

Yatib Mountain

Important Petroglyph Site

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Yatib is another highly interesting and highly rewarding ancient petroglyph site to visit situated only some twenty kilometers east of Hail close to the Buraydah highway.

It is a partially metamorphosed sandstone hill only sixty meters high and about one kilometer long and fully fenced. The rock here consists of very hard stone and therefore about twenty percent of the rock art work was done using metal chiseling tools.

These were already available at the time as Yatib is a Bronze and Iron Age site. Yatib offers some spectacular petroglyphs with over 1,000 motifs. These are found on the hill cliff itself and on many fallen boulders.

Specific to Yatib is that all human and animal figures are created in the

same style and consist mainly of camels and palm trees. Yatib is possibly the only site with over fifteen date palm trees on a single panel. The palm motif is rather rare in other areas of Saudi Arabia.

There are seven other sites in the Yatib area and each site has its own style of cattle horns and body markings on cattle, which are not repeated at any site close by, but only found at sites further away.

Animal Depictions

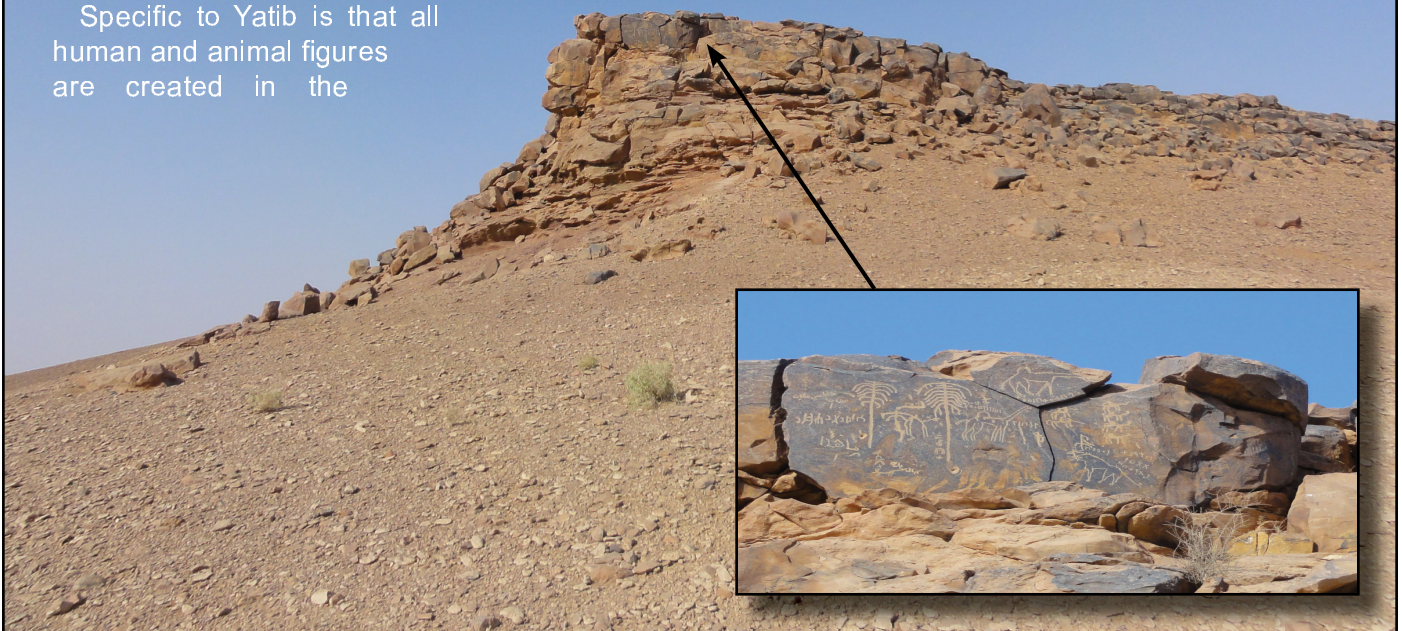
Included in the list of Yatib rock art images are also schematized cattle with different forms of horns and geometrical body decorations on rump and shoulder consisting of various

types of squares and rectangle motifs.

