

A BRIEF REPORT ON HISMAIC INSCRIPTIONS FROM RŪS ABŪ ṬULAYḤA IN THE JAFR BASIN, SOUTHERN JORDAN

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Introduction

The site of Rūs Abū Ṭulayḥa, or JF-0153 in our site registration code, is located on a small hill in the northwestern part of the Jafr basin, in southern Jordan. The site was first found during our 2001-2002 winter season survey, when seven Hismaic inscriptions¹ and two petroglyphs were collected around four small cairns standing on the hilltop. This find interested those of us who had only known scattered examples, but we could hardly embark on an investigation due to the pressure of excavations at other sites. We revisited the site for a brief investigation during the 2005 spring field season of the Jafr Basin Pre-historic Project, when eighteen Hismaic inscriptions and three *wasṣm(s)* (i.e. tribal marks) were newly collected. A short visit during the summer field season of 2006 also added four fragmentary inscriptions. Thus the site has yielded a total of thirty-four materials: twenty-nine Hismaic inscriptions, three *wasṣm(s)*, and two petroglyphs.

This is the first sizable collection of Hismaic inscriptions from the Jafr basin. It is also significant in terms of the reliability of the archaeological context. This report is intended to summarize the investigation results and outline the collection, while focusing on some important examples. The archaeological description in the former half is the work of the first author; the epigraphic commentary in the latter half is the responsibility of the second author.

The Site and Site-Setting

The hill on which the site lies is located in the

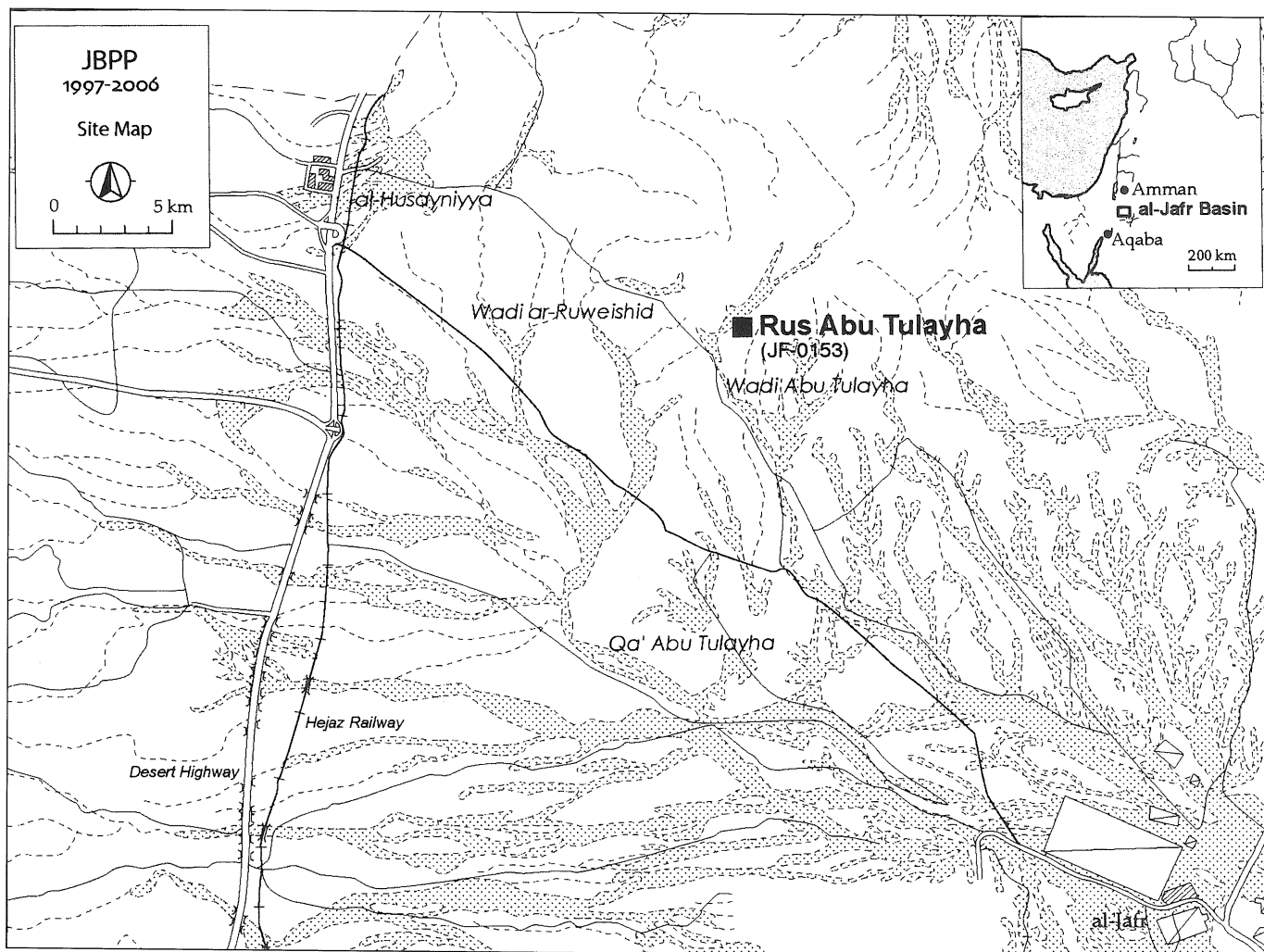
middle of a flint-strewn desert or *ḥamād* in Arabic that extends to the northwestern part of the basin. Topographically, it is situated on the south bank of the upstream of Wādī Abū Ṭulayḥa, one of the major drainage systems in this area (Fig. 1). It is a small isolated hill with a diameter of 200-300m and a relative height of ca. 25m, lying several hundred meters from the hilly terrain that forms the northwest watershed of the basin (Fig. 2). Apart from the mid-flank where limestone bedrock layers are exposed, it is thoroughly covered with abraded flint pebbles and nodules, thus fitting in the surrounding *ḥamād*. The hilltop on which the four small cairns were found is flat and relatively extensive.

