

EARLY ISLAMIC INSCRIPTIONS FROM NORTHEAST JORDAN

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This study publishes fifteen new early Islamic-era Arabic inscriptions. They stem from the Jordanian panhandle in the northeastern part of the country, near the modern town of al-Ruwayshid. The inscriptions were recorded during the Badia Epigraphic Survey 2018. Three of the inscriptions give explicit dates in the latter half of the second century AH/eighth century CE. On the basis of paleography, I suggest that the rest of the inscriptions come from that era as well. The contents also support this: nine inscriptions were written by members of the same extended family; one of these nine carries a date (AH 158/774–775 CE), so the rest of the family can also be roughly dated on the basis of this information. The set published here attests to some new epigraphic formulae and two cases of an interesting use of the Quranic text. One inscription, found on top of a hill, is a prayer for rain during a drought. I also discuss the social and religious relevance of these inscriptions. In this article, Safaitic inscriptions – lapidary texts written in antiquity in Old Arabic dialects with the Safaitic script – are used as an analogue, which might help explain some aspects of nomadic life, such as seasonal migration, in the region in Islamic times as well. I analyze the members and the movements of the family that left nine inscriptions in the region.

INTRODUCTION

In this article, I present and analyze fifteen previously unpublished Arabic inscriptions from northeastern Jordan.¹ Three of the inscriptions are explicitly dated to the late second century AH/eighth century CE. I argue on the basis of paleography and the names occurring in the texts that the remaining thirteen inscriptions probably stem from the end of that century as well. Hence, they belong to the early Islamic era and provide interesting new insights into not only the epigraphic

¹ I give my thanks to the members of the Badia Epigraphic Survey 2018. Extra special thanks go to Ali Al-Manaser, who organized and took care of everything. Other team members (during my time in Jordan) included Abdullah Alhatlani, Josef Bloomfield, Michael Macdonald, Rosie Spence, and Phillip Stokes. I am very grateful to each of them for the fruitful conversations and wonderful time we had in the Jordanian desert. Ahmad Al-Jallad unfortunately arrived too late for me to catch him but I thank him for important discussions on, among other things, Arabian and Arabic epigraphy over the years. I am extremely grateful to our local guides and drivers Abdallah Falah and Abd al-Salam for taking us everywhere and for providing their invaluable local knowledge for our use. Many of the inscriptions would not have been found without them. I also want to thank Ghali Adi, Abdullah Alhatlani, Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, Marijn van Putten, and Mehdy Shaddel for discussing some of the inscriptions published here with me after the fieldwork. All remaining errors are naturally mine. I would also like to thank the peer-reviewers of this article for very valuable comments on the submitted version of this article.

habit of the inhabitants of that time and place but also their religious views. Nine inscriptions of the fifteen are written by the members of the same family, which I call the Banū ‘Āmir al-Yamāmī. They are not, in so far as I have been able to confirm, attested in classical Arabic historical or literary works. Moreover, the family’s inscriptions have not been found (or at least published) elsewhere according to the online *Thesaurus d’épigraphie islamique* (Kalus, Bauden & Soudan 2023) and my reading of the relevant publications of Arabic inscriptions from Jordan. Khaled al-Jbour worked (among other places) in the same area and published the Arabic inscriptions that he found in his dissertation (2006) but there is no overlap in the inscriptions published in this study and his.

The inscriptions were recorded during the Badia Epigraphic Survey 2018 led by Ali Al-Manaser and Michael Macdonald. The survey was undertaken as part of the Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia (OCIANA) project. During the 2018 field season, the Badia Epigraphic Survey took place from 31 March to 27 April in northeastern Jordan near the modern town of al-Ruwayshid. Al-Ruwayshid is located in the Jordanian panhandle, some 80 kilometers from the Iraqi border. The survey’s goal was to record inscriptions (in Safaitic, Arabic, and possibly other scripts or languages) found on the border of the *ḥarra*, the basalt stone desert, and the *ḥamād*, the inner desert, along the wadis near al-Ruwayshid. The places visited included for example Wadi Miqat, Wadi Khadiri, and Wadi Zheri. All inscriptions were photographed with their GPS coordinates included; the coordinates are mentioned in the discussion of each inscription below. The survey was carried out with the permission of and in co-operation with the Department of Antiquities in Jordan.

I took part in the survey for the period from 31 March to 12 April 2018. I was able to peruse in situ all of the inscriptions included in this article. All photographs are my own. The team of the Badia Epigraphic Survey also carried out fieldwork in 2019, but I was not able to participate then. This article does not include all of the early Islamic inscriptions which I photographed during 31 March–12 April. The epigraphic texts of this article have been selected on the basis of their importance (including three dated ones). I also wanted to concentrate on the Banū ‘Āmir al-Yamāmī family, whose inscriptions are all included in this study. Moreover, some of the remaining inscriptions in the data set still require work with regard to their reading and interpretation; I hope to publish them in a future study.

EPIGRAPHIC RESEARCH IN THE SYRO-JORDANIAN ḤARRA

Modern epigraphic research in the Syro-Jordanian *ḥarra*, the basalt stone desert, has uncovered a large number of inscriptions, providing interesting details about the lives and the literacy of the (nomadic) inhabitants of the region. Since surveys in Syria have been scant in recent years because of the civil war, I will concentrate here on the inscriptions of the Jordanian basalt stone desert, which is better documented, although the area forms a continuous geographical region, extending to Saudi Arabia as well.

In what follows, I discuss the various historical phases of inscription writing in the region. I dwell at some length on the Safaitic inscriptions because they can arguably enlighten some aspects of the epigraphic habit in early Islamic times as well, though there are marked differences in, particularly, the contents on the engraved texts (for a comparison of the two corpora, see Harjumäki & Lindstedt 2016: 69–87). I also discuss the most important scholarly publications of early Islamic inscriptions from Jordan and the general forms and formulae of these engraved texts.

The phases of the epigraphic habit in the region

The literacy – or at least the epigraphic habit – of the inhabitants of the Jordanian *ḥarra* was rather high in four historical periods and low in others. These eras have been noted in earlier surveys and studies, and during the Badia Epigraphic Survey 2018 I was able to witness this first-hand. The periods of high epigraphic activity are the following:

1) The period of the Safaitic inscriptions: The exact limits of the period when the Safaitic inscriptions were written are still unclear, but conventionally it is understood that the Safaitic inscriptions date from the first three centuries before and after the beginning of the Common Era, or thereabouts (Al-Jallad 2015: 17–18). The Safaitic corpus is vast: over 40,000 inscriptions have been published so far² and many more await discovery and publication. Most of the Safaitic corpus has been recorded in the Syro-Jordanian basalt desert, although we have a few inscriptions from nearby towns as well (Macdonald 1992a). The Safaitic inscriptions can be categorized as graffiti, that is, non-commissioned texts. The majority of writers of Safaitic were nomadic, a fact that is explicit in their lapidary texts,³ although it is also clear that they had constant contact with the settled populations of the nearby regions, some of them learning Greek, for instance (Macdonald 2014). Interestingly, it seems that Safaitic was not used to write on perishable materials such as papyrus.

Safaitic is, strictly speaking, a script; the dialects expressed in this script belong arguably to the Old Arabic continuum (Al-Jallad 2015: 10–14). The Safaitic script is related to other Ancient North Arabian scripts, although their developments are somewhat unclear. The rather wide literacy (or at least the skill to write short and sometimes longer inscriptions) among a nomadic population is somewhat surprising at first blush but clearly supported by the surviving evidence: tens of thousands of Safaitic inscriptions written by a very large number of different individuals (Macdonald 2006). As stated, we do not know the end date of the Safaitic inscriptions with any certainty, but usually it is understood that they were no longer produced a few centuries before Islam. The reason for the disappearance of the Safaitic and other Ancient North Arabian scripts is unknown (Macdonald 2009). During the period when the Safaitic inscriptions were produced, some Greek and Nabataean inscriptions were also engraved in the region (Al-Jallad 2015: 4).

2) The second period of higher epigraphic activity in the area starts in the late first century AH/early eighth century CE. The earliest Islamic-era dated inscription found in Jordan is the building inscription of Qaṣr Burqu'. It is dated to AH 81/700–701 CE; nowadays, it can be found in the museum of Qaṣr al-Azraq. We also have an inscription from AH 92/710 and a few from AH 100/718–719 CE (for these texts, see Imbert 1998: 404–406; Lindstedt 2019: 213, 217–218, 220).

However, it was the second/eighth century that was the most active in the early Islamic period in Jordan, this phase of epigraphic habit dying out by the fourth/tenth century (Imbert 1998: 46). Most early Islamic inscriptions are graffiti, although monumental ones have been published as well. The inscriptions presented in this study belong to this phase; all are graffiti (for a definition and characteristics of graffiti in the early Islamic context, see Lindstedt 2022: 196–199).

