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## **The Safaitic scripts: palaeography of an ancient nomadic writing culture**

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Tens of thousands of ancient inscriptions in a script labelled as ‘Safaitic’ are found on the rocks of the Ḥarraḥ, a basaltic desert stretching from southern Syria, through north-eastern Jordan, into northern Saudi Arabia (Fig.1.1). The chronological span of Safaitic texts is uncertain, but some were no doubt produced between the first century BC and the first half of the second century AD (§1.1.4). The vast majority of Safaitic inscriptions are only names or brief texts, such as rock art signatures, references to nomadic and pastoral activities, expressions of longing and grief for loved ones, and short prayers. Their language is Old Arabic (§1.1.2).

This work is the first systematic investigation of the materiality of the Safaitic script. The primary data-set used for this study is the Jebel Qurma corpus (abbr. JQC) from the north-eastern Jordanian Ḥarraḥ (§1.2).

The first Section of this Chapter is an introduction to several aspects of Safaitic epigraphy (§1.1). The second Section (§1.2) offers some information on the context and features of the JQC. The last Section (§1.3) introduces the aims of this research (§1.3.1), reviews previous scholarship on Safaitic palaeography (§1.3.2), and illustrates the terminology and approach employed in this study (§1.3.3).

### 1.1 The Safaitic inscriptions

The term ‘Safaitic’ is a modern misnomer. It was coined by early scholars of Safaitic and it is derived from the Ṣafā, a volcanic region of unbroken lava flows which is located south-east of Damascus. However, no Safaitic inscriptions have actually been found in the Ṣafā, but only in its proximity (Macdonald 2000:35). Indeed, the vast majority of Safaitic texts are concentrated in the Ḥarraḥ to the south and to the east stretching until northern Saudi Arabia (Fig. 1.1).<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the term has become established

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<sup>4</sup>Outside of the Ḥarraḥ, Safaitic inscriptions were found in the Ḥawrān – see, e.g., the texts at Umm al-Jimāl (Littmann 1943:278–281), at Boşra (Sartre 1985:148), and on the eastern slopes of Jabal al-‘Arab (Zeinaddin 2000) –, in and around Palmyra (Ingholt et al. 1951), at Dura Europos (Macdonald 2005b), in western Iraq (Safar 1964), in Lebanon (Harding 1971, Harding 1975) and even as far as Pompeii (Calzini Gysens 1990).

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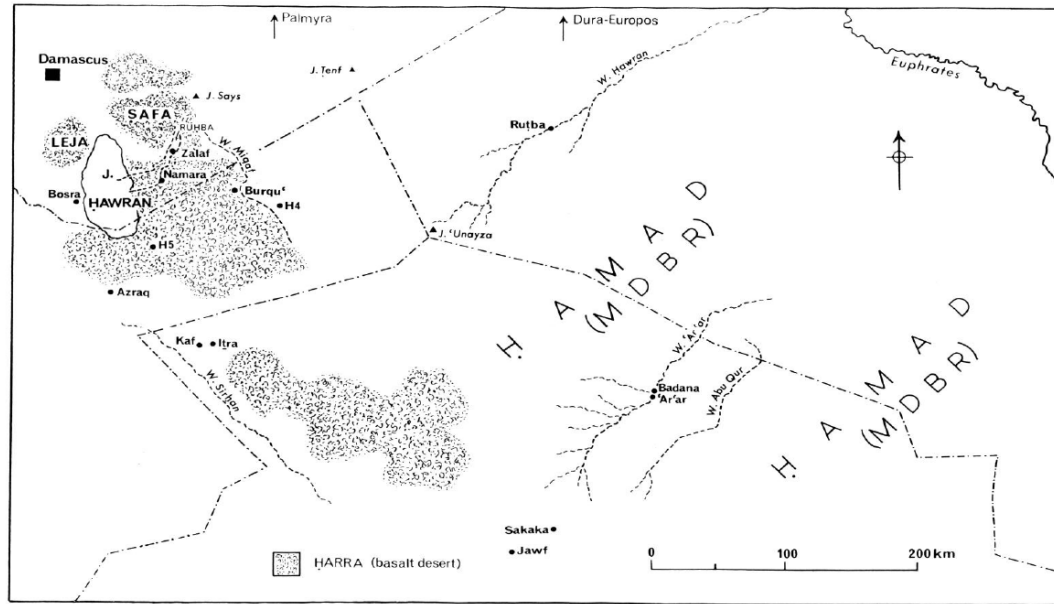


Figure 1.1: Map showing the Ḥarrah and the Ḥamād deserts (from Macdonald 1993:321)

and hence conventionally accepted in the scholarship.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.1.1 Decipherment and history of collections

The earliest copies of Safaitic texts were made by nineteenth century travellers to the Ḥarrah and the Ḥawrān. In 1857, C.C. Graham copied some Safaitic inscriptions during his travel in the Ḥarrah in southern Syria, which he published in 1858 (ZMDG XII) and 1860 (Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society XVII),<sup>6</sup> but they were so inaccurate that they played no role in the decipherment of the script (Grimme 1929:12). Around the same time in 1858, J.G. Wetzstein travelled in the Ḥawrān and the Ḥarrah and made 379 copies of much higher quality. He published only 27 copies, ten of which in his *Reisebericht über Ḥawrān und die Trachonen* in 1860,<sup>7</sup> while 17 further copies were published in 1876 by D.H. Müller in his article 'Die Ḥarra-Inschriften und ihre Bedeutung für die Entwicklungsgeschichte der südsemitischen Schrift' (ZMDG XXX).<sup>8</sup> The rest of Wetzstein's copies were published later by H. Grimme in his 'Texte und Untersuchungen zur šafatenisch-arabischen Religion'.<sup>9</sup> Further early collections of texts were made by M. de Vogüé, W.H. Waddington, R. Dussaud and F. Macler.<sup>10</sup>

The process of decipherment of the Safaitic script was started in 1877–1882 by J.

<sup>5</sup>Littmann 1901:ii; Littmann 1940:92; Macdonald 1993:305–306.

<sup>6</sup>Graham 1858; Graham 1860.

<sup>7</sup>Wetzstein 1860.

<sup>8</sup>Müller 1876.

<sup>9</sup>Grimme 1929.

<sup>10</sup>See the overview in Littmann 1940:93–94 and the references in there.

Halévy, who was named by E. Littmann as ‘*der wirkliche Begründer der Safâ-Epigraphik*’.<sup>11</sup> While Halévy believed to have completed the decipherment of the script, he had identified only 22 out of 28 graphemes, of which only 16 correctly. Soon after, F. Praetorius recognised that the Safaitic graphematic inventory was larger and identified 5 further graphemes (Littmann 1940:95). In 1901, Littmann deciphered the remaining 7 graphemes, thus completing the decipherment of all 28 graphemes of the Safaitic script.<sup>12</sup>

The first major collections of Safaitic inscriptions were from modern southern Syria. In 1943, Littmann published an edition of 1302 Safaitic texts collected within the framework of the Princeton Archaeological Expedition to Syria in 1904-1905 and 1909 (LP<sup>13</sup>). The year 1950 saw the publication of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum, Pars V* (C), edited by G. Ryckmans, which contained 5380 Safaitic texts.<sup>14</sup> With the exception of LP, this corpus included most Safaitic inscriptions published before 1950 plus 2600 new texts copied by Maurice and Mireille Dunand in the 1920s.

The following decades have witnessed the publication of an increasing number of Safaitic collections, most of which are from north-eastern Jordan. The largest ones are: Winnett and Harding 1978 (WH), with 4087 texts, and KRS (now published on OCIANA, see below), which contains 3372 texts collected and edited by the late G. King within the framework of the *Basalt Desert Rescue Survey*.<sup>15</sup>

Since 2017, the Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia (OCIANA), has been made available online.<sup>16</sup> The OCIANA, edited by Ali Al-Manaser and Michael Macdonald, gives access to most published and unpublished collections of Safaitic texts, including various MA theses and PhD dissertations, and provides photographs of the texts whenever available, together with an up-to-date edition and translation. At present, it contains 33,339 records of Safaitic texts.<sup>17</sup>

### 1.1.2 Script and language

The Safaitic writing system consists of 28 graphemes, each corresponding to a consonantal phoneme, while vowels are not represented—it can hence be defined as a *consonantal alphabet*.<sup>18</sup> The recent works by Al-Jallad have shown that the language

<sup>11</sup>Littmann 1901:ii; Halévy 1882.

<sup>12</sup>Littmann 1901.

<sup>13</sup>Littmann 1943.

<sup>14</sup>Ryckmans 1950–1951.

<sup>15</sup>See King 1990b. Other major collections from north-eastern Jordan include: Winnett 1957 (SIJ), Oxtoby 1968 (ISB), Clark 1979 (CSNS), Harahsheh 2001 (HaNS), Al-Khraysheh 2002 (KhBG), Ababneh 2005 (AbaNS), and Al-Manaser 2008 (AAEK).

<sup>16</sup>See <http://krcfm.orient.ox.ac.uk/fmi/webd/ociana>.

<sup>17</sup>Accessed on 23 May 2021.

<sup>18</sup>This is the term used in Healey 1990 and Gnanadesikan 2009. Other terms for this type of writing system have been proposed, such as *abjad* (Daniels 1996) and *consonantal linear segmentary* (Gnanadesikan 2017).

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expressed by Safaitic inscriptions is Old Arabic.<sup>19</sup>

Within the Safaitic script there is a great extent of graphic variation, and one can single out different *scripts*, that is, different inventories of basic shapes.<sup>20</sup> In my graphetic study of the JQC (see §1.3 below and Chapter 2), I identify three scripts: ‘common’, ‘fine’, and SoS (‘Southern Safaitic’).<sup>21</sup>

The Safaitic script belongs to the Ancient North Arabian (ANA) group of the South Semitic script-family.<sup>22</sup> This group includes the scripts of three ancient Arabian oases – Dadanitic, Taymanitic, and Dumaitic – and the scripts used in the deserts from the southern Levant to south-western Arabia: Safaitic, Hismaic, Thamudic B, C, D,<sup>23</sup> and Himaitic<sup>24</sup> (former Southern Thamudic).<sup>25</sup>

The ANA inventories that are closest to the Safaitic script are: Thamudic B, which is found in largest concentrations in the Najd and in the area between Madā’in Šaliḥ and Taymā’ in north-west Saudi Arabia (Macdonald and King 1999), and Hismaic, which is primarily found in the Ḥismā desert of southern Jordan and in the area around Tabūk in north-west Saudi Arabia (King 1990a:§1.C).<sup>26</sup> While there is still no comprehensive study of the Thamudic B script, a detailed analysis of the graphetic features of the Hismaic script was carried out by the late Geraldine King in her doctoral thesis (King 1990a:Chapter 2).

The ANA scripts are clearly related, but their developments and interrelationships are unclear, especially since we lack any precise chronology (Macdonald 1992a:418).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Al-Jallad 2015:10–14; Al-Jallad 2019. Previously the language of Safaitic texts was considered as part of a single dialectal bundle with the languages expressed by the other related Ancient North Arabian scripts (cf. Macdonald 2000; Macdonald 2004).

<sup>20</sup>I here follow Meletis’ definition of a script as an inventory of basic shapes (Meletis 2019:20, n. 7); see the discussion of the terminology and approach in §1.3 below.

<sup>21</sup>I borrowed the first two terms from two of the five categories proposed by Clark (1979), while the term SoS is employed here to refer to a group of inscriptions with features which have been labelled by some scholars as ‘Mixed Safaitic/Hismaic’. For a discussion of the scripts terminology employed here, see §1.3.3.4 below.

<sup>22</sup>The other group is Ancient South Arabian, from which the Ethiopian script developed; the Ethiopian syllabary is the only member of the South Semitic script-family which is still used nowadays (Macdonald 2000:32).

<sup>23</sup>The labels Thamudic B, C, and D, reflect Winnett’s preliminary subdivision of the ‘Thamudic’ material (see Winnett 1937:18–49), which included also Thamudic A (now labelled as Taymantic) and Thamudic E (now labelled as Hismaic). The term ‘Thamudic’ was coined by 19th century scholars and is conventionally employed as a ‘pending category’ including all those ANA scripts which have not been properly investigated yet; it bears no relationship with the ancient people of Thamūd (see Macdonald and King 1999; Macdonald 2000:33, 43–44).

<sup>24</sup>Robin and Gorea 2016.

<sup>25</sup>See Macdonald 2000, and the script table at p. 34; Macdonald 2004; Macdonald 2010; see Al-Jallad 2018 for the most recent survey of the features of the languages expressed by these scripts.

<sup>26</sup>For a comparison of the Safaitic scripts to Hismaic and Thamudic B, see §2.2.2, where I list the features distinguishing them as well as their shared features.

<sup>27</sup>Most ANA texts are undated. A few texts in the Taymanitic and Thamudic B scripts mention Nabonidus king of Babylon and date to the mid-6th century BC (see Macdonald 2010:11, 16). These are the earliest dated ANA texts. The latest dated text is a Thamudic D inscription which is dated to AD 267 by the associated Nabataean text with which it forms a bilingual (Macdonald 2010:16). On the chronology of Safaitic, see §1.1.4 below.

While comparing these scripts it appears that, although there are a number of shapes which are identical – or at least very similar – across scripts (e.g. the shapes of  $d\text{ }b$ ,  $y\text{ }i$ , and  $w\text{ }o$ ), there are also similar or identical shapes which have completely different graphematic values from one script to the other. In some cases, this may be the result of parallel development. Macdonald points at the example of the straight vertical line shape  $|$ , which is used for  $n$  in Thamudic B, for  $r$  in Thamudic D, for  $s^2$  in Hismaic, and for  $l$  in Safaitic (Macdonald 2015:21). This shape may have developed independently in each script.

However, there are two cases for which parallel development can probably be ruled out: 1) the shape  $\text{H}$ , which is used for the  $q$  in ‘common’ Safaitic and Thamudic B, while it represents the grapheme  $t$  in Hismaic; 2) the shape  $\text{O}$ , which expresses the  $t$  in Safaitic and Thamudic B forms, while it is used for the  $g$  in Hismaic (see Table 2.2).<sup>28</sup> As argued by King, such examples clearly show the inadequacy of uni-evolutionary models which see the various ANA inventories as the result of a single gradual development from one script to the other, since they suggest that the process by which some ANA scripts developed involved the adoption as well as deliberate rearrangement and modification of pre-existing inventories (King 1990a:§2.J).