The natural environment of the Jafr basin, including the catchment area of Wādī Abū Ṭulayḥa, is (and probably was) very harsh. The annual average precipitation is less than 50mm (Jordan National Geographic Center 1984: Fig. 114; Alex 1985: 360) and, therefore, no perennial water source is available within a radius of a few dozen kilometers around the site. Consequently, the vegetation is very poor and is limited exclusively to thorny shrubs dotted on wadi beds. No settlements exist; even local pastoral nomads are rarely encountered.

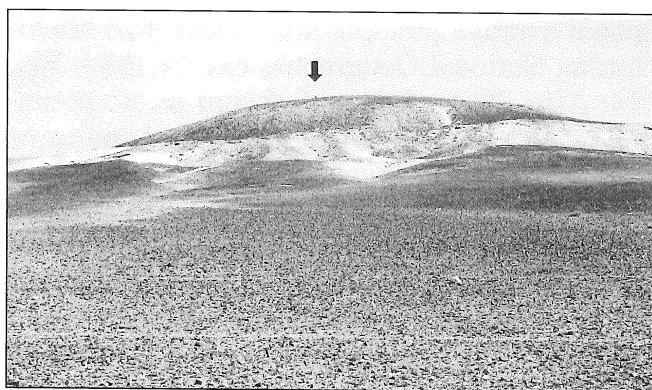
This is not to say, however, that the site is completely isolated, because it is close to a traditional track that connects the western hilly country and the central part of the basin. In addition, a track, which branches off sideways extends eastwards along the southern skirt of the hill. Although both of these are not frequented

1 Hismaic is a group of Ancient North Arabian inscriptions formerly called Thamudic E, which is found in southern Jordan and southwestern Saudi Arabia. Published materials from the al-Jafr basin is limited, but recently Hismaic and Arabic inscriptions in the east of

al-Jafr basin have been surveyed and are being studied by Prof. Sultan Ma'ani (Ma'ani 2004). As for the comprehensive study of Hismaic inscriptions, see King 1990. Also, the overview of the Ancient North Arabian inscriptions is available in Macdonald 2000.



1. The Jafr basin and the site location of Rūs Abū Ṭulayḥa.



2. A general view of Rūs Abū Ṭulayḥa (looking NE).

now, none of the local herders would deny that there was a certain amount of traffic in this area until another track to the south was widened and paved about ten years ago. Given that these traditional tracks date from classical antiquity, it follows that the site occupied an important place for the traffic of those days, which is a key to understanding the unique location of Rūs Abū Ṭulayḥa.

The Survey and Investigation

Rūs Abū Ṭulayḥa was found in the 2001-2002 winter season survey because (the focus was originally on prehistoric sites), tabular scraper components were scattered all over the hill. These components are a hallmark of the Chalcolithic to Early Bronze Age flint industries in the southern Levant (Rosen 1997: 71-80). In light of the occurrence of cores, debris and finished products, there is no doubt that tabular scrapers were produced on the hill. Similar flint knapping stations have been found in large numbers along the southern flanks of the hilly terrain (Fujii 2002; Quintero and Wilke 1998; Quintero *et al.* 2002), suggesting that there was a lot of traffic in this area from late prehistoric times.

The survey also confirmed that a number of Himaic inscriptions were either scattered around or incorporated into the four cairns standing on the hilltop. We traced the plans of these cairns first and, subsequently, collected just a portion

of the surface finds, plotting them one by one. (The only exception to this is sample No. 8, which a local assistant collected on his own initiative during a tea break). The remainder of the finds were left intact for a closer investigation in the near future.

The investigation was conducted on 3 March, 2005, between an interval of our excavation at Wādī Abū Ṭulayḥa, a PPNB agro-pastoral outpost about 3 km SWS of Rūs Abū Ṭulayḥa (Fujii 2006a, 2006b). To begin with, we collected the remainder of the surface finds and then shifted to a careful dissection of the four cairns. All artifacts were plotted before being removed. Both operations recovered a total of twenty-one materials. We finished the investigation with a brief sounding of the base of Cairn 3, the best-preserved feature, which proved that no subterranean features were lying below it.

The purpose of the brief visit during the spring field season of 2006 was to make a final inspection of the site together with Dr. Risa Tokunaga, epigrapher of our team and the second writer of this report. This revisit resulted in locating four new fragmentary inscriptions, largely at locations somewhat distant from the cairns.

The Cairns and Finds

The survey and investigation confirmed that the four small cairns (up to ca. 1m in diameter and less than ca. 0.5m in height) were aligned along the southern edge of the flat hilltop at intervals of ca. 0.5 to 4m (Figs. 3, 4). Two of them were well preserved, but the other two were badly disturbed. No structural remains other than these cairns were found on the hill. Likewise, the finds were limited to tabular scraper components referred to above and the epigraphic materials described below.

Cairn 1

Cairn 1, the westernmost feature, was the smallest of the four, measuring ca. 0.7m in diameter and ca. 0.2m in height (Fig. 5). It was a simple stone pile consisting of a dozen angular flint nodules that were sparsely heaped up on the ground surface. A dozen smaller stones were scattered around the cairn, which probably represent later disturbance or natural collapse of this small feature.

This cairn yielded three Hismaic inscriptions



3. Four cairns on the hilltop (looking W).

(Registration Nos. 1, 17, and 18) and a petroglyph probably depicting zoomorphic figures (No. 2). The former were incorporated into the main body of the cairn. In addition, two Hismaic inscriptions (Nos. 10 and 16) were found separately from the cairn, at a distance ca. 2 to 5m west and south respectively. One of these (No. 16) contained the longest text in the collection.

