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The Safaitic scripts: palaeography of an ancient nomadic writing culture

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Chapter 2

Basic Shapes and Graph Forms

As seen in §1.2.1 (Fig.1.6), the vast majority of the inscriptions of the JQC is in the ‘common’ script (4915 texts), while a small portion of texts is in the SoS script (58 texts), and an even smaller number is in the ‘fine’ script (23 texts). The first Section of this Chapter offers a description of the basic shapes and graph forms of the ‘common’, ‘fine’, and SoS inventories as they appear in the inscriptions of the JQC.¹⁶⁰ It also provides a list of *recurring graphic variables*, that is, the most common patterns of graphic variation. Subsequently, §2.2 outlines the various features distinguishing the Safaitic scripts from each other as well as the features distinguishing the Safaitic scripts from Hismaic and Thamudic B. In §2.3, I describe the script of a single text whose features do not fit into any of the script categories identified here and which may represent a further Safaitic script, while also pointing at some parallels from other collections. Finally, §2.4 discusses the features of three texts which have both ‘common’ and Thamudic B features.

2.1 Safaitic inventories

In this Section, I will describe the basic shapes and graph forms of the ‘common’, ‘fine’, and SoS scripts. For each grapheme, I define the corresponding basic shape (or shapes), and then go on to describe the various types of graph forms attested in each script.¹⁶¹

Several basic shapes are instantiated by both curvilinear and angular – either angular pointed or angular square – allographs. Because we have evidence that angular forms were sometimes stylistically marked (see Chapter 3), whenever both alternatives

¹⁶⁰For a discussion of the terminology and approach used in this study, see §1.1.3.

¹⁶¹In defining the main features of basic shapes and graph forms, I found the meticulous framework employed by King in her dissertation on Hismaic very useful (see King 1990a:§2.A, n. 6). She looked attentively at form, stance, and direction, and I have tried to do the same. I describe the individual basic shapes and graph forms as if they were in the context of a text running horizontally from left to right (for a description of the different types of text direction in Safaitic, see §5.4.). Square or elongated forms and forms turned by 90° to their basic shapes stances are included in the descriptions when attested, but their uses are specifically treated in Chapter 3.

2. Basic Shapes and Graph Forms

are attested, I conventionally take the basic shapes to be curvilinear.

From the idealised basic shapes hence defined, most variation in the graph forms can be reduced to a set of recurring graphic variables. I have identified the following:

- The shift from curvilinearity to angularity (and vice-versa);
- The depth of curves/angles;
- The size of geometric components such as strokes, forks, circles, half-circles;
- The change of orientation by 45°, 90°, or 180° (i.e. facing backwards) to the basic shapes stances;
- The compression/elongation of forms;
- The way small geometric components such as forks or circles are formed and attached to the stem;¹⁶²
- The number of waves/angles in a wavy/zigzag line;
- The addition/subtraction of hooks or curly elements to/from the extremities of strokes;
- The slanting/curving of straight lines or, conversely, the straightening of slanted/curved lines;
- The addition/subtraction of parallel lines to/from the constitutive line(s) of the basic shape;
- The simplification of small circles/dashes to a dot.

Through such variables, graph forms reflecting distinct basic shapes sometimes happen to be very close or identical in form. For instance, through the last variable in the list, i.e. the simplification of small circles/dashes to a dot, the *ʿ* and the *n* – whose typical ‘common’ forms are a small circle and a vertical dash respectively – can end up having the same form.¹⁶³

In the descriptions of graph forms, I mostly abstain from statements about the frequency of certain forms unless they are very common or very rare. In the case of the ‘common’ script, such statements are especially difficult, because they would require a study of the forms of all graphs in every single inscription; considering the size of the ‘common’ corpus, this would be a hardly manageable task.¹⁶⁴ As to the ‘fine’ and the SoS script, their corpora are much more limited in size. In these two cases, therefore,

¹⁶²E.g., in the case of forks, if they are formed by adding a slanted stroke to one side of the stem or in other ways.

¹⁶³This occasionally happens within the same text as well, as for example in QUR 333.10.1/C *l sʿlg bn mʿhr bn hmʿd* ‘By Sʿlg son of Mʿhr son of Hmʿd’, where both the *n*’s and the *ʿ* have a dot form.

¹⁶⁴The only partial exception to this are the graph forms of the *l* (see Table 2.1 below).

the frequency of certain graph forms, though easily assessable, is not very significant because we have too few examples. The ‘fine’ script presents the lowest sample of graph forms, which is probably in part also due to the limited number of ‘fine’ script texts in the JQC.¹⁶⁵ On the other hand, it is remarkable that the SoS script, represented by only 52 texts, has a rather high number of variant forms, especially for the *k*, *r*, and *s*².

A fruitful method to determine if certain variant forms were actually employed contemporaneously is the study of allographic variation within the same text or in different texts by the same author. Thus, while describing the graph forms I sometimes mention whether I found evidence that different forms of the same basic shape were used either within the same inscription or interchangeably by the same author, or whether they were idiosyncrasies typical of a particular author (see Chapter 6).¹⁶⁶ However, since in the case of the ‘fine’ and SoS scripts our samples are very limited, and since in the case of the ‘common’ script no systematic comparative study of all graphs has been made, such remarks should be simply taken as illustrative of how variation works.

2.1.1 ʾ

The basic shape of ʾ is a vertical stroke with a fork at each end.

‘Common’ The forks can be formed by attaching them to the ends of the stroke ʾ or by adding to the stem slanted or curving strokes which can be attached to either side, e.g. ʾ, ʾ. The two different types of fork formation can also coexist in the same graph ʾ. Sometimes the stem is slanted: ʾ. An elongated form with longer stem has also been attested: ʾ.

‘Fine’ In the ‘fine’ script, the two forks are usually sharper and more elongated than in the ‘common’ script: ʾ, ʾ, ʾ. This is also the case with all other forked graph forms described below, i.e., *ḡ*, *h*, and *ṣ*.

SoS The graph forms of the SoS script are mainly the same as in the ‘common’ script (see above). Some instances are also attested in which either one fork is slanted in relation to the stroke ʾ, or both forks are slanting in the direction of the text ʾ¹⁶⁷ or the stem itself is curving ʾ.¹⁶⁸ In two texts,¹⁶⁹ variants with a remarkably short stem

¹⁶⁵Cf. the much higher number of graph forms in the texts from the late ‘fine’ stage studied in Chapter 4, see Fig. 4.1.

¹⁶⁶For a similar approach, cf. King 1990a:§2.H.2, who noted that several graph forms in Hismaic were likely to be contemporary because they were found either within the same text or in different texts by the same author or in different texts by possibly related authors.

¹⁶⁷Cf. QUR 952.83.1/SoS, where this variant occurs next to the non-slanting one.

¹⁶⁸QUR 952.50.1/SoS.

¹⁶⁹These texts are by the prolific author *bs¹ bn s¹dlh* (QUR 813.14.1/SoS) and his grandfather (QUR 952.83.1/SoS); see §6.3.1, §6.3.4.1.

2. Basic Shapes and Graph Forms

∧ – which makes the graphs look very similar to a *h* – appear next to regular ones. In two other cases, the upper fork is square ⋈ .¹⁷⁰

2.1.2 ˆ

This grapheme has the shape of a circle of relatively small size, as opposed to the shape of the *g*, which is also a circle, but bigger.

‘Common’ The ‘common’ script attests, next to the usual small circle form \circ , its simplification to a dot \cdot ,¹⁷¹ as one of the forms of the *n* in the SoS script and, more rarely, in the ‘common’ script as well (see §2.1.16 below). When the size of the circle is bigger, it can be easily confused with the *g* \bigcirc .

In QUR 669.34.2/C a dot is placed inside the circle: \ominus .¹⁷²

‘Fine’ A small circle \circ , an oval \circ , a rhomboid \diamond , or a triangle Δ .

SoS A small circle \circ or sometimes a bigger one \bigcirc . In one text (QUR 137.90.1/SoS) it has a triangular shape Δ , but this particular text is deeply incised and all of its graphs have pointed forms.

2.1.3 b

In the ‘common’ script the shape of the *b* is a deep curve – deeper than the curve of the *r* – facing in the direction of the text, while in the ‘fine’ script it is a shallow curve. In the SoS inventory we find two graphematic allographs: 1) a deep curve, as in the ‘common’ script; 2) a straight line with two short arms.

‘Common’ Usually a deep curve \subset , which can sometimes have long arms \subset . Graph forms with shallower curves also occur, although less commonly \subset , in which case it can sometimes be confused with the curved version of the *r* (see §2.1.18 below). Another

¹⁷⁰These are two graphs in QUR 294.60.1/SoS and QUR 27.7.1/SoS respectively; The first inscription is by a member of the ‘*mrt*’ social group, whose members often employed square graph forms (see §3.2). In the second text this form appears together with another instance of the graph with slanting fork.

