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Rock Arts of Arfaa Precinct in Taif City, Saudi Arabia

رسوم صخرية في منطقة العرفاء بمدينة الطائف في المملكة العربية السعودية

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المخلص:

يتناول هذا البحث بالدراسة والتحليل أحد عشر نقشاً صخرياً توجد في محيط منطقة قلعة جبل عرفاء الأثرية في شمال مدينة الطائف، وبالرغم من أن هذه النقوش الصخرية في محيط منطقة قلعة العرفاء التاريخية معروفة جيداً لدى السكان المحليين في المنطقة منذ سنوات عديدة، وقيام بعض الباحثين بدراسة العديد من تلك الرسوم الصخرية، إلا أنه لم يتم توثيقها علمياً بشكل كامل ونهائي حتى الآن. وفي محاولة لإلقاء الضوء على التاريخ الأثري لمحافظة الطائف من خلال تلك الرسوم الصخرية، يقدم هذا البحث أدلة علمية تؤشر إلى أن الطائف كانت محطة للاستقرار والاستيطان الحضاري تارة، والترحال تارة أخرى، بوصفها كانت ممراً تجارياً وطريقاً مهماً يربط بين الجنوب والشمال وذلك منذ الألف الثاني قبل الميلاد على أقل تقدير. **الكلمات الدالة:** رسوم صخرية؛ نقوش صخرية؛ قلعة عرفاء؛ جبل العرفاء؛ الفن صخري بالطائف؛ غرب المملكة العربية السعودية.

Abstract:

This study identified eleven rock arts discovered at the sandstone hills of the archaeological site of Arfaa Citadel to the north of Taif city. Although these rock arts have been well-known to the locals in the area for many years ago, and the scientific activities of some researchers, it has not been fully scientifically documented yet. Trying to shed more light on the archaeological history of Taif province, this paper gives the full scientific publication for these rock arts. This research reveals much scientific evidence confirming that Taif was a station for stability and cultural settlement in ancient times, and trad hub for travelers in other times, as a commercial route linking the south and the north since at least the second millennium BC.

Keywords: Petroglyphs; Arfaa Citadel; Taif rock art; west Saudi Arabia; Arfaa Geba; the western of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Introduction:

Over the last ten years, our scientific knowledge about the rock art sites in Taif governorate has significantly increased through several research about the rock art in different sites at this charming city¹.

The site of Arfaa is one of the most important archeological sites at the northeast of Taif city. Precisely about 35 km north-east of Taif town. The site is situated on the vicinity of a region on which Wadi Wej meets the valley Qurayshiyat which runs from north-east to south-east directions leads to Riyadh Road (FIG. 1)².

The mountain of Arfaa in Taif is one of the most famous archaeological sites in Saudi Arabia, as it is part of the famous ancient market «Souk Okaz», It contains dozens of rock inscriptions have been scattered around the historical castle of Arfaa.

The Archeological site of Arfaa represents an important stage in the development rock art history at the western region of Saudi Arabia, and it was associated with the ancient famous literary forum Souk Okaz on the eastern side, and the archeological site of Wadi Lawan area on the western³.

As it is usual on other rock art sites in Saudi Arabia, Arfaa rock art site contains some Thamudic scripts executed on the smooth surface of the stone, Some of these writings were incised without details together with numerous rock human figures animals and birds, all of which indicate that

¹For more elaboration about rock art studies at Taif review: ZARINS J., & WALLEN, N., «The Comprehensive Archaeological Survey Program», *Journal of Saudi Arabia Archaeology, Atlal* IV, 1980,30-31 ;EL-TONSSY, M., «Archeological Study of Unpublished Rock Art Inscriptions at Taif», *JGUAA* 22, 2019, 21-40, [HTTPS://DX.DOI.ORG/10.21608/CGUAA.2020.22917.1011](https://dx.doi.org/10.21608/cguaa.2020.22917.1011) ; EL-TONSSY, M., «Archeological Discoveries at wadi Qarn, Taif City, Saudi Arabia», *JGUAA* 26, 2023, 29-59,<https://dx.doi.org/10.21608/cguaa.2023.185777.1155>; DABIAS, S., AL-UTABI, A .SENDI & OTHERS, «Report on the Archeological Survey of (Ancient Market) Suq - Ukaz», *Atlal: Journal of Saudi Arabia Archaeology*, №. 30, 2020, 109-120.

² EL-TONSSY, «Archeological Study» ,21-40.

³ The archeological site of Arfaa attracted the interest of researchers to study some of these inscriptions in scientific dissertations; review: PARR, P., HOLDING, J., & DAYTON, J., « Preliminary Survey in N.W. Arabia, 1968», *Bulletin of Institute of Archeology*, 1970, 193-242; ALQARNI, A., «Al-Fnun Al- Sakkrya Fi Maukea Al-Arfa Be Mohafazat Al Taif fi Al Mamlaka Al-Arabia Al-Saudia», *Master Thesis*, King Saud University,2020,72-171, in addition to that, there are some preliminary reports about the site see : DABIAS, «Report on the Archeological Survey of Ancient Market», 109-120; 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, №. 21, 1977, 40.

the site of Arfaa was a major station for permanent or seasonal human settlement in the Hijaz region before Islamic period⁴.

1.The Methodology of Arfaa Rock Arts (FIGS.1:2):

The majority of famous rock art sites at Taif, including the « Wadi Qarn» and Arfaa are found in the mountain peaks and around different plateaus to the northeast and northwest of town boundaries⁵.

Among the most famous figures of animals incised in various rock art sites in Taif are Arabian horses, houbara birds, ostriches, Arabian deer, Arabian antelopes, hunting dogs, and the Arabian dromedary⁶.

These eleven panels discussed in this paper were engraved on the smooth surface of sandstone blocks found around the main southern entrance of the castle precinct⁷.

Studying these panels could help scholars in creating a historical map for the religious connotations of ancient Arab civilization and also could increase knowledge of the symbolic significance and religious beliefs contained in the rock arts sites of Saudi Arabia ⁸.

Despite of the multiplicity and diversity of rock art sites of Taif which have been documented like those of Al-Shafa, Al-Hada, Wadi Qarn, Wadi Wuj, Wadi Quraysh, and Wadi Lawan, they are all similar in contents which clearly appears in the daily behavior and mental thinking of the ancient man lived in Arabian before Islamic era⁹.

In most ancient civilizations of the world, rock art sites assumed methods and forms that differed from one place to another. This often depends on several affecting factors, the most important being religion,

⁴This gives me the opportunity to mention that there are more than thirty-five rock art panels discovered in this site and its extensions to the north direction.

⁵Some rock art sites were discovered in the southern sites of Taif such as Shafa Hada, but all of which are still few compared to the northern sites, review, EL-TONSSY, « Archeological Study»,21-40.