Cairn 2

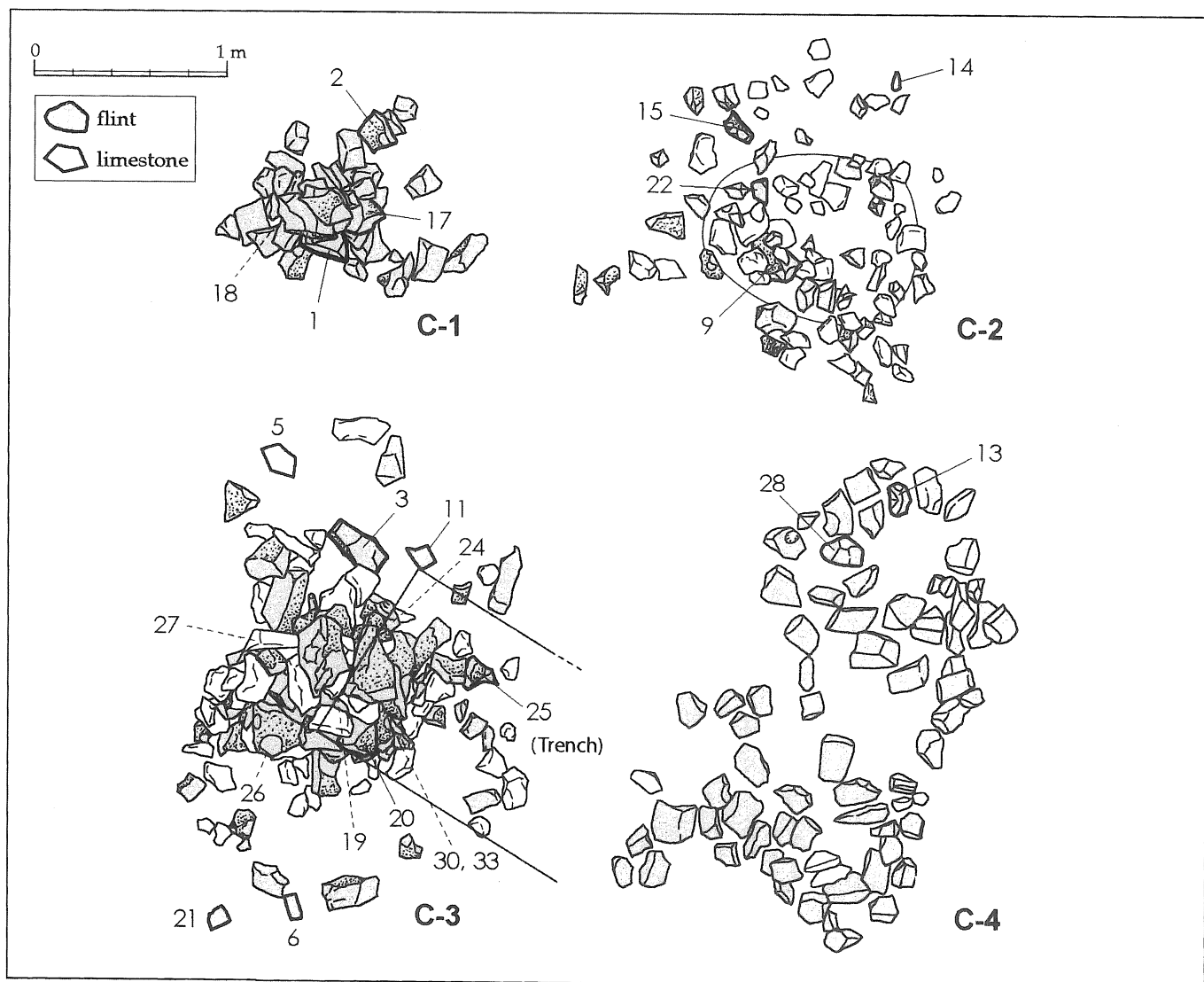
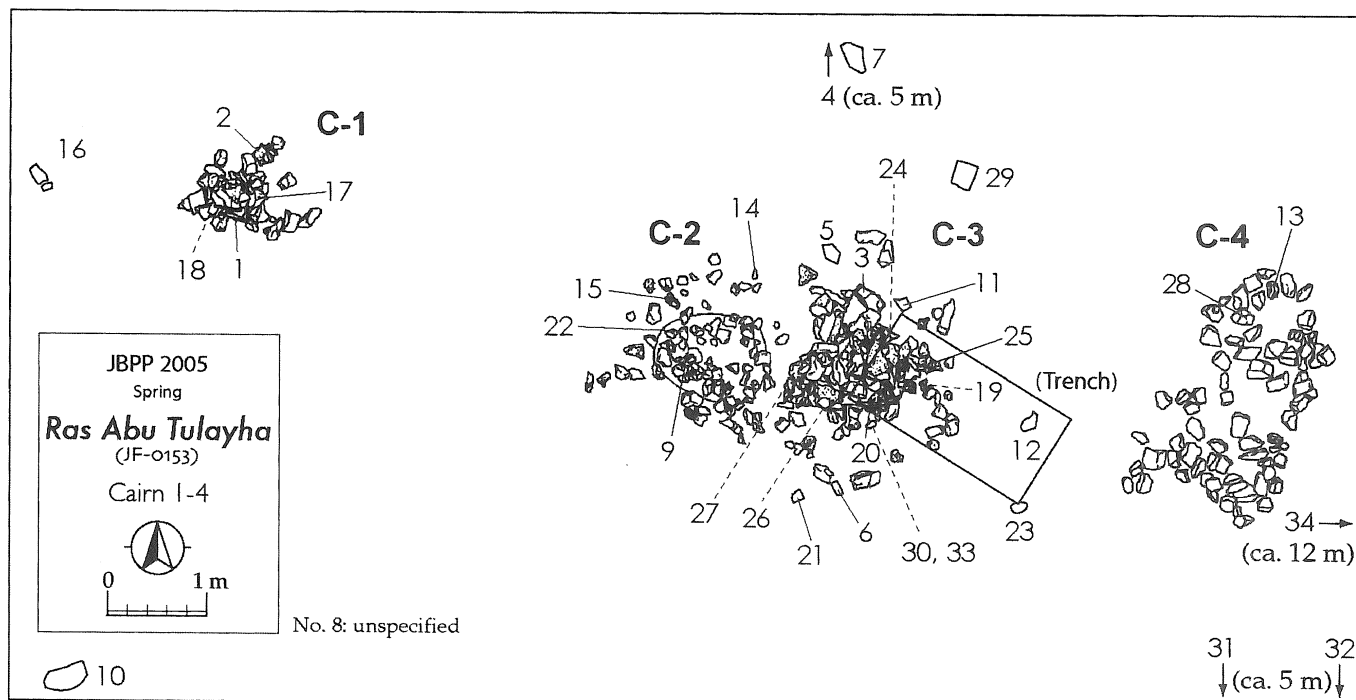
This feature, located ca. 4m ESE of Cairn 1, was a simple stone scatter containing a few dozen smaller flint nodules and limestone slabs (Fig. 6). Nevertheless, in the light of a slight ground rise and stone concentration in the central part, it seems likely that this feature originally formed a small cairn ca. 1m in diameter. As was the case with Cairn 1, no clear evidence for subterranean features was indicated.

