EARLY ISLAMIC INSCRIPTIONS NEAR ṬĀʾIF IN THE ḤIJĀZ

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I. AN INSCRIPTION OF THE CALIPH MUʿĀWIYAH

PROPAGATING the anti-Umayyad cause, ʿAbbāsid traditionalists put into the mouth of the Prophet the words, “I was sent not for agriculture but for jiḥād, the Holy War.” They averred that “Muḥammad planted no palms, nor dug he canals or wells.” Such hadith were useful propaganda to combat the Umayyad agricultural policies, and thus Umayyad sympathies in general. The Umayyads, particularly the early Sufyānids, had indeed found the time to be vigorous farmers even in the midst of their wide-flung military and political enterprises. Least of all, in this respect, did they neglect the Arabian Peninsula, notably the Ḥijāz. There was in them a deep-seated nostalgia for the land whence they came that brought them back to it from the ends of the earth; and some homing instinct moved them to place a great part of their fabulous newly won riches in the soil of their native land.

Especially was this true of Muʿāwiya, first and greatest of the Umayyad caliphs. We are told that after his rise to power and wealth he bought up vast properties in Arabia and, having acquired them, spent immense sums in improving the land for agriculture. In the vicinity of ʿArafah and in the sterile Mecca Valley he dug wells and irrigation ditches without number, built dams and dikes to contain the soil against the winter floods or sayls, and constructed barriers, reservoirs, and fountains fed by the accumulated water to irrigate the surrounding land. The suburbs of Mecca were, the historians relate, transformed by these projects of Muʿāwiya, and great reaches of field and garden flourished and blossomed with dates and grain as they had in earlier days, until the ʿAbbāsids came and either destroyed these works or by neglect allowed them and the soil they enriched to go once more to ruin and sterility. We know not only that Muʿāwiya invested much of his substance in these undertakings but also that he loved this “homeland” with something akin to a passion. Doubtless had the cares of office spared him, he would have spent much of his time in Arabia attending in person to the cultivation of his estates and enjoying their bloom. He is reported to have said of Saʿd, a freedman of his whom he had appointed superintendent of his amwal in the Hijāz, “Happy man! He passes the spring in Jiddah, the summer in Ṭāʾif, the winter in Mecca.”

It is with a relic of Muʿāwiya’s passion for the development of the land about Ṭāʾif (where we know specifically that he owned property) that these notes deal.

1 I am very deeply indebted to Professor G. Levi Della Vida, formerly of the University of Pennsylvania, for his acute and learned observations and his generous counsel in connection with the preparation of these notes, and to Dr. Florence E. Day of the Textile Museum of the District of Columbia for many helpful suggestions. Dr. Nabia Abbott of the University of Chicago has very kindly read the manuscript and has made several valuable points, for which I am grateful. My preliminary reading of the Muʿāwiya inscription was presented at a meeting of the New York Oriental Club early in 1948; subsequently the substance of the first part of this paper was read before the American Oriental Society at its annual meeting on March 31, 1948.

2 Quoted by H. Lammens, “Études sur le règne du Calife Omeyyade Muʿawiyah Ier,” in Mélanges de la Faculté Orientale, Université Saint-Joseph, II (Beirut, 1907), 130.


4 Lammens, Muʿawiyah, II. 140.
PLATE XVII

DAM OF MU'ĀWIYAH EAST OF TĀ'IF, DATED 58 A.H. (A.D. 677–78)
A First and Second Kufic Inscriptions on the Dam of Mu'awiyah

B Kufic Inscriptions on Rock West of Ta'if
To the interest in Arabia’s past and present of my friend Mr. Karl S. Twitchell, and to his kindness, I owe the loan of a precious Kodachrome negative of a photograph which he took in 1945 during the course of one of his many explorations in search of Saʿūdi Arabia’s mineral resources. In the mountains somewhat less than twenty miles east of Ṭāʾif, in a relatively inaccessible and roadless tract of rugged land, he came upon the site of a soil-conservation dam about twenty-five or thirty feet in height, built of huge boulders and called natively “Say-Sod.”

There he was shown an inscription scratched in the rock wall (Pls. XVII and XVIII A). These six lines of humble, undecorated Kufic give us, I believe, the earliest dated historical inscription of Islam. The lines are written in Muʿāwiyah’s name and are dated in the year 58 of the Hijrah, A.D. 677/78.

