Epigraphy in Islamic studies: a bibliographic guide

Ilkka Lindstedt – draft

Introduction

Epigraphy, that is, the study of inscriptions, has been an important area of inquiry in Islamic studies, though much remains to be done. Modern scholars have been interested in the inscriptions dating from, in particular, the early Islamic centuries. This is because material evidence such as inscriptions offer a significant source set for the early period for which literary evidence (such as Arabic chronicles) are, for the most part, non-contemporary and rather tendentious. Of special interest to modern researchers are graffiti, non-commissioned and unofficial inscriptions, which were often engraved by people who are otherwise unknown to the pages of history (e.g., Imbert 2011). The epigraphists have mostly studied and published Arabic inscriptions, while epigraphic work in other languages (e.g., Persian and Turkish) remains to be carried out in more detail. Moreover, modern and contemporary inscriptions have not received much scholarly attention, though these overlooked subfields are nowadays receiving more and more consideration (Grigore and Sitaru, eds., 2015). There has also been a bias in favor of studying rock inscriptions and against studying inscriptions on, for example, portable items (for the importance of these, see Blair 1998).

Pre-Islamic inscriptions

In pre-Islamic Arabia, numerous languages were spoken and written (Al-Jallad 2020): Arabic was only one of them. Aramaic was one of the languages that were written, mostly in the Nabataean script, which developed during the fifth and sixth centuries into the Arabic script (Nehmé 2013 and Macdonald 2015). Various ancient North Arabian languages were inscribed in different scripts; the Safaitic and Hismaic inscriptions are in language forms that can be classified as Arabic, though they include aspects that differ from later forms of Arabic. Ancient South Arabian languages form important epigraphic corpora too (Robin 2001). There are also some scattered Greek, Latin, and Hebrew inscriptions. In this section, I mention some studies dealing with pre-Islamic inscriptions in various languages and scripts or studies that use epigraphic evidence for the reconstruction of history (Hoyland 2007, Robin 2012, and Robin 2015), including religious history (Robin, al-Ghabbān, and al-Saʿīd 2014, Nehmé 2017, Al-Jallad and Sidky 2021). Though Arabian epigraphic evidence

takes us all the way back to the first millennium BCE, in what follows I concentrate on the period of late antiquity.

Al-Jallad, Ahmad. 2020. "The Linguistic Landscape of Pre-Islamic Arabia: Context for the Qur'an." In *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies.* Edited by M. A. Abdel Haleem and Mustafa Akram Ali Shah. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 111–127.

   An up-to-date and important introduction to the linguistic map of Arabia before Islam, which can be reconstructed in particular on the basis of the surviving inscriptions. Al-Jallad treats the Arabian alphabets and languages, dealing, moreover, with the issues of literacy and multilingualism. The linguistic context of the Qur'an is also addressed in the chapter.

Al-Jallad, Ahmad and Hythem Sidky. 2021. "A Paleo-Arabic inscription on a route north of Ṭāʾif." *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, https://doi.org/10.1111/aae.12203

   Re-edits an Arabic inscription published by A. Grohmann in the 1960s. Though the text is undated, the authors argue on paleographic grounds that it belongs to the sixth century CE. The inscription is monotheist, as are all other Arabian inscriptions from the sixth century. The article contains a useful table (p. 11) listing all known paleo-Arabic inscriptions, that is, inscriptions in Arabic language and script, from the fifth and sixth centuries CE.

Hoyland, Robert G. 2007. "Epigraphy and the Emergence of Arab Identity." In *From al-Andalus to Khurasan: Documents from the Medieval Muslim World.* Edited by Petra M. Sijpesteijn et al. Leiden: Brill, 219–242.

   The author provides suggestions about the emergence of Arab ethnic identity on the basis of the epigraphic corpus. Hoyland argues that the rise of the Arabic script and production of Arabic inscriptions in (roughly) the sixth century is linked with the formation of Arab identity around this time. The date and exact process of Arab ethnogenesis continues to be debated in scholarship.