¹⁷¹This seems to be the case especially in hammered texts, while the incised ones generally have the small circle form. In a couple of cases a hammered dot has been used in the context of an incised text, see, e.g., QUR 294.46.1/C (Fig.5.6(a)). Note also that both the circle and the dot-shaped versions of the ˆ are attested in QUR 2.591.1/C *l mnˆ bn ˆf* ‘By Mnˆ son of ˆf’. The same author has written other texts in the region (QUR 2.529.1/C, 148.92.1/C, 961.4.1/C) in which the ˆ is always a dot. Note also that the prolific author ‘*qrb bn ˆds*’ used the small circle variant in all three texts which he incised, while he used the dot form in all hammered texts (see §2.1.8).

¹⁷²See Fig. 3.1(a) (the second text starting from left). The other inscriptions by the same author *ws¹⁰l bn zb* (QUR 175.2.1/C, 243.1.2/C, 249.3.1/C, 669.13.1/C) do not have this feature. Macdonald interpreted a text in the ‘common’ script with a similar feature as a playful way of representing the ‘*ayn*’, which in that text is supported by the fact that the *yod* has fingers added to its loop (see Macdonald 2005a:94–95).

form consists of a vertical back with two arms of varying lengths \complement , but usually longer than the arms of the r as a straight line with two arms, while the back is shorter. It can also have a square \sqcap and a pointed form \angle . Its opening faces towards the direction of the text.¹⁷³ In some texts it is turned by 90° \cap and is sometimes also square: \sqcap . In this particular stance, the arms are sometimes longer, making it look very similar to a z : \cap , \sqcap .

‘Fine’ A slightly curving line \smile or, in some cases, an obtuse angle \sphericalangle .

SoS The SoS script attests mainly variants found also in the ‘common’ script: \complement , \complement , \sqcap . The small curve form \smile is very similar to the Hismaic shape of the r , which is sometimes attested in SoS texts as well and once (QUR 297.7.1/SoS) in conjunction with this same form of the b , so these two graphs are only contextually distinguishable in the inscription. In a few texts it is also attested as a straight line with two short arms \sqcap , \sqcap , looking very similar to one of the ‘common’ script forms of the r ; in one text (QUR 689.3.1/SoS), the two arms are converging \sqcap .

2.1.4 *d*

The shape of d is a vertical stroke with a half-circle attached to its middle and facing in the direction of the text.

‘Common’ The size of the half-circle can vary, but usually it is not bigger than half of the shaft length \mathfrak{d} ; it can also be rather small and filled in \mathfrak{d} . The half-circle rarely faces backwards \mathfrak{d} . There are also elongated variants where the vertical line is longer and the half circle small: \mathfrak{d} , \mathfrak{d} .

‘Fine’ The half-circle is very small \mathfrak{d} and sometimes takes a triangle form \mathfrak{d} . It can also face backwards \mathfrak{d} .

SoS In the SoS script we usually find the same forms as in the ‘common’ script \mathfrak{d} , \mathfrak{d} , but sometimes the half-circle is bigger \mathfrak{d} , and, in one case (QUR 813.14.1/SoS) it is squarish \sqcap .

2.1.5 *d*

The basic shape of \mathfrak{d} is a curve with a stroke running through its middle and extending to form a long tail.

¹⁷³In two inscriptions by *qblt bn 'm* (QUR 176.78.1/C and QUR 186.112.1/C), the author wrote the b facing backwards, which would seem an idiosyncrasy of this author, as it is otherwise unattested in the ‘common’ script and only rarely attested in Hismaic (see King 1990a:§2.C.2).

2. Basic Shapes and Graph Forms

‘Common’ The ‘common’ forms are usually curved or pointed, facing both downwards and upwards: 𐤁, 𐤂, 𐤃. Sometimes it lies horizontally, i.e. turned by 90° to its basic shape stance 𐤄. If the tail is very short it can be confused with the form of the 𐤅 with a protruding tail. It can sometimes take a square form 𐤆.

‘Fine’ In the ‘fine’ script the 𐤇 has mostly a pointed form and while the shaft is longer, the fork usually has a more acute angle than in the ‘common’ script forms 𐤂. There are three cases in which the tail has a small hook, similarly to the SoS form (see below): in one case (QUR 176.24.1/F) the hook forms an acute angle with the shaft 𐤇¹⁷⁴ while in the two other cases it forms an obtuse angle 𐤇¹⁷⁵.

SoS In the SoS script the tail typically curves either leftwards 𐤇 or rightwards 𐤈, and the curve can also continue to form a hook 𐤉. Sometimes instead of curving the tail has a dash attached to its end 𐤊. In one inscription (QUR 207.49.1/SoS), together with a hooked form 𐤋, another variant is attested in which the fork is slanted almost by 90° in relation to the shaft, which has no hook 𐤌. In one text (QUR 739.83.1/SoS) the shaft has a zigzag form 𐤍. In some cases, the 𐤇 takes the ‘common’ script hook-less form 𐤎, and in two cases the tail is not aligned with the central spike of the fork 𐤏.¹⁷⁶

2.1.6 𐤇

The 𐤇 has two different shapes: 1) in the ‘common’ and the ‘fine’ script it consists of two vertical lines joined by two parallel lines in the middle; 2) in the SoS script it is made of two concentric circles.

‘Common’ The most common form is the one of a rectangular grid with only the vertical lines protruding 𐤇, but it is also attested as a square grid with all lines extending past the square 𐤈. In two texts,¹⁷⁷ the grid has a cross inside 𐤉.

‘Fine’ In the ‘fine’ script the two horizontal parallel lines are slanted 𐤊.

SoS A circle with a smaller concentric circle inside 𐤊 which is sometimes simplified to a dot 𐤋.

¹⁷⁴This graph form occurs also in another text by the same author, i.e. the prolific author *mgd bn zd*, see §6.2.1.

¹⁷⁵The latter two are in two inscriptions by the prolific author *ms¹k bn ʾnʾm* (see §6.2.3).

¹⁷⁶In the Dūmah region some SoS texts attest a variant of 𐤇 in which the tail does not dissect the curve in two parts, which is similar to the form of an *s¹* turned by 90° and with hooked tail (see Norris 2018:80–81).

¹⁷⁷QUR 960.4.1/C and QUR 533.20.1/C. Note that possibly the same author of the latter, *gry bn mgyr*, carved another text (QUR 786.7.1/C) in which the 𐤇 appears as a square grid, as in 2), but without the cross inside.

2.1.7 *f*

This grapheme has the shape of a vertical wavy line with three undulations, the middle one being the biggest.

‘Common’ In most ‘common’ forms the middle undulation is curved ζ, but sometimes it takes a square form ζ̣.¹⁷⁸ The waves can also have similar sizes ζ, and appear as zigzags ζ̣. There are also variants in which only the side waves are pointed ζ̣, or simplified to hashes ζ̣. It can also rarely have extra curls on both sides ζ̣, in which case it looks very similar to the *s*² (see below).

‘Fine’ In the ‘fine’ script the *f* has a zigzag form, usually with three angles ζ̣, but sometimes simplified to two angles ζ̣. In one inscription (QUR 176.24.1/F) the central angle is a curve ζ̣, but the usual zigzag form is also attested in the same text. One inscription (QUR 2.490.1/F) contains a curved form of a type sometimes attested in the ‘common’ script ζ̣. This curved form, however, may also be an idiosyncrasy of this author.¹⁷⁹

SoS In the SoS script the *f* takes the usual ‘common’ curvilinear forms: ζ, ζ̣.

2.1.8 *g*

The shape of the *g* is a circle of relatively big size—bigger than the *ʿ*.

‘Common’ In the ‘common’ script it is usually a circle ○, or an oval ○̣, or a more irregular blob ○̣. It can also take square forms, usually looking like a rectangle standing on its short side □̣.

‘Fine’ A circle ○ or more often a rhomboid ◇.¹⁸⁰ It sometimes has an elongated form, looking very similar to an *m* 𐤌.

SoS The usual ‘common’ script circle form ○.

2.1.9 *ḡ*

The shape of the *ḡ* is a vertical wavy line with two undulations or a straight line with a small curve attached to the top.

¹⁷⁸Note that both variants of the *f* (with square and curved middle undulation respectively) are attested in QUR 147.20.8/C *l frhz bn ḥfy* ‘By Frhz son of Ḥfy’.

¹⁷⁹This is the same author who employed the hooked version of the *ḡ*; see the description of his writing style in §6.2.3.

¹⁸⁰In QUR 176.24.1/F both types are attested: the first variant, bigger, is used in the name of the author while the rhomboid variant is employed later in the same text. The first variant may have been employed to emphasize the name (see §6.2.1).

2. Basic Shapes and Graph Forms

‘Common’ In the ‘common’ script it often takes the form of a vertical line with two curves, and it can consist of one single line س ¹⁸¹ or of two parallel ones س . It can sometimes face backwards س .¹⁸² The two parallel lines sometimes converge س . The curves can also be very stretched out, looking like an elongated blob س . Other attested variants include vertical straight lines with a curving line attached to its top س , or a curve with a slanting line on top س . It is also sometimes found in the form of a curve with a slanting hash on top س .

