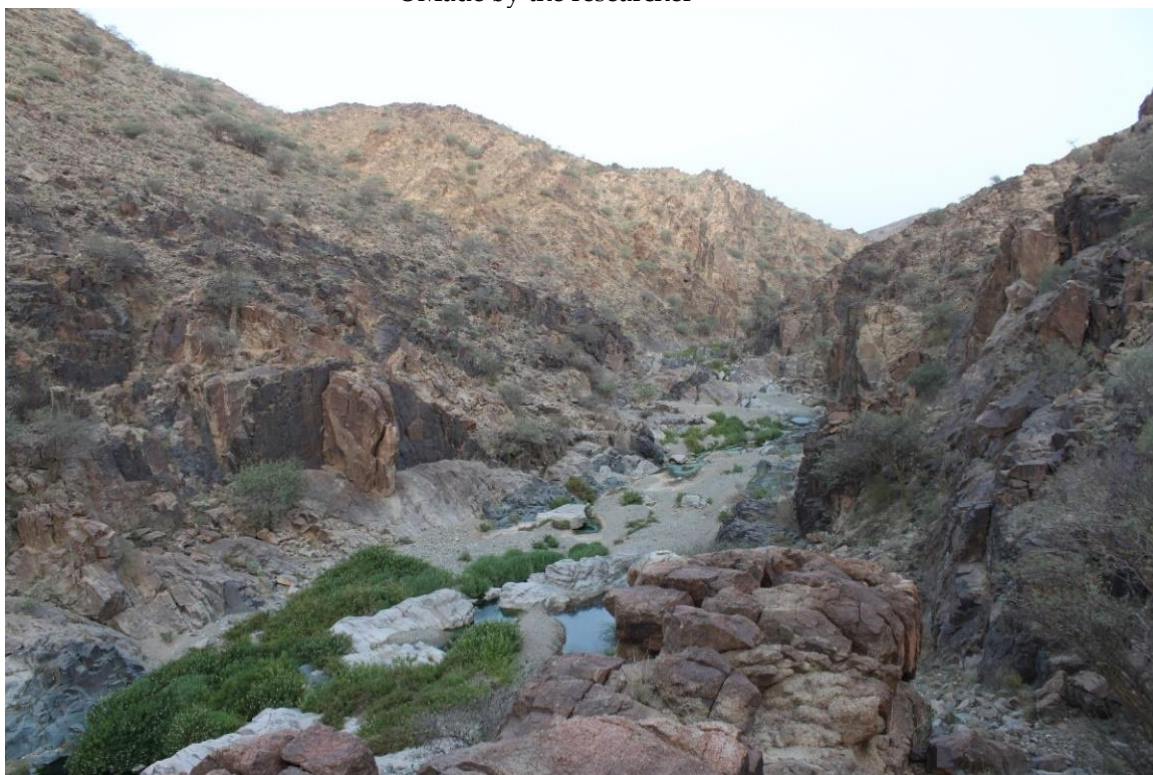


(FIG. 1) The map of Saudi Arabia showing the location of Wadi Qarn.