2 See the online database <<http://krcfm.orient.ox.ac.uk/fmi/webd/ociana>>.

3 Macdonald (2006: 78) notes: “The content of these graffiti, when it is more than purely personal names, is concerned exclusively with nomadic life and 98% of them have been found in the desert and almost nowhere else. There is, therefore, no doubt that the vast majority of them were carved by nomads rather than by settled people.”

Jordan has yielded hundreds of early Islamic inscriptions (see Imbert 1995; 1998; al-Jbour 2001; 2006; Karīm 2001; 2002; 2003; Salamen 2010; Lindstedt 2014; al-Bqā'īn, Corbett and Khamis 2015). Since only a minority of them have been explicitly dated by their writers, scholars have to resort to paleography to assess their dates (see the Appendix to the present study for the features of Arabic script that are distinctly early Islamic).

3) The seventh/thirteenth century (the Mamluk era) brings about a resurgence in the engraving of inscriptions in the Jordanian desert. As in other periods, the inscriptions are principally graffiti. The epigraphic activity seems to dwindle after the ninth/fifteenth century (Imbert 1998: 46).

4) The latest phase of high epigraphic habit (at least in the surviving evidence) begins in the modern period, especially after the 1970s CE, when literacy increased substantially among the Bedouin of the area through government efforts to educate them (Macdonald 2006: 47). The Badia Epigraphic Survey 2018 photographed a rich corpus of modern inscriptions as well. Many of them are beautiful and well-engraved long inscriptions. They and other modern inscriptions from the region await a thorough study.

Some general statements can be put forward about the epigraphic activity of over two millennia in the Jordanian *ḥarra*. Most inhabitants and the engravers of the inscriptions in the Jordanian basalt stone desert have been nomadic until the present day; most epigraphic texts found in the region can be termed graffiti, that is, non-commissioned inscriptions; most of the texts are highly formulaic, although the popular formulae are different in each phase; and most inscriptions are Arabic in language, which attests to the continuing presence of Arabic dialects in the area, even before Islam.

In what follows, I will discuss phases one (Safaitic) and two (early Islamic) of epigraphic activity in the region because they are important for the background of the inscriptions published in this article. Phases three (the Mamluk era) and four (modern) await definite studies and will not be considered here.

The Safaitic corpus

As mentioned, the Safaitic corpus (most of it recorded in the Jordanian basalt stone desert) is huge. I will discuss a few features in the Safaitic inscriptions since they provide interesting information about the movements of the people that wrote them, their livelihood, and so on. These aspects are not normally encountered in the early Islamic-era Arabic inscriptions, which are by and large religious. Of course, the names mentioned in the Islamic inscriptions can be used to study the movements and dwelling places of their writers, but the engravers themselves do not refer to their activities: they concentrate more on the afterlife than this world. This is in contrast to the Safaitic inscriptions, which discuss only the present life. Although some contain prayers to deities, there is no sign of any idea of an afterlife in the inscriptions (Harjumäki & Lindstedt 2016: 72–75).

As far as I know, none of the tribal groups mentioned in the Safaitic inscriptions are attested in early Islamic-era Arabic inscriptions from the area. However, it can be at least hypothetically suggested that many of the aspects of nomadic life and livelihood stayed the same. Hence, the Safaitic inscriptions might also be used to understand life in the desert in the early Islamic era, though this should be done with some caveats.

The Safaitic inscriptions are key to understanding transhumance in the period that they were produced. The most significant study on this aspect of life was written by Michael Macdonald (1992b). In his article, Macdonald maps the movement of the nomadic groups during the seasons attested in the Safaitic corpus: *s²ty* (winter, October–February), *dt'* (the season of the later rains, February–April), *syf* (early summer, April–July), and *qyz* (the dry season, July–October). However, the term *syf* is rare, so it can be argued that the season of *qyz* could have been understood by most writers of Safaitic inscriptions as extending from April to October, making the number of actual seasons three (Al-Jallad 2015: 212).

Be that as it may, the nomads migrated in, to, and from the desert depending on the season and where water and herbage could be found. This can be reconstructed by both the explicit mentions of migration in the Safaitic corpus as well as the distribution where the texts mentioning different seasons can be found (Macdonald 1992b: 4). It was common for the nomads to spend the rainy season, when herbage and water could be found, in the desert (which in Safaitic is called *mabr*; Macdonald 1992b: 7). During the hot and dry seasons, they would migrate to a place of permanent water, such as *brkt*, interpreted as the watering place at (the later) Qaṣr Burqu' (Macdonald 1992b: 8–9), or Ḥawrān. To quote another study by Macdonald (2014: 149):

There are a number of inscriptions which mention their authors' dealings with the Ḥawrān and which suggest that they sometimes pastured their animals there. For instance, one says that he drove his camels back to the desert on account of snow in the Ḥawrān, and several say that they began their migration eastwards to the inner desert from there. Since this migration begins with the first rains in October, this suggests that they had been spending the dry season, *qyz* (July to October), in the well-watered Ḥawrān.

Macdonald suggests the following scenario: after spending most of the dry season, *qyz*, near reliable watering places, the nomads would migrate to the edge of the *ḥarra* (basalt stone desert; in Safaitic, *hrt*) and camp in areas of semi-permanent water, awaiting the first rains. These would start the season of *s²ty*. They would then then migrate to the inner desert (Safaitic *mabr*, modern Arabic *ḥamād*), where they would spend *s²ty* and *dt'* pasturing. At the end of *dt'* or the beginning of *syf*, they would begin their return to, first, the *ḥarra* and, then, the permanent watering places, until the cycle of movement would start again (Macdonald 1992b: 9–10).

Although the early Islamic inscriptions do not refer explicitly to the migrations of the people who wrote them, we can putatively suggest that their yearly movements were akin to what can be reconstructed on the basis of the Safaitic inscriptions. Indeed, Macdonald (1992b: 9) finds the modern nomadic inhabitants of the region following similar patterns of movement. I will come back to this question toward the end of this article.

While many nomads of the *ḥarra* learned how to read and write their Old Arabic dialects in the Safaitic script, the only writing material widely available to them was rocks. This affects the contents of the texts they wrote since, naturally, the basalt desert rocks “are not much use for writing lists, letters, or other everyday documents” (Macdonald 2006: 71). Hence, the writing of Safaitic inscriptions served the purpose of both pastime and “emotional outlet” for the nomads who wrote them (Macdonald 2006: 77). Ahmad Al-Jallad (2015: 7) qualifies Macdonald's suggestion by noting that “writing in the Safaitic context was not a practice of unstructured self-expression, but a genre of rock art restricted by stylistic and thematic formulae.”

Interestingly, for this period, we have little evidence of the level of literacy of the people living in the countryside or towns in southern Syria since they did not write many inscriptions but might have used perishable materials. We have more evidence for widespread literacy

among the nomads precisely because they wrote their texts on stone in an area where there has not been much building or other activity that would have destroyed the material (Macdonald 2006: 79–80).

This can offer some analogues for the Islamic period as well. It is, for example, rather useful to understand the early Islamic-era Arabic inscriptions as (somewhat restricted) self-expression similar to the Safaitic ones, even though the formulae and themes are different in the Islamic lapidary texts, mostly consisting of supplications to God (Lindstedt 2021: 421–426).

However, by the seventh and eighth centuries CE, the socio-political context in Jordan was very different from the pre-Islamic period. The Muslim conquests brought about a political entity, the caliphate (Kennedy 2016). The area now belonged to the Umayyad caliphate, which ruled (mostly) from Damascus. We do not know enough of the modes of education in the earliest Islamic era to offer anything precise, but it can be safe to say that literacy was a valued tool to access the Qurʾān, other literature, and documents. In urban contexts, there was formal and semi-formal teaching of and in Arabic (see the various studies in Günther 2020), although how nomads could have accessed that education is unclear. With the conquest, the use of Arabic as an oral and written language advanced immensely and started to displace Aramaic as the lingua franca of the medieval Middle East. Furthermore, Arabic now had one common script (which developed from the Nabataean one) that was used, almost exclusively, to express the language, whereas in the pre-Islamic period the language was written in various scripts, for example Safaitic (Al-Jallad 2015: 2–20), Nabataean (Nehmé 2010), and Greek (Al-Jallad 2017).

It is, nonetheless, an interesting and unanswered question why the epigraphic habit – and, probably, literacy – among the nomads of the Jordanian basalt desert was high in some centuries and negligible or non-existent in others.⁴ The periods of high epigraphic activity, according to the evidence extant from the basalt desert, are the era of the Safaitic inscriptions (whatever its limits might exactly be), the 7th–9th centuries, the 13th–15th centuries, and the 20th–21st centuries CE.

