

نقش أبي بكر (نقش عربي-إسلامي مبكر): دراسة نقشية وتاريخية

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الملخص

تعدّ النقوش مصدرًا مهمًا لدراسة تاريخ الجزيرة العربية في العصور القديمة وعصر ما قبل الإسلام والعصور الإسلامية المبكرة، لقلة المصادر المكتوبة المعاصرة للأحداث؛ لذلك تقدّم لنا النقوش مادة تاريخية معاصرة مهمة عن تلك العصور من نواح عدّة كتابية ودينية وتاريخية. ومن ثمّ تهدف هذه الورقة إلى دراسة وتحليل نقش عربي مبكر غير مؤرخ مكتشف في صحراء حسمى في منطقة تبوك في شمال غرب المملكة العربية السعودية، ويعود هذا النقش المكتشف لفترة العصر النبوي. وقد نشر هذا النقش الباحثان مشلح المريخي والسيد الصاوي عام 2018 تحت عنوان -النقش الوحيد المبكر من عصر الرسول ﷺ- ويعتبر هذا النقش أول نقش يقدم لنا خبرًا عن عملية عسكرية يشارك فيها أهل المدينة المنورة في حياة الرسول ﷺ. ويذكر النقش اسم (أبو بكر) الذي يعتقد أنه أبو بكر الصديق أول الخلفاء الراشدين (11-13هـ/ 632-634م). وقد ظن الباحثان المريخي والصاوي أن النقش كتب بواسطة عمر بن الخطاب ثاني الخلفاء الراشدين (13-23هـ/ 634-644م). كما تُحاول هذه الورقة التعرّف إلى اسم الشخص الوارد في النقش، وعمّا إذا كان هو أبو بكر الصديق أم لا. وتسعى الورقة أيضًا إلى بيان مصطلح (غزة أهل المدينة) الوارد في النقش، ومناقشته استنادًا إلى القرآن الكريم بوصفه المصدر الأساس لشرح هذا المصطلح، إضافةً إلى مناقشته تاريخيًا وبيان أهميته التاريخية والفرضيات المتعلقة بالحملة العسكرية التي يشير إليها النقش.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أبو بكر، الجزيرة العربية، النقوش العربية، صحابة رسول الله، حسمى، المغازي، أهل المدينة،

السيرة.

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The Abū Bakr Inscription, an Early Arabic-Islamic Inscription: An Epigraphical and Historical Study

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Abstract

Inscriptions are an important documentary source for the Arabian Peninsula spanning from the pre-Islamic period to early Islamic times. This article re-examines an undated early Arabic inscription believed to date to the time of the Prophet Muḥammad. It was discovered in the Ḥismā desert in north-west Saudi Arabia. It was originally published by Moshalleh al-Moraekhi and Ahmad el-Sayed el-Sawy in 2018 under the title "(The Only) Early Islamic Inscription from the Time of Prophet Muḥammad." The inscription is the earliest known to refer to a military campaign of the people of Madina during the time of the Prophet. This inscription mentions Abū Bakr, who is likely Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, the first rightly guided caliph (r. 11–13 AH/ 632–634 CE). However, al-Moraekhi and el-Sawy argue that it was written by 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the second rightly guided caliph (r. 13–23 AH/ 634–644 CE). This paper also seeks to identify the person mentioned in the inscription and to determine whether he is Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq or not. It further aims to explain the term (ghuzāt ahl al-Madīna) mentioned in the inscription and to discuss it based on the Qur'an as the primary source for clarifying this term, in addition to examining it historically, highlighting its historical significance, and exploring the hypotheses regarding the military campaign to which the inscription refers.

Keywords: Abū Bakr, Arabian Peninsula, Arabic inscriptions, companions of the Prophet, Ḥismā, maghāzī, people of Madīna, sīra.

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1. Introduction

The history of the early Islamic period—particularly during the lifetime of the Prophet—is poorly documented in the form of inscriptions, papyri, coins, or other archaeological material. Most of what we know from this era was originally transmitted orally and only recorded in writing at a later stage, as seen in the Ḥadīth and maghāzī literature. In the past two decades, however, the number of epigraphic discoveries has grown significantly, particularly in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Since the initial publication of results from official archaeological surveys, scholars have gained more and more access to new material that sheds light on early Islamic history and the evolution of Arabic script and identity. This has been supplemented by the increased number of studies on these inscriptions regarding significant historical, religious, and prosopographical aspects and with regard to the heritage of the authors and so on.⁽¹⁾

This article republishes and reanalyzes an early Arabic-Islamic inscription that was first published by Moshalleh al-Moraekhi and Ahmad el-Sayed el-Sawy in 2018. They argue that the inscription was inscribed during the lifetime of the Prophet Muḥammad, during one sariyya (raid), and that the inscription refers to the first rightly guided caliph, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (r. 11–13 AH/ 632–634 CE), and was written by the second rightly guided caliph, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13–24 AH/634–644 CE). Al-Moraekhi and el-Sawy further argue that this inscription was inscribed in 8 AH/629CE while Abū Bakr and ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb were following Abū ‘Ubayda ibn al-Jarrāḥ to join ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ in a sariyya (raid) called Dhāt al-Salāsīl in Jumādā II 8 AH/ October 629 CE.⁽²⁾

This article provides a new reading and analysis the paleography of the letter shape of the inscription in order to accept the date given by al-Moraekhi and el-Sawy, to clarify the identity of the Abū Bakr mentioned, to examine the meaning of the phrase "ahl al-Madīna," and to determine which historical event—specifically which ghazwa—the inscription may refer to, in which Abū Bakr likely participated.

2. The place of discovery

The inscription was found in the Ḥismā desert, located in north-west Saudi Arabia. This desert, divided between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, has recently been the subject of several surveys and publications.⁽³⁾ The desert was well known in the pre- and early Islamic periods.⁽⁴⁾ A huge number of inscriptions that belong to the group of Ancient North Arabian Hismaic inscriptions (formally, Thamudic E) as well as some Nabatean inscriptions, a few Palaeo-Arabic ones, and an enormous number of early Arabic-Islamic inscriptions come from this region of the Islamic inscriptions discovered in Ḥismā, only a few are securely dated. Four inscriptions, in particular, are dated to significant events during the period of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (al-Rāshidūn). The inscription under consideration in this study is undated, but its early character is suggested through paleographic features and

historical context, as discussed below. It was discovered by Sa'd al-Tuwaijri during one of his expeditions into the desert,⁽⁵⁾ and was subsequently handed over to al-Moraekhi and el-Sawy by Soliman al-Theeb. At the time, no geographical details regarding the site were provided.⁽⁶⁾ More recently, however, Christian Robin visited the location and kindly shared updated photographs and precise coordinates. The inscription is situated north-west of Tabūk, to the east of Jabal al-Lūz, approximately 124 kilometers west of the city of Tabūk. It lies in the Bajda Mountains and the Ḥismā plateau, within the NEOM region. Locally, the site is known as al-Qaṭṭār (Arabic: القطار), a name historically used by the area's inhabitants.

