

Arabic Inscriptions from Wādī Salma

Wādī Salma is situated 30km northeast of aṣ-Ṣafāwī, formally called H5. It is about 13km long and not more than 60 to 150m wide (Atallah and Al-Jbour 1997: 459). This was the meeting place of the Arabian tribes in winter and spring times for pasturing. Trade and pilgrims caravans passed by this valley heading to Wādī as-Sirḥān and to the Arabian Peninsula. The city of Ṣalkhad, 60km northwest of Wādī Salma, is known as a pilgrimage station (الجزيري 1983: 1233-34). No doubt the road system varied through the ages according to the political circumstances, but Wādī Salma was frequently used as a route by the caravans. The discovery of hundreds of Arabic inscriptions in *Kufic* and *Naskhi* scripts, which cover the Umayyad to the Mamluk periods, is good evidence that this area was heavily and continuously occupied by Arab tribes who not only left many inscriptions but built several mosques in the wadi (العبادي 1997: 79). Unfortunately, in the past the inscriptions and monuments of Wādī Salma did not attract the attention of scholars and it is for this reason that I undertook three survey seasons to document this area.

The Name of the Wādī

The local people call it Wādī Salma. Some old people informed me that Salma is the contraction of *Sayl al-Mā'*, which is very plausible since the wadi is famous for the many ponds, water reservoirs and cisterns. There are also other legends referring to a young maiden called Salma who was murdered and buried in the wadi. The ancient name of the wadi is recorded in one Safaitic inscriptions as follows: "Ṣahim bin Rajūl, who went east with his camels from the Ḥawrān because of the drought and he found Ḥarrat Khabthāt". It is possible, if we trust this inscription, that the original name of the wadi was Ḥarrat Khabthāt meaning "evil". This was changed in the Islamic periods to Wādī Raḥmān or Raḥmin which is the opposite of Khabthāt, meaning "the blessed". The changing of pejorative names into more acceptable ones is still common in Jordan: Wādī al-Yābis (the dry valley) was

converted into Wādī ar-Rayyān (the fertile valley) and Khanzīra (the pork) into Ṭayyiba (good).

Comparative Documents

D. Baramki published 105 inscriptions from Jāwa and Tall al-'Abd, near Wādī Salma (برامكي 1964). They date to the same period as ours and the script and the themes of the inscriptions are very similar. However, the names are different.

In the Negev, a group of mosques and inscriptions were recorded by Avni (1994), which date to the mid eighth century AD (Avni 1994: 83). They are of the same type of script. Similar mosques were also discovered in Wādī ash-Sharāh (Wādī Ramm) by the late Bill Jobling (1989: 254). The inscriptions of Jabal Usays in the Ḥawrān are characterized by short invocations and by a special type of script in the later periods. In addition, they provide us with four princes, the sons of al-Walid ibn 'Abd al-Malik (العش 1964: 228-303). The inscriptions of Ruwawa, south of al-Madina in Saudi Arabia, date to the same period, except for two which contain different invocations of mercy of Allah, of Confidence in Allah and asking for pardon. They are very similar to our collection. The publisher described those inscriptions as "Hijazi" (الراشد 1993: 106).

The Inscriptions

The inscriptions were incised on basalt blocks or smooth rock surfaces on the mosques' façades or on cairns. Max van Berchem was the first epigraphist to draw the attention of scholars to the importance of the Arabic epigraphic material (Zayadine 1984: 103).

The most important subjects of Wādī Salma's inscriptions are: Koranic verses, religious invocations, epitaphs and wisdom sayings, together with personal names and their tribal genealogies. It is known that the Holy Koran was the source of religious piety in Islam. Although these inscriptions do not mention historical events, they shed some light on the Islamic Arabic personal names.

