

EARLY ISLAMIC INSCRIPTIONS NEAR ṬĀ'IF IN THE ḤIJĀZ

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I. AN INSCRIPTION OF THE CALIPH MU'ĀWIYAH¹

PROPAGATING the anti-Umayyad cause, 'Abbāsīd traditionalists put into the mouth of the Prophet the words, "I was sent not for agriculture but for *jihād*, the Holy War."² They averred that "Muḥammad planted no palms, nor dug he canals or wells." Such *ḥadīth* 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 Mu'āwīyah, 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 'Arafah 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.³ The suburbs of Mecca were, the historians relate, transformed by these projects of Mu'āwīyah, and great reaches of field and garden flourished and blossomed with dates and grain as they had in earlier days, until the 'Abbāsīds 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 Mu'āwīyah 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 Sa'd, a freedman of his whom he had appointed superintendent of his *amwāl* in the Ḥijāz, "Happy man! He passes the spring in Juddah, the summer in Ṭā'if, the winter in Mecca."⁴

It is with a relic of Mu'āwīyah's passion for the development of the land about Ṭā'if (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 Mu'āwīyah 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 Omayyade Mo'awiya Ier," in *Mélanges de la Faculté Orientale, Université Saint-Joseph*, II (Beyrouth, 1907), 130.

³ Lammens, *op. cit.*, pp. 130 ff.; cf. Henri Lammens, *Le Berceau de l'Islam*, Vol. I: *Le Climat—Les Bédouins* (Rome, 1914), pp. 179 ff.

⁴ Lammens, *Mo'awiya*, II, 140.

PLATE XVII



DAM OF MU'ĀWIYAH EAST OF ṬĀĪF, DATED 58 A.H. (A.D. 677-78)

PLATE XVIII



A FIRST AND SECOND KUFIC INSCRIPTIONS ON THE DAM OF MU'ĀWIYAH



B KUFIC INSCRIPTIONS ON ROCK WEST OF ṬĀIF

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 Sa'ūdī Arabia's mineral resources. In the mountains somewhat less than twenty miles east of Ṭā'if, 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."⁵ There he was shown an inscription scratched in the rock wall (Pls. XVII and XVIII A). These six lines of humble, unadorned Kufic give us, I believe, the earliest dated historical inscription of Islam. The lines are written in Mu'āwiyah's name and are dated in the year 58 of the Hijrah, A.D. 677/78.

The inscription reads:

١. هذا السد لعبد الله معوية
٢. امير المؤمنين بنيه عبد الله بن صخر
٣. باذن الله لسنة ثمن وخمسين
٤. اللهم اغفر لعبد الله معوية
٥. مير المؤمنين وثبته وانصره ومتع
٦. [مير] المؤمنين به كتب عمرو بن جناب

"(1) This dam [belongs] to 'Abdullāh Mu'āwiyah, (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 Mu'āwiyah, 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. 'Amru b. Janāb⁶ wrote [it]."

⁵ Mr. Twitchell's spelling.

⁶ This name might of course be read in several other ways, but Janāb is perhaps the most likely.

These simple lines call for brief comment, historical and epigraphical. First, the content and the historical connotations. Mu'āwiyah 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-mu'minīn*. 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 Mu'āwiyah's orders, assembled the boulders and adapted the site to purposes of soil conservation.

An individual named 'Abdullāh 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 Mu'āwiyah, for abu-Sufyān's own name was Ṣakhr.

But apparently Mu'āwiyah had no brother named 'Abdullāh. Still, might it not be that one of Mu'āwiyah's brothers took the Islamic name of 'Abdullāh, 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 'Abdullāh 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. Ṣakhr, who died about 98 A.H. and who had been a companion of Mūsā b. Nuṣayr in the conquest of Spain.⁸ There remains an exceedingly faint possibility that the ʿAbdullāh b. Ṣakhr mentioned here was abu-Hurayrah, the famous traditionalist. According to ibn-Taghri-Birdi, the Muslim name most frequently attributed to abu-Hurayrah was ʿAbdullāh b. Ṣakhr,⁹ and there is a tradition that Marwān b. al-Ḥakam appointed him temporary governor of Medina in his own place.¹⁰ But there are more arguments against this identification than there are for it. In the first place, some fifty different names are 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.¹¹ Secondly there seems to be some doubt about the likelihood of the old man's being a stand-in governor of Medina.¹² And, finally, while some say he died in 58 or 59 of the Hijrah at the age of 78,¹³ there are others who say that his death occurred in 57, the year before the present inscription.