The early Islamic-era Arabic corpus

The important publications of early Islamic (the first two centuries AH) Arabic inscriptions from Jordan were mentioned above.⁵ Here, I will mention a few important thematic and formulaic features in early Islamic inscription in general; the inscriptions recorded in Jordan do not differ in any significant way from the general formulae and contents of early Islamic lapidary texts (the following sketch is based on Lindstedt 2021: 417–427).

Early Islamic inscriptions can be divided into two categories: 1) monumental and commissioned inscriptions and 2) graffiti, or non-commissioned inscriptions. All inscriptions published

4 The statement in Macdonald 2014: 146, that the Safaitic corpus represents “the only time” in the history of the nomads of the region when they “had learnt to read and write”, is erroneous, given the abundance of Arabic inscriptions in the early Islamic and Mamluk periods and given that it is rather safe to assume that the writers of these inscriptions were nomadic as well. It is of course possible that Macdonald rather means “the first time”, but then one wonders what could have been the easily accessible and learnable script (and language) for the nomads of the basalt desert to use in the first millennium BCE before Safaitic or other forms of Ancient North Arabian scripts.

5 Note that the online database *Thesaurus d'épigraphie islamique* (Kalus, Bauden & Soudan 2023) allows searching with a location, so Arabic inscriptions from Jordan, or any other place, can be easily located with its help.

in this article are graffiti. For this reason, I will discuss here exclusively the formulae of early Islamic-era Arabic graffiti.

The writers of graffiti conventionally wrote in the third person. Against this convention however, some engravers chose to write in the first person, starting the text with *anā*, ‘I am [so-and-so].’⁶ Sometimes the writers switch between the first and the third person (Lindstedt 2021: 424). All inscriptions published in this article are written in the third person.

Another convention is to use the suffix conjugation of the verb (the so-called perfect tense): e.g., *ghafara*, ‘to forgive’. In modern Arabic, this mostly conveys the meaning of the past tense, but, in classical Arabic, the significations are more varied. In many epigraphic texts, the suffix conjugation should be interpreted as the precative (*ghafara Allāh*, ‘may God forgive’) or performative (*āmantu bi-llāh*, ‘I [state that I] believe in God’), rather than the past tense. Nonetheless, the past tense also features (*kataba*, ‘he wrote [this inscription]’). Imperative verbal forms appear too, in particular when requesting something from God (*Allāhumma ghfir*, ‘O God! Forgive [so-and-so]’).

Graffiti have a rather wide variety of different contents, though the engravers often resorted to standard epigraphic formulae. Most early Islamic graffiti are supplications to God, with writers asking for God’s mercy or forgiveness. They often also ask God to make them enter paradise. In addition to supplications to God, the engravers can declare their faith in God, stating that they believe, take refuge, or seek shelter in Him (often the testimony and supplication are combined, as in the AH 158 inscription written by Aktal son of ‘Āmir published in this article).

Sometimes the writers of lapidary texts quote or allude to the Quran. This can be seen in this article in the examples of the AH 158 inscription just mentioned and in another engraved by Janāh son of al-Ḥawshab. These Quranic quotations are often rather free: more like allusions to the text rather than verbatim quotations of it (Lindstedt 2021: 425).

In addition to these various themes, there are some rarer ones, such as *waṣīyyas* (graffiti offering advice to the readers), inscriptions quoting poetry, and, finally, miscellaneous graffiti which do not fall neatly into any category (Lindstedt 2021: 425–427).

THE NEW INSCRIPTIONS PUBLISHED IN THIS STUDY

Conventions

Below, I adduce the Arabic text (in Arabic script) and the translation into English of each inscription. In the Arabic script, have added consonantal diacritics – which are generally not present in the original inscriptions – but, in general, not the vowels or *hamzas*. In presenting the inscriptions, I use the Leiden conventions as adapted for Arabic epigraphy (Blair 1998: 222–223), with some changes:

[] Square brackets indicate a lacuna where the original text has been lost. Square brackets are not repeated in the translations of the inscriptions. I also use the square brackets to insert the medial *alif*, which is not generally written in early Arabic script but which is required in classical and modern Arabic orthography. In reconstructing missing parts of the text, square brackets will be used in the following ways in this article:

[*allāh*] A proposed reconstruction of the lacuna.

6 In strict classical Arabic, the first person pronoun is, in fact, *ana*, not *anā*.

[...] Restoration of the missing part is not attempted; each dot represents roughly one letter (in the original Arabic).

<> Angle brackets are used for signs left out by the writer where no damage is visible and where additions or corrections are proposed by me.

≠ Indicates a line break in the middle of a word.

(!) Indicates “sic!” That is, the word in question is spelled in a way that deviates from standard Arabic orthography.

No. 1: AH 146, ... son of ‘Alī



Figure 1 Inscription no. 1

1. O God, forgive
2. ... son of ‘Alī
3. al-Kā...ī
4. forgive ...
5. And he wrote in the year
6. six and forty
7. and one hundred (= 763–764 CE).

اللهم اغفر
 لـ[....] بن علي
 الكا[...]
 غفر [....]
 وكتب في سنة
 ست وأربعين
 ومائة

Coordinates: latitude: 32° 16' 2.802" N, longitude: 37° 56' 8.34" E.

Commentary: The reading of the contents of the text and the name of the writer is uncertain. However, it seems to be a standard early Islamic graffito where the writer asks for God's forgiveness. Fortunately, though lines 1–4 are rather effaced, the year of the writing in lines 5–7 is easy to read. This is the earliest of the three dated inscriptions in this epigraphic set.

No. 2: AH 158, (al-)Aktal son of 'Āmir



Figure 2 Inscription no. 2

[ان ا] لاكنل بن عامر يشهد الا
 [اله] الا الله وحده لا شريك له
 [يسل]ك اللهم بعزتك وبقدرتك
 وبِعظمتك وبسلطانك ان يزحزحه
 عن النار برحمتك ويدخله
 الجنة يرزق فيها بغير حساب
 وغفر لمن قرا هذا
 الكتاب وقال آمين رب
 العالمين وكتب سنة
 [ث]مان وخمسين ومائة

1. Al-Aktal son of 'Āmir testifies that there is no
2. god but God alone, He has no partners.
3. He asks you, O God, with your majesty, strength,
4. greatness, and power, that you keep him (*yuzahziḥahu*, cf. Q. 3:185)
5. away from hellfire with Your mercy (*bi-rahmatika*), and make him enter
6. paradise, where he is nourished (*yurzaqu*) to excess (*bi-ghayr ḥisāb*).
7. And forgive who reads this
8. inscription and says, "Amen, Lord
9. of the world." And he wrote / was written in the year
10. eight and fifty and one hundred (= 774–775 CE).

Coordinates: latitude: 32° 16' 1.872" N, longitude: 37° 56' 9.306" E.

Commentary: The right side of the inscription has suffered some weathering over the centuries but can be rather easily reconstructed, even in those lines that contain lacunae. As regards its contents, the inscription is a rather typical testimony of faith, with some allusions to the Quranic text. The phrase *yuzahziḥahu 'an al-nār* on lines 4–5 is unusual in early Islamic-era Arabic graffiti, however. It is a reference Quran 3:185, which states, among other things, *fa-man zuḥziḥa 'ani l-nāri*

wa-'udkhila l-jannati fa-qad fāza, 'whoever is kept away from hellfire and admitted to paradise⁷ will have triumphed'. The writer of this inscription has modified the Quranic text according to his needs and added the word *bi-rahmatika* between the two elements: hellfire and paradise. The word *'ālamīn* occurs in plene spelling in this inscription; this is quite rare for early Islamic inscriptions (and basically non-existent for the Quran).

The same individual left three other inscriptions that are published in this article; moreover, his extended family members engraved other lapidary texts. The reading of the name is, nonetheless, somewhat uncertain. I suggest that it be read (al-)Aktal, a rare name (al-Zabīdī: XXX, 314); another possibility would be (al-)Ukayl <<https://onomasticon.irht.cnrs.fr/en/entry/id/111699>>. In this inscription, the name appears with the definite article *al-*; below, in no. 4, it appears without. This is not completely unusual in Arabic: for instance, both Ḥasan (indefinite) and al-Ḥasan (definite) appear as forms of the same name (Endress 1988: 150). All in all, though the exact form of the name of this person is somewhat conjectural, for simplicity's sake I will refer to him as Aktal son of 'Āmir in the rest of the article. Notably, this inscription provides a year (AH 158), which will help date the other members of the Banū 'Āmir al-Yamāmī who left their engravings (to be discussed below) in the region where we conducted the fieldwork.

No. 3: AH 169, Sufyān son of Jubayr



Figure 3 Inscription no. 3

اللهم مالك الملك رحمن
الدنيا ورحمن الآخر انت
رحمن ورحيم بهما ارحمني في
حاجتي رحمة يغنيني بها عن رحمة
من سواك وكتب سفيان
بن جبير المالكي سنة تسع وستين ومئة

⁷ As far as I have been able to ascertain, the phrase does not appear in other inscriptions in this form; see s.v. *zahḥaḥa* in Kalus, Bauden & Soudan 2023. However, many epitaphs quote Quran 3:185, which the inscription discussed here alludes to and modifies, verbatim. It should be noted that in strict classical Arabic, the 3sg.m. suffix, after short syllables, is, in fact, long *-hū* and *-hī*.