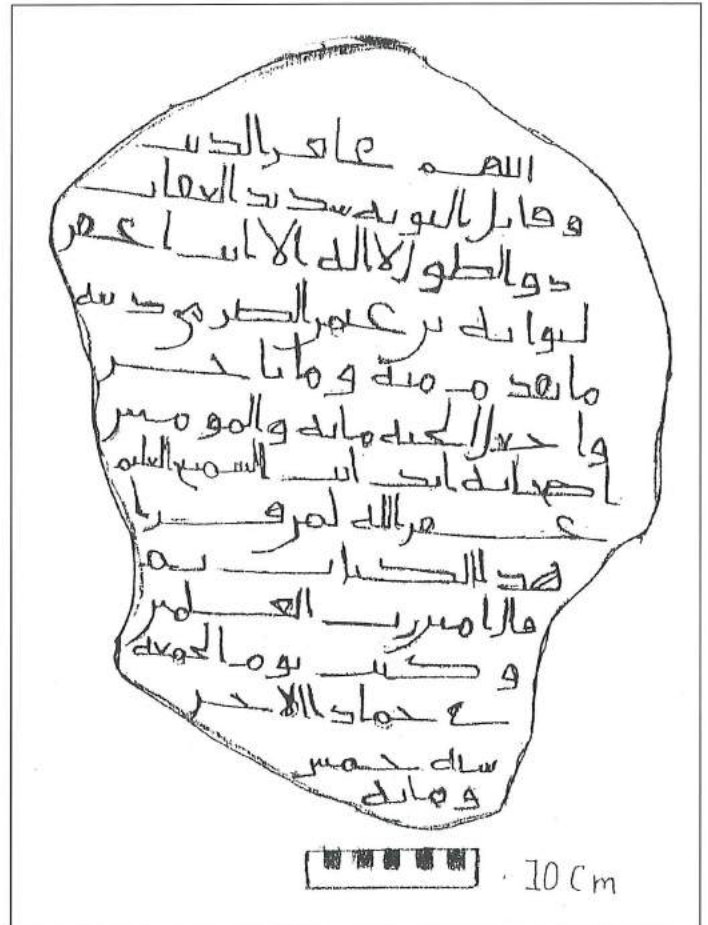
They also provide some linguistic information on the development of the Arabic paleography with the help of several dated inscriptions. There is also mention of topographical names such as al-Ḥarisa, Busan and Hawiya in the Ḥawrān, which are still used in the present day.

Inscription No. 1 (FIG. 1)

The name of this wadi appeared in an Islamic-Arabic inscription that probably goes back to the Ayyubid or Mamluk period. The name that was mentioned is رحمين (merciful) which is the opposite of the word خبيث (evil). Most probably the name was changed during the Islamic period(s) which is a common practice in this Islamic tradition. For example Wādī al-Yābis (dry) to Wādī ar-Rayyān (fertile).

Inscription No. 2 (FIG. 2)

- | | |
|--|------------------------------|
| 1) O' God forgiver of sin | اللهم غافر الذنب |
| 2) Who accepts repentance, who punishes severely | وقابل التوبة شديد العقاب |
| 3) with power no God but You forgive his sin | ذو الطول لا إله إلا أنت أغفر |
| 4) to Thuwābah son of 'Uthmān aṣ-Ṣarmi | لثوابه بن عثمان الصرمي ذنبه |
| 5) what was in the past and present | ما تقدم منه وما تأخر |
| 6) and make paradise his home with the believers | واجعل الجنة مأبه والمؤمنين |
| 7) his companions, You are most hearer and knowledgeable | أصحابه إنك أنت السميع العليم |
| 8) may Allah forgive who reads | غفر الله لمن قرأ |
| 9) this inscription then | هذا الكتاب ثم |



