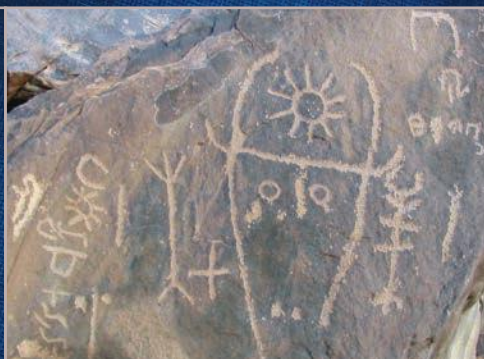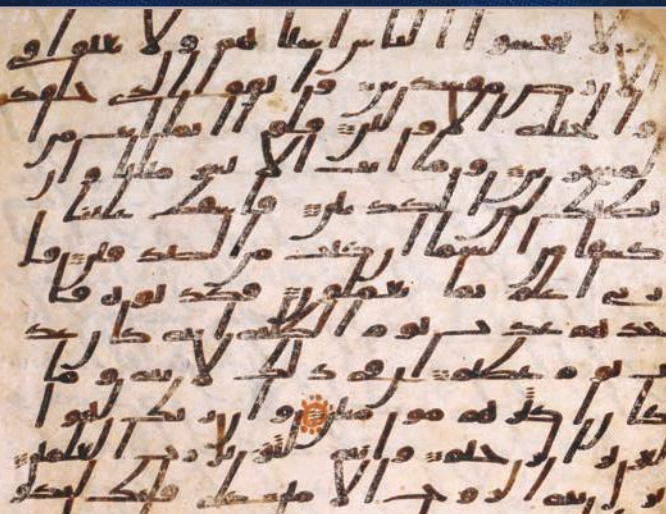# SCRIPTS AND SCRIPTURE

Writing and Religion in Arabia circa 500–700 CE

Edited by Fred M. Donner and
Rebecca Hasselbach-Andee

SCRIPTS AND SCRIPTURE

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Late Antique and Medieval Islamic Near East (LAMINE)

The Oriental Institute series LAMINE aims to publish a variety of scholarly works, including monographs, edited volumes, critical text editions, translations, studies of corpora of documents—in short, any work that offers a significant contribution to understanding the Near East between roughly 200 and 1000 CE.

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SCRIPTS AND SCRIPTURE

WRITING AND RELIGION IN ARABIA CIRCA 500–700 CE

Edited by

Fred M. Donner and Rebecca Hasselbach-Andee

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List of Abbreviations and Sigla

Sigla are in boldface.

AH	Ḥ. ʿA. D. Abū ʾl-Ḥasan. *Qirāʾah li-kitābāt liḥyāniyyah min ǧabal ʿakmah bi-minṭaqat al-ʿulā*. Riyadh: Maktabat al-malik fahd al-waṭaniyyah, 1997
ᴀʜ	*Anno Hegirae*, in the year of the Hijra
ANA	Ancient North Arabian
ArNab	Inscriptions from al-ʿArniyyāt published in Laïla Nehmé, ed., *The Darb al-Bakrah: A Caravan Route in North-West Arabia Discovered by Ali I. al-Ghabban—Catalogue of the Inscriptions.* A Series of Archaeological Refereed Studies 50. Riyadh: Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, 2018
ARNA.Nab	Frederick V. Winnett and William L. Reed, *Ancient Records from North Arabia.* Near and Middle East Series 6. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970
B Ia	one of several styles of Qurʾānic script as identified by F. Déroche
ʙᴄᴇ	before the Common Era
Bron1999	François Bron, "Une statuette en bronze à inscription en vieil-arabe." *Semitica* 49 (1999): 171–77
ca.	*circa*, about, approximately
CA	Classical Arabic
ᴄᴇ	Common Era
cf.	*confer/conferatur*, compare
ch(s).	chapter(s)
CIH	*Corpus Inscriptionum Himyariticarum, CIS pars IV*
CIS	*Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum, pars II, Inscriptiones Aramaicas continens.* Paris, 1889
col(s).	column(s)
CSAI	Corpus of South Arabian Inscriptions
d.	died
DaJ	Inscriptions from Dūmat al-Jandal
Dan.	Daniel (biblical book)
DASI	Digital Archive for the Study of pre-Islamic Arabian Inscriptions
DBv1Nab and	
DBv3Nab	Inscriptions from sites Darb al-Bakrah various 1 and various 3 published in Laïla Nehmé, ed., *The Darb al-Bakrah: A Caravan Route in North-West Arabia Discovered by Ali I. al-Ghabban—Catalogue of the Inscriptions.* A Series of Archaeological Refereed Studies 50. Riyadh: Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, 2018
ed.	edition, editor, edited by
e.g.	*exempli gratia*, for example
ESA	Epigraphic South Arabian

esp.	especially
Ex.	Exodus (biblical book)
FB-Wādī Šuḍayf	François Bron, "Quatre inscriptions sabéennes provenant d'un temple de Dhū-Samawī." *Syria* 74 (1997): 73–80
fig(s).	figure(s)
fol.	folio
Hag.	Haggai (biblical book)
HNNUT	Kh. al-Ḥāʾiṭī, *Al-nuqūš al-nabaṭiyyah fī al-manāṭiq al-wāqiʿah bayna muḥāfaẓatay al-ʿulā wa taymāʾ*. Silsilat dirāsāt ʾaṯariyyah muḥakkamah 35. Riyadh: Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, 2016
ibid.	*ibidem*, in the same place
i.e.	*id est*, that is
Ja 525	In Albert Jamme, "Inscriptions sud-arabes de la collection Ettore Rossi." *Rivista degli studi orientali* 30, no. 1/2 (1955): 103–30.
Ja 2147	In Albert Jamme, *Sabaean Inscriptions from Maḥram Bilqîs (MâRib)*. Publications of the American Foundation for the Study of Man 3. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962
Josh.	Joshua (biblical book)
JSNab	Antonin Jaussen and R. Savignac, *Mission archéologique en Arabie*. 5 vols. Publications de la Société française des fouilles archéologiques 2. Paris: Geuthner, 1909–22
KJV	King James Version (of the Bible)
Kortler 4	In Walter W. Müller, "Sabäische Felsinschriften von der jemenitishen Grenze zur Rubʿ al-Ḫālī." *Neue Ephemeris für semitische Epigraphik* 3 (1978): 113–36
l(l).	line(s)
LAMINE	Late Antique and Medieval Islamic Near East series
Lev.	Leviticus (biblical book)
LPArab	Enno Littmann, *Publications of the Princeton University Archaeological Expedition to Syria in 1904–1905*. Div. 4, *Semitic Inscriptions*. Sec. D, *Arabic Inscriptions*. Leiden: Brill, 1949
MAIS	Kh. al-Muaikil, "Naqšān ʿarabiyyān mubakkirān min sakāka." *Addarah* 19, no. 3 (1993): 112–31
Matt.	Matthew (biblical book)
mp	masculine plural
ms	masculine singular
MS	Inscriptions from Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ
MṢM 7250	In Ibrāhīm al-Ṣilwī and Fahmī al-Aghbarī, "Naqš Jadīd Min Nuqūš Al-Iʿtirāf Al ʿalanī Min Maʿbad ĠRW." *Adūmātū* 25 (2013): 51–58
München 94-317880	In Muḥammad ʿA. Bāfaqīh, "Ḏū Yaġruwwa-Amīrwa-Ḥanānfīḍawʾ al-nuqūš." In *Arabia Felix: Beiträge zur Sprache und Kultur des vorislamischen Arabien—Festschrift Walter W. Müller zum 60. Geburtstag*, edited by Norbert Nebes, 21–38. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1994
n(n).	note(s)
n.d.	no date
Neh.	Nehemiah (biblical book)

no(s).	number(s)
n.s.	new series
Num.	Numbers (biblical book)
OA	Old Arabic
OCIANA	Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia
O I	an early style of Qurʾānic script, as identified by F. Déroche
OSA	Old South Arabian
PERF 558	oldest surviving Arabic papyrus
pers. comm.	personal communication
p(p).	page(s)
pl(s).	plate(s)
plur.	plural
Ps.	Psalm (chapter in biblical book of Psalms)
pt(s).	part(s)
Q.	Qurʾān
QNNab	Inscriptions from Qāʿ an-Naqayb published in Laïla Nehmé, ed., *The Darb al-Bakrah: A Caravan Route in North-West Arabia Discovered by Ali I. al-Ghabban—Catalogue of the Inscriptions*. A Series of Archaeological Refereed Studies 50. Riyadh: Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, 2018
RES	*Répertoire d'épigraphie sémitique*
S	Inscriptions from Sakākā
Ṣanʿāʾ 2004-1	In Alessia Prioletta, "Evidence from a New Inscription Regarding the Goddess ʿ t(t)rm and Some Remarks on the Gender of Deities in South Arabia." *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 42 (2012): 309–18
SBNab	Inscriptions from Sūḥ al-Baghlah published in Laïla Nehmé, ed., *The Darb al-Bakrah: A Caravan Route in North-West Arabia Discovered by Ali I. al-Ghabban—Catalogue of the Inscriptions*. A Series of Archaeological Refereed Studies 50. Riyadh: Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, 2018
scil.	*scilicet*, that is to say, namely
sec(s).	section(s)
Ṣilwī Šudayf (al-Ṣilwī)	In Ibrāhim al-Ṣilwī, "Naqš ǧadīd min nuqūš al-iʿtirāf." *Al-Taʾrīḫwa-l-aṯār* 1 (1993): 4–6
sing.	singular
s.v(v).	*sub verbo*(*verbis*), under the word(s)
ThMNN	S. Al-Theeb, *Mudawwanat al-nuqūš al-nabaṭiyyah fī'l-mamlakah al-ʿ arabiyyah al-saʿūdiyyah*. Riyadh: Dārat al-malik ʿAbdul ʿAzīz, 2010
ThNIS	S. Al-Theeb, "New Nabataean Inscriptions from the Site of al-Sīj in the Region of al-ʿUlā, Saudi Arabia." *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 41 (2011): 349–70
ThNJUT	S. Al-Theeb, *Nuqūš nabaṭiyyah fī al-jawf, al-ʿulā, taymāʾ, al-mamlakah al-ʿarabiyyah al-suʿūdiyyah*. Riyadh: Maṭbūʿāt maktabat al-malik Fahd al-waṭaniyyah, 2005
ThNS	S. Al-Theeb, *Nuqūš mawqiʿ sarmadāʾ muḥāfaẓat taymāʾ*. Riyadh: Jāmiʿat al-malik Saʿūd, kulliyyat as-siyāḥah wa-l-ʾāṯār, 2014
trans.	translation, translator, translated by

TS	Inscriptions from the Taymāʾ Survey
UJadhNab	Inscriptions from Umm Jadhāyidh published in Laïla Nehmé, ed., *The Darb al-Bakrah: A Caravan Route in North-West Arabia Discovered by Ali I. al-Ghabban—Catalogue of the Inscriptions.* A Series of Archaeological Refereed Studies 50. Riyadh: Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, 2018
v(v).	verse(s)
vol(s).	volume(s)
vs.	versus
YM 10703	In Muḥammad ʿA. Bāfaqīh, "Ḏū Yaġruwwa-Amīrwa-Ḥanānfīḍawʾ al-nuqūš." In *Arabia Felix: Beiträge zur Sprache und Kultur des vorislamischen Arabien—Festschrift Walter W. Müller zum 60. Geburtstag*, edited by Norbert Nebes, 21–38. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1994

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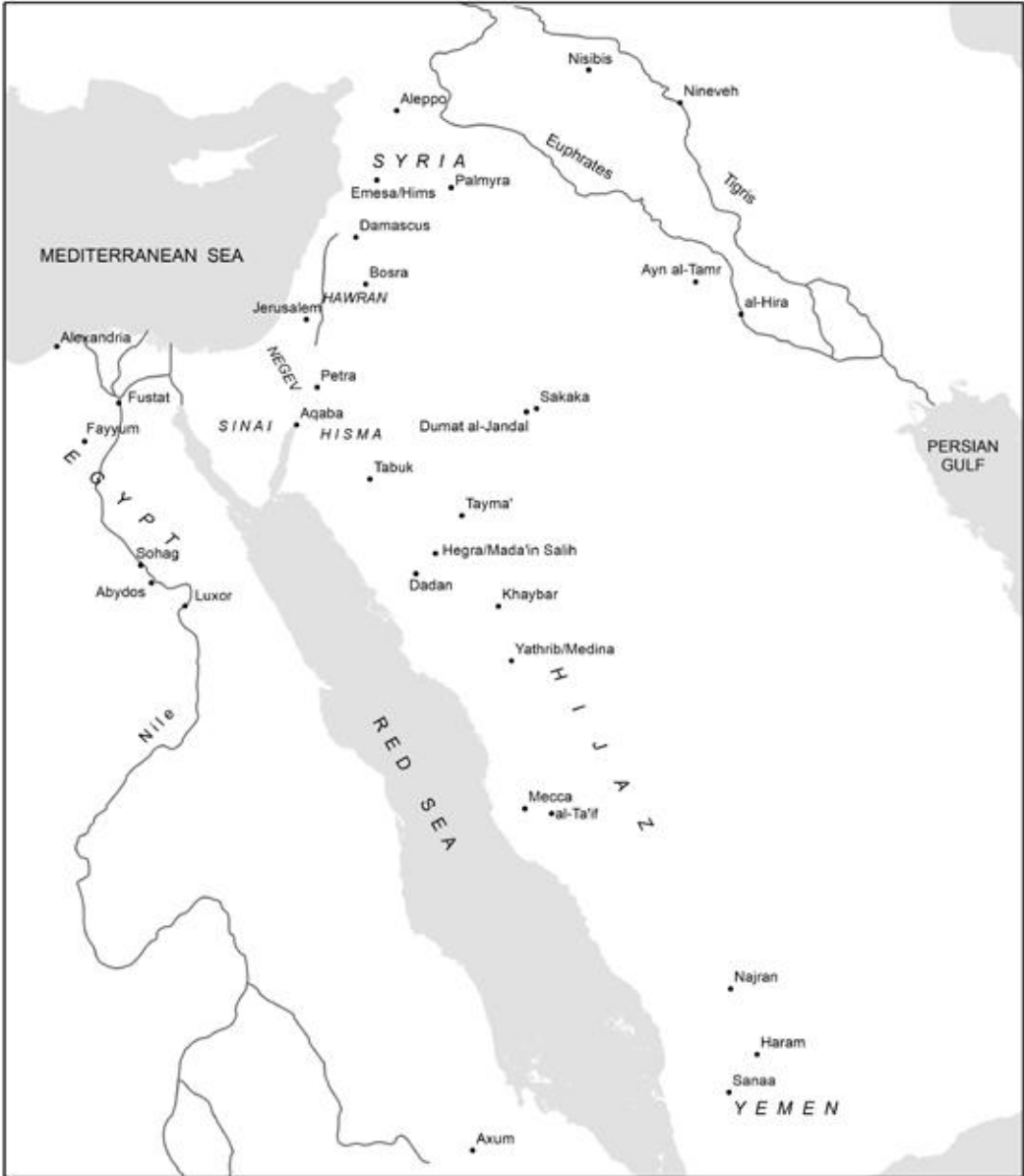
Arabia and adjacent regions (sites mentioned in book)
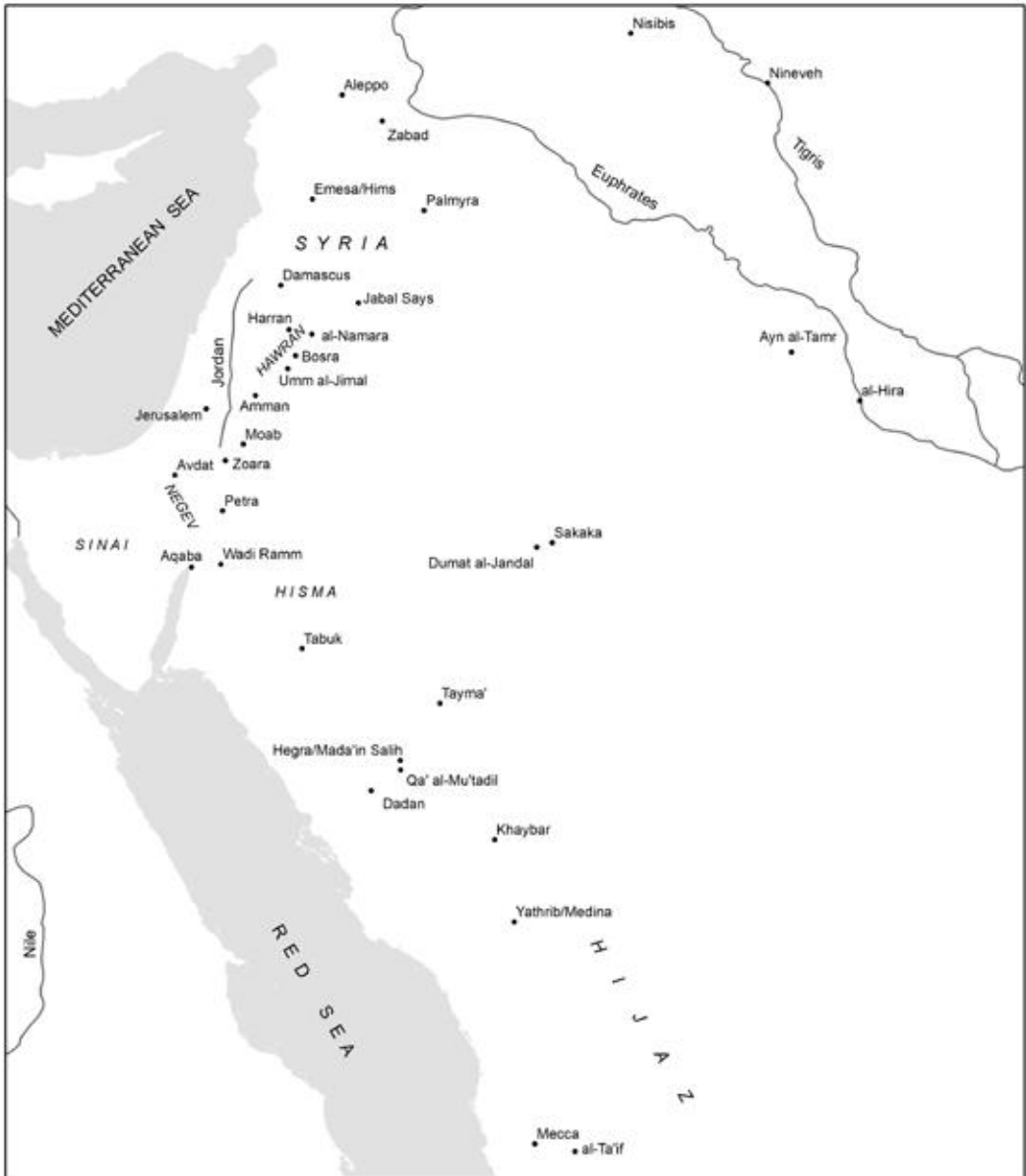
North Arabia (sites mentioned in book)

Introduction

During the centuries leading up to the emergence of Islam, various religions, both monotheistic and otherwise, were practiced in the Arabian Peninsula and adjacent regions that had contact with Arabia. The Muslim tradition itself, for example, describes various cults devoted to the worship of diverse "pagan" divinities. At the same time, it conveys many narratives about Jewish tribes living with Muḥammad's early community and elsewhere in Arabia. For a long time, scholars have also had access to Greek texts describing some pre-Islamic Arabian religious practices and to Syriac texts relating the experiences of Christian communities in Arabia. The involvement of the kingdom of Axum and its Christian rulers in the political and religious life of the southern parts of the peninsula in the sixth century is also well known. Of major importance for the understanding of the religious landscape of pre-Islamic Arabia are, of course, also the thousands of inscriptions from South Arabia, mainly from the area of today's Yemen, that cover a time span of almost fifteen hundred years (from about the eighth century BCE to the sixth century CE) and that reflect the transition in at least parts of the population from an earlier polytheistic religious system to some form of monotheism around the fourth century CE. How exactly this "monotheism" was practiced and realized—that is, if it was primarily a form of Judaism or Christianity or something else entirely—and whether it was truly monotheistic are complex issues that still require more detailed study. Other sources for pre-Islamic religions or cult practices in Arabia, although less informative than the ones mentioned thus far, are the thousands of graffiti and short inscriptions that have been discovered in northern Arabia and that are written in what is commonly labeled "Ancient North Arabian" or "Epigraphic North Arabian."

Besides the various and evolving religious landscapes that can be traced, at least to a certain degree, based on the aforementioned sources, Arabia in the century or so before Islam seems also to have been an area in which writing and writing systems were developing and undergoing significant changes. The ancient tradition of writing South Arabian languages (Sabaic, Minaic, Qatabanic, and Hadramitic, to name the major ones), used widely for almost fifteen hundred years, appears to have died out by the middle of the sixth century CE. The same is true for the various related scripts that were used to write Ancient North Arabian. At the beginning of the seventh century, however, the Arabic text of the Qurʾān, the Islamic scripture, appears to have emerged in West Arabia written in a script that developed from earlier Nabataean writing. This fact alone suggests that there may have existed more developed traditions of writing and religious thought in Arabia than was commonly believed by Western scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This traditional understanding of pre-Islamic Arabia, which was current until fairly recently, was based mainly on later Islamic reports. These later Islamic descriptions of pre-Islamic Mecca and Arabia do mention the existence of Jews and, occasionally, Christians in West Arabia on the eve of Islam; but on balance, they depict these areas and cities

as dominated by polytheistic animist religious cults. This depiction, however, presumably reflects in part the desire of later Muslim scholars to portray the teachings of the prophet Muḥammad (d. 632 CE) as bringing monotheism to Arabia for the first time by emphasizing a pagan background. But as we consider the documentary information recently discovered from Arabia itself, some of which makes the robust presence of Jews and Christians evident, this earlier view seems to be misleading. Recent research on the Qurʾān, moreover, has proposed that this text was not so much a theological response to paganism as it was the product of an engagement with currents in the Judeo-Christian tradition with which it disagreed (for example, the Christian notion that Jesus was God's son and the concept of the Trinity, or the stringency of Jewish dietary restrictions). Archaeological excavations and survey work undertaken in recent decades in and around the peninsula have brought to light new and helpful evidence, such as archaeologically identified monasteries in the Gulf region, cultic sites in Yemen and modern-day Jordan, and the aforementioned inscriptions from both northern and southern Arabia. All this evidence points to a richly varied religious life in Arabia during the sixth century and hints at burgeoning literary activity leading up to the appearance of the Qurʾān. In addition, the relatively recent discovery of numerous inscriptions and graffiti in Arabic dating to the period shortly after the appearance of the Qurʾān has stimulated renewed research into these questions of writing and religion.

A growing international community of scholars concerned with pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabia is now engaged in a vigorous debate about these questions of writing and religion and how they interact with each other. We need to know more about such basic issues as the locations of the various religious communities and their relations vis-à-vis one another; the production, availability, and possible contact of sacred texts; the nature and development of theological ideas in various localities; the evolution and concomitant influence of the very languages and scripts in which religious practices and ideas were spoken, written, and transmitted; and the manner and degree to which all these Arabian phenomena were affected by factors beyond Arabia, particularly the imperial traditions of Byzantium/Rome and Persia and the powerful religious traditions of the Fertile Crescent, particularly Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism.

This volume represents the proceedings of a conference that convened at the University of Chicago on May 18–19, 2017.[1] This conference addressed the issues and questions presented above. It was attended by leading scholars of Ancient North and South Arabian, Nabataean, pre-Islamic, and Islamic Arabic dialectology and epigraphy; Qurʾānic studies; and Arabian archaeology. The goal was to generate a rich interdisciplinary discussion of these basic issues of writing and religion that provide the background to the appearance and coalescence of the Qurʾān so as to help place that enigmatic text into a firmer historical, linguistic, religious, and literary context.

The present volume contains thirteen chapters that address both philological and literary aspects. Although the stated parameters of the conference were Arabia from about 500 to 700 CE, a number of articles somewhat spill over those artificial boundaries. This broadening is most noticeable in the case of the chapter by M. C. A. Macdonald, which describes

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1 Thirteen of the fourteen papers presented at the conference appear as chapters in this volume. On the fourteenth contribution, see below.

the religious concepts of northern Arabia (and adjacent parts of Syria, Sinai, etc.) on the basis of graffiti and inscriptions dating sometimes several centuries before the rise of Islam; they are important, however, because graffiti of this kind seem to die out by about 500 CE, so these earlier writings provide us with almost the only documentary clues as to what religious practice in this region may have been in the century before Islam—otherwise we would have no documentary data. Other chapters, too, sometimes deal with materials outside Arabia (but usually connected to it) or extending beyond 700 CE (especially chapters dealing with the text of the Qurʾan).

An obvious lacuna in the coverage of this volume, and of the conference on which it is based, is the absence of a chapter devoted to pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. This omission was intentional, however, since we desired to rely as much as possible on documentary rather than literary sources in the discussion of the issues of language and religion in the pre-Islamic era. While Arabic poetry does contain information on these subjects, our concern was that as literary texts—and texts whose date of origin has been called into question—the poems alleged to be of pre-Islamic origin might provide misleading information that reflected mainly the views of later transmitters over the Islamic centuries rather than the linguistic and religious realities of the sixth century.

Another lacuna in the volume—but not in the conference—is a chapter devoted to questions of language and religion in South Arabia. We were fortunate to have at the conference Professor Christian Julien Robin, a most active participant whose intimate knowledge of the corpus of South Arabian inscriptions brought welcome insights at many turns. His paper is not included in this volume, however, because it was very long—almost one hundred pages in its original form—and, unlike the other contributions, was written in French rather than English. For reasons of both length and language, therefore, we proposed to him that his contribution form a separate volume in the LAMINE series. A brief summary of the contributions to the present volume follows here.

Fred M. Donner provides an introduction to the three major language groups and scripts of pre-Islamic Arabia—namely, Old South Arabian, Ancient North Arabian, and Nabataean—and their relation to Arabic. Although it is now certain that the Arabic script is derived from Nabataean writing, it is still unclear where exactly Arabic writing arose. The latter question, Donner argues, might be answered by looking at certain features in the Arabic orthography such as the seat of the *hamza* and the spelling of the definite article. He concludes that Arabic might have first been written in northwest Arabia or in the Ḥijāz.

Michael C. A. Macdonald gathers evidence for religious practices in North Arabia. In particular, he compares the evidence found in the major oases of Taymāʾ, Dadan, and Duma—although the latter hardly yields any evidence—to that of nomadic peoples, especially those represented by the large Safaitic corpus. Interestingly, the scarce evidence seems to indicate that religious practices in settled areas such as oases differed quite drastically from those of nomadic people. In the oases of Taymāʾ and Dadan, worship seems to be mostly limited to one particular deity, with other deities mentioned only rarely, while the nomadic people seem to have worshipped a larger number of deities.

Laïla Nehmé looks at the religious landscape of northwest Arabia as reflected in Nabataean, Nabataeo-Arabic, and pre-Islamic inscriptions from the area. These three major corpora reflect consecutive stages of writing in the period from the first century BCE to the fifth and sixth centuries CE and thus allow for the investigation of diachronic developments. In

particular, Nehmé collects and investigates the evidence from divine names and theophoric elements in these corpora and concludes that, although there are local differences, the most popular divine and theophoric names are spread throughout the Nabataean kingdom. She further outlines the major divinities attested in various areas of the northwestern Arabian Peninsula.

Ahmad Al-Jallad investigates a well-known issue in pre-Islamic inscriptions that also occurs, although rarely, in the Qurʾān, namely, the occurrence of final -*w* on anthroponyms, a feature that occurs frequently in pre-Islamic inscriptions. Al-Jallad suggests that this -*w* originally presented the marker of the nominative case but was gradually fossilized and reinterpreted as an orthographic device for triptotic names in some traditions of Arabic writing.

Robert Hoyland investigates the connotations of two prominent terms in the Qurʾān—*ʿarabī* and *aʿjamī*. *ʿArabī* is commonly described as "clear" or "clarifying," while *aʿjamī* has negative connotations. In his article, Hoyland asks what *ʿarabī* and *aʿjamī* might reflect in terms of underlying languages. Based on the evidence from the Qurʾān and pre-Islamic inscriptions, he argues that *ʿarabī* reflects the Arabic spoken in a particular area as evidenced in said inscriptions, while *aʿjamī* seems to be linked to Aramaic or may even refer to Aramaic itself.

Gordon Newby looks at the questions of pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabia and scripture through the lens of Arabian Jews. He argues that Jewish influence was part of a complex tapestry that was antecedent to and contemporary with an Arabian culture and the embedded language and notions of scripture and religion reflected in the Qurʾān.

Sidney Griffith takes a new look at an old question, namely, whether there existed a written translation of the Bible into Arabic during the first third of the seventh century CE. Investigating passages from the Qurʾān, Griffith notices that although the text exhibits a high awareness of the Bible, it hardly ever quotes the Bible itself. In addition, it contains narratives and motifs that are better known from parabiblical literature. In an attempt to find the potential sources or parallels for these biblical and parabiblical narratives, Griffith compares the biblical stories in the Qurʾān with the Syriac literary type termed *mêmrê*.

Suleyman Dost looks at the language of ritual purity in the Qurʾān and compares certain idioms and terms to those found in Old South Arabian inscriptions. After investigating Qurʾānic and South Arabian terms and concepts, he concludes that there are substantial parallels between the Qurʾānic terms of ritual purity and those found in South Arabia, especially in the subcorpus of Haramic texts. The code of ritual purity found in these Haramic texts shows intriguing parallels with its Qurʾānic counterpart as well. The Haramic inscriptions thus provide important evidence for understanding the Qurʾānic injunctions.

François Déroche looks at the development of manuscripts of the Qurʾān and ties that development to the question why certain older manuscript traditions that existed during the early years of Islam were deliberately destroyed. Déroche questions the common explanation that the destruction of earlier manuscripts was motivated by an attempt to eradicate competing versions of the Qurʾān. Instead, he argues, the Qurʾān went through a longer period during which an ideal conception of the text was sought. A final representation emerged only in the tenth century, when the text itself was canonized.

Kyle Longworth investigates early Arabic tombstone inscriptions to place them into the wider context of late antique Christian and Jewish epithets. Christian and Jewish

tombstones of late antiquity often lack explicit theological doctrines, a feature that early Arabic tombstones seem to share. Only later epithets on Arabic tombstones developed an emphasis on the Qurʾān and Muḥammad.

Ilkka Lindstedt investigates the expression of religious warfare and martyrdom in Arabic graffiti from the period between 690 and 730 CE—the time of the early formation of Islam—to trace the background and emergence of these concepts. After a thorough examination of the pertinent inscriptions, Lindstedt argues that the Arabic graffiti show that early Muslims in general viewed fighting and falling in God's path in religious terms and as religiously inspired. That the inscriptional evidence is limited to a specific period (the Marwānid), however, begs the question whether the conclusions are equally valid for earlier periods.

Adam Flowers looks at the development of the term *sūrah*. He argues that this term originally denoted smaller, independent units of prophetic revelation, which were then combined into longer chapters. Flowers bases his claim on paleographic, literary, and historiographical analysis.

Hamza Zafer investigates the relationship between the concepts of "prophet" and "anti-prophet" in the Qurʾān, with the former claiming power through prophecy and the latter through patrimony. He develops the idea of an "antipatrimonial" theme or attitude in Qurʾānic historiography, a theme that reflects the tension or rupture between prophecy and patrimony. Throughout the article, Zafer develops this concept based on the historiographic pericopes commonly referred to as "histories of cities."

We are pleased to offer this collection of excellent essays to the public, and we trust that readers will benefit from the intellectual energy that was felt at the conference, titled "Scripts and Scriptures," on which this volume is based.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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A NOTE ON DATES

Dates preceding the rise of Islam in the seventh century are given according to the Common era (CE), or occasionally BCE. For years following the rise of Islam, dates are usually given in both the Muslim era (AH, *Anno Hegirae*) and the Common era, with a slash separating the AH and CE dates (e.g., 132 AH/750 CE, or sometimes simply 132/750 or "second/eighth century" when the context makes matters clear).

1   Scripts and Scripture in Late Antique Arabia

An Overview[1]

Fred M. Donner
University of Chicago

WHAT WAS THE BACKGROUND AGAINST which the sacred scripture of Islam, the Qurʾān, first emerged? Any attempt to answer this apparently simple question forces us to confront a range of difficult issues having to do with the diverse languages spoken where the Qurʾān arose,[2] the writing systems used to record them, and the precursor scriptural traditions in the region that might have served as models or affected how contemporaries received the new scripture.

THREE TRADITIONS OF WRITING

In the first half of the first millennium CE, three indigenous traditions of writing were current in various parts of the Arabian Peninsula and adjacent lands;[3] the writing of Arabic, in its now-familiar cursive script, was not one of them. The first of the three forms of writing was a distinctive monumental script (fig. 1.1), known as *musnad*, that was used to write a group of related Semitic languages (lumped together for convenience under the terms Old South Arabian [OSA], Epigraphic South Arabian [ESA], or Ancient South Arabian [ASA]).[4] These were the languages of the ancient South Arabian kingdoms of Maʿīn, Sabaʾ,

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1 I am indebted to several colleagues from the "Scripts and Scripture" conference (University of Chicago, May 2017) for helpful comments and guidance on the issues touched on in this essay, particularly colleagues Ahmad Al-Jallad, Michael Macdonald, and Rebecca Hasselbach-Andee.

2 Generally assumed to be Arabia, but some scholars—notably Wansbrough, in his *Qurʾanic Studies*—have proposed that the Qurʾān was actually the product of southern Iraq or Syria.

3 It should be noted that the three writing traditions are presented here in a highly simplified way; each one of them displayed significant regional variations both in the actual glyphs they used and in the languages they sought to render. There are also to be found in Arabia occasional graffiti and inscriptions in languages such as Greek, Latin, and Hebrew left by travelers or others who were not native to Arabia. An increasingly complete and valuable online database of Arabian inscriptions of all kinds is the Digital Archive for the Study of Pre-Islamic Arabian Inscriptions (DASI), accessible at http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it/.

4 On these languages, see Hasselbach-Andee, "Old South Arabian," and Nebes and Stein, "Ancient South Arabian"; also Stein, "Palaeography of the Ancient South Arabian Script." The online database Corpus of South Arabian Inscriptions (CSAI), which aims to include images, transcriptions, and translations of all known South Arabian inscriptions, is being compiled at the University of Pisa as part of the broader DASI project (see n. 3 above).

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Figure 1.1. Sabaic inscription (YM 14329, Yemen Museum). The
inscription begins in the upper right and proceeds *boustrophedon*:
*ʿmkrb bn rʾs¹hmw ḏs²qr mwdd smhʿly wyt̠ʿʾmr hqny ʾlmqh kl wldhw
bʿt̠tr wb ʾlmqh wb ḏt ḥmym wb s¹mhwly wb yt̠ʿʾmr*. Translation:
"ʿmkrb (PN), son of rʾs¹hmw (PN) of ḏ-s²qr (probably tribal
name), friend of s¹mhʿly (ruler) and yt̠ʿʾmr (ruler) dedicated
to ʾlmqh (deity) all his sons. By ʾt̠tr (deity) and by ʾlmqh and
by ḏt-h.mym (female deity) and by s¹mhʿly and by yt̠ʿʾmr."
(I am grateful to R. Hasselbach-Andee for the translation.)

Qatabān, Ḥaḍramawt, and later Ḥimyar that dominated southwest Arabia and adjacent regions from late in the second millennium BCE until about the time of the rise of Islam; and the *musnad* writing system had been in use since the eighth century BCE for formal inscriptions such as temple dedications and commemorative markers on dams and other constructions. The home region of this writing tradition was Yemen and adjacent districts, but a few inscriptions have been found much farther afield, such as one in Minaean on the Greek island of Delos that, presumably, was left by a South Arabian merchant. Beginning in the 1970s, inscribed palm-sticks have also been discovered—palm-sticks that represent another, more cursive way of writing these languages (known as *zabūr*) for use in more ephemeral communications such as letters.

The second epigraphic tradition of late antique Arabia was found in northern Arabia and southern geographical Syria and was employed to write a variety of dialects of North Arabian languages. These are sometimes called Old Arabic (OA) and Ancient North Arabian (ANA), but the designation really refers to the scripts used and does not necessarily indicate close linguistic affinity.[5] Several sets of letter-forms—often related, but not identical to one another—have been identified and sometimes linked to a particular region or town, including the scripts called Safaitic, Dadanitic (Lihyanic), Hismaic, Taymanatic, and Thamudic. These glyphs were used to inscribe tens of thousands of graffiti, or much more rarely monumental inscriptions, on stones and rock walls from central Syria down to the northern Ḥijāz (as well as a few examples from eastern Arabia; fig. 1.2). The languages or dialects rendered by these alphabets belong to the Semitic family, and it has been suggested that some of them may be the linguistic precursors of what eventually crystallizes as Arabic, despite the many variations in linguistic features among them. Al-Jallad, for example, argues that the "Safaitic" inscriptions reflect an early form of Arabic on the basis of a substantial number of isoglosses,[6] but this view remains conjectural. A noteworthy feature of both the South Arabian and the ancient North Arabian alphabets is that they contained a number of glyphs (usually twenty-eight or twenty-nine) sufficient to have a distinct symbol for each consonant used in the Semitic dialect they rendered into writing. A further characteristic is that neither of these systems wrote vowels, either long or short, in any way. So, in these writing systems, words that were pronounced *kitāb*, *kātib*, *kataba*, and *kutub*, for example, would all be written simply as *k-t-b*.

The third inscriptional tradition of late antique Arabia was that of Nabataean, used to write the Nabataean dialect of Aramaic, itself a descendant of Imperial Aramaic (fig. 1.3).[7] Centered on the Nabataean capital, Petra, Nabataean was written in southern Syria (the Ḥawrān region, etc.), Sinai, and northeastern Arabia as far south as Madā'in Ṣaliḥ in the Ḥijāz; and a few Nabataean inscriptions have recently been found in north-central Arabia

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5 The linguistic situation in northern Arabia in this period, as well as the use of scripts there, was highly complex. In "Ancient North Arabian," Macdonald gives a good overview of North Arabian linguistics. See also his "Reflections on the Linguistic Map of Pre-Islamic Arabia" and Al-Jallad's "What Is Ancient North Arabian?" The North Arabian inscriptions are being compiled in the Online Corpus of Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia (OCIANA), also part of the DASI archive (see n. 3 above).

6 Especially Al-Jallad, "What Is Ancient North Arabian?"

7 See Macdonald, "Languages, Scripts, and the Use of Writing." The Nabataean inscriptions are also being collected in the DASI archive; see n. 3 above.

around Sakāka and Dūmat al-Jandal (modern al-Jawf).

In comparison with the South Arabian and Ancient North Arabian writing systems, which had almost thirty glyphs, Nabataean contained only twenty-two distinct glyphs, a number sufficient to render the consonants found in the Nabataean dialect of Aramaic. It also differed from the other writing systems in using the letters *w* and *y* both to indicate those consonants and as *matres lectionis* to render the long vowels *ū* and *ī*, respectively.

These three traditions of writing all had a robust presence and left behind tens of thousands of

Figure 1.2. A pre-Islamic North Arabian inscription (Hismaic/Safaitic mixed script). The inscription begins vertically on the left side: *l ʿqrb bn msᵏ d ʾl ʿmrt w ḥll sᵗnt mt ḥrtt h-mlk*. Translation: "By ʿqrb son of Msᵏk of the people of ʿmrt and he camped the year Ḥāretat the king died." (Reproduced from Al-Salameen, "A New Ancient North Arabian Inscription.")

graffiti and monumental inscriptions in southern Arabia, the Ḥijāz and northern Arabia, and southern geographical Syria over a period of fifteen hundred years. Yet two of these Arabian traditions of writing inexplicably died out in, or before, the sixth century CE. The South Arabian inscriptions became increasingly few during the fourth and fifth centuries CE, and the monumental Epigraphic South Arabian inscriptions died out completely in the sixth century; the last dated inscription in Epigraphic South Arabian is from about 554 CE. It is usually claimed that graffiti and other writings in the Ancient North Arabian scripts also died in the fifth century CE, if they had not already done so by the fourth century, because none of them makes any mention of Christianity, which would be expected if they were inscribed in the fifth century or later. The absence of references to Christianity is suggestive, but as most such inscriptions are short graffiti that include only names, which might not reveal the writer's religion, this *argumentum ex silentio* should perhaps not be considered decisive. On the other hand, there is no positive evidence for the survival into the seventh century CE of graffiti in any of the Old North Arabian scripts. So the demise of this system of writing by the time of the rise of Islam, if not long before, seems fairly certain.

On the other hand, the writing of Nabataean—the third written tradition of pre-Islamic Arabia—underwent a more complex and more interesting evolution in the centuries before the rise of Islam, that is, between the third and seventh centuries CE. It was proposed long ago, by pioneers in comparative Semitics such as Theodor Nöldeke (1836–1930), Julius Euting (1839–1913), and Mark Lidzbarski (1868–1928), that the Nabataean alphabet was the ancestor of the letter-forms of the Arabic script. This assertion was based in part on the observation that the cursive script of Arabic, like the Nabataean alphabet, contains fewer letter-forms than the Arabic language's twenty-eight consonants, thus requiring some letters to represent two or more consonants in Arabic and eventually distinguishing them through a system of diacritical dots—to distinguish the sound of *ʿayn* from that of
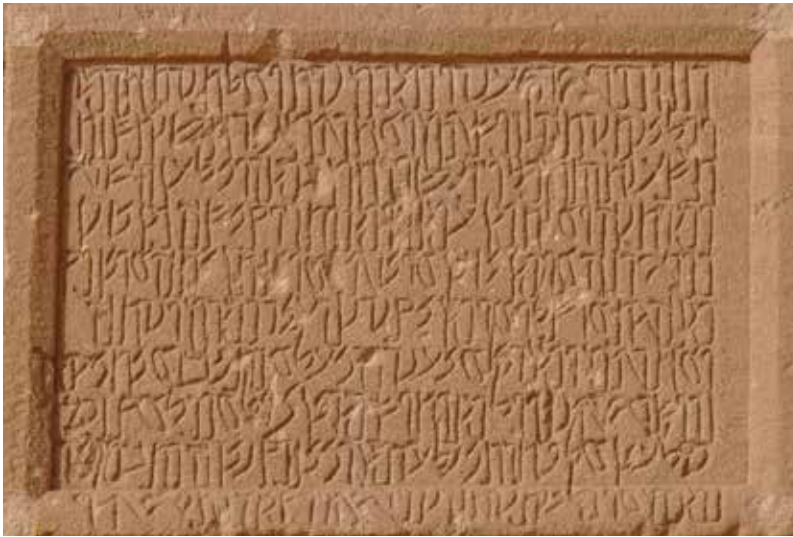
Figure 1.3. Nabataean inscription H 16 from Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ. A dedication
of a tomb built by two aristocratic women of Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ, it is dated
1 BCE/CE. The first two-and-one-half lines read: *dnh kprʾ dy ʿbdw kmkm
brt wʾlt brt ḥrmw / wklybt brth lnpšhm sʾḥrhm byrḥ ṭbt šnt /tšʿ lḥrtt
mlk nbṭw rḥm ʿamh*. Translation: "This is the tomb which Kamkam
daughter of Waʾilat daughter of Haramu and Kulaybat, her daughter,
made for themselves and their descendants. In the month of Tebet, the
ninth year of Haretat, King of the Nabataeans, lover of his people."
(First published in Healey, *The Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions of Madaʾin
Salih*, 154–62. Photograph by, and courtesy of, M. C. A. Macdonald.)

ghayn, for example. (In contrast, as we have noted above, both the South Arabian and
the pre-Islamic North Arabian scripts contained separate letter-forms for all twenty-eight
Arabic consonants.[8]) The decision to write Arabic in an alphabet that, because of its more
limited repertoire of letter-forms, was in this respect inadequate to render the sounds of
Arabic presumably reflects the status of Nabataean and its writing system as the political
and cultural prestige language of northern Arabia in the early centuries CE.

About sixty years ago the Semitist Jean Starcky (1909–1968) challenged the idea that
the Arabic script derived from Nabataean. Starcky, observing that both the Arabic and
Syriac scripts feature a prominent baseline, argued for a Syriac origin for the Arabic script,
and he speculated that it may have arisen as a chancery script at the court of the Naṣrid
dynasty of al-Ḥīra in Iraq.[9] While a few scholars backed Starcky's views,[10] many criticized
his theory, and most of his arguments were effectively refuted by Adolf Grohmann, but

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8 Actually, the South Arabian alphabet contained even more letters, as at least one of the phonemes
found in South Arabian (a sibilant referred to by Semitists as sᶾ) is not found among the repertory of
twenty-eight consonants in Arabic.

9 Starcky, "Pétra et la Nabatène," cols. 932–34: "L'écriture arabe . . . dérive tout entière du syriaque tel
qu'il était écrit dans la capitale laḥmide."

10 Notably Troupeau, "Écriture et phonétique arabes," bringing phonological support.

it has continued to attract some adherents.[11] Recently, it has also been proposed that the Arabic script derived directly from a cursive form of the South Arabian script,[12] but in view of the limited numbers of letter-forms in Arabic, this derivation seems unlikely. For as noted above, the South Arabian alphabets had distinct signs for all the Arabic consonants, so there would have been no reason to drop some letter-forms and then be forced to make other letters do double duty. Moreover, the letter-forms of Arabic script do not resemble those of the South Arabian alphabet.

Especially through the work of Michael Macdonald and Laïla Nehmé, this debate over the origin of the Arabic script has been definitively settled in the last few years by the discovery of more late Nabataean inscriptions written in cursive form (rather than as separate letters in the alphabet). These cursive Nabataean inscriptions demonstrate convincingly that the latest Nabataean letter-forms, found in graffiti from the third to fifth centuries, occupy a transitional position between "classical" Nabataean letter-forms and letter-forms of the Arabic script;[13] Nehmé has proposed that this kind of writing should be called "Nabataeo-Arabic" to signal clearly its transitional quality.[14] The last dated Nabataean inscription so far discovered is from 455–456 CE; but from the period of the transition, we find some inscriptions that mix classical and cursive Nabataean letter-forms with Arabic letter-forms (which are, of course, cursive); the language of some of these inscriptions is Nabataean Aramaic language, but others are written in a form of Arabic language, and some contain a mixture of words from both languages.[15] So in one sense the Nabataean tradition of writing never died out but instead evolved gradually into the writing of Arabic script. But this evolution went hand-in-hand with the gradual replacement of Aramaic language by Arabic language in the inscriptions. Thus, in the linguistic sense, Nabataean did die out.

The transition from Nabataean to Arabic writing was not a smooth one, however. Some areas, such as the Ḥawrān, seem to have clung to classical Nabataean letter-forms for a longer period of time than other areas, such as northwest Arabia and the Ḥijāz, which adopted more quickly the "transitional" forms that were trending toward Arabic script; moreover, to judge from dated Nabataean inscriptions, the classical and transitional forms seem to have coexisted in some areas for quite a long time. Macdonald has argued cogently that this phenomenon may be attributable to the existence of different "registers" of inscriptions: formal inscriptions used the classical letter-forms, while informal graffiti tended to favor the transitional forms. But even the graffiti sometimes imitated formal letter-forms, and in such cases we may find both forms in a single inscription. The relationship between late Nabataean and early Arabic script thus implies strongly that the Arabic script, which is of course also a cursive form of writing, must have emerged somewhere

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11 The debate over Nabataean or Syriac origins is concisely summarized in Gruendler, *Development of the Arabic Scripts*, pp. 1–3. Recently, an effort has been made to rekindle the Syriac-origin thesis; see Noja Noseda, "From Syriac to Pahlavi," pp. 266–92. This effort seems, however, to be motivated less by new evidence than by the desire of the "Inārah" group to find the origins of Islam in Syriac Christianity.

12 See Abulhab, "Roots of the Arabic Script."

13 See in particular Macdonald, "ARNA Nab 17"; Nehmé, "A Glimpse"; and Nehmé, "Aramaic or Arabic?"

14 Nehmé, "Aramaic or Arabic?" pp. 75–76.

15 Numerous examples in Nehmé, "A Glimpse."

in the zone where Nabataean was written and that it may have been written on perishable materials for a considerable time before the first extant Arabic inscriptions.

MAPPING THE RISE OF ARABIC

Even if, as we have seen, the letter-forms of Arabic script can now be confidently traced back to late Nabataean cursive, it is still far from clear exactly where the writing of Arabic as we know it first arose.[16] It seems reasonable to assume that the people who first tried to write the language we now know as Arabic with these letters would have attempted to capture in their writing the sounds of the particular dialect of Arabic they actually spoke, since there was as yet no tradition of writing Arabic in any other way that might have induced them to do otherwise. In this connection it is noteworthy that Arabic writing displays some distinctive features that find no parallel in earlier Nabataean writing, particularly in orthography—the way Arabic employs its letters to write particular words. We can surmise that these distinctive orthographic features reflect the dialect of Arabic actually spoken where this system of writing first coalesced; so if we can identify where these particular dialectic features were used in the centuries before the rise of Islam, we might be able to locate where the Arabic script first developed.

A decisive first step in such an approach was pioneered more than a century ago by the German Arabist Karl Vollers. In 1906 Vollers published *Volkssprache und Schriftsprache im alten Arabien*, a brilliant work in which he argued convincingly that certain aspects of the orthography of the Qurʾān text suggest that the Qurʾān was originally written in the spoken vernacular of Mecca.[17] The Ḥijāzī dialect, according to the later Arabic philologists of the Islamic period, did not utilize the glottal stop (ʾ) in the middle of words but, rather, elided this sound—what speakers of Cockney English would call the "glo''al stop"—into the adjacent short vowels to form a long vowel.[18] So, for example, the Classical Arabic word *muʾmin* ("believer") would have been pronounced *mūmin* in this dialect, with the medial glottal stop assimilated into the preceding short *u* vowel to form a long *ū* sound, and it was written in this way in the Qurʾān, with the opening letter *mīm* followed by a *wāw* as *mater lectionis* for the long vowel *ū* (i.e., as *m.w.m.n*).[19]

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16 It should be noted that Classical Arabic is a literary idiom that was never anyone's mother tongue and that it emerged only in the eighth and ninth centuries CE. The relation of the Arabic of the Qurʾān to Classical Arabic and to the diverse regional dialects is complex and cannot be treated here; a concise overview is found in Rabin, "Beginnings of Classical Arabic."

17 This work of Vollers was brilliant but much reviled by many colleagues of his day—so much so that Vollers left the Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft in a huff in 1906. The objections by Nöldeke and others did not revolve around his observations on the *hamza*, however, but instead on his insistence that the Qurʾān was not recited with *iʿrāb* or case endings. Paul Kahle's "Arabic Readers of the Koran" rehabilitated Vollers's views with convincing evidence in support. See also the discussion in Rabin, "Beginnings of Classical Arabic."

18 The philologists' data on the glottal stop in Ḥijāzī dialect is surveyed in Rabin, *Ancient West-Arabian*, pp. 130–45.

19 van Putten, "Hamzah," examines this question anew and concludes not only that the Qurʾānic text was written in an orthography that reflected the absence of medial glottal stops but also that the oral text itself generally lacked the glottal stop in the middle of words.

Building on the basic cogency of Vollers's observation, we can suggest that it also applies to the first writing of Arabic more generally, not to the text of the Qurʾān only, because it seems fair to assume that the Qurʾān represents but one example of the way Arabic had first come to be written. The Qurʾān's orthography, in short, reflects a more general scribal practice that had arisen somewhere in the Nabataean cultural zone and reflected one of the dialects of Arabic spoken there. If, after all, the Arabic script had first been created to transcribe an idiom that did observe medial glottal stops, it is fair to assume that the consonantal orthography of words having them would simply mark them with the *alif*, which was originally the marker for the glottal stop, in Arabic script as in other Semitic alphabets. This practice, for example, is what we find in the famous inscription Jaussen-Savignac 17 from Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ, dated to 267 CE, which renders a North Arabian (Arabic?) text in the Nabataean script; the word for "hundred" in line 5 of this inscription is written as *m.ʾ.h* (presumably pronounced *miʾah*), not as *m.y.h* (pronounced *mīyah*—as also in many modern Arabic dialects) as one might expect if the glottal stop were palatalized.[20]

Vollers argued that the Arabic text of the Qurʾān—the Qurʾānic Consonantal Text (QCT, or *rasm* in Arabic)—was fitted out only at a later stage in its transmission with markings to show when medial glottal stops should be pronounced even though the QCT did not indicate the glottal stop. This marking is the *hamza* sign (a miniature *ʿayn*, to indicate a laryngeal break in the air flow), familiar to and beloved by anyone who has studied even one year of Arabic because of its apparently capricious need to have another letter (*alif*, *wāw*, or *yāʾ*) to serve as its *kursī*, or "chair," on which to sit—or, sometimes, no chair at all. The *kursī* is of course the Qurʾānic long vowel that stood in the QCT where the missing glottal stop was assimilated into its surrounding short vowels, and the chair could thus change if the vowels around the glottal stop shifted. This refinement of Qurʾānic—and Arabic—orthography by indicating the *hamza* was added in the eighth and ninth centuries, when "proper" Classical Arabic was being codified as a literary idiom under the influence of eastern Arabian dialects, which did pronounce medial glottal stops.[21]

We can propose that other features of Arabic orthography besides the rendering of the glottal stop may also provide clues to the script's origins. One such feature is the script's way of rendering the feminine ending of nouns, with the letter known in Classical Arabic grammar as *tāʾ marbūṭa* ("tied t").[22] In early inscriptions and texts, including in the Qurʾān, we find a curious oscillation in how such words with a feminine ending are written— sometimes ending with the letter *hay*, sometimes with an open *tāʾ*. This oscillation is not difficult to explain linguistically; it reflects the pronunciation of the phrase where the word occurs in spoken language and suggests that in the dialect the Arabic script was first developed to transcribe, feminine words not in construct were pronounced with a final *-ah*, rendered naturally enough by the letter *hay*—for example, the word *niʿmah* ("grace"). But evidently the suppressed *t* sound of the feminine ending was in this dialect retained when

20 Healey and Smith, "Jaussen-Savignac 17"; cf. the rereading in Nehmé, "A Glimpse," pp. 68–69. Of course, we do not know what dialect JS 17 is attempting to transcribe—a dialect spoken in the vicinity of Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ, where it was written, or a dialect spoken by the engraver, who may have come from some other region ruled by the Nabataeans, such as around Petra or in the Sinai.

21 As Rabin (*Ancient West-Arabian*, p. 130) puts it, "much of the complication [of Arabic orthography— FMD] . . . derives from the superposition of Eastern pronunciation upon a Western spelling."

22 Discussed in Nehmé, "Aramaic or Arabic?" pp. 84ff.

such words were the first part of a construct phrase, as in *niʿmat allāh* ("God's grace"); hence the word was written in that case with the open *tāʾ* to give the ending *-at*, not the letter *hay*. The *tāʾ marbūṭa* in Arabic script might thus be seen as an effort to standardize the orthography of such words by retaining the letter *hay* but adding two dots over it, like those on the letter *tāʾ*, to mark the fact that in construct it should be pronounced as *-at*, not as *-ah*.[23]

A third orthographic clue that may help us localize where the Arabic script first developed is the writing of the definite article consistently as *al-*, even though it is not always pronounced that way in Classical Arabic, which requires the *l* of the article to be assimilated to the sound of the first letter of the following word if it begins with a so-called "sun letter."[24] The dialect that the Arabic script was first intended to transcribe, however, may in fact have pronounced the article as *al-* consistently before all words—and hence the article is always written in this way in Arabic script. A fourth possible clue to the origins of the script may be the absence of most case endings, except for sound plurals ending in *-ūn* or *-īn*, and perhaps the indefinite accusative ending (*-an* in Classical Arabic but perhaps pronounced simply as final long *-ā*, since the *rasm* or consonantal base form of Arabic script marks only these inflections of nouns).[25]

In sum, we can argue that the Arabic script first developed within the region where Nabataean had been used as a written language, but also in an area whose dialect did not pronounce medial glottal stops, did not pronounce the feminine ending *-at* on nouns except in construct state, pronounced the definite article as *al-* regardless of what the initial letter of the attached noun might be, and did not generally observe case endings (except for masculine plural nouns). These features suggest that Arabic was first written somewhere in northwest Arabia, where the greatest concentration of transitional Nabataeo-Arabic inscriptions have been found, or in the Ḥijāz, where medial glottal stops were not pronounced. A more precise localization of the origins of Arabic, however, remains to be worked out as greater knowledge of diverse North Arabian dialects becomes known.

Al-Jallad has recently suggested that Arabic writing may have originated in Syria and spread southward into the Ḥijāz.[26] While the picture is far from clear and must continually be revised on the basis of newly found inscriptions (many of them discovered by Al-Jallad himself), Syria on current evidence seems unlikely to have been the birthplace of the Arabic script, for the dialects reflected in the Safaitic inscriptions, scattered throughout desert regions of southern Syria, eastern Jordan, and northernmost Saudi Arabia, lack the features that we have seen are implied by the Arabic script.[27] The language(s) transcribed

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23 The writing of such words in early Qurʾān manuscripts is, however, still puzzling, for it does not seem to conform to this simple arrangement. An important contribution on this question is that of van Putten in "'Grace of God,'" which explores the question in detail. He also makes a compelling argument in favor of the existence of a single Qurʾānic archetype—an important but separate question that is beyond the scope of this article.

24 This observation is noted in Al-Jallad, *Damascus Psalm Fragment*, p. 24. I am grateful to Professor Al-Jallad for his having allowed me to see a copy of this important study before its publication.

25 This possibility was also treated at length by Vollers; see Kahle, "Arabic Readers of the Koran," and now Al-Jallad, *Damascus Psalm Fragment*, pp. 22–23.

26 See Muhanna, "A New History of Arabia, Written in Stone."

27 An excellent overview of Safaitic is found in Al-Jallad, *Outline of the Grammar of the Safaitic Inscriptions*.

by these inscriptions mark the feminine ending consistently with *-t* (never, it seems, with *-h*); and although the article in Safaitic inscriptions is sometimes given as *ʾl-*, it is much more frequently *h-* or *hn-*, and sometimes no article at all is used.[28] Safaitic also marks the glottal stop in the middle of words, such as *m.ʾ.t.* for "hundred,"[29] thus suggesting that the sound was pronounced there. All these indicators suggest that the Arabic script is unlikely to have originated in Syria or in adjacent regions where the Safaitic inscriptions abound. Farther south, the Dadānitic (Lihyanite) inscriptions from the region of Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ in the northern Ḥijāz also have *h-* or *hn-* as the definite article, and feminine common nouns always end in *-t* (although some feminine personal names end in *-h*). This dialect also seems to mark medial glottal stops,[30] so it also does not seem to lie at the base of the Arabic script. But perhaps one of the other oasis towns of northwestern Arabia or the Ḥijāz, as suggested by Nehmé, is where the Arabic script was first developed.[31]

Wherever the Arabic script first arose, once it had coalesced it embarked on a brilliant trajectory. In Arabic language and in the cursive Arabic script, a very few inscriptions have been discovered that date to the sixth century CE, fully a century before the rise of Islam.[32] But in the early seventh century CE this form of writing was adopted by Muḥammad and his followers in the Believers movement, who seem to have spoken a similar dialect, and it was used to write the text of the Qurʾān. The rapid expansion of the Believers movement after Muḥammad's death carried this language and script in the seventh century CE to new areas both within Arabia and far beyond it, throughout the Near East. As the language of the conquering elite, Arabic written in this way became the official idiom of the new state, so we may call this phase of the language "Imperial Arabic." Beginning in the middle of the seventh century, increasing numbers of official documents in Imperial Arabic were written on papyrus, stone, and coinage, hailing from Egypt, geographical Syria, and elsewhere. We also find informal graffiti in this form of Arabic scratched into exposed rock faces throughout the western side of the Arabian Peninsula, from Yemen to Syria, their numbers apparently increasing rapidly through the seventh century. Private letters and other nonofficial documents in Arabic also begin to be written on papyrus by the mid-seventh century. The status of this language as the prestige language of the new government and of the religion associated with the Qurʾān eventually led in the eighth and ninth centuries CE to its wide proliferation geographically and its use in many new literary genres. Furthermore, this status culminated eventually in the crystallization of Classical Arabic, which seems to have resulted from the introduction into Imperial Arabic of features of eastern Arabian dialects, such as the pronunciation of the glottal stop even within words. Classical Arabic, however, retained the same defective script in which Imperial Arabic had been written—a script derived, as we have seen, from a late stage of Nabataean writing—probably because

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28 Al-Jallad, in *Damascus Psalm Fragment*, notes that consistent use of *ʾl* as definite article was a feature of Old Arabic in southern Syria but also of the dialect of the Ghassānids, who had come from the Ḥijāz before settling in the Jawlān region and around Damascus.

29 Al-Jallad, *Outline of the Grammar of the Safaitic Inscriptions*, p. 326.

30 See Caskel, *Lihyan und Lihyanisch.* For medial glottal stops, see his texts nos. 15, 22 (names); 29, 30, 32 (*b.r.ʾ.y.* ["in the reign of"]); 33, 82 (*m.ʾ.t.* ["hundred"]).

31 Nehmé, "Aramaic or Arabic?" p. 78.

32 On these earliest Arabic inscriptions, see below, p. 11.

the Qurʾān's use of this form of consonantal writing made tampering with it in any funda-
mental way tantamount to sacrilege.

TWO PUZZLES

Despite knowing that Arabic writing emerged from the late Nabataean script, however,
there remain a couple of puzzles surrounding the emergence of written Arabic. The first
of these puzzles has to do with the location of the earliest Arabic inscriptions. As noted,
we might expect to find the first Arabic writing in the region of northwest and northern
Arabia, where the highest concentration of transitional Nabataean inscriptions is found,
or in the Ḥijāz, where the local dialect seems to resemble that rendered in the script. But in
fact the earliest dated Arabic inscriptions so far found hail from central and northern Syria,
on the northernmost fringes (or beyond the limits) of the area where Nabataean had been
written. They include the well-known inscriptions of Zebed (dated 512 CE), not far south
of Aleppo, and of Jabal Sais (dated 528 CE) and Ḥarrān (dated 568 CE), both southeast of
Damascus.[33] Recently, a fourth pre-Islamic Arabic inscription, dated 548–549 CE, has been
discovered near al-Jawf (ancient Dūmat al-Jandal) in northern Arabia;[34] and a fifth, dated
470 CE, has been discovered near Najrān in southern Arabia.[35] But to date no sixth-century
or earlier inscriptions in Arabic language and Arabic script have been found where we
might most expect them, namely, in northwest Arabia or the Ḥijāz. Are we just missing
them for some reason?

    The second puzzle has to do with the date when Arabic inscriptions first appear in
the Ḥijāz compared with the date at which the three earlier traditions of writing seem to
have gone out of use, particularly in the northern part of Arabia. Throughout the region
from the Ḥijāz northward, bedouin herdsmen, travelers, merchants, and others had left
thousands of graffiti in the Ancient North Arabian and Nabataean scripts; but as we have
seen, the Ancient North Arabian inscriptions died out probably by the fourth century and
Nabataean in the fifth century. Then, beginning apparently in the seventh century, we start
to see increasing numbers of Arabic graffiti throughout this region. But is it not strange
that in the Ḥijāz and northwestern Arabia there should be a gap of a century or more
between the dying out of the older traditions and the beginning of the new Arabic one?[36]
Did the kinds of people—nomadic herdsmen, merchants, travelers—who felt impelled until
the fourth and fifth centuries to inscribe so many graffiti in this area either vanish from
the landscape or suddenly feel no need to write inscriptions for a few generations, only to
resume the practice energetically in the seventh and later centuries? Neither one of these
possibilities seems very plausible. Thus we appear to be missing some evidence needed to
complete our picture; or are we misunderstanding some of the evidence we have?

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33 All these inscriptions, first published more than a century ago and since that time revisited by schol-
ars, are conveniently reviewed in Gruendler, *Development of the Arabic Scripts*, pp. 13–14.

34 Nehmé, "New Dated Inscriptions."

35 Robin, Al-Ghabbān, and Al-Saʿīd, "Inscriptions antiques," pp. 1087–92.

36 Nehmé ("Aramaic or Arabic?" p. 94) also notes the puzzling existence of this gap. But in the confer-
ence discussion, Macdonald and Hoyland noted that the epigraphic habit in Greek and Latin also recedes
during the third to fourth centuries.

In his discussion of the development of the transitional Nabataean cursive writing, Macdonald has argued that cursive scripts first developed not in the context of inscriptions on stone but in the context of writing in ink on perishable materials such as papyrus, leather, or wood, because the use of ligatures to connect separate letters facilitates writing in ink by relieving the scribe of the need continually to lift pen from writing surface. For an engraver working in stone, on the other hand, ligatures simply represent more work when compared to carving separate letters and hence offer no advantage. Macdonald has argued, therefore, that the cursive form of Nabataean and other ancient North Arabian languages was probably utilized on perishable materials for a considerable period of time before the first cursive inscriptions appear, but no examples of this writing have survived precisely because the media on which they were written were perishable.[37]

On similar grounds we can argue that the cursive Arabic script may also have been written on perishable materials possibly as early as the fifth or even the fourth century, since the earliest Arabic inscriptions appear in Syria in the early sixth century, as we have seen. Moreover, other evidence hints that the practice of writing Arabic language in the Arabic script on perishable materials antedated Islam. For example, the oldest extant Arabic documents on papyrus (such as the Herakleopolis/Ahnās Greek–Arabic bilinigual of 22 AH/643 CE[38]) are written with apparent confidence, as though they are carrying on well-established scribal practice. The same can be said for the earliest extant Arabic letters (in the sense of correspondence)—they conform exactly in form to what later becomes standard Arabic epistolography, thus implying that correspondence in this form had already been written for many years.[39] We might, then, consider this evidence to be circumstantial, thereby implying that the Arabic language had been written in the Arabic script for a considerable period of time before the seventh century. If so, then Islam and its scripture were born in the midst of an ongoing Arabic tradition of writing rather than inaugurating it.

But if the Arabic script did first develop in the Ḥijāz in a tradition of writing on perishable materials a century or more before Islam, we would expect also to find a number of Arabic graffiti or inscriptions there. Why, then, are no early inscriptions found in the Ḥijāz until, apparently, the seventh century? Is it possible that Arabic inscriptions from before the seventh century do exist in the Ḥijāz but that we have simply failed to recognize them?

At this point I would like to revisit some undated inscriptions found in a place called al-Ḥanākiyya, just outside Medina, that I published more than thirty years ago (figs. 1.4–1.6).[40] At that time, I dated them to the seventh or early eighth century because their palaeography was consistent with some of the earliest Arabic inscriptions, which suggested a date before the mid-eighth century, yet their religious content seemed to evoke Qurʾānic phraseology, which suggested a date sometime after the first third of the seventh century, when the Qurʾān is thought to have first appeared.

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37 Macdonald, "Arabia and the Written Word," pp. 12–14, in reference to Dadānite.

38 Often referred to as PERF 558 from its first publication in Karabacek, *Papyri Erzherzog Rainer*, in which it was item no. 558. An image, transcription, and translation of this and other early Arabic papyri are conveniently available at www.islamic-awareness.org in the section titled "History."

39 I hope to complete a study of the earliest Arabic epistolography in the near future.

40 Donner, "Some Early Islamic Inscriptions."

Figure 1.4. Al-Ḥanākiyya inscription W1. Transcription: (1) ʾmnt ʾnh lʾ ʾlh ʾlʾ (2) ʾldy ʾmnt bh bnw ʾsryl (3) ḥnyfʾ mslmʾ wmʾ ʾnʾ mn ʾlmšrkyn (4) wktb rʾfʿ bn ʿl. Translation: (1) "I believe that there is no god except (2) the one in which the children of Israel believed, (3) a *ḥanīf* submitting [to God] and I am not one of the *mushrikīn*. (4) Rāfiʿ ibn ʿAlī [?] wrote [this]."

Figure 1.5. Al-Ḥanākiyya inscription W3. Transcription: (1) ʾllhm ʾgfr lʿṣm (2) bn ʿly bn ʿʾṣm ʾlʾlby ṯm ʾlʿw- (3) ry [?] fʾnh yšhd ʾn ʾllh ḥq w (4) ʾn ʾlsʿʿh lʾ ryb fyhʾ. Translation: (1) "O God, forgive ʿĀṣim (2) ibn ʿAlī ibn ʿĀṣim al-ʿUlabī [?] then al-ʿAw- (3) rī [?] for indeed he bears witness that God is true and (4) that there is no doubt about the hour [of judgment]."

Figure 1.6. Al-Ḥanākiyya inscriptions W7–W12. Note W7, in reverse Arabic script.

Is it possible, however, that these graffiti are not early Islamic but instead pre-Islamic and date to the early seventh or even to the sixth century? Reading these short inscriptions or graffiti today, we notice that although the discourse in them does closely resemble that of the Qurʾān, there is nothing in them that is decisively Islamic; for example, they contain no mention of the prophet Muḥammad or of the Qurʾān. Yet they are clearly monotheistic, with opening invocations *Allāhumma* ("O God") and appeals to God for forgiveness.

The Qurʾān, as Patricia Crone has noted, tells us very little about the presumed pagans of Mecca who, according to later tradition, were Muḥammad's bitter enemies;[41] nor does it refer much to Islam as being what Wilfred Cantwell Smith called a "reified religion."[42] But the Qurʾān does seem to recognize as a kind of reified religion the *millat Ibrahīm*, "the religion of Abraham," also called the *ḥanīfiyya*. The Qurʾān speaks very positively about this group and enjoins its hearers in a number of passages to be true monotheists like the followers of Abraham the *ḥanīf*—"Say: God spoke truthfully. So follow the *millat Ibrāhīm* as a *ḥanīf*; he was not one of the *mushrikīn*."[43]

These passages in the Qurʾān suggest that the text arose in a context in which such an "Abrahamic monotheism" was part of the religious environment, for the Qurʾān assumes that its hearers are familiar with Abrahamic monotheism.[44] The *Sīra* of Ibn Hishām also speaks of the *ḥanīfiyya*; it mentions an individual in Medina who belonged to the *ḥanīfiyya*—Abū ʿĀmir ʿAbd ʿAmr ibn Ṣayfī, who emerged as a kind of rival to Muḥammad.[45] So the question arises, could the inscriptions at al-Ḥanākiyya, and others like them, be evidence of this Arabian "religion of Abraham"—graffiti written by people who adhered to a kind of monotheism that was found in the Ḥijāz in the years before the rise of Islam? Of particular note is inscription W1, with its bold attestation, "I believe that there is no god other than the one in which the children of Israel believed; [believing] as a submitting *ḥanīf*, and I am not one of the *mushrikīn*." This statement explicitly puts the engraver squarely in the *ḥanīfiyya*. Also particularly significant is inscription W3, which says (presumably of the writer), "he testifies that God is truth and that there is no doubt concerning the hour [i.e., the hour of judgment]." The similarity between the mode of religious expression in these inscriptions and that of the Qurʾān is striking and might be taken as evidence that they were imitating Qurʾānic discourse, as I had once assumed; but now, on the contrary, it seems possible to me that these inscriptions are vestiges of an older, pre-Qurʾānic mode of religious expression in the Ḥijāz—a mode of expression on which the Qurʾān itself drew as a natural way of articulating its conception of monotheism and as the most understandable idiom in which to address the audience to which it was first speaking. If so, then these inscriptions may provide us for the first time with some documentary evidence of the historical, religious, and literary context from which the Qurʾān emerged.

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41 See the essays collected in Crone, *Qurʾānic Pagans.*

42 Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion.* On the paucity of references to Islam as reified religion in the Qurʾān, see Donner, "*Dīn, Islām*, und *Muslim* im Koran."

43 Q. 3:95. See also Q. 2:135; 3:67; 4:125; 6:79; 6:161; 10:105; 16:120; 16:123; and 30:30. Later Muslim tradition wrestles with such passages and generally concludes that the *millat Ibrāhīm* and *ḥanīfiyya* are to be equated with Islam; see Olidort, "Portraying Early Islam."

44 Waardenburg, "Towards a Periodization of Earliest Islam," pp. 317–19. On the notion of descent from Abraham in Arabia, see Millar, "Hagar, Ishmael, Josephus and the Origins of Islam."

45 Ibn Hishām, *Al-sīra al-nabawīya* 2:234–35; cf. Guillaume, *Life of Muhammad*, p. 278.

A final thought: These inscriptions contain no hint that their engravers were Muslim or Jewish or Christian—they seem to be what we might call "generically monotheist." But notice that near some of these inscriptions (the cluster W6–W12) are engraved what appear to be two large crosses. As noted above, a pre-Islamic Arabic inscription dating to 548–549 CE has recently been discovered near al-Jawf in northern Saudi Arabia by Laïla Nehmé; it also includes an incised cross and writes the word for "God" as ʾlʾlh, which she notes is "the normal Christian pre-Islamic Arabic name for God," all of which suggests that the author of the al-Jawf inscription was a Christian.[46] Hoyland has suggested that there may be "some connection between Christianity and the emergence of the Arabic script."[47] It is worth noting that in the al-Ḥanākiyya inscriptions, the word for "God" is rendered ʾllh, as it is found in the Qurʾān and Islamic Arabic—not, as in the al-Jawf inscription, using the traditionally Christian form for writing the word. So we may ask, do the crosses in the cluster of inscriptions W6–W12 at al-Ḥanākiyya have religious significance, or are they merely tribal marks? Were they carved by the same people who made the inscriptions or even at the same time? These are questions that deserve further consideration but for which, at present, we have no definitive answers.

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46 Nehmé, "New Dated Inscriptions."

47 Hoyland, "Two New Arabic Inscriptions," p. 335.

2 The Oral and the Written in the Religions of Ancient North Arabia

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OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE RELIGIONS of pre-Islamic Arabia is extremely patchy.[1] Climatic conditions make the survival of documents on perishable materials, such as papyrus or parchment, very rare, and for the most part those that *have* survived are legal documents.[2] Even an archive of thousands of documents such as that of the sticks at al-Sawdāʾ in Yemen,[3] while casting light on daily life that was previously undreamed of, contains no mythologies, theologies, or liturgies to help us understand the premonotheistic religions of the region. Those studying religion in ancient South Arabia, however, are fortunate in having many inscriptions dealing with religious practices. Alas, with the exception of the *ẓll*-ceremony at Dadan (see below), the same is not true for ancient North Arabia.[4]

Cultures known only from archaeology and/or epigraphy—with, to all intents and purposes, no surviving literary or religious documents—present the historian with a grave problem of balance. In ancient North Arabia, we do not even know whether the various cultures wrote down the mythologies, theologies, and liturgies of their religions, as those in Mesopotamia and Ugarit did, or whether they were transmitted orally. We can make more or less educated guesses or inferences, but they are no more than that. What I hope to do here is to gather the scattered fragments of information that have survived and see what they provide in the way of evidence for the relationship of script and scripture in ancient North Arabia.

The inscriptions of ancient North Arabia fall into a number of different types, traditionally classified on the basis of their scripts. Five of these scripts are within a group known as Ancient North Arabian;[5] one group, Hasaitic, is carved in the Ancient South

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1 Unfortunately Al-Jallad, *Religion and Rituals* appeared too late to be discussed in this chapter.

2 For instance, the Naḥal Ḥever documents (Yadin et al., *Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period*), or the Petra papyri (Frösén, Arjava, and Lehtinen, *Petra Papyri I*; Koenen et al. *The Petra Papyri II*; Arjava, Buchholz, and Gagos, *The Petra Papyri III*; Arjava et al., *The Petra Papyri IV*).

3 See, for instance, Stein, *Die altsüdarabischen Minuskelinschriften*, and "The Ancient South Arabian Minuscule Inscriptions."

4 By "ancient North Arabia," I mean Arabia north of Yemen and Dhofar, including modern Jordan and southern Syria.

5 These are the scripts used in three of the oases of northwest Arabia—Taymāʾ, Dadan (modern al-ʿUlā), and probably Dūmah (modern al-Jawf; see Norris, "A Survey," pp. 75–76)—and known as Taymanitic,

Arabian script; and there are also Imperial Aramaic and various local Aramaic scripts, including Nabataean.

What the inscriptions of ancient North Arabia provide in abundance are divine names and epithets. The texts are full of prayers and make laconic references to religious activities. I will outline below what we can learn about the religious life of the authors of each group of inscriptions.

TAYMĀʾ

Taymāʾ was the most important oasis in ancient northwest Arabia. The 2004–2015 Saudi-German excavations there have shown that it already had an 18.2-km city wall at the end of the third millennium BCE,[6] but it came to prominence around 800 BCE, when its script was apparently mentioned as far away as Carchemish on the Syrian-Turkish border,[7] and at roughly the same period the Neo-Assyrian governor of Suḫu on the middle Euphrates recorded his encounter with its merchants and those of Sabaʾ.[8] In 553 BCE the last king of Babylon, Nabonidus, settled in Taymāʾ for ten years of his seventeen-year reign—an event recorded not only in his own official writings[9] but also in cuneiform texts at Taymāʾ[10] and graffiti in the deserts around the oasis both in Aramaic (the language of his administration)[11] and in the local language and script of Taymāʾ, Taymanitic.[12] Unfortunately, the three Taymanitic graffiti mentioning him are the only ones that can be dated with any accuracy, so we cannot tell how long before Nabonidus's arrival and how long after it the script was used. Certainly, at Taymāʾ we have formal inscriptions and graffiti in both Imperial Aramaic and a local development of it, and later, after the Nabataeans incorporated northwest Arabia into their kingdom, there are inscriptions in Nabataean. Thus there are many inscriptions in and around Taymāʾ, but there is very little external evidence with which to date them. In a brilliant article, Fokelien Kootstra has shown that, unlike the languages expressed in the other Ancient North Arabian scripts, Taymanitic is much closer to Northwest Semitic than to Arabic. [13] But alas, the historical reasons for this phenomenon remain unknown.

The religious situation in ancient Taymāʾ was in some ways similar to that of Dadan and in others unlike that of any other part of northwest Arabia—at least as far as we know

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Dadanitic, and Dumaitic, respectively; scripts used by nomads, which are known as Safaitic and Hismaic; and an ill-defined group of scripts still awaiting detailed study classed together under the name "Thamudic." The latter has been very roughly divided into Thamudic B, C, and D (with A and E having been studied sufficiently to identify them as the Taymanitic and Hismaic scripts, respectively). Note that all these names were created by modern scholars. See Macdonald, "Ancient North Arabian," pp. 488–97.

6 Hausleiter, "Das antike Taymaʾ," pp. 107, 111.

7 See Hawkins, *Corpus of Hieroglyphic Luwian Inscriptions*, p. 131, Inscription II.24 Karkamiš A15b, ll. 19–20; Macdonald, "Ancient Arabia and the Written Word," p. 5.

8 See Cavigneaux and Ismail, "Die Statthalter"; Macdonald, "Trade Routes and Trade Goods," pp. 338–40.

9 See Beaulieu, *Reign of Nabonidus*, pp. 169–74.

10 See Schaudig, "Cuneiform Inscriptions."

11 A graffito from site 37 (al-Muqayil 2) of the Epigraphy and Landscape in the Hinterland of Taymāʾ Survey, of which the publication is in preparation.

12 See Hayajneh, "First Evidence of Nabonidus"; Müller and Al-Saʿīd, "Der babylonische König."

13 Kootstra, "Language of the Taymanitic Inscriptions."

Figure 2.1. Some of the many images of Ṣlm, each with different characteristics: mouth/no mouth; star/crescent, star and crescent, or nothing, between the horns; beard/no beard; etc.

at present. For, with the exception of three Imperial Aramaic texts and one Taymanitic,[14] only one deity is mentioned in all the inscriptions from Taymāʾ, giving the strong impression that they were the products of a henotheistic society.[15] This deity is called Ṣlm,[16] and he is mentioned in a large number of Taymanitic graffiti. Ṣlm is unique among the deities of pre-Islamic northwest Arabia in several ways.

First, he had an image, or perhaps symbol, which was carved extensively on the rocks surrounding the oasis. We do not know of any other deity worshipped in ancient North Arabia with an image of this sort. Of course, we have references in the annals of Sennacherib and Esarhaddon to the Assyrians carrying off, and later restoring, the images of deities at Adumatu (modern Dūmat al-Ǧandal; see below), but these images were apparently unique, given the efforts the queens and kings of the Arabs are said to have exerted to have them returned. Ṣlm may also have had one or more such images in his temples (see below). Indeed, the inscriptions on the Louvre and al-Ḥamrāʾ stelae[17] imply as much. But, as far as we know, no other deity in North Arabia was represented by "graffiti artists" on

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14 On these texts, see below.

15 I use the term "henotheistic" here to mean "attachment to a single deity while accepting the existence of others and even occasionally worshipping them."

16 The Taymanitic script does not represent any vowels or diphthongs.

17 See Stein, "Musée du Louvre AO 1505" and Norris, "Riyāḍ Museum 1020 A."

the rocks of the desert (fig. 2.1). In view of the iconography of the Taymāʾ cube (see below), it is important to emphasize that these are human faces with horns, not the heads of bulls.

Second, there are very few prayers to this deity. Instead, there are religious statements, one of which is *mn s¹mᶜ l-ṣlm l twy* "whoever obeys Ṣlm will not perish"[18] (see below). We do not find similar statements in relation to other deities in ancient North Arabia, except perhaps in Thamudic B (see below). Instead, we have innumerable requests.

Much more common is the statement *nṣr l-ṣlm* "he kept watch for Ṣlm,"[19] and it is surely significant that all the graffiti that include this statement are at lookout points around Taymāʾ.[20]

The worship of Ṣlm appears to have continued for a very long time, for we find it in the Taymanitic inscriptions and in eleven Imperial Aramaic and two local Aramaic stelae from the oasis, one of which is dated to 56/57 CE and records the presentation of a burnt offering to Ṣlm.[21]

It would appear that the site of Qaṣr al-Ḥamrā at Taymāʾ may have been a temple to Ṣlm (see below). However, what was until now thought to be an open-air sanctuary to Ṣlm on Jabal Ghunaym was almost certainly simply a lookout post without any religious significance. There are no physical remains there to suggest organized worship, only the large numbers of drawings of the Ṣlm head. However, these appear beside Taymanitic graffiti in numerous places around the oasis, and I suggest that they were drawn by bored soldiers on lookout duty on this hilltop. Most of the pictures are crudely drawn and are in among the graffiti, of which many, but by no means all, say that the author was on watch on behalf of Ṣlm.

This brings me to another aspect of Ṣlm, and in this case one that he shares with other deities in both North and South Arabia. When the author of a graffito says that he was "keeping watch on behalf of Ṣlm," he is almost certainly using the name of the deity as a symbol of his worshippers, that is, the population of Taymāʾ. Similarly, the Assyrians referred to the "Confederation of Atarsamain" to mean those who worshipped this deity at Adumatu (Dumat al-Jandal).[22]

One practice that the Taymanites shared with other populations in North Arabia and the Levant was the raising of standing stones—compare Hebrew *maṣṣēbōt*—at least some of which appear to have been of religious significance and to have been identified with, or dedicated to, specific deities.[23] The erection of a standing stone to a deity is expressed

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18 See Knauf, "Thamudic," p. 481; Kootstra, "The Language of the Taymanitic Inscriptions," p. 93.

19 Kootstra ("The Language of the Taymanitic Inscriptions," pp. 79–80) has convincingly shown that this is the correct interpretation of this phrase, rather than Winnett's "he gave aid to Ṣlm" (Winnett and Reed, *Ancient Records*, p. 99).

20 Thirteen of these graffiti are from Jabal Ghunaym, south-southeast of Taymāʾ (see below); six are from Minṭar Banī ʿAṭiyyah, a watchtower to the west-northwest of the oasis; and one is from Tawit Saʿīd, northeast of Taymāʾ. See OCIANA (accessed June 25, 2021).

21 For all these inscriptions, see under *ṣlm* in the "Index of Names in the IA, TAr and N inscriptions" in Macdonald, *Taymāʾ II* and Macdonald and Al-Najem, *Taymāʾ III*.

22 Novotny and Jeffers, *Royal Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal*, p. 257, viii, 112, 124; see also Ephʿal, *The Ancient Arabs*, pp. 162–63, 166, n. 565.

23 In Ancient North Arabian, the majority of examples of the verb *nṣb* and the substantive *h-nṣb* are in Safaitic, a script used by the nomads of southern Syria, northeastern Jordan, and northern Saudi Arabia

Figure 2.2. The standing stone with the image of Ṣlm.

in these inscriptions by the verb *nṣb* + a divine name. This occurs four times in Safaitic (see below) but so far only twice in Taymanitic. In one case, in Wādī Zaydāniyyah, a long valley northwest of Taymāʾ, a Ṣlm-head with symbols on either side of it has been carved on a large vertical rock that has fallen from the cliff above (see fig. 2.2). To the left of it is a Taymanitic text carved vertically, which reads *bs³n b dtn / nṣb ṣm* "Bs³n son of Dtn set up a standing stone for Ṣ[l]m" (fig. 2.2).[24]

The other inscription recording the erection of a standing stone, this time to *h-ʾlt* ("the goddess"), comes from Qaṣr al-Ḥamrāʾ in Taymāʾ itself. It is on one face of a large pillar with four sides of equal width and a projection at one end that would have fit into the capital. One of the photographs from the excavations (fig. 2.3) shows it in the room in which

at the turn of the era. Here the vast majority (twenty-two of twenty-six instances; see OCIANA, accessed June 26, 2021) are not related to a particular deity.

24 The author appears to have been careless or in a hurry, since he forgot the *b* "son of" and had to add it to the side of the line, and also appears to have omitted the *l* from *ṣlm*. It is unlikely that this resulted from assimilation of the [l] since such assimilation occurs only when /ṣalm/ is immediately followed by another consonant, as in theophoric names such *ṣmntn* < *Ṣlm-ntn (see Kootstra, "The Language of the Taymanitic Inscriptions," p. 84).