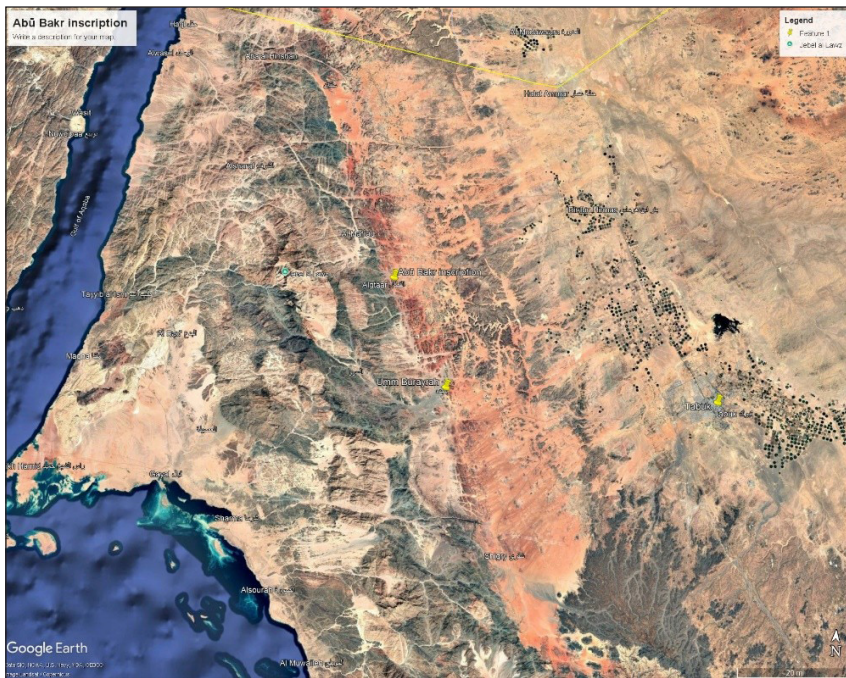


Figure 1. Map of the site of the discovery@ google earth.

3. The text

The inscription was published by al-Moraekhi and el-Sawy in 2018; al-Tuwaijri then tweeted about it on X (formerly Twitter), noting that the inscription had been discovered during his journey in the Ḥismā desert. Since al-Moraekhi and el-Sawy's publication,⁽⁷⁾ no one has revisited the text. This article will reread and reanalyze this early Arabic inscription because the first attempt left the inscription without any contextual comparisons, either epigraphical or historical; hence, a new analysis is needed.

This early Arabic inscription contains two lines, with the first line longer than the second and with the start of the second line indented further than the first. It is inscribed in a zigzag rather than a straight line. The inscription contains 12 words. It is undated, and there are no diacritical dots. The first word of the second line is damaged, owing to the rock having been broken off. On the same surface, there are other Arabic inscriptions, just above the inscription under consideration here, which has a petroglyph of a camel below it.



Figure 2. Photo of the inscription. Source: Christian Robin.

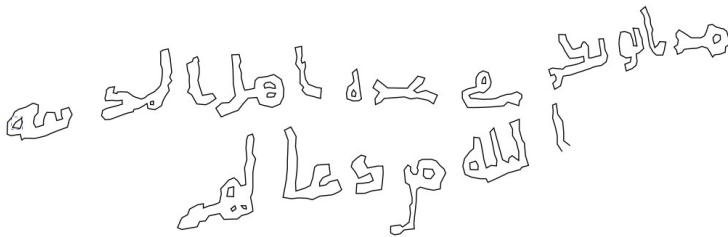


Figure 3. Facsimile of the inscription by Abdullah Alhatlani.

3.1. Al-Moraekhi and el-Sawy's original reading⁽⁸⁾

Translation	Transliteration	Text
(1) Abū Bakr came along leading the people of al-Madīna.	(1) marr Abū Bakr fī ghurraṭ ahl al-Madīna.	(1) مر أبو بكر في غرة أهل المدينة
(2) may Allah have mercy upon those who prayed for them, inscribed by 'Umar.	(2) raḥima Allāh man da'ā la-hum katabahu 'Umar.	(2) [رحم] الله من دعا لهم كتبه عمر

The original analysis must be revisited for two reasons: the first is that we do not agree with the reading of the word *ghurra*; the second regards the writer of the inscription, noted here as 'Umar.

Starting with the word *ghurra* (Eng. "leading the people along"), al-Moraekhi and el-Sawy do not discuss their assumption that this is indeed the word inscribed, even though they conclude that the inscription refers to a raid, or *ghazwa*—a word that indicates the campaign was led by the Prophet himself and not Abū Bakr. We have two comments on the reading of this word. The first concerns the second letter, which is read by al-Moraekhi and el-Sawy as *rā*, though it could also be read as *zāy*. The second is that, as is commonly known, words from that period sometimes lack a vowel, causing them to be read differently. Finally, they conclude that the word *ghurra* refers to early Muhājirīn companions—the followers of Muḥammad, those who migrated from Mecca to Medina. Nonetheless, we cannot assume that all the participants were Muhājirīn companions. As discussed below in our new reading of the inscription, another reading gives an entirely different meaning.

The second reason the inscription must be reanalyzed concerns the attribution. At the end of the second line in al-Moraekhi and el-Sawy's edition, we see the phrase *katabahu 'Umar* (Eng. "Umar inscribed it" or "it was written by 'Umar"). Al-Moraekhi and el-Sawy added the phrase *katabahu 'Umar* as the inscription ends with the word *lahum* (Eng. "for them"). If we have a look at the original inscription, we can see there is nothing written after that; there is only a scratch in the rock, not writing, for the two words *katabahu 'Umar* (see Figure 3).



Figure 4. Close-up photo of the inscription, showing there is no writing after the word lahum. Source: Christian Robin.

3.2. The new version and discussion

Translation	Transliteration	Text
(1) Abū Bakr marched with the military expedition of the people of al-Madīna	(1) marr Abū Bakr fī ghuzt (sic) ahl al-Madīna.	(1) مر أبو بكر في غزوة أهل المدينة (sic)
(2) may God [have mercy] upon those who prayed for them.	(2) raḥim Allāh man da‘ā lahum	(2) [رحم] الله من دعا لهم

Line one: marr Abū Bakr fī ghuzāt ahl al-Madīna

The inscription starts with a unique formula of marr (Eng. marched). This word is not often found in Arabic inscriptions, only twice in north Arabia: one published by al-Kilābī⁽⁹⁾ and the second published by Maysā, Ghabbān.⁽¹⁰⁾ The issue with the reading of the first line is the fourth word, and there are three suggestions. The first is al-Moraekhi and el-Sawy's argument that the word should be read as ghurra (Eng. "leading the people"), referring to the elites of the Muhājirīn (Eng. "migrants from Mecca to Medina"). As we will discuss later, ahl al-Madina had a different meaning in the early period in the Qur'ān and sīra, including Muhājirīn and al-Ānṣār. The second possibility for the word is 'izza which means "glorious people of Medina", but this does not mean anything in the context of the inscription. We suggest the reading ghuzāt (Eng. "military expedition"). Thus, the line reads, "Abū Bakr marched with the military expedition of the people of al-Madīna."