2. Inscription no. 2.



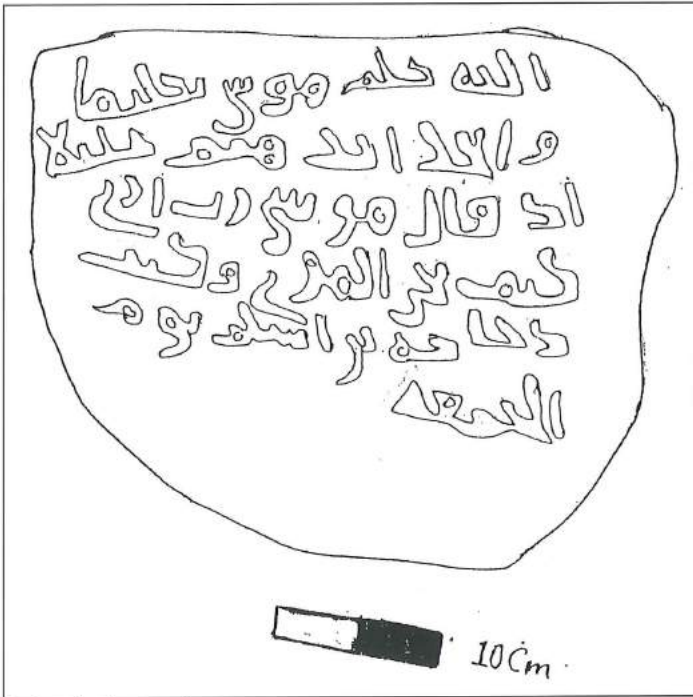
1. Inscription no. 1.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| 10) say Amen Lord of Universes | قال آمين رب العالمين |
| 11) and he wrote on Friday | وكتب يوم الجمعة |
| 12) in Jumāda al-Ākhar | في جمادي الآخر |
| 13) year five | سنة خمسة |
| 14) and one hundred | ومايه |

This inscription, dated by the day, month and year 105 H, contains a saying invocation from Muḥammad to Thuwābah or Tuwābah or Bawābah. The good design of the letters and beautifully incised regular lines characterize inscriptions in the Umayyad period.

Inscription No. 3 (FIG. 3)

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Allah spoke to Moses by words | الله كلم موسى تكليما |
| He took Abraham as a friend | واتخذ إبراهيم خليلا |
| then Moses said Lord show me | إذ قال موسى رب أرني |



3. Inscription no. 3.

كيف تحيي الموتى وكتب

how do you raise the dead. Wrote

دجاجة ابن أسلم يوم

Dujāja son of Aslam day

الجمعة

Friday

I believe that this inscription is one of the oldest that have been found by the survey, because of the shape of its letters that were written in the Naskhi script. However, the inscription has a mistake in the quotation of a verse of the Holy Quran. The one who asked God to show him how he raised the dead was Abraham not Moses. The writer did not write the date of the inscription.

Inscription No. 4 (FIG. 4)

اللهم اغفر لجامع بن عصمه ا

1) O' God forgive Jāmi' son of 'Aṣmah al

لصرمي عبدك

Ṣarmī your servant / slave

.... آجره من عذاب أليم اللهم اغفر للمؤ

2) save him from painful torture, O' God forgive the

منين والمؤمنات وامح حسنات من مح هذا الكتاب

3) faithful and erase the good deeds of the one who erase this writing

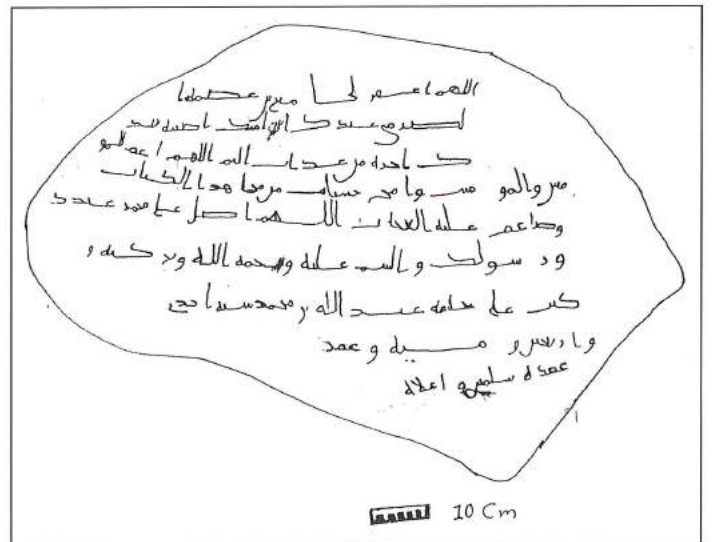
وضاعف عليه العذاب اللهم أصل على محمد عبدك