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

There follow in the inscription several benedictory phrases with reference to Muʿāwiyah. These are common expressions, but they are of interest as very early instances of their use. The phrase *ighfir lahu* occurs on a tombstone of the year 31, and (reputedly) the phrase *thabbit sultānahu* on the Fustāt bridge inscription of the

year 69;¹⁴ but I believe that this is the first epigraphical use of *unṣur* and *mattiʿ*.

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 Janāb 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 Ṭāʾif was extensively irrigated and cultivated in pre- and early-Islamic times. Père Lammens has assembled a mass of interesting material relating to Ṭāʾif's fertility and cultivation.¹⁵ There were here, as elsewhere in the Ḥijāz, wells, reservoirs, canals, and dams in great number. Also, more specifically, we know that Muʿāwiyah acquired more and more holdings in the vicinity of Ṭāʾif, so that his estates and those of his brothers ʿUtbah and ʿAnbasah became one solid block.¹⁶ Furthermore, it is specifically stated in Balādhuri's *Ansāb al-Ashraf*,¹⁷ and elsewhere, that Muʿāwiyah bought, or at least attempted to buy, an estate called al-Waḥṭ near Ṭāʾif belonging to ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ. Unfortunately, Al-Waḥṭ is not the site for which we are looking, since it lies

¹⁴ Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet, *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe*, Vol. I, Nos. 6 and 8.

¹⁵ H. Lammens, "La Cité Arabe de Ṭāʾif à la Veille de l'Hégire," in *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph*, VIII (Beyrouth, 1922), 139 ff., with full references to the sources. Cf. Maurice Tamisier, *Voyage en Arabie* (Paris, 1840), I, 341.

¹⁶ Balādhuri, *Futūḥ al-Buldān* (ed. De Goeje), p. 56; Yāqūt (ed. Wüstenfeld), III, 500; cf. Lammens, *Cité Arabe de Ṭāʾif*, pp. 238-39.

¹⁷ Olga Pinto and Giorgio Levi della Vida, *Il Califfo Muʿāwiyah I secondo il "Kitāb Ansāb al-Ashraf" . . . di Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā al-Balādhuri* (Rome, 1938), p. 71.

⁸ Ṭabari, II, 1357; Leone Caetani and Giuseppe Gabrieli, *Onomasticon Arabicum*, II, 956.

⁹ *Al-Nujūm* (ed. Juynboll and Matthes), I, 168.

¹⁰ Cf. Goldziher, s.v. "Abū Huraira" in the *Encyclopaedia of Islām*; Zambaur, *Manuel*, p. 24.

¹¹ Ibn-Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalāni, *al-Iṣābah*, IV.

¹² Goldziher, *loc. cit.*

¹³ Ibn-Taghri-Birdi, *loc. cit.* (cf. *Onomasticon*, *loc. cit.*).

in the Wādī Wajj, about nine kilometers south of the town.¹⁸ But at least there is plenty of literary evidence of Muʿāwiyah'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 Ṭāʾif. Not surprising, but happy confirmation, if such were needed. But what of this specific dam of his?

There is a passage in Balādhuri's *Futūḥ*,¹⁹ referring to some land between al-Jurf and Qanāḥ that abu-Bakr gave in fief to al-Zubayr b. al-ʿAwwām, where abu'l-Ḥasan al-Madāʾini is quoted as saying that "Qanāḥ is a valley stretching from al-Ṭāʾif to al-Arḥaḍiyah and Qarqarat al-Kudr, and thence it comes to Sadd (or Sudd)-Maʿūnah, from which it runs by the end of (or along?) al-Qadūm

