The Safaitic scripts: palaeography of an ancient nomadic writing culture

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Chapter 5

Carving Techniques and Text Layout

5.1 Carving techniques

Safaitic inscriptions were carved employing different types of techniques. The terminology used here is based on Michael Macdonald's unpublished guide which he prepared for the SESP expeditions.[330] Macdonald classified three main technique categories: direct hammering, chiselling, and incising. The same categories have been identified for the rock art.[331] Direct hammering consists of hitting the rock directly with a hammerstone. A feature typical of this technique is that 'the face is usually badly chipped around the letters where the stone has missed the line' (Macdonald n.d.[a]). Chiselling on the other hand is an indirect form of hammering: the instrument which is in contact with the rock (the 'chisel') carves the surface by being in turn hit by a hammerstone. Compared to direct hammering, the lines produced using this technique result as cleaner, 'often with small horizontal indentations within the line where each blow has been made' (Macdonald n.d.[a]).[332] Finally, incising is characterised by 'usually thin letters, cut with a sharp tool pulled over the face' (Macdonald n.d.[a]).

Table 5.1 shows the percentages of the uses of the different techniques in the JQC. Since many panels surfaces are irregular, heavily weathered, or damaged, it can be challenging to infer which type of hammering was employed. The category 'Hammering (uncertain)' covers all cases in which it is particularly difficult to decide whether the technique is direct hammering or indirect hammering (i.e. chiselling). 'Mixed' refers to the use of a combination of different techniques, mainly incision and direct hammering techniques, within the same text. From Table 5.1 it appears that direct hammering was

[330] I thank him for sending it to me and for kindly sharing his knowledge of these matters with me.

[331] See Brusgaard 2019:32–34, 105–113. Note that Brusgaard follows the international rock art terminology, whereby the terms 'direct hammering' and 'chiselling' correspond to 'pounding' and 'pecking' respectively (Brusgaard 2019:32).

[332] In addition, as noted by Brusgaard, chiselling generally results in deeper grooves than direct hammering (Brusgaard 2019:33).

Direct hammering	41%	74%
Chiselling	14%	
Hammering (uncertain)	19%	
Incision	22%	
Mixed	4%	

Table 5.1: Techniques employed in 5638 Safaitic inscriptions of the JQC

the most widespread technique, but also that there is a significant number of incised and chiselled inscriptions, while texts carved using a mixed technique would seem to be a small minority.[333]

It is important to stress that within each of these categories there is a lot of variation in the way the inscription was carved, the nature of the rock surface, the depth of the line, the technical skills of the author, and probably also the type of instrument being used.

In the following, I describe and show some examples of each of the technique types employed in the JQC.

5.1.1 Direct hammering

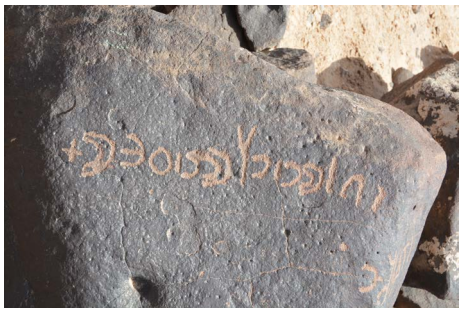
Direct hammered texts can appear as very thickly and roughly inscribed, as in Fig. 5.1(a), but can also present relatively neat lines, as in Fig. 5.1(b). In addition, there is a certain extent of variation in the degree of homogeneity of the stroke. For example, if compared with the two texts in Figs.5.1(a)–5.1(b), the strokes of the texts in Figs.5.1(c)-5.1(d) result as discontinuous. In QUR 2.520.1/C (Fig. 5.1(c))[334] one can see that in some graphs the carver did not always hammer throughout all of the points which make out the strokes of the graphs, leaving instead several tiny gaps within the lines. Such gaps are especially visible in the strokes of the *ġ* in the last word of the text *ġnmt* 'booty'.

QUR 913.18.1/C (Fig. 5.1(d)), which reads *l ʾs¹ḥm* 'By ʾs¹ḥm', may be an example of incomplete text, as the lower arm of the last *m* looks unfinished. In this text, the last two graphs (*ḥ* and *m*) present much less homogeneous strokes than the first three graphs, which on the other hand appear as more carefully filled-in. This feature may suggest that in some cases direct hammered inscriptions were not made just in one go – i.e. by simply hammering one blow after the other – but that strokes were instead hammered over and over again until the desired thickness of the line was reached, a process which may be compared to the 'Rubbed incising' category (see §5.1.3 below).

[333] Cf. the figures discussed in Brusgaard 2019:105–107, who notes a similar pattern in the distribution of the carving techniques employed for the rock art, with direct hammering being the most common technique as well.

[334] The text reads: *l ʿwḏ bn ḥmlk bn ʿmd w tẓr ġnmt* 'By ʿwḏ son of Ḥmlk son of ʿmd and he lay in wait for booty'.

(a) Crudely direct hammered text (QUR 2.434.1/C)



(b) Neatly direct hammered text (QUR 186.19.1/C)

(c) Discontinuously direct hammered text (QUR 2.520.1/C)

(d) Incomplete direct hammered text (QUR 913.18.3/C)

Figure 5.1: Examples of direct hammered technique

(a) Panel with direct hammered and chiselled texts (QUR 186.125/C)

(b) Thick chiselled inscription (QUR 64.73.2/C)

Figure 5.2: Panels containing chiselled texts

5.1.2 Chiselling

As an indirect form of hammering, chiselling can be distinguished from direct hammering thanks to the neater lines which it produces on the rock. In Fig.5.2(a) one can see two examples of thinly chiselled inscriptions – the first two inscriptions starting from the bottom (QUR 186.125.3/C and 186.125.2/C) – whose clean lines can also be easily contrasted to the direct hammered graphs of the inscription above them (QUR 186.125.1/C). Chiselled texts do not always have thin graphs. Fig.5.2(b) shows an example of a huge text carved with a rather thick tool.[335] Chiselling appears to have been typically employed in stylistically elaborate texts. For example, texts in which special features[336] are particularly prominent are often chiselled.

