



ANNAL OF GENERAL UNION OF ARAB ARCHAEOLOGISTS

ISSUE (27) CAIRO 1445 AH / 2024 A.D

Receive at: 2024-01-16 accepted at: 2024-03-31 Available online: 2024-05-23

Rock Arts of Arfaa Precinct in Taif City, Saudi Arabia

Mohamed A. El-Tonssy

Professor of Ancient Archeology Faculty of Arts Helwan University-Cairo-Egypt & Faculty of Arts Taif University-Kingdom of Saudi Arabia-(Egypt)

tonssy55@gmail.com

التونسي، محمد عبدربه، "رسوم صخرية في منطقة العرفاء بمدينة الطائف في المملكة العربية السعودية"، *حولية الاتحاد العام*

للآثار بين العرب، ع. ٢٧، يونيو ٢٠٢٤، ١-٢٨. DOI: [10.21608/cguaa.2024.263378.1212](https://doi.org/10.21608/cguaa.2024.263378.1212)

EL-TONSSY, MOHAMED A., «Rock Arts of Arfaa Precinct in Taif City, Saudi Arabia», *Hawliyya'ī Al-Itihād Al-'ām Lil Aṭāriyīn Al-'arab - Dirāsāt fi Aṭār Al-Waṭan Al-'arabī* (CGUAA) 27, 2024, 1-28, DOI: [10.21608/cguaa.2024.263378.1212](https://doi.org/10.21608/cguaa.2024.263378.1212)

Receive at: 2024-01-16 accepted at: 2024-03-31 Available online: 2024-05-23

Rock Arts of Arfaa Precinct in Taif City, Saudi Arabia

رسوم صخرية في منطقة العرفاء بمدينة الطائف في المملكة 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-(Egypt)

محمد عبدربه التونسي

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

tonssy55@gmail.com

المخلص:

يتناول هذا البحث بالدراسة والتحليل أحد عشر رسماً صخرياً توجد في محيط منطقة قلعة جبل عرفاء الأثرية في شمال مدينة الطائف، وبالرغم من أن هذه الرسوم 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 عرفاء؛ 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, the scientific activities of some researchers, have 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 a trade 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 of rock art sites in Taif governorate has significantly increased through several studies of the rock art in different sites in this charming city¹.

The site of Arfaa is one of the most important archeological sites in the northeast of Taif city, precisely about 35 km north-east of Taif town, The site is situated in the vicinity of a region on which Wadi Wej meets the valley Qurayshiyat which runs from north-east to south-east directions and 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 that have been scattered around the historical castle of Arfaa.

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

As it is usual on such rock art sites in Saudi Arabia, the Arfaa 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 these documented

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/cguua.2023.185777.1155>; DABIAS, S., AL-UTABI, A. SENDI & OTHERS, «Report on the Archeological Survey of (Ancient Market) Suq - Ukaz», *Atlal*, №. 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 & OTHERS, «Report on the Archeological Survey of Ancient Market», 109-120; ADAMS, R., PARR, P., IBRAHIM, M., & MUGHANUM, A., «Report on the First Phase of the Comprehensive, Archaeological Survey Program», *Atlal* 1, №. 21, 1977, 40.

data indicate that the site of Arfaa was a major station for permanent or seasonal human settlement in the Hijaz region before the 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 also 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 mountain's smooth surface of sandstone blocks found around the main southern entrance of the castle precinct⁷.

Studying these panels and others could help scholars create a historical map of the religious connotations of ancient Arab civilization and also could increase knowledge of the symbolic significance and religious beliefs contained in the rock art sites of Saudi Arabia⁸.

Despite the multiplicity and diversity of rock art sites of Taif that 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 that clearly appear in the daily behavior and mental thinking of the ancient man who lived in Arabia before the 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

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

⁸ The petroglyphs of Taif region are little known, but for the last ten years our knowledge about the rock art theme of Taif has been increased. More than ten years ago, I have scientifically documented various sites like the Valley of Qarn, El-Hada, Okaz and Arfaa. Hopefully, we are 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. My appreciation must go to master Anas Ahmed Sendi head of intangible heritage sector of Heritage Commission at Taif for his truly help in my field work.