1. O God, Possessor of majesty (Q. 3:26), the Merciful
2. in this world and the Merciful in the hereafter, You are
3. Merciful and Compassionate in both of them (*scil.* the two worlds). Be merciful in
4. my needs with a mercy that makes superfluous the mercy
5. of other (beings) than You; and wrote Sufyān
6. son of Jubayr al-Mālikī year nine and sixty and one hundred (= 785–786 CE)

Coordinates: latitude: 32° 16' 2.1" N, longitude: 37° 56' 8.172" E.

Commentary: The reading of this inscription is rather straightforward, though the decade is oddly written. The interpretation of line 3 is not completely certain; for example, what I take to be a *nūn* at the end of the first word has an unusual shape. In line 6, it should read *sittīn*, 'sixty', but the writer forgot to write one denticle. At first blush, the *nisba* al-Mālikī struck me as surprising. It usually refers to the Mālikī school of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). However, Mālik ibn Anas, the eponymous founder of the school, died in AH 179, ten years after the writing of this inscription. The inscription would then be evidence of people affiliating with Mālik ibn Anas and his school very early on, in contrast to what the current scholarship suggests (e.g., Melchert 1997): the schools of jurisprudence are understood as forming slowly during the third–fourth/ninth–tenth centuries.

And indeed, a more credible solution suggests itself, since al-Samʿānī (V, 177–179) notes that the *nisba* al-Mālikī was carried for a variety of reasons. For instance, there was a village on the Euphrates called al-Mālikiyya. Moreover, there was a clan with the name Mālik ibn Kaʿb ibn Saʿd to which this person might have belonged.

Three other early Islamic inscriptions including the *nisba* al-Mālikī were found in northeast Jordan by al-Jbour (2006: 216), who interprets them as indicating the Mālikī school of *fiqh*. However, as I mentioned, this might not be so. In any case, on the basis of the names in the inscriptions published by al-Jbour, they do not appear to be (at least close) family members of this Sufyān son of Jubayr.

No. 4: Aktal son of ʿĀmir



Figure 4 Inscription no. 4

1. May God forgive Aktal
2. ibn ‘Āmir his sins,
3. the earlier and later ones.
4. Amen, Lord of the world.

غفر الله لاكتل
بن عامر ذنبه
قديمه وحديثه
أمين رب العلمين-ن]

Coordinates: latitude: 32° 19’ 48.108” N, longitude: 38° 0’ 14.742” E.

Commentary: This inscription was written by the same author as the one who engraved the text dated to AH 158. Here, the name appears without the definite article. There appears to be two dots on top of each other, producing the letter *tā* and supporting the reading Aktal rather than Ukayl.

No. 5: ‘Aṣīm son of ‘Āmir

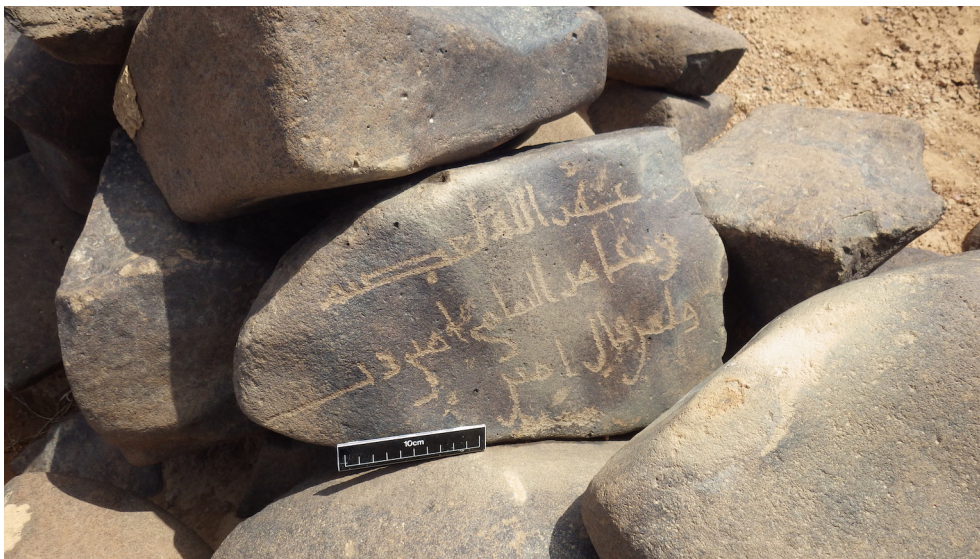


Figure 5 Inscription no. 5

1. May God forgive ‘Aṣīm
2. son of ‘Āmir al-Yamāmī, amen, O Lord!
3. And [may He forgive] the one who says: “Amen.”

غفر الله لعصيم
بن عامر اليمامي آمين رب
ولمن قال آمين

Coordinates: latitude: 32° 16’ 1.914” N, longitude: 37° 56’ 10.362” E.

Commentary: I suggest that this person is the brother of Aktal son of ‘Āmir. If so, here we receive more information about the family, since the *nisba* al-Yamāmī is used. It refers to the geographical region of al-Yamāma, corresponding to the southeastern Najd in Saudi Arabia. It is possible that the family in question moved to what is modern-day eastern Jordan from al-Yamāma during or after the early Islamic conquests in the first/seventh century.

The name of this person appears to be ‘Aṣīm. Note that he uses a diacritical mark, a round dot, under the letter *ṣ*, probably a vowel mark (*-i*). By this usage, the writer specifies that his name is not ‘Uṣaym. The name ‘Aṣīm, though rare, sometimes appears in Arabic literature: for instance, one transmitter of prophetic traditions is called al-‘Alā’ ibn ‘Aṣīm (Ibn Abī Ḥātim: VI, 359). The use of the vowel mark is interesting, because they are not, insofar as I know, attested in other early Islamic inscriptions. Indeed, such round dots marking vowels are used “almost exclusively in Qur’ans” (Gacek 2012: 288) and not in other manuscripts (see Dutton 1999 for the development of Arabic vocalization).

No. 6: Rawq son of ‘Aṣīm and Ya‘mar son of al-Naḏīd*Figure 6* Inscription no. 6

1. May God forgive Rawq
2. son of ‘Aṣīm
3. al-Yamāmī
4. his earlier sins
5. and the later ones.
6. And (may God forgive) Ya‘mar son of al-Naḏīd.

غفر الله لروق
ابن عصيم
اليمامي
ما تقدم من ذنبيه
وما تأخر
ولي عمر بن النضيد

Coordinates: latitude: 32° 14' 49.38" N, longitude: 37° 51' 47.778" E.

Commentary: Here we encounter a son of ‘Aṣīm son of ‘Āmir, discussed above (no. 5). He is called Rawq (for this name, see <<https://onomasticon.irht.cnrs.fr/en/entry/id/12239>>); we will encounter a brother of his, by the name of Ṭawq, below. The contents of the inscription are, in themselves, rather usual (“forgive the earlier and later sins of PN”). Interestingly, though the inscription is, in my opinion, written with the same hand throughout, line 6 presents a new name: Ya‘mar son of al-Naḏīd. It is very likely that the two (Rawq and Ya‘mar) were both present at the same spot at the same time, though we do not know anything more about their relationship. It is difficult to say which one of them might have written the text. Notably, Ya‘mar’s brother ‘Ammār left two inscriptions (nos. 7 and 8), to be discussed presently. The father’s name, al-Naḏīd, is peculiar and rare. It is an adjective denoting ‘orderly; arranged in rows’, a word appearing once in the Quran too (Badawi & Abdel Haleem 2008: 945).

An inscription written by the same individual that is mentioned here, Ya‘mar son of al-Naḏīd, was found by al-Jbour (2006: 77–78). Notably, in that inscription there is a *nisba* written, which is interpreted by al-Jbour as al-Mashja‘ī; he notes that Mashja‘a was a clan of the Banū Quḏā‘a.