Figure 2.3. The temple at Qaṣr al-Ḥamrā, Taymāʾ, with the pillar reused
upside down as a standing stone (photo by William Facey).

the Taymāʾ cube was found[25]—and which may originally have been a temple, though in its final phase there are nonreligious graffiti on some of the religious equipment, such as an offering table, which suggest that by that time it was ruined.

The iconography of the Taymāʾ cube (see figs. 2.4 and 2.5) appears very syncretic, and without written sources it is difficult to be sure what these symbols meant to the worshippers in Taymāʾ. Those who have studied the symbols have attributed some items to Mesopotamia, others to Egypt, and yet others to northern Syria, but these attributions do not really help us understand the symbols' combined significance on a single object in a temple in Taymāʾ.[26]

As mentioned above, the only evidence for the worship of deities other than Ṣlm in Taymāʾ comes from three Imperial Aramaic inscriptions, and the Taymanitic nṣb text just mentioned. One of the Aramaic texts is a short graffito with a prayer to an oherwise unknown deity ʿqwdš or ʿqwrš and to ʾšymʾ.[27] ʾšymʾ also appears in the two Aramaic stelae,

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25 This was Area A in the excavations in which the cube was found (Bawden, Edens, and Miller, "Preliminary Archaeological Investigations at Taymāʾ," pp. 82–83). The pillar is in the Taymāʾ Museum (reg. no. 421) and is TM.T.020 in Macdonald and Al-Najem, *Taymāʾ III*.

26 See, for instance, Hausleiter and Intilia, "Pedestal/Altar with Ritual Scenes ('al-Hamra Cube')," where "VLM" should read "ṢLM."

27 TM.IA.027 in Macdonald and Al-Najem, *Taymāʾ III*.

Figure 2.4. One face of the Taymāʾ cube (photo by Michael Macdonald).

one found at the end of the nineteenth century and now in the Louvre (stela 1)[28] and the other found in the same place as the cube in 1979 (stela 2).[29] In the case of stela 1, the deities Ṣlm of Mḥrm, Śnglʾ, and ʾšymʾ permit the introduction of Ṣlm of Hgm to the temple, while in stela 2 the deities Śnglʾ and ʾšymʾ are apparently being introduced into the temple of Ṣlm of {D/R}b. Unfortunately, we know virtually nothing from other sources of the deities Śnglʾ and ʾšymʾ.[30] It seems likely that Ṣlm of Mḥrm, Ṣlm of Hgm, and Ṣlm of {D/R}b were manifestations (presumably statues) of Ṣlm from sanctuaries at places called Mḥrm, Hgm, and {D/R}b and that, for reasons unknown, the statue of Ṣlm of Hgm was being moved to the temple of Ṣlm of Mḥrm, and statues of Śngl and ʾšym were being moved to the temple of Ṣlm of {D/R}b. Manifestations of deities attached to particular places are well known from ancient South Arabia.[31]

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28 See Stein, "Musée du Louvre AO 1505."

29 See Norris, "Riyāḍ Museum 1020 A."

30 The meagre evidence is collected and discussed in Maraqten, "The Aramaic Pantheon of Taymāʾ."

31 See, for example, with the chief deity of the ancient South Arabian kingdom of Sabaʾ, ʾAlmaqah: *ʾlmqh ḏ-mʿrbm mʿhrm* "ʾAlmaqah of Mʿrbm Mʿhrm"; Ghul al-Masāǧid 4, *ʾlmqh ḏ-hrn* "ʾAlmaqah of Hrn" *CIH* 73 (DASI, accessed June 26, 2021). Compare also the Roman Catholic shrines of "Our Lady of Lourdes," "Our Lady of Fatima," "Our Lady of Walsingham," and the like.
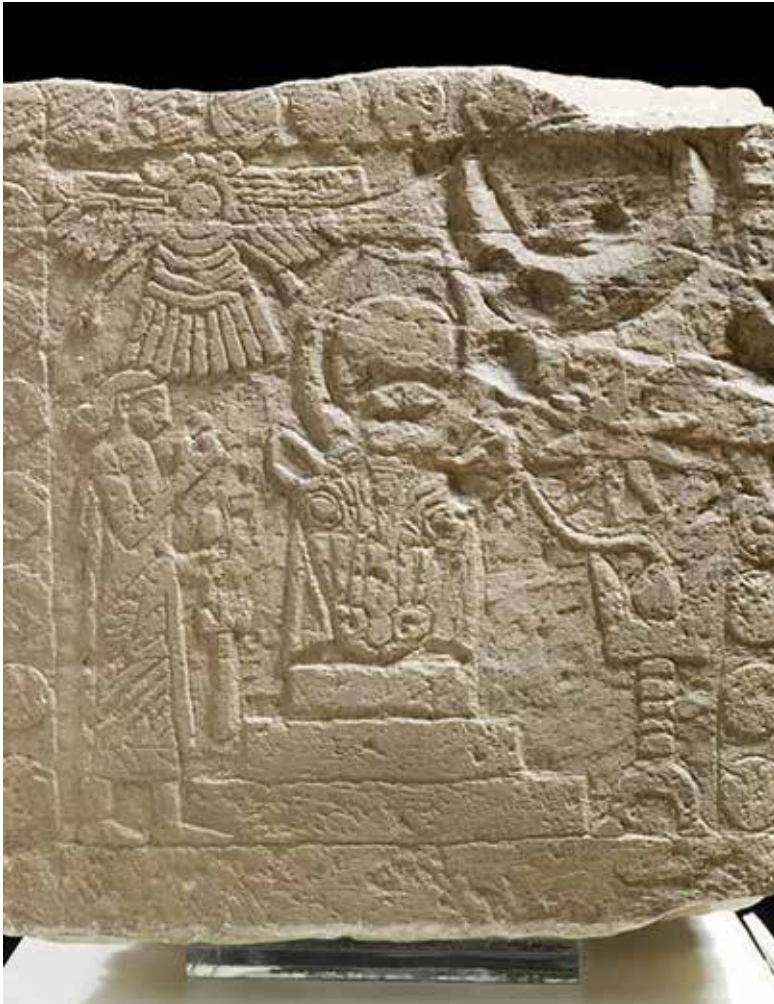
Figure 2.5. The second face of the Taymāʾ cube (photo by Michael Macdonald).

It should be emphasized that these three Aramaic inscriptions contain the only references to these deities in the whole of ancient North Arabia. Moreover, together with "the goddess" mentioned in the *nṣb* text, they are the only references to deities other than Ṣlm in all the inscriptions from Taymāʾ and the only time Ṣlm is associated in any way with other deities or with particular places/temples. As I noted earlier, this marks out the religion of Taymāʾ (and, as we shall see, Dadan) as apparently very different from the religions of the nomads of ancient North Arabia (see below).

Finally, it is interesting that in a Safaitic graffito (see below) by someone who says he comes from Dūmat al-Jandal in North Arabia, there is a prayer to Ṣlm "god of Dūmah."[32]

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32 KRS 30 as reread by Ahmad Al-Jallad: *l ʾbn bn ʿnhlh h- dmy w ḥrṣ f h ṣlm ʾlh dmt rwḥ* "By ʾbn son of ʿnhlh the Dumaite and he was cold and hungry and O Ṣlm god of Dumat grant relief from adversity." See OCIANA (accessed June 26, 2021). It is not clear how and when the worship of Ṣlm spread to Dūmah.

DADAN

Another great oasis in northwest Arabia was Dadan, modern al-ʿUlā. For centuries, Dadan was a rival of Taymāʾ as a transit point for the trade coming from South Arabia to Egypt, the Mediterranean, the Levant, and Mesopotamia. Indeed, a number of Taymanitic graffiti mention wars with Dadan.[33] The oasis had its own script, known as "Dadanitic,"[34] in which we have approximately two thousand formal inscriptions and graffiti.

As in Taymāʾ, Dadan had one preeminent deity, Ḏġbt, to whom all but a handful of prayers are addressed and for whom almost all religious ceremonies were performed. In the inscriptions known so far, his name occurs almost 260 times, whereas two other divine names (*hn-ʾktb* and *ḫrg*) are invoked three times, two (*lh*, *hn-ʿzy*) twice, and three others (*ʿtrġth*, *ḏs²ry*, and *s¹lmn*) only once each.[35]

These deities appear in the following inscriptions:

hn-ʾktb: **1**. a record of an incense offering to Hn-ʾktb (JSLih 037); **2**. a record of the offering of a statuette to Hn-ʾktb (JSLih 62); **3**. a text too damaged and incomplete to provide any information, and in which the *t* of the name was omitted (AH 218).

ḫrg: **1**. a record of a pilgrimage to/for Ḫrg on the high mountain and performance of the *ẓll*-ceremony for Ḏġbt (AH 197); **2**. a record of a pilgrimage to/for Ḫrg on the high mountain and mention of Ḏġbt in a broken context (AH 217); **3**. a record of the offering to Ḏġbt of a maidservant and offering of something (text lost) to Ḫrg (AH 222).

lh: **1**. a request for blessing from Lh (JSLih 008); **2**. a priest of Ḏġbt offers a statuette to Lh and asks for blessings (JSLih 061).

hn-ʿzy: **1**. a request for blessing from [Hn-]ʿzy (JSLih 036); **2**. a damaged context with "for Hn-ʿz[y]" (JSLih 058).

ʿtrġth: **1**. a record of the erection of a standing stone to the goddess, ending with a request to Ḏġbt to protect it (AH 288).

ḏs²ry: **1**. a prayer in the Dadanitic script at the Nabataean city of Ḥegrā (modern Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ) of a type found in Hismaic inscriptions (Nehmé, "Inscriptions nabatéennes," 189, no. 12A, siglum in OCIANA Ḥegrā.Dad 1).

s¹lmn: **1**. a vow to S¹lmn and request for blessing (JSLih 073).

In addition, there are two inscriptions, one by a priest and the other by a priestess of the Minaean deity Wd, the first (JSLih 49; see below) recording the offering of a substitute to Ḏġbt and the other (AH 199) recording the performance of the *ẓll*-ceremony for Ḏġbt.

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33 *b-ḍr(r) ddn* "in the war with Dadan" (WTay 20, 21, 22, 23.1, 33.1, 33.2), *ḫl(l) b-ddn* "he was a soldier at Dadan" (JSTham 419+422, 509+510, 513, Esk 167, 289, Al-Mušayrifah Tay 5, etc.; see OCIANA and Koots-tra, "The Language of the Taymanitic Inscriptions," pp. 94–95 for the meaning of *ḫll*).

34 This script used to be artificially divided into "Dedanite" and "Lihyanite," on which see Macdonald, "Reflections on the Linguistic Map," p. 33.

35 See OCIANA (accessed June 26, 2021).

There is also an apparently secular inscription by a priest of H-ktby (JSLih 055)[36] and a signature by a priest of Lt (JSLih 277). I will return to these later.[37]

It will be clear from this list that (a) priests and priestesses of deities other than Ḏġbt. occasionally made offerings or invocations to their deities at Dadan; and (b) being a priest of one deity did not prevent one from making offerings to others. While the functionaries of the Minaean deity Wd were probably resident in the Minaean "colony" at Dadan (see below), the tiny number of inscriptions by officials of other deities suggest that they may have been visitors. Possibly the most surprising text is JSLih 061, where a priest (*s¹lḥ*) of Ḏġbt offers statues and requests a blessing from the deity Lh, a god who is otherwise known at Dadan only from one similar request for blessing (JSLih 008). In both cases, the formula is identical to that used for such requests from Ḏġbt.

An example of the priest of one deity making offerings to another is one of the most beautifully carved Dadanitic inscriptions (JSLih 49):[38]

JSLih 49[39]

1. *ʿbdwd*
2. *ʾfkl / w=*
3. *d / w bny-h*
4. *s¹lm / w z=*
5. *dwd / hw=*
6. *dqw / h-ġ=*
7. *lm / s¹lm / h-*
8. *[m]ṯlt / l-*
9. *ḏġbt*
10. *f rḍy-h=*
11. *[m]* ----

ʿbd-wd priest of Wd and his two sons S¹lm and Zd-Wd offered the slave-boy S¹lm as the {substitute} to Ḏġbt and so may he favor {them}. . .

Wd was the principal deity of the Minaeans (from South Arabia) who, as mentioned above, appear to have had a (trading?) colony at Dadan, members of which left a number of

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36 *H-ktby* is the Dadanitic spelling of *ʾl-ktbʾ*, a deity worshipped by the Nabataeans (Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans*, pp. 120–24). The masculine form, *hn-ʾktb*—which would be *ʾl-ʾktb in Nabataean—has so far not been found outside the Dadanitic corpus.

37 Hidalgo-Chacón Diez, "The Divine Names at Dadan," p. 127, adds to the list the supposed deities *ṯḥln* (AH 289), *ḥgr* (AH 288), and *qm* (AH 100). However, in none of these inscriptions is it clear that these are divine names.

38 Note that / indicates a word divider but was not used at the end of lines in the inscriptions quoted here. - before a word attaches an inseparable particle and after a word attaches an enclitic pronoun. The use of word dividers makes it clear that these were regarded as inseparable by the authors of the inscriptions. = at the end of a line indicates that the word is split between one line and the next. ---- indicates an unknown number of damaged or lost letters. { } around a letter in the transliteration indicate that the reading is doubtful, and in the translation { } are placed around the translation of the whole word in which the doubtful letter occurs. [ ] in the transliteration indicates a restoration.

39 See OCIANA (accessed June 26, 2021).

formal inscriptions and graffiti in their own language and script. It is therefore interesting to have a record of the priest of one god (Wd) performing a ceremony relating to his own family for the god of the place in which he resides (Ḏġbt).[40]

This religious ceremony is very interesting, though we know frustratingly little about it. The fact that the young slave-boy who is the "substitute" has the same name, *S¹lm*, as the first-mentioned (and so presumably the elder) son of the priest suggests that at Dadan there may have been a religious requirement of offering to Ḏġbt the "first fruits" (including the firstborn) or a substitute, as in ancient Judaism.[41]

Another record of a functionary of Wd performing a religious rite for Ḏġbt runs as follows:

AH 199[42]

1. *s¹mwh / bnt / s¹mr / s¹lḥt / w=*
2. *d / w zyd / bʿl-h / ḏ yfʿn / ʾ=*
3. *ẓllh / l-ḏġbt / h-ẓll / b-h-mṣ=*
4. *d /f rḍ-hmy / w s¹ʿd-hmy / w=*
5. ----

S¹mwh daughter of S¹mr, priestess of Wd, and Zyd her husband of the lineage of Yfʿn, both performed the *ẓll*-ceremony for Ḏġbt at the top of the mountain and so favor them both and help them both and ----

The *ẓll*-ceremony performed for the deity Ḏġbt is mentioned in 152 Dadanitic inscriptions and was by far the most recorded ceremony at Dadan—or anywhere else in ancient North Arabia.[43] Indeed, it looks as though its performance may have *required* a record in stone, at least by those who could afford it, for the vast majority of these inscriptions are carved in relief, a technique that a man or woman who was not a professional mason would probably not be able to employ. There are also, however, incised texts—some well carved, others less so—and they may have been the work of those who could not afford to hire a mason. It is also interesting that, although the content of all these texts is basically the same, the formulae used and the order in which they are set down can vary from inscription to inscription; that is, there does not seem to have been a rigid, liturgical structure to the wording. But, of course, a rigid liturgical structure requires a written record. If the liturgy is passed on orally, more flexibility in the order of word and phrase is possible. This freedom is also found in the letter-forms, which are a bewildering mixture of formal and informal shapes within the same inscriptions, sometimes even side by side.[44] Moreover, although most of these inscriptions are found at a place now called Al-ʿUdhayb (fig. 2.6), individual texts are found scattered on rock faces in many places around the oasis, suggesting that it was possible to record the performance of the rite (and possibly even to

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40 For another inscription mentioning the offering of a substitute, see Al-Ḥuraybah 14 (OCIANA, accessed June 26, 2021), which is unfortunately very damaged.

41 See Ex. 13:1–2, 11–16; Luke 2:22–24.

42 See OCIANA (accessed June 26, 2021).

43 See OCIANA (accessed June 26, 2021).

44 See Macdonald, "Towards a Reassessment," pp. 12–14.

Figure 2.6. A rock face at al-ʿUdhayb, Dadan, covered with inscriptions both in
relief and incised and recording the performance of the *ẓll*-ceremony.

perform it) elsewhere. Indeed, some texts record that the author(s) performed it "on the
high mountain," as in AH 199 quoted above.

Despite the number of inscriptions recording the performance of this ceremony, we
know nothing of what it entailed. The most widely accepted suggestion is that it was a
harvest rite parallel to the Jewish *Sukkoth* or "Feast of Booths."[45] This is because, on the
one hand, the Semitic root Ẓ-L-L has a meaning "to provide shade," "to roof over,"[46] and on
the other hand the rite seems always to be performed "for the sake of" the agricultural or
horticultural property of the person(s) performing it. Dadan is a large oasis, with fields,
gardens, and palm groves that must have provided the food for its inhabitants and victuals
that could also be sold to the caravans that stopped there. A few examples of these inscrip-
tions are given here.

U 033[47]

1. *ʿyḏ / bn / ydʿ / ʿ=*
2. *nn / ʾẓll / h-ẓll / ḏh*

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45 Beeston, review of "Neue liḥyānische Inschriften," p. 173. The view put forward by Sima (*Die lih-
yanischen Inschriften*, pp. 96–97) that it referred to the maintenance of the underground water channels
(*qanāt*) has not been generally accepted.

46 See Cohen et al., *Dictionnaire des racines sémitiques*, p. 1128.

47 See OCIANA (accessed June 26, 2021).

3. *l-ḏġbt / b-khl / bʿ=*
4. *ḏ / nḫl-h / b-ṯr / w-*
5. *dṯʾ-h / b-ḏʿmn*
6. *f rḍ-h / w s¹=*
7. *ʿd-h*

ʿyḏ son of Ydʿ ʿnn performed this *ẓll*-ceremony for Ḏġbt at Khl for the sake of his [i.e., ʿyḏ's] palm trees in Ṯr and his crops of the season of the later rains[48] in Ḏʿmn and so [Ḏġbt] favor him and help him.

U 069[49]

1. *ʿmrn / bn / bn{t}*
2. *w / md / bnt / ẓbyh*
3. *ʾẓllw / h-ẓll / b-khl*
4. *bʿd / ṯbrt-hmy / b-ḏ=*
5. *ṯʿʿl / f [r]ḍy-hmy/w s¹=*
6. *ʿd-hmy*

ʿmrn son of {Bnt} and Md daughter of Ẓbyh performed the *ẓll*-cermony at Khl for the sake of their grain at Ḏ-ṯʿʿl and so may he [the god] {favor} them both and help them both.

Nasif 1988: 99, pl. CLVIII[50]

1. *ḏ / ms¹yh / w bd / bnh / tmʾl*
2. *ʾẓlw / h-ẓll / l-ḏġbt / b-*
3. *{h-}mṣd / f rḍ-{h}my / w ʾḫrt[-hmy]*

Symbol *ḏ*. Ms¹yh and Bd the sons of Tmʾl performed the *ẓll*-ceremony for Ḏġbt on {the} high mountain and so [Ḏġbt] favor {them both} and {their} descendants.

Besides records of the *ẓll*-ceremony, we have inscriptions recording pilgrimages for Ḏġbt[51] and for Ḫrg[52] when the deity is known. There are also three references to a ceremony called *mḥr*—possibly the burning of incense.[53] One is in the dedication of an incense altar to Ḏġbt, and the other is worth quoting in full.

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48 This is roughly between late February and mid-April.

49 See OCIANA (accessed June 26, 2021).

50 See OCIANA (accessed June 26, 2021).

51 U 063, AH 198, Rabeler 001, Al-ʿUḏayb 075, Umm Darağ 22, AHUD 1.

52 AH 217, AH 197.

53 These are AH 209, AH 288, and possibly JSLih 037. For a discussion of the meaning of *mḥr*, see Hidalgo-Chacón Díez, "Remarks on Dadanitic *mḥr*."

AH 288[54]

1. *wʾl / ʿbd / s¹rmrʾ / hʾ / nṣb / ----*
2. *h / [l-]ʿtrġth / qbl / ʾns¹ / ----*
3. *blh-h/ w hwdq / l-h / h-mḥry ----*
4. *{l-}ḥgr / rḍyt-h / w ʾḫrt-h ----*
5. *ʿrr / ḏġbt / w hʾ / ʾḫrt ----*
6. *ʿrr-h*

Wʾl the servant of S¹rmrʾ provided [?] a standing stone . . . to Atargatis in the presence of ʾns¹ . . . and offered to her the two *mḥr*-rituals [incense offerings?] . . . for Ḥgr. And may she [i.e., Atargatis] favor him and his descendants. . . . And may Ḏġbt dishonor and . . . [?] whoever dishonors it [i.e., the inscription], and . . . descendants.[55]

Unfortunately, the stone is broken on the left side with the loss of the end of each line, but enough survives to imply that the author was a visitor to Dadan from the Levant, as suggested by this single reference to the Syrian goddess Atargatis (here spelled *ʿtrġth*).[56] This inscription also contains the only reference so far at Dadan to setting up a standing stone, though this circumstance may be due to chance since, as we have seen, there are references to the practice at Taymāʾ. It is possible that the setting up of a standing stone was not part of the worship of Ḏġbt. Regrettably, the lost part of the inscription before *ḥgr* makes it impossible to know whether it is a word, a personal name, or a divine name, which would be unique at Dadan. Finally, the inscription, which would of course have been left at Dadan, is placed under the protection of the local deity, Ḏġbt, in a formula that is found elsewhere in the oasis.

Thus at Dadan, where we have much more epigraphic material than we do at Taymāʾ, we have a few more clues as to the worship of Ḏġbt. He appears to have been very closely connected to Dadan, for although we find Dadanitic graffiti as far away as southern Jordan, there are hardly any prayers to him outside the oasis. Indeed, it is notable that during the period when the kings of Liḥyān (based at Dadan) ruled Taymāʾ, all the inscriptions and even graffiti they left in and around Taymāʾ were in Aramaic, not Dadanitic,[57] and Ḏġbt does not appear in any of them. Yet, even though he was apparently the principal deity worshipped by the local population of Dadan, unlike Ṣlm at Taymāʾ, we never find Ḏġbt used as a symbol for the population of his worshippers, either by the worshippers themselves or by their enemies.[58]

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54 See OCIANA (accessed June 26, 2021).

55 The difficulty in this inscription is with the word *hʾ* in lines 1 and 5, for which no satisfactory explanation has yet been advanced. See Hidlago-Chacón Díez, "Remarks on Dadanitic *mḥr*," pp. 67–68.

56 See Hidalgo-Chacón Diez, "Divine Names at Dadan," pp. 129–30.

57 These are TA 2382, TA 8827+8828 in Stein, "Die reichsaramäischen Inschriften"; TA 14323 in Macdonald, *Taymāʾ II*, section 3; and TM.IA.029 in Macdonald and Al-Najem, *Taymāʾ III*; Norris "Riyāḍ Museum 1020 A."

58 Thus, for instance, in the frequent references in Taymanitic graffiti to "the war with Dadan," we never find "war with the people of Ḏġbt."

One other difference with the situation at Taymāʾ is that at Dadan we have absolutely no representations of Ḏġbt, either official (in contrast to the Taymāʾ cube) or unofficial (in contrast to the numerous "faces" of Ṣlm carved on rocks). The nearest thing we find at Dadan is the letter *ḏ* at the beginning and/or end of an inscription or graffito,[59] which *may* be an apotropaic sign based on the first letter of his name, though this is speculation. This circumstance fits with what seems to have been religious practice throughout Arabia, which is that, apart from at Taymāʾ, the perception of deities was severely aniconic[60]—in marked contrast to the Levant (with the notable exception of Judaism), Egypt, and Mesopotamia. Even the simple Nabataean "Dushara pillars" or the stelae with eyes labelled "Al-ʿUzzā and the Lord of the temple"[61] are perhaps concessions to the "iconophilia" of the Levantine societies into which the Nabataeans had moved when they settled in southern Jordan and spread their kingdom northward to the Ḥawrān. Certainly before the fourth century ce, by which time it seems the Ancient North Arabian inscriptions ceased to be carved, we find no record of the multitude of idols mentioned in the early Islamic accounts of pre-Islamic religion.[62]

ADUMATU/DUMAT-AL-JANDAL/AL-JAWF

According to the Annals of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (681–669 bce), his father Sennacherib (705–681 bce) removed from the oasis of Adumatu the physical representations of six deities—*Atar-samayin, Nuḥāya, Ruldāwu, Dāya, Abirillu,* and *Atar-qurumâ*—that the Assyrians called "the gods of the Arabs."[63] The last three are unknown outside these cuneiform texts, but the first three are invoked in the graffiti thought to have been carved by inhabitants of the oasis[64] and also in graffiti by nomads using the Thamudic B script, in the forms *ʿtrs¹m, nhy,* and *rḍw.* Rḍw is also frequently invoked in Safaitic graffiti (see below), and Nhy is invoked in seven cases in Safaitic (see below). We do not know whether all these deities were worshipped by the oasis dwellers of Adumatu or whether some were deities worshipped by the nomadic Arabs of Qedār and other tribes that, the Assyrians thought, used Adumatu as a center. Certainly, Ashurbanipal (668–627 bce) fought against a group the Assyrians called "the Confederation of Atarsamain,"[65] which was part of an alliance with the nomadic tribes of Qedār, *i-sa-am-me-ʾ* and Nabayat. This suggests that Adumatu, as well as having its own deity/deities, may have been a center where images of deities worshipped by various nomadic tribes were kept. We should bear in mind, however, that all we know of these ancient Arabs comes through the prism of Assyrian thinking, and there is no guarantee that the way in which those who composed the Assyrian Annals

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59 See, for instance, Nasif 1988: 99, pl. CLVIII, above.

60 See Macdonald, "Goddesses, Dancing Girls or Cheerleaders?," p. 272.

61 See, for instance, Savignac, "Le sanctuaire d'Allat à Iram," pp. 413–15, no. 4.

62 See particularly Ibn al-Kalbī, *Kitāb al-Aṣnām.*

63 Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon*, p. 19, Text 1 (= Esarhaddon Ninevah A), col. iv, lines 10–12; Text 6 (= Nineveh [Prism] D or S) col. iii, lines 5–7.

64 These are four graffiti in the "Dumaitic" script, near the oasis of Adumatu (WDum 1–3, Al-Ǧawf Dum 1), and one near Taymāʾ (al-Muqāyil.B Dum 1); see OCIANA (accessed June 26, 2021). For twenty more discovered recently, see Norris, "A Survey," pp. 75–79.

65 See n. 22 above.

perceived Arabian religion was shared by those who practiced it. After all, the writers of the Assyrian Annals inhabited a large, urban, settled culture, replete with hundreds of deities, each with its own image(s), and the authors were writing political annals, not an ethnographic study. Thus, it is wise to take what they say with a pinch of salt and to be aware that any conclusions we draw may be affected by an Assyrian bias.[66]

THE NOMADS

One of the remarkable features of ancient north and central Arabia is that, between at least the mid-first millennium BCE and roughly the fourth century AD, large numbers of the nomads were literate.[67] As far as we know, the lack of easily portable materials to write on meant that the ability to read and write did not make their societies dependent on these skills, and they remained to all intents and purposes "nonliterate societies," relying on memory and the spoken word for recording and communication.[68] But they used their literacy to cover the desert rocks with graffiti, presumably carved to pass the time during periods of enforced solitary idleness while pasturing the flocks and herds, which is what many of the graffiti say their authors were doing.[69]

Some of these graffiti are simply prayers. Many others contain prayers as well as the author's name and various narrative elements, including the occasional reference to religious practices. The picture of the religions of these nomads provided by their graffiti is extremely fragmentary and incoherent, but it is all we have.

The most informative of these graffiti by nomads are those in the script known by the misnomer "Safaitic."[70] These inscriptions are very approximately dated to between the first century BCE and the fourth century CE[71] and are mostly found in the deserts of broken-up lava (ḥarrah) in southern Syria, northeastern Jordan, and northwestern Saudi Arabia, as well as in the sandstone deserts of northern Saudi Arabia, though scattered examples can be found elsewhere, even as far away as Pompeii.[72]

The authors of these inscriptions worshipped many deities, some of whom they shared with settled societies, other nomadic societies, or both. There were also deities of particular places such as ʾlt h-nmrt, "the goddess of Al-Namārah," a place with semipermanent water sources in southern Syria, or ʾlt ʾsʾs¹, "the goddess of Usays," a huge, volcanic cone southeast of Damascus that serves as an important lookout post and has a large, semipermanent lake. There were also the tutelary deities of the two large lineage groups Ḏf and ʿwḏ—Gd-Ḏf and Gd-ʿwḏ—and even Gd-Whbʾl, the Gadd of Whbʾl, the "ancestor" from whom both

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66 See above under Taymāʾ for the evidence of the worship of Ṣlm at Dūmah.

67 See Macdonald, "Literacy in an Oral Environment," pp. 74–95; Macdonald, "Ancient Arabia and the Written Word," pp. 17–18.

68 See Macdonald, "Literacy in an Oral Environment," pp. 49–50.

69 For a discussion of these uses of literacy, see Macdonald, "Literacy in an Oral Environment."

70 See Macdonald, "Nomads and the Ḥawrān," pp. 305–6.

71 The evidence for this dating is extremely slight, but we have nothing else.

72 See Calzini Gysens, "Safaitic Graffiti from Pompeii."

groups claimed descent.[73] There are two Safaitic inscriptions in which both Gd-Ḏf and Gd-ʿwḏ are invoked. In one of them the double invocation is understandable, since it is by the brother of a man who was killed by a Nabataean while he was pasturing the livestock of members of both the Ḏf and the ʿwḏ lineage groups:

C 2446

l s¹ʿd bn mrʾ bn nr w wgm ʿ[l] ʾḫ-h nr qtl()-h ʾl-{n}bṭy m{r}ʿy nʿm ʿwḏ w ḏf f h lt m ʿmn w ʾlt dṯn w gd[ʿ](w)ḏ w gdḏf ṯʾr m-ḏ ʾs¹lf w wlh k{b}{r} s¹ḥr ʿl ʾḫ-h ḥbb-h l-ʾbd

By S¹ʿd son of Mrʾ son of Nr and he grieved {for} his brother Nr whom the {Nabataean} killed while he was {pasturing} the livestock of ʿwḏ and Ḏf. So O Lt Mʿmn[74] and the goddess of Dṯn[75] and {Gd-ʿwḏ} and Gd-Ḏf [grant] vengeance against him who committed this act; and he was {continuously} distraught with a broken heart over his brother, his beloved forever.

In the second inscription, the appeal to both tutelary deities is less explicable. It reads:

KRS 1683

l bny bn wrd bn s²hyt bn ʾs¹ w ḫll h-dr b-ʾhl-h w ḫr{ṣ} ʿl ʾbl-h f hy lt w h s²ʿhqm s¹lm w ʿwḏ-k w h gdʿwḏ w h gdḏf ʿwḏ-km h-ʾbl

By Bny son of Wrd son of S²hyt son of ʾs¹ and he camped here with his family and {he watched over} his camels. And O Lt and O S²ʿhqm [grant] security and your protection and O Gd-ʿwḏ and O Gd-Ḏf the camels are [under] your protection.[76]

The reason for this dual appeal could be that the author was related to both lineage groups (through each of his parents, for instance) and wanted to use his "influence" with the Gadd of each to make his prayer as effective as possible. But, unfortunately, it is impossible to be certain. It is worth noting that, while conflicts between members of subgroups of ʿwḏ and Ḏf are sometimes mentioned, we do not know of any major conflicts between ʿwḏ and Ḏf themselves, though this lack of knowledge may be an accident of how lineage is expressed in particular inscriptions.[77]

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73 Gd-whbʾl is invoked in only three Safaitic inscriptions: C1713 (where he is invoked alone), Is.Mu 116 (where he is invoked with Lt and Bʿls¹mn), and ZSIJ 16 (see below), where he is invoked with Lt, Ds²r, Bʿls¹mn, the Gd of Ḥr[t], and the Gd of the Nabataeans.

74 The meaning of this title is unknown.

75 This is another goddess of place; see Macdonald, Al Muʾazzin, and Nehmé, "Les inscriptions safaïtiques," pp. 474–76.

76 This is one of the very few Safaitic inscriptions containing the second person pronominal suffix. Curiously, in the first case, it is singular even though it follows the names of two deities (Lt and S²ʿhqm), but in the second case it is plural (after Gd-ʿwḏ and Gd-Ḏf). It is possible that in the first case it was a simple mistake.

77 For Safaitic graffiti testifying to good relations between Ḏf and ʿwḏ, see RWQ 346 *l* N *ḏ ʾl ḏf mn ʾl s²wʾ s¹nt tʿql ʾl ḏf w ʾl ʿwḏ* "By N of the lineage of Ḏf and the sublineage of S²wʾ, the year [members of] the lineage of Ḏf and [members of] the lineage of ʿwḏ formed an alliance," and RWQ 347 *l* N *ḏ ʾl s²wʾ s¹nt s¹rt ʾl ḏf l-ʿwḏ* "By N of the lineage of S²wʾ, the year [members of] the lineage of Ḏf served in an army unit for ʿwḏ." However, it may be significant that these inscriptions are next to each other and by members of the same lineage group, which belongs to the Ḏf.

The deity who is invoked most often in the Safaitic graffiti is *lt*. It is important to recognize that this deity is different from the *ʾlt* worshipped, for instance, at Palmyra and in the Nabataean inscriptions and the Allāt mentioned in the Qurʾān. The spelling *lt* cannot represent *allāt since, if it did, it would be spelled *ʾlt* as is the common noun for goddess *ʾlt* (*ilāt). The same goes for the deity Lh, who is distinct from both Allāh and the common noun *ʾlh*. It should be noted, however, that both *ʾlt* and *ʾlh* are also invoked as deities in their own right, and very occasionally *lt* and *ʾlt* can be found in the same text,[78] which suggests that they were considered as separate beings.

There is a tantalizing glimpse of the mythology of these nomads in two prayers to "ʾlt daughter of Rḍw" (*ʾlt bnt rḍw*) but, alas, we have no further hint of mythology beyond this.[79]

Lt is not associated with any particular area of life and can be asked for anything, including things like rain that are otherwise associated with the deity Bʿls¹mn (see below). She often appears in long lists of deities who are almost invariably asked for security (*s¹lm*) as well as other things such as booty, a change of circumstances, and afflictions on anyone who might vandalize the graffito.

The worship of Bʿls¹mn or Bʿls¹my, "the Lord of Heaven," was shared with most of the settled populations of the Levant.[80] He had an important temple at Sīʿ on Jabal al-ʿArab (ancient Jabal Ḥawrān), and in one Safaitic inscription he is called "Bʿls¹mn Lord of S¹īʿ."[81] Another is dated to the year that the pilgrimage to Sīʿ had no effect.[82] So closely was Bʿls¹mn associated with the weather—a vital concern to nomadic pastoralists—that his name is used as a personification of the sky itself, and in several graffiti we find the expression "the year Bʿls¹mn withheld it," that is, he did not send rain on the land.[83]

Another deity shared with at least some of the settled peoples was S²ʿ-h-qm (literally "companion of the travelling group"). He is also found occasionally in Nabataean inscriptions in the Nabataean Arabic form Šyʿ-ʾl-qwm. In this guise, he is mentioned in a Palmyrene inscription whose author seems to have been a Nabataean refugee from the Roman annexation of the kingdom in 106 CE. Here, Šyʿ-ʾl-qwm is given the epithet "Who drinks no wine." Unfortunately, this is only surviving reference to this characterization.

Finally, among deities shared with the settled peoples, Dushara is the god most often invoked by the Nabataeans and by the nomads of the Ḥismā desert of southern Jordan and northwestern Saudi Arabia. From the Hismaic graffiti[84] it is clear that he was a local deity

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78 See, for instance, Ms 50, AMSI 84.

79 The inscriptions are: AWS 283 *h ʾlt bnt rḍw flṭ m-sʾnt h-ḥrb flṭʾl bn ḫzr bn ḫdy bn wkyt* "O ʾlt daughter of Rḍw deliver Flṭʾl son of Ḫzr son of Ḫdy son of Wkyt from this year of war"; and AWS 291 *h ʾlt {b}nt rḍw ġwṯ-h ḫld bn ḫdrt bn ʾbrr w l-h h-dr* "O ʾlt {daughter} of Rḍw relieve him, [namely] Ḫld son of Ḫdrt son of ʾbrr [who was] here."

80 See Niehr, *Baʿalšamem*. Note that in Safaitic both a transliteration of the Aramaic form, *bʿlsʾmn*, and a calque, *bʿlsʾmy*, are used. But *bʿlsʾmn* occurs 193 times, and *bʿlsʾmy* only seven times (plus once as a personal name, C 88). See OCIANA (accessed June 26, 2021).

81 CSNS 424.

82 BRenv.A 1 *sʾnt bṭl ḥg sʾʿ*.

83 See, for instance, C 1240 *sʾnt ḫgz-h bʿlsʾmn ʿl h-mdnt,* "the year Bʿlsʾmn withheld it [the rain] from the Province"; LP 722 *w ʿlf h-mʿzy sʾnt bʾsʾ w ḫgz-h bʿlsʾmn,* "and he fed the goats on dry fodder the year of misery because Bʿlsʾmn withheld it."

84 For the term Hismaic, see Macdonald, "Reflections on the Linguistic Map," pp. 43–45.

adopted by the Nabataeans when they settled in southern Jordan; for, in the graffiti of these nomads, using a script known by the modern name "Hismaic," his name has the etymologically correct form *ḏ-s²ry*, "He of the S²aray," which was transliterated into Aramaic as *dū-śarā*,[85] suggesting that the association of this deity with the Jibāl al-Sharāh mountain range near Petra is the correct origin of his name.[86] The deity's name appears in the Safaitic inscriptions in four spellings. By far the most common, at 79 percent, is *ds²r,* a transliteration into Safaitic of Aramaic Dūšarā. The preponderance of this spelling suggests that the worship of this deity was brought to these nomads, who lived far away from the Sharāh mountains, by Aramaic-speaking Nabataeans in the Ḥawrān, rather than by nomads speaking Hismaic or Nabataean Arabic speakers from farther south. Indeed, the Hismaic form of the name (*ḏs²ry*) occurs only once in a Safaitic inscription out of 232 instances of the four forms of the name.[87] As with the other deities, except Bʿls¹mn, Dushara is not associated with any particular requests and is usually invoked with other gods and goddesses.

Of the deities invoked by these nomads but apparently not worshipped among the settled peoples, by far the most popular was Rḍw, or Rḍy.[88] The name occurs only in the form Rḍw in the Thamudic B and Dumaitic inscriptions in North and Central Arabia, but the forms Rḍw and Rḍy are found in the Safaitic graffiti.[89] It is not known whether they simply represent different pronunciations of the same divine name or signify two different deities. That the two names have not yet been found in the same inscription suggests the former explanation.

One inscription (cited above, n. 73) contains a prayer:

ZSIJ 16:

. . . lt w ds²r w bʿls¹mn w gdḥr[t] w gdnbṭ w gdwhbʾl w kll ʾlh b-h-s¹my

. . . Lt and Ds²r and Bʿls¹mn and Gd-Ḥr[t] and Gd-Nbṭ and Gd-Whbʾl and every deity in the heavens. . . .

That is: Lt plus the two most-invoked of the deities shared with the settled peoples (Dūsharā and Baʿal-šamīn), followed by Gd-Ḥr[t] who may have been the tutelary deity of the *ḥarrah*, the desert of broken-up lava flows that was home to most of the nomads

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85 If it had been the other way around, it is clear that a transliteration of Aramaic *dūśarā into Hismaic could not have produced *ḏū-s²aray.

86 Note that the language expressed in the Hismaic script did not employ a definite article. So, even though Arabic speakers (as many of the Nabataeans appear to have been) would probably have called the mountain range *al*-Sharā (there was no assimilation of the *l* of the article in Nabataean Arabic), it would have appeared simply as *s²aray in "spoken Hismaic" and therefore was adopted by the Nabataeans without the article.

87 The other three forms of the name are *ḏs²r* (forty-six times), a form that is also found seven times in Hismaic; a curious mixed form *dšry*, which is found only three times in Safaitic and twice in Hismaic; and the most common form, *ds²r,* which is found 182 times in Safaitic and six times in Hismaic. The statistics cited are from OCIANA (accessed June 26, 2021).

88 For arguments against the association of Rḍw with the Palmyrene deity Arṣū, see Macdonald, "Goddesses, Dancing Girls or Cheerleaders?," pp. 265–69.

89 So far, there are 376 instances of Rḍw and 300 of Rḍy in Safaitic. The statistics cited are from OCIANA (accessed June 26, 2021).

who carved the Safaitic graffiti,[90] followed by Gd-Nbṭ, the tutelary deity of the Nabataeans, Gd-Whbʾl the tutelary deity of the "ancestor" of the two great federations Ḏf and ʿwḏ, and—to be on the safe side—"every deity in the heavens." It is extremely frustrating that the only photograph from which this inscription is known is so bad that one cannot read what the author requested from this august assembly of deities.

Of religious practice among these nomads we know very little. There are references to sacrifice, in some cases specifying that the victim was a camel,[91] and often without mentioning the deity to whom the sacrifice was made.[92] Moreover, even when the recipient of the sacrifice *is* mentioned, the prayer that follows is sometimes addressed to a different deity.[93] In one text from northern Saudi Arabia, the author says he raised a standing stone and sacrificed, with no mention of a deity. Occasionally, the author of a graffito states, or hints at, a reason for the sacrifice. For instance:

AbWS 8

. . . w ḏbḥ l-gdḏf wqyt m-bʾsˡ

. . . and he sacrificed to Gd-Ḏf for protection from misfortune.[94]

C 860

. . . w ḏbḥ f h gdʿwḏ sˡlm w {t}{r}d f {r}md bqr sˡnt ʾty ʾṣf qr

. . . and he made a sacrifice so O Gd-ʿwḏ let there be security and {recompense} because the cattle {perished} from cold the year cold came during the early summer.[95]

AWS 279

w ḏbḥ w ʾs²rq f h gdʿwḏ w h ds²r sˡlm w mgdt

. . . and he sacrificed and he migrated to the inner desert. So O Gd-ʿwḏ and O Ds²r [grant] security and abundance.[96]

where one might infer that he was asking for security on the journey and for abundant herbage when he got there. But, in most cases, it is simply the bald statement "he sacrificed."

There is one inscription that has been interpreted as follows:

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90 The divine name *gd-ḥrt* is found in three other Safaitic texts, AWS 313 and 314 and BSWSA 251.

91 See KRS 818, "[he was on] the high place and sacrificed a male camel on it"; KRS 824, virtually the same; AbSWS 17, RWQ 318, "he sacrificed a she-camel."

92 However, see C 4358, 4360, 4410+4409, Mr.A 5, "and he sacrificed to Bʿlsˡmn"; MA 1, "he sacrificed to Rḍy"; Al-Namārah.M 58, "he sacrificed in this place to S²ʿhqm"; and references to sacrifices to Gd-Ḏf and Gd-ʿwḏ below.

93 See, for instance, AHS 1, AHS 6, and AHS 9, which have "and he sacrificed to Gd-Ḏf" followed by a prayer to Lt.

94 The four other inscriptions that mention sacrifice to Gd-Ḏf are in a group (AHS 1, 6, 7, and 9).

95 Note that this text is in a group of inscriptions (C 852, 853, 857, and 860), all of whose authors say that they sacrificed.

96 Another inscription on the same stone (AWS 281) by someone apparently unrelated to the author of AWS 279 also says "and he sacrificed and he migrated to the inner desert," followed by a prayer to Lt.

MA 1

w ṯhr w ḏbḥ {l-}rḍy w ġnm nqt

. . . and he was purified and he sacrificed {to} Rḍy and he gained a she-camel as booty.[97]

One could contrast this inscription with another:

HH 1

w n{ṣ}b w ḏbḥ w ḥll w ḫrṣ {ʾ}s²yᶜ-h ḏbʾn

. . . and he {erected a standing stone} and he sacrificed and returned to a profane condition and watched for his {companions} who had been raided . . .[98]

As I said earlier, in contrast to Taymāʾ there are no images of deities among the huge numbers of rock drawings accompanying the Safaitic inscriptions or any of the other graffiti of the nomads. At one time, it was erroneously thought that figures of more-or-less naked women drawing out their hair were images of a deity. But, once the inscriptions accompanying them were deciphered, it quickly became apparent that these figures were singing or dancing girls.[99] It is probable that having a deity in physical form, that is, an "idol," was impractical in nomadic life, in which the members of a tribe of any size are very seldom, if ever, in one place at the same time and in which the irregular distribution of pasture means that small social groups are scattered over a wide area. In such circumstances, it is only practical to worship unseen, abstract deities without physical forms, whereas settled peoples can have images they can worship in a temple or in their houses.

THAMUDIC B

This script was used by nomads from southern Syria to the borders of Yemen and probably over a very long period, though we have only one datable inscription, which was found near Taymāʾ and mentions "the king of Babylon" and so presumably dates from Nabonidus's sojourn there in the mid-sixth century BCE. In these texts, which are generally much shorter and less informative than the Safaitic graffiti, there are many prayers, particularly to the deities Rḍw, Nhy, and ᶜtrs¹m (ᶜAtarsamain), along with a few others who are less frequently invoked.

As mentioned above, in the Thamudic B script, there are quite a large number of what appear to be statements either addressing the deity, *h rḍw b-k. . .* "O Rḍw by you is . . ." or simply describing a divine action, such as *b-nhy* ". . . by Nhy is. . . ."[100] There are also

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97 See the commentary in OCIANA (accessed June 26, 2021).

98 HH 1 (translation is that of the editor, Hani Hayajneh). The word translated as "returned to a profane condition" is the verb *ḥll,* which is very common in the Safaitic inscriptions and in most contexts means "he camped." So, although the translation "returned to a profane condition" is appropriate here, we cannot rule out the possibility that it means "he camped" instead.

99 See Macdonald, "Goddesses, Dancing Girls or Cheerleaders?," pp. 261–72.

100 See Winnett, "Archaeological-Epigraphical Survey," pp. 95–100. It should be noted, however, that many of Winnett's interpretations of these very difficult texts are questionable.

straightforward prayers of the type *h rḍw s¹ʿd-n . . .* "O Rḍw help me. . . ." Beyond these scant indicators, these graffiti tell us very little of the religion of their authors.

DISCUSSION

So, what more general picture can we draw from this jigsaw with most of its pieces missing?

"HENOTHEISM" AND "POLYTHEISM"[101]

There appears to be a marked difference between the religious practices of the two oases from which we have information and those of the nomads. In Taymāʾ and Dadan, we find what appears to be the worship of single deities—Ṣlm and Ḏġbt, respectively—with hardly any mention of others. Among the nomads, on the other hand, there is what appears to be "indiscriminate polytheism" (!) with a large number of deities who—with the exception of Bʿls¹mn—appear to have had no particular specialties but could be asked for anything, either singly or collectively. Nor is there any sense of hierarchy; any deities can appear at any point in the lists of divine names invoked.

In this apparent dichotomy, the Nabataeans, who are thought originally to have been nomads, seem to present a combination of the two religious cultures. It is clear that the Nabataeans worshipped Dushara, the deity of the place where they first settled.[102] As the kingdom expanded, Dushara ceased to be the deity of a specific place and became the symbol of the state personified in its king, so that he becomes known as "the god of our lord [i.e., the king]." When the capital moved to Boṣrā, he became associated with the local deity there—ʾʿrʾ—as *dwšrʾ w-ʾʿrʾ ʾlh mrʾ-nʾ dy b- bṣrʾ*, "Dushara-ʾʿra the god of our lord who is in Boṣrā."[103]

But the Nabataeans also worshipped several other deities—ʾlt, ʾl-ʿzʾ, Mnwtw, ʾl-ktbʾ, Šyʿ-ʾl-qwm, and others—though to a far lesser extent than they worshipped Dushara, at least if their appearance in Nabataean inscriptions is anything to go by. Whether the Nabataean nomads who settled in Petra brought these deities with them is impossible to know. But if they did—and on present information this can only be speculation—the Nabataeans in their nomadic phase could have worshipped a number of deities, as did the nomads who carved the Safaitic, Hismaic, and Thamudic B graffiti. After the Nabataeans had settled in southern Jordan, they began to worship mainly the local deity of place, Dushara. But having settled in a region—the Levant—where the settled peoples' worship of large numbers of deities was the norm, they continued to worship these ancestral deities in addition to Dushara, though there was a (probably unconscious) pressure to associate some of them with him.

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101 As explained earlier, I use these terms rather loosely to mean, on the one hand, "attachment to a single deity while accepting the existence of others and even occasionally worshipping them" and, on the other hand, the "simultaneous worship of a number of different deities."

102 Quite apart from the etymology of the name, as discussed above, he is also known as "the god of Gaia" (al-Jī), the ancient (and an alternative modern) name for Wādī Mūsā next to Petra (see Healey, *Religion of the Nabataeans*, pp. 89–90).

103 RES 83, from Imtān; and see Healey, *Religion of the Nabataeans*, p. 98. The fact that ʾlh is in the singular shows that Dušara and ʾʿrʾ were considered a single being despite the *w-* between their names.

As I have said before,[104] Arabian deities seem to have had only grammatical gender and were apparently not perceived as having anthropomorphic gender. So, associating a deity of female grammatical gender with one of male grammatical gender would not have been a problem to the worshipper. Naturally, I am not presenting this observation as an explanation of the religion of the Nabataeans, the complexities of which are admirably set out in John Healey's excellent book on that subject.[105] I am merely suggesting an element that I do not think has been examined before and that deserves further investigation.

LITURGY

As might be expected, we have from the inscriptions only the merest hints of liturgical practice. The most probable indication, I would suggest, is in the famous ʿĒn ʿAvdat Nabataean inscription, which contains two lines of Arabic that I have suggested are taken from the liturgy of the deified Nabataean king Obodas.[106] We know that, until shortly before the revelation of Islam, Arabic remained an unwritten language and did not have a script of its own. So, when Arabic speakers, like many of the Nabataeans, wanted to *write* something, they had to use another, *written* language—and in the case of the Nabataeans, this was Aramaic. On the basis of the fragmentary evidence that has come down to us, I have suggested that the Nabataeans, at least in the southern part of the kingdom, used Arabic for all important spoken matters such as general communication, legal proceedings, and religious liturgies and that it was only when these matters needed to be written down that Aramaic was used; I have, as well, cited parallel situations.[107] We know from the famous remark by Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis, that at least in the third century CE, Nabataean religious ceremonies were performed in Arabic,[108] and I have suggested both that Arabic was the Nabataeans' ancestral and contemporary spoken language and that these liturgies may have been handed down orally in their original Arabic from one generation of priests to the next. Thus, the three hemistiches in rhetorical Arabic included in the ʿĒn ʿAvdat inscription could be a quotation from one of these liturgies. This possibility is, of course, speculation, but it seems to provide a plausible, if unprovable, explanation.

The second example was discovered by my friend and colleague Ahmad Al-Jallad and is, unexpectedly, in a mixed Safaitic-Hismaic inscription. It is not necessarily strictly liturgical but is poetry on a mythological theme. Al-Jallad has recognized it as three lines echoing a section of the Ugaritic Baʿal cycle, "where Mōt, personified death, temporarily disposes of Baal and takes over dominion of the Earth."[109] This understanding suggests that either some of the Safaitic inscriptions are a great deal older than we thought or versions

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104 Macdonald, "Goddesses, Dancing Girls or Cheerleaders?," pp. 264 n. 17, 289, 291.

105 Healey, *Religion of the Nabataeans*.

106 See Macdonald, "Ancient Arabia and the Written Word," p. 20; Macdonald, "Emergence of Arabic as Written Language," pp. 399–402; and Kropp, "The ʿAyn ʿAbada Inscription Thirty Years Later."

107 Macdonald, "Ancient Arabia and the Written Word," pp. 19–20.

108 Epiphanius of Eleutheropolis, Bishop of Salamis, *Panarion* 51.22.11 (ed. Holl, *Epiphanius II. Panarion haer.34–64*, pp. 286–287; translated in Williams, *The Panarion of Epiphanius*, p. 51).

109 Al-Jallad, "Echoes of the Baal Cycle," p. 7.

of the cycle remained in oral tradition for almost a millennium after they were written down at Ugarit.[110]

It might be thought that the statement *mn s¹mᶜ l-ṣlm l twy* , "Whoever obeys Ṣlm shall not perish,"[111] was taken from a liturgy. But, so far, this declaration has been found only at the lookout post of Jabal Ghunaym and the guard posts of Minṭar Banī ᶜAṭiyyah and Tawit Saᶜīd, where the majority of graffiti that consist of more than just the author's name say that the author was keeping guard for Ṣlm. Thus, it seems to me that *mn s¹mᶜ l-ṣlm l twy* is more likely to be a war cry.

NOMEN ET NUMEN

There is an interesting contrast between the deities who appear in theophoric names in the Ancient North Arabian inscriptions and those invoked or mentioned by their authors. Thus, in Ancient North Arabian, the deity *ᶜzy* (cf. al-ᶜUzzā in Arabic) occurs some twenty-eight times, with or without the definite article, in a variety of theophoric names—*hnʾ-h-ᶜzy*,[112] *mrʾ-h-ᶜzy*,[113] *mrʾ-ᶜzy*,[114] and possibly *mᶜzy*[115]—as well as the probable hypocoristic *ᶜzy*.[116] But, as yet, no prayers to this deity have been found in these inscriptions. Similarly, the goddess known in Arabic as Manāt and in Nabataean as Manōtū or Manawatū is found in the theophoric names *ʾrs²-mnwt* and *ʾs¹-mnwt*[117] and in the form *mnt* in the names *hnʾ-mnt* (and *hn-mnt*), *ʾs¹-mnt, s¹-mnt* (< *ʾs¹-mnt* ?), *s¹r-mnt, mnt* (hypocoristic?), and possibly *kmnt*;[118] and yet, Mnt occurs only once in a Safaitic and once in a Hismaic invocation[119] and Mnwt not at all in Safaitic, though it occurs four times in Hismaic.

On the other hand, the deity most often invoked, Lt, occurs relatively rarely in theophoric names—far fewer times than Lh, who, by contrast, is relatively rare in invocations. Rḍw,

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110 See Al-Jallad, "Echoes of the Baal Cycle," pp. 16–17.

111 For this interpretation of the statement, see n. 18 above.

112 It occurs once in Dadanitic (AH 197), surprisingly not as *hnʾ-hn-ᶜzy*, which would be normal before a pharyngeal in Dadanitic.

113 It occurs twice in Safaitic, in WH 1777, 3820.

114 There are three possible explanations for the lack of the definite article before *ᶜzy* in this name: (1) the *h*- definite article was assimilated to the preceding ʾ; (2) the less common definite article ʾ- was used and assimilated to the preceding ʾ; or (3) it is a form of the name taken from Hismaic, which does not use a definite article or at least not one that would show up in the severely consonantal Hismaic and Safaitic scripts. The name is found three times in Hismaic (AMJ 066, Jacobson D.2.11 and D.3.9) and twice in Safaitic (WH 621, 627). See OCIANA (accessed June 26, 2021).

115 Possibly a hypocoristic of *mrʾᶜzy*. Again, it is found three times in Hismaic (KJC 729, AMJ 124, Jacobson D.23.4 a) and apparently only once in Safaitic (AMSI 76). See OCIANA (accessed June 26, 2021).

116 It occurs as a personal name twelve times in Safaitic, and possibly once in Hismaic. See OCIANA (accessed June 26, 2021).

117 *ʾrs²-mnwt* is found four times and *ʾs¹-mnwt* three times in Safaitic. See OCIANA (accessed June 26, 2021).

118 *hnʾ-mnt* fourteen times in Safaitic, twice in Hismaic, and once in Dadanitic; *hn-mnt* twice in Safaitic and once in Dadanitic; *ʾs¹-mnt* fourteen times in Safaitic, twenty-nine times in Hismaic, and twice in Dadanitic; *s¹-mnt* (< *ʾs¹-mnt* ?) four times in Safaitic; *s¹r-mnt* once in Safaitic; *mnt* (hypocoristic?) eight times in Safaitic; and possibly *kmnt* once in Safaitic and five times in Hismaic. See OCIANA (accessed June 26, 2021).

119 RWQ 319 (Safaitic) and CH.R364.08 (Hismaic). See OCIANA (accessed June 26, 2021).

the second most popular deity in invocations, is absent altogether from theophoric names. It is possible that Rḍy occurs in the names ʾm-rḍy and rḍy-lh, though the latter is more likely to be a theophoric name with Lh, "may Lh be satisfied." It is also possible, but by no means necessary, that the personal name rḍy, which occurs three times in Safaitic, is a hypocoristic.

This situation contrasts with the situation in Taymāʾ and Dadan, where personal names with Ṣlm and Ḏġbt, respectively, are relatively common, though there are also theophoric names with other deities who are rarely, if ever, found in invocations.

CONCLUSION

It will be clear from this discussion that although we have a great deal of "script" in ancient North Arabia, it contains very little "scripture," and what little we can find has to be wheedled out of texts that were not intended to provide it. This process involves a certain amount of speculation, but I hope that I have made clear where the facts end and the speculation begins. I have gathered together the scattered fragments of information on the religions of these different peoples and have presented one way of interpreting them. Others will inevitably put the pieces together in different ways and draw different conclusions, and new evidence will emerge with further exploration and study. I look forward to being corrected in due course!

3 The Religious Landscape of Northwest Arabia as Reflected in the Nabataean, Nabataeo-Arabic, and Pre-Islamic Arabic Inscriptions*

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THIS CONTRIBUTION COMES FROM a paper I originally gave at the University of Chicago in 2017, during the conference organized by Fred Donner entitled "Scripts and Scripture: Language and Religion in Arabia, circa 500–700 CE."[1]

The initial aim of my paper was to examine whether the gods mentioned in the Nabataean inscriptions from the Arabian Peninsula were the same as those mentioned in the Nabataeo-Arabic and pre-Islamic Arabic texts from the same region. The objective was thus to determine what sort of evolution in the religious landscape can be traced between the first and the sixth century CE on the basis of a particular corpus of inscriptions. However, while I was collecting the material in the various corpora which needed to be taken into account, I realized that the gods who appear in the Nabataean inscriptions from the Arabian Peninsula (as opposed to those from other regions of the Nabataean kingdom: Petra, the Ḥawrān, the Negev, Sinai, etc.) showed specificities which were also worth pointing out—e.g., the mention of local gods who do not appear elsewhere, or the popularity of certain gods over others.

Of course, the Arabian Peninsula was never all part of the Nabataean kingdom. Therefore, when one deals with the Nabataean inscriptions recorded in this vast geographical area, one refers to regions which were either *part* of the Nabataean kingdom (at least down to Hegra, modern Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ/al-Ḥijr), were in the Nabataean area of *influence* (probably

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down to Yathrib, modern Medina), or were regions where a Nabataean *presence* is attested (down to South Arabia and the Farasān islands).

The three categories of script mentioned in the title of this contribution can be defined schematically as follows: the Nabataean inscriptions are written in a "calligraphic" or "classical" form of the Nabataean script, where most of the letters would be at home in Petra in the first century CE. They may show regional particularities, but the letters are all recognizably Nabataean and do not show clear traces of evolution. Nabataeo-Arabic inscriptions are written in a script the letters of which are starting to change, that is, they are transitional between Nabataean and Arabic. The script is, however, not homogenous, some letters being evolved and others not. Finally, the pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions are written in a recognizable form of Arabic. They represent the outcome of the evolution, and the letters are more standardized. On the basis of all the dated texts that are available so far, these categories can be chronologically defined as follows:

- Nabataean: first century BC to mid third century CE;
- Nabataeo-Arabic: late third to mid fifth century CE;
- pre-Islamic Arabic: late fifth and sixth centuries CE.

One should keep in mind that the distinction between these three categories of scripts is sometimes difficult to make. One is dealing with short texts which do not always contain diagnostic letter forms, which do not clearly belong to one category or the other, or which contain both "developed" and "archaic" letter forms. The linguistic status of the inscriptions written in these scripts is another issue which is difficult to address. The Nabataean inscriptions are generally written in Aramaic, but they contain a number of Arabic loanwords. It should be remembered that, if one excepts the Nabataean papyri from the Dead Sea region,[2] northwest Arabia is the region which has yielded by far the largest number of Arabic loanwords in the Nabataean inscriptions. It has also been reasonably argued[3] that the Nabataeans *spoke* Arabic, but it is difficult to be certain whether this was uniformly the case at all times and in all the regions under control by the Nabataeans. As for the Nabataeo-Arabic and even the pre-Islamic Arabic texts, the question of their language **[127/128]** is complicated by the following facts:[4] (1) they contain a very limited number of words (as opposed to personal names); (2) even when they do contain words, these often belong to radicals which can be either Aramaic or Arabic (e.g., *ktb*, *yd*, *šnt*, etc.) and therefore cannot be used as criteria to determine the language of the texts in which they are used (unless they appear in derived forms which are either clearly Aramaic or clearly Arabic); (3) even some of the pre-Islamic Arabic texts contain Aramaic words sometimes used as fossils (e.g., *br*, "son of"; see Macdonald, "Ancient Arabia," p. 20).

This being considered, my wish was to collect, in all the possible corpora of inscriptions which were at my disposal, anything which could be identified either as a divine name or as a theophoric name. Obviously, these two groups do not have the same value:

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2 In 2014, A. Yardeni published an article in which she gives a list of the words she identified as Arabic in the Nabataean and Aramaic legal documents from the Judaean Desert. This list contains 59 items, for each of which a translation is proposed and citations of the phrases in which each word appears is provided.

3 Most recently in Macdonald, "Ancient Arabia," pp. 19–21.

4 On the language issue, see among others Nehmé, "Aramaic or Arabic?" and Robin, al-Ghabbān, and al-Saʿīd, "Inscriptions antiques."

deities whose names appear in funerary and religious texts, or even in simple signatures carved by individuals on the rocks, were certainly the object of some sort of worship, in whatever form. They can therefore be considered as direct evidence. Conversely, theophoric names are at best indirect evidence for the worship of the deities who are mentioned in them. Indeed, as has been amply demonstrated by Macdonald ("Personal Names"), personal names neither reflect the ethnic affiliation of the bearer's parents nor their religious beliefs. They should therefore not be used to describe the cultic preferences of those who bore them. These reservations kept in mind, it seemed, however, reasonable to assume, as a working hypothesis, that theophoric names do reflect, to a certain extent, the religious landscape of the regions and at the periods in which they appear, *if and only if* one appeals to the statistical value of series of names taken from as large a number of inscriptions as possible.

1. METHODOLOGY, DOCUMENTARY ASPECTS

The first step of my research was to collect the material, that is, the divine names and theophoric personal names attested in the inscriptions written in the three categories of scripts distinguished above. Since I needed to collect as representative a body of material as possible, I decided to take into account all the inscriptions the existence of which I was aware. These belong to three kinds of documentary sources:

A. PUBLISHED MATERIAL

This includes the various collections of inscriptions from the Arabian Peninsula, usefully assembled by Sulaymān al-Dhuyayb in the two volumes of his *Mudawwanat al-nuqūš al-nabaṭiyyah* (al-Theeb, *Mudawwanat*). The *Mudawwanat* contains 967 inscriptions, only 1 percent of which had not been published previously. Note that a few published inscriptions are missing from the *Mudawwanat*.[5] To these have been added the inscriptions recorded in works published after the closing date of the *Mudawwanat* (al-Theeb, "Nuqūš nabaṭiyyah jadīdah," "New Nabataean Inscriptions," *Nuqūš mawqiʿ sarmadāʾ*; al-Ḥāʾiṭī, *Al-nuqūš al-nabaṭiyyah*; Robin, al-Ghabbān, and al-Saʿīd, "Inscriptions antiques"; etc.), as well as the inscriptions discovered along the so-called Darb al-Bakrah, which is the name given to the ancient itinerary between Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ and the Jordanian border (912 texts, about five hundred of which were not previously published).[6]

   If we add to these inscriptions those which are either under publication process or were discovered recently during survey projects which are sometimes still ongoing (for which see hereafter), the total number of Nabataean, Nabataeo-Arabic, and pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions from the Arabian Peninsula reaches about two thousand texts.

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5 For instance, unless I am mistaken: ARNA.Nab 15, *CIS* II 308, 321–323, 326–335, 338–339, 340–345, 346–348, the inscriptions published in Eskoubi, *Dirāsah taḥlīliyyah muqāranah* and *Dirāsah taḥlīliyyah muqāranah li-nuqūš ṯamūdiyyah*, those mentioned in Livingstone et al., "Epigraphic Survey," p. 142, and finally those in Moritz, "Ausflüge."

6 Al-Ghabbān, "Le Darb al-Bakra," now all published in Nehmé, *Darb al-Bakrah*.

B. TEXTS IN THE PROCESS OF PUBLICATION

These include:

- the inscriptions carved either in the Jabal Ithlib area, northeast of Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ (ancient Hegra), or associated with religious monuments in other areas of the same site[7] (about two hundred texts). These texts are being prepared for publication by the author;
- the inscriptions from the Taymāʾ Museum which are soon to be published by Michael Macdonald and Muḥammad al-Najem (five texts);[8]
- the inscriptions from the Taymāʾ excavations, which were recently published by Michael Macdonald (ten texts in the Nabataean script)[9].

C. UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL

This includes:

- the inscriptions photographed in the regions of Sakākā and al-Jawf (ancient Dūmah) during the surveys undertaken by the Dūmat al-Jandal Archaeological **[128/129]** Project (under the direction of G. Charloux) between 2009 and 2017. The examination of the about three hundred photographs taken by the team members showing Nabataean inscriptions allowed for the identification of 68 previously unpublished texts. These texts are also being prepared for publication by the author;[10]
- the inscriptions photographed in the region of Taymāʾ in 2013 and 2015 during two seasons of the Taymāʾ Epigraphic Survey Project (directed by M. C. A. Macdonald). The examination of more than five thousand photographs allowed for the identification of about thirty previously unpublished texts;[11]
- the inscriptions photographed in the region of Najrān during the surveys undertaken between 2007 and 2017 by the Saudi-French Najrān Archaeological Project (led by Chr. Robin). To my knowledge, four previously unpublished Nabataean inscriptions were photographed. The twenty-five Nabataeo-Arabic and pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions from the Ḥimā area, 100 km north of Najrān, discovered in 2014, have been published in Robin, al-Ghabbān, and al-Saʿīd, "Inscriptions antiques," in 2014;

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7 For the publication of some of them, see Nehmé, "Inscriptions."

8 I am very grateful to Michael Macdonald, who kindly gave me access to the material from the Taymāʾ excavations and museum and allowed me to mention the divine and theophoric names they contain.

9 See Macdonald, "The Nabataean Inscriptions." There are also six texts in the Taymāʾ Aramaic script, but they have not been included in this study, except one which is dated to the reign of a Nabataean king, TA 14285 + TA 14286.

10 A first group of eighteen texts from one site near Dūmah has already been published; see Nehmé, "New Dated Inscriptions."

11 I am again very grateful to M. C. A. Macdonald for letting me go through the material of the Taymāʾ Epigraphic Survey.

- the inscriptions copied in various locations by H. St. J. B. Philby and R. E. Bogue during their expedition to Saudi Arabia in 1953.[12]

Up to 2017, 165 sites with inscriptions have been identified in the Arabian Peninsula, a figure which increases year after year thanks to the new surveys undertaken. It does not, however, increase exponentially, particularly in the area south of ancient Hegra, where the Nabataean inscriptions remain a rarity. All the new inscriptions from the collections mentioned above were read, at least in a preliminary way, in order to collect the divine and theophoric names they contain. As for the previously known inscriptions, the names they contain were, whenever possible, checked on the original photographs. In total, 393 records of either divine or theophoric names were entered in a Filemaker database, which thus contains the most complete and up-to-date corpus of this category of material.

2. GENERAL REMARKS ON THE CORPUS

One should keep in mind that the number of records in the database might change slightly in the future if some names are removed and others added. Besides, new inscriptions are discovered every day, and the field is in constant evolution. The figures which are given today will therefore soon be outdated, but they nevertheless give an idea of the available data and of the distribution of the names according to various criteria. For example, 65 records are divine names or divine epithets, while 314 are theophoric personal names. Note that by "divine epithet" I mean a deity who is not mentioned by his/her name but by a periphrasis such as ʾlh gyʾ (sometimes spelled ʾlh gyʾʾ), "the god of Gaia."

If we consider the category of script in which the inscriptions are written, we can say that 350 divine or theophoric names are contained in inscriptions written in the Nabataean script, 24 are contained in inscriptions written in the Nabataeo-Arabic script, and 8 are contained in inscriptions written in pre-Islamic Arabic. The overwhelming majority of the recorded items thus appear in the Nabataean inscriptions, which is not surprising. Finally, as far as the geographical distribution is concerned, almost all the names, whether divine or theophoric, come from northwest Arabia, and only five come from inscriptions discovered in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula. This reflects, of course, the distribution of the Nabataean inscriptions themselves, the overwhelming majority of which come from an area which stretches from Aqaba to Sakākā and down to Khaybar in the south.

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12 The Nabataean texts have been handed over to E. Littmann and, after his death, to J. Starcky so that he could include them in the new volume of *CIS* II. Starcky died in 1987, but the Nabataean material was already in J. T. Milik's hands, who passed over the manuscript to me before he died in 2006. I was therefore able to see that Milik had given new *CIS* numbers to the Nabataean inscriptions copied by Philby and Bogue. The copies made by Philby and Bogue were sent to me by M. C. A. Macdonald, who had received them from J. Ryckmans in 1993.

3. THE DIVINE NAMES OR EPITHETS ATTESTED IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

In the tables presented below, the inscriptions bear the numbers which have been given to them in the relevant projects; for example, DaJ = Dūmat al-Jandal, MS = Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ, etc. (see the list of sigla). They have not been renumbered because they belong to different corpora which will be published separately. The inscription numbers which are followed by a hash (#) are presented in the Appendix at the end of this chapter. This appendix has been added for the convenience of the reader and gives, in alphabetical order of the sigla, a selection of both published and unpublished texts. When a text is recorded in S. al-Theeb's *Mudawwanat* (ThMNN), this number is used preferentially but is usually followed by the better known JSNab or *CIS* number. A concordance of the references used in the table will help the reader find his way in the numbering of the inscriptions. **[129/130]**

3.1. NAMES OR EPITHETS ATTESTED IN NABATAEAN ONLY

Name or expression	Number of attestations	Comment
ʾlh gyʾ	4×	In three inscriptions from Umm Jadhāyidh, ThMNN 477#, 688, and UJadhNab 402, and in one from Dūmah (Savignac and Starcky, "Inscription nabatéenne").
ʾlhyʾ klhm	3×	This expression, which means "all the gods," was taken into account because it refers to the worship of a number of gods. It occurs in ThMNN 200, 555, and 681.
ʾlʿzʾ	1×	MS8Nab1# (Nehmé, "Inscriptions," pp. 189–94, no. 12, fig. 134).
ʾlt	6×	ThMNN 205, 306, 307, and 662, plus two unpublished inscriptions from the site of Qiyāl, northwest of Sakākā, DaJ29Nab13# and DaJ29Nab24#.
ʾʿrʾ dy bbṣrʾ ʾlh rbʾl	1×	ThMNN 1 (JSNab 39, Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ). This very interesting text (on which see Nehmé, "Quelques éléments," pp. 43–44) was probably written by someone who came from Boṣrā in southern Syria, hence the mention of ʾʿrʾ, probably meant to be *dwšrʾ ʾʿrʾ*.
ʾrʾ (ʾ[ʿ]rʾ?)	1×	JSNab 201 (Mabrak an-Nāqah). There is no copy of this text, which was read . . . *qdm ʾrʾ* (for *qdm ʾʿrʾ*?) ---- *mnwtw bṭb*. For ʾʿrʾ, see the previous line.
dwšrʾ	21×	From a variety of sites: Nebes, "Nabatäer," ThMNN 14, 107#, 133, 190, 197, 200, 205, 209, 218, 220, 221, 226, 278, 688, 692, 705, 819; UJadhNab 226, 391, 402.

Name or expression	Number of attestations	Comment
hbl	1×	ThMNN 205 (JSNab 16, Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ), in the cursing formula of the legal text carved on a tomb, along with *dwšrʾ*.
m[n]wt	1×	In UJadhNab 391, the author wrote *mwt*, which is probably a mistake for *mnwt* (*mn qdm dwšrʾ w m[n]wt*).
mnwtw	7×	All from previously published texts: ThMNN 197, 205, 209, 221, 224, 295, 705.
mntw	3×	All from previously published texts: ThMNN 278, 292, 549.
mr bytʾ/mrʾ bytʾ	4×	All from Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ and all from previously published texts: MS8Nab1#; ThMNN 19, 20, 21.
qyšh and *byt qyšʾ*	2× and 1×	All from Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ: ThMNN 197, 205, 226. This is either a deity or a divine attribute.
{r}ṣw	1×	Unpublished text from the site of Qiyāl, ca. 15 km northwest of Sakākā, DaJ29Nab1#. This is to my knowledge the only attestation of Ruḍā in the Nabataean inscriptions.
šmyʾ	2×	*CIS* II 236# and a text discovered at Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ in 2016, 64114_I01#.
tbwš	1×	This deity, if the reading is correct, is attested in one text only, ThMNN 107# (JSNab 142), from Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ.
tdh/trh	1×	ThMNN 166# (*CIS* II 336, from Taymāʾ). Female deity not attested elswhere. Michael Macdonald suggests, however, that this text is written in the Taymāʾ Aramaic script (Macdonald, *Taymāʾ II*, p. 126 n. 4).
tdhy/trhy	1×	Legal text from Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ, ThMNN 201 (JSNab 12), where the fine should be paid to *tdhy/trhy*. Since the owners of the tomb are Taymanites, it is likely that *tdhy/trhy* and *tdh/trh* in the previous line are the same female deity.

Two periphrases are used to designate deities, *mr bytʾ* (or *mrʾ bytʾ*) and *ʾlh gyʾ*. The first one, which means "the Lord of the house" or "the Lord of the temple," behind which probably lies a major divine figure such as Dūšarā, appears four times, all from Hegra. Elsewhere in the Nabataean kingdom, it occurs once in Petra, once in Wadi Ramm, and once in Zīza near Madaba, all in Jordan (see Nehmé, "Inscriptions," p. 192). It is therefore attested several times in the heart of the Nabataean kingdom, and it is not surprising to

find it in Hegra. The same is true of *ʾlh gyʾ*, "the god of Gaia." We find this periphrasis in Avdat in the Negev, where it refers explicitly to Dūšarā (Negev, "Nabatean Inscriptions," p. 113, no. 10), and in al-ʿAdnāniyyah on the Moab plateau, without any specification of the god (al-Salameen and al-Shdaifat, "New Nabataean Inscription"). In an inscription from Wadi Ramm,[13] it is al-Kutbā who is said to be *b-gyʾ* ("in Gaia"), and it is therefore possible that al-Kutbā lies sometimes behind this anonymous expression. We also find it four times in northwest Arabia, in Dūmah (Savignac and Starcky, "Inscription nabatéenne": *dwšrʾ ʾlh gyʾ*) and in Umm Jadhāyidh, in ThMNN 688 and UJadhNab 402, where we have *dwšrʾ ʾlh gyʾ*, as well as in ThMNN 477#. The latter is the signature of an individual followed by *qdm ʾlh gyʾ*, without the god's name. Considering that four inscriptions mention explicitly Dūšarā as the god of Gaia and that *ʾlh* is in the masculine, and since it is likely that the author of ThMNN 477# was traveling from Petra to Hegra, we can assume that in this text Dūšarā is meant. **[130/131]**

Finally, we find in the Arabian Peninsula the expression *ʾlhyʾ klhm*, "all the gods," both in Hegra and in Umm Jadhāyidh. Since it is also attested twice in Petra,[14] it is a common way in the Nabataean kingdom to refer to a number of gods when the author of a text does not want to specify which gods are meant specifically. In the two inscriptions from Petra and in ThMNN 200 (JSNab 11), Dūšarā is named first, then "all the gods." The latter are therefore necessarily considered less important because they are not mentioned individually.

Three deities appear more than five times in the Nabataean inscriptions from the Arabian Peninsula and can therefore be considered, with caution, as the most popular ones: Dūšarā, Manātū/Manawatū, and Allāt. It is no surprise that the most popular one is Dūšarā (21×), the main god of the Nabataeans, worshipped throughout the kingdom.[15] He is followed by Manātū/Manawatū (10× plus one possible *m[n]wt* in UJadhNab 391).[16] Manātū/Manawatū is not attested elsewhere in Nabataea (Alpass, *Religious Life*, p. 136), and her popularity is therefore restricted to northwest Arabia. As for *ʾlt* (6×), who is surprisingly not attested in Petra, she appears in inscriptions from Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ, al-ʿUlā, Umm Jadhāyidh, and, what is new, two unpublished Nabataean inscriptions from Qiyāl, north of Sakākā.

One deity, *šmyʾ*, and one possible deity (or divine attribute), *qyšh*, appear twice each. Until the recent discovery (2016) of a new attestation of *šmyʾ*, this divine name was attested in one text only, from Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ, ThMNN 166# (*CIS* II 236), copied by Ch. Doughty and read by J. T. Milik (*Dédicaces*, pp. 409–10). The new inscription, 64114_I04# (published in Nehmé, "New Nabataean Inscription"), was brought to light by M. al-Musa during the excavations of a residential unit built next to the main Nabataean sanctuary of Hegra which is currently being excavated by a team led by the author. It had been reused in the

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13 Savignac, "Sanctuaire d'Allat (suite)," p. 575, no. 17, reread by J. T. Milik ("Nouvelles inscriptions," p. 247) and reread again by J. Strugnell ("Nabataean Goddess," p. 30) as being indeed *ʾlktbʾ dy bgyʾ*. Note that in a yet-unpublished inscription from the Sidd al-Maʿjīn in Petra, MP 621, J. T. Milik reads *lʿzʾ gyʾytʾ* in line 3 of a signature, but all that can be read on the photograph is *ʾlʿzʾ g----*, and it is therefore impossible to say whether the epithet "from Gaia" applies also to al-ʿUzzā.

14 *CIS* II 350 (Turkmāniyyah inscription) and Dalman, *Neue Petra-Forschungen*, no. 28 (MP 619).

15 All from Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ and its surroundings (13×), Umm Jadhāyidh (6×), Sakākā (1×), and Ṣirwāḥ in South Arabia (1×).

16 All from Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ and its surroundings (8×) and Umm Jadhāyidh (2×).

external wall of the unit. In both texts, *šmyʾ*, which is the emphatic plural of *šmy*, appears in the phrase *mn qdm šmyʾ*, where *šmyʾ* is expected to be the name of a deity because the expression *mn qdm*, "in the presence of," is almost always followed by a divine name in Nabataean. It should be noted that the texts do not have *mn qdm ʾlh šmyʾ*, "in the presence of the *god* of Heaven," but simply *mn qdm šmyʾ*, best translated as "in the presence of Heaven." Note also that the main sanctuary of Hegra was composed of an upper and a lower temple and that the former was tentatively interpreted as being devoted to the worship of the Sun-god (Nehmé, "Recently-Discovered," pp. 159–60). The new inscription, although not directly connected to the temple, may lead us to revise this interpretation and suggest that the upper temple was devoted to the cult of a supreme divine figure associated with heaven. In the 2017 report of the Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ Archaeological Project (Nehmé, "New Nabataean Inscription," pp. 148–49), I already drew attention to the fact that *hšmyn* and *šmyʾ* were, according to J. T. Milik (*Dédicaces*, p. 410), the most frequent substitutes for YHWH from the Hellenistic period to the Talmudic literature, which led him to suggest a possible Jewish influence in Hegra. Also, in five Aramaic papyri from the Elephantine collection[17] dated to around 410 BCE or before, the god worshipped by the Jews is called *yhw ʾlh šmyʾ*, "YHW the God of Heaven." Much later, in the late fourth and fifth century CE, the periphrasis "Master of the Sky and of the Earth," or "Lord/Master of the Sky," is often used in the monotheistic Ḥimyarite inscriptions, and the authors of these texts are identified as Jewish or Judaeo-monotheists by C. Robin ("Quel judaïsme," § F.1, pp. 138–41). Even if a Jewish presence is attested in Hegra by the fact that one of the monumental tombs, IGN 12, was owned by a man who is said to be *yhwdyʾ*, "Jew" or "Judaean," in the inscription carved on its façade, JSNab 4, dated 42/43 CE, it would probably not be reasonable to consider that the main temple of the ancient city was devoted, in the first century CE, to a Jewish god as such. What is certain is that it was devoted to a supreme deity, as is also indicated by the fact that in the Roman period of the site, in the second century, the temple was dedicated to Jupiter of Damascus.[18] Note that the divine element *šmʾ* appears in one theophoric name only, *ʿbd-ʾlšmʾ*, "servant of the sky/Heaven," in UJadhNab 72.

As for *qyšh*, who appears under this form in two texts from Hegra, ThMNN 197 (JSNab 8) and ThMNN 205 (JSNab 16), it is not certain whether she is a divine figure or an attribute of Manawatū, who/which is mentioned in association with her: is what is meant "Manawatū and Qayšā" or "Manawatū and her *qyš*"? John Healey considers, probably rightly (*Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions*, pp. 119–20), that *qyšh* is a divine name, which would therefore be attested only in Hegra, just as *šmyʾ* above. Note that *byt qyšʾ* (with an *alif*) is said in ThMNN 226 (JSNab 36) to be the temple in which a **[131/132]** copy of the legal inscriptions carved on the tomb façades of Hegra was archived.

There are also a number of divine figures which appear only once in the Arabian Peninsula. Al-ʿUzzā (*ʾlʿzʾ*) is, surprisingly, attested only once in Hegra, whereas she is relatively popular in Petra and becomes popular in the Arabian Peninsula at a later period (see

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17 Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri*: two petitions (nos. 27 and 30, ll. 27–28, *qdm yhw ʾlhy šmyʾ*) and a duplicate of one of them (no. 31); one answer to the repeated petition (no. 32, l. 3, *mdbḥʾ dy ʾlh šmyʾ*, "the altar of the God of Heaven"); a letter of recommendation (no. 38, l. 3, {*qdm*} *ʾlh šmyʾ*, and l. 5, *b-ṭll ʾlh šmyʾ*, "with the help of the God of heaven"); a fragment of a letter (no. 40).

18 This is known from a Latin inscription discovered by D. Gazagne in 2020 in the Hegra temple, 61236_ I01, to be published by P.-L. Gatier.

below). She appears in Hegra in a context where she is associated with *mr byt'* and where a "mountain" is devoted to both of them (MS8Nab1#). In this very interesting text, the word for "mountain" is *gbl*, which is an Arabic loanword in Nabataean. An alternative meaning for *gbl*, suggested to me by Michael Macdonald, would be to take the Aramaic meaning of GBL, "to give a rounded shape, to knead" (Jastrow, *Dictionary*, s.v.), hence Syriac *gəbīlāttā*, which can mean "image, work" (Sokoloff, *Syriac Lexicon*, s.v.). However, if what the authors of the text had meant to write was "This is the image of al-ʿUzzā and the Lord of the house," they would probably have used the word *nṣb*, which occurs in several inscriptions from Petra, one of which says precisely *'lh nṣyby 'l'z' w mr byt'*, "These are the betyls of al-ʿUzzā and the Lord of the house," an inscription which is written to the left of an empty niche in which movable betyls were placed on particular occasions.[19]

Aʿrā (*'ʿr*) is mentioned in a text probably written by someone who came from Boṣrā (ThMNN 1 = JSNab 39). In one other text (ThMNN 295 = JSNab 201) the name is restored.

Four other gods appear also only once. *hbl* (Hubal) is one of the three gods, along with Dūšarā and Manawatū, to whom a fine should be paid by those who undertake illegal actions in a tomb (ThMNN 206 = JSNab 16). A god named *tbwš* (Tabūš?) appears once with Dūšarā in a signature from Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ, ThMNN 107# (JSNab 142), the reading of which was checked but about whom not much can be said in the absence of any parallels. There is also *tdh/trh* and *tdhy/trhy*, for which see the table above. If the reading of DaJ29Nab 1# is correct, it would provide the first attestation, in Nabataean, of the god *{r}ṣw*, Ruḍā, a deity otherwise widely attested in Safaitic and Thamudic.[20] The context in which the name appears, almost certainly after *qdm*, makes it highly likely that it is a divine name. Finally, we should perhaps mention the god *ṣlm*, not in Nabataean but in a Taymāʾ Aramaic text dated to the seventeenth year of Malichus II, TA14285 + TA14286, for which see Macdonald, *Taymāʾ II*, pp. 117–18. This text is interesting because it shows that the main deity of Taymāʾ was still the object of worship in the first century CE (see also below the theophoric name *ʿbdṣlm*).

This systematic review of the divine names mentioned in the Nabataean inscriptions from the Arabian Peninsula is very informative. First, we should note the almost complete absence, in the texts from the Arabian Peninsula, of "foreign" gods who were relatively popular in Petra: Atargatis, Baʿalšamīn, and Isis.[21] More surprising, especially in Hegra, is the complete absence of *ʿbdt*, Obodas, who was very popular in Petra (not only because of the attestations of his cult but also because Obodas was, along with Dūšarā, the only deity worshipped by more than one fraternal society).[22] It is possible that the cult of Obodas was the closest to what we may think of an "official" cult and was therefore not practiced outside the Nabataean capital. On the other hand, there are gods who appear in northwest Arabia but not elsewhere in the Nabataean kingdom. This is the case of two pre-Islamic

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19 On this inscription and the niche, see Nehmé, *Atlas*, inscription MP 617, p. 195, and niche 1760.1, p. 120.