This feature produced four materials: three Hismaic inscriptions (Nos. 9, 14 and 22) and a *wasm*-like sign (No. 15). Two of these items were found in the central stone concentration; the other two were among the fallen stones on the northern edge.

Cairn 3

This feature lay next to Cairn 2 at an interval of only 0.5m. It was constructed with four to five courses of large flint nodules and limestone slabs, forming a well-defined cairn ca. 1m in diameter and ca. 0.5m in height (Fig. 7). As mentioned above, a limited sounding in the southwestern part proved that the underlying layers were archaeologically sterile (Fig. 8).

This cairn stood out in terms of the finds, yielding a total of ten Hismaic inscriptions (Nos. 5, 6, 11, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26, and 27), a *wasm* (No. 30), and a petroglyph depicting an-



4. Plan of the cairns (above) and the details (below).



5. A general view of Cairn 1 (looking S).



6. A general view of Cairn 2 (looking S).



7. A general view of Cairn 3 (looking W).



8. A limited sounding underneath Cairn 3 (looking SW).

thropomorphic and zoomorphic figures (No. 3). It is notable that several of these were incorporated into lower courses of the cairn, where they were covered with many non-inscribed natural stones. In addition, three Hismaic inscriptions (Nos. 4, 7, and 29) were collected at locations ca. 1.5 to 8m north or NNE of the cairn. Furthermore, a Hismaic inscription (No. 23) and an incised stone (No. 12) were recovered at locations ca. 1 to 1.5m to the southeast. The cairn has therefore yielded a total of seventeen materials, (just half of the collection), although it is uncertain whether all of the isolated finds did actually come from the cairn.

Cairn 4

Cairn 4 occupied a position ca. 3m east of Cairn 3 (**Fig. 9**). Similar to Cairn 1 (but in contrast to Cairn 2 and 3), Cairn 4 consisted exclusively of large angular flints. (Therefore, the four cairns fall into two groups in terms of construction material.) As was the case with Cairn 2, it did not take the form of a cairn, but was a simple stone scatter ca. 1m wide and ca. 2m deep. (Therefore, the cairns also fall into two groups in terms of their state of preservation). Since the stones were equally scattered, it was difficult to reconstruct the original form of this feature.

Despite the large size and amount of construction material, this feature produced only two materials: a Hismaic inscription (No. 28) and a *wasm* (No. 13). Both of these were discovered at the northern edge of the stone scatter. Although three fragmentary inscriptions (Nos. 31, 32, and 34) were found at a point ca. 5 to 12m east and south of the cairn, it is still open to question whether they belonged originally to this cairn.



9. A general view of Cairn 4 (looking S).

Archaeological Comments

The survey and investigation results described above can be summarized as follows:

- 1) The site has two archaeological aspects: an outdoor atelier of tabular scrapers and a small cairn cluster yielding Hismaic inscriptions. Rūs Abū Ṭulayḥa is used specifically for the latter.
- 2) In light of the frequency of flint knapping stations and the existence of traditional tracks, it seems that the site, even though today lying in the middle of *ḥamād*, occupied an important position for ancient traffic in this area.
- 3) The four cairns are aligned along the southern edge of the top of an isolated hill, commanding a traditional track immediately below. They are arranged in a manner that makes them clearly visible from the track.
- 4) The cairns are small, simple, on-ground features constructed with either flint nodules and limestone slabs or flints only.
- 5) Two of the cairns were well preserved, while the other two were badly disturbed and had been reduced to simple stone scatters.
- 6) The four cairns yielded from two to more than a dozen Hismaic inscriptions respectively, from either their main body or their periphery.

This is the outline of Rūs Abū Ṭulayḥa. In addition, it has also been substantiated that both the inscribed and non-inscribed stones used similar material; angular flint nodules with cortical surfaces. There is no noticeable difference in the state of post-depositional weathering in the inscriptions. These conditions seem to suggest that the cairns were constructed by the inscribers. It is possible that the inscriptions fall within a limited time range.

