Descendants and ancestors: a study of Arabic inscriptions from the Arabian Peninsula (1st-4th c. AH/7th-10th c. CE)

Alhatlani, A.S.M.B.

Chapter Two: Selecting and interpreting the corpus

2.1. Introduction

Christian Robin very well described the historical significance of the graffiti despite their brief content, intention, or message. He says:

> "Graffiti are small texts carved by non-professionals. They are found in large numbers on rocks near sanctuaries in the countryside and steppe, in the areas where shepherds would graze their flocks, and finally, along certain thoroughfares, particularly at the edge of the most desolate desert. In general, they are very brief documents yielding the identity of the pilgrim, the shepherd or the traveller. All of these people have two names: the author's personal name and that of his father, with for the upper segments of society, also that of the lineage. Details of activity or origin are rare; pilgrims normally add a brief religious formula. The main interest of graffiti is in the light they shed on social classes and the populations who have generally not left any other inscriptions. They demonstrate, first of all, that the practice of writing was widespread. They also reveal a significant variance in the local form of writings."[112]

While this annotation is made in relation to graffiti in general, it can be well applied to Arabic ones. Arabic inscriptions contain also short texts, consisting mainly of names and pious formulae. Many of the individuals mentioned in the Arabic graffiti, even, as we will see below, some who belonged to well-known and important families, remain unmentioned in the record.

This chapter offers a detailed introduction to the epigraphic corpus that forms the source base of this dissertation. It explains how I have identified the inscriptions that mention members of the

[112] Christian Julien Robin, "Before Ḥimyar: Epigraphic Evidence for the Kingdoms of South Arabia," in *Arabs and Empires before Islam*, ed. Greg Fisher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 92.

four families of descendants of the companions of the prophet Muḥammad. I will explain my search and selection criteria. Subsequently, I will identify the methods I use to extrapolate information from this corpus. Finally, a detailed discussion of the geographical locations where the inscriptions were found including a map, and a presentation on how the material can be dated complete the chapter.

The epigraphic corpus in this dissertation is based on the individuals mentioned in them, not on the genre of text or the form it takes. Graffiti, constructions or monumental inscriptions as well as gravestones are considered equally for prosopographic and epigraphic purposes. For the historical analysis, however, it is of course very relevant to take into account the different social contexts of each type. Monumental inscriptions and gravestones have survived in much smaller numbers than graffiti. Our corpus is more or less representative with 15 gravestones as opposed to 244 graffiti, and one foundational inscription.

2.2. Establishing the corpus

Before discussing the process whereby I selected the inscriptions that form the source base of this dissertation, it is necessary to provide an overview of how I have identified the individual names appearing in the inscriptions. To put it differently, I will highlight how I have matched the names mentioned in the inscriptions with historical figures or individuals mentioned in other inscriptions. In order to identify properly the individuals recorded in the inscriptions, it is of paramount importance to make sure we read the names correctly. While examining the readings and commentaries offered by previous scholars, I have been able to correct several readings in the corpus of edited inscriptions, allowing me to identify individuals, and to connect them to the historical records (see Appendix Two).

2.2.1. Identifiers and identifying

One of the most striking aspects of these inscriptions is the genealogical presentation. Some texts record only one generation, while others can have up to eleven generations. These long genealogies are found mostly on the gravestone (see Appendix Three), the family mentions in the graffiti tend to be shorter. Sometimes, the same individual appears in several graffiti found very near to one another, with some inscriptions either mentioning their first name only, while others also mention the *nasab* up to several generations. In some cases it is possible to ascertain that the names functioned as signatures in graffiti, even if the way an individual wrote his last name differed in each inscription (inscriptions 2.37-38 and 2.135-136). Normally, the first name is followed by the last name, but in our corpus there is one exception, whereby the order is reversed and the last name is placed first in the sentence structure (inscription 3.72). *Nisba*s in the inscriptions indicate tribal or family associations and are only very rarely used to describe a geographical, religious, or professional background. This use of *nisba*s would become the customary later on and in different contexts, like the religious and geographical *nisba* we find in papyri and which became popular from the 3rd/9th century onwards.[113]

When trying to identify the individuals named in our inscriptions and to match them with historical figures, our first concern is to understand how individuals referred to themselves in early Arabic inscriptions from Arabia, and what these references signify. Individuals that appear in the inscriptions generally can be identified first of all the person's name. This part of the inscription consists of their first name and their lineages, i.e. the name of their fathers, grand-fathers, great-

[113] For studying religious *nisba* in papyri see Petra Sijpesteijn, "Visible Identities: in Search of Egypt's Jews in Early Islamic Egypt," in *Israel in Egypt the land of Egypt as Concept and Reality for Jews in antiquity and the Early Medieval Period*, ed. Alison Salvesen, Sarah Pearce and Mirian Frenkel (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 424-440.

grand-fathers and so on. Occasionally their *laqab*, or epithet is mentioned. The *nisba*, often translated as the last name, which can either indicate a tribal affiliation (al-Qurayshī) or family relation (al-Zubayrī), is another part of the name that is sometimes mentioned in the Arabic inscriptions, and this can help us to recognize a person.[114] In a small number of cases, a profession or other indication of social status is mentioned. All this information is mostly given in constructions inscription and gravestones.

To identify people in the epigraphic record, I have applied four methods. The epigraphic records show that people mostly signed their names listing several generations, to make it virtually impossible to find two people with the exact identical identification. In other words, the way these individuals identify themselves in the inscriptions makes their identity unique. See, for example, Rabāḥ son of Ḥafṣ son of ʿĀṣim son of ʿUmar son of al-Khaṭṭāb (inscriptions 2.37-38) who appears in two graffiti dated 96/714-715 and 100/718-719 found in Medina, and who can be identified with certainty thanks to his genealogical line. Identifying people by their name and genealogy is the first method I applied.

Sometimes, however, individuals appear only with a shortened version of their name or only with their first name. This greatly complicates their identification as they can be easily confused with other individuals who have the same (partial) name in the epigraphic and literary record. Take for instance Yaḥyā son of al-Zubayr, who appears in (inscription 3.58) from al-ʿUlā. There were in fact three people with this name known from the historical records (see the discussion in Chapter Three, section 3.5.3). Another example from the 2nd/8th century, are the two brothers with the same name who belonged to the family of ʿUmar. A graffito written by ʿUmar son of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-ʿUmarī (inscription 2.32) thus opens two options for identification: ʿUmar al-Akbar or ʿUmar al-

[114] There are no geographical *nisbas* in our corpus.

Aṣghar, the older or younger respectively (see the discussion in Chapter Three, section 3.4.1). How is it possible to identify these individuals?

There are three ways through which we can connect such individuals who appear in the inscriptions with only a limited number of unique onomastic characteristics to identify figures from the historical record or from other inscriptions. First, we use the Arabian epigraphic habit of the time. Data show that inscriptions were generally inscribed in the same places, indicating a continued frequenting of areas for grazing, travelling or spending free time often by related individuals (see Chapter Five, section 5.6.3.1). This means that members of the same family or tribe, including dependents such as clients and slaves, left written memories in the same place. In fact, we can find up to 20 texts related to one family in the same place. For example, in Ruwāwa and Muzj (see section 2.4 on geography below) graffiti related to the same individual, or to those connected through family ties appear next to each other (see Chapter Five, section 5.6.3.1and Part Two for more details).

In Ruwāwa, three generations of the branch of ʿAbd Allāh son of ʿUmar posted inscriptions. So the grandson of ʿUmar, ʿUbayd Allāh (inscription 2.1), his two sons, ʿUthmān (inscriptions 2.2-7) and Abū Salama (inscriptions 2.19-21), as well as the two sons of ʿUthmān Abū Bakr (inscriptions 2.8-13) and Ḥafṣ (inscriptions 2.14-18) all left their inscriptions in the same place (more details in Chapter Three, section 3.4.1 and Chapter Five, section 5.6.3.3).

A second example comes from Muzj, where inscriptions from the Zubayrid family are found. Two branches of the descendants of ʿAbd Allāh through his sons Ḥamza and ʿAbbād. Besides that, the branch of ʿUrwa also exists there. For example, Yaḥyā son of ʿAbbād (inscription 3.2) and his son Isḥāq (inscriptions 3.3-4), as well as his great grandson Muḥammad son of Yʿaqūb son of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb son of Yaḥyā (inscriptions 3.5-6) left their inscriptions in the same place (see Part Two).

