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New Islamic inscriptions from the Jordanian Badia region

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New Islamic inscriptions from the Jordanian Badia region

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Abstract

This paper aims to study new Islamic epigraphical material found in the Jordanian Badia. These inscriptions include one *hadith* and one inscription dating to the thirteenth century CE/eighth century AH. This study will highlight the relationship between the place where the inscriptions were found and the early Islamic mosque also said to be located there. The purpose of this article is to publish images of the newly-found inscriptions, give a translation, and provide some commentary. This article considers the definition of Islamic inscription to be all Arabic inscriptions written since Islamic times.

Keywords: Islamic Epigraphy Mosque Arabic Inscriptions Jordanian Badia Hadith

1 Introduction

During the last two decades several hundred new Islamic inscriptions have been found in the Jordanian Harra region, most of which belong to the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods (see Al-Jbour 2001; 2006; Al-Housan 2008). Many early mosques which have been discovered in the Harra region consisted of a small circle of stones with inscriptions inside, against the stone circle wall, on the same side as the Qibla (see Al-Jbour 1999: 161–168). Mosques which previous

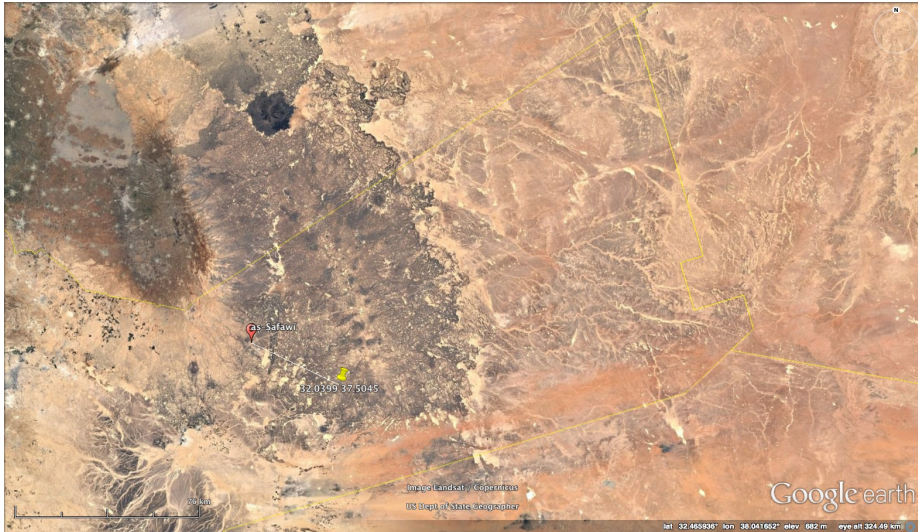


Figure 1: A map of the Jordanian Ḥarra showing the sites on which the inscriptions were recorded (source: Google).

authors have described as “simple mosques” are typically simple and small (Avni 1994: 86–87; Al-Jbour 1999: 17). The OCIANA team noticed that most mosques which they found were built next to water sources. One difference between Safaitic inscriptions in general and Islamic inscriptions specifically is that Safaitic inscriptions can be found anywhere and not necessarily close to water. In contrast, most of the time Islamic inscriptions are found next to water sources. These water sources are large ponds or small lakes which have formed for typically around two months.

This article is the first of several articles we aim to publish. Each article will examine a series of related inscriptions which have each been discovered in one location, as opposed to according to time period. This article will discuss eight inscriptions which were found and photographed by Ali al-Manaser approximately 40 km south-east of the village of As-Safawi (see Figure 1). The area where the inscriptions were found is close to a Jubat Aṭ-Ṭbalat. It is a wide, open area covered in black basalt stones. There are two places on this



Figure 2: A view showing the site on which the inscriptions were recorded (photograph: A. al-Manaser).



Figure 3: A view showing the site on which the inscriptions were recorded (photograph: A. al-Manaser).

site where water collects to form a large pond or lake between February and April. Basalt rocks have been cleared away to form a path between the two collections of water and the area which forms the mosque is in the middle of the path. It could be that rather than the location of the mosque in proximity to the water being incidental that a settlement including a mosque was built because of the discovery of water.

2 The mosque

The mosque is built in a simple way from a collection of basalt stones which form a circle. What appear to be the remains of the apse can be seen but this appears to be partially destroyed. It is not possible to comment on how the mosque was originally built as it appears to be mostly demolished. Other known examples of early Islamic mosques in Jordan were built by layering rocks up to a metre in height and presumably these would have been covered with a tent. The mosque discussed in this paper appears to have been demolished because the rocks mostly form a single layer and it is very low compared with other examples (see Figures 2 and 3).