The question is: what is the age of the cairns and the Hismaic inscriptions recovered from them? It is difficult to specify dates on the basis of the limited evidence now available. All we can say is that the cairns must have been built after the Hismaic script came into customary use. Nevertheless, that supposition will get us nowhere, because that date itself is obscure. Hismaic times do not date back as far as BC

times. The only thing we know about the date of Hismaic inscriptions is that some were contemporary with the Nabateans. However, no evidence has been found until now for the length of the period over which Hismaic inscriptions were left.² It would be wise, therefore, to shelve the archaeological approach to this issue for the moment.

What interests us instead is the unique site location of Rūs Abū Ṭulayḥa. The location of the four cairns on the southern edge of the flat hilltop of the isolated hill, overlooking a traditional track immediately below, may indicate that the cairns were built as memorials and/or landmarks along the (supposedly) frequented ancient road. It is intriguing to hypothesize that the hill itself was regarded as a 'high place' by the ancient pastoral nomads in this region, who probably inherited the belief of the Nabateans. The second writer's observation that invocative inscriptions account for the vast majority of the collection may also argue for this assumption.

Epigraphical Comments

In the survey, the four cairns divide themselves into two groups in regards to building material and state of preservation. No noticeable difference could be observed in the forms and texts of the inscriptions. As referred to above, the collection consists of twenty-nine Hismaic inscriptions, three *wasṣm(s)*, and two petroglyphs (Table 1). The most important of these is the first group, which will be surveyed below. Owing to space limitations, individual descriptions will be confined to five examples of particular significance.

Overall, the Hismaic inscriptions of Rūs Abū Ṭulayḥa are written in typical Hismaic letters,³ which have already been attested to in previously published Hismaic materials.⁴ In all inscriptions from this site, the letters are arranged in a vertical direction. The scripts used in the inscriptions of Rūs Abū Ṭulayḥa are very similar, and seem to have been left within a limited period of time by the same group of people. Among the 29 Hismaic inscriptions, 13 are in relatively good condition (Nos. 1, 6, 10, 11, 12, 16, 18, 20, 24, 27,

2. Their partial synchronism and connections with the Nabateans are evident from the existence of a Nabatean-Hismaic bilingual text (KJC 380) and the deities they have in common (King 1990: 171-172).

3. Except for No. 5, which includes some unknown letters.

4. As for a history of the survey and study of Hismaic inscriptions, see King 1990: 11-12.

Table 1: The inventory of the collection from Rūs Abū Ṭulayḥa.

No.*	Type of inscription	Archaeological context	Dimensions: stone, inscription (cm)	Contents
1	Hismaic	Cairn 1	21.0 × 15.5 × 10.0 13.0 × 9.5	Inscriber's name with seven generations and description of pastoral and agricultural life (See text)
2	Petroglyph	Cairn 1	23.0 × 23.0 × 7.5 18.0 × 16	Roughly incised cryptic drawing
3	Petroglyph	Cairn 3	34.0 × 15.5 × 12.5 23.0 × 11.0	Roughly incised cryptic drawing (chariot?)
4	Hismaic	near Cairn 3	14.0 × 12.5 × 3.4 12.5 × 6.5	Two fragmentary Hismaic inscriptions and scribble
5	Hismaic?	Cairn 3	18.5 × 19.5 × 4.3 10.0 × 11.5	Fragmentary text including irregular letters, with an incision on the backside
6	Hismaic	Cairn 3	13.0 × 6.5 × 6.8 11.8 × 5.8	Invocation to the goddess <i>Lt</i> with inscriber's name and description of pastoral life (See text)
7	Hismaic	near Cairn 3	15.0 × 11.0 × 5.2 11.0 × 5.5	Fragmentary text including a personal name
8	Hismaic	unspecified	13.2 × 8.0 × 4.2 8.0 × 5.0	Fragmentary text with several letters
9	Hismaic	Cairn 2	27.5 × 13.0 × 13.2 10.0 × 12.5	Fragmentary texts with inscriber's name
10	Hismaic	near Cairn 1	23.7 × 14.0 × 6.8 12.5 × 4.5	Inscriber's name and description of pastoral life (See text)
11	Hismaic	Cairn 3	15.5 × 12.0 × 5.7 13.4 × 10.0	Curse invocation to the goddess <i>Lt</i> with inscriber's name (See text)
12	Hismaic & scribble	near Cairn 4	21.3 × 14.0 × 6.5 5.0 × 2.0	Fragmentary text with inscriber's name and later reticular incision over it
13	<i>Wasm</i>	Cairn 4	18.1 × 10.5 × 9.7 9.5 × 6.0	A mark like the letter "E"
14	Hismaic	near Cairn 2	9.5 × 4.5 × 1.8 6.0 × 2.5	Fragmentary text with only two letters
15	<i>Wasm</i> ?	near Cairn 2	22.2 × 12.7 × 5.0 6.5 × 6.2	Cryptic mark or a <i>wasm</i>
16	Hismaic	Near Cairn 1	34.0 × 15.3 × 8.7 30.5 × 14.5	Invocation to the goddess <i>Lt</i> with inscriber's name (See text)
17	Hismaic	Cairn 1	18.0 × 17.0 × 15.0 14.0 × 11.0	Fragmentary text including personal names (top); Almost illegible fragmentary text (bottom)
18	Hismaic	Cairn 1	14.5 × 11.0 × 4.2 9.5 × 7.0	Invocation to the goddess (probably <i>Lt</i>) with inscriber's name and probably curse
19	Hismaic	Cairn 3	22.5 × 15.0 × 4.5 18.0 × 8.0	Fragmentary text and later scribble on it
20	Hismaic	Cairn 3	27.0 × 25.0 × 11.0 21.0 × 21.0	Three Hismaic inscriptions with inscribers' name and a modern graffito and <i>wasm</i>
21	Hismaic	Cairn 3	14.5 × 12.0 × 10.0 12.0 × 6.5	Fragmentary text with personal names
22	Hismaic	Cairn 2	20.0 × 11.5 × 5.5 7.0 × 2.5	Fragmentary text with only three letters
23	Hismaic	near Cairn 4	19.0 × 15.5 × 12.0 13.0 × 10.0	Fragmentary text with a personal name
24	Hismaic	Cairn 3	26.0 × 20.0 × 6.0 19.0 × 19.5	Invocation to the goddess <i>Lt</i> with inscriber's name (See text)
25	Hismaic	Cairn 3	32.5 × 18.5 × 15.0 25.0 × 13.0	Fragmentary text with personal names and other incisions
26	Hismaic	Cairn 3	17.5 × 11.5 × 12.5 12.5 × 10.5	Fragmentary text
27	Hismaic	Cairn 3	21.0 × 17.0 × 9.5 15.0 × 10.0	Inscriber's name
28	Hismaic	Cairn 4	20.0 × 14.5 × 13.0 12.5 × 4.0	Two inscriptions with the same inscriber's name and some scribbles
29	Hismaic	near Cairn 3	16.0 × 14.5 × 9.8 13.0 × 12.0	Invocation to the goddess <i>Lt</i> with inscriber's name
30	<i>Wasm</i> s & incisions	Cairn 3	27.0 × 19.0 × 15.0 11.5 × 7.0	<i>Wasm</i> s and cryptic incisions on two sides
31	Hismaic	ca. 5 m S of Cairn 4	7.0 × 8.5 × 1.9 6.5 × 5.0	Fragmentary text with five letters
32	Hismaic	ca. 5 m S of Cairn 4	10.0 × 8.0 × 1.5 7.5 × 5.0	Fragmentary text
33	Hismaic & petroglyph	from the building materials of Cairn 3	28.5 × 19.0 × 7.0 9.0 × 5.5 (Hismaic), 16 × 10 (petroglyph)	Hismaic inscription with inscriber's name and later drawing of a man with long bow.
34	Hismaic?	ca. 12 m E of Cairn 4	19.0 × 8.5 × 2.0 5.0 × 2.5	A Hismaic letter or a mark