Interestingly, some of these inscriptions record only the first name, while others contain the names of the father, grandfather, and further relations extending over several generations. In this way, individuals signing with a partially identifiable name can be linked to the same individuals or their relatives who used more extensive self-identifications in the writings that appear nearby. It seems in fact that when members of the same family placed their inscriptions next to each other, later inscriptions left out the *nisba*, presumably because those leaving their inscriptions next to those of family members listing extensive self-identifications, believed that one mention was sufficient. We find this pattern for example in the graffiti left by the two brothers ʿAtīq (inscriptions 3.31-33) and ʿĀmir (inscription 3.34) sons of Ṣaddīq son of Mūsā al-Zubayrī. On the same rock of these texts, their cousin ʿAbd Allāh son of ʿAtīq son of Ṣaddīq left an inscription (inscription 3.30), but without mentioning his full *nisba*. This phenomenon was particularly prevalent in the first four centuries of the Hijra /7th-10th century. The inscriptions show that in some places, individuals belonging to the same family added their names next to the inscriptions left by other members, using a limited lineage or none at all. However, in those cases where one individual has used an extensive self-identification listing several generations, can help us to identify the entire branch. This is the case with the descendants of Falīḥ son of Muḥammad, who belongs to the branch of al-Mundhir of al-Zubayr. His grandson, ʿUmāra son of Ibrāhīm (inscription 3.41), left a graffito with his *nisba*. Without ʿUmāra's graffito we would not have been able to identify his son, father, two uncles, or his two cousins who also left inscriptions next to his (see inscriptions 3. 40-48). Another example is formed by the texts around that of al-Qāsim son of Muḥammad son of Abū ʿAbs (inscriptions 4.1-8). Six members of his family left their inscriptions on the same site with differing degrees of identification and lineage. This all indicates the significance of the archaeological context.

The second method to identify individuals who appear in the inscriptions with only a limited number of unique onomastic characteristics, is to use the information from the literary sources about a place and those who are associated with it as based on residence or other activities. If we know from the literary sources that generation after generation a certain family resided in the same place, it helps us to identify the individuals mentioned in inscriptions. For example, according to the literary sources the descendants of ʿUmar lived in Medina for many generations. In the inscriptions we find the graffito of ʿUmar son of Ḥafṣ son of al-Fārūq (inscription 2.41) who left graffito in a site not far from that of his sons, grandsons and great-grandsons. Combining the knowledge from the literary sources and the additional information based on 'proximity' of inscriptions, we can identify this ʿUmar son of Ḥafṣ son of al-Fārūq as the great-grandsons ʿUmar with a very high degree of probability, even though he omitted his grandfather's name ʿĀṣim.

Finally, the practice of individuals of lower social rank to establish a link with members of a higher social order can help us identify both parties. For example, the word *mawlā* (freedman or client) appears almost always with an indication of the patron or former slave-owner. Sometimes, a specific individual is mentioned; in other cases, a tribe or other social group is referred to. Take for example, "Ḥabīb son of Abū Ḥabīb, *mawlā* of ʿUrwa son of al-Zubayr (inscription 3.51)" if Ḥabīb had used his bare name without referring to his (*walāʾ)* bond with ʿUrwa, it would have been difficult to identify him. Occasionally, the title that appears in one inscription is absent in another. An example is Rabīʿ, who once signed as *fatā* (slave boy) (inscription 2.113) of ʿĀṣim son of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, and left another three inscriptions without this identifier (inscriptions 2.114-116) this identification based on his handwriting.

2.2.2. The corpus

In the last decades, hundreds of early Islamic-Arabic inscriptions have been identified and edited, and new ones continue to be discovered daily (see Chapter One, section 1.2). As I intend to study certain aspects of Arabian epigraphy, it is my intention to select a cohesive body of texts from among this vast set of data. I have done this by identifying inscriptions related to four families, which also appear in the historical record.

In my research, I have become interested in examining the writings of historical figures from the first four centuries of Islam, i.e. to search for inscriptions mentioning the Companions (*ṣaḥāba,* sing. *ṣāḥib*) of the Prophet Muḥammad and their descendants. This includes members of the Meccan tribe of Quraysh to which Muḥammad belonged and the *anṣār* (Muḥammad's allies) in Medina. I started with the published editions of al-Rashid,[115] al-Kilābī,[116] and Qashshāsh.[117] Whenever I identified a Companion or descendant of a Companion in an edition, I examined all other edited and unedited inscriptions from the same place. The archaeological and epigraphic reports by the Saudi archaeological service in the periodical *Atlal* were especially useful. In this way, I worked my way through the articles dealing with the area around Medina looking for inscriptions related to the descendants of ʿUmar and al-Zubayr.[118] Eventually, I have examined all editions of Arabic inscriptions from Arabia as they appeared in books and articles as well as archaeological and survey reports. As mentioned in Chapter One, section 1.2, due to the dynamics of the field of Arabian epigraphy, the corpus of known inscriptions is constantly being adjusted. As surveys and archaeological work continue to be conducted, the number of inscriptions

[115] al-Rashid, *Kitābāt islāmiyya ghayr*, and see *al-Ṣuwaydira (al-ṭaraf qadīman)*.
[116] al-Kilābī, *al-Nuqūsh al-islāmiyya*, 244.
[117] Qashshāsh, *Nuqūsh al-ṣaḥābī al-jalīl*, 55-65.
[118] Askūbī et al., "al-Musūḥāt al-athariyya fī," 96.

continues to expand. I have also used unpublished inscriptions that were brought to my attention in the surveys of the Saudi archaeological service, but also, I found unpublished inscriptions via social media and a website.[119] In total I have edited 145 unpublished inscriptions in Part Two of the dissertation. However, as my focus is on the Arabian Peninsula, I chose my sources accordingly. So even though there exists a gravestone related to a person belonging to the Zubayrid family I did not include it in my research, because it was found in Egypt, and as such fell outside the scope of this dissertation.[120] Finally, I have limited my search to inscriptions dating from between the 1st/7th century and the beginning of the 4th/10th. In fact I have not found any inscriptions dating from after this period (see table 1 below) related to these four families.

All in all, I have studied a total of 260 inscriptions (see Part Two of the dissertation) that record 106 different-named individuals belonging to four families of Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad and their descendants dating to the first four centuries of Islam. 115 inscriptions were already published, although I was able to correct a substantial number of the readings (see Appendix Two). The individuals who appear in the inscriptions and the four families they belong to are dealt with in Chapter Three.

2.3. Disciplinary methodologies

Through the methods described in the previous section, I have identified the inscriptions belonging to four families dating to the first four centuries of Islam's history. When identifying persons belonging to the same family, I have looked at (1) their name their patronymic and lineage, (2) indication of their social status or profession, (3) their *laqab* "epithet", and (4) their *nisba*. I have

[119] I took the photos from Mohammed Almoghathawi (URL https://twitter.com/mohammed93athar, last accessed October 7, 2020); and Farīq al-Saḥrāʾ (URL: http://alsahra.org, last accessed October 7,2020). with a permission from the Saudi commission.

[120] Madeleine Schneider, *Stèles funéraires musulmanes des iles Dahlak (Mer rouge)* (Le Caire: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire, 1983), 1: 165-166.

also used the location where the inscription was found to connect them to other individuals or families. The families and individuals thus identified in the inscriptions could be matched to information from the literary sources.

In searching for information on the families mentioned in the inscriptions and in literary sources, I have paid particular attention to lineage and geographical information; our historical literary sources give us some information about the people who had lived in certain places. It is historically enriching when one finds the inscriptions of these people or their descendants near to the places that literary sources mention as their place of residence. Take for example, al-Wahaṭ cemetery in Ṭāʾif, where some gravestones of the descendants of ʿAmr son of al-ʿĀṣ were found, while literary sources confirm a connection between this family and Ṭāʾif.[121]

A prerequisite for people to carve their names in stone, would be that they at some point resided in the area where they did so. So while on the one hand literary sources, as explained above, can help us to identify individuals with a limited amount of onomastic characteristics, the equation in fact works two ways: A comparison of the information found in the inscriptions, which pre-date the literary sources and which are contemporary to the age in which the people carving them lived, helps us to evaluate the literary sources as well. The presence of inscriptions by certain individuals in a particular area, is a strong indicator that the people mentioned by the literary sources to have resided in that area, were indeed historical figures that actually lived in the places that the literary sources indicate. As we shall see, this comparison will be the subject of the next two chapters.

In addition to the information from the surrounding inscriptions, knowledge about which family resided in or frequented a place, also helps us establish the identity of the individuals mentioned in the inscriptions.

[121] Grohmann, *Expédition Philby- Ryckmans- Lippens*, 34.