### 1.1.3 Text form and subjects

The style of Safaitic inscriptions is laconic and formulaic. Virtually all texts start with  $l$ , the so-called *lām auctoris*,<sup>29</sup> followed by the name of the author, as in QUR 1020.74.1/C  $l\text{ }zmhr$  ‘By Zmhr’.<sup>30</sup> This can be considered as the minimal unit of the Safaitic text. To this unit several authors added the patronym, as in QUR 171.166.1/C (Fig. 1.2(a))  $l\text{ }bn\text{ }rt\text{ }bn\text{ }my$  ‘By Bn $\text{ }rt$  son of  $\text{ }my$ ’, or longer genealogies.<sup>31</sup>

After the name/genealogy, many texts indicate affiliation to a social group, usually through the expression  $d\text{ }l$  ‘of the people of’ + [group name], as in QUR 239.12.1/C  $l\text{ }dnt\text{ }bn\text{ }bd\text{ }d\text{ }l\text{ }s\text{ }bq$  ‘By  $dnt$  son of  $bd$  of the people of  $S\text{ }bq$ ’, or, more rarely, the *nisbah* adjective, as in QUR 1016.10.1/C  $l\text{ }qsyt\text{ }h\text{ }h\text{ }s\text{ }by$  ‘By Qsyt, the  $\{Hs\text{ }b\text{ }ite\}$ ’. The term  $l$  was employed to refer to social groups of varying nature and sizes.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup>King 1990a:§2.J.

<sup>29</sup>For a recent discussion of the functions of the *lām auctoris*, see Macdonald 2006:294–295.

<sup>30</sup>The only exception to this are initial prayers, as for example QUR 428.18.1/C, see §1.2.2.10 below.

<sup>31</sup>E.g. QUR 146.8.2/C  $l\text{ }qdm\text{ }bn\text{ }znn\text{ }bn\text{ }dh\text{ }bn\text{ }d\text{ }g\text{ }m\text{ }bn\text{ }qdm$  ‘By  $qdm$  son of  $Znn$  son of  $Dh$  son of  $\{Dgm\}$  son of  $qdm$ ’.

<sup>32</sup>See Harding 1969:3–5; Macdonald 1993:354, n.317; Al-Jallad and Jaworska 2019:30. By default, I translate the expression  $d\text{ }l$  as ‘of the people of’, but in case the affiliation is to either  $df$  or  $w\text{ }d$ , which we know were large lineages (see Appenices A–B), I translate this expression as ‘of the lineage of’.

In addition to the term  $l$ , one rarely encounters the term  $hl$ , which may have indicated the closer family group (Nehmé and Macdonald 2015:73–74).

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(a) ‘Common’ text (QUR 171.166.1/C) consisting of the author’s name plus his patronym



(b) ‘Fine’ text (AbSWS 80/F) containing all the typical elements of Safaitic inscriptions (Photo: OCIANA)

Figure 1.2: Examples of Safaitic texts

A large minority of the texts continues with a brief statement, an invocation, or a curse against potential effacers. Most Safaitic inscriptions express only a limited set of subjects, mostly falling into one of the following categories: references to associated drawings, statements concerning the author’s activity (such as pasturing, camping, migrating, keeping watch, raiding, etc.), mention of unfavourable conditions (e.g., drought, war, etc.), statements concerning the author’s emotions (mainly longing and grieving), prayers, curses, and dating formulae. In §1.2.2 below, I show examples of the most common Safaitic text types and subjects found in the JQC.<sup>33</sup>

The form of most Safaitic texts can be conceptualised according to the following additive structure: *l* PN ± [genealogy] ± [social group] ± [statement] ± [invocation] ± [curse/blessing] (cf. Macdonald 1992a:421).<sup>34</sup> When the statement contains a verb, this is almost always in the 3rd person singular perfect.

An example of a text containing all these elements is AbSWS 80/F (Fig. 1.2(b)). It reads: *l tm bn zn'l bn 'bd bn n'mn d 'l kn w r'y h-'gml f h lt s'lm w 'wr d y'wr h-s'fr* ‘By Tm son of Zn'l son of 'bd son of N'mn of the people of Kn and he pastured the camels and so, O Lt, [grant] security and blind whosoever would efface the inscription’. But the vast majority of the Safaitic corpus are only names, as the example in Fig. 1.2(a), or extremely short texts, as for instance QUR 2.132.1/C *l ns<sup>13</sup> bn nybt bn bngd w w{g}m* ‘By Ns<sup>13</sup> son of Nybt son of Bngd and he {grieved}’. Thus, it is important to stress that inscriptions as AbSWS 80/F are not necessarily representative of the Safaitic corpus as a whole, since most Safaitic inscriptions are considerably shorter. Moreover, it is not by chance that this text is carved in the ‘fine’ script: texts written in this script are on average longer and less concise than ‘common’ texts. While they share the same

<sup>33</sup>For other recent surveys of Safaitic formulae with examples, see Al-Jallad 2015:201–220 and Al-Jallad and Jaworska 2019:8–18.

<sup>34</sup>Sometimes the various elements follow a different order than the one outlined here, see, e.g., a group of texts accompanying drawings where the statement referring to the drawing is placed within the genealogy (see the examples in §1.2.2.2 below).

structure and subjects of ‘common’ inscriptions, they present longer genealogies (see §A.1) as well as longer narratives which often include a broader range of formulae.

#### 1.1.4 Chronology

Safaitic is conventionally dated to the centuries between the first century BC and the fourth century AD (Macdonald 1995b), but these chronological limits are notoriously problematic and uncertain (Al-Jallad 2015:17–18). The lower limit of the first century BC is not based on any securely dated texts<sup>35</sup> (but see below and §4.2), while the upper limit of the fourth century AD is based on the argument from silence that the inscriptions make no reference to Christianity.

Some of the most precisely dated Safaitic inscriptions are a group of texts in the ‘fine’ script which are dated to the appointment/regnal years/death of *grfš* ‘Agrippa’. These texts could refer to either Agrippa I, who ruled in the Ḥawrān from AD 37 to 44, or to Agrippa II, who ruled there from AD 53 to his death probably in 92/93 AD.<sup>36</sup> An inscription (Is.H 763/F) dated to the year 18 of king Agrippa, is the only one which unambiguously refers to Agrippa II, since Agrippa I ruled for a much shorter period.<sup>37</sup>

Most inscriptions mentioning Agrippa are by members of the lineage of *df* and present long genealogies, allowing us to locate them in their lineage tree (see Appendix A). In §4.2, I have combined the chronological framework of these texts (using as a point of reference both Agrippa I and Agrippa II) with the attested generations of *df* authors. The aim was to calculate a minimal *secure* time span of Safaitic writing among the *df*. By employing a minimal generation time span of 20 years, I have obtained an earliest secure date at the beginning of the first century BC and a latest secure date at the end of the first century AD. This result places our earliest secure dating of Safaitic in the first century BC, thus confirming the traditional chronology.

Needless to say, since this is a minimal time frame, it is very likely that *df* authors carved Safaitic texts also before and after.

There are also a number of ‘fine’ texts making reference to events involving *qsr* ‘Caesar’, *mdnt* ‘the province’ (either Syria or Arabia),<sup>38</sup> and *rm* ‘the Romans’, but it is mostly difficult to date them precisely.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup>To my knowledge, there are only two texts which, if the interpretation by the editors is correct, may date to the end of the first century BC. In one text, published by Abbadi, the dating formula reads *s'nt 'ty s'ly m-rm* ‘the year S'ly came from Rome’. Abbadi connected this formula with the return from Rome of the Nabataean minister Syllaeus and suggested that the text dates to 12–9 BC (Abbadi 1997; Abbadi 2001). A further text possibly mentioning the same event was published by Al-Rawabdeh and Abbadi (2017).

<sup>36</sup>See King 1990b:62; Macdonald 1995a:289–290. On the history of the two Agrippas, see Schürer 1973:442–454, 471–483.

<sup>37</sup>See Macdonald 2014:152. In the same paper, Macdonald surveys several other Safaitic texts referencing events which involve the local kingdoms of the Ḥawrān and the Romans, and cautiously suggests some possible identifications.

<sup>38</sup>On this interpretation of *mdnt*, see Macdonald 2014:154.

<sup>39</sup>See the discussion of these texts in Macdonald 2014; Macdonald put forward a translation of the dating formula *s'nt ngy qsr h-mdnt* as ‘the year Caesar announced the province’, and suggested that it may date



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(a) ‘Fine’ text (SESP.U 8/F) dated to the year king Agrippa died (AD 44 or (?)92/93); Photo: OCIANA



(b) SoS text (ISB 57/SoS) dated to the year Rabbel II became king (70/71 CE); Photo: OCIANA



(c) ‘Common’ text (QUR 2.353.7/C) hammered over ‘fine’ texts



(d) ‘Common’ text (BES15 1107/C) by Gregory son of Claudius; Photo: OCIANA

Figure 1.3: Panels of chronological significance

Several inscriptions in different Safaitic scripts mention *nbṭ* ‘the Nabataeans’ in various contexts.<sup>40</sup> The earliest references to the Nabataeans in other historical sources go back to the 4th century BC.<sup>41</sup> In the Hellenistic and Roman period, the Nabataeans gained considerable wealth thanks to their involvement in long-distance trade. Their capital was Petra, in southern Jordan, and they gradually expanded into the southern Ḥawrān to the north and into north-west Arabia to the south. In AD 106, this territory was annexed by the Romans as *Provincia Arabia*. The Nabataeans employed a script which was a local development of Imperial Aramaic. The Nabataean script continued to be used well after the annexation of the Nabataean kingdom by the Romans (see, e.g., the Nabataean/Safaitic bilingual dated to 125 AD mentioned below),<sup>42</sup> and, in to the announcement of *Arabia adquisita* by Trajan in AD 111 (see Macdonald 2014:154–155).

<sup>40</sup>See Al-Salameen et al. 2018; Al-Manaser, Al-Jouharah, et al. 2019; Al-Rawabdeh and Al-Manaser 2020; there are also instances of Safaitic writers who self-identified as *h-nbty* ‘the Nabataean’ (see Macdonald, Al-Mu’azzin, et al. 1996:444–449) or as *ḏ ’l nbṭ* ‘of the Nabataean people’ (see Al-Salameen et al. 2018:72–73). For examples of references to *nbṭ* in the JQC, see §1.2.2.4 below.

<sup>41</sup>See Wenning 2007.

<sup>42</sup>The Nabataean script was also used far beyond the geographical limits of the Nabataean kingdom (see Macdonald 2003a; Healey 2007). On the small number of Nabataean texts found in the Ḥarrah, see Al-Manaser and Norris 2019.

Late Antiquity, it eventually developed into the Arabic script.<sup>43</sup>

To my knowledge, the only Safaitic inscriptions referencing the Nabataeans which can be precisely dated are three texts in the SoS script dated to the regnal years or death of the Nabataean king Rabbel II (AD 70–106). Two of them (ISB 57/SoS and AbKRI 1/SoS), by the same author, are carved in square graph forms<sup>44</sup> and are dated to the year Rabbel became king and to the third year of Rabbel respectively.<sup>45</sup> One problem with mentions of a king Rabbel in Safaitic inscriptions is that there is no way to know if the reference is to Rabbel I or to Rabbel II. However, as argued by Abbadi, in this case he can only be Rabbel II, since Rabbel I ruled only for one year in 85/84 BC.<sup>46</sup> Thus, these two texts can be dated to AD 70/71 and AD 72/73 respectively. The third inscription is CSNS 628/SoS, which reads: *l brd bn šgf d ʾl ʾmrt w dṭ sʾnt ʿsʾr l-rbʾl* ‘By Brd son of Šgf of the people of ʾmrt and he spent [here] the season of the later rains, the year ten of Rabbel’.<sup>47</sup> This text can thus be dated to 79/80 AD.

From a dated Nabataean/SoS bilingual we know that the SoS script was used well into the Roman period. The Nabataean portion is dated to the year 19 of the month of Adār, which most likely follows the era of the Province of Arabia, thus corresponding to February/March 125 AD (see Norris 2018:86–87).

Moreover, there are SoS texts by members of a social group called *tts*<sup>1</sup>, i.e. the Latin name ‘Titus’,<sup>48</sup> and a SoS text surrounded by a cartouche in the form of a *tabula ansata*.<sup>49</sup>

Unlike the few instances of dated ‘fine’ and SoS texts mentioned above, so far we lack absolute dates for texts in the ‘common’ script. In Chapter 4 we shall see that the ‘fine’ script developed from the ‘common’ script, thus showing that the ‘common’ script is earlier. However, this does not mean that texts in the ‘common’ script stopped being written after the ‘fine’ script developed. This is clearly shown by the panel in Fig.1.3(c),

<sup>43</sup>Nehmé 2010.

<sup>44</sup>The script of these texts is labelled in previous literature as the so-called ‘square script’, but see §1.3.2 below and §3.2.

<sup>45</sup>The whole texts read: ISB 57/SoS *l ʾsʾybn bn mrh bn ʾbtn d ʾl mḥrb w wgm ʾl-ḥt-h ʾdb w qšs sʾnt mlk rbʾl* ‘By ʾsʾybn son of Mrh son of ʾbtn of the people of Mḥrb and he grieved for his sister ʾdb and he patrolled, the year Rabbel became king’; AbKRI 1/SoS *l ʾsʾybn bn mrh bn ʾbtn d ʾl mḥrb w qšs sʾnt ṭṭ l-rbʾl f h lt w dsʾr sʾlm* ‘By ʾsʾybn son of Mrh son of ʾbtn of the people of Mḥrb and he patrolled, the year three of Rabbel so, O Lt and Dsʾr, let there be security’. On the translation of the verb *qšs* as ‘to patrol’, see Al-Jallad and Jaworska 2019:111–112. It is worth pointing out that the author spelled the papponym as *ʾbtn* in the first text and as *ʾbt* in the latter. Considering the cultural proximity of the author to the Nabataeans – which seems also to be the case of the SoS script in general (see the discussion in §8.3) – it is possible that the variant *ʾbt* should be interpreted as a calque of Nabataean Aramaic orthography. Since the Nabataean script has no grapheme for the interdental fricative *t*, *ʾbt* is how one would expect *ʾbt* to be spelled in Nabataean. Note also the Aramaic spelling of the Nabataean deity *dsʾr* (rather than *ḏsʾr*) in both texts, which seems to be a consistent feature of SoS texts.

<sup>46</sup>Abbadi 2013:122.

<sup>47</sup>Clark did not read the dating formula and he also misread the patronym of the author. He read and translated the text as follows (the words that I read differently are in bold): *l brd bn šrf d ʾl ʾmrt w dṭ bntg ngrn rbʾl* ‘By Brd son of Šrf, of the tribe of ʾmrt, he spent the spring with the animals which were giving birth, while watching out for Rbʾl’ (Clark 1979:318).

<sup>48</sup>These are: CEDS 322/SoS, QUR 294.113.3/SoS, and SIAM 42/SoS.

<sup>49</sup>See Al-Theeb 2000:234, inscr. 145.

which is found on top of Jebel Qurma, where a text in the ‘common’ script superimposes a group of texts in the ‘fine’ script. There are also instances of ‘common’ texts whose authors have Graeco-Roman names. For example, the author of BES15 1107/C (Fig.1.3(d)) had a Greek name, while his father had a Latin one, his genealogy reads: *grgs<sup>1</sup> bn ’qlds<sup>1</sup>* ‘Gregory son of Claudius’.

