

## Yatib Its Environs and Rock Art

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**Abstract:** *This paper is about Yatib, which is an important rock art site to the north of Saudi Arabia. The paper describes various panels located on Jabal Yatib containing 197 petroglyphs of various figures such as: horses, camels, palm trees, ibexes, ostriches, and a lion. Human figures were also represented. The panels also contain fighting and hunting scenes in addition to a few palm trees. Thamudic inscriptions were also noted. An attempt was made to study the drawings on the Jabal Yatib, as well their techniques and indications. An attempt was also made to date the site.*

**Keywords:** *Yatib, Rockart, Hunting, Thamudic Inscriptions, Hail.*

### Introduction

Hail region is considered as the richest region in rock art in Saudi Arabia. Many sites are scattered in different parts of the region. Jabal Yatib is located to the north of Saudi Arabia, in Hail region. It is about 40 km east of Hail city at 41°58, 690 N and 27° 29, 415 E. (Fig 1). Jabal Yatib overlooks the nearby valley; and when it rains, water flows and creates temporary lakes. There are many trees growing in the valley most of which are acacia. These trees form a good food source for camels, and prevent soil erosion as well. The site has been visited by the author several times to record the rock art and photograph them. The information collected was first studied, then classified, and presented in this paper.

### Previous studies

Rock art sites are scattered in various places in Saudi Arabia. However, the most prominent sites were recorded in: Najran, Tabuk and Hail. Two sites were recorded recently on the World Heritage List: Ash-shwuyamis and Jubbah from Hail region.

One of the pioneering studies on the rock art of Arabia was conducted by Anati. The study was based on photographs collected from different parts of Arabia by the Philby, Ryckmans, and Lippens expedition in the south-central region of the country. Anati divided the material into groups, and classified them into different phases. The first era is attributed to the old hunting period (6000 BC). The second represents the old hunting and pastoralist period (6000-4000 BC). The third phase has been classified as the middle hunting and pastoralist period (4000-1000 BC). The final period falls in the Islamic era (Anati, 1972, 1974).

Hail region was visited in 1976 by an archaeological expedition as part of the archaeological survey program which lasted for several years. Many inscriptions and rock drawings on suitable rock surfaces throughout the province were recorded. Among them was Jubba, where two styles of rock art are represented. The first one, which is clearly contemporary with the majority of texts, includes crude and informal scenes of camels