20 References in the OCIANA database online.

21 The list of the deities worshipped in Petra is given in Nehmé, "L'espace," pp. 1044–45. See also Alpass, *Religious Life*, pp. 48–49, who, however, questions the definition of these gods as "foreign."

22 On the popularity of Dūšarā and Obodas among the fraternal societies of Petra, see Nehmé, "Installation," p. 124 and map p. 125.

Meccan deities, Hubal and Ruḍā, of two deities from Taymāʾ, *tdh/trh* (which possibly equals *tdhy/trhy*) and *ṣlm*, the latter in Taymāʾ Aramaic. Finally, three deities with no particular Arabian background, or about which we know nothing, appear in the inscriptions of this region: *šmyʾ*, *qyšh*, *tbwš*.

Apart from that, the main Nabataean deities, Dūšarā, Manāt/Manawatū, and Allāt, are well represented in the inscriptions from the Arabian Peninsula, and the same is true of the vaguer expressions *mr bytʾ*, *ʾlh gyʾ*, and *ʾlhyʾ klhm*.

All in all, and as one might have expected, the religious landscape in the Arabian Peninsula as seen through the divine figures mentioned in the Nabataean inscriptions shares common features with that of other regions, but it also has regional specificities which were worth noting and which might have escaped the attention of scholars if all the inscriptions known so far had not come under close scrutiny.

3.2. NAMES ATTESTED IN NABATAEO-ARABIC AND PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIC ONLY

The corpus of Nabataeo-Arabic and pre-Islamic Arabic texts is much smaller than the corpus of Nabataean inscriptions, and it is therefore to be expected that the number of deities mentioned in them would be much smaller. They are presented in the following table. [132/133]

Name or expression	Number of attestations	Comment
ʾlʾlh	3× (Nabataeo-Arabic and pre-Islamic Arabic)	Three attestations, one from Ḥimā, north of Najrān (Ḥimà-Sud PalAr 8#), one from site DaJ144, northwest of Dūmah (DaJ144PAr1#, Nehmé, "New Dated Inscriptions"), and one from the excavations at Dūmah (DaJ000NabAr1#: Nehmé, "New Dated Inscriptions," p. 131).
ʾlʿzy	4×	Four texts from the Darb al-Bakrah, UJadhNab 313#, 345#, 364#, and 368#.

The main points which need to be raised are the following. First, there seems to be a real change between the texts written in Nabataean and the about 160 ones written in Nabataeo-Arabic and pre-Islamic Arabic recorded so far (in 2019). The "standard" Nabataean deities who appear in the Nabataean inscriptions, listed above, are not mentioned in any of the texts which belong to the latter two categories. The only exception is al-ʿUzzā, who appears as *ʾlʿzy*, a spelling which suggests that in the dialect spoken by the authors of these inscriptions, the name of the goddess was pronounced ʿuzzay, not ʿuzzā.[23]

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23 See van Putten, "Triphtongs," pp. 52–53: "this calls into question whether alternations between final ʾ and *y* found in Nabatean should be understood as two different ways of writing the same sound or rather actual phonetic alternation within the Arabic dialects of the speakers who wrote the Nabatean texts." It seems to me that the second explanation is more likely.

Another very interesting point is that two texts from Dūmah, one of which is dated to 548–549 CE, mention, for the first time in northwest Arabia, *ʾlʾlh*, "the god," who is very likely to be equated with the pre-Islamic Arabic name of the Christian God as it appears in other pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions from Syria (Zabad, 512 CE)[24] and from southern Arabia (Ḥimà-Sud PalAr 8#, ca. 469–470 CE), as well as in the foundation inscription of the monastery of Hind in al-Ḥīra as it is preserved in the transcriptions of al-Bakrī and Yāqūt (ca. 560 CE).[25] It also appears in a recently discovered inscription from Qaṣr Burquʿ, in northeast Jordan, written by a Christian. This text (al-Shdaifat et al., "Christian Arabic Graffito") says *dkr ʾlʾlh yzydw ʾlmlk*, which the editors translate "May God be mindful of Yazīd the king." The text is not dated, but it is convincingly argued in the publication that it is from the reign of the Umayyad caliph Yazīd ibn Muʿāwiyah (680–683 CE). Note finally that *ʾlʾlh* also appears in a theophoric name in the pre-Islamic Arabic inscription from Umm al-Jimāl, LPArab 1#, as reread by the author.

The Nabataeo-Arabic and pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions contain many interesting features which will be dealt with elsewhere, but one of them is worth being addressed here. They make a more systematic use of the suffix conjugation with an optative force. It is true that the latter is known to have been used in Nabataean Aramaic, for example with LʿN, "curse," particularly in the legal inscriptions carved on the monumental tombs of Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ,[26] and this is considered as "one of the hallmark examples of Arabic influence on the Aramaic of the Nabataeans" (Al-Jallad, *Outline*, p. 105); but it is the first time that it is used with ŠMʿ (*šmʿt ʾlʿzʾ* in UJadhNab 313#, 345#, and 364#), and it gives more examples of its use with ḌKR (*dkr ʾlʾlh* in DaJ144PAr1# and DaJ000NabAr1#).

3.3. DIVINE EPITHET ATTESTED IN BOTH NABATAEAN AND NABATAEO-ARABIC

One divine epithet only appears in both the Nabataean and the Nabataeo-Arabic scripts. This is *mry ʿlmʾ*, "the Lord of the world," which occurs in both JSNab 17, dated to 267 CE and considered to be still written in the Nabataean script, and UJadhNab 538, dated to 303 CE, which is written in a very elegant form of Nabataeo-Arabic. Since UJadhNab 538 mentions Passover and has a Jewish background, *mry ʿlmʾ* probably refers to the God of the Jews (see the Appendix).

4. THE DIVINE ELEMENTS IN THE THEOPHORIC NAMES

Going through the corpus of the Nabataean inscriptions of the Arabian Peninsula led to the recording of 314 theophoric names. These contain about 42 divine elements which indirectly reflect the religious landscape in the area and at the period under study. They have, of course, to be treated with more caution than the divine names mentioned as such, but they offer a source of information which cannot be ignored.

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24 On the Zabad inscription, see last Macdonald in Fiema et al., "*Provincia Arabia*," pp. 410–11.

25 See Robin, "Les Arabes," pp. 185–86. On the date of the Hind monastery inscription, see Robin, "Les religions pratiquées," p. 239.

26 JSNab 1, 2, 8, 11, 16, etc.

The data is presented in the table below. When there are too many occurrences of one name, the references are not all given. **[133/134]**

Divine element	Theophoric name	Script	Comment
ʾysy	**ʿbd-ʾysy** (2×), ThMNN 688 and ThMNN 13 (ARNA. Nab 53)	Nabataean, with a *samekh*.	This is usually considered as a theophoric name built with the name of Isis.
ʾyš	**ʿbd-ʾyš** (1×), ThMNN 602#	**Nabataeo-Arabic**, with a *shin*.	It is possible that this name is the equivalent, in Nabataeo-Arabic, of ʿbdʾysy. Or it could be ʿbd + the Arabic name Iyās.
ʾl/l	The divine element ʾl (sometimes written without the ʾ) occurs in a large number of names built with *grm-, dn-, whb-, zyd-, ḥlpt-, ḥn-, yd/yd{d}-, yḥm-, myr-?, mqm-, mʿr-, mr-, nṭyr-, ʿbd-, ʿwd-, ʿwt-, -ʿzr, ʿly-, ʿmr-, pḥr-, qšm-, rm-, šlm-, tkrʿ-*, to which should be added the names *rb-ʾl* and *rbyb-ʾl*. Note that the occurrences of some of these should be fully checked again. In one instance, ʾl-ʿz (ThMNN 306 = JSNab 212), it is possible that the divine element is put first (ʾl is strong?). Note also one occurrence of *whb-yl* in ThMNN 585, which may reflect an īl/ēl pronunciation, as in the Arabic name Wahbīl.	Almost all in Nabataean. The only names which occur in **Nabataeao-Arabic** texts are: – possibly yd{d}ʾ{l} (1×), S 2#, but very uncertain; – ʿwdʾl (1×), UJadhNab 69 (cf. Arabic names ʿAwḏ, ʿAwḏmanāt). – the Jewish name ʾlʿzr (2×), including one in UJadhNab 561.*	This element and *lh/lhy* would require a full commentary on their geographical distribution, on the distribution of the names where the ʾ is assimilated, on those names which occur only in northwest Arabia, on the meaning, etymology, and language of the non-divine element, etc.

> * The other occurrence of ʾlʿzr, "God's help," is in papyrus Starcky,
> "Contrat nabatéen," for which see now Yardeni, "Decipherment."

Divine element	Theophoric name	Script	Comment
ʾlʾlh	**ʿbd-ʾlʾlh** (1×), LPArab 1#	**Pre-Islamic Arabic**	First attestation of a name built with ʿbd and ʾlʾlh.
ʾlktbʾ	**tym-lktbʾ** (1×), ThMNN 107# (JSNab 142); **tym-ʾktbʾ** (1×), ThNS 73; **tym-ʾlktbʾ** (4×), ThMNN 488, 584, 695 + UJadhNab 59 ʿbd-ʾlktbʾ (1×) ThMNN 952	All Nabataean \ Nabataean	Apart from ʿbd-ʾlktbʾ, which occurs only in northwest Arabia, compound names with ʾlktbʾ are widespread in various regions of the Nabataean kingdom.

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Divine element	Theophoric name	Script	Comment
ʾlʿzʾ/ʾlʿzy	*ʿbd-ʾlʿzʾ* (2×), ThMNN 23 (JSNab 61, Nabataean) and TS14NabAr1# (Nabataeo-Arabic) *ʿbd-ʾlʿzy* (1×) UJadhNab 352#	Nabataean and **Nabataeo-Arabic** **Nabataeo-Arabic**	
ʾlt	*hn-ʾlt* (2×), SBNab 4 and UJadhNab 399# *ʿbd-ʾlt* (1×), UJadhNab 331# *{ʾ}wyd-ʾlt* (1×), S 1# *tym-ʾl{t}* (1×), DBv3Nab12	Nabataean **Nabataeo-Arabic** **Nabataeo-Arabic** Nabataean	These four compound names are attested only in northwest Arabia.
bl	*rḥym-bl* (1×), ThMNN 583 *ydʿ-{b}l* (1×), ThMNN 870 *ʾyty-bl* (1×), ThMNN 644	All Nabataean	The first one also appears once in Petra (RES 1427D).
bʿl	*bʿl-{k}yn* (1×), ThMNN 440 (JSNab 385) *bʿl-ḥwn* (1×), ThMNN 720 *bʿl-ntn* (2×), ArNab 142, ThNS 87, and *bʿ-ntn* (1×), ThMNN 692 *bʿlw* (1×), ThMNN 113 (SNab 149) *ḥn-bʿl* (1×), ArNab 61	All Nabataean	All these names except *bʿl-ntn* are attested only in northwest Arabia.
gʾ	*ʿbd-ʾgʾ* (18×)	All Nabataean except one, UJadhNab 536, **Nabataeo-Arabic**	This name is widespread in Nabataean and is usually considered to mean "the servant of [the god of] Gaia [Petra]."
gd	*gd-ṭb* (3×), ThMNN 127 (JSNab 163), ThMNN 166# (*CIS* II 236), and ThMNN 128 (JSNab 164), all from Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ	All Nabataean	Theophoric names built with Gad are attested in northwest Arabia and in the Ḥawrān.
gyr	*whb-ʾlgyr* (1×) UJadhNab 428	Nabataean (bilingual Nabataean-Ancient South Arabian)	First attestation of this name in Nabataean. One of the meanings of *jār* in Arabic is "protector, one who protects another from that which he fears" (Lane *Arabic–English Lexicon*, p. 483c), thus "gift of the protector"?
dwšrʾ	*tym-dwšrʾ* (2×), ThMNN 327 (JSNab 234), ThMNN 726	Nabataean	Very widespread name. **[134/135]**

Divine element	Theophoric name	Script	Comment
hbl	**bn-hbl** (1×), ThMNN 539#	Nabataean	In northwest Arabia, in Petra (Milik and Starcky, "Inscriptions," pp. 120–22, no. 5, *brhbl*) and in Puteoli (*CIS* II 158, *bnhbl*).
ḥwr	**tym-ʾlḥwr** (2×), ThMNN 497 and 595	Nabataean	It is not certain whether *ḥwr* is a divine name or not. It is not attested elsewhere (although the name *ʾlḥwr* exists).
lh/lhy	Very many attestations of compound names built with *ʾbn-, ʾwš-, ʾḫš-?, grm-, hnʾ-, whb-, zyd-, ḥb-, ḥlp-, ḥrb-, mʿn-, mrʾ-, mrb-?, nṣr-, ʿbd-, ʿwt-, ʿyr-, šyʿ-/šʿ-, šld-, šʿd-, šlm-, tym-* and followed by *lh* or *lhy*, with or without the *ʾ* of the definite article between the two elements.	All Nabataean except one *šyʿʾlhy* in **Nabataeo-Arabic** in ThMNN 862#	Same comment as for *ʾl/l* above.
llh	One possible attestation in the name *{šld}-llh* in UJadhNab 352# (see the comment in the Appendix).	**Nabataeo-Arabic**	
mnwtw	**hnʾ-mnwty** (1×), ThMNN 963	Nabataean	Note the genitive case-ending in *hnʾ-mnwty* and others. Note also that in theophoric names, the name of the goddess is always spelled *mnwtw/ mnwty*, never *mntw/mnty*. Compounds with *mnwtw* are attested only in northwest Arabia.
	zyd-mnwtw (3×), ThMNN 449 (ARNA.Nab 25), ThMNN 959, and ThMNN 448 (ARNA.Nab 24) in Nabataeo-Arabic	Nabataean and **Nabataeo-Arabic**	
	ʿbd-mnwtw (1×), ThMNN 206 (SNab 17)	Nabataean (third century)	
	ʿbd-mnwy (1×), ArNab 80 (mistake for *ʿbd-mnwty*?)	Nabataean	
	ʿbd-{mnwty} (2×), DBv1Nab 11	Nabataean	
	ʿwd-mnwty (2×), ThMNN 9 (JSNab 48) and ThMNN 678	Nabataean	
	tym-mnwty (1×), ThMNN 55# (JSNab 93)	Nabataean	
	tym-mnwtw (1×), ThMNN 54 (JSNab 92)*	Nabataean	

*JSNab 92 and JSNab 93 are written one above the other; one has *tymmnwtw* and one *tymmnwty*.

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Divine element	Theophoric name	Script	Comment
mnpw	*ʿbd-mnpw* (1×) WRPAr3# from Wadi Ramm	**Pre-Islamic Arabic**	Cf. the Arabic name ʿAbdmanāf.
mšyḥ	*ʿbd-ʾlmšyḥ* (1×), Ḥimà-al-Musammāt PalAr 5	**Pre-Islamic Arabic**	Cf. the Arabic name ʿAbdalmasīḥ.
ʿbdt	A large number of theophoric names are built with the name of the deified Nabataean king Obodas following the words *ʾwš-*, *tym-*, *ʿbd-*. The name *ʿbdt* (and its diminutive form *ʿbydt*) itself is also used as a name.*	All Nabataean	This very popular Nabataean name, the only one with *tymdwšrʾ* which occurs in all the regions of the Nabataean kingdom, never appears in the Nabataeo-Arabic inscriptions.

*Note that since Obodas is the only deified Nabataean king, compound names built with kings' names other than *ʿbdt* (*ḥrtt*, *rbʾl*, *mnkw/mlkw*) are basileophoric rather than theophoric and have therefore not been taken into consideration in this study.

Divine element	Theophoric name	Script	Comment
ṣlm	*ʿbd-ṣlm* (3×), ThMNN 701#, HNNUT 7, UJadhNab 383.	All Nabataean	This compound is attested only in northwest Arabia, which is not surprising since *ṣlm* is the god of Taymāʾ.
qyš	*mrʾ-lqyš* (3×) MAIS 2#, Ḥimà-Sud PalAr 5, and Ḥimà-Sud PalAr 8#	**All Pre-Islamic Arabic**	This name does not occur in the Nabataean texts.
qs	*qs-ʿdr* (1×), ThMNN 539# *qs-ntn* (1×), ThMNN 226 (SNab 36) *qs-bnh* (1×), UJadhNab 553	All Nabataean	These names are built with the name of the Edomite deity Qōs. *Qsntn* and *qsbnh* are attested only in northwest Arabia; according to A. Negev, *qwsʿdr* is attested in Sinai-Egypt-Negev (not checked).
šmʾ	*ʿbd-ʾlšm* (1×) UJadhNab 72#	Mixed Nabataean and **Nabataeo-Arabic**	Cf. *šmyʾ*. This is the only name built with *šmʾ*.
šmš	*ʿbd-šmš* (1×), ThNIS 11 *šmš* (1×) DaJ29Nab5 *šmš-grm* (2×) *CIS* II 331 and DaJ29Nab2 (unpublished)	All Nabataean	Only in northwest Arabia. **[135/136]**

The most popular Nabataean theophoric names, which are attested in several regions of the Nabataean realm (*whbʾlhy*, *ʿbdʿbdt*, *šʿdʾlhy*, *tymdwšrʾ*) are well represented in the inscriptions written in Nabataean characters in northwest Arabia in a number of sites, and this is not particularly surprising. What is interesting, however, is that none of these names appears in texts written in Nabataeo-Arabic or pre-Islamic Arabic characters.

Out of the 314 theophoric names collected in the corpus of inscriptions I examined, 74 names (or orthographic variants of names) are attested only in northwest Arabia, most of them only once. Among them, about 52 were not previously listed in A. Negev's list of names published in 1990 (but quite a few of them appear in inscriptions published since then). It would be interesting to make a list of those names which are only *written* differently in northwest Arabia. This aspect of the description of the names, however, was not initially recorded in the database and would therefore require some additional work to be dealt with. It would allow one to determine whether some differences appear more consistently than others. These are, as far as I can tell (but the list is not exhaustive):

- the assimilation or not of the ʾ of the article before *-lh* and *-lhy* (e.g., *ʿwtlhy* vs. *ʿwtʾlhy*, *ḥblhy* versus *ḥbʾlhy*);
- *-yl* for *-ʾl*—for example, *whbyl* instead of *whbʾl*—which may reflect an īl/ēl pronunciation (imālah?);[27]
- the *-y* versus the *-ʾ* or *-w* endings (*tymmnwty* vs. *tymmnwtw* and *ʿbdʾlʿzy* vs. *ʿbdʾlʿzʾ*), to which should be added the case of new names with a *-y* ending (*ʿwdmnwty*).

Other orthographic differences may simply be mistakes on the engraver's part (*bʿntn* for *bʿlntn*, *ʿbdmnwy* for *ʿbdmnwty*?). Note also that the name *ʿbdlktbʾ* is written once without the final ʾ.

As for the names themselves, one should note the popularity in northwest Arabia of names referring to the goddess *mnwtw*, who appears in several names which are not attested elsewhere: *hnʾmnwtw*, *zydmnwtw*, *ʿbdmnwtw*/*ʿbdmnwty*, and *ʿwdmnwty*. Among the new names, it is worth noting *hnʾlt* (cf. with *hnʾlhy*) and *ʿbdšmš*. Note also the very interesting three attestations of *ʿbdṣlm*, built with the name of the god of Taymāʾ, and of one *whbʾlgyr* in a bilingual Nabataean-Ancient South Arabian text.

One may also point to the use of *new* non-divine elements, such as *ḥlpt-*, *pḥr-*, *ʿwd-*. Again, it would be interesting to examine not only these *new* elements but all the non-divine elements attested in northwest Arabia and determine whether they are Aramaic, Aramaic or Arabic, or Arabic. If a number of them turn out to be clearly Arabic, this would indirectly—because they are used in personal names—increase the number of Arabic loanwords attested in this region.

If we look now at the names which occur in the inscriptions written in Nabataeo-Arabic and pre-Islamic Arabic characters, the following remarks can be made:

- as said above, the most popular theophoric names attested in the Nabataean inscriptions are completely absent from the corpus of Nabataeo-Arabic and pre-Islamic Arabic texts;

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27 Is it the same phenomenon in Šarāḥīl (*šrḥ-ʾl>šrḥyl*) of the Ḥarrān inscription? I am grateful to A. Al-Jallad for drawing my attention to that.

- the most popular divine figures mentioned in the theophoric names in Nabataeo-Arabic texts are *ʾlʿzʾ* and *ʾlt*, both attested twice each;
- a theophoric name built with *ʾlʾlh*, "the God," *ʿbdʾlʾlh*, appears for the first time in a pre-Islamic Arabic text from Umm al-Jimāl in Jordan. It is not particularly surprising, since the divine figure *ʾlʾlh* itself does not appear in the inscriptions before the beginning of the sixth century CE, in 512 CE in Zabad, in 548–549 CE in the area of Dūmah, and in about 469 CE in Najrān. It is not certain whether *šldllh* is also a compound built with *ʾlʾlh*;
- the only theophoric names which appear in both Nabataean and Nabataeo-Arabic are *ʿbdʾlʿzʾ*, *šyʿlhy*, and *zydmnwtw*;
- a few theophoric names appear only in pre-Islamic Arabic. These are *ʿbdʾlʾlh*, already mentioned above, *ʿbdmnpw* (ʿAbdmanāf) in Wadi Ramm,[28] *mrʾlqyš* (in texts form Ḥimā, in Zabad, and in Namārah), and *ʿbdʾlmšyḥ* (ʿAbdalmasīḥ, in Ḥimā only). They seem therefore to be *new* in the onomasticon of the pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions of the Arabian Peninsula;
- the following names, finally, appear only in Nabataeo-Arabic: *ʿbdʾyš* (but see above—this may be an orthographic variant of *ʿbdʾysy* or the name ʿAbd + Iyās), *yd{d}ʾ{l}* (but the reading is quite uncertain), *ʿwdʾl*, *ʿbdʾlt*, *{ʿ}wydʾlt*, *ʿbdʾlšmʾ*.

5. OTHER REMARKS

The contents of the hundreds of inscriptions examined in this study raise many issues which could not all be developed in this contribution. They will be addressed later and are mentioned here only for possible discussion:

- *dkr/dkyr*: the Nabataeo-Arabic and pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions from the Ḥijāz sometimes use *dkyr* (Aramaic passive participle), sometimes *dkr/dkrt* (the perfect third person masculine/feminine, possibly with an optative force), and sometimes neither. It is worth pointing out here that *dkyr* is never used in **[136/137]** the sixth-century texts—only *dkr* is. Besides, it is not followed, as in most of the Nabataean graffiti, by a personal name but by a divine name.[29] This is true in DaJ144PAr1, the 548–549 CE inscription from Dūmah (*dkr ʾlʾlh*),[30] as well as in DaJ000NabAr1, the undated but probably middle-to-late fourth century CE text from the excavations at Dūmah. Note that both *dkyr* and *dkr* are completely absent from the Najrān inscriptions. This formula, a verb in the perfect with an optative force followed by a divine name, is paralleled in the four unfortunately undated Nabataeo-Arabic texts from Umm Jadhāyidh which start with *šmʿt* followed by *ʾlʿzy*. Rather than an Arabic "influence," these uses of *dkr* and *šmʿt* suggest strongly that the authors of these texts were Arabic speaking people;

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28 And see *ʾmtmnpw* in Zabad.

29 Note, however, that the feminine, *dkrt*, followed by the name of the goddess *ʾlt* is attested in five Nabataean inscriptions: JSNab 212, 213, as well as Savignac, "Sanctuaire d'Allat (1)," nos. 3, 7, 8, and 9 (in the latter, the goddess's name is spelled *ʾltw*).

30 In this text, *dkr* is written once in Nabataeo-Arabic characters in the first line and once in Arabic characters in the second line. See Nehmé, "New Dated Inscriptions," pp. 128–29.

- *bn/br*: as was pointed out by Macdonald ("Ancient Arabia," n. 41), *br* is always used instead of *bn* in the pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions, and this is also true in the ones which have been examined in the course of this study. *br* was therefore considered as a "fossil," very much like *šlm*, *dkyr* and *bṭb*;
- some names show a genitive case ending: *hnʾmnwty*, *ʿbdmnwty*, *ʿwdmnwty*, and *tym-mnwty*, which all happen to be written with the *mnwt* spelling of the deity's name;
- the divine name *ʾlʿzy* and the theophoric name *ʿbdʾlʿzy* point to a pronunciation *-ay of the divine name al-ʿUzzā;
- the definite article in the compound names is sometimes written *ʾl*, sometimes *ʾ*, and is sometimes absent. It might be worth looking more closely at the distribution and treatment of the definite article in these names;
- the disappearance of the *samekh* from the inscriptions written in Nabataeo-Arabic: to my knowledge, the latest *dated* example of *samekh* used in a text is to be found in JSNab 386 (306 CE), in the month name *sywn* (if the reading is correct). It is therefore not surprising that it does not occur in any Nabataeo-Arabic text except one, ThMNN 556 (UJadhNab 219), in the name *ywsp*. This text, however, does not seem to me to be later than the fourth century CE. It is interesting to see that the name built with the name of the goddess Isis, *ʿbdʾysy* in Nabataean characters, seems to be written *ʿbdʾyš* in Nabataeo-Arabic, in ThMNN 602# (unless this is the name ʿAbdʾi-yās, which does not exist in Ibn al-Kalbī's genealogies). It is possible that at a certain period of time, the Nabataeo-Arabic character *š* became used to write "pure" [s];
- a number of new theophoric names appear in the inscriptions recently published or still unpublished, but since I have not specifically distinguished those from the ones which are listed in Negev's *Personal Names*, I cannot provide a list for the moment.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

To summarize briefly, the present study has shown the following:

- there are local influences as well as regional and chronological specificities in the way divine and theophoric names are distributed, but the most popular Nabataean names are widespread throughout the Nabataean kingdom;
- the Syrian and Egyptian deities, who were very popular in Petra (Atargatis, Baʿalšamīn, Isis, etc.) are completely absent from northwest Arabia, including in ancient Hegra;
- if one takes into consideration the divine names *tdh/trh* and *tdhy/trhy* as well as the mention of *ṣlm* both in a first-century CE Taymāʾ Aramaic text from Taymāʾ and in the theophoric name *ʿbdṣlm*, attested in three texts from northwest Arabia (and nowhere else), it appears that the cult of the Taymāʾ deity Ṣalm was still relatively popular in this area of the Nabataean kingdom;
- some of the names show orthographic variants, although this aspect needs a much closer examination;
- the worship of a god named *šmyʾ* at Hegra was made clearer by the discovery in the Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ excavations of a new inscription mentioning it, as well as by the new theophoric name *ʿbdʾlšmʾ* in a Nabataeo-Arabic text;
- the Nabataeo-Arabic inscriptions show the (relative) popularity of *ʾlt*, *ʾlʿzʾ*, and *mnwtw*. This is not particularly surprising, since they are the three major goddesses

of pre-Islamic Mecca, but it is the first time that their preeminence in the fourth-
to fifth-century CE inscriptions from Arabia is demonstrated;

- one divine epithet only, *mry 'lm'*, is attested in both the Nabataean and Naba-
taeo-Arabic scripts (in the latter as the God of the Jews) but in two inscriptions
which are only 36 years apart;

- the name given to the pre-Islamic Christian God, *'l'lh*, is now found in a sixth-
century CE pre-Islamic Arabic text from the Ḥijāz;

- there seem to have been, in the Ḥijāz, at the period represented by the Nabataeo-
Arabic and pre-Islamic inscriptions, three major female divine figures and one
major male figure. The latter is not Dūšarā but Al'ilāh, "God," who, in the sixth
century, becomes widespread from Syria to Najrān. The religious landscape of
northern **[137/138]** Arabia thus seems to have witnessed a change which is visible
in the inscriptions recorded in the three successive categories of scripts distin-
guished in this study.

APPENDIX: A SELECTION OF THE INSCRIPTIONS MENTIONED IN THE TEXT

Note: The inscription numbers are those given within each project or publication. They are
presented in alphabetical order of the sigla.

• **64114_I04 (fig. 3.1)**
Nabataean, **Madā'in Ṣāliḥ**. Inscription discovered during the Madā'in Ṣāliḥ 2016 exca-
vation season in the so-called "residential unit," southwest of the Nabataean sanctuary
IGN 132. Published in Nehmé, "New Nabataean Inscription."

Figure 3.1. 64114_I04 (photo, M. al-Mūsā; facsimile, L. Nehmé).

Reading (no. 4 on the copy):

šlm ṣ----m br k----
hn't mn qdm šmy'
May Ṣ[l]m son of K---- [son of]
Hn't be safe, in the presence of Heaven.

Compare with ThMNN 166 (*CIS* II 236) below.

• **DaJ000NabAr1 (= DaJTrans1) (fig. 3.2)**
Nabataeo-Arabic, **Dūmat al-Jandal**. Published in Nehmé, "'Transitional' Inscription," with
a new reading in Nehmé, "New Dated Inscriptions," pp. 130–31. Inscription discovered at

the bottom of the collapse layer of a tower located on top of the outcrop which overlooks the so-called western settlement of Dūmah from the south. This collapse layer yielded pottery dated to the interval between the first and the fourth century CE (Charloux et al., "Western Settlement," pp. 227–28), as well as a Roman coin dated to the reign of Licinius (308–324 CE) which gives a *terminus post quem* to the inscription.

Figure 3.2. DaJ000NabAr1 (= DaJTrans1) (photo, G. Charloux; facsimile, L. Nehmé).

[d]kr ʾlʾlh
mlkw br {..}
ḥy{h} w
ṭ{b/y}ḫh

May God [re]member Mālikū son of Ḥayyah and Tābiḫah. **[138/139]**

• **DaJ29Nab1 (fig. 3.3)**
Nabataean, **Qiyāl** (a Nabataean site ca. 15 km northwest of Sakākā). Previously unpublished.

Figure 3.3. DaJ29Nab1 (photo, G. Charloux).

dkyryn
mšlm w <m{n}> mn
ḥyw
qdm {r}ṣw
May Muslim (?) and Ḥayy be remembered in the presence of Ruḍā.

This text is difficult to read because the order of the words as they are written on the stone is peculiar. *Mn qdm* should be read after *ḥyw*, the author intending, most probably, to write *dkyryn mšlm w ḥyw mn qdm {r}ṣw.*

Dkyryn being in the plural, at least two names are expected. The name *mšlm* is attested alongside the more common *mšlmw*. If the reading is correct, this text may provide the first attestation of Ruḍā in the Nabataean inscriptions.

• DaJ29Nab13 (fig. 3.4)
Nabataean, **Qiyāl**. Previously unpublished.

Figure 3.4. DaJ29Nab13 (photo, G. Charloux).

dkyr ḥrtt
mn qdm ʾlt
May Ḥāriṯat be remembered in the presence of Allāt.

The text is obscured by letters which belong to another inscription, but the reading is certain.

• DaJ29Nab24 (fig. 3.5)
Nabataean, **Qiyāl**. Previously unpublished.

Figure 3.5. DaJ29Nab24 (photo, G. Charloux).

dkrt ʾlt šlmw br
ʾdrmw bṭb lʿlm
May Allāt remember Sālim (or Sallām) son of ʾAdramū in well-being for ever.

• DaJ144PAr1 (fig. 3.6)
Pre-Islamic Arabic, Site 144 northwest of Dūmah. Published in Nehmé, "New Dated Inscriptions."

Figure 3.6. DaJ144PAr1 (photo, G. Charloux; facsimile L. Nehmé).

dkr
dkr ʾlʾlh
ḥgʿ{b/n}w br
šlmh
{b}y{r}[ḥ] šnt 4 × 100
+ 20 + 20 + 3 cross **[139/140]**
May remember. May God remember Ḥgʿ{b/n}w son of Salama/Salāma/Salima {in} the m[onth] (gap) year 443.

This very interesting text, the author of which was probably Christian because of the cross which follows the date, is the first pre-Islamic Arabic text dated to the sixth century ever discovered in northwest Arabia. It is dated to 548–549 CE. For a full commentary, see Nehmé, "New Dated Inscriptions."

• Ḥimà-Sud PalAr 8 (fig. 3.7)
Pre-Islamic Arabic, Ḥimā, north of Najrān. Published in Robin, al-Ghabbān, and al-Saʿīd, "Inscriptions antiques," pp. 1099–1102, figs. 8, 41–42.

Figure 3.7. Ḥimà-Sud PalAr 8 (photo, C. Robin; facsimile L. Nehmé).

Reading as in Robin, al-Ghabbān, and al-Saʿīd, "Inscriptions antiques," p. 1100.

(Cross) Ṭwbn br mrtd
ʾlyʾ br mrʾlqyšbr tymw
ʾlʾlh ----
Ṭawbān son of Marṯad
Elie son of Imruʾ al-Qays son of Taymū
God ----.

    The first two lines are signatures by two different individuals and are not connected with each other except by the fact that they are written one above the other. What follows *ʾlʾlh* is not clear. This text belongs to the same group as Ḥimà-Sud PalAr 1 (Robin, al-Ghabbān, and al-Saʿīd, "Inscriptions antiques," pp. 1087–92, figs. 10, 11, 29), dated to 469–470 ce, and it is probably dated to around the same time.

• **LPArab 1 (fig. 3.8)**
Pre-Islamic Arabic, Umm al-Jimāl. Published in Littmann, *Arabic Inscriptions*, and others; see also al-Ghabbān, "Inscription of Zuhayr," figs. 36–38.
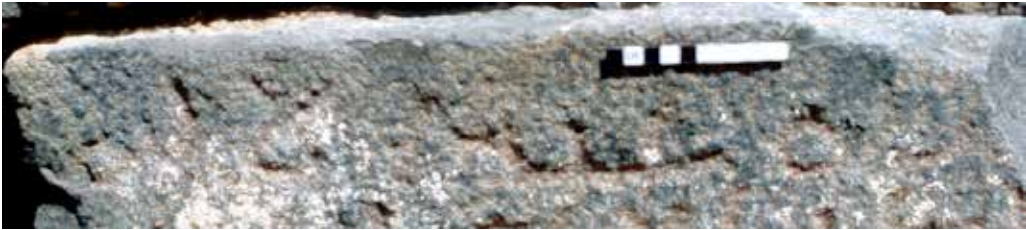
Figure 3.8. LPArab 1 (photo, L. Nehmé).

    This difficult text requires a new full edition, especially since the stone on which it is written is now stored in the Mafraq museum in Jordan, where it can be examined.[31] **[140/141]** Until this is done, I would only like here to suggest reading the end of the first line as *ʿbdʾlʾlh*, ʿAbdʾalʾilāh, a theophoric name built with *ʿbd* + *ʾlʾlh*.

• **MAIS 2 (Sakākā) (fig. 3.9)**
Pre-Islamic Arabic, Sakākā. Published in al-Muaikil, "Naqšān ʿarabiyyān mubakkirān," no. 2.
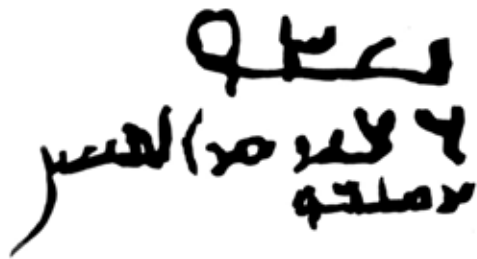
Figure 3.9. MAIS 2 (Sakākā) (photo, G. Charloux; facsimile L. Nehmé).

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31 Information given by Ali al-Manaser.

b{ʿ/y}{ṣ}w
dkyr mrʾlqyš
br mlkw
Ba{yḍ} (?). May Imruʾ al-Qays son of Mālik be remembered.

On the photograph, two letters are carved before the first word of the pre-Islamic Arabic text. They are carved a little higher and are not likely to belong to the text. The stroke of these two letters is thicker than those of the pre-Islamic text, the patina is lighter, and there seem to be two dots below the first letter (Arabic *y*?). For these reasons, it is probably (much?) later.

The first line of the text is difficult to read. The first letter can be a *b* or an *n*. The second one is likely to be a ʿ, although a *y* is also possible. The third one cannot be a *k* if one compares it with the *k* in *mlkw*. No satisfactory Arabic name starting with Naʿ- or Baʿ- was, however, found. If read *byʿw*, it could be the equivalent of Arabic Bayḍ. The second and third lines of the text are clear.

• **MS8Nab1 (fig. 3.10)**
Nabataean, **Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ**. Published in Nehmé, "Inscriptions," pp. 189–94, no. 12, fig. 134.

This text is carved on a terrace above a Nabataean monumental tomb (IGN 1) to the right of the drawing of two joint betyls, an eye-betyl on the left representing al-ʿUzzā and a plain betyl on the right representing the Lord of the house.
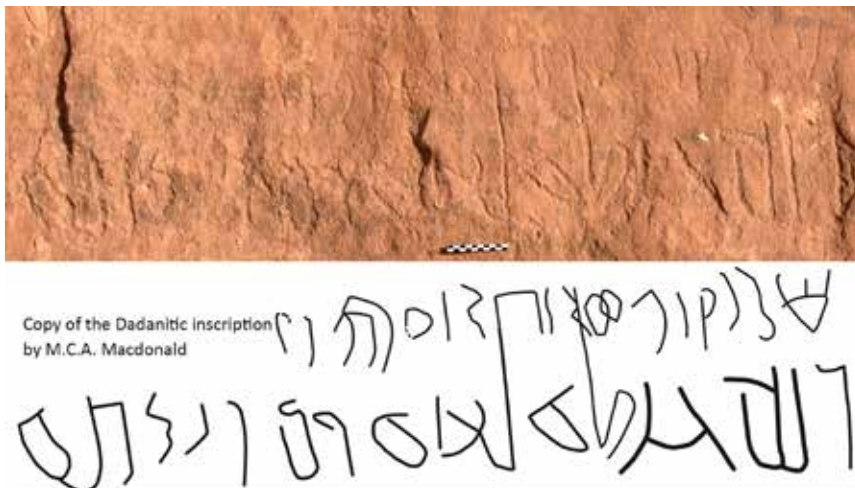
Figure 3.10. MS8Nab1 (photo and facsimile, L. Nehmé).

dnh gbl ʾlʿzʾ w mr bytʾ
This is the mountain of al-ʿUzzā and the Lord of the house.

Note the probable Arabic loanword *gbl*, "mountain." This text is interesting because it shows that a "mountain" could be devoted to gods, in the present case one of the sandstone outcrops of the Jabal al-Maḥjar in Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ. *Mr bytʾ* is probably a periphrasis for a major Nabataean god, possibly Dūšarā.

• **QNNab 5 (fig. 3.11)**
Nabataean, **Qāʿ an-Nqayb** (Darb al-Bakrah). Published in Nehmé, *Darb al-Bakrah*.
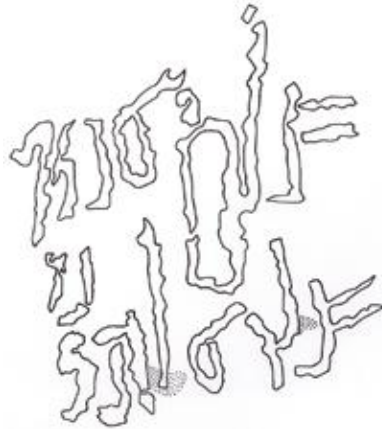
Figure 3.11. QNNab 5 (photo and facsimile, L. Nehmé).

šlm ʾbyw
br
šldʾlhy
May Ubayy son of Šaldʾallāhī be safe. **[141/142]**

The name *šldʾlhy* appears here for the first time in Nabataean. There is no radical SLD in Arabic, but Aramaic *šeled*, "a mass of a burnt or decayed body distinguishable in shape and outlines" (Jastrow, *Dictionary*, s.v.), is a particularly unfortunate compound for a theophoric name.

• **S 1 (fig. 3.12)**
Nabataeo-Arabic, **Sakākā**. Published in Nehmé, "Glimpse," pp. 71–72.
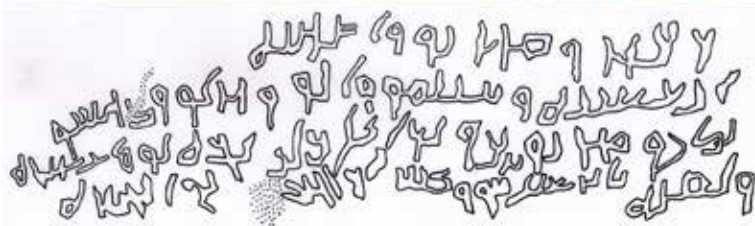
Figure 3.12. S 1 (photo courtesy of Kh. al-Muaikil; facsimile L. Nehmé).

dkyrw mḥrbw w ʾṣḥbh
ʾl ʿšrh w ʿnymw w [w]ʾlw w ḥrtw w {k}ḥšw
bṭbw mḥrbw br ʿwyḏʾlt ktb ydh ywm ʿšrh
w tmnh bʾyr šnt 2 × 100 + 100 + 20 + 3 {ʾd.ḥg}---- ʾl ḥyrh

May Muḥārib and his ten companions and Ġunaym (?) and Wāʾiland Ḥāriṯ and {K}ḥšw be remembered in well-being. Muḥārib son of ʿAwīḏʾallāt wrote [with] his hand day eighteen of Iyyār year 323 *{ʾ}{d}{.}{ḥg}*---- al-Ḥīrah?/the camp?

The text is dated to 429 CE. ʿAwīḏʾallāt means "the refuge of Allāt." What precedes *ʾlḥyrh* is not clear and would require examining the text on the rock. Its precise location is, however, unknown.

• S 2 (fig. 3.13)
Nabataeo-Arabic, Sakākā. Previously unpublished.
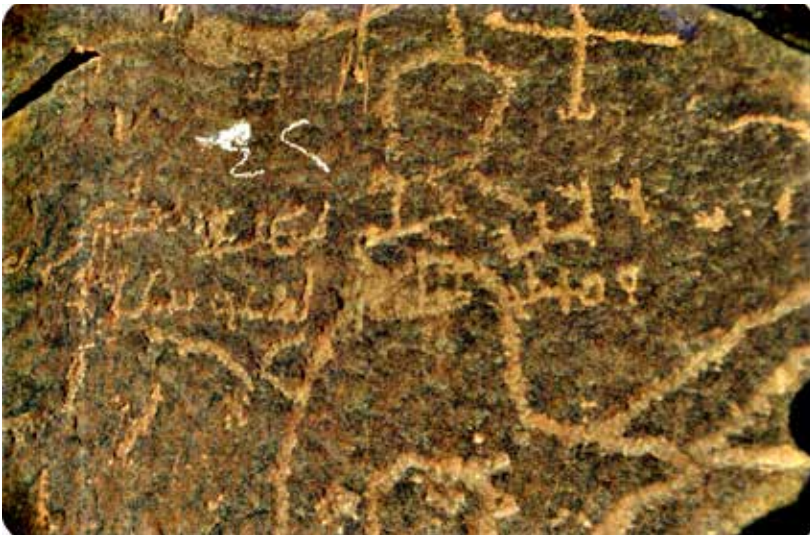
Figure 3.13. S 2 (photo courtesy of Kh. al-Muaikil).

According to Kh. al-Muaikil, this text comes from the same outcrop as the previous one. The reading is uncertain, and it is given here for sake of completeness.

dkyr {b}ly bṭb {w} šlm
w mḥl{d}---- l{b}{y/n}w bryd{d}ʾ{l}

No translation is given of this text, the reading of which remains uncertain. The second word is possibly the exclamative particle *bly*, "Yea!" On the third line, *mḥl{d}* was preferred to *mḥl{w}* because the loop of the letter is not closed at its top. The name may correspond to Arabic Muḥallad. The last name, which is the one which interests us here, is also uncertain because the last letter could be a badly formed final *h*, while the second *d* is very uncertain. The only reason why this text is presented here is because it would be the only example of a theophoric name with -*ʾl* in Nabataeo-Arabic.

• **ThMNN 55 (JSNab 93) (fig. 3.14)**
Nabataean, Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ.

Figure 3.14. ThMNN 55 (JSNab 93) (photo, L. Nehmé).

šlm tymmnwty
May Taymmanawatī be safe.

• **ThMNN 107 (JSNab 142) (fig. 3.15)**
Nabataean, Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ.

Figure 3.15. ThMNN 107 (JSNab 142) (photo, L. Nehmé).

dkyr tymlktbʾ
qdm dwšrʾ w tbwš
May Taymalkutbā be remembered in the presence of Dūšarā and Tabūš. **[142/143]**

    In the second line, one expects *tbwš* to be a divine name because it is coordinated to *dwšrʾ*.

• ThMNN 166 (*CIS* II 236) (fig. 3.16)
Nabataean, Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ. Copied by Ch. Doughty (*Documents épigraphiques*, pl. 11, fol. 18) and read correctly in Milik, *Dédicaces*, pp. 409–10. See also Nehmé, "New Nabataean Inscription."

Figure 3.16. ThMNN 166 (*CIS* II 236) (photo and facsimile, L. Nehmé).

dkrwn ṭb lzydw br gdṭb
br zydw mn qdm šmyʾ
{zydw}
Good remembrance to Zaydū son of Gadṭab son of Zaydū in the presence of Heaven. {Zaydū}.

• ThMNN 477 (UJadhNab 88) (fig. 3.17)
Nabataean, Umm Jadhāyidh. Also published in Nehmé, *Darb al-Bakrah*.

Figure 3.17. ThMNN 477 (UJadhNab 88) (photo and facsimile, L. Nehmé).

ʾ{d/r}{d/r}y br m{y/n}ʾ dkyr
bṭb mn qdm ʾlh
g{y}ʾ

A possible Arabic parallel for the first name, which does not occur anywhere else, is Udad. The second name is known neither in Nabataean nor in Arabic. The reading of *gyʾ* in this text is uncertain, but I consider that the letter after *g* is a badly formed *y* and that the vertical stroke which follows is the ligature between this *y* and the very archaic form of the *ʾ*.

- **ThMNN 539 (UJadhNab 350) (fig. 3.18)**
Nabataean, Umm Jadhāyidh. Also published in Nehmé, *Darb al-Bakrah*.

Figure 3.18. ThMNN 539 (UJadhNab 350) (photo and facsimile, L. Nehmé).

šlm qsʿdr br {bn}hbl
w dkyr bṭb

This text is interesting because it contains both a theophoric name built with the name of the Edomite deity Qōs and a theophoric name built with Hubal, of which this is the third attestation in Nabataean and the second with the Arabic compound *bn* rather than Aramaic *br* for "son of." It is *bnhbl* in Puteoli (*CIS* II 158) and Umm **[143/144]** Jadhāyidh and *brhbl* in Petra (Milik and Starcky, "Inscriptions," pp. 120–22, no. 5).

- **ThMNN 602 (UJadhNab 105) (fig. 3.19)**
Nabataeo-Arabic, Umm Jadhāyidh. Also published in Nehmé, *Darb al-Bakrah*.
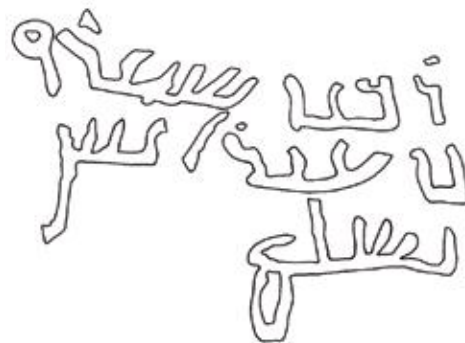
Figure 3.19. ThMNN 602 (UJadhNab 105) (photo and facsimile, L. Nehmé).

Nehmé, "Glimpse," pp. 75–76, fig. 37.

dkyr šʿdw
br ʿbdʾyš
bšlm
May Saʿdū son of ʿAbdʾīs/ʿAbdʾiyās be remembered in well-being.

• **ThMNN 701 (UJadhNab 145) (fig. 3.20)**
Nabataean, **Umm Jadhāyidh**. Also published in Nehmé, *Darb al-Bakrah*.

Figure 3.20. ThMNN 701 (UJadhNab 145) (photo, S. al-Theeb; facsimile L. Nehmé).

šlm ʿbdṣlm
May ʿAbdṣalm be safe.

• **ThMNN 862 (fig. 3.21)**
(Early) Nabataeo-Arabic, **Tabūk region**. To my knowledge, no photograph of this text is available. **[144/145]**
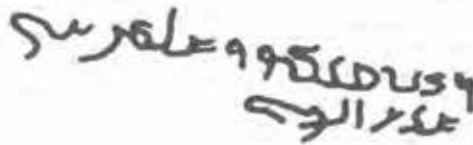
Figure 3.21. ThMNN 862 (facsimile, S. al-Theeb).

dkyr {t}ymw w šlmn bny
šyʾʿlhy
May {T}aymū and Salmān the sons of Šayʾʿallāhī be remembered.

This text is presented here because it contains, to my knowledge, the only example of the presence of the compound -*lhy* in a text written in Nabataeo-Arabic characters. Compare with the Arabic name Šayʿallāt.

• **TS14NabAr1 (fig. 3.22)**
Nabataeo-Arabic, al-Ṣulaylāt, Taymāʾ region. Previously unpublished. I am grateful to Michael Macdonald for letting me present it here.

Figure 3.22. TS14NabAr1 (photo, M. C. A. Macdonald).

dkyr yw{z/n}w br ʿbdʾlʿzʾ
May Yū{z/n}ū son of ʿAbdʾalʿuzzā be remembered.

The first name is not previously attested in Nabataean. It is just possible to read *ywlw*, which occurs once in ThNJUT 51, but one would expect the *l* to be slightly higher than the other letters, as is the *l* in *ʿbdʾlʿzʾ*.

• **UJadhNab 72 (fig. 3.23)**
Mixed Nabataean and Nabataeo-Arabic, Umm Jadhāyidh. Published in Nehmé, *Darb al-Bakrah*.

Figure 3.23. UJadhNab 72 (photo and facsimile, L. Nehmé).

<d> *dkyr ʿbdʾlšmʾ br rbw bṭb*
May ʿAbdʾlšamā son of Rabū be remembered in well-being.

Note that *bṭb* is not visible on the photograph. This text is presented here because it contains the only theophoric name built with *šmʾ* known so far and because it offers an interesting parallel to the god *šmyʾ*, mentioned in two texts from Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ presented above (64114_I04 and ThMNN 166).

• **UJadhNab 313 (fig. 3.24)**
Nabataeo-Arabic, Umm Jadhāyidh. Published in Nehmé, *Darb al-Bakrah*.
This text, as well as UJadhNab 345, 364, and 368, have already been mentioned in other contributions because the four of them contain a formula which is not attested else-where—neither in the Nabataean nor in the Nabataeo-Arabic epigraphic corpus (Nehmé, "Aramaic or Arabic?" pp. 82–83, and Nehmé, "New Dated Inscriptions," pp. 128–29). This formula is based on the use of the verb ŠMʿ in the third person singular of the perfect with an optative force, followed by the divine name al-ʿUzzā. There is an exact parallel with the radical DKR in the formula *dkr ʾlʾlh*, "May God remember," which occurs in DaJ144PAr1 and DaJ000NabAr1 presented above.

Figure 3.24. UJadhNab 313 (photo and facsimile, L. Nehmé). **[145/146]**

šmʿt
ʾlʿzy l{m}ʿš{r}
ʾ{z/r}m ktb
May al-ʿUzzay listen to {M}aʿša{r}. ʾA{z/r}m wrote.

    Mʿšr may be the Arabic name Maʿšar, but note that the first letter could also be read as a *q* or a *p*. As for the name in the third line, it is probably best read *ʾzm* because the shape of the second letter is very similar to that of the *z* in al-ʿUzzā. Besides, the name *ʾzmw* occurs in a Taymāʾ Aramaic inscription, *CIS* II 336, this time with a final *w*. If it is indeed the same name, it is interesting to have it once with *wawation* in Taymāʾ Aramaic and without *wawation* in Nabataeo-Arabic. The same name appears also in UJadhNab 364, for which see below. Note that the goddess's name is spelled with a final *y*, which suggests that her name was pronounced ʿuzzay, not ʿuzzā.

• **UJadhNab 331 (fig. 3.25)**
Nabataeo-Arabic, **Umm Jadhāyidh**. Published in Nehmé, *Darb al-Bakrah*.

Figure 3.25. UJadhNab 331 (photo and facsimile, L. Nehmé).

ʿbdʾlt
br ʾwšw šlm
May ʿAbdʾallāt son of ʾAwšū be safe.

    The name ʿAbdʾallāt is not attested in Nabataean. It is the feminine equivalent of Arabic ʿAbdallāh, the closest parallels of which in Arabic are Awsallāt, Nahdallāt, Saʿdallāt, Wahballāt, Zaydallāt, etc.

• **UJadhNab 345 (fig. 3.26)**
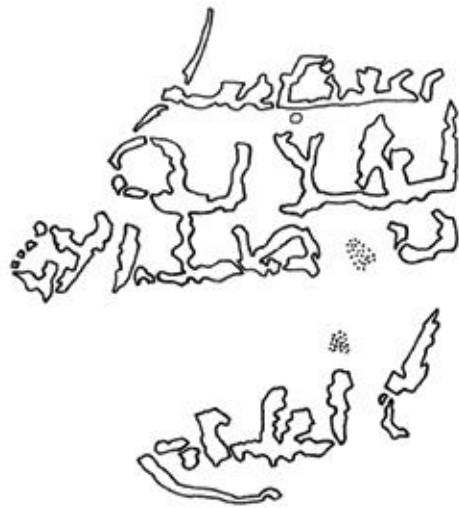
Figure 3.26. UJadhNab 345 (photo and facsimile, L. Nehmé).

Nabataeo-Arabic, **Umm Jadhāyidh**. Published in Nehmé, *Darb al-Bakrah*.

šmʿt
l{ʿ}d{y/n}w
br {ṣb}rh
ʾlʿzy **[146/147]**
May al-ʿUzzay listen to ʿAdyū/ʿUdayyū/ʿAddānū son of Ṣabira/Ṣabra/Ṣubāra.

The syntax is odd, since one would normally expect al-ʿUzzā to follow immediately the verb *šmʿt*.

• **UJadhNab 352 (fig. 3.27)**
Nabataeo-Arabic, **Umm Jadhāyidh**. Published in Nehmé, *Darb al-Bakrah.*

Figure 3.27. UJadhNab 352 (photo and facsimile, L. Nehmé).

dkyr {l} ʿbdʾlʿ[z]y
br {š}ldllh
May ʿAbdʾalʿuzzay son of Šldllh be remembered.

Note the dot above the *d* of *ʿbdʾlʿ[z]y*. The reading of the second name is not absolutely certain because one may read *yḥ* at the beginning, but a close examination of the

photograph shows that the small protrusion which appears in grey on the facsimile is a break and does not belong to the letter. The double *l* before the final *h* seems clear. It is possible that this is the equivalent of the name *šld'lhy* found in QNNab 5, for which see above. One has probably to assume a name **šld'l'lh* where both ' are assimilated.

• **UJadhNab 364 (fig. 3.28)**
Nabataeo-Arabic, Umm Jadhāyidh. Published in Nehmé, *Darb al-Bakrah*.
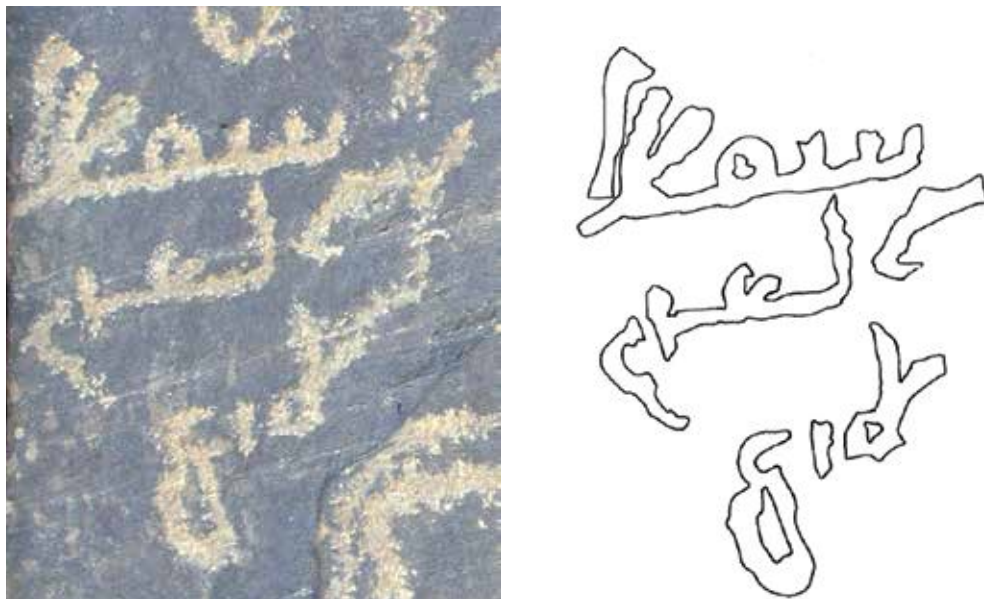
Figure 3.28. UJadhNab 364 (photo and facsimile, L. Nehmé).

šm' t
'l'zy
l'{z/r}m
May al-'Uzzay listen to 'A{z/r}m.

See the commentary under UJadhNab 313. 'A{z/r}m is probably the same individual as the one who wrote UJadhNab 313.

• **UJadhNab 368–369 (fig. 3.29)**
Nabataeo-Arabic, Umm Jadhāyidh. Published in Nehmé, *Darb al-Bakrah*.

Figure 3.29. UJadhNab 368–369 (photo and facsimile, L. Nehmé).

šmʿt ʾlʿzy
ḥ{b/n}y{b/n}w br ʾwšw
May al-ʿUzzay listen to Ḥ{b/n}y{b/n}w son of ʾAwsū.

The name may be Arabic Ḥunayn, Ḥabīb, Ḥubayb, Ḥubayyib, or even Ḫubayb. **[147/148]**

• **UJadhNab 399 (fig. 3.30)**
Nabataean, **Umm Jadhāyidh**. Published in Nehmé, *Darb al-Bakrah*.

Figure 3.30. UJadhNab 399 (photo and facsimile, L. Nehmé).

dkyr bṭb bšlm hnʾlt

The reading is certain. *hnʾlt* is not attested elsewhere in Nabataean.

• **UJadhNab 538 (fig. 3.31)**
Nabataeo-Arabic, **Umm Jadhāyidh**. Published in Nehmé, *Darb al-Bakrah*.

Figure 3.31. UJadhNab 538 (photo, Farīq aṣ-Ṣaḥrāʾ 2017).

bly dkyr šly br ʾwšw
bṭb w šlm mn qdm
mry ʿlmʾ w ktbʾ dnh
ktb ywm ḥg
ʾl-pṭyr šnt mʾt
w tšʿyn w šbʿ

[1] Yea! May Šullay son of ʾAwšū [2] be remembered in well-being and may he be safe in the presence of [3] the Lord of the world, and this writing [4] he wrote the day of the feast of the unleavened bread, year one hundred [6] and ninety-seven [302–303 CE].

This very interesting 303 CE text was discovered in the area of Umm Jadhāyidh by the Saudi Arabian team of amateur explorers known as Farīq aṣ-Ṣaḥrāʾ (www.alsahra.org). The author, Šullay son of ʾAwšū, wrote another text in the same area, UJadhNab 309, seven years earlier. The expression *ywm ḥg ʾl-pṭyr* refers to Passover, of which this is the first mention in northwest Arabia. This text is a good additional argument to interpret *mry ʿlmʾ* as the God of the Jews (Robin, "The Peoples," p. 58). For a full commentary, see Nehmé, *Darb al-Bakrah*, p. 186.

• **WRPAr3 (fig. 3.32)**
Pre-Islamic Arabic, **Wadi Ramm**. Previously unpublished.

Figure 3.32. WRPAr3 (photo, G. King).

This text was photographed by Geraldine King in Wadi Ramm and was kindly given to me, with permission to include it in this list, by Michael Macdonald.

ʾl{..}w {qy}š ʿbdmnpw **[148/149]**

The last name is the well-known Arabic name ʿAbdmanāf. Note that *ʾmtmnpw* appears in the 512 CE pre-Islamic Zebed inscription (see Macdonald in Fiema et al., "*Provincia Arabia*," p. 411).

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CONCORDANCE OF REFERENCES

In bold, the reference under which it is quoted in the text. Followed by a #, texts which are presented in the Appendix. For the sigla, see the list following the concordance.

ThMNN	JSNab	*CIS* II	ThNUJ	UJadhNab	Other reference(s)	Comment
ThMNN 1	JSNab 39				Nehmé, "Quelques éléments," pp. 43–44	Published
ThMNN 9	JSNab 48					Published
ThMNN 13		*CIS* II 274			ARNA.Nab 53	Published
ThMNN 14	JSNab 52	*CIS* II 275				Published
ThMNN 19	JSNab 58					Published
ThMNN 20	JSNab 59					Published
ThMNN 21	JSNab 57	*CIS* II 235				Published
ThMNN 23	JSNab 61	*CIS* II 238				Published
ThMNN 54	JSNab 92				ARNA.Nab 71	Published
ThMNN 55#	JSNab 93	*CIS* II 283			ARNA.Nab 72	Published, see Appendix
ThMNN 107#	JSNab 142					Published, see Appendix
ThMNN 108	JSNab 143					Published
ThMNN 113	JSNab 149					Published
ThMNN 127	JSNab 163	*CIS* II 244				Published
ThMNN 128	JSNab 164	*CIS* II 244				Published
ThMNN 133	JSNab 169					Published
ThMNN 166#		*CIS* II 236				Published, see Appendix
ThMNN 190	JSNab 1	*CIS* II 199				Published
ThMNN 197	JSNab 8	*CIS* II 197				Published
ThMNN 200	JSNab 11	*CIS* II 211				Published
ThMNN 201	JSNab 12	*CIS* II 205				Published
ThMNN 205	JSNab 16	*CIS* II 198				Published
ThMNN 206	JSNab 17	*CIS* II 271				Published
ThMNN 209	JSNab 19	*CIS* II 206				Published
ThMNN 218	JSNab 28	*CIS* II 208				Published

ThMNN	JSNab	*CIS* II	ThNUJ	UJadhNab	Other reference(s)	Comment
ThMNN 220	JSNab 30	*CIS* II 200				Published
ThMNN 221	JSNab 31	*CIS* II 217				Published
ThMNN 224	JSNab 34	*CIS* II 224				Published
ThMNN 226	JSNab 36	*CIS* II 209				Published
ThMNN 278	JSNab 184	*CIS* II 320F				Published
ThMNN 292	JSNab 198					Published
ThMNN 295	JSNab 201					Published
ThMNN 306	JSNab 212					Published [149/150]
ThMNN 307	JSNab 213 + 214					Published
ThMNN 327	JSNab 234					Published
ThMNN 440	JSNab 385					Published
ThMNN 448					ARNA.Nab 24	Published
ThMNN 449					ARNA.Nab 25	Published
ThMNN 477#			ThNUJ 7	UJadhNab 88		Published, see Appendix
ThMNN 488			ThNUJ 18	UJadhNab 83		Published
ThMNN 497			ThNUJ 25	UJadhNab 97		Published
ThMNN 539#			ThNUJ 68	UJadhNab 350		Published, see Appendix
ThMNN 549			ThNUJ 77	UJadhNab 295		Published
ThMNN 555			ThNUJ 83	UJadhNab 228		Published
ThMNN 556			ThNUJ 84	UJadhNab 219	Nehmé, "Glimpse," pp. 77–78	Published
ThMNN 583			ThNUJ 111	UJadhNab 137		Published
ThMNN 584			ThNUJ 112	UJadhNab 134		Published
ThMNN 585			ThNUJ 113	UJadhNab 133		Published
ThMNN 595			ThNUJ 121	UJadhNab 117		Published
ThMNN 602#			ThNUJ 128	UJadhNab 105	Nehmé, "Glimpse," pp. 75–76	Published, see Appendix
ThMNN 644			ThNUJ 170	UJadhNab 445		Published
ThMNN 662			ThNUJ 188	UJadhNab 237		Published

(continued)

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ThMNN	JSNab	*CIS* II	ThNUJ	UJadhNab	Other reference(s)	Comment
ThMNN 678			ThNUJ 204	UJadhNab 186		Published
ThMNN 681			ThNUJ 207	UJadhNab 189		Published
ThMNN 688			ThNUJ 213	UJadhNab 41		Published
ThMNN 692			ThNUJ 217	UJadhNab 47		Published
ThMNN 695			ThNUJ 220	UJadhNab 426		Published
ThMNN 701#			ThNUJ 226	UJadhNab 145		Published, see Appendix
ThMNN 705			ThNUJ 230	UJadhNab 40		Published
ThMNN 720					ThNJUT 27	Published
ThMNN 726					ThNJUT 33	Published
ThMNN 819					Savignac and Starcky, "Inscription nabatéenne"	Published
ThMNN 862#					al-Theeb, *Dirāsah taḥlīliyyah*, no. 26	Published, see Appendix
ThMNN 870					al-Theeb, *Dirāsah taḥlīliyyah*, no. 34	Published
ThMNN 952					al-Theeb, *Dirāsah taḥlīliyyah*, no. 91	Published
ThMNN 959					ThNJUT 65	Published
ThMNN 963						Published
—				**UJadhNab 59**		Published
—				**UJadhNab 69**		Published
—				**UJadhNab 72#**		Published, see Appendix
—				**UJadhNab 226**		Published
—				**UJadhNab 313#**		Published, see Appendix
				UJadhNab 331#		Published, see Appendix
—				**UJadhNab 345#**		Published, see Appendix
—				**UJadhNab 352#**		Published, see Appendix

ThMNN	JSNab	*CIS* II	ThNUJ	UJadhNab	Other reference(s)	Comment
—				UJadhNab 364#		Published, see Appendix
—				UJadhNab 368#		Published, Appendix
—				UJadhNab 383		Published
—				UJadhNab 391		Published
—				UJadhNab 399#		Published, see Appendix
—				UJadhNab 402		Published
—				UJadhNab 428		Published
				UJadhNab 536		Published
				UJadhNab 538#		Published, see Appendix [150/151]
				UJadhNab 553		Published
—					64114_I01# (Nehmé, "New Nabataean Inscription")	Forthcoming, see Appendix
—					ArNab 61	Published
					ArNab 80	Published
—					ArNab 142	Published
—					*CIS* II 265	Published
—					*CIS* II 331	Published
—					DaJ000NabAr1# (Nehmé, "'Transitional' Inscription")	Published, see Appendix
—					DaJ29Nab1#	Published, see Appendix
—					DaJ29Nab2	Published
—					DaJ29Nab5	Published
—					DaJ29Nab13#	Published, see Appendix

(continued from previous page)

ThMNN	JSNab	*CIS* II	ThNUJ	UJadhNab	Other reference(s)	Comment
—					**DaJ29Nab24#**	Published, see Appendix
—					**DaJ144PAr1#** (Nehmé, "New Dated Inscriptions")	Published, see Appendix
					DBv1Nab 11	Published
—					**Ḥimà-al-Musammāt PalAr 5** (Robin, al-Ghabbān, and al-Saʿīd, "Inscriptions antiques")	Published
—					**Ḥimà-Sud PalAr 5** (Robin, al-Ghabbān, and al-Saʿīd, "Inscriptions antiques")	Published
—					**Ḥimà-Sud PalAr 8#** (Robin, al-Ghabbān, and al-Saʿīd, "Inscriptions antiques")	Published, see Appendix
					HNNUT 7	Published
—					**LPArab 1#**	Published, see Appendix
—					**MAIS 2#** (al-Muaikil and al-Theeb, *Al-ʾāṯār wa-l-kitābāt*, no. 2)	Published, see Appendix
—					**MS8Nab1#** (Nehmé, "Inscriptions," pp. 189–94, no. 12, fig. 134)	Published, see Appendix
—					**QNNab 5#**	Published, see Appendix
—					**S 1#** (Nehmé, "Glimpse," pp. 71–72)	Published, see Appendix

ThMNN	JSNab	*CIS* II	ThNUJ	UJadhNab	Other reference(s)	Comment
–					S 2#	Published, see Appendix
–					SBNab 4	Published
–					TA 856 (Macdonald, *Taymāʾ II*)	Published
–					TA 14285 + TA 14286 (Macdonald, *Taymāʾ II*)	Published
–					ThNIS 11	Published
–					ThNS 73	Published
					ThNS 87	
–					TM.TA.003 (Beyer and Livingstone, "Neuesten aramäischen Inschriften," no. II)	Published
					TS14NabAr1#	Published, see Appendix
					WRPAr3#	Published, see Appendix [151/152]

SIGLA

ArNab	Inscriptions from al-ʿArniyyāt published in Nehmé, *Darb al-Bakrah*.
ARNA.Nab	Winnett and Reed, *Ancient Records*.
CIS	*Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum, pars II. Inscriptiones Aramaicas continens*
DaJ	Inscriptions from Dūmat al-Jandal.
DBv1Nab and DBv3Nab	Inscriptions from sites Darb al-Bakrah various 1 and various 3 published in Nehmé, *Darb al-Bakrah*.
HNNUT	al-Ḥāʾiṭī, *Al-nuqūš al-nabaṭiyyah*.
JSNab	Jaussen and Savignac, *Mission archéologique*.
LPArab	Littmann, *Arabic Inscriptions*.
MAIS	Al-Muaikil, "Naqšān ʿarabiyyān mubakkirān."
MS	Inscriptions from Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ.
QNNab	Inscriptions from Qāʿ an-Nuqayb published in Nehmé, *Darb al-Bakrah*.
RES	*Répertoire d'épigraphie sémitique*. Paris, 1900–1968.

S	Inscriptions from Sakākā.
SBNab	Inscriptions from Sūḥ al-Baghlah published in Nehmé, *Darb al-Bakrah*.
ThMNN	Al-Theeb, *Mudawwanat*.
ThNIS	Al-Theeb, "New Nabataean Inscriptions."
ThNJUT	Al-Theeb, *Nuqūš nabaṭiyyah*.
ThNS	Al-Theeb, *Nuqūš mawqiʿ sarmadāʾ*.
TS	Inscriptions from the Taymāʾ Survey.
UJadhNab	Inscriptions from Umm Jadhāyidh published in Nehmé, *Darb al-Bakrah*.

4

One *Wāw* to Rule Them All

The Origins and Fate of Wawation in Arabic
and Its Orthography[1]

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"Wawation" refers to the nonetymological *w/u* that follows anthroponyms of Arabic origin common in pre-Islamic Aramaic inscriptions. The earliest attestation of a nonetymological final /u/ is found on the name of the Arab chieftain *gindibu* in the Kurkh monolith inscription recounting the battle of Qarqar (853 BCE). The cuneiform script renders his name as *gi-in-di-bu-ʾ*, indicating that the word terminated in an *u* vowel that was independent of the Neo-Assyrian nominal system.[2] The same ending is found on the name of the Arab chieftain גַשְׁמוּ = /gašmū/ in Nehemiah 6:6. Here I will discuss the several hypotheses regarding the nature of wawation and argue in favor of an original nominative case interpretation. I will then develop a scenario for its development and transformation into an isolated orthographic device in standard Arabic orthography and the significance this scenario has on our understanding of the development of the Arabic script.

WAS WAWATION PRONOUNCED?

Before beginning with the subject matter at hand, I wish to visit the question as to whether or not wawation had a phonetic correlate. The idea that wawation could simply be an orthographic feature comes from its single surviving instance in Classical Arabic orthography, the name عمرو, which is pronounced as ʿAmrun in context and ʿAmr in pause. The final *waw* is traditionally said to have been introduced to distinguish the name from its diptotic cousin, ʿumaru, which would otherwise appear identical in consonantal garb.

In addition to the cuneiform and biblical transcriptions mentioned above, the distribution of wawation speaks against its status as an orthographic feature, at least in the earliest stages. Wawation was not exclusively a feature of the Nabataean writing school

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2 On this point, see Ephʿal, *Ancient Arabs*, p. 75, n. 225, and Graf, "Origins of the Nabataeans," p. 55. On the name, see Krebernik, "Von Gindibu bis Muḥammad."

but is indeed found on Arabic names across Aramaic corpora: the famous inscription of the king of Qedar, from Tell Masḫūṭahin in the Nile Delta (ca. 400 BCE), attests this feature;[3] triptotic Arabic names in Palmyrene, Hatrean, Syriac, and Taymāʾ Aramaic inscriptions terminate in *w*.[4] Indeed, D. Graf has identified the feature on the Arabic names attested in some seventy ostraca from Beersheba.[5] To account for such a widespread and uniformly deployed orthographic practice, one must argue that all these Aramaic writing traditions shared a unified convention restricted to the representation of triptotic Arabic names—a rather unlikely scenario. The more natural explanation is that the final *w* represented a *u*-class vowel.

The pronunciation of the name *gašmū* would imply that this vowel was long. Since Hebrew had lost its original final short vowels, however, any attempt to represent a final vowel from Arabic would indeed be interpreted as long. The same would be true in Aramaic orthography, as Diem had already pointed out.[6] Indeed, the transcription of wawation as [o] in a few Greek inscriptions suggests that the vowel was originally short; for [o] is the reflex of *u in the northern dialects of Old Arabic, while *ū is consistently represented as omicron-ypsilon [u].[7] I therefore suggest that wawation originally reflects a final short *u vowel. Its phonetic quality is difficult to ascertain in the earliest periods: Akkadian has no means to distinguish between [o] and [u], and the spelling *gšmw* in the Hebrew Bible could equally reflect *gašmū* or *gašmō*—there is no reason to assume that the Masoretes preserved the original pronunciation of this name.

To conclude, wawation began as a reflection of a final vowel rather than an orthographic device, and this vowel was likely etymologically short. In the body of this essay, I will turn to the identification of its origins and its ultimate transformation into an orthographic device.

ORIGINS OF WAWATION

Wawation is best known from its appearance on Nabataean personal names. Indeed, unlike other corpora of Aramaic, Nabataean is the only Aramaic writing tradition that occasionally furnishes a text in the Arabic language, thus foreshadowing its transformation into the Arabic script proper. The Arabic influence on Nabataean has long been recognized and points toward the widespread use of Arabic as a vernacular in the kingdom.[8] The traditional source for the recognition of a major Arabic-speaking component in Nabataea was the etymology of the personal names of its inhabitants. These names are overwhelmingly

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3 The well-known inscription reads *zy qynw br gšm mlk qdr qrb l-hnʾlt*, "That which Qayno son of Gošam, king of QDR, brought in offering to han-ʾilāt" (Rabinowitz, "Aramaic Inscriptions," p. 2). The presence of wawation on the triptote *qayn* and its absence from the diptote *gušam* match the Classical Nabataean situation.

4 On this phenomenon, see Israel, "L'onomastique arabe."

5 Graf, "Arabs in Syria"; I am very grateful to J. Norris for these helpful references.

6 Diem, "Die Frage der Kasusflexion," p. 231.

7 Al-Jallad, "Graeco-Arabica I," §5.12.

8 For a discussion of some of the evidence, see Healey, *Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions*, pp. 59–63; Macdonald, "Written Word," pp. 19–20; Gzella, *Cultural History of Aramaic*, pp. 238–48.

drawn from an Arabic source, but one rather distinct from Classical Arabic. The most recognizable difference is that a great number of Arabic names in the Nabataean onomasticon terminate in *w*.

Theodor Nöldeke[9] was the first to suggest that the nonetymological *wāw* corresponded to the nunated case ending in Classical Arabic, as it is usually absent from diptotic names belonging to the *ʾafʿal* pattern and those terminating in the feminine ending.[10] Focusing on deviations from this pattern, Cantineau argued against the interpretation of it as a case vowel and suggested instead that it was a way of expressing the emphatic state in non-Aramaic names.[11] Nöldeke's view, however, won the day. In support of Nöldeke's hypothesis, Blau summons data from the modern Arabic dialects of the Yemeni Tihāmah, where a similar phenomenon seems to be in play.[12] In these varieties, indefinite triptotic nouns—that is, those that originally took nunation—terminate in *u*, while patterns that were originally diptotic do not.[13]

Wawation is not an isolated phenomenon. Nöldeke also identified a genitive ending, written *y* in compound theophoric names—for example, *ʿbdʾlbʿly* /ʿabd-al-baʿli/, *ʿbdʾlhy* /ʿabd-ʾallāhi/, *tymʾlbʿly* /taym-ʾal-baʿli/.[14] Based on their distribution, Diem[15] argued that they were reflexes of the case system and concluded that the system broke down in the first century BCE, as one begins to witness compound names with both the correct *y* in genitive position alongside those with the incorrect nominative case, *w*: for example, *ʿbdmnwtw* versus *ʿbdmnwty*.[16] Blau,[17] however, produced an important response to this dating: the Nabataean Arabic personal names do not occur in an Arabic context but rather in an Aramaic linguistic setting and so do not necessarily tell us about the inflectional system of the Arabic from which they were drawn. The situation is comparable to the noninflection of Latin loanwords in English: the use of the nominative form *circus* in the sentence *I went to the circus* tells us that English lacked a nominal case system but does not imply that Latin did.

Thus the general consensus is that the nonetymological final vowels of Nabataean personal names go back to original case endings. Based on this understanding, Blau sets up a historical scenario to explain their distribution:[18]

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9 Nöldeke, "Noten."

10 The term *diptote* refers to a sort of second declension in Arabic nouns, where the nominative is represented by *u* and the genitive/accusative (= oblique) by *a*; this declension cannot take nunation.

11 Cantineau, *Le Nabatéen*, pp. 168–69.

12 Blau, "Noun Inflection in Arabic," p. 29.

13 On this phenomenon, see Behnstedt, *Nord-Jemen*, 209; Greenman, "Dialect of Central Tihāmah," pp. 60–61. van Putten, "The Feminine Ending *-at*," has recently argued that, based on the Yemeni data, the QCT, and possibly Nabataean, all nouns terminating in the feminine ending *at* in Arabic were originally diptotic.

14 Negev, *Personal Names*, s.v.

15 Diem, "Die Frage der Kasusflexion."

16 Negev, *Personal Names*, p. 47.

17 Blau, "Beginnings," pp. 183–84.

18 Blau, "Noun Inflection in Arabic."

1. Final short vowels were lost before nunation; this eliminated the final case vowels of diptotes but not in triptotes as the vowels were protected by nunation.
2. Nunation was lost, producing a second set of final short case vowels.
3. At this stage, case no longer functioned and the final *u* reached the stage found in the Tihāmah dialects today. Eventually, it was transferred to diptotes that lacked any termination; this stage is meant to explain the rare appearance of wawation on names of the *ʾafʿal* pattern.

Blau's scenario is challenged by names such as *ʿbdʾlbʿly* /ʕabd-ʔal-baʕli/, where the correct case vowel is present on the second term but should have, according to the formulation above, dropped off since it was not protected by nunation. Diem[19] explains such forms as resulting from analogy with indefinite nouns. This view, however, begins with the assumption that final short vowels had disappeared altogether. I suggest that this claim should be revisited.

Nöldeke and Diem formulated their ideas about the Arabic case system before any true Arabic text from the Classical Nabataean period had been discovered. In 1986,[20] Negev et al. published the first example of such a text.[21] The ʿEn ʿAvdat inscription contains three verses of a hymn to the deified Nabataean king ʿObodas.[22] The precise dating of the text is impossible, since it was not discovered in an archaeological context, but estimates place it before 125 CE.[23] In any case, the text must postdate the monarch to whom the hymn is dedicated, ʿObodas I, who reigned from 95 to 85 BCE. Thus we may reasonably assume its language reflects the Nabataean Arabic of the first century BCE to the first or early second century CE.

The ʿEn ʿAvdat inscription has received a great amount of attention from specialists, and each scholar who has studied it has produced a different translation. Nevertheless, these differences have mostly to do with the nuances of the text; its grammar, on the other hand, appears to be relatively clear. I provide the text according to the reading of the *editio princeps*,[24] modified by Macdonald,[25] with my own translation and verse divisions of the Arabic.

Aramaic: *dkyr b-ṭb q{r}ʾ qdmʿbdt ʾlhʾ w-dkyr mn ktb*
          grmʾlhy br. tymʾlhy šlm l-qbl. ʿbdt[lhʾ]
Arabic: *p-ypʿl lʾ pdʾ w lʾʾtrʾ*
          p-kn hnʾ ybʿ-nʾ ʾl-mwtw lʾ ʾbʿ-h
          p-kn hnʾ ʾrd grḥw lʾ yrd-nʾ

19 Diem, "Geschichte der arabischen Orthographie III."

20 Negev, Naveh, and Shaked, "Obodas the God."

21 For the most recent discussions and further bibliography, see Kropp, "'Ayn 'Abada Inscription," and Macdonald's contribution to Fiema et al., "*Provincia Arabia*," pp. 399–402.

22 There have been various opinions on the purpose of this text, but I follow Macdonald's interpretation of it as a quotation from a Nabataean Arabic liturgy; see Macdonald, "Written Word," p. 20.

23 Negev, Naveh, and Shaked's "Obodas the God" (p. 60) suggests that the text must have been composed between 88 and 125 CE based on the other Nabataean inscriptions from the site of Obodah. Inscriptions from the Roman phase of occupation and building are entirely in Greek.

24 Negev, Naveh, and Shaked, "Obodas the God."

25 In Fiema et al., "*Provincia Arabia*," pp. 399–402.

Aramaic: *grmʾlhy ktb yd-h*

Aramaic: "May he who reads this aloud be remembered for good before ʿObodas the god and may he who wrote be remembered—May Garmallāhi son of Taymallāhi be secure in the presence of ʿObodat^{the god}"

Arabic: "May he act that there be neither ransom nor scar; so be it that death would seek us, may he not aid its seeking, and so be it that a wound would desire (a victim), let it not desire us!"

Aramaic: "Garmallāhi, the writing of his hand"

Before investigating wawation in this text, a philological discussion of the first line is in order, as its interpretation bears directly on the question of the case system. Scholars have differed considerably in the interpretation of this line's meaning. The original editors interpreted *pdʾ* as "gift, reward" and *ʾtrʾ* as "favor," and these meanings have been taken over relatively unproblematically by most editors.[26] But Kropp convincingly argues that these words must be understood in the light of the entire text—he regards the inscription as a "Gesätz" consisting of three cola, with the first line constituting a condensed form of what the following two lines explain. In this way, *pdʾ* would correspond to *ʾlmwtw*, "death," and *ʾtrʾ* to *grḥw*, "wound." Within this structure, a clearer sense of the meanings of *pdʾ* and *ʾtrʾ* emerges: Kropp suggests that *pdʾ* should be taken as "ransom" (from death) and *ʾtrʾ* as "scar" (from a wound). The first line, therefore, is open to two syntactic interpretations. One could regard it as containing two clauses, with the first consisting of a modal verb *ypʿl*, "may he act," and the second having two negative existential phrases: "may there be neither ransom nor scar." This interpretation better matches the following two lines, which clearly contain two clauses. The second interpretation regards the first line as a single clause: "may he cause neither ransom nor scar."

While the meaning of both interpretations is rather close, the choice between the two has important consequences for our understanding of Nabataean orthography. The first interpretation requires the final *alif* to represent a short vowel, since the negative existential takes a non-nunated noun, while the second interpretation permits either a long or short vowel. Of course, it is possible that the vowel was lengthened, *metri causa*, as the other two lines seem to terminate in a long vowel; but it is also possible that the rhyme was qualitative rather than quantitative. Whatever might have been the case, it is clear that the final *alif* of *ʾtrʾ* signals the accusative.

With these observations established, let us approach the issue of wawation. I observe that wawation is not a feature of all Arabic nouns—the word *ʾtrʾ* is syntactically in the accusative and terminates in an *alif*. The two nouns terminating in a final *w*, on the other hand, are syntactically in the nominative case. Moreover, in the case of *ʾlmwtw*, we must conclude that the final *w* signaled a short vowel, at least etymologically, while *grḥw* could be long if one assumes, as Nöldeke and Diem do, that the case vowel was lengthened following the loss of nunation.

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26 For a list of opinions, see Kropp, "ʿAyn ʿAbada Inscription," n. 20.

This short text permits the investigation of the phonological system of Nabataean Arabic from a new perspective. While a case can be made for the *plene* writing of short *u, not all etymologically short vowels were written. Three words that would terminate in a vowel, depending on their Arabic interpretation, lack any representation of it: *ypʿl*, *kn*, and *ʾrd*.[27] The first word, *ypʿl* (CAr *yafʿal[u]*), can easily be regarded as a short prefix-conjugation (apocopate, jussive); indeed, a modal reading would suit its syntactic context, and so no connection with *yafʿalu* is required. While *kn* is usually taken as *kāna*,[28] the imperative *kun*[29] and even the presentative particle *kin*[30] are likely possibilities. The only one of these three that truly requires the non-notation of the final vowel is *ʾrd*, "he desired." Context strongly favors its interpretation as a suffix conjugated form, the C-stem of the root √*rwd*.[31] Thus the expected spelling would be *ʾrdʾ* if it truly reflected an underlying *ʾarāda*. The absence of the final *ʾ* can imply two things about the historical phonology of Nabataean Arabic:

1. With only one example, it is certainly possible that the loss of final short vowels was conditioned. Final /a/ could have been deleted following a stressed *á*, so *ʾaráda* > *ʾarád*, while other final short vowels remained intact and were written *plene.*
2. It is also possible that all final vowels not protected by nunation were lost, as suggested by Blau; a parallel is found in the history of Akkadian.[32]

Thus we would have the following paradigm:

	Pre-apocope	Post-apocope	Loss of nunation
3ms suffix conjugation	*ʾarāda*	*ʾarād*	*ʾarād*
Indef. triptote	*gurḥun*	*gurḥun*	*gurḥu*
Indef. triptote	*ʾaṯaran*	*ʾaṯaran*	*ʾaṯara*
Indef. diptote	*ʾabgaru*	*ʾabgar*	*ʾabgar*

This formulation, however, cannot explain the presence of case vowels on definite nouns—for example, *ʾlmwtw* < **ʾal-mawtu* and *lhy* < **ʾallāhi*. While Diem's idea that the

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27 See Kropp, "ʿAyn ʿAbada Inscription," n. 29, on the various readings and interpretations of this word. Structurally, it would seem that *yrd* of the second hemistich would have to be of the same root, as in the previous line. In my opinion, this requirement argues against Bellamy's interpretation (in "Arabic Verses") of the word as *ʾadāda*, "to fester," and the second verb as *yurdī*, from *rdy*, "to destroy."