No. 7: 'Ammār son of al-Naḏīd



Figure 7 Inscription no. 7

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ
 اللّٰهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلٰی مُحَمَّدٍ فِی
 الْوَلٰئِن (!) بَارِكْ عَلَیْهِ فِی الْاٰخِرِیْنَ
 اللّٰهُمَّ مَا قَالْ فَصَدَّقْهُ وَمَا شَفَعْ فَشَفَعْهُ اٰمِیْنَ
 وَكَتَبْ عَمَارُ بْنُ النُّضَیْدِ
 غَفَرَ اللّٰهُ لَهٗ وَلِوَالِدِیْهِ وَلِمَا وُلِدَا
 وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِیْنَ وَالْمُؤْمِنٰتِ الْحَیِّا (!) مِنْهُم
 وَالْمَوٰتِ (!) وَالْفِی مَنْ فَاوْ بِهْم
 عَلٰی الْخَیْرٰتِ اٰمِیْنَ رَبِّ الْعٰلَمِیْنَ

1. In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.
2. O God, extol Muḥammad among
3. the first (*alawwalīn*) and bless him among the last.
4. O God! What he has said, consider it true, and whom he has interceded for (*mā shafa'a*), accept the intercession (*fa-shaffi'hu*). Amen.
5. 'Ammār son of al-Naḏīd wrote [this inscription],
6. may God forgive him, his parents (*li-wālidayhi*) and their offspring (*li-mā waladā*),
7. and the male and female believers, both the living (*alāhyā'*) among them
8. and the lifeless (*alamwāt*). And may He reconcile those who give in return (*fā'ū*) to them (the believers)
9. the good things. Amen, Lord of the world.

Coordinates: latitude: 32° 20' 27.576" N, longitude: 38° 2' 53.436" E.

Commentary: The inscription is well preserved and easy to read. Only the top left corner has undergone some damage. The text is very interesting in content and, moreover, includes some interesting linguistic features. It is written by 'Ammār son of al-Naḏīd. We encountered his brother Ya'mar in the previous inscription where he was mentioned alongside Rawq son of 'Aṣīm.

The inscription attests some interesting spellings, which probably reflect the writers spoken dialect. Usually, the imperative verb *ṣalli* is spelled *ṣ-l-y* in early inscriptions, probably indicating the pronunciation *ṣallī* (Lindstedt 2021: 431, n. 60). Here (line 2), however, what became the Classical Arabic spelling, *ṣ-l*, is found.

The inscription also attests what the Arabic grammarians and philologists termed *naql*, that is, the loss of post-consonantal *hamza*. Hence, we have:

al-ʿawwalīn > *alawwalīn* (line 3)

al-ʿahyāʾ > *alahyāʾ* (line 7)

al-ʿamwāt > *alamwāt* (line 8)

This feature is attested, inter alia, in the Quranic reading of Warsh (d. 197/812), the transmitter from the Medinan canonical reader Nāfiʿ (d. 169/785). Thus, this is how those words (and other similar ones) are pronounced in his reading of the Quran. Naturally, the writer of this epigraphic text, ʿAmmār son of al-Naḏīd (probably a contemporary of Warsh and/or Nāfiʿ) is not relying on that specific reading tradition of the Quran in his inscription, but the way he wrote these three words in all likelihood reflects his own spoken dialect.

As regards the contents, the inscription evidences beliefs about the prophet Muḥammad. If I interpret line 4 correctly, the writer asks God (or perhaps the reader) to consider true what the prophet has said – an allusion to the *ḥadīths*, or prophetic dicta, which the scholars were busy collecting at the moment of the writing of this inscription, which we can hypothetically place around the year AH 200/815 CE. It also refers to the prophet’s intercession on the judgment day.

No. 8: ʿAmmār son of al-Naḏīd



Figure 8 Inscription no. 8

1. May God be merciful to ʿAmmār son of
2. al-Naḏīd with mercy that protects him
3. from the hellfire. Amen, Lord
4. of the world.

رحم الله عمار بن
النضيد رحمة جنبه بها
من النار امين رب
العلمين

Coordinates: latitude: 32° 20' 27.552" N, longitude: 38° 2' 53.49" E.

Commentary: This inscription is on the same stone as the previous inscription, but on a different side of the stone. The writing technique (scratching) and hand is very different from the previous inscription, which makes one think that this inscription was written by someone other than

‘Ammār, probably someone who had read ‘Ammār’s earlier inscription and was asking God’s mercy for ‘Ammār. However, the contents of the inscription are somewhat similar to the inscription just described since both address the hereafter.

The phrase *raḥima allāh* could be understood to mean that the person in question for whom mercy is asked (in this case, ‘Ammār) is dead, but this is not always the case for the early period. One inscription, dated to AH 91/710 CE, notes toward the end *raḥima allāh man qara’a hādihā al-kitāb*, ‘may God have mercy on whoever recites this inscription’ (Lindstedt 2019: 217).

No. 9: Janāḥ son of al-Ḥawshab



Figure 9 Inscription no. 9

[أ] اللهم غفر لجناح بن الحوشب
ذنبه قدمه وحدثه رب وقه حر
سقر انها سات مرلا (!) وسات (!)
المستقر رب وغفر لمن قلامن (!)

1. O God, forgive Janāḥ son of al-Ḥawshab
2. his earlier and later sins, O Lord! Protect him against the heat
3. of the hellfire (*saqar*)! It is foul (*sā’at*) as a place of residence (read: *manzilan?*) and foul (read: *wa-sā’at?*)
4. as the fixed abode (*al-mustaqarr*). Lord! And forgive the one who says: “Amen.”

Coordinates: latitude: 32° 19’ 48.246” N, longitude: 38° 0’ 14.814” E.

Commentary: This is a very peculiar inscription, the reading of which is not totally certain. It is possible that this person, Janāḥ son of al-Ḥawshab, was not very used to writing. In line 1, the engraver writes the (*i*)*ghfir* imperative without the initial *alif*, possibly indicating the assimilated form *allāhummaghfir*. In any case, the imperative form (*i*)*ghfir* is confirmed by the other imperative *qi-hi* in line 2. He uses the same *alif*-less spelling in line 4.

The usual phrase *ighfir li-fulān dhanbahu qadīmahu wa-ḥadīthahu*, is here (line 2) written *q-d-m-h w-h-d-th-h*, the *yā*’ omitted. This could indicate that the writer was intending, instead, *dhanbahu qaddamahu wa-ḥaddathahu*; the translation remains the same: ‘forgive his earlier and later sins’. This could also be a spelling mistake.

I suggest, on the basis of common epigraphic formulae, that the last word, or two words (قلامن), represents (the standard) *qāla āmīn*. The writer would have omitted the medial *alif* of *qāla* and further-

more spelled *āmīn* as *ʿ-m-n*, without the *yāʿ*, which sometimes occurs in other early inscriptions as well (see, e.g., the AH 112 inscription in Nevo, Cohen & Heftman 1993: 18). This could suggest an alternative pronunciation of the word, *āmīn*, in some Arabic dialects of the time. In the present inscription, the spelling *قلامن* might also reflect an otherwise unattested assimilated form **qālāmin*.

As regards the contents, the inscription alludes, rather freely, to Quran 25:65–66, which reads:

وَالَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا اصْرِفْ عَنَّا عَذَابَ جَهَنَّمَ إِنَّ عَذَابَهَا كَانَ غَرَامًا
إِنَّهَا سَاءَتْ مُسْتَقَرًّا وَمُقَامًا

Those who [*scil.* the servants of God] say, “Our Lord, turn away from us the torment of hell; its torment is dreadful! It is foul as a fixed abode and as a resting place (*innahā sāʿat mustaqarran wa-muqāman*)!”

The engraver rather freely reworks the Quranic text and, in all likelihood, is quoting from memory. Moreover, Janāḥ made some grammatical and spelling mistakes in his formulation. For example, the word which in all likelihood should be read *manzilan* is written with a letter missing. However, the spelling as it stands (*m-r-l-ā* or *m-z-l-ā*) does not yield any cogent meaning, so I suggest emending it to *manzilan*. One can speculate a possible assimilated dialect variant, **mazzilan*.

Inscriptions from a hill

The following inscriptions (nos. 10–15) were found on the top of the same hill (*jabal*; for pictures of the hill and a map, see below). The modern local name of the hill is unknown to me, but it can easily be located on the basis of the coordinates given below. The hill seems to have carried special meaning. Other early Islamic inscriptions recorded during the Badia Epigraphic Survey 2018 were found on low ground; these were the only inscriptions found on a hill. This is in contrast to the Safaitic inscriptions, which are often found on high places.

No. 10: Aktal son of ʿĀmir



Figure 10 Inscription no. 10

1. May God forgive al-Aktal
2. ibn ʿĀmir his earlier
3. and later sins

غفر الله للاكتل
بن عامر ما تقدم
من ذنبه وما تأخر

Coordinates: latitude: 32° 9' 9.174" N, longitude: 37° 52' 59.124" E.

Commentary: We have already encountered this person, the author of inscriptions nos. 2 and 4 discussed above. Here, his name appears with the definite article. As regards the contents, this short inscription tells very little, but it places (al-)Aktal on the top of this hill. The following inscription, from the same hill, mentions the same person.

No. 11: Aktal son of 'Āmir



Figure 11 Inscription no. 11

1. O God, forgive al-Aktal ibn
2. 'Āmir. O Lord!

اللهم اغفر للكتل بن
عامر رب

Coordinates: latitude: 32° 9' 9.192" N, longitude: 37° 52' 59.154" E.