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> .

depends on several affecting factors, the most important being religion, 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 customs, traditions and religious beliefs of ancient people who 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 is carved on the mountain smooth surface of a limestone block located on the southern side of the citadel, it contains depictions of five well-incised figures of camels, ridden by five men who appear to be sitting on a simple saddle and catching a halter on their hands¹³. Each camel is shown with a rising tail, which might suggest they 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 the Arabian Peninsula¹⁵. It seems that this scene is the only remaining figure of the Arabian camel caravan heading to an 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 part of the panel, there are fully pecked figures of two ostriches

¹⁰ MACDONALD, 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», *Atlal* 17, 2002, 75–99.

¹¹ DHAIFALLAH, 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» *Atlal*, №. 30, 2020, 133-144.

¹³ For more details about Arabic dromedary review: BRAUER, R., « The Camel and its Role Shaping Mideastern Nomad Societies», *Comparative Civilizations Review* 28, 1993, 106–151.

¹⁴ MACDONALD, «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> .

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

standing facing each other, The figures of birds are executed perfectly with a big belly and a long neck.¹⁶

At the top of the ostrich figures, there are two short Thamudic texts. The first one, above the upper bird, is written vertically in a short and incomplete line as follows: 𐩮 𐩮 — 𐩨 𐩬 𐩰 𐩬 𐩬 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: 𐩰 𐩰 " p Th " which take the shapes of the second and the fourth letters of the South Arabian Musnad alphabet¹⁸.

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

This rock art was engraved on a large broken slab that was found fallen at the top of the mountain in an attitude of about ten meters. The artist depicted figures of common hunting scenes on a smooth surface of the stone. Unfortunately, a large section of the 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 appears scattered overlapping and randomly on the face of the stone block, this pattern of rock art is noticeable at Taif, and it is usually called the art-on-art style among the archeologists²⁰. Hunting scenes are usually depicted together with Houbara bustards or ostrich birds in Taif hunting scenes. Therefore, in this panel, one could document three of such birds depicted scattered between human figures. Two simple figures of ostriches are incised in the middle of the scene to the right side, while the third one

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 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.

which is engraved to the left end of the stone may represent the form of Houbara bird figure²¹.

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 on the left often shows a big figure of a fox together with four figures of animals that might be from a dog family²². These five figures were incised standing in profile facing to the right in 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 from a vertical perspective while the flock of dogs was incised in a horizontal line. The depiction of the bull in that way may urge us to believe that the required space to draw the bull figure was very tight to execute such a big figure of the animal²⁴.

It is also noticeable that there is a bigger dog than the rest of the three with their tails depicted rising upwards²⁵. It is well known in such hunting scenes of Arabia that dog figures were usually engraved to help in the 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 a big bull executed in base relief with internal details²⁷. Unfortunately, the upper part from bull figure and its tail have been slightly erased. While the second animal is engraved at the lower left side of this panel, it represents the figure of an Arabian horse ridden by a knight²⁸. The ancient artist executed all of animal figures without any artistic or internal details except for the above-mentioned figures of bull which was incised with internal details, this artistic style may suggest that

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.

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.

²³ EL-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's father.

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

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

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

the proper date of the bull figures 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 two shapes Arabian ibexes standing with tall crescent-shaped horns³⁰. Two ibexes were seen in the upper part of the panel, while the last one was executed in the lower. 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 that resembles the shape of the second letter « 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 a camel executed in base relief with an exaggerated hump³³. This wonderful depiction of the Arabian dromedary may suggest that it is the only remaining portion of the big missing panel that may have been destroyed in ancient times³⁴. The artistic style of the camel figure with its raised neck and long tail attitude, may suggest that it faced a sudden accident that forced the animal to be ready to run in a berserk mode. There is a short Thamudic text written in front of the camel figure. The text is extremely difficult to make out or even give correct reading due to the bad conservation of the stone³⁵.

Although we could present the initial reading for some Thamudic letters written in squire script with internal details, it couldn't make a

²⁹Depiction of Arabian knights riding horses is widely common in petroglyphs of 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 knights 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.

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.

³³RIPINSKY, 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>.

depict such Arabian ibexes in rock arts at Taif or other rock art sites of Arabia in standing positions with tall crescent-shaped horns⁴¹.

There is no additional figure that could be precisely shown on this fragile 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 on this panel. Two of which represent the Arabian bull figures depicted with tall horns. All of these figures were completely pecked in base relief to the left upper part of the stone. Under 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 direction where the lower part of the valley of Wuj is located⁴³. The last figure of this panel represents the depiction of a camel ridden by a man whose figure 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 precisely realize that they are older than the camel figure in the lower left corner of the panel⁴⁵. 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 the camel figure.