4) and increase the punishment, O' God give peace/praise to Muḥammad your messenger

ورسولك والسلام عليه ورحمة الله وبركاته و

5) and servant. Peace be upon him and blessings of Allah and

كتب على عبد الله بن محمد سنة إحدى



4. Inscription no. 4.

6) wrote on 'Abdullah bin Muḥammad year one

وأربعين وميه وغفر

7) and forty and a hundred

غفر واعلى له

8) and forgive

The date of this inscription was fixed to the year 141 H, during the reign of the Caliph al-Manṣūr. Some spelling mistakes appeared in this inscription such as "السلام عليك", and also some words are not clear. The important point is that in the Safaitic inscriptions there are similar invocations such as may Allah blind the one who erases this inscription.

Inscription No. 5 (FIG. 5)

توجد عدة كتابات في هذا النقش

There are several writings on this inscription.

الكتابة الرئيسية:

The main writing:

اللهم اغفر لعصمه

1) O' God forgive 'Iṣma

بن جامع الصرمي

2) son of Jāmi' aṣ-Ṣarmī

اللهم من مح هذا الكتاب

3) O' God who erases this book/ writing

فامح ما في صدره من القرآن

4) erase from his chest the Quran

آمين رب العالمين

5) Amen Lord of the worlds

رب موسى وهارون وكتب سنة ست

6) God of Moses and Aron, and wrote year six

وثمانين وميه

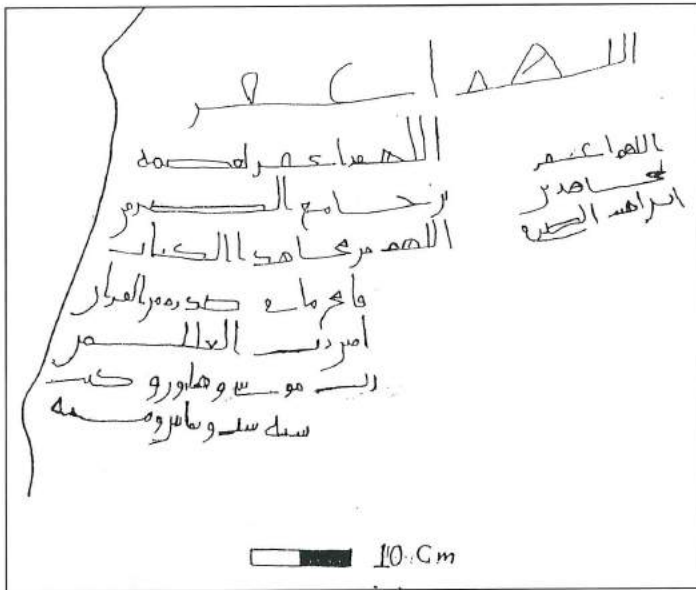
7) and one hundred and eighty

الكتابة الثانية:

Second writing:

اللهم اغفر

1) O' God forgive



5. Inscription no. 5.

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------|
| 2) to Ziyād son of | لزياد بن |
| 3) Yazīd | يزيد |
| <i>Third writing:</i> | |
| 1) O' God forgive | اللهم اغفر |
| 2) Mujāhid son of | لمجاهد بن |
| 3) Ibrāhīm aṣ-Ṣarmī | ابراهيم الصرمي |