Moreover, the epigraphic sources help us not only to identify individuals through the information contained about the place of residence of these families, but they also provide other historical information enriching our understanding of these individuals' movements throughout the region. For example, ʿUmar son of Ibrāhīm son of Wāqid son of Muḥammad son of Zayd son of ʿAbd Allāh son of ʿUmar son of al-Khaṭṭāb (inscription 2.28) was known to have functioned as a governor in Yemen and to have lived there. His gravestone was, however, found in Mecca, which suggests he died when performing his *ʿumra* or *ḥajj* or when he was performing some other business in the city. This information on his moving between Yemen and the Ḥijāz is lacking from the narrative sources.

So while the corpus of inscriptions mentioned above forms the focus of this dissertation, biographical works and other literary texts which provide useful information on the biographies of the four families, form an important additional source throughout this work. As will be discussed in detail in the next two chapters, the onomastic records of the literary sources and those of the inscriptions do not exactly coincide. Chapter Three will discuss the information that can be gleaned from the literary sources about the individuals mentioned in the inscriptions. I have also produced family trees of the families, combining information from the literary sources and the inscriptions. Here, I will also discuss any discrepancies in the ways individuals are identified. Most notably, while literary sources mention all generations of a person as they are known, inscriptions generally attest only a few, with a maximum of up to eleven generations. Chapter Four will discuss persons that appear in the inscriptions, but who are left unmentioned by the literary sources. Similarly, I will discuss any dependents of the families, such as freedmen/clients (mawālī) who appear in the inscriptions, and I will add information on whether they are known through any literary records. In analyzing the onomastic material, I have taken inspiration from the work of Asad Ahmed and

Majied Robinson on the earliest generations of Muslims based on biographical dictionaries focusing on the maternal side of the Prophet's tribe. Asad Ahmed studied the five of six families whose ancestors were part of the *shūrā* after the death of ʿUmar, except the descendants of al-Zubayr.[122] Robinson focused on the marriage customs between 500-750 of the Quraysh, the tribe that the Prophet belonged to.[123] I have used the Muslim sources, as we will see in Chapter Three, section 3.2 only as a source of information on the families who appear in the inscriptions, not analyzing the information from the *nasab* works themselves.

2.3.1. Obstacles and open endings?

Some problems that I have encountered when comparing the material in the inscriptions and that in the literary sources are listed in Chapter Three, section 3.2, together with my proposed solutions. First, there is the issue of the identification of individuals who appear with shortened, incomplete, or varied names in the inscriptions compared to the literary record (see Chapter Three, section 3.5.5, for unidentified Zubayrids). This makes it easy to confuse people. I have already suggested above, in section 2.1, that I think it is possible to establish more certainty about these individuals even when their names are incomplete from the geographical and epigraphic context – the place where they were discovered and the other inscriptions that were found near them.

The second problem concerns the limited text that these inscriptions contain and how this affects their use as historical data. Onomastics has been a long- and well-established discipline in epigraphy, but by studying the information from the inscriptions within a broader context, much more can be gained from them then merely names. I have in addition used these inscriptions for the information they contain about the ways Muslims in ancient Arabia composed and executed

[122] Those are the descendants of Saʿd son of Abū Waqqāṣ, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān son ʿAwf, Ṭalḥa son of ʿUbayd Allāh, ʿUthmān son of ʿAffān and ʿAlī son of Abū Ṭālib see Ahmed, *The Religious*, 1.
[123] Robinson, "*Prosopographical Approaches*,"19-21.

these writings on stone in public. I have studied the so-called epigraphic habit by examining what people wrote and where they wrote it. In other words, I have looked at the names – *laqab*s or epithets, first names and patronymics. Additionally I have analyzed how many generations were mentioned, whether some were skipped or all listed in order; what indicators of profession or social status were used; which religious formulae people used; and whether they added dates or not. Furthermore, I have looked at the places where people left their inscriptions in relation to where other inscriptions were located, and in which places they chose to write their messages – e.g. on high or low rocks, loose stones, in valleys or on mountains; near the road, or hidden from sight.

Combining information from inscriptions and historical sources has the danger in it to develop into a circular argument – I use the historical sources to identify the people mentioned in the inscriptions and then I use the inscriptions to verify the information recorded in the historical sources. To prevent such interdependence between the two kinds of sources, I have always used a combination of information to identify individuals. In other words, I have combined the information from the inscriptions themselves, from surrounding inscriptions *and* from the literary sources both biographical data about families and historical data about the places where an individual was active and what kind of positions he fulfilled.

2.4. The geographical outlines

Islamic-era inscriptions can be found in a number of Arab/ Muslim countries today. Especially in Saudi Arabia, where surveys continue to be carried out, there has been a marked increase in the number of inscriptions that have been uncovered; especially the so-called *graffiti* found in the desert. Graffiti are mostly found along the ancient *ḥajj* routes and around cities. They are also discovered in the areas where people spent time for leisure or work such as valleys, rivulets, in the mountains, and on spots close to water wells.

The discoveries in Saudi Arabia were accelerated by the establishment of the Independent Commission for Archaeology (formally Deputy Ministry of Antiquities and Museums) in 1972.[124] Increasing attention has already resulted in many new discoveries, as well as studies and editions of already identified inscriptions. So far, the focus has been in the regions of Mecca, Medina, al-ʿUlā, and Ṭāʾif, as well as Tabūk, al-Bāḥa, and – more specifically – the areas of Najrān, Skākā, and Ḥāʾil. In Khaybar, no systematic work has been conducted. Recently, al-Namāṣ in the south of the Saudi Arabia has been the subject of surveys by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage.[125]

The inscriptions dealt with in this dissertation stem from different regions on the Arabian Peninsula, extending from the north to the south. In the following lines I will provide more details about the geographical information of the sites where the inscriptions are found.

Most of the inscriptions, graffiti, and epitaphs discussed in this dissertation come from Medina, ancient Yathrib, these places as follow:

Ruwāwa, a rivulet (Ar. *ghadīr*) located between two mountains, is found to the south of Medina on the modern road from Medina to Mecca and Jeddah. According to al-Bakrī, the water from Ruwāwa usually overflowed.[126] The site was first studied by al-Rashid in his publication in 1993 were he published 55 graffiti.[127] Later on the site was surveyed twice by the "Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage" at that time "Department of Antiquities and Museums", in 1999[128] and 2002.[129] The site is home to more than 310 graffiti, all in Arabic.[130]

[124] al-Rashid, *Dirāsāt fī al-āthār*, 11.
[125] ʿAwaḍ ʿAlī al-Zahrānī et al., "Taqrīr ʿan masḥ muḥāfaẓat al-namāṣ 1430AH/2010CE," *Atlal* 23 (2013): 121-125.
[126] al-Bakrī, *Muʿjam mā istaʿjam*, 4: 1328.
[127] al-Rashid, *Kitābāt islāmiyya ghayr*, 106.
[128] al-Zahrānī et al., "Taqrīr mabdʾī," 72.
[129] Askūbī et al., "al-Musūḥāt al-athariyya fī," 96-97.
[130] al-Zahrānī et al., "Taqrīr mabdʾī," 72, and see Askūbī et al., "al-Musūḥāt al-athariyya fī," 96-97.

Indeed, in 2017, when I visited the site, the water on the site was low. However, during my second field trip in 2018, the site had flooded. On March the 28th 2014, Tanḍiyab al-Fāidī published an article in the newspaper *ṣaḥīfat al-Madīna*. In his article, he mentioned Ruwāwa among several places in and around Medina that are related to famous companions of the Prophet Muḥammad. He writes also that Ruwāwa used to be called *Bādiyat Āl al-Khaṭṭāb wa-maṣāyifihim*: "Steppe and summer residence of the family of al-Khaṭṭāb" al-Fāidī based his article on the inscriptions which had been discovered.[131]

I have visited Ruwāwa three times during my fieldwork; twice in January 2017, and again in January 2018. In 2018, the place was full of water due to the rain season and I was not able to examine all inscriptions *in situ*, that is why I have based my study of some inscriptions on photographs. I should mention that two of the graffiti discovered by al-Rashid's were not located during the survey (inscriptions 2.89 and 90), Interestingly, there are three graffiti discovered at the site that mention the name of the place itself. Following the publication of al-Rashid's book in 1993, Ruwāwa a fence was erected around the site, because it immediately became to be considered one of the most important epigraphic sites in Medina. Furthermore, there is only one example of rock art. There is a relatively large number of early dated inscriptions, the earliest ones being dated to the year 96/714-715,[132] 100/718-719,[133] 100/718-719,[134] 114/732-733, 120/ 737-738, and two dated to the year 121/738-739.[135] All these earliest inscriptions will be used in this dissertation.