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

This panel consists of three figures of big Arabian-horned bulls⁴⁶. The figures were incised on a fragile surface of sandstone, which was found

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.

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

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

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

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

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

fallen at the top of the mountain to the right side of the citadel⁴⁷. The figures of bulls were 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 all of the other panels in the collections at Arfaa Mountain⁴⁹.

There is also something important furthermore; the stone block was found to fall near the previous panel number ten to the right side of the citadel. This urges one to suggest also that both stone blocks originally 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 panels besides the ancient characteristic design of animal figures and the stain of stone⁵⁰.

Conclusion:

It appears from this documented survey that the site of Arfaa and its precinct was an important center for ancient local Arabian inhabitants on the western side of the Arabian Peninsula. Various meaningful compositions of humans, different kinds of animal figures, scenes of daily life and hunting strongly give the impression that the Arab ancestors have 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 represented in trade caravans that used to pass through the location heading north or south. The second category is surely for the local people from Bedouins who inhabited or owned the land in this region⁵².

⁴⁷For the 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.

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

⁴⁹ It 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 panel number 10.

⁵⁰ KHAN, «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 Arfaa archeological site dates to the 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, & WALEN, «The Comprehensive Archaeological Survey Program», 30-31.

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

With considering this, a little definite information is obtained concerning the 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 to depict the famous and commonly used hunting scene in Arabia⁵⁵. This view is 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, the bull figures depicted on both panels were completely outlined and pecked with internal details more than the other three animal figures depicted in the lower part of panel number ten which probably have been executed in the normal stick style without internal details⁵⁷.

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 in the fourth millennium BC. camel became a familiar animal in this ancient Arabic society⁵⁹.

Obviously, at that time ancient man mainly depended on the camel as the most valuable desert animal in his life. Many scholars have tried to

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.

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

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

⁵⁷DHAIFALLAH, «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.

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

determine a tentative date on which camels were domesticated in Arabia by the beginning of the Bronze Age (4500 years BP)⁶⁰.

Nubian ibex and bull figures also were the most popular depictions in Arabia rock art regions like Jubbah, Hail, and Najran⁶¹. These animal figures were the commonly 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).

(Table 1) Enumeration figures of humans, animals, and birds are 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	-	-

@Made by the Researcher

⁶⁰KHAN, «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.

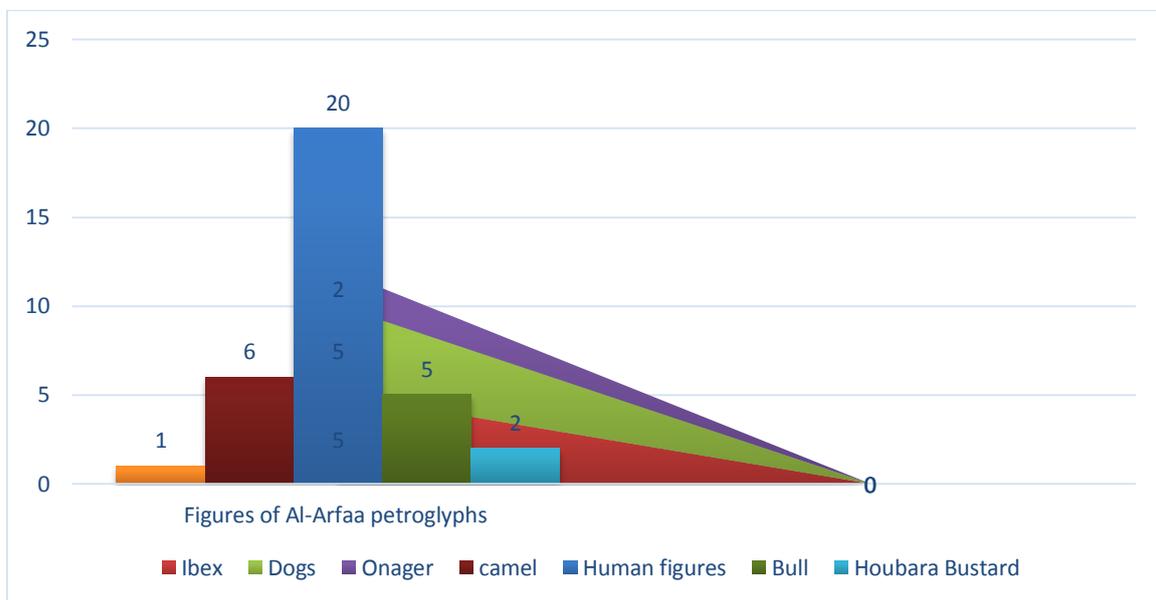
⁶²Review: KHAN, «Rock Art of Saudi Arabia», 447-475; GUAGNIN, & OTHERS, «Hunters and Herders», 3-16.