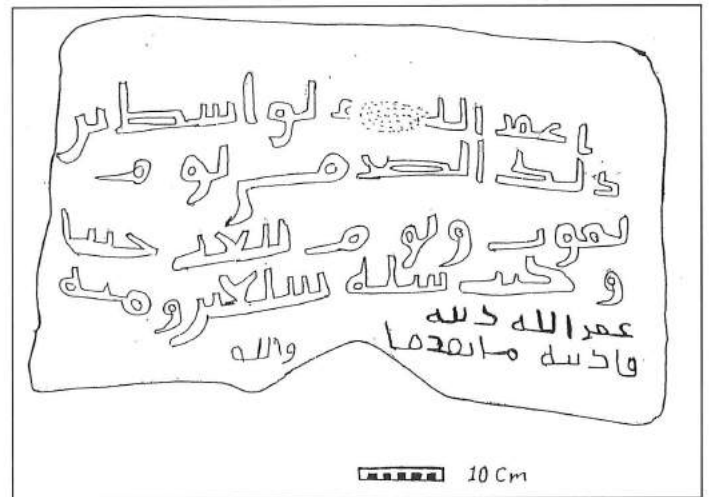
We have here three inscriptions belonging to different periods, but the main one is dated to 186 H. This inscription was written 45 years after the inscription of the writers' father, who appeared in Inscription No. 4.

Inscription No. 6 (FIG. 6)

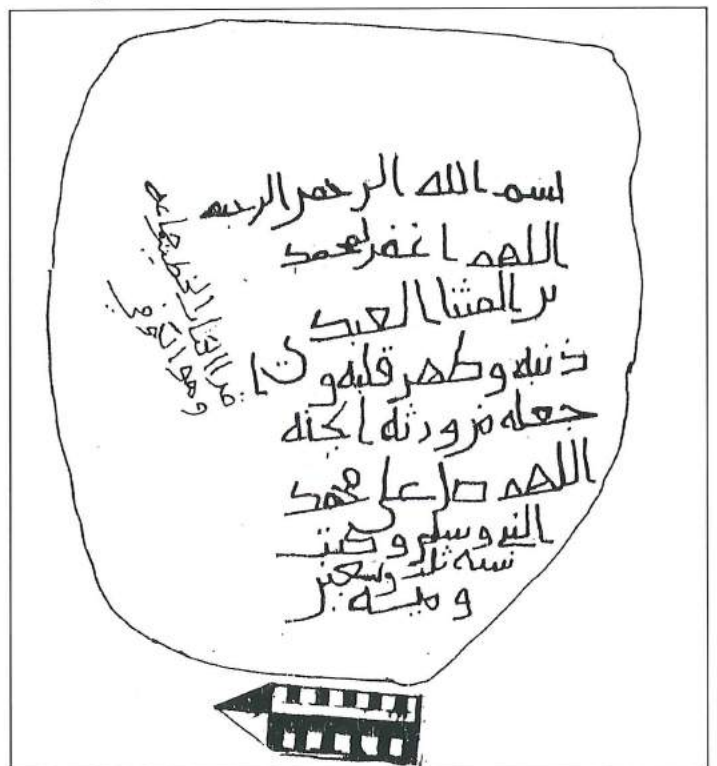
- | | |
|-------------------|------------|
| 1) O' God forgive | اللهم اغفر |
| 2) to Wāsiṭ bin | لواسط بن |
| 3. Dlk | ذلك |
| 4) aṣ-Ṣarmī | الصرمي |
| 5) and wrote year | وكتب سنة |
| 6) seventy | سبعين |
| 7) and a hundred | وميه |

Inscription No. 7 (FIG. 7)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم



6. Inscription no. 6.



7. Inscription no. 7.

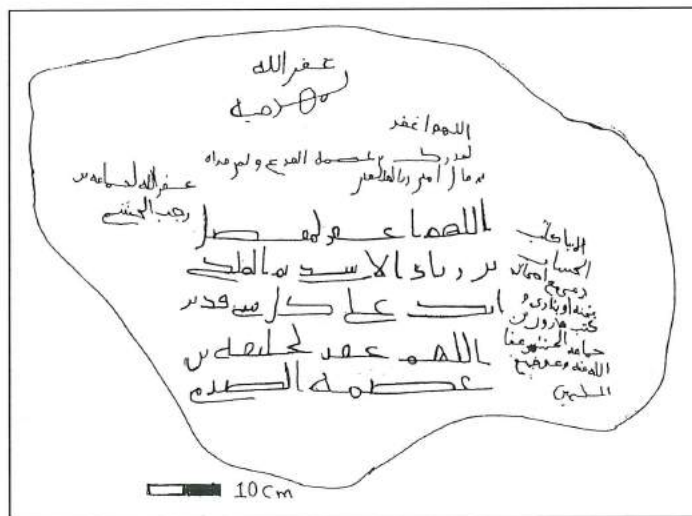
- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1) Basmallah | اللهم اغفر لمحمد |
| 2) O' God forgive Muḥammad | بن المشي العبيدي |
| 3) son of al-Muthana al-'Abdi | ذنبه وظهر قلبه وا |
| 4) his sin, and purify his heart and | جعله من ورثة الجنة |
| 5) make him an inheritor of Paradise | اللهم صل على محمد |
| 6) O' God pray on Muḥammad | النبي وسلم وكتب |