‘Fine’ A straight line with a zigzag line on top having mostly one س or sometimes two angles س . The angle is usually small, but in one case (QUR 148.76.3/F) it is relatively big س . In one inscription (QUR 176.24.1/F), a slanted dash protrudes from the lower part of the stroke س , but it is unclear if this is an intentional mark, as the other س further in the same text does not have it.

SoS In the SoS script we have one of the forms attested in the ‘common’ script س , also facing backwards س , and one form similar to one of the ‘fine’ forms, although less pointed س . One inscription (QUR 639.3.1/SoS) shows a slightly different variant س , and in the same text there is another form also attested in the ‘common’ script س . QUR 551.93.1/SoS shows a zigzag form س , similar to one of the forms of SoS s^2 (see §2.1.20 below).¹⁸³

2.1.10 *h*

The basic shape of *h* is a vertical stroke with a fork attached to one end.

‘Common’ The variation in the ways in which the fork can be formed is very similar to that found in the forks of س , e.g. س , س , س , س . In some elongated forms, the fork has a more acute angle and a longer spine: س .

‘Fine’ The fork is small and acute angled: س , س .

SoS The same forms as the ‘common’ script س , س . In QUR 207.49.1/SoS the line forming the lower fork is particularly curved س .

¹⁸¹Note that this form would represent an s^2 in the SoS script, see §2.1.20.

¹⁸²E.g. QUR 186.100.2/C.

¹⁸³Norris notes that the SoS texts from Dūmah also attest the variant form of a wavy line identical to the ‘common’ form of s^2 (Norris 2018:80–81).

2.1.11 *h*

In the ‘common’ and SoS scripts the shape of the *h* is a curve facing in the direction of the text with a horizontal stroke cutting it in two equal parts. In the ‘fine’ script it is pointed and turned by 90° to the ‘common’/SoS shape stances.

‘Common’ In the ‘common’ script it is often curvilinear ϵ , with the horizontal line sometimes extending to the left shortly past its back ϵ . The horizontal line can also extend only shortly to the right ϵ . The form of the curve varies in similar ways as the curve of the *b*: it is sometimes shallower ϵ , takes square forms E , E , E , and, more rarely, a pointed form ϵ . It is sometimes turned by 90° and in such cases it is usually squarish: rh .

‘Fine’ The ‘fine’ texts attest only pointed forms with a vertical stance h , h .

SoS The same forms as in the ‘common’ script, with the central line never protruding past the back ϵ . Square forms are also attested E , E , which sometimes have also longer arms E .

2.1.12 *h*

The basic shape of this grapheme consists of two oblique lines crossing each other at their middle.

‘Common’ The two crossing lines are usually straight X , but sometimes one of the two or both lines can be slightly curving X .

‘Fine’ The two oblique lines in the ‘fine’ script are usually more squeezed than in the ‘common’ script X .

SoS The same forms as in the ‘common’ script: X , X . In one inscription (QUR 232.30.1/SoS) both lines are curving and on the upper part slightly converging X .

2.1.13 *k*

The ‘common’ shape of the *k* is a deep curve facing in the direction of the text with a tail attached to it and protruding towards the outside of the curve. In contrast to the ‘common’ shape of the *s*¹, where the tail has a horizontal stance (see §2.1.19 below), the tail of the *k* can have any stance but the horizontal one. In the SoS shape, the tail has a vertical stance and is proportionally longer, while the body is smaller. The ‘fine’ shape is a shallow curve with a slanted dash attached to one end.

2. Basic Shapes and Graph Forms

‘Common’ The most typical ‘common’ script form is a curve with a tail attached either to its bottom-left 𐤊 or to its top-left 𐤋. Sometimes the tail is vertical 𐤌, 𐤍 or it curves towards the direction of the text 𐤎. The form of the curve varies similarly to the curve of the *b*, i.e. it is sometimes shallower 𐤏, pointed 𐤐, 𐤑 or square (see below).

There are forms in which the tail is a continuation of the back and has a vertical stance 𐤒. In square forms, the tail is always a prolongation of the back 𐤓, 𐤔 and, in a few cases, square forms are also elongated 𐤕. Similarly to the most common SoS script forms (see below), there are rare instances with longer tails and smaller body as well 𐤖, 𐤗. Sometimes in such forms the two arms of the fork are slanted 𐤘.¹⁸⁴ In QUR 256.3.4/C this graph shares a similar formation as the ‘fine’ one, albeit unlike the ‘fine’ form it is neither compressed or elongated, i.e. a curve with a line (in this case slightly curving) attached to one end 𐤙.¹⁸⁵

Finally, there are rare cases in which the *k* is turned by 90°, its form being either square or curved: 𐤚, 𐤛.

‘Fine’ A curve with a slanted dash attached to one end 𐤜, 𐤝. The transitional text QUR 529.20.1/C/F shows a less compressed form 𐤞.

SoS In the SoS script the *k* mostly has a long vertical tail, with the arms being either straight, or curving, or slanting: 𐤟, 𐤠, 𐤡, 𐤢. In QUR 370.84.1/SoS, the fork slants backwards 𐤣, but in QUR 370.84.2/SoS, by the same author, it takes the usual form, although it is formed differently, i.e. by adding a small curving line to the bottom of a shallow curve 𐤤. Sometimes the stroke is hooked or slanted: 𐤥, 𐤦, 𐤧. Two graphs are closer in shape to the typical ‘common’ forms: in QUR 305.11.1/SoS, the *k* is a curve with a curving tail 𐤨 and in one instance (QUR 952.50.1/SoS), it is a curve with a vertical stance 𐤩, although later in the same text another graph takes a normal SoS form 𐤪.

2.1.14 *l*

The shape of the *l* is a vertical, relatively long stroke (longer than the *n*).

‘Common’ Mostly a vertical stroke with or without a hook attached to its top or bottom: 𐤫, 𐤬, 𐤭. The hook can be either at right angles to the vertical stroke, or slightly slanting 𐤮, or a curving short dash 𐤯.¹⁸⁶ The graph form of the *lām auctoris* often differs




¹⁸⁴E.g. QUR 2.523.2/C, 449.10.2/C, 823.15.5/C. Forms with slanted arms appear also in some pre-‘fine’ script texts by members of the lineage of *df*, cf., e.g., the graph form, although with a short tail, found in Is.Mu 562/C 𐤛, whose author is only three generations removed from *df* (see Chapter 4).


¹⁸⁵Note that in QUR 258.72.1/C, by the same author *wkyt bn ʾbqt bn tʾdh*, the *k* is formed in the typical ‘common’ way: it is a curve with a tail attached to its top-left (see above).


¹⁸⁶The prolific author *ysʿkr bn dfgt* left five texts in the region (QUR 2.399.1/C, 2.659.1/C, 64.175.2/C, 147.20.9/C, 147.29.2/C) using the same fine chiselling technique and very similar graph forms. However,

<i>lām auctoris</i> straight	46%	68%
<i>lām auctoris</i> straight short	7%	
All <i>l</i> 's straight	15%	
<i>lām auctoris</i> hooked	19%	24%
All <i>l</i> 's hooked	5%	
<i>lām auctoris</i> straight, other <i>l</i> 's hooked	5%	
<i>lām auctoris</i> hooked, other <i>l</i> 's straight	1%	
<i>lām auctoris</i> curving	2%	

Table 2.1: Graph forms of *l* in 3525 ‘common’ texts









from the other *l*'s in the inscription. If other *l*'s are present, we can find for example an inscription which has a hooked *lām auctoris*, the other *l*'s being straight, or vice versa. Sometimes the *lām auctoris* is a shorter line ¹⁸⁷ or slightly curving . In Table 2.1 one can see the distribution of the different graph forms and their combinations.¹⁸⁸ In the ‘common’ script, straight *l*'s are the most common option, but hooked *l*'s are also well attested. Very rarely, the *lām auctoris* can also have two hooks , looking like an *r*.

‘Fine’ In the ‘fine’ script the *l* is always a straight line .

SoS Always a straight line .

2.1.15 *m*

This basic shape consists of two concentric curves facing in the direction of the text. Both lower and upper ends are joined together by two small curves.



‘Common’ Most ‘common’ script forms are curved . The depth and form of the curves can vary. One or both curves can take a square or a pointed shape , , . In some cases the curves are elongated . Forms turned by 90° have also been attested: , . The two curves are sometimes not connected: .











he used the *lām auctoris* with a hook in the two inscriptions in QUR 147 (QUR 147.20.9/C, 147.29.2/C), but a straight *lām auctoris* in the two inscriptions he left in QUR 2 (QUR 2.399.6/C, QUR 2.659.1/C), and a curving *lām auctoris* in QUR 64 (QUR 64.175.2). At least at some point, these variants were probably contemporary.

¹⁸⁷See, e.g., QUR 628.50.1/C, which presents two straight *l*'s, and the *lām auctoris* is shorter.