* Nos. 1-8 were registered in 2002, Nos. 9-30 in 2005 and Nos. 31-34 in 2006.

28, 29, 33) and allow for textual analysis. All have the fixed formula “preposition *l* + inscriber’s name”, which is widely seen in Hismaic and some other Ancient North Arabian inscriptions. These comprise six invocative texts (Nos. 6, 11, 16, 18, 24, 29) including two curse texts (Nos. 11, 18). In three cases, the inscriber’s pastoral life is mentioned (Nos. 1, 6, 10). It is particularly worth noting that the deity, which appears here is exclusively *Lt* (*al-Lāt* in Classical Arabic sources), one of the most widely venerated goddesses among the pre-Islamic Arabs. She is mentioned in six invocative texts (Nos. 6, 11, 16, 20, 24, 27).⁵

Let us illustrate the points noted above by briefly citing several important examples. More detailed descriptions of these inscriptions will be made separately with the rest of the inscriptions.

Inscription No. 1 (Fig. 10)

Transcription:

l l'kl bn hn' bn šrtt bn ḥr bn tn bn lfr bn bh' w r'y w tlwq

Translation:

By *L'kl* son of *Hn'* son of *Šrtt* son of *Ḥr* son of *Tn* son of *Lfr* son of *Bh'*; and he pastured (*r'y*) and sowed in a soft ground (*tlwq*).

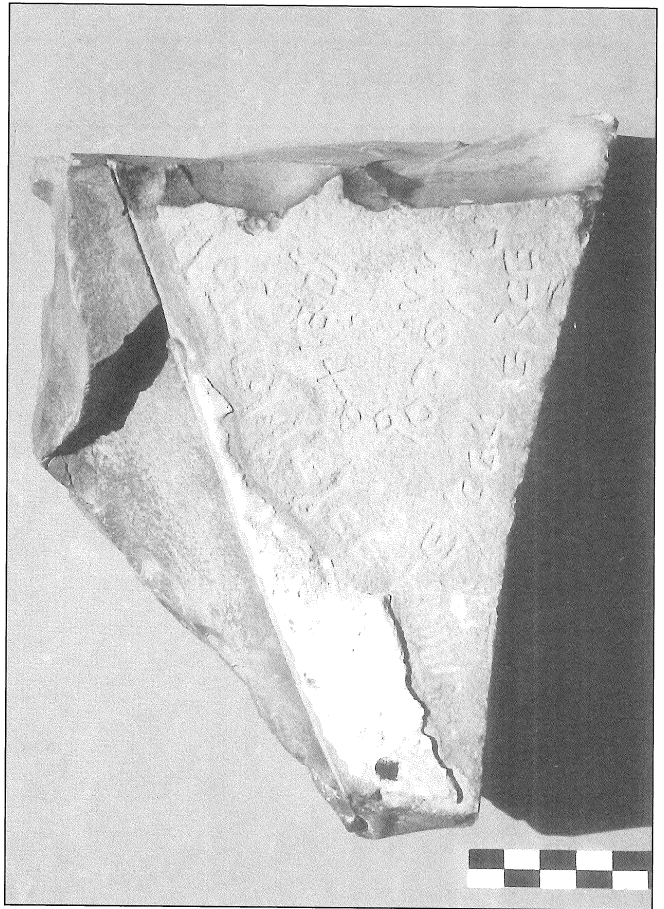
Commentary:

This inscription is incised counterclockwise in a heart-shape on the patinated flat surface of a cobble. The text begins with the typical formula “preposition *l* + inscriber’s name”. Surprisingly enough, seven generations of the author of this inscription are shown here, followed by the description of the author’s pastoral life. The verb *tlwq* in the last part has never been attributed in Hismaic, but it probably means “(he) sowed in the soft ground” or “(he) cultivated” conjecturing from the meaning of *lawwaga* “(he) sowed in a soft ground” (Hava 1982: 701). Seven parallel lines, probably embellishments, are incised at the point of the heart-shape.