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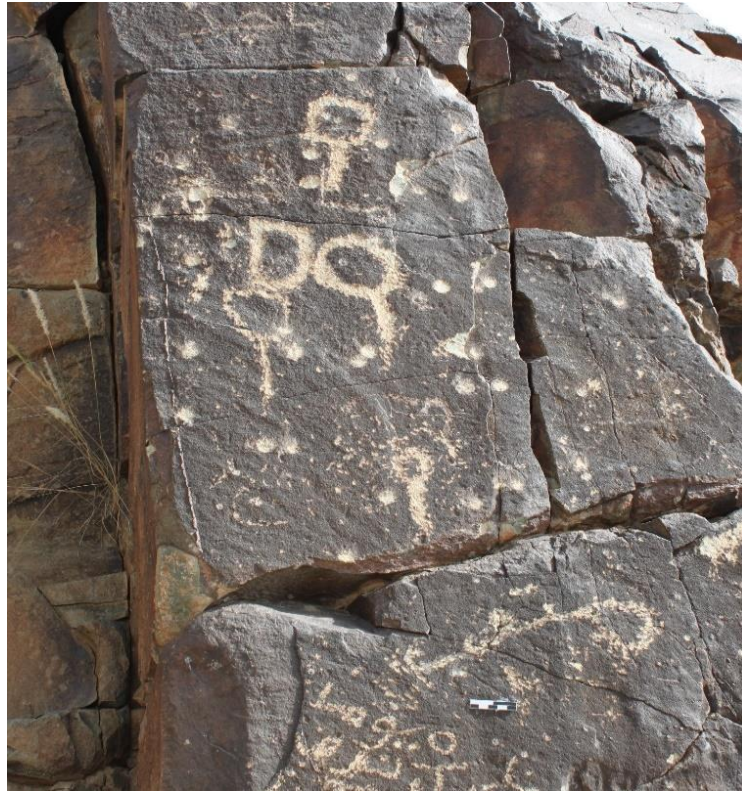


(FIG. 2) Topographical location of the rock-art panels along the extent location of the valley  
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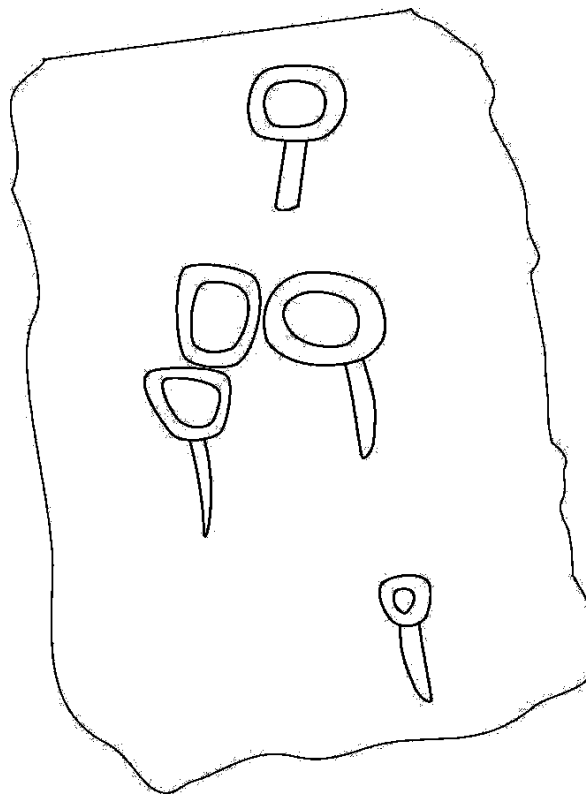
(FIG.3) A view of the valley landscape showing the rainfalls.

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(PL. 1) Arabian tribal symbols

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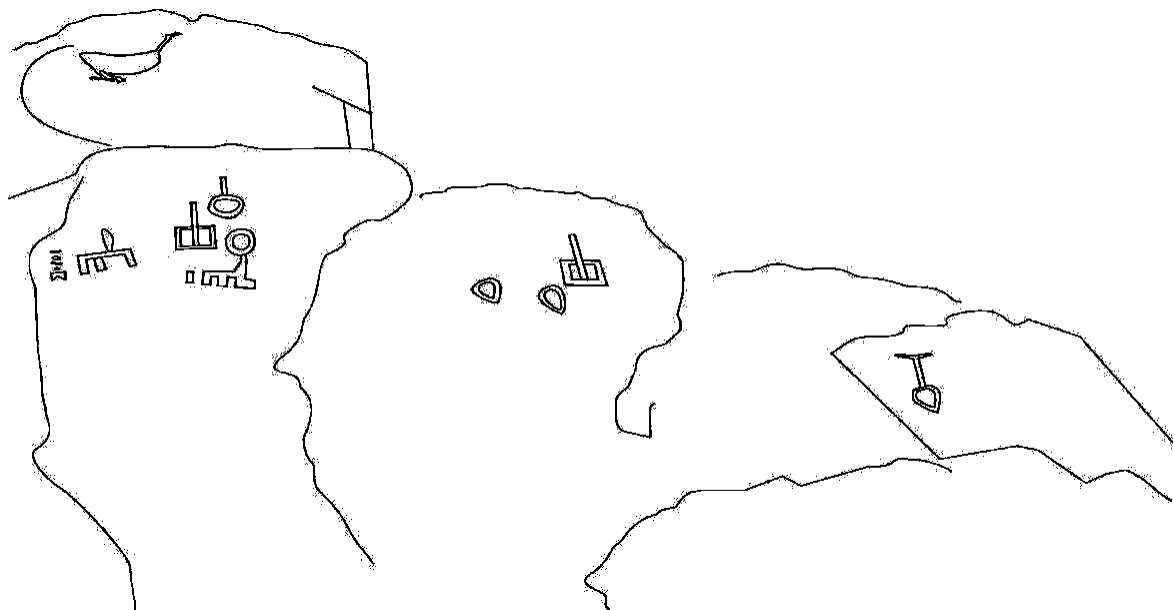
(FIG. 4) Details of Arabian symbols