Line two: raḥima Allāh man da‘ā lahum

As mentioned above, the first word of the second line is damaged, but the suggestion of al-Moraekhi and el-Sawy is good. As Robert G. Hoyland has discussed, Arabic-Islamic inscriptions are generally religious. The prayer raḥima Allāh (Eng. May God [have mercy]) is common in early Arabic-Islamic inscriptions.⁽¹¹⁾ The last phrase, da‘ā lahum (Eng. upon those who prayed for them), however, is unique in early Arabic epigraphy.⁽¹²⁾

4. Paleography

As mentioned above, the inscription is undated, but we can examine the letter shape for an indication of the period of the writing. The inscription is in an early Arabic script that belongs to the first century AH / seventh century CE. It does not contain any diacritics. In this section, we will discuss and compare the shape of the letters in the inscription with those of Palaeo-Arabic⁽¹³⁾ and early Arabic inscriptions that belong to the early Islamic period.

First, the alif is inscribed with the tail to the right—a shape that started to appear in early Arabic inscriptions and did not exist in Palaeo-Arabic inscriptions. The beginning alif is found in four words in the inscription at hand: Abū, ahl, al-Madīna, and Allāh which shows damage in the lower part. All these alifs are inscribed in a straight, not wavy, shape and as standing alifs. The alif is inscribed with the tail downwards, similar to other inscriptions discovered in Ḥismā such as Abū al-Walīd, ‘Ammār Laythī⁽¹⁴⁾ and Shurayḥ dated to 43 AH/663-634 CE (see Table 1), which are in the form of what is called "a free standing alif" that exhibits a tail below.

Table 1.

The shape of the alif in the present inscription and in various Arabic-Islamic inscriptions.

Abū Bakr	Abū Bakr/ ahl	Abū Bakr/ al-Madīna	Abū al-Walīd	‘Ammār Laythī	Shurayḥ
					

The second letter, which is an initial hā’, exhibits a shape that is not found in either pre- or early Arabic-Islamic inscriptions. In Palaeo-Arabic inscriptions, it is

normally inscribed in the baseline and has a hook going up to the left, as in the Zabad inscription. In the Islamic period, however, the "cat's eye," as 'Ali Ghabbān and Robert Hoyland refer to it, is the common form for the *hā'*, which is inscribed as two circles above and below the baseline with a hook going straight up, as in the Abū al-Walīd inscription. Zuhayr 1 and 'Amr al-Thaqafī likewise exhibit this phenomenon (see Table 2).⁽¹⁵⁾ In our inscription, it is inscribed in a circular shape without the ascending hook or dental shape, as in the Zuhayr 3, 'Ammār al-Laythī and Shurayḥ inscriptions.

Table 2

The shape of the *hā'* in various Palaeo-Arabic and Arabic-Islamic inscriptions

Zabad	Abū Bakr	Abū I-Walīd	Zuhayr 1	Zhyar 3	'Ammār al-Laythī	'Amr al-Thaqafī	Shurayḥ

Third is the unique shape of the *kāf*, which is remarkable owing to the shape of the upper part of the letter. There are three shapes of the upper part that can be compared to other Palaeo-Arabic and early Arabic-Islamic inscriptions. In the first, the upper part is straight, as it is in some Palaeo-Arabic and the early Arabic-Islamic inscriptions, e.g., the Yazīd-w,⁽¹⁶⁾ 'Amr al-Thaqafī, and Qays al-Kātib inscriptions. In the second, the *kāf* has curves to the right, such as in DaJ144PAr 1⁽¹⁷⁾ and Qurah b. Sad.⁽¹⁸⁾ In the third, our inscription presents the upper part of the *kāf* inclining slightly to the left in the manner of the FAS 8 and Shurayḥ inscriptions. In regards to the neck of the *kāf*, it appears straight as it does in other inscriptions from north-west Arabia, e.g., 'Amr al-Thaqafī, Shurayḥ and Qays al-Kātib (see Table 3).

Table 3

The shape of the *kāf* in Palaeo-Arabic and Arabic-Islamic inscriptions.

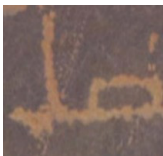
DaJ144P Ar 1	Qurah	FAS 8	Yazīd-w	Abū Bakr	'Ammār al-Laythī	'Amr al-Thaqafī	Shurayḥ/ katab	Qays al-Kātib

The fourth distinction is that the final *lām* in our inscription appears aligned with the baseline of the word. This particular form of the letter is rarely attested at the end of a word in both Paleo-Arabic and early Arabic inscriptions. In an inscription from Ḥarrān

dated to 568–569 CE, the final lām appears twice—once connected to the word and once written independently—both positioned below the baseline. Nonetheless, in inscriptions FAS 5A and 5B, the letter appears in a form identical to that found in our inscription (see Table 4). By contrast, early Islamic inscriptions often depict the final lām extending downward in a semi-circular shape, as seen in the inscriptions of al-Ḥārith⁽¹⁹⁾ and Qays al-Kātib.⁽²⁰⁾

Table 4

The shape of the final lām in Palaeo-Arabic and Arabic-Islamic inscriptions

Ḥarrān	FAS 5 A	FAS 5 B	Abū Bakr/ Ahl	Al-Ḥārith/ Qatil	Qays al- Kātib/ Qatil
					

The fifth distinction is that the letters rā' and zayn have an identical letter shape when written without diacritics. Rā'/zayn inscribed with a short shape is characteristic of early inscriptions, with the shape of the two arrows, especially the lower part, being rather sharp. This can be seen in the word marr in the inscription under consideration, with the rā'/zayn similar to the one in Umm Burayra Palaeo-Arabic (see Table 5), while the zayn in ghuzāt is inscribed similarly to the zayn in Jazā' 'Ammār al-Laythī, and the rā' in other early Arabic-Islamic inscriptions from Ḥismā 'Amr al-Thaqafī and Shurayḥ.

Table 5

The shape of the rā'/zayn letter in Palaeo-Arabic and Arabic-Islamic inscriptions

Umm Burayra	marr/ Abū Bakr	Abū Bakr	ghuzāt/ Abū Bakr	'Ammār al-Laythī	'Amr al- Thaqafī	Shurayḥ
						

Finally, the 'ayn/ghayn is also inscribed using an early-script shape with the baseline longer than the upper part. This shape appears in several early writings, such as Zuhayr 1, Zuhayr 3, and inscriptions found in Ḥismā, e.g., Abū l-Walīd, 'Ammār al-Laythī, 'Amr al-Thaqafī and Shurayḥ, and Qays al-Kātib from Taymā (see Table 6).