[131] Tanḍiyab al-Fāidī, " Ruwāwa bādiyat āl al-khaṭṭāb wa-maṣāyifihim," *Ṣaḥīfat al-Madīna*, March 28, 2014, https://www.al-madina.com/article/294641.
[132] al-Rashid, *Kitābāt islāmiyya ghayr*, 83-86; Imbert, "*L'Islam des pierres*," 1: 80-81.
[133] al-Rashid, *Kitābāt islāmiyya ghayr*, 98-100.
[134] This one published by al-Rashid without the date see al-Rashid, *Kitābāt islāmiyya ghayr*, 61-62.
[135] al-Rashid, *Kitābāt islāmiyya ghayr*, 56-58 and 93-95, Askūbī et al., "al-Musūḥāt al-athariyya fī," plate 5.4 c.

In this dissertation 137 inscriptions from the corpus are located in Ruwāwa of which 37 texts were already published by al-Rashid (see Part Two). The inscriptions contain names belonging to the ʿUmarī and Zubayrid families. Indeed, according to the literary sources, the ʿUmarī and Zubayrid families owned estates or farms close to Ruwāwa.[136]

Muzj, Mujaz, is another rivulet locality south of Medina and is part of the Wādī al-ʿAqīq. These two names were used interchangeably (in Part Two I use Muzj to refer to this location). The first name was the one predominantly used in Arabic medieval sources.[137] The second name was used by the inhabitants of the city. The site is not far from Ruwāwa, 22 texts have been discovered there, 20 of which are related to the Zubayrid family, and 2 to the ʿUmar family. Among these inscriptions there is one graffito dated to the year 207/822-823 that will be published in this dissertation. Three of the 21 inscriptions are published by Askūbī and his team.[138] I have visited the site twice in January 2017 and 2018. In 2017 there was no water, but the following year, the visit took place during the wet season, as a result of which the terrain differed significantly (see Chapter Five, figure 20).

One inscription in our corpus was discovered in Khfiya south of Medina. There are more Arabic texts found in this place, as well as some "Thamudic" ones. The place is not far from the two previous locations. The Arabic inscription discussed in this dissertation can be found at a distance of 20 to 30 meters from a water well. I visited the site twice in 2017 and 2018.

In al-Bardiya, four inscriptions that I included in the current corpus were found, one of these inscriptions was given to me by Mohammed Almoghathawi (@mohammed93athar) (inscription 2.122). I visited the site during my first fieldwork trip in 2017. Five other Arabic texts from the

[136] al-Bakrī, *Muʿjam mā istaʿjam*, 4: 1328.
[137] Ibid., 4: 1121-1122.
[138] Askūbī et al., "al-Musūḥāt al-athariyya fī," plate 5:13.

same period were found there, that I will not discuss in this dissertation as they are not related to the families that form the core of this research.

South of Medina, not far from the sites of Mujz and Ruwāwa, is a place called Ṭarīq al-Ḥamāṭ, where two of the inscriptions in our corpus were found. The site is known to medieval Muslim geographers as a part of the Wādī al-ʿAqīq, and they called it al-Ḥamāṭ or Rawḍat al-Ḥamāṭ.[139] I have visited the site during my 2018 fieldwork trip, but I only found one graffito (inscription 3.19). The photo of the graffito (inscription 2.41) was given to me by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage.

Al-Suwārqiyya is a village located south of Medina on the highway between Mecca and Medina. One inscription from this site will be used in this dissertation. The text was published by al-Rashid in 1980[140] and again in 1995.[141] The site is located about 180 kilometres southeast of Medina. According to al-Bakrī, it was a village during his time.[142] I did not have the chance to visit the site.

Jabal al-Makaymin is a mountain located on the edge of the main road in Medina between the ʿUrwa well and Dhū al-Ḥalīfa.[143] The mountain is known as being a part of Wādī al-ʿAqīq.[144] Two graffiti in our corpus originate from this site, which I have visited in January 2018.

Al-Ṣuwaydira is today a village located about 62 kilometres east of Medina. The village might have been located along the Darb Zubayda, the famous pilgrimage road from Iraq to Mecca. However, it was mentioned for the first time only in a Mamluk source.[145] As has been mentioned

[139] ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-wafāʾ bi-akhbār dār al-Musṭafā*, ed. Khālid ʿAbd al-Ghanī Maḥfūẓ (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2006), 4: 85.
[140] al-Rashid, *Darb Zubaydah: the Pilgrim*, 242-243.
[141] al-Rashid, *Darb zubayda ṭarīq*, 420-421.
[142] al-Bakrī, *Muʿjam mā istaʿjam*, 3: 764-765.
[143] Ghālī Muḥammad al-Amīn al-Shingīṭī, *al-Durr al-thamīn fī maʿālim dār al-rusūl al-amīn ṣallā Allāh ʿalayhi wa-sallam* (Jeddah/ Beirut: Dār al-Qibla lil-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya/Muʾassasat ʿUlūm al-Qurʾan, 1992), 248-249.
[144] Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1977), 5:188.
[145] al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-Wafāʾ*, 2: 183.

in Chapter One, the site was discovered by ʿAbd al-Quddūs al-Anṣārī.[146] Al-Rashid has suggested that it might be the ancient village referred to as Ṭaraf in sources pre-dating Mamluk times.[147] Some evidence indeed indicates that it was already inhabited or cultivated in the early Islamic period. Al-Rashid mentions some archeological remains that are thought to belong to the early centuries of the Hijra.[148] It seems that some of the texts were carved by the original inhabitants, and others by travelers in the region, because it was one of the *ḥajj* route stations. I visited the site in February 2017, but unfortunately the visit was cut short due to some circumstances preventing the representative of the Saudi antiquities services to accompany me. As al-Rashid mentioned part of the *wādī* where the inscriptions were found has become a cultivated area.[149]

One inscription in our corpus comes from al-Sāybiyya, known to the Muslim geographers as Biʾr al-Sāʾib.[150] It was surveyed by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage during the northeast Medina survey in 2008. According to the Askūbī team report, some remains of a building were found in this area.[151]

The Medina Museum holds some epitaphs relevant to this research that were published by al-Moraekhi in 1995. These tombstones were found in a place called al-Qāḥa, which is located southeast of Medina. According to al-Ḥamawī al-Qāḥa, this was a three-day journey (*thalātha marāḥil*) from Medina.[152] However, the names that appear on the tombstones are related to Medina. For example, ʿAbd Allāh son of Muḥammad son of Isḥāq son of ʿAbd al-Malik son of

[146] al-Anṣārī, *Bayna al-āthār*, 138.
[147] al-Rashid, *al-Ṣuwaydira (al-ṭaraf qadīman)*, 18.
[148] Ibid., 23.
[149] Ibid., 24.
[150] al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-Wafāʾ*, 4: 21-22; see al-Rashid, *Dirāsāt fī al-āthār*, 217.
[151] Askūbī et al., "al-Musūḥāt al-athariyya shamāl," 120.
[152] al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, 4: 290.

Yaḥyā son of ʿUrwa son of al-Zubayr was a resident of Medina as were his forefathers. The same is suggested for a number of inscriptions in this corpus.[153]

Wādī al-Furaysh is located 40 kilometres west of Medina around the site known by al-Bakrī.[154] It has been surveyed twice; once by the Japanese scholar Mutsuo Kawatoko,[155] and another time by the Saudi Commission mission in 2004.[156] Three graffiti that were found there will be also included in this dissertation: the one mentioned above was published in *Atlal*, while two others have not yet been published and were sent to me by Mohammed Almoghathawi.[157]

The site of al-Raghāyib, west of Medina, has been surveyed by the Askūbī team.[158] Seven graffiti will be published from this site referring to the same person. The photos were given to me by Mohammed Almoghathawi.[159]

Al-ʿUwaiyyna is located north of Medina around 10 kilometres. According to al-Rashid, the place was part of the Darb Zubayda.[160] Two graffiti in this corpus come from this area. One of these two graffiti looks semi-official because it mentions a *ṣāḥib al-majlis*, someone in charge of the council. Both graffiti belong to two persons from the family of ʿUmar and can be dated to the 2nd/8th century.[161] I did not get a chance to visit this site.