(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 the number of human, animals, and birds' figures in the Arfaa site.

@Made by the Researcher



(FIG.2) Graph showing the total number of documented rock art in the Arfaa Archaeological site. @Made by the Researcher

As mentioned before, it is very difficult to determine an accurate and proper date for rock art without obtaining direct archeological or epigraphical evidence. However, by 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.

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 paper. This technique is 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 also Wadi Damm to the north of Tabuk⁶⁵. Hence, we may suggest that most of the Afraa rock art figures documented in this study probably belong to the late period of the Second Millennium BC.

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

⁶⁴ BEDNARIK, 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.

⁶⁵ Review 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.

References:

- ADAMS, R., PARR, P., IBRAHIM, M., & MUGHANNUM, A., «Report on the First Phase of the Comprehensive, Archaeological Survey Program», *Atlal* 1, №. 21, 1977, 40.
- 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.
- BEDNARIK, R., «A New Method to Date Petroglyphs», *Archaeometry* 34, №.2 , 2007, 279-291.
- BEDNARIK, R. & KHAN, M., «A Chronology of Saudi Arabia Rock Art », *XXVI Volcamonica Symposium*, 2015, 1-6.
-, «The Saudi Arabia Rock Art Mission of November 2001», *Atlal*, №. 17, 2001, 75-99.
- BIELLA, J., *Dictionary of the Old South Arabic Sabaean Dialect*, Harvard Semitic Museum, 1982.
- BRAUER, R., « The Camel and its Role Shaping Mideastern Nomad Societies», *Comparative Civilizations Review* 28, 1993, 106–151.
- DABIAS S. AL-UTABI, A. SENDI & OTHERS, «Report on the Archeological Survey of (Ancient Market) Suq -Ukaz», *Atlal*, №. 30, 2020, 109-120.
- DHAIFALLAH, 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>
- EL-TONSSY, M., «Archaeological Study of Unpublished Rock Art Inscriptions at Taif », *CUGAA* 22, 2019, 21-40, <https://dx.doi.org/10.21608/cguua.2020.22917.1011>.
-, «Archeological Discoveries at wadi Qarn, Taif City, Saudi Arabia», *JGUAA* 26, 2023, 29-59, <https://dx.doi.org/10.21608/cguua.2023.185777.1155>
-, «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>.
- EL-ZEIB, S., *Social Life before Christ in the Hail Region through Thamudic Inscriptions*, King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, Riyadh, 2017.
- GORIUP, P., «The World Status of the Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis Undulata*», *Birds Conservation International* 7, №. 4, 1997, 373-397.
- 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>.
- HITTI, P., *History of the Arabs*, 10TH ed., Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2002.
- 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.
- JENNINGS, R., SHEPTON, CERI, AL-OMARI, A., ALSHAREKH, A, CRASSARD, R, GROUCUTT, H, & PETRAGLIA, M., «Rock Arts landscapes besides the Jubba Paleolake, Saudi Arabia», *Antiquity* 87, 2013, 666-683, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0003598X00049383> .
- 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.
- KHAN, M., « From Prehistoric to Nomadic Art – A Synopsis of the History and Development of Tribal Art in Saudi Arabia», *American International Journal of Social Science* 8, №.2, 2019, 71-80.