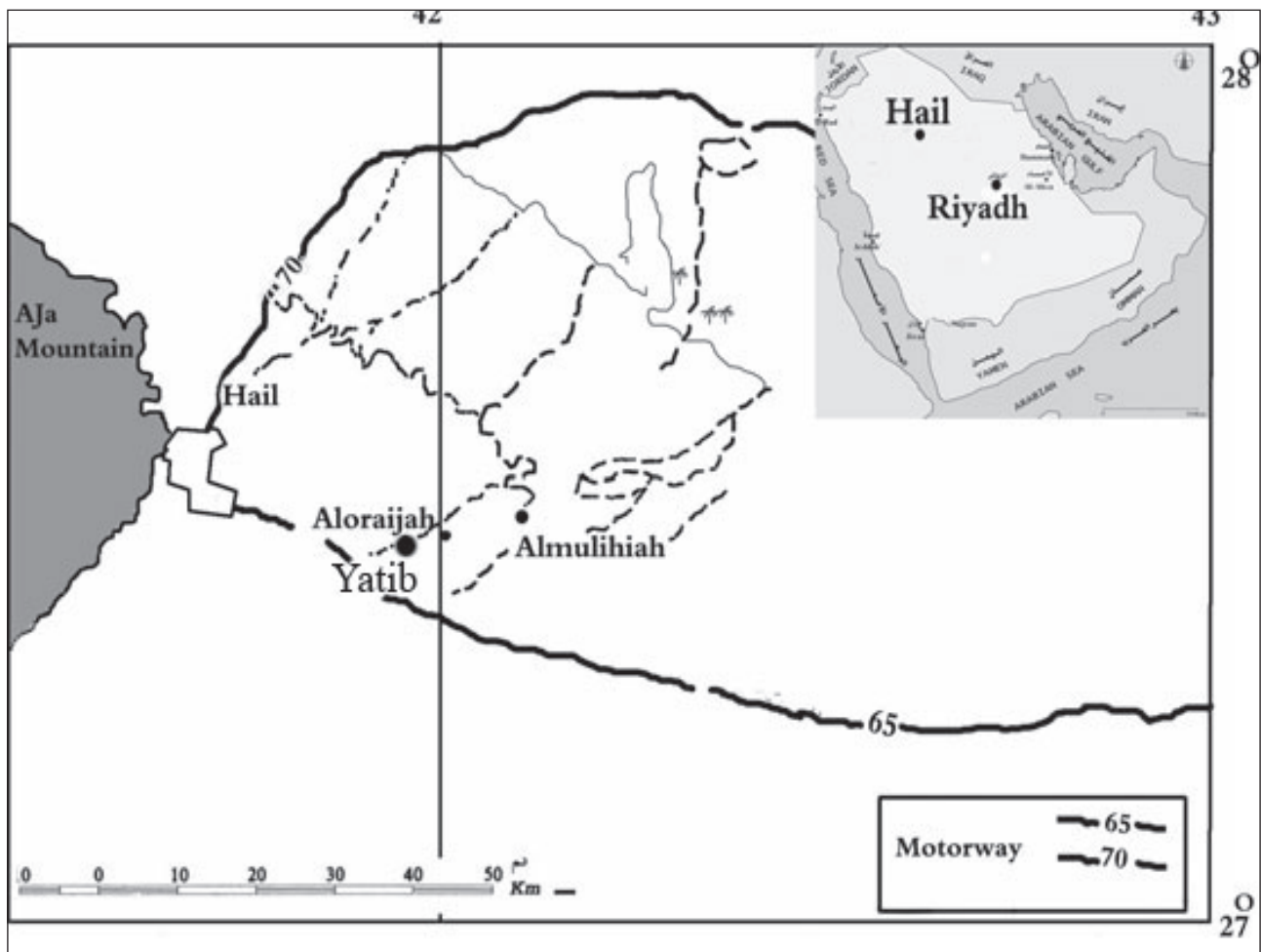


Fig. 1: The Location of Yatib, in Hail region.

and ibexes. The other style, which is older, contains life-sized scenes of human figures, bovid, Oryx and equids (Adams et al. 1977, 39-40). Also, the area was visited in 1977 by another archaeological team during the comprehensive survey program, Jubbah was reexamined and many (Thamudic) inscriptions were noted (Parr et al., 1978, 47-49).

We should also note the efforts of Majeed Khan who recorded, studied and published many rock art sites in Saudi Arabia (Khan, 1988, 1990, 1993, 1996, 1998).

Hail region was covered during the third season of the rock art and epigraphic survey

(Khan & Kabawai, 1988). Various sites were recorded such as: Jabal Yatib, Milihiya, Jabel Janin, al-Qa'id, Al-Khatta, Jubbah, Shimli, Al-Hayet and Al-Hawait. The team noted that Jabal Yatib contains a variety of rock carvings and large numbers of Thamudic inscriptions. The Thamudic period (ca. 500 BC) is recognized by the presence of the Thamudic inscriptions on the rock art panels, which usually contain camels, palm trees, ibexes and foot and hand print (Khan & al-Kabawai, 1988, 63). Yatib was known to early Arab geographers. It was mentioned in (Mu'jam Albuldan): as a place in Aja mountain with water<sup>(1)</sup>.

### The drawings



**Fig.2:** This panel shows various horse riders, carrying lances of different sizes. These horse riders are engaged in fighting. It was probably a battle that took place at that time. Riders are engaged into face to face fights, while there was one (to the center) trying to stab another in his back. On the other side of the rock, there is a group of riders carrying very long lances. Each two are fighting and trying to attack each other. Another rider is carrying what seems to be a sword.

Most of the drawings were in stick style(2).



**Fig3:** This is a fallen part of the rock which contains Fig. 2. It contains the drawings of horse riders holding long lances, and fighting. The figures are not very clear and were drawn in stick style, indirect pecking. It appears as if they are of different times.



**Fig 4:** This panel shows two horsemen chasing each other, and trying to stab with a long lance. It also shows horse drawings by a straight line for the back, and four lines for the legs. Human figures were represented by lines as well in schematic style. The tail of the first horse is raised, and the bridle was shown by a wavy line. The legs of the second horse are shown thicker than its back. The horse and rider on the right appear to have been engraved later, indirect pecking, stick style.