Table 6

The shape of the ‘ayn/ghayn letter in various early Arabic-Islamic inscriptions

Abū Bakr/ ghuzāt	Abū Bakr/ da‘ā	Zuhayr 1	Zuhayr 3	Abū I-Walīd	‘Ammār al-Laythī	‘Amr al- Thaqafi/ ‘ām	Shurayḥ	Qays
								

The overall letter shapes show features of early writing similar to the Arabic script of the pre-Islamic and early Islamic period. Our opinion is that the inscription is one of the earliest inscriptions dated to the early period of the Hijra not only because of the letter shapes but also, as we shall see in the historical analysis below, owing to the name Abū Bakr and the phrase ghuzāt ahl al-Madīna.

5. Historical analysis

In this section, we will discuss three main historical issues: the name of Abū Bakr and to whom it may refer; the phrase ghuzāt ahl al-Madīna;⁽²¹⁾ and the historical event—the raid—during which the inscription was written.

The name Abū Bakr in the Sīra

As stated above, the only name mentioned in the inscription is Abū Bakr, and there is no textual evidence identifying ‘Umar as the writer. Therefore, we reject the hypothesis proposed by al-Moraekhi and el-Sawy that attributes the authorship of the inscription to ‘Umar. Instead, two possibilities remain regarding the origin of the inscription: either it was written by Abū Bakr himself, or it was inscribed by a soldier in the Muslim army who referred to Abū Bakr. Both scenarios are worth considering given the historical and military context in which the inscription was likely produced.

Al-Moraekhi and el-Sawy suggest that the inscription was inscribed during the sariyya of Dhāt al-Salāsīl. According to historical sources, however, Abū Bakr did not lead this expedition; rather, it was commanded by ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ, possibly accompanied by Abū ‘Ubayda ibn al-Jarrāḥ. This discrepancy opens a broader discussion: either Abū Bakr had a more prominent role in the expedition than previously recorded, or the inscription refers to a different military campaign altogether. Determining the correct context is crucial for identifying the individual named in the inscription. In revisiting the sīra to enumerate the companions named Abū Bakr, we find that the name Bakr was known among the Arabs during the pre-Islamic period. However, the name Abū Bakr later became widely recognized in Islam and was considered to be the name of the first

rightly guided caliph, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq. In this section, the objective is to enumerate all the companions bearing the name Abū Bakr and to ascertain whether any of them is the individual referred to in this inscription.

Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq

Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq belonged to the Banū Taym ibn Murra ibn Ka'b tribe. His full name was 'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Quḥāfa (his father's kunya). His father was Abū Quḥāfa ('Uthmān) ibn 'Āmir of the clan Taym of the tribe of Quraysh. Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq was the first rightly guided caliph (r. 11–13 AH/ 632–634 CE).⁽²²⁾

Abū Bakr is considered one of the earliest converts to Islam and the first adult to embrace it. His proximity to the Prophet and his unwavering support during the Prophet's battles and wars are well recognized. Indeed, he participated in all the Prophet's battles and is regarded as one of the ten companions who were promised paradise. Therefore, many Sunni scholars consider Abū Bakr to be the most virtuous of the Prophet's companions and the most deserving of the caliphate, on the basis of his early conversion, unwavering support for, and participation in all major events of the Prophet's career,⁽²³⁾ and that he had the strongest case for being named the first caliph during the incident of Saqīfa, as discussed below.

According to classical Islamic legal tradition, a candidate for the caliphate must be free, rational, and of sound religion—a requirement confirmed in works by al-Māwardī and others. H. 'Amāmū, analyzing the Saqīfa incident, argues that the early Muslim community combined these Islamic principles with pre-Islamic tribal customs, such as selecting elders and wealthy members for leadership. Thus, Abū Bakr was chosen not only for his piety but also for his social status. Had purely tribal custom prevailed, the leadership might have gone to Abū Sufyān or al-'Abbās, both of whom were elderly and affluent members of the Quraysh.⁽²⁴⁾

It is likely that Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq is the individual mentioned in the inscription, as he accompanied the expedition led by Abū 'Ubayda ibn al-Jarrāḥ to assist 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ in the raid of Dhāt al-Salāsīl,⁽²⁵⁾ as al-Moraekhi and el-Sawy's suggest or in Tabūk as we will discuss below. William M. Watt asserts that the Prophet changed his strategy regarding the conquests, focusing on the northern route and particularly on Byzantine-held territories. The Prophet would have led the campaign personally had he not fallen ill. Therefore, sending important Islamic figures such as Abū 'Ubayda, Abū Bakr, and 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb affirms the significance attached to these battles.⁽²⁶⁾

Abū Bukra al-Thaqafi

The second name under consideration is Abū Bukra, Nufay' ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Kalada, or Nufay' ibn Masrūḥ (d. 51 AH/671 CE).⁽²⁷⁾ Nufay' embraced Islam while he

was still young, the day the Prophet went to Ṭā'if in the tenth year of the Prophethood, and he is considered one of the Prophet's clients (*mawālī*). Nonetheless, there is no evidence or indication of Abū Bukra's participation in the raid of Dhāt al-Salāsīl or of a journey to northern Arabia, according to the biographies that refer to him.

Abū Bakr ibn 'Abd-al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām

The last companion with the name Abū Bakr in the *sīra*, is Abū Bakr ibn 'Abd-al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām, who was born around (23AH /644 CE) during the caliphate of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and died in (94 AH/ 713 CE). He was one of the Seven Jurists of Medina, well-known for his piety and scholarship, but he is excluded from this research because he is considered one of the *Tābi'īn*, meaning that he would not have lived during the time of the raid.⁽²⁸⁾

Other Abū Bakrs

Likewise, Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm ('Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Kaysān) was a prominent Mu'tazilī theologian who died in (201 AH/816 CE). Although he was known by the name Abū Bakr, the significant chronological gap renders him entirely unsuitable for attribution in an early Islamic inscription.⁽²⁹⁾

Similarly, Abū Bakr al-Khallāl (Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Khallāl) was born in Baghdād in (234 AH/ 848 CE) and died in (311 AH/ 923 CE). He was known for compiling the jurisprudence of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and became one of the leading Ḥanbalī figures in the 'Abbāsīd period. The time and location of his life make it highly unlikely that the inscription could refer to him.⁽³⁰⁾

To this list may be added Abū Bakr al-Sarrāj, the renowned grammarian of Baghdād, who died in (316 AH/ 928 CE). Though a major figure in Arabic linguistics and a student of al-Mubarrad, he lived centuries after the early Islamic period, making it implausible for his name to appear in such an inscription.⁽³¹⁾

Given the historical timelines of these figures, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq remains the only plausible candidate whose name would logically and chronologically appear in an inscription dating to the Prophetic or early Caliphal period. All other proposed figures are either far too late or born after the Prophet's death, making them improbable in this context.