⁶EL-TONSSY, «Archeological Discoveries at wadi Qarn», 29-59.

⁷ Review: ALQARNI, «Al-Fnun Al- Sakkrya», 85-92.

⁸The petroglyphs of Taif region are little known, but for the last ten years our knowledge about the rock art theme of Taif have been increased. I have recorded various sites at Taif like the Valley of Qarn, El-Hada, Okaz and Arfaa. Hopefully, trying to propose a preliminary chronology for the conception of Taif rock art corpus. I am extremely grateful to professor Latifah Al-Adwani head of Taif History Center for giving the opportunity and help to study these archeological sites in Taif region.

⁹ For more details review: HITTI, P., *History of the Arabs*, 10TH ed., Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2002,14-30; MARAQTEN, «Hunting in Pre-Islamic Arabia in light of the Epigraphic Evidence», 208-234; EL-TONSSY, «Archeological Discoveries at wadi Qarn » ,29-59; EL-TONSSY, «Archeological Study»,21-40; MOOSAVI, S., GROSE, M. & LAKE, P., «Wadis as Dryland River Parks: Challenges and Opportunities in Designing with Hydro-Ecological Dynamics», *Landscape Research* 45, No. 2, 2020, 193-213, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01426397.2019.1592132> .

social ethics, economic, politic state, and finally the strong effect of environment¹⁰.

Consequently, the ancient man strongly tried to maintain the common beliefs and social traditions inherited from his predecessors, therefore the rock art subjects in Arabia recorded custom, tradition and religious beliefs of ancient people lived in Arabian Peninsula from thousands of years ago¹¹. Theoretically, it is extremely correct from my view what Khan has suggested about the Sympathetic Magic of rock art hunting scenes purposes in Arabia¹².

1.1. (PL. 1) (FIG. 5):

This panel carved on the smooth surface of a limestone block located on the southern side of the citadel, It contains the depictions of five well incised figures of camels, ridden by five men who appear sitting on a simple saddle and catching a halter on their hands¹³, Each camel is showing with rising tail which might suggest that camels were in the process of trotting or preparing for it, but the posture of their legs is drawn in a static position¹⁴, The figures of camel are more popular than any other animals in Arabian Peninsula¹⁵. It seems that this scene is the only remaining figure of Arabian camel caravan heading to unknown place.

1.2. (PL. 2) (FIG. 6):

The second panel is located on the left side of the mountain. Unfortunately, the upper part of the rock art is badly damaged, The preserved section shows a common hunting scene in Arabia, At the left lowermost of the panel, there is a fully pecked figures of two ostriches standing facing each other, The figures of birds are executed perfectly with a big belly and long neck.¹⁶.

¹⁰MACDONALD, M., «Camel Hunting or Camel Raiding», *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 1, 1990, 24-28 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0471.1990.tb00005.x>; BEDNARIK, R., KHAN, M., « The Saudi Arabian Rock Art Mission of November 2001», *Atlat* 17, 2002, 75–99.

¹¹DHAIFALLAH, A., «Almulihiah: A Rock Art Site in the Hail Region », *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 23, №.1, Saudi Arabia, 2012, 92–98. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0471.2011.00350.x>

¹² KHAN, M., «Tracing the Path of the Lost Civilization of Arabia» *Atlat: Journal of Saudi Arabia Archaeology*, №. 30, 2020, 133-144.

¹³BRAUER, R., « The Camel and its Role Shaping Mideastern Nomad Societies», *Comparative Civilizations Review* 28, 1993, 106–151.

¹⁴MACDONALD, «Camel Hunting», 24-28; MACDONALD, M.,& KING, H., «Wheels in a Land of Camels: another looks to Chariot in Arabia», *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 20, 2009,156-184, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0471.2009.00312.x> .

¹⁵BRAUER, R., « The Camel and its Role», 106–151.

¹⁶ For more details about birds in Taif petroglyphs review, EL-TONSSY, «Archeological Discoveries at wadi Qarn»,29-59; JENNINGS, M., «The Birds of Saudi Arabia: Past, Present and Future», *Proceedings of the 1st*

At the top, there are two short texts. The first one, above the upper bird is written vertically in a short and incomplete line as follows: j p — x r u /// L pn hkr ha ///// "To the son of Kher (this camel) " ¹⁷, While the remaining part of the second text to the upper right side of the slab contains only two Musnad letters as follows: p ث " p Th " which take the shapes of the second and the fourth letters of the Musnad alphabet¹⁸.

1.3. PL. 3) (FIG. 7):

This rock art was engraved on a large broken slab which found fallen at the top of mountain in an attitude of about ten meters. The artist depicted figures of common hunting scene on a smooth surface of the stone. Unfortunately, a large section of scene has been destroyed, and the remaining part contains at least ten figures of hunters engraved in the technique of normal stick style¹⁹, The figure of hunters appear scattered overlapping and randomly on the face of the stone block, This pattern of rock art is noticeable at Taif, and it is usually named the art-on-art style among the archeologists²⁰, It is often engraved with figures of the Houbara bustards or ostriches in hunting scenes of Taif rock art sites, Therefore, one could document three birds depicted scattered between human figures. Two simple figures of ostriches incised in the middle of the scene to the right side, while the other third figure to the left end of the stone may represent Houbara bird form²¹.

1.4. (PL. 4) (FIG.8):

Although parts of this panel have been destroyed, the remaining part is well preserved. It contains the depictions of eight figures of animals. The upper part in the left often shows a big figure of fox with four figures of

Symposium Wildlife Conservation and Development in Saudi Arabia, Riyadh: Saudi Arabia, February 1989, 255–262.

¹⁷ BIELLA, J., *Dictionary of the Old South Arabic Sabaeen Dialect*, Harvard Semitic Museum, 1982, 38, 5.

¹⁸ WOODARD, R., *The Ancient Languages of Syria Palestine and Arabia*, Cambridge, edited by Nebes, N., & Stein, p., 2008, 147-178, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511486890>.

¹⁹ For more elaboration about stick style in such hunting scenes at Taif review, 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, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ara.2015.08.001>; EL-TONSSY, «Archeological Discoveries at wadi Qarn», 29-59.

²⁰ EL-TONSSY, «Archeological Study», 27; MARAQTEN, M., «Hunting in Pre-Islamic Arabia in Light of the Epigraphic Evidence», *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 26, 2015, 208-234, <https://doi.org/10.1111/aae.12059>; GUAGNIN, & OTHERS, «Hunters and Herders», 3-16.