5.1.3 Incising

Two main types of incising are found in the JQC, which mainly diverge in the conformation of the trait: 1) simple trait incising (see Figs. 5.3(b) – 5.3(c)), and 2) 'rubbed incising', i.e. rubbing the tool up and down in order to produce thicker lines (see Figs. 5.3(e) – 5.3(f)). A further sub-category is the extremely rare rocking-blade technique, on which see below. Type 2) in some cases is combined with hammering (see §5.1.4 below) and it can also result in rather neat lines, as in the two associated texts in the panel QUR 628.41 (see Fig. 5.3(e)). The scratched out *{ġ}* in QUR 628.41.1/C (the top text in Fig. 5.3(e)), which was likely effaced by the author himself, who wrote another *ġ* again above,[337] gives us a direct insight into the rubbing incising process. Since the

[335]Note that some of the graphs have been joined by direct hammered ligatures, see the discussion of such features in §5.3 below.

[336]I.e. square, elongated, or 90° forms, see Chapter 3.

[337]See §7.1.1 on the practice of corrective effacement. The text reads: QUR 628.41.1/C *l s²nf bn rġb bn s²nf w tẓr h-rgl mn-ḥrn* 'By S²nf son of Rġb son of S²nf and he lay in wait for the *rgl* from the Ḥawrān'. Interestingly the effaced *ġ* presents the form with two parallel lines, while the other *ġ* takes the single line

graph has been effaced before being completed, it has been only partially rubbed incised, presenting much thinner and less neat strokes if compared to the other graphs of the panel, which on the other hand represent the finished product of rubbed incising.

The size of incised texts is on average smaller than the size of hammered texts. The depth, thickness, and neatness of the strokes produced by this technique varies depending on the kind of instrument used and on the amount of pressure applied to the rock surface. For example, one can compare the relatively deeply incised trait of Figs. 5.3(a) – 5.3(b) to the very shallowly incised strokes in Fig. 5.3(c). Sometimes the quality of the strokes varies within the same inscription. For instance, in QUR 305.19.1/C/F? (Fig. 5.3(d)), the first three graphs are more deeply incised than the rest, which is more lightly incised and exhibits some traces of rubbed incision.

5.1.3.1 Rocking-blade

According to Macdonald, the rocking-blade is 'a relatively rare technique (both ancient and modern) which produces a rather beautiful effect. Instead of drawing the implement with a sharp point across the rock, you rock it back and forwards as you produce the line. The result is a line made up of tiny zig-zags'.[338]

In the JQC, this technique appears only in four texts,[339] three in the SoS script (see the example in Fig. 5.4(b)) and one in the 'fine' script (QUR 2.490.1/F) a detail of which is shown in Fig. 5.4(a).[340] I am not aware of any example of text in this technique in the 'common' script.

In ANKS 1/SoS, a further SoS script example from western Iraq, the rocking-blade technique is used for the text and for the associated drawings as well, which are however carved with a much sharper instrument, resulting in a much thinner outline.

5.1.4 Mixed techniques

A minority of texts is carved by combining incision and hammering. These techniques are mixed in different ways: 1) by hammering some graphs or parts of them and incising others; 2) by sketching an incised layer which is then hammered over; 3) by using both 1) and 2), i.e. the two techniques are combined by hammering parts of the texts and

graph form (see §2.1.9). It is possible that the author effaced the first graph because he was not happy with how it turned out or perhaps because he wanted to make a better use of the panel space above in order to make the text fit. Thus, the text runs from left to right until the first graph of the patronym *r*, and then interrupts at the effaced graph *ġ* and continues above with the new instance of *ġ*, curving along the panel edges and then running boustrophedon below squeezed in between the first line of the first text and the first line of the bottom text (QUR 628.41.2/C), which runs in a curving boustrophedon fashion as well (see §5.5 below on the different types of text direction in Safaitic). It is likely that the bottom text (QUR 628.41.2/C) was carved first, it reads: *l hnẓr bn rqs*^{2} *bn wḏr w ʿgẓt h-s*^{1}*my* 'By Hnẓr son of Rqs^{2} son of Wḏr and the sky withheld (the rain)'.

[338] Michael Macdonald, p.c. 2016.

[339] The texts are: QUR 2.490.1/F, 541.18.1/SoS, 541.18.2/SoS, 541.18.3/SoS.

[340] The full text is shown in Chapter 6 (Fig. 6.14(b)) where I also discuss the writing style of its author, see §6.2.3.

(a) Detail of incised text (QUR 176.24.1/F)

(b) Deeply incised text and rock art (QUR 994.7.1/C)

(c) Very shallowly incised text (detail of QUR 586.34.1/C)

(d) Incised text with strokes of varying depth (QUR 305.19.1/C/F?)

(e) Panel with two associated texts carved through rubbed incision (QUR 628.41)

(f) Rubbed incision (detail of QUR 20.27.1/C)

Figure 5.3: Examples of incised texts

(a) Detail of QUR 2.490.1/F

(b) Detail of QUR 541.18.1/SoS

Figure 5.4: Examples of rocking-blade technique

(a) Detail of QUR 171.99.1/C, with direct hammered *q* circle

(b) Incised and direct hammered text (QUR 2.479.1/C)

Figure 5.5: Examples of mixed technique

incising others, and moreover one can see that the hammered parts have an underlying incised layer.

Type 1 is often employed to distinguish the name of the author, which is usually completely hammered, while the rest of the text is incised (see the examples in §5.2 below).

Occasionally, this type of mixing is also employed by hammering circles or small parts of the graphs in incised texts, as in QUR 171.99.1/C (Fig. 5.5(a)), an incised text in which only the circle of the *q* has been filled in through direct hammering.