¹⁸⁸The fields ‘*lām auctoris* straight’ and ‘*lām auctoris* hooked’ include those inscriptions in which no other *l* is present. The field ‘*lām auctoris* straight short’ also includes rare examples of inscriptions which have a short straight *lām auctoris* and longer straight *l*'s. Within the field ‘*lām auctoris* straight, other *l*'s hooked’, there are some texts with the *lām auctoris* being also short, but they are unmarked in the database. Also the cases in which the *l*'s are all hooked but the *lām auctoris* is shorter have been simply marked as ‘All *l*'s hooked’.




2. Basic Shapes and Graph Forms


‘Fine’ In comparison to the usual ‘common’ forms, the ‘fine’ ones are more elongated and compressed , and sometimes also pointed .



SoS All ‘common’ script forms or very similar forms have been attested in the SoS script, cf. , , . Some texts have elongated and pointed forms . QUR 25.73.1/SoS has a form similar to the ‘fine’ script one . In QUR 639.12.1/SoS, the *m* consists of an outer square form and a pointed inner indentation . In QUR 294.60.1/SoS, by a member of the people of *‘mrt*, the *m* in the name of the author takes an elongated form , while the *m* in the name of the social group has the two arms curling back and not joining together, and only the lower one is joined to the back .¹⁸⁹ In QUR 551.93.1/SoS, the first instance of *m* has a regular slightly pointed shape , while the second one is turned by 90° and the legs curve inside without being joined .¹⁹⁰

2.1.16 *n*

The basic shape of *n* is a short vertical stroke—shorter than the *l*.

‘Common’ In most cases it is a short dash , but sometimes it is relatively long , generating ambiguities with the straight form of the *l*. Occasionally it is also attested in the form of a dot , and can therefore be confused with the dot version of the *‘*.¹⁹¹

‘Fine’ A short dash .

SoS In the majority of texts it is a dot , but the dash form  is also well attested.¹⁹²

2.1.17 *q*

The shape of the *q* is a vertical stroke going through a circle in its middle.

¹⁸⁹There are also instances from the Dūmah region in which the arms both curl back and none of them is joined to the back, cf., e.g., WTI 14/SoS, 16/SoS, 17/SoS, 20/SoS. In WTI 55/SoS, this form occurs next to an allograph with the usual concentric curves form, the outer one being square. In JaS 132.2/SoS, from the ‘Ar‘ar region, a form with both arms being joined to the back occurs next to the usual concentric curves allograph.

¹⁹⁰Cf. the same form, although not turned by 90°, in WTI 55/SoS, found at Sākāka.

¹⁹¹In the rock art signature QUR 962.1.1/C *l dkr bn rbn h-r* ‘By Dkr son of Rbn is the ass’, the *n* of *bn* ‘son of’ is a dot, whereas the *n* of the patronym takes the usual short dash form, so this would seem to represent a ‘common’ variant form, although rarely attested. Since the examples of dot form of *n* are generally direct hammered texts, this could represent a faster way to carve the graph employing this technique. In some hammered inscriptions both *n* and *‘* appear in their dot form (e.g. QUR 39.5.1/C and QUR 7.95.2/C). A simple matter of ‘economy of carving’ can therefore perhaps explain the use of a dot version of the *‘* as well, since it is much easier to carve than a circle.

¹⁹²In QUR 25.73.1/SoS dot and dash forms coexist within the same text.

‘Common’ The ‘common’ graph form is mostly a circle with a vertical line crossing it ϕ . Sometimes it is carved by first drawing a circle and then two vertical lines protruding from both sides ϕ .¹⁹³ The circle can be also filled in ϕ and, in the elongated form, rather small ϕ .

‘Fine’ In the ‘fine’ script the circle is usually an oval or a rhomboid ϕ , ϕ .

SoS Same form as the usual ‘common’ script one ϕ . In two texts,¹⁹⁴ the circle is a big oval: Φ , Φ .

2.1.18 *r*

The ‘common’ shape of the *r* is a shallow curve facing in the direction of the text, while the ‘fine’ shape is a shallow curve with two vertical hooks, which help in distinguishing it from the ‘fine’ shape of the *b*, also a shallow curve (see §2.1.3 above). In the SoS script we find different graphematic allographs: a shallow and a deep curve (often with one or two hooks/curly elements).

‘Common’ The most common graph form is a vertical line with two short protruding arms, which are either at right angles to the line \lceil or slanting open \lceil , but the shallow curve form \lceil is rather common as well.¹⁹⁵ The curvilinear variant can generate ambiguity with the shape of the *b*, while the elongated form has very short arms: \lceil , \lceil .

‘Fine’ A shallow curve \lceil or sometimes an angle \lceil with two vertical hooks. In the transitional text QUR 529.20.1/C/F, it is just a shallow curve \lceil , which is usually the form of the *b* in the ‘fine’ script; in this text it is distinguished from the *b* because it is in comparison shallower, as in the ‘common’ script.¹⁹⁶

SoS In the SoS script, the *r* exhibits a great number of variants, among which are ‘common’- and ‘fine’-like forms, as well as Hismaic-like and original SoS forms. Often it is curvilinear or square and has the top arm curled in a hook – \lceil , \lceil , \lceil , \lceil – and, in two cases,¹⁹⁷ the lower arm curves downwards: \lceil , \lceil .¹⁹⁸ Sometimes it has the form of

¹⁹³In QUR 171.107.1/C, the author exploited a natural circle-shaped hollow in the rock and carved the circle of the *q* around it, which gave the graph a nice three-dimensional effect.

¹⁹⁴QUR 297.7.1/SoS and 533.36.1/SoS.

¹⁹⁵The author *fhrn bn khln* (see §6.1.3) employed both the shallow curve form and the form as a straight line with two short arms, indicating that they were used interchangeably.

¹⁹⁶On the development of the ‘fine’ *r*, see §4.1.3.2.

¹⁹⁷QUR 689.3.1/SoS and 956.43.1/SoS.

¹⁹⁸In the SoS inscriptions from Dūmah, the *r* can also take the comparable graph form of a vertical line with a curl (cf. the script table in Norris 2018:80) and it sometimes has a horizontal rather than a vertical stance (cf., e.g., Al-Theeb 2000, inscr. 124).

2. Basic Shapes and Graph Forms

a small deep curve \complement , as in Hismaic, and in some cases a vertical short hook protrudes from one or both arms of the small curve \complement , \complement . In a few texts it is a straight line with two arms, as in the ‘common’ script \sqcap . In one inscription (QUR 639.3.1/SoS) the arms are curved and slightly converging \complement , while in another (QUR 952.50.1/SoS) it has a graph form similar to the ‘fine’ script one, i.e. a shallow curve with two vertical hooks, although this form is not as compressed as in the ‘fine’ script \complement . In QUR 551.93.1/SoS, six instances of r are attested and remarkably each example is different from the others: \sqcap , \complement , \complement , \complement , \sqcap , \complement .

2.1.19 s^1

In the ‘common’ and SoS scripts the basic shape of s^1 is a curve facing in the direction of the text with long arms and a short horizontal tail attached to its back, while the ‘fine’ shape is an acute angle facing either downwards or upwards.

‘Common’ The ‘common’ forms are often curvilinear \complement ; sometimes the tail is just hinted and barely visible, and it can look very similar to a b . The curve often takes a square form \sqcap . It can also have the form of a pointed curve \complement or an acute angle form facing the direction of the text, with or without a shaft protruding from its vertex: \complement , \complement . It is sometimes formed by carving a horizontal line and adding a curving line to it \complement . Variants in which the s^1 is turned by 90° have also been attested: \complement , \complement ; in QUR 689.3.2/C, the s^1 is also pointed, similarly to the ‘fine’ form: \complement .

‘Fine’ The ‘fine’ forms are mostly turned by 90° to the usual ‘common’ stances and consistently pointed, with the opening facing either downwards or upwards \complement , \complement . In one hammered inscription (QUR 2.336.1/F), its form is curvier and does not have a vertical stance \complement , although the same author wrote incised texts in which he employed the usual ‘fine’ form and stance.¹⁹⁹

SoS In the SoS script it has usually a pointed form \complement , and in some cases it is an acute angle \complement . In QUR 137.90.1/SoS it has a square form and the stance is turned by 45° \complement . In QUR 203.7.1/SoS the shaft curves upwards \complement , while in QUR 232.30.1/SoS it is rather long and slightly bent downwards \complement .²⁰⁰ In the SoS script sometimes the s^1 is very small in proportion to the other graphs of the text \complement .²⁰¹

2.1.20 s^2

In the ‘common’ and ‘fine’ scripts this grapheme has the shape of a vertical wavy line with four or more undulations—in any case more than the undulations of the f . In the

¹⁹⁹Cf. QUR 2.490.1/F and see the discussion of the writing style of this author in §6.2.3.

²⁰⁰Long shafts are also found in the SoS texts of Dūmah (Norris 2018:81) and in some Hismaic variants (see King 1990a:§2.A).

²⁰¹See for example QUR 294.113.3/SoS.

SoS script, it has only two undulations,²⁰² but some SoS texts attest the ‘common’ shape as well.²⁰³

‘Common’ In the ‘common’ script it is often curved, the undulations being of the same size ξ , ξ . The relative size and conformation of the undulations can vary a lot, the central wave is sometimes bigger than the others ξ , as in the f ,²⁰⁴ and the form of the side waves varies and can curl up in different ways, e.g. ξ and ξ .²⁰⁵

The undulations also occur as zigzags ξ , ξ .