Commentary: The same name mentioned in the previous inscription occurs here. However, here the preposition *li-* followed by the name appears as *l-l-k-t-l*, a peculiar spelling probably reflecting the linguistic feature of *naql* (the loss of post-consonantal *hamza*) encountered also in no. 7. The combination was probably pronounced as *lilaktal* (instead of *li'aktal*).

While in the three Aktal inscriptions above the hand seems to be the same (and the writer in all likelihood Aktal himself), here the text appears to be engraved by a different hand or, perhaps, engraved by Aktal in haste. The inscription seems to end abruptly; perhaps it is unfinished. If the writer of the text is someone other than Aktal himself, one could suggest that he could be one of Aktal's nephews, Rawq or Ṭawq, who were present on the same hill and who also left their marks there, as I will show next. There is a drawing of a camel to the right of the inscription, but it is difficult to say whether it was drawn by Aktal or someone else before or after him.

No. 12: Rawq son of ‘Aṣīm



Figure 12 Inscription no. 12

1. O God, forgive
2. Rawq ibn ‘Aṣīm
3. and his parents.
4. [Possible later hand:] May God forgive.

اللهم اغفر
لروق بن عصيم
ولوالديه
غفر الله

Coordinates: latitude: 32° 9' 9.29" N, longitude: 37° 52' 58.722" E.

Commentary: The other inscription of Rawq ibn ‘Aṣīm was discussed above. He is the nephew of Aktal ibn ‘Āmir. Line 4, written in a smaller and thinner fashion than the rest of the inscription, might be by a later hand. Here, Rawq is asking God to forgive not only him but also his parents. We know that his father was named ‘Aṣīm son of ‘Āmir, but his mother is nowhere identified, though she might even have been present at the same spot at the time of the writing.

No. 13: Ṭawq son of ‘Aṣīm



Figure 13 Inscription no. 13

1. May God forgive
2. Ṭawq son of
3. ‘Aṣīm

غفر الله
لطق ابن
عصيم

Coordinates: latitude: 32° 9' 9.132" N, longitude: 37° 52' 58.824" E.

Commentary: This inscription was written by Ṭawq, the brother of Rawq. Ṭawq is a rather common name (for example, <<https://onomasticon.irht.cnrs.fr/en/entry/id/11690>>). It is unclear whether there was a fourth line which has been weathered out.

No. 14: Zayd son of ‘Āmir



Figure 14 Inscription no. 14

1. May God be content with Zayd
2. son of ‘Āmir on the day when occurs
3. the reckoning. Amen, the Lord
4. of the world.
5. [A later hand:] May He not forgive them!

رضي الله عن زيد
بن عامر يوم يقوم
الحساب امين رب
العلمين
(ما غفر لهم)

Coordinates: latitude: 32° 9' 9.234" N, longitude: 37° 52' 58.986" E.

Commentary: This inscription evidences another brother of Aktal, namely Zayd son of ‘Āmir. Line 5 is written by a later hand. It reads *mā ghafara la-hum*, ‘May He not forgive them!’ Such short curses or, rather, jests, are attested in other inscriptions. In one case, a later hand has added *kallā*, ‘certainly not!’, at the end of an inscription. Indeed, some writers of inscriptions asked God to protect their texts against vandals (Harjumäki & Lindstedt 2016: 83–84). The plural in *la-hum* probably refers to the various inscriptions asking for forgiveness on the hill, or to the Banū ‘Āmir al-Yamāmī family in particular. However, it would seem to me that the addition is (perhaps much) later, so it does not in all likelihood evidence any real, contemporary, animosity toward Zayd son of ‘Āmir or other members of his family.

No. 15: *Lāḥiq* son of *Jannān*

Figure 15 Inscription no. 15

اللهم اغفر لل[ا]حق بن جنان ما تقدم
 من ذنبه وما تاخر انك انت سد[ا]مع العيم
 رب وادخل قلبه الامان واحيه غنيا وتوفه
 تقيا واعطه من خير ما تعطي عب[ا]دك الموء
 منين اللهم واسقه المطر وعطه ظفر الجنة
 واجنبه حر ن[ا]ر

1. O God, forgive Lāḥiq son of Jannān his earlier
2. and later sins. You are the hearer of [someone bewailing] vehement thirst (*al-‘aym*).
3. Lord! And make belief enter his heart, revive him free of want, take him (unto You)
4. pious, and give him goodness like You give Your (other) believing servants,
5. O God! And let rain pour for him (*isqīhi al-maṭar*) and grant him (*wa-a‘ṭihi*, written without the *alif*) the triumph (*ẓafar*) of Paradise
6. and avert the heat of Hellfire from him.

Coordinates: latitude: 32° 9’ 9” N, longitude: 37° 52’ 58.998” E.

Commentary: as regards the contents, this is the most interesting inscription found on the hill. On the bottom left corner of the stone there is a text which has been effaced. It might be the continuation of this inscription, which ends brusquely, or another inscription. On the bottom right corner there are effaced pictures of animals, probably camels.

The reading of the name is not completely certain, but both names (Lāḥiq and Jannān) are attested (see <<https://onomasticon.irht.cnrs.fr/en/entry/id/10476>> and <<https://onomasticon.irht.cnrs.fr/en/entry/id/9766>>). There appears to be a dot under the first letter of the father’s name, which would then suggest Jannān. There are some other consonantal diacritics in the inscription as well.

The text includes a prayer for rain (the writer asks: *isqīhi al-maṭar*), though other themes are discussed too (forgiveness of sins and the afterlife). On the basis of this, one is inclined to read *al-ghaym*, ‘clouds’, at the end of line 2, but the word before it (rather certainly *sāmi* ‘) does not fit that context. Hence, I suggest *al-‘aym*, ‘vehement thirst; longing for milk; drought’, instead. Special prayers for rain (*istisqā* ‘) are mentioned in various Islamic sources and the prophet

Muhammad's example is adduced as a precedent (e.g., Muslim: III, 57–64). These could be communal prayers (*ṣalāh*) or private and freer in form (*du'ā'*).

The engraver of this inscription, Lāhiq son of Jannān, wrote his text on a high place, the hill, but I have not seen Islamic sources discussing *istisqā'* give any significance to such a place. What were the individuals whose names occur in the inscriptions doing on the hill? It would seem that it simply provided a good lookout place where one could observe the coming of, say, human or animal foes from a great distance. As discussed below, the individuals and families were probably there because of their seasonal migration.

I could not identify any prayer niche on the hill; it was probably not used for a regular, or at least communal, place of prayer. There were some stones piled up on top of one another, perhaps for lookout purposes, but it was impossible to say whether this was modern or pre-modern activity.



Figure 16 The hill where the inscriptions were found photographed from another hill



Figure 17 The view from below



Figure 18 View from the hill toward the north

DISCUSSION

First, let me address the question of gender. The inscriptions published here refer exclusively to men; and since it is generally supposed that the people mentioned in early Islamic graffiti are usually those who wrote them, even if they used the third person (Lindstedt 2021: 421), it can be suggested that the writers were also men.⁸ To be sure, some early Islamic inscriptions written by women have been discovered, but they are rather rare (Harjumäki & Lindstedt 2016: 72).

The onomastics of this article's lapidary texts show some interesting naming practices: we have brothers with the (rhyming) names Ṭawq and Rawq. The same verbal root is used to produce names in the case of the brothers Ya'mar and 'Ammār sons of al-Naḍīd. Also, the set evidences some (very) rare Arabic names, such as al-Naḍīd.

Though it must be emphasized that the majority of Arabians were, in late antiquity and the Middle Ages, settled, living in towns and villages (Donner 1981: 11), it is likely that most people living and roaming this particular region were nomadic since there were few settled places of habitation there. Moreover, the analogue arising from the Safaitic inscriptions, which are ample evidence of nomadic life, supports this.

At least tentatively, it can be suggested that all writers of these inscriptions were Muslims: some, for instance, refer to the prophet Muhammad or quote or allude to the Quran. However, it should be remembered that religious identities and social categories were in flux and sometimes overlapping, in particular during the early Islamic period (see Donner 2010).

One early Islamic-era Christian Arabic inscription has been found in the region (al-Shdaifat et al. 2017). Indeed, during the Badia Epigraphic Survey 2018, I was able to observe this important inscription with my own eyes:

⁸ However, I suggested above that the other inscription mentioning 'Ammār son of al-Naḍīd might have been written by someone other than him, probably a later person who encountered 'Ammār's earlier inscription and reacted to it.



Figure 19 The Yazīd inscription

The short anonymous text is accompanied by a cross (hence, signaling Christianity) and reads: *dhakara al-ilāh yazīdū al-malik*, ‘May God remember Yazīd the king’. The ‘king’ mentioned in the inscription would seem to refer to the Umayyad caliph Yazīd I (r. 680–683 CE). It is an interesting case of a Christian Arabic-speaking person who does not identify her- or himself by name⁹ but who is accepting Yazīd I as her or his political leader and indeed asking God to remember him.