An example of Type 2 is QUR 2.479.1/C (Fig. 5.5(b)), which reads *l bnġyr bn mlkt* 'By Bnġyr son of Mlkt'. One can still see, by zooming in the graphs, that the inscription was first outlined through incision and then direct hammered, because some graphs were not completely superimposed by the hammering, see the particularly visible incised strokes in the *b* and the *ġ* of the name of the author. In addition, even in the parts where the incised sketches of the graphs have been completely hammered over, one can still

see the incised layer, as it seems to have been more deeply carved than the hammering layer above. The example in Fig. 5.6(a) discussed in §5.2 below is an example of Type 3: by zooming in the *h* in the author's name, one can see that the extremities of the two hooks of the fork are incised rather than chiselled, likely representing a part of the incised sketch which was not completely hammered over. The use of sketching is obviously sometimes difficult to detect on the stone. Moreover, if the hammered layer is sufficiently deep and wide as to completely cover all the incised parts, it is of course impossible to establish if the inscription had been sketched first. Therefore, it is plausible that this very technique was employed for many more inscriptions. The process of first sketching the graphs through incision and then hammering them over is paralleled by a similar procedure attested for drawing the rock art.[341]

While the techniques which are mostly mixed are direct hammering and incision, there are also some rare cases of Type 1 mixing in which it would seem that the name of the author is chiselled, or alternatively more carefully hammered than the rest of the inscription, which is direct hammered.[342]

5.2 Emphasis

This widespread practice mainly consists of carving the name of the author – and often also his patronym and other parts of the genealogy – in stylistically marked graph forms, i.e. bigger, thicker, and/or with special features. It was first recognised by Macdonald, who referred to WH 3923 = QUR 2.192.4/C (see Fig. 7.3(f) in Chapter 7) as 'one of a number of Safaitic inscriptions in which the author's name is 'writ large' and the statement (or, in some cases, all or part of the genealogy) in smaller or less prominent letters'.[343]

A common way of emphasising the name/genealogy is the use of bigger graphs, as for example in QUR 176.24.1/F and QUR 952.83.1/SoS,[344] where the graphs of the genealogy and of the affiliation to the social group are distinguished by a slightly bigger size, although they are carved in the same technique as the rest of the text. In several examples, the author further emphasised his name by employing thicker lines, which were mostly accomplished through a different technique, as for example by mixing hammering (for the name) and incision (for the rest of the text).

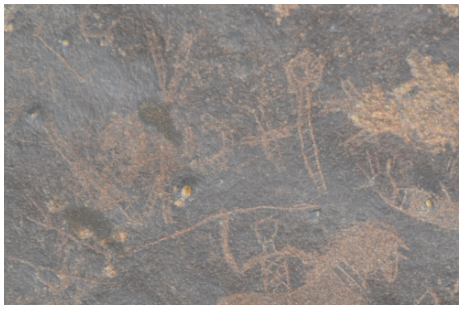
An example of this is QUR 294.46.1/C[345] (Fig. 5.6(a)), in which the name and patronym are carved in big, thinly chiselled graphs, while the much smaller statement part (traced in red on the photo) is shallowly incised, and it runs boustrophedon above it. Another example is QUR 148.127.1/C *l d{ṣ}y bn frḫ* 'By {Dṣy} son of Frḫ' (Fig. 5.6(b)), where the graphs of the name of the author, *dṣy*, are very thickly chiselled, while the patronym is incised in much smaller graphs and runs vertically downwards

[341] See Brusgaard 2019:107–111.
[342] See, e.g., QUR 12.58.1/C.
[343] Macdonald 1989:65; see also his discussion in Macdonald 2006:292.
[344] See Fig. 6.12(a) and Fig. 6.20 respectively, Chapter 6.
[345] The text reads: *l kʿmh bn bs¹ʾ h-drt ʿm f ʿm* 'By Kʿmh son of Bs¹ʾ at this place, year after year'.

(a) Name and patronym chiselled, text scratched (QUR 294.46.1/C)

(b) Name thickly chiselled, patronym incised (QUR 148.127.1/C)

(c) Name and patronym hammered, curse incised above in smaller graphs (QUR 2.196.2/C)



(d) Name and patronym in outline and filled with lines (detail of QUR 449.2.1/C)

Figure 5.6: Texts with emphasised names

to the *y* of the first name. Furthermore, the *ṣ* of *dṣy* has been joined to the *d* through the addition of a ligature, perhaps to further embellish the name (see §5.3 below).

As noted by Brusgaard, size and technique are devices which are also used in the rock art to emphasise some elements within a scene.[346]

In some rock art signatures, such as QUR 974.43.1/C[347] (see Fig. 6.11(a) in Chapter 6), the name, patronym and associated drawings are hammered, while the caption of the image is incised. As noted by Brusgaard, in all cases of rock art signatures in which the name of the author is emphasised through hammering, the associated drawing is always hammered as well, showing that the author wanted to put the visual emphasis on both the drawing and on his name.[348]

A different example of emphasis through technique and size is QUR 2.196.2/C (Fig. 5.6(c)), which reads: *l ʾ{r}{{ḥ}}m bn rhz h ʾlt ʿwr m ʿwr h-{s¹}{f}r* 'By {ʾrḥm} son of Rhz,

[346]See Brusgaard 2019:106–107, 117–118. For example, in raiding scenes, the camel, which is the object of the raid, is usually much larger than the anthropomorphs participating in the raid, and then also distinguished by technique, usually hammering, while the anthropomorphs are incised (Brusgaard 2019:118).

[347]The text reads: *l mrʾt bn ḫlʾl h-ẓbyn* 'By Mrʾt son of Ḫlʾl are the gazelles'.

[348]Brusgaard 2019:107.

O ʾlt, blind whosoever would efface this {writing}'. In this text, name and patronym of the author are hammered and bigger than the curse (traced in red on the photo), which is incised above the name and patronym, with the last word *s¹fr* curving downwards in between the *n* of *bn* and the *r* of the patronym.

