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

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Chapter Five: Epigraphic habit and self-identification

"We must look not for the occasion chosen, such as a life that ended, a vow made or an honor voted, but at the decision itself to give those facts some marble commemoration."[508]

5.1. Introduction

"L ghm bn zky bn khṭst bn skrn w wjd sfr ab-h w l…" [509]

"By Ghm son of Zky son of khṭst son of Skrn and he found the writing of his father…"

This is a typical Safaitic inscription. Inscriptions like this can be found throughout Syria, Jordan, and northern Saudi Arabia. A son left an inscription at the spot where he found his father's writing and identified himself as a descendant of his father, grandfather and great-grandfather. This example contains a list of genealogical references that remained standard amongst Arabian inscriptions in the centuries to come. The inscription is also a typical case of graffito, which is also the main type of inscription discussed in this dissertation. Considering the ubiquitous nature of these informal inscriptions throughout Arabia's history and covering its geographical expanse, one can imagine that not only the content and style of the writing, but also the practical and physical skills needed to execute the writing were passed down from one generation to the next. This way of working – leaving informal inscriptions recording genealogical relations all over Arabia – was not merely a common practice but, rather, a cultural habit. As previously mentioned, there are several cases where many inscriptions related to the same group of people have been found in one spot. The practice of leaving multiple messages in one place was common in ancient Arabia and continued into the Mamluk period. [510] In such spots Arabic inscriptions can be spread over several

[508] Ramsay MacMullen, "The Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire," *AJP* 103, no. 3 (1982): 233.
[509] Abdul-Qader al-Housan "A selection of Safaitic inscriptions from the Mafraq Antiquities Office and Museum," *AEN* 1 (2015): 82.
[510] Abdul-Qader al-Housan, "Nuqūsh ʿarabiyya islāmiyya muʾarrakha min al-bādiyya al-shamāliyya al-sharqiyya, al-mafraq," *SHAJ* 13 (2019): 19-35.

centuries, extending back to the 1st/7th-8th century. These spots often even attest earlier inscriptions in other languages as mentioned before, but they – as well as their relation to the Arabic inscriptions appearing in the same spot – are outside the scope of this dissertation. This chapter will seek to investigate the point at which leaving genealogical references in inscribed form on the rocks of Arabia started to become popular in the Islamic period. It will also examine what exactly the common elements are in the production of these inscriptions. in addition, this chapter will examine how the individuals mentioned in the texts 'self-identified' in their writings. Finally, this chapter will exhibit the formula used in the corpus.

5.2. How were inscriptions produced?

Although tools, materials and the level of execution all had an impact on the effort required, one can say that, in general, inscribing in any rock is time-consuming and requires a high degree of skill.[511] The stone in which the inscription is made has an impact on the time that an engraving would take – for example, it is much easier to engrave a passage in sandstone than in basalt, or granite. Also, the time needed to complete an inscription depends, obviously, on the length of the text – that is to say, the number of words. Funerary inscriptions on tombstones were the most elaborate as they were typically quite long, both in terms of the texts quoted and the genealogical information included. On the other end of the spectrum are our graffiti, consisting of a total of ten words or so, but inscribed over several generations, so sometimes an individual graffito would in fact be as limited as just a name. Then, there is the level of execution – how deeply incised the letters were, the size at which they were executed, and to what degree of regularity and finesse this was done – that influenced the time involved in completing the inscription. We can see, for

[511] Recently, the *Al-Iqtiṣādiyya*, a Saudi newspaper, published an article showing that some Saudis spent 17 hours a day inscribing 50 phrases in stone, using a modern method, Khālid al-Juʿayd, "Saʿūdiyyūn yaqḍūn 17 sāʿa li-naqsh 50 ʿibāra ʿalā ṣukhūr al-grānīt," June 30, 2009 http://www.aleqt.com/2009/06/30/article_246275.html.

example, the difference between more informal inscriptions in rock graffiti and those mentioned on building, like Muʿāwiya's dam at Medina.[512]

Very little is known about the tools and implements that were used to create the inscriptions. Scholars have variously called the practice by which the engraver used hammer, sharp stone and chisel.[513] One hint at how these inscriptions were made comes from epigraphic surveys. In the south of Saudi Arabia, in al-Jahwa ʿAlī al-ʿAwājī, a pen-like object was uncovered with three small pointed rocks attached to it, which would most likely have been used to engrave graffiti.[514]

The huge number of inscriptions from ancient Arabia, which continues to grow thanks to ongoing discoveries, indicates that the desire to write was so strong that people were willing to invest the time and effort needed to do so. To write in a rock is not easy, as Imbert pointed out, based on information in the *Al-Iqtiṣādiyya* article, especially without access to modern tools, he suggested that inscribing a simple graffito might take between three to four hours.[515] The more complicated versions with longer family lines, or the more elaborately executed ones, must have taken a multiple of that.

Still, people in Arabia committed the time and made the effort to produce inscriptions, which suggests that this was meaningful and important to them. They did so, moreover, beyond and above the minimum, as can be seen from some examples. Some of the inscriptions in this corpus include quite a lot of writing (inscriptions 2.38 and 3.36). This means that those responsible for the

[512]al-Rashid, *Dirāsāt fī al-āthār*, 45-46.
[513] Michael C. A. Macdonald, "On the Uses of Writing in Ancient Arabia and the Role of Paleography in Studying them," *AEN* 1 (2015): 11-12.
[514] ʿAlī Muḥammad al-ʿAwājī, *al-Jahwa taʾrīkhuhā wa-āthāruhā wa-nuqūshuhā al-islāmiyya* (Riyadh: Maṭābiʿ al-Ḥymayḍī, 2012), 292-294.
[515] His information is based on the article of *Al-Iqtiṣādiyya*, but from different website, see Imbert, "*L'Islam des pierres*," 2: 6.

inscriptions were spending a significant amount of time in the same place, or visited it on a frequent basis. Moreover, the same individual might leave multiple inscriptions (see also section 5.6.3.1 below and figure 17). In our corpus, Muḥammad son of Yʿaqūb son of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb son of Yaḥyā left ten graffiti (inscriptions 3.5-14) in different places; also, al-Qāsim son of Muḥammad son of Abū ʿAbs left eight graffiti in one site (inscriptions 4.1-8).

5.3. The epigraphic habit and how it can be applied to Islamic Arabia

The term "epigraphic habit" was first introduced almost four decades ago by the scholar Ramsay MacMullen, a specialist in inscriptions from the Roman period. His seminal article entitled "The Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire" was published in 1982.[516] Examining the literary epigraphic habit – in other words, "the desire to write something permanent,"[517] – has found the greatest following amongst scholars of the classical world. Nevertheless, a small number of studies examining similar examples found throughout other civilizations have appeared as well.[518] The phenomenon has been studied in relation to *ancient* Arabia by Michael Macdonald,[519] but for the Islamic period no studies exist that analyze the inscriptions in the light of "the epigraphic habit." This is not only because of the separation of scholarly traditions, but is mostly due to the fact that there is a severe and noted lack of fieldwork being conducted on epigraphic sites in Arabia. Most inscriptions remain undiscovered and unstudied. Indeed, as Macdonald emphasized, a growth in the number of inscriptions is what the field most needs.[520]

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[516] MacMullen, "The Epigraphic Habit," 233-246.
[517] Michael Macdonald, personal communication, April 24, 2019.
[518] For the classical world, see for example Elizabeth A. Meyer, "Explaining the Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire: The Evidence of Epitaphs," *JRS* 80 (1990): 74-96; and, by the same author, "Inscriptions as Honors and the Athenian Epigraphic Habit," *Historia* 62, no.4 (2013): 453-494.
[519] Michael C. A. Macdonald, "The Decline of the 'Epigraphic Habit' in Late Antique Arabia: Some Questions," in *L'Arabie à la vielle de l'Islam,* ed. Jérémie Schiettecatte and Christian Julien Robin (Paris: De Boccard, 2009), 17-27.
[520] Michael Macdonald, personal communication, April 24, 2019.

Increasing the number of inscriptions studied from a particular era, as has been the case for the Roman period, would allow for a more substantial and thorough examination of the epigraphic habit.[521] The importance of retrieving more evidence is clear. As Macdonald explains: "whereas a few years ago one might have said that the carving of inscriptions stopped altogether in North-West Arabia after the 4th century, the discovery of Jabal Umm Jadhayidh shows that the apparent disappearance of the ANA (Ancient North Arabian) scripts did not mean the end of writing in the region, but simply that, for reasons we still cannot fathom, the ANA scripts ceased to be used on stone."[522] In other words, only by examining all the written evidence it was possible to understand the changes that had occurred in north-west Arabian writing patterns, whereas findings based on a smaller sample of sources would have led to false conclusions.

Nevertheless, using my corpus of inscriptions, I will attempt to discuss what can be said about the "epigraphic habit" in Islamic world, using the corpus of Arabic inscriptions of this dissertation. To do so, I will start by giving a more general outline of the concept of the "epigraphic habit." MacMullen himself concluded: "My central question, why people inscribed some fact on stone, I cannot answer."[523] Nevertheless, starting with MacMullen's quote cited at the beginning of this chapter, I will discuss when and why inscriptions in the Islamic period showed a sharp rise, and – similarly – when and why they stopped being produced. Still, explaining the cessation of a practice might be as difficult as explaining its beginning. For example, scholars still do not fully understand the disappearance of Safaitic inscriptions and why this occurred, even with more than a century of study on these inscriptions to look back on.[524]

[521] MacMullen, "The Epigraphic Habit," 240.
[522] Macdonald, "The Decline," 25.
[523] MacMullen, "The Epigraphic Habit," 233.
[524] Al-Jallad, *An Outline*, 17-21.

Moving on from trying to reconstruct people's *desire* to write inscriptions, scholars have turned to look at how people composed inscriptions, and why they did so in the manner they did. Many of the Arabic inscriptions contain religious phrases besides genealogical information. Macdonald's has proposed the idea that for the inscriptions written in the desert in particular, it was thought that only God could read them.[525] The inscriptions thus functioned as a kind of prayer or supplication to God, in a direct communication with Him. The advantage of putting the writings in stone, was that the effect would presumably be permanent or at least last as long as the writing was visible on the stone. In some inscriptions, however, the inscriber wrote "*raḥima Allāh man qaraʾa hādhā al-kitāb thumma qāla amīn*", "God be pleased upon the one who reads my text and prays for me."[526] This seems to suggest that the writing was actually intended to be read by passers-by, achieving its effectiveness only when someone read the text (aloud). In addition, there are many references to mountains and valleys in the inscriptions, and these obviously had a literary function.[527]

While the religious dimension to these inscriptions is clear and must have played a large role in determining the form, place and shape of the inscriptions, I will instead focus on the genealogical references in the Arabic inscriptions and the relationship between the inscriptions, discussing what these elements might tell us about people's desire to put things in writing in stone.[528]

Looking at how people wrote their inscriptions and why, we can start with the example quoted at the beginning of this chapter. A son leaving an inscription next to that of his father in this Safaitic inscription can be compared with cases of authors producing the same inscriptions as their fathers,

[525] Michael Macdonald, personal communication, April 24, 2019.
[526] al-Kilābī, *al-Nuqūsh al-islāmiyya*, 70-71.
[527] Muḥammad Abū al-Faraj al-ʿUshsh, "Kitābāt ʿarabiyya ghayr manshūra fī jabal usays,"*al-Abḥāth* 17, no.3 (September 1964): 295; Askūbī et al., "al-Musūḥāt al-athariyya fī," 97 and ʿAbd Allāh Muṣṭafā al-Shinqīṭī, *Aḥmāʾ al-madīna al-munawwara, ḥimā al-shajar, ḥimā al-naqīʿ, ḥimā al-rabadha* (Medina: al-Maḥmūdiyya, 2013), 173.
[528] Francisco Beltrán Lloris, "The "Epigraphic Habit" in the Roman World," in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Epigraphy*, ed. Christer Bruun and Jonathan Edmondson (Oxford University Press, 2014), 131.

years later. In fact we can conclude that we see an increase of this activity. Thus the idea of writing an inscription next to that of a father or more distant relative becomes increasingly wide-spread. Furthermore, we see that occasionally individuals choose to leave their names not just in one engraving, but at many different sites. In addition, we can see growing rates of inscriptions in one area throughout a particular site. As I will show in section 5.6.3.1, some individuals left more than one inscription. Among these are those who left more than one inscription in the same spot, but at different moments. And there are individuals who left more than one inscription at different times and in different locations. See, for example, the two dated inscriptions from the years 96/714-715 and 100/718-719 (inscriptions 2.37-38) left by Rabāḥ son of Ḥafṣ son of ʿĀṣim, son of ʿUmar son of al-Khaṭṭāb in two different sites, and 100/718-719 and 121/738-739 left by ʿĀṣim son of ʿUmar son of Ḥafṣ in the same site (inscriptions 2.66-67).