Taking into account the particular case of the Yazīd inscription and Donner’s (2010) more general suggestion of early Islam as a “Believers’ movement” that some Jews and Christians joined, we should keep open the possibility that some of the writers of the graffiti published in this article might have, in fact, considered themselves Christians rather than Muslims. However, since the inscriptions of this set are in all likelihood from the late second/eighth century, we can say with certainty that the social and religious category Muslims/Islam was already operative (on this question, see Lindstedt 2023).

The Umayyads also feature in the inscription of Qaṣr Burqu‘, which mentions the building, or rather further construction, at the site. The AH 81 inscription reads: *bi-sm allāh al-rahmān al-rahīm hādihā mā banā al-amīr al-walīd bn amīr al-mu‘minīn hā‘ulā’ al-buyūt sanat wāḥida wa-thamānīn*, “In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate; this is what the *amīr* al-Walīd, son of the Commander of the Believers, built: these houses, in the year eighty-one [AH = 700–701 CE]” (Grohmann 1967–1971: II, 84).

Qaṣr Burqu‘ dates to the pre-Islamic era (Helms 1991). It was built in the Roman era; it first functioned as a watch tower but was later restructured into a monastery. We do not know when it ceased to be a monastery. After al-Walīd, the son of the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik ordered it to be rebuilt or restructured in 81/700–701, and it functioned as way station for people traveling in the area. However, it might also have functioned as a country residence for the members

9 This inscription, incidentally, is an exception to the rule that I stated above, according to which the name mentioned in an inscription is probably that of the writer, even if the text is in the third person (as they usually are). It is highly unlikely that the writer of this inscription was the caliph Yazīd I.

of the Umayyad family; in later times, it was apparently used as a way station (Gaube 2004). Whatever the exact function of Qaşr Burqu‘ during the ‘Abbāsīd era (the time of the engraving of the inscriptions published in this article), it probably had a role in the lives of the local people there and the travelers traversing the desert, giving shelter at times of bad weather and offering a place to rest at a place of permanent water.

The Banū ‘Āmir al-Yamāmī family

The family of the Banū ‘Āmir al-Yamāmī is witnessed by nine inscriptions in this article. Five names of the family are attested. It can be suggested that they were a family of local nomads. Their geographical *nisba* refers to the region of al-Yamāma in central Arabia, rather far away from the location of these inscription (*c.* 1,000 km as the crow flies). It is likely that al-Yamāmī was a name running in the family, referring to where they had hailed from sometime in the past rather than denoting any continuing linkage to that region. The names of the family attested in this study can be linked as follows:

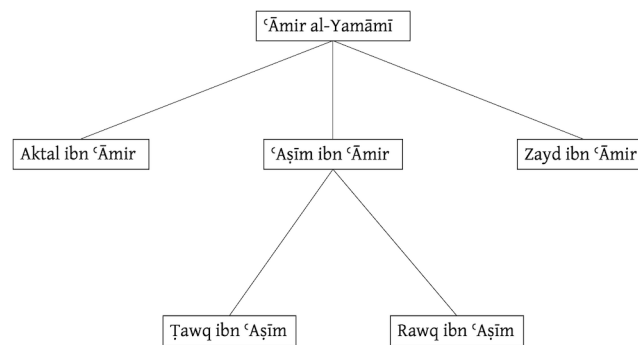


Figure 20 The Banū ‘Āmir al-Yamāmī family

It is unclear what the relationship with the Banū ‘Āmir al-Yamāmī family and the two sons of al-Naḏīd was. As discussed above, Ya‘mar son of al-Naḏīd was mentioned in the same inscription (no. 6) as Rawq son of ‘Aṣīm; I suggested that they were present at the same spot at the same time. They might have been pasturing their livestock there, but this is naturally hypothetical. In any case, this information also allows us to date the inscriptions of the sons of al-Naḏīd to *c.* AH 200/815 CE. Above, it was noted that the same Arabic verbal root is used to produce the names Ya‘mar and ‘Ammār, sons of al-Naḏīd. Incidentally, the same verbal root occurs in the name ‘Āmir, the grandfather of Rawq. Might we then have the case that Ya‘mar son of al-Naḏīd, mentioned in the same inscription as Rawq son of ‘Aṣīm son of ‘Āmir, was the brother of ‘Āmir and, hence, the great-uncle of Rawq? While this is possible, there is at the moment no evidence to support (or to counter) it. Unfortunately, for the sons of al-Naḏīd we only have a tribal *nisba* (al-Mashja‘ī), while for the Banū ‘Āmir we have a geographical *nisba* (al-Yamāmī). I have not found any statements in Arabic literature referring to the clan Mashja‘a as hailing from al-Yamāma. However, the Banū Quḏā‘a, the superordinate tribe of the clan Mashja‘a, was a very large tribe present in many parts of the Arabian Peninsula and Syria, including the central parts of Arabia where al-Yamāma is located

(Kister 1986). If more inscriptions by these individuals or other family members are found and published, we might obtain new information relevant to this question.

In light of Michael Macdonald's (1992b) theory of seasonal migrations of the ancient Safaitic-writing nomads from the same region, it is intriguing to explore whether the early Islamic inscriptions evidence anything similar. Unfortunately, none of the inscription of my set include any names of the months, so we cannot say anything definite about this. However, let us put the inscriptions engraved by Aktal son of 'Āmir on a map:



Figure 21 Map of the four inscriptions written by Aktal son of 'Āmir; two inscriptions are from the same place (the hill at the southernmost spot marked here), so there are only three marks. The map created with Google Maps.

As can be seen from the map, all the inscriptions were found on the edge of the basalt stone desert (*ḥarra*) and the inner desert (*ḥamād*). Though the inscriptions written by Aktal son of 'Āmir do not feature any specific dates, except one year (AH 158), it can be suggested on the basis of the analogue from the Safaitic inscriptions and their information about the people's movement in the area according to seasons that Aktal wrote these inscriptions while awaiting the first rains of the fall/winter. As mentioned at the beginning of the article, Michael Macdonald (1992b: 9–10) has observed clear patterns in how the ancient Safaitic-writing nomads migrated in the region, and he remarks that the modern local Bedouin also follow the same pattern.

It is quite reasonable to suggest that Aktal son of ‘Āmir and his family, living in the second century AH/eighth century CE, followed similar movements according to the seasons. That is, he and his family would have spent the dry summer months near a reliable source of water (perhaps Qaṣr Burqu‘, which has a large watering place even today). Then, they would migrate to the edge of the basalt stone desert, waiting for the fall rains to begin. The rains would make the riverbeds, *wādīs*, lush with herbage. After that, they would migrate to the inner desert, where the fall–spring would be spent pasturing. At the beginning of the hot and dry summer months, they would return, via the *harra*, to the permanent sources of water. It would seem that Aktal was moving with his extended family, since his brother Zayd and his nephews Ṭawq and Rawq also left their marks on the same hill. That hill would, one supposes, have been a safe place for lookout purposes for the Banū ‘Āmir al-Yamāmī family. In all probability, they would have returned there year after year, or at least some years.

Some supporting evidence for the hypothesis about the seasonal movement can be found in inscription number 15 written by Lāḥiq son of Jannān on the same hill. Lāḥiq mentions the “vehement thirst” or “drought” (*al-‘aym*) that he was experiencing and asks God to grant him – and, one assumes, his family and livestock – rain (*isqīhi al-maṭar*). This can be interpreted as signifying that Lāḥiq was engraving the lapidary text at the end of the hot and dry summer months while expecting the first autumn rains to begin. While there is no evidence that Lāḥiq was in any way related to the Banū ‘Āmir al-Yamāmī, or present at the site at the same place as they were, Lāḥiq’s seasonal migration could have followed the same pattern.

However, the hypothesis advanced here on the migration of the people in the area in the early Islamic period should be tested against inscriptions that mention the month of the engraving. Unfortunately, none of the new inscriptions published here attest a month, though three mention the year of the writing.