²¹ For more details about the figures of Houbara bustard at Taif see the wonderful corpus at Wadi Qarn review, EL-TONSSY, «Archeological Discoveries at Wadi Qarn», 36-38; GORIUP, P., «The World Status of the Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis Undulata*», *Birds Conservation International* 7, №. 4, 1997, 373-397.

animals that might be from dog family²², These five figures incised standing in profile facing to the right in the front of a big horned bull. The figures were simply executed with the normal technique of rock art in Taif²³. The ancient artist tried to draw the bull figure in vertical perspective while the flock of dogs were incised in horizontal line. The depiction of bull may urge us to believe that the required space to draw the figure of the bull was very tight in order to execute such a big figure of the animal²⁴.

It is noticeable also that, there is a bigger dog more than the rest three ones which their tails depicted rising²⁵, It is well known in such hunting scenes of Arabia that dog figures were usually engraved to help in hunting process²⁶.

At the lower part of the panel, one could recognize two additional animals. The first one is depicted to the right side of the scene, it represents another figure of big bull executed in base relief with internal details²⁷. Unfortunately, the upper part of the left leg and tail have been slightly erased from the stone block. While the second animal is engraved at the lower left side of this panel, It represents the figure of Arabian horse ridden by a knight²⁸,The ancient artist executed the figures of animals without any artistic or internal details except for the above-mentioned figure of the bull which were incised with internal details, this may suggest that the proper date of bull figure is possibly older than the dog figures in this panel²⁹.

1.5. (PL. 5): (FIG. 9):

This panel depicts three figures of Arabian ibexes incised on the surface of a fallen slab found on the top of the mountain. It bears details of

²² MACDONALD, D., « The Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) in Saudi Arabia: Loose-knit Groupings in the Absence of Territoriality », *Journal of Zoology* 249, №. 4, 1999, 383 – 391.

²³EL-TONSSY, «Archeological Study»,24, PL.3, FIG.3.

²⁴ Compare this at wadi Qarn petroglyphs; EL-TONSSY, «Archeological Discoveries at Wadi Qarn», PL.3, FIG.6, 36-38

²⁵ The figure of the big dog may urge one to suppose that this dog was the dominant dog of the flock or the leader father.

²⁶KHAN, M.,« Rock Art of Saudi Arabia», *Arts* 2, №.4, 2013, 453, <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts2040447>.

²⁷Compare the design of bull figures of Jubbah; KHAN,« Rock Art of Saudi Arabia», 450- 451,457.

²⁸ KHAN, «Rock Art of Saudi Arabia», 454.

²⁹Depiction of Arabian knight rides horse is widely common in petroglyphs of Saudi Arabia, the horse figures are usually associated in Arabian thought with concepts of courage and equestrian. In many petroglyphs one can find the names of the Arabian knight written in Musnad inscriptions review: KHAN, M., «An Introduction to the Rock Art of Saudi Arabia», *Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage*, 2017, 53, 54, 56, 57, 85; KHAN, «Rock Art of Saudi Arabia», 470-471, FIGS. 32-33.

two shapes of Arabian ibexes standing with tall crescent-shaped horns³⁰, Two ibexes clearly seen to the upper part of the panel, while the last one is executed in the lower of the panel. Animal figures were engraved in the normal technique of stick style without any internal or artistic details³¹, To the right corner of the panel, there is a simple Wusm resembles the shape of the second letter "b " B of Thamudic script³².

1.6.(PL. 6) (FIG. 10):

At the right side of the citadel, a long sandstone slab was found fallen on the mountain peak, It depicts a remarkable figure of camel executed in base relief with an exaggerated hump³³, This wonderful depiction of camel may suggest that it might represent the only remaining portion from missing panel may have been destroyed in ancient times³⁴. The artistic style of camel figure with its raised neck and long tail attitude, may suggest that it faced a sudden accident forced the animal to be ready for run in a berserk mode, There is a short Thamudic text written in front of camel figure. The text is extremely difficult to make out or even give correctly reading due to the bad conservation of the stone³⁵.

Although, we could present initial reading for some Thamudic letters written in squire script with internal details, but it couldn't make a correct or a complete meaning because of some missing parts of the text. The short text runs down under the neck of the camel as follows: 'z p n d p n d ' "female camel³⁶, According to MacDonald's hypothesis the nomadic people lived in every region of Arabian Peninsula widely used to mark graffiti on rocks smooth surfaces in particular those who contact with merchant traders³⁷.

³⁰For more details about the crescent-shaped Arabian ibexes at Jabel Milihiya in Haill region see: KHAN, «An Introduction to the Rock Art», 2017, 19.

³¹For more elaboration about the depictions of Arabian ibexes in Taif review: EL-TONSSY, «Archeological Discoveries at wadi Qarn»,29-59.

³²KHAN, M., *Wusum-The Tribal Symbols of Saudi Arabia*, Vol. 1, Riyadh, Ministry of Education, 2000, 57-59; WOODARD, *The Ancient Languages of Syria Palestine and Arabia*, 147.

³³ RIPINSKY, M. «The camel in ancient Arabia», *Antiquity* 49, №.196, 1975, 289-303,295.

³⁴MACDONALD, & KING, «Wheels in a Land of Camels: another looks to Chariot in Arabia», 156-184.

³⁵JENNINGS, R., SHEPTON, C., & OTHERS, «Rock Arts Landscapes besides the Jubba Paleolake, Saudi Arabia», *Antiquity* 87,2013, 666-683, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0003598X00049383> .

³⁶As we mentioned above, the text is obscure, one can assume such translation depending on previous studies, Review: EL-ZEIB, S., *Social Life before Christ in the Hail region through Thamudic inscriptions*, King Faisal Center for research and Islamic Studies, Riyadh ,2017, 43, 77.

³⁷ MACDONALD, M., «The Development of Arabic as a written language», *supplements to the proceedings of the seminar for Arabian Studies*, Oxford ,2010, 40 ,5-27.

1.7.(PL. 7) (FIG. 11):

Three figures of camels are engraved on a small stone fragment which has been found at the top of the mountain, There is no doubt that this panel contained other missing rock art figures besides some short Thamudic writing texts³⁸, The two figures of camel appear ridden by two men figures sitting on a simple saddle and catching a halter on one hand. This panel is engraved in the well-known stick style without any internal details³⁹.

1.8. (PL. 8) (FIG. 12):

This rock art is incised on sandstone slab found to the right side of the citadel. It seems that, it represents the remaining part from a missing panel. At the uppermost part, there is a small figure of Arabian camel ridden by a man. While at the lowermost, one can hardly see two ostrich figures at the right side of this portion⁴⁰, There is not safety way to recognize the remaining figures due to the bad conservation of rock surface.