5.4. Continuation with a twist

By now it will be clear that the inscribing of stones was a habit in Arabia that preceded Islam. So the corpus under study here should not be studied in a vacuum, but be connected to the already existing practice of making inscriptions. If we do so, we see many similarities, but at some point we also see a break with tradition. The Safaitic inscription quoted at the beginning of this chapter is just one example of an already wide-spread custom of listing one's family relations in inscriptions by giving genealogical information about previous generations and of leaving an inscription in the same place as one's father (or other family members). When we turn to the Arabic inscriptions from the Islamic period, it thus becomes interesting to analyze to what extend they are connecting to the pre-Islamic names that were used in Arabia.

By focusing on this aspect we find that the Arabic inscriptions from the Islamic period show a reluctance to connect to the pre-Islamic period either by using pre-Islamic names or by extending genealogies into the pre-Islamic period to non-Muslim ancestors. Currently we know of only a few pre-Islamic names in the genealogies and of genealogies that go back to before the rise of Islam. However, even in these few cases, they do not go back far in terms of ancestors. This fits what the traditional sources say, namely that the Prophet changed some of his companions' names when these were not conducive with Islam. An example can be found in the name ʿAbd al-Kaʿba who changed his name to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān son of ʿAwf when he converted. Moreover, he did not only change his name, but also his *kunya,* so the original ʿAbd al-ʿUzzā was changed into ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. And indeed we do not find ʿAbd al-ʿUzzā in any of the inscriptions, indicating that descendants were hesitant to refer to the pre-Islamic origins of their family.[529]

There are nevertheless a few Islamic-Arabic inscriptions referring to pre-Islamic names that use the name "ʿAbd" with a deity or personal name. Until now, we have found seven inscriptions, four graffiti and three gravestones, where this occurs. For example, in the entire corpus of Banī Shayba, only one inscription mentioning two females and which has two dates in the 5th/11th century, (Dhu al-Qaʿda 1, 408/April 18, 1018) and (Ṣafar 5, 416/April 7, 1025), refers to the pre-Islamic name ʿAbd al-Dār.[530] Nevertheless, the – albeit sporadic – instances where pre-Islamic names are referred to in the Arabic epigraphy may be of great value in reconstructing what pre-Islamic names looked like in Arabia.[531] But in general, finding pre-Islamic pagan names in the genealogy is extremely rare.

[529] al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 5: 102 and 110-111.
[530] al-Khathimī, "*Usrat banī Shayba*," 95-96.
[531] Like ʿAbd Manāt and ʿAbd al-Āshal; see Maysāʾ Ghabban, "*al-Kitābāt al-islāmiyya al-mubakkira*," 112 and 204.

As mentioned, one striking characteristic of the Islamic material is that the generations listed in the inscriptions hardly ever contain information on pre-Islamic ancestors. In other words, the genealogical line ends (when extending so far into the past) with the first Muslim of the family. This appears in the use of the *nisba*, in which the majority of our corpus used as the last name the name of the first Muslim in the family, like Ibn ʿUmar, Ibn al-Zubayr and Ibn Abū ʿAbs.

However, a minority of our corpus extended their lineage to the pre-Islamic name. In the corpus of the family of al-Mughīra, there are three inscriptions that extend their lineage to the time before Muḥammad (inscriptions 1.1, 8 and 9). This happened in two ways: First, by using the family *nisba* al-Mughīra (inscription 1.1) or al-ʿĀṣ (inscriptions 1.2, 3 and 7) and second by extending to the sub-tribe, al-Makhzūmī, which was used on the gravestones (inscriptions 1.8 and 9). Al-Mughīra and al-Makhzūm were pre-Islamic ancestors, al-ʿĀṣ an ancestor who did not convert to Islam and who was killed in the battle of Badr 2/624.[532] In the family of ʿUmar son of al-Khaṭṭāb, there are eight inscriptions that used the name of the ancestor al-Khaṭṭāb who was not a Muslim: four gravestones (inscriptions 2.23, 28, 33 and 34), and four graffiti (inscriptions 2.29, 30, 37 and 136). In the inscriptions relating to members of the Zubayrid family, a similar case can be found. While most members of this family identify their lineage as descending from Ibn al-Zubayr, two interesting inscriptions show an exception. The first inscription was found in al-Ḥamāṭ, and probably dates to the 1st-2nd/ 8th century. It reads: "I ʿAbd Allāh son of ʿAbbād son of Ḥamza son of ʿAbd Allāh son of al-Zubayr al-Qurayshī then al-Asadī ask God for forgiveness" (inscription 3.19). This one is interesting because he used the family *nisba*, his tribal *nisba* and the name of his

[532] al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 135.

clan. The second one is a gravestone found in Mecca, which used the *nisba* al-Zubayr son of al-ʿAwwām (inscription 3.65). Al-ʿAwwām was a non-Muslim ancestor.

Another feature that makes the Arabic inscriptions from the Islamic period different from Safaitic for example, is that the Arabic ones do not express emotions like joy or sorrow. As far as is known now, there is one exception from Jabal Usays, in which a person expresses a sense of nostalgia about his brother.[533] Ancient north Arabian inscriptions reversely did show such sensations.[534] Besides some poetic expressions (see section 5.7 below) that mostly concern the honoring of forefathers, Arabic inscriptions consist, as Hoyland has shown, mostly of names and religiously formula.[535]

Thus, while the Arabic inscriptions from early Islamic Arabia continue certain ancient Arabian practices, such as the inclusion of poetry (which has been found in Safaitic[536] and Nabataean inscriptions)[537] and mentioning the name of a place,[538] they also constitute a new beginning through their self-conscious break with the past.

5.5. The beginning and the end: the first three centuries of Hijra

Which elements helped to generate inscriptions? In his discussion, MacMullen observed that there are some kinds of environments that are conducive to producing inscriptions. For example, urban

[533] al-ʿUshsh, "Kitābāt ʿarabiyya," 246-248.
[534] Sulaymān ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Dhuyayb, *al-Ḥayāt al-ijtimāʿiyya fī miṇṭaqat ḥāʾil min khilāl al-nuqūsh al-thamūdiyya* (Abu Dhabi: Abu Dhabi Culture & Tourism Esdarat, 2019).
[535] Hoyland, "The Content," 77-102.
[536] Ahmad Al-Jallad, "Pre-Islamic 'Ḥamāsah' Verses from North-Eastern Jordan: A New Safaitic Poetic Text from Marabb al-Shurafāʾ, with further remarks on the ʿĒn ʿAvdat inscription and KRS 2453," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 47 (2017):117-128.
[537] Manfred Kropp, "The ʿAyn ʿAbada Inscription Thirty Years Later: A Reassessment," in *Arabic in Context Celebrating 400 Years of Arabic at Leiden University*, ed. Ahmad Al-Jallad (Leiden/ Boston: Brill, 2017), 53-74.
[538] See in Safaitic Al-Jallad, *An Outline,* 300; in Nabatean, see Laïla Nehmé, "The Nabataean and Nabataeo-Arabic Inscriptions," in *The Darb al-Bakrah A Caravan Route in North-West Arabia Discovered by Ali I. al-Ghabban Catalogue of the Inscriptions*, ed. Laïla Nehmé (Riyadh: Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, 2018), 32; in Arabic, al-Shinqīṭī, *Aḥmāʾ al-madīna*, 173.

populations produced more inscriptions than inhabitants of the countryside.[539] There is, moreover, a distinct and marked difference between inscriptions created in the countryside versus those from the cities. MacMullen further observes that an increase in wealth led to more inscriptions and that people of a higher economic status were more likely to initiate inscriptions. But these are all observations based on a corpus of Roman inscriptions.

So how do MacMullen's observations relate to the situation in Arabia in the period under study? It is important to note that when MacMullen (and most other scholars dealing with the epigraphic habit) speaks about inscriptions, he means monumental state-initiated inscriptions, epitaphs, and personal or public commemorative and honorific inscriptions, often placed on the pedestals of statues and other custom-made monuments, and those on buildings, triumphal arches or other architectural structures. While such inscriptions are known from Arabia and the wider area including the Levant and Egypt, the bulk of our material consists of the kind of informal writings we have been calling graffiti left in the natural environment, such as on loose and fixed rocks in mountain passes, *wādī*s and the desert.

Starting with a comparison between inscriptions produced in the countryside and in cities, it is clear that the urban environment – namely, Mecca generated the most monumental inscriptions and epitaphs. Based on epigraphic material from the rest of the Arabia, we can assume that monumental inscriptions decorated mosques and other public buildings erected or restored under the auspices of the caliphs, started as early as the Umayyad period. The name of the dynasty's founder, caliph Muʿāwiya, appears in two inscriptions on the dam at Ṭāʾif[540] and in Medina to commemorate restoration works completed at his orders.[541] It was, however, with caliph ʿAbd al-

[539] MacMullen, "The Epigraphic Habit," 241.
[540] Miles, "Early Islamic Inscriptions," 237.
[541] al-Rashid, *Dirāsāt fī al-āthār*, 46.

Malik and his sons that epigraphic commemorations of building achievements and road works increased noticeably.[542] No such inscriptions are found in situ in Arabia, but judging from those that have been preserved in the Levant, we can assume that the mosques and other public buildings that were built by these caliphs in Arabia would have been decorated with similar writings in stone, for example al-Fākihī mentions an inscription by ʿAbd al-Malik but it does not exist anymore.[543]

The Abbasids continued the practice of commemorating their deeds in stone. In general, the Abbasid caliphs left inscriptions in the same places the Umayyads did – that is to say, in the Levant.[544] From the Abbasid dynasty, however, more inscriptions are attested in Arabia than from the previous period. Even taking into account an accident of preservation, an increased investment by the Abbasid dynasty in Arabia,[545] especially Mecca, can be observed. Two inscriptions record

[542] See the famous milestones erected in the name of ʿAbd al-Malik: Van Berchem, *Matériaux pour*, 19-21; and Sharon, *Corpus inscriptionum*,1: 4-5, and 103-106, 2: 4-7, 3: 104-18 and 220-224), and the inscription on the dome of the rock, both the mosaic and the copper plate in the time of ʿAbd al-Malik – see Max Van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un corpus inscriptionum Arabicarum, Deuxième partie Syrie, du Sud. Tome deuxième, Jérusalem Ḥaram* (Le Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale,1927), 229-230. Al-Walīd I before he became caliph at Qaṣr Burquʿ and when he was caliph: Khaled Suleman al-Jbour, "*Etudes des inscriptions arabes dans le désert Nord-est de la Jordanie*" (PhD diss., Université de Provence Aix-Marseille I, 2006), 1: 60; Markus Ritter, "Umayyad Foundation Inscriptions and the Inscription of al-Walīd from Khirbat al-Minya: Text, Usage, Visual Form," in *Khirbat al-Minya: Der Umayyadenpalast am See Genezareth*, ed. Hans-Peter Kuhnen (Rahden: Orient-Archäologie, 2016), 59-83. Al-Walīd's two brothers, Yazīd II (r. 101-105/ 720-724) in Qaṣr al-Muwaqqar see Frédéric Imbert, "*Corpus des inscriptions arabes de Jordanie du Nord*" (PhD diss., Université de Provence Aix-Marseille I, 1996),1: 184-185; and Hishām (r.105-125/724-743) Abdul Kader Rihoui, "Découverte de deux inscriptions arabes," *AAS* 11/12 (1961-1962): 207-211; Oleg Grabar et al., *City in the Desert Qasr al-Hayr East, an account of the excavation carried out at Qasr al-Hayr East on behalf of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology at the University of Michigan, with the help of Harvard University and the Oriental Institute, the University of Chicago* (Cambridge/ Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), 191; see also the mosaic inscription recording the foundation of a market in Baysān see Elias Khamis, "Two wall Mosaic inscriptions from the Umayyad market place in Bet Shean/Baysān," *BSOAS* 64, no. 2 (2001): 159-176. Al-Walīd II (r. 125-126/743-744) on Quṣayr ʿAmra in Jordan before he came a caliph (Frédéric Imbert, "Le prince al-Walīd et son bain: itinéraires épigraphiques à Quṣayr ʿAmra," *BEO* 64 (2015): 321-363.

[543] al-Fākihī, *Akhbār makka*, 2: 161.