Philological analysis of the identity of "Abū Bakr" mentioned in the inscription

One published study proposed the hypothesis that the name "Abū Bakr" found in an early Arabic inscription does not necessarily refer to Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, but may instead belong to other historical figures who shared the same name—such

as the aforementioned Abū Bakr ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām, Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm, Abū Bakr al-Khallāl, or even other lesser-known individuals. These suggestions were offered in an attempt to reduce certainty regarding the association of the inscription with the early caliphate or with the well-known companion.

When subjected to rigorous chronological and contextual scrutiny, it becomes clear that none of the proposed figures besides Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq fits the historical circumstances that would justify the appearance of their names in an inscription that probably dates back to the formative period of Islam. Moreover, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq is universally known by the name and title "Abū Bakr," without need for a longer genealogical designation, making him by far the most likely candidate—both contextually and chronologically—should the inscription indeed date to that era.⁽³²⁾

Ghuzāt ahl al-Madīna

The inscription contains the phrase ghuzāt ahl al-Madīna—al-Madīna being the name given to Yathrib after the introduction of Islam. Before Islam, Yathrib was not a cohesive city; rather, it consisted of scattered forts surrounded by palm trees. It was initially an oasis on relatively level ground between the hill of Uḥud to the north and that of ʿAyr to the south; to the east and west were lava fields (Ar. ḥarra). Following the Prophet's arrival and the establishment of the Islamic state, however, the location was transformed into the capital of the Islamic caliphate and the power center of the Rāshidūn Caliphate.⁽³³⁾

In the Qurʾān, the name al-Madīna appears 14 times. Yathrib appears once (33:13), used in the context ahl Yathrib. On the other hand, al-Madīna appears four times related to Sīra. Ahl al-Madīna appears twice in the same chapter (9:101 and 120), in connection with Sīra, and once in connection to aṣḥāb al-Ḥijr (15:67). The remaining nine appearances speak about other matters in the Qurʾān.

In an attempt to understand why the inscription referred to ghuzāt ahl al-Madīna, Watt explains that the Islamic armies initially consisted of small groups of fighters, with most of the soldiers coming from Medina; these soldiers outnumbered the others by more than three to one.⁽³⁴⁾ Recent scholarship has further highlighted the critical role of the local community of Medina in shaping the early Islamic polity. For instance, al-Bakr argues that the arrival of the Muhājirīn created one of the first housing crises in Islamic history. This prompted the Prophet to establish temporary residence zones in Qubāʾ and to implement social mechanisms such as al-muʾākhāt (brotherhood) and the hosting of impoverished migrants in al-Ṣuffa. These developments indicate that "the people of Medina" (ahl al-Madīna) were not merely residents of a city but key contributors to the civic, military, and ideological structure of the nascent Islamic state.⁽³⁵⁾

There is not much information indicating who the ahl al-Madīna were—whether they were Jews who immigrated from Palestine or Arabs who had converted to

Judaism.⁽³⁶⁾ However, with this proximity of Arabs and Jews, there was naturally some overlap between them. The Jews were divided into three clans: the tribes of Qurayṣa and al-Naḍīr, who were engaged in agriculture and owned large, fertile lands, and the tribe of Banū Qaynuqā', who were involved in making armor and working with gold.⁽³⁷⁾

The second group consisted of the Arab tribe Banū Qayla, which branched into the al-Aws and al-Khazraj, later referred to as the Anṣār, or "helpers" of Muḥammad. They are among the Arabs said to have left South Arabia after the breaking of the dam of Mārib. Historically, the small divisions of these tribes formed internal alliances through intermarriage and commercial ties with the external Arabs. Branches of the al-Aws and al-Khazraj, such as Banū l-Ḥārith and Banū l-Najjār—who are considered relatives of the Prophet Muḥammad through his paternal grandfather—were among the first people of Medina to embrace Islam. This familial connection facilitated the Prophet's migration from Mecca to Medina. The lands of Banū l-Najjār, the largest clan of the Khazraj, were located in the same region where the first Islamic state was established, which also included the area of the Prophet's house.

The semantic shift in the inscription "The military expedition of People of al-Madīna": A linguistic and Qur'ānic analysis

The inscription referring to "the warriors from the people of al-Madīna" (ghuzāt ahl al-Madīna) contains two linguistically rich expressions with layered historical and Qur'ānic connotations: ghuzāt ("warriors") and ahl al-Madīna ("people of the city"). This phrase conveys a symbolic, mobilizing vision tied to the civic structure of the early Islamic community during the Prophetic era. The following sections offer a semantic analysis of these terms as they appear in the Qur'ān.

1. The meaning of Ghuzāt in Qur'ānic discourse

The word ghuzāt is derived from the root gh-z-w (Ar. غ-ز-و) "conquest" and appears in verbal form in the Qur'ān only once, according to the reading of Ibn 'Āmir, in Sūrat al-Tawba (9:81), where it reads an yaghzū instead of an yujāhidū, "to fight (in jihad)".⁽³⁸⁾ The verse criticizes the hypocrites who refrained from accompanying the Prophet on a military expedition. Thus, the term carries a situational military connotation, rather than being a legal or systematic designation. Notably, the Qur'ānic discourse tends to favor broader and more normative terms such as jihād and qitāl owing to their wider religious and legislative meanings.

2. Ahl al-Madīna between geography and ethical denotation

The expression ahl al-Madīna occurs twice in the Qur'ān, both times in Sūrat al-Tawba (9:101 and 9:120). In both instances, it is associated with hypocrisy or the

reluctance to participate in battle. In the first verse, the reference is to those who "persist in hypocrisy," and in the second, it criticizes those who failed to join the Prophet. This suggests that *ahl al-Madīna* is not merely a geographical designation but a morally and politically charged term reflecting internal tensions within the early Islamic polity. When this term appears in an inscription describing them as *ghuzāt*, it likely reflects a positive, mobilizing reinterpretation of identity in a military context.

2.1. *Ahl al-Madīna* in Q 9:120: Ethical Expectation and Shifting Communal Identity

Qur'ān 9:120 directs a strong moral admonition toward the people of Medina and the surrounding Bedouin tribes: "It was not for the people of Medina and those around them of the Bedouins to remain behind the Messenger of God, nor to prefer their own lives over his..." This verse, according to Ibn Kathīr, was revealed in the context of the expedition to Tabūk and expresses divine censure of those who lagged behind while affirming that every hardship endured in the cause of God is recorded as a righteous deed—even stepping to frustrate the disbelievers counts as merit in the divine ledger.⁽³⁹⁾

Yet beyond the traditional reading, the verse reveals a dynamic moral expectation shaped by proximity to prophetic authority. The designation *ahl al-Madīna* here functions not merely as a geographic term but as a morally loaded identity marker. Given Medina's status as the political and spiritual center of the nascent Muslim community, its inhabitants bore a heightened responsibility. Though the verse refrains from directly accusing them of hypocrisy—as occurs in Q. 9:101—⁽⁴⁰⁾ it nonetheless frames their failure to mobilize as ethically problematic. This indicates that the *Qur'ānic* use of *ahl al-Madīna* is not a fixed moral category but a contextual one that shifts in meaning based on behavioral response.