The Safaitic text which could provide the latest date is carved on the body of a crater which was found in the hinterland north-west of Palmyra. The inscription is ISP 21 bis (see Ingholt et al. 1951:151) and it is possibly dated by the Palmyrene inscription on the handle of the same crater, which is dated to either AD 261/2 or to AD 266/7.<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately there is no picture of the Safaitic text, which is only known from a not very accurate drawing. In any case, if we assume that the Safaitic text was carved at the same time or later than the Palmyrene one, this crater may provide the *terminus post quem* for Safaitic of AD 261/2.

## 1.2 The Jebel Qurma corpus

The Jebel Qurma corpus (JQC) is the primary data-set used in this study. It contains 5638 Safaitic texts collected within the framework of the ‘Jebel Qurma Archaeological Landscape Project’, directed by Prof. Peter Akkermans at Leiden University, and in close collaboration with the Department of Antiquities of Jordan. This is a multi-period project which since 2012 conducts annual fieldwork consisting of survey and excavation in the Jebel Qurma region in north-eastern Jordan. In addition to thousands of inscriptions and pictorial carvings, this project has documented a large number of cairns, enclosures, and other types of stone-built structures.<sup>51</sup>

The present PhD thesis is part of the spin-off project ‘Landscapes of Survival: Pastoralist Societies, Rock Art and Literacy in Jordan’s Black Desert, c. 1000 BC to 500 AD’, funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) between 2014 and 2018 and directed by Prof. Peter Akkermans. This project aimed to investigate the cultural landscapes of the Jebel Qurma region between the first millennium BC and the first half of the first millennium AD by bringing new data-sets on inhabitation, rock art, and epigraphy within a single interpretive framework (Akkermans 2020a:12). Thus, in addition to the present study, the ‘Landscapes of Survival’ project included two other dissertations: one dealing with the archaeology (Huigens 2019), and one devoted to the pictorial carvings (Brusgaard 2019).<sup>52</sup>

My role within the project was to investigate the 5638 Safaitic texts of the Jebel Qurma region.<sup>53</sup> The research area is located ca. 30 km east of Azraq on the south-

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<sup>50</sup>Schlumberger 1942–1943:49; I thank Michael Macdonald for bringing this text to my attention.

<sup>51</sup>See Akkermans, Huigens, and Brüning 2014; Akkermans and Huigens 2018; Huigens 2019; Akkermans, Brüning, et al. 2020.

<sup>52</sup>Another result of this project is the 2020 volume which brings together several contributions on the archaeology and epigraphy of Jordan’s north-eastern desert (Akkermans 2020b).

<sup>53</sup>These are the texts which were documented between 2012 and 2016. I took part in the inscriptions

western edge of the Jordanian Ḥarrah, and it is surrounded by the limestone desert of the Ḥamād (Fig. 1.4). It has been conventionally labelled ‘Jebel Qurma region’ after the prominent basalt hill known as Jebel Qurma. Fig. 1.5 shows the survey area of the JQC, enclosed by the grey line. It is bordered to the west by Wādī Rāḡil and to the north by the mudflat Qa‘ Al-Ṭayyarāt.<sup>54</sup>

This area has been systematically and intensively surveyed,<sup>55</sup> which makes the JQC a highly representative sample of the epigraphy of the region, allowing for different types of quantitative analyses.<sup>56</sup>

The vast majority of texts and images are concentrated in a limited number of large sites; most of the inscriptions were found in clusters on sites with good visibility.<sup>57</sup> The site on the top of Jebel Qurma (QUR 2) is the largest site of the region and it presents 568 inscriptions, i.e. approximately 1/10 of the total corpus.<sup>58</sup>

### 1.2.1 Scripts

Fig. 1.6 shows the distribution of the Safaitic scripts in the JQC.<sup>59</sup> The vast majority of the inscriptions of the Jebel Qurma region is in the ‘common’ script: 4915 specimens belong to this script. The second most attested script is SoS, with 58 texts. In stark contrast with more northern collections, we only have 23 clear examples of inscriptions carved in the ‘fine’ script,<sup>60</sup> and one instance of a text which is transitional between the ‘common’ and the ‘fine’ script.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, one text (QUR 2.712.1/Other?) presents

and rock art surveys in 2015 and 2016. Further fieldwork has been carried out in 2017, 2018, and 2019, focusing more intensively on excavations. The inscriptions recorded within these last three seasons have not been included in the data-set of the present study.

<sup>54</sup>See Huigens 2019:18–45 for a more detailed description of the geographic and topographic characteristics of the region.

<sup>55</sup>For a detailed discussion of the survey and documentation methods, see Huigens 2019:47–53 and Brusgaard 2019:25–27.

<sup>56</sup>See §1.2.1 and §1.2.2 below for a description of the distribution of the scripts and contents in the JQC.

<sup>57</sup>For a study of the distribution of Safaitic carvings in the landscape, see Brusgaard 2019:§6.3, 6.4.

<sup>58</sup>A portion of the texts from Jebel Qurma have already been edited and published, some texts more than once. I will list the various editions here in chronological order: 36 texts in Winnett and Harding 1978:536–539 (these are WH 3901–3936, with the exception of WH 3914, which is probably from another site, possibly from the environs of Qaṣr Burqū‘, see the OCIANA commentary); 5 texts published in Abbadi 1986; 19 texts published in Abbadi 1987 (AbGQ); 4 texts in Hübner and Knauf 1986 (KnSS), 3 of which were re-edited in Knauf 1991 (KnGQ) along with 2 new ones; 117 texts collected by Abbadi and edited by Ḥasan 2001, all published in OCIANA (HYGQ).

<sup>59</sup>On the scripts terminology used in this study, see §1.3.3.4 below.

<sup>60</sup>Of these, 9 texts are unfortunately heavily weathered and difficult to read, but I could reconstruct most graphs in 3 of them (QUR 2.253.1/F, 2.239.1/F, 148.76.3/F) thanks to better preserved texts by the same authors found in other regions.

<sup>61</sup>The text is QUR 529.20.1/C/F, and it is associated to a camel figure whose style seems ‘hybrid’: the form is typical of camels associated to ‘fine’ texts, while the technique is typical of the rock art of the Jebel Qurma region associated to ‘common’ texts (Brusgaard 2019:118). Thus, the transitional features of the text match the hybrid style of the camel figure.

There are further possible transitional texts, such as QUR 321.2.1/C/F? and QUR 733.7.2/C/F? – possibly by the same author of QUR 529.20.1/C/F – and QUR 239.16.1/C/F? and QUR 678.2.2/C/F?, but they are either too weathered or lack sufficient distinguishing features and are therefore unclassified. On

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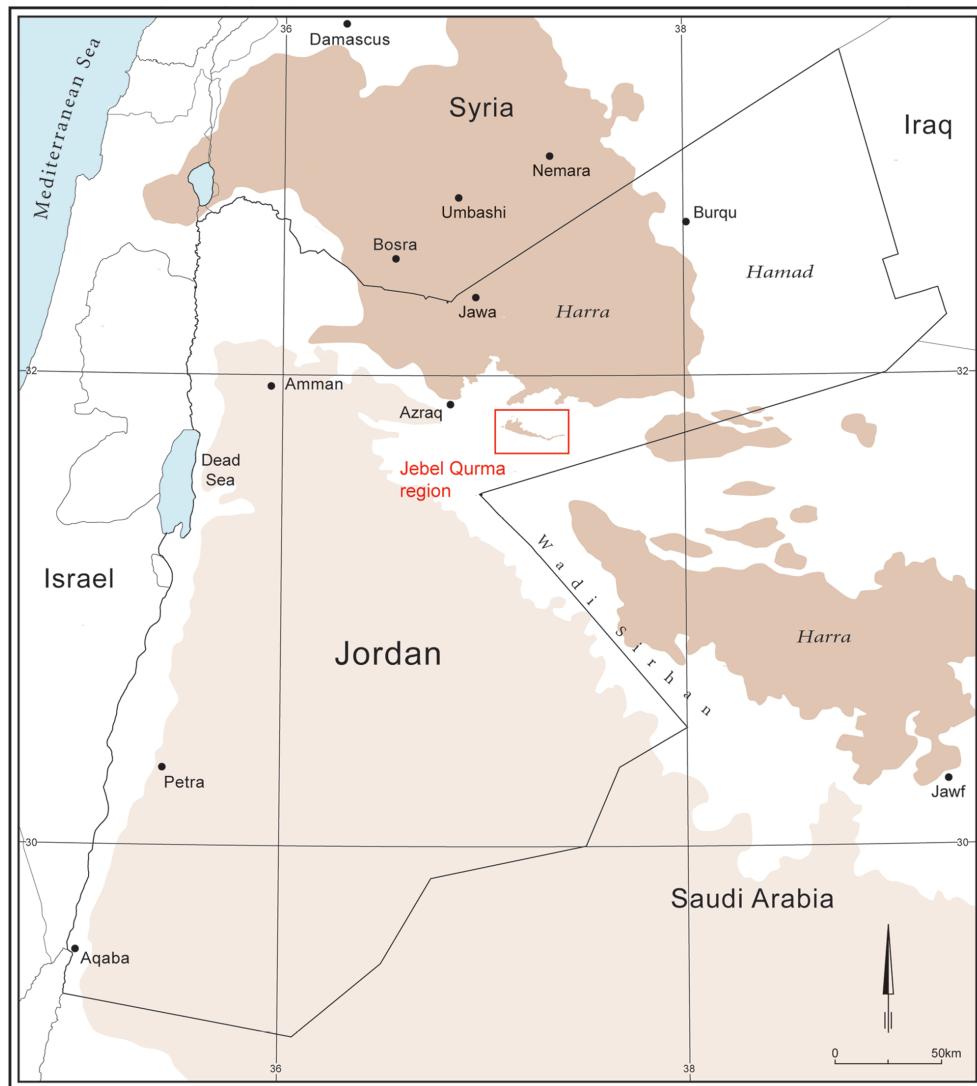


Figure 1.4: Location of the research area (map: *Jebel Qurma Project Archive*)



Figure 1.5: Survey area of the JQC (adapted from Brusgaard 2019:16)

features which do not fit into any of the script categories identified here and possibly represents a further Safaitic script,<sup>62</sup> while 3 texts present both ‘common’ and Thamudic B features.<sup>63</sup>

A large number of texts, 636 specimens, are either too weathered, damaged, or lack sufficient distinguishing features to be assigned with certainty to a script category, and thus they are unclassified. If they are likely to belong to a certain script category, they are simply labelled as either ‘Common?’, ‘Fine?’, ‘C/F?’, or ‘SoS?’. If we have no clear hints at all, they are labelled as ‘Unclassified’.

In addition to the 5638 Safaitic texts, the JQC contains 6 texts in the Hismaic script,<sup>64</sup> 4 texts in the Thamudic D script,<sup>65</sup> one text in the Thamudic B script,<sup>66</sup> and 36 texts in an ANA script which does not seem to be Safaitic, but their features are unclear and insufficient to assign them to a script category with any certainty. Moreover, 29 out of the 5638 texts of the Safaitic corpus lack sufficient distinguishing features to be assigned to either Safaitic or to other Ancient North Arabian scripts.<sup>67</sup> These texts have

transitional texts, see §4.1.

<sup>62</sup>See §2.3 for a description of its features and some parallels from other corpora.

<sup>63</sup>The features of these texts are discussed in §2.4.

<sup>64</sup>QUR 32.6.1/H, 36.7.1/H, 370.133.1/H, 657.2.1/H, 859.2.1/H, 1020.1.1/H.

<sup>65</sup>QUR 147.5.1/ThD, 186.64.1/ThD, 951.12.1/ThD, 974.42.1/ThD.

<sup>66</sup>QUR 956.91.1/ThB.

<sup>67</sup>11 texts could be either ‘common’ Safaitic or Thamudic B, 13 texts could be either SoS Safaitic or Hismaic, 3 texts could be either ‘common’ Safaitic or Hismaic, and 2 texts could be either ‘common’ or

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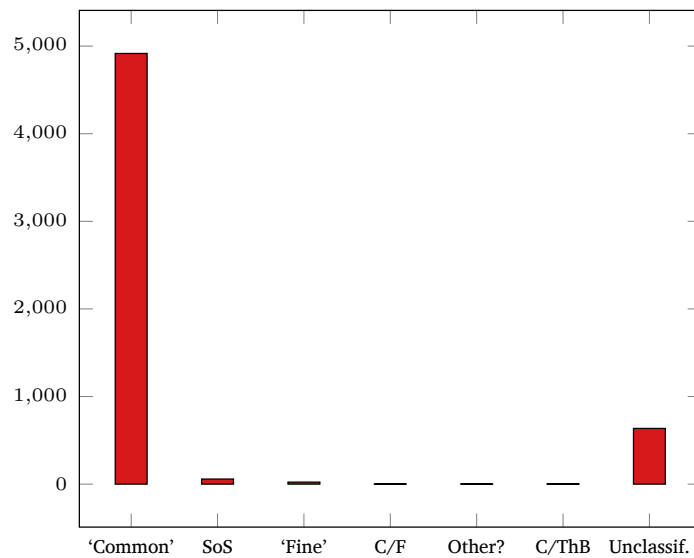


Figure 1.6: The Safaitic scripts in the 5638 Safaitic texts of the JQC

all been included in the Safaitic corpus within the 'Unclassified' group.

### 1.2.2 Contents

The majority of the Safaitic texts of the JQC (ca. 64%) are only names – often followed by short genealogies (see below) – while 18% of the inscriptions go on to express different types of subjects (see Fig.1.8<sup>68</sup>). The content of the remaining 18% of the corpus remains unclassified. These are inscriptions which are either heavily damaged or ambiguous, and one cannot identify their content with any certainty.<sup>69</sup>

In the following, I shall describe and show examples of various types of content found in the JQC.

#### 1.2.2.1 Genealogies and social groups

The genealogies of the texts of the JQC are generally short. Fig. 1.7 displays the number of generations in the genealogies of 4419 texts.<sup>70</sup> Most inscriptions (2702

another unclassified ANA script.

<sup>68</sup>The chart includes each single attestation of a given subject, regardless of whether it is the only subject in a given text, or whether it is found next to other subjects within the same text; see §1.2.2.2 – 1.2.2.12 below for examples of each subject. The category 'Other' includes either subjects which are attested less than three times, or subjects which are unclear because the text is of difficult interpretation.

<sup>69</sup>Among the unclassified category, I have also included several inscriptions consisting of only one to maximum three graphs, as for example QUR 64.140.3/U *lh*, QUR 2.227.1/U *'b*, and QUR 64.258.2/U *h*. It is not clear whether they should always be considered as texts in the first place. In many cases, since they start with an *l*, they may represent incomplete inscriptions.