‘Fine’ A zigzag vertical line ξ with varying numbers of dashes.

SoS A wavy or zigzag-form consisting of two undulations/angles facing either in the direction of the text or backwards: ξ , ξ ,²⁰⁶ ξ , ξ , ξ . A 2-shaped version of this form is also attested twice ξ . Other types with waves of different sizes and conformations with three instead of two waves are attested: ξ , ξ , ξ . Variants more similar to the ‘common’ script forms are also found ξ , ξ .

2.1.21 ξ

A vertical stroke with a circle attached to its top and a fork attached to its bottom.

‘Common’ The circle is usually empty ξ , but can sometimes be filled in ξ or, in incised texts, the vertical stroke can pass through it ξ . In elongated forms, the loop is small and the fork has an acute angle: ξ . In QUR 256.27.1/C, the fork is square and the graph is turned by 180°, with the fork facing upwards ξ .²⁰⁷

‘Fine’ In comparison to the ‘common’ script, the angle of the fork is more acute and the loop more elongated and pointed ξ .

²⁰²One of the few Hismaic texts of the JQC (QUR 657.2.1/H) remarkably shows graphs with this shape rather than the typical Hismaic vertical-line shape.

²⁰³The same has been observed by Norris in his study of the SoS texts of the Dūmah region (see Norris 2018: 80).




²⁰⁴The prolific author *ys²kr bn dfgt* employed the most frequent form of the s^2 in all but one inscription, in which he used the variant with a bigger central undulation (QUR 64.175.2/C). A similar form of the s^2 as an f with two extra curls is also attested in SoS, cf. WTI 18/SoS.

²⁰⁵Clark interpreted the latter shape in CSNS 27/C as a variant form of the \dot{g} (see his script table in Clark 1979: 71), but it is most probably a ‘common’ s^2 .

²⁰⁶Note that this form is very similar to the ‘common’ form of \dot{g} , see §2.1.9 above.



²⁰⁷It should be noted that in the same text there is a further graph with a forked shape – the h – but in that graph the fork takes the usual pointed form and the graph has the usual stance with the fork facing downwards.




2. Basic Shapes and Graph Forms

SoS The usual ‘common’ script form . In some cases the circle is bigger and the shaft remarkably short: , .

2.1.22 *t*

The shape of the *t* is a square cross.






‘Common’ The two strokes are mostly at 90° to each other , but they are occasionally rotated by 45° . In the latter case, especially if the two lines are not at 90° to each other, it can be mistaken for a *h*.


‘Fine’ The same form as the ‘common’ one . In many examples the cross is turned by 45° , sometimes with oblique crossing lines , looking like a *h*.

SoS Same forms as in the ‘common’ script (see above).

2.1.23 *ṭ*

The basic shape of *ṭ* consists of a vertical stroke with a circle attached to each end.



‘Common’ The circles (or loops) are usually attached centrally to the stroke , but they sometimes protrude from one side of the stroke . The two circles can be filled in  or, in incised texts, the vertical stroke can pass through them . In the elongated form the loops are small .



‘Fine’ As in the *ṣ*, the loops are more compressed than in the ‘common’ script .

SoS The usual ‘common’ script form .

2.1.24 *ṭ*

The shape of the *ṭ* consists of three vertical strokes crossed centrally by a horizontal one.

‘Common’ In the ‘common’ script it mostly consists of the three vertical lines crossed by a single horizontal one , but sometimes it has two horizontal lines .

‘Fine’ We have only two graphs of *ṭ* in the ‘fine’ texts, one (QUR 2.490.1/F) is identical to the usual ‘common’ script form , while the other (in the transitional text QUR 529.20.1/C/F) has a slanted crossing line .

SoS In QUR 551.93.1/SoS there is the only clear attestation of *t*, and it takes the ‘common’ script usual form \mathbb{H} .

2.1.25 *w*

The shape of the *w* is a circle with a line crossing it in the middle.

‘Common’ In the ‘common’ script it has a circular or an oval form of variable regularity: \ominus , Θ . The crossing line can also have a vertical stance \oplus , \oplus . In a few texts it takes a square form \boxplus .

It is also rarely attested as an oval with a cross inside \oplus .

‘Fine’ In the ‘fine’ script it is usually a rhomboid with a slanted line crossing it \diamond .

SoS The usual ‘common’ script forms (see above). In one inscription (QUR 12.1.1/SoS) it has a rectangular form \boxplus .

2.1.26 *y*

The *y* has the shape of a vertical stroke with a circle attached to one extremity.

‘Common’ In the ‘common’ script a circle or loop is attached to either the top $\overset{\circ}{|}$ or the bottom end $\underset{\circ}{|}$. The circle is sometimes filled in $\overset{\bullet}{|}$ and smaller in the elongated variant $\overset{\circ}{|}$.

‘Fine’ The ‘fine’ graph form has a squeezed and pointed loop $\overset{\circ}{|}$, cf. also *§* and *t* above.

SoS Mostly the same form as in the ‘common’ script $\overset{\circ}{|}$. In some cases the circle is bigger and/or formed on one side of the stroke: $\overset{\circ}{|}$, $\underset{\circ}{|}$. In two texts²⁰⁸ the loop is pronouncedly pointed $\overset{\circ}{|}$.

2.1.27 *z*

The shape of the *z* is a vertical stroke with a short dash joined at right angles to one extremity at its middle.

‘Common’ The short dash is usually attached to the top, or, more rarely, to the bottom: \top , \perp .²⁰⁹ The elongated form has a shorter dash \top .

²⁰⁸QUR 739.75.1/SoS and 739.87.1/SoS.

²⁰⁹In QUR 148.13.1/C *l ‘zz bn r{b}{l}*, the second *z* is upside down in relation to the first, perhaps to create symmetry; on this phenomenon in Hismaic, see King 1990a:§2.D.2.

2. Basic Shapes and Graph Forms

‘Fine’ Same form as in the ‘common’ script \top .

SoS Same form as in the ‘common’ script.²¹⁰

2.1.28 z

The basic shape of the z is a deep curve facing downwards and with two long legs.

‘Common’ In the ‘common’ script the z takes either a curved or a square form (\cap , \sqcap) and it can be confused with a b turned by 90° , which can also have long legs.²¹¹ It can also have converging legs \cap , sometimes also facing in the direction of the inscription \sqsubset (i.e. turned by 90°). It sometimes has a pointed form \wedge .²¹²

‘Fine’ The most distinctive ‘fine’ graph form is an open rectangle or a pointed form with two slanted dashes protruding from its legs \sqcap ,²¹³ $\sqrt{\text{v}}$. It sometimes has the square form of an open rectangle, as in one of the ‘common’ script variants \sqcap .

SoS Three ‘common’ script variants are attested: the curved one \cap , and in the same text (QUR 551.93.1/SoS) the pointed \wedge and the V-shaped ones \wedge .²¹⁴

2.2 Distinguishing features

This Section discusses the features distinguishing the Safaitic scripts from each other as well as the features distinguishing the Safaitic scripts from Hismaic and Thamudic B. Table 2.2 shows the graph forms of the Safaitic scripts of the JQC²¹⁵ together with Hismaic and Thamudic B,²¹⁶ the two Ancient North Arabian scripts which are closest

²¹⁰Norris notes that the SoS texts of Dūma sometimes attest also the Hismaic form (Norris 2018: 80).

²¹¹See §3.1.2 for some examples.

²¹²E.g. QUR 974.43.1/C.

²¹³Note that this form is very similar to a ‘common’ script f with square middle undulation (see above), the main distinction being its vertical stance and the slanted dashes (in the ‘common’ f they are two curls instead).

²¹⁴According to both King 1990a:680 (in the commentary to WTI 40/SoS) and Norris 2018:80 (script table), the ‘common’ form with converging arms is also attested in the SoS script. However, this form is not attested in the SoS texts of the JQC.

²¹⁵NB: in order to slim down the table, I have not always displayed all forms described above, especially in cases where several graph forms are attested, as for example SoS script r ; see above for a more complete representation of the attested forms.

²¹⁶Because only a few examples of Hismaic and Thamudic B texts were found in the Jebel Qurma region, the graph forms of these two scripts have been adapted from King 1990a:719–723 and Macdonald 2000:34 respectively. The graph forms of the Safaitic scripts and Hismaic are displayed as if they were in a text running horizontally from left to right. The Thamudic B graph forms, however, have been kept in their original direction following Macdonald’s script table, i.e. as if in a text running horizontally from right to left, as this is the usual direction of Thamudic B texts. Because the left-to-right direction is the most intuitive way of reading a table in a text written in the Latin script, and because the main focus of this

to Safaitic.