[544] It seems that al-Saffāḥ (r. 132-136/750-754) was called al-Mahdī in the epigraphic record as Sharon noticed, see two inscriptions al-Saffāḥ called al-Mahdī in Palestine construction); Sharon, *Corpus inscriptionum*, 2: 214-215; in Jordan milestone see Khaled al-Jbour, "The Discovery of the First Abbasid Milestone in "Bilād Al-Shām"," *SHAJ* 7 (2001): 171-175; another Abbasid caliph in Palestine (al-Mahdī, minaret and mosque): Sharon, *Corpus inscriptionum*, 1: 144.

[545] Yemen: al-Saffāḥ (called al-Mahdī in the inscriptions) reconstruction mosque: A. A. Duri, "al-Fikra al-mahdiyya bayna al-daʿwa al-ʿabbāsiyya wa-l-ʿaṣr al-ʿabbāsī al-awwal," in *Dirāsāt ʿarabiyya wa-islāmiyya, muhdāh ilā iḥsān ʿabbās bi-munāsabat bulūghihi al-sittīn,* ed. Wadād al-Qāḍī (Beirut: American University, 1981), 123-132, al-Saffāḥ

the restoration works of the Abbasid caliphs al-Manṣūr in Masjid al-Bayʿa in Mecca and al-Mahdī conducted on the holy mosque in Mecca.[546]

As Macdonald discussed, there are not many ancient Arabia inscriptions in the eastern part of Arabia;[547] this can also be observed during the Islamic period up to the modern day. For the later period, a small number of inscriptions on buildings and epitaphs are attested in the eastern part of Arabia. One inscription from Masjid al-Khamīs in Bahrain dates to the 6th/12th century.[548] From Fujairah in the UAE, we have one inscription that has been published but others remain still unpublished.[549] Finally, Oman has also yielded one later inscription.[550] In Qatar, there was only a modern 19th-century graffito presented in London by Robert Carter.[551]

The second group of monumental inscriptions originating in the cities is that of epitaphs. Gravestones are in fact *only* found in cemeteries in cities,[552] these inscriptions being made in the cemetery by a scribe, or *khaṭāṭ*, who was paid for their service. Most gravestones in Arabia were found in Mecca and these have been most studied. In Medina,[553] Ṭāʾif is where some epitaphs

milestone, al-Rashid thought it belong to al-Mahdī but it clear to al-Saffāḥ, see al-Rashid, *Darb zubayda ṭarīq*, 336, and al-Muqtadir see Miles, "ʿAli b. Īsā's," 477-487, and al-Faʿr, *Ṭatawwur al-Kitābāt*, 251-252.

[546] al-Manṣūr Masjid al-Bayʿa and al-Mahdī, pillars in the holy mosque): Māhir, "Baʿḍ al-kitābāt," 62-65; al-Mutawakkil (r. 232-247/847-861) Muḥammad Fahd ʿAbd Allāh al-Faʿr, "Naqsh inshāʾ maḍrib lil-ḥujjāj wa-abnāʾ al-sabīl min ʿahd al-mutawakkil al-ʿabbāsī muʾarrakh bi-sanat 245AH (dirāsa wa-taḥqīq)," *Majallat al-Ittiḥād al-ʿĀmm lil-Āthārīyyīn al-ʿArab* 7 (2006): 64-74; al-Muktafī (r.289-295/902-908), the same author, "Naqsh umm al-qāsim shajā mawlāt amīr al-muʾminin al-muktafī bi-llāh al-ʿabbāsī maḥfūẓ bi-maktabat al-malik ʿabd Allāh ibn ʿabd al-ʿazīz bi-jāmiʿat umm al-qurā," *Majallat al-Khalīj lil-Taʾrīkh wa-l-āthār* 4 (2008): 229-237.

[547] Macdonald, "The Decline," 18.

[548] Ludvik Kalus, *Inscriptions arabes des Iles de Bahrain: contribution* à *l'histoire de Bahrain entre Les XIe et XVIIe siècles (Ve-XIe de l' Hégire)* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1990).

[549] Peter Hellyer, "A lost Islamic inscription from Wadi Duwaini, Fujairah," *Tribulus* 22 (2014): 82-84.

[550] Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Satār ʿUthmān, Nuqūsh kitābiyya ʿarabiyya islāmiyya min salṭanat ʿumān, dirāsa fī al-maḍmūn," in *Dirāsāt fī ta'rīkh al-jazīra al-ʿarabiyya wa-ḥaḍārtihā muhdāh ilā al-ustādh al-duktūr ʿabd al-raḥmān ibn muḥammad al-ṭayib al-anṣārī* (Riyadh: Wazārat al-Thaqāfa wa-Iʿlām, 2007), 245-285.

[551] Robert Carter "Historical Archaeology at Fuwairit, a coastal site in Qatar" paper delivered at the Islamic Archaeology Day in London, February 3, 2018.

[552] See, for example, the work of al-Khalīfa et al., *Aḥjār al-muʿallā*, and al-Ḥārithī works, *Aḥjār shāhidiyya min matḥaf*; also *Aḥjār shāhidiyya ghayr*, and *al-Aḥjār al-shāhidiyya al-maḥfūẓa.*

[553] al-Moraekhi, "*A Critical and Analytical*," 1: 28-63.

were found.[554] South of Mecca, ʿAsham and al-Sirrayn have produced gravestones as well.[555] I should note here that there are not as many dated gravestones from Arabia as we have from Egypt.[556] The majority of the epitaphs discovered in Mecca and other areas of modern-day Saudi Arabia are undated. Those with dates can be placed in the 3rd/9th century and later. No gravestones that contain an engraved date referring to the 1st or 2nd/7th-8th century have been found.[557] There are however a couple of gravestones that might date back as far as the first two centuries of Islam. The gravestone of a certain "*mawlāt* ʿUthmān son of ʿAffān" might refer to a female client of the caliph ʿUthmān, in which case it should be dated to the 1st-2nd/7th-8th century.[558] Al-Ḥārithī speculated that another one can be dated to the 1st or 2nd/7th-8th century based on the paleography.[559] Several scholars have speculated that there are still some gravestones buried under the surface in Meccan cemeteries.[560] Also south of Mecca, in al-Faqīh, some gravestones were found that could arguably be dated to the 1st-2nd/7th-8th century.[561]

Finally, we should mention here that four additional inscriptions from the Abbasid era were found in Mecca, by the state or the individuals, that can be dated to from the 2nd-3rd/9th-10th centuries.[562] They concern the establishing a *waqf* (pious foundation), the reminiscence of paying *ṣadaqa* (charity), building an accommodation for *al-ḥujjāj* and for the traveler *ibn al-sabīl*.

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[554] Grohmann, *Expédition Philby- Ryckmans- Lippens*, 4-40.
[555] al-Zaylaʿī, "*The Southern Area*," 289-439, and al-Faqīh, *Mikhlāf ʿasham*, 202-32, 353-361, 373-374, 387-392, 433-439, 481-494 and 511-516.
[556] Madeleine Schneider, *Stèles funéraires*.
[557] al-Zaylaʿī, "*The Southern Area*," 289-296.
[558] al-Zahrānī, *Kitābāt islāmiyya*, *76*.
[559] al-Ḥārithī, *Aḥjār shāhidiyya min matḥaf*, 15.
[560] al-Zahrānī, *Kitābāt islāmiyya*, 78.
[561] al-Faqīh, *Mikhlāf ʿasham*, 202-226, 353-361,373-374, 387-388, 481-489 and 511-512.
[562] al-Faʿr, *Ṭatawwur al-Kitābāt*, 198, the same author "Naqsh inshāʾ," 64-74 and "Naqsh umm al-qāsim," 229-237, and "Dirāsa wa-taḥqīq li-aqdam wathīqat waqf li-khadamāt al-ḥujjāj wa-l-muʿtamirīn manqūsha min al-qarn al-thālith al-hijrī bi-makka al-mukarrama," in *Baḥth muqaddam ilā nadwat makka al-mukarrama ʿāṣimat al-thaqāfa al-islāmiyya 1426*, [2005], 45-104.

We can thus conclude that, similarly to MacMullen's observation, Arabia's cities produced monumental inscriptions, both constructions ones initiated by the caliphs and their families and those produced by individuals, mostly in the form of epitaph inscriptions. Contrary to MacMullen's case, however, Arabia's countryside *did* produce large numbers of inscriptions – in fact, more than the cities – but they were of a very different character. These are the so-called graffiti that form the largest corpus of this dissertation and constitute the largest part of Arabia's inscriptions in general.

Turning to the role of the economy in the production of inscriptions, we can observe that the rise of the economy under the Abbasids coincided with an increase in inscriptions, especially those initiated by the state or private individuals, such as buildings and epitaphs inscriptions. After all these types of inscriptions were made by professionals who needed to get paid. Only patrons with sufficient means were able to afford to record their acts in stone. The Abbasid period witnessed the rise of an urban middle class obviously also in Arabian towns. Considering the graffiti, however, I think we can say that these are evenly distributed across the different socio-economic classes. In other words, we find graffiti from members of both the lower classes and the upper classes from the early Islamic period to the Abbasid era.

Figure 15 official inscriptions from State of Kuwait photo Abdullah Alhatlani

Translation	Text
1. In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. 2. During the reign of his highness 3.al-Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber Al-Sabah 4. Emir of the State of Kuwait 5. and his highness the crown prince 6. al-Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah 7. and in the attendance of the Health minster 8. Dr. Ali Saad al-Obaidi 9. with the help of God, the opening of 10. ward of Shaikhan al-Farsi took place 11. and it was on Sunday 4th Muharram 1437/18th October 2015 12. and God is the Conciliator.	1. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم 2. في عهد حضرة صاحب السمو 3.الشيخ/ صباح الأحمد الجابر الصباح 4. أمير دولة الكويت 5.وسمو ولي العهد 6. الشيخ /نواف الأحمد الجابر الصباح 7. وحضور وزير الصحة 8.الدكتور/ علي سعد العبيدي 9.تم بعون الله إفتتاح 10.جناح شيخان الفارسي 11 . وذلك يو الاحد 5 محرم 1437هـ الموافق 18 اكتوبر 2015م 12. والله الموفق

When discussing the motives behind inscriptions, MacMullen's observation "Apparently the rise and fall of the epigraphic habit was controlled by what we can only call the sense of audience"[563]

[563] MacMullen, "The Epigraphic Habit," 246.

is very useful. From the inscriptions left by the founder of the Umayyad caliphate on a dam in the Ḥijāz[564] to a graffito from a descendent of the caliph ʿUmar or contemporary rulers in the Gulf States, inscriptions are produced with an audience in mind. Considering the audience is also a good starting point when trying to understand the motive of those producing inscriptions in early Islamic Arabia. It is clear that people leaving inscriptions in ancient Arabia used their writings in stone as a stage to present their power, justice, generosity and piety, but also to place themselves through their genealogical references consciously in a family history.

The role of audience becomes clear when we examine the number of inscriptions, especially graffiti, in early Islamic Arabia, both during its rise starting in the Islamic era and its decline three centuries later. When we examine the relative volume of gravestones and graffiti in our corpus chronologically, an interesting pattern emerges. Both graffiti and epitaphs remained popular throughout this period. Nevertheless, graffiti were especially widespread and numerous in 1st-3rd/7th-9th centuries. There is a sharp decline after that period in the number of graffiti overall in Arabia. In al-Kilābī's edition of 300 graffiti, only 33 are dated in the 4th-5th/10th-11th century.[565] Indeed, it is currently rare to find new inscriptions dating to the 5th/11th century at all. That does not mean that the practice disappeared entirely. In fact, into the 20th century, graffiti were produced by shepherds, inhabitants and other voyagers in the area.[566] The total number of graffiti in this later period is, however, only a fraction of the production of the 1st-3rd/7th-9th centuries.

[564] Miles, "Early Islamic Inscriptions," 236-242; see the one in Medina al-Rashid, *Dirāsāt fī al-āthār*, 45-46.
[565] al-Kilābī, *al-Nuqūsh al-islāmiyya*, 605-608.
[566] Writing of graffiti never entirely disappeared; there were still such graffiti produced into the early 20th century in the Jordanian desert see Michael C. A. Macdonald and Ali Al-Manaser, "Report on the Wādī Salma Area Epigraphic Survey, April 2015," *Bulletin for the Council for British Research in the Levant* 12, no.1 (2017): 36-39.

Below, I discuss the motives behind the writing of the graffiti, especially the genealogical historical interests of those leaving their writings in stone (section 5.6.3.1). In short, the need to give oneself a place in history by recording one's family history and genealogy seems to have been an important motive besides the religious reasons mentioned above. As for the decline of the popularity of graffiti from the 3rd/9th century onwards, this should be connected to the same factor of audience. I have two possible explanations for the diminished popularity of graffiti from the 3rd/9th century onwards. The first hypothesis is that it became increasingly old-fashioned to leave writings in stone, with the widespread use of paper in the peninsula. The second hypothesis relates to developments in religious practice. Rather than expressing devotion via writings in public spaces, Muslims sought to approach God via spoken prayers.