<sup>70</sup>This much lowered number of texts is mainly due to the fact that in many inscriptions the part with the genealogy is damaged or weathered and it is therefore impossible to be sure about the exact number



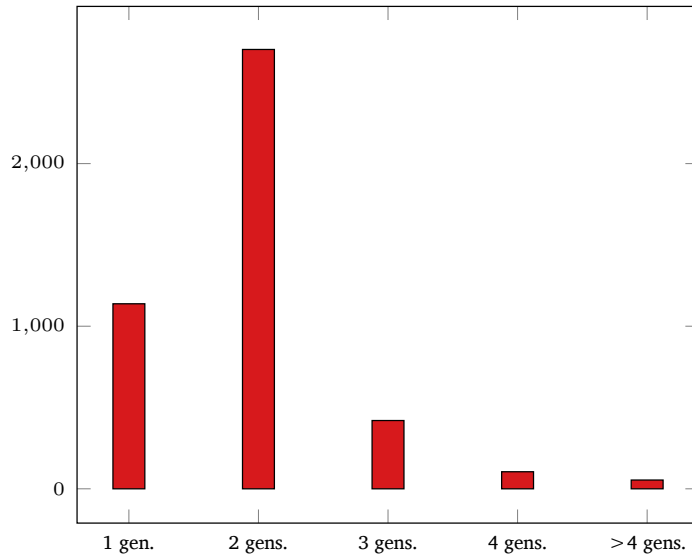


Figure 1.7: Number of generations in 4419 Safaitic texts of the JQC (1 gen. = only author's name)

items) present only the author's name followed by the patronym (i.e. 2 generations), while a great number of texts (1138 items) indicate only the author's name (i.e. 1 generation). In 420 texts, the genealogy reaches the papponym, while in 105 texts it goes back to the author's great grandfather. Only 54 texts in total have genealogies which are 5 generations long or longer.<sup>71</sup>

It has been mentioned above (§1.1.3) that texts in the 'fine' script have on average longer genealogies than 'common' ones. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the genealogies of 'common' texts are always short, nor that 'fine' genealogies are always long. In the JQC, the small number of texts with extended genealogies going back 8 to 12 generations are all in the 'common' script,<sup>72</sup> while 10 out of the 23 'fine' texts have genealogies which are only one to two generations long. Concerning the texts in the SoS script, they appear to be similar to 'common' texts in this respect: they mostly present short genealogies with occasional examples of extended genealogies.<sup>73</sup>

Only a small portion of the JQC (46 texts in total) express affiliation to a social group, mainly through the expression *d ʿl* + [social group], or, in 4 cases, through the

of generations.

<sup>71</sup>Of these, 29 texts show 5 generations, 7 texts show 6 generations, 8 texts show 7 generations, three texts show 8 generations, two texts show 9 generations, three texts show 10 generations, one text shows 11 generations, and one text shows 12 generations.

<sup>72</sup>QUR 20.31.1/C, which features 12 generations, is the text with the longest genealogy; it reads: *l ngs<sup>2</sup> bn kr{f}s<sup>1</sup> bn ḥrb bn ʿqrb bn yṣḥḥ bn ʿfrt bn {l}h{g}n bn yt<sup>c</sup> bn gr bn nmrn bn r{f}t bn zmhr w h rḏ{w} [ʿ][w]{r} [m] ʿwr* 'By Ngs<sup>2</sup> son of {Krfs<sup>1</sup>} son of Ḥrb son of ʿqrb son of Yṣḥḥ son of ʿfrt son of {Lhgn} son of Yt<sup>c</sup> son of Gr son of Nmrn son of {Rft} son of Zmhr and O {Rḏw}, {blind} {whosoever} would efface!'.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>73</sup>QUR 739.89.1/SoS presents the longest SoS genealogy, which is 7 generations long. The text reads: *l ʿmr bn mʿn bn ʿmr bn ḥy bn ṣbh bn mḥs<sup>1</sup>wt bn dʿb w wgm ʿl-mʿn* 'By ʿmr son of Mʿn son of ʿmr son of Ḥy son of Ṣbh son of Mḥs<sup>1</sup>wt son of Dʿb and he grieved for Mʿn'.



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*nisbah* adjective. Table C.1 (in Appendix C) provides a complete list of the social groups found in the JQC, arranged by script.<sup>74</sup> A trait which seems to be shared by SoS and ‘fine’ texts against ‘common’ ones is that they indicate proportionally much more often affiliation to social groups—6 out of 23 ‘fine’ texts and 23 out of 58 SoS texts vs 9 out of 4916 ‘common’ texts.

### 1.2.2.2 Texts accompanying images

Around 30% of the texts are associated to rock art.<sup>75</sup> Inscriptions accompanying images fall into four categories: 1) name-only texts; 2) texts following the structure *l* PN ± [genealogy] + [reference to drawing]; 3) texts with other types of statements (a description of the author’s activity, a prayer, etc.); 4) a combination of 2) and 3). Categories 1) and 2) are by far the most common. Below are examples of the last three categories:

QUR 256.48.1/C (Fig. 1.9(a))

*l s<sup>2</sup>b bn yṣḥḥ h-tr<sup>76</sup>*

‘By S<sup>2</sup>b son of Yṣḥḥ is the male oryx’

QUR 839.42.1/C (Fig. 1.9(b))

*l bgt bn g<sup>3</sup>wn bn zdh bn <sup>3</sup>s<sup>1</sup> w tẓr h-r<sup>77</sup>*

‘By Bgt son of G<sup>3</sup>wn son of Zdh son of <sup>3</sup>s<sup>1</sup> and he lay in wait for the young ostriches’

QUR 786.7.1/C

*l gry bn mgyr h-bkrt w tẓr nbṭ w s<sup>1c</sup>d rḏw*

‘By Gry son of Mgyr is the young she-camel and he lay in wait for the Nabateans and may Rḏw help!’<sup>78</sup>

In some cases, the caption is placed between the author’s name and the patronym:<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>The table excludes 5 out of the 46 texts, where the group name is damaged and illegible. These are: QUR 20.39.1/SoS, 203.7.1/SoS, 32.77.1/C, 521.3.1/C?, and 9.54.1/C?.

<sup>75</sup>For a study of the rock art, see Brusgaard 2019.

<sup>76</sup>This text is chiselled and runs vertically downwards to the left of the image. In addition, there are two further incised texts which run horizontally above and below the image respectively. The upper text (QUR 256.48.3/C) reads *l t<sup>3</sup>b bn ‘n* ‘By T<sup>3</sup>b son of ‘n’, while in the bottom text the value of some graphs appears to have been modified (on this practice, see §7.2). This is my tentative reconstruction: QUR 256.48.2/C *l <sup>3</sup>{b}{f}{f} bn ‘h{b}* ‘By {bf} son of {‘hb}’.

<sup>77</sup>After the *l* of *r<sup>3</sup>*l there are some smaller and lightly scratched graphs: {w?} {b-}{s<sup>1</sup>?}{l?}{‘?}t-h. Unfortunately they are too weathered to be made sense of with any certainty, and it is unclear whether they should be considered as part of the original text in the first place.

<sup>78</sup>The inscription is associated to several figures: a she-camel, four ostriches, two dogs, two archers, and an anthropomorphic figure with seven dots underneath.

<sup>79</sup>This phenomenon has been attested also in other collections (see Winnett and Harding 1978:15) and in Thamudic B (Norris 2017).

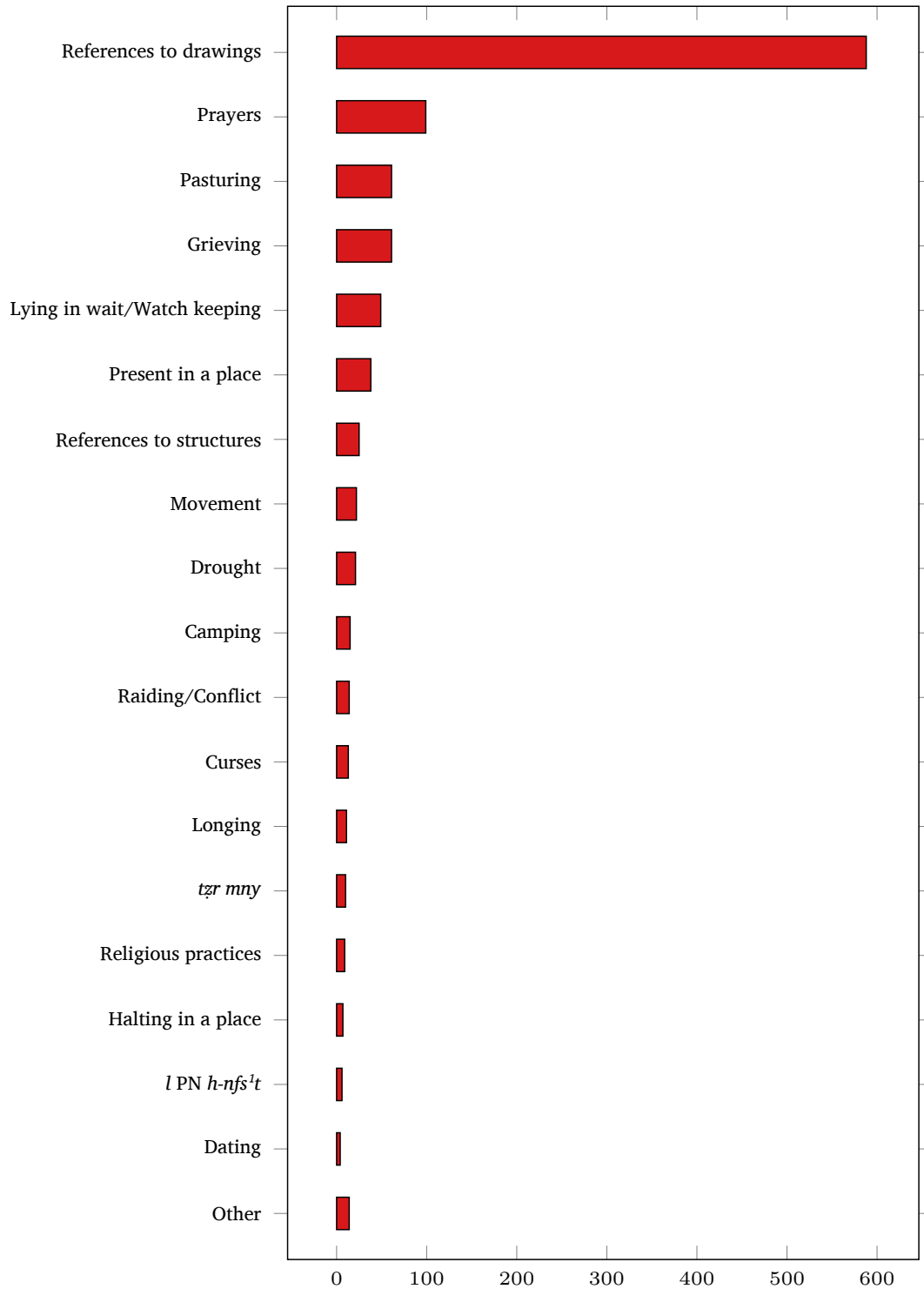


Figure 1.8: Distribution of subjects in the JQC

QUR 186.161.1/C

*l hn't h-ts<sup>1</sup> bn {}{.}bt*

‘By Hn’t is the he-goat, son of...’

### 1.2.2.3 Pastoral and nomadic activities

Several texts are statements describing various pastoral and nomadic activities: pasturing, camping, being present or halting at a place, migrating, and returning to a place of water:

QUR 628.50.1/C (Fig. 1.9(c))

*l s<sup>1</sup>ny bn s<sup>1</sup>lm {b}{n} my w r'y*

‘By S<sup>1</sup>ny son of S<sup>1</sup>lm {son of} My and he pastured’

QUR 207.13.1/C

*{{l}} {{l}}'b bn t'l h-gml w r'y h-dr rmn*

‘{By} {L'b} son of T'l is the camel and he pastured at this place on *rmn*<sup>80</sup>’

QUR 994.7.1/C (see Fig. 5.3(b), Chapter 5)

*l dr bn y's<sup>1</sup>l w r'y h-b{k}r{t}*

‘By Dr son of Y's<sup>1</sup>l and he pastured the {young she-camel(s)}’

QUR 333.7.1/C

*l hr bn 'lh w hll h-rglt*

‘By Hr son of 'lh and he camped at the water course’

QUR 28.19.2/C

*l fltl bn dhrt w syr m-mdbr*

‘By Fltl son of Dhrt and he returned to a place of permanent water from the inner desert<sup>81</sup>’

QUR 176.115.1/C

*l brqt bn 'rd w s<sup>2</sup>ty h-dr*

‘By Brqt son of 'rd and he spent the winter at this place’

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<sup>80</sup>This could be a term for a type of herbage, perhaps from the root *RMM*, cf. Classical Arabic *rimmun* ‘The herbage and other things that are upon the land [...] what is borne [on its surface] by the water’ (Lane 1863–1893:1151a).

<sup>81</sup>The term *mdbr*, usually translated as ‘inner desert’, has been interpreted by Macdonald as referring to the Ḥamād limestone desert east of the Ḥarraḥ (see Fig. 1.1 above; Macdonald 1992c:4–7, 9–10; Al-Jallad and Jaworska 2019:94).



(a) Image of an oryx accompanied by three Safaitic texts (QR 256.48.1–3/C)



(b) Drawing of ostriches associated to a text stating ‘...and he lay in wait for the young ostriches’ (QR 839.42.1/C)



(c) Inscription stating that the author was pasturing (*r'y*) (QR 628.50.1/C)



(d) Inscription with expression of grief (QR 956.67.1/C)



(e) Initial prayer directed to *rdw* (QR 428.18.1/C)



(f) Panel with text referencing a cairn (*rgm*) (upper text; QR 215.28.1/C?)

Figure 1.9: Examples of JQC texts expressing different subjects

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### 1.2.2.4 Lying in wait, watch keeping, and raiding

Another type of activities which often occur in the texts are lying in wait, keeping watch, or raiding:

QUR 766.39.1/C

*l lb'n bn b'dd bn hly w hrš*

'By Lb'n son of B'dd son of Hly and he kept watch'

QUR 176.15.1/C

*l {s<sup>1</sup>} {b}n k'br bn 's<sup>2</sup>sr bn 's<sup>1</sup> bn yt' bn tmn w t{z}r s<sup>2</sup>n'*

'By {s<sup>1</sup>} {son of} K'br son of 's<sup>2</sup>sr son of 's<sup>1</sup> son of Yt' son of Tmn and he {lay in wait} for enemies'

QUR 551.32.1/C

*l s<sup>1</sup>mk bn 'bdn bn mr{s<sup>1</sup>}b {w} db'*

'By S<sup>1</sup>mk son of 'bdn son of {Mrs<sup>1</sup>b} {and he} was on a raid'

Many of these texts include references to *nbṭ* 'the Nabataeans':

QUR 2.305.1/C

*l hr bn ws<sup>2</sup>kt w tṣr nbṭ*

'By Hr son of Ws<sup>2</sup>kt and he lay in wait for the Nabataeans'

QUR 628.4.1/C

*l 's<sup>1</sup>lm bn db' w db' nbṭ f h rdy gnmṭ w s<sup>1</sup>lm*

'By 's<sup>1</sup>lm son of Db' and he was on a raid against the Nabataeans, so, O Rdy, let there be spoil and security'

QUR 2.646.1/C = WH 3925, HYGQ 95 (Fig. 1.10(a))

*l 'hm w db' l-nbṭ*

'By 'hm By 'hm and he was on a raid to/for the Nabataeans'

The meaning of the expression *db' l-nbṭ* in the last example is somewhat ambiguous. The preposition *l-* may be taken to mean that the author was raiding *to* the Nabataeans, i.e. the Nabataeans were the target of the raid,<sup>82</sup> as in QUR 628.4.1/C above, or, alternatively, one could take it to mean that the author was on a raid *for* the Nabataeans.<sup>83</sup> As shown in Fig. 1.10(a), the inscription is associated to an image of three men riding camels which are depicted as if in movement (Brusgaard 2019:99). The other associated text (QUR 2.646.2/C) reads: *l mgr h-bkrt* 'By Mgr are the young she-camels'.