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(PL. 2) The figure of Houbara bird and Thamudic inscriptions

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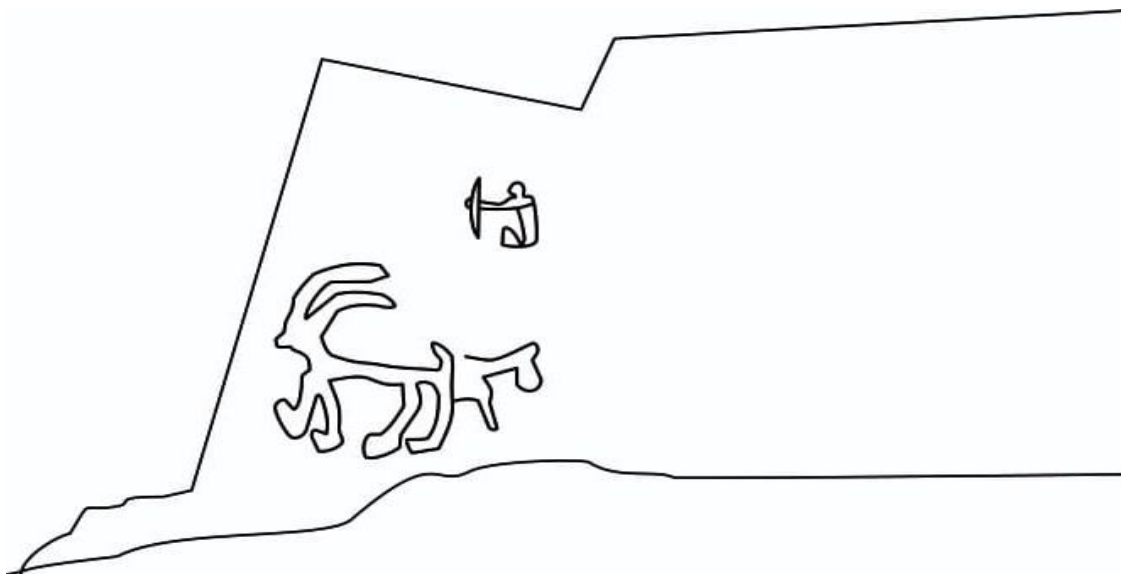


(FIG. 5) Facsimile of the figures and the inscriptions incised in the panel.