¹⁸ Carlo Alfonso Nallino, *Raccolta di Scritti editi e inediti*, Vol. I, *L'Arabia Saʿūdiana* (1938), ed. Maria Nallino (Rome, 1939), p. 223; cf. Lammens, *Cité Arabe de Ṭāʾif*, p. 139. 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 Muʿāwiyah, also relating to a dam, in the neighborhood of Ṭāʾif. In Nallino's notes (cited above) there is a detailed description of the Sadd (or Sudd) al-Samallaqi, an ancient dam about twenty-two kilometers southeast of Ṭāʾif. 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 Muʿāwiyah because it bears an inscription, "scarcely legible," engraved on the rock. I quote from Nallino's Italian translation: "'ʿAbdullāh Pasha Bānāji photographed it at the beginning of this century and sent the photograph to Egypt, where the lines were deciphered and were said to read: 'Amr b. al-ʿĀṣ ordered the building of it at the command of the Commander of the Believers, Muʿāwiyah b. abi-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 Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal confused the Sadd al-Samallaqi with the dam we are considering here and that the inscription which ʿAbdullāh Pasha photographed may have been misread and in reality be "ours."

¹⁹ Ed. De Goeje, p. 13. Cf. Philip K. Hitti's translation, *The Origins of the Islamic State* ("Studies in History, Economics, and Public Law," Vol. LXVIII [New York: Columbia University Press, 1916]), p. 28. I am grateful to Professor Hitti for pointing out to me De Goeje's correction mentioned below.

and ends at the head of Qubūr al-Shuḥadāʾ at Uḥud." Now in De Goeje's text of Balādhuri it reads Sadd-Muʿāwiyah, which, of course, first caught my eye,²⁰ but in his *emendanda* the editor changes the word to read Maʿūnah, just why I do not know.²¹ The two words, Muʿāwiyah and Maʿūnah, are of course, bereft of consonantal points, identical. Did De Goeje find, on rechecking his manuscript texts, that the word was pointed "Maʿūnah," or, if the points were lacking or dubious, did he decide that Maʿūnah was the likely reading because of the proximity of Biʾr Maʿūnah, a locality said to be not far from the Ḥarraḥ of the Bani Sulaym on the mountain road between Mecca and Medina? Père Lammens, writing of Biʾr Maʿūnah,²² implies that Sadd Maʿūnah (sometimes corrupted, as he says, into Sadd Muʿāwiyah) is mentioned elsewhere than in Balādhuri, but I have not pursued this line of inquiry further. In any case, if Sadd Maʿūnah (or Muʿāwiyah) was, as Balādhuri suggests, far north of Mecca on the road to Medina, we are very far from the locality of the inscription, and for the time being I fear we must conclude that "our" dam is unknown to the Arab writers.

These are, so far as I can trace them, the immediate historical connotations.

I have remarked that this inscription appears to be the earliest dated historical inscription of the Muslim Arabs. We must of course exclude some of the coins, but, relying upon the *Répertoire*, here is the truly epigraphical record: a putative inscription on a bridge over the Batman Su, supposedly dated 22 A.H.²³ (I have little hesitation in rejecting this); a tombstone

²⁰ Cf. Lammens, *Moʿawiyah*, II, 140.

²¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 112.

²² *S.v.*, *Encyclopaedia of Islām*.

²³ Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, No. 4 bis (Taylor, "Travels in Kurdistan," *JRGS*, XXXV, 25).

built into the wall of a church in Cyprus, relating to an unknown, dated 29 A.H.,²⁴ and another tombstone, again of a historically obscure person, in Egypt, dated 31 A.H.²⁵ Then there is nothing until the year 65, seven years after the present inscription, a dubious record in Jerusalem;²⁶ followed by Maqrizi's text of the bridge inscription in Fustāt, dated 69;²⁷ and, finally, for the first time on firm ground, the famous inscription of the year 72 on the Qubbat al-Ṣakrah in Jerusalem.²⁸ Thus, excluding the two tombstones, we are in the presence of the first dated

كنا السك لعك الله صوبه
 امد المومسرينه عك الله رطهر
 باكر الله لسه ترم وحمسيرا
 اللهم اعمرك لك الله صوبه
 صد المومسرو ثبته وانظده ومثرا
 [امدا] لمومسرينه كعب عمرو رطراب

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.²⁹

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

²⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 5 (Harawī, MS).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 6 (Hawary, *JRAS*, 1930, pp. 322–23).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 7 (Clermont-Ganneau, *Recueil d'archéologie orientale*, II, 400).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, No. 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 9 (frequently published and reproduced).