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<sup>82</sup>This is the interpretation of the *editio princeps* (WH 3925).

<sup>83</sup>This is the interpretation of this text proposed by Al-Jallad 2015: 292. Macdonald, on the other hand, suggested that *db' l-* should be interpreted as 'he sought refuge with' in light of Classical Arabic *ḏaba'a ilā* (Lane 1863–1893:1763a; Macdonald 1993:314, n. 72).

In light of other JQC texts which seem to refer to the Nabataeans as targets of raids through the same expression but without the preposition *l-*,<sup>84</sup> it is possible that *l-* here was meant to convey a sense of movement, as depicted in the associated drawing, and that the writer was on a raid to the Nabataeans.



(a) QUR 2.646.1/C = WH 3925 (upper text)



(b) QUR 7.92.1/C

Figure 1.10: Texts referencing the Nabataeans (a) and the Ḥawilat (b)

Other peoples mentioned in similar contexts are *ḥwlt*<sup>85</sup> and, in one text, *tmd*:<sup>86</sup>

QUR 7.92.1/C (Fig. 1.10(b))

*l mqṭt w ṇzr ḥwlt*

‘By Mqṭt and he kept watch for the Ḥwlt’

QUR 32.36.1/C

*l bgl bn gḥf w ṭzr ḥwlt*

‘By Bgl son of Gḥf and he lay in wait for the Ḥwlt’

QUR 7.91.1/C

*l {ḏr} bn ʿly bn nṣ²{d}ʿl bn ḥrb w h ṛdy ḡnmt m-ḥwlt*

‘By {ḏr} son of ʿly son of {Nṣ²d}ʿl bn Ḥrb and, O Ṛdy, [let there be] spoil from the Ḥwlt!’

QUR 2.199.3/C

*---w ṇzr {t}md*

‘...and he kept watch for the {Tmd}’

<sup>84</sup>See, e.g., QUR 628.4.1/C above and QUR 7.82.1/C *l r{t} w {d}bʿ nbt* ‘By {Rt} and he was on a raid against the Nabataeans’; there are also several inscriptions with the formula *w ṭzr nbt* ‘and he lay in wait for the Nabataeans’, as in QUR 2.305.1/C above as well as 64.81.1/C, 215.41.1/C, 28.19.1/C, 786.7.1/C.

<sup>85</sup>On some possible identifications of this group in different historical sources, see Al-Manaser and Norris 2018:2–3 and the references in there. There are two Safaitic texts in which the authors possibly self-identified as members of this group: LP 87/F = C 3787, 3788, from southern Syria, and QUR 2.161.1/C?, found on the top of Jebel Qurma.

<sup>86</sup>This may refer to the ancient people of Thamūd, which are known from 8th c. Assyrian annals, classical writers, the Quran, and other historical sources (see Macdonald 2005a:104–105 and the references in there). Only two other Safaitic inscriptions which mention *tmd* are known so far, WH 3792a and WH 3792c.

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### 1.2.2.5 Religious practices

A small group of texts seem to commemorate the performance of religious practices: burnt offerings, sacrifices,<sup>87</sup> and the erection of cult-stones (*nšb*). See the examples below:

QUR 683.7.1/C

*l ws<sup>1c</sup> bn mlkt h-š<sup>c</sup>dt*

‘By Ws<sup>1c</sup> son of Mlkt is this burnt offering’

QUR 20.39.1/SoS

*l ls<sup>1d</sup> bn {}bħ{}t{} bn {}tk bn {}{}{}y/š{} d {}{}{}{}{}{}{}s<sup>2</sup>/f{} {}w{} {}n{}{}{}b w dħh  
w {}d{}kr w<sup>l</sup> w {}r{}m{}s<sup>1</sup> w ---- {}d{} ----*

‘By Ls<sup>1d</sup> son of {}bħt{} son of {}tk son of...of the {}people{} of...and he erected a cult stone and he made a sacrifice and may w<sup>l</sup> and {}rms<sup>1</sup> and...be remembered...’

### 1.2.2.6 References to structures

A group of inscriptions contain references to structures. The form of these texts is usually: *l PN ± [genealogy] + [structure name]*.

Two texts refer to a *rgm* ‘cairn’.<sup>88</sup> One text (QUR 143.2.1/C), is not associated to any cairn, and it reads: *l mħl{}m{} bn {}tħr w wgm {}l-n{}k{}r ----{} w h-rgm* ‘By {}Mħlm{} son of {}tħr and he grieved for {}Nkr{}...and this cairn was made by him/he was at this cairn<sup>89</sup>’.

The other text, shown in Fig. 1.9(f), is located in the proximity of two cairns.<sup>90</sup> It states: QUR 215.28.1/C? *l ms<sup>1k</sup> bn {}mr h-rgm* ‘By/for Ms<sup>1k</sup> son of {}mr is the cairn’. The text is associated to another inscription which runs below it (QUR 215.28.2/C? *l q{}y{}mt* ‘By {}Qymt{}’). In the expression *l PN h-rgm*, the *lām auctoris* is often translated as ‘for’ instead of ‘by’;<sup>91</sup> this interpretation is only possible if we assume that the cairn was always a grave and that the person following the *lām auctoris* was the deceased. However, in cases such as QUR 143.2.1/C above, the person following the *lām auctoris* was clearly not deceased, since the statement says that he was grieving. Therefore, I have decided to keep both ‘by’ and ‘for’ as viable alternatives in the translation of QUR 215.28.1/C?. A further possibility is that *h-rgm* should be interpreted as ‘at this cairn’, and that the author was simply referencing an already existing cairn, which is one of

<sup>87</sup>On sacrifices in the Safaitic texts, see Ababneh and Harahsheh 2015; Macdonald n.d.(b).

<sup>88</sup>Al-Jallad and Jaworska opted for the translation ‘funerary cairn’ in light of the occurrence of this word in funerary contexts (see Al-Jallad and Jaworska 2019:115).

<sup>89</sup>I have here presented two possible ways of translating the expression *h-rgm* in this context. The first possibility takes *h-rgm* as syntactically bound to the *lām auctoris*, implying authorship, while the second possibility interprets *h-rgm* as in the accusative (see Al-Jallad 2015:70).

<sup>90</sup>One was unfortunately looted, while the other one has been excavated and contained burial remains; see the discussion of the results in Huigens 2019:145–155.

<sup>91</sup>Cf. Macdonald 1993:383, n. 481; Al-Jallad 2015:77; Macdonald (2006:294–295) argued that the *lām auctoris* may have been an untranslatable introductory particle and translated this expression as ‘(this is) PN whose cairn this is [i.e. it is built over his/her body]’.

the possible interpretations of QUR 143.2.1/C above as well.<sup>92</sup> In any case, one should keep in mind that the expression *l PN h-rgm* may have not always necessarily referred to a grave: as remarked by Macdonald, cairns were likely used and re-used for several different purposes (see Macdonald 1992b:303–305). A context of re-use and modification of structures across different periods has also emerged from the excavations carried out at the site.<sup>93</sup>

Several inscriptions refer to an ‘enclosure’, usually through the term *zrt*, or, in one case, the variant form *zyrt*. Most of these texts have actually been found in the vicinity of enclosures. In the site QUR 20 we found an interesting interaction: two writers, Hms<sup>1</sup>k and Hld, both claim that they either made or perhaps ‘owned’ the enclosure and accuse each other of being a liar.<sup>94</sup> It is impossible to determine whether the object of their altercation was the possession of the enclosure or whether they were disagreeing on who had actually built the enclosure. The inscriptions follow the concise ‘*l PN + [enclosure]*’ text form:

QUR 20.45.1/C  
*l hms<sup>1</sup>k h-zrt*  
 ‘By Hms<sup>1</sup>k is the enclosure’

QUR 20.50.1/C  
*l hl{d} bn w{n}nt h-zrt*  
 ‘By {Hld} son of {Wnnt} is the enclosure’

QUR 20.50.2/C  
*l hms<sup>1</sup>k h-zrt w kdbn hld*  
 ‘By Hms<sup>1</sup>k is the enclosure and Hld is a liar’

QUR 20.50.3/C  
*l hld w kdb hms<sup>1</sup>k*  
 ‘By Hld and Hms<sup>1</sup>k lied’

### 1.2.2.7 *l PN h-nfs<sup>1</sup>t*

Six inscriptions follow the structure *l PN ± [patronym] + h-nfs<sup>1</sup>t*. This expression is generally interpreted as referring to a funerary monument of some sort:<sup>95</sup>

<sup>92</sup>I would also like to point out that there is a twin inscription of QUR 215.28.1/C? in another corpus: AA EK 142/C *l ms<sup>1</sup>k bn ‘mr h-rgm*, which furthermore is associated to a twin inscription of QUR 215.28.2/C? (AA EK 143/C), as well as to three other texts by different authors (AA EK 144/C, 145/C, and 146/C). Of course, this could be just a coincidence, and these texts may be by two completely different authors who incidentally had the same names and carved the same texts.

<sup>93</sup>See Huigens 2019:145–155.

<sup>94</sup>On the excavations of the associated enclosure, see Huigens 2019:129–130.

<sup>95</sup>See Macdonald 2006:288–290; Al-Jallad 2015:330; Hayajneh 2017; Al-Jallad and Jaworska 2019:103. Al-Jallad interprets the final *t* in *h-nfs<sup>1</sup>t* as a feminine singular demonstrative (Al-Jallad 2015:82–83).



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QUR 333.14.1/C

*l bkr bn s<sup>2</sup>hr h-nfs<sup>1</sup>t*

‘By/for Bkr son of S<sup>2</sup>hr is this funerary monument’

QUR 523.16.1/C

*l ‘{d}{r} {h}{n}{f}s<sup>1</sup>t* ‘By/for {‘dr} is this funerary monument’

### 1.2.2.8 Droughts

Pasture for the domestic animals depended on the rainfall, which for the nomads who carved the inscriptions was regulated by at times very punitive gods.<sup>96</sup> Several texts witness the occurrence of droughts:

QUR 628.41.2/C (Fig. 5.3(e))

*l hnẓr bn rqs<sup>2</sup> bn wḍr w ‘gzt h-s<sup>1</sup>my*

‘By Hnẓr son of Rqs<sup>2</sup> son of Wḍr and the sky withheld (the rain)’

QUR 2.665.1/C = KnGQ 1

*l ‘qrb bn ‘d{s<sup>1</sup>} bn mlkt w tẓr h-s<sup>1</sup>my ‘gzt*

‘By ‘qrb son of {‘ds<sup>1</sup>} son of Mlkt and he awaited the rains during a drought’<sup>97</sup>

QUR 523.8.1/C

*l w<sup>1</sup>l w ṣḥwt<sup>98</sup> s<sup>1</sup>my*

‘By W<sup>1</sup>l and [the] sky was cloudless’

### 1.2.2.9 Expressions of emotions

Several inscriptions are expressions of longing and grieving, while a few texts state that the author was suffering because of a drought, see the following examples:

QUR 370.232.1/SoS

*l ‘s<sup>1</sup>rk w ts<sup>2</sup>w{q} ‘{l-}bn-h*

‘By ‘s<sup>1</sup>rk and he {longed} {for} his son’

370.124.1/C?

*l ‘mrt bn {w}‘l bn ‘mrt w wgm l-‘b-h*

‘By ‘mrt son of {W<sup>1</sup>l} son of ‘mrt and he grieved for his father’

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<sup>96</sup>See §1.2.2.10 below for examples of prayers requesting rain.

<sup>97</sup>Note that the same author left many other texts in the region (see the description of his writing style in §6.1.8). My reading and interpretation of this text differ from Knauf’s, who read the last two graphs as *w ‘zt* instead of *‘gzt* and translated the statement as ‘when he watched the sky and the evening star’ (Knauf 1991:92).

<sup>98</sup>Cf. Classical Arabic *ṣaḥā* ‘It was, or became, cloudless [...] ṣaḥwun signifies the departing of the clouds [...] ‘aṣḥati s-samā’u ‘The sky became cloudless’ (Lane 1863–1893:1656).

QUR 956.67.1/C (Fig. 1.9(d))

*l bn<sup>mt</sup> bn 'm w hwb 'l-<sup>h</sup>-h*

'By Bn<sup>mt</sup> son of 'm and he lamented over his brother'

QUR 439.37.1/C

*l mlk bn gml w wlh 'l-hbb-h*

'By Mlk son of Gml and he was distraught over his beloved'

QUR 813.14.1/SoS (Fig.6.17(a))

*l bs<sup>1</sup> bn {s<sup>1</sup>}{'dlh [b][n] [r][d][']----{w} {w}{g}m 'l-hmnt w 'l-mlk w 'l-b<sup>tn</sup> f  
h lt w ds<sup>2</sup>r t<sup>r</sup> m{n-}{h}{w}[l][t]*

'By Bs<sup>1</sup> son of S<sup>1</sup>dlh [son of R<sup>d</sup>']...and he grieved for Hmnt and for Mlk and for 'b<sup>tn</sup>, so, O Lt and Ds<sup>2</sup>r, may there be revenge from [the Hwlt]'

QUR 551.93.1/SoS

*l gyr<sup>1</sup>l {b}{n} {h}{n}{n} bn n<sup>zr</sup>l w t<sup>zr</sup> s<sup>1</sup>my f 'lt m<sup>tr</sup> 'gl d 'l n<sup>zr</sup>l w gls<sup>1</sup> l-s<sup>2</sup>g<sup>2</sup>s<sup>2</sup>  
rg<sup>c</sup> y<sup>s</sup> m-my*

'By Gyr<sup>1</sup>l {son of} {Hnn} son of N<sup>zr</sup>l and he awaited rains so, 'lt, grant rain quickly, of the people of N<sup>zr</sup>l, and he halted [on his way] to S<sup>2</sup>g<sup>2</sup>s<sup>2</sup>, while he was returning, suffering because of [the lack of] water'

### 1.2.2.10 Invocations

Table C.2 (Appendix C) shows the invoked deities of the JQC together with a list of the associated requests.<sup>99</sup> The two most frequently attested deities – both in the JQC and elsewhere<sup>100</sup> – are *lt*/<sup>'</sup>*lt* and *rdw*/*rdy*.<sup>101</sup> As shown in the Table, the overwhelming majority of the invocations are directed to one single deity, the only exception being four invocations to the pair *lt* and *ds<sup>2</sup>r*.