1.9. (PL. 9) (FIG. 13):

This panel incised in a small stone block found at the mountain surface, it may have been crashed from the original mother stone of the mountain. The smooth surface of the stone where the artist often prefers to draw the contents has been evidently erased, The remaining part depicts two Arabian ibexes at the uppermost part of the panel. These figures were simply incised in the well-known stick style, The artist used to depict such Arabian ibexes in rock arts at Taif or other sites of Arabia in standing position with tall crescent-shaped horns⁴¹.

There is no additional figure could be easily shown on this fragel panel, due to the bad conservation state of the stone. Traces of unclear Thamudic Wusum could be possibly distinguished incised beneath figures of animals.

1.10. (PL. 10): (FIG. 14)

At the top of the mountain to the right side of the citadel, there is a big limestone block still standing. The ancient artist depicted five figures. Two of which represent the Arabian bull figures depicted with tall horns. All figures were completely pecked in base relief to the left upper part of the

³⁸ For more elaboration Review: MACDONALD, «Camel Hunting » ,24-28.

³⁹ Review camels' figures in the panel number one of this paper.

⁴⁰Compare ostriches of Almulihiah and Wadi Qarn sites in: DHAIFALLAH, «Almulihiah», 94, PL. 3 FIG.5; El-Tonssy, «Archeological Discoveries at Wadi Qarn», PL.4, FIG.7, 35.

⁴¹Review for more details about Arabian ibexes in Taif rock Arts or elsewhere in Arabia: EL-TONSSY, «Archeological Discoveries at wadi Qarn»,29-59; KHAN, «Introduction to the Rock Art of Saudi Arabia»,19; compare panel number 5 of this paper.

stone. Beneath the two above mentioned bull figures, there are two figures of onagers depicted with their distinguished raised ears⁴².

The ancient artist depicted these four animal figures heading to the west side where the lower part of the valley of Wuj is located⁴³. The last figure on this panel represents the depiction of a camel ridden by a simple figure of a man appears sitting on a saddle and catching a halter on his hand⁴⁴.

All figures of this panel were executed in stick style design. From the artistic style figures of bulls and onagers, one could realize that they are older than camel figure⁴⁵, Accordingly, the camel figure seems to be added to the scene in later times, this view mainly depends on the highly skilled outline motif of bull and onager figures compared to the simple depiction of camel figure.

1.11. (PL. 11): (FIG. 15):

This panel consists of three figures of big Arabian horned bulls⁴⁶. The figures incised on a fragel surface of sandstone block which was found fallen on the mountain peak to the right side of the citadel⁴⁷. The figures of bulls fine executed in base relief with interior details⁴⁸. From the first look, the appearance of these figures and design besides the stain of the stone urge us to suggest that the character of this panel is older than other panels in all collection at Arfaa Mountain⁴⁹.

There is also something important furthermore; the stone block was found fallen near the previous panel number 10 to the right side of the citadel, This urges one to suggest also that both stone blocks originally were formed a single panel before they were collapsed in one way or another, This view has been strongly supported by the artistic outline motif of all figures which have been depicted with internal details in the two

⁴² For more details about Wadi Qarn wild donkeys: EL-TONSSY, «Archeological Discoveries at wadi Qarn»,35, FIG.7.

⁴³For more details about the archeological importance of the valley of Wuj at Taif review: EL-TONSSY, «Archeological Study»,21-24.

⁴⁴ Review camel figures in panels number one and seven of this paper.

⁴⁵This view based basically on the perfect quality of rock art design for bulls and onagers' figures compared to the simplicity design of the camel in addition to the stain of the stone.

⁴⁶KHAN, «An Introduction to the Rock Art of Saudi Arabia», 11, 17, 30.

⁴⁷For most remarkable panel of Arabian animals at the valley of Qarn in Taif review: EL-TONSSY, «Archeological Discoveries at wadi Qarn»,365-38, PL.7, FIG.9.

⁴⁸Compare the figures of bulls in this panel together with their counterparts in the previous panel number 10 in this study.

⁴⁹It is clear from the stain of the stone that the figure of animals in this scene is older than others in this rock art collection, also this assumption exactly applies to the panel number 10.

panels and the ancient characteristic design of animal figures besides the stain of rock⁵⁰.

Conclusion:

It appears from this documented survey that the site of Arfaa and its precinct was an important center for ancient local Arabian inhabitants in the western side of Arabian Peninsula. Various meaningful compositions of human, different kinds of animal figures, scenes of daily life and hunting, strongly gives the impression that the Arab ancestors have been highly interacted with the site from thousands of years ago⁵¹.

Archaeologically, the desert life in the site of Arfaa could be divided into two categories: the first is representing in trade caravans that used to pass through the location heading north or the south, The second category was the local people from Bedouins who inhabited or owned the land in this region⁵².

It is difficult to give an accurate date for most rock art sites of Arabia before Islam. In a case one could give a fairly date for rock arts, is surely the presence of ancient Arabian texts written next to the rock drawings⁵³. Consequently, scholars of ancient Arab civilization can formulate a tentatively date based on the traditional classification of Arabic epigraphic resources or even the artistic designs and motifs of rock art⁵⁴.

With taking this into consideration, a little definite information is obtained concerning direct or indirect causes of incomplete panels ten and eleven in addition to the very bad preservation state, one could assume that these figures probably were engraved at the same time as one panel in

⁵⁰KHAN, «An Introduction to the Rock Art of Saudi Arabia», 30, 39, 54, 55.

⁵¹ For more details about these ideas see: BEDNARIK, R. & KHAN, M., « A Chronology of Saudi Arabia Rock Art », *XXVI Volcanonica Symposium*, 2015, 1-6; BEDNARIK, R., & KHAN, M., «The Saudi Arabian rock art mission of November 2001», *Journal of Saudi Arabia Archaeology, Atlal* 17,2002, 75–99; EL-TONSSY, M., «Unpublished Prehistoric Lithic Tools in Shubra Museum at Taif of Saudi Arabia », *JGUAA* 18, 2015, 1-15, <https://dx.doi.org/10.21608/cguua.2015.31579> .

⁵² There are many rock arts in the precinct of Afraa archeological site dates to pre-Islamic period. Many rock figures have been engraved over the surface of the mountain to the east location of the famous historic forum of literature and culture (Souk-Okaz). The site extends to the north and east of the plateau reaching the ancient caravan roads to the north, review: ZARINS, J., & WALEN, N., «The Comprehensive Archaeological Survey Program», *Journal of Saudi Arabia Archaeology, Atlal* IV, 1980,30-31.

⁵³MACDONALD, M., «The Seasons and Transhumance in the Safaitic Inscriptions», *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Published online by Cambridge University Press: 24 September 2009, 1-11.