3 The inscriptions

3.1 Stone number 1

This stone includes two inscriptions. The first one is engraved with very thick lettering. The second one, below the first, is a much thinner inscription. The stone is approximately 40 × 30 cm in size.

3.1.1 Islamic inscription AEI 1

1. اللهم اغفر لعبد الو
2. حد (الواحد) بن الهذيل
3. ولولديه وما
4. ولد أمين
5. رب العلمين



Figure 4: Stone number 1.

1. Oh Allah, forgive ‘Abd al-Wahid
2. ibn al-Haḍil
3. and his parents

4. and his sons. Amen
5. Lord of the worlds

All the names in the inscription are known. The author used the word *bn* instead of *ibn*, which is usually found in inscriptions from the Ḥarra region. The father's name could be read either as al-Hadīl or al-Haḍīl because of the lack of dot distinguishing *ḍ* from *d*. This inscription is particularly interesting because the shape of the letters suggests that the inscription must be from an era earlier than the 8 century AH and so it is unlike many previously described inscriptions from the area. The letters *dāl* and *nūn* appear to be the same shape as those found in other inscriptions dating from the second and third centuries AH. As the inscription is undated it cannot be dated for certain.

3.1.2 Islamic inscription AEI 2

It seems as though this inscription was written at a different time to the first, and that the author of the inscription wished to finish the first one. You can see the difference in the style of the engravings. It is difficult to read the whole inscription because some letters are very thin. Possibly it is modern graffiti and therefore not relevant to this study. We will not attempt to translate this inscription for these reasons but perhaps another scholar would like to attempt it.

3.2 Stone number 2

3.2.1 Islamic inscription AEI 3

1. روي عن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم
2. أنه قل (قال) عليه السلم (السلام) ثلاثه لا يشمون رائحه
3. الجنة وأن ريحها يشم من مدمن
4. الخمر وعاق والديه والزاني...لم يتوب



Figure 5: Stone number 2.

1. It is related of the prophet of Allah, Allah bless him and grant him peace,
2. that he said, bless him, three [kinds of people] will not smell the smells
3. of paradise, whose smells can be smelt from a 500-year walk away: addicts
4. to al-khamar (alcohol) and disobedience [towards] both of one's parents and the adulterer [if they] are not [will not be] penitent

3.2.2 Islamic inscription AEI 4

1. اللهم غفر لمشعل ابن
2. جابر ابن سلمان ابن
3. نزعل من المضارحه
4. كتب سنة سبع وربعين (واربعين)
5. وسبع مايه

1. Oh Allah, forgive Maš'al ibn
2. Gābir ibn Salmān ibn
3. Ḥaza'l from al-Maḍārḥah
- 4./5. [and] he wrote [in] the year 747 [AH]

3.3 Stone number 3

3.3.1 Islamic inscription AEI 5

1. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
2. اللهم اغفر لزيد بن
3. وهب ولولديه
4. وما ودا وللهو
5. منين والمؤمنات و