In Chapter 3, we have already come across the practice of emphasising the name of the author not only by size and technique, but also by using square, elongated, or 90° graph forms. For example, as discussed in §3.1.3, in QUR 12.34.1/C *l ḫll bn gmḥy* 'By Ḫll son of Gmḥy' (see Fig. 3.3(b)), the first name is carved in finely chiselled and elongated graphs which are bigger than the graphs of the patronym. They are also more deeply carved and the *ḫ* is elongated and with part of the space in its gaps skilfully filled in. Similarly in QUR 186.162.1/C (see Fig. 3.2(a) in Chapter 3) only the name and patronym have square and 90° *b*'s, while the *b*'s in the statement take the usual curved form facing in the direction of the text.

In one inscription (QUR 449.2.1/C), the graphs of the name and patronym are drawn in outline and filled in with incised parallel lines (see Fig. 5.6(d)), while the remaining part of the text is in regular incised graphs. This type of decoration is mostly found in the rock art, where the bodies of animals or humans are sometimes filled in with lines.[349]

5.3 Joined graphs and ligatures

In a 1989 paper, Macdonald drew the scholars' attention to the Safaitic practice of joining adjacent graphs in different ways:[350] by extending parts of the graphs to join each other, by joining them directly or through ligatures (usually dots or bars),[351] by distorting them,[352] or by drawing a straight line through them.[353] This phenomenon has been noticed in Hismaic as well.[354] One of the most common features is the joining of *b* and *n* of *bn* (i.e.'son of' in the genealogy), see, e.g.,  ,  , ,  ,[355] although in some cases the joining of these graphs may have been the result of attempts to vandalise the text.[356]

[349] See 'Patterned figures' in Brusgaard 2019:113–115.

[350] Two of the examples Macdonald discusses are from Jebel Qurma (see Macdonald 1989:65–67). They are QUR 2.514.1/C = WH 3912 and QUR 2.192.4/C = WH 3923, which are interpreted here as vandalised texts. They are both discussed in §7.2.

[351] The term 'ligature' is here employed to refer exclusively to the graphic element joining two adjacent graphs together; this use is different from its current meaning in Latin palaeography, where it has been defined as 'the linking of two or more letters into one graph, in which the original letter forms have been altered' (Derolez 2003:xxi).

[352] I have not found any example of this type in the JQC.

[353] However, this last type is here interpreted as a form of modification (see §7.2).

[354] See King 1990a:§2.E.

[355] This has also been noted by Macdonald 1989:63 and, for Hismaic, by King 1990a:§2.E.1. On the joining of the *b* and *n* of *bn* in Dadanitic inscriptions, see Macdonald 2018:8–9.

[356] Cf., e.g., QUR 372.27.1/C (Fig. 7.3(e)), where in addition to two short bars joining the *b* and the *n* together, further bars have been added to other graphs to alter their graphematic values; see the discussion of this text in §7.2.

QUR 2.184.3/C (Fig.5.7(a)) – which reads: *l ns²l bn ʿbd bn mk bn ḫzr* 'By Ns²l son of ʿbd son of Mk son of Ḫzr' – is a good example of a text with both dots or bars ligatures and graph extension. Most graphs have been ligatured through roughly hammered dots and bars – see the *lām auctoris* and the *n*, the *s²* and the *l*, the *n* and the *ʿ*, the *d* and the *b*, the *b* (of the third *bn*) and the *n*, the *n* and the *ḫ* – which thus seem to have been added after the inscription had been carved. However, the *b* and the *d* of the patronym *ʿbd* have been joined by extending the arms of the *b* using an accurate hammering technique which is remarkably similar, and perhaps identical, to the one used to carve the graphs. Thus, the extensions of the arms of the *b* may have been carved either at the same time as the graph or later as the rest of the ligatures, but using a more accurate technique. In the majority of cases, as noticed by Macdonald for Safaitic and by King for Hismaic, ligatures are more roughly and shallowly carved than the graphs, which suggests that they were mostly added after the text had been carved.[357] This feature makes us question if they were always decorative features added by the author himself after he had finished the text or if they were rather malicious later additions. In the example in Fig. 5.2(b) above, one can clearly see that the bar ligatures are more shallowly and roughly direct hammered than the graphs, which are neatly chiselled. Moreover, the vertical bar closing the arms of the *b* is not joining it to the following *n*, so in this sense it is not strictly a ligature.

In other examples, however, as in the case of the *b* arms in QUR 2.184.3/C (Fig. 5.7(a)) just discussed, the technique used to carve the ligatures is indistinguishable from the one used for the graphs. In such cases, although weathering may have created the illusion of a uniformity that was not there originally, it is plausible that the author was responsible for them. Fig. 5.7(b) shows an example of a large chiselled inscription (QUR 64.139.1/C) reading *l ʿly bn grmt* 'By ʿly son of Grmt' in which the ligatures are carved using a technique similar to the one used for the graphs. The *l* of the name of the author has been joined to the following *y* through one bar on top and another at the bottom. The *n* of *bn* 'son of' has been extended to close the two arms of the *b*, forming a single sign. In addition, the arms of the *r* of the patronym have been extended to join the following *m*.

There are also instances in which the first graph of the author's name is joined to the *lām auctoris*, as in QUR 611.4.1/C (Fig. 5.7(c)) *l ġfr bn nhbt*, where the *ġ*, which is 'S'-shaped and facing backwards, is joined to the *lām auctoris*. In addition, the *b* of the patronym, which sits above the preceding *h*, is joined to the upper end of its shaft. In QUR 148.48.1/C (Fig. 5.7(d)) *l hs²ll bn ʿ{m}hm bn hwḥd*, the name of the author is distinguished through bigger graphs and only one ligature joins the shaft of the *h* to the *lām auctoris*, or, alternatively, the *lām auctoris* is hooked and its hook is simply joined to the *h*.[358] In such cases, it is likely that the process of joining graphs and/or adding ligatures had a decorative purpose and that it was the work of the author himself.

Another example is QUR 370.106.1/C *l s²kr {{b}}n s²bḥ* (Fig. 5.7(e)); the inscription

[357] See Macdonald 1989:63, 68; King 1990a:§2.E.

[358] Although the other *l*'s are not hooked, there are some cases in which the *lām auctoris* is hooked, while the other *l*'s in the text are not (see §2.1.14).