The inscription reads:

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1. هذا السد لعبد الله معاوية
2. أمير المومنين بنهء عبد الله بن عكر
   3. بأذن الله سنة ثمان وخمسين
   4. الله اغفر لعبد الله معاوية
   5. أمير المومنين ونبيه وانصره ومبع
   6. [نمير] المومنين به كتب عمرو بن جناب
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“(1) This dam [belongs] to ‘Abdullāh Muʿāwiyah, (2) Commander of the Believers. ‘Abdullāh b. Ṣakhr built it, (3) with the permission of Allāh, in the year fifty-eight. O (4) Allāh, pardon ‘Abdullāh Muʿāwiyah, C- (5) ommander of the Believers, and strengthen him, and make him victorious, and grant the (6) Commander of the Believers the enjoyment of it. ʿAmru b. Janāb⁴ wrote [it].”

⁴ Mr. Twitchell’s spelling.

These simple lines call for brief comment, historical and epigraphical. First, the content and the historical connotations. Muʿāwiyah was proclaimed caliph in 41 A.H. (A.D. 661) and died in Rajab of the year 60 (April, A.D. 680). Thus the dam was “built” for him two years before his death. His name as it appears in the inscription is accompanied by the epithet ‘Abdullāh, “servant of Allāh,” and the title amīr al-muʾminīn. This was to become the customary caliphal formula in epigraphy. The statement of ownership is followed by the name of the “builder,” who, presumably at Muʿāwiyah’s orders, assembled the boulders and adapted the site to purposes of soil conservation.

An individual named ʿAbdullāh b. Ṣakhr⁷ built it “by God’s leave.” Who was he? I must confess that I do not know. The first temptation of course is to recognize him as a brother of Muʿāwiyah, for Abu-Sufyān’s own name was Ṣakhr.

But apparently Muʿāwiyah had no brother named ʿAbdullāh. Still, might it not be that one of Muʿāwiyah’s brothers took the Islamic name of ʿAbdullāh, and, while the historians do not appear to record it, we might have it preserved here? There are only three other possibilities of identification—none of them likely. A certain ʿAbdullāh b. Ṣakhr al-Qurashi was active in the Khurāsān wars in the year 100 A.H. He would doubtless be too late; as would

⁷ Or it could be Ṣuhār.
another ʿAbdullāh b. Ṣakhir, who died about 98 A.H. and who had been a companion of Mūsā b. Nuṣayr in the conquest of Spain. There remains an exceedingly faint possibility that the ʿAbdullāh b. Ṣakhir mentioned here was abu-Hurayrah, the famous traditionalist. According to ibn-Ṭahri-Birdi, the Muslim name most frequently attributed to abu-Hurayrah, “Father of Kittens,” and the upshot of these contradictions would be that no one really knew what his “convert” name was. Secondly there seems to be some doubt about the likelihood of the old man’s being a stand-in governor of Medina. And, finally, while some say he died in 58 or 59 of the Hijrah at the age of 78, there are others who say that his death occurred in 57, the year before the present inscription.

ʿAbdullāh b. Ṣakhir therefore remains unidentified. He may, of course, have been a completely obscure individual.

There follow in the inscription several benedictory phrases with reference to Muʿāwiya. These are common expressions, but they are of interest as very early instances of their use. The phrase ḥiṣāf lahu occurs on a tombstone of the year 31, and (reputedly) the phrase ṣabbīt sullānahu on the Fustāṭ bridge inscription of the year 69; but I believe that this is the first epigraphical use of ṣanṣur and maṭīr.

Finally, there is the name of the person who wrote the inscription, that is, of the man who actually carved the lines on the rock. Whether his father’s name was Janab or some other combination of the equivocal Kufic letters in the name is an academic question, for I doubt exceedingly that this man’s name is preserved anywhere except on this rock, and it would be useless to search for him in Arabic literature.

Turning now to the identification of the site, in general we know (as I have suggested above) that the land about Tāʾif was extensively irrigated and cultivated in pre- and early-Islamic times. Père Lammens has assembled a mass of interesting material relating to Tāʾif’s fertility and cultivation. There were here, as elsewhere in the Hijāz, wells, reservoirs, canals, and dams in great number. Also, more specifically, we know that Muʿāwiya acquired more and more holdings in the vicinity of Tāʾif, so that his estates and those of his brothers ʿUtba and Anbasah became one solid block. Furthermore, it is specifically stated in Baladhuri’s Ansāb al-Ashrāf, and elsewhere, that Muʿāwiya bought, or at least attempted to buy, an estate called al-Wahṭ near Tāʾif belonging to ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ. Unfortunately, Al-Wahṭ is not the site for which we are looking, since it lies

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in the Wādi Wajj, about nine kilometers south of the town. But at least there is plenty of literary evidence of Muʿāwiyyah’s association with the land in the neighborhood, and it is therefore by no means surprising to find this inscribed testimony of his interest in the agricultural development of Tāʾif. Not surprising, but happy confirmation, if such were needed. But what of this specific dam of his?