Macdonald, Michael C. A. 2015. "The Emergence of Arabic as a Written Language." In *Arabs and Empires before Islam.* Edited by Greg Fisher. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 395–417.

   Deals with the rise of the Arabic script and language in the centuries preceding the life of the prophet Muḥammad. Macdonald introduces and sometimes reinterprets the surviving epigraphic evidence on the topic. Since the publication of this study, new pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions in Arabic script have appeared, such as Nehmé 2017.

Robin, Christian J. 2001. "Les inscriptions de l'Arabie antique et les études arabes." *Arabica* 48: 509–577.

Though by now somewhat dated, the article is a very useful introduction to the significance of the pre-Islamic Arabian inscriptions, with an emphasis on Ancient South Arabian epigraphy. Robin argues that scholars of Islamic studies can learn much from the epigraphic materials.

Robin, Christian J. 2012. "Abraha et la reconquête de l'Arabie déserte: un réexamen de l'inscription Ryckmans 506 = Murayghan 1." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 39: 1–93.
Discusses a Sabaic inscription (dated to 548 CE) commissioned by King Abraha, who is also known in the Islamic historiographical tradition. The important inscription commemorates Abraha's raids in central Arabia. The article also includes a detailed chronology of Abraha's reign and useful maps (pp. 70–77).

Robin, Christian J. 2015. "Ḥimyar, Aksūm, and *Arabia Deserta* in Late Antiquity: The Epigraphic Evidence." In *Arabs and Empires before Islam.* Edited by Greg Fisher. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 127–171.
Presents the South Arabian epigraphic evidence from the late antique period and discusses the history of the kingdoms of Ḥimyar (Yemen) and Aksūm (Ethiopia), with notes on central Arabia. Robin remarks that all South Arabian evidence after 380 CE is monotheist (Jewish, Christian, or perhaps in some cases, God-fearers). The epigraphic corpus of the period between 380 and 560 CE consists of ca. 130 inscriptions.

Robin, Christian J., ʿAlī Ibrāhīm al-Ghabbān, and Saʿīd Fāyiz al-Saʿīd. 2014. "Inscriptions antiques de la région de Najrān (Arabie Séoudite méridionale): Nouveaux jalons pour l'histoire de l'écriture, de la langue et du calendrier arabes." *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 3: 1033–1128.
The authors present important new inscriptions from near Najrān. Of particular interest here are the fifth–sixth century CE Arabic inscriptions, which contain multiple crosses. This points toward the spread of Christianity in the region even before the Ethiopian invasion of Yemen in the sixth century CE.

Nehmé, Laïla 2013. "Epigraphy on the Edges of the Roman Empire: A Study of the Nabataean Inscriptions and Related Material from the Darb al-Bakrah, Saudi Arabia, 1st–5th century AD." Habilitation thesis, École Pratique des Hautes Études.
A comprehensive treatment of the late antique Nabataean Aramaic inscriptions, including discussion on their script (which developed into the Arabic script), language (which is often a mixture of Aramaic and Arabic), and contents (which include interesting details on the religious outlook of their writers). The inscriptions were found along the Darb al-Bakra in northern Saudi Arabia.

Nehmé, Laïla. 2017. "New Dated Inscriptions (Nabataean and Pre-Islamic Arabic) from a Site near al-Jawf, Ancient Dūmah, Saudi Arabia." *Arabian Epigraphic Notes* 3: 121–164.

For the purposes of this bibliographical entry, one should note the Arabic inscription siglum DaJ144PAr1 (pp. 124–131), which is published here for the first time. The inscription is dated to 548/549 CE, mentions God (*al-ilāh*), and has a cross on it. It is so far the only published clearly Christian inscription from this region (northwestern Saudi Arabia). Nehmé compares it with other known pre-Islamic Arabic Christian inscriptions.