⁵⁴ KHAN, M., KABAWI, A., & AL-ZAHRANI, A., «A Preliminary Report on the Second phase of Rock Art and Epigraphic Survey of Northern Saudi Arabia », *Atlal* 10, 1986,10, 465; BEDNARIK, R., «A Chronology of Saudi Arabia Rock Art», 1-6.

order to depict the famous and commonly used hunting scene in Arabia⁵⁵. This view often based on the similarity of design motif and workmanship of five figures of bulls engraved on the two panels besides the stain of the stone⁵⁶, Moreover, bull figures depicted on both panels were completely outlined pecked with internal details more than the other three animal figures depicted to the lower part of panel number ten which probably have been executed in the normal stick style without internal details⁵⁷.

The most figures of animals depicted in Arfaa rock arts (PL. s 1. A, 6.F, 7.G, 11.J) surely indicate that the site was enriched with a variety of vegetation resources depending on the rainwater supply from the nearest valley of Wuj⁵⁸, After the beginning of the hot and dry climate in Arabia at the fourth millennium BC. camel became familiar animal in this ancient Arabic society⁵⁹.

Extensively, on that time ancient man mainly depended on camel as the most valuable desert animal. Many scholars have tried to determine a tentative date on which camels were domesticated in Arabia with the beginning of the Bronze Age (4500 years BP)⁶⁰.

Nubian ibex and bull figures also were the most popular depictions in Arabia regions like Jubbah, Hail and Najran⁶¹. These animal figures were the common seen artistic elements in Arfaa rock arts especially in hunting scenes together with hunting dogs (PL. s D.4, E.5, I.9, J.11, K.12) ⁶².

Studying Arfaa rock panels in this paper clearly revealed the daily life activities relating to some religious beliefs, traditions, and customs of ancient man in the western region of Arabia. Twenty-nine local desert animals and birds in addition to twenty human figures have been scientifically documented in this study (Table 1, FIG.1).

⁵⁵ LIVINGSTONE, A., KHAN, M., «Epigraphic Survey 1404–1984 », *Journal of Saudi Arabia Archaeology*, *Atlat* 9, 1985, 128–144.

⁵⁶ BEDNARIK, R., «A Chronology of Saudi Arabia Rock Art», 1-6.

⁵⁷ DHAIFALLAH, «Almulihiah», 92-94.

⁵⁸ 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.

⁵⁹ For more details about camel figures at Almulihiah, review: DHAIFALLAH, «Almulihiah», 96.

⁶⁰ KHAN, «Rock Art of Saudi Arabia», 450; MACDONALD, & KING, «Wheels in a Land of Camels: another looks to Chariot in Arabia», 156-184.

⁶¹ For more elaboration about the depiction of this point review: DHAIFALLAH, «Almulihiah», 92-98.












⁶² Review: KHAN, «Rock Art of Saudi Arabia», 447-475; GUAGNIN, & OTHERS, «Hunters and Herders», 3-16.



(Table 1) Enumeration figures of human, animals and birds depicted in Arfaa rock arts.

Panel	Human	Animals	Number	Birds	Number
1	5	camel	5	-	1
2	-	-	-	Ostrich	2
3	10	-	-	Houbara	2
4	-	Bull	2	-	-
		Dogs	5		
5	-	Ibex	3	-	-
6	-	Camel	1	-	-
7	3	Camel	3	-	-
8	1	Camel	1	Ostrich	2
9	-	Ibex	2	-	-
10	1	bull	2	-	-
		Camel	1		
		Onager	2		
11	-	Bull	3	-	-

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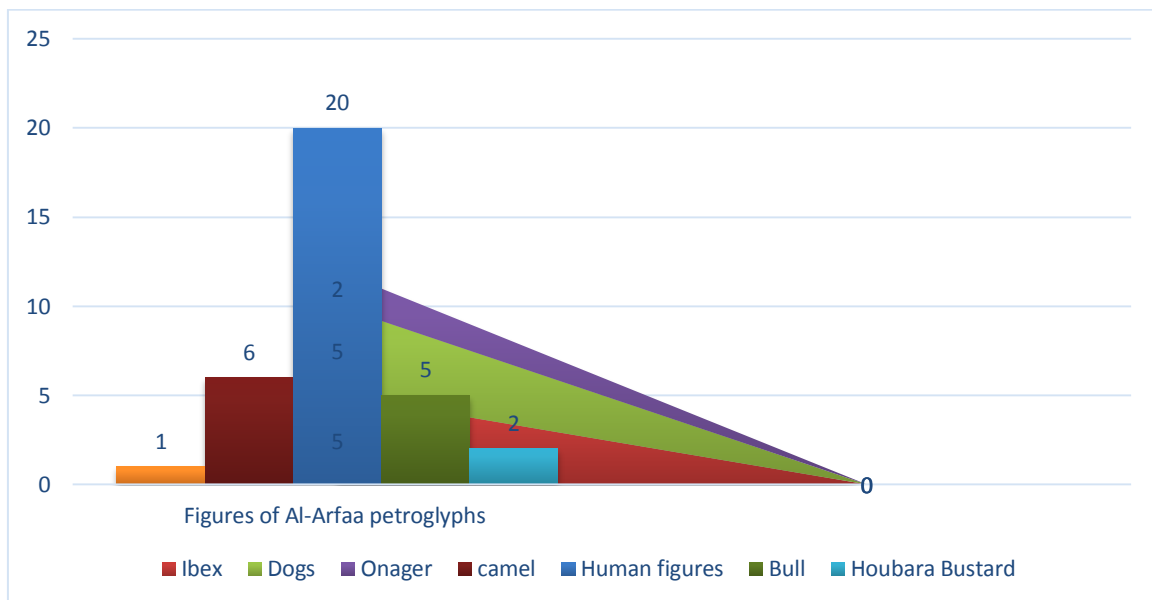
(Table 2) Rock art epigraphy of human figures, animals and birds inscribed in the Arfaa Rock Arts.

kind	Rock art figures					Total numbers	
Human Figures						20	
Animals							29

Birds						5
Musnad Alphabet (Thamudic Script)	l	b	x	r	u	Two texts 

(FIG. 1) Graph showing counting of human, animals, and birds' figures in Arfaa site.

@Made by the researcher



(FIG.2) Graph showing the total numbers of documented rock arts in Arfaa Archaeological site. @Made by the researcher

As mentioned before, it is very difficult to determine an accurate and proper date for rock arts without obtaining direct archeological or epigraphical evidence. However, comparing the artistic style and motifs of animal figures in panels number (5,9) with the Nubian Ibex figure of Al-Usayla which Bednarik and Khan examined by radiocarbon dating, one could suggest using their preliminary results that these two panels could be dated to 3180-2120 BP⁶³.