28 Bellamy, "Arabic Verses."

29 Kropp, "ʿAyn ʿAbada Inscription."

30 Noja, "Über die älteste arabische Inschrift."

31 Bellamy's ("Arabic Verses") reading as *ʾdd* and Kropp's ("ʿAyn ʿAbada Inscription") interpretation of the second verb of this line as *ydd* are also possibilities.

32 Huehnergard, "Proto-Semitic and Akkadian," pp. 7–8, n. 21, makes a convincing case for the loss of short *u and *a when not protected by mimation, thereby explaining the loss of the final /a/ on the 3ms predicative adjective and *a and *u on construct nouns.

case endings were lengthened following the loss of nunation and subsequently transferred to definite nouns remains possible, it is challenged by the fact that the phonetic correlate of wawation in Greek transcription was [o], the normal reflex of short *u. This fact argues that the reflex of wawation was a short vowel; in other words, the case endings were never lengthened. This quibble is certainly a minor one, but one that I believe is important enough to motivate us to consider an alternative solution. I follow Blau's view that final short vowels were lost *before* nunation; this sequence would have eliminated the final vowels on diptotes, the /a/ of the 3ms suffix conjugation, etc. Following this stage, we can posit that nunation was lost, thereby producing a new set of final vowels; nunation seems already to have been lost by the early first millennium BCE in the northern dialects of Old Arabic.[33] This loss gave rise to two classes of nouns: one that inflected for case through final short vowels, and a caseless class stemming from original diptotes.

	Original diptote →	Loss of final vowels	Original triptote →	Loss of nunation
Nominative	ʔabgaru	ʔabgar	ʕamrun	ʕamru
Genitive	ʔabgara	ʔabgar	ʕamrin	ʕamri
Accusative	ʔabgara	ʔabgar	ʕamran	ʕamra

Now, rather than seeing a contrast between definite, non-nunated nouns and undefined nunated nouns at this early stage, I would argue that the above developments took place before the innovation of the definite article in Nabataean Arabic. As I have suggested previously,[34] the definite article cannot be reconstructed for Proto-Arabic, as several early forms of the language do not attest it.[35] If we posit that the article, in the Nabataean case ʾal, entered the language at this point in its developmental history, then we can explain why short vowels are noted on definite forms, ʾlmwtw, ʾlbʿly, while they are absent on diptotes, ʾbgr, and on the 3ms verb ʾrd.

Thus, in the earliest Nabataean period I would reconstruct the case system as follows.[36]

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33 This phenomenon is made clear by the Biyār inscription, published originally by Hayajneh, Ababneh, and Khraysheh, "Die Götter von Ammon, Moab und Edom." While undated, its contents suggest an early first millennium BCE provenance, as does the fact that it is accompanied by a Canaanite inscription. The final word of the inscription, most likely *mdws¹t*, "destruction," would be expected to carry nunation if the feature was distributed as in Classical Arabic.

34 Al-Jallad, "What Is ANA?"

35 The Old Arabic dialect continuum of the southern Levant attests four forms of the article: *h*, ʾ, *ʾl-*, and zero. These forms are roughly contemporary in absolute terms, although zero marking is the linguistically older form; see Al-Jallad, *Outline*, p. 17.

36 The values /e/ for *i and /o/ for *u come from Greek transcriptions of Nabataean names; it seems that the high vowels were realized lower in the Nabataean dialect (Al-Jallad, "Graeco-Arabica I").

	Indef. triptote	Def. triptote	ʾafʿal diptote	Fem. diptote
Nominative	ʕamro	**al-mawto**	ʔabgar	śakīlat
Genitive	ʕamre	**al-mawte**	ʔabgar	śakīlat
Accusative	ʕamra	**al-mawta**	ʔabgar	śakīlat

Since most Nabataean Arabic words appear in an Aramaic context, the only case visible is the citation form—the nominative—hence the prevalence of *w* on personal names of Arabic extraction but the absence of any ending on diptotes.

THE BREAKDOWN OF THE CASE SYSTEM

The Nabataean case system as reconstructed from the personal names and the ʿEn ʿAvdat inscription eventually broke down, as can be observed in the next Arabic text written in the Nabataean script: JSNab 17 (267 CE).[37] Unlike most of the Nabataean inscriptions at Ḥegrā, this one, composed nearly two centuries after the last of the Classical Nabataean tomb inscriptions, is written in the Arabic language and restricts Aramaic to fixed formulaic contexts. All Arabic triptotes terminate in *w* regardless of their syntactic position or whether they are defined.

JSNab 17

*dnh **qbrw** ṣn-h **kʕbw** br*
ḥrtt l-rqwš. brt
***ʕbd mnwtw** ʾm-h w hy*
*hlkt fy ʾ**l-ḥgrw***
šnt mʾh w štyn
w-tryn b-yrḥ tmwz w lʕn
*mry ʕlmʾ mn yšnʾ ʾ**l-qbrw***
d[ʾ] w- mn yftḥ-h ḥšy w
wld-h w-lʕn mn yqbr w {y}ʕly mn-h

Translation: "This is a grave that Kaʕbo son of Ḥāreṭat constructed for Raqōś daughter of ʕabd-manōto, his mother, and she perished in ʔal-Ḥegro year one hundred and sixty two in the month of Tammūz. May the Lord of the Eternity curse anyone who desecrates this grave and anyone who would open it, with the exception of his children, and may he curse anyone who would bury or remove from it (a body)."

Unlike the ʿEn ʿAvdat inscription, this text, likely composed some centuries later, does not show any nominal inflection. Arabic triptotes terminate in *w* despite their syntactic position: *ʾl-ḥgrw* occurs in the genitive, while *ʾl-qbrw* is in the nominative position. The absence of wawation from the diptotes (*rqwš* = CAr. raqāši; *ḥrtt* = CAr. ḥāriṭatu) proves

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37 For a brief discussion of this text and further bibliography, see Macdonald's contribution to Fiema et al., "*Provincia Arabia*," pp. 402–5.

that the final *w* is not simply an orthographic device applied to Arabic words. I would, therefore, argue that this stage of Arabic is comparable to the modern Tihāmah dialects, which have not lost the final case vowel altogether, like other forms of Arabic, but have instead neutralized the inflectional category.

Another inscription from this period is the stela of Phrw son of Šly, the tutor of Gaḏīmat, king of Tanūḫ (270 CE). Like JSNab 17, this text exhibits a mixed usage of wawation.

> **LPNab 41 (=** *CIS* **II 192)**[38]
>
> *dnh npšw phrw*
> *br šly rbw gdymt*
> *mlk tnwḥ*
>
> Translation: "This is the funerary monument of Pehro son of Solay tutor of Gaḏīmat king of Tanūḫ."

Again like JSNab 17, the diptotes *šly*, *gdmyt*, and *tnwḥ* lack wawation. Curiously, however, wawation is present on triptotic forms in construct, *npšw*.[39] The interpretation of this practice is dependent on our assumptions regarding which language the author was attempting to write. The short inscription contains only one diagnostic linguistic feature, namely, the Aramaic demonstrative *dnh*.[40] Given that JSNab17 begins this way as well, it cannot inform a judgment about the language of the rest of the inscription. I would, nevertheless, suggest that the author intended to compose the text in Aramaic; and in so doing, he used the citation form of Arabic nouns even when they were in construct. In support of this view is the phrase *mlk tnwḥ*; the author clearly conceived of *mlk*, "king," as an Aramaic word, thus explaining the absence of wawation. Interestingly, the word *npš* was regarded as Arabic, thus perhaps attesting to the long presence of this noun in the language; *nfs*[1] is common in the Safaitic inscriptions.[41]

If one wished to maintain an Arabic reading of this text, then one could argue that the present inscription reflects a more advanced situation than that of JSNab17, where wawation has spread even to construct forms. In my opinion, however, this case seems highly unlikely, since the basic distinction between construct and nonconstruct forms is maintained minimally in the feminine noun, *at* versus *ah*, so there would be nothing to motivate leveling of this sort. It is impossible to say whether the Arabic dialect behind this text reached the stage of JSNab17, in which the nominative case was generalized for all situations, since the nominative was the citation form for Arabic terms in an Aramaic linguistic setting.

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38 Littmann, *Nabataean Inscriptions*.

39 Wawation was alleged to occur on a similar word in the *editio princeps* of the Mleiha bronze plaque inscription (Teixidor, "Inscription araméenne"), namely, *ʾl-npstw*. Puech ("Inscriptions araméennes"), however, has convincingly reread this inscription by showing that this interpretation was a misreading and that the word should be read instead as *npst*, without the article or wawation.

40 While *br* is also Aramaic, it continued to be used in sixth-century CE Arabic script inscriptions and even occasionally in the early Islamic period; and it seems to have been incorporated into the early Arabic writing traditions as an ideogram such that it was no longer conceived of as Aramaic.

41 Al-Jallad, *Outline*, p. 330.

EXPLAINING NAMES SUCH AS GARMABBAʿLEYO AND ʾABGARO

Following the loss of the case system and the generalization of the vowel nominative /o/ < *u for all situations, traditional names that originally carried the genitive ending could no longer be parsed. Since their pronunciation was fixed, this situation may have motivated some speakers to spread the nominal ending /o/ to them as well, thereby creating hybrid names such as *grmʾbʿlyw*[42] [garm ab-baʕleyo]. The same phenomenon may explain the rare appearance of wawation on diptotes, concentrated in the Negev and the Sinai, *ʾbgrw*[43] [ʔabgaro].

THE USE OF WAWATION AS AN ORTHOGRAPHIC DEVICE?

The occasional transcription of Nabataean names into Safaitic and Hismaic suggests that some may have begun to conceive of wawation as an orthographic device:[44] for example, *ʿmrw* (KRS 127), *qymw* in an unpublished inscription, and *ʿkrw* (TIJ 318).[45] Hismaic and Safaitic orthography does not make use of *matres lectionis*, so the presence of a final *w* in these examples can only be an imitation of Nabataean spellings. That the above names normally occur in Safaitic and Hismaic orthography without final *waw*'s could have led to the conclusion that in Nabataean one adds a final *w* when writing names of certain classes.

The restriction of wawation to personal and group names is indeed encountered in the next dated Arabic text written in the Nabataean script, the Namārah inscription (328 CE). The text is familiar to most, so I will not reproduce it in its entirety.[46] Unlike in JSNab 17, wawation is not used on common nouns but instead is restricted to triptotic group names, regardless of their syntactic position.

Triptotic common nouns	Triptotic names	Diptotic names	Compound
ʾl-šʿwb, "the settled people"	*ʿmrw*	*ngrn*	*mrʾlqyš*
ʾl-ʿrb, "the Arabs"	*nzrw*	*ʾl-ʾsdyn*	
ʾl-tg, "the diadem"	*mdḫgw*		
rtg, "gates (construct)"	*šmrw*		
mlk, "king (construct)"	*mʿdw*		

The absence of nunation from *mlk*, "a king," in the phrase *w lm yblʿ mlk mblʿ-h* /wa lam yabloġmalekmablaġ-oh/ prevents us from positing that *w* was placed on all undefined triptotic nouns. Its absence from *ngrn* /nagrān/ and *mrʾlqyš* further proves that it was

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42 Negev, *Personal Names*, p. 19, °249.

43 Ibid., p. 9, °6.

44 See the excellent discussion in Norris, "ANA from Dūmat Al-Jandal."

45 Stokes, "Thamudic Inscription from Jordan," p. 37.

46 See Macdonald's commentary in Fiema et al., "*Provincia Arabia*."

exclusively the property of triptotic, undefined anthroponyms and group names. To explain this phenomenon, we can venture two scenarios based on whether the *w* signified an orthographic practice or a phonetic reality:

1. Wawation was purely a scribal convention—its distribution reflects a learned tradition.
2. Wawation was a phonetic feature of the names on which it appears. The survival of the final /u/ only on personal names may speak to the traditional and archaic nature of this class of nouns.

To maintain the first scenario, we must posit that scribes learned in the process of their training not to put wawation on certain personal names—names terminating in *at/ah* and *ān*, compound names with a defined second member, and names belonging to certain noun patterns, such as CuCaC, *gušam* = *gšm*—a rather elaborate practice with no practical value.

The second solution would have us assume that the linguistic situation in the Namārah inscription reflects a more developed stage of that found in JSNab 17. Final vowels in general have been lost, but the generalized /u/ was maintained on personal and group names as they retained a more conservative pronunciation. The phonetic realization of wawation is supported by the spelling of *ʿmrw* across different scripts. In the nearly contemporary Sassanian Paikuli inscription,[47] *ʿmrw* is spelled *ʾmrw*. It would be too much to claim that this spelling was an imitation of Nabataean Aramaic orthography. Even as late as the seventh century, the same name is transcribed in Greek as Αμβρου /ʕamru/, where it is clear that the word terminated in a true vowel. Thus it would seem that the final *w* at least sometimes had a phonetic correlate even when wawation was not active on common nouns.

The Namārah inscription does not allow us to choose definitively between these two options. What we can say is that common nouns and personal names behave differently, unlike what we see in JSNab17, LPNab 41, or the ʿEn ʿAvdat inscription.

NABATAEO-ARABIC INSCRIPTIONS

The great scholar of Nabataean epigraphy Laïla Nehmé has established the form of the Nabataean script between the fourth and fifth centuries CE as a transitional stage between Nabataean and Arabic, termed Nabataeo-Arabic. This period witnessed the spread of the Nabataean script beyond the confines of the Nabataean kingdom. As Nehmé convincingly proposed, the writing tradition was taken over by the chancelleries of the tribal kings of North Arabia and so began to experience some change. It is in these centuries that we may begin to understand the transformation of wawation into an orthographic device, leading ultimately to its demise. Let us begin with the Nabataeo-Arabic inscription from Sakākah, dated to 428 CE. The reading and interpretation follow Nehmé.[48]

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47 End of the third century CE; see Skjærvø and Humbach, *Inscription of Paikuli*.

48 Nehmé, "Development of the Nabataean Script."

S1

dkyrw mḥrbw w ʾṣḥb-h

ʾl-ʿšrh w ʿnymw w [w]ʾlw w ḥrtw w {k}ḥšw

bṭbw mḥrbw br ʿwydʾlt ktb yd-h ywm ʿšrh

w tmnh b-ʾyr šnt 2 X 100 + 100 + 20 + 3 {ʾ}{d}{.}{ḥg}-

ʾl-ḥyrh

Translation: "May Mḥrb-W and his ten companions and ʿnym-W and Wʾl-W and Ḥrṭ-W and Kḥš-W be remembered-W for good-W. Mḥrb-W son of ʿwydʾlt, the writing of his hand, day 18 of Iyyār the year 323."

The use of wawation in this text is inconsistent. It occurs on most of the personal names but is lacking on the compound *ʿwydʾlt*, thereby matching the Namārah practice. But the author has added it to two Aramaic terms, *dkyr*, "be remembered," and *b-ṭb*, "well." This addition strongly suggests that *w* did not have a phonetic correlate, and the author misunderstood its usage. The transitional inscription UJadh 109 (455–456 CE) attests a different linguistic system from that of JSNab 17—one comparable to the Namārah inscription.[49]

UJadh 109

bly dkyr phmw br

ʿbydw šlm šnt 2x100

+100+20+20+10 ʾdḥlw

ʿmrw

ʾl-mlk

Translation: "Yea, may Phm-W son of ʿbyd-W be remembered [and] may he be secure, year 350 [when] they installed ʿmr-W the king."

Wawation is used on triptotic personal names but is missing from the Arabic word *ʾlmlk*, "the king." That wawation does not inflect for case is proven by the Arabic phrase *ʾdḥlw ʿmrw ʾl-mlk*, which in older Nabataean Arabic would have been /ʔadḫalū ʕamra ʔal-mal(i)ka/, "(when) they installed ʿamr-W the king," and according to the orthography of the ʿEn ʿAvdat inscription *ʿmrw* would have been spelled *ʿmrʾ*.

Nehmé, in her habilitation thesis,[50] conducted a comprehensive study of the Nabataeo-Arabic inscriptions from northwest Arabia (Darb al-Bakrah). Her index of personal names shows a distribution of wawation rather comparable to the Classical Nabataean texts.

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49 I follow the reading and translation of Nehmé, "Development of the Nabataean Script," pp. 76–77, and Macdonald in his contribution to Fiema et al., "*Provincia Arabia*," pp. 419–20.

50 Nehmé, *Epigraphy on the Edges*.

ḤIMĀ ARABIC-SCRIPT INSCRIPTIONS

In 2014, the Saudi-French mission to Nagrān[51] discovered eleven texts in the fully developed Arabic script and dating to the late fifth to early sixth century. Most of these texts consist only of personal names and exhibit the expected distribution of wawation. The two dated inscriptions suffice to illustrate; I follow Robin's readings and interpretations.

Ḥimā Sud PalAr 1

twbn mlkw

b-yrḥ brk

št 3 × 100

20 + 20 + 20 + 4

Translation: "Twbn (son of) Mlk-W, in the month of Brk, year 3 × 100 + 20 + 20 +20 + 4 (= 470 CE)"

Ḥimā-al-Musammāt PalAr 1

[. . .](s)w br Ḫdšw

5 + 1 + 1 + 1

[. . .](ʾ)l-mʾtmr snt 4 × 100

Translation: "[Qys-w] son of Ḫdš-W, during *(ʾ)l-mʾtmr* of year 4 × 100 + 5 + 1 + 1 + 1 (= 513 CE)"

In both of these cases, wawation is a property of triptotic names, *mlkw* and *ḫdšw*, and possibly in *qysw* if Robin's reconstruction is correct. It is not applied to the month names *brk* or *ʾl-mʾtmr*, thus making the system similar to that in UJadh 109 and the Namārah inscription. The origins of these writers are unclear, but their use of the era of Provincia Arabia could suggest that they were travelers from the north. The other undated inscriptions attest a similar distribution of wawation: it is absent from Jewish names *ʾsḥq*,[52] *ʾly*,[53] and *mwsy*[54] and from the diptotes *twbn* and *ʿmr*.[55]

LATE NABATAEO-ARABIC: HYPOTHESIS

By the fourth century CE, the Nabataean Aramaic writing system had come to express varieties of Arabic other than the dialect of the core Nabataean population, the one attested in ʿEn ʿAvdat and then JSNab 17. The Namārah inscription suggests that the Arabs of

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51 Robin, al-Ghabbān, and al-Saʿīd, "Inscriptions antiques de Najrān"; Robin, "Kalender."

52 Robin, al-Ghabbān, and al-Saʿīd, "Inscriptions antiques de Najrān," Ḥimā-Sud PalAr 2:1093.

53 Ibid., Ḥimā-Sud PalAr 5:1096.

54 Ibid., Ḥimā-Sud PalAr 8:1099.

55 Ibid., Ḥimā-Sud PalAr 2. Robin prefers the identification of this name as *ʿāmir* because *ʿumar* is rather rare before Islam. *ʿāmir*, however, would be triptotic, and one would expect the appearance of wawation, while *ʿmr* is a diptote. The absence of wawation from this word, therefore, supports its interpretation as *ʿumar*. Its relative rareness in the Islamic genealogies does not disqualify the name from appearing here.

the cis- and trans-Euphratean region of central and southern Iraq and the eastern Syro-Arabian desert had adopted the script but applied it to a local form of Arabic.[56] The irregularities encountered in S1 (Sakāka) also suggest the same. The transformation of wawation from a true marker of nominal inflection to the various, inconsistent usages found in the later texts must be understood within the context of the spread of the Nabataean writing tradition. As mentioned above, L. Nehmé suggests that the Nabataean script continued to develop in the chancelleries of the tribal kings of North Arabia in the period between the third and fifth centuries CE.[57] In the earliest periods, these kings must have sent their scribes to a scribal center, likely in the Nabataean heartland, to learn writing. There they would have learned the Aramaic idiom associated with the Nabataean script, as the transitional inscriptions all reveal that Aramaic was still a large component of the writing tradition; even as late as the fifth century, a significant Aramaic component is encountered (e.g., Ḥimā Sud PalAr 1). In the context of writing Aramaic, scribes would have learned that one writes Arabic personal and group names with a final *w*, and perhaps pronounces them with a final u/o, unless they belong to a select group of noun patterns, such as *ʾafʿal, fuʿal, faʿlān*, and those terminating with *at/ah*, that is, historic diptotes. Of course, these *wāw*'s were simply part of the late Nabataean Arabic nominal system, as revealed in JSNab 17, but they would have appeared to be the exclusive property of personal names in the context of writing Aramaic, hence their absence from other classes of Arabic words—especially when the apprentice scribe spoke a dialect of Arabic lacking wawation. Shared names, such as *muḥārib* and *mālik*, could have led to the conclusion that wawation was a purely orthographic device not to be pronounced, thus resulting in some confusion as to its function.

Nabataean orthography	Nabataean Arabic	Other North Arabian Arabic
mḥrbw	*moḥārebo*	*muḥārib*
mlkw	*māleko*	*mālik*

If we take such a situation as a starting point, then it becomes easy to understand how the author of S1 overgeneralized and added the *w* to other words in the Nabataean text that he perhaps pronounced differently in his dialect of Arabic—words such as *dkyrw*, which he may have pronounced as *maḏkūr*, and *bṭbw*, which he may have read as *bi-ḫayr*.[58] In a way, the use of wawation in this inscription is comparable to the overapplication of mimation in the pseudo-Sabaic inscriptions of Ethiopia.

The lack of standardization, and indeed the fact that all our surviving documents in the Nabataeo-Arabic script are rock graffiti, certainly allows for a degree of variation. Despite the strong arguments for the transformation of wawation into an orthographic device, we cannot conclude that it was never pronounced. The spelling of the name عمرو survives into

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56 The identification of the king *mrʾlqyš* son of *ʿmrw* and his territory has been the subject of debate among scholars; for an excellent discussion and innovative hypothesis, see Zwettler, "Imraʾalqays."

57 Nehmé, *Epigraphy on the Edges*, p. 41.

58 I thank Laïla Nehmé for suggesting the possibility that these forms were Aramaeograms.

the Islamic period, and despite later grammarians' explaining the final *waw* as a device to avoid confusion with the name ʿ*umar*, transcriptions from the first Islamic century in Greek confirm that it was pronounced ʿ*amru* = Αμβρου.[59] This ending is isolated to the name ʿ*amr* and indeed has no basis in the dialect of the first century documents, Classical Arabic, or the Qurʾānic language. We must, then, conclude that the name ʿ*amru* finds its source in the ancient Nabataean dialect, even though its cognate name ʿ*amrun* must have existed and been used at the same time. In this light, it is possible that some wawated names were pronounced as they were written, perhaps because they were drawn from the Nabataean dialect.

To sum up this complicated situation, I observe that by the fifth century the Nabataean Aramaic script was employed to write what must have been various dialects of Arabic across North Arabia. With it spread a peculiarity of the Nabataean Arabic dialect—triptotic nouns terminated in *w*. This peculiarity applied mainly to names, as the normal language of Nabataean documents was Aramaic and names, therefore, constituted the only class of Arabic nouns in the tradition. In cases when the name was drawn from the Nabataean dialect, this *w* was pronounced, while in names drawn from local varieties of Arabic it would have acted purely as an orthographic device, thus leading to confusion as to its function.

THE SIXTH CENTURY: WAWATION IN THE ARABIC SCRIPT

By the sixth century CE, the Nabataeo-Arabic script had reached the form that scholars have defined as the Arabic script. Only a handful of inscriptions in this script have so far been discovered. Here we will discuss two monumental inscriptions and three graffiti. These inscriptions have shed most of their Aramaic, with the word for son, *br*, constituting the last vestige of the script's original language. The two monumental texts read as follows.

> **Zebed** (512 CE)[60]
>
> *[d]{k}rʾl-ʾlh srgw br ʾmt-mnfw w hnyʾ br mrʾlqys* [Roundel] *w srgw br sʿdw w syrw w s{.}ygw*
>
> Translation: "May God be mindful of Srg-W son of ʾmt-mnf-W and Hnyʾ son of mrʾlqys and Srg-W son of Sʿd-W and Syr-W and S{.}yg-W"

The use of wawation here is inconsistent. It occurs on the compound ʾ*mt-mnfw* but not on *mrʾlqys*; the triptotes have it—except for *hnyʾ*, which must be either [honayʔ] or [hanīʔ], both of which should be triptotic. Its presence on ʾ*mt-mnfw* may be explained by the fact that *mnf* = the idol Manāf itself is triptotic, but its omission from *hnʾ* is unexpected. It is possible that wawation did not have a phonetic correlate at this point and that the author had mistakenly considered the name *hnyʾ* to belong to the non-wawated class of names.

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59 Al-Jallad, "Arabic of the Islamic Conquests," §4.7.

60 The reading and interpretation follow Macdonald in Fiema et al., "*Provincia Arabia*."

Ḥarrān (568 CE)[61]

ʾnʾ srḥyl br ẓlmw bnyt dʾ ʾl mrṭwl

snt 4 × 100 + 20 + 20 + 20 + 3 bʿdm{f/q}{s/š}{d,ḏ,k}

{ḫ/ḥ}{y/b/t/ṯ/n}{y/b/t/ṯ/n}r

{b/n}{ʿ/ġ}m

Translation: "I, Sarāḫʾel son of Ẓālem, built this martyrion in the year 463."

The Ḥarrān inscription is the latest inscription in pre-Islamic Arabic script, and it shows basically the same system of wawation as the Nabataeo-Arabic inscriptions: it is applied to the triptote name *ẓlm* but omitted from the theophoric name containing the element *ʾel*.

Jabal Says (528 CE)[62]

ʾnh rqym br mʿrf ʾl-ʾwsy

ʾrsl-ny ʾl-ḥrṯ ʾl-mlk ʿly

ʾsys mslḥh snt

4 × 100 + 20 + 1 + 1 + 1

Translation: "I am Rqym son of Mʿrf the Awsite; the king Al-Ḥārith sent me to ʾsys, as a frontier guard, in the year 423."

This is the earliest inscription in which there is no evidence for wawation. The fact that it is an unformulaic graffito, rather than monumental or the fixed graffiti formula *dkyr/dkr* + PN, may suggest that it more closely reflects the contemporary book hand. The redundant addition of the *wāw* to personal names, a vestige of the ancient Nabataean dialect of Arabic, was finally dispensed with in favor of a writing system that more closely reflected the spoken/read Arabic. The fact that this inscription is earlier than the Ḥarrān inscription speaks to the simultaneous existence of at least two Arabic scribal traditions or registers: one in which the practice of wawation was maintained, and a more advanced form in which it was eliminated. This suggestion accords with Healey's observation regarding the Classical Nabataean inscriptions; based on the paleography of the Nabataean papyri, he concludes that stone-carved inscriptions reflect a conservative tradition and that many of the progressive letter-shapes encountered in the transitional period had already appeared in the book hand.[63] It is possible that since Nabataean and Nabataeo-Arabic inscriptions were carved on stone, they imitated the lapidary style; therefore, changes in the book hand took much longer to appear on rock, even in the seemingly informal context of a graffito.

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61 The reading and interpretation follow Macdonald in Fiema et al., "*Provincia Arabia.*" I have preferred to leave the section after *bʿd* untranslated. The translation given by Enno Littmann, "after the expedition to Khaybar by a year," is widely adopted but is nevertheless a strange way of dating that finds no parallels in the other Arabic or Nabataeo-Arabic inscriptions. Robin ("La réforme") suggests a translation much closer to the Greek, but Macdonald (in Fiema et al., "*Provincia Arabia,*" n. 210) has rejected this suggestion as paleographically impossible.

62 The reading and interpretation follow Macdonald in Fiema et al., "*Provincia Arabia.*"

63 Healey, "Nabataean Contribution," p. 95.

THE LAST *WĀW*

While the writing of the name ʿAmr, spelled *ʿmrw,* continues today, the latest example of wawation applied to a non-*ʿmrw* personal name occurs in the Islamic period. The scribe of PERF 558 (Grohmann[64]), dated to 643 CE, spells his name as *ʾbn ḥdydw* [ʔibn ḥadīd-W] or [ʔibn ḥudayd-W]. Wawation is, however, absent from the Arabic text of the inscription, thus suggesting that it was a fossilized relic of the scribe's name. It is also possible that the scribe was trained in a writing tradition that employed wawation but then employed the orthography of Medina—lacking wawation—in his capacity as an imperial scribe. The use of wawation in his signature could reflect a sentimental attachment to a pre-Islamic tradition, or perhaps a frozen spelling.

Like the Jabal Says inscription, the writing school that gave the Qurʾān its textual form and that of the papyri from the first Islamic century lack wawation as an orthographic feature. One could carefully suggest that the Jabal Says inscription reflected the orthography of Ghassanid chancellery, which had dispensed with most of its Nabataeisms, and it is this writing tradition that was likely used in the Ḥigāzī oases, such as Yathrib/Medina. More than a century separates the earliest Islamic Arabic documents and the Jabal Says inscription—more than enough time to replace Aramaic *bar* with Arabic *ʾbn* and to innovate the *tāʾ marbutah* in construct forms, an orthographic convention unique to the written Arabic of the seventh century and later. At the same time, the diversity we have discussed rules out a unified Arabic script and orthography in the pre-Islamic period. Different chancelleries may have had different letter-shapes and orthographic conventions, all of which were unified following the language reforms at the end of the seventh century CE.

Let us conclude with a short history of wawation in Arabic.

1. Wawation begins as a marker of the nominative case, first attested in the ninth century BCE. The case vowel does not inflect when Arabic anthroponyms/words are used in an Aramaic linguistic context.
2. By the third century CE, the case system of Nabataean Arabic collapsed, and the nominative ending was generalized to all triptotes.
3. Between the third and fifth centuries CE, the Nabataean writing tradition spread to speakers of non-Nabataean dialects of Arabic that did not have a generalized nominative case on triptotic substantives. The device was therefore reanalyzed as an orthographic property of triptotic personal names.
4. By the sixth century, at least one writing school dispensed with the feature completely, as reflected in the Jabal Says inscription and ultimately the Qurʾān and standard Islamic Arabic orthography.
5. The administrative register of the Umayyads employed the "wawationless" school. Wawation was restricted to a single personal name, which was probably drawn from a Nabataean source and pronounced as an actual final /u/. The last occurrence of the feature came in 643 CE and may reflect a scribe trained in an alternative writing school that did not survive long after the conquests.

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64 Grohmann, "Allgemeine Einführung."

5   ʿ*Arabī* and *aʿjamī* in the Qurʾān

The Language of Revelation in Muḥammad's Ḥijāz[1]

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EVEN A BRIEF PERUSAL OF the Qurʾān will show that writing is a major theme of this sacred text. The main verb connected with writing, *kataba*, occurs fifty-eight times, and related verbs, such as *saṭara* and *khaṭṭa*, feature seven times and one time respectively. Furthermore, we encounter a number of terms for writing materials (parchment/*qirṭās*, 2×), writing implements (pen/*qalam*, 4×) and the products of writing (book/*kitāb*, 261×, and folios/*ṣuḥuf*, 8×). Muḥammad's audience were, then, familiar with writing, and they were encouraged to use it for recording contracts, such as for marriage,[2] and for debts, as we see in Q. 2:282: "O you who believe, when you contract a debt for a specified term, write it down. And let a scribe write (it) between you in justice. Let no scribe refuse to write as God has taught him." Unfortunately for us no documents have as yet been discovered in the Ḥijāz from Muḥammad's lifetime or from the century before it. We have, therefore, no direct evidence outside the Qurʾān for what languages and scripts were utilized by Muḥammad and his audience to conduct their commercial and religious affairs.

Yet the Qurʾān does at least offer us some clues. In particular, it employs two terms to refer to what appear to be two distinct languages or two types/forms of language: ʿ*arabī* and *aʿjamī*. The former is always used in a positive sense:

These are the verses of the Scripture[3] that makes clear; We sent it down as an ʿ*arabī* recitation[4] so that you might understand [Q. 12:1–2; cf. 20:113, 43:3];

[We made it] an unambiguous ʿ*arabī* recitation so that they might be God-fearing [Q. 39:27–28];

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1   This chapter was originally given as a paper at a conference in Chicago in May 2017, and a version of it was presented as an IQSA seminar in May 2020. I recently became aware of Claude Gilliot, "Mohammed's Exegetical Activity," which covers similar ground to this chapter, though from a different perspective and to a different end. See now also Ahmad al-Jallad, *The Damascus Psalm Fragment*, which includes a useful appendix by Ronny Vollandt on the context of Arabic renderings of Greek scripture.

2   Qurʾān 24:33: "If those [slaves] whom you possess seek a [marriage] contract, write one for them." For this interpretation see Crone, "Two Legal Problems," pp. 3–6.

3   *Al-kitāb* in the Qurʾān can refer to the heavenly archetype of all scripture or a specific revealed book.

4   Where "Qurʾān" is used indefinitely, I will translate it as "recitation"; cf. Gilliot, "Meccan Arabic Lectionary" (though I prefer not to use "lectionary," as it has strong Christian connotations).

> This [Qurʾān] is a book that confirms [the book of Moses] in the *ʿarabī* language [Q. 46:12; cf. 41:2–3].

Just as the archetype of the scripture that is kept by God is said by the Qurʾān to be "clarifying" (*mubīn*), so also the *ʿarabī* language is "clarifying" (Q. 26:195), "making clear" the message that it conveys. "We made it an *ʿarabī* recitation," the Qurʾān has God say, precisely "so that you may understand" (Q. 43:3). The term *aʿjamī*, by comparison, is always contrasted negatively with *ʿarabī*. Qurʾān 16:103 reports that people say that "a [mere] man is teaching him [Muḥammad], but the language of the one they allude to is *aʿjamī*, whereas this is an *ʿarabī* language that clarifies." The use of the *ʿarabī* tongue is said to be conducive to belief, whereas the use of *aʿjamī* has the opposite effect: "If We had sent it [Our revelation] down to one of the *aʿjamī* people/speakers and he [that *aʿjamī* person/speaker] had recited it to them [in the *aʿjamī* language], they would not have believed in it" (Q. 26:198–99).

This frequent emphasis on the *ʿarabī* language of the Qurʾān and its clarity and the pejorative tone toward the *aʿjamī* language suggest a polemical agenda. Presumably some in Muḥammad's audience were questioning whether *ʿarabī* was an appropriate language for a divine revelation; should not a language that had already conveyed scripture have been used, a language such as Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic? And it seems to me that it is this viewpoint that Muḥammad was attempting to refute. One of his arguments against it appears in Q. 14:4: "We never sent a messenger except [that he gave his message] in the language of his people." He is making the point, then, that God always imparted his message in the language of his target audience, presumably because it had a better chance of being clearly understood. That is why God chose, in the case of Muḥammad's people, to send his revelation to them in their language, namely, *ʿarabī*, so that Muḥammad "might warn the mother of towns and those around it" (Q. 42:7), that is, the populations in and around his place of residence. Muḥammad is aware that other divine messages were communicated in other languages, but they were not "the language of his people" and so could not readily be apprehended by them, thus lessening the effectiveness of the message.

WHAT IS *ʿARABĪ*?

What was the exact significance of the word *ʿarabī*, and why did Muḥammad need to stress the fact that the Qurʾān and its language were *ʿarabī*? Grammatically, *ʿarabī* is a *nisba* (an adjective expressing relationship) from the word *ʿarab*, the term for a particular people of the Middle East. But that only raises another question: *Who would have called themselves Arabs in the time of Muḥammad?* The term has been in use from the ninth century BCE until today, but over those many centuries it has of course meant different things to different people in different places at different times.[5] Since Muslim Qurʾān commentary only began in earnest in the first Abbasid century (750–850), it was inevitably influenced by the definition of "Arab" then current. The seventh-century conquests of the Ḥijāzis had placed them in control of many different peoples, many of them with a long and venerable

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5 Retsö, *Arabs*, gives an impressively thorough survey of the use of the term "Arab" from Assyrian to Umayyad times, but his conclusions are marred by his attempt to find a single meaning for it.

history, and this prompted the new leaders to redefine their own identity, in particular to claim the entire Arabian Peninsula as their homeland and all of its inhabitants, past and present, as belonging to the same ethnic group, the Arabs.[6] Closely accompanying this development was the emergence of a greater role for the Arabic language. It soon became the most important vehicle for the administrative, literary, and scientific expression of the new empire and an object of study and classification by an eager cadre of lexicographers and grammarians.

It is self-evident, then, that Arab/ʿarab and Arabic/ʿarabī could not have meant the same to Muḥammad as they meant to the Qurʾān exegetes active in the time of the Abbasid caliphs of Baghdad. This impossibility has been recently highlighted by a number of scholars, who, though they have different agendas,[7] all make the valid point that one should avoid associating Qurʾānic ʿarabī or the term from which it is derived—"Arab"—with the grander signification that the Abbasids attached to it, and with the even broader reach that it has acquired in modern times. But what did ʿarabī and ʿarab mean to Muḥammad?

Particularly relevant to this question is the annexation by the Roman Empire in 105–106 CE of the Nabataean kingdom, which ruled over most of modern Jordan and northwest Saudi Arabia. This annexation and the concomitant creation of the Roman province of Arabia initiated two developments in northwest Arabia that had far-reaching consequences. First, the term "Arab," which had been employed by Greco-Roman authors in a rather loose way to designate any and all residents of Arabia, became increasingly used to refer to settled residents of the new province of Arabia.[8] This change was in part driven by the declaration of universal citizenship by Emperor Caracalla in 212 CE, which meant that even those who lived in the remote Ḥijāz could legitimately call themselves imperial citizens in what was officially known as the "province of the Arabs" (araborum provincia).[9] Second, Nabataean Aramaic, no longer backed up by the authority of Nabataean kings, began to lose its status as the dominant written language in the southern part of the former Nabataean kingdom (the Ḥijāz and modern southern Jordan) and gradually ceded its place to Arabic.[10] The latter had already been a spoken language of the Nabataean kingdom, as we can discern from the presence of Arabic loanwords in Nabataean Aramaic texts from the

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6 This point is nicely illustrated by Webb, *Arabs*.

7 Retsö, *Arabs*, argues that the Arabs were a cultic, not an ethnic community; Donner, *Believers*, seeks to portray the rise of Islam as a purely religious movement with no ethnic/national connotations; Webb, *Arabs*, wants to say that Arab identity was a wholly Islamic phenomenon with no pre-Islamic roots.

8 E.g., Rufinus the Arab (*ho araps*) from Qanawāt, Imruʾ al-Qays king of the Arabs (*malik al-ʿarab*) from Nemara, John the Arab (*arabos*) from Jericho, and two soldiers from Pella "of the ethnos of the Arabs" (*apo khōrōn tou Arabōn ethnous*). All are cited in Hoyland, *In God's Path*, pp. 22–24, and "Arab Kings," pp. 379, 392–93. The use of the term ʿrb/ʾʿrb in Sabaic and Safaitic inscriptions in the late Roman period suggests that some transhumant pastoralists of Arabia and the Syrian desert applied it to themselves (see Robin, "La pénétration des arabes nomades," and al-Jallad, "ʿArab, ʾAʿrāb and Arabic").

9 Referred to thus in Emperor Justinian's *Novella* 102 (Hoyland, "Arab Kings," p. 392). It is likely that the Arabic term for this is *arḍ al-ʿarab*, which, as Webb notes (*Arabs*, p. 137), is used in "early layers of texts" to designate "Mecca and the wider al-Ḥijāz"; *arḍ* is used on early Islamic seals as the term for province.

10 Macdonald, "Ancient Arabia," pp. 19–21. For simplicity I will use only the term "Arabic" in this article, but the reader should note that it is difficult to be sure how diverse were the varieties of this pre-Islamic Arabic and how similar/different it was to Islamic-period Arabic(s).

southern territories,[11] but now it became also a written language. Initially it was inscribed in a variety of scripts.[12] Most popular in northwest Arabia for this purpose was the Nabataean Aramaic script (the earliest known example being from Hegra and dated to 268 CE),[13] which then gradually evolved over the period from about 270 to 470 CE[14] until by the late fifth century onward we begin to see Arabic inscriptions in what we would recognize as the Arabic script (Najrān, 470 CE; Zebed, 512; Jabal Says, 529; Dūmat al-Jandal, 549; Hira, ca. 560; see fig. 5.1).[15] There are also a number of texts that are undated but plausibly hail from the sixth century: one on the wall of a church at Umm al-Jimāl,[16] and a cluster found between Hegra (Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ) and Tabūk.[17] Then in 568–569, Arabic takes its place next to Greek, the imperial language, on the lintel of a church in the village of Ḥarrān, south of Damascus—the first use of Arabic in a bilingual text in a monumental setting, just a couple of years before Muḥammad's birth.[18]

So in the area of the Roman province of Arabia we have texts in which people self-define as "Arab" and texts in a language that is patently close to that of the Qurʾān; surely, then, this language is the one the Qurʾān intends when it refers to itself as an ʿarabī Qurʾān composed in the ʿarabī tongue. Webb worries that accepting this conclusion would imply that the Arabic language is the exclusive property of an "Arab ethnos." I agree with him that this linkage is an Islamic-period development, but I believe his concern is misplaced: there is no reason why those who called themselves "Arab" before Islam should not have spoken other languages, nor is there any reason why the ʿarabī language should not have been spoken by those who did not self-define as Arab. Yet there is no getting away from the fact that the late fifth- and sixth-century Arabic inscriptions discovered so far, though very short, are in the same language as the Qurʾān,[19] though possibly of a different dialect

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11 Nehmé, "Aramaic or Arabic," pp. 78–80.

12 Besides Nabataean Aramaic script, we find Arabic texts written in Greek letters (e.g., al-Jallad, *Damascus Psalm Fragment*, pp. 111–23) and in Hismaic and Safaitic script (Graf and Zwettler, "North Arabian," and al-Jallad, "What Is Ancient North Arabian"—see n. 20 below).

13 Macdonald, "Emergence of Arabic," pp. 399–409.

14 From these two centuries some 150 inscriptions have been discovered that exhibit these evolved letter-forms—what Laïla Nehmé ("Nabataean Script into Arabic" and "Between Nabataean and Arabic") has aptly termed Nabataeo-Arabic. She argues ("Arabic or Aramaic") that they are in the Arabic language but include some Nabataean Aramaic words that, by this time, had become somewhat fossilized and probably functioned as logograms; a likely example is the word *bar*, "son," which equates to Arabic *bin/ibn* but which is written *bar* even in the fully Arabic inscriptions of the fifth to sixth century.

15 Robin, "Inscriptions antiques," pp. 1087–89 (Najrān); Macdonald, "Emergence of Arabic," pp. 410–13 (Zebed and Jabal Says); Nehmé, "New Dated Inscriptions" (Dūmat al-Jandal); Robin, "Les Arabes," pp. 185–86 (Hira). The latter is known only from literary sources, but it is interesting that "God" is written as ʾl-ʾlh (assumed to be *al-ilah*), as in extant sixth-century inscriptions, rather than *Allah*.

16 Macdonald, "Emergence of Arabic," pp. 416–17; Nehmé, "New Dated Inscriptions," p. 131, reading the first line as ʾnh ʿbd ʾl-ʾlh ("I am ʿAbd al-Ilāh"); see also p. 66 above.

17 Farīq al-Ṣaḥrāʾ, "Nuqūsh ʿarabiyya."

18 Macdonald, "Emergence of Arabic," pp. 414–15.

19 Al-Jallad, "Ancient Levantine Arabic," pp. 129–30: "The language of the Qurʾān is similar in many ways to the epigraphy described above" (i.e., the pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions) and p. 384: "The striking correspondences between the QCT [Qurʾānic Consonantal Text] and the pre-Islamic epigraphy and [transliteration of Arabic terms in the] Greek papyri strongly support the idea that the consonantal text reflects the actual underlying language of its author(s) rather than the IA [Islamic Arabic] of the reading traditions."
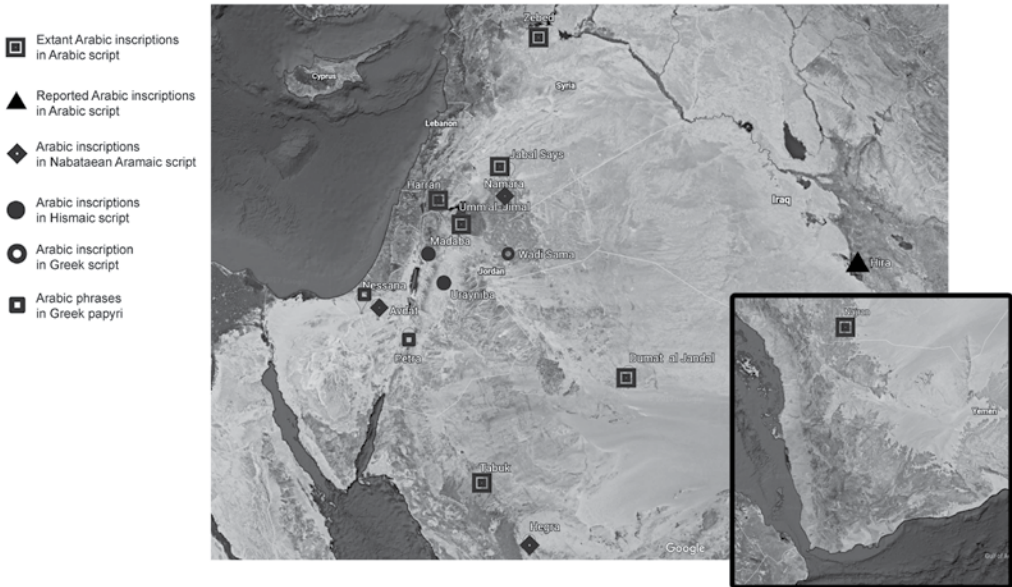
Figure 5.1. Map showing major occurrences of Arabic before Islam.

or register. This last point is worth emphasizing since scholars had been using a relatively narrow definition of pre-Islamic Arabic for a long time; but a more flexible diagnostic has recently been suggested, and if accepted, it would mean that we should think of Arabic as being very widespread, but manifest in a variety of dialects and registers.[20]

These Arabic inscriptions also have another connection with the Qurʾān, namely, they all appear to be written by monotheists,[21] specifically Christians, which is made explicit by the drawing of a cross (Najrān and Dūmat al-Jandal) and/or some tie to an Arab-Christian patron ("al-Ḥārith the king"[22] at Jabal Says) and/or a Christian building (Umm al-Jimāl, Ḥarrān, Zebed, Hira).[23] It is also true that all the sites of the pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions are in some way linked to Syriac Christianity. For example, a letter dated 570 CE has been preserved that is drafted in Syriac and signed by 137 abbots of the province of

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20 Driving this change of perspective are the studies of Ahmad al-Jallad. Note his recent observation that "Arabic cannot be defined by a single isogloss, the shape of the definite article. A more robust linguistic definition includes Safaitic, Hismaic, and some inscriptions in the Dadanitic script, at least, into the group of languages we must regard as Arabic" (al-Jallad, "What Is Ancient North Arabian," p. 30). If so, it would expand enormously both the number and diversity of extant pre-Islamic Arabic texts. Of course it would not mean that Muḥammad would necessarily have accepted all these texts as belonging to what he defined as ʿarabī. See now Al-Jallad, "Linguistic Landscape of pre-Islamic Arabia."

21 Some/all of the Nabataeo-Arabic inscriptions, which mostly only ask for the inscriber to be remembered, may have been authored by pagans, though there has been lively debate (initiated by Hawting, *Idolatry*) as to how alive paganism was in late antique Arabia.

22 Almost certainly to be identified with al-Ḥārith son of Jabala (d. 569), known to contemporary sources as the chief of a tribe allied to Rome and as a supporter of Christianity in Syria (Millar, "Arab Allies," pp. 210–13).

23 The inscription that two Muslim geographers say was engraved on a monastery in Hira also fulfills these last two criteria, the inscription being on a Christian building patronized by Lakhmid Arabs.

Arabia, mostly from southern Syria, where many of our pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions are found.[24] And there are various relations between the Christians of Najrān and the Syriac-speaking communities of northern Syria and Hira; in particular, some of the clerics of Najrān were trained in northern Syrian monasteries famed for their production of Syriac texts.[25] The relevance of this information is that it helps explain the very developed monotheist vocabulary and ideas of the Qurʾān: it emerged in a region that had for more than a century been exposed to Christianity, and very likely also to Judaism, though we have no epigraphic evidence for the latter religion past the fourth century CE.[26]

WHAT IS *AʿJAMĪ*?

If we have some sense of what is *ʿarabī*, it is much less clear what the Qurʾān means by *aʿjamī*. Moreover, as with *ʿarabī*, its meaning changed in the aftermath of the Muslim conquests. As Arab identity became stronger and the Arabs' sense of superiority over those whom they had defeated and now ruled became reinforced, *aʿjamī* and the collective noun *ʿajam* came to serve as the polar opposite of "Arabness," with all the negative things that implied. Furthermore, as the doctrine was elaborated that the language of the Qurʾān, *ʿarabī*, was inimitable and miraculous and proficiency in it a mark of eloquence and sophistication,[27] *aʿjamī* became an increasingly pejorative term, used in the same way as *barbaros* among the ancient Greeks to refer to all things foreign and outlandish. This is the meaning of *aʿjamī* that the first Muslim exegetes knew, so when they tried to identify the person mentioned in Q. 16:103, who allegedly taught Muḥammad and spoke *aʿjamī*, they always thought of someone lowly, a slave or a hired servant, and either non-Arab or non-Muslim or both (e.g., Jabr, a Christian slave from ʿAyn al-Tamr in southern Iraq, ʿAddās, a Christian slave from Nineveh in northern Iraq, or the Jewish servant Yasār Abū Fukayha).[28]

So we again need to try to get back to what the term *aʿjamī* might have meant in Muḥammad's day. Unlike the situation with *ʿarabī*, however, we have no source outside the Qurʾān to help us understand its import. The two most recent Western attempts to consider its significance have reached similar solutions, though driven by different theories on Arab identity. Jan Retsö argues, "there is no doubt that the word *aʿjamūn* . . . refers to those who do not have a good command of the ʿArabiyya and might not even understand

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24 Millar, "Christian Monasticism"; Hoyland, "Late Roman Provincia Arabia."

25 Robin, "Inscriptions antiques," pp. 1053–54. It is interesting to note that Muslim sources take it for granted that the Arabic script was modeled on the Syriac script (e.g., Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, p. 471, which also recounts how the brother of Ukaydir, the ruler of Dūmat al-Jandal in the 620s, learned the Arabic script at Hira and then taught it to people in the Ḥijāz). This theory was also that of Starcky, "Petra et la Nabatène"; he has been proved wrong as far as the actual letter-forms go—forms that are clearly derived from Nabataean Aramaic—but it is possible that there was some influence from Syriac in respect to the aesthetic of the script, such as the proportionality of letters. (Both Syriac and Arabic have some letters that are ascendants and some that stay short.) The variety manifest in the pre-Islamic and very early Islamic Arabic inscriptions, as evidenced in recent discoveries, suggests also that there may have been more than one writing tradition of Arabic before the standardization initiated by the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (685–705).

26 Hoyland, "Jews of the Ḥijāz."

27 See Wansbrough, *Qurʾānic Studies*, pp. 93–96.

28 Gilliot, "Informateurs."

it."[29] In his view, the reason for this circumstance is that the Arabs were "a religious-cultic institution rather than an ethnic group," and their *ʿarabī* speech was regarded as a sacred medium, which "had a structure that deviated from the everyday vernacular tongue, the *aʿjamī*."[30] Yet this explanation seems to go against Q. 42:7, which says that the reason God revealed to Muḥammad an *ʿarabī* recitation was so that he "might warn the mother of towns and those around it," thus implying that *ʿarabī* was simply the local language and that it was chosen for Muḥammad because it was, in the words of Q. 14:4, "the language of his people" (*lisān qawmihi*) and, according to many verses, could be easily understood. Retsö is correct that the context of the word's use is religious, but given that we are talking about its occurrence in a divine revelation, that use is hardly surprising.

The second attempt to investigate the sense of *aʿjamī* comes from Peter Webb, who is also motivated by a desire to avoid any hint that the term "Arab" might have had an ethnic sense before Muḥammad. Webb is in part inspired by Fred Donner's dictum that Islam could not have owed anything to Arab "national" sentiment[31] and in part wishes to bolster his own theory that Arab identity was forged only after the establishment of an Islamic state. He therefore postulates that the term *ʿarabī* is simply an adjective meaning "clear" or "pure" and that *aʿjamī* is its antonym indicating "something nonsensical or a sullied message."[32] Yet such a sense gives an odd spin to verses such as Q. 26:198 and 41:44 (see below)—would anyone really have petitioned God to reveal a nonsensical recitation or a sullied message in an unclear language? Webb then moves closer to Retsö's position by concluding that "*ʿarabī* connotes a transcendently clear koine from God, not a terrestrial vernacular," presumably concurring with Retsö (though not explicitly saying so) that the word for the "terrestrial vernacular" is *aʿjamī*.

The problem with the interpretations of both Retsö and Webb is that they are buying into the Qurʾān's own polemical vision. Muḥammad is trying to defend the use of *ʿarabī* over *aʿjamī* for divine revelation and so talks up the former and denigrates the latter; but the very fact that he feels the need to do so indicates he is aware that many in his audience did not agree and indeed would seem to have thought that divine messages should be conveyed in the *aʿjamī* language. This circumstance is clear in Q. 41:44, the start of which—"If We had made it an *aʿjamī* recitation"—is obviously replying to a question from some of Muḥammad's detractors as to why his revelation was not in *aʿjamī*, as was presumably considered to be the norm.

The continuation of the verse is interesting: "then they would have said: 'If only its verses had been *fuṣṣilat*; *aʿjamī* and *ʿarabī*." Between *fuṣṣilat* and *aʿjamī*, the preferred reading has a *hamza*, which is taken to be an interrogative particle, and the whole was then understood to mean: "Why were its indications and signs not made clear [i.e., in *ʿarabī*] so that we [your people of Quraysh] could understand it and know what was in it? . . . Should this Qurʾān be *aʿjamī* when the messenger/the language of the one to whom

29 Retsö, "Arabs and Arabic," p. 289; on p. 281 he specifies that by ʿArabiyya he means "the language of the Qurʾān."

30 Ibid., pp. 286, 291.

31 "Islam began as a religious movement—not as a social, economic or 'national' one" (Donner, *Believers*, p. xii).

32 Webb, *Arabs*, pp. 118–19.

it was revealed is *ʿarabī*?"[33] Most Muslim exegetes interpreted it thus because in their day the pair *ʿarabī*/*aʿjamī* were diametrically opposed in terms of both ethnicity (Arab/ non-Arab) and speech (eloquent/inarticulate), and Muḥammad had come to be regarded as the best of the Arabs and the most eloquent of them; so he could not be associated with the term *aʿjamī*, which was linked to non-Arab origins and poor Arabic expression. However, although this interpretation of the verse was the dominant one, a few exegetes read it "with omission of the interrogative particle," then understanding it to mean: If only its verses had been made clear in *aʿjamī* and *ʿarabī* so that they could be understood by both the *ʿajam* and the *ʿarab*.[34]

In general, exegetes equated the verb *fuṣṣilat* with *buyyinat*, "made clear," but although that equation is sufficient to explain the use of this verb in most attestations in the Qurʾān,[35] occasionally we see that it is not quite precise enough. For example, there is Q. 41:3: "a book whose verses have been *fuṣṣilat* into/as an Arabic recitation" (*kitābun fuṣṣilat āyātuhu Qurʾānan ʿarabiyyan*), where some element of conveyance or translation seems implied. In Q. 10:37 we encounter the verbal noun *tafṣīl*, which is also glossed by exegetes as "clarification"; but if we contrast this verse, which informs us that the Qurʾān is "a confirmation of what is before it and a *tafṣīl* of the [earlier] Scripture," with Q. 46:12, "This [Qurʾān] is a book that confirms [the book of Moses] in the *ʿarabī* language," then again we see that there is an added sense of translation. Both verses speak of a dual aspect of the Qurʾān's relationship to previous revelation: confirmation and *tafṣīl*/*ʿarabī* rendering. Thus the words *fuṣṣilat* and *tafṣīl* (from the same root, *f-ṣ-l*) must have the sense of translation or rather explanatory translation, something that elucidates as well as translates. What Muḥammad's interlocutors would seem to have wanted, then, was something like the Jewish Targums, the periphrastic and interpretative texts that helped Aramaic-speaking Jews read the Hebrew Bible.[36]

If this assumption is correct, it suggests that for the Qurʾān *ʿarabī* and *aʿjamī* are two distinct linguistic entities sufficiently unlike each other that they required translation from one to the other, whether they were two separate languages or two mutually unintelligible forms of the same language. Of course, the terms are also likely to have conveyed value judgments in the same way that *Deutsch* (German) is *deutlich* (clear) and the speech of *barbaroi* (foreigners) is *barbaros* (outlandish and uncultured), but they are also being employed to refer to discrete linguistic units. Whereas Retsö and Webb posit that *ʿarabī* is a sacred entity and *aʿjamī* is a vernacular entity, I would say the reverse: *ʿarabī* is a vernacular and *aʿjamī* a sacred/liturgical language. As we know from the epigraphic record (see above), *ʿarabī* had in Muḥammad's day only relatively recently begun to be used for writing, but *aʿjamī* was evidently regarded as an established language of scripture. This conclusion is implied by Q. 16:103, which shows awareness of the accusation that

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33 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ*, regarding Q. 41:44.

34 Ibid. on the authority of Saʿīd ibn Jubayr and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.

35 Most often the verb is used in the vague expression *faṣṣalnā*/*nufaṣṣil*/*yufaṣṣil al-āyāt* ("we have clarified/we clarify/He clarifies the verses/signs": Q. 6:55, 97, 98, 126; 7:32, 134; 9:11; 10:5, 24; 13:2; 30:28; cf. 11:1).

36 Possibly those making the objection that provoked Q. 41:44 were Jews and/or Christians who were Arabic-speakers and who had some sort of Arabic explanatory translation that helped them read their scriptures.

Muḥammad was receiving instruction on divine revelation from a human teacher whose "tongue" was aʿjamī. Although this statement is polemical, it is presumably rooted in the fact that Muḥammad was discussing Jewish and Christian scriptures with someone who knew one of the languages in which Jewish and Christian religious texts were circulating in the Ḥijāz and that this language was referred to as aʿjamī.[37]

But what language did the Qurʾān, or rather its audience, have in mind? Greek is a possibility, given that it was the official language of the Roman–Byzantine Empire, but the evidence for it in northwest Arabia is patchy up to the fourth century CE and nonexistent thereafter.[38] One could also make a case for Hebrew, if we assume that by Muḥammad's day the Jews of the Ḥijāz spoke Arabic but read their scripture in Hebrew; but again the evidence for this view is sparse.[39] By contrast, this region had had a long and continuous history of contact with Aramaic, for which we have ample epigraphic testimony, beginning already in the sixth century BCE, so a very likely candidate for aʿjamī would be some form of Aramaic.[40]

THE TESTIMONY OF DOCUMENTS

This discussion brings us back to the Qurʾānic quote I gave at the beginning and the question of what languages were used for writing in Muḥammad's Ḥijāz. Our earliest examples of documents in Arabic come from Egypt in the aftermath of the Islamic conquest of the province in the 640s. The most famous of these texts is the bilingual papyrus PERF 558, dated to 22 AH/643 CE.[41] It is a receipt for a number of sheep provided by the local community issued by the Muslim general ʿAbdallāh ibn Jābir. Although the document is bilingual in the sense that it conveys much the same message in two languages, the Arabic is by no means a direct translation of the Greek. There are differences; thus the Arabic notes that the goods are received from the "representatives" of the pagarch (local governor), a detail missing from the Greek. More significantly, the Greek begins with a subjective address, "ʿAbdallāh the emir to you, Christophoros and Theodorakios, pagarchs of Herakliopolis,"

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37 Webb (*Arabs*, p. 119) says that "the verse depicts Muḥammad as understanding both the ʿarabī of the Qurʾān and the aʿjamī of the man alluded to" (taking this as proof that the terms could not denote separate languages), but that statement is not quite correct—it implies that *one* of them spoke both ʿarabī and aʿjamī. Since the man alluded to is said to be teaching Muḥammad, it is surely more likely that he is the bilingual one rather than Muḥammad, though I do not personally find it problematic that Muḥammad could have been bilingual, given that he allegedly went on trading missions outside the Ḥijāz.

38 The language of Muḥammad's teacher is often said to be *rūmiyya*, which would normally indicate Greek, but the person's origin is most often given as Iraq (either Nineveh or ʿAyn al-Tamr), which would make some form of Aramaic more likely, though these traditions do not inspire confidence in their veracity. See Gilliot, "Informateurs." It should be noted, however, that Greek and Arabic coexisted in a number of ways before Islam, as is evident from Greek transliteration of Arabic names, phrases, and even whole inscriptions (see the inventory in al-Jallad, *Damascus Psalm Fragment*, pp. 111–23).

39 See Hoyland, "Jews of the Ḥijāz." Mehdy Shaddel pointed out to me that Qurʾān 2:78, which speaks of a group of *ummī* among the Jews who "do not know the book" (*lā yaʿlamūna l-kitāb*) and instead rely on hearsay (*amānī*) for scriptural knowledge, could be referring to Arabic-speaking gentiles who relied on oral instruction by Jews who did know the language of scripture.

40 Of course aʿjamī need not have directly meant "Aramaic"; it might have signified any scribal and/or liturgical language and so meant Aramaic in the context of the early seventh-century Ḥijāz.

41 Published in Grohmann, "Aperçu," pp. 41–43.

whereas the Arabic presents the information in an objective fashion: "This is what ʿAb-dallāh and his companions have taken of sheep for slaughter from Ahnas (= Herakliopolis)."

The use of a demonstrative particle to begin an Arabic document in the form *hādhā* + noun or *hādhā* + *mā* + verb is found in a wide variety of Arabic texts in diverse locations in the first century of Islam. For example, it occurs in papyri from Egypt, southern Palestine, and Khurasan,[42] and it features on milestones and buildings as early as the 50s AH in forms such as "this is what PN ordered" (*hādhā mā amara*) and "this is what PN built" (*hādhā mā banā*).[43] Additionally, in graffiti we encounter it in the form "this is what PN bore witness to" (*hādhā mā shahida ʿalayh*), which then introduces a declaration of the inscriber's faith.[44] The consistent use of this formula across such a wide area from a very early date implies that there already existed an Arabic documentary practice before the time of the Arab conquests. It is likely that the evolution of this practice was influenced by the Aramaic legal tradition, as was pointed out long ago by Geoffrey Khan, citing such parallels as the use of the root *b-r-ʾ* for quittances and the ratification of documents by a person stating that he was present and accepted the document as legally binding on himself (*shahida ʿalā nafsihi / ʿl npš shd*).[45] One might add to this evidence the use of an opening demonstrative in Nabataean building and funerary inscriptions,[46] which were effectively legal texts, since they made a public statement of ownership and outlined sanctions on those who would infringe that claim and, in one case, stated that it was a copy of a written document kept in an archive.[47]

CONCLUSION

One would like to have more examples from the intervening centuries before positing a link between the Aramaic legal tradition and the early Islamic one, but the aforementioned similarities in vocabulary and phrasing are suggestive. Moreover, we do have evidence of the closeness of the Nabataean Aramaic and Arabic writing traditions in other spheres, such as orthography (see the work of Werner Diem, Ahmad al-Jallad, Marijn van Putten,

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42 Kraemer, *Nessana*, p. 159 (P. Nessana 56, *hādhā mā qarrara*); Khan, *Arabic Documents*, p. 13 (most begin *hādhā kitāb min* or *hādhā barāʾa min*).

43 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, nos. 16 (Ṭāʾif dam, 58/678) and 24 (Fusṭāṭ bridge, 69/688); El-Hawary, "Islamic Monument," p. 327 and pl. 4c (Qasr Burquʾ, 81/700).

44 See, for example, the graffito published by Ghabbān, *Kitābāt*, no. 147.

45 Khan, "Pre-Islamic Background," esp. pp. 202–3; the Aramaic formula for bearing witness occurs in P. Dura 28, dated 243 CE. In a different vein, Levine ("Aramaic Legal Tradition," esp. p. 844) showed how one Nabataean document from the Dead Sea region qualified its subject's rights of ownership with synonymous Aramaic and Arabic legal terms (*ḥalaq/qism, tqān/thābit, thūm/ḥadd*), thus indicating contact between the two traditions over a very long period.

46 E.g., Healey, *Aramaic Inscriptions*, pp. 52 ("This is the cult-place which Notayru made," Elusa, second century BCE), 54 ("These are the chambers and cistern which Aṣlaḥ son of Aṣlaḥ made," Petra, ca. 96 BCE), 68 ("This is the tomb which Kamkam daughter of Wāʾilat made," Hegra, 1 CE). We can see this use of the demonstrative go into Arabic in the Hegra inscription of 268 CE ("This is the tomb which Kaʿbu son of Ḥaretat made" / *dnh qbrw ṣnʿh Kʿbw*), the Nemara inscription of 328 CE ("This is the tomb of Marʾ al-Qays"/ *Ty nfsh*), and, much later, in the earliest dated Islamic epitaph (31 AH: "This is the tomb belonging to / *hādhā l-qabr li-*"; El-Hawary, "Islamic Monument").

47 Healey, *Aramaic Inscriptions*, p. 73 (fines for violations of this tomb will be levied "according to the copy of this [text] deposited in the temple of Qaysha").

and others) and fossilized Aramaic features in early Arabic texts, such as *bar* ("son of") instead of *ibn*, a final *waw* on proper names, and the use of *kataba yadī* to indicate one's signature, all three of which appear in a graffito from the area between Hegra (Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ) and Tabūk in the Ḥijāz (fig. 5.2).[48] This graffito provides yet more evidence of a long period of interaction between the two language traditions in northwest Arabia—a conclusion that has also been emphasized by a number of recent studies on the language of the Qurʾān.[49] This field is an exciting and fast-changing one as more and more inscriptions are being discovered and recorded all the time, but I would tentatively conclude that the term *aʿjamī* in the Qurʾān should be understood as referring to some form of the Aramaic language.

Figure 5.2. Graffito from the area between Hegra (Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ) and Tabuk in the Ḥijāz.

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48 Farīq al-Ṣaḥrāʾ, "Nuqūsh ʿarabiyya," no. 2 (they read: *anah kababa/kanana bar Qaysw bar ʿUmar bar Ṭaʿbal kataba yadī*). See also the graffito found by al-Jallad ("An Early Christian Arabic Graffito") in al-Azraq, northeast Jordan, that displays *wawation*: it mentions "Yazīdu the king," who he tentatively identifies with the caliph Yazīd I (680–83); and also see his chapter in this volume.

49 See especially Dye, "Traces of Bilingualism/Multilingualism."

6 Scripture, Language, and the Jews of Arabia[1]

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ARABIA IN THE PERIOD LEADING up to the time of Muḥammad and the beginning of the Qurʾān can be described as "ripe for revelation." The appearance of the Qurʾān, however, has long caused Muslim and Western scholars to ponder the conundrums associated with the appearance of this Arabian scripture. Arabia was known to be a remote, forbidding place—unconquerable, as Aelius Gallus had learned in his failed attempt to conquer the peninsula. But it was also a refuge for those fleeing the Jewish–Roman wars or the charges of heresy from various Christian church councils. As a result, Arabia was a place of intense religious contestation and religious inquiry. In this observation, I am following Fred M. Donner's view that Islam appeared in an Arabian environment that was profoundly religious. He states, "It is my conviction that Islam began as a religious movement—not a social, economic, or 'national' one; in particular, it embodied an intense concern for attaining personal salvation through righteous behavior."[2] This intense religious concern reflected views found not only in Arabia but also among many people in other empires among whom the desire to worship in their own way, in their own vernacular, and to be ministered to by like-minded members of their own community was part of their religious aims.[3]

In Arabia were found varieties of Judaisms and Christianities, usually associated with the imperial ambitions of the two major empires, Rome and Persia. Indigenous polytheism appears to have been in decline but was still a strong social force in the Arabia of Muḥammad's birth, in particular the Ḥijāz, and individuals are reported to have been associated with monotheistic beliefs not connected to a particular named group. Some of these individuals were termed *ḥanīf*.[4] Arabia was also a center for international trade that connected

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1 I want to thank Fred Donner for inviting me to the Chicago conference "Scripts and Scripture: Writing and Religion in Arabia, 500–700 CE." I also want to thank Devin Stewart and my colleagues at Emory University who patiently read drafts of my essay and offered helpful comments.

2 Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, p. xii.

3 In this regard, one can speculate that the appearance of the Qurʾān as a "plain" scripture and a "Qurʾān in Arabic" as stated in the opening verses of Surah 12 are consonant with desires among Coptic Monophysites and Nestorians to have a vernacular liturgy rather than imperial Greek.

4 See Jeffery in *Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān*, where he discusses the various theories of the origin of this word and settles on its Christian Aramaic origin, originally meaning *heathen* and then, by extension, neither Christian nor Jewish, and then, under the influence of the Qurʾān, a follower of the religion of Abraham.

Arabia to Persia, the Roman Mediterranean, Africa, and the Indian subcontinent. Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, polytheists, and others intermixed in Arabia when politics, economics, and religion were inextricably intertwined, but religious concerns and interests were the driving force in the social change in this period.

In this study I have chosen to look at the questions of Arabia and scripture through the lens of Arabian Jews without, it should be noted at the outset, arguing for the exclusivity or even the primacy of this perspective. I contend, rather, that Jewish influence was part of the complex tapestry antecedent to and contemporary with an Arabian culture and the imbedded language and notions of scripture and religion that get reflected in the Qurʾān. My chronological center of inquiry matches that of the conference at which I first presented this study "Scripts and Scripture: Writing and Religion in Arabia, ca. 500–700 CE"—and is geographically centered on Arabia, with excursions into Rome, Persia, and Abyssinia. In this inquiry, several issues confront me. First, we have no extant Jewish writing or inscriptions from the Ḥijāz from the period immediately preceding the birth of Muḥammad or during his lifetime. So my evidence for what I contend comes through the filter of other sources, some of which are not contemporary with the period in question. Part of the task of my essay is to discuss the historical reliability of those sources that are redacted after the death of Muḥammad. Information can be found in the Qurʾān, but our understanding of the Qurʾān is framed by traditions that were collected and written down from fifty to one hundred years (or more) after the death of Muḥammad in 632 CE. Those interpretations are also a subject of my inquiry and will be treated along with other later redactions. This period, 500–700 CE, is often referred to by modern Western scholars as the end of the "late antique." As I will argue, periodicity generally assumes internal coherence between the bracketed dates as well as a teleology, both of which assumptions shape which bits of evidence we valorize over others.[5]

Another problematic issue for this study is what we mean by "Jews" in this period and in this location. Jewish self-definition and Jewish definition by others is in flux both in this period and in this location. Identity boundaries are generally porous and shifting, and in this period of seismic religious and social change, Jewish identity is as difficult to define with absolute confidence as is Christian, polytheist, Arab, Bedouin, *hanīf*, or any other group identity category, particularly because all such categories are used polemically in our sources and are not marked exclusively. "Jewish Bedouin," for example, is a category that was strongly rejected in the scholarship of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by Jews and non-Jews in spite of source evidence to the contrary.[6] Additionally, this area of inquiry has a history in Western scholarship that goes back to shortly after the appearance of Islam.[7] Christian and Jewish absolutists have insisted that Islam and the Qurʾān are derivative from Judaism *or* Christianity, thereby clouding the inquiry with polemics. Some others have denied that we can say anything historical about this period because of problems with evidence or its lack. Borrowing from the pre-Islamic poet

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5 In the debate about the chronology of the late antique period, the dates are often extended on both ends from an early date of about 100 CE to a late date of 1200 CE. For the purposes of this essay, the 500–700 dates represent a central point of my concerns.

6 See Newby, *History of the Jews of Arabia*.

7 See, as an early example, John of Damascus's (d. 749 CE) writings on heresy in which he characterized Islam as another Christian heretical movement.

ʿAntara's metaphor, I hope in this essay to put a patch on the subject and explore the shape of pre- or proto-Islamic Arabian culture through the lens of Arabian Judaism. I am responding to the notion that Islam with its scripture, the Qurʾān, is the latest to join Judaism and Christianity in conversation about the nature of God and to recent scholarship that encourages this historical inquiry.

The category of "late antiquity" is of particular concern for my inquiry into the role of the Jews of Arabia in the period leading up to and including the life of Muḥammad and the formation of the Qurʾān because of the geographic and cultural constraints the term generally embraces as well as its teleology, which is read back in ways that diminish some historical elements for the sake of preserving our understanding of the end. Aziz al-Azmeh, in his *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity*, states:

> Islam forms an integral part of Late Antiquity in the sense that it instantiated, under the signature of a new universal calendar, two salient features which overdetermine—rather than constitute the "essence" of—this period. These are monotheism and ecumenical empire, the conjunction of which, in constituting the history of the period, serves in very complex ways as its points of articulation and internal coherence. Both monotheism . . . and empire might be termed Roman, or perhaps Late Roman; the relatively sparse reference to the Sasanians in the discussions that follow is due to the fact that their legacy made itself felt meaningfully only after the period of concern here, and that, unlike Byzantium, the Sasanian empire was more of a tributary state that, albeit defining itself dynastically and politically, did not seem consistently to consider cultural and religious universalism in its understanding of empire.[8]

In his masterful tome, al-Azmeh complicates this statement but does not fully dispense with some of the boundaries and, from my perspective, problems. When looking at Arabia and Arabian Jews in the period from roughly one hundred years before the birth of Muḥammad through Muḥammad's lifetime, we can see that Rome/Byzantium/*rūm* was only part of the story, and our geographic view has to extend east to the Sasanian Empire, south to Ḥimyar, and across the Red Sea to the kingdom of Axum in Ethiopia.

Al-Azmeh's perspective is joined by G. W. Bowersock's latest work, *The Crucible of Islam*. Both perspectives see the formation of an Islamic polity after the death of Muḥammad and the formation of an imperial caliphate as a monotheistic empire that subsumes Jews, Christians, and some Zoroastrians in an "ecumenical empire" but in a way that needs, in my view, careful definition and attenuation. Bowersock's work differs from al-Azmeh's in the emphasis and detail Bowersock places on Jewish relations with the Sasanian Empire in the period immediately before the birth of Muḥammad. From my perspective, Arabian Jewish connections with the Sasanians in the Ḥijāz and Ḥimyar as well as their connections with the Jewish academies in Persian Mesopotamia contribute to what we see as Jewish prestige in Arabia up to and including the life of Muḥammad. Jewish prestige and influence declined sharply in the latter part of Muḥammad's life, the Medinan period, as a result of the direct confrontations between Medinan Jews and Muḥammad and his growing Muslim community, and connections with the Sasanian traditions experienced a short hiatus until revived with the expansion of the Islamic empire that embraced the

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8 Al-Azmeh, *Emergence of Islam*, pp. 2–3.

old Persian lands and culture. Jewish culture, particularly in the area of ways of thinking about and talking about religion, were already indigenized in Arabian society in ways that survived the decline.[9]

Another historiographic perspective of this study concerns what my colleague Devin Stewart terms the "New Biblicists." In 2000, the publication by Christoph Luxenberg of a book arguing that Syrian Christianity is the overwhelming influence on the formation of the Qurʾān revived some old claims and intensified new ones.[10] A number of scholars have responded with works of their own that propose variations and modifications of the Luxenberg theses while not fully embracing them.[11] Along with their emphases on the Christian underpinnings of the Qurʾān, many of them embrace a view that diminishes or rejects the value of Islamic traditions and scholarship for understanding the Qurʾān and the environment in which it appeared. Since the publication of Patricia Crone and Michael Cook's thought experiment, *Hagarism*, in 1977, many Western historians of early Islam have been very critical of Islamic traditions to the point of rejecting them as nothing more than what John Wansbrough termed *Heilsgeschichte*, "salvation history."[12] Skepticism of the veracity of traditions has a long history in both Islamic and Western scholarship, but not to the point of rejecting the early traditions wholesale.[13] For example, Gabriel Said Reynolds, referencing Wansbrough, writes:

> Now most critical scholars acknowledge that story-telling is a salient element in classical Qurʾānic exegesis. For Wansbrough, however, this acknowledgement leads to fundamental conclusions about the Qurʾānic text. First, the idea of a chronology of the Qurʾān according to Muhammad's life is by his reading spurious, since the stories that would link a certain passage of the Qurʾān to a certain moment in that life have no historical authority. Second, and even more far-reaching, *tafsīr* literature in general, *even when it is read with a critical method*, cannot provide the scholar with privileged information on what the Qurʾān originally meant. Instead, *tafsīr* literature is a remarkably successful intellectual enterprise to develop original and distinctive religious traditions in the face of competition from (above all) Jews and Christians. It is the second conclusion that is particularly important for the present work. I will argue that the Qurʾān—from a critical perspective at least—should not be read in conversation with what came after it (*tafsīr*) but with what came before it (Biblical literature).[14]

Similarly, he rejects any text redacted after the Qurʾān, particularly Jewish midrashic texts.[15] While he admits that his purpose is not to write history, his rejection of texts from

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9 Jewish views of religion, Jewish interpretations of biblical stories, and other aspects of Jewish culture were expanded in commentaries on the Qurʾān in the *Israʾīliyāt* traditions popular at the end of the first and beginning of the second Islamic centuries. This nexus between *Israʾīliyāt* and the Qurʾān is outside the scope of this essay.

10 Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran*; *Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*.

11 See, e.g., Reynolds, *Qurʾān and Its Biblical Subtext*; Segovia, *Quranic Noah*; El-Badawi, *Qurʾān and Aramaic Gospel Traditions*.

12 Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*.

13 See Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien* and works on *al-jarḥ wa-taʾdīl*.

14 Reynolds, *Qurʾān and Its Biblical Subtext*, pp. 12–13.

15 Ibid., pp. 37–38.

the late antique solely by date of redaction and not by a critical analysis of the text seems to this historian peculiarly arbitrary. As another example, Emran Iqbal El-Badawi asserts in his work:

> This study will demonstrate how the Qurʾān, via the agency of the late antique *lingua franca* of the Near East—Aramaic—selectively challenged or re-appropriated, and therefore took up the 'dogmatic re-articulation' of language and imagery coming from the Aramaic Gospel Traditions, in order to fit the idiom and religious temperament of a heterogeneous, sectarian Arabian audience.[16]

This bold sociohistorical claim is mirrored by others whom Stewart terms "allohistorians" and whose "othering" causes them to assert that the Qurʾān has its origins outside Arabia and in a different time as well as place.[17] For an historian trained in the historiographical methods of the ancient and late antique Near East and classics, the problems with texts and the solutions to those problems are not sufficient to drive one away from assaying our available evidence to make tentative but plausible historical claims, such as those I put forward in this essay. In support of the historian's method, I follow the lead of al-Azmeh, who, in his companion volume to the *Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity*—his *The Arabs and Islam in Late Antiquity: A Critique of Approaches to Arabic Sources*—lays out a strong argument against what he terms "hyper-criticism" of oral sources, which make up the bulk of traditional Islamic historical texts, and says that

> Arabic sources for the political history of pre-Muhammadan Arabia overall, checked against others and against other types of evidence, have been adjudged to be quite reliable, certainly material relating to the late sixth century, and perhaps even as far back as the fourth. Similarly, Arab narratives relating to north Arabia in the centuries preceding Muhammad have clear marks of reliability on a variety of grounds.[18]

In his estimation, "Ultimately, what the sceptics seem to find wanting is an historiographical state of innocence, the perfect document that might be taken literally, and it is therein that resides the misapprehension leading to the falsity and artificiality of the problem."[19] Al-Azmeh has been joined by Bowersock in *The Crucible of Islam*, in which he brings the time-proven methodologies and skeptical positivism and the attitude that history is there for the historian despite the ultimate gaps in our knowledge.[20]

What I propose to do in this study is to examine the history of the influence of Arabian Jews on the religious and linguistic culture of proto-Islamic Arabia to demonstrate that Jewish language and Jewish religious ideas had become indigenized into Arabian culture to the extent that they formed part of the everyday ideas about monotheism and religious practice but, as I said above, not the only set of ideas. I do not propose to duplicate or re-evaluate the work of such scholars as Heinrich Speyer, a project for a future work, nor will I have the space to exhaust the debate over all the specific terms in the Qurʾān shared by

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16 El-Badawi, *Qurʾān and Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, p. 5.

17 For example, see Nevo and Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*.

18 Al-Azmeh, *Arabs and Islam*, p. 45.

19 Ibid., p. 4.

20 Bowersock, *Crucible of Islam*, pp. 12–13.

Christians and Jews. I merely propose to do the historian's work and make a contribution to understanding Arabia at the time of the appearance of Islam's scripture.

WHO WERE THE ARABIAN JEWS?

There are legendary indications that Jews were in Arabia from ancient times, but for our purposes we are interested chiefly in the Jews that fled from the Roman destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem and the subsequent Jewish–Roman wars and the Jews that came into Arabia from Persian-held Mesopotamia, as well as those Arabs who converted to Judaism. We find in the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* the following account of Jews arriving in Arabia:

> Then Rome rose up over all the Children of Israel in Syria, trampled them under foot, killed them, and married their women. So, when Rome conquered them in Syria, the B. an-Naḍīr, the B. Qurayẓa and the B. Bahdal fled to the Children of Israel in the Ḥijāz. When they departed from their houses, the king of Rome sent after them to bring them back, but it was impossible for him because of the desert between Syria and the Ḥijāz. When the pursuing Romans reached at-Tamr, they died of thirst, so the place was named Tamr ar-Rūm, which is its name to this day.[21]

This is, of course, a diasporic legend that fits the pattern of what happens to Jews fleeing Rome's conquest after 70 CE, which is cast through legendary elements of the Israelite flight from Egypt and possibly the fate of Aelius Gallus's ill-fated attempt to capture Arabia about 26 BCE. Jews fled when possible to places where there were other Jews and where there was safety and economic opportunity. Arabia was one of many places that fit the bill. As for the B. Qurayẓa and the B. an-Naḍīr, Arab sources report that they were called the two priestly tribes after an ancestor called al-Kāhin, an appellation that reflects the migration of priestly tribes into Arabia after the Temple's destruction to maintain Levitical purity and await the rebuilding of the Temple and the reinstitution of Temple sacrifice.[22] As we will see, the status of *kohanīm* among these Arabian Jews did not carry with it all the restrictions set forth in the Torah and later in the Talmud.

The legendary origins of the Jewish communities of southern Arabia also involve the Temple but in their case extend back, at least in legend, to the first Temple. According to Yemenite legends, the original Yemenite settlers left Jerusalem forty-two years before the destruction of the Temple in anticipation of its destruction. When Ezra called on them to return, they refused because they foresaw the destruction of the Second Temple. Ezra, according to the legend, cursed them, and they in turn cursed him.[23] The folklorist Haim Schwarzbaum sees this story as having roots in Midrash Tanhuma, which uses the words from Haggai 1:1–6, where Ezra urges the return of the Diaspora and the rebuilding of the Temple. They, claiming that the time is not right, refuse to do so and are cursed by Haggai.[24] It is difficult to ascertain the date of this legend, and scholars have differed about its antiquity, but the legend's use of Haggai would argue for its origins in disagreements

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21 Al-Isbahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānî*, p. 100.

22 Newby, *History of the Jews of Arabia*, p. 126, nn. 10, 11.

23 Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, vol. 6, pp. 431–32.

24 Schwarzbaum, *Biblical and Extra-Biblical Legends*, p. 104.

between diasporic and "returned" Jews rather than as part of an argument between Jews and Muslims. Additionally, the Yemenite Jews derive their origins from Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, legends that get their greatest articulation in Islamic sources but are preceded by Jewish sources.[25] There is insufficient evidence to date the Solomonic legends and their use before the development of a Jewish–Islamic polemic. For the purposes of our discussion here, the use of the midrash on Haggai as well as the midrashic references to the Solomonic story are possible indications that the Jews of Arabia were acquainted with materials in the Tanakh, its expanded exposition in commentary, and material that is eventually recorded in Talmudic and haggadic literature.

Setting aside the legendary origins, there is no reason to separate the Ḥijāz from Ḥimyar in South Arabia. As Michael Lecker has demonstrated, the conversion of Ḥimyar to Judaism in the fifth century CE was under the influence of the Jews of Yathrib/Medina, which connection remained into Muḥammad's lifetime.[26] This development is part of the larger story of the Jewish king Yūsuf dhū Nuwās and his conflict with the Ethiopian Christian general Abraha. We are told that Yūsuf was a client of the Sasanian ambitions in the area. Both Byzantium and the Sasanians were using factions in Arabia as clients in their proxy wars, not always to the benefit of the Arabians.[27] Yūsuf's campaign to restore control over the Yemen involved the persecution of Ethiopian-backed Monophysites, who had apparently replaced the Persian-backed Nestorians in what had been a Jewish kingdom in the Yemen. Reports of this persecution, which we know through a Syriac martyrology, provoked an Ethiopian invasion under the support of the Byzantine emperor—an invasion resulting in the defeat and death of Yūsuf.[28] Internal politics in Byzantium and Persia as well as the negotiation of a truce between the two superpowers meant that the Persian Jewish clients were abandoned. Nonetheless, the substantial Jewish community in southern Arabia retained connections with the Jews of the Ḥijāz, and a number of Jews from Yemen were in the company of Muḥammad.