As we shall see, unlike the features distinguishing the Safaitic scripts from Hismaic and Thamudic B, the ones distinguishing the Safaitic scripts from each other are prevalently secondary distinguishing features.²¹⁷

It should be noted that the distinguishing value of a given graph form is relative to which scripts we are comparing. For example, the Thamudic B graph form of *ḏ* with slanted strokes can be derived from the ‘common’ form through a recurring graphic variable, i.e. the slanting of strokes (see the list at the beginning of §2.1 above), and hence can be considered as a secondary distinguishing feature in relation to the ‘common’ script. On the other hand, this same form has a primary distinguishing value if compared to the Hismaic and SoS form of *ḏ*. For this reason, in this Section I make separate lists for the features distinguishing the Safaitic scripts from each other (§2.2.1) vs the features distinguishing the Safaitic scripts from Hismaic and Thamudic B (§2.2.2).

2.2.1 Differences between the Safaitic scripts

In the following, I will list the features distinguishing the Safaitic scripts from each other as represented by the inscriptions of the JQC. The ‘common’ script and the ‘fine’ script are distinguished from each other exclusively by secondary distinguishing features, as the latter is derived from the former through compression and elongation, which is a *recurring graphic variable* (see the list in §2.1 above). The SoS script, however, is distinguished from the ‘common’ and the ‘fine’ script by one primary distinguishing feature, i.e. the form of the *ḏ* (shared with Hismaic).

2.2.1.1 ‘Common’ script distinguishing features

If compared to the other Safaitic inventories, the ‘common’ script exhibits the following distinguishing features:

- The ‘ as a dot ‘ and the rare form of a circle with a dot inside ๐ ;
- The *b* with long arms Ɔ ;
- The usual ‘common’ script form of the *ḏ* 𐤌;²¹⁸
- The form of the *ḏ* as a hash 𐤌 and the one with a cross inside 𐤌 ;
- The following forms of the *f*: 𐤌 , 𐤌 ;
- The rectangle form of the *g* 𐤌 ;

study are the Safaitic scripts, I preferred to leave this small inconsistency in the table rather than to adjust the text direction of the other inventories according to the Thamudic B direction. Note that, unlike Safaitic and Hismaic, the Thamudic B inventory does not attest any clear graphs for *z*, which may suggest that it was not part of its graphematic inventory.

²¹⁷For a definition of primary vs secondary distinguishing features, see §1.3.3.2.

²¹⁸A similar form is also found in the ‘fine’ script, although slightly different, i.e. with the horizontal lines being slanted (see below).

2. Basic Shapes and Graph Forms

	‘Common’	‘Fine’	SoS	Hismaic	Thamudic B
ṣ	𐩦𐩧𐩨𐩩𐩪	𐩦𐩧𐩨	𐩦𐩧𐩨𐩩𐩪𐩫	𐩦𐩧𐩨𐩩𐩪	𐩦𐩧𐩨𐩩
ṣ	◦◦◦	◦◦	◦	◦◦◦	◦
b	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪
d	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪
ḡ	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪
d	𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪	◦◦	◦◦	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪
f	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪
g	◦◦◦𐩪	◦◦𐩪	◦	𐩪𐩪	𐩪
ḡ	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪
h	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪
ḡ	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪
ḡ	𐩪𐩪	𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪
k	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪
l	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪	𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪
m	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪
n	𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪	𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪	𐩪
q	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪
r	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪
s ¹	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪
s ²	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪
s	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪
t	𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪
t	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪	𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪
t	𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪
w	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪
y	𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪	𐩪
z	𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪	𐩪	𐩪𐩪	𐩪
z	𐩪𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪	𐩪𐩪

Table 2.2: Graph forms of the Safaitic scripts (Jebel Qurma region) in comparison with Hismaic (adapted from King 1990a:719–723) and Thamudic B (based on Macdonald 2000:34).

- The wavy forms of \dot{g} (\S , ²¹⁹ $\S\S$, \S , \S) and the rare form of the \dot{g} as a curve with a slanting dash on top \S ;
- Forms of the \dot{h} with the crossing line protruding past the back (\in , \in , \in , \in);
- The k as a curve with a slanted tail attached to its top-left or bottom-left (\S as well as \S), pointed forms (\lessdot , \lessdot) and 90° forms (\lrcorner , \lrcorner , \lrcorner);
- The square forms of the k with a short tail \sqcup , \sqcup ;
- The l with a hook \l and the rare curving *lām auctoris* variant \l ;
- The n as a relatively long line \l ;
- The forms of the r as a shallow curve \l and as straight line with two short arms \l , which are most typically employed in the ‘common’ script although rarely attested in the other inventories as well;
- Some peculiar rare forms of the s^2 : \S , \S , \S ;
- The rare form of the t with an extra horizontal line $\#$;
- The form of the z with converging arms \sqcup .

2.2.1.2 ‘Fine’ script distinguishing features

The most distinctive ‘fine’ distinguishing features are:

- The form of the r with two vertical hooks \l , \l ; ²²⁰
- The form of the k (\l , \l), which is a stylization of the ‘common’ form (see §4.1.3.3);
- The pointed and elongated form of \dot{h} with vertical stance (\l , \l); ²²¹
- The pointed form of s^1 with a vertical stance (\l , \l), which only rarely features in the ‘common’ script.

Furthermore, the following forms are found exclusively in the ‘fine’ inventory:

- Forms with rhomboids instead of circles (\diamond , $g \diamond$, $w \diamond$ and $q \diamond$);
- Forms with slanted lines vs the horizontal/vertical lines in the ‘common’ script equivalents: \l , \l and $w \diamond$;
- The pointed and elongated form of the m \l ;

²¹⁹Note that this form would correspond with an s^2 in the SoS script.

²²⁰This form is marginally attested in the SoS script, although less compressed (see §2.1.18 above).

²²¹Pointed forms of the \dot{h} are attested also in the ‘common’ script, but they have a horizontal stance and are not as elongated and compressed.

Some forms are typical of the SoS script but they are rarely attested in other inventories as well. These are:

- The *d* with a hooked tail (𐤃, 𐤄, 𐤅, 𐤆, 𐤇);²²²
- The forms of *k* with a long vertical tail and small body (𐤊, 𐤋, 𐤌, 𐤍), occasionally found in ‘common’ texts;
- The *n* as a dot 𐤎, only rarely employed in ‘common’ script texts.

2.2.2 The Safaitic scripts, Hismaic, and Thamudic B

In this Section, I will compare the Safaitic inventories to the Hismaic and Thamudic B inventories, discussing the features distinguishing them as well as their shared features. For the Hismaic inventory the reference is King 1990a:§2.A, 719–723, while for the Thamudic B inventory I used Macdonald 2000:34. It should be noted that the Hismaic graph forms displayed in Table 2.2 are only a selection of the ones described in King (1990a), to which the reader is directed for a complete account. Because the ‘fine’ script is mainly a more compressed and elongated form of the ‘common’ script, and because forms with a compressed style are not part of the Hismaic and Thamudic B inventories, I will limit my comparison to the ‘common’ and the SoS inventories. While treating the shared features, I will not discuss those graphemes which attest either the same or closely related graph forms in all the inventories, as it would be redundant. This concerns the forms of fourteen graphemes: 𐤁, *b*, *d*, *f*, *h*, 𐤊, *l*, *q*, *r*, *s*^l, 𐤔, *t*, *w* and *y*. However, similarities in the graph forms – as well as differences – will be brought up when relevant.

2.2.2.1 The ‘common’ script vs Hismaic

Primary distinguishing features There are several primary distinguishing features which differentiate the ‘common’ script from Hismaic:

- The forms of *d* (𐤃, 𐤄, etc.) vs Hismaic (𐤅, 𐤆, etc.) ;
- The forms of *d* (𐤊, 𐤋, 𐤌) vs Hismaic (𐤍, 𐤎) ;
- The forms of *g* (𐤏, 𐤐, etc.) vs Hismaic 𐤑, representing the *t* in the ‘common’ Safaitic script;
- The forms of *g* (𐤒, 𐤓, etc.) vs Hismaic 𐤔 ;
- The forms of *t* 𐤕 vs Hismaic 𐤖, representing the *h* in ‘common’ Safaitic;

²²²This form is never found in the ‘common’ script, but it is attested in two texts by the ‘fine’ script author *ms'k bn 'n'm* (see §6.2.3).

2. Basic Shapes and Graph Forms

- The forms of t 𐤔 vs Hismaic (𐤕 , 𐤖 , etc., these two Hismaic forms representing the d in the ‘common’ Safaitic script);
- The ‘common’ form of the z 𐤚 vs Hismaic 𐤛 , 𐤜 ;
- The forms of z (𐤛 , 𐤜 , etc.) vs Hismaic 𐤝 , 𐤞 .
- The Hismaic form of s^2 as a straight line | vs the ‘common’ squiggly line form (𐤟 , 𐤠 , etc.).