Wādī Ḍubūʿa is located about 20 kilometers west of Medina. The site was initially visited by al-Rashid, who reported that the site contains remains of agricultural cultivation as well as some water wells. According to the Muslim geographers, the place was known from the time of the

[153] al-Moraekhi, "*A Critical and Analytical*," 1: 25, and 38-51.
[154] al-Bakrī, *Muʿjam mā istaʿjam*, 4: 1259.
[155] Kawatoko, "Archaeological Survey," 45-69.
[156] Khālid Askūbī et al., "al-Musūḥāt al-athariyya gharb al-madīna al-munawwara mawsim ʿām 1424AH/2004 CE," *Atlal* 20 (2010): 111.
[157] Mohammed Almoghathawi (URL https://twitter.com/mohammed93athar, last accessed 7th October 2020).
[158] Askūbī et al., "Al-Musūḥāt al-athariyya gharb,"111-112.
[159] Mohammed Almoghathawi (URL https://twitter.com/mohammed93athar, last accessed 7th October 2020).
[160] al-Rashid, *Dirāsāt fī al-āthār*, 139.
[161] Ibid., 147 and 153.

Prophet.[162] Only one graffito from this site, which was previously published by al-Rashid,[163] will be republished.

Jabal Rumāʿ, also located south of Medina, is not so far from al-Bardiyya; it is also located along the modern highway from Medina to Mecca. Four graffiti were discovered there, all of them related to ʿUmar's family. Mohammed Almoghathawi provided me with the photos of these pieces during my fieldwork in Saudi Arabia. The site was known to al-Bakrī as a mountain close to Rīm a village south of Medina.[164]

One foundational inscription that is included in this dissertation has been previously published by Miles.[165] The text is dated to the year 304/916-917 during the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir (r. 295-320/908-932) and mentions constructions on the *ḥajj* route undertaken in this period. The text was discovered in Mahd al-Dhahab, the ancient Maʿdan Banī Sulaym.[166] Al-Samhūdī mentions that it is also called Maʿdan Qarān and the distance to Medina is 160 kilometres.[167] Mahd al-Dhahab is a major station of the Darb Zubayda *ḥajj* route.[168] The site is located to the south-east of Medina. The inscription is now preserved in the national museum in Riyadh.

One of our inscriptions is found today in a private museum in Khaybar called the *Matḥaf Khaybar li-Turāth al-Ābā wa-l-Ajdād*. According to the owner of the Museum, Jadid Al-Rabili, the place of origin of the inscription is unknown. It can thus not be assigned a definite place of origin, and its connection to Khaybar is uncertain. The inscription is dated to the year 96/714-715, and it

[162]al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, 3:452; al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-Wafāʾ*, 4:108.
[163] al-Rashid, *Dirāsāt fī al-āthār*, 109.
[164] al-Bakrī, *Muʿjam mā istaʿjam*, 2:672-673.
[165] George C. Miles, "ʿAli b. ʿĪsā's Pilgrim Road: An Inscription of the Year 304 H. (916-917 A.D.)," *BIE* 36 (1953-1954): 477-487.
[166] al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, 5:154.
[167] al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-Wafāʾ*, 4:147.
[168]al-Rashid, *Darb Zubaydah: the Pilgrim*, 128-129.

carries the name of ʿUmar son of ʿAbd Allāh son of ʿUrwa son of al-Zubayr. The photo of this inscription was shared with me by the owner of the museum.

The region of al-ʿUlā, located to the north of Medina, is home to the second most significant number of inscriptions in our corpus. Unfortunately, I did not visit any of the sites of al-ʿUlā during my fieldwork. Inscriptions in this area were left by the inhabitants as well as by the people travelling to and from al-Shām. The first discovery of Arabic inscriptions at that site was made by ʿAli Ghabban, who conducted significant fieldwork in the region and published his article in 2001.[169] Later, al-Kilābī and al-Shammarī worked in al-ʿUlā and found some graffiti related to the Zubayrid family.[170] Three places in the al-ʿUlā mountains provided texts for this corpus, namely Umm Daraj, al-Aqraʿ and Abū ʿŪd. These inscriptions were all located by Ghabban, al-Kilābī and al-Shammarī. In addition to these text, there is an unpublished graffito that was sent to me by Farīq al-Ṣaḥrāʾ.

Al-Aqraʿ is one of the main stations on the ancient *ḥajj* route. It is located between Tabūk and al-ʿUlā. At a distance of 65 kilometres north of al-ʿUlā. Two texts in this corpus, previously published by al-Kilābī, come from this site.[171]

Jabal Umm Daraj is part of the mountain chain east of al-ʿUlā. The name refers to the stairs hewn into the mountain, which were used to access a famous temple at the top during the Liḥyān kingdom. There are five graffiti that will be used in this dissertation, two are previously published by al-Kilābī[172] and three by al-Shammarī.[173]

[169] Ghabban, "Fuwayq mawrid," 173-177.
[170] al-Kilābī, *al-Nuqūsh al-islāmiyya*, 378-380, 382-383, 383-384, and 391-392; al-Shammarī, *al-Kitābāt al-islāmiyya*, 120-121, 122-123, 124-125,126-127, 128-129.and 130-132.
[171] al-Kilābī, *al-Nuqūsh al-islāmiyya*, 244-245 and 249-250.
[172] Ibid., 377-378, 391-393.
[173] al-Shammarī, *al-Kitābāt al-islāmiyya*, 60-61, 62-63 and 64-65.

Abū ʿŪd, located 8 kilometres northeast of al-ʿUlā, between al-ʿUlā and al-Ḥijr, contains a water well. Ghabban discovered this site and discussed what al-ʿUmarī (d. 749/1349) had said about Fuwayq, the ancient name of the site. He further argued that the inscriptions were carved by the inhabitants of the area rather than by pilgrims or travelers from other locations. There are 13 graffiti in our corpus that were found in this site, of which 12 were published by Ghabban,[174] al-Kilābī[175] and al-Shammarī,[176] while one remains unpublished although it appears on Farīq al-Ṣaḥrāʾ's website.[177]

The region of al-Bāḥa or more specifically Wādī Khara, which is located on the *ḥajj* route from Yemen to Mecca, contains a number of relevant inscriptions.[178] The site was visited by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage.[179] However, the site was later surveyed by Qashshāsh, who published the inscriptions (see inscriptions 1.1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7). In Wādī Khara located 70 kilometres south of al-Bāḥa, between the two villages of ʿĀliqa and Maqmūr, six graffiti were discovered. Five were found in the north of the valley in the village of ʿĀliqa, on a rock called *haḍbat al-kuttāb* ("hill of writings"), while the sixth graffito was found in the southern part of the valley in the village of Maqmūr called Shʿab ʿĀfiya.[180]

Mecca region is also home to a number of inscriptions figuring in this dissertation. As mentioned in Chapter One, al-Muʿallā cemetery has received much attention from the epigraphists recently. It is one of the four main cemeteries in Mecca. It is known by many different names, such as Jannat

[174] Ghabban, "Fuwayq mawrid," 173-177.
[175] al-Kilābī, *al-Nuqūsh al-islāmiyya*, 378-380, 382-383, 383-384, and 391-392.
[176] al-Shammarī, *al-Kitābāt al-islāmiyya*, 120-121, 122-123, 124-125,126-127, 128-129.and 130-132.
[177] ʿAbd Allāh al-Saʿīd, "Riḥlat wādī al-qurā (2): dhikrayāt al-wādyyain fī shuʿayb abū ʿūd," November 28, 2016, http://alsahra.org/?p=15546.
[178] Qashshāsh, *Nuqūsh al-ṣaḥābī al-jalīl*, 25.
[179] ʿAwaḍ ʿAlī al-Sabālī al-Zahrānī and d ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Fahd al-Nifiyysa, "Taqrīr masḥ wa-tawthīq al-mawāqiʿ al-athariyya bi-minṭaqat *al-bāḥa* 1427AH/2006CE," *Atlal* 22 (2012): 101-109.
[180] Qashshāsh, *Nuqūsh al-ṣaḥābī al-jalīl*, 23-24.

al-Muʿallā, Maqbarat al-Muṭayyibīn, simply al-Muʿallā, and Maqbarat Ahl Makka. It is located at about one kilometer north of the Holy Mosque.[181] The name was derived from the site of its location, which is higher than the mosque, so the highest area is called al-Muʿallā and the lowest area is called al-Masfala.

Seven inscriptions from this cemetery, will be used in this dissertation.[182] These texts found in this cemetery are currently preserved at museums in the city of Mecca. Some other texts have been moved to Jeddah and to the National Museum in Riyadh.

Al-Salook published a gravestone from the province of Mecca (inscription 3.16),[183] but without mentioning its place of discovery.