(a) QUR 2.184.3/C (text in cartouche)

(b) QUR 64.139.1/C

(c) QUR 611.4.1/C

(d) QUR 148.48.1/C

(e) QUR 370.106.1/C

(f) QUR 956.56.1/C (bottom text)

Figure 5.7: Examples of joined graphs and ligatures

is surrounded by a directly hammered cartouche from which several lines protrude. The *s²* of the author's name is joined to the following *k* by a dot, and the arms of the *k* extend to join the following *r*. A line joins the *r* to the following *b*, but it goes past it, making it look like a *ḥ*. While most of the joining in the text may be the result of authorial choice, the line which alters the graphematic value of the graph suggests otherwise. There are many examples of texts in which several graphs have been tampered with and turned into others by adding lines to them with a most likely malicious purpose (see §7.2) and that is why cases such as this are especially difficult to interpret. What we see may even be the result of different hands: perhaps the author of the text added the ligatures and joined some of the graphs, and then someone else turned the *b* into a *ḥ*. It may also be the case that the line crossing the *b* was seen as a decorative rather than a damaging feature.

An even more ambiguous example is QUR 956.56.1/C (Fig. 5.7(f)), an inscription carved in huge graphs in which the name of the author has been made almost illegible by ligatures and other lines joining the graphs and their respective parts.[359] Such lines are carved very skilfully, which makes one think that they had the purpose of embellishing the name of the author, distinguishing it from the rest of the text.[360] This apparent contradiction makes it very difficult to understand what has really happened.[361] It is possible that the public for which the inscription was meant immediately understood the name behind it: while the interpretation is challenging for us, it could have been immediately intelligible to the nomads inhabiting the area at that time. On the other hand, if illegibility was the actual purpose of adding such strokes, a further explanation may be that the author himself intentionally hid his name, perhaps in order to protect it from curses of enemies passing by.

Nevertheless, in none of the examples of ligatures discussed so far we can completely exclude the possibility that someone else added these features and tampered with the inscription later. While in his paper Macdonald recognised that in some cases the addition of ligatures may represent a form of vandalisation, he generally seems inclined to interpret most examples of ligatures as intentional.[362] However, since ligatures are mostly carved in a rougher manner than the graphs themselves, and since they often hinder the legibility of the text, a lot of caution is needed in their interpretation. In §7.2, we shall see some examples in which the addition of bars to the text was most likely disruptive.

5.4 Text direction

The text direction of Safaitic inscriptions varies a lot, which is probably in part due to the irregular shape of the basalt rocks.

[359] I would tentatively read the text as follows: *l ḫ{{l}} {{b}}{{n}} ws²yt* 'By {Ḫl} {son of} Ws²yt'.

[360] On this practice, see §5.2 above.

[361] Cf. the similar observations by King (1990a:§2.E.2) on the Hismaic practices of joining and filling in the spaces of graphs, which according to her study are also embellishing and at the same time destructive.

[362] See, e.g., Macdonald 1989:68.

As shown in the examples in Fig. 5.8, Safaitic texts can often curve in various ways, as in Fig. 5.8(a) and 5.8(b), and they sometimes form coils (from edge to center, as in Fig. 5.8(e), or vice-versa) or circles (see Fig. 5.9(c) below). They can also run in more or less straight lines: horizontally (left to right or right to left), vertically (downwards, as in Fig. 5.8(a) or upwards), obliquely,[363] boustrophedon (starting left to right, as in Fig. 5.8(c), or right to left, as in Fig. 5.8(f), and running either upwards, as in Fig. 5.8(c) and 5.8(f), or downwards), zig-zag (Fig. 5.8(d)).

However, these categories should not be seen as mutually exclusive options, since in practice texts very often combine different directions. For example, in some boustrophedon inscriptions the text curves from one line to the other (Fig. 5.8(f)) rather than being arranged in straight lines (Fig. 5.8(c)), and QUR 813.14.1/SoS (see Fig.6.17(a) in Chapter 6) starts curving along the panel edges and then curves towards the inside of the panel running in a curving boustrophedon fashion. Another typical example of change in text direction is provided by the first two texts from the left in Fig. 5.8(a), which both start running vertically downwards. The first (QUR 64.180.2/C) at some point curves and forms a circle, while the second (QUR 64.180.1/C) turns by 90°. At the point where the latter text turns, we see that the orientation of the *ḥ* follows the the new text orientation, but there are also cases in which graphs in the same position rather follow the previous orientation. In QUR 207.49.1/SoS (Fig. 5.8(f)), which starts running horizontally from right to left, at the point where the text first changes direction, the *l* changes abruptly orientation and is turned by 90° to the preceding *ʾ*, as in the example just discussed, while at the second curving point we see that the *w* and *q* gradually turn their stances towards the new diagonal direction. When the text direction changes, generally the graphs orientation remains consistent to the new text direction, with most variation occurring within the graphs placed at the turning or curving point. However, in some cases, after the text has changed direction some graphs keep the orientation of the initial direction. For example, in QUR 12.34.1/C *l ḫll bn gmḥy* 'By Ḫll son of Gmḥy' (see Fig. 3.3(b) in Chapter 3), the first part of the text until the *g* runs diagonally downwards above the camel drawing, while the last three graphs turn vertically downwards to the side of the drawing. While both *m* and *ḥ* changed direction accordingly, the *y* keeps a vertical stance, i.e. it is turned by 90° in relation to the preceding *ḥ*.

A curious way of laying out some of the graphs has been attested in a few inscriptions in which parts of the text, mostly the word *bn* ('son of') of the genealogy run vertically downwards to the inscription. An example is QUR 2.58.1/C = AbGQ 3 *{l} {n}{f}{r}{t} bn ṯlm bn ḥ{b}ʾl bn qn*, where the graphs of the second and the third *bn* are both turned by 90° and written vertically downwards, while the direction of the inscription is horizontal right to left. No other graphs have been turned. This feature, which distinguishes the *bn* from the names of the genealogy, can be compared to the practice of joining them to form a single sign (see §5.3 above).