**Fig 5:** This panel contains a drawing of a camel, an ibex and a horse rider. The camel was drawn by outline style; the hump is almost in a triangle shape and connected directly to the legs, not as in nature; and the stomach was drawn in a straight line. The head of the camel is poorly executed and not clear in the drawing. Was it left intentionally, or just left without clear features?

On the same panel, there is a drawing of an ibex carved in outline style. It has long curved horns. On the right hand of the panel, there is a drawing of a horse and a rider. The horse is represented by a straight line with four lines as its legs; its tail is raised. The schematic rider is holding the bridle of the horse.



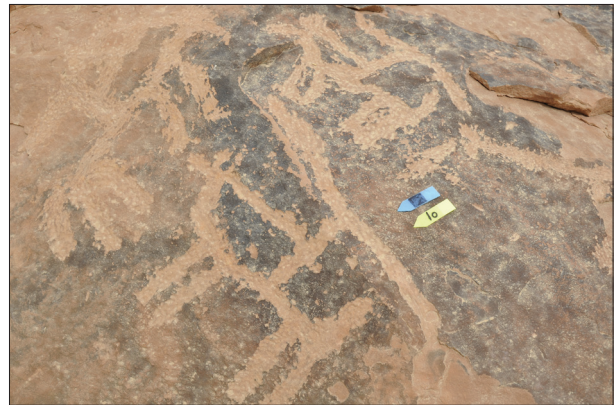
**Fig 6:** The panel contains five horse riders; two of them are fighting with long lances. Some of the riders seem to be running away as they do not carry weapons. Horses were drawn by linear lines, the same as the horse riders. To the right of the panel, there is a drawing of two undefined animals.



**Fig 7:** This panel contains two horse riders as if they are chasing each other without carrying weapons. Horses and human figures were drawn in schematic style; only simple lines were drawn to represent the body; also the bridle was shown on the horse. The panel was executed by indirect pecking probably by an unskilled artist.



**Fig 8:** This composition contains 8 horse riders. Five of them are engaged in fighting whereas the rest are watching as they don't carry weapons. Long lances are used in fighting.



**Fig9:** This panel contains 3 horse riders holding long lances in their raised arms as if they are ready to fight. The figures were drawn by linear lines in stick form. The bridles were shown as straight lines.



**Fig 10:** This panel contains 5 horse riders and a camel rider. It was drawn in stick style. The drawings are not well executed, while the camel is carefully pecked.



**Fig 11:** This panel shows two hunters trying to hunt an ostrich. One of them is using the sword while the other is using a bow and an arrow. The ostrich was well drawn. The bodies are fully pecked.



**Fig 12:** Two horse riders are fully pecked following each other. Below them, there is another horse rider. The figures are fading and are hardly visible.



**Fig13:** This panel contains several drawings:

- 1) A horse rider is holding the bridle in his left hand. The tail of the horse is raised and curved. The drawing is created in stick style by indirect pecking.
- 2) A horse rider is hunting an ostrich with a long lance.
- 3) A horse rider, the drawing is not clear, it seems to be drawn in stick style.
- 4) A camel with a raised tail is fully pecked. The hump is rectangular in shape.
- 5) A man is drawn in stick style holding a lance in his right hand.
- 6) Two dynamic horse riders apparently in motion.
- 7) A horse rider is fully pecked.



**Fig 14:**

- 1) A palm tree without dates.
- 2) An ibex fully pecked with long horns.
- 3) A horse rider holding a bridle. The horse body is fully pecked.
- 4) A juvenile camel, fully pecked with a raised tail.
- 5) An ibex; the body is fully pecked. It has long horns.
- 6) Two horse riders as if they are following each other. The bodies are fully pecked.
- 7) Three horse riders on the move as if they are in a caravan. The bodies are fully pecked with a rope connecting them. Behind them is a human like figure with a bow and an arrow holding the horses.