⁶³Compare these two panels with the figure of ibex in Al-Usayla which Bednarik and Khan used it to measure carbon isotope of rock varnish at this site, review: BEDNARIK, R., «The Saudi Arabia Rock Art Mission», 75-99; GUAGNIN, & OTHERS, «Hunters and Herders», 3-16.

It could be a remarkable view to use the method of direct dating suggested by some scholars to date the figures of panels numbers 2, 6, 10, 11 in this study. This Technique based mainly on the examination of features and artistic motifs of animal figures. Therefore, we can tentatively date these above-mentioned panels to the wet and cool phase of the Neolithic period when the cow and bull were present in rock art sites in Arabia⁶⁴.

After studying these eleven panels, especially figures of ibexes, camels, and bulls, we could recognize that they are very similar in artistic elements, work design and shapes to those panels found at Jubbah and Shuwaymis in Hail region and Wadi Damm to the north of Tabuk⁶⁵. Hence, we may suggest that most of Afraa rock arts figures probably belong to the late period of the Second Millennium BC.

⁶⁴BEDNARIK, R., «A New Method to Date Petroglyphs», *Archaeometry* 34, №.2, 2007, 279-291; Compare the date of Almulihiah site, DHAIFALLAH, «Almulihiah», 92-98, 96-97.

⁶⁵Review for more elaboration about this view: KHAN, «Rock Art of Saudi Arabia», 449, FIG.1, 2, 451, FIG.4, 453, FIG.8, 454, FIG.9, 457, FIG.12.

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Catalogue:



(FIG. 3) The map of Saudi Arabia showing the location of Al-Arfaa site.
(After Saudi Atlas).

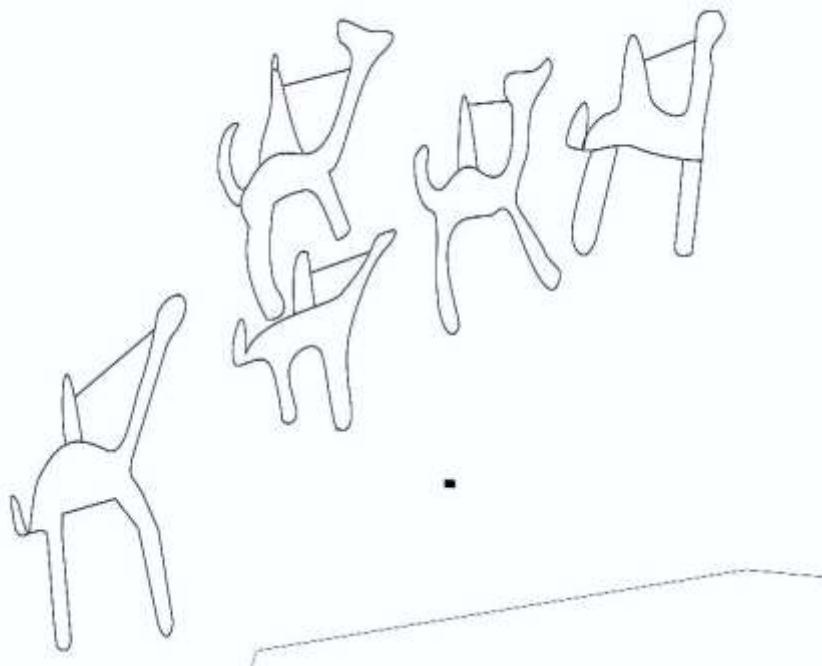


(FIG. 4) Topographical location of the eleventh rock-art panels on the rock of Arfaa Mountain
@Made by the researcher.



(PL. 1) The figure of five camels with man riders

@Taken by the researcher



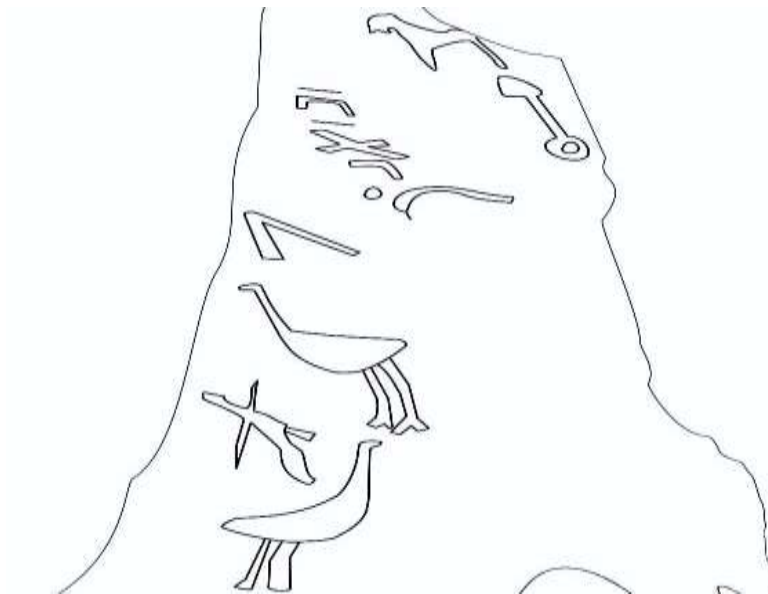
(FIG. 5) Facsimile of the camel's figures with the riders

@Made by the researcher



(PL. 2) The figure of ostriches besides Thamudic inscriptions

@Taken by the researcher

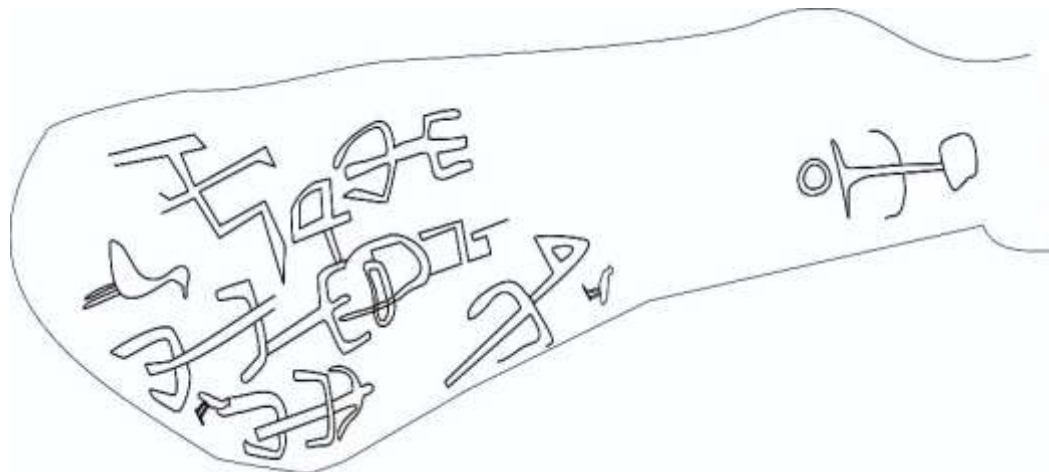


(FIG. 6) Facsimile of birds and Thamudic inscriptions

@Made by the researcher



(PL. 3) The hunting scene of Birds by human figures
@Taken by the researcher.