Although Safaitic texts can run in almost any direction, they are usually carved

[363] This is especially used in rock art signatures, see, e.g., QUR 2.511.3/C *l ʾhwd bn ʿlyn*, running diagonally downwards between images of ostriches (see §5.5 below).

(a) Panel covered with texts running vertically downwards, curving, and turning by 90° (QUR 64.180/C)

(b) Text curving following the panel edges (QUR 186.122.1/C)

(c) Boustrophedon text (QUR 176.24.1/F)

(d) Zig-zag text (QUR 186.101.1/C)

(e) Coil (QUR 139.10.1/C)

(f) Curving boustrophedon (QUR 207.49.1/SoS)

Figure 5.8: Examples of different text directions

following one single continuous line. Thus, even when they are arranged in straight parallel lines, they run boustrophedon. However, in a minority of cases the text flow interrupts and continues in a separate line. Sometimes this seems to be done in order to distinguish different parts of the text. For example, in QUR 2.196.2/C (see Fig. 5.6(c) above) we saw that the curse runs in a separate line and is incised in smaller graphs above the genealogy of the author, which is hammered. This type of breaks in the flow of the text are also common in rock art signatures, where they often distinguish the genealogy from the caption (see the examples discussed in §5.5 below).

The organisation of the Safaitic text is always in interplay with the size and shape of the rock on which it is carved. On large boulders, as the example in Fig 5.8(a), one can often find conglomerations of rock art and texts. However, the majority of Safaitic texts are carved on smaller panels, where the layout of the text(s) often needs to be adapted to their more limited size and features. It is common for the text to run following the panel edges (Fig. 5.8(b)), or, if the text is longer, to start along the edges and then to turn/curve in various ways towards the inside of the panel, see, e.g., Fig. 5.8(c), 5.8(e), and 5.8(f). Associated carvings, i.e. two or more carvings which were carved on the same panel and likely on the same occasion,[364] are often intertwined and carved very close together, curving in order to adapt to the panel features as well as to the space left blank by the other carving(s). For example, in QUR 186.150 (see Fig. 5.10(b) below), with two associated texts, the top text runs horizontally from left to right, whereas the bottom text, which was likely carved afterwards, starts horizontally from left to right, and then turns boustrophedon downwards, finally curving in a zig-zag fashion in the little space left, ending where the same text begins.

Sometimes the text runs on more than one rock face, having a three-dimensional layout,[365] and in some rare occurrences text and rock art are placed on different panels of the same rock.[366] Nevertheless, in the majority of cases single texts as well as associated carvings are organised within one single panel.

5.5 Text and image

Safaitic images were produced in a similar way as the texts, with which they share not only the same techniques, but also further comparable graphic devices. For example, as seen in §5.2 above, the use of a different size and/or technique is often used to distinguish parts of the text, but it is also employed in the rock art to emphasise particular figures within scenes.[367] Furthermore, in the next Chapter we shall see an example of a

[364] See §5.5 and §5.7 below.

[365] See, e.g., QUR 775.1.1/C *l gml bn fḏḥl w rʿy h-ʾgʾ nwy* 'By Gml son of Fḏḥl and he pastured on the ʾgʾ whilst migrating', whose last few graphs curve upwards and continue on another side of the rock perpendicular to the face where the inscription starts out.

[366] See, e.g., QUR 307.11/C (Fig. 5.11(b)), discussed in §5.7 below, which is a panel with two texts by father and daughter associated to a camel figure on the other side of the rock, although the camel is not shown in the picture.

[367] On this phenomenon in the rock art, see Brusgaard 2019:106–107, 117–118.

prolific author and artist whose texts present a set of distinctive stylistic features which are analogous to the features characterising the style of his drawings (see §6.1.5).

Fig. 5.9(a) shows a a very typical example of Safaitic drawing and associated text, which reads: QUR 171.146.1/C *l hʾs*[1] *bn ʿmrt h-bkrt* 'By Hʾs[1] son of ʿmrt is the young she-camel'.[368] This is also a typical signature layout, running vertically or slightly diagonally downwards and then curving around the image. The texts accompanying drawings most commonly curve around them and sometimes they are intertwined in the figure, as in Fig. 5.9(b), where two of the texts associated to the hunting scene run diagonally in between some of the ostriches. Another example of this is QUR 994.7.1/C (see Fig.5.3(b) above), where the text curves between the two figures. In Fig. 5.9(c), the text runs around the camel drawing forming an almost perfect circle.[369] As noted by Brusgaard, the fact that Safaitic texts mostly curve around or in between figures indicates that the images were carved first.[370]

Sometimes the part of the text with the genealogy is distinguished from the caption of the image, for example by writing the genealogy on a more or less straight line, while the caption curves, or by carving the caption in a separate line. In QUR 2.528.1/C (Fig. 5.9(f)),[371] which is finely chiselled below the drawing of a camel, the part with the genealogy curves below the feet of the camel, while the caption is carved on a separate line above the genealogy and runs vertically downwards between the camel legs.

In QUR 290.6.1/C (Fig. 5.9(d)), which reads *l ʿwḏ bn rb ⟨⟨ ⟩⟩ h-frs*[1] 'By ʿwḏ son of Rb is the horse', the caption *h-frs*[1] is carved on the other face of the rock and runs towards the opposite direction. In addition, it seems that the author hammered a line between the *lām auctoris* and the beginning of the caption, perhaps in order to better divide the two parts and disambiguate the reading of the text.