General collections and publications of Islamic-era inscriptions

This section presents key corpora of Islamic-era inscriptions (for the pre-Islamic inscriptions, see the above section). The best place to start and the most comprehensive collection is the Internet database Kalus, Bauden, and Soudan 2022, which includes earlier important collections such as Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet 1931–1991. Though photos and readings of inscriptions are nowadays often also published by people in social media, it is preferable to work with academic publications of the epigraphic materials. Inscriptions are published in various formats, both in journal articles and books (al-Rāshid 1995, Karīm 2003, al-Thenayian 2015, al-Ghabbān 2017, al-Saʿīd et al. 2017). A good academic publication usually provides a clear photograph and/or tracing of the inscription, its reading, translation, location, and discussion of its contents, context, and the site. Many of the publications mentioned in what follows contain insightful analyses of the materials published (see, in particular, Sharon 1997–, al-Kilābī 2009, and Blair 2014).

Blair, Sheila S. 2014. *The Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana.* Leiden: Brill.

Presents seventy-nine monumental Arabic inscriptions from Iran and Central Asia. The inscriptions stem from the first five hundred years of the Islamic era. The editions of the texts are accompanied by comprehensive discussions of the site and the context of the inscription in question.

Combe, Étienne, Jean Sauvaget, and Gaston Wiet. 1931–1991. *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe (RCEA).* 18 volumes. Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale.

A multi-volume collection of Arabic inscriptions up to the year 800 of the Islamic era (= 1398 CE). The inscriptions are chronologically arranged. The *RCEA* offers the location, reading, and translation of the text but not images or extensive discussion. The material of the *RCEA* is now available online via Kalus, Bauden, and Soudan 2022, which takes us to the year 1000 of the Islamic calendar.

Al-Ghabbān, Maysāʾ. 2017. "Al-Kitābāt al-islāmiyya al-mubakkira fī haḍbat Ḥismā bi-manṭiqat Tabūk: Dirāsa taḥlīliyya āthāriyya wa-lughawiyya." Doctoral dissertation at King Saud University.

        Collection of 250 Islamic inscriptions from the Ḥismā. The texts stem from the first two centuries of the Islamic era. Contains some of the same material as al-Saʿīd et al. 2017. In addition to presenting the inscriptions, the dissertation proffers analysis of the different formulae of the corpus.

Kalus, Ludvik, Frédéric Bauden, and Frédérique Soudan. 2022. *Thésaurus d'Epigraphie Islamique.* http://www.epigraphie-islamique.uliege.be/

        An invaluable digital resource for the study of Islamic inscriptions (up to the year 1000 of the Islamic era). It is based on the *RCEA*, with inscriptions added from newer publications. One needs to register to use the site, but it is free. Pictures are presented for some of the inscriptions. The *Thésaurus* is not restricted to Arabic texts but includes inscriptions in other languages as well.

Karīm, Jumʿa Maḥmūd. 2003 *Nuqūsh islāmiyya duʿāʾiyya min bādiyat al-Urdunn al-janūbiyya al-sharqiyya.* Amman: al-Maṭābiʿ al-taʿāwuniyya.

        In this book, Karīm edits a rather large corpus of early Islamic-era Arabic inscriptions from Jordan. The inscriptions are mostly supplications to God but there are also some funerary inscriptions. The photographs in the book are not of high quality but, fortunately, Karīm offers clear tracings of them.

Al-Kilābī, Ḥayā bint ʿAbdallāh. 2009. *Al-Nuqūsh al-islāmiyya ʿalā ṭarīq al-ḥajj al-shāmī bi-shamāl gharb al-Mamlaka al-ʿArabiyya al-Saʿūdiyya.* Riyadh: Maktabat al-Malik Fahd al-waṭaniyya.

        Deals with the inscriptions found on the Syrian pilgrimage route, with important notes on the route itself. In the book, al-Kilābī publishes 300 new inscriptions, which stem from the first five centuries of the Islamic era.

Sharon, Moshe. 1997–. *Corpus inscriptionum arabicarum palaestinae.* Seven volumes and an addendum to date. Leiden: Brill.