At the same time that the volume of graffiti diminished after the 3rd/9th century, there was a sharp increase in the number of gravestones in Arabia. On the one hand, the flourishing Abbasid economy made it possible for more people to invest in erecting inscribed gravestones, a costly practice involving stonecutters and engravers. Both those belonging to well-known families and those of more modest background participated in this practice. In other words, the practice of leaving graffiti as public commemorators diminished especially amongst the families that form the focus of this study, which makes the drop in graffiti is especially visible in this corpus. As mentioned above, however, the drop in graffiti is a general phenomenon. At the same time, other forms of devotion and piety arose. Both these developments might have stimulated a switch to the use of epitaphs for deceased family members. On gravestones too genealogies were mentioned, establishing clear and visible connections with deceased ancestors.

5.5.1. The start and zenith

So, when did people in Islamic Arabia start to leave inscriptions, and when did this practice reach its zenith? Although I have focused on four families and the corpus of inscriptions they produced in this dissertation, I use other epigraphic material to compare our corpus with. In general, the corpus is representative of the body of Arabic inscriptions from Islamic Arabia in terms of the chronological distribution of inscriptions produced.

When examining the corpus known so far of inscriptions produced by members of the four families of descendants of the *ṣaḥāba*, in terms of *when* they were produced, two interesting things appear. Despite the fact that there are some small variations between the families concerning the generation in which inscriptions started to be produced together, they represent a general trend. It is thus important to examine the distribution of epigraphic production across the *generations*.

When discussing the starting point of producing inscriptions in each family, there are differences. On the one extreme is the inscription by Khālid son of al-ʿĀṣ (inscription 1.1) who produced the earliest inscription in our corpus. Khālid belonged to the first generation of Muslims. Also in general this family is better represented in the earlier period than the other families. Four of the six individuals of this family who left inscriptions lived in the 1st/7th-8th century. With the 2nd generation of the family, the practice is shown to have been mainly carried out by two members of the family: Khālid's sons ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (inscriptions 1.3-4) and al-Ḥārith (inscription 1.7), and his grandson Ismāʿīl (inscriptions 1.5-6).

The family in our corpus that started to produce inscriptions latest, is that of descendants al-Zubayr, starting with ʿAmr son of al-Zubayr (inscription 3.63) who belonged to the 2nd generation of Muslims. The other two families ʿUmar and Abū ʿAbs start in the 3rd generation, the family of

ʿUmar started to produce inscriptions from the 3rd generation with ʿUbayd Allāh son of ʿAbd Allāh (inscription 2.1). In the family of Abū ʿAbs, the inscriptions from the 3rd generation are represented by four individuals: al-Qāsim (inscriptions 4.1-8), ʿAbd al-Malik (inscriptions 4.13-15), Maslama (inscription 4.16), and Maymūn (inscriptions 4.23-24), whereas those from the 4th generation were presented by three individuals.

I have not found any historical reasons to explain these differences and I consider it for the moment to be an omission in our sources. First of all, it is of course always possible that older inscriptions of members of these families will be found. Secondly, there is no historical reason why one family would start producing inscriptions later than another family.

However, it is clear that in all families, the number of inscriptions – both in absolute numbers and in terms of how many people were involved in writing inscriptions, as well as the number of inscriptions left by individuals – increases from the 2nd generation onwards. This compares well with the Arabic epigraphic record from Islamic Arabia in general. From the 2nd generation of Muslims, there is an explosion of Arabic inscriptions, and this has generally been associated with the formation of the Islamic state.[567]

The second important observation is that the height of inscription production took place between the 4th and 7th generations in the families of ʿUmar, al-Zubayr and we can add that the family of Abū ʿAbs in the 3th and 4th generations (figure 16). Using absolute and relative dating methods, as discussed in Chapter Two, sections 2.5 and 2.5.1, this corresponds with the end of the 1st beginning of 2nd/8th century. This is also the generation in which the *mawālī* of our corpus left their

[567] Robert Hoyland, "New Documentary,"395-416.

inscriptions.[568] Because some families in our collection produced a lot more inscriptions than others, the effect of the relative increase per generation/century is more visible in some families than in others.

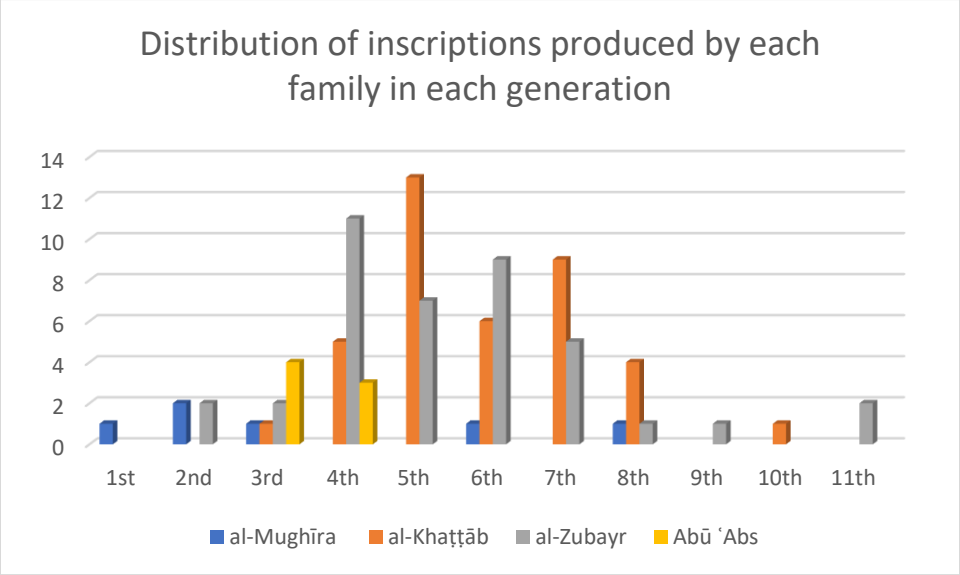

Figure 16 Distribution of inscriptions produced by each family in each generation

One topic that needs to be discussed here is literacy. Macdonald points out that learning to write is something that should be studied itself, and looked into these communities and the writings they left behind. The number of Arabic inscriptions rose dramatically after the establishment of the Islamic state under Muḥammad's leadership. MacMullen's study concerning the growth and decline of the epigraphic habit recognized that epigraphy tended to become more popular amongst citizens of a state.[569] Moreover, monumental inscriptions initiated by political or religious authorities were obviously produced in larger numbers in an official environment. At the same

[568] There are already inscriptions from *mawālī* known from the 1st and 2nd/7th-8th century in the Arabic corpus, see section 5.6.2 below.
[569] MacMullen, "The Epigraphic Habit," 241.

time, government or religious inscriptions had an added importance to them. Such inscriptions tend to be noticed more than the informal graffiti that form the basis of the analysis in this thesis.

5.6. Audience

After having presented the argument of audience, following MacMullen, in explaining the disappearance of graffiti and the simultaneous rise in monumental inscriptions by private individuals, such as epitaphs in the 3rd/9th century (section 5.5), I will now turn to people's motives for producing inscriptions, as can be deducted from the epigraphic material itself. In understanding *why* people left inscriptions (in other words, what they wanted to achieve with their inscriptions), I will examine the inscriptions themselves, analyzing the different elements of the inscriptions in the light of motives and meaning. Again, I will use MacMullen's concept of audience, thinking not of the occasion at which an inscription was manufactured, but of the messages that their patrons were trying to convey through it. I will examine the textual elements, with a lot of attention for the importance of presenting family relations, as well as the geographical context of the inscriptions: where they were placed in relation to other inscriptions, and the landscape.

Above, I have already mentioned that in trying to explain the motives of people leaving inscriptions, I will focus on the forms of self-identification that people used: their names; patronymics; tribal names and other *nisbas*; titles; and other indications. I will not discuss the religious aspect of the inscriptions, not because I think that religion played no role in motivating people to leave an inscription, but because it is a rather general and unvaried element. The religious phrases in the inscriptions consist of stock phrases that express general piety and the desire to be

close to God. Moreover, as Robert Hoyland has remarked, the focus of all Arabic inscriptions is obviously to God.[570]

Another feature that bridges piety and audience is the interaction at a ritual level that some of the inscriptions initiate. This manifests itself in two ways. The first is to leave a graffito next to one that already exists. For example, next to an inscription left by Khālid son of al-ʿĀṣ, a passer-by left a graffito, asking for "mercy upon him and upon whomever prays for him in goodness" (in inscription 1.2).

The second way is through some wording in the graffito that admonishes passers-by to pray for the person mentioned in (and having left) the inscription. The aforementioned example left by Khālid son of al-ʿĀṣ (inscription 1.2) says "whoever prays to him." So, for example, any one passing the graffito would pray to Khālid. In other words, the audience would pray for the well-being of the person mentioned in the inscription, ask God for forgiveness or make any other request. Finally, six graffiti included the word *qāla*, "says" to repeat the prayer, (inscriptions 2.38, 41 and 109; 3.51, 64 and 66).

The ways that people identified and described themselves in the contents of inscriptions, by contrast, as will become clear, allow for more analysis about the motives that people had to leave inscriptions. I will thus examine the self-description and, through that, the self-identification of those who initiated Arabic inscriptions in early Islamic Arabia.

[570] Hoyland, "The Content," 78.

5.6.1. Locals or foreigners?

To start with, I examine whether these texts were created by inhabitants of the area or travellers through the region for some reason or another. Below, in section 5.6.3.1, I will discuss the practice of individuals that seemed to prefer leaving inscriptions near those produced by family members. Here, I will discuss the relation between the location of the inscriptions and the place of residence of those leaving the inscriptions, in a more general sense. There are some variations in the corpus concerning this question. It is striking, however, that the majority of the corpus was produced by people known to have lived very near the place of discovery.

There is a clear connection between place of residence and the location of the inscriptions and we can observe a strong relationship between the texts found on the rocks and the wider community connected to the area. Other places were, however, not precise places of residence, but had some close connection to the individuals leaving inscriptions there. This becomes clear when we examine the epigraphic remains found around Medina. Inscriptions were found in *wādī*s, and near the road between Mecca and Medina, in places like Ruwāwa. For example, Ruwāwa, where most of our corpus was found, is not a residential area, but a rivulet. So, the idea is that this place was frequently visited by these individuals, as opposed to a place where they would have resided permanently. This site was already known for agriculture and pasture in the early Islamic period. As families continued to reside in the same place and family members frequented the same areas with their herds or worked the land, they continued to leave inscriptions in the same places. There are two reasons for this. The first reason, as Macdonald observed, is that the writing of inscriptions was mainly conducted as a pastime, and thus an almost automatic result of people spending time

in the area.[571] The second reason is that they wanted to express their family relationships by leaving graffiti in the same place or spot. Some of these places were visited by generation after generation. For instance, family members of the ʿUmar family produced inscriptions in the same place from the 3rd to the 8th generation.

In other cases, people originated from another area, but now lived in the place where they left their inscriptions. In other words, although they had once migrated from another place, their place of origin was still visible in their name (for example, in their tribal name, which is generally associated with Medina or through a geographical *nisba* referring to a Levantine town). In other cases they were merely travelling through or were spending some time for trade, a pilgrimage, or for some other reason. For example, five graffiti were found in Tabūk, where a handful of Medinan descendants resided (inscriptions 3.20, 35, 51, 63 and 64). Similarly, some members of the Zubayrid family left inscriptions along the Shām *ḥajj* route in "north-west" Saudi Arabia.[572] See for instance the graffiti of Yaḥyā son of al-Zubayr (inscription 3.58) and ʿUmar son of Muṣʿab son of ʿUrwa son of al-Zubayr (inscription 3.57). In addition, it is known from historical sources that some Zubayrids settled in that area, as I discussed in Chapter Three, section 3.5.5. Also, in al-Qāḥa cemetery in the Medina region, the Zubayrid family is present in the epigraphic record through four gravestones. The gravestones, indicating that a father and his son and a woman from the same branch were buried in this area, clearly confirms that this family was permanently settled there (inscriptions 3.59-62).

The gravestone of the governor of Yemen, ʿUmar son of Ibrāhīm son of Wāqid (inscription 2.28), falls into a different category, namely one whereby a person lived in one place but died in another.

[571] Macdonald, "On the Uses," 9.
[572] al-Kilābī, *al-Nuqūsh al-islāmiyya*, 547 and see al-Shammarī, *al-Kitābāt al-islāmiyya*, 230-231.