In Fig. 5.9(e), the image is associated to three texts, only one of which (QUR 2.365.2/C *{l} {k}{m}{d} {b}n s*[2]*k {h-}gmln* 'By Kmd son of S[2]k are the two camels') has the caption of the figure, the other two being only names.[372] The text signing the rock art starts above the camels heads and runs diagonally downwards from right to left, it is also the text carved in biggest graphs, while the text carved on top of the panel (QUR 2.365.1/C *l ʾbyṯʿ bn fḥl* 'By ʾbyṯʿ son of Fḥl') is the smallest one. The text referring to the image is another example in which the caption is carved on a separate line, as it runs below the patronym in the same direction. The other text carved right above the rock art (QUR 2.365.3/C *{l} {h}{ʾ}{s*[1]*} bn {y}{ṣ}{ḥ}{ḥ}* '{By} {Hʾs[1]} son of {Yṣḥḥ}') runs specular to the signature from left to right, and its *lām auctoris* is joined to the one

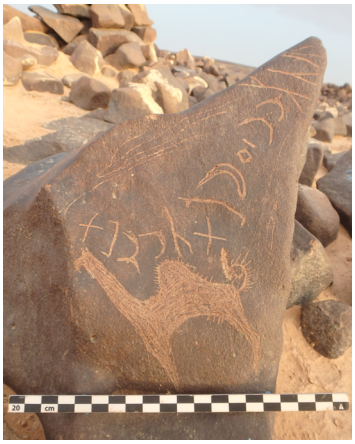
[368] Camels are the most common motif in Safaitic rock art (see Brusgaard 2019:50).

[369] The text reads: QUR 215.59.1/C *l wfd bn {ġ}{r}z{t} bn ḏhd w l-h h-bkrt s*[1]*nt* ʾ*ty s*[1]*lk* 'By Wfd son of {Ġrzt} son of Ḏhd and the drawing of the young she-camel is by him, the year S[1]lk came'.

[370] See Brusgaard 2019:110.

[371] The text reads: *l w{{h}}b bn s*[2]*{y}{t}---- h-gml* 'By {Whb} son of…is the camel'.

[372] This is often the case in panels where more than one text is associated to a drawing. Another example of this is QUR 176.32 (see Fig.6.2(b) in Chapter 6). This text, by the prolific author *fdy bn yṣḥḥ* refers to the images of 'the ibex and the animals', but the two other inscriptions on the same panel are name-only texts. In §5.7 below, however, we will see an example in which two associated texts by brothers both refer to the rock art.



(a) QUR 171.146

(b) QUR 2.511

(c) QUR 215.59

(d) QUR 290.6

(e) QUR 2.365

(f) QUR 2.528

Figure 5.9: Panels with texts and associated figures

Incised	1070	1339
Incised & lines	269	
Directly hammered	346	366
Directly hammered & lines	20	
Mixed	30	
Dotted	27	
Chiselled	16	

Table 5.2: Cartouches in 1778 Safaitic texts

of QUR 2.365.2/C, forming one single line. In this kind of panels, it is impossible to know if all names appearing next to the rock art were equally responsible for it. It is possible, however, that the author who carved the biggest text with the caption was the one who made the drawing, or perhaps most of it, while the other two helped. One may also wonder whether the positioning of the caption on a separate line in this case signified that the drawing was a collective work, although it may have also simply had to do with lack of space on the panel.

5.6 Cartouches

More than one third of the Safaitic texts of the JQC are surrounded by cartouches: these are lines which can be carved in any technique around one or more texts or drawings. Associated carvings are often surrounded by one single cartouche. Fig. 5.10(a) shows the example of a text and associated figure surrounded by a direct hammered cartouche, while in Fig. 5.10(b) the same roughly hammered cartouche surrounds two associated inscriptions sharing the same writing style.[373]

As shown in Table 5.2, the vast majority of cartouches are incised, mostly by scratching, and some cartouches are so faintly scratched that they are barely visible. In QUR 186.34.1/C (Fig. 5.10(c)), for example, the inscription is finely chiselled, whereas the cartouche has been faintly scratched in more than one go, using the 'Rubbed incising' technique (see §5.1.3 above), which is often employed for cartouches. More than one fifth of the cartouches is direct hammered, as for example in Fig. 5.10(a) and 5.10(d).

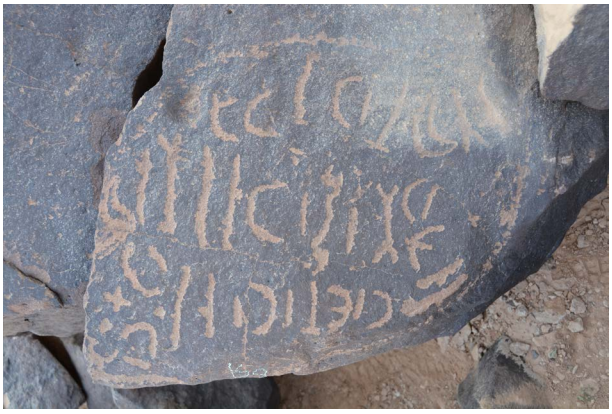
In Fig.5.10(e) (QUR 176.72.1/C), we have an example of a cartouche carved using a mixed technique: it has been first rubbed incised, and then parts of it have been roughly direct hammered.

Sets of lines or dots are commonly attested geometric symbols[374] which are often

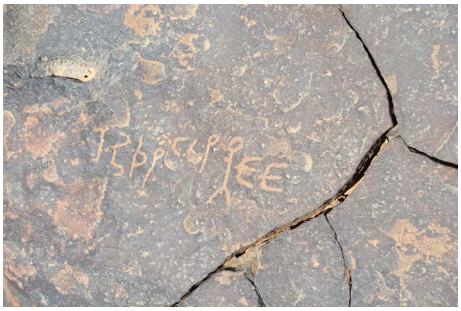
[373] Cf. also the example in Fig.5.11(a) below, in which one incised cartouche surrounds the rock art and the two signatures by brothers.

[374] See Brusgaard 2019:81–85 for a detailed description.