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(PL. 3) The scene of Arabian oryx in a labour posture  
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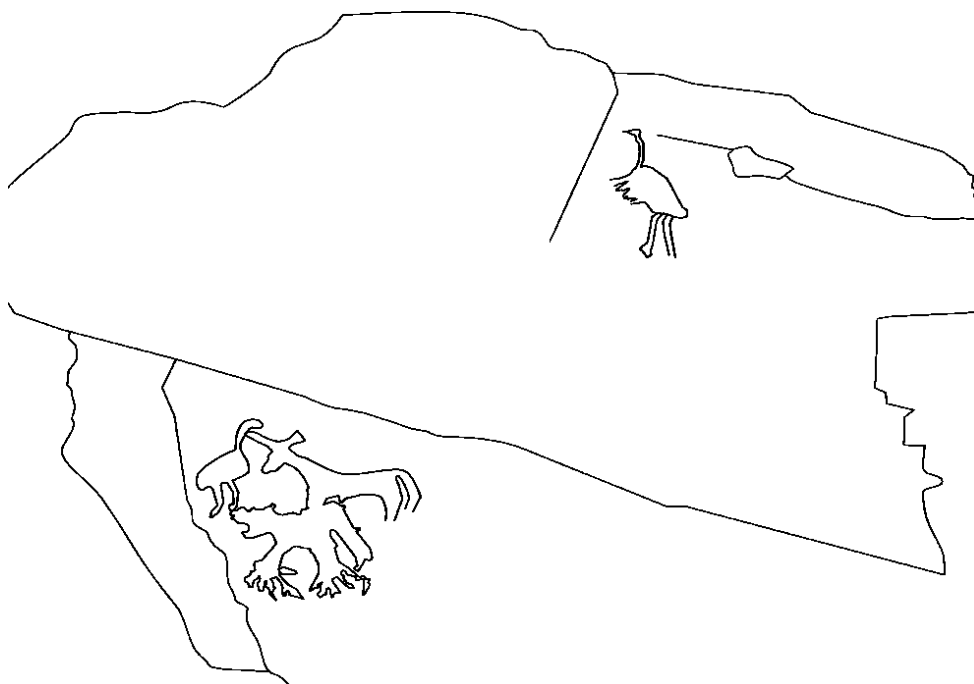


(FIG6) Details of the exceptional birth scene of Arabian oryx  
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(PL. 4) The Four scenes of a feline and an onager with two ostriches.

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(FIG. 7) Facsimile of animals and birds' figures incised in the panel.

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(PL. 5) The scene of the Arabian red fox  
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(PL. 6) The common hunting scene of Houbara birds.  
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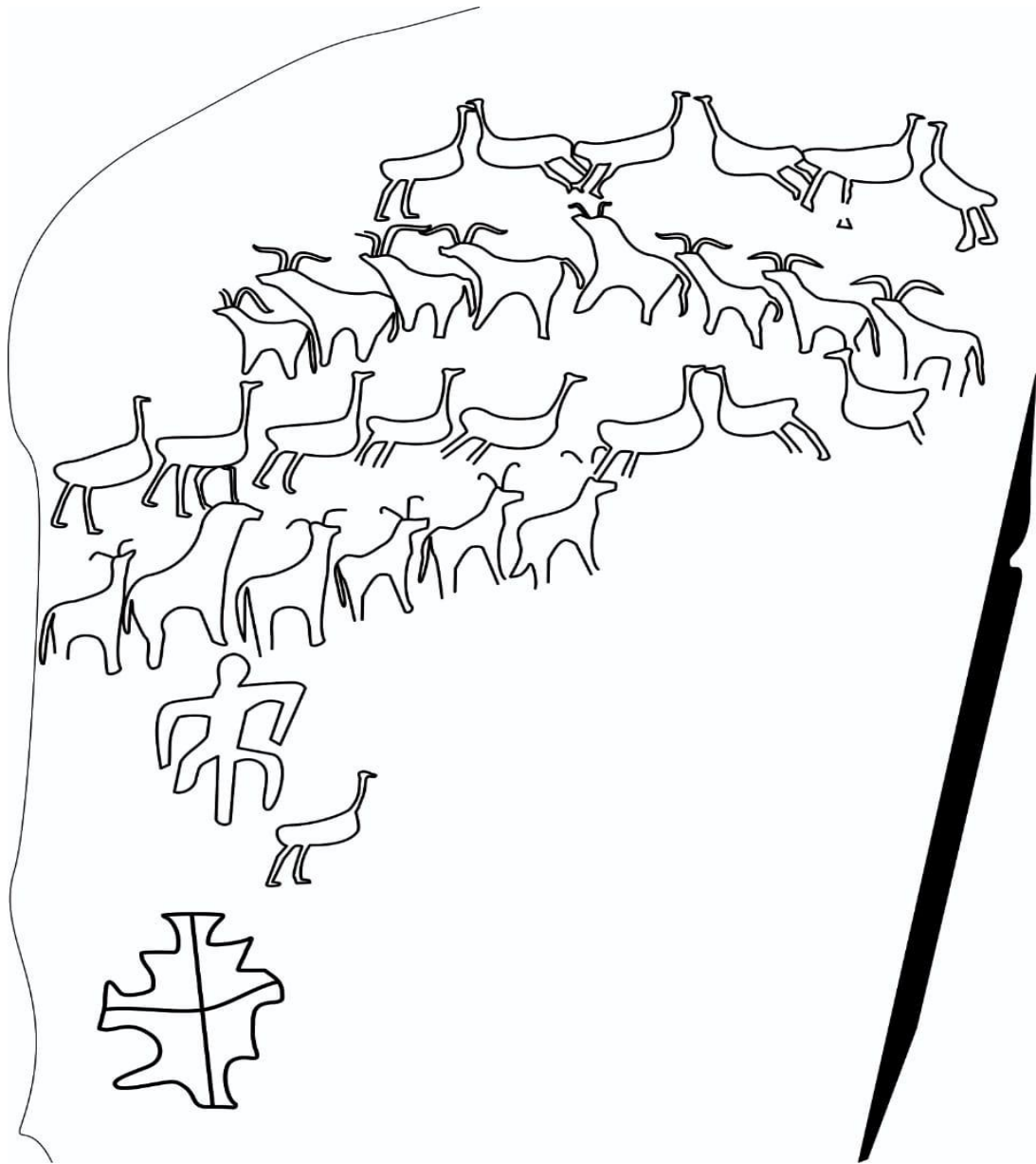