Inscription No. 6 (Fig. 11)

Transcription:

l tm bn qf ḏ wtl w q'l 'ylh⁶ w r'y f b'd w ḏkrt lt ḡt



10. Inscription No. 1.



11. Inscription No. 6.

Translation:

By *Tm* son of *Qf* of [the clan/tribe] *Wtl*; and he took (*q'l*) his mountain-goat (*'ylh*) and pastured (*r'y*) and went far away (*b'd*); and may *Lt* remember (*ḏkrt*) *ḡt*.

Commentary:

5. In addition to these five texts, No. 18, judging from its context, is probably an invocation to *Lt*, although this part is missing due to weathering and flaking.

6. There is a slight possibility that this letter (*h*) is *s*, if the obscure circle at the end of the horizontal stroke is considered.

The inscription is written in a single folded whirl from the outside to the inside in a clockwise direction. This inscription also begins with the typical formula “preposition *l* + inscriber’s name” and is followed by a description of the author’s pastoral life and invocation to the goddess *Lt*. However, the interpretation of the middle part that follows the inscriber’s name is ambiguous. The words *q’l* and *’yl’* have not yet been attested in published Hismaic inscriptions. In this context, *q’l* seems to be a verb, and in Classical Arabic, *qāla*, which commonly means “(he) told,” also has the meaning “(he) made a motion” and here we have tentatively translated it as “(he) took.” (Lane 2003: “*qāla*”) *’yl* can be construed as “mountain-goat,” from Classical Arabic dialectic *’uyyar*, the pl. form of *’ayyār* (Lane 2003: “*’yr*”). There is the possibility that the verb *q’l* had another meaning in the Hismaic context, but we have to await further evidence for the discovery of the new usage of this word in a Hismaic context.

A pair of lines is incised on the reverse side of the inscription, which is also patinated.

Inscription No. 10 (Fig. 12)

Transcription:

l nhk bn ḥṭn w r’y

Translation:

By *Nhk* son of *Ḥṭn* and he pastured (*r’y*).

Commentary:

A one-line inscription is written on a patinated surface of a tabular-scraper core. Tabular scrapers are one of the common implements in this region from the Chalcolithic Period to the Early Bronze Age, and it is probable that the discarded core was reused later by the inscriber. There is a thin line encircling around the inscription. The text shows the author’s name also in the typical formula with the preposition *l*, and his livelihood.

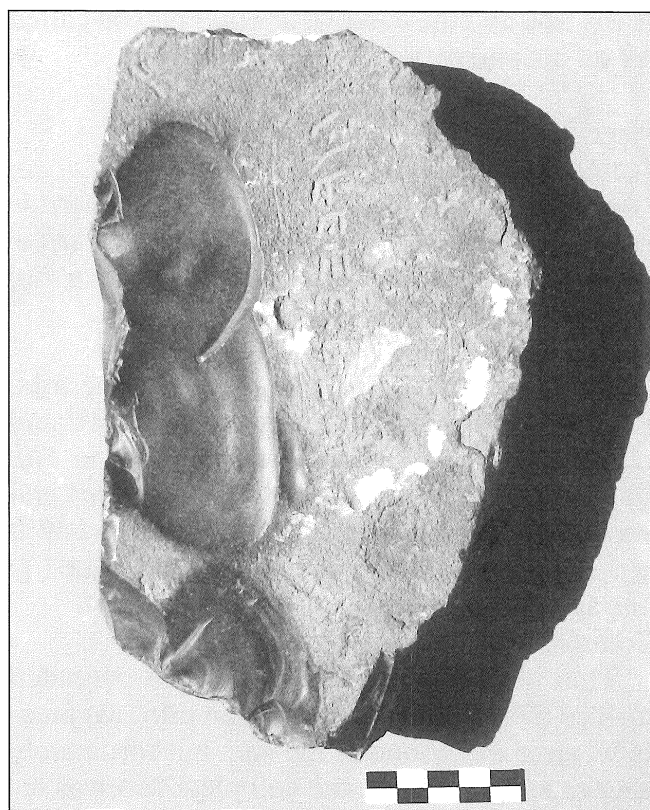
Inscription No. 11 (Fig. 13)

Transcription:

l lg’ w l’nt lt wh[(b)...]msh w n’m w l’n ml l’nh w l’[...]

Translation:

By *Lg’*; and may *Lt* curse (*l’nt*) *Whb*; and his ... and lived in comfort (*n’m*); and *Ml* cursed (*l’n*)



12. Inscription No. 10.



13. Inscription No. 11.

his curser (*l’nh*) and ...

Commentary:

The inscription is folded twice counterclockwise on the patinated flat surface of a cobble. It was apparently incised after a cobble was broken into off the rock. However, some parts of the stone were chipped off after the incising was done, and the inscription is missing in two places. The text shows a curse, and is composed of four parts: the author’s name, an invocation to the goddess *Lt* to curse *Whb*..., the description

7. In the text, third pers. masc. suffixed pron. *-h* is at-

tached to *’yl*.

of his life, and the curse of another person called *Ml* on his curser.