-
- , « Rock Art Research in the Arabian Peninsula, Levant and Anatolia», *World Rock Art series*, London, 1996, 95–103.
 - , «Rock Art of Saudi Arabia», *Arts* 2, №.4, 2013, 447-475. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts2040447>
 - , *Wusum- The Tribal Symbols of Saudi Arabia*, Vol. 1, Riyadh, Ministry of Education, 2000, 57-59.
 - , «Tracing the Path of the Lost Civilization of Arabia», *Atlal*, №. 30, 2020, 133-144.
 - , *An Introduction to the Rock Art of Saudi Arabia*, Riyadh, 2017.
 - LAMMENS, H., «La cité arabe de Ta'if à la veille de l'hégire», *MFOB VIII*, 1922, 113-327.
 - LIVINGSTONE, A., & KHAN, M., «Epigraphic Survey 1404–1984 », *Atlal* 9, 1985, 128–144.
 - 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.
 - MACDONALD, M., & SEARIGHT, A., « Inscriptions and Rock Art of the Jawa Area », *ADAJ* 26, 1983, 571–576.
 - MACDONALD, 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>
 - MACDONALD, M., «The Development of Arabic as a written language», *Supplements to the Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, Oxford , 2010, 5-27.
 - 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> .
 - 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>
 - 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.
 - 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, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01426397.2019.1592132>.
 - PARR, P., HOLDING, J., & DAYTON, J., « Preliminary Survey in N.W. Arabia, 1968 », *Bulletin of Institute of Archeology*, 1970, 193-242.
 - RIPINSKY, M. «The camel in ancient Arabia», *Antiquity* 49, №.196,1975, 289-303.
 - WOODARD, R.(ED.), *The Ancient Languages of Syria Palestine and Arabia*, Cambridge, Nebes, N., & Stein, P., 2008 [HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.1017/CBO9780511486890](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511486890) .
 - ZARINS J., & WALLEN, N., « The Comprehensive Archaeological Survey Program », *Atlal* 4, 1980, 30-31.

Catalogue:



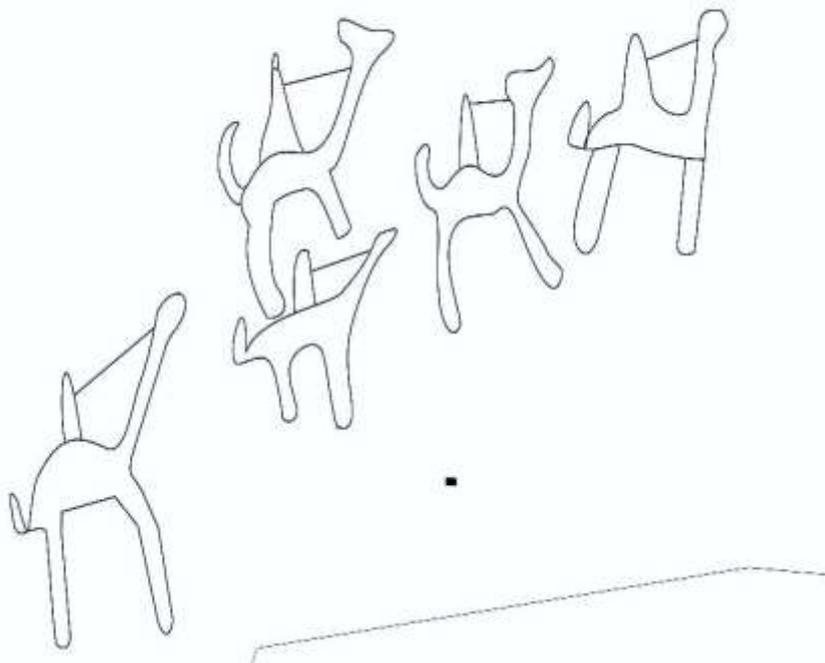
(FIG. 3) The map of Saudi Arabia shows the location of the Arfaa site.
(After Saudi Atlas).



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



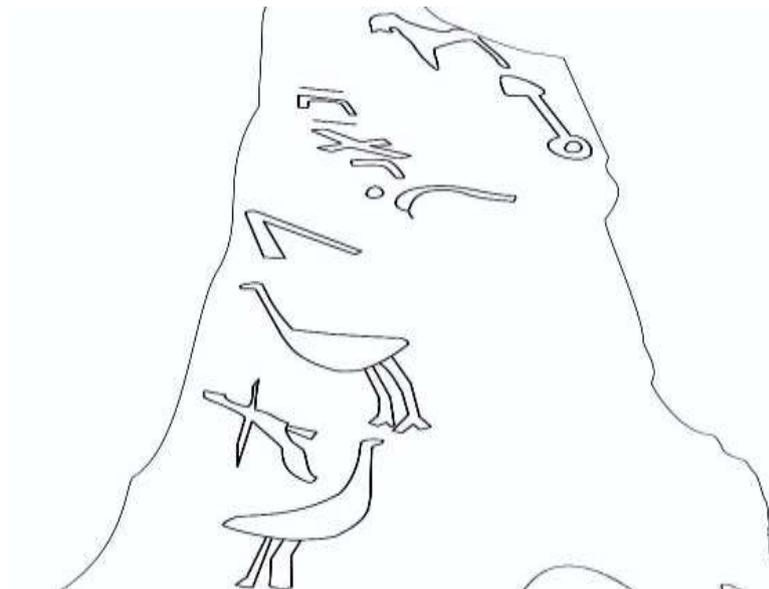
(PL. 1) The figure of five camels with man riders
@Taken by the researcher