- 7) the prophet and give peace [to him] and wrote
سنة ثلاث وتسعين
- 8) year ninety three
وميه
- 9) and one hundred

Al-Khaṭīb Bin Jumā'ah read this inscription and he put diacritical points on the text, but did not put any dots on the *Basmalah*. The name of Jumā'ah was mentioned several times during the Ayyubid-Mummluk periods. Some scholars have pointed out that he may represent the personality of a leader or trader. However, here he appears as a preacher of the mosque of jurisprudence.

Inscription No. 8 (FIG. 8)

- A- اللهم اغفر لفضل
A. 1) O' God forgive to Mufaḍal
بن زياد الأسدي ثم المالكي
2) bin Ziyād al-Asdī and al-Malkī
انك على كل شيء قدير
3) You are capable of all
اللهم اغفر لخليفة بن
4) O' God forgive to Khalifah son
عصمة الصرمي
5) of 'Iṣmat aṣ-Ṣarmi
ب- اللهم اغفر
B. 1) O' God forgive
لمدرك بن عصمة الصرمي ولن قراه
2) to Mudrik son of 'Iṣmat aṣ-Ṣarmi and to who
read
ثم قال آمين رب العالمين
3) then he said Amen Lord
ج- الا يا كاتب
C. 1) O' You who wrote
الحساب
2) the accountability
دعني مع أصحابي



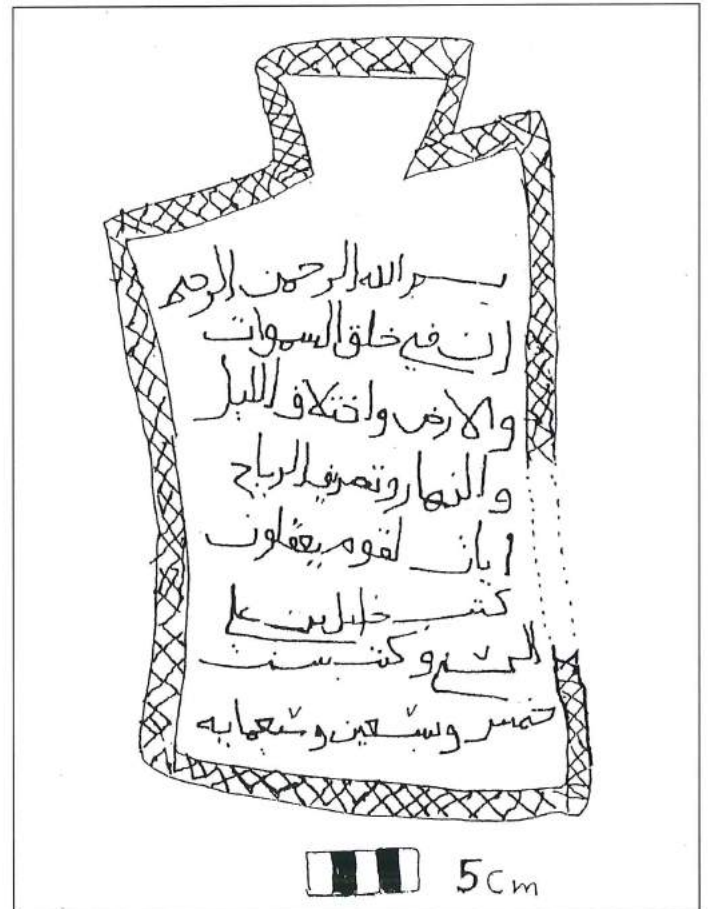
8. Inscription no. 8.