There is a passage in Baladhuri’s Futuḥ, referring to some land between al-Jurf and Qanāh that Abu-Bakr gave in fief to al-Zubayr b. al-Awwām, where abul-Ḥasan al-Madāʾī is quoted as saying that “Qanāh is a valley stretching from al-Tāʾif to al-ʿArḍādiyyah and Qarqar al-Kudr, and thence it comes to Sadd (or Sudd)-Maʿānāh, from which it runs by the end of (or along?) al-Qadūm

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19 Carlo Alfonso Nallino, Raccolta di Scritti editi e inediti, Vol. I, L’Arabia Saʿādiana (1938), ed. Maria Nallino (Rome, 1939), p. 223; cf. Lammens, Cité Arabe de Taif, p. 159. Nallino did not go very far east of the town; in consequence he did not see the present inscription, although he did record some early inscriptions in the vicinity. I must note in this connection that there appears to be another historical inscription of the period of Muʿāwiyyah, also relating to a dam, in the neighborhood of Tāʾif. In Nallino’s notes (cited above) there is a detailed description of the Sadd (or Sudd) al-Samallāq, an ancient dam about twenty-two kilometers southeast of Tāʾif. This dam, incidentally, has also been visited and photographed by Mr. Twitchell. According to Nallino, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal (whose work I have not seen) writes that this dam dates from the time of Muʿaṣir b. al-ʿĀṣ ordered the building of it at the command of the Commander of the Believers, Muʿāwiyyah b. ʿAbdullāh b. ʿAbd-Sufyān.” Nallino says that he searched for this inscription stone by stone but found nothing (op. cit., p. 227). I believe that we should not exclude the possibility that Muhammad Ḥusayn Haykal confused the Sadd al-Samallāq with the dam we are considering here and that the inscription which ʿAbdullāh b. Pasha photographed may have been misread and in reality be “ours.”

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18 Cf. Lammens, Muʿaṣira, II, 140.
21 S.v., Encyclopaedia of Islam.
built into the wall of a church in Cyprus, relating to an unknown, dated 29 A.H.; and another tombstone, again of a historically obscure person, in Egypt, dated 31 A.H. Then there is nothing until the year 65, seven years after the present inscription, a dubious record in Jerusalem, followed by Maqrizi’s text of the bridge inscription in Fustat, dated 69, and, finally, for the first time on firm ground, the famous inscription of the year 72 on the Qubbat al-Sakhrah in Jerusalem. Thus, excluding the two tombstones, we are in the presence of the first dated Kufic is primitive, clear cut, and unadorned, as one would expect in the first century of the Hijrah. Ornament or artistry are completely lacking. In fact, at first glance, there is nothing remarkable about the script; but closer examination reveals a most extraordinary fact: certain of the consonants are distinctly and undeniably pointed. The presence of these points makes the document one of capital importance for the history of Arabic epigraphy. Since the points can be seen only with a magnifying glass on the original 35-mm. negative, I have made a rough drawing of the inscription (Fig. 1), with the points exactly as they appear in the photograph. The pointed letters are: Line 1, \( y \) in مَعِيْرة; line 2, \( b \), \( n \), and \( y \) in مَيْن; line 3, \( th \) in مَتْع, \( y \) in مَهْمِس, \( f \) in اغْفِر (perhaps); line 5, \( th \), \( b \), and \( t \) in وُفِّيْتَه, \( n \) in وُانِصَرَتْ, and \( t \) in حَمَّٕت. Line 6, \( n \) (perhaps) and \( y \) in يَمْوَّمِين, \( b \) in جَنَاب, and \( b \) in جَنَاب.

The vertical arrangement of the double-dotted letters and the inverted arrangement of the three dots of \( th \) are remarkable and characteristic of the early use of consonantal points. The implications, especially with respect to Qur’anic textual criticism, are far-reaching, for it may be that this inscription, establishing beyond a doubt that in the sixth decade of the Hijrah certain Kufic letters were pointed, will prove to be the point d’appui in solving the thorny problem of dating the earliest Qur’anic parchments. There can be no doubt of the authenticity of the points. Their peculiar arrangement, similar to that in Qur’anic manuscripts held to be the earliest by certain authorities, cannot have been imitated from the manuscripts by an untutored hand at some later date. Lacking the competence, I do not propose to broach this difficult

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Fig. 1.—Transcription of first Kufic inscription

“monumental” inscription of Islam; and, with no exception, it is the first inscription in the name of a caliph or of any recognized Muslim individual.