The second place around Mecca that will receive our attention is the Wādī al-Shāmiyya, known also as Ṣanq al-Zarqaʾ. It is located at about 45 kilometres northeast of Mecca. Only one graffito from that site will be used in this dissertation, the one dated to 40/660-661, known in academia as al-Bāthā inscription.[184] Recently, Qashshāsh has tried to visit the site, but he could not find the exact place of its discovery in the Wādī, it might in fact now be a landfill under the modern road.[185]

The ʿAsham cemetery is located to the south of Mecca. It is part of the Tihāma region, previously known as Qarya or Qaryat Banī Hilāl, as it was known to the Muslim geographers.[186] Recently, the settlement has been studied by al-Zaylaʿī and al-Faqīh.[187] Two gravestones from this settlement

[181] al-Khalīfa et al., *Aḥjār al-muʿallā*, 16-19.
[182] (Inscriptions 1.8, 2.23, 28, 33,34, 3.15, and 65).
[183] al-Salook, "*Analytical and Palaeographic*," 89-90.
[184] Sharafaddin, "Some Islamic," 69-70, Ghabban, "The evolution," 96.
[185] Qashshāsh, *Nuqūsh al-ṣaḥābī al-jalīl*, 11-12.
[186] al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, 4:126.
[187] The two gravestones are related to the same women: one published by al-Zaylaʿī, "*The Southern Area*," 315-317, and the second published by Ḥasan Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, *Mikhlāf ʿasham, qaryat ʿasham-qaryat masʿūda- maḥallat al-nṣāyib- maḥallat al-aḥsiba al-janūbiyya- maḥallat al-aḥsiba al-shamāliyya, mawāqʿathariyya fī tihāma* (Riyadh: Maṭābiʿ al-Farazdaq,1992), 251.

related to the same woman will be used in this dissertation. They are now preserved in the local museum.

Only one graffito was found in the Ṭāʾif region, from the area of Haḍbat Bāniyya. It was published by al-Ḥārithī, who did not give any details about the precise location of Haḍbat Bāniyya.[188]

Two graffiti in this corpus come from the region of Najrān, from Jabal al-Murakkab, 30 kilometres east of Najrān. These two texts have generated quite some interest in the academic community, because of their mention of the name ʿUmar son of al-Khaṭṭāb. The first text records only the name of the person who wrote it, i.e. ʿUmar ibn Khaṭṭāb. The second reads: *ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb bi-Allāh yathiq* "ʿUmar son of al-Khaṭṭāb, trust in God." These two texts were discovered by a Saudi-French mission in 2012, and were subsequently published by F. Imbert. He has suggested that these two graffiti belong to ʿUmar the caliph.[189] However, I have another suggestion about these two texts and to whom they belong. In the section 2.4.2 below and in Chapter Three, section 3.4.1, I will examine these two texts in detail.

Tabūk is a large region in the northwest of Saudi Arabia. Five graffiti related to the family of al-Zubayr, were found in the desert of Ḥismā, a desert which is now shared between two countries: Saudi Arabia and Jordan. One text is dated to the year 80/699-700, it was found in Qārat al-Ṣabgh (inscription3.51).[190] The second was published by ʿAbd Allāh al-Saʿīd et al (inscription 3.20).[191] The other three graffiti are yet unpublished. Photos of two of them can be found in the publication

[188] al-Ḥārithī, *al-Nuqūsh al-ʿarabiyya*, 88.
[189] Imbert, "Annexe – Note épigraphique," 757-758, and see his article "Califes, princes," 64.
[190] Maysāʾ Ghabban, "*al-Kitābāt al-islāmiyya al-mubakkira*," 207.
[191] al-Saʿīd et al., *Nuqūsh ḥismā*, 78-79.

of ʿAbd Allāh al-Saʿīd et al., (inscriptions 3.35 and 64).[192] The photo of the last one is published by *Farīq al-Ṣaḥrāʾ* website (inscription 3.63).[193]

Al-Baqmī published a gravestone, which will be republished in this dissertation. It is from the Ḥijāz region, but its exact place of origin is unknown. It is currently preserved in the King Fahd library.[194]

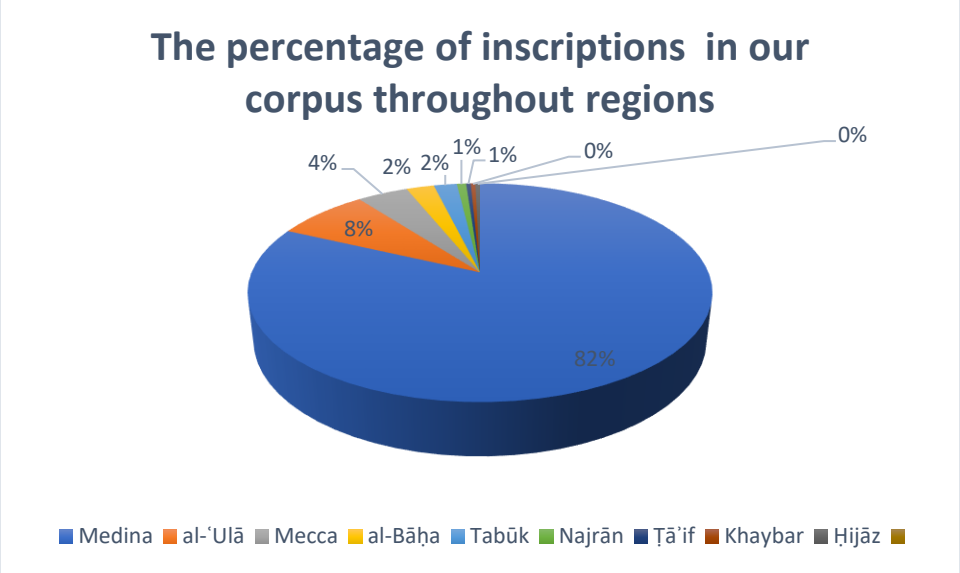

Figure 1 The percentage of inscriptions in our corpus throughout regions

[192] Ibid., 14 and 232.
[193] ʿAbd Allāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Saʿīd, "Nuqūsh ṣakhriyya tuwaththiq alqāb al-ṣaḥāba," published June 20,2018, http://alsahra.org/?p=19752.
[194] Mūḍī bt. Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Baqmī, *Nuqūsh islāmiyya shāhidiyya bi-maktabat al-malik fahd al-waṭaniyya dirāsa fī khaṣāʾiṣihā al-faniyya wa-taḥlīl maḍāmīnihā* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Malik Fahd al-Waṭaniyya,1999), 73.

Figure 2 Map 1 Finding places of the inscriptions (general view)

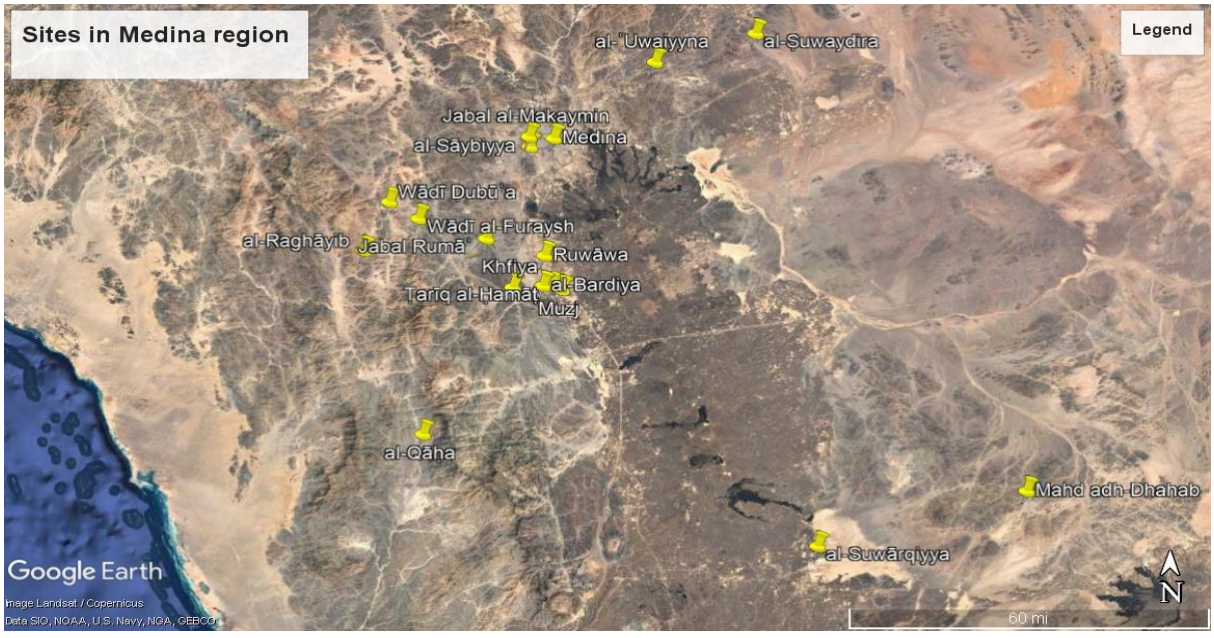

Figure 3 Map 2 The sites in Medina region

2.5. How to date the inscriptions

This dissertation deals with a corpus of dated and undated inscriptions from the first half of the 1st/7th century until the beginning of the 4th/10th century. In this corpus, fourteen inscriptions, thirteen graffiti and one monumental inscription have an absolute date (figure 4 table 1) which constitutes 5% of the total, as shown in figure 5. All except one of the dated texts in our corpus contain a year only. The one inscription containing additional information is dated to the month Shaʿbān 207/December 822/January 823, but without indicating the day of the month. These two types of dating – just a year or a month and year indication are widespread in the epigraphic record. The remaining inscriptions can be dated on the basis of the paleography or the death date of the individuals attested in the inscriptions, as will be discussed below. For a detailed discussion of the paleography of our inscriptions, see section 2.4.2 below. For the use of biographical information, see section 2.4.1 below.