- 3) leave me with my companions/ friends
بجنة أو بناري
- 4) in his paradise or in my hell/ fell fire
وكتب هارون بن
جماعة الجشمي غفر
- 5) and wrote Hārūn son of
الله عنه وعن جميع
المسلمين
- 6) al-Jashmī Jamā'h forgive
- 7) God for him and for all
8) the Muslims

We have many inscriptions, dated to different periods, that contain tribal genealogies like Asad, Ṣurum, Jushm and Mālki. However, one of these inscriptions contains a poem that shows loyalty to a friend even in the hereafter, while mentioning the name of the writer who goes back in his lineage to the tribe of Jasham or bin Jasham.

Inscription No. 9 (FIG. 9)

- بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
1) Basmallah
ان في خلق السموات
والأرض واختلاف الليل
والنهار وتصريف الرياح
آيات لقوم يعقلون
كتب خليل بن علي
الجبلي وكتب سنة
تمسروا بسنين وسعيا به
- 2) The creation of heavens



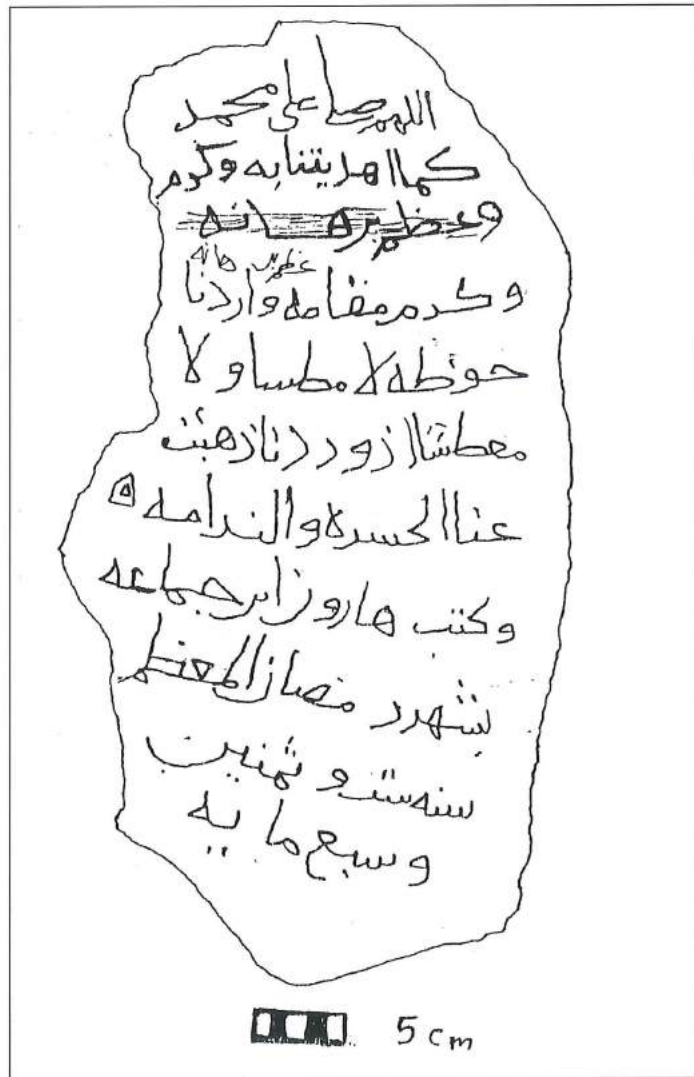
9. Inscription no. 9.

- 3) and earth and the cycling/ change of night
والنهار وتصريف الرياح
- 4) and day and direction of winds
لآيات لقوم يعقلون
- 5) are signs/ miracles to reasoned people
كتب بن علي
- 6) wrote son of 'Ali
الجشمي وكتب سنة
- 7) al-Jushmī and wrote year
خمس وتسعين وسبعماية
- 8) 795

This inscription was set in the wall of one of the mosques and was possibly covered in the plan of a mosque, where the top resembles the *mihrāb*.