(FIG. 8) Details of the well-known bird hunting scene in Arabia  
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(PL. 7) The four registers of Houbara birds and Arabian antelopes with the common hunting scene in addition to the Christian cross.

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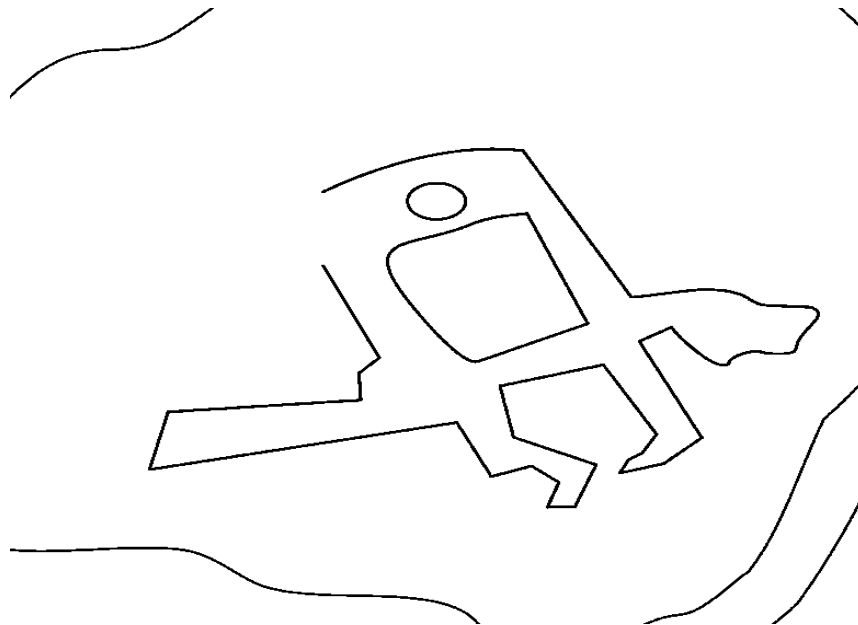


(FIG. 9) Details of Houbara birds, the Arabian antelopes with different positions in four rows with bird hunting scene.