No less interesting than the content of the inscription, and in its implications more important, is the epigraphy. The

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11 Ibid., No. 5 (Harawi, M.8).
12 Ibid., No. 6 (Hawary, J R A S, 1930, pp. 322–23).
13 Ibid., No. 7 (Clermont-Ganneau, Recueil d’archéologie orientale, II, 400).
14 Ibid., No. 8.
15 Ibid., No. 9 (frequently published and reproduced).
16 I am skeptical of M. Hamidullah’s identification of some rock inscriptions near Medina with the names of the caliphs Abu-Bakr and ‘Umar ("Some Arabic Inscriptions of Medina of the Early Years of Hijrah," Islamic Culture, XIII, No. 4 [1939], 427–39). There is little doubt, I think, that these graffiti are of the first century of the Hijrah, but the arguments attributing them to ‘Umar’s own hand are very tenuous.
subject of the paleography of the early Qur'āns; my only purpose here is to bring this extraordinary document to the attention of those equipped to make use of it.  

II. OTHER GRAFFITI OF THE FIRST CENTURY OF THE HIJĀR  

1. Beneath the Mu'āwiyyah inscription, more thinly and faintly engraved, are five more lines of simple Kufic, (Pl. XVIIA) reading:

   اِذَا رَجَعَتُ الْلَّهَ وَرَبُّكَ
   ۚ وَرَكَبْنَا عَلَى الْمَهْمَمَ بِن
   ۚ عَلَى حَمَدٍ بِنْ الْمَهْمَمَ اِبْن
   ۚ عَلَى عُبَيْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ حَمَدَ و
   ۚ تَابَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ

   “(1) The peace of Allāh and (2) his blessing upon al-Ḥakam b. . . . (3) and upon Muḥammad b. al-Ḥakam, Āmīn; (4) and upon `Abdullāh b. Muḥammad, and (5) may Allāh forgive him.”

   The last two lines were written by a different hand from that which wrote the first three, and it would be reasonable to suppose that `Abdullāh was the son of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥakam, and that, passing by the site at a later date, he had added his own invocation to those of his father and grandfather. These graffiti are to be dated in the first (or the early second) century of the Hijrah.

2. Approximately one mile west of Ṭā'īf Mr. Twitchell found another inscribed rock (Pl. XVIII B), which he also photographed in Kodachrome. It will be observed that beneath the Kufic graffiti there are remarkable “prehistoric” animal drawings, which I shall pass over here without further comment. Bruce Howe of the Peabody Museum, Cambridge, has kindly undertaken to publish a note on these drawings elsewhere. The Arabic inscriptions, undated but again in all probability of the first century of the Hijrah, are devoid of historical content but are interesting epigraphically.

   a) (upper right)

   اَنَّ اللَّهَ وَمَلَاتَكُه
   ۚ يَصُلُّونَ عَلَى الْجَبَّرِ بَيَابَا الْحَيْنِ
   ۚ أَمْنَا صَلَّوْا عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَموُا
   ۚ تَسْلِيماً وَكَتَبَ عِبَادِ اللَّهِ بِنْ تَامِسْ؟
   ۚ حَمَدَ بِنْ مِهْرَن

   “(1) Verily Allāh and his angels (2) bless the Prophet; O you who (3) believe, bless him and salute him (4) with a salutation! [Qur'ān 33:56] And wrote [it] ‘Abdullāh b. Ta’mīn [or Tām b. ?] (5) Muḥammad b. Mihrān.”

   Note the following epigraphic peculiarities: عَلَى عَلَا مَلَاتَكُه for عَلَى عَلَا مَلَاتَكُه, and يَابَا عَلَا for يَابَا يَا عَلَا. The name at the
end of line 4 is puzzling. It is certainly not Amīn or Amīr, for there is a letter before the alif, and the final letter is nūn, not ra'. Neither of the alternatives which I have suggested seem satisfactory.  

b) (upper right between the fourth and fifth lines of (a)

"I [am] ʿAbdālah (?). b. ʿAmru."

The first name is very doubtful.

c) (right center)

1. ʿAbdū (2) b. ʿAmrīm.

(1) I [am] Mū- (2) sa b. Tamīm.

d) (center)

"I [am] Sahl b. Mālik."

e) (center)

"I [am] Artāh b. ʿAwf (?)"

(1) I [am] Yazīd b. (2) ʿAbdullāh. I . . ."

g) (left center)

"I [am] Muslim. . . ."

h) (left center)

"I [am] Yazīd b. Maymūn."

(1) I [am] ʿAbdu- (2) ilāh b. Ḥasan(?).

j) (lower center)

"I [am] ʿAbdullāh b. A. . . ."

k) (lower center)

"I [am] ʿAbdullāh b. A. . . ."

The invocation, if correctly read, is ungrammatical.

I have made no attempt to identify any of these names. There may be historical personages among them, but any identification would be speculative, and I doubt that these Arabs were other than travelers obeying the universal and perennial impulse to record their names in remarkable places.

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