        Endeavors to be a comprehensive publication of Arabic inscriptions from Palestine, proffering both new and old texts. The inscriptions presented are mostly medieval; though, importantly, some modern ones are recorded as well. The sites where the inscriptions were found are often discussed in great detail by Sharon, so the *Corpus* also functions as a geographical encyclopedia, as it were. One should note that the volumes often have addenda and corrigenda to the earlier volumes.

Al-Saʿīd, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, et al. 2017. *Nuqūsh Ḥismā: Kitābāt min ṣadr al-islām shamāl gharb al-mamlaka.* Riyadh: Al-Majalla al-ʿarabiyya.

Presents new inscriptions from the Ḥismā, which functioned as one of the thoroughfares between Syria and the Ḥijāz during the Umayyad era. The inscriptions have been found and edited by a Saudi Arabian explorer group called the *Farīq al-Ṣaḥrāʾ*, Desert Team. Their website (http://alsahra.org) is, one should note, rich in epigraphic materials that have, for the most part, not yet received scholarly treatment. The most intriguing find is an inscription (p. 161) reading "I am ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān," plausibly the Umayyad caliph.

Al-Rāshid, Saʿd ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. 1995. *Kitābāt islāmiyya min Makka al-mukarrama.* Riyadh: Maktabat al-Malik Fahd al-waṭaniyya.

Al-Rāshid is a leading Saudi Arabian epigraphist who has published a number of books and articles presenting and discussing Arabic inscriptions. Here, his work on early Islamic inscriptions from Mecca is referenced. In this book, sixty-three inscriptions were published, with three interesting early quotations of Qurʾanic passages (pp. 160–164). The region of Mecca has not been the object of intensive epigraphic fieldwork, so al-Rāshid's book offers significant evidence from the region.

Al-Thenayian, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. 2015. *Nuqūsh al-qarn al-hijrī al-awwal al-muʾarrakha fī al-Mamlaka al-ʿArabiyyah al-Saʿūdiyya.* Riyadh: Maktabat al-Malik Fahd al-waṭaniyya.

A collection and treatment of the Arabic inscriptions from Saudi Arabia dated to the first century of the Islamic era. Since the historians argue about the social and religious history of this era, inscriptions can yield important evidence for the reconstruction of the past.

Paleography

Paleography is the study of handwriting and writing systems, in particular their development over time. Since most Islamic inscriptions are undated, paleography is essential in suggesting at least rough dates for the undated inscriptions, though it has its pitfalls (Macdonald 2015). The development and styles of writing naturally varied in accordance with different writing materials (ink on parchment, papyrus, or paper, chisel on stone, and so on). The general outline of the development of the Arabic script is rather well established (Grohmann 1967–1971, Gruendler 1993, Ghabban and Hoyland 2008, Nehmé 2010), but regional studies in particular would be a desideratum.

Ghabban, 'Ali ibn Ibrahim and Robert G. Hoyland. 2008. "The Inscription of Zuhayr, the Oldest Islamic Inscription (24 AH/AD 644–645), the Rise of the Arabic Script and the Nature of the Early Islamic State." *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 19: 209–236.

       The authors publish and discuss the by-now famous inscription of Zuhayr, which is one of the oldest Islamic-era Arabic inscriptions. The article also deals with the development of the Arabic script during the sixth and seventh centuries.

Grohmann, Adolf. 1967–1971. *Arabische Paläographie.* Two volumes. Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften.

       A basic work in the field of Arabic paleography. Though it is by now somewhat obsolete in some of its details, it still provides a solid general overview of the development of Arabic scripts in different environments. The work utilizes different sets of evidence, including but not limited to inscriptions.

Gruendler, Beatrice. 1993. *The Development of the Arabic Scripts.* Atlanta: Scholars Press.

       Though she was not the first to suggest this, in this study Gruendler was able to prove in detail how the Arabic script developed from the Nabataean Aramaic one. The work traces the changes in alphabet forms in ancient and late ancient Nabataean inscriptions and in inscriptions from the first century of the Islamic era. Most of the evidence she uses is epigraphic.

Macdonald, Michael C. A. 2015. "On the Uses of Writing in Ancient Arabia and the Role of Palaeography in Studying Them." *Arabian Epigraphic Notes* 1: 1–50.