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(PL .8A) The scene of Arabian dromedary with a howdah  
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(FIG.10) Facsimile of the Arabian dromedary with a howdah on its back.  
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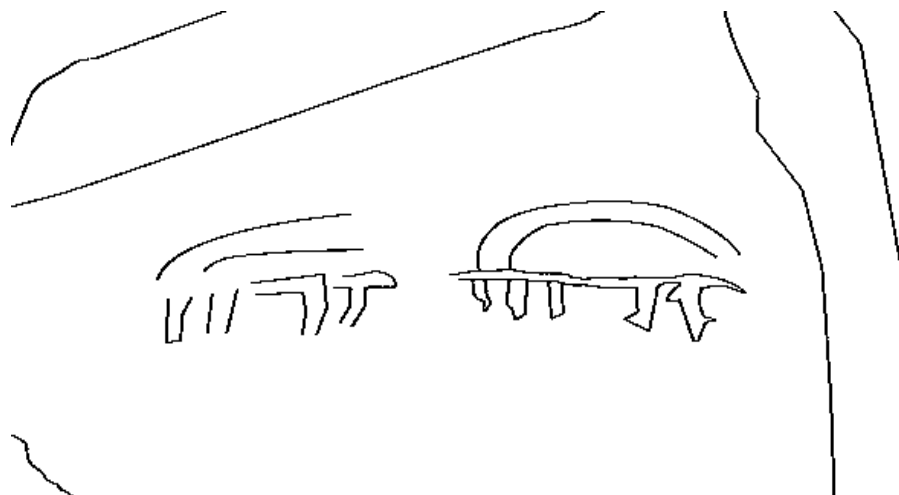
(PL. 8 B): The two common Arabian Wusum

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(PL. 9A): The scene of two Arabian ibexes with crescent-shaped horns

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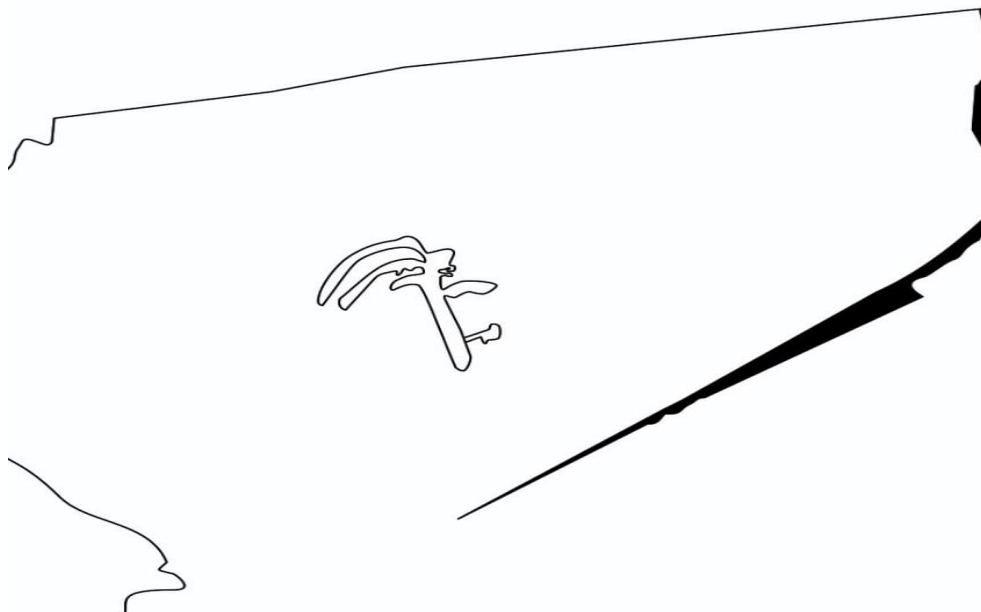


(FIG. 11)Details of the Arabian ibexes with tall horns

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(PL. 9B) The figure of an Arabian ibex standing upside down.  
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(FIG. 12) Facsimile of the Arabian ibex with two crescent-shaped horns  
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