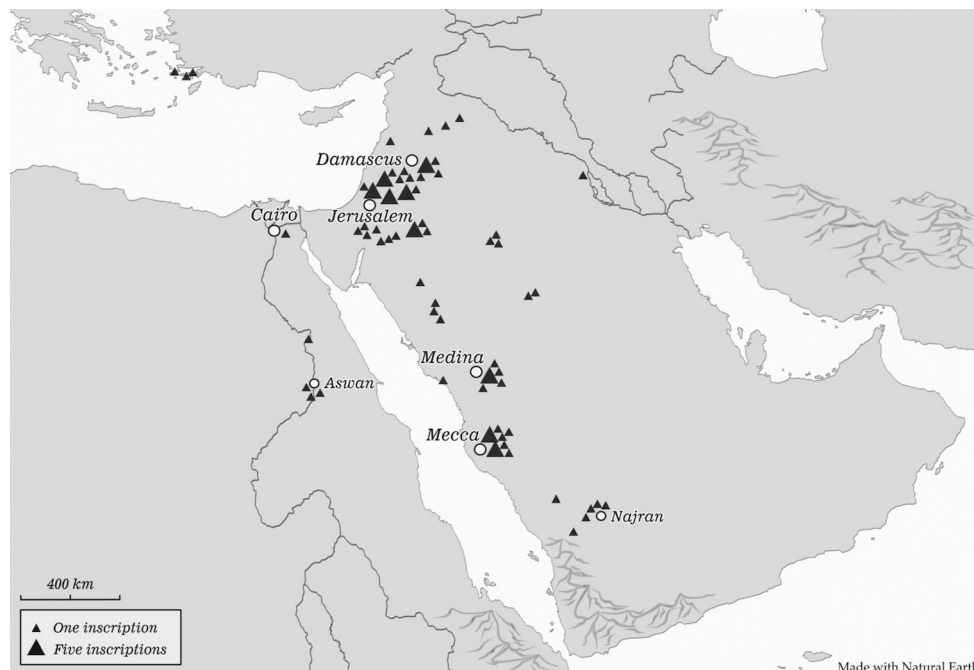


Figure 22 The distribution of Arabic inscriptions dated to 640s–740s CE on the basis of Lindstedt 2019. Map drawn by Nora Fabritius. The map is for comparative purposes; the inscriptions published in this article are somewhat later than these.



Figure 23 The location of the town al-Ruwayshid. The inscriptions were recorded to the north and south of it. Map from Google Maps.

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APPENDIX: PALEOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON THE INSCRIPTIONS

I have noted in this article that most early Islamic inscriptions, graffiti in particular, from Jordan belong to the second–third/eighth–ninth centuries. This dating probably holds true for the corpus of Arabic inscriptions in this study. Indeed, since the dated inscriptions of this corpus stem from the 140s–160s/760s–780s, and several family members of the writer of the AH 158 inscription also left their mark, I assume that most of the inscriptions presented here stem from the late second, or at the latest early third, century AH.

In addition to internal and comparative evidence, paleography, although not an exact science, concurs with this proposition. Several features that are considered early in lapidary inscriptions appear in this corpus, for instance, the general lack of diacritics. The letter forms of the inscriptions are treated next in the Arabic alphabetical order. The general remarks on early Arabic paleography are based on earlier studies (Grohmann 1967–1971: II; Gruendler 1993).

alif: This letter has two forms, independent and connected to the right. The independent form of the *alif* often has a horizontal tail extending to the right (e.g., nos. 2 and 6). In the early script, the connected form sometimes has a vertical tail extending below the base line (nos. 3 and 8). This early feature is prominent in contemporary papyri as well.

bā’, *tā*’, *thā*’ : Since the corpus displays very few diacritics, these letters are identical in undotted script. In initial and medial forms, they are represented by what is often termed “a tooth”. The letters *nūn* and *yā*’ are also simple teeth at the beginning and in the middle of a word. In contrast to the later forms of these letters, the final form of the *bā*’/*tā*’/*thā*’ is open to the left in the early phase (e.g., no. 2, l. 2).

dāl, *dhāl*: The letter *dāl* is, in early lapidary script, on and above the base line. This can be contrasted to later and modern scripts, where it extends below and above the base line. The early *dāl* often has a hook extending upward (e.g., no. 15, l. 2). The letter sometimes receives very elongated forms in the early Islamic period, in which case it is almost indistinguishable from the *kāf* (see no. 2).

jīm, *hā*’, *khā*’ : Although the *jīm* and *hā*’ had different forms in Nabataean Aramaic (the precursor of the Arabic script), in the Islamic-era Arabic script they had mostly fused together (though not in all texts, see van Putten 2019). This letter is not much different from how it appears in modern script, although it might be remarked that the “cap” sometimes extends below the base line on the right (no. 7, l. 7) and the final form of the letter usually does not have such an elaborated tail as in the modern version (no. 9, l. 1).

rā’, *zā*’ : The early *rā*’ is more or less identical with the modern *dāl*. It sits on the base line, extending below and above the base line the same length (no. 14, l. 1). In some hands, the *rā*’ is difficult to differentiate from *nūn* in its final form (no. 15).

sīn, *shīn*: The early *sīn* is not very different from the later forms of the letter. The undotted nature of the early script makes it sometimes easy to confuse the *sīn* with three *bā*’/*tā*’/*thā*’s, but there is a tendency to vary the height of the *bā*’/*tā*’/*thā*’s while engraving the teeth of the *sīn* at the same height. Also, the teeth of the *sīn* are also typically lower. In an undotted script, the writers differentiate between the numerals *sab*’, ‘seven’, and *tis*’, ‘nine’, by writing the fourth tooth taller than the first three in the former case and by writing the first tooth taller than the following three in the latter (no. 3, l. 6).

šād, *ḏād*: In contrast to the later, more rounded, *šād*, the early *šād* is basically a box. The modern *šād* has a tooth after the actual letter, but in the early Arabic script the tooth is on the top left corner of the box-shaped letter (no. 5, l. 1; no. 7, l. 5).

ṭā’, *ẓā*’ : The early *ṭā*’ is basically identical to the *šād* (in non-final position), but the tooth just described is taller (no. 2, l. 4; no. 13, l. 2).

‘ayn, *ghayn*: In the early Arabic script, *‘ayn* often has an open top in the medial and word-final positions (no. 15). However, the closed top is also attested from an early period (as in nos. 1–3). Thus, while the open *‘ayn* is a feature that appears and disappears in the third/ninth century in lapidary texts and its occurrence is thus, at least tentative, evidence of an early date (in Grohmann 1967–

1971, the last occurrence of the open form is in AH 209; Grohmann 1967–1971: II, 129), a closed ‘*ayn*’ does not exclude an early date since both forms existed simultaneously. In Quranic manuscripts, the open ‘*ayn*’ continues up to the fourth/tenth century, however. Other than the (possibly) open top, the early ‘*ayn*’ is very similar to the later forms of the letter.

fā’: The letter *fā*’ is identical in initial and medial forms to the *qāf*: a loop that stands above the base line. However, they differ in the word-final position. The final *fā*’ has a long horizontal tail (no. 7, l. 8). It does not go below the base line.

qāf: The word-final form of the *qāf* has a tail that extends vertically below the base line (e.g., no. 15, l. 1).

kāf: This letter is, in the first few centuries of the Islamic era, basically a bigger version of the *dāl*, although they later develop to be very different-looking letters. The hook of the early *kāf* is often somewhat taller and it is more elongated.

lām: The *lām* of the early script does not differ crucially from the later versions of the letter. In early word-final forms, the loop extending below the base line is often smaller than what later becomes the norm (no. 2, l. 1; no. 5, l. 3).

mīm: This letter is distinguishable from *fā*’ and *qāf* in initial and medial position by the fact that it usually sits in the middle of the base line, extending both below and above it (e.g., no. 5). However, sometimes the *mīm* is above the base line, making it somewhat difficult to distinguish from the *fā*’ and *qāf* (see no. 14). The word-final position is, in any case, different. The early *mīm* often has a short- or medium-length horizontal tail that does not usually extend below the base line (no. 14, l. 2; no. 15, l. 1). This differs from the *mīm* of later Arabic script types, where the *mīm* usually has a vertical tail going well below the base line.

nūn: In word-initial and medial stances, the *nūn* is identical to *bā*’/ *tā*’/ *thā*’ and *yā*’ in an undotted script. The difference appears in the word-final form. There, the early *nūn* resembles a modern *rā*’ (e.g., no. 15)

hā’: Similar to the modern *hā*’ but, in the early lapidary script, the *hā*’ is more angular.

wāw: Very similar to the modern *wāw*.

yā’: Identical to *nūn* and *bā*’/ *tā*’/ *thā*’ at the beginning and in the middle of words. The final *yā*’ is often retroflex (e.g., no. 3, l. 6; a form that is no longer present in modern Arabic script), although the non-retroflex form coexisted with it (e.g., no. 5, l. 2). Indeed, the two forms of the final *yā*’ were already present in the Nabataean script (see Gruendler 1993: 112–115). The retroflex final *yā*’ becomes rarer with the passing of time, but the process is slow. The retroflex *yā*’ is found in fourth/tenth century inscriptions, if not later (Grohmann 1967–1971: II, 221), so its occurrence in a text does not vouchsafe an early dating with certainty.

In this corpus, as is common in early Arabic inscriptions and papyri, consonantal diacritics are rare; however, the exception to this rule is Lāḥiq son of Jannān’s text, which has a number of them. One example of a vowel diacritic is present in this set, namely in the writing of ‘Aṣīm son of ‘Āmir al-Yamāmī.