Surprising is also the variety and mix of animal figures carved together on one panel including cattle, horses, dogs, ibex, ostrich and camel. Also camel and horse riders are shown hunting with lances, as well as human stick figures hunting with bow and arrow.

But one of the most fascinating depictions is that of a lion devouring with great force a gazelle. In addition a few small cup holes on one plain rock surface were discovered under another fallen boulder. Those cup holes we know from Janin were created very early.

But these are very shallow and might not have been used





Yatib is famous for its many date palm trees & camels + ancient Thamudic script

for the same purpose of food and drink processing. It can still be assumed that they served some sacrificial purpose.

Deciphering Yatib Inscriptions

At this ancient rock art site also lots of short as well as medium long Thamudic texts are found, which can be all dated around 500 BC. When looking at some text examples it is important to remember, that ancient script did not use vowels and only consonants. Therefore the deciphering is not that easy.

But translating this into Latin letters the six selected Thamudic inscriptions read as follows: (1) L LHT-W, (2) S Nh Btffsh Ntffs H, (3) 'Nttshkht, (4) W-W ED'S, (5) Lhfl-Bn-eml-Wtnwk-Bbnt, (6) L-Sed. Unfortunately the relevant translations were not given.

But here is another translation example for a single word describing best the difficulties which are normally encountered. The following three letters "MLK" could be read and interpreted very differently: malaka could mean "he reigned", or as malik could be read as "king", or as mâlik interpreted as "possessor or he owns", or as malâk it could also

mean "angel" and finally as mulk read as "reign".

Various times I tried to decipher some of the short graffiti, I came across on desert trips and I have to admit, I always bitterly failed even with my script identification charts at hand. The only success I could achieve was to define the type of script, but this took always some time.

Very quickly I realized that local tribesmen crossing the desert did not have any alphabet copy at hand, as very few ancient alphabet primers have been found. Therefore we have to assume that they have carved their letters from memory and often copied abnormalities from texts nearby.

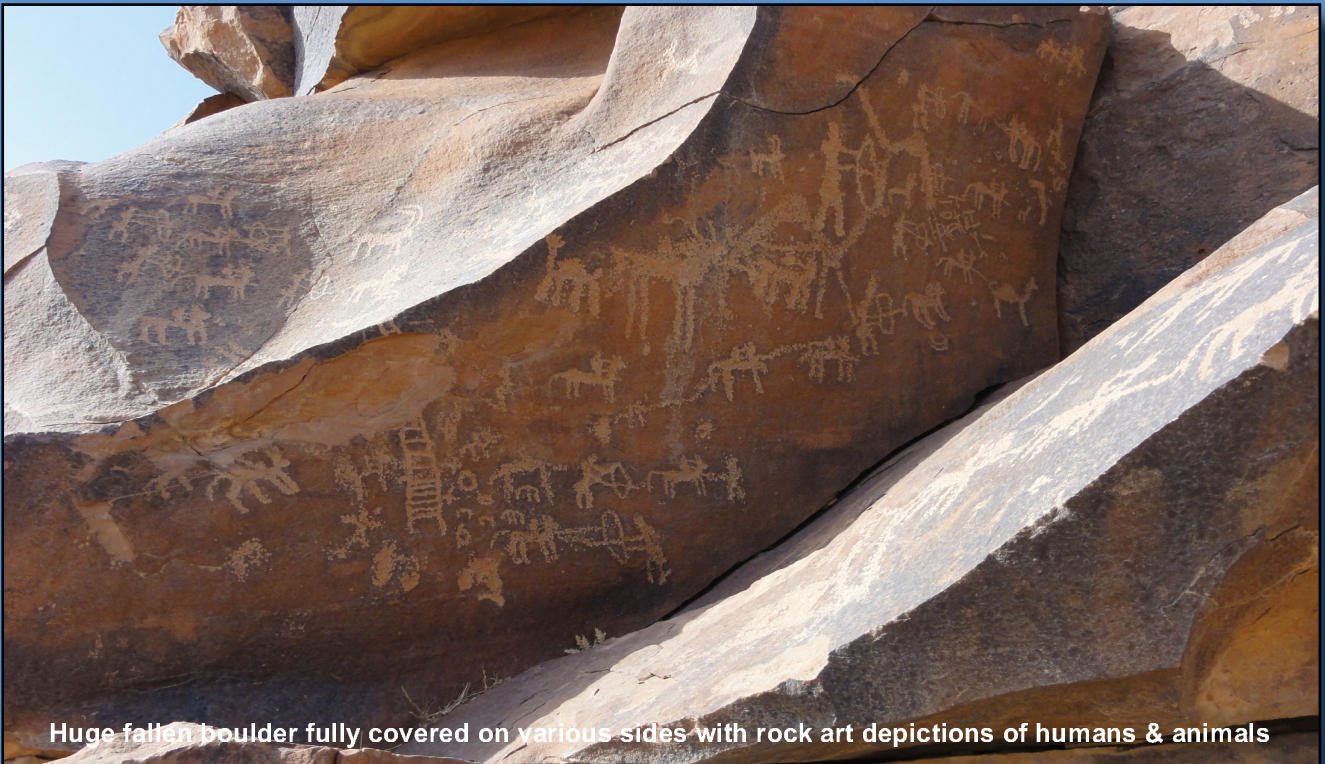
In this way they created local versions and styles to carve certain letters differently and to add new forms. So imagine that many scripts have not only one letter for the same, but several, which are sometimes used in different contexts.