(FIG. 5) Facsimile figure of five camels with man riders
@Made by the Researcher



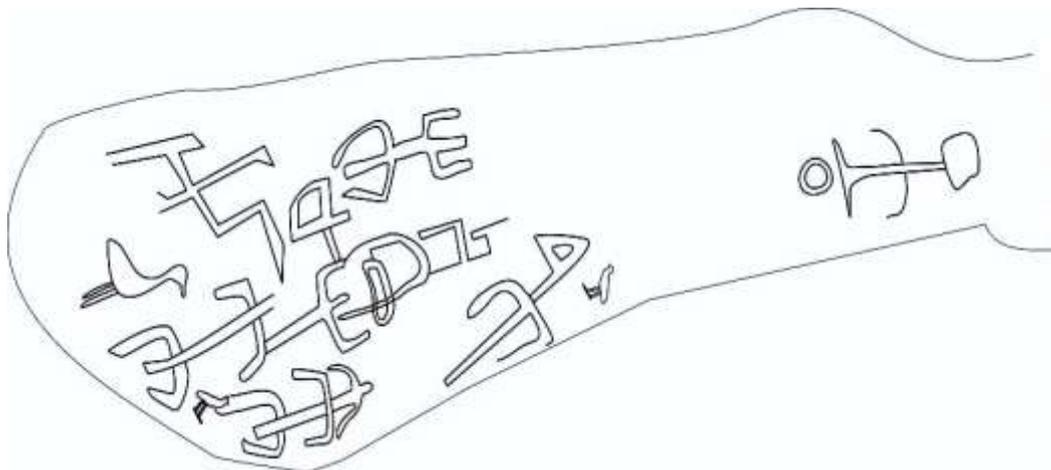
(PL. 2) The figure of ostriches and Thamudic inscriptions
@Taken by the Researcher



(FIG. 6) Facsimile of ostriches and Thamudic inscriptions
@Made by the Researcher



(Pl. 3) The hunting scene of Birds by human figures
@Taken by the Researcher.

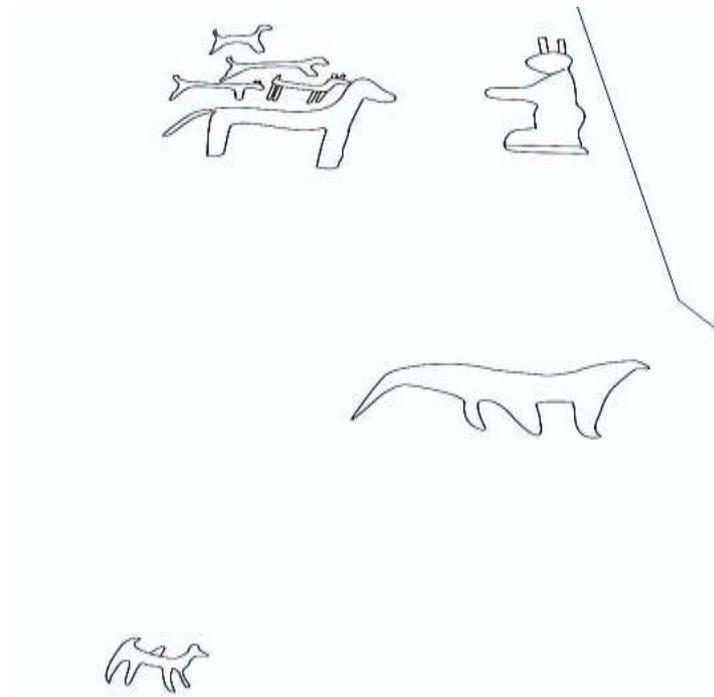


(FIG. 7) Facsimile of hunting scene of Birds by human figures
@Made by the Researcher