ʿUmar's grandfather settled in Yemen and his descendants were there, and he had his administrative position in Yemen,[573] but he died and was buried in Mecca (inscription 2.28).

Several inscriptions were left by people at quite a large distance from their place of residence. This is also a trend observed by MacMullen in relation to the classical world. He found out that some gravestones were erected for foreigners, such as residents of Rome in Egypt, far away from 'home.'[574] In our corpus, for example, this relates to those whose writings were found in Ḥismā (see Part Two) – for instance, ʿAmr son of al-Zubayr (inscription 3.63) and Ḥabīb son of Abū Ḥabīb, the client of ʿUrwa son of al-Zubayr (inscription 3.51). There are no indications that these Zubayrids lived here on a permanent basis. Rather they must have passed through the area on some journey.

Thus, it is interesting to note that most people left inscriptions locally. Presumably, this was not because they only wanted to communicate through inscriptions with those who also knew them personally, but rather because most of these people did not move very far from their place of residence. After all, people also left inscriptions in places they were only travelling through and had no long-term connection with. It is, of course, always possible that we will find more inscriptions left by people in places other than their place of residence.

5.6.2. Class?

An important observation concerning the Arabian epigraphic corpus is how socially diverse it is. In our corpus, we focus on the inscriptions left by four well-known families who descended from companions of the Prophet Muḥammad. By far the majority of those inscriptions was produced by

[573] al-Zubayrī, *Nasab quraysh*, 360.
[574] MacMullen, "The Epigraphic Habit," 239.

free persons. However, we also find clients (*mawālī*) and even a slave associated with different family members. Four *mawālī* engraved five inscriptions in total, and one slave boy produced four graffiti. They all belong to different generations; three are clients of the 2nd generation of al-Zubayr family, which are the sons of al-Zubayr, al-Mundhir (inscription 3.35), ʿUrwa (inscription 3.51) and ʿAmr (inscription 3.64); one of the 3rd generation, the client of Ḥafṣ son of ʿĀṣim son of ʿUmar (inscriptions 2.39-40).

Rabīʿ the slave boy of ʿĀṣim son of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān used his title of *fatā* only once (inscription 2.113). In his other graffiti, he removed the title of slave boy (inscriptions 2.114-116). According to recent discoveries, the practice of removing these titles was more common than previously thought. For example, in Ḥismā, the *mawlā* of Muʿāwiya used his title twice and removed it once.[575]

The Arabic inscriptions from Islamic Arabia include other examples of graffiti left by slaves[576] and *mawālī*.[577] In the 1st/7th-8th century, a marked increase in the number of dated inscriptions made by them can be seen. Members of different social backgrounds are thus well represented in the graffiti, and the same applies to gravestones. Gravestones record the *mawlā* status of the deceased or mention that they were or had been slaves.[578] Monumental foundations and other commemorative inscriptions were, not surprisingly, limited to the highest levels of society. In

[575] Maysāʾ Ghabban, "*al-Kitābāt al-islāmiyya al-mubakkira*," 101, 104 and 119.
[576] al-Saʿīd et al., *Nuqūsh ḥismā*, 16-17, 21.
[577] al-Saʿīd et al., *Nuqūsh ḥismā*, 14-15 and 20, and Zuhayr graffito, see Ghabban and Hoyland, "The inscription," 212, and the construction of the Muʿāwiya dam in Medina by Mawlā of Ibn ʿAbbās see al-Rashid, *Dirāsāt fī al-āthār*, 46.
[578] al-Saʿīd et al., *Nuqūsh ḥismā*, 20-21; two graffiti made by the same person, one mentioning he was a slave; and in the second one, he identified himself as a client.

general, however, there were no places or epigraphic genres restricted to one social class or another in Islamic Arabia. This situation, moreover, was in existence right from the start.

In this sense, the Arabic material shows a very different picture from that of the classical world, where – as MacMullen explains – certain areas were limited to inscriptions from rich people,[579] while the custom of making inscriptions only spread to lower classes throughout the course of several centuries.[580]

Besides the use of *mawlā* and *fatā*, there are only a limited number of inscriptions in the Arabic epigraphic record in general that mention individuals' titles, positions or professions. In our corpus, no positions are mentioned, but there are several positions mentioned in other Arabic graffiti, from head of state to other positions. For example, *amīr al-muʾminīn* is mentioned in Mecca;[581] others related to the Kaʿba are also mentioned, such as "*Ḥājib al-Kaʿba*" (gate keeper)[582] and "*Khādim al-Kaʿba*" (the servant of the Kaʿba), are mentioned twice.[583] Finally, someone who left his name in the south of Arabia referred to his father as a "*Ṣāniʿ al-Jirār*" (potter), in an inscription dated to the year 98/717.[584]

Most inscriptions do not, however, indicate the status of the initiator through titles or positions at all. This lack of the use of titles has been connected to the egalitarian nature of early Muslim-Arab society.[585] Even the earliest dated Arabic inscription, which mentions the death of the caliph

[579] MacMullen, "The Epigraphic Habit," 241.
[580] "The key moment when this process took off occurred at the end of the first century BCE. This was when the practice, hitherto confined to the elite, spread to other groups of the population: the urban plebs, freedmen, soldiers, foreigners, and others which, though excluded from commemorations in the forum, found cemeteries to be ideal spaces for self-display." Lloris, "Epigraphic Habit," 134.
[581] al-Rashid, *Kitābāt islāmiyya min makka,* 151-153.
[582] Ibid., 141-143.
[583] al-Rashid, *al-Ṣuwaydira (al-ṭaraf qadīman),* 183-185.
[584] al-Thenyian, "Naqsh ghayl," 66-67.
[585] See also the contrast in bi-lingual Greek-Arabic and Coptic-Arabic papyri where the Greek and Coptic parts of the documents use titles and positions to identify individuals who appear with their name and patronymic only in the

ʿUmar, does not use a title for the ruler. The identity of the caliph is based on his name, patronymic and the date of his death, as well as the fact that this presumably momentous event is used to date the inscription.[586] As I have argued elsewhere, however, the absence of the caliph's title should be explained by the notion that the inscription was produced after the caliph's death.[587]

The genealogical identifications in the inscriptions identified the inscriber's status as well, of course. After all, it was possible – this was, in fact, the whole point – to identify an individual easily by his family affiliation and his forefathers, placing him or her in the history and thereby the social stratification of Islamic society. In this sense, genealogy functioned just like position and title as an expression of status. Finally, there are several inscriptions that simply record a significant event that took place as a historical statement without offering a name, let alone that of a member of the high social classes or the ruler who initiated the inscription.[588]

In short, Arabic inscriptions from Islamic Arabia show a diversity of social backgrounds amongst the people initiating the writings – a diversity that is made visible in the inscriptions themselves. This diversification existed from the beginning of Islam, when Arabic inscriptions became omnipresent. In this aspect, there is a clear difference between the Muslim world and other civilizations. The Arabic corpus from Arabia shows a clear diversity in the graffiti, gravestones

Arabic part, Petra M Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim state: The World of a Mid-Eighth-Century Egyptian Official* (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 2013).

[586] "Ghabban and Hoyland, "The inscription," 209-236; Imbert, "Califes, princes," 65.

[587] Abdullah Alhatlani, "Death on stone: a new Arabic graffito from the Black Desert, north-eastern Jordan," paper delivered at the workshop entitled "Past, Present, & Future Encoding and Accessing Memories in Epigraphy in Post-Classical Mediterranean," Leiden, January 14,2021.

[588] Hoyland was the first to point out the lack of use of a title for the Rāshidūn caliphs in the inscription, see Robert G. Hoyland, "Reflections on the identity of the Arabian Conquerors of the Seventh-Century Middle East," *al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 25 (2017), 124. It compares well with historical descriptions of the Rāshidūn caliphs being considered not far above the other Muslims. Our inscriptions suggest that this trend of identifying people by their name only, rather than by title and position, continued amongst later generations; those not belonging to the ruling family of the Umayyad caliphs, who did include titles with their inscriptions, would not include a title or profession, except for Isḥāq bin Qabīṣa who used the title *amīr*, Khamis, "Two wall," 163.

and constructions inscriptions from the beginning of its coming into existence, covering both graffiti and epigraphs. Inscriptions from higher-class individuals were mixed with those from people with a lower social status, in the graffiti, gravestones and in the monumental inscriptions. This diverse and egalitarian characteristic of the Arabic epigraphic corpus is important because it means that conveying status does not seem to have been an important motive for the making inscriptions, what was important conversely was that they identified themselves by linking their names to their community.

5.6.3. Family

Clearly, an important element in terms of self-identification in the Arabic inscriptions from Islamic Arabia was family connections. Establishing a family connection happened in multiple ways. First, there was the practice of placing one's inscription near those of one's forefathers. Secondly, a connection was made between the generations by following the example of one's father in epigraphic practice. The names themselves were another way to establish a link within a family, especially the genealogical references to forefathers. Finally, there were the family names, indicated by tribal *nisba*s or a mention of the family founder. It is clear that the application of genealogical markers in these different ways constituted one of the most significant functions of the inscriptions. By listing preceding generations and genealogical connections, the initiators of these inscriptions placed themselves in a historical context and connected themselves to their forefathers.

5.6.3.1. The place to be: Joining one's forefathers in stone

After having discussed what the texts of the inscriptions say about the motives behind leaving them, I now move on to the placement of these inscriptions and what that tells us about their function and meaning. Which rocks were chosen, and what implication did this choice have?

The Safaitic inscription I have cited at the beginning of this chapter states: "found the writing of his father." The practice of generation after generation making their inscriptions in the same place is also a striking feature of our corpus and of Arabic inscriptions from early Islamic Arabia in general. This raises three questions: Firstly, was this a practice that frequently took place? Secondly, what significance did it have? Finally, was this a practice simply carried over from the ancient Arabia situation or was there a change in execution, application or meaning in the Islamic period?

Firstly, there is the practice of the same individual leaving his name several times in the same spot. There are 51 individuals who left multiple inscriptions in our corpus – for example, ʿĀṣim son of ʿUmar son of Ḥafṣ (inscriptions 2.66-76) – did so in the same place. In other words, it was apparently more attractive to place one's second or third inscription in the same place as a previous one than to spread one's name across as wide a geographical area as possible. Moreover, those leaving multiple inscriptions in the same place did so in places where their family members also placed inscriptions. Others, such as Zayd son of ʿUmar son of Ḥafṣ (inscriptions 2.78-86), Maymūn son of Zayd son of Abū ʿAbs (inscriptions 4.23-24) and ʿAbd al-Majīd son of Abū ʿAbs (inscriptions 4.17-18) left graffiti in different places.

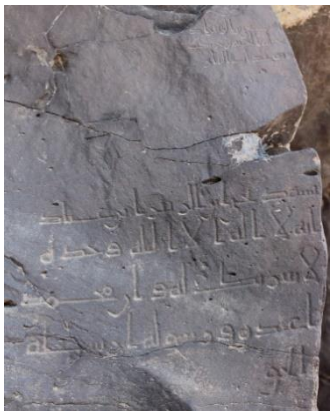

Figure 17 Yaḥyā son of al-Zubayr son of ʿAbbād left two inscriptions on this rock in Muzj, one in which he used one paternal name, and a second one in which he used two paternal names

Secondly, the practice of leaving inscriptions amongst those belonging to forefathers should be discussed. The Safaitic inscription cited at the beginning of this chapter shows that this practice was an ancient one in Arabia. The remark in the inscription – that the person left his inscription where he found the name of his father – suggests, moreover, that this was more than merely accidental. It remains unclear how widespread this practice was in the pre-Islamic period, we can not at this moment see this pattern clearly yet in pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions that are dated to the 6th century, because the corpus is still small, but in the Safaitic corpus this phenomenon is present as also becomes clear from the mentioned quote. Although, as argued above in section 5.6.1, residence, daily movements and restrictions on movement determined the places where inscriptions were left, there seems to have been also a popular practice of leaving one's inscription in direct proximity to – or even on the same rock as – those of family members. The idea of connecting to one's forefathers by inscribing one's name near those one descended from, is encountered very frequently in the Islamic period as our corpus shows, how widespread this custom was in the pre-Islamic period remains unclear. Establishing the family-relations in the pre-Islamic corpus is much harder, because the corpus of graffiti is still small. For the Islamic period the situation is clear: once one person had placed his graffito in a specific spot, other family

members followed. Therefore, it is common to find the work of up to three generations upon one rock, as with the example below of Khālid son of al-ʿĀṣ, his two sons and his grandson; (see figure 19).