Looking for linguistic evidence about Jews in northwest Arabia in this proto-Islamic period, we have some surviving poetry from Jewish poets, such as Samauʾal b. ʿAdiya, ar-Rabīʿ b. Abū Ḥuqaiq, and Kaʿb al-Ashraf, among others. This body of poetry is written in poetic Arabic comparable to other *jāhiliyyah* poetry in form and language with no real indication that these poets were Jewish. The main source of our evidence comes from the Qurʾān, in which there are a number of words that can best be explained in meaning and usage as having been derived from Jewish usage in Hebrew and/or Jewish Aramaic. Some of the most prominent examples are *ṣalāt*, *ṣadaqah*, *zakāt*, *nabī*, and others I will discuss shortly. These terms as presented in the Qurʾān are understood as clear Arabic words, even though later Islamic scholars identify them as "foreign" words. The cross-cultural,

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25 Newby, *History of the Jews of Arabia*, p. 127, n. 17.

26 Lecker, "Conversion of Himyar to Judaism," pp. 129–36.

27 Smith, "Events in Arabia," pp. 425–68.

28 These events are chronicled in Islamic sources, in Procopius's writings about Justinian (see Moberg, *Book of the Himyarites*), and various inscriptions. In spite of some obvious exaggerations, such as the generic inflation of the number of martyrs killed by Yūsuf and his troops and the Islamic conflation of the events with the birth of Muḥammad, the information we have from various vectors provides confidence that we can speak of Jews in both southern Arabia and the Ḥijāz during this period. See Newby, *History of the Jews of Arabia*, pp. 34–48.

cross-language movement of technical terms is common, of course, but in this case it is interesting to note that these are technical religious terms, indicating, in my opinion, that the indigenized Arabian Jewish communities provided fundamental ideas about religion and religious practice, including scripture. I do not mean, of course, to imply that religious models are only Jewish.[29] This process of indigenizing these words and concepts, I contend, happened mainly in the proto-Islamic period and became part of the available vocabulary to Arabs when talking about religion.

The Ḥijāzī Jews were polylingual and operated with forms of Arabic as their predominant language of communication. In one example, it is reported that the rabbis of Medina read the Torah in Hebrew and translated it (*fassara*) into Arabic for the congregation (which included Muḥammad and some of his followers on at least one occasion).[30] These "bridge" practices give us the earliest examples of Judeo-Arabic, which appears to be a Jewish subdialect of Ḥijāzī-Arabic, with its own vocabulary, script, and possibly pronunciation, parallel to other Jewish subdialects of languages where Jews were indigenized—subdialects such as Yiddish in relationship to Mittelhochdeutsch, Ladino to Medieval Spanish, and Judeo-Tajik for the Persianate world. Two instances reported in Islamic sources point to this early Judeo-Arabic. The first instance is from the *maghāzī* tradition on the raid on Khaybar, in which ʿAbdullāh b. ʿAtīk, whose mother was a Khaybar Jewess, is able to lead a raiding party into the heavily fortified city during Passover to assassinate the community leader.[31] Another instance is the famous example that Zaid b. Thābit learned *yahūdiyyah* in seven days, thus indicating most likely that he learned the Hebrew script and some vocabulary to be able to understand what was written by the Ḥijāzī Jews. In these examples, the word used for speaking *yahūdiyyah* dialect is *raṭana*, to speak a subdialect of Arabic, that is, to speak an argot.[32]

Besides the well-discussed cases noted above, there are other examples that help us understand the development of the Jewish-influenced religious vocabulary in proto-Islamic times and bring us closer to an understanding of who these Jews were. A telling example from the Qurʾān of this Jewish linguistic influence occurs in Surah 5:48. In a context discussing the scriptures that were revealed to Jews and Christians, we are told: "For each [community] we have set out a *shirʿah* and a *minhāj*." *Shirʿah* in this passage is revealed divine law, but Jewish or Christian, Torah or Gospel, as is clear from the preceding passages. The reference is to the law by which each of the communities is to be judged—Jews theirs and Christians theirs. *Minhāj* is usually translated as "way of life, a road or a path." But *minhāj* is a *hapax legomenon* in the Qurʾān, and the subsequent dictionary definitions

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29 When Waraqa b. Nawfal, who is said to have studied the scriptures of the People of the Book, talks with Khadija about Muḥammad's receipt of the Qurʾān, he refers to the revelation as the greatest *nāmūs* that Moses had received, which term is an Arabicization of the Greek *nomos* ("law"), possibly transmitted through Christian sources but used as the translation of Torah in the Septuagint and in the writings of the Pharisee Paul, whose first missions were to Jewish communities, including those in Arabia.

30 See Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri II*. From this usage we get the Islamic-Arabic *fassara*, *tafsīr*, as a technical term for the interpretation of scripture, apparently an Arabicization of the Hebrew *pesher*, meaning an "interpretation."

31 From the traditions of this raid, we see that the practices of celebrating Passover of these Arabian Jews, while "rabbinic," directly contradicted the injunctions in the Babylonian Talmud that forbid roistering on Passover and state that the meal must be celebrated in one place.

32 Newby, "Observations about an Early Judaeo-Arabic," pp. 212–21.

seem to be contextual definitions for this usage. Other meanings of the Arabic root *nhj* have to do with being breathless or overexerted—inappropriate for the Qur'ānic context and use. The word also seems to be an unusual nominal pattern with its preformative *mīm* and a long vowel between the *hī* and the *lām*. Viewed through a Hebrew perspective, the word *minhāj* appears to be a calque of the Hebrew *minhag*, meaning "customary practice." In Rabbinic Judaism, the degree of authority of *minhag* is debated, with many communities holding that *minhag* of a community is *halakha*, law. Relying on the Jewish meaning appears appropriate, since the Qur'ānic phrase clearly has both *shirʿah* and *minhāj* having divine origin. The term *minhāj* in this passage indicates a Jewish view of revealed divine law, *shirʿah*, and divinely delivered *minhāj*, customary law, a feature that later becomes identified with Rabbinite Judaism.[33]

In Surah 5:1, the word *bahīmah*, meaning "animal," occurs in a context of regulating licit animals for food: "Made licit for you are the *bahīmah* of grazing animals."[34] In Leviticus 11:1–2 we find: "God spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying to them, 'Speak to the Children of Israel, saying: These are that which you may eat of the animals on the earth,'" where the word for animal in Hebrew is *bʾhēmah*. The contextual similarity between the food regulation in the Qur'ān and the food regulation in Leviticus shows not only the phonetic correspondence between Arabic and Hebrew but also the technical semantic range. It is clear, also, that this use of *bahimah* is unrelated to other uses of the root **bhm* in Arabic.

The phrase *qawm būr* occurs twice in the Qur'ān, namely, in 25:18 and 48:12, usually understood as related to the root **bwr*, meaning "uncultivated, fallow," or "unsuccessful." Hartwig Hirschfeld, following the lead of various commentators who found difficulties associating the word *būr* with acceptable nominal forms, proposed that it is related in usage to the Jewish Aramaic *būr*, "uncultured, ignorant," such as is found in *Pirqe Aboth* 2:6: No *būr* fears sin.[35] An interesting turn from following the meanings of *būr* in Jewish and Islamic sources leads to the story of Joseph. In the Torah, the word for the pit into which Joseph's brothers threw him is *bōr*. The Targums on this event use the Jewish Aramaic word *goba*, corresponding to the Arabic *jubb*, occurring twice at Q. 12:10 and 12:15, which root has no additional development.

In Q. 2:58 the Qur'ān reports Allah as commanding the Children of Israel "to go into this town, and eat freely what is there, and enter the gate prostrating and say *ḥiṭṭah*." The same command is given in Q. 7:161. *Ḥiṭṭah* is normally translated as "forgiveness" or "repentance" in the Qur'ānic context, but the root elsewhere has the sense of debasement, going down, or putting something down. Qur'ān 2:69 then says that the wrong-doing Jews substituted another word and were punished. This pericope appears to refer to the Jewish

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[33] In spite of the fact that Surah 5:44 mentions rabbis, it also mentions *ʾaḥbār*, thus complicating our understanding of the Qur'ānic view of Jews. This term is one that seems to mean those who are learned in matters Jewish but are not necessarily rabbis, as in the name of Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, who was the source of much Jewish lore found in the *Isra'īliyāt* traditions. The interrelationship of rabbis and *chaverīm* is problematic and complicates the classification of Arabian Jews in this period without back-reading later sectarian developments. See below.

[34] See also Q. 22:28, 34.

[35] Hirschfeld, *Beiträge zur Erklärung des Korān*, p. 40. Maimonides (*Commentary on the Mishnah*), commenting on this word in his remarks on Mishnah 10, brings his definition of the Hebrew *būr* back to the Qur'ānic contextual meaning by saying that a *būr* is like a fallow field, producing nothing.

Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, in which a major part of the liturgy is the recitation of the ʿal khait, literally, "on account of the sin"—a communal recitation of a long list of sins for which atonement and forgiveness are sought. The recitation of the list of sins is designed to elicit God's forgiveness, which design accounts for the transformation of the meaning of the word from sin to forgiveness. It is clear from these Qurʾānic passages that the Yom Kippur practice was well known.

In Surah 2:102 and 2:200, we find the use of *khalāq* meaning "portion" or "share." Qurʾān 2:102 reads, "and they knew that he who buys and sells [magic] has no portion, [*khalāq*] in the world to come." So also in Q. 2:200, where those who ask Allah for things of this world have no portion (*khalāq*) in the world to come. This specialized use of *khalāq* linked with the exclusion of a category of sinners from a reward in the afterlife appears to be a near quotation of a phrase found in the Babylonian Talmud 90a (*et passim*): ʿayn lahem khēleq li-ʿolam, "there will not be to them a portion in the world to come," referring to classes of sinners excluded from the group of "all" Israel to whom the Talmud promises a share or portion (Heb. *khēleq*) in the world to come. The Qurʾānic context of distinguishing who will and will not be saved must have resonated among the Jews of Medina and others familiar with the same categories in Jewish teaching.

In addition to technical religious terms, we find examples of words for everyday objects showing up in the Qurʾānic vocabulary that have origins in Hebrew and Jewish Aramaic. One such example is the word *sawṭ*, found in Q. 89:12: "Thus your Lord cast on them a scourge [*sawṭ*] of punishment." The Hebrew *shōt* has the same meaning of a scourge or whip used on animals or humans, but in Jewish Aramaic it has the added meaning of a punishment sent by God. All the above examples are selections *per exemplum* of a numerous and rich Jewish-derived vocabulary found in the Qurʾān. This "Jewish" vocabulary stands alongside "Christian" vocabulary, all of which is presented in Islamic traditions as a "clear scripture," even when Muslim scholars identify various words as "foreign,"[36] and along with the vocabulary came the religious ideas that helped form the views of scripture held by those listening to the Qurʾān in the time of Muḥammad.

With respect to the discussion at hand about script and scripture in Arabia, it is possible with the evidence we have to see that Jews used "mainstream" Ḥijāzī Arabic and *yahūdiyyah* in spoken and written forms in addition to the liturgical use of Hebrew and Aramaic primarily by the Jewish intelligentsia: the rabbis and the *haberīm* (sing. *haber*, Arabic plur. *aḥbār*). Congregational practice for reading Torah, as indicated above, involved the ritual reading of Hebrew followed by a translation into Arabic in a dialect understandable to Muḥammad and his companions. The most famous pre-Islamic Jewish poet, as-Samawʾal, has his poetry preserved in various monumental collections of Arabic poetry, but an interesting and controversial poem attributed to him appears in the Cairo Geniza.[37] It is written in Arabic in Hebrew characters and contains many words found in the Qurʾān that can be seen to have entered Arabic through *yahūdiyyah* as well as

36 For an incomplete treatment of these words, see Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān*. Note that many of the verse references assume a Qurʾān that is different from the current standard.

37 Hirschfeld, "Arabic Portion of the Cairo Genizah." For criticism by Margoliouth, see "A Poem Attributed to Al-Samauʾal"; and for Hirschfeld's reply, see "Notes on the Poem Ascribed to Al-Samauʾal" in the same issue.

references to midrashic interpretations of biblical characters. Other poems attributed to Jewish poets and grave inscriptions in Arabic contain little that can be said to be distinctly Jewish in a religious or theological sense. This situation is not unexpected, since consideration of genre often conditions what content is included or excluded. Pre-Islamic poetry in Arabia—at least that which is preserved—reveals little about religious beliefs directly, whether polytheistic, Jewish, or Christian.

Within the language and script environment of Arabian (primarily Ḥijāzī) Jews, the range and content of their religious literature is interesting and germane to our reconstruction of the scripture-ready environment of Arabia on the eve of Islam. It appears that the Jewish communities of Arabia add significant threads to the tapestry of the Qurʾān and the traditions associated with Muḥammad. First, of course, is the Torah, but, as indicated above, the Torah is embedded in an interpretive environment as would be expected in a rabbinic Jewish context. The production of a *tafsīr* for the Medinan Jewish congregation as a means of understanding the Torah—a *pesher*, if we take the Arabic word back to its Hebrew counterpart—is an essential part of what it means to be rabbinic. This is also how the Qurʾān and related Islamic traditions understand the Medinan Jews. The term *rabbāniyyūn* occurs three times in the Qurʾān—at 3:79, 5:44, and 5:63—in contexts where it clearly means "rabbis." It can also be translated as "rabbinites" or "those who are rabbinic." If there were proto-Karaite Jews in Medina in the time of Muḥammad, as some have argued, this term would be an appropriate one to call the rabbinic Jews. The other term, *aḥbār*, is more difficult to translate. Aṭ-Ṭabarī, in his *tafsīr* on Q. 3:79, says that the *rabbāniyyūn* are higher in rank than the *aḥbār* because of their knowledge but that the *aḥbār* are ones who possess knowledge of some things. One is reminded of Kaʿb al-Aḥbār (or al-Ḥibr), to whom is ascribed a great number of midrashic traditions. In the Talmudic tradition, a *haber* was someone who practiced strict Levitical purity and separated from those in the general society, the ʿam ha-ʿaretz. This understanding fits with the tradition that Arabia was the refuge of those who fled after the destruction of the Second Temple and harbored the hope of the Temple's reconstruction. Hirschfeld argues that the title *haber* contrasts with ʿam ha-ʿaretz and that Muḥammad's appellation as a *nabī ummī* means that he was a prophet for the general populace, the ʿam ha ʿaretz.[38] Islamic sources, however, assert that some Jews accepted Muḥammad on some terms, and in the late Umayyad period the ʿĪsāwiyyah acknowledged that Muḥammad was a prophet, but not for them. It would not be surprising to find additional proof that the Ḥijāzī Jewish communities were as divided as what we can see from our current scant evidence.

Haggai Mazuz makes a strong case for Medinan Jews, for the most part, fitting into a recognizable pattern of rabbinic belief and practice.[39] He cites, for example, evidence that the Jews of Wādī al-Qurā sent *sheʾiltōt*—official legal inquiries—to the rabbis in Babylonia.[40] And some of what we find in the Qurʾān fits that picture well, particularly in the areas of interpretation of Torah. They are accused, for example, of changing the text and/or

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38 Hirschfeld, *Beiträge zur Erklärung des Korān*, p. 40. It should be noted that Muḥammad Marmaduke Pickthall's usually reliable translation of the Qurʾān is wrong when he translates ʿahbâr as "priests" at Q. 5:44 and 5:63.

39 Mazuz, *Religious and Spiritual Life of the Jews of Medina.*

40 Ibid., appendixes 1 and 2.

the meaning of the text of the Torah.[41] Doing so is normal practice in midrashim—not actually changing the words of the Torah but offering various interpretations based on plausible textual parallels found elsewhere in the Tanakh. In Qurʾānic Arabic, this practice is called *taḥrīf*, "letter substitution," or *tabdīl*, "exchange." An example of midrashic making shows up in association with Q. 2:80, in which the Jews are said to claim that the fires of hell would only affect them for a limited time. In the *sīrah* traditions, this claim is amplified as saying that since the Jews held that the creation took seven days, then the world would last for seven thousand years and would end (un-creation) after seven days, thus limiting the time one could be in hell. Since the Tanakh fails to spell out when and how long the eschaton will be, asserting parallelism with Genesis fits nicely within rabbinic midrashic practice of trying to fill the "gaps" in the text.

Other Qurʾānic accusations against Jewish belief and practice indicate that some Arabian Jews were involved with beliefs and practices outside the Torah-Talmud textual orbit. Consider Q. 9:30–31: "And the Jews say: Ezra is the son of God, and the Christians say: The Messiah is the son of God." This statement is attributed to Jewish *aḥbār* (usually translated as "rabbis") and Christian monks. The question is, how could rabbinic Jews plausibly be said to have regarded Ezra as a "son" of God? The best explanation is that Ezra, along with Baruch, Elijah, and Enoch, was translated into heaven alive, stripped of humanity, and the four were made into members of the *benē elohīm*—literally, "sons of God," part of the angelic realm—and it was Enoch who became Metatron, the guardian of the secrets of heaven. Ezra, who is known in extrarabbinic literature as the Scribe of the knowledge of the Most High,[42] is conflated with Enoch by those *aḥbār* who were involved in the practice of *Merkabah* mysticism.[43] Of interest to our discussion is that the Ezra/Enoch traditions embraced by the Arabian *aḥbār* are found among communities in Palestine, Babylonia, and Ethiopia, thereby indicating that the Arabian Jews were connected to the lands outside and surrounding the Arabian Peninsula.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, what are we to make of the evidence for Jewish presence and influence on the ideas of scripture in Arabia? First, we notice that the Qurʾān takes Jewish ideas seriously. Much of the polemic in the Qurʾān against the Jews is against ideas that can be found in Rabbinite scripture. Additionally, those polemical passages are presented in the Qurʾān as discussions of well-known ideas among Jewish and non-Jewish listeners to the Qurʾān. This phenomenon stands to reason, because we have ample evidence that Judaism in its various forms was respected in Arabia at the time of Muḥammad. Second, we should note that Jewish scripture in Arabia was more than just the five books of Moses, the written Torah. The material we have from the Qurʾān, and later from the *tafsīr* traditions on specific Qurʾānic passages, represents the dual scripture of Rabbinite Judaism, the *ketiv* and the

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41 These accusations are found among the later Karaites against the Rabbinites and in the Dead Sea materials. See ibid., pp. 103–7, where Mazuz presents an argument that earliest Islam can be seen as an anti-rabbinic movement.

42 4 Ezra 14:50.

43 See Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot.*

qere—the written and oral Torah. Indeed, the Qurʾānic polemics seem chiefly aimed at the Rabbinite use of oral Torah and their methods of reading without asserting that we have anything more than the Jewish practices later adopted by Rabbinite Jews. This being the case, it is somewhat ironic that the development of Islamic legal/scriptural practice adopts a form of dual scripturalism in the Qurʾān and the Sunna, thus supporting the observations made by many that Islam and Rabbinite Judaism are remarkably more similar than either one of them is to Christianity. Third, the Jewish communities of Arabia were well connected to Jewish and non-Jewish communities outside Arabia, which argument, of course, can be made for all the major Arabian communities, settled or pastoral. Last, "scriptural religion" seems to have been a major topic of interest in Arabia at least shortly before and during Muḥammad's lifetime. It was certainly promoted by the interests and interferences of the major powers, the Byzantine Romans and the Persians, who used the Arabian Jews as active surrogates in their ambitions. But the Jewish and Christian missionaries found fertile ground in Arabia as Arabians were interested in coalescing around communities of belief and practice.

7 Script, Text, and the Bible in Arabic
The Evidence of the Qur'ān

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1

Was there a written translation of the Bible into Arabic current in the milieu of the origins of the Qur'ān in the first third of the seventh century CE? This question has entertained scholars for many years. As many have argued, there is every reason for the historian to think it is probable that late antique, Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians would have had at least a portion of their scriptural and traditional lore in their own language, albeit in both instances the canonical languages of their communities were geographically and culturally local—Hebrew and Aramaic for Jews, Greek and Syriac for Christians.[1] The problem has been the lack of any direct, as opposed to conjectural or extrapolated, historical evidence for the currency of any written Jewish or Christian Arabic translations of any portion of the Bible or extrabiblical texts in Qur'ānic or early Islamic times.[2] As many scholars have noted, this lack of evidence is especially surprising in the case of the Christians in the Arabic-speaking milieu, whose coreligionists in other late antique language communities were quick to translate especially the scriptures into their own languages. One thinks in this connection of the Latin, Armenian, and Old Church Slavonic churches in particular. But a notable fact in these instances is that unlike in the case of Aramaic, Syriac, and Arabic, there is no linguistic relationship, cognate or otherwise, that would suggest mutual intelligibility and communicability between the canonical, scriptural languages and the target languages of the translations done into languages such as Latin, Armenian, or Slavonic. One might reasonably think that the need for an Arabic translation of the Bible in writing was not yet pressing in the seventh century, unlike the situation that obtained later—from the middle of the eighth century onward, after the Arab conquest of

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1 The longtime proponent of the currency of written Arabic Bible translations in pre-Qur'ānic times has been the late and much-lamented Irfan Shahid, who systematically searched out every hint of an Arabic Bible or portion of one in the available sources—Greek, Syriac, and Arabic. See in particular Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* and *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*.

2 I have long discussed this matter, beginning with Griffith, "Gospel in Arabic," and most recently in *Bible in Arabic*.

the Levant, when Arabic became the public language in the caliphate and eclipsed the local languages even in the internal affairs of the indigenous religious communities.[3]

It is true of course that the want of direct evidence for the existence of a pre-Islamic, written translation of the Bible into Arabic is not in itself a reason to conclude that there was no such translation. To make such a claim would be an obvious fallacy in argument, especially in view of the fact that there is abundant evidence for the currency of writing in Arabic at the time of the Qurʾān's origins,[4] albeit one recent scholar of these matters has written that the Qurʾān is really the first Arabic book.[5] It is precisely due to the ready availability of a culture of writing in Arabic at the time of the Qurʾān's origins that the discussion of the likelihood or unlikelihood of the availability of a Jewish or Christian collection of texts in Arabic prior to or contemporary with the redaction of the Qurʾān turns to the Arabic scripture's obviously high quotient of awareness of both Jewish and Christian biblical and traditional religious lore in the text as a solid basis from which one might reasonably extrapolate the hypothesis that the Qurʾān itself implies the presence and availability in writing of Jewish or Christian "subtexts." But as we shall see, what the Qurʾān has to say about its sharing in the transmission of biblical and parabiblical lore suggests that it is itself the vehicle of its first appearance in Arabic (Q. 16 *al-Naḥl* 103; 46 *al-Aḥqāf* 12).

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Ever since the publication of the magisterial studies of Abraham Geiger in the 1830s and Heinrich Speyer one hundred years later,[6] numerous researchers have been and continue to be indefatigably busy uncovering passages in the Arabic scripture that apparently re-call, allude to, or echo passages occurring in the earlier Jewish and Christian scriptures or other late antique religious texts. Such passages in the Qurʾān often seem to scholars evidently to reflect in considerable detail the narrative stream or structural outline,[7] even the specific idiom of a given narrative,[8] a doctrinal theme, or a legal precept[9] otherwise found in an earlier work, now often styled a "subtext" of the Qurʾān.[10] But in spite of the abundance of the accumulated instances of textual, thematic, or lexical reminiscences, coincidences, or interlinks with earlier texts to be found in the Qurʾān, until relatively recently there has been little scholarly discussion of the multiple hermeneutical issues attending the problem of what interpretive or historiographical construction to put upon

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3 See Griffith, "When Did the Bible Become an Arabic Scripture?"

4 See in particular the studies of Schoeler, *Écrire et transmettre* and "Writing and Publishing"; Déroche, *La transmission écrite du Coran.*

5 "Le premier livre de l'Islam et en même temps de la littérature arabe est le Coran" (Schoeler, *Écrire et transmettre,* p. 26).

6 Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed,* and Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen.*

7 See, e.g., Griffith, "Christian Lore and the Arabic Qurʾān"; van Bladel, "Alexander Legend"; Tesei, "Chronological Problems" and "Prophecy of Dhū-l-Qarnayn"; and Neuwirth, "Psalmen im Koran neu gelesen."

8 See, e.g., El-Badawi, *Qurʾān and Aramaic Gospel Traditions.*

9 See, e.g., Zellentin, *Qurʾān's Legal Culture.*

10 See, e.g., Reynolds, *Qurʾān and Its Biblical Subtext.*

this wealth of coincidental, textual data. For example, do the abundant biblical reminiscences in the Qurʾān, as opposed to the actual quotation of biblical passages, arguably support the hypothesis, strengthened by evidence of the contemporary currency of a culture of writing in Arabic, that in all likelihood there were therefore Arabic translations of the Bible in writing readily available in the milieu of the Qurʾān's origins in the first third of the seventh century CE? Clearly the answer must depend in part on a close study of how, textually and rhetorically speaking, the recollections of biblical lore actually appear in the Qurʾān, how the Qurʾān itself refers to them, and how the Qurʾān's biblical recollections may reasonably be supposed to relate to the evocation of biblical and parabiblical testimonies in the religious discourse of contemporary "Scripture People" within its ambience, especially the Syriac-speaking Christians among them, the echo of whose scriptural and traditional religious idiom so many scholars have detected behind so much of the Qurʾān's interreligious diction.[11]

Nearly all the so-called "subtexts," "intertexts," "interlinks," etc., with other scriptures that scholars have posited in connection with passages in the Qurʾān are for the most part elsewhere to be found only in works that were arguably unavailable in Arabic in writing at the time of the Qurʾān's origins. So the question arises, in the absence of written sources, how did knowledge of the lore transmitted in these other texts in other languages not only become commonplace in the Arabic-speaking milieu of the Qurʾān in its formative stages but also readily appear to be so easily, even seamlessly, woven into the Qurʾān's own discourse? The purpose of the present inquiry is to propose and support the verisimilitude of the hypothetical answer that the Qurʾān itself suggests, namely, that the intercultural transmission of biblical and parabiblical "literacy" took place orally, not textually, largely between neighboring communities of people who spoke and wrote cognate languages (Aramaic, Syriac, Geʾez, South Arabic), in a milieu of likely bilingualism, at a moment when in the so-called "North Arabic"–speaking domain such lore was not yet being recorded in writing, albeit writing was much in evidence for other purposes. The Qurʾān itself, which has much to say about writing and the accoutrements of writing, as we shall see, was at the time itself in the process of becoming the first Arabic scripture. In this connection, one recalls the Qurʾānic verse that refers in God's voice to what Muḥammad's early adversaries had to say about his recitations: "We know that they say, 'It is only a human being who teaches him,' the speech [*lisān*] of the one to whom they point is 'foreign' [*aʿjamī*]; this is a clear Arabic speech [*lisān*]" (Q. 16 al-Naḥl 103).[12] While in the Islamic exegetical tradition this verse has its own interpretation, which usually features suggestions about who Muḥammad's interlocutor might have been on the occasion of the first utterance of the verse and what his "foreign" language might have been,[13] the use of the Arabic term

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11 See, e.g., Witztum, "Joseph among the Ishmaelites." See also Griffith, "Syriacisms in the Arabic Qurʾān," "What Does Mecca Have to Do with Urhōy?" and "St. Ephraem the Syrian, the Qurʾān, and the Grapevines of Paradise."

12 In connection with matters arising in the interpretation of this verse, see Gilliot, "Les 'informateurs' juifs et chrétiens de Muḥammad." Note, too, the remarks of Peter Webb regarding the meaning and connotation of the terms *ʿarabī* and *aʿjamī* in Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, pp. 124–26, and Robert Hoyland's contribution to this volume.

13 See, e.g., the brief citations from the standard commentators mentioned in Nasr, *Study Quran*, pp. 685–87.

lisān here, both for merely human speech as well as Qurʾānic speech, among all the other terms for "talking" to be found in the Qurʾān, uniquely bespeaks orality, a "mouth-to-mouth" transmission, so to say. While one can hardly cite this passage as a proof text, it does remarkably make the point that people in his audience thought at the time that Muḥammad got much of his scriptural information from what we might call "hearsay." And another passage puts an emphasis on the point: "Those who disbelieve say this is but a lie he has concocted; other people have helped him with it. . . . They say it is only tales of the ancients he has had written down [*iktataba*]; they dictated to him morning and night" (Q. 25 *al-Furqān* 4–5). Presumably, Muḥammad is here charged with having provided for texts to be written in his own language, Arabic, which had not previously been available in that language.[14]

Hermeneutically speaking, the terminology today's scholars customarily use to indicate passages in pre-Qurʾānic, non-Arabic texts that seem to them to feature narrative motifs or word choices also found in the Arabic Qurʾān inevitably suggests a textual relation to the earlier work. Terms such as "subtext" and "intertext," in conjunction with allegations of "borrowing," "allusion," "reference," etc., suggest that the writings to which reference is made are somehow considered to have been written sources for the Qurʾān—sources that were textually, even bookishly consulted in the process of the Qurʾān's origins. Such sources are then almost subconsciously invested with a controlling narrative authority over the lore they transmit to the point that commentators have often in the past spoken of the Qurʾān's or Muḥammad's "misunderstandings," "errors," and "mistakes" in reference especially to the perceived biblical and parabiblical sources that they have alleged to lie behind passages in the Arabic scripture. The interpretive problem here is that the authority of the Qurʾān's own hermeneutical horizon is ignored. The focus on sources has had the deconstructing effect of tunneling the historian's vision to the point that the Qurʾān's own overall, governing paradigms of meaning are often neither sought nor consulted; attention is paid only to how well or ill in a particular instance the Qurʾān reflects or retells what is presumed to have been the subtext's original and authoritative first telling of a scriptural story. While there are doubtless a number of governing paradigms of meaning to be discerned in the Qurʾān's overall topical agenda, the text itself happily calls attention to the remarkably stable paradigm discernible in the expression of its distinctive "prophetology," arguably one of the most important characteristics of the Qurʾān's defining profile of originality vis-à-vis other contemporary and competing religious currents in its milieu. And it is within the range of the presentation of its prophetology, its own paradigm for the phenomenon of "prophetism," that the Qurʾān's most striking reminiscences of earlier biblical and parabiblical narratives occur. The thesis advanced here is that it is the Qurʾān's distinctive prophetology that determines the construction it uniquely puts upon the stories of the Bible's patriarchs and prophets presumed to be well known in the milieu of its Arabic-speaking audience.[15]

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14 See Madigan, *Qurʾān's Self-Image*, pp. 117–24, for some reflections on the meaning of the term *iktataba* in this passage.

15 For earlier discussions of the Qurʾān's distinctive prophetology, see Griffith, *Bible in Arabic*, pp. 62–89, and "Sunna of Our Messengers."

3

An attentive examination of the usual textual horizons of the Qurʾān's recollections of the stories of the biblical patriarchs and prophets reveals the function of a Qurʾān-wide master paradigm for such scriptural reminiscences, which, in God's words addressed to Muḥammad, the Qurʾān itself calls "the *sunnah* of Our messengers": "There is a *sunnah* of those of Our messengers whom We have sent before you [2ms] and you will find no turning away from Our *sunnah*" (Q. 17 *al-Isrāʾ* 77). What is more, the Qurʾān fortuitously displays the paradigmatic outline of this unchanging *sunnah* the most clearly in a particular *sūrah*, Q. 26 *al-Shuʿarā*, which includes the standard taglines and distinctive typological phrasing that appear everywhere else in the Qurʾān's reminiscences of the biblical patriarchs and prophets, as well as its recollections of such nonbiblical messengers as Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Shuʿayb.[16]

One readily notices the fact that an integral typology and a standard paradigm for the Qurʾān's recollection and reminiscence of the stories of God's messengers has emerged in this *sūrah*.[17] And in addition to the repeated taglines in *sūrat al-Shuʿarā*'s recollection of the several messengers and prophets, one also notices the prominence of the key terms in the Qurʾān's messenger narratives, the admonition to remember (*dhikr*), and the notice in regard to the punishment that has followed a people's disregard of the messenger's message, namely, the repeated statement that "in that there is a sign [*āyah*], but most of them did not become believers."

It is clear that the Qurʾān prefers the title "messenger" (*rasūl*, plur. *rusul*) for those who, like Muḥammad, were sent by God to warn the peoples to whom they were dispatched. This title occurs some 331 times in the Arabic scripture, whereas, with the exception of Muḥammad himself, only those figures who are mentioned in the Jewish and Christian biblical traditions are called "prophet" in the Qurʾān—a title that occurs only some 75 times. Muḥammad, who is said to be the "seal of the prophets" (Q. 33 *al-Aḥzāb* 40) is also called a "prophet" (*nabīy*) a number of other times as well.[18] The Qurʾān seems thereby to want to enroll him as a messenger who had also taken on the mantle of a biblical prophet, thereby in a certain sense "biblicizing" Muḥammad, who is otherwise a biblical figure in the Qurʾān only by way of an alleged prophecy on the lips of Jesus speaking in his role as a messenger: "Jesus, Mary's son, said, 'O Sons of Israel I am God's Messenger [*rasūl*] to you, confirming the truth of the Torah before me, and an announcer of a Messenger [*rasūl*] who will come after me, whose name is Aḥmad'" (Q. 61 *al-Ṣaff* 6). At the same time and in counterpoint, as though to enroll several biblical patriarchs and prophets in a new hermeneutical frame of reference, they are accorded the title "messenger" in the Qurʾān; they include Noah, Lot, Ishmael, Moses, Jesus, and perhaps Elijah and Jonah.[19] So the questions

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16 See the detailed outline of the *sūrah* in Griffith, "Sunna of Our Messengers."

17 Regarding the paradigmatic structure of *sūrat ash-Shuʿarāʾ*, see especially the very important but seldom cited article by Zwettler, "Mantic Manifesto."

18 See, e.g., the dozen times the title "prophet" is accorded to Muḥammad in Qurʾān 33 *al-Aḥzāb*, including the famous verse, "Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Messenger of God and the 'seal of the prophets'" (Q. 33: 40). See also the interesting sequence in Qurʾān 66 *al-Taḥrīm* 1–9.

19 See Zahniser, "Messenger."

immediately arise, what is the role of messenger in the Qurʾān, and what is the relationship in the Qurʾān's view between Qurʾānic messengers and biblical prophets?[20]

Given the prominence of the role of God's messengers in the Qurʾān and the fact that the Arabic scripture speaks of some of the Bible's major prophetic figures as messengers, it seems that the Qurʾān is thereby in a certain sense appropriating and redefining the meaning of biblical prophetism and reinterpreting it within the purview of the Qurʾānic concept of "messengership." The Qurʾān incorporates and reinterprets the role of the prophetic figures of the Bible by way of recalling their stories within a framing, sequential pattern of recollection that invests them with a distinctly Qurʾānic career pattern, with its own distinctive profile, that is, "the *sunnah* of Our Messengers." As I shall argue below, the Qurʾān's deployment of its own distinctive paradigm of prophetism in a milieu in which rival religious communities were promoting competing prophetologies highlights the counter-discursive, even revisionist character of the Qurʾān's evocations of earlier prophetic narratives.

The Qurʾān's messengers and prophets are called by God from among their own people to speak to them in their own language in order to make matters clear to them (Q. 14 *Ibrāhīm* 4), to warn them away from serving gods other than the one God (e.g., Q. 7 *al-Aʿrāf* 59; Q. 11 *Hūd* 25; Q. 3 *Āl ʿImrān* 164). They are not normally angels, "they eat food and walk around in the streets" (Q. 20 *al-Furqān* 20); God has sent messengers only as "warners" and "announcers" (Q. 17 *al-Isrāʾ* 105; Q. 18 *al-Kahf* 56); the only obligation of a messenger is "clear expression" (Q. 29 *al-ʿAnkabūt* 18). Inspired, like Muḥammad, by a spirit (*rūḥ*) at God's bidding, (Q. 42 *al-Shūrā* 52) or, like Jesus, "aided by the spirit of holiness" (Q. 2 *al-Baqarah* 253), Qurʾānic messengers and prophets are charged to recite verbatim God's "word" (*kalimah*) that has gone before (Q. 37 *al-Ṣāffāt* 171), to narrate God's "signs" (*āyāt*) (Q. 7 *al-Aʿrāf* 35), and to announce the way to the right path—"fear God and obey me" (e.g., Q. 42 *al-Zukhuf* 63–64), "Whoever obeys the Messenger, obeys God" (Q. 4 *al-Nisāʾ* 80). Like Moses and Jesus, God's messengers are models for those who come after them (cf. Q. 43 *al-Zukhruf* 56–57). But most of those to whom God has sent messengers have inevitably mocked them (Q. 15 *al-Ḥijr* 10–13) and called them liars (Q. 50 *Qāf* 14). God, however, inevitably vindicates his messengers and prophets against the machinations of their adversaries (Q. 58 *al-Mujādilah* 21).

On the basis of the passages thus far considered, the Qurʾān's distinctive prophetology, its *sunnah* as the Qurʾān itself speaks of it,[21] displays a certain paradigmatic profile; it features a paradigm shift from earlier modes of prophecy among the earlier Scripture People, be they Jews, Christians, Jewish Christians, Manichees, or any other community in the Qurʾān's milieu that was making a bid for loyalty.

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20 See in this connection the important article by Bijlefeld, "Prophet and More Than a Prophet?"; the insightful remarks in Waldman, *Prophecy and Power*; also Crone, "Angels versus Humans as Messengers of God."

21 In reference to the messengers prior to Muḥammad, God speaks of "the *sunnah* of our messengers whom We have sent before you; you will not find that our *sunnah* has any turning away" (Q. 17 *al-Isrāʾ* 77). In other places the Qurʾān refers to this *sunnah* of the prophets and the "*sunnah* of the ancients" (*sunnat al-awwalīn*), as in Q. 15 *al-Ḥijr* 13; Q. 35 *Fāṭir* 43. See Zwettler, "Mantic Manifesto," pp. 106–9.

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Closer study reveals that the Qurʾān's presentation of its distinctive paradigm of prophetism developed gradually. Already in the Meccan period of Muḥammad's career as God's spokesperson among the Arabic-speaking peoples of the Arabian Ḥijāz, the Qurʾān that Muḥammad proclaimed was recalling pertinent features of the traditional stories of the biblical patriarchs and prophets; it was presenting the memory of their careers among their own people to Muḥammad's audience as a point of authoritative reference for the proper understanding of his own, now God-inspired, role among them. Obviously, the presumption must be that these biblical figures would have already become well known in Arabia, at the very least by name and reputation, and that the recollection of their stories would already have carried with it a scriptural cachet for their authority. Over the time of Muḥammad's career in Mecca and Medina, it seems that the parameters for the Qurʾān's reminiscences of the biblical patriarchs and prophets had coalesced into a standard pattern of presentation both in plot and vocabulary so that, by the end of the Meccan period, the Qurʾān can say to Muḥammad, "As for the *sunnah* of those of Our Messengers whom We have sent before you [2ms], you [2ms] will not find any turning away from it" (Q. 17 *al-Isrāʾ* 77; cf. also Q. 35 *Fāṭir* 43; and the Medinan *sūrah*, Q. 48 *al-Fatḥ* 23).

It is important to observe at the outset that in virtually all the instances of the Qurʾān's recollections of the stories of the biblical personae, the setting, the *Sitz im Leben* of the Messenger, so to speak, envisions an occasion on which God's revelation to Muḥammad, and through him to his audience, takes the form of an authentication of the veracity of his own divinely inspired prophetic mission to them; it does so by recalling the congruence of Muḥammad's prophetic experience with that of God's earlier biblical and nonbiblical messengers and prophets who, before Muḥammad, were sent to their own people as messengers (*al-rusul*) and warners (*al-nudhur*) of the dire consequences of their unbelief and moral decadence. Initially and throughout Muḥammad's career, the Qurʾān's reminiscences of the earlier messengers and prophets come in passages addressed both to his own moments of personal anxiety about the authenticity of his calling and also the difficulties the members of his audience had in accepting and heeding him as God's messenger to them. In other words, the Qurʾān's reminiscences of the biblical figures were intended to serve as warrants for the credibility of the claim that Muḥammad was in fact following the already established "*sunnah* of Our Messengers," to use the Qurʾān's own phrase for the prophetic paradigm. At moments, as we shall see, the text even suggests that the *sunnah*'s foreseen destination from the beginning of the sequence of God's messengers was in fact, according to the Qurʾān, Muḥammad's own mission, first to the Arabic-speaking peoples of Arabia and thereafter to all the world.

The Qurʾān's prophetology, its distinctive paradigmatic profile of prophetism, unfolds gradually but quickly; the main lines of its contours were already drawn by the end of the Meccan period, to be minimally refined later, at several junctures in the Medinan period of Muḥammad's mission. From the beginning, it is clear that the Qurʾān envisions a sequence of messengers sent by God to numerous peoples before Muḥammad's time to warn those among them who, like many of his own adversaries, have belied (*kadhdhaba*) God's "signs" (*āyāt*) or deemed the messengers' summons to right belief and right living to be false. At first the Qurʾān refers to the fate of those who have disobeyed their messengers

without naming or recalling the stories of their messengers. For example, one of the earliest passages to evoke the memory of the prophetic sequence speaks first of the nonbiblical peoples, Thamūd and ʿĀd, who belied the coming of the Day of Judgment, and it then calls Muḥammad's attention to the coming of the biblical pharaoh "and those before him, along with the [cities] overturned for sin; they disobeyed the Messenger [*al-rasūl*] of their Lord, so He seized them ever more tightly. When the water mounted up, We carried you [2mp] in the ship to make it a reminder [*tadhkirah*] for you that an attentive ear might retain" (Q. 69 *al-Ḥāqqah* 4–12). There is no mention here of the messengers God had sent to the aforementioned peoples—the prophets Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Moses, Lot, or Noah—whose names we learn only in other *sūrah*s.

Moses may in fact have been the first of the messengers to be mentioned by name in the Qurʾān. At an early point in the Meccan period, God addresses Muḥammad directly in the following words (recorded in Q. 79 *al-Nāziʿāt* 15–26):

Has the story of Moses come to your attention, when his Lord summoned him in the hallowed valley of Ṭuwā? "Go to Pharaoh; he has exceeded all bounds. Say, 'Is it in your power to purify yourself? Shall I guide you to your Lord so that you might fear [Him]?'" Then he displayed the great sign [*al-āyah al-kubrā*] before him. He belied it and rebelled. Then he hastily turned away, assembled a company and proclaimed, 'I am your god most high.' God seized him for an exemplary punishment—last and first. In that there is certainly a lesson [*ʿibrah*] for any one who fears [God].

In addition to the mention of Moses by name, one also notices the narrative parallels in this passage with those in the just previously quoted *sūrah*: the messenger, the villains, the rejection of the message, and the consequences of the rejection, along with similar interpretive terms, such as "reminder" (*tadhkirah*), "sign" (*āyah*), and "lesson" (*ʿibrah*); these and other comparable terms in other passages reminiscent of past prophetic history recur as hermeneutical pointers to the Qurʾān's overall interpretive paradigm of prophetism, as we shall see. Meanwhile, in other early Meccan *sūrah*s, Abraham soon joins Moses by name as one of the two biblical messengers whose names and stories the Qurʾān recalls the most often and in the most detail; Moses appears by name 136 times and Abraham 69 times.

Moses and Abraham are mentioned together in an early Meccan *sūrah* that speaks to Muḥammad of the benefit of recalling, remembering, and reminding people of what God is reciting to him and bidding him to forget only what God wants him to forget. The Qurʾān says in this connection, "Remind [*dhakkir*] if reminding [*dhikrā*] is beneficial; one who is reminded fears [God]; the most wretched will turn away from it" (Q. 87 *al-Aʿlā* 9–11).[22] And a following verse says, "One is successful who purifies himself, recalls [*dhakara*] the name of his God, and prays" (Q. 87 *al-Aʿlā* 14–15). And at the end of the *sūrah* the Qurʾān remarks: "This is certainly in the early texts [*al-ṣuḥuf*],[23] the texts [*ṣuḥuf*] of Abraham and Moses" (Q. 87 *al-Aʿlā* 18–19). These same terms are to be found elsewhere in the Qurʾān.

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22 A verse in another Meccan *surah* bids Muḥammad, "Remind; reminding benefits the believers" (Q. 51 *al-Dhāriyyāt* 55).

23 There is a wide variety of English equivalents for the Arabic term *ṣuḥuf* to be found in published interpretations of the Qurʾān: "scrolls," "pages," "scriptures," "books," "pages of scripture." For the present purpose I prefer the English equivalent "texts" as a translation term in an effort to reduce over-specification in interpretation; the term "texts" bespeaks writing.

Speaking to Muḥammad in another passage in reference to an unnamed adversary,[24] God says, "Has he not been notified of what is in the texts [*al-ṣuḥuf*] of Moses, and of Abraham, who paid in full" (Q. 53 *al-Najm* 36–37). These texts of Abraham and Moses are presumably the same earlier texts that the Qurʾān mentions in another place in which it refers to Muḥammad's adversaries: they reportedly said, "If only he would have brought us a sign [*āyah*] from his Lord," to which God replies, "Has not the clarity [*bayyinah*] of what was in the earlier texts [*al-ṣuḥuf al-ūlā*] come to them?" (Q. 20 *Ṭā Hā* 133). In yet another place, the Qurʾān speaks in a Medinan *sūrah* of "a Messenger from God reciting unadulterated texts [*ṣuḥufan muṭahharatan*], with correct scriptures in them [*fī hā kutubun qayyima-tun*]" (Q. 98 *al-Bayyinah* 2–3). This mention of "texts" in connection with remembering and recalling earlier messengers and their messages bespeaks the Qurʾān's mindfulness of the scriptural warrant for the orally recollected and proclaimed stories of the biblical patri-archs and prophets. It nevertheless recalls and redacts their stories within the parameters of its own distinctive prophetism, which is clearly initially an oral phenomenon, the record of which was destined from the beginning to become in due course a written text in its own right, a text confirming the truth of the texts that went before it. At the end of *sūrat an-Najm*, where Moses and Abraham are mentioned by name (Q. 53:36–37), in a sequence reminiscent of the passage quoted above from *sūrat al-Hāqqah*, Q. 69:4–12, the Qurʾān now also mentions Noah by name: "[God] destroyed ʿĀd, the ancient, and Thamūd, and He did not spare them, and the people of Noah before—certainly they did exceeding evil, and were insolent—and the overturned city He also brought down, so that there covered it that which covered" (Q. 53 *an-Najm* 50–54; cf. Arberry).

From this early point onward in the Meccan *sūrah*s that include the recollection of the stories of the messengers and prophets, one normally finds them mentioned by name, along with the mention of the people to whom they were sent; not all of them are recalled in every place, and they are not always listed in the same sequence. But during the middle Meccan period of Muḥammad's mission, a definite pattern, even a distinctive typology, emerged in the vocabulary and discursive format and sequence of the Qurʾān's repeated recollections of God's past messengers and prophets, and this pattern in effect mapped the contours of the unchanging *sunnah* of Our Messengers (Q. 17 *al-Isrāʾ* 77). In the process, the gradually revealed *sunnah* came to prefigure, as it were *ex eventu*, the actual scriptural profile of Muḥammad's own career as God's messenger and the "seal of the prophets" (Q. 30 *al-Aḥzāb* 40). The reader can observe the broad outline of the paradigm already displayed in the presentation of the story of Moses that forms the narrative centerpiece of *sūrah* Q. 20 *Ṭāʾ Hāʾ* 9–101. Indeed, the recollection of the story of Moses's career as God's messenger, beginning already in the early Meccan period, as we have seen, seems to have provided the matrix, the basic template for the subsequent, systematic elaboration during the middle Meccan period of the Qurʾān's unvarying *sunnah* or typology of God's messen-gers and prophets—the matrix that would in due course become the interpretive horizon framing the presentation of the Arabic scripture's distinctive message vis-à-vis the claims of other Scripture People (*ahl al-kitāb*), primarily Jews, Christians, and even Manichees. The narrative outline of the recollection of the story of Moses in *sūrah Ṭāʾ Hāʾ* readily

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24 The exegetical tradition has it that this person was Walīd al-Mughirah, a Meccan opponent of Muḥammad.

displays the pattern that the Qurʾān follows in recalling the stories of other messengers and prophets.

The long passage in Q. 20 *Ṭāʾ Hāʾ* featuring the recollection of the story of Moses and his brother Aaron as "two Messengers" (*rasūlān*) of God (Q. 20:47) is clearly marked off as a set-piece within the *sūrah* by means of two verses that frame the narrative between an opening verse that functions as the passage's *incipit* and a closing verse that furnishes its *desinit*. The *incipit* verse is addressed as a question to Muḥammad: "Has the story [*ḥadīth*] of Moses come to you?" (Q. 20:9), followed immediately at the beginning of the next verse by the "memory particle" (*idh*), "[remember] when,"[25] and the narrative picks up from this point. The reminiscences of the Moses story follow in three stages: the call of Moses (Q. 20:10–22); the mission to pharaoh (Q. 20:24–79); and the mission to the Children of Israel (Q. 20:80–98). The *desinit* verse concludes the recollection with the following words addressed to Muḥammad: "Thus We relate [*naquṣṣu*] to you some of the [prophetic] pronouncements [*anbāʾ*] that have gone before; We have brought you a recollection [*dhikr*] from Us." There follows the warning that anyone who would turn away from the recollection of the stories of God's messengers would bear a grave burden at the end time (Q. 20:100–101). There are two important key terms that recur at regular intervals throughout the narrative in this and most other Qurʾānic reminiscences of God's messengers and prophets. They are, first, the term *āyah* (plur. *āyāt*), a word regularly translated into English as "sign(s)," which is widely used in the Qurʾān (some 373 times) in the sense of an evidentiary sign for people of intelligence (Q. 20:54) and indicative of God's presence and action in the world. The second term is any one of a number of forms of the Arabic verbal noun *dhikr*, which bespeaks remembrance, recollection, and mindfulness, as in mindfulness of God (e.g., Q. 20:14) and of his signs (Q. 20:23), be they the world of nature, historical events, verses of the Qurʾān, narratives of God's messengers and prophets, and even the messengers and prophets themselves. More will be said below about the theological significance and use of these terms as indicative of the concepts that are particularly pertinent to the description of the Qurʾān's distinctive prophetology, built as it is on the foundation of the Arabic scripture's presentation of the biblical patriarchs and prophets as "messengers" of the one God in its own sense of the term.

Following upon the pattern of the Qurʾān's reminiscence of the story of Moses in Q. 20 *sūrah Ṭāʾ Hāʾ*, one finds soon thereafter in Q. 21 *sūrat al-Shuʿarā*, as we have seen, the presentation of the series of messengers and prophets that names both the biblical and the nonbiblical personae in a single, systematic narrative scheme featuring those whose stories have so far been recalled or alluded to in disparate passages in earlier *sūrah*s. The names and reminiscences now appear in an integrated sequence, accompanied by a now standardized narrative phrasing complete with repeated interpretive taglines that reappear regularly in later *sūrah*s.

A pattern of recalling earlier messengers and prophets similar to that displayed in Q. 21 *sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ* appears on a smaller scale in the slightly earlier middle Meccan Q. 54 *sūrat al-Qamar*. It opens with God's reminding Muḥammad that when his recalcitrant contemporaries see a sign (*āyah*) they turn away and belie it by following their

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25 For a discussion of the function of the so-called "memory particle" in the Qurʾān's recollections of the stories of the biblical patriarchs and prophets, see Griffith, *Bible in Arabic*, pp. 57–62.

own whims, even though prophetic reports (*al-anbāʾ*) had already come to their attention bearing a deterrent and consummate wisdom; but the warning they provide has been to no avail (Q. 54:2–6). So God bids Muḥammad to turn away from the unbelievers; he reminds him that in the past the people of Noah, ʿĀd, Thamūd, Lot, and pharaoh had similarly belied (*kadhdhabat*) the warnings that had come to them (Q. 54:9–42). In each instance God remarks, "How then were My punishment and My warnings?" And in each instance, referring to Muḥammad's present situation, he repeats the refrain, "We have made the recitation [*al-Qurʾān*] easy to recall [*dhikr*], so is there anyone recalling [*muddakir*] it?" At the end of the *sūrah* God addresses Muḥammad's contemporaries: "Are your [2mp] unbelievers [*kuffār*] better than those, or are you [2mp] innocent of what is in the scriptures [*al-zubur*]?" (Q. 54:43).[26] Finally God avers, "We have already destroyed the likes of you [2mp]; is there anyone to recall [*muddakir*]? Everything they did is in the scriptures [*az-zubur*]" (Q. 54:52). Clearly, then, in *sūrat al-Qamar* as in *sūrat ash-Shuʿarāʾ* the Qurʾān's paradigm for the recollection of God's messengers and their message prior to the mission of Muḥammad is displayed, complete with repetitive taglines and the conceptually im-portant emphasis on "memory/recollection" (*dhikr*) in connection with the recognition of God's signs (*āyāt*), evident to believers in both nature and scripture.

A number of other Meccan *sūrah*s display a similar prophetic typology, albeit with variations in the lists of messengers and prophets who are named and variances in the sequences in which their stories are recalled. Nevertheless, the *sunnah* of Our Messengers remains on course, and it often features the repetition of the taglines and the conceptually significant key terms found already in Q. 21 *sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ* and Q. 54 *sūrat al-Qamar.* Most prominent for the present purpose among the *sūrah*s of the middle Meccan period is Q. 19 *sūrat Maryam*, in which Jesus the Messiah for the first time appears in one of the Qurʾān's dozen or so lists of the messengers and prophets, in a sequence that also for the first time features New Testament figures other than Jesus, along with an extended list of yet other figures from earlier biblical tradition. Indeed it is a notable feature of the lists of messengers and prophets in the later middle Meccan *sūrah*s generally that they include the names of ever more biblical personae than had heretofore come to the Qurʾān's attention.

Sūrat Maryam begins somewhat abruptly by calling Muḥammad's attention to "the recollection [*dhikr*] of your [2ms] Lord's mercy to His servant Zachary, when [*idh*] he secretly called out to his Lord" (Q. 19:2–3). This reminiscence goes on to recall the stories of Zachary and John the Baptist (Q. 19:4–15). Then, with an imperative, bidding phrase that recurs five times in the sequence, as we shall shortly see, the Qurʾān bids Muḥam-mad, "Recall in the scripture [*al-kitāb*]"[27] Mary and then Jesus (Q. 19:16–40). The reminis-cence unfolds in a manner that reminds the reader of the beginning of the Gospel of Luke but also of allusions to stories of Jesus's childhood that are otherwise found outside the Qurʾān in noncanonical Christian literature in Greek and Syriac that was widely popular

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26 On the sense of the somewhat ambiguous term *az-zubur* in this passage, see Addas, "Zabūr"; Badawi and Abdel Haleem, *Arabic–English Dictionary*, pp. 393–94.

27 Islamic tradition virtually unanimously understands "the scripture" (*al-kitāb*) in this phrase to refer to the Qurʾān. One wonders whether the reference in the present context is not more likely to have been to the earlier scriptural traditions in which the stories of the biblical personae were transmitted—traditions that Muḥammad is now bidden to recall.

throughout late antiquity.[28] These verses (Q. 19:16–33) are followed by a set of parenthetical verses (Q. 19:34–40) that somewhat intrusively reflect on the truth about Jesus, from the Qurʾān's point of view, and in the process they allude to differing opinions about him circulating among some unnamed people, presumably Christians. These passages in the ensemble are among the most important in the Qurʾān in terms of the Arabic scripture's teaching about Jesus the Messiah. And it is important to take cognizance of Jesus's own reported statement as a baby in his cradle, "I am God's servant [ʿabd]; He has brought me the scripture [al-kitāb] and He has made me a Prophet" (Q. 19:30). From this point on in the narrative it is also important to notice that immediately following the recollection of the New Testament personae—namely, Zachary, John the Baptist, Mary, and Jesus—along with the intrusive, theological parenthesis just mentioned, the Qurʾān then bids Muḥammad further to "Recall in the scripture [al-kitāb] Abraham, he was a righteous man and a Prophet" (Q. 19:41–50); "Moses; who was devoted, and he was a Messenger, a Prophet" (Q. 19:51–53); "Ishmael, he was a true man of the promise and he was a Messenger, a Prophet" (Q. 19:54–55); and "Idrīs, he was a righteous man, a Prophet" (Q. 19:56–57). The sequence concludes with the following remark: "Those are the ones of the Prophets from the progeny of Adam whom God graced, those whom We carried along with Noah, and those of the progeny of Abraham and Israel, among those whom We guided and elected; when the signs [āyāt] of the Merciful One would be read out to them they would bow down in prostration and weeping" (Q. 19:58).

From this point on in sūrat Maryam the Qurʾān goes forward to call attention to the subsequent falling off of religious observance among those to whom God's messengers had been sent in the past. In this context there occurs a variously worded, almost standard phrase in which the Qurʾān expresses God's oft-repeated somber observation regarding the subsequent history of those to whom he had previously sent messengers and prophets: "How many a generation before them have We destroyed, better off in resources and appearance" (Q. 19 Maryam 74).[29] Then, not far along thereafter, one encounters a passage embedded in the closing verses of the sūrah that instruct Muḥammad about how to respond to the errors of those who resist his message, a passage in which the text speaks in particular of those who

> say the Merciful One has taken a child [walad]. You [2mp] have put forward something grievous. The heavens would be rent at such a thing; the earth would be split, and the mountains would fall down in ruin that they have claimed the Merciful One has a child [walad]. It is unfitting for the Merciful One to take a child [walad]. Everyone in the heavens and the earth comes to the Merciful One as a slave [ʿabd]. (Q. 19 Maryam 88–93)

On the face of it, this polemically worded, very insistent disavowal of the claim that God has a child (walad) would seem to refer to Christian claims about Jesus, albeit it also articulates a principle that could also refer to other religious traditions. Since the verse here

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28 See in particular Neuwirth, "Imagining Mary, Disputing Jesus," including abundant bibliographical references to earlier scholarship.

29 See this theme in variation in verses such as the following: Q. 6 al-Anʿām 6; Q. 7 al-Aʿrāf 4; Q. 17 al-Isrāʾ 17; Q. 21 al-Anbiyāʾ 11; Q. 22 al-Ḥājj 28; Q. 28 al-Qaṣaṣ 58; Q. 38 Ṣād 3; Q. 44 al-Dukhān 37; Q. 47 Muḥammad 13; Q. 50 Qāf 36.

comes in the earliest *sūrah* actually to mention Mary and Jesus, in reference to whom the *sūrah* had already said in reference to Jesus, "It is not for God to take any child [*walad*]" (Q. 19 *Maryam* 35), it seems correct to think that in the closing verses of *sūrat Maryam* the reference is also to Jesus. The use of the term "child" (*walad*) here, instead of the Qur'ān's usual term "son" (*ibn*) in speaking of Jesus's relation to God (Q. 43 *al-Zukhruf* 57; Q. 9 *at-Tawbah* 30) is not without polemical intent here and elsewhere in the Qur'ān; it is a feature of the Arabic scripture's counter discourse in its prophetology that we shall discuss below.

Like *sūrat Maryam*, other *sūrah*s in the Qur'ān's middle Meccan period follow the basic *sunnah* of remembrance outlined in *sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ*, albeit they sometimes vary in both the choice of personae and the sequence in which their stories are recalled. Of the biblical personages, Moses and Abraham are the dominant figures, whose stories are re-called at greater length. Of the two figures, the reminiscences of Moses are by far the more numerous and the most detailed; indeed, Moses is the first of the two to be mentioned by name (cf. Q. 79 *al-Nāziʿāt* 15). Jesus is mentioned by name only in *sūrah* Q. 19 *Maryam* and *sūrah* Q. 43 *al-Zukhruf* 63 in the Meccan period. There is also an allusion to Jesus as "the son of Mary" (*ibn Maryam*) in *sūrah* Q. 23 *al-Muʾminūn* 50; in *sūrah* Q. 21 *al-Anbiyāʾ* 91 the passage speaks of Mary as "the one who guarded her chastity, so We breathed of Our spirit into her; We have made her and her son a 'sign' [*āyah*] to the worlds."[30] So it is clear that it was in the middle Meccan period that Jesus, Mary, and the other New Testament figures first joined the Old Testament's Moses, Abraham, Noah, and Lot, along with the Arabian messengers Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Shuʿayb, in the paradigmatic sequence of the Qur'ān's mes-sengers and prophets. The standard list expands in the late Meccan *sūrah* Q. 6 *al- Anʿām*, which also includes the mention of the New Testament figures Zachary, John, and Jesus (Q. 6:85). In the same period, *sūrah*s Q. 7 *al-Aʿrāf* 59–174 and Q. 11 *Hūd* 25–99 also present a sequence of messengers and prophets in a paradigmatic pattern similar to that displayed in the earlier *sūrat al-Shuʿarā*, along with the now familiar, repeated taglines and key terms already mentioned.

The point to be made at this juncture in the inquiry is that while we have not present-ed a comprehensive discussion of all the paradigmatic lists of the messengers and prophets that first appear in the *sūrah*s of the Qur'ān's middle Meccan period, it is nevertheless already clear that the earliest attention paid to Jesus and Mary in the Qur'ān occurs in this period. And most importantly, the crucial point is to take cognizance of the fact that in the earliest passage in which Jesus is mentioned, he is already presented as a prophet (Q. 19 *Maryam* 30), and he is placed in a narrative framework that already amounts to a canonical sequence of God's messengers and prophets. This paradigmatic framework then provides the hermeneutical horizon within which the further developments in the Qur'ān's Chris-tology will unfold, principally in the Medinan *sūrah*s.

While the mention of Jesus's name among the Qur'ān's messengers and prophets is infrequent, but nevertheless highly significant in the Meccan period, by way of contrast in the major *sūrah*s of the Medinan period of Muḥammad's mission Jesus's name and announcements about him figure prominently within the context of an often-abbreviated recollection of the names of earlier messengers and prophets (cf., e.g., Q. 2 *al-Baqarah* 87,

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30 See the similar language in the Medinan *sūrah* Q. 66 *at-Taḥrīm* 12.

136, 150–153; Q. 33 *al-Aḥzāb* 7; Q. 57 *al-Ḥadīd* 25–27; Q. 61 *al-Ṣaff* 6). The principal Medinan *sūrah*s in which the Qurʾān's definitive Christology is developed within the framework of the prophetic paradigm are *sūrah*s Q. 3 *Āl ʿImrān*, Q. 4 *an-Nisāʾ*, and Q. 5 *al-Māʾidah*. In *sūrah* Q. 3 *Āl ʿImrān* 33–63, the Qurʾān provides a virtual recasting and remodeling of the passage in *sūrat* Q. 19 *Maryam* 16–40, which, as we have seen, includes the crucial Meccan verses in which Jesus and his mother Mary are featured for the first time in the Arabic scripture.[31] For the rest, principally in *sūrah*s *an-Nisāʾ* and *al-Māʾidah*—which, in contrast to the situation in the Meccan *sūrah*s, reflect the Qurʾān's engagement in controversy with the Christian communities within the Arabic-speaking milieu of the environs of Medina and beyond—the Arabic scripture presents its very appreciative profile of "the Messiah, Jesus, Mary's son, God's Messenger and His word that He put into Maryam, and a spirit from Him" *(*Q. 4 *an-Nisāʾ* 171). In Medina the Qurʾān voices its especially high regard for Jesus the Messiah among all the messengers and prophets in a heightened parlance that nevertheless still features the standard vocabulary in which this Arabic scripture typically describes the role of all the messengers and prophets. Within the context of its late antique environment, this feature of the Qurʾān's discourse strongly suggests, as I shall argue below, its intention to counter a rival, customary, Christian understanding and interpretation of the scriptural accounts of the Bible's patriarchs and prophets—an understanding which reads them as Old Testament typologies that prefigured the New Testament career of Jesus the Messiah.

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It is surprising, given the Qurʾān's obviously high quotient of biblical awareness, that the Arabic scripture hardly ever actually quotes the Bible. There are, of course, exceptions that might seem to prove the rule. For example, scholars have long cited the passage from Psalm 37:29, evidently quoted in Q. 21 *al-Anbiyāʾ* 105: "We have written in the Psalms after the reminder that 'My righteous servants will inherit the earth.'"[32] From the Gospel of Matthew there is the reminiscence of Jesus's saying, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24) in the Qurʾān's dictum, "Indeed, those who have denied our revelations and rejected them arrogantly—the gates of heaven shall not be opened for them and they shall not enter paradise until the camel passes through the eye of the needle" (Q. 7 *al-Aʿrāf* 40). Otherwise, while there are passages in the Qurʾān that are somewhat hauntingly close to passages in the Hebrew Bible or to passages in the Gospels—in the story of the patriarch Joseph (Q. 12 *Yūsuf*), for example, or in the accounts of the Annunciation (Q. 3 *Āl ʿImrān*; Q. 19 *Maryam*)—they are actually more like paraphrases, allusions, and reformulated echoes than quotations in any strict sense of the word.

The most basic thing one notices about the Qurʾān and its interface with the Bible is the Islamic scripture's unspoken and pervasive presumption that its audience is thoroughly familiar both with biblical traditions, such as the accounts of the creation of the world and the ten commandments; with the Psalms; and, most prominently, with the stories of

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31 See Neuwirth, "Mary and Jesus."

32 See Baumstark, "Arabische Übersetzung."

the biblical patriarchs and prophets, to whom and to whose exploits the text often refers, confidently of its audience's recognition of them, without any need for even the most rudimentary form of introduction. Indeed, the Qurʾān presents itself as confirming the truth of the previous scriptures and as safeguarding it. After speaking of the Torah, "in which there is guidance and light," of Jesus, "as confirming the veracity of the Torah before him," and of the gospel, "in which there is guidance and light," God says to Muḥammad regarding the Qurʾān: "We have sent down to you the scripture [*al-kitāb*] with the truth, as a confirmation of the veracity of the scripture [*al-kitāb*] before it, and as a safeguard for it" (Q. 5 *al-Māʾidah* 44, 46, 48). The previous scriptures were, of course, in the Qurʾān's telling, principally the Torah and the gospel, as is clear here and in other places, where the Qurʾān says to Muḥammad, "He has sent down to you the scripture [*al-kitāb*] with the truth, as a confirmation of the veracity of what was before it, and He sent down the Torah and the Gospel" (Q. 3 *Āl ʿImrān* 3). In these and other passages one might cite, the position of the Qurʾān vis-à-vis the Jewish and Christian Bible is clear: the Qurʾān confirms the veracity of the earlier scriptures. In other words, not only does the Qurʾān recognize the Torah and the gospel—and the Psalms, too—as authentic scriptures sent down by God before it, but it also now stands on its own testimony as the warrant for their authenticity. There is, however, a tension in the Qurʾān between "scripture," that is "writing" (*kitāb*),[33] and orality, that is "recitation" (*Qurʾān*),[34] as in the liturgical proclamation of a scriptural lesson. While there are multiple references to scripts and texts in the Qurʾān, the narratives of God's messengers and prophets in their diction, style, and appeal to memory strongly bespeak the orality that characterizes the Qurʾān's own original recitation.

The polarity between writing and orality is readily evident in the vocabulary of the Qurʾān's references to the scriptures of the Jews and the Christians, the Torah and the gospel, and the Psalms (*az-Zabūr*), "in which We wrote [*katabnā*]" (Q. 21 *al-Anbiyāʾ* 105) and which "We brought to David" (Q. 4 *an-Nisāʾ* 163; Q. 17 *al-Isrāʾ* 55); the Qurʾān even advises Muḥammad to consult "those who were reciting [*yaqraʾūna*] the scripture [*al-kitāb*] before you" (Q. 10 *Yūnus* 94). God instructs him, for example, to "relate to them the story of Noah [*watlu ʿalayhim nabaʾ Nūḥ*]" (Q. 10:71), and He goes on to speak of Moses and Aaron, the pharaoh, the Exodus from Egypt, and the settlement of the Israelites; furthermore, within this frame of reference God advises Muḥammad, "If you are in doubt about what We have sent down to you, ask those who were reciting [*yaqraʾūna*] the scripture [*al-kitāb*] before you. The truth has come down to you from your Lord, so you should certainly not be in doubt" (Q. 10 *Yūnus* 94). In a similar vein in another pertinent passage, the Qurʾān (in Q. 16 *an-Naḥl* 43–44) records God's prophetic word addressed to Muḥammad in person:

> We have sent out before you only men whom We have inspired, so ask the "People of remembrance" [*ahl al-dhikr*] if you do not know;[35] [We have inspired them] with clear evidences and texts [*al-zubur*] and We have sent down the remembrance [*al-dhikr*] to you so that We might make clear to people what has been sent down to them; perhaps they will reflect.

33 See the detailed discussion in Madigan, *Qurʾān's Self-Image*.

34 The most accurate discussion of the Arabic term *Qurʾān* and its relation to the Syriac term *qeryānâ*, "recitation," which lies behind it, is in Graham, "Earliest Meaning of 'Qurʾān," pp. 361–77.

35 This exact sentence is also found in Q. 21 *al-Anbiyāʾ* 7.

Clearly in these passages the Qurʾān commends recalling the messages of the earlier scriptures/writings, but what catches one's attention here is the phrase "People of remembrance" and the reference to what God sent down to Muḥammad as "the remembrance." One notices in the context the parallel between "the remembrance" (*al-dhikr*) and "the scripture" (*al-kitāb*), so in this context the "Scripture People/People of the Book" (*ahl al-kitāb*) are the "People of remembrance" and what they remember or recall is God's dealings with the patriarchs and prophets as recorded in the scriptures, the very remembrance that is also recorded in the Qurʾān—a reason that the Qurʾān itself is referred to in its own text as a "remembrance," here and in the oath formula "By the Qurʾān, possessed of remembrance [*dhī al-dhikr*]" (Q. 38 Ṣād 1) and in such epithets of the Qurʾān as "a blessed remembrance" (Q. 21 *an-Anbiyāʾ* 50), and as being itself a "reminder" (*tadhkirah*) (Q. 20 Ṭā Hā 3), a "reminder" (*dhikrā*) for the worlds "of the scripture, the judgment, and the prophecy [*an-nubuwwah*]" God had previously sent down (see Q. 6 *al-Anʿām* 89–90).

On the face of it, the remembrance and the recall are meant to be recollections, even recitations of the messages of the earlier scriptures, albeit there is the constant deployment of terms that bespeak "writing." Terms such as "book" or "scripture" (*al-kitāb*) are proleptically used even for the Qurʾān itself, not yet an actual "book": "These are the signs [*āyāt*] of the Qurʾān, a clarifying scripture [*kitāb mubīn*]" Q. 27 *an-Naml* 1). For the earlier scriptures one finds such terms as *al-zubur*, in the sense of "texts," as in "the texts of the ancients" (Q. 26 *al-Shuʿarāʾ* 196) or "the clear signs, the texts, and the illuminating scripture" that the messengers before Muḥammad brought (see Q. 35 *Fāṭir* 25). There are references to the "scrolls" or "leaves," the "texts" (*al-ṣuḥuf*) of Moses, Abraham, and God's messengers in general, in which there are true scriptures (see, e.g., Q. 33 *al-Najm* 36; Q. 87 *al-Aʿlā* 19; Q. 98 *al-Bayyinah* 2–3). There is even the "copy" (*nuskhah*) in which God's guidance and mercy appeared on Moses's tablets (Q. 7 *al-Aʿrāf* 154). But a closer consideration reveals that it is not really books, texts, scrolls, or copies that the Qurʾān actually recalls, except in such general phrases as those just quoted; rather, the Qurʾān's actual recollections are of biblical and traditional narratives of patriarchs and prophets, their words and actions, retold within the paradigmatic parameters of its own prophetology. The Qurʾān knows of the scripts and texts, the books in which the accounts of God's earlier messengers and prophets are recorded in writing, but its own recollections of these accounts are primarily of the stories and not of the written texts in which they are inscribed; there are virtually no quotations from the Bible or parabiblical literature in the Qurʾān. Nevertheless, it is clear that in the Qurʾān's anticipatory view the eventual stabilization of its "recitation" (*Qurʾān*) or its "remembering" (*dhikr*) in "writing" (*kitāb*) would become a mark of its authority as a "scripture," alongside, even confirming, such earlier "scriptures" as the Torah, the Psalms, and the gospel. In a recent study, Angelika Neuwirth speaks of the production of the written Qurʾān as, in her opinion, marking a "decisive change" among Arabic-speaking peoples from an earlier reliance on collective ritual and oral tradition to textual continuity "as the primary medium to convey authority."[36] And she goes on to point out that the early Meccan *sūratal-ʿAlaq* already "projects a non-earthly writing as the source of the prophet's 'reading' (Q. 96:1)."[37]

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36 Neuwirth, "'Discovery of Writing.'"

37 Ibid., p. 14.

On closer examination, it appears that in fact in the Qurʾān, writing (*al-kitāb*) itself is actually more than just "writing" in the conventional sense of the word. Writing, even what we might call metaphorical writing, appears in the Qurʾān as indicative of the authoritative character of the message it conveys. As Daniel Madigan has put it,

> When the Qurʾān calls itself *kitāb*, it is making a statement not so much about the medium of its display or storage, but about its origin—its authority and the source of its composition. . . . It appears that *kitāb* functions in the Qurʾān as a symbol, rather than as a concrete entity. It is the primary symbol of God's sovereignty and knowledge. . . . The Qurʾān's *kitāb* still insists on seeing itself as the potent symbol and authoritative locus of divine address to the world through the Arabian prophet in the language of the Arabs.[38]

And in its origins this divine address is an oral address, often in a virtually homiletic style, proleptically claiming for itself the authority of a scripture in the line of the canonical "scriptures" (*al-kutub*) that had gone before it.

By comparison with most of the earlier scriptures, which it confirms, the Qurʾān's voice is more notably homiletic, even more paraenetic and dialogical in its rhetorical style. That is to say, it most often speaks to its audience in direct address, in the second person singular (to Muḥammad) and through him in the plural (to its Meccan and Medinan audiences),[39] often in an imperative, bidding mood, which is yet another feature of its essential orality, bidding its hearers to remember, heed its warnings, and attend to its own distinctive reading of the message of the earlier scriptures. Inevitably this homiletic or forensic mode of discourse acquires an argumentative, even polemical, dimension directed against what the Qurʾān's adversaries are often quoted in the Qurʾān itself as saying in counterpoint to the Qurʾān's position on a given issue.[40] What is more, there is yet another dimension to the Qurʾān's polemical rhetoric. When the Arabic scripture is read in tandem with attention paid to other, contemporary discourses that were current and popular within its own late antique milieu—be they texts or widespread oral traditions in cognate languages, especially those that articulated views contrary to its own—the Qurʾān's implicit but intentional critique and correction of them becomes evident in its own style of counter discourse. This Qurʾānic counter discourse is principally expressed in the Arabic scripture's reinterpretation, even counterinterpretation, of the understanding of earlier narratives according to its own paradigmatic constructions of meaning. The thesis proposed here is that in the particular instance of the Arabic scripture's "reading" and reinterpretation of the biblical and parabiblical narratives of the Bible's patriarchs and prophets circulating within its intellectual milieu, it frames its counterinterpretation of their stories within the exegetical framework of its own paradigmatic prophetology and counters, in particular, the reading of the accounts of these same well-known figures that were then overwhelmingly

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38 Madigan, *Qurʾān's Self-Image*, pp. 75–77.

39 See the interesting study in Azaiez, "Qurʾānic First Addressee."

40 On the Qurʾān's quotation of counter positions to its own message, see the insightful study in Azaiez, *Le contre-discours coranique,* which includes a discussion of recent scholarship on the Qurʾān's rhetorical styles, especially its polemical discourse.

current in Christian discourse.[41] The typical late antique Christian exegesis of the Bible's patriarchal and prophetic narratives was particularly well expressed in the homiletic traditions of the contemporary Syriac-speaking churches, the principal themes of which arguably had a wide oral circulation among the Arabic-speaking Christians of Arabia in the seventh century CE.[42]

6

In the first third of the seventh century CE, the prevailing, Christian, homiletic readings of the biblical and parabiblical stories of the Bible's patriarchs and prophets were focused through the typological lens of the gospel's announcement that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah and the Son of the Living God (Matt. 16:16).[43] In Syriac this reading was widely commended in the primarily oral, and very popular, homiletic genre of the *mêmrô*. *Mêmrô* in Syriac is, by itself, a somewhat nondescript, general term that normally means simply "speech," or even "oration," among other possibilities. It is of course a cognate term with the Jewish Aramaic word, *mîmrô*, but there is no evidence to suggest that in Syriac it would function as a hypostasized, stand-in term for God or God's word, as in the *Targûmîm*, where the purpose seems to have been to avoid anthropomorphic understandings in certain scriptural passages.[44] Syriac lexicographers, even Bar Bahlûl, make no mention of *mêmrô* as a genre marker; the term itself is not genre specific in Syriac.[45] Instead, the ecclesiastical setting, the verse structure, and the manner of delivery of this speech as a cadenced sermon or homily are the circumstances that distinguish a given *mêmrô* as a specific kind of speech. In these circumstances the *mêmrô* was composed in verse and meant to be recited by a speaker in an ecclesial setting, albeit it might also have an afterlife as a written text. The verse structure is characteristically isosyllabic, featuring in most instances a more or less self-contained line, usually composed of two (sometimes three) "half-lines" with an equal number of full syllables in the wording of each of the half-lines. For example, Ephraem the Syrian (ca. 306–373) characteristically composed *mêmrê* in which each half-line featured seven syllables, or fourteen syllables to the line, whereas Narsai of Nisibis (d. ca. 501) and Jacob of Serūg (ca. 451–521), two very popular, later composers of *mêmrê*, usually wrote in twelve-syllable half-lines, twenty-four in the full line,

41 The exegetical method I employ in setting forth this thesis is in principle somewhat akin to the hermeneutical insight espoused by El-Badawi, *Qurʾān and Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, with the major exception being that I believe El-Badawi's proposal is mistaken in maintaining that the Qurʾān features "dogmatic re-articulations," that is, Arabic rewordings, of selected Syriac gospel texts encountered in writing. See Griffith, "Review of *Qurʾān and Aramaic Gospel Traditions*."

42 See Griffith, "What Does Mecca Have to Do with Urhōy?" and "The Qurʾān's 'Nazarenes.'"

43 See the discussion of the Christian typological method of exegesis in O'Keefe and Reno, *Sanctified Vision*. While the authors neglect the Syriac texts, their discussion of late antique, Christian typological exegesis is concise and clear.

44 See in this connection the remarks of Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim*, vol. 2, p. 775. See also Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, p. 670.

45 See Sokoloff, *Syriac Lexicon*, pp. 701–2. It is interesting to note in passing that according to the tenth-century Syriac lexicographer of Baghdad, Ḥasan bar Bahlul, the distinguishing difference between *mêmrô*, "speech," and *meltô*, "word," is that it is the special feature of the former to give information, to explain, to teach. See Duval, *Lexicon syriacum auctore Hassano bar Bahlule*, vol. 2, pp. 988–99.

while the fifth-century poet Balai favored the five-syllable-per-half-line meter.[46] *Mêmrê* typically went on for hundreds of lines without any stanzas or other textual divisions. The speaker, who would often address the congregation directly, would move from topic to topic, theme to theme, in line groupings marked off only by rhetorical devices, voice modulations, or subtle shifts in reference—for example, from one biblical verse to another, one liturgical theme to another, or one stage in a saint's life to another. In the hands of the classical authors of Syriac religious discourse, the *mêmrô* was a performance genre; and when they were exploring the meanings of biblical passages in their *mêmrê*, they were engaging in scriptural exegesis within a particular tradition of biblical interpretation. In the Syriac-speaking milieu, this tradition was inevitably the one that came to its classical and clearest expression first in the works of Ephraem the Syrian,[47] whose authority and even whose modes of expression hovered over the works of later Syriac writers even as they adhered to the doctrinal commitments of rival ecclesial communities.[48]

The technical language of Syriac typological parlance includes such regular terms as *gelyōnô* ("revelation") and *rôzô* ("mystery, sign, symbol"). They and their companion words, such as *ṭupsô* ("type"), *remzô* ("indicative gesture"), and *nîshô* ("import, portent"), appear regularly in the *mêmrê* composed to commend the Christian typological reading of passages especially from Old Testament accounts of the patriarchs, kings, and prophets whose biblical narratives were chosen as liturgical recitations (*qeryānê*) for a given occasion.[49] What the authors find in the scriptures are the types and symbols, the names and the titles, in terms of which the invisible God had in their view revealed himself to the eyes and minds of biblical persons gifted with what Jacob of Serūg called "the eye of prophecy" (*ʿaynô danbîyûthô*).[50] The most significant Syriac, hermeneutical term in this exegetical process for writers such as Narsai and Jacob of Serūg, as for Ephraem before them, is *rôzô*. The term seems to have come into Syriac via ancient Persian and Old Aramaic, where it basically meant "secret," and in this sense it appears in the book of Daniel (e.g., Dan. 2:18).[51] Syriac composers of *mêmrê* typically used this term (and its synonyms mentioned above) more in the sense of "symbol," or even "mystery," a secret with a cryptic message. It is meant to be exegetically indicative in its function in an anticipatory way to disclose to the knowledgeable Christian hearer what is thought to be yet hidden in the recitations of earlier scripture but what is fully revealed in its perceived anticipatory relevance to the gospel's account of the incarnate Messiah's fulfillment of the economy of salvation. For Ephraem, Narsai, and Jacob of Serūg, all *rôzê* point to the incarnate Messiah, of whom, Ephraem had said, he is "the Lord of the *rôzê*, who fulfills all *rôzê* in his crucifixion."[52] They may point forward from both nature and scripture to the Messiah, who in turn

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46 See Brock, "Poetry."

47 See Griffith, "*'Faith Adoring the Mystery'*" and "Ephraem the Exegete" (pp. 306–73).

48 For a fuller discussion of the Syriac *mêmrô* as a popular exegetical genre, see Griffith, "Poetics of Scriptural Reasoning."

49 For a discussion of this exegetical process at work in Jacob of Serūg's *mêmrô* "On the Sacrifice of Isaac" in Genesis 22, see Griffith, "Disclosing the Mystery."

50 Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar Jacobi Sarugensis*, vol. 5, p. 399, l. 4.

51 See R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, vol. 2, pp. 3871–75. See also Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*, p. 520, and *Syriac Lexicon*, p. 1424.

52 Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Paschalhymnen, De Azymis*, poem III, couplet 1.

reveals their true meaning, or they may point back to the Messiah from the perspective of the church's life and liturgy, whose sacramental and symbolic words and actions are also called *rôzê*, which are in turn deemed virtually to be moments of the real presence of the persons and events to which they point. [53]

7

An arresting experience on reading the Qurʾān when one comes to it possessed of a frame of mind tutored by deep reading in the Syriac *mêmrê* of composers such as Narsai of Nisibis and Jacob of Serūg is a striking experience of déjà vu, not only in the reminiscences of the biblical patriarchs and prophets—the very ones whose stories are prominently recalled in the Qurʾān—but also in the very diction itself of the Arabic scripture. One has the sense of having heard these accounts before, and in hauntingly familiar terms, albeit within the parameters of a different, even counter-paradigmatic interpretive framework. Interestingly, too, the biblical and many of the nonbiblical figures of Jewish and Christian lore whose words and deeds the Qurʾān recalls are the very ones whose stories are also rehearsed at great length in the Syriac *mêmrê*. It is also notable that the biblical figures recalled in the Qurʾān are almost exclusively those whose stories are interpreted typologically in the Syriac texts. Sometimes the sequence of events narrated or alluded to in the two texts featuring the same figures mirror one another, and the Qurʾān can be seen to comment on, change the focus of, or even critique the points made in the *mêmrê*. To take just one example, this is very evidently the case in the Qurʾān's reminiscence of the experience of the nonbiblical "Companions of the Cave" when it is read in tandem with the *mêmrê* of Jacob of Serūg on the same topic.[54]

When reading the Qurʾān's reminiscences of the biblical patriarchs and prophets in tandem with the Syriac *mêmrê* on the same personae, one readily notices that the Syriac authors are ever alert to the perceived presence of the aforementioned *rôzê* and *remzê* in the biblical texts of the Old Testament that, in their estimation, can be seen to preview or set the pattern for understanding events in the later life and career of Jesus of Nazareth that would mark him out as the promised Messiah. The Qurʾān, for its part, highlights instead what it calls God's "signs" (*āyāt*) and "evidences" (*bayyināt*) apparent in the careers of these same biblical figures that, in its view, mark these figures out not as symbolic or typological forerunners of the Messiah but as scriptural personae in the Qurʾān's sequence of God's messengers and prophets, whose experiences and messages are to be interpreted as instances of God's ubiquitous signs and evidences that, again in the Qurʾān's view, are everywhere broadcast in both nature and scripture to aid the understanding of those who would see, hear, and recognize the truth the Qurʾān proclaims, albeit most people ignore them.[55] In the Qurʾān, any one of God's messengers is someone who, virtually by

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53 For further explanations, see in particular Mansour, *La pensée symbolique*, esp. pp. 23–71; Beck, "Symbolum-Mysterium" and "Zur Terminologie von Ephräms Bildtheologie"; Murray, "Theory of Symbolism."

54 See Griffith, "Christian Lore and the Arabic Qurʾān."

55 On the "signs and their refrains" in the Qurʾān, see the discussion in Madigan, *Qurʾān's Self-Image*, pp. 96–103, and Yahia, "Signes."

definition, "reads God's *āyāt* out loud [*yatlū*]" (Q. 2 *al-Baqarah* 129).[56] And the Qurʾān says of itself in another place that it is in fact "a revelation [*tanzīl*] from the Merciful, Compassionate One, a writing [*kitāb*], the *āyāt* of which are set out distinctly [*fuṣṣilat*], an Arabic recitation [*Qurʾān*] for a people who know [Arabic?]" (Q. 41 *Fuṣṣilat* 2–3). In this context one might even reasonably think of the *āyāt* of the Qurʾān's *kitāb* as being the letters of the alphabet in which God's "speech" (*kalām*) is spelled out in writing. For the cognate terms for the Arabic word *āyah* (plur. *āyāt*) in both Jewish Aramaic and Syriac are used in just this sense,[57] but here is not the place to pursue this interesting point.