Fallen boulder with script, palms & camels

Tribal Signs or Wusum

Most of us have heard this term before, but few really know any details about wusum. They are ancient tribal signs incised on rock surfaces used by clans to mark grazing and watering areas. Remember over 3,000 years ago the Arabian Peninsula received more rainfall and was



Huge fallen boulder fully covered on various sides with rock art depictions of humans & animals

able to support cattle herds. *Wusum* were used for thousands of years and nomad herdsmen also branded or painted their animals with their specific *wusum* to state clan ownership.

Wusum are found all across the Arabian Peninsula and are often mixed with or found next to old script texts, especially Thamudic and Sabaic graffiti. Unfortunately little is known about *wusum* signs and their respective clans, we just have a record of the different signs.

Interestingly those signs are very similar if not identical to certain letters of the ancient Thamudic, Sabaic and Safaitic alphabets. The signs developed over time from simple signs to rather complex geometrical pictograms.

Rock Art Phases

There is a time gap between the early cattle depictions and later Thamudic texts from the Iron Age representing phase one and two.

Phase three consists of Pre-Islamic period showing horse riders with long spears and tribal signs *wusum*. Phase four covers the Early Islamic period with no human and animal figures, but only Kufic text inscriptions.

Summary

Both Janin and Yatib are certainly worthwhile a visit and together with Jubba they will give you a deep insight into the wide variety and various periods of Saudi Arabian rock art and petroglyph motifs. Also special to Saudi Arabia are the huge compositions with mixed human and animal depictions including fascinating and huge dancing groups with up to 20 figures

and spectacular hunting scenes on foot or horse and camel back. Only in Saudi Arabia life sized humans are carved into numerous rock panels dating back up to 10,000 years.

These are real pre-historic treasures and with over 1,500 rock art sites Saudi Arabia now ranks globally in 4th place after Australia, India and South Africa.

Unfortunately only few books exist on the subject and one of the leading authors is Prof. Dr. Majeed Khan who worked over 30 years as archaeologist for the Saudi Antiquities Authority today called Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities.

Travel Tips

Janin coordinates: north 27° 33' 734" east 42° 18' 701" 7 is situated Janin is about 30 km before reaching Hail on the Buraydah highway

Yatib site coordinates: north 27° 29' 338" east 41° 58' 589"

Take next turn off after Janin on the highway going to Hail

Both sites are fenced & guarded and need a SCTA visitor permit

Permits can be obtained at the SCTA offices in Riyadh or Hail

Both sites can be visited from Hail in a half day trip as they are close Jubba another famous & very old rock art site 100 km north of Hail