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

@Taken by the researcher

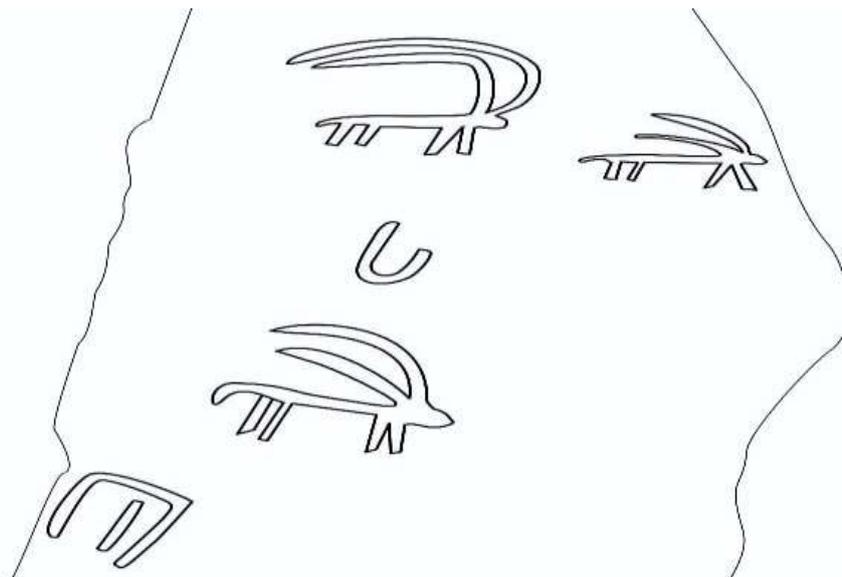


(FIG. 8) Facsimile of animals and birds' figures in hunting panel.

@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



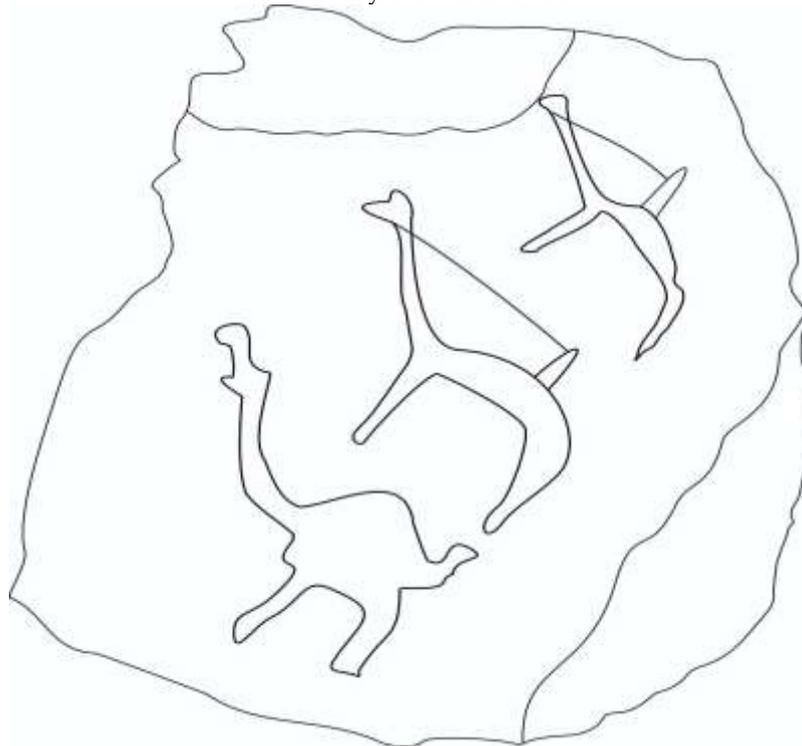
(PL. 6) Arabian camel with Thamudic text.
@Taken by the Researcher



(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 human riders
@Made by the Researcher.