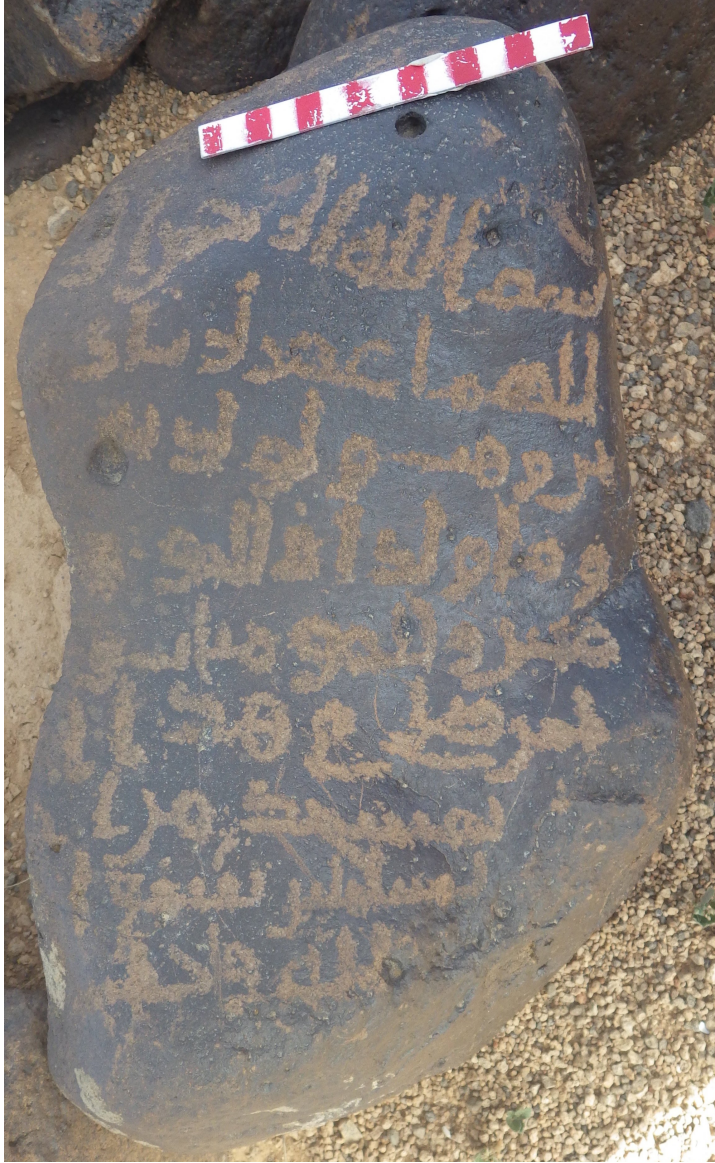


Figure 6: Stone number 3.

6. لمن صلى في هذا ا
 7. لمسجد من ا
 8. لمسلمين سمع ا
 9. لله واخذ

1. In the name of Allah, the merciful, the compassionate
2. Oh Allah, forgive Ziyād bin
3. Wahab and his parents
4. and their offspring and the
5. (male) believers and (female) believers and
6. whoever prays in this
7. mosque among
- 8./9. the Muslims. May Allah hear and accept

This stone includes nine lines of inscription, which is engraved in very thick lettering. The form of the stone plays a role in the shape of the letters. The word *ar-rahīm* in the first line is incomplete: only the first three letters are written, at which point the author seems to have run out of room for the rest of the word.

All the words of the inscription are clearly legible except the word at the end of line eight, which could be the word *sami'a* or *sabaḥa*. We think the former meaning is the most likely because we found it in a similar phrase, which we shall see in inscription AEI 7.

The inscription's formulaic 'God forgive the visitors to this mosque' has been found many times in this particular location. This inscription is evidence that this particular place was a mosque. A notable feature of this text is that there is the first known example of the use of this particular name, Ziyād bin Wahab.

3.4 Stone number 4

This stone appears to include two separate inscriptions.



Figure 7: Stone number 4.

3.4.1 Islamic inscription AEI 6

1. بسم الله الر
2. اللهم اغفر لحميد
3. بن سحمان ما تقدم من ذ
4. نبه

1. In the name of Allah the m[erciful]
2. Oh Allah, forgive Ḥamid
3. bin Saḥmān for what he formerly committed
4. [in the way of] sins

The author began the first inscription with *bismillāh*. He wrote “in the name of Allah” and then the first three letters of *ar-raḥmān*, “the merciful”, but then stopped despite there still being enough space to complete the word. The name of the author could be Ḥamīd. It is difficult to find another reading. The middle letter could be *mīm* or *dāl*. The penultimate letter could be *yā*⁷. The author does not appear to have completed his inscription because he ends it with ما تقدم من ذنبه, whereas the expression in full normally ends وما تاخر من ذنبه, i.e. the author writes “Allah forgive the sins he formerly committed”, without adding “and those that follow”. It could be that the author wrote it for someone who died and hence could not commit further sins. It could otherwise mean that the author is asking forgiveness for himself and that he confesses his past sins but does not ask for forgiveness for future ones because he does not intend to commit any.

3.4.2 Islamic inscription AEI 7

1. اللهم اغفر لريان بن عطا ما تقدم
2. من ذنبه وما بعد سمع الله

1. Allah forgive Rayyān bin ‘aṭā for what he formerly committed
2. in the way of sins and what he will do in future. May Allah hear

The second inscription, which includes a different author name, appears to include a mistake in the word تاخر as he forgot to write the *’alif*. In the opinion of the authors this appears to bear a close resemblance to the modern Jordanian Bedouin Arabic dialect. The end of this inscription helps us to understand inscription AEI 5 as it appears to be a complete phrase. In the corner of the rock is a modern inscription, dated 1982.

3.5 Stone number 5

This stone appears to include two separate inscriptions.