       Discusses different functions of writing in pre-Islamic Arabia, with particular emphasis on graffiti, that is, "personal statements carved, written or painted on a surface in a public place" (p. 8). Though Macdonald discusses pre-Islamic inscriptions (in various scripts and languages), his cautionary notes on using paleography (pp. 17–27) to establish chronology and dates should be taken into account by scholars working on Islamic-era Arabic script as well.

Nehmé, Laïla. 2010. "A Glimpse of the Development of the Nabataean Script into Arabic Based on Old and New Epigraphic Material." In *The Development of Arabic as a Written Language.* Edited by M.C.A. Macdonald. Oxford: Archaeopress, 47–88.

       Presents and discusses new late antique Nabataean inscriptions from Saudi Arabia, which show the development of a more cursive Nabataean script in the centuries preceding the rise of Islam. Nehmé's treatment of this new set of data provides more evidence for what Gruendler 1993 argued: that the Arabic script developed from the Nabataean one.

Formal aspects, functions, and classifications of Islamic inscriptions

Inscriptions can be classified in different ways: one can consider the mode of writing – e.g., incising or scratching on a surface, in a mosaic – or the functions of the texts – e.g., invocations, funerary inscriptions, building inscriptions (Imbert 2015a). One can also analyze the different linguistic formulae or the vocabulary used and propose thematic categories (Hoyland 1997, Harjumäki and Lindstedt 2016, Lindstedt 2022). The quotations of Qur'anic passages, treated by Imbert 2019, are an interesting example of an epigraphic category. A common division of the pre-modern epigraphic corpus is into monumental inscriptions, on one hand, and graffiti, on the other (Lindstedt 2021), but this is not always clear-cut and other ways of categorizing the material are also used in scholarship. Portable items form a set of their own (Blair 1998). In today's world, neither graffiti nor other types of inscriptions are usually engraved but painted or produced by other means (Grigore and Sitaru, eds., 2015), and classifications of the pre-modern material are not often helpful for the contemporary era. Inscriptions are often adduced in literary works (Crone and Moreh 2000), but the quotations do not always appear to be based on actual material evidence.

Blair, Sheila S. 1998. *Islamic Inscriptions.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

      An important introduction and contribution to the field, the book discusses the features of medieval monumental inscriptions as well as inscriptions on portable items. The work also deals with the languages of the inscriptions. The last chapter presents the methods and conventions of recording and publishing new inscriptions.

Crone, Patricia and Shmuel Moreh (transl.). 2000. *The Book of Strangers: Medieval Arabic Graffiti on the Theme of Nostalgia.* Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers.

      Translates a medieval Arabic work attributed (incorrectly, it would seem) to Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī. The introduction and analysis by Crone and Moreh are of high quality. The work is a compilation of poetic graffiti. However, in the extant corpus of Arabic inscriptions, poetic texts are very rare indeed, which makes it possible that the author of the *Book of Strangers* composed the poetic snippets rather than cited actual material evidence. In any case, the work is an interesting example of Arabic writers' (fictional or actual) use of epigraphic materials.

Grigore, George and Laura Sitaru (eds.). 2015. *Graffiti, Writing and Street Art in the Arab World.* A special edition of *Romano-Arabica* 15.

      The contributions of this volume discuss both pre-modern and modern Arabic graffiti from various points of view. The contemporary cases deal with graffiti from Tripoli (Libya), Hebron, Cairo, and Sulaymaniyah, where, for example, political graffiti abound.

Harjumäki, Jouni and Ilkka Lindstedt. 2016. "The Ancient North Arabian and Early Islamic Arabic Graffiti: A Comparison of Formal and Thematic Features." Cross-Cultural Studies in Near Eastern History and Literature. Edited by Saana Svärd and Robert Rollinger. Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 59–94.