This desire to be associated with one's forefathers through the inscriptions has, I think, three main reasons. The first is rather prosaic, as discussed above in section 5.6.1: the simple fact that people generally did not move very far from their place of residence. In other words, they left inscriptions in the same spots as their forefathers, because they frequented the same spots their forefathers did. The next two reasons place more choice and agency in the hands of the inscribers. People also placed inscriptions near those of their forefathers because they wanted to connect emotionally to their ancestors in this way. Finally, by placing their inscriptions close to those of family members from the past, they shared their history and reputation. It was a way to build a common identity that was meaningful within their own society.

This practice comes out especially strong when we see family members leaving inscriptions on the same rock (see figures 18 and 19 below). Although the physical restraints of the rock of course determined how many people could leave their written messages and how they could arrange them, we can observe a variety of examples of people placing their inscriptions on the same spot. Some left their inscriptions next to each other or under each other. See, for example, figure 18, which shows that two cousins placed their graffiti above each other. ʿAbd Allāh son ʿAtīq son of Ṣaddīq son of Mūsā placed his graffito above that of his cousin ʿAtīq son of Yaʿqūb (inscriptions 3.30 and 31).

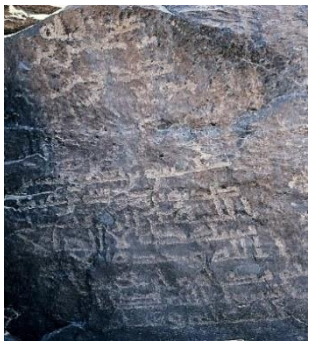

Figure 18 Example of two cousins' inscriptions. ʿAbd Allāh son of ʿAtīq son of Ṣaddīq son of Mūsā (inscription 3.30) placed his inscription above that of his cousin ʿAtīq son of Yaʿqūb son of Ṣaddīq son of Mūsā son of ʿAbd Allāh son of al-Zubayr (inscription 3.31), on the same rock in Ruwāwa

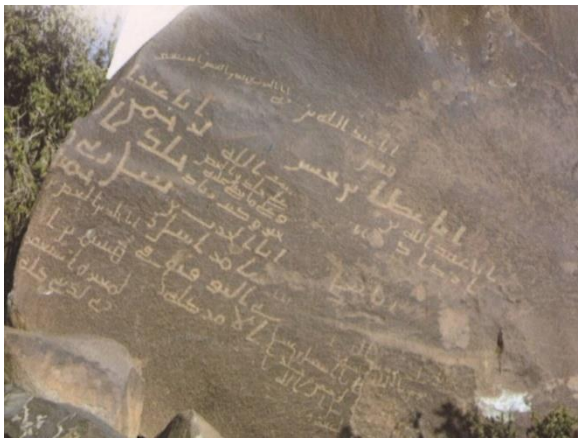

Figure 19 Three generations of one family (a grandfather, two of his sons, and his grandson) in Wādī Khara, region of al-Bāḥa. Khālid son of al-ʿĀṣ son of Hishām son of al-Mughīra (inscription 1.1), ʿAbd al-Raḥmān son of Khālid (inscription 1.4), Ismāʿīl son of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān son of Khālid (inscription 1.5) and al-Ḥārith son of Khālid son of al-ʿĀṣ (inscription 1.7) left four graffiti on the same rock

If we examine the evidence of the four families who produced our corpus, we can, however, detect a difference in when the practice of leaving inscriptions in general and – especially – placing inscriptions amongst those of the family members started to become popular. It is difficult to argue whether these constitute absolute differences in our evidence or whether it reflects a condition of our sources. In other words, is this simply the result of inscriptions of certain family members not having been found yet, or is there a historical reason for the difference in the number of inscriptions placed between family members? At the same time, in places where different members of the same

family left their inscriptions, we might be able to say something more specific. In these places, a difference in practice between the different generations and the absence of names from one generation or another arguably represents a trend in the epigraphic practice of that family.

The desire to list one's forefathers in long genealogical lines disappeared in the 2nd-3rd/8th-9th century, as discussed below (section 5.6.3.2), and was replaced with the idea of a family name like al-ʿUmarī. Without certain identifications, it becomes difficult to analyze if names that are found near each other are indeed all names of related family members, and if so, how one specific individual would be connected to the other individuals that left inscriptions in the proximity. There is, for example, ʿUthmān son of Ḥafṣ, who left one graffito in Ruwāwa using only one paternal name.[589] He might be identified as the son of Ḥafṣ son of ʿUthmān son of ʿUbayd Allāh (inscriptions 2.14-18) descending from ʿUmar via his son ʿAbd Allāh or as belonging to another ʿUmar branch – namely, that of ʿĀṣim – via the latter's great-grandson Ḥafṣ son of ʿUbayd Allāh son of ʿUmar (inscriptions 2.49-56). Alternatively, he might descend from neither of these two persons.

It is noteworthy to mention here that the placement of inscriptions helped us to identify some individuals who are not known through the literary sources. See for example Zayd son of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-ʿUmarī and his son al-Fārūq, who could be identified by the fact that they left their inscriptions in the same spot. Similarly, al-Qāsim son of Muḥammad son of Abū ʿAbs and his son Ṭālūt were able to be identified because they left their names in the same place. Conversely, when examining the inscriptions of subsequent family members who left their inscriptions on the same rock, it became clear that later generations felt that their own inscription was indeed a kind of

[589] al-Rashid, *Kitābāt islāmiyya ghayr*, 101-102.

appendix to inscriptions by family members already in place. Later generations used less extensive genealogical identifications and were more likely to leave out the *nisba*. It seems that they did so because they thought they were identified through association with their forefathers, who did leave a full name (see section 5.6.3.3 for more details).

From my fieldwork visiting inscriptions in situ in Ruwāwa, Muzj and Jabal al-Makaymin, I was able to make some general observations concerning the placement of inscriptions in the landscape. First of all, in some rocks there is no place for more graffiti because the inscribers left no space for this. Secondly, in my second instance of fieldwork in Muzj, I was unable to see some inscriptions which were located on the left side of the *wādī* and on the side of small rivers. These are unfortunately inaccessible or invisible in the rainy season when I visited the place. For example, I was unable to reach certain inscriptions (inscriptions 3.2-6 and 21-24), when the rain made the water in the rivulet rise (see figure 20). We can assume that since the places with these inscriptions are inaccessible in the rainy season, they must have been produced at other times of the year which fits of course also the season of grazing cattle better.

Figure 20 Muzj in my second instance of fieldwork

In some cases, the condition of the stones or rocks determined how an inscription was written, in the sense that some parts were purposely left out of the inscription, so it would fit the available space better. In our corpus, we find ten inscriptions that are assumingly incomplete or missing words because of their position on the stone; one in terms of lineage (inscription 2.3), three missing the word *ibn* (son of) (inscriptions 2.54, 3.2 and 14), and six with incomplete phrasing (inscriptions 2.7, 49, 80; 3.28, 29, and 47). In other words, these parts were left out (intentionally or accidentally) because there was not enough space to write the complete text.

As mentioned above, we assume in general that the makers of the graffiti wanted them to be read by passers-by. In Ruwāwa in general, the inscriptions can be easily observed. They are not located very far away from each other and in fact, when walking around, inscriptions can be seen everywhere. There are some collapsed rocks that may contain more graffiti. Most of the inscriptions are located in the north east, south, and south west of the rivulet.[590] Only in a few exceptional cases are the inscriptions found in a high place at the edge of the rivulet, such as (inscription 2.82), where Zayd son of ʿUmar did not complete his graffito. Another example of a graffito that is difficult to reach, is that of Yaḥyā son of Yaḥyā al-Zubayrī (inscription 3.68) in Jabal al-Makaymin which is located high on the rock.

A final remark concerns the specific audience - family, brothers, cousins, sons or other passers-by – these inscriptions were typically made for. It is likely that in fact other family members were the main targeted audience. Because we find several generations and different branches of one family at specific sites, we can conclude family members must have frequented the place for decades. As

[590] al-Rashid, *Kitābāt islāmiyya ghayr*, 12.

discussed above, passers-by were targeted especially in the inscriptions that asked passers-by to pray.

5.6.3.2. Names and self-identifications

Names and naming practices reveal much about the messages the individuals leaving these inscriptions wanted to emphasize about themselves. One exciting feature in these inscriptions is how the individuals who left them identified themselves and, especially, how many generations of ancestors they listed in their inscriptions. We might be able to trace some change in attitude towards self-identification and how these individuals placed themselves in the chronology of the Muslim community and the genealogy of their families.

One striking feature of the inscriptions in our corpus, and in Arabic inscriptions in general, is that the usage of the tribal *nisba* is not common. Even the *nisba* Qurayshī is only attested once in this corpus. Subtribes or clans are only attested a total of three times: al-Makhzūmī twice (inscriptions 1.8 and 9) and al-Asadī once. In one case, both the name of the tribe and clan are used: al-Qurayshī, then al-Asadī (inscription 3.19). In this regard, it is noteworthy to mention that the usage of the tribe's name before that of the clan is not uncommon in Arabic inscriptions, see section 5.4.

One person used his *laqab* "epithet" such as Rabāḥ (inscriptions 2.37-38) instead of his real name ʿĪsā. This individual, who was known as a *ḥadīth* transmitter, is referred to in the narrative sources with this *laqab* as well, rather than his first name. However, the sources do not give an original first name for his nephew's son, Rabāḥ son of ʿUbayd Allāh son of ʿUmar (inscriptions 2.46-48), so it is difficult to ascertain whether Rabāḥ is a *laqab* or a name.

An interesting phenomenon is that apparently certain names were popular in certain families. In the four families studied in this dissertation, this phenomenon is especially clear amongst the

descendant of al-Mughīra, ʿUmar and Ibn al-Zubayr. In the line of descendants of al-Mughīra we have 6 individuals, from different generations we have the name Khālid and al-Ḥārith or Ḥārith attested twice, which is the same name but with the added article al- (inscriptions 1.7 and 9)(see Chapter Three, figure 7). In the family of ʿUmar the following names occur especially frequently: ʿUmar, Muḥammad and Ḥafṣ were the most common name which are attested four times, ʿUbayd Allāh and ʿAbd Allāh three times, Rabāḥ, Abū Bakr andʿĀṣim twice. ʿUmar appears twice in the 4th generation, Ḥafṣ, ʿUbayd Allāh, Muḥammad, and Abū Bakr are attested twice in the 5th generation (see Chapter Three, figures 8 and 9).

In the family of Ibn al-Zubayr we see the following names are popular; ʿAbd Allāh is attested nine times, Muḥammad five times, Yaḥyā four times and Isḥāq three times; the following names were attested twice Jaʿfar, Ibrāhīm, Ismāʿīl, ʿUmar and Muṣʿab. The name ʿUmar is attested twice in the 4th generation (see Chapter Three, figure 12), Isḥāq appears twice in the 5th generation (see Chapter Three, figures 10 and 11), and ʿAbd Allāh is attested three times in the 6th generation (see Chapter Three, figures 10 and 11), Muḥammad appears twice in the 7th generation (see Chapter Three, figure10).

Another important point in relation to the names used is the way in which members referred to their family or final *nisba*. By the 1st/7th-8th century, a new practice started to appear in the Muslim community – namely, using variant final *nisba*s. Such a practice is found in our corpus in the families of al-Mughīra, al-Khaṭṭāb, al-Zubayr and Abū ʿAbs.

The descendants of al-Mughīra used three final *nisba*s, and these changed from one generation to the next. For example, Khālid son of al-ʿĀṣ used the final *nisba* al-Mughīra (inscription 1.1). An unidentified man named Ziyād made a graffito for Khālid, ending the name with the *nisba* al-ʿĀṣ (inscription 1.2). Khālid's sons, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān and al-Ḥārith also used the *nisba* al-ʿĀṣ

(inscriptions 1.3 and 7). A later generation used the *nisba* of the al-Makhzūmī clan (inscriptions 1.8-9).

Regarding the family of al-Khaṭṭāb, inscriptions from the 1st/7th to the 4th/10th centuries show five variants of the last name, these are al-Khaṭṭāb, al-Fārūq, Ibn ʿUmar, al-ʿUmarī and Āl ʿUmar. The *laqab* or epithet al-Fārūq, for ʿUmar son of al-Khaṭṭāb, is attested in five graffiti. The earliest attestation occurs in a text left by Rabāḥ son of Ḥafṣ son of ʿĀṣim in the year 100/718-719 (inscription 2.38). The second, which might be earlier than the one first mentioned, came in an inscription by his older brother, ʿUmar (inscription 2.41). The third one comes in an inscription by ʿUthmān son of ʿUbayd Allāh son of ʿAbd Allāh son of ʿUmar (inscription 2.2). The fourth and the fifth were used by the *mawlā* of ʿUmar's grandson Ḥafṣ – namely, Shaddād (inscriptions 2.39-40). As we can notice from the diagram (figure 21), the use of the *laqab* started in the same generation, that is to say the 4th, between the end of the 1st and beginning of the 2nd/8th century.