²⁹ I am skeptical of M. Hamidullah's identification of some rock inscriptions near Medina with the names of the caliphs abu-Bakr and ʿUmar (“Some Arabic Inscriptions of Medinah 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 ʿUmar's own hand are very tenuous.

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 معوية; line 2, *b*, *n*, and *y* in بنه; line 3, *th* in ثمن, *y* in خمسين; line 4, *f* in اغفر (perhaps); line 5, *th*, *b*, and *t* in متع, *n* in وانصره, and *t* in ثبته (perhaps) and *y* in لمومنين, *b* in كتب, and *b* in جناب.

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 Qurʾānic 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 Qurʾānic parchments. There can be no doubt of the authenticity of the points. Their peculiar arrangement, similar to that in Qurʾānic 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

subject of the paleography of the early Qurʾāns; my only purpose here is to bring this extraordinary document to the attention of those equipped to make use of it.³⁰

II. OTHER GRAFFITI OF THE FIRST CENTURY OF THE HIJRAH

1. Beneath the Muʿāwiyah inscription, more thinly and faintly engraved, are five more lines of simple Kufic, (Pl. XVIII A) reading:

١. [رحمت الله و
٢. بركته على الحكم بن....
٣. وعلى محمد بن الحكم امين
٤. وعلى عبد الله بن محمد و
٥. تاب الله عليه

“(1) The peace of Allāh and (2) his blessing upon al-Ḥakam b. . . . (3) and upon Muḥammad b. al-Ḥakam, Āmīn; (4) and upon ʿAbdullāh 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 ʿAbdullāh was the son of

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 Ṭāʾif 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)

١. ان الله و ملائكته
٢. يصلون على النبي ياتها الذين
٣. امنوا صلوا عليه وسلموا
٤. تسليماً وكتب عبد الله بن تامين(?)
٥. محمد بن مهران

Muḥammad b. al-Ḥakam, and that, passing by the site at a later date, he had

“(1) Verily Allāh and his angels (2) bless the Prophet; O you who (3) believe, bless him and salute him (4) with a salutation! [Qurʾān 33:56] And wrote [it] ʿAbdullāh b. Taʾmīn [or Tām b. ?] (5) Muḥammad b. Mihran.”

Note the following epigraphic peculiarities: ملائكته for ملائكة, على for علي, and ياتها for ياتها. The name at the

³⁰ An exhaustive inquiry into the matter, and the complete bibliography, can be found in Nabia Abbott's *The Rise of the North Arabic Script and Its Qurʾānic Development, with a Full Description of the Qurʾān Manuscripts in the Oriental Institute* (“Oriental Institute Publications,” Vol. L [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939]); “Arabic Paleography” in *Ars Islamica* VIII (1941), 65–104. Cf. especially the criticisms and counterviews of Arthur Jeffery in *Moslem World*, XXX, No. 2 (April, 1940), 191–98.

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.³¹

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

انا عبدت(?) بن عمرو

"I [am] ʿAbadah (?) b. ʿAmru."

The first name is very doubtful.

c) (right center)

١. انا مو

٢. سي بن تميم

"(1) I [am] Mū- (2) sa b. Tamīm."

d) (center)

انا سهل بن ملك

"I [am] Sahl b. Mālik."

e) (center)

انا ارطاة بن عوف(?)

"I [am] Arṭāh b. ʿAwf (?)."

f) (upper left)

١. انا يزيد بن

٢. عبد الله انا

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

³¹ Dr. Nabia Abbott suggests بن باميين (the Arabic form of "Benjamin"). This may very well be the correct reading, although the objection would still remain that the use of two personal names, along with ʿAbdullāh, is unusual and unlikely.

g) (left center)

انا مسلم....

"I [am] Muslim. . . ."

h) (left center)

انا يزيد بن ميمون

"I [am] Yazīd b. Maymūn."

i) (left center)

١. انا عبد

٢. الله بن حسن(?)

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

j) (lower center)

انا عبد الله بن ا....

"I [am] ʿAbdullāh b. A. . . ."

k) (lower center)

١. اللهم ارحم

٢. لعبد الرحمن بن عمر(?)

"(1) O Allāh have mercy (2) upon ʿAbd al-Raḥman b. ʿUmar (?)."

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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