**Fig 15:** This rock has drawings on 2 sides (A and B). On side A, several drawings were drawn:

- 1) A horse rider holding the bridle. The body of the horse is fully pecked, while the human figure is not clear.
- 2) It looks like a battle scene, or a hunting scene. At the back of the drawing, there are two persons standing on their feet. Each of them is holding a bow and an arrow pointing towards four horse riders in front of them. In front of the horse riders, there is a person standing, holding a bow and an arrow, and pointing to one of the horse riders as if he is going to shoot them. At the lower part of the scene, there is an ibex which is not very clear. Its horns are long and curved. The human and horse figures are fully pecked, while the ibex is in stick style. The patina, style and execution technique indicate that the figures were created in the same cultural period.

Panel 3: a standing person holding a bow and an arrow in his hand pointing to the back of a horse rider in front of him. There are two ibexes, one to the right of the horse rider, and the other is to the left. In front of the ibexes, there is another horse rider. In front of the ibex is a standing person, holding a bow and an arrow attacking the ibex. Further, there are groups of different drawings which are not clear. One of these looks like an ostrich. The overall impact on the panel is created as if the people on horses are involved in hunting while those on foot are supporting them.

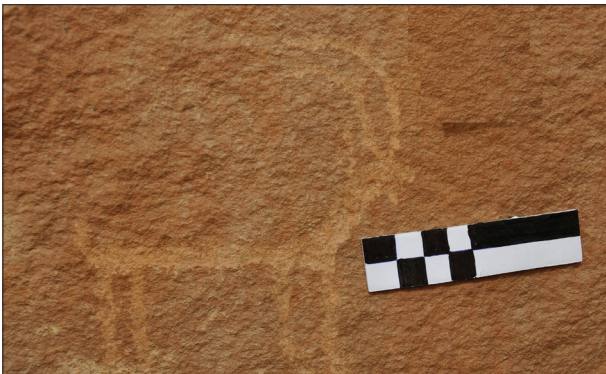
side B:

There is a ladder like figure drawn almost in the center of the rock with ten steps. It looks as if it is leading to the top of the rock. Though the rock is broken in the upper part, one step can be seen at the top. The ladder connects the two faces of the rock. To the left of the ladder is a fully pecked ibex. To the right of the ladder, there is a Thamudic inscription. There is also a fighting scene showing two standing men pointing arrows towards the two horse riders.

Also, to the right of the ladder in the middle, is a fully pecked horse rider. Another horse rider is hunting an ostrich with a long lance. On the top of the rock to the right is a camel drawing fully pecked and several unclear figures of animals. To the far left of the rock, there is a camel figure depicted in outline with a rectangular shaped hump.



**Fig16:** At the upper part of the rock, there is an ibex with only the head, long horns; and the front legs are left as the rest of the rock is broken. Under the ibex, there is a horse rider fully pecked; and to the right is a fully pecked camel figure with exaggerated long ears. The other figures on the lower part are not clear.



**Fig17:** This panel shows an ibex with long horns drawn in stick style.



**Fig 18:** This panel contains two fully pecked camels; one on the top, and the other is on the lower part of the rock. Their tails are raised as if they are running or racing.



**Fig19:** This panel shows two ibexes drawn in stick style. The first one has long straight horns, while the other has curved ones.



**Fig 20:** This panel shows a horse rider trying to hunt an ibex with a long lance stabbing his neck. The horse is fully pecked whereas the human figure does not have clear features. The ibex is drawn in stick style.



**Fig 21:** To the left, there are three camels, which are small in size. They have fully pecked bodies, and curved tails. To the right, there is horse rider, holding a long lance attacking an ostrich. The horse, the human figure, and the ostrich are fully pecked. The artist showed a clear tail of the ostrich whose legs are tall and graceful as well as its neck.



**Fig 22:** This is a prominent large panel (3×1.5m.). It contains humans, animals, and plant figures as well as some inscriptions. It is divided into groups for clearer descriptions:

- 1) Four fully pecked camels, with raised tails, but they are not very well executed.
- 2) A lion, not well drawn, only outline of the body, an opened mouth as if holding a young ibex. The lion has a long tail. There are some inscriptions around the lion.
- 3) Two horse riders with long lances. It appears as if they are chasing three camels in front of them.
- 4) Two camels drawn in outline in a natural way. The head of the upper one is missing because the rock is broken while the lower one is complete. Around the drawings, there are various inscriptions.
- 5) Two palm trees, the one to the right has dates. Around them are various inscriptions including modern Arabic writing.