Inscription No. 10 (FIG. 10)

- 1) O' God pray on Muḥammad
اللهم صلي على محمد
كما أهديتنا به وكرم



10. Inscription no. 10.

- 2) as we have been well guided by him
وكرم مقامه وأردنا
- 3) and raise his position and give us
حوضه لا مكسا ولا
- 4) his fountain of less and not
معطشاً إذ وردنا ذهب
- 5) thirsty if we attained that, had gone
عنا الحسرة والندامة
- 6) from us sorrow and remorse
وكتب هارون ابن جماعة
- 7) and wrote, Hārīn son of Jamā'a
بشهر رمضان المعظم
- 8) in the month of Ramaḍān the Great
سنة ست وثمانين
- 9) year eighty six
وسبع ماية
- 10) and seven hundred

Dated to the Mamluk period. Two overlapping triangles are shown beside the inscription.

Conclusions

The newly discovered inscriptions are characterized by the following:

1. They are incised in the *Kufic* and *Naskhi* scripts. They are similar to the Hijazi, Sinaitic and Negevite inscriptions.
2. The basalt of the Ḥarra provided good inscription material because of its hardness.
3. Some of the inscriptions were dated by the year, the month and the day. This is evidence of the precision of the writers and the importance of dating for the Arabs. They span the period from 105 to 795 H.
4. Most of the inscriptions are carefully and beautifully incised with regular lines. There are no decorative elements added to the inscriptions.
5. The Ayyubid-Mamluk graffiti are characterized by the decline of the script and the use of colloquial Arabic. They contain some very primitive decorative elements.
6. These later inscriptions begin with the verb: *ḥaḍar*, which was translated as: "to arrive", "to attend". But I understand it as: "passed away", especially when the inscription contains invocations of salvation and wishes to enter Paradise.

Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my warm thanks to H. R. H. Prince al-Hassan, patron of the Centre for the Badiya Research and Development Program, to Sharifa Zayn bint Nasser and to Engineer Mohammed Shahbaz for their support. Without their continued interest and their encouragement the accomplishment of our research work would not be possible.

Bibliography

برامكي، ديمتري، ١٩٦٤. النقوش العربية في البادية السورية. الأبحاث.

- ج٣: ٣١٧-٤٧.
 الجزيري، عبد القادر بن محمد (ت: ٩٧٧هـ/١٥٦٩م)، ١٩٨٣. **درر الفرائد المنظمة في أخبار الحاج وطريق مكة المعظمة**. تحقيق حمد الجاسر. الرياض: دار اليمامة للبحث والنشر.
 الراشد، سعد بن عبد العزيز، ١٩٩٣. **كتابات إسلامية غير منشورة من (رواه) المدينة المنورة**. الرياض: دار الوطن للنشر والإعلام.
 العبادي، صبري، ١٩٩٧. نقوش صفوية جديدة من متحف آثار المفرق. **مجلة أبحاث اليرموك (سلسلة العلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية)**، م١٣، ع١٢: ٧٩-٩٠.
 العث، محمد أبو الفرج، ١٩٦٤. **كتابات عربية غير منشورة في جبل أسيس. الأبحاث**، ج٢: ٢٢٧-٣١٦.

- Atallah, N. and Al-Jbour, K. 1997. Inscriptions Grecques de Wadi Salma. *Le Muséon* 110, Fasc. 3-4: 459-466.
 Avni, G. 1994. Early Mosques in the Negev Highlands: New Archaeological Evidence on Islamic Penetration of Southern Palestine. *BASOR* 294: 83-100.
 Jobling, B. 1989. Report of the Eighth Season of the 'Aqaba Maan Archaeological and Epigraphic Survey 1988. *LA* 39: 253-255.
 Zayadine, F. 1984. Islamic Art and Archaeology in the Publications of Marguerite Gautier-Van Berchem. *ADAJ* 28: 203-210.