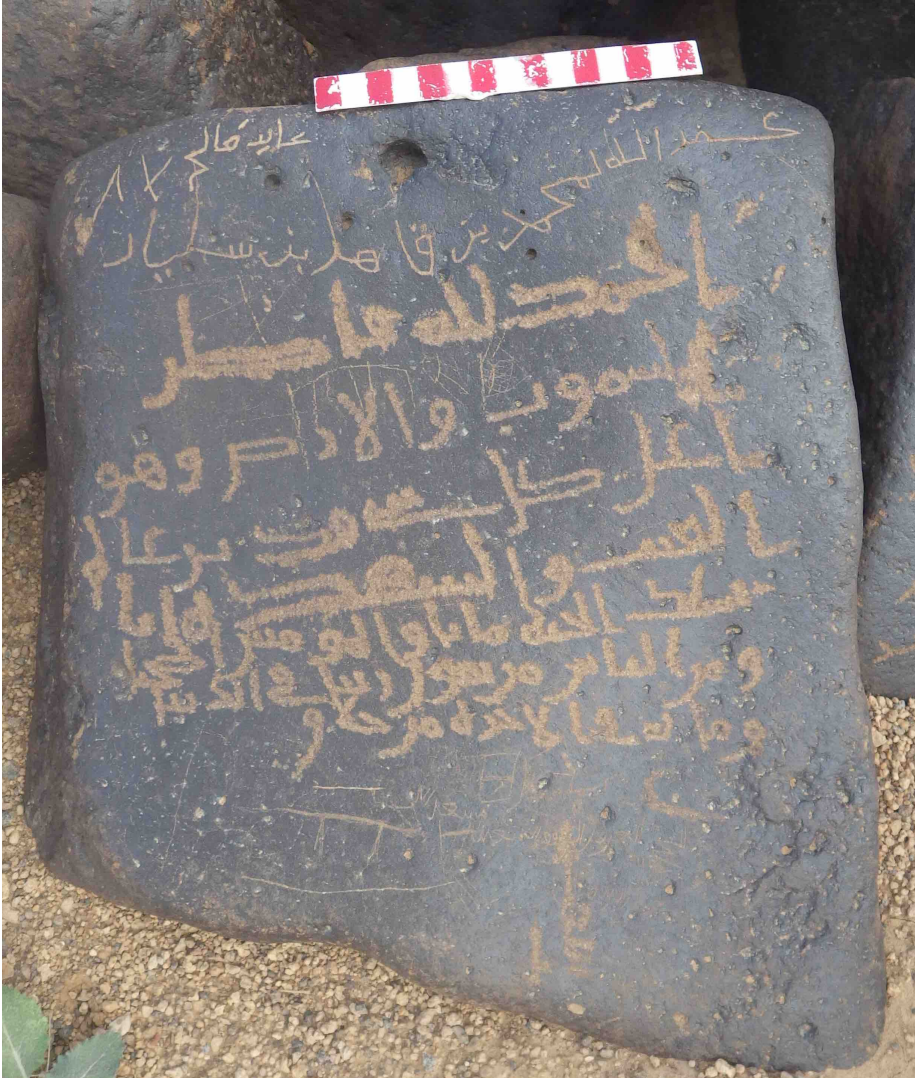


Figure 8: Stone number 5.

3.5.1 Islamic inscription AEI 8

1. غفر الله لمحمد بن قاهر بن سليمان

1. Allah forgive Muḥammad bin Qāhir bin Sulaymān

3.5.2 Islamic inscription AEI 9

1. الحمد لله فاطر
2. السموت والارض وهو
3. اعلى كل شي قدير عالم
4. الغيب والشهده انا
5. يسلك الجنة مابا والمومنين اصحبا
6. ومن الناس من يقول ربنا في الدنيا
7. وماله في الاخره من خلاف

1. Praise be to Allah, Who created
2. the heavens and the earth. And He
3. hath power over all things. Who knows
4. (all things) both secret and open. I
5. ask [Allah] that the paradise [be his] residence and the believers
as companions [in the paradise]
6. Mankind who saith: “Our Lord! Give unto us in the world”,
7. and he hath no portion in the Hereafter

3.6 Stone number 6

This stone appears to include three separate inscriptions.

3.6.1 Islamic inscription AEI 10

1. اللهم اغفر لعبدالوحد
2. بن الهذيل ذ
3. نبه امين رب العلمين



Figure 9: Stone number 6.

1. Oh Allah, forgive ‘Abd al-Wahid
2. bin al-Haḍil his sins.
3. Amen Lord of the worlds

3.6.2 Islamic inscription AEI 11

1. اللهم اغفر
2. لسعيد
3. بن مدامه

1. Oh Allah, forgive
2. Sa‘id
3. bin Madāmah

3.6.3 Islamic inscription AEI 12

1. اللهم اغفر لكالحا
2. سليم والو
3. لديه

1. Oh Allah, forgive Kalḥā
2. [bin] Salīm and
3. his parents

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