3. *Al-Madīna* in the *Qur'ān*: layers of meaning

The term *al-Madīna* appears 14 times in the *Qur'ān*, distributed across three semantic layers:

- **General geographic use:** In ten instances, the term refers to unspecified or other historical sites, such as Midian or Egypt. These are typically found in Meccan *sūras* and reflect a neutral geographical usage without religious or political charge.
- ***Al-Madīna al-Munawwara*:** In four verses, the term clearly designates the city of the Prophet, found in *Sūrat al-Tawba* (9:101, 9:120) and *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb* (33:13, 33:60). All of these verses are *Madīnan* and reflect the evolution of the city as a political and religious center symbolizing the emergent Islamic state.⁽⁴¹⁾
- ***Ahl al-Madīna* as a sociological construct:** As discussed above, this term adds a layer of social and moral meaning beyond its geographical reference.

4. Yathrib and its Qur'ānic significance

The name Yathrib is mentioned once in the Qur'ān, in Sūrat al-Aḥzāb (33:13), in the words of the hypocrites during ghazwat al-Aḥzāb (5 AH/ 627 CE):

"O people of Yathrib, there is no place for you here, so return [home]..." (Q 33:13).

The usage appears in a negative context, encouraging withdrawal and defeatism. This implies that the pre-Islamic name Yathrib was retained by those unwilling to adopt the symbolic weight of the name al-Madīna. Consequently, Yathrib functions as a symbol of regression and the pre-Islamic identity, whereas al-Madīna embodies prophethood and the Islamic project.⁽⁴²⁾

The historical event

The inscription was inscribed during a military campaign, which is apparent by the use of the phrase ghuzāt ahl al-Madīna. So which campaign does the inscription mention? In the time of the Prophet, there are two terms related to "campaign" that are relevant: ghazwa and sariyya. The first, ghazwa, refers to a campaign led by the Prophet himself. The second, sariyya, refers to a campaign led by a companion of the Prophet.

We will discuss two possible campaigns that the inscription may refer to. The first one is that suggested by al-Moraekhi and el-Sawy; however, they base their edition of the inscription on later sources, such as 'Izz al-Dīn Abū I-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Abī I-Karīm Muḥammad ibn al-Athīr (d. 630 AH/1233 CE) and Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 AH/1373 CE), instead of the earlier writing of the sīra (biography of Muḥammad) literature by Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Wāqidi (d. 207 AH/ 823 CE) and Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik ibn Hishām (d. 218 AH/ 833 CE). If, as al-Moraekhi and el-Sawy argue, the inscription was written during the sariyya (raid) of Dhāt al-Salāsīl in Jumādā II 8 AH/ October 629 CE and was referring to a sub-army led by 'Amr ibn Al-'Āṣ, who was sent by the Prophet, why was Abū Bakr mentioned in the inscription instead of the leader, 'Amr or Abū 'Ubayda?⁽⁴³⁾ The inscription does not say anything about Abū 'Ubayda or 'Amr leading the raid, though it could be understood in this way, with Abū Bakr as a perhaps one leader among several; he could thus be understood as a part of this military mission.

But the question remains: Why was the term ahl al-Madīna used? This term is to distinguish ahl al-Madīna from other troops that participated in ghazwa. So, according to the sīra regarding the Dhāt al-Salāsīl, it consisted of al-Anṣār and al-Muhājirīn, so why is ahl al-Madīna used? The inscription should refer to other ghazwa to distinguish it from other troops such as those from Mecca. But the people of Mecca began to take part in these military expeditions, beginning with the Battle of Ḥunayn 8 AH/630 CE, al-Ṭā'if 8 AH/630 CE and Tabūk 9 AH/630 CE. We will exclude Ḥunayn and al-Ṭā'if from the discussion, however, because of the geographical site of the inscription.

The other possible campaign is the ghazwa of Tabūk, in which, according to the sīra literature, Abū Bakr participated. The raid of Tabūk holds a special place in Islamic history as it was the final military expedition led by the Prophet Muḥammad. This campaign was marked by severe conditions, including extreme heat, which caused significant hardship for the Muslim army. The intensity of the situation was such that the dehydrated soldiers were forced to slaughter their animals so that they could drink their water. Additionally, this battle was notable for the internal dissent it precipitated, with some Muslims, later labelled as hypocrites, opposing the expedition. Furthermore, it represented a direct confrontation between the Muslim forces and the Byzantine Empire. The Prophet Muḥammad himself led the army, with Abū Bakr commanding the troops under his leadership.⁽⁴⁴⁾

Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845 CE) reports regarding the Ghazwa of Tabūk that, "Thumma ghazwat Rasūl Allāh, ṣallā Allāhu 'alayhi wa-sallam, Tabūk fī Rajab sanat tis' min hijratih, Qālū: balagha Rasūl Allāh, ṣallā Allāhu 'alayhi wa-sallam, anna al-Rūm qad jama'ū jam'an kathīran bi-l-Shām, wa-anna Hiraql qad razaqa aṣḥābah li-sana, wa-aḥḍara ma'ahu Lakhm wa-Judhām wa-Āmila wa-Ghassān, wa-qaddamū muqaddamātuhum ilā l-Balqā', fa-nadaba Rasūl Allāh (ṣallā Allāh 'alayhi wa-sallam) al-nās ilā l-khurūj, wa-a'lamahum al-makān alladhī yurīdu li-yākhudhū li-dhālik, wa-ba'atha ilā Makka wa-ilā qabā'il al-'Arab yastanfiruhum". (Then came the expedition of the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, to Tabūk, in the month of Rajab during the ninth year after his emigration. They said: News reached the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, that the Byzantines had amassed a large force in al-Shām, and that Heraclius had provisioned his troops for a year, and brought with him men from Lakhm, Judhām, Āmila, and Ghassān, and that they had advanced. Their vanguards had reached al-Balqā', so the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) called the people to mobilise and informed them of the destination he intended, so that they might prepare accordingly. He also dispatched messengers to Mecca and to the Arab tribes, urging them to join the campaign.)⁽⁴⁵⁾ The army of Tabūk was composed of three main groups: the people of Medina, the people of Mecca, and those living in the surrounding regions of Medina. Ibn Sa'd also reports that Abū Bakr played a central role in the Ghazwa of Tabūk. "wa-kāna Rasūl Allāh, ṣallā Allāh 'alayhi wa-sallam, istakhlafa 'alā 'askariḥ Abā Bakr al-Ṣiddīq yuṣallī bi-l-nās, wa-istakhlafa Rasūl Allāh, ṣallā Allāh 'alayhi wa-sallam, 'alā al-Madīna Muḥammad ibn Maslama, wa-huwa athbata 'indanā man qāla istakhlafa ghayrah", The Messenger of God, peace be upon him, appointed Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq as his deputy over the army to lead the people in prayer. And the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, appointed Muḥammad ibn Maslama over Medina—this is confirmed in our sources by those who said that whenever the Messenger of God appointed other than him, peace be upon him.⁽⁴⁶⁾