There is an uncanny counterpoint to be seen in the hermeneutical function of the Qurʾān's oft-repeated mention throughout the text of God's "signs" (*āyah* / *āyāt* 373×),[58] especially in its reminiscences of the Bible's patriarchs and prophets, when they are compared with the function of "the signs and symbols" (*rôzê*) of the Messiah's mission in the discourse of the authors of the Syriac *mêmrê* regarding the same biblical personae. Both terms, *āyāt* and *rôzê*, are meant to be indicative of the correct hermeneutical horizon within which the "prophetic" narratives are to be interpreted. Within this context, the Qurʾān says repeatedly that there is a sign (*āyah*) to be discerned in the mission of every one of God's messengers mentioned in the text. There are also abundant mentions of the *āyāt Allāh* in all the passages of the Qurʾān that refer to Jesus the Messiah as God's messenger and prophet; in one place the Qurʾān even says, "We made the Son of Mary and his mother an *āyah*" (Q. 23 *al-Muʾminūn* 50). In the Qurʾān's reminiscences of the messengers and prophets, the signs inevitably point to the manifest evidences of the power and presence of the one God apparent in their stories. By way of contrast, in the Syriac *mêmrê* the "signs" (*rôzê*), functioning as "types," which the composers discern in the stories of the Bible's patriarchs and prophets, inevitably point to their "antitype," which is the person and Messianic role of Jesus of Nazareth, who is confessed in the gospel to be "the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16)—a role that, as it was interpreted in the late antique, Christian discourse of the milieu of the Qurʾān's origins, is distinctly counter to that which the Arabic scripture envisions for Jesus as the last but one in its sequence of God's messengers and prophets.

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56 See the list of 31 times in which some variation of this formula is mentioned in the Qurʾān in Madigan, *Qurʾān's Self-Image*, p. 96, n. 56, where he notes that the verb *talā* occurs a total of 62 times in comparable passages. On the understanding of this verb to mean "to read out loud," see Ambros, *Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic*, p. 50.

57 See Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān*, pp. 72–73; R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, vol. 1, pp. 419–20; J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, p. 32; Sokoloff, *Syriac Dictionary*, p. 109. In this connection, see also the intriguing passage in *sūrah Fuṣṣilat* 44: "Had We made it a non-Arabic *Qurʾān*, they would surely say, 'Would that its *āyāt* were set out distinctly [*fuṣṣilat*]; it is both non-Arabic and Arabic." Is this reading possible?

58 The term as it is used in the Qurʾān refers to "some phenomenon or entity in nature that is to draw the attention of the people to the power of God; . . . [it] may also be understood as 'textual segment of the Revelation'" (Ambros, *Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic*, p. 32). In post-Qurʾānic times the term *āyah* (plur. *āyāt*) is regularly used to mean a verse or verses of the Qurʾān.

8

The perception that the Qurʾān's reminiscences of the stories of the biblical patriarchs and prophets are voiced in counterpoint to contemporary Christian readings of the same narratives is strengthened when one notices that the biblical personae who are prominently mentioned by name in the Arabic scripture are the very ones whose stories are consistently interpreted typologically among late antique Christians. The Qurʾān recalls their stories within the parameters of its own distinctive prophetology in terms that reconfigure the interpretation of their role in prophetic history in contrast with the construction of their meaning in current Christian discourse. On this understanding, it emerges that a major purpose of the Qurʾān's message is to commend its own distinctive prophetology by reordering the ways in which the stories of the Bible's patriarchs and kings are heard in its milieu.

The typological interpretations of the Bible's patriarchal and prophetic narratives were integral components of Christian Christological discourse on the popular level in the first third of the seventh century CE, an era in which the ecclesial identities of the several contemporary Christian communities in the Syriac-speaking milieu were determined precisely by their Christological views. The controversies about the correct formulae to be used in confessing the unity of divinity and humanity in Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, preoccupied Christians of the time.

Arguably, it was the prevalence of the several competing Christological views in Christian discourse that necessitated the Qurʾān's elaboration of its own distinctive prophetology to counter Christian Christology, of whatever stripe, in order to provide an appropriate hermeneutical frame of reference for a Qurʾānic Christology that would not only put Jesus the Messiah in his proper, sequential place in prophetic history but also open the scriptural way forward for Muḥammad, "God's Messenger and the seal of the Prophets" (Q. 33 *al-Aḥzāb* 40).

The Qurʾān first appears in the historical record in reports of Muḥammad's oral proclamation of its message in the first third of the seventh century, in a late antique, Arabian context literally surrounded on all sides by Christian polities from which merchants, travelers, invaders, priests, and monks had for several centuries been traversing the land and establishing local communities of faith, and where for even more centuries Jewish communities had long resided.[59] Albeit no Jewish or Christian Arabic literature in writing survives from pre-Islamic times—or from any time prior to the middle of the eighth century, long after the Arab occupation of the Levant—one may nevertheless reasonably suppose that together the Jews, Christians, and even the Manicheans embedded in the Arabian milieu, all with a pronounced Aramaic heritage, would have given voice to the biblical and traditional lore of their religious cultures orally in the local Arabic idiom of their immediate environs.[60] One might further reasonably suppose that the Christians among them would have, in the process of oral translation and transmission, more or less followed, now in Arabic, the idiomatic conventions of the most popular genre of religious discourse in which their lore was traditionally voiced in their own originally Aramaic/Syriac-speaking communities,

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59 See Al-Azmeh, *Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity*; Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth* and *Before and After Muhammad*.

60 See Griffith, "When Did the Bible Become an Arabic Scripture?"

namely, the classical Syriac *mêmrê*, which were preserved in writing but were regularly presented orally in liturgical settings, as is evident in their preservation in liturgical texts.[61] The evidence for this supposition may be seen in the Qurʾān itself, which seems to reflect in many ways not only the Syriac diction of the *mêmrê* but also much of what they have to say about the biblical patriarchs and prophets in particular.

That the Qurʾān in its origins was very much actively engaged in both agreement and critical disagreement with the religious discourse of contemporary Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians is a phenomenon evident to even the most cursory of readers. That much of the Qurʾān's recollection of the stories of the biblical patriarchs and prophets, Jesus of Nazareth included, is evocative not so much of the biblical text as of oral traditions that freely mix scriptural phrases with apocryphal and other strands of Christian lore of the sort found in the Syriac *mêmrê* is evident to anyone deeply familiar with this most popular of all the genres of Syriac literature. So one might not unreasonably conclude that the modes of religious discourse featured in the Syriac *mêmrê*, mirrored in the Arabic idiom of the local Arab Christians, played a role in providing the style, vocabulary, and topical agenda for the Arabic Qurʾān's seemingly continuous interaction with the local, Aramaic- and Arabic-speaking "Bible People" living in its midst, whose allegiance it solicited.

9

As we have seen, the evidence of the Qurʾān itself supports the view that the Arabic scripture promotes a distinctive paradigm of prophetism, "the *sunnah* of Our Messengers," that determines the hermeneutical parameters within which it evokes the memory of those scriptural figures, already well known in its milieu, whom it calls God's messengers and prophets. It is almost exclusively within these parameters that we find any reminiscences in the Qurʾān of any biblical or parabiblical lore. What is more, in the Qurʾān's recollections of the stories of the Bible's patriarchs and prophets, not only is there virtually no actual quotation of the biblical texts, but there is also often an almost equal if not a preponderant presence of narrative motifs that scholars have otherwise discovered not in the Bible but in parabiblical traditions recorded in other late antique Jewish or Christian texts in several non-Arabic languages. Examples are numerous, particularly in the stories of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Here is not the place to elaborate this phenomenon, but it is pertinent to point out that the Qurʾān does allude to the oral, nontextual medium of its origins. At the same time, while the Qurʾān is clearly aware of itself as a "scripture" (*kitāb*) in the process of coming to be (cf., e.g., Q. 15 *al-Ḥijr* 1; Q. 26 *al-Shuʿarā* 2; Q. 38 *Ṣād* 29), it is also anxious to highlight the fact that the other authoritative scriptures within its ken are non-Arabic (*aʿjamī*): "We know that they say, 'It is only a human being who teaches him'; the tongue of the one to whom they turn is non-Arabic, this is a clear Arabic tongue" (Q. 16 *an-Naḥl* 103).

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61 It is interesting to note in passing that in early Islamic times, Arabic translations of the *mêmrê* of the classical composers were prominent among the works translated by Arabic-speaking Christians with a Syriac heritage. See Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, vol. 1, pp. 421–56. For the wider context within which the translations were accomplished, see Treiger, "Fathers in Arabic." See also the introductory essay in Noble and Treiger, *Orthodox Church in the Arab World*.

As I mentioned earlier, the Qurʾān is very aware of the texts (*ṣuḥuf*, *zubur*, *kutub*) in which the non-Arabic scriptures of the earlier "Scripture People" (*ahl al-kitāb*) are record-ed in writing. It does not seem unlikely to suppose that copies of them in their canonical languages were in the hands of the religious authorities among the Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians in the Qurʾān's audience. But no available evidence credibly suggests that any portion of them, beyond the possibility of occasional notes, circulated in Arabic trans-lation in writing in the early seventh century CE, albeit admittedly the technical means for such translations were available. All the available evidence suggests that the first Arabic translations of the Bible into Arabic were produced for pastoral reasons from the middle of the eighth century onward, outside Arabia, once Arabic had become the lingua franca of all the peoples living under the sway of the Islamic caliphate.[62]

It seems not unreasonable then to suppose that the Arabic Qurʾān, published in the latter half of the seventh century, had already come to the notice of the newly Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians living in the Levant by the early eighth century. For by the second half of the century, a now-unknown Christian writer explicitly quoted from it several times in the earliest dated Christian Arabic text so far known—the apologetic work written not long after 755 CE and called by its first modern editor "On the Triune Nature of God."[63] It would not have escaped the attention of the first Jewish and Christian hearers or readers of the Qurʾān that the Islamic scripture has a high quotient of biblical awareness and that its presentation of biblical lore and its "take" on the stories of the patriarchs and prophets offer a reading of the biblical narratives notably at variance with that which was common within either of their communities. One might also imagine that it did not take the Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians long to take exception to the Qurʾān's prophe-tology and its interpretation of many aspects of the Bible's stories, especially in those pas-sages that implied a correction or objection to Jewish or Christian beliefs and teachings. These matters undoubtedly came up in interreligious conversations and controversies. Why else would one find among the stipulations already included in the early recensions of the so-called "Covenant of ʿUmar" such a provision as "We shall not teach the Qurʾān to our children?"[64] On this view, the ready availability of the Qurʾān itself and the desire to set the record straight could well have provided at least one of the many inducements for Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians to translate the Bible into Arabic.

Finally, the perception of the Qurʾān's counter discourse to the hermeneutical con-struction that contemporary, seventh-century Christians put on the stories of the Bible's patriarch and prophets, especially as it appeared broadcast in the popular Syriac *mêmrê* of the period, underlines the central importance of recognizing the wide range of active intercommunal and interreligious consciousness within the milieu of the Qurʾān's ori-gins. It was not confined exclusively within the narrow linguistic and cultural horizons of *Le Seigneur des tribus*,[65] albeit one can scarcely underestimate the shaping force of *ʿara-*

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62 See the discussion in Griffith, *Bible in Arabic*, esp. pp. 97–126.

63 For the details and further bibliography, see Griffith, *Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, pp. 53–57.

64 See Tritton, *Caliphs and Their Non-Muslim Subjects*, p. 8.

65 See Chabbi, *Le Seigneur des tribus*. In my opinion, this valuable study envisions a too narrowly fo-cused, cultural horizon for understanding the full range of the Qurʾān's message. Similarly, in a later study devoted to the biblical figures mentioned in the Qurʾān, Chabbi proposes that they came into the Messenger's frame of reference only in the Medinan period of his career, whereas my opinion is that the

biyyah both in its conception and ultimate expression. Instead, the Arabic Qurʾān represents the first literary and textual expression of the Arab world's hitherto oral participation in the wider intellectual culture of late antiquity, especially in interaction with the Aramaic-speaking Jewish, Christian, and Manichean populations within and on the periphery of its homeland, not to mention the opportunities afforded by long-distance, commercial forays beyond its own frontiers and the irruption of non-Arabs, Romans, Persians, and Ethiopians into the Arabic-speaking world from the fourth century CE onward.

The Qurʾān's perceived counter discourse to contemporary Christian interpretations of the Bible's patriarchal and prophetic narratives and its gradual development of its own distinctive prophetism in response to it is also clear evidence of a moment in which a new religious identity in Arabic expression emerged, largely still articulated in the borrowed and naturalized idiom and technical vocabulary of its predecessors. Its later transformation into the religion we call Islam can even be seen to have emerged from the working out of the implications of the Qurʾān's original reconfiguration of scriptural prophetology, a story well beyond the range of our present concerns.

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biblical and parabiblical lore informed the earliest stages of the Qurʾān's origins and even provided the framework for importing accounts of the so-called "Arab prophets" into the Qurʾān (Chabbi, *Le Coran décrypté*). See now the intriguing new study in Webb, *Imagining the Arabs.*

8 Language of Ritual Purity in the Qurʾān and Old South Arabian[1]

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THE AIM OF THIS STUDY consists in a comparative examination of Old South Arabian (OSA) and Qurʾānic vocabulary concerning ritual and, to a more limited extent, substantive purity. Jacques Ryckmans already extensively studied the then-available OSA evidence pertaining to the subject in a 1972 article,[2] and he clearly saw the potential for discussing the Islamic code of ritual purity in the context of OSA sources. He ended his article with the following remark:

> Quoi qu'il en soit, notre étude aura, nous l'espérons, contribué à attirer l'attention des islamisants sur l'intérêt que présentent certains textes épigraphiques de l'Arabie du Sud préislamique au point de vue de l'étude des origines de certaines pratiques de l'Islam.[3]
>
> Translation: "Whatever the case, we hope that our study will have helped draw the attention of Islamicists to interesting features of certain epigraphic texts from pre-Islamic South Arabia, from the point of view of the study of the origins of certain Islamic practices."

Ryckmans's counsel resonates even more strongly today in the post-*Hagarism*,[4] post-Wansbrough[5] paradigm of early Islamic historiography, where pre-Islamic Arabian epigraphy provides one of the rare treasures of much-sought-after documentary evidence. Yet there has also been a major methodological shift from Ryckmans's time to ours: unlike Ryckmans, scholars of the Qurʾān and early Islam today tend to separate the evidence of the Qurʾānic text from that of later Muslim sources in an attempt to underline the

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1 In addition to the sources I have noted in the bibliography at the end of this essay, I, like many of our colleagues, have gratefully used the Digital Archive for the Study of pre-Islamic Arabian Inscriptions (DASI).

2 J. Ryckmans, "Les confessions publiques sabéennes."

3 Ibid., p. 15.

4 Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*.

5 The reference here is to Wansbrough's *Qurʾanic Studies*. The reason I present the publication of *Hagarism* and Wansbrough's *Qurʾanic Studies* as watershed events is not because of the validity of their claims but because of their paradigm-shifting effect on the study of the Qurʾān and early Islam.

"demonstrably early"[6] and fairly well-documented text of the Qurʾān as opposed to the corpus of later narrative, exegetical, and historical sources.

Ryckmans argued, among other things, that the Islamic code of ritual purity seems to have its origins in the pre-Islamic religious milieu of South Arabia, which may or may not have developed its legal and ritual content independently of Jewish influence. In this essay, I plan to insert another column into this matrix by arguing that the strictly Qurʾānic version of injunctions concerning ritual and substantive purity has more parallels with what we find in OSA epigraphy than the later, more detailed versions in legal manuals, which were produced in "the sectarian milieu"[7] of Islam's formative period in the eighth and ninth centuries CE. I also hope to point out a few issues of philological interest that Ryckmans did not explore, especially regarding the relationship between Arabic and the Haramic dialect of OSA, in which many of the texts that Ryckmans analyzed were produced.

THE QURʾĀN ON RITUAL PURITY

Joseph Lowry, in his *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān* article on "Ritual Purity," provides a good summary of the Qurʾānic passages about ritual and substantive purity. He defines ritual purity as "a state of heightened cleanliness, symbolic or actual, associated with persons, activities and objects in the context of ritual worship."[8] Within the confines of this definition, as he rightly notes, there are only two verses in the Qurʾān—Q. 4:43 and 5:6—that directly deal with ritual purity. We can add to them a few other verses that mention purity stipulations about pilgrimage, fasting, and menstruation. As for substantive purity, that is, actual or symbolic cleanliness of objects bearing on human utility, Qurʾānic evidence seems parsimonious and ambiguous, as I will discuss below.

Let us first look at the two closely parallel verses about ritual ablution in the Qurʾān, both of which verses are from chapters considered to be Medinan. Qurʾān 5:6 is more comprehensive and provides details about how ritual washing should be conducted:

> O believers, when you stand up to pray, wash [*fa-ġsilū*] your faces, and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe [*wa-msaḥū*] your heads, and your feet up to the ankles. If you are defiled [*junuban*], purify yourselves [*fa-ṭṭahharū*]; but if you are sick or on a journey, or if any of you comes from the privy, or you have touched women, and you can find no water, then have recourse to [*fa-tayammamū*] wholesome dust and wipe [*fa-msaḥū*] your faces and your hands with it. God does not desire to make any impediment for you; but He desires to purify you [*li-yuṭahhirakum*], and that

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6 This phrase was poignantly used by Crone/Cook and Donner to make two contrasting points. Crone and Cook said: "Virtually all accounts of the early development of Islam take it as axiomatic that it is possible to elicit at least the outlines of the process from the Islamic sources. It is however well-known that these sources are not demonstrably early. There is no hard evidence for the existence of the Koran in any form before the last decade of the seventh century" (Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, p. 3). Donner, on the other hand, some thirty years after the publication of *Hagarism*, would confidently say that "the Qurʾān text is demonstrably early" (Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, p. 56).

7 Borrowing from Wansbrough's *The Sectarian Milieu*.

8 Lowry, "Ritual Purity," p. 498.

> He may complete His blessing upon you [*niʿmatahu*]; haply you will be thankful [Arberry's translation].

Qurʾān 4:43 prohibits praying while intoxicated and in the state of impurity and repeats the alternative to washing in the absence of water:

> O believers, draw not near to prayer when you are drunken until you know what you are saying, or defiled [*junuban*]—unless you are traversing a way [*ʿābirī sabīlan*]—until you have washed yourselves [*ḥattā taghtasilū*]; but if you are sick, or on a journey, or if any of you comes from the privy, or you have touched women, and you can find no water, then have recourse to wholesome dust and wipe your faces and your hands; God is All-pardoning, All-forgiving [Arberry's translation].

It is worth noting that the Qurʾān does not mention the word *wuḍūʾ*, or any other word related to it, to denote the ritual washing even though it was later to become the technical term for minor ablution for ritual purposes in Islamic law.[9] Also the neat distinction that legal manuals draw between minor and major impurity does not appear to be fully conceived in the Qurʾān. According to the Qurʾān, impurity, regardless of its degree, is removed by washing (*ġ-s-l*) and wiping (*m-s-ḥ*) with water or, in its absence, with clean dust. For men, having contact with women leads to impurity, but it is not clear from the text of the Qurʾān whether the word *junub* refers to major impurity caused by sexual conduct, as later legal reasoning determined.[10]

As is clear from these two verses and other instances in the Qurʾān, words from the root *ṭ-h-r* denote purity, often ethical and symbolic but also sometimes substantive. Even though the nominal form *ṭahāra* ("purity," corresponding to the Hebrew *ṭāhorāh*[11]) does not directly appear in the Qurʾān, it became a central concept in Islamic law to the extent that legal manuals and *ḥadīth* collections often open with a section on *ṭahāra*. Its opposite in Muslim jurisprudence, *najāsa*, "impurity," is derived from the single occurrence of the word *najas* in Q. 9:28. Instead of being strictly a word for substantive impurity, however, *najas* in Q. 9:28 appears as a characteristic of polytheists that bars them from entering *al-masjid al-ḥarām*.[12] Lowry argues that the Qurʾān uses other words, such as *rijs*, *rijz*, and *rujz*, to indicate the status of ritual and substantive impurity for things like wine, games of chance, blood, carrion, and pork.[13] As he notes, however, the Qurʾānic usage of the words *rijz* and *rujz* corresponds better to Aramaic *rugzā*, denoting God's wrath in the form of a pestilence instead of substantive impurity, whereas *rijs* denotes all sorts of abominations,

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9 Cf. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ch. 2, *Kitāb al-Ṭahārah* and *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, ch. 1. To give but one example from legal manuals, the *Mukhtaṣar* of al-Qudūrī (d. 1037), the influential work on Ḥanafī jurisprudence, opens with a chapter on purity in which the introduction of the verse Q. 5:6 quickly gives way to details of minor and major ablution (*wuḍūʾ* and *ġusl*) and circumstances that lead to their nullification (al-Qudūrī, *Mukhtaṣar*, pp. 2–6).

10 On * Janabah*'s being the technical term, see *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ch. 5, *Kitāb al-Ghusl*, *ḥadīth* no. 248.

11 Lev. 12:4; 13:7, 35, etc.

12 "O believers, the idolaters [*al-mushrikūn*] are indeed unclean [*najasun*]; so let them not come near the Holy Mosque after this year of theirs. If you fear poverty, God shall surely enrich you of His bounty, if He will; God is All-knowing; All-wise."

13 Lowry, "Ritual Purity," p. 503.

actual or symbolic, that "interfere with receptivity to Islam."[14] In any case, neither *rijs* nor *rijz* nor *rujz* came to mean the opposite of "purity" in later sources. *Najas*, albeit a *hapax legomenon* in the Qurʾān, became the basis of an important technical term as the semantic counterpart of words from the root *ṭ-h-r*. One might also note that the word *ṭumʾāh*,[15] the Hebrew antonym of *ṭāhorāh*, does not exist in Arabic; but as we will see, it is attested in an OSA inscription.

The final point about the stipulations of ritual purity in the Qurʾān has to do with menstruation. In the Hebrew Bible, Leviticus 15 enumerates certain elements of *ṭumʾah* concerning bodily fluids and sexual conduct, including the status of menstrual blood. One reads there that not only is a menstruating woman considered impure for seven days but also that any contact with her and her blood deems other objects impure.[16] Qurʾān 2:222 confirms that menstruating women (*al-nisāʾ fī l-maḥīḍ*) should not be approached sexually until they are clean (*ḥattā yaṭhurna*) but seems to reject the notion that their impurity is contagious. Lowry notes that some early Muslim scholars entertained the idea of considering the impurity of certain persons and objects contagious but it did not take root. As for OSA texts, we will see that evidence for the contagiousness of impurity is rather ambiguous.

OLD SOUTH ARABIAN SOURCES ON RITUAL PURITY: THE CONTEXT OF PENITENTIAL INSCRIPTIONS

There are two initial observations to be made about texts dealing with purity in OSA inscriptions, one already noticed and discussed by Jacques Ryckmans and the other as of yet not quite emphasized. As Ryckmans duly notes, almost all OSA inscriptions that touch on issues of ritual and substantive purity are essentially confessionary/penitential texts in which the commissioner publicly confesses a sin or a misdemeanor, often sexual, and seeks atonement. Ryckmans's uncle Gonzague Ryckmans closely studied ten such inscriptions, eight of which he identified as Sabaic (*CIH* 523, *CIH* 532, *CIH* 533, *CIH* 546, *CIH* 547, *CIH* 568, RES 3956, RES 3957), one as Minaic (RES 2980), and one too fragmentary to identify (*CIH* 678).[17] Dating from the premonotheistic phase of Old South Arabia and inscribed on bronze or copper (see figs. 8.1–8.6 at the end of this chapter), G. Ryckmans noted that these inscriptions were meant to be publicly viewed in temples for expiatory purposes, and the provenance for the majority of them was the area of Madīnat Haram, near modern-day Kharibat Ḥamdān, where temples for the deities *ḏ-S¹mwy* and *Ḫlfn* were located. He also

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14 Ibid.

15 Num. 5:19; Lev. 5:3, etc.

16 "And if a woman have an issue, and her issue in her flesh be blood, she shall be in her impurity seven days; and whosoever toucheth her shall be unclean until the even. And every thing that she lieth upon in her impurity shall be unclean; every thing also that she sitteth upon shall be unclean. And whosoever toucheth her bed shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even. And whosoever toucheth any thing that she sitteth upon shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even. And if he be on the bed, or on any thing whereon she sitteth, when he toucheth it, he shall be unclean until the even. And if any man lie with her, and her impurity be upon him, he shall be unclean seven days; and every bed whereon he lieth shall be unclean" (Lev. 15:19–24, KJV).

17 G. Ryckmans, "La confession publique des péchés." Ryckmans says that these inscriptions were earlier studied in the second volume (1935) of Pettazzoni, *La confessione dei peccati*. But I was unable to consult this text.

noted that these inscriptions had a very distinctive pattern, in which the name of the wrongdoer was often followed systematically by the name of the deity addressed, the confession of the fault that was committed, the chastisement inflicted on the wrongdoer for his/her act, and finally the demand for the continuance of the deity's benevolence.[18] Jacques Ryckmans later added a few other specimens to the list of penitential inscriptions and analyzed their content related to issues of ritual purity.

What Gonzague and Jacques Ryckmans did not emphasize, however, is that many of these Sabaic inscriptions from Madīnat Haram share morphological and syntactic parallels with Arabic. It is also worth mentioning that Madīnat Haram and other places, such as Barāqish (ancient *Yṯl*), where these penitential inscriptions are found, are located between Ṣanʿāʾ and Najrān and constitute roughly the northernmost tip of extensive OSA epigraphic activity in the region, with the exception of some outlying examples. More recently, Christian Robin[19] noted the special case of penitential inscriptions from Haram, and Peter Stein meticulously studied the language of Haramic inscriptions and its relationship with Arabic and Minaic.[20]

In the meantime, new inscriptions with expiatory content, sometimes with possibly Haramic provenance, have been discovered since the time the Ryckmans duo produced their works on the inscriptions I just mentioned. With these additions, the corpus in question is significantly enlarged. Recently, Alexander Sima worked on these texts and suggested parallels to their confessionary character in Greek inscriptions from Asia Minor.[21] In the early 2000s Manfred Kropp revisited the topic of confessionary inscriptions and discussed their religious and legal contexts.[22] Most recently, Alessio Agostini studied these texts systematically and made a comprehensive list of all expiatory inscriptions, including those coming from the Haram region. Agostini identified about thirty properly expiatory/penitential texts, in addition to a few dedicatory inscriptions addressed to a deity for forgiveness of a transgression but with a different "textual typology."[23]

In this essay I am primarily concerned with purity-related penitential inscriptions in the Haramic dialect. Before discussing the content of these inscriptions in connection with ritual and substantive purity, an introductory overview of published Haramic inscriptions, expiatory or otherwise, in list form can prove useful. The following table contains an alphabetical list of them and their provenance with some preliminary notes on their content and key vocabulary pertaining to the topic of this study.

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18 G. Ryckmans, "La confession publique des péchés," p. 3.

19 Robin, *Inabbaʾ, Haram, Al-Kafīr, Kamna et Al-Harashif.*

20 Stein, "Materialien zur sabäischen Dialektologie."

21 Sima, "Neuinterpretation." See also Sima, "Kleinasiatische Parallelen."

22 Kropp, "Individual Public Confession."

23 Agostini, "New Perspectives on Minaean Expiatory Texts." Agostini identifies the following expiatory inscriptions (in the order given in his article): YM 23643, Y.92.B.A.29, al-Jawf 04.9, GOAM 314, MAFRAY Darb al-Ṣabī 26, MAFRAY Darb al-Ṣabī 27, MAFRAY Darb al-Ṣabī 32, MAFRAY Darb al-Ṣabī 5, MAFRAY Darb al-Ṣabī 16, MAFRAY Darb al-Ṣabī 30, Haram 33, Haram 34, Haram 35, Haram 36, Haram 40, Haram 10, Haram 8, Haram 56, Fr-Ṣanʿāʾ5, YM 10886, YM 26106, Shaqab 19, al-Ṣilwī 1 (referred to in this paper as Ṣilwī Šuḏayf 1), FB-Wādī Šuḏayf 2, FB-Wādī Šuḏayf 3, München Inv. Nr 94-317 880, YM 10703, YM 24905, al-Ṣilwī 2005, *CIH* 678, and DhM 399. Other dedicatory inscriptions with contents related to transgressions are: CIAS 39.ll/o3 n.6, CIAS 39.11/rl, Ja 702, Ja 720, Nami 74, Rb 1/84 no. 178 etc., Rb 1/84 Rb 1/89 no. 291 etc., Rb V/91 n. 61 1/89 n. 298, 300, Rb 1/88 n. 130, Rb 197, Rb 1/84.

	Dialect	Provenance	Content	Key vocabulary
Bron 1999	Haramic	Unknown	Penitential(?), for striking a servant	
FB-Wādī Šuḍayf 2	Haramic	Wādī Shuḍayf	Penitential, for polluting and sexual misconduct	*ġsl*, "to wash" *tmṯ*, "to deflower"; cf. Q. 55:56, 74
FB-Wādī Šuḍayf 3	Haramic	Wādī Shuḍayf	Penitential, fragmentary	
Haram 8 = *CIH* 546	Haramic	Jawf	Penitential, nonsexual collective confession	
Haram 10 = *CIH* 547	Haramic	Jawf	Penitential, collective, for delaying the ritual hunt	*ns¹ʾ*, "to postpone"; cf. Q. 9:37
Haram 13 = *CIH* 548	Haramic	Jawf	Legal, about pilgrimage and access to a temple	*ngs¹*, "to defile"; cf. Q. 9:28 *dmw*, "to defile with blood(?)"
Haram 33 = *CIH* 532	Haramic	Jawf	Penitential, for appearing impure in public	*ġyr ṭhrm*, "in an impure state"
Haram 34 = *CIH* 533	Haramic	Jawf	Penitential, fragmentary, for sexual misconduct	*qrb*, "to approach (sexually)" *ḥyḍ*, "to menstruate" *lm yġtsl*, "he did not wash himself"
Haram 35 = RES 3956	Haramic	Jawf	Penitential, for substantive impurity	*ṭmʾ*, "impure" (both as an adjective and a verb)
Haram 36 = RES 3957	Haramic	Jawf	Penitential, for ritual impurity	
Haram 40 = *CIH* 523	Haramic	Jawf	Penitential, for sexual misconduct	*qrb*, "to approach (sexually)" *ḥyḍ*, "to menstruate" *ġr-ṭhr*, "impure" *lm yġtsl*, "he did not wash himself" *ndḫ*, "sprinkle (with semen)"; cf. Q. 55:66(?)

	Dialect	Provenance	Content	Key vocabulary
Haram 56 = *CIH* 568	Haramic	Jawf	Penitential, reason not mentioned	
Ja 525	Haramic(?)	Unknown	Penitential, for ritual impurity	*ḏ-gwzt mḥrmhw ġyr ṭhrm*, "that she traversed his temple in an impure state"
Ja 2147	Haramic(?)	Najrān	Nonpenitential	
Kortler 4	Haramic	Jawf	Nonpenitential	
MṢM 7250	Haramic(?)	Wādī Shuḍayf	Penitential, for entering the temple with unclean clothes and sexual offense	*ḏ-ʾlkyn ṭhrm*, "which was not clean" *ms¹*, "to touch (a woman)"
München 94-317880	Haramic	Wādī Shuḍayf	Penitential, for sexual misconduct in the temple	
Ṣanʿāʾ 2004-1	Haramic(?)	Unknown	Penitential, reason unclear	*n(g)[s¹]w*, "they defiled"
Ṣilwī Šudayf 1	Haramic	Wādī Shuḍayf	Penitential, for polluting wells with semen	*mḫtlm<m>*, "person with nocturnal pollution"
YM 10703	Haramic	Wādī Shuḍayf	Penitential, misconduct in an offering	

In all, we are dealing here with twenty inscriptions, two of which—Ja 2147 and Kortler 4—are considered Haramic based on linguistic evidence (see below) but have no penitential or legal content. A great majority of the remaining eighteen inscriptions include distinct formulae of penance for offenses committed in or about sacred places. Most, but not all, of these offenses have to do with sexual misconduct or ritual impropriety.

This reasonably sizeable corpus gives us a fair idea about the rules and regulations of proper ritual conduct in public and sacred spaces and in the private lives of individuals in the Jawf valley. I argue that not only does the language of these inscriptions show a close linguistic affinity with the Arabic of the Qur'ān, as Stein argued, but also that there are lexical and doctrinal parallels between the Haramic and Qur'ānic codes of ritual purity.

Before discussing these lexical and doctrinal parallels, it may be useful to point out the morphological and syntactic idiosyncrasies of Haramic within Sabaic. Stein[24] identi-

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24 Stein, "Ancient South Arabian," p. 1047.

fies five major points of convergence between Haramic and Arabic: (1) the absence (with a few exceptions) of the third sibilant that exists in other OSA dialects; (2) the presence, and comparable usage, of preverbal particle *f-*; (3) the use of the ablative preposition *mn* instead of the common OSA *bn* and the use of other particles, such as *ʾḏ* for "as"; (4) the use of *lm* for the negation of the perfect tense; and (5) the use of final *-t* to indicate the first and second person in the perfect tense conjugation instead of *-k* as in other OSA dialects. As we shall see, these similarities could be an indication as to why we also observe lexical convergence between Haramic and Arabic formulations of ritual and substantive purity.

In Haramic inscriptions ritual purity is denoted by the word *ṭhr*, and one needs to wash himself/herself (*ġtsl*) in order to regain his/her purity after entering into any violating condition. Two similar and possibly related inscriptions provide good examples for studying the usage of these terms. Haram 40 (= *CIH* 523; see fig. 8.5) is a short and complete inscription that expresses the confession and penance of a man who had sexual intercourse (*qrb mrʾtm*)[25] with a menstruating woman (*ḥyḍ*, cognate with the term in Q. 2:222) and another woman in childbed (*nfs¹m*; cf. with the Arabic *nafsāʾ*, "woman in childbed"). The text indicates that these actions put the man in a state of ritual impurity (*ġr ṭhr*) and that his impure state continued since he did not wash himself (*lm yġts¹l*) but, rather, stayed in his impure clothes (*yʾb b-ʾks¹wthw ġr-ṭhr*) and sprinkled his clothes with semen (*nḍḥ ʾks¹wt-hw hmr*). He subsequently showed submission and regret and agreed to pay a fine (*f-ḥḍrʿ w-ʿnw w-yḥlʾn*).

Haram 34 (= *CIH* 533; see fig. 8.2), another Haramic inscription, has a similar content, but this time the dedicator of the inscription is a woman—perhaps the same woman that was mentioned in Haram 40. The text begins similarly with the confession of the dedicator and her willingness to do penance to the deity *ḏ-S¹mwy*. The reason for her confession is that a man approached her on the third day of the pilgrimage while she was in her period (*qrb-h mrʾ ywm ṯlṯ ḥgtn w-hʾ ḥyḍ*). The man then walked away and did not wash himself (*w-ms²y w-lm yġts¹l*). The inscription is broken after this point, and it is not entirely clear why the woman has to pay a fine for this action, which seems to be primarily perpetrated by the man. In any case, the transgression here seems to be twofold: sexual intercourse during pilgrimage while the woman involved was menstruating. It should be noted here that the Qurʾān also prohibits sexual intercourse during the period of pilgrimage.[26]

If purity is denoted in Haramic with words from the root *ṭhr*, what denotes words for impurity other than the phrase *ġyr ṭhr* (alternatively, *ġr ṭhr*)? There is at least one example in which the verbal root *ngs¹* is used in the sense of defilement, and, just as in the Qurʾān, the context has to do with access to a sanctuary. In the Haramic case the sanctuary in question is that of *Ḥlfn* in Kharibat Ḥamdān, in the northeast corner of Yemen, and it is mentioned in the inscription Haram 13 = *CIH* 548. The inscription is entirely legal in content, and it stipulates that whoever comes to the sanctuary (*mḥrmn*) with a weapon or clothes that are defiled by blood will pay a fine to the priests of the deity *ʿttr: hn l-yngs¹n s¹lḥ-hw*

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25 Compare the usage of *qrb* with Q. 2:222, "do not approach them [*lā taqrabūhunna*] until they are clean [*ḥattā yaṭhurna*]."

26 Q. 2:197: *al-ḥajju ashhurun maʿlūmatun fa-man faraḍa fīhinna l-ḥajja fa-lā rafatha wa-lā fusūqa wa-la jidāla fī l-ḥajj*: "The pilgrimage is during well-known months. So whoever obliged himself in these months to do the pilgrimage, there are no sexual relations, no disobedience and no dispute during the pilgrimage."

w-dmwm b-sᵊᶜyᶜ-hw l-yẓlᶜn l-ʾlt ᶜṭtr w-ʾrsᵊwwn ᶜsᵊr ḥyʾlym. That blood is a defiling agent and that its presence on one's clothes makes one impure are delineated in later Muslim law, but there is no indication of these stipulations in the Qurʾān other than the impermissibility of consuming blood.[27]

Another attestation of the verb *ngs¹*, "to defile," appears in the recently discovered, possibly Haramic inscription Ṣanᶜāʾ 2004-1; however, the inscription is too damaged for one to read and understand the context of the impurity properly. One alternative to identifying *ngs¹* as the antonym of *ṭhr* is found in Haram 35 (= RES 3956; see fig. 8.3). In this inscription, two words from the verbal root *ṭmʾ* denote substantive impurity for clothing mirroring the Hebrew (טָמֵא) and Aramaic (טְמָא, ܛܡܐ, n.b. Paᶜal form in Syriac) usage of the word. Judging from the usage of the roots *ngs¹* and *ṭmʾ* in the Qurʾān and Haramic inscriptions, it appears that the latter root refers to simple substantial impurity—a category that is not quite emphasized in the Qurʾān—whereas the former root indicates an ethical or ritual form of defilement confined strictly to the context of sanctuaries and other sacred spaces.

In fact, many Haramic inscriptions contain purity regulations about access to sanctuaries. An inscription (MṢM 7250) recently discovered in the temple of *Ġrw* dedicated to the deity *ḏ-S¹mwy* reflects a similar concern about entering a sanctuary with impure clothing, albeit in slightly different wording from that in Haram 13. In MṢM 7250 the author confesses that he had entered the sanctuary (*mḥrmn*) with an unclean belt (*ḏwlm ḏ-ʾl kyn ṭhrm*) and that he touched a woman while he was there (*w-b-ḏt bhʾ mḥrm w-ms¹ ʾṭtm*).[28] Another Haramic inscription (Haram 33 = *CIH* 532; see fig. 8.1) contains the confession of a woman who committed sins in her house and in the sanctuary and entered into the temple courtyard (*mwṭn*[29]) in an impure state (*wḏ't ᶜdy mwṭnn ġyr ṭhrm*). This latter inscription can be compared with Ja 525, in which a woman seeks atonement for crossing the sanctuary in a state of impurity (*ḏ-gwzt mḥrmhw ġyr ṭhrm*).

In terms of substantive purity, Haramic inscriptions provide only a few examples. I have already mentioned Haram 13, in which "blood" is mentioned as an impure and defiling substance. In other inscriptions semen is also counted as an agent of impurity. In addition to Haram 40, referred to above, al-Ṣilwī 1 mentions a man who defiled two wells when he was still impure from his nocturnal pollution (*mḥtlm<m>*; cf. with Arabic *iḥtilām*, "experiencing an emission of the seminal fluid in dreaming"[30]). Another Haramic inscription, FB-Wādī Šudayf 2, mentions the polluting of wells by a man who filled them with filth, but it is not clear what really caused the impropriety. The same man in this inscription confesses that he deflowered (*ṭmṭ*; cf. Q. 55:56, 74) a female servant of his master, which confession may suggest that the defiling agent in this case was blood.

Did Haramic inscriptions consider ritual impurity to be contagious? The evidence on this point seems rather inconclusive, but we can mention a few instances that might indicate that impurity could be spread to other people and objects. On at least two occasions

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27 See Q. 2:173 and 5:3.

28 Al-Ṣilwī and al-Aghbārī, "Naqš Jadīd Min Nuqūš Al-Iᶜtirāf Al ᶜalanī Min Maᶜbad ĠRW."

29 The rendering of *mwṭn* as "temple courtyard" is based on the context of the inscription, but it is difficult to know what is really meant by this word. Others compared it with the Arabic *mawṭin*, used in Q. 9:25 with the meaning "battlefield."

30 Lane, *Arabic–English Lexicon*, p. 632.

(FB-Wādī Šuḍayf 2 and Ṣilwī Šudayf 1), confessors describe their transgressions as the pollution of wells, which might have been used for the purposes of ritual washing. More interestingly, we read in Haram 36 (= RES 3957; see fig. 8.4) about the confession of a woman who put her relatives in an impure state (*slḥt ḏᵓḏnh*), but once again the details of what caused the impurity are missing.

HARAMIC AND QURᵓĀNIC CODES OF RITUAL PURITY: CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

Haramic penitential inscriptions present a very unique socioreligious phenomenon: public penance for purity-related offenses in sacred spaces. Confessions are displayed in the temples with the names of the confessors and their transgressions for everyone to see, and in some cases a miniature version of such inscriptions is carried by the transgressor in the form of a pendant.[31] Hailing from the premonotheistic period of Ancient South Arabia, that is, before the fourth century CE, these Haramic inscriptions portray an interesting catalogue of ritual purity offenses, out of which we can glean a possibly autochthonous legal framework developed around sexuality, sanctuary etiquette, and substantive purity. In the absence of discursive legal or ethical texts from the area, these inscriptions are our only guides to proper ritual conduct in pre-Islamic South Arabia.

Although centuries away from the composition and dissemination of the Qurᵓān, the code of ritual purity found in Haramic inscriptions evidences intriguing parallels with its Qurᵓānic counterpart on the levels of both vocabulary and doctrine. Contrasted with the casuistry (in a legalistic, nonderogatory use of the term) of early Islamic legal corpora on ritual purity, according to which (1) minor and major states of impurity are defined, (2) various agents of substantial impurity are strictly delineated, and (3) the focus is shifted from sacred spaces to individual and communal worship, the Qurᵓānic stipulations of ritual purity seem to reflect the concerns of a simple ethical code within a covenantal structure built around a sanctuary. Both the Qurᵓān and the Haramic sources indicate that the ultimate objective of maintaining ritual purity is to guarantee the continuation of the deity's benevolence. Qurᵓānic injunction on ritual purity ends with the remark that God does not wish any hardship on the believers but desires to purify them and complete his *niᶜmah* for them (Q. 5:6). Lowry summarizes the Qurᵓānic notion of ritual purity similarly as follows: "the Qurᵓān's most basic rules governing ritual purity, at Q. 5:6 and Q. 4:43, are embedded in a context of covenantal themes, constituted in particular by references to God's bounty (*niᶜma*) and human obedience (*al-samᶜ wa-l-ṭāᶜa*)."[32] Haramic penitential texts, too, often conclude with the confessor's asking the deity for *nᶜmt*, showing submission, and admitting his/her sin while making a commitment, often monetary, to remain in God's good graces.[33]

Because of this contextual continuity, I believe there is a strong parallel between the Qurᵓānic and Haramic doctrine of ritual purity in addition to a remarkable commonality of

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31 See München 94-317880, a metal pendant with a short confessionary inscription about sexual misconduct in a sanctuary accompanied by the stylized image of a couple having sex.

32 Lowry, "Ritual Purity," p. 506.

33 Cf. Haram 35, Haram 56, YM 10703, FB-Wādī Shuḍayf 3, Ṣanᶜāᵓ 2004-1.

vocabulary. The question of whether the Haramic dialect, and thereby the inscriptions in question, was heavily infused with Arabic loanwords and morphological features is still a valid one. But for the purposes of this essay the argument that there was, indeed, a lexical and doctrinal continuity from Haramic texts to the Qurʾān with regard to ritual purity still seems to hold.

I want to end with a few remarks on Jacques Ryckmans's inquiry about whether the Jewish or the OSA legal corpus has been more influential on the Qurʾānic code of ritual purity. First, I have argued in this study that when we talk about the OSA textual evidence on ritual purity we are, in fact, dealing with a small group of geographically confined and linguistically uniform inscriptions, whereas earlier literature on penitential inscriptions tended to see them as part of a wider phenomenon. Second, these inscriptions, now sub-sumed under the category of Haramic or Northern Middle Sabaic, compare better with the Qurʾānic evidence than they do with the larger and much more elaborate corpus of Islamic law produced at a temporal and spatial remove from the context of the Qurʾān in places of Judeo-Christian learning.[34] The fact that Haramic penitential inscriptions appear to date from before the clear appearance of Judaism and Christianity in South Arabia complicates the issue of outside influence, while post-monotheistic-era inscriptions do not provide clues as to whether there was any change in the perception, or practice, of ritual purity. Nevertheless, at least on the textual level, the study of the small but well-documented corpus of Haramic inscriptions proves to be useful for understanding the context of the Qurʾānic injunctions about ritual purity.

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34 There have been attempts to study the legal and ritual culture of the Qurʾān with reference to Syriac sources; cf. Zellentin, *Qurʾān's Legal Culture.*

Figure 8.1. Haram 33.

Figure 8.2. Haram 34.

Figure 8.3. Haram 35.

Figure 8.4. Haram 36.

Figure 8.5. Haram 40.

Figure 8.6. Haram 56.

9 The Invention of a Sacred Book

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Producing a book involves a diversity of crafts and techniques that may not represent a very high level of complexity but still requires some experience, such as parchment or papyrus making, ink and writing implements preparation, binding, and of course text transcription. The challenge faced by those who decided to commit Muḥammad's teachings to writing was even greater as the Qurʾān was the first Arabic "book" in the true sense of the word. There is no evidence of a tradition of bookmaking in Arabia prior to Islam. (There is no sign of a translation of the Bible into Arabic before the rise of Islam, for instance.) Getting from outside Arabia the materials required for the production of the book was no small feat. Some of them may even have been produced locally. The production of a book also implies the composition of a text. But even if, as Gregor Schoeler has shown, poems may have been committed to writing before the rise of Islam, thus providing a training ground for the writing down of complex texts, a distinction has to be made between *aide-mémoire* used by the scribe himself and books prepared for readers.[1] The Muslim tradition hints at the existence of partial recordings of Muḥammad's teachings before 632 CE; the episode of ʿUmar's conversion involves such a document,[2] and the names of various members of the early community who recorded the revelation are known.[3] A first step toward a compilation may thus have taken place at an early date, but the nature and number of the documents resulting from such an attempt remain unclear and range from *aide-mémoire* to more developed collections. In any case, the structure of the Qurʾān as we know it today excludes the possibility that it had been produced as a book before revelations stopped being announced. In spite of the magnitude of the problems involved in producing a book, the various issues related to this process in the case of the Qurʾān do not seem to have left a trace in the local historiography, since they are barely alluded to in the sketchy accounts of the writing down of the Qurʾān during the first century of Islam. The invention of its sacred book remains largely undocumented.

Producing a sacred book is obviously not only a question of materials and techniques. Also, the text is concerned with—and our sources hint at—possible changes in the contents of the Qurʾān as a consequence of the process of turning an oral predication into a written

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1 Schoeler, *Genesis of Literature in Islam*, ch. 1.

2 Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, vol. 3, pp. 248–49.

3 Caetani, *Annali*, vol. 2, pp. 482–83.

record.[4] These possible changes are negatively accounted for in the mentions of the destruction of the "older" copies of the text that took place at various times. In contrast to the technical aspects, they are better documented. When looking at the sequence of events as it can be reconstructed according to Muslim tradition, the first such episode surfaces when the text is collected by ʿUthmān (r. between 644 and 656 CE): when the master copy by Zayd b. Thābit was ready, the caliph ordered the production of duplicate copies to be sent to the largest garrison cities of the empire as well as the destruction of the existing manuscripts on which the collated text had been based—a decision that features slightly later among the criticisms leveled at him by his opponents.[5] His decision could be explained by the need to eliminate competing versions, but this point seems to be contradicted by a kind of post-scriptum occurring a few years later, when ṣuḥuf of the prophet's wife Ḥafṣa are suppressed. According to the tradition, the latter had been prepared under the instructions of Abū Bakr as a first compilation of the Qurʾānic text and became the possession of her father ʿUmar (r. between 634 and 644 CE), who bequeathed it to his daughter. Muḥammad's widow had been asked to lend it when ʿUthmān decided to write down the Qurʾān, and we are told that Zayd's version was carefully checked with her ṣuḥuf. Although no difference existed between the two texts, as we are told, the latter were destroyed once Ḥafṣa died.[6] The insistence on the fact that the destroyed copies—that of Ḥafṣa or others—did not contain any differences compared with the ʿUthmānic version makes such a claim all the more suspect.

The Umayyads apparently also followed this procedure, perhaps with other goals: when the Qurʾānic text was revised under the supervision of al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf (d. 714 CE), copies of al-Ḥajjāj's version were sent to the major cities of the empire, and the older codices were destroyed after the completion of the process.[7] The episode has been known for some time through a report from a later source that may be suspect, since the author, al-Kindī (third/ninth century), was engaged in polemics against Islam.[8] But another source provides a detail that gives some weight to the truthfulness of this account, since it states the amount paid by the authorities as a compensation for the loss incurred by the manuscript's owners—a detail that is not mentioned in the narratives of the previous episode under ʿUthmān's reign.[9]

The accounts of the destruction of the earlier copies, if it is not a *topos*, find to some extent their ultimate expression in the fate of ʿUthmān's copy in the second/eighth century. The famous Medinan scholar Mālik b. Anas (d. 795 CE) was asked about the whereabouts of this specific copy, which was both an important textual witness (since it was one of the original manuscripts with the ʿUthmānic version, if not the original itself) and a relic, as it was associated with the writing down of the sacred text and the dramatic episode of the caliph's murder. Mālik's answer was short and precise: "It is gone."[10] Both historical

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4 Dutton, "Orality, Literacy, and the 'Seven Aḥruf'"; Déroche, *Le Coran, une histoire plurielle.*

5 Al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, p. 943; Ibn Shabba, *Taʾrīkh al-madīna*, vol. 3, p. 999.

6 Ibn Abī Dāʾūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, pp. 21, 24–25.

7 Hamdan, *Studien zur Kanonisierung*, pp. 170–71.

8 In Tartar, *Dialogue islamo-chrétien*, p. 117.

9 Ibn Muṭarrif al-Kinānī, *al-Qurṭayn*, p. 171.

10 Jahdani, "Du *fiqh* à la codicologie," p. 274.

witnesses of the canonical text—Ḥafṣa's *ṣuḥuf* and ʿUthmān's copy—disappeared instead of being carefully preserved; the numerous copies attributed or linked to ʿUthmān are later manuscripts that were doctored, thanks to the addition of a spurious colophon or on the authority of hearsay.

If carried out properly, destroying manuscripts can leave barely any traces of them. According to the sources, ʿUthmān had the codices burned, torn up, or buried.[11] But we are fortunate to have an example illustrating the fact that the elimination of Qurʾānic texts was not merely a literary *topos* but was actually enforced. The Sanaa palimpsest (Sanaa, DaM Inv. 01.27-1) is a unique case of a codex with a different version of the Qurʾān that was erased, then covered by a copy of the ʿUthmānic text.[12] The situation is therefore similar to what is more commonly found in history, that is, the destruction of books transmitting texts considered unacceptable for some reason—for instance Nestorius's books burned under an edict of Theodosius II or the Manichean writings destroyed in Abbasid times in Baghdad. The evidence of the Sanaa palimpsest suggests that the destruction of *muṣḥaf*s was indeed motivated by the wish to eliminate versions differing from the official text. The erasure of the lower script layer in the Sanaa palimpsest was not sufficient to suppress it altogether but was certainly enough to prevent one's reading it easily. Various additional evidence indicates that the destructions undertaken during the reign of ʿUthmān or later by al-Ḥajjāj were not 100 percent effective. The Muslim tradition preserved, for instance, an account involving Mālik b. Anas, who showed his students a copy of the Qurʾān supposedly written by his grandfather under ʿUthmān's reign that should have been eliminated after al-Ḥajjāj's reform of the text.[13] A number of Qurʾānic copies produced in the second half of the first/seventh century, some of them therefore also predating this alleged destruction, have actually come down to us.[14]

The destructions suggest that the point was not only to invent a book that would be able to contain the teachings of Muḥammad in their variable expression[15] but also to make it unique as far as its text was concerned. They systematically involve the caliphal authority—also instrumental in the shaping of the text. In his account of the writing down of the Qurʾān, al-Zuhrī stressed the efficacy of the written text in settling disputes, thus implicitly acknowledging that ʿUthmān's version was meant to serve as a tool against variation and divergence.[16] Although both may appear closely associated with the oral transmission in Zuhrī's account, the copies said to have been written or owned by important companions such as Ubayy or Ibn Masʿūd were of particular concern, as their texts exhibited some differences compared with the ʿUthmānic version[17]—differences that could avail themselves of the authority of these companions, who surprisingly appear in the *isnād* of

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11 Déroche, *Le Coran, une histoire plurielle*, p. 162 and notes.

12 Against Hilali's hypothesis that the Sanaa palimpsest was a collection of isolated leaves with school notes (Hilali, *Sanaa Palimpsest*, pp. 67–70), see Déroche, *Le Coran, une histoire plurielle*, pp. 201–19.

13 Ibn Rushd al-Jadd, *Al-Bayān*, vol. 17, p. 34.

14 Although the C14 dating of early Qurʾānic manuscripts cannot be taken as the ultimate answer about their age, it is interesting to note that various results point to an early date—early enough possibly to predate al-Ḥajjāj's supposed destructions. See Marx and Jocham, "Radiocarbon (^{14}C) Dating," p. 216.

15 Déroche, *Le Coran, une histoire plurielle*.

16 Comerro, *Les traditions*, pp. 59–63.

17 Déroche, *Le Coran, une histoire plurielle*, pp. 147–55.

some of the canonical readings.[18] A steadfast effort against these copies is illustrated by Mālik b. Anas, who was asking the Abbasid authorities to eliminate concurrent versions of the Qurʾān, by forbidding both the copying and the sale of manuscripts with Ibn Masʾūd's text.[19] The authenticity of Muḥammad's revelations was ultimately at stake.

The destructions of divergent texts as well as growth of the Muslim communities in the empire necessitated the production of new manuscripts that could either take over the previous solutions or opt for a new presentation. The comparison between any of the early copies and a *muṣḥaf* from the third/ninth century shows that the second option was clearly favored. The fragments of manuscripts available and the information provided by Muslim tradition can serve as a basis for a review, but both sources are partly obscure. As for the fragments, their dates are not completely certain—a fact that is problematic, since the short time span under consideration would require a fairly precise chronology; additionally, the provenance is always doubtful. The accounts of the latter, Muslim tradition, are meager and sometimes mix data from different periods.

The initial choices of those in charge of the production of an authoritative Qurʾān text were actually challenged by changes of various kinds that occurred in the decades following the initial writing down of the ʿUthmānic text. The format of the already classical codex at that time, that is to say vertical, was the immediate choice for the text of the Qurʾān. But the physical appearance of the Qurʾānic manuscripts was soon modified, and small, oblong-format copies in *ḥijāzī* script began circulating by the end of the first/seventh century.[20] The sources are silent about the reasons behind this move from vertical to oblong format, but it has been argued that it reflected the need felt by some to have a Qurʾān visually distinct from the Torah scrolls and the New Testament codices.

A prevalent feature of the earliest copies is the way in which the copyists used most of the space available on the page for the transcription of the text, leaving almost no outer margins. This feature is not the consequence of repeated trimming operations, which would have resulted in the disappearance of the margins; for in many instances, when the natural edge of the parchment was not eliminated when the sheet was cut into bifolios, the text stops in close contact with it.[21] Sparing the costly material was not the reason behind this way of handling the layout of the pages, since the size of the lines, at least in the quarto copies, could have been reduced without any loss in legibility in order to accommodate the same amount of text on a page and a reasonable margin all around. This layout cannot be traced back to other manuscript traditions of this area, either, for ample margins were a common feature of their books. The nature of the Qurʾān text itself may explain this decision. There is actually an account about the stoning verse that might provide an explanation: ʿUmar would have said that he wanted to add it in the margin of his copy but recanted out of fear that people would say he had added a verse to the Qurʾān.[22] Since margins were places where material could be added, leaving no space around the text would prevent any tampering with the revelations.

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18 Ibn Jazarī, *Das biographische Lexikon*, pp. 413, 425, 516.

19 Ibn Rushd al-Jadd, *al-Bayān*, vol. 9, p. 374.

20 Déroche, *Qurʾans of the Umayyads*, p. 58.

21 Ibid., p. 66.

22 Al-Bukhārī, *Al-Ǧāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, pp. 1238–40.

But margins were soon back in the Qurʾānic manuscripts probably by the end of the first/seventh century.[23] We lack clues as to the origin of this decision, which may have been motivated by the influence of earlier handwritten traditions or by worries about the users' fingers coming in contact with the sacred text. One should note, however, that a frame surrounds the text on every page in some copies of the Qurʾānic manuscripts from the first half of the second/eighth century—a frame perhaps as a substitute for the previous layout, with the frame's providing a delimitation for the text.[24]

The evolution of the *muṣḥaf* is marked by a process of trial and error leading to solutions that were, in the end, to last for centuries. Changes or alterations to the initial appearance of the Qurʾānic manuscripts were in some cases motivated by advances in the ability to note down the text more accurately. Such changes concern, for instance, the orthography, with a growing use of *alif*s as indicators of the long vowel /ā/, or of diacritical marks to distinguish homographs.[25] In the second/eighth century, Mālik b. Anas condemned the changes in the Qurʾānic orthography. His statement is not very precise as to his exact meaning, but we can surmise that it directly concerned the orthography.[26] It should be added that on some of the early manuscripts, letters have been added or words modified to bring them to the same level of orthographic correction as more recent copies,[27] thus casting doubt over one of the reasons that could explain the destruction of earlier copies, since they could obviously be easily corrected.

Two changes concerning the script itself are perhaps still more significant. The two points I just mentioned (orthography and diacritical marks) could perfectly well have been handled with the script at hand by the middle of the first/seventh century. The use of diacritical marks was merely a decision by the copyist, as was in good part the case for the enhancement of the orthography. Now the introduction of a specific system for the short vowels was a major change, for it deeply modified the relationship between the reader and the book. The date of its introduction cannot be dated very precisely,[28] but the red dots occur with some frequency on copies featuring the same variety of script (style *O I*) that can be dated to the end of the first/seventh and early second/eighth centuries; one red dot is even covered by a piece of illumination in one of the manuscripts of this group.[29] Here again Mālik b. Anas was opposed to the use of these marks, at least on the Qurʾānic copies meant for communal use.[30]

Another element leading to a completely new *muṣḥaf* was the deliberate change of script in favor of the style mentioned above (*O I*). Under caliph ʿAbd al-Malik's reign (between 685 and 705), the appearance of the Arabic script was consciously modified to make it look more regular and stately.[31] Inscriptions produced at that time, as well as a piece of

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23 Déroche, *Qurʾans of the Umayyads*, p. 82.

24 Ibid., pp. 119–24, 128–29.

25 Déroche, *La transmission écrite*, pp. 43–45, 51–75, 130–35.

26 Jahdani, "Du *fiqh* à la codicologie," p. 273.

27 Déroche, *Qurʾans of the Umayyads*, p. 68.

28 Ibn Khallikān, *Wafāyāt al-aʿyān*, vol. 2, p. 32 ; vol. 6, p. 175; Ibn al-Nadīm, *K. al-Fihrist*, p. 63.

29 See Déroche, *Qurʾans of the Umayyads*, p. 99, for different script styles.

30 Jahdani, "Du *fiqh* à la codicologie," p. 274.

31 Déroche, *Qurʾans of the Umayyads*, pp. 78–80.

information concerning his son and successor, al-Walīd I (r. 705 to 715), show that this reform was important and quite effective.[32] As for the copies of the Qurʾān, the same evolution can be identified. A palaeographically homogeneous group of manuscripts provides a view of the changes that the Arabic script and the *muṣḥaf* underwent by the end of the first/seventh and early second/eighth centuries. Two aspects seem especially important: on the one hand, the Arabic script was submitted to a complete revamping by anonymous script designers and, on the other hand, the results were disseminated among the copyists. The script I have suggested calling *O I* can be defined on the basis of the letter-shapes but also the line module.[33] The latter is quite consistent in the manuscripts assembled on a palaeographical basis, irrespective of the size of the copies, which range from small quarto to folio. The module remains fairly constant and measures, in the majority of cases, between 10 and 12.7 mm in height, with only two instances of a clearly lesser value. On the largest manuscripts—two fragments kept in the Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum in Istanbul—the line on ŞE 71 (41.2 × 36 cm; 25 lines)[34] is 12.7 mm high, which is very close to that of ŞE 12903 (12.5 mm) though the latter is written on substantially smaller folios (24.1 × 19.3 cm; 16 lines).[35] The duration of this process of transformation remains unclear, and it may have lasted for some time, as some fragments kept in Istanbul reflect a first step in the development of this script.

The diffusion of this uniform script may imply that the Umayyad ruling elite played a role in its success and even exerted some form of control over the whole process of book production. The references shared by those who transcribed these *muṣḥaf*s (same shapes and some common habits) suggest that some sort of teaching/training had been set up for copyists/calligraphers—a great leap forward in comparison with the largely amateur abilities of those who transcribed the manuscripts in *ḥijāzī* style. We can detect behind this change the desire to make the identity of the version supported by the Umayyad authorities visually effective on two levels. In a purely formal way, individual copies of the new Qurʾānic codex were able to compete with more accomplished manuscripts produced by other communities. On the other hand, the nature of the text, underlined by the uniformity of its visual appearance on various copies, helped make visible that the Muslim community was sharing the same sacred text. It was also, however, leading to a growing distance vis-à-vis the scripts in everyday use that would last until the fourth/tenth century in a clear example of hierography, development of a sacred script for a sacred text.[36] The emergence of calligraphy and, as a corollary, the idea of a properly Qurʾānic script may have been the consequence of the extensive contacts with older "book cultures" present in the Middle East at that time—notably, the Syriac book culture.

The contact with other book cultures of the Near East may in some cases have been the driving force behind a modification. The adoption of the codex was in itself, at the beginning of this process, the consequence of some knowledge about the books produced in the region. Even if al-Kindī contends that the Qurʾān was first, like the Torah, written on

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32 Déroche, "Un critère de datation."

33 Déroche, *Qurʾans of the Umayyads*, pp. 97–100.

34 See ibid., pp. 98–99 and fig. 31.

35 See ibid., pp. 98–99 and fig. 33.

36 Robert, *Hiéroglossie 1.*

scrolls, there is no trace of any Qurʾānic *volumen*.[37] The evidence about the involvement of non-Muslims in the production of copies of the Qurʾān is scant, but an early account about Umayyad times mentions Christian copyists' transcribing the Qurʾān for Muslim patrons.[38]

The next two changes were more optional in nature. The size of a book depends largely on its function, and, as a rule, a folio copy would not be considered a book for private possession. But the size of a text is also an important component in the decision to opt for one size or another. The Qurʾān is a short text, when compared with the Bible, and would not require a large number of folios or specific dimensions for its transcription. But on the basis of the extant material, the largest copies, in principle meant for public use, evolved toward ever-larger dimensions. Most of the early *ḥijāzī* items seem to have been large quarto volumes, with the exception of Sanaa, DaM Inv. 00-30.1, possibly a folio copy of the text (at 41.2 × 36 cm) from the early second/eighth century.[39] Two copies of a slightly later date, one in Sanaa (DaM Inv. 20-33.1) and the other in Dublin (Chester Beatty Library, Is 1404), are clearly folio manuscripts (ca. 45 × 37 cm).[40] Their script is in sharp contrast with the just-mentioned Sanaa *ḥijāzī* copy. It is also considerably thicker than that of *O I*, for instance. It shares with it a tendency to accentuate the width of the letters but relies for its execution on a tool with a larger tip that was, to some extent, adapted to the folio copies of the Qurʾān so the script would not only be fully adapted to a larger page but also allow the production of balanced, three-dimensional volumes. The thickness of the stroke means that a technical evolution had taken place. It was not only a matter of cutting a thicker nib; it probably also involved a change of tool or material as well as a change in the movements and position of the copyist. This evolution is all the more striking in that it seems somewhat sudden, and no comparable tool seems to have been known in other manuscript traditions of this area. This new kind of *muṣḥaf* may bear witness to a desire to compete with earlier, large-sized copies of the Bible—for example, the Codex Sinaiticus—which resulted in an increased size for copies of the Qurʾān.[41]

Both the Sanaa copy and the Dublin manuscript Chester Beatty Library Is 1404 were produced during the first decades of the second/eighth century under Umayyad rule and probably in some official context. In the aftermath of the Abbasid revolution, new copies were produced for public use, notably as a propaganda tool meant to eliminate the traces of Umayyad patronage. This purpose would explain the decision to have them written on plano volumes in which one folio is the equivalent of a whole sheet of parchment (and not its half, as is the case for folio copies). Bringing us back to the *topos* of the destruction/ elimination, we are thus told that when al-Mahdī's codex reached Medina, the Umayyad copy sent by al-Ḥajjāj was pushed aside in the Great Mosque.[42] If its identification as one of the twelve-lines-to-a-page copies of the Qurʾān is correct, it would indicate that new solutions were explored by the Abbasid authorities.[43]

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37 Al-Kindī, *Risāla*, in Tartar, *Dialogue islamo-chrétien*, p. 112.

38 Al-Ṣanʿānī, *al-Muṣannaf*, vol. 8, no. 14530.

39 Déroche, *Qurʾans of the Umayyads*, pp. 57–58.

40 Ibid., pp. 108–11.

41 Ibid., 107ff.

42 Al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-wafā*, vol. 2, p. 668.

43 See the hypothesis in Déroche, "Twenty Leaves," pp. 57–77, and "Of Volumes and Skins."

Illumination is what most distinguishes the group of quarto copies written in *ḥijāzī* style (which probably reflect the earliest stage of book production) from the manuscripts in *O I* style and from the folio copies mentioned previously.[44] In the former group, illumination is lacking, and *sūrah*s are separated from each other by a blank space. This austere presentation of the Qurʾānic text, which was the hallmark of the earliest copies in *ḥijāzī* style that have come down to us and was probably a faithful replication of older codices, lost its attractiveness and meaning for some patrons—those who felt the necessity for a book with a nicer appearance and one that used a visual repertory in accordance with the tastes of Near Eastern elites of that time. In a few copies in *O I* script, the illuminators and their patrons, with the aim of beautifying the *muṣḥaf*, appropriated from the late antique tradition a suitable decorative repertory. Judging from the illuminations, artists familiar with this tradition were entrusted with the task of decorating the Qurʾānic copies, so we cannot discard the possibility that professional Christian or Jewish illuminators were hired to carry out this task.[45]

One should, however, note among the material evidence that has come down to us a few examples, some of them isolated, some of them more numerous, that seem to diverge from the mainstream and keep at least partly some of the features typical of the earliest *muṣḥaf*s. These copies may represent the production of groups that did not agree with the way in which the written transmission of the Qurʾān was generally handled or experiments that failed to find a wide acceptance. As Bagnall reminds us, however, "we can never trust patterns of documentation without subjecting them to various sorts of criticism. It is not only arguments from silence that are suspect, but arguments from scarcity or abundance. The documentary record is irreparably lumpy."[46]

The list of the changes that modified the appearance of the Qurʾānic manuscripts over the first two centuries shows the diversity of the issues concerned, from textual to material. They also show how reaching a satisfactory and stable solution was difficult. After 632 CE, the writing down of the Qurʾān required a decision about the shape the various individuals/circles concerned wanted for the book that would contain the revelations. At that moment, the invention of a sacred book could not be the result of a carefully thought-out plan, a point that seems to be hinted at by the accounts of the two episodes (first under the reign of Abū Bakr, then of ʿUthmān) that both insist on the urgency of the move.[47] They do not contain any unequivocal indications about the place where the manuscripts were produced, but they do suggest that, along with the direct involvement of the caliphal power, it took place in Medina, then capital of the caliphate. The level of technical knowledge available there at that moment remains unclear, but it was probably sufficient to carry out the task of preparing the book.[48] The involvement of scribes belonging to other religious groups and familiar with previous handwritten traditions is not recorded at that point.

But wide agreement about the shape of the book seems to have emerged among the individuals/groups supporting the various compilations of Muḥammad's teachings, at least

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44 Déroche, *Qurʾans of the Umayyads*, pp. 75ff.

45 Ibid., p. 96.

46 Bagnall, *Everyday Writing*, p. 118.

47 Comerro, *Les traditions*, pp. 43, 59–63.

48 Whelan, "Evidence for Early Codification," 10–14.

if we can judge from the similarity between the slightly later manuscripts containing a text close to the ʿUthmānic *rasm* and the Sanaa palimpsest as far as the codex's shape, long lines, and lack of margins. If we admit the hypothesis that "authoritative text-forms"—that is, textual recordings that got a "degree of consensual authority at a local level"[49]—were already circulating among groups of the faithful in Medina and possibly earlier in Mecca, some material features were perhaps already decided (or at least explored) before the final compilations could be prepared and preserved or partly preserved when the final compilations were prepared. When material evidence is available to us, as is the case with the Sanaa palimpsest, it supports the hypothesis that a similar presentation had been retained for the various compilations.

As far as the text is concerned, 632 CE is an important date, since then the growth of the Qurʾānic corpus came theoretically to an end. The information preserved by the tradition about final version(s) is mainly related to the implication of the authorities in an official compilation during the reigns of Abū Bakr and ʿUthmān.[50] Although nothing is said about any decisions made at that stage concerning the *muṣḥaf* or the material aspect of the compilation they supported, the materiality appears negatively with the destruction of earlier copies and its possible relation with divergent compilations, even if, in Zuhrī's account as preserved in Ṭabarī, the textual divergences are described as oral. [51] The destructions occurred after the writing down of the sacred text under ʿUthmān's reign, then after the death of Ḥafṣa, whose *ṣuḥuf* had been spared under the agreement she made with ʿUthmān. It is only on this occasion that something is said about the version this document contained, namely, that no difference whatsoever existed between it and the ʿUthmānic text. Conversely, no attempt was made to eliminate the "canonical variants" of the *rasm* that supposedly appeared when copies of the text prepared under ʿUthmān's orders were made.[52] It has, however, to be noted that the orthography of some of these variants is not compatible with an early date—an incompatibility that suggests they appeared later in the first/seventh century or even at the beginning of the second/eighth century.

But the result soon turned out not to be quite satisfactory, except for two points that were never modified: the codex's shape and the long lines. Technical developments as well as contacts with other handwritten traditions may have stressed the deficiencies of the initial compilation and accelerated the need for an *aggiornamento*. Even if the tradition stresses the fact that ʿUthmān wanted to foster the unity of the community through the production of a text that would leave no place for variants, the tools at hand at that moment and the existence of other versions did not allow him to reach that goal.[53] The undertaking initiated by al-Ḥajjāj looks like an attempt to do so and to "invent" a *muṣḥaf* that would be the final word. The new copies were more accurate, thanks to the transition to a more precise *rasm* and to the introduction of short-vowel signs. They were also more attractive thanks to their script and to illuminations in some copies. The count of the words and letters of the text al-Ḥajjāj ordered once the editorial work had been finished points to

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49 Small, *Textual Criticism*, 7–8.

50 Comerro, *Les traditions*, 32–36.

51 Ṭabarī, *Commentary*, 25–26.

52 Cook, "The Stemma of the Regional Codices of the Koran."

53 Déroche, *La transmission écrite*, pp. 163–64.

the idea that the text had reached its definitive form, which was not the case before.[54] The process of invention was reaching its final stage. The destruction of earlier *muṣḥaf*s reflects not only the dissatisfaction with the result of the previous step but also an attempt at eliminating rival versions of the Qurʾānic text. It is unclear, however, whether these destructions were systematically enforced. Actually, the codex Parisino-petropolitanus, predating al-Ḥajjāj's reform, remained in use until at least the beginning of the third/ninth century.

The process of inventing the sacred book of Islam was far from completed. As it became apparent, the changing environment of the first centuries with various rival currents affected both the textual and material components. By the beginning of the second/eighth century, the emergence of a diversified readership, the growing diversity of the functions for the *muṣḥaf*, and the contacts with the sacred books of other Middle Eastern religious communities pushed toward new modifications. As we have seen, the dissenting voice of Mālik b. Anas makes clear that the changes were not immediately accepted, and some manuscripts, especially those in *B Ia* style, seem to reflect the wish to stick to the earlier presentation of the *muṣḥaf*.[55] The stance the same Mālik adopted vis-à-vis Ibn Masʾūd's version indicates that it remained in use in some Muslim communities in the second half of the second/eighth century. Later in that century, the symbolic replacement of al-Ḥajjāj's copy by the *muṣḥaf* sent to Medina by al-Mahdī shows that a new conception was still actively sought after for the sacred book of Islam. In spite of the official involvement, it is no wonder that an almost final presentation only started to emerge in the fourth/tenth century, when the text itself had been canonized by Ibn Mujāhid with the backing of the Abbasid authorities. At that time, hierography had ceased to be an essential tool for copying the Qurʾān.

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54 Ibn Abī Dāʾūd, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, p. 118.

55 See Déroche, *Qurʾans of the Umayyads*, p. 99, for different styles of early Qurʾānic script.

10

Script or Scripture?

The Earliest Arabic Tombstones in the Light of Jewish and Christian Epitaphs[1]

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THE EARLIEST ISLAMIC-ERA TOMBSTONE INSCRIPTIONS have received a great deal of attention by scholars from a variety of disciplines. A number of scholars have approached early Arabic tombstones and inscriptions with aims of interpreting social and religious history.[2] The value of these artifacts is unquestionable, but their interpretation for historians of the early Islamic period is not as definitive. For example, Leor Halevi is even hesitant to consider the earliest tombstone as specifically Islamic,[3] while Robert Hoyland cautions that the absence of "typical Islamic expressions" or the appearance of "indeterminate monotheisms" is to "misconstrue Islam, which is not primarily Muhammadanism, but rather subordination to an omnipotent and unique God."[4] But placing these Arabic tombstones within a wider context of Christian and Jewish epitaphs is largely lacking. By highlighting a number of similarities, motifs, and characteristics of late antique Christian and Jewish tombstones, I argue that Christian and Jewish burial epitaphs represented religious and communal identity not through scripture or doctrinal vocabulary but through distinct script and symbols. The lack of theological content on early Arabic tombstones, therefore, is not necessarily evidence of a broader absence of distinctive religious doctrine or communal identity.

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2 For example, Ory, "Aspects religieux des textes épigraphiques du début de l'Islam"; Hoyland, "Content and Context"; Nevo and Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*; Halevi, "Paradox of Islamization" and *Muhammad's Grave*; Diem and Schöller, *Living and Dead in Islam*; Imbert, "L'Islam des pierres"; Bacharach and Anwar, "Early Versions of the *shahāda*"; Harjumäki and Lindstedt, "Ancient North Arabian and Early Islamic Graffiti."

3 Halevi, "Paradox of Islamization," p. 121.

4 Hoyland, "Content and Context of Early Arabic Inscriptions," p. 96.

TOMBSTONES AS SOURCES

Tombstones are valuable material sources for historians, particularly those who study the early Islamic period. Tombstones are often dated and, as a benefit of being literally written in stone, resistant to later redactions. The tombstones discussed below include the earliest Arabic tombstones dated according to the *ḥijra* and a number of Christian and Jewish tombstones from late antiquity. I label the early tombstones as Arabic and not specifically Islamic because the latter is a characterization that has been challenged; therefore, I hope to avoid any initial confusion. But labeling the tombstones as Arabic entails its own set of qualifications. First, by "Arabic," I am referring to recognizable Arabic script and language, and not broader linguistic or philological characteristics. Second, even though the following tombstones are from Egypt, not Arabia, they reflect features of Arabian languages and cultural production in the seventh century CE.

The earliest dated tombstone comes from 31 AH /652 CE:[5]

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, this tomb	بسم اللـه الرحمن الرحيم هذا القبر
belongs to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Khayral-Ḥajrī, Oh God, forgive him	لعبد الرحمن بن خير الحجري اللهم اغفر له
and make him enter into your mercy and us with him	وادخله في رحمة منك واينا معه
Ask forgiveness for him when reading this inscription	استغفر له اذا قرا هذا الكتب
and say "amen." This inscription was written	وقل امين وكتب هذا ا
in Jumādā al-ʾĀkhir	لكتب في جمدى الا
from the year one and	خر من سنت احدى و
thirty	ثلثين

The second earliest tombstone is dated to 71 AH/691 CE, and it contains two references to Muḥammad and a variation of the *shahāda*:[6]

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5 El-Hawary, "Most Ancient Islamic Monument Known"; Hawary and Rached, *Catalogue général du Musée arabe du Caire*, no. 1. The Arabic transcription is slightly simplified and modified from El-Hawary's reading.

6 El-Hawary, "Second Oldest Islamic Monument Known"; Wiet, *Catalogue général du Musée arabe du Caire*, no. 3201. The Arabic transcription is slightly simplified and modified from El-Hawary's reading.

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate	بسم اللـه الرحمن الرحيم
The greatest of misfortunes of the people [*ahl al-islām*]	ان اعظم مصايب اهل الا
of Islam is their loss of the Prophet Muḥammad,	سلام مصيبتهم بالنبي محمد
may God bless him and grant him peace	صلى اللـه عليه و سلم
This is the tomb of ʿAbbāsa, the daughter of	هذا قبر عباسة ابنت
Jurayj [George?], the son of [?], may the mercy of God	جريج بن سد(؟)رحمت اللـه
and his forgiveness and satisfaction be upon her.	ومغفرته ورضوانه عليها
She died on Monday, four-	توفيت يوم الاثنين لاربع
teen days having passed of Dhū al-Qaʿda,	عشر خلون من ذي القعدة
of the year seventy-one [691 ᴄᴇ]	سنة احدى و سبعين
And she confesses "there is no God but Allāh"	وهي تشهد الا اله الا اللـه
alone, having no partner, and that	وحده لا شريك له وان
Muḥammad is his servant and Messenger,	محمدا عبده ورسوله
may God bless him and grant him peace	صلى اللـه عليه وسلم

The two tombstones, henceforward referred to as T31 and T71, respectively, have notable differences and their own complications. Tombstone T31 does not mention Muḥammad or any form of the *shahāda.* In contrast, T71 mentions Muḥammad twice, references the people of Islam (*ahl al-islām*), and provides a form of the *shahāda.*[7] Concerning T31, Halevi argues,

> It refers to Allāh explicitly and to the Hijrī calendar implicitly, but contains no reference to the prophet Muḥammad and no allusion to Muslim scripture. It records the death of a believer in Allāh, but otherwise lacks a distinctively Islamic identity. Its plea for divine forgiveness in the afterlife was commonplace in Jewish and Christian tombstones from late antiquity, and it is by no means clear that the inscriber's intention was to produce a uniquely Islamic—rather than, more generally, a monotheistic—memorial.[8]

Halevi contends that the changes in content between T31 and later tombstones reflect a process of religious change or "Islamization."[9] Bacharach and Anwar contend that the use

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7 For various early forms of the *shahāda*, see Bacharach and Anwar, "Early Versions of the *shahāda.*" See below for discussion concerning the dating of T71.

8 Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, p. 15. For discussion concerning Arabic graffiti invocations for forgiveness, see Harjumäki and Lindstedt, "Ancient North Arabian and Early Islamic Arabic Graffiti," pp. 77ff.

9 Halevi, "Paradox of Islamization," p. 122. By "Islamization," Halevi means "the historical process at work during the formative era of Islam, by which persons and objects were made Islamic in character and became imbued with Islamic principles or forms" (ibid., p. 124). It is also worth commenting on an additional early epitaph mentioned by Halevi—the Cyrus church inscription for the grave of ʿUrwa ibn Thābit dated to 29 ᴀʜ/650 ᴄᴇ in Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet, *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe*, n. 5. The epitaph is not from a surviving inscription or tombstone but from a literary account by ʿAlī ibn Abī Bakr

of "he alone" (*waḥdahu*) in T71 "demonstrates that from the earliest material evidence Muslims were emphasizing their strict monotheism" and "the phrase *lāsharīkalahū* emphasizes the critical differences between Muslims and Christians."[10] Similarly, Diem suggests that emphasis on the *shahāda* in early Arabic funerary texts was an effort to distinguish early Muslims from larger communities of Jews and Christians.[11]

None of these scholars, however, address how Jews or Christians distinguished themselves from one another or to what degree religious doctrine was even recorded on tombstones.[12] In order to employ tombstones as sources for social or religious history—that is to say, in order to question the degree that T31 represents an Islamic monument or how much the differences between T31 and later tombstones reflect social, religious, and communal changes—it is first worth asking how late antique religious communities distinguished themselves through epitaphs or how much doctrine was even common on stelae. In what follows, I argue that Christian and Jewish communities expressed distinct communal identity on burial epitaphs through script and symbols, not through scripture.

"ONE (IS) GOD" AND CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH EPITAPHS

The number of Christian and Jewish funerary inscriptions is vast, and a comprehensive comparison of them is certainly beyond the scope of this essay. The epitaphs discussed below are primarily Jewish and Christian tombstones from the cemetery at Ghor al-Safi in Jordan and Christian tombstones in Egypt.[13] While the tombstones at Ghor al-Safi date from the mid-fourth through sixth centuries, this material is valuable for discerning the ways different religious communities distinguished themselves from one another, for the cemetery contained both Jewish and Christian tombstones. The Christian Egyptian tombstones provide valuable insight due to their proximity both geographically and chronologically to early Arabic tombstones. This selection of evidence, while certainly not exhaustive, highlights the characteristics of Christian and Jewish tombstones that represented religious or communal identity.

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al-Harawī (d. 611/1215). Halevi characterizes the ʿUrwa ibn Thābit epitaph as similar to T31 insofar as it displays "no distinctively Islamic formula" (Halevi, "Paradox of Islamization," p. 125, and *Muhammad's Grave*, p. 253, n. 3). But the epitaph includes a quotation of *sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* (Q. 112) according to the transcription in *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe* and the literary account from which it is derived. The account reads: "I saw on the island of Cyprus an inscription [*maktūb*] on stone as follows: after the *basmala* and *sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*, 'This is the grave of ʿUrwa ibn Thābit. He died in the month of Ramaḍān in the year twenty-nine of the *hijra*.' This stone is built in the wall of the eastern church" (al-Harawī, *al-Ishārāt ilā maʿrifat al-ziyārāt*, p. 53). Nevertheless, I have chosen to omit the epitaph because it is not an existing tombstone or inscription but a literary account of an epitaph. Further, the veracity of the account is debatable. For example, Donner believes it to be "of dubious authenticity" (Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, p. 88, n. 86); in contrast, Elad argues for its authenticity (Elad, "Community of Believers," pp. 284–87).

10 Bacharach and Anwar, "Early Versions of the *shahāda*," p. 64.

11 Diem, in Diem and Schöller, *Living and Dead in Islam*, vol. 1, p. 52.

12 Hoyland comments about parallels between Christian Greek formulas and early Arabic inscriptions (Hoyland, "Content and Context," p. 89). Halevi discusses pre-Islamic epitaphs briefly and focuses mainly on the idealization of kinship (Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, pp. 17–20).

13 Meimaris and Kritkakou-Nikolaropoulou, *Inscriptions from Palaestina Tertia*, vol. 1a, *Greek Inscriptions from Ghor es-Safi*, and vol. 1c, *Jewish Aramaic Inscriptions from Ghor es-Safi*; Tudor, *Christian Funerary Stelae*.

CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH TOMBSTONES AT GHOR AL-SAFI (BYZANTINE ZOORA)[14]

A notable characteristic of the Christian tombstones at Ghor al-Safi is the prevalence of the introductory formula εἷς θεός (*heis Theos*), "One God"/"One (is) God."[15] This expression was common in the Near East (Syria, Phoenicia, Palestine, Arabia, and Egypt), with its first uses dating to the late third century CE.[16] In the collection of tombstones from Ghor al-Safi by Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou, roughly 100 of the 341 Christian tombstones recorded contain the opening slogan *heis Theos* or a variation of it.[17] While inscribing the name "Jesus" or "Christ" is rare,[18] the tombstones frequently employ Christian symbols for representing Christ—most commonly a cross, but also monograms and symbols such as the *staurogram* (⳨) and the *alpha* and *omega* (Α Ω).[19] The owner of the tombstone is identified at the beginning with the phrase Μνημῖον . . . , "Monument of . . . ," and the tombstones commonly end with the phrase Θάρσι, οὐδὶς ἀθάνατος, "be of good cheer, no one (is) immortal."[20] The religious phrase μετὰ καλοῦ ὀνόματος καὶ καλῆς πίστεως, "having a good name and good faith," is found on some of the tombstones, thus further expressing the Christian religious identity of the deceased.[21] An early sixth-century tombstone provides a useful example of the common structure and formula of the tombstones:[22]

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14 Ghor al-Safi is located at the southeastern end of the Dead Sea and is identified as Zoora or Zoara in the late sixth-century Mosaic floor map at Madaba in Jordan (Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou, *Inscriptions from Palaestina Tertia*, vol. 1a, p. 3).

15 The origins of this slogan in Palestinian inscriptions seems to derive from gnostic or pagan imagery (Di Segni, "εἷς θεός in Palestinian Inscriptions," p. 115). See also Peterson, *Εἷς θεός*. For a concise summary of its origin, see Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou, *Inscriptions from Palaestina Tertia*, vol. 1a, pp. 114–15.

16 Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou, *Inscriptions from Palaestina Tertia*, vol. 1a, p. 114.

17 Ibid., p. 427.

18 Ἰησοῦς (ibid., numbers 106, 125, 150); Χριστός (ibid., numbers 28, 116, 121, 150, 223, 254, 258).

19 See ibid., p. 15, fig. 4, for a full list of symbols and their frequency. After the cross, the most common symbol is the bird, which is a symbol for the Holy Spirit or the soul in heaven (ibid., p. 13).