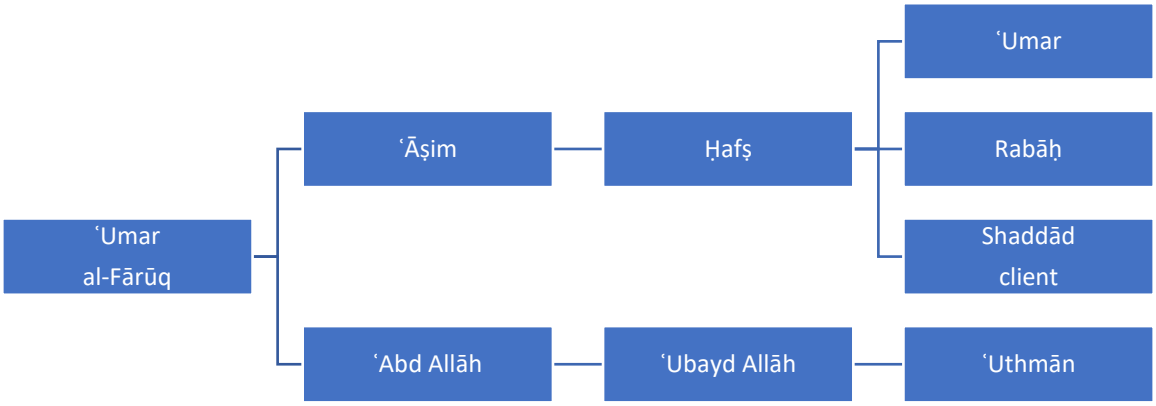

Figure 21 The usages of the epithet al-Fārūq as a last name amongst ʿUmar's descendants

In the next generation, the use of the epithet changed as it came to represent an element of nostalgia towards their forefathers. It appears in two poetic inscriptions from Ruwāwa. These inscriptions

originate from the 5th to the 7th generation (inscriptions 2.76 and 124), all of which used a particularly poetic style of inscription. In the beginning of the graffito (inscription 2.124), the inscriber identifies himself as follows: "I am the boy from the descendants …of al-Fārūq" (*anā al-fatā min banī… al-frūq*(sic)). Note that the practice of using the term *banī* was also attested throughout the Safaitic and Nabataean[591] ones. We also find this form in some early Arabic inscriptions.[592] Another way of identify is using *āl*, Ḥafṣ son of ʿUthmān identified himself as "young man of the family of Āl ʿUmar" (*shābb āl ʿUmar*) (inscription 2.14). The using of *āl* is unique in early Arabic epigraphy. I think he used this title in a place where he was surrounded by his family inscriptions as he was writing. Again, this practice of identifying oneself as belonging to a family or tribe using *āl* occurs in Nabataean and Safaitic.[593]

Interestingly, the variant "Ibn ʿUmar" was mostly used in the branch of ʿAbd Allāh, one example is taken from the branch of ʿĀṣim by Abū Bakr son of ʿUmar son of Ḥafṣ son of ʿĀṣim son of ʿUmar (inscription 2.42). In the branch of ʿAbd Allāh, the name Ibn ʿUmar was used six times (inscriptions 2.1, 3-5, 19 and 24) and the name Āl ʿUmar occurred once (inscription 2.14). On the other hand, the *nisba* al-Khaṭṭāb appears in eight inscriptions, of which six occurred outside Medina. Inscriptions 2.37 and 136 can be found in Medina and belong to the branch of ʿĀṣim, and those outside Medina can be found in Mecca and Najrān (inscriptions 2.23, 28-30, 33-34).

Around the second half to the end of the 2nd/8th-9th century, a fourth variant, al-ʿUmarī, was introduced in both the epigraphic and literary sources. The name remained popular from the 4th to

[591] Laïla Nehmé and Michael C.A. Macdonald, "Bny, ʾl and ʾhl in Nabataean and Safaitic," in *Dûma 3; The 2012 Report of the Saudi–Italian–French Archaeological Project at Dûmat al-Jandal, Saudi Arabia*, ed. Guillaume Charloux and Romolo Loreto (Riyadh, 2015), 69-73.
[592] al-Saʿīd et al., *Nuqūsh ḥismā,* 14.
[593] Nehmé and Macdonald, "Bny, ʾl and ʾhl," 71-73.

the 8th generation. In the epigraphic record, this *nisba* was found in 15 graffiti. In general, this name was more commonly used amongst the branch of ʿĀṣim than the branch of ʿAbd Allāh, with nine usages of this name in total: seven from the branch of ʿĀṣim, and two from the branch of ʿAbd Allāh.

The occurrence of the name al-ʿUmarī might be explained as a transition between the names Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and Ibn ʿUmar; instead of using the full lineage, they used this *nisba* to shorten the names. This could be confirmed by two inscriptions left by one person, al-Fārūq son of Zayd son of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-ʿUmarī. He used the name al-ʿUmarī once (inscription 2.135) and the name al-Khaṭṭāb once (inscription 2.136). The sons of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān son of ʿAbd Allāh son of ʿUmar son of Ḥafṣ used the *nisba* "al-ʿUmarī", though there is no precise information available about them. Nonetheless, the epigraphic record shows that five sons and two grandsons used this *nisba*: Ismāʿīl (inscriptions 2.96-99), ʿĀṣim (inscriptions 2.104-105), ʿAbd Allāh son of ʿĀṣim (inscription 2.107), ʿĪsā son of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (inscriptions 2.117-118), Muḥammad son of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (inscriptions 2.120-122), Zayd son of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (inscriptions 2.124-126) and al-Fārūq son of Zayd (inscription 2.124 and 135). Two individuals from the branch of ʿAbd Allāh son of ʿUmar used this *nisba*. They are ʿUmar son of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-ʿUmarī (inscription 2.32) and his uncle ʿUmar son of ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿUmarī (inscription 2.31).

The *nisba* al-ʿUmarī was only used by the descendants of ʿUmar. Al-Rashid suggested that Zayd son of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-ʿUmarī (inscription 2.124), who left an inscription in Ruwāwa, might refer to Zayd son of al-Khaṭṭāb, ʿUmar's brother. He concluded that the *nisba* al-ʿUmarī might not have been used exclusively for ʿUmar's descendants but also for those of his brother Zayd.[594] Now that we have a full lineage of Zayd son of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān in his son's inscription (inscription

[594] al-Rashid, *Kitābāt islāmiyya ghayr*, 70-71.

2.136), this suggestion can be rejected. Zayd descends also from ʿUmar, hence he uses the *nisba* al-ʿUmarī.

Al-Samʿānī reports that this *nisba* al-ʿUmarī was used by the descendants of two ʿUmars: ʿUmar son of al-Khaṭṭāb and ʿUmar son of ʿAlī son of Abū Ṭālib. Al-Samʿānī mentioned ten descendants from ʿUmar son of al-Khaṭṭāb who used this *nisba*.[595] As discussed in Chapter Three, section 3.4.1, it seems that what al-Samʿānī has suggested is correct and corresponds to what the epigraphic record shows. But there are two exceptions: they are related to the graffiti of ʿUmar son of ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿUmarī (inscription 2.31) and ʿUmar son of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-ʿUmarī (inscription 2.32); al-Samʿānī mentioned these individuals but did not add information on whether they used the nisba or not.

What becomes clear from these examples is that even within the time-span of one generation people adjusted their names quite significantly. Interestingly, moreover, there seems to have been a tendency – especially in the family of ʿUmar, where multiple names were in use – for the same person to use different names. As mentioned above, Rabāḥ used a *kunya* instead of his original first name. Also, in his two graffiti, he uses two different versions of his 'last' name. In the text dated to the year 96/714-715, he used the last name al-Khaṭṭāb (inscription 2.37); in the second one, he used al-Fārūq (inscription 2.38). A second example of this phenomenon is ʿUthmān son of ʿUbayd Allāh, who used al-Fārūq (inscription 2.2) and Ibn ʿUmar (inscriptions 2.3-5). Finally, al-Fārūq son of Zayd used the *nisba* al-ʿUmarī once (inscription 2.135) and al-Khaṭṭāb once (inscription 2.136).

[595] al-Samʿānī, *Kitāb al-ansāb*, 9: 372-374.

In al-Zubayr's family, four different last names were in use: the first variant is al-Zubayr. Al-Zubayrī was introduced in the 6th generation (2nd/8th century), but not all members of that generation used it. Sometimes, al-Zubayr and al-Zubayrī are used alongside each other (in the 6th generation: inscription 3.41; and in the 10th generation: inscription 3.16). The third variant is al-ʿAwwām. However, this name is only attested once in an epitaph that can be dated to the 3rd/9th century (inscription 3.65). Finally, one inscription mentions al-Qurayshī, then al-Asadī (inscription 3.19).

Although the *nisba* al-Zubayrī seems linguistically similar to how al-ʿUmarī was formed, it must be stressed that there is in fact a slight difference. Indeed, in some inscriptions left by members of the Zubayrī family, it is clear that the name is used to simply shorten the name in order not to present the full lineage, as is the case with ʿUmāra son of Ibrāhīm son of Falīḥ al-Zubayrī (inscription 3.41). However, on the gravestone of Muḥammad son of al-Qāsim son of ʿAbd Allāh son of Muḥammad son of Ḥamza son of Bakr son of ʿAbd Allāh son of Ṣāliḥ son of ʿAbbād son of ʿAbd Allāh al-Zubayrī the name al-Zubayrī is used differently; that is to say, in the case of this extensive lineage on a professionally made gravestone using "al-Zubayrī" was purposely done and not just meant as a quicker way of writing Ibn al-Zubayr. It seems to me that using this *nisba*, as we found in the first case of ʿUmāra (inscription 3.41), is similar to what we found in ʿUmar's family, where al-ʿUmarī was used as a *nisba*. Indeed, it is used systematically to replace full *nisba*s, so as not to have to indicate every name in the lineage, as also happened with Ibn ʿUmar or al-Khaṭṭāb. In brief, there is no general systematic use for this *nisba*. This variation shows that people used multiple ways to present themselves in the epigraphic record. Indeed, it is difficult to draw a conclusion about this variation, but what I suggest is that it was a personal choice.

5.6.3.3. Paternal lines used in our corpus

Some inscriptions in our corpus show a use of paternal names instead of the full lineage. In several cases this phenomenon appears in a situation where the same individual has also (already) left an inscription mentioning his full lineage. So frequenting the same site and leaving multiple inscriptions seems to have been a reason for using paternal names. Another reason for using a shortened lineage appears to be the presence of inscriptions by family members, who did use the full lineage and were located in the same spot. For instance, in the inscriptions of descendants of al-Mughīra, the full lineage was omitted three times (inscriptions 1.4-6). In all these cases the inscriptions were left close to the inscription of the father of the particular inscribers, so the family ties were clear. The rest of the descendants did use their full names, supporting the idea that the proximity to other inscriptions played a large part in the decision.

Another example of shortened lineage can be found in the inscriptions by the grandsons of ʿUbayd Allāh son of ʿAbd Allāh son of ʿUmar (inscription 2.1). ʿUthmān's sons Abū Bakr (inscriptions 2.8-13) and Ḥafṣ (inscriptions 2.14-18), who belonged to the 5th generation, did not mention their full lineage, because they were surrounded by inscriptions left by their father, grandfather and uncle, who had already presented their full lineage. However, Ḥafṣ once used 'son of ʿUthmān shābb Āl ʿUmar' (inscription 2.14) to connect himself to the family, but he omitted his grandfather and great-grandfather from his lineage.

I should note that in the branch of Ḥafṣ, through his son ʿUmar, the use of the full paternal formula is rare in general. Even ʿUmar son of Ḥafṣ son of al-Fārūq (inscription 2.41) omitted one member on his paternal side – namely, his grandfather ʿĀṣim. None of ʿUmar's sons ever mentions their linage back to ʿUmar except for his son Abū Bakr who was the only one in the branch to use the

nisba Ibn ʿUmar, using son of ʿUmar son of Ḥafṣ son of ʿĀṣim son of ʿUmar (inscription 2.42). His other sons, ʿUbayd Allāh, ʿAbd Allāh, Zayd, Muḥammad and ʿĀṣim, son of ʿUmar son of Ḥafṣ never mentioned their full lineage. Also the 6th generation did not use their full lineage. The 7th generation of ʿĀṣim used the *nisba* al-ʿUmarī to verify their *nasab* instead of using the full lineage going back to al-Khaṭṭāb. There is one exception to this general pattern in the ʿUmar-family. In the 8th generation al-Fārūq son of Zayd used two ways to identify himself: once he described himself with the *nisba* al-ʿUmarī (inscription 2.135), and in a second case he added his full lineage to ʿUmar son of Khaṭṭāb (inscription 2.136). But in general we can state that the members of this branch used only a short lineage to identify themselves instead of their full name.