(a) Text and figure surrounded by direct hammered cartouche (QUR 974.96.1/C)



(b) Two associated texts with roughtly direct hammered cartouche (QUR 186.150)



(c) Chiselled text with scratched cartouche (QUR 186.34.10/C)

(d) Direct hammered cartouche with protruding lines (QUR 186.102.1/C)

(e) Scratched and roughly direct hammered cartouche (QUR 176.72.1/C)

(f) Dotted cartouche (QUR 176.95.1/C)

Figure 5.10: Examples of cartouches

associated to inscriptions and drawings. In some cases, they are incorporated in the cartouche, as for example QUR 186.102.1/C (Fig.5.10(d)), whose cartouche has seven lines protruding from it. In QUR 176.95.1/C (Fig. 5.10(f)), the cartouche is composed of dots hammered all around the inscription. There are also some cases in which the cartouche is composed of concentric incised lines.[375]

In some texts, the edges of the panel are employed as a natural cartouche, and the author simply hammered the panel along its edges fully or partially (see Fig. 5.9(f) above). There are also examples in which the cartouche is only hinted at by hammering one or more curving lines around the inscription.[376]

Although there are some examples of skilfully chiselled or deeply incised cartouches, in most instances, cartouches are carved in a technique which is less elaborate than the one employed for the inscription and the rock art.

5.7 Associated texts by family members

Associated inscriptions are texts carved on the same panel and likely produced on the same occasion. This can be deduced from the fact that they either are associated to the same drawing, share a similar writing style, are surrounded by one single cartouche, or are organized in a way which presupposes that the panel space was planned accordingly.[377] In all cases in which the genealogies of associated texts do not present any shared relative, it is impossible to know whether their authors were tied by blood relationships or not. They may have also been friends or companions, for example.[378]

In some cases, however, the genealogies clearly indicate that associated inscriptions were by members of the same family: I will discuss four instances of this practice and their specificities.

In Fig. 5.11(a) one can see a drawing of two horsemen with two inscriptions by brothers. The texts are incised in exactly the same writing style and arranged one above the other, running horizontally above the figure. The first text (QUR 171.39.1/C) reads *l ʾrs¹m bn bny bn nʾlt h-ʿr* 'By ʾrs¹m son of Bny son of NʾIt is the ass' and the second (QUR 171.39.2/C) *l ʾlt bn bny bn nʾlt bn bly h-ʿr* 'By ʾlt son of Bny son of NʾIt son of Bly is the ass'.[379] Both texts have the caption of the figure, which, as seen in §5.5 above, is not always the case in texts associated to rock art. This could mean that each brother carved one of the two horsemen. One figure is bigger than the other and the body of

[375] E.g. QUR 171.138.1/C and QUR 2.665.1/C.

[376] E.g. QUR 171.81.1/C and QUR 176.142.1/C.

[377] A yet different practice is the later addition of an inscription to a panel with a text by a relative, as in the panel from southern Syria shown in the discussion of the texts by ancestors of the prolific author *ṣʿd bn ġṭ* (see Fig.6.16(b) in Chapter 6). In that example, texts have been added and squeezed in later upon finding the text, as clearly expressed by the formula *wgd s¹fr* 'he found the text of' + [person].

[378] See, e.g., Fig. 5.3(e) above, the two associated texts are intertwined, surrounded by the same scratched cartouche, and carved in the same writing style, but from their genealogy we cannot evince any relationship between them.

[379] It is worth noting that while the genealogy of *ʾrs¹m* stops at the papponym, *ʾlt*'s genealogy continues until the great grandfather.

(a) Rock art 'signed' by two brothers (QUR 171.39/C)

(b) Two inscriptions by father and daughter (QUR 307.11/C)

(c) Texts by father (hammered) and two sons (incised) (QUR 171.103/C)

(d) Ligatured texts by four brothers (QUR 533.25/C)

Figure 5.11: Examples of associated inscriptions

the animal is decorated by partial infilling, while in the smaller figure it is the rider who is filled in with parallel lines.[380] The texts and the images are surrounded by a cartouche and in the low-left corner of the panel, outside the cartouche, there is the geometric symbol of seven parallel lines.

The panel QUR 307.11/C (Fig. 5.11(b)) has two texts by father and daughter. The above text (QUR 307.11.1/C), by the father, says *l nhḍ bn fhz* 'By Nhḍ son of Fhz[381]', while the text by the daughter *mny* (QUR 307.11.2/C) simply states *l mny bnt nhḍ* 'By Mny daughter of Nhḍ'. Inscriptions by female authors in general are very rare in Safaitic, and, to my knowledge, this is the only panel by father and daughter so far attested. Both texts are finely chiselled and present graphs turned by 90° (see the *b* and the *m*). The text of the father is carved in bigger graphs. On the left and upper sides they are framed by a cartouche composed of two bundles of parallel lightly scratched lines which converge to form a pointed shape, following the triangular shape of the panel. Although not visible from the picture, on another face of the same rock to the left of

[380] For a discussion of patterned figures in the rock art, see Brusgaard 2019:§5.3.3.

[381] The PN *fhz* is peculiar and so far unattested. It is possible that the author forgot a *r*, and that the patronym was the well-attested PN *frhz* instead.

the texts there is the drawing of a she-camel, possibly associated to the inscriptions, which however do not refer to it.

QUR 171.103/C (Fig. 5.11(c)) consists of three associated texts by *tlmy* and his two sons. The text by the father is emphasised through hammered bigger graphs, while the texts by the two sons *nẓm* and *nd*ʾ are both incised and carved in smaller graphs to its left. It is possible that the texts by the two sons were added later, but the fact that the inscription by the father curves to occupy only the central-right side of the panel suggests that the space was planned in order to leave room for the two other texts. It is nevertheless clear that the text by the father was carved first, as the texts by his sons curve around it, and that the emphasis lies on the text by the father *tlmy*.

The final example is the panel QUR 533.25.3/C (Fig. 5.11(d)), which has four inscriptions sharing the same writing style. They are by four brothers, sons of *hʾs*[1], who were probably the grandsons of the prolific 'common' author *bdḥ bn rgl* (see §6.1.6). The inscriptions present ambiguous cases of ligatures which could be either a decoration or the mark of later effacing.[382] The fact that the crossing line in 533.25.4/C does not cross over the *g* favours the ligatures interpretation. Interestingly, one of these ligatures is a continuous line connecting the first inscription from the left to the one to its right: if this is indeed an original intentional feature of the text, it could represent a graphic mean of binding the two brothers together.

[382] On the ambiguities of ligatures, see the discussion in §5.3 above.