The authors compare the forms and themes of the pre-Islamic Safaitic and Hismaic inscriptions with the Islamic-era Arabic ones, concentrating on the graffiti (non-commissioned inscriptions). Though the Safaitic and Hismaic inscriptions are written in forms of Arabic, Harjumäki and Lindstedt do not suggest direct influence, since there is a gap of a few centuries (at least) between the Safaitic and Hismaic graffiti, on one hand, and the earliest Islamic graffiti, on the other. While the themes of the texts differ to a large extent, there are formal similarities in these inscriptions, such as writing in the third person singular and utilizing the suffix conjugation (the so-called perfect tense).

Hoyland, Robert G. 1997. "The Content and Context of the Early Arabic Inscriptions." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 21: 77–102.

A key study on the different forms, functions, and contexts of the early Islamic inscriptions. Hoyland suggests various ways of classifying and interpreting the epigraphic corpus, proposing the following categories of content (which can sometimes appear in a single epigraphic text): a) addressing God, b) requests from God, c) professions and declarations of various dogmata (pp. 78–87). Hoyland also suggests different ways of dealing with the contexts of the inscriptions, such as studying them from a prosopographical point of view (pp. 92–93). Naturally, since the publication of the article, quite a few new inscriptions have been published.

Imbert, Frédéric. 1995. "Inscriptions et espaces d'écriture au Palais d'al-Kharrāna en Jordanie." *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 5: 403–416.

Records and analyzes twenty inscriptions from the Qaṣr al-Kharrāna in Jordan. One of the inscriptions is early and dated (710 CE). The dated inscription is a rather rare (extant) example of a painted inscription. The article also includes an insightful treatment of the spaces of writing on the walls of the Qaṣr al-Kharrāna and how the writers reacted to earlier inscriptions (pp. 414–416).

Imbert, Frédéric. 2015a. "Le prince al-Walīd et son bain: itinéraires épigraphiques à Quṣayr Amra." *Bulletin des Etudes Orientales* 64: 321–363.

Treats the inscriptions of the bathhouse known as Quṣayr Amra. They are analyzed in the context of the functions and usages of the bathhouse, which was built at the behest of the Umayyad prince al-Walīd ibn Yazīd (d. 741 CE). Imbert publishes two hitherto unknown inscriptions and rereads known ones. Quṣayr Amra also boasts some Greek inscriptions and a number of beautifully executed images.

Imbert, Frédéric. 2019. "Le Coran des pierres." In *Le Coran des historiens.* Edited by Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Guillaume Dye. Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, vol. 1, 707–732.

    Important introduction to early Islamic graffiti in general and those citing Qur'anic passages or containing Qur'anic flavor in particular. The chapter discusses the possibilities and problems of dating undated inscriptions on paleographic grounds. It adduces the published early inscriptions adducing Qur'anic verses and treats the differences between the so-called standard Qur'anic text and the variants that appear in some epigraphic texts.

Lindstedt, Ilkka. 2021. "Arabic Rock Inscriptions until 750 CE." In *The Umayyad World.* Edited by Andrew Marsham. London: Routledge, 411–437.

    Building on earlier attempts (such as Hoyland 1997) at classifying the Arabic inscriptions, Lindstedt proposes a typology of the early epigraphic corpus. The main classification is between a) monumental inscriptions and b) graffiti (non-commissioned inscriptions), with various sub-classes in both. The article also suggests various reasons why inscriptions were written, from a pastime to expressions of personal piety (though with an intended social function too).

Lindstedt, Ilkka. 2022. "Religious Warfare and Martyrdom in Arabic Graffiti (70s–110s AH/690s–730s CE)." *In Scripts and Scripture: Writing and Religion in Arabia circa 500–700 CE.* Edited by Fred M. Donner and Rebecca Hasselbach-Andee. Chicago: Oriental Institute, 195–222.

    Lindstedt analyzes a hitherto neglected set of early Arabic graffiti: those dealing with religious warfare (*jihād*) and martyrdom. The article presents 20 published inscriptions connected with these themes and compares them to the Qur'anic discourse. The author argues that the graffiti reflect Marwānid attempts (often successful) at conquering new territories. The engravers' proclaimed willingness to die as martyrs is interpreted as an expression of costly signaling.