The typical structure of invocations is *h* 'O' + DN + [request].<sup>102</sup> See the following examples:

QUR 122.7.1/C

*l {'ml} bn 'd f h rdy gnmt*

'By {'ml} son of 'd so, O R<sup>d</sup>y, grant spoil'

QUR 256.9.1/C

*l 's<sup>1</sup> bn 'mr bn 's<sup>1</sup> bn t<sup>rd</sup> w h lt s<sup>1</sup>lm*

'By 's<sup>1</sup> son of 'mr son of 's<sup>1</sup> son of T<sup>rd</sup> and, O Lt, [grant] security!'

<sup>99</sup>For the sake of convenience, longer requests are simplified in the table. For instance, the curse QUR 2.363.14/C *h 'lt 'wr {d} {'w}r h-s<sup>1</sup>fr* 'O 'lt, blind {whosoever would efface} this writing' is shown as the 'wr 'blind [curse]-type of request. Prayers with unclear or damaged parts have not been included.

<sup>100</sup>Cf. Winnett and Harding 1978:30; Macdonald 1992a:421; Bennett 2014:44–45.

<sup>101</sup>The actual significance of the variant forms *'lt* and *rdy*, which occur less frequently, is unclear (see Macdonald 1992a:421–422).

<sup>102</sup>Only in some cases, the elements of the invocation are in a different order, see, e.g.: QUR 202.17.1/C *l w<sup>r</sup> bn gs<sup>2</sup>m w flt h rdw* 'By W<sup>r</sup> son Gs<sup>2</sup>m and deliver, O R<sup>d</sup>w'.

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QUR 64.135.1/C

*l ʿyd bn {{z}}d bn ʿbs<sup>2</sup> h rḏy s<sup>1</sup>d-h*

‘By ʿyd son of Zd son of ʿbs<sup>2</sup>, O Rḏy, help him!’

QUR 64.4.1/C

*{l} ʿyd f h lt {ḡ}nmt m-{{s<sup>2</sup>}}{n}ʾ---w tẓr*

‘{By} ʿyd so, O Lt, let there be spoil from {enemies}...and he lay in wait’

QUR 626.25.1/C

*l y{{s<sup>2</sup>}}{{k}}r b{{n}} ʾnhk w rʿy bq{l} dn f h rḏy m{{r}} {{h-}}fl*

‘By {Ys<sup>2</sup>kr} {son of} ʾnhk and he pastured on dry {herbage}<sup>103</sup> so, O Rḏy, [grant] {rain} on {this} dried out land<sup>104</sup>’

In initial prayers, the name of the author follows the invocation:

QUR 428.18.1/C (Fig. 1.9(e))

*h rḏw s<sup>1</sup>d w flt ʿm{n}*

‘O Rḏw, help and deliver {ʿmn}!’

QUR 766.26.1/C

*h ʾlt flt rd{{s<sup>1</sup>}} {{b}}{{n}} q{{s}}yt*

‘O ʾlt, deliver {Rds<sup>1</sup>} {son of} {Qṣyt}’

There are also few cases of abbreviated invocations where the deity is not explicitly addressed:

QUR 171.27.2/C

*l ʾbyn bn ʾm{r} bn mʿlt w ḡnm[t]*

‘By ʾbyn son of {ʾmr} son of Mʿlt and {let there be spoil}!’

QUR 766.28.1/C

*l ṣrmt bn wtf w hwb f s<sup>1</sup>d-h*

‘By Ṣrmt son of Wtf and he cried out, so help him!’

Several invocations are curses against whosoever would efface the text:<sup>105</sup>

<sup>103</sup>I have translated *rʿy bq{l} dn* as ‘he pastured on dry {herbage}’, and interpreted the word *dn* on account of Classical Arabic *dindinun* ‘Herbage and trees, or dry herbage, become black, or wasted and black, by reason of oldness’ (Lane 1863–1893:918b), which is a reduplicated form derived from the root *DNN*. This interpretation would fit with the prayer for rain which follows. For the word *bql* – cf. Classical Arabic *baqlun* ‘herbage produced by the spring rain’ (Lane 1863–1893:236b) – Al-Jallad has proposed the translation ‘fresh herbage’ (see Al-Jallad 2015:308). However, in this context, since it is followed by *dn*, which seems to be a substantive or an adjective referring to dry pasture, a generic translation ‘herbage’ seems more appropriate.

<sup>104</sup>The expression ‘dried out land’ translates the word *fl*, cf. Lane (1863–1893:2434b) *fillun* ‘Land in which is no herbage; or land not rained upon, and in which is no herbage’.

<sup>105</sup>For a description of the practice of effacing texts, see Chapter 7.

QUR 2.196.2/C (Fig. 5.6(c))

*l ʔ{r}{h}m bn rhz h ʔlt ʔwr m ʔwr h-{s<sup>1</sup>}{f}r*

‘By {ʔrhm} son of Rhz, O ʔlt, blind whosoever would efface this {writing}’

QUR 551.6.1/C

*l ʔbdʔl bn s<sup>1</sup>wr <b>n gmh bn ʔhm w h rdy ʔwr m ʔwr*

‘By ʔbdʔl son of S<sup>1</sup>wr son of Gmh son of ʔhm and, O Rdy, blind whosoever would efface!’

#### 1.2.2.11 *tʔr mny*

This is a typical Safaitic expression which occurs ten times in the JQC; see the following examples:

QUR 64.98.1/C

*l----{b}{n}----{r/d}n w t{z}r mn{y}*

‘By...{son of}...and he awaited Fate’<sup>106</sup>

QUR 186.122.1/C (Fig. 5.8(b))

*l nʔrn bn rdh w tʔr mny*

‘By Nʔrn son of Rdh and he awaited Fate’

#### 1.2.2.12 Dating

Only four texts attest a dating formula, although none of these can be clearly connected to a known historical event. QUR 215.59.1/C, shown in Fig. 5.9(c), is dated to the year S<sup>1</sup>lk came (*s<sup>1</sup>nt ʔty s<sup>1</sup>lk*), while QUR 276.33.1/C is dated to the year ʔbdr died (*s<sup>1</sup>nt myt ʔbdr*). The dating component of the two other texts is difficult to make sense of.<sup>107</sup>

## 1.3 Investigating the materiality of the Safaitic script

### 1.3.1 Research aims

The Safaitic script presents a considerable amount of variation, to the extent that it is appropriate to talk about different Safaitic *scripts*. In my study of the JQC, I identify three scripts: ‘common’, ‘fine’, and Southern Safaitic (abbr. SoS).

So far, there have been only a few attempts to describe and analyse this variation—most research on Safaitic has rather focused on philological, linguistic, sociocultural, and historical issues. But while the content of Safaitic texts is laconic, ambiguous, and often defies a clear interpretation, their materiality is concrete, readily analysable and measurable. In previous scholarship one finds the assumption that, since Safaitic literacy was passed on in a nomadic, non-institutionalised context, variation in the Safaitic

<sup>106</sup>Al-Jallad proposed the alternative translation ‘and Fate lay in wait’ (Al-Jallad 2015:219).

<sup>107</sup>QUR 139.3.1/C is dated to *s<sup>1</sup>nt b{n/ʔ}yt h-h{w/d}t*, while QUR 372.53.1/C is dated to *s<sup>1</sup>nt h-ʔhk*.

script would be too spontaneous and idiosyncratic for a systematic investigation to be possible (§1.3.2). This research shows that it is possible to analyse this variation systematically by using a theory of writing which aptly distinguishes the abstract from the material, that is the emic from the etic level. To quote the linguist Dimitrios Meletis, it is ‘undeniable that that there is an emic level in writing, as concrete, graphetic substantiations can be – even must be – classified into abstract emic units to make an analysis of writing possible’ (Meletis 2019:29). Indeed, despite the great extent of idiosyncratic variation in the Safaitic script, this variation cannot be said to be completely spontaneous, as a formal analysis of Safaitic texts allows to identify different scripts as well as certain recurring patterns of graphic variation. Thus, an important goal of this research is to show that variation in the Safaitic script is worth being studied for its own sake.

§1.3.3 below explains in more detail the terminology and approach employed in this study, while the analysis of the Safaitic inventories in Chapter 2 seeks to classify the variant forms which occur in the Safaitic texts of the JQC and to describe different levels and patterns of graphic variation. Chapter 3 is an investigation of the uses and functions of special features – i.e. square forms, forms turned by 90°, and elongated forms – for which there is evidence that they were sometimes stylistically marked.

Another reason for the scarcity of palaeographic studies of Safaitic is the lack of a chronological framework for most of the inscriptions, which makes it particularly challenging to distinguish synchronic from diachronic variation as well as to trace the development of graphic forms through time. However, for a group of Safaitic texts we do have at least some sort of diachronic framework. Thanks to the long genealogies in several texts by members of the lineage of *df* we are able to partially reconstruct their lineage-tree and to identify authors as belonging to different generations (Appendix A). This allows us to describe and measure the palaeographic development from the ‘common’ to the ‘fine’ script across generations, which featured the increasing compression and elongation of the ‘common’ inventory (Chapter 4). In the same Chapter, I combine the information from the *df* lineage-tree and the attested generations with the dated texts by members of the same lineage. My aim is to provide a working chronological framework for Safaitic writing among the *df*.

Chapter 5 deals with several aspects of the materiality of Safaitic texts which have never been treated systematically; it describes the techniques employed to carve the inscriptions as well as a variety of features concerning their visual appearance and organisation on the panel which can be loosely referred to as ‘text layout’.

Chapter 6 investigates the writing styles of prolific authors and their family members. It shows that although one finds a certain extent of idiosyncratic variation even within different texts by the same author, same-author texts – as well as texts by close relatives – always seem to share a relatively consistent set of features.

Chapter 7 is an analysis of disruptive practices towards the texts, that is, their effacement and modification.

Finally, Chapter 8 discusses evidence for Safaitic ‘graph classes’ (Meletis 2020), some of the possible motivations for the development and graphetic features of the ‘fine’ script, and the sociocultural contexts of the ‘fine’ and of the SoS script.

### 1.3.2 Previous scholarship on Safaitic palaeography

In previous scholarship on Safaitic inscriptions, very little attention has been devoted to their material features. In the few cases in which scholars have discussed palaeographic issues, this is mostly in the form of limited remarks, while systematic and comprehensive investigations have been lacking. In addition, in these works palaeography is viewed as an auxiliary discipline whose main scope is identifying older and younger stages of the Safaitic script. However, in absence of a chronological framework for most Safaitic texts (see §1.1.4 above), this approach is obviously problematic. Such a limited notion of the scopes of palaeography has led, on the one hand, to subjective and misleading observations as to the presumed archaic nature of certain features, and, on the other hand, to an outright rejection of these as well as of palaeographic inquiry of Safaitic altogether.

#### 1.3.2.1 Littmann's 'archaic features'

Enno Littmann, who completed the decipherment of the Safaitic script in 1901, thought that the Safaitic script represented the latest stage of a continuous development from South Arabian.<sup>108</sup> Thus, he interpreted features which in his eyes looked more similar to the monumental South Arabian graph forms as archaisms reflecting the earliest stages of the script, and claimed that inscriptions with square forms or with forms turned by 90° were older simply because of their style and presumed similarity to South Arabian.<sup>109</sup> This view is repeatedly found in later scholarship as well, cf. Harding,<sup>110</sup> Winnett,<sup>111</sup> Oxtoby,<sup>112</sup> and Clark, whose classification of the Safaitic scripts includes the 'square' and '90°' categories.<sup>113</sup>

However, as argued by Macdonald, and as will be further shown in this study, it

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<sup>108</sup>See, e.g. Littmann 1940:92, 97.

<sup>109</sup>Littmann 1904:106, 142; Littmann 1943:46–47.

<sup>110</sup>From texts so far published there would seem to be at least an early and a late form of the alphabet, in one of which the letters have a close resemblance to their South Arabian prototype, but in the absence of any dated texts we can have no exact idea of their range in time. The very striking square form (as in no. 105) has a wide distribution in space, but here at least seems to be contemporary with the more usual type' (Harding 1953:12). As noted by Macdonald, Harding later became increasingly more skeptical about the chronological significance of square forms (see Macdonald 2015: 30, n.109).

<sup>111</sup>Winnett 1957:3, 11–12, 19, 95; he names inscriptions with square forms as in an 'archaic type of the script'.

<sup>112</sup>Commenting on ISB 57/SoS: '[t]his inscription is the only one in the present collection to make use of the square characters that in Safaitic most strikingly suggest the South Arabic forms from which the Safaitic alphabet ultimately derived' (Oxtoby 1968:47). Incidentally, this inscription can be dated to the late 1st c. AD (see Abbadi 2013; §1.1.4 above).

<sup>113</sup>While Clark recognised the problems with this approach, he concluded that the so-called 'square script' may have been archaic: '[t]here is no palaeographic reason to date this type of script to any particular era or even to give it a chronological position relative to the other types of script. However, the square, almost monumental style of this script, coupled with its relatively infrequent use, does suggest that this may have been one of the earliest manifestations of Safaitic, a style which quickly gave way to other, more easily inscribed styles of script shortly after its first introduction' (Clark 1979:68). He also assumed the '90° script' to be archaic.

## 1. Introduction

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appears that square and 90° graph forms were purely stylistic variants: they often occur next to normal forms within the same text – sometimes to emphasise the name and genealogy of the author – and were used inconsistently in different texts by the same author.<sup>114</sup>

### 1.3.2.2 Grimme's script categories

In his monograph *Texte und Untersuchungen zur safatenisch-arabischen Religion* (1929), Grimme identified the following script categories:<sup>115</sup> 'Thamudisch-Safatenisch', whose graph forms can all be subsumed under the 'common' Safaitic inventory as described in this study; 'Safatenisch', consisting mainly of forms from what is here referred to as the 'fine' inventory, but including also some 'common' variants; and 'Umm al-Jimāl', i.e. the script of a group of texts from Umm al-Jimāl which is here labelled as 'SoS script' (see §1.3.3.4 below for more details). He suggested, without any argumentation, that the 'Thamudisch-Safatenisch' and the 'Umm al-Jimāl' scripts were archaic (Grimme 1929:17).<sup>116</sup>

The fact that Grimme's 'Safatenisch' category mainly corresponds to what is here labelled as the 'fine' script, can be explained through the provenance of the texts he had studied. Indeed, most Safaitic texts known at the time came from southern Syria to the east of the Ḥawrān, where a great number of texts in the 'fine' script is found (see §1.3.3.4 below). Grimme interpreted the features of 'common' texts (his 'Thamudisch-Safatenisch' category) as more archaic simply because their features appeared as less compressed, and hence visually more similar to 'Thamudisch' (i.e. the Thamudic B script<sup>117</sup>), from which he believed that the Safaitic script gradually developed.<sup>118</sup> But while the study in Chapter 4 will in fact confirm that the 'fine' script – i.e. Grimme's 'Safatenisch' – is the result of a palaeographic development from the 'common' script (Grimme's 'Thamudisch-Safatenisch'), this does not mean that all 'common' texts are

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<sup>114</sup>See Macdonald 1992a:418; Macdonald 2006:292, and the examples cited in n.86 and n.87; Macdonald 2015:12, Appendix 2. In the last study, he concludes: '[t]he term 'square script' is thus a misnomer since it is not a script as such, nor even a coherent version of a script, like the *musnad* or *Estrangelā*. The letter forms which have been identified as belonging to this so-called 'square script' are simply attempts by numerous different individuals to give some of the letters more angular forms, for reasons we can only guess at' (Macdonald 2015:32–33). Similarly, he argued against the validity of a '90° script' category: '[o]nce again, this is not a script, or even a version of a script, but simply refers to a practice in some Safaitic inscriptions of turning one or more of the letters *b*, *h*, *s*<sup>1</sup>, *k*, *m*, at 90° to the direction of the text for decorative purposes. There is no consistency between texts as to which of these letters is turned, and often within a single inscription one example of a letter will be at 90° and another have its normal stance' (Macdonald 2015:33).