Secondary distinguishing features A number of features can be employed as secondary distinguishing features to differentiate the ‘common’ script from Hismaic:

- Some Hismaic forms of the v : 𐤡 , 𐤢 , 𐤣 , 𐤤 ;
- The ‘common’ script form of the b as a curve with long arms 𐤥 , representing the r in Hismaic;
- The large Hismaic forms of the b ,²²³ made of a straight line with two arms (𐤦 , 𐤧 , 𐤨), the forms with short arms corresponding to the r in the ‘common’ script;
- Some Hismaic forms of the d (𐤩 , 𐤪 , 𐤫 , 𐤬) unattested in the ‘common’ script;
- In the ‘common’ script the half circle of the d only rarely faces backwards. This is the exact opposite of Hismaic, in which it mostly faces backwards;
- The ‘common’ script form of h in which the crossing line does not extend to form a tail 𐤭 , as it is mostly the case in Hismaic, where a tail-less form, only rarely attested for the h , is normally employed for the t ;
- The typical ‘common’ script forms of the k (𐤮 , 𐤯), only rarely attested in Hismaic;
- The hooked forms of l are shared with Hismaic, and also the slightly curving form (𐤰).
- Two Hismaic forms of the m : 𐤱 , 𐤲 ;
- The Hismaic hooked form of the l with the hook being deeply curved 𐤳 ;
- The ‘common’ script form of the l as a straight line, only rarely found in Hismaic;
- The two forms of n as a dash and a dot are attested in both the ‘common’ script and in Hismaic, but they occur with the opposite frequency: the dash shape is typical of the ‘common’ script, while the dot shape is typical of Hismaic;

²²³In the ‘common’ script, the b is usually proportionally smaller than the r and its curve is deeper than the curved version of the r , while Hismaic witnesses the exact opposite situation (see King 1990a:§2.B).

- The form of the s^2 as a squiggly line, the typical ‘common’ graph form of this grapheme, is only rarely attested in Hismaic, where it is mostly a straight line, which on the other hand would stand for l in the ‘common’ script.
- The Hismaic form of ς with a big loop \mathfrak{L} and the one with the fork being joined directly to the loop \mathfrak{L} ;
- The Hismaic y with a big loop \mathfrak{Y} .

Shared features Despite the many differences, there are also a number of features which are shared:

- The form of the h with the crossing line extending past its back to form a tail;
- The forms of the k in which the tail is vertical;
- The hooked forms of the l with the hook being a small dash: \mathfrak{L} , \mathfrak{L} ;
- The curved form of the l : \mathfrak{L} ;
- The form of the ϵ as a dot, although this form is very rare in Hismaic;
- The form of the ϵ as a circle with a dot inside, rarely attested in both scripts.

2.2.2.2 The ‘common’ script vs Thamudic B

Primary distinguishing features The ‘common’ script is distinguished from Thamudic B by a number of primary distinguishing features:

- The ‘common’ forms of \mathfrak{L} (\mathfrak{L} , \mathfrak{L} , etc.) vs Thamudic B \mathfrak{L} , \mathfrak{L} , etc.;
- The ‘common’ forms of \mathfrak{L} (\mathfrak{L} , \mathfrak{L} , etc.) vs Thamudic B \mathfrak{L} , \mathfrak{L} , etc.;
- The ‘common’ forms of \mathfrak{L} (\mathfrak{L} , \mathfrak{L} , etc.) vs Thamudic B \mathfrak{L} , \mathfrak{L} ;
- The ‘common’ forms of \mathfrak{L} (\mathfrak{L} , \mathfrak{L} , etc.) vs Thamudic B \mathfrak{L} , which represents the \mathfrak{L} in the ‘common’ script;
- The ‘common’ forms of s^2 (\mathfrak{L} , \mathfrak{L}) vs Thamudic B \mathfrak{L} , \mathfrak{L} ;
- The ‘common’ form of the \mathfrak{L} vs Thamudic B \mathfrak{L} , \mathfrak{L} .

2. Basic Shapes and Graph Forms

Secondary distinguishing features The two scripts are moreover differentiated by several secondary distinguishing features:

- The ‘common’ forms of *c* as a dot and as a circle with a dot inside, is not part of the Thamudic B inventory;
- Two ‘common’ forms of *d*: 𐤃, 𐤄;
- The Thamudic B forms of *d* with slanted protruding lines: 𐤅, 𐤆, 𐤇;
- The Thamudic B forms of *f* turned by 90° to the ‘common’ stance: 𐤈, 𐤉;
- Some ‘common’ forms of *g*: 𐤊, 𐤋, 𐤌;
- The ‘common’ *l* as a straight line 𐤍;
- The Thamudic B form of *l*, whose hook is deeply curved 𐤎, unlike the usual form of the hook in the ‘common’ script 𐤏;
- The ‘common’ form of the *n* as a short line or as a dot vs the Thamudic B form as a long line, which would represent an *l* in the ‘common’ script;
- All ‘common’ forms of *b*, *k* and *s*^l not turned by 90°;
- One Thamudic B form of *h*: 𐤐;
- All ‘common’ angular forms of *r*;
- The Thamudic B form of *r* as a shallow curve facing backwards;
- The Thamudic B form of *s* with the shaft crossing the fork 𐤑;
- The Thamudic B square *w* with a cross inside 𐤒.

Shared features Despite the many differences outlined above, the ‘common’ script and Thamudic B no doubt share also some features:

- The form of the *d* as a rectangular grid with a vertical stance and only the vertical lines protruding 𐤃;
- The forms of *b*, *k*, *m* and *s*^l turned by 90°;
- The *t* as a straight vertical line with two loops attached to both extremities;
- The *r* as a shallow curve facing in the direction of the text.
- The oval form of the *g*.

2.2.2.3 The SoS script vs Hismaic

Primary distinguishing features Seven primary distinguishing features differentiate the SoS script from Hismaic. They are only one less than the ones distinguishing the ‘common’ script, as the SoS script and Hismaic share the same concentric circle form of the d .

- The SoS form of the d (\mathfrak{d} , \mathfrak{d} , etc.) vs Hismaic \mathfrak{d} , \mathfrak{d} , etc.;
- The SoS form of the g \circ vs Hismaic \mathfrak{g} ;
- The SoS form of the g (\mathfrak{g} , \mathfrak{g} , etc.) vs Hismaic \mathfrak{g} , \mathfrak{g} , etc.;
- The SoS form of the s^2 (\mathfrak{s} , \mathfrak{s} , etc.) vs Hismaic \mathfrak{s} ;
- The SoS form of the t \mathfrak{t} vs Hismaic \mathfrak{t} , \mathfrak{t} , etc.;
- The SoS form of the t \mathfrak{t} vs Hismaic \mathfrak{t} ;
- The SoS form of the z \mathfrak{z} vs Hismaic \mathfrak{z} , \mathfrak{z} ;
- The SoS form of the z \mathfrak{z} vs Hismaic \mathfrak{z} .

Secondary distinguishing features The following secondary distinguishing features differentiate the SoS script from Hismaic, some of which are the same as the ones distinguishing the ‘common’ script:

- Some Hismaic forms of the d (\mathfrak{d} , \mathfrak{d} , \mathfrak{d}) unattested in the SoS script;
- In the SoS script, as in the ‘common’ script, the half circle of the d only rarely faces backwards. This is the exact opposite of Hismaic, in which it mostly faces backwards;
- In the SoS form of the h , the crossing line never extends to form a tail, as is the case in Hismaic, where a tail-less form is only rarely attested for the h , as it represents the t ;
- The SoS graph forms of the k with a long hooked tail (\mathfrak{k} , \mathfrak{k} , \mathfrak{k}) looking like a Hismaic \mathfrak{g} ;
- The SoS form of the k as a curve with a curly tail \mathfrak{k} , also an attested Hismaic form for the \mathfrak{g} ;
- The Hismaic hooked forms of the l as well as the curving form are never found in the SoS script, where the l is always a straight line;
- All SoS forms of the r except the small-curve form, which is shared;
- The SoS forms of the s^1 with long and slightly curving tails: \mathfrak{s} , \mathfrak{s} .

Shared features The SoS script and Hismaic share a number of features:

- Some forms of the ʾ : $\text{𐤀}, \text{𐤁}, \text{𐤂}$;
- The b as a vertical line with two arms;
- The form of the d with a bigger loop 𐤄 , and the one with a squarish loop 𐤅 ;
- The ḏ as two concentric circles 𐤇 or as a circle with a dot inside 𐤈 ;
- The forms of the k with long vertical tails and small bodies $\text{𐤊}, \text{𐤋}$;
- The r in the SoS script is sometimes a small curve 𐤌 and this is the usual Hismaic form.²²⁴
- The form of the q with the circle as a big oval: 𐤍 ;
- The y and the ṣ with big loops.

2.2.2.4 The SoS script vs Thamudic B

The SoS script is distinguished from Thamudic B by the same features distinguishing the ‘common’ script (see §2.2.2.2 above), to which should be added the primary distinguishing features of the SoS shapes of ḏ and s^2 , as well as the following secondary distinguishing features:

- The Thamudic B 90° forms of b, k, m, s^1 ;
- All SoS script forms of the k ;
- The SoS script form of the l as a straight long line, vs the Thamudic B hooked form;
- All SoS script forms of the r .

Excluding the form of the t , which is the same in the SoS script and in Thamudic B, the SoS script does not share any other of the features which are on the other hand shared with the ‘common’ script (see above).