NO	Name	Place	Date	Month	Period	Type
1	ʿAbd al-Raḥmān son of Khālid son of al-ʿĀṣ	Mecca	40/660-661	-	Caliphate of ʿAlī	Graffito
2	Ḥabīb son of Abū Ḥabīb client of ʿUrwa son of al-Zubayr	Tabūk	80/699-700	-	Umayyad	Graffito

3	ʿUmar son of ʿAbd Allāh son of ʿUrwa son of al-Zubayr	Khaybar	96/714-715		Umayyad	Graffito
4	Rabāḥ son of Ḥafṣ son of ʿĀṣim son of ʿUmar son of al-Khaṭṭāb	Medina	96/714-715	-	Umayyad	Graffito
5	Rabāḥ son of Ḥafṣ son of ʿĀṣim, son of ʿUmar al-Fārūq	Medina	100/718-719	-	Umayyad	Graffito
6	ʿĀṣim son of ʿUmar son of Ḥafṣ	Medina	100/718-719	-	Umayyad	Graffito
7	Abū Salama son of ʿUbayd Allāh son of ʿAbd Allāh son of ʿUmar	Medina	100/718-719	-	Umayyad	Graffito
8	Muḥammad son of ʿUmar son of Ḥafṣ son of ʿĀṣim	Medina	114/732-733	-	Umayyad	Graffito

9	ʿUthmān son of ʿUbayd [Allāh]	Medina	120/737-738		Umayyad	Graffito
10	ʿĀṣim son of ʿUmar son of Ḥafṣ	Medina	121/738-739	-	Umayyad	Graffito
11	ʿAbd Allāh son of ʿUmar son of Ḥafṣ	Medina	121/738-739	-	Umayyad	Graffito
12	Muḥammad son of Yaḥyā son of al-Zubayr son of ʿAbbād	Medina	207/822-823	Shaʿbān/December-January	Abbasid	Graffito
13	ʿAbd Allāh son of Muḥammad al-Zubayrī	al-ʿUlā	296/908-909	-	Abbasid	Graffito
14	Muṣʿab son of Jaʿfar al-Zubayrī	Medina	304/916-917	-	Abbasid	foundational inscription

Figure 4 Table 1 Dated inscriptions in our corpus

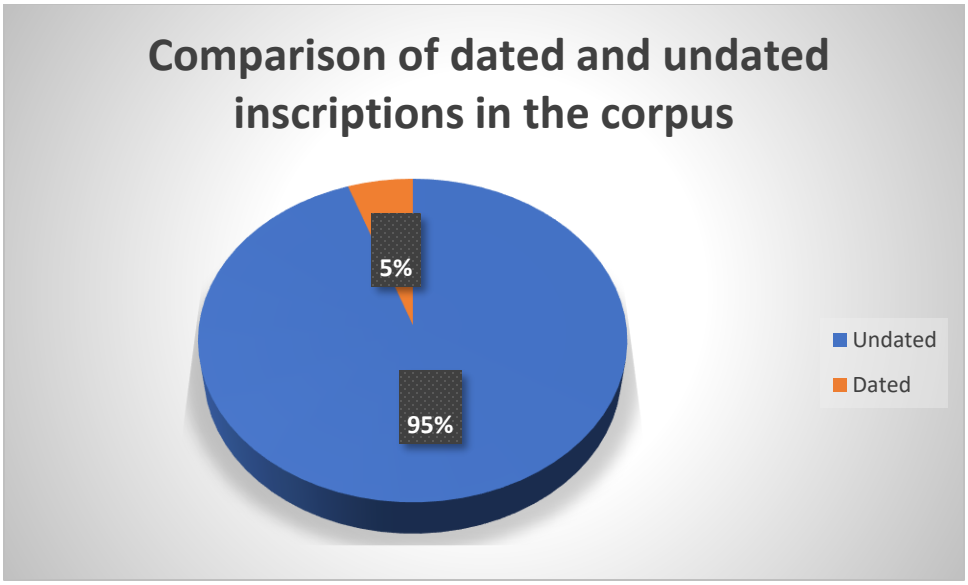

Figure 5 Comparison of dated and undated inscriptions in the corpus

2.5.1. Using biographical data to date the inscriptions

When we identify the persons mentioned in an inscription with certainly, we can also use this to date the inscription. It is, however, not possible to determine when exactly in the lifetime of this person the inscriptions were produced. This is shown by some dated inscriptions mentioning the same person. For instance, the two inscriptions (numbers 4 and 5 in the table above) mentioning Rabāḥ son of Ḥafṣ are written with a 4-year interval. Two other inscriptions (numbers 6 and 10 in the table above) mentioning ʿĀṣim son of ʿUmar son of Ḥafṣ are written 21 years apart.

The two individuals of whom we have ascertained two dated texts, Rabāḥ son of Ḥafṣ son of ʿĀṣim, son of ʿUmar son of al-Khaṭṭāb and his nephew ʿĀṣim son of ʿUmar son of Ḥafṣ son of ʿUmar son of al-Khaṭṭāb, belong to the same family. Three of the four inscriptions related to these two individuals occur in the same place, namely in Ruwāwa. Only the second of Rabāḥ's inscriptions dated to 100/718-719 was found in a different place, namely Wādī al-Furaysh, located at a distance of 35 kilometres from Ruwāwa.

Indeed, when the inscription of one family member can be more or less exactly dated based on information from the literary sources or a dated inscription, this will help us to construct more trustworthy dates for the inscriptions. For example, the inscriptions of ʿAbd al-Majīd son of Abū ʿAbs (inscriptions 4.17-18) are undated, but, according to the traditional sources, he died in the year 164/780-781.[195] So we can date his inscriptions with relative certainty to the 2nd/8th century.

Another issue is the question of generations. To calculate the date of an undated inscription, it is sometimes possible to give an approximate date based on the number of generations since a famous ancestor died or was born. This is because the dates of such a famous ancestor are generally known from the literary sources. This works well, especially in the 1st-2nd/7th-8th centuries or up to the middle of the 3rd/9th century, because in this period, individuals listed multiple generations to identify themselves. Of course, it is possible that ages differ quite a lot within generations, but an average of 20-30 years seems reasonable, based on Asad Ahmed's theory to use 20 years between the generations.[196] On the other hand, Robinson used 30 years between each generation.[197] Also, if an individual from an inscription is not known in the sources, but his father is, we can date the inscription by approximation through the same kind of calculation.

It is possible to calculate the length of a generation, on the basis of the inscriptions. In the year 40/660-661, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān son of Khālid son of al-ʿĀṣ who belonged to the 2nd generation of Muslims left an inscription. Already half a century later, in the year 96/714-715, ʿUmar son of ʿAbd Allāh son of ʿUrwa son of al-Zubayr who belonged to the 4th generation of Muslims, left his inscription. Since we know that ʿUrwa was born in 23/644, three generations or 73 years later, his

[195] Muḥammad Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad ʿUmar (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 2001), 7: 589.
[196] Ahmed, *The Religious*, 8.
[197] Robinson, "*Prosopographical Approaches*," 42 note 55.

grandson wrote his inscription (inscription 3.52). Similarly, Rabāḥ son of Ḥafṣ son of ʿĀṣim son of ʿUmar son of al-Khaṭṭāb (inscription 2.37)[198] identified himself in an inscription dated to 96/714-715 with four generations. Finally, the graffito of ʿĀṣim son of ʿUmar, who is from the fifth generation, is dated to the year 100/718-719 (inscription 2.66). In these four examples a generation covers a period of 20 to 25 years. Taking this information from the inscriptions together, in this dissertation, we will 'fill' each century with three to five generations. Conversely one generation is calculated at 20 to 25 years.