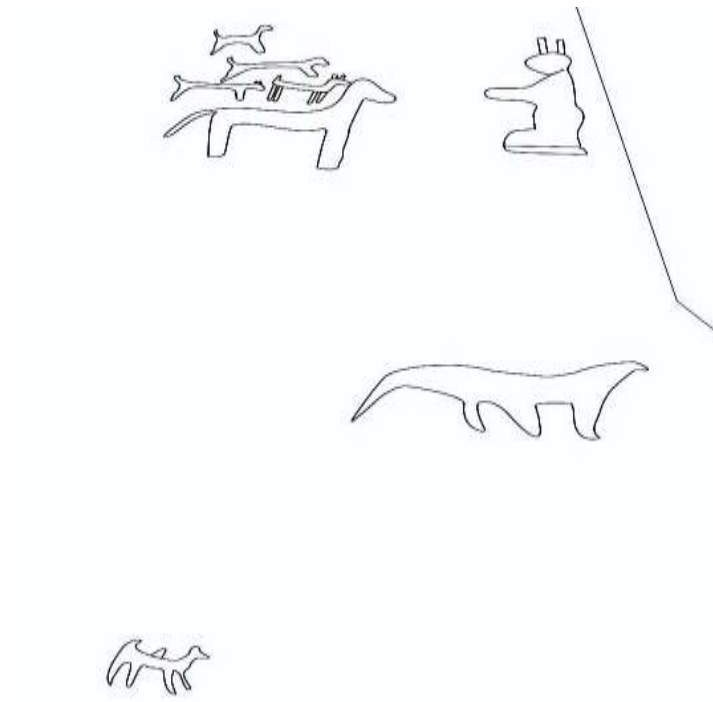


(FIG. 7) Facsimile of hunting scene of Birds by human figures
@Made by the researcher



(PL. 4) The hunting scene of Arabian Bull.

@Taken by the researcher

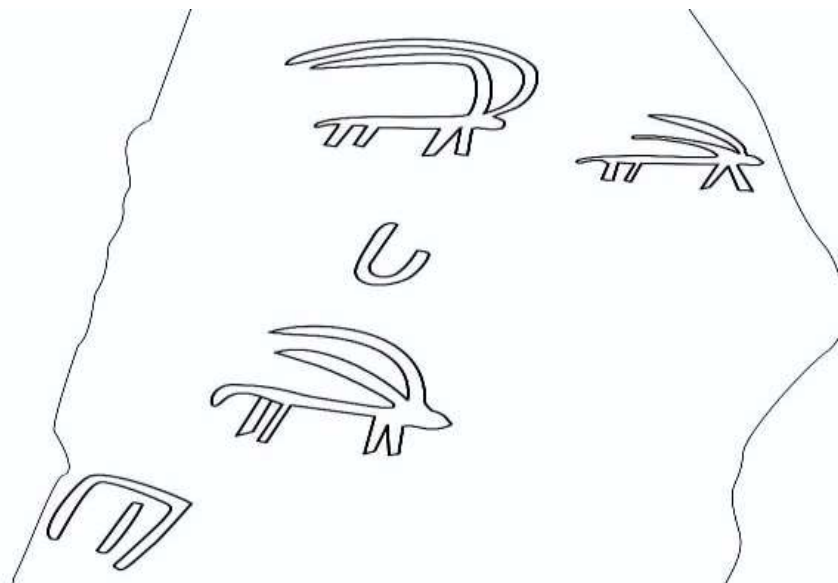


(FIG. 8) Facsimile of animals and birds' figures incised in hunting panel.

@Made by the researcher



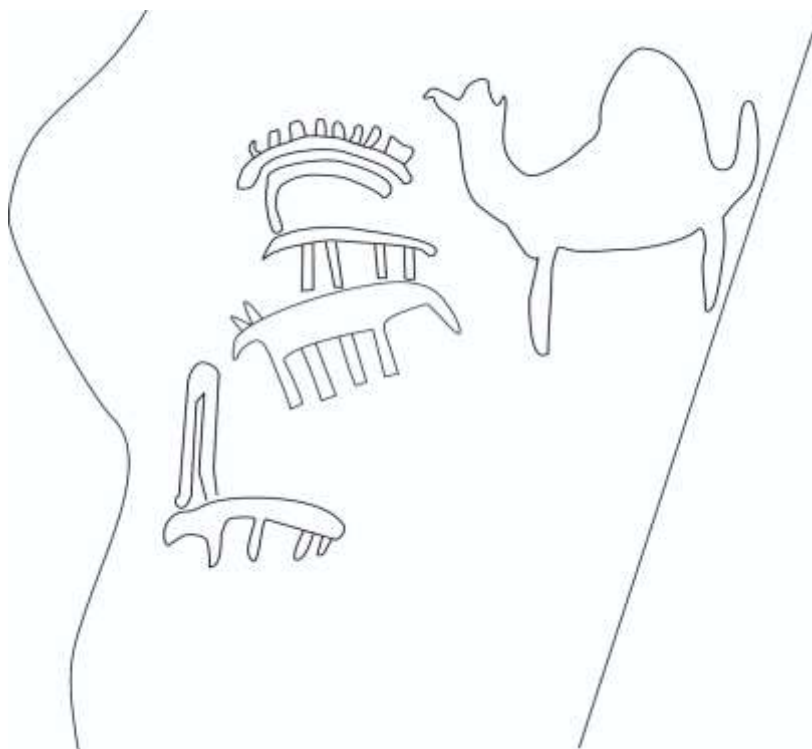
(PL. 5) scene of Nubian Ibexes with Thamudic Wusum
@Made by the researcher