In the family of al-Zubayr, as was the case in the family of ʿUmar, paternal names were most frequently used. There are a number of individuals who would sometimes use their paternal name, and in other cases used their full name, for example ʿAbd Allāh son of ʿAbbād (inscriptions 3.18-19) and ʿAtīq son of Yʿaqūb (inscriptions 3.31-32). On the other hand, others used their paternal name instead of a full genealogy. As mentioned above, using two or three paternal names would usually suffice to identify a person. For example, the brother of ʿAtīq, ʿĀmir (inscription 3.34) and his cousin ʿAbd Allāh son of ʿAtīq (inscription 3.30) did not use their full lineage; because they were writing in the same place where their brother's and cousin's inscriptions were found, they only used two to three paternal names as an indication of their identity.

In the family of Abū ʿAbs, only one individual ever used more than three paternal names. Sālim son of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz son of Muḥammad son of Abū ʿAbs linked himself to the family founder (inscriptions 4.19-20). I noted that in this family, all of the members preferred to use the family *nisba* Abū ʿAbs, except Ṭālūt son of al-Qāsim (inscriptions 4.9-12) and ʿAbd al-Majīd son of Abū

ʿAbs (inscriptions 4.17-18). In the case of the latter the family nisba is the same to the name of the father, so in this case it remains unclear which name he intended to refer to.

It is clear that the graffiti show variation in the use of lineage and the number of paternal ancestors mentioned, but at the moment I do not see a clear pattern other than maybe one based on practical considerations. As discussed above, people often left out full identification through their genealogy or family *nisba* if they wrote their inscription in a place where other family members had done so too. This means that part of their identification went via those of their family members. On the other hand, lineages on gravestones are longer because gravestones fall into a slightly different category from graffiti.

5.7. Phrases

Having discussed the self-presentation of inscribers in terms of their names and the location of inscriptions as an indicator of what they convey towards their audience, I will now turn to the remaining textual elements in the inscriptions. Besides religious phrases, which dominate in the inscriptions, poems and signatures (list of lineages only) are also included in the inscriptions in our corpus.[596] As discussed above, I will not deal with religious phrases extensively because they are formulaic and repetitive. Nevertheless, I will use them in my analysis here, not to examine the motives of those leaving inscriptions but to trace other patterns – for example, the relative popularity of certain formulae amongst (members of) one family or another.

Poems appear only seldomly. In our corpus, two graffiti contain some lines of poetry (inscriptions 2.76 and 124). These poems are short and only comprise one line; there are anonymous lines that I thought may have been composed by the inscribers themselves, because they all relate to the

[596] Hoyland, "The Content," 78-90.

honor of the ancestors of these inscribers. It seems to me these inscriptions were made because of the inscribers' feelings of nostalgia towards their ancestors, commemorating them when they were surrounded by their relative's inscriptions.

Let us start with a recapitulation of the textual elements of our inscriptions. The inscriptions of our corpus contain text – mostly pious phrases often in the form of a prayer or request, but sometimes merely stating the confession of faith or some Qurʾanic verses, and in a few cases, verses of poetry; or a combination of these, followed by the identification of the person on whose behalf the inscription was erected. Below, I have listed the kinds of texts that can be found in the inscriptions besides the names, as distributed amongst the different families. It is clear (and to be expected) that the families that left most inscriptions, such as the descendants of ʿUmar, display most textual variants. In the discussion of the different elements, I have not distinguished between the different families.

The most popular phrases attested throughout our corpus in all four families relate to confession "*āmana fulān bi-Allāh al-ʿaẓīm*" or in the variant: either "*āmana fulān bi-Allāh*" or "*thiqat fulān bi-Allāh*" *or* "*fulān bi-Allāh yathiq*", which is attested 99 times in our corpus. The second phrase used in our corpus relates to a prayer for forgiveness: "*Allāhumma ighfir li-fulān ibn fulān*." This occurs 48 times. This phrase is sometimes followed by *dhanbahu* "his sin" and sometimes by "*amīn rabb al-ʿālamīn.*" The third one relates to a prayer for repentance; it occurs 31 times, all starting with "*tāba Allāh ʿalā fulān ibn fulān*", except one (inscription 2.121).

Qurʾanic verses are used, and some prayers from the Qurʾan are adopted. Qurʾanic verses are used as follows: Chapter 112: 30 is attested five times (inscriptions 2.23; 3.15, 59, 62 and 68); Chapter 2:255 is attested once (inscription 3.65); Chapter 3:185 is attested once (inscription 2.34);

Chapter:27:19 is attested in a graffito (inscription 3.38); Chapter 33:56 is attested once on a gravestone (inscription 3.61); Chapter 18:110 is attested in graffito (inscription 3.67), and finally, (inscriptions 3.5 and 14) quote from Chapter 25:58. Additionally, there are some phrases that have been adapted from the Qurʾan; Chapter 24:35 is quoted in an adapted form in (inscriptions 1.8 and 3.60), Chapter 26:85, and Chapter 56: 49-50 is recognized in (inscriptions 1.9, 2.27, 2.33 and 3.16).

Praying for mercy is well attested in our corpus; it occurs 15 times in several formulae, for example, "*raḥmat Allāh wa-barakātuhu ʿalā fulān ibn fulān*" (inscription 1.3), (may God have mercy and blessings upon so and so). A wish to enter paradise is attested 11 times in different ways; cf. "*Allāhuma baligh fulān ibn fulān al-firdaws"* (inscription 2.94), "*fulān in. fulān yasʾal Allāh al-janna*" or "*yā-rabb fulān ibn fulān adkhilhu al-janna*" (inscription 3.22), or "*anā fulān ibn fulān asʾal Allāh al-janna*" (inscription 3.25).There is one unique request: "*fulān ibn fulān yaʿūdhu bi-Allāh min al-nifāq*" (so and so seeks refuge in God from hypocrisy) (inscription 3.84); we find a request for devotion to God "*anā fulān ibn fulān awṣī bi-birr Allāh*" (inscription 2.17); and devotion to God and kinship "*anā fulān ibn fulān awṣī bi-birr Allāh wa-l-raḥim*" (inscription 2.37). Benediction is attested three times, (inscription 3.64, 4. 8 and 17). See for example "*anā fulān ibn fulān ṣallā Allāh ʿalayhi wa-ʿalā man qāla amīn*" (I am so and so, God's blessing be upon him and on whomever says amen) (inscription 3.64).

We have in our corpus a unique example of a construction of a sitting-place and prayer for who is sitting on it, occurring once (inscription 2.22). There is only one construction inscription in our corpus that commemorates the construction of an avenue for the pilgrims on their way to the House of God (inscription 3.69). Finally, signatures are attested 15 times, which consist of a list of lineages like "*anā fulān ibn fulān ibn fulān etc.*."

A good example for a combination of different kinds of religious elements is attested in the eleven graffiti applied by ʿĀṣim son of ʿUmar. ʿĀṣim used expressions concerning prayers for forgiveness, the confession of faith, a prayer for repentance and a poem in his graffiti (inscriptions 2.66-76). A member of the same family but from a different generation, Zayd son of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-ʿUmarī (inscriptions 2.124-134), also used different formulae including a poem, a confession of faith, and a prayer for repentance. In other cases, certain words and phrases were changed in standard expressions, as used by family members or inscribers from the same generation. See, for example, in the family of al-Zubayr, Muḥammad son of Yʿaqūb son of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb son of Yaḥyā, who left ten inscriptions, of which seven are confessions in several variations, two are prayers from the Qurʾan, and one is a prayer for forgiveness (inscriptions 3.5-14).

Another example comes from the family of ʿUmar in the branch of ʿUmar son of Ḥafṣ, whereby six brothers most likely all engraved their inscriptions during the same period of time. Three of them – ʿĀṣim (inscriptions 2.66, 68, 71, 72 and 75), Muḥammad (inscriptions 2.58 and 59) and Zayd (inscriptions 2.82 and 86) – use the same formula (namely, confessions of faith), but the other three used very different texts all together. Their sons from the next generation also used the same formula, except Muḥammad son of Ḥafṣ. See, for example, Jaʿfar son of ʿĀṣim (inscription 2.77) and ʿAbd Allāh son of Zayd (inscriptions 2.87-88).

Finally, some people showed great consistency in their choice of expressions. In the case of the family of Abū ʿAbs we find that almost all members choose the same formula, a prayer for forgiveness, with the exception of only four graffiti (inscriptions 4.8, 10, 12 and 17). This means that the same formula was very popular amongst the two generations.

This leads to a conclusion that there was no consistency in the kind of text and expressions used within one family, between contemporaries, or even by the same individual. In other words, although certain phrases were more popular than others, there was no fixed choice of text. Rather, variation was the standard.

5.8. Conclusion

This chapter is an attempt to link the Arabic epigraphic corpus from early Islamic Arabia to historical questions. This is simultaneously the most challenging and the most exciting part of the dissertation. The inscriptions, with their limited historical information, might at first sight seem rather unsuitable for such an academic effort. By emphasizing the repetitive and formulaic character of the inscriptions as well as their 'accidental' coming into existence as products of leisure and pastime, scholars have generally interpreted the inscriptions as meaningless in terms of self-expression and communication, the exception being the observation that the inscriptions display the significance and omnipresence of literacy in this society.

Instead, I have speculated, by using MacMullen's concept of audience, on how we can read these inscriptions as signs of communication between the inscribers and potential passers-by and what that tells us about the society that produced these inscriptions. Using both the textual elements and the inscriptions as physical objects, as they appear in the landscape and their occurrence throughout time, I have come to make several observations.

The first one is about the relative presence of graffiti and epitaphs related to members of the four families under examination in this thesis. There is a clear relationship between the disappearance of graffiti and the increase of gravestones in the 3rd/9th century throughout the Arabian Peninsula.

The earliest gravestone containing an absolute date in Arabia is dated to 233/848.[597] There are also various other gravestones that must stem from the early 3th/9th century, like those found in southern Mecca,[598] and Mecca.[599]

This corpus shows variation in using the lineage and family *nisba*. Through their long lists of ancestors, the use of family *nisba*s and the physical location of inscriptions close to those of family members, the inscriptions are a great repository of family history. They can also be seen as a statement of location and status, both in the family history and, through that, in society at large. Indeed, although the religious function of the inscriptions is clear in the prevalence of religious phrases and prayers, it is the family history and association with ancestors that give them their greatest historical value. On the one hand the association with forefathers by the placement of the inscriptions and the listing of generations continues ancient Arabian epigraphic practice. On the other hand, we can notice clear differences in the Islamic material; thus the Arabic inscriptions can be considered as a new beginning in the epigraphic record from Arabia. Analyzing the graffiti as a corpus, we can conclude that the practice of leaving graffiti started in the 1st Muslim generation of al-Mughīra's descendants, in the 2nd generation for the family of al-Zubayr and in the 3rd generation for the families of ʿUmar and Abū ʿAbs. It reached its greatest popularity in the 2nd generation of al-Mughīra's descendants, the 4th-5th generation in the families of ʿUmar and Zubayr, and the 3rd generation of Abū ʿAbs.

In trying to read the Arabic inscriptions as historical sources, I have made use of comparative studies on different epigraphic corpora, especially those from the classical world by MacMullen. The increase in Arabic inscriptions in Arabia shows clear relations with the establishment of the

[597] al-Faqīh, *Mikhlāf ʿasham*, 229.
[598] al-Zaylaʿī, "*The Southern Area*," 310-311.
[599] al-Zahrānī, *Kitābāt islāmiyya*, 112-113.

Islamic state by Muḥammad in the 7th century, as well as several generations later with the effluence of the Abbasid Muslim society that produced the inscriptions. This compares well with some of the reasons that MacMullen offers for changes in the location and volume of inscriptions in the classical world. Conversely, it should also be noted that these practices and crafts show a distinct difference from those fostered throughout the Roman Empire. This is largely due to the fact that the Arabic inscriptions were produced by all societal classes, rather than being restricted to one or the other, and – arguably – had no bearing on governmental levels of activity. This leads to the conclusion that on the one hand MacMullen's model for studying epigraphy can offer some valuable insights for the Islamic-Arabian epigraphic record, but that on the other hand there are also some elements that seem quite unique for the Arabic graffiti and that thus deserve to be studied in their own right.