²²⁴In one SoS text (QUR 297.7.1/SoS) both the b and the r are small curves and only contextually distinguishable. Cf. the very similar situation of ambiguity between b and r often arising in Hismaic, as observed by King 1990a:§2.B.

2.3 On the features of QUR 2.712.1

QUR 2.712.1 (Fig. 2.1(a)) exhibits a set of features which cannot be classed as either ‘common’, ‘fine’, or SoS, and which may constitute a further Safaitic script.²²⁵

The script of this inscription is characterised by an overall compressed outlook, showing some similarities with the ‘fine’ script – see, e.g., the very compressed and elongated *m*’s \mathfrak{m} and some graphs of *w* with rhomboid forms, e.g. \mathfrak{w} – but at the same time it presents graph forms which are clearly distinct from the typical ‘fine’ forms. For example, the forms of *h* \mathfrak{h} and of *s*¹ \mathfrak{s}^1 do not have a vertical stance, which is a distinguishing feature of the ‘fine’ inventory.²²⁶ Moreover, while the first two graphs of *b* are an obtuse angle and a very shallow curve respectively – two forms which are also found in the ‘fine’ script – the third graph is not as compressed \mathfrak{b} . The two graphs of *r* are both hooked: the first one is unfortunately partially damaged, but it would seem a shallow curve with two hooks \mathfrak{r} , similarly to the ‘fine’ script; the second one has a square form with the top arm curled in a hook \mathfrak{r} , a form usually found in SoS texts (see §2.1.18 above). Finally, the shaft of the *d* ends with a hook \mathfrak{d} , which is a feature typical of the SoS *d*, although it sometimes occurs in ‘fine’ texts as well (see §2.1.5 above).

Texts with similar features are attested also in other collections, see, e.g., HCH 3 (Fig. 2.1(b)), HCH 69 (Fig. 2.1(c)), and BS 1085 (Fig. 2.1(d))²²⁷. Also in these examples one finds compressed forms which are typical of the ‘fine’ script next to different, less compressed forms. In HCH 3 (Fig. 2.1(b)), the *r* is a straight line with two converging arms \mathfrak{r} , which is also found in some ‘fine’ texts from later generations (see §4.1.4). HCH 69 and BS 1085 exhibit graphs of the *r* as a small shallow curve with two hooks, also a typical ‘fine’ form. At the same time, all three texts present forms of *h* and *s*¹ with a horizontal stance. HCH 3 and HCH 69 attest a square form of the *h*, in HCH 3 this form is found next to a curvilinear allograph. While the *m*’s in BS 1085, similarly to QUR 2.712.1, are quite compressed and elongated, in HCH 69 they appear to be much less compressed. I would finally like to note that, as in QUR 2.712.1, the shaft of the *d* in HCH 69 ends with a small hook.

2.4 Texts with both ‘common’ and Thamudic B features

While the JQC contains only one clear example of a text in the Thamudic B script,²²⁸ in three texts ‘common’ Safaitic forms occur next to Thamudic B ones. It is possible that

²²⁵The text reads: *l 'wd'l bn 'hlm d 'l s¹d'l w wgm 'l-whb'l w 'l-hb 'hw-h trhn w {r}{g}m[n] mny* ‘By ‘wd’l son of ‘hlm of the people of S¹d’l and he grieved for Whb’l and for Hb, his two brothers, who had perished and were {taken away} by Fate’.

²²⁶See §2.2.1.2 above and §4.1.1.1.

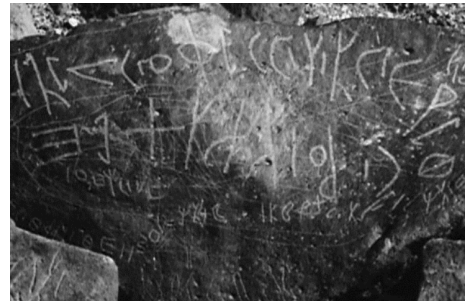
²²⁷NB: this text was collected via OCIANA in 2019, but now (December 2021) it is not to be found in the OCIANA anymore.

²²⁸The text reads: QUR 956.91.1/ThB *h rdw s¹d-n 'l-ndb* ‘O Rdw, help me/us on the matter of/against *ndb*’. I thank Jérôme Norris for suggesting this reading to me. My initial reading was: *h rdw s¹d n'l [b]n db* ‘O Rdw, help N'l [son of] Db!’.

2. Basic Shapes and Graph Forms



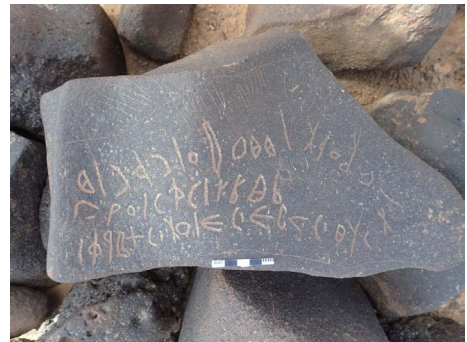
(a) QUR 2.712.1



(b) HCH 3 (Photo: OCIANA)



(c) HCH 69 (Photo: OCIANA)



(d) BS 1085 (Photo: OCIANA)

Figure 2.1: QUR 2.712.1 and other texts with similar features

2.4. Texts with both ‘common’ and Thamudic B features



(a) QUR 176.22.1/C/ThB (rock side 1)



(b) QUR 176.22.1/C/ThB (rock side 2)



(c) QUR 64.175.1/C/ThB (upper text)



(d) QUR 7.25.1/C/ThB (bottom text)

Figure 2.2: Texts with ‘common’ and Thamudic B features

such features are due to graphic interference of the ‘common’ features on Thamudic B authors passing by in the region or, the other way around, of Thamudic B features on ‘common’ script authors who were familiar with Thamudic B. In absence of chronological context the direction or even plausibility of such an interference is difficult to establish.

All three texts are initial prayers directed to the god *rdw*—this prayer and god are well attested both in Thamudic B and in ‘common’ texts.²²⁹

In QUR 176.22.1/C/ThB,²³⁰ which runs vertically downwards on a panel of curving shape (see Figs. 2.2(a)-2.2(b)²³¹), the *r* is a shallow curve, a form found both in the ‘common’ script and in Thamudic B. The *n* is a long stroke (as in Thamudic B), but it is occasionally found in the ‘common’ script as well. The *q* has the Thamudic B form of a circle with protruding slanting lines. However, the *h* has the ‘common’ form and the ‘

²²⁹There are also some initial prayers which could in principle be classed as either ‘common’ or Thamudic B, as their script lacks sufficient distinguishing features to decide, e.g. QUR 2.32.3/C?, 370.90.1/C? and 952.88.1/C? = C 5278, Rees 49. For a list of the features distinguishing the ‘common’ script from Thamudic B, see §2.2.2.2 above.

²³⁰The text reads: *h rdw s^cd ‘mr bn bz{h}* ‘O R^dw, help ‘mr son of {Bzh}!’.

²³¹Note that the images are turned by 90° to the right. Fig.2.2(a) shows the first part of the text, while Fig. 2.2(b) shows the other side of the curving rock with the second part of the text.

2. Basic Shapes and Graph Forms

takes the ‘common’ dot form. Also the form of the *b*, a straight line with short arms, is sometimes attested in the ‘common’ inventory, but never in the Thamudic B inventory, where the arms are always long.

In QUR 64.175.1/C/ThB *h rḏw s¹d bnn* ‘O Rḏw, help Bnn!’ – the top inscription in Fig. 2.2(c) – the *d* has the typical Thamudic B form with slanted protruding lines.²³² At the same time, the *ʿ* takes the dot form – attested in the ‘common’ inventory but not in the Thamudic B one – and the *r* has the typical ‘common’ form of a straight line with two short arms. The *b* and the *s¹* are curved, as is mostly the case in the ‘common’ script.

The third inscription is QUR 7.25.1/C/ThB (Fig. 2.2(d)), composed of two lines and running boustrophedon. In this ambiguous text,²³³ the features shared by the ‘common’ script and Thamudic B are: the *r* as a shallow curve, the *s¹* with a square form and turned by 90°, the *m* turned by 90°, the form of the *h*. The three *l*’s have all hooks, the first being deeply curved, as in the usual Thamudic B form, while the other two have a 90° hook, as in the usual ‘common’ hooked variant. At the same time, the *d* exhibits the typical Thamudic B form of a circle with slanted protruding lines, while all other graphs (*ʿ*, *g*, *d* and *z*) have typically ‘common’ forms. The *d* curiously lies horizontally.

²³²Note that QUR 64.175.2/C *l ys²kr bn ḏfgt* ‘By Ys²kr son of Ḍfgt’, the ‘common’ inscription carved right below, shows the ‘common’ form of the *d* as a rectangular grid, which can be contrasted to the Thamudic B form right above.

²³³The text reads *h rḏw s¹d-hn gzz ḏ-d m ḥll h-l* ‘O Rḏw help...’. The reading is clear, but I am not able to make any sense of the text.