The socio-historical contexts

Inscriptions contain and convey diverging messages and perform various functions. Modern studies, such as the following, have also analyzed the multifaceted historical and social contexts of the epigraphic corpus. The socio-historical context that can be reconstructed on the basis of other sources, such as chronicles, can help inform us about how the inscriptions should be understood; on the other hand, the inscriptions are significant for shedding new light on social and historical phenomena (Elad 1999, Diem and

Schöller 2004, Siddiq 2012). For instance, many pre-modern inscriptions stem from the countryside and desert, which the literary sources, with their urban bias, often overlook. There has been particular interest in how the epigraphic texts can inform us of religious history, the development of dogmata, and intergroup dynamics (Flood 2009, Imber 2011, Bacharach and Anwar 2012, Hoyland 2017, Lindstedt 2019). Tillier 2022 suggests that the inscriptions can also be used to study the date and development of the ḥadīth corpus (prophetic dicta).

Bacharach, Jere L. and Sherif Anwar. 2012. "Early Versions of the *shahāda*: A Tombstone from Aswan of 71 A.H., the Dome of the Rock, and Contemporary Coinage." *Der Islam* 89: 60–69.
     Uses coinage and inscriptions to argue that there were different versions of the *shahāda*, the Islamic testimony of faith, current in the first century of the Islamic era. Note, however, that Hoyland 1997: 87, n. 65 remarks that the date of the inscription that is mentioned in the title of the article might actually refer to 171 AH, with the century omitted. However, the authors also use other texts as evidence for their argument.

Diem, Werner and Marco Schöller. 2004. *The Living and the Dead in Islam: Studies in Arabic Epitaphs.* Two volumes and an index. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.
     A seminal study on medieval Arabic epitaphs (funerary inscriptions). The volumes analyze epitaphs as texts and in their social context, supplying information on pre-modern Muslim funerary practices as well. Both surviving funerary inscriptions and texts quoted in literary works are treated.

Elad, Amikam. 1999. "The Southern Golan in the Early Muslim Period: The Significance of Two Newly Discovered Milestones of 'Abd al-Malik." *Der Islam* 76: 33–88.
     Discusses the significance of two milestones from the reign of the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik found in the Golan. The information on the milestones can be used to measure the Umayyad *mīl* (a unit of distance), which Elad suggests was about 2,285 meters (p. 46). The milestones also help understand the system of roads during this era.

Flood, Finbarr B. 2009. *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval "Hindu-Muslim" Encounter*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
     Uses inscriptions and other material evidence to study the encounter between Muslims and others in the Ghurid empire (nowadays Afghanistan, Pakistan, and north India). Flood argues that the evidence suggests multiple sectarian and religious identities, which were often overlapping.

Hoyland, Robert G. 2017. "Two New Arabic Inscriptions: Arabian Castles and Christianity in the Umayyad Period." *To the Madbar and Back Again: Studies in the Languages, Archaeology, and Cultures of Arabia Dedicated to Michael C.A. Macdonald.* Edited by L. Nehmé and A. Al-Jallad. Leiden: Brill, 327–337.

  Though the scholars working on the inscriptions of Islamic times usually concentrate on texts written or commissioned by Muslims, there are naturally inscriptions written by Christians too. The other inscription that the article presents is interesting because it comes from the site of Kilwa in north Saudi Arabia (pp. 330–336). The inscription has a cross at the beginning and can be paleographically dated to the late seventh/early eighth century CE, suggesting that Arabian Christianity did not die out with the onset of Islam.

Imbert, Frédéric. 2011. "L'Islam des pierres: l'expression de la foi dans les graffiti arabes des premiers siècles." *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 129: 57–78.

  Analyzes the religious contents of Arabic graffiti from the early Islamic period, suggesting for example that the fact that references to the prophet Muḥammad are lacking in the earliest layer implies a development in the Islamic doctrine. Frédéric Imbert is an important authority on the early Islamic inscriptions, and students of this topic should consult his other studies as well.