<sup>115</sup>See Grimme 1929:15–16 and his *Schrifttafel* (Tafel I) at the end of the book.

<sup>116</sup>He also mentioned a distinction between a so-called '*Lapidarschrift*' and a '*Kursivschrift*', although he does not distinguish these alleged variants in the script table; see Grimme 1929:15, Tafel I.

<sup>117</sup>See §1.1.2 above and Table 2.2.

<sup>118</sup>Unlike Littmann, who as seen above thought that the Safaitic script was the latest offshoot of the South Arabian script (Littmann 1940:92), Grimme maintained that the Safaitic script was the result of a development from Proto-Sinaitic via 'Thamudic' (Grimme 1926; Grimme 1929:16–17).

necessarily older than ‘fine’ ones.<sup>119</sup> Grimme’s assumption that the Safaitic script developed from ‘*Thamudisch*’ (Thamudic B), while certainly possible, remains entirely speculative.<sup>120</sup>

#### 1.3.2.3 Clark’s ‘Safaitic scripts’

Clark devoted a section of his dissertation to the palaeography of Safaitic inscriptions and proposed a classification of the Safaitic scripts on the basis of his collection of texts. He identified five categories: ‘common’, ‘fine’, ‘square’, ‘90°’, and ‘formal’, while at the same time he remarked how ‘the categories suggested here are only intended to be a tentative beginning to a palaeographic study, a task for which not enough reliable data yet exists and which may yet prove to be impracticable’ (Clark 1979:67).

Clark’s ‘common’ and ‘fine’ categories have been adopted in this study as well (see §1.3.3.4 below). Concerning the ‘square’ and ‘90°’ categories, we have already seen above that, as argued by Macdonald, rather than constituting separate scripts, ‘square’ and ‘90°’ forms were idiosyncratic stylistic features (see also Chapter 3).

Finally, Clark describes the ‘formal’ script – in a rather subjective and ambiguous manner – as ‘very elegant, in a style which seems to be mid-way between the square and the common script’ (Clark 1979: 69). Some texts which Clark labels as ‘formal’ can be placed in the SoS script category as defined in this study.<sup>121</sup>

#### 1.3.2.4 Macdonald’s approach

The first study by Macdonald dealing with material aspects of the Safaitic script is his 1989 article ‘Cursive Safaitic Inscriptions? A Preliminary Investigation’, which is a detailed analysis of the Safaitic practice of joining adjacent graphs.<sup>122</sup> In subsequent studies, most of which are referenced in §1.3.2.1 above, Macdonald mainly responded to attempts by previous scholars to identify earlier and later phases of the Safaitic script. To the studies mentioned above, one should add a long footnote in his 1993 paper ‘Nomads and the Ḥawrān’,<sup>123</sup> where he stated that ‘[i]t is difficult, if not impossible, to

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<sup>119</sup>See §1.1.4 above.

<sup>120</sup>More recently, Al-Jallad has resumed this hypothesis: he suggested that Safaitic possibly reflects a continuous development from Thamudic B on the basis of commonalities in the basic shapes and formulae (Al-Jallad 2021:73). For a list of the differences as well as shared features between the ‘common’ Safaitic and Thamudic B graph forms, see §2.2.2.2. Three texts of the JQC present both ‘common’ Safaitic and Thamudic B features (see §2.4).

<sup>121</sup>E.g. CSNS 1004/SoS and CSNS 895/SoS; the latter presents some features which are typically found in the SoS texts from the Dūmah area (see Norris 2018:80–81 and §1.3.3.4 below).

<sup>122</sup>Macdonald 1989; see §5.3 for a further description of this practice based on the evidence from the JQC.

<sup>123</sup>Macdonald 1993:385, n. 487. The footnote is a response to Knauf’s 1991 claim that the Safaitic script derived from Minaic (Knauf 1991:97–98). In the same footnote he also addressed the highly problematic palaeographic schemata produced by Jamme (1971:611–612) using the forms of JaS 44–176. Jamme’s schemata are not based on any dated texts and therefore entirely arbitrary. On the basis of such schemata, he believed to have demonstrated that the Safaitic script developed from South Arabian as well as that the so-called ‘square script’ was a later development (Jamme 1971:56).



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establish a palaeography for a script which appears to have been used only for carving graffiti and in which there are virtually no datable texts’.

Macdonald’s most recent contribution to the subject is the 2015 paper ‘On the uses of writing in ancient Arabia and the role of palaeography in studying them’, where he again rejected the possibility of palaeographic analysis of Safaitic altogether.<sup>124</sup> On the one hand, he reiterated that, in absence of a firm chronological framework for most of the texts, a palaeography of Safaitic would be a practically impossible task. On the other hand, he claimed that there is no palaeographic development in the Safaitic script, since in his view palaeographic development cannot exist outside a scribal environment. The latter assertion relates to his idea of Safaitic literacy as an ‘informal’ pastime activity, which he defined in opposition to literacy in institutionalised contexts.<sup>125</sup> Accordingly, for Macdonald variation in the Safaitic script is purely spontaneous and idiosyncratic, since ‘the only pressures for stability or change are created by the exigencies of the writing materials (the surfaces of the rocks and the inscribing tools), and the personal taste, fantasy and skill of the individual inscriber’.<sup>126</sup>

While I agree with Macdonald’s critique of impressionistic identifications of ‘archaic’ features and palaeographic development in previous scholarship, I cannot agree with his generalisations about the nature of script variation and development in Safaitic. Such views are not the product of a systematic analysis of the script. Rather, they stem from an approach to Safaitic inscriptions which imposes a very specific usage of writing – i.e. the official, scribal, and administrative context – as the literate norm, and consequently denies the very existence of palaeographic development in the script simply because it is not the product of such an institutionalised environment.

As to the problem of the lack of a chronological framework, while this certainly poses significant challenges, it does not in any way hinder a material study of the Safaitic script. Moreover, in Chapter 4 we shall see how the long genealogies in several texts by members of the lineage of *df* can be employed as a chronological tool to trace the palaeographic development from the ‘common’ to the ‘fine’ script across generations.

In his ‘Outline of the Grammar of the Safaitic inscriptions’ (2015), Al-Jallad states that ‘[t]he circumstances under which the Safaitic inscriptions were produced make the paleography of the script impossible’.<sup>127</sup> He maintains that the script has ‘two primary variants’, that is ‘normal’ and ‘square’ – he follows Macdonald in considering the latter

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<sup>124</sup>Macdonald 2015:10–13.

<sup>125</sup>See Macdonald 1993:382–388; Macdonald 2010:15–16.

<sup>126</sup>Macdonald 2015:14; he continues: ‘There was no external pressure to maintain a particular set of letter forms written in a certain way, as there would be in a school, a monastic scriptorium, a chancery, or a monumental mason’s workshop’.

<sup>127</sup>He continues: ‘For a comparison between letter forms to be meaningful, they must be produced under similar circumstances and within a single scribal tradition. The Safaitic inscriptions vary not only in terms of instrument and support, both of which play an important role in giving the glyph its ultimate look on the rock, but in terms of their authors as well: the texts were produced by a diverse group of people over a relatively large area and an unknown chronological span’ (Al-Jallad 2015:27–28).

as stylistic – and presents a brief description of the Safaitic script with a few selected variant forms per grapheme. This description is then followed by a script chart of what he calls ‘idealized forms of the Safaitic glyphs’, with the top row representing ‘normal forms’ and the bottom row showing the ‘so-called square variants’ (Al-Jallad 2015:36–37).

As this overview shows, Safaitic palaeography has received very limited attention in previous scholarship. This thesis aims to fill this lacuna as well as to show the interest of a study of the materiality of the Safaitic script for its own sake.

#### 1.3.3 Terminology and approach

In the following, I will define the terminology and approach employed in this study to analyse variation in the Safaitic script. One important methodological premise of this study is that the Safaitic script, like any script, can be investigated through a theory of writing which adequately distinguishes the abstract from the concrete, that is the emic from the etic level. I here adopt the framework and terminology proposed in Meletis’s 2019 paper on the concept of grapheme as a universal unit of writing.<sup>128</sup>

Meletis argues for a four-level model of writing (Fig. 1.11), which he adopted from Rezec’s studies on the structure of the German writing system (Rezec 2009, Rezec 2013). According to this model, the *graphemes* are the emic units at the graphematic level, while the *basic shapes* (Rezec’s *Grundformen*) are the emic units at the graphetic level (Meletis 2019:29). Within this framework, Meletis differentiates graphetic from graphematic allographs: *graphetic allographs* are different instantiations of the same *basic shape*, whereas *graphematic allographs* are different *basic shapes* associated to the same *grapheme* (Meletis 2019:33).

One can also distinguish the *graphetics* as the study of ‘the materiality of writing (i.e. the visual constituents of graphemes)’ from the *graphematics* as the study of ‘the relationship between the visual and the linguistic’ (Meletis 2019:35). The present study deals primarily with the graphetics of Safaitic writing, i.e. the level comprehending its basic shapes and graphs.

While graphematics as a field of study is well-established in the German grapholin-guistic tradition,<sup>129</sup> graphetics is a much more understudied field, which presents several overlaps with disciplines such as palaeography and epigraphy (see Meletis 2015b; Meletis 2015a). Graphetics has been recently defined as ‘an interdisciplinary field concerned with the analysis and description of the materiality of scripts as well as its role in

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<sup>128</sup>Meletis defines a *grapheme* as ‘a basic unit of writing that (1) distinguishes meaning, (2) has a linguistic value (typically by referring to a linguistic unit), and (3) is minimal in that it is not composed by smaller units which are themselves graphemes’ (Meletis 2019:43). It should be noted that in Safaitic epigraphy instead of the term *grapheme* one usually finds the term *letter*, which is generally applied indiscriminately to both abstract and concrete entities. Al-Jallad often seems to prefer the term *glyph* over *letter/grapheme*, although he uses the term *letter* as well, with no apparent difference in meaning and to refer to both abstract and concrete entities (see Al-Jallad 2015:26–27).

<sup>129</sup>Meletis 2019:25; see, e.g., Dürscheid 2016: Chapter 4.

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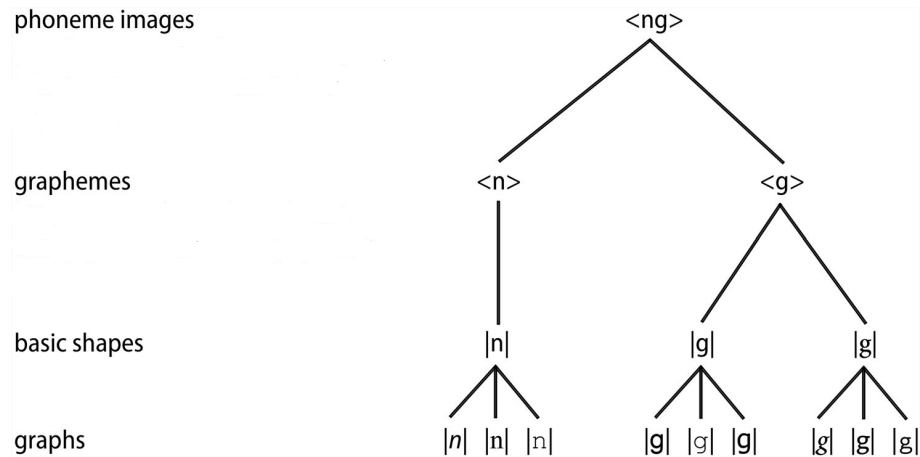


Figure 1.11: Four-level model of writing (example from Meletis 2019:34)

the production and perception of written language' (Meletis 2015a). Accordingly, this thesis may be labelled a graphetic study of Safaitic, as it deals with several facets of the materiality of the Safaitic script, ranging from formal analyses of script variation and palaeographic development (Chapters 2, 3, 4, 6), to investigations of various aspects concerning the production of Safaitic texts (Chapter 5), to descriptions of practices involving their malicious disruption (Chapter 7).

In the following, I will define the terminology that I employ to describe and analyse script variation: *basic shape*, *graph*, *graph form*, *distinguishing features*, *writing style*. Subsequently, I will introduce the terms and geographic distribution of the three Safaitic scripts which are the object of this study.

### 1.3.3.1 Basic shapes, graphs, and graph forms

To describe variation in the Safaitic script, I use the concepts of *basic shape*, *graph*, and *graph form*. For the first two terms I follow the definitions by Meletis (2019), while I have coined the third term specifically for Safaitic.







In the model shown in Fig. 1.11 above, one can see that the *basic shape* is in between the grapheme and the *graph*. A *basic shape* is '[a] material yet abstract unit' (i.e. both etic and emic) representing 'a 'skeleton', a bundle of visual features that are necessary to perceptually distinguish a shape from the other shapes in an inventory'.<sup>130</sup> For example, the 'common' basic shape of the *k*  $\mathcal{C}$  – a deep curve with a tail attached to it – is distinguished from the 'common' shape of the *b*  $\subset$  – only a deep curve – by the tail, which is necessary to perceptually distinguish the *k* from the *b* (see §2.1.3 and §2.1.13).<sup>131</sup>

<sup>130</sup>Meletis 2019:43–44, n. 6

<sup>131</sup>Moreover, the tail of the *k* can have any stance but the horizontal one, since this is a feature distinguishing the shape of 'common' *k* from the shape of 'common' *s*<sup>l</sup>, which is a curve with a horizontal tail

I also follow Meletis' definition of a *script* as an inventory of *basic shapes* (Meletis 2019:20, n. 7.). I use this term to refer to the different Safaitic scripts – i.e. 'common' script, 'fine' script, and SoS script (see §1.3.3.4 below) – as well as to the 'Safaitic script', which encompasses all these inventories, as opposed to Hismaic, Thamudic B, and the other Ancient North Arabian scripts.