2.5.2. Using paleography to date the inscriptions

Scholars have created several criteria to date inscriptions based on the paleography. For example, an open middle *ʿayn* and an *alif* with a tail extending to the right are considered characteristics of the writing of the 1st/7th-8th century. However, these criteria are not watertight. For example, there are dated inscriptions in our corpus dated to the year 96/714-715 and100/718-719, with a closed *ʿayn* (inscriptions 2.19, 37 and 38). It is therefore very difficult to date inscriptions based on the writing only; how can the writing of the late 1st/early 8th century be distinguished from that of the middle of the 2nd/late 8th century? For more details about the dating inscriptions from the 1st-5th/7th-11th century based on the paleography see al-Kilābī's works which study 300 inscriptions from Saudi Arabia.[199]

To sum up, I have applied three methods to date the inscriptions in this dissertation. The first is through the absolute dates mentioned in the inscriptions themselves. The second method looks at the individuals mentioned in the inscriptions and what the literary sources tell us about dated events in their life, or about those of any of their family members. The final is by paleography.

[198] The difference between the second and the third example is that in the second, his grandfather was born after the Prophet's death, and in the third, his grandfather was born at the time of the Prophet.
[199] al-Kilābī, *al-Nuqūsh al-islāmiyya*, 495-504.

When we examine the inscriptions together, we can observe the following distributions across the centuries. The chart below shows the distributions of inscriptions during the period under examination. It shows an increase in the period between the 1st-2nd/7th-8th which reaches its peak in the 2nd/8th-9th.

One dating issue in relation to inscriptions mentioning individuals from the family of ʿUmar occurs in some interesting graffiti discovered in Najrān. These inscriptions mentioning the name of ʿUmar son of al-Khaṭṭāb (inscriptions 2.29-30) have been recently published.[200] Najrān is rather far from the area where ʿUmar is generally considered to have been active according to the Arabic sources, namely Medina and Mecca, although there is discussion of him visiting Najrān before Islam. There are three ways to interpret these two texts and identify the ʿUmar mentioned in it. The name appears in these graffiti as: ʿUmar son of al-Khaṭṭāb. The first assumption is that we are dealing with inscriptions mentioning caliph ʿUmar and that the inscriptions therefore are probably left by him. The second is that they refer instead to one of his descendants who had the same first name. Finally, they might have been left by a 'random' passer-by who had the same name. Let's start with the first possibility, which is also the interpretation followed by the editor of the texts, F. Imbert. The paleography of the inscriptions is not very early, so it is difficult to accept that the inscriptions date to the time of ʿUmar the caliph. If we think that the inscriptions were left not by the caliph, but by one of his descendants, we should look for another ʿUmar who is associated with this area or one close to it. Indeed, such an individual is known in the sources. ʿUmar son of Ibrāhīm son of Wāqid (inscription 2.28) who is a late descendant of ʿUmar as we will see in Chapter Three, section 3.4.1 was the governor of Yemen. I would rather suggest that the ʿUmar mentioned in the inscriptions is the governor of Yemen, because the place of the inscriptions is

[200] Imbert, "Annexe – Note épigraphique," 757-758.

close to Yemen and the graffiti's paleography fits a later date better. For more information about him, see Chapter Three, section 3.4.1.

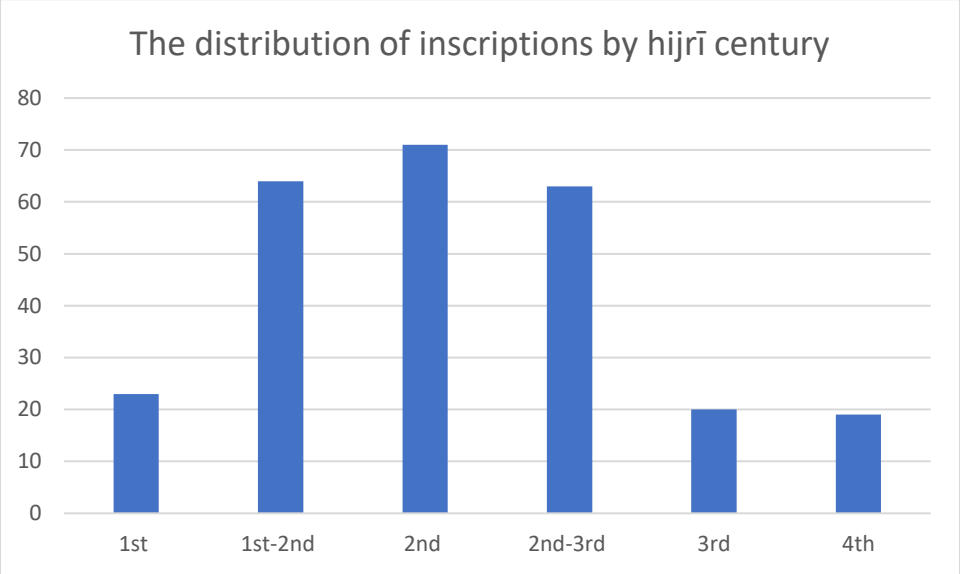

Figure 6 The distribution of inscriptions by hijrī century

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter provides a number of arguments and ideas about the methods used to identify and analyze the inscriptions. The starting point is that the individuals who left their inscriptions wanted passers-by to know who they were. While it is therefore sometimes difficult at this moment to identify an individual, this would not have been the case at the time when the inscription was written. While not all individuals identified themselves with a full genealogy in their inscriptions, many did and this is the main information I used to identify them. It is clear that sometimes names of ancestors were skipped as only the name of the most famous ancestor was mentioned. Sometimes information was left out because it was provided by inscriptions from family members located nearby. This allowed me to identify people without a final *nisba* using the names attested in the writings of the surrounding group. I will discuss in Chapter Five, sections 5.4, and 5.6.3.2 why people opted for one or the other way to self-identify in their inscriptions.

This chapter also provides an overview of the places where inscriptions were found. The area covered continues to expand as more inscriptions are being found. Most inscriptions of our corpus, i.e. 213 inscriptions, originate from the region around Medina. The writings found in Ruwāwa are overwhelmingly related to the descendants of ʿUmar son of al-Khaṭṭāb. This most prominent family produced 138 inscriptions (mostly graffiti) related to 39 individuals, the corpus of inscriptions related to this family comes mainly from Medina, Mecca and Najrān. Next comes the al-Zubayr family with 89 inscriptions related to 54 individuals, which come from different regions in Arabia, Medina, al-ʿUlā, Mecca, Ṭāʾif, Tabūk, Khaybar and ʿAsham. The Abū ʿAbs family produced 24 graffiti related to seven individuals, all of whom come from Medina. The last family is formed by the descendants of al-Mughīra who produced nine inscriptions from al-Bāḥa, Mecca and the Ḥijāz related to six individuals.

Finally, the ways by which I have dated the inscriptions show three different methods. The first is to date the work using a calculation based on the average span of a generation. This is only possible if the dates of someone in the family tree are known when they are recorded in the inscription or can be reconstructed on the basis of other sources. The second way is to use paleography to date the text. Finally, some inscriptions contain dates. Throughout this corpus, there are fourteen dated texts belonging to three families: al-Mughīra, al-Khaṭṭāb, and al-Zubayr. The majority of the dated inscriptions are connected to the family of ʿUmar son of al-Khaṭṭāb (8 graffiti) and Zubayrid (5 graffiti), with one from al-Mughīra.

Using the other methods mentioned above it was possible to establish that 16 graffiti date to the 1st/7th-8th century. There are 64 graffiti that date to period between the 1st to 2nd/7th-8th centuries. The 2nd/8th century yielded 67 inscriptions and 63 are dated between the 2nd and the 3rd/8th-9th centuries. The 3rd/9th century produced 18 inscriptions. Finally, 18 inscriptions can be dated to the

4th/10th century. It is thus obvious that there is a clear decrease in the production of graffiti from the 3rd/9th century onwards related to these famous families. I will discuss this phenomenon trying to provide an explanation in Chapter Five, section 5.5.

Comparing the genealogical information given in the inscriptions with those recorded in later biographical dictionaries and *ṭabaqāt* works, I was able to reconstruct the lineages of certain individuals. In the next chapter, I will discuss in detail the contents of the inscriptions that belong to the four families of Companions together with the information from the Arabic genealogical works about the individuals mentioned in them, displaying the family tree reconstructions I have made.