(FIG. 9) Facsimile of Nubian Ibexes with Thamudic Wusum.
@Made by the researcher



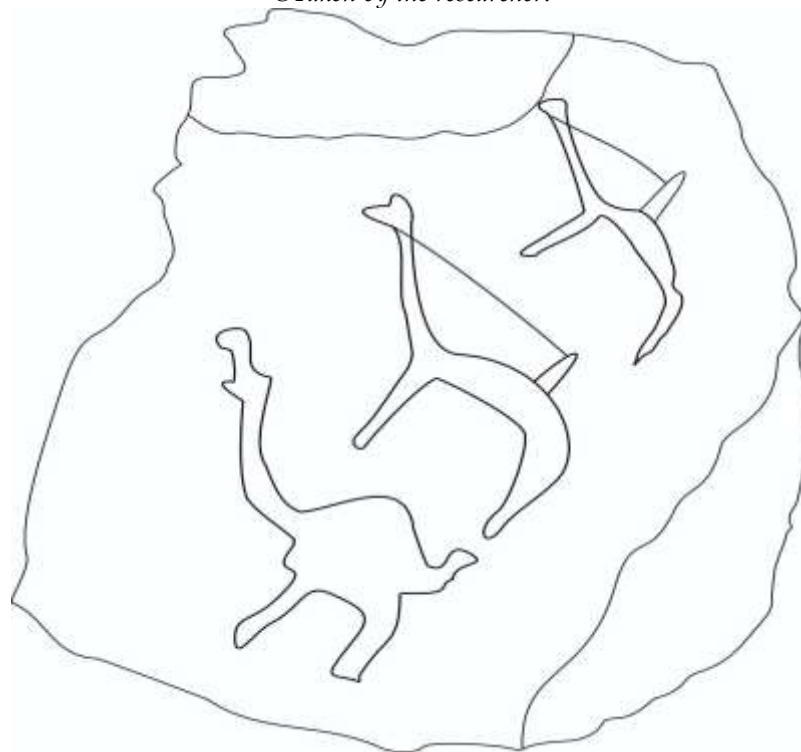
(PL. 6) Arabian camel with Thamudic text.
@Taken by the researcher



(FIG. 10) Facsimile of Arabian camel with Thamudic text.
@ Made by the researcher



(PL. 7) scene of three camels with human riders
@Taken by the researcher.



(FIG. 11) Facsimile of three camel with rider
@made by the researcher.



(Panel 8) Scene of camel riders and Ostriches.

@Taken by the researcher.

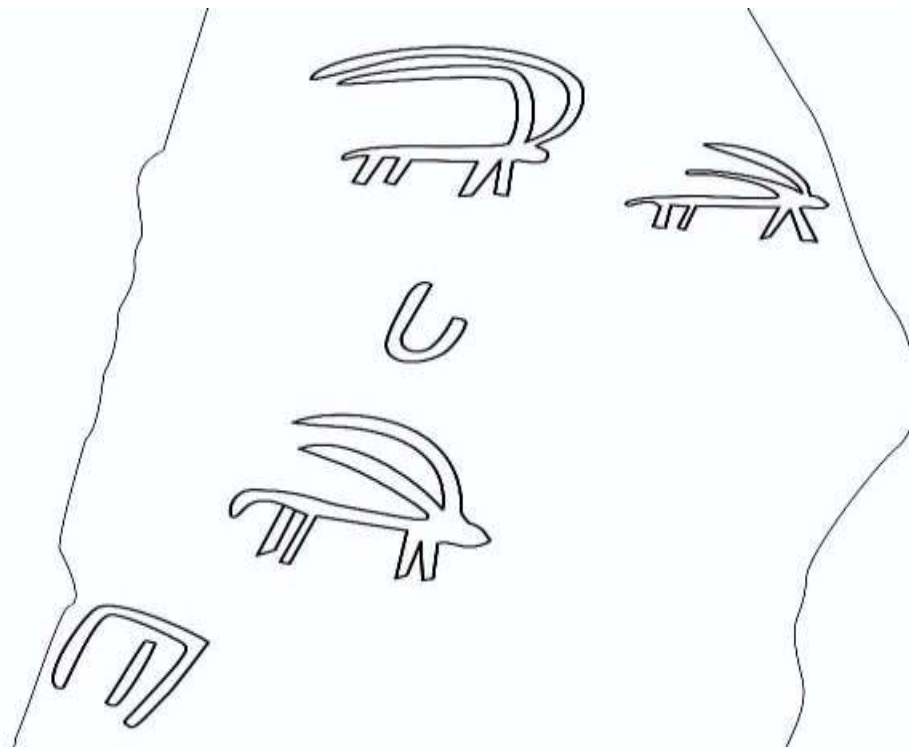


(FIG. 12) Facsimile of camel rider and ostriches.

@Taken by the researcher.



(PL. 9) The scene of two horned Nubian Ibexes.
@Made by the researcher

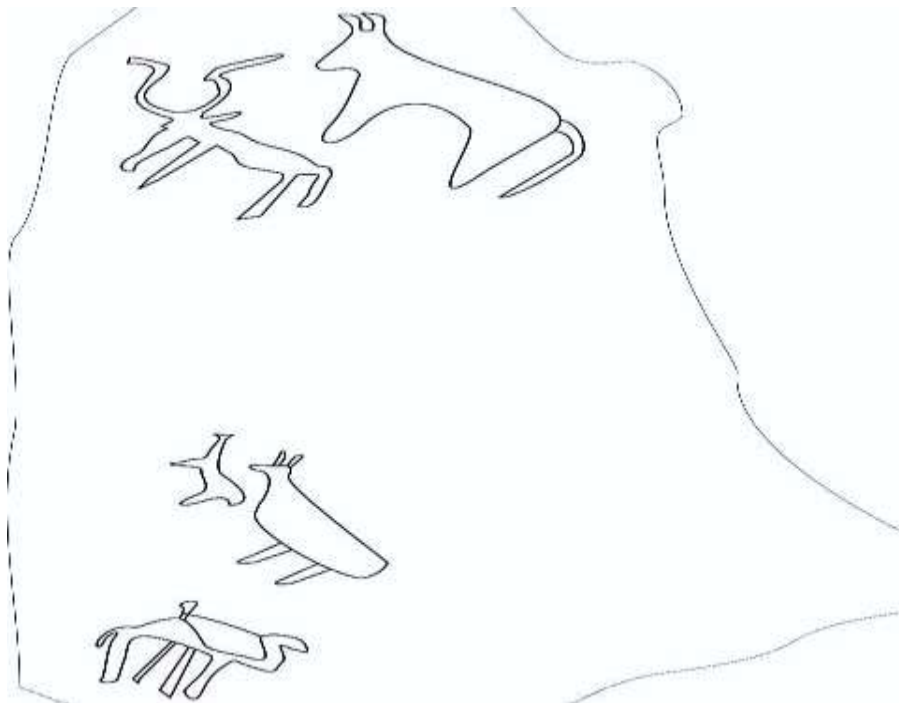


(FIG. 13) Facsimile of two Arabian Ibexes with Arabian Wusum
@Made by the researcher



(PL. 10): The scene of two horned Arabian Bulls with two onagers and camel rider.

@Taken by the researcher



(FIG. 14) Facsimile of Arabian Bulls, onager, and Camel.

@Made by the researcher



(PL. 11) Three Arabian horned Bulls.
@Taken by the researcher



(FIG. 15) Facsimile of two horned Arabian Bulls.
@Made by the researcher.