Inscription No. 16 (Fig. 14)

Transcription:

*l dwrs bn 'gm' bn ḥbk d 'l 'dw [w] ḏkrt lt wd w
gṭ w rḏwt w ḡṭ w tm w y'ly w yhd w ys' w 'srh w
hn' w zdlh w ḡṭ w 'slh w tm w 'mrt w w'lt w blḡ
w ḡṭ w ḥg w ḥbb 'l 'mr w ḥmlg w 'šy'n*

Translation:

By *Dwrs* son of '*gm*' son of *Ḥbk* of the tribe ('*l*) '*dw*; [and] may *Lt* remember (*ḏkrt*) *Wd* and *Ḡṭ* and *Rḏwt* and *Ḡṭ* and *Tm* and *Y'ly* and *Yhd* and *Ys'* and '*srh* (or "his family") and *Hn'* and *Zdlh* and *Ḡṭ* and '*slh* and *Tm* and '*mrt* and *W'lt* and *Blḡ* and *Ḡṭ* and *Ḥg* and *Ḥbb* of the tribe ('*l*) '*mr* and *Ḥmlg* and our companions ('*šy'n*).

Commentary:

This inscription is incised on the patinated surface of a cobble. It was broken into two pieces when it was found at the site, but fortunately after repair (bonding), the complete text was restored in very good condition. Moreover, such a long text is rarely seen in Hismaic. The text is inscribed in a whirl from the outside to the inside in a counterclockwise direction. There is a thin line encircling it, but one-fourth of it is unclear due to weathering. The text is a typical invocation to the goddess *Lt*, and includes many personal names.

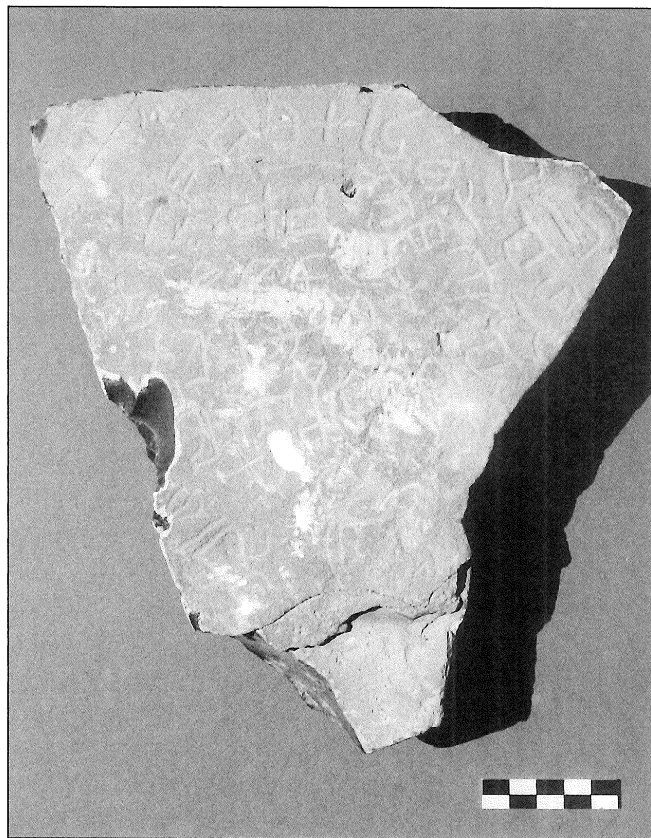
Inscription No. 24 (Fig. 15)

Transcription:

*l dḥt w ḏkrt lt l ḥdd w tm w ḥdd w mḥl[.] w
'nd[...]
f.ṭd'[.] w ḡdm [...] w lfrt [...]*



14. Inscription No. 16.



15. Inscription No. 24.

Translation:

By *Dḥt*; and may *Lt* remember (*ḏkrt*) for [sic] *Ḥdd* and *Tm* and *Ḥdd* and *Mḥl...* and '*nd...*
And *Ṭd'*... and *Ḡdm* ... and by *Frt...*

Commentary:

The inscription is vertically incised on a patinated flat surface of a cobble. It is composed of two parts, bending into different directions. The first part, which is longer than the second, is folded twice. The beginning of the second part is just to the right of the first part. The text is an invocation to the goddess *Lt*. There are several unreadable places due to scratching and thermal flaking. Above the fifteenth letter *d* (line 1), two letters ' *and l* can very slightly be seen on the edge of the stone,⁸ but its contextual connection with the main text is not clear. The second part of the inscription surrounds an incised drawing of a camel and a cross (*wasm?*).

Concluding Remarks

The Hismaic inscriptions from Rūs Abū Ṭulayḥa have provided the first glimpse into the ancient history of the Jafr basin, an area that

8. These two letters are not shown in the transliteration.

until now had been poorly investigated. The information provided by the texts indicates that the hill had something to do with the cult of a specific deity, *Lt*, as venerated by the ancient nomadic tribes of this region in a certain period. It is common among pre-Islamic Arabs to have their sanctuaries on the top of a mountain, as had the Nabateans, who undoubtedly had a close relationship with the writers of Hismaic inscriptions.⁹ It is most probable that the people inscribed their names and invocations and just left or piled them in heaps on the summit, thereby seeking fulfillment. Additionally, these inscriptions also include many new personal and tribal names, and will surely provide new onomastic information on the ancient tribal community of the Jafr basin.

Nevertheless, we have just come to the starting point. What we should address first is the collection and publication of basic information. A comprehensive report of all inscriptions found in the northwestern part the Jafr basin, including the other examples from Rūs Abū Ṭulayḥa, is due to be published in the near future by the second author.

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9. Nabateans and the writers of Hismaic inscriptions worshipped the same deities. Actually, Wādī Iram in south-

ern Jordan was the sanctuary of *al-Lāt* for both of them (Farès-Drappeau 1996).

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