Lindstedt, Ilkka. 2019. "Who Is in, Who Is out? Early Muslim Identity through Epigraphy and Theory." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 46: 147–246.

  Employs the corpus of Arabic inscriptions dated to the 640s–740s CE to argue for a piecemeal and rather slow formation of distinct Islamic identity. Until the eighth century, mentions of the group name "Muslims" or references to Islamic rituals are for the most part lacking. The article contains an Appendix that lists the (up to then) published Arabic inscriptions of this era.

Milwright, Marcus. 2016. *The Dome of the Rock and Its Umayyad Mosaic Inscriptions.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

  A recent and comprehensive study on the mosaic inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, which have been rather widely discussed in modern scholarship but about which questions remain. The book places the inscriptions in their historical contexts and suggests ways of interpreting the texts and the building. The texts are compared with other mosaic and encircling inscriptions of the late antique Near East.

Siddiq, Mohammad Yusuf. 2012. "Epigraphy and Islamic History in South Asia." *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 2.2: 1–34.

Siddiq presents an overview of inscriptions from pre-modern South Asia, with comparisons of their forms and functions with the Islamic inscriptions from other parts of the world. For the Islamic inscriptions stemming from this part of the world, see also Flood 2009, referenced above.

Tillier, Mathieu. 2022. "Vers une nouvelle méthode de datation du hadith: les invocations à Dieu dans les inscriptions épigraphiques et dans la *sunna*." *Der Islam* 99.2: 337–430.

An innovative article that compares the formulae found in early Islamic inscriptions to those of the *ḥadīth*s (prophetic traditions). Modern scholars have endeavored to date *ḥadīth*s with the analyses of their chains of transmission and contents; Tillier proposes that the dated epigraphic corpus can also be used to suggest when general invocatory formulae became prophetic *ḥadīth*s. According to Tillier, his study agrees with what is by and large the consensus in *ḥadīth* studies: most of the material originates in or is put into the mouth of the prophet in the early eighth century or thereabouts.

Prosopography and epigraphy

The epigraphic corpus can also be studied for prosopographic purposes: to understand the connections, lineages, movements, and careers of the individuals who wrote the inscriptions or are mentioned in them. Importantly, many of the people mentioned in inscriptions (in particular graffiti) are not known from other sources, so one can endeavor to study non-elite individuals and groups though epigraphic texts (Alhatlani 2021). And even inscriptions commissioned or engraved by famous individuals or political leaders can shine new light on them (see Imbert 2015). Though prosopographical scholarship on Islamic inscriptions is, one could say, in its infancy, there have been promising studies that suggest that the epigraphic sources can be utilized to study history from below (Perret, ed., 2018).

Alhatlani, Abdullah. 2021. "Descendants and Ancestors: A study of Arabic inscriptions from the Arabian Peninsula (1st–4th c. AH/7th–10th c. CE)." Doctoral dissertation at Leiden University.

Studies 260 early Islamic inscriptions (of which 145 are new) from Arabia. The inscriptions are linked to four families that were companions of the prophet. Many of the individuals mentioned are absent in Arabic biographical literature, so epigraphy can help furnish a fuller understanding of the members of the lineages.

Imbert, Frédéric. 2015b. "Califes, princes et compagnons dans les graffiti du début de l'Islam." *Romano-Arabica* 15: 59–78.

      Analyzes recently published inscriptions that mention important figures of the early Islamic period, such as caliphs, religious scholars, companions of the prophet, and their offspring. Imbert suggests that, with the cumulation of the published material, it can be possible to trace, for example, the movements of the individuals.

Perret, Daniel (ed.). 2018. *Writing for Eternity: A Survey of Epigraphy in Southeast Asia.* Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient

      A collection of articles on Southeast Asian epigraphy, including contributions by Claude Guillot, Ludvik Kalus, and Roderick Orlina on inscriptions written and commissioned by Muslims of the region. Most Islamic inscriptions from the region are funerary inscriptions, which can be used to study the lineages of the families.