**Fig 23:** A palm grove has been drawn on the front of this entire rock. The panel contains about 16 palm trees, some of which have dates. There are people climbing the tree to pick the dates. Dates are drawn in the form of small circles at the end of the bunch. The figures are executed out by indirect pecking using a sharp tool. Several inscriptions are scattered on the rock, and at the lower left side are fully pecked camel figures.



**Fig 24:** On the top of Jabal Yatib, there are several drawings that consist of camels, ostriches, a palm tree, and several inscriptions. Six camels were fully pecked and drawn in natural style. The palm tree is on a separate rock to the left, and is almost fading. A horse rider is to the left of the camels taking opposite direction, holding a bridle in his hand, and maybe some weapon. Two ostriches are located at the lower right part of the panel, fully pecked and well executed. The panel is full of inscriptions scattered all over the rock.





**Fig 25:** On the top of Jabal Yatib, there is an interesting panel. A she camel at the lower part drawn in outlines under which is a juvenile camel baby suckling. Two more fully pecked young camels are drawn. To the left are a palm tree and a camel. The camel is stretching his head as if he is trying to eat the dates. There is a horse rider drawn in a stick style, and an inscription.

### Discussion

Jabal Yatib is overlooking a wide valley, and when it rains, this valley turns into a small temporary lake. The valley attracted people for water and plants that grow around the lake for their animals especially camels and goats. The rock art and the inscriptions are possibly the work of people who camped here for long periods, or who passed through the area. Around this area, there are two more important sites: Almulihiah and Janin.

There are 24 panels of rock art in the hilly area of Jabal Yatib containing 197 petroglyphs of various animal figures. They represent a variety of animals and trees such as: horse riders 30%, horses 30%, camels 14%, palm trees 10%, ibexes 7%, humans 5%, ostriches 3%, lions 0.5% and a ladder.

The panels mostly depict fighting and hunting scenes in addition to a few palm trees. Thamudic inscriptions were also noted. The figures were mostly depicted in stick style, while some figures were fully pecked and others were drawn by outline techniques. It seems that most of the figures were created with sharp tools, using indirect pecking techniques.

### Dating

It is known that Arabian Peninsula was not dry and hot as today. According to studies of the Jubbah Lake in Hail region, the area witnessed wet and cold weathers between 6500-6000 BC (Garrard & Harvey 1981). During that time, cattle were represented in rock art. After that, the weather started to get dry and hot. Camels and ibexes could live in the hot dry climate, which was known to have begun after the fourth millennium BC. Camel figures were noted on large scale in their domesticated form on the panels. It was suggested that camels were domesticated around 1200 BC (Groom 2008, 51).

Thamudic inscriptions were widely seen on the site. These are usually dated to between the early sixth century BC and seven century AD (Alansary, Ghazal and King 2005, 109).

There is some similarity between Jabal Yatib and Almulihiah as some figures were represented on both sites such as camels, ibexes, ostriches, and Thamudic inscriptions. Almulihiah was dated to the early first millennium BC or older (Altalhi 2012, 96).

It may be suggested that Yatib rock art maybe attributed to the last quarter of the second millennium BC to the first millennium BC.

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**ملخص:** يتناول هذا البحث موقع ياطب أحد أهم مواقع الرسوم الصخرية بشمالي المملكة العربية السعودية. ويستعرض لوحات الرسوم الموجودة على جبل ياطب والتي تحتوي على ١٩٧ لوحة من أشكال متنوعة تشمل: الخيول، والجمال، وأشجار النخيل، والوعول، والنعام، والأسود، إضافة إلى الأشكال البشرية. وتحتوي اللوحات كذلك على مشاهد لمعارك حربية ومشاهد صيد، إضافة إلى أشجار النخيل والنقوش الثمودية. حاولت هذه الورقة دراسة الرسوم ودلالاتها والتقنيات التي نفذت بها، وكذلك محاولة تأريخها.

**Notes**

- (1) YaqoutAlhamoie(died 626H ) MujamAlbuldan. Edited: FaridAbdulaghani: Bierut ,vol 5, p 488.  
 (2) Stick style: where the artist draw figures in linear and stick like forms

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