According to Ibn Sa'd, during this campaign, Abū Bakr was granted the right by the Prophet to lead the people in prayer (Arabic: imāmat al-ṣalāh). This indicates that he was given greater authority here compared to his role in Dhāt al-Salāsīl.

If we consider the fact that the term *ghazwa* was used instead of *sariyya*, we can add this military event to what al-Moraekhi and el-Sawy suggest as another possible answer to the question of what campaign the inscription refers to. However, the inscription refers specifically to the 'warriors from the people of al-Madīna' (*ghuzāt ahl al-Madīna*), distinguishing them from the people of Mecca or other Muslim army troops. The classical *Maghāzī* and *Ṭabaqāt* literature highlight Abū Bakr's leadership role during the *Tabūk* campaign, but not during *Dhāt al-Salāsīl*, where leadership was given to 'Amr or Abū 'Ubayda. Additionally, sources note that the army consisted only of the *Muhājirīn* and the *Anṣār*. And we can say that this inscription was inscribed as the troops moved outside *Tabūk* during *ghazwat Tabūk*.

Conclusion

This study has re-examined a previously published Arabic inscription discovered in the *Ḥismā* desert, offering a new epigraphic, paleographic, and historical analysis. On the basis of the letter forms and lexical choices, we argue that the inscription belongs to the earliest phase of Islamic history, possibly dating to the Prophet's lifetime. The inscription refers to Abū Bakr and describes him as passing with the *ghuzāt ahl al-Madīna*, a phrase loaded with Qur'ānic, ideological, and political connotations.

Contrary to the earlier interpretation by al-Moraekhi and el-Sawy, we challenge the identification of 'Umar as the author and the word *ghurrah* as meaning "leading". Instead, we argue for a more philologically and epigraphically grounded reading: *ghuzāt*—referring to military expedition—and propose that Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq is the figure mentioned.

Our historical analysis has examined two possible military campaigns: *Dhāt al-Salāsīl* and *Tabūk*. We suggest that the inscription most likely refers to the *Ghazwat Tabūk* of 9 AH/630 CE, given its geographic proximity to the inscription's discovery and the specific mention of *ahl al-Madīna*, which aligns with the Prophet's documented reliance on Medinan forces in that campaign. Furthermore, the role of Abū Bakr during *Tabūk*, as affirmed in early *maghāzī* literature, supports this identification.

Finally, the phrase *ghuzāt ahl al-Madīna* offers an important window into early Islamic identity. It reflects the valorization of Medinan participation in the Prophet's campaigns, while also invoking Qur'ānic terminology that distinguishes sincere believers from those who merely resided in the city. Notably, *ahl al-Madīna* are explicitly mentioned in the Qur'ān in the context of the *Tabūk* expedition (Q. 9:120), which further supports the hypothesis that this inscription refers to Medinan troops participating in that campaign. As such, this inscription not only contributes to the corpus of early Arabic writing but also deepens our understanding of the symbolic and military formation of the first Islamic polity.

Appendix

Published Inscriptions up to the end of the period of the rightly guided caliphs

Inscription	Date	Site/Place	Publication
Abū al-Walīd al-Ḥārith, the slave boy of ʿAbd Allāh, son of Sabʿ	Around the time when Abū Masʿūd was imprisoned (between 20–22 AH/ 640–643 CE)	Ḥismā	al-Saʿīd et al. <i>Nuqūsh ḥismā</i> . p. 21.
Salama	23 AH/ 643–644 CE	Yanbuʿ	Mutsuo Kawatoko, "Archaeological Survey of Najrān and Madina." <i>Atlat</i> , vol. 18, 2005, pp. 45–59.
Zuhayr 1	Around the time when (the caliph) ʿUmar (24 AH/ 644–645 CE)	Qāʿ al-Muʿtadil	Ghabbān and Hoyland. "The inscription." p. 211.
Zuhayr 3	In the year ʿUthmān became Caliph (24AH/ 644 CE)	Al-Juḥfa	Ghabbān, "al-Naqsh al-thālith." pp. 276-310.
Al-Ḥārith, son of Bawlā, the client of ʿAbd Allāh, son of Sabʿ	When Egypt rebelled / was attacked (25 AH/ 645–646 CE)	Ḥismā	Al-Saʿīd et al. <i>Nuqūsh ḥismā</i> . p. 21.
ʿAmmār al-Laythī	In the year when the sea was conquered (between 27–29 AH/ 647–650 CE)	Ḥismā	Al-Saʿīd et al. <i>Nuqūsh ḥismā</i> . p. 22.
ʿAmr al-Thaqafī	In the year of the Conquest of Africa (between 27–29 AH/ 647–650 CE)	Ḥismā	Al-Saʿīd et al. <i>Nuqūsh ḥismā</i> . p. 23.
Yazīd al-Salūfī	Jumādā 29 AH/ January–March 650 CE)	Najrān	Mutsuo Kawatoko, et al. <i>Ancient and Islamic Rock Inscriptions of South Sinai</i> . Tokyo: Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2006, pp. 9–10.

Cont. Appendix

Published Inscriptions up to the end of the period of the rightly guided caliphs

Inscription	Date	Site/Place	Publication
'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ḥajrī	Jumādā l-Thānī 31 AH/ January–February 652 CE	Egypt	Hassan El-Hawary, "The most ancient Islamic monument known dated AH 31 (AD 652) from the Time of the Third Calif 'Uthmān. " <i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i> , vol.62, No.2, 1930, p. 322.
'Abd al-Raḥmān, son of Khālīd, son of al-'Āṣ	40 AH/ 660–661 CE	Mecca	Ahmad Sharafaddin, "Some Islamic Inscriptions Discovered in Darb Zubayda." <i>Atfal</i> , vol.1, 1977, pp. 69–70.

Sigla

DaJ	Inscription from Dūmat al-Jandal.
FAS	Farīq al-Ṣaḥrā' texts, published in (https://alsahra.org).
Zuhayr 1	Inscription published by Ghabbān and Hoyland.
Zuhayr 3	Inscription published by Ghabbān.