20 This imperative seems to be directed at the deceased person, since the name of the deceased is inserted after the imperative Θάρσι on some tombstones; see, for example, number 163, the grave of Petros: Θάρσι, Πέτρε, οὐδὶς ἀθάνατος, "Be of good cheer, Petros, no one (is) immortal" (ibid., pp. 258–59).

21 This phrase is found in 85 inscriptions from the early fifth to the early sixth century. The authors also add, "The phraseology of this formula, hitherto epigraphically unparalleled in Palestine and Arabia, plausibly alludes to the double status, that of the baptized and faithful Christian, possessed by the deceased. Hence its declaration on the tombstone seems to have been of importance for the local Christian community" (ibid., p. 25, and see further commentary on p. 185).

22 Tombstone number 257, dated 503 CE; ibid., p. 344. For the Greek, I have reproduced a slightly simplified version of the authors' transcription.

One is God [εἷς θεός], of all	Εἷς Θεός, ὁ π[άντων]
the Lord. Monument of Eudoxia,	Δεσπότης. Μν[ημῖον]
(daughter) of Timotheos,	Εὐδοξίας Τιμοθέο[υ]
who died having a good name	ἀποθανούσης με-
and good faith (at the age)	τὸ καλοῦ ὀνώματος
of 45 years, in the year	καὶ καλῆς πίστεως ἐτ(ῶν)
401, on (the) 21st (day)	μέ, ἐν ἔτι {τοῦ ἔτ(ους)} υά,
of (the) month Apellaios,	ἐν μηνὶ Ἀπελλέου κά,
on the fifth day of the week	ἐν ἡμ(έρα) πέμτη τοῦ σα-
(Thursday), in (the) 15th indiction.	βάτ(ου), ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) ιέ. Θάρσ[ι]
Be of good cheer, no one is immortal	οὐδὶς ἀθά<να>τος

While there are certainly variations and aberrations,[23] this tombstone demonstrates a general pattern and formula of the Christian tombstones in the cemetery. The Christian tombstones express religious identity through slogans (*heis Theos*) and symbols (crosses) but largely lack any biblical language, doctrine, or quotations.[24]

Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou also identified seventy-one Jewish tombstones in the same cemetery.[25] In contrast to their Christian neighbors, the Jewish Aramaic tombstones do not begin with *heis Theos* or an Aramaic equivalent. The tombstones typically begin with "this is the tombstone of" (*hdh npšh*) and are dated according to the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, "years of the destruction of the Sanctuary" (*šnyn lḥrbn byt mqdšh*).[26] None of the Jewish gravestones provide any theological polemics or alternative slogans for emphasizing God's oneness in opposition to their Christian neighbors. Similar to their Christian counterparts, Jewish tombstones often contain recognizably Jewish symbols and iconography, such as menorahs.[27] Additionally, the language

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23 An undated epitaph from the early fourth century records only εἷς θεός Α ⳨ ω (ibid., p. 381).

24 "The doxologies, which appear in a small number of epitaphs bearing dates around the mid-fifth century AD, are of biblical origin with preference to the *Psalms*. They are placed either in the beginning (more common) or at the end of the text and are occasionally followed by the term ἀμήν" (ibid., p. 28, regarding tombstone numbers 150, 152, 154, and 166). A partial quotation of Psalm 24:1 is found on tombstone number 296, "rendered in heavily vernacular and erroneous spelling" (ibid.).

25 Ibid. Of these Jewish tombstones, 32 are already published and 27 are unpublished; two additional epitaphs appear in the appendix. See also Wilfand's study of the Aramaic tombstones as evidence for Jewish conceptions of the afterlife (Wilfand, "Aramaic Tombstones from Zoar").

26 Translations and transliterations from Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou, *Inscriptions from Palaestina Tertia*, vol. 1c. A bilingual (Greek–Aramaic) epitaph is dated according to the Greek calendar in the Greek inscription and the Jewish dating in the Aramaic inscription (ibid., p. 42).

27 "The symbolic decoration, gradually incorporated in the tombstones from the second half of the fourth century A.D. onwards . . . is accommodated in the area below the funerary text. It consists primarily of Jewish religious symbols, such as the candelabrum (*menorah*), the ram's horn (*shofar*), the palm branch (*lulav*), the citron (*etrog*), the Ark of the Covenant (*Aron Kodesh*), the incense shovel (*maḥtah*), and the censer" (ibid., p. 21).

of the inscriptions themselves likely identified the religious community of the deceased. More than half of the Christian tombstones have names with Semitic origins (i.e., Nabataean, Arabic, and Aramaic), yet the tombstones were written in Greek.[28] In short, it is clear that tombstones provided a means to distinguish the faith and community of the deceased, and the elements that distinguished Jewish tombstones from Christian tombstones were the Jewish Aramaic language, symbols, and method for dating—not Jewish theology.

COPTIC AND GREEK EGYPTIAN EPITAPHS

As with the Palestinian Jewish and Christian epitaphs mentioned above, there have been a large number of collections and studies of Egyptian Greek and Coptic stelae.[29] Bianca Tudor has endeavored to provide a comprehensive study of stelae from a variety of catalogues in order to identify the supraregional, regional, and local features of Christian graves.[30] Compared to the cemetery of Ghor al-Safi, the Christian Egyptian epitaphs cover a vastly larger geographical and chronological scope. The Greek epitaphs range roughly from the fifth through ninth centuries CE, and those in Coptic range from the seventh to fourteenth centuries.[31] Many of these Greek and Coptic epitaphs are contemporary with the Arabic inscriptions, and later Coptic epitaphs might suggest reactions to Arabic/Islamic funerary formulas.

Tudor identifies six common formulas/characteristics in the Greek Egyptian tombstone inscriptions: "One is God"/"One is God, the Helper" (fifth to ninth century CE), "do not grieve, nobody is immortal" (fifth to eighth century), prayer formulas addressed to God to give rest to the deceased (fifth to end of the ninth century), "fell asleep" (fifth to end of the ninth century), "ended life" (fifth to eighth century), and "memorial of . . ." (fifth to eighth century).[32] Relevant regional formulas in Greek are supplications for passersby to pray for the deceased (Alexandria, fourth to sixth century) and "Jesus Christ is victor" (Faiyum, fifth to sixth century).[33] Common Coptic formulas include "One is God"/"One is God, the Helper" (sixth to tenth century), "Jesus Christ" (seventh to tenth century), "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost" (sixth to twelfth century), "pray for me/him" (sixth to eighth century), "do kindness and pray for me/him" (eighth to tenth century), prayer formulas addressed to God to have mercy on the deceased (seventh to tenth century), prayer formulas addressed to God to remember the deceased (eighth to twelfth century), "went to rest"

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28 Ibid., p. 29, with a full list of names on pp. 428–33.

29 Most notable are those of Lefebvre, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques-chrétiennes d'Egypte*, and Hasitzka, *Koptisches Sammelbuch*.

30 Tudor, *Christian Funerary Stelae*, pp. 9–10.

31 Tudor explains: "The majority of Christian funerary stelae are dated only by indiction year or are not dated at all. . . . Main criteria for establishing the provenance and date of the Christian funerary stelae in Greek and in Coptic from Egypt are the textual formulas, structures, dialectal features, and lettering styles of their inscriptions as well as the iconographical, compositional and stylistic features of their scriptural decoration, and the materials used for the erection of the tombs, coins found sometimes inside the graves or in their surroundings, funerary furnishings and human rests" (ibid., p. 222).

32 Ibid., appendix, table C, p. 232; see also pp. 139–40 and appendix, table A, pp. 243ff., for a full list of Greek funerary inscriptions.

33 Ibid.

(fifth century onward), "laid the body down" (seventh to twelfth century), and "came forth from the body" (seventh to tenth century).[34] Interestingly, several of the regional and local formulas emphasizing Trinitarian formulas are dated *after* the beginning of the Islamic period: "One is God and His Christ and the Holy Ghost" (Hermonthis, seventh to eighth century), "Jesus Christ, the helper" (Saqqara, ninth century; Abydos, eighth to tenth century; Dayr Anba Hadra, ninth century), "Holy Trinity" (Abydos, ninth to tenth century), "in the name of the Trinity" (province of Sohag, tenth century), and "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost" (Luxor, Latopolis, and Dayr Anba Hadra, seventh/eighth to twelfth century).[35]

Taken together, a number of characteristics are worth mentioning. First, the slogan "One is God" is the most popular acclamation in both Greek and Coptic epitaphs: εἷς θεός (*heis Theos*) and ⲉⲓⲥ ⲟⲉⲟⲥ (*eis Theos*), respectively.[36] Second, prayers to God for mercy on the deceased are rare in Greek Egyptian epitaphs;[37] in contrast, Coptic prayers for the dead were more common and became increasingly more complex at the beginning of the eighth century.[38] Finally, concerning the language of the tombstones, Tudor contends that the "use of Greek/Coptic language in the Christian epitaphs from Egypt expresses the cultural affiliation of the dead either to a Greek or a Hellenized milieu, which was urban and laic, or to an autochthonous environment, which was Coptic *par excellence* and usually rural and monastic."[39] While the Egyptian epitaphs cannot be compared directly with non-Christian tombstones, the formulas expressed in the stelae have many correlations to the Jewish and Christian epitaphs from Ghor al-Safi.

CHARACTERISTICS FROM GHOR AL-SAFI AND EGYPT

The examples above draw attention to a number of characteristics for how religious communities distinguished themselves through epitaphs. First, *heis Theos* is a fitting example of implementing religious slogans to identify membership in a specific religious community. The slogan is featured on nearly one third of the Christian epitaphs from Ghor al-Safi and is popular on both Greek and Coptic epitaphs in Egypt. None of the Jewish graves in Ghor al-Safi featured this slogan even though the Jewish community would certainly not object to the slogan's meaning. Second, religious symbols in the cemetery of Ghor al-Safi clearly identified the religious community of the deceased. Crosses on Christian stelae are prevalent even though inscriptions mentioning Jesus specifically are rare. Likewise, Jewish tombstones incorporated symbols such as the menorah in a similar fashion

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34 Ibid., p. 328; see also appendix, table B, pp. 282ff., for full list of Coptic funerary inscriptions.

35 Ibid. References for the Trinitarian formulas in Coptic are found in appendix, table B.

36 "The most frequently used acclamations for God in both the Greek and the Coptic epitaphs from Egypt are 'one is God!' and 'one is God, the helper!'. Invocations of Jesus Christ, the Holy Trinity, the Virgin Mary, the archangels Michael and Gabriel and the Saints are typical of the Coptic epitaphs" (ibid., p. 140). Geographically, Greek versions of this inscription between the sixth and eighth centuries were frequent in the Upper Egypt cities of Hermonthis and Latopolis, while they were rare in inscriptions of the Faiyum area (ibid., p. 167).

37 Ibid., p. 157.

38 Ibid., p. 193.

39 Ibid., p. 238.

to mark their religious affiliation. A fifth/sixth century Jewish inscription containing the slogan *heis Theos* illustrates further the importance of symbols on stelae and inscriptions for identifying religious identity.[40] The inscribed slab was likely attached to the wall of a synagogue and begins with the slogan EIC ΘEOC.[41] Its distinction from Christian uses of *heis Theos* is represented clearly by the large menorah featured in the center of the slab. Finally, the language of the tombstones themselves expresses their religious community. As mentioned above, roughly half of the Christian tombstones at Ghor al-Safi have Semitic names, but the Greek language is exclusively employed. It is worth considering how many members of surrounding communities could read Greek—the Greek script alone would likely identify the religion of the deceased without the observer's knowledge of the actual content of the inscriptions on the stelae.

CONCLUSION

Placing the earliest Arabic tombstones into a wider late antique religious context leads to two cautionary conclusions. First, theological doctrine was an uncommon feature of inscriptions on the Christian and Jewish tombstones discussed above. This observation should temper our expectations for doctrinal substance from T31—and our interpretation of its absence. Several of the components of T31 do echo Christian and Jewish patterns. It opens with a religious slogan (the *basmala*) that is analogous to the opening Christian phrase "One (is) God" (*heis Theos*). Common in both Christian and Jewish practices is marking the owner of the grave, such as with the Aramaic "this is the tombstone of" (*hdh npšh*). Finally, supplication for readers to pray for the deceased has Jewish and Christian precursors as well. When we consider the ways Christian and Jewish tombstones were distinguished from one another (i.e., through slogans, symbols, dating, and script), we find T31 also reflecting these practices. It employs its own unique slogan, introduces its own dating formula, employs the Arabic script, and lacks any Christian or Jewish symbols. Hence T31 follows a similar, late antique template but does so with its own distinct slogan, dating, and script.

Before attempting to trace the changes in epitaphs after T31, it is worth mentioning a complication concerning the dating of T71. Hoyland has questioned whether the dating should be read not 71 AH/691 CE, as written, but 171/788, based on the tombstone's script and use of the phrase, "the greatest calamity for the people of Islam is what befell them with (the death) of the prophet Muḥammad."[42] If T71 is actually dated to the year 171/788, then the next earliest extant tombstone is from 102/721.[43] This tombstone does not mention Muḥammad or the *shahāda*, but it does quote the Qurʾān.[44] Nonetheless, there are inscriptions contemporary with the earlier dating of T71 that mention Muḥammad or the

40 Di Segni, "Jewish Greek Inscription from the Vicinity of Caesarea Maritima," pp. 133–36.

41 Ibid., p. 134.

42 Hoyland, "Content and Context," p. 87, n. 65. Sharing this caution is Lindstedt, "Who Is In, Who Is Out?" pp. 210–11; in contrast, Halevi prefers the earlier dating (Halevi, "Paradox of Islamization," p. 125, n. 8, and *Muhammad's Grave*, p. 257, n. 18). Bacharach and Anwar ("Early Versions of the *shahāda*," p. 63) employ the earlier dating.

43 ʿAbd al-Tawab and Ory, *Stèles islamiques*, p. 2.

44 Qurʾān 67:1.

shahāda or that emphasize the oneness of God—for example, the Dome of the Rock and an inscription from 78/697–98 that mentions both the *shahāda* and Muḥammad.[45] But this record (or emphasis) on tombstones is lacking for the first century, a phenomenon that can easily be attributed to the dearth of surviving dated tombstones (possibly only T31) for the period in general.[46]

Finally, the prevalence of the Christian epitaph "One (is) God" (*heis Theos*) challenges the position that early Muslims emphasized God's oneness on early Arabic tombstones (and possibly other inscriptions) to distinguish themselves from Christians, considering that Christians marked their graves with an equivalent emphasis. This fact cautions against the tendency in broader scholarship to interpret early Islamic cultural production as constituting efforts by Muslims to distinguish themselves from or legitimize themselves in the eyes of Christians (either theologically or politically) rather than considering slogans or concepts as internally significant for the early Islamic community. Taken together, these observations are not to suggest that the emphasis on the Qurʾān or Muḥammad in later Arabic epitaphs does not reflect religious, social, or communal change; they are only to challenge the notion that explicit articulations of religious doctrine should be expected in epitaphs when pre-Islamic Jewish and Christian tombstones did not follow this practice. Why religious doctrine became more popular in later Muslim epitaphs is certainly a worthwhile question to investigate, but assertions that T31 reflects an indeterminate monotheism any more than it reflects a developed faith or membership within a distinct religious community is a problematic inference in the light of Jewish and Christian tombstones.

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45 Al-Ḥārithī, "Naqsh kitābī nādir," p. 535.

46 Sharon has opined a date of 80 AH/699–700 CE for the undated tombstone of a certain Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥakam—if this is the uncle of ʿAbd al-Malik (Sharon, *Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum Palestinae*, pp. 230–32). See also n. 9 above for discussion of the epitaph recorded by al-Harawī in his *Al-Ishārāt ilā maʿrifat al-ziyārāt*.

11 Religious Warfare and Martyrdom in Arabic Graffiti (70s–110s AH/690s–730s CE)

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IN A RECENT HISTORY OF Rome in antiquity, Mary Beard writes that the

> Romans did not start out with a grand plan of world conquest. Although eventually they did parade their empire in terms of some manifest destiny, the motivations that originally lay behind their military expansion through the Mediterranean world and beyond are still one of history's great puzzles.[1]

Change the word "Romans" to "Muslims" or "Arabs" (depending on your viewpoint and emphasis), and the question and the debate are transferred to the early Islamic-era Middle East. Whereas most or all scholars agree that the early Muslims did not envisage a world conquest or empire building at the outset of their conquests, the agreement ends there. Modern researchers have put forward a wide variety of interpretations—for example, material, climatic, religious, and nativist—of the original impetuses of the conquests as well as the reasons for their success.[2] It has also been recently suggested that instead of military conquests we should discuss the spread and settling of early or proto-Muslims in new areas of the Middle East in different, more nonviolent terms, since many areas were incorporated into the nascent empire through more or less peaceful treaties.[3] Hence the word "expansion" might be preferable to "conquest."[4]

The reason that the modern explanations diverge so much is at least partly because our sources are very problematic: most scholars have relied on Arabic and non-Arabic literary evidence, which is in many cases much later and full of dogmatic and tendentious biases. This study endeavors to do something novel. It surveys the available epigraphic evidence related to concepts of warfare and martyrdom. While I cannot claim that this survey will clinch the debate in favor of any of the scholarly points of view, I will argue that the Arabic

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1 Beard, *SPQR*, p. 17. I thank Laïla Nehmé, Kaj Öhrnberg, Jens Scheiner, Tommaso Tesei, the editors of this volume, and the anonymous peer reviewer for reading and commenting on an earlier version of this essay. I am also grateful to the participants in the "Scripts and Scripture: Writing and Religion in Arabia, ca. 500–700 CE" symposium for fruitful discussions on this and other topics.

2 Donner, "Islamic Conquests," critically surveys the explanations given in earlier scholarship on these two distinct questions.

3 Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*.

4 I thank Professor Jens Scheiner for pointing me to this observation.

graffiti show that the early Muslims in general viewed fighting and falling in God's path in religious terms and as religiously inspired. But all the epigraphic data surveyed here seems to derive from a specific, Marwānid period in history, so it remains open as to what, if any, conclusions can be drawn about the earliest phase of expansion on the basis of these data.

I have argued elsewhere that Arabic graffiti form an important and still rather underused corpus for the study of the social history of the early Islamic Middle East.[5] In an online text[6] I have analyzed graffiti that show that early Muslims were eager to put into writing their statements of piety, which were then read aloud by people passing by; another article looks in particular at the development of Muslim religious identity.[7] The latter study uses as its main evidence about one hundred Arabic inscriptions dated to the 640s–740s CE. Although the epigraphic corpus creates interpretive difficulties because of repetitive formulae and so on, this set of data was selected because it is explicitly dated and, it appears, written by the in-group (proto- or early Muslims) themselves. It thus proffers unique evidence for the processes of identity construction and maintenance in the Middle East of that era.

To recapitulate the findings of that article, we can give the following simplified timeline for the development of Muslim identity as reflected in Arabic epigraphy: inscriptions evince indeterminate monotheist formulae up to the 70s/690s, when the first instances of emphasis on the Prophet Muḥammad surface.[8] Designations referring to different religious groups outside the nascent Muslim in-group appear around the same time, in the 70s–90s/690s–710s. Following this time, in the 80s–100s/700s–720s, we have references to specifically Muslim rites such as pilgrimage, prayer, and fasting. The processes of marking the boundary are further cemented in about the 100s/720s, when "Muslims" and "Islam" begin to solidify as words that refer to a specific religious community distinct from others. Following the same avenues of inquiry, this study employs first- to second-/seventh- to eighth-century Arabic graffiti to study expressions of willingness to participate in religious warfare (*jihād fī sabīl allāh*) and to achieve martyrdom (*shahāda, istishhād*).

DEFINING "GRAFFITI"

First, something must be said about the word "graffiti," since it is an expression that some scholars find pejorative. It is not thus used in this essay. Readers, too, should shed the negative implications they might associate with graffiti. Merriam-Webster defines a "graffito" rather neutrally as "an inscription or drawing made on some public surface (such as a rock or wall); *also*: a message or slogan written as or as if as a graffito."[9] The word is used as an

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5 Lindstedt, "Arabic Rock Inscriptions"; Harjumäki and Lindstedt, "Ancient North Arabian and Early Islamic Arabic Graffiti." I have been inspired especially by Frédéric Imbert's studies on similar topics: "Califes, princes et poètes," "Le Coran dans les graffiti," "Inscriptions et graffiti arabes de Jordanie," "L'Islam des pierres," "Réflexions sur les formes de l'écrit." See also Robert Hoyland's classic study "Content and Context of Early Arabic Inscriptions."

6 Lindstedt, "Writing, Reading, and Hearing."

7 See Lindstedt, "Who Is In, Who Is Out?" with references to theories of social psychology.

8 Cf. Longworth, "Script or Scripture?"—chapter 10 in this volume.

9 *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. "graffito."

analytical concept in the study of Greco-Roman[10] as well as ancient Arabian epigraphy,[11] and I do not see any need to shun it in connection with Arabic epigraphy.[12]

So how is the word "graffito" used in the present study, and why? Although all categorizations are always somewhat simplifying, the following remarks can be offered. The criterion, as I apply it to early Arabic lapidary inscriptions, divides the corpus into two parts: (1) monumental inscriptions, such as building inscriptions and epitaphs, and (2) graffiti. The main difference between the two types is that while monumental inscriptions often have both an author (who might or might not be identical with the commissioner of the inscription) and a hand (scribe) who are different persons, a writer of a graffito is both the author and the hand of her or his text. This commissioned and planned nature of monumental inscriptions sets them apart from most graffiti. Indeed, graffiti are often written spontaneously, and composing and writing the text are one and the same course of action, although we must of course allow that some time and thought went into planning the text of a graffito. The division into monumental inscriptions and graffiti does not result from a premodern categorization present in Arabic: all types of inscriptions were simply called *kitāb*,[13] a word signifying in fact all written texts in any form and length and on any sort of material. The division proposed here is, then, a modern, etic, and contextual categorization—nevertheless, one that I hope is useful.

It must be noted that the mode or tool of writing does not play a role in my classification: both monumental inscriptions and graffiti can be either engraved or painted, produced with chisel, charcoal, brush, or other means.[14] But usually only graffiti are scratched on a surface. The script of graffiti can be equally or even more elegant or beautiful—obviously subjective criteria in any case—than monumental inscriptions.[15] Many of the Arabic graffiti are very skillfully and charmingly engraved, but this feature does not make them any less graffiti. The surface of writing, however, is somewhat different in the case of monumental inscriptions and graffiti: whereas the latter were written wherever a suitable surface was found, the stones on which monumental inscriptions were written were often specifically shaped for that purpose.

In any case, most surviving early Arabic inscriptions are lapidary (instead of on portable items) and engraved (instead of painted).[16] Notably too, most of them fall into the category of graffiti rather than monumental inscriptions.[17] Indeed, all the texts used in the present study are lapidary, engraved graffiti. All of them have been published in scholarly studies. This article, then, does not present new finds of Arabic epigraphy (although some inscriptions are reread); rather, the study analyzes inscriptions and uses them as evidence for social history.

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10 Baird and Taylor, *Ancient Graffiti in Context.*

11 Macdonald, "Uses of Writing in Ancient Arabia."

12 Imbert also uses it; see, e.g., his "Le Coran dans les graffiti."

13 See below in Epigraphic Evidence, nos. 1, 2, and 6.

14 Baird and Taylor, "Ancient Graffiti," p. 3.

15 Chaniotis, "Graffiti in Aphrodisias," p. 194.

16 See, at more length, Lindstedt, "Arabic Rock Inscriptions."

17 See the appendix in Lindstedt, "Who Is In, Who Is Out?"

I will dwell on the graffito form somewhat more in order better to place it in its cultural context, particularly by giving analogues from the fields of Greek and Latin epigraphy. I will not touch on modern graffiti, since it is my contention that they reflect a rather different form of expression. The main difference between them and their premodern counterparts is naturally that the majority of the former are anonymous or pseudonymous, while the majority of the latter are signed. Furthermore, it seems a modern phenomenon for graffiti to be seen (by some people, at least) as somehow illicit or subversive vandalism; producing graffiti did not seem to have held these projections in antiquity, when some of the graffiti were actually written by the elite members of society.[18] Many of the Arabic graffiti, for instance, are expressions of piety and faith, and writing them would not have been seen as anything other than legitimate, even commendable, activity.

Studies on Greek and Latin epigraphy have noted that graffiti often interact with each other: they cluster in places where they respond to earlier graffiti.[19] This phenomenon is probably true for Arabic graffiti as well (e.g., see below, Epigraphic Evidence, nos. 19–20), but detailed studies on the topic have yet to be conducted. The social context of the Arabic graffiti is sometimes clearly present in the texts themselves, which, for example, ask God to forgive "whoever reads this inscription and then sincerely says 'amen'" (*ghafara allāh li-man qaraʾa hādhā al-kitāb thumma qāla āmīn maḥḍan*; see below, Epigraphic Evidence, no. 6).[20]

Who wrote graffiti?[21] John Bodel remarks that, in the framework of ancient epigraphy at least, the prevalence of graffiti in some regions and eras offers clues that the ability to read and write extended beyond the educated elite,[22] although it does not in most cases mean that the writers and readers of graffiti possessed significant amounts of formal learning or literary proficiency.[23] Graffiti are often formulaic, so many of the writers perhaps mastered (or copied) only a few pious phrases, but there are a number of cases of very original graffiti in which the engraver reveals significant skill in composing a text (e.g., below, no. 19). Were Arabic graffiti written by the upper echelons or the lower classes of society?[24] There is no simple answer to this question. What we can say is that the great majority of graffiti were written by people whose names are *not* attested in Arabic historical, biographical, or other literary works. So for all we know, they did not belong to the political elite, nor were they part of the emerging group of religious scholars. But since the writers of the graffiti possessed at least basic skills in writing Arabic and some religious knowledge, they probably came from a background of at least moderate economic, social, and cultural capital (if we do not suppose that being able to read and write Arabic was ubiquitous in the early Islamic Middle East, which abilities seem unlikely). In any case, *Arabic graffiti offer us*

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18 Baird and Taylor, "Ancient Graffiti," pp. 3–4.

19 Ibid., p. 7.

20 See also Macdonald, "Literacy in an Oral Environment," pp. 94–96.

21 For interesting ideas on who wrote Safaitic graffiti and why (as well as much else besides), see ibid. in its entirety.

22 Bodel, "Inscriptions and Literacy," p. 746.

23 Ibid., p. 758.

24 For the same question in the Greco-Roman environment, see Baird and Taylor, "Ancient Graffiti," pp. 11–16.

evidence on individuals who are mute in other types of evidence: if they had not put up their mark on stones and rocks, we would have no idea that they ever existed, much less access to their expressions. What is more, the epigraphic record is often explicitly dated by the writers, thus giving us invaluable dated evidence for the early Islamic period.

THE CORPUS OF THIS STUDY

Having stated some reasons in general why I believe Arabic graffiti are such valuable evidence, let me say something in particular about the twenty graffiti that are used in this study. They comprise published Arabic graffiti dealing with religious warfare or martyrdom.[25] Geographically, most of the inscriptions discussed here come from Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

Six of them are explicitly dated in the 70s–110s/690s–730s. The rest of them are undated (although no. 19 can be dated to the late first or early second century AH on the basis of the names mentioned). This percentage is actually a rather good one—30 percent of the whole set are dated inscriptions. Frédéric Imbert, who collected a corpus of 192 premodern Arabic inscriptions from Jordan, notes that 19 percent of them are dated. But the inscriptions from the first through third centuries AH in Imbert's corpus are even more rarely dated (a tally which, of course, supposes we can suggest paleographically or contextually that some undated inscriptions are from the early period).[26] All in all, we should be happy to operate with a corpus that is at least partially dated.

But I will go one step further and suggest that, at least as a working hypothesis, the fourteen graffiti that are undated in all likelihood belong to the decades of the 70s–110s/690s–730s as well. Their formulae are very similar to the dated ones, so there is no reason to exclude such a dating for them, although it is of course possible that some of them are later imitations of earlier models. Paleographically, I find no reason for excluding this early dating, although number 10 could be of a later date. Let me reemphasize that the proportion (30 percent) of dated graffiti is rather high in the corpus—a fact that should warrant offering at least conjectural dating for graffiti with similar formulae. I willingly concede that assigning this dating to the entire corpus is hypothetical, and new finds could change the picture. But at the moment I know of no graffiti dated later than the 110s/730s that might contain personal statements of religious warfare and craving for martyrdom. It seems, then, to have been an epigraphic theme that blossomed for a period of time but was then abandoned.

There are some later monumental inscriptions, however, that contain similar formulae related to holy war; but in them, the statements are never personal—they are related to the ruler or the Prophet. For instance, in some late second to early third century AH

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25 After I had finished writing this article, two important new studies came out: Ghabbān, *Kitābāt*, and al-Saʿīd and al-Bayṭār, *Nuqūsh*, which present inscriptions from the Ḥismā. (The two books contain some overlapping material.) Their inscriptions contain numbers 19 and 20 below and, in addition, some undated inscriptions dealing with religious warfare that are not included in the present study (see Ghabbān, *Kitābāt*, pp. 161, 172–73, 207, 234, 272). The new inscriptions do not alter the conclusions of this article.

26 Imbert, "Inscriptions et graffiti arabes de Jordanie," pp. 46–47.

gravestones from Egypt, Muḥammad's deeds are characterized as *jihād*.[27] In later monumental inscriptions, the ruler and commissioner of the inscription proclaims having waged *jihād*, as a good ruler should do.[28] Although *shahāda* always means "martyrdom" in the graffiti used in this study, in some later epitaphs it also means "testimony of faith"—for instance, in a 245 AH gravestone from Egypt.[29] But these occurrences do not, I believe, have much to do with the subject of this study, nor do they change the proposed date for the undated Arabic graffiti dealing with *jihād* and martyrdom.

Incidentally, if it is really the case that all the inscriptions presented here are from the late first or the early second century AH (a suggestion that I put forward with considerable caution), then it shows how subjective and conjectural the suggested paleographical datings are: different inscriptions in the undated set (nos. 7–20 below) are dated by modern scholars to the first, second, third, or fourth century AH. My suggestion is that the third and fourth centuries are, in all likelihood, too late.

JIHĀD AND MARTYRDOM IN THE QURʾĀN

In this section I will offer an overview of religious warfare and concepts of martyrdom as they are found in the Qurʾān, a text containing revelations that most likely go back to the life of the Prophet Muḥammad (d. 11/632), although, according to classical Muslim scholarship, the Qurʾān was collected as one volume only after his death, perhaps in the 30s/650s.[30] I will survey the Qurʾānic material because I believe that it offers the most important background for the later appearance of similar (but not identical) formulae in Arabic graffiti.[31] The reader who is well versed in the Qurʾān can safely skip this section. I will not discuss here the *ḥadīth* corpus or the development of the *jihād* theory in Islamic legal literature, since they are later than the inscriptions used in this study.

I do not wish to linger on the late antique context of concepts of religious warfare but wish merely to state that war and fighting were sometimes motivated by religion or, at least, seen in a religious vein in the pre-Islamic Middle East.[32] Interestingly, Tommaso Tesei suggests that the concept that soldiers who fell in battle became martyrs was present in Heraclius's war propaganda more or less contemporaneously with the Qurʾān.[33]

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27 ʿAbd al-Tawab and Ory, *Stèles islamiques de la nécropole d'Assouan*, vol. 1, p. 3; Miles, "Early Islamic Tombstones from Egypt," p. 218.

28 E.g., Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet, *Répertoire chronologique*, vol. 12, no. 4588 (dated 666 AH); Bel, "Inscriptions arabes de Fès," pp. 363–65 (dated 756 AH).

29 Oman, "Steli funerarie dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale," p. 313.

30 Translations from the Qurʾān are my own.

31 For possible conceptions of holy war in the so-called Constitution of Medina and Arabic papyri, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 548–49. For the development of the ideologies of *jihād* and martyrdom more generally and their meaning (or the lack thereof) for the early believers, see, e.g., Afsaruddin, *Striving in the Path of God*; Cook, *Understanding Jihad* and *Martyrdom in Islam*; Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, pp. 55–62, 267–71, and *Muhammad and the Believers*, pp. 82–89; Firestone, *Jihad*; and Hoyland, *In God's Path*, pp. 61–65.

32 See, e.g., Bowersock, *Empires in Collision* and *Throne of Adulis*; Firestone, *Jihad*; Robin, "Arabia and Ethiopia"; Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief*; Stoyanov, *Defenders and Enemies of the True Cross*.

33 Tesei, "Heraclius' War Propaganda" and "'The Romans Will Win!'"

It might be remarked that religious warfare is mostly lacking in the surviving corpus of ancient Arabian epigraphy. In Safaitic graffiti, many writers describe raids and such, but these activities never receive any religious tenor.[34] In some Ancient South Arabian inscriptions, however, warfare does receive religious motivation and tone. In an early Sabaic inscription, the author, who is probably the *mukarrib Yṯ°mr Byn bn S¹mh῾ly Ynf*, states that he has waged war against those who had injured the deity Almaqah: he killed four thousand individuals and "assigned them (as sacrifice?)" (*w-ḥṯb[hmw]*) to said god as revenge.[35] Nevertheless, the Ancient South Arabian examples are monumental inscriptions containing royal boasting—hence they seem to me to have little in common with the Arabic graffiti discussed in this study. Moreover, they date to many centuries earlier than the Islamic inscriptions. In chapter 2 of this volume, Michael Macdonald notes that many of the Taymanitic graffiti mention war and contain phrases indicating that the writers were "keeping watch" for Ṣalm, who was the main, perhaps even the sole, deity worshipped in ancient Taymāʾ. Macdonald also suggests that the recurring phrase *mn s¹m῾ l-ṣlm l twy*, "Whoever obeys Ṣalm shall not perish," should be understood as a war cry. The Taymanitic graffiti form an interesting Ancient North Arabian analogue to the early Islamic Arabic graffiti dealing with warfare, but since they are much (possibly even a millennium) earlier, we cannot speak of influence.

Let us now turn to the Qurʾān. I will survey the text as it is, without recourse to the Muslim exegetical tradition or other Arabic literary sources that are traditionally used to explain the Qurʾānic text, its historical context, and references.[36] I will not try to trace a development in the Qurʾān on this topic; I view it as problematic in the first place to suppose that there was a clear linear development (usually understood to be a progress from more peaceful ideas toward a firmer embrace of warfare).[37]

What follows is not meant to suggest that fighting and martyrdom are the most important themes of the Qurʾān; in fact, verses discussing these themes occur somewhat infrequently and, as noted by Reuven Firestone, the message of the Qurʾān on the topic of war "is actually far from consistent."[38] But the verses are there, and they require being discussed for the purposes of this study.

According to Badawi and Haleem, the word *qitāl*, "fighting," occurs thirteen times in the Qurʾān; *qātala* (with all its inflections), "to fight," fifty-one times; *jihād*, "striving," four times; *jāhada* (plus inflections), "to strive," twenty-seven times; and *mujāhidūn*, "those who strive," four times.[39] These activities are often said to be done *fī sabīl allāh*, "in God's path" (e.g., Q. 8:74), or even *fī allāh*, "in God" (Q. 22:78, cf. Q. 29:69). They are depicted as arduous tasks but always as something commendable—there is no Qurʾānic passage that states generally that fighting or striving are deeds that should be avoided (that is, if carried out by

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34 Harjumäki and Lindstedt, "Ancient North Arabian and Early Islamic Arabic Graffiti," pp. 73–74, with references.

35 CSAI, siglum RES 3943, with commentary. See also CSAI, sigla RES 3945 and Ir 13.

36 For the sensible plea by the late Patricia Crone to read the Qurʾān with the Qurʾān, see her *Qurʾānic Pagans*, pp. xi–xvi.

37 For the traditional understanding (and criticism of it), see Firestone, *Jihad*, pp. 50–65.

38 Ibid., p. 47.

39 Badawi and Haleem, *Arabic–English Dictionary of Qurʾanic Usage*, s.vv.

the believers, not the enemy). *Jihād*, which at some later time becomes the most common designation for religious (or sacred or just) warfare, is not necessarily always synonymous with *qitāl* in the Qurʾān; it could also refer to other forms of exertion. But in many verses the synonymity can be supposed. The expression *fī sabīl allāh*, moreover, is perhaps not automatically related to fighting in the Qurʾān (even if fighting later becomes the primary context for it), as can also be seen in the epigraphic evidence of this study.

Let me now give an exposition of the Qurʾānic verses. I will start with *qitāl* and *qātala*. The passage Q. 2:216 states that "fighting [*al-qitāl*] has been decreed to you [plur.], although it is loathsome to you" (see also Q. 4:77; 47:20). In a much-discussed verse (Q. 9:29), it is commanded: "Fight those who do not believe in God or the last day, who do not deem illicit what God and His messenger have proclaimed to be such, and who do not believe in the religion of truth even if they have been given the Book, until they humbly pay the *jizya ʿan yad*."[40] Fighting is sometimes connected with "spending money" (*anfaqa*) in God's path (Q. 57:10). Although usually left anonymous, the enemy as well is mentioned as an active partner to fighting: "fight [plur.] in God's path against those that fight against you" (Q. 2:190; see also 3:13). In one verse (Q. 33:25), God is described as having saved the believers from the fight, thus showing that *qitāl* was seen as arduous.

This aversion to fighting is said to have been usual in earlier communities as well: after the life of Moses, the *Banū Isrāʾīl* are commanded to fight, but most of them turn away (*tawallaw*; Q. 2:246); however, the Prophet Muḥammad (or so it appears—as is usual in the Qurʾān, he is not explicitly mentioned in the passage) is somewhat more successful in conveying the command to fight and leads the believers to their battle stations and victory at Badr (Q. 3:121–27). Elsewhere the Qurʾān (8:65) enjoins him to encourage the believers to fight, and many people are indeed said to have fought steadfastly on the side of the "Prophets" (plur.; Q. 3:146).

But not all present in the Qurʾānic milieu are willing to fight: the hypocrites (*alladhīna nāfaqū*) are said to have rejected the command and pretended not to know how to fight (Q. 3:167), and the Qurʾān is worried that people might turn away from the battle (Q. 8:16). Those who take part in fighting are also contrasted with those who stay behind (*qaʿadū*; e.g., Q. 3:168; 9:81). In one verse, the Qurʾān (4:75) asks the audience why they are not fighting in God's path and for the weak men, women, and children. In some instances (e.g., Q. 48:16), those unwilling to fight are described as "nomads" (*aʿrāb*). Citing Firestone, the copious verses that display opposition to God's commands to fight suggest "that the Muslim community was far from unified in its view on warring on behalf of religion and the religious community."[41] Below (in Discussion of the Historical Context), I will argue that expressions and acts of fighting and sacrifice can be understood as costly signaling through which individuals indicated that they were not free riders but devoted members of the group. In the Qurʾān, "hypocrites" (*munāfiqūn*) and "those who stay behind" are particularly clear examples of free riders who were not willing to perform costly deeds, such as

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40 The interpretations of the phrase *al-jizya ʿan yad* vary. The word *al-jizya* refers to tax or tribute, but *ʿan yad* is somewhat mysterious. It could mean "willingly," "readily," "in kind," "for each person," "out of their own property," or something else. For an interpretation, see Rubin, "Qurʾān and Poetry."

41 Firestone, *Jihad*, p. 77. But in contrast to Firestone, I do not believe that the in-group described in the Qurʾān can be called "the Muslim community"; rather, "early/proto-Muslim" or the like would be preferable.

fighting, for the in-group. Their existence is seen in the Qurʾān as a problem for intragroup cohesion and solidarity.[42] Often, the Islamic exegesis and modern scholarship treat the *munāfiqūn* as a group wavering in faith,[43] but it is perhaps better to interpret them—at least from a sociological point of view—as purported free riders who waver in deeds.

The Qurʾān says that there are preconditions to fighting: the believers should not fight at the sacred precinct (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*) if they are not attacked first. If that happens, they can kill the enemy, since "such is the recompense of the unbelievers" (Q. 2:191; see also 2:217). Furthermore, hypocrites and unbelievers should be fought only as long as they fight against the believers. If the former leave the latter at peace, God has not allowed fighting (Q. 4:90; cf. 9:7–13).

As stated above, *jihād* ("striving") in the Qurʾān did not necessarily always signify physical fighting to the original audience of its message. But later it became the standard appellation for holy war, and it seems to be so used in all graffiti of this essay's epigraphic corpus. Since both *qitāl* and *jihād* are often said to be done *fī sabīl allāh*, clearly the Qurʾān is somehow discussing the two activities in the same context, and in some cases it is rather clear that the Qurʾān is in fact portraying *jihād* as physical struggle (Q. 8:70–75; 9:14–20).

Qurʾān 2:218 states: "Those who believe and those who emigrate [*hājarū*][44] and strive [*jāhadū*] in God's path aspire for the mercy of God." The mercy of God is associated in the Qurʾān with otherworldly rewards: *jihād* is connected with the entrance to paradise also in Q. 3:140–43. Above it was stated that those who fight are contrasted with those who stay behind, and the same is also the case for those who strive (*al-mujāhidūn*; Q. 4:95; 9:81, 86). Striving and having patience are connected in Q. 47:31. In Q. 9:73 and 66:9, the Prophet himself is addressed: "O Prophet, strive against the unbelievers and hypocrites [*jāhid al-kuffār wa-l-munāfiqīn*] and be tough against them. Their refuge is Hell." In some verses (e.g., Q. 49:15), striving with willingness to spend one's money and even life is mentioned as one of the conditions for being a believer, alongside believing in God and "His Prophet." As for the enemies of the believers, they strive too, but only to try to convince the believers that they should associate other beings to God (Q. 29:8; 31:15).

Killing (*qatala*) is in itself seldom a positive thing in the Qurʾān: to give some examples, historical communities such as the people of Moses are described as having killed prophets (Q. 2:61) as well as other individuals (Q. 2:72). In a recurring Qurʾānic reproach, humanity is admonished because every time God has sent messengers bringing something that people do not like, they either disbelieve in them or kill them (e.g., Q. 2:82). Paradoxically, the Qurʾān vehemently denies that people killed Jesus even though they claim to have done just that (Q. 4:157). One of Adam's sons killed the other son—a calamity (Q. 5:27–30). People are instructed not to kill each other (Q. 4:29) or their children (Q. 6:140, 151), and a believer should not kill another believer, lest he face hell (Q. 4:92–93). Pharaoh is portrayed in a negative vein as killing and ravaging (Q. 7:127, 141; 40:26); what is more, Joseph's brothers scheme to kill him (Q. 12:9). Hence most Qurʾānic references to killing are negative.

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42 For more on the "free-rider problem" in religious groups, see Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, pp. 174–76.

43 For orientation, see the valuable survey by Adang, "Hypocrites and Hypocrisy."

44 For the words *hijra* and *muhājirūn* and their probable connection with fighting (in later evidence at least), see Crone, "First-Century Concept of *Hiǧra*," and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 548.

There are some instances, however, where killing (*qatala*), not just fighting (*qātala*), is encouraged. In Q. 2:190–91, believers are commanded to kill those who fight against them, since "discord is worse than killing" (*al-fitna ashadd min al-qatl*; this phrase also occurs in Q. 2:217). Hypocrites (*al-munāfiqūn*) too should be captured or killed (Q. 4:88–89), as well as associators (*al-mushrikīn*) if they do not repent (Q. 9:5). The text of Q. 8:17 describes a battle between the believers and unbelievers and states, "it was not you [plur.] who killed them, but rather God killed them." Elsewhere, too, God is shown as taking an active part in the fight between believers and unbelievers (Q. 8:36–39; 9:14).

Whereas the Qur'ānic attitude toward killing is ambiguous or contextual, being killed (*qutila*) for God is usually portrayed as commendable: "Do not say to those killed in God's path [*li-man yuqtalu fī sabīl allāh*] that they are dead; rather, they are alive" (Q. 2:154; see also 3:169). It is furthermore stated that falling in God's path is a better bargain than amassing fortunes in this world (Q. 3:157–58). Indeed, mercantile terminology is usual in these passages describing one's willingness to sacrifice oneself for God's cause: "Let those of you who are willing to trade the life of this world for the life to come fight in God's path. To anyone who fights in God's path, whether killed or victorious, We shall give a great reward" (Q. 4:74). "God has purchased from the believers their lives and their properties in exchange for [the promise] that they will have Paradise. They fight in God's path, so they kill and are killed" (Q. 9:111; see also 61:10–12). Paradise is, then, the explicit Qur'ānic reward for those who fall while fighting, as it is for other groups who do good (Q. 3:195): their deeds will not come to naught (Q. 47:4). This promise naturally applies only to the believers and not to their enemies: the latter will be killed or expelled and then face painful punishment—except for those who repent (Q. 5:33).

Curiously, in Q. 3:144 it is even hypothesized that Muḥammad might be killed (*māta aw qutila*). This occasion is not, however, a happy one in any way, since it is stated that the audience would then go back to their old ways.

To finish my exposition of the Qur'ānic usage of *q-t-l* in the early, poetic Qur'ānic chapters, the word *qutila* is optatively (and possibly metaphorically) used and can be translated as "may he be dead/cursed" (Q. 51:10; 74:19–20; 80:17; 85:4). Furthermore, in Q. 9:30 Christians who say that Jesus is God's son and Jews who say that ʿUzayr is God's son are cursed with the interjection *qātalahum allāh*, "may God fight them!" (see also Q. 63:4).

In the Qur'ān, as opposed to the epigraphic evidence that will be reviewed in the next section, words of the root *sh-h-d* seem to relate to witnessing rather than martyrdom. More than 150 occurrences of such words appear in the Qur'ān, but only Q. 3:140 appears to have anything to do with dying as a martyr if we are skeptical of the exegetical tradition that is more keen also to interpret *sh-h-d* words elsewhere in the Qur'ān as related to martyrdom.

To summarize this section, the Qur'ān contains passages in which fighting and willingness to die in God's path are described positively or, indeed in some cases, as one of the requirements for being a believer. These passages in all probability derive from the time of the Prophet (d. 11/632), although it is uncertain in what form and magnitude the Qur'ān's diverse textual items circulated during and after his lifetime: how many of the believers heard them, learned them, recited them, or wrote them down? Moreover, we cannot know for certain what the text meant as religious teaching to the earliest believers, many of whom probably came from a Judeo-Christian background. Was the Qur'ān seen

as supplanting or merely adding to earlier scriptures? Answers to this question in all like-lihood varied according to the individual.

Graffiti containing expressions echoing Qurʾānic formulations on this theme do not appear in our earliest stratum of Arabic inscriptions (the 20s–60s/640s–680s) but only from the 70s/690s onward. What is more, the epigraphic formulae differ from the Qurʾānic ones.[45] Why this is so is uncertain. Be that as it may, let us now turn to these graffiti.

EPIGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

In this section I will put forward the epigraphic evidence used in this study before discuss-ing it in its historical context in the subsequent section. For reasons of copyright, images of the inscriptions are not included here; the reader may refer to the original publications for these images as well as the readings in Arabic script. I use the Leiden conventions as adapted for Arabic epigraphy for the transliteration of the texts.[46]

Square brackets [ ] indicate a lacuna where the original text has been lost. Square brackets for lacunae are not repeated in the translations of the inscriptions; rather, in the translations a lacuna of any size will be marked by an ellpisis (…). The square brackets are used in the following ways in the transliteration:

[*allāh*] A proposed reconstruction of the lacuna.
[….] Restoration of the missing part is not attempted; each dot represents roughly one letter in the original Arabic.
[---] Restoration of the missing part is not attempted, and its length is unknown.
<> Conjectural addition to the inscription: letters or words that seem to belong to the text but were omitted by mistake by the writer.
⸗ Indicates a line break in the middle of a word.

My editorial signs are not always identical with those of the original editors. It should be remarked that *hamza*s and medial *ā*'s, which are not usually written in early Arabic script, are added to my transliteration without explicitly marking them. I will indicate my disagreements with the original editions in footnotes. The line numbers are given in the transliterated part but not in the English translations, which also do not follow the Leiden conventions in the rendering of the text. The Arabic for "son" is transliterated *bn* if written BN and *ibn* if written ʾBN.

No. 1, 78 AH: A Graffito from near al-Ṭāʾif, Saudi Arabia

Reference: Al-Ḥārithī, "Naqsh kitābī nādir."

1. *shahida al-rayyān bn ʿabdallāh annahu lā ilāh illā allāh*
2. *wa-shahida anna muḥammadan rasūl allāh*
3. *thumma huwa yakfī*[47] *man abā an yashhada ʿalā*

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45 I thank Tommaso Tesei for pointing out this important observation to me (personal communication): none of the graffiti contain actual Qurʾānic citations.

46 Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, pp. 222–23.

47 The editor reads *y-d-m-y*, but on the basis of the published photograph (al-Ḥārithī, "Naqsh kitābī nādir," p. 542), context, and syntax, the word *yakfī* appears correct. Here it means "to be sufficient against

4. *dhālika raḥima allāh al-rayyān wa-*[48]

5. *ghafara lahu wa-astahdīhi ilā ṣirāṭ al-janna*

6. *wa-asʾaluhu al-shahāda fī sabīlihi*[49] *ā≠*

7. *mīn kutiba*[50] *hādhā al-kitāb*

8. *ʿām buniya al-masjid al-ḥarām*

9. *li-sanat thamān wa-sabʿīn*

"Al-Rayyān ibn ʿAbdallāh testifies that there is no god but God and he testifies that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God; and He [scil., God] is sufficient against those who refuse to testify that; may God have mercy on al-Rayyān and forgive him; and I[51] seek guidance from Him to the road of Paradise; and I ask Him for martyrdom in His path, amen; and this inscription was written in the year the Masjid al-Ḥarām was [re]built, year seventy-eight [= 697–698 ce]."[52]

No. 2, 98 ah: A Graffito from Cnidus, Turkey

Reference: Imbert, "Graffiti arabes de Cnide et de Kos," pp. 734–36. Numbers 2 and 3 evince raids on the Mediterranean islands and in Anatolia.

1. *raḍḍā allāh ʿamaluka*[53] *yā khaṭṭā≠*

2. *b ibn ḥajar thumma al-ʿammī*

3. *thumma al-ṣakhrī wa-katabtu*

4. *kitābatī*[54] *hādhā [ghaz]wa*[55]

5. *[---]fī sanat thamān wa-*

6. *[tis]ʿīn*

"May your deeds please God, O Khaṭṭāb ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAmmī al-Ṣakhrī; and I wrote this inscription of mine on a raid . . . in the year ninety-eight [= 716–717 ce]."

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s.o." (Dozy, *Supplément*, vol. 2, p. 478).

48 The word *wa-* is not included in al-Ḥārithī's edition, "Naqsh kitābī nādir," p. 535, although it is clear in the photograph on p. 542 and reproduced in the tracing on p. 543.

49 Remarkably, the similar phrase *asʾaluka al-shahāda fī sabīlika* occurs in the later *ḥadīth* collections, where it is put into the mouth of the caliph ʿUmar; see Wensinck, *Concordance*, vol. 2, p. 407, for references.

50 Here and elsewhere, KTB could naturally be read in the active voice. However, for simplicity's sake I will interpret it in this study as the passive if it is not followed by a personal name.

51 Here the writer, al-Rayyān ibn ʿAbdallāh, seems to switch from the third to the first person (if we do not suppose that the writer and the person mentioned are different). Changes between the third and the first person are rather usual in early Arabic graffiti; see Harjumäki and Lindstedt, "Ancient North Arabian and Early Islamic Arabic Graffiti," p. 70.

52 In the Arabic historiography, the renovation of al-Masjid al-Ḥarām after the second *fitna* is usually placed earlier—for example, in the year 74 ah in ibn Khayyāṭ, *History*, p. 131.

53 Imbert, "Graffiti arabes de Cnide et de Kos," p. 734, reads *raḍiya allāh [ʿan] ʿamalika*, but the addition of *ʿan* is unnecessary if the verb is understood in Form II.

54 One would expect *kitābī* for "my inscription," especially when the next word seems to be *hādhā* instead of *hādhihī*.

55 The reconstruction of the word as *ghazwa* is Imbert's, it might be remarked.

Imbert has also published six other Arabic graffiti from Cnidus.[56] While they do not address holy war as such, three writers associate themselves with *ahl filasṭīn*, troops from Palestine.[57] This comment probably refers to the place of origin of the raiding troops, although it is not certain whether Khaṭṭāb ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAmmī al-Ṣakhrī is also from *ahl filasṭīn*.

No. 3, 99 ᴀʜ: A Graffito from Cos, Greece

Reference: Imbert, "Graffiti arabes de Cnide et de Kos," pp. 746–47. The inscription is badly damaged, and its syntax is unclear. No verbs can be deciphered.

1. *WMNW*[58] *ʿaṭāʾ bn saʿd al-[---]*
2. *[---] mushrikīn fī ghazwa [---]*[59]
3. *wa- [---] sanat tisʿ wa-tisʿīn*
4. *naṣr allāh wa-l-fatḥ*
5. *al-ʿaẓīm [MN al-MḤRĀM]*[60]

". . . ʿAṭāʾ ibn Saʿd al-. . . [fought against?] associators on a raid . . . in the year ninety-nine [= 717–718 ᴄᴇ]; the help of God and great victory [cf. Q. 110:1] . . ."

Cos has yielded three other Arabic graffiti; one of them is dated to 99 ᴀʜ and another to the 90s ᴀʜ as well (the exact year is missing because of the fragmentary state of the text).[61] Yet another, undated graffito states: "May God have mercy on Mahdī ibn Rabīʿ al-Ruʿaynī al-Bunānī, and he is from the troops of Ifrīqiya [*wa-huwa min ahl ifrīqiya*]."[62] This statement reflects the possibility that the naval raid(s) on Cos took place in 98–99 ᴀʜ and the raiders came from Ifrīqiya, although it is uncertain whether this place of origin can be generalized for the whole party.

No. 4, 110 ᴀʜ: A Graffito from Southern Jordan

Reference: Karīm, "Nuqūsh islāmiyya taʿūdu li-l-ʿaṣrayn al-umawī wa-l-ʿabbāsī," pp. 298–99, 319 (tracing).

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56 Imbert, "Graffiti arabes de Cnide et de Kos," pp. 733–45.

57 Ibid., pp. 737–40.

58 The beginning of the inscription, before the name, is damaged. Imbert reads WMNWʾ, understanding it as a (part of a) verb, and translates "et ils ont." The word might be a form of the verb *āmana*, "to believe," which is common in early Arabic epigraphy.

59 Imbert does not give a reading for the rest of the line, but the tracing might indicate a word with the masculine sound plural ending (-*īn*). He suggests, however, that the word might be a toponym (Imbert, "Graffiti arabes de Cnide et de Kos," p. 746).

60 This reading is the one given by Imbert (with a question mark). It is unclear what the last word could mean in the context; Imbert himself does not give a translation for this part. In the published photograph, the last two words are damaged and unclear, so I give them in square brackets. Could it be a reference to the month of al-Muḥarram, in which case one should understand the *alif* after *ḥāʾ* (in Imbert's conjectural reading) to be a mistake by the writer?

61 Ibid., pp. 746–50.

62 Ibid., p. 748.

1. *li-llāh yasjudu*
2. *kāhil bn ʿalī*
3. *bn aktham wa-bi-llāh tawakkala*
4. *wa-yasʾalu allāh ji[h]ād-*[63]
5. *an fī sabīlihi*
6. *wa-ḥajja sanat*
7. *ʿashr wa-miʾa*[64]

"Before God prostrates Kāhil ibn ʿAlī ibn Aktham and upon Him he relies, asking God for *jihād* in His path; he made the pilgrimage in the year one hundred and ten [= 728–729 CE]."

No. 5, 117 AH: A Graffito from the Negev, Israel

References: Sharon, *Corpus*, vol. 3, pp. 179–80; cf. Nevo and Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*, pp. 396–97, whose reading seems to me to be inferior.

1. *bi-sm allāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*
2. *allāhumma i[ghfi]r li-ḥasan bn maysara wa-li-wā-*
3. *lidayhi wa-mā waladā āmīn rabb muḥammad wa-*
4. *ibrāhīm*[65] *allāhumma ijʿal ʿamalī jihādan*
5. *wājiban*[66] *wa-aqnī*[67] *istishhād*[68] *fī sabīlika*
6. *wa-kataba ḥasan yawm*
7. *al-thalā[th]a*
8. *fī thamān baqīna min rabīʿ al-<a>wwal wa-fīhi tuwuffū*

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63 The editor, Karīm, reads the word as *ḥamdan*. But since there are no occurrences of the phrase *yasʾalu allāh ḥamdan fī sabīlihi*, or the like, in other inscriptions (although see no. 6 for *aḥyīhi ḥamīdan*), I suggest the reading *jihādan* instead. (The medial *ā* would be omitted, as is usual in early Arabic script.) That reading would result in forming a phrase that finds analogues elsewhere in the epigraphic evidence, as will be seen. The published photograph is too unclear to ascertain either one of the readings. The reading *ḥamdan* or *jihādan* hinges, of course, only on the second letter: whether it is *hāʾ* or *mīm*, which can be mistaken (either by the premodern writers or by modern editors) on stone if the lower circle of the *hāʾ* is left unwritten by mistake or is worn off. The word *jihād* (which occurs four times in the Qurʾān) is written *j-h-d* (with the medial *ā* omitted) in many instances in early Qurʾānic manuscripts, and, indeed, even the Cairo edition writes it this way in verse 60:1. See https://corpuscoranicum.de/, verses 9:24, 22:78, 25:52, and 60:1. For all the occurrences, one can find manuscript evidence for the spelling *j-h-d* (with the medial *ā* omitted) for *jihād*.

64 Karīm adds one more line and reads *ghafara [allāh lahu]*, which can be found much below line 7. But taking into account the different direction of writing, it can be suggested that that line belongs to another graffito.

65 Sharon, *Corpus*, vol. 3, p. 180, gives erroneously *b-r-h-y-m*. The *alif* at the beginning of the word is clear in the photograph, however.

66 Nevo and Koren read *wa-ijʿal*.

67 The reading of this word is unclear. One could also read the undotted Arabic *wāfinī*, "provide." The meaning is roughly the same as *wa-aqnī*, "to cause to acquire." Nevo and Koren read *raʾfatī*, "my compassion." The published photograph in Sharon, *Corpus*, vol. 3, p. 179, does not support their reading.

68 One expects *istishhādan*, but the accusative case ending seems to be inconsistently used (cf. the previous line and also no. 12 below).

9. *banī ḥā[ti]m yarḥamuhum allāh jamī'atan*
10. *wa-huwa fī sanat sab'at 'ashara*[69]
11. *wa-mi'a*

"In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful; O God, forgive Ḥasan ibn Maysara and his parents and their offspring; amen, Lord of Muḥammad and Abraham; O God, make my deeds obligatory *jihād* and grant martyrdom in Your path; and Ḥasan wrote [this] on Tuesday, 22 Rabīʿ I, in which died Banū Ḥātim, may God have mercy on them all; and it was in the year one hundred and seventeen [= April 21, 735 CE, actually a Thursday, so the correspondence is rather to April 19]."

No. 6, 118 AH: A Graffito from Tall al-Jathūm, Jordan

Reference: al-Jbour, *Études des inscriptions arabes*, vol. 1, p. 72.[70]

1. *allāhumma ighfir*
2. *li-'āṣim bn FʿYM*[71] *'azman*
3. *wa-dharrihi'ilman*[72] *wa-tawaffahu shahīdan*
4. *wa-aḥyīhi ḥamīdan wa-yassir lahu*
5. *ḥajj baytika wa-jihādan fī sabīlika*
6. *wa-'amalan fī marḍātika ghafara allāh*
7. *li-man qara'a hādhā al-kitāb thumma qāla āmīn*
8. *maḥḍan wa-kutiba fī khilāfat hishām amīr al-mu'minīn*
9. *sanat thamānī 'ashara wa-mi'a*

"O God, forgive ʿĀṣim ibn FʿYM resolutely; and sprinkle him with knowledge; and take him [unto You] as a martyr; and bring him back to life in glory;[73] and make easy for him the pilgrimage to Your house and *jihād* in Your path and deeds pleasing to You; may God forgive whoever reads this inscription and then sincerely says 'amen'; it was written during the caliphate of Hishām, commander of the believers, in the year one hundred and eighteen [= 736–737 CE]."

No. 7, Undated: A Graffito from Mecca, Saudi Arabia

Reference: al-Rāshid, *Kitābāt islāmiyya min Makka*, pp. 104–5.

1. *allāhumma*
2. *ighfir li-abī*

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69 Sharon reads ʿ-*sh-r*, but the *tāʾ marbūṭa* seems to be visible in the photograph.

70 Unfortunately, I do not have access to this publication, so I accessed al-Jbour's reading through http://www.epigraphie-islamique.org/. The inscription was rediscovered in situ 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. I thank Ali Al-Manaser for sending a photo of this important inscription.

71 I am unable to suggest what the name might actually be.

72 This phrasing is somewhat unusual. One could also read *dharuhu 'ilman*, with the same meaning, or *dharhu 'ilman* and translate as "and let him be, [even] knowing [his sins]."

73 The appeal *tawaffahu shahīdan wa-aḥyīhi ḥamīdan* might be interpreted in the light of the idea that the martyrs are resurrected and go to paradise immediately after their death.

3. *muslim bn MKhBT*[74]
4. *wa-tawaffahu fī*
5. *sabīlika*

"O God, forgive Abū Muslim ibn MKhBT and take him [unto You] in Your path."

No. 8, Undated: A Graffito from Mecca, Saudi Arabia

Reference: al-Rāshid, *Kitābāt islāmiyya min Makka*, pp. 99–100.

1. *anā abū yazīd*
2. *faḍāla ibn samur≠*
3. *a asʾalu allāh*
4. *al-mawt fī sabīlihi*

"I, Abū Yazīd Faḍāla ibn Samura, ask God for death in His path."

This interesting graffito will affect how we read others that come after it in this survey. In the examples numbered 1, 5, and 6 above, we have seen that the writers ask for martyrdom (*shahāda* or *istishhād*). In this and some of the following inscriptions, an interesting formula appears: asking for death *fī sabīl allāh*.

No. 9, Undated: A Graffito from near al-Ṭāʾif, Saudi Arabia

Reference: al-Ḥārithī, *al-Nuqūsh al-ʿarabiyya*, p. 102.[75]

1. *ʿabdallāh bn ʿalī bn abī miḥjan yasʾalu*
2. *allāh al-qatl*[76] *fī sabīlihi ʿalā marḍātihi*

"'ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿAlī bn abī Miḥjan asks God for being killed in His path for His contentment."

No. 10, Undated: A Graffito from near al-Ṭāʾif, Saudi Arabia

Reference: al-Ḥārithī, *al-Nuqūsh al-ʿarabiyya*, p. 151.[77]

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74 This name is undotted in the original inscription and hence open to various interpretations. The reading *MKhBT* is that of the editor.

75 The editor conjecturally dates the inscription to the second or third century AH, but, as has been argued above, the graffiti that spell out willingness to participate in religious fighting and die while so engaged seem to belong to the first and second centuries AH.

76 The word (*al-QTL*) could naturally be read as *al-qitāl*, "fighting," as well. But since the wish of the writers of other graffiti seems to be to die while fighting (*shahāda, istishhād, mawt*), I assume that the reading *al-qatl* is more likely. There is some other evidence to suggest that *al-qatl* is the correct interpretation. In the Qurʾān (2:154) it is said *wa-lā taqūlū li-man yuqtalu fī sabīl allāh amwāt bal aḥyāʾ wa-lākin lā tashʿurūna*, "do not say that those who are killed in God's path are dead; rather, they are alive, though you do not realize it." This verse might be reflected in the inscriptions quoted here. Furthermore, in the prophetic traditions we have the phrase *al-qatl fī sabīl allāh yukaffiru kull khaṭīʾa*, "being killed in God's path erases all offenses" (Wensinck, *Concordance*, vol. 5, p. 290).

77 For this inscription, the editor gives an estimated date of the fourth century AH. The inscription (based on the tracing given by al-Ḥārithī) is indeed carefully and beautifully engraved and contains decorated

1. *aḥmad ibn ʿamr*
2. *ibn jābir ibn ʿiyāḍ*
3. *yuʾminu bi-llāh wa-malāʾikatihi wa-rusulihi*
4. *wa-bi-kutubihi wa-yasʾalu al-qatl*
5. *fī sabīlihi*

"Aḥmad ibn ʿAmr ibn Jābir ibn ʿIyāḍ believes in God and His angels and His messengers and His scriptures; and he asks for being killed in His path."

No. 11, Undated: A Graffito from near al-Ṭāʾif, Saudi Arabia

Reference: al-Ḥārithī, *al-Nuqūsh al-ʿarabiyya*, p. 82.[78]

1. *la-qad[79] kataba allāh li-ʿurwa aẕ*
2. *l-shahāda yawm yalqāhu wa-waqā[hu]*
3. *ʿadhāb al-nār wa-jaʿalaka[80]*
4. *maʿa muḥammad yawm al-dīn*

"Indeed, God has decreed martyrdom for ʿUrwa on the day he will meet Him; may He protect him from the torments of hell and may He place you [sic] with Muḥammad on the judgment day."

No. 12, Undated: A Graffito from Qāʿ al-Muʿtadil, Saudi Arabia

Reference: al-Kilābī, *al-Nuqūsh al-islāmiyya*, p. 189.[81]

1. *allāhumma iqdir li-yaʿqūb*
2. *bn ʿubayd istishhād fī*
3. *sabīlika mujāhidan*

"O God, ordain for Yaʿqūb ibn ʿUbayd martyrdom in Your path as a *mujāhid*."

No. 13, Undated: A Graffito from Qāʿ al-Muʿtadil, Saudi Arabia

Reference: al-Kilābī, *al-Nuqūsh al-islāmiyya*, pp. 170–71.[82]

1. *allāhumma istashhid ʿubaydallāh fī*
2. *sabīlika mawlā*
3. *salama bn ʿuthmān*

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and flowery paleographical features that become common in the third century AH. In my opinion, there is nothing to exclude a second-century AH date, however.

78 Dated conjecturally by the editor to the second century AH.

79 Read thus by the editor, although the tracing suggests *lammā* or *li-mā*. If either of these readings is the correct one, the translation would become: "Since God has decreed martyrdom for ʿUrwa on the day he will meet Him, may He protect him."

80 One would expect *wa-jaʿalahu*, as al-Ḥārithī, *al-Nuqūsh al-ʿarabiyya*, p. 82, n. 1, remarks.

81 Dated paleographically to the first century AH by the editor.

82 Dated paleographically to the first century AH by the editor.

"O God, make ʿUbaydallāh, the *mawlā* of Salama ibn ʿUthmān, a martyr in Your path."

The words *mawlā salama bn ʿuthmān* are misplaced: perhaps the writer, ʿUbaydallāh, added them as an afterthought. We can speculate that he might have been engraving his graffito in haste and first wrote what he thought to be most important—*allāhumma istash-hid ʿubaydallāh fī sabīlika*—and then, when he noticed that he still had time to finish the inscription, wrote his patron's name.

No. 14, Undated: A Graffito from Al-Aqraʿ, Saudi Arabia

Reference: al-Kilābī, *al-Nuqūsh al-islāmiyya*, pp. 245–46.[83]

1. *allāhumma ighfir li-ʿubāda*
2. *bn ḥarām al-shā[m]ī*
3. *wa-urzuqhu al-shahāda*
4. *fī sabīlika*

"O God, forgive ʿUbāda ibn Ḥarām al-Shāmī and provide[84] him martyrdom in Your path."

No. 15, Undated: A Graffito from Qāʿ al-Muʿtadil, Saudi Arabia

Reference: al-Kilābī, *al-Nuqūsh al-islāmiyya*, pp. 353–54.[85]

1. *allāhumma iṣ*
2. *stashhid [---]*
3. *bn al-[---][86] fī*
4. *sabīlika*

"O God, make . . . ibn al-. . . a martyr in Your path."

No. 16, Undated: A Graffito from near Jerusalem

References: van Berchem, "Note on the Graffiti," p. 86;[87] Macalister, "A Cistern with Cufic Graffiti" (which includes the rather poor tracings of the graffiti but not the facsimiles, which were not published).

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83 Dated paleographically to the second century AH by the editor.

84 The choice of the word (*urzuqhu*) might be influenced by Q. 3:169, which states, "do not consider those killed in God's path dead; rather, they are alive with their Lord, provided for [*yurzaqūna*]," or Q. 22:58, according to which "those who emigrate in God's path and are then killed or die, God will provide them with a good provision" (*la-yarzuqannahum allāh rizqan ḥasanan*).

85 Dated paleographically to the third century AH by the editor.

86 This reading is the one given by al-Kilābī: *bn* for son, followed by the definite article *al-* and a lacuna [---]. But it is unclear whether there is really space for anything after the putative article *al-*. Looking at the tracing, it could be suggested that the name is actually extant, even if the last letter is damaged. One could then suggest, for example, *Nazzāl* as the reading of the name.

87 Concerning the date of numbers 16–18 and other graffiti from the same place, van Berchem, "Note on the Graffiti," p. 90, states: "I should not like to say of any of these graffiti whether it was inscribed yesterday or in the first century of the Hegira." In my opinion, the latter option is definitely more likely.

1. *[---] wa-ḥamza [---]*
2. *bn ḥumayd wa-huwa yasʾalu a⸗*
3. *llāhal-shahād[a]*
4. *fī sabīlihi*

“. . . and [?] Ḥamza . . . ibn Ḥumayd, and he asks God for martyrdom in His path.”

No. 17, Undated: A Graffito from near Jerusalem

References: van Berchem, “Note on the Graffiti,” p. 86; Macalister, “A Cistern with Cufic Graffiti.”

1. *[allāh walī] saʿīd*
2. *wa-huwa yasʾalu*
3. *[al]lāhal-shahād[a]*
4. *fī sabīlihi*

“God is the guardian of Saʿīd. And he asks God for martyrdom in His path.”

No. 18, Undated: A Graffito from near Jerusalem

References: van Berchem, “Note on the Graffiti,” p. 86; Macalister, “A Cistern with Cufic Graffiti.”

1. *allāh walī*
2. *bishr bn ʿabd*
3. *[a]llāh wa-ka[taba]wa-huwa*
4. *yasʾalu allāhal-[shahāda]*
5. *fī sabīlihi*

“God is the guardian of Bishr ibn ʿAbdallāh—and he wrote [this], asking God for martyrdom in His path.”

No. 19, Undated: A Graffito from Ḥismā, Saudi Arabia

References: The rock on which inscriptions 19 and 20 are found was initially discovered and discussed by the Saudi explorer group *Farīq al-Ṣaḥrāʾ* (http://alsahra.org/?p=11163). The inscriptions were then mentioned by Imbert (“Califes, princes et poètes,” pp. 68, 76) and included in the Islamic Awareness website (http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/muwinsc4.html). They have now been published by Ghabbān (*Kitābāt*, pp. 103–4, 137–38) and al-Saʿīd and al-Bayṭār (*Nuqūsh*, pp. 126–27).

1. *allāhumma ṣallī ʿalā muḥammadʿabdika wa-rasūlika wa-aʿẓim ajrahu*
2. *wa-akrim nazlahu wa-kataba saʿīd ibn dhakwān mawlā muʿāwiya*
3. *ibn abī sufyān wa-huwa yasʾalu allāh bi-afḍal mā saʾalahu ʿabd min al-awwalīn*
4. *wa-al-ākhirīn an yarzuqahu sharaf al-qatl fī sabīlihi*

“O God, bless Muḥammad, Your servant and Your messenger. Make his reward great and make his residence noble. Saʿīd ibn Dhakwān, the *mawlā* of Muʿāwiya

ibn abī Sufyān, wrote [this] asking God for the loftiest thing that a servant has ever asked: that He provide him the honor of being killed in His path."

It is probable that the inscription postdates the reign of Muʿāwiya (41–60/661–680), for mentions of the Prophet do not appear in the Arabic epigraphic record before the 70s AH.[88] After this time, the mention of the Prophet becomes somewhat common. It is hence probable that Dhakwān, not Saʿīd, was the freedman of the caliph Muʿāwiya ibn abī Sufyān. Muʿāwiya does not bear the title of *amīr al-muʾminīn* in the inscription. But since we have here the rather full name Muʿāwiya ibn abī Sufyān, the identification with the Umayyād caliph of that name seems all but certain. The fact that the title *amīr al-muʾminīn* is missing might be explained by the possibility that Muʿāwiya was already deceased when the inscription was written. Assuming that Dhakwān was the *mawlā* of the caliph Muʿāwiya and his son Saʿīd wrote the inscription, we can place the inscription toward the end of the first century of Islam or later.

No. 20, Undated: A Graffito from Ḥismā, Saudi Arabia

References: The same as those for number 19, which appears on the same rock.

1. *anā bakkār bn*
2. *ṭālūt*
3. *asʾaluallāh sharaẓ*
4. *f al-qatl*
5. *fī sabīlihi*

"I, Bakkār ibn Ṭālūt, ask God for the honor of being killed in His path."

The writer, Bakkār ibn Ṭālūt, is clearly reacting to inscription number 19 and asking for the same honor of martyrdom for himself. This graffito finishes the exposition of the epigraphic evidence, which will be analyzed and placed in its social and historical context in the next section.

Additional, Unique, Undated Graffito from al-Ṣuwaydira, Saudi Arabia

Reference: al-Rāshid, *Al-Ṣuwaydira*, pp. 101–2. This graffito displays an unusual formula, and it is unclear whether it bears a connection with holy war. Hence it is not counted among the twenty inscriptions that definitely deal with that topic but is presented here as an additional text, the interpretation of which is unclear.[89]

1. *āmana maʿn ibn al-waẓ*
2. *līd bi-llāh wa-kafara*
3. *bi-l-ṭāghūt wa-huwa yasʾalu*
4. *allāh zakāt*[90] *fī sabīlihi*

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88 See Lindstedt, "Who Is In, Who Is Out?"

89 The editor, al-Rāshid (*Al-Ṣuwaydira*, p. 101), dates this inscription to the first two centuries of Islam. Early dating is corroborated by the medial open ʿayns appearing in the text.

90 Mohsen Goudarzi (to whom I am grateful) has suggested to me in a private communication that this word (*zakāt*) can be interpreted in another way as well. Goudarzi notes that there could be a tooth between the *kāf* and *alif*. Hence a reading *r-k-b-ā-h* might be possible. In this reading, the word would be

5. *muqbil ghayr mudbir nā◌*

6. *ṣir ghayr khādhil*

"Maʿn ibn al-Walīd believes in God and disbelieves in false gods, asking God for *zakāt* in His path, going forward, not retreating, assisting, not forsaking."

I have touched on this inscription in a coauthored publication. There it was suggested that the writer asked "to receive alms tax while in God's way (i.e., participating in Holy War?)."[91] This request might have been a reference to Q. 9:60, which mentions that the alms (*al-ṣadaqāt*) are meant for different categories of people, including, for example, the wayfarers and those who are *fī sabīl allāh*.[92] But there is as well another interpretation that was not adduced in our earlier study. Since one of the meanings of the root *z-k-w/y* is "to be or become pure," it is possible that here *zakāt* denotes "purification," perhaps through martyrdom in battle. The last two lines of the text ("going forward, not retreating, assisting, not forsaking") could certainly refer to fighting, perhaps with a reference to Q. 8:15,[93] although the formulae differ.

EPIGRAPHIC FORMULAE

Next I will discuss the epigraphic formulae of the inscriptions. Six of the writers of the graffiti ask God for forgiveness (nos. 1, 4–7, 14). This theme is, of course, a very common one in early Arabic inscriptions. One might ask, however, whether the writers thought that fighting and falling in God's path automatically granted forgiveness. This thinking might well be the case: as stated above, there are Qurʾānic passages associating *jihād*, martyrdom, and heavenly reward (e.g., Q. 2:218; 3:140–43; 4:74; 9:111), and a *ḥadīth* states *al-qatl fī sabīl allāh yukaffiru kull khaṭīʾa*, "being killed in God's path erases all offenses."[94] David Cook discusses a passage from ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Mubārak's (d. 181/797) *Kitāb al-Jihād* where a sinning but penitent believer is described as fighting until falling.[95] According to ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Mubārak's text, this "cleansing [i.e., being killed in God's path] wipes away his offenses and his sins . . . and he will be let into heaven from whatever gate he wishes."[96] In the corpus of this article, numbers 6 and 9 state that fighting and falling are pleasing to God.

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derived from the root *r-k-b* and have to do with riding or raiding, although it is unclear what exact noun would be meant. Perhaps *rakba*, with a superfluous *alif*? Or its plural, *rakabāt*, with a *tāʾ marbūṭa* erroneously instead of *tāʾ mabsūṭa*? In any case, it is uncertain whether the tooth is really there, so al-Rāshid's original interpretation, *zakāt*, is perhaps preferable.

91 Harjumäki and Lindstedt, "Ancient North Arabian and Early Islamic Arabic Graffiti," p. 81.

92 The link with the inscription and the verse Q. 9:60 was suggested to me by Edmund Hayes, to whom I am grateful.

93 "Believers, when you meet the disbelievers in battle, do not turn your backs on them [*fa-lā tuwalluhum al-adbār*]."

94 Wensinck, *Concordance*, vol. 5, p. 290.

95 Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, pp. 14–15.

96 Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Jihād*, pp. 30–31, translated in Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, p. 14.

Of the twenty graffiti, eleven mention martyrdom (*sh-h-d*)[97] and four being killed (*al-qatl*);[98] two ask God to take them unto Him (*tawaffahu*),[99] and one mentions dying (*al-mawt*).[100] All in all, then, seventeen deal with falling in God's path. One ʿUrwa, who wrote number 11, declares that God has prescribed or preordained martyrdom for him (*kataba allāh li-ʿurwa al-shahāda*). The writers of numbers 19 and 20 say that falling is an "honor" (*sharaf*). It might be interesting to note that the writers of numbers 2 and 3, which are apparently the only graffiti that were written on actual raids, do *not* mention the wish to die while fighting, thus perhaps showing a difference between ideology and practice. Indeed, the writer of number 3 does not express a hope for being killed but rather "the help of God and great victory."

Three of the graffiti mention *jihād* (nos. 4–6), with one (no. 5) describing it as "obligatory" (*wājib*). Numbers 5 and 6 connect *jihād* with martyrdom (*istishhād, tawaffahu shahīdan*), and the engraver of number 12 asks for "martyrdom in Your path as a *mujāhid*." Interestingly, numbers 4 and 6 mention that the writer had made the pilgrimage or intended to do so. Some *ḥadīth*s also link or equate *jihād* and pilgrimage.[101] But it might be imprudent to suggest that these engravers understood *jihād* not as physical fighting but as religious exertion of some other kind, since number 6 also includes a request for dying as a martyr (*tawaffahu shahīdan wa-aḥyīhi ḥamīdan*).[102] Maybe the writers wanted to proclaim their keenness to participate in the two rites, fighting and pilgrimage. The great majority (seventeen out of twenty) of the graffiti contain the phrase *fī sabīl allāh*, *fī sabīlihi*, or *fī sabīlika*.

Graffiti numbers 2 and 3 mention raiding (*ghazwa*)—indeed, they were actually inscribed on a raid—but only one graffito (no. 3) in the whole set mentions the enemy the writer is fighting against: *mushrikīn*. The invisibility of the enemy (the out-group) is an interesting feature in other graffiti.[103] As was noted above, seventeen of the twenty graffiti deal with dying in God's path. The pivotal theme in them appears, hence, to be willingness to sacrifice oneself, not fighting and defeating some identified enemy. It is perhaps natural that a graffito written on an actual raid (no. 3) mentions the enemy, while those engraved away from the border region do not.

The geography of the finds must be briefly commented on. Most of them come from Jordan and Saudi Arabia, that is to say, somewhat removed from the frontier regions where fighting was actually taking place. It might be surprising that the Marwānid push for expansion was felt so strongly in the south. But the geographical focus of our epigraphic corpus is probably simply due to (1) where good writing material was available (especially

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97 Nos. 1, 5, 6, 11–18.

98 Nos. 9, 10, 19, 20.

99 Nos. 6 and 7.

100 No. 8.

101 Wensinck, *Concordance*, vol. 2, p. 405.

102 Of course, it could be claimed that the writer of number 6 was hoping to die en route or when in Mecca and considered this martyrdom. For example, Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, p. 35 mentions a tradition saying that whoever dies while shaving the head during the pilgrimage is a martyr.

103 Since "otherness is distinguished by giving it names," as stated by Rauhala, "Danger and Delusion," p. 287, the Arabic graffiti investigated in this article have more to do with in-group formation than out-group marking and othering.

basalt stone, which is abundant in Saudi Arabia and Jordan and on which inscriptions survive for millennia); (2) where the later medieval building activities were limited; and (3) where fieldwork for early Arabic inscriptions has actually been carried out. (It has been rather extensive in Jordan and Saudi Arabia but limited in, say, Iran, Central Asia, Turkey, and the Maghreb.) Moreover, although here I am speculating, I believe it is probable that were there more recorded early Arabic inscriptions from, for instance, North Africa, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and other places, we would probably see in them expressions of the same kind. And, in any case, we do have some graffiti from the frontier regions as well (nos. 2 and 3). Furthermore, a cistern near Jerusalem has furnished three martyrdom graffiti (nos. 16–18). The narratives of the conquest and all-around sacredness of Jerusalem were important parts of Muslim communal memory,[104] so it is perhaps not surprising to find statements of falling for the sake of God there. In any case, the fact that the Marwānid conquest ideology received a positive reaction as far south as the region around Mecca (nos. 7–11) shows us the extent of (at least stated) eagerness to fight in God's path during those decades.

DISCUSSION OF THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

My intention in this study is to discuss religious warfare and martyrdom as a social phenomenon rather than as dogma, although dated epigraphic evidence can of course proffer clues about how the theological and legal principles of *jihād* and martyrdom evolved over time. The evidence above shows that there are six early dated inscriptions expressing personal views of *jihād* and willingness to die as a martyr. The dated inscriptions fall into the decades of the 70s–110s AH. Since there are altogether about eighty dated Islamic-era Arabic inscriptions up to the end of the 110s AH,[105] religious warfare and martyrdom can be described as fairly infrequent themes, with fewer than 10 percent of the surviving dated inscriptions containing formulae and expressions related to those themes. An interesting question is why these themes do not appear in the epigraphic evidence earlier, before the 70s/690s, especially when the Qur'ān discusses them rather amply. This phenomenon could be just a matter of what has survived: there are only about a dozen extant dated inscriptions up to the end of the 60s AH[106]—a meager figure. Another possibility is that these notions were not embraced by the (proto-)Muslims taking part in the earliest conquests,[107] but this idea seems somewhat questionable to me given the Qur'ānic passages discussed above.

In any case, the appearance and proliferation in the graffiti of the themes of fighting and falling seem to belong to a specific historical context: that of a renewed interest, after the second *fitna*, in active conquests and expanding the area controlled by the caliphate in which the Umayyad caliphs from ʿAbd al-Malik to Hishām were instrumental (that is, the period of the 70s–120s/690s–740s).[108] Furthermore, in the introduction to this chapter

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104 See, e.g., Shoshan, *Arabic Historical Tradition*, pp. 110–33.

105 Lindstedt, "Who Is In, Who Is Out?" appendix.

106 Ibid.

107 Shoshan, *Arabic Historical Tradition*, pp. 56–57.

108 See, e.g., Blankinship, *End of the Jihâd State*; Hoyland, *In God's Path*, pp. 138–206; Kennedy, *Great Arab Conquests*, pp. 169–343; Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, pp. 66–71. For a translation of an Arabic chronicle

I stated that, on the basis of epigraphic and other contemporary material, the processes of formulating a distinctively Muslim identity should be dated to about the 70s–100s/690s–720s.[109] This process went hand in hand with constructing the non-Muslim out-group ("the others"), who begin to be mentioned in inscriptions from that time onward. And what could be a better way of expressing and accentuating belonging to an in-group (Muslims) than affirming willingness to fight and die for it (or its God)?

Above, in the section presenting the epigraphic evidence, all instances of the noun *al-q-t-l* were read as *al-qatl* and understood as falling in battle. This reading/understanding was done in view of what I see as an analogous phrase, *asʾalu allāh al-mawt fī sabīlihi* (no. 8), and others that mention martyrdom. Naturally, we could also read *al-qitāl*, "fighting," with medial *ā* omitted as is usual in early Arabic script, and understand it as synonymous with *al-jihād*, which also occurs in the epigraphy. It is possible that some engravers intended *al-q-t-l* to be read as such, although it is peculiar that none of them uses the *scriptio plena* to indicate *al-qitāl* instead of *al-qatl*. Still another way of interpreting the word would be to read *al-qatl* but understand it as "killing" (< *qatala*) instead of "being killed" (< *qutila*). But this interpretation seems unlikely to me in the context of other graffiti and the Qurʾānic evidence that usually highlight the significance of sacrificing one's life in God's path rather than killing the enemy per se. The readiness to fall in battle is present in, for example, Arabic apocalyptic traditions that could be rather early. Some of them mention squads called *shuraṭ li-l-mawt*, vanguards that promise not to return from the battle if they are not victorious. They are especially connected with the conquest of Constantinople.[110] Arabic conquest narratives also contain expressions of love of death and actively seeking martyrdom.[111] In the later traditionist and legal literature, active seeking of martyrdom became a vexed issue: many religious scholars frowned on it.[112]

COSTLY SIGNALING

In a different context, Nina Nikki has treated the suffering of the New Testament's apostle Paul as *costly signaling*.[113] According to Nikki, the inclination of an individual to suffer and undergo hardships for a group shows that she or he is not a free rider but a faithful member of the group. Costly signals are patterns of behavior or practices that induce pain, consume energy, and thus cannot be feigned. By performing and expecting costly deeds, the members of the group can display their own communal commitment and monitor that of the other members.[114] These abilities add to intragroup cohesion and cooperation, especially if there are many individuals who are keen to offer such high-cost sacrifices. From

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detailing the era, see ibn Khayyāṭ, *History*, pp. 129–253.