Meletis defines a *graph* as an etic and concrete substantiation of a *basic shape*.<sup>132</sup> In our case, a *graph* is a unique concrete instantiation of a basic shape which is carved (direct hammered, chiselled, or incised) on a given rock surface with a given instrument. Depending on factors such as the chosen carving technique, the author's skill, and the writing support, a graph may be carved neatly or irregularly, deeply or shallowly, with more or less pronounced hammering/incising blows, etc. This is the type of variation pertaining to the level of the graph. To the terms *basic shape* and *graph*, I have added the concept of *graph form* (often abbreviated to *form*), by which I mean a unit that is slightly more abstract than the concrete *graph*. I use this term to describe the form/stylistic features of one or more Safaitic *graphs*.

For example, as mentioned above the 'common' basic shape of *b* can be defined as a deep curve.<sup>133</sup> But while the 'common' graphs , , and  all share a curvilinear graph form  $\subset$ , the graphs , , and  are 'common' graphs of *b* with a square form  $\sqsubset$ .

I employ the concept of graph form to refer to different types of features. For instance,  $\subset$ ,  $\subset$ ,  $\cap$  are all curvilinear forms of *b*, but the first is a deep curve form, the second a shallow curve form, and the third a deep curve form turned by 90°.

The difference between *basic shape* and *graph form* is an important conceptual distinction which is functional to a first systematic investigation of the different layers of graphetic variation in the Safaitic script(s). What is relevant at the level of the basic shape are the visual features which are necessary to distinguish different shapes from one another within a consistent inventory, whereas the less abstract level of the graph form is functional to a proper description of the great extent of allographic variation in the form and stylistic features of Safaitic graphs.

In order to better illustrate the features of a given graph form, I often use drawings which are based on actual graphs. Basic shapes, which are the most abstract entities at the graphetic level, are described without being drawn.

#### 1.3.3.2 Distinguishing features

As we shall see in the next Chapter, with the exception of *ḏ* – which in the SoS script is represented by a completely different shape than in the 'common' and in the 'fine' scripts – the Safaitic inventories generally exhibit graph forms representing either the same or closely related shapes. Most differences among the Safaitic scripts can be ex-

<sup>132</sup> $\subset$  (see §2.1.19).

<sup>133</sup>Ibid.

<sup>133</sup>The curvilinearity of the 'common' basic shape of *b* is ultimately a conventional choice, and it is based on evidence showing that angular forms were sometimes stylistically marked (see §2.1, Chapter 3).

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	‘common’	‘fine’	SoS
<i>d</i>	⌈	⌈	⊙
<i>r</i>	(	⌈	⊂⌈⌈

Table 1.1: Examples of primary vs secondary distinguishing features

plained through *recurring graphic variables*, i.e. recurring patterns of graphic variation, such as the shift from curvilinearity to angularity or the compression of forms.<sup>134</sup>

Certain graph forms are connected to one specific script, and so they can be used to distinguish scripts. I have divided distinguishing features into two classes:

- Primary distinguishing features, i.e. a *graph form* which is found exclusively in a given script and which is radically different from *graph forms* representing the same *grapheme* in other scripts, to the extent that they could not be derived from each other through *recurring graphic variables*;
- Secondary distinguishing features, i.e. 1) a *graph form* which is characteristic of a particular script and which is not radically divergent from *graph forms* representing the same *grapheme* in one or more other scripts, i.e. they could be easily derived from each other through *recurring graphic variables*; 2) a *graph form* characteristic of one *script*, but only rarely found in others to represent the same *grapheme*.

Table 1.1 shows some selected forms of *d* and *r* in the three Safaitic scripts as attested in the JQC.<sup>135</sup> An example of a primary distinguishing feature is the SoS form of *d* vs the ‘common’ and ‘fine’ forms, since they cannot be derived from each other through *recurring graphic variables*. On the other hand, the ‘fine’ form of *d* is an example of secondary distinguishing feature in relation to the ‘common’ form, the only difference being its greater compression and the slanting of lines, which are both *recurring graphic variables*.

Concerning the selected forms of *r* shown in the table, these are all examples of secondary distinguishing features. As we shall see in Chapter 4, the ‘fine’ form of *r* as a shallow curve with two vertical hooks has developed from the ‘common’ shallow curve form through the addition of hooks (see §4.1.3.2), which in itself is a *recurring graphic variable*. The ‘fine’ form of *r* constitutes also a good example of definition 2) of *secondary distinguishing feature*, since two SoS texts of the JQC attest a graph form of *r* as a shallow curve with two vertical hooks as well (see §2.1.18). But since in the vast majority of cases this form of *r* occurs in the context of texts in the ‘fine’ script, it can be considered as a secondary distinguishing feature of this script.

Lastly, it is important to stress that forms representing secondary distinguishing features, although clearly related, can still correspond to different basic shapes. For

<sup>134</sup>For a list of the most common recurring graphic variables, see §2.1.

<sup>135</sup>See Chapter 2 for a more complete account.

example, although the addition of hooks is a *recurring graphic variable*, the hooks of the ‘fine’ *r* can still be considered as part of its basic shape—they are necessary to perceptually distinguish the *r* from the *b*, which in the ‘fine’ script is a simple shallow curve and therefore identical to the basic shape of ‘common’ *r*.<sup>136</sup>

#### 1.3.3.3 Writing styles

A *writing style* is defined by the choices of graph forms (Chapter 2), carving technique and text layout (Chapter 5) within a particular script, i.e. ‘common’, ‘fine’, or SoS. The majority of writing styles are characterised by a set of features which are commonly attested in other texts, although the choice and arrangement of such features often varies in an idiosyncratic manner. The study of texts by prolific authors (Chapter 6) shows that some writing styles exhibit distinctive characteristics specific to individual writers, such as the use of special features or of a particular layout, which are sometimes shared by members of the same family. At the same time, it also shows that there is a certain extent of variation even among different texts by the same authors. Prolific authors did not always employ the exact same graph forms and features through all of their texts. Thus, the term *writing style* is generally employed here to refer to the features of a single given text, which are sometimes shared fully or partially with other texts. Additionally, in the study of prolific authors in Chapter 6, I will sometimes use the term to refer to the writing style of an author, whereby I mean a consistent set of features which are shared by the texts of a certain author, be they distinctive or not. It should be stressed that, in the sample of prolific authors studied in Chapter 6, authors never changed script from one text to the other. Rather, variation within one author seems to function mainly in terms of choices of graph forms within a single script.

#### 1.3.3.4 The Safaitic scripts

In my study of the JQC, I distinguish three scripts: ‘common’, ‘fine’, and SoS. I here introduce the terminology of these scripts as well as their general features and geographic distribution.

**The ‘common’ script** While Clark employed the term ‘common’ as an umbrella category referring to the script of most of the texts that could not be subsumed under any of his other categories,<sup>137</sup> in this study, the ‘common’ script is defined and described as a consistent inventory of basic shapes (see Chapter 2). I decided to keep Clark’s ‘common’ term as most Safaitic inscriptions of the JQC – and, most likely, of the Safaitic corpus as a whole – are in this script.

Inscriptions in the ‘common’ script are mainly concentrated in corpora from north-eastern Jordan,<sup>138</sup> especially its southern areas until the northern-most regions of Saudi

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<sup>136</sup>Similarly, the deep curve form of *r* attested in the SoS script, which would represent a *b* in the ‘common’ script, can be considered as a different shape as well.

<sup>137</sup>Clark 1979:69.

<sup>138</sup>See, e.g., QUR, CSNS, WH, ISB, AbaNS, HaNS, CEDS.

Arabia close to the border with Jordan,<sup>139</sup> and they are also well attested in southern Syria.<sup>140</sup>

**The ‘fine’ script** The ‘fine’ script is an inventory of compressed and elongated basic shapes which developed from the ‘common’ inventory (see Chapter 4). While in ‘common’ inscriptions with elongated forms usually only some graphs are elongated (see §3.1.3), the ‘fine’ graph forms reflect a consistent, distinctive inventory of basic shapes, which are used throughout all the graphs of the text. The term ‘fine’ was first introduced by Clark<sup>141</sup> to refer to the distinctive elongated appearance of this script. Since the ‘fine’ script appears to be the result of a gradual palaeographic development from the ‘common’ script, I here label as ‘fine’ only those texts which are from the ‘late ‘fine’ stage’ of development – i.e. the stage attesting the complete stock of ‘fine’ basic shapes –, while I label texts whose features are still in between the ‘common’ and the ‘fine’ script as transitional between the two (see §4.1.3).

The JQC, which is located at the southern edge of the Jordanian Harrah, contains only 23 examples of texts in the ‘fine’ script.<sup>142</sup> However, corpora including texts from regions further north in north-eastern Jordan, such as SIJ, but also WH and KRS, present a greater number of ‘fine’ texts. The collections from southern Syria<sup>143</sup> are the ones with the highest concentrations of texts in this script. Only a few scattered examples of inscriptions in the ‘fine’ script are attested further south in Saudi Arabia.<sup>144</sup>

**The SoS script** The SoS – i.e. ‘Southern Safaitic’ – script is the most complex script, as it presents a great extent of variation, and it shares a number of features with Hismaic, most prominently the double circle *ḏ* (see §2.1, §2.2.2.3). Because of such features, some texts in this script have been labelled in previous scholarship as ‘mixed’ texts or ‘Mixed Safaitic/Hismaic’.<sup>145</sup> Such terms are problematic, however, as they imply that this script would represent a deliberate mix of the two scripts.

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<sup>139</sup>See the texts from the al-Qurayyāt region (cf. e.g., ThSaf 60/C, ThSaf 69/C, and ThSaf 70/C), which is geographically very close to the JQC.

<sup>140</sup>See, e.g., C, LP and RSIS.

<sup>141</sup>Clark 1979:69.

<sup>142</sup>Clark noticed the same scarcity of ‘fine’ texts in his corpus (CSNS), which is also relatively southern (Clark 1979:69).

<sup>143</sup>See, e.g., C, LP, RSIS, and all the texts collected within the framework of the SESP.

<sup>144</sup>See, e.g., NSR 12/F, NSR 97/F, JaS 35/F, and JaS 36/F.

<sup>145</sup>See Harding 1972:5; Macdonald 1980:188; King 1990a:§2.I; Norris 2018:79–81. Clark (1979:76–77) used the term ‘Safaitic/Thamudic’ to refer to some texts belonging to this script (e.g. CSNS 1004–1011/SoS), but at the same time he also questioned the distinction between Safaitic and Thamudic E (i.e. Hismaic). In Clark (1980:127–128), he incorporated Thamudic E within the category of the Safaitic script, but see the reply of Macdonald (1980:188) in the same volume. Winnett defined the script of the SoS texts of WTI as ‘Tabuki’ Thamudic (i.e. Hismaic); see Winnett and Reed 1970. However, as pointed out by Macdonald 1980 and by King 1990a, the distinctive features of the Hismaic script are clearly distinct from the script of the WTI texts labelled as ‘Tabuki’ by Winnett. According to King, the WTI corpus contains only one text in the Hismaic script (WTI 11/H), while all others belong to what she calls ‘Mixed Safaitic/Hismaic’, i.e. the SoS script (see King 1990a:§2.I).

### 1.3. Investigating the materiality of the Safaitic script

Since the greatest concentration of texts in this script is found in the area of Dūmah (modern al-Jawf, northern Saudi Arabia, see Fig. 1.1),<sup>146</sup> – a region located much further south in relation to those areas of the Ḥarrah where the vast majority of ‘common’ and ‘fine’ texts are found – I employ here a geographic term: Southern Safaitic (SoS).<sup>147</sup> As we shall see below, examples of this script are also scattered in more northern regions, but in those areas SoS script texts seem to be attested in comparatively much smaller numbers, whereas in the Dūmah region they make up the majority of Safaitic texts. Though this term is not without caveats – as one has to label as ‘Southern Safaitic’ also texts which were found in more northern regions – it is more neutral than ‘Mixed Safaitic/Hismaic’ in respect to the palaeographic features of the script and its relationship to Hismaic, which need to be investigated further.

Most SoS texts are found in regions of the Nabataean cultural area, especially the ones along and connected by the Wādī Sirḥān stretching from its lower end at Dūmah up to the southern Ḥawrān in the north. The corpus of SoS texts from the Dūmah area amounts to 462 items,<sup>148</sup> representing the largest corpus of SoS texts known so far. Texts in this script have been attested as far south as Ḥāʾil,<sup>149</sup> and, to the north-east of Dūmah, in the ʿArʿar region.<sup>150</sup>

Several texts in this script are found along the Wadi Sirḥān between Iṭrā and Ṭuraif.<sup>151</sup> Further to the north, the JQC contains 58 SoS texts. There are also several texts scattered over other regions of north-eastern Jordan<sup>152</sup> and southern Syria.<sup>153</sup> In the southern Hawrān, there are some SoS inscriptions carved on dressed stones at Umm al-Jimāl.<sup>154</sup>

Further examples of SoS texts have been found in southern Jordan,<sup>155</sup> in Lebanon,<sup>156</sup> in the hinterland of Palmyra,<sup>157</sup> further to the east on the west bank of the Euphrates,<sup>158</sup> and in western Iraq.<sup>159</sup>

<sup>146</sup>On this corpus of texts, see Norris 2018.

<sup>147</sup>Note that this term has no association with Knauf’s ‘South Safaitic’, or *Südsafaitisch*, with which he referred to Hismaic (Knauf 1983; Knauf 1985).

<sup>148</sup>Norris 2018:74–75.

<sup>149</sup>See, e.g., HU 789c/SoS, WHI 62/SoS, 127/SoS, 149–151/SoS.

<sup>150</sup>E.g. JaS 83.1-3/SoS, NSR 1.1/SoS, NSR 55/SoS, NSR 56/SoS, NSR 78/SoS.

<sup>151</sup>E.g. WTI 81/SoS, INAS 69/SoS, and JaS 192/SoS.

<sup>152</sup>See, e.g., HaNSB 361/SoS, 363/SoS, HaNSC 24-26/SoS, AAEK 131/SoS, HCH 191/SoS, ISB 57/SoS, WH 2182/SoS, TLWS 20/SoS.

<sup>153</sup>E.g. C 88.1/SoS.

<sup>154</sup>LP 1269-1271/SoS; Grimme recognized that the Safaitic texts from Umm al-Jimāl had distinctive features which were different from the other Safaitic texts from Syria known at the time and classed such texts as the ‘Umm al-Jimāl script’. He wrote: ‘[...] *Endlich zeigen mancherlei Eigentümlichkeiten die Inschriften von Umm el-Jimāl, die alle auf rechteckig behauenen Steinen stehen und in ihrem Duktus mehrfach von den Inschriften der Ḥarra abweichen*’ (Grimme 1929:12).

<sup>155</sup>E.g. HH 1/SoS and KhNSB 1/SoS (the Safaitic portion of a Safaitic/Nabataean bilingual).

<sup>156</sup>E.g. HSIL 1/SoS and HFSL 2/SoS.

<sup>157</sup>E.g. ISP 63 bis/SoS, Meyer 2017:171–172, 178, Fig. 260.

<sup>158</sup>Palmyra Museum 1357.1–3/SoS.

<sup>159</sup>E.g. HSIM, RaIM, HFSI 46940/SoS, HFSI 67801/SoS, and ANKS 1/SoS.