Endnotes

- (1) Robert G. Hoyland. "The content and the context of early Arabic inscriptions." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, vol. 21, 1997, pp. 77–102; Robert G. Hoyland. "New documentary texts and the early Islamic state." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 69, no. 3, 2006, pp. 395–416; Ilkka Lindstedt. "Who is in, who is out? Early Muslim identity through epigraphy and theory." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, vol. 49, 2019, pp. 147–247. Ilkka Lindstedt. "Religious warfare and martyrdom in Arabic graffiti (70s–110s AH / 690s–730s CE)." *Scripts and Scripture: Writing and religion in Arabia circa 500–700 CE*. Ed. Fred Donner and Rebecca Hasselbach-Andee, Chicago, 2022, pp.195–222; Frédéric Imbert. "Le Coran dans les graffiti des deux premiers siècles de l'Hégire." *Arabica*, vol. 47, no. 3, 2000, pp. 384–390; Frédéric Imbert. "Califes, princes et compagnons dans les graffiti du début de l'Islam." *Romano-Arabica*, vol. 15, 2015, pp. 59–78; Muḥammad Ḥamza al-Ḥaddād. *Al-Nuqūsh al-āthāriyya maṣḍaran lil-tārīkh al-islāmī wa-l-ḥadāra al-islāmiyya*. Cairo, vol. 1, 2002, p. 31. Aḥmad Sa'īd Qashshāsh. *Nuqūsh al-ṣaḥābī al-jalīl khālīd ibn al-'āṣ wa-abnā' uhu fī minṭaqat al-bāḥa*. Dār al-Intishār al-'Arabī, pp. 35–65, 2015; 'Alī Ibrahim Al-Ghabbān. "The evolution of the Arabic script in the period of the Prophet Muḥammad

- (2) Moshalleh al-Moraekhi and Ahmad el-Sayed el-Sawy. "(The only) early Islamic inscription from the time of Prophet Muḥammad." *Studies on the History and Archaeology of Arabian Peninsula*. Ed. M. al-Moraekhi et al. Riyadh, 2018, pp. 689–694.
- (3) ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ṭāib al-Anṣārī et al. *Al-Bid’ tārīkhuhā wa-āthāruhā*. Riyadh, 2002, pp. 58–64; Maysā bt. ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm Ghabbān. "Al-Kitābāt al-islāmiyya al-mubakkira fī ḥaḍbat ḥismā bi-miṭṭaqaṭ tabūk: dirāsa ṭaḥlīliyya āthāriyya wa-lughawiyya." Unpublished PhD dissertation. King Saud University, 2016–2017; ‘Abd Allāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Sa‘īd et al. *Nuqūsh ḥismā: kitābāt min ṣadr al-islām shamāl ḡharb al-mamlaka*. Riyadh, 2017. See also Abdullah Saad Alhatlani and Ajab Mohammad al-Otibi. "A Palaeo-Arabic inscription from the Ḥismā Desert (Tabūk region)." *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, vol. 34, 2023, pp. 183–193.
- (4) Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī. *Mu‘jam al-buldān*. Beirut, Dār Ṣādir, 1977. vol.2, pp.258-259.
- (5) Sa‘ad al-Tuwaijri (Sa‘d b. Muḥammad al-Tuwayjirī). "Discovery from Ḥismā Mountains in Tabūk: ‘Marra Abū Bakr fī ghurraṭ ahl al-Madīna (raḥīma) Allāh man da‘ā lahum’." X (@OfNa-jd), 22 October 2019,
<https://emea01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ameernews.com%2FOfNa-jd%2Fstatus%2F1186692393053106177&data=05%7C02%7C%7C278d45ec488a41710c6d08dd9d69f352%7C84df9e7fe9f640afb345aaaaaaaaaaaa%7C1%7C0%7C63883-9800556562505%7CUnknown%7CTWFPbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOn-RydWUslIYiOilwLjAuMDAwMCIslIAiOiJXaW4zMlIsIkFOljoiTWFpbiC1IldUljoy-fQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=WQbsGuE7eB2JVx7ze2XkMC1MCk2VFJeW-yWDZshlXC4%3D&reserved=0> (accessed 1 August 2024).
- (6) Thanks to Christian Robin for giving us new photos, and Abdullelah al-Farss, the director of the Tabūk branch of Saudi Heritage commissions for his helpful information.
- (7) al-Moraekhi and el-Sawy. "(The only) early Islamic." pp. 689–694.
- (8) Square brackets [] for reconstructed word.
- (9) Ḥayāt bt ‘Abd Allāh Ḥusayn al-Kilābī. *al-Nuqūsh al-islāmiyya ‘alā ṭarīq al-ḥajj al-shāmī bi-shamāl ḡharb al-mamlaka al-‘arabiyya al-sa‘ūdiyya: min al-qarn al-awwal ilā l-qarn al-khāmis al-hijrī*. Riyadh, Maktabat al-Malik Fahd al-Waṭaniyya, 2009, p. 193.
- (10) Ghabbān. "Al-Kitābāt al-islāmiyya." p. 54.
- (11) Hoyland. "The content and the context." pp. 79-80.
- (12) The authors conducted a survey of this phrase, and it was not attested. See, for example, the work of graffiti in M. Ghabbān. *Al-Kitābāt al-islāmiyya al-mubakkira*.

- (13) For a definition of "Palaeo-Arabic," see: Ahmad al-Jallad and Haythem Sidky. "A Paleo-Arabic inscription on a route north of Tā'if." *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2022, pp. 202–215.
- (14) Alhatlani and Alajmi. "Dating Inscriptions according."
- (15) 'Ali ibn Ibrahim Ghabbān and R. G. Hoyland. "The inscription of Zuhayr, the oldest Islamic inscription (24 AH /AD 644–645), the rise of Arabic script and the nature of the early Islamic state." *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, vol. 19, 2008, pp. 230.
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- (40) Q. 9:101: "And among the people of Medina are those who have persisted in hypocrisy... " — a direct reference to entrenched hypocrites within the community.
- (41) al-Ṭabarī. *Jāmiʾ al-bayān. ʿan tawīl āy al-qurʾān*, vol. 20, p. 224.
- (42) ---. *Jāmiʾ al-bayān. ʿan tawīl āy al-qurʾān*, vol. 20, p. 224.
- (43) al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, 523; ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Hishām. *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*. Ed. Taha ʿAbd al-Rāūf Saʿd, Beirut, 1998, vol.6. pp.34-35. Abū ʿUbayda ibn al-Jarrah was a companion (*ṣāḥib*) of the Prophet Muhammad and one of the ten promised paradise. He was the commander of the reinforcements sent by the Prophet to the army of ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, accompanied by Abū Bakr and ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. The main army was led by ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, and the reinforcements were under the command of Abū ʿUbayda ibn al-Jarrah, with Abū Bakr and ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb as part of his contingent.
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