109 See also Donner, "From Believers to Muslims" and *Muhammad and the Believers*.

110 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, p. 63.

111 Shoshan, *Arabic Historical Tradition*, pp. 54–56.

112 Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, pp. 27–28, 40–41. Often, the scholars criticizing the active seeking of martyrdom referred to Q. 2:195, "Spend money in God's path but do not be cast to destruction by your own hands."

113 Nikki, *Opponents and Identity*, pp. 62–63, 186, with references to theoretical literature.

114 On costly signaling in religious groups in general, see Sosis, "Why Aren't We All Hutterites?"

a group boundary-drawing and boundary-maintaining perspective, defining suffering and death as something positive and encouraged can be interpreted as an example of social creativity in which the group gives value to deeds that are disapproved of outside the group and that hence serve as criteria to distinguish the in-group from the out-group.[115]

Rodney Stark has underlined that sacrifices for a religious community represent completely rational and often conscious choices, not irrational or masochistic ones.[116] Indeed, these sacrifices and stigmas alleviate the free rider problem that a religious or other social group might confront: belonging to a community that requires or expects costly deeds is actually advantageous, since such a group is often characterized by high levels of commitment, cooperation, and collective action and activity, as well as altruism.[117] Stark gives the following two rules: "First: *By demanding higher levels of stigma and sacrifice, religious groups induce higher average levels of member commitment and participation.* Second: *By demanding higher levels of stigma and sacrifice, religious groups are able to generate greater material, social, and religious benefits for their members.*"[118] Expressions of eagerness to fight and die for the in-group are seen as usual and expected in the Islamic-era Arabic evidence surveyed in this essay. They are evidence of identity formation and accentuation processes as well as intragroup cohesion. How much they reflect *actual practice* at the time is of course somewhat difficult to gauge, but it would in my opinion be rash to suggest that there was no link whatsoever.[119] At the very least, the epigraphic formulae illustrate rejection of the manners of those who stay behind and do not fight (as discussed above; e.g., Q. 3:167–68; 4:75; 9:81).

THE MARWĀNID PUSH

The graffiti from Cos and Cnidus (nos. 2 and 3, dated 98 and 99 AH) are probably somehow connected with the attempts to try to squeeze the Byzantine Empire and to capture its capital, Constantinople, during the reign of the caliph Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 96–99/715–717).[120] This effort was a rather big one, probably including both land and naval forces,[121] which furthermore might have been seen as an apocalyptic battle before the year 100 AH, when some expected the end of times to begin.[122] The campaign was led by Sulaymān's brother Maslama; Constantinople was besieged for a year, but it was not reduced.[123]

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115 Nikki, *Opponents and Identity*, pp. 183–84.

116 Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, p. 167.

117 Ibid., pp. 174–79.

118 Ibid., p. 177, emphasis original.

119 As noted by Sosis ("Why Aren't We All Hutterites," p. 108), "a signal can achieve stability in a population even if some individuals can send the signal falsely, as long as the signal is honest 'on average.'"

120 Imbert, "Graffiti arabes de Cnide et de Kos," pp. 756–57. There had been earlier efforts to do so as well.

121 Hawting, *First Dynasty of Islam*, pp. 72–73.

122 For the importance of conquering Constantinople in Arabic apocalyptic speculations, see Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, pp. 52–66. For the importance of the year 100 AH, see Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, pp. 291–97.

123 Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 2, pp. 1314–17; for a full analysis of the sources and events, see Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, pp. 229–82; more briefly, see Hoyland, *In God's Path*, pp. 170–78. Ibn Aʿtham, *Futūḥ*, vol. 7, pp. 167–205, 298–306, is problematic for the chronology since, according to him, Maslama had

The first decades of the eighth century CE were characterized by an increased effort for conquests in the east, west, and north. After a stop to these campaigns under ʿUmar II (r. 99–101/717–720), they were continued under Hishām (r. 105–125/724–743) in all directions, especially in the east and north, but not always successfully. Arabic historiography offers detailed but sometimes contradictory narratives about them.[124] The third civil war and the ʿAbbāsid revolution (126–132/744–750) brought the invasions to a halt.

Again it must be underlined that the epigraphic corpus of this article consists of graffiti, which allow us to see how people outside the political elite and religious scholars viewed things at the time. According to the dated graffiti, the epigraphic themes of personal statements of *jihād* and martyrdom seem to have flourished especially under the Marwānid caliphs ʿAbd al-Malik, Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, and Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik[125] until they were abandoned sometime after 118/736–737 (the year of the last dated graffito, no. 6, above). This phenomenon goes well with what we know from Arabic chronicles and other literary sources about the cessation of widespread military activity and expansion in the 740s CE: thus there does seem to be a connection between the epigraphic formulae and actual practice. The expressions appearing in the epigraphy are not mere rhetoric or copying of older formulae.[126] Under the ʿAbbāsids (from 132/749 onward), *jihād* was mostly a regulated and ritualized activity that did not aim for extensive new conquests but occurred with the intention of keeping and settling the conquered areas.[127]

CONCLUSION

This study has endeavored to show that Islamic-era Arabic inscriptions, especially of the graffito type, are important material for social history. The graffiti treated in this study contain personal statements about the impulse to fight and fall in God's path. Their historical context is the Marwānid thrust to expand the caliphate in the 70s–120s/690s–740s. They show that at least some individual Muslims of the time had internalized the politico-religious *jihād* ideology. Warfare was seen in religious terms or as sanctioned by religion, even if individual motivations to participate in fighting in all probability varied and also involved more mundane factors, such as desire for riches or adventure.[128]

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begun besieging Constantinople before Sulaymān's caliphate and, in fact, Sulaymān writes to Maslama to withdraw the siege (p. 298). For an overview of and references to non-Arabic sources discussing Maslama's attack on Constantinople, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 107, 294–302, 434, 624–25, 653.

124 Hawting, *First Dynasty of Islam*, pp. 83–88; Hoyland, *In God's Path*, pp. 170–206.

125 Notice, by the way, that graffito number 6 says that it was written *fī khilāfat hishām amīral-muʾminīn*: the link between *jihād* and the ruling caliph is explicitly present.

126 As claimed by Elad, "Community of Believers," p. 247: "One should remember that the wording of inscriptions became clichés, common formulae. Can they truly teach us about their authors, about early Muslim society and its character?" On the same page (n. 5), he refers to Moshe Sharon for support for this opinion. If Sharon is indeed of this opinion, it is rather striking, given that he is one of the leading scholars of Arabic epigraphy. As suggested here and in Lindstedt, "Who Is In, Who Is Out?," I disagree with this idea.

127 Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence*.

128 The more banal motives are also discussed in the Arabic traditions dealing with the subject; see Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, p. 25; Firestone, *Jihad*, p. 103.

The graffiti analyzed here belong to the same decades as those when Muslim identity began to be articulated in epigraphy and other texts.[129] The Arabic texts up to the 60s/680s, including the Qurʾān, evince a still-evolving religious identity,[130] which can perhaps be called "proto-Islamic affiliation." At this early stage, the Muslim group was yet to coalesce, and the borders between the in-group ("we") and the out-group ("them") were being negotiated. The rise of a more distinctly Muslim identity from about the 70s/690s onward, with an emphasis on the Prophet Muḥammad and Islamic rites, coincides with Arabic graffiti putting forward costly signals of striving and dying for the in-group (although, it must be conceded, they never mention the community as such but only God as a reason to struggle). As remarked by Firestone on a general level about the concepts of holy war: "The importance of distinguishing between the in-group and the 'other' cannot be overstressed as the particular vehemence and tragedy of 'civil war' suggests, for organized and sanctioned mass violence and killing can be conducted only against those who are identified, even if only temporarily, as outside the group."[131] This costly signaling, both in the fields of epigraphic messages and actual battle, produced cohesion, cooperation, and altruism among (at least the male) Muslims and, as well, more accentuated expressions of allegiance to the in-group. I interpret the Arabic graffiti surveyed here as twofold expressions: first, the engravers hoped for the reward of the *hereafter* for (eventually) dying as a martyr, and second, they wanted to leave their signatures on stone to be read by later Muslims who would memorize their names and heroic deeds *in this world*.[132]

As an intercommunal aside, it is natural that earlier, late antique Christian concepts and narratives of martyrdom naturally affected early Muslim views.[133] Daniel Boyarin, for example, speaks of "the idea of martyrdom as a positive and eroticized religious fulfillment" among "late antique rabbinic and Christian Jews."[134] In the process of borrowing, however, early Muslims changed the idea of martyr from steadfast sufferer for the faith to activist warrior defending and fighting for it.[135]

In the seventh to eighth centuries CE, the direction of borrowing could also have been different—from Muslims to Christians. Some years after Arabic graffiti evince emphasis on martyrdom in God's path on the Muslim side, Christian martyrdom narratives become increasingly frequent in the Middle East. In these narratives, individual Christians are portrayed as suffering and dying at the hands of Muslims. Many of the Christian martyrs resolutely irk the Muslims in order to gain martyrdom.[136] This practice can be compared to Arabic graffiti in which the engravers purposefully ask God for death. In the early Islamic Middle East, members of both religious communities (Muslims and Christians) expounded

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129 Lindstedt, "Who Is In, Who Is Out?"

130 Donner, "From Believers to Muslims" and *Muhammad and the Believers*.

131 Firestone, *Jihad*, p. 14.

132 See especially number 6, above. For this twofold reward in the context of Christian martyrs, see Weiner and Weiner, *Martyr's Conviction*, pp. 80–81.

133 For early Christian views of martyrdom, see, e.g., the commentary and texts in Ehrman, *After the New Testament*, pp. 26–55.

134 Boyarin, *Dying for God*, p. 114.

135 Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, p. 23.

136 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 345–47; see also now Sahner, *Christian Martyrs*.

their keenness to perform costly deeds by asserting that they were ready to die for their faith, one of the results of which was the maintaining of communal boundaries.[137]

FINAL NOTE

Above, I remarked in passing that some *ḥadīth* compilations have similar formulae to those contained in the inscriptions, but there they are said to have been expressed by the Prophet or, say, the caliph ʿUmar.[138] Western scholarship has for a long time suspected and endeavored to show that the *ḥadīth*s seem to have originated as pious phrases and narratives circulated by the early Muslims toward the end of the first century AH and later, which were then put into the mouths of important early prototypical figures (the Prophet, caliphs, pious men, and, less often, women), and finally were projected, more or less *in toto*, onto the time of the Prophet.[139] The corpus of graffiti concurs with this overall picture: the pious formulae contained in the early graffiti are always *personal statements*, not ascribed to the Prophet or some other figure. Thus, and taking into account the rather extensive modern scholarly studies about the *ḥadīth* corpus, it seems indeed possible to suggest that in some cases the Prophet's dicta reflect pious maxims that were current on the lips of the people. But the processes of composing and compiling the many and sometimes incredibly vast corpora of *ḥadīth*s were multifaceted and complex: naturally, not all Prophet's dicta have their exemplars in the (hypothetical or proven) earlier maxims.

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137 See Boyarin, *Dying for God*, for background and analogues from the earlier centuries when Jews and Christians were formatting and upholding their distinct religious identities with the discourse of martyrdom.

138 See inscriptions 1 and 9. For *jihād, qitāl, qatl*, and *shahāda fī sabīl allāh*, as well as related formulae in *ḥadīth*s, see the references in Wensinck, *Concordance*, vol. 2, pp. 405–7. For connections between inscriptions and *ḥadīth*s, see also Hoyland, "The Content and Context of the Early Arabic Inscriptions," p. 100.

139 E.g., Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, vol. 2; Schacht, *Origins*; Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*.

12 Writing and the Terminological Evolution of the Qur'ānic *Sūrah*

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THE ARABIC TERM *sūrah* is inseparable from its relationship to the Qur'ānic corpus; the term denotes a Qur'ānic chapter, one of the 114 chapters into which the Qur'ān is divided. Despite this specialized meaning, the term *sūrah* is used ten times across the Qur'ān, ostensibly *before* the Qur'ān was divided and organized into its current chapters. Employing literary, paleographic, and historiographical analyses, I will argue that the Qur'ānic term *sūrah* originally described smaller, independent units of oral, prophetic revelation (here labeled "prophetic utterances") that were subsequently combined to form longer chapters. Once brought together to create the longer literary compositions that today we identify as *sūrah*s, the divisions between the originally independent pieces of revelation were lost. As the Qur'ān began to be written down, codified, and, finally, disseminated, the term *sūrah* came to be associated with the secondary literary form of the chapter, as opposed to its original meaning denoting a small unit of oral revelation.

LITERARY EVIDENCE

Despite *sūrah*'s unclear etymology, a survey of the Qur'ān's usage of the term *sūrah* establishes the following parameters for its definition: a specific literary form that can be "revealed" (*nazala*) or "brought" (*atā*), is often tied to a specific topic, is composed of "verses" (*āyāt*), and is short in length.[1] In terms of the word's literary structure, the Qur'ān describes a *sūrah* as a specific and, importantly, recognizable literary form that can be "revealed" or "brought." The Qur'ān challenges those who doubt its message to "bring a *sūrah* the like thereof, and call upon your witness other than God, if you are truthful" (*fa'tū bi-sūratin min mithlihi wa-id'ū. shuhadāʾakum min dūni allāhi in kuntum ṣādiqīna*; Q. 2:23). This description, along with similar examples throughout the text, demonstrates both that the *sūrah* is the literary form in which the Qur'ān was revealed and that a non-Qur'ānic reproduction could be attempted. Clearly, the implication of the preceding verse is that the doubters would be unable to produce a satisfactory *sūrah*, whatever the criteria of its unsuitability may have been, but, nonetheless, its reproduction could have been attempted. Underscoring this inability of a non-Qur'ānic *sūrah* to be faithfully reproduced is the

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1 Neuwirth, "Sūra."

verse's employment of the verb *atā*, "to bring," as opposed to the more common *nazala*, "to be revealed," since the verb *atā* implies horizontal movement from one human being to another as opposed to a Qurʾānic *sūrah*'s vertical descent (*nazala*) from a divine source. Similar challenges are issued in Q. 10:38 and Q. 11:13.

A further elaboration of a *sūrah*'s literary structure is found in Q. 24:1: "A *sūrah* which we have revealed and appointed, and we revealed therein clear verses, that you may remember" (*sūratun anzalnāhā wa-faraḍnāhā wa-anzalnā fīhā āyātin bayyinātin laʿallakum tadhakkarūna*). In reference to itself, the Qurʾān describes its literary form as a *sūrah* composed of *āyāt*; as it is a genuine *sūrah*, it is revealed by God. The possible social functions performed by the genre of the *sūrah*, here suggested by the verbs *faraḍnā* and *tadhakkarūna*, will be further discussed below. Fascinatingly, the fact that this verse constitutes the opening of a Qurʾānic chapter *and* the first word of the verse is *sūratun*—an indefinite, nominative noun—suggests that here *sūratun* is referring to itself, as it is being revealed! If this is true, how long does the literary form of the *sūrah* extend—for a single verse? Multiple verses? The entire chapter?

Qurʾān 11:13 may provide insight into this question by suggesting that *sūrah*s are relatively short literary compositions: "Or they say, 'He has fabricated it!' Say, 'Then bring ten *sūrah*s the like thereof that are fabricated, and call upon whom you can, apart from God, if you are truthful'" (*am yaqūlūna iftarāhu qul fa-tū bi-ʿashri suwarin mithlihim uftarayātin wa-idʿū mani istaṭaʿtum min dūni allāhi in kuntum ṣādiqīna*). Unlike other Qurʾānic references to the term *sūrah*, Q. 11:13 places it in the plural in challenging opponents to produce ten *sūrah*s. This reference to ten *sūrah*s does two important things for reconstructing the definition of the Qurʾānic *sūrah*: it further confirms that a *sūrah* was a recognizable literary form, and it suggests that *sūrah*s had relatively short, stable lengths. Once again, the challenge to the doubters of the Qurʾānic message to "bring ten *sūrah*s" is rhetorical; there is no expectation that they would be successful. But the inability to reproduce a *sūrah* lies in the Qurʾānic revelation's superior literary quality to its imitators, not in the inability of imitations to be produced in the first place. Indeed, the fact that one could be challenged to produce ten *sūrah*s implies that the literary form of the *sūrah* was standardized to some degree; whether this standardization was in length of composition, style, content, etc., can be debated, but it appears clear that the Qurʾānic audience had enough of a conception of a *sūrah* as a literary form that it could be attempted to be replicated in multiples. The choice of ten *sūrah*s, too, suggests that a single *sūrah* was a relatively brief composition; again, the sheer manufacturing of ten *sūrah*s is not the impossible feat—it is the ability of the manufactured *sūrah*s to rival the Qurʾān's literary prowess.

Further evincing the short length of the *sūrah* is the Qurʾān's coupling of the term *sūrah* with specific topics or themes. Three of the ten total occurrences of *sūrah* in the Qurʾān associate *sūrah*s with elaborating specific topics. The three examples are as follows:

Q. 9:64: The hypocrites are afraid lest a *sūrah* be revealed about them informing them of what is in their hearts [*yaḥdharu al-munāfiqūna an tunazzala ʿalayhim sūratun tunabbiʾuhum bi-mā fī qulūbihim*].

Q. 9:86: And when a *sūrah* was revealed to believe in God and strive with his Messenger . . . [*wa-idhā unzilat sūratun an āminū bi-allāhi wa-jāhidū maʿa rasūlihi . . .*].

Q. 47:20: And those who believe say, "Why hasn't a *sūrah* been sent down?" But when a decisive *sūrah* is revealed and fighting is mentioned therein, you see those in whose hearts is sickness regarding you with the look of fainting from death! [*wa-yaqūlu alladhīna āmanū lawlā nuzzilat sūratun fa-idhā unzilat sūratun muḥkamatun wa-dhukira fīhā al-qitālu raʾayta alladhīna fī qulūbihim maraḍun yanẓurūn. ilayka naẓara al-maghshiyi ʿalayhi mina al-mawti*].

Two generalizations can be made from these three examples: first, *sūrah*s could be revealed about specific topics, and second, the topics discussed within *sūrah*s varied. Qurʾān 9:63 threatens to reveal a *sūrah* that "outs" the hypocrites; Q. 9:86 describes a *sūrah* that enjoins belief in God and striving with the messenger; and Q. 47:20 discusses a *sūrah* revealed about battle. This coupling of *sūrah* with specific types of content by no means excludes the possibility of a single *sūrah*'s containing multiple topics, but it does indicate that *sūrah*s could be revealed with the particular purpose of addressing a single topic, whether that be the hypocrites or fighting in the way of God. Equally important is the fact that *sūrah*s could contain different types of content; in the three examples above, there are three different topics linked to the revelation of a *sūrah*. While a *sūrah* may constitute a specific literary form recognizable by the audience of the Qurʾānic revelation, its content was by no means fixed. This phenomenon is perhaps best understood as the literary form of the *sūrah*'s referring to an act of Prophetic revelation to an audience that can be expressed in a variety of genres of discourse.

This discussion of the types of content found within the *sūrah* leads us back to the question of the social function of the *sūrah* as a literary form. While the evidence is far from clear, it is worth exploring the Qurʾān's usage of the verbs "appointed" (*faraḍnā*) and "remember" (*tadhakkarūna*) in Q. 24:1. With reference to *faraḍnā*, there appear to be two major trends in its translation into English: "we have made it obligatory" or "we have enjoined it."[2] Following Arberry's lead, I have translated *faraḍnā* as "we have appointed it [the *sūrah*]" in an effort to downplay the legal connotations of the two previous phrases while underscoring its reference to the *sūrah* as a fixed literary form within which different genres of discourse may be found.[3] The Qurʾānic speaker has appointed, that is, determined a fixed literary form, for the following revelation, and the purpose of the revelation is to prompt the audience to "remember." Much work needs to be done on the relationship between particular expressions of purpose and the genre of the following revelation, but it suffices to say that the *sūrah* referred to in Q. 24:1 is portrayed as having a specific social function: to make its audience "remember" (*tadhakkarūna*). A *sūrah*, as an example of a literary genre, exhibits both a particular literary form and an expressly social function.

But how can we better conceptualize a fixed, brief, literary form in the context of the Qurʾān's revelation? I am arguing here that a *sūrah*, as referenced in the Qurʾān, constitutes an individual instance of Prophetic revelation in time; that is, a *sūrah* corresponds to a single episode of Prophetic communication to an audience, regardless of the specific

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2 In particular see the following translations: Shahih International, Pickthall, Shakir, Muhamad Sarwar, and Mohsin Khan.

3 It should be noted, however, that the subsequent discussion of fornication in Q. 24:2–10 indeed suggests that the particular *sūrah* being referenced in Q. 24:1 is taking the form of a legal injunction.

content contained therein.[4] The literary form of the *sūrah*, therefore, begins with the beginning of speech and ends with the ending of speech.[5] The *sūrah* discussed in the Qurʾān, then, is a Prophetic utterance; it lasts for the duration of a single episode of revelation (whether that be one verse, ten verses, or more) and no longer; the literary form is intertwined with the action of oral performance from the Prophet to an audience.

This reconceptualization of the *sūrah* using a literary analysis of its employment in the Qurʾān does not accommodate *sūrah*'s current definition as one of the 114 chapters of the Qurʾānic corpus. That is, the Qurʾānic *sūrah* is intimately related with the process of revelation, and it is unclear to what extent the configuration of the chapter was tied to the initial communication of the Qurʾānic material to an audience. Again, it cannot be ruled out that the chapter played a role in the literary organization of the Qurʾānic material from the earliest period, but the term *sūrah*, as used in the Qurʾān, suggests a brief and fixed literary form that could be employed in response to a variety of social situations—a suggestion at odds with the dissimilar and often unwieldy chapters of the Qurʾān.

A purely literary analysis of the term *sūrah* can go only so far. A rereading of *sūrah* as it occurs in the Qurʾān offers a speculative redefinition of the term from "chapter" to "short unit of oral proclamation." To corroborate this redefinition, it is necessary to analyze the production of the earliest Qurʾānic manuscripts and, in particular, their methods of delineating between chapters. Is there evidence in the earliest Qurʾānic manuscripts that *sūrah* did not originally mean "chapter"?

PALEOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

While the unit "chapter" is witnessed in the earliest manuscripts of the Qurʾān, the use of the term *sūrah* as a term to designate a chapter appears to be utilized only in secondary revisions of these manuscripts. For an analysis of the paleographic evidence, I will use three Qurʾānic folios containing the opening of chapter 42 (*Sūrat al-Shūrā*). I have selected this chapter because it is in the middle of the Qurʾānic corpus, and, accordingly, a relatively large number of early Qurʾāns contain this chapter. The three folios under investigation appear in figures 12.1–12.3.[6]

The dating of these three Qurʾānic folios is not firmly established, although it appears that all three examples predate 800 CE.[7] As the precise dating of the manuscripts is beyond the scope of this project, it suffices to say that they are all representative of Umayyad or early Abbasid Qurʾānic production. An analysis of the division between chapters 41 and 42 in each of these folios establishes three trends in the production of early manuscripts of the Qurʾān: (1) the literary unit "chapter" appears original to the manuscripts, (2) the spatial division between chapters appears to have first been blank space that was only later filled with

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4 For further discussion of the original form of Qurʾānic revelation, see Flowers, "Two Medinan Literary Oeuvres."

5 "Speech" here is referring more generally to an act of communication, be it oral or written.

6 Corpus Coranicum, "Berlin, Staatsbibliothek"; Corpus Coranicum, "Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France"; Corpus Coranicum, "Gotthelf-Bergsträßer-Archiv."

7 See the specific citations for each manuscript listed above for information about potential datings, including carbon-dating analyses.
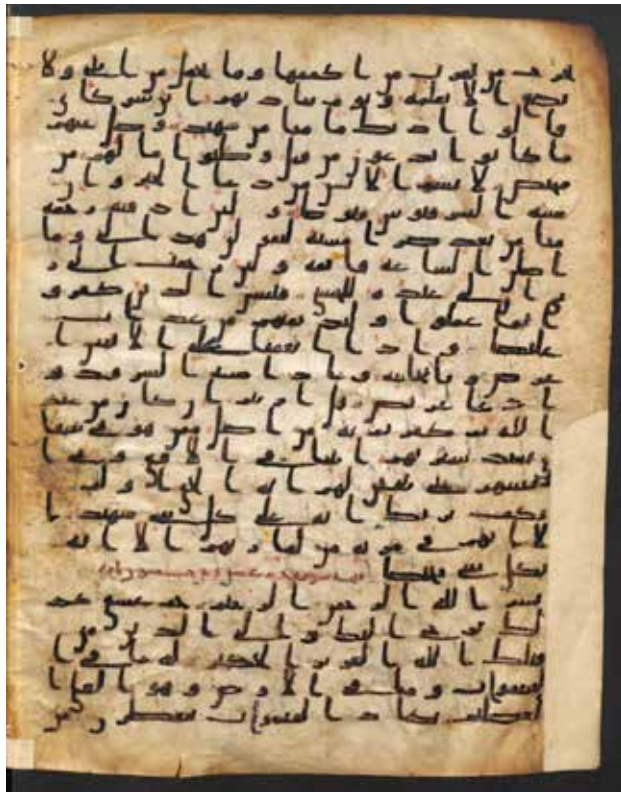
Figure 12.1. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek: Wetzstein II 1913 (Ahlwardt 305) Folio 165v.

decoration or a title, and (3) the addition of the term *sūrah* in titling the chapter is a secondary revision (perhaps completed at the same time vowel markings were added to the text).

Beginning with the unit "chapter" itself, each folio demonstrates that at the time of the initial production of the manuscript, the chapter was an established literary division complete with its own literary conventions. Each one of the three examples shows a clear ending to chapter 41 evinced by a spatial break between the final word of chapter 41, *muḥīṭ*, and the opening *basmalah* of chapter 42. In the case of the Paris and Istanbul folios, this line break was later filled in with a decorative pattern. Following the end of the previous chapter and the blank space, each chapter opens with the *basmalah*, then proceeds to begin the chapter by invoking a set of disembodied letters. That the *basmalah* is a literary convention for opening a Qurʾānic chapter is indicated by its occurrence at the beginning of the chapter in each of these three examples and its employment at the beginning of chapters across the Qurʾānic corpus. Chapter 42 is separated from the previous chapter and is therefore established as its own chapter by means of its spatial relationship to the previous chapter *and* the occurrence of the *basmalah* immediately following the spatial break. The evidence in the three examples above indicates that the chapter, as a literary division, was an established convention by the time of the production of each manuscript.

Turning to the divisions between chapters themselves, the primary spatial division between chapters in the earliest manuscripts of the Qurʾān was a blank space that during

Figure 12.2. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France: Arabe 335, Folio 8r.

Figure 12.3. Gotthelf-Bergsträßer-Archiv: "Saray Medina 1a" (Istanbul, Topkapi Sarayi Müzesi: M1) Folio 228r.

a later period of revisions was filled in with decoration or additional writing. If we begin with the Berlin manuscript, it is evident that the additional writing in red ink located between the black ink of the two chapters (to be discussed in more detail below) was not original to the production of the manuscript; the hand appears different, and the red ink very much resembles that used in the vowel markings applied to the *rasm*. Without the later addition of the title, the manuscript would have had only a blank space and the subsequent *basmalah* to alert the audience to the beginning of a new chapter.

The Paris folio, however, exhibits an intricate decorative band filling the blank space between chapters 41 and 42. That this green, purple, and yellow decorative band is posterior to the folio's initial production is evinced by its resemblance to the red and green square added in the top right corner between the words ʿarīḍ and *qul* of Q. 41:51 and 52, respectively. This colorful flourish to the verse division is deliberately shaped according to the preceding and following words: the right side of the shape of the flourish curves around the final ḍ of ʿarīḍi, and the green outline cuts straight through the *q* of the following *qul*. If this flourish was original to the writing of the *rasm*, it is unclear why it would appear shoehorned between two existing words. Additionally, the original form of verse division—a rhombus—can be seen in the text. These rhombuses both match the ink color of the *rasm* and are nicely positioned between two verses, without the overlap seen in the previously discussed addition. The similarity in color and design between the decorative band in between chapters and the later verse marker indicate that the decorative band is itself a later addition. The decorative band, then, is occupying the original blank space between the two chapters, much as is the additional writing in the Berlin folio.

Lastly, the Istanbul folio exhibits the same phenomenon witnessed in the two previous examples. Similarly to what we see in the Berlin folio, about half a line of space is left between the end of Q. 42:54 and the end of the line. But instead of adding more writing in this space, as seen in the Berlin folio, a decorative banner similar to that in the Paris folio is added between the chapters in the Istanbul folio. It stands to reason, then, that all three folios evince an original blank space between Qurʾānic chapters—space that was only later filled in with decoration or additional writing.

The addition of writing between chapters—specifically, the attribution of the term *sūrah* to the chapter along with a title and enumeration of component verses—occurred during this secondary revision of the manuscripts, further evinced by its often-irregular placement between chapters. In particular, if we examine the titling of chapter 42 in the Paris folio, it becomes clear that this titling is a later addition to the manuscript. Written carefully between the decorative band and the beginning of chapter 42 is the title: "The opening of *Sūrat* ʿsq, and it is fifty verses" (*fātihat sūrat* ʿsq *wa-hiya khamsīna āyah*). The most striking peculiarity of this title is the name given to the chapter. Chapter 42, which later becomes standardized as *Sūrat al-Shūrā*, is here labeled *Sūrat* ʿsq, in reference to the second set of disembodied letters *ayn sīn qāf* in verse 2. While it is not unusual for early manuscripts to title chapters based on the opening verse of the chapter, here it is unusual that the disembodied letters (letters not forming a normal word) of the first verse, ḥāmīm, are left out of the title.[8]

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8 While this omission can be explained with reference to the other Qurʾānic chapters beginning with the letters ḥāmīm, the fact that they are omitted from the title may suggest an early conception of the ḥāmīm

What is immediately noticeable is the shoehorning of this title between the decorative banner above and the beginning of chapter 42 below. In small black script, the title is written between the extended *alif*s and *lām*s of the *basmalah* below. It appears that this title was added as a secondary clarification; although it was originally clear that a new chapter started, it may not have been clear which chapter it was. A similar addition of a title can be witnessed in the Berlin folio, while the Istanbul folio omits a title altogether. During a secondary revision process of the original manuscript of the Qurʾān, the term *sūrah* was used to designate the following chapter, further introduced by a specific title and an indication of its number of verses.

There are two conceivable reasons for this later application of the term *sūrah*: either it was not scribal practice to title the openings of chapters with the term *sūrah* despite *sūrah*'s already meaning "Qurʾānic chapter" at the time of the initial production of the manuscripts, or the term *sūrah* had not come to mean "Qurʾānic chapter" at the time of the manuscripts' original production and was only added to the manuscripts later, when the definition of *sūrah* had evolved from "Prophetic utterance" to "Qurʾānic chapter." It is my contention that this manuscript evidence, when viewed in the light of the Qurʾān's employment of the term *sūrah* as "Prophetic utterance," indicates that the second explanation is accurate.

FROM UTTERANCE TO CHAPTER

The evolution of the term *sūrah* from designating a Prophetic utterance to a Qurʾānic chapter corresponds to the increased production of Qurʾānic manuscripts. As demonstrated by an analysis of the earliest Qurʾānic manuscripts, the literary unit "chapter" appears to have been established at the time of the manuscripts' initial production, but the titling of the chapters, and more relevantly the categorization of each chapter as a *sūrah*, occurred at a secondary stage subsequent to the original production of the manuscripts. While the earliest manuscripts of the Qurʾān witness the Qurʾānic chapters familiar to us today, they did not appear initially to equate "chapter" with *sūrah*. Indeed, the Qurʾān utilizes the term *sūrah* to describe an established literary form of Prophetic revelation that was relatively short and varied in its topics of discourse. *Sūrah* does not, however, appear to denote "chapter" in the Qurʾān. How, then, can we account for the evolution of *sūrah* from denoting an utterance to a chapter?

This shift in definition does not mean that the Qurʾānic definition of *sūrah* as a Prophetic utterance was lost or forgotten; rather, the Qurʾānic chapters came to be considered the original units of Prophetic communication and were subsequently classified as *sūrah*s. This shift in recognition of the mode of Prophetic communication—from the short instances of oral performance by the Prophet to an audience, to a chapter of the Qurʾānic corpus—occurs precisely because of the early codification of the Qurʾān in writing. If, as is argued here, these originally independent instances of Prophetic communication were compiled to form the Qurʾān's 114 chapters, evidence of each unit's original independence and self-sufficiency is lost, as soon it is written down as smaller portion of a larger whole,

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chapters as constituting a defined group. On the debate over the "disembodied" or "mysterious" letters, see A. T. Welch, "Al-Ḳurʾān," *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd ed.), section 4.d.

namely, the chapter. What were once individual Prophetic utterances revealed at different times and in response to different situations become paragraphs within a secondary literary construction. The chapter appears as an original, authorial construction with subsections, as opposed to originally independent revelations.

Crucially, once the process of collecting and composing Qurʾānic chapters has taken place, the chapter appears as the original unit of Prophetic revelation. As soon as individual prophetic utterances are brought together to form a composite chapter, their explicit beginnings and ends disappear; only a literary analysis of the Qurʾānic text may reveal typical forms of opening and closing speech that may indicate the beginnings and endings of originally independent communications. With the construction of the chapter, all that remains is the beginning of the chapter, the ending of the chapter, and the divisions between individual verses; no longer are there any explicit divisions between individual Prophetic utterances. Once compiled, chapters appear as original literary constructions and not a compilation of individual parts. In this way, as the earliest manuscripts of the Qurʾān are produced and arranged into chapters, little evidence remains of the Qurʾān's earlier form as individual Prophetic utterances, or *sūrah*s.

An audience receiving a manuscript of the Qurʾān, then, assumes that the received text and its arrangement into 114 chapters is the original form of the Qurʾānic revelation. The original layouts of the manuscripts analyzed in this study would have been chapters with only spatial divisions between them—divisions devoid of decoration or labeling. The standardized *basmalah* at the beginning of Qurʾānic chapters further reinforces the notion that the chapter is an original literary form, since each chapter begins in the same manner. As the Qurʾān was codified in writing, so too was the unit "chapter" solidified as the original literary form of the Qurʾānic revelation. Further evidence of the importance of writing in the titling of chapters is the addition of the number of verses contained in the chapter as part of the title; the enumeration and cataloging of verses becomes relevant primarily in the context of the copying of a written document.

Believing the chapters to be the original mode of Qurʾānic revelation, early readers would have turned to Qurʾānic terminology to classify the chapters in a process labeled by Fred Donner as "Qurʾanicization."[9] As we have seen in the literary analysis of the term *sūrah* in the Qurʾān, it is clear that the Qurʾān conceives of the *sūrah* as the literary form in which the Qurʾān was revealed to an audience, and, because the Qurʾān had been codified in writing and divided into chapters, the chapters appeared to a post-Qurʾānic audience as the literary form in which the Qurʾān was revealed. In this way, the term *sūrah* was correctly interpreted as the literary form of Qurʾānic revelation, but it was applied to the secondary composition of the chapter and not the individual instances of oral performance. Because this terminological shift was precipitated by continued Qurʾānic manuscript production, this shift was not instantaneous. The production of Qurʾānic manuscripts that consolidated the revelatory corpus into 114 chapters caused a gradual shift in the understanding of the original unit of Prophetic communication from "small unit of oral proclamation" ("Prophetic utterance") to Qurʾānic "chapter." The classification of each of the Qurʾān's chapters as a *sūrah* is, accordingly, seen in the paleographic evidence to be a secondary revision to a previously extant manuscript.

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9 Donner, "Qurʾanicization of Religio-Political Discourse."

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL EVIDENCE

By way of conclusion, it may be fruitful to discuss the terminological shift of the term *sūrah* in the light of the Islamic historiographical and exegetical traditions. While not being used as a principal source of evidence for the original definition of *sūrah* as a small unit of oral revelation, this new definition is amenable to traditional accounts of the construction of Qurʾānic chapters. In his introduction to his *tafsīr*, al-Ṭabarī discusses the process by which the Prophet received revelation and formed Qurʾānic chapters: "And when something would be revealed to him, he called to some of those who were writing, and he would say, 'Place these verses in the *sūrah* in which is mentioned such and such'" (*fa-kāna idhā nazala ʿalayhi al-shayʾu daʿā bi-baʿḍi man kāna yaktubu fa-yaqūlu ḍaʿū hāʾulāʾi al-āyāti fī al-sūrah allatī yudhkaru fīhā kadhā wa-kadhā*).[10] By the time this report was transmitted by al-Ṭabarī in the third century AH, *sūrah* had already come to be defined as a Qurʾānic "chapter." This report, however, suggests that at least some of the Qurʾānic chapters are composites of individual pieces of revelation. If we read this report in conjunction with the argument for the transformation of the definition of *sūrah* argued here, the similarities of the two accounts can be seen. If the phrase "these verses" is replaced with *sūrah* and *sūrah* is replaced with "chapter," a narrative emerges that directly reflects the process of revelation suggested by the literary and paleographic evidence: a group of verses (*sūrah*) is revealed and subsequently placed into a larger, composite chapter.

CONCLUSION

Writing plays a fundamental, if oftentimes hidden, role in how scripture is interpreted. As a primarily oral text that was codified into writing at a relatively early date, the Qurʾān exists on the precipice between oral and written culture. As demonstrated above, the shift in the Qurʾān's transmission from oral to written posed a series of new challenges. Content that was revealed in an oral environment and in a piecemeal fashion was transformed when it was compiled into lengthy, written chapters. The term *sūrah*, so fundamental to understanding the organization of the Qurʾān, was perhaps the term most affected by the Qurʾān's transition from an oral utterance to a written text.

The definition of *sūrah* as one of 114 Qurʾānic chapters has become so entrenched in the minds of adherents and scholars alike that an attempt to redefine the term seems far-fetched. When literary, paleographic, and historiographical evidence is considered, however, the definition of *sūrah* as Qurʾānic "chapter" is undermined. The employment of the term *sūrah* in the Qurʾān appears to denote a short, fixed literary form of Prophetic communication that could be revealed in response to a wide variety of issues and concerns. In the earliest Qurʾānic manuscript tradition available to us, the use of the term *sūrah* to title a Qurʾānic chapter is not original to the initial production of the manuscripts but part of a secondary revision process. Only once the Qurʾān was written down and disseminated could the literary division of the chapter have been considered the primary literary form of Prophetic revelation, and this gradual process is reflected in the addition of *sūrah* to describe each Qurʾānic chapter only at a later period of manuscript revision.

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10 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, p. 98.

In the context of Western scholarship on the structure of the Qurʾān, these conclusions undermine the *original* structural unity of the *sūrah*s but not the intentionality of their composition. The work of Wansbrough, Bell, Neuwirth, and Mir on the composition and unity of the Qurʾān's *sūrah*s offers a useful backdrop for the conclusions of the present study.[11] The strongest proponents against the *sūrah*'s being (as chapter) the original unit of revelation include John Wansbrough and Richard Bell, and to a large extent the conclusions of this study support their arguments. Wansbrough calls the Qurʾān a "composite" created from Prophetic *logia*, and Bell describes the collection of the Qurʾān as a "putting together of the small units in which the revelation originally came."[12] Certainly, this vision of the Qurʾān in which the chapters are heterogeneous constructions made from the compilation of the original units of revelation accords with the argument of this study; these units of revelation were the units to which the original meaning of the term *sūrah* referred.

The redefinition of *sūrah* does not, however, imply that the Qurʾān's chapters are unintentional compositions. On the other end of the scholarly spectrum, Angelika Neuwirth and Mustansir Mir privilege the *sūrah*'s structural and thematic unity; Neuwirth argues that "the vast majority of the sūras are neatly composed texts that may be understood to constitute a literary genre in themselves."[13] Ostensibly, the idea that the Qurʾān's chapters are composed from short, originally independent units of revelation undermines any sense of thematic or exegetical coherence; but this is not the case. This study demonstrates, instead, that the Qurʾān's chapters were formed from smaller revelatory units and completed at an early date with only the redefinition of the term *sūrah* developing over time. Even if the chapters are composed from smaller units, it does not preclude the fact that these smaller units were combined in an orderly and intentional manner. Just as an editor carefully constructs a volume, so too did the Qurʾānic compiler construct the Qurʾān's chapters. In a general sense, the redefinition of the Qurʾānic term *sūrah* as proposed in this paper sits squarely within the contours of the modern debate surrounding the Qurʾān's original structure.

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11 Wansbrough, *Qurʾanic Studies*; Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qurʾān*; Neuwirth, "Structural, Linguistic and Literary Features"; Mir, *Coherence in the Qurʾān*.

12 Wansbrough, *Qurʾanic Studies*, p. 44; Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qurʾān*, p. 89.

13 Neuwirth, "Structural, Linguistic and Literary Features," p. 97.

13 The Adversarial Clansman in Qur'ānic Narrative and Early Muslim Antipatrimonialism

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THE QUR'ĀNIC STORIES OF NOAH, Moses, and Abraham contain the motif of the adversarial clansman. In each account, the prophet betrays his clansman, one who expects the prophet's solidarity on the basis of a shared patrimony. The prophet and his clansman are adversaries, and the prophet's betrayal of his adversary demonstrates his devotion to God.[1] In this article, I trace the motif of the adversarial clansman in Qur'ānic narratives of Noah and his son, Moses and Pharaoh, and Abraham and Azar. I argue that the motif is evidence of a pietistic community-building strategy of the early Muslims. I use *early Muslims* here to refer only to the historical "first audience" of the Qur'ān in seventh-century Arabia. The motif reflects the early Muslims' disavowal of clan fidelity as the basis of internal communal cohesion. For them piety, not patrimony, was the ascendant principle of allegiance and authority. The believers owed their loyalty first to the prophet and his community of believers—the *ummah*—and second to their families, clans, and tribes. The *ummah* itself was not a family, a clan, or a tribe, nor was its leader, the prophet, a clan chief.[2] The early Muslims' loyalty to their prophet and his community was based on a shared fear of God's judgment, not on the bonds of patrimony.[3]

The motif of the adversarial clansmen is evidence of a distinctive feature of early Muslim pietism, namely, antipatrimonialism. Antipatrimonialism denotes a desacralized view of the patriline, demotes clan-based solidarities, and devalues patrimony as the basis of authority. Antipatrimonialism pertains specifically to patrilineal ties among all

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1 See especially Fred Donner's argument that, for the Qur'ānic community, piety was more important than "tribal or family affiliation, historical associations, or claims based on property, class, ethnicity, etc." in *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, p. 98. On early Muslim piety and its legitimating function, see especially pp. 64–97 and 98–103.

2 Whereas the early Muslims may have behaved like a clan in relation to other clans, they did not imagine their own collectivity in agnatic terms. See Watt's description of how the *ummah* document is "rooted in the mentality of pre-Islamic Arabia" in Watt, *Islamic Political Thought*, pp. 5–6. Also see Serjeant, "Ḥaram and Ḥawṭah," p. 49, and Denny, "Ummah in the Constitution of Medina," p. 46.

3 The early Muslims imagined themselves as those who were "faithful with" (*allaḏīna āmanū ma'*) the scripture-bearing emissary. In other words, they believed in him and recognized his authority to arbitrate disputes among them. This self-designation appears throughout the Qur'ān: Q. 2:214, 249; 7:88; 9:88; 11:40, 58, 66, 94; 40:25; and 66:8. A variation of the formula with the infix "and struggle [with]" (*wa-jāhadū [ma']*) appears in Q. 8:75 and 9:86.

the various kinds of kinship relations. Hence, while Qurʾānic language about patrimony is overwhelmingly negative, its communitarian language about ties based in clientage (*wilāyah*), motherhood (*umūmah*), siblinghood (*uḫuwwah*), and bondage (*ʿubūdiyyah*) is neutral or even positive. One notable example is the designation of Muḥammad's wives as the community's "mothers" (*ummahātuhum*; Q. 33:6) and, simultaneously, the designation of Muḥammad himself as "not the father of [its] men" (Q. 33:40).[4] The term *antipatrimonialism* calls attention to the early Muslims' opposition to the social ordering of power through the movement of patrimony (*mīrāṯ*) between fathers and sons.[5]

The Qurʾānic accounts of Pharaoh, Azar, and Noah's son are stories about the dissolution of clans in the face of God's judgment and of the triumph of piety over patrimony as the basis of the salvific collective. For the Arabians of the Qurʾān's historical context, patrimony was the primary and immutable basis of social power and order. As Toshihiko Izutsu notes, legitimacy and honor received through the patrimony of one's male progenitors "may be said to represent the only possible guide to moral conduct in [the pre-Qurʾānic Arabian] tribal pattern of society."[6] Clan fidelity and patrimonial piety, meaning devotion to the patrimonial cult, were universally recognized as virtuous in the diverse urban populations of cities such as Mecca, Yathrib, and Taif. This population included monotheistic scripturalist communities—Arabian Jews and Christians—whose communities were organized as patrilineal segments in a manner virtually indistinguishable from other Arabian clans. For these communities, the movement of patrimony between fathers and sons was also the chief metaphor of salvation. Patrimony, in the fatherhood–sonhood of God's people in the case of "Israel" or in the fatherhood–sonhood of God in the case of the "church," was a prominent component of the communal self-imagining of monotheistic scripturalists in the Qurʾān's environment and a consistent object of Qurʾānic polemic against Judaism and Christianity. In their rejection of patrimony as an organizing or theological principle, the early Muslims were distinct from other interpretive communities of the Hebrew Bible in seventh-century Arabia. The motif of the adversarial clansmen in Qurʾānic retellings of biblical accounts provides clues about this subversive or divergent element of early Muslim scripturalism.[7] It also points to historical tensions between the early Muslims' pietistic movement and the agnatically construed communities—families, clans, tribes—in its orbit. Such tensions are evident in early Muslim historical literature's depictions of Muḥammad and his followers' estrangement, separation, and eventual conflict with their native clans, especially the Quraysh.

In this essay, I show how Qurʾānic imagery associated with the motif of the adversarial clansman provides clues about the antipatrimonial and pietistic tendencies of the early Muslims' communitarian movement. I argue that the drowning of Noah's son represents the dissolution of the prophet's clan in the face of God's judgment, the villainy of Pharaoh and Azar points to the transgressive authority of clan chiefs opposed to prophecy, and Moses's

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4 It has been suggested that the term *ummah* had a basis in matrilineal or matrimonial structures of communal organization among Arabians of a more distant past, but the homonymy may be coincidental. See especially Smith, *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia*, pp. 32 and 202, and Massignon, "L'umma et ses synonymes," p. 152.

5 See Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qurʾān*, p. 62.

6 Ibid., 63.

7 On pietism and scripturalism in late antiquity, see especially Stroumsa, *End of Sacrifice*, pp. 57–84.

and Abraham's betrayal of their clans and their patrimony emulates pious action motivated by prophecy. The motif of the adversarial clansman illuminates the community-forming and boundary-making rhetoric of the early Muslim movement. My observations in this chapter rely on three points of agreement in scholarship on the Qurʾānic narratives of Noah's son, Pharaoh, and Azar. First, these narratives are typological, and their protagonists represent minimally differentiated iterations of the same archetypes, not entirely discrete configurations.[8] Second, the typological function of these narratives—that is, their thinly veiled mirroring of the experience and circumstance of the early Muslims—is most fully developed in the so-called "punishment legends" (*Strafelegenden*) of the late Meccan period.[9] Last, the late Meccan period is characterized by an overarching concern for communal consolidation, evidenced by the salience of the religio-political term *ummah* in the late Meccan *sūrah*s.[10] Given its typological nature, the motif of the adversarial clansman encapsulates an element of the early Muslims' collective self-image as an *ummah*: an intentional, salvific community that transcended the boundaries of clans and supplanted the belonging of blood.

THE DISSOLUTION OF NOAH'S CLAN

The motif of the adversarial clansman appears prominently in the Qurʾānic account of Noah's flood. As Noah looks on, his unrighteous son drowns in a "mountainous wave" (*mawjin ka-l-jibāl*; Q. 11:42). Noah pleads to God for his adversarial clansmen—"He is my son, he is my kin!"—but to no avail. God's judgment estranges Noah from his patriline: "He is not of your kin" (*innahu laysa min ahlika*; Q. 11:46). The forceful image of the filicidal wave illustrates that the prophet's son has no patrimonial claim on his salvific estate. In other words, a son does not inherit his father's salvation.[11] The inability to transfer salvific merit (or demerit) through patrimony was a core belief of the early Muslims. For them, neither goodness nor wickedness could be imputed through blood. The inability of Noah's son to be saved through his father's merit reflects the dissolution of the blood-based clan as the object of God's judgment. The same idea is echoed in the antipatrimonial caveat in God's covenant with Abraham: "My covenant shall not extend to the unrighteous [among your progeny]" (Q. 2:124). The drowning of Noah's unrighteous progeny confirmed the early Muslims' belief that the clan was not the vessel of salvation. Before the judgment of God, patrimony imparted neither advantage nor disadvantage, not even to a prophet's

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8 On typology in Qurʾānic narrative, see Neuwirth, "Locating the Quran," and *Scripture, Poetry, and Making of a Community*, pp. 67–69. Also see Zwettler, "Mantic Manifesto," and Busse, "Herrschertypen im Koran."

9 On the typological function of the so-called "punishment legends," suggested already by Horovitz, Paret, and Newby, see especially Welch, "Formulaic Features"; Stewart, "Understanding the Quran in English"; and Marshall, *God, Muhammad and Unbelievers*, pp. 33–37.

10 The term *ummah* appears 34 times in passages designated late Meccan in Nöldeke-Schwally's chronology—more than all the other occurrences of the term in other *sūrah*s combined. On transformations in communal rhetoric in later Meccan *sūrah*s, see Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and Making of a Community*, pp. 60–64. Also see Nöldeke et al., *History of the Qurʾan*, pp. 117–67.

11 See Stewart's description of the wave in Q. 11 in Azaiez et al., *Qurʾan Seminar Commentary*, p. 165.

progeny. In other words, unlike the bonds of the *ummah*, the bonds of the clan had no salvific consequence whatsoever.

The narrative image of the mountainous wave separating Noah from his drowning son can be understood as a version of the eschatological image of clan dissolution. In the Qurʾānic portrayal of the end times, it will be "a day when man will flee from his clansman [lit., 'brother'], from his mother and from his father, from his spouse and from his sons" (Q. 80:34–36). The clan, the early Muslims believed, would unravel before God's accounting on the Day of Judgment. Only collectives rooted in piety would survive the judgment of God and "be honored in the garden" (Q. 7:35). The image of clan dissolution in an early Meccan *sūrah* (Q. 70) frames a set of six definitions of pious believers (Q. 70:22–35) as a community. The definitions lay out the boundaries of the communal insiders in pietistic terms, for example, "those who are chaste" (*allaḏīna hum li-furūjihim ḥāfiẓūn*; Q. 70:29). While the believers will be resurrected to face God's judgment among other believers, the clans of the disbelievers will disintegrate: "The criminal will try to save himself from the wrath [of God] by [selling] his sons in ransom, his partner, his clansman, and the kinfolk that raised him" (*faṣīlatihi allatī tuʾwīhi*; Q. 70:8–13). In opposition to the corruptible clan, the believers appear as members of a collective that will survive God's judgment and achieve salvation together. The "inverted image of clan solidarity"[12] that accompanies the communal appellations could be taken as evidence of the early Muslims' individuated sense of moral responsibility. For example, Izutsu sees the image of clan dissolution as a call to a "new religio-political society" based on "individual humanism."[13] I would stress, however, that the image of clan dissolution also encapsulates a prescriptive *collectivist* ethos. It is an implicit affirmation of a subversive communal formation not based in blood but in pious action (*ʿamal al-ṣāliḥāt*). The drowning of Noah's adversarial clansman is not a disavowal of kinship altogether; rather, it signals the demotion of patrimony as the primary cohesive element in the community of believers.

God's rebuke to Noah comes in the context of the prophet's pleading with God about his drowned, unrighteous son: "Do not ask me about that of which you have no knowledge" (Q. 11:45). Noah's expression of fatherly love—"He is my son, he is my kin!"—is, in the words of God, "a deed unrighteous" (*innahu ʿamalun ġayru ṣāliḥ*; Q. 11:46). God warns that solidarity with his drowned clansman will land Noah among "the ignorant" (*al-jāhilīn*; Q. 11:46), and the prophet repents: "My master, I seek refuge in you from asking you about that of which I have no knowledge" (Q. 11:47). Noah's repentance affirms the early Muslims' aversion to the expression of blood-based loyalties with those outside the salvific boundaries of the *ummah*.[14] The early Muslims were prohibited from "seek[ing] exoneration for the Apportioners [of God's unity], even if they are the most proximate to them [by blood]" (*ūlī al-qurbā*; Q. 9:113). They believed that the "people faithful to God" were called to break from their impious clansmen and ignore the expectations of clan fidelity.

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12 Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and Making of a Community*, p. 57.

13 Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qurʾān*, p. 62. See also Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and Making of a Community*, p. 55.

14 Gabriel Reynolds notes that Noah's repentance suggests "that believers should not pray for family members who are unbelievers" (in Azaiez et al., *Qurʾan Seminar Commentary*, p. 165). Neal Robinson also observes that Noah's lament "probably mirrors the anguish of the Muslims who left relatives behind when they migrated to Yathrib" (Robinson, *Discovering the Qurʾan*, p. 156).

They were not even to lament for their slain unrighteous kinsmen, as Noah had done, for the righteous "had no love" for the unrighteous, "even if they are their fathers or their sons or their brethren or their clans" (*wa-law kānū ābāʾahum aw abnāʾahum aw iḫwānahum aw ʿašīratahum*; Q. 58:22).

The drowning of Noah's son subverts the normative expectations of a society organized around the cohering and legitimating logic of patrimony. Not only does Noah's unrighteous clansman not benefit salvifically from his patrilineal proximity to the prophet, but neither is his death mourned by the prophet as the death of a kinsman. The adversarial clansman was outside Noah's salvific kin, which comprised those "who entered into [his] household as believers, the believing men and the believing women" (*man daḫala baytī muʾminan li-l-muʾminīn wa-l-muʾmināt*; Q. 71:28). The members of the *ummah* were intentional kin—a community forged in common belief. The Qurʾānic description of Noah's community reflects the early Muslims' communal self-image as a collective forged in common belief that stood above the differences of patrimony and the distinctions of clans.

The motif of the adversarial clansman encapsulates a positive notion, a *politics*, about alternative forms of community or kinship, which would order and structure what Angelika Neuwirth describes as the "ideal city."[15] The Qurʾānic imagery of clan dissolution, such as the wave that kills Noah's son, is communitarian rhetoric. It is language that explains and legitimates the creation of a prophetic community. Hence, when Noah repents from his lamentation for his unrighteous clansman, he is instructed: "O Noah! Disembark [now] with Our peace and blessings upon you and upon the communities [*umam*] [that will emerge] from those who are with you" (Q. 11:48). While Noah's son perishes in the flood, the earth is repopulated by his intentional kin, meaning "those who are with [him]" in pious struggle and common belief.[16] They make up the prophetic community, the city that "stands" (*qāʾimun*; Q. 11:101), whose members are unencumbered by the preexisting gradations and hierarchies of patrimony.

The story of Noah's son reflects the early Muslims' subversive redrawing of communal boundaries in a social context dominated by the cohering force of patrimonialism. The image of clan dissolution in the Qurʾānic retelling of the biblical story promoted a "new and disturbing"[17] vision of virtue in lieu of clan fidelity. The motif of the adversarial clansman—the unrighteous clansman deprived of the pious believers' solidarity and love—reflects the demotion of patrimony as the organizing logic and metaphor of the insider community. The early Muslims did not consider themselves a clan. Indeed, as a social organism, the *ummah* excluded disbelieving individuals who had patrimonial ties to insiders. The early Muslims were not only to sever spiritual bonds with their outsider clansmen, they were also to minimize their material entanglements: "Do not appoint your fathers and your brothers as custodians [of your affairs] [*awliyāʾ*] if they prefer disbelief to belief" (Q. 9:23). The killing of Noah's son signals the dissolution of Noah's clan and its replacement with a salvific kinship.

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15 Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and Making of a Community*, p. 42.

16 See Abraham Geiger's explanation of the drowning of Noah's son as Muḥammad's confusion about the postdiluvian transgression of Ham in Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, p. 86.

17 Marshall, *God, Muhammad and Unbelievers*, p. 34.

The motif of the adversarial clansman provides evidence of the early Muslims' historical development as a pietistic, supra-clan community and their self-image as an *ummah*. The portrayal of the drowning of Noah's son narrativizes the image of clan dissolution and is an example of communitarian rhetoric. It subverts the normative expectations of clan fidelity and undermines the supremacy of patrimony as a cohering force in the Qurʾān's historical environment. The Qurʾānic story of Noah's son deploys biblical imagery to promote a particular Arabian program of scriptural community building and boundary making. This antipatrimonial retelling of the biblical account represents what Neuwirth describes as "the biblicization of Arabian knowledge and the Arabization of biblical lore"[18] in the early Muslim movement. Through the hermeneutic device of typology, the Qurʾānic iteration of the widely known account of Noah reflects and affirms the antipatrimonial attitudes of the Arabian early Muslims. The early Muslims saw themselves prefigured in the Qurʾānic accounts as Noah's intentional kin, ones "who [had] entered into [the prophet's] household as believers" (Q. 71:28). The drowning of Noah's son illustrates that the prophet was not their clan chief or patriarch. Their loyalty to him and to each other was based in piety alone.

PHARAOH AND AZAR AS CLAN CHIEFS

The motif of the adversarial clansman can be found in the Qurʾānic portrayal of Pharaoh as a clan chief. Pharaoh appears as an adversarial father figure whose relationship with the prophet Moses is based on a patrimonial claim. The Qurʾānic Moses appears as a member of Pharaoh's clan after his wife "take[s] him as a son" (Q. 28:9).[19] When the prophet rises up against Pharaoh, the patriarch reminds him of fidelity to the clan: "Have we not raised you up in our midst since [you were] a baby (*walīdan*)? You have been in our midst most of the years of your life!" (Q. 26:18). Hence Moses's disloyalty to Pharaoh appears as the upending of clan fidelity. Like Noah, Moses is separated from the "family that raised him" (Q. 70:13) in the face of God's judgment. As Reynolds notes, the Qurʾānic retelling of Exodus is motivated by an antipatrimonial attitude, namely, that "faithfulness to God should come before faithfulness to one's family."[20] Unlike with Noah, Moses's adversarial clansman is not his son but his father.

In the Qurʾān, the "House of Pharaoh" (*āl firʿawn*) appears as a clan, led by a clan chief. Moses appears as a subordinate member of Pharaoh's clan, which includes some who are faithful to God (Q. 40:28) and others who are faithful only to the clan chief, who is an "adversary and antagonist" (Q. 28:8). The earliest appearance of the "House of Pharaoh" is in the middle Meccan *sūrah*[21] Q. 54, where it receives an emissary: "Warning [*al-nuḏur*] came to the House of Pharaoh" (Q. 54:41). The latest reference appears in a Medinan *sūrah*, where the actions of communal outsiders are described as being "like the custom of the House of Pharaoh" (*ka-daʾbi āli firʿawn*; Q. 8:52 and 54; see also Q. 3:11).

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18 Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and Making of a Community*, p. 171.

19 Moses is not the clandestine adoptee of Pharaoh's daughter as he is in Exodus (Ex. 2:5–10).

20 Reynolds, "Moses, Son of Pharaoh," p. 297.

21 According to the Nöldeke-Schwally chronology.

Pharaoh appears as the patriarch of this house, or clan, and Moses as an insubordinate son. This is an inverted image of the tension between Noah and his son but with the same religio-political meaning. Pharaoh's paternity is a key component of his portrayal in the Qurʾān. As Reynolds notes, "the Qurʾānic author's very purpose [for such a portrayal] is to have a confrontation between father and son, that is, to have Moses choose his obligation to God above his obligation to his father."[22] Moreover, the configuration of Pharaoh as Moses's villainous father figure or clan chief is highlighted in Q. 28 by the presence of two mother figures who appear as instruments of God's plan for the father and son. As Pharaoh's wife saves Moses, so too does Moses's mother, who is inspired by God that her son "will be restored to her as an emissary" (Q. 28:7). These two antitypes to Pharaoh—the two maternal figures—thus deliver God's emissary to where he can repudiate Pharaoh, the clan chief: "Thus he was raised up [*altaqaṭahu*] by the House of Pharaoh, only to become their adversary and antagonist" (Q. 28:8). The Qurʾān is clear that Pharaoh, the leader of the "House of Pharaoh," demands Moses's obedience to his sacralized paternal authority: "Pharaoh said: 'O patricians! I know of no other god of yours other than myself'" (Q. 28:38). The depiction of Moses's break from the "House of Pharaoh" hence legitimated the early Muslims' own abandonment of clan fidelity. Pharaoh's expectation of Moses's obedience, like Azar's expectation of Abraham's obedience, rests in a normative expectation of clan cohesion and solidarity that the prophet upends.

The Qurʾān's portrayal of Pharaoh as an adversarial clan chief is mirrored in its portrayal of Azar, the father of Abraham.[23] Like Moses, Abraham rebels against his clan chief Azar and rejects his patrimony, namely, the received wisdom and cultic emblems of Azar's forefathers. The paired figures of Pharaoh and Azar represent the adversarial clan chief, who opposes the prophet through recourse to patrilineal hierarchy. Pharaoh and Azar, as clan chiefs, stand opposite the paired figures of Moses and Abraham, who appear as clan traitors, rebellious sons, or insubordinate subordinates. The Qurʾān's depiction of Moses and Abraham as antipatrimonialists was meant to empower and embolden an addressee community in its decision to adopt a subversive mode of kinship, one that replaced patrimony with piety as the basis of solidarity and mutual commitments among the collective. Early Muslim antipatrimonialism finds expression in Qurʾānic narrative through biblical typology, a process described by Neuwirth as a "political device."[24] Biblical imagery and language was pressed into the service of the early Muslims' organizing and interpretive agenda.[25] Taken as a whole, the narratives of Pharaoh and Azar encapsulate elements of the early Muslims' attitudes toward the integrative power of the clan.[26]

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22 Reynolds, "Moses, Son of Pharaoh," pp. 290–91.

23 As Sinai notes, "More so than any other Qurʾanic prophet, Abraham's religious convictions pit him squarely against his immediate family" (Sinai, "Abraham," p. 4).

24 Neuwirth, "Qurʾan's Enchantment of the World," p. 132.

25 In this regard, Watt notes that "the religious ideas of the Qurʾān were directed towards the religious roots of the contemporary malaise; but the malaise was linked with the whole economic and social life of the Meccans" (Watt, *Islamic Political Thought*, p. 4).

26 See Donner's description of the three concepts in Qurʾānic teaching that explain transformations in Arabian modes of communal cohesion: "the concept of a unique, separate, and unified Islamic community or *umma*, the concept of an absolute higher authority, and the concept of the centralization of authority within the *umma*" (Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, p. 52).

The parallel portrayal of Pharaoh and Azar as clan chiefs reconfigures biblical imagery to suit the early Muslims' particular interpretive agenda.[27] The Qurʾān's depiction of these biblical figures as adversarial clansmen must be understood against the socio-political background of Arabian cities. Pharaoh and Azar do not represent "fathers" in the modern sense of the male parent in a nuclear family. Neither do they represent "fathers" in the sense of the patriarchs of Genesis, the leaders of small bands of pastoralists.[28] Instead, they signify the urban clan chief, a figure of tremendous social power within the sedentary, class-stratified context of seventh-century western Arabia. The clan chief in the city of Mecca symbolized an accrual of social power markedly different from the clan chief among the small, resource-scarce, relatively egalitarian, and socio-economically homogenous communities of pastoralists in central Arabia. The urban clan chief was an individual who held power in a vocationally, ethnically, and socio-economically diverse context characterized by complex networks of material dependency among individuals and pronounced disparities in entitlements to material and schematic resources, such as food, shelter, and honor. As clan chiefs, Pharaoh and Azar appear as epitomes of the powerful "patrician" (*malaʾ*) who, on account of his accrued social power, wrongly "considers himself free of need" (*man istaġnā*; Q. 80:5; cf. Q. 64:6; 92:8; 96:7).

The figures of Pharaoh and Azar in Qurʾānic narrative represent amalgamations and adaptations of various late antique interpretive renderings of the Hebrew Bible's figures.[29] The image of Abraham's idolatrous father is itself old—it appears in the Hebrew Bible in Joshua's speech to the Israelites: "The Lord, God of Israel, says this: 'Long ago your fathers—Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor—used to live across the river and serve other gods'" (Josh. 24:2). Whereas the Azar narrative has a strong basis in pre-Qurʾānic sources, the mirroring with Moses's treacherous break from his clan chief Pharaoh appears to be a Qurʾānic innovation.[30] In the Qurʾān, Azar, similar to Pharaoh, demands the prophet's loyalty and fidelity to him and his clan with reference to patrimony. Like Pharaoh, Azar demands that his prophetic son continue to venerate the gods of his forefathers, the emblems of the clan's patrimony. Reynolds and Sinai have shown how the paired image of Pharaoh and Azar in the Qurʾān reflects sources in the Syriac Christian and the Rabbinic corpora. Sinai's analysis of the Qurʾān's narrative imagery of Abraham's break from Azar

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27 Reynolds notes that it is the Qurʾān's depiction of Pharaoh as Moses's father figure that explains the Qurʾān's "extraordinary interest in the conflict between Abraham and his unbelieving father" (Reynolds, "Moses, Son of Pharaoh," p. 298). Relatedly, Lowin notes that "Ibrahim's biography resembles that of Moses because the biography of Muḥammad, the prophet of Islam, resembles that of Moses" (Lowin, *Making of a Forefather*, p. 227).

28 See Mahmood Ibrahim's criticism of the "nomadic paradigm" in understanding portrayals of social power in the Qurʾān in Ibrahim, *Merchant Capital and Islam*, p. 103.

29 For an early example of determining late ancient Jewish and Christian precursors to the Qurʾān's Abraham cycle, see Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, pp. 125–32. See also Sinai's discussion in Sinai, "Abraham," pp. 16–18; Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, pp. 247–49, and Bakhos, *Family of Abraham*, pp. 81–82.

30 The Qurʾān's depiction of Pharaoh and Azar as villainous father figures has long drawn the attention of scholars. Abraham Geiger proposed that the Qurʾān's call to disobey the idolatrous father figure had its basis in biblical and parabiblical writings on the limits of parental obedience; see Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, p. 84. Heinrich Speyer saw Moses's and Abraham's filial impiety as a reflection of Christian teachings about singular obedience to God, such as the teaching offered in Acts 5:29 (see Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, p. 145).

illustrates the deep resonances between the Qurʾānic telling and texts in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and *Genesis Rabbah*. Sinai suggests that the imagery "may well have reached the Qurʾanic milieu through Christian intermediaries."[31] The figure of Abraham's adversarial and idolatrous father in the Qurʾān, much like the figure of Ishmael building the Kaʿbah, likely did not represent a Qurʾānic innovation or idiosyncratic beliefs among the early Muslims but, rather, the continuation and reformulation of preexisting ideas about Abraham circulating among interpretive communities of the Hebrew Bible in the Qurʾān's environment. What is new in the Qurʾān is the depiction of Azar as a clan chief like Pharaoh.

Like Pharaoh, Azar appears in Qurʾānic narrative as bearing power among "his people" (*qawmihi*), who support him against Abraham and who remain staunchly loyal to the received patrimony of knowledge: "We found our fathers doing thus" (*wajadnā ābāʾanā kaḏālika yafʿalūn*; Q. 26:74). Azar's conflict with Abraham was therefore not only about correct dogma but also about the correct exercise of social power: "Did you see the one who disputed with Abraham about his master because God had given him dominion [*mulk*]?" (Q. 2:258).[32] Like Moses's domineering opponent, Abraham's adversary also demands that the prophet submit entirely to his power: "It is I who bring to life and it is I who cause death" (Q. 2:258). Similarly, like Pharaoh, Azar attempts to kill his disobedient son in order to save the patrimonial cults: "Burn him, help your gods!" (Q. 21:68). Furthermore, Abraham, like Moses, disagrees with his clan chief over the patrimonial cults and rejects the wisdom of the "ancient fathers" (Q. 26:76). The strong resonance between the Qurʾān's depiction of Moses's break from Pharaoh and Abraham's break from Azar shows the subordination of a diverse repertoire of narrative materials to a singular ideological purpose: the legitimation and promulgation of a subversive, apatrimonial program of community formation in the interpretive milieu of seventh-century Arabia. The Qurʾān's emphasis on Pharaoh's and Azar's positions as clan chiefs considerably strengthens the subversive impact of the stories as communitarian rhetoric. In the context of Arabian clanism and a universally acknowledged virtue of clan fidelity, these stories would have been considered outrageous. The narratives of Noah's, Moses's, and Abraham's abandonment of clan fidelity and their estrangement from patrilineal kin contradicted the normative "common sense" of what constituted heroic or honorable behavior. In the context of the early Muslims, heroism and honor were tied to unconditional solidarity with one's clansmen and an immutable loyalty to one's clan chief. As revealed instruction to the early Muslims, the narratives of Moses, Abraham, and Noah thus affirmed the believers' subversive notions of communal cohesion.

Qurʾānic prophetology reflects the adaptation of a preexisting and active domain of Hebrew Bible interpretation in Arabia into the service of an emergent Arabian communitarian politics. For Arabian Jews and Arabian Christians, the biblical stories of Moses and Abraham had not represented counterpoints to Arabian clanism. But in the Qurʾān, these stories appear as proof texts for the demotion of patrimony as a cohesive force and a rejection of clan fidelity. Qurʾānic reference to "biblical historical precedence" in the stories of Moses and Abraham appears "to spur the emerging Qurʾānic community into

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31 Sinai, "Abraham," p. 12.

32 It is unclear whether this verse refers to Azar or to Nimrod. Both figures appear as powerful adversaries against Abraham in the Qurʾān.

relinquishing clan-based relationship in favor of relationships based on spiritual bonds."[33] The ideological commitments shaping the Qurʾān's reception of biblical materials included a clear demotion of patrimonialism or clan-based fidelity as a mode of inculcating solidarity and cohesion.

ABRAHAM AND THE CLAN TRADITIONS

Throughout the Qurʾān, Abraham appears as the "quintessential anti-paternal rebel"[34] who rejects the patrimony of his clan chief, Azar. As with Moses, so with Abraham—his prophecy drives him to betray his clan superior and defy the traditions of his clan forefathers. Abraham desecrates his patrimony, the "idols" (aṣnām; Q. 6:74; 14:35; 21:57) of his father, whom he accuses of serving Satan, "a rebel against the Compassionate" (Q. 19:44). The Qurʾānic portrayal of Abraham as a clan traitor is evidence of the antipatrimonialism of the early Muslims. The prophet's rejection and destruction of his father's idols legitimated their own abandonment of clan fidelity and patrimonial moral order. The villainous figures of Azar and his clansmen represent clan loyalists who "justif[ied] their religious practices and beliefs by appealing to ancestral precedent."[35] Abraham rises up against the ancestral precedent of his forefathers, represented as Azar's idols. The motif of the adversarial clansman in the Qurʾānic story of Abraham provides evidence that the early Muslims privileged prophetic knowledge over knowledge received as patrimony. The idols of Abraham's forefathers signify the empty symbols of the clan overturned and replaced with the sure symbols of prophecy.

The story of Abraham's treacherous disavowal of his patrimonial cults is a "reminder for the God-fearing" (Q. 21:48) and intended to educate and embolden the implicit early Muslim audience of the narratives. The revealed "reminder" is further meant to empower the community of faithful who have broken from their clans. Abraham appears as an "ideal role model" in this program of community formation because he is able to liberate himself from "the shackles of genealogical loyalty."[36] Abraham's break from his clan and the ensuing prophecy constitute the bulk of narrative material on the patriarch in the Qurʾān.[37] Sinai describes the materials on Abraham and Azar in terms of a cluster of motifs that he calls the "disputation cluster" and explains that these motifs "supplied the Qurʾānic community with an effective riposte and counter-paradigm to the Associators' appeal to parental authority and with an apposite narrative medium for exploring the tension between filial loyalty and religious commitment."[38] Azar appears Pharaoh-like and champions the emblems of patrimony. Abraham, on the other hand, is a counterpart to Moses,

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33 Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and Making of a Community*, p. 72.

34 Sinai, "Abraham," pp. 32–33. See also Sinai's analysis of antipaternal themes in the Qurʾānic story of Abraham in Sinai, *Qurʾan: Historical-Critical Introduction*, pp. 59–77, and *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, pp. 119–23.

35 Sinai, "Abraham," p. 33.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., pp. 33–34.

38 Ibid., p. 33.

an insubordinate clansman who rejects these emblems—the gods and the traditions of the clan ancestors:[39]

> Abraham was a partisan [of Noah] when he came to his master with a tranquil heart. He said to his father and his [father's] people: "What are you venerating?" [Q. 37:83–85].

> Recite for them the News of Abraham, when he said to his father and his [father's] people: "What do you venerate?" They said: "We venerate idols and we shall remain devoted to them." He said: "When you call them, do they hear you? Do they help you? Do they injure you?" They said: "No, we found our fathers doing thus" [Q. 26:69–74].

> Record in the scripture Abraham, a truth-seeker and prophet, [who] said to his father: "Why do you serve that which neither hears nor sees, that which cannot free you from any need?" [Q. 19:41–42].

> Abraham said to his father and his [father's] people: "I detach myself from what you venerate" [Q. 43:26].

> [Abraham] said to Azar his father: "You consider these idols gods? As I see it, you and your people are clearly misguided" [Q. 6:74].

A passage in Q. 21 draws an explicit parallel between Moses's break from the "House of Pharaoh" and Abraham's repudiation of Azar. Abraham's father appears, similarly to Pharaoh, not as an individual villain but as the leader of a group of villains who are loyal to the patrimonial cults:

> We gave the criterion to Moses and Aaron as a light and a reminder for the God-fearing [. . .]. This that we sent down is a sacred reminder, will you negate it? [So too] We gave Abraham his directive [*rušdahu*] [. . .]. He said to his father and his [father's] people: "What are these representations to which you are devoted?" They said: "We saw our forefathers venerating them" [*wajadnā ābāʾana lahā ʿābidīn*]. [Abraham] said: "You and your forefathers are obviously misguided [*laqad kuntum antum wa-ābāʾukum fī ḍalālin mubīn*]" [Q. 21:48–54].

The Qurʾān's portrayal of Abraham as an antipatrimonialist provides clues not only about the early Muslims' attitudes about material entanglements with their former clans but also about the inherited knowledge and traditions of their clan forefathers. Antipatrimonialism meant rejecting patrimony as a source of authoritative knowledge: "Their forefathers did not comprehend anything. They had no guidance" (Q. 2:180) and "Their forefathers did not know anything. They had no guidance" (Q. 5:104). Abraham appears here as a Moses-like clan traitor who rejects the clan progenitors' immutable authority. The prophet denies his own father's wisdom—"Father! I have knowledge that you do not have, follow me and I will guide you" (Q. 19:43)—thus inverting the expectations of hierarchy within the clan as well as notions about the source of authoritative knowledge.

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39 References are listed in one possible sequence of development along the Nöldeke-Schwally chronology. There does not appear to be any discernable development in the figure of Abraham's father other than that he is provided with a name, different from the name of Abraham's father in Genesis.

This language represents, as with the motif of clan dissolution, a subversion of normative expectations of clan fidelity and patrimonial piety. In all versions of the story, it is Azar's loyalty to the patrimonial cult that is the point of conflict between the clan chief and the prophet. Sinai explains that the depiction of Abraham's rejection of Azar's patrimonial cults must be understood against the "default assumption in the Qurʾanic milieu that beliefs and practices bequeathed by fathers, or ancestors in general, were binding and authoritative."[40] Azar appears as a champion and guardian of the patrimonial heritage that gave cohesion to the clan and provided the clan with an ethical basis in the form of ancestral precedent, meaning what the previous generations "used to do" (Q. 2:134 and 141). It is important here to note that early Muslim antipatrimonialism was a rejection not only of clan-based power but also of clan-based knowledge. Patrimony included not only inherited social power vested in tangible resources such as "property and progeny" (*al-mālu wa-l-banūna*; Q. 18:46) but also inherited knowledge, meaning guidance and misguidance. Thus the rejection of God's paternity is a rejection of both the dogma itself and the patrimonial means whereby the dogma is propagated and legitimated: "Let those who say: 'God has fathered' be warned. They have no knowledge of it and neither did their fathers. Colossal is the word that comes out of their mouths" (Q. 18:4–5). Abraham's rejection of Azar's patrimonial cult was a rejection not only of clan-based authority but also of clan-based tradition (*sunnat al-awwalīn*; Q. 8:38; 15:13; 18:55; 35:43).

When one reads the story of Abraham's conflict with Azar over the veneration of the patrimonial cult against the cultural background of clan fidelity and patrimonial piety, it becomes clear that this story encapsulates a subversive image of kinship. Sinai writes that the Qurʾān's depiction of the prophet's breaking away from his clan traditions "would have amounted to an act of epistemological rupture that evidently needed to be supported by a revolutionary precedent in its own right supplied by the figure of Abraham."[41] The image of Abraham's betrayal of his clan chief inverts the expected veneration of the father and the forefather. This inversion is made clear by the juxtaposition of the Qurʾānic figure of Azar and Pharaoh as clan chiefs with the pre-Islamic Arabian poet Labīd's figure of the clan chief of ʿĀmir, the "distributer" (*muqassim*) who holds power over his community's resources and who embodies the virtues of clan fidelity and patrimonial piety:

> The distributer dispenses to the clan [*ʿašīrah*] its shares,
> And debases down the claims of outsiders . . .
> For he is of a kinfolk whose forefathers left them a tradition,
> [In this manner] all people have a tradition and their exemplars.[42]

The Qurʾānic image of Azar is an inversion of this normative Arabian ideal. Abraham's denial of Azar's authority was a repudiation of the forefather's "tradition and their exemplars." As an acknowledged paragon of piety and virtue, Abraham in his rebellion against the clan presents a persuasive image legitimating a disavowal of clan fidelity. It affirms the early Muslims' communitarian ethos and pietistic worldview. As Heribert Busse explains,

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40 Sinai, "Abraham," p. 33.

41 Ibid.

42 Labīd, *Muʿallaqah*, p. 77.

"in the conflict between Abraham and his father [. . .] the question was raised whether obedience to God takes priority over obedience to one's father [. . .] Abraham was rewarded [. . .] for the disobedience he showed his father for the sake of his beliefs."[43] The early Muslim audience of Qurʾānic narrative found in the portrayals of Pharaoh and Azar an emboldening and reassuring biblical defense for their treachery against clan superiors. The narratives allowed the early Muslims to reimagine their subversive break from the normative communal structure of the clan as pious action justified by the scriptural precedent of Moses and Abraham, who turned against the clans that had raised them.

CONCLUSION

The Qurʾānic portrayal of Noah's son, Pharaoh, and Azar as adversarial clansmen encapsulates information about the early Muslims' communal self-image. These figures are literary expressions of the antipatrimonialism that was part of the Qurʾān's program of community formation. The motif of the adversarial clansman reflects the transformed basis of loyalty and solidarity among the early Muslims. It is a discursive clue explaining the "integrative power"[44] of the Yathriban polity under Muḥammad. As Donner explains, the *ummah* concept "not only facilitated, it demanded the breaking of tribal ties [. . .] it was exactly this emphasis on the broader, supra-tribal character of the *umma* that allowed it to expand."[45] The *ummah* recast the basis of solidarity and cohesion among individuals and subgroups in Arabia. To say that the *ummah* was different from the clan because its boundaries were permeable and outwardly expanding is not sufficient. Agnatic boundaries were dynamic and able to accommodate strangers through various mechanisms, foremost among them marriage, but also clientage (*wilāyah*) and partnership (*ḥilf*).[46] The patrimonial system also offered a viable means of outward expansion, as is evidenced by the emergence of large, albeit short-lived, tribal confederations before the Qurʾānic period.[47] I argue that the motif of the adversarial clansmen is evidence that the *ummah* represented a metaphoric transformation, where the patrilineal segment—and the hierarchies it denoted—no longer symbolized the basis of mutual commitment (*taʿāwun*) among members of a community.

In flouting the normative expectations of clan fidelity, the narratives of Noah's son, Pharaoh, and Azar reflect a subversive politics. Noah's, Moses's, and Abraham's repudiation of their adversarial clansmen gave prophetic sanction to a collective abandonment of clan fidelity and patrimonial piety whose influence in ordering Arabian social life was "incomparably stronger and more influential than the pagan religion of the desert."[48] In other words, the motif of the adversarial clansman explains how the *ummah* concept

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43 Busse, "Herrschertypen im Koran," p. 78.

44 Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, p. 55.

45 Ibid., p. 57.

46 Watt, *Islamic Political Thought*, pp. 7–9.

47 See Serjeant's discussion on how "the *ummah* in the sense of a confederation round a religious nucleus was a pattern well established long before Muḥammad" (Serjeant, "Ḥaram and Ḥawṭah," p. 49).

48 Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qurʾān*, p. 56.

could have had "revolutionary import in the context of Arabian society,"[49] thereby disrupting also "the father-son synergy"[50] or "filial understanding of salvation"[51] that characterized monotheistic scriptural pietism in seventh-century Arabia. For the Jews and Christians of the Qurʾān's historical environment, patrimony was not only the basis of communal organization but also the foundation of a communal soteriology, that is, a vision of collective salvation involving the father's redemptive sacrifice of a son. Walid Saleh notes that the Qurʾān's "remarkably apathetic" attitude toward patrimonial soteriology—what he terms "sonship–fathership theology"—is evidence of the early Muslims' "profound distrust of the filial language of both Judaism and Christianity."[52] The *ummah* offered a fundamentally altered vision of collectivity that sidelined patrimony as the basis of solidarity and cohesion among the in-group. The appearance in Qurʾānic narrative of adversarial clansmen against Noah, Moses, and Abraham supported the early Muslims' communal attitude, which privileged piety over patrimony as the basis of solidarity and authority.

While the focus of this essay has been the text of the Qurʾān itself, I conclude here with a brief note about the interpretive afterlife of the scriptural motif of the adversarial clansman in early Muslim historiography. In the early Muslim accounts, Muḥammad's adversaries include his own clansmen and clan superiors, such as Walīd b. Muǧīrah, ʿUtbah b. Rabīʿah, Abū Lahab, and ʿAmr b. Hišām "Abū Jahl," among others. It is noteworthy that all these adversarial clansmen appear as Muḥammad's father figures—"uncles" (*aʿmām*, sing. *ʿam*)—and that all these clan superiors, including Abū Ṭālib, the clan leader of Hashim, die without joining Muḥammad's community. The successors of Muḥammad's father figures, the new clan chiefs of Quraysh, who were filial equals (or subordinates) of Muḥammad in clan seniority, are not depicted in the same scriptural manner. Adversarial clansmen who are not Muḥammad's "uncles" or clan superiors are not vilified in Pharaoh-like or Azar-like terms but as repentant former foes, for example, the clansmen Ḫālid b. Walīd, Abū Sufyān, and ʿIkrimah b. Abī Jahl. Concerning ʿIkrimah's father, who was killed by Muḥammad's men at the Raid of Badr (2/624), Muḥammad is reported to have said: "This is the Pharaoh of this community."[53] In another version of the same *ḥadīth*, Muḥammad says: "For every community, there is a Pharaoh. The Pharaoh of this community is Abu Jahl."[54] Such language echoes the scriptural motif of the adversarial clan superior whom the prophet repudiates.

In the context of the early Muslims, a severed patrilineal connection, like the connection between Noah and his son, Moses and Pharaoh, and Abraham and Azar, would have meant expulsion from the community that afforded protection and loyalty. Only outcasts, hermits, and slaves lacked explicit patrimonial ties. All others, through ties of blood, clientage, or partnership, were integrated directly into patrilineal segments that

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49 Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, p. 55.

50 Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and Making of a Community*, p. 69.

51 Saleh, Review of *Muḥammad Is Not the Father*, p. 263.

52 Ibid.

53 Hanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 3, pp. 382–83, no. 3824.

54 Ibid., p. 383, no. 3825.

provided security and resources to their members. Patrimony was not simply the basis of solidarity and loyalty to the in-group, it was also the basis of honorability, and by extension authority, among the in-group. The scriptural figures of Pharaoh, Azar, and Noah's son confirmed the early Muslims' belief that soteriologically meaningful solidarity and nobility were rooted in pious faithfulness and acquiescence to God. The motif of the adversarial clansman taught the early Muslims that, within the *ummah*, the faithful stranger was more entitled to solidarity and support than the faithless clansman. Patrimony was real but salvifically impotent, and it imparted neither merit nor demerit before God's judgment.

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Note: Italicized page locators refer to illustrations; tables are noted with *t*.

How did Islam's sacred scripture, the Arabic Qur'ān, emerge from western Arabia at a time when the region was religiously fragmented and lacked a clearly established tradition of writing to render the Arabic language?

The studies in this volume, the proceedings of a scholarly conference, address different aspects of this question. They include discussions of the religious concepts found in Arabia in the centuries preceding the rise of Islam, which reflect the presence of polytheism and of several varieties of monotheism including Judaism and Christianity. Also discussed at length are the complexities surrounding the way languages of the Arabian Peninsula were written in the centuries before and after the rise of Islam—including Nabataean and various North Arabian dialects of Semitic—and the gradual emergence of the now-familiar Arabic script from the Nabataean script originally intended to render a dialect of Aramaic.

The religious implications of inscriptions from the pre-Islamic and early Islamic centuries receive careful scrutiny. The early coalescence of the Qur'ān, the kind of information it contains on Christianity and other religions that formed part of the environment in which it first appeared, the development of several key Qur'ānic concepts, and the changing meaning of certain terms used in the Qur'ān also form part of this rich volume.

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