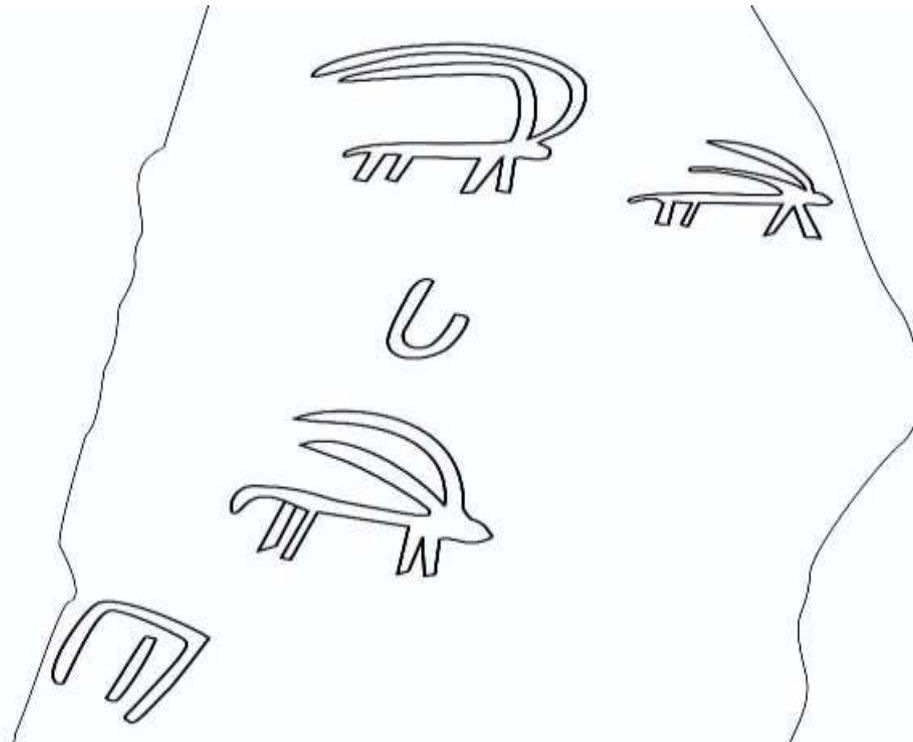
(PL. 8) Scene of camel riders and Ostriches.
@Taken by the Researcher.



(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

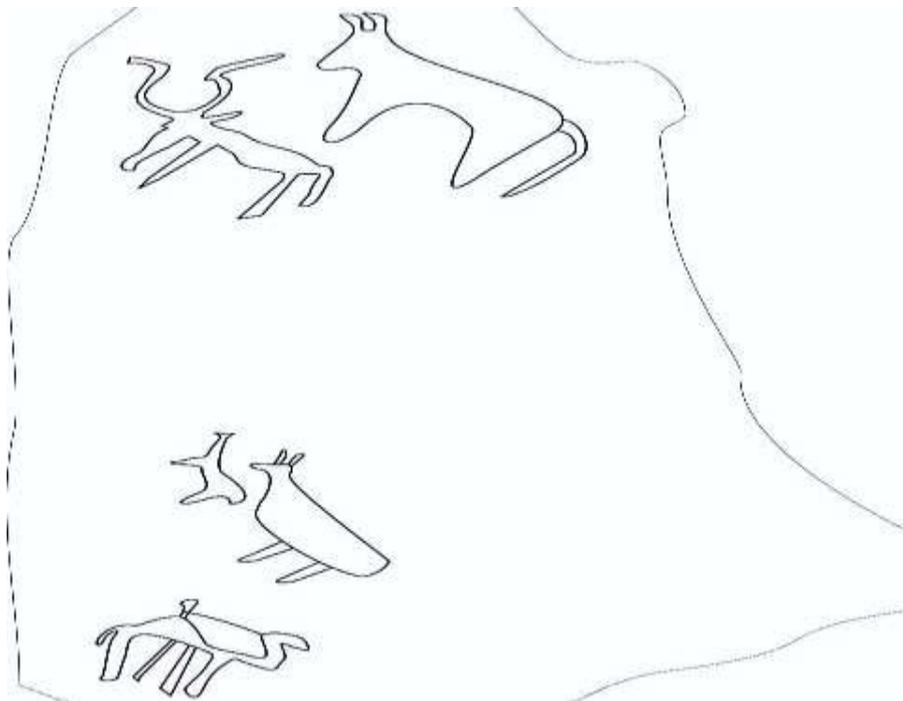


(FIG. 13) Facsimile of two Arabian Ibexes with Arabian Wusum
@Made by the Researcher



(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 rider.

@Made by the Researcher



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



(FIG. 15) Facsimile of three horned Arabian bulls.
@Made by the Researcher.